

Revisit to R.K. Mukherjee's Field Site: An Anthropological Study of Cultural Change

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Abstract: This study has its ethnographic base in one village of Fapor Union under Bogra District in the northern part of Bangladesh. A renowned Indian Anthropologist R.K. Mukherjee previously studied the village during 1942-1945. The village under study, Silimpur has features of development in terms of available government institutions, facilities and literacy of the people. The researchers have conducted an intensive field work by living in the village about 6 months from October 2008 to February 2009. This monograph examines the changing development pattern in rural Bangladesh by particularly examining the changing patterns of traditional life.

Key words: Anthropological study, cultural change, villagers, environment, cultivation, family structure

INTRODUCTION

Culture, the distinctive feature of human always changes in context of time, place, society and environment etc. Due to change of culture human's behavior, thinking, way of life and custom as well as social institutions are always changing. So, Sociologist, Anthropologist have a thrust to conduct researches on culture and its change. To serve their interest they have taken many villages as their sample and studied intensively. But the fact is that there are a few researches on village studies especially in northern part of Bangladesh. R.K. Mukherjee, the first Indian anthropologist who conducted his fieldwork in the northern part of Bangladesh. In order to sketch the features of traditional village life e.g., economic activities as well as the interrelationships among various social institutions, he devoted his research. The researchers are trying to see the same things like R.K. Mukherjee but in present context.

They marked a substantial change between the findings of Mukherjee (1995) and the present study. In this study, the researchers have taken the findings of Mukherjee as the base and they have tried to make a comparison with the findings of their own.

Literature review: Review of literature is a source of knowledge and shown a deep understanding about the topic or the issue closely related to the research to be undertaken. It also finds knowledge gap and justify the proposed research. In view of doing so, the researchers have gone through various relevant books, journals, web sites and research reports for finding research gap and

making a new contribution in the existing knowledge as well as relevant understanding about the research. Some of them are mentioned here. Chowdhry (1978) studied a village (Meherpur) in Dhaka district. He focuses on social stratification which cannot be meaningfully understood without an analysis of power relationships in the village. His functional stance regarding power relationships, however, does not provide us with useful data about the changes that have occurred within the relation between different institutions and grouping in the society e.g., social structure.

Karim (1990) has written a provative account of modern patterns of leaderships in rural Bangladesh. Looking at both patterns of traditional leaderships and leaderships in newer governmental areas such as cooperatives and union perished. Although, Karim (1990) examines the changing leadership's patterns in rural Bangladesh, he observed a lucid account of traditional political patterns organized through samaj and new organizational patterns of modern institutions.

Blanchet (1984) carried out a village based study but not a village study. The study of Miapur in Jamalpur district is primarily concerned with the beliefs and rituals, the prescriptions and prohibitions that relate to the birth among Bengali Muslim rural population. She did not see the interrelationships of various social institutions. In the study we would like to focus it.

Bertocci (1972) studied Hajipara and Tinapara in Comilla district in Bangladesh and co-related socio-political status with land ownerships. He observed that in rural Bangladesh, the power of rich landlords is not stable because of fluctuations in agrarian productions and the loss of land due to partial inheritance prescribed by

Islamic law. Moreover, he admitted that a process of change in the social structure and community organizations was occurring but he did not show what was the key factors of cultural change.

Jahangir (1979) focuses on differentiation as a kind of polarization among the peasant groups. Though, he observed the shift of loyalties in rural life, he recognized a conformation among traditional and modernists.

Arefeen (1986) studied a periurban village some 6 miles off Dhaka city focusing on ethnographic data on kinship and land tenure practice of the village. This study proved how the penetration of capitalism and other interventions of traditional social organization such as gosthi organization adopt itself with the first changing urbanization process.

