SEGREGATION OF WOMEN IN ISLAMIC SOCIETIES OF SOUTH ASIA AND ITS REFLECTION IN RURAL HOUSING
- Case Study in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

In Islamic societies, religion plays a significant role in shaping the home and the environment. An important feature of the Islamic culture is the segregation of women from males other than next of kin This aspect has given rise to the separation of domains for men and women, both in the home and the neighbourhood. And this duality of space in turn reinforces the seclusion and segregation of women

This thesis studies this phenomenon in rural settlements in South Asia in regions where Muslims predominate and also in non-Muslim areas influenced by centuries of Muslim rule. The living patterns of rural women and how they use and perceive their local space formed the focus of the study

A field study was undertaken in a rural community in Bangladesh. Gender segregation norms and the resulting spatial organization of dwellings of different socio-economic groups were studied and compared An important premise of the study is how the poor manage to integrate their faith and Islamic customs in their living environment.

RESUME

Dans le sociétiés islamiques, la religion joue un rôle considérable dans la façon que l'environnement et le domicile sont formés. Un aspect important de la culture islamique est la ségrégation des femmes et des hommes à l'exception de la famille immédiate. Ce fait donne naissance à la séparation des domaines des hommes et des femmes au foyer et en dehors de celui-ci. Cette dualité de l'espace renforce par conséquent la séclusion et la ségrégation des femmes

Cette thèse examine ce phénomène dans les habitations de l'Asie du Sud, soit dans les régions avec les grandes concentrations de musulmans, soit aux lieux non islamiques influencés au cours des siècles par l'autorité islamique. Cette étude se fixe sur le comportement d'habitation des femmes rurales et l'utilisation et la perception de l'espace qui les entoure

Une enquête sur le terrain a été entreprise dans une communauté rurale du Bangladesh Les normes de la ségrégation des hommes et des femmes avec comme résultat l'arrangement spatial des habitations en fonction de différent groupe socio-économique ont été étudiés et comparés. Une prémisse importante de cette étude est de savoir comment les pauvres parviennent à intégrer leur foi et les coutumes islamiques dans leur environnement domestique

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PREFACE

This study evolved from two personal interests: As a woman I share the concerns of women everywhere, specially from my part of the world. As an architect I am interested in how people interact with space and how living space is moulded by living patterns.

The study involved a literature review which spanned many disciplines: architecture, anthropology, ethnography and religious studies. Although I found a wealth of material relevant to my topic, the main focus, i e, women's use of space, was neglected in many of the studies or treated as secondary. It became evident that I would need to undertake an original field study in a rural area. I chose my husband's ancestral village, with which I was already familiar.

In many ways this study has been a personal journey to my roots. It revealed to me facets of my own society of which I was only dimly aware. It was not always possible to maintain a professional detachment during the fieldwork; I would often feel emotionally overwhelmed to find myself in such idyllic yet traumatic surroundings. Yet I never failed to be struck by the forbearance, humour and natural dignity of the village women as they went about their daily life. I learnt a great deal and I hope I was able to translate this knowledge effectively. I like to believe that my own background may have helped in a clearer interpretation.

The thesis is organized into two parts. The first part describes the research problem and literature review and the second part deals with the case study. There are altogether six chapters

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the concept of the women's domain in Islamic societies. It describes the research topic and discusses its scope

Chapter 2 gives an insight into Islam as a religion, its teachings regarding segregation of women and its general application in housing

Chapter 3 reviews the literature relevant to the study in the context of South Asia. It deals with the segregation and status of women in rural South Asia, and how they influence female activities and hence space usage. It acts as a frame of reference for the field research.

Chapter 4 focuses on the background of the case study and describes the methodology adopted for the actual field work.

Chapter 5 discusses findings from the field study and attempts analytical description of the data. It describes and contrasts the spatial configuration of the different socio-economic groups. It also discusses the living patterns of rural women and the resulting use of space.

Chapter 6 summarizes and interprets the general findings of the study. It compares the dwelling forms of different socio-economic groups and evaluates the performance of the survey dwellings both in reflecting and reinforcing the societal norms of segregation. The significance of the study is stated and next steps for research suggested.

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CHAPTER I

1.0 THE RESEARCH AREA: WOMEN'S DOMAIN IN ISLAMIC HOUSING

1.1 Introduction

The physical environment of any society is a complex product of many variables such as geographical features, climate, resources, culture and technology. An individual dwelling unit reflects all these features In Islamic societies, religion is an additional aspect; in fact, it is often the governing factor in the design of the built environment.[1]

A significant feature of the Islamic culture is the segregation of women from male members of society other than next of kin. This influences the female pattern of activity and movement, both in the home and in public areas. The organization of space in the Muslim home reflects this particular pattern. Consequently, there is a general separation of male and female domains in individual homes in almost all Islamic societies. This dichotomy of space in turn reinforces the seclusion and segregation of women. This study attempts to examine this socio-physical phenomenon in a particular setting - the complex and diverse Islamic societies of South Asia

1.2 The Research Problem

The Islamic societies of South Asia are among the least urbanized regions in the Islamic world.[2] The Muslim world, for various reasons, is largely a part of the underdeveloped, non-industrialised world with a very high percentage of rural population (more than 70%).[3] The rural populace arrange and order their physical environment in accordance with their societal regulations and cultural needs, which are a combination of their religious faith and local traditions. These often are quite distinct from urban cultural patterns.

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[1] As Rapoport points out, religion is an important determinant in the creation and evolution of houses in many cultures; it affects the form, plan, spatial arrangements, and orientation of the house and settlement patterns. The Chinese village, for example, can be much better understood if the religious factor is considered; in Africa the distribution of round and rectangular houses is related to the distributon of religion. Rapoport, 1969:40-41

[2] Pirani, 1989:97

[3] Pirani, 1989:95

This thesis explores the segregation of women and the resulting spatial arrangement in rural settlements in South Asia. South Asia is an area where Islam has a distinct regional character which influences this phenomenon to a great extent. Poverty, the blight of this region, also plays an important part in shaping both societal standards and the living environment. With the help of a case study in rural Bangladesh, this thesis examines in detail the response to religious regulations and cultural constraints in rural housing, taking into consideration the very serious issues of poverty and lack of resources prevailing in rural areas. Can poor rural families "afford" to follow religious and societal regulations in the design of their homes? Obviously, they have fewer architectural elements to effect the seclusion and segregation of women; what adaptations, if any, do they make to reach a solution? Their situation is also compared to that of the wealthier segments of rural society, to ascertain the relationship and interaction of economic situation and religious faith and its expression in the built environment.

1.2.1 Rationale

Urban societies in the present Islamic world are in a state of transition. "Modern " and "western" values, both in societal behaviour and the built environment, are slowly being absorbed in the urban fabric. Increasing female employment and crowded housing conditions have served as an effective (if not crucial) means for dismantling the spatial barriers between the sexes.[4] But these changes affect only a relatively small percentage of the total Islamic population. The overwhelming majority of the Islamic world live in rural areas. Even though most of the rural population live in abject poverty, people cling to age-old customs and traditions Unlike urban areas, change is slow to be adopted. It seems specially important to study a situation that affects such a large number of people.

1.2.2 Scope

To understand how people use and organize a dwelling and its surroundings, all the forces that shape the human habitat need to be addressed. This study, however, is concerned only with the practice of segregation of women, and how it affects the house and the settlement. It is limited to the analysis of this factor occurring within the framework of a rural community

The study was approached by focusing on the living patterns of rural women. As gender segregation has far-reaching effects in every rural woman's life, women's activities, role and status in society, lifecycle

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[4] Altorki and El-Solh, 1988:15. Also see Sinha's PhD Thesis (1989) for a study of the breakdown of spatial gender segregation in an urban housing complex.

changes and mobility are addressed as these directly affect space use. An appraisal of the other conditions and factors that influence rural housing is beyond the scope of this study.

CHAPTER II

2.0 UNDERSTANDING OF ISLAM: RELIGION AND GUIDE FOR LIVING

2.1 Introduction

An understanding of Islam as a religion is necessary to comprehend its effect on the built environment. Islam is the second largest of the world's religions numbering more than 800 million Muslims and 45 Muslim countries that extend from North Africa to South East Asia. (Fig. 1)
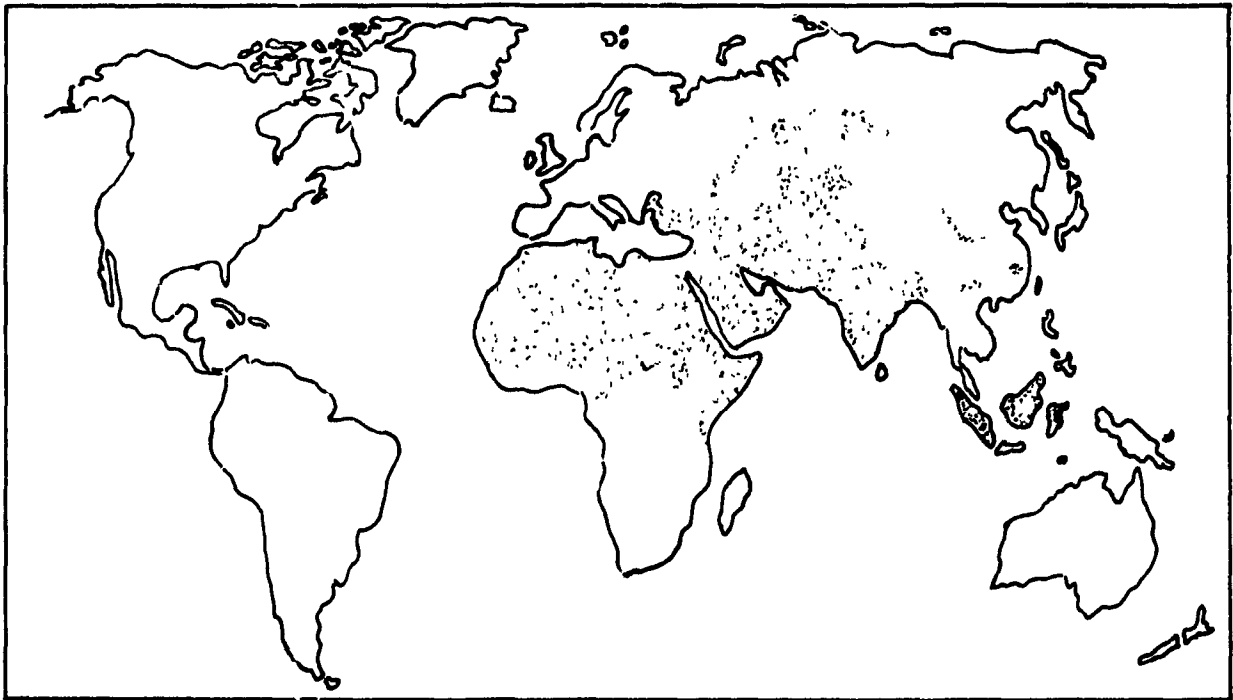
Fig 1 Contemporary Muslim Areas (After Ahmed, A.S , 1988)

Islam is a monotheistic religion which arose in the deserts of Arabia in 600 A.D. Its founder was the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The message of God revealed to him is contained in the holy book, the *Quran* The Prophet's (pbuh) sayings, deeds and teachings are recorded by his followers and compiled in the *Hadith*. These two books guide the Muslim from the cradle to the grave in al! religious and secular activities The religious laws and legislation cover all areas of political, economic, social and personal life to the minutest detail.[1] According to Akbar S. Ahmed, Islam is not simply a religion.... it represents a whole sense of community and a way of life. It defines both a world view and a guidance framework for action

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[1] Hitti, 1970:37

in all spheres of life.[2]

2.2   Segregation of Women in Islam

Before the advent of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, women were regarded as mere chattel, to be bought and sold like any other property. Infant daughters were often buried at birth. Women had no right of property and inheritance

Islam uplifted the status of women at that time (7th C. A.D.) as full-fledged members of society with certain rights and obligations. These rights included the rights to be educated, to inherit, to divorce. Women were given the right to participate in debates and public discussions, to involve themselves in public political affairs and to participate in electing the highest government officials.[3] At the same time, certain restrictions on the behaviour of both men and women led to the segregation of women from male members of society both at public and private levels Although women often took active part in public life in the early days of Islam[4], gradually, in most Islamic societies, they were restricted to the bounds of the women's domain - the *harem*[5] and to an almost total absence in public areas. At present, as A.S. Ahmed points out, the actual situation of women, their social status and privileges, is far removed from the Islamic ideal, whether in the tribe, village or city. Deprived of economic and hereditary rights, trailing far behind men in education, women are formed into an inferior class. According to Ahmed, a major reason for this is that whenever Islamic societies came under stress (for example foreign colonization), its customs became more rigid, forcing women to "hide behind veils and remain invisible in the courtyards of their homes "[6]

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[2] Ahmed A.S , 1988.20

[3] Bashier, 1980:24-25

[4] Women were valued members of the early Islamic communities of the Prophet and his Caliphs. They often had preeminent positions in society; women led armies, became rulers and were famous as religious scholars, mystics, teachers, artists and writers. For example, Shaikha Shuhda lectured publicly in one of the principal mosques of Baghdad to large audiences on literature, rhetoric and poetry
Lemu, 1978:16; Ahmed A.S., 1988.185, Bashier, 1980.24

[5] The word harem has come to English via Turkish and is associated with "voluptuous extravagance and sensual pleasures" - its actual meaning in Arabic is "holy and inviolable." Cooper E., 1915:50

[6] Ahmed A.S., 1988:185. This opinion is in keeping with Bhatty's suggestion that Muslims in India, being overly conscious of their minority status and anxious to maintain their identity, are tending to lean too heavily on the externalities of their distinctive features, one of which is *purdah*. Bhatty, 1976 112

2.3 Relevant Teachings in Islam

Muslims seek guidance in all the spheres of their life activities from the holy *Quran* or the *Hadith*. Concerning seclusion women are advised as follows:

> Stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that at the former times of ignorance. (Surah Al Ahzaab, Verse 33)[7]

In the *Hadith* the following rules are laid down.

> Women should stay home in all dignity and since there are restrictions on their mobility, no duty is allotted to them which requires them to go out of the house. A woman should always confine herself to domestic obligation and duties If the woman has to go out in unavoidable circumstances, she must be simply attired.[8]

Islam makes it *haram* (prohibited) for women to wear clothes which fail to cover the body, which are transparent or delineate the parts of the body[9] The *Quran* advises the Muslim women to be conservative in their appearance

> O Prophet, tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close around them (when they go abroad) that will be better, so that they may be recognized and not annoyed (Surah Al Ahzaab, Verse 59)[10]

It is therefore required for a Muslim woman when she goes out to wear a dress that covers her from head to foot and does not reveal her figure. According to some scholars only the hands and face should be left uncovered, while according to some others the face should also be uncovered.[11]

Many religious scholars have interpreted these teachings as meaning that women should be unobtrusive and subdued, both in private and public areas Abdul Ali Maududi interprets Verse 31 of Surah al-Nur,

> Tell Muslim women to cast down their eyes and to protect their chastity. They should not expose their beauty They should cover themselves properly. The people or men before whom they can come are her husband, father, father-in-law, son, stepson, brother, nephew, servant and pre-adolescent boys Order the women that while they walk, they should not strike the ground so hard with their feet, so that the beauty they possess may get exposed by the noise of their walk. They should talk softly and they should cover themselves with a *chadar* (veil) before going out.[12]

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[7] Translated by A.Y Ali (1983), as quoted in Rghei, 1987:50

[8] Pickthall, 1930:435-436

[9] Al-Qaradawi, 1980.85

[10] Maududi (1970) as quoted in Roy, S , 1979:26-27

[11] Bashier, 1980.10,13

[12] As quoted in Roy, S., 1979:26-27

Men have also been advised as to their conduct regarding the segregation of women The Prophet said:

> Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day must never be in privacy with women without their being a mahrem[13] (of hers) with her, for otherwise Satan will be the third person (with them).[14]

Purdah[15] became an indispensable part of Muslim social structure because of the higher status that was attributed to families which observed it. The Prophet (pbuh) instructed the women of his family and his tribe to veil themselves while making public appearances in order to distinguish the women in the family from those of other families. In time, this was taken up by other families. Thus the use of the veil not only meant segregating the females from males but implied high breeding and high family status. Veiling and seclusion regulations can be disregarded only during times of war and emergencies and when a woman's life and chastity are in danger.[16]

2.4   Women's Domain in the Islamic House

Housing and the neighbourhood are very visible products of Islamic thought and custom. In different Islamic cultures there are vast differences in religious, social and cultural mores, but the common faith has resulted in general similarities in dwelling design from one end of the Islamic world to the other. This is true in almost all Islamic cultures, whether nomadic, rural or urban

The seclusion of women from certain categories of men is an important factor in the use of household space and the orientation of dwellings with respect to one another. As a general rule men and women are in two separate domains.[17] Toulan (1980) says, "The need to separate women was reflected in the design of the typical house."[18] Even in the minimal portable tent "a clear segregation of sexes is obtained by the use

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[13] Mahrem denotes a relationship (other than marital) between a woman and a man, either by marriage or by close blood ties of such degree that marriage is permanently prohibited

[14] Al-Qaradawi, 1980:150

[15] The practice of segregation and veiling. For a more elaborate explanation, see Chapter 3

[16] Roy S., 1979:27

[17] Separate domains for women are not only present in the Islamic culture. Rapoport points out that woman's domain in the house may take different forms, from the African custom of the man visiting the women's houses and not having one of his own to the subtle distinction between man's and woman's domain in England and America In Japan, the kitchen is one of the few places which is woman's domain and is physically different from the rest of the house. Rapoport, 1969:65

[18] Toulan(1980) as quoted in Rghei, (1987):51

of dividing partitions, and each part would furthermore be provided with its own entrance."[19] (Fig. 2)

The women's activities center on the private life of the family, hidden from the public eye. The man has more interaction with the public realm and the important obligation of hospitality gives rise to the necessity of spaces to receive guests. The concept of a male guest house or reception room is widely distributed throughout the Islamic world. In Southern Iraq, for example, there is usually a free-standing guest house in every village, but sometimes part of the dwelling is partitioned off and turned into a male guest-house (the *mudhif*), with separate entrances for both domains.[20](Fig. 3)

The most common dwelling form, however, is the inward looking courtyard house, which supports the family and social functions Closed to the outer world, it opens towards a central court, thus fulfilling the need for privacy as well as for adequate light and ventilation. This dwelling type appears to be the universal solution in the Islamic world It supports the division of the home into a public and a secluded family section. (Fig 4) In larger houses, the two domains are arranged around two separate courtyards.[21]

Apart from the courtyard house, Islamic teachings have been the basis of several additional architectural devices and elements which reinforce the concept of seclusion and concealment of women:

- Minimum windows to the exterior, small in size (Fig. 5)
- Mashrabiya, screened windows, which allow women to look out without being seen (Fig 6)
- Indirect entrances to dwellings, usually from a corner, separate entrances for women (Fig 7)
- High roof parapets to allow private use of roofspace (Fig. 8)

Public areas in the Muslim world are defined, among other ways, by the absence of women. Women usually do not visit the mosques, bazaars, public gatherings or coffee houses. When women participate in public congregations or institutions, there are often separate screened off-spaces for their use or separate facilities.

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[19] Horne, 1980.28

[20] Horne, 1980:27-29

[21] The courtyard house, however, is not limited to the Islamic world. It is also prevalent in other cultures such as China, the Meditarranean countries and Latin America. Rapoport suggests that this dwelling prototype relates to some social factor in those cultures; this may be the extreme need for privacy for women who are cloistered Rapoport, 1969:65 Shoenauer argues that certain occidental cultures which adopted and retained the courtyard house did so under the direct or indirect influence of Islamic rule, such as Spain and Latin America. Shoenauer, 1981:256
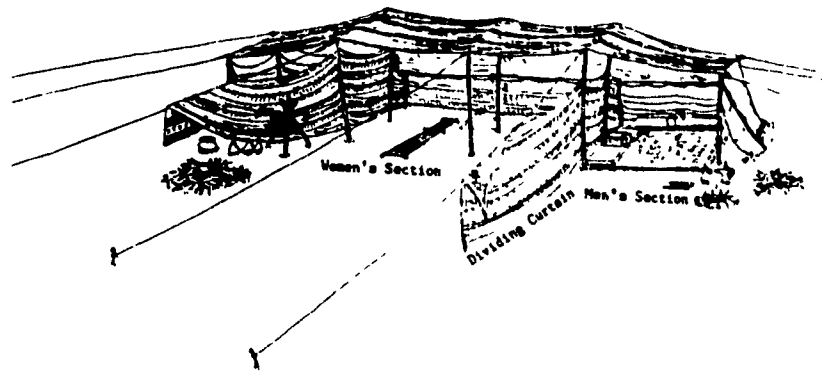
Fig. 2. Separate Zones in Arab Tent (Source Bahammam, 1987)

male female
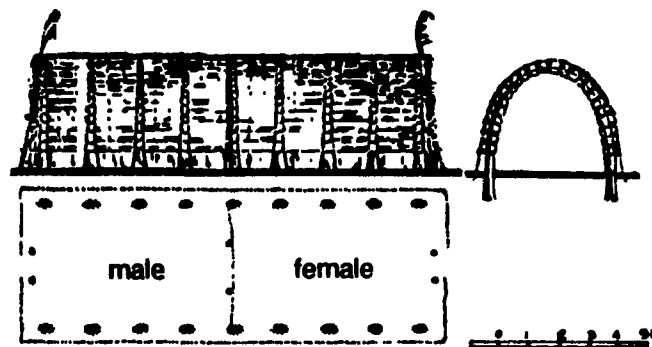
Fig. 3. Marsh Arab Reed House (Source Lorne, 1981)

Ground level : female   Upper level : male
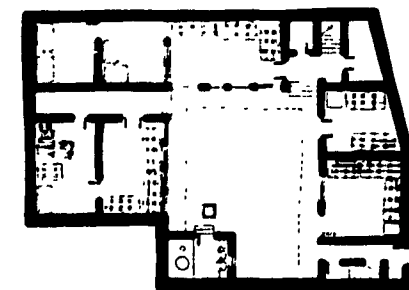
Plan of entrance level of house in Kabul   Plan of upper level
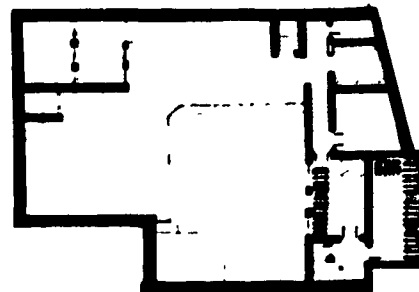
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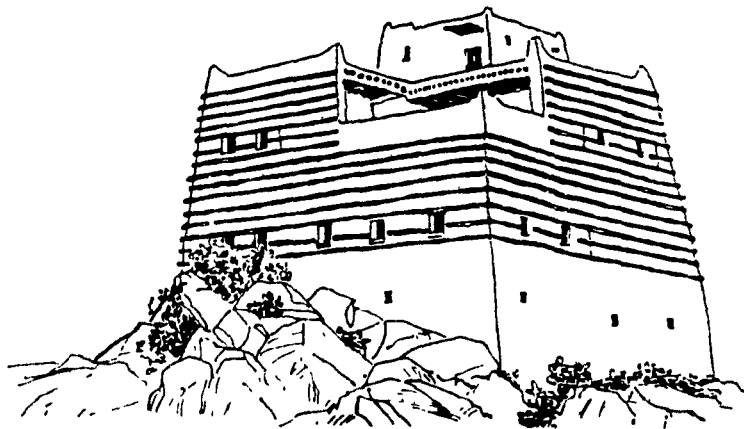
Fig 5   Minimum Windows to Exterior (Source: Bahammam, 1987)
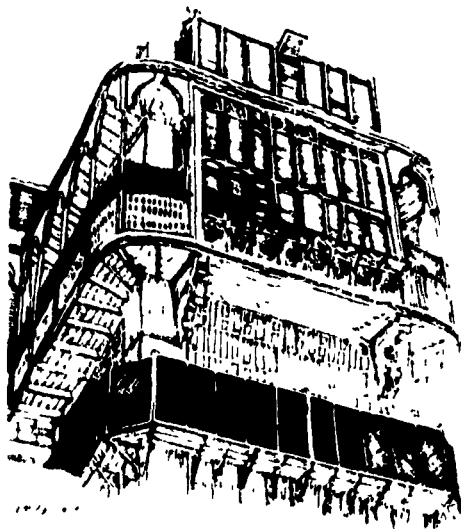
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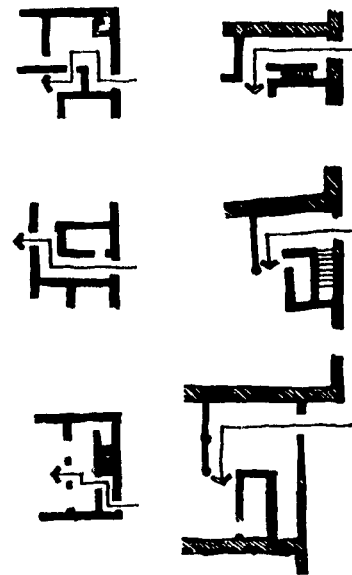
Fig. 7.   Indirect Entrance
(Source: Bahammam, 1987)
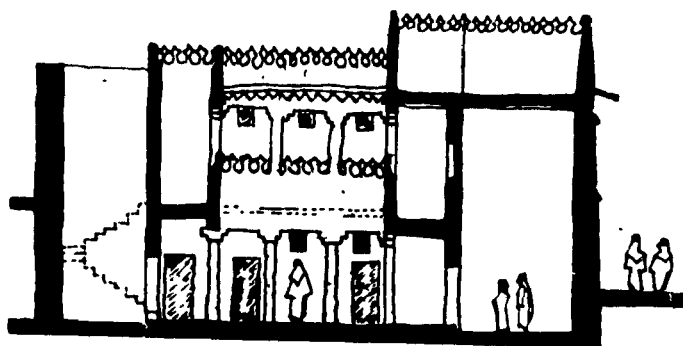
Fig. 8. High Roof Parapets (Source: Bahammam, 1987)

They go out on the streets only when necessary and even then with the protection of the veil In many Muslim countries separate transportation is provided for women, such as ladies' buses or reserved train compartments.

2.5   Summary of Findings

The separation of male and female domains in the home is not confined to the Islamic world. This spatial separation can also be seen in the traditional architecture of other cultures, such as China But in Islamic societies, it is more or less a common identifiable feature. In countries as widely apart as Morocco and Indonesia, dwellings exhibit a striking similarity in layout and organization. Different cultures and both primitive and more advanced urban societies in the Islamic world share the concept of confining women in specified spaces within the home, albeit with obvious regional differences. Inspite of considerable cultural differences, the design and layout of the typical Muslim home reflects and facilitates the segregation and seclusion of women

This special and almost universal characteristic of the Islamic home can be explained when it is understood as a manifestation of certain teachings and interpretations of the Islamic faith The teachings of Islam influence and guide its followers in all spheres of religious and secular activities and maintain social order by providing guidelines and control mechanisms for individual behaviour. The conceptual similarity in the built environment of the followers of Islam has to be understood as an expression of a common faith and a unifying religious culture

CHAPTER III

3.0   PURDAH AND RURAL HOUSING IN SOUTH ASIA: A LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1   Introduction

South Asia has a sizable Muslim population which makes up 40% of the world Muslim community. Pakistan and Bangladesh number more than 90% Muslims among their citizens, while in India, about 12% of the population is Muslim.[1] Islam plays an important role in this region and has done so for hundreds of years

This chapter, with the help of a literature survey, investigates the social and spatial aspects of segregation of women in this region It serves as an introduction to women's living patterns in rural South Asia and the resulting women's domain in the house and the neighbourhood. It also serves as a frame of reference for the case study in Bangladesh.

3.2   Islam in South Asia

South Asia already had an ancient civilization and a sophisticated religion (Hinduism) at the time of the first Muslim invasion in 650 A.D. The permanent association of the Muslims with this region started in the last decade of the twelfth century A D. when the Dehli Sultanate was established. This marked the beginning of continuous Muslim rule in India until the advent of the British in the eighteenth century. The other avenues by which Muslims found their way to India was as traders and missionaries.[2] During the centuries of Muslim rule, gradually a large indigenous population joined the fold of Islam

Islam is an extremely reified religious tradition, and its doctrines, precepts and practices are considered to be universal However, all Islamic societies contain a mixture of local pre-Islamic practice and behaviour, resulting in the present cultural diversity among the followers of Islam.[3] The Muslims of South Asia have always maintained a character of their own; as a community they are a product of numerous disparate groups from all over the Muslim world intermingling with the

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[1] Exposito, 1987

[2] Roy S , 1979 14

[3] Ahmed I , 1981:(vii); Roy, S., 1970·12

converts from the indigenous population. All this has a certain amount of relevance on the present status of Muslim women in this region Bhatty suggests that their position has been compounded of Islamic injunctions and Hindu traditions. And, "as often happens in the compounding of two sets of influences, the conservative and restrictive elements of one have tended to dominate or neutralise the liberal elements of the other."[4]

3.3   Purdah

In South Asia, the practice of seclusion and veiling of women is known as *purdah*. *Purdah* is an important part of the life experience of many South Asians and is a central feature of the social system of the area. Women veil and seclude themselves before men through the large part of South Asia that includes Pakistan, Northern India and Bangladesh. David Mandelbaum refers to these regions as the "*purdah* zone." The *purdah* zone comprises all of Bangladesh and Pakistan, plus the Indian states of Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, together with adjoining parts of Madhya Pradesh, Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. These areas, though not exclusively Muslim, are heavily influenced by the former presence of Islam There is no abrupt shift from a *purdah* to a non-*purdah* region, but rather a gradual transition through the intervening regions to quite different gender relations of South India.[5] (Fig 9)

Veiling and seclusion are customs shared by both Hindus[6] and Muslims in the *purdah* zone, but they are used in each community for different social purposes and in differing context. Whereas Muslims use this practice to safeguard their women from men outside the family and to keep them in their own separate feminine world, Hindus use the same device to enforce women's subordination to their in-laws, generally to order the domain of family and kinship[7] Muslim seclusion begins at

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[4] Bhatty, 1980:200

[5] Mandelbaum, 1988:2-3

[6] Most writers, as for example, Shibani Roy (1979) and Sinha (1989b), contend that purdah practices were introduced to this region by Muslims and gradually adopted by Hindus in areas under Muslim rule. Kamala Ganesh, however, suggests that historical and literary data of the pre-Muslim period indicate that among royal and noble families, women were secluded to a greater or lesser degree. She argues that the seclusion of high-caste women is a device to control their sexuality, which in turn is considered to be crucial to the maintenance of ritual purity of the castes Ganesh, 1989:75

[7] Vatuk, 1973:55

SOUTH ASIA

65°E

1. Pakistan
2. Kashmir
3. Himachal Pradesh
4. Punjab
5. Hariyana
6. Rajasthan
7. Uttar Pradesh
8. Bihar
9. West Bengal

10. Gujrat
11. Madhya Pradesh
12. Orissa
13. Maharashtra
14. Andhra Pradesh
15. Karnataka
16. Kerala
17. Tamil Nadu
18. Bangladesh
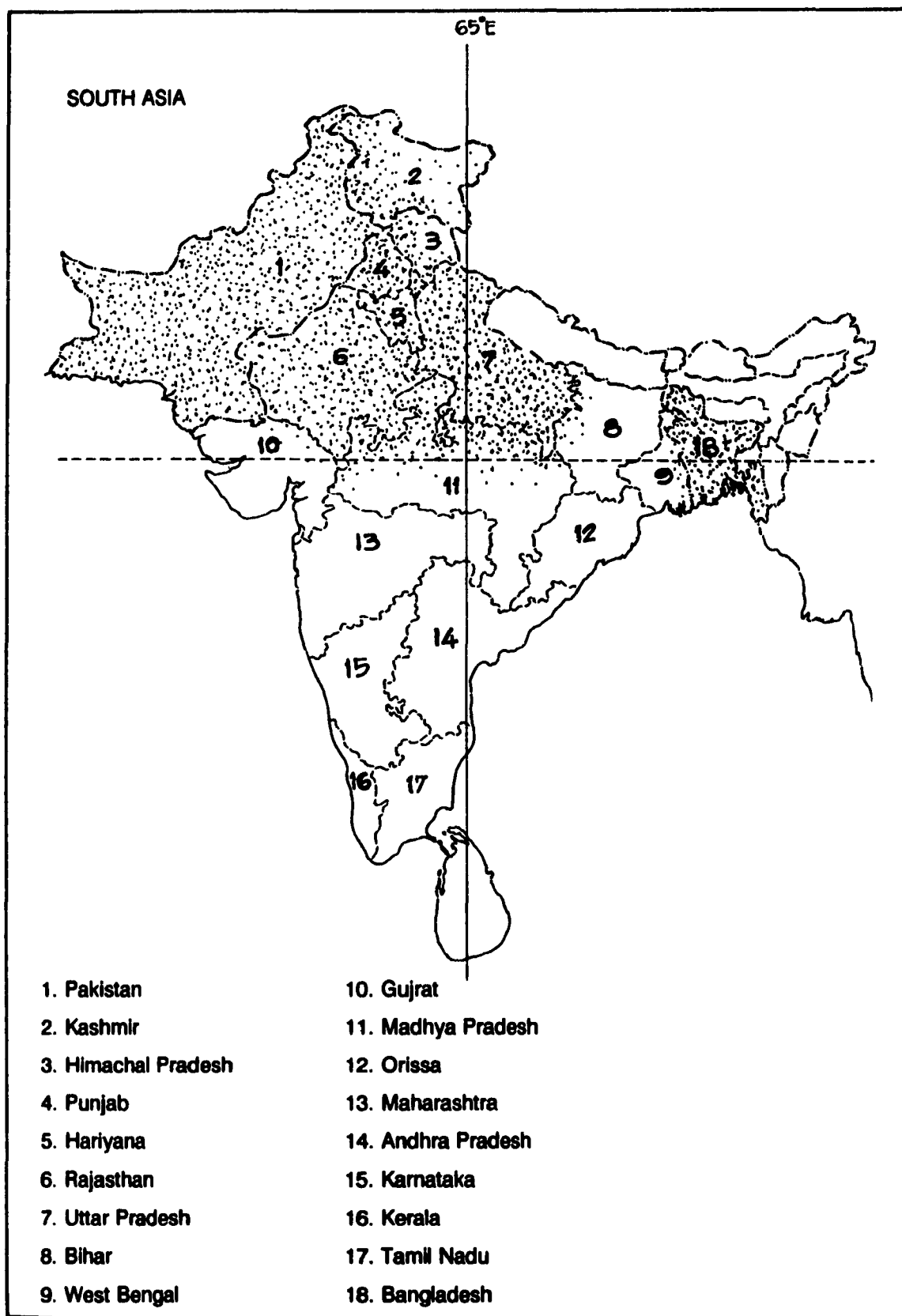
Fig. 9. Purdah Zone (Accoding to Mandelbaum, 1988)

puberty, Hindu seclusion strictly speaking begins with marriage.[8]   Both Hindus and Muslims, however, share two very central concerns, namely the protection of women and the maintenance of harmony through respect relationship within the family and kindred.[9]

Purdah, which literally means curtain, refers to the physical segregation of living space, as well as the covering of body and face. In broader terms it also refers to the beliefs and values about the behaviour of women, the restrictions on their movements and the requirements for their respectful and deferential demeanour.[10] These include a set of norms which govern the behaviour of women in the presence of males within the home and outside in public areas. The concept also governs the proper behaviour towards male and female elders, which should be respectful of their superior status. Thus a daughter-in-law will cover her head even in the presence of her mother-in-law and an adolescent daughter will assume a respectful posture when her father arrives.[11]

In its most conservative form, the forms of purdah extend to the tone and pitch of voice used known as awaz ka purdah and the practice of eye avoidance nazar ka purdah. Awaz ka purdah is a prohibition on women in respect of conversation with some categories of males and involves restrictions on tone and pitch used. If necessity demands that a purdah-nashin (woman who abides by rules of purdah) speak to an outsider, she does so from behind a screen. Nazar ka purdah restricts men and women from looking or staring at each other.

