Participation, Public Policy, Political Economy and Development in Rural Bangladesh, 1958–85

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Summary. — During this period, four successive regimes in Bangladesh have felt reluctantly compelled to set up structures for local participation in government. Each found it had to reach out beyond the support of urban and rural élites and the military if it was to move beyond mere stability to real development of the country. Despite many problems, most notably local élite takeover at local level and military coup at national level, there is considerable evidence, particularly from neighboring India, to suggest that local participatory institutions can be successful over the longer term in promoting development for the middle and the poorer rural classes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last quarter-century, four successive leaders in Bangladesh have found themselves compelled to erect structures for local participation in government. The four experiences taken together form a pattern that reveals a great deal about the urge to create participatory structures, their role in linking government and citizenry, and their function in the political economy of development, not just in the context of Bangladesh but for developing countries generally. Of particular interest is what appears to be a contradiction between their short-term effects of reinforcing élite dominance and their longer-term promise as the only hope for promoting genuine participation at the local level.

This essay explores these four efforts beginning with Ayub Khan's Basic Democracies when the country was still a province of Pakistan in the late 1950s. After Ayub, down through Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the early 1970s, Ziaur Rahman at the end of that decade, and now H. M. Ershad, each leader in turn has found top-down control of the country inadequate for development. Each found it necessary to put into place a new institution for linking national government with a system of popular participation at the local level. In the first three cases, structures were set up and began to function, but the program each time was cut short by *coup d'état* or assassination. The fourth inititative is currently in progress.

The analysis will proceed along several dimensions. First, it must be asked, what are the goals of the Bangladesh government as they relate to rural development? Why should the state concern itself with building a linkage between the central government in Dhaka and the nine-tenths of the people who live in the countryside? Second, some descriptive material will be needed to present the structures of participatory development that these leaders set up and to show how they fit into the governmental machinery as a whole. The third subject to be taken up will be the heavy criticisms that have been directed at these various participatory structures — essentially that to the extent that they work at all they serve primarily to reinforce the status quo. That is, the programs strengthen the position of dominant élites at the local level while at the

same time they cement the relationship between these élites and those in control at the center, solidifying in the process the position of both. The fourth and final topic of the essay will be the promise these structures have over the longer run of offering a vehicle for genuine and widespread popular participation and beyond that real social change. It will be argued, in other words, that what begins as an instrument for social control can become an instrument for positive social change.

If we accept the idea that development in Bangladesh (as well as many if not most other LDCs) cannot take place in any sustained fashion without the participation of a substantially greater part of a nation's citizens than are now involved, there are only two ways of encouraging that participation: revolution or some slower and more orderly process of institution-building. Aside from the many problems that it presents anyway, revolution is not, at least at present, a real possibility in Bangladesh, as is the case also in most other Third World countries. To conclude that the only hope for expanding participation in the economy and the polity lies in revolution, then, really amounts to a counsel of despair. Accordingly, we must concentrate on the second path, which is to say some form or another of incrementalism. It will be argued in this essay that, contrary to what has now become the conventional wisdom even among very conservative observers of development, and in spite of the rather bleak record that Bangladesh has established so far in this regard, the incrementalist path can help bring about a social transformation of the sort that will be needed if real economic growth that benefits all strata of society is to take place.

2. PRIORITIES FOR THE STATE

As with any developing country, the first priority of the Bangladesh government is to maintain stability and continuity for itself, the urban areas and the countryside in that order. This was true in Mughal times, during the British period, and the Pakistan era; it is scarcely surprising that it has continued to be the case, particularly in view of the large number of *coups d'état* and attempted *coups* that have continually afflicted Bangladesh ever since its independence in 1971 (see Lifschultz, 1979, for an extended account). What is especially important to note is that the imperative for stability brings with it a strong urge for central adiministration and control to ensure that stability. This desire to manage things from the center is reinforced by

two subsidiary motivations: (1) to implement government policies for development, a task seemingly facilitated in the short term through a hierarchical administrative structure that can transmit orders downward and compel obedience upward; and (2) to hold down on corruption through systems of auditing and accounting all possible details of government business, again a procedure apparently best assured through downward demands for forms and reports and an upward flow of the required paperwork.

The second priority is to increase aggregate production in agriculture. Observers and students of development scarcely need reminding of this imperative, for hardly a month goes by when we do not hear or read of Malthusian scenarios and prophecies of impending doom unless this or that is done to boost foodgrain production in Bangladesh. It is crucial to remember, however, that this objective (as well as all the others to be explored here) very definitely has a lower priority than the state's primary goal of staying in power.

A third imperative is to build political linkages of participation between the central government and the citizenry. To the Western mind, this kind of goal often seems like the maneuvering that hopeful political leaders undertake to build up a support base for election campaigns: Walter Mondale or Geraldine Ferraro cajoling support from Democratic ward captains and precinct chairman, David Owen and Shirley Williams enticing Labor party functionaries into joining their new Social Democratic organization, etc. We tend to dismiss it all as "just" politics, promises and rhetorical bombast, not to be taken seriously. In fact, however, the building and nurturing of political linkages connecting government and people is absolutely vital if any long-term development in LDCs like Bangladesh is to take place. People must have channels for expressing their needs, wants, hopes, and irritations to government or in other words for participating in matters that affect their lives; and government must have channels for responding. Routine bureaucratic systems, no matter how effective, are simply not enough to do the job. Their calling is to carry out orders, to produce, to administer, to control; it is not to transmit needs, responses, compromises, exchanges. These latter functions are directly antithetical to the bureaucratic process, which is why political institutions are necessary for any national system.

Both administrative and political structures, in short, are needed for nation-building; and, accordingly, developing political linkage structures should be seen to be just as serious an enterprise

as improving adiministrative capability. The long effort in India to build the Panchayati Raj system (1959 to the present) must be appreciated in this light, so also the attempts of Ayub Khan (in power from 1958 to 1969) to develop Basic Democracies, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1971–75) to construct his rural network of representative parishads, Ziaur Rahman (1975–81) to build his Gram Sarkar, and H. M. Ershad (1982–present) to put together his Upazilla initiative.[1] Not all of these undertakings have been successful, to be sure, in Bangladesh or elsewhere. In fact, the ratio of successful to failed efforts in the LDCs in building local representative institutions is undoubtedly considerably lower even than for economic development projects. Of those mentioned just above, only a few of the Indian states (certainly not all of them) could be said to have genuinely successful systems. In the Pakistan and Bangladesh experience,[2] stagnation, corruption, and élite domination have been the rule, followed by termination of the whole structure and replacement with a new one. But these continued efforts despite failure clearly point to a very strong urge to set up participatory institutions.

A fourth objective of government is to ensure social welfare and an equitable distribution of the benefits of development. At times over the past decades, this goal has been more prominent as a central objective or government policy (as in the ideological centerpiece of Mujib's leadership, the "four pillars of Mujibbad," one of which was socialism) and at other times less so (e.g., the "robber baron" development strategy adopted by the Ayub government in the 1960s; see Papanek, 1967). There have, of course, been similar fluctuations in the donor community's thinking over the same period (e.g., compare the widely accepted "take-off" model of W. W. Rostow in the 1960s, the "New Directions" and "Growth with Equity" strategies of the 1970s, and the return to a focus on aggregate production we see in the 1980s, for instance in the approaches being advocated by the International Food Policy Research Institute[3]). But, whatever the weighting of the priorities, social welfare and equity have always had some place among them.

