

Religious Institution-based Community-hood and Identity of a 'Muslim Community' in a 'Remote' Rural Village in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This paper addresses the notion of community and community-hood by making its ethnographic focus on a 'Muslim community' in rural Bangladesh. In applying the Resource Profiles Approach (RPA) and Subjective Well-Being (SWB), it understands the cultural constructions of community-hood in relation to the perceived religion there. It argues that the notion of community and community-hood in the contexts of rural Bangladesh is multi-dimensional and culturally rooted. Religion becomes important into the constructions as it implicates social, economic and political lives there. People tend to develop a religion driven identity though it becomes complex due to rapid transformation of village society.

Introduction

How does the notion of community identity, and therefore, community-hood develop or exist in rural Bangladesh? Here, this question is not linked to the nationalistic concern or debate about people's 'Muslim' or 'Bengali' (Ellickson 2002) identity that is still a real national issue in Bangladesh (Abecassis 1990). This ethnographic paper, here, rather focusing a 'remote' rural community in the country, attempts to explore the cultural constructions of community-hood—how do the community people identify themselves or their sense of belonging. Effort to defining 'community' in the contexts like rural Bangladesh is not

new; however, much was based in ecology, mode of production and economic relations while for example, Bertocci (1996) for the specific cultural ground suggests for 'a model of community rooted in an Islamic world view' (Bertocci, 42). He argues to capture the ideational and symbolic processes that provide clues to conceive of community in this Muslim dominant country (ibid). At the micro (village) level, the dominant sense of community-hood, in general, is geographical i.e. *grambashi* (villagers) that confines a settlement boundary and/or socio-political i.e. blood or non-blood based *samaj* (traditional social group) that, followed by specific leadership, confines a lineage/descent boundary (Mannan 2002)—rather than one's religious identity. Not that the religious boundary is missing or less important; rather many researches argue that in the whole sub-continental context including Bangladesh, religion in constructing people's identity becomes important (Ellickson 2002) though the issue is much more associated with inter-religious groups relationship i.e. Muslims vs Hindus (Azad 1996) and which often interprets as political phenomenon (Baird 2004). This paper addresses the concept of 'community' as a psycho-cultural phenomenon following the Abecassis's (1990) argument that 'communities are defined by their culture and their religious labels' (Abecassis: 4) and for its membership, 'the ways in which the members regard themselves and understand themselves ... their self-image' (ibid, 3) though construction of any (collective) community identity becomes illusory because of the non-existence of a final truth (Schuurman *ed* 1993).

Understanding the community context

The paper first of all focuses on nature of the community simply means how does it look. To do this, a combination of Resource Profiles Approach (McGregor 2004) and (community) Subjective Perception (WeD 2003) have been applied to understand the community level *perceived resources* and *subjective perception* respectively.

The following table is about different types of resources the people collectively perceive available to them, also the 'desires' within the resources:

Table: The community-perceived 'resources' and 'desires'

| Dimension | What do they have and what they desire more | |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| | Resources | Desires (want more) |
| Cultural | Ulema, madrasa and mosque | 'Morality', 'commitment' of ulema, 'quality' of ulema, 'Islamic norms' |
| Material | Arable land, limited jobs in non-farm areas, jobs in Islamic professions, migrated jobs mostly in Saudi Arabia | Enough employment and jobs, more incomes |
| Social | Social groups (samaj), old aged people (murrubbi), social leaders (matbar) who are aware of their samajs | Solidarity and collectiveness, 'powerful' and rich people for development, commitment to the social development, preserving social values e.g. enough caring attitude towards parents by sons |
| Physical | Pacca mosque, primary school and the Alia Madrasa, also the hafizia (semi-pacca) | Road communication to visiting the urban areas, electricity connection |
| Financial | Two absentee persons donate to the hafizia madrasa, also to the poor people, services (mainly loans) of NGOs | Significant number of rich who could help the community much more, 'favourable' loan conditions of the NGOs |
| State service | The Alia Madrasa (MPO benefited) and the primary school, the current UP chairman | Interest of the state apparatus and UP in social welfare, enough teachers both at the Alia Madrasa and the primary school |
| Knowledge (Social and | gaany (being intellectual) persons have knowledge for social development | Convenient social environment to apply the 'social' knowledge |