Objective of the study: The main objective of this study is to revisit the one field site of Mukherjee (1957) for examining the changing pattern in rural Bangladesh particularly by examining the traditional life. The specific objectives of this research are conceived as follows:

- To examine the changing development pattern of traditional village life
- To discover and identify the demographic, social, economic and behavioral correlates of the villagers
- To relate the present research findings to the general theoretical findings and problems in the field of cultural change

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research methodology is the procedure to answer some research questions of a definite research problems. It is a logical as well as flexible process that enables the researchers to collect, analyze and interpretation of data of this research problem.

Population: The population of the study is included all the population of Silimpur and the household is the unit of analysis.

Study area: The research village named Silimpur is located at Fap the Union of Bogra sadar upozella in Bogra district. It area is 382 acres. The area is 4 km away from the district headquarters. Its growth is obviously due to its proximity to the main town of Bogra district.

Field work : The study was planned on two levels, first, the researcher wanted to broad survey of all the families of the village obtain data for each family on such items as data of and reason for living the village size of family,

kinship, composition of households, the general levels of living the religious life and life cycle. For the most of those items, the researchers have full data on the village of Silimpur, these data could therefore be used as a baseline from which to analyze the nature and direction of change. Second, the researchers planned to do intensive studies of a few selected families representatives of the different length of residence in the village and of different socio-economic levels. Other variables that might become significant in the course of the study were also to be taken into consideration.

Sampling procedure: Purposive sampling was used for this study. The data were collected through visiting the households. The researchers located 100 families in silimpur and interviewed each family at least once among 250 families. About 50 families were interviewed twice and five of those interviewed five times. The qualitative data in this study are based on the 50 families for which the researchers have fullest data. The fact that the 100 families were distributed in 4 different para of the village and they presented distinct socio-economic levels further insures against an inadvertently loaded sample.

Nature and sources of the data: The most important task of any research is to collect data and information. Like other researches, data and information have been collected through these ways:

Primary sources: The study is based basically on primary data which have collected from the village. Through participant observation, in-depth-interview and key informant interviews with the people of the village, the data and information have been collected and gathered which have been considered as primary data.

Secondary sources: For this research, various journals, articles, books, research studies and census data have been considered as secondary sources of data.

Data collection: The study was conducted on the basis of primary data through triangulation of participant observation, key informant interview, in-depth interview techniques. Secondary data were used in few cases. The researcher also used some techniques to gather data in relation to situation such as use of notebook using of camera and daily dairy writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study presents both the qualitative and quantitative data and information which have been gathered form 100 households by using different

techniques. At the time of survey code and number have been used for each household which was very helpful for data processing. Data have been processed through statistical method. The researchers have also used MS excel and others supported softwares. The analysis of data and information has been prepared through table, chart and diagram.

Demographic features: As the current population census 2001 (GOB, 2004) the total population of Bogra sadar upazila is 694077. Among them 3422 peoples are lived at silimpur in 755 households. There is too much pressure on land in the village. The total population of Silimpur is 3422; the sexual distribution of the population is given in Table 1.

Table 1 shown that among 3422 peoples 50.27% are male where 49.74% are female. When the researchers have tried to see the age grouping of 100 households of the village they have found that most of the populations of the households are adult (Table 2). In the study, village the peoples were in 4 age grouping levels. The age groupings are child, middle adult, adult and aged. From 0-14 peoples are considered as child and 15-19 years as middle adult and whose age are 60 and above are considered as aged people. According to this consideration the number of child are 159 (31.12%), adult are 286 (55.96%) and aged are 21(4.11%). This data implies that most of the populations of the village are adult and the villagers are very much aware about population control.

Family structure and family size: A villager’s interaction in the community involves various social institutions, all or most of which are based primarily on kinship. The basic kinship units are the family of procreations, poribars and agnatically related continuous households. Poribar is the basic unit of social organization and it is the generic term

Table 1: Sexual distribution of the population of Silimpur

Sex	N	Percent
Male	1720	50.27
Female	1702	49.74

Primary data

Table 2: Age grouping of the population of 100 households of Silimpur

Age group	Age	Sex		Total	Age group total	Percent
		M	F			
Child	0-4	26	20	46	159	31.12
	5-9	29	27	66	-	-
	10-14	29	18	47	-	-
Middle adult	15-19	30	15	45	45	8.81
	20-44	132	92	224	286	55.96
Adult	45-49	17	14	31	-	-
	50-59	19	12	31	-	-
	60+	-	-	21	21	4.11
Grand Total	-	-	511	100	-	-

