

Provisional Community Profile
DINAJPUR
(BANIKNAGAR)

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I

INTRODUCTION

Physical overview

The Darjeeling Road stretches the length of the Baniknagar area from South to North acting almost as a backbone for the area, either side of which are situated the principal residential areas of Baniknagar. To the South end Baniknagar begins at the point where the Dinajpur Municipality Office is located. A railway line (which connects the Dinajpur Railway Station) is located at a ninety degree angle from the Darjeeling road. Parallel to the railway line runs the Station Road towards the west. This road can be considered acts as an effective boundary of the Southern section of Baniknagar.

To the North end of the Darjeeling Road, Baniknagar finishes when the road reaches the Dinajpur Acedemy School. Further North of this point, is identified as Nimtola.

Approximately half way down the Darjeeling road, from the Southern boundary, a road branches out to the West, upon which the Library and the Dinajpur District Museum are located. This road has its end at the connection with the Jail Road to the West, and adjacent to this connection is indeed the Dinajpur Jail itself. Across the road from the Dinajpur Jail, is the Loko Bhobon (town hall), located at the junction between Jail Road and the road going towards the West from Baniknagar. This road divides Baniknagar into two major parts: North Baniknagar and South Baniknagar.

Approximately three minute walk south of the Dinajpur Jail, along Jail Road, is located the Lili Mor Junction. A road that intersects with the Jail Road at this point runs East to meet the Darjeeling Road, and at its junction with the Darjeeling Road is the Buti Babur Mor. Just South of this point along the Darjeeling Road is another intersection with a road running to the North-East, eventually leading to the Dinajpur-Dhaka Highway. At the starting point of this road, to the South is Dinajpur Medical College Hospital, the main public health facility, not only for the town but for the whole district. Opposite to the Hospital starts another road that runs parallel to the road to Lili Mor towards the West and reaches Bahadur Bazar, the main business centre of the town. Thus at the south-west corner of Baniknagar is Bahadur Bazar.

People

A total of 683 families live in Baniknagar (WeD Census 2004). In absence of any recent statistics, the definite size of population cannot be known. Yet from the number of families, it can be roughly estimated that the size of population is between 3,000 and 4,000. Muslims constitute the majority of the population. The rest are Hindus.

HISTORY

Settlement and Residential Pattern

Most of the families living in Baniknagar now are not local. People from outside have been coming from outside and settling since a long time.

There are four major residential areas in Baniknagar: North Baniknagar, South Baniknagar, Golkuthi and Talpukur. North Baniknagar is the oldest area among these four. Habitation started here more than 100 years ago. The 22 families of North Mushipara are well known and believed to be the oldest inhabitants of this part.

South Baniknagar is inhabited mostly by people of white collar profession, particularly advocates. Almost all the families came from the nearby rural areas and settled hear. The influx of families (mostly of the advocates) from outside started with that of Advocate Rahimuddin who came from Nabaganj, another *thana* (sub-district) of the Dinajpur district. Following his family, quite a few other families of advocates cane and settled in the surrounding areas. This part of Baniknagar was in fact the property of the Zamindars of Gobindapur named Bhabani Kumar Chowdhury and Shishir Kumar Chowdhury. After the partition of India in 1947, and the following abolition of the Zamindary

system, the Zamindars left the area and their properties, and those were bought by those who settled later on.

The Golkuthi area also was the property of the Zamindars. In 1952, the then Pakistan government acquired the land and allotted to 62 (or 64) refugee families coming from India to become citizens of Pakistan after the partition of 1947. Each family was given a plot of 3.5 decimals for living and a space of 4 feet for shop. The area later became known as the Bihari¹ Colony. Now a few hundred families live here most of which are not the original ones who got the allotments at that time. In fact, according to one of the original inhabitants, only 2 of the 62 plots have not been transferred. As a result, the inhabitants of Golkuthi now include some Bangali families as well. During the Zamindary period the South Baniknagar area was also considered to be a part of Golkuthi.

