

## CHAPTER III

*Bangladesh: An Overview*

As we are going to discuss and analyse one of the major current socio-economic problems of Bangladesh, it is necessary to discuss about 'Bangladesh' as a country and its multi-dimensional, general and socio-economic issues which are the base and background of the problem of child labour and the problem-related initiatives that have been taken in the country.

Bangladesh is a unitary and sovereign republic known as the 'People's Republic of Bangladesh'. It is an independent country and this deltaic country shows a diverse mixture of religious and cultural traditions exhibiting conservative values as well as emerging modernizing trends. The state language of Bangladesh is *Bangla* (Bengali). The capital of the republic is the city of Dhaka. Currency of the country is known as *Taka* (Tk.) and its exchange rate with the US \$ was 1:54 (as on September 2000). The citizens of Bangladesh are known as Bangladeshis, though they are often called *Bengalis*, which is a more generic term.

## **2.1. Geography, History and Culture**

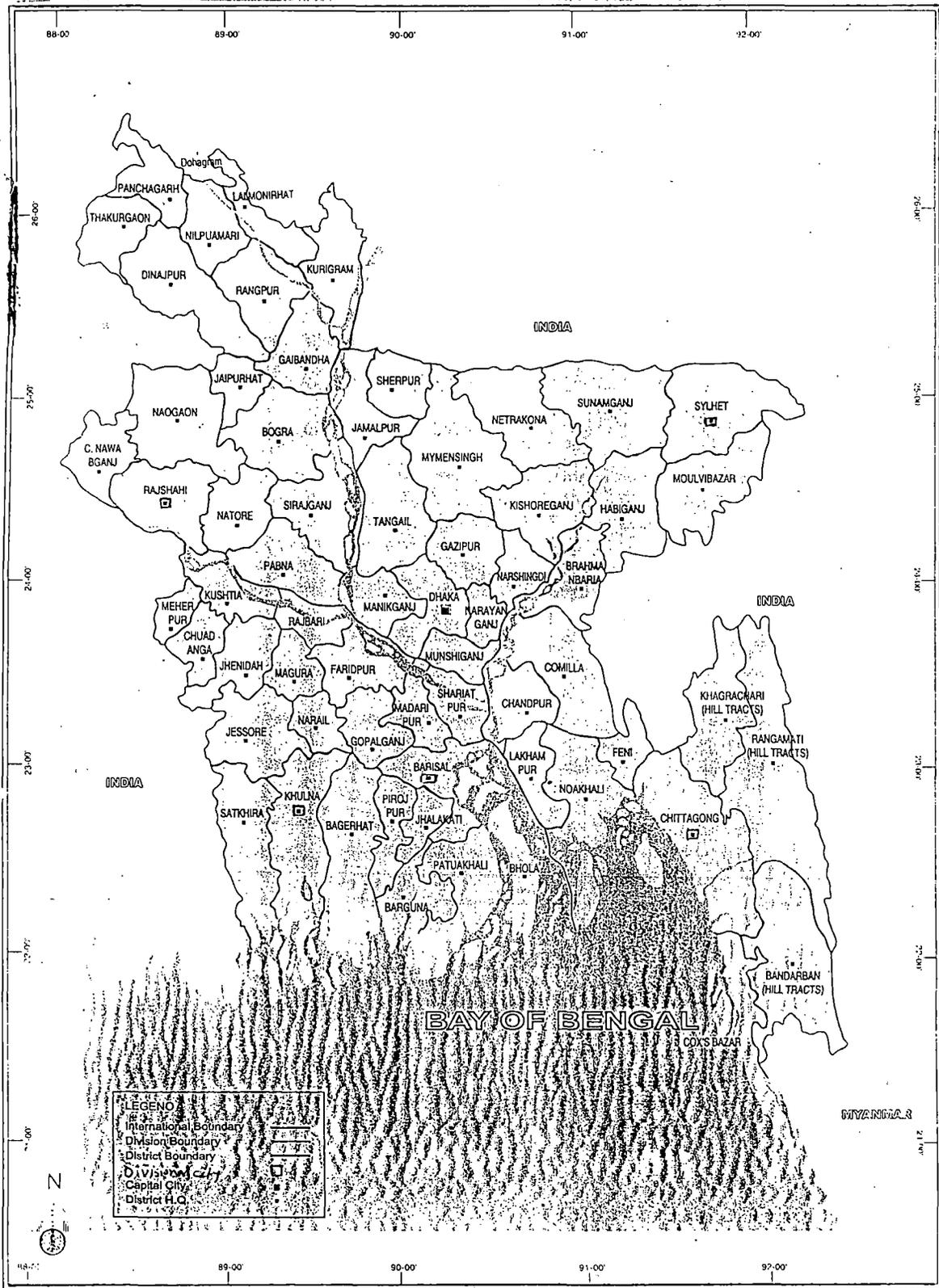
### **2.1.1. Geographical Position:**

Bangladesh lies in the northeastern part of South Asia between 20°34' and 26°38' north latitude and 88°01' and 92°41' east longitude. It is bounded on the west, the north and the northeast by India, on the southeast by Myanmar (former 'Burma') and on the south by the Bay of Bengal into which flows a network of 230 rivers with a total length of 24,140 km. The area of the country is 56,977 sq. miles, or 1,47,570 sq. km. It is divided into three broad physiographic units of which floodplains occupy about 80 per cent, hills about 12 per cent and terraces about eight per cent of land area (GOB and UNICEF, 1999: 15). Except for that hilly regions and high lands in the east and the north, the country is largely a low, flat and fertile land washed by mainly seven major rivers.<sup>1</sup> The limits of territorial waters of

