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Socio-economic Profile of the Study Area

For a proper understanding of the problem, it is essential to briefly refer to an ecological profile of Kushtia district as the values and characteristics of the masses very much depend upon, and are influenced by geographical, economic, social and political background of the area.

Physical feature and socio-historical background

Kushtia is not an ancient township but one of the eighteen oldest districts in independent Bangladesh. There is no much evidence to know the ancient history of Kushtia. The only tool to be informed about the district what was portrayed through description by different persons based on different regimes in the region governed. *Hamilton's Gazetteer* has mentioned of Kushtia town and of the fact that the local people called the town Kushtay (Kushte). In Tolemy's map, several little islands have been portrayed under the Ganges basin. These islands are considered as ancient Kushtia.¹

The district was under Natore Zemindar in 1725. Then it was under Rajshahi civil administration of Kanadarnagar Pargana.² Later East India Company transferred Kushtia under Jessore district in 1776. It was brought under Pabna district in 1828. Then Mahkuma Administration was established under Kushtia in 1861 and then brought under Nadia district.³ During the British rule, railway connection with Kolkata, capital of British India, established in 1860, made the town an alluring location for mills and factories, including the Jagneshwar Engineering Works (1896), Renwick and Company (1904), and the Mohini Mills (1919). A Municipality was established in Kushtia in 1869.

After partisan in 1947, it became a district of East Pakistan. Then Chuadanga and Meherpur were parts of Kushtia.⁴ Later, Meherpur and Chuadanga was separate districts in 1983.⁵ The town became attractive for development with the establishment of the Ganges-Kobadak Project (popularly known as G-K Project) headquarters and a number of government offices in 1954. GK Project is a large surface irrigation system which was started in 1961 and the first corps under this

project was grown in 1962-63. The whole project was divided into two units, the Kushtia Unit and the Jessore Unit. The Kushtia unit completed in two parts, Phase-I and Phase-II. Phase-I had a command area of 85,020 ha, of which 48,700 ha are irrigable. Phase-II had a command area of 117,814 ha, of which 93,300 ha are irrigable. ⁶

The various events have made the district as a historical part of the country and have turned it as important. The district is a glorious part of our Liberation War in 1971. A 147 member company of the 27th Baluch Regiment of Pakistan army reached Kushtia on 25 March 1971 that was based at Jessore cantonment. Although they initially captured the local police station and settled an outpost there, soon they faced a considerable resistance from a group of police, ansars, students and local people. By April 1, the Pakistani army was completely overpowered and the Muktibahini took control of Kushtia.⁷ Later on April 17, 1971 the Bangladesh Government in-exile formally announced Proclamation of Independence at Baidyanathala (re-named Mujibnagar after the proclamation), a border area in present Meherpur district, then a subdivision of Kushtia district. The Proclamation so announced in effect provided the fundamental instrument of law as well as an interim constitution of the Mujibnagar government during the war of liberation, including that of the government in liberated Bangladesh until the adoption of the Constitution, made effective from 16 December 1972. ^[5] Subsequently direct encounters between the Pakistan army and the rebels were held at many places of the district including Bangshitala at Kumarkhali.⁸ Daulatpur ⁹ The first flag of independent of Bangladesh was also officially hoisted here. ¹⁰

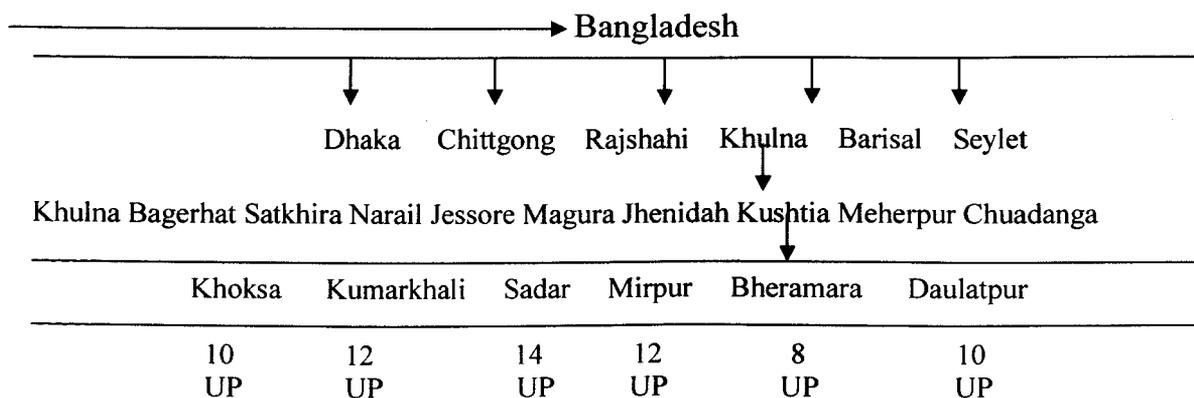
After the independence of Bangladesh, different development projects were undertaken in the district of Kushtia. On November 22, 1979 the foundation stone of The Islamic University was laid at Shantidanga - Dalulpur under the districts of Kustia-Jhenidah. However, in 1982 the University was shifted to Gazipur and