The Talpukur area developed along the canal that runs by the east side of Baniknagar. This part of Baniknagar has developed relatively later than the other parts. Most of the inhabitants here are not the people of Dinajpur and are generally poorer than the people living in other parts of Baniknagar.

Political and Social History

It is important to consider the history of Baniknagar in light of the history of the Dinajpur town as a whole. The history of the town dates back in the Mughal regime when, in absence of private ownership of land, Baniknagar was a part of the kingdom ruled by the feudal lord under the Mughal empire. The situation of Baniknagar and the Dinajpur town as a whole at that time is subject to deeper historical investigation.

The area gradually developed as an urban one, or a *mufassil*, during the regime of East India Company and subsequent reign of the British Raj. Starting from the very end of the Mughal regime and the very early time of Company Rule, several business centres (mainly European ones) grew up at different places of and around the area which is now known as the Dinajpur town. With increasing business activities, population density also increased gradually.

After the transfer of power from the East India Company to the British Raj, the entire India was brought under a unique administrative structure. The whole of Bengal was divided into 6 administrative divisions. Dinajpur was one of those. A District Collectorate was established for collection of taxes from this region.

The British regime also created a zamindary system under which all the land on India was given to *zamindars* (feudal lords) under permanent settlement (Parliament Settlement Act 1793). The lord of Dinajpur, known as the Maharaja of Dinajpur, was one of the greatest among those feudal lords. The family of the Maharaja ruled Dinajpur for more than a century. The Municipality council was headed by the Maharajas until the abolition of the zamindary system in the early 1950s. Under the Maharaja's rule the whole kingdom was divided into estates of smaller *zamindars*.

Under the *mouza* system² developed in the colonial period, Baniknagar was known as Pran Nath Mouza. During the colonial period several establishments emerged at and around this area. Those include the Dinajpur Municipality, the Courts, office of the Deputy Collector (DC), the Jail, Police Line, Dinajpur Zila School, Hospital, several Missions, residences of the high government officials, and the railway station etc. Thus the area of and around Baniknagar took a clear urban shape in the British period.

The above developments had direct influence in forming social classes in Baniknagar. A separate social class consisting of lawyers, teachers, physicians, sports personalities, public servants, printing businessmen, cultural activists and other such people, emerged. Education played a central role. Along with the emergence of this educated middle class, the town based businessmen class gradually became educated. Started cultural activities like stage theatre, music etc. The middle class thus formed became the major social group in Baniknagar by the beginning of the 20th century. Those who

¹ The Biharis are those non-Bangali people who came from India to become citizens of Pakistan after the partition of 1947.

² A system of land administration developed during the British colonial rule in which *mouza* is a unit of land area.

were highly educated got their education mostly in Calcutta although they opted to stay in Dinajpur. (Dhaka emerged as another important centre for education and subsequently for other activities since the 1920s.) The next generation of educated people of Baniknagar became more advanced. But most of those people migrated out and settled either in other parts (mostly Dhaka) in the country or abroad.

