

## Economic Pursuits

An attempt has been made here to provide an account of economic life of the Badias mainly on the basis of primary data collected from the settlements under study.

It is estimated that more than 70 percent of Muslims live below poverty line (Engineer : 1985). Muslims in West Bengal are considered as economically backward though approximation of their involvement in gainful employment in both public and private sectors is very difficult. Majority of them (57%) are engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Bidi rolling is found as one ~~of a few~~ <sup>of a few</sup> subsidiary occupations (Hussain : 1991)

An idea on the occupations of the Badias has already been given in the previous chapter on Research Setting. By tradition the Badias are agriculturists or engaged in military force and in the work of castrating cattle. Engagement in the profession of circumcision has been noticed in a village of undivided Bengal. Circumcision "is performed by a group of Muhammedans, known as badias.

Their profession is to circumcise boys and castrate domestic animals. The badias live in another village in the locality. They are looked down upon by other Muhammedans, who will not accept any food from them or intermarry with them. For circumcision the badias generally charge one rupee from the comparatively better-off households and eight annas from the average, four annas being the rate for the poor households" (Mukherjee, 1971 : 207).

At present castration is <sup>not done primarily by the Badia people.</sup> ~~done by a few badias and this is done as a subsidiary work.~~ In the seven settlements under study, no person is found primarily engaged in circumcision. The Badias are of the opinion that a special training is necessary for such type of work which is presently lacking among them. The persons who are doing such type of activity are called hajjam or osta. Osta has been identified as an occupational group or indigenous group (jat) in West Bengal, the members of this group are involved in circumcision (Mondal, 1994).

Badias are found in various activities now-a-days. Diversification in occupational structure of the Badias has become possible because of their settlements in various areas near town or semi-urban locality. Sophisticated professions of physician, doctor and advocate have been found among them. But these professions are restricted to certain families living mainly in urban areas. In the rural areas Badia's are mainly engaged in agricultural work. Their involvement in different types of activities is shown in the table below:

Table No. V.1.

## Sex wise Occupational Distribution of Badias

Occupation	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of workers
Cultivation	231 33.14	0 ---	231	18.02
Ag. Labour	50 7.17	7 1.20	57	4.45
Daily Labour	180 25.82	7 1.20	187	14.59
Rickshaw pulling	13 1.86	0 ---	13	1.01
Business	22 3.16	2 0.34	24	1.87
Service/Teaching	8 1.15	1 0.17	9	0.70
Masonry	92 13.20	1 0.17	93	7.25
Carpentry	62 8.90	0 ---	62	4.84
Ironsmithing	1 0.14	0 ---	1	0.07
Peddling	22 3.16	0 ---	22	1.72
Bidi rolling	3 0.43	84 14.36	87	6.78
Servant/Shepherd	5 0.14	3 0.51	8	0.62
Tuition	0 ---	1 0.17	1	0.07
Begging	1 0.14	3 0.51	4	0.31
Household work	3 0.43	476 81.36	479	37.36
Total	699(54.37%) 100.00	585(45.63%) 100.00	1284	100.00

N.B. Percentage to column total is placed in shaded area.

Out of a total population of 2716 it is found that 1284 people are engaged in different types of occupation. But all these 1284 people are not engaged in gainful employment. Hence, the dependency ratio is as high as 120.81 among

the Badias\*. Obviously, work participation rate is very low. About 33 percent of total population are engaged in gainful employment. Among the earners involved in gainful employment male - female ratio is 4 : 1. Sex wise distribution of workers engaged in gainful employment is shown below:

Table No.V.2.

Distribution of workers engaged in gainful employment

Gender	Number of Worker	Total Population	Percentage
Male	696	1408	78.03
Female	197	1308	21.97
Total	893	2716	32.88

Work participation rate has been raised in two settlements by higher involvement of women in gainful employment. Distribution of earners and work participation rate are shown in the following table:

Table No.V.3.

Distribution of earners and Work participation rate

Category	Chika nmati	Mal. Basti	Mur. Basti	Nitbaz ar	Uttar Dhama rgach	Dakshin Dhamar gach	Babla bona	Total	Perce ntage
Total Earners	88	62	183	80	175	236	69	893	32.88
Male Earners	88	61	167	77	93	141	69	696	77.94
Female Earner	0	1	16	3	82	95	0	197	22.06
Total Non - Earners	210	184	639	174	180	270	226	1823	67.12
Work Participation Rate	29.53	25.20	24.02	31.50	49.30	46.64	23.39	32.88	---

Population below 15 years + Population above 60 years

\* Dependency ratio =  $\frac{\text{Population below 15 years + Population above 60 years}}{\text{Population between 15 and 60 years}} \times 100$

Population between 15 and 60 years

In general, the Badias are poor people. Only 3 percent of total Badia households under study have an annual income of more than Rs.30,000/- in the year 1998. Owing to their engagement in various activities income of the Badia households has also been varied. According to the annual family income total households of the studied area have been distributed as follows :

Table No.V.4.

## Annual Income wise distribution of Households

Annual Family Income	Number of Households	Percentage
Less than Rs.4,000 /-	42	9.23
Rs.4,000 to Rs.6,200/-	78	17.14
Rs.6,200/- to Rs.8,500/-	96	21.09
Rs.8,500/- to Rs.11,000/-	82	18.02
Rs.11,000/- to Rs.15,000/-	69	15.16
Rs.15,000/- to Rs.30,000/-	75	16.48
More than Rs.30,000/-	13	2.86
Total	455	100.00

Economic condition of the households is also dependent on the size of land holding specially the holding of agricultural land. It has been found in the studied settlements that almost fifty percent of the households are landless. More than forty percent of people are to be considered as marginal farmers as their families hold upto 2.5 acres of cultivable land. Distribution of households according to size of land holding is shown below:

Table No V.5.

