

CHAPTER-III

SOCIO- ECONOMIC SETTING OF THE STUDY AREA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The origins of the socio-cultural and socio-economic diversity in India lie in the physico-geographical framework of the sub-continent. Likewise, the North Bengal region also possesses large physico-geographical peculiarities among its various portions. It is the physical framework of the region, which provided the basis for diversities in landforms and the ecological differences based on them. At first level of generalization, the three physiographic divisions of North Bengal- the Himalayas, the forest covered Terai and the Southern Plain- set the stage for differentiation in ecologies. Within each of these macro-regions, differences exist in the physical as well as climatic characteristics, which contribute to the second order differentiation in the habitat and ecology.

Physiographically, more precisely, politically, the North Bengal region enjoys international boundary between Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. It has another reflection, as well as, influence on the cultural interaction of people resulting into social and economic change. The long history of migration of people of different groups and with different customs and cultures that managed to reach in this region from different parts of Asia, mainly South-East Asia at different points of time shows how different cultural groups distributed themselves in space depending on the ecological setting in conformity with their own primordial mode of economy. The wide alluvial plains of North Bengal were vastly accessible because of their open nature and became the medium of the incoming streams of people. On the periphery of these plains, the rim of hills and uplands allowed the primitive economic modes, such as food gathering and pastoralism, to survive unaffected by the march of time. This contributed to the emergence of a cultural mosaic of great diversity. The cultural history reveals that the diversities were rooted in the environmental setting of the region. It also shows that, the people who came to settle in different regions also came with diverse cultural traditions. They did not take similar paths in the history of social evolution. The cultural differentiation was also an end product of primary differences in human initiative and ingeniousness. These contrasts were further strengthened by the fact that, the human decision-making, which was directed from the nodes of power, neglected the inter-fluvial tracts and the rim lands because of their perceived agricultural endowment.

3.2 ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Although physiographically, the northern part of the North Bengal Region, i.e., the Darjiling Himalayas is a part of the Himalaya, they form as the result of long years of administrative, political and economic association to the rest of West Bengal. The region provides to the whole state a good potential of hydro-electrical power as well as a good source of some valuable timber and forest products. The major river of this area to emerge from the Himalayas and debouch on the plain is the Tista, which can be forded both by rail and road one to the Eastern Duars and further east to the Brahmaputra Valley and the other to reach to the Darjiling. Darjiling continues to enjoy its status of a hill station with some educational facilities.

The Duars play an important role as a typical Terai Belt of alluvial fans and cones with deposition of pebbles and gravels at higher levels, terraces in the middle levels and at the lower levels zone under swamps. These swamps merge into the alluvial plains developed by the rivers Mahananda, Teesta, Atreyi, Raidak, Torsa and other small streams. Numerous tea estates dominate the higher levels of the valley while rice and jute dominate the lower levels. The cultivated lands are highly susceptible to sheet floods, lateral scouring along with extensive deposition of new sand. All these factors affect the soil of the region. As a result, crop yields are low and not only that, majority of the tea estates need agro-technological promotion. In the pre-partition days, the economic orientation of these regions used to be towards the south when products were sent down to the Padma-Jamuna waterways.

In the recent days, Siliguri become an important nodal center mainly based on road and rail links. The international boundary with Bangladesh cuts off all traffic through waterways; it has made Siliguri strategically important as the link between the North-East India and the rest of the India. Population densities are low in comparison with rest of the State. Alipurduar and Cooch Behar are two important towns. Siliguri is their counterpart to the right of the Teesta.

This is perhaps the most important region in whole State, which has some potentiality in its natural resources. As for example, the Jaldhaka Hydel Scheme suggests other utilizable sites in the Himalayan terrain. Apart from the prospects of the extension of area under tea

estates, the demand for jute is likely to bring more land under this crop with improved transport facilities. Various horticultural crops and numerous medicinal plants are gaining importance in this area. Not only that, agro-based and forest-based industries are also becoming helping hands to the economic development of the region. The oil-pipeline from Assam Valley and a possible plan to link Brahmaputra with Ganga are likely to endow this belt with greater locational advantage in economic and strategic importance.

South of Naxalbari the region consists of Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur and Maldah are characterized by a landscape of elevated lateritic alluvium. The strategic importance of this slightly elevated and undulating surface is that, it provided a military and political bridgehead across the Ganga for conquests and political control of the Brahmaputra Valley as well as the eastern part of the Assam Highlands. The higher elevations have open forests and scrubs and these are inundated by seasonal flood streams. In fact they provided, as in the case of the ancient capital 'Gour', natural moats to the town. The ancient capital Gour, Lakhnauti, Pandua with their transformed structures under the medieval Islamic rulers, and English Bazar of the colonial era all are located in this belt lying between Ganga and Mahananda. The urban landscape is however, one of the buried past with various structures of the medieval and ancient Islamic period in a terrain of heavy rainfall, floods and resultant alluvium deposition. During 8th century, this area was a well populated with flourishing agriculture, but during Muslim rule, it progressively deteriorated. The region stands in sharp contrast to the industrial regions of the state, as stagnation of agriculture is clearly visible in its peasantry and crop production. However, it appears that the region has started to revitalize itself on the strength of its location, though the center of economic gravity has shifted further west and the region is becoming the transitional zone between Behari and Bengali population.

Poor soil spread of sand and diaras are major constraints in agriculture. Rice and jute are the main crops but the productions are low. With the development of the Farakka project, the stretch of the Ganga valley between its southwestward bend and the upper course of the Bhagirathi would receive a new economic face-lift on both the banks of river. Rajmahal and other fording points of this area would receive a new stimulus.

3.3 RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

Religion is a symbol of group identity and a cultural rallying point. All societies have value system- common beliefs, understandings, expectations and controls – that unite their members, and set them off from other different cultural groups. It is one of the important characteristics of culture of a region and leaves a strong imprint on the natural environment of the region in terms of its interaction with people. The food habits, clothing, shelter and higher needs of people are also closely influenced by religious beliefs.

Religions of the world may be classified into Universal religion, Ethnic religion and Tribal or Traditional religion. Christianity, Islam and Buddhism fall under the first category. These are the faiths that claim applicability to all humans and that seek to transmit their beliefs through missionary work and conversion. On the other hand, ethnic religions have strong territorial and cultural group identification. Hinduism, Judaism and Japanese are the examples of ethnic religion. The tribal or traditional religions distinguished by their small size, their unique identity with localized culture groups not yet fully absorbed into modern society, and their close ties to nature. The belief of tribal religion is also known as Animism.

India is a country, where majority of people believe on the Hinduism. The state of West Bengal also supports more than 70 percent of its total population in this religious group. Slightly lower than the state's average, the North Bengal region possesses about 68 percent of its total population as Hindu (Figure.3.1). Maximum concentration of the followers of Hindu religion is found in Jalpaiguri district, where about 83 percent people believe in Hindu religion. Second, third and fourth highest percentage of Hindu population is recorded in Darjiling, Koch Bihar and Dakshin Dinajpur with 77, 76 and 74 percent respectively. Individually, these three districts record concentration of Hindu believers more than that of the regions average as well as the state's average. On the contrary, Uttar Dinajpur and Maldah records lowest share with 52 and 49 percent respectively of total population being Hindu. Maldah records the minimum concentration of Hindu believers in the whole North Bengal region. Thus, it is interesting to note that, the northern part of the region exhibits higher proportion of Hindu population and it decreases from north to south (Appendix 3.1).

Figure.3.1: - Distribution of Different Religion in North Bengal and West Bengal, 2001

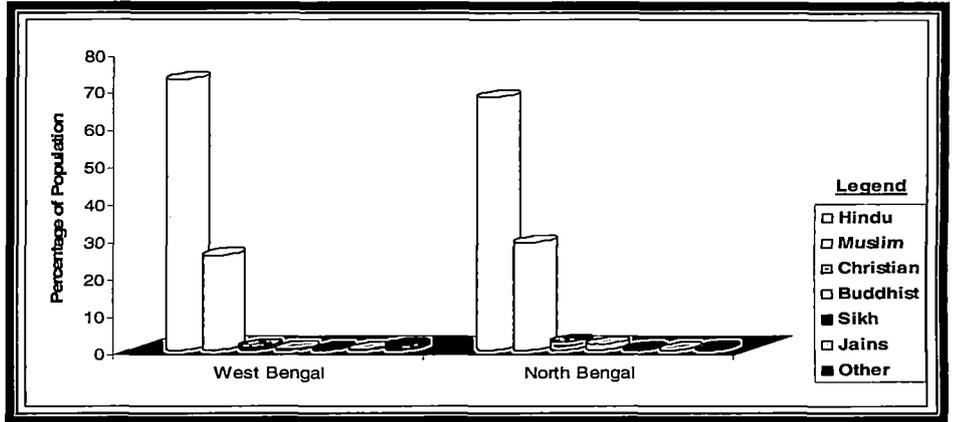


Figure.3.2: - Distribution of Different Religion in North Bengal, 2001

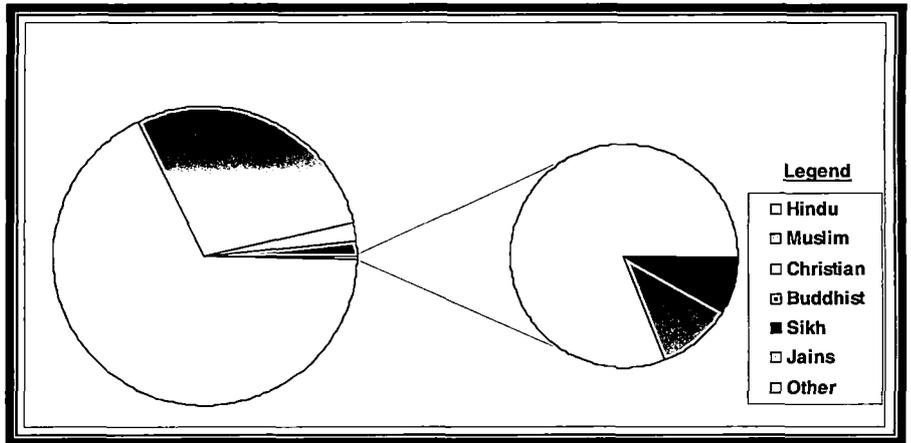
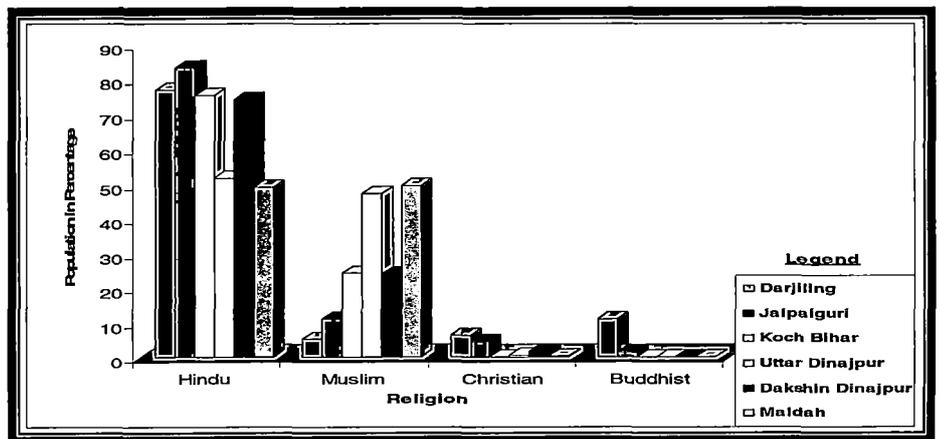


Figure 3.3: - Major religions in North Bengal, 2001- District Level Analysis



The most important universal religion of the region as well as the state is the Islam. Islam has two important sects, i.e., Sunni and Shia. In West Bengal former sect is dominant. About 12 percent of total population of the country is Muslim, which is about 25 percent for the state of West Bengal and 29 percent for North Bengal as a whole. Thus, comparing with the country, the North Bengal region has high concentration of Muslim population (Figure.3.2). District wise distribution shows Maldah is in the leading position with about 50 percent of its total population as Muslims. Next concentration is found in Uttar Dinajpur and it has recorded 47 percent in the census year 2001. Remaining four districts record comparatively low concentration of Muslims ranging between 5 percent and 24 percent with Darjiling as the Jalpaiguri, which records very high concentration of Hindu population of more than 80 percent, but in case of Muslim population concentration, it ranks as second lowest in the whole North Bengal with about 11 percent Muslims. Dakshin Dinajpur and Koch Bihar record about 24 percent Islam believers each. Therefore, Muslim majority district is Maldah and main reason behind this may be the existence of Capital of some Muslim Emperor at Gour near Maldah town.

