

## CHAPTER - I

# INTRODUCTION

West Bengal is now the third most populous state in India, with a population density of a little more than 900 persons per square km. The state continues to attract a large number of migrants from neighbouring states as well as neighbouring countries. Its topography is dominated by the alluvial plains of the Ganga and its tributaries, except for the hilly terrain of North Bengal, extending into the Himalayan foothills. During the last few decades West Bengal has recorded high rates of agricultural growth. It also has a strong industrial base which needs to be further strengthened and diversified.

Before we begin our detailed review of the situation of women in West Bengal, it would be useful to gain a broader perspective by looking at certain important socio-economic indicators which have been compiled in Tables S 1, S 2 and S 3. The first two Tables depict the position of West Bengal in an all-India context while the third presents a bird's eye view of regional variations within the state of West Bengal, based on available district level information.

West Bengal's population growth rate during 1991-2001 has been 1.8 per cent per year, lower than the all-India annual growth rate of 2.1 per cent. Similarly, levels of infant mortality, maternal mortality and total fertility are also well below the respective national averages. However, though the state's female literacy rate at 60 per cent is appreciably higher than the all-India proportion of 54 per cent, its worker-population ratio for women at 18 per cent is substantially lower than the all-India figure of about 26 per cent.

Since 1990 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been publishing Human Development Reports for a large number of countries, assessing the level of human development achieved by each through the yardstick of the Human Development Index or HDI, which is based on three important indicators : expectation of life at birth, educational attainment and per capita income. The HDR of 1995 introduced two new measures for evaluating the relative situation of women in a given country. The first is the Gender Development Index or the GDI, which is based on the same three indicators as the HDI but are differentiated for women and men, to be converted into a specific score that indicates the extent of gender-based disparities prevailing in a given country. The second is the Gender Empowerment Measure or GEM, which computes the extent to which women participate in economic and political decision making again, on the basis of certain chosen variables. All the three measures - HDI, GDI and GEM - can ideally reach a maximum score or value of 1. A study on state level GEM values in India has placed West Bengal in the 7<sup>th</sup> position in a list of 16 states. <sup>1</sup> Table S 2 provides estimates of HDI and GDI for different states of India, as computed by the Planning

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<sup>1</sup> Aasha Kapur Mehta, "Recasting Indices for Developing Countries : A Gender Empowerment Measure", *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW), 26 October 1996; p. WS-84.

Commission of Government of India in its National Human Development Report published in March 2002.<sup>2</sup>

Table S 2 shows that 27 per cent of the state's population (about 213.5 lakh) were reported to be living below the poverty line (BPL) in 2001 - almost at par with the national average - and the average per capita monthly expenditure in the state was estimated at Rs. 572 as against the national average of Rs. 591. Estimates based on National Sample Survey(NSS) findings show that BPL population in rural West Bengal declined from 41 to 32 per cent between 1993-94 (NSS % 50<sup>th</sup> Round) and 1999-2000 (NSS 55<sup>th</sup> Round) while in urban areas it declined from 7.4 per cent to 4.2 per cent<sup>3</sup> There is, of course, no gender-disaggregated data on poverty in the standard sources, but it is now being recognised that women usually constitute a majority among the poor.

Table S 3 presents district-wise estimates for population living below the poverty line, monthly per capita income and per capita district domestic product at current prices as computed by analysts. It also presents HDI and GDI scores and rankings for each district as computed in the West Bengal Human Development Report published by the Govt. of West Bengal in May 2004. The Child Survival Index has been calculated by the author of our source material by subtracting the relevant district level infant mortality rate from unity (or the score 1) and then using the resultant figure to arrive at the Child Survival Index as per the UNDP's method of computing the HDI. Predictably, Kolkata has the highest scores for all the indices, followed closely by Howrah, Hooghly and Darjeeling.

In the following six sections we present gender-based perspectives on (i) Demography. (ii) Health and Nutrition, (iii) Literacy and Education, (iv) Work Participation. (v) Violence and (vi) Empowerment. Wherever possible we attention to inter-district variations within West Bengal. The Annexures contain a brief 'Cameo of Women in Kolkata', apart from certain documents having a bearing on the situation of women in West Bengal.

It will be apparent, as we proceed, that substantial progress has been made towards desired goals. Yet much remains to be done. It is our hope that the emerging realities will provide scope for thought and action towards social advancement with gender equity, so that women of West Bengal can truly stand forth as :

"Culturally rooted, globally oriented  
Healthy, educated, self-reliant  
Secure in her home  
And safe outside  
With access  
    To all the rights of a citizen  
With opportunity  
    To contribute in all walks of life."

("Our Vision": National Commission for Women)

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<sup>2</sup> The indicators used in NHDR are slightly different from those used by UNDP; for example, for computing HDI, NHDR uses life expectation at one year of age together with infant mortality rate instead of life expectancy at birth taken by UNDP.

<sup>3</sup> R. Radhakrishnan and others, "Chronic Poverty and Malnutrition in 1990s", *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, 10 July 2004, Table 4, p. 3124.

**Table : S 1**  
**Demographic profile of West Bengal, India and selected states : 1991-2001**

| State            | popln.<br>growth<br>% p.a.<br>1991-01 | popln.<br>Density<br>sq km<br>2001 | urban<br>Popln.<br>%<br>2001 | Sex<br>Ratio<br>2001 | Infant<br>Mortality<br>Rate<br>1996 | Maternal<br>Mortality<br>Rate<br>1998 | literate population<br>% 2001 |       | working Population<br>% 2001 |       |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------|------------------------------|-------|
|                  |                                       |                                    |                              |                      |                                     |                                       | Men                           | Women | Men                          | women |
| (1)              | (2)                                   | (3)                                | (4)                          | (5)                  | (6)                                 | (7)                                   | (8)                           | (9)   | (10)                         | (11)  |
| Assam            | 1.9                                   | 340                                | 19.6                         | 932                  | 74                                  | 409                                   | 71.9                          | 56.0  | 49.9                         | 20.8  |
| Andhra Pradesh   | 1.4                                   | 275                                | 27.1                         | 972                  | 65                                  | 159                                   | 70.9                          | 51.2  | 56.4                         | 34.9  |
| Bihar            | 2.8                                   | 880                                | 10.5                         | 921                  | 71                                  | 452                                   | 60.3                          | 35.6  | 47.7                         | 18.8  |
| Gujarat          | 2.2                                   | 258                                | 37.4                         | 92                   | 61                                  | 10                                    | 80.5                          | 58.6  | 55.0                         | 28    |
| Haryana          | 2.8                                   | 477                                | 29.0                         | 861                  | 68                                  | 103                                   | 79.3                          | 56.3  | 50.5                         | 27.3  |
| Karnataka        | 1.7                                   | 275                                | 34.0                         | 964                  | 53                                  | 195                                   | 76.3                          | 57.5  | 56.9                         | 31.9  |
| Kerala           | 0.9                                   | 819                                | 26.0                         | 1058                 | 14                                  | 198                                   | 94.2                          | 87.9  | 50.4                         | 15.3  |
| Madhya Pradesh   | 2.4                                   | 196                                | 26.7                         | 920                  | 97                                  | 498                                   | 76.8                          | 50.3  | 51.6                         | 33.1  |
| Maharashtra      | 2.3                                   | 314                                | 42.4                         | 922                  | 48                                  | 135                                   | 86.3                          | 67.5  | 53.5                         | 32.6  |
| Orissa           | 1.6                                   | 236                                | 15.0                         | 972                  | 96                                  | 97                                    | 76                            | 51.0  | 52.8                         | 24.6  |
| Punjab           | 2                                     | 482                                | 34                           | 874                  | 51                                  | 367                                   | 75.6                          | 63.6  | 54.1                         | 18.7  |
| Rajasthan        | 2.8                                   | 165                                | 23.4                         | 922                  | 85                                  | 199                                   | 76.5                          | 44.3  | 50.1                         | 33.5  |
| Tamil Nadu       | 1.1                                   | 478                                | 43.9                         | 986                  | 53                                  | 76                                    | 82.3                          | 64.6  | 58.1                         | 31.3  |
| Uttar Pradesh    | 2.6                                   | 689                                | 20.8                         | 898                  | 85                                  | 707                                   | 70.2                          | 43.0  | 47.3                         | 16.3  |
| West Bengal      | 1.8                                   | 904                                | 28.0                         | 934                  | 55                                  | 266                                   | 77.6                          | 60.2  | 54.2                         | 18.1  |
| <b>All-India</b> | 2.1                                   | 324                                | 27.8                         | 933                  | 72                                  | 407                                   | 75.6                          | 54.2  | 51.9                         | 25.7  |

Note:- Working population is the total of main and marginal workers; maternal mortality rate is per one lakh live births.

Source:- Columns 2-5 & 8-11: COI, Provisional Population Tables : 2001.

Columns 6 & 7: COI, *Men and Women in India 2000*, Tables 16 & 19(b)

**Table S 2 : Estimates of poverty, human development and gender disparity :  
West Bengal, India and selected states: 1991-2001**

| <b>States</b>         | <b>Popn. below poverty line (%) 1999-2000</b> | <b>BPL persons (lakh) 1999-2000</b> | <b>p.c. p.m. consumption expenditure (Rs) 1999-2000</b> | <b>HDI score 1991 (32 states)</b> | <b>HDI Score 2001 (15 states)</b> | <b>HDI rank 2001</b> | <b>GDI rank 1991</b> | <b>Gender Disparity Index 1991 (32 States)</b> |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--|
| <b>Assam</b>          | 36.1  | 94.55                               | 473   | 0.348                             | 0.386                             | 14                   | 29                   | 0.575  |
| <b>Andhra Pradesh</b> | 15.8  | 119.01                              | 551   | 0.377                             | 0.416                             | 10                   | 8                    | 0.801  |
| <b>Bihar</b>          | 42.6  | 425.64                              | 417   | 0.308                             | 0.367                             | 15                   | 32                   | 0.469  |
| <b>Gujarat</b>        | 14.1  | 67.89                               | 678   | 0.431                             | 0.479                             | 6                    | 18                   | 0.714  |
| <b>Haryana</b>        | 8.7   | 17.34                               | 768   | 0.443                             | 0.509                             | 5                    | 19                   | 714  |
| <b>Karnataka</b>      | 20.0  | 104.40                              | 638   | 0.412                             | 0.478                             | 7                    | 15                   | 0.753  |
| <b>Kerala</b>         | 12.7  | 41.04                               | 817   | 0.591                             | 0.638                             | 1                    | 4                    | 0.825  |
| <b>Madhya Pradesh</b> | 37.4  | 298.54                              | 479   | 0.328                             | 0.394                             | 12                   | 25                   | 0.662  |
| <b>Maharashtra</b>    | 25.0  | 227.99                              | 697   | 0.452                             | 0.523                             | 4                    | 9                    | 0.793  |
| <b>Orissa</b>         | 47.1  | 169.09                              | 414   | 0.345                             | 0.404                             | 11                   | 27                   | 0.639  |
| <b>Punjab</b>         | 6.2   | 14.49                               | 792   | 0.411                             | 0.537                             | 2                    | 21                   | 0.710  |
| <b>Rajasthan</b>      | 15.3  | 818.3                               | 611   | 0.347                             | 0.424                             | 9                    | 22                   | 0.692  |
| <b>Tamil Nadu</b>     | 21.2  | 130.48                              | 681   | 0.466                             | 0.531                             | 3                    | 6                    | 0.813  |
| <b>U.P.</b>           | 31.1  | 529/89                              | 517   | 0.314                             | 0.388                             | 13                   | 31                   | 0.520  |
| <b>West Bengal</b>    | 27.0  | 213.49                              | 572   | 0.404                             | 0.472                             | 8                    | 28                   | 0.631  |
| <b>India</b>          | 26.1  | 2602.50                             | 591   | 0.472                             | 0.472                             |                      |                      | 0.676  |

Source : for HDI and GDI 1991 - Govt. of India, Planning Commission, *National Human Development Report 2001* (NHDR), Table 1.2 ; for HDI and GDI 2001 - NHDR p. 25; for per capita monthly expenditure - NHDR, Table 2.2; for poverty estimates -NHDR, Table 2.21.

**Table : S 3**  
**Estimates of poverty, per capita income, human development and gender development in**  
**West Bengal districts**

|                         | Population below poverty line (as per BPL survey of GOWB) |      | Per capita dist. domestic product at current prices (Rs. p.a.) | Human Development Index (HDI) |       | Gender Development Index (GDI) |       | Infant Survival Index |       |
|-------------------------|---|------|--|-------------------------------|-------|--------------------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|
|                         | 1997-1998   |      |  | 1993-1994                     | Score | Rank                           | Score | Rank                  | Score |
| (1)                     | (2)   | (3)  | (4)  | (5)                           | (6)   | (7)                            | (8)   | (9)                   | (10)  |
| <b>Bardhaman</b>        | 51.9  | 43.2 | 17537  | 0.64                          | 5     | 0.54                           | 7     | 0.528                 | 6     |
| <b>Birbhum</b>          | 50.4  | 40.3 | 12791  | 0.47                          | 14    | 0.42                           | 14    | 0.157                 | 13    |
| <b>Bankura</b>          | 55.5  | 62.6 | 15742  | 0.52                          | 11    | 0.46                           | 10    | 0.500                 | 7     |
| <b>Medinipur</b>        | 39.7  | 40.5 | 15526  | 0.62                          | 7     | 0.55                           | 5     | 0.357                 | 8     |
| <b>Howrah</b>           | 35.9  | 40.8 | 15591  | 0.68                          | 2     | 0.56                           | 3     | 0.757                 | 2     |
| <b>Hooghly</b>          | 47.8  | 38.7 | 16280  | 0.63                          | 6     | 0.56                           | 3     | 0.728                 | 3     |
| <b>24 Parganas (N)</b>  | 45.8  | 48.4 | 14768  | 0.66                          | 3     | 0.55                           | 5     | 0.300                 | 10    |
| <b>24 Parganas (S)</b>  | 43.4  | 43.0 | 13630  | 0.6                           | 8     | 0.51                           | 8     | 0.314                 | 9     |
| <b>Nadia</b>            | 43.5  | 47.1 | 16211  | 0.58                          | 9     | 0.49                           | 9     | 0.257                 | 12    |
| <b>Murshidabad</b>      | 40.5  | 37.0 | 13392  | 0.46                          | 15    | 0.41                           | 15    | 0.300                 | 10    |
| <b>Uttar Dinajpur</b>   | 47.1  | 40.5 | 11182  | 0.51                          | 13    | 0.46                           | 10    | 0.128                 | 14    |
| <b>Dakshin Dinajpur</b> | 56.3  | —    | 14579  | —                             | —     | —                              | —     | 0.128                 | 14    |
| <b>Malda</b>            | 47.0  | 46.5 | 14777  | 0.44                          | 17    | 0.39                           | 17    | 0.028                 | 15    |
| <b>Jalpaiguri</b>       | 33.0  | 49.9 | 16749  | 0.53                          | 10    | 0.45                           | 12    | 0.271                 | 11    |
| <b>Darjeeling</b>       | 34.2  | 73.9 | 18529  | 0.65                          | 4     | 0.57                           | 2     | 0.571                 | 5     |
| <b>Koch Behar</b>       | 34.2  | 63.1 | 13855  | 0.52                          | 11    | 0.45                           | 12    | 0.000                 | 16    |
| <b>Puruliya</b>         | 68.5  | 70.7 | 15742  | 0.45                          | 16    | 0.40                           | 16    | 0.614                 | 4     |
| <b>Kolkata</b>          | —   | —    | 33300  | 0.78                          | 1     | 0.59                           | 1     | 1.0                   | 1     |

Source:- For col. 2-3 and 9-10: Biswajit Chatterjee and Dilip Kumar Ghosh, *In Search of a District Development Index:2001*, Table 14, 14 (a), 27 (b); for col. 4-8 : WBHDR, Annexure Tables.

## CHAPTER - II

### PERSPECTIVES FROM DEMOGRAPHY

***"Births and deaths, marriage and divorce, contraception and abortion, family size and composition, education and illiteracy, employment and unpaid labour at home : (these) were the materials of demography and they were the measurable components of how women were faring in comparison with men and with women of other classes, other places, other times. Most important, (these) analyses had policy implications..."***

(Ruth Dixon Mueller, 1994, as cited in Harriet B. Presser and Gita Sen (eds), Women's Empowerment and Demographic Processes, 2000, p. 391.)

Women's position in a given society is closely linked with its prevalent demographic trends. Just as demographic attributes such as early marriage, early motherhood, high morbidity and low literacy levels can affect their progress towards empowerment, women's agency and empowerment too can influence demographic outcomes such as fertility patterns, infant mortality rates and child sex ratios. Quite often, a specific demographic feature reveals a radical aspect of women's over-all status in society, such as the female-male ratio in India's population, a sign of persistent female disadvantage. This chapter, therefore, looks at the situation of women in West Bengal from a broad demographic perspective.

#### **Population Growth**

In 1901 West Bengal's population (as per its current boundaries) stood at 17 million, rising to 68 million in 1991. As recorded in the last (2001) census, the total population of the state (41.5 million males and 38.7 million females) constituted about 8 per cent of India's population as contrasted to the state's three per cent share in the country's land area. The state's population growth rate showed a welcome decline from 24.7 per cent during 1981-91 to 17.8 during 1991-2001, more impressive than the corresponding decline at the all-India level from 23.9 to 21.3 per cent. Within West Bengal, Medinipur was the most populous district in 1991 as well as in 2001. As shown in Appendix Table AD 1, Medinipur was closely followed by several districts of South West Bengal, including North and South 24 Parganas. This Table also indicates the considerable variation in district level population growth during 1991-2001, from 1.4 per cent per year in Bankura, Purulia and Koch Behar to more than 2 per cent annual growth in the 24 Parganas, Dinajpur and Murshidabad.. It may be noted that some of the districts with high population growth rates are situated along the international boundaries of West Bengal, with sizeable immigration from across the borders contributing to their changing demographic profile.

## **Population Density, Urbanisation, Composition of Population**

West Bengal now has the dubious distinction of having the highest population density - 904 persons per square kilometre as against the national average of 324 persons. Table D I presents a demographic profile for West Bengal, India and 15 'major' states including population growth rates, population density, urbanisation. The other features - male-female ratio, infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, literacy level and work participation rate - will be discussed in the appropriate sections that follow.

From 1971 to 1991, the share of urban population in the state increased from about 25 to 27 per cent, while for India as a whole urbanisation was taking place at a faster pace, reaching 25.7 per cent from less than 20 per cent in 1971. Till 1991, urban population in certain districts of West Bengal constituted only 8 to 10 per cent of total population, including Koch Behar in North Bengal and Bankura and Purulia in South Bengal. Family migration into cities has also grown at a significant pace, specially in Kolkata and adjoining areas, with a substantial presence of women migrants. One dimension of rising population density and growing urbanisation is that it tends to affect the quality of life for women, in the context of a growing lack of civic amenities (shelter, sanitation, health care), specially in city slums, apart from rising levels of criminality and violence.

The population of West Bengal represents a mix of religions with Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs ( 63.4, 10.4, 0.2 and 0.07 per cent respectively in 1991), living in a traditional ambience of communal harmony. Muslims constitute a higher proportion of the population in rural areas (22 per cent) than in urban areas (6 per cent). Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes respectively formed 24 and a little less than six per cent of the state's population in 1991, vis-à-vis related all-India figures of 16.5 and 8 per cent.

### **Women-headed households**

Women-headed households tend to be a particularly disadvantaged segment of society and thus need a special place in development programmes. According to the findings of the 50<sup>th</sup> Round of National Sample Survey (NSS) held in 1993-94, West Bengal had about 11.6 and 4.6 million woman-headed households in rural and urban areas, accounting for roughly one-tenth of total households.

### **Women with disability**

It is estimated that about 2 per cent of the state's population suffer from some form of disability. The 47<sup>th</sup> Round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) reported 1484 and 1283 women with disability per one lakh female population in rural and urban areas of West Bengal in 1991, while the comparable all India figures were 1694 and 1361 <sup>1</sup>According to recently released official data, West Bengal has 18.47 lakh physically and mentally challenged persons, with 8.6 and 4.1 lakh suffering from sight related and mobility related conditions and 2.7 lakh from mental disability.<sup>2</sup> Of the total disabled, persons suffering from mental problems constitute 14.7 per cent, which is a higher proportion

than the comparable all-India figure of 10.3<sup>3</sup>. Studies have shown that disabled women are at a greater disadvantage than disabled men and non-disabled women but as emphasised in one study - undertaken by a Kolkata based researcher of considerable promise who is herself physically challenged- "Experiences have shown that a woman with disability can excel in her career as well as be a good home maker, wife and mother. They are able to perform all responsibilities expected of a typical stereotype image of a woman with some alteration in their physical environment as well as changed attitude of the people concerned."<sup>4</sup>

### **Age Distribution**

Between 1971 and 1991, the proportion of population under the age of 20 years fell marginally- both in India and West Bengal - in favour of the working age groups, indicating perhaps a slight fall in dependency ratios (relating to average number of (non-working) persons below 15 years and above 60 years taken together, that are dependant on a person of working age ).According to COI 1991, in West Bengal younger girl children up to 6 years, girl children aged 0-14 years, adolescent girls (11-18 years), women in the reproductive age group (15-45 years) and those in the economically active age group ( 15-59 years) accounted for 23.4, 37.5, 22.4, 60.3 and 74.7 per cent of the female population respectively. Older women aged 50 years and above constituted 12.5 per cent of the female population, a higher proportion than that found in the male population. This is now a worldwide trend and older women have to be recognised as a specially vulnerable social group as they are more likely to be widowed, physically infirm and lacking in assets, capabilities and kin support.

### **Life Expectancy at Birth (LEB)**

This variable is an important component of human development indices. Recent projections have shown that for both women and men, LEB in West Bengal have been rising steadily during the past few decades, though the female LEB continued to trail behind the male LEB. This situation changed during the 1990s when both converged and the female LEB overtook its male counterpart in 2001 by a significant margin, as shown in Table D 1. For India as a whole, the trends were similar, but the gain in female LEB was smaller. In 2001 female and male LEB for the state were estimated at 69 and 65 years respectively, both higher than the respective all-India levels of 65 and 64 years.<sup>5</sup> But as shown in our Appendix Table AD 2, certain districts in West Bengal still have a comparatively low LEB of less than 60 years (for example Malda, Koch Behar, Birbhum and Murshidabad), denoting relative backwardness.

**Table : D1**  
**Expectation of life at Birth (LEB) : West Bengal and India**  
**1987-91 to 2011-16**

| Year      | Male LEB (years) |       | Female LEB (years) |       |
|-----------|------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|
|           | W. Bengal        | India | W. Bengal          | India |
| 1987-91   | 60.6             | 58.1  | 62.0               | 58.6  |
| 1991-95   | 61.5             | 59.7  | 62.8               | 60.9  |
| 1996-2001 | 64.5             | 62.4  | 67.2               | 63.4  |
| 2001-06   | 66.1             | 64.1  | 69.3               | 65.4  |
| 2006-11   | 67.4             | 65.6  | 71.1               | 67.2  |
| 2011-16   | 68.6             | 66.9  | 72.0               | 68.8  |

Source : GOWB, *Statistical Abstract: West Bengal : 2000-2001*, Table 3.6;

#### Vital rates

A summary of vital rates is provided by Table D 2, with more detailed trends in Table D 3. During the last decade the birth rate in West Bengal fell from 28.2 to 20.5 per thousand, implying a decline (from 28.2 to 20.5) nearly double that observed in India as a whole.<sup>6</sup> During the same period the decline in the state's death rate (from 8.9 to 6.8 per thousand) too has been substantial, nearly one and a half times the national average. Rural and urban birth rates for West Bengal stood at 22.9 and 14.3 per 1000 respectively in 1998-99, markedly lower than the corresponding national averages of 27.6 and 20.8 per thousand. Rural and urban death rates in West Bengal in 1998-99 were 6.8 and 7.2 respectively, the all-India figures being 9.4 and 6.3.

**Table : D2**  
**Vital Rates : West Bengal and India : 1990-2001**

| Year | Birth Rate  |       | Death Rate  |       | Infant Mortality Rate |       |
|------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|
|      | West Bengal | India | West Bengal | India | West Bengal           | India |
| 1990 | 28.2        | 30.2  | 8.4         | 9.7   | 63                    | 80    |
| 1996 | 22.8        | 27.5  | 7.8         | 9.0   | 55                    | 72    |
| 2000 | 20.7        | 25.8  | 7.0         | 8.5   | 51                    | 68    |
| 2001 | 20.5        | 25.4  | 6.8         | 8.4   | 51                    | 66    |

Source : Govt. of West Bengal (GOWB), *West Bengal Human Development Report 2004 (WBHDR)*, Table 1.2.

**Table : D3**  
**Rural and Urban Death Rates : West Bengal and India**  
**1991 and 1998-99**

|                    | Birth rates per 1000 population |       |       | Death Rates per 1000 population |       |       |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|-------|-------|---------------------------------|-------|-------|
|                    | Rural                           | Urban | Total | Rural                           | Urban | Total |
| <b>1991</b>        |                                 |       |       |                                 |       |       |
| <b>West Bengal</b> | 30.3                            | 18.5  | 27.0  | 8.9                             | 6.7   | 8.3   |
| <b>India</b>       | 30.9                            | 24.3  | 29.5  | 10.6                            | 7.1   | 9.8   |
| <b>1998-99</b>     |                                 |       |       |                                 |       |       |
| <b>West Bengal</b> | 22.9                            | 14.3  | 20.7  | 6.8                             | 7.2   | 7.1   |
| <b>India</b>       | 27.6                            | 20.8  | 26.1  | 9.4                             | 6.3   | 8.7   |

Source : GOWB, *Family Welfare Statistics At A Glance 1995*, Table 9 and Second National Family Health Survey (NFHS 2) - India (1998-99), Tables 4.3 and 6.2

#### **Infant and Child Mortality**

Table D 5 shows that a number of significant indicators in terms of neonatal, infant, under-5 and child mortality rates (CMRs) were all well below the all-India figures in 1998-99, the difference in most cases amounting to more than 30 percentage points. The West Bengal IMR of that year was 49 per 1000 live births as compared to 68 for the country as a whole. These figures, however, have to be seen against India's National Population Policy goal of reducing IMR to 30 by 2010. Community-wise gender-based IMRs for rural and urban areas in West Bengal and India as a whole are shown in Table D 6. For each category (rural-urban/male- female ), ST and SC IMRs were higher in 1991 as compared to total population, even though these two communities fared marginally better in West Bengal. District-wise figures for male and female IMR, CMR and LEB will be found in Appendix table AD 1. Female disadvantage in survival, specially in the age group 0-4 years can be clearly seen in Appendix Table AD 3, with estimated death rates for this age group disaggregated by rural urban residence.

**Table : D4**  
**Infant and Child Mortality : West Bengal and India**

|    |   | SRS : 1991 |             | NFHS 2 : 1998-99 |       |
|----|---|------------|-------------|------------------|-------|
|    |   |            | West Bengal | West Bengal      | India |
| 1. | <b>Neo-natal Mortality Rate</b>               | R          | 48.0        | —                | —     |
|    |   | U          | 24.7        | —                | —     |
|    |   | R+U        | 43.6        | 31.9             | 43.4  |
| 2. | <b>Post-natal Mortality Rate</b>              | R          | 28.1        | —                | —     |
|    |   | U          | 21.9        | —                | —     |
|    |   | R+U        | 26.9        | 16.8             | 24.2  |
| 3. | <b>Infant Mortality Rate</b>                  | R+U        | 71          | 48.7             | 67.6  |
| 4. | <b>Under-5 Mortality Rate</b>                 | R+U        | —           | 67.6             | 94.9  |
| 5. | <b>Child Mortality Rate</b>                   | R+U        | —           | 19.9             | 29.3  |
| 6. | <b>Still Birth Rate<br/>(per 1000 births)</b> | R          | 13.6        | —                | —     |
|    |   | U          | 7.2         | —                | —     |
|    |   | R+U        | 12.4        | —                | —     |

Note : SRS : Sample Registration System.

Sl. 1: Probability of dying within the first month of life.

Sl. 2: Difference between infant mortality and neo natal mortality (or infant deaths between 28 days & one year)

Sl. 3: Probability of dying between birth and exact age of 1 year

Sl. 4: Probability of dying between birth & 5<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Sl. 5: Probability of dying between 1<sup>st</sup> & 5th birthdays.

All five rates are calculated per 1000 live births.

Source : Govt. of West Bengal, *Family Welfare Statistics At a Glance: West Bengal (1995)*, Table 15; NFHS 2, *West Bengal Preliminary Report, August 2000*, Table 16 and NFHS 2 India (1998-99), Table 6.6.

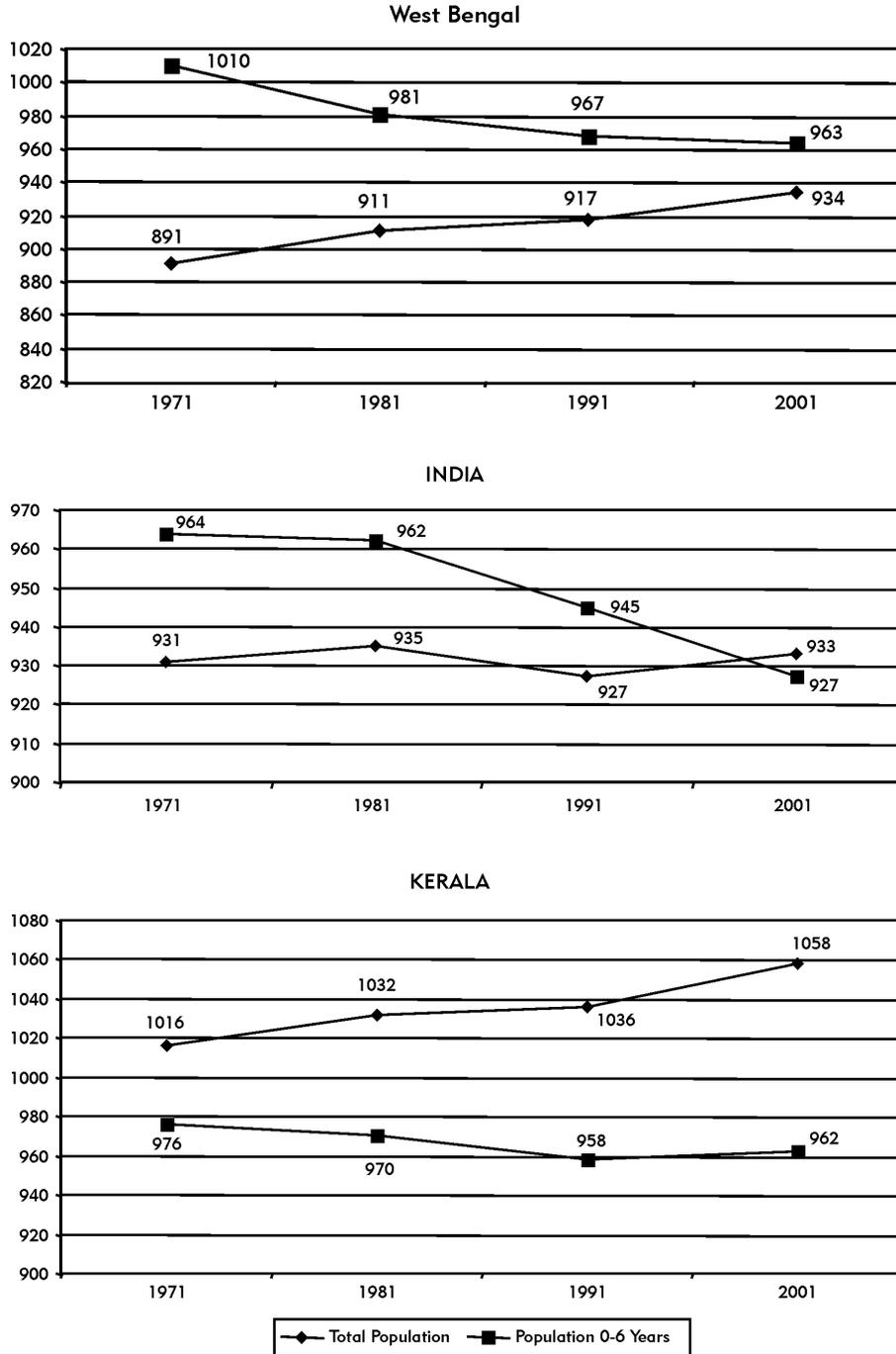
**Table : D5**  
**Community-wise Infant Mortality Rates : West Bengal and India**  
**1991 Census**

|              | IMR (General) |        |       |        | IMR (ST)  |       | IMR (SC)  |       |
|--------------|---------------|--------|-------|--------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|
|              | W. Bengal     |        | India |        | W. Bengal | India | W. Bengal | India |
|              | Male          | Female | Male  | Female |           |       |           |       |
| <b>Total</b> | 65            | 69     | 71    | 75     | 77        | 88    | 84        | 72    |
| <b>Rural</b> | 70            | 74     | 79    | 82     | 78        | 89    | 89        | 75    |
| <b>Urban</b> | 52            | 48     | 48    | 48     | 56        | 70    | 62        | 56    |

Source : S. Irudaya Rajan & P. Mahanachandran, "Infant and Child Mortality Estimates-Part I", EPW, 9 May 1998, pp. 1120-1140.

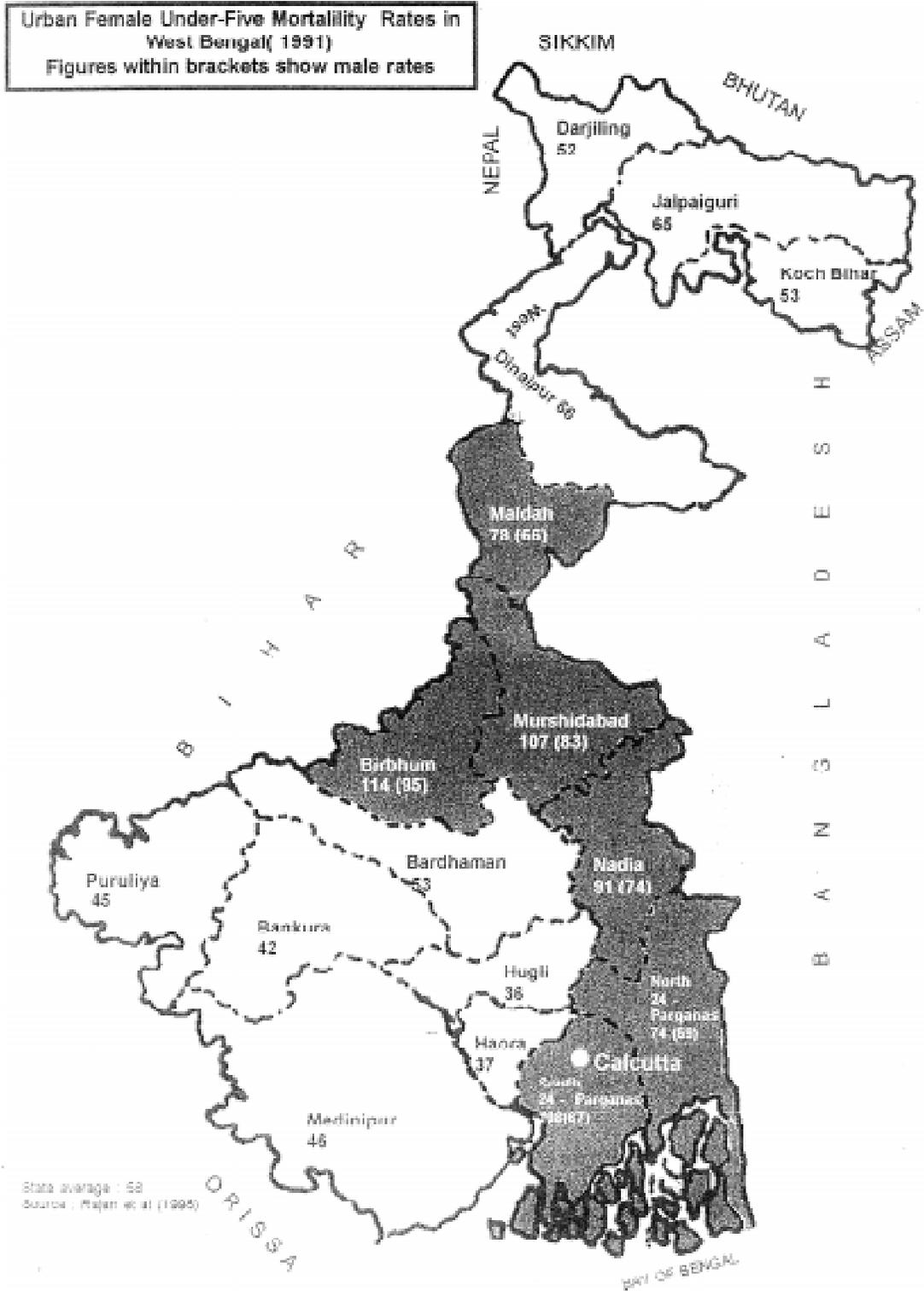
A welcome trend in West Bengal is the fall in the under-five mortality rates ; a decline of 24 per cent between 1981 and 1991. However, average figures seem to conceal a disturbing feature, as shown in Agnihotri's recent study of gender-differentiated mortality patterns in West Bengal districts, based on 1991 census data. The six districts of West Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia and North and South 24 Parganas are seen to form a contiguous cluster of high mortality rates for under-five girls, ranging from 66 to 107 in the urban localities of these districts. In contrast, the comparable male rates varied between 47 and 74. This pattern can be seen in our District Mortality Map reproduced from the above study.<sup>7</sup> This finding obviously calls for closer scrutiny and more focussed remedial action.

**Chart : D1**  
**Trends in Sex Ratio : India, West Bengal and Kerala : 1971-2001**  
**Sex Ratio - Females/1000 Males (Census Years)**



Source : Sarala Gopalan, *Towards Equality : The Unfinished Agenda*, p. 62-65

**Map : II**  
**Under-Five Mortality in West Bengal Districts**



## Female-Male Ratio (FMR)

India is known to be one of the few countries with a female-male ratio (FMR : females per 1000 males; or sex ratio/SR) that has continued to be adverse to women. The disadvantages surrounding Indian women's capacity to survive that leads to this imbalance, are rooted in a complex web of socio-cultural factors. While gender-based differentials in mortality are seen by some as the main cause behind low FMRs, others have traced the roots of these differentials to an ethos of discrimination against women, which is manifested in their unequal access to life supporting resources such as food, nutrition and health care, specially during childhood. <sup>8</sup> Widespread gender-biased practices thus serve to distort the FMRs among child populations of various ages, finally culminating in the male dominant FMR of our population.

Table D 6 shows the trends in the general and child sex ratios (CSR : pertaining to the age group 0-6 years) for West Bengal, India and selected states. Historically the West Bengal FMR has been adverse for women to a greater extent as compared to the all-India situation but there has also been a secular rise in the state's FMR so that it is now marginally above the all-India FMR. During 1991-2001 West Bengal recorded the fourth largest gain in the FMR/SR, rising from 917 to 934 while the all-India FMR/SR showed a comparatively small gain from 927 to 933. Kerala remains the only state with an SR that is well above 1000. These trends are illustrated in the preceding Chart D 1. According to the 1991 census the SR for Scheduled Tribe (ST) population in West Bengal stood at 964 ( as compared to 972 for all-India) and that for Scheduled Caste (SC) population was 931 (vis-à-vis 922 for all-India). District-wise SRs as well as CSRs will be found in Appendix Table AD 1, which provides detailed demographic profiles for each of the districts of West Bengal.

**Table : D6**

**Trends in Sex Ratio (SR) and Child Sex Ratio (CSR) for West Bengal India and selected states**

|                    | Sex Ratio (SR) |      |      |      |                     | Child Sex Ratio (CSR)<br>Age 0-6 years |      |                     |
|--------------------|----------------|------|------|------|---------------------|--|------|---------------------|
|                    | 1951           | 1971 | 1991 | 2001 | change<br>1991-2001 | 1991                                   | 2001 | change<br>1991-2001 |
| <b>Bihar</b>       | 1054           | 954  | 907  | 921  | 14                  | 953                                    | 938  | -15                 |
| <b>Gujarat</b>     | 952            | 934  | 934  | 921  | -13                 | 928                                    | 878  | -50                 |
| <b>Karnataka</b>   | 966            | 957  | 960  | 964  | 4                   | 960                                    | 949  | -11                 |
| <b>Kerala</b>      | 1028           | 1016 | 1036 | 1058 | 22                  | 958                                    | 963  | 5                   |
| <b>Maharashtra</b> | 941            | 930  | 934  | 922  | -12                 | 946                                    | 917  | -29                 |
| <b>Mizoram</b>     | 1041           | 946  | 958  | 878  | 20                  | 969                                    | 971  | 2                   |
| <b>Orissa</b>      | 1022           | 988  | 971  | 972  | 1                   | 967                                    | 950  | -17                 |

|                      | Sex Ratio (SR) |      |      |      |                     | Child Sex Ratio (CSR)<br>Age 0-6 years |      |                     |
|----------------------|----------------|------|------|------|---------------------|--|------|---------------------|
|                      | 1951           | 1971 | 1991 | 2001 | change<br>1991-2001 | 1991                                   | 2001 | change<br>1991-2001 |
| <b>Punjab</b>        | 844            | 865  | 882  | 874  | -8                  | 875                                    | 793  | -82                 |
| <b>Tamil Nadu</b>    | 921            | 911  | 974  | 986  | 12                  | 948                                    | 939  | -9                  |
| <b>Rajasthan</b>     | 1007           | 978  | 910  | 922  | 12                  | 916                                    | 909  | -7                  |
| <b>Uttar Pradesh</b> | 910            | 879  | 879  | 898  | 22                  | 927                                    | 916  | -11                 |
| <b>W. Bengal</b>     | 865            | 891  | 917  | 934  | 17                  | 967                                    | 963  | -4                  |
| <b>All-India</b>     | 946            | 930  | 927  | 933  | 6                   | 945                                    | 927  | -18                 |

Source : K.Srinivasan, "Sex Ratios : What They Hide and What They Reveal", EPW, 17-24 December 1994, Table 1 and Mahendra K.Premi, "The Missing Girl Child", EPW, 26 May 2001, Table 2.

