

## SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS

**NAME** : **Moinuddin Purokait**  
**AGE** : **85**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Hajiratan, Akra Road**  
**DATE** : **14.8.2004 & 9.8.2004**

My father died when I was just 6 years old. I was a student of class three standard at Bartala Madrasa. Due to extreme poverty I had to start working to maintain our family comprising my mother, two younger brothers and two sisters. My mother used to perform hand embroidery on clothes by collecting orders from our neighbours. I also engaged myself in stitching garments since more than 70 years from now. Initially tailors used to stitch half-gown, petticoat, after some time they started to make baba suit, blouse and blouse with hand-embroidery designs upon the sleeves etc.

During 1960s, there were paddy fields in Kankhuli, Badartola localities. A few brick-built *puccabaris* were seen in our area, use of electricity started around 1965.

The first shop of *Marwari* cloth-merchant in Bartola was in 1965-66. A merchant, Omraomal Bachowat came here from the *Pachagali*, Nurmal Lohia Lane, of Burrabazar. First I met him in *Howrahhaat* when they sold *thaan* (the entire pieces) clothes to us. Later I had a friendship with Bachowat. He used to supply *thaans* to me in credits out of faith.

Before 1960, we used to carry *gantri* (bale of stitched clothes) on our shoulders and went upto 28 no's Police Phari of Metiabruz by foot. From 28 No. Phari we used to take buses to reach *Howrahhaat*. In *Howrahhaat* we had no permanent stalls. We sat on footpath for the customers. The average income after selling of those clothes was Rs. 50 per week, if the luck favoured we earned Rs. 100 and in some weeks we had no income at all.

Later I engaged 10 to 12 men in our job, most of them family members. From around 1972 outsiders used to come for stitching work. Initially they came from Uluberia, Bagnan of Howrah District and villages

of South 24 Parganas. Later people came also from Murshidabad. For blouse stitching a group came from Basirhat (North 24 Parganas). They used to collect the *kaam* (jobs after cutting) from us and engaged their wives and daughters for stitching in their own residences.

In the childhood we saw some rich *ustagars*, who managed to collect tender-jobs from British persons and government. Among them were Hasem Mollah of Mollapara, Nurul Haque Mali of Malipara, Qusem Thandar of Thandarpara, Wachel Molla of Santoshpur and Mujibar Rahman of Rajabagan. Rest of the people was poor *darjis*. Items of daily-use were cheap. But the people starved during war and famine.

We used machines of Wilson brand, locally called *Bokmachine*. Later came Singer brand. The big *ustagars* were offered with big machines for tender-jobs from the parties.

**NAME** : **Samsunneher Bibi**  
**AGE** : **84**  
**SEX** : **Female**  
**PLACE** : **Magura Doctorpara, Akra**  
**DATE** : **5.8.2004 & 5.3.2005**

My father was a rich and renowned person of Metiabruz. His name was Md. Hasem Mollah. Everybody respected him as *Satgramer Mollah* (juryman of seven villages). Hasem Mollah lost his father when he was a school student. He had to maintain his family of four younger brothers and two younger sisters. Initially he had to sell vegetables in the neighbourhood. Afterwards he obtained the tender-jobs of coat-pants from his father-in-law Moharaddin Mollah. Later he obtained the tender-jobs of Bengal Waterproof Company. In this way Hasem Mollah accumulated his capital. He became owner of two shops at Chandni Chawk, Kolkata.

He was a Congress politician and had relation with Mahatma Gandhi. His brother Qasem Mollah was a Congress activist. Fajle Ajim Mollah, eldest son of Qasem Molla became an M.L.A. of this locality.

My father Hasem Mollah married thrice. I heard that my father built a big workshop of garment stitching and related activities at the time of my birth. Formerly it was a clay-built house erected by my grandfather Joinuddin Sarkar. Joinuddin was the son of a farmer, Sekh Ahmed Molla.

Hasem Mollah used to manage the whole garment business. My second uncle was a cutter. About two hundred men were involved in different jobs of this business. Presently, a grandson of Hasem Mollah, Aftabuddin, maintained the tradition of this garment business. We had family relation with the great garment business family of Wachel Mollah of Santoshpur.

I have a relation with the family of Dr. Abu Motalib. His third brother Abu Qasim Molla married me after the death of his first wife. Abu Motalib's father Asgar Ali Molla was a traditional tailor. He went to Singapore for the job of stitching garments.

**NAME** : **Sekh Rafiq Ahmed**  
**AGE** : **64**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Jejepara, Akra Road**  
**DATE** : **17.8.2004**

I am a worker of ELMI. My uncle Sekh Shamsul Haque, father of Sekh Jahangir Ahmed, who was a foreman in ELMI at that time, introduced me there. At that time most of our male family members were in services. There were a number of factories in this locality. Now the factory jobs are not available, so our sons of the present generation are involving themselves in *darjishilpa* (garment industry).