Primary data

for family in Bangladesh. However, the term Poribar is used polysemically in Silimpur. Such as depending upon the context, it refers to one’s wife (ves) or the aggregation of family. Most of the village people live in nuclear family but in tradition, it is claimed that the people of the people of the rural area of Bangladesh live in joint family. In this study, it has seen that most of the family is nuclear family and those who are belonging to joint family, have increased tendency to nuclear family.

Nuclear family: A nuclear family consists of a husband and a wife with or without children. It may also be a family of a widowed living together with her unmarried sons and the daughter. In some cases, one or more individuals may reside with them. They usually live one house and always have a common hearth. Nuclear families become extended through the addition of daughters-in-law and their children and others lineal or collaterals (Fig. 1).

Extended family: The extended family is a group of nuclear families and related individuals from several generations who reside together in the same households but their chulas (hearths) are separate. In this type of family, the constituting household units do not own land and property commonly. On the other hand, their land and property are held separately, although they live in the same bari. Each independent unit of the extended family is particularly free from the control of the other units. Major decisions are however, taken in consultation with the senior members of other unites (Fig. 2).

Joint family: In joint families, the kin of three or more generations live under one roof and share all land and property. Such a family normally consists of brothers their parents, unmarried sisters, wives and children. All the males’ hearth is a co-owner of the land and property. They cook at a common hearth, store grain

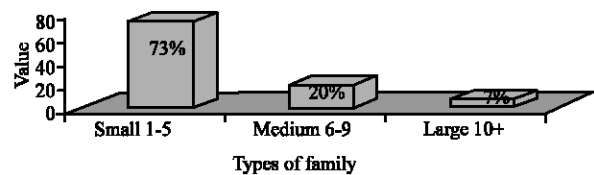


Fig. 1: Family types of Silimpur

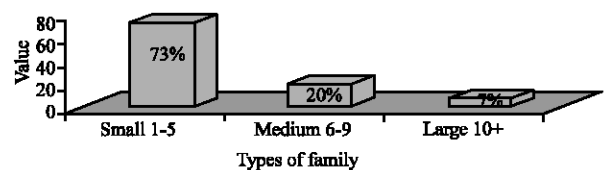


Fig. 2: Family size of Silimpur

in a common granary and so on. The head of the joint family is the eldest male member or some others responsible male member of the family.

Among 100 households 73% are nuclear family, 20% extended family and 7% are joint family. Family size has an impact on family patterns. Most of the small size member of the family belongs to nuclear patterns where in the extended and joint family member of the households are large. The family sizes of the village are shown in the below chart: Among 100 family, 73% are small whose members is between 1-5, 20% medium size family and only 7% family are large size family. Figure 1 and 2 show that most of the people live in small size nuclear family in the study village and the large size joint family becomes decreased. The below causes for the tendency to keep the small family members and breaking of joint family such as:

- Educational status has been increased that makes awareness about the bad effect of high population. It also influences them to control childbirth and makes small size family
- Impact of urbanization and high levels of occupational specialization greatly influence the family size
- Economic hardship and external dependence bound them to keep the family within small numbers

In the study village, it has seen that those people who live in joint family are normally large landowners. Their family is also large 10+. The members of joint family engaged in different kinds of occupation. They live in common household and they have also common property ownerships.

Educational status: Education is one of the important indicators of socio-economic status. The educational status of household head is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 implies that a few households' head is illiterate 3% among 100 households. Among the literate, the majority level belong to S.S.C and/or H.S.C 28.42 and 27.37% heads of the households. So, we can say that most of the people of the studied village are educated.

Land ownership pattern: Land ownership is an important socio-economic indicator. In the present research, the researchers categorized the landowners into five categories.