| Dimension | What do they have and what they desire more | |
|------------|---|---|
| | Resources | Desires (want more) |
| religious) | Persons (e.g. mufti) who has enough Islamic knowledge | Effective interactions of the mufti with the community, peoples' heartiest/positive response to the ulama |

The above table presents different categories of *resources* people perceive available to them and the *desires* they perceive to have more. Regarding the *cultural resources*, they have *ulema* who received a formal or informal religious (Islamic) education; *madrasa* (religious school, one is *alia*, and another is *hafizia*), and a historical mosque built in 1935. But they perceive a lack of morals, less commitment of *ulema* to the community people, loss in the 'quality' of *ulema*, lack of *rahmat* (kind from Allah); lack of 'Islamic norms' among the individuals as well as community people.

Regarding the *material resources*, earning money by selling crops or leasing out pieces of land is important for many villagers. Segment of people employed in non-farm sectors (e.g. labourer in industries) can also earn money to support their families while the *ulema* people do it in working at mosque/*madrasas*. A significant number of people earn their incomes through working in foreign countries, mostly in Saudi Arabia; their remittances are also spent for mosque and *madrasa* development. But there have a lack of employments opportunities as well as expected incomes.

Regarding the *social resources*, *samaj* provides a sense of attachment to the groups. The community people (the *samaj* leaders in particular) are aware of social norms and values in maintaining peace in their society. But there have a lack of solidarity among different *samajs* (groups), lack of educated and 'powerful' people to promote social development, also lack of *collective* efforts to making social development, lack of care shown by sons towards their elderly parents.

Regarding the *physical resources*, the community people have fertile cultivable land, which produces crops both for domestic usage and markets; also a *pacca* mosque and Alia Madarsa. Mosque and *madrasa* carry importance from a cultural point of view. To the people these are much more value because these are brick built. However, the villagers feel marginalized regarding the poor road communication, especially during the monsoon. They also desire for having electricity in their village.

Regarding the *financial resources*, most of the people perceive them as 'poor' because of their very poor financial conditions. This category also includes presence of NGOs in receiving credits. But having no significant number of wealthy villagers is a big concern. A shortage of funds for *madrasa* education, 'unfavourable' conditions in taking and paying loans with NGOs are also a concern.

The state service and level of knowledge of individuals is also a matter in the perceptions of resources and desires.

The above discussions give the sense that this is such a community where i) traditional kin association, consists of both blood and non-blood relationships appears a big phenomenon ii) any non-kin association does not appear with a *strong influence* where presence of religious organizations in a traditional mode carries a significant sense to the people, and iii) the appearance of the state in delivering services is very poor.

Religion and religious institutions in the community

The perceived 'religion' (Islam), in the community context, involves three types of phenomenon—i) religious institutions/organisations, refer to one mosque and two *madrasas* ii) religious actors, usually called *alem* (the plural sense is *ulema*) here are mufti, *moulana*, *kari*, and *hafez*, and iii) 'religion' reflected behaviour i.e. sense of 'morality', 'quality' of *ulema*, practicing 'Islamic norms' and 'values' in everyday life. The people like to

emphasis on their 'Islamic' practices considering a presence of the religious institutions inside the village boundary; however, not ignoring the wider cultural sense of belonging to the Muslim *ummah* (global Muslim community) because of the experiences with outside religious institutions as well as some of labouring people's living experiences in Saudi Arabia as well as Mecca.

