Chronic Poverty
Research Centre

Working Paper

June 2011 No. 201

One hundred years of economic change in Bengal: Re-visiting the economic life of a Bengal district

Selim Raihan

What is Chronic Poverty?

The distinguishing feature of chronic poverty is extended duration in absolute poverty.

Therefore, chronically poor people always, or usually, live below a poverty line, which is normally defined in terms of a money indicator (e.g. consumption, income, etc.), but could also be defined in terms of wider or subjective aspects of deprivation.

This is different from the transitorily poor, who move in and out of poverty, or only occasionally fall below the poverty line.

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Chronic Poverty Research Centre
ISBN: 978-1-906433-98-7

Abstract

In 1910, J. C. Jack, a British Settlement Officer of the then Faridpur district (which is now divided into five districts) of British India, wrote a book entitled *The Economic Life of a Bengal District*. Jack provided a comprehensive description of the economic life of Greater Faridpur. His description included a detailed analysis on the district, its inhabitants, their homes and manner of life, the composition of the domestic budgets of households, people's income and economic conditions, indebtedness and taxation. Now 100 years later, through the use of secondary data, field visits and focus group discussions, this study explores the dynamics of the evolution of the economic life in Greater Faridpur over the last 100d years (1910-2010). Such investigation suggests that there have been large increases in population and population density in Greater Faridpur. There has been important change in the religious composition of the population, with the proportion of Hindu population declining considerably over the decades. There have been significant improvements in physical infrastructure, such as roads and other forms of communication, and social infrastructure, such as health and education. Also, there have been significant changes in the structure of the economy. One hundred years ago, it was predominantly an agro-based economy. Over the years, non-agricultural economic activities have increased considerably. At the household level, important changes are observed in the composition of expenditure on food and non-food items. The major change is noticed in the proportion of expenditure on rice; compared to Jack's time the proportion of spending on rice by households declined substantially. A rise in the relative importance of non-rice food items and non-food items in the consumption basket appears to be the major cause behind such a change. Finally, the composition of poverty seems to have been changed in Greater Faridpur. Compared to Jack's time, the proportion of non-poor households increased and that of moderate poor declined. The estimate from the Household Survey of 2005 suggests that the proportion of households in extreme poverty in 2005 was higher than that in 1910. Increased landlessness and lack of work opportunities were the major factors behind the rise in extreme poverty. However, in recent years, poverty has seemed to decline, both in the rural and urban areas, because of expanded economic activities in the rural areas, increased work opportunities in the farm and non-farm sectors, a rise in the inflow of remittance money and an increase in different development works.

Keywords: Poverty, Bengal, Faridpur, Economic life, J.C. Jack

Acknowledgements

The author expresses sincere thanks to the Chronic Poverty Research Centre, University of Manchester, UK, for initiating and financing this study. The personal and professional support and encouragement of Professor David Hulme of University of Manchester, UK, are sincerely acknowledged.

A draft of this paper was presented at the International Conference on 'Ten Years of War Against Poverty: What have we learned since 2000 and what should we do 2010-2020?' organised by the Chronic Poverty Research Centre, University of Manchester, UK, 8-10 September 2010. The author is grateful to the participants of this conference for their comments and suggestions. Especially, sincere thanks go to Professor David Hulme of University of Manchester, Dr Anirudh Krishna of Duke University, Dr Syed Hasmi of BRAC, Dr Imran Matin of BRAC and Dr Richard Marshall of UNDP Bangladesh.

The author is thankful to Mr. S. M. Abdullah, Ms Salina Siddiqua and Mr Syed Helal-Uddin for their excellent research assistance to accomplish this study and to Mr Ashibur Rahman and Mr Pear Ali for their assistance with administrative arrangements during the course of this study.

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This document is an output from the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) which is funded by UKaid from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID. The CPRC gratefully acknowledges DFID's support.

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1 Introduction

Present-day Bangladesh (formerly East Bengal) was a part of the undivided Bengal Presidency of British India until 1947, when it became a part of the independent State of Pakistan, known as 'East Pakistan'. Bangladesh was liberated from Pakistan in 1971 and started its journey as an independent state. As a result, the history of Bangladesh over the past 100 years encompasses three major regimes: British India, the Pakistani regime and the independent Bangladeshi regime.

Over the past 100 years there have been significant changes in the economy of Bangladesh. An agriculture-dominated economy has now turned into a service- and industry-based economy. There have been significant improvements in many economic and social indicators. However, many social, political and environmental obstacles have hampered the country's development process. Examples include the famine in Bengal in 1943, the neglect of the development process in 'East Pakistan' by the Pakistani rulers during 1947-1971, and devastation of the economy due to the war in 1971, famine in 1974, and periodic floods and cyclones. Against these odds, the country moved forward, made significant progress on the economic and social fronts and has functioned as a democracy since 1990.

The processes of social and economic changes that have swept over the country mean that the livelihoods of both rural and urban populations have changed remarkably over the past 100 years. Understanding these changes in economic life over a long time horizon will enhance our knowledge of the development process in Bangladesh.

It is extraordinary that around 100 years ago there was a book written on the economic life of the then Faridpur district of Bengal (which we will term 'Greater Faridpur' throughout this paper). This gives us a unique opportunity to track the trajectory of the changes in economic life of this region over the past 100 years. Greater Faridpur (which is now divided into five districts: Faridpur, Rajbari, Gopalganj, Madaripur and Shariatpur)[1] has long been an important region in Bangladesh because of its contribution to the national economy, cultural heritage and politics.

In 1910, J. C. Jack, a British Settlement Officer of the then Faridpur District, wrote a book entitled *The Economic Life of a Bengal District*. This book was the result of an intensive study made by some 200 young graduates under Jack's supervision and direction during the period 1906-10, when a record of rights was being prepared in the district of Faridpur. Jack felt that valuable insights into the economic life of the district could be obtained if, along with

[1] The Greater Faridpur region was divided into these five districts in 1984.

routine settlement operations, data could be collected about patterns of income, expenditure, levels of indebtedness and taxation in respect of family units in the district.

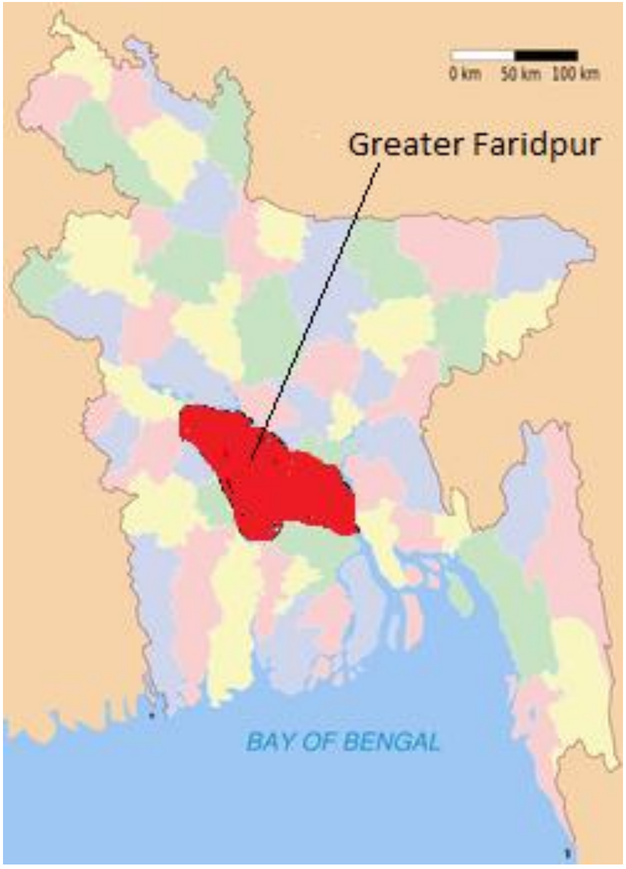
In the book, Jack provided a comprehensive description of the economic life of Greater Faridpur. His description included a detailed analysis of the district, its inhabitants, their homes and manner of life, the composition of the domestic budgets of households, people's income and economic conditions, indebtedness and taxation. Now after 100 years, this present study explores the dynamics of the evolution of the economic life in Greater Faridpur over the last 100 years (1910-2010). In doing so, the study used secondary data, published and unpublished government documents and published economic histories on Faridpur. This study also conducted several field visits to collect primary data related to the changes in the economic life of this region, which included poverty and demographic profiles of the households. Also, this study analysed household data of the districts of Greater Faridpur from the Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) to understand changes in recent decades. The study conducted 20 interviews with people in different districts of Greater Faridpur and organised five focus group discussions (FGDs).