The above set of norms are internalized by the growing girl so that even though purdah may not be practiced as such, behaviour in the presence of older kinsmen, distant relatives or total strangers is marked by self-consciousness and inhibition. This behaviour is characterized as being modest and as part of the feminine identity. A woman who does not subscribe to it is considered without shame and unrespectable.[12]

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[8] Papanek, 1973:3

[9] Vatuk, 1973:57

[10] Mandelbaum, 1988:27

[11] Sinha, 1989b:70

[12] Sinha, 1989b:71

Should she wish to go out, a secluded Muslim woman resorts to the portable purdah of the *burqa*, a garment that effectively hides her face and figure. A *burqa*, while designedly formless and obviously inconvenient, may nevertheless be viewed by the wearer as a liberating garment. It permits her to move about in public and still remain relatively invisible.[13]

The institution of *purdah* provides, what Hanna Papanek terms "symbolic shelter" for women, seeking to protect women from the hardships and dangers that dealing with society at large involves. According to Papanek, underlying the entire system of seclusion are certain assumptions about human interaction and about the nature of men and women. Symbolic shelter is provided against real dangers of a segregated world but also, and not least significantly, against the strong impulses such as sexual desire and aggression which are clearly recognized as being part of the human condition. Women's proper behaviour as sheltered persons becomes an important source of the status of their protectors and their behaviour becomes important in terms of honour and family pride for the entire kin group.[14] In a culture where male pride is very significant, and very fragile, the seclusion of women is an important aspect of male control.[15]

However, many writers have noted that women themselves play an important part in upholding, interpreting and perpetuating the concepts of the *purdah*, specially in rural areas In this regard A.S. Ahmed says about Pukhtun society in Pakistan, "Here is an obviously oppressed group, who instead of throwing off the shackles of bondage is in the forefront of preserving the prevailing social norms. Perhaps the answer lies partly in their insecurity. If they are to maintain their security and respect in society, they must live up to the ideal concept of the Pukhtun woman."[16] This applies generally to *purdah* societies elsewhere in South Asia.

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[13] Minault, 1980:196. While wearing the veil in South Asia is entirely voluntary (many women feel that dressing modestly is enough), in orthodox countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran, women risk public disgrace, even danger without it.

[14] Papanek, 1973:8

[15] Papanek 1973:35-37. Symbolic of the "protection" and "confinement" of women are the names of some Bangladeshi girls who are often named after pet birds. Popular names for boys, however, denote courage and leadership. Aziz, 1989:60

[16] Ahmed A S., 1988:45

3.4 Effects of *Purdah*

The consequences of the custom of purdah for society are many and varied. It has far-reaching effects on education, healthcare, economy, politics, culture and architecture. It is integral to such other aspects of society as the evaluation of status, the ownership and inheritance of property, the arrangement of marriages, the division of labour, and impulse control.[17] For the purposes of this study, however what needs to be considered in detail is what Hanna Papanek has termed the "separate world" of women in a *purdah* society, both in physical and social terms.

The separate world of women determines her role and status in society, her lifecycle changes, her activities and her access to different institutions. All these, in turn, are implemented by rules about the organization of living space and affect her use of space.

3.4.1. Status, Role and Lifecycle Changes

Women's use of space (both private and public) has to be understood within the context of society's definition of male and female roles and behaviour appropriate to each.[18] The strictly patriarchal society of South Asia, together with the *purdah* system determines the role and status of a woman, which are separate and distinct from the social roles assigned to men. This sharp dichotomy virtually eliminates any opportunity for women to assume roles other than wife and mother.[19]

The status and position of a woman changes as her life progresses. A girl in her parental home passes through infancy, childhood and adolescence. After marriage, she moves to her husband's home and passes through the different phases of her adult life, as daughter-in-law, mother, mother-in-law and grandmother. Women in their different life phases have different activities, as well as different degrees of freedom and adherence to *purdah*.[20] Lifecycle changes are directly affected by social status, regional differences and economic conditions. However, there is a general pattern, which is described below:

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[17] Papanek, 1973:5

[18] Sinha, 1989b:68

[19] Smock, 1977:92-93

[20] Nath, 1981:14

The birth of a girl is often greeted with gloom. In a society where sons signify honour and assets for the family and security in old age, a daughter is less valued, though not necessarily less loved. In the parental home, when a girl usually reaches the age of nine or ten, or in some families till the onset of puberty, certain restrictions are imposed on her. She is no longer allowed to play with boys or to roam about the neighbourhood. Gradually she is confined to the female part of the house and rarely leaves the house unescorted. Whether she goes to the fields for natural functions or to fetch water or fuel, she is usually accompanied by a sibling or friend.

In South Asian countries there is a tradition of early marriage for females, often in their early teens. The system of arranged marriage which prevails in South Asia is clearly related to the *purdah* system, which generally prevents the development of relationships between young people which could lead to a marriage other than one arranged by parents.[21] A Muslim marriage takes the form of a civil contract signed by the two sides and may include specific restrictions agreed upon by the two sides. The marriage service itself is simple, consisting of an offer and an acceptance by the two parties to the marriage, but preceded and followed by fairly well established rituals in a given cultural area. The wife is entitled to receive a sum of money or property from her husband at the time of marriage which is known as *mahr*. This sum is usually divided into an amount which is paid immediately and a sum which is deferred to the dissolution of the marriage by death or divorce. Divorce is allowed in Islam, but in actual practice it is very much frowned on, at least in the middle class.[22] Dowry in cash or kind, to be paid by the bride's family to the groom, has become a common fixture among Muslims in South Asia, although this system is not sanctioned by Islam. Disagreements about dowry or non-payment often leads to violence towards women and abandonment.

After marriage, as a daughter-in-law, a woman has the special responsibility to uphold the family name, which she does by meticulously observing the norms of *purdah*. A new bride observes purdah more rigorously than she will ever do in her life. She avoids the presence of even close family members like elder brothers-in law and the father-in-law. She is also expected to wait on everyone and work harder than other females in the family. Her use of space at home and her

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[21] Papanek, 1973:40

[22] Papanek, 1973:24-25

restricted use of public areas must be understood within the hierarchical structure of the patriarchal family.[23]

A young married couple must appear completely uninterested toward each other when they are in the presence of others. A gradual development of personal attachment is expected, as is indicated by the provision of periods of residence of the girl in her natal home after marriage.[24] In some regions, in the early years of marriage, a girl spends longer periods in her natal home than with her husband in her affinal home.

Marriage alone does not automatically make a woman a member of her affinal family. By producing children, especially sons, she consolidates her position, becomes a real member of the family and attains her status within.[25] Once she has borne a child, she is likely to reduce some of her veiling, such as veiling before her mother-in-law.[26]

Before the birth of her first child a woman in some regions returns to her parents' home. Even when birth takes place in the husband's household, she goes to her parents' for a lengthy visit after the childbirth There in her familiar home she is a favoured, freer person. She is the daughter of the house and the village and she is allowed more freedom than in her unmarried state.[27] Her natal home is one of the few places a woman is expected to visit, and her natal family, with the permission of her in-laws, occasionally takes her home on visits.

After birth of a few children and as she grows older, she gains more freedom and power in the family set-up As a mother-in-law, she controls the behaviour and mobility of younger females in the family and supervises their work. The senior females in a two- or three-generation household are reputed to have considerable influence over family affairs.[28] They no longer avoid certain

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[23] Sinha, 1989b:75

[24] Mandelbaum, 1970:87; Papanek, 1973:40

[25] Abdullah and Zeidenstein, 1978:25

[26] Jacobson (1970) quoted in Mandelbaum, 1988:5

[27] Mandelbaum, 1970:88

[28] Smock, 1977:98

members of the family, move about more freely in the neighbourhood and even speak to strangers if necessary.

3.4.2 Social Class, Status and Purdah

One of the indigenous features of the Muslim society in South Asia is its class structure. This is in direct conflict with the Islamic ideal of social equality and is considered by many writers to have been influenced by the general principles of the Hindu caste society. Traditionally Indian Muslims have been categorized into two major classes: the *Ashraf* and the *Ajlaf*. The *Ashraf*, who are the elite and are said to be descendants of either the Prophet's family or of invaders or preachers from the Middle East, contain four subgroups, the *Sayyad*, *Shaikh*, *Pathan* and *Moghul*. The *Ajlaf* or non-*Ashrafs* are considered descendants of local converts and are divided into several occupational subgroups, such as *Julahas* (weavers), *Mirasis* (singers), *Darzis* (tailors), *Telis* (oil pressers), *Fakirs* (mystic beggars), and so on.[29] Intermarriage and social mixing among the two groups was almost nonexistent until very recently. Although this grouping is referred to by many writers as Muslim "castes," these groups have none of the rigidity of the Hindu caste system. According to Shibani Roy, among contemporary Muslims these group names hold little meaning besides serving as family names.[30]

The division between *Ashraf* and non-*Ashraf* strata of Muslims is clearly reflected in their attitudes towards women. The *Ashraf* concept of a woman is derived entirely from her role as wife and mother and is garnished with the traditional feminine virtues of pre-marital virginity, beauty, tenderness, modesty, self-denial, graciousness, sensivity and devotion to the family. *Ashraf* women are expected to adhere to *purdah* which curtails their freedom to move around. Non-*Ashraf* women do not as a rule observe strict *purdah* and their movement is less restricted. And since *purdah* is one of the insignia of respectability, these women are considered less respectable than *Ashraf* women While they play the role of wives and mothers, they are also partners in the daily struggle for earning a livelihood, and the harder the struggle, the greater is the importance of women as a partner in work.[31]

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[29] Sinha, 1989b:89

[30] Roy S., 1970:16

[31] Bhatty, 1980:201-203

In areas where the *Ashraf*, non-*Ashraf* divisions do not apply or are obsolete, for example in Bangladesh and parts of Pakistan, a similar structure however is evident in the social hierarchy. Social classes are based on feudal landholdings and occupations. But virtually all classes in the social hierarchy continue to associate *purdah* with respectability and status and to endorse its principles of the separation of sexes and feminine modesty. Women from the poorer class, are less restricted by *purdah* due to practical considerations and because they lack the status that *purdah* represents. Nevertheless, these women, too, attempt to adhere to accepted standards of feminine modesty in behaviour and dress.[32]

Purdah is a way a family signals its economic superiority. At the same time, *purdah* commands respect in a way wealth alone cannot, because of its religious connotations and since it is considered good behaviour from a religious point of view. In every village, only a few affluent homes can afford to provide conditions for women to observe strict *purdah*, but most villagers look to these homes as the most prestigious and respected, an honour to the village, and to this way of life for the women to be most desirable.[33]

Traditionally a family that improved its financial position would attempt to enhance its social standing by placing women in a stricter compliance with the rules of female seclusion. For example, Bhatty found that while upper class *Ashraf* Muslims in Kasauli, Uttar Pradesh, due to education and urbanization, were moving toward a more liberal attitude, the non-*Ashrafs* were becoming more conservative and were trying to emulate those very traditional customs of *Ashraf* society which the *Ashrafs* themselves were giving up. There was a marked tendency among those non-*Ashraf* families who have done relatively well to put their women in *purdah* and to withdraw them from the family work force.[34] It is important to consider that in conditions of poverty, women work because they must, and not because they find in it a means for greater freedom, economic independence or self-expression. The preference for farmer's wives to withdraw from agricultural labour if they can afford to, is as much due to the degrading nature of manual work as to the effects of being seen outside the home.

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[32] Smock, 1977:94-95; Abdullah and Zeidenstein, 1978:56

[33] Abdullah and Zeidenstein, 1978:56

[34] Bhatty, 1980:205

There is a considerable difference between the separate worlds of Muslim women of different classes who observe *purdah*. The upper class women's secluded world has its share of ceremonies, comforts, friendships, enjoyments and household servants. Other classes are not so fortunate. Elizabeth Bumiller, in her study of a Hindu village near Dehli describes the *purdah* practices of women from different socio-economic groups and the status thus indicated:

> If a woman belonged to one of the upper or middle castes, she was confined within the walls of her home to isolation and hard work. An upper caste woman - Shusheela Bajpai - left her house about once a month usually for shopping in Lucknow or to see her friends. She covered her face with her sari until she was beyond the limits of her village and the neighbouring villages. Only outside these limits was she freed by her anonymity. The other extreme was Sudevi, a fifty year old widow from one of the lowest castes. She worked in the fields as hired labour or carried water for the rich families. Many days she was forced to beg at the big landowners' houses. Between these two extremes was Asha Devi, the twenty-year old wife of a son in a prosperous middle-caste farming family. She neither enjoyed the status of the Brahmin landowner's wife, nor suffered the miseries of Sudevi. Yet in some ways her life combined the worst of both worlds. She had married into a hardworking family that was on its way up and its members kept her in *purdah* to further enhance their position in the conmmunity. Keeping women off the land had always been a mark of distinction, as soon as a family could afford it, the women were brought indoors. Predictably it was often these striving families, to consolidate their precarious new positions within the village hierarchy, who secluded their women most rigidly. Asha Devi led an even more cloistered life than Shusheela Bajpai and with none of Shusheela's relative luxuries as compensation. Asha Devi left the house only two or three times a year, to see her mother. The rest of the time she lived as a virtual servant in her in-law's home.[35]

3.4.3 Division of Labour

The separate worlds of men and women in a *purdah* society involve a sharp division of labour. Within most residential units, work is divided, with males typically earning a living outside the family home, while females take charge of the domestic sphere. One of the major consequences of this highly specific and strict division of labor is that it leads to a high degree of interdependence between men and women.[36]

Among many village families, and in some urban families of the lower socioeconomic groups, women make major contributions to the family resources through their labour in the fields, on construction projects and other tasks. But in most households it is the males who have prime responsibility for providing sustenance to the family.

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[35] Bumiller, 1990:78-79

[36] Papanek, 1973.32

The *purdah* system also affects the work loads of woman by making some tasks usually associated with housework impossible for them. Male family members often buy the daily food supplies. In villages, children may be sent on some errands by their *purdah*-observing mothers. In this sense, the *purdah* system shifts to men some of the work which is elsewhere considered "women's work."[37]

Since the division of labour among women affects the way women use space, it is important to examine the distribution of power within the domestic domain. Usually, when a daughter-in-law enters a household she takes over most of the domestic tasks formerly done by her mother-in-law. At that time, the mother-in-law takes up family tasks outside the home. In a study of Muslim women in Uttar Pradesh there was also a division of household responsibilities among non-*Ashraf* families who had improved their economic situation. Among such families, the daughter-in-law who was formerly working the oilpress or self-employed as a vendor in the village streets withdrew into purdah to become a prestige symbol while her mother-in-law continued to work outside the home.[38]

3.4.4 Women's Work and Income

In a Pakistani village, where women are secluded, Khan(1976) reports that:

> A typical village woman works for fourteen hours on a normal day, i.e a day outside the hectic harvesting or sowing seasons. Of these fourteen hours, at least five hours a day are spent in animal care, collecting, carrying and preparing fodder. Other major daily activities are milking and churning, cooking and carrying food to the fields. Planting, harvesting and processing seasons intensify the physical chores of the village women During the wheat harvest for example, women spend about ten hours a day in the fields. They help their husbands in rice transplanting and sowing. Picking cotton and chillies are also major annual activities. Women living in mud houses have to renovate them twice a year after the end of the rainy season.[39]

All these duties are in addition to child-care which is totally the domain of women. Women elsewhere in South Asia carry similar work-loads and work long hours, much longer than males. Nelson cites studies that show that Bangladesh women work between 13.6 to 17.6 hours, while in

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[37] Papanek, 1973:28-29

[38] Bhatty, 1980:21

[39] Quoted by Nelson, 1979:41

Uttar Pradesh women worked 17 to 18 hours a day.[40]

The extent to which women work in the fields outside the home varies by class, region, type of *purdah* observed. On the whole, only the poorest women will be seen working in the fields (or in road or construction work in towns and cities).[41] In South Asia there are strong regional differences to be found in the way that women participate in economic activities outside the home. Albrect (1974) maintains that in Peshawar District of Pakistan, it is unheard of women of child-bearing age to do field work. S.Ahmed (1960), talking about Pakistan in general, claims that women's work in sowing and harvesting is as important as that of men's and the largest proportion of the women labour force are in agricultural occupations. In Bangladesh, however, women's labour in fields is rare - it is the exception rather than the rule. Bangladesh women also have one of the lowest reported economic participation in the world.[42] Gulati (1975) points out that there is a definite trend towards higher female participation in work outside the home as one goes from north to south and from east to west in South Asia.[43]

Because of cultural definitions of employment considered appropriate for women, women tend to cluster to a limited range of occupations in the sex-segregated labour market, which have low status and are poorly paid As a consequence of the concentration of women in a limited range of occupations, women are forced to compete with other women for limited job opportunities and this also has the effect of driving down the wage rate.[44] Largely because of cultural perceptions regarding the mobility of women in the public domain, women have a decided preference for self-employment at home. However, the preference to work at home places these women outside the scope of protective legislation and opens them to systematic exploitation. In a study of women in North India, Sharma found that the preference for tailoring in the home forced women to accept much lower remuneration than tailors who sat and stitched in the village shops. As Sharma points out, "women literally pay for their public invisibility;" and, because they have to depend on a male

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[40] Nelson, 1979:40

[41] Papanek, 1973.29

[42] Smock, 1977:107

[43] Nelson, 1979:32

[44] de Souza, 1980:7

intermediary, they become more vulnerable to exploitation.[45]

3.4.5   Access to Institutions

A.S.Ahmed writes about Pukhtun society in Pakistan:

> Women are excluded from traditional and central prestige-conferring Pukhtun institutions such as the council of elders (*jirga*), the village guest room (*hujra*), the war party (*lakhar*) or the sectional chieftainship (*maliki*). They are even excluded from certain rights accorded them by Islam: for instance, they are given in marriage without their consent, ...literally sold for a straight bride price; ... there is no written marriage contract, they cannot claim any form of divorce compensation, they cannot inherit any land, or divorce their spouse.....They rarely, if ever, go to the market. Men shop and provide household necessities.[46]

Purdah practices have made it difficit for women in South Asia to engage in public, political or economic processes which involve unrelated men, effectively excluding them from village institutions Any participation in the formal and judicial process of the village is rendered extremely difficult in so far as these processes are public and open.

The *sarpanch* (chief) of a village in Uttar Pradesh reported with pride that women hardly brought cases to the *panchayat* (village council)   He claimed that he or one of his colleagues would visit a woman with a complaint and would endeavour to persuade her to obtain some kind of settlement outside the *panchayat*. It would be a source of shame to the community, he said, if women were obliged to come and settle their disputes in a public space.[47]

Women are also excluded from the market economy. The marketing of farm produce is often entirely in the hands of men. The open market has connotations of being an indecent place for women to be in. In Bangladesh, the term "*bajarer meye*" or "woman of the market," is synonymous with a woman of loose morals. It is also worth noting that the interpretation of the *purdah* ideal in some parts of India debars women from a means of making a small income which is very important in other areas, namely petty trading and hawking. In some parts of India one does see women hawking vegetables and other goods, but this is unusual in northwest India, being totally at variance

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[45] Sharma quoted in de Souza, 1980:11

[46] Ahmed S. and Z., 1981:31-32

[47] Sharma, 1980:235

that women should not be seen conducting business in public [48]

Women do not visit mosques, where apart from communal prayers, discussions are held about matters affecting day-to-day affairs of the village. Women do not congregate in this manner. The major Islamic feasts are celebrated by men by congregating in the mosque, but the participation of women is limited to cooking for the feast.

In most rural families, education is not considered necessary for females. Often a religious education is the only education a female child receives, as knowledge of the scriptures and religious regulations is considered an asset in a girl of marriageable age. The reluctance to educate girls stems from several factors. First, since most marriages in South Asia are virilocal, the education of a girl is a financial loss to her natal family. Secondly a girl's labour in the household and childcare may be very important, especially in families where women have to spend a portion of the day in the fields [49] It made more sense to educate boys who would remain with their parents and support them in their old age. Also, the absence of schools exclusively for girls in rural areas further hampers their chances of receiving an education. The requirement of young girls to remain within a female environment discourages their school attendance after attaining puberty.

3.4.6 Women's Social Networks

In their separate worlds, women's social networks run parallel to those of men.[50] This informal network acts as a support group and helps women to overcome emotional, social or economic crises The rich-poor client-patron relationships are part of this network. Women must learn to manipulate this network and teach this skill to their daughters. Vreede de Stuers notes that,

> "Women of any country have a world of their own that remains terra incognita to the men because they do not and can never know its rules. Yet every girl automatically learns these rules as she grows up, and the adult woman perfects them and evolves a network of special feminine relationships from which men are excluded."[51]

Yet women of the *purdah* society appear more dependant on their social networks than women

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[48] Sharma, 1980:236

[49] Anwar(1976) quoted in Nelson, 1979:38

[50] Nelson reports concealed banking systems conducted on a surprisingly large scale by women of wealthy merchant families in Taiwan. Nelson, 1979:71

[51] Vreede de Stuers, 1969:43

elsewhere, as often this is the only network that they can fall back upon. Naveed-e Rahat reports that in NWFP society, the females deal with the basic network of kin relationships. These networks are very complex and it is women who manipulate them.[52] Sinha reports that female networks represent a considerable source of information for arranging marriage matches, assessment of family wealth and keeping track of relatives - information which has a considerable impact on decisions made by men and social relations among them. Thus women, though confined to their private sphere, can exercise considerable influence through their own networks.[53]

3.5   Rural Housing

The typical form of the dwelling in the *purdah* zone is the courtyard-type house, where rooms open onto a central courtyard, with a closed appearance towards the street. About the Bangladeshi Muslim house, Sattar writes, " The very shape...with its inward facing houses, its bamboo and straw screens .... is an expression of *purdah*."[54] Contrasting the dwelling form in South India (outside the *purdah* zone), Rapoport writes, "It is interesting that in South India, where Muslim influence with regard to purdah is less common, the court is used less frequently and the houses are more open."[55]

The elements of a house are either parts of a unified structure or may be structurally independent units grouped together. The arrangement can be compact, as in the hot and dry climate of Pakistan and parts of Northern India, or loose as in the humid climate of Bangladesh.

This housing form is organized on the principle of gender segregation in space. David Mandelbaum writes, "Within the household, men and women often live, for the greater part, in separate places. They sleep in separate rooms or on separate sides of the hut; they relieve themselves in separate fields or locations; they sit apart at all social or religious occasions."[56]

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[52] Naveed-e-Rahat, 1981:70-72

[53] Sinha, 1989b:74

[54] Sattar, 1975:44

[55] Rapoport, 1969:66

[56] Mandelbaum, 1988.4. Although gender-segregated spaces in Muslim houses are being discussed here, Sharma suggests that the reservation of certain portions of the home or even separate buildings for men, and the limitation of male access to that part of the home meant

3.5.1 Elements of the House

In general, rural dwellings are seen as being divided into *mardana* (male) and *zenana* (female) territories, with control by the respective sex group.[57] (Fig 10 & 11) How strongly marked the separation will be depends on the size of the house and the status of the inhabitants.

Fig. 10 Male and Female Zones (After Sinha, 1989b)   Fig. 11. Rural House (After Jamal, 1989)
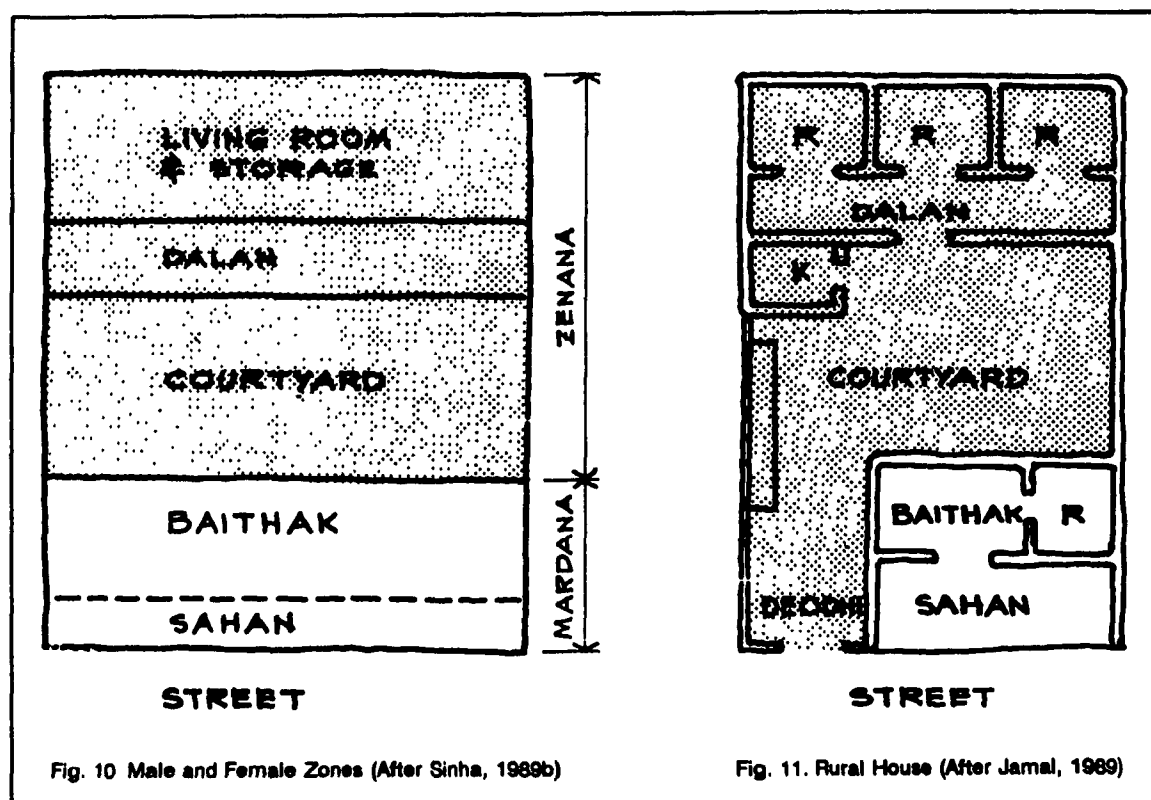
Mardana: Men spend most of their time in their own quarters, which occupy the front of the house and are directly accessible from the street. They are usually made up of the *baithak*, the room where males relax, sleep and receive guests, and the *sahan*, the transitional open space between the house and the street. The *baithak* may be a regular room, a separate structure, a platform or a veranda, or among the poor, just a cot set outside the house. There the men talk, smoke, work,

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primarily for women's activities is a marked feature of spatial arrangements in Hindu dwelling places as well. Sharma, 1980:227

[57] Sinha, 1989b:23. In Hindukush or the Karakoram and other places where the topography has given rise to terraced housing, usually one level is reserved for women. Herms, 1987:32

lounge, entertain, sleep and a woman rarely sets foot.[58]

In poor households, there may not be a separate room for males, but a symbolic dividing line is achieved by stringing a curtain across the family room.[59] Vreede de Stuers describes a village near Dehli, where most houses consist of one or two simple windowless rooms opening onto the veranda which leads to the inner courtyard. The animals are housed with the family, sometimes all together in a single room. If there are two rooms, one is reserved for the women and children, the other for the men and their animals.[60]

The *baithak* also functions as the status symbol of the household and the wealthier prefer to have a detached *baithak*. The outer area along with the baithak have storage spaces for agricultural implements and animal fodder. *Baithak-cum-gher* (cattleshed) is mostly associated with the wealthier farmers; and in many instances non-agricultural families (black-smiths, potters, etc.) combine their *baithak*s with their workshops.[61] In the villages of Punjab and Baluchistan, there may even be a separate men's house in one part of the locality or in the family compound of a leading villager, where they spend most of their leisure time and are often also reported to sleep.[62] Mumtaz mentions the *hujra*, a male guest house in the walled tribal villages of NWFP in Pakistan. These tribal clan compounds, which hold upto twenty courtyard houses, are fortified by walls and controlled entrance gates. The *hujra* is an essential part of every compound, consisting typically of a few guest rooms, a courtyard and a bath. It is normally the first courtyard to be entered from the main gate.[63]

Zenana: The women of the household remain apart in a courtyard and inner rooms where they

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[58] Mandelbaum, 1988:4

[59] Sinha, 1989:71

[60] Vreede de Stuers, 1969:80

[61] Jamal, 1989:64

[62] Papanek, 1973:9

[63] Mumtaz, 1983:38

carry on domestic and child-rearing tasks and in general spend most of their lives.[64] The *zenana* consists of the interior rooms at the back of the house, the *dalan* - a covered veranda between the rooms and the *aagan* (courtyard). The courtyard is used for various household activities like cooking and washing and drying of clothes and grain. The women of the village prefer to cook in the open, although an alternative enclosed and sheltered kitchen is provided for inclement weather. In houses with flat roofs, the roof too is used by women for various household activities and to entertain friends. Visual and verbal contact with other women from adjacent terraces is easy and frequent, and supervision of children is facilitated. In compact settlements, roofs are usually connected and women use the roofs as circulation space to visit in the neighbourhood. Sometimes a big curtain is hung on the roof so that visitors of both genders can enjoy the cool night air.[65]

In fair weather the interior open spaces are used by the women for sleeping, while the men often sleep in the *sahan* or on the street. In winter the *baithak* is used by men while the women use the interior room or the *dalan* for sleeping. Married couples usually use one of the rooms in the night or may have a screened secluded corner of the veranda for themselves. The interior rooms are mostly used for storing grains and family belongings.[66]

Men spend most of their time outside the house or in the *baithak* and come into the courtyard only for specific purposes - "to take his meals, to do necessary chores, to exchange communications, and to share a bed briefly and quietly in the still of the night."[67] On entering the female quarters, men announce their arrival by clearing their throats or calling out so that women may assume respectful poses, keep their faces turned or covered. Men are aware of being in female territory and

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[64] Herms mentions two traditional sayings describing the extent of women's confinement to the home: "A woman is either in the house or in the grave." and " A woman leaves a house only twice - once to get married and once on the shoulders of pall-bearers." Herms, 1987:33

[65] Herms, 1987:33

[66] Jamal, 1989:65

[67] Mandelbaum, 1988:4. In Punjab, the timings of visits to the wife's bed may be controlled by an older woman in the family. For example, in a Punjab joint family, it was customary for the men to be given a glass of buttermilk each evening by the oldest woman in the family. The man who did not get his buttermilk knew that it was his turn to go to his wife, while the other men slept in the men's house. Papanek, 1973:31

heap ridicule upon those who spend too much time there.[68] Messages to women are commonly carried in by children so that the courtyard need not be immobilized by the entrance of an elder male. Women do not encourage the men of the family to linger in their space. It inconveniences them and discomforts any women who may come to visit.[69]

Sanitary Facilities: Toilets are usually absent in the rural houses. The villagers use the fields or growth of shrubs to defecate   Even among the wealthy, toilets are not frequently found in houses.[70] Amita Sinha, in her study of a village in the urban fringes of Dehli, found that when toilets were present they were often part of the male part of the house, so that if visitors needed to use the facilities, they need not enter the female quarters.[71] (Fig 12) Men bathe at the village well or the village tank while women use some corner of the house or courtyard. There may be a small screened enclosure for this purpose.

Entrance: Entrances to the house are usually indirect or constructed in a way to obstruct vision into the courtyard, emphasizing the separation of public and private domains. In some areas the entrance is an enclosed space known as the *deodhi*, where men wait before being permitted to enter the *zenana*. Usually houses also have back or side entrances which are used by the women. Often there are doors directly leading into neighbour's houses, so that women can visit each other without having to use the public streets. (Fig 13)

3.5.2   Evolution and Organization of Dwellings

Houses in village and rural settings are usually not completely built all at once, but over an appreciable period of time. Construction is phased, as rooms are built to meet the additional requirements of the growing family and as finance permits. This development process is thus an

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[68] Sinha, 1989:71. Among farmers in Uttar Pradesh, the house is entered by men only at mealtimes and occasionally at night for sexual relations. Otherwise a "manly" man will pass his leisure time in the *baithak* or in some other private or semi-public gathering of men. Vatuk, 1973.72

[69] Mandelbaum, 1988:6

[70] Jamal, 1989:65

[71] Sinha, 1989b:22

organic one; as the family grows so does the house.[72]

More than one household may occupy one house, while retaining separate cooking spaces. Such households are usually closely inter-related. In this case family units are arranged around a common courtyard; the baithak too is shared by the households.

