CHAPTER VI

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE BASTEE PEOPLE

Political consciousness followed by political organization is a significant aspect in the transformation of a 'class in itself' to 'class for itself'. That is why the examination of the nature of political organization of the bastee people assumes great importance. The problem is examined both from macro and micro perspectives. More clearly, the nature of political organization of the bastee people depend much on the macro political structure of the country on the one hand and their day to day life struggle and experiences on the other. Thus policies and programmes of the major political parties which shape the macro political structure of Bangladesh, where political life of the bastee people is also a part, is examined. Then comes the nature of their political organization at the community that is, micro level. Both these aspects are analysed in this chapter.

6.1: NATURE OF POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE SLUM DWELLERS IN GENERAL

Before examining the nature of political organization of the bastee people in Bangladesh, it is worth considering the findings of scholars in other countries regarding the nature of political organization of the slum dwellers. It is believed that this will help the investigator to understand the problem in a wider context. There are two kinds of views
about the political consciousness of the slum dwellers.

The first view characterizes slum dwellers as politically apathetic. They are believed to have little interest in politics and little awareness of the political event and lack internal political organization. Such apathy or non-participation is so deeper that they alienate themselves from social, cultural, economic and political life of the city.

On the contrary, the second view does not consider slum dwellers as politically apathetic. They are believed to have local level political organizations and political leaders. The slum dwellers participate in politics, though limited in scale in a number of ways and interact with the political activities of the city.

However, both these views do not provide details about the degree of presence or absence of political consciousness and organizational structure of the slum dwellers that have been examined. Therefore, the nature of political consciousness that is related to the question of class formation remains untraceable. It should be made clear here that certain level of political consciousness which is manifested in exercising vote, knowing some political leaders including local level leaders etc. has very little to do with formation of 'class for itself'. The following sections deal with these problems in detail.
6.2: **MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES IN BANGLADESH AND THE BASTEE PEOPLE**

How the bastee people are organized within the bastee and how they react towards the process of politicizing themselves depend much on the policies and programmes of the major political parties of the country. They have greater appeal to the people through their wider organizational networks and skills to organize and/or mobilize the masses. The policies and programmes of the major political parties to organize the people of the country also bear significance for the bastee people because they are a part of the population. In other words, bastee people interact with the policies and programmes of the major political parties of the country who demonstrate massive political power. Hence, it is necessary to examine the nature of major political parties and their respective policies and programmes and bring to light their bearings on the political life of the bastee people.

In Bangladesh, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) are recognized as the major political forces of the country. Both parties had been in power successively and BNP is in power again after the general election in 1991. The rule of General Ershad and his National Party from 1982 to 1990 will also be examined in this regard.

6.2.1: **The Awami League**

The Awami League emerged as a distinct political party in the early 50's under the leadership of some dissidents
from the ruling Muslim League who were mostly from the then East Pakistan. It was not only the hegemony of the West Pakistani Muslim League leaders but also the extreme disparity in every respect that had been created between the two wings (East and West) of Pakistan that led to the growth of Bengali nationalism and the rise of the Awami League. The Awami League leaders were mostly from the middle class background but relatively progressive than their Muslim League counterparts. However, their major objectives were to restore Bengali nationalism and promote economic and political/administrative interests of the Eastern wing under the existing economic and political set up but in a more fair and democratic environment. In essence, their struggle was to promote the interests of the middle class and the petty bourgeoisie of the Eastern wing who were being deprived of this power by the West Pakistani ruling elites and the bourgeoisie. Thus tension between the two wings grew and the demand for autonomy in the Eastern wing came into forefront during the late 60's and the Awami League emerged as the most popular and organised political party. The middle class, the petty bourgeoisie, the students who were mostly the sons of the peasantry and the professionals of the Eastern wing came forward to support the Awami League.

