

CHAPTER TWO

THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In this chapter we have given a brief profile of the region where the field work was conducted. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the geographic, demographic and economic characteristics of the three districts from which the three villages have been chosen for the present study. The districts are : West Dinajpur, Darjeeling and Cooch Behar. The second section deals with the social, economic and demographic characteristics of the three villages.

The districts

The area known as North Bengal as a whole is essentially rural in nature. The five districts that comprise North Bengal are : Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, West Dinajpur and Malda. According to the 1981 Census, a strikingly high percentage of the population is settled in the villages. In the West Dinajpur district, the towns consist of only 11.14 per cent of the total population and the rest 88.86 per cent reside in the villages. In the district of Cooch Behar, only 6.91 per cent are reported as urban inhabitants and the rest 93.09 per cent population are distributed over the villages of the district. While in Darjeeling district, the percentage of urban population is comparatively higher than that of the other two districts. Here the percentage of urban population is 27.86.

The districts have shown a steady population growth. The following table shows the growth of population in the three districts.

Table - 2

Decennial population growth in the three districts

Year	Name of the districts					
	West Dinajpur		Cooch Behar		Darjeeling	
	Population	Decadal	Population	Decadal	Population	Decadal
Variation	%	Variation	%	Variation	%	
1871-72			532565		94712	-
1881			602624	13.15	155179	63.85
1891			578868	-3.90	223314	43.91
1901	741284		556116	-4.10	249117	11.56
1911	791512	6.78	591012	4.58	265550	6.60
1921	695536	-12.13	590599	-0.07	282746	6.47
1931	745821	7.23	589053	-0.26	319635	13.04
1941	834726	11.92	638703	8.43	376369	17.75
1951	976882	17.03	668949	4.74	459617	22.11
1961	1323797	35.51	1019806	52.45	624640	35.91
1971	1859887	40.49	1412148	38.47	731777	25.15
1981	2402763	29.18	1771562	25.45	1006434	30.71

Sources: Cooch Behar District - figures upto 1971 (Mazumdar 1977) and from 1971-1981 (Census of India, 1981).

Darjeeling district - figures upto 1941 (Dash, 1947:49); from 1951 to 1971 (Census of India, 1971) and from 1971-1981 (Census of India, 1981).

West Dinajpur district - figures upto 1961 (Census of India, 1961); from 1961 to 1971 (Census of India, 1971) and from 1971-1981 (Census of India, 1981).

1. D. Mazumdar, West Bengal District Gazetteers; Cooch Behar, Calcutta, 1977, Chapter III.
2. A.J. Dash, Bengal District Gazetteers; Darjeeling, Calcutta, 1947, p. 49.

Demographically the districts are experiencing a phase of exorbitant growth. The partition of India in 1947 and the emergence of Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) as an Independent country in 1971 accelerated the process of migration of a large number of people from East Pakistan after the partition of India and from Bangladesh after its emergence. The migrants have taken refuge in some border states like Tripura, Assam and West Bengal. West Bengal, however, is the largest recipient of the migrants. Another important reason was that, during the post-Independence decades there was no major epidemic or natural calamities in the districts and the mortality rate has been reduced substantially with the development of medical science.

Although the literacy rate has been making a welcome progress in the districts still a high percentage of their rural population are illiterate. In West Dinajpur district, 31.91 per cent of rural males and 16.35 per cent of rural females have been found literate in 1981 as against 27.77 per cent and 8.84 per cent in 1971. In Cooch Behar district 37.56 per cent of rural males and 16.35 per cent of rural females have been found literate in 1981 as against 28.47 per cent and 9.22 per cent respectively in 1971. In terms of literacy, Darjeeling district is considerably ahead than the other two districts. Here, 44.61 per cent of the rural males and 23.24 per cent of the rural females are literate according to the 1981 figures, in contrast with the 1971 figures of 35.23 per cent and 15.88 per cent respectively.

The economy of North Bengal is primarily based on agriculture. Apart from Darjeeling district, in all other four