A fifth and final imperative of government is haste. Whatever is the current strategy being pursued, the leadership at upper levels invariably puts heavy pressure on the bureaucracy, from ministry secretary down to village extension agent, to implement it as soon as possible. Donor-sponsored projects commonly run for four or five years, and economic planners like to think in terms of meeting needs for the year 1990 or 2010, etc. But for national leadership in Bangladesh, as elsewhere, five years is a very long time indeed, and 10 years might as well be forever. It is all too understandable, then, why government officials feel very strong urges to implement programs and achieve targets immediately, even when they know full well that success would be more likely if the pace were more deliberate and steady.

It is surely clear by now in this accounting of goals that all of them are not mutually compatible. In fact, each of them is in one way or another inconsistent with most or even all of the others. The urge to maintain administrative control is in conflict along a number of dimensions with the need to motivate producers to increase foodgrain output; the concern to build a representative base linking central government to local level probably will militate against distributional equity in the short run, and it certainly is not something that can be done within a year or two. This sort of incompatibility is not at all unusual, for it characterizes virtually all human activity. A parent wants his/her child to be obedient, yet wants the child to exhibit independence at the same time. The United States Government wishes to unleash the energies of the private sector in the economy by deregulating the economy, but it also feels the need to intervene in the economy to protect industries against "unfair" (usually meaning foreign) competition, and so on.

The point here is that the Bangladesh government just like any other must be expected to pursue contradictory goals simultaneously. This is part of the institutional milieu within which policies are formulated and implemented. Thus privatization of Tubewells (a current World Bank financed project) is seen to be good, because it offers to increase foodgrain output, but at the same time bad, because their owners may charge too much for water, thereby exploiting poorer farmers. Similarly, the Ershad upazila program now going into place promises to introduce a participatory component that will make allocation of agricultural inputs more responsive to public needs at local level, but this very achievement may well compromise the ability of the administrative organizations in charge of fertilizer, irrigation and the like to promote maximum input use efficiently. The challenge, then, is not so much to achieve complete consistency as to work toward these goals within a context of inevitable inconsistency.

3. FOUR INITIATIVES IN BUILDING LOCAL PARTICIPATORY INSTITUTIONS

(a) The four patterns

The enterprises in local participatory government to be examined in this essay did not, of course, begin in a vacuum. In fact, there is a long history of elected institutions in Bangladesh, beginning with the District Boards set up in the late 19th century.[4] The franchise was restricted to property holders and graduates, and the powers granted to local level were quite modest, but the many decades of experience in local self-governance did establish a backdrop and legacy for the experiments of Ayub Khan and those who succeeded him. The idea of using local institutions to mobilize and represent the broad mass of citizens in their own development, however, came along only after independence.

Before proceeding further, a very brief explanation of the administrative system of Bangladesh might be in order, to facilitate an understanding of the various institutions to be described immediately ahead. One of the many legacies of British rule in the Indian subcontinent, this structure has remained in place more or less intact right down to the reforms initiated by H. M. Ershad in 1982 (a glance at the left-hand portion of Figure 1 may be helpful as this description proceeds). The lowest official unit is the revenue or *mauza village*, numbering around 63,000 in all Bangladesh and having today an average of 1300–1400 people in each.

The next unit of aggregation is the *union* consisting of roughly 15 villages each and around 20,000 population at present.[5] The unions are collected into *thanas* (variously called tehsils, taluqs, anchals or blocks elsewhere in the subcontinent), each with about 200,000 inhabitants and nine or ten unions. Just above the thanas have been the *subdivisions*, a level which has not figured in the various enterprises to be dealt with here, and above it has traditionally been the *district* or *zila*, that keystone unit of British administration. The district was often large in colonial times, with well over a million population, and before the Ershad reforms of the mid-1980s had grown to an average of just under five million in Bangladesh. Traditionally there have been about 20 thanas in each district. Finally, there are divisions, which have numbered four in Bangladesh for many decades.

(i) Ayub Khan

Ayub Khan's Basic Democracies program launched in 1959 was clearly the most cautious of the four to be considered here. It had been the widespread disillusion with the ineffectual parliamentary regimes of the 1950s that had
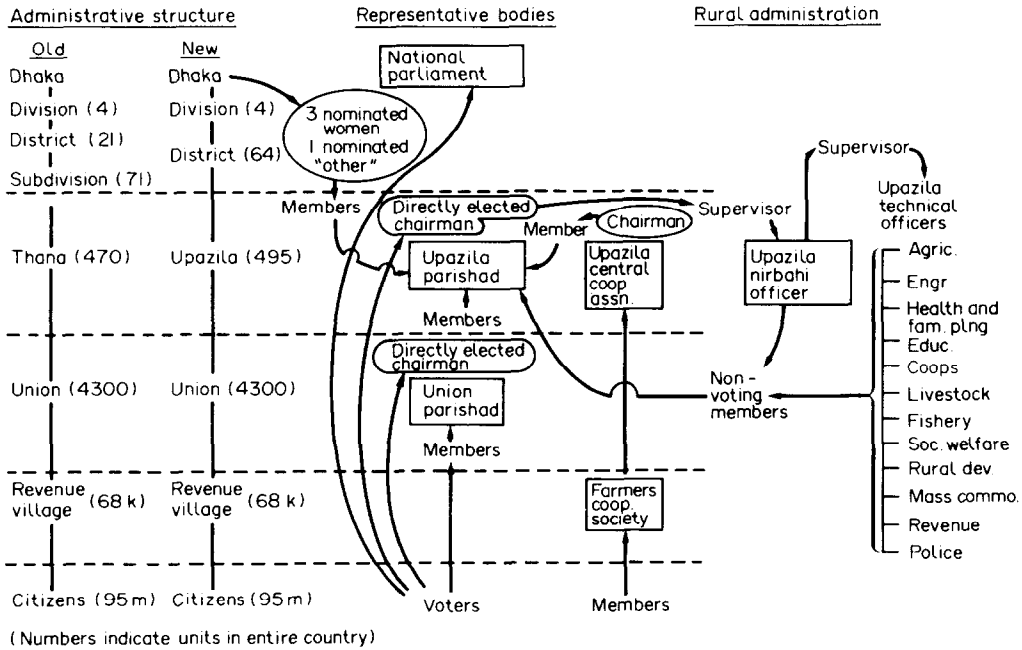

Figure 1. *Upazila structure in Bangladesh, 1984.*

provided the necessary support for Ayub's military *coup* in 1958, and though he saw the need for some popular input into government decision-making, he was very concerned to keep that input under careful control.