---

<sup>1</sup> The seven major rivers are the Padma, the Meghna, the Jamuna, the Brahmaputra, the Teesta, the Surma and the Karnaphuli.

**Map 2.1: The Map of Bangladesh (Political) Showing Four Metro-Cities Including the Divisional and District Headquarters**



Source: Baseline Survey of Street Children in Six Divisional Cities of Bangladesh (for ARISE Programme); DSS of GOB and UNDP (BGD/97/028, Dhaka, 2001).

Bangladesh is 12 nautical miles and the area of the high extending to 200 nautical miles measured from the base line constitutes the economic zone of the country (BBS, 1999: XXI).

### **2.1.2. Historical Background:**

Documented history of what now constitutes Bangladesh is traceable from as early as the fourth century BC when it formed the eastern-most part of the ancient Buddhist empire of King Ashoka (GOB & UNICEF, 1999:15). The country, formerly known as 'East Bengal', has been for hundreds of years a frontier zone on the north-eastern corner of the Indian sub-continent. Marginal but still profoundly marked by the main civilizations, which have flourished in India, namely the 'Hindu Brahmanical, Buddhist and the Indian Islamic Cultures', the Bengalis have evolved a peasant culture of their own based on wet rice cultivation. For some 500 years, from the Mughal to the British, foreign kings and emperors exerted some degree of domination over their territory (Blanchet, T. 1996: 229).

In the year of 1947, the British left India and the greater Bengal was split in two parts named West Bengal and East Bengal. At the same time Pakistan was created as an independent State following the 'Indian Independence Act, 1947' passed in the British Parliament. By this act Bengal was divided into West Bengal with its Bengali Hindu majority remaining as part of India and East Bengal (now Bangladesh) with its Bengali Muslim majority being integrated to the Islamic State of Pakistan. By this, the new nation Pakistan was composed of two wings, West Pakistan, then centred on Karachi, and East Pakistan (the then East Bengal) centred on Dhaka. Thus, the people of Pakistan divided by 2,000 kilometers of Indian territory, poor communications, different languages, cultures and histories, as well as political and economic inequalities formed a disjointed state which lasted for 24 years (Blanchet, T. 1996: 229).

Bangladesh emerged as an independent country on March 26, 1971, following a sanguinary civil war against Pakistani military regime. The dismemberment of Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh was one of the traumatic events of 1971 in the history of the political world. The birth of Bangladesh was 'unique' in the sense that it emerged out of a successful national liberation

movement waged against ‘internal colonialism’. However, in the words of T. Blanchet, “The 1971 war was fought in the name of Bengali nationalism, while the Islamic establishment within Bengali society largely remained committed to Pakistan. After losing the war, many of the representatives of the Islamic establishment were branded collaborators and kept a low profile; but re-emerged within a few years. The issues fought over in 1971 left deep scars in people’s consciousness, and are still at the core of political and ideological divisions today” (Blanchet, T. 1996: 229-30).

### **2.1.3. Society and Culture:**

By international standards, Bangladesh is a relatively homogeneous society with 98.6 per cent of the population identifying as Bengali, which is, speaking the same language and sharing a broad culture base. The language (*Bangla*) is a major pillar, medium and inspiration of Bangladeshi culture. The ‘Language Movement’ of 1951 played an important role as an inspiration for the liberation war in 1971. The majority of the Bangladeshi people are Muslims. According to the 1991 census, Muslims make up 88.3 per cent of the population, Hindus 10.3 per cent, Buddhists 0.6 per cent and Christians 0.3 per cent. However, “the diverse mixture of religious and cultural traditions among its population has led to the development of a rich cultural heritage in Bangladesh, in terms of art, music, poetry and literature. Elements of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism can be found in the daily lifestyle of Bangladeshis. The area is also known for greater religious tolerance than many other parts of the region” (GOB & UNICEF, 1999: 15).

The minority religious groups today continue to be officially recognized by the State. But progressively, the Bangladesh State has been associated with the Islamic ‘*Samaj*’.<sup>2</sup> In 1974, Bangladesh adopted a secular constitution. In 1977, the word “Secularism” was replaced by “absolute trust and faith in the almighty Allah”. And in 1988, Islam was declared state religion. So, the relationship maintained between ‘*Samaj*’ and state has important implications for human rights. A small band of indigenous middle class dominates the society of Bangladesh. Modernization has been induced by the increasing outreach of radio, television and other mass media as well as cross-cultural contact.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Bangla word ‘*Samaj*’ means ‘Society’ – especially the moral society governed by the religion.