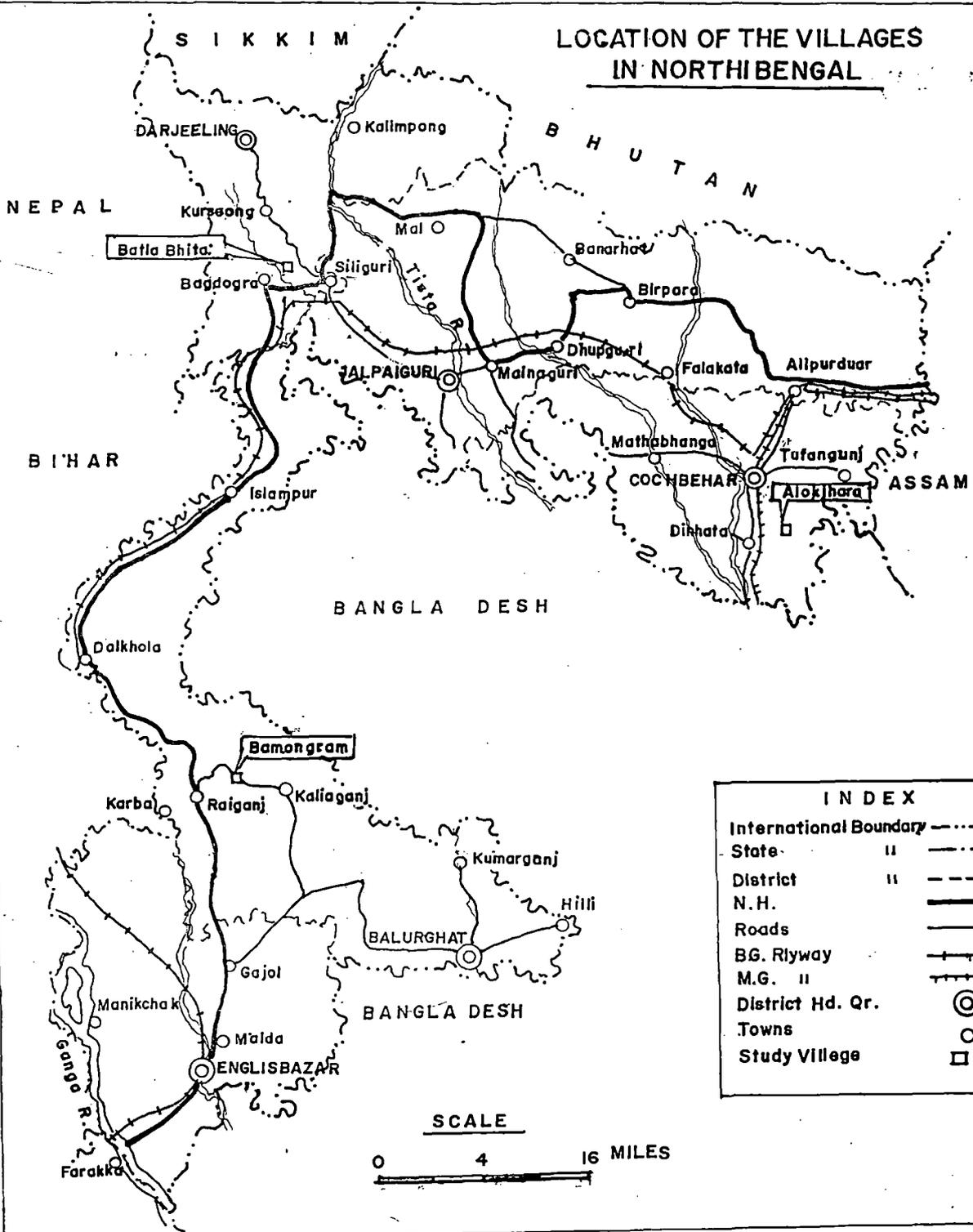
districts of North Bengal, a strikingly high percentage of the population are directly dependent on agriculture, either as cultivator or as agricultural labourer. This is quite evident from a comparative analysis of 1971 and 1981 Census figures.

In West Dinajpur district, the percentage of cultivators has come down from 57.05 in 1971 to 47.18 in 1981. But the percentage of agricultural labourers has increased to 34.26, in 1981 as against 28.23 in 1971. In Cooch Behar district, there has been a substantial decrease in the percentage of total cultivators from 67.95 in 1971 to 52.28 in 1981. The percentage of agricultural labourers has gone up from 15.59 in 1971 to 16.97 in 1981. Unlike the other two districts, in the Darjeeling district, a strikingly high percentage of the main workers have fallen under the category "other workers". A high percentage of them are engaged in the tea gardens and tourism. In this district, the percentage of both cultivators and agricultural labourers to the total main workers have reduced between 1971 and 1981. The percentage of cultivators has come down from 30.47 in 1971 to 26.93 in 1981 and agricultural labourers to 8.78 in 1981 as against 9.13 in 1971.

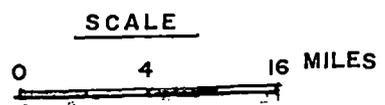
The three villages

The villages where the field-work was carried out, although have many common features, nevertheless differ in many respects regarding their economy and other characteristics. A brief introduction to the villages will therefore contribute to a better understanding of the later analysis.

LOCATION OF THE VILLAGES IN NORTH BENGAL



INDEX	
International Boundary	-----
State	-----
District	-----
N.H.	=====
Roads	-----
B.G. Rlyway	++++-----
M.G. "	-----
District Hd. Qr.	⊙
Towns	○
Study Village	□



Location, isolation and development

The village Bamangram is located in the middle part of the West Dinajpur district. To be more specific, the village is located in Raiganj Police Station under Raiganj sub-Division of West Dinajpur district. The headquarters of the Police Station and the sub-Division is located at Raiganj which is about 6 kilometres away from the village. The village is not isolated from the town in the sense that it has good access to transport facilities. It is also linked with the nearest town Raiganj by railway lines. The Radhikapur-Katihar meter-gauge railway line has crossed the village. Before 1981 there was no railway station at village and then the distance of the nearest railway station was around 3 kilometres east of the village. Now there is a railway station inside the village. As there is no metalled road inside the village, the importance of the railway line is immense to the villagers. Six passenger trains pass the station in a day. The train fare to Raiganj from the village is Rs. 1. The distance of the metalled road from the village is around five kilometres. The villagers frequently visit Raiganj by train or bicycle and even by walking. In the absence of any metalled road the villagers rarely travel by rickshaw.

