

Socio-Cultural Transformation of a Village Community in the 21st Century: A Case of Bangladesh

ABSTRACT

For a very long period, both the Indian subcontinent and Bangladesh's rural societies remained unchanging and stagnant. However, these societies have undergone significant transformation since the mid-20th century. Since the 1990s, this process of change has quickened. The media, internet, education, electrification, technology, and other factors have accelerated the changes in rural communities. Ownership of land, patterns of agriculture, enrollment in school, social mobility, sources of entertainment, use of contraceptives, lifestyle, etc. have been transformed over the previous 20 years. To identify the real scenery of transformation, the researcher has compared his present (2023) data with another survey conducted in 2001. 153 households were interviewed with a semi-structured questionnaire in July and August of 2023. At the same time, 4 FGDs and 5 case studies were also conducted in the community. In 2001, 116 households were interviewed, and 5 case studies were conducted. The study found significant transformations in the community over the past two decades. Although the ownership of homesteads has increased, however, cropland has been captured by a limited community owner. Diversified agriculture has amplified. The rate and level of education, especially women's education have increased. People's lifestyles, habits of entertainment, interest in the use of contraceptive items, etc. have changed significantly. Households' socioeconomic mobility and the size of the middle class of the community have also been transformed during the mentioned time. There is a reflection of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) model developed by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (formerly DFID).

Keywords: Village community, Land property, Education, Lifestyle, Socio-cultural transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a village dominated country. Bangladesh has a total land area of 147,570 km². There are 123,890 km² of total area of the country in rural areas (CEIC, 2024). Currently, 60% of Bangladesh's population lives in rural areas. It was 75% just 20 years ago (WB, 2024). The village contains the people, their socio-cultural activities, customs, values, lifestyle, etc. For hundreds of years, the village community of Bangladesh remained unchanged (Karim, 1996); however, after achieving independence in 1971, the socio-economic condition of Bangladesh changed very fast. Since the 1990s, rural society has rapidly changed. The development of the communication system,

industrialization, and urbanization have affected the village community's society, economy, and culture. Then, electricity and, recently, ICT and internet coverage have transformed the daily lives of rural people. Despite having nearly identical socio-cultural practices, every community in Bangladesh has distinct qualities. However, there have been a lot of infrastructural developments in Bangladesh's rural areas recently. The village community has shifted from traditional to mechanized, modern, and diversified agriculture. They are now more comfortable in their lifestyle. However, very few studies have been done on the sociocultural transformation of a particular village community in Bangladesh. This study may disseminate new thoughts and ideas about a changing village community.

Overview of Literature: Bangladesh has achieved immense economic development in the last 20 years (MoF, 2001 and 2023). The country is passing a transitional period, considering the changes in livelihoods in society. To know the reality, many sociological studies have been carried out on development, the effects of climate change, urban living, migration, education, reducing poverty, and many other topics over the past two decades. Some other studies have been conducted on the impact of microcredit, NGO activities, mobile banking, electrification, disasters, climate change, etc.

Reza (2011) emphasized the significance of socially transmitted behavioral patterns, or culture, in driving socio-economic changes at both the household and national levels. It specifically evaluates the capacity of NGOs to influence traditional values in areas such as employment, education, healthcare, and women's empowerment. Based on a few chosen personal and demographic characteristics, Chakrobarty et al. (2021) have demonstrated the socioeconomic status of farmers as well as their knowledge, attitude, and perspective on how to enhance their current standard of living.

Education is one of the most influential factors that change the socioeconomic condition and lifestyle of a community. Rahman and Hossain (2006) have examined the impact of education on the socioeconomic development of rural people in Bangladesh. The major findings of this study are that the availability of educational institutions in an area does not automatically ensure an increase in the literacy rate; people with less income are found more among the illiterate or less educated; an increase in the level of education makes people more conscious about cultural development and the development of personal and family life.

Muhammad (2000) focused on key aspects of rural life during the 1980s. He compiled socioeconomic situations, changes in livelihoods, the relationship between rural and urban areas, and the dynamics of farming and peasantry. Hossain and Rahman (2003) examined the rural economy and development, with an emphasis on agricultural activities. Azam (2023) illustrated the cultural diversity and social change from social work perspective. Sports and games, music and cinema, religion and education etc. have been included in his discussion as cultural issues. Hossain and Tisdell (2003) have researched the major demographic changes in Bangladesh and their correlation with socioeconomic development. The study shows that there are significant correlations between demographic changes and socioeconomic variables.