While Bangladesh became liberated under the leadership of the Awami League, Shaikh Mujib's government had to nationalize all the banks, insurance companies, export-import trade as well as most of the large scale manufacturing
enterprises of the country. The reason for such large scale nationalization was two fold. One was to satisfy a good number of party workers who radicalized themselves during the course of liberation struggle and demanding socialistic measures in state affairs after the liberation. The other and perhaps the more practical reason was that these plants owned by Pakistani capitalists were abandoned thus nothing could have been done except nationalizing them. There was also the absence of developed bourgeoisie and managerial classes who could take proper responsibilities of these organizations. Mujib's government tried to maintain good relationship with most of the countries of the world to ensure help to reconstruct the broken economy. However, his government's leaning was towards the socialist countries because of the vital support it received from the Soviet Union and her allies for independence. Except for a few of these aspects, the newly founded state remained bourgeois in nature. The petty bourgeoisie, a section of middle class, majority of the political leaders and workers of the ruling party, bureaucrats etc. were the main beneficiaries during the Awami League rule.

The policies and programmes of the Awami League could be better understood, if the nature of its leaders and organization are taken into account. Having political background mostly as Muslim Leaguers, the Awami League leaders came from the occupational background of lawyers, teachers, businessmen and agriculturists. Majority of them
had affluent family backgrounds. Their commitment was to promote the interests of the rising middle class, petty traders and small industrialists, prosperous farmers and their children who were students and the lower echelon of civil service.  

It should be mentioned here that there had been a process of radicalization among a section of the Awami League. During its formative stage, a good number of left leaning leaders like Moulana Bhasani, a peasant and a grassroots level leader and founding chairman of the Awami League, Mohammad Toaha, trade union leader, Muzaffar Ahmed and many others dominated the party. Because of the difference in regard to several policy matters this section of leaders left the Awami League and formed National Awami Party (NAP) in 1957. Thus shedding its radical forces, the Awami League emerged as a political party mainly of the rising petty bourgeoisie and middle class.

The Awami League could develop a good organizational network in all the districts, sub-divisions, thanas and even in some unions. Each of these party units became the platform for the local rising middle class, rich farmers, businessmen etc. Most of the finances of the party, besides the negligible membership fees, came from contributions by wealthy members of the party and the businessmen. It should be mentioned here that there was no proper list of members and neither was a secretariat of the party that functioned
regularly. There was no such democracy within the Awami League and the affairs of the party were managed by 'top echelon' and thus the policies and programmes being formulated were to serve certain classes, i.e. the rising middle class and the petty bourgeoisie of the country.

6.2.1.1: The Awami League and the Bastee People

The nature of politics and the mode of operation of the political parties in the sub-continent had been largely determined and devised by the British colonial power. The British handed over political power to the leaders of the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress to rule the newly founded nation-states of Pakistan and India respectively in 1947. The post-colonial politics and the mode of operation of the major political parties (except different factions of the communist party majority of which worked in underground during the 50s and 60s) maintained their colonial legacy in the sub-continent in general and in Bangladesh in particular. It has been shown in the preceding section that the Awami League emerged as a distinct political party having the political legacy of the Muslim League especially its economic policies. Therefore, politicizing the bastee people and instigating them to organize and fight for getting social justice remain far from the policies and programmes of the Awami League. But before going to more details about this point, the mode of functioning of the major parties needs to be studied.
A small percentage of the population of the country are said to be involved in the functioning of the political machineries particularly the major political parties. A major political party has a central committee and local to district level committees in an ascending order. The committee members, especially the executive committee members, meet periodically and discuss matters of policies and programmes of the party. Their activities become hectic to build rapport with the masses and bring them into the support base of the party mainly during the general elections and partly during the local elections. When the election is over, the functioning of the political party and political leaders come to a very limited sphere which often shows indifference to the masses. It is only the election that brings the political leaders to the common people. Since vote is the vehicle for political power, the political leaders try to create vote banks in the way they can.