In Bamangram, the primary school, high school, post office, ration shop and youth club are within the village. The co-operative society, marketing society and hospital are located at a distance of about 6 kilometres. The junior high school and the panchayat office are located at a distance of 3 to 4 kilometres. There are 10 public water wells where poor peasants and agricultural

labourers collect water for bath, washing and cooking.

The village Batla-Bhita is situated in the plains of Darjeeling district. It is under the jurisdiction of Bagdogra Police Station of the Siliguri sub-Division. The distance of the police station and the sub-Divisional headquarters is about 4 and 9 kilometres respectively.

The nearest town of the village is Siliguri which is the largest town of North Bengal. The No. 31 National Highway connects the village with the town. The Siliguri Railway Station is located at a distance of 9 kilometres south-east of the village. Both the public and private transport services connecting Siliguri are available. Although the Bagdogra Railway Station is located at a distance of 4 kilometres away from village but its importance to the villagers is very insignificant because of the easier access to the frequent transport service on the National Highway. The villagers visit the town mainly by buses.

In Batla-Bhita, the primary school, post office, ration shop and youth club are situated within the village. The junior high school is located within one kilometre and the high school, panchayat office and co-operative society are located at a distance of not more than 2 kilometres. The marketing society is situated at Siliguri and the only medical college of North Bengal is about 5 kilometres away from the village.

The village Alokjhora lies in the northern part of Cooch Behar district. It is located in Dinhata Police Station under Dinhata sub-Division. The headquarters of the police station and

the sub-Division is located at Dinhata, which are about 5 kilometres south of the village.

The Dinhata-Gosanimari metalled road has crossed the village. It is considered to be the main road which connects the village with the town. The villagers have easy access to the town through the public and private bus services. There is no train communication between the village and the town. Apart from the bus services, rickshaw is another important means of communication.

In Alokjhora, the primary school, ration shop and youth club are located within the village. The junior high school, high school, panchayat office and hospital are located at a distance of 2 kilometres and the location of the co-operative society, marketing society and post office are not more than 3 kilometres away.

If we compare the development aspects of the three villages, it appears that they are more or less at the same level. But it should be kept in mind that all the nearby towns of these villages do not possess equal importance especially from the point of view of job opportunities to the agricultural labourers. For example, the agricultural labourers of Batla-Bhita get work at Siliguri during the non-agricultural season. In contrast, the agricultural labourers of Alokjhora hardly find any work at Dinhata in the urban areas. This difference is mainly due to the fact that from the development point of view Siliguri is far ahead of Dinhata. Moreover, the village Batla-Bhita is located just behind the University of North Bengal. A section of the villagers is

partially or wholly dependent upon the University which provides opportunities to earn a living as rickshaw-puller or wage labourer.

Demographic and social features

The studied villages are not uniform by their sizes. Alokjhora is the biggest one comprising 640 households followed by Bamangram with 252 and Batla-Bhita with 57 households. Hence the total population of the three villages differ considerably. The proportion of the males take a marginal edge over the females. By religion, population of the three villages can be divided into two major religious groups i.e., the Hindus and the Muslims. Ethnically speaking, the inhabitants may be considered under three main religious groupings. They are Hindus, Muslims and Tribals. In Bamangram, the Muslims constitute 68.26 per cent of the total households followed by the Hindus 26.97 per cent and the Tribals 4.78 per cent. The tribal respondents identified themselves as Hindus. In Batla-Bhita, all the households are Hindus. In Alokjhora, the Hindus constitute 65.15 per cent and the Muslims constitute 34.85 per cent of the total households.

Household size

A household is a group of people who live under one roof and share a common kitchen. Here, we have classified the households into four types on the basis of their size. The categories are : very small (1 to 3 persons), small (4 to 6 persons), medium (7 to 9 persons) and large (10 and above).