Ensuring gender wellbeing and equity is one of the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs). The livelihood of rural women is a significant determinant of women's empowerment and equity. Islam and

Sharma (2022) have examined how gendered knowledge, roles, and responsibilities influence female livelihood time use in a patriarchal society like Bangladesh. Mazumder (2021) has investigated the impact of the microfinance program on the recipient's livelihood in rural Bangladesh. The researcher has compared the impact of governmental and non-governmental microfinance on livelihood and empowerment in rural Bangladesh.

Research gap: There is a great deal of opportunity to research a variety of topics because of the characteristics of Bangladeshi society and its fast-evolving trends. The current living standards of villagers and changes in rural socioeconomic conditions are regarded as the main topics of social study. Numerous studies on livelihoods and socioeconomic shifts have been done. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no comparable analysis has been done regarding developments in a rural village over the past 20 years. A baseline study from 2001 has been done. To investigate the true transformation of the village, the researcher gathered data from the same sources in 2023. This study differs from others in that it is fundamentally distinct.

Theoretical framework: This study closely relates to the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF). The SLF is highly effective for analyzing the changing socioeconomic conditions of a community, as it can accommodate different types of data and provide a multi-dimensional view of social changes. The SLF analyzes the demographic and household status of the selected village community. It examines demographic characteristics, changing lifestyles, and socio-cultural conditions of the chosen community in the last 20 years. However, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID, presently FCDO) primarily developed and popularized SLF in the late 1990s. A humanitarian organization CARE International was one of the early adaptors of the SLF, using it to inform its approach to development and poverty reduction in various countries.

Objectives of the study: The primary objective of this study is to examine the sociocultural transformation of a specific village community. The study aims to:

- a) Analyze the transformation of land ownership and agricultural practices;
- b) Investigate changes in education and social mobility within the village;
- c) Assess shifts in lifestyle and cultural transformation among community members; and
- d) Identify the key areas and driving factors behind these changes in the village community.

2. METHODS & TECHNIQUES

Study Area: This study was carried out in Sreenibashkathi, a village located in Gabindapur Union Parishad of Muksudpur Upazila, within the Gopalganj district in southern Bangladesh. The village was deliberately chosen for the research since the author had previously conducted a field study there in 2001. Despite its selection, the village is among the most remote in Bangladesh. It was not chosen based on specific characteristics such as proximity to a city or town, vulnerability to climate change, level of education, or economic status. As a result, this village serves as a representative example of many others across the country.



Figure 1 (a): The Map of South Asia



Figure 1 (b): The Map of Bangladesh



Figure 1 (c): The Map of the Study Area (Mukusdipur, Gopalganj, Bangladesh)

Methods & Techniques: The research has followed both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection. For quantitative data, a total of 153 rural households were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. There are a total of 306 households and 737 voters in the chosen village (373 men and 364 women). The households (respondents) were selected randomly following the voter list. For qualitative data, 04 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted during the fieldwork in July-August 2023. 2 FGDs were conducted with the villagers, and a total of 17 elderly people participated here. Another FGD was conducted with the local leaders, and 7 participants were involved in this session. Lastly, an FGD was conducted with 9 students of the community. 05 case studies have also been conducted with the women who performed as heads of their households.

A research report (Husain, 2001) has played a key role as a baseline data source to identify the change of the selected village in the last two decades. This study was conducted in the same village community in 2001. The table below compares the study in 2023 and 2001.

Table 1: The main features of the study in 2023 and 2001.

Main features of the study	2023	2001
Total voters (adult people)	737	556
Total households (total sample)	306	211
Interviewed households (sample size for the study)	153	116
FGD	04	--
Case studies	05	05
Aim of the study	Find out the socio-cultural transformation of the same community	Find out the livelihoods including non-agricultural attachment of a particular village community

In both studies, the household head or their representatives were interviewed, even though the respondents were not the same individuals. The questionnaires and checklists used in 2023 and 2001 also share many similarities. The collected data was checked, sorted, and then analyzed using Excel sheets and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, the researcher actively engaged in every stage of the study, including data collection, processing, analysis, and report writing.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Land property: Land property is an important indicator of social status, especially in the village community. 98.70% of households in the selected village live at their own homestead. Nationally, 95.11% of households have their own dwelling unit or homestead (BBS, 2023). Among the owner-dwellers, 58% reside at a single homestead, and 42% reside jointly at a homestead. The average size of the homestead is 8.44 decimals in the chosen community in 2023. It was 9.12 decimal in 2001.

