

## **CHAPTER XI**

## **CONCLUSION**

North Bengal region possesses large physico- geographical peculiarities like the whole of India. It can be divided into three broad physiographic divisions- the Himalayas, the forest covered Terai and the southern Plain. Within each of these macro-regions differences exist in the physical as well as climatic characteristics. The cultural diversities are rooted in this environmental setting of the region. The northern part is the Darjiling Himalayas, which form as the result of long years of administrative, political and economic association to the rest of the state. This region possesses a good potential of hydro-electrical power and also a good source of some valuable timber and forest products. The major river is the Tista. 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, Tista, Atreyi, Raidak, Torsa and other small streams. South of Naxalbari, the region is characterized by a landscape of elevated lateritic alluvium. 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.

In the North Bengal region, the average growth of population is measured as 22.31 percent during the 1991-2001 period which is about 4 points higher than the state's average.

Religion is a symbol of group identity and a cultural rallying point. The study region possesses about 68 percent of its total population as Hindu. Maximum concentration of Hindu population is found in the Jalpaiguri district and the lowest in Maldah. On the contrary, Maldah records maximum concentration of Muslim population. The hilly northernmost district Darjiling is the home of maximum number of Buddhist people.

About 86 percent people of the whole North Bengal live in 69 rural community development blocks. Compact settlements are found in the highly productive alluvial plains of whole North Bengal except the northern hills and foot hills. High degree of segregation among higher and lower castes is main characteristic feature here. Highest and lowest concentrations of rural population are found in Maldah and Darjiling respectively. Siliguri is the most important urban area in the whole study region. There are seven Class One towns in the whole region while maximum number of towns falls in

Class Four category. There are 32 community development blocks with urban population and about 14 percent people live in these urban units. Size of household is the ratio between total population and the number of household. Average size of household has been measured in the whole study region is 5.19. In the study region, the effective literacy rate is measured as about 59 percent as against 65 percent in the whole country. About 30 percent of total population is scheduled castes. Maximum concentration of scheduled castes population is found in Koch Bihar with the lowest concentration in Maldah and Darjiling. On the other hand, about 10 percent people are scheduled tribes. The highest concentration of tribal population is found in the Jalpaiguri with the lowest concentration in Koch Bihar. According to the 2001 Census, about 38 percent population of the study region is below 15 age group and with 6 percent above 60 age group. More than 15 percent population is in the age of below 6 years of age. In case of demographic transition, the North Bengal region can be divided into two-

- (a) Northern part is passing through late second stage while
- (b) Southern part is still at the beginning of the second stage.

The predominate economic activity of the whole study region is agriculture. It is estimated that, about 53 percent population are engaged in various agricultural activities. Generally female participation rate is much less than that of males in whole region. As major part of female population is housewives and hence they are engaged in productive activities inside the house including child bearing, child rearing and home making. But they are not considered to be economically active. In the North Bengal region the female participation rate is slightly more than the whole state. This is mainly due to the comparatively high female participation in marginal activities. In spite of this the percentage of female workers in the region is low. In the whole region, the sex ratio for total workers is 437 females per 1000 males.

One of the important structural aspects of population of any region is sex composition, which is of manifold significance in various fields of the society. The most important demographic feature in the country is the small number of females compared to males and the sex ratio that is the number of females per thousand males is decreasing in majority of districts of the country. The study region also follows this trend. A wide range of variations occurs in the regional distribution of sex ratio of the total population. It ranges from 882 to 1022 females per 1000 males among community development

blocks and 937 to 951 females per 1000 males among districts. However, on the whole, the North Bengal region's population is strikingly masculine as it is only in one of the sixty-nine C. D. Blocks that the ratio exceeds 1000. The male deficiency region occurs in the JoreBunglow-Sukhiapokri block in Himalayan zone of Darjiling district. This deficiency is a strong testimony to highly male selective migration from this hill area to the nearby plain areas taking place under the push effect of relatively limited resources and low economic development. The sex ratio of more than 975 females per 1000 males recording blocks are mainly concentrated in extreme northwestern part of the study region covering the north central and western part of the Darjiling district. Other three small pockets spread on north central and remaining two are on extreme southern part of the study region. On the other hand, the sex ratio of 960 and 975 are mainly covering the extreme northern and northeastern border areas of the study region. Another concentration of blocks of this category is found in the south central portion of the region. Therefore, most part of the study region record comparatively low sex ratio of less than 960 females per 1000 males.

