

Islam And Development In Bangladesh

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Translated from French

by

S. M. Imamul Huq



CENTRE FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

Centre for Social Studies

Room no. 1107, Arts Building
Dhaka University
Dhaka 1000
Bangladesh

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FOREWORD

As per convention, the names of the persons and of the localities where the investigation was carried out have been kept imaginary. To ease the perusal of the text, English citations have been translated into French. The author takes the responsibility of this translation. The transcription of the Arabic words is phonetic as this work is the outcome of a field investigation carried out in a non-arab country.

PREFACE

The Enigma of Islam in Bangladesh

It is only after a long hesitation that I have decided to take risk of making some remarks on the difficult subject approached in this book by Bernard Hours. Talking about Islam now-a-days has become easy for journalists and for a number of politicians; since the idealization of Islam has taken on the proportions we know in Iran, in Sudan, in Pakistan, in Algeria, in Afghanistan, in Egypt and also in other societies where the respective States are inefficiently controlling the ever increasing turmoil, and the classic Islamic thinkers have almost become silent. The opinion of the great scholars like L. Massignon, R. Brunschvig, E. Levi-Provençal, J. Schacht, G. Von Gruenbaum is rarely heard or too timid, when they do accept to express it. Moreover, the Muslim thinkers and researchers are not there to compensate by reliable works, profound analyses, evanescent proses, cursory descriptions, and the conformist accounts which once flooded the libraries. I do not say that only the classic Islam of the medieval texts merits attention and must constitute an obligatory reference for the evaluation of the spectacular metamorphosis undergone in the last thirty years, by a faith, a solidly established tradition, a burgeoning culture, a vigorous and conquering thought. But all critical studies of present day Islam must evaluate the continuities and the discontinuities between the changing expressions of Islam and the socio-political contexts over the centuries, particularly since 1945.

The discontinuities triumph clearly over the continuities since the ideology of progress has been imposed on the new National-States as an essential tool for national construction, for economic liberation which must materialize and complete the reconquest of the political sovereignties following often tragic struggles. After 30 years of varying experiences in the different

Muslim countries, it can be clearly seen that the economic development now-a-days was the instrument of the former colonial powers for perpetuating their domination in other forms, with the complicity of the National-States which have for a long time drawn from the promises of development the efficient means to make up the evident and increasing deficits of the legitimacy.

How can the study of two such complex levers as Islam and development in the evolution of all the Muslim societies be united? How can the interactions, the contradictions, the arbitrary dealings of the political players, the legitimate and regularly disappointed aspirations of so many social agents, the strategies for power and exploitation by the international and national forces be followed? How can the levels of autonomy of the religious facts be discerned when all the ill-prepared, ill-informed actors, conditioned by militant speeches obstinately confound the political opposition, economic claims, social security, relation with the national identity, Messianic hope, eschatological expectations, exasperation of the desire for salvation...?

These confusions observed everywhere now-a-days, even among the Muslim immigrants in the European societies, have taken a dimension which is difficult to define in the case of Bangladesh: the third complicated item of the subject treated by B.Hours. It is known that Bangladesh combines the negative effects of a colonial history which has delayed its independence till 1971, an unfavorable geographic location and ecologic evolution in striking disproportion with its material wealth and population growth. When the delusions of the religious "guides" and the political leaders far removed from the real needs of the greater social strata marginalized since the 19th century are added to the above-mentioned factors, it becomes confusing that Islam and development be considered as a gateway to the understanding of a society which remains one of the least studied and least explored of what was called the Third World.

The specialists of social sciences always exult

afterwards to describe lucidly the havoc caused by the theories of development, conceived in the West, and transplanted arbitrarily during the years 1960-70 in the historical, social, cultural and economic contexts of the countries, as varied as Bangladesh, Tanzania, Iran, Algeria etc...The triumphant volunteerism of the National-States have of course contributed to the creation of tense situations by listening more to the ideological "experts" than to the prudent specialists, generally known as the idealists. What place has been attributed to the religious facts by these "experts" and their political protectors in so far as the deciding cultural and psycho-social dimension in all developmental strategies applied to colonized societies isolated from all intellectual modernity since the 18th century?

It is from this question that the role of Islam in Bangladesh and elsewhere may be evaluated without taking a risk of exaggerating the religious factor, as many have done since political Islam has surfaced to the scene.

As a general practice, I maintain Islam as the modality of human experience of divinity, as an ideologic lever of a history very rapidly spread to all the continents, as a vision of the world, position of human spirit, life style and series of very varied cultural codes; this Islam is there, and if one understands by *Islam*, then all of it elude the perception of the Muslims themselves and of those whom in the West, pretend to have devoted it "scientifically" since the 19th century. I recall this fact not to underestimate, far less to deny the importance of many monographs covering the various domains of this Islam, but to emphasize further the insufficiencies, the clichés, the conformism, the false explanations, the ideologic readiness that conceal as much in the discourse produced by the Muslim social agents- I include the "organic" intellectuals, the militants and the "believers" who follow them- as in the "specialized" literature promoted by the media (there are also very bad quality books that the media fortunately ignore).

The appropriateness of these observations can be

substantiated by examining a recent publication consecrated to Islam in Bangladesh (Bull., Leiden 1992). The author U.A.B. Razia Akter Banu claims with much confidence that she offers to the public "the first socio-political study on Islam in Bangladesh", because she uses "the most acute methodologic arms" like quantitative sociology. She ignores the fact that this method has been used in France in the 50s under the impetus of Gabriel Le Bras for appraising religious beliefs and practices and that this method has been abandoned long ago. Like in many English publications on Islam, she depends exclusively on the literature of Anglo-American political scientists and some old publications of the classic Islamologists like H.A.R. Gibb, without forgetting the inevitable Clifford Geertz who has written in 1968 an essay entitled *Islam observed: Religious development in Morocco and Indonesia*. It has become a ritual for many scholars to give an "anthropologic" mark to each writing on Islam by citing one or two very general sentences from this publication.

It is not the point here to discuss the relevance of a questionnaire submitted to three preestablished categories of population for finding the ratio of the "moderns", the "orthodox" or the "popular", while the complex notions open to criticism of modernity, orthodoxy, popular (never distinguished from *populism* particularly in the overpopulated and much stricken Bangladesh as of today) have not been made the subject of any historic, sociologic or philosophic study. On the other hand, here is a publication which will become a work of reference because of the "scientific" certainty that will be acquired notably from the numerous statistical tables.

I made two visits to Bangladesh, notably to Dhaka where I knew Bernard Hours. In visiting the populated areas of the capital and a certain number of villages, it was impossible for me to mention even once with my different interlocutors the presence of Islam in this society. On the other hand, I have found concordance among a number of my colleagues or simple citizens on the fact that the terms misery, poverty, distress,

marginality, underdevelopment are no longer appropriate to account for the social and economic status of a large part of the population. *A fortiori*, talking about religion, about the sacred, about orthodoxy, even less about theology, about the Muslim law, about religious training, seems to me to be scholastic exercise and misleading until the social, economic and political status are correctly redefined with relation to the deterioration that are being caused by the "natural" calamities at all levels of individual and collective existence (I think of the ecologic imbalance that propagates and increases these calamities), the demographic pressure, the separation between the elites enclosed in the oasis of "modernism" and a society difficult to manage, inadequacy, abdication of responsibilities and incapability of the National-State, the internationalist environment, the delusions of the fundamentalist movements which, since the 19th century, have started to conceal the social dynamics and the true economics by promises of eschatological salvation and immanent divine justice (it is also true, however, that the insupportable misery, conditions of abandon and despair, the dangerous drift of populism are mitigated here and there).

How can one talk about religion - Islam or others - in such conditions? What happens to its teachings and aims for man and his destiny? What new roles are assigned to it by the social agents who are fighting for survival or to avoid falling below the criteria commonly employed to define the minimum human condition.

One can see that not only the theoretical teachings that determine "orthodoxy" must be deliberately given up: as much those of the classic thinkers as those of the dogmatic enclosures established by the present militant Islam in order to check the psychologic errors, the social disasters, the harmful disputes. There is no question of assessing the current beliefs in relation to the profession of faith of the ancient theologians, including little known, or the new "guides"- leaders like those who have guided for Pakistan, then for Bangladesh, by either the liberation war with a secular inspiration or

the call to return to an "authentic" saving Islam. The examples furnished by Bangladesh, Egypt, Sudan or Algeria of to-day demonstrate how the dialectics religion-society or the society-religion function according to the types of society and historical conjunctures. Neither the affirmations of the theologians who make religion a supernatural and transhistoric force capable of controlling the destiny of the societies in the direction of their salvation nor the antithesis made by Marx and his sociologist successors who make the religion an ideological product of societies can reliably explain the continued and changing interactions between the great ideologic formations and the social agents that manipulate these.

The work of B. Hours has the merit of attracting attention again to all of these critical questions for a better understanding of the under-studied societies and beyond the local situations, for upholding the theoretical thoughts on the social, economic, cultural and religious facts in the contemporary societies. It is clear that the author remains very cautious about Islam. He feels the need of shelter behind the "authorities". This caution of the researcher is the indication of a general scientific deficiency in so far the knowledge about Islam and the societies where this religion intervenes massively, is concerned. This lesson, although negative, merits being administered to encourage prudence, but also to take the necessary steps that will lead to a functional comprehension of the universe of thought and reality ignored or exploited for too long a time.

I can not conclude all these remarks without adding some indications on the development about which I have not talked much. It was necessary to wait for a long time before responsible political opinions like that of Jacques Delors started to delineate the concept of a new development in Europe, even though it passed from an ideology of material well-being secured by a Welfare state (welfare state- anglo-saxon), to the citizens who submit to this Welfare state all the responsibility of administering the public welfare. it is this parliamentary democracy of a delegation of powers which is, in fact, a

relinquishment of the citizens of all significant participation, responsible for developmental management. It is this model that has been preached like the path of salvation for societies awaiting development. It is known what happened after independence: the militant "elites" grasped the model of National-States without considering the introduction of the rules of representative-democracy whose serious shortcomings are being discovered today. Thus was formed a sort of union of the National-States consolidated together against the people hankering for development. The strategies for development till 1980 and in the context of ideological rivalry between the Two Big, was fixed in the bilateral bargaining between the National-States suppliers and the States without the nation seeking for a development dominated by the pursuit of profit and a total indifference to the cultural, social and ecologic depredation.

So, this is why, the urgency of rethinking about urban space, about reconstituting the torn rural fabric, about integrating nature as a living space and common heritage for all men has commenced after 30 years of reckless development. This is seen in all developmental strategies including redistribution of work, rearrangement of the North-South relations based on effective participation of the masses in the decision making and in the development processes, opening of new places for scientific research, cultural confrontation to generate concepts capable of managing the claims so far disregarded or repressed, which all societies direct towards their States.

These new demands for dealing in a better way with the historical development of societies are established in Europe which wants to free itself from the ideas of 19th century by surpassing the outdated framework of the National-State and by accomplishing a qualitative advance towards a tangible universalization of knowledge. But if even in Europe, these orientations are new and confront vanquishing resistances from all who uphold the practices of intelligibility of the 19th century -not to mention the Reason of Enlightenment- still

regarded as sacred, what can one say about the societies waiting desperately for a development which takes into account the immense unexplored fields bequeathed by their respective historical traditions? Who appraises the extent of these unexplored fields, their increase in the societies subjected to the conjugated effects of plundering development and a fundamentalist ideology that diverts the imagination towards expectations which no longer even fulfill the coherent, effective psychological functions, of the traditional eschatological discourse, that is, prior to the desires of well-being, towards the ambitions for power and assets nourished by the economic model of the West?

Everywhere, the middle classes always demand to have more assets and power without being exposed to the necessity of adjusting their way of thought and their vision of the world, because they are the ones who now form the political majority where the democracy of the delegation of powers functions. The equivalent social forces are gaining ground in the developing societies. They live in the economic and cultural enclaves, maintain productive solidarity with their counterparts in the West and in case of violent threats, improvise strategies for escape, for survival on spot and for opportunist conversions..... In this way, the political independencies and the developmental trials of the years 1960-80 have essentially produced the social parasite groups - organic intellectuals, experts and technicians, businessmen, high- and mid-level bureaucrats, the managers of the "sacred".... who become obstacles to, rather than a driving force for the development which is akin to the European bourgeoisie the 18th and 19th centuries on.

I do no longer remember which humorist or which thinker said that men are the monkeys that try to come through themselves and not the fallen angels. It is a fact that a certain religious discourse continues to assure us that we have been created in the image of God, whereas the triumphant "Reason of Enlightenment" continues to uphold in the western culture egotistical certitudes that neither the denials of the intellectual critics nor the

refutations inflicted by the history of the last two centuries manage to weaken. I refer to all the speeches made during the affair of Satanic Verses or during the still current Gulf war.

How can one talk about Islam and development in Bangladesh or elsewhere? The question remains open. I do not think that Bernard Hours ever had any other objective than to broaden it by choosing the fruitful example of a society where the dignity of men and women in the worst adversity is itself a lesson for all men.

Mohammed Arkoun

Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton)

INTRODUCTION

Public opinion in the West seems to consider that Islam constitutes an obstacle to modernity, whose best indicator would be development, or at least that this religion is not favorably disposed towards economic and social initiative¹. Contrary to the protestant ethic which favored the expansion of capitalism as Max Weber thought, the religion of the Muslim partly accounts for the underdevelopment which many of them are beset with. When a religious system is reduced by those who talk of it to the wearing of a scarf or to the territorial outflanking of a Middle-East dictator, it is important to avoid the caricatural simplifications which take the place of a debate in our society and to keep one's distance in this context, the religion reduced to cultural behavior can obviously look like an obstacle to the development of productive practices, and this kind of reasoning inevitably creates comforting, ethnocentered clichés. The time has come when the company executives are taught about various religious systems not to increase their understanding of the world, but simply to improve the company's performance.

In fact, Islam is not only a set of cultural practices. It is not separated from the politico-social contradictions which is one of the management instruments in Bangladesh. The political production of Islam, through the problematic of power and authority, is a long development followed by returns to the past.

Islam can not be reduced either to the unified vision of fundamentalism, nor to the unifying vision the West has of it. Constituted by contradictory stakes in different political situations, Islam is not a totally stable base of identity, nor a totally univocal direction. It is the subject of permanent reconstructions in such and such society lead to produce its own Islam. The Bangladeshi society is

1. J.C. Barreau: *De l'islam en général et du monde moderne en particulier*. Paris 1991.

a particularly contradictory, even conflicting one. Islam, the religion of 87% of the 110 millions of Bangladeshi, is the subject of various attempts of interpretation and appropriation.

After Indonesia, Bangladesh is the second biggest Islamic country in terms of population.

To study Islam and the development in Bangladesh from the economic, political or social point of view as well as from the symbolic and imaginary one, one has to look firstly at the political dimension of Islam in the Indian sub-continent since the 18th century and to try to understand the double identity of the Bengali Muslims. It is thus essential to study the history, the anthropology and to analyze the ideology to try to master the multiple dimensions of the relationship between Islam and development in Bangladesh.

Islam did not wait for the West to determine a theory and practice for social development.

But, is it possible to speak about Islam in Bangladesh without being an Islamologist and without recycling the vulgate promoted through the media on Islam widely opined in the West? As M.Arkoun notes: "The non-secular, transcultural and universalizable character of Sharia as was fixed by the ulamas under the Caliphate State has favored the generalization of an indistinct, uniform image of Islam to different types of civilization, to social environments or ethnocultural groups"². The same author has identified four trends in the literature on Islam. Firstly, an idealistic and orthodox vision that over-estimates the religious factor and isolates it. This is prevalent in the minds of the christian authors. Then, the same but more sociological approach, where the social forces are analyzed according to orthodoxy and of dogma. Thirdly, in a less developed manner, the Marxist approach that analyzes the relations between society and religion. Finally, the classic islamology, in so far as it sometimes produces a static and approved vision of Islam, influences in a sometimes debatable way, the

2. Mohammed Arkoun: *Pour une critique de la raison islamique*. Paris 1984.p.226.

most recent statements.

It appears then that there is place for an anthropologic approach taking into consideration the history, the society and the social and economic relations, the daily run of things and the representations of the actors, the theoretical and ideological interpretations of such and such dimensions of Islam. This present knowledge, based on studies in the field, should allow us to avoid the truths of certain believers as well as the exegesis of certain islamologists and to broaden the fields of analysis and interpretation, without being limited by the prevailing reasoning.

Here, the approach to Islam has not been made from the important pioneer texts, even though it may be necessary to make reference to them. The notion of welfare is very much present in Islam which disposes of a number of interpretations concerning wealth and poverty, social justice and equal distribution of wealth. These abstract opinions conceived by the Prophet or the doctors of Islam have traditionally been implemented by the charitable associations, foundations who endeavor to provide mutual help and to ameliorate the conditions of the widows, the orphans, the sick, the poor, in order to give them the means for a decent life of good Muslims. Begging, conceived as a social menace, has been eradicated in the model city due to the redistribution of wealth and to the collective charitable initiatives. Habib Boularès emphasizes: The Islamic ideal is not restricted to the individual moral attitude only, it equally covers the economic activity by the exaltation of effort....In another verse of chapter 28, it is said, "Search in what God has given to you, the last abode, and don't forget your part from earth³".

The Zakat is not only a legal charity, it also expresses the development, the integrity and the purification achieved through donation and the redistribution of wealth that purifies the latter's accumulation and makes it legitimate.

3. Habib Boularès: *L'islam - La peur et l'espérance*. Paris 1983. p.91-93

That is why it can be seen in Bangladesh, as in many Arab countries, that Islamic associations initiate developmental projects which are concurrently political, social and economic. The Imams of the mosques receive different types of training so that they can be made the agents of local development, with socio-economic initiatives producing income.

We will show, through three case-studies on the Imam and the Mosque, that contradictory investments are made in these programs.

The Imam (from *Imama* - direction) leads prayer. This function is sometimes conceived, by perhaps improper extension as a competence or an intellectual superiority. It seems logical then that, in conformity with his job and profession he is potentially capable of spreading the message of education for development. That is why, several Islamic organizations in Bangladesh are engaged in training them with a view to making them conscious of the fact that socio-economic initiatives are in harmony with the message of Islam. The impact of such initiatives could be significant in a poor country like Bangladesh. Nevertheless, this hypothesis implies field studies in order to correctly evaluate the eventual impact of such training, to examine the position and status of the Imams, and through them, the way how the people viewed their religion in the daily life.

In order to analyze the relations between Islam and development in Bangladesh my research was oriented on the Islamic organizations and training of the Imams.

Finally, to compare the relations between Islam and the development, not failing to specify the nature of the development, I will concentrate on the indigenous concepts on development before looking at the Islamic economic theories which are constructed as a model for alternative development.

Bangladesh is one of the most assisted and most dependant countries of the world. The intervention of the foreign bodies which are state controlled or non-governmental developmental agents is common here and can be intensively observed. Is the development, as it is offered or as it is exported,

compatible with all the values or does it simply convey the logic of an empire of the Western world supported by the fragile certitudes of its citizens? Does this development really aim at those whom it pretends to save by letting them speak?

In spite of the participation of 2000 soldiers of the Bangladesh Army, whose government fell soon after, the Gulf war has demonstrated well that the solidarity with Saudi Arabia formed from both economic and religious assistance, was not sufficient in Bangladesh to prevent a global Muslim solidarity against the foreign intervention effected outside all internal consensus. The citizens of Bangladesh, who are badly treated as workers in the Gulf countries; who make pilgrimage to Mecca; where Islam is the state religion since 1988; who liberated themselves from the tutelage of the Pakistani Muslims; the Bangladeshis, subjugated to pressures from the Arabs, show a remarkable capacity to manage with enormous difficulty, their devotion, at times contradictory in Bangladesh, to the Bengali culture and to Islam.

Bangladesh is a poor country, it is a developing country and it is a Muslim country. How can these three attributes of identity, as seen more or less in the eyes of a foreign observer, be linked together? How are they experienced and conceived by the various elements of Islam- rural and urban Muslims, Imams and fundamental social and political representatives? This study aims at bringing elements of a response to these queries.

To-day Islam displays a major macro-political and macro-ideological dimension. The local micro-societies in the Muslim countries are the areas of changes which are as discreet as profound. In the case of Bangladesh, the Imam appears like a privileged mediator between these micro-societies, the national State and the global Islam represented by the community of believers (umma). I will thus, in the first place, present the historic, cultural and political dimensions of Islam in Bengal before presenting Islam as observed in everyday life and the roles of the Imam and the mosque.

Thereafter, I will study the relations between Islam and development in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER I

Islam in the history and politics of Bangladesh

1. Islam and politics in Bengal

Bengal, situated in the south of India was particularly affected by the English colonization. The East India Company was very active in this region for its extensive cultivation of jute, cotton and indigo. The "Zamindar" system - big land owners collecting taxes - often Hindus in a dominant Muslim population, was particularly developed in Bengal. The British influence was decisive in the development of Calcutta, the cultural capital of the Bengalis. The anti-colonial struggle, as well as the tension between Hindus and Muslims, (the latter being encouraged by the British) were intense in Bengal.

Dhaka is the capital of East Bengal. During the independence of India, the Muslims were granted the State of Pakistan, divided into two parts. Having realized that they have been subjected to economic, cultural and linguistic oppression, the Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan revolted against the domination of West Pakistan in 1971. This secession led to the creation of an independent state for the Bengalis of Pakistan; Bangladesh, in 1971.

The influence of Islam is recent⁴ in Bengal. This dates back to the 15th and 16th centuries when, after long years of Islamic influence of the merchants and the Sufis⁵, Bengal came under the control of Muslim governments. The conquerors stressed on the justice

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4. The greater Bengal, before the creation of Pakistan, comprised of West Bengal (Calcutta) and East Bengal (Dhaka) which became Bangladesh in 1971 after cessation from Pakistan constituted in 1947.
 5. Sufism constitutes the principal mystique tradition in Islam. It is based on the mystique experiences of saints who become the object of popular cults (pirs). For further reading, consult Samuel Landell Mills: An anthropological account of Islamic holy men in Bangladesh. Ph.D. London School of Economics 1992.

and tolerance in Islam. From this, the idea that Islam is the religion for the oppressed, emerged very quickly particularly amongst the lower caste Hindus. The Bengalis progressed rapidly under Muslim authority. This process of development of Bengal, whether under the independent Muslim Sultans or under the governors designated by the imperial authority at Delhi, continued for five centuries and a half in all spheres of life of the common people. The Muslim governments and the Bengali Muslims have made notable contributions in the domains of arts, of political institutions, of literature and of culture. An active economic and intellectual life regardless of caste or of origin was witnessed in an atmosphere of tolerant outlook.

The preponderant position that Islam secured in Bengal can be understood from the census report of 1872. The motives of prior massive conversion is a subject of debate among the historians. The hypothesis of a mass scale forced conversion does not seem to be tenable. Likewise, the benefits expected by the converts from the Muslim princes could not explain the extent of the phenomenon.

The influence of the warrior saints fighting side by side with the persecuted community and the liberating role of the beliefs of the Sufis contributed positively to adhesion to Islam by the people who, after oppression of the caste system, discovered the democratic fraternity in Islam.

As Abdul Momin Chowdhury writes, "...for many, Islam emerged as a deliverance from the tyranny of Hinduism and the example of respect maintained by the Arabs seems to have attracted many Buddhists to Islam⁶. For his part, D. Abecassis adds, "...the original desire was often to stop belonging to one group (Hindu or Buddhist) for another group (Islam) in order to obtain a benefit without an identity crisis. The new group could be defined by limited rules like those pertaining to

6. Abdul Momin Chowdhury: Conversion to Islam in Bengal: an exploration in: *Islam in Bangladesh*. Rafiudin Ahmed, Editor. Dhaka 1983. p.21.

intermarriage and commensality with new rites simply added to the ancient ones without replacing them...This is a good indication of the initial conversion of the Bengali masses, which took place not in a sense of "spiritual illumination" but in a sense of social mobility from one community to the other, usual for the sub-continent⁷."

This theory of taking over from the Buddhists confronted with rigid Hinduism and of the attraction of an egalitarian religion, can also be applied to Indonesia. It appears then, that the liberal and flexible character of Islam is the determining factor for its progress in Asia and particularly in Bengal. Likewise, it seems to be established that the Sufis were the cardinal agents of the new faith. At the end of the 13th century Sufi Sayid Ashraf Jahangir Simnani remarks: "In Bengal, not only in the big townships but in the small towns and villages as well, no place will be found where the Dervishes are not installed" (cited by Abdul Momin Chowdhury - book cited, p.64.)

Rural revival and Urban modernism in the 18th and 19th centuries

In spite of its force of attraction of being an egalitarian religion, Islam has not abolished the classes in the society in Bengal. Thus, in the 18th century, the Muslim society had a superior class called *Ashraf*, composed of the descendants of the foreign Muslims (Arabs, Persians, Afghans) and the converts from the upper class Hindus. The inferior class, called *Atraf*, was composed of the common muslims. Many of the latter, being converts from low caste Hindus who wanted a social rise, claim to be the ancestors of the Ashrafs wherefrom high sounding names and titles are still being used by the farmers of Bengal.

The art and culture of the *Ashrafs* are communicated in persian whereas the life of the inferior classes is influenced by the Hindu culture and they speak bengali.

7. Abecassia D.: *Identity, islam and human development in rural Bangladesh*. Dhaka 1990.

According to Rafiuddin Ahmed⁸: "Thus, an amalgam of the Buddhist, the Hindu and the local syncretic customs combined with the Islam of the Sufis and the Shiite customs altered the cultural realm and the vision of religion of the Bengali Muslims and gave birth to what can be called the "Bengali muslim sub-culture". This phenomenon of superimposition of religious customs, quite frequent in Asia, presents a particular complex aspect in Bengal. This region had great independence in the 18th century. The nabab of Bengal had to make a formal allegiance to the Mogul empire and enjoyed a vast autonomy until the English entered into the scene. The battle of Plassey in 1757 was the beginning of the colonial domination and the disintegration of the Muslim state of Bengal.

This fateful date is always considered by many Muslims as a big tragedy which is referred to in sermons and religious meetings. This is done to recall the existence of a Muslim state in Bengal that appears as the golden age for the nationalists as well as for the fundamentalists. After 1757, the muslims were isolated from affairs for more than a century.

The second half of the 18th century is a period of anarchy in Bengal. The Nabab lost his authority after the battle of Plassey. The English assumed administrative responsibility only in 1772. The mercantile exploitation of Bengal was brutal. The defeated army resorted to gangsterism. In this background of anarchy and chaos, the *Fakir* and *Sanyasi* movement began. These mystics, exercising the Hindu yoga and the Sufism formed a heterodox sect that lived on charity. The *Fakirs* and the *Sanyasis* revolted during the political turmoil following the battle of Plassey, and with the help of the deserters from the army, attacked the big land owners and extracted money from the population. They had several successes over the troops of the East India Company and continued their rein of terror until 1792.

"In the 19th century, the Bengali Islam underwent a double crisis linked to two factors: the European

8. Rafiuddin Ahmed: book.cited p.V

colonialism and the Islamic revival. The revival appears as a reaction to the Western domination. The social, economic and political decadence that marked the last phase of the Mogul empire lead the muslims like Shah Waliullah to rethink that the past glory of the muslims must be restored through a return to the purity of Islam⁹". The presence of the English caused a jolt for Islamic revival. This revival is clearly political and religious. For the first time, but not for the last, the presence of the West caused a reaction of cultural and religious revaluation that has a political dimension. Moreover, a conflict between the classes also becomes apparent from these movements. The colonial alienation caused the emergence of different reformist movements. Confronted with the English colonizers and the marginalization of the social influence of the Muslims, Islam suffered a deep crisis. During the 1820s, the *Faraidi* movement, led by Shariat Ullah and the *Tariqah i Muhammadiyah* movement, led by Titu Mir, developed. At the same time, the revival movement, claiming a return to the genuine origin of Islam was also started. All these aimed to oppose the British in the sub-continent.

According to Abdur Rahim¹⁰, Shariat Ullah studied Islam for ten years from the eminent professors of Mecca. His study was made in the wake of Wahhabism. This puritan movement was developed in Arabia by Abdul Wahhab (1703-92). His son Dudhu Miyan confronted the Hindu *zamindars* (big landlords) who used to tyrannize the peasants. The *Faraidi* movement denounced the *Pirs* (cult of the saints) and criticized the master-disciple relationship as contrary to Islam¹¹.

The *Faraidi* movement turned into an agrarian

9. Rafiuddin Ahmed : book cited p.V

10. M.Abdur Rahim: *The muslim society and politics in Bengal*. Dacca 1978.

11. According to R.A.Banu in her publication *Islam in Bangladesh*. Leiden 1992: " The term Faraidi derived from the Arabic faraid, the plural of farida, signifies obligations commanded in Islam. Thus, the Faraidi leaders underlined five foundations of Islam: Kalima (the doctrine of the uniqueness of God), Salat (prayer), Roza (fasting), Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and Zakat (tax for the poor) (book cited p.36).

movement to protect the Muslim peasants against the exactions of the Hindu landlords and the indigo planters. Saiyid Ahmad Shahid, the founder of the *Tariqa i Muhammadia* movement, also advocated an Islamic reform, a return to the origin and as such, he encouraged a *Jihad* (holy war) to liberate the Muslims from the subjugation of the foreigners. His successor Titu Mir gave this movement a more asserted social dimension against the *zamindars* and the English occupation. The mutiny of 1857, known as the *Sepoy* mutiny, reunited the Hindus and the Muslims against the British power. The uprising of the native troops failed, and provoked the integration into the British crown and nomination of a Viceroy.

The insistence of the reformists on devotion to Islam and the extra-territorial solidarity among all the Muslims have opened the field of interest for the Bengalis. The current frequently turned into rural movements against the *Zamindars*, which only needed to be flared up by some minor local causes. This splitting up of a self contained rural communalism would lead to new political developments. "In brief, such an identity crisis of the rural Bengalis did not appear with the arrival of Islam in the 13th century, but in the 19th century, for the first time, a conflict ensued between a universal belief coming from elsewhere (Arabia) and the one that has been previously in the possession of the people....this tension between being a Bengali and being a Muslim continues even today in the villages and has given a particular attribute to the Islamic customs in Bangladesh¹².

The Muslims realized the inadequacy of their weapons and of the necessity of a different approach for their problems after being dislodged from most of the civil service jobs by the English. Thus, in the second half of the 19th century, a generation of modern and educated Muslims, descending from a group of elites cut off from the peasantry and open to the external world, emerged. In Bengal, the Islam of the peasants is a

12. Abecassis: book cited p.20

syncretic Islam (*folk Islam*) which is quite different from the Islam of the aristocrats. The Muslim peasants take part in the Hindu rituals and they do not follow an austere and orthodox Islam. This muslim elite speaks urdu¹³ and through some of its members makes interpretation of Islam in the light of western knowledge. Syed Amir Ali received a western education. In his book *The spirit of Islam* (1891), he maintains that science, rationalism and a liberal approach to the society are not contrary to Islam.

From his viewpoint, Abdul Latif also advances a modern secular ideology based on nationalism and education. These thinkers maintain the need for education to avoid the isolation of the Muslims from the progress of knowledge and exclusion from the collective responsibilities. However, these aristocrats refer to the Mogul culture and Rafiuddin Ahmed mentions: "For the ordinary Muslims the urdu based culture was as strange as the language itself".(book cited p.VIII). Thus, although far from the popular aspirations, these reformers let the Muslims escape from the unique reference of the traditional Muslim educative system based on the Quoranic schools (*madrasah* and *maktab*). They urge for education in English and remain faithful to the English in order to prevent the whole Muslim community from becoming suspect. Be it at Calcutta Madrasah or at the Mohamedan Literary Society of Calcutta, Abdul Latif tries to bring together the muslim intelligentsia to the current progress. Muhammad Abdur Rahim remarks about Abdul Latif: " He saved the Muslims from ruin and guided them towards genuine progress¹⁴".