The importance of 'religious' institutions and actors

The people put higher emphasis on the presence of both religious *institutions* and *actors* in the village. The institutions include one mosque built in 1935, and two *madrasas* (religious schools), one is state recognised *Alia*, up to grade 10 and another is community funded *Hafizia*, an informal school for foundation training established in 1984 and 1992 respectively. These are useful for addressing different 'religious' needs (e.g. becoming 'educated' through reading 'Islamic' syllabus in the *Alia*; getting familiar with 'Islamic norms' in reading in the *Hafizia*) of the community people. The *actors* refer to the *ulema*, who studied 'Islamic education'; therefore, receive a social status for that type of education. However, *actions* (what they can do or cannot do) of the *actors* (including functions of institutions) are much more important to the people. Here, *actions* broadly refer to 'religious behaviours' the people convey. The importance of the institutions and the actors involve a historical motivational process that has described below.

Ground for the birth of the religious institutions and actors

'Every religion arises within a particular environment which inevitably affects the development of religion' (unc.edu). The notion of 'remoteness' in the community context is important to explore *growth* of the religious institutions and the actors. Here, the sense of 'remote' is not a methodological vocabulary only that the study has previously used (welldev.org.uk); rather it has a specific historical as well as political meaning there. To them this is a *char* village, refers to a range of understanding in the wider

context: more than a hundred and half year ago this area has emerged from the river *Dholesary*, and gradually developed to a habitat. By definition, *char* means 'a mid-channel island that periodically emerges from the river-bed as results of accretion' (Kamal and Khan 1994: pp.11); but to the people, defining *char* is more than geographical; it has a socio-political meaning that refers to a community-state relationship. They feel that they are deprived of some basic services e.g. *pacca* (paved) road, electricity connection that would come from the state apparatus. They are being experienced in 'less interest' of the state apparatus (including Union Parishad, the lowest tier of local government) to their social development/welfare. 'They also find none' in their village/community who could lead a significant developmental activity as well as to reduce different community problems i.e. severe income poverty, intra-community conflict. Thus the local perception of *char* includes a community-state relationship where the community is perceived *ignored* by its counter partner.

This relationship as well as the community phenomenon has made affects not in the areas of social and economic development only, but also in the cultural sphere including developing their identity. Before 1935, the people were used to pray the *zumma* prayer (Friday's special prayer) in a far away mosque that carried huge sufferings on walking for muddy road. When this community mosque was established in 1935, then it reduced that type of sufferings, especially for the older people. This mosque was established by an influential lineage group of the community to address not the religious needs (congregation) only, but also to prove it that 'they can do', as 'they then had a status in the society'. Thus establishing the mosque became a symbol of power and status for a group of people. Some groups of people also felt that they need to educate their children but the problem was the "state's callousness" to build a paved road that could enable students to get access to outside 'better' schools. This was the situation from demand point of view; however, state as the supreme authority of delivering such services, 'did not take any

appropriate measure to address the demands of the people'. Within such circumstances, an individual (the first *alem* of this locality) of neighbouring village, studied 'Islamic education' in a *madrasa* in Comilla (an eastern district in Bangladesh), started to motivate the village people towards the same type of education ('Islamic education') in the late 50s. Since most people's livelihoods were mainly on cropping agriculture based in their locality, purpose of receiving 'Islamic education' was not fully a cash-inspired activity for them, rather, a 'moral' inspiration to perform religion as well as motivate others to gain 'spiritual benefits' both in their eternal as well as earth lives. This motivation worked and inspired others to become *alem* through that education as it carried a higher status during that period of time. This has gradually resulted in producing a good number of *ulema* from the successor generations who studied in different *madrasas* staying far away from the village as well as relatives. This has motivated further to establish at least one *madrasa* inside their village so that younger students can receive 'religious' education staying close to their relatives. In the middle of 80s, the UP chairman (head of local government), a rich person of the village, donated pieces of land, also took attempts to establish an *alia madrasa* so that students can receive 'religious' mixing 'modern' education intended to 'serve Islam' along with securing a job in the market. He, for his position did it also. However, the *ulema* people (studied in different *kowmi madrasas* outside the village), usually prefer a more orthodox type of Islam and oppose to any 'modern' (e.g. *alia*) type, were not satisfied with such type of *madrasa*, and later they made a pressure to establish a *kowmi/hafizia madrasa* that would provide 'pure religious' education only, and they made it also with the supports (both 'moral'/'ideological' and financial) came from a segment (belonged to different lineage groups other than the chairman's one) of local people who i) do not support the *alia* education for their 'moral'/'ideological' ground, and ii) did not like that UP chairman for his lineage ('Mallik') identity. Thus over period of time, the community people got one mosque and two *madrasas* in

