

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**COPING WITH FLOODS:  
THE EXPERIENCE OF RURAL WOMEN  
IN BANGLADESH**

**A theses presented in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at Massey University**

**Mahbuba Begum**

**November 1995**

## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on how rural women in Bangladesh, who live in the poorest sector of one of the poorest countries in the world, cope with floods. It seeks to explain the principal factors structuring their responses. It addresses several related questions: how do women perceive and experience floods? What problems do they face and how do they respond to them? Are they merely the passive victims of floods or do they play an active role in protecting their households? Do all women use the same coping strategies? Are the major parameters of rural society changed as a consequence of the way in which women cope with floods?

In responding to these questions a sociological perspective is adopted but not to the exclusion of other approaches. However, it is the social and sociological aspects of the phenomena being explored which are of most concern to the author.

The occurrence of floods in Bangladesh is as old as its history but over the last 40 years (1954-1995) the problem has become greatly aggravated and is now one of the main concerns of most rural households, life in which is precarious even in non-flood conditions. These problems affect women more severely than men because of the wider range of responsibilities that they have for their households and the fact that those responsibilities keep them tied to

their households more strictly and more effectively than those of male members. Those responsibilities include food processing and cooking, cleaning, collecting water and fuel, bearing and rearing children, looking after livestock and income generation, all of which become much more difficult to perform under flood conditions. Despite this heavy burden, which women bear in extremely difficult circumstances, they demonstrate considerable fortitude and ingenuity in their attempts to maintain the livelihoods of their households.

Explanation of these phenomena is sought in the economic, cultural and political structure of the country. Factors stressed in this study are the male-dominated structures of a predominantly conservative and Muslim society; the dominance of *parda* in the sub-culture of women and the position of women within the socio-economic context of their households.

## Jolpur



A typical view across the flood plains of Southern Bangladesh. The group of trees in the centre is West Para, Jolpur. To the right is the edge of a homestead plinth faced with rocks to slow down erosion. The photograph was taken by the author.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to a number of people who helped me to complete this study. First, I am grateful to my chief supervisor, Dr. Brian A. Ponter, for his untiring guidance, advice, constructive criticism, tolerance and continuous encouragement throughout the period of my study. Despite his busy schedule he gave his time inexhaustibly. I am deeply indebted to him for his persistent efforts to help me during my field work in Bangladesh which made this study possible. I am also grateful to co-supervisor Dr. Mary M. Murray for her guidance, understanding, encouragement, patience and willingness to provide supervision. I thank them both for their stimulation and reading and correcting this manuscript. Completion of this study was to a great extent attributable to their help.

I wish to thank all my study participants, particularly the 101 women of the village. They did more than co-operate with me as researcher: they shared their lives and the struggles of women in a village society and accepted me in a very friendly way which greatly enriched my experience. Without these people, this study would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank the following people for their valuable contributions to the thesis: Professor Graeme S. Fraser for his supervision and guidance for the first year of this study; Professor S.M. Nurul Alam for his guidance, helpful suggestions on my research proposal and questionnaire during the field work. As my local supervisor he gave his time generously which made the field work more fruitful; Dr. Suzanne Hanchett for her valuable comments, references, materials and encouragement to do this study; Professor Bina Agarwal, Dr. Bruce Currey, Md. Khalequzzaman, Mr. Richard Heerdegan, Dr. Monirul Islam and Ms. Hasina Ahmed for the provision of helpful materials related to the study; Professor Srikanta Chatterjee for helping me to understand and explain Bengali culture; Ms. Heather Hodgetts for initial typing; Mrs. P.L. Collins for editorial work and proof reading; Mrs. Karen Puklowski for making available her cartographical skills; Mrs. Fiona Anderson for formatting the thesis; Mr. Edward Drawnick of Massey University Computing Services, Dr. Paul Perry and Mrs. Sandhya Chatterjee of Massey University for helping me

to process the data collected from the field. I am especially indebted to Mr. Nazrul Islam and Mr. Sohrab Hossain who worked almost continuously with me at the Dhaka University Computer Centre during the last three months of my visit to Bangladesh.

The profound thanks are due to New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee for granting me a Commonwealth Scholarship. I offer my thanks also to Winrock International, Dhaka, for providing a field trip allowance which made the field work easier. I am most grateful to the University of Dhaka for granting me study leave and to colleagues in the Sociology Department there for their encouragement.

My appreciation is also extended to the field investigators, Zohora Khatun, Homaira Beauty and Selina Khondokar, whose hard work and enthusiasm facilitated the collection of data in spite of many constraints.

My adjustment to life in New Zealand was assisted by support and help from a number of people. My sincere gratitude is extended to: Mrs. Elizabeth Ponter, Professor Gregor McLennan, Mr. Charles Chua, Mrs. S. Chatterjee, Mrs. Nazneen Ara Khanam, Mrs. Margaret Gilbert, Mrs. Ngaire Ormsby, Mrs. Catherine King, Mrs. Tania Sadlier, Mr. and Mrs. Samir Dasgupta, Dr. Izabela Islam, Mrs. Nelofar Mahbub, Mr. Moyeen Kabir, Mrs. Jenny Webber and Mr. Tony Banks. I thank them for the special times that will not be forgotten. I also thank my fellow post-graduate students for their support and encouragement throughout. I thank all Bangladeshi friends in New Zealand and neighbours at Atawhai Village who in one way or another extended their help to me in times of need.

I feel very privileged to have a supportive and loving family and special friends. My love and appreciation goes to: my parents, who encouraged me to study for a higher degree, helped me in selecting the village, accompanied me at the initial stage of my field work and provided the support I needed to make my field work comfortable. They, along with my sisters, brothers, father-in-law, sisters and brothers-in-law, nieces, nephews, aunts and cousins regularly sent me messages of love and encouragement throughout the period of my stay in New Zealand. Special thanks are due to my brother-in-law Kh. Moazzem Hossain for his support.

Last but not the least, I am grateful to my husband Kh. Mokaddem Hossain for his continuous encouragement and support throughout the period of study. To all these and many more besides, I owe a great debt of gratitude.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	iii
JOLPUR .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	ix
LIST OF TABLES .....	xv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xvii
LIST OF MAPS .....	xix
GLOSSARY OF BENGALI WORDS .....	xxi
ABBREVIATIONS .....	xxxii
BENGALI CALENDAR .....	xxxiii
<b>PART I BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	3
Purpose .....	4
Rationale .....	5
Disaster research on rural women .....	7
Approaches to the study of disasters .....	9
Organization of study .....	14
Summary .....	16

	Page
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THE FLOODS</b> .....	17
History of floods .....	17
Kinds of floods .....	19
Causes of floods .....	19
Dimension of 1987 and 1988 floods .....	23
Floods and their affects on human lives .....	25
Measures to control flooding .....	26
Summary and conclusion .....	34
<b>CHAPTER THREE: RURAL WOMEN IN BANGLADESH</b>	
Life of rural women .....	36
Rural women and lack of control over the land .....	39
Rural women and <i>parda</i> .....	41
Household composition, family and women .....	43
Gender division of labour .....	46
Women in agriculture .....	48
Rural women and employment .....	51
Food allocation within households .....	54
Summary and conclusion .....	56
<b>PART II THE VILLAGE OF JOLPUR</b> .....	57
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: THE VILLAGE OF JOLPUR AND ITS SURROUNDINGS</b> .....	59
Sources of data and methodology .....	59
General ecology of the region .....	69

	Page
Land .....	73
The village and its environment .....	74
Floods .....	79
Summary and conclusion .....	82
CHAPTER FIVE: SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN JOLPUR .....	83
<i>Samaj</i> .....	83
<i>Goshthi</i> .....	85
<i>Para</i> .....	85
Social networks .....	86
Categorization of the households .....	90
Economy. . . . .	103
Land and cropping patterns .....	105
Sharecropping .....	110
Cattle .....	110
Education .....	111
Occupations .....	112
Summary and conclusion .....	118
CHAPTER SIX: GENDER RELATIONS IN JOLPUR .....	120
Maintenance of <i>parda</i> . . . . .	120
Religion .....	122
Dress .....	123
Health .....	124
Political parties .....	125
Household composition, family and women .....	125
Household decision making .....	128

	Page
Participation of women and men in agriculture . . . . .	129
Socio-economic background of the respondents . . . . .	132
Summary and conclusion . . . . .	153
 <b>PART III THE NON-FLOOD PERIOD . . . . .</b>	 <b>155</b>
 <b>CHAPTER SEVEN: EVERYDAY LIFE IN JOLPUR DURING THE NON-FLOOD PERIOD . . . . .</b>	 <b>157</b>
Women's assets . . . . .	157
Gender division of labour . . . . .	169
Maintenance of <i>parda</i> . . . . .	177
Women and water collection . . . . .	182
Women and preparation of food . . . . .	186
Food allocation within the household . . . . .	194
Women and common village resources . . . . .	198
Women and social network . . . . .	201
Summary and conclusion . . . . .	203
 <b>PART IV THE FLOOD PERIOD . . . . .</b>	 <b>205</b>
 <b>CHAPTER EIGHT: EVERYDAY LIFE IN JOLPUR DURING THE FLOOD PERIOD . . . . .</b>	 <b>207</b>
Women's perception of disaster ( <i>durjog</i> ) . . . . .	207
Problems experienced by women . . . . .	213
Loss of women's household assets . . . . .	222
Loss of women's personal assets . . . . .	224
Gender division of labour . . . . .	230
Women and water collection . . . . .	260

	Page
Maintenance of <i>parda</i> . . . . .	266
Women and welfare relief . . . . .	273
Summary and conclusion . . . . .	281
CHAPTER NINE: COPING STRATEGIES . . . . .	283
Sale of women's assets . . . . .	283
Women and preparation of food . . . . .	289
Food allocation within the household . . . . .	300
Women and common village resources . . . . .	305
Women and health care . . . . .	312
Women and social networks . . . . .	325
Summary and conclusion . . . . .	332
CHAPTER TEN: CASE STUDIES OF WOMEN . . . . .	333
Summary and conclusion . . . . .	360
CHAPTER ELEVEN: CONCLUSION . . . . .	361
REFERENCES . . . . .	371
APPENDICES. . . . .	401



## LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 2:	Comparison of the impacts of the 1987 and 1988 floods in Bangladesh . . . . .	24
Table 5:	Cropping calendar in Jolpur . . . . .	106
Table 6.1:	Marital status of women respondents by age . . . . .	133
Table 6.2:	Educational level of women respondents by household category . . . . .	135
Table 6.3:	Educational level of women respondents by age . . . . .	136
Table 6.4:	Family type by household category . . . . .	136
Table 7.1:	Assets belonging to women by sources and household category . . . . .	161
Table 7.2:	Activities performed by women and men by household category . . . . .	170
Table 7.3:	Carriers of drinking water during flood-free time by household category . . . . .	185
Table 7.4:	Frequency of types of food served by women during flood-free times by household category . . . . .	192
Table 7.5:	Frequency of food consumption by women and men during flood-free time by household category . . . . .	196
Table 8.1:	Women's definition of <i>borsha</i> and <i>bonna</i> by household category . . . . .	208
Table 8.2:	Problems faced by women in flood shelters by household category . . . . .	215

	Page
Table 8.3: Activities performed by women and men by household category before floods . . . . .	232
Table 8.4: Activities performed by women and men by household category during floods . . . . .	244
Table 8.5: Activities performed by women and men by household category after floods . . . . .	255
Table 8.6: Carriers of drinking water during floods by household category . . . . .	261
Table 8.7: Drinking water problems experienced by women during floods by household category . . . . .	262
Table 8.8: Explanation of women why they did not practice <i>parda</i> during floods by household category . . . . .	268
Table 8.9: Percentage of women receiving particular relief goods during floods by household category . . . . .	274
Table 8.10: Explanation given by women as to why they did not expect relief during floods by household category . . .	276
Table 9.1: Frequency of types of food served by women during floods by household category . . . . .	293
Table 9.2: Frequency of food consumption by women and men during floods by household category . . . . .	301
Table 9.3: Problems faced by women because of households members sickness during floods by household category . . . . .	313
Table 9.4: Measures taken by women and men to cure sick household members during floods by household category . . . . .	315
Table 9.5: Women receiving help from relatives during floods by household category . . . . .	327
Table 9.6: Women receiving help other than from relatives during floods by household category . . . . .	328

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 5.1: Categorization of households by landholding . . . . .	93
Figure 5.2: Principal occupations of heads of households in Jolpur . . . . .	113
Figure 5.3: Secondary occupations of heads of households in Jolpur . . . . .	117
Figure 6.1: Types of family in Jolpur . . . . .	128
Figure 6.2: Marital status of women by household category . . . . .	133
Figure 6.3: Building materials of women's houses by household category . . . . .	139
Figure 6.4: Income-earning women by household category. . . . .	143
Figure 6.5: Principal occupation of women by household . . . . .	144
Figure 6.6: Secondary occupation of women by household category . . . . .	148
Figure 6.7: Nature of women's income by household category . . . . .	150
Figure 7.1: Degree of <i>parda</i> maintained by women by household category . . . . .	179
Figure 7.2: Explanation of why women practice <i>parda</i> by household category . . . . .	181
Figure 8.1: Percentage of women moved to flood shelters by household category . . . . .	213
Figure 8.2: Women lost assets of their own by household category . . . . .	225
Figure 8.3: Women who did and did not maintain <i>parda</i> by household category . . . . .	266

	Page
Figure 8.4: Women faced difficulties because of <i>parda</i> by household category . . . . .	271
Figure 9.1: Disposal of women's assets during floods by household category . . . . .	285
Figure 9.2: Women benefitted from village common land and water courses . . . . .	305

## LIST OF MAPS

Map 1:	Area affected during 1988 floods in Bangladesh . . . . .	71
Map 2:	Location of Bhanga <i>thana</i> in Faridpur district . . . . .	72
Map 3:	The village of Jolpur . . . . .	76



### Glossary of Bengali words

<i>A am</i>	Mango
<i>A char</i>	Pickles
<i>A lmari</i>	Cupboard
<i>A lna</i>	Clothes-racks mainly made of wood
<i>A m in</i>	Land surveyors
<i>A mon</i>	Rice/paddy harvested in the winter season. There are two kinds of amon rice:broadcast amon, sown in mid-April to mid-May and harvested in mid-August to mid-September, and transplanted amon (one of the best quality crop in Bangladesh), planted in mid-August to mid September and harvested in mid-October to mid-November
<i>A nchol</i>	The trailing end of a sari
<i>A pa</i>	Elder sister
<i>A rhar</i>	A kind of lentil/pulse
<i>A sha</i>	Hope
<i>A shath</i>	A variety of large tree; peepul
<i>A tap</i>	Rice obtained from sun dried paddy
<i>A tar jau</i>	A gruel prepared from flour
<i>A us</i>	Rice/paddy harvested in the rainy season. This paddy planted from mid-March to mid-April and is harvested in July and August
<i>A yurvedic</i>	The Indian system of herbal medicine originating from the <i>A tharvaveda</i>

<i>Azan</i>	Call for prayer
<i>Babla</i>	A thorny tree from which gum is obtained; gum <i>acacia</i>
<i>Badha copi</i>	Cabbage
<i>Badna</i>	Kettle-like water pot
<i>Bandha jhee</i>	Tied/permanent maid
<i>Bari</i>	A complex of households which may or may not share the same courtyard
<i>Beel</i>	Marsh; swamp
<i>Begun</i>	Egg-plant
<i>Beparda</i>	Exposed
<i>Bepari</i>	Grain merchant
<i>Beshi</i>	More
<i>Bet</i>	Cane
<i>Bhabi</i>	Wife of elder brother
<i>Bhai</i>	Brother
<i>Bhalo</i>	Good
<i>Bhat</i>	Rice
<i>Bipoder somoy</i>	Danger period
<i>Bohera</i>	A medicinal fruit; <i>balearica myrobalan</i>
<i>Boitha</i>	Scull; a spoon-bladed oar
<i>Bon kochu</i>	Wild arum
<i>Bonna</i>	Severe/devastating flood
<i>Bora</i>	A kind of samosa fried in oil
<i>Borkha</i>	Veil
<i>Boroi</i>	A common fruit in Faridpur district; <i>zizyplus jujube</i>
<i>Borolok</i>	Rich/wealthy
<i>Borsha</i>	Normal monsoon flood
<i>Bou</i>	Wife
<i>Chachi</i>	Wife of father's brother
<i>Chador</i>	A long cloth covering the head and upper part of a woman's body

<i>Chal bhaja</i>	Crispy rice
<i>Chala</i>	A sack
<i>Char</i>	A sand bar
<i>Chara</i>	Young shoot of a plant or tree
<i>Chash</i>	Ploughing
<i>Chira</i>	Crushed rice which has been boiled and fried
<i>Chirata</i>	A bitter-tasting medicinal herb
<i>Chita</i>	Funeral pyre for the cremation of the dead according to Hindu rites
<i>Choitali</i>	Cereals; green crops (especially varieties of pulses) harvested in the Bengali month of <i>choitra</i>
<i>Choki</i>	A four legged bedstead, made out of average quality wood
<i>Chula</i>	A stove, mainly made out of clay
<i>Chung</i>	Wooden or bamboo platform under the roof of a house
<i>Chuta jhee</i>	A casually employed maid
<i>Coolie</i>	A porter
<i>Crore</i>	Ten millions
<i>Dabi</i>	Demand
<i>Dai</i>	A midwife
<i>Dal</i>	Pulse husk/lentils
<i>Dami</i>	Valuable
<i>Darwan</i>	Gate-keepers
<i>Data</i>	An edible plant
<i>Dayeshodhil takborgal khai- khalashi</i>	Sharecropping arrangement under which landowners leased out their land over a period of time in exchange for cash
<i>De-facto</i>	Women-headed households men of which households live outside village
<i>De-jure</i>	Women-headed households in which there is no men
<i>Debdaru</i>	A medicinal tree
<i>Dhap/shaluk</i>	Ground stalk of water lily

<i>Dhapra/ chapra</i>	Food of inferior quality usually made of liquid flour but often with pulse husks
<i>Dheki</i>	Foot operated hammer for grinding grain
<i>Dhutura</i>	Thorn-apple
<i>Dingi</i>	A narrow boat usually made of the trunk of palmyra
<i>Doa</i>	Edge of house floor
<i>Dol</i>	Factions
<i>Dowa</i>	Blessing
<i>Doya</i>	Kindness
<i>Durjog</i>	Disaster
<i>Dushsomoy</i>	Crises period/hard time
<i>Eid</i>	Muslim religious festival celebrated twice a year
<i>Ejmali sompotti</i>	Common property which belongs to all people in a village
<i>Fajar</i>	Muslim morning prayer
<i>Fakir</i>	A Muslim ascetic who provides spiritual guidance to his followers
<i>Farakka</i>	A dam built at Farakka (a place near the border of India and Bangladesh) which diverts Ganges water to flow to India in the dry season through an artificial canal and prevents normal flowing of Ganges water to Bangladesh.
<i>Fen</i>	Rice gruel/water strained from boiled rice
<i>Fita</i>	Hair ribbon
<i>Fitciri</i>	Alum
<i>Gamcha</i>	Thin towel
<i>Ghat</i>	Landing place on the bank of a river/canal/lake
<i>Khal/nala</i>	Canal
<i>Ghor</i>	A home; a dwelling
<i>Goalghor</i>	Cow-sheds
<i>Gora</i>	White
<i>Goshthi</i>	Patrilineage which stresses a shared blood relationship with a common male ancestor

<i>Gram</i>	Village
<i>Gurh</i>	Molasses made of sugar cane or date or palm juice
<i>Haat bar</i>	Market day
<i>Haat</i>	Weekly, bi-weekly market
<i>Horitoki</i>	Yellow myrobalan fruit
<i>Imam</i>	Leader of Muslim religious congregation
<i>Irri</i>	High yield varieties of (HYV) rice
<i>Ja</i>	Wife of one's husband's brother
<i>Jajmani</i>	Employer/employee relationships in the undivided Bengal. <i>Jajman</i> was used for all who have the employer relationships and the employee calls his entire clientele his <i>jajmani</i> .
<i>Jamai</i>	Husband of one's daughter; a son-in-law
<i>Jata</i>	Grind-stone; millstone; pair of heavy circular flat stones for grinding <i>robi</i> crops (for example, wheat, pulses.)
<i>Jhinga</i>	Cucurbitaceous fruit
<i>Jhola gurh</i>	Liquid molasses
<i>Jiafot</i>	Invitation to a feast
<i>Jinish</i>	Things
<i>Jollpani</i>	Water
<i>Jumma</i>	Prayer observed by Muslim men at mid-day on Fridays
<i>Kachari ghor</i>	A guest room
<i>Kacher churi</i>	Glass bangles
<i>Kaj</i>	Work
<i>Kalajira</i>	Black cumin seed
<i>Katha</i>	Quilt made from used saris
<i>Kathal</i>	Jack fruit
<i>Khala</i>	Mother's sister
<i>Kharap somoy</i>	Bad time
<i>Khesari</i>	A form of inferior lentils/pulse
<i>Khichuri</i>	A cooked mixture of rice and pulses

<i>Khop/khupri</i>	Hen coop made mainly from wood or bamboo
<i>Khora</i>	A plate made from clay
<i>Khud</i>	Broken bits of rice
<i>Kobiraj</i>	A traditional physician who follows the <i>Ayurvedic</i> system of treatment
<i>Kolar mocha</i>	Unopen flower of banana
<i>Kolmi shuk</i>	Edible aquatic plant; leaves of this plant cooked and eaten as spinach
<i>Kolshi</i>	Pitcher
<i>Kom</i>	Less
<i>Kothin somoy</i>	Hard time
<i>Krishan-kamla</i>	Hired agricultural labourer
<i>Krishi</i>	Agriculture
<i>Kula</i>	Winnowing platter/fan made out of split bamboo for separating grain from husk
<i>Kumra</i>	Pumpkin
<i>Kupi/bati</i>	Oil lamp
<i>Kura</i>	The red powdery coating of rice under the husk
<i>Latapata</i>	Creepers and herbs
<i>Latapatavoji</i>	A person who depends on creepers and herbs
<i>Lau</i>	Gourds
<i>Lozza/shorom</i>	Modesty
<i>Lungi</i>	Traditional dress worn by men in the lower part of body
<i>Ma</i>	Mother
<i>Macha</i>	Platform, made from bamboo or wood
<i>Madar</i>	Coral tree
<i>Madrasah</i>	Religious institution for Muslim boys
<i>Mainnal kheura</i>	Paddy used as animal, especially cattle, food
<i>Maryam</i>	Name of a flower
<i>Mashkalai</i>	A form of inferior lentil

<i>Masur</i>	A kind of lentil/pulse
<i>Maund</i>	Traditional measure of agricultural produce equivalent to 37.5 kilograms.
<i>Meye</i>	Daughter
<i>Morich</i>	Chilli
<i>Moshari</i>	Mosquito net
<i>Motki</i>	A large earthen-ware pot
<i>Motor</i>	Pea
<i>Mourabba</i>	A dry sweet made mainly from green mango
<i>Muazzin</i>	One who calls Muslims to prayer
<i>Mukh</i>	Face
<i>Mula</i>	Radish
<i>Mun/izzot</i>	Honour
<i>Mung</i>	A variety of lentils/pulse
<i>Munsif</i>	A lesser judge
<i>Muri</i>	Puffed rice
<i>Mushthichaal</i>	Handful of rice
<i>Naior</i>	A married daughter's visit to her parent's home
<i>Nakful</i>	Nose-pin
<i>Namaj</i>	Prayer as prescribed by Islam
<i>Nani</i>	Mother's mother
<i>Niribili</i>	Solitary
<i>Orna</i>	Long scarf worn by girls with <i>salwar-kamij</i>
<i>Paat shuk</i>	Leaves of the jute plant
<i>Paka</i>	Concrete
<i>Pakha</i>	Hand fan usually made from palm leaves
<i>Pani pora</i>	Water over which Quranic verses had been cited
<i>Panjabi</i>	Traditional loose-fitting trousers worn by men
<i>Panta bhat</i>	Stale, boiled rice put in fresh water and preserved for a future meal
<i>Para</i>	Neighbourhood within a village

<i>Parda</i>	Veil
<i>Pata</i>	Stone slab for grinding spices
<i>Paatkhorī</i>	Jute pole
<i>Peer</i>	Saint/holy man/spiritual guide
<i>Pepey</i>	Papaya
<i>Pila</i>	Jaundice
<i>Piri</i>	Flat wooden stool
<i>Pitha</i>	Cake made of husked rice
<i>Polau</i>	Fried rice with ghee
<i>Por-purush</i>	Male stranger
<i>Pora</i>	Burnt
<i>Pora kapali</i>	Unfortunate
<i>Porishod</i>	Council
<i>Pui</i>	Creepers used as a potherb
<i>Pur</i>	House, city or town
<i>Purush</i>	A man
<i>Quack doctor</i>	Those who treat patients with a combination of modern and traditional medicines
<i>Ruti</i>	Bread
<i>Sal</i>	Bark/outer rind of a tree
<i>Sala</i>	Sack
<i>Salgom</i>	Turnip
<i>Salish</i>	Village court before which village disputes are settled by the <i>samaj</i> leaders
<i>Salwar-kamij</i>	Loose-folded trousers and long shirts worn by young girls
<i>Samaj</i>	Community within a village
<i>Sarisha</i>	Mustard
<i>Sata shara</i>	Umbrella repairer
<i>Satu</i>	Flour made from barley or pigeon pea or maize
<i>Shakahari</i>	Vegetarian

<i>Shapla</i>	A variety of water lily
<i>Shekorh</i>	Root of a tree
<i>Shuddha</i>	Standardized
<i>Shuk</i>	Potherb
<i>Sika</i>	Jute-made hanger for household objects
<i>Sim</i>	Beans
<i>Sola</i>	Chick pea
<i>Sompod/ sompotti</i>	Assets
<i>Sona</i>	Gold
<i>Sosha</i>	Cucumber
<i>Tabiz</i>	An amulet containing holy words or a charm against evils, usually worn on the arm or neck
<i>Taka</i>	Monetary unit of Bangladesh; US\$ 1=40.3 <i>taka</i> ; NZ\$ 1=approximately 25 <i>taka</i> (16 March, 1995)
<i>Takta</i>	A plank of wood
<i>Tal</i>	Palm
<i>Thana</i>	Administrative unit
<i>Trak</i>	Lorry
<i>Uchu marjada</i>	High status
<i>Upo-dal</i>	Sub-faction
<i>Upojila</i>	Sub-district
<i>Vela</i>	A raft made from stem of banana plantain



## Abbreviations

BADC	Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation
BARC	Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council
BARD	Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BKB	Bangladesh Agricultural Bank (Bangladesh <i>Krishi</i> Bank)
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BWDB	Bangladesh Water Development Board
ESCAP	Economic and social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FAP	Flood Action Plan
FCD	Flood Control and Drainage
FCDI	Flood Control, Drainage and Irrigation
FPCO	Flood Plan Co-ordination Organization
HYV	High Yielding Variety (usually refer to paddy/rice)
ILO	International Labour Organization
MP	Member of Parliament
NWP	National Water Plan
SIDA	Swedish Development Corporation
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNO	Sub-district executive officer ( <i>Upojila nirbahi</i> officer)
UP	Union Council ( <i>Union porishod</i> )
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

<b>Bengali Calendar</b>	<b>Bengali Calendar</b>	<b>Gregorian Calendar</b>
<i>Boishakh</i>		15 April to 15 May
<i>Joishtha</i>		15 May to 15 June
<i>A sharh</i>		15 June to 15 July
<i>Srabon</i>		15 July to 15 August
<i>Bhadro</i>		15 August to 15 September
<i>A shin</i>		15 September to 15 October
<i>Kartik</i>		15 October to 15 November
<i>Agrahayon</i>		15 November to 15 December
<i>Poush</i>		15 December to 15 January
<i>Magh</i>		15 January to 15 February
<i>Falgun</i>		15 February to 15 March
<i>Chaitra</i>		15 March to 15 April



**PART I**

**BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**



## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The study focuses on how rural women in Bangladesh cope with floods: it describes in some detail how flood-related crises are experienced and the strategies adopted by women in the Bangladesh village of Jolpur to cope with them. It analyses the situations which arise in order to discover the key factors which structure their experiences and their responses to them.

The occurrence of floods in Bangladesh is as old as its history but over the last 40 years (1954-1995) the problem has become greatly aggravated and one of the main concerns of most rural households, life in which is precarious even in non-flood conditions. These problems affect rural women more severely than men because of the wider range of responsibilities that they have for their households and the fact that those responsibilities keep them tied to their households more strictly and more effectively than those of their male members. Those responsibilities, including food processing and cooking, cleaning, collecting water and fuel, bearing and rearing children, looking after livestock and income generation, become much more difficult to perform under flood conditions. Despite this heavy burden, which women bear in extremely difficult circumstances, they demonstrate considerable fortitude and ingenuity in their attempts to maintain the livelihoods of their households.

Explanation of these phenomena is sought in the economic, cultural and political structure of the country and of the village. Factors stressed in this study are the patriarchal structures of a Muslim society; the dominance of *parda* in the sub-culture of women and the position of women within the socio-economic context of their households: gendered culture and gendered economics.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study was, first, to explain and describe how rural women experience and cope with floods; second, to reveal the principal factors structuring their coping mechanisms. It addresses the following questions: How did women perceive and experience floods? What problems they faced during floods and how they responded to them? Were women merely victims or did they play an active role in protecting their households? Which women contributed to the survival of their households and which did not? Whether major social structures of rural society have changed as a consequence of the way in which women cope with floods? Was government support enough to help women? In responding to these questions a sociological perspective was adopted but not to the exclusion of other approaches. It was, and still is, the sociological aspects of the phenomena being explored which are of most concern to the author.

In exploring women's responses to floods the study focuses on the distinctive features of social structure of the Bangladesh village of Jolpur and obtains the following information about a representative sample of women: their socio-economic and demographic background; everyday life during non-flood period; perception and experience of floods; problems faced; preparation for floods; coping strategies or responses to floods; the gender division of labour and how they maintained *parda*.

## **Rationale**

The situation of rural women in Bangladesh has hardly been studied and there is still a lack of empirical work on the situation of women in floods.

Furthermore, few studies deal with human behavioural aspects of disaster in general, or even how men respond to floods. The whole area of peoples' response to floods is very much in need of research.

Women's responses are different from those of men. Women's responses to floods have to be understood in relation to the socio-economic conditions of their households; their everyday roles in these households and the institution of *parda*. Emphasizing the inferior socio-cultural position of women, this study addresses the problems of women during floods and their coping strategies which often led them to compromise their cultural values. The study of women's responses to floods is important because it can help in the design of better strategies to cope with floods.

In the following pages I will describe the situation of women in rural Bangladesh then I will compare their everyday life during flood-free times with flood periods. Women constitute 49 percent of the total population of Bangladesh and 90 percent of them live in rural areas. They work hard to maintain their household activities: they cook, clean, wash, do agricultural work, bear and care for children, care for livestock and poultry, make handicrafts and sew. Although women are strictly subordinate to men they have a high level of participation in productive activities both within and outside their households. Though women are not engaged in ploughing they play a key role in food production through preparation, storage and raising of seedlings. However, women's work is commonly considered to make a lesser economic contribution than men's: it is assumed to be less 'productive' and it is not officially measured. This assumption is supported by the fact that only field cultivation, such as ploughing (*chash*), is considered as agricultural work

and this is actually done by men. But data for women's involvement in agricultural work shows that they are much more involved in productive work than official statistics show (Safilios-Rothschild and Mahmud, 1989:2). Previously only subsistence and cash crop cultivation were considered as agriculture by government officials. In the 1960s a new definition of agriculture was introduced into government statistics. It included a broad range of activities, such as animal husbandry, food preservation, harvest, pre- and post-harvest activities and field cultivation. However, even though the range of activities officially included under agriculture was greatly extended in reality women's contributions to these newly included activities were not enumerated, any more than their contributions had been under the more limiting, pre-1960's, definition. Women contributed much more than men to these activities yet still their contribution was not acknowledged by government statistics.

The concepts 'production' and 'reproduction' as related to women's labour have now become a basic element in feminist literature. The term 'reproduction' includes the 'biological', which includes child birth and lactation and also the 'physical', which includes the daily regeneration of the labour force through cooking, cleaning, washing and so on, and 'social' reproduction, which includes the maintenance of ideological conditions and upholds the social and economic status quo (Edholm, Harris and Young, 1977:101-30; Mackintosh, 1981:9-12; Brydon and Chant, 1989:11). It is significant that in Bangladesh these activities fall mainly in the women's domain and contribute to the exclusion of women from public life. It is necessary to understand women's home-based activities as both 'productive' and 'reproductive': many domestic-based activities of Bangladeshi women contribute income to the household unit in the form of saving, budgeting or the provision of unpaid services.

## **Disaster research on rural women**

What has been done to document the situation of rural women? In Bangladesh the crucial roles of these women, noted above, were not recognised by researchers and policy makers until the International Women's Year in 1975. Previously the life of Bengali women was portrayed through creative writing, such as novels, stories and poetry. The authors of such work have contributed significantly to our understanding of the life of Bengali women through describing women's sacrifices for their husbands and other family members. However, it is difficult to formulate policies based solely on those writings. Since 1975 several international organizations, for example, UN agencies, UNICEF, the Ford Foundation, the Swedish Development Corporation (SIDA), Save the Children, FAO, ILO and ESCAP encouraged a number of researchers to make studies of rural women (Abdullah, 1974; Lindenbaum, 1974; Women for Women, 1975; McCarthy, 1977; Arens and Beurden, 1977; Nelson, 1979; Abdullah and Zeidenstein, 1982; Chen, 1983; Westergaard, 1983; Hartmann and Boyce, 1983). Even though they are broad and general these studies deserve credit for pioneering scientific research on the lives of rural women. However, none of these studies has dealt with women's situation during natural disasters such as floods. A study of women's situation during floods is necessary not only because women in Bangladesh have to live with floods and suffer more than others, but also because of the contributions women make despite their socially subordinate position.

A considerable number of research projects and policies have addressed specific issues relating to women and development. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDPP) was inaugurated in 1975 and pioneered in Bangladesh. Those projects have made a significant contribution to the study of women in general, or on their income generating activities in particular, but still their subsistence agricultural activities have not been accepted as 'productive' work.

White (1992:15-19) states that the main focus of most pieces of research on women addressed the data requirements of policy makers. The research stressed that women should be included in the development process. The problems of women were discussed to help policy makers. Women's 'invisibility' was highlighted, recognizing that women should be included in the national economy because of their responsibilities as the bearers of the future generation. Discussion about women has been further developed through recognizing women as resource managers. Importance was given to increased food production, lowering the birth rate and closing the gap between different socio-economic groups. Poor women became a 'target group' for policy formulation. Women's status and development has been identified with their health and work. Only a few researchers (Lindenbaum, 1974; Arens and Beurden, 1977) pointed out the negative impact of 'development' on women and on the society as a whole.

During the mid-1980s, some research was conducted on more gender-specific issues such as dowry (Ahmed and Nahar, 1986); violence against women (Akanda and Shamim, 1984); income generation (Ahmad, 1980; Begum, 1988); prostitution (Khan and Arefin, 1989) and beliefs and rituals in birth (Blanchet, 1984) but almost nothing had been done to draw attention to the burden of women's domestic work or the gendered division of labour. Sociological gender-focused studies are still few in Bangladesh.

From the above discussion it is clear that there is a general lack of research on, or planning for, rural women in Bangladesh. This lack of research is related to the fact that women's work is not seen as 'productive'. The same is true in the literature on floods. An annotated bibliography on social science literature on disaster in Bangladesh (Alam, 1990a) indicates that floods as disaster have been well researched, documented and recorded, but the specific responses of women to floods have not been studied as a separate topic. Studies have been mostly conducted after severe floods. These papers highlight

the perception, suffering, miseries and flood damages, their causes and socio-economic impact and the damage, control, management and mitigation of floods. But neither rural women's activities nor their responses during flooding received significant attention. Some information on women can be found in a few writings which highlight peoples' responses during natural disasters (Feldman and McCarthy, 1983; Hossain, Dodge and Abed, 1992). Only a few studies (Shaw, 1989; Adnan, 1990:s-6; Alam, 1991c; Hanchett, 1992; Hanchett and Begum, 1992) briefly consider the problems of women during floods. Although these writings lack the details of women's responses to floods they deserve credit for their attempts to understand the situation of women during floods.

#### **Approaches to the study of disasters**

After surveying the general literature on disaster, Alexander (1993:12-15) identified six schools of thought on natural hazards and disaster studies: the geographical approach, the anthropological approach, the sociological approach, the development studies approach, the disaster medicine and the technical approach. The geographical approach (pioneered by Barrows, 1923 and White, 1945) deals with the human ecological adaptation to the environment with special emphasis on the 'spatio-temporal' distribution of hazard impacts, vulnerability and people's choice and adjustment to natural hazards. Social science methods are widely used in this approach.

The anthropological approach (Oliver-Smith, 1979, 1986; Hansen and Oliver-Smith, 1982) emphasizes the role of disasters in guiding the socio-economic evolution of populations. Anthropologists adopting this approach search for reasons why communities in the 'Third World' fail to provide basic requirements for their people's survival. They also discuss the 'marginalization syndrome' caused by impoverishment of disadvantaged groups in 'Third World' countries. The sociological approach (Dynes, 1970; Quarantelli, 1978; Mileti,

Drabek and Hass, 1975; Drabek and Boggs, 1968; Drabek, 1986) discusses vulnerability and the impact of disaster upon patterns of human behaviour and the effects of disaster upon community functions and organization.

The development studies approach (Davis, 1978; Chen et al., 1980; Knott, 1987) discusses the problems of distributing aid and relief to 'Third World' countries and focuses on refugee management, health care and the avoidance of starvation. The disaster medicine and epidemiology approach (Beinin, 1985; PAHO, 1981) focuses on the management of mass casualties. It also includes the treatment of severe physical trauma and other diseases which may occur after a disaster.

The technical approach (Bolt et al. 1977; El-Sabh and Murty, 1988) focuses on geophysical approaches to disaster such as are studied in seismology, geomorphology and volcanology and seeks engineering solutions.

Among these approaches two disciplines, geography and sociology, have dominated the field of disaster research since the 1950s and have emphasised the environmental and behavioural aspects of disaster. Drabek's (1986:16-18) findings on existing sociological literature is a significant contribution to the conceptual typology of sociological disaster research. He identified different areas of concern in disaster research such as planning, warning, evacuation, emergency, restoration, reconstruction, perceptions and adjustments. He placed his findings under four major headings: preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. However, most of these theories (described by Alexander) and sociological research (discussed by Drabek) on disaster have been formulated and conducted for the developed world (especially the USA). Their application to developing areas is problematic and very limited in the Bangladeshi cultural context. Moreover, there is almost no discussion of the situation of women in disaster under any theoretical approach. In fact, only recently have sociologists turned their attention to the larger questions of social change related to disaster

or the pre-impact conditions in disaster areas as a source of post-impact changes (Oliver-Smith, 1986:10-13). However, there was no research on women in Bangladesh on this theme either.

Past research on natural disasters (such as, famine, river bank erosion, floods or cyclones) in Bangladesh has followed the geographical approach of the Chicago-Colorado-Clark-Toronto School of Natural Hazard Studies associated with Kates, 1962, 1971, White, 1964, 1974 and Burton et al., 1978. Disaster response studies (Islam, 1974; Paul, 1984; Alam, 1990b, 1991a) deal with people's behaviour, such as their perception, attitudes, beliefs, values, response and personalities. These studies fall in the first school of thought (i.e. geographical approach) described by Alexander. They are concerned to discover people's choices and adjustments to disaster, for example, how people viewed the hazard and how they perceived alternative opportunities available to them in coping with hazardous events. Their study problems are significant from their point of view and do contribute to disaster studies but some of their interpretations regarding people's problems and behaviour are misleading (for example, Islam, 1974:19-25). They see Bangladeshi people as 'traditionally fatalist'. This mistaken idea came from certain answers given by rural people in response to questions such as, "What do you do when flood hits your homestead?" and the response, "Pray to God". The reasons for such responses were not studied carefully (Rahman, 1988:4-5). Zaman (1989:197-198; 1986:178) points out that behaviouralists fail to understand the socio-cultural background of adjustment for Bangladeshi people. Alam's (1991c:1-26) study, however, discusses human behavioural factors in the context of existing social relations. He sees flood-prone people in relation to vulnerability and argues that people's behaviour differs by gender, age, ethnic group and economic status. The present study accepts Alam's (1991c) view which emphasizes the need for research on women's responses during floods.

There are also structural (Brammer, 1975; Currey, 1978:87-98; Alexander,

1993:532-548) and historico-structural (Zaman, 1986:177-200) approaches to natural disasters. The structural approach sees disaster as a consequence of administrative or institutional weakness. This approach makes a valuable contribution regarding structural remedial measures to cope with disasters but lacks an understanding of people's own initiatives to cope with disaster. According to the historico-structuralist approach individual responses to disasters in Bangladesh should be viewed in a broad socio-cultural and historical context (Zaman, 1989:198). Furthermore, neither the behaviourist nor the structuralist studies discuss women.

Hossain et al (1987) examined whether rural people in flood-free and flood-prone areas adopted different survival strategies or not and also focused on the responses of rural people in general, but not on women's responses. Shaw (1989) highlighted the problems of poor women in a relief camp in Dhaka city. She noted how women bore a social burden of shame when living with strangers and drew attention to the difficulties women faced when trying to maintain *parda* during floods. In his study on riverbank erosion and floods Rahman (1988) argued that people's ability to adjust to hazards should be viewed as an extension of social and natural systems already existing in society. He also pointed out that there are differences in people's reaction to riverbank erosion and flooding according to their socio-economic location. However, he overlooked gender differences. Alam's (1991a) study focused on the survival strategies of rural people on the flood-prone and relatively flood-free villages. The author observed that some middle and poor income households sold or mortgaged their lands and other assets to avert hunger during floods. No discussion of women's asset disposal was included. The Flood Action Plan 14's (FAP-14, for details refer to Chapter Two) study (1992) on peoples' responses to floods was conducted under the auspices of the Bangladesh Flood Action Plan. In the Flood Action Plan there was no discussion about women's position in the flood plain until the inclusion of an anthropologist in October 1991 in FAP 14. A section entitled, 'Economic and

Social Significance of Flood For the Rural Households: Findings of The Gender Study' was included in FAP 14's draft final report. Using the case study method this study dealt with the experience of a few women in female-headed households. It contributed significantly to the understanding of gender issues in floods through highlighting some of the major problems faced by women during floods. However, it lacks detailed information on women's responsibilities, their position in society and in their households, their coping strategies and flood mitigation actions.

Government and many other bodies dealing with flood control mainly communicate with wealthier, influential landowners who do not represent or serve the interest of the poor or of women. Nor does it seem to have occurred to policy makers that women might be involved in different activities from men or experience floods differently from men.

Researchers (Latif, 1989:103-1-5; Custers, 1993:1503) have pointed out that any steps to control floods should emphasise both the structural (i.e. building of embankments) and non-structural (i.e. people's initiatives) approach. They have discussed the problems and the negative consequences of floods and flood control projects for the environment, fisheries and many other aspects of life (Adnan, 1990; Boyce, 1990; Rogers et al., 1989; Pearce, 1991b; Custers, 1993). However, they have ignored the problems of women. There has been almost no discussion of the differential impact of floods upon men and women and very little about their differential impact upon people in different socio-economic categories.

As noted earlier geographical and sociological approaches have dominated the field of disaster research in developed societies, disaster research in Bangladesh mainly followed the geographical approach. Though useful, past studies take into account neither the sociological approach nor deal with women's responses to disaster. Although some of the above-mentioned studies

have considered socio-economic and cultural variables in assessing human responses to cyclones, river bank erosion and floods they have ignored women. It can be said, therefore, that there has been no in-depth research on how rural women from different socio-economic backgrounds respond to floods nor how they attempt to mitigate the impact of floods. Although poor rural women have very few options open to them to overcome their problems, their roles in disasters are obviously not simple: they relate to a complete range of socio-economic activities. During floods women continue to be bearers and socialisers of children, collectors and providers of food, fuel, water, fodder, building materials and keepers of household belongings: they also represent a productive potential which is not discussed. The present study argues that it is women's strategies, developed over the last few years, that are vital in enabling the rural people to cope with floods.

The present study will focus on the way poor women have been able to use the few options which come their way: their role in providing family food, drinking water, health care, their use of village common resources, social networks, stores and savings, personal assets, their protection of livestock and other belongings and their performance of both men's and women's activities.

### **Organisation of the study**

As we have seen the thesis starts with an introduction describing its purpose followed by a description of the significance of women in disaster research. I then proceed to examine the situation of floods in Bangladesh.

Chapter Two describes the history of floods, the dimension of two recent severe floods and Government measures to control floods. This background information helps us to understand the present situation of floods which women in Bangladesh experience frequently. Chapter Three describes the general background of rural women in Bangladesh. This review is an essential

background to chapters 6 to 11 where the situation of women during non-flood and flood periods is analyzed in relation to their socio-economic background.

The methods, techniques and problems of field data collection are discussed in Chapter Four. A description of Jolpur, the village in which the study was carried out, and its surrounding environment is also given in Chapter Four.

Chapter Five defines and analyses the interrelationships between the basic social groups (*samaj*, *goshthi*, *para*) of the village. The socio-economic background of the villagers, which cuts across the basic social groups, is also an important feature of village structure. Chapter Five helps us to understand basic elements of the social structure and Chapter Six presents an overview of the gender relations and position of women in Jolpur and goes on to consider the way in which socio-economic conditions shape the specificity of women's position.

Chapter Seven describes the everyday life of women in Jolpur during non-flood periods. The gendered division of labour, women's role in food management, the maintenance of *parda* and women's ownership of assets are emphasised here in the context of their households' socio-economic background. This review helps us to have a better understanding of chapters eight to ten.

Chapter Eight is concerned with women's flood period activities. How women perceive floods and the nature of the problems experienced by women when living in flood shelters, losing their assets, performing their gender assigned activities, maintaining *parda* and collecting relief goods during floods are discussed here. Women's coping strategies during floods are discussed in Chapter Nine in order to provide a more detailed picture of their activities.

Through a number of case studies, Chapter Ten focuses on the immense

problems faced by particular women during floods and the ways in which they attempted to overcome these problems. In Chapter Eleven conclusions and recommendations are made.

### **Summary**

I begin this study with a description of how women suffer from the problems related to floods in Bangladesh, followed by an explanation of why the problems are experienced in that way. I examine how the norms of a male-dominated society undermine women's 'productive' role and why women are given a lower status than men. I analyze what has been done to change the situation of women. I then proceed to examine research related to floods in Bangladesh and how women are excluded from the discussion of floods.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The floods**

Floods, more or less severe, cover large parts of Bangladesh each year causing the insecurity and misery which has already been alluded to. The central purpose of the chapter is to describe the conditions which they help to create and which rural women have to contend for several months in most years. Whether the floods are of only natural origin and the degree to which they can be regarded as the central causal factor are discussed in this chapter. The major floods of 1987 and 1988 are the ones focused upon here because of their severity.

#### **History of floods**

Since 1954 floods have occurred in Bangladesh almost every year, though the frequency and intensity of the floods occurring has varied. Floods are now the worst kind of disaster that can occur.

It is ironic that floods should be termed 'disasters' or 'hazards', for without riverine floods Bangladesh would not exist. The silt which the rivers bring down, a million tonnes a day by the Ganges alone, is responsible for replenishing the fertility of the soil, which would otherwise have been

exhausted by continuous agricultural activities. This renewed fertility has allowed Bangladesh to become a country with a high density of population in its rural area, based on highly intensive agriculture. During the monsoon (*borsha*) low lying villages remain under three-four feet of water. This water is essential for growing *aus* rice and broad cast *amon* rice. Considering the nature and type of water logging, researchers (Paul 1984:3-19; Shaw 1989:1; Alam 1990b:5) have pointed out that in Bengali the English term 'flood' does not imply abnormality. Rather distinctions are made between 'normal' and 'abnormal' floods. Normal floods, or *borsha*, are an accepted and much anticipated event and are perceived by women as benevolent agents for providing sustenance to farmers and agricultural labourers. Abnormal floods, or *bonna*, on the contrary, are regarded as disastrous and damaging phenomena. Abnormal floods cause widespread damage to standing crops and other property<sup>1</sup>.

Prior to 1957 there were no systematic studies of (abnormal) flooding in Bangladesh. After the repeated floods of 1954 and 1955 a UN mission, requested by the then Government of Pakistan and headed by Mr. J.A. Krugg, carried out a study of this issue. Since the early 1960s experts from different parts of the world have been invited to provide policy recommendations on this issue. Since the early 1960s until recent years a considerable number of flood control projects have been implemented and some are currently under construction. During the 1987 and 1988 floods almost all the projects demonstrated serious shortcomings in planning, design and execution.

---

1 In this study the term 'flood' is used to refer to abnormal floods or *bonna* unless otherwise stated.

## **Kinds of floods**

There are four kinds of floods which are considered damaging: flash floods, river floods, rain floods and cyclonic (cyclonic floods or cyclonic rain that causes flood) or sea floods (Brammer, 1989:8-9; 1990a:15-17). In the eastern and northern rivers flash floods occur due to heavy rainfall in the neighbouring hills and mountains before and during the monsoon. River floods occur due to heavy rainfall and melting snow in the upper catchment areas of the Ganges, Tista, Brahmaputra and eastern rivers lying outside Bangladesh. Heavy local rainfall may aggravate such floods. Damaging floods may occur when the three major rivers rise simultaneously. The timing of such floods is important in relation to crop damage (see below). Rain water floods occur due to heavy rainfall within Bangladesh. During the monsoon cyclonic storms bring excessive rainfall which can continue for 3 to 10 days and may exceed local drainage capacities and cause floods. Cyclonic floods occur when cyclones heat in the Bay of Bengal and cause landfall. Each year during April-May and October-December 16 cyclones occur on average in the Bay of Bengal which destroy rice and other crops. In 1991 crop damage was estimated at about 281,000 tonnes (Alexander, 1993:542-3).

## **Causes of floods**

As indicated above the origins of floods are not uniform. Flood water may come from three main sources: the sea, the rivers and rainfall. These, together or independently, may all generate more water than can be drained quickly from the land. However, the specific causes of floods vary from region to region.

Extensive research on floods was conducted by national and international experts after the 1988 floods and several theories have been developed about their causes (Ahmad, 1989:20-30; Khalequzzaman, 1994:65-80). However, the

exact causes are still unknown. Several explanations have been addressed: confluence of the major rivers, high monsoon rainfall, low mean sea level, rise of sea level, siltation of rivers, flood control measures, deforestation, the construction of the Farakka barrage and others. The last three causes, flood control measures, deforestation and the construction of Farakka barrage, are not only due to natural or ecological factors but also to social factors. Ecology is a significant factor in flooding but in part ecology is shaped by human activities causing deforestation and global warming. Ecology also clearly affects human societies, but its ability to do so is in part shaped by existing social arrangements (such as the poor who live close to the main rivers in poorly constructed houses). Because most of the research on causes of floods was done either by geographers or geologists they have given preference to the natural rather than the social causes of floods. Here the emphasis will be on social causes.

The construction of embankments and other flood control structures in and outside Bangladesh is described by researchers as one of the main causes of floods<sup>2</sup>. Several thousand kilometres of embankment have been constructed in the upper reaches of the rivers beyond the borders of Bangladesh. These have caused floods in Bangladesh.

The demand for food and firewood by the people of the Indian sub-continent has resulted in the acceleration of deforestation in the hilly areas of Nepal. It is widely believed that deforestation caused soil erosion which in turn has contributed to severe flooding in Bangladesh (Khalequzzaman, 1994:68).

---

2. Impacts of flood control projects within Bangladesh will be discussed later in the chapter.

The temperature of the world is steadily rising. Researchers (Gable and Aubery, 1990:33-46) argue that this is causing excessive rainfall and the melting of ice in the Himalayan region which, in turn, affects the low lying coastal areas by raising water levels.

The Farakka Barrage built by India is identified as one of the causes of severe flooding in Bangladesh. This barrage, was built on the Ganges only 18 kilometres away from the Bangladesh border, has changed the regime of the Ganges. Since the construction of the barrage flood peaks at some places on the Ganges and Brahmaputra have increased. Nearly 50,000 cusec of flood water has been diverted into Bangladesh which aggravated the flood situation (Ahmad, 1989:28). Other reasons have also been given for the floods such as the tides of the Bay of Bengal, geological faults which control topographical features and earthquakes in the Himalayan mountains.

Bangladesh has an extensive network of rivers, streams and canals the total length of which is about twenty four thousand kilometres (Rashid, 1991:44). The water courses are unevenly distributed and are criss-crossed (except those of Chittagong sub-regions) by three major river systems, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. The lower reaches of these three rivers together form the largest delta in the world<sup>3</sup>. Floods occur most frequently in the areas around the confluence of the big rivers and along their banks. The synchronization of the flood peaks of the three major rivers was identified as one of the main causes of the 1988 floods.

The watersheds of the three large rivers receive some of the world's heaviest rainfalls: the Ganges-Padma receives 140cm; the Brahmaputra-Jamuna receives 210cm and the Meghna receives 400cm. The total amount of rainfall

---

3. Generally Bangladesh is described as a delta or alluvial flood plain, which is subdivided into piedmont plains, active river floodplain, river meander floodplain, major floodplain basins, estuarine floodplain and tidal floodplain (Brammer, 1990a:14).

and the intensity of storms vary regionally. The south-westerly monsoon brings annual rainfall to Bangladesh. This heavy rainfall may coincide with heavy discharges into the rivers and cause severe floods.

Half of the land of Bangladesh is less than eight metres above sea level. Flood water spills from the rivers and inundates the plains. The south-easterly monsoon winds may raise the sea level about 60cm. This adversely affects the drainage and creates or intensifies floods in coastal areas.

There have been remarkable changes in the behaviour of the minor distributaries of the principal distributaries of the Ganges-Padma and the Brahmaputra. Floods occur in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh mainly due to river siltation: in particular the Padma and the Brahmaputra are badly silted up. A contributory cause of this siltation may have been the earthquake of 1950.

The implications for agricultural activity vary according to the origin and type of flooding that is experienced. These floods will therefore be discussed in relation to the destruction of crops because agriculture is the main source of income for most people in rural Bangladesh. Destruction of crops and animals has led people to adopt different strategies for their survival. Early flash floods (April-May) may destroy crops such as jute and late floods may damage *aus* and transplanted *amon*. If flood water rises rapidly in June, it may damage *aus*, deep water *amon* and jute. In July and early August floods are less damaging because *aus* and jute have been harvested by then and deep water *amon* will benefit from these deep floods. Floods coming in late August and September are damaging when deep water *amon* cannot reach expected heights due to rapidly rising water levels. River floods prevent planting, replanting and crop formation. They submerge seedlings and waste plants. They also erode river banks.

During the monsoon heavy local rainfall may coincide with high river levels and can cause flooding on both the main floodplain and other regions. In the major floodplain areas such rainfall can damage young *aus*, deep water *amon* and jute. Abnormally high floods in June or early July can damage *aus* and jute. Later (up to mid-August) floods may help the growth of deep water *amon*. But if the flood water stays high till after mid-August, it may cause damage to transplanted and deep water *amon*.

#### **Dimension of 1987 and 1988 floods**

Hydrological analysis suggests that the consecutive floods of 1987 and 1988 were the highest in 70-100 years. These two floods caused severe damage to Bangladesh which attracted international attention. Houses, roads, railways and embankments were submerged. The poor who were living close to the main rivers in poorly constructed houses suffered most. Both floods disrupted normal economic activities for over a month. However, these two floods were very different in nature and origin, which has led researchers to speculate further about the causes of floods in Bangladesh.

The 1987 flood was caused mainly by heavy rainfall from July to September over north-west Bangladesh. The monthly rainfall was recorded as 100 to 150 year events. Minor water courses failed to accommodate the huge water flow because of siltation in the river beds. Insufficient drainage and embankments without proper bridges and culverts were also identified as causes of the 1987 flood. Besides Dhaka many district head quarters, which were built above the normal flood level, were affected. From June to September almost all districts of Bangladesh were submerged and the flood water took more than the normal time to recede.

The 1987 flood though bad was not as bad as the 1988 one which was predominantly caused by the flooding of rivers. It started in May-June

with early flash floods in the south-eastern hill basins. The situation was aggravated by intensive rainfall over the north-east of Bangladesh and Meghalaya to the north which brought two major rivers above the danger level. All the major rivers exceeded their danger levels from July to August. Between 27 August and 10 September most rivers reached high volume at much the same times. This caused damage to more than 60% of the country. In the 1988 monsoon there was a lower rainfall than in 1987. A comparison of impacts of 1987 and 1988 floods is given in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Comparison of the impacts of the 1987 and 1988 floods in Bangladesh**

<b>Sectors</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1988</b>
Area flooded (sq.km)	57,000	84,059
Deaths	1,657	4,176
Rice production lost (million tonnes)	3.5	2.0
Cattle lost	64,700	172,000
Poultry lost	206,000	410,000
Houses destroyed or damaged (millions)	2.5	7.2
Trunk roads damaged (km)	1,523	2,935
Rural roads damaged (km)	15,107	15,892
Levees damaged (km)	1,279	1,990

**Source: Brammer, 1990a:18; Alexander, 1993:545.**

Note: This table is selective: not all damage done is included.

## **Floods and their effects on human lives**

Flooding is the most common disaster and it is a principal cause of anxiety of most of the vulnerable households in rural Bangladesh. Flooding leads to a shortage of essential commodities with a consequent increase in their prices thus causing a decline in the purchasing power of poor rural households. Many poor households do not have any money to buy essentials. Floods accentuate the process of pauperization and social differentiation and are followed by health hazards leading to epidemics (Hossain et al., 1987:22-42). During the 1988 flood about 1,657 people died in Bangladesh (Brammer, 1990a:18) from many causes: drowning, disease, lack of medical facilities, snake bites, electrocution, starvation and flood-related accidents, for example, land slides, collapse of buildings or injury from floating debris. Most deaths occurred due to sickness or lack of proper and timely treatment.

The 1988 flood devastated all types of agricultural activities, crops, livestock, fisheries and forests in addition to houses and other buildings. It devastated agriculture over 334 *thana* and four metropolitan areas. More than two million hectares of crops were damaged. The loss of food grain was estimated at about 2.5 million tons (ESCAP, 1989:61-64) and damage to other agricultural products was also high.

In the northern region of Bangladesh (the region where Jolpur is situated) the 1988 flood occurred during late August when the *aus* crop was being harvested and the early winter when *amon* (the main crop) was being planted. The transplantation of the *amon* crop was interrupted by the sudden rise of water. Seed bed nurseries and transplanted seedlings were washed away.

The loss of livestock, upon which Bangladesh farming households depend for cultivation, for meat, milk and income, was grave. The destruction of fodder caused severe animal malnutrition and many died.

Floods affected the houses of over 80% of the population. The proportion of damaged houses in rural areas was higher than the proportion in the urban areas because over 70% of rural houses were constructed of insubstantial materials bamboo and thatch. The cost of repair or reconstruction was estimated at TK. 3000 *crore* (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1989).

Damage to the main crop, that is *amon*, brought about loss of other assets. The physical destruction of land and other vital assets further aggravated the situation of the rural poor. Many became destitute due to the loss of important assets such as livestock.

Men lost their jobs or they could not reach them because of floods. During floods, people tried to remain in or near their homes as long as they could. If floods forced them out of their houses, their first thought was to look for temporary shelter within the village as close to their homes as possible. If this was not possible, perhaps because the whole village was under water, or because they were unable to get to higher ground on someone else's land, they tried to find shelter in some other nearby place. Most people who left their homes waited for the floods to recede and then returned.

#### **Measures to control flooding**

Over the last three decades about 200 flood control projects have been completed under the name of Flood Control and Drainage (FCD) and Flood Control, Drainage and Irrigation (FCDI). Since 1960, 50 percent of the funds for water development projects have been spent on FCD. FCD and FCDI completed 500 projects. Many embankments have been built and many are under construction.

In Bangladesh embankments have been used as a traditional flood control measure since J.A. Krugg's report in 1956. However, a number of studies and

reports have pointed out the negative consequences of FCD projects: the benefits of FCD projects were not planned. The costs and timing of the projects overran due to the cost and process of land acquisition. Moreover because such projects are not based on the nature of the flood plain, they do not prevent floods but rather increase flood losses. Many embankments have had a negative effect on river regimes, land formation, agriculture, fisheries and on the overall environment. One example of such a project is the Meghna-Dhanagoda Irrigation Project (MDIP). This project proceeded without an environmental impact assessment study and became a major environmental disaster. Similarly, other projects had a negative impact on environment and crops. Some of these problems are listed below: most of them provide no means for water to escape and as a result, land is often submerged and crops damaged<sup>4</sup>; water logging through lack of drainage on the lower level land occurs both inside and outside the polders; flood-depths increase in non-polder areas; soil fertility declines inside polders; embankment breaches develop through river erosion; farmers with insufficient understanding of new water regimes are unable to adjust to the new farming systems; the more embankments have been built the greater the area flooded (BARC, 1989:2-4) and many of the FCD constructions were not based on regional feasibility studies. Embankments and other constructions collapsed or did not function properly because they were not technically sound, appropriately constructed or adequately maintained (Adnan, 1990:4).

Lessons have not been learned from past experience: embankments continue to be built. Despite the fact that embankment projects are a controversial measure in mitigating floods and have had negative effects on the environment, engineers and donors still take this approach to flood control. Since the 1988 flood, experts from many countries have been asked to advise

---

4. For more see *Dhaka Courier*:5 (24) January 20-26, 1989 and *The Bangladesh Observer*, March, 1990.

on flood control. UNDP, French Engineering and the World Bank-funded Flood Action Plan (FAP)<sup>5</sup> have reported that embankments should be the basis of flood control. According to the French plan the building of embankments will cost from US\$5.2 billion to US\$10.1 billion. Subsequent operations and maintenance costs are estimated at US\$160-180 million per annum in perpetuity (Boyce, 1990:421). Flood Action Plan decided to build high embankments along both sides of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna, the three main rivers of the country.

Since its establishment FAP has been criticised by local and international researchers (Adnan, 1990; Alam, 1992; Boyce, 1990; Rogers, et.al., 1989; Pearce, 1991b; Custers, 1993) because of its decision to construct long embankments which could be harmful to the country's environment and economy. Bangladesh's Flood Action Plan aimed to execute engineering works to reduce flood damage without reducing the beneficial effects of flooding (Boyce, 1990:425). The negative consequences of FAP's high embankment projects on many aspects of the country's environment, people and economy are very great.

Bangladesh rivers are extremely wide and it is not possible to form alternative channels to tame these rivers. Rivers in Bangladesh "are still in the process of fashioning the delta" (Custers, 1993:1502). The FAP experts designed their projects without any basic knowledge of the stages of development of these deltaic rivers. The report of a Government task force during the interim Government<sup>6</sup> stated that since the Krugg Mission report,

---

5. The devastating floods of 1987 and 1988 received attention of foreign officials and donors. Governments of France, Japan and the UNDP, USAID send experts and engineers to take measures to control flooding. In December 1989 the World Bank conference decided to provide a permanent solution by establishing an office with foreign engineers and experts, which was named 'Flood Action Plan' (FAP). FAP started its work with 17 main and 15 supporting components.

6. Caretaker government after the fall of president Ershad in 1990.

although emphasis was put on basic research on Bangladesh rivers, it has been neglected. This report suggested that the FAP undertake research before taking any further steps towards solving the flood problems.

Researchers have pointed out that for farmers less water is more problematic than too much water. In the past two decades, during the drought years, rice production has seriously fallen compared to *bonna* years. *Bonna* helped to produce normal or above-average rice harvests (Boyce, 1990:422); hence the argument of policy makers that flood should be prevented to reduce agricultural losses is not justified. *Borsha* deposits silt and makes the land of Bangladesh fertile. Some rice needs thigh deep water to grow and farmers need boats for harvesting. If flood control measures prevent floods from occurring then agricultural land in Bangladesh will lose its nitrogen source (Boyce, 1990:424).

The flood plain is suitable for catching fresh-water fish. Many people maintain their livelihood through fishing as a main or secondary occupation. The people of Bangladesh get their main animal protein (80% approximately) from fish. Fifty percent of fresh-water fish is caught from flooded land and 50% from inland rivers, estuaries and marshy areas (*beel*) (Boyce, 1993:423)<sup>7</sup>. If FAP's four to seven metre high embankment is built, a million poor rural households will lose their source of income from fishing. For example, the embankment of Chandpur reduced local fisheries. The traditional diversity of Bangladesh's aquaculture (which comprises 257 fish species and 20 prawn species) has already been drastically reduced in certain areas as a result of construction of embankments and other structures (BARC, 1989:4).

---

7. Of 251 identified fish species 60% fish are dependent on flood plain and 73% of rural poor depended on catching fish as a part time occupation (Minkin, 1989:7).

FAP did not include environmental issues in its original plan, rather they added a single paragraph saying that "flood control schemes have to be planned, designed and operated to preserve and enhance ground water recharge, agriculture, fishing and river transport" (World Bank, 1989:8). Rather than being a major component environmental study was included only as a supportive activity in the FAP.

Custers, (1993:1501) commented that the Flood Action Plan of Bangladesh "is a good example of the unrealistic and expensive schemes that agencies like the World Bank have pushed on third world countries without a realistic appraisal of experiences within the country". Researchers argued that to complete FAP's high embankment projects Bangladesh's annual budget would be over burdened to about 0.9 billion US dollars which would lead the country into further poverty. The added tax burdens would fall on the rural poor which would be more disastrous than the floods.

FAP projects have also been criticized for helping better-off people rather than helping the rural poor (Pearce, 1991:36). The rural poor, comprising the majority of the population, have to bear the expense of the project. It is the better-off farmers or large land owners who have the resources to apply modern technology or high input fertilizers to irrigate land. Unlike poor farmers they do not suffer the shortage of water as severely because of their other resources. Poor farmers, on the other hand, do not want to stop flooding for fear of the shortage of annual flood water or *borsha*. However, they have suggested that measures could be taken to manage severe flooding or *bonna* in such a way that would not interrupt normal flood or *borsha* water flow. Some have said that if *borsha* does not occur because of the methods of flood prevention, they would prefer to live with the flood (*bonna*). The World Bank itself has reported that "farmers on relatively high land within the polders had a different view from farmers on the low lands as to what constituted a flood. Gate settings that were just right for the former would be disastrous for the latter.

Similarly, farmers growing jute may need flooding at times when rice growers in the same polder do not" (World Bank, 1990:7). In fact, most of the gates constructed under the World Bank (*Brahmaputra* project to control flood) scheme are controlled by better-off or influential farmers.

FAP has also been criticised for wasting resources through the duplication of old projects or pre-existing FCD or FCDI projects such as the 1968 Dhaka-Narayanganj-Demra (DND) project.

The FAP project is not based on a review of the history of flood control in Bangladesh. Without practical and scientific endorsement, attempts to reduce peoples' miseries through building embankments will not be successful. FAP projects, however, can be divided according to their components which include many 'non-structural' with other 'structural' projects. The FAP component ten is concerned with flood forecasting and early warning, FAP eleven is about disaster preparedness. FAP fourteen (a study of people's flood responses), FAP fifteen (concerned with land acquisition procedures) and FAP seventeen (a study of 'riverine and floodplain fisheries') are called socio-economic studies. Unlike other projects which dealt with engineering construction these components focused on non-structural elements of flood plains. These projects are identified as 'non-structural' or 'socio-economic studies'. However they focused on the impacts of proposed embankment projects rather than of decisions as to whether the embankments should be built or not. The introduction of non-structural components was to moderate the effects of embankment (Boyce, 1990:15). Hence socio-economic studies will have little effect upon FAP if the policy-makers have already decided to build embankments to control flooding. These studies are, once again, a waste of resources.

However, some researchers have agreed that there is a need for embankments in many places in Bangladesh. Properly planned and designed

embankments could provide benefits in addition to protection of life and property from severe flood (Saifullah, 1989:183-84). In fact, a combination of both physical structure and socio-cultural responses on the flood plains is needed to control flood. Flood control programmes will be effective only when the main features of the flood plains are considered. It is crucial to realise the nature of flood in Bangladesh as both a resource and disaster. Flooding in Bangladesh is not a hydraulic or physical phenomenon for which engineering design can provide a sole solution. Attempts should be made to combine both the structural and non-structural phenomenon. No flood management programme will be successful without considering the benefits and drawbacks of *borsha* and all the positive and negative aspects of past structural measurement of flood control.

Although there have been many discussions and criticisms levelled at Government policy and the World Bank's Flood Action Plan, they have dealt mainly with what should not be done rather than what should be done to control or mitigate flood. Discussions have focused on solutions to flood problems. Suggestions have included building and proper monitoring of embankments, roads and regulators, along with other efforts such as: dredging silt from the major distributors of the Ganges, removal of sandy bars (*char*) by dredging, quick drainage by building an adequate number of culverts, bridges along roads, improvement of flood forecasting and warning, regional co-operation to construct storage reservoirs along the major river basins, afforestation, barrages, dredging of rivers, re-excavation, river training and controlling the estuaries (Latif, 1989:103-105). Rogers has suggested arranging flood shelters, emergency food and medical services and the improvement of flood forecasting and warning (Pearce,1991:37). Flood insurance, the use of flood resistance rice varieties, planting of natural grasses, trees, canes and submergible embankments were also suggested as non-structural methods to manage flood water (Custers, 1993:1503). Flood problems could be minimized through the digging of ponds for surface water storage and fish culture and

through the use of submergible embankments which could check flooding only during the crucial weeks of rice cultivation.

Flood management could also allow a shift from broadcast sowing of rice to transplantation which could produce higher yields (Boyce, 1990:421-2). Agrarian reform is also necessary for the benefit of the poor, to help protect them from economic exploitation by rich landowners and merchants. They are subjected to: low market prices for their produce, sharecropping, usurious interest rates and the vastly unequal distribution of land (Custers, 1993:1503). These measures would be less expensive than the engineering solution to control flooding.

People in Bangladesh have developed many strategies to cope with floods through their experience of living with annual floods (*borsha*) and severe floods (*bonna*). Due to socio-economic differences, some people have the ability to cope better than others. Any steps in flood management should incorporate the indigenous methods used by the rural poor as a way of improving their chances of survival. Rather than try to control or prevent flooding, measures should be taken to manage flooding. Unfortunately policy makers in Bangladesh have shown little or no interest in the socio-cultural conditions of the majority of the population. Instead they have given authority to engineers whose work is not concerned with the problems of the majority of the people.

Researchers have pointed out that any steps to control flooding should emphasise both the structural and non-structural methods. They have discussed the problems of floods and the negative consequences upon the environment, farmers (men), fisheries and on many other aspects of life in Bangladesh. However, they have ignored the problems of women. There has been almost no discussion of the differential impact of flooding upon men and women and very little about its impact upon people in different socio-economic categories. Policy makers, however, have only recently started to think about the way in

which women might be involved in different activities from men and have different experiences of flooding from men. They have agreed that women's activities should be 'visible' in the development sector and therefore should be integrated with development activities in the water sector (The Fourth Five Year Plan, 1995:V.B-10). There are only a few studies (e.g. Adnan, 1990:s-6; Hanchett, 1992:73-89) which briefly consider the situation of women during floods. FAP 14's gender study was based on a few case studies of female-headed households (FAP 14, 1992)<sup>8</sup>.

The Flood Action Plan attempted to offer a permanent solution to flood problems in Bangladesh without considering the situation of the half of that country's population which suffers most during floods. Even the policy makers and local researchers did not think about the interests of women. This is quite usual in Bangladesh where most of the policy makers and researchers are men. The question of the 'public' and 'private' sphere is the basis of women's exclusion from all sectors and from any decision making. However, the discussion of gender (whether it is brief or elaborate) in FAP's study would not be of any help to women as FAP had already decided to construct embankments before considering the priorities of the poor. Government officials and many other bodies dealing with flood control mainly communicate with wealthier or large influential landowners who do not represent, or serve the interests of, the poor or women.

### **Summary and conclusion**

The chapter provides background information on the extent, causes and attempts to mitigate the effects of floods in Bangladesh with which women have had to live in most years. It points out that floods often devastate the overall economy of the country and the rural poor suffer most. It also shows

---

8. For discussion refer to Chapter One.

that floods are both a resource and disaster. On one hand, without annual riverine floods rural people cannot produce crops. On the other hand, severe floods bring damage to crops, homes, infrastructure and diseases and death to people. It is also argued that if flood control projects work as a barrier to river water flowing onto agricultural land during the monsoon it would be more disastrous for the rural people and as a result the overall economy of the country would be affected.

Women are not featured prominently in this chapter because though they are extensively affected by flooding in Bangladesh as a whole they are excluded from decision making process to do with the mitigation of floods and amelioration of their effects. However, this chapter emphasized that women are not included in policy making related to flood control. This was necessary to understand why women are neglected in the policy making and also what responses they make during floods and why they responded in that way.

It is suggested that attention should be paid to the situation of women in different socio-economic categories during floods before recommendations are made as to how the circumstances of each might be ameliorated.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Rural women in Bangladesh**

#### **Life of rural women**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the general circumstances in which rural women in Bangladesh live and the major factors which structure their lives. This provides a background to the following study of women's lives in one Bangladesh village, Jolpur, and will enable an assessment to be made of the degree to which it is representative of the thousands of others in Bangladesh.

The situation of women in Bangladesh is similar that of other developing countries. The birth rate is high which affects the health of mother and children. The life expectancy rate of women is 55 (Ahsan, 1991:14). Women's mortality rate, estimated at 6/1000 live births is the outcome of the general state of ill health of Bangladesh women resulting from inadequate diet, early marriage, a continuous cycle of pregnancies, unhygienic environment of the delivery places, anaemia, lack of pre- and post- natal care and overwork. According to the 1987 UNICEF report the literacy rate of women is only 14.3 per cent of total population.

In Bangladesh from early childhood girls are made fully conscious that they are liabilities and their brothers are the assets of the family (Women For Women, 1975:3). Girls are taught the two principal virtues: patience and sacrifice, the 'ideals' of Bengali womanhood. As girls grow up they witness the preferential treatment given to their brothers, fathers and other male members of their families and they are told that getting less of everything and not complaining about it is the ideal behaviour pattern of good women. In a milieu of scarcity, whatever is available, be it food, clothing, opportunity for education or health facilities, is first offered to men. If the family can afford good food, like meat or milk, it is the father and sons who would have the first and larger share. If the family has sufficient resources to send children to school, boys would be given preference over girls even if the latter are brighter. From her childhood, a girl is trained to fit into the dominant, socially approved, female roles, those of wife and mother. By the time a girl reaches the age of five or six, her mother has usually given birth to two or three more children and the young girl has to look after them. She also helps her mother in other household activities. Her formal education is not considered as important as her religious education, that is, reading the Koran. It is customary for girls to observe *parda* when they reach puberty (Women For Women, 1975:3-4) and their marriages are arranged by their families. The reasons for arranged marriage can be seen as attempts to ensure that daughters do not marry too far below their socio-economic category. Marriage is a way of making political and economic alliances. They can be seen sometimes as attempts to ensure upward social mobility for daughters. Clearly women have little freedom of choice in such systems, but such arrangements do appear to 'make sense' in terms of socio-economic and family interests. In rural areas girls are usually married between the ages of 12 and 15. As marriage arrangements require negotiations with others outside the family they are handled by the male guardians of the family, usually by the bride's father or brothers. A girl's consent is usually necessary but it is usually a mere formality.

After marriage a woman moves to her husband's household. Her status in that family depends greatly on her husband's contribution to the family economy and in the middle and rich income households on the amount of dowry brought by herself<sup>1</sup> (dowry usually used by her husband or his male guardians). Usually, however, during the first few years of marriage her position is very insecure. She is expected to adjust to her father-in-law's household. She is placed under severe restriction, directly subordinate to her mother-in-law, and has little or no say in decision making. Her position is also inferior to that of her husband's sister(s).

A divorced or widowed woman, if she is young, is usually re-married. If she remains unmarried she has to stay under the guardianship of a male relative, her father or father-in-law or brother or brother-in-law. A widow, if she has grown up sons, may stay with her son. Thus, a woman spends her life in a dependent position, first dependent on her father, then on her husband and finally on her sons (Chaudhury and Ahmed, 1980:14-15). Throughout a woman's stage of life the quality of male support is irrelevant and the male may be father, husband or son. Support from a man is more than economic: "It is a matter of acting for women in 'male space', the public world they are not supposed to enter" (Abdullah and Zeidenstein, 1982:89). Male guardianship is related to the fact that women have fewer resources.

The government of Bangladesh has promoted birth control since independence from Pakistan but most rural people do not practise it. A woman who does want to practise birth control needs the permission of her husband, she cannot decide about it on her own unless she does it secretly. A large number of women, worn out from bearing so many children, are

---

1. Goody (1976) discussed the way in which the allocation and control of dowry can make good sense within systems of social ranking. Dowry is also a way of restructuring the livelihood of daughters marrying too far 'down' and 'out'. Dowry is both a product and an instrument of social stratification. It can help ensure the maintenance of a daughter's status as well as maintain or even promote the status of the family.

compelled by their husbands to continue to bear children. The most important reason for this unrestricted fertility for poor rural people is the resulting child labour which can be used for extra income. To them, more boys mean more income. If women are unable to bear children, or unable to produce males, they will often be divorced by their husbands or made to accept co-wives. The failure to produce sons means that there is increased risk of property going outside the family.

The subordinate position of rural women in Bangladesh may be explained in terms of male control over the land and the law of inheritance, the institution of *parda*, household composition and family, gender division of labour within the household, women's contribution to agriculture and family food production, un-employment among rural women and male attitudes towards working women. These explanations of the inequality will be discussed in the section entitled 'allocation of food within the household'.

#### **Rural women and lack of control over land**

The economy of Bangladesh is predominantly agricultural. Land is the most basic resource of agricultural production and it is men who own most of it. Women's property (jewellery, milking cows or kitchen utensils) is considered less valuable than men's because of women's lack of control over the most valuable property, land, and also because it is deemed 'productive' in some way or a strategic resource. Because the cultural practice does not allow women to plough land women are dependent on men for this. Thus even if the law gives women some rights to land, they face difficulties getting benefit from it.

The laws of inheritance in Bangladesh are complex. According to Muslim law, agnatic descendants occupy a predominant position, inheriting the major share of the property left by the deceased. The laws of inheritance as applied to wives and daughters are as follows: a daughter who has no male siblings

inherits half the estate of her late father or mother, the other half going to agnatic relatives such as father's brothers or the father of the deceased (Chaudhury and Ahmed,1980:23-24). If there is more than one daughter and no son, then the daughters jointly inherit two-thirds of the estate. However, if there is a son (or sons), each daughter inherits half of a sons' share. There are laws that govern the share of inheritance for the parents of the deceased, his or her consanguine brothers and sisters and other heirs<sup>2</sup>. If a man leaves any agnatic descendants his wife inherits a fixed share of one eighth of her deceased husband's estate. If the deceased husband does not leave any agnatic descendants, than the wife inherits a quarter of the estate. If there is more than one wife, they share the eighth (or the quarter) equally among themselves. However, the husband inherits a fixed share of one quarter of his deceased wife's estate if she leaves any agnatic descendants, and a fixed share of one half if she leaves no such descendants.

However, whatever the law of inheritance is, in general, a woman does not claim her share of her father's property if she has brother(s). In order to ensure help from brothers during crises (such as after a divorce or widowhood) a woman tries to maintain a good relationship with their brothers by not demanding her share. At the request of their husbands some poor women may ask for parental land and may lose the chance to go for a *naior*<sup>3</sup>. A widow does not get her husband's land if she remarries an outsider or moves to her parent's village. If she remains with her in-laws' she may get the property which is controlled by her in-laws'.

- 
2. Goody's (1976) work on the system of inheritance is instructive here but he misses the point that although inheritance strategies make good class and family sense, they do so by privileging the position of the male. Although daughters do have inheritance rights, they do not have equal rights.
  3. Rural women's visit to their parents' home. Which may happen once or twice a year. This visit is very significant for a rural woman because this is the only holiday she may have. After the death of their fathers women do not ask for their share in order to keep the right to visit their parental village.

### **Rural women and *parda***

*Parda* (purdah) literally means curtain or veil but its social impact is far greater than mere attire: it relates to the socio-cultural structure of society. In Bangladesh *parda* has at least two meanings. First, *parda* in the strict sense means that women from the age of puberty to old age should restrict their mobility to the homestead of their guardian (usually their father or their husband); not allow themselves to be seen by strange men and be covered in veils whenever they go out (McCarthy, 1977:365). Second, *parda* in the wider sense means that women should keep their modesty and restrict their interaction with strange men (Rozario, 1992:88).