Cropland is the basic socioeconomic strength of a rural household. 95 (62%) of households said they have more or less cropland along with a homestead. However, 56 (36.70%) of households have only a homestead. They have no land for farming or agricultural activities. 2 (1.30%) of the households in the community are purely landless. They have no homestead too. In 2001, it was 88 (76%), 26 (22.28%), and 2 (1.72%) respectively (Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of households based on the ownership of land (2023 and 2001)

Status of land-ownership	Percentage of Household	
	2023	2001
Purely landless	01.30% (2)	01.72% (2)
Have only homestead	36.70% (56)	22.28% (26)
Have crop-land with homestead	62.00% (95)	76.00% (88)
	N= 153	N= 116

Source: Survey by the researcher of this paper in 2023 and 2001.

Though the number of homestead owners has increased, the number of cropland owners has decreased. There is no significant change in the landless issue. A survey showed that 6.2% of rural households are landless in 2022. It was 7.7% in 2016 and 4.6% in 2010. 66.1% of households have less than 0.50 acres of land (BBS, 2023). In 1977, a total of 59.15% of rural households were landless, and it was 64.96% in 1978 (Hossain, 1991).

Table 3: Distribution of households based on the ownership of cropland (2023 & 2001)

Ownership of cropland	% of Household	
	2023	2001
0.01 – 01.00 acre	50 %	61 %
1.01 – 02.00 acre	17 %	22 %
2.01 – 03.00 acre	13 %	08 %
3.01 – 04.00 acre	09 %	03 %
4.01 – 05.00 acre	07 %	03 %
5.01 or above acre	04 %	02 %
Total	N= 95 \bar{X} = 1.71 acre	N= 88 \bar{X} = 1.23 acre

Source: Survey by the researcher of this paper in 2023 and 2001

95 (62%) households of the chosen community have cropland in 2023 (Table 2). In 2001 it was 88 (76%). Table 3 depicts that the highest 50% of households own 0.01–1.00 acres of cropland. Then 17% of households own 1.01–02.00 acres. It was 61% and 22% in 2001, respectively. That is, the amount of small land ownership is gradually decreasing. On the other hand, the land ownership of mid-level and rich farmers has increased. 22% of households are owners of 2.01–4.00 acres, and 11% have 4.01 or more acres of cropland, which was 11% and 5% in 2001, respectively. The average ownership of cropland is 1.71 acres in 2023 and 1.23 acres in 2001.

Agriculture: Agriculture is a basic part of the rural economy and a key factor of society and culture. Rural life revolves around agriculture. However, there has been a paradigm shift in agriculture in recent years. In the past, it was driven only for family's food and essentials. But in the 21st century, commercial farming has been strengthened.

Table 4: Purpose of agricultural production in the selected village.

Type of crop farming	% of farmers in the Community		Purpose of engagement					
	2023	2001	Commercial		Family needs		Hobby	
			2023	2001	2023	2001	2023	2001
Food crops (rice, wheat)	37%	43%	58%	37%	42%	63%	00%	00%
Cash crops (Jute....)	37%	41%	100%	100%	00%	00%	00%	00%
Vegetable farming	44%	57%	13%	09%	63%	72%	24%	19%
Onion, garlic & chili	29%	27%	9%	06%	71%	83%	20%	11%
Oil and pulses farming	14%	36%	14%	28%	86%	72%	00%	00%
	N= 153	N= 116						

Source: Survey by the researcher of this paper in 2023 and 2001

The transformation of agriculture is one of the key tools in the selected village community. In 2001 most of the crops were cultivated for family needs (Table 4). However, in 2023 a significant number of farmers of the selected community cultivated different crops commercially. Now 37% of households

produce both food crops and cash crops. It was 43% and 41% in 2001, respectively. Everyone produces cash crops commercially at all times. However, 58% of households produce food crops for marketing and 42% for family needs. In 2001, it was 37% and 63%, respectively.

Among the community people, 44% of households cultivate vegetables. In 2001, it was 57%. Of them, 13% produce it commercially, 24% only for hobbies like gardening, and 63% for family use. Vegetables were produced by 72% of households in 2001 for family consumption and 9% for marketing. On their homestead, 19% of households grow vegetables as a hobby.

Onion, garlic, chili, and other spices are produced in 29% of households. 71% of these households make these products for their own use, 20% do it as a hobby, and the other 9% do so for profit. 27% of farmers grew spices in 2001. Only 6% of farmers' households produced it for marketing, while 83% did it for family needs and 11% for pastimes.

Oil and pulses farming is significantly reduced. It was 36% in 2001, and now only 14% of households produce these crops. 86% of them produce it for family needs, and 14% for marketing. It was 72% and 28% in 2001, respectively. So, commercial cultivation of oil and pulses has decreased in the selected community over the last 20 years.