### Child Sex Ratio

Child sex ratios are recognised to be a better indicator of women's position, because it is very unlikely that they would be vitiated by sex-selective migration trends. In a population unaffected by bias against girl children ( as evident, for example in female infanticide and foeticide), the CSR would favour girls since girls are endowed by nature to be the stronger sex. This indeed was true of West Bengal till 1971. It is a cause for grave concern that that in West Bengal the SR for children aged up to six years has declined from 1007 in 1971 to 963 in 2001 : " the imbalance that has set in at this early age group is difficult to be removed and would remain to haunt the population for a long time to come".<sup>9</sup> Ashis Bose would like to coin the acronym BIMARU, "where D stands for daughters and MARU stands for killing " and on the basis of a statistical cut-off level of 50 points decline in CSR between 1991 and 2001, this marker would apply to Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. <sup>10</sup>For West Bengal, however, the fall in the CSR (0-6 years) at minus 4 per cent was relatively negligible, as shown in Table D 6. Analysts have drawn attention to two possible factors behind the falling CSRs : the SR at birth (SRB : male live births per 1000 female live births) has become more biased against females due to the continuing pressure of son preference and secondly, the female age-specific death rates (ASDR) for the age groups 0-4 years and 5-9 years have been found to be higher than the corresponding male rates. In West Bengal, for example, mortality rates for boys and girls in the first group were 18.1 and 18.7 respectively and in the second age group, 1.7 and 2.1 respectively in 1994., pointing to the neglect/deprivation faced by the girl child <sup>11</sup>; again, the Sample Registration System (SRS) under the Census of India (COI) estimated the West Bengal and India SRBs at 105.6 and 109.5 respectively in 1991.

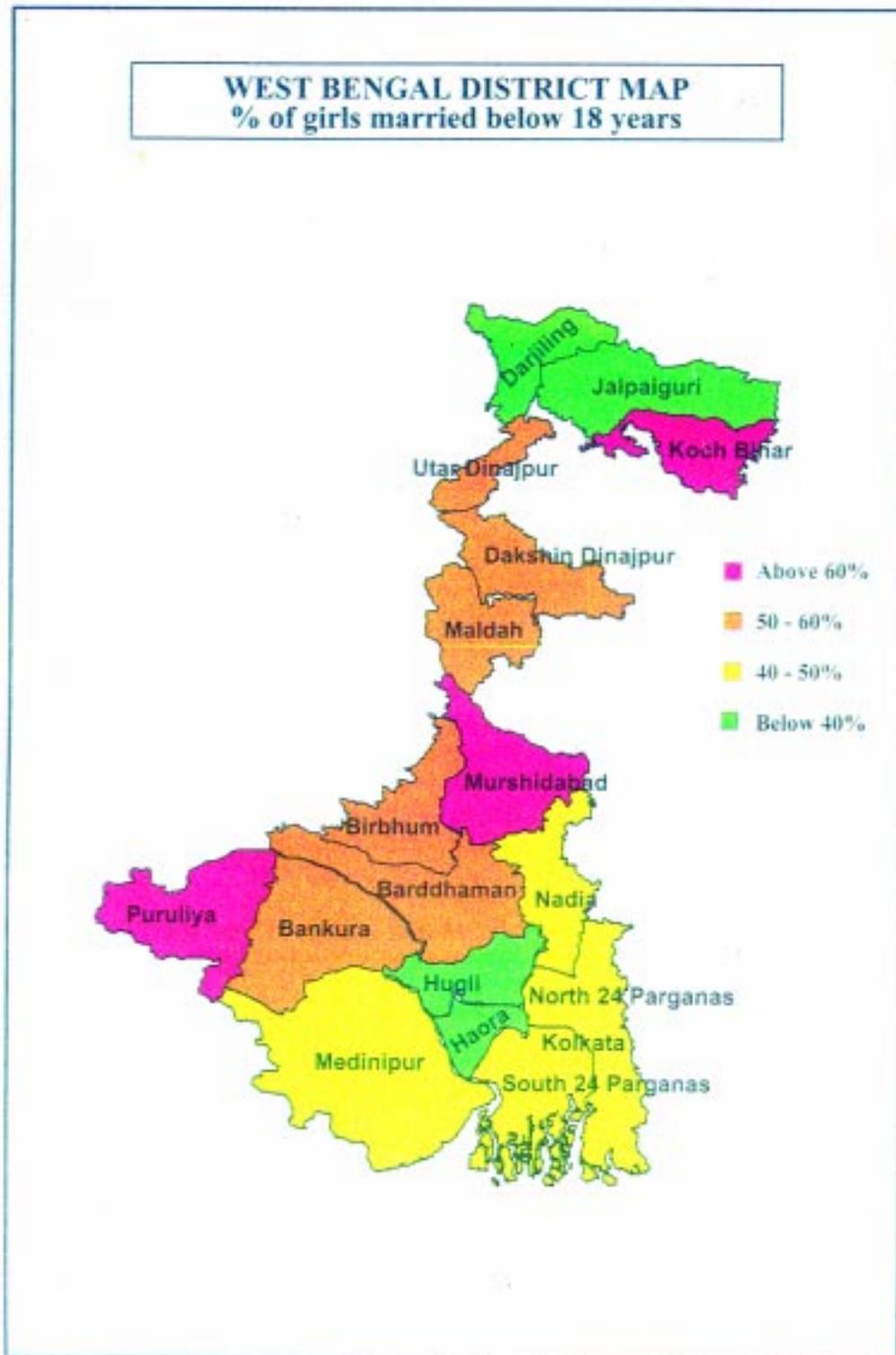
## **Marital Status**

The proportions of never-married, ever-married and widowed persons in four different age groups in West Bengal and India are shown in Table D 7, based on the 1991 census. (According to census data, the divorced/separated form a very small category, both among men and women.) According to the 1991 Census, very few persons were married in the age group of 0-14 years (only 0.3 per cent among males and 0.6 per cent among females ) ; but in the next age group of 15-19 years, over one-third of women were married in both West Bengal and India. In this group, marriage was rare among men in West Bengal but not so in India as a whole. In the age group 20-29 years, almost 90 per cent of all women had been married in the state as well as in India though more than half the men were still unmarried in West Bengal, a substantially higher figure as compared to the national average. As expected, a much higher proportion of urban women aged 20-24 remained unmarried in 1991 (37 per cent) as compared to rural women of the same age (about 12 per cent).

Appendix Table AD 4 is based on data from the 1991 census and shows the percentages of married and widowed persons in West Bengal districts. These data show that in all districts there was a rising trend in the proportion of rural women remaining unmarried at least up to the age of 20 years during 1971-1991. There was also a declining trend across districts in the proportion of currently married women who were married before the legal age of 18 years. In West Bengal as a whole this proportion declined to 48 per cent in 1991 ( from 56 in 1981); but there were still a number of districts where went up to more than 60 per cent. The following Early Marriage Map shows this varying pattern

As Table D 7 shows, women's marital status seems to change conspicuously when they enter the age group of 50-69 years : in 1991 over 40 per cent women belonging to this group were widowed. For India this particular proportion was lower, but in West Bengal as well as in India as a whole, the proportions of widowed men were much smaller. One and a half century ago Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar - Bengal's great social reformer - drew poignant attention to the situation of widows and pioneered the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. Widowed women have traditionally been one of the most vulnerable groups in society, for economic as well as cultural reasons, though lately more enlightened social mores and attitudes can be observed in West Bengal, specially in urban areas, and perhaps better prospects of economic security." There are intimate links between the predicament of Indian widows and a wide range of patriarchal institutions such as patrilineal inheritance, patrilocal residence and the gender division of labour. The cause of widows must be seen as an integral part of the broader battle against gender inequalities."<sup>12</sup>

**Map : III**  
**Early Marriage among Women in West Bengal Districts**



**Table : D7****Distribution of male and female population by age-group and marital status: W. Bengal and India : 1991**

| Age-Group          | Never-Married |       | Married |       | Widowed |       |
|--------------------|---------------|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|
|                    | Men           | Women | Men     | Women | Men     | Women |
| <b>15-19 years</b> |               |       |         |       |         |       |
| <b>West Bengal</b> | 96.3          | 66.3  | 3.6     | 33.0  | 0.03    | 0.2   |
| <b>India</b>       | 90.0          | 64.3  | 9.4     | 35.3  | 0.02    | 0.2   |
| <b>20-29 years</b> |               |       |         |       |         |       |
| <b>West Bengal</b> | 55.0          | 13.0  | 44.6    | 84.9  | 0.2     | 1.1   |
| <b>India</b>       | 42.8          | 10.8  | 56.4    | 87.7  | 0.5     | 0.9   |
| <b>30-49 years</b> |               |       |         |       |         |       |
| <b>West Bengal</b> | 7.7           | 2.1   | 91.0    | 89.4  | 0.9     | 7.5   |
| <b>India</b>       | 4.6           | 1.2   | 93.3    | 92.5  | 1.8     | 5.6   |
| <b>50-69 years</b> |               |       |         |       |         |       |
| <b>West Bengal</b> | 3.0           | 0.9   | 91.0    | 55.5  | 5.7     | 43.1  |
| <b>India</b>       | 2.3           | 0.7   | 88.9    | 66.5  | 8.4     | 32.4  |

Source : Census of India 1991, Social and Cultural Tables.

### Mean Age at Marriage

The average age at which women are married assumes importance because early marriage carries with it the enhanced possibility of early pregnancy and attendant complications, which in turn affect the health of both mother and child. Census data show that during 1971-91, the mean age of marriage for women in West Bengal went up from 18 to 19.7 years while that for men increased from 24.6 to 25.9 years : all these estimates being higher than corresponding all-India estimates ( 17.2 and 19 years for women and 22.6 and 24 years for men). Table D 8 shows that in 1998-99 the mean age for marriage for women in the state and in India as a whole were almost identical at 19.6 and 19.7 years while that for men were found to be 26.2 and 24.9 years respectively; it also shows the rural-urban disparities, the mean age at marriage for rural girls in the state being just above the legal age of 18 years while that for urban girls being slightly more than 22 years.

An NGO Meet on Empowerment of Women was held in Kolkata on 3 June 2004, under the joint auspices of the National Commission of Women (NCW) and the West Bengal Commission for Women (WBCW), its distinctive feature being a day-long Interactive Meeting with 40 assembled NGOs (hereafter referred to as Kolkata NGO Meeting). Several NGOs voiced the need for compulsory registration of marriages in West Bengal as a deterrent to marriage below the legal age of 18 years. They also wanted compulsory production of birth certificates as proof of age at the time of marriage registration.

**Table : D8**  
**Mean Age at Marriage in West Bengal and India : 1991 and 1998-99**

|              | Census 1991 |      | NFHS 2 1998-99 |      |       |      |       |      |
|--------------|-------------|------|----------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|
|              | M           | F    | rural          |      | urban |      | total |      |
|              |             |      | M              | F    | M     | F    | M     | F    |
| <b>W.B.</b>  | 25.9        | 19.7 | 25.2           | 18.7 | 29.0  | 22.4 | 26.2  | 19.6 |
| <b>India</b> | 24.0        | 19.3 | 24.2           | 19.0 | 26.5  | 21.5 | 24.9  | 19.7 |

Source : NFHS 2 - India, Table 2.4

### Fertility Levels

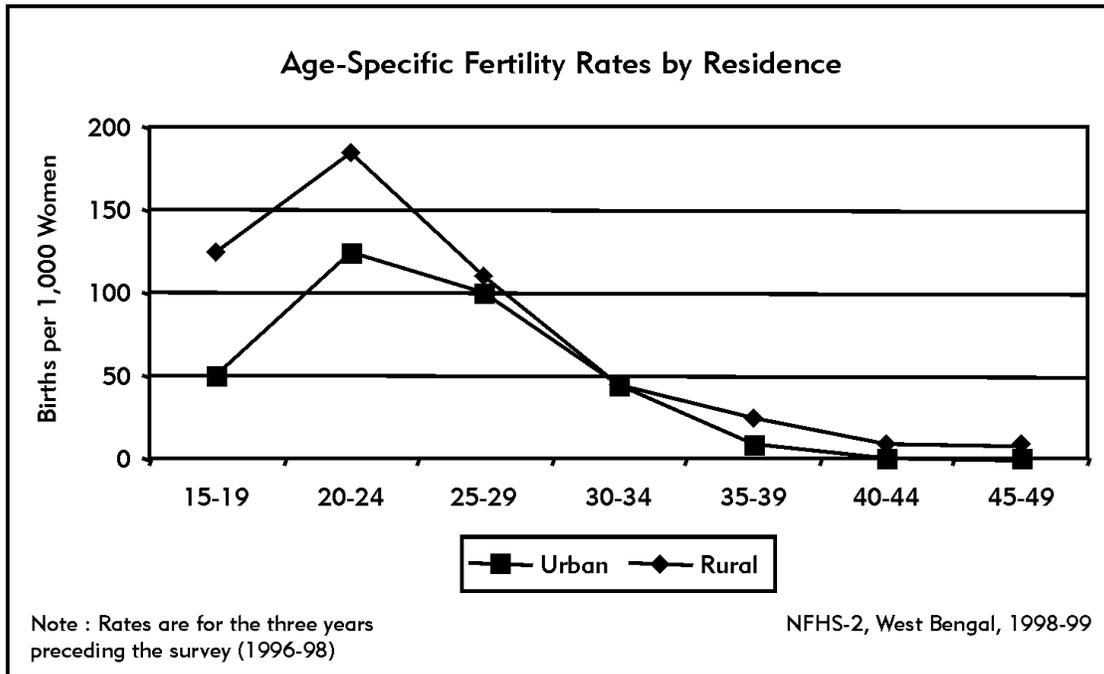
Table D 9 carries estimates of age-specific fertility rates (ASFR), total fertility rates (TFR) and crude birth rates (CBR) for the three year spans preceding the first and the second NFHS. TFR is the most commonly used measure of fertility, calculated on the basis of the ASFRs and represents the number of children a women would bear during her reproductive years. Our Table shows that in West Bengal TFR fell from 2.92 to 2.29 between the first and the second NFHS, a decline of 22 per cent. In 1998-99, both the TFR and CBR were found to be 50 per cent higher in rural as compared to urban areas and 70 per cent of urban fertility and 60 per cent of rural fertility were found to be concentrated in the prime childbearing ages of 20-29. Fertility at age 15-19 years accounted for about one-fourth of the total fertility level, pointing to a substantial occurrence of early childbearing. According to NFHS 2, at current levels of fertility, women in West Bengal will have on average 2.3 children each ( one of the lowest fertility levels in the country), and will soon approach the replacement level of just over two children per woman. Age-specific fertility rates for rural and urban West Bengal are shown in Chart D II. A summary of state level TFRs and West Bengal's relatively better position will be found in Table S 1 ( in Section 1).

**Table : D9**  
**Fertility Indicators from NFHS-1 and NFHS-2**  
**West Bengal and India**

| Age (years)                      | NFHS 1 (1989-91)  | NFHS 2 (1996-98) |       |                   |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------|-------------------|
|                                  | Total             | Urban            | Rural | Total             |
| <b>15-19</b>                     | 0.123             | 0.049            | 0.125 | 0.107             |
| <b>20-24</b>                     | 0.202             | 0.133            | 0.185 | 0.173             |
| <b>TFR 15-49</b>                 | 2.92 (India 3.39) | 1.69             | 2.49  | 2.29 (India 2.85) |
| <b>CBR (per 1000 population)</b> | 25.59             | 15.1             | 22.7  | 20.8 (India 24.8) |

Source : NFHS 2 -India, Table 4.3; NFHS 2 - West Bengal, Table 4.

Chart : D II



<sup>1</sup> Govt. of India (GOI), Planning Commission, *National Human Development Report 2001*, March 2002, p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> *The Telegraph*, 10 August 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *The Telegraph*, 20 August 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Jeeja Ghosh, *Services for Girls and Young Women with Disabilities in Kolkata*, Occasional Paper No. 6, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, May 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Govt. of West Bengal (hereafter GOWB), Department of Development and Planning, *Human Development Report of West Bengal 2004* (hereafter WBHDR), May 2004.

<sup>6</sup> National Family Health Survey (hereafter NFHS) 2, India, Tables 4.3 and 6.2.

<sup>7</sup> S.B. Agnihotri, "Infant Mortality Variation in Space and Time : Analysis of West Bengal Data", EPW, 8 September 2001, p. 3474.

<sup>8</sup> Satish Balram Agnihotri, *Sex Ratio Patterns in the Indian Population : A Fresh Exploration*, New Delhi 2000, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> See Ashis Bose, "Census of India and After", *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW), 19 May 2001, p. 1687.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Mahendra K. Premi, "The Missing Girl Child", EPW, 26 May 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Marty Chen and Jean Dreze, "Recent Research on Widows in India", EPW, 30 September 1995, p. 2448.

**Appendix Table : AD 1**  
**Demographic Profile : West Bengal Districts : 1991 and 2001**

| Districts              | Male Popn. (000) | Female Popn. (000) | Popn. Growth Rate (% p.a.) | Urban Popn. (%) | ST Popn. (%) | SC Popn. (%) | Sex Ratio  |            | Child Sex Ratio |            |
|------------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
|                        | 2001             | 2001               | 1991-2001                  | 2001            | 1991         | 1991         | 1991       | 2001       | 1991            | 2001       |
| <b>West Bengal</b>     | <b>35511</b>     | <b>32567.3</b>     | <b>1.8</b>                 | <b>28.0</b>     | <b>5.6</b>   | <b>23.6</b>  | <b>917</b> | <b>934</b> | <b>967</b>      | <b>963</b> |
| Bardhaman              | 3186.8           | 2863.8             | 1.4                        | 37.1            | 6.2          | 27.5         | 899        | 921        | 959             | 960        |
| Birbhum                | 1313.3           | 1242.4             | 1.8                        | 8.6             | 7.0          | 30.7         | 946        | 949        | 976             | 969        |
| Bankura                | 1437.5           | 1367.6             | 1.4                        | 7.4             | 10.3         | 31.4         | 951        | 953        | 982             | 955        |
| Medinipur              | 4284.9           | 4046.9             | 1.6                        | 10.5            | 8.3          | 16.3         | 944        | 955        | 953             | 951        |
| Howrah                 | 1982.5           | 1747.2             | 1.5                        | 50.4            | 0.3          | 15.8         | 881        | 906        | 962             | 959        |
| Hooghly                | 2271.8           | 2083.4             | 1.6                        | 33.5            | 4.0          | 24.1         | 917        | 947        | 960             | 951        |
| <b>24 Parganas (N)</b> | <b>3818.2</b>    | <b>3463.7</b>      | <b>2.3</b>                 | <b>54.3</b>     | <b>2.3</b>   | <b>21.5</b>  | <b>907</b> | <b>927</b> | <b>969</b>      | <b>961</b> |
| <b>24 Parganas (S)</b> | <b>2662.2</b>    | <b>2752.8</b>      | <b>2.1</b>                 | <b>15.8</b>     | <b>1.2</b>   | <b>34.4</b>  | <b>929</b> | <b>938</b> | <b>973</b>      | <b>969</b> |
| Nadia                  | 198.9            | 1862.3             | 2.0                        | 21.3            | 2.3          | 29.0         | 936        | 947        | 983             | 975        |
| Murshidabad            | 2439.3           | 2300.8             | 2.4                        | 12.5            | 1.3          | 13.4         | 943        | 952        | 977             | 975        |
| Uttar Dinajpur         | 987.8            | 909.3              | 2.2                        | 12.1            | 9.8          | 29           | 921        | 937        | 966             | 973        |
| Dakshin Dinajpur       | 632.9            | 597.6              | 2.9                        | 13.1            | —            | —            | 944        | 950        | 988             | 968        |
| Malda                  | 1360.5           | 1276.5             | 2.5                        | 7.3             | 6.5          | 18.1         | 938        | 948        | 976             | 967        |
| Jalpaiguri             | 1453.2           | 1347.3             | 2.2                        | 17.7            | 21.0         | 37.0         | 927        | 941        | 973             | 972        |
| Darjeeling             | 679.3            | 620.6              | 2.4                        | 32.4            | 13.7         | 16.2         | 914        | 943        | 976             | 971        |
| Koch Behar             | 1122.3           | 1048.8             | 1.4                        | 9.1             | 0.6          | 51.7         | 935        | 949        | 967             | 968        |
| Puruliya               | 1142.8           | 1081.8             | 1.4                        | 10.1            | 19.2         | 19.4         | 947        | 953        | 969             | 967        |
| <b>Kolkata</b>         | <b>244.5</b>     | <b>1954.5</b>      | <b>0.4</b>                 | <b>100.0</b>    | <b>0.2</b>   | <b>6.5</b>   | <b>799</b> | <b>828</b> | <b>955</b>      | <b>—</b>   |

Source: - GOWB, *Statistical Abstract: West Bengal: 2001-2002.*, Tables 1.4, 1.5, 1.6;

WBHDR, Table 1.1, p:10 ; COI, Provisional Population Totals of West Bengal, Table: A-2.

**Appendix Table : AD 2**  
**Life Expectancy at Birth, Infant Mortality and Child Mortality**  
**West Bengal Districts : 1991 and 2001**

|                        | Life Expectancy at |           | Infant Mortality per 1000 |           | Child Mortality |            |
|------------------------|--------------------|-----------|---------------------------|-----------|-----------------|------------|
|                        | Birth: 1991        |           | Births: 1991              |           | (age 1-5 years) |            |
|                        | Male               | Female    | Male                      | Female    | Male            | Female     |
| <b>Darjeeling</b>      | 61                 | 67        | 54                        | 58        | 74              | 81         |
| <b>Jalpaiguri</b>      | 63                 | 61        | 80                        | 72        | 109             | 108        |
| <b>Koch Behar</b>      | 57                 | 53        | 92                        | 91        | 129             | 127        |
| <b>Dinajpur</b>        | 63                 | 61        | 88                        | 74        | 117             | 111        |
| <b>Malda</b>           | 55                 | 54        | 91                        | 106       | 132             | 152        |
| <b>Murshidabad</b>     | 60                 | 58        | 74                        | 75        | 115             | 124        |
| <b>Birbhum</b>         | 58                 | 56        | 74                        | 78        | 93              | 101        |
| <b>Bardhaman</b>       | 71                 | 68        | 53                        | 54        | 65              | 68         |
| <b>Nadia</b>           | 65                 | 63        | 74                        | 72        | 94              | 114        |
| <b>24 Parganas (N)</b> | 71                 | 66        | 63                        | 73        | 78              | 88         |
| <b>24 Parganas (S)</b> | 70                 | 65        | 72                        | 89        | 96              | 124        |
| <b>Howrah</b>          | 73                 | 70        | 32                        | 47        | 46              | 57         |
| <b>Hooghly</b>         | 73                 | 69        | 36                        | 36        | 45              | 45         |
| <b>Bankura</b>         | 68                 | 72        | 53                        | 59        | 63              | 75         |
| <b>Puruliya</b>        | 63                 | 60        | 59                        | 57        | 76              | 77         |
| <b>Medinipur</b>       | 67                 | 65        | 63                        | 66        | 86              | 94         |
| <b>Kolkata</b>         | 75                 | 64        | 24                        | 26        | 28              | 31         |
| <b>West Bengal</b>     | <b>69</b>          | <b>65</b> | <b>65</b>                 | <b>69</b> | <b>84</b>       | <b>92</b>  |
| <b>India</b>           | <b>65</b>          | <b>64</b> | <b>71</b>                 | <b>75</b> | <b>93</b>       | <b>103</b> |

Source : WBHDR, Table1.3, p:12; S.Irudaya Rajan & P. Mahanachandran, "Infant and Child Mortality Estimates-Part I", EPW, 9th May 1998, pp:1121-1140.

**Appendix table : AD 3**  
**Estimated death rates for children aged 0-4 years by sex and residence**  
**India and major states : 1994 (excluding J & K )**

| States           | Total        |             |             | Rural       |             |             | Urban       |             |             |
|------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                  | Total        | Males       | Females     | Total       | Males       | Females     | Total       | Males       | Females     |
| Andhra Pradesh   | 17.0         | 19.0        | 14.9        | 18.2        | 21.3        | 15.0        | 13.6        | 12.5        | 14.7        |
| Assam            | 24.7         | 26.2        | 23.1        | 24.9        | 26.8        | 23.1        | 21.7        | 19.3        | 24.2        |
| Bihar            | 24.9         | 24.5        | 25.3        | 25.1        | 24.8        | 25.4        | 22.7        | 21.1        | 24.5        |
| Gujarat          | 22.2         | 20.6        | 24.0        | 24.8        | 22.6        | 27.4        | 16.6        | 16.6        | 16.6        |
| Haryana          | 2.3          | 19.1        | 26.1        | 22.5        | 19.0        | 26.5        | 21.8        | 19.5        | 24.6        |
| Himachal Pradesh | 16.0         | 14.5        | 17.7        | 16.3        | 14.7        | 18.2        | 11.8        | 12.2        | 11.4        |
| Karnataka        | 18.6         | 19.7        | 17.4        | 21.0        | 21.9        | 20.1        | 12.8        | 14.5        | 11.1        |
| Kerala           | 3.4          | 3.6         | 3.2         | 3.2         | 3.3         | 3.1         | 4.1         | 4.7         | 3.4         |
| Madhya Pr.       | 43.8         | 34.6        | 34.9        | 38.7        | 38.6        | 38.7        | 16.9        | 16.2        | 17.7        |
| Maharashtra      | 14.4         | 15.3        | 13.4        | 17.4        | 18.3        | 16.4        | 10.0        | 10.9        | 9.1         |
| Orissa           | 31.6         | 31.2        | 32.2        | 33.2        | 32.3        | 34.1        | 19.4        | 21.8        | 16.9        |
| Punjab           | 15.7         | 14.0        | 12.7        | 18.0        | 15.9        | 20.4        | 10.3        | 9.7         | 11.1        |
| Rajasthan        | 27.4         | 27.4        | 27.3        | 28.6        | 28.8        | 28.3        | 21.4        | 20.6        | 22.3        |
| Tamil Nadu       | 13.4         | 13.3        | 13.5        | 14.0        | 13.5        | 14.6        | 11.8        | 12.7        | 10.8        |
| U.P.             | 33.0         | 31.3        | 34.9        | 34.7        | 32.7        | 37.0        | 23.2        | 23.2        | 23.2        |
| <b>W.Bengal</b>  | <b>19.8</b>  | <b>18.5</b> | <b>21.2</b> | <b>20.9</b> | <b>20.0</b> | <b>21.8</b> | <b>15.6</b> | <b>12.7</b> | <b>18.6</b> |
| <b>India</b>     | <b>23.97</b> | <b>23.6</b> | <b>24.2</b> | <b>26.1</b> | <b>25.7</b> | <b>26.5</b> | <b>15.7</b> | <b>15.8</b> | <b>15.6</b> |

Source : Registrar General of India (1995), as cited in Sarala Gopalan, *Towards Equality : The Unfinished Agenda : Status of Women in India 2001* (2002), p. 75.

**Appendix Table : AD 4**  
**Marriage and Widowhood in rural areas of West Bengal districts : 1981-1991**

| Districts         | never-married<br>women (20-24<br>years)<br>(%) | ever-married<br>women (15-19years) |      | currently-married<br>women with<br>age at<br>marriage below<br>18 years who<br>married during<br>1986-1991 (%) | Widows/widowers in the<br>age-group 60-69 yrs (%) |         |
|-------------------|--|------------------------------------|------|--|---|---------|
|                   |  | (%)                                | (%)  |  | (%)   | (%)     |
|                   |  | 1991                               | 1981 |  | 1991  | 1986-91 |
|                   |  |                                    |      |  | Women   | Men     |
| Koch Behar        | 9.0  | 57.5                               | 44.0 | 56.5   | 68  | 11      |
| Jalpaiguri        | 18.3   | 38.4                               | 31.3 | 41.9   | 59  | 14      |
| Darjeeling        | 34.2   | 26.7                               | 24.4 | 38.6   | 44  | 14      |
| West Dinajpur     | 10.8   | 46.3                               | 39.4 | 51.2   | 61  | 10      |
| Malda             | 11.5   | 45.4                               | 47.6 | 59.5   | 59  | 11      |
| Murshidabad       | 8.5  | 57.6                               | 51.5 | 61.2   | 51  | 7       |
| Nadia             | 11.8   | 44.4                               | 42.3 | 57.9   | 61  | 7       |
| 24 Parganas       | —  | 46.7                               | —    | —  | —   | —       |
| 24 Parganas (N)   | 12.4   | —                                  | 43.5 | 59.7   | 55  | 7       |
| 24 Parganas (S)   | 11.7   | —                                  | 37.4 | 56.8   | 74  | 13      |
| Howrah            | 1.9  | 31.3                               | 23.4 | 43.1   | 56  | 6       |
| Hooghly           | 16.6   | 32.8                               | 29.5 | 43.4   | 59  | 7       |
| Medinipur         | 12.1   | 47.5                               | 39.4 | 55.7   | 61  | 9       |
| Bankura           | 14.4   | 45                                 | 36.7 | 53.0   | 68  | 12      |
| Puruliya          | 8.5  | 55.6                               | 51.2 | 65.6   | 64  | 15      |
| Bardhaman         | 11.8   | 41.5                               | 38.3 | 50.9   | 61  | 9       |
| Birbhum           | 10.1   | 49.5                               | 45.2 | 55.1   | 66  | 14      |
| Kolkata (Urban)   | 46.1   | 15.3                               | 13.4 | 21.6   | 48  | 5       |
| W. Bengal (Rural) | 12.7   | 44.9                               | 39.6 | 54.3   | —   | —       |
| W. Bengal (Urban) | 36.9   | 22.9                               | 19.3 | 30.3   | —   | —       |
| W. Bengal (Total) | 19.5   | 37.5                               | 33.0 | 48.3   | 59  | 9       |

Source : COI 1991, Social and Cultural Tables; West Bengal District Profiles.

## CHAPTER - III

# HEALTH AND NUTRITION

*"Good health is essential to leading a productive and fulfilling life and the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular, their own fertility is basic to empowerment."* (Beijing Platform for Action 1995)

We begin by presenting a health profile for women and children in West Bengal, compiled from the second Family Health Survey of 1998-99.

### Indicators of Health and Nutrition : West Bengal : 1998-99

(Figures are percentages except where indicated otherwise)

#### Health and Nutrition of women

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Women with anemia                                   | 62.7 |
| Women with at least one reproductive health problem | 45.3 |

#### Safe motherhood

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Deliveries assisted by Doctor                         | 35.3 |
| Deliveries assisted by Trained Birth Attendants (TBA) | 29.6 |
| Ante-natal check up from health professionals         | 89.5 |
| Two or more Tetanus Toxoid injections                 | 82.4 |
| Iron and Folic Acid                                   | 71.6 |
| Childbirth within 2 years of previous birth           | 23.0 |

#### Fertility

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Total Fertility Rate                                     | 2.3     |
| Mean no. of children ever born to women aged 40-49 years | 4.2     |
| Median age of first birth among women aged 20-49 years   | 19.4 yr |

#### Contraception use

|                      |      |
|----------------------|------|
| Any modern method    | 47.3 |
| Female sterilisation | 32.0 |
| Male sterilisation   | 1.8  |

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| Male condom use  | 2.9         |
| Unmet family planning need                             | 11.8        |
| <b>Awareness about HIV/AIDS</b>                        | <b>26.4</b> |
| <b>Child health</b>                                    |             |
| Children below 3 months who are exclusively breast-fed | 48.8        |
| Children with anemia                                   | 78.3        |
| Undernourished children (stunted)                      | 41.5        |
| Underweight (with respect to age)                      | 48.7        |
| <b>Children's immunisation</b>                         |             |
| All vaccinations                                       | 43.8        |
| BCG  | 76.5        |
| Polio (3 doses)  | 61.7        |
| DPT (3 doses)  | 58.3        |
| <b>IMR per 1000 live births</b>                        | <b>48.7</b> |
| <b>Under-five mortality per 1000 live births</b>       | <b>67.6</b> |
| <b>Standards of health and nutrition</b>               |             |

A wealth of information on the health situation of women in different states of India is now available from the results of the two National Family Health Surveys (NFHS 1 and 2), conducted respectively during 1992-93 and 1996-98 and covering about one lakh ever-married women of child-bearing age. It would be instructive to begin with some of these findings. Health standards of women, men and children are affected by basic amenities (or lack of them) at the household level. It will be seen from table H 1 that a significant achievement has been the access to drinking water enjoyed by 90 per cent of the households in West Bengal. However, there is a negative effect on women's well-being because more than half the households lacked sanitary toilet facilities, electricity and pucca housing and more than two-thirds used bio-mass fuel for cooking, known to be injurious particularly to women's health.

**Table : H 1**  
**Housing characteristics in West Bengal, Kerala and India : 1998-99**

|    |  | Percentage of Households |       |        |
|----|--|--------------------------|-------|--------|
|    |  | West Bengal              | India | Kerala |
| 1. | Lacking Electricity                                  | 63                       | 40    | 28     |
| 2. | Lacking drinking water from hand pump or piped water | 11                       | 22    | 80*    |
| 3. | Lacking toilet/ latrine facilities                   | 55                       | 64    | 154    |
| 4. | Lacking pucca housing                                | 66                       | 72    | 82     |
| 5. | Using biomass fuel for cooking                       | 67                       | 68    | 2      |

\* Note : In Kerala wells are major sources.

Source *NFHS -2, West Bengal, Table 3.12, p.70*

As pointed out in the National Nutrition Policy of 1993, " Widespread poverty, resulting in chronic and persistent hunger is the single biggest scourge of the developing world today. The physical expression of this continuously reenacted tragedy is the condition of under-nourishment, which manifests itself among large sections of the poor, particularly women and children". Table H 2 presents four indicators related to health and nutritional status of women and children in 12 states. On all the four counts West Bengal lags behind all-India. Anemia is a potentially serious condition because it is often an underlying cause of maternal mortality and implies an increased risk of premature delivery and low birth weight of babies. More than 60 per cent of women in West Bengal were found to be suffering from some degree of anemia in 1998-99 (the state ranking 19<sup>th</sup> if placed among 25 states) and more than 40 per cent were found to have a Body Mass Index (BMI or the ratio obtained by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by the square of her height in centimetres) of 18.5, the minimum level consistent with good health. These two indicators are lower in only two other states (Bihar and Orissa). Anemia among pregnant women is particularly problematic but West Bengal Government's State Plan of Action for Children reports that anemia tends to be more prevalent among pregnant women in the state (26 per cent) than among non-pregnant women (14-19 per cent.)<sup>1</sup> Again, about half the children under 3 years of age were classified as undernourished/under weight in terms of weight-for-age and more than three-fourths were affected by some degree of anemia, the West Bengal figures occupying roughly the middle position among the 12 selected states. "The situation is worse in rural areas where as many as 82 per cent of children are estimated to have anemia by NFHS 1998-99 as compared to 64 per cent in urban West Bengal and 60 per cent in Kolkata."<sup>2</sup>

Persistent malnutrition and ill-health are usually manifested through the syndrome of Chronic Energy Deficiency (CED). Table H 3 provides some state-wise figures of CED affecting all adult men and women in rural areas as well as adult men and women belonging to tribal communities in rural areas. Several features of this table are to be noted : (a) with respect to both rural groups, West

Bengal was found to be the worst affected ( excepting Tamil Nadu women) ; (b) in each and every case, women were worse off than men (excepting the striking example of Kerala women) and (c) the incidence of CED among tribal population is comparatively high, for both men and women. Table H 4 presents a further set of indicators relating to well-being of women and though it is reassuring to note that West Bengal is not among the worst performing states, it is not placed among the best by the West Bengal Human Development Report (WBHDR) published in May 2004.

The accompanying Map III, based on recent data compiled under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), shows the district-wise incidence of malnutrition among young : in as many as 12 districts of the state nearly one-fifth of the children under 3 years of age have been found to be affected by either moderate or severe malnutrition. Obviously, nutritional deficiencies among women and children have serious repercussions on the quality of life and capability patterns both for the present and future generations . As the WBHDR has stressed, there is a clear scope here for immediate target oriented intervention strategies.

**Table : H 2**  
**Nutritional Status of women and children 1998-99**

|               | % of women with any degree of anaemia | % with BMI below 18.5kg/M2 | % of undernourished children under 3 yrs | % of children under 3 yrs with any degree of anaemia |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|--|
| Bihar         | 63.4                                  | 39.7                       | 54.4                                     | 81.3   |
| Gujrat        | 46.3                                  |                            | 45.1                                     | 74.5   |
| Karnataka     | 42.4                                  | 39.4                       | 43.9                                     | 70.6   |
| Kerala        | 22.7                                  | 18.9                       | 26.9                                     | 43.9   |
| Maharashtra   |                                       | 40.2                       |  | 49.6   |
| Mizoram       | 48.0                                  | 22.8                       | 27.7                                     | 57.2   |
| Orissa        | 41.4                                  | 48.4                       | 54.4                                     | 72.3   |
| Punjab        | 63.4                                  | 17.0                       | 28.7                                     | 80.0   |
| Rajasthan     | 48.5                                  | 36.6                       | 50.6                                     | 82.3   |
| Tamil Nadu    | 56.5                                  | 29.3                       | 36.7                                     | 69.0   |
| Uttar Pradesh | 48.7                                  | 36.2                       | 51.7                                     |  |
| West Bengal   | 62.7                                  | 44.4                       | 48.7                                     | 78.3   |
| India         | 51.5                                  | 36.2                       | 47.0                                     | 74.2   |

Source : F. Arnold, Parveen Nangia, Umesh Kapil, " Indicators of Nutrition of women and children," EPW, 14<sup>th</sup> February 2004, Vol. XXXIX (7), Tables 5,6,7, pp. 666-669.

**Table : H 3**  
**Chronic Energy Deficiency (CED) among adults including tribal population in selected states**

|             | Rural population 2000-2001 |        | Tribal Population 1998-99 |        |
|-------------|----------------------------|--------|---------------------------|--------|
|             | Male                       | Female | Male                      | Female |
| Gujarat     | 37.1                       | 33.3   | 53.9                      | 50.5   |
| Orissa      | 26.7                       | 38.2   | 43.7                      | 57.6   |
| Karnataka   | 36.2                       | 41.7   | 47.2                      | 53.4   |
| Kerala      | 22.4                       | 18.7   | 39.3                      | 50.4   |
| Maharashtra | 41.3                       | 45.1   | 57.7                      | 62.3   |
| Tamil Nadu  | 26.7                       | 58.1   | 58.1                      | 59.3   |
| West Bengal | 40.5                       | 45.9   | 50.6                      | 64.6   |

Note : These data are compiled from surveys conducted by the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB), National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad.

Source : R.Ramkrishna, C.Ravi, "Malnutrition in India : Trends and determinants", Economic & Political Weekly (EPW), 14 February 2004, Vol. XXXIX, No.7, Table 3.

**Table : H 4**  
**Indicators of nutritional status of ever-married women of West Bengal and India**

|    | Variable   | West Bengal | India    | Position of West Bengal | Best performing states          | Poorest performing states |
|----|--|-------------|----------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. | Mean height (NFHS-2)                                     | 150 cm      | 151.2 cm | 23                      | Punjab                          | Bihar, Assam              |
| 2. | % below 145 cm (NFHS-2)                                  | 19.2        | 13.2     | 23                      | Punjab                          | Bihar, Orissa             |
| 3. | Mean BMI (NFHS-2)  | 19.7        | 20.3     | 22                      | Delhi                           | Bihar, Orissa             |
| 4. | % with BMI less than 18.5 (NFHS-2)                       | 43.7        | 35.8     | 24                      | Delhi, Arunachal Pradesh Sikkim | Orissa                    |
| 5. | % with chronic energy deficiency II plus III (NNMB-2002) | 19.9        | 18.5     | 8                       | Kerala                          | Maharashtra               |
| 6. | % with moderate and severe anemia (NFHS-2)               | 62.7        | 51.8     | 20                      | Kerala, Mizoram                 | Assam, Bihar Rajathan     |
| 7. | Protein plus calorie adequacy status                     | 87.1        | 87.8     | 4                       | Gujarat                         | Tamil Nadu                |
| 8. | % with 70% or more RDA of iron intake (NNMB-2002)        | 10.7        | 14.7     | 5                       | Gujarat                         | Andhra Pradesh            |

Note : NFHS-2 ranking is among 25 states; NNMB ranking is among 9 states

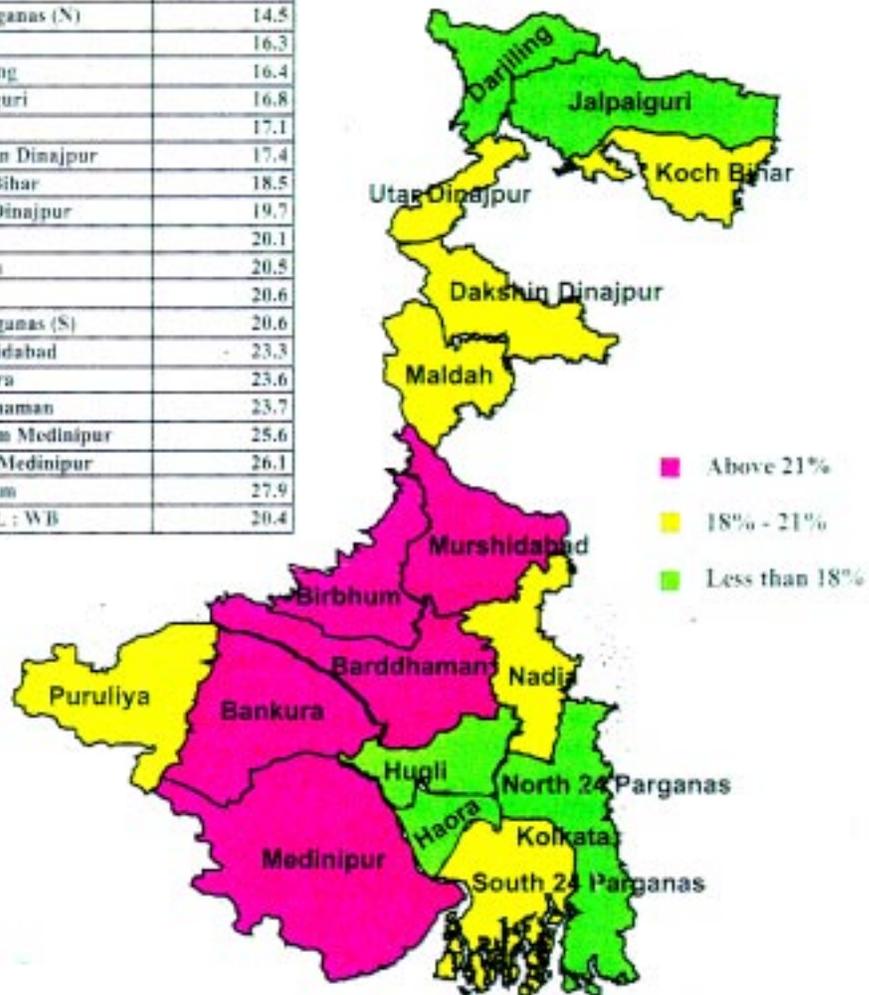
Source : WBHDR, Table 6.8, p. 126

**Map : IV**  
**Malnutrition among Children in West Bengal districts**

Moderate and severe malnutrition among children (0-3 Years)  
 West Bengal - ICDS : March - 2003

% children in Grade II, III and IV out of the children weighed

|                   |      |
|-------------------|------|
| Kolkata           | 13.4 |
| 24 Parganas (N)   | 14.5 |
| Haora             | 16.3 |
| Darjiling         | 16.4 |
| Jalpaiguri        | 16.8 |
| Hugli             | 17.1 |
| Dakshin Dinajpur  | 17.4 |
| Koch Bihar        | 18.5 |
| Uttar Dinajpur    | 19.7 |
| Nadia             | 20.1 |
| Purulia           | 20.5 |
| Malda             | 20.6 |
| 24 Parganas (S)   | 20.6 |
| Murshidabad       | 23.3 |
| Bankura           | 23.6 |
| Bardhaman         | 23.7 |
| Paschim Medinipur | 25.6 |
| Purba Medinipur   | 26.1 |
| Birbhum           | 27.9 |
| TOTAL : WB        | 20.4 |



## Morbidity and Mortality

Table H 5 provides a glimpse of morbidity prevalence among women and men in West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Kerala and India as a whole, as derived from NSS data on the number of persons reporting ailments suffered by them during two weeks preceding the survey which was conducted in 1995-96. Both with respect to acute ailment (characterised by short duration) and chronic ailment (of 30 days or more), all the West Bengal figures (rural and urban, men and women) indicate higher levels of morbidity as compared to India as a whole - with Kerala, surprisingly, reporting the highest number of ailing persons.