## Distribution of Households according to Size of Landholding

Size of holding	Number of Households	Percentage
Landless	210	46.20
Upto 2.5 acres	195	42.90
2.51 acres to 5.00 acres	45	9.89
5.01 acres to 10 acres	5	1.10
More than 10 acres	---	---
Total	455	100.00

Badias are mainly engaged in cultivation but nearly half of their households are having no cultivable land. They have to depend on their labour -- either agricultural or unspecified ones. Business as an occupational pursuit has emerged now-a-days. These three sectors of economy have, therefore, been elaborately discussed.

### Agriculture

The Badias are champion in agricultural activities. They have a tradition to cultivate the infertile low land. They do hard labour to transfer fallow land into agricultural field. Their migratory habit is supposed to be developed from this skill. To enhance economic conditions of their families they search for fallow infertile land which is obviously available in cheaper rate. They purchase such type of land and do cultivate for few years. If the place of residence in that area suits them then they settle there otherwise sale out their land at a higher rate.

They receive the higher rate because by that time the fallow land has been transformed into agricultural field. Nevertheless the Badias do cultivate their land scientifically which ultimately yield a good product. Naturally they earn more from the same amount of land than that of a farmer belonging to any other community living in the same locality. To get a better production the Badias make the field rectangular in shape. In such a shape ploughing becomes easier and time saving. Naturally cost of cultivation has been cut down by them. As a result of easy ploughing they can prepare the field at the level of their satisfaction. Just after harvesting they plough the agricultural field again. With this process the remnants of previous crop plants have been transformed into manure. It also help in destroying various insects and their larvae. They consider that this process of killing insects is useful than the application of chemical insecticides. Therefore, instead of using modern technology they prefer to indigenous ones which give them a better result.

### **Labour**

The Badias are a hardworking group of people. They extend their labour not only in their agricultural fields but also to anybody else. About 5 percent of workers among the Badias have been found working in the agricultural field as labourer. The Badias are also engaged in the non-agricultural sector. As daily labourer both males and females work in the roadside, tea garden, market place etc. As a helper to masons and carpenters, many Badias are found working. At the later stage these helpers turn themselves into a full fledged mason and

carpenter. Existence of child labour is also there among the Badias. The parents of such child labourers are of the opinion that they can run their family smoothly if a child earns something rather than sitting idle at home. Child labour in tea stalls, carpentry work, masonry, agriculture, tea garden and bidi rolling are found. Majority of the child labourers are males. Girls of tender age are also engaged in hard work but they are mostly restricted to their household arena and therefore are not considered as child labour. Distribution of adult as well as child labourers in the settlements under study is shown in the following table:

Table No.V.6

## Settlement wise distribution of Workers

Settlement	Adult Workers			Child Workers			Total Workers		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Chikanmati	73	0	73	15	0	15	88	0	88
Malda Basti	58	1	59	3	0	3	61	1	62
Murshidabad Basti	165	13	178	2	3	5	167	16	183
Nitbazar	58	3	61	19	0	19	77	3	80
Uttar Dhamargach	76	67	143	17	15	32	93	82	175
Dakshin Dhamargach	121	80	201	20	15	35	141	95	236
Bablabona	67	0	67	2	0	2	69	0	69
Total	618	164	782	78	33	111	696	197	893

**Business**

Involvement of Badias in business has also been observed in the areas under study. Their economic condition being not so well, the Badias do business with low capital investment. In some cases, for business, they take loans from mahajans (money lenders) belonging to Marwari or any other community at high



interest. The loans are repaid normally in time. With low capital the Badias are engaged in the business of paddy, jute and other crops. In the business of cattle the Badias are frequently involved. The persons engaged in these sorts of business are known as paikar or whole seller. Apart from such whole sale trading the Badias are also engaged in retailing of vegetables, groceries and clothes. Involvement in craft business like preparation and selling of iron rings used for cart wheels is found among the Badias. Other iron implements needed mainly for agriculture have also been prepared by Badia black smiths. Household industry like bidi rolling is done by male, female and children of Badia society. Many people of Malda and Murshidabad district are engaged in silk and tobacco industries but as scope is not there in the areas of Badia settlements under study, involvement of the Badias in such type of activities has become difficult to quantify.

### Observation

In the early days of their settlement the Badias were engaged in guarding the kingdom of the then rulers. They had been found in castrating cattle and circumcising the male Muslim child. They were also involved in agricultural work.

At present castration is <sup>hardly</sup> done by ~~a negligible section of~~ Badia people. They are mainly engaged in agriculture. In many areas they have settled clearing forests. They have transformed the infertile land into an agricultural field. But possession of land is not sufficient for maintaining their families. Nearly 50 percent of the households under study do not possess any land for cultivation. The Badias are engaged in various types of occupation like agricultural, daily labour, rickshaw/ van

pulling, masonry, carpentry, peddling, bidi roling etc. Involvement in small business has also been found. All these economic pursuits are the predominant fields of the males. More than 80 percent of the females are engaged in household work. The rate of their participation in gainful employment is low among the Badias. It is only 33 percent. Naturally dependency ratio is high (120.81).

In spite of their engagement in diversified field of occupation the economic condition of their families is not bright at all. About two-third of total households are living just at the subsistence level.