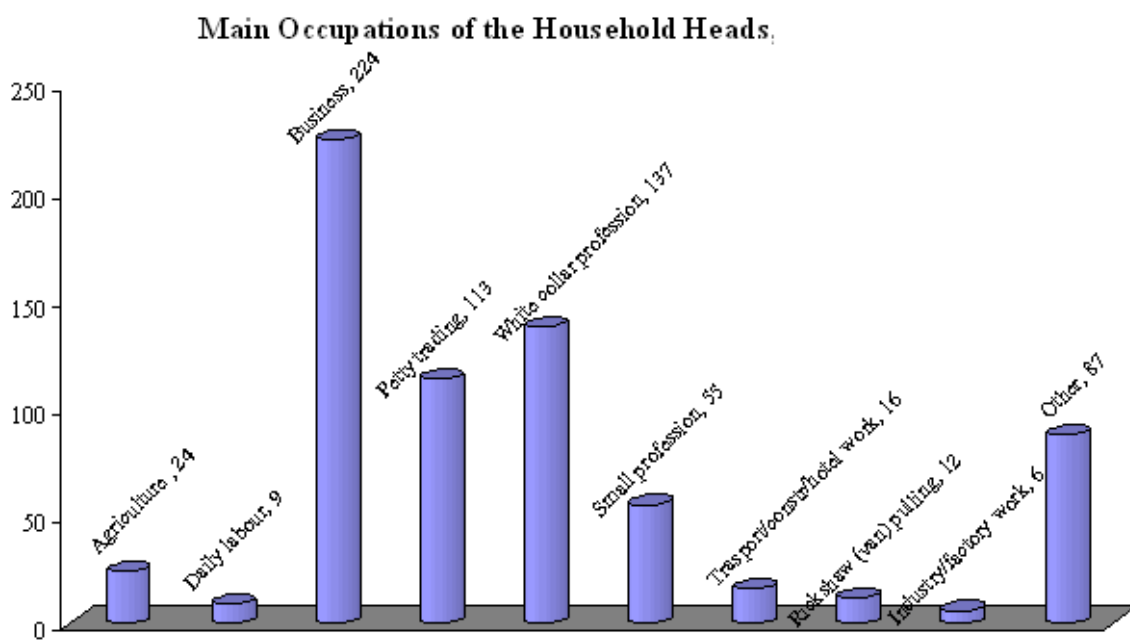
The anti-British movements and other significant political activities in Dinajpur were led by the middle class of Baniknagar mentioned above. Most of these activities were urban based. The partition of India in 1947, the communal conflicts after the partition and abolition of zamindari system in the early 1950s had profound influences on the courses of Dinajpur. Part of Dinajpur (the West Dinajpur) became a part of the independent India and the other part remained in East Pakistan. The partition was immediately followed by a huge outflow of Hindu immigrants to India and a corresponding huge influx of Muslim in-migrants from India most of whom exchanged their properties with the out-goers. Moreover, many families came as refugees (termed as *mohajers*) to become citizens of Pakistan who later on became known as 'Bihari' people. This latter group added to the already residing Urdu-speaking and Hindi-speaking (*marowarhi*) population in other parts of the town. A portion of the 'Bihari' population was given shelters by the Pakistan government in Golkuthi (the south-west corner of the present Baniknagar).

Thus after 1947, Muslim population in Baniknagar clearly increased, and the increase was substantial. Conflicts emerged among the different religious and linguistic communities living in Baniknagar with regard to political movements, nationalist feelings and identities. Between 1947 and 1971 several communal conflicts (riots) took place. During the liberation movement in 1971, the situation became even more complicated and conflicting. Killing of Bangalis by Biharis and the opposite occurred. All these ultimately brought changes in the social structure of the locality. After independence of Bangladesh, the old Dinajpur district was divided into three new districts and thus the administrative importance of the town reduced even further.

II MATERIAL RESOURCES

Occupation and Employment

Business and white collar profession are the two major occupations of the people of Baniknagar. Business (32.8%) including petty trading (16.5%) are the sources of employment for almost half of the total households residing in Baniknagar. Among the white collar professionals are the advocates, the physicians, teachers and officials of several government and non-government offices. Most of the physicians living here are not local, but have been living here for professional reasons. Proportions of households headed by daily labourers, rickshaw (van) pullers, industrial workers, and transport, construction and hotel workers are marginal. However, significant numbers of small professionals reside in Baniknagar. Only 24 families (3.5% of the total) depend on agriculture.



Total number of households: 683

Economic Activities

Huge economic activities are visible in the forms of trade and businesses of different kinds (an exhaustive list of businesses visible in Baniknagar is given in the next page). In fact, most part of the area now looks quite commercial. However, this was not the case even 15 years ago. Before 1990 the Baniknagar was purely a residential area. Apart from the adjacent huge market place named Bahadur Bazar (one of the major market place in the town) there were hardly any shops except only a few book and grocery shops. Even before the partition of 1947, a grocery shop was owned by Buti Babu at the place which has later been named as Buti Babu's Mor (the crossing named after Buti Babu whose building now can be seen as one of the oldest landmarks of the area). Beside Buti Babu's shop, there were another 3 or 4 shops which were not that well-known as the Babu's one. Few book stalls existed in Baniknagar before the Independence in 1971. Shulav Library and Kohinur Library were the oldest ones. Now there are quite a few book stalls along the Darjeeling Road among other types of shops. Hardware shops are perhaps the other category of shops which are among the oldest. Business of bamboo and cane products (initiated by people coming from outside, especially Noakhali) also started before 1971 and still continues.

