

**a) Researchers' Identity**

1. Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury  
Director  
M.A. (Modern History), Dhaka University
2. Nasimul Ghani  
Joint Director  
M.S.S. (Economics), Dhaka University

**b) Objectives**

- i. To study the process of land registration over the years; and
- ii. To explore the importance of land in different socio-economic aspects.

**c) Executive summary**

Land in Bangladesh has been at the centre of attention of its people since immemorial time. For the better-off of people land is an asset which bestows power and prestige of the holders, but to the peasantry, it is something that controls their survival. Until the middle of this century, the government viewed land as the principal source of state revenue. The emergence of customs and excise duties, income tax and other modes of taxation has displaced land revenue from its position of eminence. This shift has relegated the land to a position of lesser attention if not neglected. Fortunately for the common man in Bangladesh the policy makers have realized that socio-economic development of the country can not be achieved without upliftment of the rural areas through overall development of agriculture. This is dependent on the optimum utilization of available land. Increasing attention is being paid to land reforms as part of comprehensive agricultural reforms. The government has already initiated new policy measures in the realm of land and agriculture on the basis of the recommendations of a Land Reforms Committee. Detailed and in-depth study of diverse land systems available in various parts of Bangladesh will need time, energy and resources. Even if all these elements are available, a researcher is handicapped by the absence of comprehensive data relating to earlier periods.

The British had introduced a system for collection of data in respect of agriculture and land through the survey and settlement operations that conducted with utmost care under the supervision of officers of proven excellence and experience. The colonial government needed these data to ensure that they were getting the maximum revenue from lands. The situation changed after 1947 and more particularly after the abolition of zamindari. The survey and settlement department has been gradually relegated to the status of an unavoidable non-entity to be manned by unwilling officers who often do not possess necessary expertise, initiatives or perspectives. The Deputy Commissioners who owe their status to their original position as Collectors also did not take sufficient interest in the most important aspect of their job; land administration and management on which the progress and prosperity of the entire nation depends.

The cumulative effect of all these has been the neglected out to the valuable revenue records painstakingly compiled by the officers of the Indian Civil Service of pre-1947 days. A study on land ownership in selected villages of Bogra district conducted on behalf of the Rural Development Academy, Bogra, revealed that the revenue of village wise data of land and agriculture of the entire district as it existed during 1920-29 had been lying in a mess of cobwebs and dirt in an abandoned record room of the district collectorate. Ironically, the important records had been shifted to a new record room quite a few years ago. This made a chance to discover the comprehensive information about land and agriculture in Bogra district as register form has prompted this attempt to preserve the data for the posterity and the social scientists. Those interested in research in land and agriculture in Bangladesh can use these data for comparative studies on various aspects of rural life in a particular region of the country. It is reasonable to expect that such studies will open up new vistas of knowledge about rural Bangladesh and leads to appropriate policy formulations on land and agricultural reforms which are considered as crucial for the socio-economic development of Bangladesh as one of the poorest country in the world.

The cadastral survey in Bogra district was taken up by the Government of Bengal as a part of the survey and settlement operations of the districts of Pabna and Bogra during 1920-29. It appears from the report (pp-179 of the Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Districts of Pabna and Bogra, Bengal Government Press, 1933-34) that "the survey and settlement of the small adjacent districts of Pabna and Bogra were taken up as one operation and in view of the similarity of the conditions prevailing in them, that operation has been covered by a single report." The report compiled on the basis of diverse and extensive data collected by the field staff as well as personal observations of successive Settlement Officers

