

Some Aspects of Alluvial Land Reclamation Process in Bangladesh during the Colonial Rule

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Abstract: *This article aims at explaining in brief the reclamation process of alluvial land of Bangladesh during the British colonial rule. On the backdrop of the decline of land-man ratio and pressure of population growth, the reclamation of alluvial land became the only source of human settlement and agricultural operation. In the absence of any proper regulation illegal and forcible occupation of char land by the jotedars became the general order of the day during the British colonial rule.*

Key words: *Alluvial, Char, Jotedar, Land, Reclamation, River, Settlement.*

The Bengal delta, so far known as the largest in the world, was created by the two Himalayan rivers - the Ganges and the Brahmaputra and a non-Himalayan river namely the Meghna. This is also known as Ganges-Brahmaputra Delta. On its journey towards the north-east the Ganges built several deltas and then abandoned them before finally reaching to its present position. Modern researchers have divided the Bengal delta into five parts. These are the inactive or moribund delta, active delta, mature delta, tidally active delta and subaqueous delta. However, the main cause of the formation of Bengal delta may be attributed to numerous streams, descending precipitously from the mountain of the Himalayas, depositing the silt and sand they held in suspension of their waters on their own beds. This had gradually raised the beds above the level of adjacent plains and caused the streams to change their channels. With this the annual inundation brought

deposits on the surface of the country, rapidly creating the land in the level swampy terrain. Such alluvial formation is still a continuous process in the eastern part of the Bengal delta. As being the active delta, the creation of islands and bars is a common natural phenomenon of the country which may be considered as the by-product of the hydro-morphological dynamics of its rivers. The alluvial formation of Bangladesh is an ever-ending natural process and shall remain to continue in future endlessly. Such alluvial formation is locally known as 'char' (a sandbank of a river or sea). The paper aims at explaining the reclamation process of the 'char' land in present Bangladesh during the colonial rule.

General View of Reclamation Process in Bangladesh during the Colonial Period:

The important aspect of the agrarian history of Bangladesh is the reclamation process which is obviously inseparable with the land system and its administration. With the change of land system the nature, form and extent of reclamation changed. The famine of 1770 caused considerable depopulation in different parts of Bengal and as a result vast tracts of land left cultivable waste towards the end of the 18th century.¹ Even there was dearth of immigrant labour for reclamation. In such situation liberal terms and additional incentives were given to the ryots for the purpose of enticing the distant cultivators. In the second half of the 18th century the noabad (newly cultivated) lands of Chittagong were reclaimed by the Arakanese, known as Mughls, who fled to Chittagong in consequence of the annexation of Arakan in 1785 by the Burmese king. An elaborate policy of the settlement of the Arakanese emigrants had been adopted and they were given noabad lands at liberal terms.² But the nature of noabad settlement in Chittagong was different, if compared with other areas of Bengal. Similarly the reclamation work of Sundarban was started before 18th century. The Survey and Settlement Reports of Sundarbans by Frederick Eden Pargiter (1885) and F.D. Ascoli (1921) throw light on this aspect of history.³ In the situation of plenty of uncultivated lands and thin density of population, the landlords had to depend on the pioneer-farmers who practically monopolized land and leased it out to the actual cultivator at a rent higher than the demand of the landlord. The situation of reclamation largely changed in the later half

of the 19th century which witnessed tremendous development of many factors contributory to the reclamation process. The principal development was the demographic that ushered spectacular change in the existing social and economic order of the country. According to the ideas of the physiocrats and the classical economists the demand of ownership of property increases largely when agricultural land becomes scarce under population pressure. Because then "there was plenty of unoccupied lands, the population was sparse, the competition was not amongst the tenant for land, but amongst zamindars for raiyats."⁴ The situation changed further in the late 19th century when the resources of the country could not support the growth of population and this was mingled with the intricate and defected land system.