admission of students began in the session of 1985-86. Later on 10 January, 1990 the University re-shifted to its original site at Shantidanga Dulalpur.

Kushtia is the birth place of many historical figures including Mir Mosarraf Hossain (1912) and Bagha Jatin (1879-1915), journalist Kangal Harinath (1833-1896), King of Bauls Lalon Shah (?-1890). The shrine of Lalon reconstructed in 1963, still attracts many people from home and abroad. Nobel laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore lived a part of his life at Shelidah in this district and created some of his memorable poems while living there. The district is popularly known in the country as 'capital of culture'. There are numbers of cultural organisations and institutions here. Lalon Academy, Rabindra Museum, Kuthibari of Rabindranath are mentionable.

A total 15 daily newspapers and seven weekly newspapers and magazines including English are published from the district regularly. It is a unique event the country.

Bangladesh has six divisions. Kushtia is one of the districts under Khulna division. Division is an administrative set up of several districts, while the district is of several upazilas. Khulna division is comprised with ten districts. Kushtia is one of the oldest districts of the division. The district is formed with six upazilas as well as covered with five municipalities, 978 villages and 66 Union Parishads. The upazilas are Kushtia Sadar, Khoksa, Kumarkhali, Mirpur, Bheramara and Daulatpur. These upazilas have 66 unions. Five of them are newly formed. These are under Khoksa upazila



Geography

Kushtia district is situated about 277-km southwest off the capital city. It lies between 23.29-24.13 North latitude and 88.34-89.22 east longitude. It is bounded in the North by Pabna, Natore and Rajshahi, in the South by Jhenidah, Chuadanga and Meherpur, In the East by Rajbari and in the West by Chuadanga, Meherpur and west Bangla of India. It comprises a total area of 1682.28 Sq.Km. The district is a plain land of Ganges basin. It has the country's largest irrigation project an irrigation project -----Ganges-Kabadak project that supply water flows from Ganga basin covering 1.96 lakh hectares. Its south and southwestern parts are formed with alluvial soil. Its western area is slightly higher level than eastern and northern part.¹¹

Demography

According to 2001 population census the total population of Kushtia district is 17,37,360, out of which 8,95,300 are male and 8,42,060 are female. The male and female ratio is 103:5. Of the population 95.72% are Muslims, 4.22% are Hindus and 0.6% are others. The average family member is 4.5. The population density of the district as calculated in 2001 census shows that there are 1073 persons per Sq. Km.⁵

Literacy

Kushtia maintains its literacy rate as total 42.89%. This rate varies from upazila to upazila. It is the highest in Sadar upazila and lowest in Daulatpur upazila. The upazila wise literacy rate is 56.0% in sadar, 41.4% in Khoksa, 45.1% in Bheramara, 39.7% in Kumarkhali, 34.3% in Mirpur and 32.3% in Daulatpur upazila. There is one Public University, two government colleges—one for male and other for female, 42 private colleges, one Government Girls College with four campuses of private universities in the district. The number of recognized high schools including junior are 240. There are 658 primary schools. Of them, 430 are

government and 286 are government registered. Total 221 non-government primary schools (run by NGO) and 63 Madrashas.

Transport and Communications

This district headquarter is well connected with the capital city and other parts of the country. The basic means of transport available in the district are train, bus, truck, motorcycle, car, tempo, rickshaw, boat, bi-cycle and other locally made vehicles. The district has 469.92-km metalled road, 250.50 km half-metalled, and 540.8 Km semi-Kutchha, 20.31 km Kutchha, 201 km navigation and 42.5 km rail road linkage.