Accordingly, Ayub replaced the old Union Board system of local government by putting together a carefully orchestrated system combining direct elections at village level with successively more indirect representation at higher levels.[6] The scheme opened with a 10-member Union Council covering an area of 10–15 thousand people at the time (there were about 4000 unions in East Pakistan), directly elected by the adult citizenry.[7] The Union council members then elected a chairman, who along with all the other union chairmen in a thana (roughly 10 unions, or 100,000 people in 1958) joined the Thana Council. In addition to these indirectly elected members, the Thana Council also included an equal number of "official" members, that is, government officers posted to the rural areas. The chairman of the Thana Council was, *ex officio*, the Subdivisional Officer, who was the lowest link in the generalist cadre of adminstrators that managed the rural affairs of Pakistan, just as they had under the British earlier. There were roughly six thanas to the subdivision, meaning that the Subdivisional Officer's time was somewhat fragmented between his Thana Councils, but any gaps in his directive capacity were made up by appointing a thana-level bureaucrat called the Circle Officer (also a generalist administrator, but not in the higher-level cadre that included the Subdivisional Officer as the bottom rung) as vice-chairman of the council.

At the district level (approximately 24 thanas to the district), yet another council was set up, ths one to be staffed half by appointed officials, half by members elected by the Union Council chairman (i.e., the elected membership of the Thana Councils). Thus "elected" representation on the District Council was at two removes from the voters: they elected the Union Councilmen, who in turn elected their chairmen, who became the members of the Thana Council, which chose one from among themselves to go to the District Council. Leadership at the district level was continued in safe (i.e., "official") hands, with the *ex officio* chairman being the district Collector, that traditional stalwart and impressario of rural administration in the subcontinent from early British times onward.[8]

The scheme was repeated once more at the division level (4 divisions in East Pakistan, with 4 or 5 districts per division). One last aspect to be noted is that the Basic Democrats or members of the Union Councils also acted as the "electoral college" in the presidential poll of 1965, which is to say that the franchise was given to 40,000 people in East Pakistan and a similar number in the western wing of the country.

It was perhaps only natural that, as a build-up to the 1965 presidential election (in which, it must be said, there was a genuine opposition candidate) the Basic Democracies system became heavily used as a patronage mechanism for funneling public works monies down to the village (i.e., Basic Democrat) level. Beginning in 1962–63, a Rural Works Program was set up to erect labor-intensive local developmental infra-structure (canals, dikes, road embankments, etc.) to be paid for with Public Law 480 food imported from the United States. The administration of the scheme was decentralized to the thana and union level, where it understandably quickly became the central focus of interest among the Basic Democrats, who found that they could build up their own positions of local power and status by disseminating the patronage.

The whole edifice, in sum, did have more than a hint of citizen representation, but it was a very carefully controlled representation, kept tightly under wraps at all levels except the lowest, and even here the Union Councils could be super-seded by government officials in case of "abuse of power." It was in many ways a managed, guided and narrow democracy of the sort that Samuel Huntington (1968) wrote of approvingly as a system that could build representative institutions for development without at the same time being overwhelmed by conflicting and insatiable demands of those same institutions.[9] In the event, Ayub was so successful at bottling up citizen demand, in particular the involvement of politicians, intellectuals, students and the urban middle classes that in 1969 he found himself confronted with riots and demonstrations too widespread and serious to be easily suppressed. His regime had by then trapped itself into such a narrow base of support that even the army had become alienated, and it overthrew him in a *coup*. From that point until independence came at the end of 1971, local government along with most everything else in East Pakistan was in a state of considerable confusion and uncertainty.

(ii) *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*

In independent Bangladesh, a directly elected national parliament became the principal representative body in the country, but local participatory systems continued to play a large role. Immediately after independence, Sheikh Mujib's party, the Awami League, set up "Relief Committees" of party members at union level to handle things in place of the old and discredited

(by guilt through association with the erstwhile Pakistan government, as well as the corruption that had come to characterize them) Union Councils until a new structure could be put into place. Then, in the spring of 1973, parliamentary elections were held, won overwhelmingly as expected by the Awami League (292 out of 300 seats). In December, voting took place for a new system of Union Panchayats (the name was soon changed to Union Parishads); and it was anticipated that elected bodies would soon be set up at thana and district levels.

As it turned out, however, elections for the higher level bodies were never held, despite a declared intent to do so and a specific injunction in the Constitution of 1972 to hold elections at all levels. The reasons for this failure are somewhat murky but appear to revolve around the results of the union level poll of December 1973. In these elections, instead of a second popular mandate for the Awami League after its massive parliamentary victory the previous spring, the League's candidates were in a great many cases rejected (perhaps a majority of cases, though this is not clear[10]). Apparently what had happened was that the Awami League members appointed to the union Relief Committees just after independence[11] had proven to be so corrupt and venal that many voters turned against the party in the December voting. Whatever the reasons, the higher level local elections were never held.

Instead, Sheikh Mujib opted for a much different approach to participatory rural development in March 1975, when he promulgated his "Second Revolution," a mass mobilization effort in which there would be only one party, a direct presidential system would replace the parliamentary setup, cooperative farming would be imposed on the rural economy, and local government would be placed in the hands of some 61 appointed district governors. None of this came to fruition, however, as Mujib was assassinated in a *coup d'état* in August 1975, just as his new system was about to be implemented, and with his demise went all his plans.

(iii) *Ziaur Rahman*

Mujib's eventual successor after a period of confusion was General Ziaur Rahman, who took power initially in his military capacity but then proceeded to civilianize his regime, endeavoring to legitimize it with various elections and referenda at national and local level. Among these were a Union Parishad poll in January 1977, similar to that held under Sheikh Mujib in 1973. As in the earlier poll, three members were elected from each of three wards in every union, and a chairman was elected at large. The

chairmen were in turn members of a Thana Parishad, in a manner rather reminiscent of the Ayub Khan Basic Democracies scheme. In further similarity to Ayub's approach, the Sub-divisional Officer became *ex officio* the chairman of the thana level body, with the Circle Officer (the lead generalist-oriented civil servant at thana level) as vice-chairman. A striking departure from the Ayub and Mujib models was the new Zilla (i.e., district) Parishad, for which there were to be direct elections, with even the chairman to be elected directly by the voters.[12] The Zilla level institutions, however, were never put into place before Zia's assassination in May 1981.

What was put into place in Zia's time was an entirely new scheme, called Swanirvar Gram Sarkar. In May 1980, the government announced that a new village government or Gram Sarkar[13] would be organized for each of the country's 68,000 villages by the end of the year. The method for choosing the members of the new unit are worth noting. The thana-level Circle Officer was to convene a meeting of the *gram shava* (village congregation, i.e., all the adult inhabitants of the village), at which the selection would be made. According to the government order:

> A Swanirvar Gram Sarkar shall consist of a Gram Pradhan [head] and eleven other members of which not less than two shall be women. . . . The Gram Pradhan and other members chosen through the consensus of the persons in the meeting in such a manner as may be agreed upon, shall ensure representation in the Swanirvar Gram Sarkar of people of all walks of life and of different functional/interest groups.[14]

The Gram Sarkar was to meet at least once a fortnight and was to:

> undertake, in general, such functions as it considers necessary for over-all development of the village and, in particular for
> (a) increasing of food production;
> (b) mass literacy;
> (c) population control and family planning; and
> (d) law and order; holding *salish* [local judicial councils] to settle disputes[15]

It was also noted that the Gram Sarkar "may promote Gram Samabaya [village cooperatives] and Samabaya [cooperative] Banks."[16]

The Zia government clearly foresaw a major role for Gram Sarkar in its rural development efforts. In the draft Second Five Year Plan (GPRB, 1980b), released in the same month as the Gram Sarkar notification, the Planning Commission envisioned Gram Sarkar as the linchpin of its hopes at local level for the plan period. It was to be fully linked to union, thana,

and district level governmental institutions, undertake rural development planning and implementation in the villages, ensure the participation of the various interest groups in the villages and organize voluntary labor activities (canal digging, road building and repair, etc.), even to the extent of compelling participation.[17] Primary cooperatives were to be established at the village level also for all the "functional/ interest groups" (e.g., landless, women, weavers, fishermen, youth, etc.), which were to be integrated into a village-wide cooperative federation, to be linked in turn upward to higher levels[18] The existence of class in the Bengal countryside was explicitly recognized for the first time.