**Table : H 5**  
**Morbidity among men and women in West Bengal, India and selected states :**  
**Evidence from NSS data (1995-96)**

|                 | Number of persons affected |    |       |    |        |    |       |    |
|-----------------|----------------------------|----|-------|----|--------|----|-------|----|
|                 | Orissa                     |    | Bihar |    | Kerala |    | India |    |
|                 | M                          | W  | M     | W  | M      | W  | M     | W  |
| Rural Areas     |                            |    |       |    |        |    |       |    |
| Acute ailment   | 59                         | 53 | 23    | 29 | 80     | 79 | 41    | 44 |
| Chronic ailment | 5                          | 8  | 9     | 10 | 36     | 40 | 13    | 14 |
| Urban Areas     |                            |    |       |    |        |    |       |    |
| Acute ailment   | 46                         | 59 | 33    | 30 | 63     | 59 | 39    | 40 |
| Chronic ailment | 10                         |    | 7     | 13 | 25     | 28 | 13    | 15 |

Note : 'Acute ailment refers to short duration ailment during 15 days preceding survey while 'chronic ailment' refers to longer duration of 30 days or more.

Source : NSSO, *Morbidity and Treatment of Ailments : NSS 52<sup>nd</sup> Round, July 1995-June 1996*, Report No. 441, November 1998.

Available information on morbidity among the general population indicate a high incidence of asthma and jaundice "These are diseases which are affected by the extent of atmospheric pollution and the availability of safe water and sanitation, so these are clear areas of public intervention ... There are some diseases for which West Bengal appears to have much higher incidence any other state. For example, 40 per cent of the reported cases of measles in India in 2001 were from West Bengal, even though the rate of measles vaccination in West Bengal is higher than the all-India average. "3The state RCH programme reports that 73 per cent of women were found to be aware of diarrhoea management and 39 per cent were aware of Oral Rehydration Salt/ Therapy (ORS/ORT).

During NFHS 2, more than 40 per cent of West Bengal women reported symptoms of Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) which was higher than the national average of 36 per cent and about half (45

per cent) reported that they had one or more reproductive health problems ( as compared to 39 per cent in India as a whole);30 per cent reported at least one symptom of reproductive tract/sexually transmitted infection (RTI/STI). According to information provided by the Health department of GOWB, STD cases reported in the state showed a rise from about 26 thousand in 1994 to more than 43 thousand in 2001, share of women patients rising from about 40 to more than 62 per cent during this period.<sup>4</sup>

Women and men living in more than 70 blocks in the eight districts of Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia, North and South 24 Parganas, Bardhaman, Howrah and Hooghly are now known to be exposed to the risk of arsenic poisoning (arsenic dermatosis) through contaminated ground water. About 4000 cases have been documented so far and this health hazard needs to be tackled on an urgent basis on various fronts.<sup>5</sup>

### **HIV/AIDS**

The incidence of HIV/AIDS may not, as yet seem as alarming in West Bengal as, for example, in Maharashtra or Tamil Nadu but there has been an ominous rise in the number of affected persons in the last few years: from 670 reported cases in 2000 to 1131 in 2002-2003 according to official investigation. In a recent sample of more than 4000 HIV/AIDS positive persons, the male female ratio was found to be roughly 3:1, the highest incidence being in the age-group 15-29 years, both for women and men.<sup>6</sup> Regarding HIV/AIDS awareness, as compared to more than 50 per cent of men surveyed, only 30 per cent of women were aware of this dread disease and of this latter group, more than 50 per cent did not know any way of avoiding HIV/AIDS infection as compared to 33 per cent at the all-India level. Poor, illiterate and Muslim women are found to have the poorest knowledge in this respect. This pervasive lack of a crucial awareness is a major challenge to containing the scourge of HIV/AIDS in West Bengal.<sup>7</sup>

### **Maternal Mortality**

Maternal mortality rates (MMR or maternal deaths per one lakh live births), provide some indication of women's access to the health care system, specially arrangements for natal care. According to data derived from the Sample Registration System (SRS) of the Census of India, West Bengal's MMR stands at 264 as compared to the national average of 408. While this is a laudable and sizable decline from 1034 maternal deaths reported in 1993, it is still far above the goal of reducing MMR to 100 per 100000 live births by 2010, as articulated the State Plan of Action for Children (SPAC).<sup>8</sup> The major causes of maternal deaths include anemia (21 per cent); haemorrhage (16 per cent); toxemia (29 per cent); obstructed labour (6 per cent) and sepsis( 3 per cent) and the sad fact is that most of these fatalities are preventable.<sup>9</sup>

Recent information collected from the Reproductive and Child Health Programme (RCH) of the state indicate that 74, 25 and 59 per cent of West Bengal women experienced pregnancy, delivery and post-delivery complications. In this context Table H 6 provides some idea of the prevalence of safe

motherhood practices in the state as compared to other states and to the country as a whole. It is heartening to see improvement across states in the rising proportions of safe childbirths, that is, those taking place in medical institutions and those taking place at home with the assistance of health professionals. For West Bengal, these proportions were 40 and 44 per cent respectively in 1998-99 as against the comparable all-India proportions of 34 and 42 per cent. These figures are, of course way behind similar ones for Kerala (more than 90 per cent) or Tamil Nadu (around 80 per cent) or even Mizoram (58 and 69 per cent). According to NFHS data, only about 20 per cent of expectant mothers in West Bengal received the entire package of recommended ante-natal care - at par with the all-India situation but again, behind all other states listed in our Table except Bihar (6 per cent) and Uttar Pradesh (4 per cent). NFHS 2 also points out that older women, women with many children and women coming from a disadvantaged background were less likely to get full of ante-natal care (that is, at least three ante-natal check-ups, two tetanus toxoid injections and a full course of iron and folic acid supplements). However, in West Bengal 90 per cent of expectant mothers had received at least one ante-natal check up (ANC) and 60 per cent had received three or more, both these achievements being much above the all-India figures of 65 and 44 per cent. In West Bengal about half of those women who had any ANC went to Govt. health facilities to avail of the services. The state ranks number one among major states in this respect, the national average being roughly one-third. "Another way of interpreting the data is that West Bengal ranks highest among the 15 (major) states in respect of women being conscious (and free) enough to go out of their homes to avail of health services during pregnancy."<sup>10</sup> The existing arrangements for pre-natal, natal and post-natal care have to be extended and improved continuously, to reach out to an ever larger segment of women.

**Table : H 6**  
**Prevalence of safe motherhood practices among currently married women (%) in**  
**West Bengal, India and selected States) 1998-99**

|             | Received<br>At least one<br>ante-natal<br>check - up | Received<br>three or more<br>ante-natal<br>check - ups | Received<br>all recomm-<br>ended<br>types of | Deliveries<br>at home<br>assisted by<br>a health<br>ante-natal<br>care |         | Deliveries<br>in a<br>medical<br>institution<br>professional |         |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|---------|--|---------|
|             | 1998-99  | 1998-99  | 1998-99                                      | 1998-99  | 1992-93 | 1998-99  | 1992-93 |
| Bihar       | 13.3   | 17.8   | 6.4  | 23.4   | 19.0    | 14.6   | 12.1    |
| Gujrat      | 87.4   | 60.2   | 25.0   | 53.5   | 42.5    | 46.3   | 35.6    |
| Karnataka   | 86.3   | 71.4   | 41.5   | 59.1   | 50.9    | 51.1   | 37.5    |
| Kerala      | 98.8   | 98.3   | 64.9   | 94.0   | 89.7    | 93.0   | 87.8    |
| Maharashtra | 90.4   | 65.4   | 31.0   | 59.4   | 53.2    | 52.6   | 43.9    |

|               | Received<br>At least one<br>ante-natal<br>check – up | Received<br>three or more<br>ante-natal<br>check – ups | Received<br>all recomm-<br>ended<br>types of | Deliveries<br>at home<br>assisted by<br>a health<br>ante-natal<br>care |         | Deliveries<br>in a<br>medical<br>institution<br>professional |         |
|---------------|--|--|--|--|---------|--|---------|
|               | 1998-99  | 1998-99  | 1998-99                                      | 1998-99  | 1992-93 | 1998-99  | 1992-93 |
| Mizoram       | 91.8   | 75.8   | 13.5   | 67.5   | 61.5    | 57.7   | 48.9    |
| Punjab        | 74.0   | 57.0   | 31.0   | 62.6   | 48.3    | 37.5   | 24.8    |
| Orissa        | 79.5   | 47.3   | 21.4   | 33.4   | 20.5    | 22.6   | 14.1    |
| Rajasthan     | 47.5   | 22.9   | 83   | 35.8   | 21.8    | 6.4  | 71.6    |
| Tamil Nadu    | 98.5   | 91.4   | 50.8   | 83.8   | 71.2    | 79.3   | 63.4    |
| Uttar Pradesh | 34.6   | 14.9   | 404  | 22.4   | 17.2    | 15.5   | 11.2    |
| West Bengal   | 90.0   | 57.0   | 19.7   | 44.2   | 33.0    | 40.1   | 31.5    |
| India         | 65.4   | 43.8   | 20   | 42.3   | 34.2    | 33.6   | 25.5    |

Source : NFHS – 2, India, Table 8.13 and NFHS – 1, India, Table 9.7

### **Abortion/MTP**

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act was passed in 1972, following which 2200 abortions were recorded in West Bengal, rising to about 41 thousand in 1999.<sup>11</sup> But by and large MTP has remained a neglected area, putting to avoidable risk the lives of a very large number of women who are compelled to take recourse to unsafe procedures and unauthorised institutions." According to a recent study sponsored by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India, in all government hospitals and health centres in the districts of Hugli, Bankura, Birbhum, Medinipur and Darjiling, the situation is extremely poor. Out of 428 Primary Health Centres (PHC) in these districts, only six had at least one Medical Officer trained in MTP and only 13 of these PHCs had MTP suction apparatus."<sup>12</sup>

### **Infant Mortality**

Infant mortality (death of babies under the age of twelve months) is considered to be an important indicator of socio-economic progress, and this is one area where West Bengal's recent record outstrips that of the country as a whole. According to SRS data, during 1994-1996 and 1996-2000 the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) per one thousand live births) declined by 11 per cent and 3.6 per cent respectively in West Bengal, the comparable all-India position being a decline of 2.7 per cent during 1994-1996 but no further change during 1996-2000. Estimates of infant and child mortality are also provided by NFHS 2, which found that during the five years preceding the survey, IMR in West Bengal was 49 deaths at age 0-11 months per 1000 live births - a marked decrease from the

corresponding rate of 75 per 1000 live birth in NFHS 1. The child mortality rate, at 20 deaths at age 1-4 years per 1000 children reaching age one year, shows a similar decrease from 26 per 1000 in NFHS 1.<sup>13</sup>

Appendix Table AD 2 (in the section on Demography) with IMR figures for West Bengal districts shows the wide regional variation in IMR levels in 1991, which perhaps has a linkage to the availability of basic amenities at the village level such as PHCs, all-weather roads etc. During 1996-2000 Hooghly and Howrah reported IMRs at 24 and 34 (lowest in West Bengal), while IMRs in both Purulia and Dakshin Dinajpur stood at 74 (highest).<sup>14</sup>

Immunisation for children focuses on six serious but preventable diseases of childhood - Tuberculosis, Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Polio and Measles. The objective of the Universal Immunisation programme introduced in 1985-86 was to provide immunisation cover for at least 85 per cent of infants by the 1990s. As against this, in West Bengal only 44 per cent of children aged 12 to 23 months were fully vaccinated (as compared to the all-India proportion of 34 per cent ) in 1998-99 and 14 per cent were not vaccinated at all, which is lower than the corresponding all-India average of 22 per cent.

#### **Inter-district comparisons**

Gender-differentiated district level IMRs in Appendix table AD 2 show that female IMRs are higher in most cases. In 1991 both for girl babies and boy babies, the highest IMRs were reported in Malda district -91 and 106 respectively - while the corresponding Kolkata figures were 24 and 26. Appendix Table AH 1 shows the relative position of West Bengal districts with respect to availability of health promoting facilities/services such as drinking water, bathroom facilities within the household premises, number of PHCs and hospital beds per one lakh population, number of rural Family Welfare Centres and percentage of children with complete immunisation. Again there are substantial inter-district variations. While more than 80 per cent of children in Kolkata were fully immunised, this proportion is below 50 per cent in half the districts with Purulia and Uttar Dinajpur reporting only 39 and 29 per cent coverage respectively, the latter district also reporting the least number of hospital beds per one lakh population (39) During the first NFHS of 1992-93, it was found that West Bengal was one of only three states where coverage of girl children was better than male children with respect to full immunisation. But the second NFHS found that West Bengal had become one of 11 states where full immunisation of girls was at a lower level than that for boys and there were more unprotected girls with no immunisation ( 14.3 per cent ) than unprotected boys ( 12.9 %).

#### **Family Planning Practices.**

Table H 7 relates to family planning practices in West Bengal as observed during the second NFHS. West Bengal has the highest proportion of women -65 per cent- using any method of contraception- much above the all-India figure of 54 per cent as found by NFHS 2. District-wise couple protection rates (CPR) will be found in Appendix Table AH 2. While one-third of the women surveyed in 1998-99 had undergone sterilisation, male sterilisation rate was a dismal 2 per cent During 2003-04 again,

while tubectomies numbered more than 38 thousand, vasectomies totalled a paltry 271<sup>15</sup>. There has been very little increase in male condom use too in West Bengal, its share in family planning rising only from 5 to 6 per cent in 1998-99, even lower than the national average of 7 per cent. While about 3 lakh tubectomies were reported in 2001-2002, the number of vasectomies reported was only 1532.<sup>16</sup> Thus it is women who have to bear the prime responsibility of family planning as well as the ill-effects of unsatisfactory contraceptive procedures. Vigorous advocacy and awareness building are needed to address this shocking anomaly. Awareness campaigns are also quality of family planning services is The information that the women get when they accept a particular method of contraception and the follow-up care they receive after such acceptance are important indicators of the quality of family planning services. According to the second NFHS, in West Bengal only 9 per cent of women accepting a modern method of contraception were told about any alternative methods; only 10 per cent were told about possible side-effects; however, about 30 per cent reported receiving follow-up services which is a relatively high attainment in the all-India context

**Table : H 7**  
**Contraceptive use by currently married women (percentage)**  
**West Bengal, India and selected states : 1998-99 (Rural Areas)**

|               | Using any method | Using any modern | Female sterilization | Male sterilization |
|---------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Bihar         | 22.9             | 20.9             | 18.3                 | 0.9                |
| Gujrat        | 57.0             | 53.3             | 47.0                 | 2.4                |
| Karnataka     | 57.4             | 56.6             | 53.9                 | 0.5                |
| Kerala        | 63.2             | 56.7             | 48.6                 | 2.4                |
| Maharashtra   | 62.7             | 62.1             | 57.9                 | 5.3                |
| Mizoram       | 49.7             | 48.7             | 39.4                 | 0.2                |
| Punjab        | 64.4             | 53.8             | 34.3                 | 1.9                |
| Orissa        | 45.9             | 39.7             | 34.2                 | 1.7                |
| Rajasthan     | 37.1             | 35.3             | 30.1                 | 1.3                |
| Tamil Nadu    | 48.8             | 47.6             | 44.7                 | 0.9                |
| Uttar Pradesh | 23.9             | 18.3             | 14.1                 | 0.7                |
| West Bengal   | 64.5             | 47.5             | 33.5                 | 2.0                |
| India         | 44.7             | 39.9             | 33.5                 | 1.9                |

Source : NFHS – 2, India, Table 5.7

### **Mental Health**

Because of lack of reliable and readily available information, it has not been possible to explore the mental health situation of women and children in West Bengal, though press reports and anecdotal

evidence make it clear that mental illness, particularly clinical depression and stress-related mental disorders are on the rise, both among women and children. There is an acute need to spread awareness regarding this neglected aspect of over-all health so that a reasonably normal life can be restored to mental patients through early recognition of serious psychological symptoms and timely treatment.

Though the subsequent section reviews West Bengal's attainments in the sphere of literacy and education, it is worth noting here itself the significant manner in which female literacy levels tend to have a positive influence on important constituents of women's and children's health : in Table H 8 West Bengal's relatively higher levels of female literacy appears in tandem with comparatively better performance with respect to safe motherhood and family planning practices and infant mortality, under-5 mortality and total fertility rates.

**Table : H 8**  
**Female literacy and health related indicators**  
**Evidence from NFHS – 1 (1992-1993)**

|  | W. Bengal | Bihar | Orissa | India |
|--|-----------|-------|--------|-------|
| 1. Percentage of literate women among ever-married women aged 15-49 years                                | 49.5      | 21.7  | 32.6   | 36.9  |
| 2. Percentage of birth attended By trained professionals   | 34.8      | 19.1  | 20.9   | 35.8  |
| 3. Percentage of ever-married women Reporting knowledge of at Least one modern method of family planning | 89.8      | 67.5  | 59.2   | 75.1  |
| 4. Percentage of ever-married women who were using family planning method                                | 57.7      | 23.2  | 36.3   | 40.7  |
| 5. Total Fertility Rate  | 3.6       | 4.8   | 3.6    | 4.0   |
| 6. Under – five mortality Rate Per 1000 live births  | 128       | 154   | 172    | 137   |
| 7. Infant Mortality Rate per 1000 live births  | 55        | 96    | 71     | 72    |

Note : IMR figures are based on 1995 Sample Registration System (SRS) data, as cited in Govt. of India (GOI), Central Statistical Organisation (CSO), *Women and Men in India 2000*, March 2001, Table 16.

Source : Mukul Mukherjee with Rita Bose, *Bihar At A Glance*, Occasional Paper-4, Sachetana Information Centre, Calcutta, October 2000, Table 6.

## **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)<sup>17</sup>**

The ICDS is a centrally sponsored scheme, implemented by state governments. We must briefly refer to this scheme here, for its significant contribution towards promoting the welfare of children aged up to six years and mothers as well as would-be mothers, through a special focus on health and non-formal education. The package of benefits for children offered by the ICDS include supplementary nutrition through on-the-spot feeding and Take Home rations for babies aged six months to three years; immunisation and growth monitoring of children and children's non-formal education up to six years. The scheme provides pre-natal and post-natal care for women including detection of anemia and nutritional and health education through mothers' meetings and home visits by Anganwadi workers who are the mainstay of ICDS. There are now more than 52 thousand Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) under about 360 ICDS projects, including 24, 289 and 45 urban, rural and tribal projects and covering more than 5 crore residents as in September 2003.

Recently the West Bengal Govt. has taken steps to redesign the format of the ICDS Monthly Progress Reports, so that the large volume of compiled data can be used more effectively. The analysis of the nutritional status of children under three years has already paved the way for better monitoring of programmes and more focussed intervention.

Two other centrally sponsored schemes are under the purview of the ICDS. : (I) Balika Samridhi Yojana offering a post-delivery grant of Rs. 500 in the form of a bank deposit in the name of a girl child, born after August 1997 in a BPL (Below Poverty Level) family and (ii) Kishori Shakti Yojana, with the basic objective of improving the health and nutrition status of adolescent girls. The latter programme is now being implemented in the districts of Jalpaiguri, Malda, Murshidabad and Purulia.

### **Insights from NGOs**

Several important issues related to the health situation of women were raised at the Interactive NGO Meet held in Kolkata on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2004, as mentioned earlier. NGOs working in this area felt that there is now a discernible shift from a holistic approach to health issues to an approach marked by vertical/technocratic interventions. Because government health care facilities appear to be inadequate as compared to actual needs of the people, there is also a shift from non-profit health services to the profit-oriented private sector units which are not only expensive but often of doubtful quality. For poor people, the inadequacy of public sector facilities has also meant an increased dependence on so-called 'non-conventional' healers and local quacks which obviously imply serious risks, specially with regard to abortion and sterilisation sought by women. Commentators also urged that mental health should be considered an important constituent of health. As such, emphasis should be given to (i) mental health education; (ii) setting up of proper treatment and counselling centres and (iii) promotion of human rights of those afflicted with mental health problems.

We conclude this section on Health and Nutrition by recalling the woman-oriented goals set out in the State Plan Action for Children 2003:

- Reduce Maternal Mortality Rates to 100 by 2010.
- Ensure special emphasis on  
Quality ante-and post-natal care for all pregnant women  
Essential obstetric and new-born care, particularly in rural areas with deficient infrastructure.
- Achieve 80 per cent institutional deliveries and 100 per cent deliveries by trained persons by 2010.
- Achieve 50 per cent reduction in RTI,STI and zero level growth of HIV/AIDS by 2007.

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<sup>1</sup> Govt of West Bengal (GOWB), *State Plan of Action, 2003* (hereafter SPAC), p. 20

<sup>2</sup> GOWB, Department of Planning and Development, West Bengal Human Development (hereafter WBHDR), 2004, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp. 130-131.

<sup>4</sup> State Bureau of Health Intelligence, Department of Health Services, GOWB, *Health on The March : West Bengal 2001-2002*, p.141.

<sup>5</sup> *Health on the March*, p. 159.

<sup>6</sup> *Health On The March*, p.139.

<sup>7</sup> SPAC, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> SPAC, p.18-19.

<sup>9</sup> *Health on the March*, p.153.

<sup>10</sup> West Bengal Commission for Women, *The Challenge Ahead:Changing Status of Women in West Bengal : 1970-2000: An Executive Summary*, p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid..

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> WBHDR, Table 6.3, 122.

<sup>14</sup> WBHDR, Table 6.5, p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 4 August 2004.

<sup>16</sup> *The Challenge Ahead*, p.25 and *Health on the March*, p. 171.

<sup>17</sup> Information about ICDS is based on GOWB, *Report on the Activities of the Department of Women and Child Development and Social Welfare : April 2002-September 2003*, 2003 (hereafter WCD Report), Chapter 2.

**Appendix Table : AH 1**  
**Health promoting services/facilities in West Bengal districts : 2000-2001**

| Districts          | Popn with adequate sanitation facilities (%) | Popn using improved water sources (%) | No. of PHCs per 100000 Popn | No. of hospital beds per 100000 popn | No. of rural family welfare centres | Couple protection rate (%) | 1 year old children with complete immunisation (%) |
|--------------------|--|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Darjeeling         | 28.4   | 75.6                                  | 19                          | 151                                  | 73                                  | 38.8                       | 60.8   |
| Jalpaiguri         | 17.7   | 98.1                                  | 134                         | 39                                   | 527                                 | 38.0                       | 62.0   |
| K. Behar           | 8.6  | 98.6                                  | 16                          | 60                                   | 25                                  | 50.3                       | 49.8   |
| Uttar Dinajpur     | 9.3  | 99.5                                  | 11                          | 30                                   | 293                                 | 21.2                       | 28.5   |
| Dakshin Dinajpur   | 11.0   | 99.6                                  | 17                          | 54                                   | 237                                 | 29.6                       | 40.5   |
| Malda              | 10.6   | 99.4                                  | 14                          | 35                                   | 16                                  | 21.1                       | 38.9   |
| Murshidabad        | 13.5   | 99.4                                  | 15                          | 48                                   | 30                                  | 37.5                       | 39.4   |
| Birbhum            | 13.9   | 99.3                                  | 26                          | 75                                   | 428                                 | 42.5                       | 34.9   |
| Bardhaman          | 32.4   | 99.3                                  | 19                          | 100                                  | 768                                 | 53.8                       | 51.8   |
| Nadia              | 25.4   | 99.2                                  | 13                          | 113                                  | 28                                  | 33.6                       | 68.9   |
| 24 Pargs North     | 39.4   | 99.0                                  | 8                           | 29                                   | 779                                 | 24.4                       | 65.6   |
| Hooghly            | 32.7   | 99.3                                  | 14                          | 73                                   | 45                                  | 34.3                       | 67.8   |
| Bankura            | 10.0   | 98.2                                  | 27                          | 87                                   | 514                                 | 43.8                       | 67.3   |
| Purulia            | 8.1  | 93.8                                  | 28                          | 89                                   | 471                                 | 42.3                       | 38.0   |
| Purba Medinipur    | 9.1<br>(combined)                            | 99<br>(combined)                      | 18<br>(combined)            | 48<br>(combined)                     | 70<br>(combined)                    | 38.8<br>38.8               | 46<br>(combined)                                   |
| Pashchim Medinipur | —  | —                                     | —                           | —                                    | —                                   | 33.4                       | —  |
| Howrah             | 29.4   | 99.1                                  | 13                          | 80                                   | 97                                  | 29.8                       | 56.0   |
| 24 Pargs South     | 11.3   | 99.2                                  | 12                          | 22                                   | 34                                  | 20.0                       | 59.4   |
| Kolkata            | 75.2   | 99.5                                  | —                           | 434                                  | 92                                  | 36.4                       | 82.9   |

Source : WBHDR, Annexure Table 4; p. 222; GOWB, *Health on the March 2001-2002*, Table X.13; p. 180.

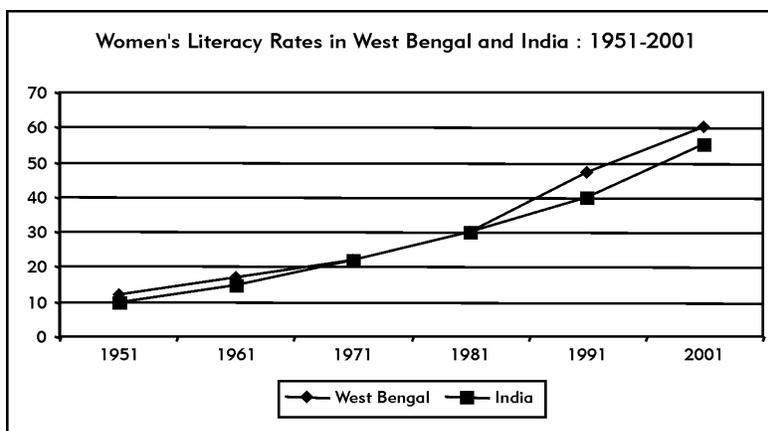
## CHAPTER - IV

# LITERACY AND EDUCATION

***“Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change... Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic returns, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable.”*** (Beijing Platform for Action)<sup>1</sup>

Let us now look literacy and education for women : a basic capability and a stepping stone for skill formation. West Bengal has made remarkable strides in the sphere of literacy and education - as evidenced by Tables E 1 and E 2 based on census data for rural and urban areas respectively.. Whereas the literacy rate for rural men went up by 12 percentage points from 62 to 74 per cent between 1991 and 2001, that for rural women rose from 38 to 54 per cent during the same period - a gain of 16 percentage points. Urban literacy rates were noticeably higher. Male literacy rates in urban West Bengal was equal to the all-India average of about 86 per cent in 2001; but the 73 per cent literacy level for urban women was higher than the comparable all-India figure of 73 per cent. Chart E 1 shows clearly that in West Bengal women’s literacy rates have been consistently higher than the national average, right from 1951. However, according to 1991 census data, adult literacy achievements left much to be desired as this figure for rural women in West Bengal was lower than the over-all state figure by several percentage points, though that for men remained the same.

**Chart : E 1**  
**Women’s literacy rates in West Bengal and India : 1951-2001**



**Table : E 1**  
**Rural literacy rates in India and selected states (%) 1991 and 2001**

| Sl. No. | States         | 1991 |       | 2001 |       | Adult Literacy 1991 |       |
|---------|----------------|------|-------|------|-------|---------------------|-------|
|         |                | Men  | Women | Men  | Women | Men                 | Women |
| 1       | Andhra Pradesh | 47.3 | 23.9  | 66.1 | 44.4  | 41.5                | 17.6  |
| 2       | Bihar          | 48.3 | 18.0  | 57.7 | 30.0  | 45.8                | 13.7  |
| 3       | Gujarat        | 66.8 | 38.6  | 70.7 | 45.8  | 61.6                | 30.4  |
| 4       | Karnataka      | 60.3 | 34.8  | 70.6 | 48.5  | 55.6                | 26.9  |
| 5       | Kerala         | 92.9 | 85.1  | 93.5 | 86.8  | 91.8                | 82.3  |
| 6       | Maharashtra    | 69.7 | 41.0  | 82.2 | 59.1  | 66.2                | 32.7  |
| 7       | Mizoram        | 77.4 | 67.0  | 84.4 | 76.2  | 77.5                | 65.0  |
| 8       | Punjab         | 60.7 | 43.9  | 71.7 | 57.9  | 55.4                | 36.0  |
| 9       | Rajasthan      | 47.6 | 11.6  | 73.0 | 37.7  | 44.3                | 8.2   |
| 10      | Tamil Nadu     | 67.2 | 41.8  | 77.5 | 55.8  | 61.9                | 32.9  |
| 11      | Uttar Pradesh  | 52.1 | 19.0  | 68.0 | 37.7  | 49.8                | 14.6  |
| 12      | West Bengal    | 62.1 | 38.1  | 73.8 | 53.8  | 62.0                | 33.4  |
| 13      | India          | 57.9 | 30.6  | 71.2 | 46.6  | 54.9                | 24.9  |

Source: COI 1991, Series 1, Paper 2 of 1992; COI 2001, Paper 2 of 2001; GOI, Planning Commission, *National Human Development Report 2001*, p.24.

**Table : E 2**  
**Urban literacy rates in India and selected states 1991 and 2001**

| Sl. No. | States         | 1991 |       | 2001 |       |
|---------|----------------|------|-------|------|-------|
|         |                | Men  | Women | Men  | Women |
| 1       | Andhra Pradesh | 75.9 | 56.4  | 83.2 | 69.3  |
| 2       | Bihar          | 77.7 | 55.9  | 80.8 | 63.3  |
| 3       | Gujarat        | 84.6 | 67.7  | 85.5 | 72.2  |
| 4       | Karnataka      | 82.0 | 65.7  | 86.9 | 74.9  |
| 5       | Kerala         | 95.6 | 89.1  | 96.1 | 90.9  |
| 6       | Maharashtra    | 86.4 | 70.9  | 91.4 | 71.3  |
| 7       | Mizoram        | 95.2 | 91.6  | 97.0 | 95.7  |
| 8       | Punjab         | 77.3 | 66.1  | 83.0 | 74.6  |

| Sl. No. | States        | 1991 |       | 2001 |       |
|---------|---------------|------|-------|------|-------|
|         |               | Men  | Women | Men  | Women |
| 9       | Rajasthan     | 78.5 | 50.2  | 87.1 | 65.4  |
| 10      | Tamil Nadu    | 86.1 | 69.6  | 88.4 | 75.6  |
| 11      | Uttar Pradesh | 70.0 | 50.4  | 78.1 | 62.1  |
| 12      | West Bengal   | 81.2 | 68.3  | 86.5 | 76.1  |
| 13      | India         | 81.1 | 63.9  | 86.4 | 73.0  |

Source: COI 1991, Series 1, Paper 2 of 1992 COI, 2001, Paper 2 of 2001

District-wise literacy figures are given in Table E 3. It can be seen that in 1981, female literacy rates were usually lower than 30 per cent in the districts of West Bengal (Kolkata and Howrah being two notable exceptions); in 2001 about half the districts had reached or crossed the 60 per cent mark. However, female literacy rate continued to be lower than 40 per cent in Uttar Dinajpur and Purulia, both with a substantial component of tribal population.

According to information collected in 1993-94 by the National Sample Survey (NSS), 68 per cent of all rural households and 50 per cent of all urban households did not have any literate adult women (aged 15 years or more). The proportion of such households in West Bengal was 56 and 38 respectively, somewhat better than India as a whole or the neighbouring states of Bihar and Orissa, as shown in Table 4.

Table E 5 brings out a less heartening feature regarding progress of literacy in West Bengal, specially with reference to rural women. We do not yet have community-wise literacy figures for West Bengal at the district level from the 2001 census, but those from the preceding census points to the educational deprivation that characterises the scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) communities in each of the districts. For the state as whole, the 1991 literacy rate for all rural women was 38 per cent; but comparable figures for ST and SC women were only 14 and 26 per cent respectively. In Malda and Birbhum, only 5 per cent among ST women were reported to be literate in 1991. Similarly, urban literacy figures for all women, ST women and SC women were 68, 32 and 43 respectively.

**Table : E 3**  
**Progress of Literacy in West Bengal Districts 1981 – 2001**

| Sl. No.    | States                   | 1991 |        | 1991 |        | 2001 |        |
|------------|--------------------------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|
|            |                          | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
|            | <b>West Bengal</b>       | 50.5 | 30.3   | 67.8 | 46.6   | 77.6 | 60.2   |
| <b>1.</b>  | <b>Darjeeling</b>        | 51.6 | 32.4   | 67.1 | 47.8   | 81.3 | 63.9   |
| <b>2.</b>  | <b>Jalpaiguri</b>        | 38.5 | 20.4   | 56.0 | 33.2   | 73.6 | 52.9   |
| <b>3.</b>  | <b>Koch Behar</b>        | 40.0 | 19.3   | 57.4 | 33.3   | 76.8 | 57.0   |
| <b>4.</b>  | <b>Uttar Dinajpur</b>    | 36.1 | 17.1   | 45.2 | 22.9   | 59.3 | 37.2   |
| <b>5.</b>  | <b>Dakshin Dinajpur</b>  |      |        | 56.8 | 35.3   | 73.3 | 55.1   |
| <b>6.</b>  | <b>Malda</b>             | 31.5 | 14.2   | 45.6 | 24.9   | 59.2 | 41.7   |
| <b>7.</b>  | <b>Murshidabad</b>       | 32.4 | 17.3   | 46.4 | 29.6   | 61.4 | 48.3   |
| <b>8.</b>  | <b>Birbhum</b>           | 43.0 | 24.2   | 56.3 | 37.2   | 71.6 | 52.2   |
| <b>9.</b>  | <b>Bardhaman</b>         | 50.9 | 33.8   | 71.1 | 51.5   | 79.3 | 61.9   |
| <b>10.</b> | <b>Nadia</b>             | 43.7 | 29.4   | 60.1 | 44.4   | 72.7 | 60.1   |
| <b>11.</b> | <b>North 24 Parganas</b> | 55.4 | 35.4   | 60.1 | 58.0   | 84.4 | 72.1   |
| <b>12.</b> | <b>South 24 Parganas</b> |      |        | 68.5 | 40.6   | 83.1 | 59.7   |
| <b>13.</b> | <b>Hooghly</b>           | 57.9 | 38.8   | 75.8 | 56.9   | 77.2 | 67.7   |
| <b>14.</b> | <b>Bankura</b>           | 49.4 | 23.1   | 66.8 | 36.6   | 74.2 | 49.8   |
| <b>15.</b> | <b>Purulia</b>           | 45.6 | 13.3   | 62.2 | 23.2   | 85.3 | 37.2   |
| <b>16.</b> | <b>Midnapure</b>         | 55.3 | 29.7   | 81.3 | 56.6   | 83.7 | 64.6   |
| <b>17.</b> | <b>Howrah</b>            | 60.7 | 40.8   | 76.1 | 57.8   | 79.9 | 70.9   |
| <b>18.</b> | <b>Kolkata</b>           | 73.2 | 63.1   | 81.9 | 72.1   | 84.1 | 78.0   |

Source : COI 1991, Series – I, Paper – 2 of 1992; COI 2001, Provisional Population Totals for West Bengal, Table A - 2.

Note : For 1991 & 2001, literates exclude children aged 0-6 years. For 1981, literate exclude children aged 0-4 years; figures for North 24 Parganas stand for undivided 24 Parganas district and figures for Uttar Dinajpur stand for undivided West Dinajpur district.

**Table : E 4**

**District wise rural and urban literacy levels for all women and for women belonging to  
scheduled castes (SC) & scheduled tribes (ST) : W. Bengal**

|                         | All Women   |             |             |             | SC Women 1991 |             |             | ST Women 1991 |             |             |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
|                         | Rural       |             | Urban       |             | Total         | Rural       | Urban       | Total         | Rural       | Urban       |
|                         | 1991        | 2001        | 1991        | 2001        |               |             |             |               |             |             |
| <b>West Bengal</b>      | <b>38.1</b> | <b>53.8</b> | <b>68.3</b> | <b>76.1</b> | <b>28.9</b>   | <b>26.3</b> | <b>42.7</b> | <b>15.0</b>   | <b>14.1</b> | <b>31.7</b> |
| <b>Darjeeling</b>       | 37.5        | 56.1        | 70.0        | 79.7        | 33.3          | 27.7        | 52.5        | 30.8          | 24.9        | 71.2        |
| <b>Jalpaiguri</b>       | 27.0        | 47.0        | 63.3        | 74.7        | 26.6          | 25.4        | 35.5        | 12.5          | 12.2        | 36.7        |
| <b>Koch Behar</b>       | 29.7        | 54.5        | 71.6        | 80.6        | 26.9          | 26.1        | 50.0        | —             | —           | —           |
| <b>Uttar Dinajpur</b>   | 15.5        | 31.4        | 68.1        | 75.4        | 17.4          | 15.3        | 46.1        | 5.6           | 5.1         | 39.1        |
| <b>Dakshin Dinajpur</b> | 29.2        | 51.2        | 74.0        | 79.2        | 22.0          | 20.3        | 41.3        | 10.9          | 10.2        | 41.6        |
| <b>Malda</b>            | 21.6        | 38.9        | 65.8        | 74.0        | 20.0          | 19.0        | 40.0        | 6.4           | 6.1         | 42.0        |
| <b>Murshidabad</b>      | 26.8        | 46.4        | 52.1        | 61.5        | 24.4          | 22.7        | 35.3        | 10.6          | 10.0        | 31.0        |
| <b>Birbhum</b>          | 35.0        | 50.4        | 54.4        | 70.9        | 16.1          | 15.3        | 27.4        | 5.6           | 5.5         | 12.1        |
| <b>Bardhaman</b>        | 46.0        | 57.1        | 62.0        | 70.1        | 24.7          | 23.2        | 29.5        | 14.8          | 15.5        | 16.1        |
| <b>Nadia</b>            | 37.6        | 55.1        | 66.1        | 76.0        | 41.2          | 36.7        | 51.2        | 12.6          | 10.4        | 25.6        |
| <b>24 Parganas (N)</b>  | 42.1        | 61.7        | 72.2        | 80.5        | 17.4          | 15.3        | 46.1        | 13.1          | 10.7        | 32.0        |
| <b>24 Parganas (S)</b>  | 36.9        | 56.9        | 63.6        | 74.3        | 33.4          | 32.0        | 52.0        | 12.1          | 11.3        | 35.2        |
| <b>Hooghly</b>          | 51.1        | 62.6        | 69.8        | 78.0        | 27.8          | 24.3        | 44.8        | 13.8          | 13.4        | 21.3        |
| <b>Bankura</b>          | 34.1        | 48.0        | 63.4        | 72.4        | 13.1          | 12.3        | 22.9        | 13.9          | 13.8        | 34.1        |
| <b>Puruliya</b>         | 19.6        | 33.9        | 58.1        | 65.5        | 13.5          | 12.4        | 22.8        | 10.6          | 10.3        | 32.8        |
| <b>Medinipur</b>        | 55.1        | 63.6        | 70.1        | 73          | 39.7          | 39.1        | 46.9        | 24.6          | 24.3        | 35.1        |
| <b>Howrah</b>           | 49.6        | 65.1        | 66.4        | 76.8        | 32.9          | 27.3        | 46.0        | 32.0          | 4.0         | 48.3        |
| <b>Kolkata</b>          | —           | —           | 72.1        | 78.0        | 47.3          | —           | 47.3        | 42.0          | —           | 42.0        |

Source: State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development (SIPRD), Govt. of West Bengal, *Nari O Shishu Unnayan Ebong Panchayet*, Kalyani (Nadia District), August 2003, Table 1- 3.

**Table : E 5**  
**Households with no literate member / literate female member of 15 years and above (%) :**  
**India and selected states 1993-94**

|                    | Rural           |                           | Urban           |                           |
|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
|                    | No Literate Men | No Female Literate member | No Literate Men | No Female Literate member |
| <b>India</b>       | <b>37.0</b>     | <b>67.8</b>               | <b>14.3</b>     | <b>39.7</b>               |
| <b>West Bengal</b> | <b>30.7</b>     | <b>56.0</b>               | <b>12.2</b>     | <b>37.6</b>               |
| <b>Bihar</b>       | <b>49.6</b>     | <b>82.5</b>               | <b>20.8</b>     | <b>50.7</b>               |
| <b>Orissa</b>      | <b>41.4</b>     | <b>70.0</b>               | <b>14.8</b>     | <b>42.8</b>               |

Source :- Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), Report no.409, Table 4.7.1

Table E 6 classifies adult women and men living in rural and urban areas according to their level of education. In West Bengal about 59 and 26 per cent of rural and urban women respectively remained illiterate till the mid-1990s. Though illiteracy was more pervasive in the neighbouring states of Orissa and Bihar, it was less pronounced at the all-India level as compared to West Bengal. Among rural women in West Bengal only about two per cent had education up to the secondary level and less than one per cent were graduates; for urban women these proportions were about 11 and 8 per cent respectively.