Table - 3

Distribution of households according to size in the three villages

Size group of the HHs	Name of the villages					
	Bamangram		Batla-Bhita		Alokjhora	
	HHs	Population	HHs	Population	HHs	Population
Very small (1-3)	57	139 (22.62)	19	53 (33.33)	124	348 (19.37)
Small (4-6)	124	576 (49.20)	29	143 (50.88)	320	1452 (50.00)
Medium (7-9)	59	424 (23.41)	8	59 (14.03)	141	1028 (22.03)
Large (10 and above)	12	132 (4.77)	1	12 (1.76)	55	595 (8.60)
Total	252	1271 (100.00)	57	267 (100.00)	640	3423 (100.00)

Note: Figures in brackets denote percentage

The above figures reveal that more or less fifty per cent households in all the three villages have between 4 to 6 persons. This size group constitutes the majority households in all the three villages. The percentage of "very small" households in Batla-Bhita is comparatively higher than that of the other two villages. One reason may be that the number of labourer households in Batla-Bhita (40.35 per cent) are more than that of Alokjhora (21.25 per cent) and Bamangram (37.30 per cent). Majority of the labourer households are nuclear and small in size. The other reason is that in Batla-Bhita, no household owns more than 10 acres of agricultural land. whereas in Bamangram 16 and in

Alokjhora 14 households own more than 10 acres of agricultural land. These large holding households have more than 10 persons each. Moreover, the medium and large size households are found in majority cases among the Muslim communities. There are 68.26 per cent and 34.85 per cent Muslim households in Bamangram and Alokjhora respectively. Whereas in Batla-Bhita, there is no Muslim household. Thus the number of medium and large size households are comparatively higher in these two villages than that of Batla-Bhita.

Age and sex factors in the population

The detailed account of age and sex distribution of the population in the three villages is given in table 4.

The table 4 shows that a total of 252 households in Bamangram have 1271 population of which 646 are males and 625 are females. Of the total population of 267 in Batla-Bhita, 151 are males and 116 are females. In Alokjhora, the total population is 3423, consisting of 1796 males and 1627 females. In Bamangram, there is no significant difference in the proportion of males to females to the total population. The proportion of male to female population is higher in Batla-Bhita and Alokjhora. The population in the working age-group (15-59), including males and females, constitutes the highest majority followed by the age-group (0-14) and above 60 years. Of the population below 14 years of age in Bamangram and Batla-Bhita, the percentage of female is higher than that of male. While in the same age-group in Batla-Bhita, males constitute 41.05 per cent as against 36.20 per cent of

Table 4

Distribution of population by age and sex in the three villages

Age group	Name of the villages											
	Bamangram				Batla-Bhita				Alokjhora			
	M	%	F	%	M	%	F	%	M	%	F	%
0-14	253	39.16	282	45.12	62	41.05	42	36.20	734	40.87	676	41.56
15-59	373	57.74	331	52.96	85	56.29	71	61.20	980	54.57	899	55.25
60+	20	3.10	12	1.92	4	2.66	3	2.60	82	4.56	52	3.19
Total	646	100.00	625	100.00	151	100.00	116	100.00	1796	100.00	1627	100.00

females. In the working age-group also in Batla-Bhita and Alokjhora, females have a marginal edge over males. In Bamangram, of the total population in the working age-group 57.74 per cent and 52.96 per cent respectively are males and females. The population in the age-group between 60 and above are small in number in all the three villages. Participation of the working population in the productive occupation by sex is discussed in the later part of this chapter.

The family structure

Sociologists generally distinguish between nuclear family of husband, wife and unmarried children and the extended family where a group of nuclear families of related males and females of several generation live and act together as a unit. Sociologists draw up this generalisation on the basis of study that nuclear family is most often found in the urban industrial society where all the members of an extended family may not be employed in the same place. This does not create a problem in case of the rural society where there is little occupational mobility in comparison with the urban society. We shall see in the following discussions that even in the rural society like the urban society the nuclear family is the dominant type. Thus it appears that the occupational mobility is not the only cause for nuclearization of family. Land ownership and other factors are also responsible for nuclearization of family.

The importance of family in an agrarian society is numerous because, it is the basic unit of production, consumption, property

holding and mutual help. The two main groups in an agrarian society are owner-cultivator and landless labourer and to both of them family seems as a basic unit of production and consumption, rearing of children, source of labour supply and mutual help.

Basically there are two types of family : nuclear and joint. The others are residual categories of either of the two. A nuclear family comprises mainly, (a) young husband and wife without a child as yet or aged husband and wife after the separation of married sons; (b) husband, wife, unmarried children and relatives; (c) husband, wife and unmarried children. There are two types of joint family which are known as lineal joint family and lateral joint family. A lineal joint family is defined as having the parental couple, their married sons, their wives and children, with or without other relatives. On the other hand, a lateral joint family is defined as having two or more brothers, their wives and children, with or without one parent of the brothers.

Table 5

Distribution of families according to type in the three villages

Type of family	Name of the villages					
	Bamengram		Batla-Bhita		Alokjhora	
	No	%	No.	%	No.	%
Nuclear family	232	92.06	54	94.74	535	83.60
Joint family	20	7.94	3	5.26	105	16.40
Total	252	100.00	57	100.00	640	100.00

Table 5 shows that, in Bamangram, 92.06 per cent families are nuclear. In Batla-Bhita and Alokjhora, the percentage of nuclear family is 94.74 and 83.60 respectively. The percentage of joint family in Alokjhora is 16.40, followed by 7.94 per cent in Bamangram and 5.26 per cent in Batla-Bhita.