their village that are significant collective assets to them. They find a meaningful attachment as well as a sense of identity with these assets.

Religion, community-hood and dynamics of the ‘muslim’ community

This paper in using the concept of *relatedness* refers to meaningful connections with intimate others and social groups and is facilitated by a sense of significance (Ryan 2004) broadly categories five types of ‘religion’ driven attachments that produce a sense of dynamism in their sense of community-hood. These are as follow:

- The distance sense
- The spiritual sense
- The lineage sense
- The gender sense
- The occupational sense

i) The distance sense

In this paper, ‘distant’ refers to the psychological as well as ideological attachment of the people with the ‘Islamic image’ of the Middle East countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. The community has a large number of people (men mainly) who are the labourer migrants to these countries (also discussed in Hossain 2004). The migrants not only send financial remittances to their origin but also social remittances (include *knowledge* or *experience*) that a migrant receives during his/her staying in the destination, and sends to the origin (Levitt 2001). To the community people, for example, Saudi Arabia is a ‘good’ country for migration because ‘that is a Muslim country’, ‘the land there is *pabitra*’ (‘sacred’) because prophet Hazrat Muhammad was born there; there have Mecca and Madina cities where they can make visit, there have the *Allah’s house* (the Kaba) and they can

perform *hajj*. “There people are forced to close shops during prayer time ...every body is forced to pray ...women cannot go outside without wearing *burkah* (veil), even the Christian women also...”; thus the community people develop some sort of ‘Islamic image’ of that country and aspire to reflect it in their village also. The mosques in Saudi Arabia are ‘very beautiful’; they also desire to make their village mosque beautiful. They take initiative also – the migrants send some money for the mosque and *madrassa* development; they while visit their origin, tell others about these ‘good’ things of Saudi Arabia, and ask to follow Islam including the mosque development. Not only the mosque or *madrassa*, individual’s everyday behaviours also get a change; for example, when a migrant returns back, s/he likes to say *salam* (as ‘hello’ in Western style) first while seeing/meeting others and most often s/he was less used to with such type of behaviour before his/her migration. Among the migrants, bringing *burkah* (veil – the perceived Islamic dress) for their women relatives (mother, wife or daughter) is common so that ‘they can maintain *purdah* like the women in Saudi Arabia’. Being Muslims, the community people construct/take these things positively and feel how they are attached with these ‘Muslim countries’. They become happy with a migrant’s financial contributions to the community mosque and/or *madrassa*, and get inspired also to make a contribution there. The whole scenario produces a *positive inspiration* for the community people towards their religious institutions as well as actions.

ii) The spiritual sense

While the ‘distant’ dimension is explained from a trans-national perspective, the ‘spiritual’ attachment can be explained from a local neighbouring perspective. The community people like to consider their village as a *Muslim village* where all people are Muslims. This distinct sense of community identity is geographically confined while lots of Hindus are living in the neighbouring villages. It encourages them to say: ‘we all are