There is no clear understanding regarding the origin of *parda protha* (purdah system) in the Indian sub-continent but it is generally considered to be a custom introduced by Islam. However, Jeffery (1979:26) argues that *parda* or veiling or seclusion of women was known in the sub-continent even before the Muslim invasions, from about the tenth century onwards. It is well established that *parda* became more widespread after the Muslim invasion.

*Parda* has its cultural roots in a deeply embedded notion of *mun* or *izzat* (honour) of women. It is a symbol of respectability, particularly among the higher socio-economic categories (Chaudhury and Ahmed, 1980:7; Feldman and McCarthy, 1983:15). It is related to chastity, a very important consideration to ensure the legitimate transmission of estates. Household circumstances influence the meaning and practice of *parda*. In rural areas women's *parda* is considered as the basis of a marriage relationship with a family of higher status. Deviation from prescribed *parda* rules could result in loss of honour for the whole family.

The observance of *parda* is a sacred duty for women in Bangladesh. Researchers (Jahan, 1975; McCarthy, 1978; Abdullah and Zeidenstein, 1982;

Begum, 1988) have pointed out that almost all women, rural and urban, practice *parda*, the form or degree of which varies from one socio-economic category to another. However, under the *parda* system all women are discouraged from participating in work outside the household, visiting public places such as mosques, meetings, markets and many other socio-cultural or legislative gatherings such as the village *salish* (legislative committee).

The practice of *parda* in Bangladesh differs not only according to socio-economic category but also according to religion, family, and education. It also varies according to age and a woman's stage of life. *Parda* is strictly observed after puberty and during a woman's reproductive years. It is relaxed for widows or single women abandoned by husbands, who have no chance of marrying again (Blanchet, 1984:142). From early childhood most women adhere to *parda* in the wider sense, while a small number of women follow strict *parda*.

In its wider sense some sort of *parda* is observed by women of all religions in Bangladesh. For example, a Hindu woman observes *parda* after marriage especially in front of her husband's older male relatives. However, for most Bangladeshi women *parda* requires that they be involved only in domestic work inside the household.

Gender differences are rooted in the seclusion of women in Bangladesh. This socio-cultural phenomenon assigns different roles, rights and responsibilities to the two sexes and also structures relationships between them. In other words, *parda* is central to the gender division of labour which allocates inside work for women and outside work for men (Chen, 1986:218). The gendered division of labour, related to the cultural values of honour (*izzat*) and shame or modesty (*lozza* or *shorom*), is the basis of women's seclusion. Within the household it is expected that a man will be the breadwinner who supports his wife and children. Women are not expected to become

independent persons. A man's *izzat* or honour is dependent upon his wife's modesty or *parda*.

Over the past decade a considerable number of women in Bangladesh have started to work outside their households and new definitions of *parda* have been developed to accommodate this. Women working outside their households or in the field are no longer necessarily seen as breaking the norm of *parda*. Economic necessity is one of the most important factors which leads women to work outside the home. Poor men cannot afford to apply *parda* restrictions over their women. They need economic support from women for the survival of their households. There has been a shift in the conceptions of *parda* from being "structurally and outwardly defined by *bari* [homestead] and *burqa* [veil] to internal definitions of individual responsibility and control" (McCarthy, 1978:16). This suggests that as men loose control over women in this public way they still benefit from the internalisation of gender ideology by women. It also suggests that access to the market or wage labour does not automatically liberate women. It is still observed that in rural areas as soon as a family has improved its economic position, men put much stricter *parda* on women. This is because *parda* guarantees a household's honour and status and households which are able to improve their situation from one of poverty want to regain that honour.

### **Household composition, family and women**

Household in Bangladesh is defined on the basis of: a common cooking place (*chula* or hearth group); common meals (*khana* or eating unit); common living quarters (*ghor* or separate room/house); and a common homestead (courtyard) (Herbon, 1994:106). The family is a social unit defined by the kinship relations among people (Ellis, 1988:13). The concept of the household is broader than the concept of the family. Households include not only kin but also single persons living alone, couples and may include distant relatives,

permanent labourers (servants), divorced or widowed daughters and others groups of people (such as a private tutor or agricultural labourers).

To understand the socio-economic condition of rural women attention must be paid to women's and men's activities in relation to household activities. The household is a fundamental social unit and a primary arena for expression of age and sex roles (for more see below). It is widely recognised that many activities like pooling and sharing of resources, food processing, cooking and decision making take place in the household. It is the smallest unit of society formed for the purpose of increasing the well-being of their members; it has resources and those resources are shared among the members; it may have alternative ways of establishing its well-being so that choice exists. How is the well-being of members pursued by households? Its resources can be "rented or sold to obtain the income with which to pursue goods, services and an environment that increase satisfaction....resources are used within the household to produce the goods, services and environment that contribute to the well-being of its members: food, clothing, shelter, basic health services, socialisation, nurture, love, leisure" and many others (Bryant, 1990:2-3).

The household can be categorised on the basis of its role as an economic organisation; a set of resources; activities and conflict and cooperation. The economy of the household as described by Kabeer (1991b:10), "refers to the activities, relationships and processes by which households produce, acquire and distribute valued resources (for use investment and exchange) essential to the survival, reproduction and prosperity of its members (men, women and children) of a household enhances the well-being of household members. Conflict and cooperation in household activities involves members' personal relationships in the context of power or authority in the household. The

household level power relationship introduces the unequal distribution of authority between men and women in decision making<sup>4</sup>.

The economy of the household is influenced by household resources. The size, composition and structure of the household influences household resources. Household resources can be classified as i) human resources, which include "the time, skills and energy of each member of the household" and ii) physical resources which include "financial resources and can be arranged along any number of continua, each one stressing a different attribute of the resources" (Bryant, 1990:6), for example, cash/kind (household goods).

More than 80 per cent of the population in Bangladesh lives in rural areas and women's everyday activities take place in households in the rural areas. Within the socio-cultural, economic and political condition the situation of Bangladesh women can be understood by analysing the position of women in their households. Bangladesh is a male-dominated society and inheritance and authority over other members of the household and materials of the households are controlled by men. The household is the main place where the majority of women spend most of their time by doing different ('domestic', 'productive', 'reproductive') activities (for more see below). Although women are strictly subordinate to male members of their households they have greater participation in productive activities (including household and income-earning activities or both). "But women's activities are usually not substantial enough to transform the 'core' relations of male power/female dependency within household structure" (Kabeer, 1991b:20).

---

4. According to Sen's 'cooperative-conflicts' model, "the prosperity of [a] household depends on the totality of various activities-getting money incomes, purchasing or directly producing food materials, and so on...the members of the household face two different types of problems simultaneously, one involving cooperation (adding to total availabilities) and the other conflict (dividing the total availabilities) among the members of the household" (Sen, 1990:129).

## **Gender division of labour**

Religious and cultural practices in Bangladesh confine women to their households and their home-based activities are largely invisible. Gender enters into all social arrangements in the country, but is more immediate and visible in the household situation. The household is critical for analysis of gender roles and relationships and is usually the key point of the gender division of labour. There is a strict division of labour which determines the work of men and women. Within a household the division of labour and control over, or rights to, major assets are central to gender issues.

The operation of the rural labour market in Bangladesh should be understood in conjunction with cultural factors (such as *parda*) which influence the division of labour within households, the most important of which resulted in a relatively low earning capacity of women. In Bangladesh all domestic work is done by women who may also perform other production-related work, some working for a wage as men do. It is widely recognised that many activities, like sharing resources, food processing, cooking and decision making take place in the household where there is a strict division of labour. There are also gender differences in access to the market economy. This also varies according to socio-economic category. Therefore, to understand the socio-economic condition of rural women attention must be paid to women's and men's activities.

Bryant (1990:7) divides 'work' in the context of 'market' and 'non-market'. Those activities, performed primarily for the money or the goods and services, can be treated as work and those activities are performed primarily for pleasure are called non-work. In this perspective women's household activities will be valued as 'work'. A distinction can be made between the activities of men and women in the context of i) consumption activities and ii) saving or investment activities. 'Consumption activities' refer to the use resources for immediate

satisfaction and 'saving or investment activities' refer to the use of resources for the future. Consumption activities are mainly performed by men whereas saving activities are performed by women in different societies (Afshar and Agarwal, 1989). Agarwal (1989:72-73) noted that in India "...women in poor households typically contributes almost all their earned income to meet the family's (household's) basic need and men typically keep a non-significant part for tobacco, liquor, etc., with the absolute contributions by women being substantial in all cases"<sup>5</sup>.

In general, women in Bangladesh do not plough but play a key role in the cultivation of rice through preparation, storage and rearing of seedlings. Poor women pick young plants in the field and weed. They also play a key role in food or cash crop production or both, make craft products for sale and care for animals. They combine domestic and 'productive' work (for details see below). The discharge of these responsibilities means that they work long hours. When men share women's work it should not be necessarily identified as domestic. When a man plays with his small children it does not necessarily mean that he is taking care of them. After work, men return home to relax, eat, gossip or sleep. Their domestic tasks are limited to house construction and shopping for household consumption. Women often participate in these tasks too.

Men generally refuse to do any work which is associated with women, they regard it as being below their dignity. A strict division of labour is specially strong among the rich among whom men never do any household work while their wives are not allowed to do anything that would take them outside the homestead. The same is true in case of middle farm households. In businesses which belong to their households, for example, grocery, livestock

---

5. This is true in context of women in Bangladesh, particularly in our study village, where poorer women spent almost all of their income for the well-being of their households/family whereas men spent part of their income on tobacco, *hooka* (a smoking apparatus) etc. (for more see below).

rearing or food processing, women may contribute to commercial production but only within the home. It is very unfortunate for women of these categories who cannot accept outside employment as a means of earning a livelihood, because the prestige of the family suffers when they have to work for others. This, however, is less true of the poor. Men may help their wives with small things such as adding firewood to the cooking fire or looking after children. In the same way poor rural women help their husbands with work such as winnowing recently harvested pulses or paddy. Because of their poor economic condition, husbands and wives struggle together for their survival (Arens and Beurden, 1977:47-48).

### **Women in agriculture**

Inequitable patterns of land ownership have existed in Bangladesh since long before independence and land is increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer men. Most households have only a small amount of land or no land at all. Because of the extremely unequal distribution of land power is also increasingly in the hands of fewer men who dominate the poor by controlling sharecropping arrangements, employment and other facilities. They use the labour resources of the country not to improve the socio-economic condition of the rural poor but to maintain their own power and thereby influence over the government. Rich people dominate poor people and women suffer most from this system of domination. With the growth of landlessness, rural people are increasingly ceasing to be self-employed family farmers and becoming dependent wage labourers in various occupations (ESCAP, 1985:12). The demand for agricultural labour is confined largely to the peak season of agricultural harvesting, planting and transplanting. The rest of the year, most rural people either seek non-agricultural work for their sustenance, migrate elsewhere or remain unemployed.

In such a highly stratified society, women's positions vary enormously. Where men occupy the public sphere and are concerned with the market, women are confined to the household and family. They spend most of their lives within the boundary of the homestead and its kin-based extensions. Although women are predominantly engaged in subsistence production: with crop storage and processing, because of *parda* they do not have control over what they produce. Women in better-off households are more secluded than women in the poorer categories. Although poor women do not plough the land as men do, much of the pre-harvesting and post-harvesting agricultural work is done by women inside the households and in some cases in the fields. Poor women are more likely to be dominated by women who belong to the landed category but the latter are more subject to gender inequalities because of their seclusion.

Land ownership is a major factor affecting peoples' survival. People with little or no land must find other means for their sustenance and women suffer much more than other members of such households. Poor women in Bangladesh work hard to produce rice, fruit, vegetables and other crops (Germain, 1976:2). After the war of liberation in 1971 with the need to help contribute to their family's survival, poor women who were mainly supportive of men started to work for food-for-work programmes, or as hired labourers for the better-off. *Parda* has not proved to be a barrier to their involvement in work in the fields (Rogers, 1980:161).

It was discussed earlier that in general, women are not owners of land, the most important asset in rural Bangladesh. Usually men do the ploughing, but it is women who play the main role in production although it often goes unrecognized. Women from all classes are involved directly or indirectly in processing (i.e. weeding, winnowing, husking and grinding) the crops which men have harvested from the fields. Some women often work in the fields. It is also women who grow vegetables to supplement their families' basic food.

Women's productive roles are considered not only by gender division of labour but also by socio-economic status. In some areas women who work in the fields are considered to be of low status. As *parda* for a Muslim woman encourages her to do most of her work inside the household, it is much more difficult to divide 'productive' and 'reproductive' work. In addition to women's common household and management work, such as cooking, cleaning, washing, caring for children, caring for animals, fetching water, collecting fuel, rural women play a significant role in the production of household economic resources. There are regional and cultural differences in women's involvement in 'productive' work. Boundaries between 'productive' and 'reproductive' work are difficult to establish, but researchers (Mackintosh, 1981:9-12) consider this as 'productive work'. Only work which is remunerated is considered productive which is not satisfactory. Many of women's subsistence activities are not paid in cash but kind. This preventing women from having access to the market and often this is an important mechanism in their subordination. Researchers consider women's subsistence work to be cooking, cleaning, water and fuel collection and child care, all usually clarified as 'reproductive' and also as 'productive' (Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1981:16-29).

In rural societies women play an important role in food production from land preparation to marketing together with men. They make farm tools, raise seedlings, slash, burn and clear bushes. In the fields, women do weeding, harvesting, threshing and fertilizing. In the post-harvest process only women are often more significantly involved in drying, threshing, husking, winnowing, smoking, parboiling and seed multiplication. Women also engage in selecting produce for the market as well as men and also take part in the actual selling. Women are often responsible for transporting crops from the fields to the house. In market-related activities, women process food for sale and sometimes trade by themselves. It is usually only women who cook and serve food and sometimes carry it to men working in the fields. For the last three stages of

women's work in the food chain, no capital support is provided (International Women's Tribune Centre, 1979:10).

In Bangladesh, women's involvement in agriculture, especially in food production has not been acknowledged in official statistics because the picture of agriculture which comes to peoples' minds is of field cultivation (especially ploughing or *chash*) which is always done by men. Many other tasks which are performed by women inside the households are not immediately visible. In practice, women's productive and reproductive or domestic work is closely interrelated. For example, storage and processing of food is an extensions of crop production which ultimately is a part of preparing food for consumption (Bernstein *et al*, 1992:97). Whenever there is a shortage during the lean agricultural seasons women manage food through their own channels. Women save rice and other food to serve to their family members during lean seasons. A woman is considered a good wife or mother who can provide food to her husband or children from her own efforts during the time of scarcity.

Fruit and vegetables, which form an important part of the family diet, also fall in women's domain. They have the sole responsibility for growing vegetables and planting trees in the homestead for household consumption and for commercial purposes. The pre- and post-harvest work of vegetable production is also done mainly by women<sup>6</sup>.

### **Rural women and employment**

The operation of the rural labour market in Bangladesh should be understood in conjunction with cultural factors which influence the division of labour within households, the most important of which have resulted in the relatively low

---

6. A study by Safilios-Rothschild and Mahmud (1989:165) documented that women's participation in seed drying (47.4%) and storage (58%) was more than men (25.8% in drying) and storage (5.6% only) among all farmers.

earning capacity of women. Extreme poverty in Bangladesh takes women outside their households to seek income-generating activities. But the low income earned by women and the prestige connected with seclusion gives little incentive to women to explore other possibilities (Loutfi, 1980:16).

Employment opportunities for rural women have been much more limited than for men. For poor rural women, there is only domestic labour, mid-wifery, food or raw materials-processing work, for example, rice husking, extraction of jute fibres, and begging. Even these types of work are not given significant occupational status by the government census, where 77 percent of rural women are in the housewife category and less than one percent of the total in the agricultural employment are women (BBS, 1988). This official data ignores women's home-based activities such as their role in crop production and processing and livestock rearing. Women's contribution in crop processing, seed or grain storage for their own households or their work on other farms is not recognized as productive or income-earning. Even women's direct income earning activities such as working for better-off farm households (both in the agricultural and non-agricultural sector); selling of homestead garden produce; operating small businesses; milking of cows and goats; and raising of poultry are ignored by official statistics.

The invisibility of women in official statistics is firstly due to the socio-cultural values of *parda* in the society in which women do not participate in field agriculture such as in ploughing as men do (which is discussed earlier). Secondly, even where women do participate in field agriculture officials are not concerned and do not count women's work as important. Thirdly, due to the *parda* norms officials (who are men) cannot approach women. Fourthly, officially 'economic activity' refers only to those activities which are done for financial gain. Despite their significant contribution to agricultural production women are not known as 'farmers' due to this invisibility.

A recent study of the agricultural sector across fourteen major agro-ecological zones in Bangladesh challenged the official data revealing that agriculture is the primary occupation for 43% of women and a secondary occupation for 12% of them (Safilios-Rothschild and Mahmud, 1989:viii). Studies also show that women are the main contributors to homestead agricultural production (BARD, 1988; Safilios-Rothschild and Mahmud, 1989:8-12; World Bank, 1990: 83-84).

After the Independence War of Bangladesh, international agencies, such as the Ford Foundation, encouraged a number of scholars to study the role of rural women and their activities. Since then some research has been done on rural women in Bangladesh. In recent decades a significant change has occurred in poor rural women's perceptions of their own conditions. Researchers (Kabir and Chen, 1976 quoted in Feldman and McCarthy, 1983:121) have documented that most poor rural women are becoming aware of their dependence on their husbands and male household members and realise the need for their own self-reliance. These changes have occurred dramatically as a result of economic, cultural and political changes. Some poor women have broken away from their past roles and are earning money from both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. But in the non-agricultural sectors women's participation is limited. However, with the help of different government and non-government organizations a significant number of rural women have been engaged in activities like tailoring, knitting and handicrafts production. More recently, women from poor rural households are working in garment factories.

Generally men have negative attitudes towards women who are working. In fact, women are allowed by their male guardians to take wage employment only if the household head cannot make ends meet otherwise. The noticeable increase in the number of income earning women indicates an extreme poverty in rural areas. For women in rural areas wage earning is a mark of low status,

so, the women from rich and middle income households are strongly inhibited by their status from doing any work through which they could earn money. Like poor women some women from middle income households may help their families to earn money by raising chickens, ducks and selling eggs, rearing milking cows and making things for village shops run by their households, but women from these households, as well as those from richer ones, do not generally have any money of their own. Women of these categories are not supposed to need anything for themselves, beyond what is provided by their husbands. However, although better-off women in rural areas are more dependent on their husbands, they do not suffer as poor women do for their socio-economic position in rural areas.

#### **Food allocation within households**

Researchers have pointed out that there is gender-bias in the household food allocation system in many societies and some have argued that this gender differentiation is more acute when there is a shortage of food (Arens and Beurden 1977:46; Chen *et al* 1981:51-68; Chowdhury *et al*, 1981:52-66; Choudhury 1981:16; Greenough 1982; Abdullah, 1989:57-64; Agarwal, 1986:167-170, 1991:370). Men's control over land and the distribution of other resources is central to intra-household food allocation and consumption.

Kabeer (1991:38) noted that women in Bangladesh have a high mortality rate. The widespread ill health of women results from inadequate diet, early marriage, repeated pregnancy and other socio-cultural causes. During their reproductive years 60% to 70% of women suffered from nutritional anaemia.

Chen *et al* (1981) documented that the per capita food intake of men is higher than women among all age groups in Bangladesh. The authors argued

that the consumption of calories and protein by men is 61% higher than by women in the age group 45 and over and 29% higher in the age group 15-44.

Research on intra-household food allocation is limited in Bangladesh. The article by Chen and her colleagues (1981) pioneered in this area. The in depth study by Abdullah (1983) on food intake of individuals in 53 households is a valuable source of information. However, these two studies are contradictory. Whereas Chen *et al.* (1981) (and also Chen, 1982) demonstrated significant gender differences, Abdullah found significant social differences<sup>7</sup>.

One reason for the limited number of studies of food allocation within households may be that empirical study of this is very labour-intensive and requires careful management. However, gender differences can be seen clearly enough through the differences between the nutritional status of men and women or male-female mortality (Dasgupta, 1993; Dreze and Sen, 1989:50-52; Kabeer, 1985:85) and from general observation. Although women are responsible for household food procurement, in general, they eat less than and last. There is a general tendency to provide larger portions and better food for men.

Popular assessment of the quality of food is not based on its nutritional quality, but cultural perception. For example, in Bangladesh, the head of a big fish or a chicken thigh will be served to husbands or sons. Greenough (1982) argued that men in Bengali society as in other parts of Southern Asia, are given priority in food intake to ensure the continuity of the male line. This is a reflection of the cultural expectation that women should sacrifice their food for the survival of their husbands and sons.

---

7. The present study will try to explore both the gender and social/socio-economic differences in household food allocation in chapters Five and Six.

Wheeler and Abdullah (1988:437-557) pointed out that differences in food allocation may occur for three reasons: cultural, resource control and functional. That culturally men get more food because of their status in society; men have the power to control resources and from the 'functional' point of view, it is considered that men expend more energy than women. They argued that these three aspects were basic to the maintenance of male privilege in food allocation.

### **Summary and conclusion**

Women in rural Bangladesh are subordinate to men. This is evident in, for example, the preferential treatment given to them regarding property and food allocation, male guardianship of women and the socialisation of women into the exclusive roles of home makers and care givers.

The workings of the property system in socially stratified rural Bangladesh play a key role in structuring women's subordination. At the same time *parda*, a powerful institution by which women are subordinated and excluded from the public sphere is a key element in the reproduction of this subordination.

The form and extent of women's subordination in rural Bangladesh vary according a woman's socio-economic category: whilst better-off women are more subordinate to, and dependant upon, their husbands, they do not suffer grinding hardship as poorer women do. Better-off women are more subordinated by men: poorer women are more subordinated by poverty.

The discussion in Part I provides a background to the general situation of women and flooding in Bangladesh. What follows in Part II is a study of the social, economic, cultural and flood conditions of the study village Jolpur and their impact on the lives of women.

## **PART II**

### **The village of Jolpur**

Part II describes the overarching political, economic and cultural circumstances which prevail in Jolpur throughout the year, flood or no flood. It highlights the regional setting of the village, its economy, culture and the consequent distribution of life chances.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Research methods and introduction to the village of Jolpur and its surroundings**

Issues related to the research methods for this study such as the selection of research methods, techniques of data collection, village and sample population are discussed here. How these were applied in the field environment; the problems of field study and the precautions taken to obtain reliable data are also included in this Chapter. A profile of the village is also included in this Chapter.

#### **Sources of data and methodology**

The data for this study was collected directly from the field by the author. The research was carried out during 1992, three years after the 1988 flood. When designing the study I did not predict that floods would occur during that year. My original intention was to study how women survived and maintained their livelihoods during the non-flood times and how they responded to severe floods? The field work was undertaken in Jolpur from June to December 1992 using a combination of the social survey method and researchers' observations. The study was carried out in three phases.

First, A pilot survey was done in two villages, other than Jolpur, in the region using a draft questionnaire. The questionnaire was addressed to women in different categories in those villages. The pilot survey helped to improve the draft questionnaire and led to the inclusion of additional questions. After careful modification a better-focused set of questions was formulated.

Second, a one hundred percent census survey was done in Jolpur to get basic information about the villagers. This was necessary for the categorization of the households. The information available from the government and the *thana*<sup>1</sup> council about the village was out of date and did not take account of the recent changes in the village, especially the changes in land holding.

Third, a combination of interviewing and researchers' observations was used for the collection of data. This method was used to balance whatever deficiencies might have arisen from the interviewing method alone. Observations helped to obtain information on women's actual work and in relation to socio-economic and cultural factors in Jolpur. Thus, for the purpose of the research, interviewing and observation provided a better information base. For the analysis of the data a statistical, qualitative approach was used.

- 
1. Administrative unit of local level. Till 1982 *thana* was controlled by district administration with the help of circle office (revenue and development). There was an elected *thana* council chairman but circle officer (revenue) was more powerful. In 1982 the President brought a significant change to this administrative unit and renamed *thana upojila* (sub-district). This administration coordinated three different levels of government power in rural areas. Member of parliament (MP), member of Union *Porishod* (*UP* or Union Council) and a new post, the sub-district executive officer (*upojila nirbahi* officer or *UNO*), who executed all local development programmes. Conflicts arose among these three administrative groups in many places based on the interests of particular groups. During the 1991 *UP* chairman election a number of MPs were selected from opposition who did not co-operate the government MPs. Partly as a result the government again changed the rural administrative unit. In 1992 the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government abolished the post of *UP* chairman and named *upojila* as *thana* which is not the same as it was till 1982. More power was given to MPs and *UNOs* who have only a loose tie with the locality. Most of the time the MPs live in the capital and the *UNOs* are bureaucrats from other localities who rarely serve the local people's interests. The main opposition party (Awami League) claimed that because 42 chairman elected in different *upojila* were from their party, the government (BNP) had abolished the *upojila* system to continue the corruption without interference.

SPSSX was used for the analysis of the quantitative data. Because quantitative data was not adequate to explain women's and other peoples' everyday lives in Jolpur the qualitative approach, that is, the researchers' observation were included (which is discussed above).

It is worth mentioning that because there is a lack of research on women's response to floods we were not able to follow how other researchers obtained their information. Studies (Shaw, 1989; Adnan, 1990; Hanchett, 1992) which dealt with floods and briefly focused on women can be identified as micro-studies. They relied on either social surveys or case studies. These brief studies provided valuable information on women's situation during floods but failed to provide any theoretical link to indicate the wider context within which their findings could be located. Even studies on women in general provided a dearth of information of a quantitative nature. This was because studies on women in Bangladesh were mainly done to help policy makers (see Chapter One) and social surveys were considered the most appropriate method to provide quantitative data. This method is appropriate to gain information on general conditions from a large range of data given limited resources and time. But it does not provide in-depth information regarding the socio-cultural situation of a village. In-depth interviews and life histories may provide detailed information about a person but limit the number of people who can be studied by researchers. Keeping the limitations and advantages of these methods in mind the combination of observation and survey method was chosen for this study. By using two or more methods validity is improved. It also enlarged my understanding of the range of factors which needed to be taken into account in order to understand and explain the social relations and behaviour observed. In interpreting the survey results I have used all available information and not just the responses to questions.

Although I had a general idea of the kind of village I was looking for, I needed to check that I had used the right criteria for its selection. Also, I

needed facts to enable me to operate with the criteria I had selected and to check whether there were other factors. That was why, before selecting the village, my first step was to visit organizations such as the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), Flood Plan Co-ordination Organization (FPCO), Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) and Flood Action Plan (FAP)<sup>2</sup>. I have also communicated with researchers who worked on floods in Bangladesh.

The research site was chosen on the basis of the following criteria: the village had to be on one of the three major flood plains, Brahmaputra (Jamuna), Ganges (Padma) or Meghna; be subject to frequent flooding and socially stratified. Jolpur is seven kilometres away from the river Padma, is subjected to frequent flooding and is socially stratified. Flood water enters Jolpur through two canals on the east and west side of it. The two canals are connected to the river Kumar. The Kumar flows 2.50-4 kilometre away from

- 
2. Within two weeks of my arrival at Dhaka I went to the office of FPCO the main government organization on flooding in Bangladesh and linked with the Flood Action Plan (FAP). I was introduced to its chief (engineer), who asked the purpose of my visit and expressed his dissatisfaction with the idea that I intended to do research only on women. "Didn't men suffer from flood?" I tried to make him understand that I wanted to study women's issues only because there was little or no information on women. However, later I was informed of the cause of the chief engineer's negative attitudes towards 'women in flood' issues. It was an anthropologist who first raised the question of the inclusion of gender issues in FAP's socio-economic component (FAP-14). She discussed only briefly about women. This was may be because the World Bank decided to build a long embankment in an attempt to solve Bangladesh's flood problems and appointed engineers to take major decisions in FAP's research projects. It is not surprising that engineers provided a structural solution to floods without knowing the opinion of half of the population of the country. However, I was able to get a list of flood prone regions from FPCO and a list of flood prone villages from FAP-14's (socio-economic component of Flood Action Plan) gender study team and decided to do my field work in a village which was not under any of FAP's study. This was to avoid any influence of FAP in the village.

I met the anthropologist from the gender study team, who was delighted to learn of my research topic and requested me to add my partial findings to her research in their forthcoming workshop. For my own development I agreed to that. She also offered a little financial support for my field research which was sanctioned by FAP-14.

the village. The Arial Khan, a branch of the Padma, also flows about seven kilometres to the east of the village.

For the requirements of the study households in Jolpur were categorised into small farmer (I divided them into categories 'a' to 'd' because of significant differences among them), middle farmer and rich farmer following the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) land holding criteria. Two other categories, landless and destitute, were included by me (for details see Chapter 5).

The unit of study was individual women. Out of a total of 183 'senior women'<sup>3</sup> one hundred and one women were selected. A stratified random sampling technique was used for the selection of six categories, small farmer ('a' to 'd') and middle farmer. Because of their lower representation purposive samples have been collected from the remainder, the destitute and rich farmer categories.

We visited the selected households several times during the survey period. Intensive information from selected women was collected. Some cases were studied in greater details to see how the lives of particular women interrelate with flood time crises. Information was also gathered through unstructured interviews with some individuals such as village leaders, school teachers and elderly people. Secondary sources such as the *thana* council, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, FPCO, FAP and BWDB were used to obtain data on some general conditions in the village, the locality and on flooding (see above).

---

3. Senior women refers in general to the wives of heads of households. In some cases the women interviewed were themselves heads of their households, in some cases mothers of the heads of households (sons of whom were unmarried and above 18 years of age or who lived in a joint family with two or more sons) and in one case a daughter (whose mother had died) of a head of household.

At the beginning of my study I decided that I would stay in the village and my investigators would visit everyday or every alternate day. I told the villagers that I would stay in any household whether it was destitute or landless, farmer (small to medium landholding), Hindu or Muslim. (There were only three Hindu households in Jolpur and my interaction with them was no different from that with Muslim households. It was observed that Hindu women broadly followed the *parda* norms as well as Muslim women). As poor households only had one room they were not in a position to provide accommodation for me. Some small farmers, who had a partition in their houses where I was ready to stay, would not agree to accommodate a woman like me who had an urban background. They said that I would face great problems staying with poor people like them. However, two rich households, who had separate rooms for guests invited me to stay with them. In addition, they said that I could also invite my companions to stay there. I thought it impolitic to stay with wealthy people who might try to transfer their attitudes to the poor to me. In the end I decided to stay at Bhanga, Faridpur district, where I had relatives. The people in Jolpur thought it appropriate for me to stay with nearby relatives and none were offended. Coming from outside the village my investigators and I were able to establish a good relationship with women in all categories and with some men. Moreover, all of us were from the same district and were able to speak the local dialect.

During the first two weeks we carried out a general socio-economic and flood-related census to obtain basic information about the village, the people and floods. Census questions were addressed to women and in some cases to men who were asked about name, age, lineage, occupation, education, marital status, income, expenditure, land holding, family composition, house structure and flood-related information such as frequency of flooding and amount of land flooded. The survey questionnaire was addressed to women and was divided into the following three sections: first, identification of household and basic social, economic parameters and population-related questions such as age, sex,

marital status, family composition, education, occupation, income, house construction and assets; second, non-flood activities of men and women and third, flood-related questions included women's perceptions of floods, problems faced by women in different categories, types of survival strategies, food intake, sources of drinking water, women's preparation for future floods, special activities of women and men during floods and health during floods. There was some repetition of questions in the census and survey questionnaires which enabled cross-checking of the information.

After having located the respondent the interviewers were instructed to be as unobtrusive as possible. Sometimes women gave their full attention to us but more often they continued to do whatever they were doing when they were located: cooking, plastering the courtyard, washing clothes, processing crops or minding children. To make our discussion informal and interesting we never read the questionnaire<sup>4</sup> in front of women. Rather we used the local dialect and talked with them informally wherever they were working. Our knowledge of the local dialect helped us to be accepted by women more easily. For the first few days I asked my investigators to participate in my discussions with women and requested them to follow the way I was talking with them. After that I observed the investigators while they were interviewing. This helped them to talk with the women in the same way.

We addressed women in kinship terms according to their age such as, *bhabi* (wife of elder brother), *chachi* (wife of father's brother), *apa* (elder sister) or *nani* (mother's mother) in order to help establish our relationship with them. Women whom I called *bhabi* or *nani* used to make jokes with me by asking questions about my husband. Questions about marriage often provoked the

---

4. The questionnaire was written in standardized (*shuddha*) Bengali and women respondents, most of whom were illiterate, might have had some problems understanding the *shuddha* Bengali because there were differences in the local dialect from the standardized Bengali.

respondents to comment on why the interviewers, all single women, were moving around the village unaccompanied by male guardians. This often led to questions, and jokes, about my investigators' future husbands. These discussions helped to convert the interviews into more interesting, social occasions. Some women did not like the idea of unmarried girls travelling so far and advised them not to visit any place without their guardians.

We were able to observe what was happening in the village from morning to evening. We tried to be as least disruptive as possible of women's everyday lives and talked with them wherever they were working. Having seen that women had little leisure time, we tried to sit on the ground or on a *piri* (flat wooden stool) beside them while they were cooking, feeding their animals, husking rice, making rope or handicrafts or stripping jute. Still, it was difficult to maintain the questioning when they were engaged in other activities, such as when they were expecting their husbands to come home, bathing their children or trying to dry grain in the rainy season. Once I felt guilty when a woman hung her jute out to dry which had got wet while she was talking to me. She was afraid that her husband would be very angry if he found that their jute had got wet. However, before taking up a respondent's time we asked whether they would agree to talk with us. We visited some women at least three times on different days, especially women who were heads of households or worked for others outside or inside the village. We found only one woman, a rich woman, who would invite us to talk in her *kachari ghor* (guest room). Otherwise, we found women in Jolpur rarely had free time. However, despite their busy schedule almost all women showed great patience in responding to questions.

It was very difficult to explain the purpose of our work to the women. At the time of my first visit I was well accepted by women who thought I was from the *Proshika* (a non-government organization which worked with them). When they heard I was not they asked whether I was from another similar organization. However, it was easier to tell them that I was writing a book on

floods and women's situation. I also told them that I was studying in New Zealand<sup>5</sup> and would write the book after returning there. I was also asked whether I was connected with any government organization. At first some women did not want to talk with me and told me that I was working for government which had taken their land to build the Bishoroad<sup>6</sup>. During the first few days of field work I was interviewing poor women. One day a woman from a rich household interrupted in my discussion with a poor woman and said, "You are getting lots of money from the government and using poor women who will not benefit". Poor women explained that the rich were angry because they thought that I would only talk with the poor and might turn them against the rich. However, I was able to convince them that I was not a government official and that I was going to visit almost all people in the village. It became easier to visit all over the village when I had finished my interviews with the richer households. It was then clearer to the villagers that I was mainly concerned about floods and people in Jolpur and, as a woman, I myself was talking with women. However, I felt helpless when women frequently asked how they would benefit from my study. I knew that there was unlikely to be any direct benefit for them. Still, I had to tell them that I would write about them and it depended on government or other organizations whether they would take steps to help women and people in Jolpur to cope with floods. However, women did not disappoint me, rather they often shared their food with me.

- 
5. New Zealand was not known to the rural women and that was why I first told them that I studied in a foreign country (*bidesh*) and then mentioned the name of the country. However, for many women I was a student from *Bilat* (Britain). Some women said they would be very happy if they had a chance to get higher study in *bidesh*.
  6. A highway completed in 1982 which connects Dhaka to Bhanga (it ends before Jolpur) through other districts. The construction was started in the mid-70s. Many villagers complained about the construction of the road for which they had to sell much of their land to the government. Many of them failed to buy land equivalent to what they previously had. Due to lack of sufficient land the majority of people used money for other purposes. Most of these people belonged to the poorer categories.

We used code numbers in our questionnaire according to women's responses rather than writing them in full. Each night I noted my experiences, especially women's fuller comments and what I had observed, in a diary. I used a camera towards the end of my field work when I had already built good relationships. Women willingly posed for the camera. I knew that in the past religious people in rural areas did not like to have their photographs taken and there might still be people who would resent it. However, I did not face any difficulties except one day while I was taking a snap of a respondent. Her father-in-law became so angry that he told me to go home and take my own photograph. However, the woman asked me not to mind the rude words and asked me to take her photo while her father-in-law was away from home.

As a Bengali woman I wanted to be accepted by women as well as men in the village. I used to cover my head while passing the mosque or during the call to prayer (*azan*)<sup>7</sup>. If one of us forgot women reminded us by saying that men might stop their wives talking to women who were Muslims but did not cover their heads even when the *muazzin* (one who calls Muslims to prayer) was giving *azan*. However, we did not always cover our heads and did not hear any adverse comments because of that. To move within the village in the monsoon I sometimes had to pull the lower part of my dress up to my knees as women in Jolpur did. This would have been unthinkable in town. However, I tried to follow the norms of the village. Although I was accepted as an educated woman, and as a researcher, I kept myself segregated from men. My occasional interaction with men was inside their houses. I was selective in discussion with men and only talked to those who were friendly and willing to give information. There were only a few men whom I thought it necessary to interview: men who were taking a rest in the afternoon; who worked only occasionally; who did not work in the fields but supervised labourers' work or

---

7. It is customary in Bangladesh that a Muslim woman should cover her head with the end of sari or *orna* during the time of *azan*. In general, both rural and urban women follow this custom.

old men who were unable to work. However, I never talked with a man in a public place as it would have been a breach of village norms. My cultural identity as a Bengali, as well as my knowledge of Muslim and Hindu culture was a great benefit in pursuing my field work. Above all, the patience, understanding and friendly attitudes of women in Jolpur helped me to complete my field work without any major adverse incident, and to enjoy it.

### **Summary**

Field work for this study was undertaken during the period from May to December 1992 in three phases: first, a pilot survey, second, the village census and third the survey. Corrections to the questionnaire were made after the pilot survey. General information about the village, its people and floods was collected through the census, and information on the situation of women during floods was collected through the survey questionnaire. The social survey, along with observation, was used. Both statistical and qualitative approaches were used to interpret data. Secondary information was collected from several organisations. One hundred and one women were selected from different socio-economic backgrounds. In-depth interviews of selected women and some men were also carried out.

Problems regarding travelling, finding accommodation and explaining the purpose of our visit were encountered during field work. The researchers' knowledge of the local dialect and women's cooperation helped to make the field work efficient and enjoyable.

### **General ecology of the region**

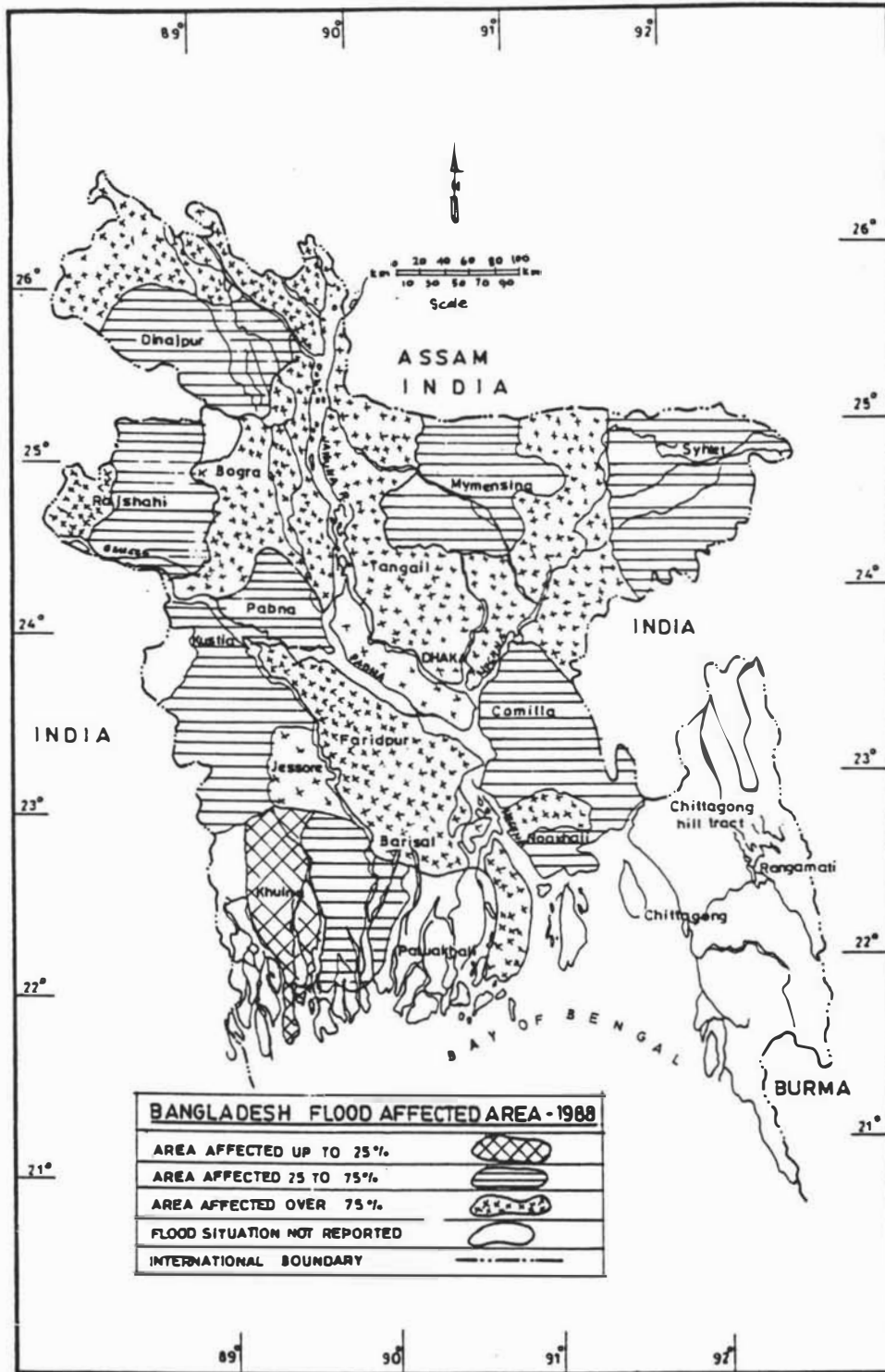
The village upon which this study is based is situated about 120 kilometres south-west of Dhaka. I have called the village Jolpur. This name is appropriate because *jol* means water (which is very much part of the lives of

the women and men in the village). *Pur* literally means house, city or town. In Bangladesh *pur* is used for any place of human settlement. Many cities, towns and villages have that suffix *pur*. The village is surrounded by a large number of canals and ponds. During the monsoon all of the cultivable land of the village gets sufficient water, which benefits the villagers. On the other hand, during floods, water submerges the village land and houses and brings suffering. The level of water affects these people's livelihood (Map 1 indicating flood-affected area of 1988 in Bangladesh).

Jolpur is in Mogra Union of Bhanga *thana* one of the 24 *thana* of Faridpur district (Map 2 indicating Bhanga *thana* of Faridpur district). Faridpur is one of the five districts of the Dhaka division. It has an area of 6,913 square kilometres including the riverine area. Faridpur has a mild, equable and humid climate and the annual temperature variation is not significant. After the cool and dry winter of December-February, a hot and showery monsoon begins in March-May followed by the relatively cooler but very wet monsoon season June-September. The district gets its heaviest rainfall during July and August.

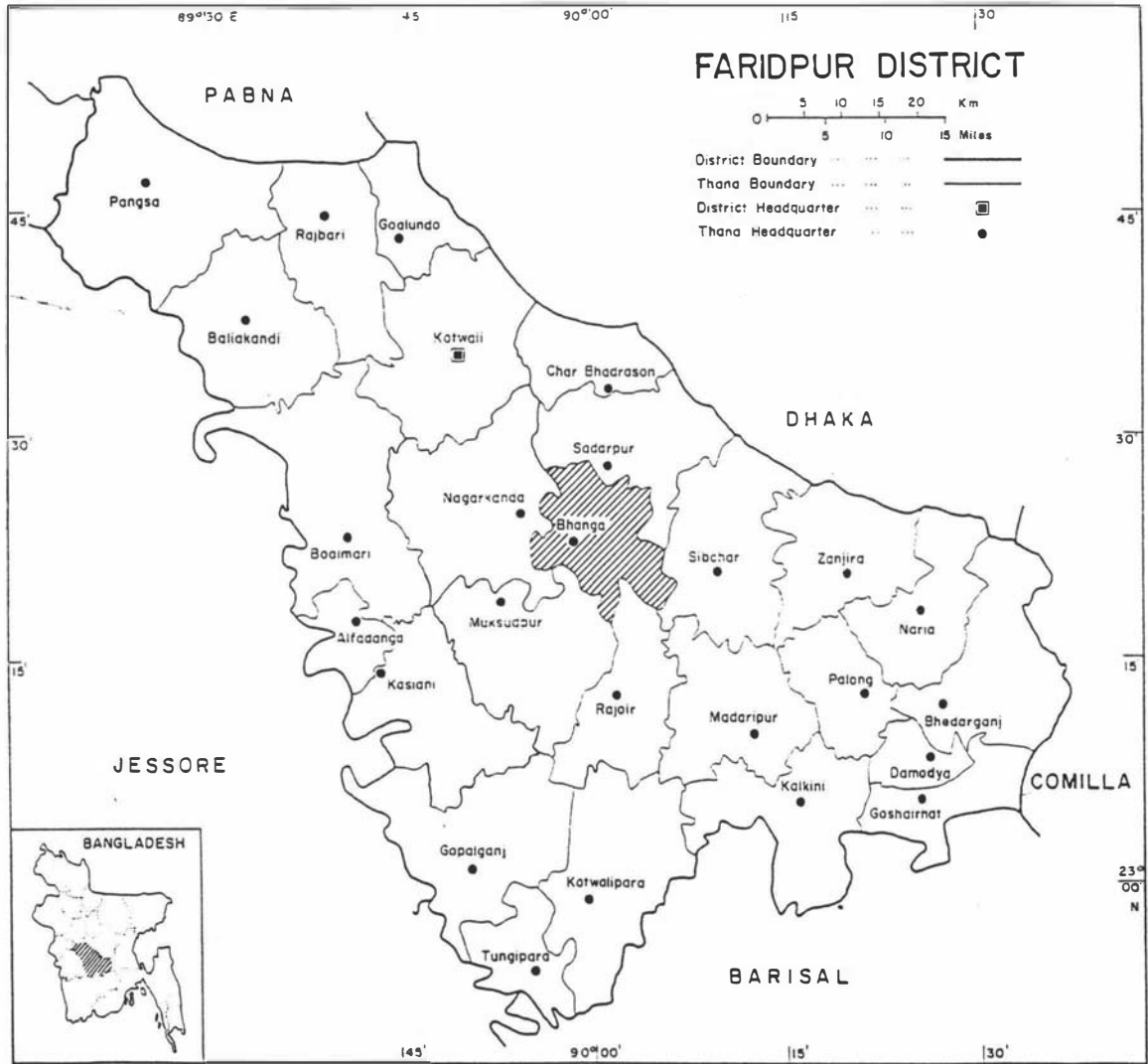
The region is heavily dissected by rivers being still in a process of deltaic formation. On the one hand, the rivers are broad and deep and store silt which makes the land fertile. On the other hand rivers take away mud from banks to re-form others. On the north and east the district is bounded by the great Padma river. The main deltaic rivers frequently change their courses bringing about variation of district boundaries from time to time. Two great rivers, the Padma and the Ganges are joined by the Jamuna and Brahmaputra near Goalondo. These flow from north-west to south-east and merge with the Meghna. The Garai, the upper part of Madhumoti, one of the principal distributors of Padma bounds the district to the north, north-west, west and south-west. The Arial Khan is the chief river in this interior. There are many

**Map 1: Area affected during 1988 floods in Bangladesh**



Source: Huda, 1989:131

**Map 2: Location of Bhanga Thana in Faridpur district**



**Source: BBS: Faridpur District Statistics, 1983**

minor distributaries. These include the Chandana, Bhubaneswar, Mara Padma (dead Padma) and Naya Bhangri (New Cut). Other smaller waterways, the Kumar, the Sitalakhaya and a second Mara Padma drain into the Arial Khan.

### **Land**

The land in Faridpur district is of several types. Like 90% of land in Bangladesh, Faridpur district consists entirely of alluvium. This alluvium is somewhat uniform throughout, consisting of both old and new deposits. In the north of the Faridpur district the soil is a very light loam, and in general is somewhat sandy. On the banks of the Ganges, a deposit of almost pure sand is common. The northern *thana* are, however, full of depressions in which the soil is a fairly heavy clay. They are not regularly inundated each year, although the lower lands get an annual deposit, and in occasional years of very high floods the deposit covers the whole country. The soils of the eastern part are suitable for all crops and, in particular, for jute. The deposit of the Ganges is lighter and not so fertile as the silt carried by the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. To the east of the district the combined stream of the Ganges, Jamuna, Brahmaputra and the Meghna floods the country almost every year and leaves a very rich deposit of silt. The soil of this region consists entirely of this silt to a considerable depth. On the west, the banks of the Modhumati for a few miles inland are covered during the rains with a heavy silt layer. However, this does not penetrate to the interior of the district where the soil is a stiff loam, containing, in the centres of the larger marshes, a very considerable impregnation of decayed vegetable matter.

Demographically, the district has the eighth highest population growth in the country. According to the 1991 population census, its total population was 1,506 (769 male and 737 female, a ratio [M/F] of 104.3). The population per square mile in Faridpur district is 1,785 as against 1,566 for the country as a whole.

## The village and its environment

The macro-ecology of the region has greatly influenced the micro ecology of the research village. The total length of the Faridpur-Bhanga road is 18.70 miles. The *thana* had under its jurisdiction 136 villages in 12 unions with an area of 218 sq. km (land area 210 square km. and river area 8 sq.km. with no reserve forest). Bhanga has an intermediate college established in 1970, a high school, a *madrasah* (religious institution for Muslim boys), a post and telegraph office, a government rest house and a *munsif* (lesser judge) court. It is also a business centre.

The area on which Jolpur is located is a deltaic formation of the river Padma and its tributary system. The two canals named Boithakhali and Baliahati flow from the east and the west sides of the village (see Map 3). The two canals are connected by the river Kumar (flows from north-west to south-east from Faridpur town and joins Arial Khan at Madaripur) which flows 2.50-4km away from the village. The Arial Khan, a branch of the Padma, flows 7km away from the east side of Jolpur. Arial Khan is known as the Bhubanesshar in its upper reaches. It leaves the town a few miles away from Padma and flows in a south easterly and then in a southerly direction. The formation began to develop several hundred years ago quite close to the active deltaic area. Jolpur was flood prone: almost all the village was under water during the rainy season (for more see below).

Aquatic or Marsh plants and weeds are found in great variety in Jolpur. Betel-nut is a common marketable tree crop. Mangoes, coconut, *boroi*<sup>8</sup> and tamarind are also found. Medicinal trees also grow in wild forest areas such as *babla* (*gum acacia*), *madar* (*calotropis*; coral), *bet* (*calerodendrom*; cane), *chirata*

---

8. *Zizyplus jujube*, a common fruit which grows best in Faridpur and Chandpur (south-east of Bangladesh) district.

(*agatholes*), *dhutura* (thorn apple), *ashath* (peepul), *horitoki* (*myrabolan*), *bohera* (*balearica myrobalan*) and *nim*. Some trees also provide fuel and timber for local use.

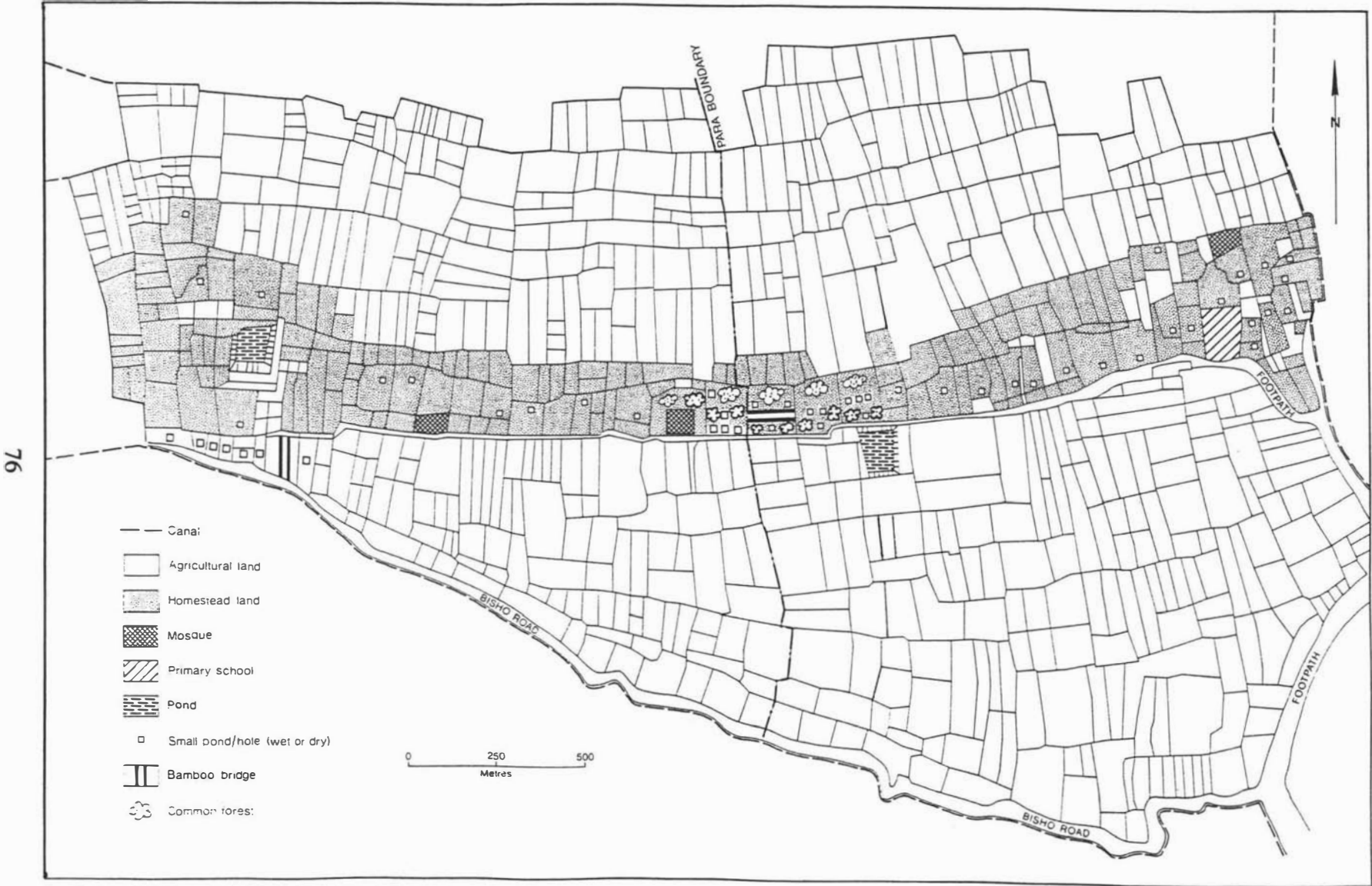
It takes about two hours to reach Jolpur from Faridpur district. From the Faridpur bus station there is an hourly bus service to Bhanga which has a stop over in the corner of Bishoroad. From Bishoroad people may hire a three wheel van to reach Bogail *ghat* (name of a canal or *khal*) and a boat to cross the *khal*. After crossing the *khal*, the long broad Bishoroad becomes visible with a bus station Bhanga to Dhaka. This road is connected with the Dhaka-Maoa road. From the starting point of Bishoroad it is a quarter mile walk to enter into West *para* (neighbourhood within a village. For more see Chapter 5) and nearly two miles to East *para*. There is also a rickshaw-van stand and people often take one to get to East *para*. There is a bamboo bridge from Bishoroad to enter the mud path of West *para*. For an outsider it is not easy to visit East *para* through West *para* because there are many holes and small ponds full of water or clay even in the dry season. An entrance from the other side in West *para* by van also saves time. Among the *bari*<sup>9</sup> there are small *khals*, flooded holes (a consequence of excavation of soil to raise the foundations of houses) and without getting one's feet wet it is not possible to reach one *bari* from another if it rains.

When one arrives in Jolpur the first identifiable geographical features one sees are agricultural land, canals and some holes. At the time of our first visit (about mid-June, i.e. the beginning of the month of *A sharh* or rainy season in the Bengali calendar) we saw long green jute plants on the high and medium

---

9. *Bari* is a complex of households which may or may not share the same courtyard. Household heads of a *bari* usually come from the same *goshthi* consequently *bari* are often identified with *goshthi*, for example, Matobbor *bari* and Sheikh *bari*.

Map 3: The village of Jolpur



height land. It was not possible to see all houses from the footpath. We entered the first *bari* in the West *para* beside two small ponds. At that time (during mid-day) there were no men at their *bari*, one woman was cooking and another was plastering her courtyard. Three small children were wandering around them. We did not know how women were going to accept us but felt relief when they asked whether we were the new addition to the organisation of which they were members. We explained the purpose of the visit to the women (later we identified them as members of the destitute category) and asked for help. They gave us some information and told us to visit houses next to their pond. Accordingly we visited other houses and found women were very busy with their domestic tasks. We saw some women husking *irri* (high yield varieties of rice or HYV rice) paddy which they had collected recently. Some women were making portable stoves, some plastering courtyards (with soil collected from holes to make the courtyard or edge of house-floors or *doa* higher and smoother<sup>10</sup> and some were shaping lumps of cow-dung to use as fuel. Later we knew that some of these tasks were a preparation for floods because that was the time when monsoon rainfall was about to begin.

All *bari* were surrounded by trees to protect the houses. They also provided shade and fruits. Apart from trees there were no other boundaries or fences, not even around the compounds where the better-off people live. The houses were made from local materials. Most of the houses had jute-mat walls and thatched paddy straw or corrugated iron roofs. Some had bamboo or wooden walls with corrugated iron roofs. Most of the better-off households' had corrugated iron walls and roofs (for more see Chapter Six).

---

10. It is women's work to plaster the courtyard, *doa* and house-floor with mud often mixed with cow-dung. In the rainy season they have to do it repeatedly because rain washes-away the plaster. Women try to make their *doa* higher to avoid rain or flood-water entering their house-floors.

Jolpur was a medium sized village in both population and area. It has 1,020 inhabitants, in 183 households, (whereas the average Bangladesh village has a population of 1,200). The village was founded by a group of high caste Hindus. Tales were told that it was a Hindu village a generation ago with a small Muslim population. Since 1947 when India was divided and East Bengal became a part of Pakistan, there was a large scale migration between the two countries. Most better-off Hindus left for India at the beginning of the process. Migration continued, though not to the same degree. However, unlike in other parts of Bangladesh there were no Zamindars in Jolpur who might have exchanged their land with that of Muslims living in West Bengal<sup>11</sup>. Those Hindus who did not have sufficient wealth to settle in India, or who had emotional ties with their own land, or who were from lower caste groups tried to stay in Jolpur. In 1992, out of 183 households two were lower caste Hindu. Members of these two households had already sold their land and were perhaps waiting to migrate to a better place. Three other Hindu households left Jolpur after we had completed the village census and started collecting data. According to remaining Muslim villagers, the Hindus felt isolated and insecure as a minority group. Arranged marriages for their children and of other religious ceremonies became very difficult for them. Some Hindus left the village during the regime of President Ziaur Rahman to President H.M. Ershad<sup>12</sup> because of rumours raised by opportunists that Bangladesh was no longer a secular country.

---

11. As the partition of India and Pakistan was based on communal boundaries, the government of Pakistan introduced a programme to encourage Hindus to leave East Pakistan by exchanging their land with Muslims in West Bengal in India.

12. Although eighty five percent of people in Bangladesh are Muslim, secularism was the commitment of the country's first president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1971-75). The second president General Ziaur Rahman (1975-81) introduced Islam into the Bangladesh constitution, and his successor General H.M. Ershad (1981-90) declared Islam as the state religion. This political change in the constitution was mainly made to increase aid from Saudi Arabia. It also gave birth to a religious community which obscures differences in class and interest (Jahangir, 1986:78; White, 1992:14).

When the village was originally established, about the end of the eighteenth century, very few people lived there because of the low lying nature of the land. However, slowly, people from many neighbouring or more distant villages started to settle there transforming the social and cultural nature of Jolpur. At first the land was farmed on an absentee basis. However, later generations, faced with greater land shortage, came to settle on the land. People bought land from Hindus cheaply and kept it for future generations. After the out-migration of Hindus, relatives and friends from neighbouring villages of the Muslim settlers in Jolpur started to settle in the village. However, people commonly had to mound up earth to make a place to live on. Over the years the number of houses increased as homestead sites were built up by transferring soil from elsewhere, often from holes made near the houses. According to a senior villager, during any special occasion 40-50 years ago, only about 38 kilograms (one *maund*) of rice was necessary to entertain the population of Jolpur. At present it is not possible to feed all the villagers even with about 225 kilograms (six *maund*) of rice<sup>13</sup>. There were only a few Muslims households which had lived in Jolpur for more than three or four generations.

#### **Floods<sup>14</sup>**

The agricultural prosperity of Jolpur depended on floods more than on local rainfall. The height and duration of floods were most important for the villagers. In Jolpur the floods of 1968, 1974, 1987 and 1988 were considered to be devastating by women. Agricultural production was affected more than

---

13. In rural areas if anybody arranged a special occasion such as a wedding, he or she had to feast the whole village. In Jolpur this feast is called *jiafot* (invitation to a feast). But for a long time it has been only the better-off households which could afford to do this. The frequency of *jiafot* was decreasing.

14. More on floods is discussed on Chapter 2.

any other sector of the economy. Better-off women in Jolpur reported the 1987 flood as more damaging than the flood of 1988. They said that the 1987 flood level was lower than the 1988 flood but it occurred so early that most of the farmers could not harvest their crops. On the other hand, farmers were able to harvest most of their crops before the 1988 flood occurred. Poor farmers whose land was low lying reported both floods as damaging as they failed to harvest most of their crops. However, the severity of damage to houses and interruption of daily life activities was higher during the 1988 flood. Destitute and landless women who did not have land or crops suffered during both floods and were thrown into absolute poverty and destitution. Most of the women and men in the landless category sold their land after the 1988 flood to compensate for the loss of their houses and other assets.

According to women and men the construction of Bishoroad caused massive siltation in rivers which was the main cause of floods in Jolpur. They argued that before its construction flood water flowed away, rather than being interrupted. With only a small amount of rainfall or riverine flood Jolpur went under water. There was no way to move the flood water from north to south as no sluice gates were constructed under the road. Poor women in Jolpur said that they had only benefitted from Bishoroad when they took refuge on it during the floods. They thought that they would not have needed it for that purpose had it not been constructed. It was built only to allow rich urban people to travel to Dhaka, a city with which most of the villagers had no significant connection.

After the 1988 flood, people who could afford to moved their cow-sheds (*goalghor*) to higher ground to protect their livestock from flood water. Many platforms were constructed to store crops in the rainy season. People were forced to cut trees and bamboo to rebuild their damaged houses. The supply was so small that many poor people had to depend on loans which they were still repaying. The poor women and men worked hard to re-start their normal

activities: no government support was provided. Floods had increased people's diligence. They knew how to live with floods. Since the 1988 floods villagers have decided to plant more trees and prevent people from cutting bamboo. Women saved crop seeds by storing them inside *kolshi* (pitcher) sunk under water. Women and men knew how to derive enough funds from a small piece of land. Women piled up water hyacinth and grew vegetables in the nearest damp depressions (resulting from the excavations made to obtain soil for raising house foundations). The poor used their own technologies to survive better, most of which were adapted by women.

Following severe floods over a number of years, increased numbers of people dug up agricultural land to make the foundations of their houses higher in order to prevent flood water entering their houses. Many holes had been created after the two consecutive floods of 1987 and 1988. Some pieces of land were many feet lower than others. There was hardly any land not under agricultural production. Land surrounded by homesteads had already been used for fruit trees and vegetable growing. Mango, coconut, betel-nut, tamarind, *boroi*, *jum* (berry) and many other fruit trees and vegetables were grown by women in the homestead areas. A small area of common land, a playground and land for primary school premises were available for community purposes. The increase in population indicates that land in Jolpur will most likely be fragmented, in which case people will have such small plots of land that will be of little agricultural use. It was not possible to use ponds or holes as agricultural land, instead they were used for washing. These ponds or holes hold water for a few months after the monsoon flood.

### **Summary**

The village in which the study was carried out is named Jolpur and is situated in Mogra union of Bhanga *thana* in Faridpur district which is in the Dhaka division. The region, being interlaced with rivers, is a process of deltaic

formation. Faridpur district is made up entirely of alluvium. Jolpur is connected by canals and small rivers to the big rivers of the region. People in Jolpur depend mainly on agricultural production which was much closely related to the magnitude of flood water. On one hand, agricultural production was dependent on annual floods and on the other hand, severe floods in different years brought suffering for people. The floods of 1968, 1974, 1987 and 1988 were identified by women as the worst floods and during these, as well as others, poorer women suffered more than others. However, women and men in Jolpur tried to adjust to floods and they developed many strategies, most of which were invented by women.

### **Summary and conclusion**

This chapter starts with the explanation of research methods used in the study, followed by a description of the region surrounding the village of Jolpur, its environment and its situation regarding floods which play an important role in the agricultural prosperity and the lives of the people in the village.

The next chapter focuses on the distinctive features of Jolpur's social conditions such as *samaj*, *goshthi*, *para*, categorization of households, economy, education and occupations of villagers to further understand the social structure.

## Chapter Five

### Social conditions in Jolpur

This chapter begins by defining and clarifying the relationships among *samaj* (community), *goshthi* (patrilineage) and *para*. Network relationships among villagers are also discussed here. An attempt is also be made to categorize households according to socio-economic background and to identify the factors which affect the way they interact. The economy, land and cropping patterns, occupations of heads of households and educational level of villagers are also discussed. All of these are related to the wider structure which helps to determine the internal divisions within these groups.

#### *Samaj*

*Samaj* literally means community or society. In rural Bangladesh, people belong to a particular *samaj*. This institution is formed traditionally to protect a village from outside interference. *Samaj* tries to ensure people adhere to the proper mode of conduct. *Samaj* has the authority to punish where deviation from the norm occurs. Jolpur had one *samaj*. A head of a wealthy Matobbor *goshthi* (whose ancestors were among the first settlers in Jolpur) was the hereditary *samaj* leader. Other members were elected by the villagers and continuously re-elected. However, most of the leaders belonged to the better-

off category and there were no women in the *samaj*. Because of cultural practice women were not included in the *samaj* or *salish* (village court before which village disputes were settled by the *samaj* leaders). Women's opinions were not sought (except in cases in which women were involved). Even a woman involved in a dispute might not be asked to present it herself before the *salish* (*parda* becomes an issue here) but to pass her version through men. Most of the time verdicts went against women, who were mainly from poor socio-economic backgrounds or who did not have any men to defend them.

With the increase of population and differences regarding the area and quality of land owned, minor conflicts emerged among men of the two *para* at different times. Settlement of disputes at the *salish* promoted the emergence of *dol* (factions). However, these conflicts were not taken seriously by the common villagers. Friction was aggravated after the 1988 flood when a decision was taken to dig a canal (named as Jolpur *khal* or *nala*) to drain off flood water. Households of West *para* were against digging of earth on their side. A wealthy and influential man in West *para* (newly emerged as the richest man in Jolpur) even encouraged his co-residents to form another *samaj* under his leadership. However, this conflict was ended within a short time by the villagers' own initiatives. At the time of our visit there were good relationships between the two *para* and we did not discover anything about the matter until towards the end of our visit. When asked, most of the men denied that there was a conflict. Some women agreed, but did not feel comfortable discussing it. This might have been because they did not want to reveal the conflict to outsiders in order to save the reputation of Jolpur, as is usual for villagers in Bangladesh and also because many had *goshthi* members and relatives who lived in both the *para*. However, generally speaking *goshthi* provided the most significant form of support for men in regards village issues whether they lived in East or West *para*. Households in the same clusters were tied with a *upo-dol* (sub-factions). Overall, the village people were unified against any outside intervention or attack.

## *Goshthi*

This is a patrilineage which stresses a shared blood relationship with a common male ancestor. *Goshthi* relations are important for the resources of a household in rural Bangladesh. Labouring work, sharecropping and borrowing depend on social networks within the *goshthi*. Many households depended on their *goshthi* members for employment, for favours and even for land upon which to build a house. However, support from better-off for poor *goshthi* members was often political in Jolpur (see Chapter 7).

There were four prominent *goshthi* in Jolpur which came from different villages of Bhanga: Matobbor, Munshi, Sheikh and Khan. Most of the better-off households belonged to the first three *goshthi*. Of the top 12% (i.e. middle and rich households on the basis of land holding), 48% belonged to Matobbor, 30% to Munshi and 22% to Sheikh. They had many strategies to strengthen their positions. The majority of the villagers were of Matobbor (literally means leader) *goshthi* and some of them had a strong economic position. However, there were also poor households in these *goshthi* and they were dominated by the better-off households in the same *goshthi*. All of the major *goshthi* encouraged members of the same *goshthi* to settle in Jolpur. Some of the recent settlers were poor, settling with permission of wealthy members of their *goshthi*. In wealthy *goshthi*, the position of women was lower in their households than that of women in poorer *goshthi* because of greater male domination.

## *Para*

The village was divided into two parts: East *para* and West *para*. East *para* is relatively higher than the West *para*. Between the two *para* were canals, small ponds, ditches and holes. The land of East *para* produced a wider variety of crops because rain water did not remain on the land but drained to the lower

land. The soil of East *para* was also fertile because it got sufficient monsoon water for cultivation. However, people in both *para* maintained neighbourhood relationships. Many households had agricultural land in both *para*. With the increase of family members households in the same *goshti* settled in both *para*. The position of women did not vary between the two *para* because in both there were better-off and poorer households. Women's network relationships were with women in both *para* but their immediate relationships were with their neighbours.

Houses in both *para* were placed parallel to the village footpaths though not at the same height. These mud footpaths were not smooth or wide enough for even bicycle riding. There were also a few holes in the paths. The footpath was made higher after the 1988 flood but not as high as the flood level. Many households had their own rafts and better-off households had boats so they frequently travelled through *beel* (marsh, swamp) areas to small rivers for many purposes even during non-flood times.

During the monsoon most of Jolpur was flooded from 5 to 12 feet leaving only homestead areas dry. Some low-lying house compounds in West *para* were also flooded. Women in twenty three households reported having between one and three feet of water in their courtyards for between ten and forty days during the normal monsoon of 1991. During the monsoon the homestead areas looked like small islands. Only part of the village footpath in East *para* was visible. Boats, rafts (*vela*) and *dingi* (narrow boat usually made of the trunk of palmyra) were the only way to move around Jolpur during the monsoon.

### **Social networks**

Many people depended on social networks for their survival and women played a vital role in the establishment and maintenance of these networks. Family,

kin and neighbours played an important part in providing social security and other services, such as support for unemployed or disabled persons. These networks may be categorised into three groups: kinship, neighbourhood and patron-client relationships. However, each of these three types was bound up with the aspects of socio-cultural structure of the village such as the gender subordination and socio-economic background of different households.

Household settlement in Jolpur, like any other village in Bangladesh, is patrivirilocal and men got immediate kin support from their male line. A woman left her natal village to live with her husband's kin. Because of the prevalent patrilocal structure of the society, their immediate *goshti* relationship was with their marital kin.

Village settlement was based on neighbourhood relationships, which were built up by different *goshti*<sup>1</sup>. People in Jolpur reported that they maintained a strong relationship with *goshti* members and good neighbourhood relationships with other *goshti*. Fictive kinship with neighbouring households played an important role in Jolpur. The stronger the fictive relationship the more the chance of obtaining favours. Most of the fictive kinship relationships in Jolpur were built up by women and among neighbours. It is evident that women's neighbourhood relationships were non-political as opposed to men's and were not patriarchal as *goshti* or patron-client relationships were.

---

1. With increasing poverty and growth in family size, the kin members of all *goshti* did not share the same kitchen. Newly married couples built their huts/homes (*ghar*) on homestead land belonging to the groom's kin. As long as a father was alive, the sons tried to live in the same household. In most households after the father's death sons separated and their widowed mother ate in turn with her sons. Some who could afford to buy land from migrating villagers (mainly Hindus) built their houses far from their *goshti* because of the increase in family members and shortages of homestead land. As a result neighbourhood relationships were built up by different *goshti*.

The buying and mortgaging of land, sharing equipment or cattle for ploughing, weeding and harvesting were common among kin-members (Feldman and McCarthy, 1983:111). Mortgaging and sale of land mostly takes place within the same *goshthi* or patrilineage (Chen, 1986:218; Jansen, 1987:122-125). Even though prices paid by kin-members might be lower than the market prices, people preferred to keep this business within the kin group.

Kinship norms also played a part in the hiring of wage labourers and in securing informal credit. Because the *goshthi* relationship is patriarchal, it was the men of one's kinship group who provided legal counsel and defence and other social support. However, if the *goshthi* members disagreed or resources were lacking, land sales or mortgaging might take place outside the kin group but the relationship with non-kin members was very formal and not the basis of a lifetime network as were the *goshthi* relationships.

Patron-client relationships have operated as social security for the rural poor since the *Jajmani* system of undivided Bengal<sup>2</sup>. The asymmetrical but reciprocal relationships between patrons and clients historically played a significant role in enabling adjustment to crises. A labourer or sharecropper was provided with a fixed amount of grain per year or half-year and received rights and protection in return for his labour, rent or services to the landlord. In Jolpur similar patron-client relationships were built around links between employers and employees, sharecroppers and landowners, mortgagors and mortgagees (Arens and Beurden, 1977; Jansen, 1987).

Chen (1991:133-138) documented two types of patron-client relationship: economic and political. Economic relationships were established between employers and labourers, landowners and tenants, shopkeepers and customers,

---

2. For details on *Jajmani* system refer to Wiser, 1936; Breman, 1985; and for partial analysis see Agarwal, 1991:365.

mortgagors and mortgagees, money lenders and labourers. Political relationships were developed between factional leaders and their supporters. However, the distinction was blurred in Jolpur where overlapping economic and political patron-client relationships were built among the same groups. Van Schendel (1986:6) identified patronage and neighbourhood relationships as "the development of 'many stranded' coalitions, which is a popular strategy for poor peoples' survival in Bangladesh". However, it was evident in Jolpur, as Van Schendel reported in his study that, with the increase of poverty, the ties between the poor and landowners or between patron and client are decreasing.

In agriculture patron-client relations took the form of relationships between rich and poor where the poor worked as permanent farm servants and sometimes as share croppers. However, in Jolpur, patron-client relationships were mainly built up by kinship and neighbourhood relationships. It can be said that patron-client relationships were one of the instruments used by better-off households to dominate the poor and secure its political support. Although it also provided support to the poor it was the better-off who benefitted most. Better-off households of other *goshthi* sometimes took advantage of conflicts between rich and poor households of another *goshthi* to make political capital. Women were not directly involved in such relationships not because they did not plough but because patrons knew the wives and children of their clients would automatically provide domestic help for them. In this relationship women suffered both gender and socio-economic subordination.

Most women depended upon network relationships to perform their household tasks. This dependence was an important part of the social resources through which they negotiate their households' advancement (White, 1992:91). Women used the relationship to borrow food and other essentials, to share labour and to look after children. Women's relationships extended over a wide geographical area including their natal area, their husband's kin and their neighbouring non-kin. They got shelter and borrow money without interest,

especially from their parents. From neighbours they borrowed food, fuel and fodder. Poor women in Jolpur hired livestock as sharecroppers through building a good relationship with neighbouring women in better-off households. Better-off women often extended charity to poor kin or neighbouring women (for more see Chapter Seven).

### **Summary**

The socio-cultural practices were patriarchal in nature and enabled better-off men to control village decisions. Land owning was related to different social practices, such as *goshthi* and network relationships, a man's position in *samaj* and *salish*. Because women were subordinate to, and of lower status than, men there were no woman in the important social institutions.

### **Categorization of the households**

The economy of the village was predominantly agricultural and land was the principal source of income for most households, the main resource which influenced social relations and the key factor shaping a household's socio-economic status. Personal identity in Jolpur was strongly influenced by land and a household's long term economic prosperity was severely damaged through the loss of its land. With advances in agricultural technology demand for land has increased. These facts justify the primary categorization of people in Jolpur on the basis of land ownership. Two categories which did not own agricultural land have also been identified. The reason for such categorization of rural households will be discussed below. As the household is still the unit of production, individuals (women and men) are not considered separately but placed in the same category as their households.

Studies in social stratification in Bangladesh (for example, Mukherjee, 1971; Bertocci, 1970, 1974; Jahangir, 1976) are mainly based on a narrow

empirical foundation and their generalizations are mainly intuitive. Wood (1976) classified the rural population as rich, middle and poor farmer and argued that rich farmers accumulate wealth at the expenses of poor through using land as a productive resource. He further argued that people living in rural areas also benefit from off farm activities. In this study Wood's theory is partially applicable although not its categorization. This was to provide a complete picture of households with different socio-economic backgrounds. Household<sup>3</sup> was used as unit of production because a household may earn from other than land. For example, landless and destitute households have no land and they (as well as small landholders) depended on income sources other than land. Because the household is a basic unit of rural economy and gender is a means of structuring allocation to resources within households household is the most useful unit of classification. The use of the household as a unit of analysis is most useful in a women-focused study because most of women's activities are performed within the households. While some studies categorised rural households only on the basis of landholding, this study considers the household as an economic, social and cultural unit those, which hold land as well as those which do not. The widening of the coverage has proved useful in the study in various contexts where we see significant differences in flood coping strategies among women in different households investigated. That was why we classified rural people on the basis of non-ownership of land rather than emphasising land holding alone. This approach, which is called "new home economics", has been followed by other researchers (Evenson, 1981; Van Schendel, 1981; Ashraf *et al.*, 1982). This approach considers the household as a production unit, which puts home-produced goods and services as well as domestic resources into a set of final use values yielding ability in consumption. In the present study, the household is therefore considered to be the most meaningful unit for analysing the socio-economic attributes of the rural people.

---

3. Details on household were discussed earlier.

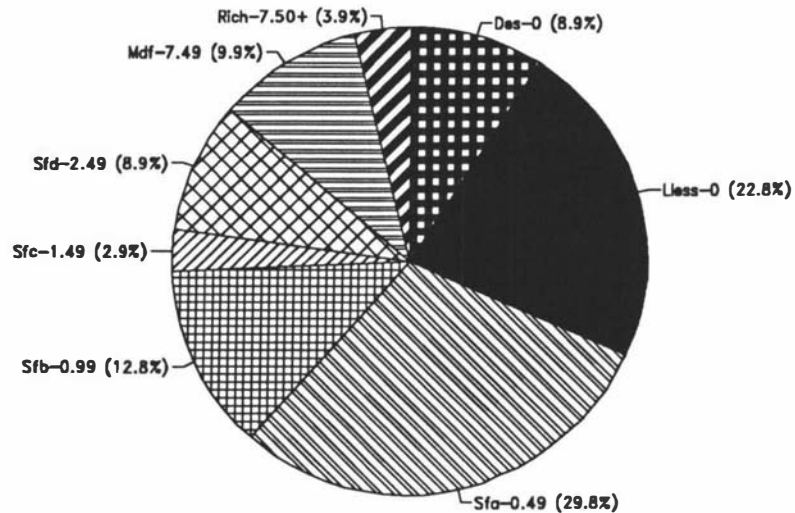
Women and men in Jolpur identified large land owners as wealthy ('*borolok*'). The more land they had the greater their income and the higher the household's standard of living. The Bangladesh government's land holding criteria were used to categorise those households which had both cultivable (land on which they produced crops) and homestead land (where they lived). The government identified small farmers, middle farmers and rich farmers (Figure 5.1). However, there were people who had no land. These have been divided into two further categories: landless households which only possessed homestead land and destitute households which had neither homestead nor cultivable land (details of each category will be discussed later in this Chapter)<sup>4</sup>. Accurate information about income is notoriously difficult to get and this was why people in Jolpur were not categorised by household income. A woman was not always informed about her husband's income. At the same time, men might not be aware of, or consider, women's work as income earning. Moreover, the income of a household was not stable.

I have not categorised women separately because of their attachments to particular households (discussed before). The number of sharecroppers was not significant and they have not therefore been identified as a separate category. Also there were sharecroppers in different socio-economic categories. Those who worked in non-agricultural activities (such as salaried employment) were not categorised separately because they also belonged to socio-economic categories which were based on ownership and non-ownership of land. Moreover, the majority of wage labourers gained the major part of their subsistence from agriculture. The economic opportunities available to the poor showed marked seasonal variation.

---

4. In the text often poor/poorer will be used to refer destitute, landless and small farmer households and better-off will be used for middle and rich farmers households.

Figure 5.1: Categorization of households by landholding (in acre)



Source: Field work, 1992

N=183

Note: Des=Destitute, Less=landless, Sfa=Small farmer 'a', Sfb=Small farmer 'b', Sfc=Small farmer 'c', Sfd=Small farmer 'd', Mdf=Middle farmer and rich=Rich farmer. These codes will be used in figures 5.2 and 5.3.