Map 3.1 reveals that we can divide the whole North Bengal region into two parts on the basis of these two religions. The northern three districts along with Dakshin Dinajpur record more Hindu population of more than 50 percent, while the southern three districts along with Koch Bihar record comparatively more Muslim population of more than 15 percent.

Next important religion in the North Bengal is the Christianity, which covers 1.99 percent of the total population of the region. This percentage is slightly more than that of the state's average. Maximum concentration of Christians is in the Darjiling district, which is followed by Jalpaiguri. About 6 percent people of the former are Christians while about 4 percent are in the latter. Minimum concentration is recorded in Koch Bihar. Christianity is the most important religion of the world and was founded by Jesus of Nazareth (Palestine) in the first century A.D.

Another important universal religion is the Buddhism. It was founded in North India by Goutam (563-483). This religion insists on rigid moral and spiritual discipline in order to attain 'nirvana', a condition, where deeds have perished, and the cycle of rebirth on earth has ceased, and supreme peace is attained. It widely spread throughout Asia, developing

many local philosophy, form and practice. Though only 0.76 percent people in India, the birthplace of this religion, believe in this religion, in West Bengal, this figure falls to 0.30 percent. The concentration of Buddhists in North Bengal region is slightly high than that of the state and it is 1.51 percent. Major portion of Buddhist population of the state is in the northernmost district, i.e., the Darjiling. About 11 percent population of this district is Buddhist. Following it, Jalpaiguri records Buddhists of about 1.29 percent. The minimum concentration is in Maldah district. Except Darjiling and Jalpaiguri, all other districts of North Bengal record followers of Buddhism of below 1 percent. The main reason for comparatively high concentration in Darjiling is the migration from neighboring areas of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim.

Except these main four religious groups, Sikhs and Jains contribute very little in the total population of the whole region as well as in individual districts. There are only 0.04 percent Jains population and 0.03 percent Sikh population in the North Bengal. Therefore in all districts of the region, believers of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism are more (constituting of about 99.59 percent) than all other religions.

3.4 CUSTOMS

Custom is an important characteristic of any group of people living in any social structure, while habit is a similar word, which is adopted by an individual. The customs may be classified into two categories, i.e., the customs derived from necessary activities (food, clothing and shelter); and the other customs involve leisure activities including the arts and recreations. Social customs may also be classified into- (a) folk and (b) popular. The folk customs develop as a result of particular physical, social and economic characteristics experienced by the group, while the popular customs are based on the ease of interaction in the world, because of rapid means of communications and transportations. Both of these two types of cultures and customs are found in the North Bengal region. These customs have close relation to natural environment. As in the North Bengal region, diversity is found in natural environment- in relief, in climate, in soil. Thus, this diversity influence on the growth and development of folk cultures as well as, popular cultures. From the northern hilly part of the region, through the precipitous forested foothills of northeast to the low flood plains of the south, every

corner of land exhibits peculiarities in natural environment and these also influence the cultural environment of the region.

Folk food habits can be derived from physical environmental condition, which is considered by its inhabitants in deciding to produce particular foods suitable to the climate and soil. Rice is the main food of the North Bengal region as the region comes under the rice-growing area. Various tropical vegetables and fruits are grown here mainly in whole part of the region, whereas some temperate and mountainous fruits and vegetables are being cultivated in the higher altitudinal areas. People used to fulfill their protein requirement by fish and meat. The avoidance of pork among Muslims and beef among Hindus is due to the religious values. Moreover, food habits are not just matters of sustenance but are intimately connected with the totality of culture or customs.

The clothing and other wearing are also affected by the environmental conditions. People living in different physical environments may require different types of foot wares, clothes etc. For example, in the northern hilly areas of the region, people wear woolen clothes and closed shoes to protect themselves from severe cold; whereas in the rest of the region, due to severe heat, people prefer cotton clothes and light shoes. But in recent days, improved communications have permitted the rapid diffusion of clothing fashion from one place to another.

3.5 SETTLEMENTS

After food, shelter is the most important need of human being. People construct houses and develop settlements to protect themselves against the extremities of weather and to enjoy social life. In fact, settlement is an individual's important step towards adopting in physical environment. Settlements are both the storage centers of the world's cultural heritage and the point of origin for the dissemination of innovative economic, social and political patterns. But the precise reasons for the formation of settlements are not known. The social scientists have given several explanations for the development of human settlements. The main reasons for the establishments have been religious, cultural, military, political and economic. In addition, the available soil, water, and forest and mineral resources closely influence the site, growth and development of human settlements. Depending on the nature and quality of resources, the settlements may be

temporary, permanent and from the rural settlements they may acquire the status of urban settlements.

However, more than 80 percent of people in North Bengal live in rural areas. Generally, any settlement in which most of the people are engaged in agriculture, forestry, mining and fishery is known as a rural settlement. A rural settlement is often been called an agricultural workshop. It cannot be separated from the land whose use it ensures. Its type, shape and pattern are generally in accordance with the kind of work, the agricultural techniques and the way the soil is used. Three types of rural settlements can be found in whole North Bengal region and these are- Compact or Nucleated, Semi-compact or Semi-nucleated and Dispersed.

Compact settlements are mostly found in the highly productive alluvial plains of all over the North Bengal region except the northern hills and forest covered foothills. In these settlements, most important characteristic feature is that, they have a high degree of segregation among the upper and lower castes. Each class is allotted its specific locality. The market place and shops and also religious centers are always near the center of the village. Compact settlements are generally found in the plains or along the water bodies where soil, fish and other resources are rich. Intensive cultivation, which clearly represents the most scientific use of soil, has given rise to the greatest number of very large compact settlements in many parts of the study region. The rural settlements become more compact to accommodate more people over minimum space. When the village area is not adequate to accommodate the increasing number of people, many of them constructed their houses at a suitable neighboring locality and similarly organized the new settlement on the pattern of their old village. This process can be seen in some places of North Bengal. Semi-compact or semi-nucleated settlement is a transitional phase in the growth of a compact settlement. As the new technology is adopted, and the population increases in this region, the scattered settlements start taking the shape of semi-compact settlement. In the arable lands and fertile plains of middle as well as southern part of the region, the primary type of settlement was small and loosely nucleated and in fact lacked a pattern. Increase in population caused villages to grow, mainly along river basins and as a result, the number of houses increases. These houses start occupying the open spaces and lead to semi-compact settlement, which ultimately acquires the shape of a nucleated or compact settlement. As except northern and

northeastern part, whole of the North Bengal region occupies alluvial soils, thus good agricultural conditions lead to semi-compact and compact settlements in this area. On the other hand, dispersed settlements are generally found in the areas of extreme climates, hilly tracts, thick forests, grasslands, poor agricultural lands, areas of extensive cultivation and the areas where it is essential that the farmer should live on his agricultural land rather than in a distant village or settlement. Majority of these conditions are found in extreme northern part of the study region. For these reasons, in the forestlands and valleys of the Himalayas, the higher altitudes of the Himalayas settlements are of dispersed type. There are some rural settlements in the forest areas, in which the dominant economic activity is gathering of forests products and lumbering. Such villages are generally very small in size and scattered and are found in the forest areas of the sub-Himalayan region and terai belt of Darjiling and Jalpaiguri districts. In the areas where timbering is on a large scale, some timber industry developed.

According to 2001 census data, there are about 86 percent people of whole North Bengal live in 69 rural areas of the region. The district wise data reveal that the Maldah district records the maximum concentration of rural population, where about 93 percent people are rural and contrary to this, minimum concentration is in northernmost district of Darjiling with about 68 percent people live in rural areas of the district. In a decade back, the figure was same in the former but in the later, the percentage of rural people decreased by 2 points in the new century (Appendix 3.2). The table shows that during both the decades, though all districts maintained their position, yet the percentages change a little. Except in Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur, in all other four districts the percentage of rural population has decreased in 2001 from that in the previous decade and the decrease is maximum in Darjiling. As the main basis for livelihood in rural areas is agriculture, and as northern part of the district is mountainous and forest covered resulting into restriction of agricultural work in only southern area, hence the percentage of rural population is also low in the district. In addition, the most important urban area of North Bengal, i.e., Siliguri is partly situated in the southern tip of this district, which adds another cause behind this low rural population.

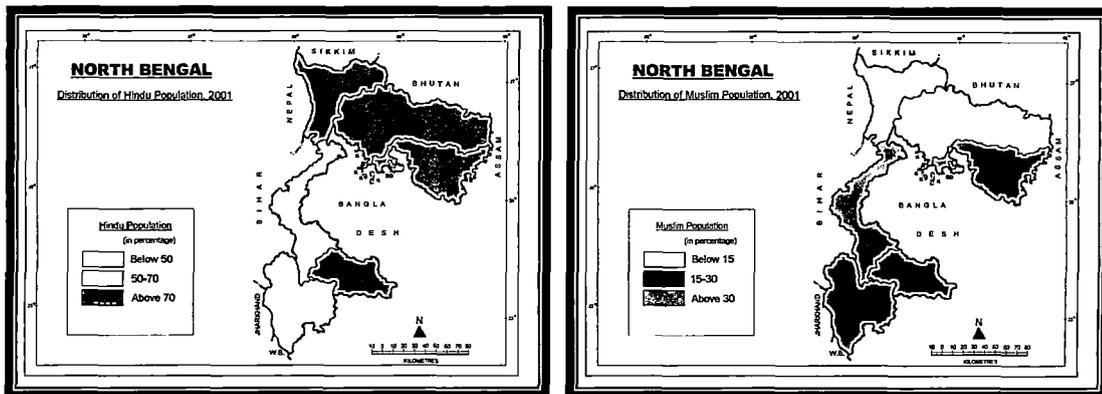
There are total 39 Community Development Blocks in whole North Bengal, where there is 100 percent rural population. Though maximum and minimum concentration of rural population is found in Maldah and Darjiling district respectively, but maximum and

minimum concentration of wholly rural blocks is in Maldah and Jalpaiguri respectively in both the years. In three districts namely, Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar and Maldah, the proportion of wholly rural blocks has decreased in the year 2001 from that of the year 1991 (Appendix 3.3).

The people living in rural areas are generally engaged and dependent on various primary occupations, viz., agriculture, dairying, cattle keeping, fisheries, forestry and mining in the region. Out of these, agriculture is the most important occupation. Consequently, the functions of most of the people of rural settlements are generally agricultural in the whole study region. The people living in rural areas are generally engaged and dependent on various primary occupations, viz., agriculture, dairying, cattle keeping, fisheries, forestry and mining in the region. Out of these, agriculture is the most important occupation. Consequently, the functions of most of the people of rural settlements are generally agricultural in the whole study region.

The settlements, in which most of the people are engaged in secondary, tertiary and quaternary activities, are known as urban places. The term urban relates to cities and towns. Though towns and villages possess the basic requirements like water and food supplies, shelter and building materials, and some protection against natural hazards, such as floods and human enemies, which make settlement possible but, this does not mean that, any village can grow into a town. This does sometimes happen but more often than not as due to their different functions towns and villages were developed separately. In modern times, this conversion that villages into towns may possible as a result of residential and sub-urban development, but in the past, town and countryside were quite separate. A common characteristic of all the towns and cities is that they are trading and business centers. Siliguri, in North Bengal region, developed as towns by traders and travelers when they cross-mountains, while the town of Maldah have developed mainly due to historical reason. Gour, near Maldah, was the capital of Muslim Rulers of the dynasty Bengal.