There was a time when people of Dinajpur (even the town dwellers) were involved mostly in paddy and rice business. Things started to change after the Independence when businesses of construction materials and machineries started. The other major business that developed after Independence is the one of medicine and private clinics. These three businesses in particular flourished quite remarkably later on.

Before 1990, most of the businesses were run by the people coming from outside and settling in Dinajpur for business purposes. But the local people started to involve in business rather recently, particularly after 1990. It is thought that most of the local people do not want to settle outside now-a-days and that's why they start some businesses to secure their position in the locality. New types of businesses also started after 1990. The major category among the new businesses is the one of electronic goods. Quite a significant number of showrooms or shops of electronic goods are seen among the roads of Baniknagar. Businesses of stationeries, photocopying and phone (including mobile) developed quite recently.

List of Businesses/Shops in Baniknagar

Baker's shop	Diagnostic centre	Rod-cement shop
Bamboo and cane products	Hardware shop	Rubber stamps maker
Battery shop	Iron furniture shop	Saloon
Bettle-leaf (<i>pan</i>) and cigarette	Jewellery	Shop of corrugated iron
Bicycle parts shop	Machine parts	Shops of electric goods
Blacksmith's shop	Machine repairing workshop	Showroom of electronic goods
Book binding	Medicine shop (all types)	Stationeries
Book Stall	Motor cycle and tractor sales	Tailoring shop
Cable TV service provider	Paper stall	Tea stall
Coaching centre	Photo framing shop	Telephone calling shop
Computer sales and training	Physician's chamber	Textile shop
Confectionery	Printing press (letter and offset)	VCD sales and renting
Construction materials' shop	Repairing of electronic goods	Wooden furniture shop
Cyber café	Restaurant	
Decorator	Rickshaw repairing/servicing	

Source: Observation by the WeD team.

Major Market Places

Three major market places in the town serve the purposes of economic transactions of the inhabitants of Baniknagar. The largest and the most important one is Bahadur Bazar which is just adjacent to the south-west corner of Baniknagar. It is a market of everything of daily necessities and almost all other commodities. Almost all the households living in Baniknagar procure their daily necessities from this market. Besides, most of the petty traders of Baniknagar have their trades at or around Bahadur Bazar. Many of the businessmen also have their important business interactions centring this market place. For sophisticated consumer products (including electronic goods, ready-made garments, cosmetics, gift items etc), the market is at Ganeshtola situated just a bit farther from the north-west of Baniknagar. And a bit farther from the north-east is the very old market of textile and garments at Maldahpatty. Apart from these three markets, there are other few market places in the town (e.g. Chakbazar, Rail Bazar etc) that the people of Mnshipara go to only occasionally.

Services

Municipality is the major service provider in the town. It provides water, sewerage and immunisation services, the quality and adequacy of which are not appreciated by many inhabitants of Baniknagar. The other services by the Municipality with which people are not generally satisfied include provision of street lights, road repair mosquito control etc. Electricity is provided by the Power Development Board (PDB). The service seems to be okay except billing of electricity charges. Often there are complaints and confusions regarding electricity bills.

III HUMAN RESOURCES

Health

Treatment facility in Dinajpur town is much better than it was. Previously people of Baniknagar had to go to Rangpur or Dhaka for better treatment. After the establishment of Dinajpur Medical College and Hospital better treatment facility and presence of good doctors has increased. People of lower income group usually go to government hospital for treatment. Private treatment is more expensive. Though the number of allopath doctors is higher but homeopath mode of treatment is preferred by many because of good old homeopath doctors such as Dr. A. G. Molla of Lily More or Dr. Munazir of Bahadur Bazar. Considering costs, side effects and trust, homeopath is often chosen over allopath. Moreover people don't trust allopath because of the idea that it is more business and treatment.