## **2.2. Population and Gender Issues**

### **2.2.1. Population of the Country:**

The population of Bangladesh doubled from 14.5 million in 1801 to 28.9 million in 1901. During that time the rate of growth was almost constant at a level of 0.67 per cent. The population growth was slow until 1931. During 1931-71 period, the population doubled again. Then 50 million people were added to the population size of 1971 (GOB & UNFPA, 1997:31). Even with a steady decline in the fertility rate with accelerated state efforts to attain a replacement fertility rate, the country's population is expected to reach 170 million, and population density 1,200 persons per sq. km. by 2010 (UNDP, 1999) and by 2015, the population is estimated to rise to 162.7 million (UNDP, 1998). In the starting year of the decade of 1990s e.g. in 1990 the population size was 111.4 million and the current population of Bangladesh is estimated to be about 131 million (1999-2000), with a population growth rate of 1.6 per cent which was 1.98 per cent in 1990-91 (Table 2.1). The majority of the population reside in rural areas, and the poorer sections are often marginalized into inhabiting environmentally degraded or resource-exploited zones. The country's population density of 882 persons per sq. km. (Table 2.1) is one of the highest in the world.

Higher population growth rate has been identified by the government as the major problem and obstacle for the development of the country. Although the population growth rate and the total fertility rate have shown a slow decline in the decades of seventies and eighties, from 2.48 in 1974 to 1.98 in 1991, and a remarkable decline in the decade of nineties (see Table 2.1), the size of the population base means that Bangladesh will continue to experience a high population growth in absolute terms for decades to come. The massive expansion in the population in the last twenty-five years has ensured a high proportion of younger people amongst the population, with 43 per cent being below the age of 15 (GOB & UNICEF, 1999: 32). On the base year of 1998, it is estimated that the total fertility rate was 2.98 (6.3 in 1974), infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) was 102 (247 in 1960), and the child population (under 15) was 43 per cent (45.9% in 1994) (GOB & UNICEF, 1999: 2000-01, & GOB, 1998b : 14). The data show a desirable trend, which is the result of the government's population control

**Table 2.1: Basic Social and Economic Data for Bangladesh in the 1990s**

	1990-91	1995-96	1999-2000
National Population (m)	111.4	122.1	131.0*
Population Density (sq. km.)	755	832	882
Population growth rate (%)	1.98	1.80	1.60
Life expectancy at birth (years/m)	56.5	58.4	60.8
Life expectancy at birth (years/f)	55.7	58.1	59.6
Literacy rate (15 years and above)	35.3%	47.3%	62%
Total fertility rate (TFR)	4.3	3.4	—
Urban population (% of total population)	17.2	22	—
Growth rate of urban population	6.3	6.09	7 & 9**
<b>GDP and Income</b>			
GDP at current market price (Tk. m.)		1,663,240	2,412,739*
GDP growth rate (%) at 1995-96 price		4.6	5.5*
Per capita GDP (in Taka)		13,622	18,531*
Per capita income (in US\$)	279	343	371*
Rate of inflation (%)	9.33 ('89/'90)	6.7	8.0*
Government development expenditure (in Tk. m.)		104,470	165,000
Government revenue expenditure (in Tk. m.)		118,139	184,440
Area in square kilometer			147,570
No. of Administrative Divisions			06
No. of Districts ( <i>Zila</i> )			64
No. of Thana			490
No. of Municipalities (as on-October 1996, excluding city corporations)			127
No. of City Corporation : (Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi)			04
Principal Crops : Rice, Jute, Tobacco, Sugarcane, Pulses, Spices, Tea, Oilseeds.			
Principal Industries: Garments making, Jute and Jute Products, Cotton Textiles, Tea Processing, Newsprint, Cement, Paper, Chemical Fertilizers.			
Principal Exports: Readymade Garments, Raw Jute and Jute Products, Tea, Fish, Hides and Skins, Newsprint.			

\* Provisional Figures. \*\* 7% in the smaller cities and 9% in the bigger cities like Dhaka.

**Sources:** (a) *Statistical Pocketbook of Bangladesh 1997 & 1999*; BBS, Dhaka ; (b) *Fifth Five - Year Plan 1997-2002 Document*; Planning Commission, MOP, Dhaka, p-14; and (c) Other official sources of ADB, UNICEF and different ministries of the GOB.

programmes, which have been intensely pursued for the last two decades in collaboration with donor agencies.