2 Changes in socio-economic conditions of Greater Faridpur

2.1 Area and population

Greater Faridpur is located at the South-West region of Bangladesh (Figure 1). The total area of Greater Faridpur is now 7,008 square kilometres. This region experienced a significant rise in population and population density over the past 100 years. Table 1 shows the growth of population, both in Greater Faridpur and Bangladesh over the last 100 years. The population of Greater Faridpur has increased by a factor of 3.5, from 1.96 million in 1911 to 6.82 million in 2010. However, the population of the whole country increased by a factor of 4.5, from 31.56 million to 143.51 million. So the population growth in Greater Faridpur has been on average lower than the national average. In fact, as Table 1 suggests, for most of the decades, the population growth rates in Greater Faridpur were lower than the population growth rate for the country as a whole. Greater Faridpur had thus been losing population almost every decade. In recent decades, this is has been primarily due to the burst of urbanisation being highly concentrated in Dhaka and Chittagong. Regions without a big city, like Greater Faridpur, have seen net out-migration to Dhaka and Chittagong.

Figure 1: Location of Greater Faridpur in Bangladesh



Source: See http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BD_Districts_LOC.svg#filelinks. Accessed on 20 June 2011.

Table 1: Size and growth rate of population since 1911

Year	Population in Greater Faridpur (million)	Annual average population growth rate of Greater Faridpur (%)	Population in Bangladesh (million)	Annual average population growth rate in Bangladesh (%)
1911	1.96	0.99	31.56	0.91
1921	2.03	0.37	33.25	0.54
1931	2.16	0.66	35.60	0.71
1941	2.65	2.25	41.99	1.80
1951	2.71	0.23	42.06	0.02
1961	3.18	1.73	50.84	2.09
1974	4.06	2.13	71.48	3.12
1981	4.76	2.48	87.12	3.13
1991	5.42	1.39	106.31	2.20
2001	6.10	1.25	123.85	1.65
2010*	6.82*	1.25*	143.51*	1.65*

Note: Greater Faridpur includes Faridpur, Rajbari, Gopalganj, Madaripur and Shariatpur after 1984.
** Author's projections considering the annual average growth rate of 2001.*
Source: BBS (2009).

In Jack's time, the density of population of Greater Faridpur was 861 per square mile, or 333 per square kilometre. The density of population increased almost threefold over the last 100 years to 978 per square kilometre. The densities of population of all districts under Greater Faridpur are shown in Table 2. The district with the highest density of population among the five districts under Greater Faridpur is Madaripur (1,119 per square kilometre).

Table 2: Density of population of Greater Faridpur in 2010 (estimates)

District	Density (per square kilometre)
Faridpur	948
Gopalganj	875
Madaripur	1119
Rajbari	951
Shariatpur	1025
Greater Faridpur	**978**

Source: Estimated using the projections in Table 1.

2.2 Religion

In Jack's time, 62.5 percent of the people in Greater Faridpur were Muslims, whereas the Hindu population was 37 percent and others (mainly Christians) were only 0.5 percent. Over the past 100 years, the share of Hindu population declined and that of Muslims increased quite substantially. According to the HIES (2005), 82 percent of people in Greater Faridpur are now Muslims. There are, however, substantial variations between districts in Greater

Faridpur. Faridpur, Gopalganj, Madaripur, Rajbari and Shariatpur districts have Muslim populations of 93 percent, 93 percent, 74 percent, 66 percent, and 72 percent, respectively. Focus group discussions (FGDs) and field visits in Greater Faridpur helped identify a number of reasons for such a dramatic change in the religious composition of the population. During partition, and with the emergence of Pakistan in 1947, a large number of Hindu people migrated to India. Also, during the Pakistani regime (1947–1971), because of feelings of insecurity and discrimination by the state against the Hindu population, the intensity of migration to India continued. Enactment of the 'Enemy Property Act'[2] after the war between India and Pakistan in 1965 resulted in a large-scale grabbing of the properties of the Hindu population by the Muslim elite. During the War of Independence in 1971, the Hindu population was particularly targeted by the Pakistani army and that resulted in a high murder rate and a large outward migration of the Hindu population. The 'Enemy Property Act' was renamed as the 'Vested Property Act' after 1971, when Bangladesh gained Independence; though, unfortunately, the discriminatory effects of the act continued during the Bangladesh regime. Barkat (2000) showed that the Vested Property Act was the single largest cause of migration of Hindus from Bangladesh, and 2.01 million acres, comprising 45 percent of the land owned by Hindus, was lost due to this Act. Although there were attempts to amend the law, little has changed. Sustained campaigning on the issue led to the government passing the Vested Property Return Act 2001. But this law, to return appropriated land, is caught in bureaucratic and legal tangles.

2.3 Economic activities

In Jack's time, there were no industries in Greater Faridpur. Virtually the entire population was dependent directly or indirectly upon the produce of the soil or water for their livelihoods. At that time, the area consisted mainly of depression-based marshland and the alluvial deposits from the Padma made the soil fertile. The major crops were paddy, jute and a variety of vegetables. Fishing was another important economic activity. The main non-farm economic activities included pottery, blacksmith and weaving, but these were all practised on an artisanal scale.

One hundred years later, Greater Faridpur's economy is still agro-based, around two major crops: paddy and jute. Greater Faridpur today is still characterised by low levels of industrialisation. There are only a few sugar mills and jute mills. Kanaipur Industrial Area was set up in Faridpur town during late 1980s, but there has not been much progress in promoting industrialisation, and in the 1980s and 1990s de-industrialisation occurred, with

[2] The Enemy Property Act was a controversial law which allowed the government to confiscate property from any individual it deemed to be an enemy of the state. The Act is criticised as a tool for appropriating the lands of the minority population. Barkat (2000) demonstrated in detail how dreadfully the Hindu populations in Bangladesh were affected by this Act.

the scaling back of the jute industry. Greater Faridpur is famous for producing high quality raw jute. Once the principal export earner of the country, the jute industry suffered until very recently, due to low prices in the international market leading to the closure of many jute plants. Also, like the sugar mills in other parts of the country, sugar mills in Greater Faridpur were in the public sector and suffered from inefficiency, lack of upgrading of technologies and bureaucratic hassles, which made them highly loss-making. There are still some jute, sugar and textile mills in Greater Faridpur. Noted factories in Greater Faridpur include Faridpur Sugar Mill, Aziz Pipes, Khankhanapur Textile Mill, Karim Jute Mill, Saiyed Jute Spinning, Faridpur Cold Storage, Faridpur Jute Fibres, Aziz Jute Fibres, Sharif Jute Mill, Rokeya Textile, BADC Cold Storage and Goalanda Textile Mill. It should, however, be noted that most of the large manufacturing industries are located in Faridpur district and the other four districts have little industry of any scale.