Map 3.1: - Distribution of Hindu and Muslim Population in North Bengal, 2001



Map 3.2: - Proportion of Rural and Urban Population in North Bengal, 2001

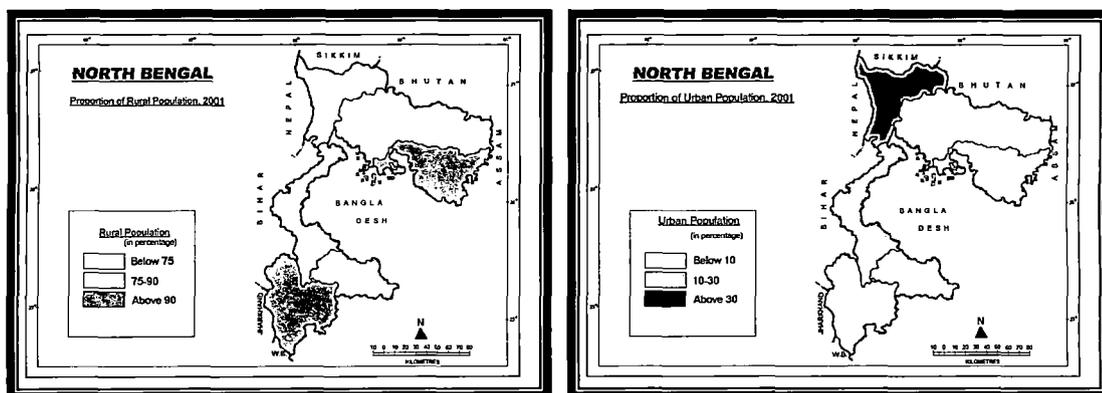
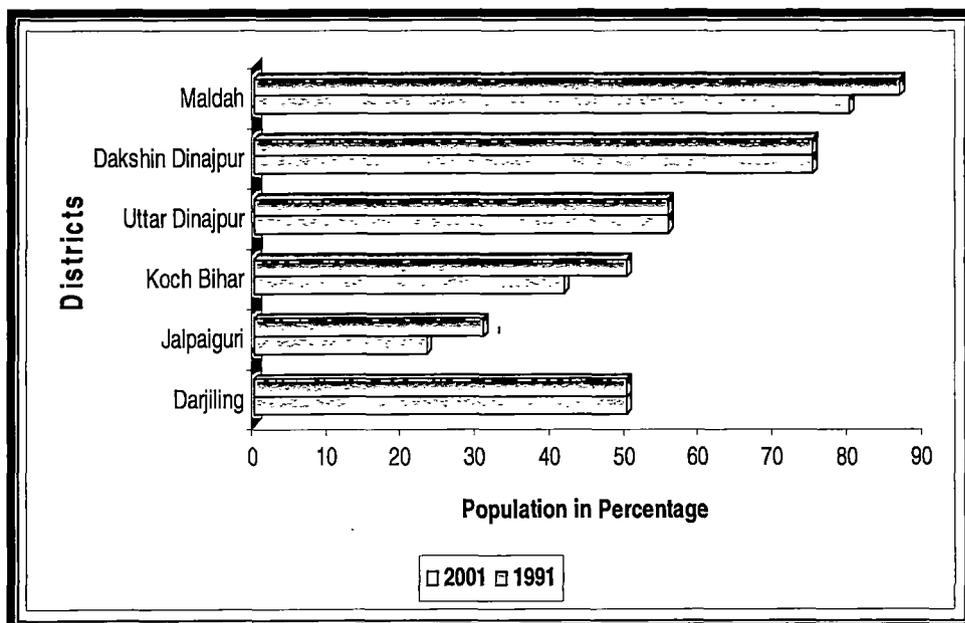


Figure 3.4: - Proportion of Rural Population, 2001 & 1991



On the contrary, Darjeeling town developed due to its scenic beauty of the Himalayas from time of British Rulers of undivided India. Some towns in Darjiling and Jalpaiguri district developed due to concentration of tea gardens in these two districts. Therefore, the reason for origin and growth for each and every urban center in the North Bengal region is different from that of the other and varies from historical, socio-cultural to economic. Urban is an agglomerated settlement, whose inhabitants are primarily engaged in non-agricultural occupations. The urban units vary in size from hamlets to mega-cities.

3.6 URBANIZATION

Urbanization, in general, is the process of becoming urban. This means, urbanization is a process associated with the concentration of population in towns and cities. Since, the beginning of 20th century, there are huge growth had achieved by all towns of North Bengal and consequently there is increase in number of towns in all districts of the region. In North Bengal, there are total 32 blocks with urban population in the year 2001 and about 14.16 percent people in this whole region live in these urban units. The district wise distribution of urban population shows that, Darjiling district is more urbanized with about 32.34 percent of its population as urban. Jalpaiguri, Dakshin Dinajpur and Uttar Dinajpur having urban population between 10-20 percent follow it. Remaining two districts record urban population below 10 percent in the census year 2001 with Maldah as the least urbanized district (Appendix 3.2).

Based on the criterion given in Census of India, in North Bengal, there are total 51 urban centers and if we take Siliguri Municipal Corporation in two districts of Darjiling and Jalpaiguri, as one, then the number will be 50. Among these 50 urban places, there are total 6 class-I towns in the whole region. These are Siliguri, Darjiling, Jalpaiguri, Raiganj, Balurghat and English Bazar. There are 5 towns with population between 50000 and 99999, i.e., 5 class-II towns namely, Alipurduar, Cooch Behar, Islampur, Gangarampur and Old Maldah. Though, in Maldah district, only 7 percent people are live in urban areas yet, there is one Class-I and one Class-II towns in this district. Contrary, to this 50 urban centers in 2001, there was only 41 urban places ten years before in North Bengal with only 3 Class-I towns and these were Siliguri, Balurghat and Maldah (Appendix 3.4 & Figure 3.5).

3.7 SIZE OF HOUSEHOLD

Size of household is measured as the ratio between total population and number of household. The average size of household in whole North Bengal during the period of 2001 has recorded about 5.19 in all areas, which varies from 5.21 in rural areas to 5.02 in urban areas. In case of all areas, the size of household is maximum in Uttar Dinajpur, where it is 5.26 and Maldah follows it with 5.21 and Darjiling with average size of household of 5.05. In remaining three districts, the average size of household is less than 5.0 and minimum size of household is recorded in Dakshin Dinajpur, where it is only 4.73.

Figure 3.6 shows that, for all areas as well as rural and urban also, the house hold size is recorded the maximum in Uttar Dinajpur district while it is lowest in Dakshin Dinajpur for both in total and rural areas but in Koch Bihar for urban areas. Figure 3.7 shows that, in majority of blocks of North Bengal, the household size is less than 5.

Among all rural areas of North Bengal, the average size of household is 5.21 in the whole region which varies between highest of 5.24 in Maldah to minimum of 4.67 in Dakshin Dinajpur district. Maldah and Uttar Dinajpur records average size of household in rural areas more than 5.0, while all other districts record it less than 5.0. Uttar Dinajpur records maximum size of household in urban areas with 5.56. It is followed by Darjiling and Dakshin Dinajpur, where the average size of household in urban areas has recorded 5.24 and 5.13 respectively with the region's average of 5.02. All other three districts record the average size of household less than 5.0 with lowest is in Koch Bihar, where it is only 4.75 (Appendix 3.5). Appendix 3.6 indicates that, in more than blocks, the size of household is less than 5. About 58 percent of all blocks of North Bengal, the size of house hold have been recorded as less than 5. All the blocks of Koch Bihar and Dakshin Dinajpur have size of house hold of less than 5. On the contrary, about 33 percent blocks each of Maldah and Uttar Dinajpur and about 8 percent blocks of Darjiling record size of house hold of more than 5.41. In other words, the size of household of more than 5.41 is recorded in only about 13 percent blocks of North Bengal. Therefore, in remaining about 29 percent blocks, the house hold size is recorded as between 5 and 5.41 (Figure 3.6 & 3.7).

Figure 3.5:- Distribution of Urban Centres in North Bengal, 2001

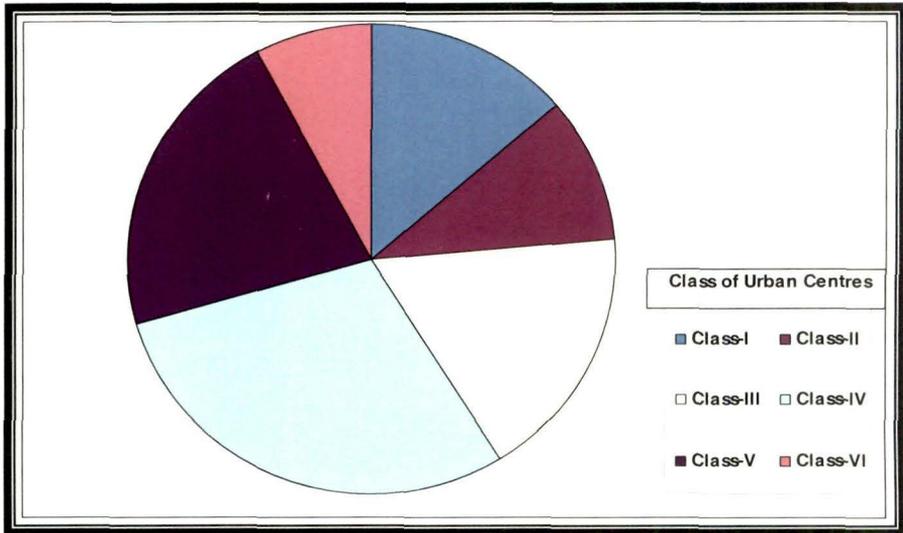


Figure 3.6: - Size of Household,2001- District Level Analysis

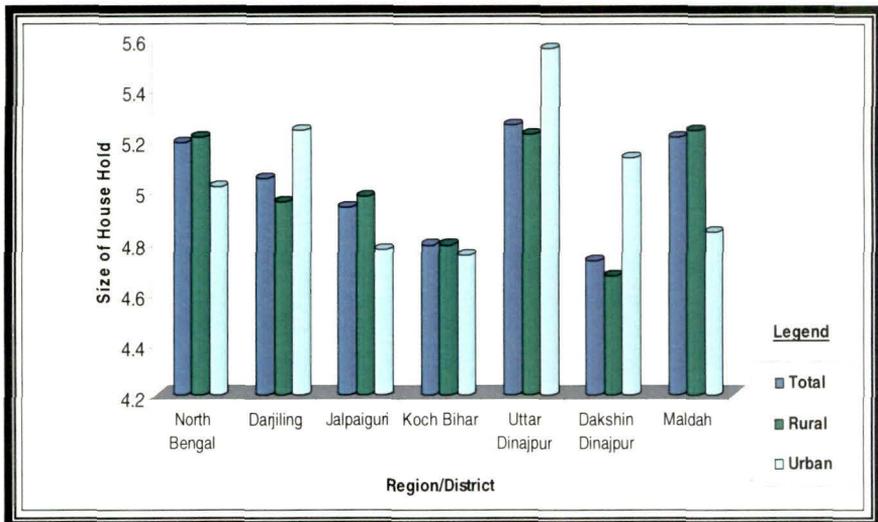
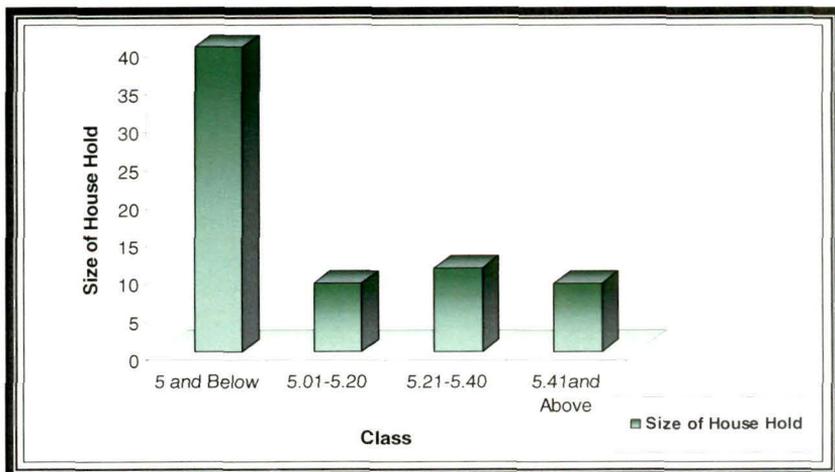


Figure 3.7: - Size of Household, 2001- Block Level Distribution



3.8 LITERACY RATE

Literacy is one of the most important and generally used indicators of educational development in any region. Though the Indian Government aims at reaching 100 percent literacy, but according to the census 2001, the effective literacy rate (i.e., of the population in the age-group 7 years and above) in India was 65.40 percent, which was about 59 percent in the North Bengal region. Despite various efforts initiated by the Government of India since independence, such as total literacy campaigns, formal center-based adult education programmes, the launching of the National literacy Mission, and expansion of school education, including non-formal education, one-third of the population is still illiterate. In spite of the mission of 'education for all', spatial and gender disparities in literacy is very high in the whole nation as well as in the whole North Bengal region. As for example, the rate of literacy among rural females in 2001 was only 36.60 percent, while it was about 77 percent for urban males. Among total population in the study region, the literacy rate was about 69 percent in males and only about 49 percent in female population (Appendix 3.7). Thus, there are 20 points gap between male-female literacy rates. Low female literacy is the result of negligence for women in society and due to difference in attitude towards boys and girls regarding education. Not only that, from the very beginning, adult literacy has been neglected and the pattern of allocation of public resources to literacy and adult education programmes were quite unsatisfactory.