The growth and proliferation of the bastees has their direct or indirect link with the way the major political parties and political leaders operate. The political leaders, the majority of whom live in the urban centre depend much on the local power brokers for their political leadership. They can not be leaders of a political party unless they can demonstrate their support-base. This is done through the support of the local power brokers who can mobilize people. The local power brokers, on the other hand, support and work in favour of those politicians who can extend to them money.
and patronization which are usually possible through holding public posts. Therefore, the relationship between the politicians and the local power brokers is reciprocal. Under such political framework, the local power brokers demonstrate considerable amount of power in their respective domains which they try to consolidate further for their own future. The establishment and proliferation of bastees have their roots in the way many of the local power brokers work. This is evident from the fact that many of the bastees of Dhaka have been established by these local power brokers which are identified by their names.\textsuperscript{10} This means the local power brokers encourage poor people of their native place to come to the city and settle in the bastee and they provide them with necessary protection. And the ultimate patronization comes from the politicians who receive political benefit out of the whole system. The local power brokers ensure the physical presence of many of these bastee-dwellers in the rallies, demonstrations etc. meant for the politicians. The bastee-dwellers who participate in these activities get nominal money for the day.\textsuperscript{11} Though the situation is not so simple now-a-days because of the growth of innumerable bastees with large number of population which goes beyond the control of any political party and its leaders, the relationship between the bastee dwellers and the political leaders remains almost the same.

While the Awami League came to power after the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, the leaders of this party
followed the same policies and programmes that were being followed by the Muslim League leaders regarding the bastee dwellers. Of the local power-brokers who used to work for the Muslim League leaders, the majority rallied behind the ruling Awami League leaders. Therefore, there was no substantial change in the power structure in which the bastee people are to interact and perform the political roles.

The precariousness of existence in terms of living and earning in the city lead the bastee people to look for some sort of protection from the powerful persons. Such a person becomes available in the nearby locality before or after the establishment of the bastee. This is the person who is a power-broker. As has been said earlier, he works for a more influential political leader and thus enjoys political/administrative as well as economic privileges in various ways. Many bastees of Dhaka city are identified with the names of these local power-brokers. This system of co-opting the bastee dwellers in the political networks of the local power-brokers did not change during the Awami League rule.

The local power-brokers not only use the bastee dwellers for their own political ends but many of them do make a good amount of money by a number of ways. One way is to build houses (single small room made of bamboo coarse-mat) in the bastee which are rented out to the bastee dwellers who do not have houses. Another way is to make rickshaw-garage and use the bastee dwellers for rickshaw-pulling out
of which a good amount of money come to his pocket. The bastee dwellers rely on the local power broker because he appears to be their protector as well as provider of livelihood and shelter. Thus, the local power-brokers happen to be the most influential personality in shaping the political outlook and behaviour of the bastee people and there can be no doubt that their positions have been strengthened during the Awami League rule.

6.2.2: The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

To understand the nature of a political party, its genesis and growth are to be taken into account. After the liberation of Bangladesh, there were manifold aspirations among the people on the one hand, and crisis and inefficient management of resources by the government on the other. The Awami League government headed by Sheikh Mujib tried to make a balance between the radicals and the rightist forces of the country by adopting centrist policies regarding the economy. Neither the radicals nor the rightist forces were satisfied with this policy. The opposition forces were also very critical about its pro-Indian and pro-Soviet block foreign policy. Because of the Pakistani experience of military supremacy in civilian administration, Sheikh Mujib's government was against a large standing army. There were also serious resentment among the army officers in particular while they found themselves neglected by the Awami League government. It should be noted that the army played a vital role during the liberation struggle of Bangladesh. On the
contrary, Sheikh Mujib's government created Rakkhi Bahini, a separate paramilitary force of officers which came mostly from the Awami League loyalists, to deal with insurgency both from the opposition political parties and the army. The army was very much enraged by this. The unprecedented floods in 1974 followed by famine and largescale starvation deaths in many rural areas of the country discredited the Awami League further. The government's unpopularity and isolation from the people aggravated after the fourth constitutional amendment on January 25, 1975. This brought the country to Presidential form of government and single political party system under the banner BKSAL (Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League). Though this was a radical programme it appeared as a threat of dictatorial rule in the country to the opposition. There was also reason for the metropolitan bourgeoisie to be unhappy with this.

