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Class, Patriarchy, and the Structure of Women's Work
in Rural Bangladesh

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Abstract

Women's roles in rural Bangladesh and the economies of developing countries in general have been poorly documented and researched. This paper provides an analysis of women's work using a unique set of data, including detailed information on time allocation, collected in a village in Mymensingh District, Bangladesh, between 1976 and 1978. Women's work is analyzed in the context of the powerful system of male dominance (patriarchy) which operates in the society. Patriarchy is grounded in control of material resources, and supported by elements of the kinship, political, and religious systems. Important consequences of the patriarchal system are that women are placed at risk of abrupt declines in economic status; under the pressure of increasing poverty the proportion of women who must fend for themselves is increasing; and women face a labor market which is highly restricted both spatially and functionally, resulting in relatively low wages and high rates of unemployment. The paper documents the division of labor by sex, seasonal variations in labor utilization, and the structure of the female labor market. Implications for fertility behavior, population policy, and employment policy are considered.

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This paper examines women's work in rural Bangladesh primarily using data gathered in a single village study. Women's work is viewed in the context, and as a consequence, of a powerful system of patriarchy—a set of social relations with a material base which enables men to dominate women. In rural Bangladesh, patriarchy interacts with economic class to produce a rigid division of labor by sex, a highly segregated labor market by sex, and a system of stratification which places women at risk of abrupt declines in economic status independent of the processes of class differentiation. We turn first to an analysis of class and patriarchy, and then to a detailed analysis of women's work using data on time use.

Class and Patriarchy

Rural Bangladesh is a class society, hierarchically organized primarily on the basis of ownership and control of arable land. The distribution of social power and income among households is closely related to the distribution and control of land. Arable land is scarce, rural areas are densely populated, and rapid population growth creates an ever increasing squeeze on already scarce resources. The proportion of disenfranchised, landless households is substantial and increasing.¹ In analyzing agrarian class structure, and the processes which result in economic differentiation, the appropriate unit of analysis is the household. In rural Bangladesh, households (usually consisting of nuclear families) are the primary corporate economic unit (being the locus of production and consumption). Production relations exist between landed and landless households and landlord and tenant households. As members of corporate units, individuals within a household can reasonably be seen to (and in fact do) face joint risks, and to jointly rise and fall in the class hierarchy (Cain, 1978).

There is another system of stratification in Bangladesh, however, which operates not at the household level, but between males and females within households. Bangladesh is a patriarchal society in addition to being a class society. As a consequence, we find two distinct processes of economic differentiation occurring in the society. One is the process of class formation which governs the economic mobility of households. The other is the system of patriarchy which governs the economic mobility of women independent of class.

Patriarchy has been defined differently by Marxists, feminists, anthropologists and other social scientists.² We define patriarchy as a set of social relations with a material base which enables men to dominate women. In Bangladesh, patriarchy describes a distribution of power and resources within families where power and control of resources rest with men, and women are powerless and dependent on men. The material base of patriarchy is men's control of property, income and women's labor. The structural elements of patriarchal control are interlocking and reinforcing and include elements of the kinship system, political system and religion.

Kinship. The custom of patrilocal marriage removes a newly married woman from her family of birth and places her in her husband's locality. Preference for lineage and village exogamy attenuates a woman's ties with her family of birth and reduces the possibility that her family will intervene on her behalf after marriage. Exogamy and physical separation also make it less likely that a woman will claim her share of inheritance, or more likely that her brothers will seize control of her share of inherited land regardless of her wishes. Arranged marriage and differences in age at marriage of almost 10 years place a woman in a position of subordination relative to her husband at the outset of marriage (Cain, 1978). Finally, evidence from the village we studied suggests that a woman does not receive a substantial dowry upon marriage.³ That is, at the time of marriage, a woman is not endowed with money or property which is

hers alone and which represents independent security. Instead, it is expected only that the bride be well-dressed when she comes to her husband's home (the family of both the bride and groom might contribute clothing and ornaments). It is common when a marriage is registered that kabin--an amount of money which the husband promises to pay in the event that he divorces his wife--is also registered at the same time. However, in practice, women rarely receive the kabin upon divorce.

Political system. Men monopolize political power. Elected officials, administrators, and police, are all men.⁴ Village councils (salish) which adjudicate most local disputes are composed exclusively of men. Power brokers--those in the village who have ties and influence with officialdom outside--are men. Solidarity groups (mallot) in the village which function in support of members for the ceremony of marriage, death, and various religious occasions are controlled and led by men.⁵ In part because of the male domination of political institutions and in part because formal judicial institutions and administration are weak, particularly in rural areas, legal protection of women (under either civil or Islamic law) has been nominal. If a female litigant in a land dispute, for example, is not closely identified with and supported by a man, she will probably lose regardless of the merits of her case.

Religion. Islam represents a strong apology for patriarchy, as we defined it, as an ideology and as the normative "glue" which channels behavior and expectations. Islam is explicit about the sexual division of labor and responsibility and, in effect, sanctifies male dominance. According to Islam, man is the earner and woman is the server of man: "Men are the managers of the affairs of women, for that God has preferred in bounty one of them over another, and for that they have expended their property. Righteous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret for God's guarding."⁶ Islam "clearly states that men and women have their own spheres of activity--a scheme of

functional division in accord with their respective natural dispositions and inherent physical and physiological qualities and characteristics."⁷ Two aspects of Islam as interpreted in Bangladesh, however, have more direct effects as instruments of patriarchal control. First are the laws of inheritance and second are the manifestations of purdah--the seclusion of women.

Muslim inheritance laws allow a daughter one-half the share received by a son. In practice, as noted previously (Cain, 1978), we observed in our field work that women frequently receive less than their rightful share under the law. Moreover, if a woman does inherit land, her husband will cultivate it (when accessible) as if it were his own. A number of authors have also noted the tendency for women to relinquish their share of inheritance to their brother(s) as a way of gaining favor and generating good will.⁸

Purdah is a "system of secluding women and enforcing high standards of female modesty" (Paparek, 1973:289). Its manifestations in Bangladesh include severe restrictions on women's movements outside their immediate homestead (bari--which usually consists of an open compound surrounded and shielded by huts, foliage, and fencing) and standards of dress which hide their face and form. Women who move out of the homestead into the public, "male space," are considered to be both provocative and offensive (Abdullah and Zeldenstein, 1979:77). Purdah is a complex institution which entails much more than restrictions on women's physical mobility and dress. It at once denies women access to many opportunities and aspects of everyday life and at the same time confers upon them social status as a protected group. Thus, in theory, purdah both controls women and provides them with shelter and security. While men have power and authority over women, they are also normatively obligated to provide women with food, clothing, and shelter.

The reality of this arrangement diverges from the ideal. Certain women have always been vulnerable to being left exposed and without protection.

These include infertile women. They also include women who "for one reason or another have run afoul of the structures of dependence in which their sexual birthright places them--widows, spinsters too old, ugly, or black to marry; unmarried mothers; divorcees, etc." (Ellickson, 1975).

An example from the study village illustrates women's vulnerability. One of the women in our sample was the second wife of a relatively rich man. She had been previously married and had a number of children by her former husband. By the time she married for the second time, two of her children had died and one daughter was already married. Her only living son joined her in her new husband's household. The rich husband also had children by his first wife, all of whom had grown up and established their own households by the time of his second marriage. When, several years after the second marriage, the man died, all his land passed to the children of his first wife. Because the second wife bore him no children, neither she nor her son had any claim to the husband's property upon his death. For various reasons, the widow was unable to turn to the family of her first husband for help. Consequently, she was left with no means of support for either herself or her son. In the absence of other options, she turned to begging for subsistence, travelling daily to Mymensingh Town (some 5 miles distant) to beg. She was permitted to maintain a hut in her deceased husband's bari and she continues to live there with her son. Just next to her hut lives one of her stepsons and his family who, aside from occasional handouts, offer her no support. The great irony of this situation is that the bari of her deceased second husband is perhaps the richest per capita in the village, and her brother-in-law who also lives in the same bari is by far the richest man in the village. None of this, however, has done the widow any good.

The widow's plight illustrates several points. First, it indicates how dependent women's economic status is on that of their husbands. As long as

the widow's husband was alive, she was a member of a wealthy household and lived accordingly. However, his death resulted in an almost instantaneous decline of status for her, from being relatively wealthy to being a beggar. Second, the case presents an instance of patriarchy as a system of stratification independent of class. Women face a different set of rules of economic mobility, and a different set of risks than do men. Despite her ties through marriage to the wealthy, landed class, the widow was not protected. It is important to note that hers was not an isolated case. The risks which women of all classes face as a consequence of patriarchy loom large.⁹ Third, the case illustrates that women have little to fall back upon when they "run afoul of the structures of dependence." The widow in question resorted to begging. As we shall see, there are neither many, nor many better alternatives for women in such a position.

While the reality of patriarchy as manifested in Bangladesh has likely always diverged from the ideal, with cases such as the widow in evidence, there is little question that under the pressure of increasing poverty,¹⁰ the divergence between theory and practice has been increasing recently. Ideally, a woman would be supported by her sons at the death of her husband. Widowhood is almost guaranteed for most women by the large difference between husband's and wife's ages at marriage. Of course, even in times of greater affluence, circumstances could result in a woman being widowed without any sons, or with immature sons. In times of greater affluence, however, stop-gap alternatives would more likely be available--for example, the husband's brother might take the widow into his household or might formalize his inherited responsibility by taking the widow as a second wife (there are still instances of this, although they are rare). Other members of the patrilineage could also share responsibility for the widow's welfare, particularly if there were surviving sons. Unfortunately, this form of "largesse" is a luxury which presumes a

certain level of affluence. That is, whether or not he is so inclined, the brother has to be able to afford to support his brother's widow. While a proportion of the current rural population of Bangladesh is sufficiently affluent to support additional dependents, the proportion is diminishing as landlessness and near landlessness increase.