But the growth of population forced the extension of cultivation further, because population pressure became so much so acute that reclamation of waste land and jungle became inevitable. The collection of William Wilson Hunter shows that reclamation process was in full swing both in the active and inactive delta in the late 19th century.⁵ It appeared that the greater part of waste lands of Bengal were reclaimed during the 19th century. At the initial stage the sub-tenure holders had played important role in the reclamation process. They took up the advantage of an increasing population and the liberty of letting waste and unoccupied land on their own terms in order to push up rents to the highest rates. The most remarkable characteristic of reclamation process in Bengal was that in most cases reclamation created a new type of tenure which had wide regional variations. However, the subject of the reclamation process in the mainland of Bengal has not remained untouched. Several scholars of different disciplines have contributed several articles and books on the above-mentioned subject.⁶ But the subject of the alluvial land or the char land reclamation process of Bengal has not yet been addressed historically. The reclamation process in the main land was relatively easier than the Char land and as a result the reclamation process of the Char land was remarkably slower than the main land in the 19th century. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that the Char lands remained untouched in the whole reclamation process in the 19th century. Initially the reclamation of Char land was not entirely directed for human settlement, rather it was found lucrative to the stakeholders e.g.,

zamindars and other subordinate landed-interests to occupy the possession of the Char keeping its future legal right in view.

Changes in the River Course:

The alluvial and diluvial formation of land is obviously related to the changes in the river course. It is very difficult to give a complete history of the changes of river courses since the formation of the Bengal delta in such a brief article. The historical records so far available show that the changes of river system of Bengal before the 16th century. The most outstanding work in this regard is the map of Major James Rennell (1742-1830) who had largely surveyed the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna river-systems. The survey map of James Rennell clearly indicates considerable changes of various major rivers that almost reshaped the riverine geography of Bengal in the 18th century.⁷

The rivers of Bengal had changed their courses under the operation of natural causes and thereby the old courses of rivers ceased to be the main drainage. The eastward movement of the Ganges was possibly occurred due to the denudation of trees on the hill-slopes in north and west resulting in an early silting up of old channels. In the sixteenth century the Ganges took turn eastward quitting the Bhagirathi and found its principal outlet through the channel of the Jalangi, Mathabhanga, Kumar, Nabaganga and Gorai. As a result the process of land formation had ended and the rivers ceased their natural function of depositing fertilizing silt to land. On the other hand the land elevation of many of the central and western Bengal districts like Nadia, 24 Parganas, Murshidabad and Jessore rose above the level of periodical inundation by silt deposit due to the change of river course. The river beds of western and central Bengal gradually became fit for cultivation. Consequently the natural drainage system became practically inoperative and public health deteriorated to a serious extent. The Brahmaputra, deserting its former course eastward of Dhaka, turned around over to the west into the bed of Teesta and Jenai rivers.⁸ Before 1787 the river Tista used to flow into the Ganges above Goalando through the Atrai. But as soon as a dam (sand bar) was formed at its junction with the Atrai its channel was cut off. Such a catastrophic change took place owing to

exceptionally heavy flood which brought down large quantity of timber from the Himalayas. There is no doubt that the rivers of Bengal had undergone a series of serious changes over the centuries which ultimately led some parts of Bengal to moribund condition. The long-term eastward movement of Bengal's major river systems and continuous deposition of rich silt made the cultivation of wet rice possible.⁹ Beside this, the earthquakes and floods that occurred during the 17-19th centuries were responsible for the creation of several new rivers. However, the gradual movement of the delta to the eastward provided further scope of reclamation where the pioneering peasants cut the virgin forests, thereby throwing open a widening zone for agricultural operation. Describing the reclamation process R.K. Mukherjee comments:

...man has carried on the work of reclamation here, fighting with the jungle, the tiger, the wild buffalo, the pig, and the crocodile, until at the present day nearly half of what was formerly an impenetrable forest has been converted into gardens of graceful palm and fields of waving rice.¹⁰

Alluvial and Diluvial Formation:

The mighty rivers known as the Ganges, Padma, Brahmaputra, Jamuna and Meghna originating mostly from the Himalayas carry millions of tons of mud and sand every year on their way to the Bay of Bengal. The huge mud and sand get accumulated in their sinuous courses raising the river beds and forming chars or accretions along the course of the rivers and at their confluence. Since the torrential rain flow is unable to discharge itself through the expanded river bed, consequently it inundates the vast tracts of land on both sides and swallows up the land mass on one side of the bank, and gradually and discernibly forms accretions on the other side. Traces of administration and management of alluvial and diluvial lands during the ancient and medieval Bengal are not directly available. It may be considered in terms of growth of population and demand for lands. But we find two Persian terms probably prevalent during the medieval time. The Persian word 'payist' or 'payaisit' means formation of alluvial land due to the change of rivers or deposition of silt due to inundation. Similarly 'Shekustee' is also a Persian word that denotes loss of land by river erosion and its emergence at the other side of the river.