Whereas land acquisition for villagers was something which some people might have some control over, landlessness was something they could not control. In fact, landlessness was increasing in Jolpur because of natural disaster and poverty. Small farmers who did not have other resources to help cope with poverty or other crises were often forced to sell land. Consequently, economic impoverishment increased. Many households sold land after the two heavy and consecutive floods of 1987 and 1988 (this was discussed earlier).

After partial, or total loss of land, share cropping became the main way the poor gained access to land. Apart from rich households, only absentee landowners and some women heads of households admitted sharecroppers on to their land. Mortgaging and money lending played an important part in the socio-economic structure and distribution of power in the village.

In Jolpur, most farmers did not have enough land for subsistence. Only a few households had a surplus. Poor households were rarely able to depend on a single, source of income. Survival was the main concern of the majority of households. The methods people used to survive reflected their socio-economic position. Where land was concentrated in only a few hands, the poor had to seek employment in areas other than agriculture. In order to survive, poor people used the labour of all members of their households including women. Where the labour of women was used, they acquired higher status within their households but this did not improve their status outside their households- rather it lowered it.

Many poor farmers depended on wage labour to supplement their income. As in any other village in Bangladesh, it was rich farmers who prospered and could further improve their condition at the expense of the poor. It was evident in Jolpur that it was the landed farmers who were able to educate their children and help them to find employment outside the agricultural sector<sup>5</sup> (discussed earlier). Furthermore, they were more likely to be able to improve their position by increasing their agricultural productivity for example, by using modern technology<sup>6</sup> or other non-agricultural advantages (i.e. money lending).

---

5. One rich farmer had eight educated children. His eldest son was a Bank manager in Faridpur district and his daughter was the only girl in Jolpur who was, at the time of our visit, graduating from a university-college.

6. For more on this issue refer to Bertocci (1972, 1974), Wood (1976, 1981), Van Schendel (1981) and Jansen (1987).

In theory, development programmes such as the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) or Bangladesh *Krishi* (agriculture) Bank (BKB), were introduced to benefit the poor. In Jolpur, and elsewhere, it was better-off farmers who benefited from these projects. For example, to get a loan from the bank one had to pay ten percent equity against the loan or have land to the same value. Most of the poor farmers, due to their limited resources, could not raise this equity. Consequently, it was only the large land owners who had access to loans, modern technology (such as deep tube-wells for irrigation), fertilizers and seeds supplied by government organisations. Instead of benefiting them, government programmes were making poor farmers more dependent on wealthy farmers. The poor were more dependent on traditional money lending through social networks of patrons or kin or both. Whereas men's dependence on patrons or money lenders was more formal and political women's relationships with their neighbouring women and relatives, on whom they relied for similar services, were informal and non-political.

The economically stronger households competed for access to available resources. Each wished to hold or maintain a secure position in the village. This security was related to land holding. Landed households provided support to the poor through money lending, sharecropping and waged employment. This support role gave landed households power over the poor. The reason for offering this support were various and differed for different households. This may be described from the religious, political, and economic points of view. For example, a rich household might be motivated to help the poor by the Islamic notion of charity. Women in rich households who helped the poor during floods reported that they did it in order to please Allah. However, the main reason for wealthy men providing support to poorer men was more likely to be political.

The poor, on the other hand, supported rich households whenever they were asked. In some cases the *goshti* relationship did not work when there

was competition. Not only did the rich households compete with each other but middle farmers also became involved in this competition. However, because middle farmers owned less land/wealth compared to the rich they had less political power than the rich.

The economic transactions were enmeshed in varying ties of dependence and unequal power relations. In times of difficulty poor people tried to get help from those with whom they had social relationships, such as *goshthi* and neighbourhood networks. The different household categories influenced each other in various ways. The poor were dominated by many people and had the least say over their lives and their work. They felt powerless. The rich sometimes dominated middle farmers as well as the poor, whilst the middle farmers often also influenced the poor. Women were more vulnerable in the system of domination in regard to socio-economic and gender relations. In other words, poor women experienced gender domination in addition to socio-economic domination whereas women in the better-off category, were subjected to gender domination but not to socio-economic position.

The socio-economic conditions of households in different categories are described below.

### **The destitute**

Nine households (4.9%) in Jolpur belonged to this category. Most of them had had homestead land which they had subsequently lost due to impoverishment. After the 1988 floods six destitute households sold their land and migrated to cities in different districts to look for work. Destitute households which were present at the time of the survey lived in huts constructed on relatives' or patrons' lands. Most of these households were heavily dependant on wage labour (87% as a primary source and 11% as a secondary source of income). They often faced unemployment or underemployment. Women in this category

did not have any status in the village but played a significant role in their households' subsistence. They had no regular or permanent income and acquired food with great difficulty. During the slack season these households depended on whatever work was available in and outside the village. They did not get a reasonable income for this sort of work. Most of the men in this category worked as *coolie*<sup>7</sup> (porter) in *haat* or bazaar or ferry-*ghat* (ferry-terminal). During floods, finding work for a day labourer became even more difficult. However, people who had a *goshti* relationship with a better-off household had an advantage in securing employment. People in the destitute households, badly needed secondary occupations but only three households in this category had jobs because they were in such short supply and because large land owners rarely used labour from destitute households because of the fear that the later might migrate at any time of the year. For the same reason landowners sharecropped out their lands to households who at least had homestead land. Destitute households were the poorest (*sobcheye gorib*) in Jolpur and had hardly any status or honour.

### **The landless**

There were 42 households (22.9%) which did not have any cultivable land of their own. However, because these households had their own homestead land, six decimals on average, they were in a better position than destitute households. Some of them had sharecropping arrangements with landed households (0.49 acres of land on average). These landless households cultivated an average of 0.38 acres of land which they had acquired by taking out mortgages. Depending upon social relationships, some households might get better access to land. But, with the increase of landlessness and the consequently greater number of people seeking work, patron-client relationships were decreasing in Jolpur. Because, as explained elsewhere, people were

---

7. People who help traders to load and unload goods. They also carry shopping for others.

reluctant to employ the destitute and landless. Landless people depended on various sources of income, 45% of which came from wage labour. Next came the rickshaw pullers (21%). During the slack seasons these individuals worked as boatmen, hawkers and other irregular occupations. Although labour in Jolpur was free, in the sense of not being tied to the land or a landlord, a seasonal contract might last throughout the year. A wage labourer might get a chance to work in agriculture depending upon his relationship with land owners as well as his/her age and skill. Additional labour was hired during busy seasons. Landless and wage labourers from small farmer households, for reasons explained above, had a better chance of getting regular agricultural work than the destitute. Most women in the landless category were hired as agricultural labourers or provided domestic help to the women in better-off categories throughout the year. These women's participation in income-earning activities was higher than women in other categories. However, like destitute women they also held a lower status in the village. Most of the women in these two categories were lowly paid and paid in kind (see below).

### **Small farmers**

These were households which had from 0.05 to 2.49 acres of agricultural land. On the basis of land holding I have divided the small farmer category into four sub-categories labelled 'a' to 'd'. This was because there were significant differences within this category which were evident in their socio-economic conditions and the strategies which were developed by women for coping with floods.

**Small farmer 'a'.** Sixty households (32.7%) belonged to this category and their land holding ranged from 0.05 to 0.49 acres. On an average these households had only 0.27 acres of land. Such a small amount of land did not provide a livelihood for households in this category. Fifty three percent of the heads of these households depended on occupations other than agriculture and

33% were engaged in wage labour as their primary or secondary occupation. Women in these households were engaged in wage-earning activities more than women in other categories who had more cultivable land. Because of their involvement in paid employment and their households' poor economic condition women in this category had a lower status.

There were sharecroppers in this category who, on average, had the use of only 0.9 acres of land. Due to the heads of households' involvement in other occupations, such as salaried employment outside the village, an average of 0.14 acres of land in this category was share-cropped out. On average 0.15 acres of land was mortgaged-in and 0.11 acres was mortgaged-out by this category. Although these households were large in number they were not in a position to control the socio-political power of the village due to their poor economic position. They were much more dependent on social relationships with better-off households than the two former categories.

**Small farmer 'b'.** Twenty five households (13.6%) belonged to this category. They had an average of 0.53 acres of cultivable land ranging from 0.50 to 0.99 acres. People in this category were also classified as poor because they were not able to secure their livelihood entirely from agriculture. Women in this category also entered the labour market.

**Small farmer 'c'.** Seven households (3.8%) belonged to this category. They had an average of 1.11 acres of cultivable land ranging from 1.00 acre to 1.49 acres. Agriculture was the principal source of income of the majority of household heads (57%) and was a secondary occupation for the other 43%. No household heads or women were dependant on wage labouring. However, there were self-employed women involved in income-earning activities for their family sustenance.

**Small farmer 'd'.** Eighteen households (9.8%) belonged to this category. They owned 1.50 to 2.49 acres of land, 1.55 acres on average. Agriculture was the main occupation for the majority (83%) of the heads (15) of these households. For three other households agriculture remained a secondary occupation. They were often not so dependent on the rich for their livelihood as for their social position and political security. These households had a regular income from agriculture. Some heads of households were engaged in other occupations such as salaried jobs. No one in this category was engaged in wage labouring. However, like other households, these were also socio-politically dominated by the rich. Women in small farmer 'c' and 'd' categories had relatively higher status than women in former categories but lower than those in middle and rich farmer categories because men in these households were not economically strong enough to compete with men in better-off households.

#### **The middle farmers**

The eighteen households (9.8%) in this category had an average of 3.15 acres of land ranging from 2.50 to 7.49 acres. Only two households in this category had more than five acres of land. Depending upon the size of their land holding middle farmers worked on their own land as well as hiring labour. They were more secure than the former categories. They did not sell their labour, produced sufficient to feed their members and could sell crops they produced. They were relatively independent and self-sufficient. Some men in the middle farmer households were respected by the former categories and were often as politically powerful as men in the rich category.

#### **The rich farmers**

There were only four households (2.1%) in Jolpur who could be identified as rich landowners according to the land holding criteria. On average they owned

1,112 acres of land which was 60% of Jolpur's total agricultural land area. These households produced a surplus. They did not work on land by themselves: they supervised the work of labourers. The rich had the greatest influence over the other categories. They considered themselves superior to others because of their political and economic position. It was evident that people in this category were more respected and were expected to be involved in village matters. Heads of rich farmer (as well as middle farmer) households tried to maintain their *goshthi*, network or patron-client relationships with other households through which they acquired power. They could use their resources to provide certain facilities to the poor and could thus gain their support to become village leaders.

Although no household or *goshthi* could be considered as the most powerful or influential, one rich household seemed relatively influential. This was because the head of the household sharecropped-out a considerable amount of land to other categories and was engaged in seasonal crop business. Poor farmers were also expected to sell their crops through him without the cost of carrying their crops to market. As there was competition among the wealthy farmers, other middle or rich households did not sell their crops through this trader except where there was a special relationship or special circumstances. For example when the price of a crop was low in the local market neighbouring middle or rich households might depend on him. This might also happen during or after the floods when there was a lack of storage facilities or the possibility of crop damage due to rain. Some middle farmers also gave their crops to be sold by the rich farmer. One rich household was honoured by villagers because of its members' high educational background.

However, in general male heads of households in the rich, and some in the middle farmer categories were considered as 'heads of the village'. They controlled agricultural production, labour and village decisions. The hereditary leader of the *samaj*, members of the *salish* and members of the Union *porishod*

were mainly elected, and controlled, by them. The children of these households had a high degree of participation in education and consequently got work in urban areas with large salaries which further promoted their status.

### **Summary**

Ownership of land was the key factor determining a household's socio-economic status. People without land were in a very disadvantageous position most not having enough land to produce sufficient for their family sustenance. Landlessness, and therefore so was economic impoverishment, was increasing. Limited agricultural land forced people to seek employment outside agriculture. The poor had to depend on the labour of women and children for their family sustenance. One of the main reasons for the landlessness and poverty was repeated floods.

Differences in socio-economic status in Jolpur affected the way in which households interacted. Better-off households controlled the politics of Jolpur through providing support, such as sharecropping and money lending, to the poor. The poor, on the other hand, helped the better-off people through their labour and political support. Children in the better-off households were more likely to be educated than others. Most women and men in small farmer categories, and to a greater extent the landless and destitute categories, had a poor income from agriculture and they had to find other jobs.

Only four households (2.1%) in Jolpur belonged to the rich category yet they owned 60% of Jolpur's cultivable land. They had the highest income from agriculture, producing more than they needed for their own subsistence and were therefore in a good position to improve their economic condition further. They had great influence over other social categories. People in the middle farmer categories were also influential though not to the same degree as the rich.

Rural development programmes have been introduced ostensibly to increase the agricultural production of the poor but have in fact, created new opportunities for the large landowners to become richer and more powerful. Land ownership tends to be a requirement for government development programmes which have been launched to help the rural poor. Thus, at best, they assist only the better-off among rural households.

It was the better-off farmers who controlled overall agricultural production, through their ownership of land, control over labourers and village decisions. Women in the poorer categories were more vulnerable in this system of domination. Poorer women were subjected to a double burden: they experienced both socio-economic and gender inequalities. Women in the better-off categories experienced gender inequality alone.

### **Economy**

In general, access to markets varied according to socio-economic category and gender in Jolpur. Women's access to the labour market indicates the extreme poverty of many households. There was no shop in the village, although two women sold oil and groceries from their houses and some others sold handicrafts and ready made clothes. Although poor women participated in wage earning they were not allowed to enter the market to buy their essentials from the neighbouring village bazaar or *haat*. For this they were dependant on men. Some poor women, however, bought groceries from shops on the Bishoroad. Bhangra was the shopping and trading centre for most men in Jolpur.

There was no electricity in Jolpur. Men in better-off households were keen to have electricity and expected other villagers to contribute to some of the expense of getting a power line to Jolpur. Poor women or men did not

have enough money to spend on supporting it. Some households owned a battery-operated radio.

The neighbouring villages of Fulpur<sup>8</sup> and Patga were sounder economically than Jolpur because of their greater area of high land. Another neighbouring village, Nurpur, was in a worse economic condition because it was lower than Jolpur. The villagers grew black cumin, coriander, red lentils and mustard in the *robi* crop season. These crops cannot be grown on very low land. The land of Nurpur was not suitable for the growth of *robi* crops because it was so low lying. On the other hand, sugar-cane, melon and water melon needed more higher land than Jolpur. More of the land of Fulpur and Patga was suitable for these.

It would be difficult for an outsider to comprehend the extreme poverty which most women and men in the village had to endure. In a flood-free year the green fields, trees and ponds, almost clean mud paths and shady plastered courtyards gave an impression that the village was calm, quiet and tranquil. According to some villagers the economic condition of Jolpur was moderate: not as poor as some other villages in Bhanga union. Men in better-off households said that it was a peaceful village to live in. But all women and men in Jolpur were not happy with their conditions because of poverty which was increased, according to people, by floods. We have discussed earlier that six households left Jolpur after they became destitute. A large population, lack of education, a small amount of land, repeated floods, the exploitative nature of better-off farmers and a lack of employment opportunities were the main reasons why people in Jolpur were poor. There was no mill or factory in which people could find jobs. Jobs were more scarce for women than men. Some poor women were agreeable to doing all the jobs men did but were prevented by the cultural norms.

---

8. The actual names of the neighbouring villages are not given to protect their identity.

With the increase of population, land was distributed among brothers. It was impossible for a farmer to maintain a livelihood on less than 10 decimal of agricultural land. Floods and other crises forced people to sell their land. The number of land sales increased after the two consecutive floods. Men in better-off households preferred to buy those lands which were close to the agricultural land they already owned. Selling land in a crisis period did not help the poor to get the market value. These people did not have time or resources to get a land broker. However, the percentage of educated people in the village was increasing causing people to feel positive about their future. Meanwhile people were trying their best to increase their agricultural production. Poor women used their knowledge and skills to cope with floods more than they did before. Poor women and men who could not afford to pay for modern technologies worked harder and longer hours than they used to.

**Land and cropping patterns:** Land is the key element in a household's socio-political and economic status and its main source of security. Losing land is a social shame for a person or household because of the consequent loss of status. Land is the basis of a household's power (discussed earlier). All major assets are linked with agricultural land, technology or credit. In Jolpur, like many other parts of Bangladesh, landlessness was increasing and land was becoming increasingly concentrated in fewer hands. In order to survive emergencies people might have to sell or mortgage land. When there was no land to sell people adopted other strategies. Diversification of occupation, sale of women's assets and income generating activities became the principal strategies for poor households. However, most of the people, especially women in Jolpur, depended on work as hired labourers. Women's labour was in high demand in the harvest season. In fact, women were busy throughout the whole year (see below).

In the Bengali calendar there are 12 months which are as follows:  
*Boishakh* (15 April to 15 May approximately), *Joishtho* (15 May to 15 June),

*Asharh* (15 June to 15 July), *Srabon* (15 July to 15 August), *Bhadro* (15 August to 15 September), *Ashshin* (15 September to 15 October), *Kartik* (15 October to 15 November), *Agrahayon* (15 November to 15 December), *Poush* (15 December to 15 January), *Magh* (15 January to 15 February), *Falgun* (15 February to 15 March) and *Choitro* (15 March to 15 April). Different crops are planted in different months (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Cropping calendar in Jolpur**

Bengali Calendar	Gregorian Calendar	Crop Planted	Crop Harvested
<i>Boishakh</i>	15 April-15 May	jute, broadcast <i>amon</i>	
<i>Joishtho</i>	15 May-15 June		<i>irri</i>
<i>Asharh</i>	15 June-15 July		jute
<i>Srabon</i>	15 July-15 August		jute, <i>aus</i>
<i>Bhadro</i>	15 August-15 September	<i>sona mung</i> , transplanted <i>amon</i>	jute, broadcast <i>amon</i>
<i>Ashshin</i>	15 September-15 October	<i>mashkalai</i>	
<i>Kartik</i>	15 October-15 November	wheat, <i>khesari</i> , <i>sarisha</i> , <i>rai</i>	transplanted <i>amon</i>
<i>Agrahayon</i>	15 November-15 December	wheat, <i>mosur</i> , gram	<i>sona mung</i> ,
<i>Poush</i>	15 December-15 January	<i>irri</i>	<i>mashkalai</i>
<i>Magh</i>	15 January-15 February		<i>sarisha</i>
<i>Falgun</i>	15 February-15 March		<i>khesari</i> , <i>rai</i>
<i>Choitro</i>	15 March-15 April	<i>aus</i>	wheat, <i>mosur</i> , gram

Source: Field work, 1992

Agricultural land can be cultivated two or three times a year with proper irrigation. Depending upon the height of land, various types of crops were grown in different seasons. In Jolpur similar types of crops were grown on high and medium height land, such as jute, wheat, pulses, mustard and beans. Paddy or rice was cultivated on low or land of medium height. Two kinds of rice were grown: *amon* and *aus*. There were two types of *amon* crop: broadcast *amon* and transplanted *amon*. The first type was planted in *Boishakh* and was harvested in *Bhadro*. Transplanted *amon*, one of the best quality crops, is grown in the nurseries and was transplanted from carefully prepared land in *Bhadro* month. This crop was harvested in *Kartik* month. In Jolpur it was mainly the better-off farmers who cultivated the transplanted *amon*. The cultivation of transplanted *amon* depends on rainfall as well as on farm resources such as labourers for making nurseries, picking plants and weeding before replantation. Seeds of *aus*<sup>9</sup> rice were planted in *Choitro* and harvested in *Srabon* months. During the month of *Boishakh* seeds of jute were planted and gradually harvested from *Ashar* to *Bhadro* months. Wheat or *choitali (robi)* crops were planted in *Kartik* and *Agrahayon* month and harvested in *Choitra* month. During the month of *Poush irri* paddy was planted. It was harvested in the month of *Joishtho*.

The varieties of *robi* pulses grown in Jolpur were mainly *khesari (lathyrus sativas)*, *masur (ervum lens)*, *mashkalai (phaseolus radiatus)*, *sola (cicer arietinum)*, *mung (phaseolus mungo)*, *motor (pisum sativum)* and *arhar (cytiscus cajan)*. *Khesari* was cultivated on low land in October and November (*Kartik*) and harvested in February and March (*Falgun*). *Mosur* was sown on high land and cultivated as a cold-weather crop during November or December (*Agrahayon*). This pulse was harvested in March or April (*Choitro*). *Mashkalai* was planted during September or October (*Ashshin*), on land from

---

9. This crop is inferior to *amon* but supplemented the main meals of rural people when the stock of *amon* was depleted.

which flood water had just receded. This luxuriant crop was harvested from the end of December to the beginning of January (*Poush*). *Sola* was sown on high land in November and December (*Agrahayon*) and was harvested March to April (*Choitro*). Three varieties of *mung*, golden (*sona*), white (*gora*) and burnt (*pora*), were grown in different seasons on high lands. The best variety was *sona mung* which was sown in August-September (*Bhadro*) and harvested in November-December (*Agrahayon*). Two varieties of oil seeds were cultivated: *sarisha* (*Senapsis nigra*) and *rai* (*Senapsis ramosa*). Both varieties were sown in October or November (*Kartik*) but harvested at different times. One in January to February (*Magh*) and the other in February to March (*Falgun*).

Because the soil of Jolpur was suitable for jute most farmers cultivated it. Two types were grown in Jolpur<sup>10</sup>: the long fruited jute (*corchorus olitorius*) and the round fruited jute (*corchorus copsisularis*). The first type was grown on the higher land which needed protection from flood water. The other type was grown on medium and low land. Much of Jolpur's jute was of this latter type. However, villagers did not grow jute on all cultivable land because they had to grow other vital crops such as rice or *robi*. People said that if the government increased its price they would only grow jute.

Jute cultivation was a long procedure. Seeds were sown in April and May after four to five ploughing. Because the soil was too heavy at that time, a great deal of labour was needed to produce a fine tilth. After weeding, the soil was broken up two, three or four times according to the height of the land and the rainfall. In the month of *Asharh* jute plants get sufficient rainfall and started to grow. Between July and September the jute plant was gradually cut. The plants were gathered into bundles and steeped in the nearest *beel* or *khal*

---

10. The cultivation of jute in the Faridpur district began after 1860 with the decline of indigo cultivation. *Bhanga* is one of two main parts of the district where good quality jute grows.

under a layer of grass and brushwood until sufficient fermentation had occurred, allowing the fibre to be easily separated. This took 10 to 15 days. After fermentation it was women's responsibility to strip or separate the fibres (see below). This activity was done gradually and continued for about three months.

The sale of jute started at the end of July and continued until April of the next year. Much of the crop, however was sold before October. As a rule, cultivators had to sell jute through grain merchants (*beparis*) who collected the jute from the growers either at the local market (*haat*)<sup>11</sup> or by travelling by boat around the villages. However, villagers resented the low prices they were paid for their produce.

In Jolpur, like other parts of Bangladesh, growth of crops in all seasons was dependent on distribution of rainfall over the year which combined with annual floods. For example, rain in February was needed for ripening robi crops and in March for sowing jute and rice. Light, intermittent showers were required in April and May, because in this period heavy rain could damage the young plants of jute and paddy. Intervals of fine weather were required for harvesting aus rice after it had received heavy and continuous rainfall from the beginning of June till the middle of August. Rain was also necessary to help the transplanted amon during September-October when the flood (monsoon) water started to recede. Cultivation of the crop was greatly dependent on *borsha* or normal flooding. Flood water from the great rivers helped rice and jute to attain maturity. Abnormal rise and low level or insufficient flood water damaged crops. Very heavy floods have caused more damage to Jolpur

---

11. Although the English word 'market' is used to translate the words *haat* and *bazaar*, there are differences between the two words. *Haat* is a periodic gathering of people for buying and selling. Market day or *haat bar* occurs once or twice a month where small to large things (such as buffaloes) are brought to be sold. A *bazaar* is an assembly everyday at a certain place where people buy and sell daily needs, especially food items.

cultivation because most of its land was low lying. The rapid rise of water during different floods also swamped the young rice and jute.

Since 1971 the mechanization of agriculture in rural areas has increased rice production. People in Jolpur started to use chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Irrigation was needed for high yielding varieties of crops. Dependence on government suppliers such as the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) and the Bangladesh *Krishi* (agriculture) Bank (BKB) has broken down the relative autonomy of the village.

**Sharecropping:** There were many sharecroppers in Jolpur, most of whom belonged to the poorer socio-economic categories. Depending upon *goshti* or other social connections, landless households were also able to enter sharecropping relationships. For high yielding variety (HYV) paddy or *robi* crops, land owners got half of the crops if the irrigation cost was provided. On the other hand, if irrigation costs were not paid by the sharecropper, the land owner got one third of the produce. Another arrangement was locally called *dayeshodhi* or *tak-borga* sharecropping under which land owners leased out their land over a period of time (one to five years) in exchange for a certain amount of money. The amount depended on the height and quality of the land. However, in Jolpur the number of *dayeshodhi* sharecroppers was not significant.

**Cattle:** Depending upon their socio-economic category, farmers in Jolpur had different types of cattle including buffaloes, oxen and milking cows which they depended upon for cultivation, milk, meat, manure and fertilizer. Many women share tended milking cows on a regular basis which helped their household to survive. Women and children had the responsibility of taking care of these animals. *Khesari* (a kind of inferior pulse which is extensively grown in this region), crop residues such as rice husk or straws, and rice gruel comprised the main cattle food because there was only limited grazing land.

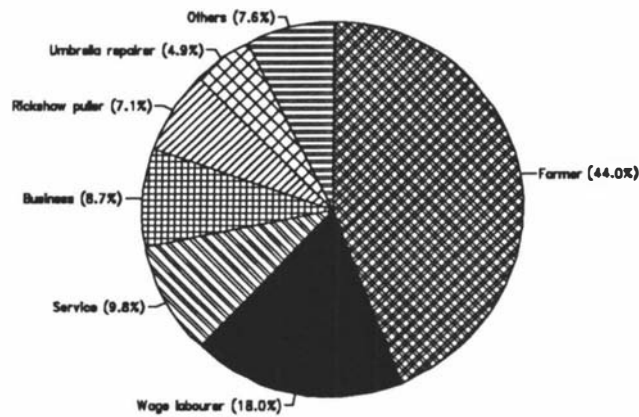
## **Education**

There was a primary school in the village which was established in the 1950s. The nearest high school was in the neighbouring village. Many boys and some girls attended this high school. There has been a significant change in education in Jolpur. In the age group 60-75 years only one man studied up to class eight and five studied up to primary level. Only one woman in this age group had studied up to class three. Most of these people belonged to the better-off households. At the time of our visit, almost all school age children went to the village primary school. Boys of better-off households were sent to the high school and intermediate college at Bhanga and also to Faridpur College. Only one girl from a rich household, was admitted to a University College of Faridpur district. However, drop out rates were higher among the children of poor households. Poor parents needed young children to help with home-based and outside work. Boys were engaged in agricultural work, as well as tasks such as van pulling, hawking, umbrella or suitcase repairing by their male guardians. However, many parents who managed these tasks by themselves sent their children to school. Even a widow, a young woman, sent her son to school while she was worked as a servant in better-off households. However, most girls did not complete primary education because they were needed to take care of small brothers or sisters or to take other household responsibilities while their mothers were busy in income generating work. They also had to avoid interaction with boys and had to be married. Girls started to do household work at the age of 8-10. Marriage would be arranged for them between 14-16. There was no high-school in Jolpur and most of the children of poor households ended their education with primary level. However, some households in the landed category even sold their assets, such as women's jewellery or land, to pay for the education of their sons. No such sales were reported to provide for a daughter's education.

## **Occupations**

Although in rural Bangladesh agriculture is declining in its contribution to total income, it is still the principal occupation of 44% of households in Jolpur. Fifty six percent of the population had a principal occupation other than in agriculture. Among these day labouring, salaried work or service, business, rickshaw and van pulling, umbrella repairing and hawking were common. People diversified their occupation due to lack of land or insufficient land. With the increase of population land had been segmented and people forced to seek other occupations (figures 5.2 and 5.3). Unpredictable income from agriculture was another reason for people's involvement in subsidiary occupations. (Occupations have been divided into principal and subsidiary in terms of their contribution to total income.) Poor villagers received wages on a daily basis. With the exception of business and services incomes were very low.

Figure 5.2: Principal occupation of heads of households in Jolpur (N=183)



Source: Field work, 1992

N=183

**Agriculture:** Of the total 183 households in the village the heads of 80 households (43.7%) reported agricultural production as their main occupation and the majority of the population was directly or indirectly attached to agriculture.

Agricultural land was unevenly distributed among households. Twenty eight percent of households had no land of their own, whereas only two percent of households owned nearly 60% of the total area of agricultural land in Jolpur. Some households operated less than they owned because it was difficult for large land owners to cultivate all their land. This was true for absentee land owners who had to depend on others to cultivate the land. On average rich

households in Jolpur cultivated 2.61 acres of land less than they owned. Small farmer 'a' category cultivated slightly more than they owned. Small farmer 'b', 'c', 'd' and middle farm households operated slightly less than they owned.

**Wage labour:** Thirty three (18%) household heads claimed wage labour as their primary occupation and for twenty two households it was secondary. Most of the households which depended mainly on wage labour belonged to the destitute (67%) and the landless (45%) categories. These households did not have any permanent sources of income. Another 24% belonged to the small farmer 'a' and 'b' categories who were hired by large landowners throughout the year. Most of the wage labourers migrated elsewhere during the lean seasons. During peak seasons wage labourers worked in the fields. However, with the increase of mechanical process in production, demand for hired labour in agriculture became more and more limited in Jolpur.

Manual irrigation was replaced by technology. It is significant that the demand for hired labour was higher for women than for men in Jolpur<sup>12</sup>. Women were hired for almost all agricultural work except ploughing. Their tasks included making seed beds, planting, threshing, weeding, picking, stripping jute fibre, drying and storing crops and raising seedlings. Men, on the other hand, were hired for some specific tasks such as ploughing, planting and harvesting. Employment as a permanent labourer was not common for men or women. This is because the limited opportunities on local farms caused men to migrate to towns or other villages. However, women were in a better position to get work especially in peak seasons because they remained inside the village and because there were certain agricultural and domestic services which were

---

12. The occupations of women respondents will be discussed in Chapter Six.

only done by women. Depending upon their network relationships and skills poor women were hired by the better-off throughout the year.

**Salaried work:** Eighteen heads of households worked in government or non-government organisations as their main occupation (9.8%). These included drivers, peon (office menials), gate-keepers (*darwan*), clerks, village land surveyors (*amin*), school teachers, police, mechanics and bankers. Most of the full-time job holders who worked outside the village belonged to the small farmer categories. These individuals were educated up to at least primary level. Although most of them were lowly paid they were more certain of a monthly income than those who depended on agriculture. Even better-off farmers claimed that people with salaried jobs lived better than farmers. Except for a bus driver, the *amin* and school teachers, other service holders stayed at their work places and visited Jolpur during the holidays. The cultivation of the land of absentee land owners was supervised by their wives. Women in these households had to make major household decisions and take responsibility in the absence of their husbands or adult men. Some sharecropped out their land.

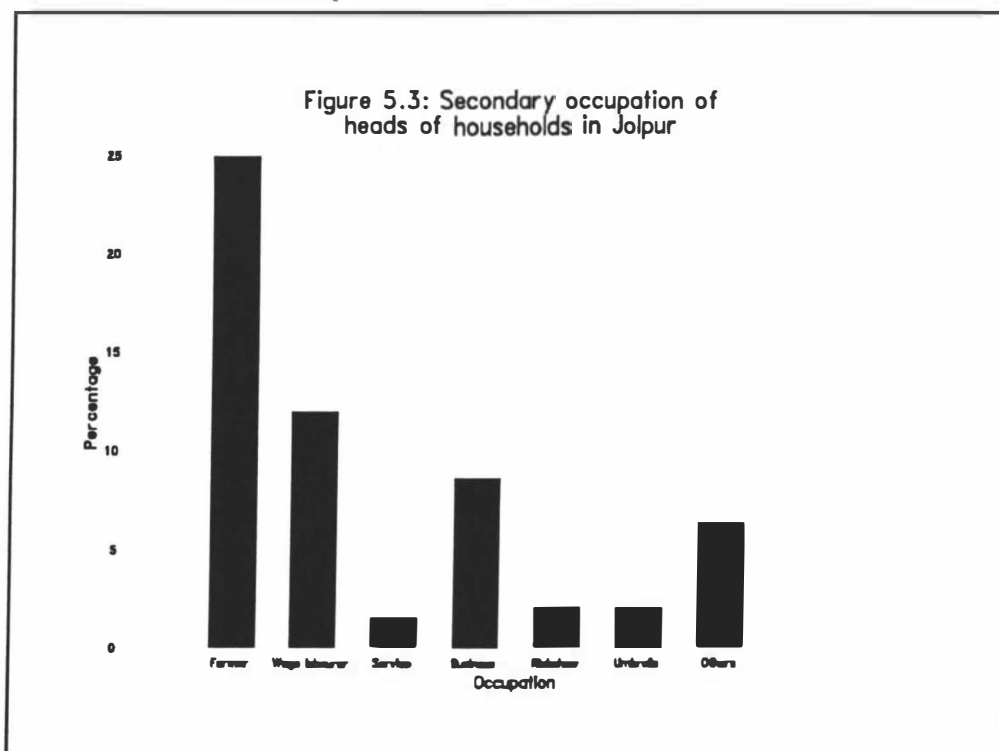
In addition to their principal occupations three individuals worked as part-time government and non-government service holders: one as a night guard at a government office (BADC), one as a bus-conductor and another as a lorry (*trak*) driver. All of them lived in Jolpur.

**Business:** There were 16 heads of households (8.7%) who traded as their principal occupation. All of them, except one rich landowner, were engaged in petty business. People sold main staples, such as rice, pulses, potatoes, onions, vegetables, mustard oil, jute and jute products in the *haat* or bazaar, as retailers or as wholesalers. Most of the retailers belonged to the landless and small farmer 'a' categories. One rich farmer was involved in seasonal crop trading. He sold most of the Jolpur farmers' jute at Narayonganj (a district near Dhaka).

Heads of small farm households ran grocery shops at the corner of Bishoroad. They sold a variety of essentials.

Sixteen households did business as their secondary occupation. Among these the sale of milk, poultry, eggs, vegetables, fruit, oils and handicrafts fell into the women's domain and were reported by men as their household's secondary occupation. Some heads of households who described agriculture as their main occupation, sold their crops at the market or to dealers also mentioned trading as a secondary occupation.

**Rickshaw pulling:** After the construction of Bishoroad poor men in Jolpur started to engage in rickshaw pulling. There were thirteen heads of households (7%) whose main occupation was rickshaw or van pulling. Most of them belonged to the landless and small farmer 'a' categories. Some belonged to small farmer 'b' category. No other heads of households were engaged in this occupation. This work is considered as of low status. However, it was expensive to buy a rickshaw which most of the poor could not afford. Instead they hired from an owner, paying 50% of their income to him each day.



Source: Field Work, 1992

N=44

Although rickshaw pullers did not get a reliable or sufficient income in return for their hard labour, they were not so badly off as wage labourers during the lean seasons.

**Umbrella repairing:** People of Bhanga *thana* were traditionally repairers of umbrellas. They were often referred to as *sata shara* (umbrella repairer) by people from other districts. The reason behind the profession is unknown. One popular theory is that the region had such a high rainfall that most people used umbrellas. However, umbrella repairers in Jolpur, like many other villages of Bhanga, moved all over the country due to great competition among repairers inside the region. Nine heads of households (5%) in landless and small farmer 'a' category reported *sata shara* as their main occupation. An umbrella repairer carried a bag on his back in which he kept some wooden umbrella sticks, cloth (usually black), needles, thread and ribs. He then travelled from village to

town. Teenage sons sometimes accompanied their fathers as helping hands. Women in these households performed different responsibilities in the absence of their husbands or and sons.

Four heads of households repaired umbrellas as their secondary occupation. People in Jolpur said that the number of umbrella repairers was decreasing due to the introduction of foreign umbrellas, rain coats and improvements in communications. Rain coats replaced umbrellas and foreign materials replaced local materials. In the past people used to travel on foot or by boat and they carried umbrellas to protect themselves from rain or sun. This traditional practice is not so common due to communication developments such as travelling by bus. Umbrellas were also used by women to maintain *parda* whenever they went out. These have been replaced by *borkha* or *chador* (a long cloth covering the head and upper part of a woman's body).

Income from umbrella repairing was very low. The wives of umbrella repairers said that their husband's income was not sufficient even to maintain the husbands themselves. These women had to depend on their own income to run their households.

Heads of other households had different occupations such as boatmen, carpenters, servants, vendors or hawkers, suitcase repairers, a tailor and a *quack*<sup>13</sup> doctor.

### **Summary and conclusion**

In this chapter various aspects of Jolpur's social structure such as *samaj*, *goshthi*, *para* and the socio-economic categorization of households have been

---

13. This word is not used as in the English pejorative sense. In general, those people who do not have formal qualifications but who carry out treatments with a combination of modern and traditional medicines are called *quack* doctors in Bangladesh.

analyzed. Education and occupations, land and cropping patterns are also discussed here to better understand Jolpur's social conditions. It has been noted that the village is highly stratified and land was the key element shaping a household's socio-economic status. It has also been argued that ownership of land was central to all social relationships such as *samaj*, *goshthi* and *salish*. A variety of occupations were pursued by the poorer villagers particularly those who had no, or limited, agricultural land. Large land owners controlled political relationships in the village and the labour of women and men of poorer households.

Women are not featured prominently in this chapter as their socio-economic and status position are integrally linked to their households, in particular in terms of landholding; as women rarely exercise any control over land, they are seen to be dependent on their husbands, fathers or brothers for their livelihood.

Yet it is indicated how a household's economic condition depends on its control of the mobility of its women. Ability to prevent women's mobility is closely associated with a household's socio-economic position. In the next chapter, which addresses gender relations in the context of various social factors, it becomes clear that the socio-economic status of women's households are of utmost importance in determining their physical mobility, practice of *parda*, religion, health, household and family composition, household decision making and participation in agriculture. Discussion in this chapter, therefore, will help to understand the differential practice of social functions and the activities of women of different socio-economic backgrounds which will be focused on in Part III.

## Chapter Six

### Gender relations in Jolpur

This chapter examines the maintenance of *parda*, religious practices, dress, health, involvement in agriculture, political parties, household composition and household decision making. This information is important to understand how gender and socio-economic differences influence the lives of women and men in Jolpur. The socio-economic background of women respondents is also introduced here.

#### Maintenance of *parda*

*Parda* constitutes a powerful set of norms which define women's behaviour in most situations and in most circumstances. The practice of *parda* in Jolpur was affected by age, stage of life and, more importantly, by socio-economic location. Depending upon economic necessity, poor women worked outside the village. The practice of *parda* was more flexible among poor women who had to pursue income earning activities. Poor women were involved in various crop processing activities with many strangers around: they dried crops on the Bishoroad, weeded them, threshed them and stripped fibre from jute. Despite poverty, women in this village did not work for pay except in certain acceptable jobs such as domestic service, jute stripping, threshing of crops and

paddy husking in rich and middle farmer households. However, some *parda* practices were followed by all, for example, women were not allowed in the mosque or in public places; unnecessary interaction with strangers was unacceptable; they did not acknowledge or exchange any word with strange men and were always expected to cover their heads. It was also evident that women's involvement in some income generating activities was prevented by the need to keep *parda* and thereby to protect their households' honour.

Young and newly married women always maintained *parda* and their movements were restricted, whereas older widows were more free. However, this also varied according to socio-economic category. Poor widowed women were freer to go outside the village to look for work regardless of their age. However, poor young women who were married were not so free to go outside the village alone. *Parda* in Jolpur was also different for women who were born in the village (*gramer meye*) compared with those who were from a different village (*gramer bou*). The former had more freedom than the latter. However, only a few women in Jolpur married within the village.

Women and men were asked to define *parda*<sup>1</sup>. To rich men *parda* meant not going outside or appearing in front of strangers without *borkha*. To the headmaster of the village primary school *parda* meant always staying within the homestead compound and not being seen by strangers. Men felt all women did not adhere to those definitions. Marriage within the village or neighbouring villages and Hindu influence were cited by men as the cause of the relaxed practice of *parda* within Jolpur. Only few households had boundaries. For want of high land, people built their houses close to each other. Men who wanted to put high fences around their houses in order to put strict *parda* on their women, failed to do so because of the location of houses or objections from neighbours or lack of resources. Within the same compound there were

---

1. Women's definition of *parda* is stated in Chapter seven.

many households and it was easy for a person to move from one house to another through crossing neighbouring courtyards rather than using village paths. Men in this village frequently walked to each others' compounds except to those of the rich. This situation is not a recent phenomenon. The movement of women outside their households was higher among the poor. It has also increased because of developments in communication, for example, the construction of the Bishoroad made it easier to travel by bus, van or scooter. Women visited relatives in other villages or in the town of Bhanga using vans or buses.

### **Religion**

Although the village people were predominantly Muslim, only a few practised Islam rigorously. Only a small proportion of men attended a mosque (there were three mosques in Jolpur) five times a day. Most of those who did were over 60-65 and were no longer able to do much work. Religious observance was generally more likely to be practised by the better-off in the village. This was because the better-off had leisure time due to their ability to employ people to carry out agricultural and domestic tasks. However, it was observed that at Friday prayer (*Jumma*) most men attended the mosque. At night, when men had completed their work, they often gathered in the mosques to discuss village issues. Women were not allowed in the mosque and not included in the meeting. This is a very strong rule among the Muslim villagers.

Women in better-off households who could afford to employ servants appeared to be more religious, praying five times a day. Religious women in the other categories prayed at least twice a day- before sunset and in the dead of night. Poor women said that they felt guilty for not praying five times a day but failed to do so due to their workloads. Some poor women tried to say their prayer at their employers' houses and were not resisted (for spending time on praying taking time from the work they were assigned to). Better-off women

who practised religion were honoured by other women. Heads in some wealthy households ordered other members in their families to follow religion strictly. Moreover, all Muslim villagers celebrated the religious festivals such as *Eid* which varied according to socio-economic category. Better-off households could afford new clothes and delicious food during those occasions, the poor on the other hand, depended on women's own resources or on network relationships.

### Dress

Dress in Jolpur was typically Bangladeshi. Women wore a cotton sari in the traditional way<sup>2</sup>. Women in better-off households wore saris with blouse and petticoats. Poor women could not afford to have petticoats and blouses. Some of them had those clothes kept with much care to visit outside village. Many women depended on social networks to fulfil that requirement. Most women covered their bodies with the ends of their saris. The materials from which saris were made also differed from poor women to better-off women. Whereas poor women wore cheap and coarse materials, other women wore fine quality saris, the prices also varied widely. Men wore *lungi* and *panjabi*. Young boys wore western style shirts and short trousers or *lungi*, young girls wore frocks. Girls also wore folded cotton half pants different from boys. Most of the time small boys and girls wore only pants, specially in the poorer categories. A young girl's only frock would be kept to wear in winter by her poor mother. After childhood unmarried daughters wore Muslim dress (*salwar-kamij*), loose folded trousers and long shirts or saris depending upon price or availability.

- 
2. In general, rural women wear sari in a different way from urban women. Whereas urban women wear their sari by folding in the middle part, referred to as sari with fold (*kuchi deya* sari), in rural areas women give two-three pleats-which is called sari with one fold (*ak-patch deya* sari). The main reasons for wearing sari in *ak-patch* are three fold: i) it is easier for a woman to move and do their work, ii) to wear a sari in an urban way one must have a petticoat and a blouse which are too expensive for many of the poor women and ii) they do not fold their sari to keep the *anchols* (the trailing end of a sari) long which would enable them to cover their whole body and head and keep their modesty.

Women in the better-off households distributed unused or old clothes to their poor kin, neighbours or servants. Only a small number of women wore *borkha* when travelling over long distances. Wearing an ornament was a symbol women wore after marriage. This custom, however, was dying out. Better-off women had gold earrings, necklaces, nose-pins and bracelets or bangles. Poor women, however, might only have glass bangles and silver or other nose-pins. In rural Bengali culture a married woman should wear a nose-pin and at least two bangles on each wrist. However, some poor women in Jolpur could not afford those or did not wear bangles because they were inconvenient when working.

### Health

The diet was poor and health a problem; malnourishment was common among the poor and women were in worse conditions. Dependence on traditional medicine was high in Jolpur. Women have historically made a significant contribution to the health system. Lack of resources, distance from the health centre and cultural barriers prevented women from using modern medicine. Men rarely paid attention to the illnesses of household members. Women usually offered the first remedies. Dependence on a *fakir* or religious treatment was not as significant as it once was. The only *quack* doctor in the village gave treatment with a combination of allopathic and homeopathic remedies. He would be called when a poor woman's own efforts had failed. People only visited the Bhanga hospital or called a doctor in case of chronic or unidentified disease.

Women were less likely to be treated by modern medicine. Firstly, seclusion and cultural barriers discouraged women from being treated by a male doctor, even when a household could afford to pay doctor's fees. Secondly, women complained less about their illnesses because their problems were not taken seriously. Poor women preferred their husbands and children to be

treated first even when they were also suffering from the same disease. Women often depended upon other women for help to recover from certain types of disease. Some women had better knowledge or greater skill than others when using herbal treatments. Women in Jolpur frequently and voluntarily helped others, never charging a fee for herbal medicine. However, in spite of their wide knowledge and use of herbal medicine they were not known as 'herbalists' or *kobiraj*, only professional men got this title.

The rural family planning programme was known to women in Jolpur although the practice was not satisfactory. Lack of resources to acquire modern birth control methods prevented rural women from controlling their pregnancies. Women in Jolpur did not seem to be afraid or intimidated by cultural or religious barriers regarding birth control. In fact women asked why they did not get regular supplies of pills from the government.

### **Political parties**

There were no strong political parties in Jolpur, though male supporters for the *Awami League*, *BNP*, *Jamate Islami* and *Jatio Party* emerged during different election periods. No women were involved in a political party. Men said that political parties had not been able to keep the trust of the villagers because of their unkept promises. Moreover MPs were only visible when they needed votes. There were nearly seven hundred voters in Jolpur.

### **Household composition<sup>3</sup>, family and women**

In Jolpur household and family composition was dependant on the economic situation. Like many other villages in Bangladesh, the extended or joint family where parents lived with their married sons, unmarried children and grand

---

3. More on household and family discussed in Chapter 3.

children was the 'norm'. After the death of a father sons may live together for some years and the older brother is considered to be the head of the household. Around the same compounds brothers lived with their own families in separate houses. In Jolpur, as in Bangladesh more generally, better-off people were more likely than poorer people to live in household compounds made up of several families. People stayed in joint households not only because it is considered to be the ideal but because joint households help protect socio-economic status, power and prestige. Even if there was conflict between brothers, they would not make it public. The poor, on the other hand, had little land and relied more basically upon wage labour. By definition this meant that they earned different amounts than the better-off. While those earning less would prefer to share incomes in a household, those earning more resisted. This was a common source of conflict within households. Another common cause concerned the use of a common kitchen by the wives of brothers. Within the same homestead brothers lived in separate rooms with their wives who cooked in separate kitchens. Sometimes women used different stoves in the same kitchen. There were some households in the small farmer categories where brothers cultivated the same land but did not share the same kitchen. The area of land was usually so small that they did not divide it to produce crops.

The average size of family in Jolpur was 5.5 persons. This is lower than the 5.7 average for all rural Bangladesh. Eighty eight percent of the households in the village constituted families with an average of five to six members. The dominant joint family type was being replaced by the nuclear family structure. Middle and rich or better-off households, with an average of 7.5 members, were larger than other households. There were a number of reasons for this. There were more better-off households living in joint families than poor households (see above). Better-off households needed more individuals to cooperate in different work. The rich did not need to think about their source of food as keenly as did the poor. Moreover, infant mortality was

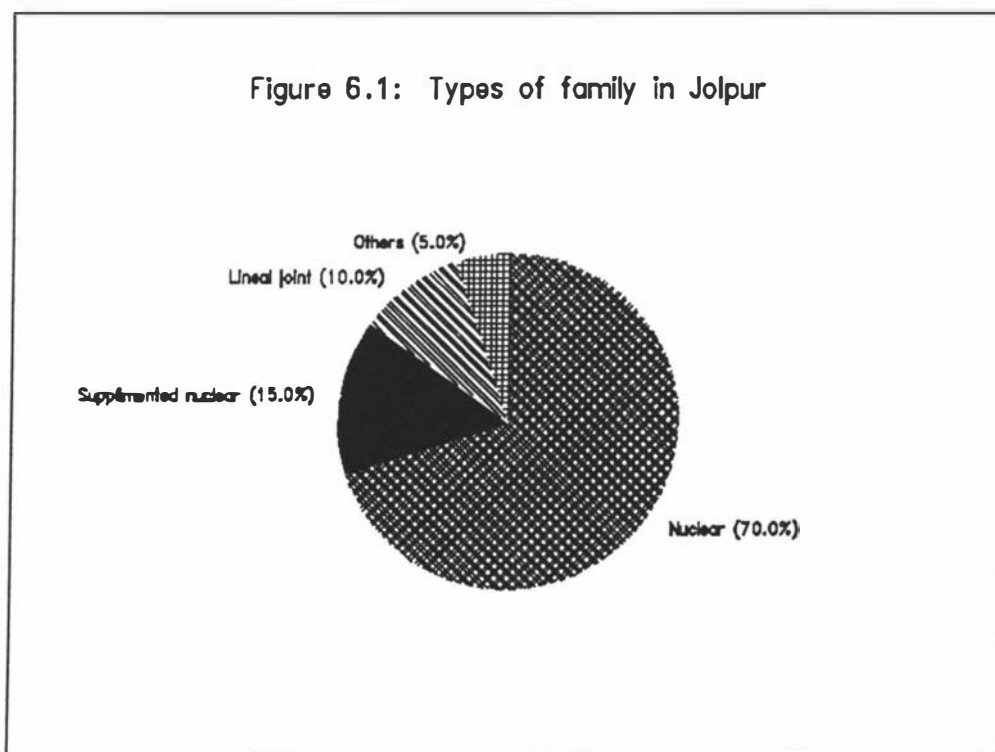
lower among better-off households because they could afford to get proper food and care for mothers and babies. However, women in these households were not allowed to engage in paid work and were strictly confined to the domestic or private sphere, whereas poor women participated in both the private and public spheres. By employing poor women as servants, rich women were free from certain types of household work.

I have used Kolenda's (1968:346-47) system of family definitions because it is partially appropriate to Jolpur. Also because there was a lack of information on household categorization. Seventy percent of families were nuclear (married couple with or without their unmarried children); 15% supplemented nuclear (nuclear family plus some other persons, often widowed parents or siblings of a spouse, and so on), 10% lineal joint (two married couples of different generations, with or without their children: that is married parents and other married child) and 5% belonged to other (more than two married brothers with single parent, single person with unmarried children or other relatives such as grand children) family types. We did not use Kolenda's definition of 'other' family composition because they differed from her types (Figure 6.1)<sup>4</sup>.

Women's position in nuclear families is better than other types of family in terms of gender inequalities. Women in nuclear families were free from other types of domination such as subordination to a mother-in-law or a sister-in-law (husband's sister or husband's elder brothers' wife). Most of the poor families were of the nuclear type the reasons for which were described earlier.

---

4. Kolenda's definition of 'family' is not applicable for 'household' because she did not include other members (such as distant relatives or permanent labourers) living in a household. However, 'family' and 'household' units had some overlapping features in Jolpur and only a few better-off households had 'other members' such as permanent labourers or maid servants. That was why in this study the term 'family' is often used interchangeably with 'household'.



Source: Field work, 1992

N=183

### Household decision making

In Jolpur decisions relating to economic matters, communal activities and family ceremonies such as marriage were generally taken by heads of households, who were predominantly men. Joint decisions were rare for most of the households. On very few occasions did a head of a household discuss issues with other household members. After he decided about a family matter, he might discuss it with other men in his household or might inform the other members. Most of the time it did not matter whether the decision was approved by others or not. Women had a minor role and could not influence men's decisions. However, women in the poor households were more likely to be involved in household decision-making than women in better-off households. This was because better-off women had no role in the outside world and they did not make as great a contribution to the family income as did poor

women. Wealth and a strict division of labour in the better-off households made women's life private and men's life public as was discussed earlier.

Membership of a household was the main element in a woman's identity. With regard to gender relations, the differences among the socio-economic categories were significant. The culture of male domination was not the same for all households. Women in wealthy households rarely had any opinions about agricultural production because they did not have to worry about where their next meal was coming from and their men did not depend on them. Poor men, on the other hand were dependant on their wives. They knew that if they failed to earn any money for the day to buy food, their women would be able to acquire food through their own channels. According to socio-economic category, gender inequality was both sex and age specific, because rich men dominated the women and younger men in their households. Poor men were not so dominant over their wives and children.

#### **Participation of women and men in agriculture<sup>5</sup>**

Women in Jolpur were much more involved in agriculture than is usual in Bangladesh villages (for example, see White, 1992:60). Poor women in Jolpur worked as wage labourers, being paid mainly in kind, for the better-off during the harvesting or peak seasons, especially for jute stripping, picking young paddy plants and weeding before winter *amon* could be transplanted and during the *robi* crop harvest. During the *robi* crop harvesting months poor women collected and threshed crops such as mustard seed, pulses and *mashkalai* seeds. They collected *irri* paddy and weeded seedlings. Drying, boiling and storing *amon*, *aus* or *irri* were also done by women. Women in Jolpur were experts in stripping jute. In Jolpur it had become women's work whereas in other parts of Bangladesh men, women and children shared it (for example, see Chen, 1982).

---

5. Also see Chapter Seven.

Villagers explained that this was because the cutting of the jute plant was done over a period. Men were busy in the fields for two to three months during which time some plants became ready to be separated from the fibre. To see men sitting beside their wives but not helping them with jute stripping was common in Jolpur. Threshing of crops was often done by cows and picking or weeding nurseries was often done by men and children but, like cooking, stripping jute was done only by women. During this time, most of the poor women worked from dawn to dusk on the village footpaths or in the compounds of better-off households. Most of the women in the small farmer category stripped jute on their homestead land. Until the drying of jute women were so busy that they hardly had time to eat. Women hung up the fibres on bamboo poles in the courtyards. If rains came suddenly women had to take them inside their houses, hanging them out again when the rain stopped. This task might have to be done repeatedly. Because of the huge amount of jute involved better-off households hired poor women as labourers. Women in the better-off categories supervised the hired women's work. Hired women might be asked to take jute to their own courtyards when there was no space at their employers' homestead. The homesteads of Jolpur looked like golden islands during this time. Women, who did the most important part of the production process, were particularly poorly paid. For stripping ten bundles a woman got five bundles of jute sticks worth slightly less than the price of one kilo of rice. A woman could strip 30 bundles a day on average.

Agriculture was the main source of income for many men in Jolpur. Men in this village, as in other parts of Bangladesh were involved in such work as was supposed to be done in the fields, i.e. ploughing (*chash*). Men were also busy during the planting and harvesting seasons but not to the same degree as women were. In addition to their domestic activities women had to participate in agricultural activities, whereas men did not do any domestic activity. Men in the poorer category did the cultivation themselves and women in their households contributed a lot to their households' production process. Men in

the richer households rarely did any agricultural work themselves, instead they hired and supervised the labour of others. The hiring of labour was only possible by better-off households. In the busy seasons, *de-jure* or *de-facto* (see below) women heads of households also hired labour depending upon the area of their land. Women heads of households with less land tried to do much of the work themselves. These women were compelled to hire labour to do work culturally expected to be done by men, such as ploughing. However, although women did not participate in ploughing it was significant that most of the women heads of households supervised men's labour and supplied inputs which were normally done by men. In the absence of men women in the small farm households broke *parda* to go to their fields in order to make sure that labourers worked properly. Some women helped labourers to do certain agricultural work such as watering, weeding and carrying crops home. They considered that they did not have any option but to do this. They said that they hired labourers from Jolpur who were their 'village brothers'. However, women always covered their heads when moving to and from the fields and they were not criticised by other villagers.

### **Summary**

In the highly stratified village women were subordinate to men in relation to access to resources, family decision-making, education, health, diet and access to the public sphere. Land was related to social practices such as religious practice and family composition. There were no women in the *samaj* or *salish* (which was stated earlier) or political parties. They were not allowed in the mosques or to plough. Men did not do any of women's gender-assigned tasks whereas women in the poorer category often shared men's responsibilities through entering the labour market.

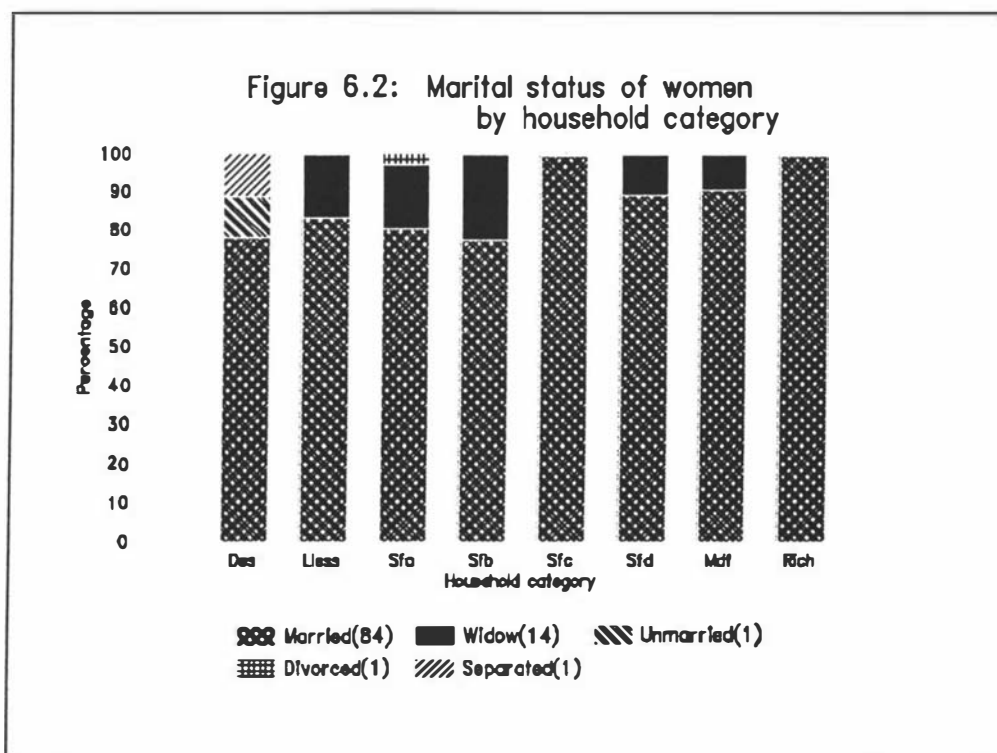
The position of women in the village was also related to their households' socio-economic background. Women in the poorer category had to live with

poverty and struggled continuously for their households' survival. Poorer women had lower status than women in better-off categories because they worked for others and were less likely to be in *parda*. Women in the better-off categories were not subjected to socio-economic exploitation but to gender subordination alone. These women were more likely to be in *parda* and had almost no influence over their men regarding household decision-making. Women in the poorer categories, on the other hand, did participate in family decision-making. This may be because women in these categories contributed significantly to their households' sustenance as opposed to women in better-off households.

### **Socio-economic background of the respondents**

For the purpose of this study the households of Jolpur were categorised according to their ownership of land. The one hundred and one women were selected on the basis of a stratified random sample. The strata were the landless, small farmers and middle farmers and purposive sampling for destitute and rich categories from the total 183 households in the village. The socio-economic background of the different households was discussed above. This section will discuss the types of households, marital status, education, family patterns, house construction and occupation of the women respondents.

Households in Jolpur, like other parts of Bangladesh, are patrivirilocal, patrilineal and patriarchal. Of the 101 women respondents, 83% were married, 14% were widowed, 1% was unmarried, 1% was divorced and 1% was separated (Figure 6.2 and Table 6.1).



Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note: Des=Destitute, Lless=Landless, Sfa=Small farmer 'a', Sfb=Small farmer 'b', Sfc=Small farmer 'c', Sfd=Small farmer 'd', Mdf=Middle farmer and Rich=Rich farmer. These codes will be used in figures 6.3 to 6.7.

**Table 6.1: Marital status of women respondents by age**

Marital Status	Age				
	12-22 (12)	23-33 (33)	34-44 (27)	45-55 (19)	55+ (10)
<b>Married (84)</b>	92	97	78	79	50
<b>Widow (14)</b>	-	3	14	21	50
<b>Unmarried (1)</b>	8	-	-	-	-
<b>Divorced (1)</b>	-	-	4	-	-
<b>Separated (1)</b>	-	-	4	-	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note: Frequencies in parentheses. Percentages rounded to nearest number.

Eighty three percent of the women belonged to male-headed households, those which had an adult male family member over 18 years of age<sup>6</sup> and 20% belonged to female-headed households. Four percent of female-headed households did not have any adult male member (which we named as *de-jure* female-headed) and in 16% the male lived outside the village (which we named as *de-facto* female-headed households)<sup>7</sup>. Women in the female-headed households belonged to the poorer categories (39% in the landless, 23% in the small farmer 'a', 33% in the small farmer 'b' and 33% in the small farmer 'c' categories). Where most of the households were male-dominated and women hardly participated in decision making (discussed above), women in female-headed households had a hard time. With few or no resources women in the poor female-headed households had no choice except selling their labour or/and working longer hours than others<sup>8</sup>. They became the heads of their households either because they had no alternative or because their husbands or guardians had had to, or preferred to, work elsewhere. Being head of the household in a patriarchal society did not necessarily raise the status of poor women even when the entire responsibility for maintaining the household fell on these women. This was especially true for those who were *de-jure* heads. Women whose husbands or sons lived outside Jolpur and came home only occasionally and who provided little or no financial support were not even considered by villagers as heads of households. Although women in the better-off category were not free to act or take decisions and be a part of *samaj* and *salish* as men

- 
6. Although some women, who had unmarried sons above 18 years of age referred them as heads of households we did not consider them as heads. This was because those men were the main income earners of those households. Some of those women were engaged in paid work but their income were lower than the income of their sons. Although decisions regarding households matters were sometimes taken by women in those households they had to ask their sons before deciding.
  7. We refer these as female-headed because in most of these households responsibilities of households' heads such as economic and decision making fall on women. For more refer to Hamid, 1992:119; Safilios-Rothschild and Mahmud, 1989:x.
  8. United Nations has documented that in Bangladesh 25% of landless households are dependent only on women and the number of female headed households is steadily increasing (*Bichitra*, 1993:Sept, 3:34).

were, they did not have to worry about the economic needs of their households. Also, women in better-off categories were not so helpless as the women in poor and female-headed households.

The majority of women (69%) had not attended any school at all, 23% had primary education and only 8% percent had completed junior level schooling (tables 6.2 and 6.3).

**Table 6.2: Educational level of women respondents by household category**

Educational level	Household category							
	D (9)	L (23)	Sfa (30)	Sfb (13)	Sfc (3)	Sfd (9)	Mdf (10)	Rf (4)
Illiterate (70)	79	65	80	54	-	67	90	50
Up to class five (23)	11	26	13	39	67	33	10	25
Five passed to class eight (8)	11	9	7	8	33	-	-	25

Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note:

i) D=Destitute, L=Landless, Sfa=Small farmer 'a', Sfb=Small farmer 'b', Sfc=Small farmer 'c', Sfd=Small farmer 'd', Mdf=Middle farmer and Rf=Rich farmer. These codes will be used in Table 6.4.

ii) Frequencies in parentheses. Percentages rounded to nearest number.

**Table 6.3: Educational level of women respondents by age**

Educational level	Age				
	12-22 (12)	23-33 (33)	34-44 (27)	45-55 (19)	55+ (10)
<b>Illiterate (70)</b>	58	49	78	90	90
<b>Up to class five (23)</b>	25	36	19	10	10
<b>Five passed to class eight (8)</b>	17	15	4	-	-

**Source: Field work, 1992****N=101**

The different types of family patterns existing in Jolpur were discussed earlier. Among the women respondents 55% percent belonged to nuclear, 26% to supplemented nuclear, 11% to lineal joint and 9% to other family patterns (Table 6.4).

**Table 6.4: Family type by household category**

Family type	Household category							
	D (9)	L (23)	Sfa (30)	Sfb (13)	Sfc (3)	Sfd (9)	Mdf (10)	Rf (4)
<b>Nuclear (55)</b>	56	52	60	77	33	33	40	50
<b>Supplemented nuclear (26)</b>	33	35	23	8	33	56	10	-
<b>Lineal joint (11)</b>	-	4	7	-	33	11	40	50
<b>Others (9)</b>	11	9	10	15	-	-	10	-

**Source: Field work, 1992****N=101**

Note: For key see Table 6.1.

Here nuclear family refers to a married couple with or without children; supplemented nuclear refers to a married couple plus some other relative(s) but no other married couple and a lineal joint family consists of two married couples of different generations (Kolenda, 1968:346-47). Women in nuclear families have much more freedom than women in the other families because these women were only subordinate to their husbands' and there were no other women (such as mothers-in-law or husband's sister(s), husband's elder brothers' wives) or men who would dominate them.

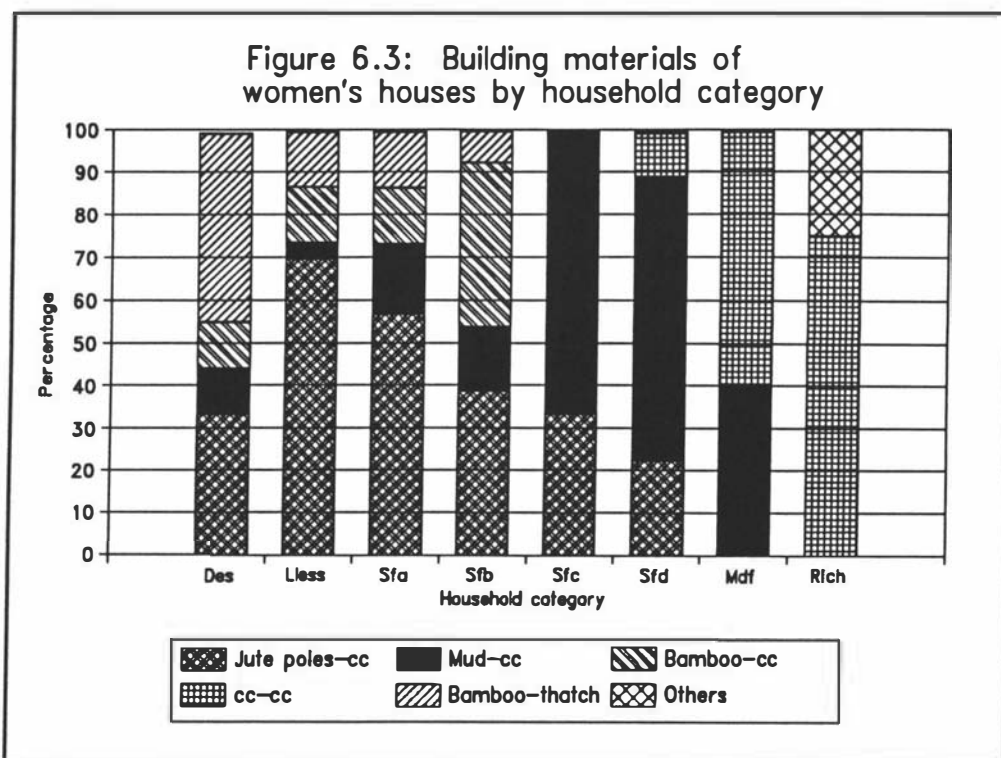
For people who live in flood prone areas the style, method of construction and building materials of their homes is very important. Forty three houses were constructed with jute poles and had roofs of corrugated iron. Poor women contributed almost all of the materials for the construction of their houses because in Jolpur women from all categories, except the rich, engaged in jute stripping and poor women were given bundles of poles (*paatkho*) as payment (see below). Twenty one houses were constructed from mud and corrugated iron. The walls of these houses were made of bamboo, jute poles or thatched materials (depending on a household's income) and the task of plastering walls was women's responsibility. Women said that after the 1988 flood they did their best to obtain at least a corrugated iron roof for their houses. Many women were able to achieve this with the help of the co-operative (*somiti*) run by *Proshika*<sup>9</sup> in Jolpur (see below). The houses of a majority of the women in the middle (60%) and rich (75%) households had walls and roofs made of corrugated iron. Only one rich house had brick walls with a corrugated iron

---

9. Introduced in 1976, *Proshika* shifted from a basic participatory small group to a village co-operative named *Bhumihin doridra krishok somiti* (Landless poor farmers' co-operatives) which included men of all small groups in a single village in Bangladesh. But the loan scheme was suspended during 1982-83 due to problems of loan recovery and other factors. In 1984 the programme was re-organized and expanded. Women's inclusion in this programme is a very recent development. In March 1988 there was 321 women's *somiti* with 11,800 members. Women members of these co-operatives saved about 2.6 million (Interagency Committee on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific, 1990:9).

roof. In no households were concrete (*paka*) floors found. Some poor houses had walls made of wheat straw (*gomer tanga*), also obtained by women as payment in kind. Some had houses made of other crop-waste or simply from branches (see Figure 6.3).

Formed in 1989, *Proshika somiti* encourages income generating activities among women such as poultry raising, food processing, vegetable production, petty-trading and animal rearing and community development such as, health and education. The training of group leaders was a major activity. The trainees became paid employees in the programme after six months evaluation. Her responsibilities were to collect money from door to door and organise monthly meetings. The first leader of the women's *somiti* in Jolpur was the young energetic wife of the village *quack* doctor (who belonged to small farmer 'b' category). She was obliged to give up her job because of her in-laws' views regarding her door-to-door collection of money which involved breaking the *parda* norms. Currently one woman (head of her household) in the small farmer 'a' category who was separated from her husband and a 'daughter of the village' was the leader (see case study). However, each member must deposit 2.00 to 5.00 *taka* per week with no entry fee. In times of special need such as sickness or when houses were damaged, voluntary subscription were collected from members. After the 1988 flood *Proshika* offered assistance to affected women in Jolpur by distributing house building materials, animals, trees and seedlings.



Source Field work, 1992

No=101

Note: cc=corrugated-iron roof.

The number of women members in *Proshika* had increased significantly. Women appear to find co-operative organisation easier to maintain and contributed more than men to the *somiti*. This may be because women were determined to improve the living conditions of their households and can sacrifice their time by doing additional work. There had only ever been one men's agricultural co-operative and that failed because the members, as in many other co-operatives, were either involved in leadership conflict or did not pay *somiti's* fees in time. Men were rarely interested in doing such low-income or invisible community work because they said that they did not have the 'free time' that women had. Did women really have so much 'free-time'? For women who did not have any men at home; who were heads of households or who regularly worked for others, such community work seemed like an additional responsibility. One meeting might sometimes require them to

sacrifice their main income generating tasks. However, despite the additional workload and the low remuneration, women said that the *somiti* gave them a degree of self-sufficiency and a new meaning in life.

However, women to whom five *taka* was a large sum in terms of providing children's or her own *sokher jinish* (things they like) such as toys or bangles was sacrificed for the future benefit of their households. Women broke the social conventions by doing business inside and outside their homes. Rearing poultry, livestock and handicraft production were not just domestic activities but could become a profitable business for women. Women combined their domestic role with this profitable work. Some helped their husbands' to run a grocery shop, built and repaired houses and sent children to school with their money. The most important fact of women's co-operative succession may be that women played a major role in maintaining social relationships. It was women who tried to maintain their networks by avoiding conflicts with neighbours. Women paid their dues regularly. However, men did not treat women's contribution to the household as significantly as their own because of the low income of women from the outcome of the *somiti*. Some poor women however, especially those in the destitute category, did not have the resources to join the *somiti*.

The data collected showed that 55% of women were involved in farm and non-farm activities. For women in Jolpur employment was limited to certain kinds of work and they were mostly paid in kind rather than cash (see below). This factor contributed to their exclusion from the market. Where women were employed as paid labourers they took on a double burden because they were also primarily responsible for child care and domestic work within their households. Women's subordinate role within the family (a 'private' sphere) structured their subordinate role in the 'public' sphere (e.g. paid labour). It is a popular idea in Bangladesh that women's low status is caused by their exclusion from productive labour and from lack of recognition of their work as productive

(discussed earlier). However, it cannot be generalised that women's status will be raised in Bangladesh through recognition of their productive work because it was only poor women who worked outside their households and were considered of low status. However, with the increase of women's involvement in economic activities, their role in household decision making has also increased. As a result, these women felt that they had higher status. Women in better-off households, whose men had greater influence outside their households, experienced greater inequality with their men. Men in the poorer categories often assumed the domestic responsibilities of women such as baby sitting, while their women were busy with outside work. Men in the better-off categories, however, never did such a work. Whilst poor women suffered more economic exploitation they were less oppressed by the system of gender subordination.

Women in better-off households acquired high status due to their men's strong economic position, but they had less power in and outside their households. They did not participate in household decision making because of their economic dependence on men (see above). In that sense, it could be argued that better-off women were more likely to be excluded from household decision making and thereby were given lower status within their households. However, women in better-off households enjoy economic security through their husband's income and they did not feel themselves so powerless. They also commanded the labour of poor women.

Women in Jolpur were involved in primary and secondary occupations, that is, work done for payment either in cash or kind. A woman might be involved in several gainful activities, for example, as an agricultural labourer; selling poultry, eggs or milk; saving money in co-operatives and doing domestic work for other households. She might also be involved in tree-planting, or a fruit business or handicraft production or all three. Most poorer women who had two or more occupations belonged to the destitute, landless

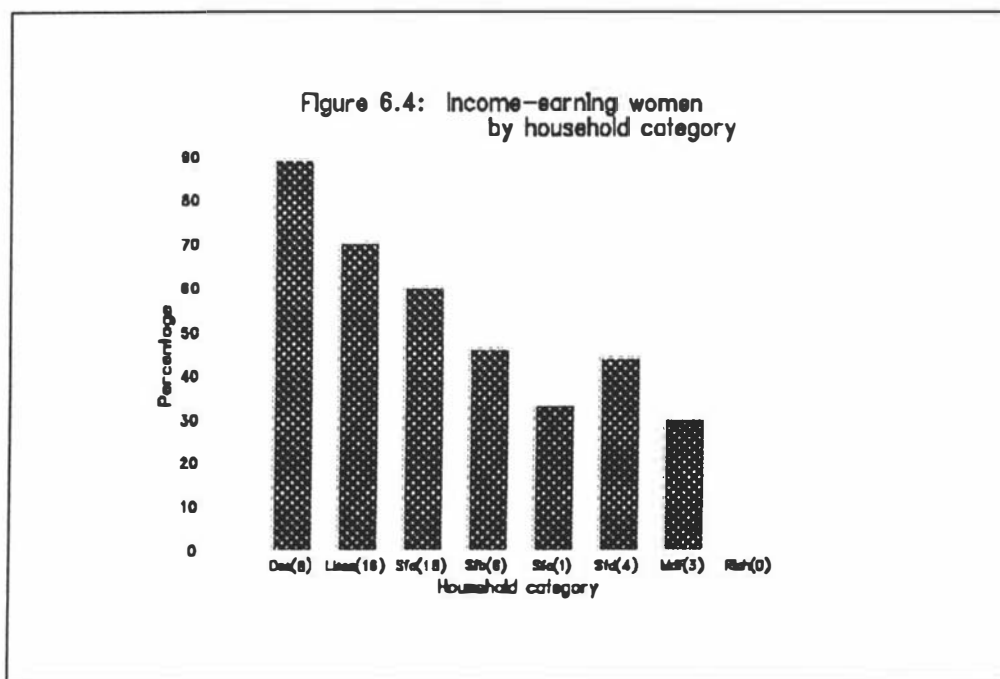
and small farmer 'a' categories. This made it difficult to distinguish between women's primary and secondary occupations. Women were asked about their regular income-earning activities and listed their main and secondary occupations. The basis of defining the principal or main occupation was subjective: the one which women thought of as their main income-earning activities, that is, the one from which they earned most. Women's secondary occupations were also identified by them: those which they did irregularly and from which they earned less. Income-earning women included those who were employed by other households who were paid in cash or kind and self-employed women who earned through rearing livestock or poultry, selling agricultural products, engaging in small businesses or selling handicraft and other products.

Among 70% of women who participated in income earning activities, fifty six (Destitute 89%, Landless 70%, small farmer 'a' 60%, small farmer 'b' 46%, small farmer 'c' 33%, small farmer 'd' 44% and middle farmer 30%) were currently participating in income-earning activities (Figure 6.4). Fourteen women had ceased income-earning activities because of their old age; lack of capital or the increased price of paddy; (some women were involved in rice business: they bought paddy, made rice with it and sold it. Their business was stopped due to the higher price of paddy than rice); restrictions imposed by husbands' or in-laws' or an improvement in their financial conditions.

Women mentioned several kinds of primary (56%) and secondary (36%) income-earning activities. The most common principal occupations were agricultural labour; poultry raising; livestock rearing; business; cultivation and other activities which included membership in *somiti* (as discussed above)<sup>10</sup>,

---

10. *Somiti* is listed as an income-earning activity mainly because women referred to *somiti* when asked "are you pursuing any income-earning activity?" Members of the *somiti* supplemented family income and so played significant roles in their households' survival.



Source: Field work, 1992

N=56

Note: For key see Figure 6.2.

domestic service<sup>11</sup>, selling of groceries from home, making *katha*<sup>12</sup> as commissioned by others, making and selling of handicraft such as *sika* and making paper bags for grocery shops (Figure 6.5). Women's primary role as mothers and wives determined the kinds of income-earning activities they undertook.

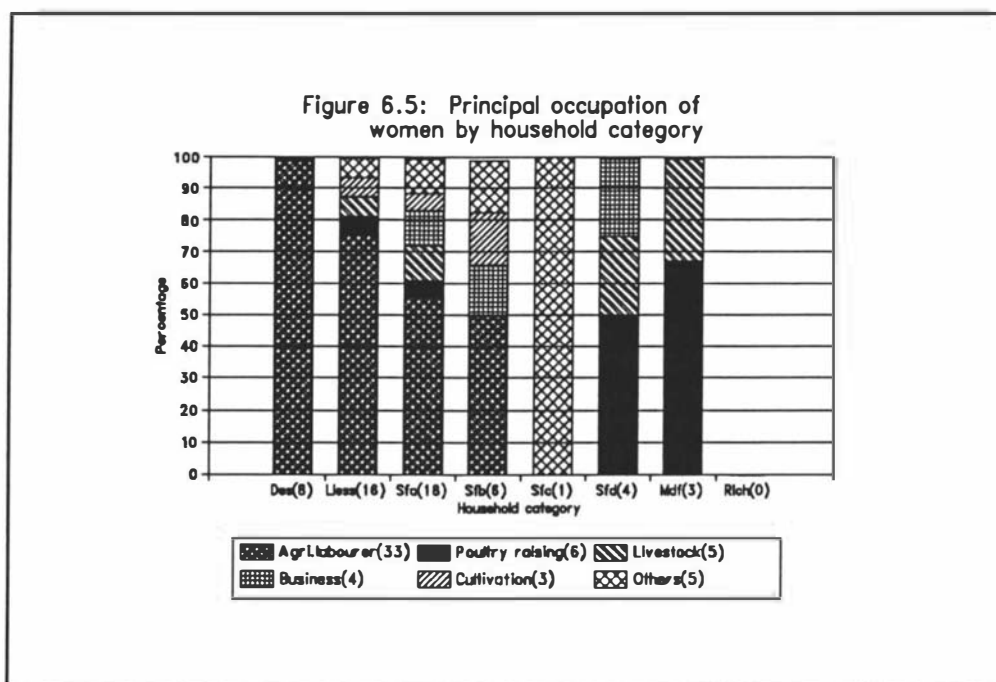
Women in the poorer households were actively involved in field agriculture as labourers in particular seasons. All working women in the

11. Domestic service included only those women who agreed that they sold their domestic labour. Women who occasionally worked for better-off households were excluded here because they did not want to be identified as 'servants'. However, some poor women referred to this as their secondary occupation.

12. *Katha* is made from old saris provided by customers and paid for in cash or kind.

destitute category gave agricultural labourer as their main occupation and 75%<sup>13</sup> in the landless category. These women worked mainly seasonally in jute stripping, threshing, winnowing, weeding, drying and the picking of seedlings to be replanted. Women in small farmer 'a' category (56%) and small farmer 'b' category (50%) also reported working as agricultural labourers. No women in other categories said that they worked as agricultural labourers.

Although land ownership was almost entirely in the hands of men, livestock often belonged to women who often owned milking cows, goats, chickens and ducks from which they might gain some income. Women earned money from selling cow's or goat's milk. Often they reared the animals on a share basis. Some women had received them as dowry from their parents.