The joint household, another cultural ideal in Bangladesh, is a domestic form which usually permits smooth transitions for a woman through the various stages of her life and continued security in the event of her husband's death. The joint household, however, also requires a certain amount of land or other kinds of wealth to maintain. Land gives the household head power to control his sons, and the labor required to operate the land justifies a larger and more complex household structure (Cain, 1978). Land also increases the likelihood of generating a surplus which can be applied to the support of dependent kin. Without land, or with little land, the joint household is unstable.

A number of recent studies in Bangladesh document the prevalence of nuclear, as opposed to joint, households.¹¹ In Char Gopalpur, only 15 percent of all households are joint in structure and, with one or two exceptions, all of the joint households are located in the class of relatively large landowners. Although longitudinal data on changes in household structure do not exist, it is reasonable to speculate, given the cross-sectional relationship between type of household structure and class, that the documented trend of increasing poverty is linked to a trend of increasing household "nuclearization." If such is indeed the case, then women, who are especially dependent on kinship bonds for their security, stand to suffer the most from this trend.

The erosion of the joint household, however, is but one symptom of the underlying strain which poverty places on the bonds of obligation between kin and, more specifically, on men's fulfillment of their normative obligations toward women. In other ways, too, the patriarchal system in Bangladesh appears

to be in a state of disequilibrium. The kinship, political, and religious institutions which support male dominance and authority remain strong and intact, while the associated sanctions which ensure that males carry out their responsibilities to women have weakened. With the pressure of increasing poverty, this outcome is predictable, since male authority has a material base while male responsibility is normatively controlled. Normative control, while powerful, is nevertheless relatively malleable in the face of economic necessity.

While this outcome may not be surprising, it is certainly alarming, because the system is generating increasing numbers of women (such as the widow in the case above) who must fend for themselves in an environment which presents few opportunities for doing so. As the proportion of landless households in the population is a good indicator of the progress of rural class differentiation, so the proportion of female headed households indicates the extent of patriarchal differentiation." In Char Gopalpur (the village we studied), there were at the time of our census in 1976, 22 female-headed households, 6.4 percent of all households. Table 1 shows the distribution of all ever-married women in the village by marital status and relationship to head of household. One can see that almost all of the female heads of household are widows. Out of a total of 70 widows in the village, 29 percent head independent households. Only 59 percent of all widows achieve the security of being integrated members of their son's households. Other studies show similar or higher proportions of female-headed households. A 1974 census of villages in Matlab Thana, Comilla, conducted by the Cholera Research Laboratory, showed that out of 45,030 households, 7.4 percent were headed by widows and other currently unmarried women (Ruzicka and Chowdhury, 1978). In a village in Rajshahi district of Bangladesh, Ellickson (1975) found that women headed 16 percent of all households and, moreover, that 49 percent of all widows and other adult unmarried women headed their own households.

Table 1 Distribution of Ever-Married Women by Relationship to Head of Household and Marital Status, Char Gopalpur, 1976

| Relation to head | Marital Status | | | | All Women |
|------------------|-------------------|---------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| | Currently married | Widowed | Divorced | Separated | |
| | N | N | N | N | N |
| Head | - | 20 | 1 | 1 | 22 |
| Wife | 315 | - | - | - | 315 |
| Daughter | 3 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 15 |
| D-In-law | 65 | 1 | - | - | 66 |
| Mother | - | 41 | - | - | 41 |
| M-In-law | - | 3 | - | - | 3 |
| Sister | - | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| S-In-law | 2 | 2 | - | - | 4 |
| Total | 385 | 70 | 6 | 10 | 471 |

Female-headed households are poor either because their deceased husbands were already poor, because the widow had no claim on her husband's property (as in the example we cited), or because they lost land since the husband's death. In Char Gopalpur, 17 of the 22 female-headed households are landless, and the remaining 5 own very little land, less than enough to support them. In Ellickson's village, only 4 out of 31 female-headed households owned enough land to provide for household subsistence.

The predicament of these women and their households, and of other poor women who, of necessity, must generate income on their own, is that the same patriarchal structures which force them into relative seclusion in the household compound, also deny them access to most forms of market work. In Bangladesh, a division of labor among household members has evolved whereby women

specialize in work inside or near the homestead and men specialize in work outside the home. This division is, of course, consistent with the norms of purdah, but also engenders a powerful element of patriarchal control over women, enforcing women's dependence on men by denying them direct access to income-earning opportunities. This sexual division of labor applies in large part to all women, regardless of economic status or household structure. As a consequence, women are totally excluded from most agricultural wage employment (despite being able to perform the work) and the costs, in terms of loss of dignity and various forms of abuse, of engaging in other types of work which require movement outside the homestead (petty trading for example) are very high indeed. While abrupt downward shifts in women's economic status are the most dramatic consequence of the patriarchal system, the effects of patriarchy on the lives of women are pervasive, and it is in this context that we shall analyze women's work in rural Bangladesh.

Women's Work

Existing knowledge about rural labor utilization for both men and women in Bangladesh is extremely scant. For example, compared to other South Asian countries, India in particular, there have been remarkably few farm management studies in Bangladesh (see Clay and Khan, 1977). To date, there has been only one published study which measured labor utilization prospectively, to permit analysis of seasonal variation in employment (Habibullah, 1962). Without exception, to our knowledge, the existing farm management studies (including Habibullah's study) have not differentiated between male and female labor, referring instead to unpaid "family labor" which is inclusive of women and children.¹²

Nor are census data very revealing about women's work. The Bangladesh census adheres to the "labor force approach," defining the labor force as those of the predefined working age population who are "economically active."

In Bangladesh, working age population was defined as all persons aged 5 and above in the 1974 census, and all aged 10 and above in the 1961 census. "Economically active" was defined as working for profit, wage or salary; helping, without remuneration, another family member work for profit or wage; or looking for such work. For non-agricultural work the reference period was the week before the census; in the case of agricultural work, the reference period was indefinite.

The labor force approach was developed in the United States during the depression in order to get better measures of current unemployment (Standing, 1978). This approach was designed for, and is best suited to, an economy in which the dominant form of economic activity is stable wage employment. The underlying concepts and definitions are extremely difficult to apply to economies such as Bangladesh, where much of production is family-based and for home consumption, where the agricultural cycle generates sharp seasonal variation in activity, where the length of the working day is not uniform, where most wage work is for daily wages, and where many individuals engage in a variety of economic activities in a variety of sectors in the course of a single year. For Bangladesh the standard labor force approach, even with scrupulous and careful field work, yields categories and indices which reveal little about the nature and extent of people's economic activity. When one considers the practical difficulties of large-scale data collection in rural Bangladesh in addition to the conceptual difficulties, reported female rural labor force participation rates (e.g., 19 percent in 1961) become virtually uninterpretable.¹³

In the following analysis of women's work, we use data on time allocation collected in the village of Char Gopalpur, Mymensingh District in 1977. In our study of the village we collected 24-hour time budgets from both male and female members of 114 households (all aged 4 and above) every 15 days throughout the year.¹⁴ The data reported here represent 25 observations on each

eligible household member, beginning in late December 1976, through early December 1977. Time use surveys represent a logical extension of the behavioral (in contrast to the normative) labor force approach. The time use approach has the advantage of greater flexibility in categorizing work and measuring the work day and can better capture occupational multiplicity and seasonal variation in work time inputs.

A description of the village setting and economy appear in an earlier paper on the labor of children (Cain, 1977b). Briefly, the village is poor and densely populated with approximately one-third of all households landless, and the remainder, for the most part, owning very small plots. Agriculture dominates, with the majority of households depending on either cultivation or agricultural wage labor as the primary source of income. Fishing, petty trading, animal husbandry, and nonagricultural wage labor provide additional sources of income. A few men are employed in the formal sector with jobs in the government or in a jute mill fairly close by. The technology of agricultural production is very simple; all energy is provided by either humans or bullocks. The major crops are rice and jute. The land is fertile, usually supporting two crops a year; however, yields are low because irrigation is uncontrolled and few modern inputs are applied.

The technology of household production is also primitive. There is no electricity or running water in the village. Collecting fuel and carrying water are both time-intensive activities. Food enters the household in forms that require much processing before being consumed.

The division of labor by sex. The outlines of the household division of labor were suggested in the previous section. That is, women tend to specialize in work which keeps them close to the homestead (food processing and preparation, household maintenance, cultivation of vine and other crops located in or near the homestead, and animal husbandry), while men specialize in work

outside the homestead (rice and jute cultivation, trading, and other forms of market work).

Summary distributions of time allocation for ever-married men and women in the sample are presented in Table 2. The table reports the average number of hours allocated to 12 categories of work per person-day over the whole of 1977. The figures thus represent the distribution of total labor time rather than time allocation in a typical day. The work categories are by and large self-explanatory, but detailed definitions are given in the notes. The 12 categories are further aggregated into two summary groups according to whether the work is income-earning (i.e., generates income in cash or kind for the worker, or contributes to physical capital formation) or constitutes nonincome home production (i.e., producing services for home consumption).¹⁵

Comparing first all males and all females (columns 3 and 6), we find that average hours of work per day over the whole year are roughly the same, 8.33 for males and 8.29 for females. Of total work time, however, men allocated 85 percent (7.04 hours) to income-earning work, and only 15 percent (1.29 hours) to home production. In contrast, most of the labor of women was allocated to home production (81 percent and 6.68 hours), with only 19 percent (1.61 hours) in income-earning work. The locus of all the activities grouped under home production, with the occasional exception of collecting firewood, is the homestead. On the other hand, the locus of income-earning activities, with the exception of handicrafts, hut construction, some animal care and some crop production, is outside the homestead. Overall, the majority of men's income-earning labor time (64 percent) is split equally between wage work and own crop production. Trading, "other income" (primarily fishing), and animal care (14, 12 and 8 percent, respectively) account for all but a small fraction of the rest. In comparison, a disproportionate amount of women's income-earning time is allocated to handicrafts and hut construction. Of men's home production