Rural areas, especially in southern Bangladesh, were filled with ponds, lakes, fens, canals, rivers, and wetlands. There were plenty of native and natural fish. But it is like a fairy tale now. Because of climate change, natural native fish are rare and precious. As a result, some people of the selected village are engaged in fisheries. Some of them have one or more ponds, and some people take them on lease. A total of 16% of households are engaged in fisheries. Among these households, 64% produce fish for marketing, 20% for family needs, and 16% for hobbies. In 2001 it was even lower, just 4%. At that time people were dependent on the natural sources of fish. They caught, collected, or hunted fish from ponds, lakes, fens (locally called Bill-Baor-Haor), wetlands, canals, rivers, etc. There was no practice of fisheries for marketing in the chosen community.

Table 5: Engagement of the households in the extended forms of agriculture.

Extended forms of agriculture	% of farmers in the Community		Purpose of engagement					
			Commercial		Family needs		Hobby	
	2023	2001	2023	2001	2023	2001	2023	2001
Fisheries	16%	4%	64%	00%	20%	87%	16%	13%
Poultry (Hen, ducks etc.)	58%	63%	3%	00%	71%	74%	26%	26%
Dairy (Ox, cow, goat)	18%	46%	63%	11%	22%	81%	15%	8%
	N= 153	N= 116						

Source: Survey by the researcher of this paper in 2023 and 2001

Poultry (hens, ducks, etc.) was traditionally fostered in rural families. In the chosen village, 58% of the families are involved in cultivating poultry. Among these households, 71% raise poultry for family needs, 26% for hobbies, and only 3% of households operate poultry commercially. In 2001, 63% of households were engaged in poultry activities. Among these households, 74% raise poultry only for family needs and 26% just for a hobby. None of the households raised poultry commercially in 2001 in the chosen community.

Currently, in the village, no household raises cattle to cultivate land. However, some people raise a few bullocks or oxen or goats as small entrepreneurs. They foster these cattle throughout the year and sell them during the "Qurbani season," (one of the festivals of the Muslim people) when the prices are higher. In the chosen village, 18% of households are involved in dairy. The highest 63% of households in the chosen community raise dairy commercially, 22% for family needs, and 15% for hobby. In 2001, 46% of households in the same community raised dairy. 81% of them raised cattle, especially cows, for farming or family needs. Only 11% of farmers' families did it commercially, and 8% just for a hobby. There has been a significant transformation of dairy in the community in the last two decades. The total number of households has reduced rearing cattle, but commercial dairy has flourished.

Education: Education is one of the key catalysts of social change. Education contributes to the promotion of enriched norms, values, behavior, and knowledge-based capacity that helps sustain the overall development and prosperity of a nation (Azam, 2023). The literacy rate of Bangladesh was 64% in 2001, and 76.4% in 2023 (MoF, 2001 and 2023). In the chosen community, 47% of the population was literate in 2001 and 67% in 2023. Boys' and girls' enrollment in primary education was 88% and 84% in 2001, respectively (Husain, 2001). Now (2023) about 100 percent percent of the boys and girls of the community are enrolled for primary education. In 2001, 4% of households had graduate members; however, now this number is 14. The rate and level of education in the chosen hamlet have significantly changed over the past two decades. In 2023, about 68% of the population of the village is literate. At least 2% of households have postgraduate (with a PhD) members, and 14% of households have graduate members of the chosen village.

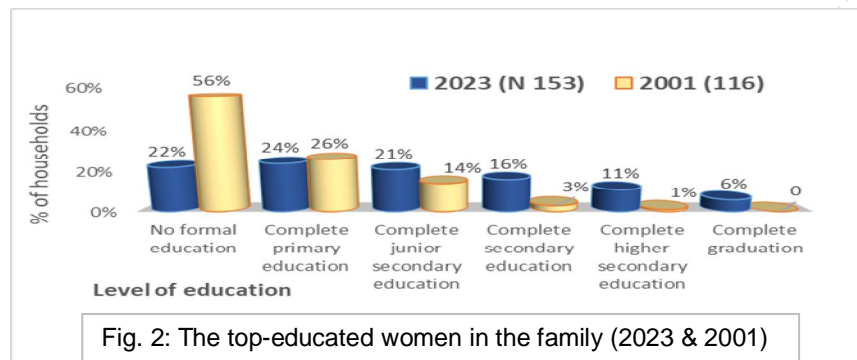
Table 6: The highest level of education in families comparing 2023 and 2001

Level of education	% of Household	
	2023	2001
No formal education	00	07
Complete primary education	16	33
Complete junior secondary education	19	28
Complete secondary education	22	17
Complete higher secondary education	27	11
Complete graduation	14	4
Complete post-graduate (PhD)	02	0
Total	N= 153	N= 116

Source: Survey by the researcher of this paper in 2023 and 2001.