and their assistants contains valuable consolidated information about land, agriculture and other related matters. The actual mouzawari data would be of much interest for conducting further research and studies. Before making some comments about these data it is worthwhile to look at a comment in the report about the importance of raiyats in those days. It says, "The average raiyat, having a holding of uneconomic area, split up into a number of plots, unless backed by persons' influence can not find the courage or the where withal to stick up for himself. The law can be on his side, security of tenure may be his by the Tenancy Act. He may be protected against arbitrary enhancement of rent, against abwabs and illegal demands and he is entitled to receive a clear statement of his accounts with every payment that he makes towards the rent. Yet in practice, most of these safeguards are regularly set at naught by the landlord. In operation, the law, however beneficent is a feeble defense of the poor, illiterate, gullible peasants, who, with a long tradition behind them of subservience, meekly accept the oppression of the future. Often and when the officers of the settlement tried to discover the actual demands made upon the people, they would refuse to listen to the questions put, because they feared that, after the departure of the officers, the zamindars would have their revenge for any disclosures and their last state would be worse than the first." It makes one feel that time stands still for the peasantry of Bangladesh even after more than half a century since these words were written by the alien administrators of a colonial government. It is to change this state of affairs that more and more rural researches need to be undertaken at grassroots level. The statistics included in this volume will help such researches by providing a baseline for in-depth comparison of the present-day rural conditions.

The district of Bogra was created in 1821 and revenue jurisdiction was granted in 1830. Like many other districts of the time, it has gone through territorial changes and adjustments to suit the needs of revenue and the law and order administration of the government. At the time of the survey and settlement operation (1920-29) Bogra consisted of 12 Thanas; Bogra, Sherpur, Dhunat, Shariakandi, Gabtali, Shibganj, Adamdighi, Kahalu, Dhupchancia, Joypurhat, Khetlal and Pachbibi. At present all these Thanas plus Nandigram (coming from Natore district) exist as Upazilas of same names. However, the original Thanas have gone through further readjustments to give birth to three new Thanas; Sonatola, Akkelpur and Kalai. It is necessary to note that Joypurhat, a subdivision of Bogra district, is now an independent district with the same name and comprises the Thanas (now Upazilas) of Joypurhat, Akkelpur, Khetlal, Kalai and Panchbibi. At the time of partition of 1947 the then Bogra district was subjected to inter country readjustments because of the infamous Redcliff award. The actual

position of Bogra and Joypurhat districts in 1929 and 1988 is as follows:

Upazila (Thana)		No. of mouzas 1929	No. of mouzas in 1988
1. Bogra	(i) Bogra	263	263
	(ii) Gabtali	105	106
	(iii) Sherpur	224	225
	(iv) Kahaloo	166	166
	(v) Shibganj	245	245
	(vi) Dhunat	91	91
	(vii) Shariakandi	223	134
	(viii) Dhupchancia	115	115
	(ix) Adamdighi	228	112
	(x) Sonatola	×	89
	(xi) Nandigram	Formerly a part of Natore and transferred after 1929.	
2. Joypurhat	(i) Joypurhat	180	184
	(ii) Panchbibi	234	222
	(iii) Khetlal	197	88
	(iv) Kalai	×	109
	(v) Akkelpur	×	116

It will have to be kept in mind that territorial readjustments have taken place not only within the greater district of Bogra but also with the neighboring districts. Because of the Redeliff award four mouzas west Dinajpur in India have come to Joypurhat Thana and twelve mouzas from Panchbibi have gone to west Dinajpur.

The data included in this volume were collected by the settlement staff through plot-to-plot survey of each mauza and interview of the tenants. These were compiled in registers under the following four categories:

- a) Statistics of tenancies and rent: This register records information about the number of holdings, area of land held by the proprietors under different entitlements, types of tenures and rents with quantity of land in each category, types of raiyats and the quantum of land held by each type, categories of occupancy-and non-occupancy raiyats and other related matters. A look at the data gives an idea of the very complicated land tenure system of those days.
- b) The agricultural stock statement records the results of the census of cattle population and agricultural implements. The register contains mouzawari information about the number of stud bulls, bullocks, cows, goats, horses, mares, mules, donkeys, elephants, camels, pigs, ploughs, buffalo/ox carts, boats and wells.