The size and form of the house varies according to affluence. A rich family's house would probably have specific rooms for the various activities. A poor family may survive within a walled compound with a single room and a courtyard shared equally by man and beast while the houses of the more affluent have a more elaborate layout; in both cases the essentials are same.[73] (Fig 14 and 15)

3.5.3 Organization of the Village

Mumtaz mentions that in the feudal villages of Punjab and Sindh land is the basis for the feudal society prevailing there. Traditionally no member of the labouring and artisan class was allowed to own land. Almost every village has a distinct sector or precinct set apart for these occupational classes. In addition it is not uncommon to find the sector of villages occupied by the land-owning classes, further sub-divided into neighbourhoods or mohallas, each associated with the ethnic group, tribe or clan of its inhabitants.[74] In many villages of the plains, the dark angular form of burnt brick structure towers over the humbler sun-dried earth huts of peasants, symbolising the domination of the landlord over the country around. The vast difference between rich and poor is in direct contrast to the tribal villages in NWFP and Baluchistan where villages usually consist of clan compounds with none of the individual houses displaying any discernible marks or symbols of social distinction. This reflects the tribal egalitarianism, manifest in every aspect of tribal custom.[75]

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[72] Jamal, 1989:62

[73] Jamal, 1989:64

[74] Shoenauer points out that in oriental cultures, residential precincts represent commonalities or solidarities based on ethnicity, religious affiliations, occupations or some other form of association, but they do not represent homogeneous income-groups. These precincts are in direct contrast to the economically stratified residential neighbourhoods of occidental culture. Shoenauer, 1981:254

[75] Mumtaz, 1983:29,32
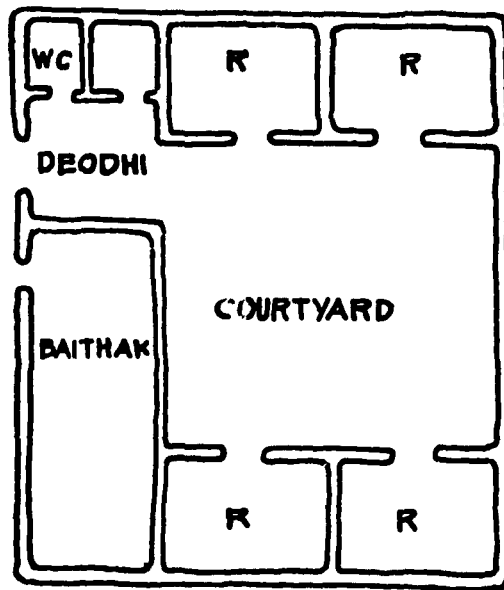
Fig. 12. Toilets in Male Zone (After Sinha, 1989b)
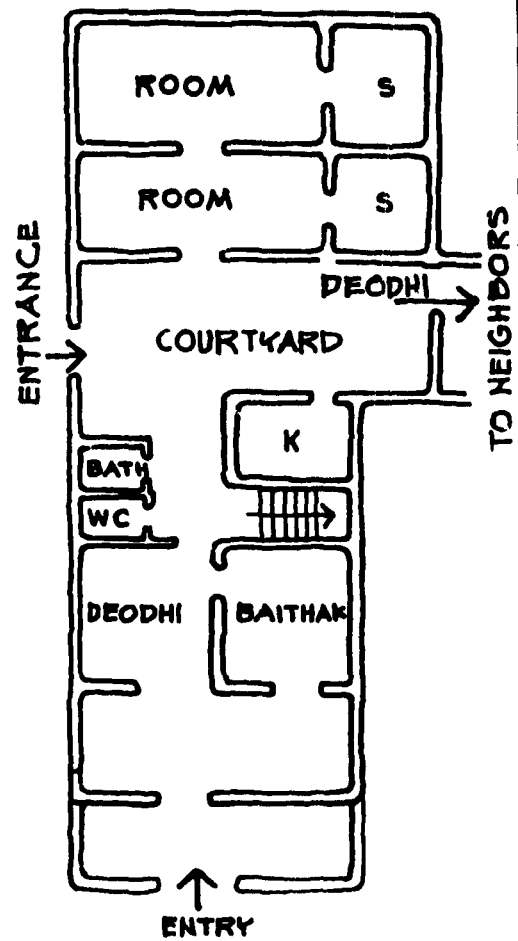
Fig. 13. Internal Entrance to Neighbour's House
(After Sinha, 1989b)
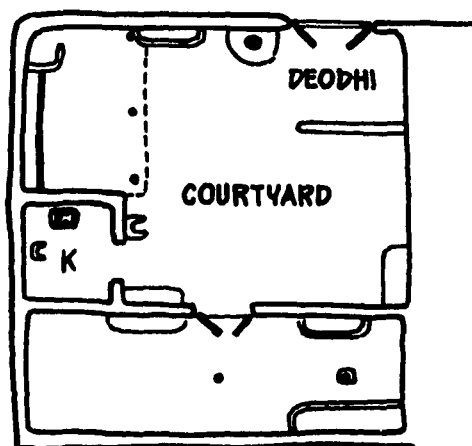
Fig. 14. Poor Family's Dwelling (After Mumtaz, 1983)
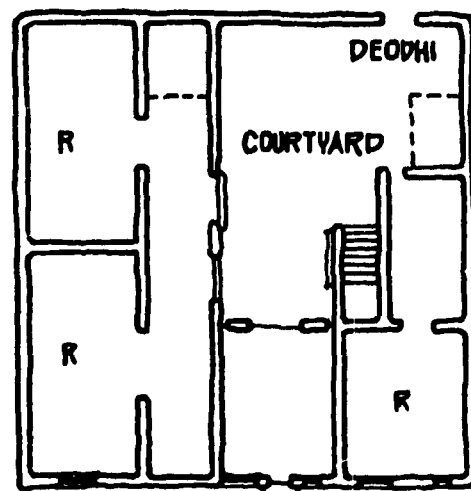
Fig. 15. Affluent Family's Dwelling (After Jamal, 1989)

Sinha also indicates that social relations in a village shape housing pattern and settlement form. The neighbourhoods in the village that she studied were kinship clusters and displayed a close congruence between the spatial distribution of the houses and kinship ties.[76]

3.5.4 *Purdah* and Public Space[77]

The public and private worlds in a village can be equated with male and female spheres respectively. Public areas in general are considered to be male preserves and women's use is conditional to necessity and discretion. Their demeanour in public areas is marked with self-consciousness and hesitation. Sharma writes,

> Women experienced a sense of unease in public places which was sufficient to inhibit their behaviour. The sense of being "out of place"... is enough to ensure that women go about their business discreetly and then return home briskly when it is done. Their appearance in public is conditional - upon discreet behaviour and having some specific business. They cannot use the public space in the casual manner permitted to men.[78]

In the village, public areas are graded according to their "publicness," which determines their degree of use or avoidance by women. Women experience public space as divided into zones of differential danger or risk. This can be the danger of real or symbolic violation or the risk of losing one's reputation, for women these dangers pose an obstacle to the uninhibited use of public space.

In Harbassi, a village in Punjab studied by Sharma, the areas which women avoided included the bazaar, the grain depot and wholesale vegetable market; the main road which runs right through the village, and is lined with public buildings such as offices, schools, a library, etc These public areas are acknowledged to be male preserves, women often had to venture into them but would not linger there longer than their business obliged them to. The bazaar, specially, is felt to hold moral danger for women in the sense that they invite sexual attention from men, which can result in teasing, rude remarks and bold staring. Women will often take circuitous paths to visit, rather than take a busy main road or bazaar.

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[76] Sinha, 1989b:1

[77] This is also the title of a paper by Ursula Sharma, in which she describes the of the conventions which control the use of social space by women in N.India. See Sharma,1980:213

[78] Sharma, 1980:218-219

The network of back alleys between the bazaar and the main road was felt to be less public and women did not mind being seen there. Most could reach the houses of friends or kin via these backstreets without crossing the more public areas. These lanes were freely used as they did not have the same inferior moral connotations as the bazaar. Similarly, the footpaths and bylanes which linked the village with its surrounding hamlets were also felt to be less dangerously public for women, even though they were quite public in the sense that anyone could use them.

Agricultural land is social space of yet another type. Many women are obliged to work in the fields. Sharma found that the wives of rich farmers would sometimes visit their estates either for relaxation or to help their husbands to supervise operations. These outings were not undertaken very often, but there was a feeling that one's land was so much a projection of one's own domestic space that one had as much right to be seen there as one had in one's own courtyard.[79]

Another category of social space which is evaluated in quite a different way is the jungle. The term "jungle" refers to any uncultivated ground; it need not be actual forest. This space is used for a number of purposes, such as grazing and collection of fodder for cattle and collection of fuel. As these are predominantly female activities, women are obliged to use this space, but there is a feeling that the jungle is not a good place to linger in and that it is potentially dangerous.[80] In essence, her own home is the only place where a woman is safe. She ventures outside this private space at her own risk.[81]

There are a few spaces outside the home that are essentially women's spaces. If women frequent a path to the well, it becomes "private" or women's path. Men are supposed to avoid using it specially during the time women use it.[82] This is one of the few public spaces where women are relatively free and uninhibited and where they congregate to gossip and socialize. A similar social space in Bangladesh is the pond where women bathe and wash clothes.

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[79] Sharma, 1980:220-221. In Bangladesh, however, agricultural space is considered as exclusive "male" space. Women rarely work on fields and many women have never even seen the family land or land that they own themselves.

[80] Sharma, 1980:223

[81] This definition of public space as essentially male territory is not peculiar to Islamic cultures. In many western urban areas, ther are streets which are effectively "no-go" areas for women; that is, women who enter such streets at night do so at their own risk. Sharma, 1980:224

[82] Ahmed A.S., 1988:34

Women effectively take their walled courtyards with them when they venture out in a veil.[83] It is a logical supplement to the use of enclosed living spaces and enables women to move out of these spaces in a kind of portable seclusion.[84] The *burqa* is less used in rural areas. The usual way of observing purdah in the village is by a strict dress code where the head and breasts are covered by a piece of cloth or the end of the sari, often pulled forward to obscure the face - this is known as *ghungat*. If a woman must go out to work on the fields or to fetch water, her demeanour is so reserved, that it is as effective as wearing a *burqa*.[85] As Ruth Woodsmall notes, "Although women in Pakistan rural areas mostly do not wear the *burqa*, the *purdah* psychology of segregation has prevailed, and conservatism, which dominates the life of village girls and women, is a positive force."[86] Papanek describes two villages in Punjab studied by Zekiye Eglar in 1960, where women wore *burqas* only when they went out of the village. In the Bangladesh villages studied by McCarthy, on the other hand, the observance of *purdah* restrictions was much more stringent. Women were supposed to remain within the *bari* (homestead), where their household tasks lay. Between puberty and old age they were not to be seen by strangers, and therefore wore the *burqa* when leaving the bari.[87]

Public spaces are often enclosed so that secluded women may move in them as if they were private. Vehicles can be equipped with curtains, and separate compartments set aside in trains and buses.[88] Bangladeshi rural women travel in covered and curtained oxcarts or boats, or curtained rickshaws.

Several writers have mentioned the temporal zoning of public space, where the use of space shifts diurnally for men and women. Vreede de Stuers describes a village named Okhla near New Dehli, which she visited in the late afternoon, "when most household chores had been finished and before the animals came home prior to *Magreb* (evening) prayers. At this time of day the village appeared to belong to the women alone; the men were still at work in the fields or elsewhere. The women

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[83] In Pakistan a woman's space is defined literally as *chador* (veil) and *chardiwari* (four walls).

[84] Papanek, 1973:1

[85] Vreede de Stuers, 1969.63

[86] Woodsmall, quoted in Vreede de Stuers, 1969:63

[87] Papanek, 1973:2

[88] Papanek, 1973:9

were uncovered and they did not veil themselves when they left their compound to visit another house. When all the men return towards the time of the evening prayer, the village retains its masculine appearance. The easy atmosphere among women yields to the relaxation of the men."[89]

In describing the temporal zoning in the use of public space in walled compounds of tribal villages of Peshawar district (Pakistan), Mumtaz writes,

> A network of narrow lanes runs between the two gates at the opposite ends of the sector. Each gate, with heavy wooden doors, controls the entrances to the sector from two parallel streets. Within the walls the women move about freely, but any male, not a member of the family is strictly forbidden entry. Even clansmen may not enter a street within the walled sector unannounced. They are often preceded by a small boy calling out "take shelter" and only when the women have moved out of sight will an adult male proceed through the street.[90]

3.6   Summary of Findings

The lives of women in South Asia are governed by the institution of *purdah* at all levels. *Purdah* has many variations. The physical expressions of purdah are the concept of separate living quarters for women (*zenana*), veiling with an enveloping garment (*burqa/chadar*), covering of the face (*ghunghat*) and separate or curtained facilities and transportation. More enduring is the invisible *purdah* that restricts a woman's activities and regulates her behaviour, both in private and public spaces. Depending on the age and status of a woman, the institution of *purdah* affects her activities, mobility, opportunities for income, social relations and access to institutions. All this in turn affects her use of space.

The house, the neighbourhood and the village all are arranged in a hierarchical sequence of spaces which determine the extent of their use by women. The public and private spaces in a settlement can be equated with male and female spheres respectively. Women's private domain is their domestic space in the rural courtyard house. The courtyard house in South Asia is ideal in adapting to the social norms of *purdah*. In the walled courtyards women can be effectively screened from men while carrying on their various indoor and outdoor activities without hindrance. Inside their homes they are uninhibited, except before men they have to observe *purdah* from, and relatively free

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[89] Vreede de Stuers, 1969:81

[90] Mumtaz, 1983:38

to socialize with other women.

The use of public space by women, however, depends on necessity and discretion. Women experience public space as divided into zones of danger or risk and their use or avoidance of such space depends on their category. Although women are not excluded from public spaces, they cannot use public space in the casual manner permitted to men.

The literature review yielded varied and interesting data about segregation of women in South Asia and their living patterns. However, information of how these patterns relate to the use of space was often found to be indirect or incomplete. This necessitated a field study which would study these patterns in the setting of a rural community and provide a more comprehensive and detailed report of how purdah practices affect space use by women.

CHAPTER IV

4.0   FIELD RESEARCH STRATEGY

4.1   Introduction

The findings from the literature review formed a reference base for the field study, which was undertaken as a primary data source for this thesis. The main objective was to investigate the effect of purdah practices on the layout and organization of rural housing in an attempt to achieve an understanding of how this particular facet of the rural living pattern influences and is, in turn, influenced by its built environment.

The study was conducted during October/ November, 1991 for about a month. It consisted of
1) Fieldwork in the rural study area for three weeks plus a few days
2) One week in the capital Dhaka, collecting relevant literature and publications and discussions with professionals engaged in the field of rural housing and development for women.

4.2   Choice of Locale

The field research necessitated a case study in an Islamic country. Bangladesh, a country of more that a 100 million Muslims was chosen as the location for the field study. Several factors helpful to the study were taken in consideration for the choice of locale:

(1)   Population-wise, Bangladesh is one of the largest Muslim countries in the world. At the same time it is one of the poorest and least urbanized. In this country, I would be able to study the building traditions of a rural Muslim society with its own distinctive cultural identity. I would also be able to have an insight into the dynamics of poverty and religious regulations in the layout of a poor Muslim home - an important premise of my study.

(2)   As a native of the country, I would have the assets of knowledge of the language, familiarity with the cultural background, contacts with professionals in the field and access to relevant Bengali literature.

(3)   Last, but not least - as a woman, I would have the advantage of studying this segregated society from the closest possible range.

The main factor influencing the choice of the research site was that it should be in an area where the field work could be carried out in a safe manner and the time available could be utilized in the best possible way. In the uncertain political and law-and-order situation that presently prevails in

Bangladesh, it was imperative to choose an area where I already had a secure base and precious research time would not be squandered in trying to "set up shop."

Shampur, a rural area in the Chapai Nawabganj district, with which I was already familiar, was chosen as the site for the field study. (Fig. 16) To participate in village day-to-day affairs, to enter private homes and conduct interviews in a conservative society is not an easy task for a researcher without proper introductions and credentials. This particular aspect was made easy for me as I am related to some of the villagers by marriage. I had visited the village as a new bride and was already known well in a section of the village. As a kinswoman, I expected that access to the rest of the village and establishing a rapport should not prove difficult.

4.3   The Research Site

The village in Bangladesh has been called "a somewhat elusive unit."[1] Usually villages do not have recorded boundaries, but for administrative purposes rural Bangladesh is divided into Unions with defined limits.[2]

Each union is subdivided into a number of *mauzas* which consist of one or more villages. Shampur Union (pop 30,000) is divided into 10 *mauzas*, which in turn comprise 31 villages Two neighbouring *mauzas* named Bajitpur and Shadashivpur were selected as the research site. These two *mauzas*, in structure, spatial organization and function, were observed to be two complementary parts of a settlement surrounded by agricultural land.

Officially Bajitpur has 7 villages and Shadashivpur has 3 villages. In fact, some of the settlements within the mauzas are known as *para*[3] and others are called *gram* (village). Contrary to the official line, however, most villagers consider the two *mauzas* to be two adjoining villages with the individual *paras* scattered within. To avoid confusion, the villagers' delineation of the settlement was followed for the purpose of this study. (Fig. 17)

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[1] BRAC, 1986a·19

[2] These boundaries were often demarcated by colonial rulers for revenue collection purposes. Bangladesh is divided into more than 400 unions, each of which has about 20 villages. Hartman and Boyce, 1983 129

[3] A para is a section or enclave of a town or village. The names of these enclaves often represent a common occupation or kinship association of the residents

BANGLADESH

● Location of Research Site

Panchagarr
Thakurgaon
Nilphaman
Lalmonirhat
Rangpur
kurigram
Dina,pur
Gaibandha
Joypurhat
Sherpur
Sunamganj
Netrokona
Sylhet
Jamalpur
Naogaon
Bogra
Mymensingh
Moulvibazar
Nawabganj
Rajshahi
Serajganj
Kishoreganj
Habiganj
Natore
Tangail
Gazipur
Narshingdi
Pabna
Dhaka
Manikgonj
Brahmanbaria
Kushtia
Narayanganj
Meherpur
Rajbari
Comilla
Chuadanga
Munshiganj
Faridpur
Chandpur
Jhenadah
Magura
Shariatpur
Khagrachari
Madaripur
Narail
Lakshmipur
Feni
Jessore
Gopalganj
Chittagong Hill Tracts
Barisal
Noakhali
Perojpur
Chittagong
Bagerhat
Jhalokati
Bhola
Satkhira
Khulna
Patuakhali
Bandarban
Bar guna
Cox's Bazar

B A Y   O F   B E N G A L

0   23 Km   92 Km

Fig 16 Location of Research Site

1 Binpara
2 Enayet Biswas Tola
3. Chaipara
4. Bahadur Morol Tola
5. Puratan Gram
6 Nuton Gram
7. Chowdhurypara
8. Kamarpara
9. Nayeb Tola
10. Tikosh
11. Ajgubi
12. Kanapara

● Selected Homesteads

Fig 17 Site Map with Selected Households

4.4   Research Methodology

The format used in this study is known as exploratory research which has as its object "the exploration and clarification of some phenomena where accurate information is lacking and is intended to provide description as thorough as possible, often with a view to providing material and guidance for subsequent research."[4]

Due to obvious constraints of labour resources and time, it was decided not to attempt a statistical survey with a large representative sample of the study area. Instead a smaller sample was relied upon to generate a pattern which would serve as a basis for a descriptive analysis of the research problem.

The sampling unit was a homestead with one or more households. According to the Union Office there are 425 homesteads in Bajitpur and 380 in Shadashivpur. The total sample size was 60 homesteads (7.5% of the total).

4.4.1   Selection of Sampling Units

Stratified sampling methods were used, in which the population was broken up into several subgroups or strata (in this case different socio-economic groups) and separate samples were taken within each sub-group These samples were taken in the same proportion as the proportion of the subgroups in the total population following the "proportional stratified" sampling system.[5]

At first the different socio-economic groups of village society were identified. Because of the obvious constraints, it was not possible to attempt a census of the villages in order to determine the socio-economic make-up of the population. In the absence of reliable information as regards income (which in rural Bangladesh is often in kind rather than in cash), possession of landed wealth was taken as an indicator of social grouping. Land has traditionally been valued as the ultimate security in the subsistence agricultural economy of Bangladesh. Any surplus income is invested in land and it is disposed of only as a last resort. As ownership and use of land is the measure of wealth and status, this factor was taken as a basis of identifying the different groups in the social

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[4] Forcese and Richer, 1973:79

[5] Forcese and Richer, 1973:131

hierarchy.

After discussions with several long-time residents of the area, the following socio-economic levels were established:

Landlords - These are the descendants of the four original *zamindar* (feudal landlords) brothers, who came and settled in Bajitpur. Although the system of feudal land-ownership was abolished in 1950, these landlords still own the majority of agricultural land and mango groves in Shampur Union. They do not work on the land themselves but lease it out to tenants or sharecroppers. Supervision of tenants and management of their land and orchards is carried out by traditional caretakers known as the *dafadars*, who may be members of any of the following groups.

Surplus Farmers - They work on the fields themselves, but also hire labour or lease part of their land. Some of these rich farmers have stopped working on their fields as a sign of their improving wealth and status, but this group was not included in the "landlord" category as their status is not regarded as equal to the original landlord family.

Subsistence Farmers - These farmers live mainly by working on their own lands. Their produce is barely enough for their own consumption.

Marginal Peasants - This group owns some land, but not enough to support themselves. They earn their living mainly by working as sharecroppers and day labourers.

Landless labourers - They own no land except for their homesteads. They have to sell their labour on a daily basis in order to survive.

In the absence of census figures, the author relied on the estimation of various village heads regarding the size of the various groups. According to them, the percentage of landless is about 55-60%, landlords and surplus farmers about 8-10% and subsistence and marginal farmers constitute the rest of the population. Five village chiefs who were interviewed independently quoted these numbers. Consequently it was decided that the sample would roughly reflect these numbers. Taking into account the number of households that could be surveyed in a day - about 3 to 4 - it was decided to survey 60 homesteads in total. Of these, 35 were landless, 9 marginal farmers, 8 subsistence farmers, 5 surplus farmers and 3 landlords. However, random sampling could not be carried out because, in many instances, personal introductions served as a basis for choice of households. At other times, homesteads were chosen at random, but the socio-economic grouping of the household was assessed before commencing study of the homestead.

4.4.2   Focus of the Study

The mutual interdependance and social dichotomy between these segments of village society has led to an interaction between the groups which is simultaneously function-wise closeknit and status-wise divergent. To study the built environment of these separate groups, an understanding of their complex social structure is important. To narrow the focus, the study concentrated on the status and roles of the women of this village, their activities within and outside the home and their interaction with each other. A study of how women use and perceive their local spaces would give insight into the physical form and cultural structure of their built environment. It would indicate the extent of the influence of societal norms of segregation in local housing and would give valuable indications about how the built environment affects living patterns of women

4.4.3   Data Collection Tools

The method of data collection involved an ethnographic approach. Ethnographic research is a mixed data-collection process, consisting of observational techniques, participation, interviews (usually informal) and secondary information bases such as recorded history, oral traditions, physical artifacts and so on.[6] Although this approach involves "an intensive study of some given society," it was modified to accommodate the architectural research that forms the main focus of this study. Instead of an exhaustive study of the society in question, data gathering was limited to those aspects of social life which were relevant to the physical environment of women. Also, even though there is no question that "participation" is an important tool for research of this kind, for the architectural researcher equipped with prior training regarding the physical environment, a less intensive and less prolonged participation may be sufficient to recognize what Sinha terms "environmental behaviour."

Instead of a structured questionnaire, an open-ended interview guide (see Appendix 1) was prepared and used in informal interviews. This was more appropriate given the limited literacy of the respondents and also because of the close interaction that could take place between researcher and respondent. In almost all cases, female family members were interviewed in groups or individually, except in a few instances when male household heads deemed their wives too "ignorant" to be interviewed. Some male members were, however, interviewed in addition to the females, to get an understanding of male perspectives of female space use and behaviour. The interviews were

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[6] Forcese and Richer, 1973:148

unstructured and informal to allow the female respondents to discuss their living patterns and felt needs freely and at ease. Conversations were taped rather than noted down as this seemed less inhibiting and also saved time.

Key informants were consulted about the history of the village and about village life in general. Photographs and measured plans and sketches of house plan and furniture layout formed an important part of the study. At least two to three hours were spent in each homestead to allow enough time for friendly discussions and for observing the family activities at close range. Space use and avoidance by women were also observed and noted, not only within the homestead, but also in the neighbourhood. Women's perception of spaces and their cognition of their larger environment was taken into account. Access of women to educational, commercial, religious, legal and medical institutions in the villages and their surroundings were researched and noted.

4.4.4 Constraints of the study

The field study was hampered to a great extent by several constraints. Time constraints proved to be a crucial factor. It became evident that a much longer period of field work is needed for ethnographic-environmental research of this kind to achieve a more complete and comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

Being a member of the landlords' family imposed additional constraints on my role as a researcher. In many ways, I was expected to conform to standards of behaviour in keeping with my status in the social hierarchy. For example, it was my intention to spend a full day and night with a landless family. This suggestion was met with horror by my hosts. I had to be accompanied at all times by a female and a young male companion (to carry my materials), as walking about unescorted would be unacceptable. As I stayed in the landlord's enclave, I had more opportunity to observe their living patterns over a twentyfour-hour cycle, rather than those of the poorest villagers, which was the focus of the study. My "known" status sometimes proved to be a disadvantage in directly acquiring information about sensitive issues, such as family assets, religious practices, compliance to purdah norms, etc. Villagers were understandibly reluctant to impart such personal information to an "insider." Also, many of my questions seemed self-evident to my informants. As a member of the same culture, I was expected to know about certain aspects of their daily life. At times, some of their observations seemed designed to project a favourable image, rather than reality. My role as a participant observer (and access to secondary sources) overcame such disadvantages to some extent.

As a woman and moreover as a daughter-in-law, I had to abide by the general purdah conventions and behavioural norms of the village society, a fact that I could not afford to ignore. A breach of these norms would have offended the villagers and brought disrepute to my affinal family and affected their standing in the community. It was impossible to do any work after dark, as it was totally against social norms to be out at that time. Gathering information in public spaces, such as mosques, markets or eating places was out of the question. Although my status as a researcher and as an educated professional afforded me flexibility, mobility and access to male respondents, however, strict rules for dress code and behaviour had to be followed.

Nevertheless, the constraints were more than offset by the advantage of easy access and introduction to the villagers. As a result the field work could commence on day one and a friendly rapport could be established with the majority of my respondents.

4.4.5 Methodology for Analysis

A descriptive analysis was attempted rather than a statistical one. To achieve a systematic organization of the data, it was necessary to establish particular categories of research. During the course of the literature review, several aspects of space use of women emerged which were used as a basis for the interview guide. At the end of the field work some other factors were added and these, along with the earlier ones were used to formulate the analytic categories to present and explain the study results. These results are contrasted with experiences of other researchers and the empirical generalizations thus produced helped to develop the concluding interpretations of the findings

CHAPTER V

5.0   CASE STUDY: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1   Introduction

A study of the physical spaces in village housing with special emphasis on women's activities and use/avoidance of these spaces forms the essence of the field research. In this chapter the findings from the field research will be presented. Social and spatial aspects of gender segregation are described and analyzed to establish a pattern of women's use of space. At first, however, some relevant facts about Bangladesh are introduced as a background for the field study.

5.1.1   Bangladesh - Background

Bangladesh is one of the least urbanized nations in the world, with 90% of its population living in rural areas. If we consider women exclusively, they are even less urbanized. 95% of women live in villages.[1] The total area of Bangladesh is 142,776 sqkm and the population according to the 1990 census is 112 million. Poor in mineral and power resources, Bangladesh is mainly dependent on agriculture which is done in the most traditional way. Poverty and over-population are two of the country's main problems.

The topography of Bangladesh is basically low-lying, flat alluvial land with an extensive network of rivers and channels. Its typical monsoon climate is characterized by rain-bearing winds, warm temperatures and humidity, resulting in a lush green landscape all year round. Its geographical location renders it susceptible to heavy rains, floods, high intensity storms and tidal bores which cause immense loss of life and property year after year.

For its entire recorded history, this region has been a peasant society, which has provided the foundations of its distinctive culture.[2] In addition, Bangladesh shares in two of the oldest and richest traditions. Its roots reach back in two directions, both to ancient Indic civilizations and to Islamic culture. This northeast corner of the Indian subcontinent has been influenced by successive Indian civilizations but its people have retained a certain autonomy and cultural distinctiveness - mainly because of its location outside of the mainstream, at the periphery of major cultural changes. The crystallization of the Bengali language from the classical Sanskrit during the Indian Medieval period provided the region with

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[1] Smock, 1977:92

[2] Ahmed R., 1988:115

a linguistic underpinning for its separate cultural identity. Following the conquest by Muslim invaders from Central Asia in the thirteenth century and the subsequent arrival of Muslim missionaries, a substantial portion of the population gradually converted to Islam. This reinforced the sense of distinctiveness and eventually found expression in the demand to create an independent state,[3] first in 1947 as the eastern province of Pakistan, and then in 1971, as independent Bangladesh.

5.1.2 Islam in Bangladesh

Islam in Bangladesh has a unique local form and identity. Conversions to Islam during the era of Islamic empires came more as a spontaneous response to the preaching of itinerant Sufi mystics and Muslim teachers than as a result of state policies encouraging such religious change.[4] Because of the peaceful penetration of Muslim missionaries, the evolution of Islam was different from that of Northern India. In North India the spread of Islam was primarily confined to cities and urban administrative centres. In eastern Bengal, it spread mainly in the villages. Far from the cradle of Islam, with no knowledge of Muslim scriptures (which were either in Arabic or Persian), illiterate Bengali villagers evolved their own brand of Islam. Pitted against a rich but unpredictable environment, their desire to tame the cruelties of nature distinctly affected and shaped their visions of religion and culture.[5] As a result, many local customs, rites and rituals were incorporated into Islamic beliefs. Saint worship, belief in supernatural powers of the spirit world, belief in astrology - although contrary to Islamic practices - all are part of the rural spiritual faith.

5.1.3 Rural Settlement Patterns in Bangladesh

The majority of the population of Bangladesh live in rural settlements dispersed among the agricultural land. These settlements are characterized by two major forms, namely the nucleated or clustered settlement and the scattered or dispersed settlement. A third variant, semi-nucleated or semi-dispersed is also notable in some areas. These can take a linear pattern or clustered pattern or a combination of

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[3] Smock, 1977:83

[4] Smock, 1977:83

[5] Ahmed R., 1988:115

the two.[6] According to the geographical, physical and social forces, we find different patterns of settlements in different regions of Bangladesh:

- Nucleated and semi-nucleated or clustered in the high flat land of the northern Piedmont and the
- Barind regions, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Haor areas of Sylhet
- Scattered in the central delta region, the flood plains, where homesteads are built on artificially raised mounds
- Scattered in isolated clusters in the coastal areas and offshore islands
- Linear along the levees of rivers and in the moribund delta area of the south-west region.
- Linear and sparse along the spring line in Chittagong[7] (Fig 18)

5.2 Setting for the Field Study

The villages Bajitpur and Shadashivpur are located near the Indian border. The villagers are proud of the fact that it is through this area that Islam first entered Bangladesh in 1204 A.D. with the invasion by Ikhtiar Muhammad Bakhtiar Khilji. Bakhtiar Khilji established a capital in Gaur, an area about eight miles north of Bajitpur. There are several historical edifices in the area: remains of palaces and courts of erstwhile rulers, the thirteenth century walled city of Gaur and the Sona mosque of the fifteenth century.

This settlement is the place where four brothers from Shashani in Patna (India) came and established an estate in the middle of the nineteenth century. A British administrator named James Grey, out of gratitude for their generosity (they wrote off a large loan when he defaulted), conferred additional government land and the title of Chowdhury[8] on the family. Bajitpur is named after the eldest brother Bajit Dewan, while Shampur is named after the second. The youngest brother Abdul Karim Peshkar is said to have written the first autobiography in the Bengali language.

The two villages can be reached by bus and ferry from the nearest town, which is the district capital Nawabganj. At the time of the study, the roads were at places virtually impassable due to the post-flood situation. Fortunately a four-wheel drive jeep could be found to make the journey to Kansat, a marketing

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[6] Ali, Khadem et al, 1982:4

[7] Hasan, 1985:22-27

[8] Chowdhury was a title conferred upon landlords who acted as revenue collectors for the British government

RURAL SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

L LINEAR
S SCATTERED
SN SEMI NUCLEATED
N NUCLEATED

BAY OF BENGAL

SCATTERED & CLUSTERED

NUCLEATED & LINEAR
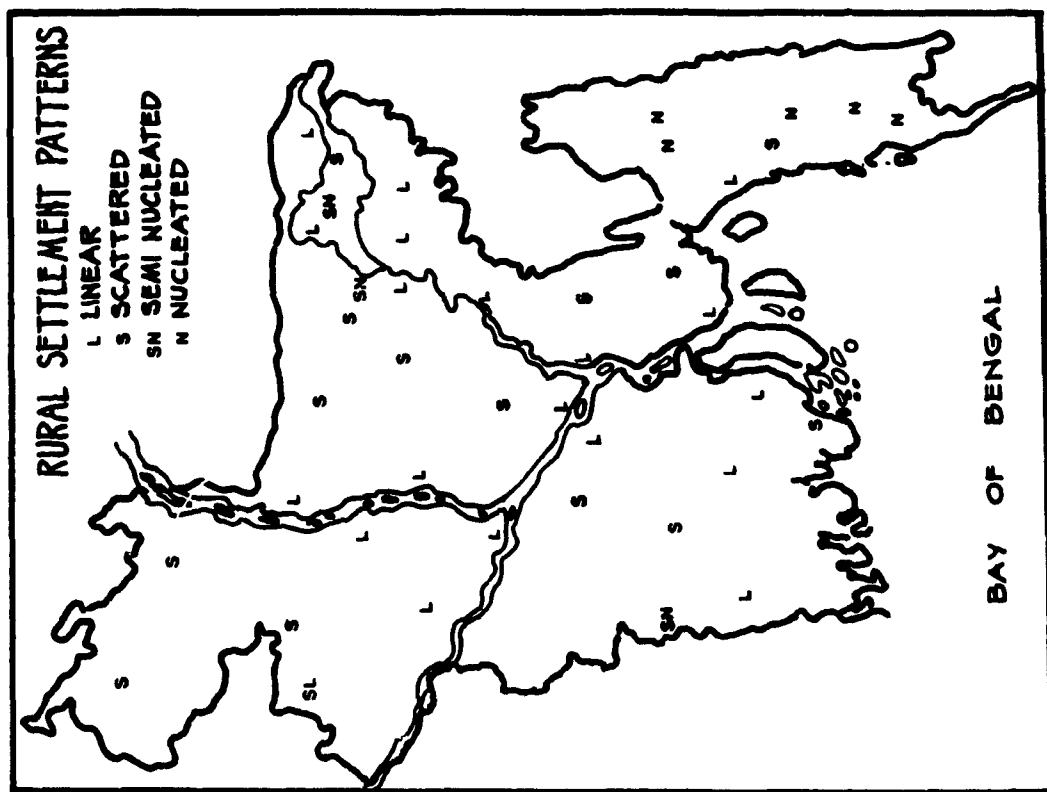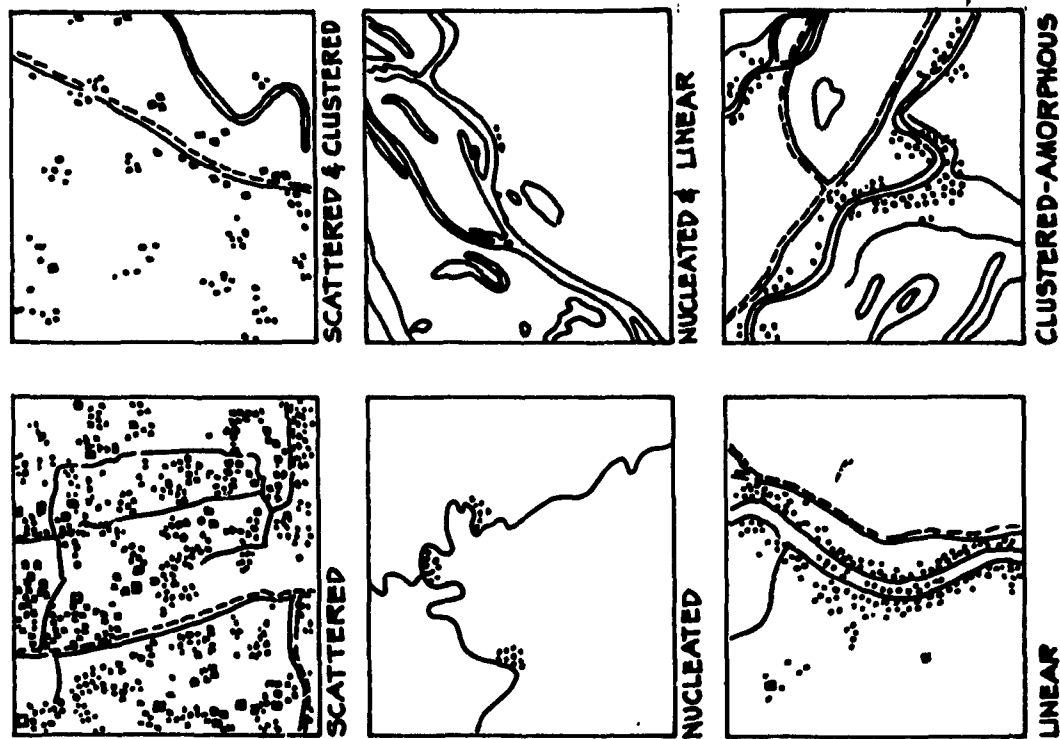
CLUSTERED-AMORPHOUS

SCATTERED

NUCLEATED

LINEAR

Fig. 18. Bangladesh Rural Settlement Pattern (Source: Chowdhury F., 1980)

centre next to Shampur Union. The river Pagla between Kansat and Shampur was crossed by boat. A two-kilometer walk through the muddy and rutted road to the research site followed.

The population of the two villages is 9,825 with 380 homesteads in Shadashivpur and 425 homesteads in Bajitpur. There are about 20 Hindu households in Bajitpur, concentrated in three paras. Although there are one or more mosques in each para, there are no Hindu temples in the two mauzas. The river Pagla on the east separates the villages from Kansat, which boasts of a post office, a college, daily and weekly markets (Saturdays and Tuesdays) and a silk weaving cottage industry. On the west is Chama, which also has weekly markets (Thursdays and Sundays). The Union Council Office and a coeducational High School is located in Chama. An agricultural bank and a small electric ricemill is located in Bajitpur. The individual paras of the villages are scattered among agricultural land and mango-groves. (Fig. 19)

This region is mainly dependant on agriculture. Mango, sugarcane and paddy are the main crops. Jute, pulses, mustard,vegetables, etc. are also important cash crops. There are no industries in this area. The primary occupation of most villagers is agriculture, either by direct cultivation or by commercial dealing. Other occupations include traders, teachers, health workers, artisans and businessmen.