Landless: Who do not occupy any cultivable land and found that among 100 households 14 households (14.74%) belonging this groups.

Marginal: The households occupy 0.01-1.00 acre have treated as marginal land owners. In the study, village 30.53% (29) households are such categories.

Poor: The poor landowners occupy 1.01-2.50 acre and in the study, village 28.42% households are poor landowners (Fig. 3).

Average: The households that hold 2.51-7.50 acre is average landowner. In the study, village 14.74% households are poor landowners.

Rich: Rich landowners occupy 7.51 and/or above land. This land must be cultivable land. In the study, village only 16% households are rich landowners.

The data of the Table 1 and 2 imply that most of the land of the village belongs to average and rich landowners, though marginal and poor landowner household's percentage is higher than average and rich landowners. Available data and information support that 4 large gosthi of the village occupy most of the cultivable land. But cultivable land is turned into residential land with the growth of urbanization.

Gosti status of the village: Basically 4 dominated gosthi people live in this village which makes them to maintain solidarity within and without the gosthi members. As all of the villagers are Muslims, Muslims caste system has an impact on gosthi status. The peoples of the Muslim gosti are most dominant in the village.

The villagers life: The connection of the village with the public administration and facilities is mainly through the local union board, the police station and the district board. But now the function of union board is not visible as earlier period.

The union board is also supposed to look after the village. The village in return to pay a tax to the union board every year.

Table 3: Educational status of the study households of silimpur

Educational status	n		Percent		N	Percent
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Illiterate	01	-	1.06	-	3	3
Read only	-	-	-	-	-	-
Signature only	-	-	-	-	-	-
Read and write	6	-	6.32	-	09	09
Primary (1-5)	13	-	13.68	-	13	13
Secondary (6-10)	16	-	16.48	-	16	16
S.S.C	27	-	28.42	-	27	27
H.S.C	26	4	27.37	80	26	26
Graduate	3	1	3.15	20	3	3
Post graduate	3	-	3.15	-	3	3
Grand total	95	5	95.00	100	100	100

Primary data

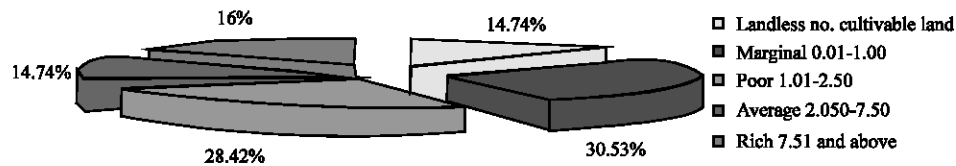


Fig. 3: Landownwerships of households of Silimpur

The other organizations mostly concerned with the facilities in the district headquarters. As the village is located at so close to the Bogra district headquarters is responsible for the maintenance of roads and bridges etc. It also empowered to under take relief measure in case famine and carryout any other local work likely to promote health comfort or convenient of the people of the district at Silimpur however, the people were so closed with modern's life. Many of the villagers have been to abroad and other parts of the country.

Almost all of them have been to the cinema halls in the town for now and then. About 90% people of this village regularly read newspapers and in general, the people were found to be more informed about the outer world. The village people were found to have simple ways of living life starts in every morning in the village. The people get up 1 or 2 h before sunrises, after the morning toilet the men, women and children have a light meal after the morning meal the men go to work and the women begin their duly round household's duties.

The children go to school with their respected friends. At midday the men return for their meal. The men and women eating together and children take their first meal after returning from educational institutions. A shoot siesta for an hour/two after meal is very common aspects for the villagers, especially for agriculturalists in the busiest sessions of the year.

After the siesta, the research resumed until light fads out at dusk. In the evening the men sit in their houses on in an open courtyard where friends and relatives from neighboring houses also gather. Talk about their past, present and future life is the main theme of the conversation in which the incidents like the increase in the price of consumable goods, hot weather of politics and the prospect of current years government figure prominently. The atmosphere occasionally brightens up with a local gossip about a family intrigue/dealing with the conjugal life of a person or a case of litigation. After an hour the or two they go back to their home. Generally, at 8-10 p.m. they take supper with almost all family members.