In 1940s we saw that the local Bengalee Muslims dislike engaging themselves in the jobs of the factories. Local Hindus used to go to factories as *babu* (clerical jobs). Outsiders from Bihar, U.P., M.P., came here as workers of the factories for hard labour. The trend in our family was an exception.

In Metiabruz High School, there were 80% Hindu students, in spite of the fact that the school was situated in a Muslim populated area.

**NAME** : **Kowsar Ali**  
**AGE** : **75**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Ramdashati, Metiabruz**  
**DATE** : **20.8.2004**

My grandfather was a *dorji* and used to go to Singapore. My father, Abdul Rahaman, was a *dorji*. He died when I was a child of 8 years. We were two brothers and two sisters. I along with my brother went to my *mama's* (maternal uncle's) *dahliz* of Thutorkal. He was attached with Harlalka, a big garment merchant of Burrabazar. After sometime around 1947 I was appointed there as a daily worker for 1 rupee a day. I took training of *kandhselai* (shoulder stitching), *hathselai* (sleeve-stitching) there. Later I was married with the daughter of my *mama* Mayalam Mollah and purchased a Wilson stitching machine for just Rs. 60 from Akra. Then I started my independent business.

Later I went to *Purba* Pakistan for 3 months and afterwards engaged myself with a business of school uniform in Shyambazar (North Kolkata). I continued my work there for 25 years. Now I am a retired *dorji*. My four sons are doing business on local *Jabbarhaat*. They have eight machines in total. Each of the sons works personally in one machine and run the other with an outside *karigar*. They collect orders from Belal Ustagar of Rajabagan and also from some other small *ustagars*.

**NAME** : **Mustafizur Rahaman**  
**AGE** : **40**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Kachisarak, Metiabruz**  
**DATE** : **22.2.2005**

I have a business of machine embroidery upon Guernsey, jeans item and saris. I have a Japanese computerized machine, purchased with a price of 32 lakh, in which designs of 44 different combinations can be done. It is called Multi head embroidery machine, maker JAILUN. In Metiabruz there are about 20 such machines. We collect orders mainly from *Marwari* concerns, which export the items to Dubai. From Dubai the garments were supplied to the Arab countries, South Africa and elsewhere.

The businessmen supply the *thaan* (the entire piece of cloth) to the cutters and tailors. For export items, the designs were imitated from the costly items of famous companies like Disney. Usually we perform the embroidery work on the cut-pieces before stitching. The entire process of production takes one month to complete. The businessmen clear their stock during pujas and festivals in the domestic market.

In Metiabruz, the whole businesses of local *ustagar* were done verbally without any paper work. They have no business documents, licenses or insurance-papers. Credit exchanges are also done without written documents.

My turnover is 60,000 per month approximately. 15% of the turnover is needed for buying threads.

**NAME** : **Sekh Akbar Hossain**  
**AGE** : **70**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Jejepara, Akra Road**  
**DATE** : **17.8.2004**

I retired from my service at ITC (*Cigaretkal*) in 1992. I started my service there as a casual worker and after 4 years became permanent. Before joining ITC I worked in several factories. My father was a *dorji* and worked in Burma and Singapore. But he never became an *ustagar*. Jahangir Ahamed is my cousin and remained in the same premises from the time of my grandfather.

**NAME** : **Sajid Ahmed**  
**AGE** : **32**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Mudially Jelepar, Metiabruz**  
**DATE** : **10.2.2005**

I have completed my graduation in 1993 and then started to make *churidar panjabee* for ladies. My father, a retired teacher, supplied the initial capital.

First of all I collect cloths from Burrabazar or Bartola through cash-purchase. Usually I myself do the cutting-job. If I go outside for cutting, I pay Rs. 2 per piece. Then I send the cut-pieces for embroidery work at the rate of Rs. 30-35 per piece. They bear expenses for threads. The cost of *paka suto* is Rs. 32-35 per cone (bundle) and *kacha suto* Rs. 15-16 per cone. *Paka* means the color is permanent. After embroidery I also do stitch-work personally. Occasionally I go outside for stitching of the jobs; the rate is Rs. 10-12 per piece. Then we pack the garments in paper-boxes. For quality products, we pack *churidars* with pant and *orna* (scarf) in a single box. Ordinary items are packed in half a dozen in a single box. Quality products are sold for Rs. 200 per piece. Ordinary 6 pieces are sold for Rs. 900. The *churidars* are made in different sizes, numbered viz., 32, 34 and 36. Usually in a week we prepare 10 dozens of *churidars*.