There is no particular type of disease which can be said to have greater prevalence in Baniknagar. However, prevalence of respiratory problems (e.g. asthma) amongst is higher due to excessive presence of dust.

Education

Higher educational institutions with good quality are less in number. Thus people have to go to Dhaka for higher education. The public examination results of local schools and colleges are good not because of the teachers but it is for the students themselves. Teachers are not interested for giving adequate teaching in the classes; rather they are busier with private tuition or coaching. For higher education, Dinajpur Government College and Government Women's College are the important ones. Among schools Saint Joseph, Saint Philips, Dinajpur Zila School and the Government Girls School have good reputation. One English medium school is there but that one is viewed to be more commercial and people are less interested in sending their children to that institution.

People of south Baniknagar are more educated than those living in the northern part and other parts of the Dinajpur as a whole. But compared to other districts (e.g. Rangpur), Dinajpur seems to be gradually lagging behind in terms of higher education. Besides, environment for education is deteriorating day by day. Richer peoples' children are becoming more ignorant about others due to the way their parents are educating them. They don't have any connections with mass people of the society.

Skill

Skills are attached to occupational groups. Bookbinding, bamboo and cane works, and gold works are the major skills available in Baniknagar.

IV

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL RESOURCES

Social Groups

Different social groups of Baniknagar have emerged based on settlement, economic class, ethnicity, religion and profession. There is no existent of any *samaj* at this moment. Everyone is living on his/her own. *Samaj* operated social order has perished thirty years ago. Small disputes are resolved by municipality. Social groups like 'Bihari' living in Baniknagar are not from Bihar of India but they are Urdu speaking Muslim 'non-Bangalis'. It is a separate linguistic group. They have come here mostly after the partition of 1947. People from different districts outside Dinajpur are treated as non-local by the locals but they don't constitute any separate social group. Baniknagar inhabitants are mostly Muslims apart from Hindus.

Organisations

Dinajpur Mohila Samitee is one of the oldest locally initiated social organizations. It was established in the early sixties. Every year this Samitee train 100 women on income generating activities. This organization also performs a significant role in activities of dead body wash. Ex-parliament member Hasina is the current president and founder member of the organization. Another leading woman focused organization is Mohila Parishad led by Monwara Sanu, the female ward commissioner. This organization provides legal support for the marginalised women and operate awareness program on abandon violence (physical and mental) against women, dowry, child marriage, birth registration etc.

NGOs like Polly Shree, MBSK, Uddog, Mohila Ainjibi Samiti (women lawyers' association) work on legal aid along with the micro credit and savings program that most of these organisations have. These organizations are working on abandon violence (physical and mental) against women, particularly against rape, acid throwing, women trafficking, dowry, child marriage etc.

Nazimudin Public Library was established in 1947 in Baniknagar. Hemayat Hall and Dinajpur museum are located on its compound. These are among the oldest social institutions in the town.

Civil Society

Civil society is not strong in the Dinajpur town and thereby in Munsipara. Doctors, law professionals (Mohila Ainjibi Samitee and Bar Association) have their professional organizations which are politically bipolarised into the major two political parties of the country. Citizens initiated Nagorik Committee formed with businessman and cultural activists, is also active here.

Leadership

The political or social leadership in Dinajpur town have always come from elite families in Baniknagar. The local political leadership is determined in two different ways in the two major political parties. However, in both the parties, the central command plays strong role in choosing the leaders. The ruling party's minister keeps her presence very visible in the town. She is immensely powerful in deciding anything about the party in Dianjpur. In comparison, main the opposition party does allow some degree of local opinion in deciding about the leadership. As a result, multiple centres of leadership have been emerging within the party. Apart from the ex-MP (Member of Parliament), a few other leaders are also emerging now-a-days who are likely to lead the party in the future. The ex-MP is a resident of Baniknagar.