Most, if not all, of the Gram Sarkars were set up by early 1981, albeit not without considerable confusion, but before the enterprise could be linked up with the existing local governmental structure and geared up to be the implementing agency for the Second Five Year Plan at local level, Ziaur Rahman had been cut down in a hail of machinegun bullets. Gram Sarkar as an institution died with him.

(iv) H. M. Ershad

Another period of confusion followed Zia's assassination in May 1981, but by March 1982, General H. M. Ershad had emerged through yet another *coup d'etat* as the country's leader. The local government situation at the time of his takeover was that the Union Parishads elected in 1977 were still in place, with their chairmen also serving as members of the Thana Parishads. These latter in turn were chaired by the Subdivisional Officer from the next higher level of administration (6 or 7 thanas per subdivision), with the vice-chair held by the Circle Officer, the administrative head at the thana level. The Gram Sarkars had been abolished, and the promised directly elected Zilla Parishads had never been set up in the first place.[19] The central government, in short, continued to exercise a very firm hand on local affairs.[20]

In view of the precedent set by his predecessors, it is not surprising that it was not long before Ershad came up with his own program for participatory local development. Just 35 days after taking over power, he appointed a high level committee to review the country's administrative structure and recommend "an appropriate, sound and effective administrative system based on the spirit of devolution and the objective of taking the administration nearer to the people."[21]

Under the chairmanship of Admiral M. A. Khan, the Committee for Administrative Reorganization/Reform submitted its report in June (GPRB, 1982). The major recommendations were that rural administration be decentralized to the thana level and that there be a real devolution of power to the thana as well.

The recommendations were almost all accepted and began to be implemented in 1983 under the rubric of the "Upazila" program (the work means "next to importance to a district"[22]). Administratively (see Figure 1), the government decided to abolish the subdivision level and at the same time more than double the number of districts by amalgamating old subdivisions.[23] The thana would remain the same geographically but be renamed the upazila, a change symbolizing its upgrading in terms of administrative importance. Its technical staff would greatly expand to a total of 250, and the technical officers (e.g., upazila engineer, upazila livestock officer, etc.) would be upgraded in qualification and training.[24] In short, the kind of rural developement cadre that had been available at subdivision level (71 in the whole country) would now be on tap at upazila level (495 in Bangladesh). Expertise, then, would be very significantly spread out into the countryside.

Administrative control was also to be decentralized. The official in charge of the thana had previously been the Circle Officer, who had been responsible for overall rural development of the thana. But he had only "coordinating" authority over the thana technical officers, who were themselves responsible through the chain of command of their own technical services. Thus the Thana Education Officer, for example, had to listen to the Circle Officer, but he took orders from and looked for career advancement within the Ministry of Education in Dhaka.[25] Under the new dispensation, the Circle Officer would become the "Upazila Nirbahi Officer" (UNO), with higher rank and pay scale, and direct supervisory authority over the entire upazila staff of 250 — technical officers and all.[26]

The second reform was to be a genuine devolution of power to the upazila level. For the first time ever in Bangladesh (though not quite the first time in South Asia), the chairman of a thana-level representative body would be directly elected.[27] He (it is unlikely to be she in rural Bangladesh) will, according to the government's instructions[28] "Coordinate all the development activities. . . initiate formulation of policies in development matters, identify projects and schemes," and in general will be "responsible for ensuring implementation of government policies and programmes within the Thana."

This elected official will be somewhat like the Collector or Deputy Commissioner has been at district level, but in fact he will have even more

authority to supervise thana officialdom, for the
real key to the administrative side of the upazila
enterprise is that the UNO and technical officers
will be under the control and supervision not of
the line ministries in Dhaka but of the Thana
Parishad Chairman. How will this revolutionary
change be brought about? The actuating device is
both simple and eloquent: the Thana Parishad
Chairman will write the personnel evaluation
report (called the Annual Confidential Report,
or ACR) of the UNO, and the UNO will do the
same for the thana technical officers (see
Figure 1).[29]

The rest of the Upazila Parishad would consist
of the elected heads of eight to ten Union
Parishads contained within each Upazila's
boundaries (plus the elected heads of any munici-
pal bodies within the Upazila). In addition, there
will be three appointed women members and one
other appointed member (apparently to be a
freedom fighter from the 1971 war[30]) all with
voting rights. The UNO and most of the other
technical officers, perhaps as many as 12
altogether, will also be members, but will not
have voting rights, in contrast to all the earlier
systems, in which "official members" always had
at least half the votes.

(b) Successively widening (albeit unimplemented) participatory schemes

It should be clear by now that each of the four
structures represented a widening and deepening
of the participatory concept over its predecessor.
Hierarchical, top-down administrations sufficed
in pre-modern times, when rural life was for all
practical purposes autonomous and self-
sufficient, and government's only interest in the
countryside was to collect revenue, prevent
insurrection, and hold rural banditry down to an
acceptable minimum. Such was the situation in
the Mughal era and throughout most of the
British period.

To a limited extent during the closing stages of
British rule and in an infinitely more serious way
after the partition in 1947, this older approach
was not enough. As the economy grew and
become more interlinked, as new production
technologies came along and consumption pat-
terns changed, as education advanced and new
élites emerged, traditional administration could
no longer do the job of linking government and
people. Structures and channels of participation
had to be developed so that citizens with their
new wants, needs, and frustrations could make
them known to government and so that govern-
ment could respond by altering policy as re-

quired. Governance, in short, had to become an
iterative process, with continual feedback and
continual adjustments in policy. People had to
have ways to get involved in decisions affecting
their own futures, if any sustained development
were to take place.

Ayub began his very cautious Basic Democra-
cies scheme, with its carefully measured drops of
power at union, thana and higher levels, all
under increasingly watchful bureaucratic eyes at
successively higher echelons. Then came Mujib
with his 1972 Constitution promising directly
elected government at all rural levels up through
district. Third was Zia, who promised direct
elections at union and district level, then pro-
ceeded to set up a village governance structure
that explicitly incorporated rural class divisions
into its syndicalist mechanism. And last, H. M.
Ershad has now promulgated his upazila initia-
tive, which specifies a decentralization and
devolution of power to the countryside that has
never before been contemplated: subordination
of all the technical development staff to the
generalist rural development cadre and control of
the whole administrative apparatus by a popu-
larly elected thana-level chairman.