*Thaan Kapad* was supplied from mills of Ahmedabad, Gujarat and Surat. We sell the *churidars* in *Jabbarhaat* in Sundays. Usually customers come from Delhi, Chennai, and Bihar for village markets.



**NAME** : **Akhtar Hossain**  
**AGE** : **67**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Hajiratan, Akra Road**  
**DATE** : **3.4.2005**

At the age of 4-5 I started staying to my maternal uncle's house at Thandarpara. In 1940s I saw them in farming activity. Formerly we were at Santoshpur for the last seven generations. It was a peasant community. They started tailoring activity besides agriculture for the last 250 years. Clothes were sewn by hand. Later the sahebs brought Wilson machine in Bartola. It was an American brand and was introduced here something before 1900. Many people gathered in Bartala to see the machine. Agricultural lands were in Panchur, Fatak and Khaldhari. Tailoring was a good occupation for earning money, so people inclined to this occupation.

My grandfather was a tailor of ordered items. He used to collect orders from aristocrat families of Kolkata, like Tagore family. Later my father started readymade ladies items by taking bulk orders from *Marwari* traders. We got a tender order in 1947. In 2<sup>nd</sup> World War also we managed to get war contracts from ordnance factory at Hide Road. After independence we got railway orders.

I became a teacher of Bartola High School in 1976. We took the initiative to establish a girl's school in our locality after the riot of 1964. The initiative was succeeded after some initial resistance from local Muslim community in 1966.

**NAME** : **Sultan Ahmed**  
**AGE** : **68**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Mudially Jelepara, Metiabruz**  
**DATE** : **13.1.2005**

My forefathers stayed at Govindapur. When Fort William was built the place was vacated and they came to Sonai. My grandfather was Helaluddin Saudagar. He used to travel Somalia, Java, Tibet, and Africa and supplied feathers of peacock and other birds from here. My father was a student of a renowned madrasa at Rayberrily. He used to educate students from Jessore, Khulna, Maimansingh, and Chitagang free of cost. My uncle was a student of Presidency College of Kolkata. Later he went to *Purba* Pakistan after partition and became a food minister during Tikka Khan regime. I was a teacher of Mudially School.

**NAME** : **Md. Zakiruddin Fakir**  
**AGE** : **40**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Bartala, Akra Road**  
**DATE** : **13.3.2005**

Our forefather lived in Badartala Fakirpara. Traditionally they used to look after, as *Sebayet*, the *mazar* of Badarpir. Seven generations ago there was a conflict between Sayum Fakir & Kayum Fakir, two brothers. Kayum Fakir came to Padirhatty. He was a tailor of gowns. His son was Abdul Latif Fakir. Abdul Latif had three sons Jainul Abedin, Qasem Ali and Mohiuddin. Jainul Abedin had three sons Alauddin Fakir, Alamgir Fakir and Jahangir Fakir. They are among the topmost *ustagars* of this locality. In 1968 during my father's era, his family business was broken apart. My father had a shop Ajanta Tailors in Burrabazar. He himself was a designer and cutter.

I have a business of cloth trading along with the *Ustagari*. I purchase export quality Korean and Chinese clothes from *Marwari* traders. I manufacture jean items and shorts (*barmuda*) partly in my own house and partly by contract to other *dahlizs*. Hindu women from poor families work in my *dahaliz* for wages of Rs. fifty-sixty per day.

In Padirhatty there was cultivation of paddy and jute upto 1965-68. Later CMDA acquired the lands. A new business can be started with 4 to 5 machines with Rs. 5 lakh capital. The business is done 25% from *Howrahhaat* and 75% from *Metiabruz*.

**NAME** : **Pradip Jana**  
**AGE** : **35**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Alampore, Ramdashati**  
**DATE** : **14.2.2005**

I was failed in class seven and came to Barasat from our native village in Midnapore. First of all I worked in a brickfield as a cook of its manager. Later I joined textile units Poddar Projects in this locality by offering bribe to an agent. The mill was locked out frequently. So I engaged myself in tailoring work side by side with the mill's job. I married in 1986 and purchased a small Merit machine with Rs. 700. Later I purchased a big machine. My wife also learnt the stitching jobs. I stitch children pants and Guernsey sets of 0 to 20-34 sizes. I was paid Rs. 22 to 24 per dozens of these sets. The cost of threads is mine. My two children also help us in after-stitching light-jobs. If anybody hires a *Chutley* (boy) for these light-jobs, he is paid usually Rs. 100 per week.

My *ustagar* Sekh Enaet Ali lives in Biswaspara adjacent to our residence. He is doing this business for last 20 years. Formerly he kept outside *dorjis* in his own *dahliz*. Now he has engaged 5 to 6 independent *dorjis* like us, who worked in piece-rate system. Enaet himself is also a cutter. He has a special relation with me. We both help money to one another if it is needed.