**Table : E 6**  
**Distribution of persons aged 15 years and above by level of education and rural-urban residence (%) for India, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa: 1995-96**

|                    | Not Literate |        | Literate Without Formal Schooling |        | Primary |        | Secondary |        | Graduate |        |
|--------------------|--------------|--------|-----------------------------------|--------|---------|--------|-----------|--------|----------|--------|
|                    | Male         | Female | Male                              | Female | Male    | Female | Male      | Female | Male     | Female |
| <b>India</b>       |              |        |                                   |        |         |        |           |        |          |        |
| <b>Rural</b>       |              | 66.3   |                                   | 1.0    |         | 10.1   |           | 3.8    |          |        |
| <b>Urban</b>       | 14.3         | 32.7   | 1.1                               | 1.4    | 14.2    | 13.4   | 17.4      | 13.1   | 11.5     | 6.7    |
| <b>West Bengal</b> |              |        |                                   |        |         |        |           |        |          |        |
| <b>Rural</b>       | 32.5         | 58.5   | 3.1                               | 2.3    | 23.8    | 15.5   | 5.7       | 2.2    | 2.3      | 0.7    |
| <b>Urban</b>       | 13.8         | 26.1   | 1.5                               | 3.1    | 16.1    | 18.0   | 12.5      | 10.6   | 15.0     | 7.6    |

|               | Not Literate |        | Literate Without Formal Schooling |        | Primary |        | Secondary |        | Graduate |        |
|---------------|--------------|--------|-----------------------------------|--------|---------|--------|-----------|--------|----------|--------|
|               | Male         | Female | Male                              | Female | Male    | Female | Male      | Female | Male     | Female |
| <b>Bihar</b>  |              |        |                                   |        |         |        |           |        |          |        |
| <b>Rural</b>  | 52.6         | 82.8   | 2.5                               | 1.7    | 8.8     | 3.5    | 8.8       | 2.9    | 3.0      | 0.4    |
| <b>Urban</b>  | 20.8         | 48.4   | 2.8                               | 2.9    | 8.5     | 7.2    | 17.2      | 12.8   | 13.1     | 4.5    |
| <b>Orissa</b> |              |        |                                   |        |         |        |           |        |          |        |
| <b>Rural</b>  | 38.5         | 66.4   | 3.4                               | 1.5    | 12.4    | 8.3    | 7.7       | 2.7    | 2.5      | 0.5    |
| <b>Urban</b>  | 15.6         | 35.5   | 1.5                               | 2.3    | 10.3    | 9.9    | 14.5      | 10.8   | 13.3     | 1.3    |

Source : NSS 52nd Round (July 1995-June 1996): *Attending an Educational Institution in India: Its Level Nature and Cost, Table 2R, 2U.*

### **Pre-school/non-formal education<sup>2</sup>**

In West Bengal, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme plays a notable role in imparting non-formal, pre-school education for young children across length and breadth of the state, apart from providing specialised care for mothers. Beginning with only two operational projects and 250 Anganwari Centres (AWC) in 1977, as of September 2003, this programme has grown to foster about 350 projects and about 52,500 AWCs. The population covered by ICDS has increased from 2.5 lakh to 5.2 crore during this period.

The Sishu Siksha Karmasuchi (SSK) is another special scheme for providing basic education to children who cannot be part of the formal primary school system because of various constraints. The programme envisages setting up SSK units in any village with twenty or more children in the age-group 5-9 years. Each SSK unit has a nine-member managing committee of which three must be women and all the teachers ('sahayikas') are also women above the age of 35 years. Currently about 8 lakh children are being taught at more than 11000 SSKs or Child Education Centres, girls accounting for about 50 per cent of total students.<sup>3</sup> According to a survey report on Primary education in three Bengal districts by the Pratichi Education Trust (set up by Amartya Sen), instruction in SSKs appeared to be more effective than formal schooling, specially for children from less privileged backgrounds.<sup>4</sup> This survey found an encouraging trend emerging in rural areas : more than 80 per cent of the parents believed that girls should get the same education as boys.

### **Primary and Elementary and Secondary Education**

In West Bengal Primary schools usually refer to those teaching classes I to IV. According to recent information, there are about 52000 thousand such schools with co-education, but girls' schools number less than 500. There are only 1700 Junior Basic schools teaching up to class V. According to

some experts, this is one of the reasons behind substantial drop-outs among girl students before completing primary education. Out of about 13000 and 2650 Secondary and Higher Secondary schools, 1780 and 431 are exclusively for girls.<sup>5</sup>

Literacy and educational standards attained by women (and men) in any society have to be seen in the context of certain important indicators such as enrolment and drop-out ratios. Detailed enrolment ratios pertaining to classes I-V and VI-VIII for all students, SC students and ST students in West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and Kerala will be found in Appendix table AE 1. In its very comprehensive and path-breaking Report on the Status of Women in West Bengal, the West Bengal Commission for Women has observed that while girls enrolment in the primary stages (including class V) went up from about 41 in 1986 to more than 45 per cent in 1997, in the upper primary level, girls' enrolment declined from 43 per cent to 40.5 per cent during the same period. In terms of all-India rank, at the upper primary stage the state declined to the ninth position in 1997 from the third in 1986. "As far as enrolment in the final year of elementary education is concerned, the West Bengal scenario is rather dismal. In the female to male ratio in enrolment in class VIII, there has been a sharp decline from 78.3 per cent in 1973 when the state ranked third in the whole of India to 55.6 per cent in 1993, when it ranked last among the 15 major states."<sup>6</sup> This trend is reflected in the Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) of 2000, which puts West Bengal's net enrolment ratios for boys and girls in Primary schools (Grade I-V) at 75 and 70 per cent respectively, vis-à-vis the all-India ratios 79 and 73 per cent. MICS figures for net attendance ratios in Primary schools for West Bengal boys and girls were 73 and 68 per cent respectively, corresponding to 75 and 69 for India as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Table E 7 provides age-specific school attendance ratios in West Bengal, India and Kerala during the mid-1990s. Though these ratios for rural girls in West Bengal are better than those obtaining in India as a whole, the almost universal attendance achieved by Kerala is an indication of the gap to be covered by other states including West Bengal.

**Table 7**  
**Age-specific school attendance ratios (%) for West Bengal, India and Kerala : 1995**

|                    |              | 6-10 years |       | 11-13 years |       |
|--------------------|--------------|------------|-------|-------------|-------|
|                    |              | Boys       | Girls | Boys        | Girls |
| <b>West Bengal</b> | <b>Rural</b> | 69         | 61    | 74          | 67    |
|                    | <b>Urban</b> | 79         | 75    | 83          | 83    |
| <b>All India</b>   | <b>Rural</b> | 71         | 58    | 75          | 57    |
|                    | <b>Urban</b> | 84         | 82    | 87          | 83    |
| <b>Kerala</b>      | <b>Rural</b> | 96         | 97    | 97          | 98    |
|                    | <b>Urban</b> | 98         | 97    | 97          | 98    |

Source:- Department of Development and Planning, Govt. of West Bengal, *West Bengal Human Development Report, 2004*, Table 7.2, p.154.

Table E 8 shows that during the 1990s, the proportion of never-enrolled girls (aged 5-24 years) was as high as 35 per cent in rural West Bengal. Though this was somewhat better than the comparable all-India figure of 41 per cent, the 17 per cent never-enrolled girls in urban areas was higher than the comparable all-India average of 14.7 per cent. As compared to girls, the proportion of never-enrolled boys in rural and urban West Bengal was appreciably lower at 26 and 12 per cent respectively.

Table E 9 shows drop-out figures for girls and boys in classes I-V in 1987-88 and 2000-01 and for I-IX in 2001-02. As in most other states, in West Bengal too girls are clearly at a disadvantage, drop-out rates for girls being 57 per cent as against 46 per cent for boys in classes I-V in 2000-01; the point to note is that though these figures are lower and therefore better as compared to 1987-88, the gender gap had become more pronounced. The same gender gap appears if classes I-IX are taken together : drop out rates for girls in 2001-02 was 81 per cent as against 77 per cent for boys. The 52<sup>nd</sup> Round of the NSS made a special enquiry into the reasons behind non-enrolment as well as dropping out of school among girls and boys aged 5-24 years, as reflected in Table E 10. We see in this Table that 'financial constraints' and 'child not interested in studies' are important causes behind non-enrolment and dropping out, both for girls and boys.

**Table : E 8**  
**Percentage of never enrolled girls and boys (aged 5-24 years)**  
**India and selected states : 1995-96**

| Sl. No. | States         | Rural |      | Urban |      |
|---------|----------------|-------|------|-------|------|
|         |                | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys |
| 1       | Andhra Pradesh | 38.8  | 24.0 | 13.7  | 8.1  |
| 2       | Bihar          | 64.2  | 39.6 | 28.6  | 18.5 |
| 3       | Gujarat        | 37.4  | 15.6 | 14.2  | 7.8  |
| 4       | Karnataka      | 37.4  | 22.7 | 14.9  | 9.2  |
| 5       | Kerala         | 29    | 13   | 12    | 2.2  |
| 6       | Maharashtra    | 19.4  | 11   | 8.1   | 4.8  |
| 7       | Mizoram        | 18.6  | 26.7 | 2.4   | 2.4  |
| 8       | Punjab         | 15.2  | 11.3 | 11.5  | 8.5  |
| 9       | Rajasthan      | 63.1  | 29.2 | 22.5  | 11.2 |
| 10      | Tamil Nadu     | 18.4  | 6.7  | 6.1   | 3.7  |
| 11      | Uttar Pradesh  | 54.2  | 27.3 | 25.2  | 18.4 |
| 12      | West Bengal    | 35.0  | 26.3 | 17.2  | 12.2 |
| 13      | India          | 40.6  | 23.5 | 14.7  | 9.6  |

Source : NSS 52 Round, Tables 17R and 17U

**Table : E 9**  
**Drop out rates among girls and boys (%) in classes I-V and I-IX**  
**West Bengal, India and selected states: 1987-88 and 2000-2002**

| States         | 1987-88<br>Class-I-V |       | 2000-01<br>Class-I-V |       | 2001-02<br>Class-I-IX |       |
|----------------|----------------------|-------|----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|
|                | Boys                 | Girls | Boys                 | Girls | Boys                  | Girls |
| Andhra Pradesh | 58.5                 | 55.0  | 40.8                 | 44.2  | 68.5                  | 63.1  |
| Bihar          | 46.9                 | 41.9  | 22.6                 | 24.4  | 78.4                  | 86.7  |
| Gujarat        | 46.9                 | 41.9  | 22.6                 | 24.4  | 70.3                  | 74.6  |
| Karnataka      | 57.4                 | 50.2  | 24.7                 | 18.5  | 60.2                  | 63.2  |
| Kerala         | -3.6                 | -4.4  | -9.7                 | -6.0  | 23.8                  | 14.3  |
| Maharashtra    | 45.7                 | 39.8  | 15.9                 | 18.8  | 48.9                  | 56.0  |
| Punjab         | 37.8                 | 37.3  | 22.0                 | 18.5  | 40.4                  | 38.8  |
| Rajasthan      | 60.8                 | 52.3  | 55.5                 | 73.5  | 72.6                  | 80.4  |
| Tamil Nadu     | 24.5                 | 21.8  | 53.0                 | 31.7  | 58.0                  | 58.9  |
| Uttar Pradesh  | 47.2                 | 47.7  | 53.0                 | 62.1  | 57.3                  | 74.9  |
| West Bengal    | 65.8                 | 63.8  | 46.2                 | 57.0  | 77.0                  | 80.5  |

Source : GOI, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Annual Report, 1991-92, p. 305; 2001-2, p. 219.

**Table : E 10**  
**Distribution of never enrolled and dropped out girls and boys (aged 5-24 Yrs.) by reason for**  
**non-enrolment and dropping out of school (%) for rural West Bengal and India : 1995-1996**

| NSS<br>Code | Reason for non-enrolment/ drop out      | (a) never-enrolled |             | (b) dropped-out |             |
|-------------|---|--------------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
|             |   | Boys               | Girls       | Boys            | Girls       |
| 02          | Child not interested in studies         | 20.5 (21.7)        | 15.1 (18.5) | 28.5 (35.6)     | 21.0 (20.9) |
| 03          | Parents not interested in studies       | 27.8 (17.7)        | 35.6 (32.0) | 5.6 (3.4)       | 16.3 (14.5) |
| 08          | Has to work for wage/salary             | 2.2 (2.6)          | 0.9 (0.3)   | 6.1 (6.6)       | 1.4 (0.4)   |
| 09          | Has to work in other economic activity  | 4.6 (1.4)          | 3.0 (0.7)   | 11.4 (7.4)      | 3.9 (2.8)   |
| 10          | Has to look after younger siblings      | 0.6 (0.4)          | 2.5 (1.4)   | 0.7 (1.0)       | 1.6 (2.4)   |
| 11          | Has to attend other domestic activities | 0.7 (0.1)          | 4.0 (1.4)   | 1.2 (1.2)       | 9.2 (12.2)  |
| 12          | Financial constraints                   | 16.3 (27.3)        | 13.6 (17.1) | 13.6 (27.8)     | 10.2 (22.4) |

Note: Non-enrolment and drop-out figures do not add up to 100 as the full list of reasons recorded by the NSS is not shown here. Figures in brackets are for all India.

Source: NSS 52nd round (July 1995-June 1996), *Attending Educational Institutions in India: Its level, Nature and Cost*, Tables 17R, 17U.

In the above context, some West Bengal NGOs concerned with education had a number of points to make at the Interactive NGO Meet held in Kolkata on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2004, under the joint auspices of the National Commission for Women and West Bengal Commission for Women (hereafter Kolkata NGO Meet). They observed that the practice of relegating large numbers of girls to 'alternate schools' and thus to non-formal and non-standard systems of education was an undesirable trend. They also referred to certain 'hidden costs' of education which make for lower enrolment and higher drop-out rates even though West Bengal Govt. offers free school education for girls and they drew attention to the need for 'safe shelter', specially for older girls in rural areas who have to attend schools located at a distance from their homes. These views find some corroboration in a recent study carried out in a number of West Bengal districts. The study identified certain common deterrents to school participation for girls : not having a dress that can be worn to school; want of adequate learning materials and lack of safe means of travel. The study also found that half the ever-enrolled girls needed tuition after school for continuing with their studies.<sup>8</sup> Again, it has been noted that " The provision of mid-day meals is an important step towards ensuring better nutrition among the young as well as providing incentives for children to attend school regularly... However, the problem of finding finances to support a mid-day meal programme for all the children in public schools a elementary level still remains a difficult one."<sup>9</sup> Currently more than 2000 schools provide mid-day meals and this number is expected to double by the end of 2004. Another relevant factor influencing enrolment and retention of girls, specially as they grow older, is the involvement of women teachers in educational institutions. In West Bengal, women teachers currently constitute about one-fourth of total teachers teaching at various levels. This is comparatively low in the all-India context and less than half the high proportion prevailing in Kerala, as shown in Appendix Table AE 2. There is also the problem of poor infrastructure that particularly affect girl children, lack of drinking water in the premises and absence of separate toilets for girls being two telling instances. Appendix Table AE 3 shows that till 2002 less than one-fifth of the schools had provided separate toilets for girls in most districts. Appendix table AE 4 brings out the gender imbalance in the student population in the primary as well as higher classes in each West Bengal district during the mid-1990s.

### **Vocational training/education**

In this era of globalisation with fast evolving markets and technologies, concerted and continuous efforts have to be made for protecting and enhancing income earning opportunities for women, specially in view of their many vulnerabilities. An important strategy in this direction is imparting new skills and transforming/upgrading existing skills through appropriate vocational education/training programmes. Vocational training being a concurrent subject, responsibilities are shared by both central and state governments. One of the Regional Vocational Training Institutes (RVTI) for women (under Govt. of India's Directorate General of Employment and Training) is located in Kolkata, conducting basic and advanced courses in secretarial practice, dress making, fruit and vegetable preservation, architectural draughtsmanship, console operation etc. The Technical Education and Training Department

of GOWB lays emphasis on 'women-friendly' vocational courses under its Short Term Vocational Training (STVT) programme and the Community Polytechnic scheme, about one-third of the total trainees being women. The courses are described as skill-based (such as embroidery and garment design, tailoring, silk screen painting etc.), knowledge-based (such as secretarial practice, business assistantship etc.), computer-based (such as DeskTop Publishing etc.) or technology-based (such as training as physiotherapist, laboratory technician etc.)<sup>10</sup> The Craftsmanship Training scheme was introduced by the Govt. more than 50 years ago to ensure a steady flow of skilled personnel for participating in various sectors of industry. It is implemented through the countrywide network of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs). There are now 29 ITIs in West Bengal, four being exclusively for women, located in Kolkata, Bardhaman, Siliguri and Banipur (in North 24 Parganas district). The intake for most trades taught in an ITI is rather modest, usually only 16 trainees per course. Women trainees in ITIs rose from 422 in 2001 to 489 in 2002-03, while in the Polytechnics, it was 630 and 635 respectively. <sup>11</sup> About 20 per cent of the total intake of 6500 in the Polytechnics are available to women candidates.<sup>12</sup> A comparative perspective regarding vocational education/training for women is provided in Table E 10, showing statewise seats in Women's ITIs and Women's Wings in general ITIs. It can be seen that the total number of women's ITIs and Women's Wings in general ITIs in West Bengal rose from 4 in 1995 to 11 in 2003, total seats allocated for women rising from 448 to 720 - much behind all other states except Bihar.

**Table : E 11**  
**Statewise seats in Women's ITIs and Women's Wings in general ITIs**  
**India and selected states : 1995 and 2003**

| States                | 1995               |                       |                        | 2003                            |                        |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
|                       | Women's Govt. ITIs | Women's wings in ITIs | Total Sanctioned Seats | Total no. of Women's ITIs/Wings | Total Sanctioned Seats |
| <b>Andhra Pradesh</b> | 23                 | 4                     | 3340                   | 36                              | 3600                   |
| <b>Bihar</b>          | 7                  | 0                     | 608                    | 8                               | 592                    |
| <b>Gujarat</b>        | 0                  | 16                    | 1172                   | 33                              | 2238                   |
| <b>Karnataka</b>      | 17                 | 10                    | 1800                   | 28                              | 2626                   |
| <b>Kerala</b>         | 3                  | 9                     | 1456                   | 11                              | 1552                   |
| <b>Maharashtra</b>    | 15                 | 11                    | 2320                   | 238                             | 8592                   |
| <b>Mizoram</b>        | -                  | -                     | -                      | 3                               | 48                     |
| <b>Punjab</b>         | 50                 | 7                     | 5668                   | 78                              | 6154                   |
| <b>Rajasthan</b>      | 10                 | 8                     | 704                    | 16                              | 736                    |
| <b>Tamil Nadu</b>     | 10                 | 13                    | 1832                   | 23                              | 2326                   |

| States        | 1995               |                       |                        | 2003                            |                        |
|---------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
|               | Women's Govt. ITIs | Women's wings in ITIs | Total Sanctioned Seats | Total no. of Women's ITIs/Wings | Total Sanctioned Seats |
| Uttar Pradesh | 14                 | 57                    | 4380                   | 80                              | 4316                   |
| West Bengal   | 4                  | 6                     | 448                    | 11                              | 720                    |
| India         | 214                | 231                   | 34480                  | 800                             | 46658                  |

Source: Department of Women and Child Development, Statistical Profile of Women in India: 1997, pp. 173-174, Table 5.34 and relevant Annual Reports, Government of India, Ministry of Labour, DGET.

After considering a number of indicators directly concerned with educational attainments of women and men, we can now look at certain aspects of macro policy which have their own impact on the infrastructure of education. Table E 10 provides figures for central and state governments' expenditure on education as a proportion of total government revenue. In ten out of the 12 states shown in this Table, including West Bengal, this proportion was lower in 2001-02, as compared to situation obtaining in 1988-89, before the introduction of economic reforms ushering in globalisation. Whereas in 1989 almost one-fourth of the total revenue of the state was spent on education, this share was reduced to 18 per cent by 2001-02.

**Table : E 12**  
**Expenditure on education as a proportion of total revenue of state governments :**  
**1988-89 and 2001-2002**

| Sl.No. | States         | 1988-89 | 2001-02 |
|--------|----------------|---------|---------|
| 1      | Andhra Pradesh | 18.4    | 16.0    |
| 2      | Bihar          | 26.3    | 23.4    |
| 3      | Gujarat        | 20.5    | 13.5    |
| 4      | Karnataka      | 21.3    | 18.0    |
| 5      | Kerala         | 28.1    | 23.0    |
| 6      | Maharashtra    | 19.6    | 22.4    |
| 7      | Mizoram        | -       | -       |
| 8      | Punjab         | 20.8    | 16.3    |
| 9      | Rajasthan      | 21.2    | 21.9    |
| 10     | Tamil Nadu     | 20.9    | 20.2    |

| Sl.No. | States        | 1988-89 | 2001-02 |
|--------|---------------|---------|---------|
| 11     | Uttar Pradesh | 20.3    | 18.4    |
| 12     | West Bengal   | 24.5    | 18.1    |

Source : Nirmala Banerjee and Poulomi Roy, *Gender in Fiscal Policies : The Case of West Bengal*, The United Nations Development Fund For Women (UNIFEM), 2004, Table 2.8

### Initiatives in Education

We have already taken note of the role of ICDS with regard to pre-school/non-formal education in West Bengal<sup>13</sup>, which in September 2003 accounted for about 350 projects and about 52,500 AWCs. The population covered by ICDS has increased from 2.5 lakh to 5.2 crore during this period.

The Sishu Siksha Karmasuchi (SSK) is another special scheme for providing basic education to children who cannot be part of the formal primary school system because of various constraints. The programme envisages setting up SSK units in any village with twenty or more children in the age-group 5-9 years. Each SSK unit has a nine-member managing committee of which three must be women and all the teachers ('sahayikas') are also women above the age of 35 years. Currently about 8 lakh children are being taught at more than 11000 SSKs or Child Education Centres, girls accounting for about 50 per cent of total students.<sup>14</sup>

The literacy campaign in the state passes through three successive stages : (I) Total Literacy Campaign(TLC); Post Literacy Programme (PLP) and Continuing Education Programme (CEP). Eleven districts have now reached the CEP stage.<sup>15</sup>

Presently two national programmes address gaps in primary and secondary education in West Bengal, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. DPEP was formally launched in 1997-98 and now covers about 24000 primary schools in 10 districts (Bankura, Birbhum, Koch Behar, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas, Dakshin and Uttar Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Purulia). These districts were selected initially on the basis of low female literacy rates as compared to the national average.

- DPEP districts are reported to be making steady progress in enrolment, retention and awareness building regarding the need for girls' education and has benefited deprived and disabled children.<sup>16</sup>
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is dedicated to expansion of elementary education.
- The National Programme for Education of Girls at Primary Level is functioning in 86 educationally backward Blocks in 12 districts of the state.
- The state's Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC)- in collaboration with Unicef and NGOs such as Ramakrishana Mission etc.- lays special emphasis on building separate toilets for girls in school premises.

- The School Dress Programme for all girls in primary schools aims to cover nearly 60 lakh children every year.
- More than 55000 primary school teachers have been sensitised on gender issues with special focus on girl children.

The discussion above makes it clear that important gains have been made in the field of women's literacy and education. Yet, much work remains to be done; for disparities persist. There is a clear divide marking the attainments of women and men, which tend to get sharpened by inequalities between different social groups ( such as scheduled castes, schedules tribes and minorities) and between different geographical areas by way of rural-urban or inter-district differentials. Eliminating inequalities is the only sure way of realising the SPAC goals of Universal Primary Education by 2006 and Universal Elementary Education by 2010 and building basic capabilities of women.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Fourth World Conference on Women, September 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Mainly based on GOWB, Department of Women and Child Development and Social Welfare (hereafter WCD), *A Report on the Activities of the Department of Women And Child Development And Social Welfare : April 2002-September 2003* (hereafter WCD Report), 2003, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Memo from Joint Secretary, WCD, GOWB, addressed to Member Secretary, National Commission for Women (NCW), dated 26 May 2004 (no. 2113-SW/3W-5/2004); hereafter GOWB Memo to NCW.

<sup>4</sup> Kumar Rana, Abdur Rafique and Amrita Sengupta, *The Pratichi Education Report : Delivery of Primary Education, A Study in West Bengal*, Kolkata 2002.

<sup>5</sup> GOWB Memo.

<sup>6</sup> West Bengal Commission for Women, *The Challenge Ahead : Changing Status of Women in West Bengal : 1970-2000. An Executive Summary*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> GOWB, *State Plan of Action for Children (SPAC)*, p.52.

<sup>8</sup> Piyali Sengupta and Jaba Guha, " Enrolment, Dropout and Grade Completion of Girl Children in West Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly* (hereafter EPW), 27 April 2002, Vol. XXXVII(17), p. 1634.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid..

<sup>10</sup> GOWB Memo to NCW.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> WCD Report, p. 105.

<sup>13</sup> WCD Report, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> GOWB Memo to NCW.

<sup>15</sup> *Report on the West Bengal Economy*, December 2003, p. 80.

<sup>16</sup> WBHDR. p. 161.

**Appendix Table : AE 1**  
**Enrolment Ratios for classes I-V and VI-VIII**  
**West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Kerala : 2000-2001**

|                    | Classes I -V<br>(6-11 years) |       | Classes VI-VIII<br>(11-14 years) |       |
|--------------------|------------------------------|-------|----------------------------------|-------|
|                    | Men                          | Women | Men                              | Women |
| <b>West Bengal</b> |                              |       |                                  |       |
| (i) All Students   | 112.7                        | 106.8 | 60.5                             | 47.0  |
| (ii) SC Students   | 114.2                        | 101.9 | 64.5                             | 43.0  |
| (iii) ST Students  | 103.0                        | 73.3  | 77.1                             | 33.8  |
| <b>Bihar</b>       |                              |       |                                  |       |
| (i) All Students   | 99.7                         | 60.4  | 39.8                             | 19.8  |
| (ii) SC Students   | 84.6                         | 54.6  | 52.4                             | 27.3  |
| (iii) ST Students  | 85.5                         | 54.6  | 52.4                             | 27.3  |
| <b>Orissa</b>      |                              |       |                                  |       |
| (i) All Students   | 131.9                        | 96    | 65.4                             | 43.0  |
| (ii) SC Students   | 118.8                        | 86.8  | 67.8                             | 44.8  |
| (iii) ST Students  | 111.2                        | 66.9  | 69.7                             | 47.4  |
| <b>Kerala</b>      |                              |       |                                  |       |
| (i) All Students   | 88.4                         | 87.3  | 101.4                            | 96.6  |
| (ii) SC Students   | 87.1                         | 84.2  | 97.3                             | 91.7  |
| (iii) ST Students  | 98.8                         | 97.9  | 83.7                             | 78.2  |

Source : Govt. of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, *Annual Report, 2002-03*

**Appendix Table : AE 2**

**Women teachers as percentage of total school teachers in West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Kerala and All India : 1995-96 and 2000-2001**

|                    | Primary     |             | Middle Stage |             | Secondary   |             | Higher Secondary/<br>10+2 Schools/<br>Junior Colleges |             |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---|-------------|
|                    | 1995-96     | 2000-2001   | 1995-96      | 2000-2001   | 1995-96     | 2000-2001   | 1995-96   | 2000-2001   |
| <b>West Bengal</b> | 23.3        | 24.5        | 24.2         | 25.2        | 39.9        | 25.6        | 23.5  | 26.1        |
| <b>Bihar</b>       | 19.0        | 19.2        | 21.1         | 22.8        | 13.0        | 11.3        | 24.9  | 30.1        |
| <b>Orissa</b>      | 24.4        | 24.8        | 14.5         | 14.7        | 21.1        | 21.2        | 24.0  | 23.5        |
| <b>Kerala</b>      | 68.7        | 71.5        | 65.7         | 66.9        | 65.2        | 66.7        | 66.4  | 65.2        |
| <b>India</b>       | <b>31.8</b> | <b>35.6</b> | <b>35.1</b>  | <b>38.2</b> | <b>35.2</b> | <b>35.0</b> | <b>32.6</b>   | <b>29.8</b> |

Source:- Govt. of India, MHRD, *Selected Educational Statistics 2000-2001*. Govt. of India, MHRD, Department of WCD, *Women in India: A Statistical Profile-1997*, Table 4.20, p. 107.

**Appendix Table : AE 3**  
**School infrastructure in different districts of West Bengal : 2001-02**

| <b>District</b>          | <b>No. of Schools</b> | <b>No. with no Drinking Water</b> | <b>No. without Girl's Toilet</b> | <b>% of Schools without girls' toilet</b> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Bankura</b>           | 3464                  | 955                               | 3307                             | 95.5                                      |
| <b>Birbhum</b>           | 2366                  | 815                               | 2275                             | 96.2                                      |
| <b>Koch Behar</b>        | 1812                  | 112                               | 1125                             | 62.1                                      |
| <b>Murshidabad</b>       | 3165                  | 48                                | 2896                             | 91.5                                      |
| <b>24 Parganas (S)</b>   | 3526                  | 1147                              | 3131                             | 88.8                                      |
| <b>Dakshin Dinajpur</b>  | 1188                  | 335                               | 1097                             | 92.3                                      |
| <b>Jalpaiguri</b>        | 1967                  | 718                               | 1843                             | 93.7                                      |
| <b>Malda</b>             | 1886                  | 557                               | 1743                             | 94.5                                      |
| <b>Puruliya</b>          | 3001                  | 635                               | 2838                             | 94.6                                      |
| <b>Uttar Dinajpur</b>    | 1443                  | 679                               | 1424                             | 94.6                                      |
| <b>Bardhaman</b>         | 3939                  | 756                               | 3456                             | 87.7                                      |
| <b>Darjeeling</b>        | 779                   | 638                               | 717                              | 92.0                                      |
| <b>Howrah</b>            | 2034                  | 550                               | 1730                             | 88.0                                      |
| <b>Hooghly</b>           | 2887                  | 518                               | 2446                             | 84.7                                      |
| <b>Nadia</b>             | 2651                  | 437                               | 2381                             | 89.8                                      |
| <b>24 Parganas (N)</b>   | 3896                  | 715                               | 3168                             | 81.3                                      |
| <b>Paschim Medinipur</b> | 4685                  | 932                               | 4167                             | 88.9                                      |
| <b>PurbaMedinipur</b>    | 3157                  | 702                               | 2828                             | 88.6                                      |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>48224</b>          | <b>11360</b>                      | <b>42952</b>                     | <b>89.1</b>                               |

Note : Total includes schools in Siliguri.

Source: Govt. of W. Bengal, *State Plan of Action for Children, November 2003, p;59-60.*

**Appendix Table : AE 4**  
**Percentage of girl students in schools in West Bengal districts : 1993-94**

| <b>Districts</b>                     | <b>% in primary schools</b> | <b>% in higher schools</b> |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Koch Behar</b>                    | 82.6                        | 46.8                       |
| <b>Jalpaiguri</b>                    | 76.1                        | 68.5                       |
| <b>Darjeeling</b>                    | 74.8                        | 77.5                       |
| <b>West Dinajpur</b>                 | 77.1                        | 57.8                       |
| <b>Malda</b>                         | 77.2                        | 53.0                       |
| <b>Murshidabad</b>                   | 89.5                        | 56.5                       |
| <b>Nadia</b>                         | 89.0                        | 62.0                       |
| <b>24 Parganas (N)</b>               | 91.0                        | 82.9                       |
| <b>24 Parganas (S)</b>               | 92.0                        | 92.9                       |
| <b>Howrah</b>                        | 84.6                        | 77.4                       |
| <b>Hooghly</b>                       | 90.4                        | 48.4                       |
| <b>Medinipur</b>                     | 84.7                        | 62.2                       |
| <b>Bankura</b>                       | 79.0                        | 56.6                       |
| <b>Puruliya</b>                      | 61.9                        | 39.6                       |
| <b>Bardhaman</b>                     | 89.4                        | 40.8                       |
| <b>Birbhum</b>                       | 71.1                        | 52.4                       |
| <b>West Bengal (without Kolkata)</b> | 83.8                        | 62.3                       |

Source: District Statistical Handbook(s), 1994/1993-94, Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, West Bengal, as cited in Scchidananda Roy, *Manab Unnayan : Pashchim Banger Jela Chitra*, January 2002.

## CHAPTER - V

### WORK PARTICIPATION

***It is in the interest of a society to make full and most effective use of its human resources. The full benefit of development can only be realised with people's participation and the economic role of women can not be isolated from the total framework of development*** (Towards Equality : Report of the Committee on the Status of Women In India, 1974)

As a result of expanding research and advocacy on women's issues, we now have a better understanding of women's contribution to the economy and to society as a whole through the many types of work that they perform in all communities. In this section we look at the economic circumstances and work participation patterns of women of West Bengal, keeping in mind the context of globalisation that has been increasingly perceptible in India since the 1990s. Experiences accumulated from different parts of the world now makes it clear that those adversely affected by the processes associated with globalisation include disproportionately large segments of women, specially from the weaker sections of society, primarily through constraining work opportunities and employment levels, which, in their turn are important determinants of women's over-all situation in society.

#### **Reporting work and counting workers : The missing women**

Standard data sources such as our decennial population censuses and National Sample Surveys (NSS) classify and count as workers/employed all those women and men who are reported to be engaged in gainful productive activities (i.e. producing goods and services for sale in the market). We can then derive estimates of the worker-population ratio for total, male and female populations, or the relevant work participation rates (WPRs: i.e. percentage of workers in a given population). Here we have to be aware that though there are large numbers of women workers participating in the productive activity of the household as unpaid family helpers, they are very often missed out due to various shortcomings in the data collection system and this gives rise to the persistent problem of under-counting and 'statistical invisibility' of women. Much of the work women do thus remains unrecognised and under-valued. As the Human Development Report of 1995 points out, this has a deep impact on the status of women in society and the gender blindness of public policy.

Data sources use several types of classification concerning workers. The industrial classification groups workers according to the area or sector of their work ( for example, cultivation, agricultural labour or manufacture) while occupational classification refers to the occupation followed within a

given sector (for example occupation of manual labour, which can be in an agricultural farm or in a factory). Workers are also classified as (a) 'main' (or 'principal') workers who are found to be employed for a greater part of the year (at least 183 days) or 'marginal' workers who work for a shorter period and who are obviously exposed to greater economic insecurity.

### Work Participation Rates

Work participation rates (WPRs) for men and women for West Bengal and selected states based on data from the last two censuses are given Table B 1 and the two Appendix Tables, AB 1 and AB 2 based on NSS data, show the disposition of rural (Table AB 1 ) and urban workers (AB 2), further classified into the nine sectors of economic activity that comprise our economy. Some of the features of Table B 1 are familiar to us - the substantially lower female work participation rates (FWPRs) as compared to those for males and rural participation rates being generally higher than those for urban areas. Rural and urban FWPRs in West Bengal were 16.8 and 19.1 in 2001; corresponding male WPRs were 44.5 and 47.5. But there are other striking features that draw attention : a clear decline in FWPRs in most of the states - except for small gains in urban female work participation rates. This is consistent with the known loss of employment opportunities associated at least partially with the impact of globalisation. In West Bengal rural FWPR for main workers declined from 8.4 to 5.8 per cent between 1991 and 2001. Secondly, both for 1991 and 2001, West Bengal's FWPR was the lowest in India both in rural and urban areas. (This has been a historical trend and has been discussed in other works of the author.<sup>1</sup>)

**Table : B 1**  
**Men and women main workers as proportion of male and female population (%)**  
**India and selected states: 1991 and 2001**

| States                | Women |      |       |      | Men   |      |       |      |
|-----------------------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|
|                       | Rural |      | Urban |      | Rural |      | Urban |      |
|                       | 1991  | 2001 | 1991  | 2001 | 1991  | 2001 | 1991  | 2001 |
| <b>Andhra Pradesh</b> | 37    | 30.9 | 48.7  | 47.5 | 57.5  | 51.9 | 48.7  | 47.5 |
| <b>Bihar</b>          | 10.8  | 9.2  | 4.3   | 4.6  | 48.5  | 41.1 | 41.8  | 37.9 |
| <b>Gujarat</b>        | 17.7  | 18.9 | 6     | 7    | 54.4  | 50.4 | 50.9  | 52.6 |
| <b>Karnataka</b>      | 27.4  | 24.7 | 12    | 13.5 | 55.4  | 52.3 | 49.6  | 51.2 |
| <b>Kerala</b>         | 13.4  | 10.8 | 11.3  | 10.6 | 44.9  | 41   | 44.6  | 44.5 |
| <b>Maharashtra</b>    | 36.1  | 33.6 | 50    | 49.8 | 52.1  | 47.8 | 50    | 49.8 |
| <b>Mizoram</b>        | 39.2  | 37.6 | 27.8  | 26   | 51.3  | 51.7 | 47.6  | 46.8 |
| <b>Punjab</b>         | 2.2   | 14   | 4.3   | 7.9  | 54.9  | 49.4 | 52.2  | 51.4 |
| <b>Rajasthan</b>      | 15.3  | 20   | 5.4   | 6.2  | 49.2  | 43.7 | 46.4  | 44.2 |

| States        | Women |      |       |      | Men   |      |       |      |
|---------------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|
|               | Rural |      | Urban |      | Rural |      | Urban |      |
|               | 1991  | 2001 | 1991  | 2001 | 1991  | 2001 | 1991  | 2001 |
| Tamil Nadu    | 32    | 52.6 | 30.1  | 52.9 | 54.9  | 49.4 | 52.2  | 51.1 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 8.4   | 6.6  | 3.8   | 4    | 50.1  | 39.3 | 46.2  | 40.5 |
| West Bengal   | 8.7   | 5.8  | 5.8   | 8.8  | 51.2  | 46   | 49.3  | 50.6 |
| All India     | 18.6  | 16.8 | 8.1   | 9.1  | 51.8  | 44.5 | 48.6  | 47.5 |

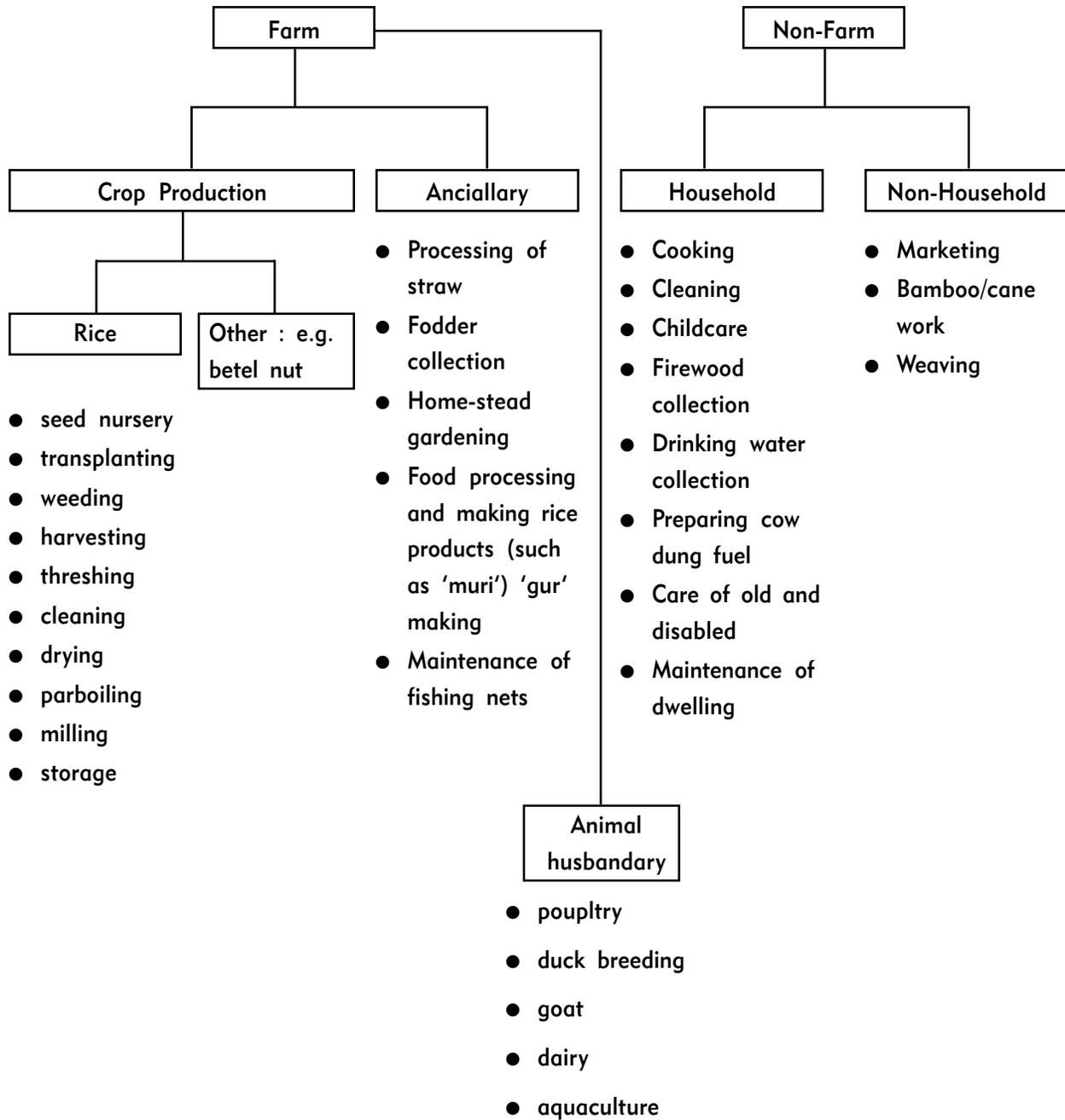
Source: COI 2001, Paper 3 of 2001, Annexure - 1.

### **Economic activities of women and their contribution to the household**

An important reason behind the conspicuously low levels of economic activity pertaining to West Bengal Women lies in the ubiquitous problem of undercounting of women's work, as mentioned earlier; however, when we look at women's work more closely, it will be evident, as in Table B 2, that women are in fact involved in a whole range activities that contribute significantly to the economic welfare of the household. This information is based on special enquiries periodically undertaken by the NSS and addressed to women engaged in 'domestic duties' - women who are not formally counted as 'workers'. The interesting point about Table B2 is that as many as 95 per cent of rural women in West Bengal not acknowledged as workers are actually involved in resource generating activities that help sustain their families. Chart B 1 also illustrates the wide varied ambit of rural women's work, ranging from agricultural and ancillary economic activities to those necessary for maintaining the household.