### **2.2.2: Gender Issues:**

The sex ratio (number of males per 100 females) is 106 for the entire population and 107 for children upto 18 years old. This disparity is commonly attributed to the strong gender inequalities (Blanchet, T. 1996: 233). However, according to the Human Development Report 1998, the gender-related development index (GDI) ranks Bangladesh at the 140<sup>th</sup> position out of 174 countries. The main causes for this low index value are low literacy rates<sup>3</sup> and very

<sup>3</sup> The literacy rates however increased rapidly in the 1990s - from 35.3 per cent in 1990-91 to 62 per cent in 1999-2000 (Table 2.1).

low share of earned income of women compared to men. There is an interesting paradox regarding gender relations in the country. In terms of life expectancy at birth, however, Bangladesh is one of those few countries all over the world where women are in the weaker position than men – though these figures are rising gradually: from 56.5 years for male and 55.7 years for female in 1991 to 60.8 years for male and 59.6 years for female in 1999-2000.

However, there is an unclear understanding of empowerment of women as process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation in decision-making and control over her own life, although women as mothers are held in high respect at the individual level. These serious gender inequalities result in a negative impact on the quality of life. Women without proper education and gainful employment, get married early (a substantial proportion of them get married at teenage), have children early (a substantial proportion of women get pregnant in their teens), and due to lack of proper status they cannot participate in the decision making process, they do not receive adequate medicare services, etc. These factors have substantial impact on the population as well as on the development process (GOB & UNFPA, 1997: 37-38).

Recent years have seen an attempt to bring women more effectively into the mainstream of events in Bangladesh. Although women constitute 49 per cent of the population, they are marginalized in the decision-making structure of the country. Till today from the tail years of 1980s, both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament are female, but at the senior levels of the executive, legislature and judiciary, the number of women is strikingly low. In terms of ownership of land and assets, men at all levels of society are better off than women. It is estimated that a significant majority of the people living in absolute poverty are women, and women-headed households are among the poorest in the country with 45 per cent of female-headed households living below the poverty line (UNDP, 1999 as cited in GOB & UNICEF, 1999:18). In general, women's contributions to the economy are invisible because much of their activity consists of non-market work. In rural areas and even in many of the semi-urban areas, women do not have access to markets, and find it hard to obtain income-earning work. Some of the micro-finance schemes provide women with opportunities for self-employment, but

market access remains a persistent problem. Women's workloads are frequently heavy, leading to the concern about the "triple burden" they carry in terms of market and non-market productive activity, as well as reproductive responsibilities and child rearing (GOB & UNICEF, 1999: 18).

There has been some development in this field. Labour force participation rate of the females increased from 4.10 per cent in 1974 to 18.20 per cent in 1996. Life expectancy of the females is hardly different from that of males. Literacy ratio of the females as a percentage has gone up from 35.50 per cent in 1974 to 68.50 per cent in 1996 (Rahman, M. A., 1998:3). Recently, primary school enrollment of the females as a percentage has also gone up drastically and is in a higher position than that of the males.<sup>4</sup>

However, for the majority of women in Bangladesh, the inequitable inheritance laws, as well as social perceptions and cultural practices with regard to dowry and divorce, combine to make their position in society subordinate to that of men. This is the situation that currently prevails, even though the constitution of Bangladesh formally provides for equality between citizens irrespective of gender.

The gender inequalities have crippled Bangladesh economy for obvious reasons. Until the women are given basic education as well as their share of quality of life, the economy will not move towards the desired direction. Through improving the quality of life, the economy can achieve the goals in all other sectors, particularly in attaining the population goals more rapidly than the envisaged target (GOB & UNFPA, 1997: 38).

## ***2.3. State of the National Economy and the Poverty Issues***

### **2.3.1. The National Economy:**

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries of the world with sluggish growth, low per capita income, poverty and unemployment. The macro-economic situation in Bangladesh during the 1990s shows two different and contrasting trends: on the one hand it reflects the gains that can be made by adopting good policies; and on the other, it highlights the negative effect of slow progress in policy

---

<sup>4</sup> According to BBS, the net enrollment rate (6-10 years) of females in 1999 was 79.7 whereas the rate of males was 76.9 (Cited in GOB & UNICEF, 1999: 200).

reforms with respect to the state-owned enterprises. The healthy increase in the growth of real per capita GDP from 3.8 per cent in 1994 to 5.5 per cent in 1999-2000 has been attributed to the improvement in Government policies. The GNP per capita has also shown a steady rise from US \$ 279 in 1990-91 to US \$ 371 in 1999-2000 (Table 2.1).<sup>5</sup> This per capita GNP of the country is still below the average for low-income countries (US \$ 410) and that for South Asia (US \$ 440) (*data for 1999*), and thus, Bangladesh is classified by the World Bank as one of the poorest countries in the world. Data published by UNESCO rank Bangladesh is the thirty-first position out of thirty-five Asian countries for which GDP per capita data could be given (AUCC, PAL & DPC Group, 2001: 3).