The more political Ameer Ali on his part, founded the *National Muhammadan Association* in 1877. The objective of this association was to defend the interests of the Muslims in the framework of the institutions, while maintaining loyalty to the British crown. As such, this association addressed reports to the Hunter commission established by the English.

13. Urdu: Language of Pakistan

14. Muhammad Abdur Rahim: book cited p.67

The most advanced modernist of the 19th century was certainly Delwar Hosain (1840-1913). In addition to his career as a high ranking civil servant, this Bengali muslim of a middle class origin published in 1889 *Essays on Mohammedan Social Reform* in English. Rationalist and liberal, he does not implicate Islam but blames the history and the institutions for the misfortunes of the Muslims of Bengal. He suggested a change of the institutions and of the practices in certain domains. It seems that he was influenced by the 9th century arabian mutazilite philosophy.

Delwar Hossain advocated the setting of the secular law segregated from the religion. He writes: "In reality... there is no real association between the religion and the social, civil and political laws under which a community lives. The religious truths surpass mens' powers of comprehension while the laws are the phenomena of relations unfolded over experience¹⁵".

Profoundly antagonistic to the union of religion and state, Delwar Hosain emerged as a secularist and modernist ideologist, quite conscious of the necessity to close the gap existing among the Muslims due to the differences between the aristocratic elites and the peasant masses. By encouraging the advancement of Bengali language against Urdu and the learning of English, Delwar Hossain expresses an idea ahead of his time. The ideas that he advances allow to focus better on the opposition between muslim traditionalism and modernists, the effects of which continue to be felt even today.

The underlying social problem of Bengal can be recognized from the rural based traditionalist and revivalist movements of the 18th century to the enlightened urban modernists of the end of the 19th century: the existence of a less educated Bengali-speaking rural mass whose spokesman were the Urdu-speaking and western style educated members of an aristocratic elite. All these components result in the politicisation of the Muslims that become the cardinal

15. Rafiuddin Ahmed. 1983. book cited p.123.

stake, since their political representation is in question at the scale of the Indian sub-continent before the anti-colonial struggle that will follow. Contrary to the Islamic revival of a rural, non-aristocratic origin that appears as the reaction of the *Ulemas* (the religious scholars) to the changes, a generation of modernist and educated muslims, stemmed from an elite and cut off from the peasantry, calls for the access of the Muslims to the administration and to certificates and finally to political representation.

From muslim nationalism to the anti-colonial struggle

The extent of the classes present during the rural based revivalism makes place with the modernists in a consensual and communitary vision of Islam produced by the elites. The idea of an Islamic solidarity with rights becomes gradually evident confirming that "... in most of the Muslim countries Islam is always the ultimate criteria for identity and loyalty to the group¹⁶". The "Muslim community" falsely united for rehabilitation, takes a political dimension at the beginning of the 20th century and tends to seclude itself within India. Ameer Ali thought that the Indian muslims comprised a nation and in 1883, he demanded the introduction of a separate electorate and representation of the minority communities. By the end of the 19th century, a Bengali literature capable of attracting a vast audience, developed.

The decision for partition of Bengal in 1905 was taken by the Viceroy. To simplify the administration of a population of 79 million people, Lord Curzon divided this part of India into Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. This partition was considered by the Muslims as a significant recognition and a decisive step in the progress of the muslim nationalism in Bengal. For a better self assertion to the need of communalist separatism, political solidarity was achieved with difficulty. Nawab Salimullah, who devoted himself to the acceptance of the Muslims of Bengal, seemed to have played the principal role in this

16. B.Lewis: *Le langage politique de l'islam*. Paris 1988 p.16

policy of partition. At that time he founded the *Provincial Muhammadan Union* and in 1906 at Dhaka, he became the chief of the organization- *All India Muslim League* which aimed at spreading the dynamic regional politics to the whole of India. The satisfaction of the Muslims was short lived because, following commotion and pressures from the Hindu tradesmen, the partition was repealed in 1911. This measure provoked a big disappointment among the Muslims who had notably progressed in political awareness by this time. From 1906 to 1911, the number of Muslim students increased by 35% signifying a commitment of the Muslim community of Bengal to the modernization process.

Although the Hindu-Muslim relation was seriously upset by this partition and its annulation, the latter however, aroused a political awareness which was evident from the doubt cast on the faithfulness towards the British, because as B.Lewis puts forward "...Islam provides the system of the most effective symbols for a political mobilization, either for inspiring the people to defend an authority thought to be holding the necessary legitimacy or for fighting the authority seen to be lacking this legitimacy¹⁷". For his part Muhammad Abdur Rahim points out: "The educated young middle class men experience the failure of the loyalist strategy of their aristocratic elders who were at the head of Muslim politics...They put forward a radical policy and declared their will to cooperate with the Congress in its fight for the *self- government*¹⁸".

An aristocratic leader, Muhsin ul Mulk writes : "By this decision, the government has shown its shocking indifference to the Muslims and the result is that certain educated Muslims have started saying that remaining distant from the Hindus is not in the interest of the Muslims. They suggested abandoning the Muslim League and joining the Indian National Congress¹⁹". Among these young generation, the names of the future leaders of the anti-colonial struggle, Fazlul Haq and Jinnah are

17. B.Lewis: book cited p.17.

18,19. M.A.Rahim: book cited p.220,p.221.

worth mentioning. During its session of 1913, the congress of the Muslim League advocated for the *self government* marking a point of no return in the political activity of the Muslims of the sub-continent.

For the Muslims of the 20th century Fazlul Haq is the first political figure to attract great prestige based on his power to voice the interest of the peasants, his quality as an advocate for the Muslims and his anti-colonial profile. He was a fiery, popular orator, capable of talking to the peasant mass. The ardor of his comments arouse support and moves those, numerous in Bengal, who are sensitive to the value of dignity and justice. He underlines: "The empires were born and were destroyed on the soil of India leaving no trace of them, and this will be the fate one day of the British Empire in India". Fazlul Haq became minister in 1924 and took his stand on the Krishak Proja Party (party for the peasants) which protected the rights of the peasants against the big landlords. This party, the majority of which is Muslim, starts advocating a legal agrarian revolution with the slogan: "Rice and Soup for every one".

The Muslim League that continued to be a party of the aristocrats, collapsed progressively till 1936. At this time, Jinnah tried to rejuvenate the party but Fazlul Haq refused to associate himself with a party of rich traders and landlords. The Krishak Proja Party and the Muslim League confronted each other in the election of 1937. The former was the party of the middle class attached to the peasants while the latter was a party of the rich landlords. After being named the Prime Minister of Bengal, Fazlul Haq rejoined the Muslim League and formed a coalition government. At the beginning of the Second World War, Fazlul Haq was contested by Jinnah, the chief of the Muslim League and he was debarred from the party, after trying in vain a policy of multiple alliances, and criticized by the Muslim League which had become the principal organization representing the Muslims. For this fact and because of the presence of the Hindus in his government, Fazlul Haq was going to lose his popularity among the Muslim intellectuals and his poor relation with the Governor of Bengal brought about

the unilateral resignation of his government.

Nevertheless, he exerted a determining effect at the Lahore congress in 1940 that formulated the demand for a separate state for the Muslims of India.

Towards the creation of Pakistan

In the 1930s, Jinnah tried several times to come closer to the Congress Party. Neither Gandhi nor Nehru reacted to the appeal of the Muslim League. The Muslims were then left to foresee diverse forms of autonomy that would allow to organize a cohabitation with the Hindus. The federal solutions are turned down and at the Lahore congress, Fazlul Haq had adopted unanimously a resolution claiming for separate Muslim States. He writes: "Allah has given us the opportunity to serve the people and we are not going to let slip away this power for an imaginary unidentified central authority". This resolution anticipates the creation of separate States for the Muslims in the North-West and in the East of India where the Muslims are the majority (Bengal and Punjab).

The name of Pakistan surfaced in 1943. From this time on, Jinnah imposed the idea for a single rather than several States. When the Hindus started demonstrating against the British during the hostilities, the *Muslim League* maintained its attitude of non participation in the war effort by not associating with the commotions organized by the Congress party. The discussion between Gandhi and Jinnah in 1944 did not result in any agreement. In the general elections of 1945-46 the issue at stake is clearly the creation of Pakistan. Jinnah specified: "The immediate stake before us in the next elections is Pakistan and the fact is that the Muslim League is the only representative and authorized organization of the Indian Muslims". The coalition won 30 muslim seats. In the provincial elections, the party of Fazlul Haq came out victorious against the Muslim League in Bengal winning 113 muslim seats.

Communal riots erupted in Calcutta during the general strike of the Muslims and turned into civil

war²⁰. The frustration among the Muslims increased when the constitution by the British of an interim government without the participation of the Muslims before the anticipated independence. The idea of partition slowly became apparent both to the English as well as to the Hindus in the face of an extremely tense situation, and this invoked unitarian reactions for an independent and sovereign Bengal, to which the Muslim League resisted till the creation of Pakistan in 1947 sealing off the individual destiny of the Hindus and the Muslims of the subcontinent.

This rapid summary of the political history of the Muslims of Bengal put forward many problematic questions advanced by Rafiuddin Ahmed in his book *The Bengal muslims, 1871-1906. A quest for identity*²¹. The author centered his analysis on the manipulation of the political symbols that allows to temporarily surpass the inherent contradictions between the popular Bengali culture and the culture of the aristocratic elites in order to fully and precisely state the Bengali nationalism and muslim nationalism. This allowed the Muslims of Bengal to be united and represented by the Muslim League till the creation of Pakistan, the State for the muslims. The opposition between the two leaders, Fazlul Haq and Jinnah, expresses well this stake of unification of the Bengalis and/or of the muslims. Rafiuddin Ahmed underscored: "The objectivation of the identity as a political symbol was the work of the elites in conjunction with the *Mullahs* and became apparent much later with the gradual expansion of the institutional politics²²".

At the beginning of the 20th century, the social dichotomy between the aristocrats (*ashrafs*) and the common people (*atraf*s) is sublimated in the conflicts of all the Muslims, entirely like the dichotomy between the

20. The great Calcutta killing and its impact on Bengal politics. Harun-or-Rashid in Rafiuddin Ahmed: *Bangladesh, Society Religion and Politics*. Dhaka, 1985, p.122-133.

21. Rafiuddin Ahmed: *The Bengal muslims 1871-1906. A quest for identity*. Delhi 1988.

22. Rafiuddin Ahmed, pub.cited.1988,p.XIX.

popular Islam and the Islam of the aristocrats. The *mullahs* were the key-men of this maneuvering steered by those mentioned above. These *mullahs* are the rural notables, devout, supposed to be skilled in the interpretation of Islam for the use of the village community. As such, they participate in the rituals and ceremonies and as local representatives of Islam exert a notable moral influence, particularly during religious gatherings (*bahas*). Abandoning the policy of class struggle present in the revivalist movements of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Muslim leaders came to realize a symbolic and political unification necessary for negotiating with the English as well as with the Hindus to force upon them the recognition of a place for the Muslims of the sub-continent, then a party for these Muslims which will be Pakistan. The path covered is immense because, in the 19th century it happened that the *ashrafs* and the *atraf*s prayed in different mosques as if they were two castes of two qualities of Muslims.

The idea of an Islamic solidarity thus becomes essential contrary to the historic fact that Islam is a foreign religion of Arab origin and centered around the Arab world. The "ashrafization" of the names, that allows the peasants to have the names of princely dynasties, reveals the volition to attain a superior social status and an Islamic identity whose value becomes universal instead of remaining native. This phenomenon is opposed to the Bengali culture and its specificities which are left aside. This collective ascent nevertheless, remains largely fictive in the extent where education continues to be a privilege of the elite and where the established political solidarity does not obliterate the communalist separations. It is the Islamic ideology of equality of the believers and of the community of the believers (*umma*) that makes possible this sublimation which prefers Urdu to Bengali, global Islam compared to local culture.

After the census of 1872 the Muslims become the majority in Bengal. But the Bengali Muslims do not get the power which still remains with the Hindus. But they are going to behave in such a way as if there was no

social discrimination among them, as if their interests were common. A certain social change sets in by the end of the 19th century. The *jollahs* (weavers) no longer have to bind themselves to this activity. This is why the Muslims show an immense flexibility, in comparison to the rigidity of the caste system (Hindu), which is necessary for their political unification. The multiple segregation of the classes and of the status in the Bengali muslim society is but a temporarily hidden infrastructural reality. The reform movements and the discussions that they initiated, let the villagers surmount the narrow settings of their everyday lives to feel that they are a member of a broader group.

"A determining character of the Islamisation campaign of the 19th century in Bengal was the attempt to virtually reject, in the life of a Muslim, everything that is Bengali, as this was thought to be incompatible with the ideas and principles of Islam... The local names, the attire and the language gradually became repugnant as a symbol of non-islamic culture to the Neophytes²³". Everybody reclaims a mogul ancestry and attaches a handle to his name to demonstrate his noble origin. This identity crisis or this "ashrafisation" constitutes an important factor of split in the society till this date. Although the position of the muslim community of Bengal facing the British has no more importance, the Hindus however, have effective credentials in the contemporary political life. Likewise, the significance granted to the Bengali culture and to the Bengali language arouses a profound and durable split that gives a structure to the political life. With the creation of Pakistan, the Bengali Muslims acquire the status of citizen of a muslim state which must very rapidly confront the reality of the Bengali culture masked for more than a century and the source of a split which will materialize through the creation of Bangladesh.

23. Rafiuddin Ahmed.1988.p.106-109.

2. Islam, national identity and fundamentalism in Bangladesh

"The Bengali politicians like Fazlul Haq, Bhashani, Suhrawardy have given more importance to the regional interests of the Bengali muslims than to a muslim revivalism", points out Zillur Rahman Khan. From the day after the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the *language movement* was launched, the movement is aimed at promoting Bengali, along with Urdu, as one of the languages of Pakistan. The intention of the government of Pakistan was to make Urdu the official language and the language of bond between the provinces.

Just before his visit to East Pakistan, Jinnah received from a number of signatories a petition supporting Urdu and identifying the supporters of Bengali as the pro-Indian enemies.

The intellectuals and the students of the *Tamaddun Majlish* who were the supporters for two state languages: Urdu and Bengali, set the debate into motion. They won the promise on this from the Provincial Chief Minister which the government did not support. This resulted in a students' upheaval in 1952 which was quelled in a blood bath. The victims became the symbols of Bengali nationalism that fought moreover against the domination described as colonial of the central government.

"All the great local figures, religious or political, incited the Bengali Muslims to become aware of their exploitation by the Hindus, the English, and the entrepreneurs of West Pakistan", notes Zillur Rahman Khan²⁴. Between 1947 and 1970, a Bengali nationalism develops because of the economic and political domination of West Pakistan over East Pakistan. Besides the fact that a State divided into two parts is difficult to administer, the West Pakistanis and the muslim refugees from Bihar seem to have replaced the Hindus to exploit the Bengalis, politically and economically. This Bengali nationalism is founded on the Bengali culture and language which has long been suppressed and demeaned.

24. Zillur Rahman Khan: "Islam and Bengali nationalism" in Rafiuddin Ahmed, 1985, p.20.

During this long period they were obliged to fight for muslim nationalism. This latter yielded a bitter experience for the Bengalis who felt frustrated by the minor and peripheral position that they had to occupy in the greater Pakistan.

Being frustrated with this, Suhrawrdy, and later Mujibur Rahman formed the *Awami League*. The Awami League won the election in 1971 which started a liberation war which was dramatic for all these actors and problematic for all the Muslims. The secession of East Bengal from Pakistan that resulted in the formation of Bangladesh is the outcome of a fratricidal encounter between the Muslims. This brutally shows to which extent the interests of the Bengalis, united as Muslims, were ignored.

Since 1972, the constitution of Bangladesh provides: "The unity and the solidarity of the Bengali nation which holds its identity through its language and its culture, has acquired its sovereignty and the independent Bangladesh through a united and determined combat during the Independence war, must be the foundation of the Bengali nationalism²⁵". Sheikh Mujib, the first President establishes a secular regime²⁶, which is formally socialist and profoundly nationalist. The Hindu (8%) and the Christian (2%) minorities receive relatively tolerant treatment from the Muslim majority. The communal type conflicts are rarer than that in India. This is noticed since the Hindus have lost their economic power as landlords or agencies of the latter (*Zamindar*). The article 12 of the Constitution rules out communalism, the status of a favored religion, abuse of religion in politics and religious discriminations.

India has played a determining role to help the Bangladeshis during the liberation war and is a neighbor that has to be treated carefully. From this fact, the pro-Indian image of the *Awami League* and the refusal of

25. Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh Art.9. Bangladesh government press. Dacca 1972.

26. The concept of secularism is used from the English. It partially constitutes the French notion of "laïcité" without making any confusion with this word.

a part of the population to continue their support of the regime of Sheikh Mujib, seen as a regime that was not sufficiently based on Islam and one confronted with a preoccupying economic and political situation.

After the assassination of Sheikh Mujib in 1975, Ziaur Rahman opens the way to a gradual return to Islam under pressure from the Arab countries. The amendment to the Constitution in 1977 makes an unequivocal reference to the Muslim faith. During this epoch Saudi Arabia secures an important political role as an aid donor to Bangladesh.

According to Zillur Rahman Khan: " In spite of his concessions to the Islamists, Zia shows a profound interest for modernizing the society in Bangladesh²⁷". A particular effort was made to modernize the *madrrasah*²⁸ education. It can be asserted that Zia became successful in making a certain balance between aspirations of the secular nationalists and the various Islamists frustrated with Sheikh Mujib. His assassination in 1981 brings to power the military regime of Ershad in 1982. The same author adds: Each time a liberal Western approach has been tried, a concerted opposition from the conservative elites has prevented the modernists to maintain a balanced policy between secular politics and Islamic society²⁹".

The permanent dialectics in Bangladesh between the lyrical nationalist aspirations expressed by very popular songs and poems, and the social and ideological reality of an Islamic conservatism encompassing rural devout and militants of urban fundamentalist groups, indicates the existence of a politico-religious problem, particular to Bengal, then to Bangladesh. This problem has arisen from different political contexts and lasts throughout the history of the sub-continent. In Bengal, the Bengali populist and nationalist tradition is in constant clash with the entity of the Muslim community that does not constitute a specific or univocal political body but presents itself as a permanent moral standard with

27. Rafiuddin Ahmed 1985, book cited p.25.

28. Quoranic School, according to vocables used in Bangladesh.

29. Rafiuddin Ahmed 1985, book cited p.26.

which it has to be reckoned, without being easy to appropriate. The resulting instability of the political references is the outcome of this double reference, regional in one part, and universal in the other. That is why the regime of Sheikh Mujib appears a veritable failure in the setting up of a modern, secular, national policy. Besides, the aristocratic idea that the Bengali Muslims are the peripheral muslims and are blemished by impurities remains deeply rooted in the society "... as soon as the idea of nation becomes a matter of domestic consumption in the muslim world, it is no longer consumed" underscores Bertrand Badie³⁰.

The military regime of General Ershad from 1982 to 1990 made up a record of longevity which can be explained by a long period of martial law and the involvement of the Jatyo Party that established itself deeply in the society by distributing small and big benefits. This party, pragmatic and at the same time authoritarian, made the army a determining force in the politics of the country. To achieve a minimum consensus and compelled by endless hedging, Ershad was obliged to defend himself against the nationalists of the Awami League, against the BNP and the widow of Zia and against the islamists of the *Jamat i Islami*, the latter fighting for the establishment of an Islamic State. The regime of President Ershad became dependant on international aid and the influence of Saudi Arabia that supports the regime by financing the Islamists. Bernard Lewis writes: "Islam is the State religion in all sovereign states where it has clear majority, without a single exception³¹." Pressed by the Islamic parties, the government in 1988, declared Islam as the State religion, taking an important step beyond the reference to the Muslim faith made by Zia. As M. Arkoun notes in relation to the Maghreb: "The State and its privileged agents, the rising bourgeoisie, be it of the State or traditional, the more and more

30. Bertrand Badie : Les deux cité, dans islam le grand malentendu-*Autrement* no 95 dec.87,p.117.

31. B.Lewis: book cited p.15

32. M. Arkoun: Pour une critique de la raison islamique. Paris 1984, p.353.

numerous middle classes, all find some interest to resort to Islam³²". This decision of Ershad displeased both the nationalists upholding the memories of the liberation war as well as the Islamists. This belated attempt to strengthen the regime on a hypothetical Islamic consensual interpretation could not prevent the fall of Ershad in 1990 following the thrust of a student movement. The students have always been politically vocal to express their demands. The fall of the Ershad regime and his involvement against Iraq during the Gulf war must be linked together. To neutralize his opposition and to manage a precarious but developing economic situation, Ershad sent 2000 soldiers for the Saudi Arabian and the Western forces. This has profoundly divided the opinion of the Bangladeshis who, since the liberation war, are exceedingly touchy about any strife between the Muslims. The withdrawal of the support from the army during a brief and less acute political crisis than those that the regime survived since 1982, hastened his fall.

Frequent demonstrations and fights that erupted between the students of different parties caused regular closure of the universities. These confrontations resulted in deaths and taking control of the campus by the police on many occasions. The student groups of the political parties constituted not only the resonance chamber spokesman but also the fuse that sparks off the social movements in Bangladesh. Since the disappearance of the great political leaders, the peasant masses do not participate directly in the political debates. However, the rural population plays a determining role in the elections and in the inner organization of the parties. The views are discussed in the cities, at the universities, in numerous newspapers, by a more or less educated members of an urban middle class who commit themselves to the various parties. They take part in protest demonstrations and this class manifests a strong political awareness. They live from their work, when they have one, and this class does not belong to the rural exploitation system. The social rifts particular to the Bangladeshi society provoke confrontations and

fiery polemics. Almost two years after her ascent to power, the widow of General Zia does not appear to be in a position to fulfill the democratic aspirations she arose. After a phase of expulsion of the collaborators of Ershad, Begum Zia won the poll of 27 February 1991 held in good conditions. The BNP won 140 seats while the *Awami League* of Sheikh Hasina, the latter being the daughter of the "Father of the Nation" (Sheikh Mujib), obtained only 84 seats. Begum Zia had heavily attacked the *Awami League* for its attitude towards Islam and its ties with India.

The fundamentalist party *Jamat i Islami* that is fighting for an Islamic State, and whose previous representation in the assembly was symbolic, collects 18 seats and thus makes its remarkable entry there. This party had refused to make an electoral pact with the BNP against their common adversary, the *Awami League*. However, it came to an understanding with the government of BNP after the election. The agreement is ambiguous, which in practice excludes the direct criticism of Begum Zia but allows multiple reservations about her "lack of program".

This agreement has let the nomination of *Jamat i Islami* members to the key posts. The reason of this political agreement is questionable because this alliance was not totally necessary to form the government. Begum Zia seems to have wanted to consolidate her legitimacy with the Islamic side. But she cannot ignore that the *Jamat i Islami* is a revolutionary party that aims to take power and does not fail to show its scorn and its distance vis-a-vis the political and parliamentary strategies. This party strongly and vehemently claims that it is not hostage of the BNP. Its Secretary General told me in April '92 : Our objective is to establish an Islamic State in this country which has lost all the values and principles of Islam because of corruption. The agreement with the BNP is but a pact of non-aggression. To us, the BNP does not have program or ideal. But we need time to show that we are democratic and that the real enemies of Bangladesh are the accomplices of the Indians and the *Awami League*. We can not fight all the

parties at a time.

Whatever its reasons, this alliance, though limited, will have an important bearing on the current political life as it allows the consolidation of an ancient confrontation between the secular Bengali nationalists and the various Islamic groups for whom any reference to Islam, exclusive or not, is politically determining.

The Golam Azam affair flared up in December 1991 in the post-electoral situation which caused no rapid reforms or expected improvements. The nomination of Professor Golam Azam, who was a renowned collaborator during the liberation war, as the *Ameer* (chief) of *Jamat i Islami* put fire to fuel and set off a polemic distinctive of the political life in Bangladesh. Golam Azam returned to Bangladesh in 1978. Although he was born in Bangladesh he has been refused the citizenship of the country by all the governments. He is thus considered a foreigner in Bangladesh. His presence has always been ignored so long and it was discreet. By publicly naming him the chief of the party the *Jamat i Islami* wanted to draw profit from his entry in the official political scene and to make a comeback in the political arena due to a more favorable balance of power than in past years. The political phraseology of all the regimes including that of Ershad, who did not participate in the liberation war, has always been to honor the memory of the heroes of liberation war and the *Freedom Fighters* in general. By conviction or by opportunism, the birth of Bangladesh wrested from Pakistan has always been seen as a positive event fostering the myth of the origin of nationality. To the contrary, the personality, the writings and the acts of Golam Azam constitute, in the name of Islam, an extreme denial of the legitimacy of the liberation struggle.

The Bangladesh Constitution does not permit the foreigners to head political parties formed in Bangladesh. This question of law will serve as a pretext of an important protest movement against Golam Azam and against the collaborators of the Pakistanis during the war of liberation. The formation of the *Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee* (Committee for the realization of

spirit of liberation war and annihilation of the killers and collaborators of 1971) constitutes the response of the various social and political forces devoted to the spirit of the liberation and to the respect of the millions of war victims and the numerous martyrs revered for their sacrifice.

In this committee of sixteen members there are two Imams, four war widows, three university professors, journalists and writers. One of the widows, Jahanara Begum has published a book of memoirs that revives the wound of 1971 and recalls that there is neither forgetting nor forgiveness for the collaborators, the hands of many of whom are stained with the blood of the patriots.

This Nirmul (to annihilate) committee set the holding of a public trial of Golam Azam in March '92. Begum Zia tried in vain to disband this movement by intimidation and subjecting the organizers to police actions. Golam Azam was arrested on 24th March and imprisoned the day before the holding of the trial which was to be held on 26th March '92. The Government challenged the authenticity of holding a public trial to judge Golam Azam but it admitted that there existed a deep problem concerning him and wished to protect his security by putting him in prison. Those ambiguous deliberations caused embarrassment to Begum Zia from both sides to chose as much by her Islamic allies as by their nationalist adversaries. This political crisis showed the deep ambivalence in the pact concluded with the Jamat as well as the rather perverse strategy of this party that put its ally (BNP) into the most profound embarrassment.

The public trial was held on 26th March in the presence of a huge assembly representing various social groups and numerous associations. Golam Azam was condemned to death and was compared with a nazi criminal. The government was called upon to execute the judgment whereas the government took judicial action against the organizers of the committee. A largely followed movement of general strike (*hartal*) was held on 22nd June. The police intervention was brutal. A

"Committee for the annihilation of the collaborators of India" (stemming from the *Jamat i islami*) called for a general strike the day before to organize a counter-movement with demonstrations and with bombs, refuting the accusations.

This event, characteristic of the style of Bangladesh politics, indicates the embarrassment of a politically contradictory government. Besides, it shows the reactivation of an opposition that compose the politics in Bangladesh between collaboration and liberation.

In very close terms to what crossed in the French society after the liberation, a system of political accusations centered around the war of liberation and of the collaborator/liberator duo can be permanently seen in Bangladesh³³, the persistence of which in all political speeches is remarkable. One is led to ask from where this lasting antagonism draws its logic and its coherence after twenty years and four successive political regimes. A permanent Islamist interpretation continues to oppose the native Bengali culture considered inferior, impure or corrupted by elements that do not come from Islam, to the true, Arabian, non-native and superior Islam because it is pure and not corrupt. Moreover, Pakistan was created as the country for the Muslims of India. The birth of Bangladesh that has forsaken this "common house" indicates that these are the bad Muslims. The two representations become reciprocally forceful. For the majority of the liberal and pragmatic Muslims of Bangladesh this opposition is transcended by administering a double identity, the combination of which permits to assert that one can be a good Muslim and a responsible citizen of Bangladesh without any alternative choice.

Nevertheless, there exists the logic of the binary model as mentioned above trying to rationalize the passage of the muslim state to islamic state - an aspiration of the fundamentalists. This scheme of

33. M. Selim - "Le Bangladesh": L'Etat du Monde 1991-1992-1993. -1971-1991- Représentations politiques et légitimité au Bangladesh. Les cahiers no 15. Pratiques sociales et travail en milieu urbain. pp.71-82.

unification in its simplicity imparts a great force of attraction. At the opposite of this Islamic interpretation, the nationalist political model underscores the value of the Bengali culture and maintains a segregation between Islam, the divided religious belief, the global moral system and the secular political system distinct and separate from the religious domain. This nationalist and modernist idea is opposed to the viewpoint of the Islamic state. Likewise, all are opposed to the idea that Pakistan would be "more Islamic" than Bangladesh. The polemic bears thus on the Islamic authenticity and its criteria, or even on the purity of Islam. Does it refer to a "fundamental" character to be measured, or isn't it that Islam is but a faith, a moral, the source of values and the rules for a private life.

None of the succeeding governments of Bangladesh, with the exception of that of Sheikh Mujib, could permanently change the course of this polemic. Sheikh Mujib founded a secular state in a muslim populated country which was thrown over very quickly. The consequence is that all political arguments are used on to two levels, both for the citizens and for the politicians. The nation of Bangladesh is administered as a modern State with its conflicts and social tensions, its economic inequalities and its struggle for the secular power. But it is also administered like the part of a community where one can find Islamic states and the Muslim citizens. The administration of these two political levels constitutes a permanent challenge as much for the government as for the citizens. This might explain the political fragility of the country. The violence in the political debates, and a certain opposition to progress that constantly brings into question the liberation against the collaborators as if this antagonism constituted yet again the real political identity of a country run by politicians without quality, a country that perceives international aid as an unavoidable disgrace, and due to this, a country is ashamed of itself, giving however, the deserved homage to the quality of its artistes and its intellectuals, the guardians of the excellence of the Bengali nation.

The liberty of speech in Bangladesh, the radical and profound character of the political confrontations is, perhaps not extraneous to the persistent colonialism, of which the inhabitants feel that they are the victims. After the Moghuls, the English, the Hindus, the Pakistanis, Bangladesh is now colonized by the World Bank, the IMF, and the various forms of international aid that pour into the country, delays the advent of political progress which, without forgetting the past not to pardoning the killers, will finally put the things in their places, that is, into the history, and not in an endless arena of shadows, where the dead and the alive, the heroes and the culprits, the pure and the impure (the corrupt) are mixed up.

CHAPTER II

Islam in everyday life

1—Problematics, investigation, method

Analysis of the macro-political dimension of Islam in the history of Bengal and then of Bangladesh has put into perspective a double identity, at times conflicting and often contradictory. The identity of the Bengalis is their culture and their language. Islam has served as an attribute of identity in the backdrop of colonial fights against the British and later against the Pakistanis. This double identity continues to provoke great tension in the Bangladeshi society. One is led to ask oneself, at a moment when Islam is sometimes presented as a planetary bugbear, on the nature of the local Islamic practices, within the macro political field where the symbols are in confrontation. The investigation made during one year in Bangladesh enables us to situate the position of Islam and how it has been used.

After defining the problematics, the conditions of investigation and the method, we will consider the Islamic associations and the training of Imams that some of them implement before looking at the mundane role of Islam in two villages and in a district of Dhaka.

After having studied a local developmental NGO (Hours, Selim 1988) it became interesting to look at the objectives and work of other types of organizations. A number of Bangladesh NGOs are venturing to play a more or less participatory role in the development of health, education, and agricultural sectors. This model of development is partly imported from the West while at the same time applicable to Bangladesh for the immediate need of production and revenue.