About 16.75 per cent of total population in North Bengal has been enumerated as children of 0-6 ages and among them about 965 girls per 1000 boys during the period of 2001. Therefore, the effect of low sex ratio of this age group plays a very crucial role in shaping the sex composition of the whole region. However, the district wise variation ranges from maximum of 969 females per 1000 males in Jalpaiguri to minimum of 962 in Darjiling. The block wise distribution of child sex ratio is maximum in Gorubathan with 1045 while minimum is in Rangli-Rangliot with 919 girls per 1000 boys. Gorubathan is the only block, where the number of girls is more than the number of boys. Hence in both the cases of total population and child population the male deficient block is located on the extreme north western mountainous part of the study region.

Education plays an important role in social engineering. The study region exhibits considerable gender inequality in education and girls and women in North Bengal largely suffer with discrepancies in education. Against 69 percent effective male literacy rate in North Bengal, the female literacy is recorded only 49 percent. This huge gap between male and female literacy may lead to several negative situation regarding socio-economic betterment of any region. Firstly, gender inequality in education and access to resources may affect fertility and child mortality and expansion in education of the next

generation. Secondly, gender inequality in education may reduce economic growth. About 676 females are educated per 1000 males in whole North Bengal region, while there are 944 females per 1000 males have enumerated for total population in the region. This low sex ratio among literates indicates a poor status of women both socially and economically. As about 86 percent people of the region live in villages, hence more females are concentrated in villages if we consider the sex selective migration of males from rural to urban areas. But the sex ratio for literates in rural areas is also very low and only 643 rural females are educated against 1000 educated males in rural areas of North Bengal. Thus, in spite of the fact that, the total sex ratio is more in rural areas but in case of literates sex ratio, it is very low in rural areas as compared to that of total area. However, the sex ratio among literates varies from maximum of 734 females per 1000 males in Darjiling to minimum of 581 females per 1000 males in Uttar Dinajpur district.

The spatial distribution of literates sex ratio shows that there are four pockets of literates sex ratio of more than 971 females per 1000 males. Out of these four, the larger one covers the whole of extreme northwestern corner blocks of the study region. Remaining three very small patches cover three blocks spreading over the north eastern and southern part. There is one block in the whole study region where the sex ratio is above 801 and this is Kalimpong-I situated on the northern hilly part of the study region. Some socio-cultural and historical factors are responsible for such a high sex ratio among literates in this area. It is mainly because of the establishment of primary and secondary schools by the Missionaries during the British period. The socio-cultural settings of the local people also help in educate girl child and due to these reasons the sex ratio for literates are more in this part of the study region.

The high sex ratio of more than 1000 for scheduled castes population also concentrated only on the extreme northwestern corner blocks of the study region. While major concentration of high tribal sex ratio of more than 1001 females per 1000 males are found on the extreme southeastern part covering some blocks of Maldah district. Remaining five zones of such a high category are spreading over the whole region in the form of five small patches.

Though there has been an increase in the overall sex ratio from 927 in 1991 to 933 females per 1000 males in 2001 in the whole country and from 930 to 944 females per

1000 males respectively in the study region. This increasing trend is good news, but the worrying news is that the sex ratio figures of children below seven years has decreased markedly from 945 females per 1000 males in 1991 to 927 in 2001 in India and from 969 in 1991 to 965 females per 1000 males in 2001 in the study region. Except the southernmost district of Maldah, in whole North Bengal region, there is a sharp decline in the sex ratio of below seven age groups. It is supported by most of the social scientists that, there is a strong preference of son and the sharp decline in the under seven sex ratio in the whole country which is the result of the rapid spread of the use of ultrasounds and amniocentesis for sex determination, followed by sex selective induced abortions.

Juvenile (0-14 years) sex ratio is substantially low in all the districts of North Bengal. On an average it is about 954 females per 1000 males which is one point higher than that of the state's average in this age group of population. Only two northeastern districts, i.e., Koch Bihar and Jalpaiguri, have sex ratio above 960 females per 1000 males. Therefore, it can be clearly said that, in case of general distribution of juvenile sex ratio, all the districts of North Bengal suffer from a general deficiency of female. High rate of infant mortality mainly among females, comparatively low female literacy and some other socio-cultural factors are responsible for low sex ratio among juvenile population in all districts of North Bengal.

Though the general character of masculinity is also maintained in both the rural and urban sectors but the sex ratio in the rural population is higher than the urban population in almost all the blocks. The rural sex ratio ranges from 903 to 1022 females per 1000 males among community development blocks of North Bengal region. There are two blocks located in the hill tracts of Darjiling district with rural sex ratio more than 1000. But on the contrary, there is no block in whole region, where the urban sex ratio is above 1000. In fact, there appears to exist a strong negative correlation between sex ratio and level of urbanization.

Among the decennial age groups the highest range of sex ratio is found in the age group of 20-29. All districts of the North Bengal generally share this feature of sex structure. In other words, in this age group all districts of North Bengal record sex ratio of more than 1000 females per 1000 males. Except this age group, the distribution of sex ratio among decennial age groups of both the rural and urban populations is distinctly uneven.