In this back drop, some of the army officers started the process of coup d'etat by assassinating Sheikh Mujib and bringing an abrupt end of the Awami League regime in August 1975. After a number of coups and counter coups General Ziaur Rahman, being the army chief, consolidated political power of the country and later on became the President in 1977.

After assuming office, the military rulers headed by General Zia undertook series of policies and programmes. Their first task was to strengthen the armed forces. Since
they had capitalistic political ideology and anti Soviet block foreign policy, the western countries particularly USA, Arabian countries, Pakistan and China became their natural allies. Country's economy was made more open to stimulate the inflow of the metropolitan capital along with the emphasis of privatization and more capitalistic measures in the economy. Close ties with the Islamic countries was given preference with the emphasis of Islam in the domestic socio-cultural life. All these were to please the western and Arab aid donors particularly the USA, Soudi Arabia, Libya etc.

The development funds received from the aid donors were channelled to local bodies to ensure loyalty of the local representatives. Arrangements were also made to distribute loans for different types of enterprises in the rural and urban areas. The regime also allowed the collaboration between Bangladesh private sector and the metropolitan capitalists. The aim of all these policies was to strengthen the growing capitalist (comprador bourgeoisie) class both in the industrial and agricultural sectors of the economy. The military rulers knew that the armed forces alone can not rule the country for long. That is why they needed the collaboration of the rising comprador bourgeoisie and the middle class. Considering this, General Zia took step to form a political platform. He received very encouraging response from the leaders of several factions of right wing and ultra-left parties who were anti Awami League in nature. In this process the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) ultimately
came into being in 1978 with President Ziaur Rahman and Dr. Badrudduza Choudhury as its President and Secretary General respectively.12

6.2.2.1: The BNP and the Bastee People

The BNP's policies of privatization, turning Awami League's policies of mixed economy to absolute capitalistic direction, diverting the development funds to local bodies etc. strengthened the hands of the local power brokers. Significant changes also took place in the political structure of the country. Instead of increased democratization and people's representation which was one of the goals of the liberation struggle, bureaucratic and oligarchic political set up that began to emerge during the Awami League rule became matured in the hands of the military rulers who worked under the banner of BNP. Common people were already disillusioned with politics seeing the adverse political and socio-economic situation after the liberation that caused them great sacrifice. Prior to this, people used to rally behind the political leaders to uphold the causes of the nation. While BNP headed by General Zia came to power, people were less enthusiastic about the political process. Moreover, the army generals and the host of political leaders who came forward to form the BNP had no such organizational network among the people. In such a situation, they had to depend much on the local power-brokers for several political activities such as participating in
the elections, arranging big rallies, demonstrations etc. which were essential to remain in power. The local power-brokers who kept good command over the bastee people of their respective domains, ensured votes and the presence of the bastee dwellers in the rallies and demonstrations in favour of the political leaders. The bastee dwellers who provided such service were either paid for the day or were obliged to do that for some other economic reasons. In this process, the political and economic positions of the local power brokers were further strengthened during the BNP rule. It should be mentioned here that these power brokers belonged not only to BNP but also to the Awami League and some other political parties. But when BNP was in power and able to distribute more economic and political patronages than the others, it could attract major percentage of the local power brokers into its organizational fold.

Under such circumstances the bastee people depended more on the local power brokers who could provide them with economic relief as well as political security to stay in the squatter settlements and work in the city for which they found themselves always vulnerable.

