

SEASONAL MIGRATION
A Case Study from West Bengal

Narayan Banerjee
Lokenath Ray

Centre for Women's Development Studies
B-43, Panchsheel Enclave
New Delhi-110017

REPORT PREPARATION

**Narayan Banerjee
Lokenath Ray**

FIELD INVESTIGATION

**Narayan Banerjee
Lokenath Ray
Sidhartha Mukherjee
Pulak Gupta**

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PREFACE

Upto the completion of my school education in the late '50s I lived in a village in Bardhaman. I noticed many Santhal men, women and children visiting our village twice a year regularly to undertake agricultural work. It never appeared strange to me then in anyway.

In the meantime, I migrated to Calcutta and then to New Delhi, and forgot all about the Santhal's migration to my village every year. But fate decided otherwise and I was destined to meet them at their homes in Bankura in the early '80s. The initial introduction revealed that the migration was still continuing, and many Santhal women were better informed about my village and home than me. They helped me to revive my childhood memories about them and the phenomenon of seasonal migration.

For next 8 years these women made me work for them in their homes. In the 9th year (1990) four of us decided to migrate with a few of them to the neighbourhood of my village - once during the sowing and next during the harvesting season. These women came back with some money and rice. We came back with our field notes to produce this case study.

We are certain that we shall not be saying anything new. While writing the report we noticed several gaps in our data but in order to meet the dead line of sponsored study we could not manage a repeat visit to the field. Previous commitments and regular routine activities of office broke the continuity of thoughts and ideas. In the end we are left with the feeling that we have failed to make full justice to the ungrudging cooperation of many individuals, men and women, whose accounts we were to write.

The case study has attempted to focus on various dimensions of the migration process with a historical perspective. It has also at every step tried to articulate the nature of women's involvement in the process. At no stage we have tried any theoretical formulation on various traits of the migration process. We have endeavoured to present the field study materials in raw form to conform to the format of a case study. We admit that this has made this report less scholarly. We, however, draw our own satisfaction to the fact that we have been able to maintain our understanding

close to the grassroots to comprehend the links of various factors and reproduce the same as objectively as possible. Because we believe that a greater objective of this case study will be served through articulation of the possible areas of intervention at policy level and by grassroot level socio-political structures.

In order to do so we are beholden to a large number of people difficult to thank individually. Nonetheless we must first of all thank the seasonal migrants, men and women, with whom we spoke at their own homes and at their work places, at times, at odd hours and places. We thank the farmers, political leaders, and several government officials for expressing their views on a subject they have never been questioned before. I thank my colleagues S/Shri Lokenath Ray, Siddhartha Mukherjee and Pulak Gupta in carrying out the field work with me. I must thank Shri Rabi Das for his resourcefulness to offer us food and innumerable cups of tea when we used to return hungry and exhausted.

I am indebted to the faculty members of CWDS for keeping a constant pressure on me to complete this draft report. I am thankful to Swapna particularly and to Ravinder and Nandan for typing the report.

Centre for Women's Development Studies
New Delhi
September, 1991

Narayan Banerjee

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Introduction

The present case study by the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) is belated on one hand and incomplete on the other. It is belated in the sense that we could undertake the study in a somewhat systematic manner eight years after we had felt the need. It is incomplete because the foregoing presentation can not be described as the last word on an ongoing phenomenon which has been under the influence of a multitude of factors over a long period of time.

Back in 1980, when a representative from the CWDS visited Bankura to attend a rural camp of women agricultural labourers organised by Government of West Bengal she repeatedly came across the word Namal Jaoa mentioned by these women. As it happened, CWDS finally started to work with the same class of women thereafter to implement a programme of employment generation through women's own organisation.¹ In course of this association, the word was repeated countless times by hundreds of men and women. In other areas of the same and the neighbouring district we came across a synonymous term called Pube Jaoa.

Subsequently, we noticed that although the word was mentioned freely an overtone of misery underneath could be sensed. It was apparent that certain amount of anxiety, sadness, and helplessness was intimately associated with the word. Some of these had been revealed during the camp by the participating women.² In course of our action project, we started enquiring further about the phenomenon in private discussions.³ We found a general consensus on certain issues. For instance, neglect of children's health and education due to repeated treks every year was emphasized as the direct consequence of seasonal migration or Pub Khatali (work in the east). Deteriorating health of family members and especially of women who were doubly burdened with work, low life expectancy of women, child mortality and abortion etc. were regarded as other consequences. Unstable family life due to change of residence three to four times a year, increase in bigamy, divorce/ desertion, indignity suffered by women at workplace as well as during travel, discontinuity in asset management such as livestock, house, backyard gardens etc., fragmented and ad-hoc approach to social development of family on account of temporary displacements, and low, uncertain and irregular income, vicious cycle of indebtedness etc. were other direct consequences of seasonal migration. During a study⁴ conducted in 1987-88, more details about the phenomenon came to light and the life histories of several women who went on Namal showed that the strategy adopted by poor households to fight deprivation at the survival level had its other social costs. All these nudged us on to undertake the present case study. In other words, the subject under study was not totally new or unknown to us.

The words Namal Jaoa and Pube Jaoa mean one and the same thing - i.e. a regular and periodic movement of population towards a particular direction to find work. Whereas the literal meaning of Namal Jaoa is to go to the eastern low plains, Pube Jaoa simply means going eastward - both describing the phenomenon of seasonal migration from the districts of Bankura, Puruliya and Medinipur to the alluvial plains of Bardhaman and Hugli districts. Since the topography of the area from where seasonal migration originates is characterized by undulating terrain and is marked by alternating interfluvial ridges and water channels, Namal Jaoa is an apt description of the phenomenon with geographical connotation. Till about 1986, we observed the broad external expression of the phenomenon through our presence in the Bankura district. The case study undertaken in 1987-88, helped us to proceed a little further such as to understand the causal connections, impact on the lives of the seasonal migrants and the broad dimensions of the process. The said case study in three villages empirically established its overpowering necessity and growing magnitude due gradual impoverishment and diminishing employment opportunity in one geographical region and agricultural expansion and prosperity and increased work opportunity in agriculture in another.

Seasonal migration from Bankura, Puruliya and parts of Medinipur started a long while ago. It used to be originally undertaken twice a year for agricultural work, initially only by tribal

communities like Santhals living in these district. But its intensity both in magnitude and frequency started to have increased with the introduction of the HYV⁵ and development of irrigation facility in Bardhaman. The rapid social and economic transformation in the areas of origin also contributed to the flow. Several non-tribal communities, particularly the artisanal castes and other tribal communities, who hitherto restrained themselves, also joined the stream. It has become a way of life now to a large number of households of the region.

If we try to trace back the migration process a little further, seasonal migration included, we find from old Census reports, district gazetteers, settlement reports, notes left by colonial collectors and administrator that the tribal tract of Chotonagpur Division has all along been a labour recruiting ground for mining/quarrying, tea gardens, railways, forestry and land reclamation activities, sugar cane cutting and other industrial activities.⁶ Manbhum pargana, within and adjacent to which our study areas fall, was specially mentioned as a recruitment area. It is as a result of this historical process that we find the Santhals, Oraons, Mundas, Hos and other allied tribals in ^{the} tea gardens, collieries, industrial areas including jute mills ^{and the} Sunderbans of West Bengal today. Seasonal migration to Bardhaman and Hugli for agricultural activities was either a part or a later development of this generic process which changed internally alongwith the change in type of employment opportunities and options, and destination. That it is a part of ^a larger and ^a historical process is supported

by the common nomenclature applied to the migrants. In this part of the region, the seasonal migrants are even today known by the generic term Coolie⁷ which in common usage means wage labourers of coal mines, railways and tea gardens. Apparently the nomenclature stuck and the migrants going for agricultural activities also came to be known by the same term. As a result, transporters and others and even the migrants themselves call the groups of seasonal migrants as Coolie. The farmers who come to recruit agricultural labour are even today variously referred as Babus, Mahajans, Maliks coming to recruit Coolie.

However in the rice regions of Bardhaman, these migrant agricultural labourers are not so much known by the word Coolie as by the Munish. In this region, usually a farmer goes to the west to bring Munish and Coolie. Therefore the nomenclature changes from Coolie at source region to Munish at destination point.

For the purpose of this study seasonal migration has been defined as short duration migration of people for employment from one rural location to another in season related operations, primarily in agriculture. In addition, certain manufacturing and processing activities such as in brick kilns and rice mills respectively where a large number of seasonal migrants from these districts appeared were also covered to some extent. However duration of stay at the place of migration of the latter category was much longer than those in agriculture. On the other hand the former type is characterised by a greater frequency and magnitude, and an arrangement of traditional nature and relation.

The above types of migration consequently resulted in a variety of sub-types and processes. For instance, certain groups, particularly the Santhals, remained primarily associated with the agricultural activities such as paddy transplanting and harvesting and ploughing, potato picking and rice processing while certain other groups preferred brick-kiln activities. Similarly, people from certain villages were going more for brick-kiln work while from others agricultural work was preferred. The place of destination (villages in Bardhaman) similarly was dependent on a number of considerations of social, geographical and economic nature. The human element of the migration process while consisted of both sexes and various ages, its ethnic composition was dependent on several factors which will be revealed by the case study. However, the most important characteristic of seasonal migration unlike other types of migration, has been its group character - nobody goes alone, he/she goes with an identifiable and temporarily organised group with certain social traits and having common economic interests. Even a household collective of husband, wife and dependent children will like to be part of a larger group formed on the basis of various social and economic considerations.

Methodology

Although the phenomenon of seasonal migration has been going on for years now, no attempt has ever been made to systematically record it by any official data collecting agency. As a result it is difficult to produce any statistical evidence from any official records. A sudden spurt in movement of people more or less at a certain fixed months of a year is only 'noticed' by public and officials, and the railways and the roadways bear the burden of transporting this huge mass of population, male and female, old and young, from one point to the other.

As has been mentioned earlier certain visible aspects of the phenomenon such as the months of visit, average duration of stay, recruitment methods, place of destination, composition of the group, wage rates etc. were more or less known to us in view of our stay in the region from 1980 onwards. The case study of 1987-88, as also our continuous association with the poor tribal women who have been regular seasonal migrants provided further insight to the phenomenon. However, for the purpose of this case study, in the beginning, we visited several villages in Ranibandh Block of Bankura district, Belpahari Block of Medinipur district and Manbazar and Bundwan Blocks of Puruliya districts to assess the magnitude of seasonal migrants. The villages were selected on the basis of concentration of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and artisanal castes by looking up the village level 1981 census data. Many a times villagers of one village directed us to another. At the second stage, household

census data available with us of several villages of Bankura and Puruliya, collected in connection with our action project were examined and tabulated. This data provided certain basic information regarding types of household sending members on seasonal migration, places gone, average duration of stay and income, age and sex composition of migrants etc. In the third stage, a kind of reconnaissance visit was made during the rice transplanted season in Bardhaman, and several villages were visited. During this time we held extensive discussions with farmers hiring migrant labour, with leaders of political parties, Panchayat and Krishak Sabha, and with actual migrant groups from Bankura and Puruliya.

In the fourth stage, a village called Karma in Bundwan Block of Puruliya district was selected for detailed study. Simultaneously life histories of several migrant women of various ages and communities at random, were collected. Lastly, a lengthy second visit was made to Bardhaman during rice harvest season and a village called Chakunda was selected for intensive study. Several other villages where groups of migrant labourers were found to be engaged in rice harvesting, brick kiln activity and rice mills were visited. Farmers, groups of local agricultural labourers, leaders of Khet Mazdoor Sangathan, Panchayat leaders, and Santhals who are permanently settled in Bardhaman villages were also interviewed. Some of the interviews were undertaken with the help of a guide schedule/

questionnaire. During the peak period of migration, we kept special vigil on one or two embarkation points to assess the magnitude of outgoing migrants. Similarly when the study team was in Barddhaman a few important bus junctions were visited to observe the process of return migration and the condition of journey. We also spoke at random to several groups of migrants from Birbhum of West Bengal and Dumka of Bihar at several villages in Barddhaman and at the bus stops there.

Besides the materials collected through above, we made a thorough search of secondary data from earlier census publications, gazetteers and land survey reports on which we could lay our hand pertaining to the districts of Barddhaman, Bankura and Puruliya to reconstruct the past and to identify causes of migration.

Delineation of the Study Areas

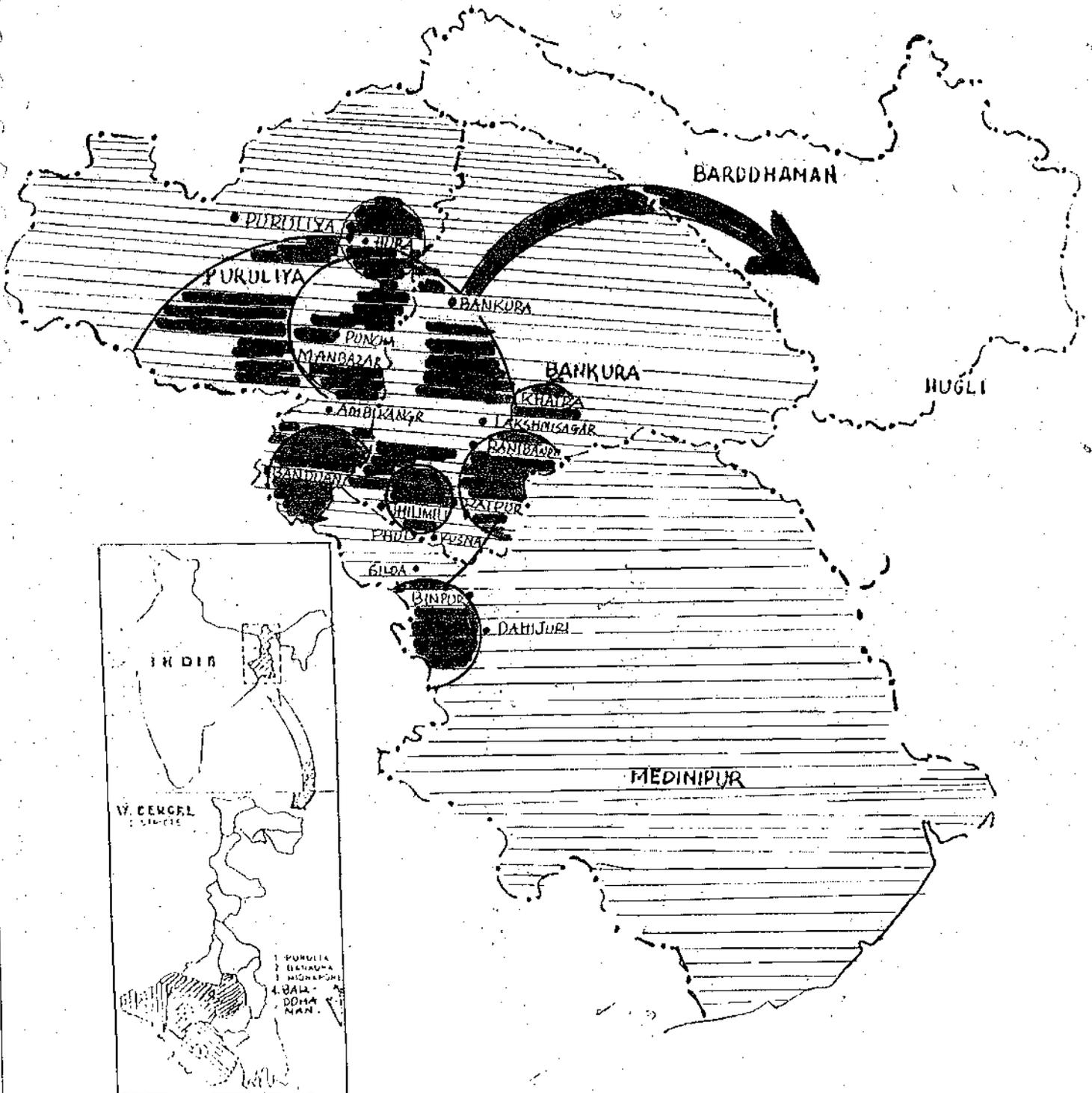
At the beginning we believed that seasonal migration every year to Barddhaman is undertaken only for agricultural work. We found during our visits to several villages in Puruliya, Bankura and in Barddhaman that a slightly longer duration migration has been taking place for quite sometime now to brick-kilns and rice mills which have sprung up in Barddhaman in large numbers in the recent past as a result of agricultural prosperity.

We thought that majority of the seasonal migrants, as agricultural labourers/brick-kiln workers, to Bardhaman hailed only from the three districts viz. Medinipur, Bankura and Puruliya of West Bengal. We found that this was not true. Only a cluster of villages from the north western part of Medinipur district bordering Purbi Singhbhum district of Bihar sends seasonal migrants to Bardhaman. Similarly, ^{only} certain parts of Puruliya and Bankura districts of West Bengal have been participating in seasonal migration to Bardhaman (see Map). We are also relatively certain that Puruliya district has been sending more migrants at present (agricultural and brick kiln work combined) to Bardhaman than Bankura. It was found that other districts of West Bengal such as Birbhum, Murshidabad and South 24 Parganas, and a few districts of Bihar such as Dumka, Giridih and Hazaribagh also send varying numbers of seasonal migrants to Bardhaman.

In view of these findings in the early stage, we decided, for the purpose of this case study, to concentrate on villages of south western parts of Bankura and south eastern parts of Puruliya forming a compact geographical area and the feeder or source region of seasonal migration (see Map). We also decided to put primary emphasis on agricultural labourers as they still form the major bulk of seasonal migrants. The village Karma selected for detailed study is in the heart of this region. Brick kiln and rice mill workers will be briefly discussed by way of new trends and opportunities.

MAP - 1

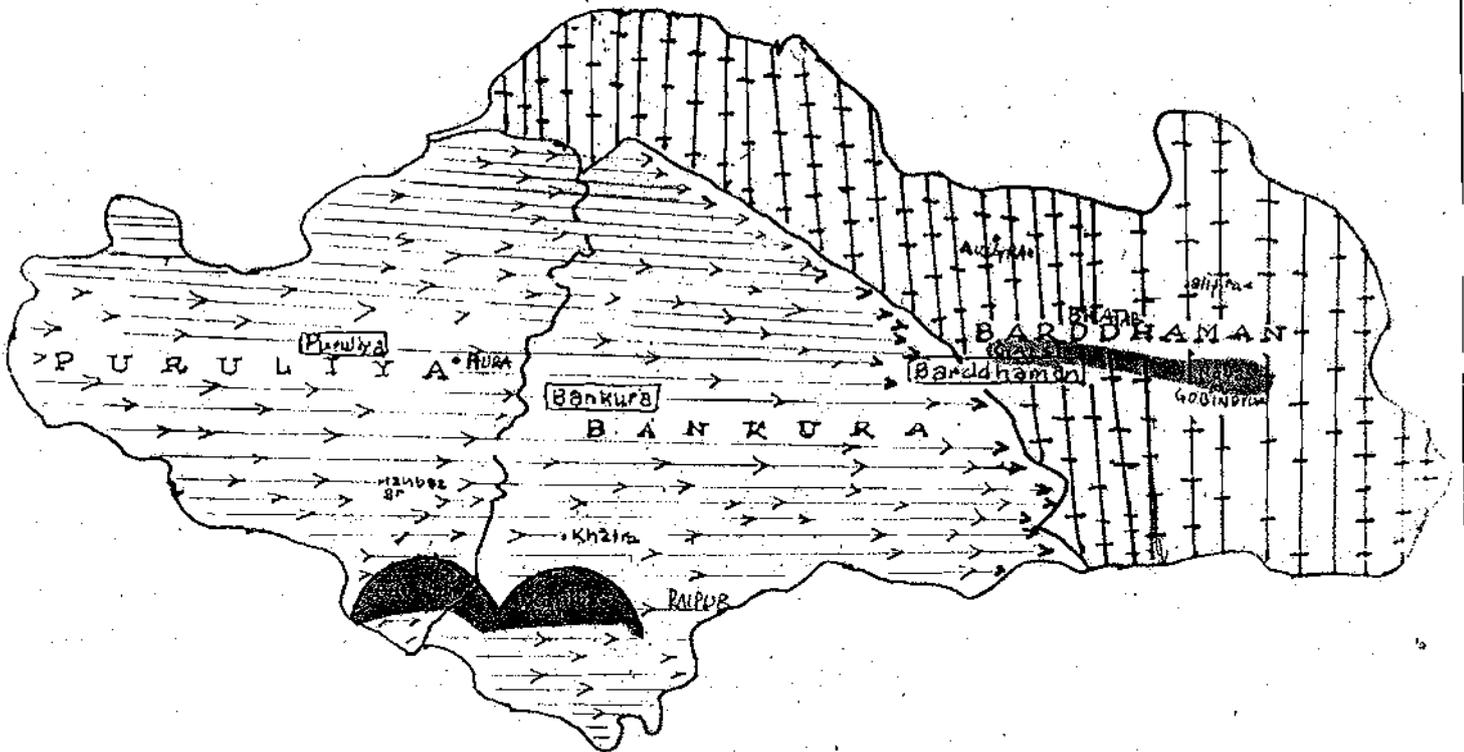
IDENTIFIED AREAS OF ORIGIN
OF SEASONAL MIGRATION

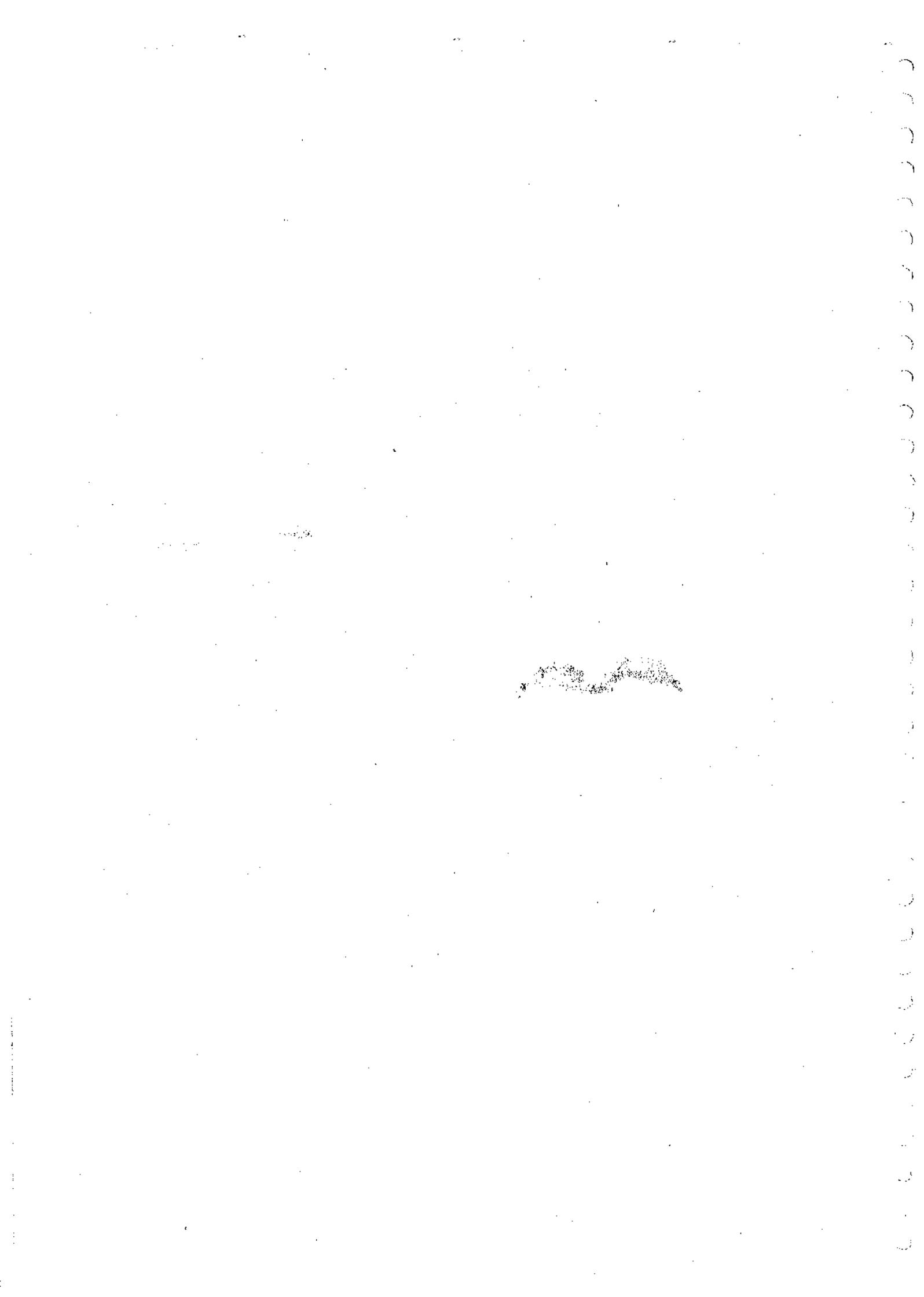


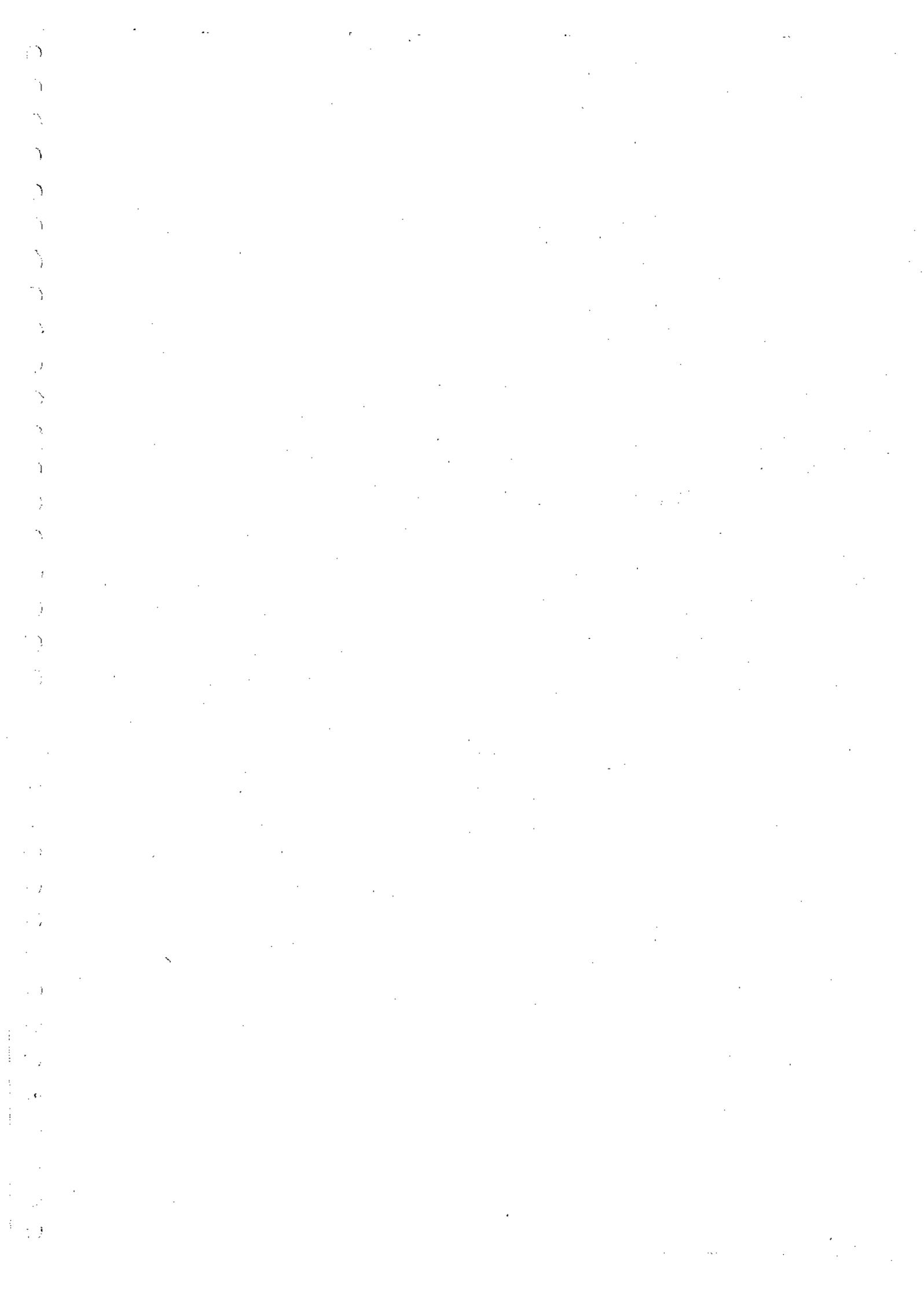


MAP II

STUDY AREA IN BANKURA, PURULIYA AND BARDHAMAN

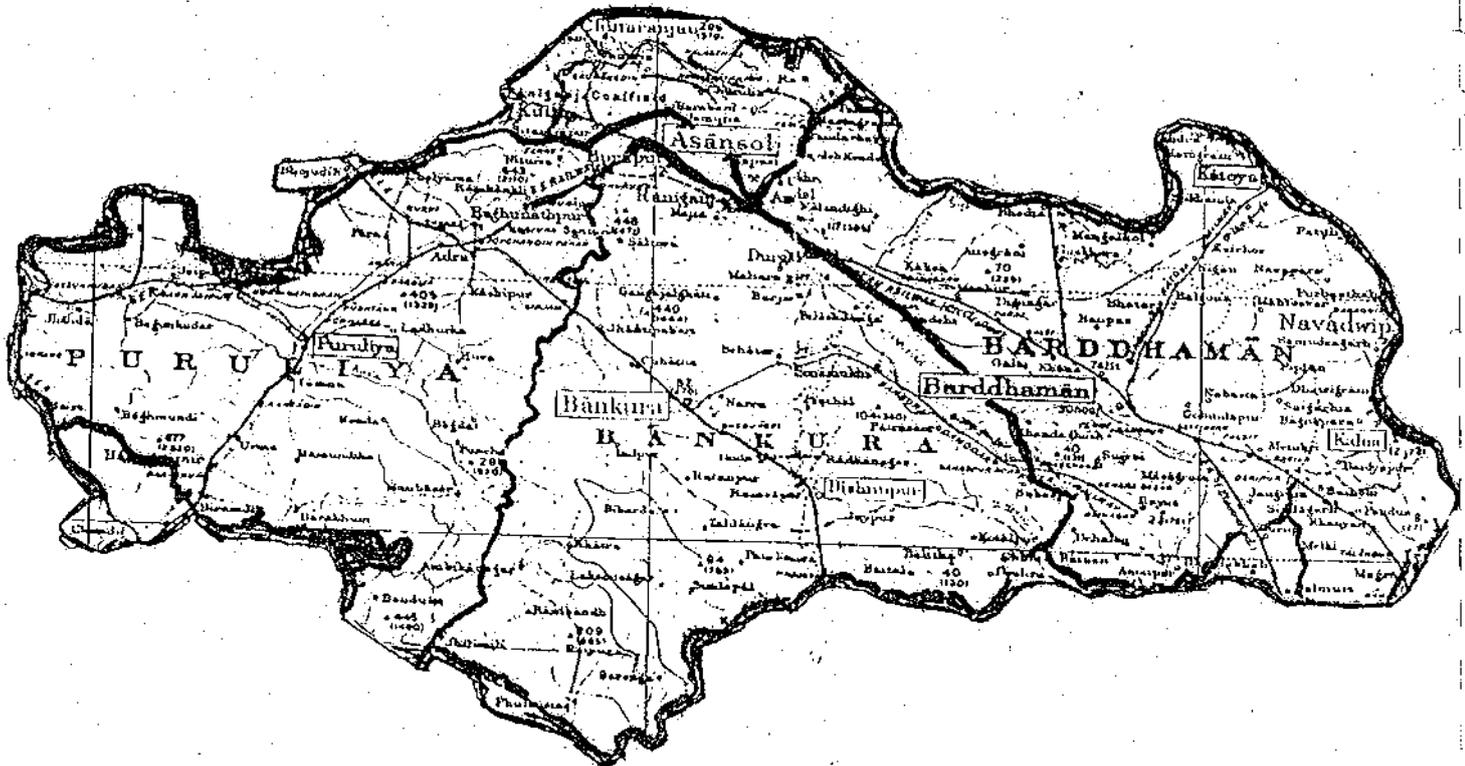






MAP III

EXISTING RAIL AND ROAD WAY
BETWEEN BANKURA, PURULIYA AND BARDHAMAN



From the above study region, we did not come across a single individual reporting to have gone to Hugli on seasonal migration ever and therefore no enquiry was made in that district. Secondly, the villages in Barddhaman reported as the places of destination were generally those which were located upto several miles deep on either side of the Grand Trunk Road, Barddhaman-Kalna road, Barddhaman - Kusumgram road, and were either directly connected by BDR⁸ or it provided the primary link, and by the roadways. For the purpose of this exploratory study it was not possible to cover such a vast geographical area - which formed the major rice heart land of Barddhaman. We therefore decided to concentrate on the belt between Galsi to Nabastha on the Galsi - Barddhaman - Kalna road (see Map) which formed a part of the traditional belt of destination and where a large number of permanent settlements of Santhals, consequence of repeated seasonal migration, can be found now. With this belt, one of the authors was also sufficiently familiar as he hailed from one of the villages. It also turned out during both visits to Barddhaman that almost identical groups of people were met by us at the same source region and place of destination. Contact with one group led us to locate other groups in nearby villages of Barddhaman. The village Chakunda, selected for indepth study, was also located in the heart of this region.

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- (b) Peasant Women Organise for Empowerment. Vina Mazumdar, 1990. Occasional Paper No. 13, Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi.
- (c) Women, Participation and Development. Narayan Banerjee, Occasional Paper No. 5, CWDS, 1985.
2. Travails of Migrant Tribal Women. D. Bandyopadhyay, Mainstream, June 14, 1980. (See Appendix - I).
3. The Mills of Sustenance, Narayan Banerjee, Lokayan Bulletin 7:1, January-February 1989, New Delhi. (See Appendix - II).
4. Women's Work and Family Strategy - a Case Study from West Bengal. Narayan Banerjee with Lokenath Ray and Bharati Sengupta. Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, 1987 (Unpublished).
5. HYV - High Yielding Varieties of Rice and Wheat introduced in the mid-sixties.
6. The reference of this can be found in the Gazetteers and other reports of the early 20th century. For instance, reports of Manbhum and Bankura of 1901 recorded about emigration of 'hardy aborigines' to Barddhaman and other places of Bengal. Similarly, report of Barddhaman 1901, recorded that coal, iron work, paper mills, potteries, mines attracted outside labour in large number from Bankura and Puruliya.
7. Coolie, Coolie-Kamin, Coolie-Mazoor are Bengali nomenclature for wage labourers.
8. BDR - Bankura Damodar River Railway. opened in 1916-17 between Bankura town and Raynagar (Raina) of Barddhaman district.

CHAPTER - II

COMPULSIONS OF OUT-MIGRATION AND DEMAND FOR MIGRANT LABOUR

In this chapter we shall try to deal with two issues. Firstly, when and why the phenomenon of seasonal migration from the source region first originated or since when and why the farmers of the destination region in Bardhaman needed the help of seasonal agricultural labourers from the source region. Secondly, what were the compulsions of the two points viz. the place of origin and the place of destination of seasonal migration, and whether there has been any change in the nature of these compulsions.

Origin of Out-migration

Because of its short duration, seasonality and relatively low magnitude at the early stages the phenomenon appears to have remained unnoticed by researchers and administrators. As a result no clear written evidence is available. Discussions with various ethnic groups now involved with seasonal migration revealed that the phenomenon was originally restricted to a single community viz. the Santhals and their brethren of Kherwar origin such as Deshwali Majhis. Induction of other communities to the phenomenon seems to have happened much later when ^{the} compulsions of the source region have started changing to worse and social barriers of many ethnic groups could not withstand the increasing pressure of subsistence needs.

Earlier records¹ mentioned of Santhal community's special aptitude in land reclamation and agriculture, specially in converting cultivable wastelands into rice fields, and as a result Santhal labour used to be in great demand and hired where possibilities of such reclamation existed. Several old settlements of Santhals in the Bardhaman district bear testimony to this process. In fact, the history of settlement of the Santhals within the districts of Bankura and Puruliya indicate that they were not autochthonous of the districts. They appeared to have migrated to the said districts in the 16th or 17th century (apparently after receiving the appellation Saontal for staying in Saontbhum) either in search of virgin land for reclamation and settlement, or being chased and persecuted by other stronger community or political force for one reason or the other. Whatever may be the reasons, the two districts seemed to have immensely benefitted from this migration process. They (the Santhals) have on one hand a keen instinct of identifying suitable virgin land to reclaim for cultivation and to settle, and on the other have a peculiar trait to leave the same in the face of slight provocation of persecution and threat (the method normally adopted by non-tribal proprietors to evict them), or in the event of bad omens and loss of life and livestock due to death, disease and illness in a particular site. Above all, due to non-acquisitive character, fickle mindedness and love for semi-nomadic life (Santhal's extrovert life and love for hunting, travel, and liquor are famous till today), the Santhal males (It is their females who try to keep them in reins most often without any success) used

to change their habitations. These traits of the Santhals suited the enterprising proprietors of land all over Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, who used to seek them out to open new areas for cultivation. Suddenly they were in great demand particularly after severe famines, floods, droughts and cyclones. There is reason to believe that large tracts of land in the major fertile plains of Bengal became fallow and covered with weeds after the famine of 1770² as a large section of agricultural labourers and small and marginal farmers and sharecroppers became decimated³ and there was nobody to till the soil. Santhals, who did not suffer so much because of their abode in the hills and forests, were brought in large number to reclaim these lands and to cultivate. This process ultimately might have given rise to the phenomenon of seasonal migration as an alternative agrarian arrangement.

Secondly, a reverse process viz. the scarcities, droughts and famines in the source region of migrant labour also might have forced people to migrate to Barddhaman in order to tide over the immediate food shortage. It will be seen later that consecutive droughts or regular appearance of droughts influence the frequency and magnitude of seasonal migration.

Thirdly, Barddhaman was once famous for its malaria and other epidemics. Local agricultural labourers, as a socially distinct category belonging to lower castes and tribes, either dwindled⁴ or were incapacitated considerably from these attacks. This created a

shortage of able bodied local labour. It must have forced the farmers of Barddhaman to look for labourers skilled in agriculture operations elsewhere. Bankura and Puruliya of West Bengal and Santhal Parganas of Bihar were the only nearby places known to the farmers of Barddhaman to look for such labour. Santhals living in those places seemed to have readily agreed to come.

Fourthly, differing agricultural cycle in the two places viz. the source region and place of destination provides till today an unique opportunity to the Santhals to sell their slack season labour for agricultural work at Barddhaman. This could have possibly been achieved through the trade and other administrative⁵ links between various zamindars and zamindaris of these places.

Lastly, the three tasks viz. transplantation, weeding and harvesting are time bound peak agricultural activities. Large number of skilled agricultural labourers are needed for short span of periods intermittently in the agricultural cycle. The social formation of castes and communities in Barddhaman was such that sufficient number of local labour skilled in these three tasks was hardly available as females in general, even of the socially distinct agricultural labour class, hardly worked in rice fields and were reported to be engaged in post-harvest processing, household industry and other service activities. On the other hand Santhal women were not only expert in those operations but even superseded

the Santhal males. It was quite natural then that they filled the void and formed a great majority of the migration stream from the very beginning providing the migrating group a social character and to the phenomenon a gender dimension. Existence of a rajmani type of relation between people of particular villages of Bankura/Puruliya with the farmers of various villages of Barddhaman points to the fact of a long standing connection and consciously maintained link. The description on labour recruitment procedures in the next Chapter will further substantiate this fact. This also in course of time, apparently led to the process of semi-permanent and permanent migrations of Santhals to Barddhaman and existence of several not so old Santhal settlements there at present. Apart from these, inequitable agrarian relation, excessive sub-infeudation, prevalence of share-cropping, and ^{the} nature of farming communities in Barddhaman district who owned agricultural land but did not personally cultivate, etc. contributed to inflow of seasonal agricultural labourers. There also from the very beginning existed a higher rate of agricultural wage in Barddhaman as compared to the places from where the migrants came which must have attracted agricultural labour from Bankura and Puruliya to migrate to Barddhaman.

The Permanent Settlement of 1793 on one hand opened the flood-gates for bringing new areas into cultivation and on the other brought major changes in land tenure systems in the source region. For instance the traditional Mandali, Ghatwali and Pradhani tenures in Bankura/Puruliya gradually disappeared during the 19th century and this could have resulted in inducing movements of people from Bankura/Puruliya to Barddhaman.

The other evidence as available indicates that the district of Bankura (specially western and south-western parts) and Puruliya (specially Manbhum region) has been a traditional ground of labour recruitment for tea gardens, coal mines etc.⁶ Forcible cultivation of Indigo during the colonial period and repressive methods associated with it turned many small and marginal farmers to become wholly dependent on agricultural labour. The erstwhile forest region (then known as Jungle Mahal) of Bankura/Puruliya generated Tasar silk cocoons and other minor forest produce such as kendu leaves in sufficient quantity. Many zamindars of this region used to trade these object with weavers and others of Barddhaman. This trade link might have also led to subsequent supply of seasonal labour to Barddhaman for agricultural activities. The social, cultural and economic link maintained by early Santhal settlers in Barddhaman with their place of birth also might have helped in perpetuation of the phenomenon.

In all probability, the phenomenon of seasonal migration from the source region to Barddhaman originated sometime in the eighteenth or nineteenth century during the colonial period. The continuity has been maintained due to increasing degradation of the source region as opposed to increasing industrial and agricultural development of the destination point, particularly due to improvement in irrigation facilities in the fertile plains of Barddhaman.

The other reason of increasing magnitude of seasonal labour is due to rapid development in communication facilities particularly in the 20th century. Earlier, travel to rice-belt of Bardhaman from the study region was extremely difficult. There was no road, no bus or train service from the source region for a considerable distance till about the first half of 20th century. The BDR from Bankura town which opened during 1916-17 provided the ^{only} link in the 20th century and as a result almost the entire flow of labour migration used to take place via this route thereafter. The position has considerably changed now. Presently the roads have not only gone deep into the heart lands of source region but there now exist bus services from these regions making travel much easier. Absolute dependence earlier on the BDR is now gone. Similarly, within the Bardhaman district, communication has improved so much that migrant labour can go deep into the rice belt. It has also made farmers' travel to find labour much easier. Many a times they are not even required to visit the villages in the source region as the willing labourers either travel upto Bankura town of their own only to be picked up by the farmers or they make the journey after hearing from the farmers through postal communication.

Trends of Female migration

Before we examine the opposite and differing compulsions of the two related regions, an attempt is being made here through the foregoing discussion (1) to examine the general nature of female

migration and its trend in India and West Bengal, (ii) to explain about the availability of data on seasonal migrants in various national data sources and (iii) to provide some idea about the volume of regular migration taking place between the two study region during the last 100 years.

Internal migration data, as available from the Indian Census, earlier and recent, do not indicate a separate category of seasonal migrants. It may be possible that during the days of Census enumeration groups of seasonal migrants are indeed enumerated at the place of migration when their visit coincides with the enumeration period, but there is no way to delineate such data from the census records. Internal migration data of the Census is said to have improved in the Sixties with the introduction of an additional concept such as place of last residence of an individual apart from the details of place of birth of the same individual. For last two censuses, some broad ideas of reasons for migration is also available which has enabled several cross classification of migration data possible with other social, demographic and economic characteristics of the population. However, inspite of feasibility for tabulation and usefulness of the results, the Census does not undertake any analysis or tabulation of available data on migrant households whose member(s) moved for employment. Similarly, Census has also avoided in its migration analysis the two distinct social categories viz. the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who not only traditionally form the largest group of seasonal migrants but also as regular migrants within and outside the state.

The National Sample Survey Organisation which conducts focussed surveys has from time to time tried to ascertain internal migration trends with reasons for movement normally as a part of employment - unemployment enquiry. It started with 'native place' concept in the fifties and later adopted 'previous or last usual place of residence' concept to determine migration status. In the 9th, 11th and 12th rounds, migration particulars were collected only for the labour force population. From the 13th round onwards more detailed information on internal migration has been collected and presented. In the 28th round migration data was a part of birth, death, morbidity and disability enquiry. The NSSO has now decided to collect regular statistics on migration with regular quinquennial survey on employment and unemployment. The 38th round (Jan.-December, 1983) has been the first such attempt. The other innovation introduced in the 38th round was to obtain some information on the migration status of households. This data is not available in Census tabulation. Similarly, unlike the Census enumeration, the NSS surveys extend over a full year period through four sub-rounds, as a result more reliable data with seasonal variation are available. More importantly for seasonal migrants as a separate category, the NSS data can be cited as the only national level data source at the moment. The NSS migration data also provides several cross classifications which the Census does not tabulate - e.g. with social category, expenditure class, previous activity etc. But NSS data, unlike Census, is not available at the district level. Some of the NSS findings on internal migration of the 38th round with special reference to rural West Bengal are given below:

- (i) Proportion of migrant households to total rural households in West Bengal was 0.9 per cent as against 1.4 per cent in India and 2.7 per cent in Andhra Pradesh which was the highest in the country. Of these 0.9 per cent households, 19.2 per cent and 2.19 per cent were seasonal migrants and non-seasonal temporary migrants respectively, and 8.49 per cent as permanent migrants - all of whom moved 'in search of work';
- (ii) In rural West Bengal approximately 24 per cent population were migrants - of which the proportion of females were more than 3 times higher than males;
- (iii) Rural female migration in West Bengal in search of employment or for better employment was around 2.5 per cent;
- (iv) Inter-district rural female migration in West Bengal was around 10 per cent;
- (v) In West Bengal, more than 90 per cent of the rural female migrants were not in the labour force before migration. Of the remaining, almost half of them were casual agricultural labourers. Usual activity status after migration did not seem to have changed materially. Nearly 8 per cent was still not in the labour force. Approximately 6 per cent continued as casual agricultural labourers;
- (vi) The all-India scenario of rural in-migration of seasonal nature indicated that -
 - a) Nearly 20 per cent of all household migration were of seasonal nature - half of which was in search of work;
 - b) Nearly 8 per cent of total scheduled tribe female migration from rural areas of other district of the same state was in search of employment or better employment. Scheduled tribe females also constituted the highest number of all social categories in this regard.

- c) Of the total rural female migrants who migrated for a period of one year and whose usual activity status was casual agricultural labourer before migration, more than 70 per cent of them remained so and nearly 15 per cent went out of the labour force after migration. In case of female migrants of 5 years duration of similar category, more than 17 per cent went out of labour force and nearly 66 per cent continued to remain casual agricultural labourers after migration.

The third possible data source on seasonal migrants could have been the Rural Labour Enquiry surveys of the Labour Bureau. Unfortunately, no separate data on seasonal migrant labour force exists there.

The general scene of internal migration in India as revealed by the Census showed that females were more migratory than males - largely on account of marriage and associational migration. The trends of female migration within India, between 1971-1981, indicated that relatively long distance migration (inter district and inter state) was higher in 1981 and short distance migration (intra-district) declined. Of the total female migrants (144.67 million out of 321.36 million female population in 1981) 35.2 per cent were inter-censal migrants (i.e. less than one year to less than ten years duration), 23.7 per cent were migrants of 10-20 years duration and 37.7 per cent were of more than 20 years duration. The seasonal migrant females, if enumerated anywhere, by definition, should fall in the category of migrants of less than one year duration who moved because of employment. The 1981 Census data showed that 3.7 per cent of total female migrants were recent migrants of less than one year duration and 1.9 per cent of total female migrants moved ^{for} employment reason. Therefore, on a pro-rata basis about 0.1 million females migrated because of employment

reason and for a duration of less than one year. As stated earlier, if seasonal migrant females have indeed been enumerated anywhere in India in 1981 census, they are hidden within this 0.1 million females.

Another trend of disturbing nature, as revealed by the 1981 census data, showed that about half of total female migrants who moved because of employment reason ultimately remained unemployed. It is presumed that they either failed to get the promised/employment or were thrown out of employment after a while. Those who remained gainfully employed were also largely recent migrants. There was also an indication that nearly 50 per cent of female migrants who moved for employment reason were above 30 years of age and a substantial number of them only were gainfully employed.

Similar trends, with slight variations, was also visible in West Bengal in 1981. For instance, only 1.7 per cent (1,58,931 females) of total female migrants (9,264,215 females were migrants out of 26,019,746 female population) moved for employment reason. Nearly 2 per cent of all female migrants moved less than a year before the census enumeration. Of the total female migrants who moved for employment nearly 47 per cent were returned as main worker, 3 per cent as marginal workers and remaining 50 per cent as non-workers. Under such a situation it would appear that seasonal migration remains a well thought out strategy of the female agricultural labour force.

Of the total gainfully employed female migrants nearly 55 per cent were above 30 years of age. Of the total female migrants who moved for employment a little more than 10 per cent were recent migrants of less than one year duration and perhaps within this group the seasonal migrants, if enumerated, are hidden. The following table provides the details of age and activity status of this group of migrants.