Economical condition

Economical condition of the district is well. The economy of the district is mainly agro-based in character. The district has 1, 15, 978 crop land. Total 41.5% people are involved in agriculture, 13.9% labourer and 8.53% are in service. The district yields surplus food grains. Kushtia is now well known as a tobacco yielding zone. The district has become the country's center for Virginia Tobacco manufacturing. At least 22, 000 hectares of land in the district are used in tobacco production. Different industries are also contributing the economy of the district. A number of industries have been developed in the district in recent years. It has 15 big industries, 38 middle industries and 5212 are small scale industries.

Location and area of the study

In our study, we have selected twelve Union Parishads of six upazilas. In selecting Union Parishad, we have used development as one of the criteria—we took two Union Parishads from each upazila. Of them, one is developed and other is under developed.

The list of the selected union Parishads at a glance:

Name of the Upazila	Name of the Selected Union Parishad
Kushtia Sadar	Mazampur, Hatosh Haripur
Kumarkhali	Jodubaira, Kaya
Khoksa	Joyitihazra, Osmanpur
Mirpur	Ambaria, Baruipara
Bheramara	Mokarimpur, Bahadurpur
Daulatpur	Ramkrishnapur, Chilmari

Kushtia Sadar Upazila:

This upazila has a total area of 326.26 sqr.km. It has 14 Union Parishads. It has 14 union parishads and 166 villages. It is bounded in the North by Mirpur and Kumarkhali upazila of the district, in the South by Sailkupa upazila of Jhenidah district, in the East by Kumarkhali upazila of the district and in the West by Alamdanga upazila of Chuadanga district. According to 2001 population census the total population in the upazila is 2,54,800. The literacy rate is 45.28%. Mazampur and Hatosh Haripur, the two Union Parishads have been selected under this study.

Mazampur Union:

This union comprises a total area of 11.47 sqr.km. It has 13 villages. According to 2001 population census, the total population in the union is 39749. Of them, 21976 are male and 17773 female. The literacy rate is 43.5%.

Hatoshharipur Union:

This union comprises a total area of 35.60 sqr.km. It has 10 villages. According to 2001 population census the total population in the union is 32097. Of them, 16976 are male and 15121 female. The literacy rate is 24.8%.

Kumarkhali upazila

This upazila comprises a total area of 265.89 sqr.km. It has 10 Union Parishads and 202 villages. It is bounded in the North by Padma river, in the South by

Sailkupa upazila of Jhenidah district, in the East by Khoksa upazila of the district and in the West by Kushtia sadar upazila. According to 2001 population census, the total population in the upazila is 3,15,138. Of them, 16,0781 are male and 15,4357 female. The literacy rate is 38.98%. We have taken two Union Parishads namely Jodubaira and Kaya in our study.

Jodubaira Union:

This union comprises a total area of 22.33 sqr.km. It has 20 villages. According to 2001 population census the total population in the union is 25,212. Of them, 12,858 are male and 12,354 female. The literacy rate is 31.33%.

Kaya Union:

This union comprises a total area of 19.59 sqr.km. It has 18 villages. According to 2001 population census the total population in the union is 32,453. Of them, 16,661 are male and 15,792 female. The literacy rate is 33.33%.

Khoksa Upazila

This upazila comprises a total area of 99.17 sqr.km. It has 9 Union Parishads and 101 villages. It is bounded in the North by Padma river, in the South by Gorai river, in the East by Pangsha upazila of Rajbari district and in the West by Kumarkhali upazila of the district. According to 2001 population census the total population in the upazila 65120. Of them, 16,0781 are male and 15,4357 female. The literacy rate is 38.98%. We have taken two Union Parishads namely Jointihazra and Osmanpur in our study.

Osmanpur Union:

This union comprises a total area of 17.59 sqr.km. It has 11 villages. According to 2001 population census the total population in the union is 13,326. Of them, 6,898 are male and 6,428 female. The literacy rate is 40.33%

Jointihajra Union:

This union comprises a total area of 16.35 sqr.km. It has 12 villages. According to 2001 population census the total population in the union is 10,349. Of them, 5,485 are male and 5,164 female. The literacy rate is 30.33%

Mirpur Upazila

This upazila comprises a total area of 317.35 sqr.km. It has 12 Union Parishads and 187 villages. It is bounded in the North by Padma river, in the South by Dmaurhuda upazila of Chuadanga, in the East by Kushtia sadar upazila and in the West by Bheramara upazila of the district. According to 2001 population census the total population in the upazila 1,69,440. Of them, 1,45,760 are male and 1,37,700 female. The literacy rate is 41.94%. We have taken two Union Parishads namely Ambaria and Baruipara in our study.