Table 2 Average Hours worked Per Person-Day, by Sex and Economic Class
For Ever Married Persons in Char Gopalpur, 1977

| Activities ^a | Males | | | | | Females | | | | | | |
|---|--|-------|--|-------|-----------------------|---------|--|-------|--|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| | HH Owns Half Acre or Less (1) | (%) | HH Owns More Than Half Acre (2) | (%) | Total Males (3) | (%) | HH Owns Half Acre Or Less (4) | (%) | HH Owns More Than Half Acre (5) | (%) | Total Females (6) | (%) |
| Animal Care | .09 | (1) | .31 | (11) | .53 | (6) | .16 | (2) | .12 | (1) | .14 | (2) |
| Crop Production | .79 | (9) | 3.20 | (42) | 2.26 | (27) | .20 | (2) | .35 | (4) | .28 | (3) |
| Handicrafts | .01 | (0) | .04 | (1) | .03 | (0) | .33 | (4) | .23 | (2) | .28 | (3) |
| Trading | 1.57 | (17) | .60 | (9) | .98 | (12) | .16 | (2) | .01 | (0) | .07 | (1) |
| Wage work | 4.35 | (47) | .92 | (12) | 2.26 | (27) | 1.04 | (13) | .05 | (1) | .49 | (6) |
| Other income | 1.32 | (14) | .52 | (7) | .83 | (10) | .35 | (4) | .07 | (1) | .20 | (2) |
| Hut Construction | .11 | (1) | .18 | (2) | .15 | (2) | .15 | (2) | .15 | (2) | .15 | (2) |
| Income Earning (subtotal) | 8.25 | (89) | 6.27 | (81) | 7.04 | (85) | 2.40 | (30) | 0.96 | (12) | 1.61 | (19) |
| Rice Processing | .00 | (0) | .02 | (0) | .01 | (0) | .53 | (7) | 1.89 | (22) | 1.29 | (16) |
| Firewood | .07 | (1) | .04 | (1) | .05 | (1) | .46 | (6) | .27 | (3) | .36 | (4) |
| Housework | .89 | (10) | 1.30 | (17) | 1.14 | (14) | 1.88 | (23) | 2.12 | (25) | 2.01 | (24) |
| Food Preparation | .04 | (0) | .02 | (0) | .03 | (0) | 1.92 | (24) | 2.48 | (29) | 2.23 | (27) |
| Childcare | .03 | (0) | .07 | (1) | .05 | (1) | .35 | (11) | .76 | (9) | .30 | (10) |
| Non-Income Home Production (subtotal) | 1.04 | (11) | 1.45 | (19) | 1.29 | (15) | 5.62 | (70) | 7.52 | (88) | 6.68 | (81) |
| Total Work Persons | 9.29 | (100) | 7.71 | (100) | 8.33 | (100) | 8.03 | (100) | 8.50 | (100) | 8.29 | (100) |
| | 55 | | 83 | | 138 | | 78 | | 96 | | 174 | |
| Total Person-Days ^b | 1119 | | 1760 | | 2879 | | 1633 | | 2069 | | 3702 | |

Notes to Table 2

- a. Animal Care includes collecting fodder in addition to tending and caring for animals.
- Crop Production includes all field operations, for all crops, from clearing land through harvest, carrying to bari, threshing, and marketing where applicable; processing by-products, seed preparation and storage; tree, vine, and all kitchen garden cultivation; all other associated activities such as plot inspection, supervision, purchase of inputs, maintaining or repairing tools, negotiating sharecrop contracts, arranging credit, and registering land. Excluded are rice processing activities beginning with parboiling paddy.
- Handicrafts includes all activities associated with sewing quilts (piece rate), bamboo weaving, and other crafts, for sale or home consumption.
- Trading includes petty commodity trading simply involving purchase and resale; small businesses which involve some intermediate processing (e.g., purchasing unhusked paddy, husking it at home, and selling husked rice); and other "business" such as operating a small shop and labor contractor.
- Wage Work includes agricultural, non-agricultural, temporary (daily) or permanent, regardless of location.
- Other Income Work includes fishing, regardless of scale of operation and associated activities; other hunting and gathering activities; begging; and self-employed skilled work, such as carpenter, midwife, deed writer.
- Hut Construction includes construction and repair of own home and property (not already covered above).
- Rice Processing includes parboiling, husking, drying, cleaning and winnowing, and associated activities.
- Firewood Collection includes scavenging for tinder, wood, and other fuel, and activities such as making dung cakes for fuel.
- Housework includes carrying water, cleaning huts and homestead, washing clothes and dishes, serving meals, preparing houka, and running errands. Also includes shopping for household items.
- Food Preparation includes cooking, grinding spices and pulse, washing, peeling, cutting food, etc.
- Child Care includes care of own children, breastfeeding, and care of "others" (which accounts for a very small amount of child care time).
- b. This refers to total person-days present for interview. Excluded are cases of missing data and days absent from the village. Because of these exclusions, total person-days are not divisible by 25. Permanent servants in richer households are excluded.

time, almost all is accounted for by shopping for consumer goods (included in "housework"). Although women have complete responsibility for preparing meals at home, they do not themselves go to the market to make purchases. Because of the strictures of purdah and the distance of the bazaar from the village (3/4-2 miles depending on where one is located in the village), men do the shopping.¹⁶ Men allocate very little time to child care, food preparation, firewood collection, rice processing, or other kinds of housework. In contrast, food preparation, housework, and rice processing together account for 67 percent of women's labor time.

Aggregate patterns of work time allocation mask important economic class differences for both men and women. Columns (1)-(2) and (4)-(5) in Table 2 distinguish for men and women, respectively, work time allocation for members of households owning a half-acre of arable land or less (columns (1) and (4)) and members of households owning more than a half acre.¹⁷ Of the 114 households in our sample, 58, or 51 percent, own or control half an acre or less. Of these, 38, or 32 percent, own no arable land at all. A comparison of rich and poor males shows major differences in time allocation. Forty-two percent (3.20 hours) of the labor time of richer men is devoted to crop cultivation, while this activity accounts for only 9 percent (.79 hours) among poor men. Wage work (47 percent of all work time), trading, and fishing (which accounts for most of the 1.32 hours in "other income") occupy the majority of poorer men's time. With the exception of "housework" (which, as noted, in the case of men is primarily shopping), however, the time allocated by both rich and poor men to home production is uniformly small.

Poor women (column 4) spend more than twice the time in income-earning work (2.40 hours versus 0.98 hours) than do richer women (column 5). Most of this difference is accounted for by the 1.04 hours (13 percent of all work time) that poorer women allocate to wage work. The distribution of time within

the category of home production is similar for both classes of women, with the major exception being that the richer class spends 22 percent (1.89 hours) of total work time processing rice compared to 7 percent (.53 hours) for the poorer class.

While class differences in time allocation are quite apparent for both men and women, it is nevertheless remarkable how inflexible the sexual division of labor is across class. Thus, although poor women do engage in wage work and other activities which are either typically male or which take them outside of the homestead much more than richer women, the total amount of time involved is small. For poor women, time in trading, wage work, and "other income" together total 1.55 hours--19 percent of their total work time, and 21 percent of the average hours spent in the same activities by poor men. Moreover, while it is not clear from Table 2, the great majority of women's earning time is devoted to employment which is peculiarly female--that is, rice processing and service as servants in richer households.

The rigidity of the sexual division of labor across economic class is a reflection of the power of patriarchy in the society. In the absence of a system of male dominance (or with a weaker system), we can speculate that need alone would dictate a higher level of income-earning activity by poor women. Why patriarchy is perpetuated in the face of the poverty that exists in the lower economic class is a complicated but important question. That men benefit materially from the power that they exercise over women is clear. First, they are provided with services and amenities which they would otherwise have to provide for themselves or do without entirely. Second, there is at least qualitative evidence that the distribution of food and consumer goods within the household favors men in general and adult men the most.¹⁸ Less tangible but probably no less important benefits include satisfaction gained from exclusive access to various aspects of social life and a feeling of importance.¹⁹

While such benefits may accrue to all men, to richer men greater benefits accrue, and they are in a much better position to savor them. This is suggested by a comparison of total hours worked in Table 2. When total work time is disaggregated by economic class, we see not only that women in richer households work more than men (8.50 compared to 7.71), but that with rising economic status, women's work actually increases from 8.03 hours per day to 8.50 hours per day. In contrast, men's work time decreases almost two hours per day on average, from 9.29 among the poor to 7.71 among the relatively rich. It is probably correct to say that with an increase in economic status, the burden of work decreases for men while for women it remains the same.²⁰ That is, richer men hire agricultural labor (or sharecrop land out) instead of working themselves. Just as the demand for agricultural labor increases with size of holding, so too does the demand for home production labor, not only because of increased demand for rice processing labor, but also because household and homestead size tend to increase. The kind of substitution of hired labor for own labor, however, that seems to occur for men, does not occur for women, at least not to the same extent. Men gain because expenditure on wages for female servants or rice milling charges is avoided. Their gain is at the expense of women.