Muslims and we have no Hindu in our village' – reflects their spiritual cognition that is further associated with their *roles* and *responsibilities* towards the religious institutions, here, the mosque and *madradas*. Such *roles* and *responsibilities* include: younger *madrada* students are appreciated for studying 'Islamic education', the *ulema* people, in spite of their income poverty enjoy a social status for their 'Islamic occupation' like jobs in mosque and *madradas*; people are often called to contribute (donate) more to their religious institutions, people collectively desire to develop (both infrastructure and increasing number of participants) their mosque and *madrada*, many are concern for the 'loosing of their religious values', many parents find a 'moral' obligation to send their children to *madradas* to make them *ulema*, almost all households make contribution of *musteer chaal* (one clenched rice paid once a week) for the mosque, and they through a collective effort supported a solar technology system for lighting (power) their mosque and *madrada* because of no electricity connection in the village.

Being Muslims, and for their spiritual inspiration, the people do these things as part of their 'religious' duties as well as obligations. However, their obligations and actions most often are driven by other types of attachments. Here kinship (lineage/*samaj*), gender status and occupational involvement matter that are describing next.

iii) The lineage sense

The community people are divided into nine major *samajs* (traditional social group based on blood and non-blood kin); however, formation of as well as attachments to these *samajs* is confusing—to what extent these connect to blood relation or particular occupational involvement. For example, 'Munshi' is a lineage group in the community; textually 'munshi' refers to a person who is involved in a specific religious occupation (Karim, 1998) i.e. *imam* to lead a congregation in mosque, but in the

contemporary community scenario, 'Munshi', as a group, consists of a lot of people who are not involved in any religious occupation. It was told that they belong to the 'Munshi' group because they come from a same ancestor who pursued a religious occupation in the past, and for his occupation people called him 'Munshi'. The same is about the *Bepari samaj* – 'bepari' there refers to a person who does business, but many people of this *samaj* are not involved in doing any business. Mannan (2002) argues that Muslim society organized according to the principles of ethnic and also occupational stratification, and not by descent criteria, in the British period. He considers social mobility that produces fluidity in descent (Mannan 2002). In the community, the lineage/descent formation primarily comes from blood based kin group (locally called 'sharik' means belonging to a same group to inheriting property) usually headed by the oldest male (e) n.

The influence of national level party-politics (except elections) and any non-kin associational form (except a few NGOs) is less significant in the community, and the groups of people belong to individual *samaj*, generally care this traditional identity. This type of identity, in one hand, provides a (informal) social security for the individual groups/persons, for example, when an individual faces any social problem, then *samaj* takes a responsibility first to mitigate it; provides insecurity also when inter-*samaj* conflict takes place, on the other. Because of multi-dimensionality (amount of cash flow and size of land a person holds, 'capacity' i.e. to do something significant and 'quality' i.e. educational status or intellectuality of individual, connection to urban influentials etc.) of power none (individual/group) can enjoy a monopoly over it. The inter-*samaj* conflicts, sources may be different, however, have a connection to the community's religious practices. The *ulema* (religious actors) come from different *samajs*, and such diversification does not create any significant tension into any conflicts as most of them are absentees living away from the village to earn. Regardless the sources of conflicts among *samajs*, the mosque, the *hafizia madrasa* and the graveyards become

important into these conflicts for historical reason—which *samaj* established what and its relationships with others. For example, the *hafzkhana* (*hafizia madrasa*), an important community institution was established in 1992 by an influential *samaj*, but the opposite group(s) wants to control over it. There are two graveyards in the village, based on specific *samaj* attachment (*Mallik* and non-*Mallik/grihosta*). The *Mallik* people established their graveyard (at least 80 years back) close to the *alia madrasa*, which also was established (in 1984 but launched in 1990) by this (*Mallik*) group while the non-*Mallik*'s (known as *grihosta*) graveyard is close to the *hafizia madrasa*, and gets a 'higher' attention and care from the *ulema* people who oppose the *alia* type of education as to them "it does not provide the 'real' Islamic education that Islam suggests".