**NAME** : **Akina Mondal, Fatema Mondal**  
**AGE** : **28, 25**  
**SEX** : **Female**  
**PLACE** : **Ramdashati**  
**DATE** : **10.3.2005**

Our father died in our childhood. My mother took the work of maidservant in our neighbourhood. We, two daughters started to work in sewing machines 10 years ago. Our elder brother works in Poddar Mill, now under lockout from 1997.

We stitch pants for *ustagar* Sekh Enaet Ali. He pays Rs. 20 per dozen. We stitch 9 dozens in 3 days. We buy threads of Rs. 75 for a month's work. For maintaining two machines we pay Rs. 400 every year. We together earn Rs. 1000 per month. For this work we have to work for seven days without any rest day in a week.

**NAME** : **Anup Majumdar**  
**AGE** : **50**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **KMC Office, Garden Reach**  
**DATE** : **16.11.2004**

In 1993-94 an *ustagar* required Rs.10 for getting a license. But later the fees increased. The trend among Bengalee *ustagars* for licensing was decreased. The rate of license-holders is more among Urdu-speaking kite-makers. In the year 2002 pressures were built up from KMC's License Department. But the Municipal staff faced awkward position for canvassing in *dorjipara*. In total there are 3000 license-holders among the *ustagars*. It is 30 to 40% of the total *ustagars*.

**NAME** : **Abdul Khabir Gaji**  
**AGE** : **56**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Satghara, Bartola**  
**DATE** : **3.9.2004**

In 1975 I started my job as a tax advocate in this locality. Before 1975 there was some twenty to twenty-five tax files for the business of this locality. Now there are about three to four thousand tax files of local *ustagars*. Most of those files are just to keep a record. Many *ustagars* pay income tax for taking advantages for getting bank-loans etc. There are ups and downs in this business all the time. IT file-holders are about one thousand families of Maheshtala-Metiabruz. One business holds sometimes more than one file. Some business are family enterprise, some are of individuals. Big *ustagars* have an average annual turnover of 5 crores rupees. Sometimes a family of three to five brothers made a turnover of three to four crores. Average turnover of IT payers is Rs. ten to twenty lakh over the year. In South Twenty-four Parganas, among Kolkata 18, 24, 44, 66 Postal Areas, including two Municipal wards, there are about twelve to fourteen thousand IT files. It includes three to four thousand garment industries.

**NAME** : **Rajib Das**  
**AGE** : **30**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Ramdashati**  
**DATE** : **18.2.2005**

I am a newcomer in this business of threads. We have 5 to 6 kinds of threads, viz., embroidery, interlock, stitching, nylon, etc. There are also two types such as, ordinary (*kachha*) and fast colour (*pacca*) threads. Threads are supplied from outside and there are also local-makers in Metiabruz. We buy from the wholesalers. In this locality there are some *jogare karbar* (business of materials other *thaan* clothes) of threads, buttons, chains and clothes for pockets. It requires 2 to 2.5 lakhs rupees to start a *jogare karbar*. But business of threads can be started with 5 to 10 thousand capitals.



**NAME** : **Tapan Deb**  
**AGE** : **40**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Ramdashati**  
**DATE** : **30.12.2004**

I started the business of old pants from 1985. The full pants are supplied from America and European countries. The users there left those pants after using for a short period, because ironing cost is much in those countries. Those pants are loaded in ships and sent to Bombay. From Bombay pants are sent to Kolkata.

We cut those pants for children's use. After cutting in our houses, printing is done in silk-screen units of Padirhatty, Santoshpur and other places. After printing, the jobs of stitching and packing of 6 pieces in a bundle are done by *dorjis*. Cutting is Rs.4 per dozen, printing Rs.5 and stitching Rs.8 per dozen. If *dorjis* stitch in *ustagars* house the rate becomes Rs.5 per dozen.

I sell the pants in Howrah *Samabayikahaat* in Tuesday. The cost is Rs.36 to 120 per dozen for sizes vary from 10 to 17 inches. Customers from Samastipur, Patna, Hajipur, Gaya, Bihar, Assam, Madras, Nagpur and Delhi used to come here for purchasing these pants.

I avoid *Jabbarhaat* in Metiabruz, because customers deduct a *baaj* of 10% from the manufacturers. The business was better in the past. But the new pants also become cheaper than before. So the business of old pants is declining.

**NAME** : **Shamim Anawar**  
**AGE** : **56**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Chandni Chawk, Kolkata**  
**DATE** : **8.3.2005**

In 1856 Nawab Wazed Ali Shah came to Metiabruz from Lukhnow. He was a secular person and had many literary qualities. In Metibruz he established Shahimahal, Begummahal, Imambaras, Masjids, Cemeteries, Zoo and a number of buildings. A large number of followers came with the Nawab. It was heard that he married 365 women. He introduced a new cultural life in Metiabruz.