The Brahmaputra river forms a complex river system characterized by the most dynamic and unique water and sediment transport patterns. It is the fourth largest river in the world in terms of average water discharge. The river with such a high volume of water discharge and sediment load represents the most dynamic fluvial regime. Its wide alluvial channel is dotted with several hundred small and large sand bars, locally called 'char'. The emerging lands are generally known as 'Char' which grows up gradually in the geo-morphological process. Chars vary considerably in terms of their ecological and environmental setting. Generally the Char is divided in two groups, e.g., island Chars, attached Chars. Both the island Chars and attached Chars are inhabitable though they are also liable to periodical inundation. Island Char may be defined as land which is communicable from the main land by crossing a main channel even in the dry season. Attached Char is communicable from the main land without crossing a main channel even during the dry season. Consequently the formation process and characteristics of both the types of chars in both the meandering and braided rivers are naturally different and entirely unpredictable about their stability. It takes some long time to start human settlement in the char after its formation and it is accomplished after natural progress and much human effort. Sometimes the Chars become connected with the main land. Some Chars are not inhabitable; though these are vegetated but remained submerged under water for a long time of the year.

It has already been discussed that the alluvial and diluvial character of the rivers of Bengal is very common phenomenon and unpredictable. Reference to these is available in the noted literary works. Manik Bandyopadhyay's (1908-1956) *Padmanadir Majhi* (The Boatman of the River Padma) is a story set in a fisherman's village standing on the banks of the river Padma. In some place it has been remarked that "It is true Padma gives us a lot, but in return it also takes a lot from us." Similarly Adwaita Mallavarman's (1914-1951) *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam* (A River Named Titash), where the author has realistically portrayed the life of the fishermen on the banks of the river Titas. River erosion is so common in this country that bards of Bengal often used to chant:

"Nadir Ekul Garey Okul Bhangey - Ei to Nadir Khela,
Shakal Bela Amir Re Bhai, Fakir Shadhya Bela"

Translation: ("It is the game of the river to break one side and build up another side.

The king in the morning becomes beggar in the evening.")

Laws Regarding Char Land administration:

Though the Mughal rule provided elaborate regulations for the administration of land but those regulations had not been in strict operation for the administration of these 'char' lands before the colonial rule. The low growth of population and less demand for land may be attributed for this. The colonial rule introduced new land system which in turn provided a new process for the reclamation and administration of these 'char'. In fact, char land remained outside the regulation of the Permanent Settlement of 1793 and no official initiative was taken by the Government of Bengal till 1819, because it was neither a problem of the landlords nor of the government. From 1819 to 1825 several half-hearted regulations and acts were passed relating to the proprietorship of the char land, but all these efforts went in vain as the Government was busy otherwise. The Bengal Rent Act of 1859 recognised the corollary principle that the tenant was liable to enhancement and remission of rent in case of increase of area of his land by alluvial and of decrease of the area of land by diluvial process. In the later half of the 19th century, when land-man ratio started to decline and the population pressure became considerably high, people had started to settle on the char land. Such situation ultimately led to considerable litigation and power-struggle relating to the proprietorship of the char land and consequently the Government was forced to enact some laws and regulations about the subject under review. The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 provided some regulations relating to the proprietorship of the char land, but these regulations had created debates in the Executive Council on the one hand and difference of opinions of the officialdom on the other. As a result the regulations and acts passed in between 1819 to 1885 relating to the proprietorship of the char land remained ineffective during the colonial rule.¹¹ The later amendments of the Bengal Tenancy Act were aimed at giving relief to the tenants, but those amendments were carried out after 1947.

Pattern of Char Land Settlement:

Apparently the settlement of Char land was simple, because no stringent provision was included in the administration and management of Char lands from the beginning. But in fact it encouraged litigation among the contending parties always. Any denomination of landed-interest and even the individual could procure legal status from the Government for the Char lands. In the later half of the 19th century many people invested heavy money for buying marshlands and Char as because they found this venture profitable in future in the given situation of high growth of population. Initially the Char remains uninhabitable for some years, when a kind of grass locally known as 'Khaila' (in some places it is also known as 'Chaliha') abundantly grows which is used as fodder of the livestock.¹² Human settlement starts at later years. Generally very bold, courageous and stronger class of people were engaged in the reclamation and habitation of these newly formed Chars, because they could encounter all sort of natural hazards and maintain their livelihood over there. The general practice of taking occupation of a Char was very interesting. Some influential man of the nearby locality sowed some species of productive nature on the Char and kept it under his possession over some years. After the lapse of some time he applied to the Government for legal rights known as malikana. Curiously enough that such practice was so common that many of these place names appeared identifying the first agricultural operation. The name of places like Bansbunia (bansh is bamboo and bunia is sowing the bamboo), Marichbunia (sowing chilly), Bethbunia (sowing cane) and Chur Victoria seem to carry the image of the above mentioned historical incidence.¹³ In the coastal area of Bangladesh considerable place-names are available embracing with the Bengali word 'Char' either in the prefix or at the suffix. In fact, Bengal is predominantly a creation of the Ganges and the Bhahmaputra and as such, rivers are very important factors in the life in Bengal. Therefore, place-names containing words connected with hydrological aspects are peculiarly restricted to the deltaic Bengal.

The modus operandi for the settlement of Char land developed during the colonial rule was in principle very simple. In case of formation of new Chars it was usual practice to send a party consisted of Ameen (staff of

revenue department) and a Police force for enquiry and investigation. The next step was to send a Tahsildar for the settlement of the Char land. But the operation of this system was practically difficult as the designing persons usually lodged frivolous and false complaints against the Ameen and Tahsildar (a native collector of revenue). As a result of this, the local administration had to summon the Ameen and Tahsildar at the headquarters. The object of the designing persons was to keep the possession of Char land and draw benefits as long as possible without paying rent to government.¹⁴

Both alluvial and diluvial process created complications for survey and settlement works. The land originally appertained to one estate was encroached upon and washed away by the river and again formed. In such case advertisement was issued inviting those who had claims on the Char to come forward and prefer them. This ultimately led to serious disputes among the contending zamindars and settlement of such Char became a prolonged procedure. The intricate land system introduced during the colonial rule provided enough scope to the landlords irrespective of the size of their holding to embark upon dispute over land possession. Private entrepreneurship was also noticeable in the possession of Char land. It was a practice prevalent there to occupy Char land and establish its legal right through payment of stipulated money directly either to zamindars or to the Government. The zamindars also preferred those parties, enough to encounter the opposition of the rival landed interest and capable of establishing the authority in favour of the zamindars. Because competition of the land market of any form was too high in view of the growth of population and to cope with the competition of other landlords or neighbouring zamindars, it became essential for them to hire lathials (clubmen) to show their strength. The profits from the Char land could be drawn sometimes paying nominal rent and sometimes without paying any rent. Curiously enough that among the settlers of Char 90% were Muslims and 10% were Hindus of the Namasudra (Hindu community placed low in the social order) caste. Literacy rate among the settlers of Char was very negligible. In most cases the Char land was very fertile and production of crops was very high. Most of the Char lands are known as Ashli jomi (highly

fertile land), they get new silt every year through the works of river. The cultivation of paddy, fishing and rearing of livestock were common professions of the dwellers of the islands.¹⁵

The settled families in the Char land played important role in the power struggle between the contending zamindars by supporting any of them. In fact, they earn huge benefit or profit, either cash or kind, for rendering services to the landlords during this crucial time. This was very much dangerous as their lives become at a risk during this power struggle. The history of occupation of a new alluvial accretion or Char was always marked by bloodshed. Litigations of both civil and criminal were also common phenomenon in the life of Char dwellers. The bulk of the income drawn from the productions of Char was spent in litigation and they frequently became easy prey in the hands of amla (clerk) and muktiars (lawyer) in the legal court. Consequently they fell in the clutches of money-lenders too. Having no other alternative to survive they were forced to migrate to another Char and start settlement anew.

The Chars could not be instantly used for habitation. In Bakerganj they were used as bathan (fodder ground) which would provide fodder to the livestock. There were numerous bathans in the south of Bakerganj and the Meghna islands where a fee of one rupee per head was charged. Such estates in South Shahabazpur were let out on a local settlement known as gorkati (a tax levied for the privilege of cutting firewood in the jungle). The Char appeared to have assumed a special importance as pastures after the disappearance of bathans and other grazing grounds in other parts of the Dhaka Division. Thatching grass was important for rural economy and it grown purposely for selling in the market. In this background the behaviour of so-called jotedars was very interesting.