Poor men do not have the option of reducing their work load. Among the poor, the fact that men work more than women is primarily explained by the limited opportunities for expanding women's income-earning work. While these women may appear to have greater "leisure" than men, it is unlikely that it affords them much comfort, given their poverty.²¹

Even if the present system of patriarchy, with its associated limited market for women's labor, were, on balance, materially disadvantageous to poor men (and it is not clear that such is the case), it is unlikely that the system would be seriously undermined, as long as relatively rich men continued to

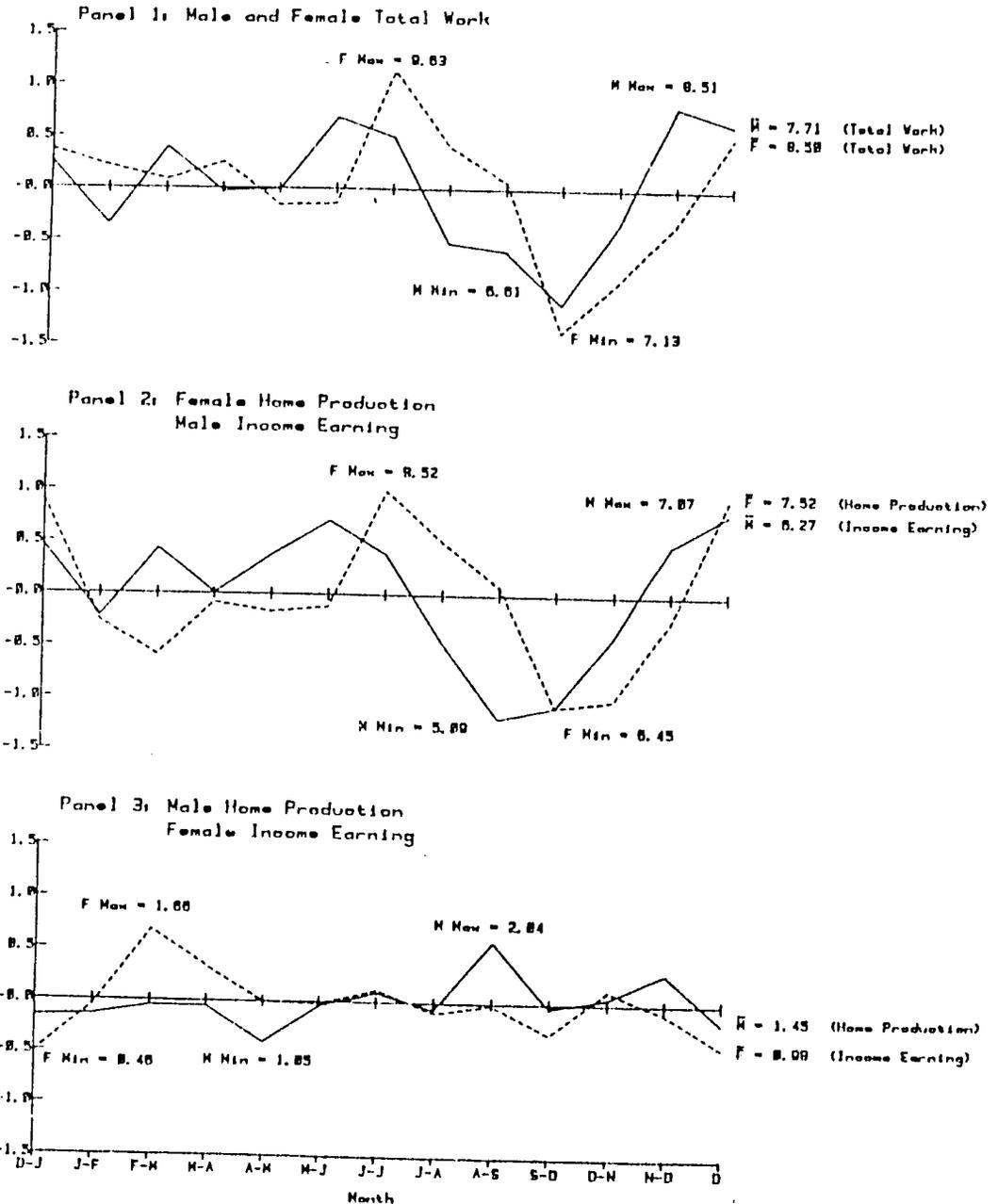
benefit. Although patriarchy creates a certain solidarity among men, it does not interfere with the class hierarchy which separates them, or the power and dependence relationships between them.

Seasonal variation in work. The annual agricultural cycle results in substantial seasonal variation in the economic activity of both men and women. Seasonal peaks in activity coincide with the harvest and processing of the amon rice crop, beginning in late November and continuing through early January, and the harvesting and processing of the aus rice and jute crops, beginning in June and continuing through July. Of the cropped area in the village, the 1976-1977 amon crop accounted for 36 percent of the total, and the 1977 aus and jute crops combined accounted for an additional 45 percent.

Figure 1 plots the monthly absolute deviations from annual mean hours worked for ever-married men and women in households owning more than half an acre. Panel 1 of Figure 1 plots monthly variations in total work time and Panel 2 plots monthly variations in home production time for women and income-earning time for men. Although the seasonal trend line for women lags slightly behind men's, male and female fluctuations in economic activity correspond closely. The lag is, of course, due to the respective roles of men and women in the production process, with men specializing in harvest and preharvest activities, and women specializing in postharvest activities. In Panel 2, women's peak periods of activity in December-January, June-July, and early December are primarily due to extra time allocated to rice processing activities. A relatively slack period for both men and women begins after the aus rice and jute harvest and postharvest peak, during the height of the rainy season and Ramadan (August 16-September 14 in 1977), the Islamic month of fasting.

In contrast to the coordinated and marked seasonal swings in women's home production work and men's income-earning work, seasonal variation in men's home

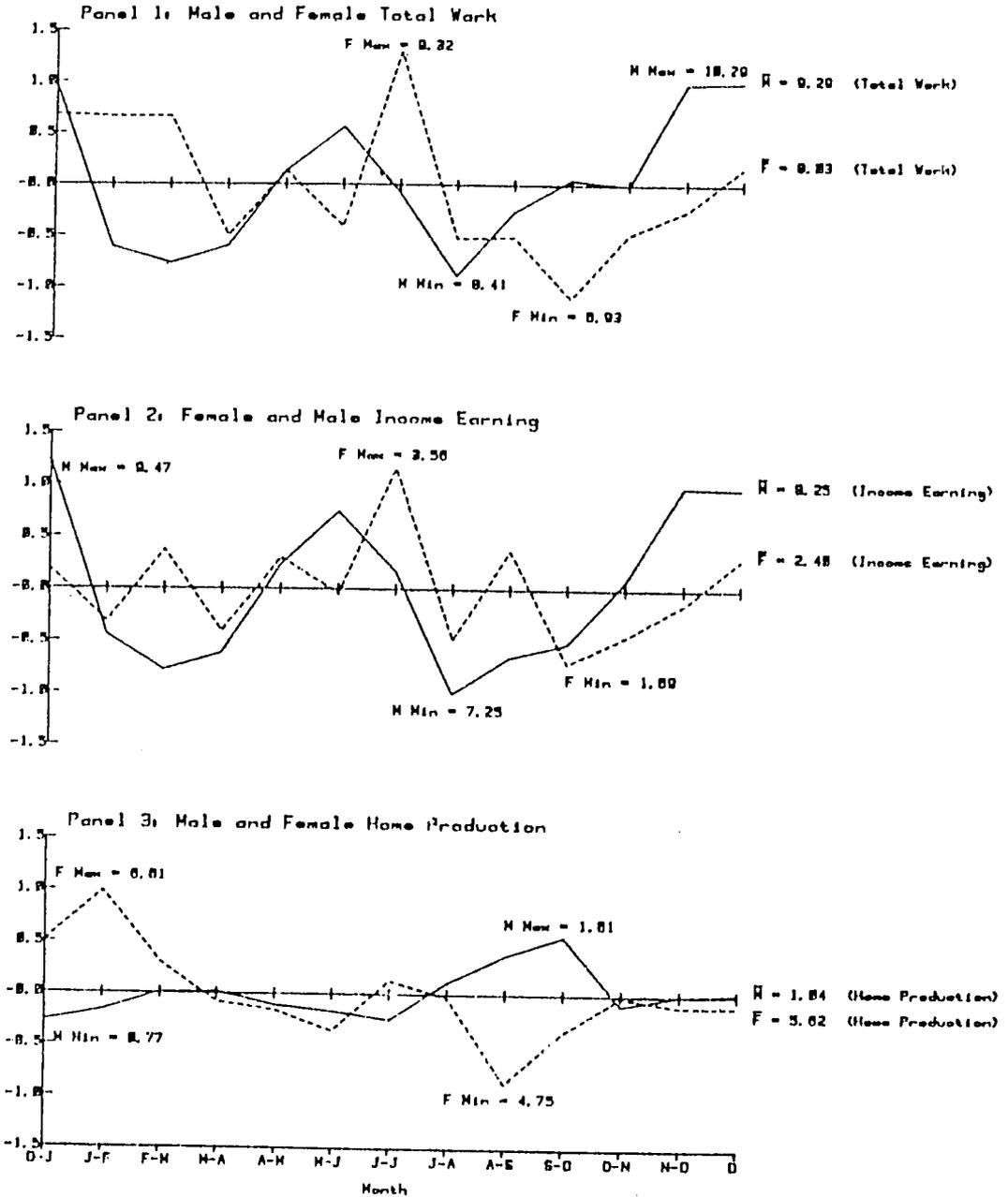
Figure 1 Seasonal Variation in Work - Rich Men and Women
 (Expressed as monthly deviation from annual average hours)



work and women's income-earning work (Panel 3) is relatively slight. For men, the apparently sharp rise in home production time in August-September is explained by inordinately long periods spent at the bazaar shopping for the household. As noted earlier, the bazaar is a center of social activity and trips to the market for whatever productive purpose (e.g., selling produce or making purchases) also serve as recreation for men. The peak in female income-earning time in February-March is the result of a busy period in garden cultivation (particularly squash, pumpkin, and beans), hut repair, and handicrafts (primarily sewing quilts). With the exception of these two peaks, however, there is little fluctuation in men's time inputs to home production, or women's time inputs to income-earning work. This further illustrates the rigidity of the functional division of labor between the sexes. Male and female labor are not homogeneous; they are not substitutable under the present circumstances. The correspondence of seasonal variation in men's and women's work evident in Panels 1 and 2 shows that the two types of labor are highly complementary. There is no indication, however, given different peaks in labor demand for men and women, that men increase their work time in order to ease work loads of women, or vice versa.