Later during the period of industrialization since the later half of 19th century many Urdu-speaking people came for the jobs in factories. There was Ispahani Jute Mill, Clive Jute Mill, CIWTC, Keshoram Cotton Mill and other factories in Metiabruz.

Nawab had his own *panwala*, *Khansama*, Palanquin-bearers etc, which also influenced the traditional culture of Metiabruz.

**NAME** : **Kali Bhandari, Chairman of Maheshtola Municipality**  
**AGE** : **55**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Maheshtola**  
**DATE** : **21.2.2005**

My father Sudhir Bhandari was elected as MLA from Maheshtola in the year 1952 by defeating the so long winning candidate from Congress. In 1952 Mujaffar Ahmed of Communist Party came here for election work. He was the first man who raised the issue for organizing *dorjis*. In 1953 he personally started working amongst the *dorji* community with Abul Bashar. In 1955 West Bengal Tailors Union was formed. In 1957 there was a big rally from Maheshtola Dakghar Post Office. I also joined the rally. I was 9-10 years old at that time.

Initially organization was built up in Chatta, Maheshtola, Kankhuly regions, not so much in Bartola. There was a role of *ustagars* like Akbar Ali Thandar and others. At that time *dorjis* were very poor like peasants, who used to work for three months only and for nine months of the year they had no work. Later the class position of *dorjis* was changed. After Left Front came to power *dorjis* became *petty ustagars*.

In the past *dorji* union demanded for tender-jobs. Usually *Marwari* community captured the govt. orders of Railway and Police.

**NAME** : **Mursalin Molla, MLA of Maheshtola**  
**AGE** : **56**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Akra**  
**DATE** : **29.9.2004**

I was involved with WBTU in 1967. The union was established in 1955. During the period of undivided Communist Party Md. Ilyas was its President and Abul Bashar was its Secretary. Abul Bashar later became the President and Md. Ismail the Secretary. Abul Bashar held the presidentship upto his death on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2002. Now I am the Secretary.

The first conference of the union was held at Bankra of Howrah in 1955. At that time *dorjis* were poor. They made a big rally of 15 thousands to the Govt. of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy. They achieved a demand of Rs. 100 as artisan loan.

In 1991, this *dorjishilpa* became an open sector like all other sectors of industries. In this industry as well as in the union there remained the *Udyogkarta* (entrepreneur) and *Karigar* (craftsman) both. Both of them have a traditional knowledge. Without this knowledge they can never be an *ustagar*, in spite of their capital.

In West Bengal today *dorjis* are six lakh in number, out of which three lakh in Metiabruz-Maheshtola. In Maheshtola among 3.5 lakh population 40% is associated with *dorjishilpa*. In Metiabruz the Bengalees (Musalmaan) are 100% with this industry.

In 1955 there was mere 20% *ustagars*, the rest 80% were *dorji-shramik*, who had their labour power. But they had no means of production, like machine, scissors etc. Upto 1970s these *ustagars* were mostly small, comprising about 80% of the total *ustagars*. After land reform in West Bengal, the demands for cheap garments were enhanced in the village markets. Nowadays 70% became middle or *petty ustagars*, 10% big, 10% small and rest 10% local *dorji-shramik*. But there are a huge number of outsiders joined in this business.

Before independence people came from Burma, Singapore to purchase garments from here. There was a market of Eastern India of Assam, Bihar etc. after 1947. But later the skilled *karigars* were hired to

Bombay, Gaziabad and Karnataka with good payments for garment making and competition was started.

The industry is divided into segments of items, like pant, coat in Chatta, Maheshtola, Akra; shirts, punjabee in Magura, Santoshpur; ladies frocks in Metiabruz Bartola. Actually the work performed here in a *parampara* (tradition).

**NAME** : **Mamtaz Begum (Councilor, Ward no.140) with Rajab Ali Molla and others of Ward No. 140**  
**SEX** : **Female**  
**PLACE** : **Satghara, Bartola**  
**DATE** : **29.3.2005**

In ward no.140, there are 70 to 75 thousand residents. Among this population about 40 thousand are local people and the rest are an outsider associated mainly with garment industry. About three thousand are Urdu-speaking, who are *Kasai* (slaughter) by occupation and the rest of the people are engaged mainly with garment making.