6.2.3: The Rule of General Ershad and the Bastee People

There were factions in the army that arose due to personal as well as ideological conflicts among the Generals and officers during Zia's rule which were manifested in several attempts of abortive coups. The assassination of
General Zia by a rebel group of the army on May 30, 1981 in Chittagong, the second largest city of Bangladesh, was also a case in point. General Ershad, who was chief of the army staff at that time, and the majority of the other army units stood against the coup attempt and it was thus foiled. The army officers including a General who said to be involved in that attempt were killed. Justice Abdus Sattar, the Vice-President of Zia's government, took over as the President of the country and the BNP continued to rule. General Ershad emerged as a powerful personality in this crisis and started to consolidate his position for the future Presidentship, the ultimate power of the country. Within a short period, he seized the power from BNP headed by Justice Abdus Sattar and proclaimed martial law on March 24, 1982 in the country. The main slogan that he put forward to seize power was 'crusade against rampant corruption' which he termed number one enemy of the nation. What followed was the repetition of General Zia's way of getting into politics and formation of a political party with only a slight variation.

The rule of General Ershad and his National Party is marked by more privatization of the public sector and more dependency on the metropolitan bourgeoisie and the Islamic countries in the economic front and more privilege and power to the army officers, the comprador class and the power brokers in the socio-political front. Thus these classes became the main beneficiaries of the Erashad regime. The regime was also more isolated, in comparison to the earlier
regimes, from the people because of its weak organizational network. Elections were made a farce and opposition movements were suppressed either through the use of coercive machinery or by bribe that made the regime more isolated. In such a political vacuum, local power brokers grew stronger with more political and economic strength on whom the regime had to depend much for conducting the political activities viz. the elections, rallies, demonstrations etc. The regime could manage to remain in power till 1990 because of the disunity among the opposition parties particularly the Awami League and the BNP. However, most of the opposition political parties came together on the issue of the ouster of General Ershad and the restoration of democracy. The Ershad regime collapsed in late 1990 while the opposition movement took a revolutionary turn. General Ershad was forced to resign and put on trial for his rampant political and financial corruptions, which he declared number one enemy when he captured power.

As the local power brokers grew stronger, the use of the bastee people for meeting their political ends also enhanced during the Ershad regime which became more isolated from the people. In this process the bastee people are caught more in the grips of the local power brokers who maintained their status quo by joining the ruling party after every successive change in the Government. The bastee people find it more convenient to be individualistic and lumpen\textsuperscript{14} than to be conscious about class interests. This also explains
the internal weakness of the bastee as a community to generate cohesiveness and leadership which are the subjects of the following sections.

6.3: COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE BASTEE

The nature of class consciousness, political organization and leadership of the bastee dwellers also depend on the way they interact with each other and share a community life. Since the bastee people are isolated from the urban social structure and encapsulated within the social boundaries of the bastee, their community life can be the basis of the fulfilment of some of their fundamental social needs. Family, being the primary social unit, functions in the bastee in arranging food, shelter, gratification of sex, reproduction and socialization of the new generation and the instincts of love and affection among members. But while many families live together in the bastee being isolated from the urban social structure some sorts of community activities are necessary for the pursuit of some goals viz., having law and order, arranging marriages of the young members, performing religious and recreational activities etc. that go beyond the scope of the family. However, to proceed to examine the community life of the bastee dwellers the following questions seems to be pertinent. The questions are: How is their social network constituted? How do they resolve interpersonal and interfamilial conflicts? How do they face any crisis that might arise from within or outside of the bastee? How do they arrange religious, recreational
and other activities that require group involvement?

