CHAPTER IV

KINSHIP AND THE COMMUNITY

The character and quality of social relations based on kinship have always been treated as a prominent area of inquiry by social anthropologists in their study of small-scale rural communities. This is because in such communities, whether tribal or peasant, kinship tends to play a dominant role in social organization. On the other hand, as societies change from a folk stage to an urban or a complex civilizational stage, kinship seems to lose its central position in the organization of inter-individual relations. In this chapter an attempt is made to portray the ways in which kinship plays a part in the general socio-economic field of the Singimari Muslim community. The relative importance of Islamic principles and indigenous folk traditions in determining the character and tenor of kinship and marriage are also considered in this chapter. Besides, the extent to
which community organization is influenced by kinship factors is also discussed.

To the Singimari Muslims, their community is a "kin community" in which the notion of everybody being related to everybody else is very strong. The Muslims of this village constitute an 'exogamous group'. In this, they offer a contrast even with the neighbouring Muslim villages where intra-village marriages are not uncommon. As a result of village-level exogamy, Singimari Muslims have had to establish affinal ties with the Muslims of other villages. Thus, their network of social relations frequently cut across the village boundary.

KIN GROUP

The household is the primary residential-cum-kin unit among the Singimari Muslims. Next to this there is a kin-group formed by households where the heads are related to one another as primary kin (see fig. 4). Beyond these clustered household units of familial kin, one could refer to each Muslim chuba as an aggregate of patrilineally related kinsfolk. The northern, middle, and southern hamlets are not mere
It is possible to chart out kinship links between heads of different households within a particular chuba (see fig. 5). The heads of all the households in any chuba are patrilineally related to one another. Thus, each chuba is a patrilineal kin-group functioning more or less like a sub-lineage. This has resulted from the lack of physical mobility of a man outside his own hamlet following marriage. The residents of a chuba thus feel that they are like "one big family" which is demonstrated by frequent inter-household interactions and economic co-operation in agricultural work and at times of crisis.

The sense of patrilineal kinship-based unity, however, does not end at the chuba level. As a matter of fact, the entire Muslim community of Singimari corresponds to a wider patri-kin unit. There is a broad sense of kinship involving all the Muslim households of Singimari. For, the Muslim heads of households consider themselves to be the descendants of one or another of six different ancestors who happened to be patrilineally related to one another. On inquiry it was, however, not possible to place
An example of inter-relationships between the Muslim households within a chuba. Simplified from an extended genealogy, this diagram shows the relationships of E (ego - a 59 years old householder) to the household heads in 11 different households (within dotted lines). The deceased kin (blocked in) are plotted only to indicate the links.

Fig. 5
all the Muslim households in a single genealogical table, nor was it possible to trace exact kin links between all the households. Nonetheless, there is a clear sense of kinship identity at the level of the community covering the entire Muslim population of the village. Among the Singimari Muslims the fiction of 'everyone in the village being related to everyone else' is quite strong. They say that they all belong to the same bangsha (or lineage). The Muslim community is thus organised like a lineage. This is reflected by the existence of strong feelings against marriage involving village households. The reason offered is that since all the village households belong to the same bangsha it would be incestuous for

1 The term bangsha covers the kin, living or dead, close or remote, with whom relationship is assumed to be traceable on the paternal side. Besides bangsha, certain other terms are also used by the villagers, both the Hindus and the Muslims, for different circles of kin. For example, the term bhagi is used to denote the members of village households with whom a villager can actually trace kin links on the father's side. One's bhagis more or less coincide with the residents of one's chuba. These are the kinsfolk with whom one feels close, next to his/her primary kin. The bangsha appears to be a wider unit than the bhagi, since the former term is generally used by the villagers to refer to the kinsfolk belonging to this village and elsewhere, while the later term is invariably used to refer to the village households only.

The term ghar is used to denote a household unit. Depending on the context the same term may also be used to imply a house. Another term kurma is used to denote the affinal kinsfolk only. A social visit to the home of an affine is kurma khowa (literally dining with affines) while establishing relations with others through marriage is kurma nata.
anyone to marry in another household, even if it is outside one's own chuba. The Singimari Muslims thus constitute an exogamous community. As a consequence, Singimari households bring in brides from neighbouring villages and girls from this village are invariably married away to other localities.

The practice of village-level and patri-kin exogamy is an interesting phenomenon among them in as much as there is no stigma attached to such alliances in Muhammedan law except, of course, involving one's primary kin. But the Singimari Muslims have so far been totally averse to such marriages. Among them the notion about patrilineal kin approximates the Hindu rather than the Islamic principles. In this regard, one sees a greater impact of indigenous folk traditions in organising kin relationships rather than the tenets of Islam.