TABLE - 1

Percentage of Female Migrants who moved for employment, were staying for less than one year, and their activity status, 1981

Age	Total Migrants	Main Workers	Marginal Workers	Non-Workers
1	2	3	4	5
0-14	20.2 (100)	12.5 (40.0)	2.9 (1.6)	47.5 (58.4)
15-29	52.9 (100)	56.7 (69.0)	80.3 (16.4)	31.0 (24.6)
30+	26.9 (100)	30.8 (73.5)	16.8 (6.7)	21.5 (19.8)
All ages	100 (100)	100 (64.3)	100 (10.8)	100 (24.9)

(Percentages in parenthesis refer to the relevant age group).

(Source: Census of India, 1981)

It may be seen that one out of every two migrants belonged to the age group 15-29. One out of every eight gainfully employed migrant workers were in the age group 0-14. More than 35 per cent of female migrants who moved for employment were not gainfully employed (marginal and non-workers taken together).

Census does not provide any table on migrants who moved for employment from one rural location to another, duration of stay and their occupational status in order to know the nature of jobs on which they are employed. However, some information is available for those who moved from rural areas to urban areas for employment reason. It is found that in West Bengal, those females who moved for employment a year before the Census enumeration from a rural area within the state to an urban area within the state were largely illiterate (55 per cent). Of the similar category of female migrants who were enumerated in Calcutta urban agglomeration more than 85 per cent were illiterate and more than half of them were reported as service workers and the remaining in an omnibus category of production and related workers, transport equipment operators and labourers. It can therefore be perceived that females who moved from one rural location to another within the state a year before the Census were likely to be largely illiterate and were employed either as agricultural labourers, service workers, processing (rice mills) and manufacturing (brick kilns) or as simple wage labourers or in any employment they came across. It has also been noticed that gender specificity of tasks, docility of female labour (particularly unorganised and illiterate female labour from backward social categories like ST & SC), increasing impoverishment of place of normal residence

induce women to migrate for varied period of duration, initial preference being seasonal migration.

The available census data on immigration and emigration in respect of Bankura, Puruliya and Barddhaman is given in Table 2 for four censuses.

TABLE - 2

Immigration and Emigration in 1891, 1921, 1951 and 1981 (contiguous districts only)

	Bankura		Puruliya		Barddhaman	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
I. Immigration						
1891*	14,612	24,118	NA	NA	33,813	42,830
1921*	5,000	10,000	NA	NA	37,000	48,000
1951*	18,218	23,474	4,574	10,175	52,970	62,763
1981**	8,947	51,588	7,975	34,548	42,598	59,356
II. Emigration						
1891*	32,940	35,135	NA	NA	32,376	36,182
1921*	50,000	57,000	NA	NA	15,000	27,000
1951*	33,500	40,162	NA	NA	21,435	37,449
1981**	33,568	68,826	19,060	41,165	6,892	35,501

(Source: Census of India 1951 and 1981)

- Notes: **For 1981, contiguous districts for Bankura will mean Puruliya and Barddhaman; Bankura and Barddhaman for Puruliya, and Bankura and Puruliya for Barddhaman.
- * Contiguous districts for each district for 1891, 1921, and 1951 censuses appear to be several other districts surrounding Bankura, Puruliya and Barddhaman (See Map). Puruliya district in 1951 was part of Bihar and the migrants from West Bengal have been taken in column 4 & 5.

It may be seen that emigration from Bankura and Puruliya as such was all along been substantially higher than immigration to those districts. In case of Barddhaman, the trend has been reverse.

Table 3 provides the pattern of emigration and immigration during 1981 census.

TABLE 3
Immigration and Emigration in 1981 in
Barddhaman, Bankura and Puruliya

District of Birth	District of Enumeration							
	Bankura		Puruliya		Barddhaman		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Bankura	-	-	5318	26,805	28,250	42,021	33,588	68,826
Puruliya	4,712	23,830	-	-	14,348	17,335	19,060	41,165
Barddhaman	4,235	27,758	2657	7,743	-	-	6,892	35,501
Total	8,947	51,588	7975	34,548	42,598	59,356	59,520	145,492

(Source: Census of India, 1981)

It may be seen that emigration to Barddhaman from Bankura and Puruliya is still quite high, and ^{as} compared to Puruliya, Bankura ^{district} sends out more migrants to Barddhaman. Whereas males generally migrate for employment, education, business and with family, the females move additionally for marriage also.

In the context of seasonal migration between Bankura / Puruliya and Bardhaman, it is hardly possible that Census has ever been able to effectively net the seasonal migrants because of timing of the Census enumeration. For instance harvest of winter (kharif) rice is over by mid-January whereas the Census ^{enumeration} is held normally in February. The seasonal migrants who have some possibility of getting enumerated are those who stay or go back for potato picking or summer rice transplantation during February.

There are several common beliefs and theories⁹ relating to migration (including seasonal migration). One of the theories states that migration is a great lubricant to economic development and modernisation process. The other theory states that economic development is hampered because of lack of planning with regard to the movement of population from one area to another, thereby disturbing the economy of both the places. The third theory states that female migration does not contribute materially to the process of speeding up of economic development and modernisation.

As will be later seen through this case study, seasonal migration has been a compelling strategy of a class of people to meet survival needs and therefore has not been materially contributing to the economic development of the source region. The phenomenon has only helped to keep the body and soul together of a large number of people of the said class who desperately needed this cushion. On the other hand, the process has obviously been absorbing and taking off the steam and fury expected to be generated from deprivation in the source region. Conversely, the phenomenon has definitely been adding

to the prosperity and economic development of the destination point, more so when the fruits of output are not to be shared on a long term basis - as the involved population is of transient character, unorganised and ignorant of rights. In spite of their complaints of rising agricultural wages and cost of cultivation, the farmers in Bardhaman are found to be not only prosperous but are making investments in non-agricultural sectors with the income from agriculture.

The second theory stated above seems to be based more on the experiences of rural to urban migration or migration arising out of catastrophe, and where movement of population is intended to be of permanent nature mainly for trade and employment. This theory therefore does not apply to the seasonal migrants under discussion here.

In the context of low female migration for reasons of employment and education in India, and the character of handful of females in those two categories, it is inadequate to make any formulation as has been made above. We have seen in the brief analysis of 1981 Census data on female migration that majority of such migrants have been illiterate, a lot of them remained unemployed after migration, and those who were employed were in the low paid jobs. Under the circumstances it is ridiculous to expect that migration of such nature, which can summarily be termed as distress migration, will speed up economic development and modernisation of the source region. By and large, female migration in India including seasonal migration for employment particularly from rural areas has been taking place

to serve a very vital purpose - that is to meet the survival needs of the migrants' families.

It has been explained that migration, especially seasonal migration, has not been anyway responsible for bringing in economic prosperity to the source regions. It has also been seen that seasonal migration from Bankura and Puruliya is not a ^{recent} phenomenon and has been in existence for a pretty long time. Under the circumstances, it is possible to hypothesize that a multitude of factors such as food shortage, natural calamities such as consecutive droughts/famines/scarcities, oppressive tenurial practices, demographic trends, deforestation, repeated failures of crops, etc. seemed to have forced the people living in the source region, including its women, to opt for seasonal migration in the beginning, and later to adopt the same as both primary and secondary source of livelihood, as a consciously maintained survival strategy and as an alternative option. Since all indications also point to the fact that the one single community, the Santhal, opted for its first, a special mention will be made wherever possible in the following discussion to note the nature of transformation the community underwent during the last 100 years for which some official evidences exist.

In presentation of the facts historically on the basis of available records and materials, we shall restrict our analysis first of all to the source region viz. the delineated areas of Bankura and Puruliya and then to the destination region viz. the delineated region of Bardhaman district. Most of the earlier records and materials do not always specifically refer to the sub-district level, and as a result it will obviously be a major handicap to pin point the disabilities of the delineated study regions. However, wherever data at this level have come to our notice, the same will be mentioned.

SECTION - A

OUT-MIGRATION FROM SOURCE REGION

The compact source region delineated for the purpose of this case study mainly consisted of south-western parts of Bankura (including its adjacent parts in Bankura and Medinipur) and south-eastern parts of Puruliya. This will mean a group of villages of Belpahari Block of Medinipur district bordering south Bankura, Banduan and Manbazar blocks (forming parts of erstwhile Pargana Barabhum and Manbhum) of Puruliya district and Ranibandh Block of Bankura district. In no case does it mean that this is the only region from where seasonal migration originates. This may possibly be the region contributing the maximum number but other blocks of the three districts do send seasonal migrants in varying numbers to Bardhaman, Hugli and other districts of the State.

ETHNIC COMPOSITION

This geographical region from past to present day, provides some common ecological, ethnic and economic features. The entire tract was once heavily forested mainly with Sal tree but mingled with varieties of other tree species which provided food and livelihood to the inhabitants. The region at the same time was characterised by low hills and water channels, and as a result was relatively inaccessible and had marginal existence of definitive administration of any kind. The region was once primarily inhabited by the Santhal tribals along with the autochthonous Bhumij. A majority of the other communities as found today are later migrants to the region and have usurped ^{the} resources of the region from the tribals in one pretext or another. Current ethnic composition of the region is given below.

TABLE - 4

Ethnic Composition of the Region

Block	Ethnic Categories	<u>Percentage to total Population of the Block</u>			
		1981	1971	1961	1951*
Ranibandh	SC ¹	10.9	14.9	13.5	34.2
	ST ²	49.2	45.9	41.4	21.2
	Others ³	39.9	39.5	45.1	44.6
Banduan	SC ¹	6.6	3.2	10.0	4.8
	ST ²	51.8	55.9	48.6	23.0
	Others ³	41.6	44.9	41.4	68.6

(Source: Census of India 1951, '61, '71 & '81)

Note: *1951 data relate to a larger tract inclusive of Ranibandh. In 1951 Banduan was part of pargana Barabhum.

Ranibandh

1. There are 20 distinct communities today.
2. Consists of eight separate tribal communities of which Santhal are the largest group.
3. Composed of more than ten communities.

Banduan

- 1,2,3 = According to a study¹⁰ in late fifties there were 65 ethnic groups in the area, of which about 8 were tribal groups, 10 Scheduled Castes and remaining other communities.

SC = Scheduled Castes; ST = Scheduled Tribes; Others = Consist of various caste/community/groups e.g. Brahmin, Artisan castes, Service Castes, Pastoral castes, Agricultural Castes. One community viz. Kurmi, Mahato occurs in large number in the group.

Table 4 shows that the above source region is predominantly inhabited by the tribal groups. The total scheduled caste population is although not so large but they appear in considerable number of distinct individual communities of smaller population such as Kaira, Sunri, Mochi, Dom, Hari etc. whose services were necessary for isolated village societies. It seems that except the brewing community (Sunri) which carved a strong foothold in the region through occupation of good agricultural lands which were originally reclaimed by the tribals, the other scheduled castes never succeeded in establishing any strong agrarian economic relation with the region. Their dwindling number suggests that they have been regularly migrating to other areas also.

It is the remaining group consisting of a large number of castes and communities who need special mention. The artisanal castes such as potters, basket makers, weavers, oil crushers etc. did not seem to have posed any great threat to the tribals. As they are currently participant in seasonal migration alongwith the tribals it is obvious that they have been hardly cleverer than the tribals who have been their main and traditional clients. On the other hand, the Kurmis (Mahato), the Baniyas, Brahmin, Jat Baishnabs, etc. are relatively better off than the tribals and the artisanal communities. There are however exceptions in all categories. The moot point to be noted from the population composition that not only there exists a large number of tribal population but there are scheduled castes and other communities who easily offer themselves as agricultural labourers and will be prone to participate in seasonal migration when times are difficult.

DROUGHT PRONENESS

It is normally believed that drought contributes in swelling the magnitude and frequency of seasonal migration. Currently, the region is considered as drought-prone area¹¹ with poor soil quality and characterised by high run-off of rain waters, inadequate storage and low moisture retention capacity of the light textured soil. During the last 50 years in Bankura district, 50 per cent years were rainfall - deficit years and 25 per cent years had annual precipitation less than the requirement of the optimum production of traditional kharif paddy. In other words, one out of every four years may be termed as agricultural drought year¹² spelling great hazard to rainfed paddy cultivation in the region where almost entire cultivated area has no assured irrigation facility till today. The paradox of drought condition has also to be related to preponderance of small and marginal farmers at one hand and large number of agricultural labourers on the other. The intensity of drought condition and extent of its effect should again be perceived when the drought years happen to be consecutive or recurring, for instance in recent times in 1981 and 1982.

The aberrant rainfall affects the agrarian economy dominated by small and marginal farmers¹³ (including^{the} nascent farmers - the assignees of tiny uplands distributed through recent land re-distribution programme) and agricultural labourers in many ways. This dominant agrarian category has to incur debt at high interest, their prospect

to recuperate in future being doubtful they undertake such measures as seasonal migration, the only option open to them as agricultural labour, the only skill they have. The most recent experience of such a situation in Ranibandh and Banduan was in 1982 when there was practically no rainfall and the kharif paddy dried up in the fields. These are also the times when many of the tight social boundaries are loosened to make room for other options and opportunities to meet the pressing needs of survival. There was unprecedented increase in seasonal migration in 1982 and 1983 from the entire study region - and many communities who so far kept themselves away joined the stream. For instance in one of the villages ^{visited by us} near Ambikanagar in Ranibandh Block, the Blacksmiths were found to have resorted to seasonal migration around that time. Similar cases were reported from many other villages - where the Oil-crushers, Jat Baishnabs, Potters and such other communities have been gradually drawn into the phenomenon.

As stated above, agricultural drought has been a regular phenomenon in the region during the last 50 years. We have at the sametime officially recorded drought years in 1902, 1915, 1927, and 1935, between 1900 and 1940,¹⁴ and lowest rainfall years in 1955, 1966, 1976, 1977 and 1982 in Bankura district.¹⁵ Apparently, the several types of droughts viz. meteorological, agricultural, hydrological, socio-economic, surface water, soil water, ground

water droughts either together or singly operate in the region to make it a drought prone area. With limited pre-existing options and opportunities, the people of the region naturally tend to depend upon seasonal migration.

FORESTS AND CPRS

Forest cover seems to enhance rainfall, retain moisture and prevent run-off. It may therefore prevent droughts to some extent. But forests also provide food and livelihood to the inhabitants. People of many of the forest areas of the country did not suffer so much at times of famines, scarcities and droughts as compared to those outside the forest areas. The Indian Famine Commission of 1981 has detailed 31 species of trees whose produce was consumed as food by the tribes of Satpura hills in different seasons - including fruits, flowers, buds, young shoots etc. both in raw and cooked form.¹⁶ And today we notice more seasonal and regular migrants from these erst-while forest areas!

The study region under discussion had once upon a time been famous for its forest. The area fell deep into what the Mughals and then the Britishers called as Jungle Mahals.¹⁷ The whole region, it can safely be imagined, to the south of Kangsabati river, remained relatively impenetrable till about the end of 19th century. Its relative isolation was violated when the commercial value of such forests was fully realised. In the Mughal period the whole stretch

of Jungle Mahals was an wild undefined area of low revenue yielding estates. There were several zamindaris, mostly of tribal origin, who settled in this area, cleared the country and started agriculture. Present day Banduan for instance, consists of two erstwhile estates. The northern part of present Banduan was part of Barabhum estate and southern part coincides with the Koilapal estate. Strachey¹⁸ described this area around 1800 to be "the wildest and most remote of the Jungle Mahals". Present day Ranibandh on the other hand was formed of parts of erstwhile Phulkusma, Shyamsundarpur and Ambikanagar estates.

From all available accounts, it appears that the whole stretch of land consisting of present day Ranibandh, Manbazar, Banduan Blocks, and a portion of Singhbhum (of Chotanagpur Division) formed a compact forest tract inhabited mainly by Santhals and Bhumij - the latter a semi-Hinduized community of Mundari origin claiming the ownership of the area and forming the zamindaris or estates. It can be imagined that the people then lived in comparative isolation and depended largely on forest and subsistence agriculture. The forest provided the where-withall, food and land cleared for subsistence agriculture. The tribal did not know the commercial value of many of the forest produces- both wood and non-wood. They obviously cleared large tracts of suitable land for agricultural purpose and the zamindars of those areas never objected to the process. There were few people as compared to the vast forest area and the forest thrived in pristine glory. As late as in 1871 only about 40 per cent of the total area of Bankura district was under cultivations¹⁹ and the remaining area was covered with forest. The situation in Ranibandh and Banduan which

still retain the highest percentages of forest cover today can be imagined to have even lesser area under cultivation during those days.

Unfortunately, the situation has dramatically changed from the last part of the 19th and beginning of the present century. The timber value of the forest was realised between 1890-1900 with the opening of the Railway in Bankura and Purulia, and building of roads through these districts. 'Before the coalmines of Raniganj became fully operative, the railway companies also indulged in widespread use of local timber as fuel for the locomotives²⁰'. The forest areas, which so long remained under the overall indirect control of the zamindars and, at village level, under the control of small village communities (mainly tribal), by 1936, were sought to be brought under the control of the Government in the name of preventing destruction of forest and regulating the felling cycle. Between 1936 and 1948, when the West Bengal Private Forest Act came into existence, large areas of forest were cleared of trees by several interest groups - the zamindars, timber contractors, and the people - both tribal and non-tribal (who by then were all over the place to seek fortunes). The next severe blow resulting in widespread deforestation came during the mid-fifties when the Zamindari Acquisition Act was passed. The same group of people again cleared the forest with renewed vengeance. It is still fresh in the memory of older people²¹ of many villages in the area how forests were cleared during those days

and how helplessly they looked on. The two world wars in the first half of this century also were responsible for major destruction of forest. It is no wonder that an Anthropologist who visited Barabhum between 1950-1960 found "only a small portion of the pristine jungle left on the Dalma Ranges and their extensions making the southern and the south-eastern boundaries of the Pargana. There are also sporadic patches of thin jungles scattered all over the pargana, concentrating more towards the south and the south-east."²² The situation in adjacent Ranibandh was no different. Successive survey and settlement operations, during when records of rights were prepared, also was partially responsible for destruction of standing trees and village forests in the region.

From the available district level records, it is obvious that area under forest has rapidly been decreasing in the region. This is also confirmed by satellite data of 1972-75 and 1980-82 for West Bengal.²³ Ranibandh Block, which still has the highest percentage of forest area in the district (although all of which is not necessarily under natural sal cover) has also the highest percentage of barren and unculturable land and cultivable wasteland - a gift of deforestation. According to a current estimate²⁴, Bankura south Forest division, within which Ranibandh falls, has only about 30 per cent of the forest area under covered sal forest and only 11 per cent of the total area of the district is so. The situation in Banduan seems to be no different. Forest area, even

between 1971 and 1981, has decreased by about 300 hectares. Wastelands have increased from 2500 hectares to 4000 hectares during the same period.²⁵ The neighbouring Manbazar block (the erstwhile Manbhum Pargana) also presents the similar picture viz. decrease of forest area and increase in wastelands.²⁶ To make the situation worse one can also notice a trend of decrease in cultivated area between 1971-1981 in Banduan block.²⁷

The Committee on Forest and Tribal in India (1982)²⁸ emphasized on the importance of forests on tribal life and said that besides getting free fuel, fodder and wood for house construction, the tribals also earn about one-third of their income from the sale of minor forest produce. A Government estimate of revenue from MFP in 1976-77 showed that for West Bengal the amount was Rs. 5.90 million while the state had about 26 lakh Scheduled Tribe population then.²⁹ A recent study in Medinipur³⁰ showed that 15-20 per cent income of a household is generated from minor forest produce. A study³¹ done in the fifties among the Santhals indicated that they used to collect 82 varieties of wild plants, 70 varieties of fruits, 7 varieties of resins, 31 varieties of mushroom, 7 varieties of jungle millets besides several species of animals and birds through hunting. According to recent studies³² in adjacent Medinipur on estimated income from forest based activities in two villages showed that annual income per family ranged between Rs. 722 to Rs. 2940. The same study³³ in a village in Ranibandh Block reports as follows:

"The Santhal tribal community of Pukuria decided to protect a 130 hectare tract of degraded Sal forest in 1982. Over the past six years, the forest has recovered, yielding substantial income in minor forest products to the community's 93 families The women of Pukuria spend four or more hours a day in the forest collecting a range of products including sal seeds and leaves, bidi leaves, tasar silk cocoons, mahua flowers, kalmegh and other medicinal herbs, fruits and gum, fodder and fuel. Rough estimates of income generated indicate that an active woman could obtain upto Rs. 2500-3500 per year or Rs. 7 to Rs. 10 per day from one hectare of mixed sal forest after 3 to 4 years of regeneration."

The said study also attempted an estimate of per hectare annual value of production in a regenerated forest and concluded that it is in the order of Rs. 4772/-, and if a household is allowed to protect one hectare of forest and take all minor forest products and 25 per cent of the sal poles, its annual income will be around Rs. 3272 or Rs. 9 per day. These findings indicate on one hand the place of forest in tribal economy and the gradual depletion of forest resources which affects that economy, on the other.

A related area of resource from which the poor heavily drew their subsistence and nutrition, particularly during droughts and scarcities is the common property resources (CPR). Such resource could be in the form of land, rivers, ^{and} tanks and their beds, trees, grass, soil, animals, birds, fish, molluscs, and a variety of other goods. In village societies, it is the women who use these resources more. There exists another set of resources with undefined rights in

village societies which the poor utilise. For instance, fodder grass growing on the ridges of rice fields, dungs of cattle left on fields and grazing lands, agricultural wastes, and grains left on the field after harvest or collected from rat holes, fish and molluscs growing during the kharif season in rice fields and ⁱⁿ tanks and ponds, edible plants and creepers growing on private and public land and water bodies, and a variety of other objects constitute a whole range of subsistence items of the poor. Studies have sufficiently demonstrated on one hand the nature of contribution made by CPRs by way of physical products, income/employment gains and larger social and ecological gains, and benefits obtained by poor household from CPRs on the other.³⁴ For instance, the proportion of poor households depending on fuel, fodder and food items from CPRs of various types ranged between 84 to 100 per cent (in different study villages). CPR income accounted for 14 to 23 per cent of household income from all other sources (in study villages).³⁵ Unfortunately, depletion of CPRs is increasing due to neglect in developmental planning, increasing privatisation of CPRs, degradation of ecology, practice of intensive agriculture in certain regions and change in land use pattern and other factors. Although no detailed study could be carried out in the delineated study regions on the whole range of issues stated above, it is possible to imagine that access of powerless poor households to CPRs of all kinds is on the decrease as a part of general current trend. As a result, nutrition, equity, income and cushion during droughts and scarcities that the CPRs provided to the poor are being affected negatively.

LAND, SOIL AND
PRODUCTIVITY

It has already been indicated that the source region of seasonal migration is characterised by rolling hills - a characteristic of the Chotanagpur plateau. As a result, the crop lands of the region are in the form of terraces carved out of ridges of virgin forest over the years by enterprising tribal communities - who still form the major bulk of population. Such a situation obtaining in crop lands would require appropriate agricultural practices, water conservation methods and cropping pattern to maximise the produce and to adapt to this topographical feature. Such land situation also had the basic constraint of carrying capacity of such crop lands and the population it could support.

In order to adapt to this peculiar topographical feature the arable space was divided mainly into two types as per the gradient and had been manipulated through terracing. In Chotanagpur plateau such a division of land was made into don (valley bottoms) and tanr (sides of the ridges).³⁶ Such a land situation would be prone to over-drainage and soil erosion precluding the possibility of growing long duration and water sensitive crop like rice on tanr land.³⁷ The people tried to make optimum use of don land exclusively for rice cultivation and the tanr land was mainly utilised for millets, pulses, maize, oilseeds and such other crops.

It is said that while don land used to be annually cultivated, this was not possible on tanr land because of its poor soil quality. Therefore, a complicated system of crop rotation and fallowing used to be practised on tanr land, and 'on an average only about half the tanr land was cultivated every year at the turn of the century'.³⁸ This helpless situation was tried to be cleverly altered by the ingenious tribals through a labour intensive method of terracing. As a result, the tanr land then could be used in a more intensified way. Even today several village names in Barabhum pargana are suffixed with tanr (e.g. Daman Tanr, Karma Tanr) signifying the land situation of the village on one hand and the people's forced dependence on such type of land. All such tanr were subjected to intensive terracing, and, at different points of time, to further terracing to adapt to the gradual decline in hydrological changes.

Land situation in Ranibandh³⁹, as of now, indicates that nearly 69 per cent of the cultivated area is high land (corresponding to various categories of low tanr and high don land of Chotanagpur plateau) variously known here as Tara, Gora, Danga, Dungri; only 6 per cent is low land variously known as Sol, Bahal, Kanali (corresponding to low Don land of Chotanagpur plateau); and remaining 25 per cent holds an intermediate position known as Baid. In two sample villages of Banduan Blocks, the land situation is more or less same. It is given in the following table.

TABLE 5

Land Situation in two sample villages
in Bandwan

Types of Land	Village - 1		Village - 2		Remarks
	Area in (acre)	% to total	Area in (acre)	% to total	
1. Bahal	22.82		5.99		Roughly correspond to <u>Don</u> land of Chotanagpur Plateau.
2. Kanali	22.75		25.87		
Total of 1 and 2	45.57	16.2	31.86	10.8	
3. Baid, etc.	121.54	43.1	119.97	40.5	Intermediate position between <u>Don</u> and <u>Tanr</u> or may be classified as <u>tanr</u> .
4. Gora, Danga, Dungri etc.	103.62	36.8	115.81	39.1	Exclusively <u>tanr</u> land.
5. Patit	10.97	3.9	28.35	9.6	Fallow land
Total	281.72	100	295.99	100	
Total area of the Village	440.53		338.53		Nearly 64% of the village area in village 1 and nearly 87% of the village area in village - 2 have been tried to be brought under arable space signifying intense pressure on land on one hand and vain optimization and intensification of arable space on the other.

(Source: Settlement office, Bandwan)

The above table, as also the situation in Ranibandh Block, indicates an overdependence of people on Baid land - which, in turn, due to unchecked deforestation and soil erosion over the years, gradually turn into wastelands. This evidence is already available in Ranibandh where barren and uncultivable land, cultivable wasteland and fallow land including current fallow together constitute 38 per cent of the total area of the Block excluding forest, land under non-agricultural use and permanent pastures and grass land.

As has been indicated earlier, the system of arable expansion in the region had been largely through reclaiming jungle under different tenurial customs (discussed later). An available study⁴⁰ on spatial expansion of arable frontier in Chotanagpur Division between 1880-1950 is relevant in this context because the erstwhile Manbhum and Singhbhum districts of Chotanagpur division form parts of the source region of today's seasonal migrants under study. The said study showed that, between 1918-25 and 1946-53, the Manbhum district registered a marginal regression in arable frontier (i.e. from 13,60,000 to 13,15,000 acres). This regression happened because some of the unprofitable and marginal tanr land was going out of cultivation. This could also signify that by 1946-53 the possibilities of expansion through fresh reclamation was severely restricted. This is supported by the fact that arable area as percentage to total area of the district had reached a ceiling of 51 per cent in Manbhum district.

As opposed to this in Singhbhum district the arable frontier increased by 2 per cent between 1916 and 1946-53, and it had reached a ceiling of 35 per cent only. The study suggested that 'by the beginning of the 20th century the reclamatory impulse (of the people) had greatly slowed down.'⁴¹ because of several reasons, one of them being the disillusionment of the 'pioneering tribesmen who lost to late coming landlords and contractors in the struggle for resources of the region'.⁴²

An intensive use of tanr land, in the face of arrestment in arable expansion and major loss of don land to non-tribal interlopers, was the only course open to the pioneering tribesmen, and this was attempted to be done firstly through reduction of fallowing period and secondly through terracing. The first process apparently did not happen in Manbhum and Singhbhum districts (in the first half of this century) because the records indicated that proportion of current fallow to the arable had remained roughly stagnant. Alternatively the people seemed to have resorted to the other intensive use of tanr land through terracing. A third process of intensive use of land open to a cultivator could have been through double cropping. The study⁴³ showed that in Manbhum district, between 1918-25 and 1946-53, this last process had also not been so much possible. The district registered a decrease of net sown area by 1.4 per cent and an increase of double cropped area by 72 per cent - resulting in a marginal increase of gross sown area by 0.9 per cent during the period. Obviously, terracing was going on in the region to convert tanr land into don land for rice cultivation.

For instance, in Manbhum, between the twenties and fifties of this century, there was an increase of don land by 16 per cent and decrease of tanr land by 30 per cent. Obviously, a portion of the tanr was getting converted into don land through terracing and at the same time marginal tanr land was being abandoned as they became unfit for any cultivation.⁴⁴

The above analysis of Manbhum district refers to the first half of this century. The scenario prior to that viz. in the 19th century is reproduced here from the study referred above.⁴⁵ It has been generally asserted that 'there was no expansion in the arable either in the extensive or intensive margin prior to the settlement operation' mainly because of 'insecurity of tenancy'. However, 'in the case Manbhum there is concrete evidence of expansion in arable in the period before the settlement operation. For instance, Koilapal estate (present day Kuilapal of Banduan Block) which consisted of 48 villages and 26 square miles area, was surveyed in 1881 and 1897. The estimated rent in 1897 was 41 per cent higher than 1881 although the rate of rent remained unchanged during the two surveys. It is therefore definite that there was definite expansion in arable don land. Extension of cultivation in Koilapal estate between 1897- and 1922 is given below.⁴⁶

Table 6
Extension of cultivation in Koilapal

Land Type	1897 (in acres)	1922 (in acres)	Per cent increase
Don	2420	3645	+50
Tanr	4604	5201	+13
Total cropped area ^a	7026	8816	+26

It may be seen that during the 25 years 'rice lands increased by 50 per cent while upland increased by 13 per cent, and total increase in cropped area was relatively lower than the increase in rice land'. It is therefore apparent that by the end of the 19th century the scope of fresh reclamation had already reached a limit in Keilapal either due to physical constraints or due to insecurity of tenancy or due to both. On the other hand, in Barabhum, (a part of which is today's Banduan) during 1907-12 the "process of founding new villages was still visible". The then settlement officer observed that there had been extensive reclamation and formation of new villages during the 19th century. In 1800, there were 218 rent paying villages in Barabhum and by 1908 there were 596 villages in existence. Many of these new villages were founded only two generations before the settlement and were still mainly populated by the families of original reclaimers with only two or three outside tenants. Not only was cultivation expanding in the extensive margin but the equal proportion of don land and tanr land in Barabhum suggested that expansion in the intensive margin was also taking place in the late 19th century".⁴⁷

Along with the above nature of arable expansion Manbhum district was also heavily shifting towards rice cultivation at the cost of other foodgrains, oilseeds etc. For instance, between 1875-1918 indigo and sugarcane had vanished from Manbhum. It may however be also noted that simultaneously short duration gora rice was also being substantially replaced by longer duration wet land rice in Manbhum.⁴⁸

A disproportionately lengthy discussion on land situation in the region has been given above mainly for three reasons. Firstly, it has to be all along kept in mind that the land situation provides certain inherent weaknesses and constraints. Secondly, the process of land alienation must have been selective in the sense that only marginal lands remained with the pioneers. Thirdly, over-dependence on rice in a region where ecological and hydrological changes are of negative nature and leading towards drought proneness can be fatal for its people.

According to available data⁴⁹ the soil characteristic of the region, particularly of Ranibandh Block, is of phyllites origin, and its nutrient status as of now (1987-88) is very low.

Land utilisation statistics for the year 1987-88⁵⁰ of Ranibandh Block showed that out of a total area of 42,840 hectares, net sown area accounted for 14,371 hectares. Nearly 2000 hectares were cropped more than once giving a gross cropped area of 16,339 hectares. Nearly 30 per cent of the cultivated area was irrigated by wells, tank, jorbandh, and canal. The available statistics on cropping⁵¹ pattern indicates that more than 85 per cent of the gross cropped area is under rice cultivation. The average productivity of autumn rice in the district during the last 15 years has been around 1400 kg per hectare and that of winter rice around 1500 kg per hectare. Ranibandh Block being a largely unirrigated and soil-nutrient

deficient area, the productivity of paddy will be much less. If one arbitrarily accepts a productivity index of 1200 kg. per hectare, then the block should be producing nearly 16000000 kg. of paddy per annum. In Bunduan Block on the other hand only 1.4 per cent of the total cultivated area of 15094 hectares (which is 56.3% of the area of the Block) is irrigated. In this Block, chances of area sown more than once is also much less. Roughly, therefore, about 150,00,000 kg. of paddy can be expected to be produced annually here. If one accepts 600 gms of rice per capita per day to be the minimum consumption requirement, both the blocks produce less than what they require to feed their population. The situation is compounded in a drought year and the year following it. As a result, both the blocks seem to be chronically suffering from foodgrain shortage. Moreover in view of increasing deforestation and decreasing productivity of existing forest, the food substitution and nutrition expected to come from the forests is also much reduced.

LAND TENURE, ALIENATION AND LANDHOLDING PATTERN

It has been emphasized in the earlier section that although the pioneer tribals reclaimed virgin land to make them arable, much of the good land at the bottom of the valleys did not ultimately remain with them. Alienation of land in general and particularly of the good land took place through several processes. The inherent weakness of the nature of tenurial practice was one of them.

The precolonial land tenure system in the region was somewhat vague. In the Mughal period, in Bengal, Zamindari system of land revenue administration was prevalent. The Zamindar collected tax from cultivators and after keeping a share for himself passed on the rest to the state. The Mughal land survey carried between 1700 and 1722 could not enter the Jungle Mahals for its inaccessibility, and as a result major parts of the Jungle Mahals were classed as uncultivated land. Consequently the Zamindars in position then in this area were required to pay a very light revenue. The political system and authority prevalent in this region at this time consisted also of scattered chiefdoms whose wealth and strength used to be primarily derived from agriculture. As a result these chiefs/Zamindars encouraged reclamation of jungle to bring more areas under cultivation in order to increase their income.

The commonest form of reclamation in Manbhum, Singhbhum and Ranibandh areas was known in the precolonial days as Pradhani or Mandali ⁵² system under which large tracts of jungles were cleared. The Pradhan or Mandal was the leader of a band of settlers (tribal) who undertook to reclaim jungle by paying a stipulated lumpsum to the Zamindar. The rent used to be periodically adjusted according to the size of the cultivation. The Pradhan or Mandal was often remunerated either by grant of perpetually rent free land called man or khem or given a certain percentage of the rent as commission.

It may be remembered however, that originally the Bhumij had set up villages in these tracts in the same pattern which would be comparable with Khut-Katti system of Chotanagpur division and the Santhals joined them later only. Many of ~~the~~ small chiefdoms therefore was of Bhumij origin and many such chiefs guarding the ghats and jungle passes were known as Ghatwals.⁵³ Their landed right was known as Ghatwali tenure which was rent free or with small token rent. Chief and his subjects belonged to the same tribal group but a system of political hierarchy developed giving rise to a stratified socio-political order. On the other hand, the Pradhani or Mandali system was by and large associated with the Santhals who either held land from a Ghatwal or from other Zamindars of the region. The fundamental weakness of the Pradhani or Mandali form was that the reclaimers were not the virtual owners of the reclaimed land unlike the Ghatwals and chiefs, and were in the nature of settled and occupancy ryots.

In the precolonial period the Kurmis (Mahato), Brahmins and traders from Orissa and Bengali caste groups had started entering the region. However, it was the colonial administration which not only encouraged many other communities to settle in the region but also was responsible for interfering with the traditional tenurial practices of the pioneer tribals. The famous chuar or Paik rebellion⁵⁴ (1799-1800) of the region was basically related to right over land. The advent of colonial administration in Jungle Mahals, Manbhum and Barabhum and the attendant interference by a few British commercial concerns like the Midnapur

Zamindari Company were so new and puzzling to the preliterate tribal society that by the end of 19th century or early part of the 20th century, the pioneers had virtually lost control over the land so labouriously reclaimed and terraced by them. Improvement in communication towards the end of ^{the} 19th century which facilitated the arrival of hordes of non-tribals, payments of rents and revenue by cash, vigorous measurement of land holding etc. played havoc with the non-competitive, non-thrifty, feckless and simple tribal mode of subsistence existence.

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The settlement report of 1850 recorded that "land belonging to former cultivating proprietors and ryots holding occupancy rights with low cash rents were being acquired by money-lending landlords who then proceeded to settle the land with its former proprietors or occupancy ryots at iniquitously high Sanja rent - which consisted of a fixed amount of produce - generally 1/3rd of the crop in normal year which had to be paid in good and bad years alike".

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The Mandali or Pradhani system and the power of Mandal or Pradhan was almost gone by the end of ^{the} 19th century. Thus by 1909 only one-fifth of the Mandals existed. ⁵⁷ Thus the villages formed on the basis of Mandali or Pradhani system were completely bought over by non-tribal proprietors of land by the first quarter of this century. Similarly the Chatwals and Chatwali tenures although did not suffer

so much in the hands of colonial administration except that they were required to pay rent which they were not doing earlier, became victims of the moneylending Mahajans. They also sold and mortgaged land in their possession in times of distress and in order to meet extravagant expenses of socio-religious practices of Hinduism with which the Bhumij were increasingly becoming fascinated. The Zamindari Acquisition Act of 1953 ultimately took away the village forests and surplus land in possession of the Ghatwal and chiefs/Zamindars.

The Sanja system referred above was an invention of the cunning non-tribals and it seemed to have broken the morale of tribal way of life. It kept the cultivator under an ever increasing load of debt. By 1926 in Bankura, one-fourth of the settled ryats land was held either on produce rent or produce rent supplemented by cash payment. A surprisingly 50 per cent of land were in direct possession of proprietors and tenure holders.⁵⁸ The tribals ultimately became helpless dependent on a small class of grasping usurers. According to the Settlement Report of Bankura district (1917-24) there were nearly 11,000 proprietors holding 122,871 acres of land, 1,61,000 tenure holders with 174434 acres of land at fixed rent or rate of rent, 3,60,000 settled or occupancy ryots holding 603863 acres of land on cash or produce rent and 5080 non-occupancy ryots holding 7442 acres of land.

It is evident from the above that major part of agriculture which was monocrop, dependent on rain and practised in a drought-prone area had the heritage of a weak base of land-relation which did not permit any form of agricultural development. The quality of soil and alignment of fields resulted in an overall low productivity. Deforestation did not result in corresponding increase in cultivation area. Because of dispossession of good rice lands a landed class of non-tribals was foisted on a relatively classless society who became dependent on the former in various ways. In the absence of assured irrigation agricultural innovation was also not possible. Holding size of land became comparatively reduced and a section of erstwhile peasants either turned totally landless or became owners of uneconomic holdings/useless uncultivable tara land.

The available data⁵⁹ on size of holding of land owning households of the block at present indicate that 60 per cent of the farmers are marginal farmers, 25 per cent small farmers and the remaining are medium and big farmers. This position in land holding pattern has emerged after the implementation of land reform measures in the State in post 1980 period.⁶⁰ In 1960, a few years after the Zamindars Acquisition Act, the per centage of marginal farmers was 45 the small farmers 29 and medium and big farmers together constituted the remaining 26. Although the number of medium and big farmers had now been almost reduced to half, the land reform measures through

redistribution of surplus land to landless and land poor have created other unforeseen problems for the assignees. Major portion of distributed land is not suitable for intensive rice cultivation and the soil quality is bad. In situation of droughts the entire investment in agriculture is a total loss and debts have to be incurred by such marginal farmers for sustenance in the drought year and for agricultural activity in the next year.

It has been said in the beginning that the region was originally inhabited by the two tribal groups viz., the Bhumij and Santhal. During the 19th and 20th century various non-tribal groups entered the region to share the land and forest resources. They first of all secured control over these productive resources and access and monopoly over markets, and finally started presiding over the local administration to complete the process of dominance. This process is not unique to this region only. It has happened with surprising rapidity in many tribal districts⁶¹ of this country almost simultaneously throughout the 19th and 20th century. It would appear somewhat strange that the people who reclaimed the virgin land to make it cultivable, a considerable number of them ultimately became either landless or land poor. Our survey⁶² in ten villages of the region around 1986-87 indicated that more than 10 per cent tribal households were landless. The 3000 and odd households who were assigned land in Ranibandh Block under land redistribution programme of the Government were largely tribals who once owned land and were peasant.

LABOUR, EMPLOYMENT
AND OCCUPATION

Generally 55 per cent population, in Bankura and Puruliya in 1981 Census, belonged to the age group 15-59 commonly constituting the district's manpower. In poor households girls and boys below the age of 15 and men and women above the age of 59 do however make considerable economic contribution in various ways to the household. According to 1981 Census, only 39 per cent people in Bunduan Block were returned as main workers and 10 per cent as marginal workers. In Ranibandh the proportions were 37 and 10 respectively. The following table provides the sexwise details in 1981 Census.

TABLE 7

Percentage of Main, Marginal and Non-workers in 1981 Census

Block	Main Workers to total population			Marginal Workers to total population			Non-workers to total population		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Ranibandh	36.6	52.1	20.4	10.3	4.2	16.6	53.1	43.7	63.0
Bunduan	39.0	53.5	24.3	10.2	4.2	16.3	50.8	42.3	59.4

(Source: Census of India, 1981)

Seen against the average working age population of the blocks, the data in Table 7 show that a large number of females of working age group are non-workers. This is somewhat strange because half the population in both the blocks are tribal and their women are 100 per cent

worker, majority of the scheduled caste women have no inhibition to work, and almost all women from artisanal castes also work. It is however true that in both the blocks there does not exist adequate employment opportunity for women of these social and occupational categories and therefore they remain considerably unemployed. The Census data therefore could be a reflection of that situation besides its operational and definitional inadequacy.

The National Sample Survey data on employment and unemployment has shown increasing casualisation of female labour force.⁶³ The Census work participation data for females, for instance for Bankura and Purulia and Ranibandh and Bunduan, (See Table 8) between 1961 and 1981 indicate a declining trend in household industry, other workers and cultivator categories, and an increasing trend in agricultural labour. This trend in rural areas is indicative of erosion in and loss of control over traditional resource base and market of a section of population and their increasing dependence on the resources of another section. It has also to be borne in mind that the cultivator category includes a large number of marginal and small farmers and sharecroppers who easily offer themselves for agricultural and other wage labour. The following table will make the scenario clear about Bankura district.

TABLE 8

Percentage Variation in Work Participation
Between 1961-1981

	Cultivator		Agricultural Labourer		Household Industry		Others		Non-workers		rke Fe
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Bankura	+1.2	-55.9	+73.0	+39.8	+10.5	-39.5	+49.6	-44.1	+55.6	+47.6	+4
Ranibandh	-2.1	-58.0	+48.0	+18.2	-14.9	-47.6	+31.3	-59.0	+31.9	+34.4	+6
Puruliya	-12.1	-71.2	+81.1	+30.3	+ 3.9	-42.5	+51.6	-16.2	+63.2	+64.5	+4
Bunduan	-13.7	-59.3	+107.3	+35.1	+5.7	-65.4	+55.2	-44.8	+36.5	+41.7	

(Source: Census of India, 1961 & 1981)

TABLE 9

Distribution of Operational landholding
by amount of land owned (1987-88) with
estimated worker⁶⁴ (Bankura District)

Type	No. of hold- ing (Families in '000)	Amount of land owned (3 000 hectares)	% of total Land own- ing fami- lies	Land owned	% of agri- cultural families including landless	Estimated workers (in lakh)
Landless	-	-	-	-	37.23	2.07
Marginal farmers	149	89	60	23	40.10	2.23
Small farmers	62	93	25	24	16.18	0.90
Medium farmer	30	91	12	24	5.39	0.30
Large farmer	7	109	3	29	1.10	0.06
Total	248	382	100	100	100	5.56

(Source: 8th five year plan, Bankura district)

It may be seen from above that more than 90 per cent of the estimated workers from the farm household are likely to be offering themselves for agricultural and other wage labour. In addition to this, it is estimated that about 50 per cent of the main workers and 80 per cent of the agricultural labourers of the district belong to the socially and economically backward categories of Scheduled Tribes and Castes. Such a situation will automatically lend itself to migration of labour force when adequate employment opportunity is unavailable within the district.

As per the district administration⁶⁵ estimated employment potential in agriculture within Bankura district in a year works out to be approximately 735 lakh persondays. This provides employment for about 130 days a year to its 5.56 lakh estimated workers of farm household. It can (see Table 10 below) be seen that less than 40 per cent of the estimated supply of labour is utilised in the district in the agricultural sector.

TABLE 10

⁶⁶
Estimated Employment in Agriculture (1987-88) in Bankura District

Major Crop	Total cultivated area ('000 hec.)	Estimated employment in lakh person days in a year	% supply of labour utilised
1. Pre-khariff	38	66.50	3.2
2. Khariff	327	516.61	25.8
3. Boro	27	63.79	3.0
4. Wheat	18	20.70	1.0
5. Potato	10	35.00	1.7
6. Pulses	9	9.10	0.5
7. Oil-seeds	19	22.79	1.1
Total	448	734.49	36.7

(Source: VIIIth Five Year plan, Bankura District)

The monthwise employment potential in agriculture, percentage of available labour utilised and average employment per worker per month in Bankura district will make the position further clear as to why and when seasonal migration occurs (see Table 11).

TABLE 11

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Monthwise Employment in Agriculture from Major Crops,
% of labour utilised and Average Employment per worker
Per Month

	Total	Janu- ary	Feb. ruary	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Decem- ber
1. Estimated employment in lakh persondays	734.49	73.60	22.69	32.15	17.21	18.87	73.00	105.30	94.00	63.62	50.19	69.19	110.87
2. Percentage of labour supply utilised	36.7	44.1	13.6	19.3	10.3	11.3	43.8	63.1	56.3	38.1	30.1	41.5	66.5
3. Average employment per worker	132	13	4	6	3	3	13	19	17	11	9	12	20

Note: Total supply of labour per month = $5.56 \times 30 = 166.8$ lakh.

(Source: VIII Plan Document, Bankura District)

The table above shows very clearly that a surplus pool of agricultural labour is always available round the year and even in intensive agricultural seasons between June to December. On an average only 15 days^{of} work is available per month locally to the agricultural labour in the farm sector.

It may be remembered that both availability and distribution of employment in the agricultural sector vary from region to region or even from village to village within the district. It also depends on several other factors like area and crops cultivated, facilities of irrigation, land type etc. For instance, in Ranibandh Block nearly 14 per cent of the total Block's population are agricultural labourers. There are 12,084 farmers in the Block operating on various sizes of land holding. Gross cropped area of the Block is 16,339 hectares whose productivity rate and production are comparatively lower. Because of land situation, droughtproneness and lack of irrigation facilities options open to a farmer here are also limited. Since the Block's 60 per cent population consist of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and in the remaining 40 per cent there are a large number of artisanal castes, backward castes, and economically weak communities it can safely be assumed that 90 per cent of the Block's manpower should be available for agricultural work and a great majority of them of both sexes will offer themselves for agricultural wage work. With these points in view and employment potential of Block's gross cropped area, it is estimated that average employment in agricultural activity per annum per worker will work out to be anything between 60 to 75 days. The situation in Bunduan Block of Purulia district will be no different.

in Table - 11

On the basis of estimates, annual income of an average agricultural labour family of 5 members with two workers (husband and wife) will work out to be around Rs. 3900/- (@ Rs. 15 per day per worker with 130 days of employment). In Ranibandh, the family's income will be half of this as the wage rate as well as days of employment available are less. The per capita household income per day here will work out to be a rupee only. With this amount a person can purchase only 250 gms of foodgrains if the entire amount is spent on this item and as a result, only half of the calorie requirement of the individual will be met.

According to official admission, "in the 7th plan period through all Government efforts by means of various developmental programmes not more than 10 to 15 days of employment per worker per year could be generated at a wage rate varying from Rs. 16.34 to Rs. 19.65".⁶⁸ The same official statistics indicate that on an average between 1985-86 to 1989-90, appx. 41 lakh persondays of employment per year was generated through various government programmes. Therefore, including the agricultural sector, total employment generation per year in the district works out to be 775 lakh persondays. Average employment per worker per year thus becomes about 140 days and income of a family of two workers per annum becomes Rs. 4200 (@ Rs. 15/- per day).