6.3.1: Social Networks of the Bastee People

Social networks of the bastee people can be seen from two aspects. One is their interaction within the bastee and the other is the interaction outside the bastee. Though the bastee people are socially isolated from the urban social structure, they are not totally cut off from it. The rickshaw-pullers, day labourers, maid servants and all other occupational groups of the bastee interact with various people of the city for economic reasons. They also interact with social welfare workers and programmes that deal with the improvement of educational, economic and physical conditions of the bastee. The participation of the bastee people in the activities of the major political parties through the local power brokers has been already mentioned. Besides these they also interact with the neighbouring residential areas of the city for having water, watching some one's TV, consulting physicians and having medicine from the health centres etc. All these interactions give the bastee people an opportunity to be aware of and linked with the city life. Even then, they remain socially isolated from the city. Such isolation is explained in terms of community activities which is determined by community feeling. Though there is no community life as such for the city people because of the fact that they are highly individualistic and isolated from each other, they belong to formal organizations and several
associations. The offices, industrial plants, markets, parks, clubs, recreational centres and all other things the city has are meant for them. Therefore, the whole city appears like a giant community where its members are socially linked to each other by community feeling or, in other words, city feeling. But the very precarious nature of income and living (including housing) of the bastee people dictate them to think that they are not members of the city. They experience that whatever the city has are not meant for them. They also experience a wide discrepancy between the bastee and other residential areas in terms of housing, civic facilities, standard of living, life style and value orientation etc. which can not go together. They find most of the city people are literates while most of them are illiterates. In such circumstances, social interactions in the form of marriage, kinship, religious accomplishments, recreational activities etc. appear to be impossible between the bastee and the city. Thus, whatever the linkages the bastee people have with various persons, groups and institutions of the city can not be identified as part of their social or community life though their thinking and interpersonal adjustments are influenced by these interactions.

Our data relating to the social networks within the selected bastees reveal the fact that kinship, region of origin, neighbourhood, intimacy or friendship etc. together form the basis of interpersonal and interfamilial relations.
This basis of social networks within the *bastee* is associated with the process of their joining the *bastee*. It has been pointed out that the rural migrants come to the city and join the *bastee* through a process. They get the information about how to go to the city and how to get the job and settle down in the *bastee* from the residents of the *bastee* who had migrated to the city from the same locality. These old residents (they may be kin) also help the in-migrants in getting the job and settling down in the *bastee*. Through this process, the rural migrants join the *bastee* one by one or in a group and form a cluster of people having the same regional background. Kinship and locality are the two important factors at the time of joining the *bastee*. Then they form the neighbourhood. Therefore, the process of joining the *bastee* determines their social networks to a greater extent. But when the *bastee* enlarges with continuous inflow of new in-migrants having the same or different regional background, such social networks no longer remain that much alive. In a life situation which keeps most of them very busy all the day, physical proximity in terms of housing (next door neighbourhood) and/or working make their intimate social networks. More clearly, intimate friendship is built up among the close neighbours and working mates on the basis of reciprocal helping attitudes especially during the time of crisis (accidents, illness, etc.). This is the most intimate social network they make other than the family. This explains their highly individualistic and lonely life within the *bastee* too.
6.3.2: Maintenance of Law and Order and Resolution of Conflicts within the Bastee

There is no formal or informal political organization in the bastee to maintain law and order and resolve interpersonal and inter familial conflicts. While asked about the nature and magnitude of law and order situation and conflict within the bastee, the respondents of all the three selected bastees mention that they hardly have any such problems that are to be dealt with. They explain that everybody is busy in the bastee for their daily earnings. On the other hand, they do not have any property, other than a small hut, that may arise as a source of conflict in the bastee. However, they have intrafamilial conflicts that arise mostly within husbands and wives and some occasional quarrels among housewives due to children's misdeeds. But these are often minimized automatically without others intervention. Since everybody is aware about their shared precarious life situation, quarrels on any trivial matter do not sustain long.

While asked about the local level leaders who come to help during their personal, familial and community level crisis, their responses were negative. This means that they do not have any persons who come forward as leaders and help them during personal and community level crises. There is no such persons who can have command over other fellow bastee.
dwellers on the matters of law and order situation or on any other occasions. Since everybody's socio-economic conditions are more or less similar and they are to work hard all the day, no one is in a position to bother about the affairs of the community. For the same reason, they do not have community level religious activities and religious leaders. There is neither a bastee union nor trade unions or occupational unions in the selected bastees. None of the bastee dwellers belong to any political party. They explain that any such organizational activities require some organizers, membership fee and action plans. Since most of them work individually in the informal sector and busy all the day, there is no time for any one to organize or to be organised. Nobody will be willing to pay the membership fee without which no organization can run. There is also an absence of trust on others especially on financial matters. All these circumstances act as barriers to the growth of local level leaders within the bastee. It should be made clear here that the relationship of the bastee-dwellers with the local power brokers exists not at the formal but at the personal level. That is why the bastee-dwellers do not belong to any political party or organization though they are being used by the local power brokers whose political ends are sufficiently met.