The children have to prepare their homework before suppertime. This the general picture of the village. The

routine is repeated everyday without any variation except on a few occasions in the year. Such occasions are either the annual festivals/religious ceremonies in the village or in the locality or a social function in the family like a marriage or a sraddha (death ceremony).

Visit of relatives from a distance is also a slight change in the daily routine. At Silimpur and in the neighboring area melas (fair) are comparatively rare. But the villgaers have the opportunity to visit town for leisure activities. They may visit one of the 7 cinema halls in the towns or see some friends or visit various diverse places like Karupalli, Palace Museum, Bogra Pura-Uddan, Wonderland and Mahasthangar etc. During the period of crickets and football game, the villagers also enjoyed it at the Shohid Cahndou Stadium.

They also sit in a shop in the bazar and chat for a while. As regards food and boiled rice is the staple diet of the people. Next to rice potato and vegetables are the most important food-items of which potato is consumed all the year round. The main vegetables are onions and garlic through the year, brinjal, tomato, kidney been (Seem) and karola (*Memodica charatica*) in winters and spring (that is from October to March).

The villagers frequently eat the seasonal vegetables. At Silimpur the above vegetables are not grown sufficiently and an appreciable quantity is therefore, bought from the town market by house who can afford it. The diets of the village families are simple. It depends on their income. An idea of nature of meals in the villages will obtain from the preparations that average villagers would generally consume everyday. The villagers live in bricks home built by experts. There were some mud huts built by themeselves.

The dwelling compounds have a c thetyard in front of the living rooms and courtyard within and a kitchen garden by the side or at the back. Within the compound there have a room with one or more bedrooms, a kitchen, a sitting rooms, a lumbers room and a cattle shed. But many huts do not have the outer or the inner country and or a compound at all and the kitchen in poor households, there were not be any sitting room and only one bed room (Mukherjee, 1971).

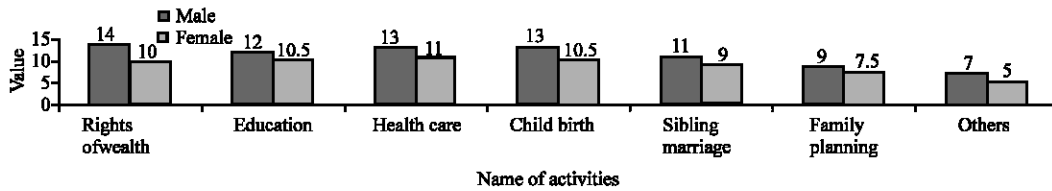


Fig. 4: Gender role in various activities

The most of the houses of Silimpur was well furnished. The sanitation of the village mainly depends on the water supply and the methods of disposal of refuse and drainage. The source of water supply is the tube-wells. Now at Silimpur, there is no problem of water supply at all. There was one tube-well in every household. Every household was found to have well latrines which are regularly used by peoples of all ages.

Silimpur was found to be as clean as the Bogra town because the villagers were greatly responsible for their health.

Changes of women status in Silimpur: Economic, political and social statuses of women in rural Bangladesh are lower than male. But this study shown information that the status of women has been increased. In this area, women also work in public sphere like bank, school, Ngo's and Go's.

Women status of the village is high because most of the heads of the households share decisions with their wives. Among 100 households, 78 households heads share decision with their wives that is 88.11% (78) women have decision making power in various sectors, 9 households heads think that it is not necessary to share and 13 household head was reluctant to answer the questions.

Figure 4 provides the data that the decision making rights of women in the below sectors are higher and they can put their decisions with their husbands in parallel ways. Rights of wealth, education, health care child birth sibling marriage family planning and others. According to Fig. 4, we can say that the women role is really remarkable in Silimpur.