The above discussion sufficiently bring out the vulnerability of rural households in the region. It is for this reason that the survival strategies of such households have been different. Our earlier study in the region have shown that multiple occupations and seasonal variations in work pattern have been the major coping mechanisms to keep the body and soul together of the members of a household. By and large, an average household in the region will work on its own farm mainly with family labour or through reciprocal exchange of labour. It will cultivate and maintain a small backyard vegetable garden. It will also try to take a crop of maize, pulses or oilseeds if it has some tann land. The produce from all these will go largely to meet the consumption needs of the household. The second major area of occupation of the households will be to keep certain amount of livestock. On an average a household in Ranibandh Block has 1.5 plough animals, 0.06 dairy animal, 7 goats/sheeps/pigs and 12 poultry birds. ⁶⁹ These are kept not so much for household nutrition but to meet unforeseen expenses and to meet the clothing and medical needs of the household. The third area of emphasis will be on expenditure saving activities - like free collection of fuel, vegetables, housing materials and other free goods. The fourth area of income for the household will be through collection, processing and sale of various minor forest produce - fuelwood, leaves, seeds, flowers, gums, herbs, mats, platters, ropes etc. Women of all ages are engaged in the activities of rice processing, liquor brewing, rope twisting,

mat stitching and such other occupations at the household level. The fifth major occupation of the household will be any wage labour in agriculture, forestry and non-agricultural activities both locally and distant. The children not only help in looking after the household livestock but also tend the same of other households to earn an income. The aged members stitch sal platters and mat and twist ropes at home. These in nutshell are the occupations of an average household of the region.

Wage pattern in Bankura/Puruliya and Bardhaman has also been a major factor in promoting seasonal migration. Even today wages in this region ^(Bankura/Puruliya) are largely paid in kinds - either by a measure of rice or ^{by} bundles of paddy in agriculture related work. Cash wage till recently was not only very low, it continues to be discriminatory also. Men always get higher wage than women. It is only in the employment generated through Government programmes that prescribed minimum and equal wage is paid to the wage workers. But this has failed to play the expected catalytic role in upgrading the existing exploitative wage pattern in private sector.

On the other hand, wage rate in Bardhaman rice belts has been always higher as compared to what the seasonal migrants has been getting in their home villages. There is no discrimination in wage ^{for last 10-12 years.} by sex. Even today, a seasonal migrant will be getting less than half in her/his home villages of what he/she will get in Bardhaman. The other major attraction has been the continuing

practice in Bardhaman to pay a certain percentage of the wage in rice, oil, vegetable, fuel, pulses etc. A migrant can bring back his entire cash wage plus one third of the entire rice he/she is given. And indeed rice always conjures up a special attraction to these class of people.

At the time of our survey the cash wage rates for male and female in the home villages of seasonal migrants were Rs. 8/- and Rs. 6/- respectively per day. Whereas in Bardhaman, an agricultural labourer, male or female received a cash payment of Rs. 10/-, 1½ kg. of clean rice, and required amount of oil, spices, vegetables, pulses, fuel and bidi per day and an accommodation to stay. Since a major part of the agricultural operations now-a-days have been piece rated an agricultural labourer could also expect to work a second shift to earn a double wage. These two factors viz. the non-discriminatory wage rate and the chance of earning double wage have given a major gender dimension to the phenomenon of seasonal migration besides the fact that women from such class of households have always been the main-stay of household survival strategy.

Apart from these factors, the major peak season and time bound agricultural operations viz. removal of seedlings, transplantation, weeding, harvesting and threshing for which the seasonal labourers are needed are traditionally women - specific activities in which tribal women, specially of Santhal community, were adept. As a result, demand of women seasonal agricultural labourers as such has always been quite high-giving gender dimension to the whole process a prominent place.

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTOR

It appears reasonable that apart from the various compulsions discussed earlier, the phenomenon of seasonal migration has a demographic dimension - particularly for its gender characteristics. The share of female agricultural labourers in the seasonal migration process emerges as one of the crucial issue and the demographic situation of the region could be one of the factors which seems to have played a definitive role in shaping the gender dimension.

Growth of population in the region as such has been slow in comparison to the Districts and State. For instance, in Ranibandh, during the last 100 years the population has increased from 36,608 in 1881 to 82,896 in 1981. Between 1961 and 1981, the growth of the three categories of population viz. Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other communities respectively has been 8992 to 8997, 27580 to 40810, and 30095 to 33089 - showing some ^{noticeable} increase in tribal population only. The general variation of population between 1961-71 and 1971-81 was in the order of 15.8 per cent and 7.5 per cent respectively. The following table provides the decennial growth rate of male and female population of Ranibandh and Banduan blocks between 1961 and 1981 by different categories of population.

TABLE 12

Decennial Growth Rate of Population

Categories	Sex	Population Variation			
		1961-71		1971-81	
		Ranibandh	Banduan	Ranibandh	Banduan
Scheduled Caste	Male	+13.9	-59.2	-22.3	+103.7
	Female	+41.2	-62.5	-17.4	+106.4
Scheduled Tribe	Male	+31.3	+29.3	+14.4	+0.7
	Female	+25.0	+31.8	+16.5	-0.4
Other than SC & ST	Male	+3.1	+33.0	+9.4	-8.2
	Female	-0.4	+32.6	+7.4	-4.6
All Categories	Male	+16.1	+22.1	+7.1	+0.7
	Female	+15.4	+22.5	+7.9	+1.1

(Source: Census of India)

It may be seen that growth rate of population by sex in the three categories has been uneven in both the Blocks and in fact the two Blocks reflect an opposing trend.

However sex ratio of population by three ^{social} categories reflects a slightly different picture. For instance, till about 1951, in Ranibandh, there were 1004 females per 1000 males and this trend persisted only among the Scheduled Tribes till 1961 when the other two categories registered a lower sex ratio. But while there is an improvement in sex ratio among Scheduled Castes between 1961-1981 the other two categories started registering a declining trend (See Table 13 below).

TABLE 13

Sex ratio of Population by Categories

Categories	Blocks	1951	1961	1971	1981
All Categories	Ranibandh	1004	967	952	959
	Banduan	994	976	979	983
Scheduled Castes	Ranibandh	-	775	962	1022
	Banduan	-	1012	932	944
Scheduled Tribes	Ranibandh	-	1011	963	981
	Banduan	-	990	1009	987
Others	Ranibandh	-	967	957	917
	Banduan	-	950	947	984

(Source: Census of India)

In fact sex ratio of the three categories of population between 1961 and 1981 shows an unstable character and more or less an opposing trend. Sex specific differentials in migration, birth and death rates seem to play an opposing role in the two contiguous blocks. In spite of the falling sex ratio, in the tribal category, females exist in large number.

Education and training generally contribute to human capital formation and provide wider options of employment and choice of livelihood. The people of the region were suffering from the lack of these opportunities. In 1951, 90 per cent people of both Ranibandh and Banduan Blocks were illiterate and female literacy was abysmally low (Female literacy in 1951 was 0.8 per cent in Banduan and 3.2 per cent in Ranibandh).⁶⁵ Sexwise percentage of literacy in both the blocks for 1961 and 1981 indicate a small progress in female literacy. During the last 40 years although

TABLE 14

LITERACY RATE

		<u>1961</u>	<u>1981</u>
Banduan	Male	18.8	32.6
	Female	1.5	5.7
Ranibandh	Male	30.4	44.9
	Female	3.4	12.0

(Source: Census of India)

literacy rate has improved, it has largely been confined to population of younger age. The skewed distribution of literacy rate by social categories and by gender is also a prominent feature of both the blocks. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and the artisanal and backward caste components of the other category continue to have high illiteracy level and within this heterogenous group, females in general have much lower literacy rate. For instance, sex ratio of illiterates shows an increasing trend in both the Blocks. In Ranibandh, it was 1328 in 1961 and 1533 in 1981. In Banduan the figures were 1184 and 1376

respectively. Such a situation first of all restricts options for employment, secondly it encourages a unidirectional thrust for employment and lastly it prevents people from being innovative, enterprising and protesting.

The sex ratio of agricultural labour population on the basis of Census data will not reflect the real position of the region because of conceptual and enumeration faults. The alternative way to arrive at the estimated figures of agricultural labourers by sex will be through other data source. According to our estimate in Ranibandh Block, there were about 17,000 households in 1987-88 - of which 12,000 were farm households. Therefore about 5000 households were landless. In the district as a whole there were more than 37 per cent landless families in 1987-88. If we apply this proportion we get a figure of slightly more than 6000 families to be landless in Ranibandh. It is assumed that agricultural labour will generally be drawn from landless and marginal and small farmer households and not so much from medium and large farmer households. Similarly agricultural labour of both sex will generally be drawn from SC & ST categories (with some exceptions like Sunris among SC), which together constitute ^{more than} 60 per cent of the Block population, and to a certain extent from the other categories from among artisanal and service castes and socially backward communities. On a prorata basis, therefore, we arrive at the figures 25000 to 30,000 persons to be in the category of agricultural labourers in the Block in 1987-88. The 1981 census provides a figure of only 9422 persons as agricultural

labourers in the Block with a sex ratio of 714. But if marginal workers (who would otherwise largely be agricultural labourers) numbering 8539 are added to this the sex ratio immediately rises to 1468. We may also keep in mind that nearly 8 per cent of all households in Ranibandh Block in 1981 were headed by females. If this condition is introduced, it is most likely that in agricultural labour population, females will outnumber the males. The above estimates clearly demonstrate the existence of not only a higher percentage of agricultural labour population but a higher sex ratio in the same in Ranibandh Block in 1987-88.

In Banduan Block, according to 1961 census, sex ratio of agricultural labour population was 1165. If we add up the marginal workers to the agricultural labour category as given in 1981 census, a sex ratio of 1352 is obtained. It clearly demonstrates the preponderance of women in the agricultural labour force. In absolute number, in Banduan Block, according to 1981 Census, there were 5783 males and 8126 females enumerated as agricultural labourers and marginal workers. This alone gives us a figure of nearly 14,000 as agricultural labourers. But this will surely be an underestimation in the sense that there are many cultivators, men and women, who will offer themselves as agricultural labourers - particularly from small and marginal farm households who together constitute about more than 80 per cent of the total farm households. Therefore the estimated figure of agricultural labour in Banduan Block will be around 25,000.

Two related demographic characteristics of some importance particularly expected to provide a gender dimension to the phenomenon of seasonal migration are high rate of divorced/deserted/widowed in the female population and the existence of a relatively large number of female headed households in the region.

Based on 20 per cent sample data of the 1961 Census, in Bankura district, 7.7 per cent of all households were single member households - of which 62 per cent were composed of single females. Households with 2.3 member which accounted for 20.7 per cent of all households of the district had a sex ratio of 1050. Similarly, in the district, nearly 10 per cent of all households were female headed of which nearly 1 per cent had male spouse alive. About 55 per cent female headed households were neither engaged in cultivation nor in household industry. In 1981 Census, in Ranibandh Block, 7.8 per cent of all households were female headed. Nearly 40 per cent of all households seemed to have single members (inclusive of single females), female heads of households, and female relations of various kinds inclusive of widows/divorced/separated/deserted females.

The available data from the Census of 1951 and 1961 for Ranibandh Block indicated that more than 33 per cent and 20 per cent respectively of all females were widowed/divorced/separated. The sex ratio of widowed/divorced/separated in the above censuses

in the age group 15 and above also indicated a preponderance of females. The sex ratio of widowed/divorced/separated for the two districts in 1951 and 1981 censuses is given in the following table. It may be seen that both the districts are not only characterised by a high sex ratio but also by an increasing trend in widowed/divorced/separated category.

TABLE 15

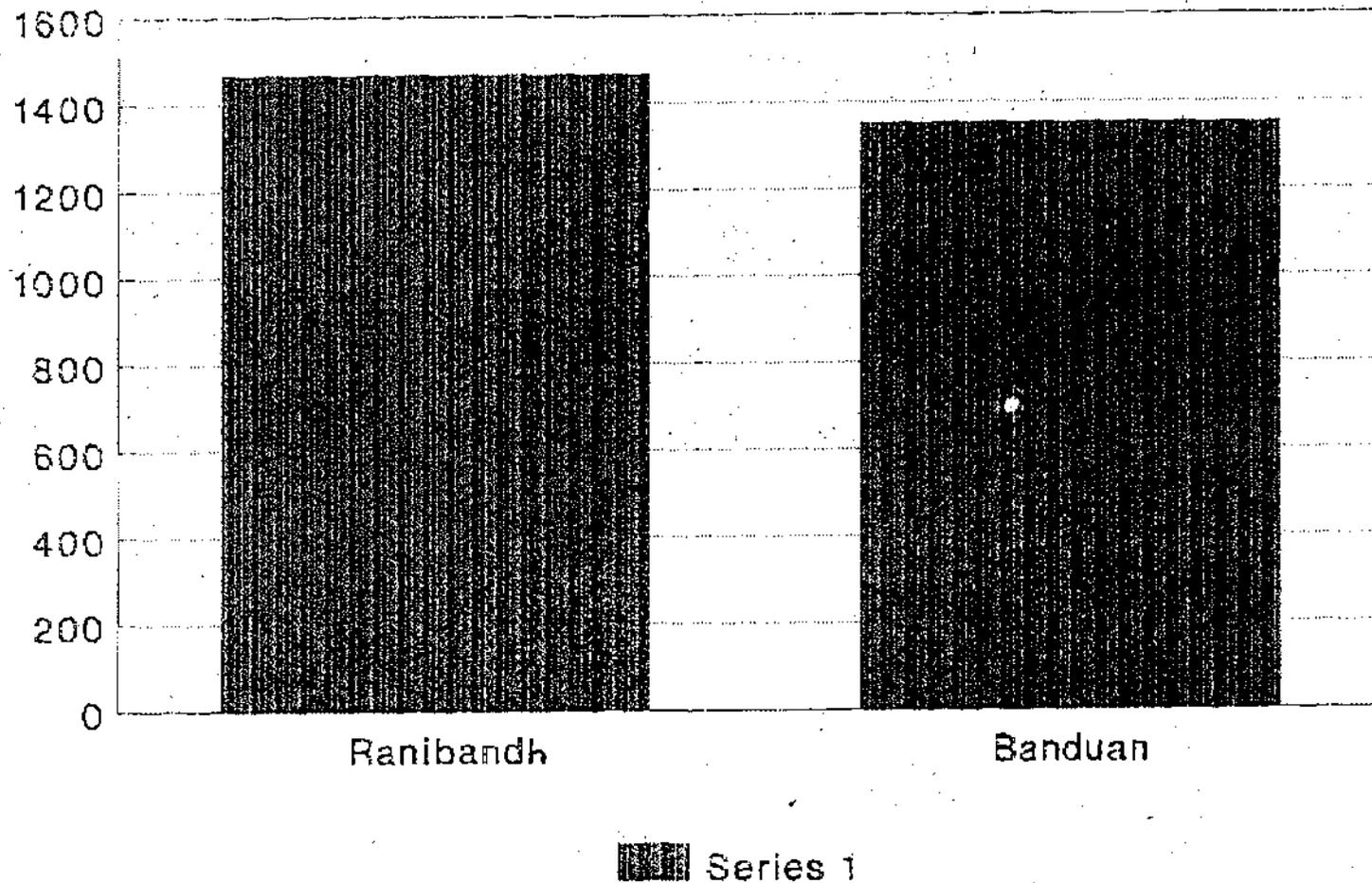
Sex Ratio of Divorced/separated/
Widowed in 1951 and 1981

Age Group	Sex-ratio 1951		1981	
	Puruliya	Bankura	Puruliya	Bankura
15-24	4395	6131	6343	11793
25-34	1702	5796	2987	6770
35-44	1629	5972	3149	6699
45-54	1111	3350	3590	6540
55+	344	4283	4083	5537

(Source. Census of India)

The widowed/separated/divorced females generally either constitute separate households or form a component of various household types. In Scheduled Tribe, Caste and socially and economically backward households they are required to make economic contribution for their own maintenance and social protection. Bulk of these are expected to join the rank of agricultural labourers and of the seasonal agricultural labour force.

Sex-Ratio of Agricultural Labourers in the Study Region - 1981



Female per 1000 Male
(Including Marginal Workers)

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In the previous pages, we have tried to analyse principally two issues. The first issue related to the various compulsions of the region which resulted in seasonal migration as the only option and the reasons for its growing magnitude. The second issue has largely been confined to examining the reasons and magnitude of gender characteristic in the whole process.

The available macro-level data of the census and the NSS have provided certain broad trends and characteristics of migration including seasonal migration process with special reference to female migrants for the country, state and the three concerned districts. The various inherent and changing characteristics of the source region of seasonal migration have, by and large, provided various positive and potent indicators for the rise and continuance of seasonal migration process on one hand and large scale involvement of women in the same on the other. It may be possible that there could be other factors as well which have not been discussed here largely due to lack of definite data. For instance, we have seen that differing agricultural cycle in the two regions is a contributory factor for seasonal migration. This needs to be understood more clearly at the micro level with reference to species of paddy cultivated at two places, extent of agricultural modernisation, onset of monsoon in the source region or release of canal water in Bardhaman, and the nature of management of agricultural practices in both the regions viz. the source and the destination regions. The differing agricultural cycle releases agricultural labour population at certain points of time which meets the demand and supply equation. In other words, the spells of unemployment of the catchment area coincide with the peak season labour demands of the destination point.

It is possible to determine the spells of unemployment with reference to certain available data of the block and the district. In Ranibandh Block, 69 per cent of the cultivated area is high land, 25 per cent medium land and only 6 per cent low land. The last category of land only is best suited for winter rice cultivation. Of the total farm households 85 per cent are marginal and small farmers. Considering the pattern of land alienation that had taken place they are unlikely to possess the last category of land in any measure. Of the total area of the district under summer, autumn and winter rice, more than 90 per cent area are used for winter rice of traditional variety. Available data on adoption of high yielding variety of rice in Ranibandh Block indicates that in respect of autumn rice Ranibandh appears at the bottom and in respect of winter rice the Block is much below the district average. Since canal irrigated area of the Block is comparatively small, cultivation of HYV is a risky proposition. As a result, the major cultivation is dependent on rain and therefore traditional variety of rice predominates. For instance, in Ranibandh Block, in 1987-88 nearly 70 per cent of the winter rice and more than 50 per cent of autumn rice were of traditional varieties. Since HYV required a good deal of non-traditional inputs it must have been largely adopted by medium and big farmers who could afford risks and inputs. As a result, the majority of the potential seasonal migrants would be associated with traditional variety of rice at the source region. On the other hand, in Bardhaman, the HYV varieties predominate the agricultural scene and traditional varieties are cultivated only for special requirements. The agriculture in Bardhaman is also largely canal water dependent. Therefore, when the farmers of source

region complete transplantation of winter rice, in Bardhaman the farmers will be raising seedlings and preparing fields. Similar situation occurs during harvest also. As far as the demand of agricultural labourers in Bardhaman during Boro rice cultivation is concerned, seasonal labourers are available in far more numbers as hardly any Boro cultivation is done in the source region. The annual calender of activities ^(See appendix-VII) of average small and marginal farm households, agricultural labour households and artisanal households of the region also indicate spells of unemployment in those periods when agricultural labourers are needed in Bardhaman.

The current macro-scene of West Bengal reveals a situation where agricultural labour force predominates. In the whole state, small and marginal farmers are preponderant. Fragmentation of holdings and new assignments of land due to land reform measures have also added to these categories. Rate of increase in agricultural labour as well as proportion of agricultural labour to cultivator are high. The Scheduled Castes and Tribes - a major source of agricultural labour force together constitute a higher proportion of population in rural West Bengal. Efficacy of land redistribution as an anti-^{poverty} programme rather than production related programme needs to be evaluated to see whether the assignments continue to remain in agricultural labour force. Evidences at the micro-level suggest that landless and land poor households in rural West Bengal are still quite large.

On the issue of gender dimension in the whole process, it may be pointed out that such factors as gender specificity of tasks, docility of female labour, rapid increase in female agricultural

labour both in absolutely and in relation to male agricultural labour, general impoverishment of households and marginalisation of women in resource access, gradual disappearance of traditional services, arts and crafts and certain social control and protection, lack of education and training, neglect of women in anti-poverty and resource redistribution programme etc. could be some of the major reasons.

SECTION B

Demands of Destination Point

The reports of the colonial period abound with the remarks on labour migration both of periodic and permanent nature to Barddhaman from Bankura and Manbhum (Puruliya). By the 19th century, Barddhaman district had distinguished itself in several areas such as coal mining, iron work, paper mills, potteries and of course agriculture. Towards the end of the 19th century, more than 20 per cent of the district's population used to be supported by industry, commerce and profession. But nearly 60 per cent also used to be supported by agriculture. More than 45 per cent of the total area of the district was under rice cultivation, 80 per cent of which was under Aman rice (winter rice) alone and 25 per cent was already twice cropped area.

The Bengal District Gazetteer⁷³ (1910) for Barddhaman recorded that in the 1770 famine "one third of a generation of peasants had been swept from the face of the earth". Subsequently also there were several important famines and distresses in the district in the year 1866, 1873-74, 1884-85-86, 1894, 1904, 1907 and 1943. As can be imagined, it was the socially and economically weaker section who suffered most during these famines and distresses, and caused not only a shortage of agricultural labour in the district but also was responsible for a large area remaining out of cultivation due to shortage of labour and farmers. Such calamities also used to cause immediate demographic imbalances and several years were needed to repair the situation. Meanwhile, permanent and seasonal migration of labour from outside had been the only means to continue cultivation.

The account of land employment in Bardhaman district as available upto 1950 indicates certain interesting features. "Between 1765 and 1788 grants to hold 6600 acres of revenue free land under the names of debottar, brahmottar, mahattran, khairat etc. were given to 408 persons with a view to bringing wastelands under cultivation"⁷⁴. In 1870 "nearly 2/3rd of the husbandmen of the Burdwan district hold their lands with a right of occupancy and the remaining 1/3rd being simple tenants at will"⁷⁵. By 1881, in Sadar subdivision of Bardhaman district an important change had taken place. In order to supply drinking water to Bardhaman town and for sanitary purpose a 27 miles long canal known as Eden canal, which took water from Damodar river, was constructed. This canal started irrigating 33 sq. miles (more than 20,000 acres) of land in Burdwan, Jamalpur and Memari police station resulting in agricultural prosperity in these regions.⁷⁶ It is interesting to note that traditionally also seasonal migrants visited these areas most and the process became more intensive after the BDR was opened in 1916 which carried seasonal migrants from Bankura and Puruliya and released them at Raina which was situated only a few miles away from Jamalpur. Many settlements of Santhals also grew up in these region as a consequence of this.

By 1903-4, nearly a quarter of the cultivated area (1268 sq. miles) in Sadar sub-division was twice cropped giving a gross cropped area of nearly 1600 sq. miles. More than 3/4 of the gross cropped area was under rice cultivation and winter rice covered 4/5th of the same.⁷⁷

The District Gazetteer of Bardhaman (1910) reported that 15 per cent of the net cropped area of the district was twice cropped, 81 per cent of the area was under winter rice and another 13 per cent was under autumn rice. Some 20,000 acres of land was being irrigated by the Eden canal. It was mentioned that "large areas have been brought under cultivation within the last century, especially the western part of the district which a 100 years ago were covered with sal forests and jungles. There is now little land in the district of any agricultural value which is not used for crop".⁷⁸

The settlement operations, 1924-32 recorded that in the Sadar subdivision of the district 90 per cent of the area under rice was Aman paddy.⁷⁹ The Ishaque Report of 1944-45 also indicated more or less the same figure.⁸⁰

The above details bring out two points into sharp focus. Firstly, upto the 19th century, substantial areas of land was brought under cultivation in order to increase the area of cultivation. This used to be evidently done at the initiative of zamindars. Secondly, on an average 90 per cent to 95 per cent of the cropped area was under winter rice cultivation indicating the need for large number of agricultural labour for various agricultural tasks during the agricultural seasons especially during the peak periods of transplantation and harvesting.

The major part of Aman cultivation in the district was tank irrigated and rain water dependent in the 19th century. In the 20th century the Damodar canal system, completed in two phases

in the thirties and fifties, brought considerable area of the District under canal irrigation resulting in an increase in cropping intensity on one hand and in demand of more agricultural labourers on the other. The Damodar canal system also benefitted the Sadar subdivision of the district most as the main canals and their branches criss-crossed the area.

Currently in the Sadar subdivision nearly 2.45 lakh hectares of land is under cultivation and since the subdivision has developed into a fine irrigated area of all types (See table below) the substantial part of the agricultural land is cropped more than once. According to 1981 census nearly 80 per cent of the total area of

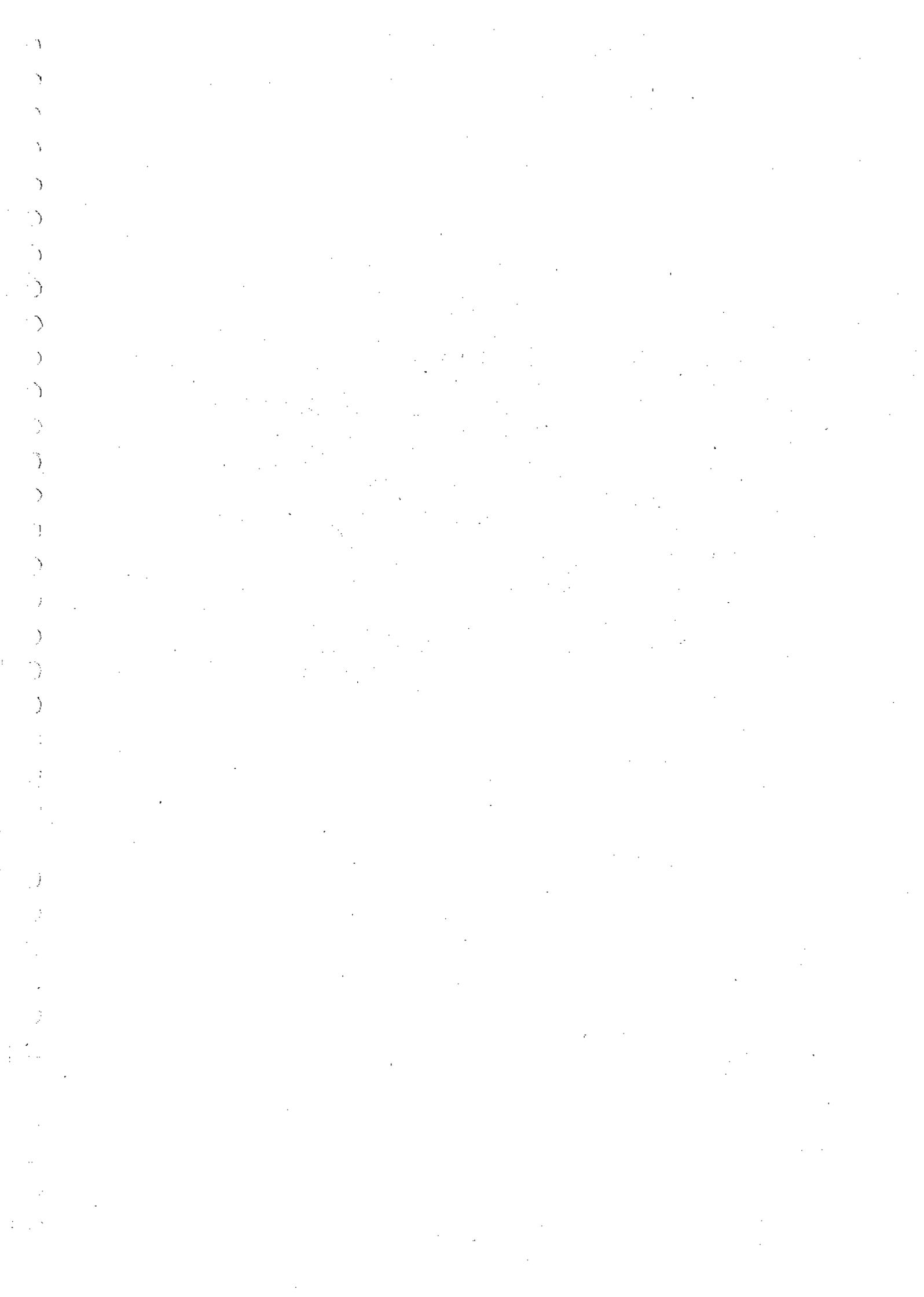
TABLE - 16

Irrigation by Types in Sadar Sub-
division (1981)

Percentage of Irrigated area	Irrigation by source (in percentage)					
	Govt. canal	Tank	Tubewell with electri- city	Tube well	River	Multiple source including Govt. canal etc.
77	63.2	2.3	1.4	2.9	1.3	28.9

(Source: Census of India, 1981)

Sadar subdivision comprising eight police stations was cultivable area and more than 75 per cent of the same was irrigated. As a result it is expected that the gross cropped area of the subdivision is somewhere between 4.00 to 4.30 lakh hectares.





(5)

'THE GREEN DISTRICT' - THREE/FOURTH OF THE
AGRICULTURAL LAND OF BARDHAMAN BROUGHT
UNDER PROPER IRRIGATION SYSTEM.

District's records of foodgrains production (as per the Economic Review, Government of West Bengal) indicate that area under rice has increased from 462.2 in 1960-61 to 563.5 thousand hectares in 1987-88, which constituted 97 per cent of the area under foodgrains in 1987-88. In 1960-61, the proportion was around 90 per cent. In 1988-89, the proportion rose to about 98 per cent. Rice production in the district has almost doubled during the period and rice yield per hectare has increased from 1514 kg./hectare in 1960-61 to 2203 kg./hectare in 1987-88. In 1988-89, yield per hectare rose to 2595 kgs. As a result, area, productivity and cropping intensity have increased simultaneously.

On a very simplistic calculation, the estimated employment potential in rice cultivation in Kharif and Boro in 1981 in the Sadar subdivision of Bardhaman should have been in the order of 820 lakh persondays. The enumerated agricultural labour force in 1981 in the Sadar subdivision was 2.26 lakh. If we assume that each of them worked for full 300 days a year, more than 140 lakh persondays of employment was still wide open to migrant agricultural labourers and small and marginal farmers of the subdivision.

Since seasonal migrant labourers are mainly used for tasks like ploughing, seedling removal and transplantation, weeding, harvesting, threshing and storage, the intensity of labour requirement at peak seasons outstrips the local supply of agricultural labour force. For instance, let us take the task of seedling removal and transplantation. The farmers of Bardhaman have clubbed these two tasks together to develop a piece-rate work norm, that is, an agricultural labourer is to remove 24 bundles of paddy seedling and transplant the same in a day in Kharif. In case of Boro paddy the work norm per day is

20 bundles of removal and transplantation. In case of Aman paddy, estimated requirement of labour per acre for the two tasks viz. seedling removal and transplantation is 18 persondays. In case of Boro, it is about 27 persondays.

Thus in Sadar subdivision, during the transplantation seasons of Aman and Boro rice in 1981, requirements of agricultural labour on a moderate estimate were 110.25 lakh and 125.80 lakh persondays respectively. This operation needs to be completed within the shortest possible time in order to meet the demands of cultural operations such as land preparation, size of seedlings, water availability and proper timing of transplantation. With the available local agricultural labour it would take about 50 and 55 days respectively to complete the transplantation of Aman and Boro rice whereas the norm of agricultural practice demands that it should be completed within two weeks time. Therefore, need of outside labour becomes essential for the farmers, and the underemployed agricultural labour force from Bankura and Puruliya migrate to meet this need.

Since seedling removal, transplantation, weeding, harvesting and threshing are predominantly and traditionally female-specific tasks, the demand for docile female agricultural labour is very meaningful. Similarly, as each of these tasks is a time bound operation it has to be kept in mind that demand for extra female agricultural labour follows a pattern. The female seasonal migrant agricultural labourers therefore become a central element in the whole agricultural practice.

Having seen that the need for additional agricultural labour still exists in the region under study and the underemployed agricultural labourers of Bankura and Puruliya meet this need through seasonal migration, let us examine the historical, cultural and ethnic dimensions of growth of agricultural labour force and the reasons for continuing use of seasonal migrant labour in the region.

In 1901, the population of the district was 1552475 of which the three major communities who seemed to have constituted the bulk of agricultural labour force, viz. the Bagdis, Bauris, and Santhals together constituted 3,57,000 (1,98,000 - Bagdi, 113000 - Bauri and 46,000 - Santhal) or about 23 per cent of the total population. The total cultivated area of the district at that time was 336182 hectares, and on 290257 hectares, alone (86 per cent of cultivated area) winter rice used to be cultivated. Such an area would have normally an employment potential of 455 lakh persondays per annum. Another 65,398 hectares was under autumn rice which had the employment potential of 115 lakh persondays annually. If we expect to have an agricultural labour force of 1.5 lakh (assumption being two persons per household from the population of the above three communities), it appears that shortage of labour for agricultural tasks existed then also.

In fact the Census of 1901 categorically recorded about periodic and permanent immigration from Bankura, Manbhum and Santhal Parganas to Barddhaman. The Bengal District Gazetteer Burdwan (1910) recorded that the Bauris were generally to be found in the western coal mines

of the district. They were also cultivators, agricultural labourers and palki bearers. On the other hand, the Bagdis, who numbered about two lakhs, were basically dependent on agriculture, but very few of them were occupancy ryots. They worked as landless day labourers or as nomadic cultivators under bhaq-jot system (korfa ryots). The Gazetteer mentioned about semi-aboriginal women expected to work in field, village tank or road. Bauri women used to work as head loaders of earth during tank and road construction. The collector of Burdwan in 1895 recorded "the only women and children whom I found employed in outdoor labour for hire belonged to the poor relation and semi-dependent class widows and orphans. The poorest Bauri labourer did not let his wife work for any one but himself" (emphasis author's). The collector in 1892 mentioned "Females husk rice for their wealthier neighbours thus earning Rs. 12/- per annum. They never work in the fields but assist in such operation as threshing and winnowing if carried on in the dwelling-house yard. (Hunter in his Statistical Account of Bengal (1876) mentioned about 10,000 female rice huskers in the district). The collector also said "In this district it is impossible to draw a sharp distinction between poorer cultivators and the agricultural labourers. There are very few cultivators holding less than 4 acres who do not supplement their income by working as labourers and there are scarcely any agricultural labourers who do not hold some land from a garden patch of ten katha to a share in rice field". In 1891 census, agricultural population in the district in all numbered nine lakhs. Of these, only 32 per cent (3800 rent receivers, 2,51,000 rent payers, and 36,000 labourers) were actual workers. There were 20,000 rice

pounders in the district (all of them likely to be low caste Bagdi and Bauri women) and 1,13,000 persons were earth workers and ground labourers. In the coalfields of Raniganj usually a whole family worked in the mines. Hence family mining was induced. Miners were usually Bauris from the district itself and Santhals from neighbouring districts.

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A study on 1943-44 famine of Bengal indicates "the development of famine relief at state expenses in the 1870s and 1880s seem to have coincided with an important change in the agrarian sociology of Bengal - the appearance of wage labourers and sharecroppers on large scale. While hired labourers had existed before the 1870s it had been more or less confined to northern and western districts, where landlords brought in tribals from the Chotanagpur region. For this reason wage labourers were originally called Pashchimoyallas or people from west. By 1931 agricultural wage labourers made up slightly more than 1/5th of the working population of Bengal."

From the 1950s it is possible to get a good deal of desegregated data relating to the study region mainly from the Indian census. The following table (Table 17) on the basis of 1951 census data, provides some insights. The entire Bardhaman (Sadar) subdivision fell within the command area of the Damodar canal system. Jamalpur and Memari police stations had enjoyed the benefits of Eden canal from 1881. As a result, in keeping with agricultural progress a substantial proportion of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes

TABLE - 17

Area, Population, Sex-ratio and Self
supporting persons in Sadar Sub-
division in 1951

	Study Region (Rural)			Sadar Sub- division
	R - I Bardhaman, Raina and Khandaghoash	R - II Jamalpur and Memari	R - III Galsi, Bhatar and Ausgram	
1	2	3	4	5
Appx. Area ('000 Hec.)	113	68	149	330
Appx. area under Aman, Aus and Potato ('000 Hec)	72	43	95	210
<u>Percentage of</u>				
a. Total Population	100.00	100.0	100.0	100.0
Male	52.6	52.5	50.7	51.8
Female	47.4	47.5	49.3	48.2
b. Scheduled Caste to total population	28.9	28.3	31.8	29.8
c. Scheduled Tribe to total population	3.5	13.7	8.4	8.1
<u>Sex Ratio of</u>				
a. Scheduled Castes	838	958	951	914
b. Scheduled Tribes	869	1000	965	966
c. Residual	929	860	987	932
d. Santhals	875	1000	964	966
<u>Percentage of Self- supporting persons to total population</u>				
a. Male	48.8	51.7	49.8	50.0
b. Female	9.9	14.3	10.4	11.3

	1	2	3	4	5
6. Percentage of self-supporting persons in					
I. Male		51.7	28.8	31.5	337
Female		21.2	23.0	28.3	24.4
II. Male		9.8	20.5	21.0	17.0
Female		14.9	9.3	6.6	10.0
III. Male		22.2	28.9	30.8	28.3
Female		20.4	37.9	34.1	31.3

(Source: Census of India)

- Note:
- I. Self-supporting cultivators of land wholly or mainly owned.
 - II. Self-supporting cultivators of land wholly or mainly unowned.
 - III. Self-supporting cultivating labourers

population poured in and started inhabiting the region to meet the local labour demand. For instance, because of early development of irrigation facility in Jamalpur and Memari, a good deal of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) population were found ^{there} in 1951. Jamalpur and Memari were also well connected by road (the Grand Trunk Road), rail (both BDR and EIR) and river (Damodar river) for quite sometime. The other notable feature in 1951 was low percentage of self-supporting women in the entire region. Of the total self-supporting women 65 per cent derived their livelihood from agriculture and remaining from non-agricultural activities such as rice-pounding, weaving, domestic maids etc. However, when only 28 per cent of self supporting men were agricultural labourers, the proportion of women was 31 per cent. Presumably, the entire bulk of this women labour force came mainly from scheduled tribes and partly from scheduled castes,* although scheduled caste population was nearly four times higher than the ST population. Lastly, as compared to area under the three principal crops, cultivating labourers were fewer than the needed number of agricultural labourers. It can also be seen that the tribal category was dominated by Santhals and as their both sexes were expert agriculturists the sex ratio is also higher as compared to SC and residual communities. The table also shows that male population of the region are largely self-supporting cultivators of land owned but the females appear in higher proportion in the cultivating labour category.

*One of the authors who lived in the heart of this region in the fifties and sixties noticed that scheduled caste women hardly worked in rice fields in many villages.

As mentioned earlier, ~~the~~ high sub-infeudation of land and share cropping in various forms gained ground from the 19th century in the District of Bardhaman. These two processes seemed to have induced a great deal of movement of SC, ST and other backward communities into the study region. Many of them came in search of agricultural wage labour. Whereas the scheduled castes were traditionally landless and it hardly mattered where they settled as long as work was available, in the case of scheduled tribes, more specifically the Santhals, they preferred to go back as they owned land under some tenure in their home villages. As can be seen from the following table (Table 18) the growth of Santhal population in the District was gradual and it was definitely in response to the ^{growing} scope of sharecropping and availability of permanent agricultural work.

In the study region, there were several scheduled castes in 1951. But Bagdis alone constituted 60 per cent of them. There were two other communities viz. the Bauris and Muchis (Chamar) who numbered more than 20,000 each. Similarly, the Santhals formed about 98 per cent of the tribal population. Therefore, the main bulk of agriculture labour used to be definitely drawn from these three scheduled castes and one scheduled tribe. However the population growth trend of the six scheduled caste communities upto 1951 in the district shows that the Bagdi population had decreased between 1872-1951. Although the Bauris improved its strength, its growth rate was not high. So was the case

TABLE 18

Population of Major Scheduled Castes and Santhal Tribe
and Natural Calamities (1872-1981)

Year	Baḡḡdi	Bauri	Muchi	Dom	Hari	Nama- Suḡra	Santhals	Famine	Flood	Drought
1981	3,85,130	2,15,762	1,64,652	59,836	43,543	1,12,321	2,32,437	-	1978	-
1951	1,89,671	1,24,162	65,542	31,949	20,746	31,017	1,27,441	1943	1934	1940 1935 1932
1931	1,85,172	1,23,864	63,885	34,910	20,132	14,809	1,01,522	-	1913 1920 1917-18 1916	-
1911	1,95,374	1,14,302	62,125	39,396	23,248	14,909	65,999	1907 1904 1894	1905	-
1891	1,49,461	92,322	51,280	39,689	22,976	18,075	22,256	1886 1885 1884 1874		
1872	2,05,074	70,598	-	52,327	27,254	33,326	4,487	Onset of Barddhaman Fever		

(Source: Census of India)

with the Muchis. A decreasing trend of population was not associated with the Bagdis alone. The other scheduled castes like Dom., Hari, Namasudra who were associated with agriculture showed a decreasing trend. On the other hand the Santhal population in the district grew steadily between 1872 to 1951.

Between 1951-81 on the other hand, there had been a sudden spurt of growth among all the six scheduled castes and the Santhal tribe. This growth seems to include a great deal of migration of SCs from other districts of West Bengal and Santhals from Bankura, Puruliya and Medinipur. In the tribal category it is seen that while the Santhals once constituted 95 per cent of total tribal population of the district its percentage in 1981 came down to less than 85. Apparently other tribal communities have also been migrating to Bardhaman in large number during the period 1951-81.

The proportion of people by social categories in various livelihood classes in the district in 1951 showed that less than 10 per cent population of SC and ST categories fell in class I as compared to more than 50 per cent of residual category. There were substantial number of SC and ST population in class II as well as in class III as compared to residual category. In the non-agricultural sector also SC and ST together formed an overwhelming category. Although no data was separately provided by castes and tribes, it was found that nearly 5000 women independently and more than 1000 as employees worked in processing of grains and pulses in the study region out of 10,000 and 3000 respectively in the district. Similarly more than 2000 self-supporting women out of more than 4000 in the District were engaged in domestic services in the study region.

TABLE 19

Population by Livelihood Classes, 1951

Social Categories	Proportion in population	Livelihood Classes								
		I	II	III	V	VIII	IV	VI	VII	Total
Scheduled Castes (SC)	31.3	10.2	20.8	33.6	13.1	9.2		13.1		100
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	7.2	8.2	32.9	29.5	24.1	4.3		1.0		100
Residual Category	61.5	52.7	12.6	8.4	15.1	8.3		2.9		100

Note: Livelihood Classes. (Source: Census of India)

Agricultural Classes

- I - Cultivators of Land wholly or mainly owned and their dependants.
- II - Cultivators of land wholly or mainly unowned and their dependants.
- III - Cultivating labourers and their dependants.
- IV - Non-cultivating owners of land, agricultural rent receivers and their dependants.

Non-Agricultural Classes

Persons (including dependant) who derive their principal means of livelihood from -

- V - Production other than cultivation
- VI - Commerce
- VII - Transport
- VIII - Other services and miscellaneous sources.

It appears that much of the domestic services and grain processing activities were in the hands of scheduled castes women only. By all accounts many scheduled castes women particularly from landless households in the study region might have worked as agricultural labourers but scheduled tribe women from landless, landpoor and sharecropping household did definitely work as agricultural labourers. In spite of this situation, anywhere between 40 to 50 per cent of the estimated employment generated in agriculture had to be met by the seasonal migrant labourers. In Bardhaman as a whole, area under rice cultivation between 1960-61 and 1987-88 had increased by nearly 22 per cent. Boro rice cultivation alone had increased by more than 1500 times increasing the demand of agricultural labourers further - which the agricultural labourers in situ can not possibly cope with.

The growth of agricultural labour force took an upward swing between 1961-1981 in the study region. The following table (Table 20) indicates the variation of population, workers, cultivators and agricultural labourers in the study region between 1961 and 1981. It may be seen that although variation in population and worker has almost gone hand in hand, the realignment within the workforce by sex has been quite distinct. For instance, female cultivators have decreased considerably to swell the rank of agricultural labour force. This realignment in workforce must have proceeded with calculated readjustment in social relation, restriction and allocation of work. As is evident from the table 21 presumably many scheduled caste women of the study region have joined the rank of agricultural labour force during the last 30 years.

TABLE 20

VARIATION IN POPULATION
WORKER, CULTIVATOR & AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS
BY SOCIAL CATEGORIES BETWEEN 1961 AND 1981

Study Region	Social Category	Variation in Population			Worker			Cultivator			Agricultural Labourer		
		P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F
I. Barddhaman, Raina & Khanda-ghosh	Total Population	+56.1	+54.5	+57.9	-108.5	+48.6	+63.7	+11.3	+14.5	-65.0	+152.8	+139.5	+232.1
	Scheduled Caste(SC)	+75.0	+76.0	+74.0	+99.2	+100.7	+90.4	-9.8	-8.2	-54.9	+373.5	+367.4	+414.0
	Scheduled Tribe(ST)	+91.3	+96.2	+86.3	+92.7	+97.6	+87.3	-38.9	-35.6	-46.0	+206.0	+252.7	+166.1
I. Jamalpur Memari	Total Population	+57.6	+58.6	+56.6	+67.3	+64.1	+80.1	+14.1	+22.3	-54.3	+139.1	+133.4	+150.9
	SC	+70.4	+63.0	+70.7	+53.8	+53.8	+117.2	+13.4	-6.9	-43.4	+125.7	+98.4	+247.2
	ST	+82.5	+69.2	-12.9	+85.0	+68.7	+106.5	-33.9	-33.6	-34.5	+155.1	+164.5	+146.2
II. Galsi, Bhatar, & Ausgram	Total Population	+28.6	+28.4	+28.9	+34.5	+27.1	+81.0	+12.9	+9.3	-41.2	+113.6	+93.1	+194.6
	SC	+46.0	+53.3	+39.2	+86.2	+66.2	+182.4	-10.5	-10.7	-8.2	+265.4	+222.0	+469.7
	ST	+21.5	+24.8	+18.2	+23.9	+22.1	+26.3	-39.6	-26.7	-58.2	+80.5	+74.8	+88.2
IV. Sadar Sub-division	Total Population	+46.7	+46.3	+47.1	+48.9	+44.5	+75.9	+9.9	+14.4	-51.4	+133.0	+119.1	+180.6
	SC	+62.9	+64.3	+61.4	+84.5	+74.4	+133.6	-10.0	-8.7	-33.2	+233.9	+208.3	+360.6
	ST	+59.0	+56.2	+62.1	+61.0	+54.0	+70.0	-37.1	-31.2	-48.1	+134.0	+138.3	+120.1

TABLE 21

Percentage Difference Between 1961 and 1981 in the share of Population
and Other Characteristics of the Scheduled Caste & Schedule Tribe
Categories

Study Region	Social Category	Population		Worker		Cultivator		Agricultural Labour	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
I. Bardhaman, Raina and Khandaghosh	Scheduled Caste (SC)	+3.3	+2.6	+7.8	+5.7	-4.9	+6.2	+29.9	+15.8
	Scheduled Tribe (ST)	+0.8	+0.7	+1.3	+4.3	-1.2	+16.4	+4.0	-12.0
II. Jamalpur Memari	SC	+0.7	+3.5	-2.0	+6.1	-4.9	+3.3	-8.5	+10.8
	ST	+0.9	-5.1	+0.4	+6.7	-5.9	+20.0	+3.5	-1.0
III. Galsi, Bhatar and Ausgram	SC	+5.1	+2.3	+8.0	+19.3	-3.3	+8.8	+23.6	+27.6
	ST	-0.2	-0.7	-0.4	-14.8	-2.3	-19.0	-1.9	-21.3
IV. Sadar Sub- Division	SC	+3.2	+2.6	+5.4	+10.7	-4.3	+6.1	+16.4	+17.9
	ST	+0.5	+0.7	+0.6	-1.4	-2.7	+3.5	+1.5	-10.6

(Source: Census of India)

The sex ratio of agricultural labour force between 1961 and 1981 (Table 22) not only shows an improvement but also registers a growth even where it was already high e.g. in Jamalpur - Memari police station.

The other notable feature of the period is the decrease in the proportion of Santhal population to total tribal population. In 1951, Santhals constituted nearly 95 per cent of the district's tribal population. In 1981, it was nearly 84 per cent. Admittedly, the influx of other tribal communities in the district has been intensive during the period to take a share in agricultural and non-agricultural employment opportunities. It may also be possible that ^{Permanent} migration of the Santhal has reached a ceiling.

This chapter in two sections ^{been} has an attempt to show the contrasting demands and compulsions arising out of various forces -- social, economic and developmental in the two regions under study viz. the catchment area and the destination point, which encouraged and sustained the phenomenon of seasonal migration of agricultural labour. Between the '50s and '80s a series of agrarian and political changes have taken place in the state although with differing intensity and priority between the districts. For instance, intensity of political mobilisation and priorities of political actions in Bankura and Puruliya have been slower and different from Bardhaman. The nature of the farm sector in Bankura and Puruliya is also not the same as in Bardhaman.