As of this writing (June 1985), none of the
programs has delivered on its promises. Ayub's
Basic Democracies turned into a massive patron-
age scheme in an ultimately futile effort to build a
support base among rural élites. The voters
rejected too many of Mujib's Awami Leaguers in
electing Union Panchayat members in 1973; and
in response, he left the system to stagnate,
eventually opting for his highly centralized but
ill-fated one-party scheme in 1975.

Zia also held Union Parishad polls but never
delivered on his pledge to have direct elections at
district level. Nor, despite the detailed incorpora-
tion of his Gram Sarkar setup into the Second
Five Year Plan, did he ever link it in with the rest
of the rural government structure before it faded
into oblivion with his demise. And finally Presi-
dent Ershad has indeed officially upgraded all the
thanas to upazilas and has held Union Parashad
and upazila chairman elections, though there was
considerable hesitation with the latter. Slated for
March 1984, these elections were vehemently
objected to by the major opposition parties on
the ground that the Ershad govenment would rig
the voting in order to insinuate its own men into
this crucial office, thereby giving it a strategic
rural power base for the national elections
scheduled for May. The Ershad regime for its
part appeared to be worried that too many
opposition people might get elected at upazila
level. In any event the government vowed to go
ahead with the upazila polls in spite of opposition

threats to disrupt them, but then on the very eve of the elections, it lost its nerve and postponed them indefinitely.[31] Finally, after much shuffling and reversal, the upazila chairman elections were held in May 1985, whereupon the new system was presumably ready to function.

(c) An aversion to participation

Why this pattern of reluctance to follow through with the various participatory schemes? Two explanations, both pointed to in the report of the Khan Committee for Administrative Reorganization/Reform (GPRB, 1982), stand out. First, the technical bureacracies themselves have viewed with great apprehension any effort to interfere with their direct departmental lines of authority. Personnel evaluation, postings and career advancement all come within the technical cadres (public health, education and so on), even down to field administration, so that a district public health officer has traditionally looked to his own departmental superiors for guidance, not to the generalist District Collector who was supposedly in charge of all governmental activities in the district. From time to time, the central government would try to impose more generalist control over the technical field officers, but such schemes never succeeded.[32]

The reaction of the technical officers to the Ershad Upazila initiative is instructive. When the program began to be implemented, officers who had built their careers on advancing from the countryside to a comfortable and well-appointed berth in the central secretariat in Dhaka suddenly found that the key posting in their careers was no longer the subdivisions or the district but the lowly thana. Even worse perhaps than the rustication itself was finding that their superiors would not be from within their own technical service, but instead would be the generalist Upazila Nirbahi Officers. And doubtless worst of all, the whole officer cadre at upazila level would have to answer to an elected official. They must have felt very much like Chinese officials did in the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s when they were "sent down" to the countryside.[33] Clearly, there is a great deal of scope here for the kind of "bureaucratic reorientation" currently being advocated in the development field by Korten and Uphoff (1981), Rondinelli (1983), and others.

A more important reason for hanging back, certainly in the minds of those managing the affairs of the regime, was a fear that, if there really were open elections, opposition elements would gain some measure of control. This was especially an issue at the thana and district levels,

where control by an opposition party or coalition would mean the chance to develop a real base from which to defy the central government. Ayub Khan both detested and feared the politicians he had overthrown in his seizure of power, and was loath to give them any chance for a comeback.[34] In East Pakistan particularly, even after he has banned former elected officeholders from political life and had greased his "electoral college" of Basic Democrats with a lavish patronage, he barely squeaked through with a majority in the 1965 presidential poll. Any more devolution would have been dangerous, he surely believed.

The reluctance of Mujib, Zia and (at least initially) Ersad to follow through on their devolutionary promises can be similarly explained. Each was afraid that opposition elements would gain an important foothold from which to launch future political offensives on those in control at the center. The Khan Committee put the matter succinctly in its 1982 report: "It has been amply demonstrated that it is the ruling political élite since 1972 which was the chief stumbling block to a meaningful devolution of authority to popular and representative councils at the local level."[35] The Khan Committee, of course, urged that the Ershad government reject that pattern by setting up the upazila program, a course which with a good deal of trepidation it has begun to follow.

4. THE DOMINANCE OF LOCAL ELITES

But, it will surely be argued, what if previous regimes actually had devolved power to elected local bodies? What if the Ershad government really does follow through on elections for the Upazila chairmen? Wouldn't the dominant rural élites that have long controlled village life just have taken control anyway, and used the new structure to enhance their dominance? Won't the same thing happen with the Upazila scheme?

Admittedly, the evidence from village level is not encouraging. Studies that have been done of village social and political structure have invariably shown a pattern of élite control (e.g., Wood, 1976; Arens and Van Beurden, 1979; BRAC, 1979; Jahangir, 1979; Hartmann and Boyce, 1983). And when several villages in an area are looked at as an entity the pattern appears to be the same, as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee had shown (BRAC, 1980) in its analysis of 10 contiguous villages that it aptly entitled The Net.

Data at national level confirm the pattern. Distilling the findings from the very laborious

and thorough Land Occupancy Surveys done in the late 1970s (Jannuzi and Peach, 1980), the World Bank[36] finds four meaningful strata in the countryside. First there is a large landowning element, with holdings in excess of 5 acres. They amount to perhaps 6% of rural households with 45% of the cultivable land, much of which they let out on share. Next, there is a middle farmer level (2½–5 acres), about one-sixth of the households and owning around one-third of the land. They produce a considerable surplus for the market. Third, come the small farmers (0.5–2 acres), who constitute roughly 30% of the households and own around 20% of the land, a share which they more or less double by taking in land on share from the large landowning stratum. And finally there are the landless and near-landless (up to 0.5 acres), approximately half the rural households and owning collectively only 2 or 3% of the cultivable land. Most of household income for this last group obviously comes from wage labor for others, though the traditional artisans (carpenters, ironsmiths, etc.) also come from this group.[37]

With this socioeconomic structure at village level, it is not surprising that elections for local representative bodies have favored the rich and well born. Rashiduzzaman (1968; see also Sobhan, 1968) found in his study of the Ayub scheme that the Basic Democrats returned in the 1959 election were far above the average rural inhabitant in terms of education, land owned, and income. Then in the 1964 election, after serious patronage had began to flow though the structure, those who won office were even less representative of the rural populace. The same thing happened, in other words, that was to happen with subsequent participatory rural development programs like the Comilla coopera-tives and the Thana Irrigation Program: the rural gentry used their status and influence to take over office and be in a position to steer the benefits of whatever came down the distribution channels from Dhaka to themselves.[38]

A study of all the Union Panchayat chairmen elected in 1973 in Comilla district (Alam, 1976) revealed the same pattern, as did a number of field surveys of both candidates (Solaiman and Alam, 1977) and winners (Alam, 1982; Rahman, 1981; Rashiduzzaman, 1982; Saqui, 1980) in the 1977 Union Parishad poll. The relatively short-lived Gram Sarkar scheme did not provide as long an opportunity for analysis, but even so Khuda's (1981; see also Alam, 1980–81; and Huque, 1984) survey of 26 Gram Sarkar units in Comilla district showed both members and chair-men to be far above average in status and wealth. Admittedly, much of the data from these various

elections are from Comilla district, where the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development has long conducted most of its field research, but there is no reason to think that the situation elsewhere in the country is significantly different.