Field visits in Greater Faridpur revealed the vast size of small-scale non-crop and non-farm economic activities in recent years. Such activities include poultry farming, flower cultivation, construction work, fishing, petty trading, cottage industries, weaving, woodwork, goldsmithing, blacksmithing, pottering, bamboo work, tailoring and welding. According to Banglapedia (2011), there are now 544 dairy farms, 2,329 poultry farms and 530 fishery and hatchery farms in Greater Faridpur. Recently there has been a surge in the commercial cultivation of flowers in Gopalganj. Farmers are enthusiastic about flower cultivation, as this brings a higher rate of return. Box 1 reproduces a recent report on this business.

Box 1: Flower business blooming in Gopalganj

Gopalganj: Flower business is fast gaining popularity in Gopalganj district and the business is going on in full swing here. According to sources, over one thousand people of the district earn their livelihood from flower business by producing and selling them. About Tk 5 million is earned every year from this business and encouraged by the turnover other farmers also have started flower cultivation on commercial basis. More than twenty flowers farms have been set up in the district and flowers produced in those gardens is better than that of other parts of the country, sources said. There are various kinds of flowers produced in the flower gardens, such as rose, tuberose, marigold, gladila, lotus, jasmine, etc. The local growers said proper training and financial and technical assistance can pave the way for large-scale commercial production of flowers across the southern region. They claimed they have to face harassment and sometimes have to offer bribe to the officials for taking loans from banks. A local flower businessman, Tuku Mollah (67) of village Goradair under Gopalganj Sadar Upazila, told this Correspondent “I have been involved in this flower business for the last 38 years and I am selling flowers worth about Tk 500 to Tk 1000 every day.”

Source: The Financial Express, 13 March 2011

2.4 Communication

In Jack’s description of Greater Faridpur in 1910, the main means of communication was waterways, since for almost eight months a year the region was under water. In all the villages there was barely ever a village road, usually only footpaths that led from house to house. Often there was no path at all.

Compared to Jack's time, the overall communication system of Greater Faridpur has improved significantly. Table 3 shows the status of road infrastructure. Notably, Shariatpur, Rajbari and Madaripur districts have much lower lengths of roads compared to Faridpur and Gopalganj. As far as the road length per thousand people is concerned, Gopalganj has the highest ratio, whereas Shariatpur and Madaripur have the lowest ratio. Despite improvements in communication, Faridpur and its surrounding districts are still lagging behind many other regions of Bangladesh. It emerged from several of the FGDs in Greater Faridpur that, except for Municipalities, communication in these districts is poor. Moreover, the district's communications with Dhaka city are problematic, as there is no bridge over the river Padma and thus people rely on slow ferry services. In 2009, the Bangladesh government announced plans to construct the long demanded Padma multipurpose bridge. When completed in 2013, it will be the longest bridge in South Asia. The Padma bridge will have a massive impact on the Greater Faridpur region, as it will connect Dhaka with the region and greatly reduce travel times and transportation costs (Raihan and Khondker, 2011).

Table 3: Length of road of Greater Faridpur by road classification in 2009 under Roads and Highway Department (kilometres)

District	National Highways	Regional Highways	Zilla Road	Total	Road length per 1,000 people
Faridpur	84.17		208.68	292.85	0.15
Gopalganj	82.76	44.82	154.98	282.56	0.22
Madaripur	47.42	16.50	80.68	144.6	0.11
Rajbari	17	52.27	89.3	158.57	0.15
Shariatpur		47.02	86.38	133.4	0.11

Source: BBS (2009).

During the rainy season, vast areas of Greater Faridpur go under water and remain so for several months. Boats and steamers become the major means of transport. A significant development over the last decade is the widespread use of diesel engines in boats, which has resulted in cutting travel times and transportation costs. This has increased the dynamism of the economic life of this region.

One remarkable development in terms of communication that happened over the last decade is the widespread use of mobile phones by the majority of people. Ten years ago, mobile phone were treated as a 'luxury' item, only available to rich people. However, by 2009, about 40 percent of the rural households in Bangladesh are reported to have access to mobile phones, and roughly one-fourth of the users are poor (Bayes, 2009), and this rate is rapidly rising as the costs of phones and calls fall and having a mobile phone becomes a social norm. Rickshaw pullers, fishermen, traders – all use it to minimise information asymmetry and quicken communication between two points. The expansion of mobile networks has increased market participation and sales of fresh products. More importantly, small producers and farmers in remote areas earn more money. As information flow increases, the cost of crop marketing is expected to decrease, particularly in remote areas, where potential marketing gains from the increased information flow is large. This reduces price dispersion across markets. This ‘luxury’ item of the early 1990s translated into a ‘necessity’ within the span of one decade. It appears from the FGDs and field visits in Greater Faridpur that the use of mobile phone has increased in this region in recent years, due to the rise in several economic activities, such as poultry farming, flower cultivation, fishing, wholesale and retail trading. Also, the rise in remittances contributed to the expansion of mobile uses.

2.5 Housing

During Jack’s time, nobody in Greater Faridpur, whether a cultivator or engaged in any other occupation, lived in a rented house. The peasant or the workman, although paying rent for the land to a landlord, always built his own house at his own expense. This was the custom for all classes of the community. The buildings contained several rooms and sometimes two floors under one roof. It never consisted of a single hut – even the poorest families always had a separate kitchen.

The latest Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES, 2005) provides information on the pattern of housing of the households in Bangladesh. According to HIES (2005), in 2005 only eight percent of the households in Greater Faridpur lived in rented houses and the remaining 92 percent of households had their own house. HIES (2005) also provides information on the average number of rooms per household in Greater Faridpur. Table 4 shows that in 2005 in Greater Faridpur, 24 percent of the households had only one room and the remaining 76 percent of households had more than one room. There are, however, district variations within Greater Faridpur. While in Rajbari, as much as 40 percent of the households had only one room, the corresponding figures were 37.5 percent, 19.2 percent and 15.8 percent for Madaripur, Shariatpur and Gopalganj, respectively, and in Faridpur district, the figure was very low, at only 5.7 percent. This suggests that, compared to Jack’s time, in recent time the number of households with a single room has increased substantially in Greater Faridpur. Smaller housing units, and less space per person, may be one of the negative changes since 1910. Also, Table 5 suggests that in recent time, not every household has a separate kitchen. Fragmentation of landholdings, population pressure and rise in population density are responsible for such changes.

Table 4: Percentage of households with different number of rooms in 2005

Number of rooms	Faridpur	Gopalganj	Madaripur	Rajbari	Shariatpur	Greater Faridpur
1	5.7	15.8	37.5	40.0	19.2	24.1
2	30.7	35.8	36.7	19.2	32.5	30.5
3	29.3	27.5	16.7	20.0	25.0	23.3
4	22.9	11.7	5.0	15.8	16.6	14.7
5	3.6	6.7	3.3	1.7	5.0	4.0
6	6.4	2.5	0.8	2.5	1.7	3.0

Number of rooms	Faridpur	Gopalganj	Madaripur	Rajbari	Shariatpur	Greater Faridpur
7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
8	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.5
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source: HIES (2005).

Table 5: Dwelling with separate kitchen (% of households) in 2005

	Faridpur	Gopalganj	Madaripur	Shariatpur	Rajbari	Greater Faridpur
Yes	76.43	72.50	58.33	84.17	80.83	74.52
No	23.57	27.50	41.67	15.83	19.17	25.48
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: HIES (2005).