The joint family is found mainly among the large land owning group. Most of the agricultural labourers and poor peasant families are nuclear.

A comparative analysis of the different types of families in the three villages show that the percentage of nuclear family is comparatively lower in Alokjhora than in the other two villages. This is primarily due to the low percentage of the service holders in Alokjhora (1.56 per cent), whereas their percentage is 21.05 in Batla-Bhita and 6.75 in Bamangram. Moreover, the percentage of cultivator families is higher in Alokjhora (71.88), than that in Batla-Bhita (17.55) and Bamangram (38.89). In the villages it is observed that the tendency towards nuclear family is more among the labourers and service holders than that among the cultivators. An agricultural labourer earns his livelihood by selling his labour and can barely support his family. A service holder also earns his livelihood independently. This independent source of fixed earning to some extent compels a man to set up his own establishment. On the contrary, in a cultivator family a man can not form separate establishment so easily in the absence of an independent source of earning. Here "land" is the main source of earning which is often held jointly and he has to wait

for the division of land to have an independent source of living.

Caste/community background

The sample villages differ by their caste/community compositions both in number and numerical strength of each caste/community group. In Bamangram, there are five caste/community groups, while in Batla-Bhita two and in Alokjhora six. It is to be noted here that the communities are Muslim, the Scheduled Castes (mainly Rajbanshi) and the Scheduled Tribes (mainly Santal). The details of the caste/community background of the population in the three villages are given in the following table.

Table 6

Distribution of households by caste/community in the three villages

Caste/ Community	Name of the villages					
	Bamangram		Batla-Bhita		Alokjhora	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Scheduled Castes	41	16.26	55	96.50	221	34.53
Scheduled Tribes	12	4.78	-	-	-	-
Kayastha	26	10.31	2	3.50	102	15.94
Brahmin	1	0.39	-	-	10	1.56
Muslim	172	68.26	-	-	223	34.85
Banik	-	-	-	-	30	4.69
Nath	-	-	-	-	54	8.43
Total	252	100.00	57	100.00	640	100.00

In Bamangram, the Muslims constitute the majority households (68.26 per cent) followed by the Scheduled Castes (16.26 per cent), the Kayasthas (10.31 per cent), The Scheduled Tribes (4.78 per cent) and only 0.39 per cent are Brahmin households. In Batla-Bhita, the Scheduled Castes form the numerically dominant group. The Muslims (34.85 per cent) and the Scheduled Castes (34.53 per cent) together constitute the numerically dominant group in Alokjhora. Bamangram and Alokjhora may be called a multi-ethnic village where the Muslims and the lower castes are numerically dominant. Like in the other two villages, Batla-Bhita is not a multi-caste/community village.

Education

The illiteracy rate is higher in the rural society than that of the urban society in India, as it is in West Bengal. The illiteracy rates in Bamangram, Batla-Bhita and Alokjhora are 57.83 per cent, 35.96 per cent and 60.57 per cent respectively. Even among the literates females are neglected more in respect of education than the males in all the three villages. It is interesting to observe that, in Bamangram, among males the rate of literacy is higher than the illiterates. In contrast, about two-third females are illiterates in the village. The distribution of the population according to literacy and sex is shown in the following table.

Table 7

Literacy rate by sex in the three villages

	Name of the three villages											
	Bamangram				Batla-Bhita				Alokjhora			
	M	%	F	%	M	%	F	%	M	%	F	%
Literate	341	52.79	195	31.18	76	50.33	20	17.24	948	52.79	402	24.71
Illiterate	305	47.21	430	68.82	75	49.67	96	82.76	848	47.21	1225	75.29
Total	646	100.00	625	100.00	151	100.00	116	100.00	1796	100.00	1627	100.00

Even among the literates the attainment of higher education is strikingly poor. No one in the villages has received technical education. Only two persons in Bamangram have completed university education. The percentage of college educated person is not significant. Majority of the educated have attained either primary or Junior high school education. The following table gives us detailed account about the educational background of the literate population of the three villages.

Table 8

Distribution of the literate population by sex and educational level in the three villages

Educational level	Name of the Villages											
	Bamangram				Batla-Bhita				Alokjhora			
	M	%	F	%	M	%	F	%	M	%	F	%
Literate	14	4.10	7	3.59	7	9.21	3	15.00	19	2.00	8	2.00
Primary school	147	43.10	112	57.43	30	39.47	11	55.00	315	33.00	187	46.52
Jr. High School	112	32.85	51	26.15	26	34.21	5	25.00	504	53.16	169	42.03
High School	52	15.24	21	10.77	7	9.21	1	5.00	101	10.66	36	8.96
College	14	4.10	4	2.05	6	7.90	-	-	9	0.96	2	0.49
University	2	0.59	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	341	100.00	195	100.00	76	100.00	20	100.00	948	100.00	402	100.00

The above figures show more or less the similar features with respect to the educational attainment in all the three villages. In the villages the proportion of people having primary and junior high school education is high. It also shows that the percentage of females is higher than that of males in case of primary school education. While the percentage of enrolment of males in the junior high school and higher education is higher than that of females. Thus it appears that the incidence of drop-outs is higher among females than that of males.