What seems to be the case, then, is that familiar political economy of rural underdevelop-ment in which macro-level élites use what are ostensibly rural development programs to chan-nel patronage into the hands of the rural rich, in return for which the latter use the traditional machineries of control (sharecropping, money-lending, etc.) to keep things relatively calm and subdued in the countryside. Urban national élites are safe from insurrection, while their rural counterparts at village level can enjoy freedom from land reform, enforcement of minimum wages, etc. This concern for stability on both sides far outweighs any interest in development, and any sort of exchanges between the two groups that preserves both in control at the expense of development by turning rural project money and supplies into patronage has to be counted a success in their eyes. There is not even much pressure on either side to produce more foodgrains, for concessionary foreign food aid provides cheap foodstuffs for the urban areas, which after all amount to only around 10% of the population. In the light of this unhappy reality, what is the point, it could well be asked, of further efforts at participatory rural development schemes?

5. SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE LONGER RUN

There is, I believe, a case to be made for participatory rural development enterprises in Bangladesh, even in the face of all the dismal evidence just cited. But the case is a long-term one. Participatory institutions that show little hope for success in their first five or ten years, in other words, may actually promote significant rural transformation over 20 years. Putting a structure into place for the rural majority to use to guide and promote their own development is not a short-term affair.

Initially, of course the rich will dominate the new institutions, just as they have dominated everything else. But once the mechanism is in place, and if it is continued in place for long enough, other strata can learn to use it and even take it over to make rural local government meet their wants and needs. These newer strata are more likely to be the middle farmers than the landless and near landless, but in the process of change generated by a middle class bid for

power, the poor rural majority finds itself with a mechanism that can give it a voice to participate in determining its own future as well.

(a) *An analogy from India*

The case for such an idea will have to be argued by analogy; but, fortunately, there is one close to hand in the form of the Panchayati Raj program in India, first set up around 1960. The state of Bihar, which was until 1911 like Bangladesh a part of the Bengal Presidency in British India, is still very much like Bangladesh in many respects. The climate, the agricultural cropping regime, and even the rural class structure is very similar to that of Bangladesh; only in the majority religion of Hinduism is there much difference.

Panchayati Raj, in Bihar as elsewhere in India, though it has suffered from all the debilities of élite domination already noted, has also had considerable success as an engine of rural change. These changes have not been particularly noticeable in the short run of five years, or even in the more intermediate terms of 10 or 12 years. But over a 20+ year period some genuine changes have emerged, in which shifts in the rural political economy can be related to the Panchayati Raj system.

Bihar offers an especially interesting example of this sort of change, for among the major Indian states, it has been the most impervious to development efforts. Dominated by an upper caste/upper class landed élite that has been much more concerned with maintaining rural control (and in fighting for control among its own caste factions) than with economic development, Bihar stands at the bottom of the Indian states on virtually every measure of socioeconomic advance,[39] a failure which even the state government has felt constrained to admit.[40] But while all these program failures were unfolding, the political economy of the state was not one of homeostasis, in which after every perturbation in the form of a new deveopment program sent down form New Delhi everything returned to its former condition. Far from continuation of the status quo in the countryside, the last two decades have seen a slow transformation, in which a traditional, even semi-feudal upper caste landowning élite — the so-called "twice-borns" — has been increasingly challenged as the dominant stratum by a middle caste and middle class surplus farmer element.

This "kulak" class or "backward caste" element pressed its campaign along two fronts. First, it slowly dislodged the gentry economic-ally, by working its smaller farms harder, by striving for profit and surplus, and by buying up land whenever possible. This task was made considerably easier by the fact that the traditional group, successors to the zamindars of the British period, were primarily interested in collecting rents and maintaining status. The closest that members of the "twice-born" caste groups could come to actually cultivating the soil while maintaining appropriate caste dignity was to "supervise" the work of hired laborers from a suitable remove (e.g., a nearby shade tree, or better yet the compound of one's own house), and the preferred form of making an income from agriculture was through sharecropping out one's land. Given this diffidence toward direct work, it is not surprising that the more hardworking middle caste farmers were able to compete successfully with them.

Second, the "backwards" conducted a political compaign, capitalizing on their relative strength in numbers and unity of purpose (for it took the "forwards" an astonishingly long time to learn that the major threat to their existence was not from the internecine intrigues of the forward castes themselves but rather from the upstart "backwards") to take over first the Gram Panchayats (the analogy to Union Councils and later Union Parishads in Bangladesh), then seats in the state Legislative Assembly and finally the Assembly itself (and briefly the Prime Ministership of the country as well, during the short and clouded rule of Charan Singh in 1979–80). Naturally, the campaigns in these two theaters of operation reinforced each other. Increasing economic surpluses furnished a resource base for election efforts, while at the same time political power facilitated ability to promote agricultural policies favoring surplus farmers at the state and national levels.[41] In short, we could say that the economic "base" and the political "superstructure" reinforced each other to promote structural change.

The change that these factors set into motion, however, was not a one-step matter in which a middle class seized power from a traditional upper class and then consolidated its position against challenges from above or below. Once they recognized the threat, the "forwards" reacted with enough unity to regain control at the state level, and at present the outcome of the struggle between the two groups is far from clear.[42]

More significantly, no sooner did the "backwards" begin to enjoy some modest success in their upward move than they were challenged by those below them — the Harijans or Scheduled Castes, who are also by and large the landless

agricultural laborers of the state. These de-
pressed classes have begun to demand that they
too be given a share in things in the form of mini-
mum wages, abolition of bounded servitude,
sharecropping rights, etc. (virtually all of these
demands are already legally enacted, some of
them like abolishing bonded servitude several
times). The reaction of those above them in the
socioeconomic hierarchy has been intense and
vicious. Murder, rape, house burnings, pillage,
etc., most of it apparently instigated by the
arriviste "backwards" (and often with the conni-
vance of police authorities), have been the order
of the day.[43] Once the process of social
transformation has been set into motion, it would
appear, it is hard to stop, for the forces that set
the first phase into motion also set subsequent
phases moving.

Where the process will lead is very uncertain.
There is at present no assurance that the Harijans
will gain entry or access to the system. One can
hope that the price to the "backwards" of gaining
superiority over the "forwards" or parity with
them will be the need to give a place to those at
the bottom, but there is no guarantee that this
will be the outcome of the class tension and
violence that will quite possibly increase rather
than decrease in the next few years. One can be
fairly confident, however, in saying that such an
accommodation is more likely now that the
Harijans are gaining some consciousness of their
position and some willingness to assert them-
selves as a group at the local level *vis-à-vis* the
higher castes. The foundations for progressive
social change in short, have been laid; whether
that social change eventually occurs remains to
be seen.

Will the same thing happen with the Upazila
program? Having observed it to happen in Bihar,
which would have to be considered highly
unfavorable terrain for social change, the possibi-
lities for Bangladesh do not seem so bleak.