Source: Field work, 1992

N=56

Note: For key see Figure 6.2.

13. The percentages of women involved in these different activities were calculated on 56 women who were engaged in income earning activities. Primary and secondary occupation were calculated separately.

However, only a few women in the poorer categories mentioned livestock rearing as their principal source of income. Better-off women often share-tended out their livestock to those women with whom they had *goshthi* or neighbourhood relationships. Eight women in the poorer categories share-tended livestock but they did not derive their main income from it. Women mentioned that it was not a stable income for them because they could sell milk only when it was available. However, twenty five percent of income-earning women in the small farmer 'd' and 33% of middle farmer women reported that their main source of income was from livestock rearing.

Although almost all women kept poultry (mainly chickens and ducks), only 15% (15) reported a regular income from them. Six of these women stated that their main income was derived from poultry raising. Most of them belonged to the small farmer 'd' (50%) and middle farmer (67%) categories and had comparatively large courtyards in which they could keep a considerable number of poultry (20-50 birds) and build protected poultry coops. They could also afford the vaccination of their birds. Poor women reported that they could not keep many birds because they did not have the proper resources to raise them and their poultry often died for lack of vaccination. Women in the rich categories said that they had many chickens and ducks which were used for family consumption. They said that they often sold poultry through their servants but did not think of this as an occupation.

The evidence shows that landlessness or small land holding did not prevent women from having livestock or poultry or both. Women who had at least a homestead courtyard were raising poultry and some of them had one or two cows. Some women said they depended on their poultry only during slack seasons or when they did not have other sources of income.

The main occupation for four women in different categories (small farmer 'a' 11%, small farmer 'b' 17% and small farmer 'd' 25%) was business which

included boiling paddy and husking rice for others and fruit selling. Many women gave up the paddy business because income from it was very low.

All women were involved in the agricultural sector but it was only those women who gained their main income from cultivation who mentioned it as their occupation. Some women who were heads of households (who did not have any adult men or the men lived outside the village) went to their fields to supervise labourers' work and some worked along with the labourers because they did not have enough resources to hire all the labour they needed. However, only three women said cultivation was their main occupation. These women did not have any adult men in their households and belonged to the landless who sharecropped land (6%), small farmer 'a' (11%) and small farmer 'b' (17%) categories. It was noticed that, in a busy season, almost all women in small farmer categories and some of those in middle farm households, participated in home-based agricultural activities even if this was by hiring other women to work for them. Women in the rich households rarely participated in agricultural work but did supervise other women's work. None of these women mentioned agricultural cultivation as their occupation except those three mentioned above.

Women said that although they cared for homestead gardens most of what they produced was used for family consumption. If much extra was produced it was men who sold these at the market and kept the income. However, women occasionally sold some of the homestead garden produce themselves; sometimes they gave or exchanged some with neighbours. Only one woman in the small farmer 'a' category earned money from her homestead garden. This woman obtained fruit-trees from the co-operative and sold fruit commercially. She was mentioned under the 'business' category in the occupation table.

Thirty six percent of women were also engaged in secondary occupations. Secondary occupations refer to work from which women might get up to 40

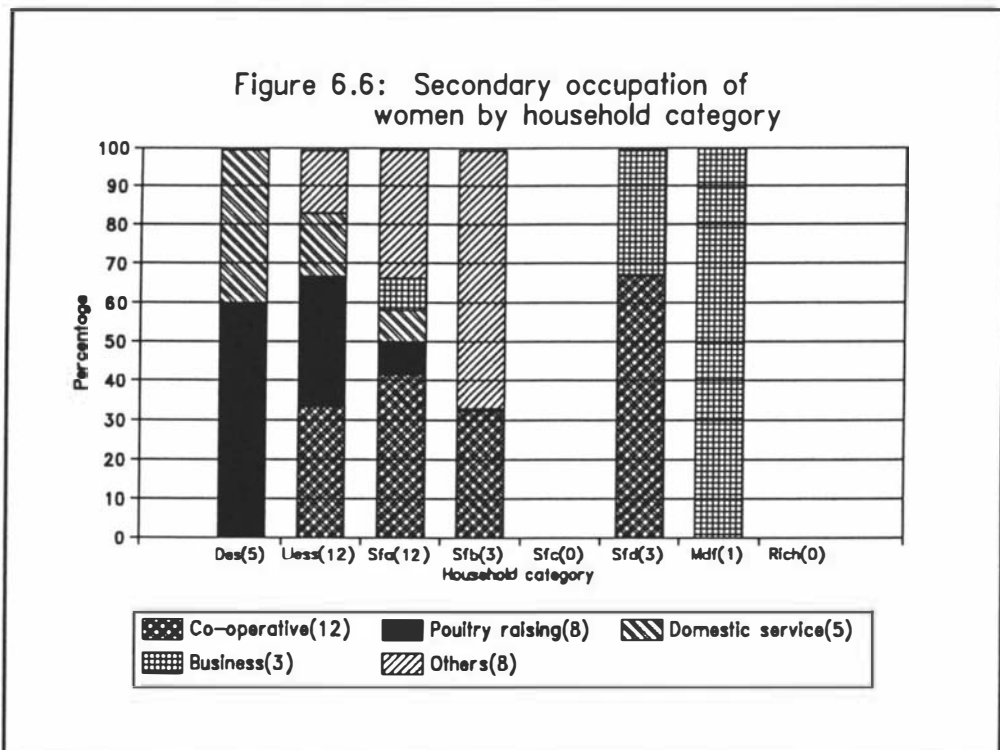
percent of their income but which were not regular sources. Destitute women made up the majority (89%) of working women who had a secondary occupation, followed by women in the landless (70%), small farmer 'a' (60%), small farmer 'b' (46%), small farmer 'd' (44%), small farmer 'c' (33%) and middle farmer (30%) categories. Poorer women said that because of their households' needs they tried to do as much work as they could throughout the year. As a secondary occupation most common were membership in co-operatives, poultry raising, domestic service, business, livestock rearing and seasonal agriculture (Figure 6.6). Whereas poorer women were more likely to be involved in *somiti*, poultry raising, domestic services, rice husking and fruit selling, middle farmer women were more likely to be involved in paddy boiling as their secondary occupation.

There was a considerable gap between what women need to do and what they were allowed to do in order to fulfil their needs. The question of *parda* and the gender division of labour were major factors affecting women's availability for work. Many women complained about the lack of job opportunities. Some said that they wanted to contribute to their family's income but could not because of work scarcity. Jobs were scarce for men also but for women they were even more limited. Women were limited to work in seasonal agricultural activities or domestic service. Because of the socio-cultural setting women were lowly paid and more likely to be paid in kind<sup>14</sup>. However, they tried to get wages in any form, cash or kind, throughout the year for their family survival. Because they were women they could not obtain cash

---

14. As mentioned above that payment in kind is a factor which can prevent women from participating or having access to the commodity market. Weberian class theory sees the market as a crucial structuring feature of socio-economic ('class') category. Historically, in many societies women have been restricted or excluded from the market and this has been linked to their subordination. For example, (though not immediately relevant to Bangladesh situation but illustrative nonetheless) in Western capitalist nations, the market has been associated with rationality. In those societies, women have often been characterised as non-rational and therefore inferior. One of the many reasons they were seen as non-rational because many of them did not have access to the market e.g. especially the middle classes where women's place was supposed to be in the home.

payment. It was in the interest of employers to pay women in kind which was of less value than men's cash payment. Women's occupational mobility was restricted by their socially sanctioned domestic role which only allowed them to engage in such activities as were available inside the village. Such work included cooking, carrying water, washing clothes and dishes, cleaning courtyards, feeding animals and drying or husking grain for better-off households.



Source: Field work, 1992

N=36

Note: For key see Figure 6.6.

Women in the destitute category were in the most helpless position for obtaining work except during busy seasons as employers feared that members of destitute households might migrate at any time of the year (discussed earlier). Destitute women were occasionally employed as domestic servants in better-off households in and outside Jolpur. That was why they (40%)

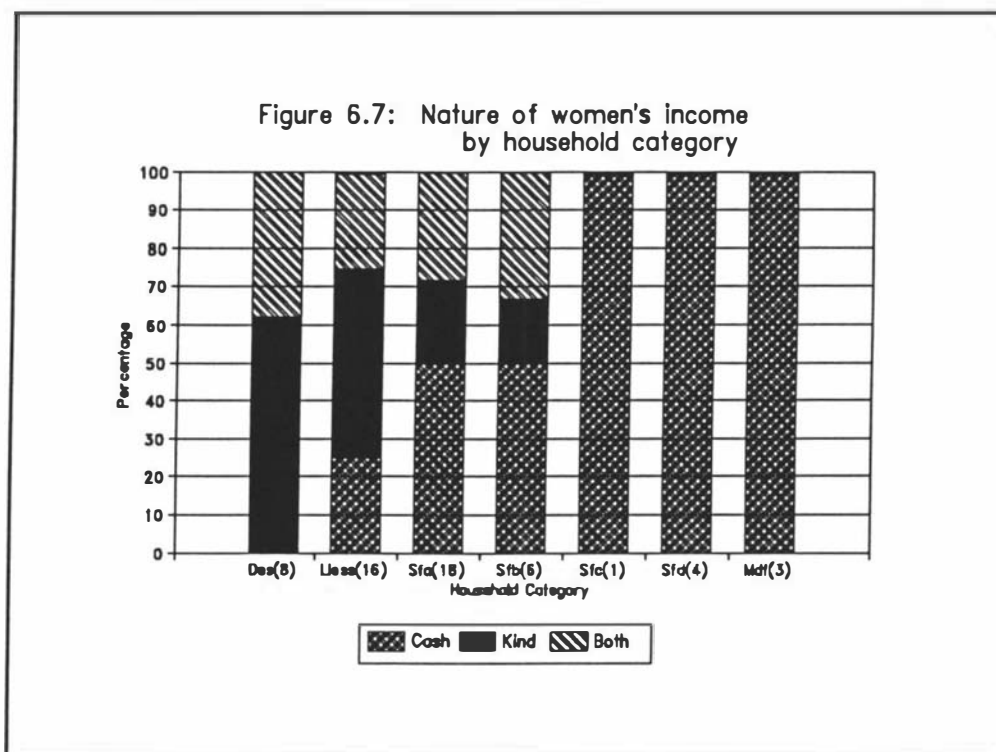
mentioned domestic service as their secondary occupation. However, women in the landless, small farmer 'a' and 'b' categories were in a good position to get domestic, waged employment inside the village.

Better-off women employed poor women's labour throughout the year according to their needs. Poor women depended on their network relationship with women in the better-off households for obtaining occasional work. Moreover the relationships built up by poor women helped their husbands to get work in future. Neighbourhood and kin relationships also played an important role in poor women's income earning activities.

Whatever contribution women made, their labour was always cheap and never equal to men's. For the same kind of work women might be paid one-third of the men's wage. Men generally had negative attitudes towards working women. However, women working inside the village were not criticized. As long as women were pursuing their domestic responsibilities and maintaining their *parda* men did not discourage women's income earning activities. Some men in the poor categories even encouraged their wives to do gainful work. In fact, men agreed that there were many tasks in the agricultural production process such as jute stripping which had become women's work in Jolpur. However, women in the rich and most of middle farmer (70%) categories were not allowed to take paid jobs or participate in work which was considered as low status.

**Types of women's income:** Among income earning women 41% had a cash income, 33% had an income in kind and 26% had both. Women who were paid only in kind belonged to the destitute category (62%), followed by the landless (50%), small farmer 'a' (22%) and small farmer 'b' (17%) categories. All working women in small farmer 'c', 'd' and the middle farmer categories received cash income. No women in the destitute, only 25% in the landless and 50% of women in each of the small farmer 'a' and 'b' categories

were paid in cash. The percentage of women who received incomes in both cash and kind was also high among the poor categories. No women in any other category worked for payment in kind (Figure 6.7).



Source: Field work, 1992

N=56

Note: For key see Figure 6.2.

Seasonal agricultural activities such as jute stripping and threshing of *robi* crops, were the main sources of women's income in kind, followed by their work as servants. From stripping jute women received bundles of *paatkhor*i or jute poles generally on a fifty-fifty basis, but some poor women reported that they got only one third of the stripped jute-poles. For their work during the *robi* crop harvesting season women were paid in crop-wastes such as dry threshed branches of coriander or wheat, stalk and husks. This arrangement depended on the demand for labour. Women were paid in rice, paddy or meals for their work as servants. Depending on the nature of their work women

received one to three meals a day or other kinds of wages. Most of the time they shared their meals with other family members especially children.

Income in kind has been converted into cash at the current market value. For example, a servant who got three meals a day (approximately 8 *taka* per meal) had an income of 720 *taka* per month. The price of one bundle of jute poles (approximately 20) was 1.50 *taka* and a woman could strip 30 bundles a day. Therefore, if she was paid with half of the stripped jute poles a woman could earn 23 *taka* a day or 690 *taka* per month. This activity was seasonal: it lasted about three months.

There were variations in women's capacity to work depending on their age, number of children and the degree of *parda* they practised. Whereas a young woman could strip 30 bundles of jute or pick 50 bundles of paddy plants a day, an elderly woman might only strip 15 bundles. A mother with young children might not work as long as a mother with grown up children. Some women might agree to go to the fields or to strip jute along a village foot path whereas others might be willing to work in the compound of better-off women. However, most of the poor women had no choice but to work wherever they were asked as the main form of work available for these women was in seasonal agriculture which might take them to the other side of the village. This was because the payment which they received in kind had a significant value for their families' survival or convenience: their houses were reconstructed after *borsha* or *bonna* floods from jute poles or crop wastes. Similar materials were used for fences, toilets, gardens and poultry coops; some was used for fuel. Some women also sold jute poles which were surplus to their needs or which they did not have room to store.

Women were often paid cash for their work in the field. For example, a woman might earn one *taka* by picking 20 bundles of young paddy plants or seedlings and women said that they were able to earn approximately 50 *taka* a

day for this. Women who sold eggs earned *taka* 20-30 a month on average. One litre of milk could be sold for approximately seven to ten *taka*.

Women said that their contributions to their families' welfare were not considered as income but were appreciated. Almost all women in the poor categories played a significant role in running their households. In the absence of men some poor women worked as hard as they were able. Most of the income of women either in cash or kind went towards providing support for family members: for food, house building materials, purchase of livestock or poultry, fodder, clothes, providing health care and education facilities, agricultural tools, land, celebrations, marriage expenses of daughters and much else. However, not very much of women's income went towards the purchase of land. Their income was mainly disposable rather than income which could increase the capital assets of a household. This presumably, gives women less 'claim on' family assets (already limited by patriarchal inheritance practices) and therefore less power within the household than men. In other words this situation reinforces the already existing male dominance within the household.

### **Summary**

Respondents for this study were selected according to the socio-economic background of their households. Women in Jolpur did not have a separate identity and mainly belonged to male headed-households. Some households were headed by women and these women performed men's responsibilities within their gender-assigned areas. Most women were less educated than men, carried heavier workloads, had almost no access to resources and had fewer opportunities to engage in income-generating activities. These factors were related to women's overall lower status in society.

A majority of the women lived in poorly constructed houses. Poor women were the main suppliers of house-building materials which were

obtained by payment in kind or from a co-operative or *somiti*. Whereas the men's co-operatives failed the women's succeeded. With the help of *somiti* women were involved in tree-planting, fruit selling and handicraft production. They were provided with credit, livestock and house building materials to enable them to contribute to their households. Membership of *somiti* assisted considerable numbers of poorer women to rebuild their damaged houses after the 1988 flood. Women in the better-off categories were in an advantageous position in the context of resources and did not need to join a *somiti*.

Employment was limited for women because *parda* prevented them from doing all kinds of work that men did. The gender division of labour which assigned women's primary role to be home makers and care givers located them in certain sections of the labour market such as agricultural work, domestic service and livestock rearing from within the village. However, depending on the availability of work; the degree of *parda* practised by them; age; and ability to work, poor women tried to do whatever was available to them within the village. For the same kind of work women were paid less than men. They were paid in kind rather than cash which contributed to their exclusion from the market. However, although women's participation in income generating activities helped them to improve their households' survival, they were hampered by heavy workloads and remained of low status.

### **Summary and conclusion**

Given the very general nature of data relating to conditions of women in rural Bangladesh discussed in Chapter Three and that relating to ongoing conditions in Jolpur presented above it is not possible to make an assessment of the representativeness of Jolpur of Bangladesh villages in general. However, it can be said from the above discussion that the social condition of Jolpur, especially the situation of women, are more or less similar to those of other Bangladesh villages where women are excluded from the public sphere and are of low

status. Most women had little education, lived in poorly constructed houses and had almost no access to resources. They were subjected to gender and socio-economic subordination. The cultural norms of *parda* and the gender division of labour were central to women's subordination. The economic impoverishment of their households forced them to look for paid employment. However, jobs were limited for them because *parda* only allowed women to do certain kinds of work and they were low paid and most often paid in kind.

Women's position in the village was also related to their households' socio-economic condition. Women in the poorer households had lower status than women in the better-off households because poorer women had to work for others and partly because of this they failed to maintain strict *parda*. Women in better-off households were in a more advantageous position because of their households'/husbands' stronger economic background and could maintain their *parda* more strictly. They did not need to struggle continuously for their households' survival as poor women did. However, women in better-off households were subjected to greater gender subordination than those of women in poorer categories. This was because these women did not contribute to their households' sustenance as poorer women did and thereby were excluded from family decision making.

Factors contributing to the lower status of women and their overall position in the society were discussed in Part I and in Jolpur in Part II. Further details on the situation of women in Jolpur will be discussed in Part III.

## **PART III**

### **The non-flood period**

Part III builds upon Part II which provided an overview of Jolpur, its environment, various social groups, socio-economic structure, education, occupations and gender relations which shape the village. Against this background Part III and IV compare and contrast the lives of women in Jolpur during the non-flood and flood periods. The purpose of this comparison is to provide a set of norms, life in the non-flood period, against which the full socio-economic and cultural effects of the flood may be gauged.



## Chapter Seven

### Everyday life in Jolpur during the non-flood period

#### Women's assets

In Bangladesh women's assets were regarded as less valuable (*kom dami*) than those of men. For assets other than land, which were considered as more valuable (*beshi dami*), it was difficult to establish ownership within the household. However, livestock, including poultry and kitchen utensils, were considered as the assets of women, and it was these assets that were mostly sold or mortgaged first to help household survival. In addition women also owned trees, jewellery, land and other goods in their own names. These assets were often used to meet their families' immediate needs. They were kept as 'risk insurance' to face periods of crisis.

Women in Jolpur mentioned livestock (goats, cows, ducks and chickens) as their very own assets. Buffaloes and bullocks, found in the better-off households, were mainly considered as men's property, whereas cows, which women got as gifts, or through share tending arrangements, were considered as women's property. Parents of some women provided land and/or jewellery or a cow as dowry for their daughters. Daughters and their children also got cows

as gifts from parents or grandparents. Relatives or close friends of some women also gave smaller animals as gifts. Women looked after these animals. Rich households in Jolpur had expensive and stronger buffaloes, owned by men, to cultivate land. Other animals like goats, ducks and chicken belonged to women. Women in all categories said that poultry belonged exclusively to them and sometimes children looked after these. Women in better-off households kept more than 50 chickens on average, poorer women, on the other hand had only 15 to 25 on average.

Most buying and selling of livestock, especially small animals such as goats and poultry, took place within the village though some people bought livestock from the local market (*haat*). In Jolpur, people bought livestock through personal contacts. Only larger and more expensive cattle were bought by better-off households from the *haat*. Most village trading was carried out through women's personal relationships in the village. Women's exclusion from the markets did not affect their trading. Women reported that men rarely knew how many ducks and chickens their wives had. Livestock, such as cows and goats, attracted men because of their high value. Though they were mainly in the women's domain, men often asked how much women were spending on rearing these livestock and/or how much they were earning. Women said that men sometimes asked for the money which women earned by selling their assets. Women reported that they tried to keep a secret fund which, in fact, they used for their families' needs.

Whereas, in better-off households the consumption of milk, eggs or chickens was common, poor women tried to sell these items instead of consuming them. Women in the poorer categories sold chickens, eggs or milk within the village. Women who reared livestock sometimes had a regular arrangement with neighbouring households for selling milk.

Women in better-off households share-tended out livestock to poorer women. The women who share-tended in were responsible for feeding and looking after the young calves or goats until they gave birth. Their milk was divided equally between the owners and the women who looked after the cattle. Sometimes the latter might sell calves, goats, cows or milk on behalf of owners to whom they then gave the money. Poor women said that they had the responsibility for looking after livestock and the collection of fodder most of which they got from village common land. Both partners benefitted from animal share-tending though poor women said they gained more than the better-off because for them those animals were often the only means to maintain their livelihood. Poor and better-off women used the resources such as money or animal products in different ways. Better-off women could re-invest in other things such as businesses or buy furniture, clothing, ornaments or other personal things which they described as *sokher jinish* (things they liked) and to which their husbands did not always pay attention. Poor women, on the other hand, used their resources for their daily needs or for family welfare. Better-off women used milk for family consumption whereas poor women sold this to others.

It sometimes happened that women in better-off households had more chickens than they could accommodate or look after, in which case they might sell the surplus birds to neighbouring women either directly or through their servants. The husbands of these women did not sell chickens or ducks in the markets themselves because of their concern for their status - only the poor sell small things to survive. If women in the poor categories failed to sell their poultry themselves within the village, they would sell them in the bazaar or *haat* through their husbands or through others they trusted. Livestock and poultry were often sold at *haat* or bazaar during Eid because of the high prices they got in the market at that time.

Some women said that they did not like selling their own livestock through their husbands because the husbands sometimes kept the money. They preferred to sell them themselves within the village even for a lower price. Sometimes they sold animals in the *haat* through parents or friends because they thought there was a greater chance that the money would come back to them. Quarrels or disagreements arose if the amount was big and men wanted to keep the money.

Women said that before they agreed to tend livestock belonging to other women they had to obtain permission from men. Some men did not like their wives spending time on rearing livestock because they feared it would interrupt women's 'main' household work. However, most of the time men allowed women to do it because they knew women generally used the income for their households. Although women tried to keep the exact amount they earned secret they were often not successful.

#### **Women's personal assets**

Women owned livestock, land, jewellery and others which they thought of as their very own. Sometimes they had purchased them with their own earnings. Table 7.1 shows assets belonging to women by household category. The ownership patterns of the more frequently owned assets are elaborated below in order of the frequency of ownership by all women in the sample.

**Table 7.1: Assets belonging to women by sources and household category**

Assets and sources	Household category							
	D (9)	L (23)	Sfa (30)	Sfb (13)	Sfc (3)	Sfd (9)	Mdf (10)	Rf (4)
<b>Kitchen Utensils</b>								
(101) Family income	33	43	30	38	33	44	50	50
(39)	22	22	37	46	-	44	50	50
Husband (35)	11	26	23	8	33	-	-	-
Self (16)	11	4	3	-	-	11	-	-
Parent (4)	22	4	7	8	33	-	-	-
Others (7)								
<b>Poultry (75)</b>								
Self (31)	22	22	43	46	67	22	10	-
Family income (28)	-	30	20	8	33	33	60	100
Husband (13)	22	13	13	8	-	22	10	-
Others (3)	-	4	8	-	-	11	-	-
<b>Jewellery (52)</b>								
Parent (29)	11	17	27	23	67	55	50	25
Husband (19)	-	9	10	15	33	44	40	75
Others (4)	-	9	-	8	-	-	10	-
<b>Livestock (30)</b>								
Self (11)	-	13	23	-	-	-	-	-
Husband (6)	-	4	3	8	33	-	10	50
Family income (4)	-	-	3	-	-	-	10	25
Parent (3)	-	-	7	8	-	11	-	-
Others (6)	11	4	3	-	-	11	20	-
<b>Land (26)</b>								
Husband (15)	-	9	13	38	-	-	20	50
Parent (9)	-	4	7	8	33	11	20	25
Self (2)	-	4	-	-	-	11	-	-
<b>Others (39)</b>								
Husband (12)	-	9	17	8	-	-	30	25
Family income (10)	-	-	-	8	-	33	50	25
Self (8)	-	9	10	8	33	11	-	-
Parent (9)	-	4	7	8	-	22	10	50

Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note: i) D=Destitute, L=Landless, Sfa=Small farmer 'a', Sfb=Small farmer 'b', Sfc=Small farmer 'c', Sfd=Small farmer 'd', Mdf=Middle farmer and Rf=Rich farmer. These codes will be used in tables 7.1 to 7.5. ii) Frequencies in parentheses. Percentages are done on the basis of total women in each category. iii) 'Others' include furniture, radio etc.

**Kitchen utensils:** All women considered kitchen utensils which they had acquired through different channels as their very own assets. However, some women (39%) said that they bought kitchen utensils with the family income<sup>1</sup>. Of these women half were in the middle farmer and half were in the rich farmer categories. Women who bought kitchen utensils with their husbands' incomes also belonged to middle farmer (50%) and rich farmer (50%) categories. Only a few women in the destitute (22%) and landless categories (22%) got resources from husbands to buy kitchen utensils. Most of these poor women had bought the kitchen utensils themselves with their own income. Sixteen percent of the women who had used their own resources<sup>2</sup> to buy kitchen utensils belonged to the destitute, landless, small farmer 'a', small farmer 'b' or small farmer 'c' category. No woman in the small farmer 'd', middle farmer and rich farmer bought kitchen utensils with her own resources.

There was a wide difference between the types of kitchen utensils used by the poorer and better-off women. Whereas, women in the better-off households had aluminium, stainless steel, brass or bell-metal utensils, cooking pots or pitchers, poor women only had earthenware or, at best, wooden or bamboo spoons. The number of kitchen utensils also varied between poor women and better-off women. Four women reported that they had got their kitchen utensils from their parents at their wedding or later. For some poor women these were the only expensive assets they had. Poor women (71%) also got cooking pots as gifts from neighbours, employers, close friends or

- 
1. This means the total income of household members, that is, the income of husband and wife and son and daughter or other member such as brother's joint income. In rural Bangladesh it is common for all earning members of a joint family to keep their income in a family fund (traditionally at home). The amount they earn is mainly controlled by the heads of the households. Other members could use the money when necessary with the permission of head of households. Heads of better-off households may have bank accounts which are only operated by them even though the money came from their sons, brothers or other family members. However, some money is kept in the house by the head of households to which women and children have access. Sons may give some money or things as gifts to their mothers which is separate from the family fund.
  2. By 'own resources' meant assets which were:
    - a) acquired from own earnings,
    - b) made by themselves,
    - c) acquired from own savings

married daughters. No women in the middle farmer and rich farmer category reported receiving kitchen utensils from parents or other sources.

**Poultry:** Seventy four percent of women in Jolpur reported raising poultry and 31% of them bought the poultry with their own resources. Most belonged to the destitute, landless and small farmer categories. They said that they had bought these poultry with their own income. No women in the rich category, and only ten percent of those from the middle farmer category, said that they had bought poultry from their own resources.

Twenty eight percent of women said that they had bought poultry using their family income. Most women in the better-off households bought poultry with the family income. All women in the rich farmer households and 60% of those in the middle farmer households owned poultry which they had bought using these resources. Women said that their husbands did not like to use their money on such small things from which they would not get much profit. Rich women said that money from their sons' incomes was mostly used for mothers' small things. Unlike poor women rich women did not consider poultry as a valuable asset. Poor women, on the other hand, said that because their income was small they used it to buy small assets. What were 'assets' (*sompod*) to poor women, were 'things' (*jinish*) to rich women.

Thirteen percent of husbands, on request, gave their wives money to buy poultry or eggs. Poor women said that if they had one hen they bought eggs to breed a number of chickens. Husbands sometimes gave them a little money to buy eggs. Women used other sources such as gifts from parents or relatives or from exchanging things with neighbours to become the owners of poultry.

**Jewellery:** Fifty two percent of women owned some sort of personal ornaments, which varied according to their socio-economic category. Whereas for a poor woman a silver or gold nose-pin was a valuable ornament, for better-off women, gold bangles or necklaces were considered to be ornaments

or jewellery. The cultural value of a nose-pin (*nakful*) is very high for a married women in rural Bangladesh. For rural women it is compulsory to wear a nose-pin constantly from the day of marriage ( though this is a symbol of married women, unmarried daughters may also wear nose-pins but it is not compulsory for them). After the death of her husband, a woman's nose-pin will be taken out. Elderly women reported that in the past at least the nose-pins were made of gold. These were less common due to socio-economic degradation. Married women in Jolpur still wore nose-pins, most of which were gold imitations, especially those of poorer women.

All women in the rich, middle, small farmer 'd' and small farmer 'c' categories said that they possessed some jewellery. Some women in the small farmer 'a', 'c' and 'd' categories reported having gold earrings or nose-pins, middle farmer and rich farmer women said that they had more than one pair of earrings. However, these women said that they had sold some of their big ornaments to meet family needs. Most of the middle farmer women did not have gold bangles or necklaces as rich women had. Some of the women in the middle and rich categories said that they gave their ornaments to their daughters as wedding gifts or they sold them to provide for a son's higher education. The percentage of women possessing jewellery was low in the other categories (46% in the small farmer 'b' category, 37% in the small 'a' category, 35% in the landless category and 11% in the destitute category). Ornamentation for destitute and landless women was nothing more than a silver nose-pin which they considered as a valuable asset because of the possibility of selling it (for at least 80 *taka*).

**Livestock:** Thirty percent of women said that they owned livestock personally, most of which they had acquired with their own resources. Of eleven women who owned livestock themselves, eight obtained them by share tending. They belonged to landless (two), small farmer 'a' (five), and small farmer 'b' (one) categories. Three women (two in small farmer 'a' and one landless) become the owners of livestock by using their income from

agricultural work. No other women had livestock obtained with their own resources.

Of the women who owned livestock (milking cows) bought by their husbands, two belonged to the rich category. The other women (in the small farmer 'a' and 'd' categories) got livestock as a dowry or gift from their parents. Ten women had bought livestock using either family income (50% in the middle and rich farmer categories and the other 50% in the small farmer 'a' and small farmer 'b' categories) or other sources of income.

**Land:** Most women in Bangladesh do not own land. In Jolpur 92% of households owned some agricultural and/or homestead land over which only 26% of women had some sort of ownership right. Some of the women who belonged to landed households, especially in small farmer households, but did not have any land in their names said that they would have preferred to have at least a small piece of land of their very own because, after the death of a woman's husband, married sons (in Jolpur) no longer shared the same kitchen and the land was divided among these sons. The widowed mother became a burden for sons. Many widows in Jolpur stayed with their sons in turn each month. In most cases if there was more than one son, none of the sons would agree to take full responsibility for a mother or unmarried or unemployed brothers or sisters. Some older widows expressed their sorrow that it was becoming more and more difficult to get support from their sons.

Women in Jolpur could become the owners of land in several ways. Two women in the landless category became owners of their homestead land after the death of their husbands. One of these women said that she had land in the village of her birth but sold it to contribute to family sustenance and to pay her husband's medical bills. Another woman in the same category said that her husband registered 0.10 acre homestead land in her name when he was sick.

Thirteen percent (4) of women in the small farmer 'a' category possessed land after they became widows. Three of these women had grown up unmarried sons aged between 22 and 30. The other woman's land was registered in her name although she had married sons over 30 years of age. These women said that their sons were young when they became widowed so they automatically became the owner of their lands. Their sons were still living with them and had not ask them to divide the land or register it in their names. These women seemed very confident about their ownership and very pleased with their sons.

The same was true in the case of three (23%) small farmer 'b' category women the husband of one of whom had registered all his land (0.11 acre homestead land and 1.60 acre agricultural land) in her name when he was sick. This woman's son was an adult when her husband died. Her son was working in town and had no time to look after agricultural land. All her agricultural land was share cropped out. The other two women had got small plots of land after the deaths of their husbands. Two other women in this category had got land from their husbands who were still alive. Twenty percent of middle and 50% of rich farmers registered some of their land in their wives' names.

Nine percent of women reported that they obtained land from parents. Of these 4% were landless, 7% small farmer 'a', 8% were small farmer 'b', 33% were small farmer 'c', 11% small farmer 'd', 20% middle farmer and 25% were in the rich category. Land which had been given to a woman's husband as a dowry from her parents was not included here as the woman's asset. In a few cases land given as a dowry had been registered in the young bride's name. In other cases this dowry was used by the older generation, that is, the father-in-law<sup>3</sup>. One woman in small farmer 'a' category got agricultural land

---

3. In Bangladesh the traditional *pon-protha* (system in which money was paid to a bride's family by the groom's family to pay for the wedding feast) has changed to *joutuk* (dowry- which is paid by bride's family to the groom or both the bride and groom). Depending upon socio-economic status the bride's family pays a dowry to the groom's in many forms. In fact, in most cases this dowry is paid according to the groom's family's demand or *dabi* (Rozario, 1992:131-150). The groom's family may demand money, land, jobs or other forms

from her deceased father's property after she was abandoned by her husband (see case study). Women who got land from their parents feel much more confident than those whose husbands got land as *dabi* or dowry from their parents. One landless woman whose parents were also living in Jolpur got homestead land from her parents in her name.

Only two women who became the owners of land with their own resources belonged to small farmer 'a' and 'd' categories. The woman in the small farmer 'a' category said that she sold her labour and other assets and saved money to buy a small piece of homestead land when her husband failed to do so. Another woman said that she possessed land in her native village but sold it to buy land in her marital village.

Seventy five percent of women in the rich category thought that their husband's land also belonged to them. They said that they did not need any land of their own. These senior women appeared to feel like this because of their husband's wealth or because they had not felt economically insecure in the past. However, 25% percent of women in the rich and 50% in the middle farmer category did not agree that they owned any land, although their husbands had large or middle sized farms or areas of homestead land.

It is significant that women in Jolpur possessed some land and women in the poorer farmer categories wanted to have land of their own. However, in most cases, land owned by women was controlled by their men. A husband usually insisted that his wife sell any land which she owned in her village of birth because, being in a village other than his own, he could not exercise control over it.

The quality of women's land is generally lower than that of men. Some men preferred to keep even the low quality land because of the prestige of land ownership and the consequences in terms of power in the village. They

---

of dowry from the bride's family. Many marriages are postponed because of the bride's parents' inability to pay *dabi*. If the groom is considered a highly valued son-in-law, they try to pay the *dabi* as best as they can.

had it in mind that, in an emergency, they would sell that land which belonged to women. In some cases women's gold was sold to buy land and sometimes the women became the owners of this land. Some women thought that they owned this land because their assets had been used to buy it or because they had got it from their parents.

Women mentioned other assets such as furniture, including clothes-racks (*alna*), cupboards (*almari*), meat-safes, suitcases, wrist watches, radios and many other items most of which were owned by women in better-off households. Most of the landless and small farmer women and all destitute women reported that they did not have assets as rich women did which they would refer to as luxury items or *sokher jinish*. Some women, however, mentioned that they had assets such as a suitcase made of tin, a food rack or a meat-safe which belonged to them. Nine percent of women received these assets from their parents, 8% had bought them themselves, 10% got them from their family income and 12% obtained them from their husbands. All rich women, and 90% of middle farmer women, had other resources. The percentage is low in the other category.

### **Summary**

Women in Jolpur did not possess assets as men did partly because of the patriarchal nature of inheritance (see Chapter 3). Although women had some assets of their 'very own' they were considered as 'less valuable' or 'weaker' than those of men. Even when women in the landed category owned 'productive' assets, such as land, the quality of their assets were inferior to those of men. Moreover, it is evident that women's land was controlled by men. This control was related to the gender division of labour and *parda* of women which did not allow women to cultivate their land themselves.

Assets, and their sources, varied from poorer to better-off women. Poor women's assets played a significant role in times of crises. It was women in the poorer categories who drew upon their 'very own' assets for the welfare of

their families. Poorer women had small assets which they possessed mainly through their own efforts whereas better-off women often owned large assets acquired through their husbands, sons or others. Women in the better-off categories did not need to depend on their assets in order to sustain their families'.

### **Gender division of labour**

In Jolpur, as in other parts of Bangladesh, there was a strong division of labour which defined women's and men's work differently (see Chapter 3). Table 7.2 lists the activities that women and men in different categories performed<sup>4</sup>. These activities were divided into home-based (domestic), agricultural, animal husbandry and market-related. Women were supposed to do all work which was considered 'domestic' and confined women in households. Men, on the other hand, were supposed to do agricultural, animal husbandry and market-related activities which were usually or officially known as men's or 'productive work'. But it is evident that many women performed those activities. Because *parda* (which is central to gender relations) of Muslim women required them to do most of their work inside their homes it is much more difficult to divide their 'productive' from their 'reproductive' labour. It is also clear from the data that although many women participated in men's work men rarely did women's. No men cooked, plastered courtyards or made stoves. Many women, on the other hand, were involved in agriculture. Women in the destitute and landless categories did not have their own agricultural land but worked for others.

Women in all categories were directly or indirectly involved in husking, grinding, preparing seed beds, threshing crops, drying, parboiling crops, preparing land for homestead crops, irrigating and harvesting in addition to

---

4. Table shows that in some households some essential activities, such as cooking or collecting drinking water, were performed neither by women respondents nor by male-heads. It does not necessarily mean that these activities were absent. These were performed by other family members or employees in these households depending upon their socio-economic background.

their common household work, such as cooking, cleaning, washing, caring for children, caring for animals, fetching water and collecting and storing fuel. Women (75%) participated much more than men in vegetable production, in which only 3% men were involved. Better-off women were more likely to be involved in vegetable gardening than poorer women because they had more homestead land. Better-off categories had much more agricultural land than others and women in these categories employed poorer women to help them. However, 90% of women in the middle farmer and 50% of women in the rich farmer households said that they participated in agricultural work, such as parboiling rice or drying grain, along with employees (see Table 7.2). Poorer women, on the other hand did these activities themselves in addition to their work for better-off women.

**Table 7.2: Activities performed by women and men by household category**

Activities	Household Category							
	D (9)	L (23)	Sfa (30)	Sfb (13)	Sfc (3)	Sfd (9)	Mdf (10)	Rf (4)
<b><u>Home-based</u></b>								
<b>Care for sick</b>								
W=96	100	96	97	92	100	89	90	100
M=3	11	-	8	-	-	11	-	-
<b>Make stove</b>								
W=93	100	91	93	100	100	100	80	50
M=0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Cook</b>								
W=90	100	91	90	92	100	89	70	75
M=0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Collect drinking water</b>								
W=89	89	83	90	85	100	89	80	50
M=0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Plaster courtyard</b>								
W=88	100	96	93	85	100	89	60	25
M=0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

<b>Wash cloths, utensils</b> W=87	100	91	93	92	67	78	70	25
M=0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Look-after children</b> W=82	78	82	90	69	67	67	80	100
M=6	11	9	7	8	-	-	-	-
<b>Do craft work</b> W=80	44	73	77	100	100	100	80	50
M=3	11	-	7	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Store food</b> W=72	44	48	77	92	100	78	80	100
M=4	-	4	-	-	-	-	20	25
<b>Collect fuel</b> W=66	100	91	90	85	67	56	20	-
M=4	-	-	3	15	33	-	-	-
<b>Repair house</b> W=22	22	43	23	15	-	11	-	-
M=51	78	43	60	54	33	33	30	25
<b>Raise homestead land</b> W=20	33	35	27	-	-	11	-	80
M=37	22	35	53	23	33	22	30	50
<b><u>Agricultural work</u></b>								
<b>Parboil rice</b> W=87	67	78	93	92	100	100	90	50
M=0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Dry grain</b> W=77	22	61	87	92	100	100	90	50
M=1	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Grow vegetables</b> W=75	56	74	67	69	67	89	100	100
M=3	-	-	3	-	-	-	20	-

Table 7.2 continued

<b>Grow fruit trees</b>								
W=54	11	52	47	61	67	89	80	75
M=18	-	4	20	15	-	44	40	25
<b>Thresh crops</b>								
W=49	56	52	57	54	33	22	-	-
M=37	44	22	50	52	-	33	30	-
<b>Store seeds</b>								
W=36	-	4	47	62	100	67	40	-
M=45	-	13	60	52	33	56	80	50
<b>Prepare seed-bed</b>								
W=25	22	26	27	23	33	44	10	-
M=47	44	26	60	52	33	67	40	25
<b>Husk rice at home</b>								
W=21	22	35	27	8	-	22	-	-
M=0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Transplant seedlings</b>								
W=8	33	9	7	-	-	11	-	-
M=45	44	26	53	54	33	67	40	25
<b>Irrigate land</b>								
W=3	-	4	3	8	-	-	-	-
M=49	44	26	70	54	33	44	30	25
<b>Husk rice at mill</b>								
W=2	11	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
M=35	22	35	50	46	33	56	20	25
<b>Harvest crops</b>								
W=1	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
M=47	44	26	70	54	33	55	40	25
<b>Plough land</b>								
W=0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
M=49	44	26	70	54	33	55	40	25
<b><u>Animal husbandry</u></b>								
<b>Raise poultry</b>								
W=75	44	69	79	62	100	88	80	100
M=0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 7.2 continued

<b>Feed animal</b>								
W=23	22	22	37	15	-	33	-	-
M=12	22	-	10	8	-	22	30	25
<b>Collect fodder</b>								
W=19	22	17	33	8	-	11	-	-
M=19	22	4	23	15	-	11	40	50
<b>Graze animal</b>								
W=7	11	4	10	8	-	11	-	-
M=13	22	4	20	15	-	11	10	-
<b><u>Market-related</u></b>								
<b>Sell poultry/eggs/ milk</b>								
W=49	44	61	60	39	-	44	40	-
M=12	11	26	17	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Work for payment in kind</b>								
W=37	89	57	33	46	-	-	-	-
M=0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Work for cash income</b>								
W=34	33	35	43	23	33	44	20	-
M=76	78	78	83	85	67	78	60	25
<b>Sell handicrafts</b>								
W=9	22	9	17	-	-	-	-	-
M=3	11	3	8	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Sell goods at market</b>								
W=4	-	9	7	-	-	-	-	-
M=21	11	9	30	23	67	33	-	25
<b>Purchase goods from shop/market</b>								
W=3	11	4	3	-	-	-	-	-
M=56	78	57	73	54	67	67	50	56

Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note: For key see Table 7.1. W=women and M=men.

Ploughing, harvesting crops, irrigating land and storing seeds and carrying crops to the mill were the main forms of agricultural work which were performed by men. Only in the female headed households, and when men were absent, did women do such activities including the hiring and supervision of labour but excluding ploughing. Most of these women belonged to poorer categories (see Chapter 6). Men generally refused to do any work which women normally did, they regarded it as below their status. A strict division of labour was specially strong among the rich. Among whom men never did any household work while their wives were not allowed to do anything that would take them outside the homestead. This, however, was less true of the poor. among them men often helped their wives with small things such as adding firewood to the cooking fire or looking after children.

Fifty four percent of women had planted fruit trees in their homestead gardens, whereas only 18% of men had done this. Almost all women in better-off categories planted fruit trees not only because they had resources to buy and space to plant fruit trees, but because they also had the time to do this. However, most women had the knowledge to use trees to provide food, fuel, fodder and medicine to meet their households' needs. Men knew the commercial value of trees whereas women used them for their households' survival. Women reported an increasing shortage of fuel wood which made some of their tasks difficult to perform. Women were forced to collect fuel for longer and longer periods and from further and further away. Due to the shortage of fuel the price of wood also increased. Women in Jolpur and other parts of Bangladesh have made great contributions in such crises<sup>5</sup>. Sixty six percent (all in the destitute, 91% in the landless, 90% in the small farmer 'a', 85% in the small farmer 'b', 67% in the small farmer 'c' 57% in the small farmer 'd' and 20% in the middle farmer categories) of women collected fuel and most of them belonged to the poorer category. However, there was a variation among poor and landed women in the distances they needed to travel to collect fuel. Poorer women travelled far to get fuel whereas two middle

---

6. An average women in Bangladesh spent three to five hours a day collecting fuel (FAO/Sida, 1987).

farmer women collected it from their nearby stores of jute-poles, dry leaves or branches beneath their homestead trees. For the latter not only was less work involved but they also suffered much less exposure regarding *parda*.

Women played a key role in collecting and managing water. No men in Jolpur normally collected water (for more see below). It was women who knew about water sources and the relative quality of the water from them, and in a dry season women often travelled long distances to obtain drinking water. Although women in better-off categories often employed poorer women to bring water for them, poorer women had to do this work themselves. Among eighty nine women 66% carried water themselves and 19% carried water with the help of their daughters. Some women received help from their daughters-in-law, however, 80% of women (60% carried water themselves and 20% with the help of their daughters) in the middle and 50% of women in the rich farmer categories said that they carried water themselves from their own tube-wells sunk in their courtyards.

Care of draft animals, milking cows and goats and rearing of poultry was almost exclusively women's work. Twenty three percent of women fed their animals compared to 12% of men. Women in poorer households sometimes took cows, goats and poultry from rich families on a share basis and through this earned some money. Women also participated in collecting and storing fodder and in grazing animals. Washing and cleaning the cow-sheds, were also women's responsibility. Women bathed the animals and provided herbal treatment when they were ill.

Many women, mostly from poorer categories, were involved in market-related activities though not to the same degree as men. Because of *parda* and prestige related to their households women in the better-off categories rarely did these tasks. Even poorer women only participated in them within the village and in situations where they did not need to suspend their *parda*. A considerable number of women (49%) reported that they sold poultry and eggs and thereby earned some money. Some of them sold milk from their cows.

Some women reported their involvement in selling handicraft (9%), fruit, vegetables or milk door to door (7%). In their household businesses women in the better-off categories, especially in the middle farmer households, often contributed to commercial production but only within the home. Women of these categories were not allowed to accept outside employment as a means of earning a livelihood, because the prestige of the family suffered when they had to work for others.

It is evident that participation of women in household income generation was high. But poor women who worked as seasonal agricultural labourers were rarely paid in cash. In exchange for their labour they received payments in kind such as, jute sticks, crops, grain, crop wastes or meals. Men would never accept payment in kind (see Chapter 6). However, even though women were (under) paid in kind they contributed significantly to their families survival. Women's domestic work was not appreciated and their work as subsistence farmers was not remunerated within their households. Women without husbands or other male guardians did not get adequately paid work as men did. They were heavily dependent on seasonal agricultural work and providing domestic services for better-off women. Some women reported that they did not find work inside the village throughout the year. Most of the women in female-headed households reported that they worked outside the village in the lean season. Some of them worked as *chuta jhee* (released maid)<sup>6</sup> in nearby areas. However, women who worked in the fields were considered of low status. Women in better-off households were not allowed by their men to do work done by poor women.

---

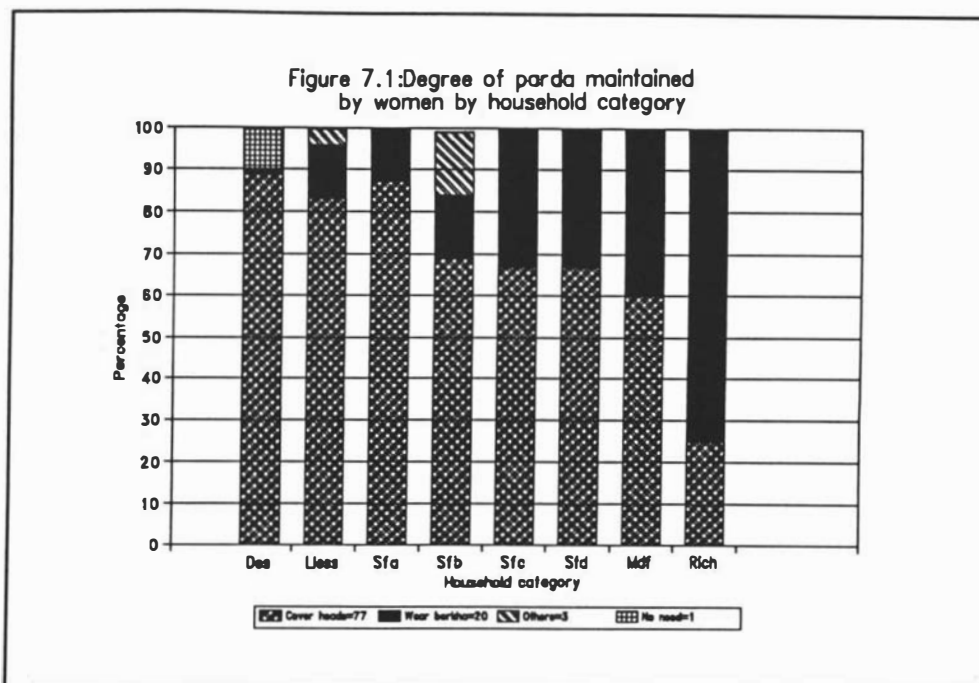
6. There are two types of maid servants: *bandha jhee* and *chuta jhee*. The *bandha jhee* (tied or permanent) stays 24 hours at her employer's house. As long as a woman is employed as *bandha jhee* she is not allowed to leave her employer's house except in special circumstances. *Chuta jhee* is employed for a few hours a day to do some specific work, such as, cooking, washing dishes, clothes and collecting water. Most of the Jolpur's women worked as *chuta jhee* because they could go to their houses to look after their children. Moreover, release from one house allowed a woman to work for several others.

if they did not maintain *parda* in front of strangers, they would be considered bad women by those strangers.

Fourteen percent of women said that they maintained *parda* to keep their husband's honour. Most of these women belonged to better-off categories (30% in the middle and 50% in the rich categories) and said that if they did not live in *parda* their husbands would be criticised. For these women maintaining *parda* was bound up with maintaining the social honour (*izzat*) of their husbands, of themselves and of their households.

Eleven percent of women gave other reasons: they started covering their heads after they had reached puberty and from then on it had become a habit; they maintained *parda* because they had been ordered to do so by their husbands after marriage; some said they had been ordered to do so by their parents; some said that they had seen their '*ma-khala*' (mother and her sister) maintaining *parda* and some said that they did not know why they practised *parda*.

It was noticed that considerable numbers of women in the better-off households said that they followed strict *parda* to maintain the honour and status of their households. Women in the better-off categories gave religious explanations more often than poorer women. Most women from middle and rich farm households rarely left their households except to visit a doctor or a parent. They also felt that they were fortunate to be able to maintain *parda* because they did not need to struggle for better food, clothing or housing as poor women did. Unlike poor women they gained honour (*izzat*) rather than shame (*lozza*) because of their seclusion from the outside world. Poor women were in general more free to acquire economic independence. In doing so they sacrificed their social status. However, it was observed that attitudes towards women working outside the



Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note: Des=Destitute, Lless=Landless, Sfa=Small farmer 'a', Sfb=Small farmer 'b', Sfc=Small farmer 'c', Sfd=Small farmer 'd', Mdf=Middle farmer and Rich=Rich farmer. These codes will be used in figures 7.1 and 7.2.

reasons were given by women (Figure 7.2). Thirty three percent of women in different categories said that they maintained *parda* for fear of Allah (25% in the destitute, 30% in the landless, 33% in the small farmer 'a', 30% in the small farmer 'b', 33% in the small farmer 'c', 33% in the small farmer 'd', 40% in the middle and 50% in the rich categories). These women thought that to disown *parda* would be a sin. The second most common answer (25%) was that if they did not maintain *parda* people would gossip about them (38% in the destitute, 26% in the landless, 27% in the small farmer 'a', 31% in the 'b', 22% in the small farmer 'c', 33% in the 'd' and 10% in the middle farmer). No women in the rich category gave such an explanation may be because they thought no one in the village would gossip about them. Seventeen percent (25% in the destitute, 17% in the landless, 20% in the small farmer 'a', 23% in the 'b', 33% in the 'c' and 22% in the 'd' categories) of women reported that they practised *parda* to avoid strangers from other villages. These women said

wore *borkha* belonged to the better-off categories (40% in the middle and 75% in the rich categories). Poor women could not afford a *borkha*. However, poorer women (13% in the landless, 13% in the small farmer 'a', 15% in the 'b', 33% in the 'c' and 33% in the 'd' categories) mentioned that they hired *borkha* from better-off neighbours or relatives when necessary: when outside the village, visiting parents or relatives and in town, when visiting officials, for example, a doctor.

The majority of women in Jolpur came from neighbouring villages and had lived in Jolpur since their marriages. Some belonged to Jolpur by birth. Women reported that all men in this village were like their *bhai* (brothers). No women said that they wore *borkha* in front of men of the village. However, women said they always covered their heads in front of men of other households. Three women reported they never went outside the village or their *bari* without *borkha*.

One destitute young woman said she did not maintain *parda* and did not need to cover her head because of her youth. She wore *salwar* and *kamiz* only. She did not go beyond the village and its fields like boys of her age. To her, covering the head was *parda*, and she did not maintain that sort of *parda*. However, I found her secluded from village boys.

Only a few women (mostly in better-off categories) observed *parda* very strictly inside the village. Poor women said they did not have the resources to maintain *parda* strictly and they were compelled to go outside the village for work. However, women said that they always tried to keep their modesty and never acted in ways which would cause others to refer to them as *beparda* or exposed.

Women laughed when asked why they practised *parda*? It was an amusing and an embarrassing question for them. At first they found it difficult to answer, never having considered the issue before. They had been brought up in such a way that *parda* had become a part of their lives. They could not separate *parda* from their identity as women. However, different

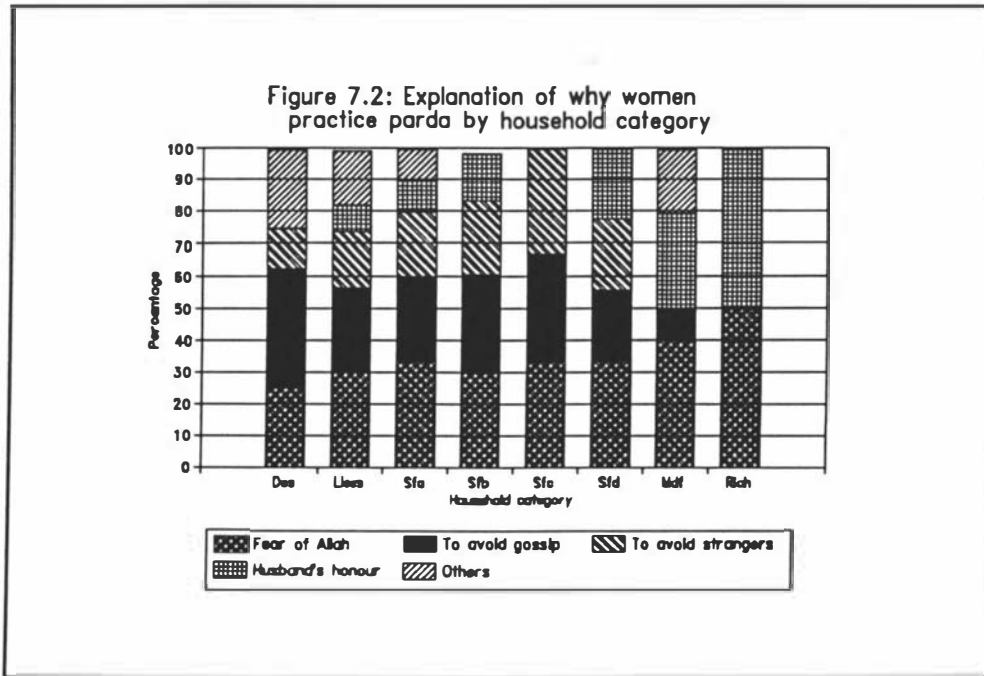
## Summary

Poor women in Jolpur were responsible for all domestic tasks. *Parda*, the socio-cultural phenomenon central to the gender division of labour, allowed women to perform their tasks from within their households or the village. Although many women in the poorer categories shouldered men's responsibilities, their work was not considered as 'productive' in the official statistics due to their confinement to the private sphere. Men, on the other hand, did not participate in any tasks normally done by women. There was a gender division of labour in almost all households but this was more strong in better-off households. Men in this category, in contrast with many poor men, did not allow their women to work for payment.

However, women in the better-off categories did not have to do as much work as poorer women. Because of their households' stronger economic position they could hire labour whenever they needed. Most of the women in the poorer categories, on the other hand, were subjected to a double burden: involvement in both paid employment and domestic tasks (discussed in more details in Chapter 6). Although their contribution towards their households survival was great and although they participated in paid work they were not able to break down the cultural practice which identified them as 'low status'.

### Maintenance of *parda*

*Parda*, the powerful set of norms of Jolpur, was defined by women in different ways: some said that *parda* meant always covering one's head; some that it meant not appearing in front of male strangers or conversing with them; some that it meant always staying at home and being secluded from all outsiders and some said that it meant wearing *borkha* when outside. Women were asked whether they maintained *parda*. All women except one reported maintaining *parda* (Figure 7.1). Seventy seven percent maintained *parda* by covering their heads with the ends of their sari, 20% wore *borkha* and 3% practised other degrees of *parda* such as wearing a *chador*. Most women who



Source: Field work, 1992

N=100

Note: For key see Figure 7.1.

village were changing. Some men in the village said that women who lost husbands or who had no men around to support them worked outside the village and got sympathy from villagers rather than being criticised. These women themselves, however, felt ashamed that they were not keeping the *izzat* of their husbands' *goshti* and did not get honour as women in better-off households did.

### Summary

It was explained in Chapter 3 that, because of the *parda* norms in this patriarchal Muslim society, women were excluded from public spheres. *Parda* also played an important part in the division of labour between women and men (discussed above). *Parda* is an integral part of the lives of women in Jolpur. All women maintained *parda* in its strict or wider sense. However, *parda* was not practised to the same extent by women in all categories. Poor women did not adhere to *parda* as strictly as better-off women because of their economic, social and cultural circumstances. These women had no choice but

to support themselves by whatever means available and, like men, they often went outside the village to work. Because of increasing poverty the practice of, and attitude towards, *parda* in Jolpur was changing but it was not losing its hold. Even poor women did not completely disavow *parda*. They always tried, at least, to cover their heads with the saris when they went out.

### **Women and water collection**

Water is needed to maintain hygiene and sanitation, vegetable gardening, farming, plastering the courtyard, washing cloths, utensils and cooking. As in many other societies, women in Bangladesh play the key role in water carrying<sup>7</sup>. Through experience they know the location and the quality of water at different sources and the relative difficulties of getting the water and returning home with it safely.

In Jolpur a woman's day started with the collection of water from tube-wells, ponds and rivers. They got up early in the morning while the rest of the household members slept. They checked the water pots, *kolshi* and other buckets or jars and usually found most of them were empty. They carried the *kolshi* and stood in the queue with other women to get water from the nearby tube-well. In Jolpur there were twenty tube-wells (some were private and a few recently established by government). For some women, tube-wells were within 200 yards but others were up to one kilometre away. Often women did not use the nearest tube-wells because they were faulty. The handles of some tube-wells were in bad repair or too heavy to operate so that they had to press them down firmly for which they needed all of their strength. Some tube-wells were too high or too low and difficult for women to operate. Other women said that the quality of water from some tube-wells was so bad that

---

7. Women's role as collectors and managers of water was recognized in some 'third world' countries after the UN Water Conference in 1977, and the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. Six years later UNDP started a project named PROWESS (the Promotion of the Role of Women in Water and Environmental Sanitation Services) which has worked with the government of twenty countries in the 'third world' and included women's interest in the drinking water supply (see Rodda, 1991:54-55).

they hardly ever used them. Many tube-wells were full of clay, sand, insects or iron.

Women said that they used the best quality water for drinking, washing food, cooking and cleaning kitchen utensils. Other water was used for watering plants or vegetable gardens, washing clothes, watering animals and cleaning floors. However, whereas women always used tube-well water for drinking, they used clean water from ponds for cooking. They knew that pond water was not as pure as tube-well water and they used it in cooking so as not to discolour the food. Women said that after boiling, pond water was free of germs and their food looked good, whereas, tube-well water made the colour of food reddish. They did not use tube-well water to wash clothes.

During dry seasons women faced problems getting drinking water from many village tube-wells and from village ponds. Sometimes the water level was so low that the raising of water was very difficult. During this time women could only use those tube-wells which had longer pipes to reach the water. Women reported that government did not use long pipes in the public tube-wells and they had to use the private tube-wells of the villagers, most of which belonged to better-off households. Women said that they had to carry water from East *para* to West *para* or vice-versa. Some women failed to get permission from the better-off households and some did not have the time to walk long distances or to wait in a long queue. Most of the poor who were involved in income earning activities had little time to spend on water collection and therefore they had to use nearer, and poorer, quality water.

Women reported using special techniques to obtain water from a dry tube-well. Women said that they carried one or two buckets or *kolshi* of water from the pond or river and used a mug or *badna* (kettle-like water-pot) to pour water through the narrow joint at the top of the tube-well handle. A woman needed the help of another to use this technique. One woman pumped by hand and blocked the nozzle of the tube-well with the other hand (to prevent pond or river water coming through). The other woman

continuously poured water until the tube-well water began to flow. Many women said that they used this technique throughout the dry season. Village ponds or nearby canals also became dry and women had to walk one to two kilometres to reach the big ponds or rivers. Women said that walking long distances with twenty kilograms or more of water made them very tired and they sometimes had to walk thigh-deep in clay to get clean water. Women usually took their daughters with them to help. The size of *kolshi* or buckets or other jars becomes gradually bigger with the age of the girls. Pregnant women faced more problems than others in carrying water.

Women said that village tube-wells and ponds were the meeting places of women and where they passed on their knowledge regarding the quality and collection of water. They knew how to purify drinking water using indigenous techniques for which they collected materials from their environment. Because many chores needed water, they reused waste water: they watered plants with the water which they washed vegetables in or used waste water for plastering courtyards and watering animals.

Women in Jolpur preferred to bathe in the river or pond when there were no men around. They bathed early in the morning or at night. Ablution in an open place was embarrassing for women. They kept one or two *kolshi* of water for bathing if they did not have time early in the morning or if it was too cold at night to go out. Women said that they felt much less embarrassed when observed by men when laundering clothes than when washing themselves. It was a common sight in Jolpur that, after finishing the washing at the water source, women carried one pitcher of water pressed between their arms and their waist and another bucket in their hands. Table 7.3 shows the proportion of women members in households of various socio-economic categories who collected drinking water when there was no flood.

Table 7.3 shows that nearly all women, whatever their household category, fetched water. Respondents said that they carried water by themselves, or accompanied by their young daughters or daughters-in-law. In

three households water was carried only by young daughters while mothers were busy in other activities. Two women (50%) in the rich category said that their maid servants carried water for them. Table 7.3 shows that during the flood-free time no men carried water in Jolpur.

Table 7.3: Carriers of drinking water during flood-free time by household category

Carriers of water	Household category							
	D (9)	L (23)	Sfa (30)	Sfb (13)	Sfc (3)	Sfd (9)	Mdf (10)	Rf (4)
Self (67)	78	70	63	62	10 0	67	60	50
Self and daughter (19)	11	13	27	23	-	22	20	-
Daughter-in-law (10)	11	9	10	8	-	11	20	-
Daughter (3)	-	9	-	8	-	-	-	-
Husband (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Son (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Self and husband (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Servants (2)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	50
Others (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note: For key see Table 7.1.

### Summary

Collecting water was exclusively a woman's chore in Jolpur and they had to do it at any time of the day and of the year in any conditions. Under no circumstances would men carry water because of the strong cultural connections between women and water carrying. Consequently it was only women who had the knowledge of the location and quality of water and how to use it.

Whereas better-off women had their own tube-wells poor women had no tube-well of their own and had to go further in order to collect drinking water.

### **Women and preparation of food**

In Jolpur, a woman's domestic work takes ten to fifteen hours per day. She is the first to get up with the call of *fazar* prayer and is the last to go to bed. Before preparing breakfast women will sweep the courtyard. It is always women's responsibility to decide what food will be cooked each day, how much rice will be taken from the store and how it will be served to household members. Men shop daily, weekly or monthly according to need but they ask women what to buy. Sometimes men tell women what they (men) would like to eat on a particular day. Cooking needs adequate water which is carried by women. Fuel must be stored in advance. Some poor women store fuel the day before for the next morning's cooking. The grinding of spices and processing of inedible paddy must be done before the actual cooking.

Rural women sometimes share the processing of food. In Jolpur, until recently, women husked paddy by *dheki* (foot operated hammer). Two women could husk approximately 10kg of paddy in 2-3 hours. This was a heavy and exhausting job and women drew upon other women or young girls to do this work. Some poor women worked for others husking rice by *dheki*. With the establishment of two rice mills, a majority (83%) of the villagers husked rice at the mills but the poor thereby lost a regular source of income from husking for better-off households<sup>8</sup>. Only the very poor who did not have enough money to use a mill used a *dheki* (18%), often using a neighbour's. However, 47% of women (in different categories) reported husking paddy by *dheki* on special occasions to make *pitha* (cake made of husked rice). To them, *pitha* was considered tasty and properly made when husked by *dheki*.

---

8. Findings of a study (BARD, 1988:178-179) documented that though 66.7% of larger farms own their own *dheki* only 37.5% of them husk rice by *dheki*; on the other hand only 14% of the landless and 36% of the small ('marginal') farms own a *dheki* but 75% of landless and 78.8% of the small farms husk paddy by *dheki* probably using the neighbours' *dheki*.

Most of the women in Jolpur did this work in their 'leisure' time. Women ground wheat or pulses in a *jata* (grind-stone) which was heavy work for most women.

Women had very little leisure time. After feeding their family members and doing other necessary daily activities, a woman would either husk paddy, sew *katha* (quilt made from used saris), make *sika* (Jute made hanger for household objects) or *pakha* (a hand fan made from palm tree leave) or other similar objects.

Because of the high temperature and to avoid wastage women cooked at least twice a day (Hartmann and Boyce, 1983:86-87). Sometimes, rice was eaten twice or three times a day depending on household resources. Women tried to cook and serve a variety of foods to their household members. In the Bengali calendar *Boishakh* was the first month when vegetables, such as *sosha* (cucumber), *Jhinga* (cucurbitaceous fruit), *data* (an edible plant) were available and women made a variety of food items with these vegetables most of which they had grown. Women took much care in growing, weeding and watering their vegetables. Better off women planted bananas and other fruits. Green mangoes, shaken down by storms, were used by women to make *achar* (pickles) and *mourabba* (a dry sweet). During the second month, *Joishtho*, *kathal* (Jackfruit) and *aam* (mango) mature. Women said that they served *kathal* in many ways: when it was green women cooked it with spices. When it was ripe a whole family was fed with one *kathal*. Its seeds were dried and stored. Sometimes the seeds were soaked in water, finely chopped, fried and eaten. In the third month, *Asharh*, the rains began and towards the end of this month flood water began to accumulate and the problems which form the central concern of this study began to be felt. In this month women's activities were limited due to *borsha*. However, women were busy with handicraft making as well as other normal activities inside the household compound. In the *Srabon* month *aus* paddy was brought in and women were busy with processing it. This is also the time for jute stripping. In fact, between July and September the jute plant was gradually cut and all women

except the rich engaged in stripping jute. In the next month, *Bhadro* women dried jute as well as stripping the last harvested bundles and making them ready for sale. *Pitha* was most often made with ripe *tal* (palm) in this month and it was also often called *pitha* month. Women made *pitha* depending upon their socio-economic resources. Much of the jute is stripped or sold by *Ashshin*, the next month. In this month women cleaned their houses after the rains and dried damp food storage places, taking special care with the storing of rice and other foods.

In *Kartik* women grew different vegetables: *lau* (gourds), *mula* (radish), *salgom* (turnip) and *badha copi* (cabbage). In *Agrahayon* they were very busy with *amon* paddy work and *Poush* month was for rice - different kinds of *pitha* were made with rice, palm, date, mangoes and coconut. *Chira* and *muri* (puffed rice) were made by women in this month. *Gurh* (molasses) with date palm and sugarcane juice were also made and sometimes sold in this month.

In the month of *Magh gurh* was made and stored and used to sweeten puffed rice or in *payesh* (rice pudding) or *pitha* making. *Falgun* was a dry month when women planted vegetables such as *sim* (beans), *lau* (gourds), *begoon* (brinjal) and *sosha* (cucumber). In *Choitro*, the last dry hot month, women were again busy with vegetable and tree planting<sup>9</sup>.

However, women's activities varied according to household category. Although most had a very busy life not all were busy with their household labours, neither did all women take part in all the activities in each month. Destitute or landless women were not able to make *pitha* in *bhadro* month with their own *aus* rice as landed women did. However, these women usually helped better-off women to prepare special foods and their family members' to taste some of those foods.

---

9. Women do many other activities throughout the year which have not been mentioned here. For details on women's daily and annual activities refer to Sattar (1975:46-65)

## Sources and types of food prepared by women during flood-free times in Jolpur

During the flood-free times different households obtained food from differing sources. Women in better-off households reported that they knew where their food was coming from, whereas poor women faced uncertainty, especially during the lean seasons. All rich women reported obtaining food from the market as well as from their own land, while the destitute depended entirely on the market for food.

All women in the destitute and landless households reported that they had to buy food from the market and none of them obtained food from their own household land. Women in 57 households reported that they got principal crops from their own land. Many of these households also depended on the market. Whereas the better-off bought meat, fish or other 'luxury' foods from the market, the poor often had to obtain their basic food there. Twelve percent of women reported that they ate food from their own stores especially during the lean seasons. Rich women always had sufficient food for family consumption throughout the year, they were able to store food for lean seasons. On the other hand, women in the small farmer categories reported that they did not produce enough food for family consumption throughout the year and were unable to save for the lean seasons. For this reason they depended on the market most of the time.

Most women in the poorer categories said they stored a *mushtichaal* (handful of rice) from each cooking to save for periods of shortage. However, women in the destitute category depended on "*dine ani, dine khai*" (bring daily, eat daily) method, not having the capacity to keep a *mushtichaal*. Whatever they earned they spent on food. Poorer women (mostly in the destitute and landless categories) who worked for better-off women obtained food in payment. For such women these sources of family food were the norm. Some women did not get any wage except food in return for their labour throughout a normal year. Their children mainly depended on the food

their mothers' had obtained in exchange for labour. When there were no men, or the men became unemployed in the lean seasons, food in exchange for this work was a significant contribution to the family diet.

When asked what types of food they cooked and served to their household members when there was no severe flood women in all categories reported that rice was the most commonly cooked food, but the frequency of its preparation varied according to their socio-economic category. Table 7.4 shows the types and frequencies of food served by women to the members of their family. This does not necessarily mean that they also ate that same food allocation within households (see below). However, most (75%) said that during flood-free times they tried to serve three rice meals a day. Twenty three percent of women reported that in flood-free times they could afford to serve rice twice daily and a total of only 3% (11% of the destitute and 9% of the landless category) only once a day. There was variation among women in different categories in the frequency of cooking: many in poorer categories cooked once or twice a day and served these foods at three main meals, women in better-off categories cooked three times a day. Women in the better-off categories usually cooked rice three times a day, sometimes twice or once a day depending upon need. Many women in the landed category prepared bread (*ruti*) only occasionally, although they grew wheat.

Forty three percent of women reported that they served vegetables three times a day. This is a common food for most women which they served at least once or twice a day (33%). However, 19% of poor women (33% in the destitute, 26% in the landless, 27% in the small farmer 'a' and 15% in the small farmer 'b' category) cooked and served vegetables once in three to four days. Women often borrowed vegetables from other women. It was common to distribute vegetables one had grown among neighbours, even though they had been planted to be sold. Women said that they distributed *lau doga* (the tender upper end of the bottle-gourd plant), pumpkin leaves and other things. Vegetables were also exchanged. Women gave *kumra* (pumpkin) or *begun* in exchange for someone else's *lau* or *morich* (chillies). Women reported that

because vegetables cost less than meat or fish they could afford to buy them from the market when necessary.

In general, *bhat* (rice) and *dal* were the main items which were served three times a day. Thirty four percent of women served *dal* twice a day, 15% once a day and 8% occasionally (once every 3-4 days or less). In the destitute, landless and small farmer categories, most women served *dal* twice a day. Eight women who served *dal* only once a week belonged to the poorer categories (33% destitute, 13% landless and 10% in the small farmer 'a' category). A majority (80%) in the middle farmer and all rich women reported serving *dal* three times a day.

Only 17% of women reported that they served fish three times a day. Many women cooked fish once every 3-4 days (48%) or once a week (3%). Poor women, especially women in destitute households, reported that they cooked fish only occasionally. Even if family members caught fish, they preferred to sell them in the market. However, 9% of women in the landless category said they tried to serve fish twice a day and 4% once a day. In fact, the principal livelihood of some members of these households was fishing. Women in the poorer categories stated that during the monsoon their children caught fish in small ponds in the village and then they cooked fish more often. Whereas only 50% of the middle farmer women reported serving fish three times a day, women in the four rich households served fish three times a day. Small farmer women said that they bought fish from the market when available. Only rich and some middle farmer women reported buying big fish from the market.

Bread, or *ruti*, was very uncommon among all categories. Only one landless woman said that they had to depend on wheat flour most of the year even though they did not like it. However, other women (19%) said that they prepared *ruti* occasionally. Some women said that even when they could not afford rice, they did not like to eat *ruti*. One woman said, "You can't eat *ruti*

**Table 7.4: Frequency of types of food served by women during flood-free times by household category**

Types of Food and Frequency	Household Category							
	D (9)	L (23)	Sfa (30)	Sfb (13)	Sfc (3)	Sfd (9)	Mdf (10)	Rf (4)
<b>Rice</b>								
3 times	44	39	80	92	100	100	100	100
Twice	44	52	20	8	-	-	-	-
Once	11	9	-	-	-	-	-	-
Once in 3-4 days	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Once a week	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Pulse (<i>dal</i>)</b>								
3 times	11	44	30	38	67	77	80	100
Twice	44	39	37	38	33	22	20	-
Once	11	37	20	15	-	-	-	-
Once in 3-4 days	33	38	10	-	-	-	-	-
Once a week	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Fish</b>								
3 times	-	-	7	8	33	44	50	100
Twice	-	9	17	31	33	33	20	-
Once	88	4	3	-	33	11	30	-
Once in 3-4 days	-	61	57	61	-	11	-	-
Once a week	-	4	7	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Vegetable</b>								
3 times	11	17	40	54	67	67	70	100
Twice	44	43	27	31	33	33	30	-
Once	11	13	7	-	-	-	-	-
Once in 3-4 days	33	26	27	15	-	-	-	-
Once a week	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Bread (<i>ruti</i>)</b>								
3 times	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Twice	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Once	-	4	10	8	-	11	10	-
Once in 3-4 days	11	17	23	8	-	33	10	50
Once a week	88	52	33	23	33	11	10	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note: For key see Table 7.1.

with salt or chilli only, but rice can be eaten like that". Other women reported that if they cooked rice once a day it could be eaten at least twice that day and thus less fuel was consumed, but *ruti* took a long time to make and fry and men and children did not like to eat it cold. A majority of women said that without rice neither their children, their husbands nor themselves would be satisfied. However, poor women (88% in the destitute and 52% in the landless category) said that they had to prepare *ruti* once a week to supplement rice. In other categories, except the rich, *ruti* was also made once a week. Two women in the rich category said that they made it occasionally.

Meat was cooked infrequently and was a luxury in Jolpur where only the rich could afford it. However, most women thought no women in Jolpur cooked meat once a week yet twenty four percent of women in different categories reported that in general they cooked meat once a week. Poor women depended on their own poultry for their families' meat consumption. No women in the destitute category could afford meat and only one woman in the landless category reported occasionally cooking meat. Other women reported cooking meat only during festivals. Women in better-off categories said that they cooked meat once or twice a month.

Women named other kinds of food which they prepared. These also varied according to their socio-economic category. Better-off women reported *polau* (fried rice with ghee- a delicious food which is a status symbol for better-off households) *pitha*, and other sweet items. Poor women, on the other hand, named rice with chilli only, *dhapra* or *chapra* (a substitute of *ruti* made of liquid flour which requires less flour than *ruti*), rice-gruel and different edible plants which were considered as lean food. For both groups, destitute and landless these foods were occasional items.

## **Summary**

Women played a crucial role in producing family food and only women prepared the family meals (see previous Chapter). Men did the shopping but it

was women who had the responsibility for deciding what to buy as well as what and when to cook it. Women grew vegetables, creepers and fruits throughout the year and exchanged vegetables with each other. When men in the poorer categories had no income and did not support their families women's efforts were the main source of family food. This became clear when women in the poorer categories accepted food in return for their labour or helped better-off women in preparing better food from which they got a share or adjusted their cooking patterns.

There were differences in the types of food available and the frequency of cooking and serving by different categories. Although rice was the most common food cooked and served by women, poor women could not afford rice as often as better-off women could. There were also variations in sources of food between women in poorer and better-off households. Whereas women in better-off categories reported that their main meals came from their land, destitute and landless categories, having no land, had to depend on the market or their own initiative. Land possessed by small farmer categories was also not sufficient to produce sufficient food crops to support their families. These women tried to save a handful of rice to be used in lean seasons.

#### **Food allocation within the household**

There are considerable differences in the frequency of food consumption and the amount of, and quality of, food consumed according to socio-economic category and gender in rural Bangladesh. Married women in Jolpur agreed that they served food first to their husbands, then to their children and finally they ate themselves. According to women, they ate less because their work was not as heavy as their husbands'. When women were asked about the frequency of food served to their household members, some of them simply laughed and said that it was normal for men to get better and larger amounts of food. If their husbands' brought big fish from the market, the fish heads would be served to them.

Of the 101 respondents 84 were married among whom 67 lived with their husbands. The husbands of another seventeen women worked outside Jolpur and came home only occasionally. These women are referred to as *de-facto* heads of households and they performed both men's and women's responsibilities in order to run their families. However, in this section data on frequency of food consumption will be presented only for those married women whose husbands stayed in Jolpur (Table 7.5).

Many women in Jolpur ate three times a day when there was no flood or food crisis. This varied considerably according to household category and gender. Generally the quality of food was very low for most people. Fifty seven percent of women in the destitute category ate three times per day, compared with 86% of men. In the same category 43% of women ate twice daily and 14% served food twice daily to their husbands. In the landless category 91% of husbands ate food three times daily compared with 64% of their wives. Twenty seven percent of women in this category ate twice daily whereas only ten percent of them served food twice daily to their husbands. No men ate only once a day but nine percent of women did so. One woman in the landless category said that she ate less than any of her household's members and was the only one who often missed meals at night if she had rice for lunch.

In the small farmer 'a' category 89% of wives ate three times a day and 11% twice whereas 100% of men in this category ate three times a day. Some women in this category said that their husbands were wage labourers or rickshaw pullers which was heavy work. They always tried to give their husbands proper food whenever they were hungry. Women said that they did not need as much food as men because in the flood-free times they generally stayed and worked at home. Most of the men who worked in Jolpur or nearby villages as day labourers, rickshaw pullers or wage workers returned home whenever they needed a break or when they did not have work. One woman said, "My husband is a van-puller and I always serve a larger portion of food to him, than to my son. My daughter and I eat last and less".

In the small farmer 'b' category all men and women could afford to eat three times a day, which was also true for the small farmers 'c' and 'd', middle and rich farmer categories. However, some women in the small farmer ('b', 'c' and 'd') category said that even when there was sufficient food for them to eat three times a day they did not do so, consequently they rarely felt satisfied. These women saved some food for their husbands, who might suddenly come home in the middle of the day and ask for food. Some women said that they served rice as the main meal more than three times a day to their husbands if they could afford it.

**Table 7.5: Frequency of food consumption by women and men during flood-free time by household category**

Frequency and gender	Household category							
	D (7)	L (11)	Sfa (19)	Sfb (7)	Sfc (2)	Sfd (8)	Mdf (9)	Rf (4)
<b>3 times</b>								
Women (58)	57	64	89	100	100	100	100	100
Men (65)	86	91	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Twice</b>								
Women (8)	43	27	11	-	-	-	-	-
Men (2)	14	9	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Once</b>								
Women (1)	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	-
Men (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=67

Note: For key see Table 7.1.

The amount of food they consumed even three times a day was not comparable to their husbands' consumption. This was partly because they always ate what was left in the pot after their husbands and children had eaten their fill. Women who worked as agricultural labourers for cash or kind did not

have enough time to eat, even if there was food available. During the period when demand for women's agricultural labour was high, such as at jute stripping time, they had to cook before sunrise and serve food to their husbands and children. They ate last and had to work till evening. Almost all women in Jolpur except rich women engaged in jute stripping. Women said that even in this busy period they made sure their husbands got proper food. Sometimes women carried food for their husbands with them or men came home and took whatever their wives had prepared in the morning and saved for their husbands lunch. Women tried to be there when their husbands were at home. If there were grown up children, they would carry food in *khora* (clay-made plate) or tin-plates tied up in a *gamcha* (thin towel) by women, to their fathers wherever they were.