Jack demonstrated that around 1910, in Greater Faridpur, the huts of poor people were cheaply made of materials grown on the land or locally obtained and were never strong enough to carry an upper storey. A prosperous family would build larger huts and more of them. All the huts had doors, which would, however, only be closed at night. Every house had a good garden, which contained several fruit and timber trees, besides plantains and a clump of the indispensable bamboo. In the district, only one homestead in every 200 had a brick house (i.e., 0.5 percent); but one in every seven had a tin-roofed hut (14.3 percent) –in the south-east this figure was one in every four (25 percent) and in the west one in every 20 (five percent). In most of the houses, there were no tables or chairs, sofas, bedsteads or cupboards, and the rooms appeared absolutely bare.

Tables 6 and 7 provide information on the percentage of households using different materials for constructing the roofs and walls of their houses in Greater Faridpur. It appears that after 100 years, the majority of the houses in Greater Faridpur are tin-roofed. Also, tin is the major construction material for walls in the majority of the houses in Faridpur, Gopalganj, Shariatpur and Rajbari districts. This suggests a significant change in the use of building materials in constructing houses in Greater Faridpur over the last 100 years.

Table 6: Main construction material of the roof (% of households) in 2005

Roof materials	Faridpur	Gopalganj	Madaripur	Shariatpur	Rajbari	Greater Faridpur
Brick/cement	5.7	7.5		1.7	5.8	4.19
Tin/wood	91.4	90.8	96.7	98.3	75.0	90.47
Tile/Wood					15.0	2.90
Hemp/hay/bamboo	2.9	0.9	3.3		1.7	1.80
Other		0.8			2.5	0.64
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: HIES (2005).

Table 7: Main construction material of the walls (% of households) in 2005

Wall materials	Faridpur	Gopalganj	Madaripur	Shariatpur	Rajbari	Greater Faridpur
Brick/cement	13.6	17.5	21.6	14.2	15.8	16.45
Tin/wood	51.4	39.5	14.2	77.5	50	46.68
Mud brick	6.4	7.2	24.2		16.8	10.77
Hemp/hay/bamboo	28.6	35.8	40	8.3	17.4	26.10
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: HIES (2005)

2.6 Education

One hundred years back, there were limited education facilities and education was mostly enjoyed by the wealthy classes. All the boys of the Hindu upper classes went to school at least from the age of six to the age of 16, and many of them stayed in school much longer. Hindu and Muslim traders also sent their boys to school, but usually took them out at the age of 14. Some of the Muslim landowners and wealthy classes had only begun to send their boys to school around this time, while many Muslims were still reluctant to send their sons to school. Labourers and fishermen would rarely send their boys to school, weavers more often, while the Hindu shopkeepers, goldsmiths or silversmiths usually taught their boys at home to read, write and keep accounts. Girls from all classes did not attend school.

The people of Greater Faridpur have experienced a rise in literacy rate in recent decades. Table 8 shows that in 1981 the highest literacy rate of all the districts of Greater Faridpur was in Faridpur district, although it was only 23.18 percent. But in both 1991 and 2001, the literacy rate was the highest for Gopalganj district. The male literacy rate was always higher than the female literacy rate for all periods.

Table 8: Literacy rate of persons aged seven years and above of Greater Faridpur

District	1981			1991			2001		
	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female
Faridpur	23.18	31.6	14.58	27.84	34.61	20.75	40.85	44.64	36.96
Gopalganj	16.34	21.26	10.69	38.23	44.73	31.64	51.37	55.23	47.44
Madaripur	20.45	28.07	12.89	32.56	39.96	24.89	42.14	46.87	37.29
Rajbari	21.1	29.4	14.2	26.43	32.7	19.68	39.81	43.66	35.75
Shariatpur	18.88	26.04	11.86	24.41	30.31	18.45	38.95	42.17	35.77

Source: BBS (2009).

Though the dropout rate today is high, due to different government initiatives girls' enrolment is increasing at a faster rate. People from all classes (both Muslim and Hindu) now send their children to school. Government stipend programmes have also played a significant role in encouraging parents to school their children.

There are now 3,770 schools (primary and secondary) and 128 colleges in Greater Faridpur (see Table 9). Gopalganj has the highest number of schools per thousand people, whereas Faridpur has the highest number of colleges per thousand people. Noted institutions in Greater Faridpur are: Faridpur Zila School (1840), Faridpur Ishan Institute (1891), Bhanga Pilot High School (1889), Hitoishi High School (1889), Boalmari George Academy (1911), Baishrashi Shib Sundar Academy (1914), Kalamridha Govinda High School, Karakdi Rambihari Multilateral High School (1901), Rajendra College (1918), Bakiganj Islamia Madrasa (1922), Krishnapur High School (1910), Rajbari Government College (1961), Pangsha College (1969) and Baliakandi High School (1917).

Table 9: Number of schools and colleges in Greater Faridpur in recent years

District	Schools		Collage	
	Number	Per thousand people	Number	Per thousand people
Faridpur	966	0.49	48	0.024
Gopalganj	883	0.68	21	0.016
Madaripur	816	0.64	17	0.013
Rajbari	507	0.48	24	0.023
Shariatpur	598	0.49	18	0.015
Greater Faridpur	3770	0.55	128	0.019

Source: Banglapedia (2011)

2.7 Women’s empowerment

In Jack’s account, 100 years ago women in Greater Faridpur had little influence or power. They spent most of the day inside the house, and their comfort and preferences were little considered by men. They had no seasons of work and seasons of idleness (as did men), but had to work throughout the year at duties which were always the same.

Things began to change in the late 20th century, and the Constitution of Bangladesh promotes equal rights to women. However, they still suffer from discrimination and violence in their homes and workplaces. Women in rural Bangladesh today are very hard working. They perform heavy household work throughout the day, but their contribution to the family income is not as recognised as that of men’s. Recently, the situation has started to change, as the market participation of women has increased. Women are also migrating to Dhaka to work in the readymade garment industries. Microcredit and non-governmental organisation (NGO) activities have brought important changes in women’s lives. Bangladesh has been the ‘birthplace’ of microcredit, with world-reputed NGOs like Grameen Bank and BRAC. More than 90 percent of the borrowers of microcredit are poor and low-income women. The leading NGOs in Greater Faridpur are BRAC, Grameen Bank, ASA, Proshika, CARITAS, CARE and SDS. Different farm and non-farm activities among the women have increased considerably over the years because of microcredit. Box 2 shows how poultry and livestock farming have changed the lives of some women in Faridpur district.Box 2: Livestock, poultry rearing make Faridpur women self-reliant

Faridpur: Ultra poor women living in the vast sandy shoal (char) areas of the Padma and the Madhumati rivers have become self-reliant through raising livestock and poultry birds. Now, they have learnt to fight poverty, natural calamity and other odds. Earlier, they had to wait for relief after natural disasters. But now they do not wait for assistance; instead they are supporting each other. A sense of awareness has developed among the women about the effect of sanitation, safe drinking water, healthcare facilities, maternal care, dowry, child marriage, repression on women and trafficking of children and women. Most of the women in remote char areas of Sadar Bhanga, Sadarpur, Charbhadrasan, Boalmari and Alfadanga upazilas have achieved success after taking up projects on livestock and poultry birds. Meherunnessa Begum and Jahanara of Alfadanga upazila said that they purchased three sheep at Tk 1,700 each two years back and sold those at Tk 7,900 each. Sakina Begum bought 11 goats at Tk 9,800 two years ago and sold those in phases for a total of Tk 35,000. Moyna Begum, the wife of a disabled man, said she has 200 ducks and earns on an average Tk 20,000 per year. 'The ducks lay eggs and every year I sell about 80 ducks.' Tofi Mollah of Jhama village said he got more than 25 litres of milk from eight cows and he had to spend Tk 70 to Tk 80 to take the milk by boat to Chilmari or Roumari. 'Milk selling is not profitable to me. Instead, I am producing cream,' he said. These self-reliant women proudly said each of them has sanitary latrines on their homesteads. Water-borne diseases have been reduced, their children go to school. Not only that, incidents of child marriage and dowry have also been reduced significantly. Setting up of dairy farm, milk processing plants with government and private initiatives, and providing modern technology can help a lot in changing the fate of poor people. These small entrepreneurs urge the government and the Bangladesh Bank to provide easy loan, so that they can change their fate and help contribute a lot to the development of the area, the local elite said.