It seems that not only the jotedars but also European Indigo Planters were also associated in the reclamation process of Char land. It is well-known that the British planters made large investments in indigo during the early 19th century. Gradually the European indigo planters also obtained new powers and concessions in regard to the land with the acquisition of

zamindari rights. It was too much irritating to the Bengali zamindars to see the emergence of a rival group backed by the government. On the other hand, coercion and oppression were common features of the indigo cultivation and ryots of Bengal became averse to cultivate indigo in their paddy lands. As an alternative measure the interest of the European indigo planters was directed towards the Char lands which were fit for indigo cultivation. So rivalry and litigations between the European indigo planters and the Bengali zamindars and other subordinate tenure holders centering round the occupation of Char lands appeared as a common feature in the early 19th century Bengal.¹⁶ However, the indigo cultivation was ceased to exist after the great Indigo Resistance Movement (1859-1862) and consequent legislative promulgation. There are instances where both the Bengali zamindar and European planter collected lathials for taking the possession of the disputed Char by harvesting paddy forcefully.¹⁷

The story of a French citizen is very interesting in this regard. Purchasing a share of a zamindari through auction sale Mr. Courzen, a French citizen, became a zamindar of Noakhali. His attention was then directed to occupy the khas land of Char Bamni that was then occupied by the local peasants and some of them held khas land legally in perpetuity. Applying his high tactics and connection with the Government officials Mr. Courzen succeeded to take lease of the khas land of Char Bamni and then again leased out to subordinate tenants at a higher rate adding many conditions. Mr. Courzen also filed law suit against those local peasants who held khas land legally in order to evict them. He also kept retainers or lathials for frightening the peasant. This had ultimately led to a peasant revolt in the Char Bamni and in consequence of this Mr. Courzen had to give up his idea of forcible occupation.¹⁸ Practically, the activities of heterogeneous landed interests in the situation of scarcity of land created a complicated social and economic situation.

Production in Char Land:

Major R.H. Colebrooke found that Char lands had invited immediate cultivation even in the first decade of the 19th century. According to his experience "such islands as are found, on their first appearance, to have any

soil, are immediately cultivated; and water melons, cucumbers, and sursoo, or mustard, become the produce of the first year. It is not uncommon even to see rice growing in those parts where a quantity of mud has been deposited near the water's edge."¹⁹ The information gathered from various sources reveal the fact that production of char lands varied widely according to the variety of soil texture and other reasons. However, it seems that boro (a sort of rice sown in January and reaped in April), aus (paddy crop grown in the monsoon), aman (a kind of paddy commonly produced everywhere), indigo, jute, sweet potato, fodder and miscellaneous varieties of fuel are usually produced in the char lands, though all these have wide regional variations.²⁰

Scenario of Char Reclamation at District-Level in the 19th Century:

The formation of alluvial or Char land is a common feature in the active delta of Bangladesh. For natural causes e.g., continuous changes in the river course Chars formed in Noakhali, Comilla, Barisal and Chittagong districts. The process of reclamation of Char land had wide regional variations. A detailed description of this subject is extremely necessary, but neither time nor space is available for such prolonged discourse. Consequently the author has been forced to make a brief account of the char reclamation process at the district-level in the 19th century Bangladesh. The alluvial formations of Comilla had important bearings upon the district's land system and reclamation process. In 1840s a large portion of Chandpur had fallen out of cultivation and relapsed to its primeval jungle due to spread of malarial fever. Later the pressure of population impelled the surplus to seek fresh fields and the talukdars had granted long lease of waste lands at nominal rates along with the takavi (agricultural loan) advances. The formation of alluvial land was very much common in Noakhali side of the Meghna estuary. Many Chars were not inhabitable; cultivation commenced thereon and most part was left for pasturage where cattle remained day and night. The condition of the Chars inhabited by people and located in the vicinity of the sea was different. The inhabitants of this Chars had to build some sort of embankment round the Char commonly called by them 'Mogra' in order to prevent penetration of salt water.²¹ The Char lands of Noakhali always suffered much from cyclone and inundation and the colonial government provided them necessary help in the form of takavi loan under

the Land Improvement Act. The terms and period of settlement of the Chars were not uniform in any district, rather it varied according to the location and condition and the principles laid down in the Khas Mahal regulations.²² In Noakhali the reclamation process assumed a complex character and resulted in an intricate land tenure pattern. The local authority pursued the colonial policy of 'maximization of profit' without paying any heed to the position of actual cultivators.²³ The Char land of the Noakhali district was divided into two groups e.g., Sonatpateet (and left uncultivated for a year) and Laikabad (land fit for cultivation and population habitation). In 1860s the local authority was forced to limit the period of lease. But after a decade the jotedars of Noakhali became reluctant to extend cultivation in the Char lands. Because they incurred serious loss due to inundation and cyclone; moreover they had no certainty of their tenure holding in perpetuity.⁴¹ However, in spite of such impediments large numbers of Chars were reclaimed in the later half of nineteenth century. Some Chars of Noakhali were belonged to gang of dacoits who carried on their plundering activities in some areas.²⁴