The high rate of maternal mortality is another important factor leading to female mortality results into low overall sex ratio. In villages, generally, the numbers of women patients are small because the doctors attending to patients are male. For childbirth, the idea of hospitalization is mainly domestic and is mainly attending by village women and 'dais' (midwives). Though the recent data on maternity facilities of these years all over the state shows that the growing presence of Indian women doctors inevitably led to a rise in the numbers of women patients but still the numbers of women patients are small. In the northern part of the study region, welfare measures promoting maternal and infant care had been initiated by the missionaries in the previous century. Since independence, through different five-year plans, in various parts of the study region, there were establishment of health centers to care the child and maternal health. The 1900s, saw an expansion of these and the establishment of voluntary organizations, some wholly private and others semi-official, which were cooperative efforts of activist health offices, civic leaders etc. But in spite of these measures the maternal mortality rate is still there in remote areas.

The sex ratios in the three age groups by economic status are distributed distinctly disuniformly both among the districts and the rural and urban sectors of the population. The sex ratio in the juvenile population is moderately high in the eastern districts and relatively low in the northern, and southern districts. The general pattern of the distribution of sex ratios of work force, which is marked by a moderately high index of sex ratio of more than the North Bengal's average is found in the southern and northern districts. These high ratios are caused mainly by out-migration of male work force. In the former region covering Maldah and Dakshin Dinajpur, heavy pressure of population under a predominantly agricultural economy which is badly over manned and consequently the jobless members of the work force are compelled to move to those areas which offer better opportunities of gainful employment. In the northern Himalayan district of Darjiling, it is caused by male migration from the poverty- stricken mountainous region to the plains mainly in search of employment. Another factor for relatively high sex ratio of work force in Darjiling district is the engagement of more female workers in various tea-estates of the district. In the senile age group, the comparatively high sex ratio is found in southern districts of Maldah, Dakshin Dinajpur and Koch Bihar with the sex ratio of more than 1000. On the contrary, the senile sex ratio is found lowest in the Darjiling district.

Thus, it may be said that, the sex ratio variations have been tested with each of the independent variables (as discussed in chapter X), which are expected to be the determinants of sex structure. The overall assessment of these variates and their associations with sex ratios leads to the conclusion that locational structure of population distribution over the region, age structure, socio-economic structure, migration and productivity are the chief determinants of sex structure of the total population. Along with these, the work participation rate, literacy, dependency ratios also have substantial impact on the pattern of sex structure of both rural and urban population.

The employment is the most natural and best way to achieve the objectives of economic growth, poverty eradication, social justice, social stability and peace. The participation of women in economic activities is an important factor in the economic and social empowerment of women. It is because; employment is not only a source of economic independence, but also gives women a sense of self worth. Women's participation in labour force exposes them to the world outside the home and kinship and helps in developing support systems other than kinship based ones. The women work participation rate analysis reveals the fact that, the gender composition of the labour force displays a systematic change through long term economic development. Besides the economic development, industrialization and demographic factors, cultural and ideological factors play a role in determining the degree of feminization of the labour force.

Major findings of the study will help to fulfill the seven objectives -

*The first objective of the study is to access the spatial variation and temporal variation of the sex structure.*

There are huge differences in the distribution of spatial as well as temporal variation of sex structure in whole study region on the district level and on the community development block level. The general distribution of sex ratio varies from the highest of 951 females per 1000 males in Dakshin Dinajpur to the minimum of 937 females per 1000 males in Darjiling and Uttar Dinajpur with the average of 944 females per 1000 males in the study region as a whole. Though it ten points higher than that of the state but the figure itself is not satisfactory. Only Jorebunglow-Sukhiapokhri block of Darjiling district records high sex ratio, i.e., the number of females exceeds the number of males.

The sex ratio of more than 975 females per 1000 males recording blocks are mainly concentrated in extreme northwestern part of the study region covering the north central and western part of the Darjiling district. Other three small pockets spread on north central and remaining two are on extreme southern part of the study region. On the other hand, the sex ratio of 960 and 975 are mainly covering the extreme northern and northeastern border areas of the study region. Another concentration of blocks of this category is found in the south central portion of the region. Therefore, most part of the study region record comparatively low sex ratio of less than 960 females per 1000 males.

The temporal variation of overall sex ratio shows that, during the period of 1901-1951, there was continuous decrease in sex ratio of whole North Bengal from 909 to 881 mainly due to the poor medical and infrastructural conditions. Following 1951, there has been a continuous increase in the overall sex ratio till 1991-2001 and become 944 females per 1000 males in 2001.