Cultural change: During the fieldwork, the researchers concentrated their attention on reconstructing the traditional social structure which made them less sensitive to the factors making for change. As regards the marital status of villagers, early marriage is totally prohibited. Very few people remain bachelors until their establishment and women to remain a spinster natural phenomenon. Among the villagers, there are three main features in the

Table 4: Types of disease of the study people

Diseases	Time
Dysentery	Usually in the rainy season or any season
Diarrhoea	Usually in the rainy season
Fever/pneumonia	Approach and end of winter
Various types of women disease	Through out the year

Primary data

traditional form of marriage. These features are as follows: the bridegroom's party initiates the proposal of marriage. The marriage fall into any health friends/acquaintances of parties to be united. Today, it usually takes places at the bride's home. Marriage is arranged by the parents and others relatives in the village, a young man even of a lower class family selects his own wife and himself makes request of the girl's father for permission to marry her.

It is remembered, however that the boy's father and mother used to make this formal request. The researchers found that one marriage were in fact parentally arranged and controlled, the girl having nothing to say in the matter and the boy very little. Widows and widowers were also not found during the fieldwork because of common practice of marriage.

Man can remarry as Muslims customs. Polygamy marriage, though allowed by the religion is seldom practice in these days. To give a short account of the healthy and disease of the villagers, in Silimpur most of the peoples were seen to have a healthy figure or were of a sturdy body.

During the fieldwork, the researchers have observed that the villagers who became ill and who are not helped by the self-treatment make choice about whom to consult in the popular sectors, folk or professional sectors for further help.

The choice are influenced by the context in which they are made which includes the types of helper actually available whether payment for their services has to be made whether the patient/villagers can afford to pay for these service and explanatory model that the villagers/patient uses in explaining their ill health Helman (1990) (Table 4). In Silimpur when people suffering from physical discomfort/emotional distress, they have a number of ways of helping themselves orof seeking help from other people. It is a matter of great joy for the

villagers that a 500 seated medical college is build up in the Southern side of the village. As the village is situated at most near to the Bogra town. So, when the villagers oriented problem they can easily consult with the doctor of local Mohammad Ali Hospital or various clinics. Today, though there are no schools in the village but most of the villagers are educated. Because the learned person of the village made it point to send their sons and daughters to various schools and college in Bogra town. A significant change has occurred in the villager's material culture.

The researchers will not however, make an effort to describe but will show the changes in two items both of which concerned the body and were visible, viz , dress and hair-style. Now the most of the villager wear collar adds shirts with proper sleeves with buttons and buttonholes. Both the young and old wear modern shirt and pant undoubtedly.

They also wear long full-sleeved shirts. A thin towel was invariable draped over left shoulder. Most of them also wore thin factory made, effeminate sandals. In comparison to men dress, women's dresses have gone very slight change that was true of Bangladesh as a whole. The sari and blouse continued to the standard dress of village women. Now many women wore saloare and Kamij like younger girl. They also wear half-sleeved and wide modern blouses for weddings and festivals.

Political change: There are two clear power domains in the study village. One is the samaj (an indigenous social organization) whose leaders may be designated traditional leaders. The other domain encompasses local government organization e.g., Union Parishad, Community Policing) S.M.S.S. (Silimpur Manob Sheba Sonshta) and other local formal organization. The leaders who run the UP, CP and SMSS are called the formal leaders.

Change in economy: The increasing heterogeneity is not merely a function of the size of the villagers. By this, the researcher mean that the mental world of one individual is much like that of any other orto put the same thing, in other words, objects and acts have much the same meaning to everyone.