Among the multiple NGOs of Bangladesh, the Islamic organizations, as they exist in most of the muslim countries, are engaged in social and charitable activities

or in the more ambitious and innovative programs like training the Imams of mosques to make them promoters of modern development among the people. Islam is usually presented in the West as a conservative and fatalistic religion. Such initiatives call into question this prejudice and incite the study of the approaches and the conceptions of development imparted by these form of training as well as its impact in the practical field and on the population.

A work on the training of the Imams and its effects necessarily calls for touching on the problematic of Islam in relation to development. Development here is considered as an ideology rather than a project or a technocratic evidence.

It reflects a conception of the world, of the society, of the life. Like that of Islam, it conveys representations and values. It became particularly useful to compare and to observe the practices concerning Islam and development in one of the most "under-developed" countries of the planet - according to the criteria in use. The training intended for the Imams seems to make up a preferential approach to embark on the question of Islam and of development.

The investigation was first carried out on the training itself, its content, the profile of the trainees and their motives. Afterwards, the investigation was carried out in two villages and in a neighborhood of the capital in order to observe, through study of the Imams and the mosques, the effects of this training after the return of the trained Imams to their localities. A field investigation, with a view to situate the position of Islam in the whole of the local context was carried out, besides many and repeated interviews with the instructors and about one hundred Imams, in a village where I lived for four months. More brief investigations were made through repeated interviews around two other mosques.

My access into the village was mediated by the Imam to whom I was introduced by an Islamic association. The humane qualities of this Imam of Bongol have largely facilitated my contact with the local people and my investigation. Foreigners are often suspected of the

christian proselytism designs. I could escape from this stereotype since I was in association with the Imam who took care of my boarding and lodging for payments.

To the contrary, a personal attempt to investigate in another village without any mediator, ended almost in failure, largely attributable to the Rushdie affair which had just flared up. While the entrance into the mosques in the villages during prayers did not pose any problem, in Dhaka however, I was requested to be absent during prayers since I am not a Muslim.

Though interviews with the Imams were easy, the discussion with the representatives of Islamic associations however, sometimes took hours of proselytic explanations, particularly when the anthropologist maintained that he is neither a Christian nor a Muslim. I tried to disclose many a times that I was a Christian to cut short this type of discussion. Nevertheless, I abstained from this readiness which, on the whole, would have limited my access to the phenomena of religious conviction that can be observed with the *Tablighs*, for example. I will come back on this pietist movement.

In Bangladesh, the anthropologist, like all other western foreigners, is first of all considered like an agent of development, the avant guard of a project that will be the source of revenue, an advantage which must be reaped. This is why the notables are particularly considerate during the first few weeks of the investigation. Every one emphasizes on the needs of the village of which he seemed to be the best expounder. Irrigation pumps, medical stores, loans for renovating the mosques, all has to be done, because the peasants are little educated and deprived of means. In spite of denials, they do not seem to believe that an anthropologist living in the residential neighborhood of Dhaka and having a car, will come to live in an ordinary and far away village without any operational motive. The practice of my investigation showed that I was interested in the social organization and to the customs of Islam. This provoked a rapid and discreet withdrawal of the notables of the village, who did not appreciate the

fact they were not considered the only worthwhile informants. Their status do not call for any commentary on their part because it is not problematic. On the contrary, the rest of the villagers who want to talk about it, showed their frustrations and aspirations. By putting myself visibly in the shadow of the Imam, who is respected but does not have an elevated position, my interests became useless even suspect, particularly because of the few, semi-educated Islamists of the village who mostly worked in printing-presses at Dhaka or at Tangail.

The ostracism of a non-Muslim foreigner is strong in the city mosques and those in the proximity of the capital. This has created some difficulties for me and many reciprocal explanations. By maintaining a less comfortable life, close to that of the villagers, I progressively regained the confidence of the peasants of Bongol after the withdrawal of the notables. To them, the quality of the Muslim is not a case of dialogue and my apparent uselessness did not constitute an obstacle to the relation. A foreigner is neither an enemy nor a friend but a guest. Thus, except for the disappointed expectations of the notables, and the fundamentalism, at times aggressive, of the semi-educated, clerics, the ethnologic investigation can go ahead in acceptable conditions. It must be underscored here that, the economic adversity of the population sometimes make them less available in terms of employment of time and that the Bangladeshi peasants express themselves with reserve and with sobriety, without the curiosity towards the foreigner, elsewhere frequent, and without producing a fictitious communication observed in the other ethnologic contexts.

In these circumstances, having identified the different *Baris* (small houses) in the village, I made several non-directive, repeated interviews with the communicative individuals. I discussed all aspects of their lives in an informal and non systematic manner. It became apparent very quickly that I was becoming particularly interested in Islam of the villages and in mosques, in so far as I participated in diverse

socio-religious meetings, without limiting however, the investigations to these aspects. This exceedingly flexible method requires time and it is assumed to be deprived of all operational objective. Under such conditions, it produces better quality material than the "rapid" investigations and other socio-economic questionnaires which serve as alibi in the development projects.

These rapid or intensive rural studies are so frequent in Bangladesh that the peasants have learned to furnish in a minute all answers asked by the NGOs and the experts, concerning the causes of poverty, the socio-economic inequality, the financial tenure and the status of women. Such investigation only serves to justify *à posteriori* the decisions already taken and to provide jobs to the young native graduates, which constitutes their sole interest and objective. It happens often that these employees of the developmental organizations embraces the preoccupations and the objectives of their employer to such a point that they more and more ignore the intimate forces of their proper society. By dint of being devoured by the objectives never attained, the place required for a correct knowledge about the society shrivels in the developmental projects. This is why, it has to be strongly emphasized that the peasants, even if they are for a moment confused, are perfectly capable of conversing with those who do not consider them to be the onlookers of the projects, and that they appreciate being considered at times like individuals in the society.

Before proceeding to the village of Bongol and tangibly approaching the social problem of the Imam and the role of the mosque, let us look into the Islamic organizations that have activities in social and economic development and training.

2 - Islamic associations and training of the Imams

In his article "Current trends of Islam in Bangladesh", Emajuddin Ahamed writes: "Bangladesh always had a great number of religious institutions and organizations run by traditionalist Islamic researchers. These institutions and organizations promote and preach the Quoranic teachings and the Sunnah and train a great number of persons who follow the tradition. These institutions and organizations could be classified into three groups. The first comprises the institutions like the *madrrasah*, the mosques and the *tabligh jamat*. The centers formed around the tombs of the saints (*mazars*) and sufis, places of pilgrimage and meditation constitute the second group. The third, consists of a number of cultural and socio-religious organizations whose purpose is not only the social well-being and security but also the cause of Islam¹".

Let us look into some of these organizations and their activities in the capital Dhaka. The same author underscored that between 1975 and 1978 the number of *madrrasahs* in Bangladesh will have increased from 1830 to 2386 while the number of students increased from 291,000 to 441,000 for 18,700 and 23,600 teachers respectively. The *tabligh jamat* on its part, organizes an annual gathering, *Ejtema*, where more than a million muslims, many among whom are foreigners, assemble by the riverside.

The non-governmental organizations have become the custodian of the Western states to disseminate their model of economic and social development in the third world. It is estimated that there are 900 declared associative organizations in Bangladesh among which more than 400 are engaged in developmental projects financed by foreign organizations. These latter are the

1. Emajuddin Ahamed: Society and politics in Bangladesh. Dhaka 1983, p.138.

best known. Among these are the important NGOs like CARE, CARITAS, OXFAM... There are a certain number of organizations in the midst of other less known organizations, that distinctly make allusion to Islam. The big foreign development organizations then must not conceal the richness and the abundance of an associative fabric in the society of Bangladesh. Episodic protests denouncing the foreign NGOs, whether in the name of secular nationalism or in the name of Islam, accuse the western NGOs of transforming the society by importing values and norms incompatible with Islam, or to indulge, behind the development projects, in a missionary venture of conversion.

Control of the activities of the foreign NGOs is an important political theme in the most aided countries of the third world like that of Bangladesh. It is the same with the local associations because foreign or local, these organizations are not neutral and transmit the developmental models and the models for society; these organizations exert direct or indirect pressures on the political power. A typical Western associative idealism must then be challenged; all the NGOs are politically active, compete with each other and sometimes oppose each other in the practical field.

An attempt will be made here to present a simple typology of the Islamic associations in Bangladesh before analyzing the different concepts of development that these associations impart. An ancient charitable tradition exists in the Indian sub-continent. The western concept of NGO is then not new, at least not newer than its character of substitution to the inadequate action of the State. In places where the indigenous vocabulary speaks of committee, of league, of association, of society, the modern concept of NGO especially implies, for the Bangladeshis, a foreign sometimes neocolonial godsend, purveyor of money, employment and moreover of material advantages of which it is better to draw profit. That is why the charitable dimension of aid is always perceived more rapidly than the more abstract notion of development which does not make any sense to the peasants.

One can distinguish among the associations referring to Islam two categories which go from the most charitable to the most militant. The Islamic associations bring aid to the destitute and distressed. The virtues of almsgiving and of equitable sharing are very much present in Islam where, as in many great religions, charity procures merit. This individual virtue is inseparable from the need to eradicate begging which does not exist in the city of God, the latter representing the ideal model of a just society where everyone has his place and where everyone is at his place.

Thus, for the upper middle class of Dhaka it is quite frequent that one can show one's good works meaning to participate in or even better, provide a sewing workroom for the destitute women, a school for the poor with an honorary or paid instructor, a free medical service with medicines and a few hours of free consultation per week. Collecting funds between friends or neighbors help the functioning of such modest but widespread organizations. Many orphanages have been suitably established by the more structured organizations of different sizes. Education and health always make up the major activities of the charitable Islamic associations. The education includes alternatively a religious one with more technical education or professional apprenticeship.

For health, it concerns setting up dispensaries and day clinics, even small hospitals by those organizations that receive funds from external sources. The motivation of a small group is sometimes transformed into a vast charitable venture that takes root in a neighborhood and exerts an appreciable social control over the inhabitants. Thus, the *Bangladesh Azad Muslim Welfare Complex* rooted in old Dhaka is a foundation established by the rich notables of the area who maintain close relation with the municipality and with the ward commissioner. Its president Al Hussein* affirms: "Allah can give each of us the opportunity to devote ourselves to the service of humanity". Initially a para-military organization during

*All names are fictitious.

the Pakistani period, the foundation has come to the present status because of donations from the local leaders. It maintains that since 1945, the organization has wanted to serve the humanity, the State, the nation, make reference to faith, to discipline, to confidence, to social works, to sincerity, to honesty, to love and to service of the fellow-man. Controlled by a family of politicians belonging to the government party during the time of Ershad (*Jatyo party*), the activities of this foundation are multiple. In the education sector, the organization has set up about twenty adult schools for boys or girls, sewing and embroidery courses and small handicraft industries. Having installed these structures, the authorities of the *Azad Complex* seek, often with success, to make the State take charge of the functioning of the schools. Besides, consultation service for allopathic and homeopathic medical treatments has been installed near the schools on premises donated by neighboring notables. The association is linked, according to its prospectus, to the NGO department of the United Nations. It has constructed a market on donated land where it has 300 shops to let. It also manages a nutritional center, sporting clubs and sports equipment, a "residence" (quite modest) for the rickshaw-pullers, an investment cooperative.....

The charitable activities are rarely carried out in such a scale and it seems that it is very largely controlled by a local oligarchy composed of 2/3 business men and 1/3 civil servants. The political connections have been underscored. Only occasionally frequented, these organizations sometimes act as an alibi and render service to a few. But they also appear as enterprise for attracting prestige and power in an urban neighborhood. The president of the foundation has received several decorations and has produced several edifying books on social development, the necessity to moralize the society and the need to eradicate begging and delinquency. The office of the *Azad Muslim welfare complex* is situated in two small rooms in an old building at the center of Paliatur district. Sitting among the heap of files crammed in age-old cupboards, the permanent staff of

the association, a young man from the neighborhood, receives the visitors. The shooting club is one of the most vital activities of the association. The members come to take out their permits and the social cases present their problems. The decisions are taken in the residence of the president, municipal councillor, who receives them in a small bureau separated by a waiting room at the entrance of his big mansion where an atmosphere of a provincial notarial office prevails. Two half-days per week are devoted to receiving the public.

The association and its president thus have at their disposal an important index-card about the inhabitants of the neighborhood. This index contains information about poor families, about women deserted by their husbands, about young sportsmen or about unemployed persons. This gives the association an excellent means of social and political control over the neighborhood. Al Hussein presents the symbol of a humanist and a noted philanthropist and at the same time an efficient politician. He excels in public relations. He is as good with his countrymen with whom he shows great paternalism as with the foreigners with whom he talks of the multiple initiatives of the association by underscoring its non-political character which he had to impose after internal fights and expulsions. He is particularly adept in persuading the representatives of foreign urban projects, always looking for an "access to the poor", that his association makes an excellent mediator. By using the ideology of partnership with brilliance he manages to obtain financing for the nutritional schemes and the alphabetization program for women. Hardly suspected of fundamentalism, his association makes reference to a very universal and popular Islam that encourages the foreign donors who are in quest of a population ready to accept their assistance and likely to help them expend their credits and justify their use.

Visits to various adult education centers have revealed a certain parody. The day when I was to make my visit, I have never found more than three or four women learning knitting.... the other activities being

suspended for reasons of leave or of sickness of the instructors.

Most of the instructors and the doctors in the dispensaries of Islamic associations are not paid. This voluntary help results in high rate of absenteeism and often a lack of interest of the contributor. Because of mediocrity or symbolism of the rendered service the participation by the population becomes a fiction. When it becomes necessary, like during the visit of a national figure or of a foreigner, gifts or food is distributed to attract the participants. The index-card helps the association to mobilize a few groups and if needed, to fetch them from their homes. The notables of the local middle class who finance such associations, find in these activities, sometimes a pretence, a moral and Islamic alibi, an element of prestige and at the opportune moment, a political power.

Some more humble associations are often found that are financed by some families whose humanism is more authentic. They open a school with a salaried instructor where modest young girls learn to read, to write, to follow the precepts of Islam and learn embroidery. These enterprises display the spirit of a religiously inspired charitable tradition. Their humble dimension, their sometimes symbolic character, do not let them make profit and show lasting results that can indicate a process of development although these micro-enterprises are numerous.

The president of the *World Islam Mission Qurani Sunni* is a former lawyer of the supreme court who criticizes the Islamic organizations that are financed by the Arab countries. This organization has started activities on rehabilitation, a maternity center at Shonpara, Demra, adult education classes, orphanages at Thakurgaon and at Khulna and homeopathic dispensaries. Advocates, bankers, industrialists and high officials are in the administrative council. Another association of comparable dimensions, the *Islami Samaj Kalyan Samity, Dhaka* had in 1978, according to its brochure, a budget of 450,000 takas. This leads to think that such charitable activities take place on a relatively

limited scale in terms of the effect that they produce.

These charitable organizations are found to have limited activities on the scale of a well covered neighborhood. The idealistic values to which their writings and discussions refer, are of course not without invoking the Christian charity by our right-thinking middle class that started a few decades back in Europe. There, Islam is the vector of an idealistic requirement of a humanistic solicitude devoted to the poor tormented by hardship. During the 1988 flood, such organizations were very much present to set up soup kitchen and shelters in Dhaka.

Besides these charitable organizations that have been motivated by Muslim humanism of universal nature, there exist some more militant organizations like the *Bangladesh Masjid Samaj* (Society of the mosques) or the *Bangladesh Masjid Mission*. The *Masjid Samaj* had a budget of 300 000 FF in 1981 and had received funds from the UNICEF for the adult alphabetization program, from the World Food Program as well as from the Government of Bangladesh for mass education. Their objective is to develop the social and religious role of the mosques by imparting training to the Imams, by promoting religious education, by rendering social services to the poor (medicine, material aid...). Reference to Islam is precise here and the activities it organizes are in total conformity with the demeanor and the underlying values required of the muslims. The best known cultural or socio-religious associations after the *Islamic Foundation* and the *Bangladesh Masjid Mission* are the *Islam Prachar Samity*, *Quronic School Society*, *Bangladesh Islamic Center*, *Bangladesh Jamiatul Mudderresin*, *World Islam Mission Quoran*, *Ittehadul Ummah*, *Council for Islamic Socio-Cultural Organization* etc.

The *Islam Social Welfare Association* (*Anjuman Heidaitul Ummah*) for its part organizes dispensaries, professional training of some dozens of young men in mechanics and typing. Some of its directors are members of the "Jamati Islami", the fundamentalist party fighting for an Islamic state.

For its part, the Association for the teachers of *Madrasah* (quoranic colleges) is financed by Iraq and it presents itself as an extremist militant organization that controls and retrains the teachers by inspiring them with the values of a fundamentalist Islam.

Rabiat Al Alam Al Islami (International Islamic Relief Organization) is financed to the extent of 70% by Saudi Arabia. This organization has its headquarters in Saudi Arabia and according to the organization itself it is close to the "Jamati Islami" party. It has implemented training programs in the *madrasahs*, day clinics, three hospitals (210 beds), sewing courses, 400 cycle rickshaws and courses in professional training (as refrigerator repairer, mechanic, typist) with 25 instructors in operational premises where a veritable activity prevails.

In spite of the dominant role of Saudi Arabia, a keen competition is there between the Arab, the Iranian, the Iraqi and the Libyan donors. This becomes prominent at certain periods and on occasions. Of the funds of these Islamic associations, the donations from *zakat* (the legal alms) and the donations procured from the sales of the skins of the sacrificial animals (*kurbanî*) need to be mentioned here. The amounts are nominal but are associated with an authentic Islamic tradition.

The *Islamic Foundation* is the chief Islamic organization of the country. It is a state controlled organization. It represents well the ambiguities linked with the management of Islamic ideology in Bangladesh. Attached to the promotion of the Islamic institutions, the *Islamic Foundation* also shows a "modernist" dimension by imparting training to the Imams for promoting economic development in the villages, medical care in the dispensaries and clinics and rehabilitation of the converts. The variety of the organizations referring to Islam thus appears, through multiple cases, where social logic and internal politics and external financing, frequently Arabian, sometimes Western, interfere. The state controlled organizations try to follow a mid-path between the charitable paternalism and the radical, fundamentalist militancy.

The utopian humanist discourse is not exempted from pharisaism of the rich in a country of poor people. But here, all pauperist messianism or preoccupation with the sordid aspects of life are absent. There is no place for a theology of liberation in Bangladesh. It is a question of making the real society endurable, to regulate its regression and finally to preserve it.

On the contrary, the militant Islamist political organizations hope to change the society in the name of the principles of Islam. Bearded young men could be found in these organizations who are convinced that Islam must be established with all its rigor and the charitable activities are of secondary importance in comparison with the goal for moral reform. For them, development is in the first instance the moral development of men that will help promote that of the society. Social justice is only the consequence of establishing virtue and peace in society. For them, *welfare* is not prosperity and a material well-being; it is a profound harmony between men and nature, the gift of God. In a lawful and serene society such a harmony promotes regard for the religious laws derived from the teachings of the Prophet. According to them, Bangladesh, an underdeveloped country, lives in an abject dependence, faced with the notion of economic and social development. To them this appears to be amoral and at the same time immoral.

One can see that the gap is serious and continues to be widened between the well-intentional attempts of the Western NGOs and an increasing number of Muslims, deprived of national dignity, of jobs, of decent salaries, who commit themselves to organizations motivated to extremism by the modesty of their concrete results. An increasing part of the Islamic organizations are dedicated to this field where frustrations and demands mingle together revealing that Islam appears more and more as the major alternative to the relative failure of the Western oriented and technocratic development. Taking over from the Third worldism ideology struck down in the West, these new "damned of the earth" is throwing a challenge to the financiers and other

supporters of planetary development blue-printed in the West. The price paid for it is known. They prefer a pilgrimage to Mecca to a visit to the headquarters of the World Bank. Through their various organizations, they assert that development and liberty, as such, are not human objectives but that the respect of the world order and of the the ethical principles decreed by Islam constitute the only just venture.

Advancement of the Islamic associations have occurred in Egypt, in the Maghreb as well as in Bangladesh. In their article " The Da'wa in Morocco. Theorico-historic prolegomena" M.Tosy and B.Etienne² write "... through the study of the Da'wa we have discovered the emergence of "small independent entrepreneurs", and of associations (forms of which vary) founded on Islam as the basis of legitimacy. They enter in competition with the clerics and the orthodox organizations to break their monopoly in the creation of legitimate symbolic goods". If the will to reform the urban and rural Islam of these associations, financed by the Middle-East countries, appears behind the socio-economic projects, the latter mobilizes both the government and the NGOs. When the building of a mosque, the construction of Islamic cultural centers for the inhabitants of the cities, are not revenue generating socio-economic developmental activities in the eyes of the villagers, on the other hand, they participate in the overall development of the local population in a connotation which is not alien. These investments, said to be non-productive, are in fact socially very productive and it popularizes the implantation of Islam in the social fabric in such a way that the technical and educational activities of these associations sometimes look like alibis besides a more or less explicit approach of islamisation in depth of the society. We have seen before how syncretic is the past of this society and torn its conscience about the place of Islam in the city and in

2. M.Tosy-B.Etienne: La Da'wa au Maroc. Prologomènes théorico-historiques, In: O.Carré and P.Dumont Radicalismes islamiques. Paris 1986. Volume II, p.5-32.

the society.

Religious proselytism and socio-economic action are intimately linked for most of these associations for which properly exercised Islam make up the key to the solution of social and economic problems. After considering the type of organization and the ideology that they convey, we will look more particularly into the training programs destined to the Imams by certain associations like the *Islamic Foundation* or the *Islamic Mission*. The training is aimed at making these Imams the conveyers of a modern message where the socio-economic development is looked upon as the will of God.

Training of the Imams

The training destined for the Imams originates from several established facts and convictions. In a society as little developed as Bangladesh, in a situation where social malediction is combined with the poverty supplemented by the impact of natural calamity, it is not possible to hold a discussion pleading exclusively for the future life or for an ideal society. The present day problems condition the contribution of the mass of a population and their religious mandate is not separable from the improvement of their material or spiritual conditions of life.

From this evidence, and from the developmental experiences of the Comilla Rural Academy, several attempts were made to engage the Imams of the mosques in an education motivated for development. A number of underlying stakes are present in this strategy. First of all, that of "modernization" of the very traditional rural Islam, then the influence of the presence of Islam at the core of the socio-economic difficulties of the population, and finally a counter offensive towards the Western NGOs who monopolize the dialogues on development in Bangladesh. These significant subtleties are hidden in the insipid presentation on the training of the Imams. Accordingly they are supposed to be in a position to pass on the message of development to the villagers by dint of their implied authority and dignity.

This rather simple approach, destined to the foreign financiers, leaves out the question of the conception of development of which one talks: the development as conceived by the young urban Islamic clerics, the secular humanists, the villagers... ? Finally, one is forced to ask if the social status of the Imams in the villages or in the urban neighborhoods lets them exercise this function of developmental education as it is understood by the program organizers.

The presence of a manna of foreign loans, particularly that from Saudi Arabia, plays a determining role in the implementation of these programs. The diverse objectives do not intersect the same preoccupations and each interlocutor receives from such and such organization and such and such version of the motives. It needs to be mentioned here before presenting the examples of this training, that these training programs demonstrate well the ambiguities of the historic situation of a dependant, Muslim society confronted with multiple difficulties even after twenty years of independence that has not brought the anticipated progress. Two cases of training of unequal importance will be analyzed in detail to the extent where it was possible to follow the programs, to interview the trainee Imams and to follow some of them in their villages.

The *Islamic Mission* is a recent organization, founded in 1985 by a renowned professor of Medicine in Dhaka. Professor Khan is a leading retired medical practitioner. His private practice is full of patients. This little man in a gray suit, displays the pontificating posture of a scholar and has decided to let his followers benefit from his knowledge. Readily formal, he is accustomed to patronize the ambassadors to whom he proposes to finance his association for the training of Imams and for health care to the poor. He highlights to the Arabs the charitable dimension of the activities of his association maintaining at the same time, a modernist discussion with the Europeans. An eminent bourgeois of the urban society, Professor Khan has inaugurated the buildings for his Association in a great ceremony in presence of a

number of ambassadors including that of Saudi Arabia. During that ceremony in front of an audience of celebrities and of "Imams for alibi", the discussions in the form of litany made tributes to development, to Islam and their profound harmony.

Ambassadors, Parliament members, physicians, political personalities, high ranking civil servants and journalists were later invited to a grand banquet at the residence of a local Parliament member (MP). This dinner of the notables, full of discussions and of food, reunited the elites of the city. The Imams registered for the primary training however, were excluded from this dinner. They disappeared from the scene. The left-overs of this meal were generously distributed to the poor assembled at the entrance of the house of the MP. Professor Khan is regarded as a great humanist figure in Dhaka. He writes articles that are published not only in international medical reviews but also in national journals where he studies the social problems and asserts the modernity of Islam. His ideology and his practices are symptomatic of the enlightened urban upper middle-class of Dhaka. The appealing humanist speech doubled with a clever social strategy is made with talent, in principle, in the service of people are assembled or collected in trucks, to be present at the inaugurations of the operations meant to help them. Taking up on his own account the discussion on the prestige of the Imams among the villagers, this Professor has been able to convince his medical students to take part generously in the training program for the Imams. His social relations helped him to secure financing from the Saudi Arabian embassy with whom a modest training center had been opened in 1988 and a dispensary in 1990.

The opening of the training center in presence of the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia, several MPs and local dignitaries concluded with a grand dinner where not a single trainee Imam was invited. Political leaders, military personalities, religious leaders, journalists, all the personalities present there evinced the local strategic significance of the Professor's initiative.

At the opening of the dispensary, after an avalanche of speeches by the dignitaries provoking the impatience of the children, food was distributed to "the poor", who were brought in by trucks from a neighborhood. These abstract speeches in front of an audience of women and children brought from a shantytown, showed in a remarkable manner, the gap that separates the humanist speech of the urban bourgeoisie of Dhaka from the mass of the people that it pretends and tries to help, for its benefit or for theirs.

According to this Professor, the Imams constitute a quality human resource. They know well the problems of the villagers thanks to the mosque which is considered as a socially privileged place in a perspective of primary health care. According to him, Islam is not in any way incapable of employing the scientific discoveries. It is important to let the population accede to simple medical knowledge that will help improve the health. The Imams, according to the Professor, due to their status and their role in the villages, give valued advice and thus they are the best agents to propagate a message of preventive cares.

Depending on the funds received, the training is given to 45 Imams three or four times per year. Generally the duration is for three weeks after which a certificate is given which is very important in the eyes of the trainees.

The program includes training on the role of the Imams for promoting health, the principles of diseases, food and nutrition, vaccination and blood transfusion, skin diseases, burns, fractures, secondary effects of drugs, "female diseases", birth control, mental diseases. The training ends by a session of evaluation. The lessons take place in a recently built tin-shed that houses the class room with the only pedagogic material- a black board. The very young audience is often restless and noisy. The class has to be frequently called to order except during the courses referring to the medicine and its uses. The trainees are then found to be busy passionately taking notes. For the rest of the time, it appears that there is certain impatience as if the course

contents were insipid and already known. It was as if only the therapeutic means were interesting to the trainees. Moreover, according to those young people, it is the delivery of these means that makes up the principal criteria of a "good teacher".

During my following of the training it appeared that the pedagogic methods were a total failure. Each instructor (benevolent) catered to his own whim without speaking about those who seemed to be on fatigue-duty or who were verbally provoked. The absence of control of the teaching subject matter, added to the cacophony of the organization (systematic late attendance by the teachers, cancellation of course without advance notice...) seemed to constitute a serious handicap. Besides, certain teachers, clinical physicians without any teaching capacity, frequently distribute the chemical methods of treatment, without demonstration of the pathologies or their causes or the means to institute a diagnostic technique. The Imams are on the look out for "treatment" that will guarantee them fame and income.

The same goes for all the "village doctors", even if little or not qualified. It appears then very inconvenient to dispense, without choice or control, of the mode of use of medicines which are easy to buy and which are prescribed by the young trainees, happy with this godsend, in an anarchic manner. This is potentially dangerous. When it involves a simple pathology and typical treatment there is no such difficulty. Unfortunately, it was easy to see in this course that, under insistence from the students, implementation of costly and complicated treatments were made without any preparation for establishing an adequate diagnostic.

Such an absence of control is particularly unfortunate in the sense where it devalues a process otherwise deserving attention. The course evoked, that took place in October, 1988 was shortened by one week and then suspended at the end of two weeks. A complementary course was announced for later on. In spite of this shortened training, certificates were however, awarded to the students, in the face of insistence from them. The young voluntary physicians engaged in this training

program have shown, with some exceptions, a great incapability for teaching. Enduring a drudgery they wanted to cut short, they presented a medical approach centered on the therapeutic methods. This was too exclusively curative and was hardly in measure to increase the capacity of the trainees to solve health problems in their totality. Many of the instructors were ragged by the students as if they could realize that they have taken part in a formality as an alibi.

Several debates were launched by the teachers concerning birth control and blood transfusion in view to underscore the modernity of Islam and the absence of contradiction between Islam and scientific progress. Most of these debates amounted to an exchange of prejudices without the beginning of a collective reflection. On this occasion, it was possible to ascertain the mediocre capacity of most of the young Imams present to take up a question other than that like a stock of pre-established knowledge, that is to say, as a personal reflection, surpassing with difficulty the ready-made formulae, with the exception of the most active trainees of the audience. One may think that the Quoranic apprenticeship, founded on repetition, has something to do with this argument.

This training presented the particularity to getting the students of *madrasah* together. Certain young Imams were named by their superiors a few days before the start of this course while the others were recruited through announcement in the press. The recruitment for this session was thus as improvised as the course itself. This certainly explains the lack of interest and little concern of the trainees for whom it meant, with the exception of the more intelligent ones, a chore.

To comprehend the motives and the ambitions of the students, a number of interviews were held with them. It must be mentioned here that all were young persons in the course of Islamic studies and only a third of them were Imams. The organizers of the course have distributed a very general questionnaire from which the following elements could be reproduced: 16 out of 45 students were Imams and 26 among them give private

coaching for their livelihood. All think that their incomes are not sufficient. Almost all mention the desire of their fathers in choice of Islamic studies. All are members of religious organizations and 25 are members of political students' organizations. 4 are the sons of pharmacists or village doctors. Although all consider that vaccination is a necessity, half among them however, refuse blood transfusion and consider it prohibited by the religion because blood is a gift of God and man cannot distribute it. It needs to be underscored here that the opinions on the subject did not change between the beginning and the end of the training program.

Most of these students coming from the big *madrasah* of Chittagong are between 17 and 25 years of age. They are studying for higher degrees in religious teachings: *Dakil, Alim, Fazil, Kamil* which they transcribe into equivalent to *O level, A level, degree and masters degree* respectively. Some examples will help better understand the profile of these students.

Let us listen to Amin who is 18 years old and whose father has died leaving very little land for his five sons. His youngest brother who is 14 years old, is a *hafez*³. **"He will have a good job as Imam. It does not concern me. What I wish is a job of a civil servant. This is because of the retirement benefit. Like most of us, I wish to acquire medical knowledge from this training program"**. According to him, among the students of Sunnia Madrasah, only 30% wish to become Imam: **"The 25 takas that is given to the trainees per day as well as the certificate at the end of the training program attract them to such training. People will think that I am a doctor, but it is not possible in a week."** he said.