The high rates of illiteracy in all the three villages are reflected in the poor enrolment at the primary schools. This is despite the fact that all the villages have primary schools and primary education is free. Even among those enrolled at the primary schools very few continue education beyond this stage. The incidence of drop-outs increases with increase of the educational level.

Occupation

In the absence of any large or small industry the main occupation in the village is agriculture. The villagers are attached to agriculture either as cultivator or as agricultural labourer. These two categories together constitute the major part of the working population.

Rickshaw pulling is also another important occupation in villages which have access to surfaced road. Dinhata-Gosanimari metalled road has crossed Alokjhora. Batla-Bhita is also surrounded by a metalled road. Hence, a considerable number of people are

engaged in rickshaw pulling in Alokjhora and Batla-Bhita. In contrast, in Bamangram, there is no one engaged in this occupation obviously because this village is not connected by a metalled road.

During our field work we have talked with a number of rickshaw pullers in order to know their socio-economic background. It is learnt that they have been pulling either their own or rented rickshaws. Majority of them have expressed satisfaction with the present occupation. Many of them were marginal farmers before joining this occupation. According to them, "by cultivating one or two bighas (0.33 or 0.66 acre) of land one can not earn his subsistence for the year; one has to seek some other work like agricultural labour". Hence, by selling their meagre land they have purchased rickshaw. In this occupation, a rickshaw puller is able to earn on an average Rs. 15 to Rs. 20 a day. Those, who have been pulling the rented rickshaws, even after paying the rent are able to earn Rs. 10 to Rs. 15 daily. A few of them have purchased rickshaws with the institutional loan.

Service in the government offices is related with the development and locations of the villages. The studied villages differ from each other by their remoteness and state of development. The differences are important with respect to the employment pattern in the different villages. Employment in the formal sector is also directly concerned with the level of education.

It is important to mention here that there is a small market both in Bamangram and Alokjhora. In these small markets

both buyers and sellers come more or less from within the village. Thus, a small section of the villagers are engaged in small trade as their primary occupation. The extent of this occupation ranges from one village to another. The business mainly comprises vegetable shops. The businessmen generally purchase vegetables from the village farmers and sell it in the market place. Others have opened either small tea stall or grocery shop and the like in the market place.

Carpentry is not a popular industry in the surveyed villages, since there is little demand for furniture and fittings. Only two persons in Bamangram and one in Batla-Bhita are engaged in carpentry as their primary and only occupation. In the third village there is no one in this occupation. These people work at home with their meagre tools. They make the body of the plough and other general works. Apart from few ordered furniture they also prepare furniture for selling in the weekly markets.

There are only few brick-built houses in the villages. Hence, the opportunity of work in the building construction is very limited in these villages. This is clear from the fact that only two persons are engaged in it as their primary occupation in Batla-Bhita. They mainly seek employment in the urban and semi-urban areas. In other two villages there is no one who practises it as his primary occupation. Besides, there are many people, especially the agricultural labourer who have adopted masonry work as their secondary occupation.

The village household industries have been destroyed over the past few decades mainly due to the industrial revolution and developed communication system. This is reflected in the fact that only four persons in the three villages are engaged in basket making as their primary occupation. These people purchase bamboo from the village and prepare baskets for selling in the market. Distribution of the working population is shown in table 9.

The figures in table 9 show that the percentage of females among the cultivators and agricultural labourers is higher than that of males in all the three villages. But if it is considered in terms of total working population then the proportion of males will be higher. Moreover, in the other occupational categories like service, small business, rickshaw pulling, carpentry, construction work, household industry males constitute the majority. Some female members of these families work as cultivator and wage labourer,

In Bamangram, the cultivators and agricultural labourers together constitute about 90 per cent of the total working population. Out of the total 19 government employees 1 is a college teacher, 1 is a headmaster of a high school, 2 are high school teachers, 5 are primary school teachers, 1 is a railway station master, 1 is an office-bearer in the panchayat office and the rest work in the army. The category "others" includes 3 persons. Two of them have been continuing their traditional caste occupation i.e., priesthood and the other one is beggar.