This area is flooded about two months a year during the rainy season, but as most of the houses are built on elevated ground, they are usually above flood-level. But the surrounding countryside remains under water and the only mode of transportation is the boat. Continuous rain and rising groundwater, however, cause many of the mudhouses to crumble and there was ample evidence of this in the villages at the time of the survey due to the recent floods. Ninetysix homesteads were reported to be affected

About fifty years ago there were single village chiefs in each of the paras, many of which are named after these chiefs (Bahadur Morol Tola, Enayet Bishash Tola, etc.) Nowadays there are three to four chiefs (matbor) in each para heading their own communities or factions which are often made up of members of the same kingroup. These chiefs are not necessarily hereditory, but elected by the villagers periodically. Their main function is to arbitrate differences in their factions, individually or by "calling a shalish (group of arbitrators)." They also advise in important family matters and take part in marriage negotiations of members of their groups.

Officially the union is governed by a Union Council board. The board consists of a Chairman and nine members, all elected. The Chairman has always been a member of the landlord family, reflecting their status in the region The main political parties are quite active in the villages. The most influential one
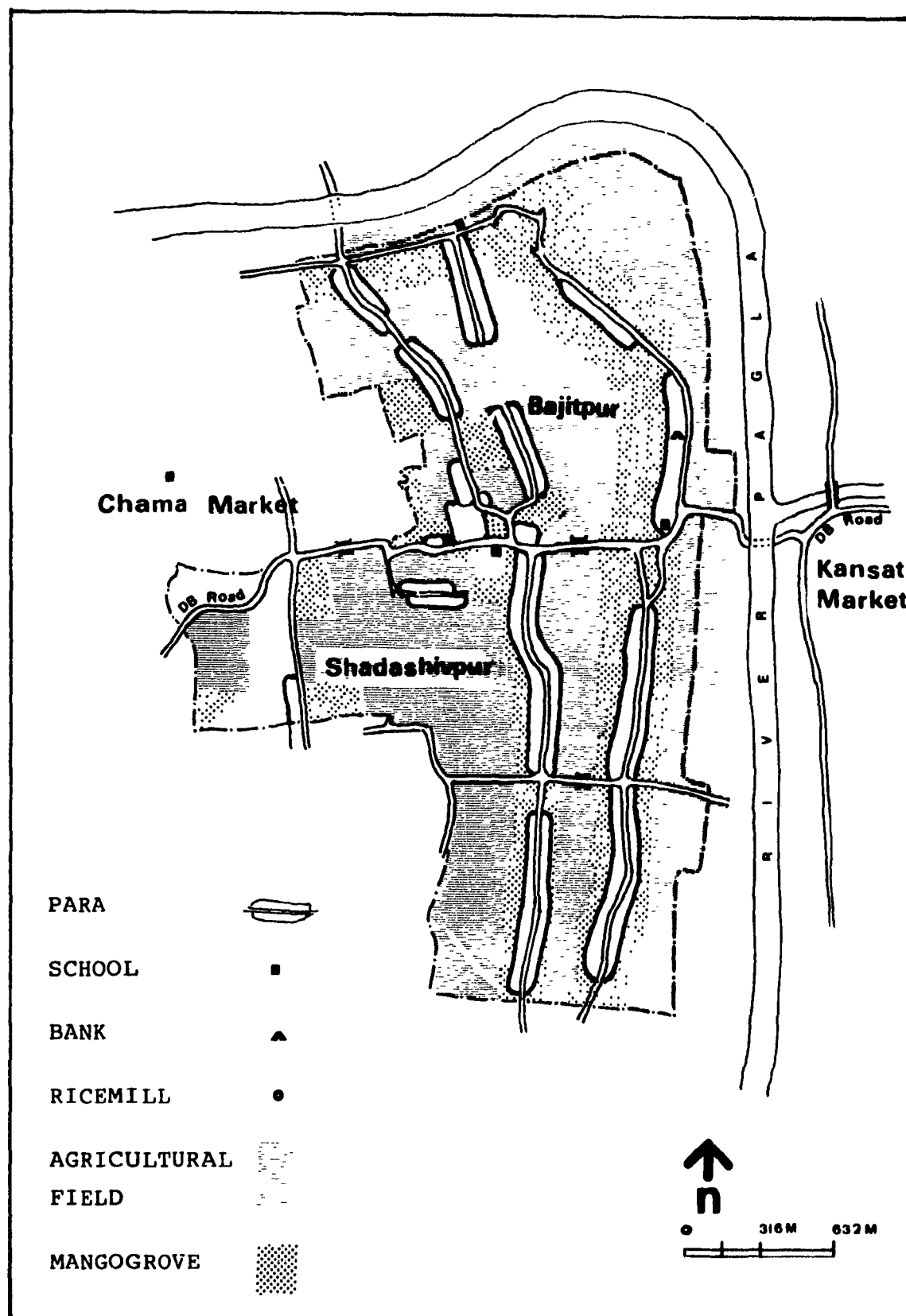
Fig. 19. Map of Bajitpur and Shadashivpur

is the "Jamat-e-Islami," a political group with fundamental ideology. This group is active in trying to encourage and maintain Islamic rules and standards, one of which is the segregation of women.

5.3 Analysis of Findings: The Physical Environment

5.3.1 The Settlement Pattern

The two villages together seem to function as a single entity. (Fig. 20.) In the middle of the community is the landlords' enclave - Chowdhurypara. The rest of the socio-economic groups are scattered in different *paras*, which are separate linear clusters surrounded by orchards and crop-land. Rich and poor farmers live side by side - often the only way to distinguish their houses is by the condition they are in, and sometimes by their size. Some Hindu occupational groups such as the smiths, the carpenters and the milkmen have their own enclaves at the edges of the settlement.

Fig 20 Settlement Structure

The main public institutions - the schools, the bank and the ricemill are located on the main road and on its main subsidiary, the road along the edge of Bajitpur, parallel to the river. This road is a thoroughfare leading to other villages and in this study it will be called the edge road.

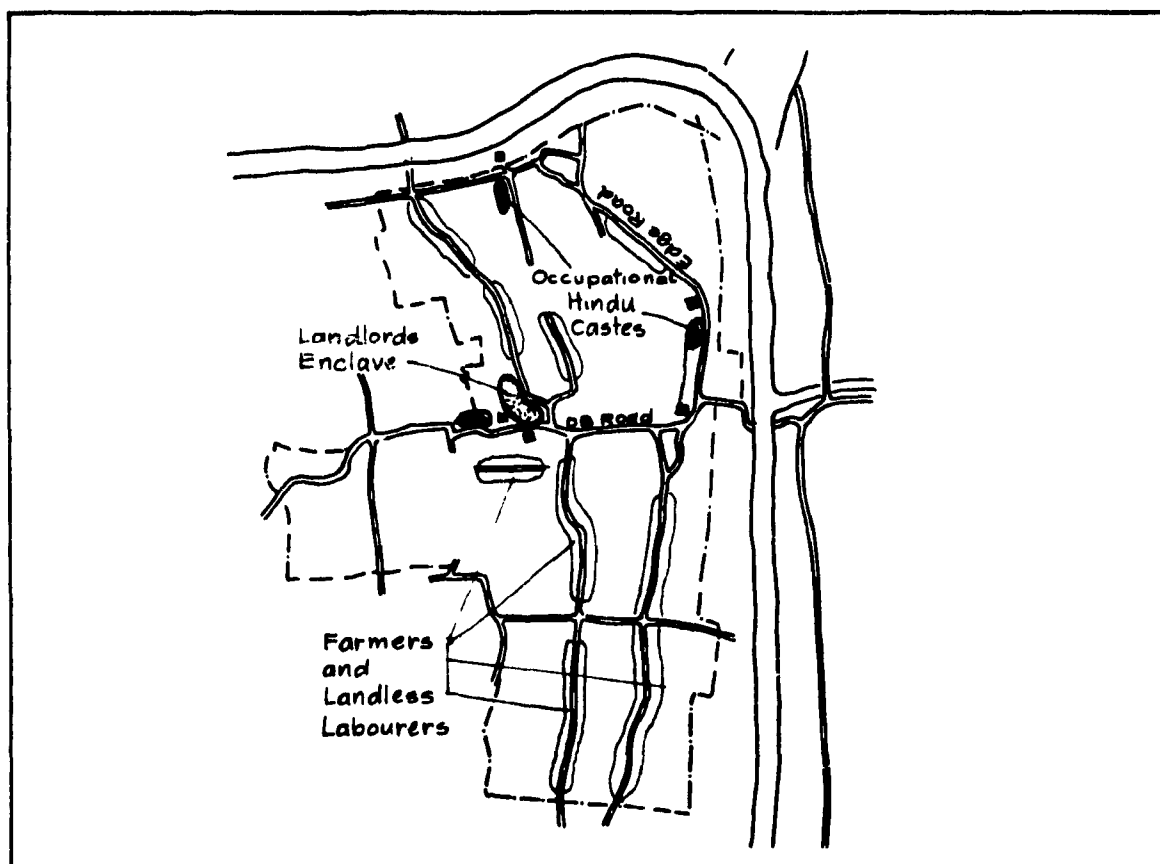There is a very definite hierarchy of spaces in the circulation pattern. (Fig. 21) The main road (D.B.road) which runs from east to west is mainly a circulation spine in Shampur union built by the British for revenue collection purposes. This road joins two markets, one in Kansat and one in Chama. The secondary village roads which feed the individual paras branch out at right angles to the main road.

The main road runs through mango-groves, canefields and paddy fields; ditches on both side of the road act as drainage channels where children often fish. Because of its relatively high level, this road is often the only one not to be submerged during the annual monsoon. During heavy rains, however, (as for example just before the field study took place) boats instead of oxcarts ply on the D.B.road. The other vehicles used on this road are bicycles and occasional motorcycles. Only a few houses face this road; among them the three households of the village smiths, who take advantage of the commercial traffic on this road

The secondary roads, which are the village lanes, branch off perpendicular to the D.B. road and lead into the individual paras or neighbourhoods (Fig. 22) Homesteads are organized in a linear pattern on both sides of the village lanes. Only the edge road has homesteads on one side. Men walk along these roads and congregate to stand and talk. They sit by the roadside to socialise or to work. Mosques and small neighbourhood shops on the roadsides also encourage social gatherings. Children play all day long in safe surroundings - there is no fear of wheeled traffic (except bicycles and on rare occasions, an oxcart). Cows kick up a dusty haze when they are led home at sunset. Women are almost totally missing from the street life. Their appearance there is conditional to necessity and to modest behaviour. Sometimes women are visible in the entrances to their homesteads, looking out at the road. Their role in the street-life is as discreet spectators, never as participants.

The third category of roads are the network of back-lanes and footpaths at the back of the homesteads. These lanes, which are often nothing more than narrow dirt paths created by walking feet, meander through mango-groves and crop-fields and link the different paras. These lanes are used by women to get about, but men also use them to get to their fields or as short cuts.
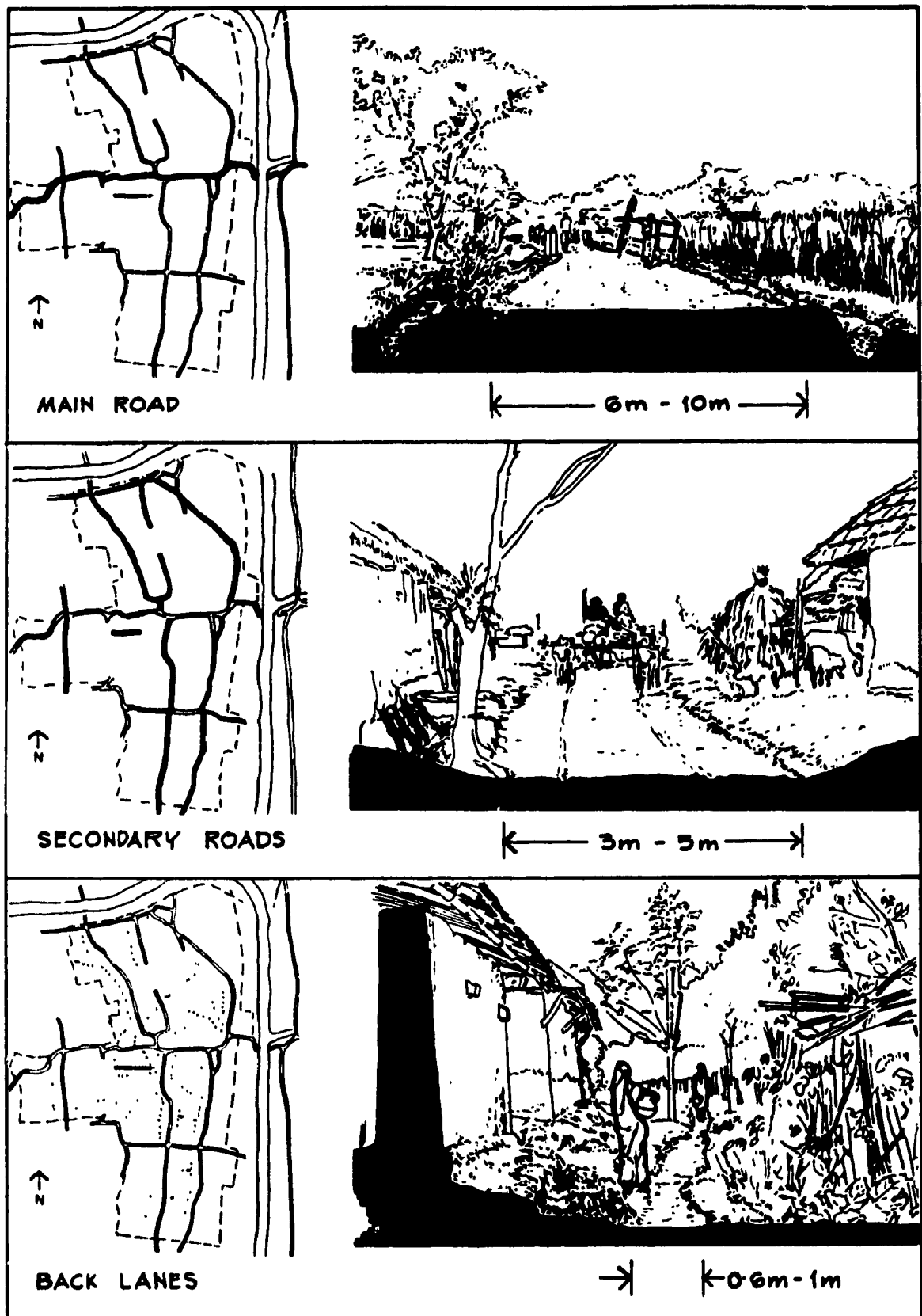
MAIN ROAD 6m - 10m

SECONDARY ROADS 3m - 5m

BACK LANES 0·6m - 1m
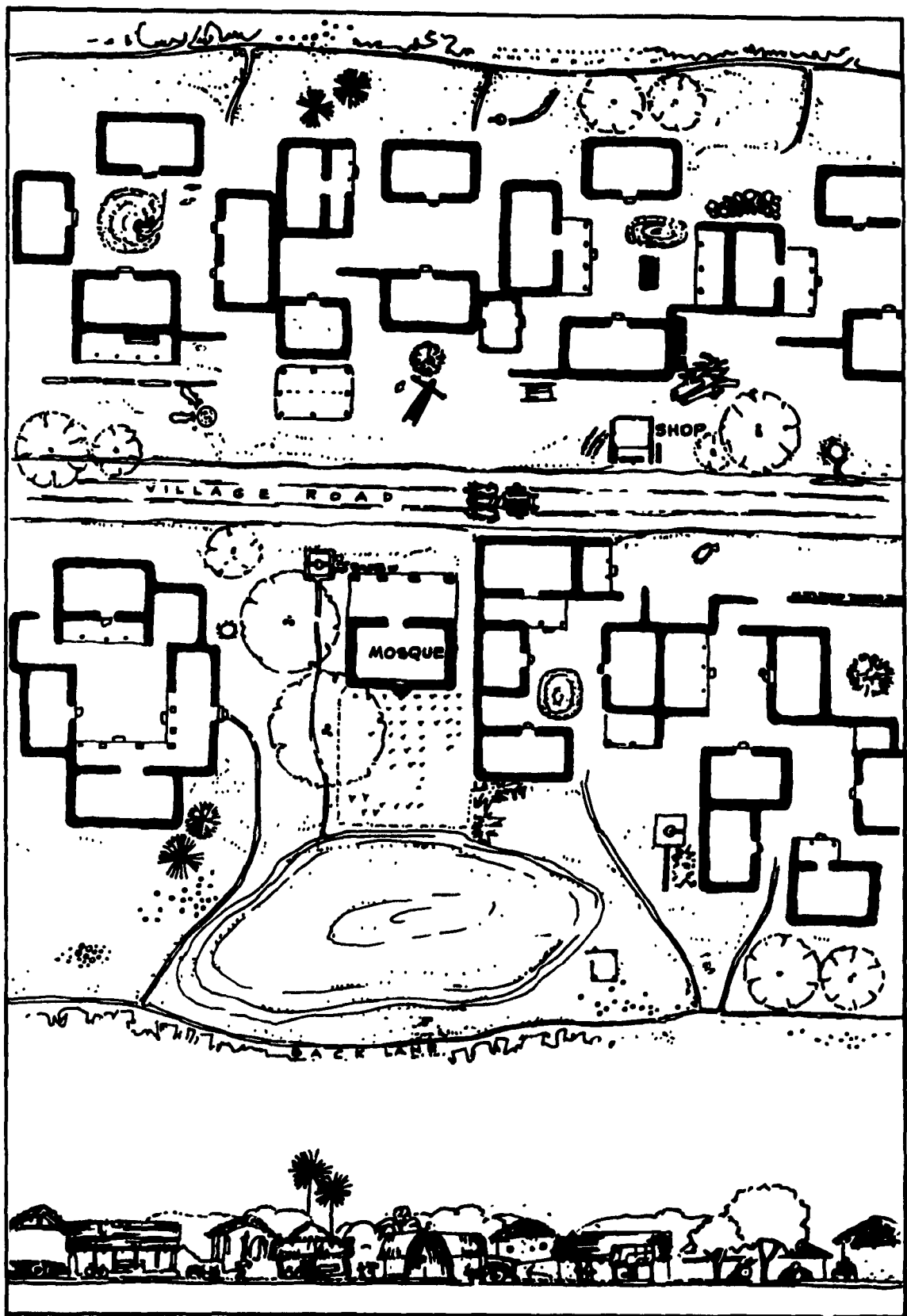
Fig 2· Circulation Pattern

Fig 22 Part of Para (Neighbourhood)

5.3.2 Public Spaces

Public spaces are conceived as "male spaces." (Fig. 23) Women do not visit public institutions such as the mosque or the bank. Women usually move discreetly within a cluster of homesteads or sheltered paths when men are in the fields. They avoid open fields and public roads. If women travel on foot, they must be accompanied, either by male relatives or by their children. They often shield their faces with an umbrella while travelling. The most common mode of transportation for men is the bicycle, while for women it is a covered oxcart or a covered boat. When women are going to a nearby village to visit relatives, they usually walk through the fields and mango groves at the back of the house. The D.B. road is generally not used by women, specially on *hat* (weekly market) days when the traffic increases. In the post-flood period, however, when many of the pathways through the fields were virtually impassable, women were sometimes forced to use the D.B road

The public areas can be categorized in the following manner:

Public·	D.B.road, mosques, fields, mango orchards, daily and weekly markets, school, bank, ricemill
Semi-public	Village lanes, neighbourhood shops, the frontyard or *goli*, public handpumps
Semi-private	Back-lanes, women's pond and bathing pier
Private	The enclosed courtyard, the backyard or *kanta*

Women use spaces according to the order, the higher in the hierarchy, the less the spaces are used by women.

5.3.3 The Homestead or *Bari*

The name for the homestead is synonymous with the family name or occupation. Which *bari* a villager belongs to is an important factor determining his status and social standing. Although the traditional extended family structure is disintegrating under the onslaught of poverty with many members leaving the often overcrowded homestead, they are still known as members of their original *bari*

Mosque

Field

Neighbourhood   shop

Mangogrove

Main Road

Fig 23 "Male" Spaces

Organization

The homesteads are arranged in rows on one or both sides of the village road. The residential plots (as shown on the *mauza* land maps) are usually rectangular with the narrower side abutting the street. Plots are generally not demarcated by physical boundaries. The homestead is started by creating a flat mound (*bhiti*) for flood control. The traditional Bangladeshi homestead is an aggregation of loosely spaced free-standing units grouped around a central courtyard. In this region, however, the more compact layout with adjoining rooms, similar to the North Indian model, was also noticeable The size and number of huts and the size of the courtyard is a good indicator of the economic condition of the family.

The total plot is not built on. The homestead is organized on the plot in a distinct hierarchical sequence. (Fig 24) There is a fairly large transition space on the street side of the plot. This is a semi-private space known as the *goli*.[9] At the back of the house is an open space with vegetation known as the *kanta* The living area is made up of several huts (*ghar*) grouped around and facing a square or rectangular courtyard. This courtyard, known as the *angina*, is the heart of the homestead where most activities take place. The courtyard is entered on the street-side by the *deori*, the indirect entrance which acts as a visual barrier. There are one or more huts around the courtyard, which are only used for storage and for sleeping. Most huts have attached semi-open covered spaces known as *baranda*, which act as transitions between the open courtyard and the enclosed courtyard

The structure and layout of the homesteads are not uniform, although certain systems of organization can be observed. The dwellings of five socio-economic groups were studied; however, according to systems of organization, the dwellings can be categorized in three main groups - homesteads of the landless, the farmers and the landlords (Fig. 25)

Each house is unique and changes with the needs of the family and reflects the pattern of its growth and modifications Rather than a division within an enclosure, it is an aggregation of spaces. A nuclear family shares one room and an additional one is built when a son gets married. Huts can be dismantled and transported if a family member decides to move. A large courtyard is fragmented into smaller ones as the family multiplies and separates. This flexibility is inherent in the organisation of the homesteads and the transitory nature of the building materials used.

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[9] All spatial terms used are in the local dialect.
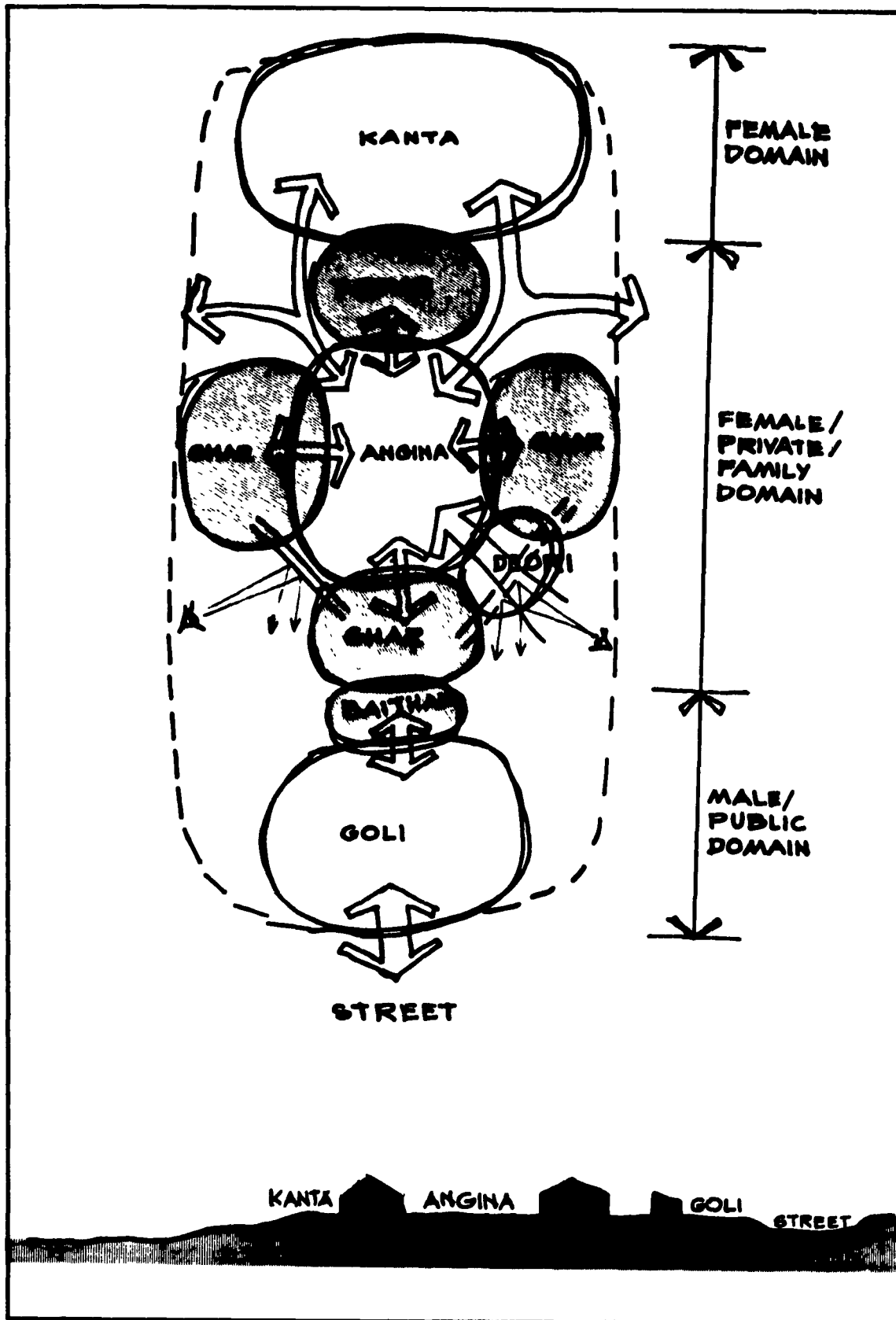
Fig. 24. Sequence of Spaces in the Home
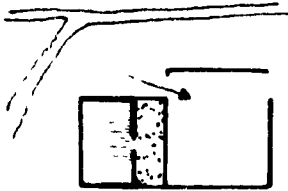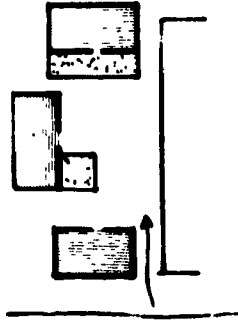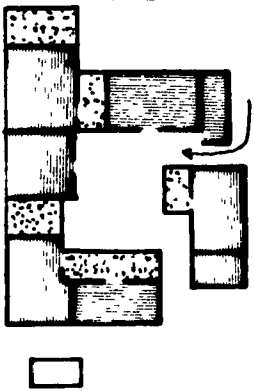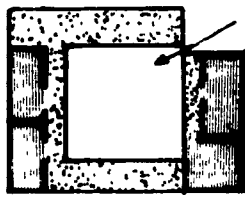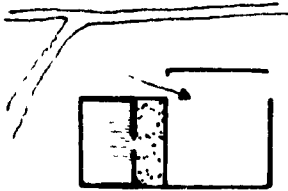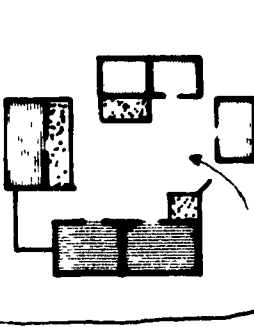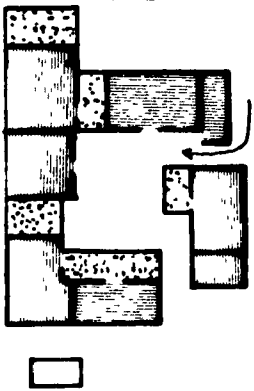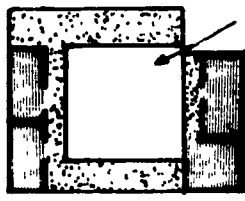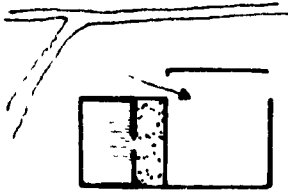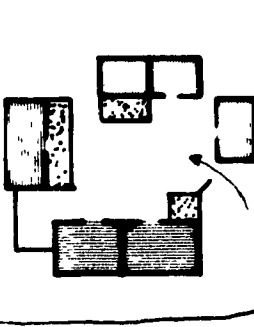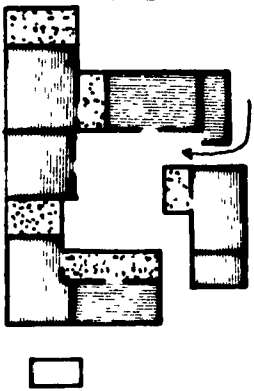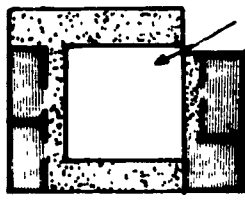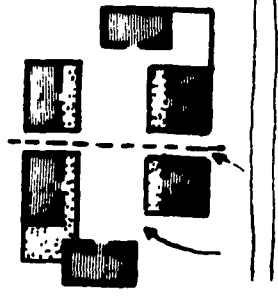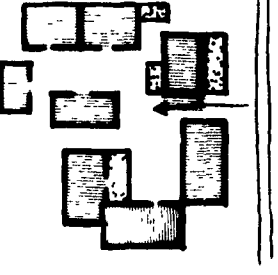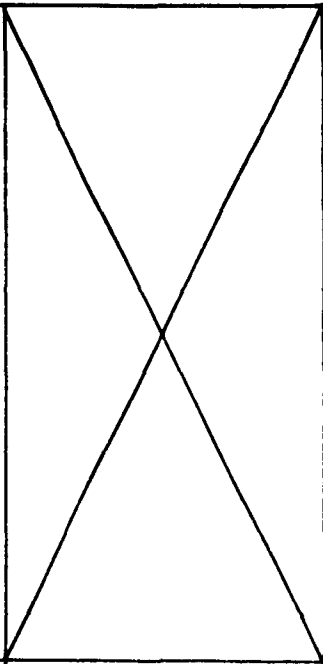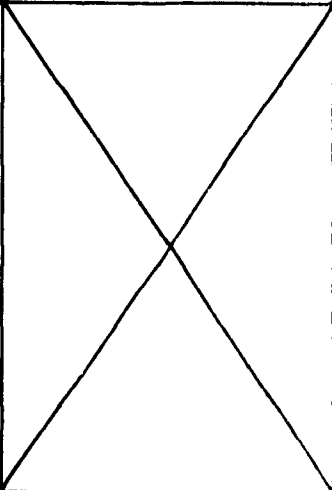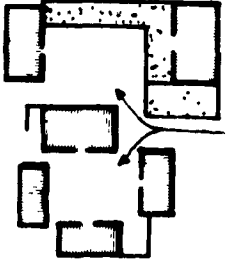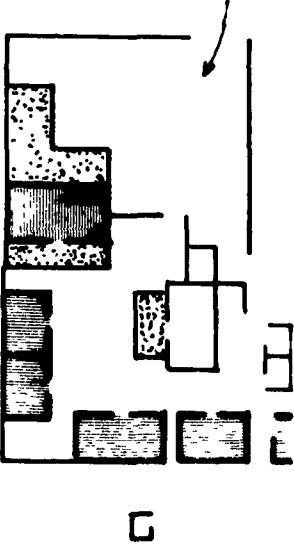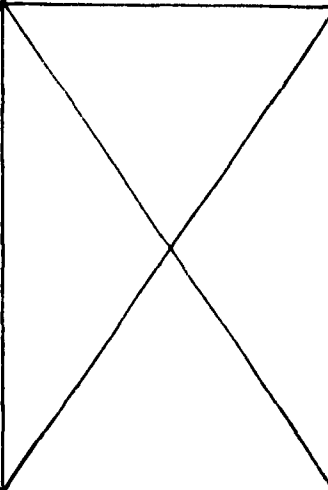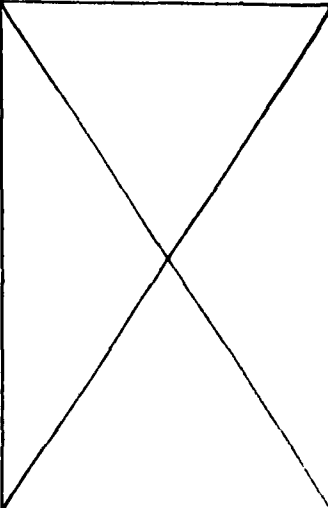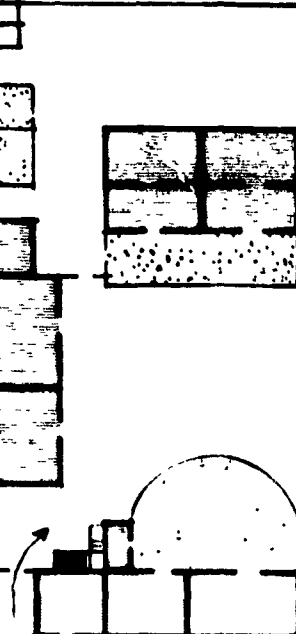
	One unit with courtyard	Additional units Loose arrangement	Additional units Compact arrangement	Walled courtyard continuous *baranda*
Landless				
Farmer				
Landlord				

Fig 25 Organization of Homesteads

	Adjacent courtyard unrelated occupants	Interlocking courtyards	Multiple courtyards with separate functions
Landless			
Farmer			
Landlord			

Most families are nuclear, often with single families living in separate homesteads. More common however is what may be called the semi-extended family where members of the same family share a homestead with one or more courtyard, but have separate incomes and eating arrangements. Among the landless, there is also the arrangement of several nuclear unrelated families sharing a homestead with a single courtyard. Adjacent homesteads usually belong to relatives and have interconnected courtyards. Family ties are an important determinant in the grouping and proximity of individual homesteads.

Elements

The *Goli*[10]: The *goli* (Fig. 26) in front of the homestead mostly remains unfenced and is freely used as circulation space for people passing through. It is usually at a higher level than the street. The family uses it for feeding livestock, keeping the haystack and receiving guests who are not close or important enough to be taken inside the house. Men usually gather here in the evenings to converse Mobile quilt-makers, vendors and the village barber use this space to set up temporary shop. This space is considered to be "male" space, although women too use it to some extent. They use it for work that often spills over from the courtyard, for example for drying grain or to make mud storage bins They however do not linger there for extended periods of time. Previously, women were hardly ever visible in the *goli*, but nowadays they can be seen there socializing with one or two other women and watching the activities on the road. However, I have seen women actually sitting in the *goli* on only one occasion and that was in a relatively isolated area at a time when men were at the weekly market. At other times it is obvious that they do not feel at home in this space, although it is part of their homestead.

The *Baithak*. In many of the homesteads, there is a long shaded porch facing the *goli* for receiving male guests (Fig. 27) This is known as the *baithak*. In more affluent homesteads the *baithak* is a proper room, which is also used by the family for sleeping and/or as a study for older boys. Previously, *baithaks* were separate structures; the present trend is to incorporate them into the main structure. For occupational groups like the village smiths, the workshops double as *baithaks* where men gather to play cards in the afternoon. In some homesteads *baithaks* are also used to shelter domestic animals. Several related families may share one *baithak* even if they do not share a courtyard.