Table B3, based on the findings of the second NFHS, provides further insights into women's economic role. Among West Bengal's rural women, again, a higher proportion - 29 per cent- were found to be gainfully employed (as compared to 25 per cent for India as whole) and among them, more than one-eighth were contributing at least half of their families' expenses. Perhaps it will not be wrong to infer that such women come to acquire a certain status and say within their social ambit and many more can be added to this category through greater access to assets and to skill formation. Chart B 1 portrays the wide and varied ambit of rural women's work, ranging from activities related to cultivation and ancillary economic activities to those necessary for maintaining the household.

**Chart : B 1**  
**Facets of Farm Women's work in West Bengal**



Adapted from : B. Mitra et al., 'Women in Rice-Based Farming System. A Case Study', in C. Prasad and Shri Ram (eds), *Women in Agriculture - Technological Perspective*, New Delhi, International Federation for Women in Agriculture, Delhi 1990, Fig. 2.

**Table : B 2**

**Number of rural women usually engaged in household duties and also participating in specified activities per 1000 rural women usually engaged in household duties in West Bengal and India : 1993-94**

|    | <b>Activity</b>                         | <b>West Bengal</b> | <b>India</b> |
|----|---|--------------------|--------------|
| 1. | <b>Kitchen garden</b>                   | 252                | 169          |
| 2. | <b>Poultry &amp; Dairy</b>              | 526                | 260          |
| 3. | <b>Free collection of fish etc.</b>     | 306                | 195          |
| 4. | <b>Free collection of firewood</b>      | 483                | 403          |
| 5. | <b>Any of above 4</b>                   | 744                | 610          |
| 6. | <b>Sewing, tailoring</b>                | 674                | 537          |
| 7. | <b>Tutoring children</b>                | 423                | 221          |
| 8. | <b>Bringing water from outside home</b> | 716                | 581          |
| 9. | <b>Any of 19 listed activities</b>      | 946                | 892          |

Source : NSSO, *Sarvekshana*, October-December 1997, Table 4.1.1, p. 79.

**Table : B 3**

**Proportion of married women who are employed and who contribute to their households' expenditures : India and selected states : 1998-99**

| <b>States</b>         | <b>Percentage employed</b> | <b>Percentage whose earnings pay for at least half the family expenses</b> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Andhra Pradesh</b> | 58.7                       | 24.5   |
| <b>Bihar</b>          | 26.4                       | 10.8   |
| <b>Gujarat</b>        | 50.8                       | 16.9   |
| <b>Karnataka</b>      | 52.1                       | 12.2   |
| <b>Kerala</b>         | 25.0                       | 9.8  |
| <b>Maharashtra</b>    | 55.7                       | 14.0   |
| <b>Mizoram</b>        | 49.9                       | 22.8   |
| <b>Punjab</b>         | 9.4                        | 4.1  |
| <b>Rajasthan</b>      | 43.5                       | 8.5  |
| <b>Tamil Nadu</b>     | 53.8                       | 12.4   |
| <b>Uttar Pradesh</b>  | 23.4                       | 4.1  |
| <b>West Bengal</b>    | 28.5                       | 13.0   |
| <b>India</b>          | <b>25.4</b>                | <b>13.0</b>  |

Source : Second National Family Health Survey (NFHS 2), as cited in Sunita Kishore and Kamala Gupta, "Women's Empowerment in India and Its States: Evidence from NFHS EPW, 14 February 2004, p. 695, Table 8.

### Categories of women workers

Participation of West Bengal women in economic activities as main workers and marginal workers vis-à-vis the all-India situation during 1981-2001 is illustrated in Table B 4, which also draws attention to a worrisome trend - the growing marginalisation among women workers. Women's comparatively greater dependence on short duration/uncertain/marginal work is also brought out in the district level data on work participation shown in Table B 4A.

**Table : B 4**  
**Main workers and marginal workers as proportion of total population (%)**  
**West Bengal and India (1991 and 2001)**

|                    |             | Main Workers |       | Marginal workers |       |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------|-------|------------------|-------|
|                    |             | Men          | Women | Men              | Women |
| <b>West Bengal</b> | <b>1981</b> | 48.7         | 5.8   | 1.6              | 2.3   |
|                    | <b>1991</b> | 50.7         | 8.0   | 0.7              | 3.3   |
|                    | <b>2001</b> | 47.3         | 8.9   | 6.9              | 9.2   |
| <b>India</b>       | <b>1981</b> | 51.6         | 14.1  | 1.0              | 5.6   |
|                    | <b>1991</b> | 51.0         | 16.0  | 0.6              | 6.2   |
|                    | <b>2001</b> | 45.3         | 14.7  | 6.6              | 11.0  |

Source : GOI, *Statistical Profile of Women in India : 1997* and GOWB, *Statistical Abstract : West Bengal : 2001-2002*.

The next two Tables (B5 and B5A) show the distribution of main workers among men and women according to three main livelihoods ( as cultivator, agricultural labour and household industry) for West Bengal separately and for selected states and India

**Table : B 5**  
**Classification of main workers in W. Bengal according to main livelihoods : 1991 and 2001**

|                           | Men  |      | Women |      |
|---------------------------|------|------|-------|------|
|                           | 1991 | 2001 |       |      |
| <b>Cultivators</b>        | 30.2 | 20.8 | 16.2  | 13.4 |
| <b>Agri. Lab.</b>         | 22.7 | 22.6 | 37.9  | 32.4 |
| <b>Household industry</b> | 2.8  | 4.0  | 11.3  | 18.0 |
| <b>Other work</b>         | 44.3 | 52.7 | 34.7  | 36.2 |

Source : WBHDR, Table 5.2, p. 93.

As we have seen above in Table B 5, a remarkable trend in the sphere of work and employment has been the rise in the proportion of women engaged in household industry from 11 to 18 per cent during the last two decades, the comparable increase for men being from 3 to 4 per cent. This diversification can be seen both as a means and an end of the process of development, including a shift from agriculture to non-agriculture. But, as the West Bengal Human Development Report points out, "...there are doubts about the sustainability and continued viability of some of the activities, either from an ecological or economic perspective."<sup>2</sup> Table B 7 provides an idea of the distribution of women workers between the public and the private sectors of the organised sector as a whole.

**Table : B 4A**  
**Percentage of total Workers (Main + Marginal)**

|                         | Marginal workers |        | Cultivators |        | Agricultural labourers |        | Workers in household Industry |        | Other workers |        |
|-------------------------|------------------|--------|-------------|--------|------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|--------|---------------|--------|
|                         | Male             | Female | Male        | Female | Male                   | Female | Male                          | Female | Male          | Female |
| <b>Bardhaman</b>        | 15               | 49.1   | 17.1        | 5.1    | 26                     | 44.4   | 2.8                           | 12.4   | 54.1          | 38.1   |
| <b>Birbhum</b>          | 15               | 59.5   | 27.6        | 9.7    | 33.4                   | 47.4   | 11                            | 16.2   | 32.7          | 26.6   |
| <b>Bankura</b>          | 18.1             | 63.2   | 36          | 21.4   | 27.8                   | 48.9   | 3.7                           | 9.7    | 32.5          | 20     |
| <b>Howrah</b>           | 11.2             | 39     | 5.4         | 2.3    | 10.5                   | 7.7    | 9.3                           | 28.1   | 74.9          | 61.9   |
| <b>Hooghly</b>          | 10.3             | 45.6   | 16.4        | 8.7    | 21                     | 36.7   | 3.1                           | 12.8   | 59.1          | 41.8   |
| <b>Puruliya</b>         | 26.6             | 67.4   | 34.3        | 26.6   | 25.3                   | 52.4   | 5.7                           | 10.1   | 34.8          | 10.7   |
| <b>24 Parganas (N)</b>  | 7.7              | 35     | 11.1        | 3.4    | 13.8                   | 12     | 2.5                           | 14.3   | 72.6          | 70.2   |
| <b>24 Parganas (S)</b>  | 18.1             | 59     | 16          | 15.7   | 26                     | 25.8   | 4.3                           | 14.5   | 53.6          | 44.1   |
| <b>Nadia</b>            | 6.6              | 39.7   | 22.3        | 8.4    | 26.2                   | 10.6   | 6.6                           | 31.4   | 44.7          | 49.7   |
| <b>Murshidabad</b>      | 10.3             | 37.6   | 23.2        | 2.7    | 33.8                   | 8.4    | 7.2                           | 64.7   | 35.7          | 24.3   |
| <b>Uttar Dinajpur</b>   | 10.3             | 54.1   | 33.6        | 19.9   | 34.5                   | 51.7   | 1.5                           | 8.6    | 30.4          | 19.8   |
| <b>Dakshin Dinajpur</b> | 9.8              | 54.3   | 37.6        | 15.3   | 30                     | 50.9   | 2.6                           | 9.5    | 29.8          | 24.2   |
| <b>Malda</b>            | 14.8             | 53.5   | 27.6        | 7.2    | 30.5                   | 31     | 4.7                           | 37.1   | 37.3          | 24.7   |
| <b>Jalpaiguri</b>       | 10.7             | 46.7   | 22          | 16.4   | 14.1                   | 26.1   | 1.3                           | 28.2   | 62.6          | 54.8   |
| <b>Darjeeling</b>       | 10.7             | 28.3   | 13.7        | 16.7   | 8.9                    | 13.5   | 2.2                           | 3.6    | 75.2          | 66.2   |
| <b>Koch Behar</b>       | 8.3              | 58     | 39.9        | 31.1   | 24.2                   | 43.5   | 2.4                           | 7.9    | 33.5          | 17.6   |
| <b>West Bengal</b>      | 12.7             | 51     | 20.8        | 13.4   | 22.6                   | 32.4   | 4                             | 18     | 52.7          | 36.2   |

Source :- GOWB, *Statistical Abstract : 2001-2002, Table 8.1.*

**Table : B 5A**  
**Total Workers (Main and Marginal) distributed by main industrial categories : 2001**

|                       | Cultivators |       | Agrl. labourers |       | Workers in household industry |       | Other workers |       |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------|-----------------|-------|-------------------------------|-------|---------------|-------|
|                       | Men         | Women | Men             | Women | Men                           | Women | Men           | Women |
| <b>Andhra Pradesh</b> | 24.3        | 19.9  | 29.6            | 56.2  | 3.1                           | 6.9   | 43.0          | 17.0  |
| <b>Bihar</b>          | 31.6        | 22.4  | 42.7            | 63.2  | 3.1                           | 6.0   | 22.6          | 8.4   |
| <b>Gujarat</b>        | 27.4        | 27.8  | 17.3            | 39.8  | 1.6                           | 2.5   | 53.6          | 30.0  |
| <b>Karnataka</b>      | 32.2        | 24.6  | 17.0            | 43.8  | 2.5                           | 6.6   | 48.3          | 25.0  |
| <b>Kerala</b>         | 8.0         | 4.7   | 14.2            | 22.0  | 2.3                           | 7.3   | 75.5          | 66.0  |
| <b>Maharashtra</b>    | 25.1        | 34.7  | 18.3            | 42.1  | 2.0                           | 7.3   | 54.6          | 19.9  |
| <b>Mizoram</b>        | 48.8        | 60.5  | 4.9             | 7.1   | 1.2                           | 1.7   | 45.1          | 30.8  |
| <b>Punjab</b>         | 26.0        | 13.0  | 15.0            | 17.9  | 2.3                           | 7.0   | 55.8          | 62.1  |
| <b>Rajasthan</b>      | 48.2        | 67.0  | 7.1             | 16.4  | 2.7                           | 2.8   | 42.0          | 13.8  |
| <b>Tamil Nadu</b>     | 18.2        | 18.7  | 23.6            | 45.4  | 3.4                           | 8.7   | 54.8          | 27.2  |
| <b>U.P.</b>           | 43.0        | 34.3  | 20.1            | 41.2  | 4.4                           | 8.3   | 32.5          | 16.1  |
| <b>West Bengal</b>    | 20.8        | 13.4  | 22.6            | 32.4  | 4.0                           | 18.0  | 52.8          | 36.2  |
| <b>India</b>          | 31.3        | 32.5  | 20.8            | 39.4  | 3.0                           | 6.4   | 44.8          | 21.7  |

Source : *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol. 45(1), January-March 2002, "Labour Statistics", pp. 185-191.

**Table : B 6**  
**Distribution of usually employed persons by status of employment**

|                        | Self Employed |         | Regular Employee |         | Casual Labour |         |
|------------------------|---------------|---------|------------------|---------|---------------|---------|
|                        | 1983          | 1993-94 | 1983             | 1993-94 | 1983          | 1993-94 |
| Bihar Rural Male       | 56.0          | 54.9    | 7.0              | 4.9     | 37.0          | 40.3    |
| Female                 | 47.9          | 55.4    | 1.6              | 4.7     | 50.3          | 39.9    |
| Urban Male             | 47.1          | 47.9    | 35.4             | 37.2    | 17.5          | 14.0    |
| Female                 | 46.8          | 35.8    | 22.3             | 32.1    | 30.9          | 32.1    |
| Orissa Rural Male      | 53.3          | 55.7    | 11.4             | 6.4     | 35.2          | 37.9    |
| Female                 | 49.6          | 56.6    | 2.3              | 6.2     | 48.1          | 37.2    |
| Urban Male             | 36.4          | 36.9    | 47.8             | 48.9    | 15.8          | 14.2    |
| Female                 | 39.7          | 33.9    | 21.6             | 38.6    | 38.8          | 27.8    |
| West Bengal Rural Male | 48.0          | 53.3    | 11.9             | 10.7    | 40.0          | 36.0    |
| Female                 | 33.0          | 54.7    | 10.7             | 10.3    | 56.3          | 35.0    |
| Urban Male             | 34.7          | 36.6    | 51.8             | 48.5    | 13.5          | 14.9    |
| Female                 | 19.3          | 27.2    | 59.6             | 52.4    | 21.1          | 20.4    |
| India Rural Male       | 59.5          | 56.7    | 10.6             | 8.7     | 29.9          | 34.6    |
| Female                 | 54.1          | 57.7    | 3.7              | 8.5     | 42.2          | 33.8    |
| Urban Male             | 40.2          | 41.2    | 41.5             | 42.8    | 15.3          | 16.0    |
| Female                 | 37.3          | 37.7    | 31.8             | 35.8    | 30.9          | 27.5    |

Source : Sarvekshana, July-September 1990, Table 6 NSSO, Revised Report No. 406, Table 44 and NSSO, Report No. 409, p. 104f

### **Women employed in the organised sector**

During the last decade, on an average, only about 15 per cent of women could find a foothold in the organised sector, which has to observe certain basic norms regarding social security and labour welfare and West Bengal is not an exception. Table B 7 provides state-wise information on women's access to employment in the public and private components of the organised sector in 1991 and 1999. It will be noticed that in contrast to other states, women's employment in the private sector shows a decline during the 1990s. So far as employment under the state government is concerned, in 1999 about 63,000 women employees constituted about 17 per cent of all state government employees but their share in the Group A (highest category) jobs was only 10 per cent. <sup>3</sup>

**Table : B 7**  
**Employment of women in the organised sector (thousand) :1971 and 1999**  
**West Bengal and selected states**

|                   | Public sector |       | Private sector |       |
|-------------------|---------------|-------|----------------|-------|
|                   | 1971          | 1999  | 1971           | 1999  |
| <b>Andhra Pr.</b> | 55.4          | 216.4 | 99.1           | 182.9 |
| <b>Gujarat</b>    | 56.9          | 151.7 | 40.3           | 78.5  |
| <b>Karnataka</b>  | 52.7          | 232.5 | 56.8           | 310.0 |
| <b>Kerala</b>     | 61.1          | 191.4 | 150.0          | 281.0 |
| <b>Punjab</b>     | 32.6          | 106.0 | 8.7            | 32.3  |
| <b>Rajasthan</b>  | 26.3          | 129.3 | 15.5           | 42.0  |
| <b>Tamil Nadu</b> | 97.6          | 412.8 | 129.4          | 324.9 |
| <b>Uttar Pr.</b>  | 82.1          | 184.4 | 34.2           | 54.0  |
| <b>W.Bengal</b>   | 49.5          | 117.5 | 144.6          | 133.8 |

Sarala Gopalan, *Towards Equality : The Unfinished Agenda - The Status of Women in India - 2001*, Table 6.21, p. 210.

#### **Women working in the unorganised/informal sector**

As in the rest of the country, an overwhelming proportion of West Bengal women are dependent on the informal/unorganised sector as contrasted to the organised sector, with mandatory provisions for social security and labour welfare, The informal sector comprises of a multitude of small units characterised by low skill, low productivity and low income and large numbers of women crowding this sector are deprived of basic entitlements such as minimum wages, maternity benefits, compensation for health hazards etc. Many such women are home-based workers, engaged in occupations such as sericulture, embroidery work, work connected with textile production, bidi making etc. Table B 8 provides some state level information on women's involvement in the non-agricultural component of the informal sector. In West Bengal, more than 4 lakh women comprise 18 per cent of the total persons engaged in own account enterprises while 2.5 lakh comprise 15 per cent of total employment in establishments.

**Table : B 8**  
**Women workers in non-agricultural component of the informal sector**  
**India and selected States: 1998**

| States         | Own Account Enterprises |                          |                        | Establishments          |                          |                        |
|----------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
|                | Total Employment (lakh) | Female Employment (lakh) | (3) as % of (2) (app.) | Total Employment (lakh) | Female Employment (lakh) | (6) as % of (5) (app.) |
| Andhra Pradesh | 18.3                    | 5.0                      | 27.0                   | 17.7                    | 5.3                      | 30                     |
| Bihar          | 9.3                     | 1.2                      | 13.0                   | 7.6                     | 1.0                      | 13                     |
| Gujarat        | 5.4                     | 0.8                      | 14.0                   | 7.6                     | 1.3                      | 17                     |
| Karnataka      | 8.8                     | 2.4                      | 27.0                   | 11.8                    | 3.2                      | 27                     |
| Kerala         | 8.0                     | 1.7                      | 21.0                   | 16.3                    | 0.6                      | 3                      |
| Maharashtra    | 11.9                    | 1.7                      | 15.0                   | 16.0                    | 2.5                      | 16                     |
| Punjab         | 2.3                     | 0.1                      | 5.0                    | 4.5                     | 0.9                      | 20                     |
| Rajasthan      | 6.9                     | 0.6                      | 9.0                    | 9.0                     | 1.0                      | 13                     |
| Tamil Nadu     | 11.3                    | 4.0                      | 35                     | 19.8                    | 6.4                      | 32                     |
| Uttar Pradesh  | 15.8                    | 1.6                      | 10.0                   | 14.5                    | 1.8                      | 13                     |
| West Bengal    | 23.7                    | 4.3                      | 18.0                   | 16.6                    | 2.5                      | 15                     |
| India          | 158.1                   | 30.1                     | 19.0                   | 179.6                   | 38.5                     | 22.0                   |

Source : CSO, Economic Census 1998, *Results At A Glance*, chapter 2.

### Gender-based wage disparities

The NSSO regularly collects wage data during its various Rounds, apart from other government agencies such as the Ministry of Labour. Some idea of the average level of agricultural and non-agricultural wages for men and women in West Bengal and the pronounced gender gap in wages will be found in Table B 9 below. This gender gap is also evident in recent wage data published by Govt. of India's Labour Bureau.<sup>4</sup> In rural West Bengal daily wages for men for transplantation work were reported to be about Rs. 52 while comparable wages for women who are acknowledged to specialise in such work - amounted to about Rs. 49. Women's wages for weeding were at the same level (Rs. 49); but for men they went up to Rs. 53.70. Average daily wages for unskilled labour were Rs. 51.40 for men and Rs. 46.90 for women. However, the gender-based wage differentials appeared to be even greater at the all-India level (e.g. male and female wages for unskilled labour were reported to be Rs. 59.83 and 44.92 respectively).

**Table : B 9**  
**Agricultural and Non-agricultural Wage Rates (Rs. /day) : Selected States**

|                    | Agrl. wage rates 1991<br>(Govt. of India,<br>Ministry of Agriculture) |           |             | Non-Agrl wage rates 1986-87 (NSS 43rd Round) |           |             |             |           |             |
|--------------------|---|-----------|-------------|--|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
|                    |   |           |             | Regular                                      |           |             | Casual      |           |             |
|                    | Women wages   | Men wages | 2 as % of 3 | Women wages                                  | Men wages | 5 as % of 5 | Women wages | Men wages | 8 as % of 9 |
| <b>Bihar</b>       | 17.09   | 19.23     | 88.9        | 23.4   | 33.9      | 69.03       | 9.2         | 14.1      | 65.2        |
| <b>Orissa</b>      | 12.41   | 14.48     | 85.7        | 19.4   | 30.9      | 62.8        | 7.0         | 10.4      | 67.3        |
| <b>West Bengal</b> | 19.13   | 21.34     | 89.6        | 15.2   | 34.9      | 43.6        | 8.0         | 14.6      | 54.8        |

Source : Sita Prabhu et al, "Gender -related Development Index for Indian States", EPW, 26 October 1996. Table 3.

### **Unemployment Rates**

Appendix Table AB 5 shows that according to Planning Commission estimates, daily status unemployment rates among women in West Bengal have been quite high in comparison with male unemployment rates as also with female unemployment rates in most other states - to the extent of 25 per cent of the female labor force in rural areas and 13 per cent in urban areas. The corresponding rural and urban unemployment rates for India as a whole were 7 and 9.4 per cent respectively.

### **Child Labour**

District-wise estimates of child labour will be found in Appendix table AB 6. Fortunately, for the state as a whole, the numbers are not very large : 2.7 per cent among girls and 5.6 per cent among boys in the age group 5- 14 years were reported as child workers in the census of 1991. The corresponding all India figures were 5.1 and 5.7 per cent. In certain states - such as Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka - these proportions were higher, going up to 8-10 per cent <sup>5</sup>. However, as we have already noted, census counts would not reflect all the work that a girl child might be required to perform, particularly in low income rural families; for instance, a survey conducted in 1993 in some villages in Medinipur and Howrah districts of West Bengal reported that " A girl child's work is considered non-productive and non-remunerative by the menfolk in her family...on an average a girl child performs 30-35 types of tasks throughout the day, specially if school is closed or if she is a drop out and her work load increases during the peak season.<sup>6</sup>"

### **Education levels of women workers**

Finally, in Table B 10 we present statewide figures regarding educational attainment (or lack of it) among women workers, with more details in Appendix Table AB 5. The trends are clear : (i) more than 70 per cent of women workers in rural Bengal were reported without education (ii) urban areas

are more advanced regarding prevalence of women workers with secondary level and higher level education; (iii) West Bengal women workers do not feature among leading states such as Kerala, Mizoram or Tamil Nadu and lack of elementary education continues to be a serious barrier to skill formation and access to better employment opportunities particularly in the context of globalisation.

**Table : B 10**  
**Education levels of women workers aged 15-59 years (%)**  
**India and selected states : 1998-99**

| States         | No Education |             | Primary Level |             | Secondary Level |             | Higher Levels |             |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
|                | Rural        | Urban       | Rural         | Urban       | Rural           | Urban       | Rural         | Urban       |
| Andhra Pradesh | 78.0         | 50.2        | 13.8          | 17.4        | 7.3             | 16.8        | 0.9           | 15.6        |
| Bihar          | 91.8         | 49.1        | 3.1           | 8.2         | 4.1             | 21.8        | 1.0           | 20.9        |
| Gujarat        | 66.8         | 35.5        | 15.4          | 15.4        | 14.8            | 26.1        | 2.9           | 23.1        |
| Karnataka      | 72.2         | 41.3        | 12.9          | 13.0        | 13.1            | 22.6        | 1.8           | 23.1        |
| Kerala         | 21.5         | 7.0         | 25.9          | 19.8        | 32.9            | 35.8        | 19.7          | 37.5        |
| Maharashtra    | 59.2         | 27.2        | 20.5          | 14.7        | 17.8            | 30.5        | 2.5           | 27.6        |
| Mizoram        | 42.5         | 17.6        | 26.1          | 22.0        | 24.9            | 33.5        | 6.5           | 26.9        |
| Punjab         | 47.6         | 9.8         | 10.2          | 4.9         | 20.4            | 25.9        | 21.8          | 59.4        |
| Rajasthan      | 88.7         | 52.7        | 6.8           | 12.1        | 3.3             | 14.1        | 1.2           | 21.1        |
| Tamil Nadu     | 55.4         | 27.6        | 25.5          | 27.1        | 15.9            | 25.5        | 3.3           | 19.8        |
| Uttar Pradesh  | 83.3         | 36.3        | 9.2           | 8.8         | 5.0             | 14.1        | 2.5           | 40.9        |
| West Bengal    | 72.3         | 33.4        | 17.5          | 17.6        | 7.8             | 21.6        | 1.9           | 27.4        |
| <b>India</b>   | <b>68.02</b> | <b>30.3</b> | <b>15.9</b>   | <b>15.7</b> | <b>12.4</b>     | <b>23.7</b> | <b>3.7</b>    | <b>30.3</b> |

Source: S. Mahendra Dev, "Female Work Participation and Child Labour: Occupational Data from NFHS", EPW, 14 February 2004, p. 740, Table 9.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Mukul Mukherjee "Women's Work in Bengal, 1888-1939", in Bharati Ray (ed), *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> WBHDR, p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> Dilip Kumar Ghosh, "Changing Profile of Occupations in Rural West Bengal : A District Level Analysis", *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol. 46(4), October-December-December 2003, Table 15.

<sup>4</sup> Govt. of India, Ministry of Labour, Labour Bureau, *Indian Labour Journal*, July 2004.

<sup>5</sup> GOI, Planning Commission, *National Human Development Report 2001*, March 2002, Table 6.7, p. 274.

<sup>6</sup> Ashim Mukhopadhyay, "Girl Child in Three Indian States", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4 June 1994, p. 1381.

**Appendix Table : AB 1**  
**Per Thousand distribution of usually working population by broad industry division :**  
**India and selected states :1999-2000**

**Rural Areas**

| States         | Agriculture etc. |     | Mining & Quarrying |    | Manufacturing |     | Electricity, Water etc. |    | Construction |    | Trade Hotels etc. |    | Transport etc. |   | Financial, Insurance etc. Services |    | Pub. Administration Education etc. |     |
|----------------|------------------|-----|--------------------|----|---------------|-----|-------------------------|----|--------------|----|-------------------|----|----------------|---|------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|-----|
|                | M                | W   | M                  | W  | M             | W   | M                       | W  | M            | W  | M                 | W  | M              | W | M                                  | W  | M                                  | W   |
| Andhra Pradesh | 744              | 842 | 10                 | 7  | 53            | 59  | 1                       | 0  | 34           | 8  | 58                | 31 | 30             | 0 | 4                                  | 0  | 66                                 | 53  |
| Bihar          | 789              | 843 | 6                  | 1  | 53            | 92  | 1                       | 0  | 28           | 6  | 53                | 20 | 19             | 1 | 3                                  | 1  | 48                                 | 35  |
| Gujarat        | 714              | 902 | 4                  | 5  | 101           | 27  | 3                       | 0  | 33           | 24 | 55                | 17 | 39             | 2 | 4                                  | 0  | 46                                 | 23  |
| Karnataka      | 785              | 878 | 9                  | 6  | 52            | 57  | 1                       | 0  | 21           | 6  | 57                | 24 | 24             | 0 | 6                                  | 0  | 45                                 | 29  |
| Kerala         | 413              | 452 | 21                 | 11 | 96            | 251 | 3                       | 0  | 130          | 38 | 163               | 51 | 93             | 3 | 21                                 | 17 | 59                                 | 178 |
| Maharashtra    | 739              | 941 | 2                  | 1  | 69            | 18  | 4                       | 0  | 34           | 10 | 58                | 13 | 33             | 0 | 6                                  | 0  | 56                                 | 17  |
| Mizoram        | 835              | 850 | 5                  | 0  | 5             | 17  | 0                       | 0  | 14           | 4  | 19                | 55 | 2              | 1 | 10                                 |    | 118                                | 73  |
| Punjab         | 636              | 490 | 0                  | 0  | 77            | 108 | 11                      | 11 | 79           | 8  | 81                | 67 | 56             | 0 | 5                                  | 0  | 54                                 | 316 |
| Rajasthan      | 672              | 901 | 19                 | 8  | 54            | 35  | 3                       | 0  | 120          | 29 | 55                | 8  | 30             | 0 | 5                                  | 0  | 41                                 | 19  |
| Tamil Nadu     | 621              | 752 | 7                  | 3  | 138           | 145 | 3                       | 0  | 58           | 17 | 72                | 35 | 43             | 2 | 8                                  | 2  | 50                                 | 44  |
| Uttar Pradesh  | 713              | 836 | 2                  | 0  | 84            | 83  | 2                       | 0  | 45           | 4  | 68                | 23 | 30             | 0 | 4                                  | 1  | 52                                 | 52  |
| West Bengal    | 663              | 572 | 4                  | 0  | 110           | 305 | 1                       | 0  | 27           | 6  | 3                 | 0  | 43             | 0 | 4                                  | 1  | 45                                 | 83  |
| India          | 712              | 841 | 6                  | 4  | 73            | 77  | 2                       | 0  | 45           | 12 | 68                | 23 | 32             | 1 | 5                                  | 1  | 56                                 | 42  |

Source: NSS Report No. 458; *Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, 1999-2000*, Table 6.7.1

**Appendix Table : AB 2**  
**Per Thousand distribution of usually working population by broad industry division:**  
**India and selected states: 1999-2000**

**Urban Areas**

| States         | Agriculture etc. |     | Mining & Quarrying |    | Manufacturing |     | Electricity, Water etc. |    | Construction |     | Trade Hotels etc. |     | Transport etc. |    | Financial, Insurance etc. Services |    | Pub. Administration Education etc. |     |
|----------------|------------------|-----|--------------------|----|---------------|-----|-------------------------|----|--------------|-----|-------------------|-----|----------------|----|------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|-----|
|                | M                | W   | M                  | W  | M             | W   | M                       | W  | M            | W   | M                 | W   | M              | W  | M                                  | W  | M                                  | W   |
| Andhra Pradesh | 71               | 151 | 10                 | 2  | 185           | 217 | 7                       | 1  | 116          | 123 | 276               | 203 | 119            | 16 | 49                                 | 21 | 176                                | 266 |
| Bihar          | 87               | 174 | 45                 | 35 | 179           | 171 | 13                      | 8  | 52           | 34  | 311               | 195 | 81             | 4  | 36                                 | 21 | 195                                | 358 |
| Gujarat        | 72               | 151 | 6                  | 1  | 267           | 160 | 6                       | 1  | 84           | 72  | 292               | 161 | 98             | 27 | 40                                 | 24 | 134                                | 404 |
| Karnataka      | 81               | 196 | 3                  | 3  | 218           | 289 | 7                       | 0  | 116          | 51  | 296               | 156 | 97             | 7  | 51                                 | 53 | 132                                | 244 |
| Kerala         | 70               | 77  | 4                  | 2  | 181           | 330 | 7                       | 2  | 145          | 28  | 314               | 186 | 118            | 23 | 47                                 | 47 | 114                                | 305 |
| Maharashtra    | 35               | 152 | 4                  | 1  | 252           | 148 | 9                       | 1  | 88           | 42  | 272               | 193 | 130            | 27 | 59                                 | 54 | 150                                | 383 |
| Mizoram        | 238              | 415 | 18                 | 12 | 43            | 30  | 0                       | 0  | 119          | 39  | 142               | 245 | 43             | 7  | 25                                 | 14 | 372                                | 238 |
| Punjab         | 63               | 38  | 0                  | 0  | 244           | 185 | 13                      | 12 | 75           | 14  | 321               | 141 | 99             | 36 | 38                                 | 22 | 146                                | 551 |
| Rajasthan      | 66               | 237 | 27                 | 20 | 206           | 256 | 8                       | 0  | 115          | 82  | 251               | 80  | 94             | 12 | 44                                 | 9  | 188                                | 305 |
| Tamil Nadu     | 65               | 140 | 4                  | 4  | 266           | 319 | 9                       | 4  | 84           | 44  | 285               | 167 | 110            | 29 | 50                                 | 20 | 129                                | 274 |
| Uttar Pradesh  | 74               | 122 | 0                  | 0  | 244           | 310 | 5                       | 0  | 71           | 16  | 325               | 115 | 87             | 13 | 31                                 | 10 | 163                                | 414 |
| West Bengal    | 32               | 22  | 9                  | 6  | 253           | 262 | 14                      | 0  | 72           | 22  | 278               | 132 | 132            | 17 | 47                                 | 16 | 162                                | 524 |
| India          | 65               | 146 | 9                  | 4  | 225           | 232 | 8                       | 2  | 88           | 55  | 293               | 164 | 104            | 20 | 44                                 | 28 | 165                                | 350 |

Source: As in Table AB 1.

**Appendix Table : AB 3****Distribution of female main workers by education level in West Bengal and India: 1991**

| Education level                         | Rural       |       | Urban       |       |
|---|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|
|   | West Bengal | India | West Bengal | India |
| <b>Illiterate</b>                       | 82.2        | 82.3  | 41.9        | 47.0  |
| <b>Literate</b>                         | 17.8        | 17.7  | 58.1        | 53.0  |
| <b>Below primary</b>                    | 6.3         | 4.7   | 6.0         | 5.3   |
| <b>Primary</b>                          | 5.8         | 6.9   | 9.0         | 9.5   |
| <b>Middle</b>                           | 2.8         | 3.3   | 8.7         | 6.7   |
| <b>Matriculation/Secondary</b>          | 1.2         | 1.5   | 7.9         | 9.1   |
| <b>H.S. or Equivalent</b>               | 0.6         | 0.4   | 5.6         | 4.2   |
| <b>Diploma/Certificate (Non-tech)</b>   | 0.01        | 0.1   | 0.05        | 0.8   |
| <b>Do (Tech)</b>                        | 0.05        | 0.2   | 0.3         | 1.6   |
| <b>Graduate &amp; above</b>             | 1.01        | 0.5   | 13.3        | 8.3   |
| <b>Post Graduate</b>                    | —           | —     | 3.5         | 3.4   |
| <b>Grad/ PG Degree/ Diploma(Tech)</b>   |             |       |             |       |
| <b>(I) Engineering &amp; Technology</b> |             |       | 0.3         | 0.24  |
| <b>(ii) Medicine</b>                    |             |       | 0.7         | 0.8   |
| <b>(iii) Agriculture &amp; Dairying</b> |             |       | 0.03        | 0.8   |
| <b>(iv) Veterinary</b>                  |             |       | 0.01        | 0.01  |
| <b>(v) Teaching</b>                     |             |       | 2.9         | 3.1   |
| <b>(vi) Others</b>                      |             |       | 0.07        | 0.03  |

Source:- Census of India 1991; Series I-India, Part-III, Series-B, Economic Tables, Vol. 1

**Appendix Table : AB 4****Child workers (age 5-14 years) in W. Bengal districts ('000) :1991**

| <b>Districts</b>       | <b>Boys (No.)</b> | <b>Girls (No.)</b> |
|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Darjeeling</b>      | 5.7               | 4.7                |
| <b>Jalpaiguri</b>      | 24.3              | 11.9               |
| <b>Koch Behar</b>      | 22.9              | 5.5                |
| <b>Dinajpur</b>        | 48.5              | 15.4               |
| <b>Malda</b>           | 34.7              | 20.8               |
| <b>Murshidabad</b>     | 59.2              | 29.1               |
| <b>Birbhum</b>         | 22.3              | 7.6                |
| <b>Bardhaman</b>       | 30.3              | 10.8               |
| <b>Nadia</b>           |                   |                    |
| <b>24 Parganas (N)</b> | 34.2              | 9.9                |
| <b>24 Parganas (S)</b> | 31.8              | 9.5                |
| <b>Hooghly</b>         | 20.2              | 7.2                |
| <b>Bankura</b>         | 17.7              | 11.1               |
| <b>Puruliya</b>        | 15.7              | 20.4               |
| <b>Medinipur</b>       | 59.3              | 45.5               |
| <b>Howrah</b>          | 17.1              | 3.2                |
| <b>Kolkata</b>         | 12.8              | 5.8                |
| <b>West Bengal</b>     | <b>487.2</b>      | <b>224.5</b>       |
| <b>India</b>           | <b>6189.8</b>     | <b>5095.5</b>      |

Source:- GOWB, State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development, *Nari O Sishu Unnayan Ebong Panchayat* 2003, Table 4, p.11.

**Appendix Table : AB 5**  
**Current daily status unemployment rates : 1992-2000**  
**(unemployment as per cent of labour force)**

|               | Rural |       | Urban |       |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|               | Men   | Women | Men   | Women |
| Bihar         | 7.2   | 6.2   | 8.1   | 13.5  |
| Gujarat       | 5.1   | 4.2   | 4.0   | 5.4   |
| Karnataka     | 4.4   | 4.0   | 5.3   | 5.9   |
| Kerala        | 20.0  | 26.1  | 15.5  | 28.2  |
| Maharashtra   | 6.3   | 6.9   | 7.7   | 10.0  |
| Orissa        | 7.6   | 5.6   | 9.8   | 8.2   |
| Punjab        | 4.2   | 1.7   | 4.8   | 5.3   |
| Rajasthan     | 3.3   | 1.9   | 4.7   | 3.5   |
| Tamil Nadu    | 14.4  | 12.3  | 9.0   | 8.6   |
| Uttar Pradesh | 4.0   | 2.1   | 6.3   | 5.0   |
| West Bengal   | 15.2  | 25.1  | 10.0  | 13.9  |
| India         | 7.2   | 7.0   | 7.3   | 9.4   |

Source : GOI, Planning Commission, Report of the Special Group on Targeting Ten Million Employment Opportunities Per Year, May 2002, Table 17, p. 153.

## CHAPTER - VI

### VIOLENCE

***“The experience of violence and the silent acceptance of violence by women undermines attempts to empower an will continue to be a barrier to the attainment of demographic, health and development goals.”*** (National Family Health Survey 2, India, p. 79)

In terms of personal security, West Bengal is generally considered to be a comparatively safe state in the all-India context. In 2001, for example, the number of cognisable crimes per one lakh population in West Bengal (76.7) was less than half of the all\_India average (172.3), with only Meghalaya and Mizoram reporting a lower rate.<sup>1</sup> But here our chief concern is one crucial component of the total security scenario in any civilised society; violence against women.

Perhaps the most painful devaluation of women is the physical and psychological violence that stalks women’s lives from cradle to grave. It can scar the early life of a woman in the shape of child abuse, incest and sexual harassment ; it can threaten marriage and domestic life, sometimes culminating in murder or suicide, as so tragically evident in the rising number of such atrocities recorded in crime statistics.

For the first time a large body of national level and state level data related to domestic violence against women has been compiled by the second National Family Health Survey conducted during 1996-98. Some of its findings are summarised in Table V 1. According to the revelations of this very large all-India survey (addressed to ever-married women of child-bearing age), domestic violence appears to be ‘democratic’ - cutting across age, religion, community, rural-urban divide, even women’s employment status. In West Bengal, 18 per cent of the respondents had experienced beatings and physical mistreatment (lower than the national average of 21 per cent) and in nine out of ten cases this violence had been inflicted by the husband. However, incidence of this type of violence seems to fall appreciably with rise in the standard of living and with women’s access to higher education. Illiterate women in West Bengal were almost nine times more likely to experience violence (about 27 per cent) as compared to women who had completed high school (about 3 per cent). These findings have obvious implications for the need to strengthen women’s basic capabilities.

The magnitudes of various types of officially recorded crimes committed against women (CAW) can provide a rough yardstick of violence against women, specially when these are assessed in the context of population growth; but it must be remembered that only a fraction of the actual prevalence

of crime is captured in these statistics. Although women may be victims of robbery or murder, CAW usually refer to a number of specific crimes under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) as noted below. Additionally, there are certain gender-oriented laws under which crime statistics are recorded as SLL (special and local laws) crimes; such as Immoral Traffic Prevention Act of 1956; Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961; Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act of 1979 and Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act of 1986. Since the SLL crimes have a very low incidence in West Bengal they are not discussed here.

**Table : V 1**  
**Ever-Married women's experience of beatings/mistreatment**  
**West Bengal and India; 1998-99**

|                           |  | Beaten since age 15 years |       |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|-------|
|                           |  | West Bengal               | India |
| <b>Age Group</b>          | <b>15-19 Years</b>                           | 12.2                      | 21.0  |
|                           | <b>20-29 Years</b>                           | 17.5                      | 21.0  |
|                           | <b>30-39 Years</b>                           | 20.2                      | 23.0  |
|                           | <b>40-49 Years</b>                           | 15.7                      | 20.0  |
| <b>Social Group</b>       | <b>SC</b>                                    | 18.5                      | 27.0  |
|                           | <b>ST</b>                                    | 17.8                      | 23.0  |
|                           | <b>OBC</b>                                   | 14.7                      | 23.0  |
|                           | <b>Other</b>                                 | 17.4                      | 16.0  |
| <b>Residence</b>          | <b>Rural</b>                                 | 11.0                      | 22.5  |
|                           | <b>Urban</b>                                 | 19.6                      | 17.0  |
|                           | <b>Kolkata</b>                               | 8.9                       | —     |
| <b>Wife's Education</b>   | <b>Illiterate</b>                            | 22.9                      | 25.5  |
|                           | <b>Literate, not completed middle school</b> | 17.0                      | 19.0  |
|                           | <b>Middle school completed</b>               | 8.5                       | 15.0  |
|                           | <b>High school &amp; above</b>               | 2.6                       | 9.0   |
| <b>Standard of living</b> | <b>Low</b>                                   | 24.6                      | —     |
|                           | <b>Medium</b>                                | 14.1                      | —     |
|                           | <b>High</b>                                  | 4.7                       | —     |

Source : NFHS-2: West Bengal, Table 3.10; NFHS-2:India, Table 3.15.

Crimes against women under the Indian Penal Code are as follows;

1. Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)
2. Kidnapping and Abduction for different purposes (Sec. 363-373 IPC)
3. Homicide for Dowry, Dowry Deaths or their attempts (Sec. 302/304B IPC)
4. Torture/Cruelty - both physical and mental - (Sec.498A IPC)
5. Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC)
6. Sexual Harassment/Eve-Teasing (Sec. 509 or 294 IPC)
7. Importation of girls up to 21 years of age (Sec. 366B IPC)

If we look at the information released by the National Crime Records Bureau for 2002, it would be clear that Torture/Cruelty tends to account for the highest share in total CAW in the state; more than half in 2002 as against less than one-third for all-India ; in the same year; rape accounted for 10 percent of total CAW here as against 11 per cent of all-India total CAW; molestation constituted 11 per cent of the West Bengal total CAW while in all-India CAW this proportion was more than double at 23 per cent. The following two Charts illustrate the relative shares of each of the seven listed categories of CAW in total CAW; Chart V I with respect to in West Bengal and Chart V II with respect to all India.