In Batla-Bhita, the percentage of cultivators is low but the percentage of agricultural labourers is higher than that of the other two villages. The percentage of service holders is higher

Table 9

Distribution of working population by sex and primary occupation
in the three villages

Occupational Category	Name of the villages											
	Bamangram				Batla-Bhita				Alokjhora			
	M	%	F	%	M	%	F	%	M	%	F	%
Cultivation	147	44.67	102	50.49	15	20.55	10	21.74	690	76.15	460	77.84
Service	17	5.16	2	0.99	12	16.43	1	2.17	10	1.10	1	0.16
Small business	39	11.86	2	0.99	1	1.36	-	-	5	0.56	1	0.16
Agricultural labour	123	37.38	96	47.52	34	46.58	23	50.00	172	18.99	126	21.31
Rickshaw puller	-	-	-	-	6	8.21	-	-	10	1.10	-	-
Carpenter	2	0.61	-	-	1	1.36	-	-	-	-	-	-
Construction work	-	-	-	-	2	2.73	-	-	-	-	-	-
Household industry	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	0.44	-	-
Others	3	0.92	-	-	2	2.73	12	26.08	15	1.66	3	0.51
Total	329	100.00	202	100.00	73	100.00	46	100.00	906	100.00	591	100.00

Note: Working population is the aggregate of all adults between 15 and 60 years. Domestic work is not included as it is not remunerative.

in this village. The category "Others" includes 2 males of which one is a whole time political worker. This fellow gets a specific amount of remuneration on monthly basis from his political party. The other person collects fire-wood from the forest and sell it in the market. This category also includes 12 females. Majority of them work as domestic servant.

The percentage of both male and female cultivators is higher in Alokjhora. There is no one engaged in the carpentry and construction work. The category "others" comprises 18 persons of which 12 work on temporary basis in the Marawari houses and the rest 6 are locally known as Dalal. They work as brokers between the seller and the buyer of cow or goat and against it they receive some commission.

The Production Process

All the cultivable land in Bamangram are not of equal quality. There are up land which is locally known as Danga Jami, where as Khal Jami refers to low land. The marshy or water-logged land is locally known as Bil Jami. The Bil Jami is considered suitable only for aman paddy.

There is no deep tubewell in the village and hence the irrigation system is owned privately. Many big cultivators own shallow tubewells and pumpsets. Even all the cultivable land of these big cultivators are not irrigated. The dispersion of land over wide areas on the one hand creates difficulties in irrigation and on the other hand it involves a high cost to irrigate all the land. In the absence of personal shallow tubewells the marginal and small farmers are mostly dependent on rainfall, which sometimes adversely affects their production. They can hire shallow tubewell from the big cultivators but sometimes it becomes difficult to bear the cost. Moreover, the local irrigation system consists of a number of small "tanks", ponds etc. But the scope of using "tank" or pond as the source of irrigation is very limited. In the absence of any canal it is difficult in major cases to irrigate land located at a considerable distance from the "tank" or pond.

The crop pattern is mainly determined by the ecological factors. In Bamangram, rice, both Aus and Aman are the main crops. The farmers grow both traditional and high yielding varieties of paddy. They cultivate different varieties of paddy like Parijat, Kalam, Jhulan etc. High yielding variety-Boro paddy like Jaya, Ratna and Pusa etc. are also cultivated to a limited extent by those, who can afford the irrigation cost and meet other necessary expenditures. The main cash crop grown in the village is jute along with different varieties of pulses like, mug, masur and mas kalai. The other cash crops are wheat, mustard, tisi (oilseed) etc. Other crops consumed by most households are also locally grown. Such

specialities include : vegetables like brinjal, chili, tomato, lady's finger, radish, potato etc.

The cropping pattern of the village falls under three broad seasons: Pre-Kharif, Kharif and Rabi. The Pre-Kharif season yields crop like jute, Aus paddy (both local or H.Y.V.) and different vegetables or Boro paddy (H.Y.V. or local), different types of pulses and vegetables. In the Rabi season crops like wheat, potato and pulses are grown.

Cow-dung is the most important fertilizer. The farmers are not unaware of the importance of manuring. The farmers also use chemical fertilizers, viz. urea, potash, sufala and compost. But many farmers especially the small and marginal farmers can not afford to use them in large quantity.

There are five gradience of cultivable land in Alokjhora. The up land or Danga Jami covers 70 per cent, the low land or Dhulo Jami covers 15 per cent, the marshy or water-logged land which is locally known as Duba Bhumi covers 2 per cent and the flood prone or Payasthi Dhola Jami covers approximately 3 per cent of the total cultivable land of the village.

There is a deep tubewell in the village which at present can irrigate 40 acres of agricultural land. 20 acres in 1980 have been irrigated by the deep tubewell. Hence, large tracts of cultivable land remain outside the command areas of the deep tubewell. Only eleven farmers in the village own shallow tubewells. Majority of them are big cultivators. The marginal and small farmers are heavily dependent on the rainfall. The farmers also use "tanks", ponds as a source of irrigation.

The production cycle of the village falls under three broad seasons. These are : pre-Kharif, Kharif and Rabi. In the Rabi season the main cash crop grown in the village is tobacco. The ecological condition of the locality is very much favourable to the tobacco cultivation. The other crops like wheat, different varieties of pulses and vegetables are also grown in this season.