TABLE 22

Sex Ratio in 1961 and 1981

Study Region		Population		Workers		Agricultural labourer	
		1961	1981	1961	1981	1961	1981
Bardhaman Raina and Khanda- ghosh	General Popula- tion	913	934	113	124	165	228
	Scheduled Caste	963	953	175	166	152	167
	Scheduled Tribe	1039	986	890	843	1170	883
Jamalpur and Memari	General Popula- tion	957	945	255	280	489	525
	Scheduled Caste	960	965	237	334	224	392
	Scheduled Tribe	824	424	752	920	1062	989
Galsi, Bhatar and Ausgram	General Popula- tion	958	962	158	226	254	388
	Scheduled Caste	1061	964	204	353	212	376
	Scheduled Tribe	1003	950	754	780	759	818
Sadar Sub- division	General Popula- tion	940	946	163	199	292	374
	Scheduled Caste	977	960	204	274	202	302
	Scheduled Tribe	931	966	776	857	945	910

(Source: Census of India)

Although agrarian policies and reforms adopted by the State Government during the period were intended to be uniform, there have been differing constraints in the districts. Growing incidence of small holding size, fragmentation of operational holdings, shift in investment of agricultural income of farmers, increased re-affirmation of workers' right, larger proportion of agricultural labourers to cultivators, high SC and ST population, higher percentage of population below poverty line, rapid increase in female agricultural wage labour and their distribution across operations and tasks, population growth etc. may cause some change in the characteristic and intensity of seasonal migration in future.

Seasonal migrant agricultural labour as a sub-stratum of agricultural labour force must have been undergoing required internal changes alongwith the general changes in agricultural labour force. Some of the general changes particularly with reference to female agricultural labour are indicated below to provide the general macro-scenario of West Bengal.

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In West Bengal, when rural households increased by 21 per cent between 1974-75 and 1977-78, agricultural labour households increased by 64 per cent. Among scheduled caste these growths were 13 and 26 per cent respectively. Among scheduled tribes, rural households decreased in absolute number but agricultural labour households increased by 52 per cent. Percentage growth of both male and female

agricultural wage labour, according to Rural Labour Enquiry, 1974-75, was highest in the Eastern zone between 1964-65 and 1974-75, and female labour increased by 96 per cent. During the 20 year period between 1964-65 and 1983 agricultural labour households increased from 25.4 to 38.5 of total rural household in West Bengal. During the same time other labour households decreased from 8.7 to 8.1 of total rural households. Hence there has been not only a unidirectional growth in agricultural labour household but a realignment was also taking place. Available data on percentage of agricultural labour households with land shows an increasing trend in West Bengal between 1956-57 to 1977-78 i.e. 36.5 per cent and 45.2 per cent respectively. There could have been two explanations of this trend. Firstly, size of holding of such land was small (and largely perhaps under sharecropping) e.g. in West Bengal in 1974-75, 60 per cent had half an acre of land and nearly 82 per cent had less than one acre. In 1977-78, it became 53 and 79 respectively. Secondly, the quality of such land was bad as is the case in Bankura and Puruliya.

In rural West Bengal percentage of population below poverty line in 1983-84 was nearly 44, and among scheduled caste and scheduled tribes it was 52 and 59 respectively. A study within the study regions few years back indicated that average number of days women worked for wages was 119 in a Bardhaman village and 242 in a Puruliya village. According to Rural Labour Enquiry, full days in a year of wage paid employment in agriculture per agricultural labourers in rural labour households in West Bengal were as follows:

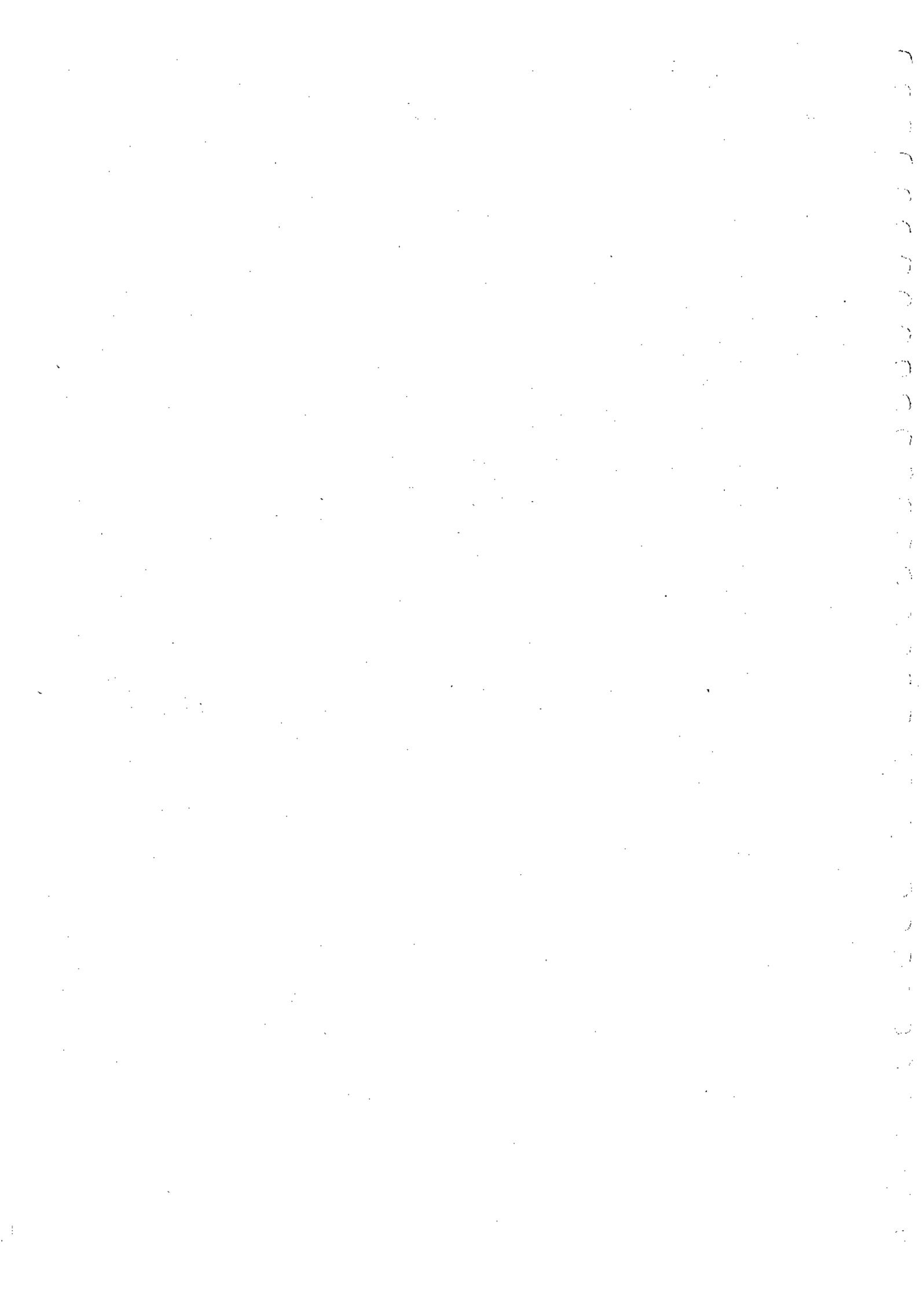
Year	Adult Male	Adult Female
1956-57	187	138
1964-65	268	206
1974-75	210	149
1977-78	242	202

It may be seen that percentage variation between 1956-57 and 1977-78 was higher among adult females than adult males. The other inducement for seasonal migration as well as larger participation of women in agricultural labour force has been due to fall in average annual real household income of rural labour households from all sources in West Bengal as noticed during the period between 1956-57 and 1974-75 (Rs. 677 to Rs. 572).

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As per the NSS 32nd round (1977-78) percentage distribution of rural females in agriculture by broad activity category in West Bengal was 31.0, 5.6 and 63.4 respectively as self employed, regular employees and casual labour (with reference to usual status employment). In the same period, female population below poverty line in rural West Bengal was almost 2 per cent higher than male (Male : 55.75, Female: 57.56). The 25th round of NSS survey (1970-71) indicated that among the wage earner households, wage income constituted 85.7 per cent of total income in Bankura, Medinipur and Puruliya, and 84.9 in Bardhaman. An average wage earner in Bardhaman earned about Rs. 90/- more than the one from Bankura, Puruliya and Medinipur. Labour absorption (persondays per hectare) by broad crop groups indicate that in West Bengal it has increased from 111.25 in 1973-74 to 142.75 in 1983-84 in cereals. In the Eastern states a peculiar relation can also be found between growth rate of agricultural output and growth of

female agricultural labour. For instance, between 1964-65 and 1974-75 growth rate of agricultural output was 1.1 per cent in the Eastern zone whereas growth rate of female agricultural labourers was 96 per cent. During the same period, proportion of male and female persondays in sowing, transplanting, harvesting in West Bengal showed that women were appearing in higher proportion in these three operations.⁹⁰ There has been practically no wage differential in agricultural operations in Bardhaman between male and female which exists in Bankura and Puruliya. The Census data of 1961 and 1981 have also convincingly shown a social trend in the study region that the scheduled caste women are increasingly moving towards agricultural labour force. This trend if continued and if a ceiling is not reached may create problems for future seasonal migrant women agricultural labourers.



NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Imperial Gazetteer, Provincial Series, 1901, and Bengal District Gazetteers, 1910, Calcutta. The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot.
2. Bengal District Gazetteer, Burdwan, 1910.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Many of the 19th century Zamindars traded in silk cocoons and other forest produce.
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9. Ibid.
10. Surajit Sinha *et al.* Ethnic groups, Villages and Towns of Pargana Barabhum. Anthropological Survey of India, Memoir No. 14, 1964.
11. According to the VIIIth Five Year Plan Document, Bankura District, 1990, in Ranibandh Block out of 12,880 hectares area available for cultivation slightly less than 10,000 hectares are drought prone.
12. Bankura District: A socio-economic profile in Agro-climatic spectrum. Droughtprone Areas Programme, Bankura, Government of West Bengal. 1987-88.
13. In Ranibandh Block, out of 12,084 farmers 7255 were marginal farmers (owning land 1-2 hectare), 3021 small farmers (owning land 1-2 hectares), 1480 medium farmers (owning land 2-4 hectares) and 328 big farmers (owning land above 4 hectares). There were, in addition, 3000 nascent farmers (assignees of vested land) each owning upto a maximum of one acre of land. There were also a certain amount of recorded bargadars and nearly 9500 agricultural labourers (as per 1981 census). (Also see Eighth Five Year Plan Bankura District, 1990).
14. District Census Handbook, 1951.

15. VIIIth Five Year Plan, Bankura District, 1990, Government of West Bengal.

It is reported that the district receives more than 1300 m.m. of rainfall annually but still the rice crop suffers because of less rainfall during transplantation (June-August), absence of or less rain fall during reproductive phase of rice crop (September-October) and less precipitation during the entire growing period (June-October). It is said that, for rice, dry spells for two weeks or more is unfavourable. Each rainy day between 16 September to 15 October can increase the yield of rice by 14-15 kg per hectare.

A study in Bankura district on relation between rainfall and production of winter rice indicated the following:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Rainfall</u> (m.m.)	<u>Production</u> (Metric Tons)	<u>Remarks</u>
1988	1274	6.56	Best
1985	1326	6.01	Good
1982	859	2.63	Drought
1981	1441	3.82	Drought
1979	935	2.08	Drought

For fuller details on types of drought see

- (a) VIIIth Five Year Plan, Bankura, District, 1990.
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CHAPTER III

TRAITS OF SEASONAL MIGRATION

As mentioned earlier, during our field investigation, we visited several villages in the two study regions in order to determine the magnitude, frequency, recruitment methods, work norms, composition of groups, wages etc. of seasonal migration. These aspects will be discussed in this chapter. The two selected villages where the study was focussed in some details will also be introduced here. Besides, the new areas of non-agricultural employment which have been drawing migrant labourers steadily from Bankura/Puruliya for quite sometime will also be discussed in this chapter.

During the course of our study we visited about 14 villages in Ranibandh Block of Bankura district, 13 villages in three Blocks (Manbazar, Banduan and Hura) of Puruliya district and two villages in Bin pur Block of Medinipur district. The magnitude of reported seasonal migration by sex in the previous season (harvesting) prior to our visit is given in the following table (Table 23). It may be seen that nearly 50 per cent of the able bodied population of the villages migrated as agricultural and non-agricultural labour. It was from some of the villages of Manbazar Block that we came across groups who were going to the brick-kiln of Barddhaman. At the time of our visit, in certain villages, the migrants were still in the brick-kilns of Barddhaman and were sending money to kith and kins.

TABLE 23

Magnitude of Seasonal
Migration in 1989

Name of Blocks	Average population of all ages (1981)	Social Categories by percentage	Average sex-ratio per village (1981)	Percentage reporting seasonal migration to estimated population aged 15-59	
				M	F
1. Ranibandh (14 villages)	616	ST = 66.4 SC = 8.6 Residual = 25.0	1027	46	40
2. Manbazar, Banduan and Hura (13 villages)	668	ST = 47.7 SC = 11.3 Residual = 41.0	1012	55	51
3. Binpur (2 villages)	956	ST = 46.3 SC = 29.1 Residual = 24.6	1014	44	48
All areas	663	SC = 11.9 ST = 56.0 Residual = 32.1	1019	46	43

(Source: Census of India, 1981 and Survey data)

Apart from near equal participation by sex, it was noticed that majority of the migrants belonged to scheduled tribes, scheduled castes and artisanal communities like blacksmiths, potters, weavers, oil-crushers etc. In an earlier study we discovered that incorporation of women (and men) from artisanal communities in seasonal migration had been through tribal migrants but at the initiative of the former. And in this process there were several evidences that women from artisanal communities took the first initiative to establish links

with tribal women in order to find work or for collection of minor forest produce locally.

In a few villages, the people took us to be farmers from Barddhaman, and men and women rushed out of their villages and homes to greet us. In other villages people enquired from us whether canal water from Durgapur barage had been released or not - as release of canal water was the signal to prepare for migration. In almost all villages the women were more enthusiastic about giving out information as compared to men. We made it a point, during our visit to each village, to talk to the people about prevailing minimum wage for agricultural labourers and to know from them how much they were exactly getting locally and at Barddhaman. We noticed that inspite of sufficient political mobilisation of the working class in West Bengal, minimum wage was one issue which had hardly been articulated at least in the villages we visited. We shall see later how and why the issue, for various reasons, has been kept away from agricultural labourers by the political parties and the Government functionaries.

2

In an earlier study in three villages in Ranibandh Block of Bankura district we found that 46 to 72 per cent households participated in seasonal migration. The findings of the said study is presented below. (Table 24)

TABLE 24

Reported Seasonal Migration in 1987

Social categories	% of household reporting seasonal migration of at-least one member	Sex ratio of migrants	% of male and female of 15-59 age group reporting	
			M	F
Potter (Kumhar) of village I	39.6	727	27.2	19.5
Bhumij (Hinduized tribal) of village 1 & 2	16.7	833	10.3	10.6
Santhals (Tribal) of villages 1 & 3	65.0	585	35.6	25.5
Other tribal and Scheduled castes from Village 1	76.5	866	44.1	59.1
All Communities	47.4	690	29.2	23.7

(Source: Survey data)

It may be seen that nearly 50 per cent of all households were migrating. Evidently, Santhals led the first three groups. The high sex ratio^{of migrants} in other groups as compared to the Santhal has a sociological explanation. Unlike the Santhals, all other groups are quite protective of their^{women} and dependent on them during the days of migration for food and care. While a Bhumij or Potter woman will always be accompanied by her husband, in case of Santhal it is not unusual to see single women migrating with a group to whom she is socially related. So also is the case with a Santhal man who may not hesitate to travel minus his wife as his cooking problem is looked after by the group with whom he remains. Besides, culturally also Bhumij and Potter communities used to discourage wage work of their women.

Another set of data on seasonal migration comes from the action research project area of the CWDS. This data was collected from 1987 onwards from the households of members of the grassroot women's organisations as a part of member's profile data. The membership of the grassroot organisations were overwhelmingly tribal viz. Santhal and Bhumij. While the Santhal society has no cultural restriction of its women going on wage work, the Hinduised Bhumij attempts to disallow its women to do so if the household economy permits. The data presented here may reflect that attitude to certain extent. The reference period of the data was the previous season of seasonal migration before the survey.

TABLE 25
Seasonal Migration among Santhals & Bhumij

Tribe	No. of Household	Total No. of Adult members in the household		Number reporting seasonal Migration		
		Male	Female	Household	Male	Female
Bhumij	134	241	259	82	84	88
Santhal	42	81	82	27	35	30
All tribes	176	322	341	109	119	118

(Source: Survey data)

It may be seen that more than 60 per cent households in both the communities had reported to have gone on seasonal migration. While the sex ratio of seasonal migration was 857 among the Santhal, the same among the Bhumij was 1047. The proportion of females reported to have gone on seasonal migration during the season prior to the survey was 34 and 37 per cent of the total ^{adult} female population of the Bhumij and Santhal respectively. The proportion of males was 35 and 43 respectively.

When we examined the types of households from which one or more members migrated during the previous season it was noticed that all single member households and more than 60 per cent of nuclear and joint family households participated in seasonal migration (See Table 26).

TABLE 26

Types of Household by Seasonal Migration

Category	Households by Types				
	All household	Single member holds	Nuclear	Joint	Residual
(a) Total number of household	180	3	90	64	23
(b) Household reporting migration	109	3	55	40	11
(c) Household not reporting migration	71	-	35	24	12

(Source: Survey data)

It can be imagined that single member households and nuclear households without children will have hardly any problem to migrate. In case of nuclear households with children, care of children may pose some problem. The same may not be true in case of joint households where there are other members to look after children and asset left behind. Such households will also have surplus labour. Residual

households consisted of female headed, broken nuclear and other residual category of households where social and familial problems may hinder regular migration.

It was also found that nearly 70 per cent of the surveyed households belonged to below poverty line and the remaining 30 per cent above it (income from seasonal migration included). Of the households below poverty line 67 per cent reported seasonal migration at the time of survey. Similarly more than 45 per cent of the households above poverty line ^{also} reported to have gone on seasonal migration during the survey. The following table describes the economic situation by type of households and migration status at the time of survey.

TABLE 27

Type of Household and Economic and Migration Status

Type of Household and Migration status	Number	Economic Status		Land-less	Upto one hectare	Above one hectare
		Below poverty line	Above poverty line			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. <u>Single Member</u>	3	3	-	2	-	1
(a) Migrant	3	3	-	2	-	1
(b) Non-migrant	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. <u>Nuclear</u>	90	73	17	17	57	16
(a) Migrant	55	51	4	12	35	8
(b) Non-migrant	35	22	13	5	22	8
3. <u>Joint</u>	64	29	35	1	31	32
(a) Migrant	40	21	19	1	18	21
(b) Non-migrant	24	8	16	-	13	11

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. <u>Residual</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>3</u>	-	<u>14</u>	<u>9</u>
(a) Migrant	11	9	2	-	8	3
(b) Non-migrant	12	11	1	-	6	6
5. <u>All Types</u>	<u>180</u>	<u>125</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>102</u>	<u>58</u>
(a) Migrant	109	84	25	15	61	33
(b) Non-migrant	71	41	30	5	41	25

(Source: Survey data)

It may be seen that of the migrant households 14 per cent were landless and 56 per cent held land upto one hectare only. The position of the non-migrant household as regard possession of land was no better. For instance 7 per cent held no land, 56 per cent had upto one hectare and the remaining more than one hectare.

Of the 55 nuclear migrant households 93 per cent were below poverty-line. Nearly 22 per cent were landless and 64 per cent held upto one hectare of land. The relative position of the 35 non-migrant nuclear households was also not happy but they seemed to have managed to survive without going on migration in the season prior to the survey. The joint families seemed to have a slight edge over the rest of family types in participating in migration during the season under survey. Many such families not only had labour to spare but also lived below the poverty line.

Of the 180 household surveyed more than 75 per cent belonged to Hinduised Bhumij and nearly 60 per cent of them migrated during the season prior to the survey. The percentage of migrant Santhal household was nearly 65 per cent of the remaining households belonging to Santhal community. The communitywise migration status from different types of households is given below.

TABLE 28

Community, Types of Household and
Migration Status

Community	Total No. of house- holds surveyed	Types of Household and Migration Status			
		Single member	Nuclear	Joint	Others
1. <u>Bhumij</u>	<u>138</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>69</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>16</u>
(a) Migrant	82	3	41	30	8
(b) Non-migrant	56	-	28	20	8
2. <u>Santhal</u>	<u>42</u>	-	<u>21</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>7</u>
(a) Migrant	27	-	14	10	3
(b) Non-migrant	15	-	7	4	4

(Source: Survey data)

It may be seen from the data above that the earlier hegemony of Santhal community over seasonal migration is being eroded through larger participation in the process by Hinduised Bhumij and artisanal communities like potters, weavers, blacksmiths oil-crushers etc.

Of the 11 per cent landless households in the above sample 75 per cent migrated. Of the 57 per cent households owning upto one hectare of land 60 per cent migrated and of the remaining households owning more than one hectare 57 per cent migrated.

We had earlier mentioned that in Ranibandh Block of Bankura district 69 per cent of the land was high land, 25 per cent medium land and only 6 per cent low land. The position of surrounding areas of this Block is almost similar. In order to find out connections between seasonal migration and land situation we collected data from

about 800 households from 25 villages from Ranibandh and its adjacent block. It may be admitted that while we tried to divide the holdings of individual households into cultivable and uncultivable by referring the land situation into Tara and Sol, some overlapping and inaccuracy might have crept in while collecting the data which was made for entirely different purpose. For instance, cultivable Sol land might include both medium and low, if not some portion of high land also. By and large, people tried to classify holdings into cultivable and uncultivable in terms of paddy cultivation generally.

It may be seen from the table (Table 29) that average holding of the sample households was less than a hectare and therefore they were largely marginal farmers. And from such more or less homogenous category certain households reported migration and others did not. It seems therefore that size of land holding formed a part of the determining factors for resorting to seasonal migration. Cultural factors did prevent some household to migrate. Pride of past and present status of the family might have been another discouraging factor. Since women formed an integral part of the migration process any disability suffered by them would affect the participation in migration process of males also. For many households, participation in wage work as such and by women in particular could be a big step and an unavoidable decision. There has been instances ^{of} also the tendency to hide it as long as possible from neighbours and village community. For instance people went on seasonal migration to Barddhaman but had told neighbours and villagers that they were going to meet relatives or to in-law's house.

TABLE 29

Migrant¹ and Non-migrant households by Communities
and type and proportion of land held

Community	Total number of households	Total number of land-less households	Number of Households holding land ²		Total acreage of land held		Average size of holding (in acre)		Remarks
			Culti-vable	Unculti-vable	Culti-vable	Unculti-vable	Culti-vable	Unculti-vable	
1. <u>Bhumij Tribe</u>	<u>368</u>	<u>34</u>	<u>332</u>	<u>269</u>	<u>390.6</u>	<u>210.7</u>	<u>1.18</u>	<u>0.78</u>	1. Migrant households for this table were those from whom one or more members migrated 2. There were households who held either both types of land or one of the two types.
(a) Migrant	185	21	164	133	156.5	89.4	0.95	0.67	
(b) Non-migrant	183	13	168	136	244.1	121.3	1.45	0.89	
2. <u>Santhal Tribe</u>	<u>318</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>275</u>	<u>211</u>	<u>386.6</u>	<u>223.3</u>	<u>1.41</u>	<u>1.06</u>	3. This group contained Kurmi Mahato and oil-crushers who did not migrate and scheduled caste and a few tribal households.
(a) Migrant	190	22	166	121	166.1	106.3	1.0	0.88	
(b) Non-migrant	128	11	109	90	210.5	117.0	1.93	1.30	
3. <u>Mixed Communities³</u>	<u>112</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>94</u>	<u>63</u>	<u>111.4</u>	<u>48.2</u>	<u>1.18</u>	<u>0.77</u>	and a few tribal households.
(a) Migrant	29	3	26	9	15.3	6.4	0.59	0.71	
(b) Non-migrant	83	14	68	54	96.1	41.8	1.41	0.77	
4. <u>All Communities</u>	<u>798</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>701</u>	<u>543</u>	<u>888.6</u>	<u>482.2</u>	<u>1.27</u>	<u>0.89</u>	
(a) Migrant	404	46	356	263	337.9	202.1	0.95	0.77	
(b) Non-migrant	394	38	345	280	550.7	280.1	1.60	1.00	

(Source: Survey data)

(Source: Survey data)

The data (Table 29) present certain expected situations. For instance, as seasonal migrants, Santhals still held the leading position. The average land holding of migrants in all communities was less than ^{that of} non-migrants. This was true in terms of both Sol and Tara lands. In near future Bhumij community may emerge as a serious competitor in seasonal migration to the Santhals if they continue to remain dependent only on land resources. By and large, the ratio of cultivable and uncultivable land among migrants and non-migrants also showed the expected differentiation. That cultural restriction of wage work continuing to operate among certain communities/households, particularly for women, is somewhat apparent from the migration status of landless households. Similarly, although majority of the landless migrated, landlessness does not seem to be a major criterion for migration. ~~While~~ quantity could be a definite factor quality of land and its productivity seemed to be other associated factors. Lastly, as indicated earlier, a substantial portion of land classified as cultivable here in this table ^(Table 29) would seem to officially belong to medium and high land, and in all likelihood a large number of migrants held such land. A plot by plot verification would have substantiated this statement.

The marital status of seasonal migrants from 109 households out of 180 showed that participants were predominantly married (70 per cent) but unmarried and widowed/divorced/^scontituted 23 and 7 per cent respectively of total migrants (See table 30).

TABLE 30

Marital Status by Sex of Migrants

Community	Total no. house-holds	No. of house-holds reporting migration	Total migrants		P E R C E N T A G E O F					
			M	F	Unmarried		Married		Divorced widowed	
					M	F	M	F	M	F
1. Bhumij	138	82	84	88	33.3	15.9	65.5	73.9	1.2	10.2
2. Santhal	42	27	35	30	31.4	6.7	62.9	80.0	5.7	13.3
Total	180	109	119	118	32.8	13.6	64.7	75.4	2.5	11.0

(Source: Survey data)

Among the Santhals in our sample, married and divorced/widowed females together constituted 93 per cent of the total migrant females whereas males of those categories together constituted about 68 per cent. The same among the Bhumij were 84 and 67 per cent respectively. Relatively more unmarried females of Bhumij than Santhals - seemed to have migrated during the year of survey. It may also be seen that a greater number of married females as compared to married males migrated during the year of survey from both the communities. Similarly number of divorced/widowed females was greater than males in those categories. It is only in the unmarried category that males outnumber females.

The two villages, one at Banduan Block of Puruliya district and the other at Nabastha Block of Bardhaman district, where this case study was focussed in some details were Karma and Chakunda respectively. Karma was a multi-ethnic village and a section of its population was religiously migrating to Bardhaman villages for agricultural work. Chakunda was predominantly inhabited by the Ugra Khastriya farming community who had been hiring seasonal migrants to complete agricultural operations. There was no definite criteria for selecting the two villages on our part. Karma was a typical village in interior Banduan Block. Chakunda was an agriculturally prosperous village not far away from Bardhaman town. However, a simple walk through ^{-the} two villages would provide contrasting pictures. For instance, whereas there were only two pucca houses belonging to two non-migrant Kurmi Mahato in Karma village, there were overwhelmingly large number of multistoreyed and electrified Pucca houses in Chakunda. One could see big grain golas (storage bins) and huge hay stacks in all houses in Chakunda. Television sets, motorbikes, tractor, big farm yards, fish ponds etc, were also a common sight in Chakunda. These were almost totally missing in Karma.

Karma is a big village of nearly 240 households. There were 36 Santhal (Tribal), 16 Sahar (Tribal) 19 Scheduled Castes (Sunri - 11 and Hari - 8), 14 Muslim, 24 Kurmi Mahato, 46 Deshwali Majhi (semi-tribal), 22 Baishnab, 2 Bania and 59 occupational castes (washerman - 8, Barber - 12, Weaver - 7, Blacksmith - 2, Oilcrusher - 30) households.

The population of the village was well over 1000 with an average household size of 5. It was characterised by greater number of females to males (e.g. the sex ratio was 1117). The SC and ST population together constituted roughly 1/3rd of total population. The average literacy rate was quite low (14.7 per cent) and whereas literacy rate of males was 28.6 per cent, for females it was a meagre 2.3 per cent.

The total area of the village was nearly 780 acres of which nearly 100 acres were non-agricultural land. Of the remaining, 105 acres were vested with the Government awaiting distribution to landless/landpoor of the village. Of the land classified as agricultural nearly 80 per cent were unirrigated upland, locally known as Baid/Gora. Remaining 20 per cent land was low lying unirrigated terraces suitable for rice cultivation locally known as Bahal/Kanali. Much of the latter category was held by Muslims, Mahatos, Sunris, Baniyas, Oilcrushers and Barbers. The tribals, other Scheduled Castes, semi-tribal groups and other occupational castes held normally the first category land where rice cultivation was difficult but nevertheless always attempted, and a marginal yield of a coarse variety of rice (Bhutnari) was obtained. Nearly a quarter of the households were landless, 15 per cent were medium and the rest small and marginal farmers. Because of lack of irrigation facility a single crop was cultivated every year with rain water.

Of the total households of the village, 50 per cent were surveyed by us. It was found that except the Muslims and Banias rest of the twelve communities of the village were participating in seasonal migration in varying numbers. The following table provides the details of households by communities and number of seasonal migrants by sex.

TABLE 31

SEASONAL MIGRANTS BY COMMUNITIES

Participating communities	Total No. of House-holds	No. of House-hold surveyed	Number of House-hold	Number reporting seasonal migration			
				Adult (15 years +)		Children (upto 15)	
				M	F	M	F
1. Tribal							
(a) Santhal	36	23	22	34 (37)	33 (36)	12	19
(b) Sabar	16	12	10	17 (20)	15 (25)	9	7
2. Semi-tribal							
(a) Deswali Majhi	46	25	22	30 (35)	33 (37)	18	8
3. Scheduled Castes							
(a) Sunri	11	5	2	4 (4)	4 (4)	3	2
(b) Hari	8	5	3	3 (3)	3 (3)	7	3
4. Kurmi Mahato	24	7	4	9 (9)	6 (6)	1	3
5. Occupational Castes							
(a) Tanti (Weaver)	7	4	3	4 (4)	4 (4)	3	4
(b) Kolhu (Oilcrusher)	30	12	6	12 (12)	12 (12)	4	3
(c) Karmakar (Blacksmith)	2	2	1	1 (1)	1 (1)	2	1
(d) Rajak (Washerman)	8	3	2	3 (3)	4 (4)	-	5
(e) Paramanik (Barber)	12	4	3	4 (4)	3 (3)	1	1
6. Baishnab	22	7	4	5 (5)	7 (7)	3	3
Total	222	109	82	126 (139)	125 (142)	63	59

(Figures in bracket indicate total adult workers in the migrating households). (Source: Survey data)

It may be seen that about 75 per cent of the surveyed households of the participating twelve communities migrated. The tribal and the semi-tribal group together constituted the major migrants and formed 2/3rd of total migrating households. One-fourth of the occupational caste households had also taken to seasonal migration. There was hardly any variation in male-female participation in seasonal migration of adult population. On an average three adult persons per household migrated. A notable feature of the migration process was that one-third of total migrants were child population who accompanied their parents and relations - some as dependents and others for work and to look after younger children and the temporary establishments of the migrant groups.

There did not exist any employment opportunity within the village or nearby for its working population. People normally made an all out effort with whatever quantity and quality of land they held to produce a crop and then constantly remained in search of wage work. Seasonal migration obviously formed a definite option. Our enquiry in the village revealed that the local Panchayat had taken a few steps under rural development programme to ameliorate the condition of the villagers. For instance, 24 households below poverty line were given IRDP assistance. Similarly 37 eligible individuals received SEP loan. Unfortunately, inspite of more than 100 acres of arable land remaining vested with the Government for redistribution, so far only two Scheduled Caste households have received land.

The village did not have any forest worth its name nearby. There was no scope for local trade and commerce which people could adopt. Sponsored wage work programmes of Government such as JRY etc. were far too inadequate. Lack of irrigation facility made it impossible to take a second crop from the land. Artisanal and service sector activities were tremendously reduced. Illiteracy and lack of entrepreneurial skill and capital prevented people to take risk in small business.

More than 80 per cent land being unsuitable for rice cultivation the cereal production in the village was far inadequate than it needed annually. Average productivity of paddy per acre was 1000 kg. to 1200 kg. This productivity was again absolutely dependent on ideal precipitation and therefore any aberration caused havoc. Local rate for wage work, whatever available, was Rs. 6 to 8 per day. In Government programmes of wage work people expected to get slightly more, around Rs. 16. Nobody we met had heard about Minimum Wages Act or Equal Remuneration Act and there had so far been no articulation on these by political parties operating in the village. Local wage rate remained much below the declared minimum wage of the state for agricultural labourers, and women continued to get one to two rupees less than what men received. Several moneylenders carried on their business successfully with high rate of interest. Many migrating households were found to be indebted to them. It was no wonder that appx. 600 persons from the village migrated regularly.

Chakunda of Barddhaman was also a big village with nearly 270 households and a population of approximately 1500. The major farming community of the village was the Ugra Kshtriya (70 households). There were 15 Brahmin and two Blacksmith/Goldsmith households in the village. The rest of the population was constituted of socially and economically backward communities primarily engaged as agricultural labourers. Thus there were nearly 140 households of scheduled castes belonging to Mal, Muchi, Bacdi and Bauri communities and 40 scheduled tribe households belonging to Santhal community. According to 1981 Census, nearly 30 per cent population of this village was constituted of SCs and STs.

More than 85 per cent area of the village constituted the rice land and 1.3 per cent of it only was unirrigated. Approximate area under Aman rice cultivation, according to villagers, was about 250 hectares and on 50 per cent of which Boro rice was also cultivated in Rabi. (According 1981 census, the Mauza had about 190 hectares of rice land. It appears that the villagers owned and cultivated land in adjacent mauzas). Other crops like mustard, potato, etc. were also taken during the Rabi season. Roughly estimated gross cropped area under rice was over 400 hectares, if not more, in the village. The estimated employment in rice cultivation alone (Aman and Boro) would thus work out to be nearly 75,000 person days annually. Other crops like potato, mustard and various vegetables cultivated would also generate another several thousand days of employment annually.

The agricultural labour population, according to 1981 census, in the village was 127 only. There has been a definite increase of agricultural labour force during the last 9 years due to immigration of Bauris, Bagdis and Mals from neighbouring Birbhum district. During last few years a norm of agricultural employment has evolved in Bardhaman villages through political mobilisation of local agricultural labour force. It has been more or less accepted that 180 days of employment should first be ensured to local agricultural labourers. Migrant labourers could share the rest and the peak season employment. This has been a reason for movement of agricultural labour force from one Block/district to another during the last few years. Almost complete disappearance of earlier system of attached labour has been another outcome. Agricultural wage actually paid was found to be about 15 to 20 per cent less than the declared minimum wage but obviously higher than what was paid in Bankura and Puruliya. At the same time although not strongly articulated publicly there existed an undercurrent of dislike of local labour by farmers. It was also possible to extract more work from unorganised, docile and unprotesting migrant labourers by paying same wage. It was no wonder then that an explicit preference for migrant, especially Santhal, workers existed. In Chakunda, migrant labourers not only got employment specially during transplantation and harvest seasons they were greatly welcome by farmers there. On a modest estimate, they cornered definitely about 40 per cent of agricultural employment of the village.

The Scheduled Castes viz. Bauri, Mal and Bagdi of Chakunda were reported to be totally landless (mostly recent migrants from Birbhum). Among the Muchi only 4 households possessed some land. Similarly only two Santhal households had land less than an acre each. Therefore the combined SC and ST households were primarily dependent on agricultural labour. The 15 Brahmin households possessed land upto a maximum of 9 acres, whereas the Ugra kshatriyas on an average held land from 5 to 20 acres. Most of the farmers in the village were owner cultivators. Only about 3 acres of land was held under Barga by four households. In the entire village only 4 acres of land was vested with the Government, of which one acre only has been distributed to five scheduled caste households.

Literacy rate among the Brahmin and Ugra kshatriyas was quite high and almost all household had atleast one member working either as school teacher or employed in Government service or engaged in business. Several Ugra kshatriya farmers have invested large sums of money in rice mills. Earlier, the farmers used to take pride in acquiring more land. This trend has been primarily curbed by various current land laws. Additionally, the farmers reported that margin of profit in agriculture was much reduced now. Due to land reform measures land does not seem to be no longer a popular commodity available for sale. Value of agricultural land no longer appropriate. Farmers thought it safe to invest in non-agricultural sectors.

The villagers admitted that earlier entire rice processing for consumption and marginal sale was a household activity in which Baqdi/Bauri women used to be essentially employed in considerable number. This employment is now totally lost to these lower caste women because the farmers no longer maintain this activity within the household. Almost every household now gets its rice processed in the nearby rice mill. Therefore, ^{the} only domestic and non-field employment left to Baqdi/Bauri women has been as maid-servant. Lack of grazing land in the village and total lack of grazing opportunity on rice fields due to multiple cropping, cattle population of farm households need more than normal attention now. The household labour of farm households owning such cattle no longer has inclination or time to tend them. Therefore, there has been some increase in demand of cattle tenders in the village.

Employment pattern of various classes of women in the village therefore was somewhat demarcated. Women of Brahmin and Ugra kshatriya communities never worked in rice fields. They have largely been relieved of rice processing activity in the sense that only puffed rice is prepared at home. On the other hand, since many of the farmers are now school teachers and Government employees, and since attached labourers are not kept any longer, a great deal of agricultural supervisory work has been bestowed on women. Gradual disappearance of the system of attached labour (which practically meant attached family labour as both husband and wife and often the children used to be employed to a particular farmer's household in various work)

has driven women from scheduled caste communities increasingly towards wage employment in agriculture. Many of them do work as maid servant as affluence and status consciousness within village among farmers have enlarged the scope of this employment. Therefore, total lack of opposition from local female labour earlier in certain operations in agriculture does not exist anymore. Local scheduled caste females have also become a strong contender for those agricultural operations in which the seasonal migrant females used to have a strong monopoly.

During visit to Barddhaman villages we met eleven groups of seasonal migrants at various places working as agricultural labourers. Three of such groups were from Dumka of Bihar, two from Bankura and six from Puruliya district. Average size of each group was 18 persons and all of them have been regularly coming to Barddhaman for quite sometime atleast twice a year. All of them were invariably tribal, mainly Santhal. An average group consisted of 15 adults (9 males and 6 females) and 3 children (2 male and one female). Nearly 75 per cent of the adult males and 80 per cent of adult females belonged to the age group 15-35 years. Nearly 63 per cent of the adult males and females were married, 34 and 25 per cent unmarried and the rest were widowed/divorced males and females. None of the adult females in any group owned land in their own village. Almost 1/5 of adult males were landless. The rest although owned land from less than an acre to a maximum of 7 acres, quality of such land was invariably inferior and cultivation was monocrop entirely dependent on rain.

We also visited a brick-kiln situated a few kilometers away from Bardhaman town. It was a relatively old and big brick-kiln employing about 150 labourers - 80 per cent of which were migrants from various places of Puruliya district and the rest from Chotanagpur region of Bihar. We contacted a group of 40 migrant workers hailing from a village between Banduan and Barabazar block of Puruliya district. The group consisted of 45 and 55 per cent adult male and female migrants. All of them belonged to 15-50 age group. There were 7 girl children - some related and a few totally unrelated to the group, hired by the migrant workers to look after the young children. Almost all of them have been working in this brick-kiln for quite sometime and have been able to purchase some agricultural land in their native village from the earning from brick-kiln. By and large, most of them were originally landless but the pride to possess some land induced them to invest in land purchase - although, it was reported, that quality of such land was bad and they were forced to undertake migration regularly. Therefore, a primary dependence on migration to brick-kiln has developed.

It was reported by the group that on an average, they worked for a period of 6 months at a stretch generally from November to April and returned to their village to complete kharif cultivation. About 1/3rd of the said group on the other hand spent the whole year in Bardhaman to work in the residual activities in the brick-kiln, agricultural operations and any other wage work generally procured through the brick-kiln owner. Since stay in the brick-kiln has always been of longer duration and of continuous nature, a sizeable number

of young children always accompanied the parents. The group reported that work availability in brick-kiln was continuous, regular and of increasing nature. As a result, not only there has been a sufficient diversion from agricultural work to brick-kiln but also it was considered more profitable than the latter. It was also reported that unlike the agricultural work, the local labour had for some inexplicable reason remained away from brick-kiln. As a result, the entire activity is monopolised by migrant workers. The group we talked to also reported that they were associated with the particular brick-kiln over a long time and they returned to the same brick-kiln every year. Normally, almost all of them took an advance payment for the next season when they departed before monsoon to their own village.

The wage paid in the brick-kiln was on piece-rate basis. For instance, for every thousand of kutcha bricks prepared an amount of Rs. 50/- was paid. Besides, both accommodation and to and fro transport are provided by the brick-kiln owner. Every year they were fetched from and returned to the village by a truck provided by the owner. This facility was found to be utilised for carrying goats and cow from Bardhaman and vice-versa. Medical expenses of the workers were also borne by the brick-kiln owner. Fuel for cooking was also supplied free. Although the brick preparation activity was done in cooperative basis by the group, cooking etc. were largely family-based.

The supervisor of the brick-kiln kept an account of daily production of bricks but payment was not made on daily basis. The workers only collected an advance for day to day expenses and the rest was collected at the time of departure for home. Women workers were found to be engaged in almost all operations of the brick manufacturing process and received equal wage with men.

We also visited a rice mill near Nabastha Block which came into existence about 6 years back. Women from Duley, Bagdi and Santhal communities were found to be employed in the rice mill in such operations like drying of paddy etc. (It may be recalled that Duley/Bagdi women were traditionally workers in rice processing activities or used to be employed by farmers' households for the purpose). There were 50 permanent employees in the rice mill of whom 40 were women, who enjoyed certain benefits such as paid holidays for 19 days per annum, three months' unpaid maternity leave and a bonus payment equivalent to 28 days' wage. There were 27 casual women workers who not only did not enjoy such benefits but whose names were not kept on the rolls. Normally a division of labour existed in the entire operation. For instance, in the machine rooms only men were found to be employed and they got Rs. 15 per day and one kilogram of rice besides free lunch, oil and soap. The women workers were paid Rs. 13 and one kilogram of rice daily. Although this daily wage rate existed, the work was simultaneously piece-rated. For instance, 100 bags of rice had to be handled daily by a group of eight women. Their daily work consisted of carrying of

boiled paddy from machine room to the drying area, spreading and turning of grains and carrying the same by head load to dehusking area. Those women who were unable to carry headload were usually paid Rs. 2/- less than those who did. In case of any accident while working within the mill, the management paid the expenses. A union looks after the interest of the workers and was responsible to find fresh casual or regular ^{WORKERS} when needed. The management was entitled to find workers only when union failed to get any. Most of the Santhal women workers have now settled in nearby villages around the mill and originally hailed from Bankura and Puruliya. Since they got employment for the whole year their connection with native villages was feeble. Some of the Duley/Bagdi women were also migrant from Bankura but now permanently settled in a nearby village. Other members of the workers' families either worked as wage workers or were engaged in small trade and commerce.

As has been mentioned earlier, other people contacted during the study were the leaders of political parties and individual and groups of farmers to elicit information and opinion on various issues relating to seasonal migration process and the seasonal migrants in particular. Some of the traits of the process as revealed through various data source are discussed below.

SEASONALITY

Seasonality of migration process for agricultural work depended mainly on two factors. Firstly, seasonal need of the farmers of Barddhaman for migrant labour mainly in respect of two types of paddy - kharif and Boro, and partly for potato, had been a primary factor. This need was also linked with the onset of monsoon and release of canal water. The main operations for which the bulk of migrant labour was hired were transplantation including seedling removal and harvesting including threshing and storage of paddy grains and hay ^{of} kharif and Boro. Weeding, ploughing, manuring, and water management of rice fields together constituted a small part of migrant labour employment. Similarly, for planting, harvesting and cultural operations of potato crop some amount of migrant labour was utilised by farmers. As a result, migration process from the source region usually started immediately before these operations. Any change in cropping intensity in Barddhaman directly affected the volume of migrant labour employment. For instance, particularly during the Boro season, many farmers faced an uncertainty in regard to water availability because ground water and canal water formed the two main sources of irrigation. More often, shortage of canal water at times of need was usual, and due to over-use of ground water over the years its flow was much reduced. This could reduce the intensity of Boro cultivation and consequently the magnitude of needed migrant labour.

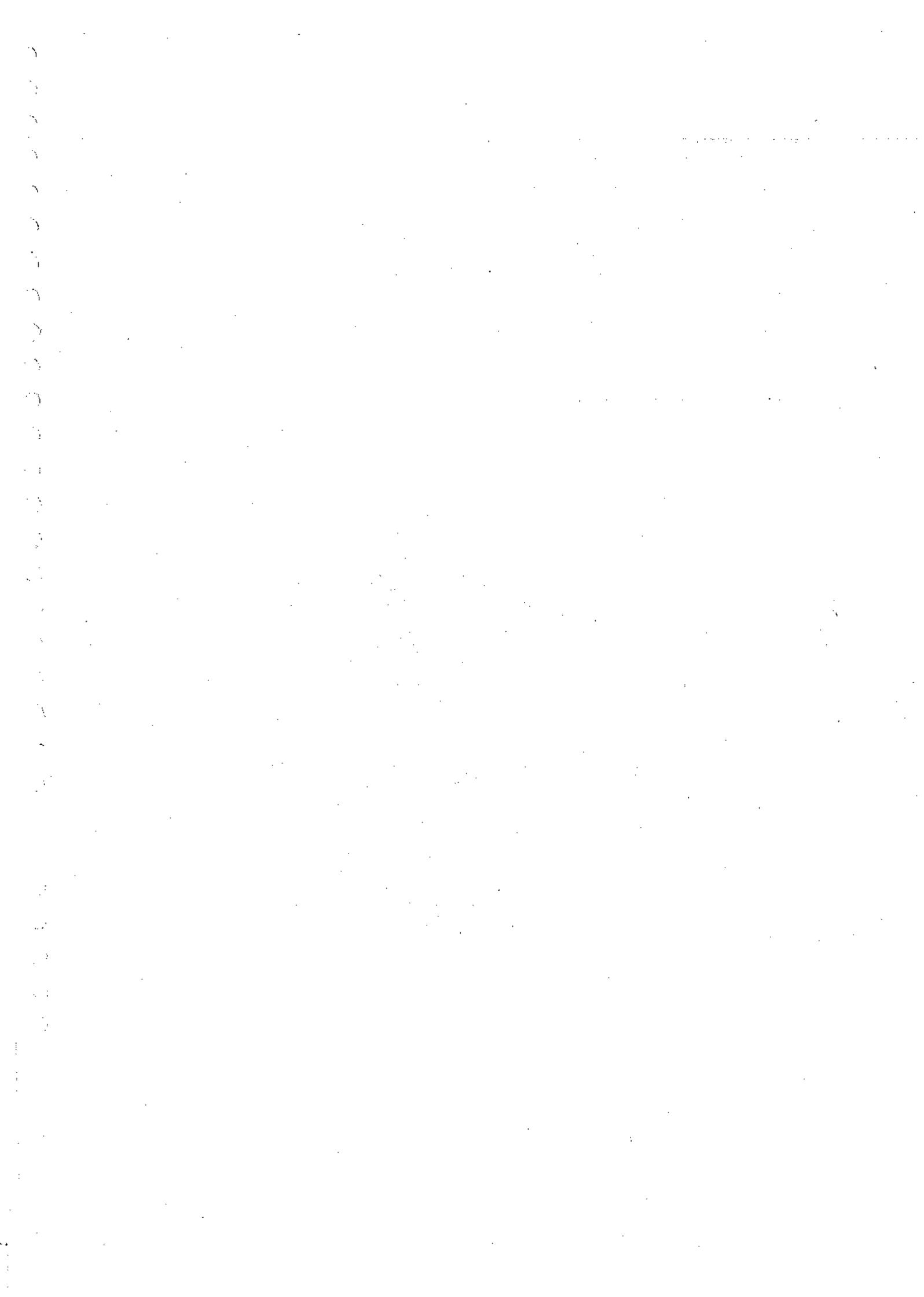
Secondly, migrants consisted of various categories of households such as landless and with land, occupational castes, households hailing from totally deforested or moderately forested and drought-prone areas. The migrant households were found to give a primary emphasis on their own farm and non-farm activities. For instance, they normally migrated after completing their own agricultural activities whoever owned land. The potters, for instance, migrated more during transplantation than harvest season because pottery activity became substantially reduced during the rainy months. For the landless and labour surplus households there was always an eager wait to migrate any time during the year. In general, for the migrating households, the months between kharif rice transplantation and harvest were the hardest time, since they faced acute shortage of food during this period. Chances of availability of work during this period were much reduced. As a result, relatively impoverished households attempted to work as much as possible during the pre-kharif and beginning of kharif period to tide over these bad months.