Let us now turn to Abdul Hassam whose father is a teacher and also the Imam of the village. His elder brother works in Kuwait and the younger one is a *madrasah* student. Abdul has pursued Quoranic lessons from 9 years of age till 19 years. In 1988, he got himself admitted to the University of Chittagong in the department of Islamic History.

3. Hafez: a title given to he who memorizes the whole Quoran.

He specifies: **"My grand father was an alim and judge of the village. I wish to become a teacher of Islamic studies. This course is not for the Imams. Most of the students there look for a way to acquire medical knowledge for the family and for the neighbors... I am against blood transfusion because no one can give the blood given by God. One of our teachers in the madrasah has said that it was illegal for a muslim."**

Mohammed Tayet, 20 years of age, has pursued religious education to learn Arabic and to know Islam better. He is preparing himself to become a teacher of madrasah and wishes to study Arabic at the university. He commands a strong attraction among his friends. **"I would like to be a doctor too. The instructors of this training program are not good. They are not good doctors; they are only students, not professors. The training of the Islamic Foundation that I had, dealt with a greater number of subjects, and to my opinion, the professors were better,"** he says.

For his part, Hafez Mohammed Ullah, 20 years, recounts: **"I was hafez at 14 years. I memorized the Quoran in 2 and a half years. At the time of examination we recite for 5 and a half hours. We receive a ribbon of cap and a certificate. I would like to write books on Islam and politics. There are links between the two that need to be correctly presented. It must be well explained; the idea of this training program is good but the program does not have a relation with the purpose".**

A number of these trainees have already undertaken the courses offered by the Islamic Foundation. This training is considered as an added qualification in a quantitative approach of knowledge which is habitual in the religious schools. As such, it is said "to pass the training", as if it meant an examination approved for a degree which will add to the precedent ones. Most of the trainees come from well-off or humble but large families and aim at procuring a knowledge of medical practice in order to derive quick benefits and a little prestige which lacks for the Imams. The most frequent professional aspirations are to become teachers, officers, or workers in the Middle-East. Mostly coming from

pious families with an Imam father or brothers that are student of *madrasahs*, the representations of these young persons puts us in front of a less idealistic but pragmatic generation, who does not seem to carry any great expectation for the future of Bangladesh. It seems that, in the face of limited professional prospects, the most frustrated ones will become Imams; strong political and ideological pressures under which they are subjected in the urban *madrasahs*, might explain their Islamist commitments, which certain view, for the time being, cynically rather than ideologically.

In a second occasion, I followed and analyzed in detail the sequence of training of the *Islamic Foundation*, the principal state controlled Islamic organization in Bangladesh. This training program has been administered on a big scale for more than ten years. Persons of the organization responsible for this program allowed me, after certain reticence, to follow the development of this training program and they have accepted to answer my questions concerning this training.

An appreciable number of Imams, several thousands according to the organizers, have undergone this training intended particularly for the Imams. It is administered at a national level in such a way that it seems as if the association is a part of the curriculum of the required knowledge for the Imams. Half of the Imams I met have undergone this training. Unlike the training program of the Islamic Mission which is a new and more private organization, the training of the Imams by the *Islamic Foundation* is given in a cycle of forty five days and discusses progress in agriculture, hygiene as well as religion in the light of developmental activities. The audience is regularly and continually reminded of the leitmotive of the course: Islam and the science are not contradictory. The progress of scientific knowledge is a gift of God which must be used with intelligence and with prudence. Development is supposed to profit from this acquisition for ameliorating human condition. The motivation of men added to the implementation of the available technologies help to produce legitimate wealth

from the religious point of view. The innovation is a capability given to men by God to improve their life on earth. Except in prayer, it is good to engage one-self in the socio-economic activities to improve the material conditions without which there can not be a decent life.

The 150 trainees of each session are housed in dormitories and receive 25 takas per day. The courses are given in the neighborhood of Mohammedpur in Dhaka, in a big room fitted with P.A.(microphone) in the midst of a semi-concrete building, very hot under its corrugated iron roof.

The teaching corps comprises doctors of Islam with a 'modernist' approach of the contemporary man as well as of professionals from different sectors (agriculture, medicine, horticulture, small industries). These teachers give proof of great proficiency and great command. Competent and clear, they have a good experience of their subjects and the audience primarily composed of young Imams aged around thirty. There are also some students of 40 or 50 years of age.

A progressive and systematic presentation of the symptoms, an emphasis on the prevention as well as the absence of self-satisfaction of the doctor observed during a course on dysentery, indicates the sound pedagogic quality of the teachers. Here, it is matter of making the trainees understand and not to endure or chore in front of a scorned audience.

At the beginning of the training program, each Imam receives a dozen publications of the *Islamic Foundation* on the various subjects to be discussed. The themes are integrated to make the total presentation consistent. Thus, hygiene, water supply, worms and dysentery are discussed with reference to cleanliness and this is presented as an Islamic virtue. At each step, the speaker demonstrates to the audience the convergence of the requirements of Islam and the proofs in modern science. Written questions are expected at the end of each course that begins with a prayer and some songs.

Let me cite the principal themes discussed: Islam and child education, adult literacy, primary health care, infectious diseases, pure water supply, Islam and health,

contribution of Muslims to the medical science, religious education for children, correct recitation of the Quoran, benefit of prayer, agriculture according to Islam, the sovereignty of Allah, the purpose of Imam training, administration, students, teachers and guardians, the donation of *wakf*⁴, first-aid, the vitamins, snake or insect bites and electrocution, pisciculture, sugar-cane and potato cultivation, method of mathematics teaching, proteins and nutrition, role of mosques in the Islamic city, bondage, illiteracy and the condition of the students, modern methods of rice and jute cultivation, mass communication, oral rehydration, malnutrition, dental care, mental diseases, disease of domestic animals, fever and headaches, drugs, dysentery and worms, teaching methods, ulcer, the Islamic society, use of water schemes, the family in the Quoran, fish meal, trade and loans, local resources against unemployment, forestry, summer vegetables, maternal and child care, maternal nursing, Islam and female health, the mystery of creation, condition of the Imams, dividend and falsehood, irrigation systems, virtuous income and reverence of work in Islam, the natural resources, the sacrifice of animals (*Kurbanî*), the *zakat* (legal alms).

Each day two technical sessions frame a more religious one. Merits of the students are however determined through written tests and final examinations. The moral requirements of Islam are systematically put in relation with the problems of development, in view to show the absence of contradiction between the religious principles and the contemporary social and economic demands. The importance of the Imams in the village communities as well as their capacity to weigh upon the social life of their villages are constantly highlighted. The person in charge of the training program declares in front of a thoughtful audience:- "Each of you will contact 1000 persons. You are here 150,000 persons and I am talking to 150 persons". During a session on the small industries, the Imams are asked to motivate the

4. . Donation in mortmain.

unemployed and to help the victims..."like the NGOs" says the instructor who adds: "According to the Quoran, man is the best of the creation and nothing is too good for him. In all domains, health, education, food, man has the right to get the best of what God has given". Poverty is then really scandalous, looked from all possible angles, and the course of the *Islamic Foundation* presents an orientation that is far-off from all fatalism, rather, on the contrary, is profoundly activist.

In spite of quite regular refresher courses, the big limitation of this approach is the habitual absence of follow-ups of the Imams. They remain in their villages with the good ideas but neither with any practical means, nor with money to put into effect any concrete initiatives. Invited to take time out of the prayer to take charge of the social life, the Imams afterwards left to them-selves. Designated to become leaders and to motivate the villagers, the trainees are send back to their posts in their villages.

Atun is 35 years of age. He is the Imam of a new mosque and has passed the degree of *Fazil*. It is a *pir* (Saint) who told him to go to the *madrasah*. He attests: **"Me, I don't have any goal. It is Allah who decides. My father is the president and my uncle is the vice-president of the mosque committee. We are poor and we have to buy some rice, but my elder brother has taken the drive to construct this new mosque of which I am the Imam without salary and without food"**.

Ahmed is 27 years old and he has passed the degree of *Fazil*. He has been an Imam since eighteen months and his salary is 600 takas plus gifts of food. One of his brothers is in Saudi Arabia. **"There are a few educated muslims in my family. I wanted to improve this and to acquire a little knowledge and authority. I wish to be preacher in the religious meetings (Islamic mehfil) but that implies different studies"**, he says.

Farid's father is an Imam and all his brothers have frequented the *madrasah*. Two of them are Imams and one is an Arabic teacher. He is the Imam of a mosque erected on a piece of land given by his family (*wakf*). Before him, his uncle was the Imam. His salary is 500

takas. His brother is president of the mosque committee and his uncle is an *alim* (Islamic scholar). Amitul of Barisal, aged 40 years, is Imam since one year after having been in business. He was a member of the mosque committee before becoming the Imam. His salary of 200 takas without food is insufficient and he asserts that he is ready to take the first job he is offered. Mussa, 30 years, has obtained the Islamic degree of *Kamel*. His father is a teacher of *madrasah*. His brothers are respectively engineer in Saudi Arabia, Imam and the youngest one has gone to Libya. Imam since 2 years, he receives 300 takas per month. His brother is president of the mosque committee and his grand father has donated the land for the mosque (*wakf*- donation). He wishes to become a principal of *madrasah*.

The training programs of the *Islamic Foundation* that are held on a big scale with the support of Saudi Arabia and the government of Bangladesh show an organized attempt to control the society through the basic structure of religion. This control has been based around the mosque of which the Imam is supposed to be an important pillar. Although for some, other activity would have been more gratifying, the trainees of the *Islamic Foundation* are the real Imams and are more motivated than their colleagues seen elsewhere. If these paid training programs are a respite from the daily routine, the Imams present however, demonstrate interest for the courses, but only a minority among them envisage the application or implementation of the knowledge thus acquired.

A number of Imams complain about the absence of a follow-up of this training which, in effect, has become widely known among the Imams as a "degree". What is the impact of this training once the Imams return to their villages? The Imams, are they in a situation to put into action the socio-economic initiatives from their social position which all those reasoning of the training theorize as being prestigious and source of authority?

This is the query that has led me to inquire into and analyze the social position of the Imams under three different contexts.

3 - Bongol - The dependence of the Imams

First of all, let us enter into the Bongol village.

The village of Bongol is located in the vicinity of the township of Tangail, about hundred kilometers from the capital. The adjacent market of Rampur is an active commercial center famous for its weaving of saris.

The ethnologic investigation continued for six months during which Amra, the Imam of the village, has carefully looked after my living conditions which were a bit precarious at first, then more comfortable⁵. As soon as it became apparent that the researcher has not brought with him any profitable developmental projects, most of the notables of the village, while remaining polite, left the Imam with the responsibility of supervision of this Foreigner queerly interested in the local Islamic practices. Opposite to the outlook that prevails in the cities where a foreign observer is distrusted as a "Christian" and a potential missionary, the rural villagers do not show any complexes when someone inquires about their religious customs. It is as if Islam has less importance as a sign of their identity compared to those in the cities. Contrary to the responses given to our questions in Dhaka, which were often sibylline, and where the respondents create a rift between the foreigner and the muslims, the rural Imams and the members of the mosque committees on the other hand, talk about more practical things than the abstract values. These latter thus appear more approachable to the queries of the anthropologist. Here, he is not suspected of being an irritating ideologist or the propagator of another competing alternative, truth.

This supervision consisted mainly of finding decent accommodation after two temporary dwellings, and of providing cooked and remunerated food. The nature of

5. All the investigations were conducted with the assistance of a Bangladeshi, Mr. Nesar Ahmed, with whom I had a fruitful and affable collaboration since 1985 and with the assistance of the Center for Social Studies - University of Dhaka.

my interests did not explain alone putting to the front of the Imam, who had moreover been the origin of the Islamic Mission's choice of this village, since he was presented by this organization as one of its good trainees.

The field work effected in Bongol helps to present the profile of the village society that will let one appreciate the nature of the social status of the Imams in the context of the local Islam.

The village society

Bongol comprises three *paras* (neighborhoods) five hundred meters apart from each other. Each of these *paras* has a mosque. Under an identical name, three separately existing, well distinct social units can thus be noticed.

A review of the social organization of these three micro-societies allows to note different cases around the same sociological categories. The three neighborhoods are identified by the name of North, South and West. A pond (*pukur*) situated at the center of the village is used by the three neighborhoods who assemble together in the same prayer field (*Eid gah*) during the festival of *Eid*⁶. There is a common graveyard for two neighborhoods who have procured the land recently. The village has 300 households with about 1400 persons. The neighborhood of *Uttor para* where I resided, has 41 households. Bongol is not approachable by motor vehicles which stop at the market, 3 Km away. Sometimes a few motor bikes cross the village, but the ever narrowing tracks split into branches each leading to a cluster of dwellings.

The spatial organization of the village is thus divided into three parties resulting in very scattered dwellings, typical of Bangladesh. Each *bari* (house hold), more or less important according to its wealth, forms a distinct unit. The mosque does not constitute the center around

6. It refers to the equivalent of the Aïd of the Maghreb. Each family, whoever can afford, sacrifices a bull or sheep the meat of which is distributed among the relatives, the neighbors and the poor.

which the settlements would be located. This is explained by the fact that a mosque must be located on a land given in mainmort (*waqf*). Its construction takes place either through the private initiative of a rich family or through a collective decision by the villagers. The selection of the site of the mosque recalls a dominant family or else it is done by an initiative of the community following a well-known mechanism prevailing in South Asia where the village community sets up a temple, a monastery or a mosque.

In terms of proximity, Bongol appears in the form of three distinct villages and is separated by some fields and the pond. The existence of three mosques and three mosque committees confirms in terms of "parish" the observed spatial division. Thus, each house (*bari*) is included in a hamlet (*para*) of several hundred inhabitants with its mosque and its proper political structures that makes a real village. This again merges into a more vast group provided with a common name (Bongol) which is expressed by the common possession of a ground used as the place for the annual prayer of *Eid* and the burial-place.

Such a structure exhibits all the mobility and the flexibility of the social organization which is formed around possession of the land, of the strife between the *samaj*⁷ and finally the fragmentation of the society which is evident from the occupation of the space.

The *samaj* makes up the mainspring of the social and political organization. Ideally, each *para* used to make up a *samaj*. Through division, exclusion and dispute, the *samaj* have multiplied and their number constitutes a recognition of the divisions among the villagers. The reality of the *samaj* clearly materializes during the sacrifices (*Kurbanî*) of the *Eid* festival and during marriage ceremonies. The peasants join in their efforts to buy the sacrificial animals and share the meat among themselves on the basis of solidarity of the *samaj*. The latter appears both as an organization of solidarity

7. The *samaj* is the principal solidarity group after the family, at the village level.

between persons having the same socio-economic status or as a network of customer relations connected to a prominent rich land lord. The *samaj* is led by a *matbar*. He is a person with authority and with prestige capable of protecting the interests of the group. Now-a-days, the *samaj* no longer refers much to the kinship and to the lineages to day but specifically to the neighborly relations. The *samaj* has been formed due to the struggle for the control of lands and wealth in general. Three, seven and ten *samaj* can be found in the three *paras* of Bongol which reveals the existence of a divided and split village society. The lineage (*bongsho*) has not been put ahead by the villagers. Most of the names of *bongsho* refer to a profession: peasant, religious status, or a title (*Khondokar, Mia, Khan*). The difficulty with which certain recall their lineage shows that it plays only a minor role in the village society and it does not constitute the basis of distinct unity among the members. The lineage remains as a distinguishing value rather than an identity, a little like a reference to the caste system, though this only exists as a matter of form. The very habitual use of the Moghul or Pathan titles by the villagers robs the titles of all significance. This refers to the symbolic value ascribed to the aristocratic Islam of the *ashrafs*.

Thus, the status in the village society does no longer seem to result from the descendance but rather from the land owned, education, wealth and the power, as well as conservation of *purdah*⁸. The last remains as an important criterion for dignity. The dissensions are resolved before the *salish*, the village tribunal where the *matbars* of the different *samaj* form the jury, and when the affair is about manners and morals the Imam is there as well.

Besides the agricultural activities, Bongol is distinguished from the neighboring villages for its weaving industry. The recent development of this industry has changed the working conditions in the local market because, this is an alternative to the daily labor

8. Rules for segregating the women.

for the poor peasants. The weavers, a profession undermined in the Indian caste system, have provoked disgrace from the rich landlords because the latter are obliged to look elsewhere for daily laborers for the cultivation of their land.

The nearness of the market where the Hindu wholesalers operate, eases the retail sale of the cloths that brings in more money than agriculture. In Bongol many landless peasants have invested 3500 takas (700 FF) for buying machine, or they work in a neighbor's place in exchange for wages and food.

The success of this venture has inspired some villagers to buy two or three machines which are run by paid individuals while they work in their lands. In Bongol, and particularly in *Uttar para*, there are a striking number of weaving looms and the clapper of the machines rocks the daily life. The saris produced are sold each week to the itinerant vendors or to the wholesalers of the market. The women are quite rare at the weaving looms where young men are numerous. The women are now the members of a group of the *Grameen Bank* which has commenced its activities in this region.

The *Grameen Bank* is not irrelevant to the weaving activities of the region. It is known that this organization has now become a symbol of local investment for developmental activities. Credits are given to the peasants with a view to enabling them to create their own resources and thereby to dodge the shackle of dependance, defying the landlords. The conditions of repayment of the loans given by the *Grameen Bank* are excellent with a remarkable recovery rate. This helps to buy a cow or a machine thereby ensuring a regular income.

The *Grameen Bank* was launched in the Tangail region during the early 80s with groups of five farmers, either landless or having less than half an acre of land. A lone member per family, with no relationship between them and neighbors; such was the prerequisite foreseen to get loans of 500 to 2000 takas (100 to 400 FF). The amount borrowed is repaid at the rate of 2% per week. An interest of 16% is charged at end of the payment of

the loan. This drew animosity from the rural fundamentalist against the *Grameen Bank* because Islam has banned the practice of interest. A group is composed of a president, a secretary and three members. Six groups constitute a center. The representatives are changed every year. These loans are granted for income generating investments (livestock, machine, seeds,...). The employees of the bank ensure a meticulous systematic follow-up that enables the recovery of the loans and a transparent collective supervision of the allocation and the use of the loans.

In Bongol, six groups of men and six groups of women function and meet each week to administer the loans and to allocate new ones under the active supervision of an executive of the *Grameen Bank*. An obligatory solidarity fund is used as a precaution against the outstanding loans due to disease or deaths. The presence of the groups of women is vividly criticized in Bongol as much by the old devout as by the rich peasants who loose the cheap labor. The economic and social commitment of the women is considered as disgraceful and not conforming to the rules of *purdah*⁹. These opinions do not affect those concerned and, falling into rank, they meet each week under the guidance and vigilant surveillance of an "officer". These women, relatively young, provided with their loan booklet, converse and express themselves in public. The meetings are held, under the slogan: "Unity, Work, Discipline", to collect money, to slowly record it into the ledger, and to decide about next loans. This is how the activities of the *Grameen Bank* sometimes initiate a

9. Monique Selim defines *purdah* as: "the *Purdah*, this costume of practice and of rules locally symbolizes the moral of sexual distance, of segregation and of obligatory isolation of women and is positively invoked: the reason of *purdah* was not to deprive the women of their liberty of movement but for their "security"...The *purdah* thus generally goes beyond Islam, being used by some as a conservative plea to keep the women dependant and to fight against the bashful attempts to change the society in the name of a Bengali identity". The imaginaries of contact: the letter of the Bangaladeshi readers facing sexual separation. *L'homme et la société*. No 99-100.1991.Femmes et sociétés.p.177 and 183.

trend of close sociability to take shape in *samaj*.

The different customs in the muslim countries concerning the protection of women are often the object of hasty simplifications. The radical forms of political Islamism in Iran or Islamist conservatism in Saudi Arabia have lead to summarily see a series of rigid dogma in Islam systematically involving prohibition for women on going out from the family home or on access to the public places reserved for males. Each ethno- and socio-cultural conformation involves a reinterpretation and an endogenous reconstruction of the behavior and the interaction between men and women. Within the same nation, each social class, each group, is brought to a rethinking on the behavior of men and women in function of its singular history in which the particularities and the idiosyncracies of the actors are included. In this situation, Bangladesh thus shows a wide range of differential practices that cannot be exclusively interpreted with the help of the socio-economic or educational factors, but also vary considerably within the same family in terms of its movements. According to M.Selim: "The conservatism and the maximalist application of the *purdah* are no longer the prerogative of a social stratum and it is found disseminated in all social classes. It can be mentioned for example, that in a girls' school at Gulshan, a particularly smart neighborhood of Dhaka, the students are required to be covered with the *burqua*; this school differs with the vestimentary choice of the European type of a part of the elite that lives in that neighborhood. The *purdah* is of course, more stringent in the villages where it is difficult to escape from the very strong social endorsements and the consequent constraints. It is uncommon to find that the working class women in Dhaka are rigorously following the *purdah*, that is to say, for example, not to come in front of outsiders, or else, getting out on the street being covered with a *burqua* - a type of long "pinafore" covering the body from head to foot. On the other hand, many of them have confessed that they are obliged to put on a *burqua* in the house of their in-laws in the villages; when their parents-in-law

come to visit them in Dhaka, they also take care not to offend them and embrace a quasi-reclusive posture breaking off from their habits; thus, in the presence of her father-in-law, one of these women abstains from going in front of the vendors of vegetables or fruits who pass in front of her house every day, as she usually does daily. The majority of them define the *purdah* in a rather original way as an inner and personal moral value and not as a series of duties that impartially and externally set the conduct: the *purdah* would thus be a matter of the individual conscience in front of God, and not the fixed social norms because these have been dictated by God¹⁰.

Let us come back to the activities of the *Grameen Bank*: numerous loans have been advanced for weaving looms. The actual amounts of loan are between 3,000 and 7,000 takas (600 to 1400 FF) and Tozim, one of the first borrowers of Bongol, recounts his uncertain life of daily work as a small business man, including that of an earth carrier that he had been doing till the time of the starting of the *Grammen Bank*. With the first loan of 3,000 takas (600 FF) he buys a horse but breaks his hand. To repay the loan, he had to sell his horse and borrow money from a neighbor. In spite of his fright from the accident and worry that this borrowed money causes, he asks and gets a loan of 1,500 takas (300 FF) again which he repays without problem. Reassured from this experience, and after repaying each loan, he borrows Tk. 4,000 and then successively 4,000, 5,000 and 6,000 takas in 1988.

Now he has got a loan of 7,000 takas and considers himself to be satisfied. He has regained his confidence, a capacity to foresee and to control the money. He has overcome his original worry. He has built a house for his old days with the loan he received last.

Terming it the "*Landless party*" by its opponents, the *Grameen Bank* exerts a lasting effect in the area. The growth of village weaving is one of the most evident activities of the bank which gives the poor peasants the

10. M.Selim: pub.cited p.196-197.

outlook of escaping from the precarious situation in the first instance and then to send their children to schools and to consider the future without being its victim.

As it could be noticed in other organizations¹¹, the framework and the discipline, predominating the field of activities of the *Grameen Bank*, can give rise to an impression of a sort of forced recruitment. Between the anarchic dependance, which is the common destiny, and this type of easily fustigated enrollment, the choice belongs to those concerned. Their livelihood becomes substantially better when they receive the loans, but the social pressure and the fear of the initiative that results from it prevents many from joining the *Grameen Bank*. A local association, the *Para Krishok Samity* (group of peasants of the *para*) assembles twenty seven members, all neighbors of *Uttar para*. Founded in 1980, this association owns an office of seven members. It is affiliated with the *Bangladesh Rural Development Board* (BRDB). The board handles its deposits of around 8,000 takas (1,600 FF) which will let the association procure a loan of 30,000 takas (6,000 FF). This group of mid-level owners functions with the weekly subscriptions of two takas. Lacking any definite projects, the members have bought an irrigation pump, insecticides and according to the neighbors, they behave like a *samaj*.

In Bongol, 10% of the population can be classified as very poor. Landless, without regular job, these families live on uncertain jobs and a few of them resort to begging in the neighboring villages. A limited but genuine mutual help exists among the close neighbors. It does not permanently ameliorate the condition of those who are helped, rather it shows the existence of a token of village solidarity and in certain rare cases, of the act of personal piety.

The village society of Bongol, apart from the unequal access to the land like that in all countries, is based on different types of institutions. Because of the presence

11. B.Hours - M.Selim: *Une entreprise de développement au Bangladesh. Le centre de Savar* (A developmental enterprise in Bangladesh. The Gonoshastya Kendra), Paris 1989.

of the leaders of *samaj* in the mosque committees, Islam with its mosques and their committees, displays an aspect of openness and equality. In practice, the competition that these *samaj* are engaged in to control the rare resources, makes obligatory and determining the recourse to the *middlemen* who are the key-men of the factions. For the lack in his rank of a man having external political and administrative relations, a *samaj* possesses only a limited influence. The presence of the representatives of the political parties in the mosque committees attests this fact. The biggest landlords of the village all have politico-administrative relays at Tangail even at Dhaka. These power alliances are established at the neighboring market (*bazaar*). Whether it is linked to the disputes between the villages, allotment of grants, the mediation of the big politically active landlords and those who work for them exerts a determining influence on the equilibrium of the village. To make one's voice heard, one has to have access to the administrative and political authorities. Each of the big parties has a semi-official representative in Bongol. All of them are members of the mosque committees of their respective neighborhoods. Thus reappears the structure of the typical regional Asiatic village communities. The political power of the *zamindars* previously and now-a-days that of the State form the link between them. The discrete presence of the State is nevertheless capital to control the groups with divergent interests and to stop the very frequent conflicts or the too active struggles that will prohibit the cohabitation. All the local institutions of Islam are like the regional stations of the State and play a determining role in the social reproduction and in the maintenance of order.

As has been illustrated by a number of studies on the villages carried out in Bangladesh, the micro-political and macro-political dimensions are linked together in a conclusive manner for conserving a permanently fragile social cohesion. The political integration of the rural environment seemingly less engaged in the discussion, is in fact a fundamental stake for the political life of Bangladesh.

How is the Imam placed, and what is his position and status in the village society in this social context ?

Imam Amra

Amra, of around forty, is a man of small size and has a sleek long beard. His keen, sharp and clear gaze is striking. In spite of his modest income, he is always attired in an impeccable dress which differs from those of the other imams which is sometimes neglected in the village. This attire is nothing special and like other villagers, Amra wears a long tunic (*kurta*) and trousers. Serene and thoughtful, his concentrated and serious gaze indicates his uprightness as much with regard to God as with regard to the village community. His long and carefully combed beard distinguishes him from the other villagers. During the interviews, Amra has never shown the least animosity towards other villagers. He analyses his condition and his aspirations without frustration and does not involve the will of God for all purposes. His English is not excellent but with my mediocre Bengali, the exchanges on both sides were gratifying.

I could esteem the qualities of Amra as much in the village where I was introduced as in my residence in the Capital. During his stay in my house, Amra has never shown his least curiosity and never departing from his discretion, being as serious in eating the European dishes as in talking about his family. Free from all forms of dependance, without being anxious about his identity and his status, I could thus appreciate a relationship of rare equality. Amra has never shown his delight in the comfort of my urban residence where he resided with great naturalness and perfect ease. After I had shown him the direction of Mecca and taken all the pictures from the wall, he started saying five times his daily prayer. He used to go to the nearby Gulshan mosque which the upper middle class people frequent, and did not make any comments. One day he brought a patient to the house whom he treated, like the way he did in the village, with his breathing and prayers.

Contrary to most of the fundamentalists, Amra gave

proof of great tolerance and a remarkable practical intelligence. He is opposite of the narrow-minded rural devout and of the fundamentalist ideologists or the utopians and treats the discussions on concepts and on belief in a very pragmatic way. He is different from a number of rural Imams whom I have met, by a sharp and unostentatious sense of dignity of his functions of the Imam. This attitude is far away from those for whom it means an employment without significance or from certain urban Imams who try to impress the foreigner by a religious authority of which they are deprived within the social and religious system. Amra has then nothing of a *mullah*. Those doctors and rural devout are the symbol of some inane reactionaries in certain milieu of the urban society of Dhaka. Sensitive to the difficult life of the villagers which he shares, dignified and open to dialogue, he is an example of a character of Islam. Particularly free from any complex, and in spite of his modest, even precarious condition, he is a respectable and a relatively respected man. His limited education was never a pretext for a loss of confidence or of identity and that is why he has greatly simplified my presence in the field considering my curiosity as quite natural and the customs of the villagers as dignified. In this context, he constitutes a rare illustration of a successful synthesis between Islam and the Bengali culture. Actor of a sort of "concrete spirituality", he constitutes the most pleasant character of Islam in Bangladesh that I have met in the sense that he was one of those rare ones not to call on me to declare which was my tribe.

Another event enabled to show up this fundamental dimension of exchange during the investigation. I made a mistake in not acceding to the demands of the notables and of Amra during my very first days in Bongol: in fact they wished my wife to stay in the village at least for one or two nights. I did not see any necessity for it. During the whole period of my stay at Bongol, I had the notion that the *pardah* is strictly maintained there and it was the reason why no woman came before me. As a result, I was remarkably taken aback when, during the visit of my wife for a day, I saw a group of women from

the village suddenly come to us without any restraint and bustled about without any reluctance over the meal which we took in the open air. I then realized that my earlier refusal had been interpreted as a lack of confidence towards the villagers and since I conceded to "bring my wife into public", reciprocally it was no longer necessary to seclude theirs.

This anecdotic event teaches in particular, the existence of the ever relative nature of the practice of segregation of women, their necessary inclusion in individual interactions and in personal relations. The ethnocentric vision of Bangaldeshi Muslims obeying without thinking the so-called unchanging demands of the *pardah* is thus invalidated.

Imam of Bongol for seven years, Amra hails from Pabna, wherefrom his family migrated several generations ago. He says that his ancestors had lot of lands and some were in the police service during the British colonial periods. **"My grand-father Mongomia was *matbar* (leader). He was accused of having taken part in a theft in the region and was imprisoned. He had two young sons: Jalal Mia and Elal Mia. His wife was forced to give up his very covetous lands to tenant farming. In spite of the attempts to keep him in prison, he could come out of the prison after seven years with the help of the *zamindar* (big landlord, tax collector) of Korutia. He then started venturing to get back his lands. He was subsequently killed by *ban* (sorcery). A man can be killed by an insect or by a cut betel leaf put on the bottom of a pond. One can protect oneself with the *surahs* (chapters) of the holy Quoran.**

My grand-father Mongomia is dead and his lands remained occupied by the tenants. Each of the two brothers inherited half of the lands that were left. With these reduced lands, life was difficult and my father had to go to Calcutta to work in a book binder's shop. After the creation of Pakistan, my father came back to the village following the crisis in the publication industry. Three years of floods have obliged him to sell his belongings to Kakumia, the real *matbar* (leader), and to our neighbor, Manik Mia. Previously, we used to live in a

big house. It is too small now to let you reside there.

Our house has been bought by Sarjamia and the furniture by Amullo. We had to do the same with the six cows: sell them one after another. My brother had to stop schooling and go to work in a press in Tangail, as did my father went to the binder. We lived poorly with that and we had to borrow without interest from the relatives. I was only six. I could not stay in a boarding-house at Atya and I came back to the village. I was given food in lieu of small jobs. I have passed class V at the school. The son of my uncle, an instructor himself, brought me to his school for my good results. In lieu of my accommodation, I was to teach and to keep watch on the school at night. Things changed with the liberation war of 1971. I lived in the house of the president of the Muslim League who was killed by the resistance forces (*Freedom Fighters*) because he was pro-Pakistani. The house was burnt and the family fled. Then I was asked to join the collaborators (*razakars*) for money. My mother forbade this and I joined the resistance force. I attained the age of 22, yet, I did not have money for my books. My sister asked me to become the tutor of her children. Although I did not have my own books, yet I did good results in class III. For this, I was given a scholarship with which I bought the books. I was the leader of the students and we presented a show in the school for the benefit of the mosque. Then I successfully passed my SSC examination from Tangail.