Ambaria Union:

This union comprises a total area of 30.56 sqr.km. It has 22 villages. According to 2001 population census the total population in the union is 17,602. Of them, 9,134 are male and 8,468 female. The literacy rate is 35.43%

Baruipara Union:

This union comprises a total area of 28.56 sqr.km. It has 18 villages. According to 2001 population census the total population in the union is 26,408. Of them, 13,516 are male and 12,892 female. The literacy rate is 32.00%.

Bheramara Upazila

This upazila comprises a total area of 153.72 sqr.km. It has 6 Union Parishads and 78 villages. It is bounded in the North by Padma river, in the South by Daulatpur upazila of the district, in the East by Mirpur upazila and in the West by Padma river. According to 2001 population census the total population in the upazila 9,97,20. Of them, 5,15,20 are male and 4,8,200 female. The literacy rate

is 40.69%. We have taken two Union Parishads namely Mokarimpur and Bahadurpur in our study.

Mokarimpur Union:

This union comprises a total area of 26.56 sqr.km. It has 13 villages. According to 2001 population census the total population in the union is 30,146. Of them, 15,489 are male and 14,657 female. The literacy rate is 25.9%.

Bahadurpur Union:

This union comprises a total area of 19.63 sqr.km. It has 14 villages. According to 2001 population census the total population in the union is 26,041. Of them, 13,238 are male and 12,803 female. The literacy rate is 22.7%.

Daulatpur Upazila

This upazila comprises a total area of 468.76 sqr.km. It has 14 Union Parishads and 251 villages. It is bounded in the North by Padma river, in the South by West Bengal Border of India, in the East by Mirpur upazila of the district and in the West by Mujibnagar upazila of Meherpur district. According to 2001 population census the total population in the upazila 4,43,960. Of them, 2,29,620 are male and 2,14,340 female. The literacy rate is 35.50%. We have taken two Union Parishads namely Ramkrihnapur and Chilmari union in our study.

Ramkrishnapur Union:

This union comprises a total area of 53.50 sqr.km. It has 24 villages. According to 2001 population census the total population in the union is 28,183. Of them, 14,571 are male and 13,612 female. The literacy rate is 34.5%.

Chilmari Union:

This union comprises a total area of 53.25 sqr.km. It has 22 villages. According to 2001 population census the total population in the union is 28,922. Of them, 14,435 are male and 14,487 female. The literacy rate is 35.2%.

Notes and References:

1. S.M Sawkat Ali, “*History of Kushtia*, (Bangla) (Kushtia, November, 1978), p-30-31
 2. Ibid, p-1
 3. Ibid, p-40
 4. Ibid, p-40-42
 5. **Rajib Ahmed**, ‘*Chuadanga District*’, in Sirajul Islam, “*Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003
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 10. **Md. Abul Hannan**, “*Kushtiar Muktijuddher Itihas* (Bangla), (Kushtia, 1999), p-2
 11. **Bharatkosh**, 2nd Vol. First Version, (**Bangio Sahityia Parishad, Calcutta, 1373** (Bangla), p-378
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5. Regional Statistics Office, Kushtia

Profile of the Leaders (Respondents)

We have taken in total 72 elected women representatives from 12 Union Parishads of six upazilas in Kushtia district as respondents for the field study. The respondents were of two categories. The first category included 36 elected representatives who were elected in 1997 election and the rest 36 were elected in later election held in 2003. And no election was held after the last election.

There are 6 upazilas and 65 union parishads in Kushtia district. We have taken 2 union parishads from each upazila. A union comprises of 13 representatives including one Chairman, nine members and three women members.

According to district election office, election was held in 59 out of 66 union parishads in 1997 and 61 in 2003 election.

In the study, we have taken the three elected female members from each union as respondent. Our study covered 12 union parishads that holds 36 women representatives. We have taken the same figure of respondents (36 from 1997 election and 36 from 2003 election = $36 + 36 = 72$) from two successive elections to get a comparative result between them.

In our study, we also found of several women who were elected in both 1997 and 2003 elections. We have considered their opinion as most important as they got experience through working.

* The data about Kushtia district has been taken from Regional Statistic office in Kushtia, Kushtia district administration and Kushtia municipality.