Source: The Daily Sun, Thursday, 6 January 2011

Women's welfare has also been enhanced through increased health facilities in the rural areas. Greater Faridpur now has 15 hospitals, 31 upazila health complexes, 258 union-level health and family planning centres and 102 other health facilities. However, field visits and FGDs in Greater Faridpur indicated that such health facilities are still much lower than the actual requirements and also that there are numerous problems associated with the low quality of medical services, lack of availability of required medicines and lack of availability of required number of doctors at the village level.

Table 10: Number of health facilities in Greater Faridpur

District	Hospitals	Upazila health complex	Union health and family planning centres	Other health facilities
Faridpur	6	8	77	39
Gopalganj	3	5	50	44
Madaripur	4	8	57	3
Rajbari	1	4	41	7
Shariatpur	1	6	33	9
Greater Faridpur	**15**	**31**	**258**	**102**

Source: Banglapedia (2011).

3 Changes in the economic conditions of households

3.1 Major occupations of the households

In Jack's time, 77 percent of the population of Faridpur were peasants or engaged in other agricultural activities, and the remaining 23 percent were involved in non-agricultural activities. In analysing family budgets, Jack made the distinction between these two classes. The peasant grew his own food and was for the most part able to feed himself and his family. On the other hand, the non- agriculturalist bought food. According to Jack, the peasant was always better fed than the non-agriculturalist with nominally the same income. In his book, the incomes and all calculations of the domestic budget of the peasant were expressed partly in cash and partly in crops as a basis of estimation, while those of the non-agriculturalist were expressed fully in cash. The domestic budget of a non-cultivator of the working classes was found to be little different from that of a cultivator. The non-agricultural community was not in any case of great importance, as it amounted to only 23 percent of the population, among which as much as 10 percent was employed in service or supported by the rent of land which it owned, six percent was engaged in trade and only eight percent was employed in industry.[3]

Over the years, the dependence on agriculture in Greater Faridpur has been reduced – the main occupation of around 45 percent people is now agriculture. People are involved in different types of economic activities. Table 11 suggests that, compared to Jack's time, the percentage of people involved in trade has increased currently. A particularly important change is that a large percentage of people are now agricultural labourers, which is due to the fact that landlessness has increased significantly over the years. In Jack's description 100 years back, there were no landless households in Greater Faridpur. However, recent estimates (HIES, 2005) suggest that as many as 23.5 percent of agricultural households are landless in Faridpur district. Corresponding figures for Gopalganj, Madaripur, Rajbari and Shariatpur are 40 percent, 30 percent, 43 percent and 22 percent, respectively. River erosion, flood, population pressure, and selling of land due to vulnerable economic conditions are among the major reasons behind this rising phenomenon of landlessness.

Table 11: Percentage of households involved in different activities in Greater Faridpur in 2005

	Faridpur	Gopalganj	Madaripur	Rajbari	Shariatpur	Greater Faridpur
Agriculture	42.76	46.37	43.74	42.82	46.53	44.39
Fishing	1.47	1.71	1.51	1.25	1.29	1.45

[3] The sum of these three percentages, however, becomes 24 percent, as against Jack's citing of 23 percent of the non-agricultural population.

	Faridpur	**Gopalganj**	**Madaripur**	**Rajbari**	**Shariatpur**	**Greater Faridpur**
Agricultural labour	21.67	20.94	24	23.63	23.22	22.66
Wage labour	2.74	1.71	2.96	2.94	3.19	2.71
Trade	10.63	9.76	9.93	11.43	9.55	10.27
Transport	2.06	1.38	1.31	2.15	1.01	1.60
Service	7.16	9.28	6.08	6.08	4.95	6.72
Other	11.51	8.85	10.47	9.7	10.26	10.20
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: HIES (2005).

3.2 Composition of budget among different household groups

With a view to analysing the economic conditions of households in Greater Faridpur, Jack made four classifications of households: (i) 'comfort', which implied a condition in which the material necessities of life could be fully satisfied; (ii) 'below comfort', in which the income and material conditions approximated more nearly to those of families living in comfort than to those of families living in indigence; (iii) 'above indigence', in which the income and material conditions approximated more nearly to those of indigent families; and (iV) 'indigence', which implied a condition in which the family had just sufficient to keep itself alive and no more.

The methodology adopted by Jack in classifying households was subjective in nature. Jack's officers were expressly told that where they found an agricultural family well-fed, well-housed and well-clothed, this was comfort; where they found a family thin and ill-developed, their garments old and worn, and their huts ill-thatched and tumbled-down, this was indigence. His advice to the investigators was to:

> "pay more attention to what they saw than what they heard, and only after they had seen the condition of the family by a visit to its household, to enquire into its resources, to tabulate its income, and to enter its classification".

However, presentday household surveys rely more on objective criteria related to socio-economic conditions to classify households into poor and non-poor. For example, the Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) of Bangladesh considers expenditure of households in order to classify them into non-poor, moderate poor and extreme poor. A household is considered as non-poor if the average daily intake of food per member is more than 2,122 kilocalories. The household is moderate poor if the per member daily food intake is less than 2,122 kilocalories, but higher than 1,805 kilocalories and finally the household is extreme poor if the per member daily intake is less than 1,805 kilocalories.

In order to have a comparison of the households of the present day with those of Jack's time, it is assumed that Jack's households in 'comfort' will be compared with the 'non-poor' households of the present day. Similarly, comparison will be made between Jack's households of 'below comfort' plus 'above indigence' and present-day households of 'moderate poor'; and between Jack's households of 'indigence' and present-day 'extreme poor' households. This means that the comparison is a little crude, but still it allows for a useful analysis.

Jack provided information on the average spending on food and non-food items by agricultural households living in comfort and indigence 100 years ago. From those figures, the proportion of spending on different food and non-food items can be calculated. Such calculated proportions are reported in Table 12. A similar exercise is carried out for the agricultural non-poor and extreme poor households using the latest available household data. The results of the former exercise are reported in Table 13.

Table 12: Shares of expenditure on food and non-food Items by agricultural households in Greater Faridpur in 1910

Item of expenditure	**% of total spending annually by a family in comfort**	**% of total spending annually by a family in indigence**
Food		
Rice	46.57	59.17
Salt	1.05	1.48
Oil	2.33	2.96
Spices	1.05	1.33
Fish	2.21	0.00
Vegetables	2.91	1.48
Milk & butter (ghi)	1.16	1.48
Other necessaries		
Kerosene	1.05	1.33
Tobacco & molasses	1.05	0.74
Betel nut	1.16	1.33
Clothes	9.84	8.88
Household utensils	0.52	1.33
Minor house-repairs	2.21	1.48
Furniture	1.16	1.48
Miscellaneous		
Rent	9.84	4.44
Local taxation	0.58	0.74
Medical treatment	2.21	1.48
Purchase of cattle	3.38	1.48
Purchase of boat	0.52	0.00
Thorough house-repairs	3.38	3.70
Domestic festivals and entertainments	5.82	3.70
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**
Share of food in total expenditure	**57.28**	**67.89**

Source: Computed from Jack (1916).

