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PAY AND PURDAH
WOMEN AND INCOME EARNING IN
RURAL BANGLADESH

BY

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A

THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

MASSEY UNIVERSITY

FEBRUARY 1986

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was threefold: first, to identify factors which caused some rural women to obtain paid employment and not others; second, to discover the problems faced by those involved in income earning and third to find out what the economic and social impact had been on the lives of these women and their households. A single major hypothesis, an expression of the sociological approach adopted in this study, provides a continuous theme. It is that economic factors predominate the explanations sought in this thesis, more especially in explaining why women seek income earning and what kind of jobs they prefer.

A sample of 158 women of a village, out of a total of 911, was selected on the basis of a systematic stratified random sampling technique and was studied by using social survey and ethnographic methods.

Neelganj was one of the poorest villages of Bangladesh. Only a few villagers had agricultural land, the most important means of production in rural areas, the majority were engaged in occupations other than farming. Economic need was found to be the most important reason for women's income earning. It was the expressed reason given by women

and their guardians. Inflation, death of the major breadwinner, dowry, divorce, in the absence of social security, aggravated the economic needs of women.

Women of all ages were income earners. Widowed, divorced and separated women were more frequent among female income earners. Twenty two women had no male guardians and were the only income earners of their households.

A variety of activities was pursued by women. Lack of capital, insufficient orders and seasonal work affected women's income earning. A large number of unemployed women was interested in working, some were desperately in need of money. Lack of job opportunities, shortage of capital and domestic responsibilities were the major reasons for women's unemployment.

Though women's income was important and brought economic relief to their households, this did not make much difference to their social status or expectations about women's role in society.

Attitudes of villagers were favourable towards women's income earning. Activities which could be done inside the home were preferred for women. Villagers generally were of the opinion that government should be much more active in the field of women's employment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to convey my thanks to a number of people who helped me in completing this thesis. First, I am immensely grateful to Professor Graeme S. Fraser for the advice, guidance and encouragement he provided throughout my study.

Words cannot convey my gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Brian A. Ponter whose untiring patience and attention to detail allowed this thesis to appear in its present shape. However, all the limitations of the thesis are mine. Despite his busy schedule he gave unstintingly of his time. Without his effort it would have been impossible for me to have completed my course within the two years available. Apart from the academic side, the affection and care I received from Professor Fraser and Dr. and Mrs. Ponter was invaluable, which I deeply acknowledge.

I am thankful to my colleagues at Dhaka University, Professor A.K. Ahmadullah, Dr.M. Moslehuddin and Mr.A.Hakim Sorker who helped me during my fieldwork in Bangladesh.

I thank the Agricultural Development Council for offering me the fellowship to pursue this study. I am

particularly grateful to Mr. Gerard Rixhon, Dr. Gerard Gill, Ms. Wanpen Dyche and Ms. Tulalamba for their continuous co-operation.

My appreciation is extended to: the field enumerators, Aleya Begum, Mosleha Khatun, Shamim Ahmed and Shafiqul Islam, whose enthusiasm and hard work facilitated the collection of data inspite of many constraints; Glennis Fairley who typed much portion of the first draft; Andrew Needs, Andrew Sims, Raymundo Rangel-Santos and Sunaina Singh who did the proof-reading and the consultants and staff of the Computer Centre, Massey University, for their co-operation.

Needless to say, without the co-operation of the people of Neelganj, the entire study would have been impossible. I thank them most sincerely for the hours they spent talking to us and the hospitality they offered.

I am much grateful to my husband, Gholam Mohammad, and children who tolerated my long absence from home and constantly provided me with encouragement and support. I am also deeply grateful to my mother and other relatives who took care of my family during my absence.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends, especially Shudir Tomar and Nurul Islam, who helped me in many ways and made my stay comfortable in this foreign land.

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GLOSSARY

Anchal	The end of sari, often distinctively patterned, which hangs over the left arm or is put on the head in the <u>ghomta</u> style.
Burkah	A loose fitting gown used by Muslim women which covers the body almost entirely. It is worn over normal dress to observe <u>purdah</u>
Bhai	Brother, often used to indicate friendship
Dhenki	Rice husking device operated by foot
Eid	There are two Muslim festivals called <u>eid</u> . <u>Eid-ul-Fitre</u> marks the end of <u>Ramadhan</u> . It falls on the first day following the month of <u>Ramadhan</u> . <u>Eid-ul-Azha</u> marks the occasion of <u>Hajj</u> , the pilgrimage to Mecca. It is celebrated on the tenth day of the lunar month of <u>Zil-Hajj</u> . On this day all solvent Muslims sacrifice something to Allah, most often a goat, a cow or a sheep
Eid-gah	The field or open space on which the <u>eid</u> congregations are held
Ghomta	Women are supposed to cover their heads with <u>anchal</u> of their saris to observe <u>purdah</u>
Imam	Head of mosque or leader of prayers
Mama	Maternal uncle
Mond	Unit of weight. One <u>mond</u> approximately equals 36 kilogrammes
Naior	A married woman's visit to her parents' home

(family of origin)

Nakshi-kantha Embroidered quilt

Para Neighbourhood; part of a village or town

Panipora Sacred water transformed from ordinary water by having verses of the Qur'an recited or blown over it, generally by an imam or peer

Peer Informal religious leader

Purdah Literally purdah means 'curtain' or 'veil'. It refers to the system of isolation of Muslim women from outsiders and the imposition of high standards of female modesty

Samaj Village council generally composed of rich and influential local men

Serviceholder Salaried person who holds a job in government or some well established private company. The term emphasises predictability and security of income

Tabiz Talisman

Taka Monetary unit of Bangladesh (NZ\$ 1=TK.15, May 1985)

Upa-zila Sub-district

Zila District