Not only in the community's perceived religious practices, but also in other non-religious areas, the social conflict makes an affect that weakens the collectiveness of that single 'Muslim community'. It comes true when the villagers take mosque-based collective action to develop a village road in particular, but does not produce an equal benefit to all. Having different lineage groups and conflicts influence their sense of *Muslim-hood* negatively, in case of resources distribution in particular though they try to mitigate these influences centering to the mosque-based identity.

iv) The gender sense

It refers to the nature and extent of the village *women's participation* (*inclusion*) in the community religious institutions including their *actions*. The community mosque, two *madrasas* are the 'public' (male facet and opposite to 'domestic' / 'private') institutions and the existing religious norms and values as well as practices there do not allow women to come and take an action (e.g. attend the congregation in mosque) that the men can do (except the girls' studying opportunity in the *madrasas*). However, the village women find a *hidden inclusion* with *their* institutions that encourages them towards performing some *roles* and

responsibilities. This type of *inclusion* can broadly be categorised from the following two aspects:

i) Material aspect

ii) Non-material aspect

Material aspect: It denotes the material goods or cash donated for the mosque and *madrassa* or received from there. The mosque receives *musteer chaal* (one-clenched rice) every week to meet its different expenses. An assigned man (asked by the Mosque Committee) visits every door when women in most cases hand over/transfer an amount of rice to him. Here, the women as individuals are not the decision makers to give the rice; but they, being the community members, feel a *sense of belonging* to their mosque that creates a social obligation for them. To them it is their 'religious duty' also and cannot ignore such obligations.

The mosque produces a sense of 'our' for the women though it restricts them to get a physical entry in it. Not donating the rice only, the women receive material benefits also from the mosque, for example, *tobaraak* (food items come from community people) that is distributed to the *musullis* (men, boys come to the mosque to pray) just after the Friday's *Jumma* (noon) prayer and some carry it to their family to transfer to women and children. The *hafizia madrassa* organises annual *wez mehfil* (religious gathering) where lots of women (in a separated sitting arrangement) participate as listeners, also receive *shirni* (late night meals) as part of the programme. Thus both the mosque and the *hafizia madrassa* produce 'a sense of inclusion or participation' (no matter it is equal or not compare to men) for the village women that is strongly associated with their community membership.

Non-material aspect: It refers to women's obligation for the religious institutions other than the material goods. The community membership and the religious identity all together develop a sense of *our* in women's cognitive level for which they cannot ignore *their* attachment with the religious institutions.

The following story reflects such type of cognitive sense of a village woman:

feel proud with our mosque; I do not go there, women never go there ...my husband goes there to pray; I ask him to pray for the departed souls of my father/mother in laws, he prays also. He also shares Hadiths with me that are discussed in the mosque ...I do not think that the mosque is for the men only ...this is for both ...they can go, they can pray there, we cannot; but we receive religious statements (Hadiths) from our husbands ...I live in this village ...this is our mosque also...

Source: Field note: Dec 2004

The mosque there is not merely a place for men to pray, but also an instrument to reproduce religious ideologies as well as roles and responsibilities both for men and women. The *imam* there states many religious prescriptions that are significantly applicable for women – what they should do and what not. Thus it becomes a ‘public guardian’ for the women, includes (or control) them, recognises them as its ‘members’, and takes a ‘responsibility’ to ‘guide’ them to the ‘paths of Islam’.

However, this is all about ‘female face of inclusion’ that differs from men and provides a very limited scope for women compare to men, for example, women’s job in transferring the weekly rice (women also responsible for cooking at the household level) is large while they can not hold any position of *ulema* in the village.

v) The occupational sense

Occupational engagements include both local (inside the village) and migratory (outside the village) involvements of work to make a living. It looks at the cultural constructions – how people’s occupational involvements connect their identity as well as well-being.