In the past people used to go to Howrah and Burrabazar for raw materials and other business purpose. Now after establishment of *JabbarHaat* in our locality, many common people started independent business with 3 to 4 thousand rupees capital and usually earn 4 to 5 hundred rupees per week. The number of such *petty ustagars* is about 5000 in this ward. They are not truly *ustagars*, but work for stitching contract collected from real *ustagars* numbering about 500 in this ward. They also employ outsiders. Big *ustagars* are about 10 in this ward.

Due to competition from new comers, who make duplicates of items of big *ustagars* and start business with small capital. The common people became poorer due to stiff competitions. Small businessmen suffer most due to hazards of Trade License, taxes. Customer also started to defer current payments for the purchase of garments. They give a *rukka*, a kind of note for deferred payment, to the *ustagars* in *haats*. During cash payment they also deduct some percentage from the cost of purchase called *baaj*.

West Bengal Minority Development & Financial Corporation give big loans against guarantors from Govt. servants. Without guarantor WBMDFC grant small cluster loan of about Rs. 25000, which is not enough for starting a business.

Urdu-speaking neighbours also started embroidery work. Bengalee *karigar* are lagging behind. We are lagging in garment business due to breaking of family bondage. We are losing for competition among ourselves within our families.

**NAME** : **Aftab Ahmed**  
**AGE** : **50**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Behalapara, Haji Ratan**  
**DATE** : **8.4.2005**

Traditionally I engaged myself with this business from my school days. My grandfather Hasem Mollah had a contract with the Bengalee concern Duckback. Everyday we used to send 3 to 4 cutters to the Panihatty (North 24 PGS) factory of Duckback and returned with the cut-pieces, which we stitched in the next day. It was a job of waterproof items. At that time Nurul Haque Mali and some other *ustagars* were engaged with Duckback. My father got sub-contract of Railways, Port Commissioners and other office orders by tender. It continued upto 1970s.

In 1975 I personally started stitching work of the export orders of Magnum Enterprise. They had 20 to 25 sub-contractors in Kolkata for the stitching work. Magnum did the ironing and packaging jobs in their own factory and sent their products by ship or by air to various European countries. They had their local office in Camac Street, Kolkata and the head office in London. They supplied raw materials and diagrams to us. They used 100% cotton cloths of South Indian Mills. In 1984, 40 ironmen of their factory started a movement and the factory became lockout.

They shifted to Madras and offered me to go with them. I, along with 25 *karigars* went to Madras and worked there for one and a half-year. Afterwards they also returned to New Alipore and open Kiran Export. Its new factory was built in Gopalpur of Maheshtola. I worked with them upto 1997.

Now I am doing business independently. I purchase raw materials from Burrabazar and do the designing and finishing in my new workshop in Behalapara.

Presently Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore, Chennai are much advanced in export garment business. In West Bengal, we have no exclusive zones of this export business like Okhla, Gandhinagar of Delhi. We have no expertise in the technical matters for exporting. State Govt. in other provinces, like Chennai; take a role for making communications between buyers and exporters. They also render financial help to the exporters for buying

modern machines, raw materials. These are absent in Metiabruz. A few *ustagars* are doing export jobs by sub-contracts from *Marwari* traders.

We are also facing competition with the businessmen of other provinces for the domestic market. Our future is not so bright. So big *ustagars* are inclining themselves to other business and real estate business.



**NAME** : **Dr. Q.H. Hannan**  
**AGE** : **73**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Kachisarak, Metiabruz**  
**DATE** : **10.4.2005**

I came in Metiabruz from Murshidabad in 1954. First of all I was a teacher of Metiabruz High School. I passed MBBS in 1959 and started practicing here. When I came here, there was no electricity, but people used to operate Wilson stitching machines from morning to sunset. After sunset they relaxed. On Tuesday they used to go to *haat* for selling the garments stitched for the last five days. On Wednesday *ustagars* used to pay *dorjis*. There was a rush of patients in our chambers in Wednesdays and Thursdays.

In 1964 there was a sudden strike in garment industry. For seven days the whole business became deadlock. Afterwards, *dorjis* came to *ustagars* and appealed for jobs due to starvation of their families. It was a watershed for this industry. The whole system changed. The piece-rate system was introduced in a big way from that time replacing daily-rated system. The working hours also changed. *Dorjis* started working from 6 A.M. to 10 P.M. for their earnings. Outside labourers from Medinipur, Murshidabad and other districts started to come for jobs. They joined in groups in different *dahlizs*. Local labourers were faced with competition. Polarization of traders and labourers was enhanced.

In 1970s local *ustagars* faced a challenge from the products of Bombay. But they went to Bombay and collected designs from there, copied these designs for their own products and sold the same in cheaper rates. In the meantime in 1980s *Jabbarhaat* was built here. Metiabruz started to compete with Bombay directly for capturing Indian domestic market. In export line Bombay, Delhi, Ahmedabad defeated Metiabruz.