Table V 2 provides crime figures relating to incidence of CAW for the years 2000-2003 and also the rate of CAW per one lakh population in West Bengal and India in 2001, as these rates indicate a more realistic comparative picture of crime. It will be seen that West Bengal is better situated as compared to all-India, with respect to the rates for total CAW (8.2 per lakh population), as well as individual components of CAW (except dowry death, which is on par with all-India). It will also be seen in Table V 3 that West Bengal's share of the all-India incidence of rape, dowry death and total CAW has remained below the state's share in the all-India population (roughly 8 per cent). Surprisingly, however, CAW as proportion of total IPC crimes in the state (9-11 per cent) has remained higher than the comparable all-India figures (6-8 per cent).

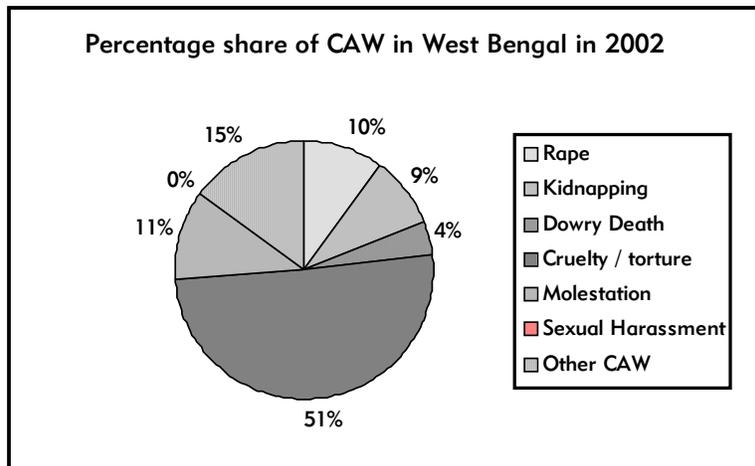
Table V 4 presents statewise figures for 1998 and 2001 relating to incidence of CAW in 12 selected states ; each state's rate of CAW ; its share in all-India CAW as well as its ranking among 28 states of India in terms of the last two criteria.

Among all offences perpetrated against women, the most heinous are the crimes of rape and dowry death. "The threat of rape clips the wings of a woman ready to take flight into freedom and achievement. It cripples her mentally and hurts her physically beyond the imagination of anyone. Dowry death, on the other hand, arises out of a mentality that denies the woman unequal status and respect even in supposedly her 'own house' "2. Table V 5 provides statewise figures for these two crimes per one crore population. Only three or four states have figures that are lower than those for West Bengal. This Table also underscores the fact that the conviction rates for CAW - for example rape- tend to be appreciably lower than those for IPC crimes as a whole. A worrisome trend is the proclivity towards imposition of dowry in communities where it was once conspicuous by its absence.

As part of a project on the status of Muslim women in West Bengal, the Women's Studies Research Centre of Calcutta University undertook a village survey in the district of South 24 Parganas in 1998. Almost all the Muslim families reported dowry transactions in cash or kind or both while elderly women over 70 years of age reported that they had never encountered dowry or 'groom price' in their youth<sup>3</sup>. Dowry has also begun to make its appearance among the tribal communities of West Bengal<sup>4</sup>.

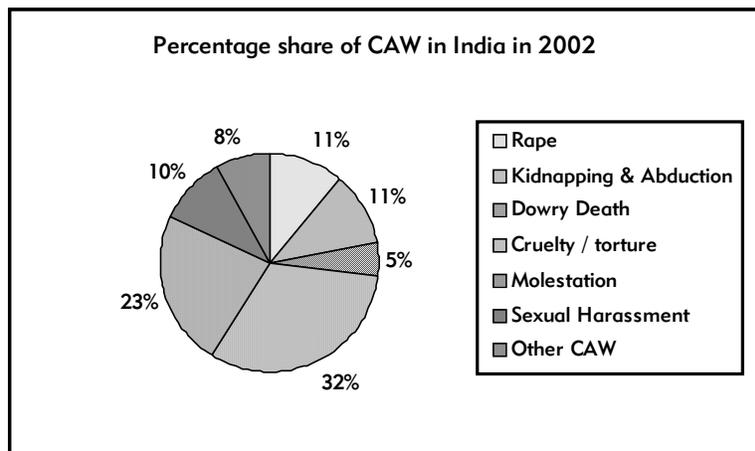
Table V 5 shows the rising incidence of sexual assault against women in West Bengal districts in the form of rape (including gang rape), molestation and eve-teasing, together with the number of persons arrested in connection with these crimes. According to information available for 2003, prevalence of CAW was more pronounced in the districts of North and South 24 Parganas, Bardhaman, Murshidabad, Nadia, Jalpaigiri and Koch Behar. District-wise incidence of torture/cruelty, dowry deaths and total CAW in West Bengal and the the number of persons arrested for CAW during 1995 and 2001 are provided in Appendix table AV 1.

**Chart : 1**



Source:- NCRB, *Crime in India 2002*

**Chart : 2**



Source:- NCRB, *Crime in India 2002*

**Table : V 2**  
**Incidence and rate of crime against women (CAW) in West Bengal and All-India: 2001-2003**

|   | Incidence of CAW in W. Bengal |      |      | Rate of CAW in 2001 |           |
|---|-------------------------------|------|------|---------------------|-----------|
|   | 2001                          | 2002 | 2003 | West Bengal         | All India |
| <b>Murder (Sec.498A/ 302 IPC)</b>                     | 128                           | 141  | 115  | —                   | —         |
| <b>Culpable Homicide (304 IPC)</b>                    | 30                            | 33   | 25   | —                   | —         |
| <b>Dowry Death (304B IPC)</b>                         | 319                           | 263  | 313  | 0.3                 | 0.7       |
| <b>Abetment to Suicide (Sec.498A/ 306 IPC)</b>        | 885                           | 927  | 820  | —                   | —         |
| <b>Cruelty by husband and relatives (Sec. 498A)</b>   | 3654                          | 3823 | 4727 | 4.8                 | 4.8       |
| <b>Rape (376 IPC)</b>                                 | 686                           | 723  | 969  | 0.9                 | 1.6       |
| <b>Kidnapping &amp; abduction (366/366A/366B IPC)</b> | 644                           | 640  | 715  | 0.9                 | 1.4       |
| <b>Molestation (354 IPC)</b>                          | 788                           | 800  | 1018 | 1.2                 | 3.3       |
| <b>Sexual Harassment/Eve-Teasing (509/294 IPC)</b>    | 11                            | 7    | 14   | 0.1                 | 0.9       |
| <b>Total CAW</b>                                      | 7145                          | 7357 | 8716 | 8.2                 | 14.0      |

Note: Rate of CAW (including SSL) calculated from relevant tables in crime in India 2001.

Source : NCRB, *Crime in India 2001* and Memo of Jt. Secratery, Dept of WCD and Social Welfare, GOWB, to the National Commission for Women, dt 25.05.2004.

**Table : V 3**  
**Indicators of CAW in West Bengal : 1995-2002**

| Year        | W.B. popln.<br>as % of<br>All India | W.B. CAW<br>as % of<br>AICAW | Rape in W.B.<br>as % of<br>All India | Dowry death<br>in W.B. as %<br>of All India | CAW as % of<br>all IPC crimes<br>in W.B. | CAW as % of<br>all IPC crimes<br>in All India |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>1995</b> | 8                                   | 6.04                         | 6.58                                 | 4.40  | 10.07                                    | 6.3   |
| <b>2000</b> | —                                   | 4.98                         | 4.87                                 | 4.06  | 10.69                                    | 7.2   |
| <b>2001</b> | 7.8                                 | 4.46                         | 4.41                                 | 3.87  | 10.67                                    | 7.4   |
| <b>2002</b> | —                                   | 3.95                         | 5.12                                 | 4.29  | 8.97                                     | 7.96  |

Note: (i) CAW here includes SLL crimes.

(ii) 'all IPC crimes' refers to total cognisable crimes under IPC.

Source : Calculated from relevant tables in NCRB, *Crime in India*, 1995,2000,2001,2002.

**Table : V 4**  
**Incidence and rate of crimes committed against Women in West Bengal, India and selected states :**  
**1998 & 2001**

|                      | Incidence of CAW |               | % share of total CAW in All-India |            | % share of total IPC crime in All-India | Rate of total cognisable crime against women | Rank among 28 states by crime rate of CAW |      | Rank among 28 states by % share of total CAW |      |
|----------------------|------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|------------|---|--|---|------|--|------|
|                      | 1998             | 2001          | 1998                              | 2001       | 2001                                    | 2001   | 1998                                      | 2001 | 1998   | 2001 |
| <b>Bihar</b>         | 7105             | 5356          | 5.4                               | 3.7        | 7.4                                     | 6.5  | 22  | 28   | 7  | 12   |
| <b>Gujarat</b>       | 6658             | 5805          | 5.1                               | 4.0        | 5.8                                     | 11.5   | 11  | 20   | 9  | 9    |
| <b>Karnataka</b>     | 5516             | 6002          | 4.2                               | 4.2        | 6.2                                     | 11.4   | 17  | 21   | 10   | 8    |
| <b>Kerala</b>        | 4799             | 5450          | 3.7                               | 3.8        | 5.9                                     | 17.1   | 10  | 5    | 11   | 10   |
| <b>Maharashtra</b>   | 14266            | 12524         | 10.9                              | 8.7        | 9.7                                     | 12.9   | 6   | 17   | 3  | 4    |
| <b>Mizoram</b>       | 141              | 126           | 0.1                               | 0.1        | 0.1                                     | 14.1   | 7   | 15   | 20   | 25   |
| <b>Orissa</b>        | 4450             | 5357          | 3.4                               | 3.7        | 2.6                                     | 14.6   | 13  | 14   | 12   | 11   |
| <b>Punjab</b>        | 1238             | 2361          | 0.9                               | 1.6        | 1.6                                     | 9.7  | 27  | 22   | 17   | 16   |
| <b>Rajasthan</b>     | 12159            | 12175         | 9.3                               | 8.5        | 8.8                                     | 21.6   | 1   | 3    | 4  | 5    |
| <b>Tamil Nadu</b>    | 11201            | 10111         | 8.5                               | 7.0        | 8.8                                     | 16.3   | 4   | 10   | 6  | 6    |
| <b>Uttar Pradesh</b> | 17497            | 20227         | 13.3                              | 14.1       | 10.1                                    | 12.2   | 18  | 19   | 1  | 1    |
| <b>West Bengal</b>   | 6811             | 6570          | 5.2                               | 4.6        | 3.5                                     | 8.2  | 21  | 27   | 8  | 7    |
| <b>All-India</b>     | <b>131338</b>    | <b>143795</b> | <b>100</b>                        | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b>                              | <b>14.0</b>                                  | —   | —    | —  | —    |

Source: - NCRB, *Crime in India 2001*, Table 26, p:261 & *Crime in India 1998*, Table 26, p:163.

**Table : V 5**

**Rate of dowry death and rape per one crore population and crime conviction rates :  
West Bengal, India and selected states : 1995 -97**

| <b>State</b>         | <b>Rate of dowry<br/>Death</b> | <b>Rate of rape</b> | <b>Conviction rate :<br/>Rape (%)</b> | <b>Conviction rate :<br/>all IPC crime (%)</b> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Bihar</b>         | 43                             | 144                 | 33.8                                  | 26.2   |
| <b>Gujarat</b>       | 14                             | 72                  | 17.5                                  | 35   |
| <b>Karnataka</b>     | 39                             | 50                  | 7.1                                   | 15.8   |
| <b>Kerala</b>        | 8                              | 132                 | 21.3                                  | 32.4   |
| <b>Mizoram</b>       | 0                              | 581                 | 60                                    | 94   |
| <b>Orissa</b>        | 59                             | 176                 | 19.1                                  | 11.3   |
| <b>Punjab</b>        | 75                             | 70                  | 29.2                                  | 37.5   |
| <b>Rajasthan</b>     | 73                             | 234                 | 27                                    | 50.1   |
| <b>Uttar Pradesh</b> | 123                            | 111                 | 50                                    | 51.3   |
| <b>West Bengal</b>   | 18                             | 110                 | 14.1                                  | 21.9   |
| <b>All India</b>     | 58                             | 157                 | 28.2                                  | 38.3   |

Source : Leela mehendale, "Crime, Women and Justice Delivery: The Numbers Speak", *Mainstream*, 8 December 2001, p. 21.

Table V 6 shows the rising incidence of sexual assault against women in West Bengal districts in the form of rape(including gang rape), molestation and eve-teasing, together with the numbers persons arrested. According to information available for 2003, prevalence of CAW was more pronounced in the districts of North and South 24 Parganas, Bardhaman, Murshidabad, Nadia, Jalpaiguri and Koch Behar. District-wise incidence of torture/cruelty, dowry death and total CAW in West Bengal and number of persons arrested for CAW during 1995 and 2003 are provided in Appendix Table AV 1.

#### **Trafficking in women and children**

Though it is difficult to produce hard data, information collected by NGOs confirm that trafficking in young girls and women is assuming serious proportions in West Bengal, at the inter-state level and also across porous international borders. The districts of Murshidabad, Howrah, North and South 24 Parganas, Medinipur and Birbhum have been identified as trafficking-prone areas.<sup>5</sup> The geographical position of the state makes it a convenient transit point for child trafficking to other states of India and also to foreign destinations, specially to the Middle-East, for camel jockeying and begging. SANLAAP, a well-known NGO of West Bengal actively involved in providing a better life for trafficked persons, has reported rescuing about 180 girls and women aged between 13 and 28 years.

**Table : V 6**  
**Incidence of sexual assault against women in West Bengal districts : 2003**

|  | Rape Cases |                  |                   |                       | Molestation Cases |                       | Eve-teasing/sexual harrasment cases |                       |
|--|------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
|  | Custodial  | No. of gang Rape | No. of other Rape | Total person arrested | No. of cases      | Total person arrested | No. of cases                        | Total person arrested |
| <b>Bankura</b>   |            | 1                | 42                | 46                    | 31                | 34                    | —                                   | —                     |
| <b>Birbhum</b>   |            | 4                | 44                | 38                    | 51                | 28                    | —                                   | —                     |
| <b>Bardhaman</b>   |            | 9                | 60                | 97                    | 70                | 138                   | 1                                   | —                     |
| <b>Koch Behar</b>  |            | 3                | 50                | 48                    | 60                | 57                    | —                                   | —                     |
| <b>Darjeeling</b>  |            | 2                | 22                | 27                    | 20                | 19                    | —                                   | —                     |
| <b>Hooghly</b>   |            | 2                | 35                | 34                    | 25                | 20                    | —                                   | —                     |
| <b>Howrah</b>  |            | 20               | 15                | 13                    | 30                | 33                    | 1                                   | 1                     |
| <b>Jalpaiguri</b>  |            | 4                | 56                | 52                    | 75                | 60                    | 1                                   | 2                     |
| <b>Paschim Medinipur</b>   |            | 4                | 46                | 37                    | 31                | 20                    | 2                                   | 1                     |
| <b>PurbaMedinipur</b>  |            | 6                | 27                | 31                    | 11                | 9                     | —                                   | —                     |
| <b>Murshidabad</b>   |            | 8                | 98                | 104                   | 131               | 127                   | —                                   | —                     |
| <b>Malda</b>   |            | 4                | 53                | 63                    | 67                | 75                    | 1                                   | 1                     |
| <b>Nadia</b>   |            | 7                | 101               | 107                   | 96                | 101                   | 2                                   | 3                     |
| <b>24 Parganas (N)</b>   |            | 15               | 76                | 86                    | 105               | 91                    | 3                                   | 3                     |
| <b>24 Parganas (S)</b>   |            | 9                | 80                | 96                    | 105               | 109                   | 1                                   | 1                     |
| <b>Puruliya</b>  |            | 2                | 23                | 36                    | 34                | 57                    | —                                   | —                     |
| <b>Uttar Dinajpur</b>  |            | 4                | 20                | 17                    | 23                | 24                    | 1                                   | 1                     |
| <b>Dakshin Dinajpur</b>  |            | 1                | 30                | 33                    | 40                | 51                    | 1                                   | 1                     |
| <b>Total</b> (excluding crimes repled. by Govt. Railway Police). |            | 85               | 881               | 964                   | 1001              | 1047                  | 15                                  | 14                    |
| <b>2000 (All West Bengal)</b>                                    |            | 82               | 697               | 679                   | 905               | 753                   | 9                                   | 23                    |
| <b>1996 (All West Bengal)</b>                                    |            | 95               | 699               | 777                   | 1150              | 972                   | 10                                  | 8                     |

Source : West Bengal Commission for Women, *Sexual Violence and Law*, Annexure II, Table IV, p:48-51.

A notable initiative on the part of the state government has been the extension of AWCs under the ICDS scheme to the red light areas of Kolkata and some of the districts. Four NGOs (SANLAAP,

SEVAC, REACH and SLRTC) are currently working in partnership with state agencies towards the objective of rehabilitating the victims of trafficking and prostitution.<sup>6</sup> These victims suffer from gross violation of human rights, physical and mental trauma and grave risk of STD and HIV/AIDS. Facilities for rehabilitation of victims are minimal compared to the dimensions of the problem. Against this dismal backdrop it is only concerted action at different levels that can bring about perceptible change; the family has to accept and support women who wish to return to normal life; community leaders have to engage in awareness building regarding trafficking and keep track of suspicious events concerning women at the local level and effective steps have to be taken to ensure economic stability of distressed households that are typically open to the risk of trafficking. One encouraging trend has been a decline in the number of minor girls forced into prostitution in Kolkata's red light area of Sonagachi - from about 25 per cent in 1992 to less than 4 per cent by 1998, as reported in a survey carried out by the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health (Kolkata).<sup>7</sup>

During the NGO Meet on Empowerment of Women held in Kolkata on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2004, under the joint auspices of the National Commission for Women and the West Bengal Commission for Women, attention was drawn to the evil of witch hunting, which still occurs in the districts of Jalpaiguri and Malda, specially in areas with scant medical and infrastructural facilities. Speedy introduction of basic facilities in the interior areas of districts with large tribal populations was advocated as a strong safeguard against the atrocity of witch hunting. NGOs also drew attention to the need of expanding services to meet demands of more and more women reporting crime and the need of spreading these services beyond Kolkata and South Bengal, where these tend to be concentrated.

The National Commission for Women held an interactive meeting with senior officials of the GOWB in Kolkata on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2004. The Director General of Police (DGP) West Bengal stated in this meeting that in view of the rising incidence of crimes against women, top priority was being given to monitoring and controlling offences against women. Under a new system, reports of CAW coming in from all over the state are reviewed by the DGP every evening and necessary directions conveyed to the respective district police authorities. The DGP stated that there were no 'mahila' thanas in the state but there were 'mahila desks' at all urban police stations and apart from the CAW wing at the West Bengal Police Headquarters in Kolkata, there are special cells for CAW in each district. There are also special Family Counselling Centres run by the West Bengal police - 'Seva' located in the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Kolkata and the recently opened 'Asha' in Siliguri. Presently women under threat of violence can access seven helplines which function with the help of NGOs. Another relevant step taken is the launching of the Missing Persons Website which provides information on missing women, recovery of such women and unidentified dead bodies.

We now come to the city of Kolkata. Table V 7 presents CAW figures in the metro city of Kolkata for the years 1995 and 2000-2003, while Table V 8 presents the six major crimes against women per one lakh population in the metro cities of Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai apart from Kolkata. Table V 7 shows that specific crimes against women have increased from a total of 554 in 1995 to 679 in 2003;

it also brings into focus the rising trend in cases under section 498A of IPC relating to torture/cruelty by husband/relatives; from 111 in 1995 the number has doubled to 222 in 2003, whereas the number of rape cases show a decrease from 54 to 36 between 1995 and 2003. There is a noticeable spurt in cases of molestation (185 in 2003), and sexual harassment (57 in 2003) and murder (52 in 2003). Though the rising incidence of CAW in Kolkata is a cause for grave concern, it is a small consolation to find that in 2001 this city had the lowest crime rates per one lakh population with respect to each of the components of CAW. This applies to rates of rape, kidnapping and abduction, dowry death, molestation and sexual harassment.

**Table : V 7**  
**Crimes against women in Kolkata under IPC : 1995 and 2000-2003**

| <b>Crime (section/IPC)</b>                         | <b>1995</b> | <b>2000</b> | <b>2001</b> | <b>2002</b> | <b>2003</b> |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Murder (302)</b>                                | 83          | 49          | 65          | 38          | 52          |
| <b>Culpable homicide (304)</b>                     | 3           | 13          | 8           | 15          | 13          |
| <b>Dowry Death (304B)</b>                          | 9           | 15          | 6           | 4           | 16          |
| <b>Abetment to suicide (498A/306)</b>              | 26          | 25          | 12          | 13          | 12          |
| <b>Cruelty/Torture by husband/relatives (498A)</b> | 111         | 196         | 207         | 235         | 222         |
| <b>Rape (376)</b>                                  | 54          | 35          | 19          | 33          | 36          |
| <b>Kidnapping and abduction (366/366A/366B)</b>    | 114         | 71          | 78          | 68          | 86          |
| <b>Molestation (354)</b>                           | 140         | 152         | 165         | 160         | 185         |
| <b>Sexual harassment/Eve Teasing (509/294)</b>     | 14          | 46          | 37          | 24          | 57          |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>554</b>  | <b>602</b>  | <b>597</b>  | <b>590</b>  | <b>679</b>  |

Source : Deputy Commissioner of Police, Detective Department, Kolkata Police.

**Table : V 8**  
**Rate of crime per one lakh population in metro cities : 2001**

|                                 | <b>Kolkata</b> | <b>Delhi</b> | <b>Mumbai</b> | <b>Chennai</b> |
|---------------------------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>Rape</b>                     | 0.1            | 2.5          | 0.8           | 0.4            |
| <b>Kidnapping and Abduction</b> | 0.6            | 6.4          | 0.1           | 0.0            |
| <b>Dowry Death</b>              | 0.0            | 0.7          | 0.1           | 0.2            |
| <b>Molestation</b>              | 1.2            | 3.1          | 1.7           | 1.1            |
| <b>Sexual harassment</b>        | 1.5            | 0.6          | 0.3           | 3.3            |

Source : NCRB, *Crime in India*, 2001.

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<sup>1</sup> National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), *Crime in India 2001* (hereafter CII), p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Leela Mehendale, "Crime, Women and Justice Delivery; The System Speaks", *Mainstream*, 8 January 2001, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> West Bengal Commission of Women, *The Challenges Ahead: Executive Summary*, 2004, p.50.

<sup>4</sup> See Vina Mazumdar (ed), *Dui Pribir Uttaran*, Kolkata 2000.

<sup>5</sup> SPAC, p.75.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See *The Challenge Ahead*, p. 53.

**Appendix Table : AV 1**

**District-wise incidence of crime against women (CAW) and persons arrested in West Bengal**

|   | Total CAW under IPC |             | Torture/cruelty by Husbands/relatives |             |             | Dowry Death |            |            | No. of arrests for CAW |              |
|---|---------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------------------|--------------|
|   | 2000                | 2003        | 1995                                  | 2000        | 2003        | 1995        | 2000       | 2003       | 2000                   | 2003         |
| <b>Bankura</b>  | 194                 | 264         | 59                                    | 112         | 153         | 9           | 17         | 20         | 258                    | 459          |
| <b>Birbhum</b>  | 353                 | 367         | 115                                   | 201         | 219         | 6           | 11         | 13         | 195                    | 381          |
| <b>Bardhaman</b>  | 727                 | 739         | 223                                   | 482         | 107         | 8           | 34         | 30         | 2062                   | 2526         |
| <b>Koch Behar</b>   | 336                 | 369         | 111                                   | 189         | 209         | 0           | 3          | 11         | 249                    | 538          |
| <b>Darjeeling</b>   | 133                 | 146         | 28                                    | 64          | 69          | 0           | 1          | 3          | 177                    | 182          |
| <b>Hooghly</b>  | 583                 | 567         | 320                                   | 453         | 457         | 4           | 7          | 14         | 457                    | 667          |
| <b>Howrah</b>   | 267                 | 237         | 107                                   | 175         | 168         | 5           | 22         | 17         | 383                    | 409          |
| <b>Jalpaiguri</b>   | 297                 | 376         | 108                                   | 158         | 210         | 1           | 3          | 4          | 263                    | 496          |
| <b>Paschim Medinipur</b>  | 904                 | 530         | 558                                   | 598         | 376         | 28          | 56         | 18         | 675                    | 545          |
| <b>Purba Medinipur</b>  | —                   | 402         | —                                     | —           | 267         | —           | —          | 37         | —                      | 446          |
| <b>Murshidabad</b>  | 440                 | 814         | 78                                    | 245         | 468         | 0           | 4          | 17         | 432                    | 1363         |
| <b>Malda</b>  | 213                 | 275         | 43                                    | 89          | 119         | 1           | 5          | 4          | 389                    | 383          |
| <b>Nadia</b>  | 595                 | 600         | 226                                   | 370         | 363         | 11          | 22         | 23         | 1053                   | 1422         |
| <b>24 Parganas (N)</b>  | 843                 | 1128        | 546                                   | 589         | 784         | 3           | 21         | 24         | 968                    | 1367         |
| <b>24 Parganas (S)</b>  | 975                 | 1214        | 469                                   | 692         | 884         | 2           | 49         | 44         | 930                    | 1759         |
| <b>Puruliya</b>   | 259                 | 187         | 107                                   | 139         | 94          | 0           | 4          | 8          | 443                    | 543          |
| <b>Uttar Dinajpur</b>   | 225                 | 170         | 74                                    | 113         | 85          | 1           | 5          | 14         | 179                    | 233          |
| <b>Dakshin Dinajpur</b>   | 242                 | 227         | 37                                    | 126         | 113         | —           | 4          | 8          | 193                    | 440          |
| <b>Total (excluding cases registered by Govt. Railway Police)</b> | <b>7586</b>         | <b>8872</b> | <b>3319</b>                           | <b>4785</b> | <b>5603</b> | <b>89</b>   | <b>268</b> | <b>312</b> | <b>9330</b>            | <b>14176</b> |

Source: NCRB, *Crime in India 1995* and Special Inspector General of Police, State Crime Records Bureau, Kolkata.

## CHAPTER - VII

# EMPOWERMENT

*Empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes both control over resources (physical, human, intellectual, financial) and over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes) ...* (Harriet B. Presser and Gita Sen, *Women's Employment and Demographic Processes*<sup>1</sup>)

Women's empowerment in West Bengal has many facets, which we now review briefly.

### **Women's participation in PRIs**

The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments enacted in 1993 opened a new vista in women's journey towards empowerment; for they paved the way for assured entry of women in grassroots governance through 33 per cent reservation for them in Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs). West Bengal has the unique and unbroken record of holding Panchayat elections at the stipulated 5-year intervals since 1978. PRIs in the state have a 3-tiered structure, with the basic unit, the Gram Panchayat (GP) serving 10-12 villages. The next tier, the Panchayat Samiti (PS) serves about 100 villages and there is an apex body, the Zilla Parishad (ZP) in each district, its chairperson having the status of a state minister. Till 1992, elected women members in Gram Panchayats in the state constituted less than one per cent of total representatives. But the picture has changed dramatically since 1993 when women were elected to the reserved constituencies of the GPs for the first time. Corresponding one-third reservation for women in Municipalities, Notified Areas and Municipal Corporations followed soon after. Reservation for women as office-bearers in the PRIs was introduced in the Panchayat elections of 1998. The relative position of women members in the Panchayat bodies in 1998 is shown in Table P 1 while Table P 2 shows that of the women office-bearers at different levels. It will be seen that in almost all instances the share of women members goes beyond the statutory 33 per cent., there being a woman Sabhadhipati (chairperson of ZP) in 40 per cent of ZPs. West Bengal's record compares favourably with the situation obtaining in other states of India, except perhaps Karnataka, where women's share in GP seats was more than 43 per cent and in PSs and ZPs, about 40 and 37 per cent respectively. During the 1990s, the average percentage of women members in PRIs (with respect to nine states) was about 27 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

**Table : P 1**  
**Women members in PRIs in West Bengal : 1998**

| <b>PRI</b> | <b>Area of work</b>        | <b>Total members</b> | <b>Woman members</b> | <b>SC women</b> | <b>ST Women</b> | <b>No. of PRI</b> |
|------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| <b>GP</b>  | 10-12 villages             | 49199                | 36 %                 | 18%             | 7%              | 3227              |
| <b>PS</b>  | Block of app. 115 villages | 8515                 | 35%                  | 17%             | 7%              | 329               |
| <b>ZP</b>  | District                   | 716                  | 34%                  | 17%             | 7%              | 16                |

Source : Maitreesh Ghatak and Maitreya Ghatak, " Recent Reforms in West Bengal : Towards Greater Participatory Governance ?", EPW, 1 May 2002, p.47.

**Table : P 2**  
**Women members as office-bearers in PRIs in West Bengal : 1998**

|                           | <b>SC women</b> | <b>ST women</b> | <b>General category women</b> | <b>All women</b> | <b>All seats</b> | <b>% held by women</b> |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| <b>GP Pradhan</b>         | 298             | 94              | 734                           | 1120             | 3360             | 33.6                   |
| <b>GP Upa-Pradhan</b>     | 269             | 82              | 392                           | 713              | 3360             | 21.2                   |
| <b>Sabhapati : PS</b>     | 28              | 14              | 73                            | 115              | 333              | 34.5                   |
| <b>Upa-Sabhapati : PS</b> | 31              | 8               | —                             | 74               | 333              | 22.2                   |
| <b>Sabhadhipati : ZP</b>  | 2               | —               | 5                             | 7                | 17               | 41.2                   |
| <b>Sahakari " : ZP</b>    | 1               | —               | 5                             | 6                | 17               | 35.3                   |

Source : *Ganashakti*, 5 November 2003, p.5.

Certain encouraging trends can be noted in the evolving PRI structure and composition in West Bengal. First, there is growing participation of women belonging to weaker sections of society such as scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST). In 1998, for example, SC women comprised nearly 30 per cent of all women representatives in Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, all-women Panchayats have also emerged and working successfully- such as the Kultikari Gram Panchayat in Medinipur district. Thirdly, it is often found that as compared to their male compatriots, women members of GPs take a more active interest in essential developmental work such as expansion of literacy and convenient access to drinking water.<sup>4</sup> It has further been observed, that in West Bengal, women representatives are becoming more self-reliant and by and large they do not need to function as 'proxy members'. But it is also a fact that women panchayat members are not always given equal status with their male counterparts. They are considered 'less equal' than the male representatives and hence, they are seldom given responsibility of work considered to be important by

the PRIs and the chairpersons (*karmadhyksha*) of the important standing committees handling substantial funds are almost always men<sup>5</sup>. One study found that women members of these committees less than one-fifth of total members though women account for one-third of total PRI members.<sup>6</sup> The relative exclusion of women in decision-making seems to be a common feature in other spheres of the political life of the state and women are also hardly visible in the high level decision making bodies of political parties in the state, in common with the rest of India. According to information collected by the West Bengal Commission for Women, a number of political parties (including the Forward Block, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Bharatiya Janata Party) had only a single woman in their state level decision making units, while the CPI-M had 8 in a total of 28.

Two other issues are comparatively low levels of education of women panchayat members and the paucity of women's presence in the GP meetings. A recent study of nine Panchayats in Birbhum district found that of the 64 women surveyed in 1997, 24 were just literate and four could only sign their names, apart from 12 who had completed primary education. However, this group also included 9 who had passed School Final. The study mentioned above also found that 25 per cent of each of general category and SC members, 65 per cent of ST members and 50 per cent of Muslim members attended less than half of the meetings held. (Panchayat meetings were held once a month from 1 to 4 pm and during the survey period each member received Rs. 20 for attending meetings) It is necessary that we pay attention to the reasons stated by the women for irregular attendance, for these reflect a common pattern and need to be addressed at appropriate levels. (i) *Shortage of time*: Household chores and rearing of children took up so much time that it was not possible for most women to attend meetings regularly. (ii) *Loss of a day's wages* : since a large number of women members worked as agricultural labourers or daily wage earners, they had to sacrifice a day's earnings; moreover, in most cases husbands or adult sons had to escort them to Panchayat offices, incurring additional loss of earnings. (iii) *Poor transport facilities* : one-third of the women surveyed had to walk more than 3 km either to reach a bus stop or the meeting venue as villages were not well connected by road (iv) *Superstition*: In some household it was still considered inauspicious for women to be involved in Panchayat activities.

There is no doubt that with growing awareness among women in the PRIs and growing emphasis on appropriate training for this group through government and non-government agencies, most of them will duly enhance their inherent skills and continue to use them as effective community leaders. As the West Bengal Human Development Report observes, "The participation of women in panchayats tends to have dynamic effects on the social and political empowerment of women in general ... More significantly, the greater presence and participation of women in public life has powerful effects on the situation of women in local society generally. There are numerous examples of how local women leaders have emerged through this process, transforming their own lives and those of the society around them."<sup>7</sup> It has to be emphasised here that creation of political spaces for women is not an end in itself but only a necessary step towards an egalitarian polity and society.

**Table : P 3**  
**Declining representation of women in state legislatures 1957-1997 (% of women MLAs)**

| State                 | 1952       | 1957       | 1960-65    | 1967-69    | 1970-75    | 1977-78    | 1979-83    | 1984-88    | 1989-92    | 1993-97    | 1998-99    | State Avg. |
|-----------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Andhra Pradesh        | 2.9        | 3.7        | 3.3        | 3.8        | 9.1        | 3.4        | 4.1        | 3.4        | 3.7        | 2.7        | 9.5        | 4.6        |
| Arunachal Pradesh     | ****       | ****       | ****       | ****       | ****       | 0.0        | 3.3        | 6.7        | 3.3        | 3.3        | 1.7        | 3.0        |
| Assam                 | 0.5        | 4.6        | 3.8        | 4.0        | 7.0        | 0.8        | 0.8        | 4.0        | 4.0        | 4.8        | ****       | 3.2        |
| Bihar                 | 3.6        | 9.4        | 7.9        | 2.2        | 3.8        | 4.0        | 3.7        | 4.6        | 2.8        | 3.4        | ****       | 4.3        |
| Goa                   | ****       | ****       | ****       | 6.7        | 3.3        | 3.3        | 0.0        | 0.0        | 5.0        | 10.0       | 5.0        | 4.4        |
| Gujarat               | ****       | ****       | 8.4        | 4.8        | 3.2        | ****       | 2.7        | 8.8        | 2.2        | 1.1        | 2.2        | 4.0        |
| Haryana               | ****       | ****       | ****       | 7.4*       | 6.2        | 4.4        | 7.8        | 5.6        | 6.7        | 4.4        | ****       | 6.2        |
| Himachal Pradesh      | 0.0        | ****       | ****       | 0.0        | 5.9        | 1.5        | 4.4        | 4.4        | 5.9        | 4.4        | 8.8        | 4.2        |
| Jammu & Kashmir       | ****       | ****       | 0.0        | 0.0        | 5.3        | 1.3        | 0.0        | 1.3        | ****       | 2.3        | ****       | 1.5        |
| Karnataka             | 2.0        | 8.7        | 8.7        | 3.2        | 5.1        | 4.0        | 0.9        | 3.6        | 4.5        | 3.1        | 2.3        | 4.3        |
| Kerala                | 0.0        | 4.8        | 3.9        | 0.8        | 1.5        | 0.7        | 3.2        | 5.7        | 5.7        | 9.3        | ****       | 3.6        |
| Madhya Pradesh        | 2.1        | 10.8       | 4.9        | 3.4        | 5.4        | 3.1        | 5.6        | 9.7        | 3.4        | 3.8        | 8.1        | 5.4        |
| Maharashtra           | 1.9        | 6.3        | 4.9        | 3.3        | 9.3        | 2.8        | 6.6        | 5.6        | 2.1        | 3.8        | 4.2        | 4.6        |
| Manipur               | ****       | ****       | ****       | ****       | 0.0*       | ****       | 0.0        | 0.0        | 1.7        | 0.0        | ****       | 0.3        |
| Meghalaya             | ****       | ****       | ****       | ****       | 1.7        | 1.7        | 0.0        | 3.3        | ****       | 1.7        | 5.0        | 2.2        |
| Mizoram               | ****       | ****       | ****       | ****       | 0.0        | 3.3        | 3.3        | 2.5        | 0.0        | 0.0        | 0.0        | 1.2        |
| Nagaland              | ****       | ****       | ****       | 0.0        | ****       | ****       | 0.0        | 1.7        | ****       | 0.0        | ****       | 0.5        |
| Orissa                | 9.6        | 3.6        | 1.4        | 3.6        | 1.4*       | 4.8        | 3.4        | 6.1        | 4.8        | 5.4        | ****       | 4.0        |
| Punjab                | 2.2        | 5.8        | 5.2        | 1.0*       | 5.8        | 2.6        | 5.1        | 3.4        | 5.1        | 6.0        | ****       | 4.0        |
| Rajasthan             | 0.0        | 5.1        | 4.5        | 3.3        | 7.1        | 4.0        | 5.0        | 8.0        | 5.5        | 4.5        | 7.0        | 5.0        |
| Sikkim                | ****       | ****       | ****       | ****       | ****       | ****       | 0.0        | 0.0        | 6.3        | 3.1        | 3.1        | 2.5        |
| Tamil Nadu            | 0.3        | 5.9        | 3.9        | 1.7        | 2.1        | 0.9        | 2.1        | 3.4        | 9.0        | 3.8        | ****       | 3.6        |
| Tripura               | ****       | ****       | ****       | 0.0        | 3.3        | 1.7        | 6.7        | 3.3        | ****       | 1.7        | ****       | 3.0        |
| Uttar Pradesh         | 1.2        | 5.8        | 4.4        | 2.8*       | 5.9        | 2.6        | 5.6        | 7.3        | 3.3*       | 4.0*       | ****       | 4.1        |
| West Bengal           | 0.8        | 3.6        | 4.8        | 2.9*       | 1.6*       | 1.4        | 2.4        | 4.4        | 7.1        | 6.8        | ****       | 3.4        |
| Delhi                 | 4.2        | ****       | ****       | ****       | 7.1        | 7.1        | 7.1        | ****       | ****       | 4.3        | 12.9       | 7.3        |
| Pondicherry           | ****       | ****       | 6.7        | 3.3        | 0.0        | 0.0        | 3.3        | 3.3        | 1.7        | 3.3        | ****       | 2.6        |
| <b>Period Average</b> | <b>1.8</b> | <b>6.3</b> | <b>4.9</b> | <b>2.9</b> | <b>4.4</b> | <b>2.8</b> | <b>3.8</b> | <b>5.3</b> | <b>4.5</b> | <b>4.0</b> | <b>6.0</b> | <b>4.1</b> |

Notes : Table entry stands for % of women MLAs elected to state legislature in the relevant elections  
(\*\*\*\*) States did not exist/no elections held in that year/period

\* Two elections held during this period. The figures given here is an average of the two. The figure given here are based on name recognition and hence liable to under reporting of women representatives

Source : Forum for Democratic Reforms, "Enhancing Women's Representation in Legislatures : An Alternative to the Government Bill for Women's Reservation" Manushi, No. 114, p. 6

## Women's participation in state and national level political processes

Involvement of West Bengal women in national level and even state level politics seems to have been less vigorous as compared to their participation and contribution at the local level. As Table P 3 shows, women's representation in the State Assembly has been below 5 per cent in most elections up to 1991, when women MLAs constituted a little more than 7 per cent of total members. Between 1971 and 1999, the number of women MPs from the state in the Lok Sabha went up from 2 to 5 only while at the all-India level the proportion of women MPs went up from 4.2 to 8.8 per cent.<sup>8</sup> In the matter of exercising their franchise at Assembly or Lok Sabha elections, however, West Bengal women are almost as active as their male counterparts, sometimes registering about 80 per cent voter turnout. Table 4 presents some indicators of women's participation in political processes with reference to the last Assembly and Parliamentary elections held in West Bengal in 2001 and 2004 respectively. While women candidates constituted a little more than 6 per cent of total candidates contesting Assembly elections, their participation in Parliamentary elections was somewhat higher, accounting for about 10 per cent of total candidates.

Interestingly, in the 2001 election, women who won constituted a much higher proportion of women who contested (26 per cent) as compared to men (17 per cent); in 2004, men and women who won constituted almost similar proportions of total men and women who contested (12 per cent). The proportion of women electors who exercised their franchise in 2001 and 2004 varied between 72 and 75 per cent, not very different from the proportion of male electorate casting votes (75-80 per cent).

**Table : P 4**

### Women's Participation in Assembly and Parliamentary Elections in West Bengal

| <b>Assembly Elections : 2001</b> |                                  |                                  |              |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|
|                                  | Women                            | Men                              | Total        |
| 1. No. of contesting candidates  | 108                              | 1567                             | 1676         |
| 2. No. of Independent Candidates | 30                               | 499                              | 529          |
| 3. No. of Elected candidates     | 30 (26 % of women contesting)    | 266 (17 % of men contesting)     | 529          |
| 4. No. of SC/ST MLAs             | 4 SC + 1 ST                      | 55 SC + 16 St                    | 59 SC+ 17 ST |
| 5. No. of Electors               | 23315103                         | 25370279                         | 48685372     |
| 6. No. who cast their vote       | 16890081<br>(72 % of electorate) | 19333956<br>(76 % of electorate) |              |

| <b>Parliamentary Elections 2004</b> |                                  |                                  |            |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------|
|                                     | Women                            | Men                              | Total      |
| 1. No. of contesting candidates     | 34                               | 321                              | 355        |
| 2. No. of Independent candidates    | 10                               | 136                              | 146        |
| 3. No. of elected candidates        | 4 (12 % of women contesting)     | 38 (12 % of men contesting)      | 42         |
| 4. No. of SC/ST MPs                 | 1 SC + 0 ST                      | 7 SC + 2 ST                      | 8SC + 2 ST |
| 5. No. of Electors                  | 22638685                         | 24797393                         |            |
| 6. No. who cast their vote          | 17021861<br>(75 % of electorate) | 19792360<br>(80 % of electorate) |            |

Source : Chief Electoral Officer and Ex-Officio Secretary, Home (C & E) Department, Govt. of West Bengal.