The gross investment has been over 20 per cent of GDP despite a lower domestic savings rate (15%). The Tax-DGP ratio is low (less than 8%) but the fiscal deficit has been kept within limits. The country has now experienced a higher inflation rate than a few years back.<sup>6</sup> The currency has been devalued a number of times. The current account balance has remained negative and utilization of aid has slowed down. The policy of promoting the private sector has not borne the expected results. Moreover, financial sector reforms as well as other economic and administrative reforms have made slow progress.

The economy of Bangladesh manifests dualism. Traditional agriculture is still dominant. The technology in agricultural production is changing though it is constrained by low investment by small peasant holdings. Agriculture remains by far the main source of employment, accounting for 60 per cent of the labour force in 1985-86. Now, the economy is slowly but steadily shifting its emphasis from agriculture to the manufacturing and service sectors, the share of agriculture in GDP dropping from 49 per cent in 1980 (Blanchet, T. 1996: 233) to 23 per cent in 1998. During 1990 to 1998, the corresponding change has been a 3 per cent point rise in manufacturing and a 2 per cent point rise in the service sectors.

The increase in manufacturing is largely attributable to the readymade garments and knitwear industries, which have displayed a significant growth.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the source of data in this Section is GOB & UNICEF (1999).

<sup>6</sup> In 1995-96, the rate of inflation was 6.7 per cent, which rose to 8.0 per cent in 1999-2000 (Table 2.1).

Exports from these sub-sectors increased more than three-fourth from 1,183 million US dollars in 1992 to 3,784 million US dollars in 1998. However, these improvements are partly the outcome of improved macro-economic management as discernible by the General Macro Performance Index, which has risen from a lowly 2.5 in 1984 to a somewhat respectable 4 in 1998. This was achieved by adopting sound macro management measures during the 1990s, to reduce fiscal deficits, contain rates of inflation, correct the distortions in the exchange rates and promote export-oriented growth (GOB & UNICEF, 1999: 24).

### **2.3.2. The Poverty:**

Poverty is widespread in Bangladesh. The economy of Bangladesh with a large and rapidly growing population and low per capita income reveals conditions of abject poverty for the majority of the people. In Bangladesh, poverty is accompanied by: (i) unemployment, (ii) malnutrition, (iii) illiteracy, (iv) low status of women and (v) limited access to social and health services. All these are associated with low productivity as well as high fertility, morbidity and mortality. Poverty can also be linked with inequitable distribution of natural resources such as land and water (GOB & UNFPA, 1997: 40).

However, the percentage of the poor in Bangladesh is declining. According to one study, the percentage of the poor on the basis of per capita expenditure classification fell from 71.3 per cent in 1973-74 to 43.8 per cent in 1988-89 (GOB, 1994a: 103). According to the BBS and UNICEF report, "in 1980-84 hardcore poverty (defined as less than 1805 K.cal consumption per day) in rural and urban areas was 38% and 35% respectively. However, in 1995-96, these figures reduced to 25% and 27% respectively" (1998: 9). The Government Household Expenditure Surveys of 1985-86, 1988-89 and 1991-92 also showed that the percentage of population living below the poverty line had declined from 52 to 47 per cent during the six years period.

The most recent estimates of the Human Poverty Index (HPI) for Bangladesh show that the HPI decreased from 61 in 1981-83 to 40 in 1995-97. This is reconfirmed by findings that while poverty remains endemic, aggregate poverty declined from 59 per cent in 1983-84 to lie in the range of 45.53 per cent in 1995-96. Extreme poverty also decreased in this period from 41 per cent to 23-35 per

cent (H.Z. Rahaman 1998, cited in GOB & UNICEF 1999: 26-27). Rural poverty dropped from 53 per cent in 1991-92 to 51 per cent in 1995-96, urban poverty experiencing a higher drop from 34 per cent to 26 per cent.

However, the burden of poverty continues to fall disproportionately on women in the areas of nutritional intake, access to gainful employment, wage rates, and access to maternal health-care. Not only are female-headed households the worst-off group among the poor, but also households dependent on female earners have a higher incidence of poverty than those dependent on male earners.

Another scenario of poverty in Bangladesh is that it has declined more in urban than in rural areas. The rates of decline have been more pronounced in the case of extreme poverty, which halved since 1983-84. The situation in the urban slums and fringes however, still remains precarious. There is also regional variation in poverty levels that cuts across both rural and urban areas. The disparity is more prominent in urban than in rural areas, possibly because of the skewed urbanization process.

It is observed that, poverty in Bangladesh is not static. There are five critical process dimensions, which perpetuate the situation. These are natural disasters, illness-related expenditure, insecurity, dowry and death of the main income earner in a household. Natural disaster includes floods, cyclones and riverbank erosion; illness-related expenditure includes expenses incurred for illness of family members or livestock; insecurity includes loss from theft, dacoity (banditry), eviction from land, litigations, physical threats, extortion, police harassment, legal expenses, rape, abandonment of women, and general absence of law and order; and dowry expenses are incurred on daughter's marriage. Death of the main income earner in the family is another major cause of poverty. The magnitude of the income erosion arising from these five dimensions is estimated to be nearly Tk. 8,000 annually or nearly 16 per cent of the average rural household income (GOB & UNICEF, 1999: 29).