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[10] Elsewhere in Bangladesh, the term *goli* denotes an alley, but locally it means frontyard

ROAD
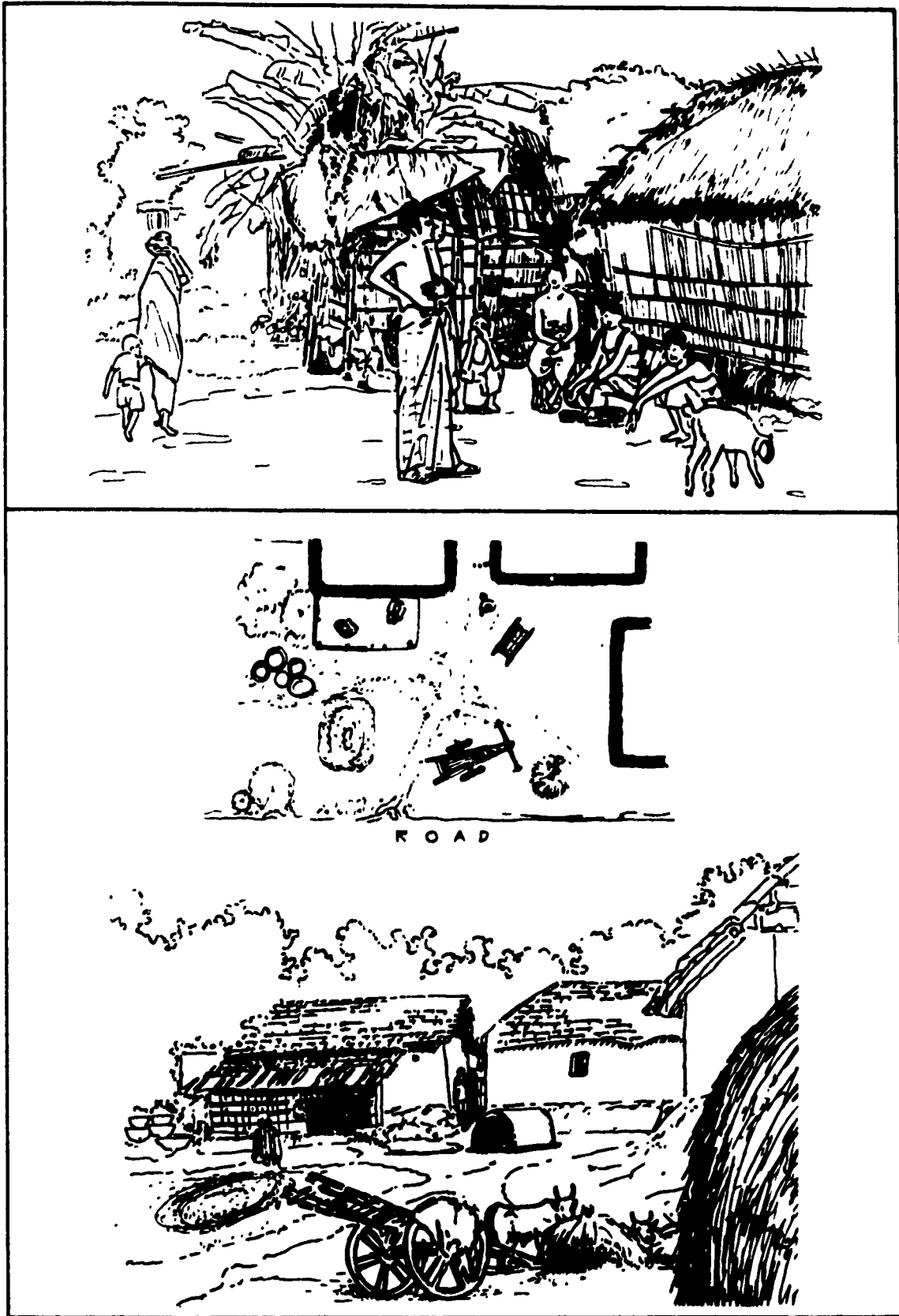
Fig 26 The Goli
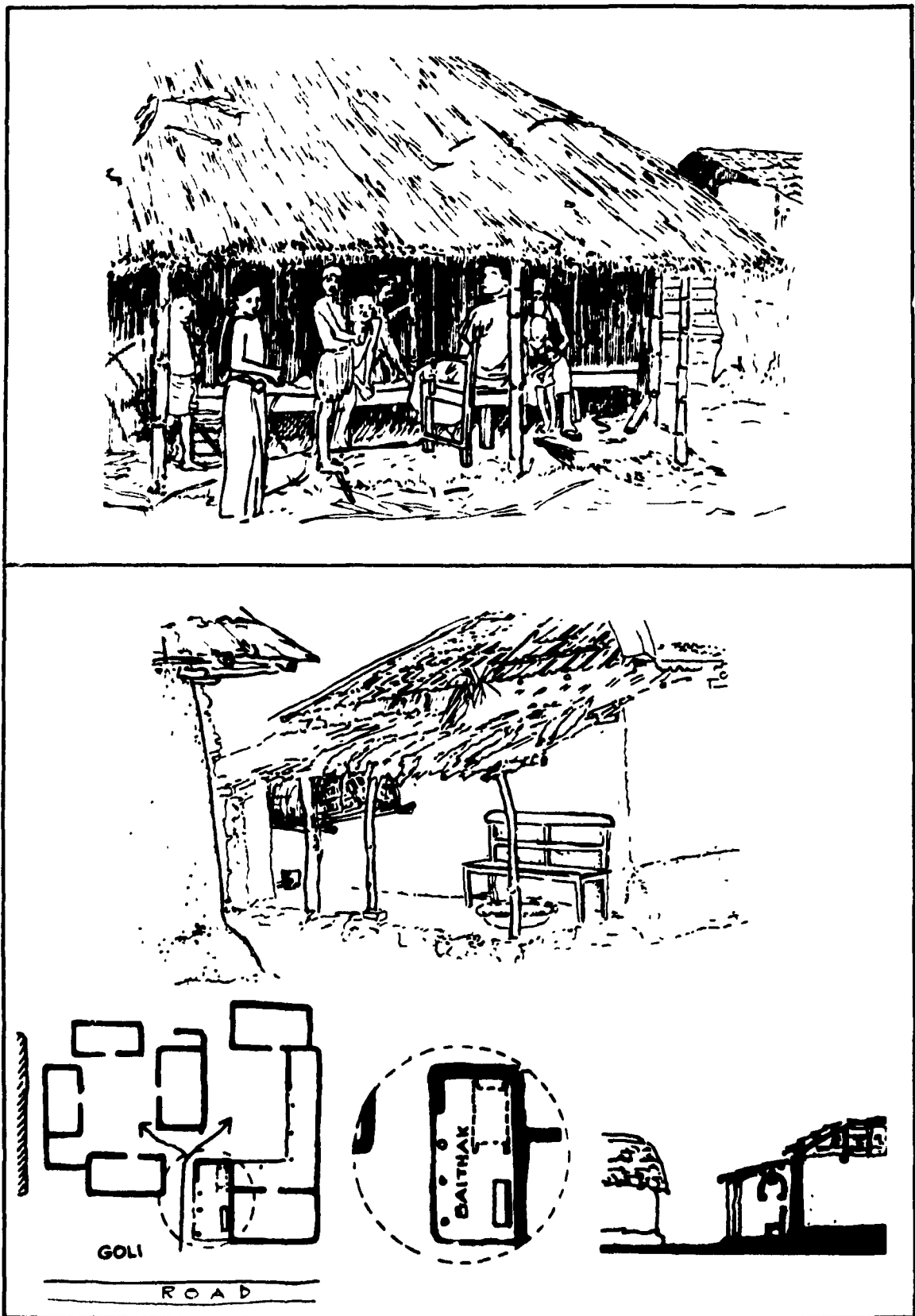
Fig 27 The Baithak

The *Deori*: The homestead is usually entered through a corner of the courtyard between two huts. This entrance is generally indirect with specially built walls for visual privacy. (Fig. 28) The entrance space is known as the *deori*. In affluent households the courtyard has boundary walls with entrance doors that can be locked. In other households, however, the corners between the structures remain free from fencing and the entrances do not have doors. Often in poor households, the entrance is not visually obstructed by staggered walls. Nevertheless there is always an attempt to create visual barriers, either by hanging a jute-mat or old quilt in the doorway or by a movable door made with leaves in a reed-frame The *deori* acts as a buffer or filter between the public outside and the private inside. It is the "threshold" between the two domains.[11]

The *Ghar*: The individual huts known as *ghar* are usually single- or two-room multi-functional structures used mainly for sleeping and storage. They are also used for other household activities during inclement weather. The huts are rectangular in plan and entered from the courtyard on the longer side. They are usually made of mud with overhanging sloped roofs of thatch or tile. Bamboo walls were popular in the past, but beyond the means of most villagers at present. Thatch, jutesticks or reeds may also be used for walls. In some huts there is a false ceiling which is used for storage Corrugated iron roofs are rare but are regarded as status symbols. The structures in the landlord *para* are all built of brick with flat roof of burnt clay tiles supported by wooden beams. During feudal times, peasants were not allowed to build in permanent materials like brick, and to this day, there are not many brick houses other than the landlords' homes. In the typical village home, usually one nuclear family shares one room until the son grows up and marries. Then another hut is built for him. The individual huts are oriented in cardinal directions.[12]

Furniture: In contrast to other regions of Bangladesh, there is a tradition of having some household furniture in this region. Even the poorest family usually owns a wooden bed or a string cot. Other furniture used are wooden chests and in more affluent households small cupboards and a few chairs. Jute hangers hang from the rafters to store food items, bottles and crockery. Paddy or rice are stored in mud storage bins which are usually plastered closed till they are needed These bins and often beautifully decorated mud storage shelves are made by women. Water is stored in

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[11] See Rapoport, 1969:80 for locations of thresholds in different cultures.

[12] According to Hasan (1985), this orientation is maintained to make it convenient to establish the direction of *qibla* (i.e., the Kaaba in Mecca) for prayer. Hasan, 1985:45

| 1. Visual barrier through placement of huts | 2. Screen wall | 3 Diagonal screen wall at corner | 4. Staggered screen wall for central entrance |
| 5. Enclosed corner entrance | 6. Corner entrance with door | 7. Long entrance passage, restricted vision through tunnel effect | 8. Combination of 4 and 7 |
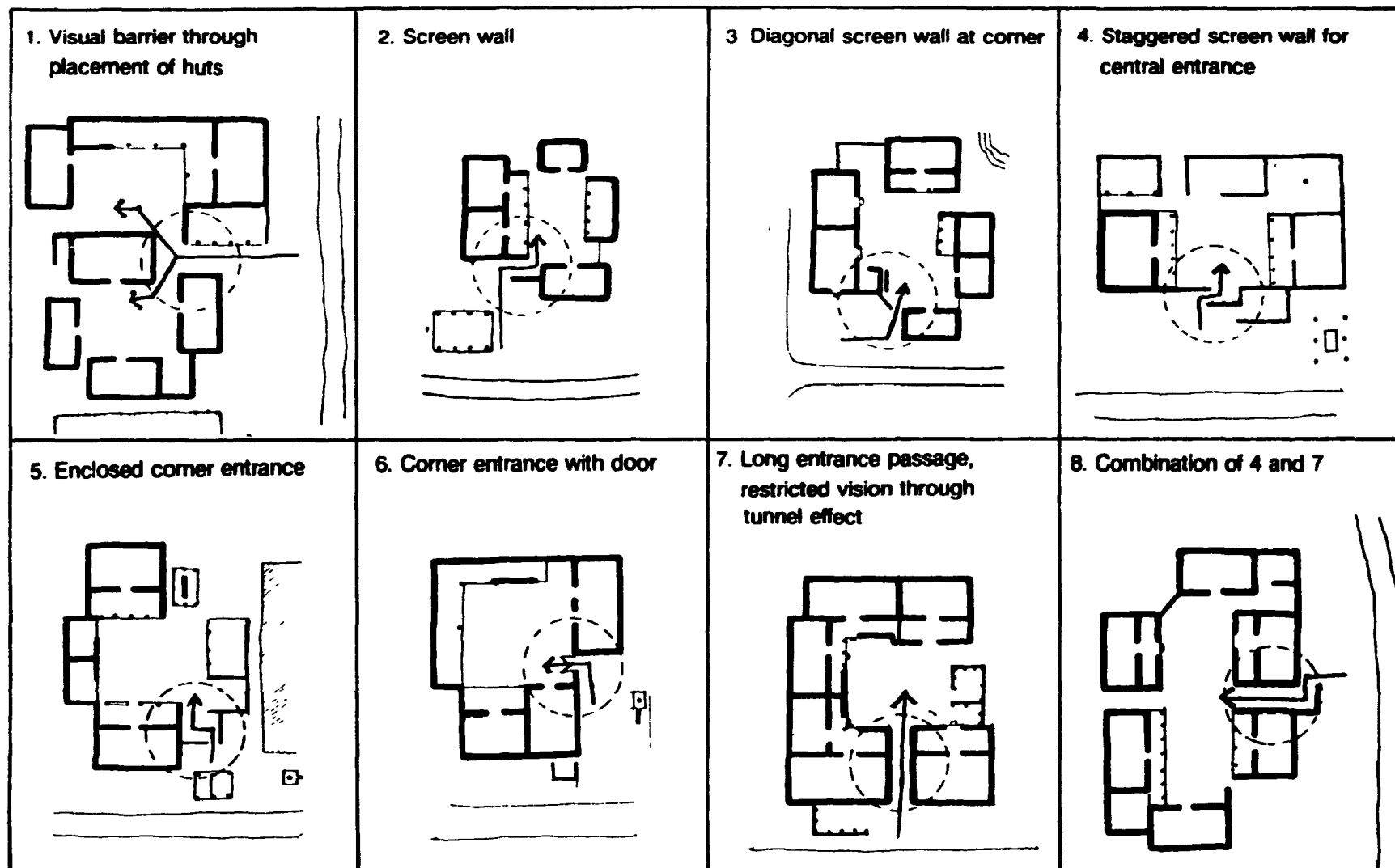
Fig 28. Variations of Deori

earthenware or brass jugs. Brass utensils are a sign of status and wealth. They also can be pawned in times of need.

Openings: The mud huts often do not have any windows and only one doorway as a source of light. If there are windows present, they are very small, usually only a horizontal slit or round narrow holes. The reason given for absence of windows or for their small size is visual privacy and more importantly, a safeguard against evil spirits entering the room. In more affluent homes, windows are larger, often with wooden shutters. The shutters or wooden flaps are in four parts, so that the lower two can remain closed during the day to ensure privacy. (Fig 29)

Baranda: The *baranda* is a transitional space between the open courtyard and the enclosed space of the *ghar*. (Fig. 30) These roofed semi-open porches are usually attached to a *ghar* and face the courtyard, but they may also be attached to the courtyard wall. The *baranda* is a shaded space used as an extension of the courtyard to support outdoor activities during hot or rainy weather. It also protects assets such as storage urns and animal coops. In more affluent homesteads, the *baranda*s are continuous covered spaces running along the length of the courtyard wall. At times the *baranda* or part of it may be enclosed to provide additional room for family members.

The **Kitchen**: Kitchens are small sheds not as well-built as the sleeping rooms. (Fig. 31) The *baranda* is also often used as a cooking area. The stoves are built in the mud floors of the kitchen. Interestingly, in affluent homesteads with brickwalls and cemented floors, the kitchen or part of the kitchen always has a mud floor with stoves dug into the floor. Usually there are built-in mud stoves in the courtyard for open air cooking during fair weather, which is most of the year. Kitchen utensils include a grinding stone, round-bottomed earthen pots, a winnowing basket and a curved cutting edge fixed to a wooden base.

The **Cattleshed**: Cattle are kept in cowsheds or the *baranda* at night. The cowshed is one of the structures surrounding the courtyard. In some of the homesteads, due to crowded conditions, some family members share their sleeping quarters with their cows.
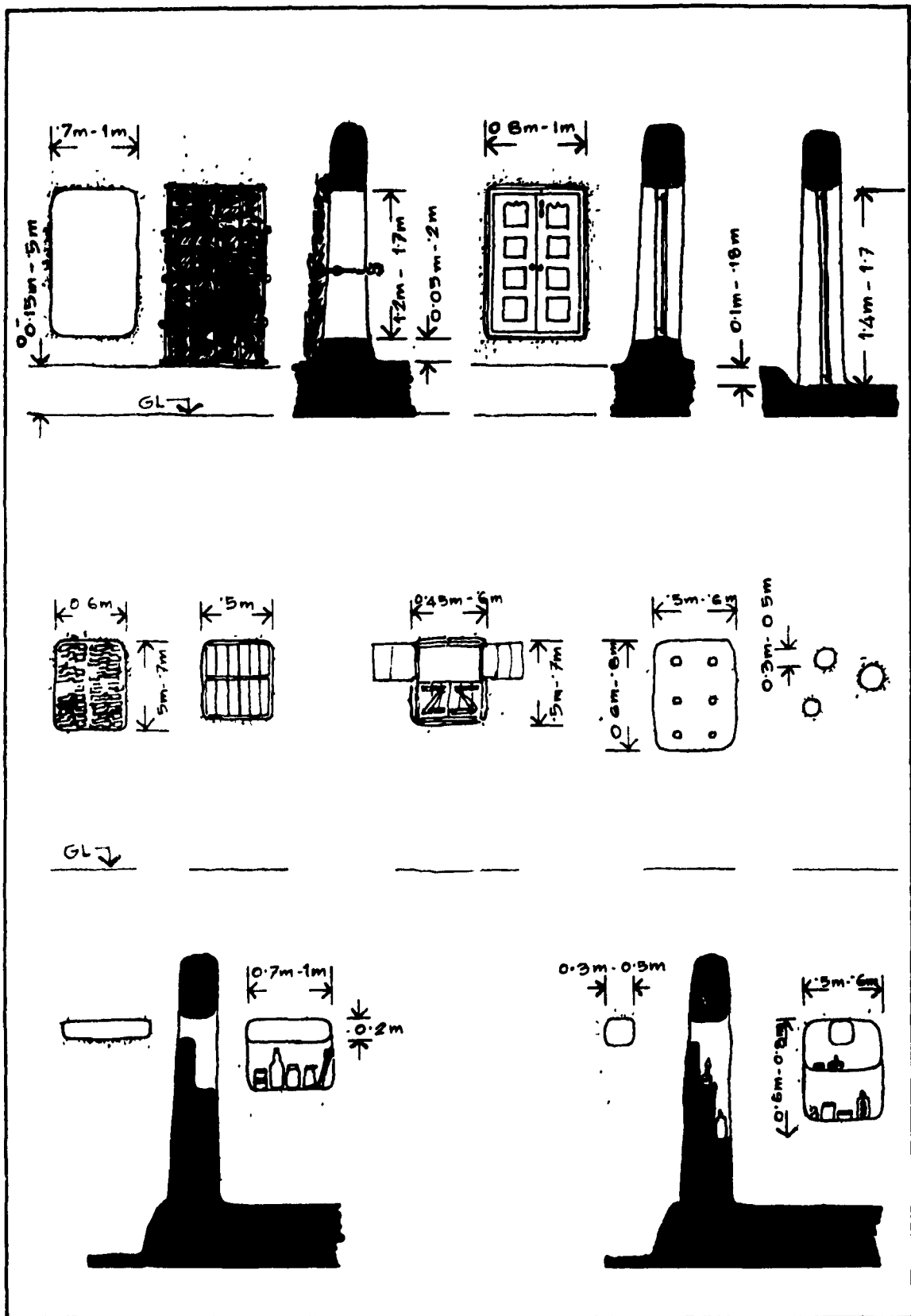
Fig 29 Doors and Windows

Fig 30. Baranda

GOLI
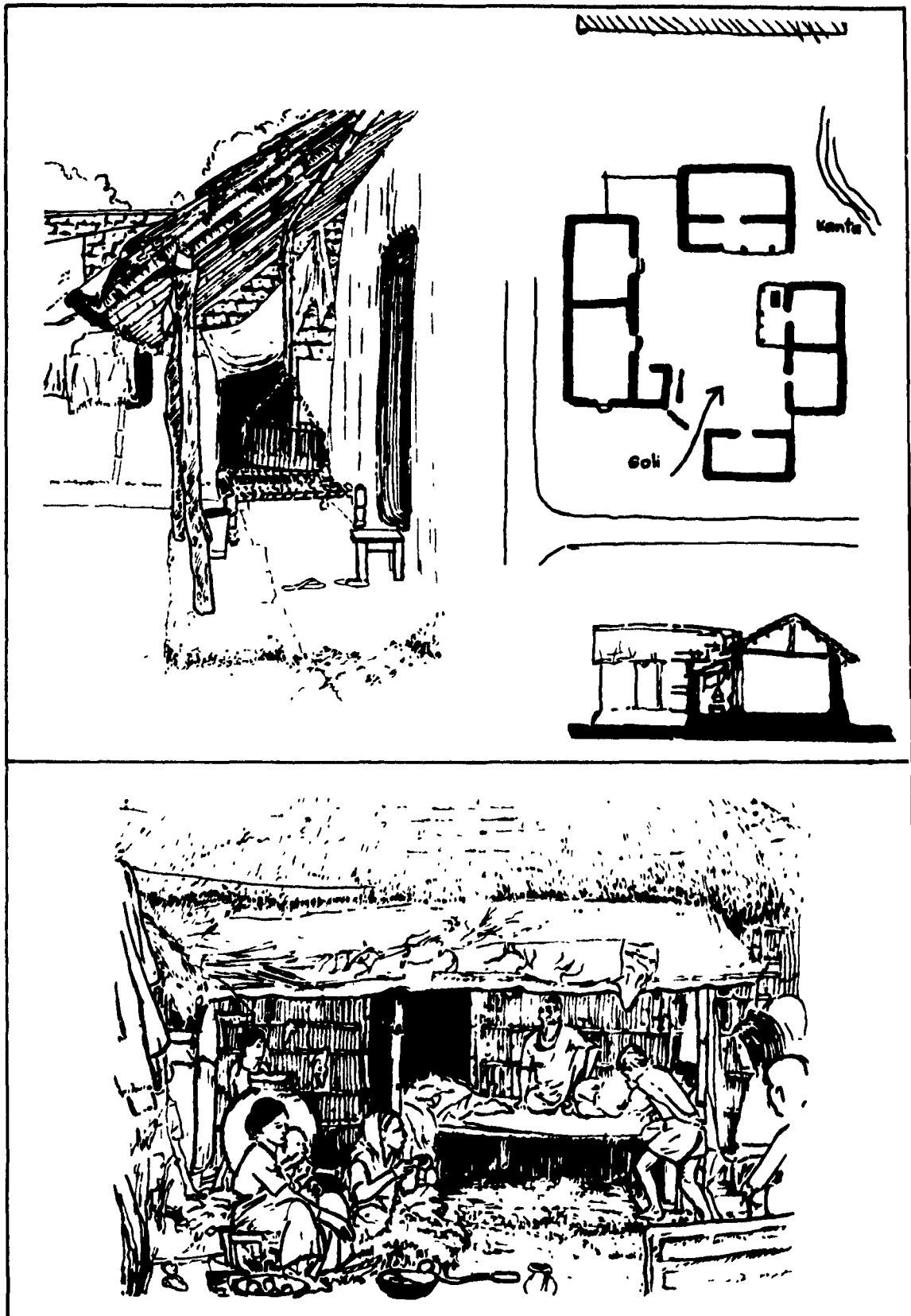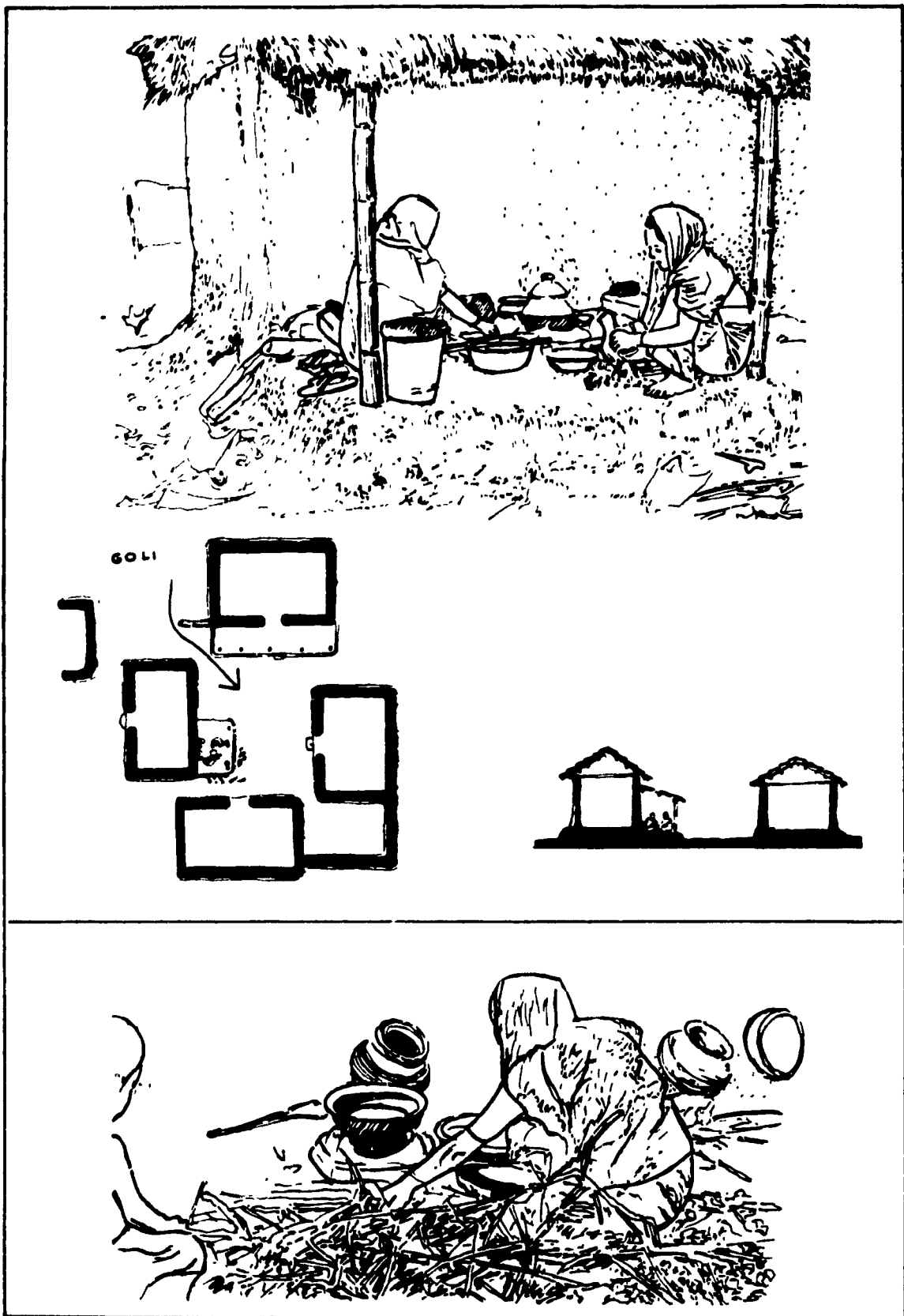
Fig 31 Cooking Area

The Courtyard: The courtyard is the focus and spiritual centre of the home. (Fig. 32) It is swept twice a day and plastered every few days with a mixture of mud and dung.[13] In fact, sweeping the courtyard is the first task to be undertaken each day. In Hindu households the courtyard contains the sacred *tulsi*-plant and has to be plastered daily and kept meticulously clean; otherwise bad fortune may befall the family.

When women invite other women to visit their home, they will say, "Come to our courtyard." I myself was invited several times in this manner, which seemed symbolic of the status of the courtyard in the home. The courtyard is kept private only from non-kin males. Women, known or unknown, never need permission to enter a courtyard. It is quite acceptable for women to use courtyards to get from one place to another. Men other than family members, however, will never enter a courtyard unless invited. For a male, entering a courtyard without permission is an act of symbolic violation. Even when men close to the family come to visit, they will always call out the name of the householder or make their presence known before entering. Only close male relatives or important male guests are invited to sit in the courtyard. Others are received in the *goli*.

The courtyard supports all the activities of work and leisure. Cooking, eating, sleeping, child rearing, processing paddy, manufacturing household items (income-generating work for men usually takes place in the *goli*), sewing and gossiping all take place in the courtyard. Women use the courtyard for the majority of their activities, but mostly sleep indoors even during the hot and humid summers. This is because the courtyards have several entries and thieves may enter. Another reason is that she may be touched by an "evil" wind. The "evil" wind, which mainly affects women, is blamed for many illnesses. In affluent homesteads the courtyard may be plastered with cement and a part of it may be used as a garden. Neighbouring courtyards are usually inter-connected so that women can visit each other without having to go out on the road. The boundaries of the plots are rarely fenced, but the courtyard boundaries are always well defined, even if only with ramshackle straw fences.

The *Kanta*: The *kanta* is the backyard of the homestead, which usually contains the vegetable patches, bamboo groves and fruit-trees. (Fig. 33) Often it is a low level area (as soil is dug from here to build the house) with a small water-body and a handpump where women wash their utensils and

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[13] Dung, however, is not used to plaster the stove, kitchen or inside the rooms where people pray as it is considered to be a Hindu substance.

Fig 32 Courtyard

ROAD

Goli
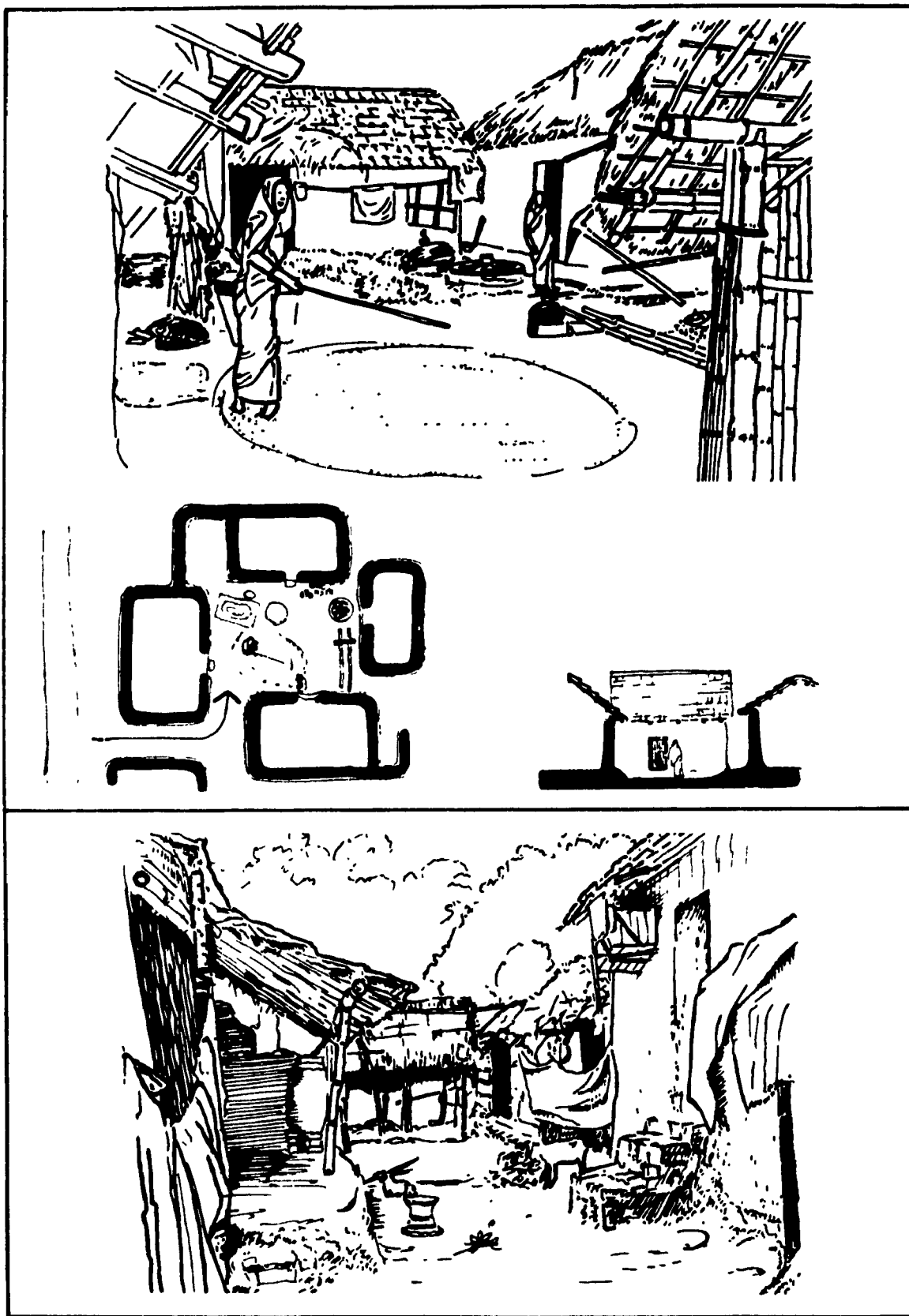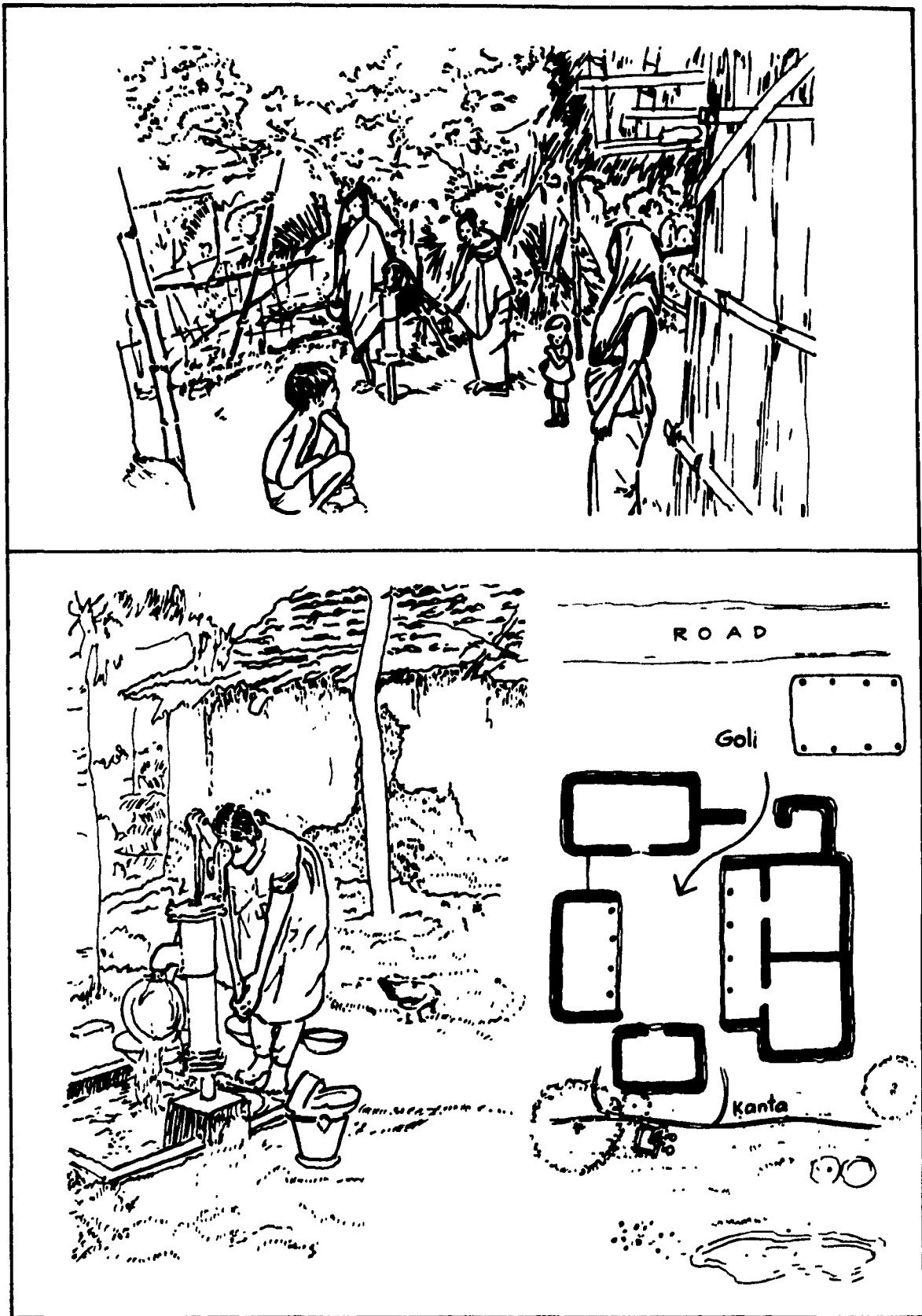
Kanta

Fig. 33. The Kanta

clothes. Private ponds in the backyards, a common feature in most regions of Bangladesh, are relatively rare in this area. Although the backyard is usually not fenced, it has some privacy because of the vegetation and women feel free to bathe and work there. The *kanta* is considered primarily women's space

Sanitation Of the sixty homesteads surveyed only nine had existing toilets, while two homesteads lost their latrine structures in the flood. The common practice is to use the bushes, cane-fields or mango-groves behind the houses. This practice is the source of complaint for many of the women. As Moinara(30) reported, " Our husbands do not allow us to go to out on the *goli*, but they do not care if we are seen performing this very private activity. I have heard that a concrete ring and a sanitary slab costs only 70 Taka (about C$2.00), but still they do not see how important this is for us. We have to wait till dark or go before daybreak in order to hide our shame."[14] Her sister-in-law added, "If we have diarrhoea, we are forced to go out in daylight, which is very humiliating." Women who live near canefields are slightly more comfortable as the tall plants afford some privacy. Only nine women reported that they have no complaints about sanitation practices and did not feel shy to go out during daylight. The few homesteads that have sanitary toilets are of the pit-latrine type, usually placed in the *kanta* at a safe distance from the house (up to twenty metres). In the landlord's houses the latrines were often placed in separate courtyards. Up to about thirty years ago, there were separate toilets for women in Chowdhurypara.