Table 13: Share of expenditure on food and non-food Items by agricultural households in Greater Faridpur in 2005

Item of expenditure	% of total spending annually by a family of non-poor	% of total spending annually by a family of extreme poor
Food		
Rice	21.86	37.70
Oil & fat	2.68	2.92
Spices	4.30	4.64
Fish	7.27	6.04
Vegetables	4.01	5.57
Pulses	3.41	4.40
Meats & eggs	3.49	1.59
Milk & dairy	3.51	2.15
Fruits	2.41	0.99
Sugar	1.36	0.62
Other foods	2.28	1.13
Other necessaries		
Tobacco	0.98	1.27
Betel leaf & chew goods	0.06	0.06
Fuel (including kerosene, firewood, electricity, etc.)	7.09	9.31
Clothes & footwear	7.21	5.72
Furniture	0.83	0.18
Miscellaneous		
Housing expenditure	11.31	7.57
Medical treatment	3.40	3.05
Transport	4.04	1.69
Education expenditure	5.13	1.81
Other miscellaneous expenditure	3.36	1.59
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**
Share of food in total expenditure	**56.59**	**67.75**

Source: HIES (2005)

Comparison of Table 12 with Table 13 suggests that the proportions of food in total expenditure have remained almost unchanged for the non-poor and extremly poor households among the agricultural class over the last 100 years. The extremely poor households still spend a much higher proportion of total expenditure on food items than the non-poor households. However, one important change which occurred over the last 100 years is that the share of spending on rice by both the non-poor and extremely poor households has declined remarkably. One hundred years ago, non-poor agricultural households used to spend 46.5 percent of their total expenditure on rice; this figure has come down to only 21.8 percent in recent times. Similarly, for the extremely poor agricultural households, the figure has come down from as high as 59 percent to only 37.7 percent. The major reason behind such change is the fact that the importance of non-rice food items in the food basket has increased over time, both for the non-poor and extremely poor households.

A similar exercise is conducted for the non-agricultural households. The results are reported in Tables 14 and Table 15. Compared to the agricultural households, non-agricultural households, both non-poor and extremely poor, used to spend a higher proportion of their total spending on food 100 years ago. However, this pattern has changed, and non-agricultural households now spend a lower proportion on food. Also, similar to the agricultural households, the proportion of spending on rice has declined significantly. The main reason behind this is the rising importance of several non-rice food and non-food items in the basket of expenditure, both for the non-poor and extremely poor non-agricultural households.

Table 14: Share of expenditure on food and non-food items by non-agricultural households of Greater Faridpur in 1910

Item of expenditure	% of total spending annually by a family in comfort	% of total spending annually by a family in indigence
Food		
Rice	47.53	58.57
Salt	1.07	1.46
Oil	2.38	2.93
Spices	1.49	1.46
Fish	2.97	2.20
Pulses	2.97	2.20
Vegetables	1.19	1.46
Milk & butter (ghi)	1.78	1.46
Other necessaries		
Betel nut	1.19	0.73
Kerosene oil	1.07	0.88
Tobacco & molasses	1.49	0.00
Clothes	10.04	10.10
Household utensils	0.89	1.46
Petty house-repairs	2.97	2.20
Rent	2.55	2.34
Local taxation	0.59	0.88
Medical treatment	4.46	2.34
Furniture	2.97	0.00
Thorough house-repairs	5.94	3.66
Domestic festivals and entertainments	4.46	3.66
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**
Share of food in total expenditure	**61.38**	**71.74**

Source: Computed from Jack (1910).

Table 15: Share of expenditure on food and non-food Items by non-agricultural households in Greater Faridpur in 2005

Item of expenditure	**% of total spending annually by a family of non-poor**	**% of total spending annually by a family of extreme poor**
Food		
Rice	16.53	32.60
Oil & fat	2.54	3.36
Spices	3.70	5.20
Fish	7.21	6.57
Vegetables	3.78	6.01
Pulses	3.30	4.53
Meats & eggs	3.77	0.64
Milk & dairy	3.28	1.64
Fruits	2.67	1.23
Sugar	1.11	0.51
Other foods	3.11	2.80
Other necessaries		
Tobacco	1.08	0.91
Betel leaf & chew goods	0.05	0.08
Fuel (including kerosene, firewood, electricity, etc.)	6.44	9.76
Clothes & footwear	7.19	6.83
Furniture	1.29	0.18
Miscellaneous		
Housing expenditure	11.68	6.56
Medical treatment	4.30	3.62
Transport	6.21	3.38
Education expenditure	5.46	1.79
Other miscellaneous expenditure	5.32	1.81
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**
Share of food in total expenditure	**50.99**	**65.08**

Source: HIES (2005).

Focus group discussions point to the fact that the non-rice food items have been becoming costlier over time. The prices of these items, especially of pulses, fish, milk and dairy, meat and oil have increased more than that of rice, which has resulted in a lower relative price of rice, despite the fact that its absolute price has increased considerably in recent years. Therefore, the share of rice in total spending has declined. However, for the households in extreme poverty, whether agricultural or non-agricultural, the share of food in total spending remains very high, which indicates that these households are extremely vulnerable to any food price shock.

3.3 Extent of poverty

In addition to analysing the domestic budget of different types of households, Jack also calculated the proportion of households living in comfort, below comfort, above indigence and below indigence. As mentioned above, Jack's households classified as living in comfort are considered as present-day non-poor households, and the households living in indigence are considered as households in extreme poverty. Jack's classification of households living below comfort and above indigence are considered together to be present-day households in moderate poverty.

Table 16 presents Jack's classification of households for agricultural and non-agricultural population 100 years ago. It appears that a higher percentage of agricultural households compared to the non-agricultural counterparts was living in comfort. Also, a very low percentage of households living in indigence was observed, both for the agricultural and non-agricultural households.

Table 16: Percentage of households living in different economic conditions in 1910

	Agricultural	Non-agricultural	Total
In comfort	49.5	47	49
Below comfort	28.5	27	28
Above indigence	18.0	20	18.5
Indigence	4.0	6	4.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Moderate poor, as per the present-day classification (sum of households living below comfort and above indigence) equals to 46.5 percent, 48.5 percent and 46.5 percent for the agricultural class, non-agricultural class and total population, respectively.

Source: Jack (1916).

Table 17 provides information on the proportions of households which are extremely poor, moderately poor and non-poor, drawn from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 2005 (HIES, 2005). It appears that out of the total sample of households in Greater Faridpur, 24.73 percent were extremely poor, 17.31 percent were moderately poor and 58 percent were non-poor. This suggests some interesting changes in the pattern of poverty in Greater Faridpur. Compared to Jack's time, the proportion of non-poor households has increased by almost nine percentage points. However, the alarming picture is that the proportion of extreme poverty has increased by 20 percentage points. The proportion of households in moderate poverty has declined considerably. While one needs to be cautious about comparisons between data using such different methodologies, during the focus groups, it was revealed that increased landlessness and lack of work opportunities were the major reasons behind the rise in the proportion of households in extreme poverty. It is possible that the landlessness of a significant proportion of the rural population in Greater Faridpur means that their livelihoods are more vulnerable than in earlier times and, perhaps, that extreme poverty is more common.