### **Other aspects of empowerment**

Empowerment for West Bengal has a number of dimensions, some of which we have noted above. Now we look at certain other, no less important aspects. The state has a long and vibrant history of women's movements, specially in the context of India's struggle for freedom. " Though thousands of women all over the country were involved in the Quit India movement, going underground, helping form parallel governments, leading 'illegal' activities in the course of which several women were killed, feelings ran specially high in Bengal...There were three planks of the women's movement in this period,. First, defence of the country; second, release of the leaders and the formation of a national government; and third, defence of the people from starvation and death....maintaining communal harmony took on great urgency. In trying to tackle these three main tasks, a big mass women's movement came to be born."<sup>9</sup> There have been many streams within this movement, with the basic objective of securing women's rights, ending gender-based discrimination and violence and organising intervention on issues affecting women's welfare and entitlements. A powerful current is now visible in the shape of a growing NGO movement, reaching out even to remote areas in rural West Bengal, with new initiatives towards women's empowerment.

### **NGO Initiatives**

The presence and potentialities of West Bengal NGOs concerned with women's issues was evident at the Seminar on Empowerment of Women held in Kolkata on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2004, under the joint auspices of the National Commission for Women and the West Bengal Commission for Women, the main component of which was the Interactive NGO Meet. About 40 NGOs participated in this Meet and through their experience and insights, made a valuable contribution to the Seminar. The range of their work covers many important aspects of women's lives and extends to almost all the districts of West Bengal. Some have a special focus, such as women's health (e.g. Swasthaa); violence against

women (e.g. Shramajeevi Mahila Samity); women with disabilities (e.g. Sanchar); women in Correctional Homes /Prisons (e.g. Human Rights Law Network); tribal women (e.g. Suchetana) and trafficked women (e.g. Saanlap). NGOs in West Bengal have been developing innovative models for breaking the barriers that stand in the way of women's over-all advancement and their right to a dignified and productive existence. Here we briefly draw attention to some of the remarkable work being done through NGO initiatives :

(i) *Dealing with violence against women*

- (a) In view of the many problems associated with customary judicial processes, one NGO (Shramajeevi Mahila Samity) has been relying on 'Salishi' for resolution of conflicts involving violence against women. This is a traditional and widely prevalent method, but reformulated in such a manner that people have come to accept it as a community-based, a non-partisan intervention offering due space to women. The Samity relies on persuasion rather than on fines or other punishment for implementing decisions arrived at through 'salishi' or informal arbitration. The Samity has recently completed a study entitled "Salishi in West Bengal : A Community-based Response to Domestic Violence" and it is encouraging to know that the number of people seeking help had increased from those involved in 7 cases in 1991 to over 400 cases in 2001.
- (b) The Street Survivors of India, an NGO located in Murshidabad district of West Bengal, started its Murshidabad Ashray Project (MAP) in February 2000, in collaboration with the district police. The project has now evolved into what can be described as an informal justice delivery system, with a 'people's court' attending to cases that are related mostly to marital discord and domestic violence against women, and capable of arriving at mutually acceptable resolution of problems.<sup>10</sup>

(ii) *Promoting micro-finance*

In West Bengal micro credit/micro finance has acquired a certain prominence during the last decade or so and here too NGOs have been playing a leading role in motivating and mobilising women for economic self-reliance through participation in micro credit programmes. Women who became beneficiaries of such programmes have repeatedly affirmed that participation in credit groups has given them exposure to the outside world, experience in handling money and above all, a sense of solidarity and self-confidence. To quote a report of the NGO South Asia Research Society about its micro credit scheme 'Project Nirdhan': "The many-sided impact of Project Nirdhan upon the target group of landpoor or landless women is not exactly quantifiable ... but if the dilapidated thatch hut of a village has witnessed extensive repairs, if more than 89 per cent of the (women) beneficiaries regularly attend meetings, the impact of the project is indeed appreciable"<sup>11</sup> And the contribution of NGOs has to be acknowledged in making such impact visible in most districts of the state.

(iii) *Activising Self Help Groups*

The NGO Nari Bikash Sangha came into existence in Bankura district in 1986 and has been instrumental in setting up a number of village-based mahila samities /self help groups, with the main

objective of generating much needed opportunities for employment. Under the guidance of this NGO, these women's groups raised plantations of host trees on degraded /abandoned land for rearing silkworms. This venture generated adequate employment and income so that women no longer had to endure the hardships of seasonal migration in search of work.<sup>12</sup>

Women's self-help groups (SHGs) are now emerging as a force to reckon with : motivating women to step out of the confines of custom and experience a new sense of purposeful solidarity. These SHGs may have specific objectives in specific areas but the priority remains the same : confront inequity and oppression through shared awareness and collective action. To give only two instances :

A few years ago 20 women belonging to landless SC families in Hinch village of Kanthi subdivision in Medinipur district were persuaded by a local NGO to embark jointly upon a project which they called 'Annapurna dhangola'. These women were agricultural labourers, receiving part of their earnings in dhan or paddy in the peak season. From this each woman deposited 20 kg in the dhangola or paddy depot, which became their own source of paddy borrowings during the lean season or even for starting a paddy trade. Now many such units function in a number of villages, benefiting hundreds of families.<sup>13</sup>

"It is ten o'clock at night in a village in Gangarampur Block in Dakshin Dinajpur District...the village resistance group is out, keeping watch. Some carry lathis; one carries a shovel; the leader carries a torch... Everything is routine. Except that all the members of this resistance group are women."<sup>14</sup> Such groups in the area also keep vigil on trafficking and other social evils such as witch hunting.

### **West Bengal Commission for Women**

West Bengal Commission for Women (WBCW) was established in 1992 through the WBCW Act of the same year. As an apex body - with eminent members with long experience of activism on behalf of women, the WBCW is mandated to investigate and examine all matters relating to the safeguards provided for women under our Constitution and to intervene in matters relating to deprivation of women's rights; non-implementation of laws relating to protection of women, non-compliance of policy decisions or instructions issued for protection, development and welfare of women and visit jails and various women's institutions or places of women's custody. The Commission receives and attends to hundreds of grievances articulated by women not only from Kolkata and adjoining areas, but also from far-flung districts. It has thus emerged as a strong and sensitive source of support for women facing critical circumstances who have no support base of their own. As mentioned before, a comprehensive study on the status of women in West Bengal (1970-2000) has recently been completed under the aegis of WBCW.

### **Policy Initiatives**

#### **(a) Land reforms**

Decentralisation of governance and land reforms have been two distinctive features of government policy in West Bengal. We began this section by drawing attention to the first, as reflected in women's participation in local self-government through their expanding role in PRIs. Table P4 shows that land reform measures implemented by the state have brought distinct benefits to at least a section of

women belonging to the agrarian sector. They now hold formal landholding rights in all the districts of the state - a basic ingredient of empowerment in rural India. As of 2003, women's names featured in about 16 per cent of total pattas, either on individual basis or jointly with male relatives.

**Table : P 5**  
**Distribution of joint and single pattas to women in West Bengal districts : 2003**

| District                 | Joint Patta   | % of total | Single woman  | % of total |
|--------------------------|---------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| Darjeeling               | 1360          | 2.8        | 3037          | 6.1        |
| Jalpaiguri               | 6087          | 7.1        | 4851          | 5.7        |
| Koch Behar               | 8764          | 6.6        | 2264          | 1.7        |
| U. Dinajpur              | 14316         | 10.5       | 1105          | 0.8        |
| D.Dinajpur               | 3453          | 3.9        | 1148          | 1.3        |
| Malda                    | 8499          | 6.8        | NA            | NA         |
| Murshidabad              | 10185         | 8.0        | 7075          | 5.5        |
| Birbhum                  | 6941          | 6.0        | 4005          | 3.4        |
| Bardhaman                | 14565         | 8.1        | 5968          | 3.3        |
| Nadia                    | 2356          | 3.4        | 5234          | 7.5        |
| 24 Parganas N            | 3797          | 5.0        | 5960          | 7.8        |
| Hooghly                  | 9448          | 17.0       | 3819          | 6.9        |
| Bankura                  | 26855         | 19.2       | 6619          | 4.7        |
| Purulia                  | 4006          | 4.5        | 3514          | 4.0        |
| Medinipur                | 63800         | 16.1       | 30210         | 7.6        |
| Howrah                   | 3669          | 14.4       | NA            | NA         |
| 24 Parganas S            | 1778          | 2.2        | 39548         | 48.9       |
| <b>Total West Bengal</b> | <b>209855</b> | <b>9.7</b> | <b>128593</b> | <b>5.9</b> |

Source : WBHDR, Table 2.3, p.36.

Obviously, this long over-due recognition of women's rights in land has to be further strengthened and women across the districts of West Bengal need to be made fully aware of this vital entitlement.

(b) *Women-oriented schemes administered by GOWB's Department of Women and Child Development and Social Welfare (WCD)*

We have already taken stock of a major Govt. initiative in the shape of **ICDS**.

(i) Other important schemes include : **Swayamsiddha**, now operative in 39 blocks, with the objective of supporting income generating activities of Self Help Groups (SHGs). About 2000 SHGs had been formed up to 2003.

- (ii) Previously known as the NORAD scheme, **Swalamban** aims at imparting vocational skills as a step towards economic empowerment of women. Training is imparted in both traditional and non-traditional occupations, through participation of a large number of NGOs. The nodal agency for this scheme is **West Bengal Women Development Undertaking**. Though the Undertaking came into being in 1993, it actually started functioning only since 1998.
- (iii) Support of Training and Employment for Women (STEP) promotes economic participation of women by providing the requisite training and access to credit. During 2001-2002, beneficiaries numbered more than 10,000.
- (iv) Support Services to Women : These again include **Working Women's Hostels** and **Short Stay Homes**. There are now 41 Working Women's Hostels accommodating about 2500 women, as well as 15 Day Care Centres for children, involving a large number of NGOs. Short Stay Homes provide temporary support to distressed women till arrangements are made for their rehabilitation. There are about 30 such Homes in the state, with a total capacity of about 900.
- (v) **Swadhar** is a scheme for women in difficult circumstances and its objectives include supporting and rehabilitating widows deserted by relatives, women prisoners released from jail but without family support, trafficked women rescued but disowned by their families and mentally disturbed women who have been abandoned by their families.
- (vi) **Women's Helplines** : These helplines are designed to provide emergency services (including information on available facilities) to women victims of exploitation and violence, deserted women, homeless women and other vulnerable groups. These are available through the following NGOs: Association for Social Health in India (Phone no. 10921); Joyprakash Institute of Social Change (10922); Saujatya (10923); Village welfare society (10924); Gana Unnayan Parishad (10925); Society for Equitable Voluntary Action (10926) - apart from the line maintained by Kolkata Police (1091).
- (vii) **Child Line**: A toll free 24 hour telephone line (1098) is at present working in six districts of the state, responding to emergency needs of children concerning shelter, protection from abuse, medical assistance etc.
- (viii) **Pension scheme for widows, disabled persons and old persons**: Under this widows are eligible for pension payment of Rs. 500 per month.
- (ix) **Benefits for disabled persons** : Medical Boards have been constituted in the districts for issuing identity cards to disabled persons who are to be provided the following benefits : disability pension of Rs. 400 per month; free education up to 18 years of age, 3 per cent reservation in educational institutions and scholarship of Rs. 60 per month up to class VIII; identification of suitable jobs and 3 per cent reservation for disabled persons; barrier free entry in hospitals, offices, public buildings and schools.

- (x) The **West Bengal State social Welfare Advisory Board** was established in 1954, with the main objective of uplifting the poorer sections of society - particularly women, children and the handicapped, through voluntary social workers and institutions. The Board supports more than 30 Family and Child Welfare Projects, apart from Holiday Homes and Homes for destitutes.

### **Centres for Women's Studies**

Two Universities located in Kolkata have instituted special departments for academic studies and research devoted to the emerging discipline of Women's Studies : the School of Women's Studies in Jadavpur University (SWS)- which also awards the MPhil degree in Women's Studies - and the Women's Studies Research Centre (WSRC) in Calcutta University, which also brings out a specialised journal devoted to this discipline (*The Journal of Women's Studies*). Both SWS and WSRC hold Refresher Courses and Orientation Courses relating to Women's Studies for College and University teachers.

Perhaps the most telling testimony of women's empowerment will be found at the end of this section, in the simple statements recorded by two newly literate rural women in their own steady hand after experiencing the excitement of belonging to a women's group:

- ❖ "Now we have the courage to speak out
- ❖ Now we can make others understand (our problems)
- ❖ There were many illiterates in our group : we have made them literate
- ❖ My savings have gone up

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<sup>1</sup> Harriet B. Presser and Gita Sen (ed), *Women's Empowerment and Demographic Processes : Moving Beyond Cairo*, 2000, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> GOI, *A Statistical Profile of Women in India -1997*, March 2001, p.5.

<sup>3</sup> West Bengal Commission for Women (WBCW), *Voice of Women*, March 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Raghavendra Chattopadhyay, Esther Dunflo, "Impact of Reservation in Panchayati Raj, : Evidence from a Nationwide Randomised Survey", *EPW*, 28 February 2004, p. 983.

<sup>5</sup> Buddhadeb Ghosh, "Gender and governance in the eastern Indian states " (mimeo), 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Arabinda Ghosh, "Inside-Outside Dichotomy in Panchayati Raj Institutions in West Bengal", *The Administrator*, October-December 1997.

<sup>7</sup> WBHDR, p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> *The Challenge Ahead*, p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing : An Illustrated Account of Movement for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1880-1990*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1993, p. 93.

<sup>10</sup> Mukul Mukherjee, *Human Rights and Gender Issues*, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, 2003, p.29.

<sup>11</sup> Mukul Mukherjee, "Micro Credit's Promise for Women : Pointers from West Bengal", paper presented at Xth National Conference of the Indian Association of Women's Studies, Bhubaneswar, October 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Narayan Banerjee, "Nari Bikash Sangha : Towards Empowerment", in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies Vol. 11(2)*, May-August 2004, pp. 179-203.

<sup>13</sup> *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 30 May 2004.

<sup>14</sup> *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 17 June 2004.

তাহাদের কথা

গোয়ালপাড়া সহায়ক দল / চাঁচল

দলে যোগ দেওয়ার পরে আপনার কী কী পরিবর্তন হয়েছে বলে মনে হয় :

আমরা দলে যোগ দিলে আমাদের মধ্যে যোগাযোগ  
যেমন আমরা যোগ দিলে আমাদের মধ্যে যোগাযোগ  
যোগ্য সবুজ রঙের মধ্যে যোগাযোগ সবুজ  
সবুজ আলাদা করে সবুজ আলাদা করে সবুজ  
সবুজ আলাদা করে সবুজ আলাদা করে সবুজ  
করে অনেক উপকার পেয়েছি এবং সবুজ

স্বাক্ষর : কমল মল্লিক  
(উত্তরদাতার নাম)

তারিখ : ২৪/১/২০০৪

মাতঙ্গিনী হাজরা মহিলা মন্ডলী / রায়গঞ্জ

দলে যোগ দেওয়ার পরে আপনার কী কী পরিবর্তন হয়েছে বলে মনে হয় :

- (১) কন্যা বনাম মেয়ে হওয়া
- (২) অপরকে মেয়ে হওয়া
- (৩) বিভিন্ন দলের মধ্যে যোগাযোগ
- (৪) আমরা দলে যোগ দিলে আমরা নিবন্ধন ছিল তাদের জায়গা করে দি
- (৫) আমরা সবুজ করে দি
- (৬) আমরা নিজে খনিজ হওয়া

স্বাক্ষর : অরিন্দম বর্মণ  
(উত্তরদাতার নাম)

তারিখ : ২৪.১.২০০৪.

## CHAPTER - VIII

### SUMMING UP : EMERGING ISSUES AND INTERVENTIONS

#### Regarding Aspects of Demography :

West Bengal is the third most populous state in India. The male-female ratio in West Bengal's population (934) is now marginally higher than the all-India average. The state's Infant Mortality Rate, Child Mortality Rate and Maternal Mortality Rate compare favourably with the all-India figures and its Total Fertility Rate is expected to soon reach the replacement level of just over 2 per women of childbearing age. However, the following concerns emerge in the course of our present study, each meriting urgent attention :

- ◆ Apart from the secular decline observed in the male-female ratio of the population as a whole, the falling sex ratio in the age group 0-6 years is a grave cause for concern. West Bengal's child sex ratio is now 963, with even lower ratios for a number of districts and Kolkata. Despite the introduction of Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, relentless abuse of sophisticated medical technology continues, leading to female foeticide and the girl child is still exposed to many types of deprivation. These critical issues have to be countered with vigorous and sustained awareness building about the worth of the girl child through all possible means coupled with stringent monitoring of pre-natal diagnostic facilities by designated agencies.
- ◆ Though infant and child mortality in West Bengal have remained lower than the all-India average, the state's IMR of 49 per 1000 live births (in the 1990s) is still high and there are marked rural-urban differences in IMR as well as inter-district disparities. It should be possible to identify high IMR locations in West Bengal districts so that health care facilities for both mother and child can be reviewed and deficiencies addressed on a priority basis.
- ◆ As shown in our Under-Five Mortality Map for West Bengal districts, recent research has identified a noticeable gender gap in mortality rates for children under five years of age living in urban areas of the state. As the next step, we need to identify the factors that may give rise to such gendered mortality patterns, so that appropriate interventions can follow.
- ◆ Elderly women will now account for a rising share of our population and census data indicate that a large proportion among them will be widows. Since older women are known to be a vulnerable group because of economic insecurity, physical infirmity and lack of kin support, new

schemes need to be devised in anticipation of their growing needs and the few existing schemes need to be made more inclusive and more accessible. Dissemination of information of all such schemes need to be vastly improved.

- ◆ Though West Bengal's mean age of marriage for girls had gone up to 19.6 years in 1998-99, about one-third of 15-19 year old girls were reported to have been married in 2001. Our Early Marriage Map for Bengal districts indicates the areas with frequent occurrence of marriages where the bride's age was below 18 years - the legal age of marriage for girls. Besides the need for mounting special campaigns in such areas for alerting people about the harmful consequences of early marriage, there are strong grounds also for compulsory registration of marriages, along with compulsory proof of age.
- ◆ Pressure of population and proliferation of slums in urban areas are known to create serious problems that affect people's quality of life, particularly that of women and children living in congested areas. It is imperative, therefore, that local authorities concentrate on mapping out the most deprived areas so that provision is made for essential amenities such as clean water, sanitation, medical facilities and primary schools. They must also work towards a safe and violence-free neighbourhood, to ensure security and mobility for women and children.
- ◆ Dearth of suitable data often becomes a major constraint in policy formulation for disadvantaged groups. Building a data base for women with special needs should therefore deserve priority - particularly with reference to women belonging to scheduled tribes, women who are heads of households, widowed and abandoned women, adolescent girls, women with disability and women afflicted with HIV/AIDS.

#### **Regarding Health and Nutrition:**

The two National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) have collected a wealth of data on different aspects of health and nutrition of women and children in West Bengal. There are a number of positive findings : West Bengal's Maternal Mortality Rate of 264 maternal deaths per 100000 live births in 1998-99 is much lower than the all-India MMR of 408. There is growing realisation of the importance of child immunisation, safe motherhood practices and family planning. A substantial proportion of women receive ante-natal check-ups at government facilities. According to NFHS 2, about 90 per cent of expecting mothers received at least one ante-natal check-up and 60 per cent received three or more. However, as we have noted, the West Bengal Human Development Report of 2004 does not place West Bengal among the best performing state regarding health and nutrition, even though it is not included among those with the worst performance - and there are several disquieting aspects to which we now turn :

- ◆ The proportion of women with some degree of anaemia in West Bengal was found to be as high as 63 per cent in 1998-99 and that of children with some degree of anaemia was as high as 78 per cent; the proportion of under-nourished children was more than 40 per cent. Persistent

malnutrition and ill health is manifested through the Chronic Energy Deficiency Syndrome (CED), which affected 46 per cent of all rural women and 65 per cent of rural women belonging to scheduled tribes in 2001. As widespread nutritional deficiency among women and children has serious consequences for quality of life and capability patterns of both the present and future generations, there is need for immediate intervention in this critical area. Expanding and strengthening the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and establishing a network for supply of cooked meals for all needy school children appear to be two expeditious and effective ways of coping with malnutrition and risk of disease.

- ◆ We have seen how almost the entire onus of family planning rests with women, tubectomy being the most common method and male sterilisation, and even condom use being a rare event. Even in the metro city of Kolkata there were about 20 thousand cases of female sterilisation as against 67 for males in 1999-2000 and in 2001-02, the latter figure actually came down to 53, while female sterilisation went up to almost 21 thousand. <sup>1</sup>This shocking anomaly has to be addressed and set right, so that the responsibility for family planning is shared equally by women and men.
- ◆ Lack of government medical facilities within easy reach and with proper facilities endangers the lives of very large numbers of women who are compelled to take recourse to unauthorised institutions and unsafe procedures, often at exorbitant cost. Another crying need therefore is to ensure that all Primary Health Centres are fully functional in reality - with adequate presence of qualified personnel and adequate supply of essential medicines and medical equipment including apparatus for MTP (medical termination of pregnancy).
- ◆ The objectives of the Universal Immunisation Programme have to be fulfilled throughout the state so that all children are protected from the life threatening but preventable diseases of childhood.
- ◆ There is no doubt that mental illness is a growing malady, affecting men and women and even young children. We need to accord priority to gathering information on this count and to spreading awareness that demystifies mental disorders, so that those affected can benefit from early diagnosis and timely treatment.
- ◆ There must be steady progress towards the goals identified in the State Plan of Action (2003): reducing maternal mortality rate to 100 per 100000 live births; providing ante- and post-natal care for all pregnant women as also essential obstetric and new-born care, particularly in rural areas with poor infrastructure; achieving 80 per cent institutional deliveries and 100 per cent deliveries by trained attendants and achieving 50 per cent reduction in RTI and STI together with zero level growth of HIV/AIDS.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Telegraph*, 3 June 2003

## **Regarding Literacy and Education**

- ◆ In our view literacy and elementary education represent a basic capability and an essential foundation for higher learning and skill formation. In recent years there has been a remarkable rise in literacy rates, including a gain of 16 percentage points in rural women 's literacy level. An encouraging trend in higher education is the growing participation of girls even in streams traditionally considered 'unconventional' for them, namely, the pure science courses or professional courses such as engineering or business management. However, West Bengal still lags behind Kerala or even the north-eastern state of Mizoram so far as educational attainments of women are concerned. We do not yet have comparable data from the 2001 census, but till 1991 average literacy rates for women belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes were as low as 14 per cent and 16 per cent respectively, with certain districts reporting only 5 per cent literacy among ST women. Girls of school going age have lower enrolment rates and school attendance rates as compared to boys, particularly in rural areas, more than one-third being reported as 'never enrolled' in the 52<sup>nd</sup> Round of National Sample Survey in 1995-96; they also had markedly higher drop-out rates, specially in the higher classes. For closing these distressing gender gaps in education and to achieve progressively higher standards in literacy and education for girls we need to concentrate on certain priorities. These are not new but they have to be pursued now with renewed resolve and concrete, time-bound action.
- ◆ Advocacy for girls' education that includes awareness generation about ensuing social and economic gains;
- ◆ Introducing target-based schemes for promoting literacy and education among children of ST families, specially girl children;
- ◆ Lowering the direct and indirect costs of girls' education through provision of school dress, study materials, cooked meals at school and safe transport, particularly for students from BPL families;
- ◆ Ensuring drinking water and separate toilet facilities for girls in all schools. At present not more than 20 per cent of district schools have these amenities;
- ◆ Expanding hostel facilities, specially for older girls in rural areas;
- ◆ Building all-weather roads for connecting schools to relatively inaccessible rural pockets;
- ◆ Promoting recruitment of women teachers, specially in coeducational institutions. We have seen earlier that at present the proportion of women among school teachers in West Bengal is about 25 per cent, as against 65 per cent in Kerala.
- ◆ Strengthening the vocational streams in school education on the basis of carefully revised syllabi that are relevant to the prevailing market conditions.
- ◆ Looking for and adopting innovative ways of furthering the cause of women's education such as the 'Savitribai Phule Foster Parent Scheme' sponsored by Govt. of Maharashtra, which basically

brings together initiatives from school authorities, teachers and motivated citizens to financially support education of girls from the marginalised sections of society.<sup>2</sup>

### **Regarding Work Participation and Empowerment**

According to the 2001 census, worker-population ratios for women in rural and urban areas of West Bengal were 16.8 and 19.1 per cent respectively, though the corresponding ratios for men were 44.5 and 47.5 per cent. But we have shown earlier that in reality a much higher proportion of women are engaged in different types of work/economic activity - often missed out in official statistics. Women's work and employment patterns have a significance of their own, as they are key factors contributing to their economic empowerment which, in turn, influence women's over-all position in society. However, economic reforms and the globalisation process in India seem to have given rise to certain disturbing trends, which may be summarised as :

- ◆ *Loss of employment opportunities* and consequent economic insecurity faced by women as they are displaced from many traditional sources of employment, without gaining adequate access to the new opportunities emerging in the wake of globalisation.
- ◆ *Deterioration in the conditions of work* on account of :
  - Rising proportions of marginal workers among women as against main workers
  - Rising incidence of casual work as against regular work or self-employment
  - Persistent disparities in wages and earning that are gender-based
  - Growing dependence of women on the unorganised/informal sector
  - Concentration of women in sweated occupations where they are often exploited

In the above context, protecting and raising women's employment levels assumes critical importance as also the concept of 'decent work' (expressed as "adequate opportunity for productive and meaningful work in decent conditions", with basic rights, security and opportunity for representation and dialogue<sup>3</sup>.) Towards these ends -

- ◆ It is necessary to study and act upon the recommendations made by the National Commission for Rural Labour (1991) and the National Commission for Labour (2003), particularly with respect to improving the conditions of work in the unorganised/informal sector of our economy which absorbs about 90 per cent of our women workers.
- ◆ Simultaneously, we require more effective implementation of existing labour laws such as the Minimum Wages Act or the Equal Remuneration Act or Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment Act) Act.

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<sup>2</sup> See Vibhuti Patel, "Schools to Empower Women", *Frontline*, 1 August 2003.

<sup>3</sup> See Gerry Rogers, "Decent work as a Development Objective", *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol. 44(1), January-March 2001.

- ◆ Perhaps some of the most reliable routes to women's empowerment emerge from women's forming and joining collectives and this must be zealously fostered by government agencies, Panchayati Raj Institutions and NGOs. Apart from trade unions, these collectives can be self help groups, micro credit groups, forest management committees, cooperatives organised for productive activity etc.
- ◆ Also to be stressed is replication of training-cum-production-cum-income generation units for women under the NORAD scheme. Initiated by Govt. of India, it is now being implemented in the state by the Women's Development Undertaking of Govt. of West Bengal. Under this scheme, women proceed step by step from skill acquisition to gainful work under the same set-up. The final objective here should be transition to cooperatives- the desired form of collective activity for income generation - with necessary orientation, training and market linkages.
- ◆ When at least a minimum level of education is now needed for participation in occupations based on modern technology, we have seen that our women workers suffer from a pervasive lack of basic literacy and vocational aptitudes. As the regime of liberalisation opens up new sectors of economic activity and consequently, new areas of skill formation, the entire system of basic education and skill training for women has to be reoriented to cope with the challenges of globalisation.
- ◆ Thus there has to be a concerted attempt to build new skills for women and upgrade existing skills through appropriate skill development programmes that are attuned to current market conditions.<sup>4</sup>
- ◆ NGOs have been playing an increasingly pivotal role in the task of skill generation for women in the informal sector. Their efforts at developing and running skill training projects merit strong support. Also, we need to know more about 'success stories' where NGOs have been able to establish sustainable income generating activities so that we may benefit from their experiences and insights.
- ◆ A major constraint for women is their lack of information about markets, about schemes for women's training and development and NGOs working in this area, about their legal entitlements. A good beginning in this regard will be dissemination of such information in the regional language and down to the grassroots level, with a special focus on rural women.
- ◆ West Bengal has been holding regular Panchayat elections since 1978. In 1998 about 18000 women were elected as Gram Panchayat members of whom 18 per cent and 7 per cent belonged to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes respectively. Representation of women in PRIs continues to exceed the stipulated quota of 33 per cent. Of the 141 wards of Kolkata Municipal Corporation 47 have been reserved for women and at present the Deputy Mayor is also a woman. In this

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion on this theme, see Mukul Mukherjee, "Marketable Skills in the Wake of Globalisation : A Study in the Indian Context", 2004, sponsored by the National Commission for Women.

context an essential requirement is skill building for women members of PRIs through appropriate training so that their participation in local self governance is truly autonomous and meaningful. West Bengal Government's State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development plays a leading role in this endeavour.. Apart from the issue of education and training, there are other constraints that hamper women's regular attendance at Panchayat meetings, as pointed out by women members of Gram Panchayats during a survey that we have discussed in the preceding section. These reflect a common pattern and need to be addressed at appropriate levels:

- ◆ *Shortage of time*, because women have to attend to so many household chores.
- ◆ *Loss of a day's wages*, as many women work as daily wage earners.
- ◆ *Poor transport facilities*, which requires a long walk for attending meetings.
- ◆ *Superstition*, which dictates that it is inauspicious for women to attend meetings.

Lastly, property rights for women and ownership of assets (such as land, dwelling place, productive equipment etc.) are critical issues. As land is perhaps the most precious asset in rural India, the agenda for women's empowerment has to include land reform measures that ensure women's entitlement to land. A good beginning has been made in West Bengal with the issue of landholding 'pattas' to women. As of 2003, women's names featured in about 16 per cent of pattas, individually or jointly with male relatives. Obviously this long overdue recognition of women's entitlement to land has to be further extended. There are indications that though their names feature in official records as pattaholders, women may not always be aware of this fact or its beneficial implications. Hence special drives have to be undertaken to make women aware of their due entitlements.

### **Regarding Violence against Women**

We have presented a brief account of violence against women as observed in West Bengal and in the metro city of Kolkata. Though West Bengal is generally considered a comparatively safe state in the all-India context, the rising crime graphs point to a disquieting situation that threatens women's right to live a safe and dignified life. Apart from the heinous crimes of rape and dowry deaths and the alarming uptrend in domestic violence, there is also the insidious increase in trafficking in women and children. Against this rather dismal context, there are some encouraging features :

- ◆ There is a growing focus on gender sensitisation of administrative personnel at different levels, including the police, who now have a network of women's grievance cells and have set up crisis intervention centres in aid of women.
- ◆ The NGOs play a major role in the fight against violence inflicted on women. Imparting awareness, self-confidence and requisite support, they are making an important contribution to women's quest for security and justice.
- ◆ Significant support and redress for victims of violence is facilitated by the very presence, accessibility and pro-active stance of the West Bengal Commission for Women.

For consolidating the positive impact of these trends, there is an urgency for :

- Enhancing the scope and quality of the ameliorative services most needed by affected women including Rescue Homes, Short Stay Homes, rehabilitation centres, telephone helplines etc.
- Recognising the need for economic rehabilitation - apart from temporary shelter and subsistence- and adequately dealing with this important dimension.
- Widely publicising, specially in interior areas, location of relevant NGOs, and of services needed by women in distress, as also details of helplines.
- Considering and taking care of counselling needs of families of traumatised victims, including trafficked women, so that the affected women receive due acceptance and family support, which makes for a less complicated rehabilitation.
- Fostering more intense interaction among agencies dealing with violence against women so that interventions are coordinated and are based on a common understanding.

### **The Three Planks for Progress**

In the preceding seven sections we have tried to reflect upon the salient aspects of women's life in West Bengal. We feel that underlying all strategies for improving the situation of women is the issue of capability building, which again, begins from three crucial planks. The first and foremost is **education**, with all its intrinsic and instrumental values. The second is **skill building**, with its promise of economic security and self-reliance. The third is **organisation** : getting together and forging bonds so that women's problems can be shared, their voices can be heard and their wholesome influence can be felt within the home and outside. Hopefully, all the three planks will grow ever stronger for women in West Bengal as the new millenium unfolds.

## A CAMEO OF WOMEN IN KOLKATA

Scholars say of Kolkata/Calcutta : "She is a 'primate' city, the great magnet for survival seekers from one of the poorest and most populous segments of the subcontinent. More amazingly still, she has absorbed with incredibly meagre resources, little attention and less sympathy, what is arguably the biggest mass migration..."<sup>1</sup>. After the partition that divided eastern India, the 'survival seekers' also comprised thousands of women, uprooted from their homes, sought refuge in this city and struggled for social and economic survival. These intrepid women of 'tempered steel' became a new presence in the city - commuting to work, marching to meetings, gradually entering the public space and forging a distinct identity for themselves.<sup>2</sup>

In 2001 20.74 lakh women and 25.06 lakh men were living in Kolkata of which 1.75 lakh and 1.89 lakh were girls and boys respectively, aged 0-6 years. The total population of Calcutta/Kolkatta was a little more than 10 lakh in 1951; in 1991 the Municipal Corporation of Calcutta registered a population of 44 lakh, rising to 45.8 lakh in 2001. The population of Kolkata Urban Agglomeration (UA) was 132 lakh or 13.2 million in 2001, while population figures for Greater Mumbai and Delhi UA were 16.4 and 12.8 respectively. On account of the historical process of male dominant migration into the city and its precincts, the secular trend in Kolkata's sex ratio (SR) has always been adverse to women. In 1901 Kolkata's SR was only 518, rising slowly to 636 in 1971; in 1991 and 2001 it was 779 and 823 respectively, lowest in the state. A disquieting trend is the decline in the child sex ratio in the age group 0-6 years. From 1011 in 1951 and 1019 in 1971, it fell to 967 in 1991 and declined further to 963 in 2001.

Kolkata has pioneered social reform and women's education. The renowned Bethune School for girls, founded in Kolkata 1849, has the motto : *kanyapyeva palaneeya shikshaniyatnatah* ('Daughters too are be nurtured and educated with special care'). In 1879 Bethune College became the first women's college in South Asia and in 1883 Kadambini Bose and Chandramukhi Bose became the first women graduates in the whole of British empire. Women's literacy rates in Kolkata have always been much higher than the state as a whole. In 1951 the city had a female literacy rate of about 42 per cent when it was less than 10 per cent in the rest of the province; by 1981 it had gone up to 63 when female literacy was still below 30 per cent in West Bengal excluding Kolkata.<sup>3</sup> In 2001 male and female literacy rates in the city had reached 84 and 78 per cent respectively. Statistics show that the student population in Kolkata in classes I-VIII was quite evenly divided between girls and boys in 1991 but the gender gap became prominent in the higher classes; at the higher secondary level for example, there were 439 girls per one thousand boys in 1991.<sup>4</sup>

Women in Kolkata have always participated in the vibrant political and cultural life of the city even as they do now. And they continue to make their mark in all spheres of economic activity. The accompanying Table shows the classification of Kolkata's male and female workers as reported in the 2001 census. In Kolkata women are to be found in services and professions, as entrepreneurs and NGO activists, as industrial labour and home-based workers. "In a difficult city like Calcutta, the heroism of the working woman increases day by day. She is no longer the Devi to be worshipped on a pedestal, nor a woman who habitually walks behind men. Like Rabindrasnaath's Chitrangada, she keeps abreast of the men in crises and struggles. She goes even further : she breasts the storm alone whether in preferred institutions, factories or sweatshops. A new woman is raising her head."<sup>5</sup>

**Classification of male and female workers in West Bengal (thousand) : 2001**

|                               | <b>Men</b> | <b>Women</b> | <b>Sex ratio<br/>(women per 1000 men)</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------|--------------|---|
| <b>Total Workers</b>          | 1413.5     | 224.3        | 158                                       |
| <b>Main workers</b>           | 1471.5     | 253.7        | 172                                       |
| <b>Marginal workers</b>       | 58.0       | 29.4         | 507                                       |
| <b>Cultivators</b>            | 381        | 204          | 273                                       |
| <b>Agricultural labourers</b> | 1.7        | 3.5          | 2058                                      |
| <b>Household industry</b>     | 38.9       | 9.4          | 242                                       |
| <b>Other workers</b>          | 1430.5     | 243.9        | 170                                       |

Source : GOWB, *Statistical Abstract : West Bengal : 2001-2002*, Table 8.1

<sup>1</sup> Sukanta Chaudhuri (ed), *Calcutta : The Living City* : Vol. II, OUP, 1990, (editorial).

<sup>2</sup> For a fascinating account, see Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (eds). *The Triumph and the Trauma : Gender and Politics in Eastern India*, Kolkata 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Shrabasi Basu, "Daughters too aare be educated with special care", in *Education and Empowerment : Women in South Asia*, published on the occasion of one hundred and fifty years of Bethune School, 2001, p. 177

<sup>4</sup> GOWB, *Statistical Abstract : West Bengal : 2001-2002*, Table 4.3

<sup>5</sup> Jasodhara Bagchi, "Women in Calcutta : After Independence", in *Calcutta : The Living City*, Vol. II, p. 49.

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## **ANNEXURES I - V**

- I. Notes from Seminar on En/countering Violence : A Seminar organised by West Bengal Commission for Women in collaboration with National Commission for Women, held in Kolkata on 8 August 2003.**
- II. Excerpts from Proceedings of NGO Meet on Women's Empowerment organised by West Bengal Commission for Women in collaboration with National Commission for Women, held in Kolkata on 3 June 2004.**
- III. Minutes of National Women's Commission's meeting with Chief Secretary and other Secretaries of Govt. of West Bengal on Gender Profile of the state , held in Kolkata on 4 June 2004.**
- IV. Minutes of Meeting on Sexual Harassment at Workplace organised by West Bengal Commission for Women, held in Kolkata on 4 June 2004.**

**Notes from Seminar on En/countering Violence : A Seminar organised by West Bengal Commission for Women in collaboration with National Commission for Women, held in Kolkata on 8 August 2003.**

(Based on Minutes prepared by Shri Rudraprasad Motilal, Smt. Rukmini Jalan and Smt. Ranjana Das Gupta).

In the inaugural session the Seminar was addressed by Professor Jasodhara Bagchi, chairperson, West Bengal Commission for Women , Hon'ble Minister Shri Biswanath Chowdhury , Dr. Poornima Advani, chairperson, National Commission for Women and Dr. Sudha Mallaya, member NCW.

Professor Jasodhara Bagchi explained to the audience that the Seminar would be devoted to explore the process of encountering violence, with the purpose of countering the menace of violence against women that is growing in society. As we are approaching the time of presenting the second Country Report before the CEDAW Committee of the United Nations, public policy should more and more turn towards the General Recommendations No. 19 ( 11<sup>th</sup> Session 1992) which focussed on areas of violence against women. We have to be in a position to confront the different forms of violence that women face in our society : domestic violence, violence emanating from sexual harassment, infringement of various entitlements that women have to safe shelter, right to property, right to life , right to be protected against the organised offences of trafficking, particularly of minors. Some of the most notable groups who work incessantly to ensure redressal of violence against women , such as Swayam, Sanhita ,Sanlaap, Women's Coordinating Council, Counselling Centres like Suraha as also the West Bengal Women's Commission's own Pre-Litigation Counselling Cell helped to bring before the Seminar women who are fighting violence both physical and psychological, in the family or outside, and who would relate their experience of suffering and combat. After listening to them, a panel of eminent persons were to give their own suggestions and alert us to the best ways of ensuring social justice.

In her brief address Dr. Poornima Advani said that as the most important part of the day's proceedings was the testimony of victims of violence, she would not like to encroach upon that time and would only make a very short speech. Recounting her experiences from a recent meeting held in a village away from the city of Lucknow, she expressed her deep concern that often women are not even able to register an FIR. Against such a backdrop exercises such as legal amendments etc. appear to be futile if the very gateway of justice does not open its door to a suffering victim.

Hon'ble Minister Shri Biswanath Chowdhury reminded the audience that times are changing fast and we ourselves have to decide which are the changes that are necessary and desirable and which are not. Age old problems cannot be eliminated instantly as there is no magic formula. We should remember that one in every five women are victims of violence . Rape is the most traumatic form of violence though even society hesitates to protest against this crime. And there are many forms of violence which remain hidden. These are crimes against which there are no specific legal provisions or there is no machinery to enforce provisions. In his view , protection of women's rights was a crucial issue. In conclusion he commended the West Bengal Commission for Women for the good work it was doing on behalf of women.

Dr. Sudha Mallaya spoke briefly, drawing attention to the present grim scenario in India where a rape takes place every fifty minutes, an incident of physical violence occurs every twenty-four minutes and a dowry death occurs every hundred minutes or so.

Thereafter nine women , with rare courage , recounted their individual experiences of oppression/ exploitation/violence. The narrations brought out the many forms of violation of basic rights , cases of sexual harassment leading to extreme distress, the trauma of being trafficked, sold into prostitution and consequently infected with HIV/AIDS and the agony of being abandoned together with young children, by marital and natal families. The only ray of hope is that they are now being supported by a number of NGOs and they are determined not to give up the fight for justice.

The following are some of the observations made by the panel of juries. This session was moderated by Ms Bharati Mutsuddi, member, WBCW.

- ◆ Violence against women is likely to increase, because after years of total control over their lives, now for the first time women are beginning to rebel, and so patriarchal men would try to crush the rebellion by resorting to violence.
- ◆ The problem of violence is multi-dimensional. Those who are victims of violence need counselling- often they are too submissive and they need a fighting spirit to combat injustice. Here psychologists have an important role to play.
- ◆ In many cases women face many kinds of harassment in their natal homes including denying them any legal right in their father's property. Therefore, awareness about property laws among women is also a pressing necessity.
- ◆ Maintenance payments to women in terms of a lump sum must be made compulsory as quite often husbands fail to provide regular monthly payments.
- ◆ Because there are cases where the mother is victimised due to birth of a female child, we should try to create awareness that the gender of the foetus is determined by the chromosomes of the father.

- ◆ The Supreme Court has given guidelines regarding sexual harassment but most committees formed in this context are not aware of the proper way to conduct an enquiry , giving rise to problems in implementation of the guidelines. Hence there is need for proper training in this area.
- ◆ We need to have more self help groups organising homes/shelters for women where shelterless women can live with their children.
- ◆ Those responsible for the criminal justice system need to be sensitised with respect to women's issues and they also need to update their knowledge.

## **Excerpts of PROCEEDINGS**

of

**NGO Meet on Women's Empowerment in West Bengal, organised by the West Bengal Commission for Women in collaboration with the National Commission for Women, held on 3rd June 2004 at the Institute of Chemical Engineers Auditorium, Jadavpur University Campus, Kolkata.**

This one-day meet/seminar was basically structured as an interactive consultation with Non-Government Organisations, giving priority to the NGOs' articulation of issues and problems concerning gender equality and women's advancement in West Bengal. The inaugural and valedictory sessions were addressed respectively by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of West Bengal Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and the Hon'ble Governor of West Bengal Shri Viren J. Shah. The two intervening sessions were devoted exclusively to presentations made by a number of leading NGOs active in different parts of West Bengal including the Kolkata metropolitan area. More than 40 NGOs participated in the deliberations, representing almost all the districts of the state.