Urinals, if there are any, are usually located adjacent to the homestead. Urine is considered less polluting than excreta. The reason why the toilets are located at a distance is two-fold. Firstly there is the problem of odour, flies and the sense of pollution. Also, certain members of the spirit world are believed to live on excreta and as such the toilets are often believed to harbour such spirits. This may account for the general reluctance of the rural populace to have fixed toilets. Women are often said to be possessed by spirits when going out to defecate. Women who wait till dark to defecate in the bushes often took their husbands to guard them as this was also the time when spirits were most active.

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[14] Simpson-Herbert suggests that in many parts of Asia, men often spend much time out of the home and use toilets in the mosque or other public spaces. For them a latrine in the home may not be a priority, while for women who are largely confined to the home, a latrine is often a high priority. Simpson-Herbert, 1989:59

The village has several old wells, some of which are still in use. Almost all households surveyed, however, depend on handpumps for their consumption needs. These handpumps were either privately owned or government tubewells. Private handpumps, even when shared by several families, were usually installed in the *kanta* or in the courtyard, while government handpumps were located in the *goli*. Women bring water from the handpumps in earthenware or brass vessels. They also bathe near them, usually when the menfolk were away at work. If the tubewells are placed next to the road, women carry water home and bathe behind the house. In some households, women bathe in ponds or in the river. There is a special spot in the riverbank where only women bathe. Also there is a women's pond near Kanapara in Shadashivpur, where women from as far as one kilometer away come for their daily bath and to wash clothes. Although most households have access to handpumps, many women prefer to go to the women's pond, possibly because they can meet women other than their immediate neighbours. There are not many ponds in this area, but the ones that are there, are not used much by women for bathing. Women bathe fully clothed. They often have only two saris, one to bathe in and one to change into. Clothes and utensils are washed at the tubewell. Sometimes they are also washed in the waterbody at the back of the house. (Fig. 34)

5.3.4   Building Process and Rituals

Most homes are built with family labour unless the family is wealthy enough to be able to afford hired help. The building of a new home involves several ceremonial rites. It also involves an established division of labour among men and women when the homes are self-built. (Fig. 35) Whenever a new home is built, 4 nails are buried in the four corners of the hut, otherwise it is believed that the house will fall in. Women dig the earth from the kanta, bring water and prepare the mud. The walls of the house are built by the men of the family. Women plaster and finish the walls. A roofer, known as *gharami* is hired to make the roof frame and to cover it with thatch or tiles. Before moving in, a *mullah* or two *madrassa* students are called to recite the *Quran* in the courtyard. People, who can afford it, will have a *milad* in the *goli*. A *milad* is a religious gathering where incidents from the prophets life are discussed and prayers offered collectively. Only males take part in *milad*s. Women listen from inside the courtyard or from behind screened partitions

For both Hindus and Muslims, the "home is the temple," where prayers and religious rituals are a part of daily life. Hindus have the sacred *tulsi*-tree in their courtyard and an altar in their huts where they worship their patron gods. Muslims have special prayer-corners in their homes which have to

women's pond

Toilet

KANTA

NOW

Fig 34 Sanitation

1. Women dig earth from the *kanta*, men prepare the plinth.

2 Women mix soil in a ditch, mixing straw or rice-husk.
Men build walls on plinth in strata of 40-50cm.

3. Tapering walls are built, 70-80cm
at bottom, 30-40cm at the top.
Women plaster walls with mud.

4. The roof-frame of timber/
bamboo is built by roofing
expert in courtyard.

5. The roof is tiled and
baranda added.
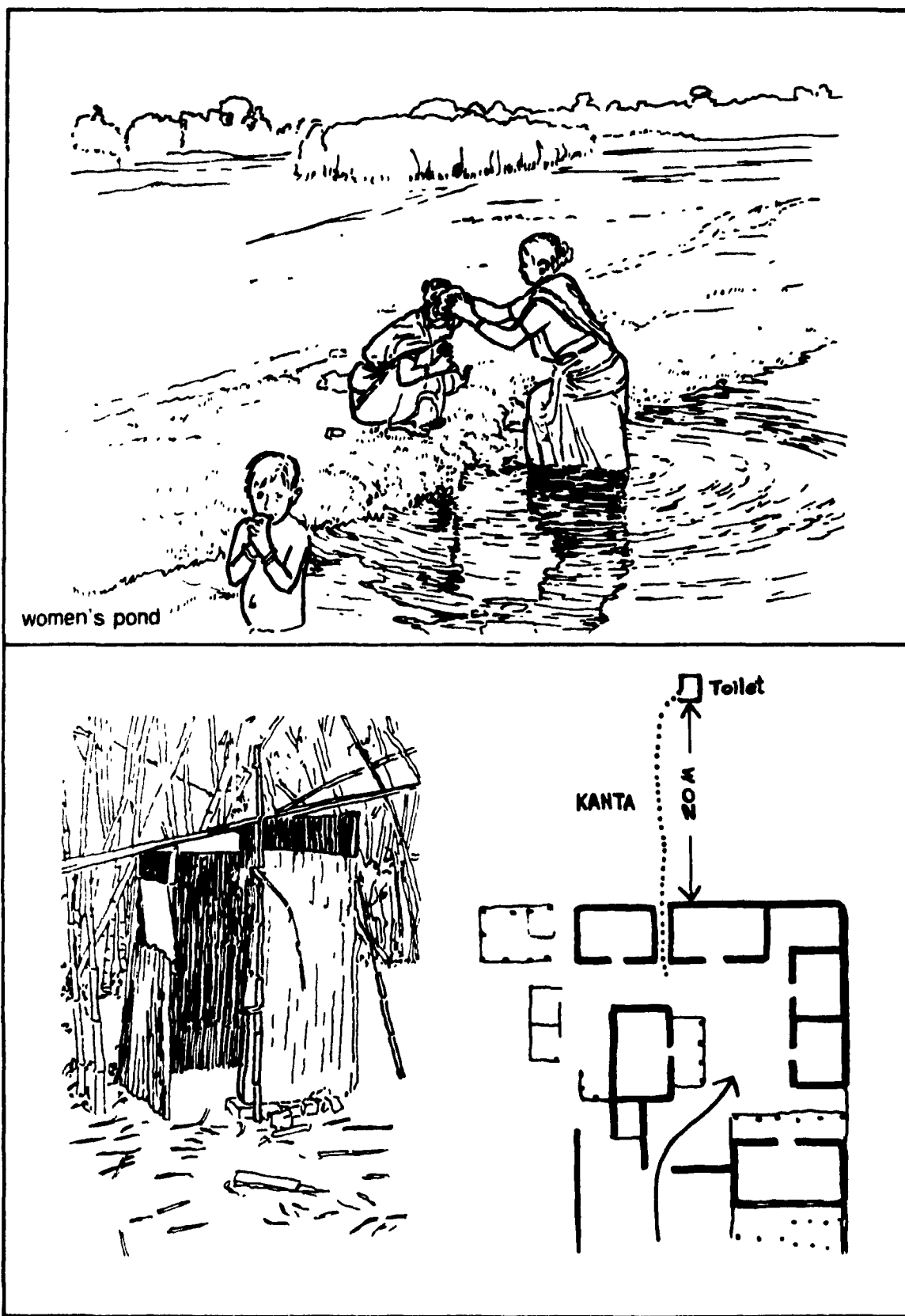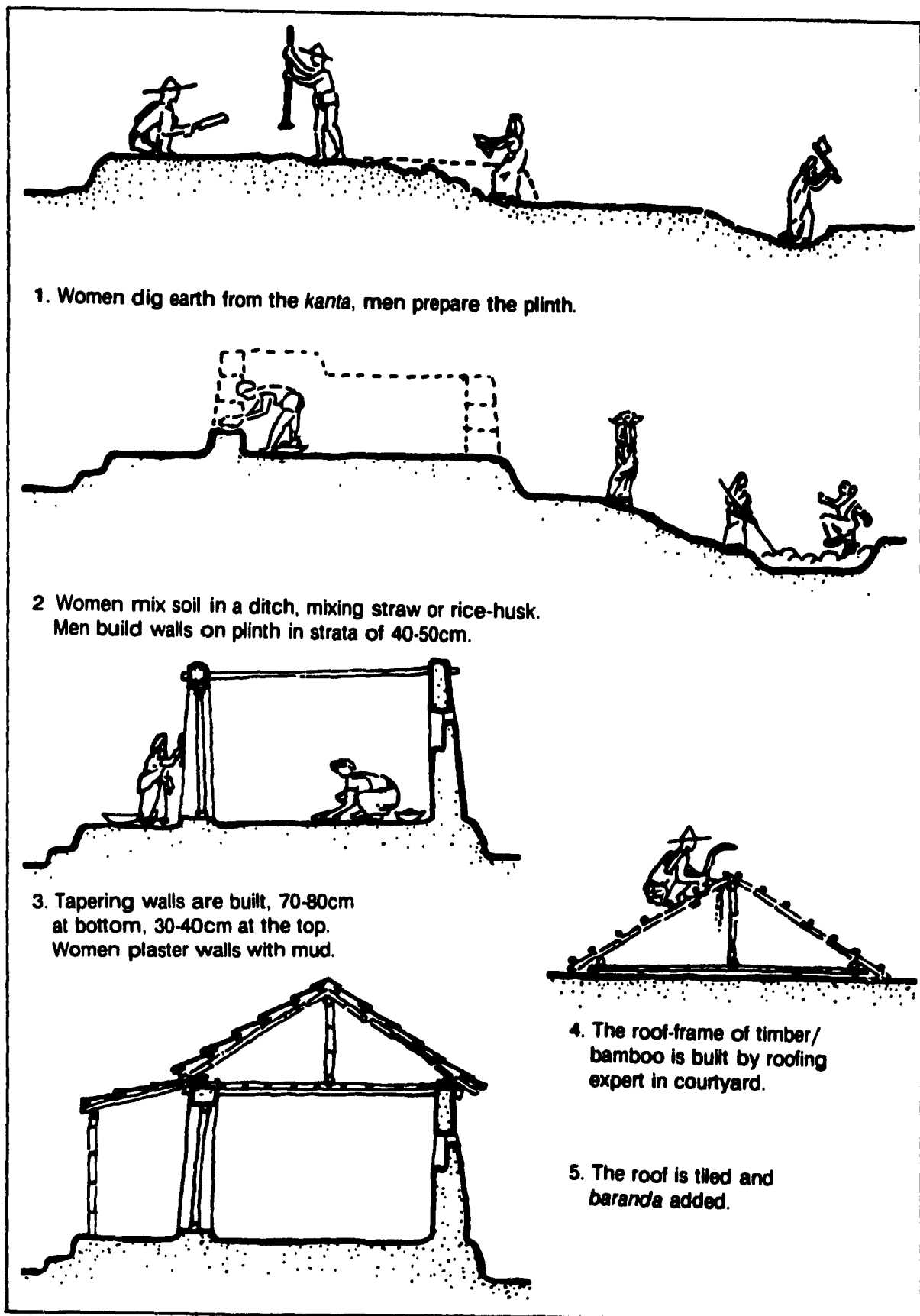
Fig 35. Process of Building a House

be kept pure and clean. For Muslim women, the home is the only temple. They do not visit mosques

5.3.4 Examples of Homesteads of Different Socio-economic Groups

House A: Homestead of landless nuclear family (Fig. 36 and 37)

Jonaki, her husband and three children live in a one-room house with a fenced courtyard in Ajgubi near the river. Her husband is a boatman and ferries people across the river for a nominal fee. They moved to this house three years after their marriage when her affinal home became too crowded. She was fifteen years old at that time. The plot, which is in the middle of a small orchard was given to them by her father who owns the orchard. Jonaki and her husband jointly built the small house. To ensure privacy, the house has its back towards the street. There is no screen wall in the *deori*, but a movable reed door conceals the courtyard from passers-by.

The house is isolated and surrounded by big trees. For this reason (so she feels), Jonaki was possessed several times by spirits and had to be exorcised. Jonaki rarely visits her neighbours, but women in groups of two or three come almost daily to visit her. They sit on a string-cot in the *kanta* under the shade of the mango-trees. The only place that she visits is her natal home, usually by the backlanes under the trees. She has been to Kansat twice. Once her husband took her to attend a huge religious gathering where she sat in a screened enclosure along with other women and listened to the *waj* - religious discourse. This was, as she noted, a highlight of her otherwise routine life.

Jonaki and her husband had been saving a long time to buy a hand-pump. It stands in a corner of the courtyard surrounded by loose bricks. Previously she used to bring water from the school or from a nearby pond. She and her family use the nearby cane-field for defecation, but she wishes they would have an enclosed toilet as in her natal home.

Jonaki's first child was born in her father's home where she stayed seven months for the occasion. Her oldest daughter is six years old but does not go to school. Jonaki knows how to pray and read the Quran, but her husband never received any kind of education.
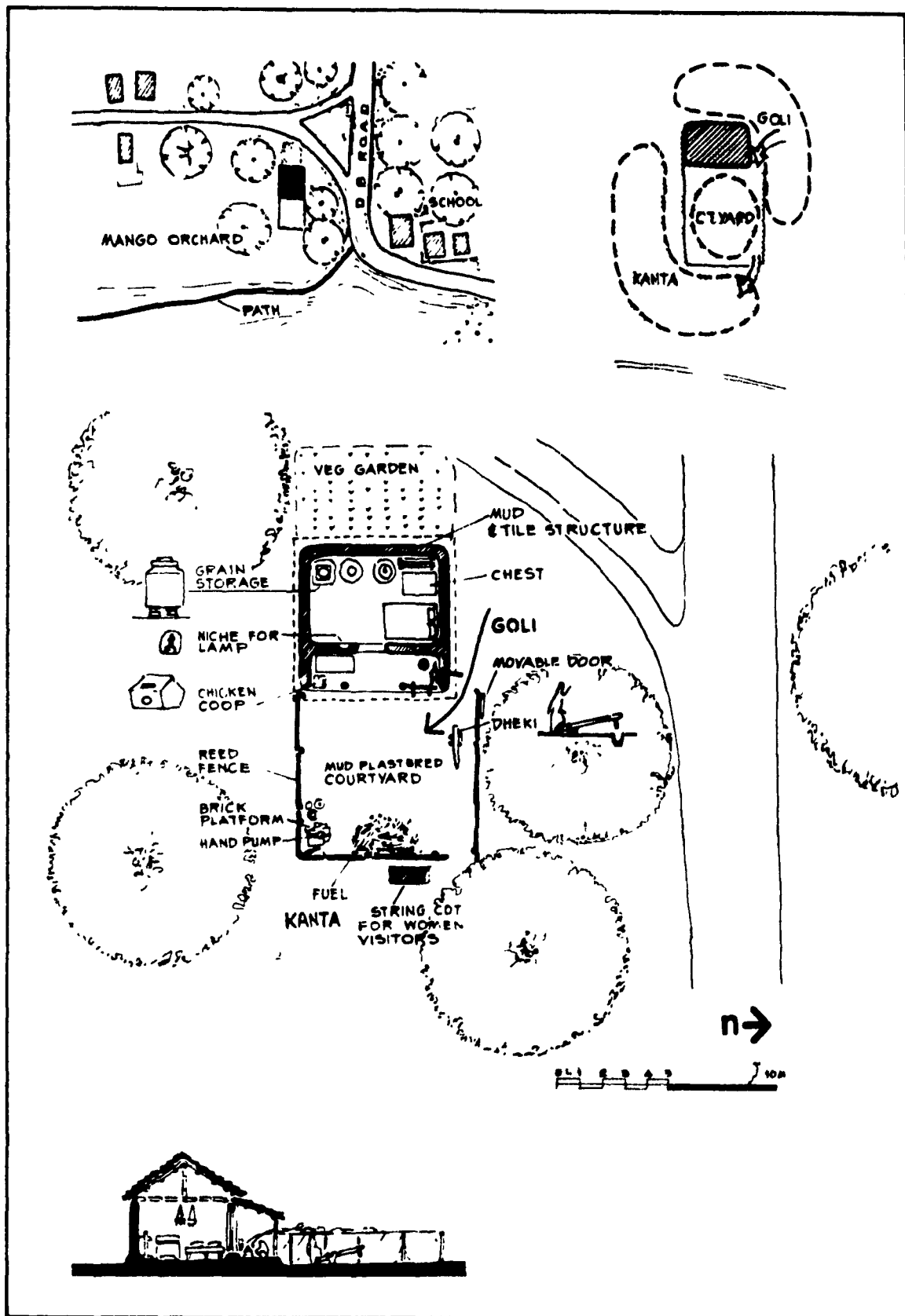
Fig. 36 House A. Homestead of a Landless Nuclear Household

Her husband barely earns enough to feed and clothe the family. The reason that her daughter does not go to school is because her only dress is torn. Jonaki tries to supplement the family income by sewing quilts, but she does not get many orders. Her husband and her father would not like her to work outside the home and she too would not feel comfortable. When their situation becomes too desperate her father helps them out.

Fig 37 Courtyard of House A

House B: Homestead shared by several landless families (Fig 38 and 39)

Mukta is a fourteen year-old orphan, who along with her two younger siblings, lives in the homestead of her paternal uncles The homestead is entered through a passage between two huts. On the left of the entrance is her parental homestead, while on the right is the homestead of her father's cousins. Both homesteads are open towards the *kanta* which slopes down into a muddy water-logged space. The nuclear families who share the homestead all have separate cooking spaces

Mukta's uncles are too poor to support her, so Mukta works in one of the landlord's houses. Every morning, she walks three kilometers to her work-place using the foot-paths through the orchards because "I don't like walking in front of men sitting in the *goli* and I can walk in the shade of the mango-trees." Mukta works a long ten-hour day. Her employer depends on her to help in the housework, as well as "outside" work such as getting wheat milled at the mill. As wages, she gets

food for herself and her siblings and clothes twice a year. She also receives the yearly *zakat* (compulsory charity according to Islamic rules) from her employer's family.

In the homestead, each conjugal family shares a room. Mukta's youngest uncle, who recently got married, built a small straw hut in the courtyard for himself and his new wife. At the time of the survey, his wife was visiting her natal home. Her father refused to send her back till a proper mud-hut is built for her. Mukta and her siblings do not have a hut; her parents' hut which rightfully belongs to them, was occupied by one of her uncles. Her father's cousins allow the three children sleep in a sheltered *baranda* in their homestead. There, among the storage urns, Mukta has set up her little household. A part of the long *baranda* was enclosed with bamboo matting to prepare a birth-room. One of the daughters of the house, who has come to her parent's home to give birth to her first child would live there for at least six months. Mukta hopes that when her cousin returns to her husband, she will be allowed to use the small room for her family.

Fig. 38 Entrance to House B

GOLI

KANTA

ROOM FOR
NEWLY MARRIED
COUPLE

BAITHAK-
CUM ANIMAL
SHED

DEORI

FUEL

DUCK COOP

KITCHEN

KANTA

ROOM
SHARED WITH
CATTLE

BARANDA

MUKTA

VEG GARDEN

BIRTH
ROOM

10M
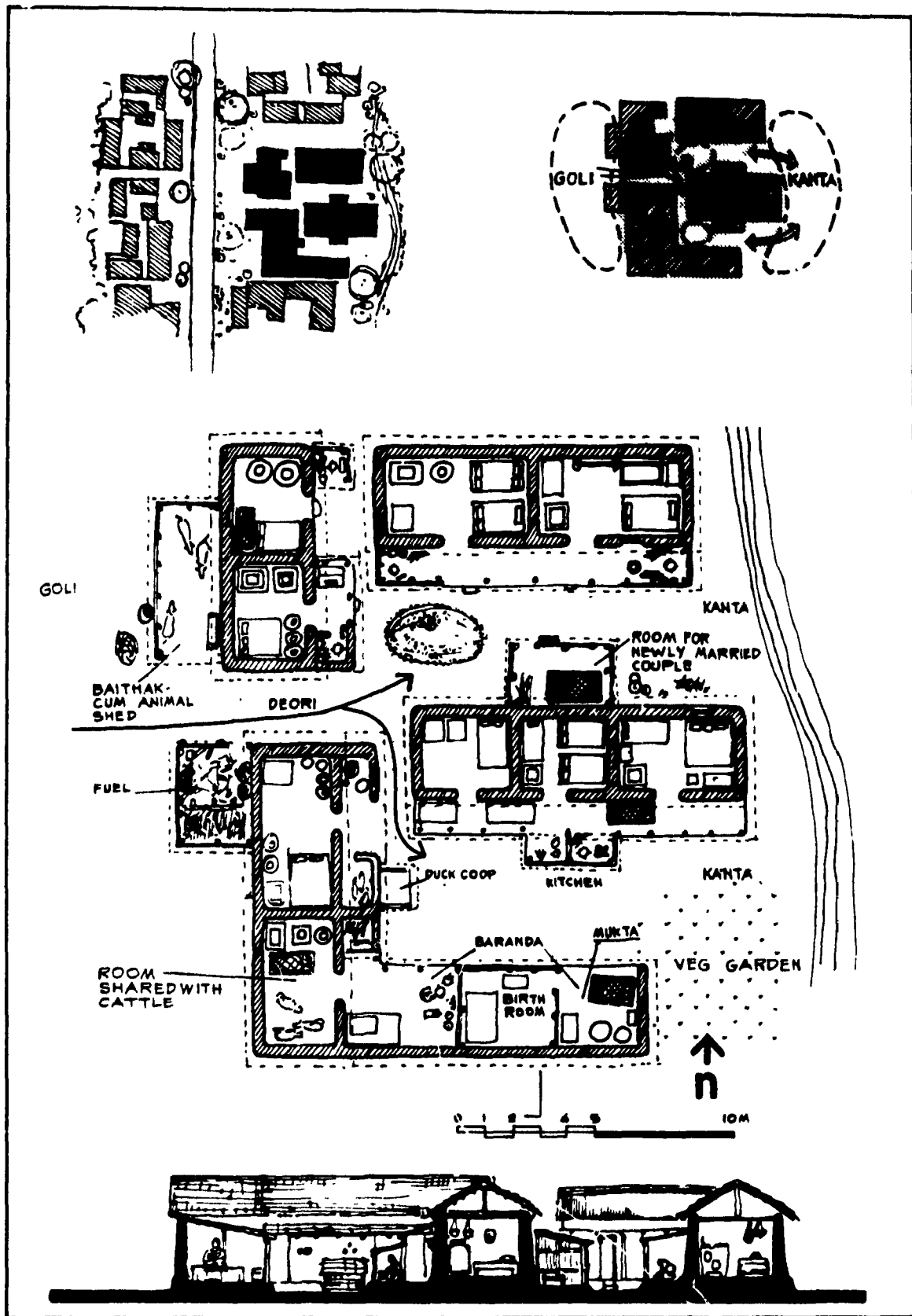
Fig 39. House B Homestead shared by Landless Nuclear Families

House C: Homestead of a farmer (Fig 40 and 41)

Jahanara is the middle-aged wife of a subsistence farmer. By Bangladeshi standards they are comfortably well off. They own seven acres of land and two cows. She has eight children (she is embarrassed at the large number) - one son and one daughter are married. Her daughter-in-law is twelve years old and has come on a visit (she will live in her natal home for another two years). Jahanara sometimes brings her on visits "so that she will learn to love us." She is careful not to let her son alone with the girl as she is still young. In the crowded two-room house this is not difficult.

The house is about twenty yers old. It has a walled courtyard with a continuous *baranda* running along the wall. The entrance through the corner of the courtyard is fitted with a door that can be locked.

Jahanara's days are filled with numerous household chores, which she does with the help of her two daughters. She does not do any gainful work because as she says "while my husband is alive, why should I work?" Jahanara rarely visits her natal home as she is too busy to leave her household for longer periods. She remembers the thrashing she received from her husband when she once went to her natal home without his permission. Nowadays, she visits freely in the neighbourhood. Her age has afforded her mobility and she likes to joke with the neighbours - even the men. However, her movements are restricted to her neighbourhood.
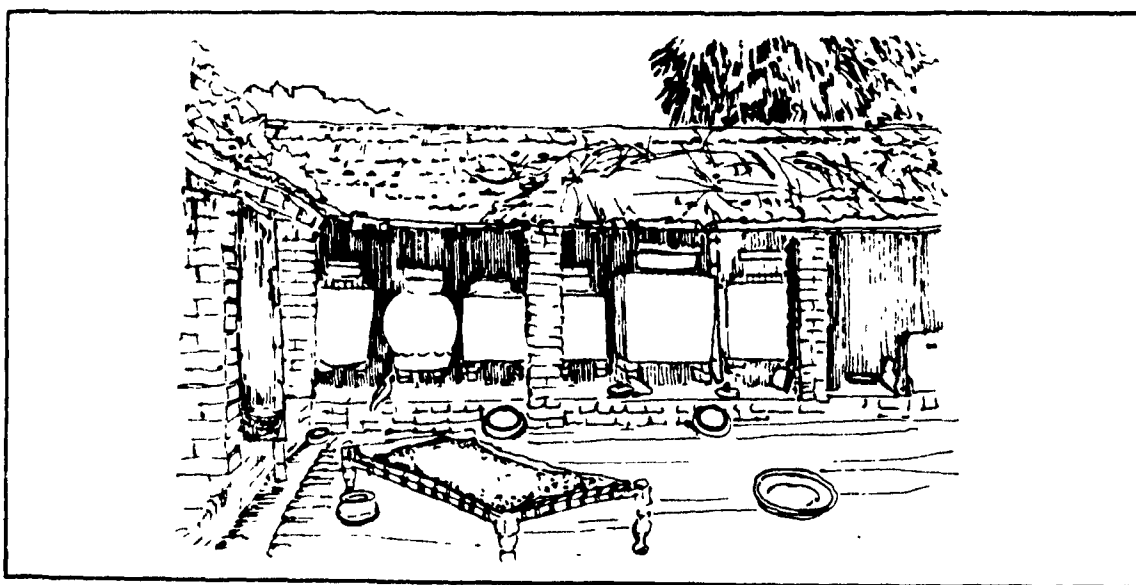
Fig 40 Courtyard of House C

GOLI

KANTA

HAY STACK

GOLI

WINDOWS PLASTERED SHUT- AFTER BAITHAK BUILT

BAITHAK

MUD STORAGE URNS

WATER BODY

CHICKEN COOP

GRAIN ON STRING COT

COURTYARD

COOKING & EATING

DHEKI

FUEL

VEG GARDEN

n →

KANTA

0 1M   5M   10M
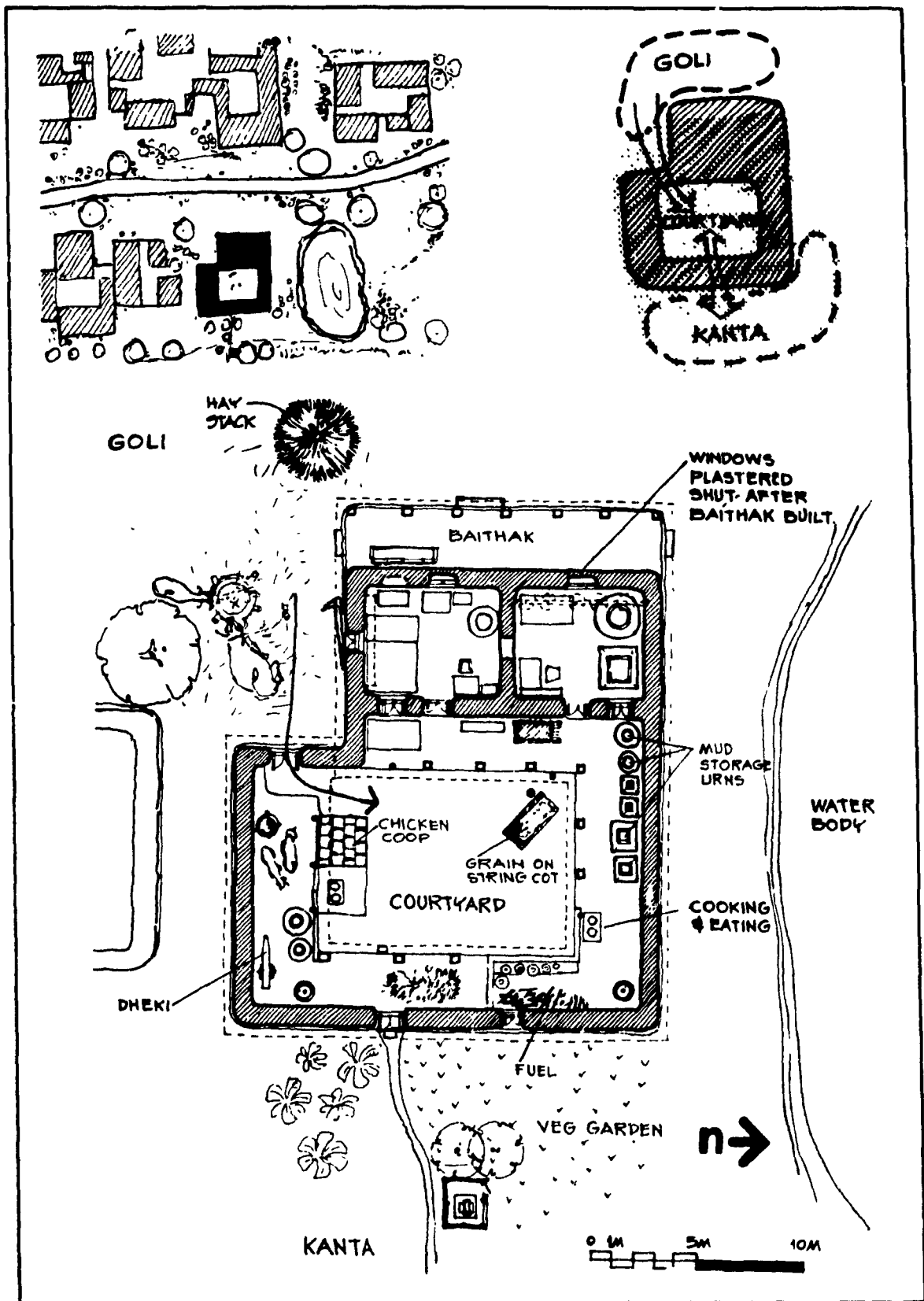
Fig 41 House C Homestead of a Farmer

House D: Homestead of a landlord (Fig 42 and 43)

This large two-storey brick house, built fifty years ago, is in the middle of the landlord's enclave. Two brothers and their families used to share the house, but one brother built a new house nearby and moved there two years ago At present only their mother, her older son and her daughter-in-law live in the huge house. The grand-children are all grown up and work or study in towns.

The main entrance door of the homestead is hidden behind a screen wall. The house has three courtyards - one for male guests, the main central courtyard and a service courtyard in the *kanta*. The central courtyard again is divided into two spaces, a cemented portion for drying produce or fuel and other household tasks and a separate fenced portion adjoining the kitchen for washing and cleaning The handpump and a small vegetable garden is situated in this part of the courtyard. In contrast to houses in the rest of the village, houses in Chowdhurypara have fairly large windows, which however are hidden from the street by high walls.

Saleha Chowdhury, the grandmother, remembers the times when women were strictly confined to their homes in Chowdhurypara and never went out except in a covered palanquin.[15] Every family had special decorated oxcart covers to be used by the women while travelling. Girls received instruction at home in Persian and Arabic, as well as Bengali Her daughter-in-law studied in a Calcutta school Two of her grand-daughters are graduates and the rest are in school.

Saleha and her daughter-in-law have two maids to help take care of the house. Their *dafadar* (field supervisor) also helps in household tasks whenever necessary. The two women hardly go out, except for extended trips to town to visit relatives. While in Chowdhurypara, they are totally dependent on their maids to take care of outside work. Their situation shows how the seclusion of one class of women is dependent on the mobility of another class.