*The second objective of the study is to assess the rural-urban distribution of sex ratio of North Bengal.*

According to the Primary Census Abstract 2001, about 86 percent people of North Bengal lived in rural areas while remaining 14 percent of total population is urban population. As this northern part of the state is more rural than the southern part, hence the general pattern of sex ratio in rural North Bengal determines the overall pattern of female-male ratio in the region which again affects the sex structure scenario of whole Bengal. Among the rural people in North Bengal, about 51 percent are male and remaining 49 percent are female. During 2001 census year, the sex ratio has recorded as 947 females per 1000 males in this area. Though the most important characteristic of rural to urban migration is the male dominance resulting into the low sex ratio in the urban areas, but this phenomenon can not describe the cause of low sex ratio in the rural areas. Hence there should be other factors which are responsible behind the high deficiency of female in rural areas also. However, the district wise rural sex ratio reveals that, maximum is recorded in Darjiling with 956 females per 1000 males and the minimum of 944 is found in the district of Jalpaiguri. Though, in case of total population, North Bengal records more sex ratio than that of West Bengal as a whole, but among total rural population, sex ratio in North Bengal is low than that of the whole state. Like

the region as well as the whole state, the sex ratio is recorded slight high in rural areas than the total (rural and urban) areas in Darjiling, Jalpaiguri and Uttar Dinajpur. In case of Maldah, the number of females per every 1000 males is same as total area of the district. Remaining two districts reveal the opposite picture and in these two districts, the sex ratio has recorded a little bit low in rural areas than among total population. Dakshin Dinajpur occupied first position among all of six districts of North Bengal in case of sex ratio among total population. But, in case of rural sex ratio, maximum sex ratio recording district is Darjiling, which is also having sex ratio of more than the state's average and remaining five districts have their sex ratio of less than that of the state's average. If we consider the average sex ratio of the whole region of North Bengal, then it can be easily said that, Darjiling along with Dakshin Dinajpur and Maldah have recorded sex ratio among rural population more than region's average. On the other hand, Jalpaiguri and Uttar Dinajpur, the two districts with minimum rural sex ratio in the whole region lie in the below region's average rural sex ratio line. Koch Bihar records rural sex ratio same as the region's average of 947 females per 1000 males.

On the other side of the coin, the sex ratio among urban population has recorded more in North Bengal than that in the whole state. There are 926 females per 1000 males in the former whereas it is 893 females in the later area. The district wise distribution of urban sex ratio among urban units shows that, the sex ratio varies from maximum of 964 females per 1000 males in Koch Behar district to minimum of 893 females per 1000 males in Uttar Dinajpur. Except the Uttar Dinajpur and Darjiling, all other four districts record their sex ratio in urban area more than 900 females per 1000 males and Uttar Dinajpur district records urban sex ratio same as that of the state's average of 893 females per 1000 males. If we consider the urban sex ratio of North Bengal, then it is clear from the above discussion that, only Darjiling along with Uttar Dinajpur are the below side and remaining four districts have their urban sex ratio more than the region's average of 926 females per 1000 males.

If we compare the sex ratio of individual district of North Bengal between their rural and urban units, then a clear picture about the number of females per 1000 males in different economic areas will come out. Thus a general trend of more females can be observed in rural areas in majority of districts. But, in Koch Bihar and in Dakshin Dinajpur an opposite trend is observed, where the sex ratio in urban areas has recorded more than that

of the rural areas. But in remaining four districts, number of females is more in rural areas than that in case of urban areas for every 1000 males. It may also be noted that these differences in sex ratios between rural and urban populations are, to a large degree, due to the currents and counter-currents of migrations and their age selectivity.

*The third objective of the study is to assess the distribution of sex ratio in decennial age groups.*

Age structure has major significance because it affects a wide range of demographic and social phenomena and highlights some of the fundamental and social forces at work within the country. An analysis of age structure not only throws light on the future trends of population growth, but also reveals the amount of dependency on productive group, which is the keynote of national planning.

About 944 females have recorded in whole North Bengal region for all the ages and for total population per 1000 males. In the age group 0-9, the sex ratio is recorded as 964 females per 1000 males, which declined dramatically in the immediately next age group. It is interesting to note that, between age groups 10-19 and 20-29, there is sudden increase in sex ratio and recorded more females than males in all the districts of the region in whole region as well as in all districts. Again in the next age group, sex ratio declined which became lower than that of the below 10 age group. In the whole region, this declining trend continues in the immediately next age group and not only that, the sex ratio of this age is the lowest in the region as a whole among all decennial age groups. Between the age groups of 40-49 and 50-59, a slight increase in sex ratio in whole region is recorded and except Darjiling, all other five districts supported this phenomenon. This increase in sex ratio continued till the age of 60-69 in the whole region. Except Darjiling and Jalpaiguri, the number of females was more than that of males in all remaining four districts in the age group of 60-69, i.e., except the above mentioned northern two districts sex ratio for other four districts were well above 1000. In the whole region, sex ratio again decreased in the next age group of 70-79 and then increased in the age group of 80+, where 970 females per 1000 males were recorded in the whole region.