#### ***2.4. Urbanization and Urban Dimensions<sup>7</sup>***

Like many other underdeveloped poor countries of the world, Bangladesh is a rural-based country. More than 75 per cent of the people live in rural areas. Yet,

---

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the source of data of this Section is 'GOB' 1998', p. 14.

cities have developed vary rapidly in the last two decades, representing 8.8 per cent of the total population in 1974, 15.2 per cent in 1981, 17.2 per cent in 1991 and 23 per cent in 1996-97 (Table 2.1). In Bangladesh, the urban population is defined as all people living in places having a Municipality (*Pourasava*), a Town Committee (*Shabar Committee*), or a Cantonment Board (GOB & UNFPA, 1997: 158). However, the growth rates of these urban populations were always higher than the general population growth rates. In 1974, the population growth rate was 2.48, whereas the growth rate of urban population was 4.25. In 1981 and 1996, the population growth rates were 2.35 and 1.80 whereas the urban population growth rates were 6.63 and 6.06 respectively. In 1999-2000, the population growth rate in big cities rose to 9 per cent and in smaller towns it rose to 7 per cent (Table 2.1).

The fast-growing urban population is caused by two major factors: natural increase and the internal migration and reclassification. Internal migration and reclassification contributed, from 1970, as the main factor of the growth and internal migration will continue to be the major contributor to the growth of urban population. It is expected that three-fifths of the total urban growth will be contributed by this factor upto the year 2005 (GOB & UNFPA, 1997: 160). In other words, much of the urban growth is due to the migration of the rural poor to the urban area. In addition, the native urban poor have also been growing through natural increases. Change in the definition of urban areas has also made a contribution to the growth.

Given the magnitude of the Bangladesh population, however, the higher rate of urban population growth means a considerable flow of people settling in cities, which are hardly prepared to receive them. Most of the rural migrants are the poor and the landless that come in search of work. Some migrate temporarily, basically alone, during the lean seasons; others migrate permanently with or without their family. Poor women and children unsupported by husbands and fathers have better earning opportunities in the city, even if that were through begging. Many children presently living on the streets of Dhaka, Chittagong and other cities migrated alone to the city. BIDS shows that the main reasons for this rural-urban migration in Bangladesh are: seeking better job (33%), no work in rural areas (25%), job transfer

(12%), came with relatives (9%), to help his/her family (2%) and others (19%) (BIDS as cited by Stalker, P. 1997: 52).

Urbanization in Bangladesh is not an outcome of industrialization. Even the trend of rapid growth of urban population is not the direct effect of urban development. There are so many problems in urban areas. Unemployment, lack of proper housing and sanitation facilities, water problem, over-population, communication problem, environmental hazards, mass-poverty, crime and illegal trafficking, etc. are the major problems of urban areas. All these contribute to the growing urban poverty. The absolute number of urban poor and the hardcore poor is increasing over time. The relative poverty situation in urban areas is highly pronounced: the lowest 40 per cent of urban population receive at best 20 per cent of total income, whereas the richest 10 per cent receive at least 10 times the income of the lowest 10 per cent (GOB & UNFPA, 1997: 162).

Cities have grown in a largely unplanned manner. Rising urbanization and the consequent severe pressure on existing urban infrastructure and services including healthcare, basic education, water supply, sanitation, solid waste collection and drainage services have reduced the quality and level of availability of urban services. There is no uniform structure of services provided in the urban areas. In most cases, it is significantly inadequate. Lack of coordination, on the other hand, is seriously hindering the usual flow of services (GOB & UNICEF, 1999: 191).

The provision of drinking water and sanitation are inadequate in most areas, but are particularly appalling in the slums. Unsafe and unregulated shelters, unsanitary environment with garbage heaps piled at street corners, poor roads and canalization, and undisciplined and dangerous traffic are the common features of the cities. Over-population creates pressure to the communication, water and sanitation system and pollutes the urban environment. The status of pollution prevention legislation cannot be termed satisfactory. Also, the shortage of land has resulted in extraordinary price inflation of land and consequently in various forms of distortions in the land and housing markets.

Apart from nearly 61 per cent of the urban households being outside the public water supply distribution system, only 20 per cent have private connections; others depend on stand posts, tube-wells and other sources. Sanitation and solid

waste disposal are deficient and progressively deteriorating. Many cities face serious environmental degradation and health risks caused by uncollected domestic refuse in streets and open areas, urban drainage systems that have become dogged by indiscriminately dumped refuse, and the pollution of water resources near uncontrolled dumping sites (GOB & UNFPA, 1997: 163).

As Peter Stalker studied, urban dwellers face the hazards of many other kinds of pollution. Dhaka, the capital city, is also estimated to have more than 1,000 polluting enterprises located in residential areas and generating around 1,000 tons of solid waste per day, most of which is disposed of in the surrounding low-lying areas where it pollutes both surface and ground water. City dwellers also face the hazards of air pollution (1997: 52).