**NAME** : **Sekh Nur Hossain**  
**AGE** : **72**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Noapara, Akra**  
**DATE** : **18.3.2005**

My father was a worker of Bata Shoe Company. I had to start tailoring work at the age of 8 due to sudden death of my father. My brother and I went to the *dahliz* of Amir Hazi and after our training period we used to earn 4 to 5 rupees for our labour for a week. We stitched shirts by hand. *Ustagar's* name was Amir Ali Khan. After going to Mecca for Haj he became Amir Hazi. He used to supply the orders of *Marwaris* in *Howrahhaat*.

Before 1960s, the labour process was two *hathwalas* (who work by hand) with one *kolwala* (machine man). We *hathwalas* were paid double rate, and *kolwalas* single. Later the work of *hathwalas* became obsolete and thus abandoned. From 1970s, when Vinar, Raymonds and other companies started export work, the total work of *kolwala* for a complete shirt was broken into part jobs of collar, sleeves, pockets, front portion for separate stitching.

In 1959, the *ustagars* declared to reduce the rate of payment of *dorjis* unilaterally. *Dorjis* started an indefinite strike under the leadership of Islamuddin Laskar of Panikal (Dhoapara) of Metiabruz. Another leader Sushil Mukhopadhyaya, an employee of Anandabazar Patrika, also came to organize the strike. *Dorjis* from Chatta (Maheshtola), Budge Budge, Akra all joined in the strike. It continued for 6 to 8 months. *Ustagars* also started meetings to break the strike. All the strikers made a rally upto Assembly House in Dharmatola. Later a settlement was made and 4 annas for a rupee earning of the *dorjis* was enhanced. *Ustagars* also compelled to give an Idd Bonus to the *dorjis*. In 1960, the strikers were assembled in a union named *Sadharantantri Dorji Sangha* and a membership was fixed for the cardholders.

The export jobs were started after the strike. Outsiders also started to come for tailoring jobs. *Hathwala* system was abandoned. Formerly women in the *mahallas* stitched the buttonholes, hemming etc. by their hands. Later came the interlocking system by machines.

In the 1960s, we got a loan of Rs. 9000 by installment from Panchayat and B.D.O. office for independent business. But the capital was lost by small *ustagars*. They started to collect capital by mortgaging their lands, gold ornaments etc. 20% of them became big *ustagars* and 80% remained small *petty ustagars* or tailors. Formerly local *dorjis* used to go to *ustagar's dahliz* for work. Now most of them work in their own house. Women have also started machine-work for shirts, punjabees.

**NAME** : **Md. Moktar Hossain Molla**  
**AGE** : **68**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Panchpara Road, Rajabagan**  
**DATE** : **16.1.2005**

From our family deeds it revealed that in 1190 Bangabda (about 220 years ago) a man Kinu Fakir came to Akra. Later his son Sekh Eoaji sold a piece of land in Dhopapara, village Domdoma, Pargana Magura, Thana Sadar in South Twenty-four Parganas, from a Hindu landlord Narendra Nath Basu. Kinu Fakir lived in a place adjacent to Fort William. I am seventh generation of Kinu Fakir. British later built Fort William in that place of bushes and bamboo's. Kinu Fakir used to stitch clothes and also knew exorcism to clean evil spirits. After coming to Metiabruz my forefathers voluntarily worked for the Masjids and were offered Mollah title.

In Fort William there was a village peasant economy. When my forefathers came to Akra, they became *dorjis*. At that time, about two hundred years ago, local people used *Nima, Geje, Dhoti, Chadar, and Fatua* as their garments. Stitched garments were used by the British *memsahabs* (ladies). First of all stitching was done with the needles in hand. British introduced sewing machines of Wilson and Singer brands.

My father was in Pinang of Malay before his marriage. After marriage he stayed here and started to collect orders of gowns from the *memsahabs*. It was the practice of garment-making upto 1950-1955. Readymade was introduced later. First came readymade blouses, which were sold in dozens from *Manglahat* of Howrah. Later total ladies and children items were introduced in readymade business.

A relative of mine Mohit Mollah managed orders from Hall & Anderson and became rich. There were big merchant-houses in Park-Street, New Market of Esplanade who used to supply orders to the *dorjis* of Metiabruz.

I personally started order jobs from aristocrat Bengalee houses after passing class nine and took responsibility for maintaining our family, as my father became sick. The rate at that time for the orders was Rs. 24 for 12 shirts. We used to take orders for the whole family. There were 5 to 6 ladies in a family. If we could get orders of 12 blouses of *chemises* for each lady, it

would enough for us. At present the work for order-jobs is not in a good position. My sons are doing readymade business of ladies items. Bartola, Rajabagan and Badartola are places of ladies items; Santoshpur, Badamtola for pant, shirts and punjabees.