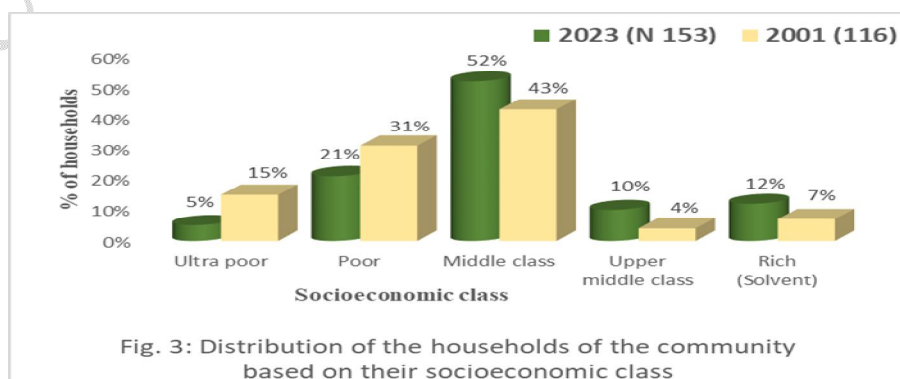
There is a visible change in education in a particular village community (Table 6). In 2001, the highest 33% of households' top-educated persons completed primary education. Now (2023), this number is decreased by 16%. On the other hand, in 2023, the highest 27% of households' top-educated people completed higher secondary education, whereas it was 11% in 2001. In 2001, 7% of households had no formal education. However, now there is no household without formal education. Among the most educated people in 2023, 37% worked for a non-governmental organization. 12% secure a government job. 15% are housewives, while 09% work in agriculture. 5% of the top educated family members work as day labourers! The remaining 22% of the top educated family members work in other (different) professions.

Over the past 20 years, women's education has also increased. In 2001, there were no graduate women in the community. Most of the women had no formal education. However, now the situation has changed. In 2001, the highest 56% of households had no formal educated women (Figure 2). Currently, 22% of households' women have no formal education. Now (2023) 24% of households' top-educated women completed primary education and it was 26% in 2001. 21% of the respondents said, the top-educated women of their family have completed junior secondary education, which was 14% in 2001. 16% of the households' top-educated women have completed secondary level and 11% have completed higher secondary level education and 6% have achieved graduation in 2023. It was only 3%, 1% and 0% respectively in 2001 (Husain, 2001).



Very few households in the selected village have earning (service-holder) women. Currently, 13% of households have service-holder women, which was 4% in 2001. Among these working women, 82% work in the private or non-governmental sector. 78% of households said that because of engagement in family and lack of eligibility, no woman in their family can engage in any earning profession. Now, most rural families are eager to educate their children. They spend a significant portion of their income on the education of their children. Most of the families in rural areas are also conscious about the career of their offspring. They want their son or daughter to build their career with a government job or in other non-agricultural service sectors.

Social Mobility: Many people have graduated from poverty in the last 20 years. In 2000, 48.9% of Bangladeshi people were poor, and 34.3% were ultra-poor (WB, 2008). In 2023, it is 18.7% and 5.6%, respectively (MoF, 2023). In 2001, the average monthly household income of the chosen village was BDT 2,522 and in 2023 is BDT 18,987. The overall impact of socioeconomic changes has resulted in a class transformation of the rural population.



In 2001, 15% of households in the selected village were ultra-poor, and 31% were poor. However, in 2023, it is 5% and 21%, respectively. 52% of households belong to the middle class in 2023. However, it was 43% in 2001. In 2023, 10% of households are upper-middle-class, and 12% are rich or solvent in the village. It was 4% and 7%, respectively, in 2001. In 1990, 23% of rural people were ultra-poor and 50% were poor. But it was 19% and 32% in 1995, respectively (Hossain and Rahman, 2003).

Cultural transformation in the chosen village: Culture is a big issue for any society or community. Language, customs, values, beliefs, and habits all are included in culture. The provision of entertainment is also one of the key components of culture. According to Robert Bierstedt, culture is the complex whole that consists of all the ways we think and we do and everything we have as members of a society. Basically, culture is often defined as a set of rules, norms and values. It provides a blueprint for its standard of living (Bierstedt, 1963). A rigorous transformation of cultural practice in the village community has occurred over the past two decades. Most of the villagers talk in standard language. As a result, many local words are disappearing. The kin relationships in the village community have been affected significantly. Now (2023) in the chosen community 90% of households are nuclear or single, whereas only 10% belong joint family. Just 20 years ago, it was 87% and 13%, respectively.