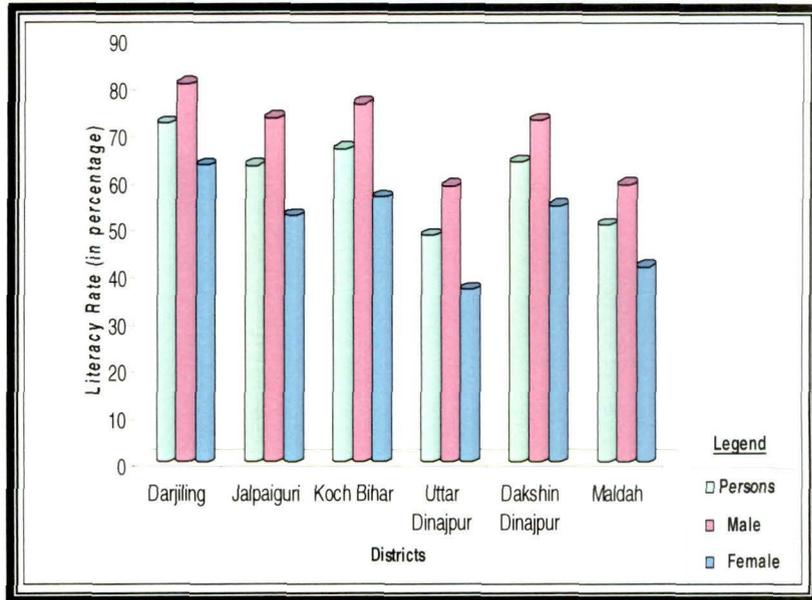
Based on the available data on literacy in the region in 2001, by all of six districts of the North Bengal region, the various districts could be grouped into three literacy districts (with above the region's average but below 70 percent literacy) and low literacy districts (with below the region's average literacy). Like districts, all of 69 Community Development Blocks also be grouped into three groups of above mentioned categories.

Appendix 3.7 shows that, comparing among the districts, only Darjiling, quite expectedly takes the first place with a high literacy rate of more than 70 percent in the year 2001. Medium literacy rate can be observed in three districts, namely Koch Bihar, Dakshin Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri with effective literacy rate varies between below 70 percent and above region's average of 59.45 percent. At the lowest rung are the districts of Maldah and Uttar Dinajpur with a literacy rate of below the region's average. Thus,

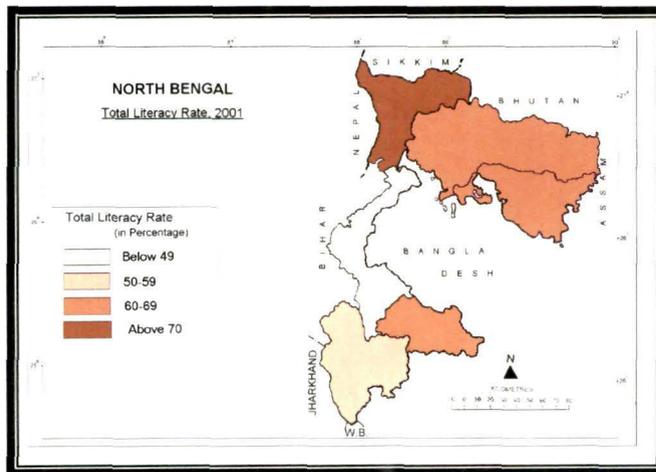
the table reveals the fact that, in the whole North Bengal region, like the whole nation, high rate of spatial disparity can be seen in case of effective literacy rate and it varies from highest of 71.79 percent in Darjiling to lowest of 47.89 percent in Uttar Dinajpur district. Among total 69 blocks, about 17 percent blocks record high literacy rate, about 33.33 percent record medium literacy rate and remaining 49.28 percent blocks have recorded very low literacy rate of below the region's average (Appendix 3.7). Figure 3.8 shows that, in all the districts of North Bengal male literacy is greater than female literacy. Not only that, both male and female literacy rate is maximum in Darjiling district. On the contrary, both male as well as female literacy rate is lowest in Uttar Dinajpur district.

Literacy is not only uneven among several districts and blocks, but disparities by gender are also very high. For example, maximum gender disparity can be recorded in the Uttar Dinajpur district with lowest literacy rate. Here, the gap between male and female effective literacy rate are 21.97 points for total population, 23.44 points for rural areas and 10.68 points for urban areas, which are the highest among all districts and among all areas (Appendix 3.8). It should be mentioned that, only Darjiling district records literacy rate more than 70 percent for total population in the whole region and more than 80 percent male literacy and more than 60 percent of female literacy in the whole North Bengal. The condition of Uttar Dinajpur in terms of literacy rate is very poor. Only 48 percent people of the district are educated, while 58 percent of total male population and 37 percent of total female population are educated in whole district, which is the lowest literacy rate in the whole region. Maldah district is another district with very low literacy rate. In this district about half of its population is illiterate. Therefore, in these two southern districts namely, Uttar Dinajpur and Maldah, the literacy rate is below than 60 percent, while all other districts of North Bengal, more than 60 percent of total populations are literate. In these two districts, less than 50 percent females are literate, which reveals the fact that, in these two districts, the status of women is very low. Map 3.3 and Map 3.4 show the condition of districts of North Bengal in terms of literacy rate for both the sexes. In both the cases, the condition of southern part of the study region is not good.

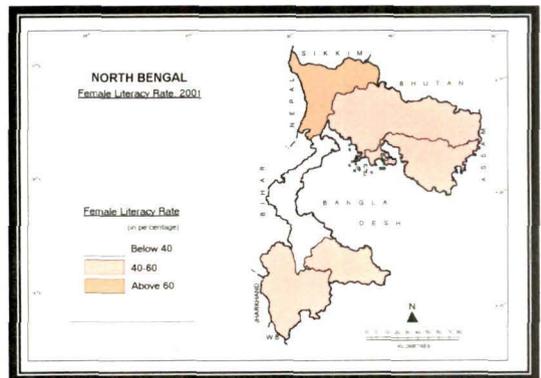
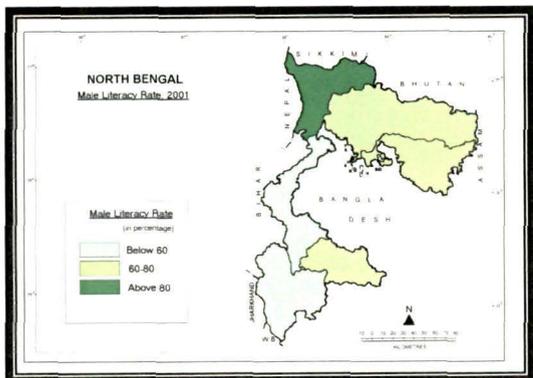
Figure 3.8: - Effective Literacy Rate by Districts in North Bengal, 2001



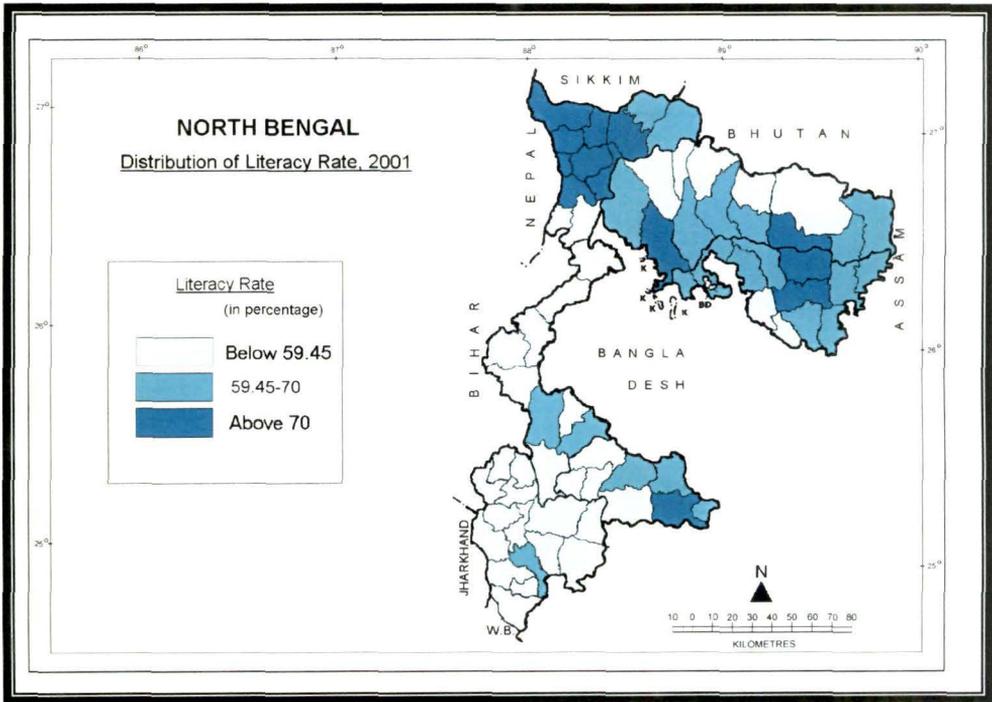
Map 3.3: - Total Literacy Rate in North Bengal, 2001- District Level Variation



Map 3.4: - Male and Female Literacy Rate in North Bengal, 2001- District Level Variation



Map 3.5: - Total Literacy Rate, 2001- Block Level Variation



About 45 percent people are educated in rural areas of the whole region, while about 54 percent of male population and 37 percent of female population are educated in urban areas. This means in all districts of whole North Bengal region, the rural literacy is comparatively low. Among total population, the rural literacy is maximum in Darjiling followed by Koch Bihar and Dakshin Dinajpur. About 66 percent people of Darjiling are literates, which is 64 percent and 60 percent for other two districts respectively. These three record total literacy rate more than 60 percent. Jalpaiguri records total literacy between 50 and 60 percent, while two southern districts have recorded less than 50 percent of their total population as literate, with the lowest of only 43 percent literacy rate in Uttar Dinajpur. Having 76 percent male literacy, Darjiling is in the first position followed by Koch Bihar and Dakshin Dinajpur in case of male literacy. Only, Darjiling and Koch Bihar have male literacy more than 70 percent. With about 55 percent female literacy, Darjiling is in the leading position among all districts of North Bengal, while the lowest female literacy of about 30 percent is recorded in Uttar Dinajpur district. About 73 percent of total population of North Bengal is total literate and the literacy rate varies from maximum of 85 percent in Koch Bihar to minimum of 79 percent in Maldah. Only Maldah have total literacy rate of less than 80 percent in urban areas. Darjiling

follows Koch Bihar with 83 percent total literacy. In case of male literacy, Koch Bihar records the highest of 90 percent, which is followed by Dakshin Dinajpur of 87.80 percent and Darjiling with 87.70 percent with the region's average of 77 percent. The lowest is found in Maldah with 84 percent male literacy. In female literacy, it is 68 percent for whole North Bengal. District wise maximum is in Koch Bihar with 80 percent and lowest in Maldah with 74 percent (Appendix 3.8).