The analysis of sex ratio among different age groups reveals the fact that, in North Bengal, quite a large percentage of population is in juvenile stage but the number of girls

and boys are not equal and always and in all areas this imbalance is prominent. But as the ages increase, the females are starting to count in much lower number than males. The number of females per 1000 males is very low in the productive age group in the whole study region. If we consider out-migration of males in the adult age group, then what is the reason behind this very low sex ratio in all age groups and in all areas of the region. Since about 86 percent people of North Bengal lives in rural areas, hence, male migration from this region to big urban centers of the South Bengal as well as neighboring states of Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, Assam and Sikkim in search of job should result into high number of females in this North Bengal region. But the picture in reality, according to the 2001 Population Census, is completely reverse. Hence there are other social as well cultural factors behind this low sex ratio in the middle age groups.

*The fourth objective of the study is to assess the rural-urban distribution of sex ratio in age groups by economic structure.*

The age wise distribution of occupation structure is based on primary sources of data in this study. Further, primary data have also been studied for the analysis of age wise distribution of sex ratio among working population for both the cases of rural and urban areas.

In the surveyed area, the sex ratio for working population is recorded as 318 females per 1000 males. Maximum sex ratio for total areas is recorded in the age groups of 30-39 and above 80 with 403 and 400 females per 1000 males respectively. It is interesting to note that, the minimum sex ratio is recorded among workers at the age of 40-49.

In case of rural areas, the maximum sex ratio has recorded in more than 80 and 70-79 age group. In the age groups of 20-29 and 30-39, the whole North Bengal region records low sex ratio of 400 and 349 females per 1000 males respectively. In remaining age groups, the sex ratios are low to very low. Unlike rural areas, the sex ratios for urban areas are comparatively high in the age groups of 30-39 and 40-49 with more than 400 females per 1000 males. On the other hand, the lowest sex ratios are in 70-79 and 40-49 age groups.

*The fifth objective of the study is to delineate the sex structure region.*

Sex structure regions provide the general picture on the basis of some selected set of structural variables, which separately exhibit different frequencies of occurrence in various locations through time. Thus regionalization based on sex structure is the identification of locations that have similar associations of structures and the interdependence of these relatively homogeneous locations into areas. There are some factors, which demarcate the sex structure regions and the relevance of these factors may vary from region to region. In the study region, there are some physical, economic, socio-cultural, political and demographic factors, which influence the sex structure regionalization. Among them most important are the nature of economy, society and the demographic determinants, which have a more significant effect on the development of regions as identified on the basis of sex structures. The economy effects sex structures of an area sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, whereas the social and demographic determinants have direct effect. As there should be balance between two sexes in a society, hence, the sex structure regionalization is very important to analyze the socio-cultural condition of any country or any area.

To identify the sex structure regions, in this present study, all the demographic, social, cultural and economic variables are analyzed with the help of 'Z' score or standardized score statistical technique for the period of 2001. Among six districts, the mean 'Z' score of sex structure for total areas varies from highest of 0.62 in Maldah to lowest of -0.82 in Uttar Dinajpur district. Dakshin Dinajpur and Koch Bihar follow Maldah. These last mentioned two along with Maldah record positive Z score for sex structure. Remaining three districts, namely Darjiling, Jalpaiguri and Uttar Dinajpur record negative 'Z' score.

*The sixth objective of the study is to assess the relationship between sex structure and other socio-economic variables.*

The importance and significance of sex ratio related indicators for assessing relative levels of progress or backwardness of women's status across the regions of North Bengal. An analysis of the current situation of women across the districts based on a select set of indicators covering issues of work, education, health, survival, safety and

women's participation in private and public decision-making is undertaken here to illustrate the relevance of adopting a sample methodology of some indicators. The indicators used here include both attainment levels as well as gaps between men and women in selected spheres. This analysis reveals the utility of such a methodology in identifying the areas of gender backwardness and possible intervention mechanisms that can prove to be effective in improving the situation of women. The purpose of gender development indicators is to generate specific sets of information that can be usefully utilized for identification of and intervention for the amelioration of the status of women. Individual, disaggregated indicators provide statistical data in a format that is amenable to the identification of problem areas as well as for intervention, thereby making it a better tool in comparison to any composite index.