The agricultural cycle in large part determines the aggregate demand for hired labor in the village and thus the seasonal fluctuations in economic activity among the poor. In contrast to the situation of relatively rich women, however, seasonal variations in the total work of poor women are influenced more by variations of income-earning time than home production time. Figure 2 plots the monthly absolute deviations in work time from the annual averages for men and women in poor households (i.e., owning a half acre or less). Panel 1 of Figure 2 plots variations in total work time; Panel 2 plots variations in income-earning time for both men and women; and Panel 3 plots variations in home production time. There are clear similarities between

Figure 2 Seasonal Variation in Work - Poor Men and Women
 (Expressed as monthly deviation from annual average hours)



the rich and poor in seasonal patterns of total work time for both men and women (Panel 1). Thus, for men, work peaks in November-January and in May-June, with a slack period in July-September. For women, the most pronounced peak is in June-July, followed by an extended slack period. However, there are also clear differences. For example, poor men experience two distinct troughs (January-April and July-October) while rich men have only one (July-October). For landless men, agricultural employment is hard to find after the end of the amon harvest and before weeding of aus and jute begin in April. Vegetable crops and the boro (winter) rice crop which are harvested during that period do not create much employment, and land for aus and jute is usually prepared and sown by family labor.

While seasonal variations in total work are roughly comparable for rich and poor women, the principal source of variation is home production for the former and income-earning work (primarily wage work) for the latter. The major source of wage employment for poor women throughout the year is rice processing. The June-July peak in women's income-earning time (Panel 2) combines wage work in rice processing and in separating jute fibre from its stalk. Significantly, this peak and other fluctuations in poor women's income-earning time correspond more closely to the seasonal pattern of richer women's home production time than the pattern of poor men's income-earning time. This attests to the extreme segmentation of male and female rural labor markets.

Among the poor, there is some indication that women's income-earning activity increases at times when men's activity is relatively low. In Panel 2, there are small peaks in female income-earning time during February-March and August-September, both periods of relative slackness for poor males. This could suggest that wives' market work is responsive to variations in husbands' activity, however the evidence is too weak at this point to warrant a firm conclusion.²² It is nevertheless clear for the poor, as for the relatively

rich, that male labor does not substitute for female home production labor, regardless of the level of female income-earning activity. As in the case of the rich, the level of home production time is relatively invariant throughout the year for poor men (Panel 3, Figure 2).

Women's work and the life cycle. A woman's progression through her life is marked by a series of transitions in status. Transition events usually include marriage, the death of her father-in-law, and the death of her husband. The periods in a woman's life which these events demarcate and the associated status' are (in terms of the woman's relationship to the head of household) those of daughter, daughter-in-law, wife, and mother. Different patterns of work, hours worked, and authority relations with other women in the household characterize each of these periods. Two aspects of women's life cycles have particular significance for the social control of women and the perpetuation of patriarchy. One is the process of sex-role socialization during childhood. The second is the hierarchy that exists between women of different status in the same household. In general, older women dominate younger women (i.e., mothers-in-law dominate daughters-in-law, elder brothers' wives dominate younger brothers' wives, etc.). This age stratification among women allies older women to patriarchal interests (because both share domination and exploitation of younger women) and also gives the younger women something to look forward to with advancing age.²³

Young girls spend most of their childhood learning the work roles, skills and tasks which constitute the women's share of the division of labor.²⁴ The process is largely one of learning by doing, and thus young girls also spend most of their childhood working. Children of both sexes work long hours at early ages. Children begin to work in many activities as young as ages 4, 5, and 6. By the age of 13 they work on average as long or longer than adults. This is true of female children regardless of economic class. More significant is the fact that the sexual division of labor manifests itself from the

beginning. An earlier analysis of the participation of children in a large variety of economic activities concluded:

For male children there is little overall participation in house-keeping or food preparation; likewise for females there is very little participation in marketing activities or, with the exception of harvesting chillies and potatoes, in agricultural field operations. For virtually every type of task, such specialization is evident. [For example] with regard to animal husbandry, boys tend cattle, which involves extensive grazing and searching for fodder, while girls tend chickens. With regard to home upkeep, men and boys repair mud walls and thatched roofs, while young girls repair mud floors.

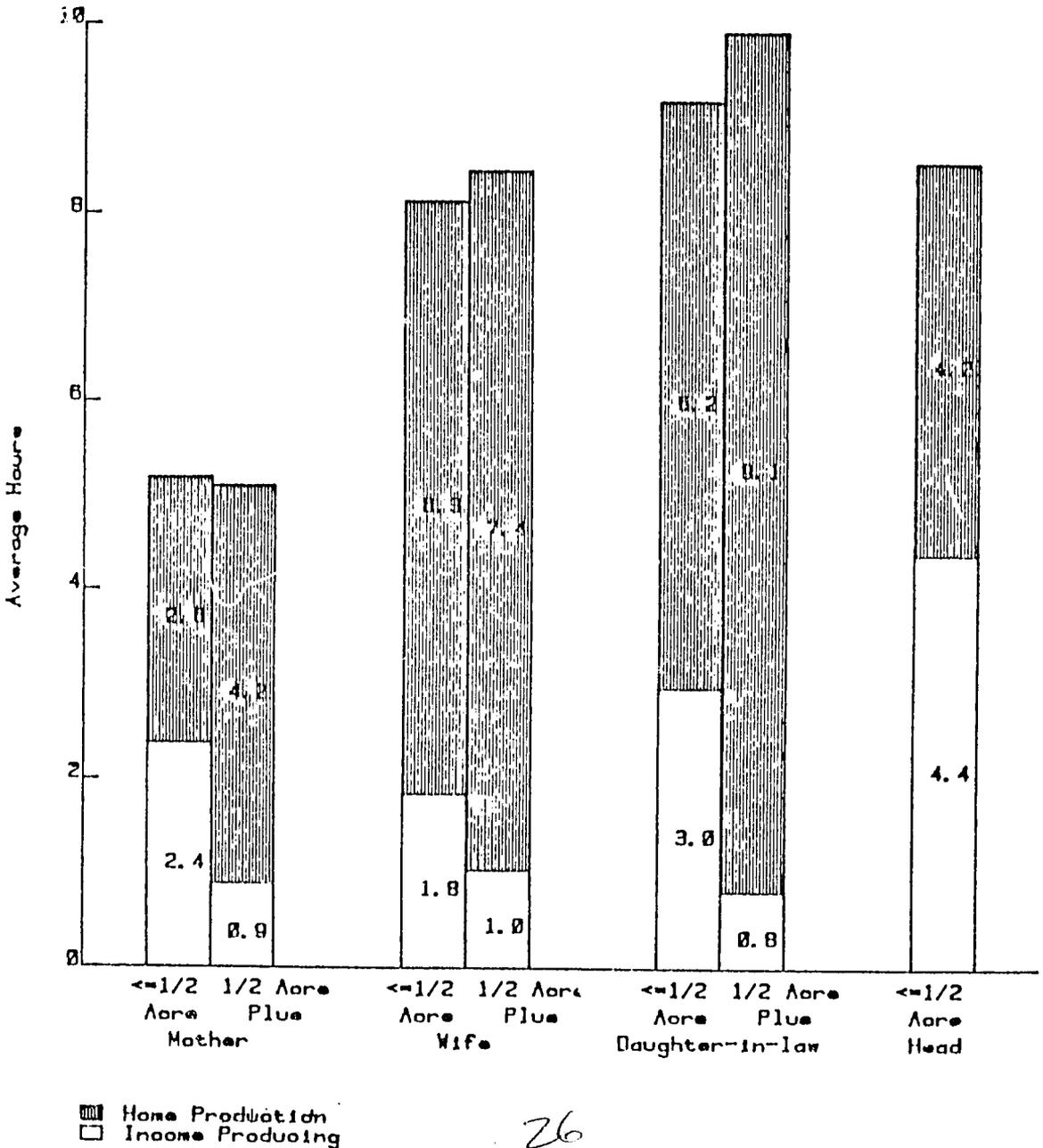
(Cain, 1977b:212 and Table 2)

Such a thorough division of tasks at very young ages engenders unambiguous and powerful norms regarding appropriate work roles and responsibilities of males and females.

A young woman's apprenticeship does not end at the time of her marriage. After joining her husband her work is usually closely supervised by the husband's mother.²⁵ During the initial period of marriage, a daughter-in-law's diligence and skill are critically evaluated by elder women in the household, and if fault is found the elders will intervene. For many activities, rice processing at the height of the harvesting season for example, the mother-in-law will actually allocate tasks to the daughter-in-law and directly control her labor. The extent and period of subordination obviously varies, however, even after the son and daughter-in-law have established a separate household (usually in the same bari), the mother-in-law's authority will continue to be felt. A woman gains increasing autonomy with age and the birth of her children. The death of the father-in-law will undermine the authority of the mother-in-law but not eliminate it. The cycle is complete when a woman's first daughter-in-law enters her household.