By and large, people migrated during July-August and December-January respectively for transplantation and harvest of kharif paddy for a period ranging from 10 to 20 days each time. Similarly, February-March and May-June were the seasons to undertake those operations for Boro paddy for a period ranging between 15 to 25 days each time. The places where local seasonal employment was generated - governmental and private, or opportunity existed for minor forest

produce collection and other non-farm household activities a strategic priority was given by many households to these income/employment opportunities. Therefore, a household notionally planned the entire calendar year for various types of activities including seasonal migration on the basis of ideal and normal conditions. This broad planning however was always subjected to strategic alterations due to unanticipated droughts, crop failures, death of livestock, illness and death of working members, pregnancy and child birth, collapse of house, low yield of minor forest produce etc. Since some employment was always available in Barddhaman during agricultural seasons migration became an essential priority. Those who worked in the brick-kilns, one noticed their primary dependence on the same as it provided employment for longer duration and comparatively higher income. Same was the case with the workers in rice mills. In both these sectors rainy season also happened to be the lean employment period.

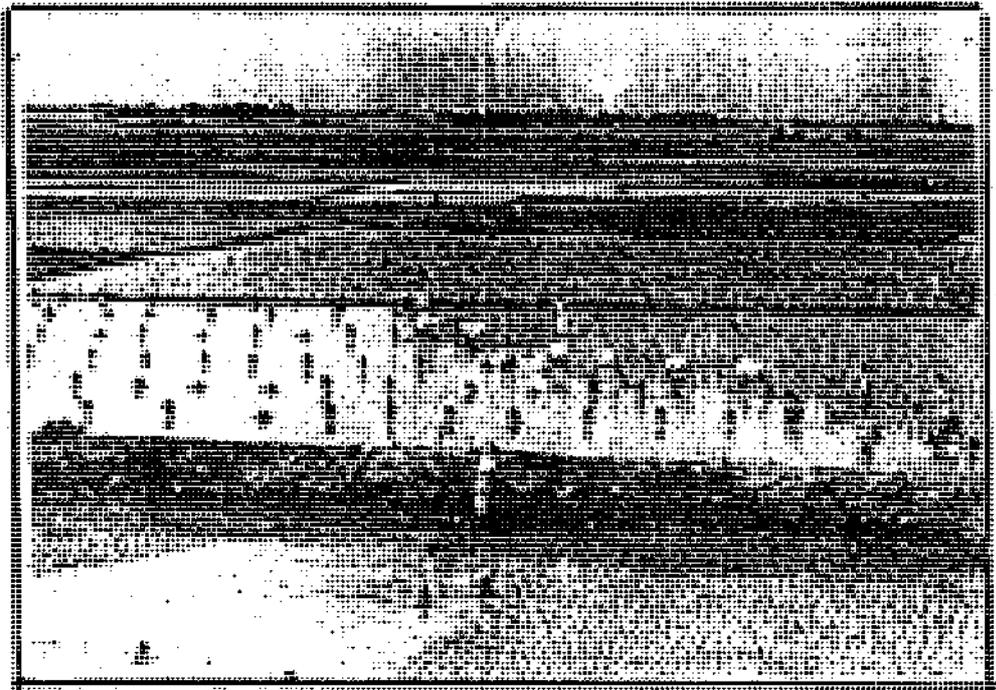
FREQUENCY OF MIGRATION

Frequency of migration to Barddhaman in a year by various households from the study region varied between once to four times. The need to migrate depended on existing household resources and labour supply. The decision for number of migration a year also depended on economy, composition and moveable and immoveable assets of migrating household. For instance, livestock, house and household assets needed to be looked after. Children's education, ailing





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(7)

GREEN REVOLUTION CREATED SOME POCKETS
OF DEVELOPMENT - BURDDHAMAN'S AGRICULTURAL
PROSPERITY IS ATTRACTING THE LARGER VOLUME
OF LABOURERS ALL THROUGH THE YEAR.

parents, crops and trees were to be taken care of. Household debt was definitely a motivating and compelling factor for many households. By and large, seasonal migration for a large number of households was a primary coping strategy and an unavoidable necessity. For a few others, seasonal migration was the means to build a capital base for the household to invest in land, livestock or to pay back existing debts. It was also undertaken in view of certain anticipated expenditures in the households such as marriage, house building and repair, festival etc. There existed a good number of village based groups of households who had maintained a long standing attachment with big farm households of Barddhaman. Such groups invariably went to those particular farmers, to work on their lands. They were more or less, attached migrant labour to those farmers.

Frequency of visit of 82 migrating households of Karma village during the previous one year is shown in table 32. For the purpose of this table a migrant household was that from whom at least one member migrated in one or more seasons.

Table - 32 : Frequency of Visit by main and subsidiary Occupation

Occupation			No. of migrating households	Frequency of visit during last one year-mainly			
Main	and	Subsidiary		Once	Twice	Thrice	Four times
1		2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Cultivation		Agricultural labour	22	5	9	7	1
2. Agricultural labour		Cultivation	19	3	2	7	7

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Marginal land-owners mainly engaged in non-agricultural activity	Agricultural labour	3	1	1	1	-
Sub Total (1+2+3)		44	9	12	15	8
4. Landless agricultural labour	Other wage work	34	-	3	3	25
5. Landless, small traders, non-agricultural wage work	Agricultural labour	4	-	-	3	1
Sub Total (4+5)		38	-	2	10	26
All categories		82	9	14	25	34

(Source: Survey data)

It may be seen that, in general, more than 40 per cent households migrated 4 times, 30 per cent 3 times, 17 per cent twice and the remaining only once during the last one year. Cumulative distribution of frequency of visit of households shows that 100 per cent went once, 89 per cent went twice, 72 per cent thrice and 41 per cent four times. Of the first three categories, who owned cultivable land of various types (low, medium and upland) and quantity, only 18 per cent of the households went four times during the last one year. On the other hand, 68 per cent households of the landless categories went four times during the last one year.

The frequency of visit by various caste/tribes during last one year (See table 33) shows that more than 60 per cent of the tribal/semi-tribal category of households went four times a year and the remaining communities restricted their visit maximum upto 3 times a year. Cumulatively examined, 100%, 96%, 81% and 61% of the tribal/

semi-tribal household migrated once, twice, thrice and four times a year respectively. In the case of residual category the percentage were 100%, 75%, 53% and 3% respectively.

Table - 33: Frequency of Visity by Caste/Tribe

Communities	No. of migrating household	Frequency of visit during last one year			
		1	2	3	4
1. Tribal/Semi-tribal	54	2	8	11	33
2. Scheduled Castes	5	-	1	3	1
3. Occupational Castes	15	2	4	9	-
4. Residual	8	5	1	2	-
All Communities	82	9	14	25	34

METHODS OF LABOUR RECRUITMENT -
PAST AND PRESENT

In the beginning the needs of the farmers of Barddhaman seemed to have been greater than the needs of the Santhal agricultural labourers of Bankura and Puruliya. Travel during those times from the hills of source region was difficult. According to migrants, drinking water of Barddhaman villages was distasteful as compared to their native villages. Barddhaman fever and other water-borne diseases used to scare them. Still, migration process went on uninterrupted.

1. In the early days, a farmer from Barddhaman would visit a potential Santhal village in Bankura/Puruliya prior to the agricultural season. He would stay in the house of the chief (Mandal) of the village and organise a group through the latter. During those days, it may be recalled, a Santhal village was usually organised on the basis of Mandali system and a single clan/lineage unit. The farmer used to leave it to the Mandal to organise a group of his choice. He either took them along with him or entrusted the responsibility to the Mandal. (This was how the term Sardar/Majhi/Morol came into existence. A group always used to have a leader, originally possibly the Mandal himself or anyone of his choice). In the latter case, the farmer would advance a sum of money to the Mandal as journey expenses for the group, which included bus/train fare for forward journey and expenses on food for the entire group during the journey period. In all probability, the local Zamindars of source regions during those days also acted as contact persons and helped farmers to mobilise labour from his Santhal ryots.

One should also remember the hazards of journey a farmer of Barddhaman faced during those days. He used to carry some cash for himself and the recruited labourers. Major part of the journey had to be undertaken on foot, by boat and bullock carts into the forest areas where Santhals lived. It was therefore possible that they also usually came in small groups. Sometimes, a small group used to be organised by the farmers of a village in Barddhaman to fetch labour for the entire village. This seems, therefore, to have been the usual

and only method originally adopted. Over the years, an understanding developed between migrants of a particular village in Bankura/Puruliya with the farmers of a village in Bardhaman. Since Santhals were considered to be fickle minded, a visit by farmers by way of reminder and for cash advance seemed to have continued. The strong point of this system was the emergence of the group leader (usually the Mandal) with whom the farmers largely interacted for all negotiations. In this whole process of negotiation with the farmers, women had no role. They simply accompanied their males to work in the rice fields and to cook for them. The neat and faithful work, docility, hardy constitution and amenability to persuasion for extra work of Santhal women made them the darlings of Bardhaman farmers. From the accounts available from life histories of some aged migrant Santhal women it appears that they also used to be cultivated by farmers' wives during everyday's distribution of sidha (daily quota of rice, oil, fuel, vegetables, spices, pulses, and tobacco) so that they came in the next season.

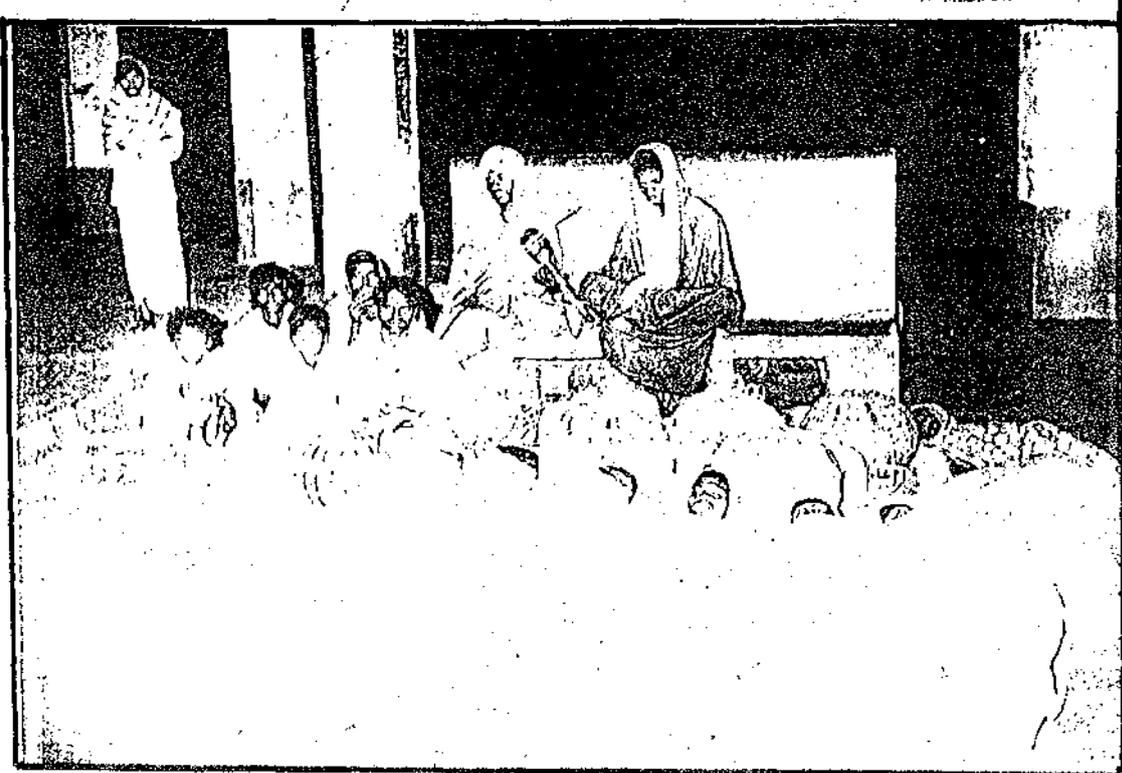
2. The above system in its broad form still continues. But certain changes have taken place. Firstly travel has become much easier for all. Malaria and other diseases are much reduced. Drinking water in Bardhaman however is still considered bad. A farmer now generally comes alone to pick the best labour. He now seldom stays with the Santhals or actual migrants. Instead, he stays with non-tribals, money-lenders, Mahajans, traders or in small hotels. Since Mandali

system no longer exists and traditional social and political structures of the tribals are much diluted, and since needs of migrants are now greater than that of farmers, the process of organising a group has become much easier and a subject of commission earning. A Sardar still heads a group and he may be the smartest guy of the village and not the traditional chief. He may make some money on the sides by way of commission and undercutting expenses of forward journey. There are agents now to organise labour for the farmers on commission basis. The moneylenders and Mahajans persuade their clients to go with the farmers with an eye to recover the loans. These people further earn a commission from the transporters viz. bus or truck operators.

3. An offshoot of the traditional method now is to obtain labour through postal message accompanied by money order to meet the expenses of forward journey. This system operates where a traditional farmer - migrant understanding and familiarity exists - more at the initiative of the latter now. The Sardar on receipt of the message reaches the farmer's house with his group. A more firm arrangement often made by a group of migrants with a farmer or group of farmers is to reach on oral agreement during a visit by which the migrants report to them at their own initiative in the next season. The expense of forward journey is collected after reaching the farmer(s).

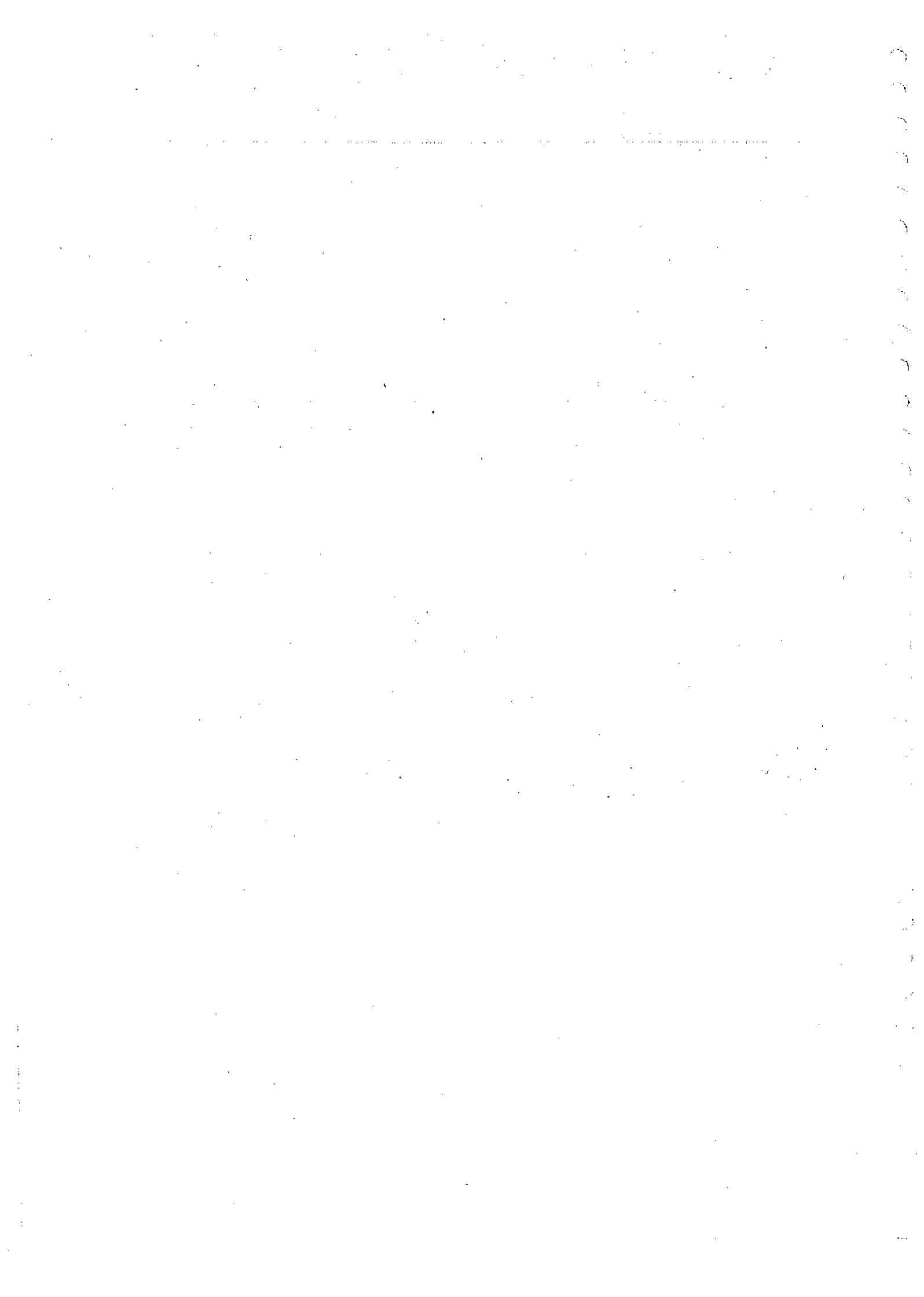


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(4)

WAITING FOR AN EMPLOYER



4. For last several years, a new system has evolved. Groups of migrant now-a-days assemble at the bus stops/rail heads at various points such as Bankura town, Durgapur town and Barddhaman town, and offer themselves for work to farmers in search of migrant labour. This development signifies the pressing need of migrant households who can not take the risk to wait for the farmers to visit their villages. It is the migrant labourers who catch the farmers now, not the other way round.

Apart from the agreement on number of labourers, a farmer also used to decide on the issue of wage with a Sardar. Prior to 1980, a farmer had his way on deciding the wage. While the wage paid in kind remained generally unaltered a bargain ensued on cash wage. Since the agricultural labour population remained unorganised and the migrant labourers were more so, the farmer used to strike the deal always to his own advantage. The change in agricultural wage as compared to other things over the years being one of the slowest, the migrant labourers had no bargaining power at all. The farmers, many of whom were not angels, also deliberately withheld the information even if there had been any revision of wage at Barddhaman.

Earlier records of agricultural wages in Barddhaman showed that women used to be discriminated. This discrimination was a widespread phenomenon and continued till about late seventies. Until 1976, when Equal Remuneration Act was enacted, this was also officially

recognised in fixation of minimum wages - where men and women had separate rates. It was officially removed from the rates of minimum wage only after 1976. Thereafter, it took sometime to persuade the farmers to bring in equality of wage between men and women. First credit obviously goes to the ~~Left~~-front Government of West Bengal. The local agricultural labourers who were mobilised by the left parties to wage a struggle were also responsible for this step. It is also possible that the farmers, firstly under political pressure and *secondly* ^{under} the spell of agricultural prosperity agreed to pay. In no case also, they have even been paying the declared minimum wage.

However, there were several instances of violation of agreement mainly regarding rates of wages by farmers of Bardhaman. Often, the agreed wages were not paid after the completion of work. Many a times, a farmer would intentionally pick up a quarrel with the group working under him and would not pay at all. There was no redressal and the migrants were helpless. In view of all these past experiences and lack of knowledge regarding prevailing wage rate in Bardhaman in a particular season several migrant groups now-a-days insist on settling the wage rate only after arrival at Bardhaman. Some others endeavour to collect the information on prevailing wage rate in Bardhaman through kin network and then fix up with the farmer. Still others do make an agreement with a farmer at the time of negotiation in their native villages and many of them do suffer. Migrant labourers have always been honest on oral agreements and even if they find they are looser they do not complaint. We shall discuss more on this issue when we deal with change in wage rates.

PREFERENCE OF FARMERS
AND MIGRANT LABOUR

Till today, a strong preference for Santhal labourers exists among the Bardhaman farmers. In earlier days, the migrant labour used to be entirely from Santhal community. Gradually, other tribal communities, various sections of non-tribal groups have joined the migration stream. But Santhal still remains the most favoured community to farmers. It was enumerated by the farmers that Santhals are most skillful and neat workers, docile and amenable to supervisory direction, can be persuaded to undertake extra work with or without payment and are most hardy of the lot. They also do not cheat farmers in the two major agricultural operations like seedling removal cum transplantation and harvesting. Although these two operations are piece-rated now, there exists the scope to work less. For instance, if the work norm against the wage paid demands that a person is required to remove 20 handful of seedling and transplant the same, a Santhal will prepare standard bundles and transplant. On the other hand, agricultural labourers from other communities will more often prepare bundles of smaller volume with less number of seedlings and transplant the same. As a result, more persondays are required to transplant an acre of land. Santhals will also maintain straight rows and required spacing, and properly plant the seedlings into the soil. Similar sincerity is maintained during harvest also in regard to neatness of work^{v13} preparation of bundles with no loss of grains and threshing of paddy. Most of these are missing with labourers of other communities.

There also exist a strong preference for Santhal females to males particularly for the operations like seedling removal, transplantation, weeding, harvesting and threshing. Surprisingly, a distinction is also made between Santhals of Bankura/Puruliya and those of Santhal Parganas (Bihar). The farmers reported that the work of the latter group is untidy, unsystematic and lacking in neatness. On the contrary, the latter group are being increasingly favoured now-a-days because of other reasons. They can be made to work for lesser wage and for longer hours. Many of them do not speak Bengali and their economic condition, political awareness and information base are much lower than their counterparts in West Bengal. As a result, at the time of recruitment the farmers are able to strike an agreement for lower wage rate. In short, they are not only cheaper than other migrant labourers but can be coaxed to work for more hours.

However, a general preference for migrant labour to local labour also dominates the scene. Had it been possible to ignore the political pressure and the politically supported legitimate demands of the local labour, the farmers would have gone entirely for migrant labour for all types of agricultural operations. Gradual settlement of Santhal households permanently in almost all villages in Bardhaman is partially in response to this preference of farmers and partially due to the interest of the Santhals.

By and large, migrants can not have much choice about who their employer is. They prefer to work with those farmers with whom they have developed a cordial relation over the years. Certain groups are privileged to remain as attached migrant labour to particular households of farmers. For the rest, availability of work is more crucial than the integrity of employer. We were however told by certain migrant groups that there are both bad and good employers (including their wives). They even named certain villages in Bardhaman where they would never like to go as almost all farmers there were bad. The local labourers in many villages did not ^{also} appreciate their presence.

Seasonal migrants do not like to travel to unfamiliar villages also and villages situated far away. Since the cost of travel and incidental expenses during return journey are not paid by employers, the migrants prefer to save on those expense by visiting nearby villages.

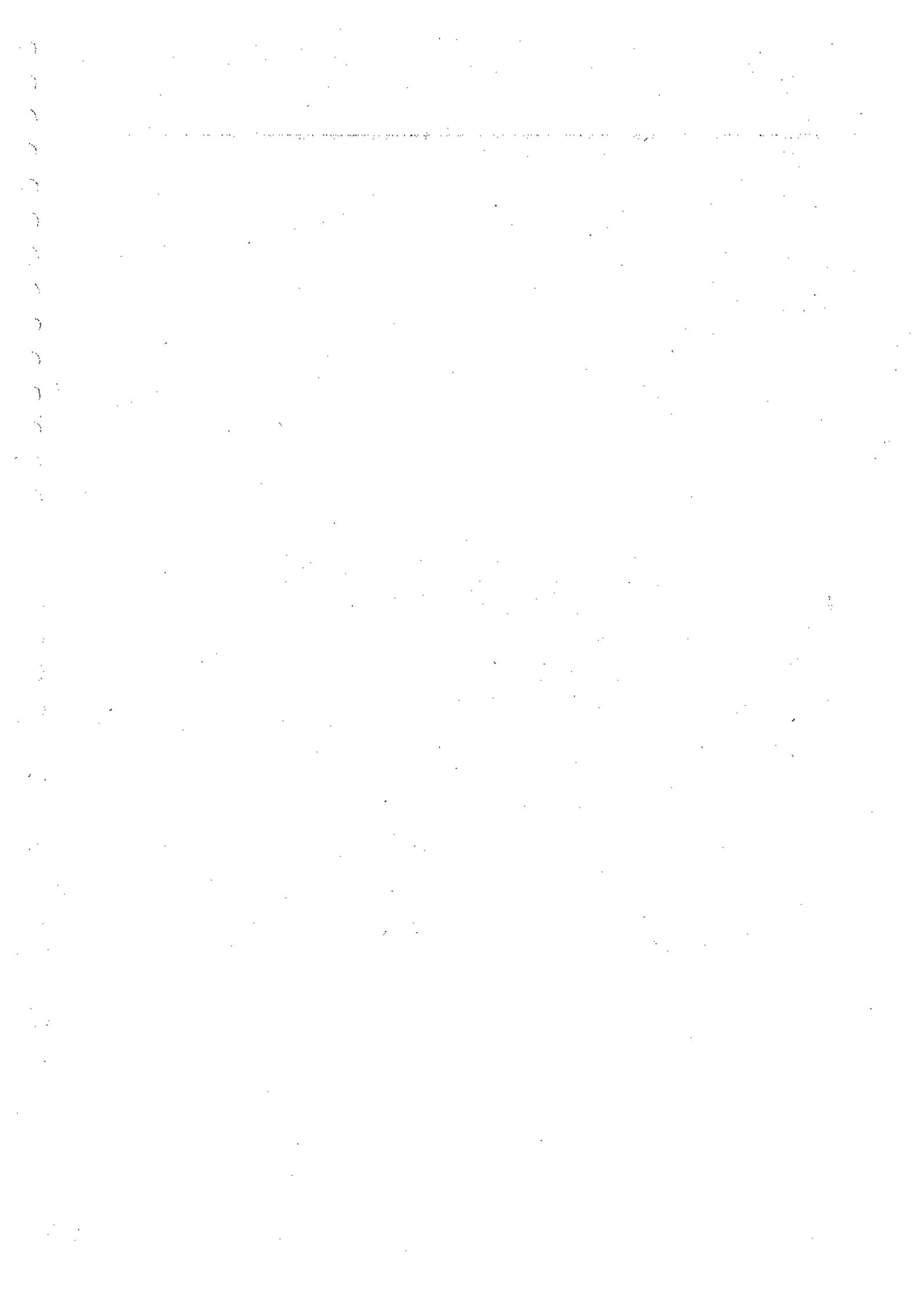
Although there is a specific preference for female labour in general and Santhal females in particular by the employers, there is hardly any occasion by the two parties to interact during negotiations and agreements. Female migrants continue to remain invisible, inspite of their having a most favoured position in the agricultural labour market and forming almost half of the migrant agricultural labour force.

CONDITIONS OF JOURNEY

In the earlier days, journey from the hills of Bankura/Puruliya to the plains of Barddhaman was tedious. Much of the journey from their own villages had to be covered on foot by the migrants. The turbulent Damodar river bordering Bankura and Barddhaman was to be crossed by boat. Within Barddhaman, many villages could be reached only on foot. They were required to spend nights at bus terminal/ Railway stations and various other places.

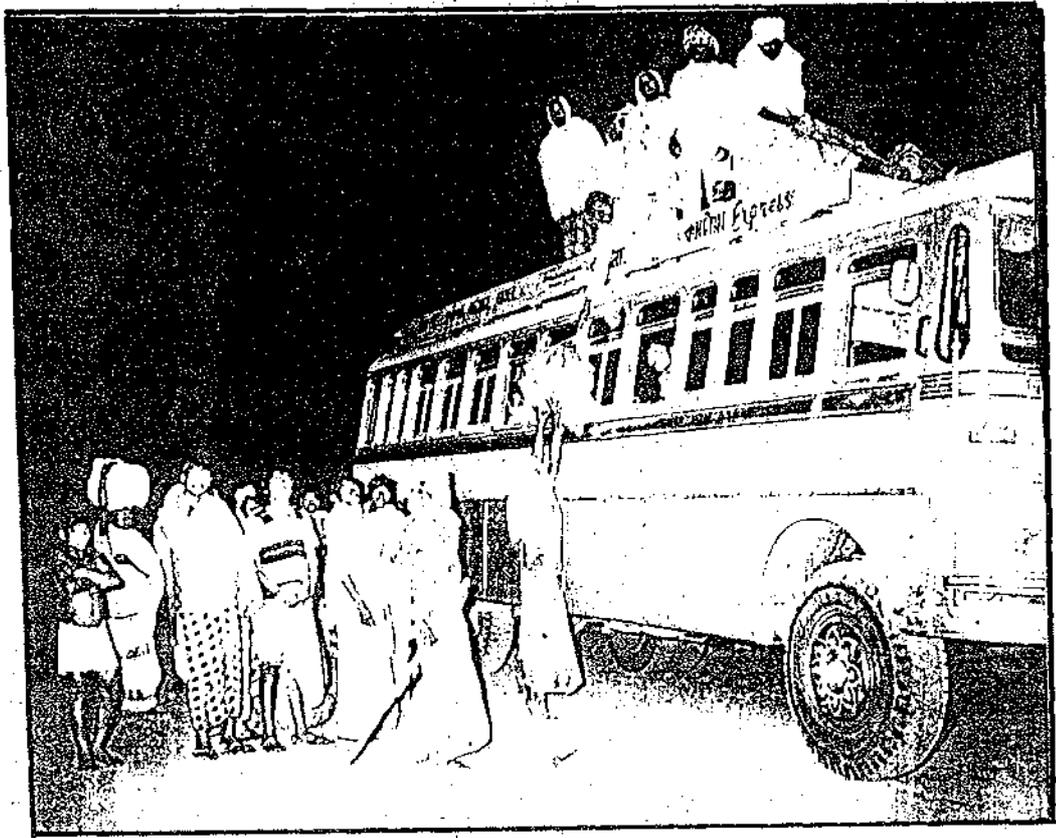
This is no longer the case now. There are buses now in the interior areas of Bankura and Puruliya and Barddhaman. There are bridges on Damodar now. The BDR has been transporting migrants from Bankura town to Barddhaman from 1916 onwards. The truck operators also carry migrants during the season. Therefore, now-a-days a migrant can expect to reach his/her destination either the same day or next day when earlier it used to take longer time.

However, buses and trains are always overcrowded with migrants during the season. In fact, easy transport facility has been responsible for greater participation in the migration process. The fear of hardship of travel is gone. Although it is not comfortable due to overcrowding, the migrants can hope to reach within shortest possible time. Since they (also the Sardars) try to save on travel expenses paid by employers for forward journey, the migrants tend to avail cheapest arrangement as far as possible. As the entire





(1)



(2)

THE JOURNEY - FROM SURPLUS TO SCARCITY

migration, to and fro, takes place within a span of few days during each season, the buses/trains are overcrowded making the journey generally uncomfortable.

Although the migrants are able to squeeze inside the bus/trains, their presence however has always been abhorred by other passengers. Their dirty clothes, untidy belongings, smelly bodies, mal-nourished appearance and unsophisticated mannerism are resented by other fellow passengers. In the earlier days, there were fewer buses and selective means of travel. As a result, the migrants faced a great deal of indignities. Since, much awaited days of employment is uppermost in the minds of migrants, the journey is undertaken with total disregard to indignities* and inconvenience. Those who miss proper bus/rail connections and those who wait to be picked ^{up} by farmers spend nights at bus and rail station. Life histories of migrant women did however mention about miseries of journey particularly when they travelled with children. Young children suffered in crowded bus and mothers panicked. Occasionally a member would get separated from the group.

The migrants from Bihar districts still have to undertake the tedious journeys. Employers often do not pay for their forward and backward journeys, and these people try to cover as much as possible on foot. The few groups we met at Bardhaman from Bihar did not

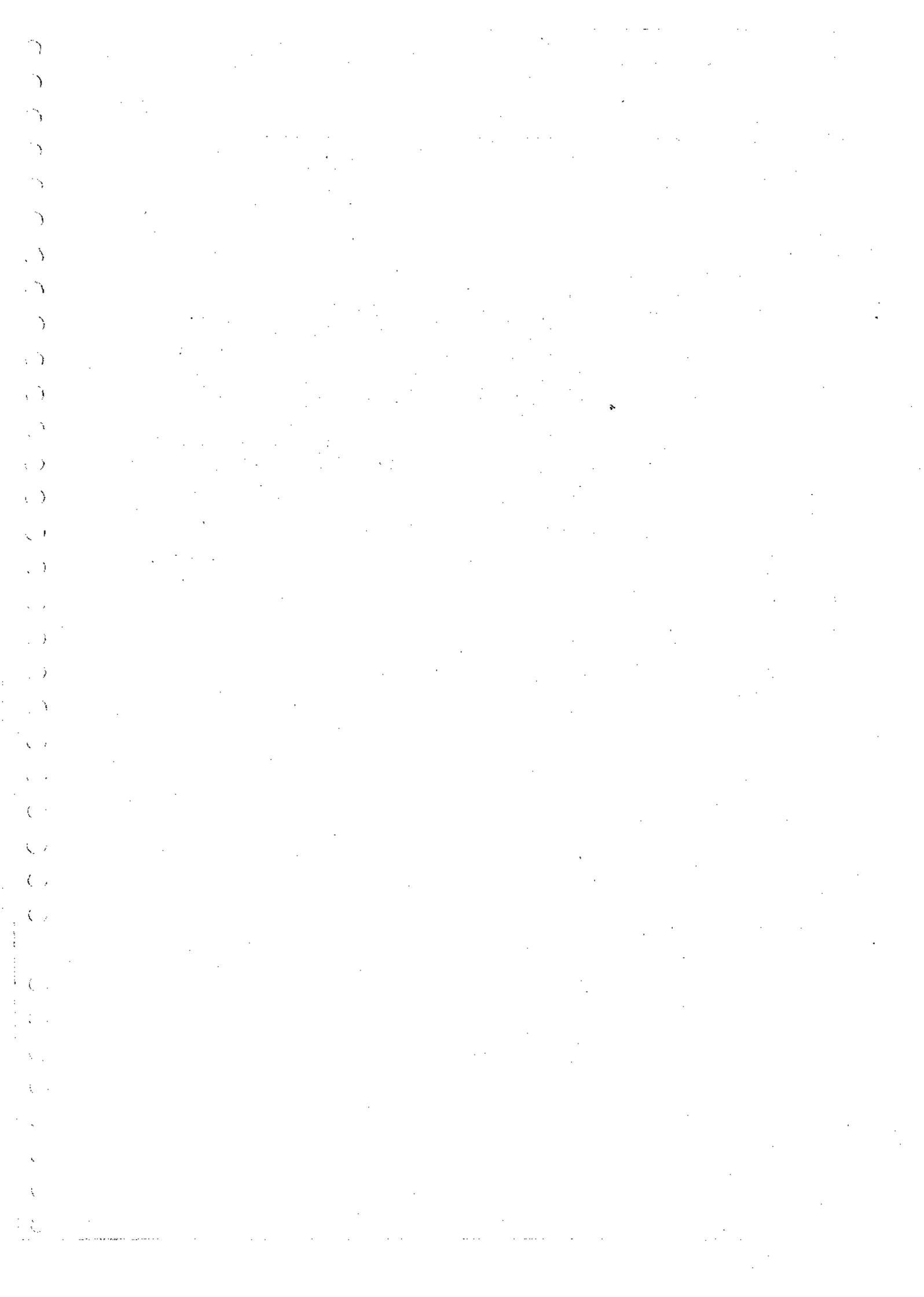
* 'Travails of Tribal Women' by D. Bandyopadhyay, Mainstream, June 14, 1980.

receive any payment towards the cost of travel expenses and they made the forward journey on foot. At the time of return journey only they travelled by bus.

ACCOMMODATION

A group of migrant labourers usually stayed in the cattleshed/ outhouse of a farmer. Temporary sheds are also erected on the edge of ponds/gardens/derelict temple compounds/or any deserted house repaired temporarily is also used. When temporary thatched huts are to be erected, the employer supplies the straw and bamboo to the migrants to do so. The accommodation is always viewed as a thatched place where the migrants spend few hours in the night to sleep. No separate accommodation is provided for married couples or individuals. To the employer, the group is an economic unit; its social and biological needs have no meaning to him.

When the group is homogenous in composition in the sense that several related families contribute to form the group, the accommodation is utilised through mutual understanding. Often, however, a group may be composed of diverse elements of caste/communities from the same village and one can notice temporary partitions within the insufficient accommodation. Everywhere we went we largely came across makeshift arrangements and overcrowded accommodation for migrants. Nowhere employers provide any other facility.





(8)

JUST TO PASS THE NIGHT SOMEHOW -
COMMONLY IT'S THE EMPLOYER'S COW SHED
USED AS THEIR COMMON ACCOMMODATION

The migrants during harvest season set up their chulhas in front of their accommodation and cooked in the open. This becomes difficult during the rainy season when it has to be done inside. These temporary accommodations as they are the migrants face more inconvenience during the rainy season. The migrants do not seem to have courage to complain. After everyday's hard labour, sleep comes automatically.

A typical accommodation of a migrant group measured 36'X12' mud wall room with a 3 feet raised verandah and a low height roof thatched by paddy straw. It had^a/single door but no window. It was situated on the edge of a pond close to the threshing yard of the farmer. Twentyfive migrants with their four odd children stayed in this room. There was a gunny bag/straw mat partition in the middle of this room as the group consisted of two different communities. It may be remembered that the two usual seasons of migration are during rains and winter. As a result, none can sleep outside. They spread paddy straw/leaf-made raincoats/kantha (thin quilt made out of worn out saree) on the floor and sleep.

Now-a-days every village in Barddhaman has tube wells. Migrants use one of them. But occasionally during the rainy season they drink water from rice fields, field channel or canal.

During our discussion with the local Panchayat leaders we made a suggestion for better accommodation for migrant labour (which is a regular and somewhat permanent phenomenon of Bardhaman villages) constructed jointly by Panchayat administration and local farmers. Such a structure can be put to other community use after the departure of migrant labour.

ARRANGEMENT FOR CARE OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Suckling babies and young children have always been accompanying their mothers during migration. Many nuclear households are not in a position to leave children behind in native villages. Both during harvest and transplantation, a major period of the day is spent in rice fields away from village and the place of stay of migrants. In the vast rice fields there is not a single speck of shed anywhere and the migrants work under the scorching heat and incessant rain. A helpless mother will usually place her child on a piece of cloth tied to bamboo crosspieces at four corners with an umbrella on top to protect the child from rain and sun.

The other arrangement generally made by migrant groups is to bring young girls specifically for the purpose of looking after the small children. Many a times young girls are hired by migrant parents having small children. All expenses of such girls including a small payment are borne by such parents of small children. Such a girl may have her parents in the group itself but occasionally she can only be socially related to the group but without parents forming a

part of it. This arrangement is made before starting the journey and a member may hire a young girl from her own village or send for brother's/sister's daughter from another village for the purpose.

Those migrants who have members of the family left behind in the village of origin usually leave their children with them. Conscientious parents were found to leave behind school going sons with neighbours on payment basis. Similar arrangements are occasionally made for goats/cattle/poultry also when a migrant family has none of his own in the village.

It is in this context that we raised the issue of at least temporary child care facilities for working mother in both Barddhaman and Bankura/Puruliya villages. We talked to the Panchayat leaders/farmers regarding making temporary arrangement of care and protection of the migrant's children each season for a month or so in every village of Barddhaman. Such an arrangement was welcomed both by migrants and the Panchayat authorities at many places. The migrant mothers said that when they worked in rice field a constant nagging anxiety remains about the children left in the make-shift accommodation.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR UNACCOMPANIED
MEMBERS OF FAMILY AND LIVESTOCK

Who is to migrate and who is to stay behind is a complex family decision. This decision depends on several factors such as composition, economic condition, need and asset of households including children going to school or any unfinished farm and non-far activities. Usually very old persons unable to undertake migrations are left behind. They are supposed to look after the livestock and any children left behind. For such persons and their charge an uninterrupted provision of food for the period is required to be arranged before departure. Local money/grain lenders are approached. Migration acts as the collateral against which such loans are advanced. Occasionally, a migrant may make a quick trip in the middle of his stay back to his own village to hand over some grains/money earned at Barddhaman. He does so on behalf of others in the group also.

Local money/grain lenders hike the rate of interest on the eve of seasonal migration. In normal times the rates vary between 10 to 15 per cent per month. On the eve of seasonal migration the rates go upto 25 to 30 per cent per month. The employer farmers who come from Barddhaman to fetch labourers now-a-days usually stay with such moneylenders. They refuse to give any advance until agricultural work is completed. As a result households totally depended on wage work have to turn to the local moneylenders only. This may not be the universal situation with all migrants but it is so with a large many.

The other type of arrangement, as mentioned earlier, is to leave behind household members, livestock etc. with relatives/neighbours with a guaranteed subsistence amount/fee. We came across several cases of school going boy left behind with relatives/neighbours/school hostel but not a single school going girl because ^{has a} ~~because~~ ^{greater} utility at the place of migration - in terms of looking after small children, fetching water, cooking food, or collecting agricultural wastes/left overs. Since major agricultural activities are piece-rated now, young girls do help the parents to complete the fixed task. Those children of the migrants who worked as Bagals (tenders of livestock) are generally left behind to hold on to the income.

ARRANGEMENT OF FOOD PREPARATION

Agricultural wage for migrants is given in cash and kind. While the cash is disbursed usually at the end of the total period of work the kind in terms of daily sidha (1500 gms of rice, vegetables, oil, spices, pulse, tobacco and fuel) is given everyday (majority of the migrants however take only that much quantity of rice daily that they require for everyday consumption and collect the rest at the end of the total period). Sidha is generally collected in the afternoon by women migrants individually or one or two selected by the group from the farmers's wife.

In case of a closely knit group of migrants consisting of members of closely related households, the cooking may be done in a single hearth. But, by and large, it is not the case. Some migrants within a group may have children with them and others may not. The group may consist of several distinct families from the village and common cooking is unacceptable. However this is a totally internal arrangement and often several families join together. Since the employers generally supply one set of utensils, sometimes out of compulsion cooking is done at one place.

Daily cooking is the exclusive job of women. Girl-children assist them. Normally all the women of a group perform one or other duty in cooking, food distribution and cleaning of utensils. Occasionally, a woman is allowed to come away an hour or so before from the worksite to start the process of cooking. Other members of the group join together to complete her unfinished task. When the group undertakes double shift of work, a woman is exclusively kept for cooking and she is compensated by the group. Since the work is generally piece-rated it is not difficult for a group to additionally perform the quota of work of one or two persons who are then exclusively assigned the task of collecting sidha and undertake cooking. A closely related group often brings an aged woman to take complete charge of cooking for the group.

MANAGEMENT OF ILLNESS

Illness during the days of migration is one thing the migrants dread very much. Absence from work due to illness is not only a loss of wage but creates other complications. Medical expenses are not borne by employers and for a migrant it is a drain on the wage earned. If a person does not work due to illness he/she is deprived of the daily sidha (Farmers say that they occasionally give for a day or two out of compassion) and as a result has to share with spouse/group. The whole purpose for the migration is defeated when either member of the couple falls sick. So also is the case with illness of accompanying children. Occasionally a group may help in all possible ways but if the illness does not show any sign of relief the couple may be sent back. This is one hazard that the migrants can not avoid due to nature of their activity such as transplantation in rainy season in knee-deep muddy water and harvesting during cold weather with insufficient clothes. These migrants become more prone to illness during Boro cultivation when they are required to transplant in cold season in knee-deep muddy fields and harvest in scorching heat of summer. Unfortunately, illness does occur primarily for two reasons. Firstly, there is a sudden change of water, accommodation and weather. Secondly, the migrants usually suffer from reduced nutrition level when they migrate because of household food shortage during those seasons.

The common diseases reported are fever, sore in hands and feet, aching body and diarrhoea. The migrants try to get medical treatment by taking advance from the farmer - who gives only that much which he can recover. If a person is incapable of working from the first day to the end he/she is required to pay back the forward journey expenses spent by the employer.

ROLE OF SARDAR

Recruitment of labour for agriculture, mines, plantations, railways, road construction etc. through Sardar/Sirdar/Majhi has been going on from the colonial period. Sardars/Majhis came to administrative recognition in the colonial period for other purposes as well. For instance, in the early part of British rule, the Santhals and Malpaharias were reported to be attacking the plains villages after their own harvest was over. The colonial administration thought of making Sardars as part of administration through payment of bribe and regular allowances. There was another suggestion to raise a crop of archers from among the Santhals, to defend colonial interest, through circulation of money as a bait to ensure attachment of tribal chiefs. Therefore, it is most certain that the institution of Sardarship presently existing in the villages of source region for mobilising and leading a group of migrants, tribal or otherwise, is an extension of the colonial practice.

A migrant group always has a Sardar (leader of the group) who looks after the interest of the group and liaises with the farmer. He mobilizes the group, collects the expenses of forward journey from the farmer and takes the group to farmer's house. He is often entrusted with the supervision of work of members of his group in addition to his own quota of work. The agreement for wage and other facilities, and work norms are made between the Sardar and the farmer.

A Sardar normally now-a-days does not receive any special benefit for this role nor does he get any extra wage. Those Sardars who maintained traditional relation with particular farmers are often rewarded with a gamcha/dhoti/umbrella/a bottle of liquor or an additional lumpsum amount totally at the discretion of the employer. In the earlier days and sometimes now he may be paid an amount of Rs. 2/- per labourer he brings. In very isolated cases, in big farm households, he is paid for his supervisory role and is not required to undertake any direct manual work. Such a Sardar is called Bara Sardar.

Today, by and large, a Sardar is no different from a member of the group. He does the same work as the others do. He therefore insists on getting a commission amount for mobilising a group. He tries to earn something from the Rs. 25/- normally paid per labourer for forward journey. He bargains with the bus and truck operators for bringing so many passengers and earns a discount. He curtails the expenditure on food and makes some money. Unlike the earlier Sardar

he is now a corrupt person. The group tolerates this in the hope that he will make a firm deal with the farmer for the next season.

His other role is to see the welfare of his group. He must see that everybody in his group gets full employment, is paid fully by way of cash and kind, and none of his group misbehaves nor anyone is illtreated by the farmer/local labour/any villager. He has a particular responsibility towards the unmarried girls in the group in the sense that they must be escorted safely back to the village and do not suffer any indignity anywhere. In case of any violation of agreement by a farmer he takes it up with the local Panchayat leader to receive remedy. Since seasonal migration is a normal phenomenon in almost every village in Bankura/Puruliya particularly in certain parts of these two districts there are publicly recognised Sardars there. Whenever a farmer arrives in search of labour, villagers will take him to their Sardar.

As indicated earlier, the role and function of the Sardar should be traced to the politico-social post of traditional village chief in Santhal and other tribal societies participating in various types of migration process. Dependence of the group on his wisdom as a custodian of social, cultural and political honour and interest of the group and community was very explicit. In its wake, the post of Sardar for migration process revolved with the post of traditional village chief. Because of breakdown in traditional system in many

societies now, the post of Sardar has lost its varied social and cultural connotations. (A summarised account of views and particulars of a few Sardars is given in the appendix - III).

We did not come across or hear about any female holding the post of Sardar in the groups from Bankura/Puruliya. However, one of the groups from Dumka of Bihar had a sturdy female acting as Sardar whom we met at Chakunda village. Her husband originally held the post of Sardar and she has been coming to a particular farmer in Chakunda for last 15 years. Since her husband is no longer able to undertake the journey, the post has revolved to her. According to the members of her group she is equally competent and they have full trust in her.

WORK NORMS AND CONDITIONS OF WORK

In the earlier days, working hours more less used to be regulated by rising and setting of the sun both for migrant and local labour. A farmer himself or his gomoshta (paid supervisor) or attached labour who used to be farmer's right hand man intensively supervised and extricated maximum work from the migrant labourers. The absolute dependency of agricultural labourers on agricultural work and on farmers who provided agricultural employment created a situation where farmers ruled the roost.

This situation has undergone some change now. The dependency on agricultural work and farmers does still exist but it has been able to shed its character of total sub-servience. Articulation of workers' rights and social responsibility of employers, and political reinterpretation of worker - employer relation have contributed to such change. In West Bengal, particularly in the rice-belts, during the last fifty years, struggles and movements of sharecroppers and agricultural workers led by the left and ultra-left have laid open the nature of exploitation on one hand and sought to bring a modicum of social justice on the other. In this process of organised social change, farmers were also mobilised around various issues. The various land reform measures which were initiated in the late forties and mid-fifties, and which reached a height of social equity in the late seventies and early eighties, traumatised the landed class. The traditional landed peasant who always has been employing hired labour - local or migrant - could not totally forget his past relation but at the same time were required to reconcile to the changed situation.

The farmers employing hired labour have a long experience of intricacies of labour deployment in various operations of agriculture. Being actual workers, this experience is also shared by the agricultural labourers. The farmers today are now engaged in a variety of non-agricultural pursuits and have developed a dislike to work along with the labourers in the field. Because of changed circumstances the

Gomosta and attached labourers are also disappearing bringing the responsibility of supervision on farmers themselves. In view of heightened political mobilisation they are required to make adjustments in working hours and wages of agricultural labourers. The resultant backlash is visible now in farmer-labourer relation. It has become more impersonal, formal and business like. In view of increase in agricultural wage, intensity of agricultural activity, political mobilisation of agricultural labourers resulting in affirmation of workers' rights and ensuring a fair share of agricultural employment to local labour, continuing dependency on farm households and loss of certain earlier relations, activities and support, a large number of semi-skilled workers in agriculture (mainly local women) has ^{also} enrolled themselves in agricultural labour force.