In the past (up to 2001), the village people, especially youngsters, participated in sports like football, kabaddi, and traditional folk sports like Dariabandha, Gollachhut, Danguli, Kanamachhi, Lookochury, etc. Sometimes they organized competitive tournaments, and thousands of people gathered to enjoy these sports. In the winter, they arranged whole-night folk songs like Jari gaan, Palagaan, Yatra, etc. The young pupil would rent a VCR/VCD and play popular movies for the whole night. The older people also enjoyed all these arrangements. Many people enjoyed the programs (songs, drama, etc.) with cassette player, tape recorder, or radio. But within 20 years, significant changes have happened in rural society. Now, many people (male only) gather in village shops or local markets in the evening. They have tea, snacks, and gossip for 2-3 hours.

Now the source of entertainment is device-driven. Television, mobile phones, social media, etc. are the main sources of entertainment for the present generation. Television is the main source of entertainment for 35% of households. 39% of households depend on mobile phones or social media for their (especially young) entertainment (Table 7). So, devices like television and mobile phones are the main source of entertainment for 74% of households. It was only 9% in 2001. Now, 12% of households enjoy local or folk games and sports, and 14% enjoy gossiping. It was 38% and 27% respectively, in 2001. At that time, 15% of households enjoyed whole-night folk songs (Jari, Yatra, Bichar, Puthi, etc.). However, none of the respondents or households have any interest in this event.

Table 7: Distribution of households based on the source of entertainment (2023 and 2001)

Source of entertainment	% of Household	
	2023	2001
Radio-cassette player	0%	11%
Television/VCR/VCD	35%	9%
Mobile phone	22%	0%
Social media (Youtube, FB...)	17%	0%
Local/folk games and sports	12%	38%
Whole night folk song	0%	15%
Gossiping	14%	27%
	N= 153	N= 116

Source: Survey by the researcher of this paper in 2023 and 2001.

Rural residents have fewer options for entertainment. However, the medium of entertainment has now evolved. It has also altered the interests and tastes of people. Some schoolboys play cricket sometimes, especially in the holidays. Most youngsters roam the streets in groups, chatting, playing games, or watching videos with mobile phones. Some young members are engaged in gang culture or terrorist activities. Some of them are addicted. Drugs are now available in villages. But earlier it was unimaginable. Common people are afraid of these crazy youth. In the past, neighbors or relatives (outside of family members) had a right to govern or control the adolescents and youth of their locality. But now nobody interferes with other offspring except their own.

There was a taboo in the village community especially the Muslims about birth control systems. They believed a baby is born by the grace of God. He who gave mouth will also give food. So, many people were not interested in family planning by birth control.

Table 8: Distribution of households based on the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR)

Status of CPR	% of Household	
	2023	2001
Accepted contraceptive	74 %	59 %
Not accepted for religious belief	08 %	21 %
Not accepted for religious unconsciousness	13 %	18 %
Not relevant	05 %	02 %
Total	N= 153	N= 116

Source: Survey by the researcher of this paper in 2023 and 2001

One or more persons in 74% of households accepted the contraceptive or birth control systems (Table 8). It was 59% in 2001. 13% of the households didn't accept it due to unconsciousness and 08% because of their religious belief. It was 18% and 21% respectively in 2001. However, the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) nationally stands at 62%, and there are high regional variations (UNFPA, 2024).

Results of Qualitative Analysis

During the study in 2001, most of the villagers were used to going here and there (to a weekly hut or market, an upazila sadar, a relative's house, etc.) on foot. Only 8% of households had bicycles, and 1.72% of households had motorbikes at that time. If they had to carry a heavy burden, then they used a 3-wheeler traditional rickshaw van. Rural communication systems (roads, transport, etc.) were not developed at that time. But in 2023, a communication system has developed. The purchase capacity and mentality of rural people have also improved. So, very few people are used to going somewhere on foot. 90% of people in the selected village ride in a battery-driven auto or 3-wheeler rickshaw van. Even so, they don't use bicycles. 15 (10%) households have their own motorcycle for local transport.

In the last 20 years, there has been a drastic shift using electronic items. 57% of rural households use a normal mobile phone set, and 42.48% use Android or smartphones in 2023. Furthermore, 30% of households in the selected village community use the internet. In the selected village, 34% of households have refrigerators, 23% use a gas cylinder, and 10.46% of households use rice cookers or electric cookers. However, in 2001, these kitchen items were not in use. Now, about 100% of households use healthy (covered) latrines. 23 (15%) households have an attached and healthy toilet system. In 2001, there was no attached toilet system in selected villages, but 37% of households used hygienic (covered) latrines.