Table 17: State of poverty in Greater Faridpur in 2005 (% of households)

	Agricultural households	Non-agricultural households	Total
Non-poor	51.4	62.9	57.9
Moderately poor	20.4	14.9	17.3
Extremely poor	28.2	22.2	24.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: HIES (2005).

Table 17 also indicates that, compared to the non-agricultural households, agricultural households have a higher proportion of extremely poor households. The percentage of moderately poor is also higher for the agricultural households. This is in contrast to the findings of Jack, which showed that the agricultural households were in a better position than their non-agricultural counterparts 100 years ago. The reason that poverty is now relatively lower among the non-agricultural households in Greater Faridpur is due to the fact that, as the non-farm economic activities expanded rapidly in Greater Faridpur, income earning opportunities are better for the non-agricultural households.

From field visits and FGDs, it is known that there were very few employment opportunities in Greater Faridpur even 10 years ago. Over time working opportunities have increased, though they are of a very casual nature. As a whole, economic conditions in recent years (after 2005) have improved, due to an increased demand for labour. Many people are going outside of Greater Faridpur in order to work at the garments factories and local governments' construction works. Many landless people have chosen the professions of petty service works, such as repairing locks and umbrellas, rickshaw and van pulling, day labour in construction works, etc. Also over time it is reported that the number of beggars has reduced. Within Greater Faridpur the number of people migrating from the rural to the urban areas has increased because of newly created job opportunities in the construction sector.

In Greater Faridpur currently there are a huge number of families who have at least one member working outside the country. The trend of going abroad is higher among the lower middle class and middle class family members. The majority of them are migrating towards Malaysia, countries in the Middle Eastern region and Italy (Mamun and Nath, 2010). Remittances are now playing an important role in improving the economic conditions of many households. For a large number of households they have also helped reduce poverty. Therefore, it appears from different FGD respondents and field visits that the current level of poverty is much lower than that reported in the HIES 2005 (Table 17). It is suggested that the level of extreme poverty has been reduced in recent years because of expanded economic opportunities. However, such expanded economic opportunities are more prominent in the Faridpur district and its surrounding areas. In remote rural places, extreme poverty is still extensive.

3.4 Financial service

In Jack's time, informal money lending was virtually all that was available in Greater Faridpur. It was found that 55 percent of all cultivators were free from debt and that, of the 45 percent who were in debt, more than a half were in debt to an amount less than one-quarter of their annual income. Cultivators who had financial problems would borrow from multiple moneylenders. If they had mortgaged their fields to the hilt, they would pledge jewellery with another lender to obtain more money for immediate necessities. They might borrow more money from a third moneylender on the security of the growing crop and they might pledge jewellery to fourth and fifth moneylenders to obtain fresh loans. The prudent cultivator who had little debt usually dealt with a single money-lender and the amount of his debt was easily ascertained. For non-agriculturalists, 73 percent were free from debt, probably due to the fact that fishermen and unskilled labourers were wary of being in debt. Amongst cultivators classified as living in comfort, 80 percent were either without debt or in debt only by a very small amount. Of the lowest class of all – the indigent – 48 percent were without debt, three percent were in debt by more than a year's income and 11 percent by more than half a year's income. The great majority of agricultural debtors got into debt through improvident expenditure on ceremonies and, in particular, on marriage expenses. The sum spent on the marriage of a son or daughter, both by Hindus and Muslims of the cultivating classes, was often out of proportion to the families' incomes. Here the important thing was that once a debt had been incurred, it mounted with amazing rapidity. The interest rate was high, never less than 36 percent, often 48 percent and more.

In Jack's time there was no formal banking system in Greater Faridpur. Over time the formal banking system extended in Greater Faridpur, but remained small until Independence in 1971. The banking sector in Greater Faridpur has expanded over the last 20 years, with increases in bank advances and deposits (Table 18 and Table 19). However, poor and rural people have less access to commercial banking services, as they are not able to meet the requirements, such as collateral, to obtain credit. Rural people also have low access to commercial banking services, as is evident from the fact that in 2007-08 commercial banks' deposits and advances in urban areas of Greater Faridpur were much higher than those in the rural areas. Over time, the shares of commercial banks' advances and deposits in rural localities have also been decreasing. It is also important to note that the amounts of bank advances in Greater Faridpur in recent years have been significantly lower than the amount of bank deposits. This indicates that there is a net outflow of financial resources from Greater Faridpur to Dhaka.

Table 18: Bank deposits in Greater Faridpur (million taka)

Districts	Locality	1989-90	1991-92	1993-94	1995-96	1998-99	1999-2000	2003-04	2005-06	2006-07
Faridpur	Urban	565.9	821	1013.6	1186.7	1762.2	2065.6	4019.8	5922	6387.8
	Rural	480.5	613.8	849.9	1120.4	1650.4	2049.1	2728	2864.5	2885.6
	Total	1046.4	1434.8	1863.5	2307.1	3412.6	4114.7	6747.8	8786.5	9273.4

Gopalganj	Urban	147.5	230.3	287.9	392.2	547.1	73.4	1635.8	2198.7	2427.4
	Rural	203.9	313.9	436.3	580.1	912.4	1104.3	1188.6	1262.3	1286.1
	Total	351.4	544.2	724.2	972.3	1459.5	1847.7	2824.4	3461	3713.5
Madaripur	Urban	223.4	281.7	412.6	522.3	673.8	793.3	1878	2819.3	3174.1
	Rural	213.4	291.8	453.5	603.4	956.6	1123.7	1178.2	1254.1	1341.9
	Total	436.8	573.5	866.1	1125.7	1630.4	1917	3056.2	4073.4	4516
Rajbari	Urban	158.7	243	312.6	324.6	441.7	490.5	1352.9	1892.5	2031.5
	Rural	208.9	280.5	379	513.6	745.9	880.2	1028.5	1594.9	1742.9
	Total	367.6	523.5	691.6	838.2	1187.6	1370.7	2311.4	3018.1	3774.4
Shariatpur	Urban	62.9	90.6	138.8	221.4	309.8	357.6	1282.9	1423.2	1641.3
	Rural	203.9	269.8	423.8	592.7	817.2	989.4	1028.5	1594.9	1742.9
	Total	266.8	360.4	562.6	814.1	1127	1347	2311.4	3018.1	3384.2
Greater Faridpur	Urban	1158.4	1666.6	2165.5	2647.2	3734.6	3780.4	10169.4	14255.7	15662.1
	Rural	1310.6	1769.8	2542.5	3410.2	5082.5	6146.7	7151.8	8570.7	8999.4
	Total	2469	3436.4	4708	6057.4	8817.1	10597.1	17251.2	22357.1	24661.5

Source: Various volumes of Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh

Table 19: Bank advances of Greater Faridpur (million taka)