Map 3.5 shows that main concentration of high literacy of above 70 per cent is recorded in northwestern part of the region. Some small pockets can be observed in the north and northeast, while no high literacy block is there in the southern part except only one in the extreme southeast. On the other hand, concentration of medium literacy blocks can be observed in the form of a continuous belt passing through the middle and southern portion of the northeastern section of the North Bengal region. Small pockets of medium literacy blocks are found in the extreme southeast part of the region while only one block of the southern part falls under this category. On the contrary, the biggest concentration of low literacy is found covering most part of the south, southeast and middle part of the region.

In the whole region, about 26878 educational institutions are there. Among them, 38 percent is up to Primary level and about 56 percent are special non-formal education centers. Only 3 percent of total educational institutions of North Bengal are high schools while very negligible higher secondary and middle schools as well as colleges/University and Professional and Technical schools are there. It should be mentioned that, only one University is there in the whole region and it is the North Bengal University, which is located at Siliguri in Darjiling district. Out of total 10141 Primary schools in the North Bengal region, about 19 percent is located in the Jalpaiguri district. While about 25 percent of total special non-formal education centers are located in Koch Bihar district. About 42 lakh students are there in various educational institutions of the region and among them about 47 percent are students in Primary level. In the whole region, number of teacher is more than 76 thousand and among them about 44 percent is attached with Primary Schools (Appendix 3.9).

3.9 ETHNIC STRUCTURE: -

Caste is an essential element in the social structure of India as it is both a social class and a social institution. As a social class, it is functional, endogamous, hereditary and hierarchical.

In the North Bengal as a whole, as per 2001 census, about 30 percent of total population is scheduled castes (Appendix 3.10). District wise distribution reveals the fact that, Koch Bihar with 50.11 per cent tops the list. Next important concentration is found in Jalpaiguri district with about 38 per cent of its population as scheduled castes population and it is followed by Dakshin Dinajpur with 29 percent and Uttar Dinajpur with 28 percent. However, less than 20 percent concentration of scheduled castes population is recorded in two districts of extreme south and extreme north, i.e., Maldah and Darjiling (Map 3.6).

Therefore, in whole North Bengal, though the percentage varies from one district to another from 50 percent to 16 percent, and though the concentration of scheduled castes population has decreased from 31 to 30 percent during 1991-2001 period, but it is still very high as compared to whole nation (16.20 per cent) and the state of West Bengal (23.02 per cent).

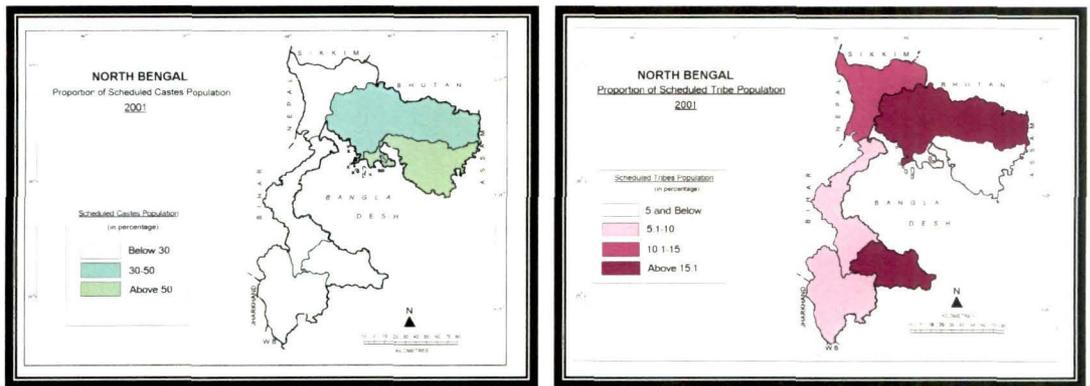
A reference to Appendix 3.10 shows that likewise total areas, in rural areas also, Koch Bihar and Jalpaiguri constitutes first and second largest concentration of scheduled castes population with 53 percent and 40 percent respectively. Next important cluster is in Dakshin Dinajpur and Uttar Dinajpur with 30 and 29 percent of total population respectively. But in two extreme north and extreme south districts, scheduled castes percentage varies between 17- 19 percent of total population. In the North Bengal as a whole, in rural areas, scheduled castes Population constitutes about 32 percent of total population. But in urban areas of the region, about 16 percent of total population is scheduled castes and in all districts, it varies from 20 percent in Jalpaiguri to 10 percent in Darjiling. Thus, in urban areas, Jalpaiguri shares highest concentration while Darjiling as the lowest. More than 15 percent of total population as scheduled castes is found in Uttar Dinajpur and Koch Bihar and Dakshin Dinajpur. But in Maldah, the concentration is less than 15 percent (Table 3.10).

Map 3.7 shows that, majority of high scheduled caste concentrated areas are found mainly in the northeastern part of the study region. Though, district wise highest concentration is found in Koch Bihar, but except this district there are three blocks of high concentration of scheduled castes population in Darjiling, Jalpaiguri and Uttar Dinajpur districts. Almost whole western part of Koch Bihar district record high percentage of scheduled castes population. Only one small pocket is found in the extreme southern part and this in the Uttar Dinajpur district. On the other hand, low scheduled caste concentration areas are found in extreme two parts, i.e., one in northern part covering whole northern and mountainous part of Darjiling district and the second is in extreme southern part of the region covering central and southern part of Maldah district (Appendix 3.11).

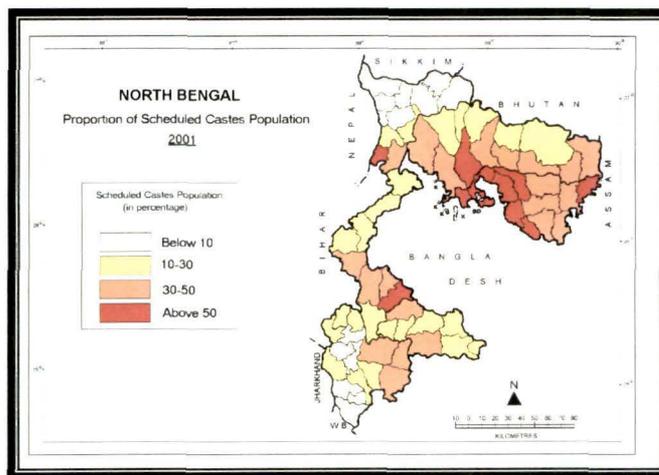
In general, the origins of the tribe lie in the earliest stages of human evolution: the emergence of man as a hunter- food gatherer led to the unique pattern of social behaviour and his march towards civilization has weaved a complex network of economic, social and ecological relationships. The primitive way of living may be vanishing but tribalism lives on.

According to 2001 census, about 10 percent of total population of North Bengal region is Scheduled Tribe. Maximum concentration of Scheduled Tribe Population is in Jalpaiguri with about 19 percent of its total population as Scheduled Tribe. It is followed by Dakshin Dinajpur and Darjiling, where tribal population constitutes about 16 percent and 13 percent of total population of these districts respectively. Koch Bihar has recorded very small percentage of its total population as Scheduled Tribe, with less than 1 percent. In rural areas, in whole region tribes constitute about 11 percent of North Bengal's total population. In Jalpaiguri, about 22 percent of its total population is tribal population and in Koch Bihar, tribes constitute less than 1 percent. But in urban areas, in all districts, tribal population constitutes less than 10 percent of total population. Maximum concentration is in Darjiling, which share about 5 percent of its population as tribe in urban areas. Appendix 3.12 shows that, more than 50 percent blocks of Dakshin Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri districts record above 15 percent concentration of tribal population. On the contrary, very low concentration of tribal population of below 5 percent is recorded in more than 50 percent blocks of Koch Bihar, Uttar Dinajpur and Maldah.

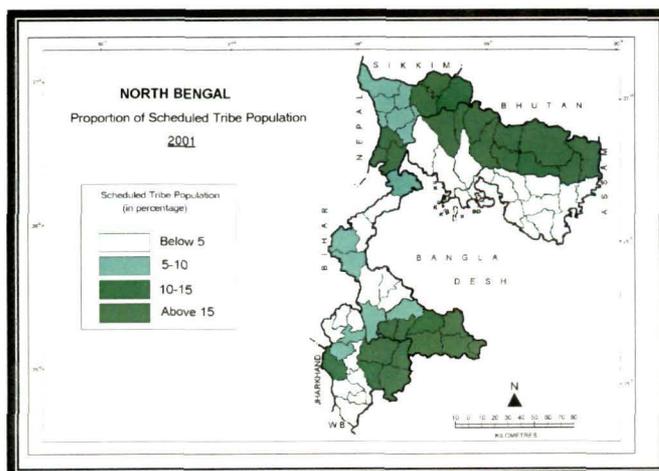
**Map 3.6: - Proportion of Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Population, 2001-
District Level Variation**



**Map 3.7: - Proportion of Scheduled Castes Population, 2001-
Block Level Variation**



**Map 3.8: - Proportion of Scheduled Tribe Population, 2001-
Block Level Variation**



Map 3.8 shows that, high tribal concentration zones lie on the extremities- one is a belt running along the northern part of the northeast and the second one is along the southeast portion of the region. While, the low tribal density area lies in a belt along the southern boundary of the northeast and another on the extreme south and middle part of the North Bengal region.

3.10 SEX AND AGE COMPOSITION

Sex composition plays an important role in the social and economic structure of a region. In North Bengal region, about 51 percent of total population is male population while womenfolk constitute about 49 percent of the total population. Age composition, as social relations within a community, holds an important place among the various components of population composition of a region and the community is affected considerably by it. Not only that, many types of planning, particularly the planning of community institutions and services, manpower supply, labour force and per head productivity as well as the economic development of the community etc. are guided by the age structure of the population.

In the state of West Bengal, during 1991, the proportion of population in young age group is 37 percent and in North Bengal region, it is 40 percent. Therefore, it can be easily said that, in North Bengal, due to high growth rate of population, two-fifths of its population is in young age groups. But in 2001, though all districts of the region as well as the region as a whole show a decrease in the proportion of young age people, but still it is very high as compared to the state as a whole. According to 2001 census, about 38 per cent population are in below 15 age group in the region while in case of the whole state the figure is about 33 per cent (Appendix 3.13). Besides, mortality also affects the age composition of a population. However, its impact upon age structure depends largely upon the variations in mortality rates at different ages. Migration affects completely in different way on the age structure of a population as the migrants have their own typical age pattern as well as natural increase pattern. Mainly due to its age selective character, the impact of migration is maximum upon age structure of any region. Generally people in the age group of 15 to 30 years are more mobile than the people in the younger and the older age groups and this is the main reason behind the high proportion of adolescents and young adults in the urban areas of all districts of North Bengal which is mainly

caused by age selective rural to urban migration in search of employment, education and other facilities. This is the reason, why after independence, there was population explosion in most of the districts of North Bengal. The one and only factor was high rate of international migration from neighboring countries, mainly from Bangladesh.

3.11 AGE PYRAMIDS

One of the most important and commonly used methods of analyzing age composition is the age pyramid, which is more commonly known as the age and sex pyramid. The shape of pyramid varies from region to region depending upon the stage of the demographic transition through which the region is passing. North Bengal region, as it is characterized by high birth rate and sharply declining death rate typical of second stage of demographic transition shall have broad base of the pyramid. This broad base continues for early age groups but tapers off rather due to low live expectancy. The population of North Bengal as a whole can be divided into three major age groups that is the young or juvenile age group, the adults or mature age group and the old or senile age group (Appendix 3.14).

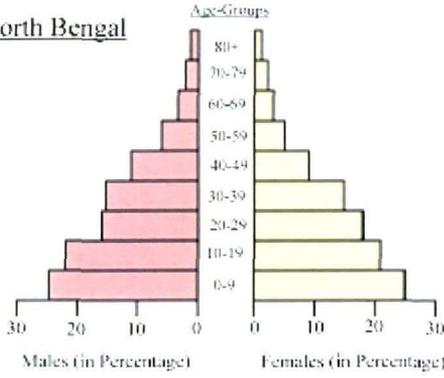
The young or juvenile age groups include below 15 years of age. The proportion of population in this age group in any region is determined by the stage of demographic transition through which it is passing. This proportion is large if it is passing through the first or second stage of demographic transition. As North Bengal is in the second stage hence its proportion of people in below 15 age is also large which starts declining as the region approaches the late second stage. It is interesting to note that, in this region about 37.86 per cent of total population is in the juvenile age group and this figure is about 4.58 point more than that of the state average. Because of the regional variations of proportion of young population are related with the fertility patterns of different regions there seems to be a direct correlation between birth rates and proportions of young population. This group is economically unproductive and the most expensive age group as it is to be provided with food, clothing, education etc. it may be said that the burden of population on the resources of a country is directly proportionate to the size of this age group in a population.