- c) The register of crop statement shows the mouzawari acreage under various crops including the acreage under spices, drugs and narcotics, fruits, vegetables and fodder crops. Acreage under multiple cropping has also been shown.
- d) The "milan khasra" register contains information about land use such as season wise acreage under crops, cultivable areas other than fallow, area not available for cultivation, areas under different types of irrigation, crop wise irrigated areas and number of wells (masonry and earthen).

It is interesting to note that the settlement operations taken up in 1920-21 were delayed because of fever in high areas and early floods in low areas of the districts. In Bogra district the operations were partially stopped in 1921-22 because "a determined attempt was made by the non-cooperators to stop the settlement in B Block in Bogra" (Settlement Report, op. cit). It further appears from the report that a disastrous flood swept over the Western part of Bogra district to disrupt the operations further. The settlement operation covering both the districts of Pabna and Bogra was taken up with the estimate of 2,77,000 plots at 1,000 per square mile, 694,250 interests or holdings at 250 per square mile and a total expenditure of 22,97,259 rupees. At the end the number of plots came to be 4,648,522, interests 1,022,328 and expenditure Rs. 26,79046. The cost of the operations was realized from the landlords and tenants on a per acre basis. According to Resolution No. 226 T.R. of 19th May 1933 of the Revenue Department of the Government of Bengal "The rate of recovery from landlords and tenants varied from 1-2-6 to 1-4-0 per acre and the amount due was recovered without any difficulty." A comment noted in the resolution on the basis of facts and figures obtained through the operation throws valuable insight into the agrarian situation of the time. It says, "Pressure on the land is heavy in a large portion of the area. Figures collected for twelve villages in each Thana go to show that in fifteen out of twenty nine Thanas more than half of the raiyats hold less than two acres each and that in five Thanas near Serajganj in the fertile alluvial tract along the Jamuna, where the population is over a thousand per square mile, 45% or more of the raiyats hold less than one acre each. In Pabna very few bargadars have been recorded as tenants though they are numerous in that district.

The question whether bargadars who were cultivating land before the amendment of the Bengal Tenancy Act are tenants under the law as it then stood is one of fact or it appears that a greater number of bargadars should have been recorded as tenants in Pabna." These observations will be helpful in analyzing the present position of the agriculturists and the bargadars in Bangladesh.

A few words about the background leading to the present publication are in order at this stage. The mass of data had to be transferred from the large old registers with care and utmost caution into a manageable manuscript. In many cases the registers are torn and the leaves are disintegrated making their handling difficult and the publication, a matter of urgency. Transferring the data required very careful scrutiny to ensure that figures going into decimal points were correctly transcribed. This was painful and arduous work needing constant supervision. M/s Monirul Islam (Audio-Visual officer), Abdul Quddus (Photographer), Rafiqul Islam (Stenotypist), Abdus Sattar, Yusuf Khan, Nazmul Huq. Amirul Islam, Mir Fazlur Rahman, Mostafizur Rahman, Abdus Sattar (II) (Research Investigators and Tabulators) and Moslem (Photocopy Machine Operator) of the Rural Development Academy, Bogra, worked devotedly and untiringly in preparing the manuscript. Dr. Bruce Currey, Programme Leader of Winrock International (HRDD), Dhaka, encouraged the publication of the data in a book form to facilitate future agrarian research. Dr M. Matlubur Rahman, Executive Vice-Chairman, the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council unhesitatingly came forward to finance the publication from his organisation under a PL-480 grant received by it from the USAID. Mr. Aminul Islam, Deputy Commissioner, Bogra has made the entire exercise possible by allowing the removal of the original registers from the collectorate to the RDA library. Finally, we wish to record our appreciation of the painstaking work ungrudgingly done by Mr. Quazi Abu Daud Ibrahim, Press Manager, Press Institute of Bangladesh. He had made this publication a reality. Efforts and contributions of many have combined in this publication. To everyone, we express our gratitude. It is up to the researchers and scholars to make these efforts worthwhile by using this volume for purposes for which it is being published.