(b) *A case from Bangladesh*

There are several programs underway already
in Bangladesh that give considerable hope that
social transformation through participatory
development enterprise may indeed be possible,
if given enough time. The best known among
these is the work of the Bangladesh Rural
Advancement Committee, usually referred to by
its acronym BRAC. This voluntary agency began
working in relief projects in 1972, just after the
independence struggle, and since then has devel-
oped a very low-key approach to development,
much along the lines of Paulo Freire's ideas (1970
and 1973) on consciousness-raising. Its develop-

mental activities centered mostly on one thana in
Sylhet District in its initial decade, though more
recently it has expanded into a number of other
areas as well. BRAC has focused on adult
literacy efforts, organizing the poor for manual
work projects (many of them "food for work"
activities), setting up cooperatives for women
and the landless, and public health projects
emphasizing preventive medicine and simple
therapies.[44]

Throughout all is activities, there have been
four central themes of interest. First, there have
been the efforts at consciousness-raising that
have characterized almost all of BRAC's en-
deavors, particularly in the literacy and coopera-
tive projects. The BRAC approach here has been
very nondirective all along, with the idea that
people must think through such concepts as
exploitation and its possible remedies by them-
selves. Second, and following from this nondirec-
tive consciousness-raising, there has been a
concerted attempt to avoid any direct confronta-
tion with local power structures. Manual work
programs have little attraction for the wealthy or
those with pretensions to gentility (especially if
the projects are closely supervised so as to
prevent the leakages that have bedevilled food-
for-work schemes elsewhere in Bangladesh).
Likewise, employment projects for women in a
purdah-conscious Muslim culture do not appeal
to the higher classes. Nor do such activitites,
which are perceived by the dominant strata in the
village as essentially relief handouts, represent
much visible threat to the established order.

Third, there is a strong emphasis on question-
ing and requestioning in the BRAC approach, on
discovering deficiencies and changing methods.
Both the participants and the BRAC staff are
expected to engage in this continuous learning
process.[45] Lastly and stemming from the first
three factors, there is a recognition that these
development strategies are all going to take a
long time, that there can be no hope of quick
results.

6. CONCLUSION

Whether the BRAC model can grow from its
already extensive coverage (more than 78,000
members in almost 1750 groups in 925 separate
villages in 1983, according to its 1983 report:
BRAC, 1983) to become a major force for
promoting social change in Bangladesh as a
whole (over 15 million households in 65,000
villages counted in the 1981 census) remains to be
seen. And whether the Upazila program (assum-
ing that President Ershad goes ahead with its

implementation) will be allowed to stay in place long enough for any social change to begin to percolate up through it also remains to be seen. But the BRAC experience indicates that social consiousness can be raised and can in a self-directed manner mobilize itself, and the Indian Panchayati Raj experience shows that if participatory structures of local self-government are left in place for long enough, they can become instrumental in the social transformation that must take place if the rural majority is to have a say in managing its own future.

The variety of local institutions is virtually infinite, as Esman and Uphoff have shown in their study (1984) of over 150 of them in LDCs over the world. And while failures abound everywhere, there are a large number of successes that have given rural people in the Third World a significant measure of control over their own lives, as Esman and Uphoff have also shown. Surely the Upazila initiative or some similar program is not the only kind of effort that would work in Bangladesh, but it is one that could work if given enough time and support. Perhaps the BRAC approach could do the job as well, though it is difficult to see how the model could expand to cover the whole rural area without losing its integrity in the process.

It must be pointed out also that the very element of time itself, which is so crucial to the success of any local particpatory enterprise in Bangladesh, is something of a luxury. National nutritional surveys conducted over the last two decades have shown a steady decrease in average food intake from 2301 kilocalories in 1962–64 to 2094 in 1975–76 to 1944 in 1981–82. Fully 76% of the rural households surveyed in 1981–82 were below the caloric requirement (Ahmed and Hassan, 1984). One questions how much longer this process can go on. Between false starts, loss of nerve and abrupt changes of government, Bangladesh has squandered most of its opportunity to build local participatory institutions over the last quarter centry and more. The current upazila initiative offers an excellent chance to make up for some of this lost gound, if the present government has the courage to follow through on its implementation and if the present constitutional setup is allowed to endure long enough to give the upazila parishads a chance to work.

NOTES

1. Names in Bangladesh need a word of explanation to the Western ear. Ayub Khan was gererally known as Ayub, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as Sheikh Mujib or simply Mujib, and Ziaur Rahman as Zia. The incumbent president's full name is Hossain Mohammad Ershad, but he is usually referred to in Bangladesh as H. M. Ershad or just Ershad. These appellations will be used throughout this essay.

2. Bangladesh was the eastern province of Pakistan (i.e., "East Pakistan") from the latter's independence in 1947 until the civil war of 1971, which resulted in secession and independence for the Bangladeshis. Thus Ayub's Basic Democracies scheme took place in the Pakistan period, while the remaining three participatory programs belong to independent Bangladesh.

3. See Rostow (1960) on the take-off approach, Chenery et al. (1979) as an example of "growth with equity" thinking and Mellor and Johnston (1984) as illustrative of the return to an aggregate production strategy.

4. A number of accounts trace this history, of which two good ones are Tepper (1966) and Ahmed (1979).

5. The union is the lowest official unit with any real socio-political integrity. The mauza villages are quite artificial and generally bear little more than a co-incidental relationship to actual aggregations of people on the ground.

6. The best overall treatment of Basic Democracies is Jahan (1972). For structural details of the system, see Ahmed (1979). Perhaps because of its longevity relative to succeding participatory structures, there is a much larger and more complete literature on the Basic Democracies effort than on the later attempts. It is also the only one concerning which its founder has given his thoughts for posterity, in this case in Ayub's autobiography (1967). Mujib and Zia both died in office without having written such an account, and Ersad has not thus far published any memoir.

7. Actually only two-thirds of the Union Council members were elected in the first poll in 1959, with the others being appointed, a futher example of Ayub's caution. In the 1964 round, all members were directly elected, though only at union level (Ahmed, 1979, 1982).

8. On the role of the collector, or deputy commissioner, and its significance, see Braibanti (1966).

9. Huntington (1968), pp. 168, 251–255.

10. A study (Alam, 1976) of the 324 Union Parishad chairmen in one district found that 53% had previous experience as members of Ayub Khan's Union Councils or the Union Boards of the pre-Ayub period. Almost 25% of these chairmen had also chaired an earlier Union Council or Board. See also Glaeser (1975), who cites a US embassy analysis indicating that

70% of the winners had some kind of tie or another to the old Basic Democrats of the Ayub period. Qadir (1981) makes a similar finding.

11. Ali (1982, pp. 115–125) gives a detailed account of local government during the confused 1971–73 period.

12. The Zia structure is explained at length in Ahmed (1979, pp. 147–205). Actually, the chairman of the old District Boards set up during the British period were directly elected, but through a franchise restricted to property holders and graduates, and with responsibilites that were severely restricted.