The people in the village are much kinder now than before. People of all ages wear dresses when they go outside of their homestead. But in the past, a significant portion of males, including children, boys, and young people, didn't wear dresses when they roamed the village. Quality, numbers, fashion and design of dresses also improve in rural life. Very few people wore shoes or sandals during their regular movement in the past. But now they don't come outside from their house without wearing shoes or sandals.

The kinship ties among the villagers are decreasing gradually. In the past, they had regular contact with their neighbors and lineage. They exchanged cooked food, vegetables, and gifts (especially food items) given by relatives to each other. They responded to any hazards or dangers as best friends. Rural people borrowed money from their community as per need without any interest. Sometimes they worked freely at agricultural lands or farms of their neighbors or relatives in case of emergency. The landowner offered an improved diet only. But now this system is over. Everyone thinks for his own interest. Women of rural communities sat together in their leisure time; they gossiped and searched for lice in their hair each other. Sometimes they quarreled with each other (Arens and Burden, 1980). But now very few women go to their neighbor's house and sit together.

Key areas of transformation

One of the study's goals is to examine the social and cultural shifts that have occurred in the chosen village community over the past 20 years. The discussion previously mentioned depicts various changes in the village community. Things like education, agricultural activities, cultural issues, and living standards have changed. The table below shows the key changing areas of the selected village community.

Table 9: Major areas of changes in rural society in the last 20 years

SL#	Major areas of changes	Agreed	Not Agreed	No Comment
9.1	The rural economic system has been improved	78%	9%	13%
9.2	Awareness about education has been increased in the village	88%	4%	8%
9.3	Diversified opportunities in the occupation have been created	87%	4%	9%
9.4	Vast changes in livelihoods	83%	6%	11%
9.5	Rural livelihoods become easier and smoother	89%	5%	6%
9.6	Social relations are weakened	58%	27%	15%
9.7	Reduced traditional cultural activities	75%	11%	14%

Source: Survey by the researcher of this paper in 2023.

N= 153

A major proportion of the respondents said rural economic systems, education, occupation, livelihoods, social relations, cultural activities, etc. have been changed, developed, or affected in the last two decades. 78% of respondents agreed that the rural economic system has improved. On the other hand, a total of 9% of respondents do not agree that the rural economic system has improved in the past 20 years. 13% of respondents didn't make any comments in this regard.

According to 88% of respondents, there is now more awareness of education in the hamlet. 4% of respondents disagree with the survey's majority. On the other hand, 8% of respondents have not responded to this query (9.2). Up to 87% of respondents concurred that the occupation had expanded to include a variety of options in rural locations. However, 4% disagreed, and 9% of respondents did not remark on this question (9.3).

The highest 83% of the respondents felt that there had been a significant shift in rural livelihoods over the previous 20 years. However, 6% of the respondents disagreed with the majority. On the other hand, 11% of respondents remain mute on this question (9.4).

Not only have rural livelihoods changed in the past 20 years, but they have also become easier, smoother, and simpler. 89% of the respondents agreed with this statement. In this aspect, 5% of respondents disagree, and 6% are neutral (9.5).

Social bondage and relations in rural society have eroded during the past 20 years, along with many other aspects. 58% of respondents agreed with this statement. On the other hand, 27% of respondents disagree with the majority. However, 15% of respondents remain silent on this point (9.6). The traditional cultural activities have decreased over the last twenty years. 75% of respondents agreed with this statement. However, 11% of respondents disagreed, and 14% remained silent on this question (9.7).

Major causes of transformation in the chosen village community

The above analysis shows that effective and visible transformations have occurred in the selected community over the past 20 years. Some factors have played a key role in these changes. The surveyed people were asked to give opinions on some well-known factors that are frequently discussed at the national level. Based on their knowledge and experience, they have given valuable opinions on the factors or causes of changes in the selected village community. The table below shows the factors and respondents' opinions.

Table 10: Major causes of changes in rural society

SL#	Major causes of changes	Agreed	Not Agreed	No Comment
10.1	Impact of education & non-agricultural occupation	80%	13%	7%
10.2	Development of infrastructural communication system	69%	18%	13%
10.3	Impact of electricity & ICT (Mobile phones, internet, social media etc.)	88%	5%	7%
10.4	Economic development & scopes of income generation	82%	10%	8%
10.5	Mobile and online banking	72%	19%	9%
10.6	Close connection with urban areas	61%	27%	12%
10.7	Role of NGOs	51%	35%	14%

Source: Survey by the researcher of this paper in 2023.