Cowdung (gobar sar) is still considered by the farmers as an important manure in the village. They said that this manure was plentiful few decades ago. Now there is a shortage of this manure with the gradual diminishing of the number of cattle. Green manure is grown in the intermediary periods of two seasons and is ploughed down before the sowing. The use of chemical fertilizers viz. urea, potash, sulphate etc. are not unknown to the Alokjhora farmers. But the extent of their use vary according to the economic condition of the household.

If we compare the three villages as to the degree of penetration of market forces, we find that although all three have been integrated into the network of the market economy, their integration differ qualitatively and quantitatively. Batla-Bhita seems to have maintained most of the characteristics of the old economy because it does not offer many advantages for commercial farming, while Bamangram is the most "advanced" of the three in this respect. Use of tractor, developed irrigation system, production of triple crops etc. are the features of agriculture in Bamangram. In the following chapters we shall examine the relationship between these processes and their effects on labourers in these three villages.

Summary

All the three districts have shown considerable population growth mainly after Independence in 1947. The high growth rate along with large-scale infiltration of population from erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, has aggravated the process. Besides, there has been no major outbreak of epidemic or natural calamity in these districts since Independence. The mortality rate has also reduced substantially with the availability of modern medical facilities. These factors have to some extent helped to increase the population substantially in the post-Independence period.

The economy of West Dinajpur and Cooch Behar districts is primarily agriculture based. As such overwhelming majority of the population ⁱⁿ these two districts are dependent on agriculture either as cultivator or as agricultural labour. While in the Darjeeling district, the major percentage of the main workers have been grouped under the category of "other workers" - a high proportion of them are engaged in the tea gardens and tourism.

According to the 1981 Census, the percentage of cultivators has come down in 1981 as against 1971 in all the three districts. On the other hand, the percentage of agricultural labourers has gone up during this period in West Dinajpur and in Cooch Behar. While in Darjeeling, along with cultivators the percentage of agricultural labourers also have come down marginally.

Although the districts have been making welcome progress with respect to literacy, still a large section of them are illiterate. In terms of literacy, Darjeeling is considerably ahead of the other two districts.

The selected villages are not located far away from the town. The inhabitants of Batla-Bhita and Alokjhora have good access to the local town through the metalled roads and the inhabitants of Bamangram have access to the town through the railway. There is no marked difference between Bamangram and Alokjhora with respect to access to the other infrastructural facilities. The only difference is that the nearby town of Bamangram is comparatively large in size than the nearby town of Alokjhora, while Batla-Bhita is located near to Siliguri town - the largest town in North Bengal. Moreover, the village is located just behind the University of North Bengal.

The studied villages differ by their sizes. Among the three villages, Alokjhora is the biggest one comprising 640 households followed by Bamangram 252 and Batla-Bhita 57 households. The villages also differ by their caste/community compositions. In Bamangram, the Muslims are the numerically dominant group; in Batla-Bhita, the Scheduled Castes comprise the majority households, and in Alokjhora, the Muslims and the Scheduled Castes constitute 34 per cent each of the total households.

Most of the families in the villages are small in size. More or less 50 per cent families in the villages have between 4 to 6 persons. There are only few large families with more than 10 persons. The percentage of large families is high in Alokjhora followed by Bamangram and Batla-Bhita. The large families are generally found among the large land holding group. In the absence of large land holding group in Batla-Bhita, the percentage of large

families is comparatively low. The dominant type of family in the villages is nuclear.

A high percentage of the population are illiterate in the villages. Females are neglected more in the field of education than males. The literacy rate for female in Batla-Bhita is comparatively lower than that in the other two villages. One reason may be that females in this village have comparatively greater access to outside work.

To the question of higher education, there is no significant difference among the literates in the villages. Only two persons in Bamangram have completed university education. No one in the three villages has received technical education and only few are college educated. Majority of them have either primary and junior high school education.

As said before majority of households are attached to agriculture : either as cultivator or as agricultural labourer. Besides, we find some sort of differences among the villages with respect to access to the different types of occupation. Firstly, the villages Alokjhora and Batla-Bhita being connected with the metalled road have a number of rickshaw pullers. While in Bamangram, as the villagers have no easy access to the metalled road, so there is no one in this occupation. Secondly, the nearby town of the villages do not possess equal status from the developmental point of view. The villagers in Batla-Bhita, especially the labourers have comparatively greater opportunity to get work in the urban and semi-urban areas. While, the nearby town of Alokjhora

is a rural town and hence the opportunity to get work in the urban informal sector is very much limited. Thirdly, the size of the village affects the economy. Bamangram and Alokjhora is large in size and hence there is a small market in each village. In this market both the buyers and sellers come more or less from within the village. Hence, a number of the villagers are engaged in small business as their primary occupation. Many cultivators also have taken it as their secondary occupation. Batla-Bhita is small in size and hence there is no market inside the village. People are not found in this occupation here.

Thus it may be said that ecology, demographic features and location of the villages have determined to some extent the nature of the occupation of the villagers. The diversification of occupation seems to be more among the small and marginal farmers except among the educated villagers who are mostly engaged in some service. This point will be further clarified in the following chapters.