The Municipality leadership seems to be independent of the influence of the two major political parties. The current Municipality Chairman is from neither of the two parties. However, he is thought to be associated with another party which doesn't have that much prominence in the town as a party. Leadership at the Municipality level depends on personal image rather than political identity. The ruling Chairman appears to be immensely popular because of his honesty, dynamism and interaction with ordinary people. In the Municipality, Baniknagar is represented by the Commissioner elected from the Ward it belongs to. The current Commissioner is from a local political family of Baniknagar. He and his family members have been in this responsibility form quite a few years now.

Among other personalities who have been involved in providing leadership in Baniknagar is the ex-female MP. Her husband, language movement leader Late Aminur Rahman was one of the oldest inhabitants of Baniknagar. He was an advocate like his father who migrated from India 100 years ago. His wife was the parliament member during the late 1970s. She was personally known to the family of Taioba Mojumdar, the mother of the current prime minister and the minister for women and children affairs (also the minister in charge of the Dinajpur district).

Election

Two major elections concern the inhabitants of Baniknagar: the Parliament Election and the Poursava (municipality) Election. Voting in the Parliament Election depends on partisan politics. While most of the local families have political affiliations, the non-locals or settlers, most of who belong to the low income group, determine the result of the election. Wining the support of these voters is often thought to be the major factor behind success of the ruling party here. They have been winning the elections for two times consecutively. Results of the Municipality Election depends more on personal image than on political identity. Elections are usually held peacefully with huge enthusiasm among the voters.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Religion

Overwhelming majority of the population in Baniknagar are Muslims. It has been predominantly a Muslim inhabited area since the British Period. However, after the Partition in 1947, proportion of Hindu population reduced further. However, most of the remaining Hindu families are local. Apart from these two, there is hardly any other religious group living in Baniknagar. Hindus and Muslims observe their religion apparently without any conflicts.

Major Religious Events

Major religious events among the Muslims are the two Eids: Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha. For the Hindus, the major community level festivals are Durga Puja and Basanti Puja. These festivities are observed with huge enthusiasm and participation from all sections of the society. Hindus also observe some other festivals which are mostly household-based or hardly temple-based, e.g. Laxmi Puja, Kali Puja etc.

Life-Cycle Events

Apart from the traditional ceremonies regarding birth, marriage and death, new urban forms of ceremonies centring life-cycle events have emerged. Many families now observe birthdays of their children few of which involve huge festivities. The nature and grandeur of the festivities are subject to the economic position of the respective families. Few families, especially among the economically well-off ones, observe marriage anniversaries quite regularly.

Non-religious Events

Cultural activities and festivities are quite regular in Baniknagar. All the national days (e.g. Victory Day, Independence Day, and Language Movement Day etc) are observed with cultural programmes and with huge participation of people. Lok Bhaban and Dinajpur Insitute (both situated at the north-west corner of Baniknagar) are the major locations where cultural programmes take place. Stage theatre is practiced quite regularly. Among the theatre groups, the Dinajpur Natya Samitee is quite renowned and old. The theatre groups arrange theatre festivals each year. Quite a few community centres and public halls are available in the town for holding programmes of large scales.

Different Honorific Titles

Among the major honorific titles are 'Chowdhury' and 'Khan'. The Chowdhury families are prominent, but most of them are not original inhabitants of Baniknagar. Few Khan families have been involved in political and social activities since long ago.

Status

The definition of status has been changing among the inhabitants of Baniknagar. Money now appears to be the major determiner of status. Factors like education, profession and family background are minor, and those are only added after money with marginal influence. Thus a new pool of elites has been emerging with money as their key source of status and influence.