**NAME** : **Sekh Jahangir Ahamed**  
**AGE** : **59**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Akra Road**  
**DATE** : **17.6.2004 & 15.11.2004**

My great grand grandfather was Sital Sekh. From the land deeds at our disposal it seems they were previously Hindus and were converted to Musalmaans during that period. The time was more than 150 years from now. From the deeds it was found that our ancestors purchased the land in Jelepara from a *zamidar* (landlord) Bipin Bihari Das. My *nana* (maternal grandfather) came from a place, adjacent to the river, named Sonai. Due to industrialization and development of Calcutta Port the Sonai area was engulfed into present Hide Road industrial belt the Bengalee population was displaced. Now there is a different Bihari population in Sonai. Nana Abu Bakar and his brothers with their families came to Kanthalberia, Akra Road. Nana was married to Burmese girl at Satghara. Abu Bakar and his sons were tailors of ladies items and went to Burma. One of my maternal uncles stayed and worked as a *dorji* in Burma for 30 years. One of my relatives stayed in Rangoon of Singapore and died there.

My great grandfather started a business of fish's side by side his tailoring occupation. My father also engaged himself in this business; later became a worker of the lamp factory (*battikal*). In the year 1963 I started readymade garment business by collecting capital from my father. I myself became a cutter and stitched babasuits by three to four *Karigars*. They stayed here for months and were paid Rs. three to four for daily work along with foods. After sometime pieces rate system was introduced. There was a system of no work no pay. It was a twelve hours work for a day. They stitched three to four dozens babasuits (boys shirt and pant set). For fixing hooks, buttons etc., I engaged some women who were paid four to eight annas for a dozen pieces. Women came from the families of workers of Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Keshoram Cotton Mills. There were also Hindu women in the jobs. They earned 20 to 30 rupees per week.

Later I became a teacher in the primary section of Metiabruz High School and stopped the tailoring business.

**NAME** : **Shaokat Ali Molla**  
**AGE** : **80**  
**SEX** : **Male**  
**PLACE** : **Chatta Kalikapara, Maheshtola**  
**DATE** : **31.10.2004 & 26.12.2004**

I engaged myself in *dorji* (tailoring) profession when I was just 14 years old. Before 1947 we used to stitch coats. Traditionally, as I saw, my grandfather and grand grandfather used to stitch *choupat*, a cross-shaped piece of clothe for playing game with *cowries*. Initially women sewed *chowpats* domestically by their hands. Later came the sewing machine of Wilson brand. Later I saw in my childhood the making of coats. The orders came from some wholesalers named Habibullah and Safiullah. They used to supply the coats stitched by our tailors to Jessore Bagura Kusthia Rajshahi Bagerhaat of undivided Bengal and also to Tinsukia, Kachar and Silchar of Assam. After independence, when the orders from East Bengal stopped making of items like pants, shirts were started. In the 1970s the stretchlawn cloths were supplied from Bangladesh. Lastly in the 1980s the stitching of jeans items was started.

In Chatta the business of Subid Ali Mollah was prospered most. He was given Khan Bahadur title by the then British Government. Initially capital accumulation for this garment industry was done from the surplus gathered from agricultural work. Tailoring was an occupation of the peasants of village community. Later after 2<sup>nd</sup> World War it became an independent occupation of the Muslim population of this locality.

Before independence in 1940s I personally worked for making coats. Three types of coats were stitched at that time: Cape Collar, Sporting Collar and Closed Neck. The design forma were made by *ustagars*. A cutter or *matji* used to work from 6.30-7.00 in the morning to sunset in the evening. He used to cut about 100 coats in a day and was paid a rupee or five *siccas* for the work. The stitching was done by *kolwala* (machine man) with the help of three to four *hathwalas* (helpers). A *kolwala* was paid Rs. three to thirteen *siccas* for a week. *Hathwalas* were paid less than *kolwalas* and for a complete making of coat; the total labour cost was three *annas*. When pant stitching was started, *kolwala* was paid three *annas*, fourteen *paisas* or four *annas*. *Hathwalsa* were paid four to five *paisas* per pant. These were the rates of payment before 1947.

A small *ustagar* used to start his business with a meager two hundred rupees at that time. They were helped for *ustagari* by the *Marwari mahajan* (creditor).

Initially the center of business was *Howrahhaat*. Later on, since 1970s Metiabruz became a business place and since 1980s the centre of readymade garment business was shifted to Bartola of Metiabruz. It helped to develop the entry of a wide layer of small petty *ustagars* in this industry. Traditionally women in the families acted as mere helping hands. But when jeans were introduced, women started to work for the fading of jeans items by acid-wash since the last fifteen years.