My father then asked me to return to the village. But I wandered looking for a job. I did not succeed. I had to bribe all. I then learned typing and the work of printing press. The nephew of Sarjamia proposed me to work in his shop in Mymensingh for 300 takas plus food. I worked there for one year till the election of 1976 when I returned to the printing press in Tangail.

I left that work after my employer blamed me about my prayers which he thought to be superfluous. I sold my bicycle and went to attend the Biswa Iztema at Tongi¹²; this big muslim congregation impressed me

12. It relates to a regular huge gathering organized by the pietist movement of the Tabligh at the outskirts of Dhaka.

and after one month in Kakrail, I made a tour of Tabligh in Barisal and Narsigdi for three months.

Thereafter, I borrowed 1,000 takas from the father-in-law of my brother for opening a shop and a lending library of non religious books in the market. I struggled along. In 1977, the Imam of our village became old. As I temporarily worked as an Imam, I was requested to replace him. I hesitated, then I accepted. Because of a low salary I had to continue my business in Rampur.

I married. Payment of the dowry for my wife was delayed and I borrowed 2,000 takas to invest in my shop. As my income was insufficient, the repayment was delayed. Being exclusively an Imam is not sufficient for livelihood. I had to sell a goat and help my brother for his small trade. Because of economic difficulties a number of disputes arose in our big family. My father decided that every one should live on his own and thus, we have three houses, for my father and for my brothers, in this *bari*. I thought that the business of betel that I was doing with my brother was not prestigious for someone educated. I participated in the training of the *Islamic Foundation* in 1980 with a view to improve my knowledge and my status. The authority of a primary Quoranic school (*maktab*) in Atya allowed me to teach there in 1980, first for nothing and then in 1985, with a salary, when it became a government approved *madrasah*. Simultaneously, I was preparing for the degree of Dhakil (equivalent to the O level) after passing the Quari examination from Mymensingh. Quari is for good recitation.

I attended the courses on Janasheba (Islamic Mission) for 45 days in 1982. There, we gathered knowledge, but there is no prospects afterwards. One must have a follow-up training. We need not only the good counsel but equipment are also needed. So what can one do. The social and economic status of the Imams must be improved".

The life of Amra was not easy. He appears to be a man of lower class coming from a family that has lost its lands, and who is on the lookout for a new social ascent

after a declining phase. He is an educated and intelligent man, capable of analyzing his situation and is clear-sighted about the possible prospects.

Following the training he had, Amra became a village doctor (*palli chikitchoc*). He displays this qualification occasionally on an wooden signboard. He receives a maximum of about twenty patients a week and has in his stock medicine valued at 300 to 400 takas. He seldom prescribes antibiotics. He shows a certain humility when he maintains:- **"I am not a doctor. But I wanted to be one. My family was too poor to help me become a doctor. I do good to others from what I have been taught. In 1975, I ventured with Dr. Mofiz Uddin in the bazaar. I had some homeopathic medicines. I treat only the neighbors. For cold, I give paracetamol, ampicillin capsule and histacin tablets. For dysentery, I prescribe flagyl, emosyl or tetracycline. For diarrhoea, I prescribe oral rehydration salt with sulfaguanidine or sumasine capsules. Homeopathy is good for the children. I discuss with the doctors and if it does not work, I ask the doctors in Rampur or in Tangail. I myself do the tests. For tuberculosis, I tried with stimetine which is prescribed in the hospital. I use the book given to us during the training of *Janasheba*¹³. When the symptoms are precise, I use the prayers. For the evil spells, the snake bites, poisoning, I use breathing and water. If a woman swallows pesticide (habitual fashion of feminine suicides in rural Bangladesh) I give her *tetul* (tamarind: indigenous vomitive) and I send her to the hospital..."**

Although inadequately trained, Amra however, is reasonable and takes few therapeutic risks. On the question of morality, he is reasonably conservative, because it is needed for a village Imam.

"The old lament for the *purdah* (segregation of the women). But one can even crush stones under *burqua* (veil). Women can replace men in the weaving industry. The *purdah* protects the women against molestation.

13. *Janasheba*: training of the Imams instituted by the Islamic Mission and mentioned in this book (*cf.* Islamic Mission).

When marriage is free, the guardians (parents, those responsible) have no more say and the discussions never end with all the tension. The virtue of a woman has to be protected. Here, in this *para*, we keep watch on our women. That is why, there is no women group of the *Grameen Bank* here. One has to pay interest. It is not good".

In spite of his security in the village, the economic status of Amra however, is precarious. He receives 700 takas per month by giving a course every morning in the *madrasah* of Atya. His medical activities enable him to earn 300 takas more. These also include the animal care which he learned from a three day training course. His remuneration for Imam (300 takas) and the proceeds from his sale of books bring his total income to 1,600 takas per month. He has to help his father and one of his school going brothers with this money.

Amra is not satisfied with his job of Imam which gives the advantage of only guaranteeing him a modest status in the village. After several requests for a raise of his salary, he was told by the mosque committee: "If you leave, we will have no one for this salary and you will cause harm to the village". Amra was even proposed to pay 100 takas per month to another Imam, to collect the money and to find the Imam. The mosque committee remained unmoved.

Working in the *madrasah* of Atya the whole morning where he teaches, moving around in the market on a bicycle with a lot of books the whole after-noon, it is only on Friday, during the weekly prayer (*jumma*) when Amra performs the duty of the Imam. He finds time to take part in a certain number of social and religious organizations. This demonstrates his asserted capacity to go beyond the village context. Thus, he is associated with the not so active *Islamic Trained Samity*, - the association of the ex-trainees of the *Islamic Foundation*. He is the vice-president of the *Islamic Peace Mission*, a local organization whose activities include a few annual meetings. He is a member of the *Book Samity*, the association of the book sellers as well as of the *Madrasah Teacher Samity*. Finally, he is the *Welfare Secretary* of

the local branch of the "*Jatya Imam Samity*" which protects the Imams in difficulty.

Open to all discussions, enthusiastic and curious, Amra takes active interest in the social and economic development which for him means creation of local jobs in the first instance. It is the developmental enterprises that are needed here. There is no job, no cotton or jute mills here. People want them to be hired by external groups, without investing any capital like in the weaving factories. He considers disease like an atonement: "*Allah will pardon*". Endowed with a great social tolerance, he is uncompromising on the rules which can not be interpreted, according to him (*e.g., the purdah*). His outlook is symptomatic of the disjunction between the inflexible rules and the much more flexible customs, which are frequent in Bangladesh.

Although Amra lives unsatisfied with his status, his job and his income, he is however, neither frustrated nor belligerent, for it is the will of God. With his intelligence and his skill to work, this village Imam would certainly have been a good doctor provided his social environment had allowed him to undertake the required studies. Conservative on the moral issues, Amra is capable of innovation, to organize and to guide small groups. His subservient position in the village however bars him from showing his competence to take initiatives which would be immediately penalized by the notables of the mosque committees. This authority of the local notables, plays a determining role in the control and direction of the religious activities in the rural as well as in the urban mosques.

From the Imam to the local practices of Islam.

The mosque (*mashjid*) constitutes the essential sign of Islam in villages. The absence of mosque in new or very poor villages is seen as a negative sign by the people. Construction and maintenance of mosque and payment of Imam's salary are the constant worries for the mosque committees. Many a rural village mosques are incomplete (faulty roofing, construction incomplete or it is brick-walled).

Bernard Lewis notes: "All words denoting the mosque apply only to a cultural edifice and not to an abstraction, an authority or to an institution¹⁴". The mosque (*mashjid*) must then be well distinguished from *murshid*, meaning a "guide" or one who gives direction. For the peasants, the mosque is but a structure expensive to construct and maintain and where prayers are offered, particularly the big prayer of Friday (*jumma*) which makes up the main collective expression of the religious custom of a community.

In Bongol, each *para* has its own brick-built mosque for several years where the ritual ablutions can be performed because of facilities of running tap water or because of its nearness to the pond of the *para* where Amra is the Imam. The size of the mosques is regulated according to the number of devotees attending the Friday prayer. This implies a certain promiscuity of the believers who fall in neck to neck during prayer allowing the notables in the first row. That is why, in Bongol, the mosques are almost filled by thirty or fifty men on Fridays. The function of the mosque is inseparable from the role of the Imam who leads the prayer facing the direction of Mecca, standing in front of the villagers with his back directed towards them.

In his book on *L langage politique de l'islam (the political language of Islam)*, Bernard Lewis specifies: "The jurists and the theologians, specialists of the constitutional laws of the classical Islam, invariably use in their writings the term *imamat*- "the duty or the function of the Imam"- to designate the supreme and sovereign authority. Originating from a word signifying "in front", the word Imam has now become to mean someone who leads the prayer and from there, by extension, the politico-religious chief of all the Islamic community in whom God has vested the task to bring the community to accomplish his commandments¹⁵".

In his part, M. Arkoun underscores two dimensions in the context of the *imama* and of the Imams: that of

14. Bernard Lewis: *Le Langage politique de l'Islam*. Paris 1988.p.14.

15. B.Lewis, book cited p.54-55.

direction in the one hand and of guide in the other. According to Habib Boularès: "The Imam, literally meaning someone who gives the direction to follow, is at the origin, the conductor of the prayer. He is not a priest pertaining to an order. It could be any one. It suffices that the devout appoint him or accept to fall behind him for the collective prayer. However, it has become a convention to appoint the Imams for the big mosques and, now-a-days, all places for regular prayer has its Imam appointed either by the official authority or by the rulers of the minority Muslim community living in non-Muslim countries... While any body could become *moaddib* because of the non-existence of priesthood in Islam. A *moaddib* is an Imam for leading prayer or ensuring all other socio-religious functions like that of accomplishing the mortuary rituals, one must possess a certain level of knowledge to accede to other dignities¹⁶".

In Bongol, with the exception of the big prayer of Friday (*jumma*), a small number of persons go to the mosque for the diurnal five time prayers, the calls (*Azan*) for which are not given by the Imams but by the third persons. Amra's father, an old pious man often does this job when Amra is absent being busy with his multifarious preoccupations. Only four or five villagers assemble for the end of the day prayer.

"All muslim adults of rural Bangladesh know that Allah is the creator and the judge of each entity and every thing. God will judge each action at the time of death. They know the five pillars of Islam: the invocation (belief in God and his messenger, Muhammad) recited in each *namaz* (prayer), the necessity to pray five times a day, the principles of alms, the necessity and the virtue of fasting during Ramadan, and for those who can afford, the pilgrimage to Mecca. These simple rules and the other that they can discern, have been made by Allah and constitute the center for perception of Islam by the people. A small number of poor peasants pray five times a day and those who practise it, command certain

16. Habib Boularès: *L'islam, La peur et l'esperance*. Paris 1983.

respect, because devotion is respected. A study indicates that, in Bangladesh, about one fourth of men, and half of women assert that they pray five times a day and that half of the men go to mosques once a week¹⁷.

Each inhabitant of the three *paras* of Bongol frequents the mosque of his own *para*. The dwelling and the financial involvement undoubtedly determine to which mosque men of such and such house (*bari*) will go. Besides the mosque and its maintenance that is the responsibility of the neighboring population, another place has a major social and symbolic import linked with Islam. It refers to a field (*Eid ga*) where the prayer during the festival of *Eid* is held. This piece of land, faraway from the village, is the expression of the socio-religious identity of a village (Bongol) beyond those three neighborhoods and the three mosques. Adorned with a big tree in the midst of cultivated plains, the land was given as a donation (*waqf*) by a villager, Nassir Khan. On the day of the festival, late in the morning and in the sun, about four hundred persons (exclusively men and boys) participate in the biggest collective prayer that symbolizes the existence of a Muslim community on one soil. Almost all men are present and the prayer is led by one of the Imams of the village or by any other *alim* (wise) present. In 1989, in Bongol, because of refusal by Amra, this prayer was led by a blind "*hafez*" of the village. (*Hafez*: one who can recite the Quoran from memory).

The graveyard is another place that indicates the existence of a village community. In this locality where the *baris* (households) are quite scattered, it becomes vital to recognize the places that signify the collective identity. Only two *paras* (*Noya para* and *Uttar para*, excluding the *Dokhin para*, whose deceased are interred elsewhere) have contributed to the purchase of the land recently. The ad-hoc committee formed for the buying of this land of 1500 m² comprises the two Imams and the principal members of the mosque committees of the two concerned *paras*. The collection gathered 70,000 takas.

17. David Abecassis: Identity, Islam, and Human Development in rural Bangladesh. University Press, Dhaka, 1990. p.40.

This is a significant amount of money (about 14,000 FF). Certain contributions from the rich leaders were ostentatious (Chan: 10,000 takas; Aza: 5,000 takas). Amra has contributed over 100 takas. Zobar and Jinna, two members of the mosque committees, contributed 500 takas each. The poorest four or five families did not contribute. Likewise, these families could not contribute to the maintenance of the mosque and to the salary of the Imam. The mosque committee administers it and pays the Imam and supervises him. The members of the mosque committee are not frequently changed; particularly when they are the notables, their position is lasting. In the village context, the notability represents two dimensions. It is appropriate for a *matbar* (leaders of factions) who has more than average wealth and maintains substantial external political and economic relations and who commands a genuine personal influence.

A very pious villager having but a small stock of Islamic bag might be offered a post in the mosque committee for the sake of his respect that he commands even if his income and his connections are humble. So, the mosque committees present two aspects: one is political and the other is moral. These are the two dimensions that dictate the local administration of religion.

Kakumia, the richest landlord of the village, is the president of the mosque committee of *Noya para*, where Amra is the Imam. He possesses more than 10 acres of land and each of his two brothers who live out of the village possess as much. Kukumia and his brothers are proprietors of a printing press in Tangail town. Touchy and not very sociable, Kukumia is not considered a particularly pious Muslim even though he regularly attends the weekly prayer. He has not yet performed the pilgrimage to Mecca although he has adequate money to do it. He makes use of his external economic and political connections with his nephew who is the president of the local council (*Union Council*) and is the leader of the *Jatyo Party* of the deposed president Ershad. His father was already a *matbar* and a member of

the local council. Like his father, Kukumia is also a village leader. It is his connections outside the village rather than his oratory or negotiating qualities, which has given him this image and made him the president of the mosque committee. His integrity becomes doubtful when many claim that he has drawn an illegal electric line for his pump for which he was sentenced to pay a fine of 20,000 takas. As he did not pay, the village does not benefit from the source of electricity which is so near.

Another *matbar*, Saitul Haq, is the vice-president of the committee. He was elected to the local council (union) and is the local leader of the Awami League, the party of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, "the father of the nation". He possesses only half an acre of land. But the lack of wealth is compensated by his remarkable social facility and a well-known flair for negotiation in marriages or in litigations. He derives his comparably limited income from a food ration shop where some elementary essential materials are sold at fixed prices against ration cards issued by the Government. Such a "business" presupposes the grant of a license that entails lot of canvassing. At the higher level it is in the hands of the local leaders for whom it is a position of power beset with a large scale corruption concerning the management of food stock. Besides this business, whose transparency is questionable, Saitul Haq takes part in the *jatras* during winter. *Jatras* are popular erotico-buffoon shows, a sort of small opera meant for the peasants and in which one notes the abundance of highly erotic feminine roles for a rustic and less urbane audience.

These spectacles are denounced by the religious authorities. The pious people thus do not go there. In the countryside, it can be easily proved that, rural prostitution is occasionally organized under the cover of *jatras* by the "business" men who operate both as agents as well as procurer. Saitul Haq is often absent from the village for his business and he irregularly attends the prayer. A man of warm and lively character, his equivocal activities outside the village are not an

impediment to his status in the village. Beneficiary of a clientele he built up himself, Saitul Haq is always ready to resolve a family problem or to give some takas for the mosque. Although his business outside the village offends the villagers, he safeguards the morality in the village.

Thakon is the Secretary of the mosque committee. He is also the Secretary of the Rampur market. He is a good administrator. He is a former soldier and has two acres of land which he cultivates himself when he is not busy with the tax collection in the bazar or the cleanliness of the market. Endowed with a strong authority, this ex-army man, son of a *matbar*, returned to the village in 1974 after having being freed from Pakistani prison camp where many Bengali soldiers of the Pakistan army were confined during the hostility. His cousin, Nurul is a member of the committee. His deceased father was very religious and was an Imam. He has recently donated a piece of land (*waqf*) for the welfare of the mosque.

Besides the above mentioned three leaders (*matbars*) there are seven members in the mosque committee. Many of them have donated small pieces of land, the incomes from which go to the mosque. Kassem, whose father has donated a piece of land where the small mosque of *Naya para* has been erected, is a member of the committee. So is the cousin of Saitul Haq. It appears that the power within the committee where Imam Amra is the treasurer, is controlled by the three *matbars* and they keep a socio-political equilibrium while the other members are more busy with the morality or the religion. What are these two functions in the committees of the other two *paras* and what are the relations between the Imam and the committee in those two cases?

Dokhin para is the most inhabited of the localities in Bongol. The Imam of this locality is Hafez Ahmed. It seems that he has pursued the training course of the *Islamic Foundation* without any practical outcome. Imam for seven years, he is practicing the profession of a tailor for the last four years and receives 1800 takas per annum for the Friday prayers plus 300 takas during the

Ramadan. His father was an Imam of an adjacent village. His principal income comes from his sewing. As he does not own any land he never abandons his sewing. He maintains: "Here, the mosque committee never meets. The meetings are very rare. Bunta Sarker is the acting chief because old Depari can not move around. He looks after all the affairs of the mosque. As for the others, I no longer remember them". Bunta Sarker is one of the two principal *matbars* of Dokhin Para. His father had gone to Mecca twice during the last four years. He is the only pilgrim in Bongol. This has given him and his family a great prestige. He is the Secretary of the committee and is a big landlord because he possesses 10 acres of land. One of his sons helps him in his agriculture, the second has a restaurant in the bazar and the third has a jute business near Dhaka. According to him, "having an Imam from the village is better because he is frequently available. A better salary will not change the quality of the Imam". In fact, it is Bunta Sarker who administers the mosque committee. He is responsible for the collection of rice for the mosque contributed by villagers. The president Depari is an old man and at times irascible and he is almost disabled. His house is near the mosque.

Bunta Sarker mentions: "I have to look after every thing because no body wants to do any thing. Depari is old. The land for the mosque is a donation (*waqf*: in the name of God) from his father. Previously it was on their land. Our mosque is the oldest in Bongol. A *pir* (saint) lived there during the British period. To collect rice and to sell afterwards for the mosque, certain *samaj* (solidarity groups) do their own collection. The rest is done by Hossain who takes two hundred and fifty or five hundred grams according to the richness. It is voluntary and weekly. After storing, the rice is sold and the money is deposited with Depari. Hossain receives seven hundred twenty takas per annum for his work. The salary of the Imam is collected during the Eid by 15 or 20 takas. Only the very poor people do not pay. The Imam receives an additional donations for *milad* (prayer in the domicile) or for *tarabi* (prayer of Ramadan)."

Hafez Ahmed considers he needs to do only a minimum of work as an Imam. He does not take any initiative outside his profession of a tailor. For him, the activity of an Imam is unimportant and ancillary. For this reason, he does not command any respect, nor a minimum of authority. The *maktab* (Quronic primary school) is run by another villager.

"To be an Imam here is an alternate profession (side job). What I have learned from the training of the Islamic Foundation is not serving me because no body asks me anything besides the Friday prayer. The Imams are having several jobs for a long time because their salary can not be raised. The poor can not pay and the rich do not want to pay all. That is the reason why I learned sewing in Rampur. I work for the village and that is enough. One of my brothers works in the weaving factory and the other is in *madrrasah* where he is learning the Quroran to become *hafez*.... My predecessor was sacked. Bunta Sarker did not like him because he used to keep himself absent too frequently. I am lucky to have my work in the village".

So, in *Dokhin Para*, the Imam seems to be less involved with the mosque committee which is administered by some rich or pious men as before. However, all the *matbars* here are not members of the committee. Thus, Shaitul Karim, member of the local Union Council, is totally unconcerned about the prospects of the mosque even though he is the godson of the president. *Matbar* and blunt politician, he has his land worked by daily laborers and affirms: "People think that we are the bootlickers of the government and they do not respect us. They think that we belong to *Jatyo Party*. As I am a member (local MP) now, I can not be a big *matbar* here". He says these things with feigned regret.

Dokhin Para is split into seven *samaj*. The relations are tense. This reveals the absence of a mosque committee that should speak out on behalf of the village. On the other hand, the Imam keeps himself completely aloof from the affairs of the mosque. He only declaims the Friday prayer.

Purbo Para is the third locality of Bongol. The Imam here is Shahjahan Mia who owns a small grocery, not far from his house and the mosque. It is here, where one can meet him every day and discuss with him. He is unclear on the level of his education at the *madrasahs* in Mymensingh and in the area. His father is an Imam of a mosque two kilometers away from the village. Another Imam from another village was the Imam of *Purbo Para* before him. These crossed appointments among the neighboring villages are common. According to Shahjahan Mia, the training of the *Islamic Foundation* is meant for the "illiterates". He thinks that he does not need it because one learns more in the *madrasah*. Shahjan as well as his father present themselves as small rural religious craftsmen. They do this in a very limited fashion in the precise limits of task for which they are remunerated. The father of Shahjahan cultivates his land while he looks after the shop where he sells on credit, "if not, there would not be any clients".

Some of Shahjahan's clients banter about him. During the Friday prayer, the president of the committee takes the podium once the recitation is finished. His participation in the morning catechism (*maktab*) when the children are often alone in the mosque is episodic.

In April 1989, the committee decided to do away with the services of Shahjahan following an apparently religious dispute. He was adjudged mediocre.

"Me, I follow the teachings of the Prophet who never did *milad* (private prayer at the domicile). Moreover, the Prophet did not frequent *madrasah* (higher qouranic school). We follow here Hannafi, the school of the four Imams. I do not want to be continually disturbed for leading the prayer (*milad*) for any reason". The mosque committee blames the Imam for his unabated refusal to lead prayers at domicile for a happy occasion like after the end of a sickness. It blames him for a great number of women in his shop which sells to the most poor of the locality and thus attracts women who are the least discrete and the least respectful of the decency and of the *purdah*. It is the stubbornness rather than the

mediocre competence of Shahjahan, which has been the reason for his dismissal. This mediocre competence is common with many rural Imams. But for others, they are more submissive than him and thus are more tolerable.

Kobir, a former soldier, is the president of the mosque committee of *Purbo Para*. He is a faithful disciple of the *Pir* of Korutia and the owner of a tailoring shop in the Rampur bazaar. He is also the treasurer of the mosque committee. With 11 members, and an office room, the committee comprises most of the *matbars* of the ten *samaj* as well as some pious individuals or some who have frequented *madrasahs* for a few years during their youth and are regarded as being informed about the matters of religion. To the extent where Kobir has the opportunity, the capacity and the required instruction, he can thus ensure the most important work.

The construction of the brick-built mosque was initiated in 1983 but it has not yet been completed although 24 takas per family per annum for the Imam and 50 takas per month for these works are being levied. The villagers find it too high and the works are discontinued. Kobir asserts: "We are called *master* or *munshi* because my father was a school teacher and my grand-father was an Imam. The people of Dokhin Para have not sat down with us before because there were weavers here and it is considered a profession for the Hindus. Abu Garoda, the vice-president, is my cousin. He was a local councillor (union council member). My nephew collects rice for the mosque. We manage and our family is known to be pious". Garoda is in the committee for the last 12 years and he is the son of a *matbar*. He is an ex-police man. His five sons have left the village and work respectively in the customs, in the army, in the Middle-East while the last two are students.

Barek Khan sells and buys saris. His land is rented out from which he earns an adequate income. He is in the committee for 20 years. The majority of the committee members is recruited from among the well-off or wealthy peasants as well as from among the

ex-government servants (police or army). However, Mohammed Ali Mia does not have enough land to feed every body in his family and he has to rent out his land and has to buy more rice even though his children are weavers. Abdul Khan is also an ex-police man. His little land is rented out and he goes to the bazaar every day. This *matbar* is a leader of the Awami League party. He lives on his pension and on the investments in the weaving and in the welding workshop. His daughter-in-law is the chief of the womens' center of the Grameen Bank in the village. He explains: "My maternal uncle's bari is here. My relatives are at Del Duar. My father was a member of the union council 15 years ago. The Grameen Bank has good activities here. I am not against it. My son has got a loan for his welding workshop".

Not particularly interested in Islam, Abdul Khan has a number of connections. He entertains them in the tea shop of the bazaar where he passes several hours every day. A Social and political leader, well-off without being rich, he has a post in the mosque committee. He however, does not have any particular interest for the religion and his presence in the big prayer is irregular. These three cases derived from the same village allow to analyze a certain number of characters particular to the religion in a village environment.

The mosque committee or those who represent it play a decisive role not only in the administration of the mosque but also in dealing with the Imam, often considered as a "supplementary" to the mosque. That is to say that, the desired qualities are discretion and prudence surrounded with morality. These rural Imams are ill paid and all engage themselves in other activities. Their contribution to the local islamic organizations depends on their personal qualities. This is apparent from the fact that, with similar wages, Amra, in spite of his modest social status, demonstrates a substantial interest for his job and certain respect for himself whereas his colleague of *Dokhin Para* does not leave his sewing machine and seems to be incapable even of evoking the essential values of Islam.

The mosque committees make up a good indicator of the social and political profile of a *para*. All the principal leaders are present there, directly or through a close connection. In essence each *samaj* is represented. However, the relative importance of the members is quite variable. When the Imam is inadequately involved or inactive, the mosque committee on the other hand, seems very quickly to turn into the private ground of one or two *samaj* with their leaders, that is to say one or two persons. Majority of the members are the rich or well-off peasants and in all instances, the political leaders, local elected persons, the officials of political parties or their close associates are present. This leads to confirm that the mosque committee is an important authority of social and political control. The precarious economic condition and social dependence of the Imams in addition to their mediocre status forces them to be confined to a repetitive task in which initiatives are out of place. To be an Imam is a poor man's activity. No sons of any *matabar* or rich peasants become Imam. When, as with Amra, the Imam is particularly active, perceptive and ambitious equal to his capacities, he can achieve a substantial authority among the villagers, but that does not change his status which remains firmly controlled by the *matbars*. In this unstable balance between the factions and their clients that constitute the background of village politics, the Imam has either to keep himself aloof or to play a modest role with the benediction of those in charge of the factions, while these people consider that the role of the Imam is globally positive, that is beneficial for the village. The three Imams mentioned here are from their own respective villages for which reason they have been paid less and kept "available". Nevertheless, as we will see later, that in other villages where the Imam is an outsider and his status is also a bit superior, the expectations concerning him are little different too.

Placed in between a more or less torn apart, real "village community" and the abstract community of the united and pacified believers, the village Imam must identify with the first while referring to the second.

Besides his precarious economic condition, his extreme social dependence, prevents him from taking all initiatives that would otherwise modify the common practices. Other than the activities centered around the mosque and in the annual congregational prayer ground (*Eidgah*), the evidence of Islam is apparent in two other situations that involve the private domain.

The home prayers (*milad*) are frequent. These are held at the request of an individual to celebrate a happy occasion like that of recovery from disease, construction of a new house etc. The Imam is not remunerated for his recitation followed by devotional songs, but sometimes he receives a small gift as a token of gratitude. The gathering for nocturnal sermons (*Waaz mehfiles*) organized in winter are held in the home of some one who bears the cost of equipment and the remuneration of the hired professional preacher. The microphone and the marquee are rented for 50 takas. The preacher, depending on his reputation, is paid 200 to 300 takas or more. These ceremonies of sermons are held to thank God after a happy incident. It is a personal investment decided by he who organizes it in his own courtyard in presence of all his neighbors and with a big audience if the preacher is famous and his sponsor is a notable. A very particular mood that dominates in this night-gathering that continues till dawn, resembles the village ceremonies held in honor of the spirits as observed in other areas of South Asia. The preacher is enthusiastic and vivid and addresses the peasants assembled and seated on the ground in a loud voice. It is essentially the repeated threat of hell. The theme of the omnipresence of God is fundamental. (Don't be blind. I observe you) all like that of his omniscience (I am the erudite of the erudites). The long improvised declamation of the preacher in a miraculous atmosphere, turns into a heroic song punctuated by religious songs. The miracles accomplished by the famous saints (*pirs*) and the episodes relating the demons, Abraham, Adam are recounted in these songs. Highlighted by a number of metaphors, these sermons constitute one of the popular foundations of Islam by

representing the traits of the faith of the peasants which is still impregnated with animist traditions. Most of these preachers have a background of Quoranic education. Certain number of persons among them are ex-Imams who prefer a higher earning and are capable of livening up a night by continuing the speech for 6 to 8 hours at a stretch. The strong odor of animism that floats in these demonstrations emphasizes the composite character of Islam in rural Bangladesh.

Morality, the interest for power in the society, instrument of social control- that is the rural Islam for all these at the same time. Around the mosque, the big weekly prayer and the annual prayer ground (*Eidgah*) it gives an image of a community of believers (*Ummah*) otherwise torn apart by its internal conflicts. Islam is also a system of beliefs in the here-after in some home ceremonies. It is again village politics as can be expressed by the mosque committee. Finally, it is certain popular and marginal customs of an individual and mystic nature.

A last aspect of the religious life in villages pertains to the cult of the saints (*Pir*). These exceedingly popular cults result in much frequented pilgrimages. According to D.Abecassis: "The *pirs* are now the principal mediators in rural Bangladesh¹⁸". Aware of their ignorance about Arabic and their impure morals, the peasants need the mediation of the *pirs* because Allah is far away and transcendental. That is why the local divinities and the *pirs* are useful. The revivalists accuse the *pirs* of being unorthodox and impure.

There is a renowned *mazar* (mausoleum of a *pir*) in Atya near Bongol where an annual festival is held. The peasants go there to make wishes and to make offers. This is a custom widely practiced in many religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam) of South Asia. It is quite common to find disciples of a neighboring *pir* among the rural elites (civil servants, businessmen). These modern *pirs* ensure the continuity of the cult and teachings of the defunct saints.

18. D.Abecassis: pub.cited. p.25.

Some disciples of *pir* can be found in Bongol. Among them are Kabir, the influential and responsible man of the mosque committee of *Purbo Para* and Amra, the Imam. They go to the *pir* of Atya several times per year for the meditation sessions and the prayer followed by *jighir* (trance). Before an audience of about thirty men on their knees, one of the disciples of the *pir* leads the prayer and the meditation which ends with a more and more accelerated repetition of the name of Allah. This mystic technique brings tears and moaning from some disciples at the peak of their trances. According to Kobir, these sessions help to come to a close contact with the Creator and to present oneself to Him in a state of nearness. For certain villagers, to become the disciple of a *pir* is a particular form of distinction. This illustrates the quality of his faith and his virtue of a believer. It also means having the advantage of an intellectual model. Neither Kobir nor Amra attain the trance, but the quality of the disciple of a *pir* proves the strength of their religious convictions. The two men on the other hand, are the models of devoutness in the village where they organize competitions for recital of the *Qur'an* for the students of the *Qur'anic* school (*Maktab*). Along with a few villagers, they are the only ones to further the magnificence of the religion in an ordinarily pragmatic social context where the aesthetic dimensions of faith are rare and poorly valued with the exception of the art of declamation which is well-known but little practised in the rural milieu.

In terms of this illustration of Islam in Bongol, what is it to be expected of a muslim for the villagers?