In the North Bengal region as a whole, while about 37.86 per cent population is below the age of 15 years, the corresponding figure for the maximum and the minimum

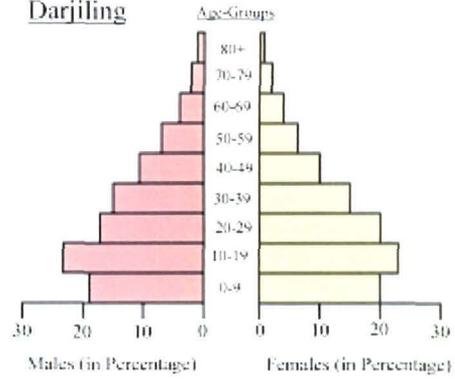
percentage among districts are 42.77 per cent and 31.56 per cent in Uttar Dinajpur and Darjiling district respectively in the census year 2001 (Appendix 3.15). Only Darjiling district records young population less than that in the state's average. Thus, in all parts of the North Bengal, due to high fertility rate the proportion of young population is very high which will lead to further high rate of population growth till the end of their reproductive age. It is because, though the juvenile age group is biologically unproductive, but when this group will enter the reproductive age group it will create population explosion in the region. Appendix 3.15 shows the decrease of proportion of juvenile population from 1991 to 2001, which is a very good sign and if this trend continues, then it will be much beneficial for the region to improve its economic condition and to control its high population growth. In spite of the fact that, the percentage of child population is decreasing in the decade 1991 to 2001, all are much higher in themselves. According to the latest census data more than 15 per cent population of North Bengal is in the age of below 6 years.

The population of a country is generally divided into three specific age groups that is 0 to 14, 15 to 59 and above 60. This categorization of population is useful for inferring dependency, need for education and employment, potential fertility and other age related factors. Taking the state of West Bengal as a whole, the average population is increased in above 60 years from 6.05 per cent in 1991 to 7.12 percent in 2001. In case of North Bengal region it has increased from about 5.33 to 5.97 percent. According to 2001 census, among all district of North Bengal region, the proportion of senile population in Koch Bihar is the highest being 6.91 per cent followed by Darjiling and Dakshin Dinajpur with 6.60 and 6.44 per cent respectively. Jalpaiguri comes next while in remaining southern part of the region the proportion of senior citizen is comparatively low. Like the state's figure, three districts, namely, Koch Bihar, Dakshin Dinajpur and Maldah record more females than males in the senile age group (Appendix 3.14).

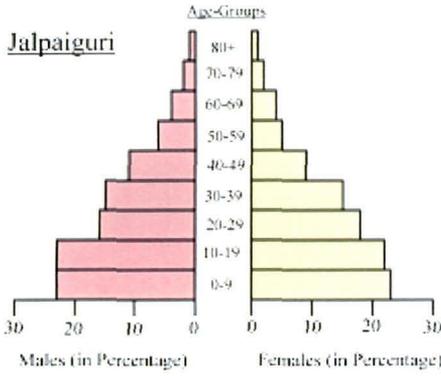
North Bengal



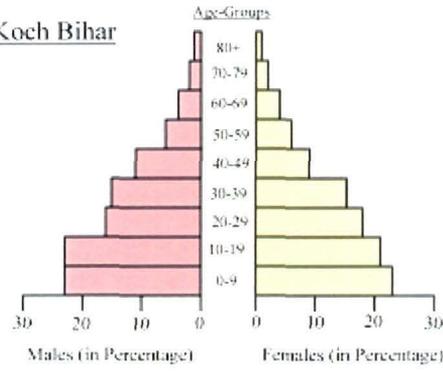
Darjiling



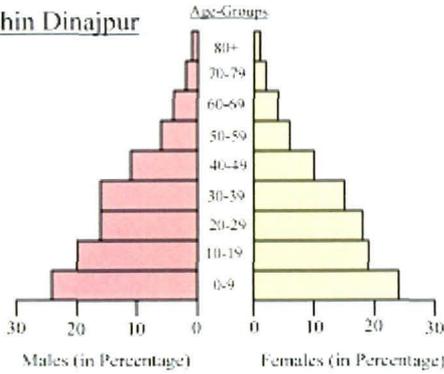
Jalpaiguri



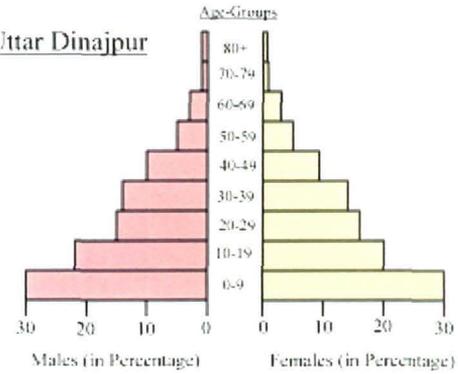
Koch Bihar



Dakshin Dinajpur



Uttar Dinajpur



Maldah

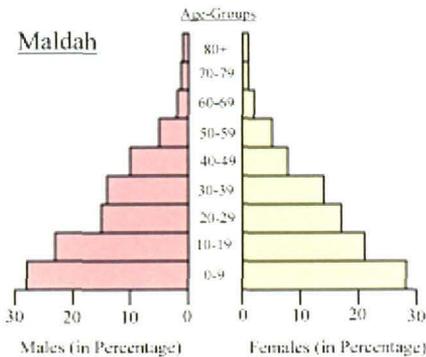


Figure 3.9: -Age- Sex Pyramid of North Bengal by Districts, 2001

Scale: - 1 cm represents 10 percent of population

The Mature group comprises of people falling in the age group of 15 to 59 years. The adult age group is biologically the most reproductive, economically the most productive and demographically the most mobile. It supports the bulk of other two age groups. There are about 60 per cent people of the state of West Bengal in this age group in 2001, which is 56.17 percent, i.e., about 4 points less than the state. Out of all six districts, Darjiling possesses maximum proportion of adults, which is 61.84 percent, i.e., about 2 points high than the state's average. It is followed by Jalpaiguri, Dakshin Dinajpur and Koch Bihar, which record the percentage of working population more than the region's average. On the other hand, Maldah and Uttar Dinajpur record proportion of adults less than the North Bengal's average with the lowest in the Uttar Dinajpur district as 52.09 percent (Appendix 3.15). That is, there is a wide variation in regional distribution of active population in North Bengal as there is about 10 points gap in recording highest and lowest proportion of economically active population of the region.

From the above discussion about age structure of North Bengal, it can be easily said that, in case of demographic transition, it is far behind the state's average scenario. Among all districts of North Bengal, Darjiling shows a positive picture with lower proportion of young people and relatively higher proportion of adults. This means, it entered the last portion of second stage of demographic transition with lowering fertility rate and declining mortality rate. On the other hand, out of all districts, the position of Maldah is worse. It records a broad base in age pyramid revealing the fact, that the fertility rate is still high. Thus, in North Bengal, there are two zones-

- (a) the northern part which is passing through the late second stage and
- (b) the southern part which is still at the beginning of second stage of demographic transition.

3.12 DEPENDENCY RATIO

Dependency ratio has a direct and positive bearing on the economic position of the state and its districts. Achievements in economic growth and progress bring prosperity, which makes the nations with low age dependency ratios to have high per capita income and to augment their capacity to invest in the process of economic growth. The population of North Bengal is characterized by very high proportion of dependents as a result of which the region is under great strain of high dependency burden and this strain seems likely to get of dependency ratio are of three and these are total, juvenile and senile (Appendix 3.16).

Figure 3.10: - Age Composition in North Bengal, 2001

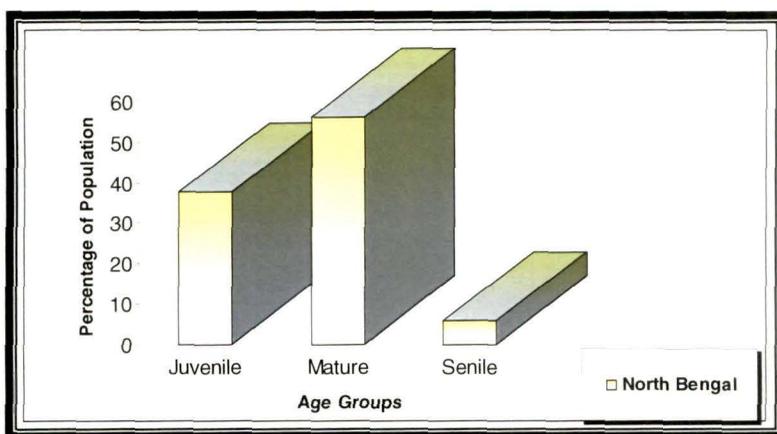
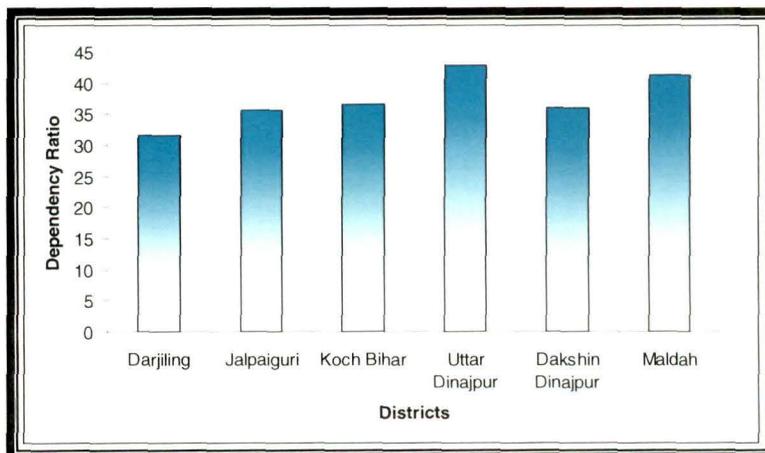


Figure 3.11: - Total Dependency Ratio by Districts in North Bengal, 2001



Though all the districts suffer from heavy burden of dependency; there are, however, found to be considerable inter-district variations. On the whole, the total dependency

ratio for North Bengal is about 78 in 2001, which varies from maximum of 92 on Uttar Dinajpur to minimum of 62 in Darjiling. Apart from Darjiling, other three districts namely, Jalpaiguri, Dakshin Dinajpur and Koch Bihar record total dependency burden of below the North Bengal's average.

In the study region, as in the state the juvenile dependency is most conspicuous constituent of the total dependency. During 2001, the juvenile dependency ratio for the whole state is 56, which is 67 for the whole North Bengal region. District wise variation shows that it varies from minimum of 51 in Darjiling to maximum of 82 in Uttar Dinajpur. Therefore there is a large gap between maximum and minimum concentration of juvenile population. Like the case of total dependency ratio, three districts, namely, Jalpaiguri, Dakshin Dinajpur and Koch Bihar record the juvenile dependency burden of below the North Bengal's average during the year 2001.

During 2001, about 12 percent population of whole West Bengal is dependent upon working population as senile dependency burden. In case of North Bengal, this percentage is about 11 per cent. Among all districts of North Bengal, Koch Bihar has the maximum senile dependents where 12.21 percent is the senile dependency ratio. Maldah is having the lowest senile dependents with 9.83 per cent in 2001.

It is interesting to note that, in case of the whole state, as well as the North Bengal as a whole and obviously all of its districts, the total dependency burden have been decreased from the year 1991 to 2001. The case of juvenile dependents is also same like the total dependents but the condition for the senile dependents increased from 1991 to that in 2001(Appendix 3.16).