Figure 3 shows the average hours of work per day of ever-married women by economic class and relationship to head of household. The results suggest

Figure 3 Average Hours of Work for Ever Married Women by Relation to Head of Household and Economic Class



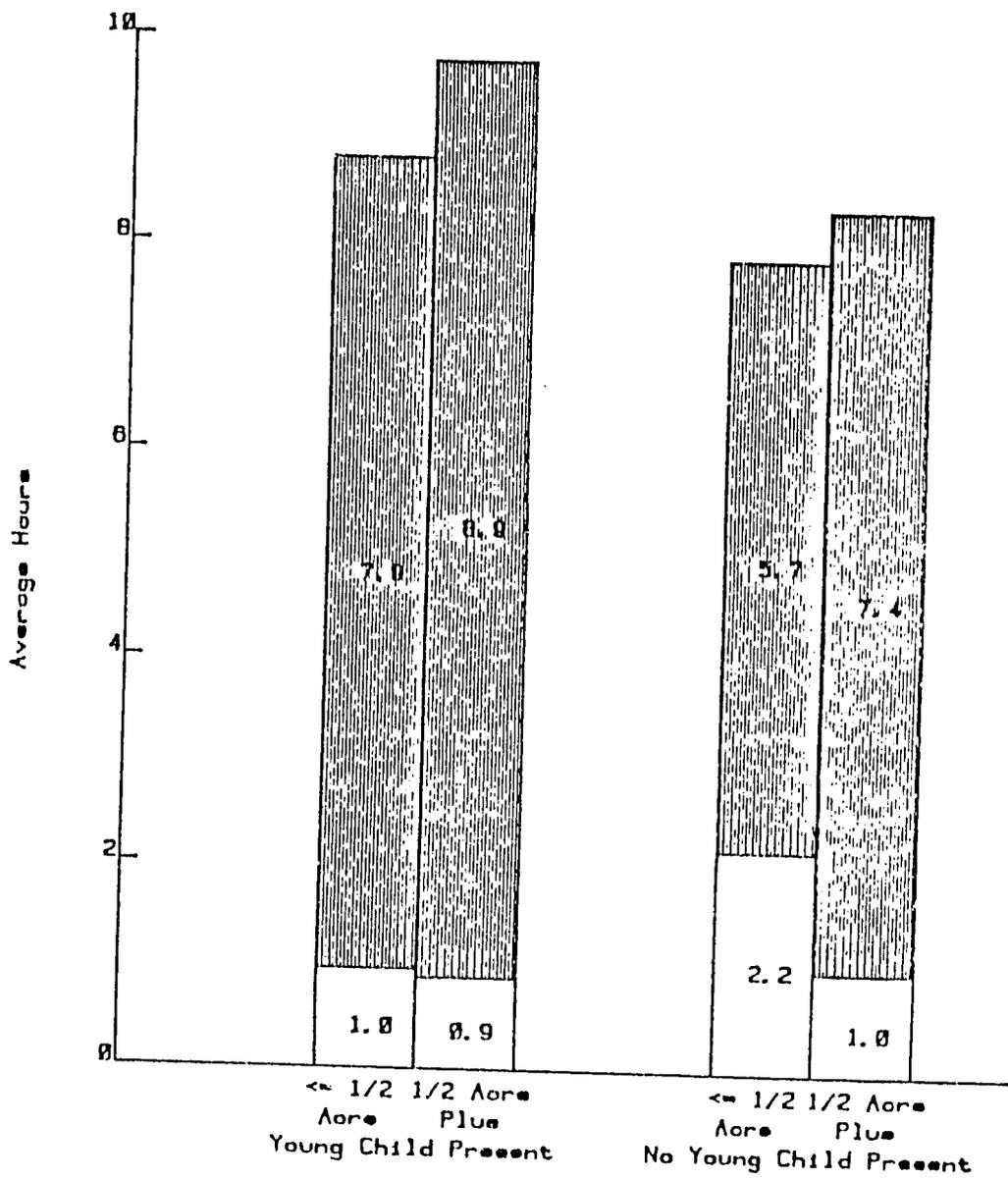
first, that as women advance in status within the household, things do indeed get better. The total work time of daughters-in-law (9.7 hours) on average exceeds that of wives (8.3 hours) and is almost double that of mothers (5.1 hours). Second, within status groups (i.e., mother, wife, daughter-in-law), total work time is relatively invariant across economic class. As noted before, age stratification among women strengthens the patriarchal system. The similarity of variations in work time by status for both rich and poor women is consistent with powerful and pervasive patriarchal control. Third, while women benefit in increased leisure and power over younger women as they advance in status within the household, these gains are forfeited if, after the death of their husbands, they do not remain integrated in their son's household. The situation of widows who head their own households stands in stark contrast to that of their more fortunate peers, poor mothers of household heads. The former work 8.6 hours per day as compared with 5.1 hours for poor mothers. Moreover, the relative independence of female heads also requires that they work much longer hours on average in income-earning activities.

Childrearing and work. Child care in rural Bangladesh is most time-intensive for women during the first few years of a child's life. During this period the majority of a woman's time input to child care (as we define it) is devoted to breastfeeding. Although children are typically breastfed for very long periods in Bangladesh,²⁶ the amount of care that they receive after age 3 is relatively minor. It is difficult to assess the extent to which child care represents a constraint to women's market work, independent of the effects of the more general system of patriarchy. However, we do have some evidence that income-earning time declines, at least for the poor, with the presence of very young children (less than two years of age). Table 3 and Figure 4 show hours worked for currently married women only, by economic class and age of youngest child. Among richer women, who in any case do not participate in

Table 3
Average hours worked per person-day by age
of youngest child and economic class, for
currently married women in Char Gopalpur, 1977

| Activity | Households owning a half acre or less | | Households owning more than half an acre | |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| | Women with children age 0-1 | Women without young children | Women with children age 0-1 | Women without young children |
| Income Earning | .96 | 2.17 | .88 | .99 |
| Child Care | 1.76 | .76 | 1.31 | .62 |
| Other home production | 6.10 | 4.95 | 7.58 | 6.76 |
| Total Work | 8.82 | 7.88 | 9.77 | 8.37 |
| Number of Person-Days | 18 | 36 | 24 | 61 |
| | 388 | 773 | 548 | 1318 |

Figure 4 Average Hours of Work for Currently Married Women
By age of Youngest Child and Economic Class



 Home Production
 Income Producing

market work which takes them outside the home, average time in income-earning work is the same (one hour) for women with young children and those without. In terms of total work time, richer women with young children work considerably more on average than those without. Much of the difference would appear to be due to increased child care time (1.31 versus .62 hours), however, other home production time also seems to increase. Among poor women, the presence of young children would seem to have a significant impact on women's income-earning activity. Poor women without young children work on average about twice the number of hours in income-earning activities as women with young children. As in the case of richer women, child care time, other home production time, and total work time is greater for poor women with infants than those without.

The apparent negative effect of infant child care on market work participation is weakly substantiated by regression analysis. Table 4 presents the results of a regression analysis of time in income-earning work (both total income-earning hours and hours in wage work, trading, and other income work only) on presence of young child (dichotomous variable), age of woman, and value of household assets. These equations were estimated using ordinary least squares for the whole sample of currently married women, and for poor women alone. Metric coefficients with standard errors are presented. While the coefficients for presence of children are significantly negative for all the equations, the relationship is not strong. In most cases the coefficient for presence of young child is only slightly greater than twice the standard error. As one would expect, the trade-off between child care time and income-earning time is most pronounced among the poor.

While the negative impact of child care on female market work is an important finding, implying perhaps a reduction in welfare for poor women and their household, following the birth of a child, its significance must be kept

Table 4
Regression analysis of income earning work time
of currently married women, Char Gopalpur, 1977

| Independent Variables | Dependent Variables | | | |
|--|------------------------------|--|---|-----------------------------|
| | All currently married women | | Poor currently married women ^a | |
| | Total Income Earning Time | Outside Income Earning Time ^b | Total Income Earning Time | Outside Income Earning Time |
| Presence of young child (dichotomous variable) | -.468 (.223) ^c | -.387 (.196) | -1.22 (.44) | -.880 (.412) |
| Age of woman | .008 (.008) | -.002 (.007) | -.001 (.016) | -.007 (.015) |
| Value of household assets (taka) | -.000004 (.000002) | -.000003 (.000001) | -.00006 (.00004) | -.00008 (.00004) |
| Intercept | 1.28 | .876 | 2.40 | 1.94 |
| R ² (unadjusted) | .09 | .06 | .19 | .15 |
| N | 133 | 133 | 52 | 52 |

- a household owning half an acre of land or less
b total time in wage work, trading, and other income work only
c numbers in parentheses are standard errors

In perspective. In particular, it does not follow that the time demands of childbearing or rearing are the most important or even a major factor affecting either the kinds of market work women engage in (e.g., informal vs. formal; near the home vs. away from the home) or their overall rates of participation in rural Bangladesh.²⁷ Such a conclusion cannot be reconciled with the fact that in other societies in South Asia (Muslim included), with similar regimes of fertility, women's participation in market work is often as high as men's, and in all cases seems to be greater than that of women in Bangladesh.²⁸ Furthermore, such a conclusion clashes with the gross underemployment (relative to men) of female heads of households, who we know are not constrained by childrearing responsibilities and who must participate in the labor market in order to survive (see Figure 3). The underemployment of these women and poor women in general relative to men is primarily a consequence of highly segregated markets for male and female labor, with the employment opportunities on the female side many fewer than on the male side. The degree of labor market segregation is not simply a neutral accommodation of women's childrearing role. Rather market segregation is both a consequence of and a means for perpetuating the system of patriarchy.

Segregated labor markets. In rural Bangladesh, more so than in many underdeveloped agrarian societies, the evidence for sex-segregated (or segmented) labor markets is clear and unambiguous. The market for a woman's labor is normally (there are exceptions) demarcated both physically and functionally. The physical limits of the market for a particular woman's labor are described by a circle with a radius of 200-400 yards with her homestead as the center of the circle. The radius of the circle will vary depending on the size of the village neighborhood (para) in which she lives, the homogeneity of her para in terms of kinship and other social criteria, and the degree of her or her husband's social integration within the para. The precise size and shape of

the area demarcated is, of course, not important. What is important is that, geographically, the market for the labor of any given woman is small, and the pool of potential employers is limited by the condition that some sort of prior social relationship exists between the woman seeking work and the employer. The relationship might be based on kinship, joint membership in a mallot (see above), allegiance of a woman's husband to a faction leader, etc. These criteria usually overlap. The norms of purdah influence the distance a woman would be willing to travel to work, or the distance a husband would permit his wife to travel, a woman's willingness to work for a stranger, and the receptivity of potential employers. As noted previously, the psychic and more tangible costs of job search rise quickly when a woman leaves the confines of her "circle."

It is not only the discomfort a woman would feel if she goes beyond the boundary that acts as a constraint to wider-ranging job search. Wealthy households with which she is not related in some way, either in the village or outside of the village, would be much less likely to employ her because she is a stranger. On the one hand, such households would risk violating norms of propriety; and on the other hand, they would already have a number of client women to whom they were patrons and to whom favored access to employment opportunities would be offered. In contrast to the situation for women, the market for male labor is much more extensive. While men may also establish stable relations with certain familiar employers, they nevertheless have the opportunity of looking for and finding work in other parts of the village, in other villages, and in the towns.