*The seventh objective of the study is to suggest measures for development of the study area in social and economic dimension by balancing in sex structure.*

The constitution of India adopted in 1950 is progressive not only in gaining equality to women but also in empowering the State to adopt measures of affirmative discrimination in favour of women. The Constitution further imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to abstain from practices derogatory to the dignity of women. As far back as October 1938, the National Planning Committee was formed to draw an outline for Independent India's planned development. The 29 sub-committees published a report entitled 'women's role in planned economy' in 1947 informed by the liberal and socialist perspectives, the report quite admirably brought into focus the dualism that existed between inside/outside, private/public, familial/economic and informal/formal whereby 'inside', 'private', 'familial' and 'informal' were the categories belonging to women's labour as a 'separate unit of production' rather than part of family work.

The three hypotheses taken at the beginning of the study also can be established with the help of some major findings of the study-

The first Hypothesis says that regional disparity in sex ratio is the resultant effect of combination of factors like social and economic condition of the area. The sex ratio that is the number of females per 1000 males is mainly governed by the socio-economic and cultural attitudes of people of any region. The present study shows that there are highly positive correlation between sex ratio and some socio-economic parameters like working

status of women, their literacy rate, dependency rate etc. The second hypothesis says that migration explains high sex ratio in rural areas compare to that in urban areas. The study reveals that there are more in migration in urban areas than that of the rural areas and majority of in-migration are rural to urban migration as a result of which is the high sex ratio in rural areas. The third hypothesis says that improvement in sex ratio is directly related with improvement in medical facilities in the region. Child and maternal mortality plays an important role in the lowering of the number of females of a region. Hence, the improvement of the medical facilities will increase the sex ratio by reducing the child and maternal mortality. This fact is also true for the study region.

The First Five Year Plan (1951-'56) saw social welfare programmes and measures, that is, institutional orphanages, homes for destitute women and girls, craft centers to teach women skills, and nursery schools, with women (and children) identified as the main recipients along with the other deprived groups.

The Second Five Year Plan (1956-'61) recognized special needs of women workers such as maternity benefit and crèche facilities for their children. It also suggested speedy implementation of the principle of equal pay for equal work and provision for training to women in order to enable them to compete for better-paid jobs.

The Third Five Year Plan (1961-'66) recommended the increased allocation for the Central Social welfare Board, the main instrument of state activity and proposed to link maternal and child health care with general health facilities and related institutions. Family Planning concentrated on oral pills for women. Female education was seen as a major welfare strategy and the enormous gender gap in elementary schools prompted through the Council for Women's Education for the education of adolescent girls and training/recruitment and housing for women teachers. The largest share was assigned to expansion of rural welfare services and condensed courses of education.

The Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-'74) continued with its emphasis on education. The basic policy was to promote women's welfare within the family as the basic unit of operation. The outlay on family planning was stepped up and women were seen as the major agency in the implementation of population control measures.

The Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-'79) overlapped for its some part with the United Nations International Decade for Women (1976-'85) and for the first time there was a shift in the approach from 'welfare' to 'development'. The scope of social welfare was enlarged to cover training of women in need of income together with functional literacy to acquire skills and knowledge to perform the household duties including childcare, nutrition, healthcare and home economy. The Plan identified areas of health, family planning, nutrition, education, employment, legislation and social welfare for formulating and implementing action programmes for women and called for planned intervention to improve the condition of women in India. Subsequently, the Women's Welfare and Development Bureau (under the then Ministry of Social and Women's Welfare) was established in 1976.

One of the most significant documents to emerge as a part of the International Decade for Women was the forward looking strategies for the Advancement of Women, which was intended to provide a blue print for action to advance the status of women in national and international, economic, social, cultural and legal spheres by the year 2000 and to which the Government of India has been a signatory. As a follow up gesture, the government, within the broad constitutional and developmental paradigms, set up a separate department of Women and Child Development under the Ministry of Human Resource Development in 1985. The National Perspective Plan for Women was drawn up in 1988 to facilitate mainstreaming of women's issues in policies and programmes. The Plan pointed out the conceptual and made a plea for an alternative strategy, that creates for women an enabling environment rather than mere additional space.

The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-'85), in which women's development received recognition as a specific development sector, claiming, for the first time in India's planning history, a separate chapter on Women and Development. The cumulative impact of the UN International Decade for Women, a more sensitive international environment, and various efforts by the Indian government is visible to some extent in this plan period. The strategy for women's development including: employment and economic independence; education; access to health care and family planning; support services to meet practical gender needs; and the creation of an enabling policy, and institutional and legal environment were conceived..

The Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-'90) continued development programmes for women with the objective of raising their economic and social status. The Plan appropriated some of the language of the International Decade for Women and showed some concern at operationalizing the concepts of equity and empowerment and at integrating women into the mainstream of national development. A significant step was to identify and promote 'beneficiary oriented programmes' specifically focused on women. The UN Commission for the Status of Women in its 25<sup>th</sup> report, had recommended the establishment of the National Commissions for Women or similar bodies with a mandate to 'review, evaluate and recommend measures and prioritize, to ensure equality to ensure equality between men and women, and the full integration of women in all sectors of national life'. Following the recommendation and many other proposals at the country level, the Ministry and Human Resource Development prepared the National Commission for Women Bill and introduced in the Lok Sabha in 1990. The Bill was passed in the same year and the National Commissions for Women was constituted in January 1992 as an autonomous statutory body. This has been replicated at the state Level also; as per 2001 Report, 18 States now have their own commissions for women.

The Eight Five Year Plan (1992-'97) has at times been seen as a step backward in the sense that once again women were part of social welfare concerns, which included, besides women, children, the disabled, and the aged, although measures were proposed to ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors did not ignore women. Special programmes aimed at women were to be identified within general development programmes and the flow of benefits to women in the three key sectors of education, health and employment were to be monitored. The important ideological change was in acknowledging women as equal partners and participants empowered. Thus from development the emphasis now shifted to 'empowerment' of women and emphasis on extending employment opportunities through skill training.

The Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) changed the conceptual strategy on women in two major ways. First, empowerment of women became one of the nine primary objectives of the Plan whereby utmost importance was given to creating an enabling environment for women to freely exercise their rights, both inside and outside the home, as equal partners. Categorically identifying women as agents of social change and development, it proposed the formulation of the National Policy for Empowerment of

Women. The Plan, for the first time, also discussed the need for reservation of seats the parliament and state legislative assemblies along with public sectors and civil services. Second, the Plan attempted a 'convergence of existing services' in women-specific as well as women-related sectors. To this effect, the most important resolve of this Plan was a proposal directed at the Centre and the states to adopt a special women's component in the Plan to ensure 30 per cent flow of funds/benefits from all general development sectors to women. The year 2001 was celebrated as 'Women's Empowerment Year', which saw various activities and programmes specially aimed at women including the much talked-about women's self-help groups (SHGs).

As far as the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) is concerned, it proposes to be distinctly different 'from that of earlier Plans' as it borrows from the Platform for action with 'definite goals, targets and a time-frame' and expects to continue 'the process of empowering women initiated during the Ninth-Plan'. The plan also charts out the operational strategy in terms of a time-bound action plan; responsibilities of the executing agencies, both government and non-governmental; built-in mechanism for coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of impact through measurable indices, etc. The plan also proposes 'to encourage SHG mode to act as the agents of social change, development and empowerment of women'.

India has led the world in ratifying UN Conventions and international covenants like the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. National Plans and Policies have consistently reflected a vision of progress that is not narrowly confined to expanding incomes, but gives a central place to the achievements of human rights, freedoms and well-being for all. The last few years have seen dramatic increases in the space available for space in Indian society- consequences of affirmative policies and programmes by the government and initiatives by NGOs and other civil society groups. Most of all, these achievements are the result of years of determined advocacy, campaigning, and action for change by women themselves.

Despite the rapid growth in literacy in post-independent India, gendered deprivation still exists and needs to be overcome. Despite progressively increasing gains for females in literacy and education resulting in declining disparities, in 2001, slightly more than half

of the female population was literate as against three-fourth of males. It may be seen that, it took almost five decades for male-female disparity to reduce to half of what it was in the 1960s. Following the same logic, if the present trend continues, it will take another five decades to finally close the gender gap in terms of literacy attainment. However, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) exhibits a pyramidal structure with a broad base at the primary level and gradual tapering as one moves to higher levels. Over the years, the gender gap seems to be closing. The early decades of Independence saw huge disparity between boys and girls at the primary level, with the situation being even worse at the upper primary level. Undoubtedly, the gender disparities over the years have come down; yet substantial gender gap in enrolment at the elementary level still persists. Various Five Year Plans and Committees, including the National Perspective Plan (1988-2000), have stressed the need for greater participation of women in higher education and yet, the disparate levels for men and women are visible in increasing levels of higher education. One important trend in recent years, however, is the narrowing gap between men and women in this regard.

Census data show that in recent years there has been an increase in work participation rates of women, both in rural and urban areas, with the increase being primarily in the numbers of main workers. Since 1981, there has been a steady increase in the number of female workers. The male-female employment ratio is higher in the public sector as compared to the private sector despite the fact that the public sector accounts for about 60 per cent of female employees in the organized sector. The tilt in the male-female employment ratio in favour of women in the private sector is, however, offset by a wage structure that privileges males, as females are often confined to the lower rungs of job hierarchy with low wages.