All these developments led the farmers to opt for certain work norms for various operations in agriculture. Apparently, in deciding these norms, the farmers could not take a unilateral view, the experience and opinion of local workers had to be kept in mind and political pressure in this area could not be ignored by them. As a result, it appears to us, the existing work norms are a result of some amount of consultations between local, as distinct from migrant, agricultural labourers and farmers with a strong political support directed towards the former section.

The farmers were found to be visibly hurt and dissatisfied on several accounts. They feel that work norms are incompatible with wage rates in the sense that less amount of work is done as compared to wage paid. They also feel that they are being unnecessarily pressurised to allot a fair share of employment to local labour which they would have otherwise preferred to extend to migrant labour. Additionally, they have come to realise that they have practically least say in fixation of wage rates. These dissatisfactions are further strengthened when they notice the migrant labour to complete the day's task in much shorter time. They are also able to procure willing migrant labour in lesser wage than normally fixed in a particular season. They have also now less control over the agricultural labour - local or migrant. By and large, they carry a feeling that work norms and wage rates are totally in favour of agricultural labourers and the farmers' interest has been summarily overlooked.

Work norms in various operations are now piece-rated. A farmer can object to the quality but can not complain if the quantity of work is fulfilled satisfactorily. For instance, during 1989-90, in transplantation of kharif paddy, a labourer is required to remove 24 handful of seedlings from the nursery bed and transplant the same as per required spacing on the field prepared for the purpose for a day's wage. If it is only transplantation, a labourer is required to plant 48 bundles. In case of only removal, 64 bundles of seedling are to be prepared per day. In case of Boro paddy the norm is ^{reduced} to 20 bundles of removal and transplantation as the seedlings are

slender, shorter and transplanted in closer spacing. These norms will vary if the variety of paddy cultivated (e.g. Pankaj, IR8 etc) is different.

Similarly for harvesting and threshing of paddy the work norms are 6 person days an acre for the former and 2 persondays for a kahan of paddy threshed on wooden platform and 1½ kahan threshed on machine. Similar work norms exist for weeding, ploughing* etc. The piece-rated work norms have released the farmers from intensive supervisory role. They are now mainly required to coordinate the systems in agriculture such as timely raising of seedlings, timely preparation of field before seedlings are removed, making proper arrangement for threshing before harvest etc.

Although usually the indications of norms of piece-rated work and daily wage rate during a particular season reach almost all villages by word of mouth and through organs of political parties/ Panchayats, deviations in both do occur. For instance, in regard to daily wage rate if a clever farmer strikes a deal at lower amount there is no way to help the migrant labour, and such a situation largely occurs with the labourers from Bihar region. Many a times, migrant labourers can expect to be paid at a higher rate when they venture to interior villages of Bardhaman which are generally avoided by migrants for various reasons. Similarly, more often additional work beyond the daily quota is extricated from migrant labour as well as from local labour. This is done through co-ercion, persuasion, small reward and through

* A local labour was dissatisfied being a ploughman. He said that whole day's of ploughing brought him Rs 10 and 2kg of rice, while another labour made two shifts in transplantation and earned Rs 20 and 4kg of rice.

verbal assurance of employment in the next season. It is also done through clever manipulation of daily activities - by way of cleaning the threshing yard, stacking the hay, carrying grains to the bins, misrepresenting acreage of land, insisting on thicker bundles of seedlings etc. All these are not difficult to do in isolated villages where the migrants are outsiders and unorganised whereas the farmers are united. Not many migrants know where or who to complain.

Working conditions in agriculture are always hard. During the Kharif, ploughing, seedling removal, transplantation and weeding are done in slushy fields in knee deep water either under scorching sun or under rains. Kharif paddy is harvested in cold season for which agricultural labourers have insufficient clothes. During Rabi, ploughing, seedling removal, transplantation and weeding are done in cold and slushy mud of rice fields, and harvesting is completed in scorching heat of summer months. Therefore, physical inconvenience caused by climatic condition and nature of work place is an unavoidable part of the working condition. But it is the operational postures for various agricultural operations which are more painful. A person virtually walks several miles in order to plough a field. Seedlings removal and weeding can not be done without assuming a bending or squatting posture. Transplantation and harvesting are done again in bending posture only. During threshing on wooden platform a person has to turn and twist his/her arms 4000 to 5000 times per day. For malnourished or pregnant women these are physically unbearable tasks. For semi-skilled women labourers, these are hard work taking more time. Furthermore, many of these activities tend to be group or partner oriented and as a result rhythm, quantity and quality are to be maintained.

RELATION BETWEEN LOCAL
AND MIGRANT LABOUR

The history of growth of agricultural labour force in the study regions of Bardhaman shows that a major percentage of the local labour now are originally migrants currently settled in small number in almost each village. The entire tribal category of the ^{Local} agricultural labour force are largely migrants. A section of the scheduled castes has also come from other districts of the state. This history of migration of a section of local labour tends to diffuse the tension that normally develops between local and migrant labour.

Discussion with local and migrant labour about each other however indicates certain emerging areas of tensions. Firstly, as already mentioned, a feeling exists among local labour that migrants are enjoying the fruits of continuous struggle ^{of the former} for better wage without participating in it. Secondly, there is an increasing feeling ^{among local labour} that migrants are taking away a huge share of employment in agriculture. Thirdly, employers' singular preference of female migrant labour to local female labour of non-tribal communities because of skill is a visible tension area. Lastly, by agreeing to undertake unpaid extra work, paid extra shift or to work at lower wage rates, the migrant labourers ^{the local labourers thought,} are harming the cause of unity and struggle of agricultural labourers in the district of Bardhaman.

The migrant labourers are found to be partly aware of these issues and express their inability to help in any way. Many of them also believe that improvement in wage has been made by the Panchayat and Left Front government, and agricultural labourers of Barddhaman have no contribution to it. They also consider themselves to be superior peasant workers than the local labourers. They say that moment the needed employment for the survival of their families are made available to them in and around their native village they will stop migrating. It has never been a pleasure trip for them. They also carry a hurt feeling of being treated as an inferior category of people by the local labour. Although a mutual self-respect is yet to develop between the two groups, there has been no instance of explicit expression of likes and dislikes. When asked whether any discussion between Panchayat authorities and political leadership in the involved districts can help ease the relation and understanding in anyway the migrants thought that would be a positive step towards protection of their interest and expression of their desperate situation and solidarity with the local labour.

COMPOSITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF GROUPS

During our visit to Barddhaman we met with several groups of migrant labourers. With ten of them we had detailed interaction during the harvesting season. A summarised account of these ten groups is given in Appendix-IV. The Group - IV consisting of Santhal and Mahato, and Group VI

consisting of Blacksmith community hailed from the same village of Puruliya and were working in the same village location, but with different farmers, in Bardhaman. Group II and VIII although hailed from the same village were working in different village locations in Bardhaman. So was the case with Group III and X from Bihar.

The groups presented a variety of characteristics. They were overwhelmingly made of Santhal tribe - the traditional migrants. The groups III, VI and X had only one female member each to take charge of cooking. Other seven groups had more than one female member each. Majority of the groups originated from single village locations of Puruliya, Bankura and Dumka. Only two groups had members from more than one village location. Overall composition of groups by sex showed a ratio of 2 male to 1 female. Half of the groups had young children with them and average number of such children per group was five. There were 26 children against 21 married females.

On an average each group consisted of 15 adult workers (10 males, 5 females) and 3 children. The size of a group is now more or less dependent on a farmer's size of land holding and his total requirement of labour. Overwhelmingly larger number of migrants belonged to age group 18-45, and currently married males and females together constituted about 60 per cent of total adult migrants. There was no unrelated female in any group, and a core group of a few related members appeared to have constituted the nucleus of each group. Not a single female migrant owned land in her own name in

native villages and 30 per cent male migrants were land less. More than 75 per cent of those who owned land in native villages were owners of land of less than an acre. All the ten groups made two trips a year to Bardhaman. Six groups additionally visited for two more times. Majority of the groups were coming to the same village and frequently to the same farmer for quite a number of years.

The most notable characteristics of the groups, particularly of those hailing from Bankura/Puruliya of West Bengal, was their total ignorance about certain labour laws which directly affected them, such as the Minimum Wages Act, Equal Remuneration Act, and specially about the prescribed minimum rates of wages for agricultural labourers. So was the case with the two groups from Dumka, Bihar.

It may be seen in the Appendix - IV that a mention has been made about sub-groups within a group. These sub-groups are not so much based on caste/community divisions and other character, as they are on number of hearths and number of primary social unit of family. The sub-groups are more often formed in order to save on the quantity of rice, as consumption pattern of individuals varies. If there are children with a group consisting of heterogenous families, separate cooking is resorted to. Each of the distinct community categories such as Santhal, Bhumij, Kora, Mahato definitely forms separate unit of sub-groups for cooking and occasionally for sleeping.

AGRICULTURAL WAGE
IN BARDDHAMAN

One hundred and fifty years back a daily agricultural labourers received one anna ($1/16$ of a rupee) worth of paddy/rice as wage. In 1874, an agricultural labourer in Barddhaman received slightly less than 4 kg of paddy (unhusked) and day's food daily. In 1895, he used to be paid less than 5 kg. of paddy (unhusked) or less than 3 kg. of cleaned rice then worth four anna (one fourth of a rupee) daily and food. Females engaged in husking of rice in 1895 earned a rupee per month³!

By 1910, an agricultural labour was paid Rs. 7 to 9 per month; an attached labour (Mahinder) received Rs. 4 to 5 per month plus daily food and a set of clothes annually. Daily agricultural labourers used to be paid at the rate of 4 to 5 anna in rainy season and 3 to 4 anna during harvesting plus food and tiffin. In 1922, the daily wage rate remained at 4 annas. These were the wage rates for male agricultural labourers. Female agricultural labourers who were mainly tribals, local and migrant, obviously used to receive lesser wage than their male counterparts. Apparently, agricultural wage paid partly in cash seemed to have been introduced around the beginning of the 20th century. Cash wage also provided a great attraction to the migrant labourer who then were mainly Santhals.*

*In many Santhal villages, the migrants told us that if Barddhaman farmers would not have paid part of the wage in cash they would not have gone on migration!.

Agricultural wage rate, particularly for migrant labourers, prior to 1978 did not have any uniformity in Bardhaman villages. It used to differ from village to village and even one farmer to another within same village and from season to season. For instance, the wage rate used to go up in peak season and slide back in slack season. As mentioned above, the rate used to vary between transplantation and harvesting. The migrant labourers usually received what the local daily labourers, whose condition was then no better than the former, received. The only undiscussed point was the fact of urgency of the farmers to transplant or to harvest, which could have encouraged the migrant labourers to bargain with the farmers for higher wages while they were still in their villages and farmers were at their doorsteps.

The post-independence Bardhaman was a relatively strong base of the left political parties. By 1948, the Minimum Wages Act had been enacted providing the target and plank for wage struggle. The Krishak Sabha of Bardhaman was organisationally far stronger than it was in any other districts. Several eminent Krishak Sabha leaders emerged from this district. The district has been the venue of a few Krishak Sabha conventions. In spite of these favourable conditions, the conditions of agricultural labourers did not materially improve. The farmers, on the other end, were being gently treated. In the '50s, their traditional feudal interest in land was hurt by such legislative measures like the Zamindari Acquisition Act, Land Ceiling laws and recognition of sharecroppers' rights. Many absentee

landlords and agricultural rent receivers resumed cultivation to become owner-cultivators. The country was also passing through an extended period of foodgrain shortage and the farmers were

encouraged to grow more food and to adopt new agricultural practices and high yielding food crops. In the process, the agricultural labourers, who were vital to achieve those national objective, remained a forgotten lot or were considered as the natural beneficiary of the process of agricultural development which unfortunately did not happen.

We went to a village not very far away from Chakunda in Nabastha Block to speak to farmers and political leaders belonging to Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Indian National Congress regarding agricultural wage rates of migrant labourers. In 1968, an agricultural labourer in this village, which was a Congress stronghold then, used to be generally paid @ Rs. 1.50 and 1 kg. paddy (unhasked) per day; some farmers of the same village even paid Re 1 and 800 gms. cleaned rice. The second half of the sixties saw non-Congress governments in the state for brief periods and Land Reform was a major thrust area. The Naxalite movement was also at its height during the period. As a result of these political developments and threats of strikes by agricultural labourers the wage rate in this village uniformly rose to Rs. 3 and 1 kg rice per day around 1969-70. It seemed to have remained unchanged upto 1977. In 1978, the Left Front Government of West Bengal initiated the measures of land reforms in the village and agricultural labourers and sharecroppers were being mobilized through Krishak Sabha. The question of

agricultural wage was naturally an issue with the landless agricultural labourers and a drama was enacted in the village around this issue.

The Krishak Sabha kept a propaganda that agricultural labourers should be paid @ Rs. 8.10, the prescribed minimum wage then in the state for agricultural labourers. The organ of the Congress Party in the village immediately supported this. The farmers of the village were divided into two sections. Those in imminent danger of being affected by land reform measures overnight became members of the Krishak Sabha. The other section supporting the Congress party agreed to pay Rs. 8.10. This helped the Congress party organ in the village to win the support of agricultural labourers who immediately decided to go on strike in the middle of agricultural activity. The farmers supporting the Krishak Sabha in this villages were pressurising the Krishak Sabha for a lower wage rate than Rs. 8.10. The Krishak Sabha changed its earlier stand and initiated a propaganda that considering the cost of cultivation it was really difficult for farmers to pay the minimum wage and hence Rs. 3.50 in cash and 1½ kg. rice in kind should form the agricultural wage rate - which in money value was obviously less than Rs. 8.10.

4

A study in 1974 in Bardhaman, indicated that a casual agricultural labourer used to be paid at the rate of Rs. 1.50 plus 1100 gms of rice, bidi, oil and vegetables, during lean season, and Rs. 2.50 plus the same items in kind per day (the total money value of the wage being Rs. 4.39). during the peak seasons of agricultural activities.

In Chakunda village, around 1970, the prevailing agricultural wage rate was reported to be Rs. 3 and one kg. of rice. Around 1974, a Krishak Sabha Sangathan was formed in the village and some articulation about higher wage in agriculture was reported to have been made. In 1978, the wage rate in the village was Rs. 4 and one kg. of rice per day. Between 1978 and 1990, there were several revisions in agricultural wage to reach the current rate of Rs. 10 and 2 kg rice. But the revisions followed a pattern. It was either the kind or the cash amount which was revised in a particular year, never the both.

What happened in Chakunda between 1978 and 1990, by and large, happened in other villages of Bardhaman. However, the greatest contribution of the post 1978 period has been a ^{more or less} uniform agricultural wage, although not equal to the prescribed minimum wage, ensured in all villages of Bardhaman. This has benefitted the migrant labourers greatly from being underpaid or cheated. The other sign of improvement during the last 12 year is an almost regular and quicker review of agricultural wage and its subsequent revision. From the point of view of female agricultural labourers the post-1978 period has brought them the equality in wage removing the previous discrimination in wage between men and women. There was another change also. By 1980, the earlier practice of feeding agricultural labourers, particularly the local casual or attached, by farmers had disappeared.

According to available official statistics, in 1956-57, average daily money wage of a male agricultural labourer in West Bengal was Rs. 1.4 and of a female Re. 1. In 1964-65, it increased to Rs. 1.8 and 1.4 respectively. Ten years later in 1974-75, it went up to Rs. 3.5 and Rs. 2.8 respectively. In 1977-78 it was Rs. 4.3 and Rs. 3.7 respectively (The Consumer Price Index Numbers for agricultural labourers during these years were 97,136,338 and 321 respectively at 1960-61 base year). Annual money and real wage earnings per agricultural labourers (male and female) in West Bengal were as follows.

TABLE 34

Annual Money and Real Wage Earnings in West Bengal

Year	Annual Money wage earnings (Rs.)		Annual Real Wage earnings (Rs.)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1956-57	267	165	275	170
1964-65	485	280	356	206
1974-75	732	419	216	124
1977-78	1031	753	322	234

(Source: See Notes & References)

It may be seen that annual money wage earnings per agricultural labour have risen steadily and sharply between 1956-57 and 1977-78 for both males and females in West Bengal. On the other hand annual real wage earnings per agricultural labourer, both male and female, increased at a much slower pace than money earnings. In fact, the earnings fell in 1974-75 and rose again in 1977-78.

It was uniformly been reported by the migrant labourers that higher wage and its major part paid in cash together have been the subject of great attraction to them. While the second aspect is easily substantiated by the fact that in their native villages agricultural wage is usually paid in kind even today, the first aspect needs some discussion. Our enquiry during the late '80s in native villages of migrants definitely indicates a difference in wage between Barddhaman and Bankura/Puruliya and it is higher in the former district. In 1880, in Bankura a male labourer would be paid two anna a day ^{and} in Bundwan between 2 annas and 3¼ annas. In 1912, an agricultural labourers would be paid one or two seers of parched rice ^{in Bankura.} and three seers of paddy daily / In 1960, he would be paid on an average Rs. 1.50 and she Re 1 per day. In 1965, he was getting about Rs. 1.75 and she about Rs. 1.40 per day.⁷

However, the official statistics of the Government of West Bengal provide a different picture altogether. According to the Economic Review, 1982-83, Government of West Bengal, the average daily wage rates of agricultural labour in the following five districts in 1976-77 and 1979-80 were as follows (in Rs.):⁸

	<u>1976-77</u>	<u>1979-80</u>
Barddhaman	5.70	7.15
Bankura	7.10	8.00
Puruliya	7.00	5.15
Medinipur	5.40	7.15
Birbhum	5.55	7.30

The above data show that in 1976-77, the agricultural wage rate in Bardhaman was lower than that of Bankura/Puruliya. In 1979-80, it was higher than Puruliya but continued to remain lower than Bankura. In 1971-72 agricultural wage rate in Puruliya was Rs. 2 to Rs. 2.50. In Bankura, it was Rs. 4 to 5. Admittedly, therefore, it was the opportunity of employment in Bardhaman during the spells of unemployment in native villages which caused the labour movement. Alternatively, the rates of wages given for Bankura/Puruliya in the official statistics of the Government of West Bengal do not relate to the areas from where large scale migration takes place.

In all probability, the Minimum Wages Act of 1948 provided the first plank for any movement and struggle of agricultural labourers, though the meaning, purpose and scope of the Act remained largely unknown to them. Neither the agricultural labourers of Bankura/Puruliya nor of Bardhaman whom we met, knew anything about the Act nor did they know what was the prescribed minimum rate of wage in 1989-90. On the other hand, many farmers and leaders of the political parties and Panchayat had full knowledge about it and Minimum Wage Inspectors were found to be in position in many Block Development offices both in Bardhaman and Bankura/Puruliya. In 1990, we came across wall posters on the demand of Minimum Wage for agricultural labourers in Bundwan and Manbazar Block headquarters put up by the Communist Party of India (Marxist). There was however no serious articulation beyond that. People did not know what was the actual rate and how to get paid by that rate. Although in Government sponsored employment programmes it was obligatory to pay Minimum Wage and with

some exceptions, it was actually being paid, the people were not told that it was the prescribed minimum rate of wage fixed by the Government and they were entitled to that rate for employment in agriculture as well. The leader of the agricultural labourers in Chakunda village and the member of the Panchayat from Manbazar who were themselves agricultural labourers and supporters of Krishak Sabha had no idea about the prescribed minimum rate of wage as fixed by the Government but were familiar with the phrase 'Minimum Wage' as they were required to lead marches in demand of the same prior to the 1990 harvest season.

According to a Chairman of Panchayat Samiti and Krishak Sabha leader the process of fixation of wage rate of agricultural labourers in Bardhaman during the last few years was as follows. 'Usually before the harvesting season, the State Government, by an administrative directive, declares the minimum rate of wage for agricultural labourers. The district Krishak Sabha unit, of which the farmers as well as the agricultural labourers are members, picks up the issue and after some deliberation decides the upper and lower limits of the wage rate. The upper limit is always slightly less than the prescribed rate of the government and usually a difference of Rs. 2/- is kept between the two limits. It was reported that, for about a month or so, the organs of agricultural labourers all over the district hold intensive discussion at Panchayat Samiti levels and come out in favour of the upper limit. On the other hand, the farmers' representatives opt for the lower limit. To conclude the exercise finally a compromise formula of a rupee higher than the lower limit or a rupee lesser than the upper limit is announced'.

In actuality, much of the above said process is theoretical and ritual now. If the Krishak Sabha decides to pick up the issue there is usually a slight raise. At the same time, the Government may or may not revise the rate every year, and usually, in Bardhaman, the Krishak Sabha has been picking up the issue every second year. Within the Krishak Sabha, the issue may not have identical priority in all districts of the State. (The same is true in respect of Equal Remuneration Act also). For instance, the Krishak Sabha unit of Bankura/Puruliya generally does not take it up at all on the ground that the major parts of the two districts are drought prone and unirrigated, and as a result agricultural productivity is uncertain.* It is therefore improper to enforce minimum wage rate in such areas. In addition to this, there still exists sufficient scope to provide land to the land poor and landless peasantry in these two districts. With the Krishak Sabha of Bardhaman, regular articulation on the issue of minimum wage has to be compulsively maintained as an instrument of peasant mobilisation because there are not enough land to distribute to land poor and landless peasantry. But it is an issue which affects the members of Krishak Sabha viz. farmers and agricultural labourers, differently. The farmers employing agricultural labour by and large remain a reluctant lot to agree to any regular increase in agricultural wage without corresponding increase in the sale price of paddy. The leaders of the agricultural labour or the so called landless peasant within Krishak Sabha considered to be the militant section, bear the onerous responsibility of ensuring social justice

* Organisational weakness of Krishak Sabha in various districts and a somewhat complacent stand taken by many Krishak Sabha leaders were reported to be the other reasons.

and equity to the traditionally deprived section, for whom full-time employment still remains a far cry. What is therefore usually done is to effect a raise either in the cash component or in the kind alternatively. Panchayats are then told to see that no deviation is made. This exercise is also often avoided for a year or two keeping the rate stagnant for two to three years.

Let us examine what happened during the period 1988 to 1990. The prescribed minimum rate of wage for employment in agriculture in West Bengal upto 30.9.89 was Rs. 19.65 without food and Rs. 16.45 with food for adult males and females. From 1.10.89 to 30.9.90, the prescribed rates were Rs. 21.17 and Rs. 17.97^{respectively}. The issue of the minimum wage appeared to have been taken up by the Krishak Sabha of Bardhaman in 1988. The agricultural labourers, males and females, made demonstration march in demand of the prescribed minimum rate of wage (and as mentioned earlier, without knowing what the actual rate was) with posters and festoons. At the Panchayat Samiti level a meeting of the leaders of farmers and agricultural labourers was held. The district leadership of Krishak Sabha then assembled to deliberate on the feed back from the leaders of farmers and agricultural labourers from various Panchayat Samiti levels of the district. The compromise formula of Rs. 10 in cash and 2 kg. rice in kind - the total money value of which worked out to nearly Rs. 16 was adopted. (The farmers, including some of the Panchayat and Krishak Sabha leaders, reported that they never attended such meetings as its decision was a foregone one). Thus the agricultural labourers were getting at least Rs. 3 less than the prescribed rate of wage.

We visited Bardhaman villages twice, once during the transplantation season (July-August) of 1989 and second time during December 1989 to January 1990. During the first visit, the prescribed rate of minimum wage in operation was Rs. 19.65 without food and Rs. 16.45 with food. The local agricultural labourers were being paid @Rs. 10 plus 2 kg cleaned rice and the migrant labourers @ Rs. 10 plus 1½ kg cleaned rice and dal, vegetable, oil, bidi, fuel for one person for one day (dal, vegetable, oil, bidi, fuel together apparently constituted equivalent to ½ kg cleaned rice). However, by October 1989, the minimum rate of wage for employment in agriculture was revised to Rs. 21.17 without food and Rs. 17.97 with food. In December '89 - January 1990 harvest season* the agricultural labourers continued to receive Rs. 10 plus 2 kg rice or Rs. 10 plus 1½ kg rice and dal, vegetable, oil, bidi, fuel. Surprisingly however, the local leader of agricultural labourers of Chakunda village reported that as per the direction of the Party they had held a march through the village just before the harvesting season demanding minimum rate of wage. Apparently, the issue of the revision of rate was not taken up by the Krishak Sabha/Panchayat till that time. It may also be possible that the gap between notification of the rate and implementation of the same is so much that by that time harvesting operation is complete.

Whatever may be the plus and minus points of this process, the migrant labour has absolutely no part to play in it. But they automatically benefit from the exercise, for in deciding the wage rate no distinction is made for migrant and local labour. At the sametime, Panchayats and Krishak Sabha organs were found to express

* See Appendix - VIII for wage pattern in 1990-91 harvest season.

their inability to interfere when (a) a migrant labour himself unknowingly makes an oral agreement with a farmer to work for an amount lesser than what has been decided in Bardhaman in a particular year or (b) a mischievous farmer says that he (migrant labour) accepted it at the time of negotiation. One of the Panchayat Chairmen, thought that it would be easier for him to look after the interest of the migrant labour as well if these people brought a written piece of agreement between them and a farmer duly authenticated by the Panchayat authorities of the village from where the migrant labour hailed. When asked whether he had ever raised the issue of migrant labour or about his above suggestion in the inter-district Panchayat or Krishak Sabha meetings, the answer was in the negative. There exists an explicit knowledge about the phenomenon of seasonal migration and also a surprising silence about the migrants both within Krishak Sabha and the Panchayat system - both of which being in a unique position to help the migrant labour in various ways.

It was also reported by the same Panchayat Chairman that in case of non-payment of wages by farmers to the migrant labourers, or payment of lesser wage than agreed or non-payment of prescribed minimum rate^{of} wage whenever it was enforced the Panchayat authorities or the Minimum Wage Inspector in Bardhaman find it difficult to initiate legal redressal. The migrant labourers are difficult to be traced later and are unwilling to stay back to respond to court summons/appearance. The case drags on or is dismissed or decided ex-parte. He said that he was aware of several cases before 1978

when labourers were not paid at all or paid less but there was little he could do. He claimed that during the last 10 years such cases were very rare and Panchayats did try to intervene to force the mischievous farmers to pay the prevalent wage and other rightful benefits to the migrant labourers. The migrant labourers also reported that from 1978 onwards, they had not faced much problem in the area of receiving payments and agreed wages, and they approached either the Party (meaning CPI-M) or the Panchayat in Bardhaman villages for redressal of grievances.

LEGISLATIVE MEASURES FOR MIGRANT AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

Till today, no protective legislation has been enacted either by the Central or by the State Government for agricultural labourers as such and migrant agricultural labourers in particular. In 1979, the Government of India enacted 'The Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Services) Act, 1979 mainly in response to the alleged ill-treatment of migrant workers from Orissa to Delhi and other places. The provisions of this act firstly do not apply to the agricultural labourers and secondly to the inter-district migrants within the state. However, the two Central Acts, viz. the Minimum Wages Act of 1948, and the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 do indirectly affect the agricultural labourers including the migrant agricultural labourers. A third

Act enacted by the State Government in 1975, known as Homestead Act was primarily meant for agricultural labourers - by which they were given the rights over homestead land.

In the first Act, "Employment in agriculture, that is to say, in any form of farming including the cultivation, and tillage of the soil, dairy farming, the production, cultivation, growing and harvesting of any agricultural or horticultural commodity the raising of livestock, bees or poultry and any practice performed by a farmer or on a farm as incidental to or in conjunction with farm operations including any forestry or timbering operations and the preparation for market and delivery to storage or to market or to carriage for transportation to market of farm produce", has been included ⁱⁿ the schedule of employment for which minimum wages are prescribed and are to be paid to employees by employers. The Minimum Wages Act applies to a variety of other employments such as in rice mills, road/building operation, stone breaking/crushing, employment under any local authority etc. etc.

Briefly, the Act provides that -

- (a) the State Government has the power in respect of employment specified in para above i.e. employment in agriculture etc. to fix minimum rates of wages for a part of the state or for any specified classes of such employment in the whole state or part thereof;
- (b) the State Government ^{may} review and revise the minimum rates of wages from time to time but definitely within a period of five years;

- (c) the State Government may fix a minimum time-rate, a minimum piece-rate, a guaranteed time-rate and over-time rate;
- (d) the State Government, in fixing/revising minimum rates of wages, may fix different minimum rates of wages for different classes of work in the same scheduled employment, for adults, adolescents, children and for different localities, and for wage periods by the hour, by the day, by the month or by such other larger wage period;
- (e) Minimum rates of wages may consist of a basic rate of wage and special allowance, a basic rate or wage with or without the cost of living allowance or an all inclusive rate;
- (f) the Government may authorise the payment of minimum wages wholly or partly in kind;
- (g) the Government may fix hours for a normal working day;
- (h) the Government may appoint Inspectors to oversee the operation of the Act;

We have seen in the previous section that agricultural labourers have not been receiving the minimum rates of wages prescribed for them. There has always been a mix of piece rate and time rate. Many migrant labourers reported that, particularly during harvesting season, the employers insist on their working upto late in the evening without paying any overtime and the earlier practice of releasing one or two persons slightly ahead of time for cooking food has been stopped. The Government prescribes minimum rates of wages for two categories of agricultural workers viz. adult and children, and in two manners viz. cash plus meal and cash without meal. The farmers have stopped giving meals and have resorted to 'cash and kind' payment to agricultural labourers.

It is seen that even though the migrant workers do not enjoy the benefits and protection of provisions of the Act fully and they are largely ignorant of the Act and its provisions, the Act itself provides a fulcrum to political parties and the Panchayat authority in the district to articulate the various issues and mobilise the agricultural labour force. The migrants tend to categorically say that it is the Panchayat which has helped to raise the agricultural wage not the agricultural labourers of Barddhaman. But then it is difficult for illiterate ordinary rural people to understand the difference between the statutory Panchayat and the organ of the party in power in village context.

The Equal Remuneration Act was enacted in 1976 and it basically provided that -

- (a) an employer paid equal remuneration to men and women workers for same work or work of a similar nature;
- (b) an employer made no discrimination while recruiting men and women workers for the same work or work of similar nature (except where the employment of women in such work is prohibited by law).

It has been mentioned in the previous section that the migrant women agricultural workers to Barddhaman do get equal wage with men from around the '80s. At their native place they are however discriminated in private employment but not in Government sponsored employment programmes.

INCOME FROM SEASONAL
MIGRATION

Income from seasonal migration of a migrant can not be said to be definitive because the days of employment available to him/her per trip always vary - usually between two weeks to four weeks. With ever increasing number of local and migrants workers participating in agricultural labour force the days of employment available to a migrant labourer are getting reduced every year. For instance, during 1989-90 Kharif season, both during transplantation and harvest, we noticed that the operations were over earlier than expected. When earlier, migrants used to return only around mid-January to attend to Pous Sankranti festival, in 1990 they were returning by first week of January after completing the harvest operation. The farmers are always eager to complete the two operations viz. transplantation and harvest, within quickest possible time and they are able to do so now on account of abundant supply of labour.

On an average, a migrant earns anything between 10 to 25 days' of cash wage and saves about 500 to 700 gms of rice from his/her daily quota which is brought home. He/she has to spend for the return journey from the cash income on travel and food. Many a times if the cost of rice is cheaper in Bardhaman, a portion of cash income is generally spent to procure some, particularly after the transplantation season when the food shortage is highest and employment is scarce everywhere.

Once a migrant undertakes a trip his/her singular aim is to remain employed for as many days as possible. But this desire is curtailed by the factor of availability of employment in a particular location/with an employer. There remains hardly any scope to move on to an another location by the time employment opportunity in the first location is exhausted. He/she can only move over to an another employer within the same village. As a result a migrant's intention revolves round finding an employer who will provide maximum days of employment. Failing this, he will try to find out whether the village he is going has the potential to provide substantial period of employment. This is what usually happens. Not all farmers from Bardhaman come to fetch labour. A few will generally come and after their agricultural operations are over, the migrant labourers will be loaned to other farmers of the village who need fewer labourers for a few days only. This need and arrangement within a village location acts to the advantage of migrant labour. There are other inherent operational processes which help the migrants. For instance, not all the plots of a farmer are ready for harvest on a single day, paddy also requires a few days to be spread over in the field to dry, cultivation starts early in the fields closer to the canal and later in those away from it. All these may create intermittent gaps of employment with a particular farmer, when the migrants will work with another.

Taking all these limitations and advantages into consideration a migrant continues to aspire for 4 weeks' employment. But it usually is the outer limit now, he generally ends up with two weeks or so. There is again a variation in labour requirement during

transplantation and harvest - and it is generally higher in the former than the latter firstly because of inherent desire of farmers to use skilled migrant labourers in transplantation to make it perfect, and secondly harvesting does not require very skilled worker and is completed in comparatively lesser time.

The following table is a notional attempt to find out the share of income from seasonal migration of migrating households of Karma Village belonging to different socio-economic categories. It is seen that the tribal/semi-tribal landless category has the highest dependency on income from seasonal migration and they obviously attempt to avail the maximum possible days of employment during a trip. This is more or less the scenario also with the landless of other social categories. The contribution by female migrants to such income is uniformly high among all, and by and large their share to total income from seasonal migration is significantly high across all socio-economic categories.

GAINS AND LOSSES

The tribal migrant labourers reported that intensive cultivation in Bardhaman had brought in a variety of direct loss to their free earnings and nutritional support. Earlier, when Aus and Aman paddy were the main crops, the rice fields were the source of a variety of free goods. For instance, they used to collect several

Women's Studies – A View from Classroom and Beyond

Sadhna Arya

Paper presented at the Xth National Conference of the Indian Association of Women's Studies, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, Orissa, 17th –20th September, 2002.

The emergence of women studies is directly related to the acceleration of women's movement that threw challenges to the androgynous nature of the existing knowledge systems. The scholarship that emerged was qualitatively different as it signified a shift from the traditional focus on 'status of women' to not only filling information gaps but essentially to review, question and revise content and methods of social science teaching and research so as to incorporate the experiences of women's lives. In doing so it emphasized on improving theoretical frameworks and methodological tools for generating knowledge from a feminist perspective as well as work as an instrument of social transformation. To that extent last twenty-five years have been quite exciting since a rich scholarship has been produced aimed to fulfill the above objectives. At the same time the State itself was pushed to institutionalize women's studies first through the Indian Council of Social Science Research and then by setting up a number of Women Studies and documentation centres. In some Universities certificate, diploma/degree courses in women studies have also been started. Since women studies posed a challenge to the education system, a number of disciplines, mainly in the social science sector, attempted revisions in their curriculum with a view to incorporate women 'component'. The resultant visibility of women's question at the level of higher education makes it necessary to understand the state of disciplines in terms of the impact of this new perspective and the possibilities that it presented.

Despite the fact that women's studies was understood as 'perspective that required articulation in every discipline, institution, in all studies and at all levels,' the process of making required changes has been quite slow and many times not so easy. Being a teacher of Political Science in one of the colleges of Delhi University, it was in the course of teaching at the undergraduate level an optional paper on Women and Political Process that I encountered several stumbling blocks. This presentation draws on my experiences in the classroom of teaching a paper on women studies for the last four years within the larger context of examining the engagement or absence of engagement on the part of discipline of Political Science and Political Scientists with the issues of women and gender. It will also try to look at the challenges confronting feminist politics and theorizing as a result of the rapidly changing socio-political and economic scenario.

Women's Studies is more than a generation old now. With its beginnings in 1970s, this period of about thirty years is long enough to make us ponder over – as to what impact it has been able to make at various levels – at the level of acceptability in mainstream disciplines, at the level of teaching, at the level of social transformation. While trying to address all these questions, I will divide up my presentation into three parts – (a) My own life experiences as they shaped me and my teaching, (b) Assessing the impact of WS on a *main stream* discipline like Political Science, changes brought out in the curriculum - weaving in gender vs separate papers etc. and (c) Problems and experiences at the level of teaching a Women Studies course and issues for the future.

Coming from a fairly liberal middle class family that wanted to educate its daughters and make them economically independent, I encountered no gender discrimination in the educational opportunities offered. But it stopped there only and no further scrutiny of relationships within the family and household meant that our other socialisation process was no different in reinforcing gender stereotyped roles within the family. We, two sisters, were expected to help our mother in all the household chores whereas there was no such expectation from our brother and there were usual controls on our mobility. For a long time we never understood it and never questioned it. But I did feel some discomfort about it. It was the dowry murder of a close family acquaintance's daughter, just after three months of her marriage that unnerved me a lot. The constant reference to that friend having three more daughters

was another thing that led me thinking into man-women relations in society. I was still in school. My restlessness and need to explore more led me to join an autonomous women's group Saheli later.

Since then my understanding of feminist politics has come from my direct involvement with women issues as part of Saheli. Working with Saheli influenced my teaching also in fundamental ways. For years I had been teaching my discipline without relating it to real lives. But now involvement with case work in Saheli, with various campaigns both inside and outside Saheli, intense discussions on political issues, understanding and developing linkages with other movements raising the issues of class and caste without losing the feminist perspective, discussions on funding and a conscious decision to remain non-funded, role of law and the state in bringing social change and a range of other issues, all of this went deep into my consciousness to get reflected in my teaching and in my day to day interaction with students, family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. The Women Development Centre in the college further provided me with an opportunity to engage with students in many different ways on issues related to women and also helped to mobilize students to opt for the paper on women.

Women Issues in Political Science Curriculum

It was in the course of this active engagement with women issues and politics that I realized how the discipline of Political Science had remained immune from feminism. Woman as a political category has been absent in political theorizing, despite the fact that the issues of power, equality, justice, rights, freedoms, political representation have been central to the discipline. The state-centered understanding of the political occluded an appreciation of the varieties of women's political experiences and activities.

The traditional subject matter of the discipline – high politics – treaties, war, power politics as it played out in the top echelons of the public sphere, not to mention the institutional politics of the parties, executives and the legislatures, has been typically male dominated. Political Science is about politics and government, it is about public life. A standard opening in introduction to politics courses is to reach back to classical notions of polis or community for a means to define the boundaries of politics and the conception of political life was constructed that implicitly defined it as a realm of activity and authority for men. Thus if the 'political' has been conceptualised in opposition to women and domestic life, then it is very hard to see how women can be included without a radical transformation of the political itself, i.e. to bring in 'family' in the political realm.

Women studies since the last two decades identified a number of issues from why women are not political to how they are, putting to critical scrutiny the category itself through the slogan 'the personal is political', enhancing the analysis as to how 'private' and 'personal' are as power-laden as that of mainstream institutional actors, how invisibility of women in governance is directly related to their social and economic subjugation, absence of focus on women in governmental policies or need to scrutinize state as a site of power from a feminist stand point. The earlier writings of the second wave of women's movements argued that family is part of the political realm. Through their slogan, 'personal is political', they critiqued and undermined the assumptions of political theory and attempted to offer an alternative perspective.

Feminist theoretical perspective raised the problem of patriarchy. Unlike other theoretical standpoints, feminism posited male domination as a political problem. Feminists asked how and why it was that men occupy the authoritative positions in institutions conventionally regarded as political, and how and why was it that men exercise power over women through these institutions and in the family, in marriage, in production, in personal sexual relations, in short throughout the whole of socio-political life.

The generation of knowledge in this manner reveals the fact that this effort took place mainly outside the realm of mainstream disciplines. The new information revealed how gender component was totally absent in mainstream disciplines. As part of the efforts that followed this explosion of new knowledge, many social science disciplines incorporated gender component in their syllabi. In the University of Delhi

too, similar efforts were made in 1990s to integrate gender component and perspective both at the under-graduate and post-graduate levels by the Department of Political Science. As we shall see at both the levels, the effort remained at touching the fringes without changing the basic analytical frameworks and structure of the courses. The changes that were brought out in the syllabi included adding a few women related topics in some of the papers, rather than weaving them into the concepts, into critiques of theories being taught and debates going on in the discipline. These additions were also done without developing any linkages with other papers and even within those papers. Two papers on women titled 'Women and Political Process' and 'Women and Politics' at the under-graduate and post graduate levels were also introduced as an optional papers.

The undergraduate course in Delhi University has nine compulsory papers and one optional paper. Despite the efforts that were made to include feminist content in Political Science curriculum in 1990s, a few papers still remained untouched by these efforts. Two courses on Indian Political Thought and Western Political Thought have almost nothing to do with the woman question. Feminist theories find no place in these core courses on Political Thought. Nor is there anything that critiques the political thought of both western and Indian political thinkers all of them being invariably male, about the way women have either been totally excluded in their structure and style of thought or of their treatment of women as symbols of private ties, restraint and stability required to support society and polity.

The lack of any deep engagement on the part of the discipline of Political Science on issues of women and gender in the Indian context is clearly visible in the paper on Indian Government and Politics. The paper should have been providing a much larger space for incorporating women issues and perspective. At the outset, the paper nowhere takes up a feminist critique of the nature of the constitution and its position on women's rights and equality, women's labour, women's rights over property and productive resources of the family. The retention of personal laws which are premised on the principles of gender inequality and subordination of women to male members of the family and the decision to postpone the enactment of a civil code based on equal rights for women and men requires a gender critique of Article 15 of the Constitution. Further the issues of inequality, discrimination, injustice, marginalisation of women in the development process, the issues of political representation of women are conspicuously absent in the topics listed in the paper. In the whole paper, the only topic on women's movement is listed under 'Social Movements'. The issues of communalism and secularism and violence have been treated as 'pure' political topics having no analysis as to how such conflict and violent situations affect women in specific ways. An understanding of interconnections between caste, class, religion and gender is thus missing as it has not been knitted into various topics.

The paper on Political Theory has two topics on women under the themes of Power and Justice and Common Good. But as this gender related understanding of power, justice and common good is not taken further in other papers, in my experience of teaching the same students in their final year, who study this compulsory paper in the first year, I found that they have no basic understanding of concepts like patriarchy, gender and of feminist theories which they are supposed to have studied in their first year. The result is that we practically start from a scratch and in totally segregated way, with no connections emerging from their earlier papers.

The other papers on International Relations, Indian Foreign Policy and even on Public Administration have nothing to do with women at all. This is despite the fact that in the last one decade a lot of literature in WS has come linking the globalisation and militarisation processes and their impact on women and gender relations. The increasing globalisation of common markets is extended to global militarisation where states are being prompted to increase their defense capabilities. At the ideological and cultural level, it is being argued that the policies of globalisation and militarisation are lending a 'muscular discourse' to international politics that provides continuity to the principle of patriarchy and privilege, the basis of earlier periods of history as well. This kind of discourse permeates institutions and structures in a way that moulds gender relations. At the same time, feminist analysis and peace

movements are proposing an alternative discourse. The protest against wars, conflicts and militarisation by women are not because they are essentially peaceful, but because women have begun to relate domestic violence and gender stereotyping to state and inter-state violence.

Thus, women and gender issues are part of international politics not only in terms of women's roles but also in terms of structural impact international politics has on gender relations and the role of gender in war and conflict. Women are actors, strategic leaders and policy makers even though men outnumber and overshadow them. Further gender issues are used in foreign policy agendas and international politics has an impact on women and gender relations, even though the most dominant role of women continues to be that of victims of such politics. Women are combatants in such politics and consent builders of ideologies of nationalism and militarism that states need for foreign policy agendas. Further they have been part of peace movements, analysts and active in conflict resolution. Overtime the feminist movements and scholarship have deconstructed the ideology of militarism and patriarchy and have questioned national security paradigms. This discourse has still been shunned by the mainstream international politics. It is lack of these new understanding and absence of living experiences that stands out most in the syllabi.

While the above discussion on the nature of the syllabi present a case of invisibility of gender, the optional paper on Women and Political Process in the final year of the course seems to be a classic case of all gender packed into one. With the result that the course becomes very heavy, dissuading the students to not to opt for it. The deciding factors for students are mainly three: (a) whether the paper is easy in comparison to others, (b) whether it is a scoring paper, (c) whether there is simple reading material available. Though there are always exceptions to this trend, but predominantly the decision of the students depends on the above matter of fact reasons. At the post graduate level too the situation has been almost the same till this year. The new syllabus that has been brought this year for M.A. has abolished the optional paper on Women and Politics. The approach in the new syllabus has been to integrate gender component in almost all the papers being offered.

Problems at The Level Of Teaching

While teaching at the under-graduate level the optional paper on 'Women and Political Process', I realized that all the concepts and theories that were being taught in this paper were mostly new for the students. The students lacked any understanding of the basic concepts of 'Patriarchy', 'sex-gender distinction', sexual division of labour, domestic labour, leave aside the feminist theories. In fact working with different batches of students brought forth diverse experience on the manner in which students relate to initiatives taken in higher education to integrate gender component in it. This also included the realization that these initiatives are fraught with many limitations that emanate from attempts to insert gender analysis and questions of women's status and participation with in the pre-existing analytical framework without attempting to assess whether the framework itself may require reformulation from perspective of gender. It may be quite difficult to do this, but since this is not done we find two contradictory responses from the students. These are – (i) students hesitate to take this paper as they feel unsure that they would not be able to handle this new and 'difficult' terrain and (ii) they feel that this is the easiest area to venture in as it is very simple to write on anything related to women. This reinforces the notion that studying any course on women is a trivial activity that need not be taken seriously. Thus year after year I not only found non-serious approach towards the paper but also non-understanding of the issues and therefore highly repetitive answers.

The issue of optional courses on women has always been debatable. In the case of Political Science too having two optional papers on women, one each at the undergraduate and post graduate levels limited the outreach of these papers to the students. A large number of colleges in Delhi University do not offer this option to the students, simply because no one in these colleges is interested in taking the initiative to teach this paper. It requires a lot of effort to mobilize students to opt for this paper. The reasons for this ranged from logistics of non-availability of simple reading material to resistance in many forms and

at many levels. Lack of material in an organized shape to cater to the needs of the students and teachers compound the problem and this is one area I want to focus on here.

Feminist research and studies that brought in a critical evaluation of terms, concepts and methods in existing social sciences and a feminist component in the curricula was not an end itself. Reaching out to present generations of students and teachers required that the new knowledge and information is simplified and converted into simple reading material. Lack of good textbooks in Hindi, English and regional languages have been a serious handicap. Neither the Department of Political Science nor the Women Studies and Development Centre of Delhi University made any serious efforts to generate such material to facilitate the teaching of this paper, except for a hurriedly brought out set of dossiers in English by the Women Studies and Development Centre. In 2001 essentially with the efforts of college teachers a book in Hindi based on the syllabus of optional paper in B.A. and M.A. was brought out. One finds that except for some activist and self-initiated teachers, others have not shown much interest in teaching this paper.

Since most of the published work in women studies has been done in English, with the result that women studies, despite sincere and genuine works of excellence, has come to acquire a class character. In addition, most of the work is in the form of research books and papers because of the academic prestige attached to research papers and books written in English than to just text books written in English, Hindi or regional languages. The national and international funding that is available for various research purposes or various other opportunities available both within India and abroad depends how much you have published in the form of serious academic research, where academic is not so much assessed from the point of view of your successfully reaching out students in a range of ways. The argument that runs is that there are no ways to judge merit on the basis of one's being just a good teacher. The Women Studies Conferences have also paid little heed to this aspect. Despite the fact that IAWS conferences have focused and explored on a range of issues since its inception in 1980s, there have not been enough endeavors make this rich resource generated at various conferences available in Hindi or regional languages or to encourage original writing in local languages. Even the material that is available in English needs to be simplified so that the students can easily grasp it. A few efforts in this regard have been made outside the academic field by individuals and NGOs, but such efforts are not forthcoming from academics for the reasons cited above. It is important to develop the material in simplified and creative ways without diluting the rigorousness of the field, so that more and more students and teachers could be reached.

In addition to the grave inadequacy of simple reading material, the paper is also very exhaustive and normally pitted against the paper on United Nations Organisation, which is not only a conventional paper but also has the advantage of having more reading material. Thus, students opting for the paper on Women and Political Process do not feel confident that they will be able to score as much as the ones opting for the other paper.

The other serious problems at the level of teaching are because of the predominantly masculine culture. As pointed out earlier, the students suffer from the inability to make interconnections when gender is totally absent in other papers and in other classes more especially when the teachers are also not trying to interweave gender, class, caste issues into their lectures. As a result when the students have to opt for this paper in the final year of their course, they feel as if they are entering a totally new terrain, despite the fact they it is so closely related to their everyday experiences. Male teachers are generally not interested in the teaching of this paper. Women in colleges where feminist courses are beginning to be taught, are still often made to feel that such a focus is really not required and that women's studies are just a 'fad'. At every step within the college, especially if it is a co-educational college the female perspective needs to be fought and defended. It is not surprising that it is mainly the girls colleges that have been offering this paper on the initiative of some activist teachers or the ones who are influenced

by feminist thinking. In these colleges too the continuation or discontinuation of the paper depends on the initiative or availability of few committed teachers.