N= 153

80% of respondents think education and non-agricultural occupations have had a significant impact on the changes in rural livelihoods. 13% of respondents don't agree with the majority. The remaining 7% were kept silent on this question. 69% of respondents agreed that the development of infrastructural communication systems changed rural life significantly. 18% of respondents disagreed with this connection. However, 13% of respondents have not made any comments on this question (10.2).

Electricity and ICT (mobile phones, internet, social media, etc.) have made a great change in the village community. 88% of respondents agreed with this opinion. 5% of respondents have different thinking, and 7% of respondents were kept silent on this question (10.3). Momentous economic development and scopes of income generation have changed the village community evidently. 82% of respondents agreed with this statement. 10% of respondents didn't agree with their neighbors. Nevertheless, 8% of those surveyed had no comments regarding this issue (10.4).

72% of respondents agreed that mobile and online banking has greatly impacted rural socioeconomic and cultural change and affected the community's lifestyle. On the other hand, 19% of respondents don't agree with this opinion. However, 9% of respondents were silent on this question (10.5).

Row 10.6 shows that 61% of respondents think village communities are significantly impacted by the proximity of rural and urban relations. However, 27% of respondents disagreed with the majority proportion of respondents. The remaining 12% of respondents didn't make any comment on this question. NGOs play an important role in changing the village community. 51% of respondents support this opinion. 35% of respondents think there is no notable impact of NGOs on rural changes. However, 14% of respondents were kept silent on this question.

4. MAJOR FINDINGS

From the above discussions, some major findings can be highlighted. The village community has transformed socially and culturally in the last two decades. Homeless people have been reduced. 14.42% of households become new owners of homesteads. However, 14% of marginalized households lost their cropland at the mentioned time. The ownership of cropland is centralized. The average ownership of cropland is 1.71 acres in 2023. However, it was 1.23 acres in 2001. Diversified agriculture has flourished more than traditional agriculture. Agriculture has shifted from family needs to commercial purposes. Agriculture for marketing and profit has become popular.

Women's educational attainment has increased, as has the rate and quality of schooling. At least 7 (6.03%) of families lacked formal education in 2001, and the community had no post-graduate students. There were no women with formal education in 56% of households. In 2023, no graduate ladies were living in any household in the village. At least 6% of homes have graduate women, 2 more households have PhD holders, and there are no illiterate households in the community. The selected village has seen a notable increase in social mobility. There are now more middle-class, upper-middle-class, and wealthy families. In 2001, it was 43%, 4%, and 7%, in that order. It is 53%, 10%, and 12% in 2023, respectively. On the other hand, poor and ultra-poor families have been reduced. In 2001, it was 31% and 15%, respectively, but now (2023) it is 21% and 5%.

The cultural transformation of the chosen community is also very significant and visible. People become kinder than in their previous life. Daily life, habits, attitudes, etc. have changed. The medium of entertainment has completely shifted from traditional to modern items. Folk games and songs are almost on the verge of extinction. Lifestyle and entertainment are now device-driven.

On average, more than 80% of respondents agreed that rural economy, education, occupation, and livelihoods have been changed and improved. However, social relationships and traditional cultural practices have been weakened. They have identified the main factors of transformation in a village community. The respondents also identified the main causes of transformation. These are basically the increase of education, expansion of non-agricultural occupations, development of infrastructural communication systems, electrification, use of ICT, economic development, scopes of diversified income-generating activities, online and mobile banking systems, close connection to urban areas, the role of NGOs, etc.

5. CONCLUSION

The rural landscape and lifestyle in Bangladesh have undergone profound and multifaceted changes over the first two decades of the 21st century. These transformations, both visible and subtle, are driven by a combination of infrastructural advancements and shifts in socio-economic dynamics. Electrification, improved connectivity, and the integration of modern technologies such as ICT and mobile banking have revolutionized daily life, bridging the gap between rural and urban communities. Additionally, changes in education, economic activities, and cultural practices have reshaped the traditional fabric of village life, signifying a transition towards modernity while still retaining elements of the past. However, there should be more studies on the transformation of rural society in Bangladesh. A comparative study on the transformation of livelihoods or socio-cultural issues from one region to another, from city to village, is essential. Besides, quality education, women's education, women's employment, and empowerment in the changing rural society; reducing disparities and providing equality among all citizens, incentives for the use of modern technology, etc. must be strengthened by different governmental initiatives. Then the development of rural society can be accelerated; likewise, progress will be made in achieving the goals of the SDGs.

Disclaimer

I, Iqbal Husain, the author of this paper, hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies, such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators, have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript. However, I have used only the QUILLBOT grammar checker and paraphraser to check grammatical errors. In some cases, I have paraphrased my own write-up using this software (free version).

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