In Chittagong general reclamation was known as 'noabad' which had its origin during the Mughal period. The East India Company too followed the same policy from the beginning of their rule in Chittagong. The Company had even tried to settle the Mughls in Chittagong who took asylum there following the political turmoil in Arakan. The noabad grants continued to operate for long time.²⁵ Ratnalekha Ray's study on Dhaka, Faridpur and Bakerganj throws enough light how the extremely fertile alluvial lands were reclaimed mostly by the Muslims and low caste Hindus (Namasudras). While arguing the demographic composition Ratnalekha Ray comments that:

... the preponderance of the Muslims in the population was evident, specially in the south, where new land was being reclaimed; as hardy cultivators they were better able than the Hindu gentry to endure the unhealthy climate on the seaboard, especially its salt air...The hardy and enterprising sections of the Muslim peasantry who were engaged in reclaiming Chars and forests formed the main Faraizi settlements along the banks of the great rivers."²⁶

In Barisal Chars were let on cultivating leases by Government and measured after every five years. The areas, being extensive and compact, had afforded possible scope for colonization. But the main physical obstacle to reclamation in the brackish-water parts of the district was the intrusive canals that broke the line of protective embankments. Far more serious obstacle stood on the way of reclamation was the scramble of the co-sharers having undivided fractional interests in the settlement. Frequent quarrel over the division of profits or payment of rent was inevitable nearly in every case. The net result was endless litigation.

Forcible Occupation of Char Land in the earlier half of the 20th Century:

In Bangladesh the forcible occupation of Char is locally known as 'char dakhla' which is in reality a common feature during the colonial rule and even now. The trend of forcible occupation of Char land, which gained some importance in the later half of the 19th century, continued almost unabated and received its momentum in the earlier half of the 20th century. The forcible occupation of Char lands by the gangsters was sometime noticeable in the 19th and the 20th centuries Bangladesh. Usually the khas Chars or Government islands were their main targets. It will be a futile exercise if attempt is taken to record such history as a whole in view of the vastness and magnitude of such forcible occupation of the chars by the gangsters. Henceforward, it is better to provide the readers a peep into the problem through case studies. In the district of Mymensingh a leader and his men had succeeded in establishing a reign of terror by mobilizing all the bad characters of the neighbourhood into a gang and the number of recruits was going up by leaps and bounds. They also used to cut and forcibly take away paddy from the fields of the Char without the least pretensions to any right or possession and they even went the length of extorting tolls or rents from persons whom they could fleece with impunity. The grave situation ultimately called for Police intervention and consequently a fierce fighting ensued between the gangsters and the Police, who being forced opened fire leading several casualties. According to the report:

Should anybody happen to raise his voice to protest against their

misdeeds, he was forcibly dragged out his house and beaten. On the pretence of settling dispute by arbitration, they used to enforce their decision on the unwilling parties by terrorising them. They urged local people to join their parties (tarika) and freely assaulted any person who refused to do it at their bidding. We were shown a number of processes and parwanahs which these self-appointed rulers served through their peadas and which clearly revealed the gangster methods they were employing for bringing the people under their tyrannical away.²⁷

As a matter of fact the party had set up parallel machinery for the administration of the Char. They had their own courts and imposed fines which they realized from their unfortunate victims under the threats of physical torture. The entire population of the Char was terror-stricken by their acts of oppression. Another singular feature of the organization was that the members of the party had their own uniforms made for them by a tailor brought from elsewhere for the purpose. Practically the party gave the Char dwellers the impression that Government had abdicated in their favour, and any person who was bold enough to cross over to the other side of the river and report their activities to the Police at would be met with condign punishment. Such was the scenario of the char land reclamation in the early half of the 20th century Bangladesh. Spectacular changes occurred in char land reclamation after the Partition of India and the creation of Pakistan in 1947. The pressure of population had increased significantly on the one hand and political polarization centering round the char land reclamation assumed complicated nature.

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