Thus, the fact of the matter is that women issues continue to remain at the fringes of the discipline, women related 'topics' as 'additives', highly inadequate for posing serious challenge to the mainstream, and heavily dependent on the 'voluntary' labour of feminist faculty. Most feminist issues have been raised by scholars outside this discipline. There has been comparatively little response of political scientists to contemporary issues like communalism, violence etc., from a feminist perspective. Thus while the discipline of Political Science continues to remain largely unaffected by the changes that have taken place in women studies, the high visibility of women issues otherwise creates a situation where the need for such special courses is being questioned.

There is considerable unease on the issue of how to change your colleagues especially male but also female, who are not only unacquainted with what was happening with the world of feminist scholarship but are also indifferent to women issues in addition to the non-seriousness with which they view such courses. Here we also need to address the larger issue as to whether one can think of making the University women-centered while the society remains andocentric. People like us in WS and activism changed our minds and perspectives and tried to change our life patterns too but what about the rest. This requires addressing the larger questions facing the women's movement and women studies, an issue that will be taken up later in the paper.

Classroom As A Space For Questioning Power

The frustration and unease that we experience in the institutions of higher education is also accompanied by some hope and the need to reflect upon our strategies. This is because the knowledge generated through WS definitely presents the possibility to connect life experiences of students to what is being studied and produced within the classroom, with a particular focus on how caste, class, religious and gender relations are lived in everyday life. Clearly this knowledge creates a lot of discomfort in the classroom more especially when it is a mixed class, because learning includes an uncomfortable recognition and questioning of social power, privilege and oppression, where boys, because their life experiences are different from girls are not able to identify with the course and generally give their reaction as if it is biased against men. The visibility that women issues have gained over a period of time whether through women's movement or through various state sponsored schemes, programmes, legal reform etc., or through women studies centres, women cells, committees, departments creates a false feeling that since so much is being done in the name of women why do we still need to have separate courses for women. Girls in the class share their discomfort about the contradictions that they face in the class that while fighting for equality why there should be a course on women studies, which right there, segregates men out of studies. Interestingly, while they find this segregation problematic, they are unable to give the same response when women are excluded in traditional classes or mainstream courses.

All these debates that come up during the course of teaching actually help not only in developing a relationship with the students but also in identifying what has been missing in classroom teaching i.e., a sense of purpose. Despite the limitations of an optional course in women studies, such courses still represent a major component of feminist space within the academy. My experience with teaching a full paper on 'Women and Political Process' throughout the year to a group of students has convinced me that it is a very different kind of experience than talking on feminist issues as part of different papers. Teaching a full paper means engaging and working with them exclusively on a range of women issues throughout the year that opens up many possibilities. It gives a longer span of time to thrash out issues and also helps in developing a holistic understanding of feminist politics by making the interconnections

and linkages. There are definitely positive aspects of teaching a full paper on women which cannot be compensated by putting in feminist content in all or most of the papers. Both the processes need to go on simultaneously. At the same time there is also a need to link these papers/courses to post graduate courses or to women studies programmes to provide a linkage and continuation.

Issues Facing Women Studies And The Women's Movement

Coming back to the question of issues facing feminist politics and theorizing, we need to understand that we are caught between a situation where the women issues are characterised by high visibility while there is very little change at the level of consciousness and mindsets. This means that our earlier hope that bringing the women issues in the mainstream will have a major impact towards bringing important changes in women's lives has not proved correct. The required change in the mind sets has not come and without which no change can sustain itself. Here we need to reflect on both the state of women's movement and women studies, the challenges that they are facing and the new strategies that are needed. There is a great need to keep the link between the women's movement and studies alive at a time when both the movement and studies are facing the challenge of institutionalization.

As part of the movement though initially we began with the idea of using WS as a strategy to change education and existing knowledge systems, but it was also realized that WS carried with in it the potential to transform the individual lives of students, researchers and academics, by bringing a significant change in knowledge and consciousness. Thus the women studies was to work as an arm of the women's movement. But with the institutionalization of WS that has happened especially in the last decade, this earlier relationship between WM and WS, between activism and teaching and research has been adversely affected. The widening gap between WM and WS brought on by the latter's emergence as a highly specialized and academic field of enquiry and WS itself becoming a ladder towards many professional opportunities and a generation gap between activist pioneers and the young undergraduate and post graduate students opting for these courses and teachers and scholars teaching and researching requires serious debate.

At the same time the challenges that the WM is faced with due to the rise of conservative, religious and reactionary forces both at the societal and state level, mobilization of both men and women on the basis of their religious, community and caste identities is posing severe challenges in taking up the issues of women from purely gender justice point of view. The weakness of both the left and secular forces to reach out to people on the above issues has made the task even tougher. At a time when the State through its National Curriculum Framework is bent on reinforcing the 'traditional' social roles of women as mothers, wives and daughters within the family and nation, the possibility of using education as tool for women's empowerment is severely in question. (refer, Dipta Bhog, "Gender and Curriculum" in Economic and Political Weekly, VolXXXVII, No17, April27-May3 20002, pp. 1638-42) .In such situations when WM itself is in need of more examination and analysis of the challenges it is faced with and is searching for more constructive strategies for dealing with the State, society and law, it is quite clear that the power of patriarchy is far more complexly entrenched ideologically and institutionally than we had imagined about twenty five years back. Women themselves are caught in the contradictory processes related to social, economic and cultural changes in the wider society. In such situations it is even more important to bring women studies scholars and teachers not only closer to the battles being fought by the women's movements but make them learn the history both of WM and WS in order to effectively take the issues to generations of students. Differences between the activist pioneers, who began WS and the young graduate students opting for these courses and teachers teaching these courses need to be recognised. This new generation of teachers and scholars in the university often are as little aware of the history of women's studies movement as their students. In addition, most of the academics, researchers and teachers are from privileged sections of the society where majority of

women are living on the margins, will their teaching not be remote from the reality of women's lives? Even for practitioners of WS, it is viewed as relatively non-threatening, even seemingly non-activist form of women's movement.

The contemporary women's movement and feminist analysis have shown great recognition to the complexities of Indian society in view of its colonial past and pluralist constitution of the social matrix by challenging the concept of woman as a homogeneous category. Without disagreeing to the fact that significant differences separate women, there are significant characteristics that connect them even across class, caste or religious differences. In Indian context in view of the rising tide of religious fundamentalism and reactionary politics it has become even more important to address the question of 'difference' more seriously. Despite intellectual challenges to universalistic theories of gender, which questions whether feminism can any longer profess the primacy of gender as a category of analysis, the feminist theory and practice has to keep its focus narrow and constant, because without that focus there can not be a disciplinary or discursive domain that can be claimed as distinctly feminist? Also would that not amount to making feminist studies as an additive category rather than a primary category? The task for WS is not only to address these questions but also to look into multiple arenas for change, e.g., domestic relations, relationships between home and work etc.,

At the same time, there is also a need to look at the fact that with in the University, effective networks, groups and structure have not been created that could give a sense of security, safety and confidence to women who come here. A history of cases of sexual violence on female community (most of them being young girl students) in Delhi University raises a lot of questions for most of us who have been part of struggle against such violence since 1980s. The apathy of the University authorities towards the issues and demands raised at different points of time, the lack of redressal mechanisms and indifferent attitude of students, teachers and administrative staff all contribute to a feeling of disempowerment. Such a scenario coupled with rising violence against women at the societal level, highly frustrating experiences with the police, legal and judicial system and increasing pressures emanating from the rise of many socio- religious forces is leading to a feeling of helplessness and loss of faith in struggle oriented politics. This gap of theory and practice creates problems the level of teaching too

Today the feminist politics and theorizing is confronted with the challenges put forth by the rapidly changing socio-political and economic scenario due to the undermining of welfare state having major impact on the lives of women, the rise of religious and fundamentalist movements and the resultant issue of religious identities, the reaffirmation of religious faith and rituals coupled with the reinforcement of conservative values of family and home, its retrogressive impact on women and women's movement, and the resistance that comes (especially in urban areas) from a media and otherwise publicly created feeling that women have been given their due through various government programmes, policies and structures and a sort of backlash that these 'feminists' are always blaming and are in a habit of complaining. In a situation where education system is also under attack from various quarters, more and more effort is needed to make space for our ideological agenda. In this scenario, our responses to these challenges need to be examined, both from the point of view of understanding the factors impinging on the struggles of women and other marginalized sections of society and integrating effectively and holistically their life experiences into what we teach in our classrooms and also from the point of view of channelling the co-operative efforts of like-minded professionals, academicians and activists, so that women studies do not get relegated to become yet another bookish and exam-oriented discipline.

TABLE 35

SOME SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS OF MIGRANT HOUSEHOLD

Social and Economic Category	No. of migrant household	Av. size of land holding per household (in acre)	Av. No. of workers per household		Average annual income (in Rs.) of a household from				Proportion Share (%) of income of from sea- female mi- gration tototal income of a house- hold from seasonal migration	
			Male	Female	Culti- vation	Local wage work	Seaso- nal migra- tion	Total	10	11
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
TRIBAL/SEMI-TRIBAL										
(a) Cultivator	13	1.81	1.4	1.7	3846	154	546	4546	12.0	43.7
(b) Agricultural la- bourer (with land)	13	0.58	2.3	2.5	2269	1000	1692	5015	33.9	50.2
(c) Landless wage workers	31	-	1.5	1.5	-	1661	1274	2935	43.4	48.9
OCCUPATIONAL CASTES										
(a) Cultivator	5	1.33	1.2	1.0	3600	1180	1280	7340	21.1	53.1
(b) Agricultural La- bourer (with land)	5	0.60	1.8	1.8	1475	2500	2200	6175	35.6	48.9
(c) Landless wage workers	5	-	1.8	2.2	-	45.00	2480	6980	35.5	50.8
RESIDUAL										
(a) Cultivator	5	1.07	1.4	1.6	3300	-	760	4060	18.7	44.7
(b) Agricultural La- labourer (with land)	2	1.17	2.0	1.5	4500	500	900	5900	15.3	44.4
(c) Landless wage workers	3	-	2.3	2.0	-	5666	2700	8366	32.3	49.4

(source: survey data)

kilos of paddy ears from the rat holes and rice fields. They used to catch fish, snails, rats, snakes and other reptiles and collect leafy vegetables during and after their work. These are now items of rarity because of intensive cultivation. Similarly, field ponds, pastures, fallows and small orchards at the outskirts of villages and banks of ponds have all been brought under extensive cultivation. The free goods earlier available from these sources have therefore dried up. Intensive cultivation of high yielding variety of paddy has produced other problems. Chemical fertilisers and pesticides are to be compulsively used and the migrants reported that they experienced irritation of hands and feet. According to migrants, removal of seedling, transplantation, harvesting and threshing of these hybrid variety of paddy require more strength than the traditional variety. The days of employment in cultivation are also reported to have shrunk. For instance, frequency of ploughing and weeding is much reduced now. Ridges of paddy fields are hardly repaired so frequently now. Threshing is done on machines. Harvested paddy is carried from the field to farmers' threshing yards on trucks and trawlers. Pumpsets have replaced the manually operated irrigation equipments.

Some of the migrants from Puruliya reported that they faced another kind of problem particularly during the Boro season. Many a times, due to shortage of canal water and excessive use of ground

water, Boro cultivation in many villages is abandoned at the last moment. Migrants who reach Bardhaman either at own initiative or at the invitation of farmers have to come back without getting the much awaited employment and have to sell their personal belongings to meet travel expenses.

Improvement in wage since 1978 through political intervention has made the farmers extremely stingy. There is no earlier liberalism in distribution of sidha which used to be given more for nutritional consideration than wage substitute. The Sidha is perfectly measured and costed now to match the wage component. Worst possible vegetables, spices, pulses, oil and rice are given now. Because of rigours of intensive cultivation of paddy farmers have stopped growing vegetables which used to be given liberally to the migrants. Paddy wastes ususally form the fuel now and have replaced wood and cowdung cakes.

The present day migrants have learnt to live with these losses and to come to terms with the many inconveniences mentioned above for the sake of their utter dependence on seasonal employment.

Instead of two times earlier, migrants can now hope to migrate four times a year and employment is more or less assured. Seasonal migration has become an unavoidable agenda in the annual calendar of activity of a large many households.

What has been enumerated above is the economic balance sheet. The phenomenon generates certain social implications which largely remain invisible because their impact is either realised later or smaller in dimension. For instance, repeated migration obviously disturbs children's access to education (see Appendix - V) and health facilities affecting the process of human capital formation. A stable and sedentary family life is never achieved because of repeated shift of residence particularly between December to August every year. Many female migrants reported that their sexual harassment and other kinds of indignities comes from within the group. Among the Santhals a few cases of a male member contracting another marriage and staying back in Barddhaman have been reported. Therefore desertion/bigamy occurs in small number. There has been a slow stream of permanent migration all the time particularly among Santhal and artisanal communities to Barddhaman either through their own endeavour or through land redistribution programme. Those sharecroppers who could hold on obtained their records of right because the whole land reforms programme had a special emphasis on Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes categories. It is not very clear whether the migrants socially gained very much. The losses seem to outweigh the gains generally.

GLIMPSES FROM THE VIEWS OF LEADERS
OF PANCHAYAT/KRISHAK SABHA AND
FARMERS AND FROM THE LIFE HISTORIES
OF MIGRANT WOMEN

(This section was added to this Chapter as an afterthought with the hope that the contents would supplement and substantiate the earlier section a great deal).

Panchayat Pradhan of Nabastha was an experienced Krishak Sabha leader of the Gram Panchayat of which Chakunda village was a part.

According to him, in the twin villages of Saligram-Chakunda the pattern of labour deployment in agriculture was with the help of 80 per cent migrant labour and 20 per cent local labour which included 40 households of Santhals presently settled in Chakunda. In the adjacent Nabastha and Ausa villages Bhumij, Mahato, Duley, Bagdi and Mal constituted the local agricultural labour force. Many of them worked in the nearby Ausa rice mill where 50 per cent labourers were migrant. Khet Majur Sangathan was started in 1968 in the area and a movement was initiated on several issues such as right over homestead land, Minimum wage, rights of sharecroppers, etc. Towards the end of 1988, a movement in demand of higher wages in agriculture was held by the Khet Majur Sangathan and the wage rate of Rs. 10 plus 2 kg. cleaned rice was achieved. Panchayat strongly supported this movement. According to him, the big farmers were not much perturbed by this raise because they had the capacity to hold on till the price of paddy reached a high rate. It was the middle and small farmers

from whom the agricultural labourers faced the opposition. These farmers were required to sell their produce almost immediately after the harvest in need of money to meet agricultural expenses, and their cost of cultivation^(see appendix - VI) was also slightly higher than the big farmers. He reported that the Panchayat and the Party (CPI-M) put an end to the Mahajani system - private money and grain lending. The farmers have been discouraged to continue the Bari system - grain advance to agricultural labourers, sharecroppers/marginal farmers with high interest rate to be recovered at the time of harvest. Many types of rural activities have disappeared and an attempt to enforce reasonable work hours/norms are being made by Panchayat/ Party. For instance, parboiling of rice at household level and services of maid servants are disappearing. There are as many as six rice mills in the area paying Rs. 13 and 1 kg. rice per day, bonus per year and other facilities to workers. A regular worker in rice mills earns about Rs. 5 to 6 thousand per year and get an employment throughout the year. Cultivators have stopped weeding the rice fields for a second time as it is no longer necessary due to intensive cultivation. Yield from Boro cultivation is higher but cultivation itself is strenuous. Paddy sowing has to be done in cold muddy fields in winter and harvesting is done in scorching heat of summer. A farmer or his engaged labour has to spend nights in the rice field to irrigate the field by means of shallow pumps.

Snails and small fishes so abundant in rice fields earlier constituting the poor man's nutrition during a period when he/she does the hardest work are no longer available due to application of chemical fertiliser/pesticides and due to intensive cultivation. Because of the use of pond water for Boro cultivation, bigger fish and a variety of aquatic snails and vegetables are no longer available. An agricultural labourer no doubt gets more work now in a year but his nutritional requirements remain unfulfilled for want of appropriate food.

According to him, migrant women with infants are not to be seen so much now-a-days. Nobody bothers about the conditions of migrant labour's accommodation, they live like goats and cattle. Panchayats are not bothered either about how they live or about their children. Now-a-days they bring young girls with them to look after smaller children. In Barddhaman, rice fields are spread miles after miles and it is often that an agricultural labourer works in a field quite away from his/her temporary place of stay. They, in such cases, drink water from fields and canals and fall sick. The employer turns his face away if one of them is ill. Maximum a labourer can expect is to receive one or two day's quota of rice. On the issue of farmers' preference for migrant labourers, the Pradhan said, that it was because they (farmers) got their money's worth of work from the migrant labourers which was difficult to get from local labour - who often cheated on the size of seedling bundles/paddy bundles and in transplantation. A farmer always made a contract not only of wage but also of quantity of work per day with the seasonal migrants.

The seasonal migrants who came to Bardhaman generally held some land in their native villages. They completed their own cultivation and then started for Bardhaman. If on any account there was delay in completing their own agricultural activity due to delayed monsoon, a delay did occur in agricultural activities in Bardhaman also worrying the farmers a great deal. The Pradhan thought that the female seasonal migrants always out-numbered males and his estimate was 60 females and 40 males in a group of 100. In some years it went up 90 females and 10 males.

In regard to fixation of agricultural wage rate, the Panchayat is forced to adopt an one-sided decision because the invited farmers for a discussion do not turn up. Panchayats do get involved during wage settlements of migrant labourers by farmers in case of any dispute. He reported that there had been cases of farmers being beaten up for ill treatment of migrant labourers. Many a times, in order to make the group agree to come, a farmer would promise higher rate of wage but at the time of payment he would try to pay at lower rates. The troubles originated mainly on this account.

We met with several farmers employing migrant labourers, and with six of them mainly belonging to the twin villages of Saligram-Chakunda we had detailed interaction during harvest season. Three of them belonged to the traditional peasant caste of Ugra Kshatriya and the remaining three belonged to Brahman and Baidya communities.

Four of them were matriculates and the remaining two were graduates. The size of landholding of the six farmers ranged from 4 acres to 17 acres. Four of the farmers could recall that they were hiring migrant labourers for more than 50 years. All the farmers raised kharif and Boro paddy and therefore hired migrant labourers four times a year.

Four of the farmers regularly went or sent somebody else to fetch migrant labourers. One of the farmers was attached to a particular group of migrant labourers and usually asked them to come again. The remaining farmer used migrant labourers brought by other farmers. The six farmers were using varying number of migrant labourers but the highest number used was 25 and the lowest ten.

The views of the six farmers did not differ much although we talked to them separately. The preference of the farmers regarding groups of labourers however slightly varied. For instance, two farmers preferred to hire a particular group every season in every year. The ^{other} four although wanted to have the same Sardar but preferred that members in his (Sardar's) group should be changed. Because the farmers thought that more familiarity led to create a relation when labourers started demanding much. All the farmers had explicit preference, firstly, for Santhal labourers from Bankura/Puruliya and specially for Santhal women particularly for transplantation activity. All the farmers were very much aware

of the Minimum Wages Act as also of the prescribed rate of minimum wages as fixed for the previous season for agricultural labourers but not about the current rate of Rs. 21.17. They claimed that they were paying equivalent to minimum rate of wage, if not more. When asked how it was so, they started costing in minute details of everything given in money value and came up with an inflated amount near about the prescribed minimum rate of wage of Rs. 19.65. All the farmers unanimously expressed the view that if they had their way they would not have employed local labourers at all. They felt that they were the greatest trouble maker in the sense that not only they themselves did not work sincerely but provoked the migrant labour in neglecting the work. They often stole paddy from the field during harvest. They took advance from four farmers at a time in one season but tried to avoid all of them when asked to work. But they could not be ignored because of their close connection with Party people (meaning political leaders) At the same time, the farmers agreed that there were good workers among local labour also and therefore the farmers always tried to pick them up to get maximum work done and the rest was allocated to migrant labour.

The elders among the farmers felt that they had totally lost command over the agricultural system and particularly on agricultural labourers, and they considered themselves to be saddled with cultivation of land, which had become less prestigious, as they had no other occupation. Now-a-days, they seemed to be a scared lot and all the time talked about huge investment as compared to returns from agriculture. The younger farmers on the other hand

thought that agriculture needed much support from the Government in the area of credit, fertiliser pricing and crop price which was not forthcoming from the Government. They thought that if these supports were extended it was no reason why agriculture could not be remunerative. The young farmers were not averse to paying minimum wage, firstly because they thought that the amount was reasonable and secondly, they had seen the condition of migrant labourers in their native villages. But they objected to one sided stand taken by Government regarding agricultural policy. The older farmers also said that the conditions of agricultural labourers, local and migrant, had improved sufficiently and they were employed for about eight months a year in agriculture, Jawahar Rojgar Yojana and others. ^{Because of that the} migrant labourers, they said, no longer demanded advance nor did they ask for money to drink liquor which was usual earlier. But the farmers and agricultural labourers admitted that a definite business like or mechanical feeling had developed between farmers and labourers. The older farmers thought it was due to political interference. The younger ones thought it was not so much due to political interference but due to lack of understanding of each others problems. The farmers opined that there was a general reduction in the agricultural labourer's ability to work. The older farmers thought that it was a deliberate tactics of the agricultural labourers ^{to work less.} For instance they had used 12 labourers on 10 acres of land for the same quantity of work which was now performed by more than double that number of agricultural labourers. It was not due to health condition which had reduced the capability

but it was a common stand taken by agricultural labourers to perform less. The younger farmers did not agree with that view. They thought that the agricultural labourers had suffered a lot and whatever they were earning now was not sufficient to maintain a decent living. Physical condition of agricultural labourer truly had deteriorated.

The young farmers also felt that there existed a communication gap between farmers and Government, and the case of the farmers was not properly and rationally placed before the Government during any policy formulation. For instance, they said, the farmers of Bardhaman were at one time vigorously encouraged to undertake Boro paddy cultivation. Boro cultivation was totally dependent on canal water and the last the Government supplied them canal water was in 1977. Between 1978 to 1989, the supply was extremely erratic. But the farmer had seen the margin of profit in Boro cultivation and almost everybody adopted it. As a result when they experienced difficulty in getting canal water, a large many of them opted for shallow tube wells/pumpsets - which increased the cost of cultivation. Even when the canal water was supplied, the announcement came late and by that time a farmer had no way to prepare seedlings and undertake cultivation. They also said that due to intensive cultivation the natural fertility of soil was totally gone and therefore yield of paddy was now highly dependent on the input of chemical fertiliser - which was again a costly input and needed to be subsidized. They also demanded that consolidation of holding

should have been undertaken along with land reform measures because Boro cultivation was unprofitable to a farmer without that. All the farmers considered kharif paddy to be meant for consumption and sale but Boro was totally meant for sale only.

All the farmers admitted that the living and working condition of the migrant labourers were inhuman but they thought that farmers could not be expected to do anything about that. It was the duty of the Government and Panchayat to help improve these situations and look into their other problems. The farmers ability to stretch had reached a limit.

Life histories of regular migrant women of various ages, mainly from Santhal community showed a great deal of commonality. Most of them went on seasonal migration before marriage and continued to do so after marriage. ^{When unmarried} she used to go with her father/brother/brother-in-law/uncle, and after marriage mainly with husband but occasionally without him. Before marriage she could keep the major part of her earnings to herself and invested in goats/pigs/cows. After marriage, her entire earnings would go to support the survival of family/children. Her husband would occasionally squander a part of her earnings on liquor.

They talked of walking several miles to catch a bus to go to Bankura town from where they would board the chhoto rail (BDR) and then walked again to spread to different villages in Bardhaman.

One woman mentioned how her second daughter, then a mere 3 year old, was getting suffocated in the bus and how scared she was. Another talked about her state of mind when she heard that one of her children had fallen sick in her native village. One old woman said how she once got detached from the group and lost her way in Barddhaman. Most of them said that frequently they had to sit on the floors of bus/train because other passengers did not want to share a seat with them. Many of them had to take children along with them and others left them behind which worried them a great deal.

They had to work hard at Barddhaman from sun rise to late in the evenings. The farmers and their men would drive them mad to get more work. They would manage only a few hours sleep because they went to sleep last after completing cooking, eating and cleaning the utensils. They had to get up well before sunrise to cook breakfast and lunch which they carried to fields and ate there. Even in agricultural work, women had to do extra and more work, sometimes in obligation of old familiarity and occasionally at the persuasion of farmer's wife. All these were largely shared by women in the hope of work in the next season.

They shared their nights with farmer's cattle or hurriedly and temporarily raised shelter of straw and bamboo outside the village near the edge of a pond. Sexual demands of their partners and sometimes of other men of the group had to be tolerated unwillingly. They had to keep a watch on accompanying children from getting drowned

or fallen in the rice fields. Continuous work for days together in bending posture in slushy mud would give them backache. Many of them would go in pregnant condition but would receive practically no care from husband. There would be cases of abortion or delivery in rice fields.

Farmers' wives would pour rice on their outstretched sari to avoid physical contact but would treat them nicely and give rice liberally if requested for accompanying children. She would ask them to come again and enquire about their families/husbands. Farmers would convey their instructions via accompanying males and settle payments through Sardar. Wages were low but it was even lower in their own villages. They used to be thrilled to see miles and miles of green and golden rice fields - a rare sight in their native villages.

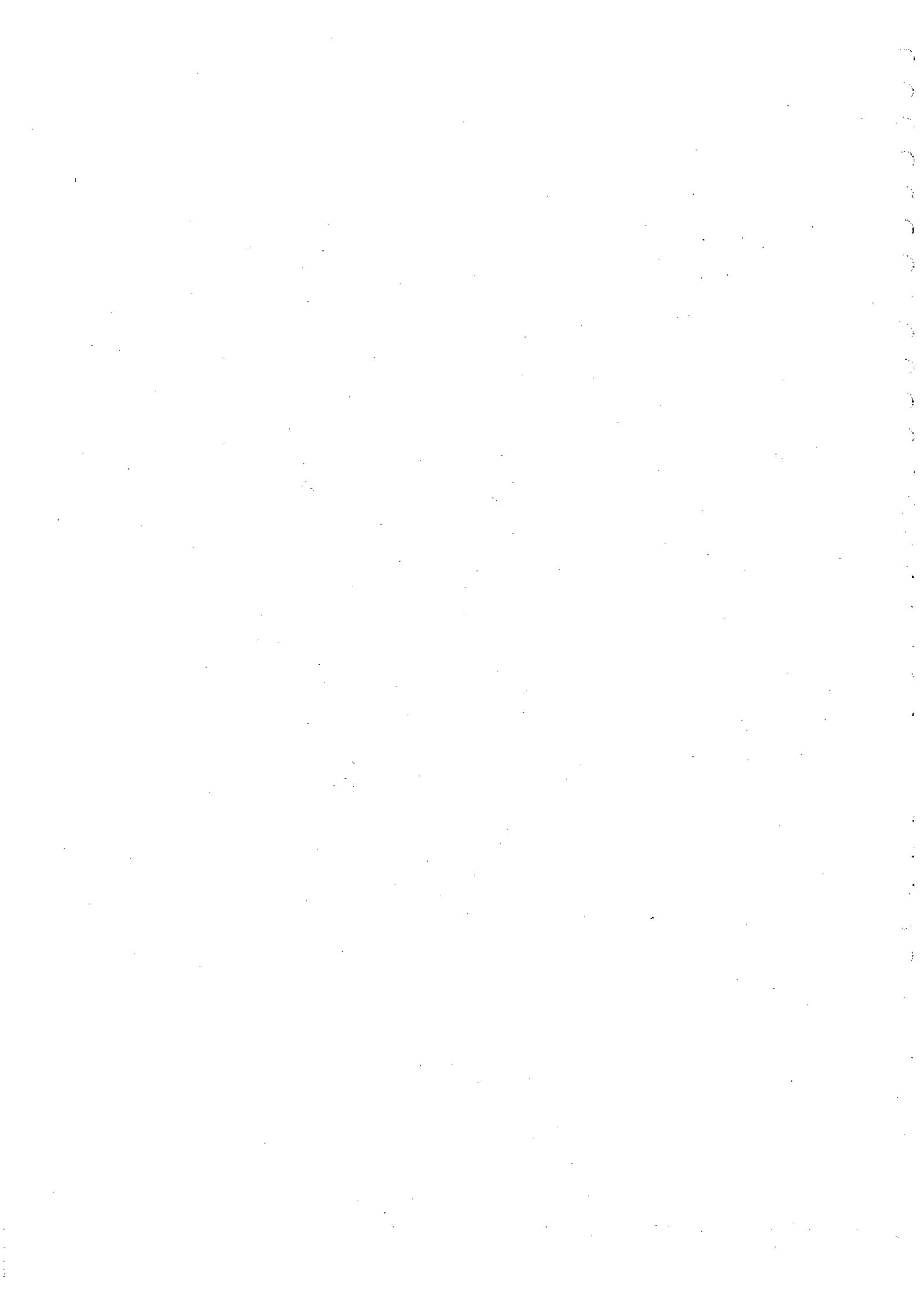
On way back, they would purchase a few trinkets, children's clothes, a sari/dhoti and occasionally a utensil from Bankura or Barddhaman town. They would put the rice saved in the spherical basket balanced on their head and return home.

Occasionally one of their men would be interested in another woman from the group or in a Santhal girl staying in Barddhaman villages and stay back. Many unmarried girls found their future husband during a trip and got married on return. The politics and caste system of Barddhaman villages did not interest them nor did they mix well with local agricultural labourers who considered themselves to be of superior status. They went every year with singular purpose-to work and earn a cash wage to bring home.

The foregoing discussion on various facets of seasonal migration supported by empirical evidences from the field reveals that the phenomenon does not show any sign of slowing down. On the contrary, an increasing trend both in magnitude and frequency is discernible. Apparently, measures of land reforms, democratic decentralisation process, programmes of rural development, forestry tribal welfare and food subsidy have not been able to make enough dent on the situation which forced people to migrate. It has lost whatever social stigma it carried earlier and many other communities who avoided it on account of the same are participating in the process openly. The social and economic arrangements to sustain the process have been suitably modified alongwith the changing socio-political scenario of the two regions. The phenomenon has also provided succour to the people of Bankura and Puruliya for several generations and therefore can not be outright condemned. A few supportive arrangements with no considerable cost in the areas of travel, accommodation, health and child care, and nutrition can remove several continuing hardships of the seasonal migrants, especially migrant women who needed these supports most.

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CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Mobility of labour beyond the village boundary was a rare phenomenon in the pre-colonial period. On the other hand, the colonial period ushered a great deal of labour mobility and the emergence of a definite labour market. By and large, the market was characterised by captive labour force organised and induced to migrate for particular type of activity. For instance, labour used to be mobilised for plantation, mining and quarrying, manufacturing salt, land reclamation, railways/roads construction, forestry and industrial and other activities. A large number of labour used to be exported to colonies outside India.

The process of labour mobilisation for the above purposes was aided by a class of labour contractors (who emerged with the commencement of labour market and who included a few zamindars and their men) and the traditional socio-political leaders of various ethnic groups. The Sardar/Majhi belonged to the latter category. A major part of the above labour mobility and market was characterised by permanent out-migration to new places either within the province or outside the province and quite often outside the country. There were instances when a few zamindars opposed this labour mobility and tried to stop the exodus as it affected their interest in agriculture and control over the subjects.

Towards the end of the 18th century, particularly after the Permanent Settlement of Zamindari system in 1793, another

kind of labour mobility was effected. It was primarily and originally encouraged by Zamindars who wanted to expand their area of cultivation within the zamindari through reclamation of culturable wastes and fallows. This was a specialised job in which tribal groups like the Santhals and Mundas excelled. They were, therefore, suddenly in great demand and zamindars' men lured them from their forest habitat to the alluvial plains of Bengal. Their worth and expertise in agriculture and in reclamation of land was already demonstrated after the famine of 1770 when they were brought from their hill resorts to the plains of Bengal to start cultivation both on new lands and on old rice fields which became fallow because of lack of cultivation due to shortage of cultivators and agricultural labourers a larger number of whom died during the famine.

This new labour market in agriculture in all probability was not initially characterised by mobility of seasonal nature. Because these tribal pioneers and reclaimers used to be encouraged to settle with reward of a few acres of land either as share croppers or as settled ryots to ensure a captive labour supply to the Zamindars and enterprising farmers who brought them. Obviously such first generation tribal settlers in Barddhaman ultimately became the link to further the process of both permanent and temporary migration.

The process of arable expansion in Barddhaman both through reclamation and intensive use created both temporary and permanent labour market in agriculture. Loss of good lands to non-tribals in Bankura and Puruliya by tribals created a conducive situation of both permanent and temporary out-migration. Droughts, scarcities, deforestation and unexpected decrease in productivity of minor forest produce added to the process of impoverishment and migration became an unavoidable survival strategy.

The seasonal migrant agricultural labourers originally belonged to peasant communities. Most of them had land either owned or leased in, and some became landless later on. The latter situation is an economic and social rootlessness which degrades a household within the community and removes its peasant identity. This feeling was true also in the case of artisanal and service castes who joined the migration stream later. The loss of one's own traditional vocation and to adapt to a new one was a very painful decision for them. By becoming casual agricultural labourers they lost the prestigious identity of producers.

Migrant labourers by definition should have been the free-wage labourers with option to chose employers and having no particular strong association with individual farmers employing them. In the case of seasonal migrant agricultural labourers from Bankura/Puruliya to Barddhaman, the relation was slightly

different. Originally, the Zamindars and big farmers sought for seasonal agricultural labourers and an informal association grew between such farmers and seasonal migrants by which a particular group of seasonal labourers tended to visit a particular farmer of Barddhaman repeatedly. This tendency seemed to have been strengthened more now as supply of labour had outstripped the demand presently.

The sexual division of labour in agricultural sector, particularly among traditional peasant communities, provided a conspicuous gender dimension to the process of seasonal migration. A link was established between sexual division of labour, rural labour market and seasonal demands of agricultural work (and recently a few non-agricultural work also). Many females from peasant castes in Barddhaman did not work in rice fields in activities like seedling removal, transplantation, weeding and harvesting. On the other hand, the females from tribal and semi-tribal peasant communities of Bankura and Puruliya, traditionally performed a greater share of these activities. As demands for seasonal labour in Barddhaman has always been for those types of operations in agriculture, the female agricultural labourers from Bankura and Puruliya were in great demand and a marked preference for females from a particular tribal group viz the Santhals gained ground because of their docile nature and sincerity in work discharge.

Chronologically speaking, the demand for agricultural labourers for peak season activities had existed in Bardhaman for a long time. Since there was no formal agricultural labour market and since information, communication and travel were difficult, seasonal migration did not emerge as a conspicuous phenomenon until about the 20th century. Upto 1920, labour scarcity in agriculture was a prevailing phenomenon because a sizeable section of labour preferred to move over to more labour intensive activities like plantations, mining etc. But dramatic changes started to have taken place after the 1920s when population grew at a faster rate and offset the land-man ratio. By this time work opportunities outside agriculture had virtually stopped also. Within Bardhaman district, low caste people with association in agriculture moved considerably from one place to another in search of agricultural wage work and share cropping, and tended to reduce the opportunity of willing tribals from Bankura/Puruliya to settle permanently in Bardhaman. The magnitude of seasonal migration thus increased.

It also appears that the Bengal Tenancy Bill of 1928 caused a great deal of eviction of sharecroppers/under-ryots. Certain land laws of the fifties and late seventies also generated similar phenomenon. Immediate backlash of such incidents can be many. More visible ones are increase of agricultural labour population, and weakening of the bargaining power of agricultural labour in rural areas - which in turn reduced wages and earning level of such population.

Politically Bardhaman district has been a stronghold for the Communist movement from its earliest days. Several communist and Kisan leaders have emerged from the district. The All India Kisan Sabha was established in 1933 in a village which is situated in the heart of our study region. Between 1937 to 1969, two provincial Krishak Sammelan were held in Bardhaman's rice region. But the fate of agriculture labourers did not materially change. M. Abdullah Rasul in his History of Krishak Sabha (1969) lamented - "Krishak Sabha for long has waged a strong and continuous struggle on the various demands of share croppers. It was indeed a correct policy to do so. But Krishak Sabha has not given similar emphasis to the just demands of the most exploited and deprived section viz. the agricultural wage workers. The various demands of this section such as distribution of land free of cost necessary financial support for agriculture, etc. did not merit similar movement and organisational mobilisation as was done in the case of sharecroppers. There was also a difference of opinion within the Krishak Sabha regarding the status and place of Khet Mazoor Sangathan (KSM). Some subscribed to the view that it should be kept outside the Krishak Sabha. Others thought it to be legitimately a part of it. Finally, it was decided that the strategy of coopting/separating the KSM would be adopted wherever it was felt necessary to do so". It is well known that agricultural labourers formed a part of land/wage related struggles although the communist movement but they were bypassed at the time of distribution of benefits. In order to integrate

the agricultural labourers/Khet Mazoor Sangathan within the Krishak Sabha and the CPI(M) fold, the agricultural labourers are now termed as landless peasant (Bhumiheen Krishak) giving them a peasant identity.

As has been seen in the earlier Chapter, the seasonal migrant agricultural labourers remain an unorganised lot and receive a dual treatment - slightly better in Bardhaman as far as better wage and equity in the same is concerned, and a lower wage rate and discrimination in the same between sexes in Bankura/Puruliya.

Besides landlessness, the other factor which induced seasonal migration a great deal was the debt trap. In Bankura, for instance, Sanja system till recently generated a vicious debt-trap. Share-croppers/Bhag jots had to regularly incur debt in cash and kind, and it became intensive after droughts and scarcities and unexpected fall in productivity of minor forest produce.

There have also been several changes in the social composition of migrant group and in the role of Sardars. Firstly, the migrant groups used to be larger in size earlier as Zamindars and big Jotedars used to have large holdings and a bigger group of migrant labourers was necessary. Currently, 3/4th of the landholdings in Bardhaman accounting for nearly 42 per cent of the areas belong to marginal and small farmers, of whom the later category use seasonal labour to some extent. The remaining 25% of holdings belonging to medium and big farmers (75,000 in number) accounting for 58% of the land area use

seasonal agricultural labour compulsorily. Zamindari Acquisition Act and Agricultural land ceiling laws have eliminated very big holdings forcing labour need of smaller size per holding. Secondly, due to socio-political obsolescence of the post of traditional tribal chiefs who played the role of Sardars during migration process, the institution of Sardar has assumed more an economic meaning than social and ethnic. Thirdly, mixed community groups, or groups based on traditionally non-agricultural communities are of recent origin during the last 10-20 years. Fourthly, seasonal migration although largely remains the domain of the poor, a section does participate in the process who did not need it so much. Lastly, there has been some degree of political mobilisation among seasonal migrants due to repeated visits to a highly politicized district. Instances of cheating in wage payment or non-payment, have almost disappeared, and the migrants now know whom to turn to for redressal of grievances. Similarly, behaviour and attitude of employers have become fully business like and mechanical as agriculture to them is a remunerative vocation now and they are aware of migrant labourers' dependence on them for work. That the income from seasonal migration did not and does not bring any real prosperity to the source region/migrating households is beyond doubt. Very few households could make positive investment in durable assets from the income of seasonal migration and ultimately stopped migrating.

Over the years two things have changed towards the worse. Firstly, spells of unemployment in source region have become

longer releasing more time and people to undertake out-migration of seasonal nature. Secondly, magnitude of female participation in the migration process seems to have increased further due to progressive involvement of other communities in the migration process.

In spite of full knowledge of the regularity, intensity and magnitude of seasonal migration, including relatively high involvement of females in the process, the political and administrative inaction in the involved districts is noteworthy. There has been practically total lack of concern and dialogue within the government, bureaucracy and political parties - relegating this important phenomenon to a non-issue.

As indicated earlier, the phenomenon, to a large section of people, remains a major life-support strategy and from that point of view it can be termed as subsistence migration. There has been a keen desire to migrate, specially among women, during Rabi and Kharif plantation seasons to tide over the chronic and impending food shortage during July to October. One of the factors that tends to disturb this preparation for migration during the Rabi season is the uncertainty in supply of canal water for Boro rice cultivation. An outsider visiting villages of Bankura and Purulia prior to this seasons will definitely be asked one single question, mainly by women, whether canal water has been released from Durgapur barrage or not.

Breman(1985) in his study in South Gujarat concluded that 58 per cent migrant labourers were women. This aspect is obviously dependent on several socio-demographic factors. For instance, in a demographic situation where males outnumber females, and in a social situation where there are restrictions of women working as wage labour, that too in an alien land, and where out-migration by unaccompanied women may create social problem, 45 per cent share by women in seasonal migration has to be considered not only significant but of critical nature also. This participation, as emphasized repeatedly, will again depend on seasonality, efficiency of the group and positive change in the source region.

This case study did not come across any seasonal migration from one part of the district to another part either in Barddhaman or in Bankura/Puruliya. For instance Barddhaman receives seasonal migrants from several districts of the State such as Birbhum, Murshidabad, 24 Parganas, Bankura, Puruliya and Medinipur. Seasonal migration within the district is reported in a limited scale in Medinipur. Similarly, distance did not seem to be a major factor in case of seasonal migrants from Bankura/Puruliya to Barddhaman. Since return journey expenses are borne by the migrants, a tendency to reach villages in Barddhaman from where return is less expensive, can be noticed.

Sexual exploitation and teasing of young migrant women at work place seem to have become rare now because of strong

presence of Panchayat and political parties on one hand and social and cultural transformation among farmers and rising consciousness among migrants on the other. Sexual services to farmers were not unheard of earlier though. A guarded rumour floats around on two issues. Firstly, sexual exploitation does occur within the group. Secondly, some young women are lured away to small town red-light areas under the garb of seasonal migration.

Total lack of employment opportunity particularly in the deforested areas caused out-migration, and majority of migrating people obviously belonged to landless, marginal and small farm households. Income from migration was almost entirely spent on consumption and debt repayment, and in isolated cases towards purchase of small livestock like poultrybirds, goats and young calves. Seasonal migration also entitled a person to plead for loan from money lenders/shopkeepers in home villages.

Preference for migrant labour, specially for Santhal and Santhal women, continued to exist among farmers of Barddhaman. The absence of disparity of wage between migrant and local labour tended to increase the preference for the former. This tendency was understandable in view of prevailing socio-political and economic relation between farmers and local labour in Barddhaman. As an employer, a farmer could assert greater control over the needy and dependent migrant labourers. His economic relation with such labourers was of short duration, and obligatory social relation as he

was required to maintain with local labourers was not expected.

Lastly, it has been seen althrough the case study that the role and participation of women in the process was significantly important. Women participated because of several reasons. Firstly, all of them were primarily workers and this identity got sufficiently established through seasonal migration. Secondly, women's concern for survival of family and children had always been greater than their men. Thirdly, existing sexual divisional of labour within the agricultural operations acted in favour of them, and their docility and sincerity endeared them to the farmers of Barddhaman. Fourthly, these women proved to be better negotiator for assurance of work in the subsequent seasons in view of their greater access to farmers' households and better performance in discharge of work responsibility. Fifthly, women's traditionally and culturally established vital roles within the family in native places continued to be maintained even while on migration. Women's natural concern for men of the family made them go with their men. Lastly, repeated migration from childhood to old age through the same path and frequently to same village/area have brought in so much familiarity that anticipated stigma, fear and inhibition were absolutely reduced.

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Travails of Migrant Tribal Women

D. Bandyopadhyay

They issued no declaration. They prepared no manifesto. There was no thunder. There was no rhetoric. Haltingly, almost shyly, they raised a few simple but basic issues. They questioned the rationale of the present social arrangement and the ethics and legitimacy of the process of development which, over the decades ignored and bypassed them. They doubted the possibility of ^{peaceful} transformation of society where the strong were expected to surrender to the weak their privileges without demur and without resistance. They had assembled in the Jhilmili Reorientation Camp for migrant women workers. (May 22-25, 1980). Initially they appeared to be bewildered. They were young and old, married and unmarried, divorced and deserted. Children accompanied their mothers - and there were a few sucklings.

That they mattered surprised them all. That their problems could be subject of intense discussion made them rather uneasy. Their menfolk were not very unwilling to let them come unescorted. Perhaps the women might get some relief, they thought. The annual migration would have to be undertaken soon; it was a period of penury. So, if the women and children were fed by the Government it would mean a welcome relief to their strained family budget. So they allowed their women to join the camp.

They came from half a dozen villages of wooded up lands in the north western corner of the district of Bankura in the Ranibandh block. They were thirtyfour in all. They were Santhals, Kherias and Scheduled Caste Hindus. None of them knew how to read and write. Excepting a couple of them none had any land. Quite a few among them did not have even homestead plots. They were all agricultural workers who migrated two to four times a year to the lowlands in search of work.

Slowly they overcame their shyness and started talking softly but sharply about their economic, social and family problems. They wondered why it was that they had to leave their villages and homes every year several times and migrate in groups along with their menfolk and children to Burdwan and Hoogly for work. They wanted to know why they could not get employment in the neighbourhood.

Migration caused immense trouble to them. Agents would come from these distant low-lands, organised them in groups and make them walk from the villages through the wooded hilly terrain to the bus stops. They would be taken to Bankura where they would not know where to stay with their children and a few belongings. They would sleep on the railway platforms or on the outer verandahs of shops in the market. Shopkeepers would drive them out. Other railway passengers would resent their presence.

They would wait for two or three days to get accommodation either in the light railway or in a bus. In both cases some babu passengers would object to their presence or make derisive and not infrequently loud remarks about their figure, social habits, ignorance and rusticity. They would not allow them to sit. With children on their lap or back and some tugging at their saris, pressed and jostled, they would arrive at their destinations hungry and exhausted. It would be the same again when they would come back.

Each time they returned, they brought back in cash about Rs. 30 to Rs. 70 after meeting their expenses there. On the way back they would make little purchases in Bankura bazar and with the remaining cash they would repay the advances they had taken from the money-lenders. To avoid the complication of calculation, the money-lenders made very simple arrangements. They charged Rs. 5/- per Rs. 10/- per month as interest. After repaying the loan with interest they would be penniless again. The cycle would start afresh - indebtedness, hard work at low wages, migration and repayment. They disliked the seasonal migration to the irrigated areas of Burdwan and Hoogly. They wanted work and employment in their own villages.

They thought that if there could be irrigation resulting in double or triple cropping, they would get enough employment. They would not have to go to distant areas for work and income. But a few of them during the discussion raised the question why the land-owners of Hoogly and Burdwan inducted tribal labour from the uplands of Bankura and Birbhum instead of engaging local labour. They thought double-cropping in the area perhaps pushed up the wages of local labour and that encouraged the land-owners and their agents to bring cheaper labour from a far. So bringing in irrigation in their own locality might not assure full employment to them. The land-owners might organise similar migration from Chhotanagpur region to cultivate their lands and harvest the crop. So from irrigation they moved on to a more fundamental issue - the problem of land alienation and restoration of alienated land.

All of them stated that they had heard that either their grand-father or their great-grandfather did possess land in the area. They had brought the culturable lands in the valleys under cultivation by clearing the jungle and removing stones. Soon thereafter through indebtedness or just physical threat, they lost their land and became agricultural workers. They had also heard that the Government had vested some land belonging to some big land-owners. They did not know who got these surplus lands. They knew well that a small parcel of land of an acre or so in this infertile area would not yield sufficient income or crop to meet their needs for a year. But the fact that they had land and the fact that it would at least provide some insurance against starvation and hunger would certainly enhance their bargaining power vis-a-vis the land-owners, which would result in increase in wage rates. They identified landlessness as the major cause of their poverty and migration. They demanded land and irrigation and the wherewithal to cultivate the land without any dependence on money-lenders.

The women tribal workers received lower rates of wages. While the men got 3 paise* of paddy for a full day's work, the womenfolk would get 2 to 2½ paise for the same quantum of work. On top of it, while menfolk would waste their income in drinking liquor and merry-making, the entire burden of maintaining the family and looking after the children would fall on the women. They resented this discrimination which prohibited differential wage rates between men and women for the same kind of work. They asserted that the intensity of work of women workers was greater than that of the men. This was in spite of the fact that even during the work time they had to

* Local volumetric measure; paddy of one pai weigh slightly less than a kilogram.

feed the children who were either left on the high field boundaries or wallowed in the mud and slush in the field.

Their main grievance was against the forest policy of the Government. For the tribal women forest provided basic means of livelihood. They used to collect free of cost fruits, flowers or leaves of mohua, peesal, kendu and other trees. They used to gather kendu leaves and brushwoods and other minor forest produce without paying any charge to anybody. But during the last three decades gradually their customary rights had been abrogated. They were harassed, prosecuted, insulted, - and above all were deprived of their supplemental income from forests.

In the course of the discussion it came out that not infrequently some of the tribal men and women would cut standing trees, and shape them as poles for sale in the market. They conceded that this was a reprehensible practice. They would not mind action against such persons who harmed the forest. Forest to them was a source of livelihood and by tradition and custom they never do anything that would cause any harm to it. But they wondered why, while so much concern was shown about preventing them from exercising their customary rights in the forest, no one bothered when the contractors clear felled huge areas and left gaping blanks in the forests. They complained that the contractors always took away more wood than their permits allowed. Such deforestation by contractors caused more harm to the forest than collection of brushwood or even occasional lopping of live branches.