However, informal and very loose type of leadership is to be observed in the selected bastees. The old resident of the bastee who provides moral help to the new comers during
settling down and getting job in the city are often consulted in different matters. He advises what to do and what not to do. His role is, therefore, more of an adviser than a leader. He does not have any command over others in the way a leader usually has because he lacks socio-economic superiority over others. Other than these, there arises natural leadership during the time of general community crisis or any matter that is related to the general interest of the bastee. There can be a threat of eviction of the bastee. Also there are some social welfare programmes for the betterment of the community. In either of the situations some persons emerge as natural leaders who can address the problem properly while others rally behind them (the leaders). Therefore, the bastee people have dependency on each other only on matters of general problem of the bastee and there arises some natural leaders but not in the conventional sense of the term. These leaders are the products of a particular situation and when the situation changes, they no longer remain relevant and are ignored as leaders in the bastee.

6.2.4: Socio-Cultural Activities in the Bastee

Several socio-cultural activities take place in a community life. Among these marriage ceremonies, religious rituals and recreational activities are quite prominent. They not only serve to increase cohesiveness among the members but also help to fulfil their natural socio-psychological instincts. Keeping these facts in mind,
efforts were made to examine the nature of socio-cultural activities in the selected bastees. The bastee people were found to be less involved in these activities. As has been already pointed out in the preceding chapter, marriages take place in the bastee with very little involvement of members and with very little formalities. The young members of the bastee even prefer court marriages for simplification and economy in terms of time and money to observe marriage rituals. The parents and senior members of the bastee do not usually discourage it. They have a little say in the matters of their sons who are earning members. The reason is very simple. Once the young son becomes economically active, the parents lose control over him because the parents do not have any assets and properties which are to be inherited by the son. Neither the parents can provide the son any financial help. In such a situation whatever the young earning members prefer to do, the parents pose no obstacles so long as it does not affect others' interests.

Religious festivals especially Idul Fitar and Idul Azha are being celebrated with great enthusiasm by Muslims of all walks of life in Bangladesh. The rural poor also celebrate these days at a community level. But the bastee-people are not in a position to celebrate these festivals at a community level. Most of the male members particularly the rickshaw pullers go for work even on these days. They earn double or triple wages these days because people pay visits to their friends and relatives and give more money to the rickshaw
pullers on the auspicious days. Others particularly women, children and old male members go door to door and to religious congregations to collect charities meant for poor in the form of cash, used clothes, food etc. For these reasons the bastee people keep themselves busy in earning more money and collecting charities outside the bastee during the religious festival days which contribute to the absence of their own community level participation.

In every Muslim residential area, a mosque is built as a general practice so that the members can observe day-to-day religious prayers. In every mosque, there is an Imam (Muslim priest). Other than religious activities, the mosque also functions as a source of meeting place where discussion and decisions in the form of consensus on matters of community affairs are generally taken. The Imam plays a vital role in this process. Efforts were made in this research to examine the role of mosque and Imam in the community affairs of the bastee. No mosque even substandard in form and no Imam, even an informal one, was found in any of the bastees that were investigated. The reason is that the bastee people hardly have time and money and do not have the overall cultural orientation to observe religious activities. They also lack religious education. Since there is no Imam among the bastee dwellers there is no initiative to build mosque and motivate the bastee people for religious activities. In such circumstances, the bastee people lack religious institutions and activities that act as a linking force among the
community members.