Districts	Locality	1989-90	1991-92	1993-94	1995-96	1997-98	2001-02	2003-04	2005-06	2006-07
Faridpur	Urban	506.7	693.3	758.7	1169.2	1429.1	2647.6	3223.2	4199.9	4302.3
	Rural	699.3	683.2	836.1	1113.1	1196.2	1594.7	1624.1	1675.1	1713.8
	Total	1206	1376.5	1594.8	2282.3	2625.3	4242.3	4847.3	5875	6016.1
Gopalganj	Urban	64.4	67.6	71.1	104	144.4	533.1	650.3	866.2	854.1
	Rural	451.3	417.4	466.8	574	619.9	827.3	879.9	898.3	933.4
	Total	517.7	485	537.3	678	764.3	1360.4	1530.2	1764.5	1787.5
Madaripur	Urban	187.7	194.5	240.2	315.8	462.1	808.4	1070.5	1324.7	1315.4
	Rural	348.3	347.5	394.4	544.9	623.2	911.8	963.6	1114.6	1207
	Total	572	542	634.6	860.7	1085.3	1720.2	2034.1	2439.3	2522.4
Rajbari	Urban	111.8	129.5	151.4	204.5	249.6	607.6	666.9	817.9	818.1
	Rural	386	409.3	529.7	752.7	933.3	896.4	782.5	948.7	969.4
	Total	504.8	538.8	681.1	957.2	1182.9	1280.2	1386.9	1603.7	1599.3
Shariatpur	Urban	86.2	90.7	73.4	142.9	202.7	383.8	604.4	655	629.9
	Rural	298.8	239.9	302.6	433.7	522.2	896.4	782.5	948.7	969.4
	Total	385	330.6	376	576.6	724.9	1280.2	1386.9	1603.7	1599.3
Greater Faridpur	Urban	956.8	1175.6	1294.8	1936.4	2487.9	4980.5	6215.3	7863.7	7919.8
	Rural	2183.7	2097.3	2529.6	3418.4	3894.8	5126.6	5032.6	5585.4	5793
	Total	3185.5	3272.9	3823.8	5354.8	6382.7	9883.3	11185.4	13286.2	13524.6

Source: Various volumes of Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh

Over the last three decades, the microfinance sector has experienced spectacular growth in Bangladesh with respect to the number of branches, clients, amounts of loan disbursed, etc. Microfinance institutions (MFIs) have been offering credit services to people who are not eligible for credit from commercial banks. With minimum and even no collateral, fewer formalities and frequent but small repayment schedule facilities, microcredit has reached distant areas of the country and created financial access for underprivileged citizens. This sub-sector of financial institutions has also been playing an important role in employment generation, women's empowerment, poverty alleviation and in the country's overall socioeconomic development. As mentioned before, there has been a significant rise in the operation of microcredit facilities in Greater Faridpur through different NGOs. However, despite their successes, the main criticism of MFIs is the rate of interest they charge. Although MFIs usually charge a flat interest rate of between 12 and 15 percent on loans, the effective rates turn out to be in the range of 30 and 35 percent, and in some cases much higher than that.

Another important issue for access to financial services, particularly for an agriculture-based economy like that of Bangladesh, is farmers' access to financial services. In Bangladesh, farmers barely have access to credit facilities or any other financial services. For credit facility they depend on the NGOs, MFIs and largely on informal sources, where they often have to pay high interest rates. In 2010, Bangladesh Bank directed the state-owned commercial banks and specialised banks to allow farmers to open accounts with an initial deposit of only 10 taka. This move is intended to help the farmers to access basic financial services, as well as to receive the government subsidies into their accounts. Moreover, Bangladesh Bank, in association with BRAC, a leading NGO in Bangladesh, recently launched collateral-free agricultural loans of 5000 million taka for sharecroppers and landless farmers. This is a unique attempt to create opportunities for sharecroppers to access credit facilities. Field visits and FGDs in Greater Faridpur indicate that such moves, although still inadequate, have helped farmers and sharecroppers in Greater Faridpur.

3.5 Collection of revenue and local development

In Jack's time, in Greater Faridpur the revenue collected under various heads was divided between three authorities, the greater part being allocated to the Imperial or Central Government, and the lesser part being divided between local bodies and the local police force. The land tax was a legacy of the permanent settlement. When originally imposed, it nominally represented 91 percent of the rent paid by the cultivators of the soil, the remaining nine percent being retained by the agents who collected the rent. In the small towns the property tax was assessed capriciously, amounting on average to 1.5 rupees per head of the population, equivalent to an income tax of about two percent or less. The proportion of revenue derived from tax and non-tax sources was approximately same. Jack asserted that the people of Bengal, although they paid only one-half or one-third of the tax that people in other countries paid to their governments, received even less in return. Faridpur was backward, even for Bengal. Trunk roads were few; there were no village roads of any sort, although they were urgently needed; doctors were fewer and less well qualified than in neighbouring districts, although fever and other diseases had taken such a heavy toll in some parts of the district as to reduce the population materially; finally in the matter of education and its extension into the villages and amongst cultivators, Faridpur appeared to be the most backward district in Eastern Bengal.

In Jack's time, the local rates were of two kinds, collected and assessed by different agencies and devoted to different objects: the district rate, which was known as the Road and Public Works Cess; and the village rate, which was known as the Chokidari Tax. The district tax was levied on the agricultural classes only, although the services upon which it was spent – roads, water supply and the like – equally benefited the non-agricultural classes. It was a tax of six percent, assessed on rent, half being paid by the landlord and half by the tenant. The Chokidari tax, or village tax, was assessed and collected in an entirely different manner. It was assessed in a rough and ready fashion by the headman of each village as a tax upon income with a maximum limit, and was spent on the provision of village police.

At the present time, in addition to the land tax, there are also income tax, city corporation tax and Pauroshava tax. However, the coverage of income tax is very limited. In the city corporations, people who have their own houses have to pay 27 percent of their house rent as tax. This tax rate has increased by almost 250 percent over the last 100 years. The inhabitants in the Pauroshovas (small towns with local administration) also pay Pauroshava tax. From responses in FGDs it appears that people are reluctant to pay city corporation tax, as they are not satisfied with the services provided by the city corporations. The amount of revenue collected through Pauroshava tax is greater than that through land tax, as the land tax has not increased much over the years.

The development activities in Greater Faridpur in the present era, whether physical infrastructure, health or education, do esnot depend greatly on the amount of revenue collected in that part of the country. Rather, the allocation from the Annual Development Programme (ADP) of the annual national budget, and different development programmes in association with donor agencies and donor countries, are the major contributors to the development of physical infrastructure, health and education facilities in Greater Faridpur. However, field visits and FGDs in different parts of Greater Faridpur reveal that there are significant disparities in the allocation of such resources and development activities. The urban areas are the major beneficiaries of the development activities, with little progress taking place in the remote rural areas. Also, Faridpur District is well ahead compared to four other districts.

4 Conclusion

This paper has made an assessment of the changes in the economic life of Greater Faridpur over the last 100 years or so. In 1910, J. C. Jack provided a comprehensive description of the economic life of this region in his book. After 100 years, this paper provides an examination of the evolution of the economic life of the region, through the use of secondary data, field visits and focus group discussions.

There have been large rises in population and population density in Greater Faridpur. The proportion of people living in the urban areas has increased massively. There have been important changes in the composition of population in terms of religion. The proportion of Hindus in the total population has declined considerably.

It also appears that there have been significant improvements in physical infrastructure, such as roads and other forms of communication, and social infrastructure, such as health and education. Also, there have been significant changes in the structure of the economy of this region. One hundred years back, it was predominantly an agro-based economy, but now non-agricultural economic activities have great significance.

At the household level, important changes are observed in terms of the composition of expenditure on food and non-food items. The major change is the proportion of expenditure on rice. Compared to Jack's time, the proportion of spending on rice by the households declined substantially. A rise in the relative importance of non-rice food items and non-food items appears to be the major cause behind such a change.

Finally, the composition of poverty seems to have changed in Greater Faridpur. Compared to Jack's time, the proportion of non-poor households has increased and that of moderately poor households has declined. However, the proportion of households in extreme poverty may have increased. Increased landlessness and lack of work opportunities are likely to be the major factors behind the rise in extreme poverty. However, increased work opportunities in the farm and non-farm sectors in recent years, a rise in the inflow of remittance money, and various development works in the rural areas have been contributing to a further decline in poverty in recent times.

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