There are other problems, however, not the least of which from children's point of view, is the absence of parks and safe space for playing. Most middle class children in Dhaka and other cities grow up confined within the congested flats, while poor children grow up in insecure and polluted slums, or on the streets. The shelters of the poor who squat on government and semi-government land are regularly destroyed by the law-enforcing agencies. The need to provide the poor with cheap housing has been very much overlooked by the government (Blanchet, T. 1996: 235).

As R.I. Nasir and F.R. Parvin have studied, "the increase in the absolute number of the urban poor is both through natural increase of the native urban poor population and in-migration of the rural poor to urban areas caused by strong rural push factors as well as pull factors.... The incidents of urban poverty resulting from rapid urban growth is indicated by the population of squatters and slum dwellers, specially in metropolitan cities" (1997: 209). According to ADB, 56 per cent of the urban population fell below the poverty line income in 1986 (Bangladesh Observer, June 7, 1990). There are also other kinds of problems in urban areas. Presently, Bangladesh does not have an explicit urbanization policy. The government has in the past been reluctant to invest in urban areas on the grounds that this would attract more immigrants (Stalker, P. 1997: 53). The urban management and planning is also weak. Absence of urban development strategy and the lack of a single institutionalized focal point with the responsibility of addressing urban

development issues, and antiquated and inefficient land administration systems and procedures are the other problem issues (ADB, 2001: 7). In recent years, however, the government shows its interest more positively to plan and develop urban areas. Like the Government, NGOs and donors in the past have concentrated on the rural areas. But now they are also increasingly turning their attention to the cities.

## **2.5. Four Metropolitan Cities with Urban Poverty and Slums**

There are six divisional cities in Bangladesh – of them, except Barisal and Sylhet, four are metropolitan cities. These are: Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi. The growth of urban population in Bangladesh is mainly discernable in the four metropolitan cities. In 1991, 56.67 per cent of the total urban population of the country<sup>8</sup> lived in these four metro cities. “The present urban population growth rate is about 7% per year in the smaller cities and 9% per year in the bigger cities like Dhaka” (DSS, 2001a: 7). This urban population growth rate is one of the highest in the world. A brief profile of those four metro cities, however, is given below.

### **2.5.1. Dhaka – the Capital City:<sup>9</sup>**

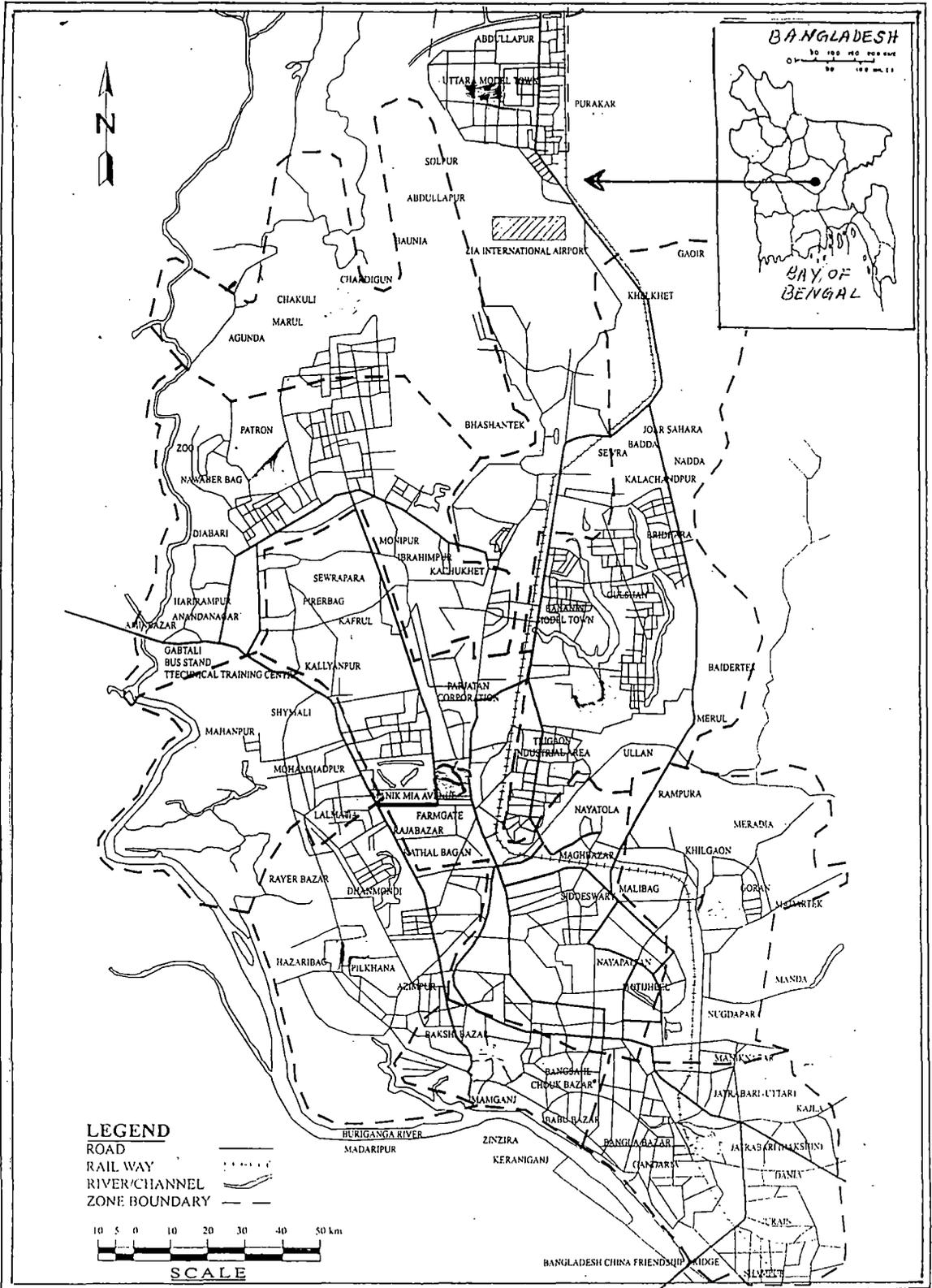
Dhaka is the emerging mega city – which is the capital of Bangladesh. It is situated on the bank of the river Buriganga in the south and the river Turag in the north. It is one of the historic cities in the subcontinent. Dhaka received attention as a hub of socio-political, cultural, commercial and economic activities from the successive rulers over the ages such as the Buddhist Pala kings, the Hindu Sena kings, the Muslim Sultans and the Mughal emperors. But Dhaka, renamed as Jahangir Nagar in 1608 AD, gained real importance by becoming the capital of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa till 1717 under the Mughals.