13. The "Swanirvar" in the offical title of the program means "self-reliant", a reference to the pilot scheme which (quite unlike the actual program) mobilized thousands of villages to dig massive earth works. For an exhaustive analysis of the program, see Ali (1982, pp. 172–222) and more recently a PhD dissertation on the subject by Huque (1984). There were roughly 16 gram sarkars per union.

14. GPRB (1980a), p. 1186.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 1190.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 1190.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. VII–6–7; X–7, 11; XII–97, 107.

18. *Ibid.*, p. XII–98.

19. In contrast to the draft Second Five Year Plan (GPRB, 1980), which made Gram Sarkar the centerpiece of the rural development effort, the final version of the Plan (GPRB, 1983b) did not mention it at all, observing only that "A system of elected Local Government would be established at Union, Thana and District levels" (p. 90) and that the details would be worked out.

20. In addition to their direct control of the Thana Parishad, the Subdivisional Officer and Circle Officer retained a close supervisory power over the Union Parishads through their responsibilities for approving budgets and auditing accounting respectively (World Bank. 1984. pp. 106–107). As might be expected given the span of control involved (60 unions per subdivision, 9 or 10 unions per thana), this supervisory power appears to have been exercised rather lightly (see Schroeder and Maniruzzaman, 1982, pp. 42–53).

21. GPRB (1982), p. 1.

22. "Upazila" is an especially significant choice of wording for Bangladesh, inasmuch as it combines a Sanskritic prefix (upa-) with an Urdu–Persian word (zila), thus reflecting the twin heritage of Bengali culture.

23. Originally the plan was to create 50 districts out of the 71 old subdivisions, a considerable increase over the 21 districts then in existence (GPRB, 1982, pp.

221–224). In 1984, it was decided to create a total of 64 districts (GPRB, 1984, pp. i–ii).

24. Thana-level technical experts had formerly been certificate holders, with 12 years education; now they were to be BS degree holders.

25. The influence of the Circle Officer was even further diminished by the fact that he had a lower pay scale than the technical officers he was supposed to be directing.

26. There were some governmental functions that would be "retained" for the regular chains of command, such as the judiciary, collection of central taxes, electrical power distribution and the like, but even here the Upazila Parishad "will be competent to call for report from these officers on their activities and also summon them for hearing. . . to cause inspection of their offices and to report to government on any lapse in the discharge of their duties" (GPRB, 1983a, p. 23).

27. The Panchayati Raj system in India (about which more later on in this essay) has a thana-level representative body, but in most of the states (which differ somewhat from one to another) these *Panchayat Samitis* are indirectly elected, like Ayub Khan's old Thana Councils in the Pakistan era. In a few cases in India there are direct elections at all levels of the panchayat system. See GOI (1978), pp. 231–244 for a complete accounting.

28. GPRB (1983), p. 29.

29. In the official words of the new *Manual on Thana Administration* (GPRB, 1983a, pp. 29–30), the Thana Parishad Chairman "will initiate" the ACR of the UNO, and the latter will "initiate the ACR of all thana level officers except the Munsiff-Magistrate." The elected chairman will then "countersign" these latter ACRs after the UNO has written (i.e., "initiated") them; this means he will approve, add to or dissent from the ACR, acting in effect as a higher level reviewing officer. It should be noted that actual promotion, transfer, appointment, salary, etc., would continue to be handled by the relevant technical department for these officers. Presumably, though, the ACR would have a great deal of bearing on those decisions. Certainly the technical officers themselves think so (see the next section and note 33), and the government resolution creating the new system specifically notes that "the services" of these officers "will be deemed to have been placed at the disposal of the Upazila Parishad and they will be accountable to the respective Upazila Parishad" (GPRB, 1983c, p. 23).

30. If so, this would be a fence-building political strategem on the part of Ershad, who, along with virtually all the high ranking officers in the Bangladesh military, was repatriated after the 1971 war from West Pakistan, where he was interned during the conflict. The officers who fought in the war have by now left the military in one way or another, including quite a few

who, like Zila, were killed. The inclusion of one freedom fighter would be an olive branch to this somewhat alienated constituency. There will be one further voting member: the chairman of the Thana Central Cooperative Association, who is indirectly elected by all the elected heads of the agricultural cooperative societies in the upazila (see Figure 1).

31. Presidential and parliamentary elections, promised for May 1984, were also postponed. with the parliamentary contest scheduled for 8 December 1984, to be followed by presidential elections and then later on by the upazila poll. In late 1984 the two national elections were again postponed after much agonizing and a referendum held as a substitute (along the lines followed by Zia) in March 1985.

32. Some of the evidence is conflicting here. The Khan Committee, for instance, noted (GPRB, 1982, pp. 41, 53–54) that in 1977 the Zia government withdrew the Collector or Deputy Commissioner's coordinating authority (he never had any line authority) over technical officers at district level, while Shawkat Ali (1982, p. 332) cites a number of government orders from the same period emphasizing that same authority. In any event, the authority appears never to have been taken very seriously.

33. These were the impressions I gathered when in Bangladesh in the summer of 1983, when the thanas were in the process of being "upgraded" to upazilas, and the bureaucracy was combing through its personnel rolls to find officers to post to the new structures. For a certain number of the officers affected by the new dispensation, an additonal problem was that the channels of corruption that they had become accustomed to and comfortable with would now cease, meaning that much effort would have to be expended to develop new ones. A return visit in the summer of 1984 confirmed all these impressions.

34. His feelings are abundantly evident in his memoir (Ayub Khan, 1967).

35. GPRB (1982), p. 93.

36. The World Bank (1983), pp. 15–18.

37. The World Bank discreetly avoids the word class in its analysis, though most of the groups described would be best understood in terms of class.

38. This theme is explored at length in Blair (1974, 1978).

39. For a good account of this process of stagnation, see Prasad (1978, 1979), also Singh (1980).

40. GOB (1978), pp. i–vi; GOB (1983), pp. i–iv; Nayyar (1977).

41. For an excellent general analysis of the rise of the "backwards" in Bihar, see Frankel (1983); also Prasad (1978, 1979, 1980); and Blair (1980). Though growth in agricultural production has been much more modest in Bihar that elsewere in India, there has in fact been a slow rate of increase over the past several decades (Blair, 1984).

42. In a sense Indira Gandhi's victory at the national level in the 1980 election represented a victory of the "twice-born" castes over the "backwards," though this is only a parochial interpretation from the north Indian perspective. Nationally, there were too many factors at work to explain the overall election outcome so simplistically. For an update on the position in Bihar, see Blair (1984).

43. There are many examples. One of the best documented is the ongoing violence between middle caste landowners and their Harijan laborers in the Masaurhi area of Patna district. See Chakravarti (1981); EPW (1981); and Das (1983) for a detailed analysis.

44. This account of BRAC's activities is taken largely from its own publications (e.g., BRAC, 1978) and discussions with BRAC staff (which is not, of course, responsible for my interpretation of BRAC activities). For an easily accessible analysis of BRAC's efforts, see Korten (1980). A more recent assessment, and one focusing on BRAC's very extensive work with women's groups, is Chen (1983).

45. The BRAC interest in continual self-criticism is reminiscent of the Comilla experiment, particularly in its earlier years under Akhter Hameed Khan, who insisted on much the same approach.

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