VILLAGE-LEVEL KIN RELATIONSHIP

As stated earlier, each Muslim chuba is like a patrilineal kinship unit where the people regard one another as bhai. Interactions among the inhabitants of a chuba is more informal and intimate than between the inhabitants of different chubas. Children, for
instance, move about freely from one house to another within a chuba without any kind of restriction. Women belonging to different households of a chuba visit one another all the time for a bit of gossip or when asked for to help in such feminine activities as husking and weaving. This kind of informal inter-household relations at the chuba level has come about due to the close kin links as well as due to the physical proximity of the houses.

Apart from day-to-day informal contacts, help and assistance, persons belonging to a chuba also join hands for occasional group activities. It is common for the chuba kin to work as a group whenever someone is in need of assistance for the preparation of land, harvesting of paddy, cutting of sugarcane, manufacture of jaggery out of sugarcane, building and repairing of houses and so on. Such help and assistance are always mutual. Every householder can expect co-operation from his chuba kin whenever he requires the help of a group of men.

Certain events, such as marriage and death, provide the best occasion for observing the role of kinship among the Singimari Muslims. On such occasions
the chuba kin act as a corporate group in organising various activities. However, on such occasions persons from other chuba may also come and extend help in various ways. There is some amount of overlapping of the functions of chuba kin and other Muslims of the village. Certain roles are primarily confined to one's own chuba members. For instance, a marriage negotiation party for a village boy usually consists of the elderly men and women from among his chuba kin. Such a party visits the future bride's parents to begin the negotiations. But when a boy's party from another village comes to seek a bride from a Singimari Muslim household it is the elders of the Muslim community of Singimari as a whole, and not the chuba elders alone, who would discuss the proposal and fix up the details of the marriage with the visitors. Such details include fixing the date of wedding and the wedding gifts and ornaments to be given to the bride. When a villager gives a feast to the community in connection with a wedding, death or any other ceremony, his chuba kin would come forward to help him with such tasks as cutting trees and splitting of firewood, husking paddy and so on. On such occasions the entire Muslim community
of Singimari must be invited to the feast. There are some Muslim villagers who are recognised as expert cooks for such occasions. They are always invited by any Muslim householder to prepare food at feasts.

A householder must observe the appropriate procedure in inviting people to a feast or gathering at his house. The village people must be invited by the householder himself or, if he is a young man, by his father, father's brother or elder brother. In other words, an elderly person from among the primary kin of the householder is considered the right choice to go around inviting people within the village. An elderly person from among the primary kin of the householder is also sent to invite the kinsfolk living outside the village.

When death takes place in a household, it generally brings together the Muslims of the village as a whole and not merely the immediate kin from within the chuba. Muslim villagers, irrespective of their kin connections with the deceased's household, come forward to take part in the funeral rites such as washing the dead body (ghusal), praying for the deceased (janaza) before placing the body in the
grave and for all other rites. The villagers also come forward to assist in the post-funeral feast. The following tasks and observances are, however, specifically confined to the chuba kin of the deceased.

(a) Each chuba has its own graveyard (koborasthan or gorasthan). When any member of the chuba dies his body will be buried in his chuba graveyard and nowhere else. There are thus three graveyards for the three chubas.

(b) A period of three days following a death is observed as mourning period by the chuba-kin of the deceased. During these three days they abstain from ploughing and other agricultural work, and also do not go out fishing. They also abstain from partaking of meat and fish during this period of mourning. This is an expression of the solidarity of the sub-lineage. The members of the deceased's household are supplied with food by their chuba-kin during the period of mourning. The Muslims of other chubas observe the period of mourning for only the day following the death. On this day they abstain from ploughing.
EXTRA-LOCAL KIN

The practice of village-level exogamy of the Singimari Muslims has led to a proliferation of affinal kinship. Every household has close affinal kin in the neighbouring Muslim villages and this has made the range of kinship very broad.

To a villager his chuba people are his 'effective kin' in most day-to-day situations. Next to this is the village level sense of kinship. The strength of ties which are maintained with extra-village kin varies according to the nature of situations and from person to person. There is a fair amount of personal choice with regard to interactions with extra-local kin, excepting for 'priority kin' such as wife's parents, wife's brothers, or mother's brothers.

As indicated above, avoidance of inter-marriage among the village households has connected Singimari Muslims with many other villages. Most of these villages are situated within five miles of Singimari and can be reached in one or two hours of walk. Thus contact

1 "Those with whom significant contacts are maintained...." (Piddington 1961: 15; also Firth 1956: 41).
2 "Members of the individual family and kinsfolk closely related to it, particularly parents of the spouses" (Piddington 1961: 15).
with extra-village kin can be easily maintained and there is a great deal of visiting between such kin, especially during the free days following harvest. Due to the close proximity of the villages, households related by marriage also frequently co-operate in agricultural activities such as share-cropping, ploughing, transplantation and harvesting of the crops.

The practice of village-level and patri-kin exogamy compels Singimari Muslims to choose brides or grooms in other villages. This is usually done by using previous marital ties in the neighbouring villages. Information about prospective brides and grooms are obtained from extra-local kin by a Singimari household. Many Singimari households thus come to be related to one another through their affinal relatives who happen to be from the same village and are in turn related to one another. This way, an inter-linking of extra-village kin has taken place through the practice of village exogamy.