To be a muslim in the village one has to be a member of the Muslim community (*Umma*). That is, to be a member of a *samaj* (local group). For some, it has also to have the benefit of the teachings of a *pir*. None of these forms of socialization is established on an *à priori* social exclusion. These are all open to every believer.

To be a Muslim, one is to be socially registered and to define one's identity in a Muslim group without prejudging the secondary beliefs. In the Indian sub-continent, to be a Muslim clearly involves a

particular quality of man as it is mentioned by D.Abecassis when he writes: "To be a Muslim is in consequence to be a member of the *jati* (caste) of the Muslims and not necessarily a proclamation of the faith, of the doctrine or a representation of the world. The Muslims, local or global, are your people¹⁹". A hindu concept (*jati*) becomes apparent from this reference and it points to what extent the rural Islam is faraway from that of the *ulemas*, the doctors of Islam, and the reason why the islamization of the society is still a real challenge in Bangladesh.

Bongol is a typical village of Bangladesh faraway from the capital. Let us now observe the standing of the Imam, the mosque and Islam in a village close to Dhaka.

19. D.Abecassis: pub.cited.p.43.

4-Shyampur : mosque - the gamble for power

The village of Shyampur is situated at about twenty kilometers from Dhaka. It is a region specialized for market-gardening. An Imam from the village had been leading the prayer for 30 years. After his death in 1978, it was necessary to employ the Imams of the nearby villages. Maulana Helal has been doing this job for six years. He explains: "We have lost our house twice, swept away by flood water in 1971 and 1973. I passed *dakhil* in '73 and *alim* in '77, then *fazil* in '79 and *kamil* in '81. This has helped me to become a *madrasah* teacher instead of living by reciting the Holy Quoran. My father is a farmer but he does not possess much land. In 1982, I saw an announcement in the news paper asking for a teacher in the Shyampur school. I wanted to be a doctor like my uncle, but my father sent me to the *madrasah*; I am capable of leading the prayer. I was invited to lead a prayer and I was recruited by the treasurer of the mosque committee soon after my debut at the primary school. He knew me because he is a member of the governing body of the school.

In 1983, I followed the training course for the Imams of the Islamic Foundation. I have given lot of advice to the people. I lead the prayer during the festival of Eid. There was no common graveyard. I have proposed one for eight adjacent villages. The *alims* (doctors of Islam) are all respected here. But the *mullahs* (devouts) do not know much. They are stubborn and make life difficult for the Imam. In certain *shalish* (village tribunal) I tried to intervene for good reason, but it is difficult to go too far against the *matbars*. If someone moves against the *matabars* in the name of the religion, he may be dismissed. My predecessor had this experience. They stopped his salary and discontinued to give him food, until he left. The salary was 500 takas, but I earn 2,045 takas from the school where I teach religious affairs. There are many a persons here who

have come back from their jobs in the Gulf countries. They have money but do not donate it for the mosque and they are not better Muslims than the others. But they are well considered and then they infiltrate into the mosque committee. I have ceased to be an Imam because it was too much work for me with the job of teaching in the school and they were becoming more and more demanding'.

His successor, Maulana Abdur Rob, who has since been dismissed received only 600 takas. "Before me, the Imam had to collect his salary and the food from each family. I refused this method which aroused controversy in the committee. The two *matbars* sought to retain me. They tried without success to convince the poor to pay. At the end, I received a cow worth 1300 takas for the arrears. All that the villagers wanted was five times prayers and that the Imam keeps quiet. Of the persons coming back from the Middle-east, only Jainal has progressed. He is more pious and he is the vice-president of the committee.

I followed the training of the Imams in 1981, but I did not have the refreshers' course. In Shyampur, the *matbars* do not have any power. Nobody listens to anybody. I lost a boat worth 65,000 takas; stolen during the floods and for this reason I am anew the Imam of this village, near Shyampur. After three months, I already have a problem of non-payment of salary. One needs 2,000 to 3,000 takas for a better living. In Dhaka, the Imam of an average mosque receives 1,200 to 2,000 takas but competition is strong'.

The circumstances of the study effected in Shyampur are special and warrant to be mentioned. Soon after my first few visits in this village, the Rushdie affair erupted which gave rise to great emotion among the Bangladeshi Muslims. After a number of explications and discussions, the mosque committee decided by a small majority to give an unfavorable opinion concerning my presence in the village. As a big part of the village conformed to this opinion, many interviews became impossible.

The study was thus conducted outside the village through interviews with six persons, among whom were

the two former Imams, the secretary and a member of the mosque committee. As the prevalent village structure was known, the attention of the interviews was concentrated on the mosque committee and the factions inside the village. This is the reason why the dimension of the local politics in the mosque committee appears so clearly in Shyampur. The circumstances compelled me to think about this dimension. One of the two secretaries of the mosque committee has instinctively offered his service to answer to my queries and present his idea on the management of the mosque committee in a divided village, presented as such. I had to interpret later his remarks on the basis of what I knew about his social position in the village.

In most of the villages, a reference of the golden age of a idyllic solidarity is given where "there was only one *samaj*". We have seen quite a high number of *samaj* in Bongol (3, 7 or 10 according to the *paras*). In Shyampur, since about twelve years, the village society is divided into two *samaj* called here north and south for convenience as well as in relation to the geographical location of the village. Till 1968, there was an important brothel on the site where the school is now situated. Following mounting protests it was burnt in an opportune moment. The Muslims of the village, a few among them, seem to have made an onslaught of virtue to wipe out this recent souvenir. This explains the fussy tendency of the mosque committee attested by the previous Imams. The increasing economic incapability to cope with an increasing number of persons to be invited for the festival of Eid and marriages rather than the specific disputes is perhaps the reason for the division into two *samaj*. The increasing number of the poor in the north of the village surpasses that of the south. The ultimate consequence of this division is indicated by presence of two separate places for the sacrifice of the animals during the *Eid* and by the selective marriage gatherings on the basis of the *samaj*.

Samsul Mia, a *matbar* of the *samaj* of the north locality, is the president of the mosque committee. He is a wealthy farmer and he rents out his land. His eldest

son works in the Emirates. The youngest son is a student of *madrassah*. Batsu, *matbar* of the south locality, has left his place in the mosque committee to his son Hamon and has partly retired from the activities. Hamon lives in Lavar, a town situated at 10 kilometers from here where he does business being a henchman (*mastan*) of the local leader of the Jatyo Party, the government party at the time of Ershad. He tried without success to convince the mosque committee there to cooperate with my study.

He recounts: **"I got into the committee because a new committee has been formed with a view to obtaining a subsidy from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. As I have connection with the MP, they thought that I could further the allocation from the special fund of the ministry with the mediation of the local politicians. Only the political recommendations for such grants are considered. This year, the MP had at his disposal 36,000 takas for several mosques. There is another fund with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. We are expecting 3,000 takas. As the collaborator of the MP, who is a friend of President Ershad, I asked him to support the request. I have always been interested in politics. I was at first the president of an association in Shyampur, and secretary of the Shyampur Friendship Samity. We used to deal with sports and a solidarity fund aided by the Lions Club. There are a number of similar clubs which are not openly political but have political strategies. My father in collaboration with the ex-Imam has taken the initiative to buy the grave yard. Through my external political links, I try to maintain our influence, because Samsul Mia does not have any external political link. But we are the least in number in the committee. We are going down hill"**.

Hamon is a man aged thirty of unfailing cynicism. He explains his job with the *Jatyo party*: **"I am in charge of organizing the meetings, to recruit men for demonstrations, to listen to the complaints and to contact the useful leaders"**. He is the prototype of the "*mastan*", henchman of the local politics, well known figure in Bangladesh where the political life banks on

violence and corruption.

Hamon has access to the political leaders in the capital. At the same time he keeps contact with his village where he tries to maintain his family status. He meets the MPs, even the ministers. He is fascinated by their power. He openly declares a scorn for the rural people from where he comes and has more or less mysterious earnings. **"I wish to have a political carrier. Once one is decided, one can quickly grow rich. I am not afraid of my enemies. I keep them away"**, he says.

Harsh and crude in his judgments, all his stratagem and intelligence are directed towards his political ascent. He knows that by rendering services he establishes effective links for the control of the local society. He is hardly interested in the village. His life and his ambitions are at the level of Lavar township, the administration center where the local political ventures are launched. His attitude towards the village politics merits to be confronted with other view points, but his harsh frankness gives prominence to his analyses on the local society.

Although he is the secretary of the mosque committee, Hamon is not a believer and he does not pray. He however, attends all the meetings of the committee to derive advantage of his position of *middleman* with the authorities outside the village. In this locality close to Dhaka, the political control is permanently at stake, object of negotiations and of constant bargaining. Small political entrepreneurs like Hamon bustle there up to the mosque committees. **"During the last Eid festival, my samaj killed seven bulls and one goat. We are richer but the rich are more in number and they expand their clientele among the poor. We are always present in the shalish (village tribunal) with my father and I sometimes, but we are only five of the fifteen members in the mosque committee and only one of the seven members in the office"**.

In Shyampur, with the new Imam recruited from the town, the prayer is longer and more sophisticated than in Bongol. One of the devout brings his prayer mat. This constitutes an uncommon elegance. The closeness of the

locality to the capital, the presence of five television sets in the electrified village, and an elevated number of ex-workers from the Middle-East, all are sufficient to explain it. The neighborhood of the town brings about earnings from the services, the transport, the business and of course from the vegetables cultivation. The number of agricultural farm workers is high. Several villagers have made pilgrimage to Mecca which explains the required formalism of an Imam and a certain religious conservatism. If the Imam receives 600 takas per month, he receives as well his food each day from a different family. He does no other job, and leads the five times a day prayers. For the call to prayer (*Azan*) he uses a loud speaker.

Recruitment of an Imam from outside the village and his employment as a full timer requires payment of regular salary to him. This Imam can otherwise be easily kept away from the different factions. Thus, one of the previous Imams had his son married to the daughter of the committee, Samsul Mia, which displeased a group of the villagers. The poor and the rich mingle together during the big Friday prayer, but the participation of the richer persons is more regular and they sit in the first row. Only three families are not capable to pay ten takas per month for the Imam.

By raising the pay of the Imam by hundred takas the villagers of Shyampur have made an option to employ the services of a "professional" full timer. This demonstrates the volition for a greater religious dignity partly inspired by the ex-immigrants to the Middle-East. The latter, with their impeccable attires during the Friday prayers, are noticeable and play an important role to promote the idea of a more stringent Islam which they have frequented in the birthplace of Islam in Arabia. Although it flatters the old native *mullahs* (devouts), this volition however, clashes with the economic constraints. The mosque committee must make a number of requests to collect, always with delay, the required sum. "None wants to pay for others", remarks the ex-Imam.

The recent recasting of the mosque committee shows, besides the prospect of a conjured up grant, the

admission into the mosque committee, of several ex-immigrants to the Middle-East. They exert a vital importance on the orientations of the village Islam, very flexible not long ago, and trying henceforth to be more rigorous. But it is still subjected to the micro-political logic that relativize the impact of this as yet faltering fundamentalism.

The mosque appears to be a stake for power through the rivalry among the *samaj*. The unequal representation of the two *samaj* in the mosque committee of Shyampur confirms it. Although founded on the rural patronization, the social life in Shyampur however, is nevertheless influenced by the nearby capital. Here, the political parties are active and an important portion of its income is obtained from the direct commercial links with the city.

In the city, each district has one or several mosques. What is the impact of the urban social organization on the activity and the role of the Imam and of the mosque in one of the old quarters of Dhaka?

5 - Paliatur : a mosque in the city

The old Dhaka is a criss-cross of narrow lanes crowded with rickshaws, noises, the odor of the stalls and the road side booths of the businessmen; an age old picture of the oriental bazaar of the Western imagination. The crowd that wander around in the vicinity are on the look-out for earning their livelihood. Hardware materials, provisions, spices and the families, employees, artisans, all are crowded in the tiny rooms of dilapidated buildings. This is amazing how one can live in such a compactness among the jumbles of objects, a scene inherited from the medieval age, and cut off by the haven of serenity and the freshness constituted by the mosques of the localities, not to speak of the *pirs* (saints) who are offering their prayers in the midst of the tumult and taking care of the pains of their visitors.

When a visitor enters the mosque of bamboo wall and corrugated tin roof in the Paliatur district situated within the old Dhaka, he is overwhelmed by the prevailing studious and pleasant ambiance. Baitul is 22. He succeeds the previous Imam dismissed for interference. He knows nothing about the urban quarter and is little acquainted with its inhabitants. Very young and spontaneous, he is friendly but worried because he wants to retain his job of Imam. This will help him pursue his Quoranic studies ultimately helping him to get a superior position. He teaches the children of the locality the Quoran with skill and talent. His cheerfulness disappears in presence of the elderly people of the locality, he becomes reserved and sometimes subservient. When he is not teaching in the *madrasah*, the young Imam of this new mosque can be seen in the company of two or three students whom he teaches the Quoran by emphasizing on the rhythm of articulation with a wooden staff, or else, he is found discussing with a passer-by.

In the very center of the swarming city and in spite

of the heat diffused from the roofing, a perfect serenity prevails in the place where the Imam and the young muezzin of 18 years of age live. The brother of the Imam, *hafez* at 12, came to live here during the Ramadan for the special prayer (*tarabi*).

Another slightly older *hafez* lives at the mosque. Religious discussions and recitation competitions puncture the day. The repetitions destined for the students become monotonous but not weighty. The grace and ease of the teachers compensate the awkwardness of the students.

The Imam here has religious ambitions. He wants to be a *maulana* and is preparing himself for the requisite degree. There are *madrasah* teachers or Imams in his family. His five brothers are having religious education. His father is a *madrasah* teacher. His *madrasah* teacher has invited him to become the Imam of this new mosque. The mosque is a temporary building rather misplaced in this old locality where the most famous mosques of Bangladesh are situated. The mosque was founded eight months ago on the site where there was an office of the Jatyo Party. It was burnt in 1987, soon after the election. The idle juvenile used to meet there and indulge in scuffling which irritated the surrounding population consisting of new non-native inhabitants of old Dhaka. This locality is considered as conservative and traditional where the inhabitants - the *Dhakayas*, are little open to the exterior and they conspicuously maintain their proper standards.

Alam Rahman, police officer and member of the mosque committee explains: **"The inhabitants of this district are not native to old Dhaka and we wanted to have our own mosque. The troubles linked with the politics, then those with the young men, made us to take decision for transforming this land for the welfare of the whole community. The people have given prayer mats, one clock, one loud speaker, the ceiling fans, and materials worth 150,000 takas. The bamboo wall and the corrugated tin roof as well as the cement and the taps for ablution have been purchased from the contribution. We have made an appeal to the notables of this ward**

(quarter). The MP of the quarter has asked the government to make this land a public donation (*waqf*), as only it can allow to erect a permanent mosque on the land. That is why, although we pray here, we can not offer the big Friday prayer (*Jumma*) till this donation is effected. Once the inhabitants have shown their willingness by this construction and the recruitment of the Imam, the donation should come immediately. The donation can not be a State affair; therefore the MP will pay a sum and will make the donation (*waqf*) as per rule. Maulana Azizul selected the Imam. The Imam is fed by a devout family of the locality. In stead of quarreling with each other, the young men are coming back to the religion".

Alam Rahman, is not a notable like some members of the committee. He is rather a demanding Muslim, tired of the violence and the corruption. He considers that the religion is a way to moralize the social life. This idea is shared by many members of the urban petit bourgeoisie. The frustrated children of this society are often involved in divers islamist movements.

The Imam is a *fazil* and has been appointed only a few days back after the failure of another who was not up to the mark. He is paid 1200 takas whereas the muezzin receives 600 takas. He is a young man of 22, cordial, dignified and kind. He teaches at a *madrasah* in old Dhaka. Too much occupied with his own job and little interested with extra-religious affairs, he has not followed the training of the *Islamic Foundation*.

The president of the mosque committee is Al Haj Abdul Hafiz. He has performed several pilgrimages to Mecca. He is a prosperous business man, proprietor of a cinema hall and lives in a big three storeyed house close to the mosque. Because of too many occupations, he leaves his chairmanship of the committee to a devout, who is well-off as a small businessman of food products. Abdul is a man from different epoch. He represents Islam of the bazaar, traditionalist and at the same time a businessman. He is a real *mullah*, stubborn and un-educated.

Maulana Azizul is a teacher of a *madrasah* in the city.

His resemblance to Imam Khomeiny is not only physical. He is a religious fundamentalist preaching for the restoration of the pure Islam, the only which is capable of making the society perfect and which can solve the socio-economic problems, which are not real problems but simply the results of disorders, corruptions and immorality that are rampant in the society. He is the vice-president of the committee and intervenes on the questions of morality and religion.

The second secretary, Al Hossein, is a man of quite different image since he is the founder of the *Bazad complex*, a charitable organization of the locality. He is a typical notable and is the *commissioner* (sort of a mayor) of the quarter. His brother, the MP, who has been given the responsibility to carry out the transfer of the land, is also the chairman of an important industrial company. As he remains busy with his responsibilities in the company, he does not directly intervene in the affairs of the mosque.

Al Hossein underscores: "**Previously, I was a member for six years of the big Khan mosque. I had my education here in the old Dhaka at the Jinnah College (presently S.S.College). My mother is a native to the locality. My younger brother is an accountant of the Dhaka Municipality; the two others are in industry. The elder brother is the chairman of the enterprise. He is the MP from the locality. I have been living in this big house all along. Any body can come to visit me. On the other side of the highway is the new population and the government housing for the civil servants. It is in this part where the initiative for the new mosque was taken. We meet every month because a new mosque is really a big concern. We have twenty five members in the executive committee, two thirds of which is made up of the businessmen, the civil servants and one advocate. They are very different people who want development of the locality and social peace. I am president or vice-president of a dozen of social organizations. The mosque is an enterprise which I encourage because it is beneficial for the population and because I have always worked for the social development of this locality**".

Al Hussein represents the original population of the locality who seem to be reserved towards the new inhabitants, civil servants and the small bureaucrats mentioned by Alam Rahman. Only four or five members of the committee are active and manage the mosque while gaining the support of the notables. Amidul Khan, a small civil servant in the Dhaka Municipality maintains the secretariat of the committee and he has a different language when he says: **"The mosque is the means of our escape from the politics of the locality which is controlled by the richest families. There are a number of low earning modest inhabitants here. It is for them and for the others who did not dare to go to the big mosque, that we have constructed this mosque. The society must be made free from all its corruptions. Previously, at the place where the mosque has been erected, were political brawls, people drinking alcohol, the rickshaw pullers using drugs etc. All these had to be stopped and the notables of the locality have realized it"**.

Thus, the emergence of this mosque, which has not yet been completed awaiting donation of the land, demonstrates rather than an abstract unanimity, the attempts of the middle class Muslims (civil servants, small businessmen) to make their voices heard which are otherwise endangered by the temptations of a certain fundamentalism, diffuse but well represented to the context. The political and economic powers of the notables have been put to question, though not with direct confrontation but without any concessions. It appears that in Paliatur, the notables have supported the construction of the mosque under pressure arising out of these events. The most apparent strategy to support it, is to have control over it finally. The delay that has been made in the expected donation seem to have transformed it into a wait-and-see affair. Encouraged principally by the Muslims presenting a fundamentalist will for "social purification", the mosque is situated in the sphere of distinctively urban contradictions, associated with a strong politisation, to the problems of the urban housing and to the immigration which allow the educated civil servants to join the religious ones in

the same campaign where Islam is presented as the tool for a social reorganization more conform with the fundamental values.

The new mosque of Paliatur is seen as the social signal of the middle classes, non natives of Dhaka, are hostile or reserved about the politisation of the urban neighborhoods, carried out by the traditional political parties. Frustrated of the power and of the representation, the population representing the civil servants, the bureaucrats and the businessmen does not seem to be in a position to get united except on a criticism of the urban disorder founded on the sublimation of the fundamental religious values. The patronage observed in the rural milieu with its specific string of solidarity and of dependance make way here for an approach which is a more radical criticism of the society. Refusing to be the passive clients of the paternalistic notables, the inhabitants of Paliatur even if they have a modest earning, refuse to be considered as dependent of an elite whom they have not chosen. The discourse of these elites on charity have attracted only the poorest, the precarious workers, the rickshaw pullers or the small craftsmen.

This small urban bourgeoisie, conscious of its dignity and endowed with certain education, is trying to erect the mosque in a place which is the symbol of identity of the locality. To avoid onslaught of the notables, it uses a fundamentalist type of religious discourse in which the mosque must be regulated for its religious activities and for the development of the values of purity, of justice, of faith etc. This population does not enjoy a satisfying individual status. Building and organizing the mosque are the opportunities to gain a collective status as the dignified inhabitants of a dignified area. Having a stable job and a regular income, this small urban bourgeoisie keeps its distance from the local elderly notables as well as from "the poor" who live in precariousness and statutory indignity.

This delicate consensus established surrounding the erection and the management of the mosque involves the common Muslim practices different in their

connection from the place which must occupy Islam in the society.

The Fundamentalists of Pallatur

Mammoud lives at two hundred meters from the mosque in the ground floor of a well maintained house. He is a man of thirty five, well-off, married and father of two children. His apartment is spacious. It consists of four rooms, one of which is a big drawing-cum-dining room. Working as a physicist and engineer in a research institute in the suburb of Dhaka, Mammoud belongs to the *tabligh* movement. Each year, he and his companions go out for touring the towns and villages of Bangladesh for forty days to explain the message of Islam among the people.

"The people are becoming too preoccupied with their lives day by day. They are forgetting the teachings of Islam; and are running after pleasure, easy money. Our goal is to make them share our faith by reminding them of the message of God, the sole rule to lead an honest life". Expressing himself in perfect English, our interlocutor goes to the mosque at the time of the Friday prayer, but prays in his residence on other days. He is neither a member among the notables in the mosque committee nor is he locally influential. He explains: **"Neither the local organization of the mosque nor the local politics is important. It is important to transmit the message and spread the speeches of God so that everybody becomes a good Muslim, being personally convinced of the verity of the message of the Prophet. In my profession, I discover the marvel of the harmony created by God. For me, the science constitutes a permanent proof of the validity of the divine message. God has given each of us the capacity to lead a decent and honest life according to the law. Physics teaches me that it is always the law of God and that is why there is no contradiction between my activities in the physics laboratory and my tours for preaching in the villages. I must give evidence of all this to my fellow men. I must impart the knowledge that I possess to my brothers. I must not keep myself contained within my milieu. I have**

learned much from the *tabligh* tours. I have found a true sharing of the faith, a fraternity, in this movement that helps me in my professional life. If every body would have followed and accepted the order that Allah has revealed to us, the chaos that prevails in Bangladesh would have ended. To remind this, I tour every year in Bangladesh or in a foreign country. Two years back, I went to Indonesia and to Pakistan. Even if I am better educated than some other *tablighs*, I do not have any problems because, we are the ones who share the same faith and who want to share with a bigger number of our brothers to enlighten their lives and to help them become purified. Besides our diverse activities, we are all equal in front of the creator and we are made of his image. Each of us are respectable because each of us have been created by God".

Like a certain number of scientists and technicians of the Arab countries, Mammoud also finds a fundamental truth in the message of Islam which can put the world in order. The belief is presented as fully rational and totally logical. This conviction, very widely spread among the Muslim intellectuals, brings out an enormous force of conviction that develops into a permanent proselytism to which all the interlocutors are exposed. One has to share a truth in the form of a rational evidence as is frequently done by the educated *tablighs*. For having experimented it for hours, and I can assure that it is very difficult to escape the effectiveness of this discourse of the believers. They progressively take care of you by monopolizing the arguments and the counter-arguments, by having ready responses to all objections, by creating a sort of intellectual security where everything becomes reassuring because of the implacable logic. This formidable rhetoric is likely to impress the most sturdy agnostic, if only some one follows the sequence of the arguments with interest and good faith.

Haman is a typical shopkeeper of old part of Dhaka who lives in a small room adjacent to his shop where bags of rice, salt, fertilizers and hardware materials are stacked. The strong odor of the stock piled

merchandises mounts into the head. Even in the drawing room, with the exception of a big wooden cot, all the furniture has been replaced by drums and bags that are used as sitting places.

Haman is pious, and a member of the mosque committee. He is a *mullah*; socially known by this name, meaning conservative, of confirmed religiosity and fussy. He has performed pilgrimage to Mecca three times and frequents the *pirs* (saints) and goes to their tombs for praying. **"I have lands in Rangpur which my brother cultivates. My family lives there. I have five children of whom one is a boy. He is studying in a *madrasah* in Rangpur. In our family from father to the son, all are religious. My son supports the *Jamat i Islami*. I have been voting for them for the last few years. Now, as they are in the parliament, they are going to bring a little order and morality among the corrupt leaders who do not abide by the *sharia*. I am respected in my village. I have given a land to *wakf* (mainmort) for the mosque. Business in Bangladesh is difficult because the competition is tough. Moreover, there is no morality. The morals are dissolute. Women do not respect the *pardah*. Islam gives us all the principles necessary for leading a decent life. I have no education but I know that. Now-a-days, the university is no more a place where one learns. It is a hide-out for the bandits. I will never send my children there"**. Although Haman is elusive about his role during the liberation war, he maintains however, **"Since liberation, our country has known a permanent misery. The life is becoming more and more difficult and the religion is being respected less and less. For this reason everything is going bad. Those who know the religion must be heard"**.

A semi-rural, semi-urban businessman, Haman is a real *mullah*, conservative, even reactionary in the matter of moral and politics. He advocates for the traditional values but he thinks that Islam is the ultimate political and social recourse. This is why he votes for the fundamentalist party (*Jamat i Islami*). Contrary to the *tablighs*, who give reasoning and want to convince, Haman is not capable of lengthy discussion. He explains the simple alternatives in the light of a political

dimension which is absent with the *tablighs*.

The two characters presented here emphasize several divisions. The first bears on the politisation. Among the different fundamentalist profiles, some are indifferent to the political powers (*tabligh*) and are preoccupied with the message of God and the call (*dawa*). Others are right away convinced about the social necessity of an Islamic power (*Jamat i Islami*) to establish an Islamic state. Another distinction merits to be made between a modernist fundamentalism, frequent with the urban intellectuals, and a traditionalist fundamentalism resulting from the conjunction of the religious traditionalism and the political fundamentalism as is seen in the large villages.

6-The Imam, servant of the community and precarious employee in Bangladesh

"Stir not your tongue to recite it (the Holy Quoran) as if you wanted to hasten the wordings. It behooves us to compile it and to announce it, (*qur'anahu*); and when we have announced it, recite it faithfully; it then comes back to us to make it clear". (Surah 75- verses 16-17)

The religious functions and those performing the same are all objects of a general idealist prejudice in the Western countries. This often masks the social conditions in which these actions are effected. Besides, the importance of the sacerdotal and apostolate catholic models over-valorizes the function of the priest who not only bears witness to a word, but also sacrifice himself by leading an austere, frugal and virtuous life. We will not linger here over the ethnocentric mysticism that convey these representations when they are applied to other religions.

The sunnite Islam is a religion of the book, without any priesthood. The function of the Imam is to read this book (the Holy Quoran, *qur'an* in Arabic from *quyraya* meaning to read) or to read the orthodox comments in it. "In true sense, there is no sacerdotal system in Islam. Each faithful Muslim comes in direct contact with God in the prayer, the pilgrimage to Mecca (*Haji*), the individual carrying out of fasting during the Ramadan and the legal alms...The Imam who prays in front of rows of the faithful in the collective prayers, does not have any sacerdotal function; he separates himself from the rest of the faithful by keeping in the alcove called *mihrab* to symbolize the unity of the praying community²⁰".

The Imam, then is not a witness, but a voice that repeats and transmits the contents of a message preserved in the Book. The paramount pedagogic importance of recitation and repetition in Islam is well

20. Mohammed Arkoun : *Ouvertures sur l'islam*. Paris, 1989. Pub.cited p.110.

known. Whether it concerns the Quoranic schools (*maktab*, *madrasah*) or the recitation that initiates the trance (*Zikr*), the repetition appears as a major instrument of knowledge and of impregnation of the truth.

The moving around in the villages of Bangladesh of a number of preachers and their manifestations in the religious meetings (*dhormio shova*) attest the verity of Islam in a popular religious context where the fear of the hell is more apparent than the discovery of the truth. Most of them are the ex-Imams turned into preachers because of their oratory capability and for the need of a better income than that of the Imams. These itinerant preachers are remunerated by the families who arrange the meetings. They make use of a much more liberal language than that of the Imams. They do not hesitate to use some verbal displays that are quite close to animism. It is questionable whether these meetings are not the extension and continuation of the animist meetings organized in the villages surrounding a spiritualist or medium as it is practiced in the Indian sub-continent or in the South-East Asia, whatever the big dominant religions (Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism).

Contrary to these extensions, captures, colonizations and diversions constituting the profound dynamics of the interactions between religious systems and the peasant communities in Asia, the Imam in Bangladesh sees his activities extremely supervised and controlled, in towns as well as in the countryside. A truly repetitive job, where initiative is reduced, if not excluded, the task of the Imam is firstly taken up as a paid service for the village community in the one hand, and for community of the faithful on the other. The status of the Imam observed through several case studies emphasizes their precariousness and their limited prestige in Bangladesh. Finally, an attempt will be made to characterize the job of the Imam as a servant of the community and also as a precarious worker, indicating that these studies were carried out uniquely in Bangladesh. According to Habib Boularès: "The Islamists bring to light the notion of *umma*. This does not

represent the nation as is understood in the European languages. *Umma* stems from *Amm*, which equally gives rise to the word Imam, meaning the guide. The *Umma* is the assembly of persons who follow the same direction, the path of rectitude and of salvation. It is the community of the believers. The point at which these men and women unite, is the faith, the adhesion to a morality and the submission to a law. It has no territory. The black Muslims of America resolve this split by adopting the term "nation of Islam" to represent themselves. They are doing away with the notion of allegiance to a State delimited in the space by a frontier, in the time by a common history of its inhabitants and socially by its proper laws. According to them, the citizenship is a juridical status, an administrative situation that permits to accomplish certain acts like travelling. It does not involve the obligations towards a society to which one is not convinced of belonging²¹.

From his part, Bernard Lewis underlines in the book *Le langage politique de l'islam* (Political Language of Islam), the pre-Islamic character of the concept of *Umma* as well as its ethnic, moral and ideological dimension, unified now.

The concept of the muslim community (*Umma*) refers to an abstract but strong belonging to the community of believers. The Imam is but a member of this anonymous community. He is a believer among the believers. Conversely, the village community is quite a tangible concept, particularly in the South and South-East Asia where the major religious systems are always associated with the peasant communities through political power, even the supernatural forces exploited by the diviners or the astrologists of the princes, as of present chiefs of state.

The territorial community of the village farmers living on the same land is particularly unstable in Bangladesh. The population pressure, the competition for the access to the scarce resources, put the Bangladeshi peasants outside of any village harmony, far

21. H.Boularès: pub. cited p.134.

from the idyllic communities as conceived by the Westerners. Fights, conflicts, violence, thefts, crimes, corruption, all are rampant. However, in the face of all these practices denying the village solidarity, the Imam apparently presents a pacifying and egalitarian figure pursuing the religious message of Islam which is in effect incompatible with the practice of "every one for himself" that dominates in Bangladesh. From this, originates a double discourse that evokes an idyllic community of the Muslims of Bangladesh, while dealing with contradictions and conflicts from day to day.

The humanism of Islam appears to be ideal in a country where human dignity is often ridiculed. This message of idealism is particularly emphasized by the pious muslim urban elites, teachers of the Quoranic schools or the religious authorities.