As the majority of poor women contributed to building their houses and getting fuel from jute stripping and threshing of *robi* crops, the harvesting seasons had greater importance for the poor. Most often the compounds of the better-off households were used as places to thresh crops, to strip jute because the land where jute was grown was usually under water in the rainy season and women had to strip it on higher ground. Poor women worked on the village footpaths and common high ground in the jute harvesting season. The wages for poor women were related to the number of jute bundles stripped and that was why they tried to strip as many as they could (see Chapter 6). For this reason they missed the main meal of the day. Women who worked nearby their households reported that they also worked hard to complete the bunches of jute which they had got from the fields and they chewed betel-nut and betel leaf to avoid hunger. Women said that no husbands worked such long hours without basic food.

Women in the *de-facto* households said that the frequency and type of food cooked when their husbands were at home were different from when they were absent. One landless woman said that she cooked three times a day when her husband and sons came home from town. When they were absent she served *chal bhaja* or crispy rice (rice fried without boiling it) once or twice to

her two daughters while she herself ate once. One woman said that her husband worked in town and came home every two months. When he was at home she served him good food and cooked three times a day but when he was absent she ate rice for two months with only chilli and salt.

### **Summary**

The amount and quality of food and number of meals taken per day also differed from one socio-economic category to another. Women in the poorer categories did not have the resources to cook, serve or eat the same types or amounts of food as better-off women did. Women in the destitute, landless and small farmer 'a' categories could not afford to eat three rice meals a day like better-off women but some served three rice meals to their husbands. Women and men in other categories ate three times a day. Again, a woman's three meals a day in any household category were not comparable to her husbands' three meals.

### **Women and common village resources**

In Jolpur resources over which no rights of ownership had been established were considered as *ejmali sompotti* or *ES* (property which belongs to all the villagers), common or public property. These resources included food, fuel, fodder, manure, medicinal herbs, water, fibre, small timber and house building materials<sup>10</sup>.

During the dry seasons, village common trees, ponds, small canals and village common land served various purposes. While men usually showed interest in the commercial benefits of the common land, such as the collection of free timber or bamboo for sale, women concentrated on getting food, fuel, fodder or medicinal herbs. Women were usually more successful than men because the products of the village common land in Jolpur were not enough to

---

10. Research on *ejmali sompotti* benefit is scant in Bangladesh. For discussion of this benefit in India (which is called by some researchers 'Common Property Resources') see Jodha, 1986:1169-1181; Agarwal, 1991:352 and Chen, 1991:118-123.

be used for commercial purposes. Due to an increase in population, forest products were depleted and a collective decision was made to conserve those resources. The densely settled houses prevented anyone from cutting common trees and bamboo without common knowledge. Village members had the authority to punish anyone who cut common trees for commercial purposes. However, the collection of food, leaves, twigs or dry branches was not restricted and women could collect these whenever they were available. Poor women said that these items were very important to sustain life.

Poor women collected various items of food from village common land and were knowledgeable about wild plants. During the dry season or flood free time, the beds of small ponds and canals became dry and villagers, especially poor women, used these for vegetable gardening. Bamboo or branches were used to fence off these common lands. These were also collected from *ejmali sompotti* areas<sup>11</sup>. Village common ponds were used for irrigation and for the collection of aquatic plants, including water hyacinth, which were used as fertilizer and fodder and to make barriers around houses, water lily and *kolmi shuk* (leaves of edible aquatic plant). These were mainly collected by women.

As in many other villages in Bangladesh poor women and children in Jolpur collected dry leaves and twigs from beneath village common trees or in state forests. Because of the price of firewood the poor could not afford to buy it. The collection and storage of firewood was considered women's work. Usually, the women swept the leaves with a broom and the children helped by putting them in a sack (*sala*). Cow-dung, which was dropped on village common land, was also collected by women to use as fuel and for the plastering of courtyards and house floors.

Poor women said that they grazed animals on common land because they did not own pasture land. In certain circumstances people had free access to private resources. Poor women hired livestock from middle or rich farm households. Better-off women sometimes allowed poorer women to graze their

---

11. People make fences to avoid damage to vegetables by cows, goats or by theft.

animals on their land. Some poor women and men gained fodder or free access for grazing to the harvested fields of the better-off. This arrangement depended on the relationship between the women and men in those households.

Locally available and commonly used medicinal plants and herbs play an important role in primary health care in rural Bangladesh. Poor women mentioned a number of plants and local herbs which they collected from *ejmali sompotti* and used for the curing of disease<sup>12</sup>. Medicinal herbs were mainly collected by poor women and were important in their everyday lives. Poor women said that the income of the members of their households were not sufficient to purchase modern treatment and that was why they did not ask men to call a doctor. Women in the better-off category also depended on such herbal medicine though not to the same degree as poor women. Better-off women did not collect these herbs from forests or common land themselves but asked poor women to supply them when needed. These women said that men in their households called a doctor or took a sick family member to hospital if necessary.

- 
12. Angel's trumpet (*datura artorea*) and *chirata* were used to help calm intestinal cramps and stomach-ache. Papaw, *horitoki* and *bohera* was used to get rid of intestinal worms and also for digestion. Cactus juice was used to stop bleeding, bark (*sal*) of the deodar (*debdaru*) tree was used to cure infections. The leaves and or fruits (and often stems) of *chirata*, *bet*, *ashath*, *horitoki* and *bohera* tree were used to get relief from different diseases related to stomach. The leaves of the nim tree served various purposes. Women reported that they ground nim leaves and poured the juice on the body of people suffering from chicken-pox or skin disease which helped to heal them and stop irritation. After recovery from chicken-pox, nim leaves would be boiled and patients would bathe themselves or herself in the water. Women said that this practice would help to heal, and also remove, the pox-spots from the patients' bodies. Some women made globule or tablets from boiled or fried nim leaves to serve as oral medicine. Women named many other medicinal herbs, such as aloe vera, fig, *bet* or cane plant, *ashath*, *madar* and the peepul tree, which they did not grow on their homestead land but collected from village common forests. At the time of child birth women used certain roots from the forest. These are tied to the mother's thighs during her labour. The popular belief is that this helps women to give birth without much trouble. Usually midwives (*dai*) depend on such *koviraji* trees when attending births (for detailed discussion on the role of midwives or *dai* refer to Blanchet, 1984:128-149).

In Jolpur women named a flower (*Maryam*) which they collected from common land and soaked in water when women were in labour. If the flower blossomed quickly they considered the pain to be real.

## Summary

The collection of food, fuel, fodder and medicinal herbs from village common land, ponds and forests was gender-assigned work for women. Most women knew different forest trees from which they could collect items for the benefit of their households. Men, on the other hand, were interested in deriving commercial benefit from village common land or forests or both, which was very restricted in Jolpur.

The extent to which women made use of the resources found on the village common land was influenced by socio-economic position and the degree of adherence to *parda*. Due to the stronger economies and higher status of their households and strict practice of *parda* women in the better-off categories did not collect products from the village common land. In comparison poor women had only limited stores and fewer resources and were unable to buy fuel from market. They collected leaves, branches, twigs and cow dung from the village common land. Through their knowledge women were able to collect medicinal herbs and provide treatment for the sick, thus helping men to save money otherwise spent on modern medicine.

## Women and social networks

Women in Jolpur maintained a strong relationship with kin and non-kin neighbours (discussed earlier in Chapter Five). They exchanged goods, food and services. For example, when a woman produced vegetables or fruit in her garden, the first produce was shared among relatives and neighbours. Women exchanged warm curry with each other. When visiting outside Jolpur some women borrowed saris or *borkha* from neighbours. They borrowed ornaments, cooking pots, plates and other kitchen utensils, spices and many other things from each other. Women who could not hire labour, depended on neighbouring women to husk paddy, stitch *katha* or to prepare special food items, such as *pitha*. Women in better-off households often asked poor women to work for them during the *pitha* month or just before their married daughters and sons-in-

law visited them<sup>13</sup>. This is called *naior*, which is very significant for a young bride. For helping neighbouring women to prepare especially nice food, poor women received food in exchange. This was shared with the children for whom poor women were unable to prepare good food from their own resources. Poor women's relationships with better-off women often helped their husbands' to get jobs.

Women borrowed small things from their neighbours. One woman often asked others to look after the grain, which she had spread in the courtyard to dry, while she was busy with cooking or feeding her children. Women said that they often quarrelled with each other on minor issues, such as childrens' fights, but they usually forgot these quickly, however, and returned to normal relationships.

Some women reported that during a normal or flood-free year, the dependence on neighbours was greater than the relationship with relatives. Poor women reported that rich *goshthi* members did not always help them economically because of the poor women's inability to pay back loans on time and also because the *goshthi* or patron-client relationships existed more for agricultural cultivation and therefore women without men did not get much support from those networks.

A majority of women in Jolpur came from neighbouring villages and they maintained strong links with their birth-places. Married daughters and their husbands and children received gifts on special occasions from her parents. It was expected that the father or brother of a bride would give money or gifts to her or to her children when they visited them. Poor women reported that their parents, who were also poor, tried to send at least some *kacher churi* (glass bangles) or *fita* (hair ribbons) on special occasions such as *Eid*.

---

13. It is common for a mother-in-law to cook delicious food for sons-in-law. Even a poor mother-in-law tries to serve chicken curry. These women often depend on social network relationships. Women reported that if they did not serve good food to their sons-in-law, their daughters would be treated badly by their in-laws.

Some women said that they were sometimes sent to their parents' houses by their husbands to seek help, especially to obtain money. Some were asked to stay with their parents because their husbands were not able to support them<sup>14</sup>. Women said that whatever their financial situations were, their parents would always try to help them.

### **Summary**

Relationships with neighbours and parental kin helped poorer women to meet the immediate needs of their households. These relationships were bound up with women's gender-assigned role and *parda* which confined women to particular activities such as providing food or domestic services to better-off women. Women in better-off categories were also dependent on network relationships with poorer women for performing their domestic tasks. However, they did not need to depend on such relationships for their survival as poorer women did. Poor women's relationships with better-off neighbouring women often helped poor men in their households to get work.

### **Summary and conclusion**

The situation of women in the study village was little different from the overall condition of women in rural Bangladesh (discussed in Chapter 3). The strong gender division of labour assigned women to activities different from those of men and the institution of *parda* played an important role in the division of labour. The position of women and their access to resources was weaker than that of men but nevertheless they played crucial roles for their households' sustenance: they used their assets, provided family food and sacrificed their meals for their husbands and children; did their gender-assigned activities such as carrying water, drew upon village common resources and maintained social relationships. Poorer women worked hard for their households' sustenance, often shouldering men's economic responsibilities (for women's income-earning

---

14. Chen's (1983:197) case study documented the life of a poor woman who was asked by her husband to get money from her poor parents, probably to use as bribe to get a job.

activities see Chapter 6). These contributions became much more significant when there was a crises such as during the floods (which will be discussed in Part IV).

There was a large gap between the condition of women in the poorer and better-off categories in Jolpur. Women in the better-off categories were not as burdened as poorer women were because of their households' gender resources. Also these women were more likely to be in *parda* and of higher status. On the other hand, although poor women's participation in different activities was for their households' survival, they remained of low status.

## **PART IV**

### **The flood-period**

Against the normality of non-flood periods this Part examines how women in different categories perceived floods and the coping strategies they adopted to preserve their households and themselves. Case studies of nine particular women are also given in detail in this Part to reinforce the interactive nature of the many problems they faced and to try to ensure that the narration of these were maintained in context of the situation of women during floods.



## Chapter Eight

### Everyday life in Jolpur during the flood period

In describing women's perception of floods at the beginning of this Part of the study I am not making the idealistic assumption that perceptions are the motivating factors. Women's perceptions of floods are influenced by years of practical experiences of floods only some of which are described below. The issues as to the extent to which, and the nature of, their influence on the practical action taken by women to ameliorate the effects of floods in their lives will be dealt with below.

#### Women's perception of disaster (*durjog*)

In Bengali natural disasters are referred to as *prakritic durjog*. People used the word *durjog* (*kharap somoy/kothin somoy/bipoder somoy/dushsomoy*) to refer to a very bad or dangerous period when all kinds of unpredictable things may happen. Women in Jolpur thought of a disaster as involving *bipoder somoy* or hard times involving unpredictable and uncontrollable events. The 1988 flood was reported by almost all women as the most destructive flood they had experienced.

Women's perceptions of *borsha* and *bonna* varied according to their socio-economic background and age. Table 8.1 shows that women thought of *borsha* as a very important but normal phenomenon, whereas they thought of *bonna* as a bad event. Thirty four percent of women explained *borsha* as a normal event and

*bonna* as an abnormal rise of water. The majority of the women who gave the above explanations of the two types of floods belonged to poorer categories (33% in the destitute, 44% in the landless, 40% in the small farmer 'a', 31% in the small farmer 'b', 33% in the small farmer 'c', 33% in the small farmer 'd' categories). Only 10% of women in the middle farmer and none in the rich categories perceived normal and abnormal floods in this way. This might have been because for them the level of water was not so crucial as for poor women.

**Table 8.1: Women's definitions of *borsha* and *bonna* by household category**

Definition and Frequency	Household Category							
	D (9)	L (23)	Sfa (30)	Sfb (13)	Sfc (3)	Sfd (9)	Mdf (10)	Rf (4)
<b>BS: normal monsoon water</b> <b>BN: abnormal rise of water (34)</b>	33	44	40	31	33	33	10	-
<b>BS: people benefit</b> <b>BN: people lose (24)</b>	-	22	17	15	33	33	50	75
<b>BS: people stayed at their houses</b> <b>BN: people left their houses (19)</b>	33	26	30	8	-	-	-	-
<b>BS: flood water surrounded the courtyards</b> <b>BN: flood water entered the houses (14)</b>	11	4	13	31	33	22	10	-
<b>Others (10)</b>	22	4	-	15	-	11	30	25

Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note: i) D=Destitute, L=Landless, Sfa=Small farmer 'a', Sfb=Small farmer 'b', Sfc=Small farmer 'c', Sfd=Small farmer 'd', Mdf=Middle farmer and Rf=Rich farmer. These codes will be used in tables 8.2 to 8.7. ii) BS=*borsha* or normal floods and BN=*bonna* or severe floods.

Twenty four percent of women defined *borsha* as benefiting people and *bonna* as disadvantaging them. Most of these women belonged to better-off categories (50% in the middle farmer and 75% in the rich farmer categories). This was because these women belonged to those households which benefitted a lot from agricultural land during the normal floods but lost that benefit during abnormal floods. Some of these women said that men in their households did not do other kinds of work as poor men did, and they had to depend on their stores, savings and other property. Some reported losing stored crops through flood water. Women in the destitute and most of the landless categories did not give such explanations because they did not have cultivable land from which they would benefit as better-off women did. However, 22% of women in the landless, 16% in the small farmer 'a', 15% in the small farmer 'b', 33% in the small farmer 'c' and 33% in the small farmer 'd' also gave the above explanations of normal and abnormal floods. These women reported that they successfully adjusted to normal floods and benefitted from them, while the abnormal floods pushed them beyond their ability to cope, with resulting hardship. These women evaluated flood as destructive of crops and land because they were directly or indirectly involved with land, either as members of landed households or as agricultural labourers. Women in the small farmer categories reported that their agricultural land was flooded before they were able to harvest their crops. Their lands were low lying and flooded early. Women in the better-off categories said that they had stores to use during floods but that seeing flood water rising day by day they were worried about the next planting.

Nineteen percent of women in the lower socio-economic categories (33% in the destitute, 26% in the landless, 30% in the small farmer 'a' and 8% in the small farmer 'b') who were forced to leave their houses and suffered more than others when making platforms, explained *borsha* as when people could stay in their houses and *bonna* when people had to take shelter at a *macha*. Most of these women's houses and kitchens were completely destroyed by flood water (see below). No women in other categories perceived floods in such a way.

Fourteen percent of women said that if the flood water surrounded their households but remained under the courtyard they called it *borsha*. When floodwater entered the household premises, however, they call it *bonna*. Most of these women belonged to poorer categories. No women in the rich categories gave this explanation because their houses were built on high plinths and during *borsha* flood water did not enter their courtyards.

Ten percent of women gave other descriptions such as, *borsha* was when women could maintain their *parda* and *bonna* meant women had to be *beparda* (exposed); *borsha* meant two metres depth and *bonna* meant four metres; *borsha* meant water in the fields and *bonna* meant the homestead under water; during *borsha* people could grow jute and paddy but during *bonna* the land was under water.

Some women mentioned floods as a cause of the destruction of livestock. For poor women, livestock was the most valuable asset for which they took risks during floods (discussed earlier). They reported being very dependent on livestock. Some women thought that losing livestock was much more painful than the destruction of their houses. They mentioned that they could re-build their houses again but raising livestock was not so easy. It represented long term damage to their income. Women's perceptions of floods were also related to the assets they lost during floods or the sickness their household members suffered from and to many other problems they faced.

From the description of normal and abnormal floods given by women the following picture emerged: Normal floods occurred when water rose gradually with rainfall and women, men and children faced no problems when moving about. There was no severe shortage of food, no problems in cooking, carrying water, maintenance of *parda* and looking after livestock, no problems with toilets, no sickness, no shortage of fuel or fodder and women could perform their normal activities.

Abnormal floods occurred when water rose suddenly with abnormal rainfall, submerged houses and damaged crops. During *bonna* women's normal activities became much more difficult to perform. They could not maintain their 'normal' *parda*. They faced different types of problems in performing all household activities such as cooking, cleaning, carrying drinking water, taking care of children, looking after livestock and sanitation. They suffered from food shortages, diseases and transport problems. Men lost their work. Women reported that they had to build a separate *chula* (stove) for cooking. They faced fuel shortages and had to move from their houses with or without the men of their households.

It was very interesting that 27% of women attributed the causes of floods to 'Allah's will'. Such women perceived *borsha* as a gift from Allah and *bonna* as a punishment. Women said that Allah was very kind but because of people's continual sin He punished them by creating disaster. Twenty two percent of women gave a naturalistic explanation along with the divine. However, a considerable number of women (51%) gave only the natural explanation of *bonna* and *borsha*. Women perceived natural causes of floods as excessive rainfall, silt accumulation in river beds, unplanned development, the *Farakka* Barrage, road building that obstructed the normal water flow and other causes. Supernatural causes were perceived as the curse of Allah, defying Allah's order, Allah's will and other causes.

It was also interesting to notice that poor women were more likely to give natural explanations of causes of floods than better-off women. This may be because the poor suffered more than the better-off and they had to solve their problems themselves. Better-off women thought Allah was the master of their livelihood (*rujir malik Allah*) and thanked Allah for their households/husbands' strong economic condition.

However, it was noticed that there was a lack of convention between derived explanations and women's coping strategies. In other words, whether women explained the causes of *borsha* or *bonna* in natural or supernatural ways, all had made some sort of preparations to cope with floods (which are discussed below).

To face the crises of flood or *bonna* they did not depend only on Allah's will: they planned positive responses to deal with it.

### Summary

Natural disasters were unpredictable and an uncontrollable event. Two types of flood in Bangladesh, *borsha* or normal flood and *bonna* or abnormal flood were defined by women differently. Women perceived *borsha* as a necessary phenomenon to assist agricultural production and *bonna* as an unexpected and damaging event.

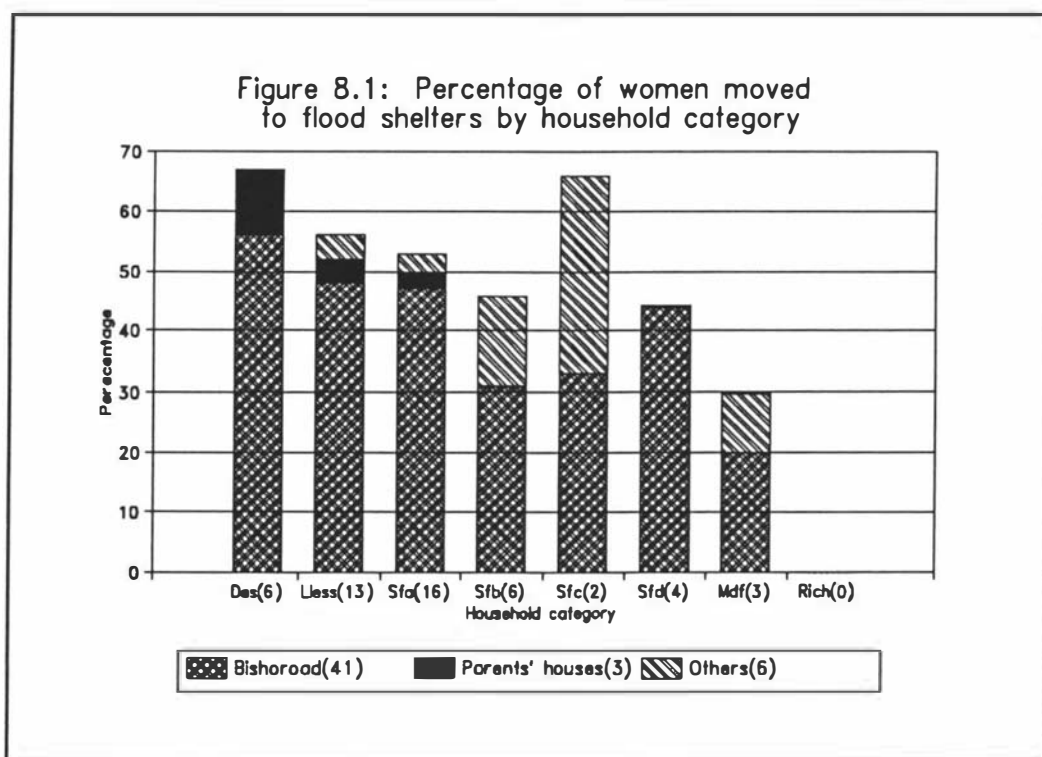
Women's perception of the two kinds of flood varied depending on the sorts of problems they faced, this being partly determined by the socio-economic background of their households. For example, some women in the lower socio-economic categories defined floods in relation to the periods they spent at home or living on platforms. No women in the better-off categories gave such definitions. Whereas women in the poorer categories perceived levels of water as significant characteristics of floods, for women in better-off categories floods were synonymous with agricultural benefit and loss. This may have been because poor women suffered more than the better-off did from the rise of water levels. The better-off benefited greatly from agriculture during normal floods.

It was evident that women's perception of the two kinds of floods were also based on their gender-related activities and cultural norms such as those associated with *parda*. However, for many women abnormal floods were synonymous with damage to their homes.

Women explained the causes of abnormal floods or *bonna* in terms of both natural and divine phenomena. These explanations were also related to their socio-cultural position. But no matter how women perceived floods, or whatever explanations they provided, all women had some sort of gender-assigned strategies to cope with floods according to their socio-economic background which we will see in the following chapters.

## Problems experienced by women

During floods women faced different kinds of problems. Poor women suffered from lack of food, clothing and shelter. Unemployed men often sat idle or moved elsewhere, leaving their household members behind. It was women, the household-based workers, who took responsibility for protecting their houses, children and other members of the family, livestock and other belongings. Traditional gender specific work such as carrying water, cooking, caring for children and animals, became so difficult for women during flood conditions that their lives were at risk. Especially while travelling during floods the sari was like a death trap for women. Often there was no alternative because there were no men around to help and even if there were they did not assist with women's work because of the powerful ideas of gendered division of labour. However, problems



Source: Field work, 1992

N=50

Note: Des=Destitute, Lless=Landless, Sfa=Small farmer 'a', Sfb=Small farmer 'b', Sfc=Small farmer 'c', Sfd=Small farmer 'd', Mdf=Middle farmer and Rich=Rich farmer. These codes will be used in figures 8.2 to 8.4.

were not the same for women in different socio-economic conditions. Although women in better-off households also lived in flood-prone areas, the structure of their houses or flood protection resources were better for them.

During floods women's gender assigned tasks, especially procuring food and cooking, providing drinking water, storing fuel and child care were such that they had to bear more of a physical burden of coping with floods than men did. Men's normal work or responsibilities, such as agricultural or most of the non-agricultural work outside the home, ceased during floods. Some women said that men sat idle at home because they could not perform their conventional tasks (for more see below). In the following I will first discuss the conditions faced by women at the flood refuges or flood shelters and then some general problems faced by all women.

#### **Problems faced by women in flood shelters and flood refuge<sup>1</sup>:**

Figure 8.1 shows that 50% of women moved elsewhere during floods. These women said that it was difficult to live in their houses because of high levels of flood water. Among these three women in the middle farmer category reported that they stayed for a few days on newly built platforms in their courtyards or in buses on Bishoroad during the day. Whereas women (46) in other categories said that they built platforms on Bishoroad, neighbours' or relatives' courtyards and stayed throughout almost all the floods. Three women in the destitute, landless and small farmer 'a' categories moved to their poor parents' houses in the neighbouring villages.

The six most frequently experienced problems faced by women who moved to the flood shelters or a flood refuge are presented in Table 8.2 and are described below in order of the degree to which they were experienced by women<sup>2</sup>.

- 
1. 'Flood refuge' is mostly used in the text because most of the platforms made by women and their families were uncovered.
  2. The first two problems (e.g. fuel and food crises) were faced by almost all women and have been discussed in different chapters.

It is women's responsibility to collect fuel, prepare and use it to meet the energy needs of household members (for more on fuel collection see below). In times of scarcity poor women have to depend on many alternative fuels, such as, cattle dung, crop residues, coconut husks, rice hulls, millet stalks or herbs (Dankelman and Davidson, 1988:68-70). During the 1988 flood women were very vulnerable to the shortage of fuel which led them to take considerable risks collecting it. Many women collected branches and combustible parts of damaged houses. Wood, branches or leaves were under water and there was no place to dry them. Some had to reduce the number of meals cooked per day to meet the shortage of fire wood. All women who moved onto the flood refuge suffered fuel shortage except one middle farmer woman. Two out of three middle farmer

**Table 8.2: Problems faced by women in flood shelters by household category**

Problems and Frequency	Household Category							
	D (6)	L (13)	Sfa (16)	Sfb (6)	Sfc (2)	Sfd (4)	Mdf (3)	Rf (0)
Fuel crises (49)	100	100	100	100	100	100	67	-
Food crises (42)	100	100	87	83	50	50	33	-
Polluted environments (25)	17	23	56	50	100	100	100	-
Insecurity (15)	17	232	31	50	-	50	33	-
Difficulties in making platforms (12)	50	35	25	-	-	-	-	-
Living in flood water (10)	33	23	19	25	-	25	-	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=50

Note: Flood shelters also include flood refuge.  
For key see Table 8.1.

women faced a fuel crisis. Some women said that they had rice and lentils in their stores but failed to cook for want of firewood. Women had to decide themselves how to cope with this helpless position.

Cooking and providing food was one of the main gender specific concerns of women. Cooking was difficult on the platforms due to shortage of space. It will be discussed in the following sections that women had to manage food in different ways to meet family consumption. They faced food shortages more than other members of their households.

Women who moved to the flood refuge included all in the destitute and landless categories; 87% of the women in the small farmer 'a' category; 83% of those in the small farmer 'b' category; 50% in each of the small farmer 'c' and 'd' categories and 33% in the middle farmer category. All of these women faced food crises at the flood refuges. Some women said that they had to cook standing in flood water; some prepared food on a raft or in a boat and some had to do it on the road side, by putting bricks under the stove. A common problem faced by most women was the lack of a portable stove.

Fifty percent of women (25) who lived in flood refuges reported that they had to live with dead animals, insects and stench. Women in the destitute and landless categories did not report suffering from the polluted environment as much as women in landed households did. This may be because the destitute and landless women had much bigger problems, such as hunger. Small farmer 'c', 'd' and middle farmer women, who lived in better conditions during flood free times, said that they had to live and suffer in very inconvenient situations in the flood shelters.

Thirty percent (15) of women reported feeling insecure at night. They were frightened of thieves, robbers and strangers. Women who did not have any adult men in their households faced even more insecurity. Some of these women had grown up daughters and providing security for them was a great concern for them as mothers.

Twenty four percent (12) of women had no building materials to make platforms. These women belonged to the lower socio-economic categories. They had to seek help from their relatives or friends or had to live in open places. Women who, because of *parda*, did not move to nearby high roads, took shelter on the roofs of their houses. Some women raised their beds by putting bricks under them or hung them from the rafters with ropes. Some women lived in boats tied to big trees. Some women did not live inside their houses for fear the house might be washed away. Other women, however, were forced to leave their homes and they faced difficulties making platforms on the flood refuge. These women had no other choice but to live under the open sky and bear the burden of shame by not maintaining *parda*. These women did not have the resources to make high platforms or, if they did, they had no means to cover them.

Twenty percent (10) of women who moved to different shelters reported that they were flooded again. These women said that they had to raise their platforms frequently which made their living even more problematic. They said that in order to raise platforms they had to carry all their belongings to a raft or a neighbouring platform and they had to wait in flood water. Destitute (33%) and landless (23%) women said that they did not have the resources to raise their platforms more than once or twice and they lived in the flood water. One woman from the small farmer 'a' category said that she moved to her parents house with her husband and children but within a few days her parents house was also flooded. Her brothers moved to a nearby market with her husband and children, leaving her behind in the flood water to maintain her *parda*.

### **Problems faced by all women**

The following problems were faced by all women regardless of their staying at home or at a flood refuge. Although these were not mentioned by all women but nevertheless their significance was often considerable for who did suffer them. The majority of women reported that they failed to maintain their *parda*, which they considered as one of their major flood time problems, especially in the flood shelters (for more see below). Women felt more vulnerable when collecting food,

fuel and water, during child birth, when members of their households were sick, if they were bereaved or when they performed their natural functions. Women were anxious about their small children and afraid of snakes and insects. They faced difficulties when trying to protect household belongings. Women lost many of their assets through flood water or having to dispose of their assets in order to reduce their vulnerability (see below).

No toilet facilities were usually constructed in the flood shelter. Regardless of the socio-economic background women faced problems in performing their natural functions due to the high level of flood water. In fact, no household in Jolpur had a sanitary toilet and only two rich households had concrete (*pucca*) toilets. However, with the rise of flood water all of those toilets were inundated. While better-off households had alternative toilets for women, poor women faced problems because they did not have enough resources to make separate toilets or to cover places where they could conceal themselves from others. Most women (79%) said that they were unable to go to a toilet when necessary and felt abdominal pain because of that. The question of *parda* prevented them from urinating or defecating in an open place like men. Women (28%) waited till night and travelled a long distance to look for a solitary place. Many could not get a boat or a *dingi* in emergencies. Women had to wait till their husbands or other aged men went out. Sometimes they (24%) had to urinate or defecate over the edge of their *macha* in front of their children. Women said that being seen by others during their toilet activities was the cause of their greatest shame (*boro lajja*) and they did not even want to speak about it. Poor women said that they did not need to defecate for three or four days because they had so little to eat. Some deliberately did not eat even when they had food in order to avoid going to the toilet. One woman reported falling out of a *dingi* while going to a toilet. They said that to cover a place to use as a latrine they had to look for palm tree leaves which was difficult. However, some women managed to do this. A middle farmer women reported that her husband made a latrine in a high tree which was very frightening for her. Other women in this category said that men in their houses made bamboo-latrines which proved to be very troublesome.

Women always tried to keep their children on their laps. They were very worried that children might drown. Despite all precautions some small children fell from the *macha*. These accidents caused more difficulties for women. Women said that they did not trust their husbands to take care of small children. Women were worried that men might fall asleep and that the children might have an accident at that time. These women explained that "men do not know how to hold a baby" (*purushera janena kivabe bachcha dhortey hoy*).

Women in Jolpur reported that when flood water entered their courtyards, *dheki* (foot operated hammer) or nearby rice husking mills were inundated. Women failed to husk rice which they had stored. Many women ground *atap* (boiled) rice in *pata* (grind-stone) with great difficulty.

During floods, women lived in fear of snakes, frogs, mosquitos, ants and many other creatures. They were particularly frightened of snakes. Some of the women who stored paddy, rice, lentils and other food in *motki* (large earthen-ware pots) or stored water in *kolshi*, were frightened to see snakes taking refuge around the necks of their *motki* or *kolshi*. One destitute woman said that she stayed awake at night after she had touched a snake while pouring water from her *kolshi*. Fear of snakes interrupted other daily tasks of women. However women knew that to prevent snakes from taking refuge on their kitchen pots they burnt whole dry tumeric (*pora holud*) and kept it beside the *motki* or *kolshi* at night. They said that snakes did not like the smell of burnt tumeric. To keep snakes and insects away from young children they tightly sealed the edge of mosquito nets (*moshari*). Poor women, however, had neither tumeric nor *moshari*. Some women reported borrowing tumeric but did not get *moshari*. Some had to keep lights (*kupi* or *bati*) burning the whole night until their kerosene was used. Poor women said that they did not sleep at night at all. These women put fire on the top of a dry tree branch and checked frequently whether the flame touched the platforms or other belongings. They had to change these burning branches twice or three times a night which aggravated the fuel shortage for these women.

Women who did not have any adult men present during the flood, faced great uncertainty. These women (17%) said that they had to take all flood time decisions themselves. They had to look for shelter, build *macha*, buy food, protect children, livestock and other belongings and many other things. One landless woman used a local proverb: "We are not going to die but life is very hard (*na jaye poran nig dhiki paye*)". Some of these women said that because of *parda* they did not do all the outside work done by the male heads of households. They had to depend on their own resources and adaptive capacities which they had only adopted inside the village and flood shelter. Unlike men, most of them could not buy food for their children from the market even if they had had the money.

In Jolpur six women were pregnant during the 1988 flood and they were particularly vulnerable. Women had to work in a narrow place and they were not free to move around. One woman said that sitting in one place made her ill and had brought about the death of the unborn baby. Women who were in very advanced stages of pregnancy, lived in great anxiety around the time the birth was due. One woman had an abortion and another woman gave birth with great difficulty<sup>3</sup>. Women who had newborn babies or babies under two years of age faced acute problems during flood conditions.

In the flood shelter women faced over-crowded conditions. Poor women said that in a small *macha* they had to live with many people, livestock, the foul smell of dead animals and other general rubbish. Some women of small and middle farmer households lived in an over-crowded private bus during the day. Some poor women who took shelter in the higher compounds of better-off neighbours, were compelled to leave these places when the households' own relatives' arrived or when women in the better-off households faced *parda* problems after the arrival of poor women's husbands. Women who moved to their parental villages lost communication with their husbands. One destitute woman said that her husband deliberately avoided knowing the whereabouts of herself and her children in order to free himself from economic responsibilities. These women felt a burden on their poor parents.

---

3. Refer to case study number 5.

Women who spent the whole day on a high nearby road or in the bus, came back home and remained sleepless. These women explained that they did it for many reasons but mainly to maintain *parda*. They feared revealing parts of their bodies to strange men. Some women said that they might not have noticed whether they covered their heads or not while sleeping. Some said that they had to guard their houses to prevent theft or that they simply did not feel comfortable staying 24 hours with many people and animals. These women left their children with their husbands or with relatives. Women who had small children were forced to live in the flood refuge all the time.

Travel by boat or raft caused great problems for women. However, while women who did not have anything left in their houses, or whose entire houses were under water, did not go back home to check their houses, they still had to travel to collect water, food, fuel, fodder and perform their natural functions. Some women cooked at home on the roofs of their houses or on boats or rafts to avoid polluted environs at the flood shelter. They carried food with them and used it throughout the day. Most of the time poor women had to depend on the boats or rafts of friends or neighbours for travel. One landless woman tried to go to her parental village after facing great difficulties in the flood shelter but failed for want of a boat. This woman said "I could swim but what about my six month old baby?"

Women reported that all the places in the flood shelter were usually occupied by men and livestock and there was no little room for them to make a partition to hide themselves from strangers. That was why they tried to cover their *macha* with mosquito nets or cloths or broken parts of their houses or with branches. Most of the poor women, however, failed to put anything around their *macha* and had to live with the cultural burden of shame.

### **Summary**

Although floods affected all women and men in Jolpur, the physical burden of coping falls heaviest on women and particularly women in poorer categories. This

situation was related to the cultural norms of the male-dominated society in which *parda* and the gender division of labour were central. These practices made the lives of poor women different from those of men. Most of the problems women faced, in the flood refuge or at homes, were related to their gender identity, for example, insecurity, lack of toilet facilities and being exposed in public. The problems were also related to the strict gender division of labour, for example, it was only women who had the responsibility to collect fuel and procure family food and thereby the burden of coping with shortages of fuel and food also fell upon them. However, despite the severe problems poorer women faced, for example, in obtaining fuel or procuring food, cooking and making platforms, they used their experience to good effect. It was also poorer women who contributed more than men to solving the different problems consequent upon flooding which will be discussed in more details in Chapter Nine.

Women's problems were not only related to their gender identity but also to the socio-economic structure of the society. We have seen earlier that women's perception of floods varied according to the problems they experienced which were, in fact, related to their socio-economic position. It has now become clear that women in better-off categories did not suffer as poor women did because of the variation in economic conditions. Women in better-off categories did not need to struggle as poor women did because of their husbands' greater wealth.

#### **Loss of women's household assets**

It was discussed earlier that (Chapter 4) if any fluctuation occurred due to the magnitude of the monsoon water (that is inundation or insufficient flood water), the planting and transplanting and harvesting of crops would be affected. Flooding might prevent planting; insufficient water would make planting difficult. During the 1988 flood, by the end of August almost all agricultural land was flooded in Jolpur.

Men and women of destitute and landless households who depended on agricultural or other daily labour, were affected more than others. During the two

consecutive floods, members of these households lost their place of work. Labourers who helped better-off farmers to sow *robi* crops, or sowing and harvesting *amon* paddy and jute, did not have any income at all. Women who engaged in weeding, winnowing, threshing, boiling, drying crops and picking immature plants from nurseries to be replanted, faced great uncertainty, because poor women and their household members depended greatly on women's agricultural work.

Women reported that they lost most of the nursery beds. The transplanted *amon* of better-off farmers' were affected by flood water. Women in the small farmer categories said that most of their lands were situated on the low land and they lost most of their main crops. They did not have money to hire labour and therefore could not harvest their crops as fast as the better-off households could. They said that many poor farmers depended on *robi* crops which were destroyed due to early flooding. However, women in the better-off and some in the small farmer categories reported that jute, the other main agricultural product of Jolpur was already harvested before the flood came.

Some women in better-off categories, said that they had harvested the *aus* crop and most of the broadcast *amon* crops before the 1988 flood reached a high level. They reported selling those crops at the market and storing some for their own consumption. These women said that during the 1987 flood they failed to harvest even *aus* and *amon* from some land. However, many small farmers lost these crops because they were on their low lying lands and the lack of resources to hire labour.

All women said that they suffered loss or damage during floods. Among these women, some faced serious losses due to the complete destruction<sup>4</sup> of the main part of their houses (26%), kitchens (33%), trees (27%), poultry (45%), livestock (10%), paddy (11%), jute (6%) or other assets (23%). Other women

---

4. Completely destroyed/devastated by flood for example, houses which needed reconstruction, walls, floors of which totally inundated and damaged by flood water.

reported the partial damage<sup>5</sup> of their houses (66%), kitchens (29%), trees (4%), livestock (5%), household furniture (18%) or other assets (6%).

Most women who reported the extensive damage of assets such as the main part of the house or livestock, belonged to the poor category. Some women in the middle farmer category said that their mature paddy fields were totally inundated. Some reported partial damage. Women said that they lost their stored crops due to lack of storage facilities. Women reported losing other crops and fruit trees due to submergence. Of the stored seeds which were washed away wheat, mustard, peas, black cumin (*kalojira*), coriander, onion, lentils and jute were the main losses.

One middle farmer woman lost crops and a house (built on approx. 20 acres) with many fruit trees, 50 *maund* of jute, 30 *maund* of paddy seed and a cow-shed. Women in the rich category also reported that they had lost some of their assets. One woman in the rich farmer category lost 20 *maund* of paddy and five *maund* of jute. Other rich women reported the partial loss of fuel and fodder. Many women reported the destruction of cow-sheds and household furniture.

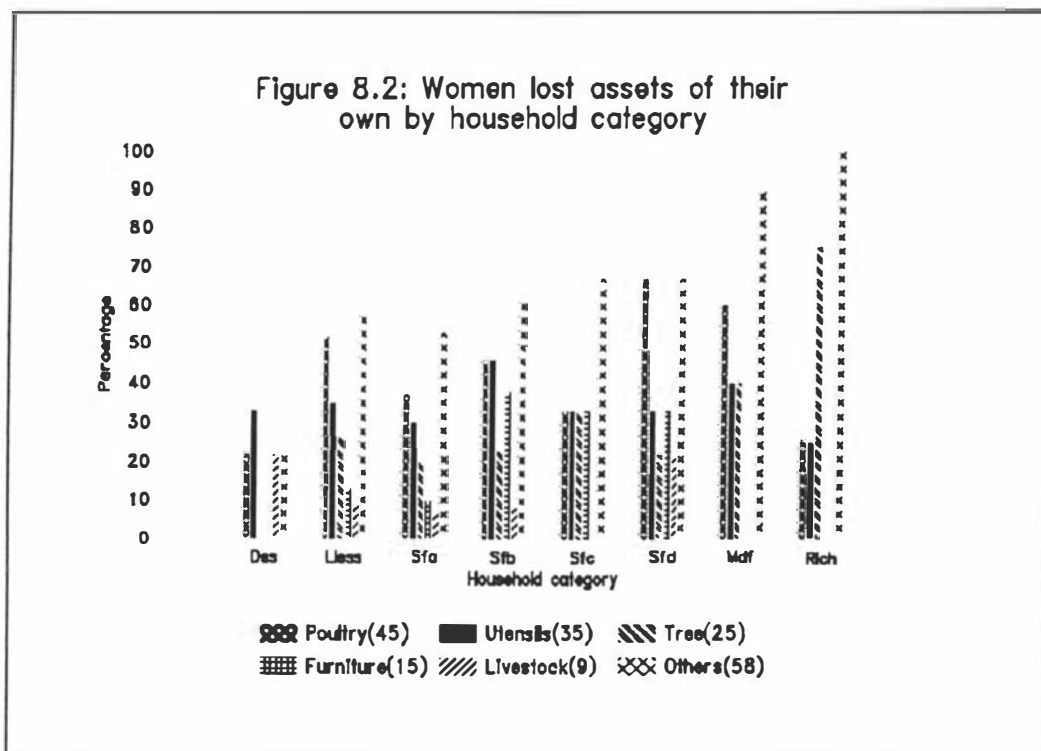
#### **Loss of women's personal assets**

Women were asked whether they had lost any assets which they thought of as their very own. Women reported losing many assets which are considered essential to the maintenance and well-being of their households; for example, livestock-poultry, trees in homestead gardens, kitchen utensils, furniture, stores of food and many other things which women thought of as their very own assets. Eighty eight percent of women said that they had lost their assets. Among these, women in the destitute category did not differentiate the ownership of assets in their households. These women said that they did not have many assets to lose and only a few assets they used belonged to them. The greater the assets the greater the chance of loss. Thirty percent of women in the middle farmer category and 75% of women in the rich farmer category also said that all the assets they lost which belonged to their households they thought of as their own.

---

5. Damage of houses or kitchen which needed repairs only.

Seventy seven percent in the destitute, 87% in the landless, 80% in the small farmer 'a' and 92% in the small farmer 'b' category reported losing assets. Whereas all women in the small farmer 'c', 88% in the small farmer 'd', all in the middle and rich farmer households reported losing assets. Poor women said that they had only a few assets which they could carry with them whereas better-off women did not have enough time to rescue all their own assets. They reported losing their trees, kitchen utensils and other things (Figure 8.2).



Source: Field work, 1992

N=89

Note Percentages are more than 100% because many women gave several responses. For key see Figure 8.1.

Forty five percent of women reported damage to poultry (22% in the destitute, 52% in the landless, 37% in the small farmer 'a', 46% percent in the small farmer 'b', 33% in the small farmer 'c', 67% in the small farmer 'd', 60% in

the middle farmer and 25% in the rich farmer categories), kitchen utensils (35%), trees (25%), furniture (15%), livestock (9%) and other assets (58%), which included clothing, jewellery etc. They said that they had thought of these assets as their very own and men rarely bothered about them. Women said that only the loss of draft animals and crops made men distressed. However, poor women said that the loss of the main house or the place where they worked was more worrying to men than any other losses.

Many women lost poultry because they did not have any proper place to keep them. Destitute and landless women reported losing several ducks and chickens which drowned or were washed away by flood water. Women in the middle farmer and rich farmer categories also lost some of their poultry. However, the losses of these women were not of the same magnitude as the losses to poor women because for some poor women poultry was the only personal asset they possessed.

Women (33% in the destitute, 35% in the landless, 30% in the small farmer 'a', 46% in the small farmer 'b', 33% in the small farmer 'c', 33% in the small farmer 'd', 40% in the middle farmer and 25% in the rich farmer categories) reported losing kitchen utensils because of flood water. Poor women said that their pots were made of clay and they were vulnerable to an on-rush of flood water. Losing a pot or a spoon caused great difficulties for a woman in a poor category whereas it was not so troublesome for a woman in a better-off category. This is because destitute or landless women only had one or two earthen pots or cooking pots unlike better-off women.

Due to soil erosion many small plants were swept away. Water deposited on the roots of big trees or insects caused the ruin of trees. Poor women said that their households depended to an extent on their homestead trees because they did not have the resources that the rich had to buy fish, meat, or vegetables. These women tried to gather vegetables in all seasons to supplement the main meals in

their households. The flood prevented them from getting food from their own sources which caused them great trouble in managing the family food (see below). Better-off women (40% in the middle and 75% in the rich farmer category) reported the highest number of trees lost. They had long courtyards or large areas of homestead land and they planted trees around their homesteads. Most of them had separate gardens for small plants. These women said that flood damaged their trees which prevented them from cooking vegetables or getting fruits from their gardens. However, they did not suffer from the losses of trees to the extent that poor women did.

Women in the destitute category, however, did not have any land on which they could plant vegetables or fruit trees. These women depended on public or common property (*ejmali sompotti*) or other sources, such as private property, the market, or on food in exchange for their work or on their social networks. These women suffered a lot and reported that after the flood they started to do vegetable gardening wherever they got a suitable place near their houses or huts.

Women in fifteen households (in the destitute, landless, small farmer 'a', 'b' or 'd' categories) reported losses of livestock and nine said that those belonged to them except six draft animals which belonged to men. Most women became the owners of livestock, mainly milking cows, through their own earnings or through share-tending and some received cows as dowry from their parents (discussed earlier). However, some women said that even though they had so much work to do they had to act as men during the flood to protect their livestock but they often lost these despite their efforts. Destitute and landless women reported that lack of fodder, disease or flood water caused the death of their cows. One destitute woman said that she used to tether her cow to her waist day and night but one night the force of the flood water broke the rope and the cow was washed away. This woman grieved that the cow would not have been lost if she had changed the rope which she knew had become weak because of being wet by flood water. Some women complained that if these cows had belonged to men the men would

have done something to protect them. Some had seen other men and women take many steps to protect their ploughing cows. Women grieved that they did not have sufficient fodder for their cows. But still they did not sell them, not only because of the income they had got from rearing them, but also because they had become very fond of them. Women who were share-tending said that they had been grateful to those women who had entrusted them with the care of the cows and did not ask any return after the death of the animals.

Women lost their furniture such as boxes, cupboards, meat-saves and other food racks. These women belonged to the landless and small farmer categories. They said that they did not have any high platforms or separate racks as the rich did to which they could shift their furniture. These women reported that though they did not possess any expensive furniture they did have things that were of great sentimental value to them.

Poor women reported losing small items such as, sandals, petticoats, quilts (*katha*), beds (*choki*), oil lamps (*kupi/bati*), pitchers (*kolshi*), jute-poles and other small things (women mentioned as "*tuk-tak jinish*"). Poor women said that they tried to protect or carry all belongings to flood shelters but still they lost some things which gave them much pain. After the flood almost all of their income was spent on rebuilding their houses or maintaining their livelihood. Some women said that they would never be able to replace some of their belongings.

Among other assets reported lost by small farmer and middle farmer women were eggs and stores of food and money (which they had stored underneath the *macha*). Women lost stored fuel, fodder and cow-sheds which were destroyed by flood water.

Some women reported losing their jewellery which they had kept inside boxes they had lost. Women said that their *dheki* were ruined by flood water.

One landless woman said that the *dheki* was her only means of income, the destruction of which made her income irregular.

Thirty percent of women in the middle farmer and 75% of women in the rich categories reported losing fodder, fuel, paddy, jute fibre and houses. All of these women reported partial damage to these assets, most of which they could not shift to the higher ground. These women thought all the assets they lost belonged to them because they were the wives of heads of households.

However, only two percent of women said that the main structure of their houses was completely destroyed, whereas, earlier 26% of women reported complete damage to houses. This was because the majority of women did not think of houses as their own assets. Only one woman in the rich category reported the partial damage of her house.

### **Summary**

We have seen before that women's perception of floods depended on the problems they faced which, in turn, varied according to their socio-economic backgrounds. It was evident that almost all women reported losing assets which caused problems for their households' survival. However, the loss of assets was more severe for poorer than for better-off categories. It was stated in Chapter 7 that women played a significant role in times of crises through disposing off their assets even though they did not own valuable assets (more on this will be discussed in Chapter Nine). These assets, such as milking cows, poultry, trees or kitchen utensils, which women thought of as their very own, were particularly vulnerable to flood. Women in better-off households also lost their assets but they did not suffer as poor women did. This was because poor women thought they would not be able to obtain replacements when the original assets were lost.

## **Gender division of labour**

Floods created acute problems for some types of activities such as cooking, cleaning, procuring drinking water and caring for small children and animals. Because of the strong gender division of labour these activities were performed by women and they became difficult to carry out under flood conditions. Women's daily household activities were extended by extra responsibilities to protect their households, family members, livestock and other belongings. Because of their lack of resources poor women faced greater flood problems than women in middle and rich households. Women reported shortages of food and other essentials, resulting in increasing prices and a consequent decline in purchasing power. They had to eat unusual food and adjust consumption patterns because of this. These will be described elsewhere. In this section a brief description of the activities of men and women in different socio-economic categories (during three phases of flood) is given.

Women were asked what activities they performed to mitigate the effects of floods. They reported that they did not see flood time activities in isolation from their pre-flood and post-flood activities. It was interesting to know that different priorities were established in different phases of floods. Some activities were done during the pre-flood period, some during the floods and others after the floods had receded, on a priority basis. However, women reported their flood-time activities were more extensive than the pre- and post-flood activities. They also reported that despite their knowledge of, and sufferings during, floods not all of them had resources to take precautions against severe floods. There were gender divisions of labour for many activities which varied according to the different phases of the floods. However, poor women participated in many of men's activities whereas men did not carry out women's activities. There were also differences between activities of poor and better-off women and men. Whereas women and men in the better-off categories were helped by their servants or hired labourers, poor women and men had to do their own or helped each other. In the following section data

will be presented on activities performed by women and men in different categories during the three phases of the 1988 flood.

### **Pre-flood activities**

Women attempted to prevent the adverse impact of floods by preparing for them. Prior to the monsoon, women took preparatory measures not only to cope with the monsoon, but also to cope with severe floods. Men and other members of the family often helped women to perform these activities. Women reported that since the flood of 1987 their usual preparations for *borsha* had increased significantly. For elderly women this preparation started long before 1987 (depending upon their previous experiences of severe floods). However, it was discussed earlier that women in different categories did not have the resources to make all the preparation necessary. Table 8.3 shows the most frequently performed pre-flood activities which were done before the 1988 flood. Although women were not sure whether there would be a flood or not, they tried to prepare for a potential crisis by taking essential action prior to the monsoon. Women reported that the flood warning system was very poor and often there was no warning at all. However, some women said they could predict from their previous experiences whether there would be a flood or not. There was some indigenous knowledge about the likely occurrence of floods, and indicators other than the visible rising of water. For example, women reported that before severe floods insects such as ants would start to climb big trees.

Storing fuel was a most common preparation (59) for the monsoon, and women (52) mainly performed this activity (44% in the destitute, 48% in the landless, 57% in the small farmer 'a', 46% in the small farmer 'b', 67% in the small farmer 'c', 56% in the small farmer 'd', 50% in the middle farmer and 50% in the rich farmer categories). Women had the responsibility of collecting cow-dung, tree leaves, twigs and branches to dry and store. Poor women reported that they made cow-dung sticks by plastering lumps of cow-dung on to jute-sticks to use as fuel

during the flood. However, many poor women did not have the storage facilities and were unable to store as much fuel as women in the better-off categories. Whereas all women in the middle and rich households said that fuel was stored for them either by themselves, other members of the households or by their servants, only seven women in other categories reported storing fuel jointly with men.

**Table 8.3: Activities performed by women and men by household category before floods**

Activities before floods	Household category							
	D (9)	L (23)	Sfa (30)	Sfb (13)	Sfc (3)	Sfd (9)	Mdf (10)	Rf (4)
<b>Stored fuel (59)</b>								
Women (52)	44	48	57	46	67	56	50	50
Men (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Both (7)	11	4	3	8	-	11	20	25
Others (5)	11	-	-	-	-	11	30	25
<b>Stored food (58)</b>								
Women (49)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Men (0)	-	-	13	-	33	-	20	-
Both (7)	-	4	3	-	-	-	-	-
Others (2)								
<b>Made stove (42)</b>								
Women (42)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Men (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Both (0)								
<b>Stored household items (29)</b>								
Women (9)	-	9	7	15	-	11	20	-
Men (7)	-	-	3	-	-	22	30	25
Both (8)	-	4	7	8	33	-	10	50
Others (5)	-	4	3	-	-	-	20	25

Table 8.3 continued'

<b>Built barriers</b>								
<b>around house</b>								
(27)	11	9	10	-	-	-	-	-
Women (6)	-	9	13	8	-	22	20	50
Men (14)	-	9	13	-	-	-	-	-
Both (6)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others (1)								
<b>Purchased boat</b>								
(20)	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	-
Women (1)	-	-	10	23	33	33	30	75 -
Men (18)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Both (0)	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others (1)								
<b>Stored fodder</b>								
(18)	-	4	10	-	-	-	-	25 -
Women (5)	-	-	10	8	-	22	10	25
Men (8)	-	4	3	-	-	11	10	
Both (5)								
<b>Reinforced roof</b>								
(16)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Women (0)	-	-	7	15	-	11	30	50 -
Men (10)	-	9	3	-	-	-	-	25
Both (3)	-	-	3	8	-	-	-	
Others (3)								
<b>Lifted stores of food (13)</b>								
Women (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Men (4)	-	-	-	8	-	11	20	-
Both (7)	-	-	7	15	33	11	-	25 -
Others (2)	-	-	3	-	-	-	10	
<b>Lifted stores of fodder (11)</b>								
Women (1)	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Men (5)	-	-	3	8	-	11	-	-
Both (1)	-	-	3	-	-	-	20	-
Others (4)	-	-	7	-	-	11	-	-
							-	25
<b>Reinforced wall</b>								
(10)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Women (0)	-	4	-	15	-	-	10	-
Men (5)	-	9	7	-	-	-	-	-
Both (5)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25
Others (1)								

Table 8.3 continued

<b>Boiled paddy</b>								
(9)	-	9	3	8	-	22	20	25 -
Women (9)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Men (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Both (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note: i) Parantheses presenting the number of households performed this activity. ii) 'Others' includes daughters-in-law, grand-children and labourers. iii) For key see Table 8.1.

The second most common pre-flood activity was storing food (58). This activity was also mainly performed by women (49). Women stored their grain in large vessels made of clay or dry date palm leaves or *hogla* (a kind of fibre). In flood-free times these vessels were placed in any corner of the house. Women kept small vessels or pots filled with food, such as puffed rice, *gurh* (molasses) or *jhola gurh* (liquid molasses) in different locations. They placed these vessels either in the corner of a room or in the roof on a specially made wooden or bamboo rack to keep them away from children. However, only 11% of women in the destitute and 30% in the landless categories were able to store food before the 1988 floods. This is because they did not have the necessary surplus resources of food as rich or middle farmer households did. Women from these categories, and 40% women in the small farmer category 'a' mentioned that they tried to keep at least a handful of rice back each time they cooked in the dry season. Fifty four percent in the small farmer 'b', 67% in the small farmer 'c' and 67% in the small farmer 'd' categories stored food before the floods. All women in the middle farmer and rich farmer categories said they always stored food. Seven percent of women (13% in the small farmer 'a', 33% in the small farmer 'c' and 20% in the middle farmer categories) reported being helped by their husbands to store food.

Forty two women in different categories (33% in the destitute, 35% in the landless, 37% in the small farmer 'a', 54% in the small farmer 'b', 33% in the small farmer 'c', 56% in the small farmer 'd', 50% in the middle and 50% in the rich

categories) said that they made moveable stoves before the 1988 flood. During the monsoon it was common to see one or two (according to socio-economic background) unused, recently made, stoves in the corner of a woman's kitchen. Women said that after the 1988 flood it became a regular pre-monsoon activity for them to make a moveable stove with soil on the top of a clay pot or used can. Women laughed when asked if any men did this? This gender-assigned work was done after the 1987 flood by women, which showed their foresightedness.

Women from twenty nine households reported that they bought and stored essential items. These included cooking pots, tin to make stoves, matches, grain, medicine, dried turmeric, platform (*macha*) materials and many other items which varied among the household categories. Nine women in the landless (9%), small farmer 'a' (7%), small farmer 'b' (15%), small farmer 'd' (11%) and middle farmer (20%) categories reported that they stored these items by themselves. Whereas poorer women bought cooking pots or grain middle farmer women bought stoves or tin from poorer women. Eight women (4% in the landless, 7% in the small farmer 'a', 8% in the small farmer 'b', 33% in the small farmer 'c', 10% in the middle farmer and 50% in the rich farmer categories) stored these essentials with the help of men in their households and seven men (small farmer 'a', 'd', middle and rich farmer categories) were involved in such storing. No women or men from destitute households were able to buy these essentials before the floods.

Women (27) said that they tried to build barriers around their houses before the flood. Socio-economically higher categories could make barriers with mud, bricks or wood, whereas poor women had to collect water hyacinth to build these barriers. However, these tasks were mainly done by men. Six women from the destitute (11%), landless (9%) and the small farmer 'a' (10%) categories were involved in this activity themselves. Six women from each of the landless (9%) and the small farmer 'a' (13%) categories jointly built these barriers with the men.

Twenty women reported that they purchased a boat just before the monsoon. The village land is low lying and divided by a network of small canals. During *borsha* people need a boat, *vela* (raft, usually made of banana tree-trunk) or *dingi* to move from one *bari* to another or to go outside the village (see Chapter 4). In the West *para* villagers also used a high bamboo bridge to enter and leave the village during the monsoon. However, for their movement some people used their own small raft or boat. Some people borrowed a neighbour's or a relative's boat, *dingi* or raft. Before the 1988 floods all boats were purchased by men (10% of the small farmer 'a', 23% in the small farmer 'b', 33% in the small farmer 'c', 33% in the small farmer 'd', 30% of middle farmer and 75% of rich farmers categories) except two. One was purchased by a woman (belonging to middle farmer category) and another one purchased by a brother of a woman in the landless category. Destitute and landless women or men (except one) could not afford to buy boats of their own or even a share in one.

Eighteen percent of women said that they stored fodder before the floods came because they were concerned about the depletion of fodder during the floods. Five women (4% of the landless category, 10% of women in the small farmer 'a' and 25% of women in the rich farmer categories) had the sole responsibility of storing fodder and five women (4% in the landless, 3% in the small farmer 'a' 11% in the small farmer 'd', 10% in the middle and 25% in the rich farmer category) performed this activity with their husbands or sons. Eight men (10% in the small farmer 'a', 8% in the small farmer 'b', 22% in the small farmer 'd' and 10% in the middle farmer category) stored fodder before flooding. Two destitute women who were share-tending livestock did not have the resources to store fodder before flooding. Many poorer women said that their animals only had crop residues as fodder after the harvesting seasons. The rest of the time these animals grazed on village common land or on private land of neighbours' or on the land of the women for whom they share-tended animals.

Women in sixteen different households reported that the roofs of their houses had to be reinforced before the floods and that these activities were mainly carried out by men. It is apparent from the Table 8.3 that the socio-economically higher categories, such as middle farmers and rich farmers had the resources to reinforce their roofs before floods. In only three households both the male and female members jointly reinforced their roofs before floods. Poorer women said that they changed their roofs only when it become impossible to live under that. Many said roofs made of poor materials, such as thatch, leaked when it rained.

Only thirteen women reported that they had raised their food stores on high platforms: most did not have the resources to do this. Of those who did it is apparent from Table 8.3 that seven women and men jointly raised the store of food before the flood, and five men raised the place of food storage alone. This was a heavy job which, women reported, was not possible for them to do alone. Seven percent of women in the small farmer 'a', 15% in the small farmer 'b', 33% in the small farmer 'c', 11% in the small farmer 'd' and 25% in the rich farmer categories, helped the men of their households to put their stores of food in the roofs of their houses.

Eleven women in different households reported that they had raised the level of their stores of fodder before the flood and both women and men were mainly involved in this. It can be seen from Table 8.3 that no destitute women carried out this activity. This was because most destitute women did not own any livestock, except two who were not able to raise the place where they would have kept fodder.

To avoid damage by flood water, rural people tried to reinforce their house walls before floods, but few achieved this. Only ten women reported carrying out this reinforcement. Of these, 4% of men in the landless, 15% in the small farmer 'b' and 10% in the middle farmer categories reinforced their walls. This activity in the rich farmer category (25%) was performed by hired labourers. Five women

(9% in the landless category and 7% in the small farmer 'a' categories) participated in this activity jointly with men.

Women in nine households said that they boiled paddy before the monsoon. It was discussed earlier that only women did this activity. Some poorer women (9% in the landless, 3% in the small farmer 'a' and 8% in the small farmer 'b' categories) said that before the monsoon they bought paddy to cope with floods. Other women (22% in the small farmer 'd', 20% in the middle and 25% in the rich farmer) said that they boiled additional paddy from their store to dry it before the monsoon.

Very few women (8) said that they reinforced the corner-posts of their houses before floods. Among these 9% landless and 3% small farmer 'a' women did it jointly with men. Three men (8% in the small farmer 'a', 10% in the middle farmer and 25% in the rich farmer categories) did this activity themselves. One rich farmer hired labourers to reinforce corner-posts. Destitute women reported that they did not have the resources to reinforce the corner-posts of their houses before the flood.

Before the flood five women/men had to sell their crops as they did not have the facilities to store them. Destitute and most of the landless women reported that they did not have any crops to store. One woman in the rich farmer category said that her husband sold some of his stored crops, not for want of storage facility, but because they would fetch a high price at the market.

Only four women reported raising their house floors before flooding (7% in the small farmer 'a', 10% in the middle farmer and 25% in the rich farmer category). The majority of women reported that they preferred to raise their house floors before flooding but it was too expensive. All women in the rich category said that their houses were made with raised floors.

Women reported that they did many other activities such as making platforms inside the house, building cow-sheds on higher ground, gathering bricks and platform materials, extending pipes in tube-wells and raising house levels. Most of these activities however were reported by better-off women.

### **Activities during 1988 flood**

The normal division of labour for women changed but for men remained much the same during floods. In other words women had to do men's work as well as their own and thus took on an additional work burden, whereas men kept to their traditional work. When women were asked whether women's and men's activities were different during floods mixed responses were given. Poor women who worked as men said there were no differences because women had to work like men. Also many of them said that women had to do more work than men. Many women said that men did not have to do any work throughout the flood. Women said that it was the first time in their lives that they had done so much work. They said that men did very simple work: went to market, wandered around on Bishoroad then came home or to the flood refuge to eat and sleep. During floods men lost their place of work and some men in poor households left their families to look for work and food. Some said men sat idle because they had nothing to do. Poorer women suffered more than men in each category and more than better-off women because they had to do all domestic activities as women and other activities which men usually did. In the better-off category the division of labour remained the same during the flood. Women in this category hardly did any work which was supposed to be done by men. Men in this category did not do any of women's conventional activities. However, in the landed category women and men both tried to protect their crops because of their larger storage facilities than others.

Out of the total sample households, sixteen did not have any men at home. The women of these households belonged to poorer categories (22% in the destitute, 26% in the landless, 13% in the small farmer 'a' and 31% in the small

farmer 'b' categories). During the absence of men, women performed men's activities in addition to their regular gender-assigned tasks such as child care, looking after livestock, food processing, collecting fuel and fetching drinking water. Even when men were present they were of limited value in terms of the work they did. Women took over men's work, including rope making, making bamboo bridges, building platforms and cutting branches, banana trees and bamboo. Village land was flooded and much of men's work, such as ploughing, planting, weeding or irrigating land, ceased during this period. Even so men did not participate in activities which were considered 'women's work'. However, many women participated in men's work and together they tried to protect their households by building *macha*, rafts and repairing homesteads and mounds. Cooking, collection of food, fuel and drinking water (for more see below) or the storage of grain or food remained mainly women's responsibility. A range of activities performed by poorer women is given below: they built platforms, raised platforms and beds, made ropes, cut bamboo and made bridges and made water hyacinth barriers around houses, placed soil in courtyards, plastered *doa*, stored kitchen utensils, moved cows on to beds and reinforced walls, plinths and roofs of their kitchens. They made arrangements to protect their belongings and made flood barriers around their courtyards. Women stored fuel, made poultry cages and piled water-hyacinth to raise poultry and kept goats and poultry in house ceilings. Many made stoves with used cans, placed poultry on roofs and moved poultry cages onto roofs. Women helped men to build platforms and toilets.

In the destitute category there were no men in two households. Women said that they built platforms and tried to do all sorts of activities to survive. They said at that time there was no difference between women and men. At one stage one woman had to move to her parents' house. She said she had no other option when all her attempts failed. This woman said, "Once I received food as a loan but was refused the second time because the better-off (*borolok*) people thought I would never be able to repay the loan". Women whose husbands were at home said that they came home to eat regularly and stayed outside the rest of the time. One

woman said, "We worked as men did. There was no separate work for women or men". Some women and men broke up their houses and built platforms with the materials on the road. Women protected their belongings, tied their houses to big trees with ropes and tried to keep the soil off floors by covering them with jute-poles.

In the landless category six households did not have any men in their households. Some women whose husbands were present but were sick also had the main responsibility for running the family. They worked for income in cash or kind or borrowed. "We had to do all kinds of work to survive. We made stoves and also cut bamboo and made platforms as men did", one woman said.

In the small farmer 'a' category four households had no men. These women said that they worked as men in the absence of their husbands. They often asked others to help them to build platforms. Women who had livestock had to take cows and goats to the road. They had to buy beds and borrowed money often with interest. Some women cooked on one stove by rotation. Women said that at that time all family members had to participate in all kinds of work. Some women, whose husbands returned in the middle of the flood, said they gathered bamboo and other platform materials to make platforms. Women sold livestock and bought paddy. Seeing water rising day by day they reinforced walls, plastered house floors, *doa* and drained water. Some said their husbands smoked and ate sitting on the platforms. Some women had to move their livestock to the Bishoroad. Women tied house walls with rope to keep them firm, repaired their houses and moved paddy to platforms. Some made *vela* with banana trees. Some of the remarks of women in this category are given below: "Men brought bricks, banana trees and together we made rafts. I arranged everything"; "Can women and men do the same work? Does a man make stoves?"; "At that time men did not have any work. Women had to look after children and livestock"; "Men also suffered through not having work. Can a man stay at home or eat less?" "I raised the bed

and thought of what to do. My husband wandered around the road and looked at what others were doing".

There were no men in four households in the small farmer 'b' category. Women stayed on boats or platforms and tried to keep all their belongings out of the water. Women who had men in their households said that their husbands often did shopping and women made ropes, helped husbands to build platforms, cut bamboo and made bridges. Women raised beds into the ceiling, put things in higher places, tried to keep walls firm and organised everything. Husbands cried to Allah. One woman in this category said, "My husband stayed in a neighbour's shop and came home only to eat. I had to do all the work inside the house with great hardship".

Women in the small farmer 'c' category had to store food and fuel, cook and look after the children and animals. Women in this category said that they participated with men making platforms, raising places of storage, making rope and bamboo-bridges. One woman said, "Men did some work but do they know what food goes in which pot?".

In the small farmer 'd' category women had to feed animals, clean cow-dung, boil paddy and store fuel. Women said that men called on Allah and looked for higher places to live. Women and men moved their crops on to the road together and women boiled paddy. Women moved chickens to the house roofs. Men made platforms on the road for livestock. Few men in this category took labourers' help to look after their livestock. Some of the responses of women in this category are given below: "My husband is very old. I made rope, moved paddy, took rice to the road and built a platform with the help of labourers"; "Can men and women do the same thing? Women can cook, can men cook?"; "Men prayed to Allah, made platforms, women made stoves to cook on the top of platforms"; "I saved children from drowning and cooked. My husband wandered around and did not even go to

market"; "There was no work for men. Have men anything to do when paddy and jute fields are under water?".

Women in the middle farmer category said that they worked inside their houses and organised everything. These women stored fuel and fodder in boats, often raised platforms with men and took jute and other crops to higher places. They plastered house floors and *doa*. Their husbands worked with the help of children and labourers. Some made platforms with bricks and moved jute onto them or raised poultry on separate platforms. Responses of some of these women are quoted below: "My husband went out and bought things, I stayed at home with children"; "My husband did not have any work. He often raised platforms with the help of labourers and our sons or went to market when bored at home. I cooked, dried crops, hung up jute, collected paddy seed from under water and organised belongings". "I cooked on one platform and went to other platforms to serve food to children and poultry, my husband was too busy to look after livestock. Together we moved crops to a boat".

All women in the rich categories had labourers who worked for them. Women and men looked after their crops and moved them on large boats. Together they looked after livestock and women prepared fodder. Women placed firewood to keep the soil of the *doa* from washing away. Women spread rice and paddy to avoid damp. Men raised granaries for paddy, jute and other crops and had to go far away to buy bricks. They made and raised platforms for stored food and fuel. Some men moved cattle to Bishoroad. One woman said, "I stored paddy, rice and *dal* in a higher place, washed the walls of the houses and, looked after children and poultry. My husband and labourers dried jute on the road, moved cattle to higher ground and made platforms in the courtyard for poultry".

Some of these activities performed by women and men in different categories are described below:

**Table 8.4: Activities performed by women and men by household category during floods**

Activities during flood	Household category							
	D (9)	L (23)	Sfa (30)	Sfb (13)	Sfc (4)	Sfd (9)	Mdf (10)	Rf (4)
<b>Made platform (97)</b>								
Women (16)	22	26	13	31	-	-	-	-
Men (14)	-	-	7	31	33	22	50	-
Both (45)	67	61	50	46	33	22	10	-
Others (22)	11	4	20	8	33	56	30	100
<b>Stored food (66)</b>								
Women (54)	33	52	50	62	67	77	60	75
Men (1)	-	-	-	-	-	11	-	-
Both (5)	-	-	-	8	-	-	30	25
Others (4)	-	4	3	-	-	11	10	-
<b>Lifted stores of food (55)</b>								
Women (11)	11	22	10	15	-	-	-	-
Men (14)	22	13	3	15	-	22	30	25
Both (23)	11	9	30	38	33	-	10	-
Others (7)	22	-	-	8	33	11	-	50
<b>Made stove (52)</b>								
Women (52)	44	52	57	46	67	44	50	50
Men (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Both (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Looked after livestock (46)</b>								
Women (18)	11	26	27	15	33	-	-	-
Men (10)	-	-	-	-	-	11	60	75
Both (17)	11	9	3	31	33	33	40	25
Others (1)	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 8.4 continued

<b>Stored fuel (39)</b>								
Women (34)	22	35	27	31	33	44	50	50
Men (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Both (3)	-	9	-	-	-	11	-	-
Others (2)	-	-	3	8	-	-	-	-
<b>Made rope (38)</b>								
Women (27)	22	26	33	31	33	22	20	-
Men (5)	11	9	3	8	-	-	-	-
Both (3)	11	4	-	-	33	-	-	-
Others (3)	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	50
<b>Lifted stores of fodder (36)</b>								
Women (9)	11	9	13	15	-	-	-	-
Men (17)	-	13	7	8	33	22	60	50
Both (10)	11	9	7	8	33	11	10	50
Others (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Stored fodder (31)</b>								
Women (8)	11	9	7	-	-	11	20	-
Men (7)	-	-	-	8	-	22	20	50
Both (14)	-	-	17	15	33	11	40	25
Others(2)	-	-	-	-	-	11	-	25
<b>Made bamboo bridge (28)</b>								
Women (6)	11	9	7	8	-	-	-	-
Men (5)	-	-	7	8	-	-	10	25
Both (11)	11	9	10	15	33	22	-	-
Others (6)	-	-	-	-	-	-	40	50
<b>Reinforced cornerposts (24)</b>								
Women (9)	11	22	7	8	-	-	-	-
Men (7)	-	17	3	-	-	-	10	-
Both (5)	11	13	3	-	-	-	-	-
Others (3)	-	-	-	8	-	-	-	-
<b>Built Barrier around house (14)</b>								
Women (1)	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Men (4)	-	-	-	8	33	11	-	25
Both (9)	11	4	20	-	-	-	-	-
Others (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 8.4 continued

<b>Bought household items (14)</b>								
Women (1)	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
Men (6)	-	-	3	-	-	22	20	25
Both (6)	-	4	-	15	-	22	-	-
Others (1)	-	4	3	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Lifted bed (12)</b>								
Women (6)	11	9	7	8	-	-	-	-
Men (2)	-	-	-	-	33	11	-	-
Both (4)	-	9	3	8	-	-	-	-
Others (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Reinforced wall (9)</b>								
Women (1)	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Men (3)	-	4	3	8	-	-	-	-
Both (4)	-	9	3	8	-	-	-	-
Others (1)	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	-
<b>Purchased boat (8)</b>								
Women (1)	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
Men (6)	-	-	7	8	-	11	10	25
Both (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others (1)	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Raised house floor (8)</b>								
Women (3)	-	9	3	-	-	-	-	-
Men (1)	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Both (3)	-	13	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others (1)	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note: For key see Table 8.1.

The preparation of a *macha* was the most common activity. Ninety seven women in different categories reported that they had to make platforms for their livestock and crops. This work was mainly done by women and men jointly (45). Women from different categories (67% in the destitute, 61% in the landless, 50% in the small farmer 'a', 46% in the small farmer 'b', 33% in the small farmer 'c', 22% in the small farmer 'd' and 10% in the middle farmer categories) were

involved in preparing platforms with the male members of their households. Sixteen women in the poorer categories (22% in the destitute, 26% in the landless, 13% in the small farmer 'a' and 31% in the small farmer 'b' categories) had to build platforms by themselves because of the absence of men. These women faced greater flood problems than women with men. Few men (14) built platforms without the help of women. In the destitute, landless category and most of the small farmer categories women and men built platforms together: poorer women and men were not able to hire labourers as were the better-off. In the rich farmer category platforms were made by hired labourers and often men participated in building. It is clear from Table 8.4 that socio-economically higher categories of women (middle and rich) did not need to participate in building platforms whereas almost all women in the poorer categories were involved in this activity.

The second most common activity during floods was storing food. Sixty six households stored food during the floods and this storage was mainly done by women (60). In five households it was done by both women and men and in one household it was done by men only. Poor women (destitute, landless, and small farmer categories) reported that the prices of food increased greatly during floods and they did not have the resources to buy and store food. Still 33% of destitute and 52% of landless women tried to store some food during the flood. Fifty percent of women in the small farmer 'a', 62% in the small farmer 'b', 67% in the small farmer 'c' and 77% in the small farmer 'd' categories also said that they tried to store some food during floods. However, whereas better-off women had sufficient stores of food from their land or men bought food from market, poorer women often stored food from one meal to the next. Poorer women said that their men did not have the resources to buy food and it was women who managed food through their own channels and tried to store some each time they cooked. Some said they often missed a meal and stored it for their children or husbands' next meal (see below). All women in the middle and rich households could afford to store food during floods.

Fifty five women reported raising the level of the place of storage. Although women in the destitute and landless categories said that they did not have the resources to create a raised platform for food before the flood, they still had to do this work when the floodwater started rising. Eleven percent of women in the destitute, 22% of women in the landless, 10% of women in the small farmer 'a' and 15% of women in the small farmer 'b' categories reported that they had to do this work themselves. Twenty three women (33% in the destitute category, 17% in the landless category, 27% in the middle farmer category and 10% in the middle farmer category) carried out this activity with men. Women in rich households did not participate in such activities.

To provide food for the family it was a woman's responsibility to make a stove with whatever materials she had. Table 8.4 shows that during floods making a portable *chula* (stove) was the most common activity which was done only by women (52). Women said it was their job only to make stoves and under no circumstances would men do it (see Pre-flood activities). Many women made stoves before the monsoon. Two women in the rich category said that their stoves were made on high plinths before the floods and another two said they had to make new stoves because their main ones had been built in the courtyards which became damp due to floods. Many women said that they made portable stoves before the flood water entered their courtyards. Others said that after their courtyards flooded they had great difficulty making stoves. Women reported that they used old tin-cans, clay pots or bricks for stoves. Some women said that even if they had food they failed to cook it because of the collapse of their clay stoves. They made another one, or temporarily borrowed from neighbours or relatives, to prevent their children crying. Some women said at times the thin stove broke in the middle of cooking. Women borrowed used tin-cans from better-off women when they could not cook in mud or other types of stoves. No men were involved in this activity. When they were asked about this, women laughed and said "Can men make a stove? (*Purushera ki chula banaite pare?*)".

Women who had livestock faced great trouble keeping them alive. The collection of fodder, the feeding of the animals and the rearing of livestock were mainly women's responsibilities. Women in the lower socio-economic categories faced greater problems than those of better-off women in protecting livestock. Poor women in Jolpur faced great difficulties collecting leaves, creepers and water hyacinth to feed their animals on. Unlike poor women, better-off women had stocks of fodder though not in the same amounts that they had in flood-free times. Poor women said that they tried their best to save their livestock and often had to take risks to obtain or preserve fodder. For some households livestock such as milking cows were the only source of income and women in these households were ready to go to considerable trouble to protect them. Men also helped women to save the lives of their animals. However, when poor women could not feed or protect their animals from flood water they had to sell them. Some sold them to buy food. For some women "the main flood problem was that of maintaining their cows and goats" (*bonnar moddhey goru-chagoler koshto chilo boro koshto*). Women also kept chickens and ducks in cages (*khop/khupri*) feeding them regularly. During floods, most of the poultry *khop* were flooded. Poor women did not have the resources to buy or make alternative *khop* as better-off women did. These women always had to keep their eyes on their chickens, many of which took refuge in nearby trees. However, many drowned which deeply upset some of the women.

Women said that men were reluctant to help with those livestock which belonged to women but both men and women tried to protect those cattle which were used for cultivation. Women reported that they had the responsibility of feeding animals and cleaning cow-dung from cow-sheds. Forty six households had livestock and women looked after those either themselves (18) or jointly with men (17). It was evident that poorer women had to look after their livestock themselves possibly because they owned them, whereas women and men in the better-off households jointly did this activity because their animals were men's assets and needed for their agricultural prosperity.

Women in 39 households reported storing fuel and this activity was also mainly done by them alone (34). Many women in the poorer categories reported that they did not store fuel before a flood as did other households and as a result they had to face the problems of a fuel crisis. These women had to collect leaves, twigs and other materials to use as fuel during floods. Some women reported that they sometimes starved, not because they did not have food, but because they had no fuel. The whole family depended on women for food and it was women's responsibility to manage the fuel, to cook and to serve food to family members. No men stored fuel. Although some women in poorer categories had stores or collected and stored fuel their stores were never comparable with those of better-off women. Poor women did not have enough fuel or storage facilities. These women had to depend on their social networks to support them or on resources from the village common land. Sometimes they borrowed food or fuel from others or starved. Women in the middle and rich farmer categories reported they had sufficient stocks of fuel. However, 50% of women in both the middle farmer and rich farmer categories said their stores were depleted or wet by flood water and they had to buy fuel from the market. However, poor women did not have the resources to do this.

In Jolpur making ropes was also women's work as was jute stripping. In most of the landed households rope was made just after women dried jute. Rope was needed for many household purposes such as making houses or fences. Poor women often received jute from better-off households as wages, or in exchange for other things, to make ropes. During floods it was also women who made the ropes necessary to cope with floods (discussed earlier). Women in 38 households reported that they made rope mainly to build platforms and this was done by women in most of the households (27). They also used rope to make rafts, tie houses with trees, reinforce plinths of houses, tie beds, boats or other things in higher places. Only five men made ropes by themselves and in three households

women and men did it together. Better-off households (10% in the middle farmers and 50% in the rich farmers) employed women labourers to do this.

Thirty six women reported that they had to raise their stores of fodder during the flood and this activity was mainly performed by men (17). Nine women in the poorer category had to do this heavy work by themselves and ten women performed this activity jointly with men. The majority of women who reported raising the place of fodder storage belonged to the middle (70%) and the rich farmer (100%) categories. Poor women said that they did not have the resources to do this.