3.13 CHILD POPULATION

About 17 percent of total population of North Bengal is children of 0-6 age group. This indicate that, in the age-sex pyramid of the region, there is a broad base which is caused by high fertility rate, low standard of living, negligence towards female education etc. About 17 percent each of total male and female population also are occupied by children of 0-6 age group. About 21 percent and 19 percent of total population in Uttar Dinajpur and Maldah respectively are child population. These two districts record child population

more than the region's average. In case of male and female population also, the percentage of children are more than that of the region's average. Thus, in these two districts, there are high birth rates than other districts of the North Bengal region. On the contrary, Darjiling record minimum percentage of children in total population as well as both male and female population. About 13 percent each of total population are at age of below 6 years in this district. It is followed by Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar and Dakshin Dinajpur. Therefore, the proportion of children of 0-6 age to the total population is low in the northern part of the region, while it increases southwards and the proportion is maximum in the southern part of the region (Appendix 3.17).

In the rural areas of the whole region, about 18 per cent of total population is below 6 years of age and it ranges between six districts from highest in Uttar Dinajpur with 22 percent and lowest in Darjiling with 14 percent of total population being children. Like total areas, in rural areas also, Uttar Dinajpur and Maldah- the two southern districts record percentage of children more than that of the region's average. On the other hand, Darjiling is followed by two other northern districts, i.e., Jalpaiguri and Koch Bihar and these two have about 16 percent each of their total rural population are in less than 6 years of age. Dakshin Dinajpur records about 17 percent of its total rural population in this age group. However, in the whole region, about 18 percent each of the male and female population are recorded in the age of below 6 years. Maximum proportions for both the cases are occupied by the Uttar Dinajpur with about 22 percent each of total rural male and female population in the age of 0-6 years. On the contrary, lowest percentage of children is in Darjiling for both the cases of male and female population. Like total areas also, in rural areas, the proportion of children increases from north to south of the region (Appendix 3.18).

About 11 percent of total urban population in the region is recorded as children of below 6 years of age. Darjiling records the minimum percentage of child population of 10 percent of its total urban population, and maximum child population to total urban population is found in Uttar Dinajpur district. In case of male and female population, in terms of percentage of child of 0-6 age, Darjiling and Uttar Dinajpur maintained their position (Appendix 3.17).

Appendix 3.18 reveals that, there is highest percentage of child (0-6) population in Uttar Dinajpur for rural, urban and total areas. This fact is maintained by both the sexes. On the contrary, for all the areas and for both the sexes, the minimum concentration of child (0-6) population is recorded in Darjiling district. Another interesting fact is that, the proportion of child (0-6) population is recorded of above region's average in the districts of Uttar Dinajpur and Maldah for both sexes as well as in total and rural areas. But, in case of urban areas, the proportion of child population of above the region's average is recorded in Jalpaiguri along with the above mentioned two districts.

3.14 MIGRATION

As migration is one of the demographic factors influencing a region's sex ratio, it also do so even without any substantial change in the numerical magnitude of the population. If the median age of the migrants is lower than the median age of the whole population, the migration will produce instantaneous ageing, especially if the migration rate is high, and mortality and fertility remain constant. But in case of the country of immigration, the results reverse. Generally, the median age of the migrants is lower than the median age of the population and as such, the impact of immigration is reflected in an instantaneous rejuvenation and the retardation of ageing process. Statistical evidences reveal the fact that, migration is generally sex selective and men are more prone to migration. Only in a short distance internal migration, the selectivity appears to turn in favour of females. Migration behaviour of people changes the sex structure of the population of both the dispatching and the receiving areas. Generally, sex selective migration results into more masculine nature of areas of in-migration whereas, the proportion of females tend to increase relatively in areas of out-migration. Thus there is an inverse relationship between sex ratio and in-migration in all districts of North Bengal. Appendix 3.34 shows that there is more migration in urban areas than that of rural areas. Maximum in-migration are recorded in Koch Bihar and Jalpaiguri districts.

3.15 PREDOMINATE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

About 53 percent of whole North Bengal is engaged in agricultural activities such as cultivators and agricultural labourers and remaining 47 percent are working in various non-agricultural activities. But in case of whole state, only 44 percent people are engaged

in engaged in agricultural activities and remaining 56 percent are non-agricultural workers. Therefore, in the North Bengal region, more than half of working force is absorbed by agricultural activities. This is true for both the sexes- male and female. In Darjiling district, only 26 percent of workers perform agricultural work, which varies from 23 percent among males to about 32 percent among females. Thus, this district records about 74 percent of its workers as non-agricultural workers including workers engaged in household industries and other workers. About 77 percent of total male workers and 68 percent of total female workers are in these non-agricultural activities (Appendix 3.19). Like Darjiling, Jalpaiguri also records more than half of its total workers in non-agricultural activities and there are 62 percent workers of the Jalpaiguri district are engaged in various non-agricultural works. About 64 percent of male workers and 58 percent of female workers are engaged in non-agricultural activities. In case of Koch Bihar, about 67 percent of total workers are supported by various agricultural sectors. The percentage varies from 64 among male workers to about 74 percent among female workers. In Uttar Dinajpur district, about 69 percent of total work force as well as 68 percent and 72 percent of male and female workers respectively depend on the agricultural sectors. In Dakshin Dinajpur also, more than half workers are involved with agricultural activities. About 68 percent of male workers and 66 percent of female workers are also involved in agricultural activities. About 52 percent of workers of Maldah and 58 percent and 39 percent of male and female workers respectively in the district of Maldah are engaged in agricultural activities. Therefore, among all districts of North Bengal, predominate economic activity in Darjiling and Jalpaiguri are non-agricultural related activities while in remaining four districts, agricultural activities are in dominant position in terms of workers engagement (Appendix 3.20).

Like total workers, in rural areas also, except Darjiling and Jalpaiguri, in all of the four districts, most of the workers are engaged in agricultural and allied activities. Among these four, Uttar Dinajpur's share is highest with about 76 percent of its workers are engaged in agricultural sector with 77 percent of male and 76 percent of female workers. Having about 74 percent of total workers, Dakshin Dinajpur comes next. Though Koch Bihar have recorded 72 percent of its total workers engaged in agricultural sector, but in terms of female workers this district records highest with 78 percent of its female workers in agricultural sector. Maldah records 55 percent of its workers in primary sector. However, in Darjiling and Jalpaiguri, less than 45 percent of workers are in

agricultural sector and about 64 percent of Darjiling and 55 percent of Jalpaiguri's total workers are engaged in non-agricultural sector. About 60 percent of total workers of North Bengal records in agricultural sector, while state's share is 58 percent.

Unlike total and rural workers, in all districts of the North Bengal region, along with the North Bengal as a whole, and the state as a whole, the percentage of agricultural workers to total workers for urban areas is very low in case of agricultural activities. Therefore, in all districts, in urban areas, more than 90 percent of workers are engaged in non-agricultural activities. Among all districts, Darjiling share highest worker in non-agricultural sector with 99 percent of its urban workers. Uttar Dinajpur share the lowest having 96 percent of its urban workers are in non-agricultural sector (Appendix 3.20).

In the whole North Bengal region, about 26 percent of total workers are cultivators and about 28 percent are engaged as agricultural labourers. There are 29 percent of total male workers are engaged as cultivators while 24 percent of total male workers are agricultural labourers. Though, female participation as cultivators are low with only 17 percent of total female workers are engaged as cultivators but the female participation as agricultural labourers (about 35 percent of total female workers) is far more than that of the males. In case of non-agricultural activities, especially in household industries, the participation rate is only 6 percent for total population and only 2 percent for males but about 14 percent of total female work force is engaged in various household industrial activities. On the other hand, except these three activities, work participation rate as other workers are low in female population than males as about 33 percent females are engaged as other workers as against 44 percent of total male workers in these occupations. Koch Bihar district records maximum percentage of its total workers as cultivators in whole region and minimum participation rate as cultivators is recorded in Darjiling for both males and female workers during 2001. For total cultivators, the participation rates in Koch Bihar, Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur are more than the region's average. The work participation rate for agricultural labourers is maximum in Uttar Dinajpur with 40 percent of its total work force are engaged as agricultural labourers in this district. In case of male as well as female population, the work participation rate for agricultural labourers is the highest in Uttar Dinajpur and minimum is in Darjiling. Darjiling along with Jalpaiguri record work participation rate for total agricultural labourers less than that of the region's average of 27.56 percent. The same

case is in male workers also. But in case of female agricultural labourers, the work participation rate in Darjiling, Jalpaiguri and Maldah are less than the region's average of about 35 percent. The work participation rate for household industry workers reveal that in Maldah, female's participation is strikingly high. About 16 percent of total workers of the district are engaged in various household industrial activities against the region's average of 6 percent. The lowest participation rate is in Jalpaiguri with only 2 percent of its total work force in these activities. Among male workers, the participation rate is very low in all the districts with highest of 5 percent in Maldah and lowest of 1.6 percent in Uttar Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri. Though, the female work participation rate is about 14 percent in North Bengal, but in Maldah it is as high as 37 percent and in Jalpaiguri, it is as low as 3 percent. Except Maldah, all other five districts record female work participation rate less than 10 percent. Thus in Maldah, exceptionally high proportion of female workers are engaged in Household industries like mango industry, sericulture industry etc. The work participation rate for total workers as other workers is high in Darjiling with 71 percent while it is only 27 percent in Uttar Dinajpur. Among male workers, it is maximum of 74 percent in Darjiling and minimum of 30 percent in Dakshin Dinajpur and Uttar Dinajpur. On the other hand, comparatively lower portion of female workers are in these occupations of 33 percent as the region's average. Female participation ranges from maximum in Darjiling to minimum in Koch Bihar (Appendix 3.20).

Work participation rate in whole region is about 77 percent for main workers, which ranges from maximum of 84 percent in Darjiling to minimum of 72 percent in Maldah. Darjiling is followed by Jalpaiguri and Koch Bihar with work participation rate of 79 percent and 78 percent respectively for total main workers. Like total population, Maldah also records lowest percentage of male workers as main workers in North Bengal, but the highest participation is recorded in Koch Bihar with 92 percent, while the figure for the whole region is about 89 percent. But in case of female participation as main workers, is maximum in Darjiling with 72 percent female workers as main workers and minimum is in Koch Bihar as 43 percent female workers are engaged in main work force. In case of total marginal workers, the work participation rate has recorded as 23 percent in whole North Bengal, which varies from 28 percent in Maldah to 16 percent in Darjiling. In case of male participation as marginal workers, the participation rate is 11 percent in whole region and for females, it is 50 percent for the whole region. Thus, female participation is

more as marginal workers than that of male workers. Female participation is maximum in Koch Bihar as 57 percent and minimum in Darjiling as 28 percent only (Appendix3.21).

The work participation for rural population in whole North Bengal has recorded as about 75 percent as main workers and 25 percent are engaged as marginal workers. The total participation rate is about 80 percent in Darjiling in case of rural main workers, which is the maximum in the whole region and the minimum is recorded in Maldah with 71 percent rural participation as main workers. But in case of male population, maximum is found in Koch Bihar with 91 percent male workers as main working force in rural areas and minimum of 84 percent in Maldah. In case of female workers, maximum participation is in Darjiling and minimum is in Koch Bihar. Among marginal workers, about 25 percent of North Bengal's rural population are engaged as marginal workers. District wise distribution varies from highest participation in Maldah and lowest in Darjiling. Among male and female workers of rural areas, average region's participation rate as marginal workers is recorded in 9 percent and 59 percent respectively.

About 93 percent of total urban workers are engaged as main workers and remaining 7 percent as marginal workers in whole North Bengal. About 95 percent of total urban male workers and 82 percent of total urban female workers are engaged as main workers in the region. The work participation rate is maximum in Darjiling and minimum in Dakshin Dinajpur district. But in case of male workers, the district wise maximum is observed in Maldah and minimum is in Koch Bihar, while in case of female participation rate, the Darjiling district secure first position and lowest is in Koch Bihar. In case of marginal workers, among male and total participation, the percentage varies between 4-9 percent in all districts with region's average of about 5 percent and 7 percent respectively. But in case of female workers, the work participation rate is maximum in Koch Bihar, where about 59 percent of urban female workers engage as marginal workers in the district. In other districts, the urban female work participation rate varies between 12-22 percent with the region's average of about 18 percent.