Women have been the central targets of the family planning programmes from the late 1960s. After the 1993 Vienna Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD 1994), and the Fourth World Conference on women held at Beijing (1995), the health sector witnessed a paradigm shift in the sense of locating health within a comprehensive framework of poverty reduction, women's empowerment, reduced social inequalities, economic growth, and women's rights to better health, choice, and safety in reproduction. Family planning concerns were thus expanded into reproductive health care covering a broad range such

as the prevalence of reproductive tract infections, needs for contraceptives, infertility, uterine prolapse and fistulae.

The Eleventh Five Year Plan (2008-2012) tries to restructure policies to achieve a new vision of growth, which aimed at a faster reduction of poverty and helping in bridging the divides. The main approach of this plan was to “Towards Faster and More Inclusive Growth”

Women and Child development has a crucial role in the socio-economic development. For increasing coverage of immunization, there is a convergence between Women and Child Development Department and Medical and Health Department. At each Anganwari Centre, an additional functionary called Sahayogini has been provided to guide the families in matters of nutrition and health mainly of under-3 children and pregnant and lactating women. This Plan also design and implement women development programme for focusing on women empowerment and creating appropriate environment for women’s socio-economic growth and development. Formation of 1.12 lakh Self Help Groups is a step towards attaining self-sufficiency and women’s empowerment in taking policy decisions.

The main thrust in respect of children is to ensure their survival, protection and development with special focus on the girl child and the girls at adolescent period, while the emphasis in respect of women is to make them economically independent and self-reliant.

Other thrust areas are IMR, MMR, malnutrition among children and women, high incidence of childhood diseases, child marriage, declining sex ratio among under 6 age groups, low female literacy, poor health and poor socio-economic status of women along with social discriminations etc. To keep in mind these thrust areas, the Eleventh Five Year Plan approaches to-

- Prevention of child marriage through strict enforcement of Child Marriage (restraint) Act.
- Programme on National Nutrition Mission to provide foodgrains to adolescent girls upto 18 years of age with less than 35 kg. Weight

- Efforts made to improve ECE component under ICDS for physical and cognitive development of children.
- Reduction of Infant Mortality Rate to 32 per 1000 live births, Maternal Mortality Ratio to 148 per one lakh live births, malnutrition upto 25 percent of under-3 children, anemia among children and women by half of the present level by the end of the Eleventh Plan period.
- Immunization and health checkups, nutrition and health education will be completed by Institutionalization and Strengthening of Mother Child Health Nutrition day (MCHN), promotion of institutional delivery, induction of Sahayogini, expansion of management of child nutrition scheme throughout the state including establishment of malnutrition treatment center in district hospitals.
- System of providing meal through mothers committees, women self help groups, women co-operative societies at Anganwari centers will be further strengthened.
- The plan also targets to generation of employment among women, reduction of school drop-out rates among adolescent girls along with increase in enrolment of girls in schools.

It is important to note that, despite their relatively slower pace, several gender related developmental indices in India have improved with institutional support in place in terms of planned interventions as well as constitutional reforms, some of which are quite radical in nature. Despite several forward-looking initiatives, Indian planning has followed the instrumentalist logic for development of women, which has to change.

Women's empowerment remains a fundamental issue as it linked to the broader question of the status of women in society. The major issue of concern is the growing decline in the male-female ratio in certain states of the country. Most researchers agree that female survival chances are lower than males because of differential feeding and health care. It also relates to the marriage and succession laws of both the Hindus and Muslims that do not provide any space for individuality of women. The inequality that stems from the lack of educational opportunities and economic dependence is also a major problem that speaks for women's low rate of participation in the market economy and the low valuation placed on them as human beings. To achieve their desired status women have

to win their own battle. First of all, they have to strive to change the male chauvinistic mindset nurtured over the years. Efforts should also be made to change the highly exploitative and hierarchical rural power structure.

For women to participate effectively in the social, political and economic activities, for the development of the society and of themselves, a congenial and conducive atmosphere should prevail in the society. Under the existing traditional, patriarchal and orthodox social conditions, there are numerous factors like caste, class, religion and education that determine the extent of their participation in the socio-political processes. In a male-dominated society where women belonging to every class and category are subjugated and exploited, it remains to be seen how political empowerment of women could lead to their socio-economic emancipation.

The analysis of regional variation in distribution of the sex structures of the population of North Bengal and the identification of the explanatory factors- both demographic and non-demographic which were attempted in this work lend strong support that in a developing region like North Bengal with a high predominance of rural population and agricultural economy the structural differentials of the population play a vital role in shaping the pattern, trend and rate of economic development and that for planning a legitimately diversified but regionally balanced economic development the regional pattern of population structures deserves to be rated as one of the most important items of consideration.