Of the thirty one women who reported storing fodder during the flood, eight women (11% in the destitute, 9% in the landless, 7% in the small farmer 'a', 11% in the small farmer 'd' and 20% in the middle farmer categories) stored fodder themselves and 14 with men's help. In seven households, the storage of fodder was done by men and in another two households labourers did this work. Before the flood no destitute women reported storing fodder but during the flood 11% of women in this category stored fodder. Poor women reported water hyacinth as the most common type of fodder which they stored during floods.

Bamboo bridges were necessary to enable people to move from one house to another or to toilets. In some households toilets were nothing but a part of the bamboo bridge which was covered by palm tree fronds. Most of the bridges were made in the better-off household compounds. However, poor women also reported making bamboo bridges. Women said they had to cut bamboo as men did. Six women in the poorer categories (11% in the destitute, 9% in the landless, 7% in the small farmer 'a' and 8% in the small farmer 'b') made bridges themselves and 11 women did this jointly with men.

During the 1988 flood, women and men of 24 households reinforced the corner-posts of their houses. Of these, nine women in the poorer categories (11%

in the destitute, 22% in the landless, 7% in the small farmer 'a' and 8% in the small farmer 'b') did this work themselves and five women (11% in the destitute, 13% in the landless and 3% in the small farmer women) participated in this work with their husbands or sons. For better-off households this work was done by labourers (40% in the middle and 50% in the rich categories).

Fourteen women reported that they built barriers around their houses to prevent floodwater entering. This was usually done by both women and men (9) in the poorer categories. Women said they put water hyacinth barriers around their houses to keep soil off courtyards. One landless woman was involved in this activity by herself. In four households men did this.

Among fourteen women who bought and stored essential items such as tin to make stoves, matches, medicine, grain, platform materials etc. during the flood only two belonged to the landless category. No destitute women reported buying these essentials. It was mainly men in the socio-economically higher category (20% in the middle farmer and 25% in the rich farmer) who went to market and bought these essentials. Twenty two percent of men in the small farmer 'd' category also bought some of these things during floods. Six women did this work with men.

Twelve women reported raising their beds higher above the house floors. Women in the poorer categories had to do this by themselves (11% in the destitute, 9% in the landless, 7% in the small farmer 'a' and 8% in the small farmer 'b' categories). In only two households did men perform this work and in four households men and women did it together. Poor women who tried to stay at home said it was their routine work to raise beds every morning with whatever materials they had. However, many said they had to leave their houses and take refuge on platforms.

Nine women reported that they had to reinforce the walls of their houses in order to keep them strong. Four percent of women in the landless category who did not have men at home during the flood, had to do this themselves. Four women (9% in the landless, 3% in the small farmer 'a' and 8% in the small farmer 'b' category) reported that they reinforced their walls jointly with the men of their households. Four percent of men in the landless, 3% in the small farmer 'a' and 8% in the small farmer 'b' categories were involved in this activity. In one household in the middle farmer category this work was done by labourers. Women in the rich category reported that their houses did not need reinforcement.

Eight women reported that they purchased boats during floods. One woman in the small farmer 'a' category was involved in purchasing a boat and the rest of the boats were purchased by men. All women from the rich farmer category said that they had their own boats but one woman's husband had to buy a larger boat to move some of their crops. Few in other categories could purchase a boat because of the high price of boats and their short supply.

During flooding, the floors of eight houses were raised. Three women in the poorer category (9% in the landless and 3% in the small farmer 'a') had to raise their house floors themselves during the flood. In three households both men and women worked at this. Women reported that they collected soil from the side of a nearby road to raise their floors.

Five percent (3) of the small farmer and 25% (1) of the rich farmers sold crops. Women in the small farmer category reported that often they did not have sufficient food or crops stored for themselves, but they had to sell some crops because of lack of a storage facilities.

Women reported many other activities such as working for cash or kind. However, they said most men did not get work except for a few who worked as wage labourers for better-off farmers and helped in making platforms, moving

livestock or moving crops. Many women said after that men had no income. Seventeen percent of poor women said they worked for better-off women, but they said this work was only occasional and women often could not work for others when they had to struggle with flood water.

### **After flood activities**

After severe floods the affected women and men started to re-build or re-construct their damaged houses. Women said that this involved even more laborious activities than during the flood-free time. Women mentioned that after the flood the courtyards and floors of houses remained muddy and slippery. If it rained it became even more muddy. It was the women's duty to plaster the courtyards and floors, to clean away rubbish and make stoves to cook on in the courtyard and to lead their households back to a normal life. Women helped men to cut bamboo, make rope and re-construct house walls and roofs. Re-construction work was done after women had cleaned their houses. Women reported that they had to play a major part in the post-flood re-construction, spending most of their time working in muddy and slippery conditions. As a result they often suffered from skin diseases on their fingers and feet. Whereas better-off women often hired poorer women to do this work, poor women had to do it themselves. Women had to dry rice, paddy, fodder, cow-dung, fuel-wood and crops which had got wet during the flood.

After all these tasks had been done women tried to re-plant the vegetable gardens which had been damaged by the flood. Women reported on the scarcity of seeds and young plants. They grieved that in flood-free times they grew their vegetable gardens by collecting relatives or neighbours' surplus seeds or *chara* (young shoot of a plant or tree) and they often bought plants in the market, but after the floods they had no alternative but to buy seeds or plants from the market because all the village was under water and only a few women were able to get help from neighbours or others due to the high price of plants and seeds after the flood. Some poor women reported that they gave up hope of starting their gardens

again straight after the flood and some of them started growing vegetables very late.

Table 8.5 presents data on the post-flood activities of women and men. All women reported that they had to clean rubbish from their houses. It was the women's job to organise things (73). Even women in the better-off households said that they could not get other women to work for them because all the women were trying to reorganise their houses as soon as the flood water receded. Better-off woman said that they did not have much work to do as poorer women because their houses were on high plinths and they had not had to leave their houses. Poorer women had to work harder to normalise their lives. In 28 households men also participated with women in cleaning houses.

**Table 8.5: Activities performed by women and men by household category after floods**

Activities after flood	Household category							
	D (9)	L (23)	Sfa (30)	Sfb (13)	Sfc (3)	Sfd (9)	Mdf (10)	Rf (4)
<b>Cleaned house (101)</b>								
Women (73)	10	78	53	69	67	89	70	100
Men (0)	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Both (28)	-	22	47	31	33	11	30	-
Others (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	-							
<b>Plastered house (89)</b>								
Women (77)	78	91	70	85	10	78	60	25
Men (0)	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-
Both (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others (12)	-	9	30	15	-	22	40	75
					-			
<b>Reinforced wall (88)</b>								
Women (3)	33	9	3	-	-	-	-	-
Men (29)	22	9	10	31	33	89	70	25
Both (43)	11	65	70	31	-	-	10	-
Others (13)	-	13	10	23	33	11	-	25

Table 8.5 continued

<b>Reinforced cornerpost (88)</b>								
Women (2)	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	-
Men (31)	33	17	17	38	67	44	70	25
Both (37)	33	57	63	15	-	-	-	-
Others (18)	-	9	17	23	33	56	10	25
<b>Reinforced roof (59)</b>								
Women (1)	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Men (22)	22	13	13	15	33	33	60	25
Both (22)	22	35	37	8	-	-	-	-
Others (14)	-	13	17	15	33	33	-	-
<b>Raised house floor (52)</b>								
Women (5)	22	9	3	-	-	-	-	-
Men (4)	-	-	3	8	-	-	20	-
Both (23)	22	26	37	23	-	11	-	-
Others (20)	-	4	20	23	-	33	30	100

Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note: For key see Table 8.1.

The majority of women (89) said that they had the sole responsibility for cleaning the floor, organising household belongings and plastering the house floor with mud. No men did this activity. Only in the socio-economically higher categories (40% in the middle farmer and 75% in the rich farmer category) women did have the resources to hire servants, but they had to supervise their work.

Eighty eight households had to reinforce their house walls after flooding: almost all house walls were affected by flood water. A considerable number of women (43) in different categories (11% in the destitute category, 65% in the landless category, 70% in the small farmer 'a', 85% in the landless, 31% in the small farmer category 'b' and 10% in the middle farmer category) reconstructed their damaged walls with their husbands or sons. Seventy percent of men in the middle farmer category and 25% of men in the rich farmer category performed this activity mainly with the help of labourers. In one rich household this work was done totally by labourers. Thirty three percent of women in the destitute category,

9% in the landless category and 3% in the small farmer 'a' category reinforced their walls alone. No women in the rich farmer category participated in the post-flood house wall reinforcement. Some poor women who did not reinforce their walls reported that their house walls were also damaged by floodwater, but they did not have the resources to repair them after the floods. Twenty percent of women in the middle farmer category and 50% in the rich farmer category said that their house walls were reinforced properly before the floods and the damage did not force them to repeat the work. However, some other households had to do this two or three times.

After the 1988 flood women reported that they had reinforced the corner-posts of their houses. It was mainly a gender-assigned task for men and many men did this work themselves (31) but after floods a considerable number of women (37) were involved in this post-flood activity jointly with the men, as they did in reinforcing walls. Two women in the landless category even did this work without the help of men. Destitute women mentioned that they did not have the resources to reinforce the corner-posts of their houses before or during the floods but had to do it after floods. Three destitute women did not have the resources to reinforce the corner-posts after the flood either. No women in the rich and middle farmer categories participated in this work because doing such work was below their dignity.

A significant number of women and men in different households (59) had to reinforce and repair the roofs of their houses after the flood. Women mentioned that their roofs were badly affected by rainfall during the flood. They also reported that during the floods the repairing of roofs was very dangerous due to the high water levels and the risks of climbing up. Following the flood both men and women might help to lift the roofs down into the courtyard. In all categories the number of male participants was higher (22) than the number of women repairing roofs. The main reason for this, as women reported, was women's dress, the *sari*, which made it difficult for them to climb onto roofs. Women who took

refuge on roofs or boats (tied in trees) during floods said that they had to do this in emergencies which they did not do in flood-free times. However four percent of landless women reported that they had to repair their roofs themselves because of their inability to hire labourers. Twenty two women (in the landless and small farmer categories), worked with men reinforcing the roofs of their houses. No women in the middle and rich farmer categories participated in this work. To them it was men's work only and they did not want to lose their reputation by doing men's work (*purusher kaj*).

Fifty two percent of women reported that they had raised the floors of their houses after floods. Twenty two percent of women in the destitute, 9% in the landless and 3% in the small farmer households raised the floors of their houses themselves. Another 22% of women in the destitute, 26% in the landless and 37% in the small farmer 'a', 23% in the small farmer 'b' and 11% in the small farmer 'd' categories raised their floors together with men after the floods. Middle farmers' and rich farmers' house floors were raised by men helped by hired labourers. It was found that 50% of middle farmers and all of rich farmers had raised their floors after floods, whereas the percentage of other socio-economic categories raising their house floors was very low because of the cost involved. Women reported that they thought the raising of house floors would reduce their misery to some extent: the raising of floors would make it possible for them to stay at home during floods. However, they did not always have the resources to do this. They suggested that the government or other organisations could help them to raise house floor levels<sup>6</sup>.

Women from nine households reported making barriers around their houses to limit the effects of the next flood. Some women mentioned preparing a platform (8%), raising stores of food (8%), storing household items (7%),

---

6. A considerable number of women joined an NGO after the 1988 flood. These women got support from the NGO to re-build their damaged houses, to buy livestock and to get back their mortgaged land.

purchasing boats (5%) and other activities which needed to be performed after floods. Thirty two percent of women did other activities.

Women reported that they had learned many things from the two consecutive floods, but all of them did not have the ability to adopt necessary steps. However, it was found that almost all women made portable stoves and tried to store fuel before the monsoon. According to women, saving money and storing food, fodder and platform materials could also reduce their miseries during floods.

### **Summary**

It was shown in Chapter 7 that there was a strong division of labour among women and men in Jolpur. It became clear in this chapter that during floods the gender division of labour was not broken down, rather the crises created an additional work load for women, especially in the poorer categories. Also their gender-assigned work was reestablished after the flood according to the socio-economic category in which they were placed. It was evident that women played important roles during the different phases of floods. Women had the main responsibility for flood preparation work. During floods, while men's gender-assigned work almost ceased, women's burden increased greatly. In order to meet the immediate survival needs of their households women performed different functions during floods and most of their activities overlapped with men's work in flood times. It was women who had to perform most of the activities needed to restart normal life after floods.

There were variations in the precautions taken before floods and in activities during and after floods by women and men and according to socio-economic groups. Better-off women and men had more resources to prepare for floods than the poor. Women in the better-off category did not do as much work as poor women did during floods and the latter had to shoulder men's as well as women's responsibilities. These women performed their own gender-assigned functions as

well as assisting men with theirs and sometimes taking their area completely. These activities were very important in terms of the survival of rural households. Men remained much more restricted to their conventional gender-assigned work even when physical conditions presented them from doing any of these tasks.

### **Women and water collection**

The collection of water during the 1988 flood caused great problems for women. Women were responsible for collecting and storing water. In Jolpur, almost all tube-wells were flooded. Women travelled long distances by raft or by boat, walked or swam in order to obtain water. Children under ten, and those who could not swim, were not allowed to get drinking water during floods, whereas in flood-free times children helped their mothers to fetch water. Women said that at first they tried to get drinking water from tube-wells. With the increase in flood water level, many women were compelled to collect and use flood water for drinking. Women had to walk through chest-high water or swim to collect fresh or clean flood water. Table 8.6 shows that most of the women carried water by themselves (73%) and most of them belonged to the poorer category.

Women said that they did not take their daughters with them due to the risk of drowning. Whereas, during the flood-free time 19% of women were accompanied by their daughters, during floods only 4% took their daughters with them. Whereas, three grown up daughters used to carry water alone during the flood-free time, two fetched water during floods. Differences can be seen in the case of daughters-in-law's water carrying. Only three daughters-in-law carried water during floods, whereas ten women in this group carried water when there was no flood. The reason given for this was that aged women were more experienced than younger women. Also they said that young daughters and young daughters-in-law should maintain their *parda* more than older women and that was why young women should not travel far to get water. However, young or older women in the poorer categories, most of whom belonged to nuclear families, had

to collect water by any means in order to survive. They said that they did not have time to think about *parda*. A few men helped women to carry water which they never would have considered doing in the flood-free time. Six women reported that their husbands carried water for them. These women belonged to the landless and small farmer categories. Four destitute and one landless woman said that they carried water with the help of their husbands. Another five women reported help from their sons. However, in most cases men's involvement in collecting water did not mean that they collected it from the source, rather that they took the water, collected almost totally by women, and poured it into a larger container for keeping.

**Table 8.6: Carriers of drinking water during floods by household category**

Carriers of water	Household category							
	D	L	Sfa	Sfb	Sfc	Sfd	Mdf	Rf
Self (74)	78	78	83	69	33	89	50	25
Self and daughter (4)	-	9	27	-	15	-	-	-
Daughter-in-law (3)	-	-	3	-	-	-	20	-
Daughter (2)	-	-	-	8	-	-	10	-
Husband (6)	-	9	3	8	33	11	-	-
Son (5)	11	-	7	-	-	-	20	-
Self and husband (2)	11	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Servants (3)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	75
Others (2)	-	-	3	-	33	-	-	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note: For key see Table 8.1.

Table 8.7 shows the different problems women faced due to floods. Almost all women, except 50% in the middle and 75% in the rich categories, reported that

they did not experience problems in water collection. Forty two percent of women said that they were compelled to use flood water for drinking and for cooking. Despite their knowledge about water quality they did not have other options except drinking foul-smelling water which was polluted by dead animals, snakes, frogs and faeces. The use of flood water varied according to socio-economic category. Women in the destitute, landless and some in the small farmer categories reported that they had to drink polluted flood water because they did not have a boat or raft, or because there was nobody at home to take care of the children, or no extra sari to change into after getting wet. Some of the women in the small farmer category said that they collected nearby flood water to maintain their *parda*. These

**Table 8.7: Drinking water problems experienced by women during floods by household category**

Problems	Household category							
	D	L	Sfa	Sfb	Sfc	Sfd	Mdf	Rf
<b>Only flood water available (42)</b>	56	48	40	46	67	56	-	-
<b>Need to apply special techniques (36)</b>	33	35	47	46	33	22	20	-
<b>Transport problem (20)</b>	11	26	27	23	33	11	-	-
<b>Travel far to bring tube-well water (17)</b>	11	26	17	15	33	22	-	-
<b>Lack of fuel to boil water (11)</b>	11	17	13	-	-	11	10	-
<b>Collected clean flood-water from long distance (7)</b>	11	9	3	-	33	22	-	-
<b>Others (22)</b>	11	13	30	15	33	22	40	25

Source: Field work, 1992

N=95

Note: For key see Table 8.1.

women said that they tried to get drinking water from the tube-wells near their houses. After all those tube-wells were flooded they did not have means, time or energy to collect drinking water from distant tube-wells. However, women in better-off categories said that they tried to boil or put *fitciri* (alum) in the flood water to purify it before using the water for cooking. On the other hand, destitute, landless, and most of the women in the small farmer category said that they did not have enough fuel or *fitciri* to purify water. If they had one piece of *fitciri*, they used it to purify water for ten households. This type of solidarity was only present among poor women.

Women in different categories (36%), except the rich, explained the use of a special technique to get water from tube-wells, only the neck of which was above the flood water level. They closed the nozzle of the tube-wells and pumped continuously till water flowed through the heads of the tube-wells. Some women used a special technique to get that water. They put their *kolshi* under the floating nozzle of tubewells and started to pump. When they saw that the colour of the water was different from the flood water, they raised the *kolshi*. Women did this by standing waist-high in the flood water. Women called upon other women to help with this technique. However, women said, still flood water mixed with tube-well water while pumping. Sometimes they went to collect water in pairs. One pumped with one hand while her other hand was held over the mouth of the pump. The result was that the water spurted out of the top of the pump forming a fountain. Her friend then had the very difficult task of catching the falling water in her *kolshi*. Another demanding, and less successful, method was to hold a plastic bag over the submerged nozzle of the pump. They rarely succeeded in totally excluding flood water from the bag however.

Twenty percent of women (destitute, landless and small farmer) said that they faced the problem of not having any transport to get water. Often these women requested others to help them with transport to get water but rarely got help. Seventeen percent of women said that they collected tube-well water from a very

long distance. They travelled by boat, raft or *dingi* to reach those sources. Women reported getting water from the ferry *ghat*, which is about 3-4 kilometre away or from the neighbouring high land village which is more than two kilometres distant.

Eleven women said that they faced fuel crises so could not boil flood water. Some women said that after they heard the warning on the radio about water pollution they started boiling flood water which caused a shortage of fuel. Women in the destitute, landless and some in the small farmer categories said that they did not have the resources to boil water, whereas, one woman in the middle farmer category said that she always boiled flood water and thereby faced fuel scarcity. Many poor women said that they knew it was good to boil flood water but that was not possible because they did not even have fuel to cook with.

Seven women said that they carried clean flood water over long distances. These women said that they felt too disgusted to use nearby polluted flood water and so swam or walked through chest-high water to get clean flood water. These women said that they did not have time or means to reach any high tube-well.

Women reported many other problems which they faced in the context of obtaining drinking water. They had to reduce the consumption of water. Some said that they drank less water also to avoid going to the toilet. Some women left their small babies with men or other household members or neighbours to get water. They suffered great anxiety for them as well as for themselves. Women said that their saris sometimes seemed death traps to them while swimming. Women collected flood water and waited to deposit sediment at the bottom of *kolshi* to use for drinking or cooking. Some women stored rain water to use for drinking. Women collected flood water from underneath their *macha* which they thought better than other flood water. Some women did not have anybody at home to look after their children and some said that they were scared of drowning in flood water. Women who had sick husbands or children at home were very

reluctant to leave them alone. Some women waited with *kolshi* for a long time to request someone to get water for them. Those who were travelling by boat or raft to fetch water for themselves sometimes helped these women. Many poor women's *kolshi* floated during the flood and they did not have means to store enough water at a time. They had to collect water several times in substitute pitchers.

Some women in the middle (40%) and one in the rich farmer categories also faced problems in storing drinking water. Middle farmer women said that their tube-wells were not high enough and they had to depend on neighbouring rich households' tube-wells. Some women in these households also experienced the risk of collecting water by boat. Only one woman (25%) in the rich category said that she had to spend her time collecting water from a tube-well standing on a bamboo-bridge which was disgusting. Other women (75%) in this category employed poorer women to bring water for them. However, all women in rich households said that they joined long pipes to their tube-wells and they did not have to depend on flood-water.

### **Summary**

The collection of drinking water was a gender-assigned task for women and they had to do it under all circumstances. Once more it can be seen that the physical difficulties and dangers are greatly aggravated by the perceived need to maintain *parda* and the unwillingness of most men to cross gender lines. It would have been much easier for men, who did not have to think about *parda*, to bring water from a distant place, but they rarely did it because of the cultural division of labour between women and men.

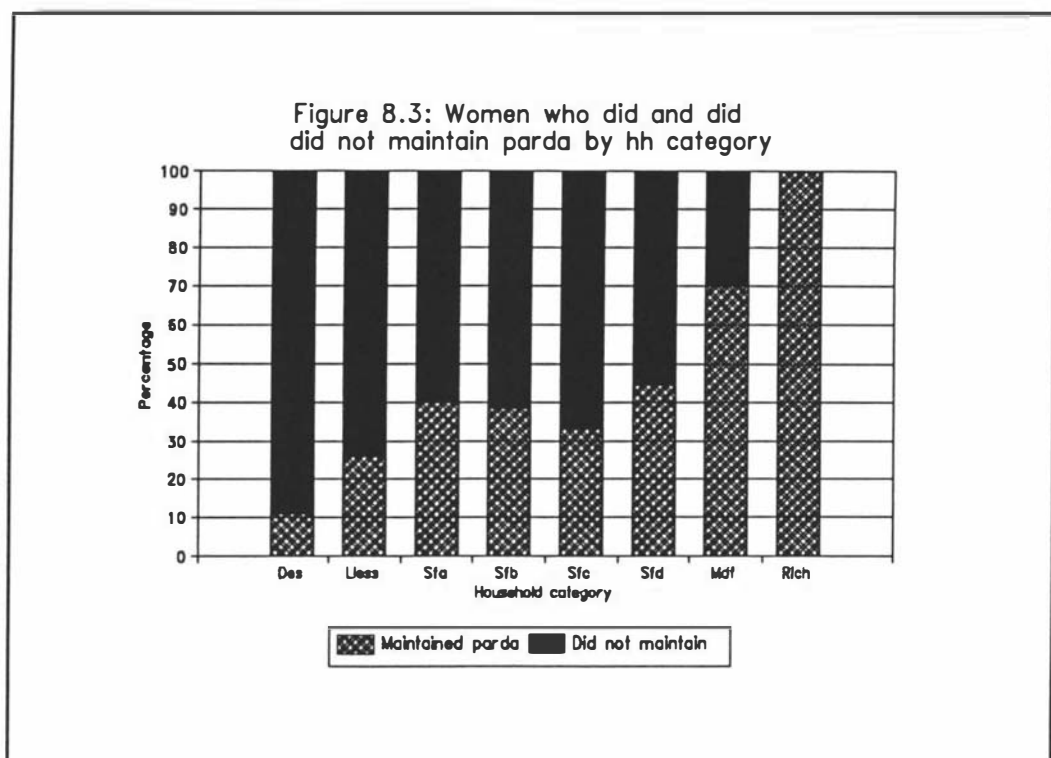
During floods almost all tube-wells in Jolpur were under water and poor women had to take considerable risks to get drinking water from great distances. Poor women helped each other to get water using special techniques. Better-off

women did not face such problems as poorer women did because they had their own tube-wells, or other ways of purifying water or were able to employ others to bring water for them.

### Maintenance of *parda*

Women were asked whether they had maintained *parda* during floods or not. Sixty percent of women said that they were unable to maintain *parda* during floods.

These women belonged to the destitute (89%), the landless (74%), the small farmer 'a' (60%), the small farmer 'b' (62%), the small farmer 'c' (67%),



Source: Field work, 1992

N=61

Note: For key see Figure 8.1.

the small farmer 'd' (56%) and the middle farmer (30%) categories (Figure 8.3). Many women had to do men's work as well as their own (see below for discussion on the gender division of labour). When men did not have any work women became the food providers for their household members. They

made, or helped men to make, platforms and rafts, protected children, livestock and other belongings. Women who did not have any men in their households did not adhere to *parda*. To perform different kinds of activities, many women had to endure the experience of shame when intimate parts of their lives were exposed to public view. However, this did not stop them from doing work which they thought important for their households' survival. These women said that they had to leave their houses and move to a flood refuge or shelter where they were seen by many strangers. Despite problems of privacy which arise when women break *parda*, they still maintained a sense of self-respect.

Forty percent of women said that they had maintained some sort of *parda* during floods. These women reported that they covered their heads and that was why they thought they maintained *parda*. However, they also said that they felt *beparda* when seen by men other than those from Jolpur.

Seventy percent of middle farmer and all rich women said that they did not leave their homes during floods and that they observed *parda*. These women faced other problems due to floods but did not take the main responsibility for their families' sustenance. They did not need to do men's work or to collect food and water from open places. Their houses were well constructed on higher ground and they were not forced to leave their homesteads. These women said that they only allowed poor women to take refuge in their houses when those women did not have any men in their households.

Table 8.8 shows the reasons given by sixty one women why they did not maintain *parda* during floods. Among these women 52% (32) said that they could not maintain *parda* because they had been seen by many strangers. Most of these women belonged to poorer categories who reported that they had had to live in an open place which they did not do in the flood-free time. According to these women, many men saw them while cooking, washing, travelling or taking a bath.

**Table 8.8: Explanation offered by women as to why they did not practice *parda* during floods by household category**

Explanation and frequency	Household category							
	D (8)	L (17)	Sfa (18)	Sfb (8)	Sfc (2)	Sfd (5)	Mdf (3)	Rf (0)
Seen by strangers (32)	50	29	61	50	50	80	100	-
Not possible (28)	63	53	39	75	50	-	-	-
Barrier for survival (9)	-	24	22	13	-	-	-	-
Many family stayed together (6)	-	-	17	-	-	60	-	-
Unable to cover platform (6)	13	24	-	13	-	-	-	-
Others (18)	13	35	22	-	50	40	100	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=61

Note: For key see Table 8.1.

They felt very ashamed (*lozzakor*) about this, especially as they had not foreseen this possibility. Because of the perceived need to maintain *parda*, living on a *macha* or in public burdened women with shame during floods. To keep their modesty their great concern was to ensure their bodies and heads were covered. Still, for poor women *parda* was suspended in emergencies. Women said that they did not wish to die for the sake of *parda* rather they wanted to live but retained the desire to practice *parda* on other occasions. They said that they felt sorry for not maintaining *parda* but because of circumstances they were unable to do so.

Forty six percent of women (28) said that it was not possible to maintain *parda* during crises. These women also belonged to poorer categories (63% in the

destitute, 53% in the landless, 39% in the small farmer 'a' 75% in the small farmer 'b' and 50% in the small farmer 'c') and said that they could not maintain *parda* when their lives were in danger. These women said that maintenance of *parda* was not possible during *bipod* (crisis). For these women, coping with the crisis was more important than the maintenance of *parda*. One woman said, "We tried to cover our heads but did not have time to watch whether our back-sides were covered or not". Women had to do all sorts of work standing in water and they had to pull their sari up high in order to keep them dry. Some poor women said that they only had one sari to wear. Sometimes, women had to dry one end of their sari by spreading it over the *machas* while covering their bodies with the other end. Covering the head was less important for these women. They said that during the 1988 flood everything became abnormal and unusual which even created the need for them to converse with strangers which they would not do in the flood-free time.

Fifteen percent of women (9) said that *parda* was a barrier to their survival. These women said that at the beginning of the flood they tried to keep their *parda* as usual which left them unfed. For their households' survival they started to go out and help their families.

Ten percent of women (6) said that they could not maintain *parda* because many families stayed together on platforms. These women did not leave their homes and they took shelter on *macha* with neighbouring households. These women reported that they built open *macha* jointly with their neighbours. They reported that they did not feel that they were living with other men on the same platform: all became brothers to them. Another 8% (5) said that they did not have the resources to screen their *macha* during floods and that was why they thought that they did not maintain *parda*.

Thirty one percent of women (19) gave other reasons for not maintaining *parda*. Poorer women reported that they could not be in *parda* while they looked

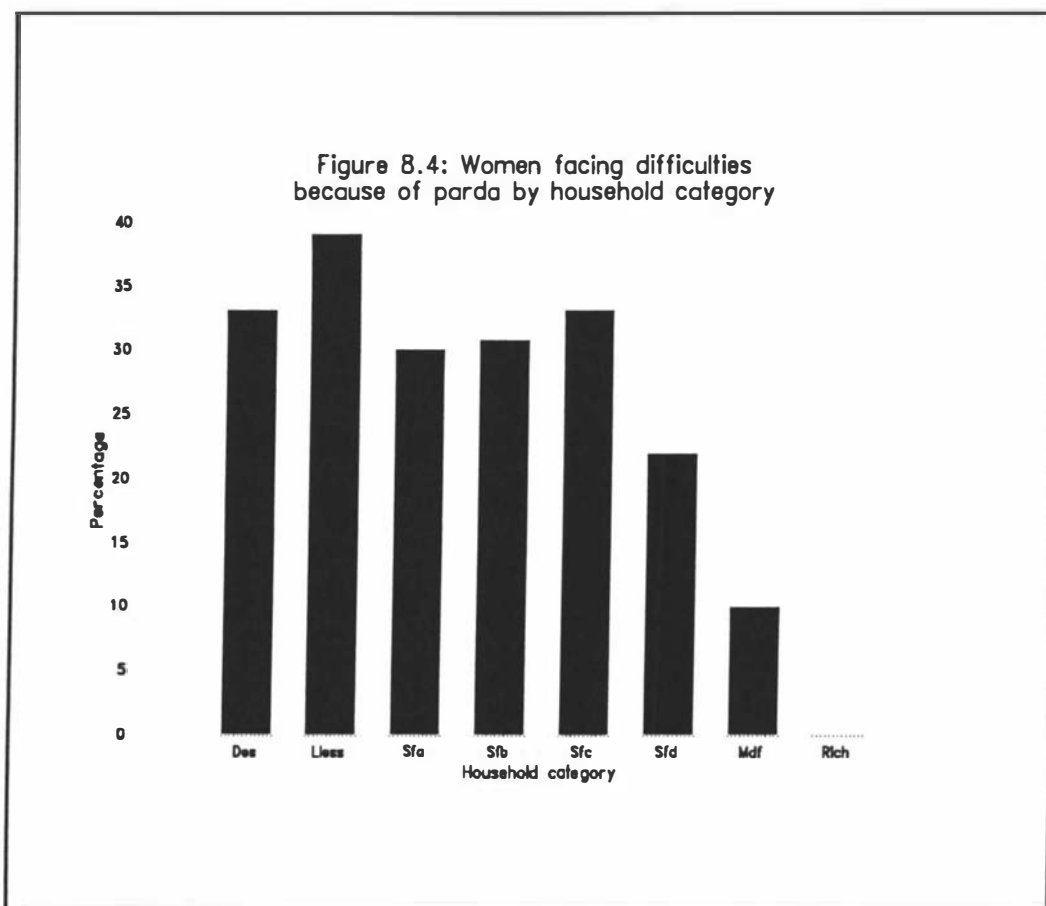
for food, fuel, herbs or carried drinking water from distant places (discussed in different chapters). Sometimes they had to swim to collect these. Almost all women who moved elsewhere faced the problem of finding materials to make *macha*. Only a few women reported that they covered their *macha* with *chat* (jute mat) or a sari or other clothes. Others did not have the opportunity to cover their shelters and had to take refuge on roads where people from many places lived together. Some women failed to maintain *parda* because of children's sickness, obtaining relief from outsiders and going to market.

Many women (28%) reported that they faced problems due to *parda* (Figure 8.4). Twelve percent of women said that their miseries increased due to being conscious of *parda* in the crisis period. All women, except one, belonged to the poorer categories (destitute, landless and small farmer 'a' and 'b'). According to these women they had to do lots of work, like men, but always had to be careful that their heads were covered. Sometimes they did not maintain *parda* and felt guilty, particularly when their husbands reminded them. For these women it was an additional burden to them at that miserable time.

Some women in the landed category who spent the whole day on the road or in a bus, came back home at night to maintain their *parda*. These women said that they feared revealing parts of their bodies to strange men. Some said that they did not notice whether they had covered their heads or not while sleeping.

Women who had teenage daughters said that they always had to be careful to keep their daughters in *parda*. These women said that they were much more aware of their daughters' safety and modesty than their own. They said that they faced difficulties in going outside leaving their daughters at a *macha* surrounded by many strangers.

Six percent of women said that they were unable to go out when they needed to. These women reported that men were free to move anywhere but women had



Source: Field work, 1992

N=29

Note: For key see Figure 8.1. Percentage is done on the basis of total women in each category.

to be careful and wait until dark to go outside to urinate or defecate. Some women who did not have any men in their households had to wait to collect food. These women said that they and their children often starved because of *parda* and that their children often cried because they were extremely hungry.

Some women (6%) reported that whilst they knew that they could carry out many tasks done by men to deal with flood crises, they were prevented from doing so in order to maintain their *parda*. For fear of gossip they sometimes sat idle on

their *macha* and avoided strangers. These women reported that whilst they had to look for *niribili* (solitary) time to go outside, men were always outside. Four percent of women gave other reasons for this. One landless woman said, "*Parda* should be maintained only by the rich, because they can afford a *borkha*." Other women said that it is a luxury for the poor, who always wear torn clothes so how could they cover their heads? According to these women people would gossip about them if they did not maintain *parda*, but they would not provide poor women with food to eat or dry clothes to change into.

Some women felt that *parda* prevented them from performing essential activities. The notion of a gendered division of labour remained during floods but in fact, many women end up shouldering large responsibilities. Poor women were more vulnerable to floods but they had more freedom and responsibility in household decision making and sustenance. When men lost their paid work women provided family sustenance.

### **Summary**

It was stated earlier that *parda*, the socio-cultural ideology of the society, was a major part of women's everyday life. But in this chapter it was evident that when survival became the main concern, the practice of *parda* was modified. This was particularly true with women in the poorer categories who hardly had resources to survive during floods. Men did not need to think about *parda* but did not do any women's tasks even to protect their wives' *parda*. This situation created a dilemma in the lives of poorer women in Jolpur: they had to do their gender-assigned activities, such as collecting drinking water and also had to maintain their modesty.

Many women in the poorer categories shouldered the main responsibilities for their households' sustenance and were compelled to suspend *parda*. These women felt ashamed and obligated for not maintaining *parda* but accepted the reality that

they did not have any other option during the floods. Living in public view was, nevertheless a cause of shame. Women in better-off categories did not face such severe flood-related crises and were therefore able to maintain *parda* more easily.

### **Women and welfare relief**

During floods, food, clothing and sometimes money was often available but on a limited scale. In Jolpur only food aid was available. This was given by the government. In addition relief was also given by one religious leader, one foreign donor agency and other private sources. During the 1988 floods lists of households were obtained by the relief agencies from the Union *Porishod* (UP) or union council office, and food was distributed to the senior woman of each household.

During the 1988 flood, only 34 (2 [22%] in the destitute, 9 [39%] in the landless, 16 [53%] in the small farmer 'a', 5 [38%] in the small farmer 'b' and 2 [22%] in the small farmer 'd' categories) out of 101 women reported that they received any relief goods.

Table 8.9 shows that 46% (16)<sup>7</sup> of women reported getting rice; 29% (10) flour; 26% (9) *khichuri* (a preparation of rice and pulses cooked together); 18% (6) wheat and 14% (5) other kinds of food such as *atap* or boiled rice (women usually made *pitha* from this rice), cooked rice and dates. All of these women belonged to the poorer categories and said that these relief goods were not sufficient for their needs. A majority of women in the destitute (77%) and landless (61%) categories who faced severe food shortages during the 1988 flood did not get any kind of food as relief. Women in other poorer categories (47% in the small farmer 'a',

---

7. These percentages were based on the total of 34 women who received relief. The percentage is more than 100% due to women's multiple responses, for example, a woman who received rice at the same time might also have got wheat or flour.

61% in the 'b'. 100% in the 'c' and 77% in the 'd' categories) also faced food shortages and other flood related problems but did not get any relief.

**Table 8.9: Percentage of women receiving particular relief goods during floods by household category**

Types of relief (frequencies)	Household category							
	D (2)	L (9)	Sfa (16)	Sfb (5)	Sfc (0)	Sfd (2)	Mdf (0)	Rf (0)
Rice (16)	50	78	50	-	-	-	-	-
Flour (10)	50	33	25	-	-	-	-	-
Khichuri (9)	50	22	25	-	-	50	-	-
Wheat (6)	-	-	19	50	-	50	-	-
Others (5)	-	22	13	20	-	-	-	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=34

Note: For key see Table 8.1.

Sixty six percent of women reported that they did not get any relief during the 1988 flood because: first, when they heard relief was being distributed by men they did not collect it because of *parda*. They said that strangers pulled women's thumbs, which was a breach of their *parda* norm. This referred to the practice of taking finger prints as a record that aid had been received. Women said that they heard that some distributors were disrespectful, arrogant and harassed women. Second, women faced transport problems. Third, some women who did not have any adult male to accompany them did not go to the relief centre because they had heard women without male guardians were given lesser amounts of relief than women who went with men. By not going at all these women did not get any of the relief which they thought they needed. Fourth, single women with children did not go because they thought they should not leave the children alone at their

*macha*. Fifth, they had seen that some women left their crying children with their husbands or other members and came back with very little or no food. These women said that distributors stole the relief goods and then told women that they had already distributed all government relief. Sixth, women who had walked long distances (sometimes carrying their children through chest-high water), needed quick assistance but the response from relief officials was just the opposite.

Of the 67 women who did not receive relief those in the middle and rich farmer categories said that they did not need it and wanted to depend on their household members' income, but they thought that the poor did need it.

In Jolpur the union *porishod* was the relief distribution agency for all government relief and sometimes, on request, distributed relief from other sources also. This was true of most other remote villages. The chairman (chief executive of the UP) had the responsibility to distribute relief among villagers. Women said that relief was distributed at a main centre on the road from where they had to collect the relief goods. According to some women, relief was not properly distributed regardless of its source. A few women reported that the distributors of the aid from the religious leader brought relief goods direct to their households. In all other cases, women (and in a few cases, men) had to collect the relief goods themselves from the distribution points. Women wanted to know why, if the relief goods were in their names, they had to either leave their children, or carry them through the flood (both of which were dangerous), to reach the distribution points? Why did the distributors not come to them?

Women were asked whether they always expected relief to help them survive floods. The majority of women (82%) reported that they did not always expect relief and did not want to depend on relief for survival.

Table 8.10 shows the reasons given by women as to why they did not expect relief as a coping or survival mechanism. Sixty one percent (51) of women said

they did not want to depend on relief, rather they wanted to depend on their own family income for survival. They prayed to Allah to keep them from depending on outside assistance and stated that they did not want to depend on the kindness (*doya*) of others in order to survive floods. They argued that relief did not help people very much in the long run, although it might help some temporarily. They preferred to work their own way out of their problems. These women belonged to the destitute (33%), landless (57%), small farmer 'a' (69%), 'b' (70%), 'c' (67%), 'd' (66%), middle (60%) and to the rich (25%) categories.

**Table 8.10: Explanation given by women as to why they did not expect relief during floods by household category**

Explanation (frequencies)	Household category							
	D (3)	L (21)	Sfa (23)	Sfb (10)	Sfc (3)	Sfd (9)	Mdf (10)	Rf (4)
Want to depend on own income (51)	33	57	69	70	67	66	60	25
Corruption of distributors (27)	33	43	40	33	33	-	-	-
Want flood protection (12)	-	33	17	20	-	-	-	-
No need (7)	-	-	-	-	-	-	40	75
Others (7)	33	5	9	-	-	11	10	25

Source: Field work, 1992

N=83

Note: For key see Table 8.1.

Thirty two percent (27) of those women (33% in the destitute, landless 38%, Small farmer 'a' 43%, 'b' 40% and 'c' 33%) who did not expect relief said that this was because of the way it was distributed. Most of these women belonged to the poorer categories. They reported hearing that the Government had provided huge

amounts of various foodstuffs for distribution among villagers but they had not received anything.

Women commented on the corruption of relief distributors. One landless woman challenged this corruption: "Why should we expect relief goods for the UP members to eat?". One woman in the small farmer category said that it would be better if the government stopped the relief distribution, because all the relief goods were stolen by the UP chairman and members and the poor continued to suffer. Another woman in the small farmer 'a' category grieved that it was a matter of great regret that the members and chairman of the union *porishod* did not distribute relief among the poor properly. She expressed her sorrow by saying that, "These people begged votes from us during the election but betrayed us during our crises". Women said that they had heard the chairman and members got plenty of dates along with other food but did not redistribute them to poor women, rather they sold them at the market. These women reported that their expectations were raised by the possibility of getting relief and difficulties were only increased through not receiving the relief expected. According to these women, *asha*, or hope for relief, was enough to make one idle. Some women said their husbands and sons did not allow them to work or did not look for work themselves after they had heard that huge amounts of relief goods were coming. However, these women reported that they overcame this within a short time and started to depend on whatever they themselves could do for their households' survival. One woman in the destitute category said that she heard that the Government gave rice, sugar and other foods for distribution among the villagers, but she did not get any. She starved and "...thought for a while that it would be better if Allah took me to the graveyard". Her children were crying for food and she had nothing to give them but when she saw that one of the neighbouring women had come back with just half a kilo of wheat after queuing a long time, she resolved to survive by doing something herself. She collected water lily and *shaluk* and started to work for better-off women during the daytime, avoiding the risk of flood water.

Fourteen percent of women in the poorer categories (33% in the landless, 17% in the small farmer 'a' and 20% in the small farmer 'b') reported that they did not expect relief because, for these women, the question of relief distribution was much less important than the prevention of flood (*bonna*). Because the hardships during floods were severe, relief was of very little (*khub samanya*) help in coping with them. These women said that the Government should take steps to prevent floods rather than distribute relief. Flood prevention would aid women more in the long term.

Eight percent of women gave other reasons why they did not want any relief: reasons connected with *parda*, the absence of men and transport problems. Women said that in the last flood men distributed the relief, and held their hands while taking thumb-prints after the distribution. To these women, the touch of a *por-purush* (male stranger) is a sin for a woman. Some women said that their husbands did not like the system of relief distribution either. Women in the middle and rich farmer categories said that they did not need to depend on relief. Thirty percent of women in the middle farmer category said that they had suffered shortages of things for which they never expected to depend on others help.

When asked what problems arose without relief, one landless woman expressed her anger by saying that, "We have never got any relief, so we can't know the problems of not getting it? We did not die!" No women said that they would not survive without relief.

Women said that they did not see much difference in their survival chances with or without relief; that during the floods they suffered not only from food crises but also from other problems such as housing, lack of sanitation, protection of livestock and many others. In Jolpur the only relief goods distributed were food and women thought this was not sufficient to reduce the hardships of the poor. However, women in the better-off categories thought it would have been useful if relief goods had been sufficient for a poor family through the flood. These women

reported that during floods poor women often had to eat unusual food or miss a daily meal, and relief could have reduced these hardships. Some women in the middle and rich farmer categories said that they had to prevent starvation of the poor and had helped them from their own stores or savings, even when they themselves were anxious about the uncertainty of flood water receding. They argued that the poor did not have land, stores of food, money or work during floods and in those conditions they would starve. Some women said that if the poor could get small amounts of rice gruel (*fen*) they would not die. Poor women, on the other hand, did not say relief was needed only to prevent their starvation. This may be because they did not only face food problems but many others which they thought should be solved by the Government.

Eighteen women in the poorer categories (66% in the destitute, 9% in the landless, 23% in the small farmer 'a' and 23% in the small farmer 'b') said that they needed some relief in order to be assured survival in future floods. They said that relief in the form of food and work could reduce their miseries to some extent. Some women mentioned that they lost their work during floods and in that period any kind of work could ameliorate their difficulties. They said that during floods they needed all kinds of aid to minimise their losses. Poor women said that appropriate relief would have eased some problems as they had neither income nor savings. These women mentioned their housing conditions and problems in the flood refuge. They asked for government to provide a flood-shelter.

Women said that during floods prices of essentials at the market became so high that it was beyond the ability of the poor to purchase goods and at that time essential relief could help them. Women in the destitute category said that they did not get help from other villagers because of their poor economic situation. Some said that if they have had relief they would not have to face severe flood-related difficulties. Some mentioned the need for medical facilities during floods. Some women talked about the distribution of water purification methods as relief to avoid sickness.

Women who depended mostly on social networks said that they did not need to depend on relatives or neighbours if they had sufficient relief from the government. Women who had to sell assets to survive the flood reported that if people could have got some kind of relief they would not have had to sell their assets.

### **Summary**

Relief goods were not distributed to the people who most needed them. Relief was available to women by name but it was received by only a few of them. Poor single women or women who were unable to leave their houses or the flood refuge failed to collect relief goods. The amount of relief goods available was insufficient. It was not possible to feed a family throughout the flood with the small amounts of food that were received. For some poor women, however, it was a temporary help.

Women mentioned the appropriation of relief goods by officials. Women thought distributors should bring relief to their doors so that they would not have to leave their households and their children or carry heavy burdens in dangerous conditions. For fear of breaking *parda* norms some women did not go to the relief distributing centres which were operated by men.

No poor women wished to depend only on relief, rather they wanted to depend on their own income. Poor women said that they would prefer that floods be prevented rather than having to depend on even a small amount of relief. Better-off women did not need to depend on relief but they thought that the poor should get assistance from government so as to limit their dependence on social networks (i.e. on better-off women). Better-off women said that the poor needed relief to prevent starvation. Poor women, on the other hand, thought relief was needed not only in the form of food but also in forms which would solve some of their other major flood-time problems.

## Summary and Conclusion

Flood or *bonna* was perceived by women as an uncontrollable, unexpected and damaging phenomenon. Women's perceptions varied depending on the problems they faced. Flood brought tremendous sufferings for all women and men in Jolpur but the problems and coping mechanisms varied according to gender and socio-economic background. Women in poorer categories suffered more than others because of gender-differences in the society and the poor socio-economic background of their households.

As discussed earlier there were differences between the conditions of poorer and better-off women in the flood-free time. This was even more true during the flood time. Better-off women did not have to face flood-related crises as severely as poorer women did. During flood women in poorer categories suffered from loss of their houses, assets, shortages of food, fuel and water; felt insecure; lacked toilet facilities and failed to maintain *parda* as opposed to better-off women.

The activities they performed before, during and after flood, the coping strategies they developed and the problems they faced were also related to their practice of *parda* and gender identity. The strong division of labour forced poorer women to do certain tasks for their households' survival which led them to compromise with *parda*. During floods the gender division of labour was not broken down, rather the crises created additional jobs which were more often done by women than men. Floods made poorer women's everyday tasks more difficult to perform and, when men were absent, brought about a transfer of some of men's responsibilities to women. Women in poorer categories often acted as men did in making platforms, cutting bamboo, making bamboo bridges, protecting crops and livestock and engaging in income generating activities. These were very crucial for the survival of their households' during floods. Men, on the other hand, remained more restricted to their gender-assigned activities. It was evident that

welfare relief provided by government did not reach the poor who most needed it. Moreover, collection of relief goods created great difficulties for women.

The next chapter will focus on some of women's coping strategies developed within their gender-assigned sphere.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Coping strategies during floods**

In Chapter Eight women's perception of floods and the problems they faced when living in flood shelters, losing their assets, performing different activities, maintaining their *parda* and collecting relief goods have been discussed. On the basis of the above discussion the present chapter will attempt to focus on the coping strategies developed by women. It will emphasize the activities undertaken by women for their households' survival.

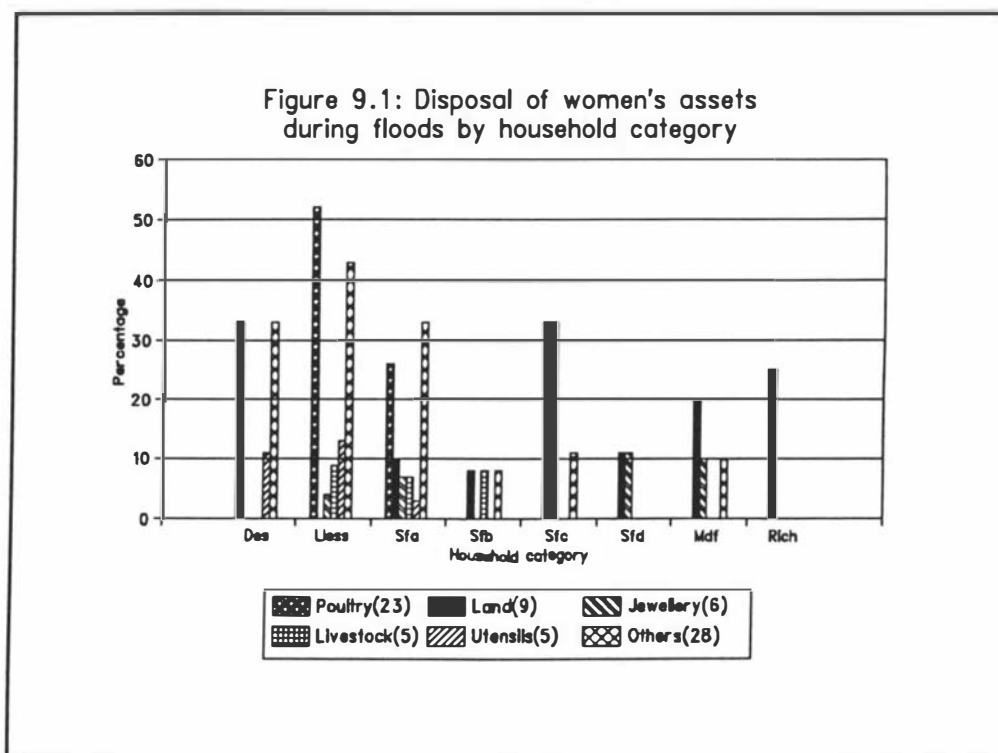
#### **Sale of women's assets**

The sale of assets is a common way for rural households to survive any crisis. Researchers (Chen, 1983:61, 1991:127; Katona-Apte, 1988:44; Corbett, 1988:1106-1107; Agarwal, 1991:383-84) have pointed out that some assets, such as jewellery, livestock and household items, are more likely to be sold than others during a food crisis. This is very significant because these are assets which usually belong to women and they are often their only assets. They are sold, or mortgaged, by their husbands to repay loans, to educate sons or to maintain the livelihood of the households.

Assets such as milking cows or goats are not essential for agricultural production but can play a major role during crises. Sometimes these assets are described as 'non-productive' because they cannot usually produce a continuous income as can land. Land or cattle, which play a main role in earning, are less liquid than these 'non-productive' assets. Women's assets are more easily converted to cash and are therefore the first to be disposed of to meet the immediate needs of family survival. These assets are referred to as 'self-insurance' which help to save the 'key-productive' assets of a household. The loss of key-assets might result in long-term economic decline. Women or men resist changing their status from farmer to landless as long as they have other options to cope with crises.

Women were asked whether they had sold any assets of their 'very own' during the 1988 flood. Forty six percent said they had. Of these women many had sold several 'small' assets. Women said that even during a normal year they had to sell assets but not to the same degree as they did during floods. This is because survival options became limited during flood-related crisis, when they could not do other income-earning activities such as selling their labour, handicrafts, share-tending or carrying on small businesses (Figure 9.1).

**Sale of poultry:** Most poultry was sold by poor women: they did not have more valuable assets to dispose of. These women said that they needed money to buy food and, furthermore, they did not have the means to keep the poultry alive. In general, during a flood, many livestock, such as cattle, cows, goats and poultry were destroyed due to the sudden rise of water, snake bites, diseases and starvation. Destitute and landless women said that they had to sell their poultry at a low price. Some women said that they cried when their poultry died in the flood water and they decided to sell the rest to meet family needs. No women in other categories reported selling chickens.



Source: Field Work, 1992

N=46

Note: Des=Destitute, Lless=Landless, Sfa=Small farmer 'a', Sfb=Small farmer 'b', Sfc=Small farmer 'c', Sfd=Small farmer 'd', Mdf=Middle farmer and Rich=Rich farmer. These codes will be used for Figure 9.2.

**Sale of land<sup>1</sup>:** Nine percent of women sold their land during or just after the flood to supply family needs. Women reported that men sold the land that belonging to women first even when they intended to sell other land also. They said that men's assets were retained for the future and women's assets, whatever they were, were disposed of. This represented a considerable sacrifice for these women because they thought that they would never be able to own land again.

1. Women said that they were grateful to those who bought land from them and said that at that time all village land was under water but still people bought it to help the poor get some money. However, some women said that better-off men were clever enough to realise that land is always valuable and they did not hesitate to take the opportunities to buy land at very low prices.

Ten percent of the small farmer 'a', eight percent of the small farmer 'b', 33% of the small farmer 'c', 11% of the small farmer 'd', 20% of the middle farmer and 25% of rich farmer women said that they sold their own land. However, some women said that their land was not as important as their husbands' because its location often in their places of birth and the quality, being very low lying and often not cultivated.

**Sale of jewellery:** Jewellery, which represents stored and sentimental value for women, also helped some women to meet flood-related crises. However, women said that the devastating flood of 1988 made it very difficult to buy and sell items such as jewellery. A middle farmer woman said that she had to sell her gold bangle to a goldsmith in a nearby town, which was a sad experience for her. Her husband took much trouble to reach the town by boat and, after the visit become seriously ill. However, the woman agreed that selling her bangle helped her family to save their land from being disposed off. Two women in small farmer 'a' and another two women in small farmer 'c' and 'd' categories sold their ornaments to relatives or neighbours. One landless woman said that she had sold a silver nose pin, which was her only ornament, to her cousin (mother's sister's daughter) who was also married in Jolpur. These women (except the middle farmer woman) said that those who had bought the ornaments from them did not do so willingly, but after being implored they took them but asked the sellers to keep the sale secret, especially from their husbands. Women who sold jewellery were grateful to those women who bought it because they knew these women had used some of their own resources.

**Sale of livestock:** Although women owned livestock such as milking cows or goats, they did not sell these as long as they had other means to survive. For some women their livestock was their main source of income and they tried their best to keep them. Some said that they disposed of their poultry and other small assets to save livestock. Poor women said that they

tied the tether around their waists to prevent livestock being washed away by flood water. However, five women, two in the landless, two in small farmer 'a' and one in small farmer 'b' categories, reported that they had sold livestock. Women said that they sold livestock because they could not accommodate them or feed them or because they feared the animals would drown or die from disease. The most common reason for selling livestock was "to get money to eat". One landless woman said that the members of her household had to compete with her cows for food. Poor women said that they had great affection for their animals and were partly or fully dependent on them. However, they had had no alternative but to dispose of them.

Men's livestock or draft animals (cattle, oxen), which were essential for ploughing, were protected from the flood and women and men shared the responsibility for caring for those animals. Women said that they were very anxious about their vulnerable cattle which were essential for agricultural production.

**Sale of kitchen utensils:** Women in destitute (11%), landless (13%) and small farmer 'a' (3%) categories said that they had sold kitchen utensils to survive floods. Among other commonly sold kitchen utensils was the moveable stove which women made for themselves and sold to other women. These women sold mud pitchers and small *oron* (a spoon made from a section of a coconut-shell with bamboo or other stick as a handle). However, no other women told of such sales.

**Sale of other assets:** Twenty eight percent of women said that they sold various items which they considered their very own possessions. These included trees, seeds, clothing such as saris and petticoats, quilts (*katha*), mosquito nets, eggs, food, small birds, pieces broken from the houses, jute-poles, bamboo, bricks and other things. Some collected aquatic plants and sold them. Most of these assets were sold by poor women (33% in the destitute,

43% in the landless, 40% in the small farmer 'a', 8% in the small farmer 'b', 11% in the small farmer 'c' and 10% in the small farmer 'd' categories). Although many households had several trees and women looked after them, most of them were destroyed by flood water. Women said that it was impossible to cut down trees due to the depth of water. Most of the women said they did not think anyone would buy these. However, three women said that they sold trees to people who needed materials to build platforms or boats. These women said that at that time flood water had just crossed the normal flood or *borsha* water level. Other households also sold trees after the 1988 floods but women in those households did not think of those trees as their 'very own' assets.

Women said that it was hard for them to dispose of, or pawn, something which had great sentimental value but nevertheless they had to do this to protect their families from hunger. It was interesting that most of the women sold their assets (other than land) themselves as they did during the non-flood time. They said that they sold chickens and livestock themselves at very low prices to neighbours, relatives or traders, despite the fact that they knew that the latter would sell them at a higher price in a nearby market, because they had to meet their immediate family consumption. Most of these women did not have any men present during the flood. Women who had husbands or sons sold some of their assets at the bazaar or *haat*.

### **Summary**

We have seen in Chapter Seven that women in Jolpur did not own valuable assets as men did. Even if they had some assets they were considered 'less valuable' or 'non-productive'. However, it is evident that women's 'non-productive' assets became more 'productive' when they were disposed-of during floods. Women's assets were used to meet the immediate needs of the households during floods when men's assets were kept for the future. Poorer

women and men did not have stores of food, money or work during floods and they had to sell their 'small' assets such as poultry and kitchen utensils. Some also had to sell their goats and milking cows whereas men's animals, which were needed for cultivation, were more protected.

Women in better-off categories did not have to depend on their assets for their families' survival because of their husbands' stronger economic background. However, even when some of these households needed to dispose of assets it was women's, not men's, assets that were sold. It was revealed that men sold lands which belonged to women. Perhaps this was because even though women possessed some land its quality was lower than that of men. The sale of their own land affected women more than the sale of other assets as they thought they would never be able to become owners of land again.

#### **Women and preparation of food**

As previously stated in Jolpur the kind of food consumed, the sources of food, for example, own gardens, market, stores, food as wages and the amount and frequency of food intake varied according to socio-economic category even when there was no flood. During floods there was a great difference in the kind of food, the amount and the frequency of food preparation and the sources of food among women in different socio-economic categories. The food supplies of the poor, undernourished and malnourished at the best of times, were further reduced during the floods. It was women who had the responsibility for adjusting the household food consumption. However, all women reported that they had to adjust their consumption pattern during the 1988 floods and the food intake of almost all households differed from that of the non-flood period of a normal year. Differences in food intake can also be found according to gender (see below).

Researchers (Islam, 1977; Curry, 1981; Ali, 1984; Abdullah and Wheeler, 1985) have pointed out that there are considerable seasonal variations in food availability in rural Bangladesh and people have devised various means of adjusting to the lean periods. Women's work is closely related to agricultural production, family food and income generation and that is why the burden of food shortage falls upon them. In times of shortage women in rural areas make a vital contribution to family food consumption. In the 1943 Bengal famine, when men went out to look for work or food, women were left behind with children and aged family members. These women took up low-paid jobs and collected roots, edible greens and other 'famine food' (Arnold, 1988:86-9).

In Bangladesh when the land is too dry, women participate in rain-making rituals with a *kula* (winnowing-platter), paddy, grass and water. Women throw water from pots in the landowners courtyard and plant grass (as a symbol of paddy-grains) with paddy and sing a song: "*Allah megh dey, pani dey*" (God give cloud and rain) for rice. Agriculture cannot guarantee food throughout the year in Bangladesh and poor rural women have to depend on different strategies for their livelihood - which include borrowing money and engaging in non-agricultural work. Women also contribute to the household food supply by receiving meals as part of their wages (which is discussed in Chapter Six).

Currey's (1981:128) study on the famine syndrome in Bangladesh stated that river bank erosion and heavy rainfall or floods interrupted agricultural work and caused unemployment and high food prices which, in turn, affected the food purchasing power of the rural poor. Some households could not even afford to buy coarse grain. Over 63% of his sample households ate less than one rice meal a day. Curry's statement regarding rural Bangladeshi households' three rice meals per day however, is not valid for Jolpur where even in a flood-free year, some households can afford to eat rice only twice (23%) or even once (3%) a day. In one of his sample villages, Currey found that people adjusted their consumption patterns by eating alternative, 'ubiquitous and

unacceptable' foods, such as *kolar mocha* (cone of the banana) and *bon kochu* (wild arum). However, he did not document women's responsibilities in this alternative food consumption.

Ali (1984:18) states (in the case of Bangladesh and India) that during any kind of food crisis when men cannot earn enough to feed the whole family, women become the food procurers for their household members. During famine or other food shortages women gathered wild foods and engaged in other work for the families' survival.

### **Sources and types of food prepared by women**

Most of the poor households did not have a reliable and stable source of food during floods. Women in these categories played a vital role in acquiring food from many sources, some of which were totally different from flood-free sources. Poorer women reported that seasonal food shortage was a normal part of their lives at certain times of the year, becoming worse during a severe flood. Women in poorer categories were more responsible for family food procurement. When there was a shortage, these women tried to manage food through their own efforts by gathering edible or wild plants or small amounts of low quality food such as rotten or discarded vegetables or accepting rice gruel from better-off women.

Whereas during the non-flood periods 57% households obtained food from their own land, only 13% depended on their own land for food during the 1988 flood for that year's food grain yield. These women mostly belonged to the middle farmer and the rich farmer categories. Small farmer women reported that they possessed only a few acres of land on which they not only produced food grain but also cash crops, such as jute. These women said that after they had sold their crops they had little left with which to feed their household members. Women in these categories also mentioned that most of their land

was low lying and was flooded before they had harvested all their crops. This did not happen for the better-off households which had cultivable land on higher ground. The ability to hire labour was also greater for the rich. With the help of employed labour, better-off households harvested their crops earlier than the smaller landowners who did not have the resources to hire labour. Members of these households used only their own labour and failed to harvest all their crops before flood waters entered their fields.

Women's own efforts were very useful in protecting their family members from hunger at least for some days. Some landed women said that they did not have large amounts of land as did middle or rich households and they stored part of their crops for lean years. Most of these women said that they did not inform their husbands/male members of their households of this store because, according to one woman in the small farmer category, "Men want to make money by selling all crops, women want to stop the crying of their children by providing food from their own pot."

Destitute and landless women who had little or no land only maintained their livelihood by a hand-to-mouth existence. However, rich and middle farmer women said that they had stores for the whole year and during a normal year they did not use their stores. Almost all women in the middle and rich farmer categories reported that they had to use their stores of food for family consumption. Poor women, on the other hand did not have sufficient stores of food. Women in the landless category said that they stored a handful of rice and other food which was not sufficient to prevent hunger during the food crises associated with floods. Small farmer women also reported the same. No destitute women reported having stores of staple food.

The arrangement and procurement of food was mainly the responsibility of women in Jolpur. Women were asked whether, during floods, they had cooked any kind of food which they would not eat in a normal year. A

majority of women in the poor categories said that they had. Women said that during the flood the normal pattern of food consumption in their households changed. The price of staple food items became so high that they were beyond the purchasing power of the poor. When men refused to buy food women had to manage by their own means. Women without any men in their households had no choice but to get food themselves (women's collection of food from village common land will be discussed later).

Poorer women said that during floods the type and amount of cooking or serving of any kind of food was different from flood-free times (see Chapter 7). Table 9.1 shows the frequency of types of food served by women during the 1988 flood. Poorer people frequently ate food of poor nutritional quality. A majority of women in the poorer categories stated that they starved during floods. Women did not mention for how many days they starved but said it was frequently. There were also variations in the amount of rice or other food cooked and served by women in different categories. Whereas better-off women cooked food to ensure that at least their husbands and children were satisfied, the poor reported that they cooked only to survive. For poor women missing a meal for the whole day was not uncommon.

**Table 9.1: Frequency of types of food served by women during floods by household category**

Types of food and frequency	D	L	Sfa	Sfb	Sfc	Sfd	Mdf	Rf
<b>Rice</b>								
3 times	-	4	7	8	33	22	50	50
Twice	22	21	37	38	67	67	40	50
Once	44	35	30	46	-	11	10	-
Once in 3-4 days	22	30	27	8	-	-	-	-
Once a week	11	4	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 9.1 continued

<b>Pulse (dal)</b>								
3 times	-	-	3	8	33	11	40	50
Twice	-	-	7	23	33	22	30	25
Once	-	21	13	15	-	11	10	25
Once in 3-4 days	22	17	27	38	-	11	20	-
Once a week	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Fish</b>								
3 times	-	-	3	-	-	11	10	-
Twice	-	-	-	-	33	11	10	25
Once	-	-	-	8	-	11	-	-
Once in 3-4 days	-	4	3	23	-	22	-	-
Once a week	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	25
<b>Vegetable</b>								
3 times	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25
Twice	-	9	3	15	33	11	30	50
Once	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25
Once in 3-4 days	-	4	3	8	33	11	10	-
Once a week	33	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Bread (ruti)</b>								
3 times	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Twice	44	4	9	8	-	11	-	-
Once	11	13	3	8	33	11	-	-
Once in 3-4 days	11	13	3	8	33	11	-	-
Once a week	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=101

Note: Where D=Destitute, L=Landless, Sfa=Small farmer 'a', Sfb=Small farmer 'b', Sfc=Small farmer 'c', Sfd=Small farmer 'd', Mdf=Middle farmer and Rf=Rich farmer. These codes will be used in tables 9.2 to 9.6.

Whereas 75% of women reported serving three rice meals per day in normal times only 14% said they served rice three times daily during flooding. Women in the destitute and landless category suffered food shortages more than the others. Forty four percent of destitute women reported that they tried to serve rice at least once a day, 22% twice, 22% once every 3-4 days and 11% once a week. Women in the landless category said that they served rice either once a day (35%), twice a day (21%), once every 3-4 days (30%) or once a week (4%). Only one women in this category reported serving rice three times

a day. Women in the small farmer categories also had to adjust the daily frequency of rice cooking. The percentages of women in poorer categories (4% in the landless, 7% in the small farmer 'a', 8% in the small farmer 'b', 33% in the small farmer 'c' and 22% in the small farmer 'd' category) who served rice three times a day were very much lower than those of middle and rich farmers. Fifty percent of women in the middle farmer and 50% who were in the rich farmer categories served rice three times a day. Although all women in the middle farmer category served rice three times a day during the flood-free period, during the flood 40% of them served rice twice a day and one woman reported cooking rice only once. It was also true in the case of the rich farmer households. All women in the rich category cooked rice three times a day in the flood-free time, whereas only 50% of them cooked three rice meals per day during floods.

In the case of preparing *dal* it was also poorer women (3% in the small farmer 'a', 8% in the small farmer 'b', 33% in the small farmer 'c', 11% in the small farmer 'd') who cooked lesser amount of *dal* compared to better-off women (40% in the middle farmer and 50% in the rich farmer category). Twenty two percent of women said that they prepared *dal* once every three to four days. Most of these women belonged to the poorer categories.

The percentage of women preparing *ruti* also varied from flood-free time to the flood-time and from poorer to better-off women. During the flood-free time 19% of women reported serving *ruti* once every three to four days, whereas during the flood 7% of them made it twice a day, 8% once a day and another 8% once every three-four days. Poor women said that most of them borrowed or were given flour with which they prepared *ruti* and other items. A majority of poor women used flour in other ways rather than preparing *ruti* from it, and these will be discussed later.

Fish was infrequently served by rural women during floods. The percentage of women who served fish three times a day varied from 5% to 17%. Poor women said there were no fish to be caught in the high floodwater. *Borsha*, or normal flood, favours the catching of fish from village ponds, but not the *bonna* or severe floods. When members of some households caught fish, they preferred to sell it because of the higher price in the market during floods. Only one women in the landless category reported cooking or serving fish every three to four days. This item was mainly cooked by women in the better-off households.

The preparation of vegetables also varied from one category to another. Only 33% of women in the destitute category said that they ate 'normal' vegetables once a week. In the landless category, nine percent of women served vegetables twice a day, four percent once every 3-4 days and four percent once a week. Women in the middle farmer category reported serving vegetables once (10%) or twice (30%) a day whereas rich women cooked them once (25%), twice (50%) or three times (25%) a day.

Women reported cooking other (unusual or infrequently cooked food in a flood-free year) food once every three to four days. Poor women said most other foods were unusual for them (discussed below). However, the types of other food differed from rich to poor. Whereas women in destitute, landless and small farmer categories reported cooking other food either once or twice a day, middle farmer and rich farmers reported cooking other food once every three-four days, the content of which varied according to the household's socio-economic category. No women in the rich category reported cooking unusual or lean foods during floods. No women reported cooking meat, the 'luxury' food, during the flood of 1988.

Whereas rich women had sufficient stocks to feed their families, no women in any other category did. Forty three percent of women reported that

they made *atar gola* or *atar jau* (a gruel prepared from a small amount of flour heated with huge amount of water) during floods which was never eaten during flood-free times. Women said that although in the flood-free time they rarely used flour and prepared *ruti*, during floods they made *chapra*. Whereas most of the poor women often ate *chapra* in flood-free times, some women in the small farmer 'd' and the middle farmer categories reported having *chapra* only during floods. The majority of women in the destitute (56%), landless (65%) and small farmer 'a' (50%) category reported that they did not make *chapra* or *ruti* because of the shortage of fuel and also because of the limited resources to buy flour. These women said that whereas with half a kilo of flour they could hardly make 6-8 *ruti*, they could use half a kilo of flour to provide for at least three days of family meals. Women in these categories reported that they mixed flour with water, sometimes they were even unable to include salt. Women said that no members of their households liked this food but they had to eat it to survive.

Nineteen percent of women reported eating *fen* (rice gruel) during floods. Women in the poor categories, especially the destitute and landless, said that *fen* was not an unusual food for them. Even during a normal year, when there were no severe floods, they never threw out rice gruel. A majority of these women said that if they cooked rice it was not always sufficient for their households' consumption and most of the time after serving food to their household members they themselves ate *fen*. But it was unusual for other women. A woman in the middle farmer category said that she did not serve rice gruel to her husband or children but sometimes she had to eat it herself to save rice. She said that in flood-free times she gave rice gruel either to her cattle or chickens or to the poor. Women who had livestock fed them rice gruel.

Seven percent of women said that after they had finished all the food in their stores, they cooked *khesari* or *kalai dal* (kinds of inferior pulse), which

they considered to be animal food. One woman in the small farmer 'd' category reported that when the price of food became extremely high she cooked *khesari/kalai* from her store, having been told how to do it by a neighbour. Destitute women, however, did not even have stocks of *khesari/kalai*.

Forty two percent of women reported cooking other foods which included boiled vegetables, without spices, roots, animal fodder and others. A majority of women said that they had to prepare all these unusual foods to prevent the starvation of their household members. They said that these foods were very unusual and they would never normally cook or serve these foods. Every morning they had to get a new idea about what to make as family food for the day. Many foods were new innovations for the majority of women. Women reported cooking *shapla* (stem of water lily) with arum, dust of *kalai*, foaming rice or *kalai*, rice of *mainna* or *kheura* paddy (animal fodder) curry with *fen*, *satu* (flour normally made of barley or pigeon-pea or maize) made of broken bits of grain and *kura* (the red powdery coating of rice under the husk), lumps of flour burnt in the fire, one handful of rice with lots of water and chili, fried broken bits of grain, *panta bhat* (stale, boiled rice put in fresh water and preserved for future meal) and different creepers or *shuk* (edible plants or potherbs). However, this list of generally unusual food was not unusual for all women. For example, *sudhu bhat* (rice without any other item) was common for destitute or landless women but was reported as an unusual food by women in small farmer 'd' and the middle farmer category.

It has been explained earlier that during floods destitute and landless women rarely cooked rice. These women said that even during flood-free times they had to depend on rice gruel or creepers, which were unusual for other households. During the flood food for them became even more unusual. They had to depend on wild, animal food or on borrowing rice gruel, vegetables, *khud* (broken bits of rice) or others.

Some women in the small farmer category reported that they cooked *atap* rice as the main meal which they never did during flood-free times. These women reported that *panta-bhat*, chilli-rice was very common in their flood-time food consumption.

Women in the middle farmer category said that they had to prepare and eat unusual foods such as broken bits of grain, foamy rice, rice only with ground chilli with *kalozira* or *dal bharta* (mashed lentils), *pepey bharta* (mashed papaya) or *chapra*. Women in this category said that they had never had to depend on these types of food for their family consumption before the 1988 flood.

Women in the rich category reported that they did not prepare any unusual food but they did change their dietary pattern. They said that in order to conserve rice they cooked fewer rice meals. They prepared lentils more than they did during flood-free times. These women said that even if they had stores of food they were very anxious about the future with the level of floodwater level rising every day. They said, "Seeing floodwater rise day by day we lost our appetite (*bonnar pani roj barte deikha pate khudha silona*)". Some women said that they did not eat or feel like eating not because they did not have any food but for want of fuel or because they were worried about a child's or a husband's sickness. Women in rich households said that for fear of fuel depletion they had to limit the number of times they cooked.

### **Summary**

Food shortage was a part of the lives of people in Jolpur which varied not only according to the seasons but also according to gender and socio-economic category (see Chapter 7). Shortage of food mainly occurred during the lean agricultural seasons which were accentuated by floods. Coping with food crises was women's gender-assigned task. Women in all households, though not to

the same degree, adjusted their cooking and consumption patterns during floods. Men in better-off households often bought food from markets but due to the high price of food men in poorer categories often refused to go shopping and it was women who obtained food from various sources.

During floods sources of food differed among socio-economic categories. The types and amount of food cooked by women also varied according to their socio-economic category. Whereas poor women managed food to help their household members survive, better-off women had stored food. After they had used all the food from their own small stores poor women had to adjust their cooking. They cooked food in many ways which were different from flood-free cooking procedures.

#### **Food allocation within the household**

Only a few studies (Chowdhury *et al*, 1981:52-66; Abdullah, 1989:57-64) document the impact of the seasonal variation of food consumption on gender and there is lack of data on food consumption during floods<sup>2</sup>. Chowdhury *et al* (1981:52-59) demonstrated that there are seasonal fluctuations in the nutritional intake of mothers. They showed that women in landless households lost bodyweight just after the period of highest labour demand when the price of rice was high. Abdullah (1989:57-64), pointed out that men's nutritional ('energy') intake was higher than women's. Referring to his research over four different seasons in a Bangladesh village, he also showed that women in poor households were less energetic than women in better-off households.

During the 1988 flood poor women suffered greatly from shortages of food. Of 83 married women 67 were living with their husbands at that time.

---

2. For studies on food allocation to household members in India refer to Gulati, 1978; Batiwala 1983 and Agarwal 1991:368-371.

Women in households without men belonged to the poorer categories (22% of the destitute, 26% of the landless, 4% in the small farmer 'a' and 4% in the small farmer 'b' categories) and they struggled constantly against starvation. These women had either been left by their husbands or their husbands were unable to come home from their work places due to the floods. They reported that they provided whatever food they could for their children and they often starved themselves. To afford three meals a day was beyond their capabilities. These women had to gather or borrow food, to queue for relief and often all three, for the survival of their children and themselves (Table 9.2).

**Table 9.2: Frequency of food consumption by women and men during floods by household category**

Frequency and gender	Household category							
	D (5)	L (12)	Sfa (20)	Sfb (6)	Sfc (3)	Sfd (8)	Mdf (9)	Rf (4)
<b>3 times</b>								
Women (13)	-	-	-	17	33	25	56	10
Men (25)	-	-	20	50	67	63	78	0
								10
								0
<b>Twice</b>								
Women (27)	20	25	45	50	67	63	44	-
Men (34)	60	67	70	50	33	37	22	-
<b>Once</b>								
Women (27)	80	75	55	33	-	12	-	-
Men (8)	40	33	10	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Field Work, 1992

N=67

Note: For key see Table 9.1. Table includes married women whose husbands were at home.

In the destitute and landless categories no women and men took food three times a day. These women said that their husbands were at home but

they did not have any work and it was women who had to manage the food. Sometimes there was no food to manage. In the destitute category 14% of women had two meals a day but 60% of their husbands ate twice. Whereas 86% of women in this category took food only once a day only 40% of men ate once a day. In the landless category 22% of women ate twice and 78% ate once a day whereas 62% of their husbands ate twice and only 38% ate once a day. Women in these categories said that they tried to serve better and larger portions of food to their husbands while they themselves sometimes missed two meals. One landless woman said that her husband liked good food and could not eat coarse or unusual food. For this reason she ate wild food and served the better food to him, if there was any.

No women in the small farmer 'a' category said that they ate food three times a day during the flood, whereas 18% of men in this category were served three meals a day. Forty six percent of wives and 73% of husbands in this category had two meals daily while 54% of women and only 9% of men had one meal a day during floods. One woman in this category said that if she could not serve proper food to her husband or children, how could she think about herself? One woman said that only after feeding her husband and sons did she eat and then only if there was something left. But her sons were not getting proper food as they had during flood-free times and whenever she ate her share the children looked at her reproachfully, "How could a mother eat when her hungry children look at her?" she asked.

Whereas all men and women in the small farmer 'b', 'c', 'd'; middle and rich farmer categories ate three times a day in flood-free times, there was considerable variation during the flood period. In the small farmer 'b' category only 10% of women reported having three meals a day but 56% of their husbands did. Sixty percent of women and 44% of men in this category ate twice and another 30% of women ate once a day during the floods.

In the small farmer 'c' category thirty three percent of women compared to 67% of men ate three meals a day and 67% of women and 33% of men ate two meals a day during the flood. In the small farmer 'd' category 25% of women and 63% of men ate three times a day and 63% of women and 37% of men ate twice daily during flood times. Twelve percent of women in this category ate only one meal a day, whereas none of their husbands were so deprived.

In the middle farmer category 56% percent of women and 78% of men had three meals a day and 44% of women and 22% of men ate only twice a day. No rich women or men missed meals during floods. However, women in this category reported that they could not cook, eat or serve properly because of their anxiety over the high level of floodwater.

There were variations in serving food to boys and girls which cannot be discussed in detail in this study. Women in Jolpur agreed that they served larger amounts of better food to their sons than they did to their daughters. Women said that to raise a girl was to water the neighbours' plants. Girls were *porer sompotti* (other's property) but sons belonged to them. A majority of women said that from their own experience they realised that girls could tolerate hunger but boys could not. A woman cited the local proverb "*Meye loker jan ar koi macher jan sohoje jayna* (women and *koi* fish die slowly)" meaning that women could suffer a lot and could still survive despite their miseries. Eating less than men was a normal part of their lives which started from an early age. Women said that was why they frequently survived for some days during floods without food. A majority of women in the poorer categories said that during the 1988 flood they took food only if there was any left. Some women reported that they did not serve proper food to their husbands during floods and they felt guilty about this. Women thought that even when men did not work, they should always get huge amounts of food. They reported that if they had one meal, they did not eat a second time but tried to serve food to their husbands and children twice a day during floods.

One woman in the landless category said, "*Jotoi thak maye kokhono pet pura khaite parena*" ("Even if there is plenty, mother cannot make her stomach full"). I used to save some food from my smaller share to serve my husband and children again, if they asked". Another said, "If my husband's stomach was full, everything was alright (*pet thik, shob thik*) and that was why I served food first to my husband during floods."

Some women in the better-off category, who did not have a shortage of food, reported that they did not eat three times daily or huge amounts of food as their husbands did, in order to avoid defecating or urinating when provision for such was not private. Others said they did not eat or sleep because of anxiety or sickness during floods.

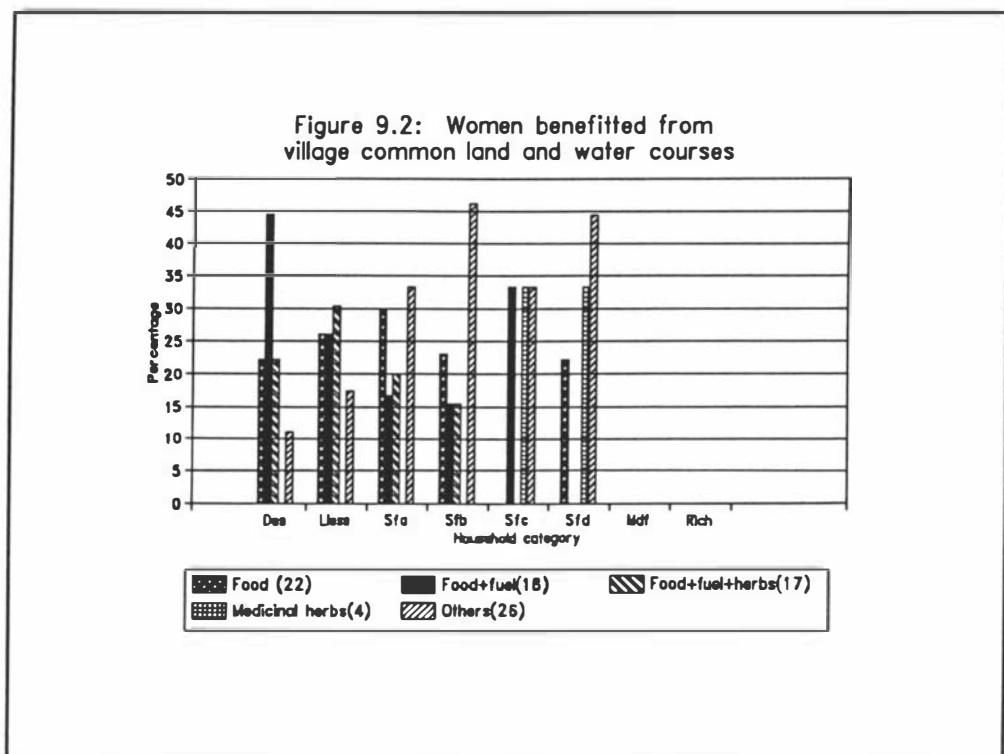
### **Summary**

In Jolpur there was discrimination against women in terms of the quality and frequency of food intake during flood-free times (discussed in Chapter 5). It was evident in this section that this discrimination increased during the floods. It was also evident that both women and men in the poorer categories suffered from food shortages and women commonly sacrificed their own meals for their husbands and children.