This urban discourse presents an ideal image of the Imam that gives him prestige and authority. The authorities of the grand religious institutions like the religious universities (*madrasahs*) enjoy a moral authority exactly like those responsible for big urban mosques. They have at their disposal a large number of young people due to the crisis in professional prospects. A large part of these young men expect a social rise by procuring the job of a civil servant, professor or by migrating to the Gulf states. It needs to be mentioned here that, less than 10% of a sample of 200 students of a *madrasah* in Chittagong wished to become Imam. Living from the coaching of the children of the bourgeoisie, they also aspire to obtain an equivalence (real or symbolic) of their Islamic degrees with that of the degrees given for higher studies. It often happens that the sons of large families having little or no land, yield to their fathers' wish that one of the sons in the family follows less costly higher religious studies. They are the potential unemployed and exposed to the most fanatic propaganda. Some of the most esteemed by their teachers find the job of Imams in the urban mosques subject to having the required qualities. They accept a reasonable subordination to the hierarchy of the local Muslim authorities. As for the other workers, getting a

job constitutes a certain privilege and to keep that job lasting, submission and conformism are needed.

The service in an urban mosque is much better remunerated than it is in the countryside. A novice urban Imam receives around 1,200 takas (240 FF) and a bit more if he has a brilliant academic background. The Imam who earns 2,000 to 2,500 takas per month after ten years of service is looked upon as an upstart. The job of an Imam is thus sometimes considered as a vocation but it is always the resultant of a strategy. The situation of an urban Imam shows some characters of a clergy in the sense that, the Imam to obtain a job has to be involved in the hierarchy and dependant on the islamic university.

The condition of the village Imams is totally different. One needs to differentiate the villages close to the cities where the Imams earn 600 takas from those which are remote and, there are many such, where an Imam earns between 200 and 300 takas. These wages are fixed according to the number of prayers required to be led by the Imam. For 200 or 300 takas, the Imam is required to lead only the Friday prayer (*jumma*). The Quoranic qualifications are more demanding for a salary of 600 takas per month. However, this salary is also modest compared to 200 takas paid to a village Imam who knows only a few Arabic words and have but one or two years of *madrrasah* education. The range of qualification for the Imams is then extremely broad.

In cities, the activities of an Imam are addressed to a community of believers who frequent the mosque while the mosque is managed by a mosque committee composed of notables, businessmen and the civil servants of the locality. This committee keeps the Imam under control. The most acceptable quality of an Imam is his discretion and restraint. The Imam is often changed when he becomes too much involved in an issue related to the social order. Sort of a "municipal official" in the populous localities, guest of a prestigious mosque of a residential neighborhood, the Imam can maintain the fiction of being at the service of the community of believers if he remains in his place, that is, if he remains

discretely dependant on the mosque committee. This dependance of the Imams reproduces the same model as has been shown by M.Sélim in her book *L'aventure d'une multinationale au Bangladesh* (The experience of a multinational company in Bangladesh)²².

The situation of a village Imam is otherwise presented in the context where the service to the village community seems to prevail over a community of believers, extremely abstract in a rural environment. The different factions that share power in the Bangladeshi villages keep their strategies out of religion. As a result, the Imam does not have a key position in their plans. In any case, the Imam must keep himself aloof from the factions if he wants to keep his job.

It is unusual to find an aspirant for the post of an Imam at 200 takas per month. The mosque committees have the biggest difficulty in finding aspirants in spite of a very high turn over. This indicates that someone becomes a village Imam through circumstances rather than by a professional choice. This also indicates that the Imam is easily sacked even for the slightest irregularity with the mosque committee, all the more sensitive as its legitimacy is more fragile than in the cities and the village conflicts are more intense.

The village mosque committees want to make room for each *samaj* (group of residents) in it which is not always easy when there are as many as six or seven *samaj* in a village. These *samaj* that function as the village pressure groups led by a leader (*matbar*) have never tolerated that a very extraordinary individual becomes the Imam of a village. He must be reserved like his urban colleague. But the appointed Imam must also represent Islam in the village. The Imam is present in a *shalish* (village tribunal) only when the question of manners and morality are raised. For all other activities (economic or political), the Imam is kept away from the debates. Obviously, he is not a notable, rather a weekly symbol of religion common to an otherwise divided, even not very religious village. This is why his salary is not higher than

22. Monique Sélim : *L'aventure d'une multinationale au Bangladesh*. L'Harmattan, Paris, 1991.

200 takas and for this reason a good number of rural Imams have a narrow vision about their social functions which has been brought down to recitation of some Surahs of the holy Quoran eventually without understanding their meanings. The service of the community of villagers thus becomes the management of the symbolic wealth that Islam represents to the villagers. Humanity for some, morality for others, Islam is for all a belonging demonstrated during the Friday prayer and by a few takas per month for the Imam and the mosque. The salary of the Imam is always considered too high and no body wants to pay more. But to be a bad Muslim, even if one is a profoundly animist, is like returning to the natural state and refusing the humanity of a universal religion. The presence of the Imam in the mosque insures the appearance of a village community which has, of course, no unity, but somehow shows a mutual acceptance and lives together.

By devoting themselves to the pretence of a mythical muslim community (*umma*), the Bangladeshi peasants agree to accept his neighbor and rival. The Imam, consciously or unconsciously, is the catalyst of this peace program. Lined up behind him, the dirt of a week's hard toil washed, the Friday prayer (*jumma*) constitutes the profound, original and ultimate legitimacy, if not the only function of the Imam: this makes a village community discernible which is otherwise unthinkable in every day affairs. Once the ceremony is concluded, each one goes back to his *samaj*, to his field or to his house.

The rising status of the Imam in the vicinity of the capital becomes evident by the terms used. That an Imam is called *Munshi* in villages (this term is very close the idea of "worker" or "religious official") as against *Imam sahib* in cities, clearly indicating the respect shown to him. Between these two words, the term "*Huzur*" symbolizes a respect in between. This word is seldom used in villages to show respect to a foreign Imam. The condition of an Imam always remains delicate even if his status is not too inferior. The contract that binds him with the mosque committee is tacitly clear. It

involves the maintenance of the religious, cultural and ritualistic dignity of the village without any direct interference in the socio-economic stakes that divide the community. This leaves two possibilities for the Imam: either a planned restraint and withdrawal or a constant loyalty to the position of the dominant group.

It appears that, among the Imams of Bangladesh, even if the salary is an important measure of his prestige, it however, is not a measure of the limit of his independence. The Imam is often obliged to claim his salaries in arrears. A member of the mosque committee is entrusted with the task of realizing this salary which in fact, becomes a long and complex process. There is a very large number of Imams around Dhaka who resign for non-payment of salary or for dissension about that. The majority of the Imams in the villages around these areas are strangers. An Imam from the village accepts a much lower salary and he is obliged to have great patience.

The turn over of the Imams is as high in the capital as in the villages. Among the hundreds of mosques in the big cities of Bangladesh, the Imams endowed with good degrees (*Kamel* or *Fazil*, equivalent to master or bachelor degrees according to the Imams) have a greater possibility of mobility and ascent. But this possibility is limited by the great number of graduates. It has been found during the interviews that, becoming an Imam is the last choice for a graduate of *Madrrasah*. It is the last resort and thus is the common lot for thousands of students of Islam in Bangladesh.

The least qualified of the Imams of small villages often leave their jobs for years together. Then, when their luck does not favor any commercial or agricultural endeavor they start the job afresh elsewhere.

The Imam then appears like a humble worker who recites in obscurity the message of the holy Quoran. Sagacity, availability, compliance - all are required from him. Deprived of all prestige, his status in the villages is delicate. His function in the cities and towns is less belittled and he enjoys an infinitesimal fragment of prestige of Islam as a clerk. The *Ulemas*, doctors of

Islam, are at the summit of this hierarchy. The precariousness of the job is common for all the Imams who in fact, remain under the control of the mosque committees where social tension is prevalent or dominant factions manifest. It means that the ideal of Islamic justice must be put forward by the Imam in a metaphoric form. Besides this job of recitation, the Imam is like a minor actor in the administration of the symbolic goods of salvation. Torn between his objective affiliation to the village community and his mythical affiliation to the community of the believers (*Umma*), the Imam in Bangladesh is nevertheless a major symbolic actor, even if he appears like a minor social actor. As it is underscored by M. Arkoun, "the conscience of the *Umma* is essentially mythical²³". Bangladeshi Islam is permanently trying to make blend of an aristocratic vision inherited from the Moguls, (historic vector of islamisation), with the pre-existing culture of the animist farmers of South Asia, and, now the international Islam having a strong relationship with Arabism. It needs to be mentioned here that, Saudi Arabia has an important influence in Bangladesh.

The Imams are seldom economically solvent enough to accomplish a pilgrimage to Mecca. While being obliged to be accountable for their villages or neighborhoods, they must at the same time be accountable for the legitimacy of Islam domiciled in the Arab countries. They perform their important symbolic job under such a complex context aiming at linking the local village community politically to the totality of the Muslims without any consideration of distance, of nationality and of political regime. It is clear that the young Imams are the objects of solicitation by the Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia or Iraq which are adversaries in the international arena for control of the Muslims whom they employ on occasion in their countries as immigrant workers exploited without restriction.

With his belittled social status, with his role of

23. M. Aarkoun : book cited p.49.

underpaid symbolic actor, the Imam is placed in between the confrontation of these internal and external influences that are exerted on the Bangladeshi society. Little mobilized now, the most educated Imams of Bangladesh constitute potentially the troupes of ideological radicals who could one day operate in the name of Islam. In fact, the frustrated clerics have always been the natural clients of the Islamic brotherhood, as in Egypt, for example. These salvation workers are deposed of their message in a society which is dependant and lives on aid. Finally, it is the pre-islamic peasant culture that actually constitutes the principal force of inertia in the face of ideologic discourse in the name of Islam, the geo-political relevance of which is already demonstrated. The job of the Imams could have enormous changes which would transform these symbolic actors into real ones. Conveying a great message, the Imams are the obscure readers. The change in the impact of this message would bring about radical changes in their status. How many will resist this temptation if the development remains a perpetually abortive venture?

CHAPTER III

The ideologies of development and their Islamic conceptions in Bangladesh

The ideology of "communitarian" development, according to which development is pioneered by the drives from the grass root level or from the "communities", has advanced the institution of the Imam training programs in Bangladesh. These initiatives rests on the hope of making the latter become genuine "developmental agents": by associating the moral authority due to their religious roles and to their somewhat limited, but sufficient knowledge to bring about a particular assistance in the matters of health and hygiene to the inhabitants of a village. They should be the best placed for supporting the "communitarian" incentives rather than welcoming the western "professional developers". In the face of this aspiration the reality about status and social positions of the Imams that we could pin point from the three case studies, shows certain limits and contradictions between the voluntarist approach of development and the actual situation which often makes this determination incantatory and mythical. Between the idyllic village "community" which the experts of international organizations depict as egalitarian, harmonious and motivated by a common purpose and the previously mentioned villages that are established on inequality, dependance and dissension, Islam as the religion of 90% of the Bangladeshis, permits to recognize the only acceptable consensus which can be formulated, that is to belong to the community of the believers (*Umma*).

We will first look into the local conceptions about development as these can emerge in the society, before considering the notion of development as it is perceived by the Islamic economic theoreticians.

Finally, we will look into the problematics of

development in the context of the current confrontation between nationalism and fundamentalism which is attaining a phenomenal and new magnitude in Bangladesh. Here, beyond the public prosecution held against the chief of the *Jamat i Islami* party, all historic destiny of Bangladesh is at stake.

1 - Local politics of development

Before taking up the indigenous conceptions of development, it will be pertinent to discuss the particular characters of politics and practices of development in Bangladesh.

In this country of 110 million habitants where the poor are persistently becoming poorer since the last two decades, in spite of an abundance of aids and policies in force the scenario of development necessitates involvement of many national executives and foreigners. Control of overpopulation is considered a pre-requisite condition by many. The overpopulation however, does not allow either to ignore the importance of social inequality, particularly so far as access to land is concerned, or allow to hide the political and social factors. The political violence was controlled, at least during the elections of '91, which were held under plausibly democratic conditions. This democratic pretence, a pre-condition for foreign aids, American in particular, is fragile and fictitious so long as access to the resources remains a battle for the majority of the population.

Factors other than overpopulation or natural catastrophes are responsible for the under-development of the country. Incapability of the different governments to undertake structural reforms is leading Bangladesh to exist with the life-line of foreign aid which itself maintains under-development.

Besides, there are instances of misuse of the loans in uncertain projects like that of embankment for flood control, the feasibility studies of which have already cost an enormous sum and probably without any foreseeable accomplishment, Bangladesh has become the playground for the developmental technocrats and experts as well as for the NGOs whose number is attaining a world record.

These various players of the developmentalist myth continue to close their eyes and ears to the alarming

evidence that the development is achieved only by those who are already developed and they themselves are the first. The capital of Bangladesh is a city where the arrogance of the experts and their pretention rivals with the naivete of the foreign NGOs. The developmentalist bourgeoisie who keeps the businessmen of the residential neighborhoods active, is neo-colonial as much in its practices as in its ideology of Western development. This continues unabated and has never been put in to question.

The international organizations secure their proper continuity by distributing the aids, sometimes found resold in the open market, by endorsing the political and economic officials who do not have more than two children, welcoming them in New York or in Washington, without any permanent benefit to the majority of the Bangladeshis.

Surrounded by a number of subordinate Bangladeshi employees, who come to denigrating their proper society, the NGOs are becoming a new bourgeoisie of the expatriates and a lower middle class of subservient employees. On the other hand, in the villages, the developmental projects are creating a client-patron relationship between the population and the "developers". The projects which have become small enterprises, must show some positive results to motivate the donors and as such, these results are being concocted through fictitious scenario of people's participation.

Similarly, the government is lying to the international public aid donors, the local employees of the NGOs are lying to their patrons who on their part make lies to the respective donors. This is happening because of the simple fact that the cult attached to the attained objectives, demands a result, even if fictitious, according to a well established technocratic reasoning.

We will better understand why the majority of the population is not concerned about these big maneuvers which are ultimately destined to the western donors. While every body pretends, the development is but a scenario for on lookers. So long as the West will demand

specific results from those who benefit from their aids, the development will be nothing but a neo-colonial humanitarian farce where dependance forbids all initiative at the grass root level.

The relative political stability of Bangladesh has enabled the setting up of industrial projects. However, the lion share of the extra profit is exported and is not re-invested in the country. The particularly active textile sector shows that, Bangladesh with its active and cheap man-power, forms a relay between the raw materials imported at low price, finished or semi-finished products made at little cost and its resale with a bigger profit in Paris, London or New York. One should not forget that our ski anoraks have been made by women and children working at 35^o C. in the shade.

Such a domination, common in many third world countries, but particularly harsh in Bangladesh, constitutes what is termed development by the World Bank. None but the foreign establishments, and to a limited extent, the Bangladeshi industrialists who do not venture to finance from their own resources, profit from this development. The latter, on their part take partners without risking the minimum of initiative. This social class has become immensely rich during the last few years. It comprises a middle-class businessmen deeply turned towards foreign countries as much as by their culture as by their investments. This picture will appear extreme to all who refuse to see in the myth of development, one of the founding myths of the West. Such a misuse and such a repeated failure in relation to the most elementary equity, does not go unnoticed among the half-educated, urban, petite bourgeoisie from which the fundamentalists are recruited anymore than it deceives the peasants. The Imams return to their villages after listening to an educational discussion advocating economic and social initiative. They clash with the heaviness of village organization. They are not capable of changing it without an external support which is lacking. The notion of initiative is however, not strange in the rural society. Contrary to the ethnocentric concept, according to which the peasants are passive

and backward, the latter display a wealth of astuteness for survival, for living or for prospering. In fact, the destiny of someone is seen as a blend of initiatives taken by Allah and by himself¹.

For the poorest, food for everyday is a permanent problem and a day to day solution for it has to be found out. The schemes adopted for them are in fact the short term ones because, either they have no resources or they have an insignificant or very small savings. With the exception of those who are forced to begging following some misfortune that confines them into an extremely precarious condition, the others are obliged to lasting initiatives. The life histories recollected by the *Grameen Bank*² show a durable capacity of reasoning and economic strategy with a view to arranging a security reserve that will enable an access to simple forms of dignity: send the children to school, take care of a sick person, buy a sari for the wife. For those who possess lands and surplus wealth, the approach to the development of the patrimony becomes more extensive and assumes a more confirmed political dimension.

There exist some native conceptions of development which commonly centers around the family, the *bari* (the household). The affluence of a family is measured by the size of its *bari*, condition of the buildings and their roof coverings. It depends also on the capacity to ensure a sufficient crop of rice for family consumption. Without this, the family members have to look for jobs to earn money needed for the commodities. The affluence is equally indicated by the impeccable attire on the weekly prayer day and to have rooms in the dwelling which would house the women folk of the family to keep them away from the eyes of the outsiders (*pardah*). To develop oneself is, first of all, to enhance the family welfare. As is noted by David Abecassis: "The concept of poverty is not limited uniquely to economic considerations, it also includes a lack of opportunities for personal accomplishment". He continues: "Not to have offensive

1. D.Abecassis: book cited p.35

2. Jorimon: Ed.M.Yunus, Dhaka, 1982.

beliefs and practices exposed to possible derision by the foreigners is more important than to change the beliefs and the practices in a society where shame is an important element of social control and of personal demeanor. The people are capable of having a strong desire to be a good Muslim (like, for example, to be capable of abiding by the *purdah* or the importance of religious education in the marriage negotiations) while at the same time to tolerate or to approve a custom which they know non-islamic³.

Accumulation of possessions and wealth is admired in the family. Under such a context where possessions are rare, the concept of a collective strategy does not have a tangible meaning although it is extensively advocated by the NGOs or the developmental agencies. They ignore or want to modify the grass root level village tenets of "every man for himself". More or less endowed with grace (*daya*) which, according to Abecassis enables to accept the redistribution from the patron to his clients, fortified by his untarnished honor (*izzat*), for the peasants it is difficult to integrate class solidarity into an environment which leaves room for initiative, but reduced to an individual level.

On the other hand, rumors or images of the actors whose objective is the socio-economic development, reach the villages. In most of the villages of Bangladesh, activities of the cooperatives, projects of local or foreign NGOs have been heard or seen. People have heard the deliberations of the politicians and have worked in the state-owned enterprises. What are the local concepts about those activities? Bangladesh is a vast enterprise for the national or foreign NGOs, which are generating thousands of projects aiming at ameliorating the lot of the population and to give them lasting means to improve their daily life.

As all NGOs are operating through projects, there must then be a distinction between the foreign organizations and the national organizations. The projects of the foreign NGOs (Caritas, Care, Oxfam...)

3. D.Abecassis: book cited p.1 and 42.

consist of instituting an economic activity, an income generating source, in a given locality which will ultimately bring potential emancipation of the population of that locality. For the villagers, one must reap benefits from the large manna that these NGOs distribute. Opening a project is, to the peasants, like the setting up of a distribution enterprise. The just redistribution that inspires these projects is not perceived immediately.

The NGOs recruit urban executives coming from the petit bourgeoisie who sometimes have a very ideological approach of the peasant society. As a result, the projects are often divided according to two interpretations. The first, endogenous, consists of drawing profit out of the project conceived as a foreign enterprise. In certain cases, drawing profit out of a project means to participate in certain collective rituals which are thousands of leagues away from the daily preoccupations of the local population.

The second interpretation about the projects is that of the executives and their promoters. It postulates that the locally engaged activities are the start of durable and irreversible socio-economic changes. We are not opting here for the pragmatism of the poor, the cynicism of the rich (who some times pretend to be poor) or the time to time technocratic idealism of the executives. When these executives are locals but working with the foreign NGOs, they are out of place and they very easily propagate their foreign employers' opinions. The paternalistic, benevolent, charitable as well as the technocratic and productist ideology of the foreign NGOs is the center of multiple contradictions. It appears that it is degenerating into an interfering and aid giving neo-colonial doctrine. In the face of this, one can not wonder that the local society reciprocates by the quest of profit, even if it is necessary to submit itself to the participatory rituals in the form of collective fantasies where extra people are brought in by trucks to play the scenario of development. This is what the donors sitting in their armchairs and the NGO experts in their offices wants to see.

The misappreciation of the foreign NGOs about the

competence of the rural society or rather the very ideologic and Western-oriented conceptions that they have, explain why the innumerable projects implemented in Bangladesh do not produce any lasting over-all progress. Although the impact of many foreign projects seems to have positive effect at the field level, and though sometimes it triggers off some changes in the local society, yet it is not possible to ignore the fact that the surrounding society is not profoundly concerned. This sometimes results in a staging of development in which certain Bangladeshis have become experts.

If the projects of Bangladeshi NGOs are considered which are often financed by foreigners, a greater closeness vis-a-vis the local society can be ascertained. Even if the concept of these projects are basically not different from those of the Western foreigners, their better command of the relationship with the surrounding society however induces more genuine incentive from the part of the recipients. The big national NGOs (BRAC, GK⁴, Grameen Bank) are huge, ideological organizations where the organizational dimension and discipline are fundamental. The contractual commitment expected from the participants is generated and supervised so that it becomes long-lived and prolific. As a result, the peasants are not tempted to simply draw benefit out of the projects, rather they are persuaded to commit themselves to it, criticize them for political or moral reasons and in the worst situation, to remain indifferent.

These NGOs are fighting against the dependence and domination of the big landlords who make them involve completely in local politics. They participate like the other political forces in these politics with known and well identified arms, with urban connections. D.Abecassis adds: "The NGOs tend to replace the habitual rapport between the employer and clients; a new type of dependence is emerging between the initiator of the

4. B.Hours, M.Sélim: *Une entreprise de développement au Bangladesh. Le centre de Savar*. Paris, 1989. (A developmental enterprise in Bangladesh.The Gonoshastya Kendra).

project and the target group⁵". Be it a foreign manna or a political force, the development put into effect by the NGOs is not immediately recognized by the majority of the peasants as a collective project that can mobilize.

The big works organized by the State (*food for work* program, diverse works) are comparable to the big works evoked by Marx in the Asiatic mode of production. These works have always been considered as a chore due to the State. The rural community send there the most poor of their members as if it is always meant an obligation to a land lord, a state land lord. The not so old memory of the *zamindars* underscores that these state initiatives are conceived as a participation to a central political system which brings up to date its domination on the land linked peasant communities. This continuation of representations leaves room to think that the state is not conceived by the peasants as a real or potential developmental agent but as an exclusively centrally controlling organization, relatively far away but basically repressive. This makes it incompetent to trigger off some socio-economic changes in the eyes of the villagers.

Thus, in the lack of democracy which allows the reproduction of a political and social system founded on injustice and violence is maintained by the various factions in the society. The developmental model recommended by the foreign participants implies the existence of social forces collectively engaged in a voluntary process. The splitting up of the civil society, absence of all unanimity, dominance of different factions in the rural society, reveal the gap that separates the real society from the western developmental model. This model appears as a body all the more foreign as it is the subject of an islamic criticism, according to which Islam constitutes an alternative model of development, even the only authentic development. That this model is conveyed by the minority and has not stemmed from popular representations, does not deprive it of its potential force, because of the fact that it can at the

5. D.Abecassis: book cited p.110.

same time catalyze the refusal of foreign alienation and the assertion of moral and cultural values of dignity.

The "Islamic economists" have emerged under such a context. They are the intellectual minority who have tried to set up the model of an "Islamic economics". This model is utilitarian like the other developmental models while at the same time conforms to the Islamic tenets.

2 - The Islamic economics : an alternative development

Although it is quite natural that the macro-economists are fascinated by the "take-off" and the development of the NIC (New Industrial Countries), it seems helpful however to remind that Asia is also portrayed as having poor or undernourished masses deprived of all social protection. In relying exclusively on the creation of wealth, one can at times, overlook analyzing the creation of poverty that functions as the basis of multiple Asiatic societies. This is because of the reason that here like in other places, the wealth of some is made at the expense of poverty of the others. Being amazed with the economic growth in Thailand without measuring the social imbalances which is one of the causes, it is likely that one will take risk of a shortsighted vision, or at the least a partial one, of things. Hence, the importance of the complimentary strategies by the different disciplines.

We lack singularly historical depth for deciding whether certain economic and financial conjunctures are capable to arouse global organizational metamorphosis by which one can identify an economic and social development with the changes that it is supposed to bring about. Only time can answer this question. Hong Kong continues to quiver each time China moves.

Religion, though little studied now-a-days, occupies an important place among the various factors intervening in the economy of a society. After Weberian analyses on the "entrepreneurs of salvation", study is often limited to sometimes summary speculations on the comparative worthiness of Confucianism and Shintoism in the industrial production of automobiles or video-tape recorders. This pseudo religious anthropology has importance only for the CNPF (National Council of French Managers) and the ideological extensions of the

neo-liberal vulgate of the 1980s, which serves as a common denominator of thought for most of the Western societies today. Among those countries called "developing", whose place has not yet been clearly established in the "world economy", the Muslims are the only ones to claim having an alternative or different economic theory. An abundant literature dedicated to the "Islamic Economics" have been produced by the Muslim economists, the essayists and the journalists. This literature of unequal quality is largely unknown to the West. From what has been gathered in the leaflets, books and specialized review articles published in Bangladesh, the theoretical and ideological framework, the principal conceptions, and the principal lines of the analyses contained in those publications have been presented here. All these are supposed to represent the economic thinking of Islam. Whether this concept has a sense because it is often declared that Islam challenges some specific or distinct field: political, economic and religious.

The author, being neither an economist nor an islamologist, will not judge the technical or metaphysic validity of these works considered here as the representation of the world, formulated by some muslim economists, intellectuals or ideologist. Though Bangladesh is not the cradle of the islamic civilization and does not have a big islamic University, it nevertheless appears as the second biggest Muslim country of the planet in terms of population and it is a place of intense activity of preaching and of ideological agitation, like the neighboring Pakistan, as the Rushdie affair revealed. It is being proposed here to see which are the principal themes and supporting points of the works mentioned above, before attempting to generally characterize the approach to economy of the authors cited, and trying to take the measure to its situation facing the so-called world economy.

Topics and supporting points

Islamic law is transcending and must involve all humankind which *in fine*, will altogether be converted to

Islam and thus will attain a sort of ultimate oneness on the basis of social justice and high morality.

The world as it is, is considered as the gift of God, a "provision" bequeathed to mankind for life here below. These capital of riches must be made to yield a profit through the "just" action of men. This assumes a moderate development of the natural resources as well as the manpower. Material gain and prosperity are achieved by such a "moderation" and these are nothing but extra elements of prospects in moral and spiritual development. In this context, growth has been put into question and Dr. Atiul Huq, economist of the Chittagong University exclaims: "Why, until recently, has the economic growth been exclusively important? Growth for whom? For certain privileged ones or for the mass? Contrary to all other economic systems, the Islamic economics have certain innate things that can resolve all these problems. There resides the importance of Islam as the code of an integral life". The same author continues by presenting one of the cardinal ideas concerning the redistribution of excess wealth that constitutes one of the pillars of the Islamic economic theories. "There are some unique things in the Islamic economic system. It is based more on the morality, ethical and human aspects than on the material aspects of this world. If each rich man were conscious about his responsibilities, then there would not have been any neighbor or any poor left in a state of famine. This is how the distribution of income or social justice is integrated in the Islamic economics⁶".

This conception is extraordinarily typical of Islamic discourse on economics. Western researchers find there a specific logic, a circular thought where the ideal is conceived as real, without posing the condition of its implementation. In this idealism which Haegel would become an uncouth materialist, the world is really upside down.

On the basis of this conception which is quite

6. Thoughts on islamic economics. Ed. Islamic Research Bureau. Dhaka 1979. p.23.

homogenous as per different authors, a particular depiction and a theory of Islamic welfare society is found. This welfare society depends on a harmonious development and is moderate (without destroying the natural resources) based on fair distribution. This has nothing to do either with the inegalitarian capitalism or with the too materialist socialism. The slogans on the walls of the universities declare *No East, No West, Islam is the best*.

In his book, *Islam and Capitalism*, Maxime Rodinson has well analyzed the reality of medieval Islam and the content of the texts. Besides that the private property is absolutely permitted, although Allah be the proprietor of all things, the commercial activities, in which the Arabs excelled during the Middle Ages, are indubitably recommended if only it avoids hoarding and speculation. The commercial profits would be called "grace of God". " On the day of judgment, the trusted merchant will have his seat in the shade of the throne of God".

Prohibition of interest (*riba*) is presented by the Islamic economist as one of the conditions for social justice. This is in opposition to the Western economics accused of exploiting the indebted consumers. Sharing of loss and gain of an enterprise is the principle in the setup of "Islamic Bank". One wonders about the "Morally" acceptable profit rate and redistribution of this profit. Part of these financial considerations aims at producing an explicit and practical theory taking into consideration the rejection of the principle of dividend which is considered as usury. Several technical disagreements were generated in the proceedings of the international seminar held at Dhaka in 1980 and published under the heading: "Conclusively, an islamic bank is a commercial organization aiming at development and well-being on the basis of Islamic values⁸".

With several examples M.Rodinson shows that the principle of interdiction of dividend was established

7. M.Rodinson: *Islam et capitalism*. Paris, Seuil 1985.pp31-33.

8. *Thoughts on islamic banking*. Functions of a central bank in the islamic frame work (Shah Muhammed Habibur Rahman,p.173). Dhaka 1980.

since the beginning to be partly bypassed with specific tales, more or less specious and tortuous sayings, formulated by the Islamic professors. The same author affirms that this interdiction had little practical effects and he asks himself: "Why then, the medieval society has given ideological prescriptions that contradicted with its practice" (Rodinson,p.61). The reply as advanced by G.Le Bras in relation to the medieval Christian society is: "The doctrine furnished the explanations which seemed to respect the fundamental principle while allowing the deviations".

M.A.Razzaque affirms: "The Islamic economic system is neither capitalist nor socialist, but is a combination of the good aspects of both⁹". According to Islamic economics, redistribution of wealth is a duty imposed by God. Does the Prophet not affirm: "he who eats with satisfaction while his neighbor cries in hunger, is not a believer". This obligatory redistribution is made effective through several institutions and practices of which *zakat* is the most important and the most referred to. According to M.A.Razzaque: "In this way Islam collects 1/10 of all agricultural productions, 1/5 of mineral riches and imposes other taxation which can be sufficient to give the requisite amount to all. In certain cases, this comprises the welfare and comfort. For this purpose Islam has introduced the *zakat* (the poor share the wealth of the rich) and has established the *zakat* (one of the four pillars of Islam) to the level of the prayer (monetary) (book cited p.42). It needs to be mentioned here that M.A.Razzaque is the head of the department of Economics of the Government Commerce College in Chittagong.

The laws of heritage edified in Islam, in the same way, have the objective to avoid gathering of wealth, because men are equally the servants of God. Honestly acquired wealth is lawful. Thus, the holy Quoran underlines: "Don't neglect your part of the world"(the holy Quoran 28,77), and, "Oh Allah, give us what is good in this world and here-after"(the holy Quoran 2,201).

9. *Thoughts on islamic economy*, p.34-35.

Economic activities are explicitly encouraged: "When you end your prayer, spread out on this earth in quest of the bounty of Allah" (the holy Qur'an 62:10). Wealth, the gift of God, is moral by nature and purpose. It is good because it gives rise to lawful activities and because it is used for the good (both moral and material) of the society.