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[15] For a description of strict purdah practices among Bengali Muslims in the early part of the century, see "Inside Seclusion" by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein, written in 1929
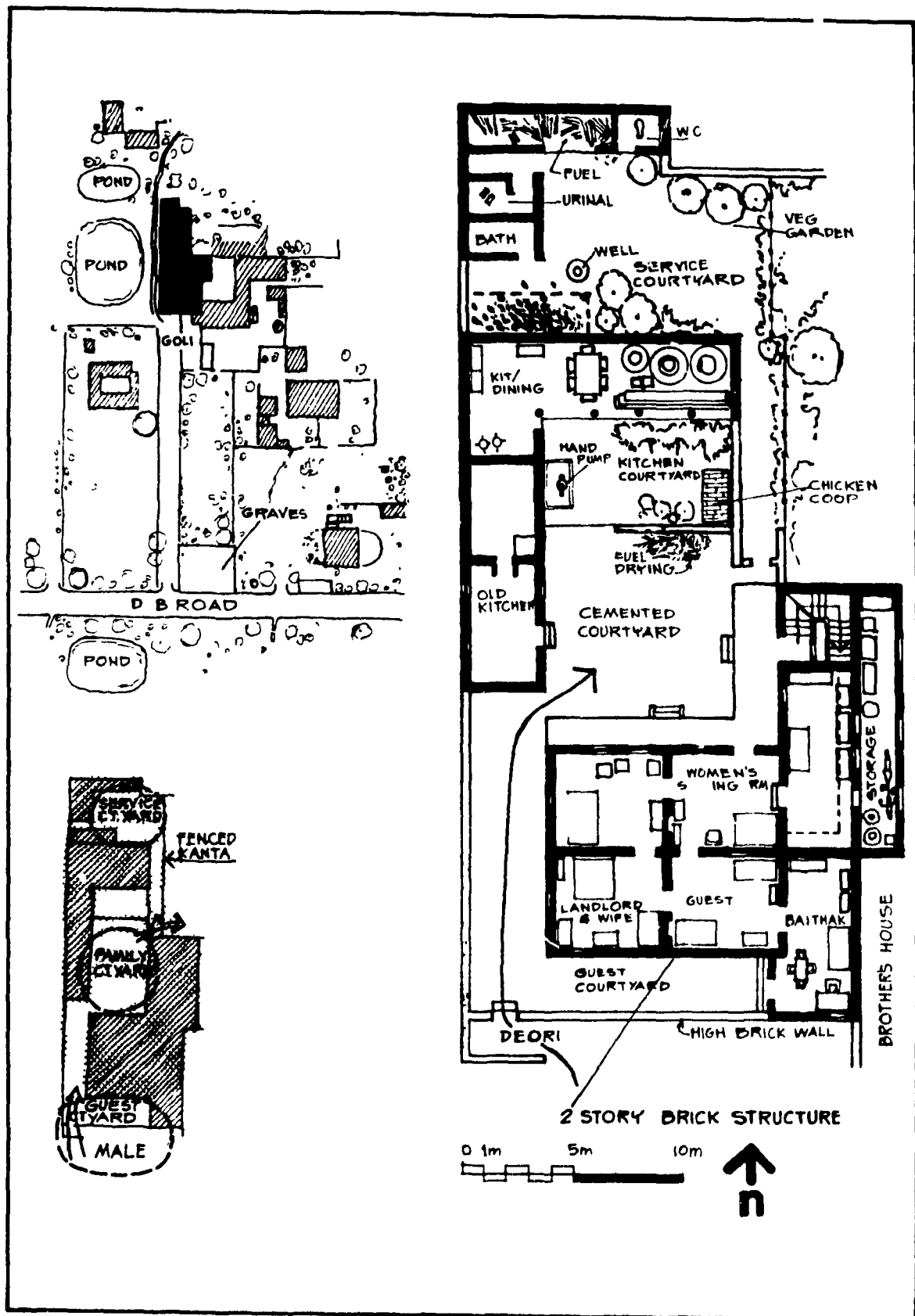
Fig 42 House D Homestead of a Landlord

Ghar

Deori
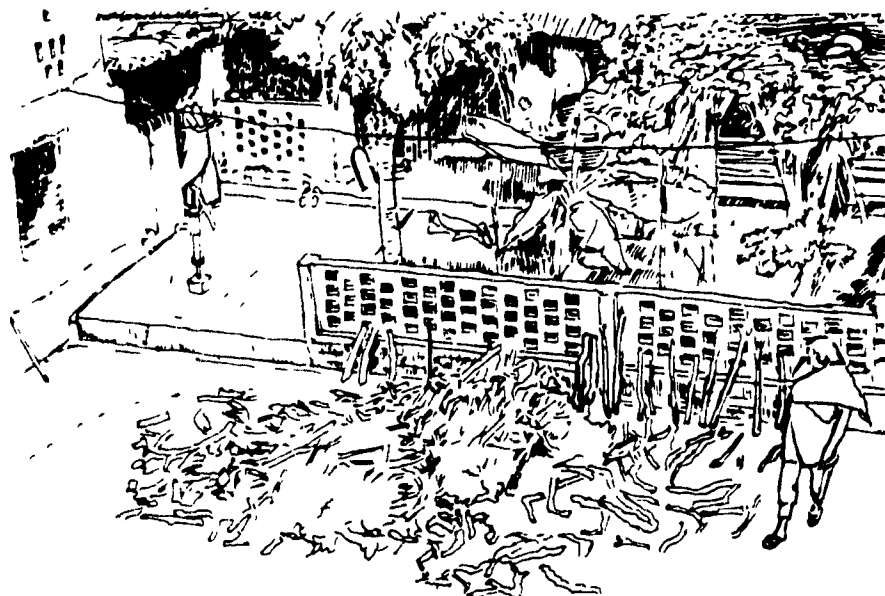
Kitchen courtyard

Fig 43 Different Spaces in House D

5.4 Women's Separate World: Gender Roles and Space Use

5.4.1 Separate Roles

From a very young age, boys and girls from the villages are introduced to their separate roles in society. Boys are given preference in matter of nutrition, education and childhood demands They have more time to play and to explore their surroundings, while girls, from a very early age are expected to help with household work, to collect fuel and to look after younger siblings By the age of eight or nine, depending on the economic status of the family, most girls are quite adept in housework and rearing children Boys, on the other hand, are sent on errands or to fish in the roadside ditches They are gradually separated from the females of the household and taught the skills of ploughing, sowing, reaping and selling the crops in the market, which are considered male activities Girls learn the processing of produce - work that can be done at home. From early childhood, both girls and boys internalize their different roles in society and their separate spaces - the private spaces in and around the house for girls and the more public spaces in the village for boys.

5.4.2 Purdah Practices

Purdah practices in the study area are not as strict as in some other regions of Bangladesh Women are more relaxed about conversing with non-kin males, although only when necessary. None of the women interviewed own or wear a veil (wearing a veil is more of an urban phenomenon) but they modestly cover their heads with the end of their sari in the presence of adult males When going out of the homestead, they can often be observed holding the end of the sari with their teeth, thus obscuring the lower part of the face. (Fig. 44)

At what age a girl should be confined to the homestead depends more on her physical appearance, than her age. A girl who looks mature at twelve would be confined earlier than a girl who still looks like a child at fourteen. A girl who is considered to be old enough to be confined, is expected to do a major share of the housework, including fetching water or fuel. A new bride, however, who may be the same age as an unmarried girl in the family, observes purdah more rigorously and is not even allowed to visit neighbours At the Adult School for women, I found three women from the same household, but their newly married brother's wife did not accompany them. "She is a new bride. It would be shameful for the family if she goes out," they explained As a woman grows

Veiling with sari

Curtained rickshaw

Covered oxcart

Fig 44 Purdah in Public Space
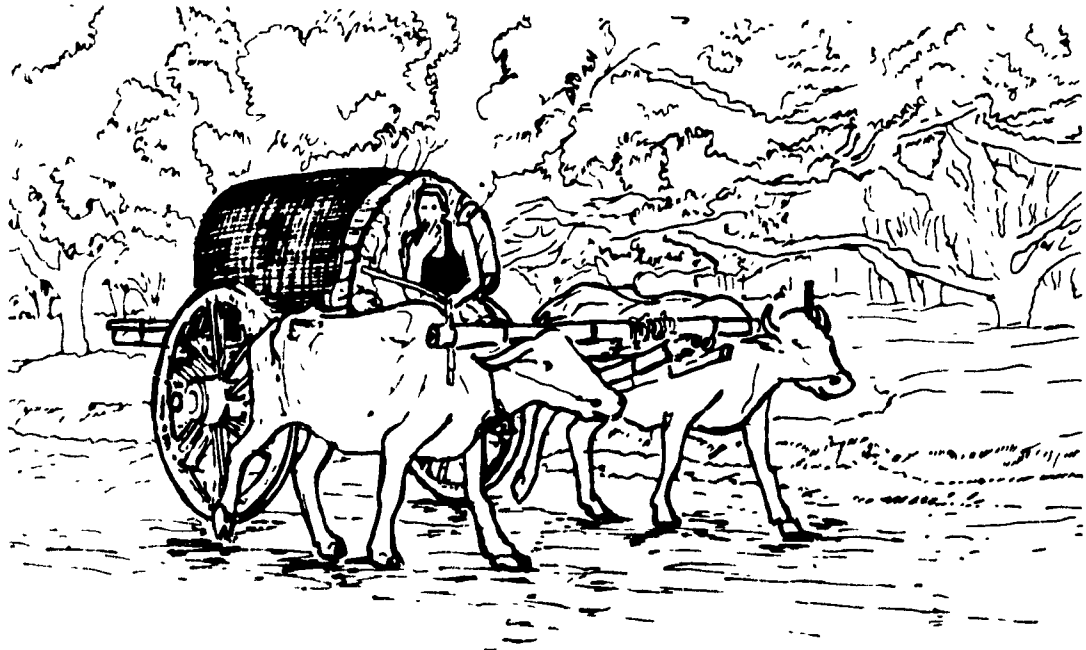
older, she gradually gains more freedom, both in mobility and in her relations with men. An older woman reported that she took over tasks that involve going out of the homestead (like taking goats out to graze or to collect fuel) to ensure strict purdah for her daughter-in-law [16]

The observance of purdah seemed to me a complex practice with many subtle shades of behaviour and often contradictory patterns For example it was quite acceptable for me to use the D.B road during my field work, except on *hat* (weekly market) days Walking about on those days, when there was a lot of traffic on the road, was considered *bepurdah* (non-purdah). So apparently *purdah* depended not only on the presence of males, but on the number of males that were present Similarly, women use the back-lanes not because they will not meet any men at all, but because they will meet fewer men there   Also the social status of the males dictated whether the woman should cover her head or not If a known male visitor is a social inferior or much younger than the woman of the household, she will not bother to pull her sari over her head. If however, the visitor is a social equal, an honoured guest or a relative by marriage, e g , daughter's father-in-law, women cover themselves immediately and retire from their presence

Most respondents considered *purdah* to be an ideal practice to which they aspire It symbolizes for them a comfortable and sheltered life It also raises the status of the family and brings honour to the family name. A woman who worked as a domestic servant would not let her teen-age daughter take up similar employment, although the family was barely able to sustain itself She felt it might hamper her chances to contract a good marriage. [17]

One of the first acts of upwardly mobile families is to confine the womenfolk within the homestead A middle farmer, who became rich through smuggling, built a closed toilet for his daughters-in-law He also forbade them to visit in the neighbourhood, which they had been accustomed to do previously. To emphasize the separation of sexes, all the new brick-built houses in the villages have proper *baithak*-rooms with separate entrances, while in the older mudhouses this feature was often missing

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[16] This is analogous to Bhatty's findings in Uttar Pradesh, where in a family of oil-pressers, the working daughter-in-laws were confined to the home when the family could afford it, but the mother-in-law continued in her profession as oil-vendor.

[17] Abdullah and Zeidenstein also noted that families will tolerate great deprivation before suffering the loss of status involved in allowing women to work outside the home Abdullah and Zeidenstein, 1968:42

The social order in a village, which includes adherence to *purdah*, is regulated by a very strong gossip network. There are no secrets in a village. Unbecoming behaviour of a woman can be cause for loss of face or social ostracisation of the family concerned. A woman's behaviour is so controlled by social mores that the norms of purdah are internalized by women and practised as correct behaviour. For example, in a group discussion, most women agreed that if a woman leaves the immediate neighbourhood without her husband's permission, it can be valid reason for wife-beating.

5.4.3 *Purdah* and Status

Status is also another determining factor of what constitutes *purdah* behaviour. For example, the landlords' wives do not think it necessary to hang curtains while travelling by oxcart, while women of other classes would not travel otherwise. On the other hand, upper class women feel it is extremely non-*purdah* to go out of the homestead for natural functions, while for women with lower status it is a common practice.

Purdah in Chowdhurypara is relatively relaxed. Women freely visit each other in the afternoons and use the D B road to visit the other members of the family who do not live in Chowdhurypara. However, even they avoid the D.B road when *hats* are in session. For trips ouside the village, women will use oxcarts to travel even if the trip is within walking distance. It is considered a loss of status and *purdah* to walk longer distances. The girls, when they reach puberty, are not confined to their homes. They freely roam about the neighbourhood and congregate in the evenings to walk and converse. Three fourteen year-old girls are well-known for their tom-boyish exploits like climbing trees, fishing in the ditch and playing pranks. This kind of behaviour, which would not be tolerated in the other *paras*, is looked upon quite fondly by their families. Nevertheless, the young girls do not move out of their own neighbourhood unless they are travelling to town escorted by male members of the family. The principal of the girl's school, a landlord's wife, who is also the head of several charitable organisations in the area has to move about alone quite often. Although villagers appreciate her work, her behaviour is criticized by *mullah*s and other men of the village, often to her face. Another landlord's wife does not depend on male members of family for work she can do herself. She goes to houses nearby to buy eggs or milk. On one occasion, when her husband was absent, she even went to the orchard to supervise pruning of their trees. She is however an exception. The reason that the women of the landlords' family are more relaxed about *purdah* restrictions is that their status is quite secure in the village. They obviously do not feel the need to

observe *purdah* for men who are their social inferiors. Nevertheless, their movements too are restricted to some extent

Thus, while due to education and exposure to urban life, the women of the landlords' families were giving up many trappings of *purdah* bahaviour, lower class families were seeking to emulate the status that strict purdah signifies, not by emulating the present behaviour of the upper class women, but by what was once the tradition prevalent in Chowdhurypara Among the farmer class, strict seclusion is still the ideal

The "status" of a space or a facility is also an important determinant whether it is acceptable for women to use it For example, neighbouring Kansat has weekly and daily temporary markets selling daily necessities, where women are noticably absent On the other hand, the permanent market at Kansat, with well-built shops selling clothes, books and other consumer items is an acceptable place for a woman to visit, escorted by a male member of her family [18]

5.4.4 Women and Folk Religion

Folk religion also has a strong influence on the mobility and movement of women and their use of local spaces The rural syncretic belief includes the belief in an active spirit world which is largely associated with women When a village girl reaches puberty, many sections of the village become off-limits for her due to the belief of evil spirits lurking in different spaces If she is menstruating, she will never venture near big trees or leave the home after dark, as she may be harmed or possessed by evil spirits in her polluted state [19] In Bajitpur there are two places in the village which are specially dangerous - a swampy waterbody and a group of graves in the middle of the village Women will make wide detours to avoid these spaces A pregnant woman is not allowed to leave the homestead on full moon days and eclipses, for fear of bearing a deformed child Similarly, a new mother and her baby are also believed to be specially vulnerable to spirits and are not allowed

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[18] Similarly, Dr Salahuddin of BRAC reported that in one of their target areas, women field-workers on bicycles were considered totally unacceptable and *bepurdah* by male villagers BRAC convinced the villagers of the need for the women to be mobile and the villagers came up with an acceptable solution - motorcycles!

[19] Menstrual rags were usually buried in the back of the house or jungle, where they would not be harmful Therese Blanchet found that menstrual rags were never buried in fields or near graves, because of their polluting nature Also, menstruating women avoid walking through paddy fields, as this might reduce the crop. Blanchet, 1987:38,42

to leave the homestead for forty days Spirit possession is a fairly common occurence among the village women Any behaviour deemed abnormal is ascribed to possession by spirits. Excorcisms by local *ojhas* (excorcists) are held in the courtyard and involve incantations, fires and flowers and often merciless beatings of the women involved Usually homesteads are supposed to be safe, but at times, the entire homestead is considered to be possessed In such cases, the *mullah* is summoned to give *azaan* (call for prayer) in the four corners of the house to "close" the house to entry by evil spirits

Women are excluded from mosques, but often they are regular visitors to saints' tombs and shrines, a common fixture in the countryside Both Hindu and Muslim women visit these shrines to pray for a special favour, such as a son. The tomb of Sheikh Niyamatullah, a sixteenth century saint, is about eight miles from Bajitpur Several women reported visiting the shrine for prayer

5.4.5 Women's Work

Women spend most of their time in domestic work, which is labour-intensive and time-consuming. (Fig 45) Women use spaces in around their homesteads for their daily activities (See Appendix 2) Flour and spices have to be ground by hand. Paddy has to be husked manually to make rice The homestead has to be swept twice daily and plastered periodically. Repairing and replastering the mud house is also a woman's job Cooking is done on mudstoves with leaves and sticks for fuel. Cooking utensils become covered with soot and have to be cleaned by rubbing them with ash and coconut husk Cattle is usually taken care of by men, as they are tied in the *goli*, but women take care of goats. chicken and ducks However, women collect dung to make dung-sticks for fuel. If there is a vegetable patch in the *kanta*, it is within the women's domain. Vegetables grown commercially on the field, however, is grown by men. Women pump water from the hand-pump and carry it inside the homestead. Quilts, pickles and mud storage bins are made in the afternoon, during leisure time This is also the time when women visit each other, pick lice and put oil in each other's hair

Women spend a considerable time in productive work in the agricultural sector. Women work daily in processing and storing the farm produce Men grow paddy, but women are responsible for paddy processing, storage and seed germination, in short, all the activities that can take place within the home (Fig 46) Paddy-boiling and drying is done in the courtyard If there is not enough space this activity sometimes spills out to the *goli* This is considered to be purely women's work. One

husking paddy

drawing water

grinding spices

sewing

repairing house

washing utensils

grinding flour

Fig 45 Women's Work
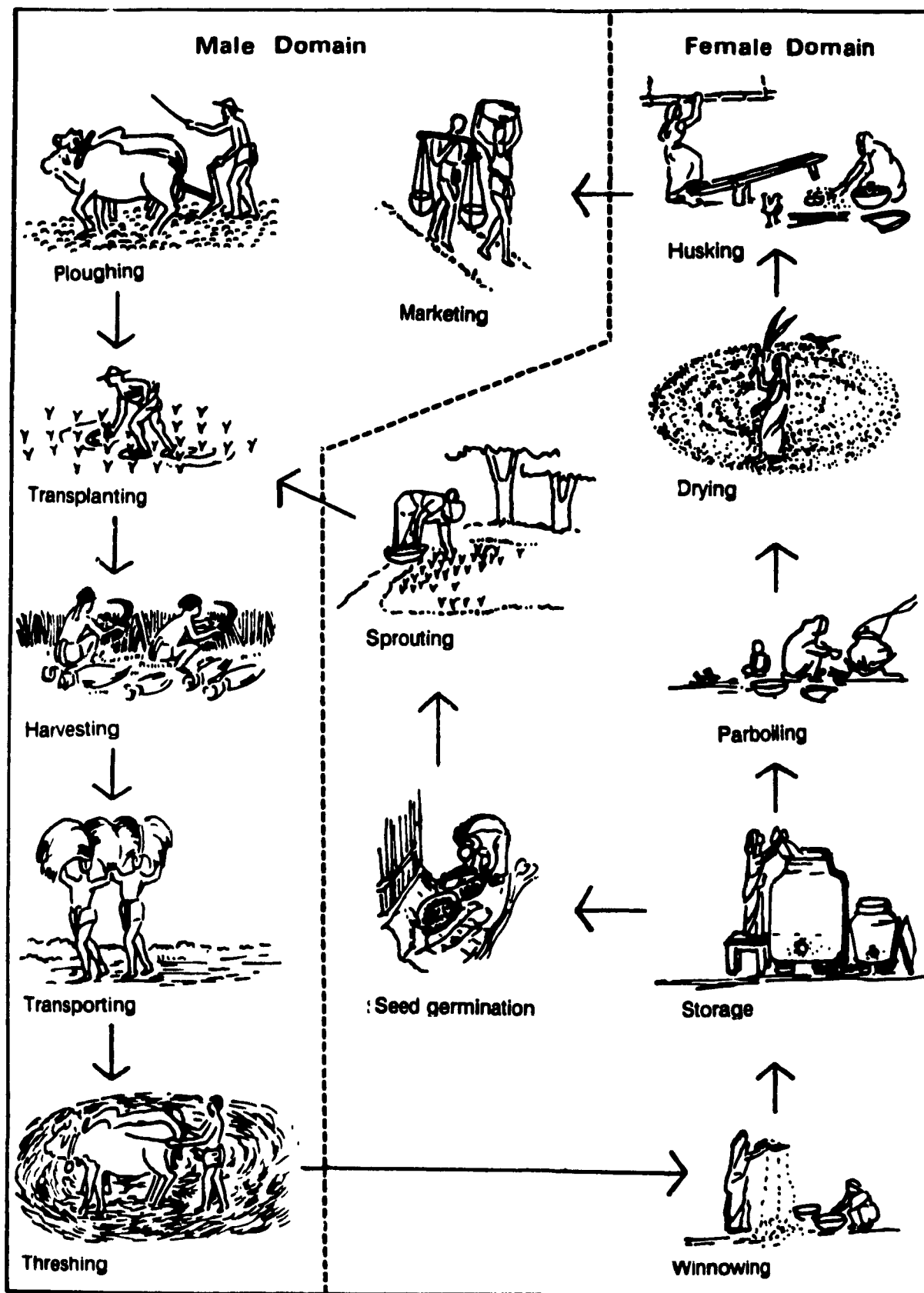
Fig 46 Paddy Cycle

respondent described the uncommon devotion of a husband by stating that "he even processed paddy when his wife was ill." Fields are totally off bounds for a woman unless she is walking through them to travel. No woman has ever been known to work on the fields, even during periods of great want.[20] Also women do not go to the fields to deliver food to their menfolk. The men usually carry their meals with them or it is delivered by children.

5.4.6 Women's Gainful Employment

There are very few opportunities for women to work for wages. They are absent from the main agricultural businesses of mango and sugarcane. Sugarcane growing and marketing is totally in the male domain. Sugarcane is grown on the fields and marketed from the fields. If molasses are made they are also made on the fields in big vats. Only men are involved in growing mangoes and caring for the orchard. Mangoes are also marketed from the orchard itself. Women are only involved in making *amta*, a dry sweet made from the juice of overripe mangoes or mango-pickles made with green mangoes collected from the ground after a storm. These are usually made for home consumption in richer households and for sale to wholesalers in poorer ones. Poor women often process paddy for wages.[21] Paddy is brought from richer households, which the women husk at home or get husked at the ricemill. The paddy is either delivered to them or male family members or children bring it home. Only three of the women interviewed stated that they themselves went to the richer households to process paddy there or to bring it home. All of them were middle-aged widows. The electric ricemill, although viewed by the villagers as a symbol of development for the village, was actually detrimental to the income-earning capacity of the women. Husking rice manually by the *dheki* is a labourious and backbreaking task, but the advent of the ricemill meant that many of the richer households could get their rice husked at the mill at a lower price. Thus opportunities for work, which are normally limited, decreased even more. Parboiling and drying is still done at home and the rice is husked at the mill. Another upshot of this development is that as very few women are able to go to the ricemill, which is next to the D.B. road,

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[20] Smock reports in her study that women who go beyond the accepted division of labour to visibly farm on the land risk the censure and contempt of their villagers. Smock, 1977:109, Chen cites the example of women who, in the post-famine conditions of 1975, were forced to work in the fields but worked at night so as not to break out of purdah. Chen, 1983:61

[21] When processing forty kgs of paddy, the women have to deliver twenty-five kgs rice. Their profit is about three to four kgs of rice. Making rice-flour is more profitable If ten kgs of rice is given, five kgs of rice-flour have to be delivered.

they have to be dependent on their husbands or their children to get the rice husked. Some of the families, if they manage to save or borrow some capital, buy paddy and husk it for profit

Another traditional way for women to earn is by sewing quilts known as *katha*. These are hand-sewn and often beautifully embroidered. The *katha*s sewn in these villages are made for local consumption.

Domestic work in richer households is another way for women to earn a living Usually such work is not remunerated in cash, but by meals for the worker's family and clothes once or twice a year. Respondents stated that, not so long ago, no married woman, however poor, would engage in domestic work, as it reflected on the honour of the husband. Nowadays, poverty has driven married women to hire out as domestic help, but the majority are unmarried young girls, or female head of households

The government employs poor men and women in the "Food for Work" (FFW) program, in which wheat is given in exchange for cutting earth to repair roads. In Shampur Union there is only one gang of women earth-cutters consisting of fifteen women In a population of women of which the majority are in need of gainful work, the small number of women employed in this kind of work represents the low status and loss of *purdah* that it entails. All fifteen women thus employed are widows or divorcees whose families are totally dependent on their income. Two of the women are from Bajitpur I met one of them - Sabina, in her mid-thirties. After her husband died she tried very hard to support her children by the traditional income-generating work such as processing paddy and sewing quilts, but they often went hungry. She finally decided to join the FFW program, as it meant regular employment. At first her brothers-in-law objected to the loss of *purdah* that this meant for the family, but they were too poor themselves to support her and eventually agreed. (As she was living on their property she had to obtain their approval.) Her neighbours also spoke ill of her and predicted that no-one would marry her daughters. But the fact that she worked in an all-female gang and that her demeanour and dress remained as modest as before made her work acceptable to her neighbours. She is now commended as she did not ask for charity to support her children but relied on her own labour. Nevertheless, although there are several other destitute women in her village, only one of her neighbours followed her example. To leave the confines of

the *bari* and to work on the road, a "male" space, obviously is a bold step that not all women are willing or able to take.[22]

5.4.7 Access to Social and Economic Institutions

Women are excluded from most village institutions. Tho "publicness" of these institutions discourage women from taking advantage of their services

Legal Services

Women are often denied their Islamic and constitutional rights, but are powerless to fight for them because of the negative and public image of legal institutions. Respondents reported that women who attend court are a source of shame and loss of face for their families. None of the respondents had ever attended court. Most of them had given up their right to their parental property in favour of their brothers, so that their brothers would not consider them a burden on their *naior* (vacation at parental home) visits or if they are forced to return to the parental home. In the village *shalish* (traditional arbitration court), which are called on to mediate village disputes, women are almost always represented by their male kin - husband, father, brother or adult son These courts, which are held in the *baithak* and *goli* of the *matbor* (faction chief) or the neighbourhood mosque are all-male affairs Only older widows have at times requested arbitration and attended these courts.

Marketing

Although women are excluded from daily and weekly markets, both as vendors and buyers [23] they are not totally excluded from commercial activitites. Door-to-door vending is very common. Most women do not observe *purdah* in front of male vendors, as mostly they are considered village

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[22] In Chen's study of poor women who took part in the "Food for Work" program, she found that the marriageability of the young girls was compromised due to this work, because they worked outside the village and sometimes, worse still, among male labourers Women who are forced to seek wage labour outside the village, thus crossing the boundaries into male space, are often condemned by village *mullah*s (religious leaders) as non-*purdah* and this may jeopardise their chances to get married, to find work or to receive loans from the wealthy. Chen 1983:69,73-74 Abdullah and Zeidentein write about a young working girl who reported the village *mullah* saying to her, "There is flood and drought because you girls walk outside and dont keep purdah. You are Allah's curse." (Abdullah and Zeidenstein, 1978:62)

[23] In a personal conversation, Mr. Tazemul Haq of Grameen Bank informed me of the existence of a small temporary women's market in Sirajganj, where women vendors sell to women buyers The market is called BouBazaar - the bazaar for wives.

"brothers." Pots and pans, cooking oil, bangles and ribbons, vegetables, fish, etc. are some of the items that are sold door-to-door. Transactions usually take place in the courtyard, where neighbouring women also congregate to sample the wares. (Fig. 47) There is only one woman vendor in the area and she is a Hindu. This activity is not acceptable to Muslim women, however poor they may be. Wholesalers also visit the homesteads to buy eggs, milk and home-grown vegetables from the women. The money earned from selling these products remains in the hands of women. In poor households this money is obviously spent for food and other household expenses, but if possible it is spent on a few luxuries like plastic bangles or ribbons for the children.

There are small neighbourhood shops in all the villages selling daily necessities. These road-side shops are meeting places for males in the afternoons. Women go to these shops only when they have no alternative, for example if no-one else is at home. One husband reported that his wife never visited the neighbourhood shop, although it was a few yards from his doorstep. The wife, however, later told me privately that she does visit the shop if necessary, but only when her husband was out.

Credit Facilities

Professional moneylenders known as *mahajans* are usually a common feature of rural life, but there are no professional moneylenders in these two villages. For small amounts of credit villagers are mainly dependant on richer relatives or friends. Faction chiefs often advance personal consumption loans to members of their communities. An agricultural bank located in Bajitpur advances loans to cultivators. Women are dependent on other women for small loans, which they use to buy a few chickens or ducks, or to buy paddy for processing. No woman ever visited the Agricultural Bank or was given a loan.

Grameen Bank, a mobile bank which gives income generating loans mainly to poor landless women, has started operations in one of the *paras* (Ajgubi). Grameen Bank recognizes the limited mobility of rural women and sets up weekly office in one of the courtyards/*barandas* of their members. Other members gather there and make their weekly loan repayment and compulsory savings contributions. (Fig. 48) One of the loan recipients, Amena Begum, the only earning member in a family of five, borrowed Tk 2000.00 (approx. C$57.00) and bought two goats, some ducks and some paddy to husk. She repays the loan at Tk40.00 (C$1.20) per week for fiftytwo weeks. With her nominal salary as the school cleaner and the money she is earning from paddy-husking, she manages to support her family. She described how access to a small loan helped her to care for
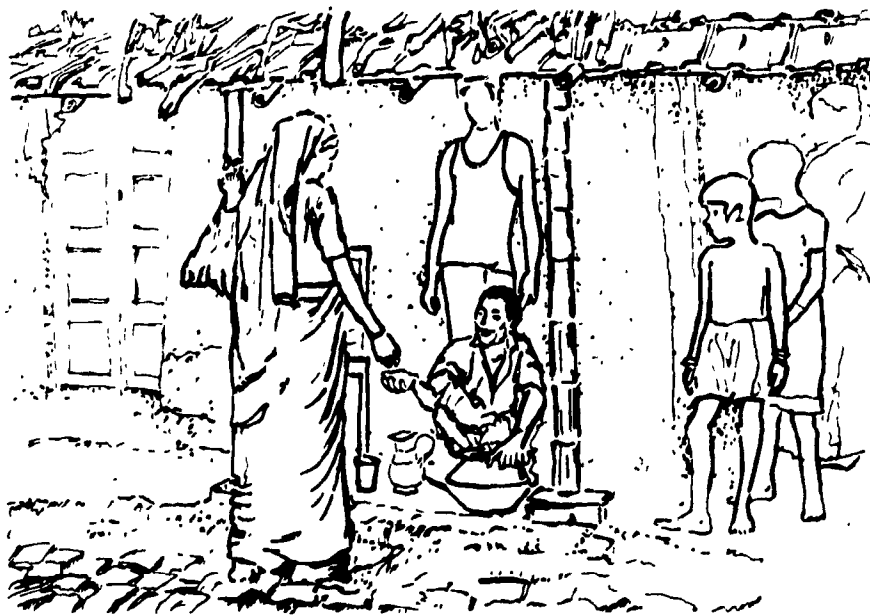
Fig 47 Vendors in Courtyard

KANTA

GOLI

Road
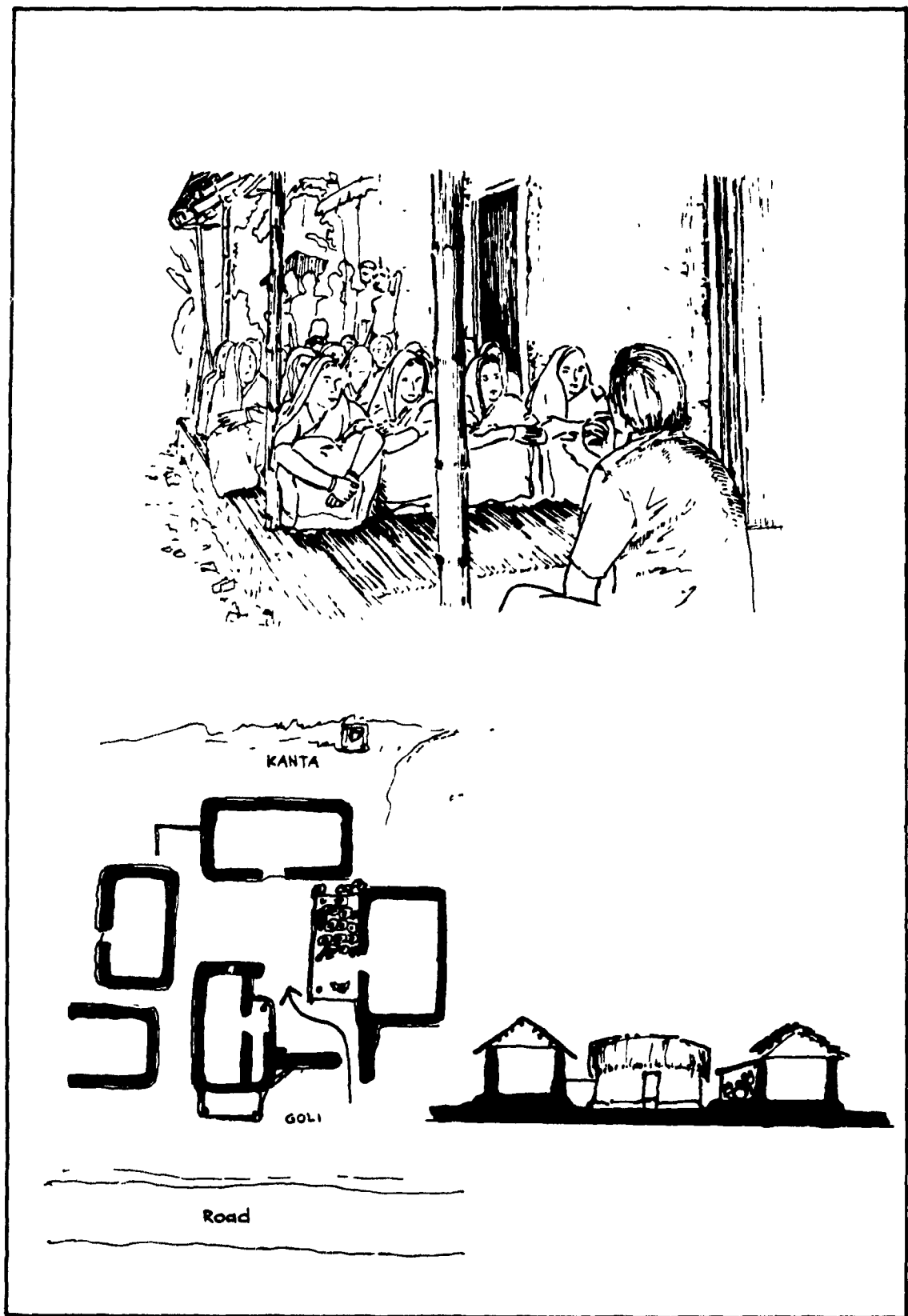
Fig 48 Grameen Bank Meeting

her family on a daily basis and to raise their standard of living. They were now able to have two meals a day instead of one.[24]

Healthcare

Women in this area have little access to healthcare facilities The usual practice is for husbands to describe the symptoms of their wives' illness to the male doctor in Kansat or to the two homeopaths in Bajitpur and bring medicine for their wives. Unless it is absolutely necessary women are not taken to the doctor [25] This is both for reasons of purdah, lack of mobility and the inconvenience of going to the clinic. Women's lack of mobility and the long distance that has to be covered through muddy roads to reach government health facilities in Kansat means that women are mostly left out of modern health services. They are thus compelled to rely on indigenous health care practices which they can avail of easily and which operate within the given social constraints imposed on them. There are several village practicioners, known as the kobiraj, who dispense traditional herbal medicine. There are also several women kobiraj in the area, who are quite popular for treating women.

The only health-visitors that reach the women are the two female family planning workers who distribute contraceptives and advice women about planning their families They visit weekly in different paras, setting up "shop" in some of the courtyards. Neighbourhood women, who are interested in availing of their services, or out of plain curiosity, gather in the courtyard.

Education

There are two primary schools, a girls school and a coeducational high school in this area There are also two adult education centres in Shadashivpur run by an NGO named Sha-unnayan. All the schools for children are situated on land donated by the landlord family. One of the primary schools was established in 1882 by them. In this school there are 372 students of whom 169 are girls. The

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[24] Women who take loans from Grameen Bank are often perceived by men as trying to upset the traditional balance of society. A woman in Baghmara near Rajshahi was refused burial by mullahs in her village as she had been a Grameen Bank loan-holder.