The Santals knew the utility of forest much more than anybody else. Left to themselves they would protect it. They resented the interference of the Government in the exercise of their customary rights. According to their folklore their customary rights were recognised by the British Raj after the great 'Hul' (revolt). But it appeared strange that the Government which professed sympathy for them should withdraw the same rights and stop their major source of supplemental income, and even prevent them from living on forest fruits in the lean months. An old woman wondered whether they would have to organise another 'Hul' to restore the rights that were given to them six score years ago following the great rebellion.

They talked about changing social relations, particularly those which affected women adversely. In the tribal area the previous practice of paying 'bride price' had been substituted recently by the dowry system. Bridegrooms demanded costly items like bicycle, transistor, big torch and other consumer durables. Many tribal parents could not afford to pay dowry except by selling their meagre possessions. Among the participants were a number of girls who remained unmarried because of their parents' inability to pay dowry.

What caused an even greater sense of insecurity among tribal women was the easy process by which husbands deserted their legally married wives. Not only quite a number of tribal husbands did not contribute anything for the maintenance of the family, often they deserted their wives on flimsy grounds and married other women accepting lower dowries. The tribal women had never felt so insecure before. The old system of tribal panchayat where the women could lodge a complaint about the misbehaviour of the husband had fallen into disuse. Further, panchayats being wholly dominated by men, women hardly ever got justice or relief.

They demanded legal security against desertion and a stringent law against divorce. As a measure of protection, they demanded equal property rights for women. The least that could be done was to record the homestead plots in the names of the women. If the properties were in their names, husbands would think twice before deserting them. They also wanted some social security for such abandoned women and wondered whether land could be assigned to them separately.

They expressed great concern about the welfare of their children who accompanied them during their migration to the lowlands. Women had to work as hard as the men. Most of the jobs being contractual in nature, they had no fixed working hours. They worked from sunrise to sunset, and often late into the evening on full-moon nights. They had to complete the job within a fixed period and move on to some other job elsewhere.

They were working hard for bringing up their children. If the children suffered or died of disease what was the need for their working? They had to prepare meals before they left for the field and do the same after they came back.

Children accompanying them had to suffer untold agony during the entire period of their work. Often they died of snake bite, fever or dysentery. They demanded extra wages to engage some old women to look after their children during the working hours. They knew that no one would listen to them unless they organised themselves to put pressure on the employers. They wondered whether the Government machinery or any other organisation could help them to arrest high mortality among the children during the period of migration.

Someone talked about the importance of education of children. They cut him short by stating that they knew the utility of education of children - both boys and girls. But could anyone solve their problem? Children demanded food in the morning and some wearing apparel before they went to school and the parents could not afford these. Instead, if they could engage their boys as cowherds, at least a meagre meal is assured and in addition they might earn fifty paise per head of cattle per month or one bag of paddy in a year. Formal schooling meant loss of income and extra cost of feeding the child in the morning. Therefore, free primary education was not free for them.

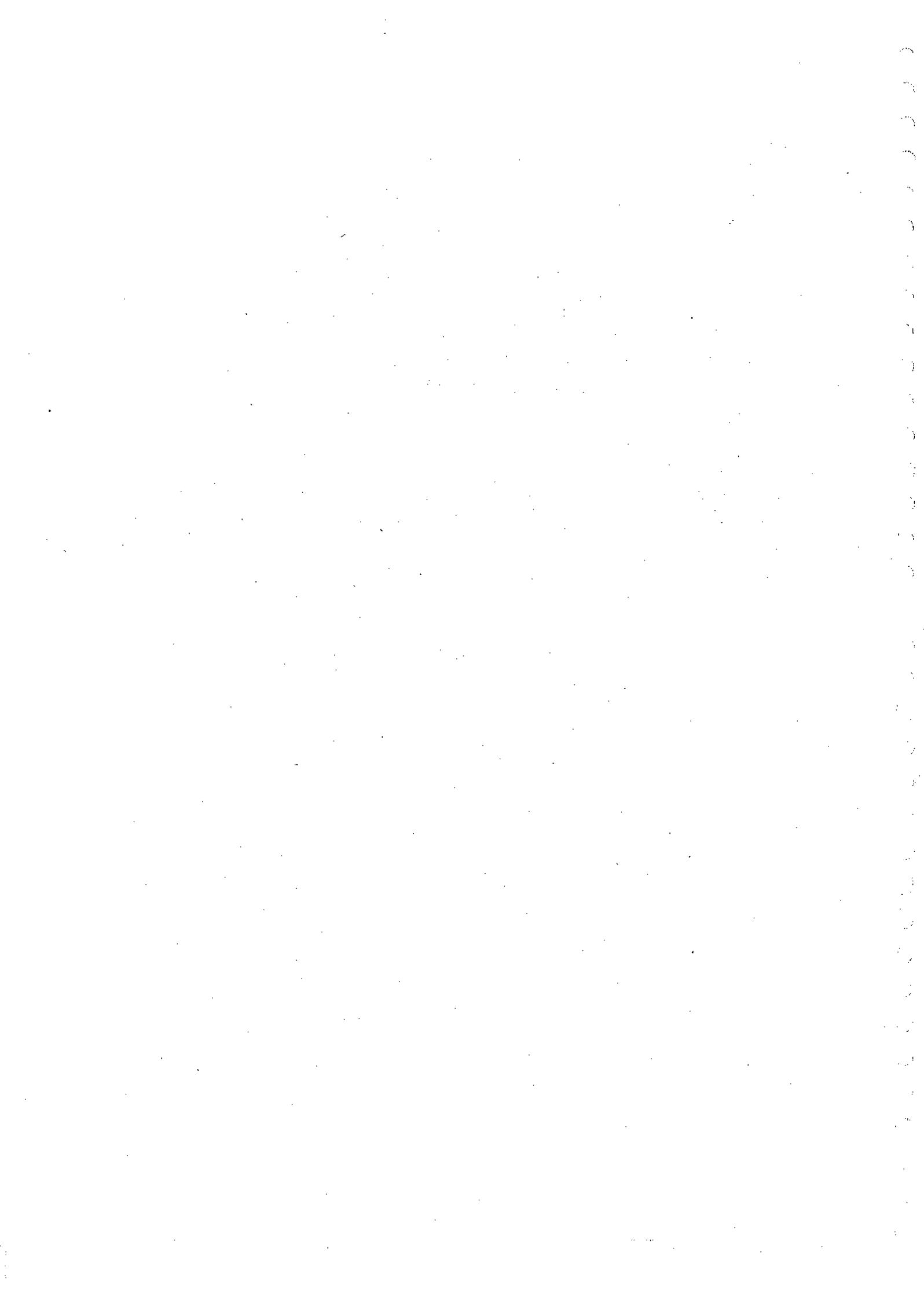
They could not send their girls to school because they helped the mothers in household chores, particularly in looking after the young ones. Mother had to go to field or forest to earn a living. The young girls looked after household work. But they wondered why classes could not be held in the evening when both boys and girls could attend without losing their earnings or usefulness. They knew that most of the present teachers would not agree to this change. They wanted teachers from their own community who understood their problems to undertake this new type of educational programme.

What they talked about at Jhilimili are perhaps universal problems of tribal migrant workers all over the country. What distinguished this group was their clear perception of the basic problem and unambiguous exposition of it. Their participation a few years ago in the kendu leaf movement for enhancement of price of leaves collected by them taught them the value of group action. The price went up from 10 paise for 600 leaves to 8 paise per 100 leaves. They knew that their weakness lay in their disunity and they were also aware that poverty divided them and made them compete among themselves for the limited opportunities. The same merchants who yielded to

their joint action played one against the other and succeeded in again reducing substantially the price of kendu leaf.

These merchants also deprived them of extra income from rope-making from sabal grass by exporting grass to manufacturing units in industrial towns. Their utter resourcelessness resulting in lack of staying power made them vulnerable to manipulation by merchants, land-owners, money-lenders and corrupt officials. Therefore they demanded asset redistribution in their favour and guaranteed employment to enhance their bargaining capacity.

It was their camp. They posed their own problems. They thought of possible solutions. They were convinced that the critical factor in bringing about any significant change in the existing situation was organisation. Such an organisation could not develop without some external support. They were also aware that this might be dangerous. Their economic advancement would certainly affect some others adversely. Confrontation was unavoidable. All that they wished was that if and when it came the sarkar which organised the camp should not be on the other side.



ON SURVIVAL

The Mills of Sustenance

Narayan Bannerjee

It was a hot summer's day of 1982. I was walking through the jungle path in a remote area of Bankura district, West Bengal. An old Santhal woman was with me. She was taking me to her village. Walking through the forest, I asked her to narrate her experiences as a migrant agricultural labourer going to Burdwan and Hoogly. She suddenly stopped and exclaimed, "what a foolish question to ask! I have lost count of how many times I have gone to 'your' village and, of course you know how we stayed and worked there, what we gave and what we received. Even if you were young in those days, surely you noticed?"

She was right, I 'noticed' them coming every year to my village, indeed, twice a year without fail, in groups; more women of various ages than men, like a flock of sheep with their heads down. Every year my uncle would disappear for a few days; first when the rains started and, later when the paddy fields yellowed. I waited for his return with great expectations, because he would bring along with him an essential part of my growing process - a multitude of unprotesting human shapes, appearing with unflinching regularity like crops, rains, seasonal birds and festivals.

My uncle always came back accompanied by a group of tired looking Santhal/Majhis and Kamins (male and female migrant labourers respectively). But the picture showed two contrasting appearances between one figure and the rest. While my uncle's demeanour showed freshness, assurance and delight (he was expecting an uninterrupted transplantation or harvest), the flock of human beings behind him looked tired, hesitant and glum.

The Majhis with their bows and arrows, tangis (axes) and flutes and harps never interested me. My centre of attraction was the Kamins - each with a folded talis (palm leaf mat) tied to a spherical bamboo basket securely fixed on her head. It generally was a mixed group of people -- a few young and unmarried Kamins (considered fit for the first time to work on another's field) who would measure everything with their quick glance and with easy familiarity, some middle aged Kamins with infants slung on their back and youngsters hanging at their elbow with lack-lustre eyes cast downwards and some impatient looking middle aged or old Kamins.

They used to spend their days in the rice fields and nights in my uncle's cowshed. I would leave my games and meet them in the evening when they, with mud or dust all over their body, would come inside my uncle's house to collect their daily sidha (quota of rice, salt tobacco, vegetables, oil, spices and fuel). I would lean against the housepost and watch how they haggled over more rice and oil for their Majhis and children. My aunt would measure out the items in front of them to show that she was not cheating. But these were not the focus of my attention. The spontaneous smile that lit up their faces, the instant lustre in their eyes and the sudden shiver that shook them while receiving sidha, or the nudging and pushing each other over a joke shared with my aunt, drew me to them every evening. They were quite frank and familiar with my aunt and would talk about what happened to them and their villages in between the two visits - one during transplanting and then during harvest - death, abortion, birth, marriage, drought, divorce, desertion, epidemics, etc. They would similarly enquire from my aunt what happened to her and in the houses where they worked last time - pregnancy, birth, marriage, a new house, more land, new ornaments, saris, utensils etc.

They returned to the cowshed to leave the sidha there, collected the infants and children and went to bathe. The Majhis had already bathed and were either soaking chuba or had gone to the liquor shop. The Kamins returned and immediately busied themselves cooking. They cooked only once, in the evening, while breast-feeding the infants. They ate their evening meal early, all sitting together, occasionally throwing a glance at me, patiently sitting on the door step, eyes glued on them. They ate lots of rice and vegetable with fair amounts of chilli and onion. They ate till they could eat no more because these were the few days in every year when they could eat as much as they liked. Their oiled faces would cheer up with the satisfaction of eating

and glisten in the dim light. They would clean their brass eating bowls till they shone like gold. Their eyes would grow sleepy after the heavy meal and a hard day's labour, but they would notice me still sitting there and sing a song in chorus accompanied by the flutes of the Majhis to send me away.

In the day time while returning from school, I would stop on the edge of the rice fields where they had hung their sleeping infants on alings tied to bamboo cross-pieces and listen to the music sung in chorus and to the continuous 'chub', 'chub' sound coming from their ebony hands engaged in transplantation. They were bent over the field, wet bodies, legs apart dug into the slush, a bunch of seedlings in the left hand, with the right engaged in pushing seedlings into the mud. The song in chorus and the 'chub', 'chub' sound of transplantation mingled with one another - indistinguishable and complementary.

The Kamins and Majhis brought by my uncle did not work only for him. Other landowners would hire some of them. They used to be referred to by the generic name of Munis (agricultural labourer). Sometimes my uncle's fields would not be ready for transplantation and some of them would be laid off if no one in the village needed them but this was seldom. Firstly, since my uncle had brought them it was partly his responsibility to find work for them in the village. Secondly, only big farmers, who would not like to take a risk and therefore made sure of an adequate supply of labour, would fetch them. Small and marginal farmers did not do so. They would approach the large farmers for one or two Munis usually according to the latter's convenience. This was one of the reasons that the small and marginal farmers were forced to transplant their paddy late and obtained comparatively poor harvests. Thirdly and traditionally, there used to be close dependence and exchange between the farmers in agricultural operations as the agricultural task had to be finished by a certain time. This was particularly so relating to seedlings, bullock and plough, and water management. The cumulative effect of all these smoothly worked in favour of the migrant labourers.

Then one evening they collected their last sidha, because my uncle and others needed them no more, and on that day the spontaneous smile on their faces and lustre in their eyes was gone. They would prepare their supper in uncle's cowshed in stony silence and would unnecessarily beat the children and shout at the Majhis. They would tend not to notice me and go back to my uncle to collect the wages. On the following morning they would fold up their tales, put the hoarded rice, salt and oil set aside everyday from their

daily sidha, the brass bowl and the only other sari into the spherical basket. Following their men they would start walking down the village path in a single file. On the back of some Kamina, the infant was no longer in the sling or did not hang at the elbow. It had died either of diarrhoea or of unintentional neglect. Their own illness was of no practical consequence to them and they worked as long as they could stand on their legs. On this day they looked tired in the same way as on the day they had come with my uncle. All this I noticed all through my stay in the village till the late fifties. I did not see them for twenty long years while pursuing my education and career, and I did not meet them again until 1982. Then it was in their home, no mine.

The Santhal woman was wrong when she assumed that I knew them or that I knew ^{how} they worked and what their problems were. I never knew them individually because they all seemed to look alike. I was totally unaware of where they came from. I never bothered to ask why they looked tired on the date of arrival and departure, why there used to be more Kamin than Majhi and why some Kamin-mothers returned with empty backs and elbows. I also did not know why they spontaneously smiled while collecting their daily sidha and why their faces cheered up after evening meals. Actually, I did not know them at all in spite of meeting them year after year in my own house, in my own village.

I have been dwarfed and humbled on two counts. First, now I know what I should have known about her as a fellow human being, and I had never asked. I have been unmasked by an illiterate, worn-out, half-fad but strong-willed Santhal woman. Secondly, in one stroke, my education, training and knowledge were proved to be inadequate because they were misdirected.

Being a student of Anthropology, I had read about the Santhals in books and articles and I was talking to the Santhal woman on the basis of my bookish knowledge. When she turned away after her brief but penetrating retort, I was brought down to earth. I did not know who had failed me, the books, my teachers, or my training. I only realised that my knowledge about them was incomplete and I had never tried to analyse what I had noticed in my childhood, in my own village. While sitting by the side of the old Santhal woman whose life was written on her face, who willingly gave away her only possession, a patch of wasteland to the local Santhal women's organisation so that they

did not have to go to my village any more, and who soon died with that expectation treasured in her heart, I started reflecting on my career which spanned from the late sixties to the beginning of the eighties. I had compiled various types of data both at macro and micro level but it never occurred to me to look into those secrets that mere data could never yield, nor did I perceive the issues critical to women. On that day, in mid-1982, a nameless tribal woman took me by the hand and helped me to see the strange world of their lives.

She told me frankly about many things - her childhood, the unhappy marriage, desertion, return to her own village and her everyday battle for two square meals. She had absolutely no feeling of guilt for whatever she had done to keep her body and soul together. As a young child, she used to accompany her parents year after year. She used to be fascinated at first at seeing new places. Gradually it became a monotonous journey and at the same time, an evil necessity. It was a labyrinth from which there was no way out. And in that labyrinth she was not alone. Suddenly she was narrating the story of thousands of women like her, women for whom intermittent migration was a way of life.

She did not know when it had all started. She learnt from the elders that they had a golden past. The land, forest and streams provided them with everything. With the passage of time, others became the owners of their land, the forest no longer belonged to them, the productivity of land decreased, and there were sporadic scarcities. Severe droughts affected the crops and two successive droughts forced most people to leave home in search of employment. In Burdwan and Hoogly, opportunity for work was assured because of good irrigation facilities. Very few women of Burdwan and Hoogly worked in the rice fields and there was no competition with the migrants for the type of jobs they did, viz., removal of seedlings, transplantation, weeding, harvesting, bundling, threshing and cleaning. Firstly, only the Santhal women along with some men from their community took up this journey. Later men and women from other communities joined them and came to be known by the same generic name of Munis in Burdwan and Hoogly. They all wished to have the whole year fully taken up with productive work. They did not want to miss a single day for then there would be hungry mouths waiting at home. But they had to return home and wait anxiously for the next visit.

With the diminishing forest wealth and various restrictions on its use, the dependence on seasonal migration increased. The uncertain rain and the leftover unfertile land provided them very little sustenance. For about six months, rice - the only staple food - was not available to them. At home, there was practically no work available and agricultural work at Burdwan and Hoogly provided the only hope. The years of drought were the years of plenty for the Mahajans. Even borrowing with high interest seemed attractive when children at home starved. Everyone had to stay alive till the next agricultural operation.

They locked up their beautifully painted houses, sold the livestock, put their belongings in the spherical basket and left for the regular journey after putting a thorny branch at the entrance of the houses to ward off the evil spirit. The farmers from Burdwan and Hoogly come in time to fetch them. To the migrants, these farmers were angels sent by their god Marangburu. It took 2 to 3 days to reach the destination by foot, by bus or truck, by narrow-gauge trains and again by bus and on foot.

The children suffered on the way and the thought for the old and infirm left behind was always a worry. But the journey had to be undertaken to pay back the debts incurred at home. To the local Mahajan, the seasonal migration was equivalent to the collateral against a loan. The farmers from Burdwan and Hoogly knew the Mahajans and the Mahajans knew who would go to work. He would meet them the day they arrived back home. The journey and the Mahajans were both unavoidably linked, one with the other.

The old Santhal women was certain that the intensity of seasonal migration had increased over the years. The country's independence did not make any difference to them. On the contrary, the tentacles of state power were more confusing than helpful. The work at the place of migration had become harder and more irksome. Prior to the sixties, they had enjoyed trust and a personal relationship with the employers' households, and now this understanding had vanished.

The advent of high yielding varieties, chemical fertilisers and pesticides, shallow pumps, and multiple-cropping has indeed opened more work oppor-

tunities forcing them to migrate four times a year now instead of two earlier, but at the same time the employer has become more business-like, rough and calculating. He extorts more work and always reminds them that he must get his money's worth of work. The all important *sidha* is now fully costed and measured. In many places it has been totally replaced by cash to conform with the Minimum Wages Act. The employer's supervision has become intensive and they are gradually becoming piece rate agricultural workers. The chemical fertilisers and pesticides cause uneasiness. The coarse stocks of HYV paddy require more strength to harvest and thresh. The first few days are the days of real trial of strength and stamina since when they arrive, their level of nutrition is at the lowest. The old, pregnant, and sick women are required to invoke a hidden strength which only the women have, to keep up with the normal work. Those who cannot stay the course, fall sick and the golden journey becomes a stony patch. The employer will neither feed the women nor get their illness treated gratis. The dependent children in turn also suffer. Sickness has to be kept in abeyance at all costs.

This intermittent nomadism four times a year creates an altogether different quality in human life. Forty years ago no one bothered so much about formal education in the villages. Unfortunately, educational opportunity was imposed gradually, more to provide employment to teachers than to educate the children. But in spite of incentives, formal education is a pipe-dream for the children. Even when the children are admitted in the primary or high schools, their education is interrupted. The school attendance fell substantially during these periods of migration even when the schools adjusted the vacation period to coincide with seasonal-migration. This often provided an opportunity for some children to drop out of school. Many high school students have to do a short stint of agricultural work to the neglect of their studies. The immunization, vaccination and other child health programmes suffer. The full course of immunization is never taken as the target children have to go to Burdwan and Hoogly with their parents. The ICDS centres at Bankura and Purulia assumed a deserted look when agricultural operations began at Burdwan and Hoogly. The family welfare programmes and the programmes for expectant mothers and mothers of very young children suffered in the same way.

The old Santhal woman suddenly looked up and asked me a few simple questions: "Can you tell me, we women being mothers, what kind of future we are giving to these children? Are we not passing on our past as their future? Have we undertaken these innumerable treks to do just that?" She was still not cursing me or anybody else. So strong was her dignity that she accused none.

Later she took me to several old and experienced female seasonal migrants. They could no longer undertake the journey due to ill health and old age. Life was very hard for them. Their families still continued to extract some regular and continuing work from them like rope twisting, stitching leaves, weaving palm mats etc. Some of them were still alert and vividly remembered their first visit as agricultural labourers to Burdwan and Hoogly.

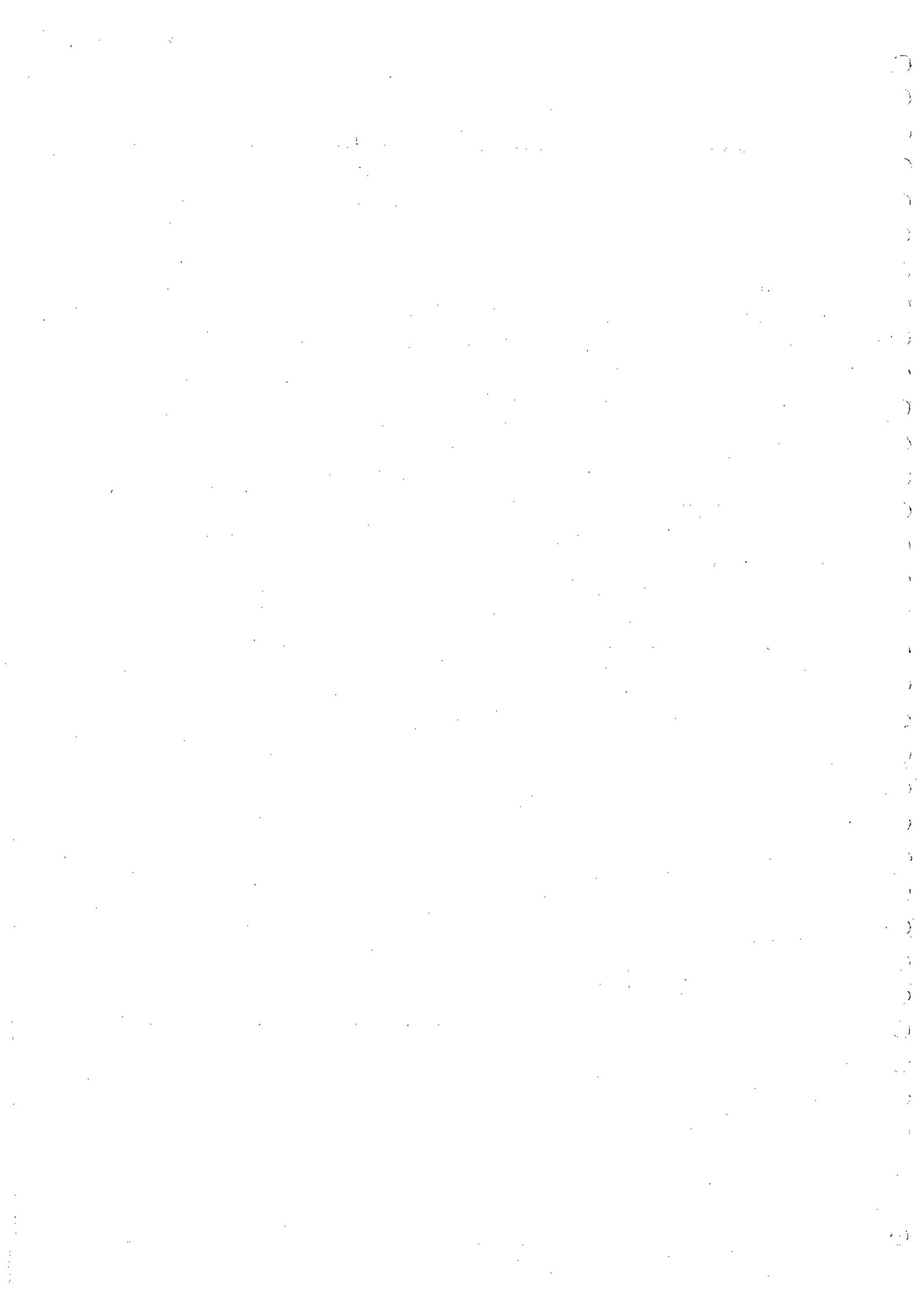
They said that in the beginning, they saw a romantic association in these new places and most often squandered their earnings, buying cheap trinkets from the markets while returning home. But on later journeys, marriage and the arrival of children had made them wiser. Even then they could not save up anything for their old age.

Others among them became silent and numb. They quickly burst into tears. The pride for which they were once famous was completely gone and they were more vulnerable than young children. One could make out that they needed care, both medical and human. My guide and mentor quickly read my mind. For once she was very bitter and said, "you know, when there are elections and we are at Burdwan and Hoogly, there will be trucks to bring us back to obtain our votes. If this can be organised, is it not possible to arrange something for our children at the villages of Burdwan and Hoogly? Is it not possible to give a brighter future to these aged women some of whom have nobody to look after them but who have given the best part of their life to the agricultural prosperity of Burdwan and Hoogly? Does nobody owe us anything?"

She reminded me why there used to be more women than men in the groups and why so many aged women needed care and support. The unmarried and young girls who went on migration were on the threshold of their lives and as a result they used to form a large group. But there used to be an equally large section who were deserted, divorced and widowed for whom regular seasonal migration was a necessity. Similarly, the overwhelming concern for children pushed many a mother into trekking eastward. The deserted, divorced and childless women suffered most in their old age and died unnoticed.

Each individual woman had a different story to tell and each suffered differently. But there was an overwhelmingly calm acceptance of the miseries and insults thrust upon them. No one protested because deprivation and oppression did not easily shake their resolve. They could not plan their own lives for they lacked resources. The young girls know that they do not have a carefree childhood. They must contribute to the family's support as soon as possible. They start by looking after the younger children to release the mother for full time work. They collect fuel, water and other forest produce. They work as bagals and bring some paddy home annually. They quickly grow from childhood to womanhood and follow in the footsteps of their mothers, aunts, sisters. The tradition continues. To some, marriage, love and children come additionally. To others, unhappy marriage, broken homes and childless life can be the final result.

The common thread of life for all is to work to live and live to work. Their bodies are bowed in work. Will their unbowed minds have to follow suit?



PARTICULARS OF SARDARS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Village of Origin and community to which belongs	Age/Sex/Marital Status/ Educational Standard/ Principal occupation	No. of Persons led/ Relation/Ethnic composition	How come to be recognised as sardar/How long acting as Sardar	Method of organising the group	Method of Linkage with the place of work	Role before and after the migration	Personal view on seasonal migration
Sardar-I	Karmo, Puruliya. Deshwali Majhi.	30/Male/Married/ Illiterate/Wage labourer	50 (Male-30, Female 20) Children 12 (Male 7, Female-5) Generally own relatives, friends, Other co-villagers belonging to Deshwali Majhi and Santhal	Replaced his father as Sardar for last 6 Years but visiting Barddhaman for last 18 years.	He has an almost permanent team of workers who work with two three employers.	He spends at least 8 months a year at Bardhaman for last 4 years & keeps occasional link with native place.	Since he undertakes to mobilise the labourer, and ensures employment, he is accepted as a leader. His responsibility continues till their return and after that he has no role to play in the group's daily life. In his opinion, a Sardar gains nothing except some additional respect from his fellow people during those periods.	In his views working with a particular employer is not wise. Because the old relation creates some unavoidable problems in the long run. As for example often they have to do extra work for employers which they cannot resist for the sake of old familiarity.
Sardar-II	Karmo, Puruliya. Santhal	55/Male/Widower/ Illiterate/ Wage Labourer	20 (M-12, F-8) Children 2F totally unrelated group formed with the people of his own community exclusively.	Leading a group for last three years but a regular visitor of Barddhaman for more than three decades. Earlier he was a member of the group belonging to Sardar-I. He developed some differences with the previous	Farmer visits his village & informs him about number of labour needed. He then mobilises the group & takes them to the farmer's house.	He selects the people for his team from his own community & keeps a good relation with his employer. If any time the farmer changes his attitude then he would not mind to change his employer.		

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
				Sardar and separated himself. Since then, he is attached to a land-owner at Samanti village of Bardhaman.			
Sardar-III	Bakiari, Dumka, Bihar, Scheduled caste	42/F/Married/ Illiterate/ Wage labourer	15 (M-9, F-6) Children (M-2, F-2). Totally a scheduled caste group & all the members are related to each other.	She is holding the post for last three years but a regular migrant since 1978. Her husband was the former Sardar of the group.	Four years back, while going back from Bardhaman, her husband met with an accident and lost his right arm. Since then, she has taken the charge of Sardar. Her husband stopped coming but he is still a Sardar of their village. She claims that her husband established the first link with their village. Her group working for a particular farmer from the first trip. Everytime the farmer visits their place to bring them. Since she took charge of Sardar she could convince many of the females/relatives to accompany the group. Otherwise, the females of her village generally avoided outside journey for work. Almost all the members of her team accompany from the first time. Size of the team depends on farmer's demand.		
Sardar-IV	Bahadurpur-Puruliya Scheduled Tribe.	35/M/Married/ Literate/Wage labourer.	25 (M-10, F-15) Children (M-2, F-2). This group is formed by the members of three tribal communities belonging to 3 adjoining villages. Majority members are related to each other.	This group is known as Bahadurpur gang since the Sardar belongs to that particular village. Sardar is holding the post for last 7 years. Earlier his father was the Sardar of the same group. After his retirement, present Sardar was selected by his team-mates. He feels as a Sardar that he gains nothing except some extra responsibility - organising people, work arrangement, responsibilities of young accompanying girls etc. His employer does not visit his place. Generally he writes a letter or settle the next assignment at the end of one trip. He arranges everything for the trip and reach the farmer in right time. He is in favour of working with a particular farmer because he feels that it provides some extra facilities, smooth working atmosphere and an informal security of employment.			
Sardar-V	Bheladanga, Bankura, Scheduled Tribe.	30/M/Married/ Illiterate/Wage Labourer.	10 (M-6, F-4) Formed exclusively by the family members and relatives.	Purely a new team with a new Sardar. Present Sardar was visiting Bardhaman as a member of a team headed by a Santhal for last 10 yrs. This time employer visited their village and the original Sardar refused to accept the assignment. Before leaving the village, the farmer gave him some money to arrange the trip. Then he organised his family members & relatives - thus he became a Sardar. He is planning to form a bigger group and decided to work for a bigger farmer - he does not find any reason to stick to a particular farmer. In his views, when there is uniform system of work and wage, then nothing resist one to accept bigger employment opportunity with a bigger farmer.			

Appendix - IV

CHARACTERISTICS AND COMPOSITION OF MIGRANT GROUPS

Group No.	Group Strength	Origin/Destination	Sub-Groups/ Ethnic composition	Age Composition/ Marital Status	Relationship	Land Holding	Normal Frequency of Visit	Other characteristics
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
I	25 adults (15M, 10F) 4 Children (2M, 2F)	3 adjoining villages - X, Y, Z of Purulia, WB/ Village 'a' of Bardhaman.	Five sub-groups Santhal - 1 Bhumij - 2 Kora - 2	5 M&6F belong to 18-25 10M & 2F to 26-35, 2F to 50+ 5M & 5F married, 10 M&2F unmarried, 2F Widow 1 F Divorce	9 M and 8 F had one or more relative within group	No female owned land. One male, a year landless, 13 held less than one acre each, and one held more than one acre	Four times a year	Group headed by a Santhal Sardar visiting same farmer for last 7 yrs. On average gets 3 months employment in native place and 4 months in Bardhaman. 1 person received IRDP assistance in native village. None knows about MW/ERA and about prescribed minimum wage.
II	14 adults (7M, 7F) 6 Children (5M, 1 F)	2 adjoining villages - A & B of Purulia/WB Village 'b' of Bardhaman	1 single group of Santhal	1M, 5F between 18-25 6M, 2F between 26-35 7 M, 5F married 2 F unmarried 1 pregnant women in the group	Clan/Kin group	No female owned land. 4 M landless, 3M less than 1 acre	4 times a year	Group headed by a Santhal Sardar visiting particular farmer for last 12 years. Farmer visits to bring them. Average 100 days a year spent in Bardhaman, 60 days employment available annually at native place. M/F wage difference by Rs. 2/- at native place. No knowledge about MW/ER Acts and prescribed M.W. rate.
III	9 adults (8M, 1F) No children	1 village 'M' from Dumka Bihar/ Village 'a' of Bardhaman	1 single group of Santhal	4M, 1F between 18-25 1M between 26-35 4M married 4 M, 1 F unmarried	One female related to 1 male. Village kin group	Female landless 2 M landless 5M less than 1 acre 1M more than 1 acre	4 times a year	Group headed by a Santhal Sardar visiting particular farmer for last 3 years. Farmer visits them to indicate number of labour needed. Group made of old and new migrants. Wives not brought. 1/2 unmarried female accompany brother(s) to take charge of cooking. Wage employment for about 90 days a year available 24 Kms. away from native village @ Rs. 8/- per day. No knowledge about MW/ER Acts and prescribed MW rate.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
IV.	22 adults (15M, 7F) 2 Male Children	1 village 'C' from Purulia, WB/ Village 'c' of Bardhaman	2 sub-groups; Santhal and Mahato	6M, 3F, bet. 18-25 8M, 2F bet. 26-35 1M, 2F - 40+ <u>10M, 4F married</u> 5M, 2F unmarried 1F widow	10M, 4F had relative within group	Female landless 6M landless 7M less than 1 acre. 2M more " "	4 times a year	Group led by a Mahato Sardar whose father attached to present farmer for 50 years, working with him for last 6 years. 2 sub-groups in two separate rooms, cooking in 6 hearths. Sardar's sister-in-law gave birth to a child. No knowledge about MW/ER Acts and proscribed MW rate.
V.	22 adults (14M, 8F) 8 Children (5M, 3F)	1 village 'D' of Purulia WB/village 'c' of Bardhaman	3 sub-groups of Santhal	4M, 3F of 18-25 8M, 3F of 26-35 2M, 1F of 36-45 One female 50+ <u>9M, 4F Married</u> 4M, 2F Unmarried 1M, 2F Widowed	12 M, 7F had relatives within group	All females and 5 males landless 6M less than 1 Acres 3M more than 1 acre	4 times a year	Group led by a Santhal Sardar same group visiting same farmer for last 8 years. One month's wage work available in native villa ge. Sardar's brother's daughter looks after children. Sardar's mother and wife in charge of coo- king for two groups and leave work place early. No knowledge about MW/ER Acts and proscribed M,W rate.
VI.	5 adults (4M, 1F) No children	1 village 'C' of Purulia WB/ Village 'c' of Bardhaman	1 single group of Blacksmith caste	2M, 1F of 18-25 2M of 26-35 <u>3M, 1F married</u> 1M unmarried	All belong to same extended family	3 landless One held more than 1 acre	2 times a year	The group led by eldest member of the family coming to present farm for last 2 years. The family start- ed coming along with a larger group of Santhal migrants from same village. Has not reconciled with the idea of working as wage-worker and as migrant labour. Reduced traditional occupation and poverty of land forced to migrate. More members will join in future. No knowledge of MWA/ERA and MW rate.
VII.	12 adults (6M, 6F) No children	1 village 'D' of Purulia, WB/ Village 'c' of Bar- dhaman	2 sub-groups, Santhal Tribe	4M, 3F of 20-35 1M, 2F of 36-45 1M, 1F of 50+ <u>4M, 4F married</u> 2M unmarried 2F widow	4M, 4F related to each other. Rest clan members	All females landless 4M less than 1 acre 2M more than 1 acre.	4 times a year	Led by a Santhal - whose father was once a resident of the villa- ge where the group working. He came as a migrant labour, stayed for 15 years as an attached labour, got homestead land where his eldest son now staying. He went back to his native villa- ge. His other son leading the migrant group. No knowledge of MW/ER Acts and MW rate.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
VIII	22 adults (15M, 7F) 6 Children (5M, 1F)	1 Village 'A' of Purulia WB/Village 'c' of Barddhaman	1 single group of Santhal tribe	5M, 3F of 16-25 5M, 2F of 26-40 4M, 2F of 41-55 9M, 3F Married 5M, 2F unmarried 1M, 2F widow	All related by blood	All females and 4 males landless 7M less than 1 acre 4M more than 1 acre	3 times a year	Group participating in seasonal migration for last 14 years. Belongs to 5 families related with each other. Part of a larger group, working with another employer. This group originally brought by one employer working with another after completing the operation of one who brought them. Employme nt opportunity at native place reported of one month. 44 pu paddy & two meals daily. None aware of MWA/ERA or rate of MW.
IX	10 adults (4M, 6F) No children	One village 'E' of Bankura WB/ Village 'c' of Barddhaman	1 single group of Santhal tribe	4M, 4F of 20-35 2F, of 36-50 3M, 3F married 1M, 3F unmarried	All related to one another	Female land- less 1 male land-less 3 males less than 1 acre	2 times a year	A group of 40 migrants led by a Santhal Sardar and from same village came to a Barddhaman village to work with one employer. Other 30 also distributed in small groups to different employers in the same village. Majority coming for last 12 years, and except the Sardar none has any particular attachment to any farmer. The Sardar remains responsible for other 30 migrants also.
X.	14 adults (13M, 1F) No children	1 village 'M' of Dumka, Bihar/ Vill- age 'c' of Barddhaman	1 single group of Santhal tribe	6M, 1F of 20-35 5M of 40-50 2M of 50+ 9M married 4M, 1F unmarried	5 members including the single female related to each other. Remaining clan members from same village.	4M landless 6M less than 1 acre 3M more than 1 acre	2 times a year	Group led by a Santhal Sardar. Lone female member Sardar's unmarried sister specially brought to take charge of cooking. Group coming for last 5 years to the village. Members suffer from fear complex and never comfortable.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
All 10 Groups	155 adults (M101, F 54) 26 children (M14, F12)	7 villages of Purulia, 1 village of Bankura of W.B. and 1 village of Dumka, Bihar/3 villages of Barddhawan	6 single groups and 12 sub-groups of 4 main groups. 7 exclusive groups of Santhal 1 mixed group of Santhal, Bhumij and Kora. 1 mixed group of Santhal & Mahato. 1 group of Blacksmith.	89M, 48F of 18-45 12M, 6F of 45+ 63 M, 29F married 36M, 15F unmarried 2M, 9F widow 1F Divorcee	Majority group members had relatives within groups	No female owned land 30M landless 54M less than 1 acre 17M more than 1 acre	6 groups 4 times a year; 1 group 3 times a year. 3 group 2 times a year	Not a single member from any group aware of MWA/ERA/ prescribed minimum wage. All groups led by a Sardar, generally a person from within the community constituting the group. Majority coming to same village/same farmer.

Note : M - Male, F - Female
MWA - Minimum Wages Act
ERA - Equal Remuneration Act
MW Rate : Prescribed rates of Minimum Wage for agricultural workers.

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Existing Educational Facilities
in Karma Villages

Two primary schools in the twin villages of Chota Karma and Bara Karma existed. The one at Bara Karma was established in 1910 and had two pucca rooms but no black boards, benches or chair/tables. The school at Chota Karma was ten year old and had no building of any type. The classes were held in the courtyard of a Santal household. The old school was single teacher schools and the new one had two teachers.

The old school had a total of 76 enrolled student in 1989:-

In class I there were 19 male and 27 females student, in class II 11 males and 7 females, in class III 5 males and one female and in class IV 5 males and one female.

The students came from Vaishnav, Muslim, Mahato, Garai, Bhumij, Paramanik, Tentubai, Rajak, Sahish, Sabar, Mandal communities. There was no student from Deshwali Majhi community who migrated regularly. Average daily attendance ranged between 15-20 student of which 70% were males. The school irregularly provided a midday meal and the student attendance increased then. Books were provided by the school and for SC/ST and poor girl students a set of clothes was given. The average number of student who passed out of the primary school and joined high school per year was five. During agricultural seasons the school attendance was further reduced. Girls' education took the back seat for a number of reasons.

The new school had 67 enrolled students in all of which 45 were male and 22 female. During agricultural seasons daily attendance became nil and teachers also did not turn up. The enrolment in class I was 22 boys and 8 girls, in class II eleven boys and 9 girls, in class III 7 boys and 4 girls and in class IV there were five boys and one girls only. All the students belonged to Santal community.

School Enrolment of Children of
School going age of Migrant and
Non-migrant Households (Karma Village)

Migratory Households having Children of School going age (5-15)			Non-Migrant Households			Percentage of Children Enroll in School			
						Migrant Household		Non-migrant Household	
No.	Male	Female	No.	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
82	85	72	19	19	18	48.2	25.0	57.9	44.4

ESTIMATED COST OF ONE ACRE OF KHARIF
PADDY CULTIVATION

<u>Input</u>	<u>Rs.</u>
1. Seed (30 kg.)	90.00
2. Manure	100.00
3. Ploughing (15 persondays)	270.00
4. Preparation of seed bed, water management etc. (4 persondays)	72.00
*5. Seedling removal, carrying and transplantation (24 persondays)	432.00
*6. Weeding (6 persondays)	108.00
*7. Harvesting/bundling (24 persondays)	432.00
8. Cost of carriage of harvested paddy	200.00
*9. Threshing/storing (9 persondays)	162.00
10. Miscellaneous labour cost (2 persondays)	36.00
Total =	1902.00

(*Female specific operations)

Output

(a) Paddy 1800 kg @ Rs. 2 per kg.	=	3600.00
(b) Paddy straw 3 kahans	=	600.00
	Re.	4200.00

(Cost of labour per day per person has been taken as Rs. 18).

The farmers in Bardhaman gave us a figure of Rs. 600-700 per bigha (1/3 of an acre) as the cost of cultivation, which we believe would be true if overheads and cost of chemical fertiliser/pesticides, water tax, cost of plough if hired etc. were added for kharif paddy cultivation. They said that yield of paddy per bigha would be 10 bags (600 kg) which they sold @ Rs. 120 per bag. The straw yield of one kahan per bigha was sold at Rs. 200/-

On the other hand, for Boro cultivation in Rabi season the cost of cultivation per acre was reported to be as follows (Labour cost per day was taken as Rs. 20/-).

1. Seed (45 kg.)	115.00
2. Water Cost	115.00
3. Seedling Preparation	300.00
4. Chemical Fertilizer and Pesticide	650.00
5. Ploughing (By Tractor)	300.00
6. Transplantation	700.00
7. Weeding	300.00
8. Harvesting to threshing	900.00
9. Miscellaneous cost	120.00

Rs. = 3500.00

Output

1. Paddy-2200 kg. @ Rs. 2/kg.	4600.00
2. Straw 4 kahan	800.00

Rs. = 5400/-

ANNUAL CALENDAR OF ACTIVITIES OF
SEASONAL MIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS

<u>Months</u>	<u>Activities</u>	
	<u>Forest Area</u>	<u>Non-Forest Area</u>
BAISAKH (April-May)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Land preparation, manuring, seed bed preparation and raising of paddy seedlings. 2. Forest Nursery work 3. Kendu leaf collection 4. Pottery/smithy/Rice processing 5. Seasonal Migration 	1, 4, and 5 and Nursery work if Social Forestry undertaken
JAISTHA (May - June)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ploughing for maize sowing 2. Collection of sal leaf and seeds 3. Pottery/smithy/Rice Processing and Forest Nursery work 	1 and 3.
ASAD (June - July)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ploughing and levelling of agricultural field 2. Forestry plantation 3. Collection of sal leaf 4. Local non-agricultural wage work in road/well/tank construction 	1 and 4 and plantation for Social Forestry
SRAVAN (July - August)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transplantation of paddy 2. Collection of sal leaf 3. Seasonal migration 	1 and 3
BHADRA (August-September)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Weeding/watering 2. Sal leaf collection 3. Pottery/Rice Processing 	1 and 3
ASWIN (September - October)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Harvesting of <u>Bhutmuri</u> paddy and Maize 2. Sal leaf collection 3. Pottery/Rice processing 	1 and 3

<u>Months</u>	<u>Activities</u>	
	<u>Forest Area</u>	<u>Non-Forest Area</u>
KARTIK (October-November)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Harvesting of Kartik Paddy 2. Sal leaf collection 3. Rice Processing/Pottery 	1 and 3
AGHRAYAN (November-December)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Harvesting of Aman Paddy/ vegetable cultivation 2. Sal leaf collection 3. Pottery/Rice processing 	1 and 3
POUR (December-January)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agricultural Migration 2. Rice processing/Pottery 	Same
MAGH (January-February)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pit cutting for forestry work 2. Agricultural Migration 3. Rice processing/Pottery 	Same
FALGUN (February-March)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sal leaf collection 2. Rice processing/Pottery 3. Agricultural migration 	2 and 3
CHAIT (March-April)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collection of kendu leaf, Mahua Flower, sal leaf, other minor forest produce 2. Seasonal Migration 	Seasonal Migration

FEMALE MIGRANTS DURING 1990-91 HARVEST
SEASON CONTACTED AFTER THEIR RETURN

Name of Women and Community	Village of origin	Village of Destination in Barddhaman	Days spent on migration	Daily wage received
1. Saraswati Soren, Husband and one adult son (Santhal)	Ramgarh Bankura	Nabagram and Moina	30	Rs. 10+2kg. rice+vegetables +oil+fuel
2. Ledi Hembram (Santhal)	"	Saddy and Singhpara	29	Rs. 13+1½ kg. rice +Vegetables+Oil+ Fuel
3. Jaleswari Hembram, Elder brother and sister-in-law (Santhal)	"	Kandupur	35	Rs. 12+1½ kg rice +vegetable+oil +fuel
4. Fulmoni Murmu (Santhal)	"	Kuruli	27	Rs. 13+1½ kg. rice +vegetable+oil+ fuel
5. Surajmoni Murmu (Santhal)	"	"	27	"
6. Anjali Murmu (Santhal)	"	Supur	30	Rs. 14+1½ kg. rice +vegetable+oil+ fuel
7. Tusi Basra (Santhal)	"	Saligram	45	Rs. 10+1½ kg. rice +vegetable+oil+fuel
8. Champa Sardar and Husband (Bhumij)	Kumarpara Bankura	Kaligram	20	Rs. 12+1½ kg rice +vegetable etc.
9. Rachni Mudi and adult son (Kora)	"	Naisara (Hoogly)	45	"
10. Sasta Pal, two brothers-in-law and young daughter (potter)	"	Gopinathpur	33	"
11. Karpura Singh (Bhumij)	Tetla, Purulia	Searabazar	30	"
12. Basanti Sardar (Bhumij)	"	Singhpara Sadya	35	"
13. Chunibala Mandi and entire family (Santhal)	"	Aradanga	40	"
14. Chintamani Murmu (Santhal)	"	"	40	"

Name of Women and Community	Village of Origin	Village of Destination in Barddhaman	Days spent on migration	Daily wage received
15. Bimala Majhi (Deshwali Majhi)	Tetla Purulia	Nabastha	31	Rs. 12+1½ kg. rice+vegetable etc.
16. Namuna Sardar and Husband (Bhumuj)	Batikara Bankura	Galsi	35	Rs. 14+1½ kg. rice+vegetable etc.
17. Buri Soren and brother (Santhal)	"	"	30	"
18. Rati Sardar and husband (Bhumij)	"	"	30	"
19. Dhakti Sardar (Bhumij)	"	Sonepur	20	Rs. 12+1½ kg. rice+vegetable etc.
20. Chandmoni Hembram (Santhal)	Kadambara Bankura	Gopalpur	28	"
21. Bimala Hembram (Santhal)	"	"	28	"
22. Ahladi Hembram (Santhal)	"	"	45	"
23. Jopi Bauri (Scheduled Caste)	Pakuria,	"	45	"

These are some of the women with whom CWDS is working for last 4 years in Wasteland Development Project. Most of them said that crop failure in home villages, higher wage and better crop production in destination areas and rising cost of living are the main reasons for seasonal migration. It may be seen that on average one month's work was available depending on the capacity of labour absorption of destination villages. Similarly cash wage received ranged from Rs. 10 to Rs. 14 in destination villages.