In addition to geographic limits, the market for female labor is limited functionally. For the most part the division of labor which exists in the household also applies to markets for male and female labor. That is, women find wage employment in the village, primarily serving as servants within

richer households, and processing rice and other crops. The field work in which they find wage employment, is limited to a few crops which are normally planted close to the owner's bari. Table 5 shows the distribution of cases of female wage employment by type of employment in Char Gopalpur. The 310 cases in Table 5 were transcribed from the time-budget forms.²⁹ We can see that 77 percent of all cases of female wage employment involved work done in the employer's bari (general housework, rice processing, sewing quilts, and other food processing). The largest source of employment for women is rice processing (50 percent of all cases). Field work, including harvesting chillies, potatoes, and ground nuts, accounts for only 16 percent of the total, and, as noted, involves work which is normally located close to the employer's bari. Stripping jute fibre, which accounts for 5 percent of total wage employment, also takes place close to the employer's bari.³⁰

Within the boundaries that define the physical limits of a woman's market area, her participation in wage work is limited to these tasks. Thus, even if rice and jute are planted within a woman's market area, she will not be employed in field operations on these crops. Wage employment in rice and jute cultivation is the prerogative of men alone. In the course of our field work, we regularly conducted plot surveys in the village, interviewing laborers working on plots undergoing particular operations. These surveys began with the 1976-77 amon harvest and continued through early 1978. In total we enumerated and interviewed laborers on 1,937 plots during two amon harvests, the 1977 boro harvest, weeding of aus and jute, aus and jute harvests, and amon transplanting. None of the laborers on these plots, either hired or unpaid, were women; all were men. For jute stripping, of 716 hired laborers interviewed, only 60, or 8 percent, were women.

The consequences of segregated labor markets are that women's wages are lower than men's and women are less likely to find wage employment when they

Table 5
Sources of Female Wage Employment*

| Source of Wage Employment | Number of Cases | Percent |
|---|-----------------|---------|
| General Housework ^a | 62 | 20.0 |
| Husking and Rice Processing Only ^b | 156 | 50.3 |
| Sew Khatha ^c | 12 | 3.9 |
| Other Food Processing ^d | 8 | 2.6 |
| Strip Jute | 16 | 5.2 |
| Harvest Chilli | 19 | 6.1 |
| Harvest Potato | 8 | 2.6 |
| Harvest Ground Nut | 16 | 5.2 |
| Other Fieldwork ^e | 7 | 2.3 |
| Other Miscellaneous ^f | 6 | 1.9 |
| Total | 310 | 100.0 |

Notes:

- * Transcribed from the time budget forms.
- a General Housework combines a number of tasks such as cleaning, helping to prepare meals, etc. It often also includes husking paddy and other rice processing tasks.
- b Includes parboiling, husking, drying, winnowing (cleaning). Only one case of threshing.
- c Most khathas (quilts) are produced on a piece rate in one's own home. The cases included here are for a daily wage in the employer's homestead, not piece rate.
- d Includes grinding pulse, processing garlic, clean and peel onions, winnow pulse, separating potatoes by size.
- e Includes harvesting garlic, mulching, carrying paddy, weeding.
- f Includes feeding cattle, preparing cakes (cooking), making fish net, drying jute stalks, and sitting with mother and newborn child.

want it. Segregated markets mean that the demand for male labor is independent of the demand for female labor. Moreover, wage employment demand generated by male sources is much greater than that generated by female sources. For example, while rice and jute represent 86 percent of the total cropped area in the village, chilli, potato, and ground nut (crops in which women find employment) together account for only 3 percent. And, as noted before, richer households are less likely to hire female labor for rice processing than they are male labor for agricultural operations. Consequently one finds sharp differentials in the daily wages of males and females on any given day. The chilli harvest overlaps with weeding for aus rice and jute. In late April 1977, we found women harvesting chillies at a daily rate equivalent to 2.5-3 taka,³¹ while at the same time men were earning the equivalent of 8-10 taka for weeding. Similar differentials exist in other periods, when, for example, men are employed in harvesting at the same time women are employed in rice processing.

Sex differentials in time allocated to wage work (Tables 2 and 3) themselves suggest that women are less likely to find wage work than men. Table 6 presents slightly more conventional indices of labor force participation, comparing poor men and female heads of household. Participation rates are calculated for wage work alone, for wage work, trading, handicrafts, and "other income" work combined, and for all income-earning work (excluding hut construction). Three participation rates are presented: persons ever participating (in any of the 25 budget rounds) as a percentage of all persons (LFPR1); days of participation as a percentage of total person-days (LFPR2), and days of participation as a percentage of total person-days for persons ever participating only (LFPR3). We compare female heads of household with males because among women the former are the most likely to be actively seeking wage work. Table 6 shows that for all measures of labor force participation, the rates for

Table 6
Indices of Labor Force Participation
for Poor Ever Married Men and Female Heads
of Household, Char Gopalpur, 1977*

| Activity Group ^a | Poor Ever Married Men | | | | Female Heads of Household | | | |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|---------|-----------------------|
| | LFPR(1) ^b | LFPR(2) ^c | LFPR(3) ^d | Average Hours per doer ^e | LFPR(1) | LFPR(2) | LFPR(3) | Average Hour per doer |
| Wage work | 76 | 41 | 52 | 10.6 | 64 | 17 | 26 | 7.4 |
| Wage work, trading, handicrafts, and "other income" work, combined | 96 | 71 | 73 | 10.0 | 82 | 44 | 53 | 8.0 |
| ⊃ All income earning work | 96 | 83 | 86 | 9.7 | 91 | 63 | 68 | 6.6 |
| Total persons | 55 | | | | 11 | | | |
| Total person-days | 1119 | | | | 251 | | | |

Notes:

- * Derived from time budget data.
- a Categories correspond to those in Table 2.
- b LFPR(1) is the number of persons ever participating in the activity(s) (in one or more of the 25 time budget rounds) as a percentage of all persons.
- c LFPR(2) is the number of days of participation (i.e., the number of days with a non-zero entry in the activity(s)) as a percentage of total person-days.
- d LFPR(3) is the number of days of participation, as a percentage of total person days for persons ever participating only.
- e Average hours per day in activity for non-zero entries.

female heads of household are substantially lower than for males. Moreover, the average length of work day is shorter for females (e.g., 7.4 hours in wage work) than for males (10.6 hours in wage work). Wage work is usually the preferred activity because for poor men and women alike, it tends to offer the highest returns to labor among alternative forms of income-earning work. For wage work alone (row 1 of Table 6), poor men find employment for 41 percent of all person-days (LFPR2) while female heads of household find employment for only 17 percent of all person days. For all income-earning work (row 3 of Table 6), men are employed 83 percent of all person-days while female heads of household are employed 63 percent of all person-days.

Low wages and inability to find work make it extremely difficult for women alone to earn enough for their own and their families' subsistence. We found mean daily caloric consumption per adult male equivalent consumption unit (see note 21) to be 2000 calories for members of female headed households as compared to an energy requirement of 2475 calories. Thus, energy consumption in these households is 81 percent of requirements, and 68 percent of the overall sample average (2923 calories per day).

Discussion

The picture that emerges from our analysis of patriarchy and women's work in rural Bangladesh is bleak. Male dominance is grounded in control of material resources, and supported by interlocking and reinforcing elements of the kinship, political and religious systems. Powerful norms of female seclusion extend to labor markets, severely limiting women's opportunities for independent income generation. At the same time evidence suggests that under the pressure of increasing poverty, male bonds of obligation to support women are weakening, thus creating increasing numbers of women who must fend for themselves. Potential agents of change or sources of resistance to the current system of patriarchy, are undermined by the interaction of age, sex, and class

hierarchies. Among women, solidarity and potential resistance to patriarchy are undermined by an age hierarchy which allies older women to patriarchal interests, and by class differences between women. Moreover, the institution of purdah confers social status upon women, while at the same time serving as an instrument of repression. Similarly, among poor men, for whom the material benefits of patriarchy are less than for the relatively rich, and whose well-being might improve if their wives could find more employment, potential resistance is blunted by their position of dependence in the class hierarchy.

Two points in the analysis are, in our view, particularly important. First, women of all economic classes face not only the risks common to all households in rural Bangladesh (e.g., flood, political disruption, epidemics, crop failure) but also the special risks associated with the patriarchal system. As the bonds of obligation between kin erode under the pressure of poverty, the risk of precipitous decline in status for women increases. Second, women who, for whatever reason, have no male on which to depend, and have to sell their labor, face a labor market which is highly restricted both spatially and functionally, and the prospect of relatively low wages and high rates of unemployment.

The risk and insecurity that patriarchy imposes on women represent a powerful systemic incentive for high fertility. While women are thoroughly socialized into the patriarchal system and undoubtedly value the status they achieve by maintaining high standards of purdah, they are nevertheless very aware of their insecurity and the high risks that they face. Within the constraints of the patriarchal system, women do everything they can to hedge against risk and create independent sources of security. This motivates behavior such as women relinquishing rights to inherited land in order to maintain good relations with brothers. Through such acts, a woman creates a debt of obligation, which may be "called in" (with admittedly uncertain results) if she is divorced or widowed. Many other examples from the village

that we studied come to mind, which suggest that women actively seek to hedge against patriarchal risk. With the collusion of a young son a woman may sell grain without her husband's knowledge and accumulate savings in that way. There are cases of women surreptitiously purchasing land (usually outside of the village), or engaging in money-lending activities without their husband's knowledge. However, the best risk insurance for women is to produce sons, as many and as soon as possible. Without a son, considering the high probability of widowhood, a woman's welfare in later years is extremely uncertain, regardless of steps she may have taken to create other sources of security. There are other incentives for high fertility in rural Bangladesh, including the productivity of children in a labor-intensive economy and the role that children, particularly sons, play in reducing the economic uncertainty that confronts households in general. The risks that patriarchy generate for women are, however, independent and powerful incentives for high fertility, and given the strength of underlying patriarchal institutions, they present a significant obstacle to government population policy initiatives.³²

There is convincing evidence to suggest that the employment situation for males in rural Bangladesh is deteriorating. In the agricultural sector the rate of growth of labor demand in the last decade has been less than that of agricultural output, while the rate of growth in output has itself been substantially less than that of agricultural labor force.³³ There is additional evidence of a downward trend in real wages in the agricultural sector.³⁴ Our analysis suggests, however, that no matter how bad the employment situation is for men, the situation for women is worse (i.e., higher unemployment and underemployment and lower wages). Moreover, given patriarchal processes that generate increasing proportions of women who must depend on wage employment, the degree of labor market segmentation, and the strength of patriarchal structures which underlie market segmentation, the employment situation is quite likely deteriorating more rapidly for women than for men.