Correspondingly, the division of labor becomes more complex in the village, some men were agriculturists and to supply himself what he need, now it is increasingly constituted of interdependent specialists. The researchers have observed that the proportion of secular specialist increases, their function are discharged as a matters of livelihood and their fees instead of being nominal or traditional are dependent upon the fluctuations of free

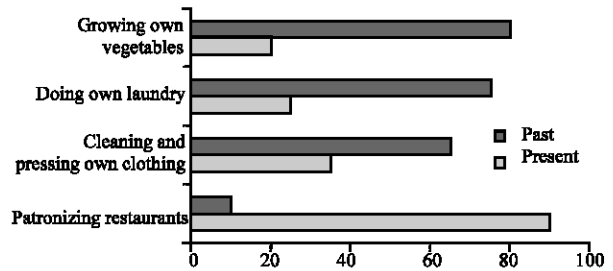


Fig. 5: Contrast in prior and present farm service for own households

economic competitions. Communal labor which is powerful instrument in maintaining the solidarity of the samaj members breaks down with the introduction of money substitute for personal labor. Lending of money, at first without interest becomes subject to exorbitant interest rates, lands comes sale and then as security for debt and later banking begins.

The production and distribution of economic goods gradually has been taken away from the family by specialized enterprises. Now the family produces little for its own consumptions. Framers, fishermen, miner and other extractors supply raw materials to village dwellers. Factories convert many of these raw materials into more consumable form and stores distribute consumer goods to the villagers (Fig. 5).

Technological change: The researchers have seen a remarkable technological change in Silimpur. The most of the villagers are preferred modern life. But most remarkable change taken place in terms of electricity, during the visit of R.K. Mukherjee electricity was not introduced. And it was just like nightmare for the inhabitants of Silimpur that they can get electricity. But the researchers have observed that every houses has come under the coverage of PDB and Polli Biddut and they have started to enjoy the fruits of modern ecectricity. For example, in Silimpur almost every family has got TV, CD player and freeze etc. but it should be mentioned here that palli Biddut is primarily used especially for irrigation. Among the three or f the village surrounding Silimpur, the researchers have seen one Rice Mill and another one is Cotton Mill.

There goes a vissay road through the Silimpur that plays an important role in terms of communications. Another change that has taken place in Silimpur is standard of living, Gas pipes are being set up through Silimpur, a mobile tower has constructed. Besides these a mdical college and nursing college has started their

activities. In Silimpur, the researchers have noticed a fuel station. There is a head office of Polli Biddut Somiti in Silimpur. There are also a Soil Research Institute and Gas Transmission Company in Silimpur. So, in fine it can be said that a significant change has taken place in Silimpur in terms of technological change.

CONCLUSION

This study has described the changing pattern of village life of rural Bangladesh. Asserting two advantages which in here the mode of defining a study of cultural change which has been developed in the consideration of the study materials can therefore describe the trend of this study.

In the first place, the simultaneous study of village enjoying the same fundamental culture but exposed in different degrees to outside influences allows the study of cultural change directly, the data are under immediate observation and without the necessity of waiting until the laps of time has brought about marked changes in Silimpur. And in the second place, the change observed can be compared with other like it, so as to lead the study into scientific generations.

A review of the specific changes which the researchers have mentioned for Silimpur will indicate direction to be taken by this generalizing terminology. During the period of Mukherjee (1961), the village was a relatively immobile society, culturally homogeneous in which the ways of life form a single web of interrelated meanings. This culture is closely adjusted to its local milieu. Relationships are personal and the important institutional controls are familial.

The sanctions which control conducts are prevalently sacred and custom has the force of moral rule. On the other hand with the passage of time, urbanization led the village towards a contesting type society. This is much more mobile and culturally heterogeneous. The ways of life are less closely interrelated; group habits exist more in terms of it and do not to the same degree evoke a body of closely associated and defamatory acts and meanings.

This ways of life rest upon but are not of their natural environment. Relationships are increasingly in personals and formal institutions qualify the acts of the individuals. Considering the importance as an instrument of control the familial organization is much reduced.

Life is a few secularized, economic advantage and valuation have penetrated the social body and the individual acts from constraints or convenience rather than from deep moral conviction. Religious beliefs and

actions are much reduced; the individual can no longer express himself in the comfortable grooves of sacred ritual (Redfield, 1962).

From this description, it may conclude that this study has both academic and policy related implications. As the study has dealt with the changing social structure in the village and the mechanism by which these changes have come about, so it will shown a basis for developing a general theory of the processes of social change in rural Bangladesh.

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