In Islam, the right to wealth has been established not only through payment of remuneration of the factors of production but also through ascertaining the rights of low income groups to the wealth of the rich in the form of obligatory or optional charity schemes. "There is a recognized right in their wealth, for them who ask for it and for them who are in need of that wealth"(the holy Qur'an,7,24-25)¹⁰. According to the same author, in the factors of production, equipments and technology are considered like the land in Islam. The legal forms of the economic and financial associations are prescribed and toil must be justly recompensed. "Give the workman the equitable share of his work, because the worker of Allah will not be deprived of his part".(Musaud Ahmad) or, "And on the day of harvest, pay his right" (the holy Qur'an 6,142).

Opposite to this deliberate sharing, the practice of usury and of corruption is denounced. "He who offers or accepts bribes are in the hell"(Bukhari). Prohibition of illegal transfer of wealth has regional relevance. The State must control business out of the society from which the State has received the mandate to assure moral and material welfare. "The *Caliph* (Chief of an Islamic State) will not let a poor man stay poor, an indebted in debt, he will help the weak and without subjugating the oppressed, he will provide clothes to those who are without clothes" (Sharh-Sher-Atul-Islam: Islam ka Nezama Iktisadiat, cited by Alauddin Khan: Rasta O Khelafat 1971 p.208).

Whether it is an individual contribution in order to eliminate poverty or a *Zakat* redistributed by the State, the wealth of Allah must be distributed which can not be

10. *Thoughts on islamic economy.* p.44.

monopolized. "The wealth can not be accumulated and controlled by the rich only" (Surah Hasher) "Prayer purifies the soul. *Zakat* purifies the wealth" (the holy Quoran 9,103). According to Dr.Hasan Zaman (book cited p.106), Professor at the King Abdul Aziz University (Jeddah), the *Zakat*, considered as an incentive to work, encourages production and prosperity. According to Ali Akkas (University of Dhaka), it contributes to prevent economic depressions. All these provisions are considered as "the best solution for the problems confronting the contemporary humanity" by the Islamic economists.

Thus, "Islam is a complete code of life that fosters the best solutions for all problems at personal, social or national levels", affirms Abul Hasan M.Sadeq (book cited,p.85), who adds, "the Islamic economic system is the panacea that can eliminate the causes of inequality in the society". His conclusion is clear, "it can be confirmed with fact and certitude that the Islamic mode of life assures an equitable distribution of wealth in a community with justice".

These assertions voiced by the university people whom one supposes qualified put the reader in front of a particular thought endowed with a specific logic. Tables and figures are presented along with the quoted sentences. Beliefs, declarations of faith, economic and social analyses overlap each other to give a vision which the world economy we shall now try to characterize in its cardinal concepts.

Rationality, Islamic and World economies

M.A.H.Mahmud, press attaché of the Iranian Embassy in Bangladesh, writing on the agriculture of this country says, "The problems in agriculture are nothing but some problems of morality¹¹".

The researcher gets similar type of response when he makes the observation to the authors cited that the Bangladesh community is one of the poorest, most inegalitarian and most unjust in the world. "Islamic

11. *Thoughts on islamic economy* .p.28.

economy" is, ethically speaking, normative in the first place. Sharing, mode of taxation etc. are nothing but means for divine justice. Social injustice is a human error. It does not call into question the ideal validity of Islamic model.

The Western economic doctrines themselves are also normative and put forward sometimes faltering rules. However, their reference is not ethical to the same extent although the Western beliefs on human rights are some times voiced by ideologists whose accents can recall the ayatollahs.

The important normative character of "Islamic economy" is lessened by its univocal and holistic dimension. Islam is one, as the humanity to come. Politics, economy, religion are nothing but facets of a single truth under a sovereign and unique God. From this point, the concept of progress does not have the same outlook as in the West. It no longer relates to the accomplishment of a journey, an advancement to facilitate a process. It is a matter of returning to the source of goodness, of order, of justice, revealed by Allah.

From this emerges the major character of the thought of Islamic economy: its retrospective character. References to the medieval Islamic golden age abound and the West is accused of having made hindrance to a "real" development of humanity by the illusion of an uncontrolled growth founded on the pillaging of the third world and imperialist domination. Revolution took place here, and it is a question of returning to it, to rediscover the original oneness the evidence of which is singularly lacking at least to realize an ancient model. Even though many analyses appear common with the "progressism" of the XXth century (socialism, third-world ideology, ecologism), the profound logic of the Islamic economists are however different. This is because of the fact that, the future golden age refers to an ancient golden age, to a past model. M. Rodinson thus speaks on this point of a "reactionary" thought where the future takes off on a backward march.

This retrospective character of the Islamic models is

the one that nourishes the debates on Islam and modernity. "Modernizing Islam" seems intrinsically problematic. According to a journalist, to "Islamize modernity" is to emphasize on the immorality of modernity to the eyes of the Islamic ideologists. It may be comprehensible from that point as to why an "Islamic economic order" is promoted which is more just than the present world economic order.

The Islamic economic model stands for an alternative welfare state. The moral conception that underlies this welfare state (temporarily realized during the Islamic middle-age) is in total contradiction with the Western developmental ideology, and more particularly with the neo-liberalism of this late XXth century. The Western economy (that is, ideologically the world economy) is considered as unjust and amoral and finally immoral through its impact. Maximization of profits, exchanges, or production, is essentially immoral according to a part of Islam who on the other hand, tolerates and encourages business very well.

The holist, totalizing concept of the Islamic economists is fundamentally opposed to the pretention of universality of a world market (and the human rights). We will leave here to the care of others to decide which of these two pretentions is more "totalitarian", this concept having become unusable after twenty years of simplistic discussion. The strong utopic nature of analysis of the Islamic economists appears in various references to an Islamic banking system, to an Islamic common market, to a new Islamic economic order, to the Islamic maritime companies... and even to a United nations of the Islamic States!

From idealism to utopia, there is only one step, many a times taken, for the best or for the worst, in the history of ideas. There exist ample citations among the Islamic economists to affirm the belief according to which the Islamic states possess "the best resources", "the best values", "the best ways" to render happiness and dignity to humanity that it would have lost due to the fault of the West. The western immorality would result in its unreasonable taste for the unrestrained

production of wealth. The islamic ethics for sharing will be the only universal solution. It has been for the last ten centuries, it is for to-day and it will be for the next ten centuries. In such radical interpretations of Islam the extremist terrorist as well as the anti-Islamic ethno-centrism of the Western Christian societies find their justification, not to talk about racism. The science of religions amply shows that the great texts of the great revealed religions have survived through exegesis and manipulations which never go without contradictions. By chance, as M.Rodinson underlines it: "The ideologists do not govern, even in Islam. They express only the opinion of God¹²". Iran continues to make an exception.

The writings on Islamic economy are the acts of intellectuals and ideologists. These are edited in a country, Bangladesh, which lives on international aid and which mistrusts its own government as well as the donor governments. The lack of dignity in this situation, in which the West has only a partial but real responsibility, could be the field for election of fundamentalism, of radicalism, and of radical islamism. The theories of the latter are far from mobilizing the 100 million Muslims of Bangladesh. However, the perpetuation of social injustice can only invigorate the radical ideologies. These ideologies are those of the frustrated urban lower middle classes. Professors of universities could also be included in this class....when their monthly salary is only 1,000FF.

Parallel to the spiritual and cultural Islam, which may be considered as personal faith, the holistic, radical and utopic ideology of the medieval crusade could arise. Progress of the international economic relocation, Western pretentions to the universality and to the organization of a uniform market for goods and values will always collide with the existence of diverse societies. This could bring about a self-defense through means and measures where intellectual or physical violence predominate. The injustice in the current world economic order produces such ideologies

12. M.Rodinson: book cited p.62.

"scientifico-religious" as it incites a "theology of Islamic liberation". The sequel of centuries of colonial frustrations and then of national frustrations are there in which the West must shoulder its part of responsibility.

On the other hand, the pilgrims or the workers who go to Saudi Arabia perfectly know to realize how they are cooped up or exploited. But it is in their country of origin that the dialectic takes place and where the ideologies of tomorrow take shape.

The Islamic economy is presented as an "anti-imperialist" device. It becomes evident that its scientific validity should be put to question. It is necessary to underscore its ideologic charisma and its immense capacity to attract the frustrated urban masses and the semi-educated masses of the mega-cities of the third world of tomorrow. The utopic naivety of the merchants of bazaars equalled only with that of the arms or other industrial product merchants in the context of ideological frustrations. These frustrations are produced in the countries where they get contracts whose profits are not shared. The third world is posing as obstacle to the strategies of internationalist development for the last 30 years. These strategies have only been appreciated in the West. This "failure of development" will probably continue till it becomes clear that the "Islamic economy", for example, is no more utopic than the dreams of neo-liberals of to-day (well presented in the writings of one Guy Sormann).

The invincible gap that widens between the part of humanity where individualism makes the sense and that part (which some people proclaim accursed) where the morality is given by religion will not be filled with agitation of the Western humanitarian commandos, no more than the most brilliant economic theories that have not allowed the "development" of the third world. To want to apply by force our own recipes to the rest of the mankind, recipes that have not been a total success, is to expose ourselves to a world wide misunderstanding of the goals of other societies and of other men who believe in the sense of this sentence: "Those who believe in Allah and follow the holy path (*taqwa*) we will open to

them the doors of progress (*barkat*) in the sky and on the earth" (*Surah Araf*).

One can try to draw a vision of an abstract theory put forward by the idealist intellectuals from this presentation. However, it needs to be mentioned here that, beyond the BCCI scandal, the Islamic banks are becoming more and more active in the world economy after draining off a significant portion of savings in the Muslim countries.

The Al-Baraqua group, the biggest Islamic bank of Saudi Arabia, is extending its activities in India and in Malaysia. The bank has effected some investments in Malayasia amounting to 40 million dollars in February, 1992 and this bank is being established in Indonesia too. In Iran, the nationalized financial institutes are working according to the rules of "Islamic banking" following the loss and profit sharing principle that avoids the practice of interest, or dissimulates this practice¹³. In Bangladesh, the Islami Bank can be taken into account for rapid progress since 1983. This is because of the fact that, its investments have passed from 56 million takas in 1983 to 4509 million takas in 1991 through its 61 branches and its almost one thousand employees.

The principles followed are set by the bank. All operations are conducted without interest according to *shariah*. The relationship between the bank and its clients is participatory instead of being founded on debtor-creditor relationships. The bank invests as per profit-risk sharing system. The bank distributes 70% of its income to the depositors. It aims at introducing a welfare oriented system founded on equity and justice in the business and economic fields. It intends to extend its cooperation to the poor and the low income groups to improve their economic lot. A *Shariah Council*, consisting of eminent bankers, jurists and economists of the country, administers all activities. The bank has created a social aid fund of 38 million takas under the name of *Islami Bank Foundation*. This foundation offers loans particularly consecrated to the acquisition of self-employment (rickshaws), to finance educational

13. *Courrier international*, no 78, April-May 92.

institutions, and to the aid and help giving activities, particularly during natural calamities. An appreciable amount of this fund is devoted to this assistance, to hospitals, to schools and to activities of appeal and preaching (*dawa*).

There are young graduates, close to the Jamat-i-Islami, in the offices of the national bank, which does not refer to the Islamic principles. These young men will one day hold positions of responsibility in the bank. One of them, whom I met in April, 1992, explained the common logic between Islamic economy and its political commitment.

"For sometime I was with the communist party, but they are worse than the capitalists. I am following a complete training in the domains of preaching, organization and physical and spiritual formation with a view to fight for attaining mass support and institute a strong leadership in this country". It can thus be construed that some bank officials associated with "Western" practices in their jobs are not convinced of the utility of their roles. It then seems that the Islamic financial system is no more only other oriental illusion. It weighs on the financial market, it uses the wheels of liberal economy (with the exception of interest, in fact, often disguised) with dexterity and competence. If it is not, it could be a political springboard and constitute a link between fundamentalist political ideologies and the world market. The latter is the pantheon of the Western neo-liberal ideologies and is the place for its big frailty. The failure of the West, dream of all fundamentalists, would become a judgment of God and would bring about a technical and financial bankruptcy. Moralizing the market (or pretend it to do so), while participating there in an increasing way, seems to be the ideological and financial strategy and for which Islamic economy is the tool.

Although every partisan of the Islamic economy could be qualified as fundamentalist, yet all are not politically as radical as the Jamat-i-Islami party. Let us look at the place of this party in the present conjuncture of Bangladesh.

3 - Jamat-i-Islami, The party for Islamic Revolution

In the article consecrated to the Jamat-i-Islami and its founder in Pakistan, Maududi, M.Gaboriau uses the neo-fundamentalism concept¹⁴. Maududi (1903-1979) is a petit bourgeois, originating from a prestigious lineage but fallen from rank. He was a self-educated man and was a journalist by profession. During the politization of the Indian Muslims, Maududi emerged as an anti-modernist and anti-nationalist. He was profoundly a politician. He used to write in Urdu and became an independent theologian and was supposed to be in relation with the Muslim brothers of Egypt.

To Maududi, Islam is a universal ideology. It is a coherent and rational whole. According to M.Gaboriau, a "nationalist reconstruction", his writings also develop the idea of harmony and a "romantic vision of history" based on the golden age of the first caliphs. The fundamentalism of Moududi is vented in the following citation excerpted from *Towards understanding Islam*. For the Muslim "the whole existence is an embodiment of the truth; because, in all spheres of his life he obeys, voluntarily or involuntarily, the laws of the one and the same God, master of the universe. He is in peace with the whole universe for, he loves him who loves the universe. Such a man is the representative of God on this earth. The whole world is for him and he is for God¹⁵".

M.Gaboriau underscores that *Shariah* is the only law and this law is entirely applicable to the modern world. According to him, the socio-economic thought of Moududi is explicitly conservative and his radicalism resides in the full application of *Shariah*. This application presumes an Islamic political system in the "style of the

14. M.Gaboriau: "Le néo-fondamentalisme au Pakistan: Moududi et le Jamaat-i-Islami" in O.Carré and P.Dumont, *Radicalismes islamiques*.vol.2, p.33-74,Paris,1986.

15. Cited by M.Goboriau: book cited p.44.

primitive Islamic *umma*". Conceiving Islam as an ideology, Maududi has a reactionary vision. "Finally the Islamic State that he envisages owes as much to modern ideologies as to the Islamic tradition¹⁶". This ambiguity is well represented in the recent publications of Jamat-i-Islami of Bangladesh. We will look into them too.

The Jamat-i-Islami party denounces the errors of the "secularists, nationalists and socialists" and reminds the prohibition of the party from 1972 to 1979, and its return after the removal of the term secularism from the constitution, in a brochure entitled, "Introducing *Jamat-e-Islami Bangladesh*" and edited by the party in 1989. "Islam is not only a religion...but an ideology too. It is not a mission but also a socio-political and cultural movement". Three "calling points" are presented (*dawah*):

- Accept Allah, if you desire peace in this life and want to be saved in the future life.....

- You must avoid all practices and actions which are against your belief.

- You must make a collective effort to replace dishonesty and the secularist leaders by leaders who are God fearing, honest and efficient in their political and social life.

These three points, of which the last presents a distinct political dimension, open up a four point program. After having mentioned that the party is a "scientific and revolutionary" movement, it is affirmed that "...If Allah wants it, the Jamat, with the support of the public must form the government and shape the entire society and the State according to Quoran and Sunnah". Four functions are put to action in this perspective. First of all, propagation and call (*tabligh* and *dawa*) that evoke active proselytism; then organization and training (*tanzeem* and *tarabiah*) that aims at developing the real servants of Allah and workers capable of participating in the movement. Thirdly, the social reforms by developing social services for the poor in order to organize the public to resist the "anti-social"

16. M.Goboriau: book cited p.71.

activities by peaceful means. Lastly, reform of the government and the administration (*Islah al Hukumah*), this includes replacement of the corrupt leaders.

This ideologic discussion presents the habitual characteristics of all "langues de bois" (stereotype political rhetoric). It is normative, highly logical and coherent. The workers of the Jamat are classed into three categories: the members (5,000 according to Abbas Ali Khan, the secretary general), the workers (50 to 60,000), and the associates which would be about 5 million. Strict conditions are followed for the passage from one category to the other. This passing over is subjected to a training and some tests (daily relations, capacity to make call (*dawa*), attendance in the meetings, voluntary subscription ...). This party is better organized and more disciplined than the other parties of Bangladesh. The *Ameer* is at the head of the party and is elected for three years. He is helped by a central advisory committee (*Central Majlish-e-Shura*) with an executive committee.

There are districts, subdistricts and unions at the regional and local levels. According to the same brochure mentioned earlier, the *Jamat* follows strictly the methods and activities shown by the prophet. "It tries to illuminate the soul and mind of the people by Islamic ideology". This method, qualified as scientific, impregnates the functions that open up some actions. It is advisable to purify the thought of "sensualism, materialism, secularism, socialism and rationalism, ... and even modernism" for propagating faith and appeal. A substantial literature has been produced where it is said that appeal must be made to the reason and to the mind rather than to the emotion. Meetings are organized at all levels (preaching, conferences and prayers). The journals of the party propagate the appeal while the workers establish personal contacts. Concerning the organization and training, it means developing the individuals and activate them for recruitment. Daily self-criticism is required. Training camps and study circles are set up. The activities for social reform aim at forging Islamic unity and

"reconstructing the human character". It concerns educating and mobilizing opinion against the corrupt, distributing relief to the victims, improving the hygiene, dispensing practical training for creating employment, offering loans to the rickshaw-pullers, to the peasants for buying their material. Finally, looking after the orphans is mentioned. For reforming the government and the administration, reactivation of independence and of sovereignty in the framework of Islamic State is proposed. One notes the party's insistence on the constitutional and non-violent action that it maintains and the democratic nature of the party that it claims.

There is monthly contribution by the members and workers to the party which constitutes 5% of their income. This indicates the sacrificing devotion of its adherents. The party does not mention any foreign source. This presentation underscores a rational will and coherence, typical of a ideological and revolutionary party, not withstanding its non secular reference to the Islamic model. "The model of Islamic State, established by the Prophet in Arabia 1400 years ago, continues to be the model for all time" - this is mentioned in the pamphlet presented during the elections of 1991 in which the *Jamat* secured 18 seats.

The *Jamat* maintains its Islamic, Bangladeshi, democratic nature and supports order. Social justice and social order are presented side by side. This is to be achieved through food and education for all citizens but for men and women separately. In that electoral pamphlet, there is the mention of honest leadership, separation of powers, redistribution of wealth, protection of women and even, encouragement of Bengali in the education system. The last is rather astonishing. The economic reforms proposed are those referring to the Islamic economic system and it conforms to that. A moderate attitude is voluntarily maintained seemingly destined to foil the accusations of the patriots or the poor mass. The *Jamat* is trying to adopt Islam politically to make it an element of moral attraction to the mass. The message of the moral of Islam is transmitted in a repetitive and systematic way

by criticizing some former leaders, by considering corruption as impurity and non respect of laws. The party appears to be saying to the citizen: we are not violent, neither are we dangerous. We are pure because we respect Islam which gives us an eternal model to attain a peaceful and just society. The activists of the *Jamat* are technical on the economic points but become readily moralizing about public life when talk about politics.

The party executives are the men formed before the liberation war. They often belong to the students front. All of them have had *madrrasah* training and have in common a profound hatred of India and of communalism. Some of them were officials during the British colonial period. Among the young generation, which is largely represented, many members of the *Jamat* have come from other parties including the communist party. They emphasize on the revolutionary dimension of the *Jamat* ideology.

The students branch (*Bangladesh Islami Chatra Shibir*) publishes a journal where news about the victims of assault by the students of *Awami League* appears. In the last few years, the party has lost 41 members, killed during encounters or attacks in Chittagong, and in Rajshahi,... These deaths are presented as martyrs in a very emotional way and are used to show the absence of law and order, corruption of the police and the government. The opposition parties, on their part, affirm that the *Jamat* members are also armed. The *shibir* emphasizes personal activity for the appeal (*dawah*) and for proselytism. It makes explicit references to "Islamic revolution" and it exercises a strong appeal in the students community. The objectives of the students community are foiled by governments incapable of mobilizing and producing consensus. The widespread violence in the campus is chronic. The students branch constitutes a breeding ground where future executives of the *Jamat* are trained and recruited.

The radical discussions disseminated in the students community have been softened for the general public and for this, allusion to Islam is becoming a moral

reference rather than a political ideology. For a general acceptance, the *Jamat* nurtures a democratic pretense, its probity and moral purity produced from Islam. According to the **Jamat** ideologists, the secular state of Sheikh Mujib and the secularism were the worst misfortunes. These are veritable "sins" against Islam and its morality which is "the morality". In these conditions nationalism is considered as a pernicious and pervert ideology. The accusation of collaboration brought against most of the *Jamat* leaders in the press, has been disposed off as defamatory. Some members of the party are said to have participated in the Bengali language movement of 1952. The proceedings against *Jamat* as antinationalist were but an intention to contain the party. The party asserts its rejection of the decadence and corruption of the state and the deterioration of the national image. It would be the real custodian of a nation properly and purely built on Islam. It would be the sole bulwark against immorality that results from secularism.

It seems that the strategy of the party executives is to exploit the rural conservatism while capitalizing on the frustrations of the politicized urban lower middle class, the social group that constitutes the habitual supporter of political fundamentalism (Egypt, Algeria...). While all political parties of Bangladesh criticize the successive governments of this country, the *Jamat* does it in the name of Islam and claims that an Islamic State is the only solution to it. Presenting a fascist tendency by its organization and its profoundly reactionary supporters, the national myth is being replaced by the myth of an Islamic State. The latter is considered the ultimate totality and the final solution of all problems.

CONCLUSION

"The comparative scheme that I outline helps one to clear oneself from two excessive ideas: that of the developmentalism for which there is no other historic model than that of the West, but there is also that of culturalism according to which ideas and theories are controlling- the world. For me, there are social practices provided with a double universal and particular vision, and all mastery consist in distinguishing one from the other. In consequence, each study develops its "particular" modernity, but not without relation with some demands and needs that have universal value" (B.Badie. *Les deux cités. Autrement* no 95, Dec.'87.)

The study on the relation between Islam and development in Bangladesh in terms of politics or in terms of the socio-economic situation, leads to consider the position and the limits of the integrating and political role of Islam. Islam does not currently constitute a definite and decisive unifying force in Bangladesh. The double identity of the Muslims of Bangladesh, Bengali and Muslim, reveals the existence of two levels of integration. One is the religious identity that binds the Bengalis faithful to the Muslim community, the other is the cultural and social identity that included the regional village communities.

Islam has functioned well to unite the anti-colonial movement against the British and resulted in the creation of Pakistan. It did not succeed in making the domination of the Pakistanis on the Bengali culture tolerable. The islamist movements did not support the military dictators like that of Ershad, who tried to create a consensus including Islam or to produce a legitimacy with Islam. By fighting against other muslims to leave Pakistan - country of the muslims of the sub-continent- the Bangladeshis have created a particular situation, where, contrary to many Arab countries, the national liberation was achieved. This was achieved not only without the support of Islam but with support from "almost" anti-Islamic force. The will for political secularism shown in 1971 is remarkable and evidently "modern" to the Western sense of the term although Islam has been playing an expanding political role since

then. The history of Bengal and of Bangladesh thus indicates two lasting allegiances that clash or accept each other till today.

Observations on Islam in day-to-day life have shown to what extent rural Islam is integrated, like in all other popular religions, to the village culture in a flexible and not very normative form. Social inferiority of the Imams underscores that they are captives like all other villagers, in a net of dependance and micro-political and micro-economical domination. Although different factions are present and despite some effects of dominations which could be observed, the mosque through its committee, insures a democratic function. Would Islam work elsewhere, out of the political field, where the political fundamentalists are trying to make it enter? Bertrand Badie has underscored that, contrary to the Western democratic model which aims at creating a consensus through integration, the opposing arguments are kept out of the political system in the Muslim countries. In Islam, as legitimacy is derived from religion, political power thus never achieves a solid legitimacy.

The controversial and violent nature of political life in Bangladesh can not be explained by the anarchic character of the Bengalis or by "cultural" causes. It can however, be explained by the impossibility of a political consensus, outside the political field, which by nature is not political, and must be transformed into an ideology to become political.

The position and nature of the State constitute a fundamental element for study and comparison, for example, with Islam or Algeria. The Imams in Bangladesh were never state employees. They are confined in a network of local dominations. The training that they were given remain abstract since they mask the social relations of power in the society. These courses for the Imams pretend to consider the society as a unified community, a sort of "national *umma*" which does not have any reality, because "*umma*" and nation incorporate a different logic which reciprocally influence each other without themselves being reduced one to the

other. Everything is done as if the social and charitable activities of the associations were addressed to a different society than the actual one. These activities are symbolic in their limited effectiveness and their consequences. These initiatives have less concrete impact than the developmental activities. The latter also do not have immense effect in the absence of profound organizational, political, economic and financial reforms, which the governments are incapable to promote. Nevertheless, these welfare activities have a good symbolic impact so far as the activities make the abstract community of the muslims (*umma*) more visible and when it concerns indigenous activities even if, like that of the developmental activities, they are financed by foreign sources but from Islamic countries. A profound dissociation is operated and internalized between the harmonious discourse produced by Islam and the everyday violence of the local and international market laws. Only the Islamic economists and the fundamentalist ideologists refuse this dissociation and extend the virtues of Islam to the economic and political fields. They do this by forging an Islamic macro-ideology that draws its sources from the Arab countries and conflicts in politics with secular nationalism.

M. Arkoun asks himself: "For what social, political and cultural reasons the religious vision transmitted by the *Shariah* has been permanently imposed on the whole of the Muslim societies, while rationalizing and secular tendencies had only ephemeral existence¹⁷?" One can also ask, why many Bengali Muslims remain permanently imbued with a humanist and rationalist approach of the religion. The British influence certainly intervenes as it has trained an elite of cultivated administrators who are open to dialogue. Nevertheless, Islam has been playing an important role in the political development of Bengal and then of Bangladesh. The political islamism is developing since the creation of Bangladesh, because of frustrations caused by the failure of socio-economic development, social inequality and increasing poverty.

17. M.Arkoun: Book cited 1984.p231.

The farmers are not subjected to radicalism although the *Jamaat* claims to have succeeded in making thousands of followers in rural areas. It must, however, be mentioned here that, the popular rural Islam is opposed to the ideology of *Jamaat* which claims to be rational and modern. The anti-western argument that constitutes the principal appeal of the fundamentalist parties is a negative attitude. This attracts the urban, semi-educated, lower middle classes who are either unemployed or occupy substandard jobs.

In a country where the education system is in a crisis, where the developmental methods are not ensuring employment, where the political system depends on patronization, corruption and violence, where the cities are full of the poor to whom there is nothing to offer, it is easy and convincing to promote a radical criticism magnified by a retroactive utopia. According to B.Badie, this utopia counters the market utopia, foundation of the Western modernity. According to H.Boularès¹⁸, *Jihad* (combat) is a fight to purify an individual and a society where "history becomes a song". In a world of corruption and frustration, the appeal and the propagation (*Dawah*), the comprehension and the interpretation (*Ijtihad*) are instruments of the greatest necessity.

B.Badie and R.Santucci mention: "The force of fundamentalism is thus to succeed in focussing all the dissatisfaction originating from modernization whether due to a conservative reaction or on the contrary to a desire to gain a maximum of advantages. Its success can be correlated with the extent of the frustrations aroused by the socio-economic transformations of each Muslim country of the world¹⁹".

The appeal for motivation and endeavor, all like invitation, made to the Imams to spread their technical experience among the population conflicts with the fact that there is no alternative popular socio-economic

18. H.Boularès: book cited p.81.

19. B.Badie, R. Santucci: *Essai d'analyse de la contestation fondamentaliste et marxistes dans plusieurs pays islamiques in Contestations en pays islamiques* CHEAM, Paris 1984.

developmental model. The principles of justice and distribution referred to are moral rules believed to have achieved in a past golden age. On the other hand, the Western technical formulas are tainted with impurity. They lead to sexual promiscuity and immorality. In this respect, the technic used by the trainers in the training of the Imams, are supposedly morally neutral although there are frequent objections on morality from the auditors. The *Salafism* of the Afghans is symptomatic of this type of debate. It aims at renewing the interpretations without bringing the religious primacy into question and without copying the West. Unity of the *Umma* and effort for adaptation (*Ijtihad*) of the law to the modern world are maintained together. According to B.Badie: "The *Talfik* consists of choosing the interpretation of the law declared to be the most conformed to the requirements of the modern world... Thus, supported by the *Sharia*, the *Talfik* avoids following the censured doctrines. However, it allows to integrate the practices of the Western world and those adjudged both good and effective. This is possible thanks to the work on interpretation by the *Alims* (doctors of law)²⁰."

Developmentalism is triumphant in Bangladesh. It does not triumph through its results which are modest, or even negative. The country is remaining into under-development. It triumphs by the presence and importance of the international experts who dictate and then finance the government policies. These experts continue to think that the Western developmental model is good and that it must be adopted as it is. They arrogantly ignore the wishes and the references of the people. In the face of this failed adoption, they have a tendency to attribute to hereditary incapability of the Bengalis, they have a tendency to attribute to the Bengalis' identity a congenital, almost cultural, incapacity to implement this model.

A less summary reflexion than these approaches of technocrats leads to grasp the complexity and ambiguity

20. B.Badie: *Les deux Etats*. Paris 1986. p.96.

of the attraction/repulsion concerning the development envisaged in the unique perspective of its product: wealth. The developmental concept of the Muslims, Bengali or not, is not separable from moral development, measured by law. The fundamentalists confound this with the law. The developmental policies in Bangladesh show the difficulty in establishing a Western type modern State which is not to be undermined by constant opposition to the political power, which accepts the idea of a State concentrating political power and moral authority, often dissociated in Islam. By dint of being repeated in Bangladesh, it seems that this conception about the fateful impurity of power has made impossible the existence of a lawful State served by an honest government. The nature of the State and the nature of its relations with the religious system are the crux of this problem.

The State of Bangladesh appears to be typically patrimonial. Patronization lays down the law. The Muslims of Bangladesh are ashamed of the State which they have wrested from Pakistan and which is grossly dependant on the West. They are not ready, far from it, to demean the liberation struggle because they have paid a high price for it. However, with the passing of time, this price and the weight of memory are being weakened progressively. Besides, the successive disillusionments due to changes of governments, makes it less and less unthinkable, in the middle term, the acceptance of an Islamic State. This state would be realized by a minority become prominent in the society and be legally imposed on a majority bewildered by the failure of western development, which makes vain all reference to a conception said to be modern of democracy, measured too formally by the conditions of voting or participation of women. The major social forces are attached to a secular modern society and the freedom fighters have never constituted a political oligarchy like that in Algeria. It remains that Bangladesh presents the profile of the States where the political stakes of Islam is evolving rapidly.

Thus, Islam in Bangladesh is not that closed and

reactionary yoke which directly opposes development and Western modernity. It is a series of moral regulations, values and widely-accepted practices, even reinterpreted, throughout the history. Islam is hindering the political progress of the country in certain fashion, but at the same time it is unavoidable.

Finally little concerned about the socio-economic development that follows moral development, according to the Islamists, Islam, among other factors, makes it relatively impossible the existence of a legitimate power, of a consensus and of a civil society. The fundamentalist politicians seem to be waiting for the supporters of the impossible secular democracy to become tired of it and thereby open the path to an Islamic State, denying the obvious division between the State and the religion inscribed in Islam. The issue remains uncertain, but for how long, if the failure of Western development continues and if the ethnocentric obstinacy of the economic and financial institutions like that of the World Bank allows to make them become "devilish" as symbols of evil in a neo-Third World scenario where Islam is already the principal dynamic ideology for struggle against the Western order. The Bangladeshis, like the other muslims, do not forget their "earthly part".

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