Women Status

Women are quite visible in the public sphere in Dinajpur town as a whole and Baniknagar in particular. Their active presence is visible in economic activities. They are visible also in cultural activities. Overall attitude towards women have also been changing towards positive direction. Previously, most the elite families did have reservations in allowing women of their families outside. But now only a very few families retain that attitude. Women are increasingly being involved in professional activities. There are now at least 16 advocates practicing in the town, compared to only 2 in 1986. Women are working as teachers, physicians, and nurses etc. The activities of different NGOs have encouraged many women to engage themselves in small income generating activities.

The NGOs seemingly have positive influence on awareness and legal status of women. However, dowry is commonly practiced by almost all. It has become so usual that it is hardly realised that it is illegal.

VI

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Migration and Horizontal Mobility

Migration has profound influence in the shaping the Baniknagar of today. Migration out of Baniknagar and migration in Baniknagar, both have been present significantly since long ago. Quite a few families of Baniknagar have settled permanently in Dhaka and even broad over the last few decades. But even more important has been the influence of in-migration. People from all over the country have come and settled here. Most of these people have settled here after coming for business, profession or other economic purposes. According to the view of the local people, the in-migrants found life in Dinajpur to be quite easy and simple, and that encouraged them to become settled here. Besides, many government officials have brought their relatives here and settled them with the huge *khas* (government owned) land that was available earlier. People still move frequently to and from other parts of the country, particularly Dhaka. The movement of businessmen are more frequent. It has substantially increased after the construction of Jamuna Bridge – the bridge that hugely reduced the time and costs of travelling between Dhaka and the northern part of the country.

Drug Addiction

Drug addiction is something that everybody is concerned with. The prevalence of drug addiction among the young population is threatening. Because of the nearness of the Indian border, many drugs are easily and cheaply available via smuggling. This availability along with some other socio-economic factors is viewed as responsible for the increase in drug addiction. Young people from all the sections of the society are being victims of this trend. However, it is particularly prevalent among young people of the very rich and the poor sections of the society. Among the types of drugs, a type chemical used in cough syrup named phencidyle (popularly known as *dyle*), other cough syrups, and different tablets are relative more prevalent.

Vertical Mobility

Upward and downward mobility among the original Baniknagar inhabitants is insignificant. The poor have remained poor and the rich have remained rich. However, few previously rich people appear to have lost a bit of their economic strength. Most of the settlers have substantially gone up economically. The settlers are, in fact, now the biggest businessmen in the town.

Modes of Transport

Bus and train are used for travelling out of Dinajpur. Bus gained popularity since the construction of Jamuna Bridge. For travelling to and from the nearby rural areas, people use tempoo, rickshaw and rickshaw-van. Tempoo replaced the old bullock cart about a decade ago. For transportation within the town, rickshaw is the mode used most. Motor bikes and bicycles are also quite common.

Traffic Condition

Traffic congestion is seen occasionally. This is largely because of too many rickshaws many of which have no legal license. Besides, for excessive rush after school hours, congestions are created at different locations.

Waste Management

The Municipality is responsible for waste management. It tries to carry out the responsibility, but the quality is not satisfactory mainly because lack of sufficient dustbins.

Pollution

The town as a whole and thereby Baniknagar in particular is generally free of any major pollution. Since not many motorised vehicles ply within the town and since mills and factories are situated outside the town, the air is hardly polluted. But the canal water is very much polluted because of

waste disposal in it. However, it doesn't have huge implications on people life as they do not use this water for any purpose.

Social Environment

Baniknagar appears to have a quite healthy social environment. Communal harmony is remarkable among the different religious and linguistic groups. Incidences of theft and crime are also not very frequent. The overall law and order situation appears to be excellent. People generally feel safe. However, one might sense that the minority groups do at times feel relatively less secured.

Social Interactions

Although social relationships are quite good, social interactions have reduced remarkable as people have now become much busier than ever before. Most of the families now tend to live within their own spheres.

Important Factors Affecting the Life of the People

Drug addiction and other related problems among the young generation is one of the major causes of unhappiness among the inhabitants of Baniknagar. People are anxious how the future leadership from them would emerge. People also view increasing trend of corruption in the administration and terrorism all over the country as matters of big concern.