### **Inaugural session**

In her welcome address Professor Bagchi expressed the conviction that in an unequal and stratified society, gender discrimination calls for constant combat, cutting across all divisions that aggravate the marginalisation of women. She drew attention to NGOs being a crucial resource for taking up women's issues at the grassroots level and for campaigning for women's rights..

Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee began his inaugural address by stressing that women's empowerment is to be viewed as an area of prime concern in a modern society. The entire development process will be flawed if this is lacking. He observed that though law and order in the state is under control, a cause for concern is the rising violence against women, to contain which women's economic empowerment is necessary. Shri Bhattacharjee referred to a special initiative of the government during the last two years which is aimed at enhancing economic empowerment of women: the issue of joint 'pattas' that secure an important dimension of women's rights. The 27.5 lakh pattaholders in the state now include 6.16 lakh women - more than one-fifth of the total. He also referred to the prominent role of women in handicrafts, sericulture and the Information Technology (IT) sector in West Bengal and observed that among the 19000 IT professionals working in 137 IT companies operating in the state, 50 per cent are women.

Dr. Poornima Advani , chairperson of the National Commission for Women drew attention to the mandate of the NCW : to advise the state and central governments on the socio-economic problems of women and to participate in the planning process. Hence there is need to understand the actual situation at the grassroots and for this interaction with women's organisations are very necessary. Regarding crimes against women, Dr. Advani sounded a note of caution, saying that undue emphasis on such statistics may have a contrary effect for women as the concern for controlling crime rates may lead to suppression of crimes against women, specially those committed against adivasi, dalit and powerless women. She urged the media to adopt a more positive role in investigative journalism. Drawing attention to the adverse impact of globalisation which is robbing women of their traditional livelihoods, Dr. Advani stressed the need for appropriate policies that can address the concerns of these women. She expressed her appreciation of the role played by the chairperson of West Bengal Women's Commission as a 'constant partner'.

### **Presentations**

Nine presentations were made during the second session . the first being a powerpoint presentation by Shampa Sengupta on behalf of West Bengal Commission for Women. This was based on *Changing Status of Women in West Bengal: 1970-2000*, the comprehensive Report prepared by the WBCW, as mentioned before.

The second presentation, on Economic Empowerment, was made by a representative of Sreema Mahila Samity. Empowerment was defined as an ongoing process through which a person or a group achieves equal rights, resources and power. Economic, social, political and legal empowerment , together with well-being constitute the different dimensions of empowerment , which is manifest at various levels. She pointed out that the existing status of women did not reflect any significant progress towards empowerment because of the following factors : unequal wages, lack of education, disparities in access to food and nutrition and unequal decision making power.

The third presentation, on aspects of health care for women, was from Dr. Krishna Soman, a representative of Swasthaa - the Bengal Initiative on Women and Health. It demonstrated that there is now a discernible shift from a holistic approach to health issues to an approach marked by vertical/ technocratic interventions. Because government health facilities appear to be inadequate as compared to actual needs of the people, there is also a shift from non-profit health services to the profit making private sector and there is a proliferation of private sector units..For poor people, the inadequacy of public sector facilities has meant an increased dependence on so-called 'non-conventional' healers which obviously imply serious risks To bring about improvements in the health sector, our stress should be equally on the quantity and quality of medical services and on integrating the valuable insights of experienced NGOs in our interventions.

The theme of the fourth presentation was women's education from the perspective of equity. Subhra Chatterji of Vikramshila Education Resource Society recalled several important commitments

made to the cause of girls' education in India, starting from the National Policy of Education (1986). She noted that serious problems may remain out of focus if our attention is confined to superficial aspects and directed only to average figures. Instead, we have to look at the growth figures through the prism of 'equity' and 'equality'. Thus we find that the rise in average literacy rates conceals serious gaps between male and female literacy levels as also gaps between rural and urban achievements which are further affected by gender. Similar disparities appear if the enrolment and retention rates are disaggregated by gender. Further, a girl from a low income, scheduled tribe or low caste family has to face a triple handicap with regard to opportunities for literacy and education.

The fifth presentation focused on violence against women and was made by Anuradha Talwar of Shramajivee Mahila Samity. She referred to data on crimes against women, which points to 18 crimes committed against women each day in West Bengal as per 2003 crime figures. In view of the many problems associated with customary judicial processes, this NGO has been relying on an innovative approach for resolution of conflicts involving violence against women: this is the traditional and widely prevalent method of 'Salishi', but reformulated in such a manner that people have come to accept it as a community-based, democratic, flexible and non-partisan intervention offering due space to women. A number of important recommendations were made in the course of this presentation.. Women are often forced to live with their children in violent homes because they have no alternative income or shelter. The state must therefore ensure food and guaranteed employment for poor women, uphold women's equal property rights and right to the homestead and be more vigilant regarding enforcement of laws for survivors of violence and more supportive of women's collectives that are working to stop violence against women.

The sixth presentation, on trafficking, was made by a representative from Sanlaap. Information collected by NGOs confirm that the problem of trafficking in persons, specially young girls and women, has assumed alarming proportions in India which is now considered to be a sending, transit and destination country. The typical victims are poor, with little access to education and economic resources and they suffer from gross violation of human rights, physical and mental trauma. Against this dismal backdrop, it is only firm action at different levels that can bring about lasting change. The family has to protect the girl child through awareness building, gender equality and prevention of child marriage; Panchayats have to play a more vigilant role; the police have to take immediate action for tracing missing girls and women and the Government has to implement special schemes for development of the girl child and for economic stability of distressed families open to the risk of trafficking.

The seventh presentation, focusing on women in prisons, was made by Ruvena D'Silva, representing Human Rights Law Network(HRLN). She stated that at present there are about 169000 women lodged in 53 prisons (Correctional and Sub-Correctional Homes). More than 200 children were living in these jails with mothers, about half being girls. Though conditions inside prisons have improved, serious problems still abound.

Several cases were cited to illustrate how apathy and denial of basic amenities aggravate health problems suffered by women prisoners. A number of pertinent recommendations were made by HRLN .There was a strong plea for resumption of the previous practice of prison visits by experts so that women prisoners can avail of professional help and there is some monitoring of prison conditions; supply of basic amenities to maintain health and hygiene; better access to services provided by NGOs and better provision of legal aid services. There was also a plea for a more significant role on the part of civil society in supplementing government efforts which often tend to be constrained due to paucity of resources.

The next (eighth) presentation, made by a representative from Jayaprakash Institute of Social change, concentrated on Rescue Homes for women. The Institute runs two Family Counselling Centres - one each in Birbhum and North 24 Parganas districts. It also runs two Short Stay Homes and a helpline . These Homes provide shelter to women in physical , social and moral distress and inmates include women sent by the police or the Panchayats. They are often victims of exploitation, released from jail, trafficked women and helpless widows. There are serious shortcomings in the present set-up: outreach of Homes is predominantly urban; publicity is poor as well as coordination with other organisations; vocational training opportunities for the residents - a very important need - are minimal and the staff, who are often ex-inmates, are lacking in interpersonal skills. For improving the present state of affairs it is necessary to appoint trained counsellors , ensure school admission for inmates' children and identify and address training needs of individual women to facilitate rehabilitation.

The ninth presentation was made by Sanchar (an NGO involved in community based rehabilitation and developmental activities in rural areas of West Bengal) and focused on women with disabilities who number more than 19 lakh in West Bengal, people with disabilities constituting 4-5 per cent of the total population of India. Even though People with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation ) Act was passed in 1995, persons with disabilities continue to be excluded from mainstream services. Women with disabilities often have greater health care problems than others but for them, attitude and accessibility of health care professionals constitute a great barrier ; similarly comparatively few girls with disabilities are found to be enrolled in schools. Due to social conditioning, a women with disability is often deprived of performing her role as mother, wife and homemaker even though she may be able to do so in real life. Now some NGOs of West Bengal are looking the issues disability not only as rehabilitation or service delivery but also as capability building with a special focus on women with disabilities. The Govt. of West Bengal has to support the rights of this group and also ensure speedy implementation of the PWD Act with special reference to girls and women with disabilities.

The theme of the last and tenth presentation, by Suchetana, was the situation of tribal women in West Bengal where we have Santal, Munda, Oraon, Bhumij, Lodha, Kora, Malpaharia Toto and certain other tribes constituting about 7 per cent of the total population in the state. Poor tribal communities live under distressing conditions with severely limited access to clean water, basic health

care and proper nutrition. This NGO made the following suggestions for alleviating the problems faced by tribal women : each district should be divided into a number of specific zones in terms of major resources available, e.g. agriculture, forest, rural industry, tree plantation areas etc. and the livelihood patterns of the dominant tribal groups should be reviewed in the light of local resource endowment. Necessary steps should be taken for setting up suitable cottage industries in the ST dominated areas with provision for credit, raw materials and marketing facilities. Last but not the least, cooperatives should be formed with landless ST women in order to improve their economic condition and end the exploitation of middlemen and other vested interests.

### **Interactive Session**

This post-lunch session was coordinated by Professor Malini Bhattacharya, member, West Bengal Commission for Women. Many queries and comments came from the floor, mainly in the context of the presentations made during the previous session. The following are the main issues emerging out the hour-long interaction :

- Mental health should be considered as an important constituent of health.
- To prevent child marriage, marriage registration should be made compulsory ;
- Family Counselling Centres should be opened at all police stations/thana, with greater involvement of civil society.
- Police personnel should be more cooperative towards NGOs wherever NGOs operate such centres. This is important in view of the common problem of police apathy.
- There were questions regarding the efficacy and utility of the 'salishi' process in dealing with violence against women. It was pointed out in this context that 'salishi' was based on mutual consent and was not looked upon as a replacement for the judicial process; the women's movement would act as check and balance towards this already widespread system.
- A number of NGOs stated that late release of funds was a recurrent problem, affecting their day-to-day functioning .
- One commentator observed that two groups of women seem to have been left out in the deliberations : women who belong to the families of retrenched workers from sick industries and women who are evicted during implementation of development projects.
- Attention was drawn to the plethora of TV programmes and advertisements that send out distorted and negative signals with respect to the status of women and to the need for proper monitoring.
- Other subjects that came up included : (i) need to appoint more 'special educators' under the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* project; (ii) need for more grants subsidising hostel facilities for

needy students and (iii) need for specific schemes devoted to economic advancement of women belonging to SC, ST and BPL groups.

In a brief intervention, Professor Anuradha Chanda spoke on the situation of tribal women - who are still marginalised and exploited. She drew attention to the fact that witch hunting seems to prevail in areas with scant medical and infrastructural facilities. Hence it is essential that interior areas in districts with large tribal populations be provided with basic facilities such as medical care, schools, roads and electricity.

### **Valedictory Session**

In his valedictory address the Hon'ble Governor of West Bengal Shri Viren J. Shah reminded the audience that economic and political empowerment can go a long way in paving the way for liberation of women folk from the clutches of regressive forces. There is a need to accord a very high priority for creation of self-help groups through which the economic status of women can be enhanced significantly. There is also need to evolve an exclusive legal framework for rendering justice to women affected by gender bias, violence dowry and such other atrocities. Besides waging a legal battle, it is all the more necessary to strive for creating attitudinal changes among the people. In order to supplement the role played by Government Departments and organisations, voluntary effort is very much needed for the coverage of maximum number of women caught up in economic and social backwardness. The Governor commended the untiring efforts of National Commission for Women and State Commission for Women for relentlessly trying to ensure dignity and equal opportunities for women.

The day's programme ended with a brief vote of thanks from Professor Jasodhara Bagchi.

**Minutes of NCW's Meeting with the Chief Secretary to Govt. of West Bengal and Secretaries of other Departments of Govt. of West Bengal held in the Rotunda of Writers Building, Kolkata 700 001, on 4 June 2004.**

(Prepared by National Commission of Women)

List of those attending the meeting is given as Annexure IIA

1. After brief introductory remarks by the Chairperson NCW, Dr. Poornima Advani, the Director General of Police (DGP) of West Bengal was invited to present his observations. He stated that after assuming office he has given top priority to monitoring and controlling **offences against women**. He has introduced the system of daily recording of reports of crimes against women (CAW) coming in from all over the state in a special register which is put up to him every evening and appropriate directions have been conveyed to the respective district police authorities.

The West Bengal police has also introduced a '**missing persons website**' which is connected to all police stations. This gives on-line information to the CID headquarters regarding missing persons including unidentified dead bodies.

The State Government further explained that 'Women Grievance Cell' were functioning in all Kolkata and all district headquarters which undertake counseling and mediation with the help of NGOs. The Commission, however, feels that police very often drag their feet, delay, prove obstructive in recording complaints. The cases of Omapote, PS Goaltore, Pachim Midnapore (Gangrape), April, 2003 and rape of Chempa Hansda (ST) of Budbud, District Burdwan, May, 2003 are examples of such an apathy.

However, the rate of crime in Kolkata has increased and the incidence of rape has gone up considerably in 2002-03 compared to 2001-02. The State Government in this context gave details of crime as under:-

| Description       | 2001-02 | 2002-03 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|
| Rape              | 36      | 52      |
| Abduction         | 112     | 120     |
| Dowry Deaths      | 08      | 18      |
| Sexual Harassment | 48      | 68      |
| Domestic Violence | 324     | 340     |

This is a matter of serious concern to the Commission. The West Bengal police explained that they had introduced a **help-line** for CAW. They had explained that seven (7) help-lines are counseling in the State. However, the NGOs, even of Kolkata, seemed to be unaware of the same. The help-line number is 10921-25.

(Note: The Chairperson (CP), NCW during the press meeting asked the journalists whether they were aware of the help-line number. A number of journalists of Kolkata claimed ignorance.)

The Commission was informed that there are no mahila thanas but, instead, **mahila desks** are there at all urban police stations.

(Note: The Commission has asked the police to provide the figures of the number of mahila desks, the total number of police thanas and the rural – urban disaggregated data., which government agreed to provide.

The Commission has recommended the following steps:

- a) A three digit toll-free number which should have a direct connection with the DG's office and the Police Commissionerate at Head Quarters should be introduced. There should be an increase in the number of help-lines. The information regarding help-lines should be widely disseminated. For this, there should be coordination with the publicity department, telecom, transport and railway authorities so that the number is exhibited on PCOs, buses and trains. Digital recording of all calls is advisable..
- b) There is a need for induction of more number of women police officers and constables.

The State Government agreed to these suggestions

2. The meeting discussed the problem of **infiltration from across the border** – specially Bangladesh. It was agreed that this was an acute problem, as the women near the boarder areas are a vulnerable lot. With the 2,200 kilometre border, the State was in need of 34 battalions of the Border Security Force. The current strength is 11 short. It was also noted that the border fencing by CPWD was not up to the mark – only 50% of the border was fenced. The Chairperson, State Women's Commission, noted very rightly that women are a vulnerable group at the border.

The Commission recommended that adequate steps should be taken to ensure that safety and security measures are put in place so that women at the borders are safe and the problem of infiltration is tackled. Border fencing would require to be completed and more number of BSF battalions and West Bengal police would need to be deputed at the border.

(The Chairperson, NCW, recounted the experience of the Commission while investigating the gang rape case at Karimganj. Several factors brought out the insecure and unsafe conditions of women. On the recommendations of the National Commission for Women the DG, BSF, had visited the border and the action taken report of the Government of Assam had been received by the Commission.

The West Bengal Government also needs to ensure that steps with regard to the problem of infiltration are taken urgently which the State Government had agreed).

3. The State Government recognized the fact that **trafficking**, across the national borders with Nepal and Bangladesh, as well as within the country, was a matter of grave concern and necessitated a dialogue between the Governments of India, Nepal and Bangladesh to put in a structure in place that could focus on this menace. The felt that need to completely fence the Indo-Bangladesh boarder to check the increasing human trafficking. The West Bengal Government informed that some NGOs in India as well as in Bangladesh are in a process of drafting a bilateral agreement on combating trafficking in women and children between the two countries. The draft, once finalized, will be submitted to the respect Governments for their consideration. This will bring out institutional mechanism of bilateral cooperation to deal with the menace.

The DG Police informed the NCW that there were regular informal consultations with Bangladesh (BD) and Nepal Consulates regarding missing women and several cases involving women have been handled successfully. The chairperson of West Bengal Women Commission for Women (WBCW) referred to the case of Arifa who was repatriated to Bangladesh.

In 2003, the Kolkata Police had launched a special drive against trafficking and several minor children were recovered. They, however, encountered problems of determining the age of victim girls and if the age is recorded as 15 to 17 years the victims are in danger of being handed over to 'fake parents'. Now children are being handed over to recognized NGOs and later being restored to genuine parents. The Commission was informed that there are a number of night schools for street children and children from red light areas.

On being asked about forensic laboratories it was confirmed that forensic laboratories are functioning efficiently and there is a standing direction for expediting examination of rape cases. The Commissioner of Police also said recently a forum had been formed for protection of rights of women which includes NGOs and principals of women's colleges. There is a proposal to have divisional deputy commissioners as conveners of these forums. The Commissioner of Police also assured the NCW that training syllabi include gender issues and seminars etc. are also held regularly focusing on such themes.

It was suggested that the interaction between the State Women's Commission and the Commissioner of Police should increase to effectively deal with crimes against women which was agreed to by the West Bengal Government authorities.

4. On the issue of **witch hunting**, the Commission was informed that this evil practice continues to persist in the backward and tribal areas of the State. The main problems that seemed to contribute to the persistence of the superstition are: (i) lack of electrification in the backward tribal areas- i.e. considerable darkness persists: (ii) health facilities fail to reach the rural areas compelling people to rely on "witches", and (iii) illiteracy. Apparently, the State Government has

not yet worked out a plan of action to deal with this problem. The State Government stated that they were relying largely on the State Women's Commission which had been working on the problem of witch hunting.

CP, WBCW stated that they have made several investigations and sent their recommendations to the government. Conditions in tea gardens are particularly alarming and a policy package needs to be developed by the police to keep a watch on these areas. According to DGP, investigations into 4 Malda witch cases have been completed and are now sub-judice.

*Recommendation:*

NCW recommended that a joint meeting should be convened to deal with this problem in the affected districts which should include Chief Secretary, Home Secretary and Secretaries for Health, Education, Women and Child and Tribal Department and also West Bengal Commission for Women which was agreed to by the State Government.

1. Dowry : Although the State Government officers said that West Bengal had no serious dowry problem, the West Bengal Commission for Women reminded them that it was still a problem. There appeared to be a lack of awareness amongst State Government officials that the District State Welfare Officer in each district also functions as the Dowry Prohibition Officer. No cases are reported because the Dowry Act is not understood properly. The WBSCW is bringing out a booklet explaining important provisions of the Dowry Prohibition Act.

*Recommendation:*

It was recommended that Chief Secretary should hold a meeting with Dowry Prohibition Officers to work out strategies for making their assignment more meaningful which was agreed to by the State Government.

7. Family Courts: There are only two Family Courts in Kolkata (with one male and one female judge). Even they do not have sufficient space accommodation. There are no family courts in the districts. The District judges of Alipore and Burdwan have proposed setting up two additional courts. The counsellors receive an honorarium of Rs.50 per sitting. The government desired that there should be atleast one family court in each district but for want of accommodation no other family court could set up in any other district till date.

*Recommendations:*

- a) CP, NCW suggested that the salary of counsellors should be raised and their professional qualifications need to be reviewed so that the courts function more efficiently. Efforts should be made to locate them away from the normal court environment. The State Government agreed to the suggestion.

(Note: CP, West Bengal Commission for Women referred to their ongoing comparative study of family courts which could provide useful insights. It was suggested that family courts would have a better environment if they are situated away from city centres and other courts.)

7. **Liluah Rescue Home:** The problem of the escape of inmates from the Liluah home and the known problems of general administration of the home were discussed. The Commission informed the authorities that there are serious complaints about the Liluah Rescue Home. There are allegations that women are treated extremely cruelly and are even used for prostitution. It was quite clear that the basic problem was that of management and it was agreed that a holistic approach would be required. It was clarified that the escape of the inmates had taken place from the hospital and the real problem was that the medical officer, though presumed to be full time, was not really present there full time.

The Commission was informed that arrangements are now put in place for guarding the inmates who are sent to private clinics. However, the Commission is unhappy to note that no action has been taken against the erring officer. The Commission reiterates that mere transfer should not be taken as an action; disciplinary action is called for which the State Government had agreed to.

The State Government was asked to study the report on Liluah Home finalised by the State Commission for Women and ensure that action on their recommendations is taken.

8. Commissioner of Police Kolkata, informed that, recently, a **women's grievance cell** had been opened with experienced lady officers. Qualified psychiatrists and expert NGOs were engaged for counseling and mediation. More than 300 cases have been given to this cell.
9. **Education:** The State Government officials stated that there were no significant gender gaps in enrolment. However, unless gender ratios are reviewed for enrolment at different stages of education it is hard to assess the actual position. The NGOs had informed the Commission that non-availability of toilets, specially in the secondary schools, was one of the main reasons for drop-out of the girl-child. However, at the officers meeting, the picture was not quite clear regarding toilet facilities for girl students and apparently there is no precise plan of action on this point. The Commission recommended for providing separate toilets for girls in each school to which the government agreed to do in a phased manner.

The Commission was informed that the District Magistrates had been advised to pool resources from projects like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan for construction of toilets but this seems to be an ad-hoc arrangement. It was revealed that although there are about 50,000 primary schools up to class IV the number of schools with class V is only 1000, which is probably one main reason for dropping out by girls.

The Secretary, Technical Education, stated that during the last 3 years girl students form only about 10 per cent of the total. It was recommended that a plan of action be drawn up for spreading

technical education in rural areas. Chairperson, WBSCW, referred to the need for hostel facilities being provided for technical schools in rural areas. The State Government agreed to consider the same.

10. **Jails:** According to IG (Jails), in West Bengal, 4 Central jails have women prisoners with the Presidency area having the largest number of inmates (about 190). The numbers in district jails tend to be rather small. Presidency Jail has ICDS project which takes care of children of inmates. Presidency Jail also has a women's hospital. There is a tendency of a rising number of women under-trials under section 498(A) and because of illegal migrants from Bangladesh giving rise to the problem of overcrowding.

The Home Secretary noted that in North Bengal jails may be over crowded as inmates cannot usually be transferred to other districts.

The NCW recommended that adequate number of women prison officers be earmarked for supervision of female prisoners which was agreed to by the State Government.

11. With regard to **Tribal Women**, the Secretary, Tribal Affairs, noted that the Government gives priority to education for tribal girls and to family oriented economic schemes. There is also stress on safe drinking water and toilets. The Government also has introduced Adivasi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojana.

CP, NCW said that there is need to formulate a comprehensive plan of action which should include inputs from the Departments of Health, WCD, Panchayat and Rural Development. The State Government agreed for the same.

The Chairperson, State Women's Commission noted that there is need to have tribal women-oriented schemes which restore the balance between the tribals' links with forests and new economic opportunities. She also referred to the Forest Protection Committees' functioning in West Bengal which has significant participation of women.

12. **Widows:** The Commission was informed that widow pension was earlier Rs 400/- per month which has been increased to Rs 500/- in Jan 2004. Only 2500 widows are registered for this scheme in Kolkata. The conditions of eligibility include monthly income of not more than Rs 100/-, dependence on the children, etc. However, these stringent conditions and the tedious methodology for application has restricted access to the scheme for the majority of widows in the State.

The Commission recommended that the scheme should be reviewed and made more accessible; the pension amount should be increased reasonably. There is need to institute a simpler, transparent and more convenient procedure by means of which needy widows can access this provision of monthly pension. Chairperson State Women's Commission suggested that consultations should be held between post office and bank authorities to devise an efficient and convenient delivery system. The State Government agreed to explore this possibility.

13. **Disability:** The Government has ensured that every child with disability has free education up to 18 years. Very recently an intervention was made by Commissioner (Disabilities) when it was reported that some students with hearing impairment were disallowed for admission in a school of Kolkata. Upto October 2003 a total no. of 6210 children with disabilities who are reading in integrated schools were given transport allowances @ Rs.50/- per month. Escort allowance @ Rs.75/- per month/per child was given to 2616 children who are reading in integrated schools. 1000 children have been given equipment allowance @ Rs.2000/- p.a., 1420 children given book grants @ Rs.400/- and 1420 children have been given allowance for uniform @ Rs.200/- all under IEDC programme. Apart from this 66 integrated visually impaired children were given reader allowance @ Rs.50/- p.m. About 8 thousand handicapped students have been awarded scholarships upto class VIII by Social Welfare Deptt. Besides, Mass Education Deptt. releases funds regularly for awarding scholarships to the disabled children.

**The State Government informed that** they had not undertaken any special survey on the disabled women in the State; the source of information is NSS reports. Information regarding concessions available to disabled persons is disseminated through the information department. On the question of sensitizing employers it was stated that a workshop was recently held by the Government where business chambers and insurance agencies were invited and incentives were proposed for employers who offer facilities to people with disabilities.

Regarding issue of disability certificates CP, NCW referred to the need to decentralize the whole process and make panchayats and urban local bodies competent authorities for issue of such certificates. However the HS pointed out that this matter has been discussed and it has been concluded that the proper channel should be government hospitals to minimize the risk of issuing false certificates. State government officials have also consulted PWD and Municipal Affairs authorities for expanding barrier free entry for hospitals, schools etc. No specific policy for women with disabilities in the state has been formulated.

It was recommended that the State Government should set up a task force and work out a policy and action plan for women with disabilities to which the State Government agreed.

The Commission had investigated some gruesome cases of crime against women in 2003. The outcome of these cases was also discussed:

1. **Nadia case:** In February 2003 there was a gangrape of a number of women passengers in a bus returning from a *barat* at village Aishmali, PS Dhantola, Dt. Nadia. The National Commission for Women had recommended trial by a specially designated court in camera, police to make all out efforts to apprehend the real culprits, adequate compensation for physical and mental rehabilitation, vocational training and counseling. The report was sent to the West Bengal Government on 27<sup>th</sup> May, 2003 and an action taken report was received on 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2003.

Two main areas of concern continue:

1. The Commission finds the compensation extremely inadequate and the State Government has been asked to enhance the amount.
2. Practically all the witnesses for the prosecution have started turning hostile because of various kinds of pressure.

The Commission was assured that steps would be taken by the State Government to get the case transferred to the High Court, conduct the trial in camera, so that the witnesses can depose in the absence of pressure.

2. The second case discussed was that of gang rape at PS.Gaoltore, Dist.Paschim Midnapore. In this case too the State Government has been directed to ensure that adequate compensation is given to the victim and the witnesses are able to depose without fear.

The Commission had written to the West Bengal Government for a report on a series of rapes at Bashirhat. The Commission was informed of the crimes and the criminals who were apprehended under sections of criminal assault, molestation, rape and attempt to commit rape. The accused persons have been arrested and they are in jail custody. A Sub Inspector has also been suspended for dereliction of duty in neglecting to take appropriate action on the complaint of Ms.Sandhya Haldar on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2004. An Inspector has been censured for lack of supervision. The Commission recommends due disciplinary proceedings against the erring officers.

**Meeting with National Commission for Women at 10.00 a.m. on 04.06.2004 on Gender Profile of West Bengal in Rotunda, Writers' Building, Kolkata.**

**Attendees:**

| <b>S.No.</b> | <b>Name</b>               | <b>Designation</b>   |
|--------------|---------------------------|--|
| 1.           | Dr.(Smt.) Poornima Advani | Chairperson, National Commission for Women                               |
| 2.           | Shri Asok Gupta           | Chief Secretary to the government of West Bengal                         |
| 3.           | Smt. Vike                 | Member, National Commission for Women                                    |
| 4.           | Smt. Jasodhara Bagchi     | Chairperson, West Bengal Commission for Women                            |
| 5.           | Dr. P.K.Agarwal           | Principal Secretary, Women & Child Development & Social Welfare Deptt.   |
| 6.           | Shri Swapan Chakraborty   | Pr. Secretary, Development of Planning Deptt.                            |
| 7.           | Shri B.L. Meena           | Secretary, Mass Education Extension Deptt. Deptt.                        |
| 8.           | Shri J. Dasgupta          | Jt. Secretary, Mass Education Extension Deptt. Deptt.                    |
| 9.           | Shri R.K. Ray             | Jt. Secretary, School Education Deptt.                                   |
| 10.          | Shri T.K. Sinha           | Jt. Secretary, B.C. Welfare Deptt.                                       |
| 11.          | Shri Krishna gupta        | State Project Director, West Bengal District Primary Education Programme |
| 12.          | Col. S. Chakravarty       | Secretary, RSB   |
| 13.          | Shri S.K. Chakraborty     | Secretary-in-Charge, Judicial Deptt.                                     |
| 14.          | Shri S.K. Nandy           | Secretary, Law Deptt.  |
| 15.          | Shri Suman Bala Sahoo     | DIG, CID (Special), CID, W.B.  |
| 16.          | Shri J. Chakraborty       | I.G., CS   |
| 17.          | Shri J. Sundara Sekhar    | Secretary, Technical Education & Training Deptt.                         |
| 18.          | Shri S.K. Chakraborty     | Commissioner of Police, Kolkata  |
| 19.          | Shri Shyamal Kumar Dutta  | DGP, W.B.  |
| 20.          | Shri Supriya Gupta        | Commissioner, Disabilities   |

| <b>S.No.</b> | <b>Name</b>            | <b>Designation</b>  |
|--------------|------------------------|---|
| 21.          | Shri A.L. Narula       | Project Coordinator, NCW  |
| 22.          | Dr. Mukul Mukherjee    | Research Advisor, NCW & Hony. Associates, Women Studies Research Centre |
| 23.          | Shri A. Ahad           | Jt. Secretary, Higher Education Deptt.                                  |
| 24.          | Dr. Rama Das           | Vice Chairperson, W.B. Commission for Women                             |
| 25.          | Smt. Bhagabati Mondal  | W.B. Commission of Member   |
| 26.          | Shri M.K. Sarkar       | Jt. Secretary, Personnel & Administration Reforms Deptt.                |
| 27.          | Shri C.D. Bandopadhyay | Special Secretary, Home Deptt.  |
| 28.          | Shri S.K. Das          | Controller of Vagrancy, W.B.  |
| 29.          | Shri D. Mukhopadhyay   | Secretary, Municipal Affairs Deptt.                                     |

**Minutes of meeting on Sexual Harassment at Workplace Held in  
Kolkata on 4th June 2004**

(Prepared by Shampa Sengupta)

A meeting was held at the Rotunda of Writers' Buildings in Kolkata on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2004 to discuss the implementation of Supreme Court guidelines on sexual harassment at workplace in West Bengal.

At the beginning, Dr. Poornima Advani, Chairperson National commission for women, briefly explained the objectives of the meeting. She said that it is important to understand whether Visakha Guidelines were implemented in all the departments of the state and to see whether these departments have introduced a Complaints committee with 50% women members including a 3<sup>rd</sup> party member.

The Home Secretary informed that complaints committees have been formed in all the departments. There has been a case in Malda where two WBCS officers were harassed by Chief Judicial Magistrate.

In the Municipal Affairs department, a committee has been formed. Officers are all made aware of its existence and awareness programmes with Sanhita, an NGO has been taken up.

In the Eastern Railways, complaints committee is there. However there is no 3<sup>rd</sup> party involved in their committee. Members of Sanhita said that this 3<sup>rd</sup> party should not be chosen from Eastern Railway Officers Wives Association. In last five years, two cases of sexual harassment had been reported. Prof. Jasodhara Bagchi, Chairperson, West Bengal Commission for Women mentioned here that their complaints committee is not a valid one without 3<sup>rd</sup> party involvement.

In the Social Welfare Board, an 8 member committee was formed in 2002. Not a single complaint has been lodged till date. This department also published poster on the issue of sexual harassment at workplace and distributed to all projects running under them.

The department of Personnel and Administration also mentioned that they have formed a committee but 3<sup>rd</sup> party representation was not there. At this point, Prof Bagchi, Chairperson, West Bengal commission for women, intervened and said that a study has been done jointly by Women's Commission and Sanhita where it is found that absence of 3<sup>rd</sup> party is a common problem area. She requested members of Sanhita to speak in brief about the findings of the study. Ms. Soma Sengupta of Sanhita said that the survey was done in all departments, select directorates and institutions, Government of West Bengal. Here are some of the findings :

**Department** : 56

**Directorate** :152

**Institution** : 24

**Analysis from the data from the Departments shows that regarding Formation of Complaints Committee:**

36 of the 53 departments (**67.92%**) have formed Complaints Committee

**Woman Chairperson of Complaints Committee:**

33 of the 53 departments (**62.26%**) have women as Chairperson

**Woman membership in the Complaints Committee:**

7 of the 53 Department Complaints Committees have *all* women members

1 of the 53 Department Complaints Committee does not have *any* woman as member

Women in the rest of the Department Complaints Committees form **50% to 100%** representations in the Complaints Committees

**Analysis from the data from the Directorates shows that regarding Formation of Complaints Committee:**

34 directorates out of 140 (**24.28%**) have formed Complaints Committees

**Woman Chairperson of Complaints Committee:**

26 of those 34 (**76.47%**) Complaints Committees have women as Chairpersons

**Woman membership in the Complaints Committee:**

1 Directorate gives no response

3 Complaints Committees do *not* have any woman member

8 Complaints Committees have *all* women members

Women in the rest of the 22 Complaints Committees form **50% to 100%** representations in the Complaints Committees

**Analysis from the data from the Institutions shows that regarding Formation of Complaints Committee:**

6 of the 22 Institutions (**27.27%**) have formed Complaints Committee

**Woman Chairperson of Complaints Committee:**

4 of the 22 Complaints Committees (**18.18%**) have women as Chairpersons

**Woman membership in the Complaints Committee:**

Women form **50% to 100%** representation in these committees

Ms. Sengupta pointed out that the dismal picture is found out in the third Party Representation in Complaints Committee. **Among the 36 complaints committee in the departments, presence of 3rd party is only in 8 of them which comes 22.22%. Amongst the complaints committee in the Directorates, only 8, which means 23.52 has a 3rd party. Amongst the 6 complaints committee of the Institutions, only 3 which mean 50% have a 3rd party.**

After presentation of survey report of Sanhita, Dr. Advani asked the other officials to talk about status of complaints committee in their departments.

In the department of Higher Education, a committee is there comprising of 9 members of whom 5 are women. However there is no 3<sup>rd</sup> party involved in their committee. Dr. Advani asked whether formation of the committee was publicized and received the answer in negative.

In the department of School Education, a committee is there. However there is no 3<sup>rd</sup> party involved in their committee. Also there are no committees at the school level. A discussion followed on how to assure that teachers of all the Government aided schools can access the committee. Prof. Malini Bhattacharyamember, West Bengal Commission for Women mentioned that committee at the level of D.I. is necessary to make it accessible to all school teachers and staffs.

In the department of Health and Family Welfare, a 6 member committee is there with member of Sanhita as a 3<sup>rd</sup> party. Sanhita also organizes awareness programmes with them. At Damodar Valley Corporation, committee with 3<sup>rd</sup> party exists. They feel the need of brochures in Bengali and Hindi for awareness generation amongst the staff members. Their committee is an all woman committee. Soma Sengupta of Sanhita mentioned here that when a committee is constituted with all female members, it is looked upon as an "only women's" issue and not as a workplace issue in general.

An official from West Bengal Police informed that a complaints committee was formed in 2002 with 7 members of which 2 were male members. No complaint had been lodged till date. There was a discussion on how accessible in this committee to the police women posted in the rural areas. Dr. Advani remarked that unless all women police can access this committee the existence of such a committee does not have any impact.

The Social Welfare department has a very active complaints committee with regular meetings. The 3<sup>rd</sup> party member Ms. Amita Sen of all Bengal Women's Union however felt that this committee is not reachable by all who are falling under this department. She said that even ICDS workers should be able to access the services of the committee.

An official from Development and Planning informed that they have a 5 member committee including 4 female members. Sanhita has already done awareness programmes for this department. No complaint has been registered. Here, Soma Sengupta of Sanhita said that absence of complaint does not mean that there has been so harassment in that office. Maybe the woman is too frightened to talk about the harassment she is facing. Giving a comfortable environment for women is also a job of the committee.

A representative of Calcutta Port Trust informed that they have a committee but there is no 3<sup>rd</sup> party. They sought help from West Bengal Women's Commission to provide names of NGOs for 3<sup>rd</sup> party requirement. They also raised a question that if any complaints are not there, is there any need of the committee to hold meetings? Dr. Advani said that it is important to have an active committee even if there are no complaints. The committee should not be need based. In the Panchayat and Rural Development department, a committee is there with 8 members, 3 of whom are female. Awareness programmes and 3<sup>rd</sup> party member is provided by Sanhita.

At the end of the meeting it was found that absence of 3<sup>rd</sup> party and finding out suitable 3<sup>rd</sup> party is a vital problem. As a result it was decided that West Bengal Women's Commission can make a list of suitable NGOs and give it to all the departments. Then the departments can select from the list. As Sanhita has already been 3<sup>rd</sup> party to so many departments, they do not want to take more responsibilities. Dr. Advani suggested that Sanhita can work as a mother NGO and train other NGOs regarding this issue. Prof. Bagchi promised to make a list of NGOs for this purpose. Prof. Malini Bhattacharya informed that till this list is made other existing lists can be consulted.

**A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS  
OF WOMEN AND GIRLS  
IN WEST BENGAL**

**BY  
MUKUL MUKHERJEE**



**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN  
NEW DELHI**

**NCW TEAM**

**DR. POORNIMA ADVANI**  
*Chairperson*  
*National Commission for Women*

**MS. ANUSUIYA UIKE**  
*Member*  
*National Commission for Women*

**SH. A.L. NARULA**  
*Project Co-ordinator*

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## FOREWORD

The existential pathos of a woman's life has been inimitably captured by the great Hindi poet, Shri Maithilisharan Gupta, in a memorable couplet which says, "Alas, woman! Thy destiny is eternal sacrifice, eternal suffering!"

Despite the exalted position given to women in some of India's religious texts and the exceptional attainments of individual women in fields as diverse as philosophy, statecraft and even warfare, the profile of the average woman through the ages has been that of a perpetually poor, perpetually pregnant and perpetually powerless being.

Independent India has tried to redeem the situation by proclaiming equality of the sexes as a Fundamental Right under the Constitution and directing state policy towards removing the various disabilities that thwart women in realising their potential. Five decades of Independence have also seen a plethora of laws passed by the State and Federal Governments to protect women from violence and discrimination and to strengthen their entitlements in the social and economic fields. Numerous committees and commissions have x-rayed the position of women, the advances made by them and the obstacles faced by them, and they have made umpteen recommendations to improve the situation. Scores of schemes have been floated by various Ministries of the Government to address women's problems, particularly those relating to education, health, nutrition, livelihood and personal laws. In the institutional area, independent administrative departments to give undivided attention to women's problems have sprung up at the Centre as well as in the States. Development corporations were an innovation of the Eighties to energise economic benefit schemes. The Nineties saw the setting up of the National Commission for Women (NCW) and State Commissions in various States to inquire into the working of various legal and constitutional provisions concerning women, to investigate cases of violation of women's rights and generally to advise on the socio-economic policy framework in order to mainstream women's concerns. In recent years, the Governments, Central and State, have also articulated comprehensive policies for the empowerment of women through



a variety of instruments and approaches focusing on an explicit vision of equal partnership of women in all walks of life.

Credit must also be given to a robust women's movement which has often given forceful expression to women's aspirations and joined issue with all the organs of state — legislative, executive and judicial — for reviewing the age-old prescriptions of a patriarchal society. Often they have networked effectively with the international community and fora in the quest for worldwide solidarity on issues affecting women. These interactions have often times changed the idiom of discourse on women's right to justice and development.

The half-century of struggle and reform has undoubtedly had considerable impact on women's world. Some of the key indicators of development have perked up significantly; women's life expectancy has risen; education levels have improved; economic participation has grown. But there are areas of darkness too; crimes against women, both at home and outside, continue unabated; traditional economic occupations have withered in the face of global competition; there is increasing commodification of women's persona and vulgarisation of their image in the media's marketplace. The new economic regime, where Sensex swamps sensibility, has meant the precipitate withdrawal of the state from many fields leaving the weak, including women, in the cold. Similarly laws change; minds don't. Therefore between progressive legislation and sensitive enforcement falls a long shadow. Critics also point out that whatever advances have been made remain confined to urban India and the vast hinterland resists change obstinately.

The overall picture is thus a mixed one leaving the profile of the average Indian woman not substantially altered. But in this vast country there is no average Indian woman. As in all other matters, diversity marks the Indian woman's picture too. How society and economy are coping with the forces of modernisation differs substantially from region to region. The geography of a state provides its own constraints and opportunities; history gives its own moorings to values and momentum to change. Thus the regional profile is superimposed on the national profile. The NCW has therefore commissioned these studies to gauge how women's life has been changing or not changing in different States of the country, and to situate these studies in the historical and geographical context of each region or State so that progress can be measured across time and across space. Such spatial comparisons can highlight what lessons there are to be learnt from the 'leading' areas and equally they help in focusing the attention on the 'lagging' areas. Regionally disaggregated data helps in benchmarking progress of different regions, areas or districts, and can be used for improving performance by attempting to raise the performance levels of the laggards to the average of the State and then matching the State's average to the national average. Interesting insights can also be gleaned from the experience of implementing agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, in dealing with different problems. Some of these may be rooted in the soil of the region and may not lend themselves

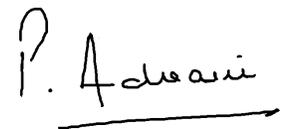
to replication but many others can be useful examples to emulate. That is how Best Practices become common practices.

These studies have been carried out by different research groups having special knowledge and interest in the area — its people, its history, its administration, its cultural ambience etc. They have interacted with official agencies as well as with leading NGOs working with women in the respective areas. The NCW has given a helping hand by providing information from its own database where available and also by interacting with the government of the State to set the stage for these exercises. The result is in your hands.

The research effort in respect of West Bengal was anchored by Prof. Mukul Mukherjee while the NCW team comprising **Dr. Poornima Advani**, Chairperson; **Ms. Anusuiya Uike**, Member and Mr. A.L. Narula, Project Co-ordinator facilitated the dialogue with the West Bengal Administration.

It is our hope that this effort will eventually result in the compilation of a comprehensive index of gender development focusing on the key issues in women's lives thus enabling comparisons of achievements and gaps regionally and nationally. This will help scholars and administrators alike.

Place : New Delhi  
Dated : 7.12.2004



**(POORNIMA ADVANI)**

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15 August 2004

Mukul Mukherjee

# WEST BENGAL

( Census-2001 )

TOTAL POPULATION - 802.2  
(in lakhs)