3.16 LAND UTILIZATION

Appendix 3.22 shows that, about 64 percent area of whole state are used for cultivation, while in North Bengal, the corresponding figure is slightly more than the state and it is

about 67 percent of the total area of the region. However, due to its hilly and rugged character, Darjiling records the lowest percentage of net sown area with only 45 percent of the total area of the district constituting only 10 percent of the total net sown area of North Bengal during 2001-2002. Not only that, the district constitutes about 40 percent of total forest area in North Bengal by covering 38 percent area of the district with forest cover. Due to about 29 percent of the district's area under forest occupying about 58 percent of total forest land of North Bengal, Jalpaiguri records low net sown area. Therefore, as a considerable portion of these two northern districts comes under forest cover, hence the area under cultivation become low. But, in the southern district, i.e., Maldah also records only 60 percent of its area under cultivation. In this district, about 16 percent land is fallow land and about 23 percent land is not available for cultivation. Except these three districts, all other three have more than 80 percent of district's land is under cultivation. About 87 percent land of the Uttar Dinajpur district is used for cultivation constituting about 19 percent of the total net sown area of the whole region.

3.17 AREA AND PRODUCTION OF CROPS

About 1275.50 thousand hectares area in the North Bengal region was under the rice cultivation during 2001-2002. In case of district wise distribution during 2001-2002, about 22 percent area under rice crops in whole region is in Uttar Dinajpur and Koch Bihar. About 23 percent and 22 percent of total region's rice production is occupied by Uttar Dinajpur and Maldah respectively. Though Koch Bihar possesses second highest area under rice, but the production of rice is quite low in this district.

Wheat cultivation is not that much important as rice, as only 154.40 thousand hectares area of whole North Bengal comes under wheat with a production of about 333.50 thousand tones during the year 2001-2002. During this period, area under wheat crop in the whole region is the highest in Maldah and the production of wheat also high in Maldah with about 39 percent of total production of wheat in this district. Though, in rice and wheat cultivation, Darjiling's share is very negligible due to unfavourable relief and climate, yet, in case of maize production, the district takes an area under maize crop in North Bengal region falls in Darjiling as well as more than half of total maize production of the region also comes from Darjiling during the period of 2001-2002 (Appendix 3.24).

Figure 3.12: - Percentage of Agricultural and Non-agricultural Workers to Total Workers, 2001

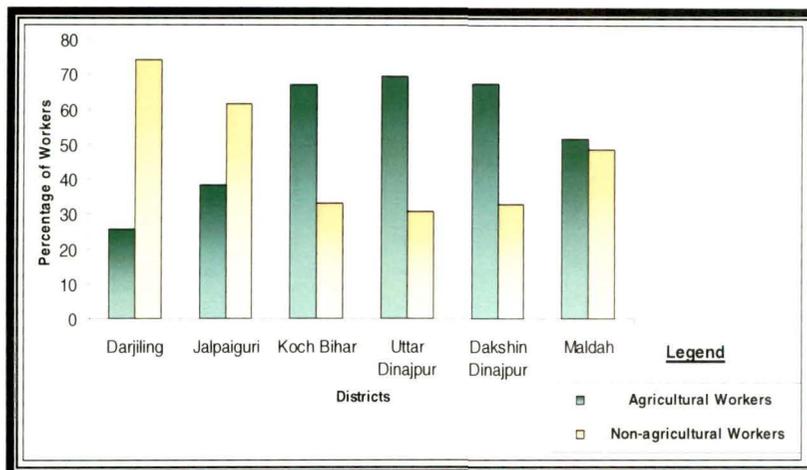
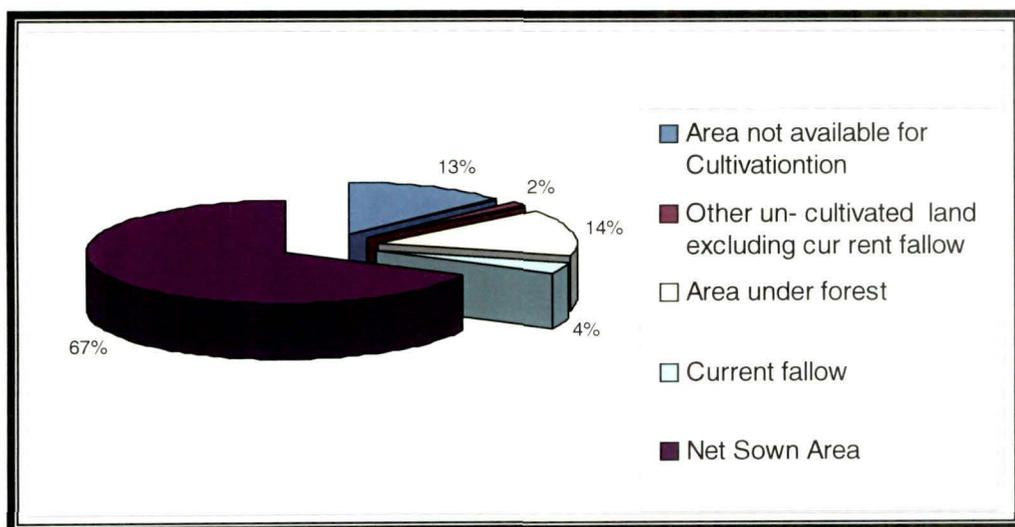


Fig 3.13: - Utilization of Land in North Bengal, 2001-2002



However, in case of total food grains production, during 2001-2002, Maldah leads all districts of North Bengal with about 24 percent of total production of the region, in spite of the fact that, Maldah have third position in terms of area under total food grains after Uttar Dinajpur and Koch Bihar. Maldah leads all districts in terms of the production of total oilseeds with about 37 thousand tones during the period of 2001-2002, which is about 38 percent of total production in the whole region. About 249.50 thousand hectares area in whole North Bengal is under total fibre crop and among all districts leading role is done by Koch Bihar in terms of both- area under total fibre and production of total

fibre in the whole region. In case of vegetables and other crops, North Bengal have an area of about 194 thousand hectares and the production was 1629.7 thousand tones during 2001-2002. In terms of area and production of vegetables and other crops, Jalpaiguri leads all districts with 95 thousand hectares of area and about 454 thousand tones of production. It is followed by Darjiling where about 43 thousand hectares are under such crop and the production is about 348 thousand tones. (Appendix 3.24).

About 489.62 thousand hectares area of whole North Bengal has been under irrigation facilities of which, about 26 and 25 percent is occupied by Uttar Dinajpur and Maldah district respectively. About 274.40 thousand tones of fertilizers are consumed in whole North Bengal region during the year 2001-2002, of which 24 percent is consumed in Koch Bihar followed by Jalpaiguri with about 21 percent of total consumption in the region (Table 3.23).

3.18 MEDICAL FACILITIES AVAILABLE

In the whole North Bengal region, about 1511 medical institutions are there including about 152 Hospitals, 227 Health Centres, 1008 Clinics and 124 Dispensaries. In these medical institutions, total bed capacity is about 10795 and there are total 1126 doctors in the whole region (Table 3.25).

3.19 POST, TELEGRAPH AND TRANSPORTATION

About 1571 Post Offices are there in whole North Bengal along with 7 Telegraph Office and 120 Combined Office (of P.O. and Telegraph) during the year 2002. About 23 percent Post Offices of the whole region is concentrated in Koch Bihar followed by 21 percent in Maldah with 360 and 323 Post Offices respectively. In case of Telegraph Offices, only Darjiling has two telegraph Offices while all other districts of the region has one each (Table 3.26).

The mode of transportation is to a great extent, determined by the physical environment of any region. The high rugged mountainous terrain greatly restricts the development of more efficient means of transportation, and thus, the modern hilly district of North Bengal, i.e., Darjiling is still lag behind in regard to the development of more advanced forms of transportation. There are about 20809.75 km long roads in whole North Bengal, which is maintained by P.W.D., Zila Parishad and Panchayats during the year 2001-

2002. Among these, about 21 percent is maintained by P.W.D., about 55 percent is by Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samity, while remaining is maintained by both Zila Parishad and Panchayats. However, among roads maintained by P.W.D., about 34 percent is district and 31 percent is village roads. About 18 percent total length of the roads maintained by P.W.D. in whole North Bengal is National Highways and another 18 percent is the State Highways. There are four National Highways pass through this region and these are N.H.34 (passes through Maldah and Uttar Dinajpur districts); N.H. 31 (passes through Uttar Dinajpur, Darjiling, Jalpaiguri and Koch Bihar districts). Apart from these two main highways, two small, i.e., 31A and 31C; the former passes through Darjiling as it originates from Sivok and ends in Gangtok of Sikkim, while the 31C passes through Jalpaiguri as it originates from Chalsa and enters Assam. If we take the number of registered motor vehicles in the whole region, then with 32 percent of total motor vehicles of the region, Darjiling leads all districts. It is followed by Maldah with 20 percent of total motor vehicles of the North Bengal region (Appendix 3.27 & Appendix 3.28).

3.20 REVENUE RECEIPT

About 3103297 thousand rupees of revenue has been collected in whole North Bengal region from various sources in 2001-2002. About 32 percent of this revenue comes as Excise Revenue while 29 percent is being collected as Sales Tax during the period of 2001-2002. However, about 16 percent of total revenue collected in the whole region as Stamp Revenue. Apart from these three major sources, revenue is also collected as Land Revenue, Registration Fees, Professional Tax, Entertainment Tax, Electricity Duty, Agricultural Income Tax and from various other sources. It is interesting to note that, about 57 percent of total collection of revenue during the said period has been done by Darjiling district and 37 and 34 percent of the district's revenue is collected as Sales Tax and Excise Revenue respectively (Appendix 3.29).

3.21 VILLAGES ELECTRIFIED

According to 1991 Census Report, about 6251 villages in the whole North Bengal region have been electrified till March 1991. About 99 percent villages have been electrified in Jalpaiguri while 98 percent villages of Koch Bihar have the electricity. In case of former West Dinajpur district, only 76 percent villages have been electrified till the end of

March 1991. Another poor condition is in case of electrification of villages is in Darjiling, where only 79 percent of all villages have the facility to use electricity (Table 3.30).

3.22 INDUSTRY

Tea: - About 273 tea gardens are there in whole North Bengal covering about 96483.23 hectares of land. About 254 thousand workers are employed in factories and tea plantation activities. Among these tea gardens of North Bengal, 115 are in Darjiling and 158 are in Jalpaiguri. Among total workers, about 72 percent are employed in various tea gardens in Jalpaiguri. In whole region, the average yield per hectare is about 4595 kg per hectare.

Mango: - About 24290 hectares areas are under mango orchards and these are located in Maldah district. During 2001, the production of mango was about 1400 thousand quintals and average yield was 57.63 quintals per hectares.

Sericulture: - There are about 18798.33 thousand Kahan Cocoons was produced during 2001-2002 period in whole region (Appendix 3.31, Appendix 3.32 and Appendix 3.33).

3.23 CONCLUSION

The society is made up of elements drawn from diverse origins. In the North Bengal region, there are numerous tribes, caste groups, languages and religious groups, displaying striking differences in social organization and cultural patterns, even material cultures. There are differences in racial strands and ethnic and cultural identities. The social diversity is perhaps the most powerful manifestation of the region's identity. The organization of space in tribal regions may be seen as a manifestation of the ways of adaptation to the environmental setting as determined by the historical process of peopling of the traditional habits of homogenous clan and kinship groups. The tribe, although exposed to the agrarian mode, remained on the fringe of sedentary agriculture. The river valleys are occupied by peasant societies whose distinctive trait is a social hierarchical order based on the institution of caste. Caste is a social phenomenon of great relevance. Infact, caste and communal identity together define the basic parameters of the organization of rural space. The layout and morphology of the rural settlements reflect the way different caste groups have come together to constitute the village society and have segregated in space in accordance with their function or occupation and their social ranking based on it. The propertied classes among these groups emerged as dominant castes, as they were owners of land- the principal means of production.

Despite the fact that, ethnic, tribal and caste identities are strongly defined, the society in North Bengal has been responding to the processes of modernization and social change with varying degrees of intensity. Urbanization, industrialization, education, social reform movements, political awakening and the advent of democratic processes seem to have exercised an all-embracing modernizing influence. As for example, with the development of transportation, the inaccessible lands of the northern hilly part of North Bengal become exposed to human beings and the interior tribes also being able to exchange their culture with modern societies. Moreover, the transformation of agriculture and the ongoing process of rural development have generated a new economic environment, which has led to an increasing degree of rural-urban interaction.