So far as the recreational activities are concerned, the bastee people do not have any cultural organizations that would provide them with entertainment facilities. Some of the bastee dwellers, particularly the young male members, go to watch cinema, but it is outside the bastee. At the bastee level, they do not have any recreational arrangement other than chatting and playing cards in a group when they have leisure time to spend. They also meet in the small grocery store or in any such place in the bastee. It is not true that all the bastee members meet in these places but only those who form small groups on the basis of intimacy do meet. These groupings are not fixed and closed. Any bastee memeber can join them. Since the place is congested and over crowded both males and females participate in gossiping either in the same group or forming different groups of males and females. All these suggest that there is no community level participation in the recreational arrangements of the bastee.

6.3: NATURE OF CLASS-CONSCIOUSNESS AND CLASS FORMATION IN THE BASTEE

The social networks and arrangements for law and order, religious, recreational and other socio-cultural activities of the bastee-people that have been discussed in the preceding sections clearly testify that they hardly have any community life. Though so many families live together in a congested area, they do not participate in a community life
even in maintaining law and order, religious and recreational activities. Family appears to be the only social unit to which they attach themselves in a meaningful way but that is also not so harmonious and stress-free. All these are indicative of their economic hardship and vulnerable life situation which forced them to become individualistic and lumpen in nature. Their vulnerability is further strengthened by the political structure of the country on the one hand and the nature of community life they are forced to accept on the other. This has a wider bearing on the nature of class-consciousness and class formation. When a group of individuals who live together become socially isolated from one another there remain very little chance of class formation. This is the case with the bastee-people. Though they live in a close physical proximity to each other and they have some political consciousness, they remain socially isolated from one another. Their political consciousness cannot be equated with class consciousness. Class-consciousness could be measured by the existence of a political organization of their own and the identification of the rival class. In case of the bastee-people, they can not identify a rival class for whom their economic interests and physical existence in the city seems to be threatened. Rather, they find the middle and upper class people as provider of livelihood. It is true that they experience a great inequality existing between them and the city people (the middle and upper classes). It is very likely that they carry within themselves a deep frustration and anger against
the powerful and affluent sections of the people many of whom treat them in a sub-standard way. But their past experience of semi-starvation in the village and present precariousness of living in the city force them to be individualistic and lumpen. Consequently they are unable to form a class of their own with a political organization that could educate them about the broader and real perspectives that create the conditions of their miserable life situation which they need to change in order to change their fate in a group or class.

It is evident from our earlier discussion that the economic conditions and the nature of community life are not solely responsible for deterring class formation and preventing the crystallization of class consciousness in the bastee. The policies and programmes of the major political parties and the overall political culture of the country also has a significant bearing on this. It has been shown how the major political parties, with the help of their local power-brokers, use the bastee-dwellers for their political ends.

It is, therefore, the economic conditions, the overall political structure of the country and the nature of community life in the city determine the individualistic and lumpenized character of the bastee-people, which are unfavourable to the growth of class consciousness and concomitant political organization in the bastee. It is also a fact that the bastee-people are unable to find a direct oppressor or exploiter class against whom they feel the need
to get organized; rather they find the city-people sympathetic towards them. They also find the city-people are the providers of their livelihood which is essential for their very existence. They also cannot forget the fact that they had to lead a life of semi-starvation in the rural areas from where they had migrated. The combination of all these factors result in the bastee-dwellers to be individualistic and lumpen than to be class conscious and politically active.
Notes:


11. These facts are widely known and spoken in Bangladesh in the informal level. But these hardly appear in the formal level, i.e. in the written form so far. However, many of the bastee-dwellers admitted these facts.

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14. Marx described the lumpen proletariat as the 'refuse of all classes' 'a disintegrated mass' comprising 'ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds... pick pockets, brothel keepers, rag-pickers, beggars' etc. The main significance of the term is not so much its reference to any clearly defined social group which has a major socio-political role, as in drawing attention to the fact that in extreme conditions of crisis and social disintegration in a capitalist society large numbers of people may become separated from their class and come to form a 'free floating' mass which is particularly vulnerable to reactionary ideologies and movements. See Bottomore T.B. (ed.), A Dictionary of Marxist Thought, Blackwell Publisher Ltd., England, 1985, pp.292-93.