There were also differences among the various socio-economic groups. Whereas women in better-off households ate more frequently, women in poor households ate less frequently. Women and men in the better-off category could afford three rice meals a day but women did not eat as men did to avoid having to perform natural functions in embarrassing situations. This indicates that even when there was no shortage of food it was women rather than men who were disadvantaged, which is related to the low status of women.

## Women and common village resources

The degree of dependence on *ejmali sompotti* (ES) varied with the season. Women said that their dependence on village common land or its products diminished due to flood but on many occasions these were their main sources of food, fuel and medicine. Among these aquatic food was the main product gathered by women to serve their household members. It was women who shouldered the main responsibility of collecting products from the village common or private land (Figure 9.2).



Source: Field Work, 1992

N=87

Note: For key see Figure 9.1.

Women reported that they became *shakahari* (a person who is undernourished, probably subsisting on a lean diet of vegetables) or *latapatavoji* (a person who depends on creepers and herbs) during floods. Due to the

increased prices of food-stuffs most poor families did not have cash to buy food from the market. Women said that during the flood their dependence on food from the common land increased greatly and, like cooking and cleaning, the collection of food from common land was women's work. When men failed to earn any money, they became helpless and did not feel it incumbent upon them to find alternative sources of food for their families. Women, on the other hand, were much more capable than men of collecting food for their families. Poor women named a variety of food items which they collected from *ejmali sompotti*. *Shapla* (the stem of the water lily) was the most common one which women used as a major food item and was often mixed with others like *kolmi shuk*, arum leaves or *kochumukhi* (wild arum). Women said some of the plants they collected were only recent discoveries. They had experimented with these by preparing them as food for their families.

During the monsoon, the stems of water lilies (*shapla*) were a common aquatic plant in Bangladeshi ponds and canals and people ate this occasionally. Because of its availability the price of *shapla* was not high and poor people could also afford to buy it in Jolpur.

However, women said that during floods they had sometimes quarrelled with other women because of competition for water lilies. Other plants such as arum leaves and *kolmi shuk* were also eaten but not to the same extent as *shapla*. However, they did not depend on these *ejmali sompotti* foods only in flood free times. For poor women, *shapla* and some other *ejmali sompotti* foods were frequently eaten at different seasons throughout the year when they did not have enough money to buy other food.

Almost all women in the poorer categories (86%) depended on village common land and water courses. Of 22 women who collected food from *ejmali sompotti* 22.2% belonged to the destitute category; 26% to the landless; 30% to the small farmer 'a'; 23% to the small farmer 'b' and 22% to the small

farmer 'd' categories. Eighteen percent of women collected both food and fuel and most of them belonged to the destitute category followed by those of the landless category; 17% of women collected food, fuel and herbs and 4% collected only herbs from the village common land. Twenty six percent of women reported that they were dependent on village common land for various purposes such as collecting platform materials, fodder, water hyacinth (to use as fodder and to build barriers around houses) and grazing livestock. Women in the middle and rich farmer categories were not as dependent on village common land as poor women and did not collect anything themselves. Some women in these categories, however, were dependent on poor women for medicinal herbs or *shapla*.

Destitute women reported that they used water lily as a common food with little or no rice. They had also eaten leafy vegetables and boiled unripe green bananas. Landless women reported that they ate water lily prepared in many different ways: with arum leaves, a little rice and made *bora* (kind of samosa fried in oil) with *dhap* or *shaluk* (ground stalk of water lily). *Kolmi shuk* and *kochu shuk* (arum leaves) were also common foods which were collected by these landless women. Women in the small farmer 'a' category used water lilies in different forms. Most of them (61% amongst the total small farmer 'a' women who collected food) reported that they prepared water lilies using the same process they used in flood-free times. Other food used by small farmer 'a' women included the leaves of the jute plant (*paat shuk*), wild arum, *shapla bora* and other aquatic leaves. Women in small farmer 'b' category reported eating water lily as the most common *ejmali sompotti* food (71% of women in this category who gathered food from common land), rotten fruits and other *shuk*. *Shapla*, mixed with rice and lentils, fried water lily and aquatic plants which they collected from common land were also cooked by women in the small farmer 'd' category.

Women in the middle farmer category also cooked *shapla* and other *shuk* but they had to buy it from the market or poorer women. One woman in a middle farmer household said that they were in much more trouble than the poor. For fear of *parda*, they could not go outside like poor women to collect food. Because of the strict division of labour and the prestige related to their households, men in this category would neither allow their women to collect aquatic food from village common land nor would they do it themselves. Women in this category reported that they had stores of rice or paddy but not vegetables or leaves, fish or meat. They had to depend on men to get these from the market. Another woman in the middle farmer category said that she once waited for a whole day after her husband went to market to purchase food. He came back in the evening having bought one kilo of vegetables (normal price about 7 *taka*) and half a kilo of green chili (normal price about 6 *taka*) for a total of 150 *taka*. She then asked him not to purchase food from the market and started to use food from her store and to buy aquatic plants from a landless woman. No women in the rich farmer category reported eating *shapla* or other aquatic food from the village common land during floods. These women said that they had stocks of rice and other staple food and men in their households bought vegetables and other essentials from the market.

During floods certain private properties also provided food for the rural poor. Women said that in the crisis period some private property or land, especially vegetable gardens, became a useful source of food for them<sup>3</sup>. In Jolpur, rich women allowed poor women to take vegetables or creepers from their gardens. In flood-free times, women grew vegetables and took care of these gardens. They prevented outsiders from stealing their vegetables. According to rich women, they were very diligent in the care of their vegetable

---

3. This is different from Chen's (1991:138) study of drought-related crises in India. In drought years private owners withdrew their concessions whenever there were shortages. During floods the concession of using private property grazing land was not possible because of flood but the concession of private vegetable gardens (which were under water) was common.

gardens and that was why they allowed poor women to take things from the garden. They said that it was good that such things were eaten by the poor rather than being destroyed by water. Poor women even ate rotten fruits or vegetables from some private gardens. Rotten papaya, *lau* or dry *pui* (creeper used as a potherb) were named by poor women as gathered from private property.

Women reported that they collected *ejmali sompotti* plants, roots, creepers and herbs to use as medicine. Their health was worse during floods and only a few households had access to a doctor. Consequently, their dependence on *shekorh* (root) and *lata-pata* (creepers and herbs) also increased during and after flood. Poor women reported that no medicine was available for anyone. Although there was a *quack* doctor resident in the village poorer people could not afford to visit him, their first recourse being to treat flood-time diseases using herbs. Even though they knew which substances to use they were often unable to obtain them because the areas where they grew were flooded or inaccessible. However, many women said that they did not have other resources to use to cure the sick (for more see below).

Obtaining fuel was one of the major problems for poor women during floods (discussed before), because fuel, which is gathered mainly by women, mostly came from *ejmali sompotti*. During floods all village land and forests were under water and there was no dry land where women could collect leaves or twigs. They reported that there was no dry place where cows could graze and drop dung and even if they had found cow-dung there was no place to dry it. A majority of women said that during a flood-free time they usually, or at least occasionally, collected fuel from common or private property. Poor women were paid for stripping jute in bundles of jute-poles. The jute-poles were used to build house walls, to cook their families' meals or to sell. Rich women reported that men often bought fuel from the market although normally they obtained this from their private land.

According to some poor women, common and private property became synonymous during floods. In this period almost all houses were under water and floating debris from damaged houses could be collected to use as fuel. Jute-poles or bamboo house walls were often damaged or washed away by flood waters and it was possible to break off pieces of these to use as fuel. This, however, was physically dangerous in severe flooding and could result in conflict among neighbours. Some poor women said that when they went outside to collect drinking water or food they sometimes broke off a dry part of a flooded house. They did not have time to think whether it was from common or private land. Some women grieved that if they had known that flood waters would reach the roofs of their houses, they would have broken their own walls and used them as fuel or allowed others to do so. Women said that they did not retrieve fuel from under water and even if they had there was no place to dry it. Some women (destitute, landless and small farmer) reported that they had to collect fuel from the state forest by using a raft or by climbing on top of flood shelter platforms near the trees. These women said that almost all of them had tried to take at least one branch from state trees but most of them failed because the branches were too high. Even if they got one it was often too wet to light.

Women in poor categories reported that they had collected fodder from common land, including leaves and water hyacinth. However, many women said that the collection of fodder from common land was difficult. In the dry season, poor women would free their livestock on the common land or they collected fodder from the village common land or trees. In flood-free times women who hired livestock had access to some private property (mentioned earlier). But during flood, the availability of fodder was limited for poor women. They said that there was no grazing land in the entire village and they always had to tie their livestock to the platform plinth. Women reported that they were very careful with their livestock, because the welfare of their children

depended on the animals. Some women said that they slept by holding the tether which secured their animal to the plinth. That was why poor women, who had lost their livestock, stated that they died from poor fodder rather than flood water. Socio-economically higher categories of women said that they had stocks of fodder but not as much as they had in the flood-free times. These women said that they tried to help the poor by giving money or food, but not fodder, as it was too important and too scarce.

Other *ejmali sompotti* materials included platform materials such as bamboo, branches, water hyacinth for making barriers around their houses with and fish. All this was done by poor women during floods. As the collection of forest products for household survival was considered women's work men did not do it.

### **Summary**

It was shown in Chapter 7 that the collection of products from village common land was women's gender-assigned work. During floods women's dependence on resources from village common land increased especially in the context of food collection. This became much more significant for the poor who did not have other options for survival except women's ingenuity. Although during floods the collection of food, fuel and medicinal herbs was risky, women did not give up. Because of the strong division of labour in the rural households men never engaged in such activities.

Women in better-off households did not depend on resources from the village common land as did poor women. Even if richer women needed something from the common land, such as herbs, they did not go out for fear of breaking *parda*.

## **Women and health care**

Disease was prevalent in Jolpur: out of one hundred and one women sampled only six women said that their household members were free from diseases (one landless, two small farmer 'a', one small farmer 'c' and two middle farmer households). There were some general flood-related diseases, such as, diarrhoea, viral fever, jaundice, skin diseases, conjunctivitis and swelling of the body. Many of these diseases were transmitted by drinking contaminated water and living in an overcrowded, polluted environment. The lack of health care facilities aggravated the problems.

During floods, tube-wells, wells and latrines were inundated and water from different sources became contaminated. Flood-affected people faced difficulties reaching health centres or visiting doctors due to the break down of the communication system. Some simply did not have the resources to visit a doctor or hospital. Cultural barriers prevented women from travelling long distances without their male guardians.

Diseases spread very fast due to people living in close proximity in flood refuges. Wounds sustained as a result of floods became infected. Men and women faced problems performing income-earning activities due to injury or sickness. Problems were generally aggravated when the sole income earner of a household became sick. Table 9.3 shows the major problems women faced due to their household members' sickness. Women in eighty households said that they faced problems because of their family members' illness and most of these women belonged to poorer categories. Only one woman in the rich category reported facing problems of her grandson's sickness. Almost all women said that they lacked money to buy food and other essentials during floods but women who had patients in their houses reported that they did not

**Table 9.3: Problems faced by women because of household members sickness during floods by household category**

Problems and frequency	Household category							
	D (9)	L (21)	Sfa (26)	Sfb (9)	Sfc (2)	Sfd (8)	Mdf (6)	Rf (1)
Want of money (55)	100	76	65	78	100	50	17	-
Nursed others despite self-sickness (25)	11	38	38	11	-	50	17	-
Other tasks interrupted (24)	11	29	27	11	50	50	50	100
Unable to go to doctor (19)	33	29	35	-	-	13	-	-
No men at home (17)	33	26	13	31	-	-	-	-
Death (5)	11	5	4	11	50	-	-	-
Others (52)	56	52	58	78	100	87	62	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=82

Note: For key see Table 9.1. Frequencies in parentheses presents the number of households which had sick members.

have enough money to buy proper food or medicine to cure their household members. Poorer women were the majority to face the monetary crises. Even one woman in the middle farmer category, having sold her gold bangles to improve the life of her family, had to spend the money on her husband's treatment. Twenty five percent of women (mainly in the poorer categories) reported that despite severe sickness they had to perform all household activities and had to take care of other sick family members. Nineteen women

(33% in the destitute, 29% in the small farmer 'a', 35% in the small farmer 'b' and 13% in the small farmer 'd' categories) reported that they were unable to visit a doctor with their seriously ill patients because of not having any men or transport or resources. These women had to depend on their own remedies. Seventeen women without any adult men in their households suffered more than others when members of their families became sick. These women belonged to the destitute (33%), landless (26%), small farmer 'a' (13%), and small farmer 'b' (31%) categories. Being poor and not having any men to call a doctor or *kobiraj* (traditional physician), these women were compelled to do men's work and break cultural barriers. Five women in the poorer categories lost household members due to severe sickness during floods. Women faced other problems such as finding proper food, clothing and shelter necessary for patients.

However, women said that they tried their best to keep their husbands and children free of disease. They used traditional knowledge and techniques to keep the water germ-free. They fetched drinking water from tube-wells by standing in waist-high water or by swimming through flood water. Only a few women used *fitciri* as a water purifier. But many of them, despite their knowledge of water contamination and its consequences, were compelled to use polluted flood water. Some women, however, said that even though they were careful not to use contaminated water, members of their households still became sick.

Table 9.4 shows that out of 95 households women in 90 households (95%) nursed their household members. Five women said that they were so sick that they could not do this. Members of some households were transferred to the *thana* hospital. Poor women said that they poured water over the heads of household members who were attacked by fever and they covered their children to stop them shaking from fever. When children received injuries,

**Table 9.4: Measures taken by women and men to cure sick household members during floods by household category**

Measures and frequency	Household category							
	D	L	Sa	Sfb	Sfc	Sfd	Mdf	Rf
	W9 M6	W22 M16	W28 M24	W13 M9	W2 M2	W9 M9	W8 M8	W4 M4
<b>Did nursing</b>								
Women (90)	10	91	93	100	50	100	100	75
Men (3)	-	6	4	-	50	-	-	-
<b>Prepared herbal medicine</b>								
Women (48)	67	59	39	77	50	33	37	25
Men (0)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Visited hospital</b>								
Women (11)	11	9	18	8	50	11	-	-
Men (28)	33	25	42	44	50	33	50	-
<b>Called <i>kobiraj</i></b>								
Women (8)	11	14	11	-	-	-	-	-
Men (7)	17	12	8	-	-	-	12	25
<b>Bought medicine</b>								
Women (7)	11	9	11	8	-	-	-	-
Men (28)	67	37	25	55	-	22	50	25
<b>Called doctor</b>								
Women (4)	-	-	4	8	-	11	-	-
Men (8)	17	6	4	11	50	11	12	25
<b>Others</b>								
Women (11)	22	14	11	8	-	11	13	-
Men (17)	67	25	13	-	-	33	38	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=95 Women and 78 Men

Notes: For key see Table 9.1. W=women and M=men. Frequencies in parentheses give the number of adult women and men in households who had sick members. Percentages are more than 100% because many women gave several responses.

they put the juice of the leaves of a certain tree on the wound to stop bleeding and they crushed herbs for the prevention of diarrhoea or dysentery. When children fell into the water, they pulled them out and shook them to force the water from their lungs. They tried to keep their children warm. One landless woman kept her sick baby inside the jute bundle of a neighbour to keep her away from the rain and flood water. Women said that most of the children who became feverish got wet while taking refuge on their *macha*. Some got fever due to stomach problems and others had fever after falling into the water. Most of the children who had head fractures had been hit by floating *kolshi*, wood or other materials.

Women whose husbands were sick and unable to move, also played a key role in nursing their husbands back to health. Poor women said that they suffered more when their small children were sick and did not get any treatment except their own nursing. Children attacked by diarrhoea, dysentery or fever, made poor women's beds dirty. Many poor women did not have any spare sheets and after being washed there was no place to dry them. While they were drying women had to take the children on their laps. If it rained the conditions became much worse.

Women who had babies one to six months old often suffered from malnutrition, weakness, fever or other problems to do with childbirth. The babies also became sick as a result of not having proper food or care. The mothers did their best to cure their babies by their own efforts. They took many risks to visit the village *kobiraj*. Sometimes husbands stayed at home to look after other children or to protect household belongings. Some women said that fathers did not know the symptoms of diseases or they did not have the knowledge to answer the questions of doctors or *kobiraj*. Some women who did not have any men or any adult to look after their other children were not able to visit a doctor.

Forty eight percent of women said that they prepared medicine from herbs such as, roots, bark or leaves because they did not have money to visit a doctor, nor money to buy medicine. Most poor women collected medicinal herbs from the village common, and in some cases from private trees, and prepared medicine themselves<sup>4</sup>. Poorer women, especially women in the destitute (67%), landless (59%) and small farmer 'a' (39%), small farmer 'b' (77%) and small farmer 'c' (50%) categories used their own knowledge and experience to cure sick family members. Women said that during the flood-free time their first specialist contact for a patient was the herbalist. Though there was a *thana* health complex, the distance and cost of modern treatment was beyond them. Women said that the raw materials and ingredients were locally available and they used trees in their gardens or village *ejmali sompotti* (*ES*) resources to prepare medicine which cost no money. Although the collection of herbs from the *ES* was limited during flood time women had to take the risk to get leaves and roots to use as medicine. Women reported using juice from different leaves which they ground up. *Nim* leaves were mostly used for curing skin diseases. Because of the lack of fuel they could not boil it. They ground *nim* and other leaves or roots. Women said that the flood refuges were not near trees from which they could prepare medicine. They travelled long distances to get proper roots and bark from the village common

---

4. A vast majority of rural people depend on herbal or *kobiraji* treatment in Bangladesh. With the increase in modern treatment, people try to visit a qualified doctor or a hospital, but most people can not afford it. The herbal and *kobiraji* treatment has been very well-known to people since the beginning of the 19th century. People become satisfied with the treatment due to their knowledge about the ingredients and can prepare it personally or under the supervision of a *kobiraj*. In the past people in Bangladesh used to be treated by a *moulovi* (religious leader). But this dependence is decreasing due to failure of the cures. The existing health care facilities in Bangladesh only cover 30% of the total population (The Third Five Year Plan, 1985-90:363). In terms of facilities, such as, qualified doctors, supplies of essential drugs, services and other medical facilities are inadequate for the rural poor. Although there are *thana* health complexes and government hospitals which are supposed to be free, poor had to pay for treatment which they could not afford. The distance of the thana health centre, the cost of transport, medicine and overall treatment keeps poor people away from modern treatment. The herbal treatment is mainly free of cost and even the poor call the local *kobiraj*, they supply the materials to prepare medicine and only a nominal fee (For more refer to Hossain, 1995).

forest or from their own or other's inundated gardens or trees, while going to bring water or collecting fuel. For women it was very risky but they had to do it because they did not have enough money to get modern treatments. Some did it because of their faith in herbs. Even women in the middle (38%) and rich (25%) farmer households prepared medicine from herbs which they got from their gardens. No men prepared herbal medicines for household members. Women reported that they used roots to make *tabiz* (amulet) what they tied around patients' necks or arms to cure certain diseases. This *tabiz*, in flood free times, is acknowledged by *kobiraj* or *peer* (saint/spiritual guide). Women reported that during flooding, it was difficult to find a *kobiraj* or to reach a *peer*. One destitute woman said, "*amago dactar-kobiraj silo Allah ar oshudh silo shikorh-buckorh*" (our doctor-kobiraj was Allah and medicine was roots and bark).

However, flood related diseases forced some women to visit the *thana* hospital or to call a doctor. Women became very upset when their children did not recover after continuous nursing and herbal treatment. Some women had to visit the health complex for a complicated illness or when surgery was needed. Women said that when a patient was seriously injured or needed surgery, they had to visit a hospital. Doctors from the health complex seldom visited patients' houses in Jolpur, which is far from the *thana* hospital. Even if a doctor did visit he or she might prescribe expensive medicines which the poor could not afford. Some women in the poorer category (33% in the destitute, 9% in the landless, 18% in the small farmer 'a', 8% in the small farmer 'b', 50% in the small farmer 'c' and 11% in the small farmer 'd' categories) had to rush to hospitals mostly due to their children's serious injuries or sickness. Among these women seven women in the destitute, landless, small farmer 'a' and small farmer 'b' categories went to hospital without men. They faced transport problems and difficulty paying for the treatment and above all the fear of drowning.

Table 9.4 shows that only women prepared herbal medicine. Only a few women (8) ever called a *kobiraj* to their homes. Women bought medicine, went to hospital and did other activities such as calling a doctor which were supposed to be done by men. These women belonged to poorer categories and did not have any men in their households. Some said their husbands themselves were sick and women had to go to call the village *kobiraj*. Women said that they had to violate the *parda* norms to cure their family members.

Women did other things such as borrow money, sell assets or work for cash incomes to buy medicine for household members and made *tabiz*. Women who tied *tabiz* around the neck of the sick reported that they prayed for a *dowa* (blessing) themselves while tying the *tabiz* on the patients' body. Only one woman said that she went to the *imam* (leader of the religious congregation; who leads prayer at mosque) to get *pani pora* (water over which Quranic verses had been cited) and *tabiz* for her husband. No women, however, depended on *tabiz* only. Women said that when any member of their families became sick, first they nursed them, poured water on their heads, tried to give them food and prepared medicine, rubbed them with oil and took many other measures for which they did not need any help from outside. Women said that one day a doctor visited Jolpur when called by a rich farmer to see his daughter's newborn baby. Other men and women who had heard about the visit begged him to visit their houses to see serious patients. The doctor made quick visits to some households and suggested the others visit the hospital.

Women said that men rarely did any nursing nor gave attention to any primary health care. There were only three cases of men who had nursed sick household members during floods: one in the landless, one in the small farmer 'a' and one in the small farmer 'c' categories whose wives were seriously ill at that time). Men only did something when they were asked or requested by women. Out of 95 households 78 had adult men of whom nine did nothing to cure a sick family member. However, some women said that their husbands

were also sick and they did not blame them for not doing anything. Women also said that tasks like cooking, nursing or pouring water on ill members' heads were not men's responsibility. Whereas women depended on their own efforts, experience, and knowledge, men depended on modern treatment for which they had to sell women's jewellery and other assets and after flood waters receded, they sometimes had to sell their land. Women said that if men looked after the children properly, or did some nursing, they would not need to pay so much for hospital treatment. Men (69) who took measures to cure sick household members went to hospital (40%), bought medicine (40%), called *kobiraj* (25%), called doctors to the home (25%) and did other things (25%) such as borrowing money or selling assets to assist sick family members.

Below are the experiences of some women whose household members were acutely sick during the flood. One landless woman said that her husband was so sick that he could not work. She started to work as a day labourer<sup>5</sup> to run her family. She nursed her husband and prepared medicine to cure him of jaundice. With her work at home and outside she did not have enough time to collect the proper roots or leaves and she had to depend on her social network. She called a *kobiraj* and then a doctor from the *thana* head-quarters but could not save her husband's life. She grieved that because of her work to get income in cash or kind, she could not take proper care of her husband. Her husband died just after the flood water receded.

Another woman rented a boat to take her husband to hospital when he became unconscious after sustaining a head injury. She said that she poured water on his head and face on the way to hospital and her husband regained consciousness. She asked, " Don't you know the feelings when a husband is sick? (*Shami ghore poira thakle kamon lage janen na?*)".

---

5. Day labouring during the flood-time was different from in the flood-free times. Carrying platform materials and water, helping to cook and store crops, fodder and making platforms for livestock for better-off households were common.

A woman in the small farmer 'a' category said that her husband had severe pains in his abdomen and she helped him to raise his head, to sit, to eat and to perform every movement. She said that her other domestic chores, such as cooking and looking after children, were interrupted due to her husband's sickness. Neighbouring women helped her to get herbs to rub into her husband's body.

Another woman in the small farmer 'a' category said that she had been suffering from stomach pains when her husband's body, legs and arms become swollen. She made an oil from sesame seed and rubbed it into her husband's body. She also crushed medicinal herbs for both of them.

A woman's husband (small farmer 'b' category) was attacked by tuberculosis and pulmonary disease (inflammation of the lungs) when her only son was working in town. At first she did not know about the disease. Neighbours helped her to call a doctor who said her husband would not live. He died and there was no place to bury him. Her brother, informed by the woman's neighbour, came from the next village. They put the body in a box and took it to her natal highland village for temporary burial. After the flood water receded, they dug a graveyard in her Jolpur household compound and transferred the box from her natal village to the graveyard<sup>6</sup>.

Two women in the small farmer 'd' category said that their husbands' bodies became swollen. One woman said that she had young children and that was why she could not move from the *macha* leaving them with her sick husband. She borrowed herbs to rub on her husband's body.

---

6. Cultural tradition requires that a man should be buried in his birth place. Wherever he dies, the dead body is, in general, carried to the deceased's ancestor's land. A woman's burial should be on her husband's land.

Pregnant women suffered from malnutrition, fever and many other maternity problems. Sickness of other household members, especially, women without any adult men created acute problems for them. One woman in the landless category reported that during the flood she was staying with her aged mother-in-law and two young children. After a few days her mother-in-law and both the children became so sick that she hired a boat to take them to the *kobiraj*. She did not have any men at her home to call a doctor or *kobiraj*. Ignoring her pregnancy-related sickness, she did her best to cure her children and mother-in-law but their conditions deteriorated. Being pregnant, she became scared of collecting medicinal herbs by herself and that was why she visited a *kobiraj* to get herbal treatment for her family members. At a certain stage she herself became very sick and there was then no one to take care of her. Her husband came home after the flood water receded and took her to the *thana* hospital.

Another (in small farmer 'c' category) woman's baby died in her womb due to her sickness. She said that she had to stay on a small *choki* with many other people and their belongings. She did not have any place to move. Her legs became swollen and the baby died. She was taken to the hospital and they had to sell crop seeds to pay doctor's fees and to buy medicine.

Women in better-off households also suffered during the flood-time. One woman in a rich household said that her daughter was staying with them to give birth to her first child<sup>7</sup>. Though their houses were built on a high plinth, she was worried to see flood water rising day by day. She was anxious about the health of her daughter and the infant and nursed both continuously. She bought and cooked expensive food such as milk, fish, fruits, tea, bread and fried rice for her daughter. She served ground *kalojira* with rice to make sure

---

7. It is a common practice in Bangladesh to visit a parent's house to give birth a child, especially the first issue.

that her daughter would have sufficient milk to feed her baby. She tried to keep the infant out of danger. She rubbed oil everyday on his body and tried to keep him warm. However, the baby was attacked by fever after a few days and her husband called a doctor. The woman said that if anything happened to the baby her daughter's in-laws would be unhappy and might complain that the bride's parents had not given him proper attention.

Poor women said that they did not have enough resources to visit the hospital or to buy medicine and that was why they mainly depended on herbs and gave proper nursing to the sick. But when the sickness or injuries were serious they felt compelled to visit a doctor or the hospital the cost of which forced them to borrow or sell assets.

One woman in the small farmer 'c' category said that her son fell into the water and blood curdled in his head (internal haemorrhage). They took him to the *thana* hospital but the injury was so serious that the doctor of the *thana* hospital referred him to the district hospital. She and her husband reached that hospital on foot, by boat and by bus. The woman said that they stayed three weeks at the hospital and spent 6000 *taka* on her son's operation. She said that she collected that amount of money by selling her jewellery and by borrowing. Later they had to sell land to repay the loan.

Another woman said that they had to starve to pay the doctor's fees. One woman in the small farmer 'a' category said that her mother-in-law became seriously ill and her own treatment and *kobiraji* treatment failed. Her husband was also sick but wanted his mother to be properly treated. She had to sell her land to pay the doctor's and hospital's fees. She spent ten to fifteen thousand *taka* on her mother-in-law's treatment but she died. She did *fakiri* (treatment by a Muslim ascetic, locally referred to as a *fakir*) and *kobiraji* treatment to cure her husband. This woman said that after her mother-in-law died she did not

have any trust in modern treatment or in hospitals and "we did not have any money left to spend on modern treatment, anyway" she added.

Some women in the middle farmer category said that to cure a patient they depended on both herbal medicine and religious treatment (*fakiri*). These women said that to cure a patient they planted many medicinal trees at their homestead. One woman in this category was attacked by appendicitis and had to go to hospital for treatment. She said that her husband had trouble paying for the treatment during the flood crisis.

Women said that they and many men had several accidents during the flood times such as wood falling on their necks or spikes or wire nails injuring their legs while making or raising *macha*, or their rafts or boats over turned. Women had skin diseases, ulcer, urine obstructions and many other sicknesses for which they depended only on their own knowledge and tried to recover.

### **Summary**

It was discussed earlier that only women had knowledge about certain medicinal trees and they used herbs, roots and barks to cure family members' from different types of diseases in a flood-free time. This section indicates that without any health care facilities from Government or other organisations during floods, it was also women who provided health care for the sick. Poorer women took risks to collect medicinal herbs from distant places during the floods despite *parda* restrictions (discussed previously). Men, on the other hand rarely did such work because providing herbal treatment or nursing was not their gender-assigned role. Men in poorer categories also did not have the resources to get modern treatment.

It is revealed that the cost of modern treatment forced some of the poor to sell assets and thereby caused further deterioration in their economic condition.

However, most women in the poorer categories, despite their own sickness and other activities, tried their best to cure sick family members themselves in order to avoid the cost of modern treatment.

Women in the better-off categories did not face severe problems from family members' sickness because men in their households had resources to visit a health complex or to call a doctor to their homes. Thus it was poorer women who showed great ingenuity to cure their households members' from flood-related diseases. Such contributions, however, are not measured in the official statistics.

### **Women and social networks**

With little or no support from the government during floods, the women of poor households sought help from their social networks. Such support mainly came from their own and that of their husbands' kin and sometimes from patrons and neighbours. Women were able to get more support from such relationships than men did from theirs. Relatives and neighbours provided shelter, lent food, gave loans with little or no interest, provided temporary employment and helped with money, labour or materials to rebuild houses after floods. Women reported that their neighbours also provided material and moral support for them.

Studies in India show that in the past the system of patron-client relationships provided some security for the poor during normal years, but did not help in crises (Chen, 1983:61; Agarwal, 1991:365). In some parts of India *jajmans* (land lords) guaranteed payment or provided occasional gifts to clients in normal years but during any crises or shortages, such as during droughts, they were not able to assist (Chen, 1991:134-5). This was also true in the case of Jolpur. Though there was no *jajmani* system in Jolpur or any part of Bangladesh, agriculture-related patron-client relationships, such as those

mentioned above, existed. During floods relationships with patrons decreased because of dislocation. Also people/clients competed to get help from the same patron. Women in landed households reported that men did not want to help poor clients (whether from kin or non-kin) to the extent they did in the flood-free time because they did not know when the floods would recede and they could start cultivation.

Women in Jolpur reported that their relationships with neighbouring women and kin helped them to survive floods. They borrowed small amounts of food, money and other essentials such as rice, wheat flour, salt, oil, pulses, spices, vegetables, drinking water, fuel, stoves, materials to build platforms or to raise their beds, water purifiers, medicinal herbs, money and many other things from relatives and neighbouring women. Poor women said they received this help sometimes as a loan, charity and sometimes as a gift. Men, on the other hand, did not show such ability to provide for their households. Women said that men wanted to do something for their households but did not receive much help from their patrons, whether kin or non-kin. Women said that borrowing small things or food is not a man's responsibility and asking for help from others (*hat-pata*) is below their dignity. Sometimes men wanted to borrow big amounts of money but failed. A few men who borrowed money from their patrons with interest had difficulty repaying the loans.

Thirty four percent of women in Jolpur reported receiving help from relatives and 23% received help from other sources. Some women got help from kin and non-kin networks but most reported receiving help from their own kin. Women's dependence on their *ja* (husband's brothers' wives) was almost as great as the support they got from their parental relatives (see Table 9.5). Women often received help from their parents during the crisis periods. Alam's (1991a:11) study reveals that men (who he refers to as "people") preferred to seek help from their fathers-in-law during floods because brothers competed for resources from their own fathers and therefore did not get much help. Some

flood victims thought their fathers-in-law were rich; some said their in-laws' houses were situated in flood-free areas and they were therefore better able to assist and some preferred to take shelter with in-laws because sons-in-law are usually treated well by their wives' parents. One landless woman said that she did not get much help from her husband's kin and on one occasion had to take a long risky journey by raft to get 300 *taka* from her parents. Another woman in the small farmer 'a' category reported that her brother came from a neighbouring village to help her to the flood shelter, to sell edible plants collected by her and to give her money. Women said that they received money, paddy, rice and other help unconditionally from their parents, whereas, from their brothers-in-law or their families they had to borrow and in most cases promise to repay. However, some women in better-off households provided support to their kin and non-kin with no conditions attached.

**Table 9.5: Women receiving help from relatives during floods by household category**

Sources	Household category							
	D (5)	L (9)	Sfa (11)	Sfb (5)	Sfc (0)	Sfd (2)	Mdf (2)	Rf (0)
Sister or brother (9)	20	33	9	60	-	50	-	-
Sister-in-law or brother-in-law (8)	40	22	18	20	-	50	50	-
Parent (6)	20	22	27	-	-	-	-	-
Parent-in-law (2)	-	11	-	-	-	-	50	-
Others (13)	20	22	45	60	-	-	-	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=34

Note: For key see Table 9.1. Total do not equal 100% because some women gave more than one responses and because of rounding.

**Table 9.6: Women receiving help other than from relatives during floods by household category**

Sources	Household Category							
	D (1)	L (8)	Sfa (9)	Sfb (4)	Sfc (0)	Sfd (1)	Mdf (0)	Rf (0)
Neighbour (17)	100	75	67	75	-	-	100	-
Employers or patrons (4)	-	12	22	25	-	-	-	-
Money lender (2)	-	12	11	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Field work, 1992

N=23

Note: For key see Table 9.1.

Fifty five percent of women in the destitute category depended on their kin networks for their survival. A majority of them (80%) received help from their own kin. These women said that they got money and rice from their parents, sisters, brothers and uncles (brothers of fathers or mothers). One woman in the destitute category borrowed rice from her *ja* and had to repay the loan which caused her great trouble. Only one woman in the destitute category received assistance from non-kin. She borrowed two hundred *taka* from a neighbour and repaid the loan over three years. Poor women, especially women in the destitute category, claimed that they did not get much help from neighbours because of their poverty. They said that better-off people always deserve repayment or service in return for their help and thought destitute women would not be able to repay or might leave Jolpur. According to poor women their parents and parents' siblings were their only friends during floods.

The most significant assistance that women received from social relationships was money (26% from relatives and 18% from other sources). Women reported that they did not pay interest to relatives, whereas loans from

patrons and non-kin had to be repaid with interest. Women reported that in most cases they were sent by their husbands for any kind of borrowing, even if it was from husbands' kin. However, poor women received rice, paddy, wheat, flour and many other essentials most of which were collected by them.

Overall thirty two percent of women reported that they helped others. These women said that they helped their relatives and neighbours by providing food, shelter, money, transport and other things. All rich women reported that they helped their relatives such as poor sisters and *ja*. One woman gave shelter to her mother's poor brother who came from a neighbouring village. Seventy five percent of women (those who helped others) helped neighbours by providing shelter, places to store their crops, lending money, transport, food and crops and other essentials. These women said that their houses were built on high platforms and most of them gave shelter to their relatives. One woman who gave shelter to a poor neighbour whose husband was absent at that time asked her to leave when the poor woman's husband returned<sup>8</sup>. Better-off women, said that they tried to give food to their neighbours' hungry children.

Fifty percent of women in the middle farmer category helped relatives and neighbours with small amounts of food and other cooking needs such as onions, chillies, lentils or rice, made places to store jute or crops in order to keep them dry and loaned boats or money. These women also said that they helped their relatives and poor neighbours to prevent them from starving. One woman said that she helped for humanitarian reasons (*manobotar jonne*). Another woman asked, "How can I eat if my brother and his children remain hungry?"

According to their ability to help, 13% of women in the landless category; 10% women in the small farmer 'a'; 8% in the small farmer 'b', 67% in the

---

8. Refer to case study nine.

small farmer 'c' and 33% in the small farmer 'd' categories supported their relatives and neighbours. Most of these women said that they tried to save their relatives' lives with whatever resources they had. They mentioned providing small amounts of money, rice and various other types of food. According to small farmer women who helped others, they did not want to see children of their relatives crying or their *ja* fighting to collect food from village common resources. One woman in the small farmer 'd' category said, "They are the sons of our *goshthi* and will be a help in future"<sup>9</sup>. Some women said that even when they did not have enough resources to help others, they shared their miseries with their relatives and neighbours. A woman in small farmer 'a' category said that she had prevented the starvation of a poor neighbour by giving her sixty *taka*. This amount had been donated equally by herself and the wives of her husband's brother. These women said that they gave the money from their own small savings which their husbands were not aware of. Landless women, on the other hand, said that they helped others by sharing work. They said that they helped their relatives and other villagers to make *macha*, to store or transfer their jute, crops and livestock to higher ground for safety, provided medicinal herbs to better-off women and in many other ways. These women said that they did not have enough money or food to give others but they had their physical ability. Poor women said that they tried their best to help relatives and neighbours. One landless woman said that she and her husband had often tried to save people from danger by swimming to them ("*ami ar amar shami satraiya manusher bipod uddhar korer cheshta korsi*"). Another woman said that she lent money to her *ja* to get medicine for her son even though she did not have enough money to buy food for her own children. Many women reported helping each other to collect drinking water from tube-wells using the special techniques described previously.

---

9. The woman referred to 'sons' not only because *goshthi* is patrilineal but also for the cultural practice of son preference.

## Summary

In general, according to cultural practice, it was the role of women to borrow small things such as food or fuel or small amounts of money, or obtain charity. It was the social networks of poorer women with neighbouring women and *goshti* members which helped their households to survive floods. This was true especially of poor women in female-headed households (*de-jure* and *de-facto*). Support from poor women's parental kin was much higher than from other sources. Women in better-off households did not need the help of others to survive floods but they helped poorer women who were their relatives and with whom they had a good relationship.

Although patron-client networks were one of the oldest social security systems in flood-free times, during floods they did not work to the same extent. Because of abnormal floods men in better-off households became anxious about the uncertainty of their own future. Men in poor households became helpless because they did not have support from their patrons or employers. This indicates that men's networks were not sufficient for their households' survival.

Although poor women did not have enough resources to give great support to others, they did their best to help them. Solidarity among poor women was very evident and during floods it had great significance in helping them to cope with flood-related crises. Women tried to prevent other women's children from starving. They tried to maintain the network relationships with neighbouring and kin women, for example, through lending small amounts of money, stoves, food, platform materials, fuel and fodder as they usually did in flood-free times. This mutual assistance was less common among men who were socialised into the belief that seeking such help was below their dignity.

The substantial contributions of poor women secured through their network relationships to assist with their households' survival reinforced their

gender subordination: it was usually women's responsibility to seek help for anything but large loans.

### **Summary and conclusion**

During floods women adopted many coping strategies which were related to their gender identity and the socio-economic position of their households. The strong division of labour in the society forced women to do certain tasks, for example, collect water, aquatic plants and medicinal herbs for their households' survival which led them to compromise their *parda*. Poorer women drew upon their stores or savings, sold their very own assets, adjusted cooking and consumption patterns, sacrificed their own meals for their husbands and children and drew upon their social networks. These coping strategies were vital for the survival of the poor households and only adopted by women. However, despite their contributions and heroism during floods, the overall situation of rural women in Bangladesh did not change. Rather, those women who were forced to compromise the cultural ideologies (that is *parda*) for their households' survival remained of low status.

## Chapter Ten

### Case studies: how women cope during floods

In the preceding chapters, findings relating to the situation of women respondents during non-flood and flood periods and factors affecting their responses to floods have been discussed. The data gathered were organised, described and interpreted around different issues and questions. The statistical or quantitative method used to this end does not convey adequately the situation of many women. To overcome that limitation, a number of case studies are presented in this chapter. Focusing on the lives of particular women, the case studies aimed to demonstrate something of the harsh reality of their situation. Representative cases were selected for this purpose.

#### Moti<sup>1</sup>

Moti is 42 years old and belongs to small farmer 'a' category. She is an agricultural labourer and also hires poultry on a share basis. She is from a neighbouring village and has lived in Jolpur for about 24 years since her marriage. She was married for twelve years before her husband died of asthma. At that time Moti had three young girls and a boy. Since childhood she has been hard working: she comes from a poor small farmer household and used to

---

1. Women's real names are not used to protect their identity.

help her father in the fields, ploughing, weeding and tending cattle. Her father was a small farmer and was too poor to hire labour. Although she, like other married women, was under the authority of her husband rather than her father, marriage gave her some relief from doing both domestic and outside work. However, the death of her husband took her back to her past and once more she began to use her agricultural experience. She had to depend on hired labour to produce less than had been produced before. She was prevented by cultural norms from going into the fields because she was considered to be a 'wife of the village' (*gramer bou*<sup>2</sup>) and should maintain her *parda*. However, to meet her children's needs she started to raise poultry and was able to seek work as an agricultural labourer. She was compelled to mortgage some of her land (0.10 acre) to marry off her eldest daughter. After the 1988 flood she sold five decimals of land for her second daughter's wedding. She now has only a small amount of land which is cultivated by her son.

Moti described her experience during the 1988 flood: Seeing the water rise day by day Moti started to prepare. One day, just before she went to collect relief<sup>3</sup>, she found water entering her courtyard. She found the *doa* was submerged and damaged. With the help of her children Moti raised her bed day by day. Within five to six days flood water had reached *gola pani* (neck high water or about four feet in depth). She cut a hole in the roof of her house so that she could get out in an emergency. This was very risky. She did not allow her daughters to go out believing it to be too dangerous. When it became impossible to stay in the house she decided to move to the flood shelter. She carried the moveable stove, which she made before the flood,

- 
2. In an ideological sense it suggests that widows, like other married women, are village common property.
  3. Moti lives in East *para* where flood water entered later than West *para*. In the meantime relief activities had started.

cooking pots, bamboo, wood, bundles of *paatkhor*i and stored food. She constructed a platform with the help of her children.

Moti had to do different types of work everyday from morning to night. Her day started with raising the platform standing on to the water. She then took her clean cooking pots to a distant place to collect drinking water. Cooking was a troublesome job for her because the mud stove became damp even though she tried to keep it in a dry place with her raised store of food. She burnt leaves together with paddy husk to warm it before putting jute sticks inside the stove. Moti served just wheat or rice as a main meal cooked in different ways for at least fifteen days. Supplies came from her store and from relief which she had collected before moving to the flood shelter. Most days she ate only once. The only vegetables she ate were immature papaya, green banana and green chilies from her garden. She collected *shuk* and other leaves with which she prepared *bharta*. She stayed in the flood shelter for about 25 days and during these long days remained unfed. She felt helpless, always fearful of the next day.

Moti faced the problem of *parda*. She did all her tasks but had to be careful about strangers. In particular she was worried about her grown up daughters who were 12 and 14. She did not allow her daughters to be viewed by others while washing, cleaning or taking a bath. Moti explained, "I have to find *bhalo jamai* (good grooms) for them which will be difficult if they can not maintain their *parda* before marriage. Girls who don't have a father are very unfortunate (*porakopali*) you know". Moreover, she wanted to protect her children from any danger. Moti's only son, who used to work as a casual labourer become sick and could not go out to look for work. "...and what would he do if he were alright? During the flood there was no work for men". However, Moti said that having a seventeen year old son gave her courage to stay at the road with her two young daughters.

Moti faced problems urinating and defecating. She could not do it in front of her children. She waited till late at night and went with her two daughters by raft to look for a calm and quiet place. She fell off the raft several times while travelling long distances. She could not sleep at night because of fear. She was scared of snakes, leeches and other creatures but her main anxiety was for her two daughters who she thought might be attacked by strangers. She kept her *kupi* on all night but still she could not sleep. She used her savings to buy kerosene.

### **Analysis**

In Moti's experience we see how she had to do a woman's job, as well as a man's, in order to ensure the survival of her poor farmer father's household's. Whereas in her father's house she did almost all the work related to agriculture but was prevented from going to the fields after her marriage by the cultural norms of *parda* which were stronger for a 'wife' than for a 'daughter' of the village. After widowhood she had some control over the family resources but it was her son who looked after the field cultivation. It was the cultural norm to give the controlling power of assets (especially land) to sons to protect the interests of family members. However, through her gender-assigned work Moti played an important role in her household's sustenance.

During the 1988 flood Moti had to manage food for her children whom she continued to struggle to feed. Burning leaves with paddy husk to warm her stove was a new invention. She was always protective of her grown-up daughters who might be disturbed by strangers, keeping them in *parda* and not allowing them to leave the *macha* except at night.

## Duli

Duli is a 32 years old. She is from a neighbouring village and had been married to a landless umbrella repairer of Jolpur. Her father died when she was 5 or 6 years old. Her brothers married her to a poor man for two reasons: he was from a famous *ghoshthi* (Matobbor) and did not ask for dowry. However, according to Duli, her husband changed his mind "because of poverty". She was asked to demand her share of her father's property from her brothers. When she received it her husband compelled her to sell it so that he could build a corrugated iron shed-house in Jolpur. She is now working as a maid and agricultural labourer. She has two children, a ten year old son and an eight year old daughter. Duli worked hard to educate her children and both, at the time of my visit, were attending the village primary school.

The following is Duli's story of the 1988 flood. She had always made some preparations before every monsoon. During the 1988 flood she was the only member of her family to take responsibility because her husband fell ill within a few days of the flood water entering the house. She raised their bed by putting broken pieces of mud pot and pieces of wood under the legs. She managed to survive like this for one week. However, it was a time of great hardship looking after two small children and her sick husband. She cooked on the bed side by putting her mud stove on the top of a *motki*. She was constantly afraid of flames which could hurt her children and husband. Duli decided to move when she failed to find more materials to raise the bed. Getting a lift in a neighbour's boat Duli left her husband and children at the house in order to build a platform on the road using some bamboo and rope which she had from her store.

Duli did not have any staple food in her store. One day she waded about one kilometre to collect five kilograms of wheat from the relief station. "That was a big help at least for a few days". She tried to use this wheat for as long

as she could. Every night she used to soak one handful of wheat and to make a paste next morning. Then she boiled it in water to make *atar jau*. She also made *dhapra* from wheat paste. After she had finished all this, she started to collect *shapla* and other aquatic plants. Her husband's condition started to deteriorate day by day. He would not eat and complained of stomach pains. One day she realised that her husband had jaundice (*pila*). She did not have any money to call a doctor. She collected tree-bark and nim leaves from village trees and prepared some medicine. She also got *pani-pora* (water over which Quranic verses had been recited) and *tabij* from an *iman*. It was impossible for her to leave the *macha* for a long time. She was forced to drink flood water in order to nurse her husband and she was unable to travel to find aquatic food. She then went to the Jolpur member of the *thana* council and got one kilo of rice.

She returned to her house when it was still under approximately 30 centimetres of water. She cleaned out the floating materials from inside her hut and fixed the bed to make her husband comfortable. Her husband, however, died a few days after her return home. Duli tried to educate her children by any means possible as she believed they are her only assets<sup>4</sup>. Her brothers do not keep in touch with her as she forced them to give her her share of their father's property. As Jolpur's demand for labour is highly seasonal, she works outside the village in the lean seasons. Duli feels helpless about not being able to keep *parda*. However, she does not want to remarry or leave Jolpur under any circumstances. She said that a woman should marry once and should live in her husband's *vita* (homestead land or courtyard) till her death.

---

4. Children, generally sons, are regarded as assets in rural Bangladesh because children's labours are one of the strategies for rural poor's survival. Because girls are considered as 'other's property' and are supposed to be in *parda* they are not considered as assets (see Chapter 3).

## Analysis

Duli's story is a saga of great misfortune which shows that, despite her preparations to cope with the flood, she lost her husband. Her story tells us the situation of a girl who did not have a father. Her brothers married her off to a poor man to avoid having to pay dowry. She was forced to sell her land to help her husband to build a corrugated-iron house in Jolpur. Duli's story also showed that through demanding land from her brothers she lost the right to visit her natal village.

She shouldered the major responsibilities of providing family food during the flood. Duli's ingenious effort was the only way to cure her husband from jaundice. It is worth mentioning that she herself made a platform using materials which she had stored. She also got support from neighbours to get a lift on their boat. Duli had to travel a long distance to get relief. She also received help from a local leader. Although the amount of food she received was very little it was a big help for her, especially when her husband was seriously ill and she could not collect aquatic food. After the flood Duli had to compromise with the cultural norms of *parda* by taking employment within and outside Jolpur to raise her children.

## Tohura

This story is about the problems faced by Tohura, 47, who had three sons and two daughters. She belonged to the small farmer 'a' category and had 0.20 acres of cultivable and 0.08 acres of homestead land. During the famine after the 1974 flood (according to Tohura, "*Mujiborer akaler bochor*" or the year of Mujibor's famine) her daughters died when they were five and one and a half years. When asked why it was that none of her sons died and whether she had feed her sons and daughters equally, Tohura said that she did not discriminate among them, rather her daughters were young and could not eat lean or aquatic

food like adults. Her elder son is a *ghor jamai* (uxorilocal resident) of his step uncle and does not maintain any relationship with his parents. Tohura's husband is old and unable to work in the fields. Her second son does the cultivation with the help of the youngest one and she does the processing. She has the responsibility for all major decisions regarding the household. Tohura works for better-off households inside the village and rears milking cows to supplement the family income. She is also a member of *somiti*.

Tohura had bad memories of the floods. She remembered the three severe floods: 1974, when she not only lost her daughters but also mature paddy and jute; 1987 when both her paddy and her jute fields were inundated and 1988 when she managed to cut some of her crops and jute. She thought that the 1988 flood was not as bad for people who harvested their crops and sold or had storage space. But it was a great hardship for poor people like her who did not have storage facilities, lived on low land and had poorly constructed houses. However, her bitter experience of the two previous floods helped her to take some precautions before the 1988 flood.

In 1988 flood water entered her house at night when she was sleeping on the floor. She called out to her two sons who were sleeping behind a partition. Together they prepared a platform with her stored wood and other materials. They stayed for a few days on the platform inside the house before one day she collapsed. She heard that most people in her condition moved to a flood shelter. Her sons become angry when she refused to move to a public place with them. "I have my own dignity which I saved all the time, even in the year of famine I did not go out to beg" Tohura said. Her husband also did not ask her to move to save his *mun-ijjot* (honour) by keeping his wife's *parda*. However, she made a platform in the branches of her *boroi* tree. She said that she was not scared to live at the top of a tree as she had seen that one of her neighbouring woman tied a boat to her mango tree to live in. "Planting a tree is so useful you see" she said.

She had one milk cow and one goat which were very dear to her. These were her main source of income which allowed her to send her sons to school. Her husband wanted her sons to work in the fields. Tohura's second son was interested in education and used to display his anger by throwing his books in the courtyard when he had to follow his father to the fields. However, Tohura always took care of her animals. During the floods she decided not to leave them with her young sons and husband who never looked after them properly. She walked through water and collected water hyacinth which she piled under the feet of her cow and goat. At night she could not sleep for fear of losing them. She jumped from her *macha* one day when she saw a snake coming to her cow shed. "It was the snake which slid away scared of me" Tohura laughed. After that she started to keep burnt tumeric beside the cow shed. However, her cow survived well by eating from her small store of hay and then water hyacinth. But it was difficult to manage to find enough leaves for the goat since Tohura had began to use tree leaves as fuel. She collected some leaves from *ejmali sompotti* resources and from a neighbouring property which was very risky. These leaves also became scanty because other people also depended on them. Her husband and sons were not available to help her in this vulnerable condition because of they stayed on the road. Finally she asked her husband and sons to sell the goat at the distant *haat* as she had no fodder.

Tohura asked her husband and sons to come home when they felt hungry. It was her job to serve food to them. She had a *chula* which she made from an empty tin can. She had some stored rice which was insufficient for four persons to eat throughout the flood. She bought rice from a middle farmer with the money she got from selling the goat. On her way to collect drinking water she picked rotten vegetables from her own and her neighbour's garden. She had some *paatkhor* in her store and she collected branches of the *boroi* tree when her stock became small. Tohura did not fill her stomach even for a single day. Instead she kept whatever she could cook for her sons who used to carry food for their father as well. She modified her cooking by preparing

different types of unusual food. She faced ablution problems and relieved herself from the edge of her *macha* at night.

Her house was totally destroyed: it fell down into the water in front of her. After the flood they worked hard to reestablish the house but failed to do much for lack of resources. The roof of the house, which had began to collapse, was raised just sufficiently to allow them to live inside.

In 1989 *Proshika* workers came to Jolpur and encouraged women to join in *somiti*. "We liked their way of talking (*tago katha amago mone lage*) Tohura said. She also said that, "The rich in this village exploit the poor. If they find any fault or delays in a labourer's work they cheat by paying 15 Taka instead of 25". "They don't get punished for misappropriation of wheat (relief) but take the poor to the school room to give them punishment for stealing one pumpkin" (*tara gom churi korley shasti hoyna, goribe kumra churi korle school ghore niya bichar kore*), Tohura said. However, being encouraged by *Proshika* field workers Tohura become a member of *somiti*. She saved 10 *taka* per month twice the minimum required by *somiti*. She succeeded in getting back their mortgaged land by borrowing 6000 *taka* from it. She also borrowed 2000 *taka* with which she bought fourteen sheets of corrugated iron and six wooden poles and rebuilt her main house. Tohura started to work even longer hours than before. She asked for cash instead of payment in kind for her work in better-off households. "I do not accept meals any more for my labour. I am ready to remain half fed to repay *somiti's* loan within the next six years and three months" Tohura added.

### **Analysis**

This story was about Tohura who showed a high level of resourcefulness to overcome the problems she and her household faced during and after the flood. However, in her story we also see that she lost two of her daughters during the

famine accompanying the 1974 floods but her sons were alive. This indicates the general neglect of daughters in preference to sons. However, Tohura and her family did not see in that way. However, Tohura's case revealed that she identified differences in flood depths and timing and the range of effects they had on floods in different times in regard to degree of people in different socio-economic categories. In Tohura's opinion the 1988 flood was not so bad for better-off people who harvested their crops before the water reached high a level. It was poor farmers who lost their crops because their crops were on lower land and they harvested them later because they did not have the resources to hire labourers. Tohura's story also tells how she managed to live on a tree-platform built by herself. She did not move to a flood refuge in order to maintain her *parda* and thereby saved her husband's honour.

In Tohura's experience we see how she protected her important assets, a milking cow and a goat. The income she got from her animals enabled her to pay for her sons' education. Tohura's attempt to get fodder for her animals, her ingenious solution to get food and fuel and to frighten away snakes from her animals showed a high level of ingenuity and courage. Because she was a woman those jobs were supposed to be done by her. She had to sell her dear goat not only for want of fodder but also for family sustenance. Tohura's story also tells us about the courage of a poor woman who did not hesitate to talk about the corruption of the better-off. It is worth noting that she herself re-built her flood-damaged house with the help of *somiti* and accepted only payment in cash to repay the *somiti* loan.

### **Fulzan**

Fulzan is 35 years old and belonged to the small farmer 'a' category. She separated from her husband who is a small businessman in a neighbouring village. Fulzan was married for seven years and was only 19 years old when she separated from her husband. Her father promised to give a radio as a

dowry to her husband but died without keeping his word. Her husband and in-laws repeatedly tortured her and sent her to bring the radio from her brothers. Her brothers had already divided the share of their father's property and were living in separate households after their father's death. None of her brothers would make good the dowry. She was asked by her mother to leave her husband's house. At that time her two daughters were two and half years and one and half years old respectively. Fulzan's brothers did not like her returning to Jolpur with her two daughters. They repeatedly asked her to send her daughters to their father. They tried to get her to remarry an old widower. She refused and called the *salish* to grant her some of her father's land. Fulzan started to live separately when she obtained 0.10 acres of land awarded to her by the *salish*<sup>5</sup>. Her mother was not able to influence her brothers as she was dependent on them. However, Fulzan started to work in the fields with hired labourers (*krishshan-kamla*). Being a daughter (*meye*) of the village she was more free than women who are wives (*bou*). "A woman practices *parda* according to her husband's position in the village which I don't have. I go to the fields, weed, supervise labourer's work, make them understand what I need, supply inputs or fertilizers or whatever, collect crops from fields, husk and store them". In her field Fulzan produced *irri* (High Yield Varieties or HYV rice) paddy and wheat. She did all these tasks without any help from her brothers. She also does seasonal agricultural work for others in the peak seasons and helps better-off women in cooking, grinding and other domestic tasks in the lean seasons. She is paid in kind for her work for others. Making and selling moveable stoves has also become her occupation since the 1988 flood. Her two daughters' weddings were arranged by her in-laws. The first one was married when she was only 11. Fulzan did not agree with her in-laws but failed to stop her daughter's wedding. "It does not matter that they didn't

---

5. The outcome of the case may appear quite surprising. This is because it is widely known that women in Jolpur (as in many other parts in Bangladesh), did not get justice from village leaders. However, being a *gramer meye* (daughter-of the village) Fulzan had some advantage. Her father had a good relationship with village leaders and she was very dear to her father. That was why she thought she was given justice.

support us after I left them. My daughters are my husband's *ghoshthi*'s blood and they have the right to arrange marriages for them", Fulzan grieved. However, she succeeded in convincing her in-laws to arrange a later marriage for the second one who got married in 1991.

When flood water entered her courtyard Fulzan started to make a platform. She collected water hyacinth and put a barrier around her room. She became emotionally upset after her paddy field was totally inundated. With the help of her daughter she made *vela* and reached the field. She used a *boitha* (scull) to pick some paddy under water but failed to scoop it due to the force of the water. She knew that year would be one of great hardship.

She always stored fuel in the ceiling of her kitchen. Each morning she collected fuel by climbing a ladder. She put bricks on each plinth to keep her kitchen firm. Fulzan did not have enough space in her loft to store all the paddy husks and had to leave some on her kitchen floor where snakes were hissing every night. She was scared of snakes, leeches and other creatures but necessity made her dare to collect fuel from the kitchen ceiling.

She had a small store of food such as rice, *khud*, *muri* and spices and salt. She broke a mud cooking pot to make a stove and used to cook on the raft. This task gave her much trouble. She placed two or three bricks under the stove to avoid burning the raft. To set a stove on the uneven raft was very difficult but she had to do it because there was not enough space on her *macha*. She used to cook once a day: rice with salt only. Before her stock had become depleted, she started to collect other foods to supplement the rice. She collected *shapla*, *shuk* and edible leaves from inundated public and private gardens.

One morning she noticed her daughter's body had become swollen. She prepared medicine from a tree-root which was difficult to collect. She always

moved around Jolpur using a raft. However, when her daughter's condition remained the same she hired a boat and rushed to the neighbouring village to her elder daughter. Her elder daughter lent her some money. Fulzan called the village *quack* doctor who suggested she take her daughter to the hospital. She did not do that for lack of money and also because she is a woman. She said that, "A woman's life is always miserable and it becomes worse when a woman does not have any man during flood (*meye loker amnee koshto. Bonnar modhdhey kono purush lok na thakley koshter shima nai*)". However, she continued to give herbal medicine to her daughter. Fulzan herself was also attacked by fever, skin diseases and became weak. However, she ignored her sickness.

After the flood water receded it also became difficult to perform her work. She plastered the kitchen first to make a stove. She started to look for work and earned money by cleaning better-off households' compounds, making stoves for them and helping them in other domestic tasks. But she did not earn enough to make a living and support her daughter. People suggested she sell the land. She refused to sell her only asset. "Rather I preferred to starve than sell my land. Now I'm surviving well on my land and work", Fulzan said. Because she was a daughter of the village Fulzan had some advantages over other women and that was why she thought she succeeded in keeping her land. For the same reason she became the leader of the *somiti* after the former leader was prevented by her in-laws' from collecting membership fees door to door thus violating *parda* rules.

### **Analysis**

The story of Fulzan demonstrates the importance of dowry. It shows how a father's or brothers' unkept promise to provide a dowry forced a poor woman to leave her husband's house. Fulzan's story revealed that the torture she was subjected to because of dowry was so grave that she failed to maintain the

'ideology of Bengali women', according to which a woman considers her husband's house is her ultimate place to live. Her brothers did not like her returning either because she asked for the family property which is an irregular practice. However, Fulzan succeeded in getting her share and started to do almost all the work on the agricultural land. Being a 'daughter of the village' she was in a better position (which was opposite for Moti) in the context of *parda* maintenance and was able to work with labourers. Fulzan's story also showed how strong is the patriarchal domination when we see that her daughters' weddings were arranged by her in laws' although she had long been separated from her husband.

Having no men around her household Fulzan faced great flood problems. She had to do all women's and men's gender-assigned work. She did her best to protect crops, houses and her daughter. Despite all her miseries after flood Fulzan did not sell her land which showed a poor woman's intelligence and struggle to overcome her situation.

### **Mazu**

Mazu was the daughter of a solvent farmer and had been married for 10 years. Before her marriage relatives of her husband lied to her father that her husband's family had huge amounts of land. But in reality her husband's family had no more than 1.61 acres of land. However, she lived in a joint family for a year and did not suffer from poverty. The property of the family was distributed among seven brothers and each brother got only 0.23 acre of land which identified them as small farmer 'a'. It was very difficult to run her household with such a small amount of land. Since then Mazu has depended on her father and brothers to meet her family expenses. However, she knows that her brothers will not support her after the death of her parents. Because she is from a wealthy family which have a "high status" (*uchu marjada*) she could not work for other households. She started share tending a goat and

saving money in *somiti*. She saved 3000 taka in three years. Her husband worked as an umbrella repairer in a distant district and came home every five or six months during the harvest seasons to look after his agricultural land. He did not send any money to Mazu.

Mazu was expecting her third child within two weeks of the flood water entering her house. Even though her brother came to collect her three times, Mazu's husband and mother-in-law did not allow her to go to her parents' house to give birth except her first child<sup>6</sup>. Mazu said that her husband would face problems in her absence. Her mother-in-law, who was living with her eldest son, said to Mazu's brother, "Who will cook or collect drinking water for my son?"

However, the water was rising gradually and she was praying that Allah would not send her child during this crisis. Mazu made rope and helped her husband to cut bamboo to make a platform. In the meantime, all of her brothers-in-law moved to safe places with their families. Her mother-in-law did not move because of *parda*. Mazu was selected by her mother-in-law as her youngest son's wife because she had worn *borkha* since she reached puberty. However, her mother-in-law stayed on a separate platform built in her son's house. At night Mazu's husband used to stay with his mother. During the day he would wonder around by boat or stay on the road but came home to eat.

She used to cook for her husband and mother-in-law and look after her children and household belongings. She stored some fuel and rice and got wheat and more rice from a religious organisation. Mazu mixed wheat with a little rice to serve to the family. She used to eat rice gruel and served rice to her husband, mother-in-law and children. Sometimes she remained hungry to

---

6. It is the common practice in Bangladesh that a daughter gives birth in her parent's house, especially the first one.

serve food three times a day to her young sons. However, she did all her work sitting on the platform with the fear that any time her child might come.

One day Mazu realised that she was in labour. She called her mother-in-law. There was no *dai* (midwife) at that time and nobody was there to call her husband. Her mother-in-law kept Mazu's two sons, who were crying, under a partition of cloth. A girl was born and her mother-in-law asked Mazu to cut the umbilical cord. Her mother-in-law refused to cut it saying that she did not want to lose her purity. She believed that a woman who cut an umbilical cord could not pray her *namaj* (Muslim prayer) for one month. Mazu felt helpless but cut the cord with a blade with great fear. She remained senseless for the whole day. Later her mother-in-law and her neighbours told her that her daughter is a sign of misfortune and would give her much trouble in future.

When the baby was three days old the platform collapsed and her eldest son received a head injury. She was forced to move to a flood shelter with her children and other belongings. Her mother-in-law did not move to maintain her *parda*.

Despite the constant pain in her abdomen, she started to do all the domestic work from the day she took refuge in the flood shelter. She tried continually to keep her things away from flood water. Her mother-in-law helped her to cook for two days while she was at home but under no circumstances would her husband cook. Mazu did not complain about her husband rather she thought it was not his work. She said that, "Men did what they were supposed to do. Was it a man's job to make a stove or feed children?" However, she did say that her husband nursed her children when they had fever. She and the infant also suffered from malnutrition.

She did not leave the *macha* for fear of breaking *parda*. She put mosquito net around the *macha* to maintain her *parda*. "it was also good for my children's safety" she said.

After the flood Mazu was taken to the *thana* hospital by her brothers. Mazu said that doctors removed a bag (uterus) from her abdomen and told her that she could not have any more babies. Doctors charged very much for the operation which was paid for by her father.

After the flood she did not have the face (*mukh*) to ask for any more money from her father or brothers. To rebuild their damaged house Mazu's husband sold a piece of their land. Since then her husband has not been a full time farmer and has started to do umbrella repairing in other districts. The money he earned was not even enough to support himself. The small pieces of land and Mazu's goats are the main sources of income for their household survival.

### **Analysis**

Mazu's story presents a different picture from that of Fulzan. Mazu got support from her father and brothers. However, Mazu thought because her father was still alive she would receive support. In her story we see that she adjusted to her husband's family and tried to make her living. Because of her pregnancy Mazu was forced to live with her in-laws' who prevented her from going to her parents' house. The reason for this was because there was nobody to cook for her husband and children. During the flood Mazu faced severe maternity problems which gave her much trouble. Despite her sickness she had to do all her gender-assigned work. Because she was a daughter of a better-off farmer she faced *parda* problems more severely when living in a flood refuge. She was taken to hospital and was operated on after the flood, the cost of which was mostly borne by her father and brothers.

## Sobura

Sobura is 25 years old and belonged to a landless household. They had had 0.15 acre of land which was sold for her husband's treatment. At the time of my visit they cultivated 0.38 acre of land as sharecroppers. Sobura had the sole responsibility for most of the pre- and post-harvest activities and who supervised the labourer's work in the field. Sobura's husband was an umbrella repairer and generally came home every six months. The money he sent for Sobura was not enough for the family. Sobura husked rice for better-off women to support her family. She used to raise poultry and did other work but stopped that to take care of her six children. She was a member of *somiti* and regularly saved money.

Sobura told me how she saved her children from starving. When flood water was rising Sobura left her children in the care of a neighbouring woman so that she could make a platform. At that time her husband was out of the village. She tried to stay at home as long as she could. She was afraid of moving anywhere with her small children. Her neighbour asked her to move to a flood shelter with them. She decided to move to save her children because her thatched roof house was not strong. She prepared another platform on the road with materials from her house.

Sobura had a *pui* tree in her garden and she cooked the stem and leaves of *pui* for few days. She had some *muri* but no staple food, neither did she have any money to buy food nor have any one to look after her children. She heard about relief distribution but did not receive any. It was already distributed before she moved to the flood shelter. Sobura complained that, "Even landed people who had stored food for six months got relief but many poor women who did not have men at home got more".

However, she borrowed some rice and money from her cousin which she used for a few days. Sobura said that she remained unfed or half fed for about one month but managed to feed her children. She left her two younger children with her eight year old son to look for food.

She walked through chest-high water or swam to pick water lilies from a distant place where no one dared to go. She then sold those to other women in the village and later at the market. Sobura said that before the 1988 flood she never thought that she would go to market or in front of strangers. She felt ashamed to be seen with a wet *sari* by lots of strangers but she did not have any other means to save her children. "I might not be able to manage the half kilo (rice) for my children if I maintained *parda* (*Bachchago jonne jei adhser jogar korsi tao partamna jodi parda kortam*)", Sobura said. She also said that at the beginning she faced food, fuel and toilet problems because of *parda*.

Sobura combined her domestic work with outside work in order to save her children. She grieved that because of her time consuming work in looking for *shapla* she could not save her poultry from drowning.

Sobura joined *somiti* in 1989. With *somiti's* loan she bought corrugated iron sheets and rebuilt her house.

### **Analysis**

The story of Sobura, the wife of a landless umbrella repairer, showed a poor women's capacity to survive poverty and flood time crises. Being a de-facto head of household this poor woman carried the burden of her household and six children. Sobura's story also revealed that when survival became important *parda* for a poor woman was modified. She had to go to market to sell edible food in order to save her children.

## Nojimon

Nojimon was a destitute woman. She was 44 and was living with her son during the 1988 flood. Nojimon was married into a neighbouring village at the age of 18 but was abandoned by her husband after he remarried. She came back to Jolpur with her seven year old son and two year old daughter. One of her relatives allowed her to build her hut behind his courtyard. Since then Nojimon has raised her children through her hard labour. She worked for better-off women, did seasonal agricultural work and sewed *katha* for sale. She also share-tended poultry. Her son was a day labourer and her daughter was already married.

Nojimon and her son raised their bed when there was already 60 centimetres of water inside her house by putting bricks under two *takta* (planks of wood). Later fearing that the house might collapse at any moment she and her son built a platform in the courtyard. Then she tried to support the house by tying it to a big tree. Everyday she used to collect pieces of wood to make a barrier around the house to prevent the floor from washing away. She always tried to keep everything tidy.

She made a special *khop* with her stored cane and jute-poles and put it in the ceiling of the house. Feeding the chickens was difficult and Nojimon had to climb up to the ceiling to do it. She took that risk to save them from drowning as she relied on selling the chickens and their eggs for survival.

At first Nojimon made a stove with a thin earthen cooking pot which was broken few days after. She then had to break her *motki*, in which she stored rice, to make another stove. She put her stored rice in a *sala* (sack). She cooked rice for a few days and made *dhapra* from flour from her store. She had only some jute-poles and crop waste (husk, leaves, stem) to use as fuel. Then she started to collect branches, creepers and leaves from the village

common resources. She had to fight with other women for these. She borrowed food from a better-off woman for whom she worked. Selling one of her *kolshi* and two *khora* was her last effort. She got a small amount of money which she gave to her son to buy whatever he could to eat. Most of the time she remained hungry but served food to her son. She did not get any relief.

Nojimon sent her son to live on the road and during the day she also used to stay there. She said that she wanted to save her poultry and house from flood water and from thieves. That is why she used to return home every evening. She remained sleepless at night to protect her house and poultry. Her son did not find any work. Nojimon said, with sarcasm, "No men in Jolpur had work for one month. They had plenty of time to eat, sit and sleep".

Every morning Nojimon woke up and, standing in the water, repaired or raised her *macha*, or both. Then she took her *kolshi* on her head to collect drinking water. Nojimon had seen that many people had water-related diseases and she decided not to give her son flood water to drink for a single day. As most of the nearby tube-wells were under water she swam to a distant high tube-well. "We remained thirsty many times but did not drink flood water", Nojimon said with great pride. She used to bring water every morning before she cooked. She then carried food to the road for her son who was waiting to eat and drink. Nojimon used special techniques to pump water from the tube-well. She tied a polythene bag to the neck of the tube-well. She needed many bags of water to fill her *kolshi* and she had to pump the tube-well repeatedly. This was a hard and time consuming job for her. However, Nojimon thought that some flood water might enter into her *kolshi* while she was swimming and pushing it forward. However, she said that her son was not attacked by any disease. She herself also did not have any sickness except fever after the flood.

## **Analysis**

The story of Nojimon is a sad one, about what a destitute woman, abandoned by her husband, faced. Nojimon's destitution forced her to work as a wage labourer. She tried her best to protect her poorly constructed house during floods but with very little resources she had nothing but her own effort to secure her family's living. Selling small assets was a part of her survival.

## **Bina**

When her mother died during the 1988 flood, nine year old Bina was left to cook and look after her small brothers and sister. At the time of my field work she did seasonal agricultural work, threshed harvested crops such as wheat and coriander and received dry threshed branches of crops as payment in kind. Before the monsoon Bina made a stove and stored fuel.

Bina's father was a carpenter. She had two brothers, aged nine and six and a five year old sister. Bina's father sold their homestead land after her mother's death but still lived there with the permission of the new owner.

Bina's mother had a small stock of jute-poles and cow dung. Flood water came so suddenly that her mother did not have time to make a stove. She collected three bricks to use as a stove. She placed a piece of tin underneath the bricks. Cooking on such a stove was very difficult. Her mother stored some *dal* and some *mushthichaal* to cook for a few days. She asked Bina to pick chillies after their homestead garden was flooded. Her father built a platform for them. Her mother was attacked by tuberculosis within a few days of the flood. When her mother became bed-ridden Bina shouldered her mother's domestic work. Her mother used to instruct her on how to adjust cooking and consume less fuel. She made *ruti* which, the first time, were not so round as her mother's. Her father bought flour from the market once or

twice and got rice from his brother as a loan. They depended on such loans for about fifteen days. They did not get food or help from other sources.

Although their chickens were very dear to her mother, Bina's father sold them to get money to buy food. Moreover there was no place on their platform to keep them and they took refuge in trees. At the beginning Bina used to collect *bon kochu* and some edible plants while collecting drinking water from a tube-well. Her father accompanied her occasionally. The tube-well was about 500 metres away and she had to walk through chest-high water. When that tube-well was submerged they were forced to drink flood water.

Bina felt helpless when her little sister, father and brothers were attacked by fever. She had to nurse all of them. Her father had a small amount of money left with which he bought medicine. Bina could do nothing when their cooking pots, quilt and clothes were washed away one day by the flood. She was then feeding her one year old sister.

The flood water receded day by day but her mother's condition deteriorated and her brothers and sisters cried for food. Her father was away looking for work. She did not cook for two days because there was no fuel. They survived on some *ruti* she had made before.

One morning, after the flood water receded from their courtyard Bina started to clean it. At that time her mother asked her to take her to the toilet. Her mother fainted and died in the courtyard before Bina came to hold her. Her father was away from home. One of their neighbours caught him at the bus station. They tried to arrange a *chita* (funeral pyre) according to religious rites but failed to do so because of not having enough fuel for a funeral fire. Bina said that at that time most households in Jolpur did not even have enough fuel for cooking. Her father had no money to buy fuel from the market. However, both the father and daughter carried the dead body to the river and floated it. Bina's father did not remarry and Bina has taken charge of their

household. She and her father always feel guilty for not cremating her mother according to the appropriate religious rites.

### **Analysis**

The story of Bina shows how a poor child shoulders the responsibility of a mother or mature woman. What she did would never be contemplated by a boy of her age. Her father did not do the work which was supposed to be done by women. This story also tells us about the fuel crises during flood. This led Bina and her father to float her mother's dead body to the river instead of cremating it.

### **Amina**

This story is about the problems Amina faced during floods. She is 36 and belongs to the small farmer 'b' category. She was married at fourteen. Her husband is a car-mechanic in Dhaka and comes home every two to three months. She has two sons and two daughters: the eldest son is 18 and the youngest is 7. She sends all of her children to school and she does most of the work in the household. She takes almost all responsibilities for the household decision making and her husband does not disagree with her decisions. She hires labourers and supervises their work when necessary. She used to raise poultry but had to stop when her neighbouring rich household objected that she could not control her chickens and ducks which soiled the rich neighbour's courtyard. Her husband sent a small amount of money from his salary. She had to run her family with her income from agriculture and the money her husband sent. She became a member of *somiti* after the 1988 flood and regularly saved money.

During the 1988 flood Amina had to face great problems in the absence, and also in the presence, of her husband. When the water reached neck height

she, with the help of her elder son, raised their bed using bamboo and ropes from her store. Her house was made of bamboo (plastered with mud) with a corrugated iron roof. She became worried that her children might drown or bitten by snakes or insects. She was also worried that her house might collapse. When it became impossible for them to live on the bed she decided to ask for help from her rich neighbour. Because she did not have a boat or a raft she had to swim to reach the neighbour's house. Her neighbour not only had a corrugated iron house (the roof and walls) built on higher ground, but spare rooms and platforms. The neighbour agreed to accommodate her on conditions that she leave if relatives came or if needed the space. However, that was a big help for Amina whose thoughts were for her children. Even when she was living with her neighbour she regularly visited her house to check it while collecting water or fuel. Her kitchen collapsed one day and she collected broken parts from under the water. She did not want her main house to be destroyed by flood water and put the broken parts of the kitchen to protect the house-plinths.

She was able to collect drinking water from the neighbour's tube-well. She had some paddy in her store which she boiled, putting bricks under her stove. She made rice from it using her grind-stone (*pata*). It did not make the rice properly and they had to eat it with chilli and salt. She had a small store of fuel which she brought (along with her bed and kitchen utensils) with her. She lost many of her things which she could not carry away from the flood water. Whatever she had was not enough for four people to survive. However, Amina did not ask any other help from her neighbour because she thought it was enough that they gave them shelter. "I knew the neighbour had stores of paddy which they carried to the rice mills of Bhanga but did not request them to carry mine. I felt helpless when my kids smelled food from next door and were asking for that. I had to keep their mouths shut to prevent them from crying," Amina said.

However, despite all her attempts to live at the rich neighbour's house she had to quit when her husband arrived from Dhaka. The day after his arrival they were asked to leave. The rich man gave two reasons: first, the embarrassment to his wife of having a strange man around their home and second the family was no longer helpless now that there was a man to look after the family. Amina, however, did not think that she and her children survived better after her husband's return, rather she grieved at having lost her shelter due to his arrival during the mid-flood crisis time. "I was happy to see my husband but was shocked when we had to move to the flooded house", Amina said.

She thought that the reason for the rich man's unkindness was because her husband, not living in Jolpur, had not built up a social relationship with the better-off like other men in poorer categories. Amina said, "He [the rich man] does not call my husband when he needs any [political] support". As a woman she built a neighbourhood relationship with the wife and that was why she thought they got the shelter. But when Amina's husband arrived the rich man's wife could do nothing not only because she herself maintained *parda* but because she had to follow her husband's order.

They had to stay in the attic (*chung*) of their house until the flood water receded. Her husband became very angry with the rich man and asked Amina not even to use their tube-well. Since then she had to swim to carry clean flood-water. Amina faced great problems while cooking on the roof and had to reduce the number of times she cooked. Although her husband was sympathetic to her, under no circumstances would he collect water or cook food. "He took care of the children while I cooked or collected water which was enough for a man to do", Amina added.

## **Analysis**

Amina who is a wife of an absentee land owner in the small farmer 'b' category and bore the responsibility of her household maintenance. Being a neighbour of a rich farmer Amina made a network relationship with the woman in a rich household and got shelter during the flood. But she was forced to leave the shelter when her husband returned. The reason was the maintenance of the rich man's wife's *parda* and the lack of social relationships (patron-client) between her husband and the rich man. Amina thought because her husband did not live in Jolpur the rich man could not use him politically.

## **Summary and conclusions**

The nine case studies presented in this chapter reveal in detail the situations of non-flood and flood periods which confront poor rural women in Bangladesh. It shows how poor women cope with poverty and flood-related crises. Adopting a qualitative approach these case studies are the human face of the statistical data in a more direct and immediate way than sociological generalisations. The case studies show how the combination of socio-economic position and gender subordination dramatically affects the lives of rural women.

## Chapter Eleven

### Conclusion

This study was concerned with how rural women in Bangladesh were affected by, and coped with, floods and the principal factors structuring their responses. It analyzed the strategies used by women in different socio-economic categories to cope with floods in a single flood-prone village in Faridpur district in Bangladesh and it attempted to explain them. It demonstrated in detail the way in which socio-economic categories, gender differences and cultural norms, such as *parda*, structured women's coping strategies.

Several related issues were addressed in general terms: how women perceived and experienced floods; the problems they faced and their responses to them; were women the victims of flood or did they play an active role to protect their households? which women contributed to their households' survival? whether any change took place in the social structure as a consequence of the way in which women coped with floods and whether government provided enough support for poor women's survival. Since the findings of the study have already been presented in detail in relevant chapters, only major points relating to specific issues will be summarized here and conclusions drawn. Areas for further research are indicated and some policy recommendations are made on the basis of the findings.

Chapter One presented a picture of the situation of women during flooding in Bangladesh. It showed that women have been neglected by researchers and by government policy makers and because of this information was lacking on the situation of women during floods and how they were coping with floods in Bangladesh.

The second chapter focused on the severity of floods in Bangladesh with reference to their causes and consequences. Flooding has become a constant factor in the country but the measures taken so far to control floods have largely been inappropriate. It showed that government policies regarding flood prevention have often accentuated the vulnerability of poor rural women. This chapter underscored the need to develop policies which would assist the solution of flood problems. The inclusion of women's responses to floods in policy making, this chapter argued, could go a long way towards improving the situation of rural households during floods.