[25] Shamima Islam desribes an occasion when the mother of a woman with labour complications resisted attempts to take the woman to an urban hospital on the plea that it would mean a loss of prestige for the family. She agreed to the baby being cut out of its mothers body rather than violate purdah by sending her daughter to the hospital. The midwife who handled this case was proud of the fact that she could save the woman's life as well as the family's prestige. S. Islam, 1989:233-234

Government High School has 304 students, of which 131 are girls. The number of girls attending school is steadily increasing This is probably as much due to changes in attitude towards female education as to the presence of several educational institutions in the area. A school within a short distance becomes an important consideration for attendance, specially for girls approaching *purdah* age.

All parents interviewed agreed that education for children, both boys and girls, is necessary, but few sent their children to school beyond the age of ten. The drop in attendance is most acute in Grade Five. The dropout rate among girls is higher than for boys, the main reason being early marriage or confinement to the home at onset of puberty.

Both girls and boys are needed at home to help in household work, childcare and running errands. Because the mothers' mobility is severely restricted, children have to do most of the work that has to be done outside the homestead, such as taking animals to graze, collecting fuel and fodder, taking food to the fields, going to the neighbourhood shop, etc. In fact, the mothers' adherence to *purdah* is dependant to a great extent on the children's mobility. This fact is not taken into consideration in school timing. Schools open in the mornings when the children are mostly needed at home The all-girl school in Binpara has helped in ensuring that more girls stay in school longer than usual. Parents feel more comfortable in sending girls to a school where they will not come in contact with young boys Nevertheless, girls do drop out at an alarming rate; but if a girl is specially promising, teachers will visit her house in order to try to convince her parents to keep her in school. In the government high school, boy and girl students attend the same classes, but sit separately in the classroom During break the boys play or congregate on the playing field, while the girls gather under the trees near the teacher's staffroom Although the school is coeducational, the children are totally segregated by sex, both in and outside the classroom, and are not encouraged to communicate There are no female teachers in this school. Parents however do not stress the need for female teachers; male teachers are quite acceptable because of their special status as educationists. For the same reason parents do not hesitate to send girls to religious schools known as *maktabs* in which all the teachers are male. Often, a religious education is the only education deemed necessary for girls Among the mothers, the majority only received a religious education, i.e., they can read the Quran in Arabic, know how to pray (all Muslims pray in Arabic) and have some knowledge about Islamic history. In well-to-do families children do not go to the *maktab*, but receive religious education at home from private tutors.

There is an Adult Education program run by an NGO active in this region Classes for women are held in a courtyard in a farmer's house, while the male school is held in the *goli* of another homestead. There are about twenty-five women in the class The course that they follow is known as "functional education" and lasts for six months. It teaches them the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic and educates them in healthcare, nutrition, etc. Classes are held at four o'clock in the afternoon when the women are not so busy with their domestic work. The students ranged in ages from sixteen to fortyfive. The teacher, who is a matriculate of the same *para*, reported that there have been no drop-outs and there was already a waiting list of women who wanted to attend the next course. All of the women were, however, from the same part of the *para* Distance seems to be a determining factor in the attendance of school (Fig. 49)

5.4.8   Women's Social Networks

Men and women have separate and parallel networks which they depend on for emotional, social and economic requirements, but for women's social network, the boundaries of the *para* are more relevant than that of the village

Women, in their social behaviour, seem to be less conscious of class differences than men I met long-time maids in Chowdhurypara, who have become close friends and confidantes of their female employers and are frequently consulted on family matters. Women of different classes form relationships that are mutually beneficial For example, a poor woman will help out in a richer neighbour's hour: (not as a servant) when needed This will ensure that she occasionally receives charity or a small loan from the neighbour

Respondents spoke of the existence of a women's network of loan relationships, which is largely hidden from men. Some women save small amounts of money in order to lend it at interest to other women. The interest rates vary from five to twenty percent, depending on the relationship between the borrower and the lender.

While the male villagers depend on the *shalish* or the elected Union Chairman's for arbitration, women more often rely on his wife to do the same The Chairman's court is held in the covered porch of his *baithak*, while that of his wife is mobile - she usually arbitrates in homesteads that she visits in the course of her work.

Primary School

GOLI
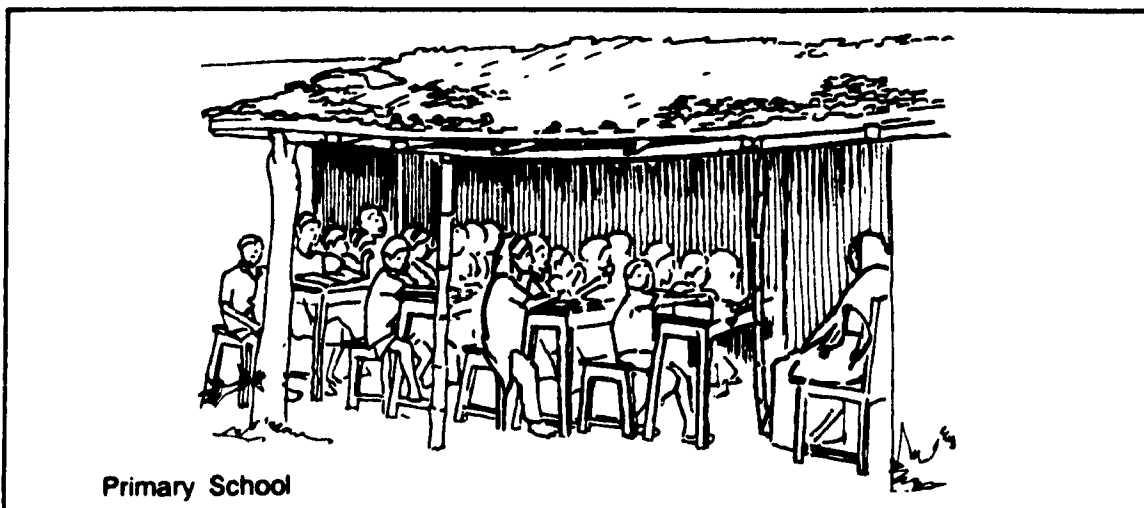
Adult School
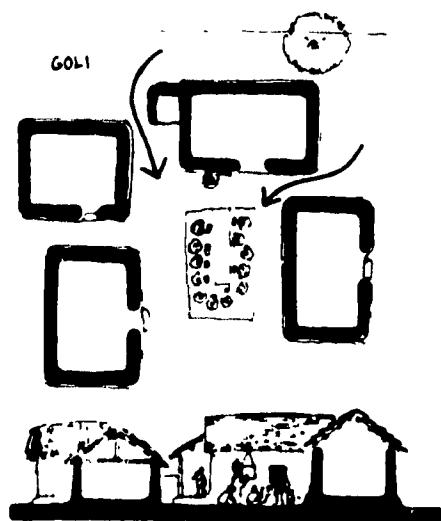
Fig 49 Education Facilities

Women depend on other women for taking care of children and the household when they are ill During deaths, it is the duty of women to visit the household to help and condole - men usually only attend funeral prayers. After births and marriages, women pay social visits to "see" (with a small gift) the new baby or the new bride There are series of rituals in the woman's domain, dealt only by women

Women visit neighbours' courtyards almost daily. This frequent interaction with other women helps to decrease the tedium of a confined life and keeps their social network active. Women depend on this network for gathering and disseminating information. Children often act as messengers. The beggar woman who moves from house to house to beg and to chat is also a part of the information system (Fig 50) For example, when Amena from Shadashivpur, came to our house on a Friday (the Islamic holy day, when people give alms), we came to know that House B was having *koi*-fish for lunch, that the couple in House F had quarreled and the wife had gone home to her parents and that House J had visitors from town.
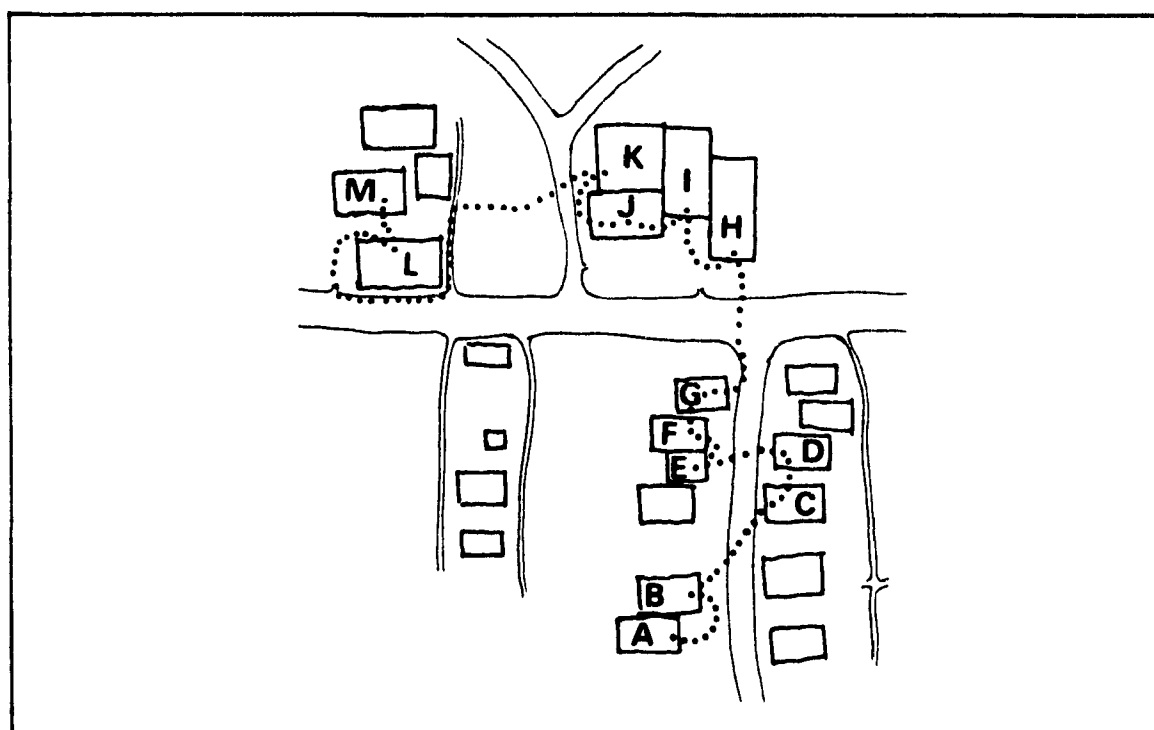
Fig 50 Amena's Route

5.4.9 Lifecycle Rituals

The different spaces in the home play an important part in marking the lifecycle rituals of the family. Except for the Islamic rites, men are usually excluded from lifecycle rituals such as birth and weddings, these are part of the women's domain.

Birth

None of the women interviewed ever went to a clinic or hospital to give birth. The usual practice is to go to the natal home for childbirth, at least for the first child. This practice is followed even in poor households Only a few women reported that their natal families were too poor to support them during cnildbirth For the birth a room or part of the room is set aside for the purpose and for forty days after the birth it will be known as the *atur ghar* or birth-room. Usually the child is born in the presence of female relatives or neighbours and a midwife is only called to cut the umbilical cord [26] There are no midwives in the Bajitpur and as the midwife is fetched only after childbirth, the cord is often cut only an hour or two after childbirth Midwifery is considered to be a low status and polluting occupation and there are no Muslim *dais* (midwife) in this area The usual practice is to give birth by squatting on the floor and the baby is mostly caught by the mother herself as this act is considered highly polluting. After the birth, the placenta is placed in an earthen pot and buried in the *kanta* Women from richer households can afford to have a midwife throughout labour and also for days afterward to massage both her and the baby Some women deliver babies themselves, as they are too poor to afford the services of a midwife. One woman with six children reported cutting the umbilical cord herself with a blade or a sickle (dao).

After child-birth, the mother and the new-born stay strictly confined to the birth-room for seven to nine days, during which the mother is supposed to do nothing except look after the baby. One respondent reported that for the birth of her sons she was confined for seven days and for her daughters for nine days, as girls are considered to be more polluting. For the period of confinement, a fire is kept burning constantly in the often windowless pitch-dark room, filling it with smoke This fire is a safeguard against spirits harmful to babies. The only time the new mother leaves the room is when she goes out for natural functions As in her post-birth state she is considered to be most vulnerable to possession by spirits, which in turn could harm the child, she is always accompanied by another female and carries a small sickle and a burning dung stick in her

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[26] A midwife charges six kg of rice and Tk 2.00 for the birth of a son and half the amount for the birth of a daughter.

hand These are meant to protect her from harm Even after confinement is over, for upto six months, whenever she leaves the homestead with her child, she carries something made of iron to ward off evil spirits. After the nine-day period, she has a ritual bath and the birthroom is swept and plastered, the bed-linen is boiled to purify it and the new mother may now use the other spaces in the homestead. She is considered totally free from pollution only when forty days have elapsed At that time both she and the birthroom are again ritually cleansed and she rejoins the normal activities of the household. During those forty days, many neighbouring women will not visit the household as the homestead is considered to be polluted as well.

Marriage

Weddings usually take place in the bride's home. Pre-wedding ceremonies give women a chance to sing and dance in the courtyard, while men are careful to stay away. Often a *baithak* is first built to receive a new bride-groom and his party on the wedding day. In a poor household, the groom had to sit under a tree in the *goli* in the absence of a proper baithak. A *maulvi* and two witnesses first ask the groom's consent, then are escorted into the homestead to hear the bride's consent Marriage prayers are held in the *goli* among the men. Only after the marriage has been solemnized is the groom taken into the courtyard to sit next to his bride. Some wedding rituals are then carried out by the women, before the bride leaves with her husband The incorporation of the bride into her husband's family is marked with a ritualized entrance into her husband's home. There will be some special rituals in the *deori* of her affinal home, again carried out by the women of the family, to welcome her into the family and to make her entry into the homestead auspicious This may take the form of reading a passage from the Holy Quran or more elaborate celebrations

Death

After a family member dies, the body has to be washed and wrapped in a shroud according to Islamic injunctions. This usually takes place in the courtyard. For a female, a portion of the courtyard is screened off, while women wash her body. Water is collected in a hole dug in the courtyard. Funeral prayers are held in the *goli*, mosque or graveyard. A woman's corpse, while being carried on a byre is usually covered with an extra cloth or an oxcart cover to signify *purdah*. At times, the body is buried within the homestead - in the *kanta* or the *goli*. Women do not take part in burial prayers or the burial itself. Women also do not visit graves or graveyards. Their presence is considered to be polluting to the sacred ground.

5.4.10 Women's Cognition of their Surroundings

The usual tool for evaluating awareness and perception of spaces is by having the subjects draw cognitive maps. Due to the limited and often non-existent literacy of the respondents, this medium could not be utilised. Rather a series of questions attempted to draw out women's knowledge of their surroundings. From interviews, it was evident that women from all groups lacked adequate knowledge of their environment. Often they only knew the name of their own *para*. A few women could name some other *paras* in the village but could not point out the directions. They were also vague about landmarks and public institutions. Their world seemed to be confined to their own *para* and those that they visited, which were very few. Even poor women, who were relatively more mobile, only knew the way to their places of work. One of the questions I would ask during interviews was, " Could you give me the directions to such and such place in the village?" Very few women could answer such a question accurately. Evidently, even as children, the respondents had not explored their surroundings to a great extent.

5.5 Poverty and Space Use

The economic condition of a family determines how strictly its female members can observe *purdah*. Poverty forces women to work outside the confines of the home. Poor women mainly seek employment from other women in wealthier households, either as domestic help or as processors of produce. In Bajitpur and Shadashivpur, there were few other opportunities for women to make a living

The only women observed walking on the roads alone were poor women going to work or to bring work home. Women beggars also go about alone. Begging door-to-door is considered to be very non-*purdah*. There is only one woman beggar in Shadashivpur, who is an old widow supporting a divorced daughter and two grandchildren with her earnings. Every Friday, however, several younger women from another village come to beg in Bajitpur and Shadashivpur. They are looked down upon by the villagers and do not receive much sympathy. These women, along with domestic workers, are often victims of sexual exploitation as they are not considered as respectable as women who observe *purdah*.

Respondents informed me that before the famine of 1975, very few women left the house to earn a living and women were rarely visible on the village roads. Disaster conditions, natural and man-made, together with landlessness and lack of work opportunities have brought increasing

impoverishment to this region. Also the rise of female heads of household has significantly increased (the national figures are 15%), indicating a breakdown of traditions. In better times, these women and their families would have been the responsibility of male kin. As families become poorer and the traditional extended family structure disintegrates[27], such support is often not offered. Women who have been conditioned to be dependendent on male members of their family often face what Chen calls a "frightening financial independence."

In better times, these women were sustained by the rural economy. But in the present economic climate, even women with male support have to find ways to supplement the family income This does not mean, however, that women are willing or able to do "outside" work, which is not acceptable to the community. Not many women opted to work for the "Food for Work" Programme, as it involved working on the roads and crossing into "male" space.[28]

In the physical environment, too, poor families strive to uphold social norms as best as they can. Because of financial constraints and lack of materials, the poor are not always able to provide the architectural elements, such as solid fencing or screen walls in entrances for visual privacy. In the facade to the street, at least, they try to visually protect the privacy of the courtyard by adding fencing in the corners. Entrances often are just a gap in the fence, but during the day women hang quilts or jute-sacks to curtain the entrance. (Fig. 51)

Fences are often made with reeds and leaves and fall into disrepair quite rapidly. In several households, I noticed that women sometimes cover these transparent fences with their 6-yard long saris. In some households, where torrential rains had washed away sections of the courtyard boundaries, I found women going about their work in the courtyard with heads and bodies properly covered, to protect themselves from male eyes. In three cases I found that the courtyard fence was repaired before the house itself, signifying the higher priority for privacy.

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[27] All landless families in the survey were found to be nuclear family units.

[28] Zeidenstein also found that, "Women of middle peasant families who struggle to keep their heads above water refused to enlist in the productive work programmes initiated in some Bangladesh villages. The only explanation seems to be that since these work programmes entailed leaving the home, and therefore breaking *purdah*, women felt the trade-off of more family income for the loss of family prestige was not adequate to justify leaving the home." Quoted in Nelson, 1979:71
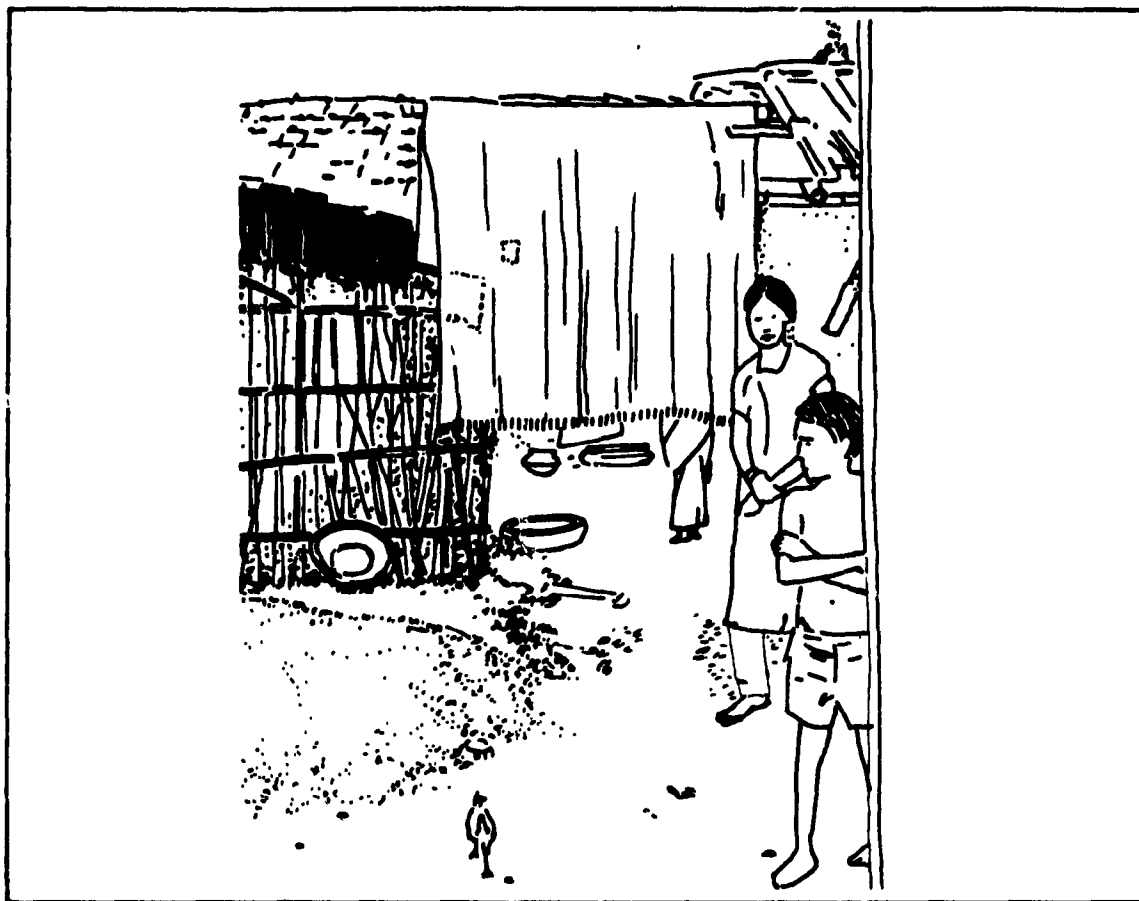
Fig 51 Entrance Concealed by Quilt for Privacy

In poor households, the *baithak* is often absent. Male guests visit in the *goli*. Sometimes the guest is important enough to be brought into the courtyard - in such cases. some women reported that they hid in their kitchens or rooms, while others were unaffected.

The face of the village is changing, slowly but surely. Both the physical appearance and the social set-up is affected by the economic condition of the inhabitants. If more women are now seen on the roads, it is not because of social reform (though some modernisation cannot be denied), but as a by-product of poverty. Although *purdah* practices underwent often radical change in the last few decades, the rural populace were largely unaffected. However, with the rise of pauperisation in rural Bangladesh, changes toward more openness have been observed in *purdah* practices and in the physical environment. Poverty, not social reform is the modifying factor in this change.

CHAPTER VI

6.0   CONCLUSIONS

6.1   Introduction

In the study area, religious and social norms have given rise to special segregated spaces for women In the concluding chapter, this study presents and interprets the general research findings concerning these spaces and their use. The dwellings of different socio-economic groups from the survey are examined and compared to understand the interaction between status and the dwelling form. Some general reflections are presented to evaluate the performance of the survey dwellings, both in reflecting and reinforcing the societal norms of the segregation of women The significance of the study is described and steps are suggested for subsequent research.

6.2   Summary of Research

This thesis approached the research topic by first taking a global view of the dwelling form of Islamic societies. The literature review showed that separation of zones for men and women were clearly identifiable by locations of these zones and were fairly constant in the different societies of the Islamic world   Having established this common feature in Islamic housing, the dwelling form in South Asia was investigated. The findings further reinforced the concept of separate domains, both in the home and the neighbourhood, although with certain regional variations. In Bangladesh. the field study revealed that rather than a strict physical separation of domains with the exclusion of either sex, behaviour and space use determined the limits of the domains. The separating physical boundaries exist, but are made flexible by time zoning, use/avoidance and behavioural norms Age, status and financial standing also determine the rigidity of the spatial barriers between domains.

6.3   Comparative Analysis

In the case study, five socio-economic groups of village society were studied, but in terms of organization of homesteads, the survey data established three main socio-economic groups· the landlords, the farmers and the landless labourers. Although these three groups share basic norms of *purdah* and a basic concept in dwelling design, each adapted the different spaces of the traditional dwelling form to their own particular lifestyle. The sequence of spaces within the

homestead were same for all three groups; the differences noticed were in the size, use and character of these spaces.

Landless families, as the poorest group, have limited access to resources in land, materials and funds. Their dwellings were generally smaller and less well-built than those of the other groups. Poor landless families live in small nuclear homesteads or larger homesteads shared by family members or non-related occupants. Farmers and landlords also have nuclear family homesteads or homesteads shared by several family members, but there were no instances of homesteads shared by non-related members. Generally landlords have the largest homesteads and the best construction materials. Their one and two-story flat-roofed brick structures stand out in a village of mud houses with sloping tile or thatch roofs. The dwellings of farmers and the landless are similar in appearance because of the similar building materials used, but often differ in size and upkeep.

The landless have a comparatively smaller set-back from the street, on an average 3-5 m, while for the farmers it went upto 15 m. Male landless labourers used this space for socializing or manufacturing articles Farmers used their *golis* primarily for rearing cattle and threshing produce and thus needed larger spaces. The landlords usually did not rear cattle and had their produce semi-processed in their tenants' houses and as such used the *goli* mainly for socializing. Several landlords built walls around their *golis* and planted elaborate flowering gardens in this space.

The courtyard spaces also differed in size, but they were primarily meant for women's domestic work. Courtyards in the landless homesteads ranged from 12 sqm to 30 sqm, in farmers houses from 30 to 100 sqm, while in the one landlord's houses the size went up to 300 sqm. Landlords' courtyards are usually divided into spaces with separate functions, a cemented portion for general household work, a small vegetable and flower garden and another cemented space for work connected to the kitchen; the courtyards of the other two groups are more multifunctional.

The *kanta* in the landlords' houses are enclosed with walls creating additional service courtyards for latrines, bathing spaces and fuel storage. In the other two groups, the *kanta* remains unfenced, although the vegetation in the back of the house provides privacy for the women while they work or bathe. Landlords' wives usually did not perform any household work in the *kanta*; their kitchen courtyards with the handpump provided ample space for "wet" household work. None of the landless houses surveyed had latrines or enclosed bathing spaces in their homesteads. Of the 21 farmers' houses surveyed, 5 had latrines in their backyards, indicating the changing sanitation practices with increase in wealth (and stricter adherence to purdah for women).

The *ghar* or enclosed living spaces of the separate groups also exhibited distinct characteristics and configurations. In the landless and farmers category, all rooms are directly accessible from the courtyard, while in the landlords' houses some of the rooms are accessed only through other rooms - a layout pattern usually found only in urban areas. Sizes did not differ appreciably, ranging from 10 to 25 sqm for all three group. The landless, however, have on average smaller rooms with lighter walls than the farmers. Homesteads of the landless are usually organized loosely with separate one-room structures surrounding the courtyard. Farmers' houses tend to be more compact with adjoining rooms and walled corners for additional living and storage space. With increasing wealth, more semi-covered space is needed to shelter animals, household implements and storage urns. This need has given rise to the walled courtyard with long wide *barandas* attached to the wall.

The basic concept of male and female domains respectively at the front and the back of the homestead, is present in the homesteads of all income groups There are some differences, however, in how these domains are achieved and how visual privacy is maintained Among the poor, where adherence to purdah is less stringent due to practical needs, the huts are more loosely arranged and the fences lower and more transparent and sometimes nonexistent The entrances sometimes lack screen walls as visual barriers. As the families move up in the social ladder, the boundaries of the house become more defined and solid, the walls become higher, with entrances that can be locked and barred. Apart from privacy needs, this also reflects the need to safeguard wealth - and women are considered to be part of that wealth

All three groups have adapted the basic configuration of the house to their own special needs. The spaces have been apportioned and given a character specific to the income group and its requirements. The common denominator is the delineation of spaces for women, the courtyard and the *kanta*. For all income-groups, the dwelling form has generally been found to reflect and facilitate the segregation and seclusion of women through physical means. The degree of segregation varies according to class and family differences and result in variations of spatial qualities, but not widely differing functional qualities.

6.4   General Reflections

Purdah is an important determinant in the value system of Bangladesh. The organization of the house facilitates the observance of purdah by providing architectural boundaries to conceal and segregate women. There are several architectural devices which are used to facilitate the seclusion of women and achieve visual barriers. These include:

- spatial configuration and organization of different structures of the homestead
- secluded and private open space
- small exterior openings
- entrance with screen wall for visual privacy
- multiple entrances to segregate paths of men and women

The creation of domains and the physical boundaries within the homestead are instrumental in achieving a segregated existence for women, but these boundaries are not the crucial factor in the separation of men and women. Societal standards and religious injunctions are far more effective in maintaining the separate world of women Apart from Islamic norms of segregation, several other factors are also instrumental in reinforcing the confinement of women to the homestead. The belief in malevolent spirits specially harmful to women ensures that women stay within the safe confines of their homes The notions of menstrual and post-partum pollution further aid confinement of women

The complex and shifting nature of purdah according to age and status dictates the use of space; for example the physical boundaries of the homestead define the limits of living space more for younger women than for older. For newlyweds or new mothers, these boundaries are absolute and impossible to disregard. But generally, for other women, the physical boundaries are flexible and vary according to time, period and occasion.

Although architecturally the rural house facilitates the segregation and confinement of women, it also provides an environment that is not claustrophobic or confining. The design and arrangement of the courtyard house mitigates the effects of confinement in several ways. The courtyards are fairly large with a feeling of openness. One courtyard flows into another, heightening the sense of space and movement. Three kinds of spaces - enclosed, semi-open and open, satisfy the separate spatial needs for different activities. Access to neighbouring courtyards assures frequent visits from other women[1] - total isolation is not the norm. Although many of the families studied were nuclear, the spatial arrangements of their shared living quarters and common courtyards assured many of the support systems of the traditional extended family, such as combined child rearing, household help during illnessess, companionship and emotional support, specially for the women. Social interaction

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[1] A woman who was observing the strictest form of seclusion practised in the comunity would meet a large number of people in the course of her day, perhaps more than a British housewife, isolated in an impersonal block of flats. Papanek, 1973:233

and strong feelings of ties imply significant role of traditional houseform in providing spatial bonds to fragmented families.

Architecturally, the home assures segregation from males outside the family, but does not provide privacy barriers within the home. As the courtyard is the focal point of the house with rooms opening onto it, there are no visual barriers to act as privacy buffers from affinal males, such as father-in-law and brothers-in-law, who have to be avoided according to regional norms. Women adopt avoidance behaviour in this case.

The enclosed and private courtyard space has been found to be extremely versatile It supports domestic activities as well as activities considered to be public, such as manufacturing, commercial transactions, banking, school and so on, although exclusively for women. Thus private courtyards take on public functions. When vendors come into the courtyard, several women from the neighbouring homesteads congregate to create a small market in the courtyard. Grameen Bank uses member's courtyards as temporary banking premises. The success of the Adult Education program for women is due to a great extent on its location n one of the neighbourhood courtyards. It facilitates the attendance of women with limited mobility and also assures tht women feel comfortable in familiar surroundings. Rural women tend to be intimidated by alien and public environments

The public outdoor areas, with their hierarchical structure, also facilitate the segregation of the women. Women use special paths which connect the backyards of the homesteads which is part of their domain. There are specific boundaries that women are not encouraged to cross, such as the *deori* in the homestead and the DB. road which runs through the settlement. Women of Bajitpur, for example, are bounded by the river on one side and the main road on the other and thus limited to their own vilage for social visits. Most women, however, do not cross their neighbourhood boundaries. The kinship boundaries of the family and the physical limits of the homestead and the immediate neighbourhood very much define the world of the average woman. The synergy of physical boundaries and behavioural norms facilitates and ensures the segregation of women in traditional rural settlements.

6.5   Significance of the Study

In most developing countries, governments and foreign agencies are involved in development programs in rural areas. By contributing to research in this area, this study attempts to add to the

body of knowledge regarding traditional houseforms and living patterns in the religious and cultural context. This may help in the provision of housing or upgrading of settlements that is more culturally appropriate for those areas. It also provides an insight into health and education issues in rural areas, as these are directly linked to the living environment and to notions of privacy, accessibility and mobility of rural women.

The main objective, however, is to add to the growing awareness of the importance of women in development programmes, both in their participation and as a target group. The special needs and problems of women in the provision of shelter has long been a neglected field, specially in the developing countries By addressing a specific research problem geared to women's living patterns in one of the countries, this study attempts to contribute research in this particular field.

The study will serve its purpose if it can be used as a professional tool and a guiding document for future research and/or development programmes, taking into consideration the value system and special needs of women

6.6   Steps for Further Research

Research techniques sensitive to women's special requirements as well as more data are needed to broaden the understanding of various aspects of women's use of space in the home and the neighbourhood. Occupational and social mobility of women, the relationship between changing family structures and the status of women particularly with respect to their freedom of movement and choice of occupation needs to be studied in greater detail. The very significant relationship between purdah and class and the resulting environment also requires more research.

This field study was concentrated in a specific location. More regional studies are needed to account for regional differences. Further studies of the same nature will add to the vocabulary of traditional houseforms available to professionals engaged in planned interventions in the built environment.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS[1]

Aagan (u/h), **Angina** (b) - Courtyard

Baithak - Room or semi-enclosed space next to the street for male visitors

Bari (b) - Homestead. It may also refer to a family or kinship location

Burqa - A garment Muslim women use to veil themselves. It covers the whole body leaving the face or only the eyes open.

Baranda (b), **Dalan** (u/h) - Semi-open space between room and courtyard

Chowdhury - A patronymic, historically associated with ownership of land

Deori (b) - Entrance space

Dheki (b) - Wooden rice-husker operated by foot

Ghar (b) - Home or room

Gharami (b) - Roofing expert

Goli (b) - Transitional space between the street and the homestead

Hat - Weekly market

Kanta (b) - Backyard

Katha (b) - Embroidered quilt

Kobiraj (b) - an indigenous practitioner of herbal medicine

Maktab, Madrassa - Islamic religious school

Mardana (u/h) - Men's quarters

Naior (b) - Married woman's vacation in natal home

Na-mahram - Anyone a women could have been married but has not been married, all persons with whom marriage relationship is possible.

Ojha (b)- An exorcist. His services are much in demand, because many diseases are attributed to possession by evil spirits

Para (b) - A part of the village - a neighbourhood

Purdah - The system of seclusion and segregation of Muslim women, with both physical and behavioural means

Shalish (b) - Traditional village arbitration

Taka (b) - Monetary unit in Bangladesh. 1 Tk = US$ 40.00

Zamindar - Landlord class

Zenana (u/h) - Women's quarters

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[1] **b = bangla**
u/h = urdu/hindi

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Guide

1. Family data:

      Socio-economic status of the family

      Details of occupants

      Main and secondary occupations of the women of the family

2. The homestead·

      Type and condition of construction

      Organization and connection of spaces

      Architectural devices used to effect seclusion of women

3. Female activities in the homestead and neighbourhood:

      Activity cycles of the female members of the family

      Uses of spaces both within and outside the family homestead

      Temporal zoning of space use within and outside the home

      Sanitation practices

4. Effects of purdah and other social norms of behaviour:

      Purdah practices according to age and status

      Other social devices to achieve seclusion of women

      The effect of folk religion

      Women's social networks

5. Use of public space:

      Mobility and freedom of movement

      Use of circulation system

      Access of women to educational, political, legal, commercial and religious institutions of the village

      Cognition of surroundings

APPENDIX 2 Women's Activities Daily activity	courtyard	kanta	baranda	kitchen	hut	field/bushes	goli	Tools
Rise before dawn, wash, defecate		●				●		container for water
Sweep courtyard	●							broom
Wash last night's dishes and pots		●						ashes, grass coconut husk
Prepare breakfast (bread and salt)	●		●	●				earthenware pot
Bring water for washing, consumption		●					●	brass or earthenware pitcher
Boil, dry, husk clean paddy	●		●					big pot *dheki*(husker)
Grind wheat, rice Grind spices			●	●				stone roller grinding stone
Cook lunch (rice,fish/pulses /vegetables)			●	●				earthenware/ aluminium pots,mudstove
Bathe children Bathe, wash clothes		●						occasionally soap, soda
Serve and eat lunch			●		●			plates, bowl
Socialize	●		●					mat, stool
Sewing	●		●					
Care of animals, vegetable garden	●	●	●					spade, hoe
Sweep and clean	●		●	●	●			leaf-broom
Prepare dinner or leftovers			●	●				pots, stove
Sleep					●			bed,stringcot