

# **Religious Institution Based Community-hood and Identity of a “Muslim Community” in a “Remote” Rural Village in Bangladesh**

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## Major Focuses

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- Cultural construction of community-hood
- Dynamics of a Muslim community in rural Bangladesh
- Perceived religion and its local practices as a case (Islam)
- Community relation and its implication to well-being or happiness



# Methodological Approach

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- Data generated for “Well-Being in Developing Countries (WeD)”, a four country inter-disciplinary academic research programme coordinated by the University of Bath, UK (2004-2006)
- Ethnographic focus on a ‘remote’ rural community in Bangladesh
- Use of Resource Profiles Framework (RPF) and Subjective Well-Being (SWB) as conceptual tools



# The Community: A Socio-cultural Snapshot

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- A combination of resources--material, financial, social, human, physical and cultural into the construction of community well-being or happiness
- Significance of social and cultural resources in shaping community relations and developing the sense of community-hood
- A perceived 'deprived' community in terms of State services, and regarding accessing to material resources
- Weak presence of State in terms of services delivery but stronger presence of traditional lineage and religion in every day life



## The Community: A Socio-cultural Snapshot (cont.)

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- Combination of religious institutions (e.g. mosque), actors (*ulema*) and practices (everyday rituals including sense of ‘morality’) as parts of the perceived religion
- Sense of belonging to wider (Muslim) *ummah* being a Muslim community
- Historical and contextual needs, both spiritual, social and material, behind the strong religious presence/influence
- Religion as a means of pursuing collective action also for community development (e.g. road development)
- The village mosque as a symbolic capital to unite the (village) people



# Constructions of Community-hood

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## Distance sense of community-hood

- Out-migration to middle east countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia) for poverty and unemployment but a socio-cultural effects (social remittances) also in people's cognition with that migration—linking the local community with the wider Muslim *ummah* and a positive construction of that “Muslim” countries in practicing their religion at community level
- That sense of *ummah* motivates the villagers to be “better Muslims”, and to be collective for addressing different local religious needs (e.g. mosque repairing)
- The *ummah* driven contributions and supports for local religious need as a source of collective proud and community happiness



## Constructions of Community-hood (cont.)

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### Spiritual sense of community-hood

- The single religious identity (“Muslim” only inside the village) strongly develops a sense of “our” in making people’s relationship with the religious institutions (mosque and *madrasa*/religious schools) and the actors (*ulema*)
- It further motivates to be responsible collectively for caring their religion in favour of community well-being



## Constructions of Community-hood (cont.)

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### Lineage sense of community-hood

- Existence of a number of traditional groups—familiar as *samaj*—both blood and non-blood based kin networks
- The *samaj* identity works within the “Muslim identity” and very often produces a collective dilemma into the mosque based community actions including village development
- It, therefore, produces a sense of community unhappiness also in the existing social relationships
- However, practical religious needs in line with different rituals and festivals restore the groups’ sense of collective; also strengthen their sense of community-hood



## Constructions of community-hood (cont.)

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### Occupational sense of community-hood

- Cultural construction of occupations involves both “religious” and “non-religious faces” of works, and implicates the sense of community-hood and collective well-being
- Local unemployment and income poverty making people (younger men mainly) absentees but in terms of physical sense only while they are attached with community activities including religious festivals
- Out-migration and better earning produces more scopes to make donations for religious purposes and community development which fostering the collective satisfaction also



## Constructions of community-hood (cont.)

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### Occupational sense of community-hood

- The religious face of occupations (e.g. *imam* of mosque, students of *madrasa*) is being supported by community for people's perceived spiritual obligations and desire to achieve gains
- Engagements with religious occupations motivate people to be responsible for their "Muslim-hood" including strengthening collective solidarity



## Constructions of Community-hood (cont.)

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### Gender sense of community-hood

- Patriarchy does not allow women to get a physical access into mosque in the village's cultural setting
- However, women do have a psycho-cultural attachment as well as they feel a *sense of belonging* to their mosque because of having community membership (both social and spiritual)
- Therefore, produces a sense of *inclusion* for the village women and become responsible for that type of community institution and its functioning
- Such belonging ensures exchange of material benefits for women (e.g. rice, cooked foods as *tobarak*); also believed to have spiritual gains leading to achieving happiness



## Concluding Remarks

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- Identity matters, and it goes beyond individualism in the contexts of rural Bangladesh
- The notion of identity embedded in a culturally rooted social relationship that determines roles and responsibilities leading to production of happiness or unhappiness as outcomes
- Any development intervention may be misleading if it ignores the issues of *cultural identity* and *happiness* as these are people's practical needs also
- Community Happiness Index (CHI) could be an important indicator to measure and analyse development



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Thank you all  
in the  
“Land of the Thunder Dragon”