Occupations relate to the community identity can be seen from two dimensions:

- a. The 'non-religious' face of occupation (e.g. non-farm labourers)
- b. The 'religious' face of occupation (e.g. *imam*)

a. The 'non-religious' face of occupation

The 'non-religious' face of occupation refers to these *activities that have no any direct religious attachment* and people depend on these occupations to pursue their incomes. Cropping agriculture is the main source of earning to the people who own enough arable land. Most of the farmers heavily depend on producing cash crops like jute, maize etc. apart from the staple food of HYV paddy. Though the present farmers are habituated with the land cultivation, nowadays, their descendents seem to have less interest for that occupation. This is for two reasons: i) the successor generations (age below of 30) are getting attraction with various non-farm occupations in urban areas; also in foreign countries, and they find a 'status' with the new jobs, and ii) the economic benefits against the costs in the contemporary agriculture is not so much attractive (profitable) to the village farmers.

The changes in the village economy are fasting with their increasing connections to the capital city and closer urban areas. These changes have shifted the mode of religious contribution also—donation of money/cash instead of/along with rice/paddy to the community mosque and *madrassa* in some cases. The increasing number of jobs based in urban non-farm sectors encourages the village people to be out-migrants that produce a negative effect to the conventional family as well as social relationships. Breaking up of traditional joint family and creating of more nuclear type of family causing to be less caring to the older parents by their married sons. These are developing a sense of *individualism* among the younger people who in the contemporary village scene are out-migrants or want to be, and who have been identified 'callous' to lead a village life staying in the community. The interpretation of 'callousness' also includes people's degree and nature of *religious participation* at the

community level, their (ir) regular physical presence in the mosque in particular which is understood as 'deterioration of or loosing religious values' of the younger people. Younger people's work at outside the village physically makes them absent in praying at the community mosque; however, the unemployed older people interpret it as a *deviation* from their 'religion' as well as community responsibility. This 'deviation' in one hand lessens the number of people in the mosque, but increases the volume of cash (*daan*) donated for the mosque on the other. A number of international migrants (elaborately discussed in Hossain 2004) make financial supports for the mosque/madrasas which are a very significant source of fund for the institutions. Such donations are perceived as a 'good' work which 'bring *chouab*' ('religious gains') to the donors; also provide a status and honour for them.

b. The 'religious' face of occupation

The 'religious' face of occupation refers to *the income activities based in religious institutions, mainly at mosques and madrasas*. Different mosques, *hafizia/kowmi madrasas* in and around the village where the community's *ulema* people pursue their jobs, are a significant source of earning for the group. Apart from the cash earning by the religious professionals, many poor students reading in the community's *hafizia madrasa*, receive regular free of cost food supports from the village households; also free accommodation in the *madrasa* building. Pursuing these types of 'religious' occupations mostly depend on the community financing which is perceived as a 'moral' and 'spiritual' duty of the people. A number of local students, reading in different *madrasas* far away from the village, also get free of food and accommodation supports there for the same reason. Such 'religious' face of occupations exists and sustains because of the perceived community obligations, here both spiritual and social, for their religion. Therefore, are strongly liked to their collective Muslim identity.

Conclusion

This ethnographic paper looks at the constructions of community-hood by taking a case of a 'Muslim community' in a rural village in Bangladesh. It argues that the notion of *community* and *community-hood* in the contexts of rural Bangladesh is multi-dimensional and culturally rooted. In case of religion, it (community-hood) goes beyond spiritual and involves a range of factors related to every day social and economic life there. Religion and religious institutions make a sense not for spiritual necessity only, but also for people's non-spiritual *practical needs* that hardly addressed by the state authority. Because of socio-cultural and economic implications, the rural people tend to find a sense of well-being for their attachments with religion. Traditional nature of *collectiveness* integrates to the religious practices that unite the people towards a common identity. The culturally rooted socio-economic contexts maintain and sustain that identity though recent transformation of village life makes it much more complex.

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