Table 11 shows the number of women from Singimari married away to other villages and also the number of women who have come to the village through marriage.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance from Singimari (in miles)</th>
<th>Number of Villages Linked by Marriage</th>
<th>Number of Women Married away from the Village</th>
<th>Number of Women brought from other Villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 - 20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 +</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the Village</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>58</strong></td>
<td><strong>80</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 indicates the way in which marital ties have enlarged the range of affinal kinship for the villagers. It is also evident that most of the marriages are contracted in the nearby villages so that only 4 village girls out of the total of 58 were married away in villages located beyond 10 miles. In the same manner only 6 brides out of the total of 80 came from villages beyond 10 miles. The only married woman who comes from Singimari and at the same time married within the village...
appears to be an exception to the rule of village level exogamy. But this case is easily explained by the fact that the woman came as a little girl to the village with her widowed mother from another village following her mother's marriage, for the second time, to a Singimari man.

The presence of affines in the neighbouring villages facilitate interactions with them. The distance to these villages is sometimes lessened by the use of short cuts through paddy fields following the harvesting season. Kin from different villages also meet one another in the weekly market held on Saturdays at Dumunichouki.

When questioned the people, one and all, say that they prefer to establish marital ties in the neighbouring villages because that way it is possible to keep close and frequent contacts with their relations. The parents would want to keep their married daughters as near to them as possible. In the same way, the girls also want to be as close to their natal village as possible. At times an otherwise suitable match would not be considered just because the prospective groom happens to be from a distant village. The following
instance indicates how a girl married away to a distant village compares her lot with her elder sister who is married away to a nearby village:

Begum and Sarumala are two sisters. Begum, the elder sister, is married away to Dumunichouki, only 3.2 Km. away from Singimari, while Sarumala is married away to a village some 12 Km. from Singimari. Begum visits her parents frequently. Once both the sisters happened to visit their parents on the same day. In the course of their gossip with other members of the family, Sarumala said to Begum "You are fortunate, you can come to our home frequently and meet the family. But I cannot do this."

As noted earlier, affinal links already existent in other villages are usually used in exploring possibilities of finding a match for a Singimari boy or a girl by his or her parents. The following case may be cited as an example.

Marriage negotiations of Jalil, the Muslim shopkeeper (see chapter 3), was in progress while I was in Singimari. Earlier, Jalil had himself chosen a girl but his parents did not allow him to marry the girl of his choice since she came from a village "too far away from Singimari" (some 24 Km. from Singimari). His parents also told him that it would not be possible for them to select a bride from such a distant village since the family background and other details about the girl was not known to any of the villagers. Jalil's parents then looked about for a prospective bride for him and finally decided to open negotiations for a girl at Dumunichouki through a family in that village to which a girl from Singimari had been married away.
It may be noted here that as many as 15 girls from Singimari households are married away to Dumunichouki. In the other direction, 17 married women at Singimari originally hail from the village of Dumunichouki. In this way the two villages have come to be linked by marriage over the years and the already existing connections are used by the people when they are in the lookout for a prospective match for their sons and daughters.

The relations from the neighbouring villages are always invited to household functions. The news of a crisis, such as death, are usually conveyed to the close extra-local kin through a villager, usually through one's own chuba-kin. The relations, mainly men, from other villages come to offer their condolence and to attend the janaza rites.

The invited kinsfolk from other villages are received in special ways. For example, their sitting arrangement at feasts is made in one courtyard. During feasts, banana leaf is used to serve meals. If a householder, who offers a feast, cannot arrange banana leaves for all the invitees even then such arrangement is made only for the kinsfolk from other villages. In such a case the Singimari people are
informed by the householder and accordingly they bring their own pots to take meals.

The kind of kinship situation noticed at Singimari is unique in some ways. The neighbouring Muslim communities surrounding this village do not observe village-level exogamy. Marriage among patrilineally related kin are, however, avoided even in the surrounding villages though marriage within the village is common. At Singimari on the other hand, the fiction of village-level patrilineal kinship has emerged due to which the whole village community functions like an exogamous lineage.

A passing reference should be made to an emergent feeling among the younger generation of Singimari Muslims about ban on intra-village marriage. The younger people say that there is nothing wrong in marrying a girl from within the village, while the elders have persistently objected to such unions which were about to be materialised a number of times during the past few years. If such a marriage takes place in the near future, conflicts are likely to arise which may disrupt the cohesive influence of kinship among the Singimari Muslims.
The Singimari Muslims have harmonized their social relations according to the dictates of the indigenous folk traditions by totally excluding patrilineal kin marriages and by using a kinship frame of reference for inter-individual relations. They have built up an expansive kinship system through the practice of village-level exogamy. Kinship also provides a sense of unity and solidarity among these Muslims. It is also largely responsible for maintaining a system of communication, authority and social control in the community. The next chapter (chapter 5) deals with these aspects of community life.