Factors influencing poor women's responses to floods cannot be understood without referring to the general position of women in society. Thus Chapter Three described the general circumstances of women in Bangladesh with reference to the major factors which structure the lives of rural women. It concluded that women are subordinate to men, evident in the preferential treatment given to men regarding access to resources, the gender division of labour, food allocation and access to the public sphere. It showed how the cultural norms of a male-dominated, Muslim society has perpetuated inequalities which accentuated the vulnerability of poor rural women during floods. Women were subjected to gender sub-ordination. Men were known as the bread-winners of households and had free access to the public sphere whereas women were supposed to be confined to their houses. To keep *parda* women were not allowed to enter public places. There were significant gender disparities among household members in terms of their activities and resources. Gender differences were such that women were assigned all domestic activities

and men all outside work. In addition to women's roles in household and management activities such as cooking, cleaning, washing, care for children, care for animals, fetching water and collecting fuel, rural women play significant roles in productive activities. Men, on the other hand, rarely did anything which was conventionally regarded as women's work. Men's major activities were officially described as 'productive' mainly because their activities were related to the market economy. Women's activities are described as 'reproductive' because they do not, at least directly, relate to the market economy. By this device women were further excluded from public life. But in practice, several home-based activities performed by women contribute significant income to households. Many women combined their domestic activities with income-generation and participated in household decision making. However, these activities are not officially measured by the Department of Statistics. This chapter also emphasised that the form and extent of women's subordination was related to their households' socio-economic background and concludes that better-off women were more subordinated to men and poorer women were more subordinated by poverty.

Details of the research methods used in the study and a profile of the region and environment of the village were presented in Chapter Four. The summary findings pointed out that floods played an important role in the lives of the people in the village.

Chapter Five discussed the social conditions of Jolpur with reference to economic and social factors. The village was highly stratified and land was central to its social structure. Educational and occupational levels of the villagers were also related to their economic conditions.

Gender relations in Jolpur were described in Chapter Six. Women were subjected to gender and socio-economic subordination in terms of religion, health, dress, family decision making and access to the public sphere.

Ideologies surrounding *parda* and the gender division of labour played important roles in legitimising and maintaining hierarchical relationships between women and men, as also between different socio-economic categories. Women in the poorer categories were much more involved in income-generating activities in order to help their households' survival than women in the better-off categories. However, women who worked for paid income could not maintain strict *parda*. Together with their poverty this contributes to their low status. Their work outside their households brought little change to their existing activities and status. On the contrary, it over-burdened them.

The everyday life of respondents in Jolpur, presented in Chapter Seven, showed that there was a strong gender division of labour which assigned women to activities different from those of men and the institution of *parda* played an important role in the division of labour, also that there were differences among women in different households. Whereas women in better-off categories contributed less and were free from economic responsibilities because of their households' stronger resources, poorer women, played important roles for their households' sustenance: they often took over men's economic responsibilities, provided family food, sacrificed their meals for their children and husbands', drew upon their assets, maintained social networks and used village common resources. However, despite their contributions to their households' survival poorer women remained of low status.

Against the normality of non-flood periods, Chapter Eight showed that women's perceptions of floods varied according to the problems they faced and their socio-economic categories. Problems experienced by women, such as problems in the flood refuge, loss of women's assets, the gender division of labour, maintenance of *parda* and collection of relief were also discussed in Chapter Eight. During floods women's gender-assigned tasks, especially procuring food and cooking, providing drinking water, storing fuel and child care were such that they had to bear a greater physical burden than men did.

These activities became extremely difficult during floods. Women still had to do these activities because it was extremely rare for men to carry out these task or even assist them. The normally gender-assigned activities for men did not change but women often shouldered those activities. Women in better-off categories did not face flood-related crises as severely as poorer women did because of the advantageous position of their households'. The strong division of labour forced poorer women to carry out their gender-assigned tasks for their households' survival and in coping with everyday life problems during floods women had to compromise the cultural norms of *parda*. Despite their heroism they remained of low status.

Chapter Nine showed that despite their overall subordinate position in their households and in society generally poor women contributed significantly to their households' survival during floods. It focused on some of the coping strategies developed by women within their gender-assigned spheres. It showed that women's coping strategies were vital for the survival of poor households' during floods. When men were not able to carry out their gender-assigned responsibilities women tried to compensate by engaging in additional, innovative activities within their own gender-assigned spheres, and beyond them. Poor women have developed a range of strategies to deal with floods. Women in poorer categories contributed much more than women in better-off categories in the context of their households' survival: they sold their assets, drew upon village common resources to obtain aquatic plants and medicinal herbs, adjusted cooking patterns and sacrificed their meals for their children and husbands, provided primary health care for sick family members and secured assistance through their social networks. Men did not show such highly adaptive tendencies as women did for their family survival. Also women in the better-off categories did not need to develop such coping strategies because of their households' stronger economic background.

The case studies of nine different women, presented in Chapter Ten, were provided in order to convey as holistically and realistically as possible the way in which the range of problems described elsewhere interact in the lives of individual women.

Flood was a constant threat to rural livelihoods and it brought great hardships to the poor, especially for women whose access to resources was extremely limited and vulnerable. Gender differences together with socio-economic differences affected survival patterns. Women experienced floods almost every year but there was no common perception of their experience of floods. There is an assumption that women regarded floods with a fatalistic attitude and did nothing to change their situation. This study finds no support for this assumption. It became clear that women were not merely the victims of floods but played an active role in protecting their households from flood-related crises, even those women who considered floods ordained by fate. Although poorer women had low status they were the major contributors to their households' survival during floods.

There were also differences in duration of problems experienced by women. While some women suffered temporarily and could overcome the worst flood-situations, others faced hardship for a long time. These differences correlated with the socio-economic circumstances of households: women in better-off households are less affected by floods than women in poor households. Whereas the former had resources to help them to face the floods, the latter had nothing to depend on except their own efforts.

Men were less affected than women in each socio-economic category. Women in the poorer socio-economic categories suffered more: women in the better-off category suffered less. That was why the responses of poorer women to floods were researched in relation to better-off women.

The study also showed that in the context of women's contribution to the reduction of their households' vulnerability, poor women contributed more than women in better-off households. Women in the better-off categories did not need to leave their houses or seek paid work because of their stronger socio-economic background. This allowed them to maintain *parda*. Poor women, on the other hand, shared men's economic vulnerability to flood and unemployment and were less likely to follow *parda* so strictly.

It is clear that there was little or no government support to help women to survive floods. Relief (food only in Jolpur), distributed by government and non-government organisations, was inadequate to support a poor household during flood. In fact relief was not distributed to those who most needed those and was often appropriated by corrupt officials or village influentials or both. Poorer women did not want to depend on relief, rather they wanted to rely on their own income and preferred the prevention of floods.

By analysing the relationship of the situations of women during non-flood and flood periods, this study has shown that women's coping strategies or responses to floods were, in fact, related to their gender identity in the society. Women's coping strategies during floods became understandable by focusing on the socio-economic differences among households, the socio-cultural factors, that is, the notion of *parda* and the gender division of labour. All of these factors played important roles in structuring women's responses to floods. The socio-economic identity of a women's household is of utmost importance in contributing women's responses to floods. It is revealed that *parda*, a powerful mechanism in the construction of women's identity and the gender division of labour was also related to the socio-economic position of a woman's household.

The overall conclusion is that the magnificent fortitude with which women attempted to save their households went unrecognised. The major social structures which defined the social position of women did not change as

a consequence of the way women coped with floods. The reason for this is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural nature of the society. Floods are deplored by everyone but they did not touch or affect the basic structure of the society. After the severest floods life returned to normality and women and men took up their traditional roles as before the floods. Nevertheless, having documented the responses of women to floods, the contributions they made to the well-being of their households' sustainability and overall economy, it can be said that women in Bangladesh may gain some recognition which will help to change their position. Because, in spite of the obvious strength of the cultural ideologies, gender division of labour and *parda*, are not static but subject to change with repeated floods and poverty. Change in the economic conditions has begun to be reflected in the local norms or value systems. Floods and, as a consequence increasing poverty, decreased the material basis of patron-client or kinship relationships between poorer and better-off households. Most men were unable or reluctant to provide for the livelihood of their women or families, which has been the normal practice until now. This situation in turn has broken down the dependency relations of women on men, with an implication for the ideologies of the society. Unlike earlier times, when only very poor women worked for paid employment, over the last decade women from almost all categories were increasingly joining the labour force (Rozario, 1992:179). Repeated floods contributed significantly in women's involvement in public spheres. Thus it could be argued that as more women continue to contribute for their households' survival during non-flood or flood periods or to participate in the economy, the discrepancy between socio-cultural structure will change to reflect the new socio-economic situation. This would mean more economic and social freedom for women without simultaneously being subject to the ideals of gender division of labour and *parda*. However, as Cain et al (1979:438) argue, even if the present system of male-domination may not necessarily be materially advantageous to poor men, the system is not likely to be interfered with as long as the rich men continue to benefit. The notion of *parda* and gender division of labour are important not only to maintain status and male

hierarchy but to maintain group boundaries, distribution of power and the overall structure of domination. Thus, although there is great potential for change, there is also a real danger that changes may occur within the limits of the existing system of socio-economic and gender relations.

#### **Need for further research and policy recommendations**

The findings of the study may be applicable to other villages like Jolpur. To understand the situation of women during floods in different socio-economic contexts, similar studies need to be made in other flood-prone villages in Bangladesh.

Before floods, government and foreign NGOs gave urgent attention to measures such as making embankments and raising dykes instead of focusing on people's survival activities. Community-based schemes, which were mostly run by international and local non-government organizations (NGOs), have also failed to focus primary attention on the needs of people. They had a narrow understanding of floods because they consider them in isolation from the general socio-economic structure, processes and gender relations of the country. Furthermore no development effort was based on the existing capacities of local people. Relief had come to be a concomitant of floods. It was distributed through powerful and commonly corrupt groups and therefore poor and powerless women could not benefit much from it. Government, donor countries, NGOs and policy makers concerned with flood control and relief distribution pay little or no attention to household survival strategies and techniques, especially women's role of protecting the members of their households. There is a need for timely and well-focused policy to solve the flood-related problems. Programmes may be targeted at specific groups, such as the poor, or they may have a broader socio-economic scope. This study indicates that because women make significant contributions to their

households' survival during floods, their activities need to receive attention in government planning.

Recognition of the role of poor women in safeguarding the interests of their families is a necessary starting point from which to devise policies to reduce the vulnerability of the rural poor to floods. The study showed that there were specific gender implications in the way households coped during floods which were different among women according to their households' socio-economic status. In order to perform their roles poor women were compelled to modify the cultural norms of *parda*. During floods women act to protect households, their children, their aged relatives and livestock and other belongings. Women sell assets, adjust their work, cooking and consumption patterns, use common village resources and their social networks, provide primary health care to the sick members in their households, undertake gainful or income-generating activities which give their lives a purpose and a chance for self-fulfilment. Their role, however, was largely unrecognised.

Women are still largely ignored in social science research on natural disasters. Attempts should be made to grasp the different issues relating to women during floods, such as their coping strategies and the types of work women and men perform during floods. Considering the importance of women in the rural socio-economic scene, and the important roles they are likely to play in future years, it is crucial that the roles of poor women during floods are recognised. An in-depth understanding of the gender division of labour during floods is important for formulating an effective and pragmatic flood mitigation programme. Programmes will be most effective if they are backed by strong policy support and guidance. This study lends to support to policies that involve women and men in planning, that considers women's typical disadvantages, that considers their separate sphere and assets, and that gives priority to poorer women.

## REFERENCES

- Abdullah, T. and S. Zeidenstein. 1982. *Village Women of Bangladesh: Prospects for Change*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Abdullah, M.E., E.F. Wheeler, 1985. 'Seasonal Variations and the intra-household distribution of food in a Bangladesh Village' *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 41:1305-13.
- Abdullah, Mohammed. 1989. 'The Effect of Seasonality on Intrahousehold Food Distribution and Nutrition in Bangladesh' in David E. Sahn (ed) *Seasonal Variability in Third World Agriculture: The Consequences for Food Security*. London: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Abdullah, Taherunnesa. 1974. *Village Women as I Saw Them*. Dhaka: Ford Foundation.
- Adnan, Shapan. 1990. *Institutional Aspects of Flood Protection Programmes*. Report No.2. Dhaka: Research and Advisory Services.
- Afshar Haleh (ed). 1991. *Women, Development and Survival in the Third World*. London: Longman.
- Afshar, Haleh and Bina Agarwal (eds). 1989. *Women, poverty and ideology in Asia*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Afshar, Haleh (ed). 1987. *Women, state and ideology: Studies from Africa and Asia*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Agarwal, Bina. 1991. 'Social Security and the Family: Coping with Seasonality and Calamity In Rural India' *Journal of Peasant Studies* 17(4):341-412.
- Agarwal, Bina. 1989. 'Rural women, Poverty and Natural Resources: Sustainability and Struggle for Change' *Economic and Political Weekly* xxiv:43.

- Agarwal, Bina. 1988. 'Who Sows? Who Reaps? Women and Land Rights in India' *Journal of Peasant Studies* 15(4):531- 81.
- Agarwal, Bina. 1986. 'Women, poverty and agricultural Growth in India' *Journal of Peasant Studies* 13(4):165-220.
- Ahmad, Parveen. 1980. *Income Earning As Related To The Changing Status Of Village Women In Bangladesh: A Case Study*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Women for Women.
- Ahmad, Mohiuddin (ed). 1989. *Flood In Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Community Development Library.
- Ahmed, I. (ed). 1985. *Technology and Rural women*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Ahmed, R. and Nahar, M.S. 1986. 'Changing Marriage Transactions and the Rise of the Demand System in Bangladesh'. Dhaka, *Journal of Social Studies* 33:71-107.
- Ahsan, Rosie Majid. 1991. 'Women and Environment'. A paper presented at the seminar on *Women and Environment*, organized by Bangladesh Geographical Society and Department of Geography, University of Dhaka, September 6-7, 1991.
- Akanda, Latifa and Roushan Jahan (eds). 1983. *Women For Women: Collected Articles 1983*. Dhaka: Women For Women.
- Akanda, L. and Ishrat Shamim. 1984. *Women and Violence: A Comparative Study of Rural and Urban Violence on Women in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Women for Women.
- Alam, S.M. Nurul. 1991c. 'Conquering Nature: Myth and the Reality of Flood control in Bangladesh'. A paper presented at the international conference on the *Impact of Natural Disaster*, California: University of California and Los Angeles, July 10-12, 1991.
- Alam, S.M. Nurul, 1991b. 'Training for Disaster Reduction in Flood-Prone Areas: Human Behavioural Aspects'. A paper presented at the seminar on *Training Materials for Disaster Reduction* organised by Delft University of Technology, Netherlands, September 1-8, 1991.
- Alam, S.M. Nurul. 1991a. 'Survival: An Analysis of General Issues and Concerns with Emphasis on the Strategies to cope with Floods in Bangladesh'. A paper presented at the Seminar on *Environment and Natural Resources Management in Bangladesh*, organised by Bangladesh Sociology Association, Dhaka, January 25-26, 1991.

- Alam, S.M. Nurul. 1990a. *Annotation of Social Science Literature On Natural Disasters in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Community Development Library.
- Alam, S.M. Nurul. 1990b. 'Perception of Flood Among Bangladeshi Villagers' *Disasters* 14(4): 354-357.
- Alamgir, M. 1980. *Famine in South Asia - Political Economy of Mass Starvation in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.
- Alamgir, M. et al. 1977. *Famine 1974: Political Economy of Mass Starvation in Bangladesh. A Statistical Annex*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.
- Alavi, Hamza. 1980. 'India: Transition from Feudalism to Colonial Capitalism' *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 10(4): 371.
- Alavi, Hamza. 1973. 'Peasant and Revolution' in K. Gough and H.P. Sharma (eds.) *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*. London: Monthly Review Press.
- Alexander, David. 1993. *Natural Disasters*. London: UCL Press.
- Ali, M., 1984. 'Women in Famine the paradox of statics in India' in Bruce Currey and Graeme Hugo (eds.) *Famine: As a Geographical Phenomenon*. Netherlands: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Allen, Michael and S.N. Mukherjee (eds). 1982. *Women in India and Nepal*. Monographs on South Asia No.8. Canberra: Australian National University (ANU).
- Amin, S. 1975. *Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Development* (translated in English by Brian Pearce). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Anderson, Jon W. 1968. 'Cultural Adaptation to Threatened Disaster' *Human Organization* 27:298-306.
- Anderson, Mary B. and Peter J. Woodrow. 1989. *Rising from the Ashes*. London: West View Press.
- Anker, Richard and Catherine Hein (eds). 1986. *Sex inequality in Urban Employment in the Third World*. London: Macmillan Press.

- Anker, Richard. 1983. 'Female Labour Force Participation in Developing Countries: A Critique of Current Definitions and Data Collection Methods' *International Labour Review* 122(6):709-723.
- Anker, Richard *et al* (eds). 1982. *Women's Role and Population Trends in The Third World*. London: Croom Helm.
- Ansary, Iqbal A. 1991. 'Muslim Women's Rights: Goals and Strategy of Reform' *Economic and Political Weekly* xxvi(7):1095-1097.
- Arefeen, H.K.S. 1987. *Shimulia: Changing Agrarian Structure Of a Peri-urban Village in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Center For Social Studies, University of Dhaka.
- Arens, Jenneke and Jos Van Beurden. 1977. *Jhagrapur: Poor Peasants and Women In a Village In Bangladesh*. New Delhi: Orient Longman.
- Arnold, David. 1988. *Famine: Social Crisis and Historical Change*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Ashraf, A. Chowdhury *et al* 1982. 'Health, Disease and Health-care in Rural Bangladesh' *Journal of Social Science and Medicine* 16:2041-2054.
- Banerjee, N., 1988. *Women's Work and Family Strategies: A Case Study from Baukura, West Bengal*. New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies (memo).
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. 1988. *Report on Labour Force Survey 1984-85*. Dhaka: Statistical Division, Ministry of Planning.
- Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC). 1989. *Floodplain Agriculture*. Dhaka: BARC.
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1989. *Final Report: Bangladesh Flood Policy Study*. Dhaka: Ministry of Planning.
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. 1983. *Faridpur District Statistics: 1983*. Dhaka: Statistical Division, Ministry of Finance and Planning.
- Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD). 1988. *Women's Contribution to Homestead Agricultural Production System in Bangladesh*. Comilla, Bangladesh: BARD.

- Bangladesh Flood Action Plan (FAP). 1992. *Draft Final Report and Planning Guidelines*. Flood Response Study (FAP 14), prepared for The Flood Plan Coordination Organization of the Ministry of Irrigation Water Development and Flood Control. Dhaka: Irrigation Support Project for Asia and the Near East (Ispan).
- Barrett, Michele. 1986. *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*. London: Verso.
- Barrows, H. H. 1923. 'Geography as human ecology' in *Annals of the association of American Geographers* 13:1-14.
- Batiwala, S. 1983. 'Women in Poverty: The Energy, Health and Nutrition Syndrome'. A paper presented at the Workshop on *Women and Poverty*. Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences.
- Begum, Najmir Nur. 1988. *Pay or Purdah: Women and Income Earning in Rural Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Human Resources Development Programme, Winrock International Institute of Agricultural in Collaboration with Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council.
- Beinin, L. 1985. *Medical consequences of natural disasters*. New York: Springer.
- Beneria, Lourdes and Gita Sen. 1981. 'Accumulation, Reproduction and Women's Role in Economic Development' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7(2):279-98.
- Beneria, Lourds and Catherine R. Stimpson (eds). 1987. *Women, household and the economy*. London: Rutgers University Press.
- Beneria, L. and Shelly Feldman (eds). 1992. *Unequal burden: Economic crises, Persistent Poverty, and Women's Work*. Boulder: West View Press.
- Bennholdt-Thomsen, Veronika. 1981. 'Subsistence Production and Extended Reproduction' in Kate Young *et al* (eds). *Of Marriage and the Market: women's subordination in international perspective*. London: Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE).
- Berkes, Fikret (ed). 1989. *Common Property Resources*. London: Belhaver Press.
- Bernstein, Henry, *et al* (eds). 1992. *Rural Livelihoods: Crises and Responses*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Bernus, E. 1988. 'Seasonality, climate fluctuations, and food supplies (Sahelian nomadic pastoral societies)' in I. DE Garine and G.A. Harrison (eds.) *Coping with Uncertainty in food Supply*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bertocci, Peter J. 1974. 'Rural communities in Bangladesh: Hajipur and Tinpara' in C. Maloney (ed.) *South Asia: Seven community profiles*. Sydney: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Bertocci, Peter, J. 1972. 'Community Structure and Social Rank in Two Villages in Bangladesh' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 6:28-52.
- Bertocci, Peter, J. 1970. *Illusive Villages: Social Structure and Community Organization in Rural East Pakistan*. PhD. dissertation. East Lansing: Michigan State University.
- Bharati, P. and A. Basu, 1988. 'Uncertainties in food supply, and nutritional deficiencies, in relation to economic conditions in a village population of Southern West Bengal, India' in I. DE Garine and G.A. Harrison (eds.) *Coping with Uncertainty in Food Supply*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bichitra*, 1993. 'Bangladesher Nari '93 (Women in Bangladesh '93)' 22(15): 29-38, Dhaka, September 3, 1993.
- Blanchett, Teresa. 1984. *Women, pollution and Marginality: Meanings and rituals of Birth in Rural Bangladesh*. Dhaka: The University Press.
- Blumberg, Rae Lesser. 1981. 'Females, Farming and Food: Rural Development and Women's Participation in Agricultural Production System' in B.C. Lewis (ed) *Invisible Farmers*. Washington D.C: Agency for International Development.
- Bolt, B.A., W.L. Horn, G.A. Macdonald, R.F. Scott 1977. *Geological hazards: earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, avalanches, landslides, floods*, 2nd edn. New York: Springer.
- Bose, Sugata. 1986. *Agrarian Bengal Economy, Social structure and Politics, 1919-1947*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Boserup, E. 1970. *Women's Role in Economic Development*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Bourdieu, P. 1979. *Algeria 1960*. Translated in English by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Boyce, James. 1990. 'Birth of a Megaproject: Political Economy of Flood Control in Bangladesh' *Environmental Management* 14(4):419-428.
- Bradnock, Robert W. 1984. *Case Studies In the Developing World: Agricultural Change in South Asia*. London: John Murray.
- Brammer, H. 1990b. 'Floods in Bangladesh: 2. Flood mitigation and environmental aspects' *The Geographical Journal* 156(2):158-165.
- Brammer, H. 1990a. 'Floods in Bangladesh: 1. Geographical background to the 1987 and 1988 floods' *The Geographical Journal* 156(1):12-22.
- Brammer, H. 1989. 'Floods in the Agroecology of Bangladesh'. A paper presented at the international seminar on *Bangladesh Floods: Regional and Global Environment Perspectives*. Dhaka, March 4-7, 1989.
- Britton, N.R. 1990. 'Challenges and Opportunities in the Disaster Organizational Setting', *International Journal Of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 8(3):199-205.
- Britton, N.R. 1988. 'Organized Behaviour In Disaster: A Review Essay' *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 6(3):363-395.
- Britton, N.R. 1986. 'Developing An Understanding of Disaster' *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 22(2):255-271.
- Bryant, W. Keith. 1990. *The Economic Organisation of the household*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Brydon, Lynne and Sylvia Chant. 1989. *Women in the Third World: Gender Issues in Rural and Urban Areas*. London: Edward Elger.
- Burton, Ian, Robert W. Kates and Gilbert F. White. 1978. *The Environment As Hazard*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Buvinic, Mayra. 1983. 'Women's Issues in Third World Poverty: A Policy Analysis' in Mayra Buvinic, Margaret Lycette and William McGreevey (eds) *Women and Poverty in the Third World*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Cain, M., S.R. Khanam and S. Nahar. 1979. 'Class, Patriarchy and Women's Work in Bangladesh' *Population and Development Review* 5(3):405-438.

- Caldwell, J. C., P.H. Reddy and P Caldwell. 1986. 'Periodic High Risk as a Cause of Fertility Decline in a Changing Rural Environment: Survival Strategies in 1980-83 South Indian Drought' *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 34:677-701
- Campbell, D.J. and D.D. Trechter. 1982. 'Strategies for Coping with Food Consumption Shortage in the Mandara Mountains Region on North Cameroon' *Social Science and Medicine* 16:2117-2127.
- Carroll, Theodora Foster. 1983. *Women, Religion and Development in the Third World*. New York: Praeger.
- Cecelski, Elizabeth et al. 1979. *Household Energy and the Poor in the Third World*. Research paper R-15. Washington, D.C.: Resources for The Future.
- Chambers, R, Longhurst, R and Arnold Pacey (eds). 1981, *Seasonal Dimensions of Rural Poverty*. London: Francis Pinter.
- Chambers, Robert, 1989. 'Vulnerability, Coping and Policy' *IDS Bulletin* 20(2):1-7. Sussex: Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.
- Chambers, Robert. 1983. *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*. New York: Longman.
- Charles, Nicki. 1993. *Gender Divisions and Social Change*. Great Britain: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Charlton, Sue Ellen. 1984. *Women in Third World Development*. Boulder: West View press.
- Chaudhury, H. and N.R. Ahmed, 1980. *Female status in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.
- Chaudhury, Rafiqul Huda, 1981. 'The Seasonality of Prices and Wages in Bangladesh' in Chambers *et al* (eds). *Seasonal Dimensions to Rural Poverty*. London: Frances Pinter.
- Chen, *et al*, 1981. 'Sex Bias in the Family Allocation of Food and Health Care in Rural Bangladesh' *Population and Development Review* 7(1):55-70.
- Chen, M.A., 1991. *Coping with Seasonality and Drought*. New Delhi: Sage.

- Chen, L.C., A.K.M. Chowdhury, S.L. Huffman 1980. 'Anthropometric assessment of energy-protein malnutrition and subsequent risk of mortality among pre-school age children' *American Journal of Clinical and Nutrition* 33:1836-1845.
- Chen, M.A. 1983. *Quiet Revolution: Women in Transition in Rural Bangladesh*. Cambridge: Massachusetts.
- Chen, M.A. 1986. 'Poverty, Gender and Work in Bangladesh' *Economic and Political Weekly* xxi(5):217-222.
- Chowdhury, A.K.M., S.L. Huffman and L.C. Chen. 1981. 'Agriculture and Nutrition in Matlab Thana, Bangladesh' in Chambers *et al* (eds). *Seasonal Dimensions of Rural Poverty*. London: Frances Pinter.
- Clarke, John I *et al* (eds). 1989. *Population and Disaster*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Colson, Elizabeth. 1979. 'In Good Years and in Bad: Food Strategies or Self-Reliant Societies' *Journal of Anthropological Research* 35:18-29.
- Connel, R.W. 1987. *Gender and Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Corbett, J.E.M. 1988. 'Famine and Household Coping Strategies' *World Development* 16(9):1099-1112.
- Cuny, Frederick C. 1983. *Disasters and Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Currey, Bruce and Graeme Hugo. 1984. *Famine: As a Geographical Phenomenon*. Netherlands: D. Reidel.
- Currey, Bruce. 1981. 'The Famine Syndrome: Its Definition for Relief and Habilitation in Bangladesh,' in John R.K. Robson (ed) *Famine: Its Causes, Effects and Management* London: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers.
- Currey, Bruce. 1978. 'The Famine Syndrome: Its Definition for Relief and Rehabilitation in Bangladesh' *Ecology of Food and Nutrition* 7(78):87-98.
- Custers, Peter. 1993. 'Bangladesh Flood Action Plan: A Critique' *Economic and Political Weekly* July 17-24, 1993: 1501-1503.

- D'Onofrio, Pamela M. *et al.* 1982. *Scientific-technological Change and the Role of Women in Development*. Published for the United Nations Institute for Training and Research. Boulder: West View Press.
- Dankelman, Irene and Joan Davidson, 1988. *Women and Environment in the Third World: Alliance for the Future*. London: Earthscan Publications.
- Das, Man Singh and Panos D. Bardis (eds). 1979. *The Family In Asia*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Dasgupta, Partha. 1993. *An enquiry into well-being and destitution*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Davies, Miranda. 1983. *Third World-Second Sex*. London: Zed Books.
- Davis, I. 1978. *Shelter after disaster*. Headington, Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic Press.
- Deere, Corman Diana and Leon de Leal, M. 1982. *Women in andean Agriculture*. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- Deere, Corman Diana and Leon de Leal, M. 1981. 'Peasant Production, Proletarianisation and the Sexual Division of Labour in the Andes *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and society* 7(2):338-60.
- Desai, A.R. 1969. *Rural Sociology in India*, London: Sangam Books.
- Desai, Meera and Vibhuti Patel. 1985. *Indian Women: Change and Challenge in the International Decade 1975-1985*. New Delhi: Sangam Books.
- Dhaka Courier*. 1989. 'The environmental price of a development project', 5 (24), January 20-26, 1989.
- Dhanagare, D.N. 1976. 'Peasant protest and politics- the Tebhaga movement in Bengal, 1946-1947' *Journal of Peasant Studies* 3(3):360-378.
- Dixon, Ruth B. 1978. *Rural Women at Work*. London: John Hopkins University Press.
- Dixon-Mueller, Ruth. 1985. *Women's Work in Third World Agriculture: Concepts and Indicators*. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- Drabek, Thomas, E. 1986. *Human System Response to Disaster: An Inventory of Sociological Findings*. London: Springer-verlag.

- Drabek, Thomas, E. and William H. Key. 1984. *Conquering Disaster: Family Recovery and Long-Term Consequences*. New York: Irvington Publishers.
- Drabek, Thomas, E and Keith Boggs. 1968. 'Families In Disaster: Reactions and Relatives' *Journal of Marriage and The Family* 30:443-451.
- Dreze, Jean and Amartya Sen (eds). 1989. *Hunger and Public Action*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Dreze, Jean and Amartya Sen (eds). 1990. *The Political Economy of Hunger*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dube, Leela *et al.* 1986. *Visibility and Power*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Dynes, Russel R. *et al* (eds). 1978. *Sociology of Disasters: Contribution to Disaster Research Italy: franco Angeli*.
- Dynes, Russel R. 1970. *Organised behaviour in disaster*. Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books.
- Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). 1985. *Poverty, Productivity and Participation Contours of and A lternative Strategy for poverty Eradication*. Bangkok: ESCAP.
- Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). 1989. 'Asian and Pacific Experience: The 1988 Flood In Bangladesh' *Water Resources Journal* 17(4): 61-70.
- Edholm, F., O. Harris, K. Young. 1977. 'Conceptualising Women' *Critique of Anthropology* 9/10:101-130.
- Eisenstein, Z. R. 1981. *The Radical feature of Liberal Feminism*. New York: Longman.
- Eisenstein, Z. R. (ed). 1978. *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- El-Sabh, M. I. and T. S. Murty (eds). 1988. *Natural and man-made hazards*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Ellis, Frank. 1988. *Peasant Economics: Fam households and Agrarian Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Haider, Raana. 1993. 'Natural Disaster, Environment and Vulnerability of Women in Bangladesh'. Dhaka: *The Daily Star*, April 29 and May 13, 1993.
- Hameed, Shamim. 1992. 'Female-headed households' in Hossain Z. Rahman and Mahabub Hossain (eds) *Rethinking Rural Poverty: A case for Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.
- Hanchett, Suzanne. 1992. 'Gender Issues in Flood Response' Draft report prepared for the Bangladesh Flood Action Plan, *Flood Response Study (FAP 14)*. Dhaka: Irrigation Support Project for Asia and the Near East (Ispan).
- Hanchett, Suzanne and Mahbuba Begum. 1992. 'Gender Issues in the Flood Action Plan'. A paper presented at the workshop of *Flood Response Study (FAP 14)* organised by Bangladesh Flood Action Plan, Dhaka, November 9, 1992.
- Hansen, A. and Oliver-Smith (eds.) 1982. *Involuntary Migration and Resettlement*. Boulder: West View Press.
- Haque, C.E. 1987. 'Human Responses to Riverbank Erosion Hazard in Bangladesh: Some Lessons from Indigenous Adjustment Strategies'. A paper presented at the international symposium on the *Impact of Riverbank Erosion, Flood, Hazard and the Problem of Population Displacement*, Dhaka, December 7-9, 1987.
- Haque, C.E. and M.Q. Zaman. 1989. 'Coping With Riverbank Erosion Hazard and Displacement in Bangladesh: Survival Strategies and Adjustments' *Disasters: The Journal of Disaster Studies and Management* 13(4): 301-314.
- Harris, Olivia. 1981. 'Households as Natural Units' in Kate Young *et al* (eds) *Of Marriage and the Market*. London: Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE).
- Harris, John (ed). 1982. *Rural Development: Theories of Peasant Economy and Agrarian Change*. London: Hutchinson University Library.
- Hart, Gillian. 1988. 'Agrarian Structure and the State in Java and Bangladesh' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 47(2):249-67.
- Hartmann, Betsy and James K. Boyce. 1983. *A Quiet Violence: View from a Bangladesh Village*. London: Zed Press.

- Herbon, Dietmar. 1994. *Socio-economic Dynamics in Rural Bangladesh*. Sydney: Avebury.
- Hewitt, K. (ed). 1983. *Interpretations of Calamity. The Risks and Hazards Series: 1*. Boston: Allen and Unwin.
- Heyzer, Noeleen. 1988. *Daughters in Industry: work skills and consciousness of women workers in Asia*. Kuala Lumpur: Asian and Pacific Development Centre.
- Heyzer, Noeleen. (ed). 1987. *Women Farmers and Rural Change in Asia: Towards Equal Access and Participation*. Kuala Lumpur: Asian and Pacific Development Centre.
- Heyzer, Noeleen, 1986. *Working Women in South-East Asia Development, Subordination and Emancipation*. Milton Keynes, Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Hossain, Mahabub and Steve Jones. 1983. 'Production, Poverty and the co-operative ideal- Contradiction in Bangladesh Rural Development Policy' in David A.M. Lea and D.P. Choudhury (eds) *Rural Development and The State*. London: Methuen.
- Hossain, H., C.P. Dodge and F.H. Abed. 1992. *From crisis to Development: Coping with Disasters in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: University Press.
- Hossain, M. et al. 1987. *Flood in Bangladesh: Recurrent Disasters and Peoples Survival*. Dhaka: University Research Centre.
- Hossain, Monwar. 1989. *The flood of 1988 in Bangladesh* Dhaka: Multidisciplinary Action Research centre.
- Huda, Nurul. 1989. 'Flood Control Proposal for the Major River Systems of Bangladesh' in M. Ahmad (ed) *Flood in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Community Development Library.
- Humphrey, John. 1987. *Gender and Work in the Third World Sexual Divisions in Brazilian Industry*. London: Tavistock.
- Huq, Jahanara, et al (eds). 1983. *Women in Bangladesh: Some Socio-economic Issues*. Dhaka: Women For Women.
- Huston, Perdita. 1979. *Third World Women Speak Out*. New York: Praeger.
- International Women's Tribune Center (IWTC). 1979. *Newsletter 10: 'Women and Food'*, New York, August, 1979.

- Islam, Aminul, M. 1974. 'Tropical Cyclones: Coastal Bangladesh' in G.F. White (ed) *Natural Hazards: Local, National, Global*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Islam, Nurul, 1977. *Development Planning in Bangladesh: A Study of Political Economy*. London: Hurst.
- Islam, M.A. 1980. 'Agricultural Adjustment to Flooding in Bangladesh: A preliminary Report' *The National Geographical Journal of India* 26(1-2):51-59.
- Islam, Aminul S. 1991. 'Women's Contribution in Rural Household Economy and Environmental Protection'. A paper presented at the seminar on *Women and Environment* organised by Bangladesh Geographical Society and Department of Geography, University of Dhaka, September 6-7, 1991.
- Jacobson, Doranne and Susan S. Wadly. 1977. *Women In India: Two Perspectives*. New Delhi: Monohar Book.
- Jahan, R. 1975. 'Women in Bangladesh' in Women for Women Research and Study Group (ed) *Women for Women: Bangladesh 1975*. Dhaka: University Press.
- Jahangir, B.K. 1986. *Problematics of Nationalism in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Centre for Social Studies, University of Dhaka.
- Jahangir, B.K. 1979. *Differentiation, Polarisation and Confrontation in Rural Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Centre for Social Studies, University of Dhaka.
- Jannuzi, F. Tomson and James T. Peach. 1978-79. 'Note on Land Reform in Bangladesh: The Efficacy of Ceilings' *Journal of Peasant Studies* 6:343-47.
- Jannuzi, F. Tomson and James T. Peach. 1977. Report on the *Hierarchy of Interests in Land in Bangladesh*, Washington, D. C.: Agency For International Development.
- Jansen, Eric. G. 1987. *Rural Bangladesh: Competition For Scarce Resources*. Dhaka: University Press.
- Jargen, Friedrichs and Harmut Ludtke. 1975. *Participant observation*. England: Saxon House.
- Jeffery, Patricia. 1979. *Frogs in a Well: Indian Women in Purdah*. London: Zed Press.

- Jodha, N.S. 1986. 'Common Property Resources and Rural Poor in Dry Regions of India' *Economic and Political Weekly* xxi(27):1169-1181.
- Joeks, Susan P. 1987. *Women in the World Economy*, In straw. Oxford University Press.
- Joseph, Ammu. 1991. 'Education as if Women Mattered' *Economic and Political Weekly* xxvi(14):876-878.
- Kabeer, Naila. 1991b. *Gender production and Well-being: Rethinking the Household Economy*. Discussion paper No. 288. Sussex: Institute of development studies, University of Sussex.
- Kabeer, Naila. 1991a. 'Gender Dimensions of Rural Poverty: Analysis from Bangladesh' *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 18(2):241-262.
- Kabeer, Naila. 1990. 'Poverty, Purdah and Women's Survival Strategies in Rural Bangladesh' in Bernstein, Henry *et al* (eds) *The Food Question*. London: Earthscan.
- Kabeer, Naila. 1985. 'Do women gain from high fertility?' in H. Afsher (ed) *Women, Work and Ideology in the Third World*. London: Tavistock.
- Kabir, K. *et al*. 1977. 'Rural Women In Bangladesh: Exploring Some Myths' in Bureau of Economic Research (ed) *Role of Women in Socio-economic Development in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: University of Dhaka.
- Kates, R.W. 1971. 'Natural Hazard in Human Ecological perspective: Hypotheses and Models' *Economic Geography* 47:438-451.
- Kates, R.W. 1962. *Hazard and Choice Perception in Flood Plain Management*. Research Paper No. 78. Chicago: Department of Geography, University of Chicago.
- Kaushik, Susheela (ed). 1985. *Women in Society: Women's oppression patterns and perspectives*. New Delhi: Shakti Books.
- Kelly, Ruth. 1994. 'Challenge is to pour money into right channels' *The Guardian*, Monday, July, 18, 1994.
- Kent, C. Randolph. 1987. *Anatomy of Disaster Relief*. New York: Pinter Publishers.
- Khalequzzaman, MD. 1994. 'Recent Floods in Bangladesh: possible causes and solutions' *Natural Hazards* 9:65-80.

- Khan, Nurul Islam (ed). 1977. *Bangladesh District Gezetteers: FARIDPUR*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Government Press.
- Khan, Zarina Rahman and Helaluddin Khan Arefeen. 1989. *Potita Nari: A study of Prostitution in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Centre For Social Studies, University of Dhaka.
- Kidwai, Sheikh M.H. 1978. *Women under different social and religious laws*. New Delhi: Light and Life Publishers.
- Knott, R. 1987. 'The logistics of bulk relief supplies' *Disasters* 11:113-116.
- Kolenda, Pauline, M. 1968. 'Region, Caste and Family: A comparative study of Indian "joint" family' in Bernard S.Cohn and Milton Singer (eds) *Structure and Change in Indian Society*. Chicago: Viking Fund Publications.
- Kosambi, Meera. 1991. 'Images of Women and the Feminine in Maharashtra' *Economic and Political Weekly* xxvi(25):1519-1524.
- Krishnamurty, J (ed). 1989. *Women in Colonial India: Essays on survival, Work and the State*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Latif, A. 1989. 'Control of Flood in Bangladesh: Need for International Co-operation for solution of problem' in Mohiuddin Ahmad (ed) *Flood In Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Community development Library.
- Leavitt, R. 1971. 'Women in Other Cultures' in V, Gormick and B. Moran (eds) *Women in Sexist Society*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lebra, Joyce *et al* (eds). 1984. *Women and Work in India Continuing and Change*. New Delhi: Promilla.
- Lerner, Gerda. 1986. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Levi-Strauss, C. 1956. 'The Family' in H.L. Shapiro (ed) *Man, Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Liddle, Joanna and Rama Joshi. 1986. *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste and Class in India*. India: Zed Books.
- Lindenbaum, S. 1974. *The social and economic status of women in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Ford Foundation.

- Lindsay, B. 1980. *Comparative Perspectives of Third World Women: The Impact of Race, Sex and Class*. New York: Praeger.
- Little, M.A. *et al* 1988. 'Health and energy requirements of nomadic Turkana pastorals' in I. DE Garine and G. A. Harrison (eds.) *Coping with Uncertainty in Food Supply*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Loutfi, Martha F. 1980. *Rural Women Unequal Partners in Development*. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- Lowie, Robert H. 1947. *Primitive Society* (original edition 1920) New York: Liveright.
- Mackintosh, Moureen. 1981. 'Gender and economics: The Sexual Division of Labour and the Subordination of Women' in Kate Young *et al* (eds) *Of Marriage and the Market: women's subordination in international perspective*. London: Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE).
- Mading, Klaus. 1988. *Peasant in South India* (translated in English by Madan Mohan Puri and Jeremy Lane). New Delhi: Panchsheel Publishers.
- Maskrey, Andrew. 1989. *Disaster Mitigation- A community based approach*. New York: Oxfam.
- Mason, Andrew. 1987. *Homes: A household model for economic and social studies*. Papers of the East-West Population Institute No.106. Honolulu, Hawaii: East-West Center.
- Mathur, R.N. and Monika Mathur. 1984. 'Women in Disaster- A Response Study' *Disaster Management* 4(122):13-15.
- McCarthy, F. 1984. *Rural Women and Development in Bangladesh: Selected issues*. Oslo, Norway: Ministry of Development Co-operations.
- McCarthy, Florence. 1983. 'Purdah and Changing Patterns of Social Control Among Rural Women in Bangladesh' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 45(4).
- McCarthy, Florence. 1981. *Differential family characteristics as the context for women's productive activities*. Study paper No.1. Bogra, Bangladesh: The Women's Section, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and the regional Development academy.
- McCarthy, Florence. 1978. *The Status and Condition of Rural Women in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Women's section, Planning and Development Cell, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests.

- McCarthy, Florence. 1977. 'Bengali Village Women as Mediators of Social Change' *Human Organization* 36: 363- 370.
- Meillassoux, Claude. 1972. 'From Reproduction to Production' *Economy and Society* 1: 93-105
- Mencher, J. 1987. 'Women's Work and Poverty: Women's Contribution to Household Maintenance in Two Regions of South India' in D. Dwyer and J. Bruce (eds) *A Home Divided: Women and Income Control in the Third World*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Mies, Maria and Vandana Shiva. 1993. *Ecofeminism*. London: Zed Books.
- Mileti, Dennis S. 1980. 'Human Adjustment To The Risk of Environmental Extremes' *Sociology and Social Research* 64(3): 327-47.
- Mileti, Dennis S, T.E. Drabek and J.E. Haas. 1975. *Human Systems in Extreme Environments*. Boulder, Colorado: Institute of Behavioural Science, University of Colorado.
- Mills, Patricia Jagentowicz. 1987. *Women, Nature and Psyche*. London: Yale University Press.
- Minkin, S.f. 1989. *Steps for conserving and developing Bangladesh fish resources*. Dhaka: Agricultural Sector Review (mimeo).
- Misra, R.P. and Nguyen Tri Dung. 1986. *Third World Peasantry: a continuing saga of deprivation*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.
- Mitra, M. 1988. *Women's Work and Household Survival Strategies: A Case Study of Santal Women's Lives and Work*. New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies.
- Moghadam, Valentine M. 1990. *Gender, Development and Policy: toward equity and empowerment*. Helsinki: World Institute for Development Economics Research of the United Nations University.
- Momsen, Janet. H. 1993. *Different Places, Different Voices: Gender and Development in Africa, Asia and Latin America*. London: Routledge.
- Momsen, Janet. H. 1991. *Women and Development in the Third World*. London: Routledge.
- Momsen, Janet. H and Janet Townsend (ed). 1987. *Geography of Gender in the Third World*. London: State University of New York Press.

- Morris, Lydia. 1990. *The Workings of the Household: a US-UK comparison*. Cambridge: Polity press.
- Moser, Caroline O.N. 1993. *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training*. London: Routledge.
- Moser, Caroline O.N. 1989. 'Gender Planning in Third World: Meeting Practical and Strategic Gender needs' *World development* 17(11): 1799-1825.
- Mukherjee, Ramkrishna. 1971. *Six Villages of Bengal*. Bombay, India: Popular Prakashan.
- Mukherjee, Ramkrishna. 1957. *The Dynamics of Rural Society*. Berlin: Academic Verlag.
- Mukhopadhyay, Maitrayee. 1984. *Silver Shackles: Women and Development in India*. OXFAM.
- Murray, Colin. 1987. 'Class, Gender and the Household: The Development Cycle in southern Africa' *Development and Change* 18:235-49.
- Nath, Jharna. 1979. 'The Role of Women in Rural Bangladesh: A Study of Nutunpur Village' in Women for Women Research and Study Group (ed) *Situation of Women in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: United Nations' International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).
- Nelson, Nici. 1979. *Why Has Development Neglected Rural Women?* Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Netting, Robert *et al.* 1984. *Households: Comparative and historical studies of the domestic group*. Barkeley: University of California Press.
- Newman, Lucile F. (ed). 1990. *Hunger In History: food shortage, poverty and deprivation*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Noman, Ayesha. 1983. *Status of Women and Fertility in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: University Press.
- Oakly, A. 1972. *Sex, Gender and Society*. London: Temple Smith.
- Oliver, J. (ed). 1980. *Response To Disaster*. Townsville, Queensland: Centre for Disaster Studies, James Cook University of North Queensland.

- Oliver-Smith, Anthony. 1986. 'Disaster Context and Causation: An Overview of Changing Perspective in Disaster Research' in Vinson H. Sutlive *et al* (eds) *Natural Disasters and Cultural Responses*. Williamsburg: Department of Anthropology, College of William and Mary.
- Oliver-Smith, Anthony. 1979. 'Post disaster consensus and conflict in a traditional society: the 1970 avalanche of Yungay, Peru' *Mass emergencies* 4:39-52.
- Oliver-Smith, Anthony. 1977. 'Disaster Rehabilitation and Social Change' *Human Organization* 36:5-13.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 1985. *The Integration of Women into the Economy*. Paris: OECD.
- Organisation for Economic co-operation and Development (OECD). 1979. *Equal Opportunities for Women*. Paris: OECD.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 1975. *The Role of Women in the Economy*. Paris: OECD.
- Pacey, Arnold and Philip Payne (eds). 1985. *Agricultural Development and Nutrition*. London: Hutchinson.
- Palmer, Ingrid. 1977. 'Rural Women and the Basic Needs Approach to Development' *International Labour Review* 115(2):97-107.
- Palmer, J, George and S.B. Sells. 1965. 'Behavioural Factors in Disaster Situations' *Journal of Social Psychology* 66:65-71.
- Palmer, Ingrid. 1979. 'New official Ideas on Women and Development' *Bulletin* 10(3):42-52.
- Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). 1981. *Emergency health management after natural disaster*. Washington, DC: PAHO.
- Papanek, Hanna. 1979. 'Development Planning for Women: the Implications of Women's Work' in R. Jahan and H. Papanek (eds) *Women and Development: Perspective from South East Asia*. Dhaka: Institute of Law and International Affairs.
- Papanek, Hanna. 1973. 'Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15(3):289-325.
- Papanek, Hanna. 1971. 'Purdah In Pakistan: Seclusion and Modern Occupation for Women' *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 33:517-530.

- Paul, Bimal Kanti. 1984. 'Perception of and Agricultural Adjustment to Floods in the Jamuna Floodplain' *Human Ecology* 12(4):3-19.
- Pearce, Fred. 1991b. 'The Rivers That Won't be Tamed' *The New Scientist* 130(1764):34-37.
- Pearce, Fred. 1991a. 'Human Lives Shrugged Off In Flood Plain' *The New Scientist* 130(1768):7.
- Penning-Rowsell, E. et al. 1986. *Floods and Drainage*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Penning-Rowsell, E. et al. 1977. *The Benefits of Flood alleviation: A Manual of Assessment Techniques*. Farnborough, United Kingdom: Saxon house.
- Petak, William J. and Arthur A. Atkinson. 1982. *Natural Hazard Risk Assessment and Public policy Anticipating the Unexpected*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Poostchi, Iraj, 1986. *Rural Development and the Developing Countries: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. Oshawa: The Alger Press.
- Quarantelli, E.L. (ed) 1978. *Disasters: theory and research*. Beverly Hills, California: Sage.
- Quarantalli, E.L. 1977. 'Response to social Crisis and Disaster' *Annual Review of Sociology* 3:23-49.
- Rahman, M. Aminur. 1989. 'In Search Of Flood Mitigation' in Mohiuddin Ahmad (ed) *Flood in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Community Development Library.
- Rahman, M.M. 1988. 'Vulnerability syndrome and the question of peasant adjustment to riverbank erosion and flooding in Bangladesh'. A paper presented at the international symposium on the *Impact of Riverbank Erosion, Flood Hazard and the Problem of Population Displacement*, Dhaka, April 11-13, 1988.
- Rahmato, Dessalegn. 1987. 'Peasant survival strategies' in Angela Peurose (ed.) *Beyond the Famine: an examination of the issues behind famine in Ethiopia*. Geneva: International Institute for Relief and Development, Food for Hungry International.
- Raj, Maithreyi Krishna (ed). 1986. *Women's Studies in India: Some Perspectives*. London: Sangam Books.

- Ramu, G.N. 1991. 'Changing Family Structure and Fertility Patterns: An Indian Case' *Journal of Asian and African Studies* xxvi(3-4): 189-206.
- Rao, V.V. Prakasha and V. Nandini Rao. 1982. *Marriage, the Family and Women in India*. New Delhi: Heritage Publishers.
- Raphael, Beverley. 1986. *When Disaster strikes*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rashid, Harun Er. 1991. *Geography of Bangladesh* (second revised edition). Dhaka: University Press.
- Redclift, Nanneke and Enzo Mingione (ed). 1985. *Beyond Employment: Household, Gender and Subsistence*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Rihani, May. 1978. *Development as if Women Mattered: an annotated bibliography with a third world focus*. Prepared under the auspices of the Secretariat for Women in Development of the New Transcentury Foundation. Washington D.C.: Overseas Development Council (ODC).
- Rivers, J.P.W. 1982. 'Women and children last: An essay on sex discrimination in disasters' *Disasters* 6(4):256-267.
- Rodda, Annabel. 1991. *Women and the Environment*. London: Zed Books.
- Rogers, Peter et al. 1989. *Eastern Waters Study: strategies to manage flood and drought in the Ganges-Brahmaputra basin*. Washington D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).
- Rogers, Barbara. 1980. *The Domestication of Women- Discrimination in Developing Societies*. London: Tavistock.
- Rossi, Peter H. et al 1983. *Victims of the Environment*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Rossi, Peter H. et al. 1982. *Natural Hazards and Public Choice*. New York: Academic Press.
- Roth, Robert. 1983. 'Cross- cultural Perspectives on Disaster Response' *American Behavioral Scientist* 13(3): 441-451.
- Rozario, Shanti. 1992. *Purity and Communal Boundaries: Women and Social Change in a Bangladeshi Village*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Rubin, G. 1975. 'The Traffic in Women: notes on the "political economy" of sex' in R. Reiter (ed) *Towards an Anthropology of women*. London: Monthly Review Press.

- Rudra, Ashok and Pronab Bardhan. 1983. *Agrarian Relations in West Bengal*. New Delhi: Samaiya Publications.
- Sacks, Karen. 1979. *Sisters and wives: the past and future of sexual equality*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Safilios-Rothschild, Constantina and Simeen Mahmud. 1989. *Women's Roles in Agriculture: Present Trends and Potential for Growth*. Dhaka: Bangladesh Agriculture Sector Review.
- Sahlin, Marshal. 1974. *Stone Age Economics*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Saifullah, A.M.M. 1989. 'Embankments for Flood protection: Success and failure' in Mohiuddin Ahmad (ed) *Flood in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Community Development Library.
- Samjee, Geeta, 1989. *Narrowing Gender Gap*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Sandbergen, Loes Schenk. 1991. 'Empowerment of Women: Its Scope in a Bilateral Development Project- A small-scale irrigation project in North Bengal' *Economic and Political Weekly* xxvi(7):27-35.
- Sanderberg, Elisabet. 1975. *Equality is the Goal*. Stockholm: Sweedish Institute.
- Sattar, Ellen. 1975. 'Village Women's Work' in Women For Women Research and Study Group (ed) *Women For Women: Bangladesh 1975*. Dhaka: University Press.
- Schofield, S., 1979. *Development and the problems of village nutrition*. London: Croom Helm.
- Scott, Hilda. 1984. *Working Your Way to the Bottom*. London: Pandora Press.
- Seaman, J (ed). 1984. *Epidemiology of Natural Disasters*. London: KARGER.
- Sen, Amartya. 1988. 'Family and Food: Sex Bias in Poverty' in T.N. Srinivas and P.K. Bardhan (eds) *Rural Poverty in South Asia*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sen, Amartya and Sunil Sengupta. 1983. 'Malnutrition of Rural Children and the Sex Bias' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual number (May 1983): 855-864.
- Sen, Amartya. 1981. *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- Sen, Gita and Caren Grown. 1988. *Development, Crises and Alternative Vision s: Third World Women's Perspectives*, London: Earthscan.
- Sen, Iina (ed). 1990. *A space within the struggle Women's participation in people's movement*. New Delhi: Kali For Women.
- Sen, S.R. 1962. *The Strategy for Agricultural Development*. Bombay, India: Asia Publishing House.
- Shanin, Teodor. 1990. *Defining Peasants*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Shanin, Teodor. 1982. 'Defining Peasant: Conceptualisation and de-conceptualisation' *Sociological Review* 30(3):407-32.
- Shanin, Teodor (ed). 1971. *Peasants and Peasant Societies*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books.
- Sharma, Ursula. 1980. *Women, Work, and Property in North- West India*. London: Tavistock.
- Shaw, Rosalind. 1989. 'Living With Floods in Bangladesh' *Anthropology Today* 5(1):10-13.
- Shiva, Vandana. 1988. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival In India*. London: Zed Books.
- Siddiqui, Kamal. 1978-79. 'A comment on Jannuji and Peach: A Note on Land Reform in Bangladesh' *Journal of Peasant Studies* 6:348-50.
- Silverman, Seydel. 1979. 'The Peasant concept in Anthropology' *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 7(1):49.
- Sims, John H. and Duane D. Baumann. 1987. 'The Adoption of Residential Flood Mitigation Measures: What Price Success?' *Economic Geography* 63(3):259-272.
- Sinha, Radha. 1984. *LANDLESSNESS a growing problem*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).
- Smith, Joan et al (eds). 1984. *Households and the rural economy Explorations in the World-Economy*. London: Sage.
- Spitz, P., 1983. *Food Systems and Society in India*, Geneva: UNRISD.
- Standing, Hillary. 1991. *Dependence and Autonomy: Women's Employment and the Family in Calcutta*. London: Routledge.

- Statistical Year Book of Bangladesh. 1986. Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Government of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh.
- Stewart, Frabces. 1985. *Planning to Beet Basic Needs*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Taplin, Ruth. 1989. *Economic Development and the Role of Women*. Aldershot, United Kingdom: Avebury.
- The Second Five Year Plan. 1980-85. Dhaka: Planning Commission, Government of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh.
- The Fourth Five Year Plan. 1990-1995. Dhaka: Planning Commission, Government of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh.
- The Indian Council Of Social Science Research (ICSSR). 1975. *Status of Women In India*. A Synopsis of the Report of the National Committee on the Status of Women (1971-74). New Delhi, India: Allied Publications.
- Tinker, Irena (ed). 1990. *Persistence Inequalities: Women and World Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tinker, Irena. 1976. 'The adverse impact of development on women' in I. Tinker and M. Bramson (eds) *Women and Development*. Washington D.C.: Overseas Development Council.
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 1978. *Simple technologies for rural women*. Dhaka: Women's Development Programme, UNICEF.
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 1977. *Report of a Feasibility Survey of Productive/Income generating Activities for Women In Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Women's Development Programme, UNICEF.
- United Nations Fund For Population Activities (UNFPA). 1990. *South Asia Study of Population Policy and Programmes*. Dhaka: UNFPA.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 1989. *Bangladesh Flood Policy Study: Final Report*. Dhaka: UNDP.
- United Nations Inter Agency Committee on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific. 1990. *Participatory Rural Development In Selected Countries: A Report On Action Plan for Multiplication of Participatory Rural Development*. Bangkok: United Nations Inter Agency on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific.

- Van Schendel, Willem. 1986. 'Self-Rescue and Survival: The Rural Poor in Bangladesh'. A paper presented at the *Sixth National Conference* organised by the Asian Studies Association of Australia, University of Sydney, May 11-16, 1986.
- Van Schendel, Willem. 1981. *Peasant mobility: The odds of life in rural Bangladesh*. Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum.
- Vylder, Stefen de. 1982. *Agriculture in Chains- Bangladesh: A case study in contradictions and constraints*. London: Zed Press.
- Walsh, R.P.D. 1981. 'The Nature of Climatic Seasonality', in R. Chambers, R. Longhurst and A. Pacey (eds) *Seasonal Dimensions of Rural Poverty*. London: Frances Pinter.
- Watts, M., 1988. 'Coping with the market: uncertainty and food security among Hausa peasants' in R. Chambers *et al* (eds) *Seasonal Dimensions of Rural Poverty*. London: Francis Pinter.
- Webster, Andrew. 1984. *Introduction to the Sociology of Development*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Westergaard, K. 1983. *Pauperization and Rural Women in Bangladesh: A Case Study*. Comilla, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD).
- Wheeler, E.F. and M. Abdullah. 1988. 'Food allocation within the family: response to fluctuating food supply and food needs' in I. DE Garine and G.A. Harrison (eds) *Coping With Uncertainty of Food Supply*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- White, Gilbert F. (ed) 1974. *Natural Hazards: Local, National, Global*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- White, Gilbert F. 1964. *Choice of Adjustment to Floods*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- White, Gilbert F. 1945. *Human adjustment to floods: a geographical approach to the flood problem in the United States*. Chicago: Department of Geography, University of Chicago.
- White, Sarah C. 1992. *Arguing With The Crocodile: Gender and Class in Bangladesh*. London: Zed Books.
- Whittow, John. 1980. *Disasters: The Anatomy of Environmental Hazards*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

- Wieringa, Saskia (ed). 1988. *Women's Struggles and Strategies*. Aldershot, United Kingdom: Gower.
- Wijkman, Anders and Timberlake L. 1984. *Natural Disaster-acts of God or Acts of Man?* London: Earthscan.
- Wiser, W. Henricks. 1936: *The Hindu Jajmani System*. Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India: Lucknow Publishing House.
- Wolf, M. 1985. *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China*. Stanford University Press.
- Wolf, E. 1966. *Peasants*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Women for Women Research and Study Group. 1975. *Women For Women: Bangladesh 1975*. Dhaka: University Press.
- Wood, G.D. 1981. 'Rural Class Formation in Bangladesh, 1940-1980' *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 13(4):2-15.
- Wood. G.D. 1976. 'Class differentiation and Power in Bandakgram: The Minifundist Case' in M.A. Huq (ed.) *Exploitation and the Rural Poor*. Comilla, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD).
- World Bank. 1990a. *Bangladesh: Strategies for Enhancing the Role of Women in Economic Development*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.
- World Bank. 1990b. *Project programme and audit report: Bangladesh: drainage and flood control project*. Washiongton D.C.: Operation Evaluation Department, The World Bank.
- World Bank. 1989. *Bangladesh: action plan for flood control*. Washington D.C.: Asia Region, Country Department, The World Bank.
- World Bank. 1975. *Integrating Women Into Development*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.
- Young, Kate (ed). 1988. *Women and economic Development*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- Zaman, M.Q. 1989. 'The Social and Political Context of Adjustment to Riverbank Erosion Hazard and Population Resettlement in Bangladesh' *Human Organization* 48(3):196-205.

Zaman, M.Q. 1986. 'The Role of Social Relations in the Response to Riverbank Erosion Hazards and Population Resettlement in Bangladesh' in Vinson H. Sutlive *et al* (eds) *Natural Disasters and Cultural Responses*. Williamsburg: Department of Anthropology, college of William and Mary.

APPENDIX-A

**Questionnaire on how women experience and cope with floods in a flood-prone village in Bangladesh**

Name of the village:

Union:

*Thana*:

District:

1. **Questions related to socio-economic background**

	Variables	Column number
1.1	Name of respondents:.....	
1.2	Age: .....year	1-2 [_____]
1.3	Education (see codes):	3-4 [_____]
1.4	Religion (see codes):	5 [_____]
1.5	Marital status (see codes):	6 [_____]
1.6	Type of family (see codes):	7 [_____]
1.7	Building materials of house:	8 [_____]
1.8	Number of present household members	9-10 [_____]
1.9	<b>Information about household members:</b>	
	Actual number of family members:	11-12 [_____]

M/F	Age	Where lives	Main occ. (see code)	Sec. occ. (see code)	Relation-ship with heads of household	Edu-cation (see code)	Column number
1							13-22 [_____]
2							23-32 [_____]
3							33-42 [_____]
4							43-52 [_____]
5							53-62 [_____]
6							63-72 [_____]
7							73-82 [_____]
8							83-92 [_____]
9							93-102 [_____]
10							103-113 [_____]
11							114-123 [_____]
12							124-133 [_____]
1.10	How long you have been staying in this village? (in years)						134-135 [_____]
1.11	Who owns this homestead?						136 [_____]
1.12	(If the household possess homestead land) How much homestead land does your household own? (in acres)						137-139 [_____]
1.13	Does your household possess agricultural land? 1. Yes 2. No						140 [_____]
1.14	(If yes) Own land :						142-145 [_____]
	Share-cropped out :						146-149 [_____]
	Share-cropp in :						150-153 [_____]
	Leased out :						154-157 [_____]
	Leased in :						158-161 [_____]
	Mortgaged :						162-165 [_____]

Mortgaged out : 166-169  
[\_\_\_\_\_]

\_\_\_\_\_  
Total land under cultivation 170-173  
[\_\_\_\_\_]

- 1.15 How much of your land is: (in acres)
- 1. High 174-177  
[\_\_\_\_\_]
  - 2. Low lying 178-181  
[\_\_\_\_\_]
  - 3. Medium hight 182-185  
[\_\_\_\_\_]

How much of these land flooded during:

Normal flood (*borsha*) 186-189  
[\_\_\_\_\_]

Abnormal flood (*bonna*) 190-193  
[\_\_\_\_\_]

2. Questions related to buying and selling of assets

2.1 Did your household sell any land?

1. Yes 194 [\_\_\_\_\_]

2. No (If no go to question 2.2).

Year(s) of land selling	Amount (in acre)	Causes for land selling	Column number
1.			195-201 [_____]
2.			202-208 [_____]
3.			209-215 [_____]
4.			216-222 [_____]

2.2 Did your household buy any land?

1. Yes 2. No (If no got to question 2.3). 223 [\_\_\_\_\_]

Year of buying land	Amount (in acres)	Source of money	
1.			224-229 [_____]
2.			230-235 [_____]
3.			236-241 [_____]

2.3 Do you have any assets of your very own?

1. Yes 2. No

242 [\_\_\_\_\_]

(If yes) Types of assets	Source of money	
Livestock		243 [_____]
Poultry		244 [_____]
Ornament		245 [_____]
Kitchen utensils		246 [_____]
Land		247 [_____]
Others (specify)		248 [_____]

2.4 Do you need to seek permission to sell any of your own asset?

1. Yes 2. No

249 [\_\_\_\_\_]

(If yes) From whom?

250 [\_\_\_\_\_]

1. Husband

2. Parents-in-law

3. Son

4. 1+2

5. 1+2+3

6. Others (specify)

3. **Questions related to income and expenditures of household**

3.1 Are you pursuing any income-earning activities? 1. Yes 2. No

251 [\_\_\_\_\_]

3.2 (If yes) What is your monthly income? (in *taka*)

252-255 [\_\_\_\_\_]

Occupation: 1. Main

256-257 [\_\_\_\_\_]

2. Secondary

258-259 [\_\_\_\_\_]

3.3 (If no) Did you ever pursue any income earning activity?

260 [\_\_\_\_\_]

1. Yes 2. No

(If yes) Occupation (see code)	How long pursued?	Reasons for discontinuation	What was your monthly income?	Column number
				261-271 [_____]

3.4 (If ever pursued income-earning activities) Did you spend your income on any of the following?

Sectors	Sectors	Column number
1. Food (Y/N)	2. Clothing (Y/N)	272-273 [____I____]
3. Health (Y/N)	4. Purchase of land (Y/N)	274-275 [____I____]
5. Purchase of poultry (Y/N)	6. Purchase of livestock (Y/N)	276-277 [____I____]
7. Ceremonies (Y/N)	8. Children's education (Y/N)	278-279 [____I____]
9. House building or repairing (Y/N)	10. Purchase of agricultural instrument (Y/N)	280-281 [____I____]
11. Purchase of fodder (Y/N)	12. All spend to meet household needs (Y/N)	282-283 [____I____]
	13. Others (specify) (Y/N)	284 [____]

3.5 Please give an estimate of your household's flood-free time's expenditure (per month in *taka*) 285-288 [\_\_\_\_]

3.6 Give an estimate of the total monthly income of your household from the source(s) below (in *taka*):

<u>Agriculture</u>	289-292 [____]
<u>Business</u>	293-296 [____]
<u>Service</u>	297-300 [____]
<u>Others (specify)</u>	301-304 [____]

4. Questions related to activities performed by members of household

In your household who performs these tasks below?

Nature of tasks	Self	Husband	Daughter	Son	Others	Column number
Cook						305-309 [____]
Collect fuel						310-314 [____]
Carry drinking water						315-319 [____]
Make stove						320-324 [____]
Care for sick						325-329 [____]

Look after children						330-334 [_____]
Plaster courtyard						335-339 [_____]
Wash cloths, utensils						340-344 [_____]
Do craft work						345-349 [_____]
Store food						350-354 [_____]
Repair house						355-359 [_____]
Raise homestead land						360-364 [_____]
Plough land						365-369 [_____]
Dry grain						370-374 [_____]
Thresh crops						375-379 [_____]
Prepare seed-bed						380-384 [_____]
Transplant seedlings						385-389 [_____]
Irrigate land						390-394 [_____]
Harvest crops						395-399 [_____]
Store seeds						400-404 [_____]
Husk rice at home						405-309 [_____]
Husk rice at mill						310-314 [_____]
Grow vegetables						315-319 [_____]
Grow fruit trees						320-324 [_____]
Raise poultry						325-329 [_____]

Feed animals						330-334 [_____]
Graze animals						335-339 [_____]
Collect fodder						340-344 [_____]
Sell poultry or eggs or milk						345-349 [_____]
Work for payment in kind						350-354 [_____]
Work for cash income						355-359 [_____]
Sell handicrafts						360-364 [_____]
Sell goods at market						365-369 [_____]
Purchase goods from shop or market						370-374 [_____]
Others (specify)						375-379 [_____]

**5. Flood-related questions: Perception of floods**

	Column number
5.1 How many times have floods occurred in your village? In which years?	380 [__]
1.	381-382 [__]
2.	383-384 [__]
3.	385-386 [__]
4.	387-388 [__]
5.	389-390 [__]
5.2 What do you think causes floods?	391 [__]
1. Natural events	
2. Super natural events	
3. Both	
5.3 How do you evaluate floods?..... ..... .....	

5.4 Is there any difference between *borsha* (normal flood) and *bonna* (abnormal flood)? 1. Yes 2. No 392 [\_\_\_]

(If yes) Please state the characteristics of *borsha* and *bonna*..... 393 [\_\_\_]

.....  
 .....

5.5 Which flood(s) was severe on your village? (in year)

1. 394-395 [\_\_\_]

2. 396-397 [\_\_\_]

3. 398-399 [\_\_\_]

4. 400-401 [\_\_\_]

5. 402-403 [\_\_\_]

5.6 Why do you evaluate this flood(s) as severe?..... 404-406 [\_\_\_]

.....  
 .....

5.7 How many days flood water stayed in your village during the severe flood(s)?

Year	Days	Column number
1.		407-410 [_____]
2.		411-414 [_____]
3.		415-418 [_____]
4.		419-422 [_____]
5.		423-426 [_____]

5.8 Did flood water enter your courtyard in the last year? 1. Yes 2. No 427 [\_\_\_\_\_]

(If yes) Can you remember the approximate height of water (in meters)? 428 [\_\_\_\_\_]

How many days flood water remained? 429-430 [\_\_\_\_\_]

5.9 Do you think that the frequency of flood occurring has increased over the last 10 years? 1. Yes 2. No 431 [\_\_\_\_\_]

5.10 (If yes) How do you know that the level of flood water has risen in your locality over the last 10 years?

5.11 Did you get any information about flood occurring before flood? 1. Yes 2. No 432 [\_\_\_\_\_]

(If yes) How?..... 433-434 [\_\_\_\_\_]  
 .....

5.12 Did the elderly members of the village offer any advice about coping with floods? 1. Yes 2. No 435  
[ ]

(If yes) What did they say?..... 436  
..... [ ]

5.13 Did you pray to Allah to get rid off flood? 1. Yes 2. No 437  
[ ]

(If yes) Why? ..... 438  
..... [ ]

**Response to floods**

5.14 Did you take any special measures during flood? 1. Yes 2. No 439  
[ ]

(If yes) Did you/member of your household do any of the following to cope with floods? 440-494  
[ ]

Measures taken	Before flood	By whom	During flood	By whom	After flood	By whom
Built barriers around house						
Reinforced wall						
Reinforced corner-post						
Reinforced roof						
Stored fodder						
Lifted stores of fodder						
Stored food						
Lifted stores of food						
Stored fuel						
Made stove						
Stored household items						
Purchased boat						
Boiled paddy						
Made platform						
Looked after livestock						
Made rope						
Made bamboo bridge						
Lifted bed						
Raised house floor						

Cleaned house						
Plastered house						

5.14 Did you perform any other special activity? 1. Yes 2. No 495  
[\_\_\_\_\_]

(If yes) Which activity(s)? 496-504  
[\_\_\_\_\_]

Activities	Before flood	During flood	After flood
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

5.15 Is it possible for you to continue these activities during flood-free time? 1. Yes 2. No 505 [\_\_\_\_]

(If not) why not? 506 [\_\_\_\_]

5.16 Do you think that the activities of women and men are different during flood? 1. Yes 2. No 507 [\_\_\_\_]

(If yes) How it is different? 508-511 [\_\_\_\_]

5.17 Please explain the activities of you and your husband/male members of your household

Self	Column number	Husband/male member	Column number
1.	512-513 [____]	1.	522-523 [____]
2.	514-515 [____]	2.	524-525 [____]
3.	516-517 [____]	3.	526-527 [____]
4.	518-519 [____]	4.	528-529 [____]
5.	520-521 [____]	5.	530-531 [____]

#### Food and water

5.18 What types of food and how often do you cook during flood-free and flood periods? 532-543 [\_\_\_\_\_]

544-554 [\_\_\_\_\_]

Types of food	Flood-free period	How many times	Flood-period	How many times
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				

- 5.19 Did you eat any unusual food during flood? 1. Yes 2. No 556 [\_\_\_\_]  
 (If yes) Which food(s)? 557-560 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.20 From where do you carry drinking water?  
 During flood-free time: 561 [\_\_\_\_]  
Distance from house (in yard) 562-564 [\_\_\_\_]  
 Who carries?..... 565 [\_\_\_\_]  
 During flood: 566 [\_\_\_\_]  
Distance from house (in yard) 567-569 [\_\_\_\_]  
 Who carries?..... 570 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.21 Did you face any problem in getting drinking water during floods? 1. Yes 2. No 571 [\_\_\_\_]  
 (If yes) What problems? 572-574 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.22 From which source do you get food during flood-free and flood times in the following:

Source(s) of food	Flood-free time	Column number	Flood time	Column number
Market		575 [____]		585 [____]
Own land		576 [____]		586 [____]
Own savings		577 [____]		587 [____]
Food for work		578 [____]		588 [____]
Village common land		579 [____]		589 [____]
Relative		580 [____]		590 [____]
Neighbour		581 [____]		591 [____]
Relief		582 [____]		592 [____]
Government kitchen ( <i>longorkhana</i> )		583 [____]		593 [____]
Others		584 [____]		594 [____]

5.23 How many times do you serve food to your household members during flood-free and flood times?

Household members	Flood-free time	Column number	Flood time	Column number
1. Self		595 [_____]		600 [_____]
2. Husband		596 [_____]		601 [_____]
3. Son(s)		597 [_____]		602 [_____]
4. Daughter(s)		598 [_____]		603 [_____]
5. Others		599 [_____]		604 [_____]

5.24 Did you spend any day without having food?

1. Yes 2. No

604 [\_\_]

5.25 (If yes) How many days?

605-606 [\_\_]

**Village common resources**

5.26 Did you get any benefit from village common land/forest? 1. Yes 2. No

607 [\_\_]

5.27 (If yes) What type of benefit?

608 [\_\_]

**Migration**

5.28 Did you move elsewhere during flood? 1. Yes 2. No

609 [\_\_]

5.29 (If yes) Where did you move?

610 [\_\_]

5.30 Who accompanied you?

611-613 [\_\_]

5.31 When did you move?

614 [\_\_]

5.32 How did you reach there?

615 [\_\_]

5.33 How many days did you stay there?

616-617 [\_\_]

5.34 What did you carry with you? .....

618-621 [\_\_]

.....

**Relief and flood shelter**

5.35 (If moved to flood shelter/refuge) Did you face any problem in flood-shelter? 1. Yes 2. No

622 [\_\_]

5.36 (If yes) What problems? .....

623-623 [\_\_]

.....

.....

5.37 Did you receive any kind of relief good during flood? 1. Yes 2. No (if no go to Q.5.39)

624 [\_\_]

5.38	(If yes) What kind of relief did you receive? .....	625-627 [___]
	.....	
5.39	Who distributed relief to you?	
	1.....	628 [___]
	2.....	629 [___]
	3.....	630 [___]
	4.....	631 [___]
5.40	What type of difficulties may arise if people do not receive relief during flood? .....	632-633 [___]
	.....	
5.41	Do you always expect relief to survive flood? 1. Yes 2. No	634 [___]
5.42	(If no) Why not?.....	635-636 [___]
	.....	
5.43	Was there any difference in relief distribution between women and men? 1. Yes 2. No	637 [___]
5.44	(If yes) What type of difference?...	638-639 [___]
	.....	

**Social networks**

5.45	Did you/your household member receive help from others during flood? 1. Yes 2. No	640 [___]
5.46	(If yes) From whom?/Type of help	641-646 [___]
		647-652 [___]

1. Relatives	Related to whom? (self/husband)	Type(s) of help
Parent		
Brother(s)		
Sister(s)		
Father's brother		
Mother's brother		
Others (specify)		
2. Other than relatives	Who went to get help?	Type(s) of help
Neighbour		
Friend		
Employer or patron		

Money-lender		
Political leader		
Others (specify)		

5.46 How long did you depend on such help? 653-655 [\_\_]

5.47 Did you help any flood-affected people/ household? 656 [\_\_]  
 1. Yes 2. No (if no go to Q. 5.50)

(If yes) To whom	How	Why	658-661 [_____]
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

5.49 Did you inform your husband/male head about helping others? 1. Yes 2. No 662 [\_\_\_\_\_]

**Destruction/damage of asset**

5.50 Did you/your household suffer from damage or destruction of asset(s) during last severe flood? 1. Yes 2. No 663-672 [\_\_\_\_\_]  
 (If no go to Q. 5.53)

5.51	(If yes) Type of asset	Totally	Partially	Very small
	1.			
	2.			
	3.			
	4.			
	5.			
	6.			
	7.			
	8.			
	9.			

5.52 Please give an estimate of the cost of damage (approximate, in *taka*) 673-677 [\_\_\_\_\_]

5.53 Did you lose any of your very own assets? 1. Yes 2. No 678 [\_\_\_\_\_]

5.54 (If yes) Which asset(s)?..... 679-682 [\_\_\_\_\_]  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

**Family sickness**

- 5.55 Did any of your household member became sick during flood? 683 [\_\_\_\_]  
1. Yes 2. No (if no go to Q. 5.62)
- 5.56 (If yes) Who and what kind of sickness they suffered from? 684-692 [\_\_\_\_]  
1.  
2.  
3.  
4.
- 5.58 Did you take any measures to cure them? 1. Yes 2. No 693 [\_\_\_\_]  
(If yes) What did you do? 694-695 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.59 What did your husband/male member do? 696-697 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.60 Did you face any problems due to the sickness of you/your household member? 1. Yes 2. No 698 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.61 (If yes) What types of problem? 699-701 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.62 Did you face any problem in performing natural functions during flood? 1. Yes 2. No 702 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.63 (If yes) What types of problem? 703-705 [\_\_\_\_]

**Questions related to *parda***

- 5.64 Do you practice *parda*? 1. Yes 2. No 706 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.65 (If yes) To what degree? 707 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.66 (If no) Why not? 708 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.67 (If yes) Why do you practice *parda*? 709 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.68 Did you maintain *parda* during flood? 1. Yes 2. No 710 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.69 (If no) Why you did not maintain *parda* during flood? 711-712 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.70 Have you faced any problem during flood because of *parda*? 713 [\_\_\_\_]  
1. Yes 2. No
- 5.71 (If yes) What problem? 714 [\_\_\_\_]

**Household decision making**

- 5.72 Did you play any role in flood-time decision making? 715 [\_\_\_\_]  
1. Yes 2. No
- 5.73 (If yes) Which decisions did you take? 716-719 [\_\_\_\_]

- 5.74 Were the roles of flood-free times different than your roles during flood? 1. Yes 2. No 720 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.75 (If yes) How these were different? 721-722 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.76 Did you sell any asset of your very own during flood? 1. Yes 2. No 723 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.77 (If yes) Which asset(s)? 724-727 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.78 Do you save money and food before flood? 1. Yes 2. No 728 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.79 (If yes) Do you inform your husband/male heads about the savings? 1. Yes 2. No. 3. Often 729 [\_\_\_\_]

**Flood protection measurement**

- 5.80 What did you learn from the last severe flood which might benefit you in future?.....  
.....  
..... 730-738 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.81 Which of the strategies taken by you during the last severe flood were: 739-740 [\_\_\_\_] 741-742 [\_\_\_\_]

Wise	Not wise
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
6.	5.

- 5.82 Do you think that it is possible to control flood? 1. Yes 2. No 743 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.83. (If yes) How? 744-746 [\_\_\_\_]
- 5.84. In your opinion what measure(s) should be taken as the most useful technique to mitigate or control flood? 747-749 [\_\_\_\_]

Many thanks for your time.

Name of interviewer:

Total time spent:

Date:

## APPENDIX-B

### Value codes labels

Question 1.3. Education:

1. Illiterate
2. Up to class v
3. v passed to viii

Question 1.4. Religion

1. Muslim
2. Hindu

Question 1.5. Marital status

1. Unmarried
2. Married
3. Separated
4. Divorced
5. Widow
6. Abandoned
7. Betrothed

Question 1.6. Type of family

1. Nuclear
2. Supplemented nuclear
3. Supplemented subnuclear
4. Lineal joint
5. Collateral joint

Question 1.7. Building materials of house

1. Bamboo and hay
2. Mud and hay
3. Bamboo and corrugated iron
4. Jute stick and corrugated iron

Questions 1.9, 3.2 and 3.3. Occupations

1. Cultivation
2. Service (low salary)

3. Petty business
4. Teaching
5. Day labour
6. Agriculture (casual helper)
7. Fishing
8. Blacksmith
9. Peterman
10. Boatman
11. Weaver
12. Carpenter
13. Rickshaw/van puller
14. Household work
15. Student
16. Unemployed
17. Seasonal agriculture
18. Umbrella repairing
19. Disabled/unable to work
20. Maid servant
21. Agriculture (share-cropped out)
22. Agriculture (share-cropper)
23. Service (high salary)
24. Business (Large scale)
25. Co-operatives
26. Livestock rearing
27. Poultry raising/farming
28. Hawker (specify)
29. Others (specify)