The Government of Bangladesh has endorsed the objective of raising the status of women, as is reflected in the Constitution,³⁵ in planning documents,³⁶ various government directives,³⁷ and, to a lesser extent, in programmatic activity. It is difficult to determine the extent to which such endorsements reflect real commitment, empty rhetoric, or expedient response to pressures applied by foreign aid agencies. In any case, it is likely that development planners and officials, if only through lack of data, may have in the past underestimated the predicament of rural women, their vulnerability, and the strong incentives for high fertility created by dependence and patriarchal risk. While our analysis appears to present a strong argument for according women higher priority in development plans and for greater government involvement in efforts to create employment specifically for rural women, we are mindful both of the magnitude and diversity of other development problems facing officials in Bangladesh and the limited data on which our analysis is based.

We conclude with several observations about policy formulation and implementation which our analysis prompts.

First, the systemic nature of patriarchy suggests that solutions to the problem of women's vulnerability and lack of income-earning opportunity will not be easily arrived at. To the extent that policies seeking to increase women's economic autonomy or protect their rights conflict with patriarchal interests, such policies will meet resistance. Furthermore, resistance can be expected from women as well as men, if policy initiatives imply violating norms of purdah, and thus threaten an important component of women's social status.

Second, because one can expect such resistance, programs designed to generate female employment and income opportunities (such as the Women's Program of the I.R.D.P.)³⁸ will need the full support of the central government in order to succeed.

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Third, and finally, because the market for women's labor is so restricted, elimination of one of the more important sources of wage employment can be expected to have disastrous effects. The Government of Bangladesh is strongly committed to a policy of mechanization of rice processing. If the village we studied is at all typical, then well over 50 percent of all female wage employment is currently found in processing rice. While there may be strong political reasons for pursuing such a policy, the government should be apprised that mechanization will almost certainly severely erode an already fragile female labor market.

Notes

¹The Rural Land Occupancy Survey estimated the number of landless households in 1977 to be 33 percent for all households (Jannuzi and Peach, 1977). The proportion of "effective" landless—those with less than half an acre—was estimated to be 48 percent of all households. The proportion of landless has increased from around 17 percent in 1960 to the present level at an exponential rate of growth of between 5 and 7 percent per year (Clay, 1978a).

²Hartmann (1979) points out that most radical feminists define patriarchy as an ideological system of male dominance with psychological underpinnings. For both Marxists and mainstream social scientists, patriarchy has referred to hierarchical relations between men (either age or feudal hierarchies). We adopt a modified version of Hartmann's own definition, which emphasizes the material base of male domination of women. See also Hartmann (1976).

³This conclusion is based on information taken from the participants in marriages that occurred during our field work. While the particulars of negotiations varied widely, with both cases of the bride's side giving more and cases of the groom's side giving more, and sometimes to the groom as well as the bride, in general the value of goods and cash given was small. In other Muslim societies a more substantial dowry (mahr) is the rule (see: Papenek, 1973).

⁴Early in 1977 a local Union Council election was held. Candidates from a neighboring village defied tradition by taking their supporters' wives to the polls, making elaborate arrangements to maintain the women's purdah. To counter this tactic, candidates from our village decided at the last minute to bring out the female vote. While this was the first time in memory that men had permitted their wives to vote, the event illustrated women's subordination to men rather than the beginning of a trend towards liberalization. Women on voting day were literally herded to lineage staging points in the village, wearing burkas (cloth coverings extending from head to foot), where they were carefully told how to vote and for whom to vote by a male kinsman.

⁵ Mallot is the term used in this locality for community groups identified as reya by Bertocci (1970) and samaj by Adnan (1976).

⁶ Passage in the Koran (Sura 4:35) from Arberry (1955) quoted in Papanek (1973:307).

⁷ Maududi (1968) quoted in Papanek (1973:308).

⁸ See Bertocci (1970) and Abdullah and Zeldenstein (1979).

⁹ In addition to other examples from our village, a number of such cases are reported in Chen and Ghuvnavi (n.d.) and Abdullah and Zeldenstein (1979).

¹⁰ Khan (1976) and Clay (1976) document a trend of declining real wages in agriculture over the past decade. Analyses by Robinson (1969) and Clay and Khan (1976) suggest that since 1951 additions to the rural labor force have been redundant given existing capital stock and organization of production. Between 1962-64 and 1975-76 per capita calorie consumption declined by 7 percent (Institute of Nutrition and Food Science, 1977).

¹¹ For example, see Bertocci (1970).

¹² In a sample survey, Farouk and Ali (1977) collected time allocation data on both men and women. This is an excellent study, but it focused more on men than women, and recorded time use for only one day. An excellent study of rural women, with a detailed description of women's work and responsibilities, is Abdullah and Zeldenstein (1979).

¹³ Calculated from data in Government of Pakistan (1961).

¹⁴ Time use data were collected not through direct observation, but by retrospectively reconstructing the day's and previous evening's activities and activity durations. The data were collected by village youths who lived near and were familiar with their respective respondents. Details of the methods of data collection and processing are described in Cain (1977a), available from the first author. The 114 households represent a random sample of the total population of 343 households.

¹⁵ Consolidating activities into two categories compromises the internal consistency of the categories. Determining which activities are "income-earning" as opposed to "nonincome home production" is not always straightforward, and in several cases, decisions were somewhat arbitrary. See Cain (1977b).

¹⁶ While shopping for household consumption goods is certainly a necessary economic activity, it should be noted that the bazaar is a center of social life and trips are made there for recreation as well as productive purposes.

¹⁷ Ownership of land is here measured de facto; that is, land formally owned is adjusted for land mortgaged in or out, and land taken in or given out rent-free.

18 Men always eat first, women last. If there is insufficient food for the whole household, men will tend to consume proportionally more than those who follow. Poor men tend to be better dressed than poor women. See: Chowdhury, Huffman, and Chen (1978) and Abulullah and Zeldenstein (1979). On the benefits which men accrue from female labor see: Hartmann (1979) and Caldwell (1978).

19 On sexual oppression of women see Arens and van Beurden (1977).

20 A regression analysis of total hours worked on value of assets and age for men and women separately yielded the following results (OLS):

$$H_F = 11.6 + .000001 \text{ Assets} - .093 \text{ AGE} \quad (R^2 = .37) \\ (.000003) \quad (.0095)$$

$$H_M = 11.2 - .000022 \text{ Assets} - .050 \text{ AGE} \quad (R^2 = .22) \\ (.000005) \quad (.013)$$

The asset coefficient for females is not significantly different from zero, while for males it is significantly negative. Log and doublelog regressions yield the same results.

21 Mean caloric consumption per consumption unit (persons were weighted by age and sex according to Chen (1975)) for households in the lowest wealth quartile was approximately 95 percent of daily energy requirements. Data on daily food consumption was collected along with the time budgets. The calculation above includes only data from February 1977 to September 1977.

22 The first small peak is a consequence of above average time in own hut construction and repair.

23 Caldwell (1978) develops a similar point.

24 For a more detailed analysis of children's work see: Cain (1977b).

25 While only 15 percent of all households are joint in the cross-section (i.e., a point in time), most households go through a joint period in their cycles. That is, a son will usually bring his bride to live in his parent's household for at least a short period.

26 See Huffman (1977).

27 This conclusion is prominent in much of the literature. For example see: Birdsall and McGreevey (1978).

28 For example see: Stoler (1977)-Indonesia; Dixon (1978)-South Asia General; Mencher and D'Amico (1979)-South India; and Das Gupta (1976)-North India.

29 In this process, some cases were overlooked and omitted by mistake, thus the number 310 underestimates the actual total.

30 After harvesting, jute is steeped in water for several weeks to soften the fibre. Most of the village is flooded during this period (June-July), with water reaching right up to bari boundaries, but with raised dirt paths linking most baris in a given para. After steeping, jute bundles are brought to the nearest path, where the fibre is then stripped from the stalk.

³¹In 1977, US \$1 = 15 taka.

³²Our analysis of fertility differs from that of Caldwell (1978) for whom patriarchy also figures prominently. Caldwell argues that high fertility in societies such as Bangladesh is decisively determined by the material advantages accruing to men as a result of their control over the labor of women and children. We would argue, to the contrary, that conditions external to the household (environmental and social risks, and the technologically determined demand for labor) are decisive in determining high fertility. Despite male dominance within the family, household members share important common interests in dealing with such external conditions. Moreover, we would argue, with respect to fertility, that the risks which patriarchy create for women are a more important determining factor than the material advantages which accrue to men.

³³See Clay and Khan (1977) and Clay (1978a and b). Since 1960 the rate of growth in food grain production has been less than 2 percent while the annual rate of growth in the agricultural labor force has been at least 2.1 percent. Most of the growth in agricultural output has resulted from increases in yield rather than expansion of cultivated area.

³⁴See Clay (1976) and Khan (1976).

³⁵See Smock (1977).

³⁶For example, see Government of Bangladesh (1973).

³⁷During the period of the field work, for example, government ministries were instructed to attempt to achieve gender parity among their employees through affirmative action in hiring. This order conflicted with a number of civil service procedures and has largely been ignored.

³⁸The I.R.D.P. Women's Program is described in detail in Abdullah and Zeidenstein (1979). The Program is based on credit and savings cooperatives for rural women.

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