The first Municipal Committee was established in Dhaka in 1823 during the British period. A second Municipal Committee subsequently replaced this Committee with more responsibility after the introduction of the District Municipal

<sup>8</sup> According to 1991 census, there were 19,178 thousand people living in urban areas which were 17.2% of total population.

<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise mentioned, the source of this section is: *Baseline Survey of Street Children in Six Divisional Cities of Bangladesh*, DSS, GOB (BGD/97/028) and UNDP, September 2001, Dhaka: pp. 13-16.

Map 2.2: Map of the Dhaka City Corporation



Source: Baseline Survey of Street Children in Six Divisional Cities of Bangladesh (for ARISE Project); DSS of GOB and UNDP (BGD/97/028), Dhaka, 2001.

Improvement Act of 1864. Dhaka Municipality also gained new momentum and importance when Dhaka became the capital of the newly established province of Eastern Bengal and Assam after the partition of Bengal in 1905. After the emergence of Bangladesh, however, Dhaka became the capital city of the country and Dhaka Municipality was turned into a Corporation in 1978. Subsequently, in 1982, two adjacent Municipalities of Gulshan and Mirpur were merged with the Dhaka Municipal Corporation. 'Dhaka Municipal Corporation' was finally renamed as the 'Dhaka City Corporation' (DCC) in 1990.

The control exercised by the Government over DCC is very comprehensive covering legislative, administrative, financial and judicial aspects. "DCC is responsible to formulate and implement development plans and projects within its jurisdiction. Such responsibilities are also entrusted to many service delivery agencies, such as Rajdhani Unnayan Katripakka (RAJUK) for urban development control and city planning including housing; Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (DWSA) for supply of drinking water, sewerage and drainage; and Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) for supply of electricity" (DSS & UNDP, 2001: 15).

Dhaka is a city of slums and urban poor families. Currently, there are more than 3,000 slums in Dhaka city with a huge population of 25 lacs – which is about 25 per cent of the total Dhaka population (DSS & UNDP, 2001: 17 & BBS, 1999). These slums are very crowded. "In Dhaka, some 70% of the population who fall into low-income groups, occupy less than 20% of the residential space, while the remaining 30% of middle and upper income households take up 80% of the land" (Stalker, P. 1997: 52). Like other cities, most of the urban population – about 85 per cent – lives in temporary or makeshift housing of thatch and bamboo though often with a tin roof. These simple constructions have mushroomed throughout Dhaka to form the city's more than 3,000 slums.

While the poverty situation in urban areas has probably improved more than in the rural areas, nevertheless, more than 50 per cent of the urban people are believed to be poor, with 30 per cent among the hardcore poor (Stalker, P. 1997: 52). Urban poor children have been the worst victims of hardcore poverty. Only 3 per cent of Dhaka's urban poor have their own land – nearly 90 per cent of them live in single rooms in very poor quality shelters, for which they pay very high rent. The

average living space per family (5 persons) enjoyed by the poor of Dhaka is only 30 square feet (AB, 1999: 4-5).

### **2.5.2: Chittagong – the Sea-Port City:**

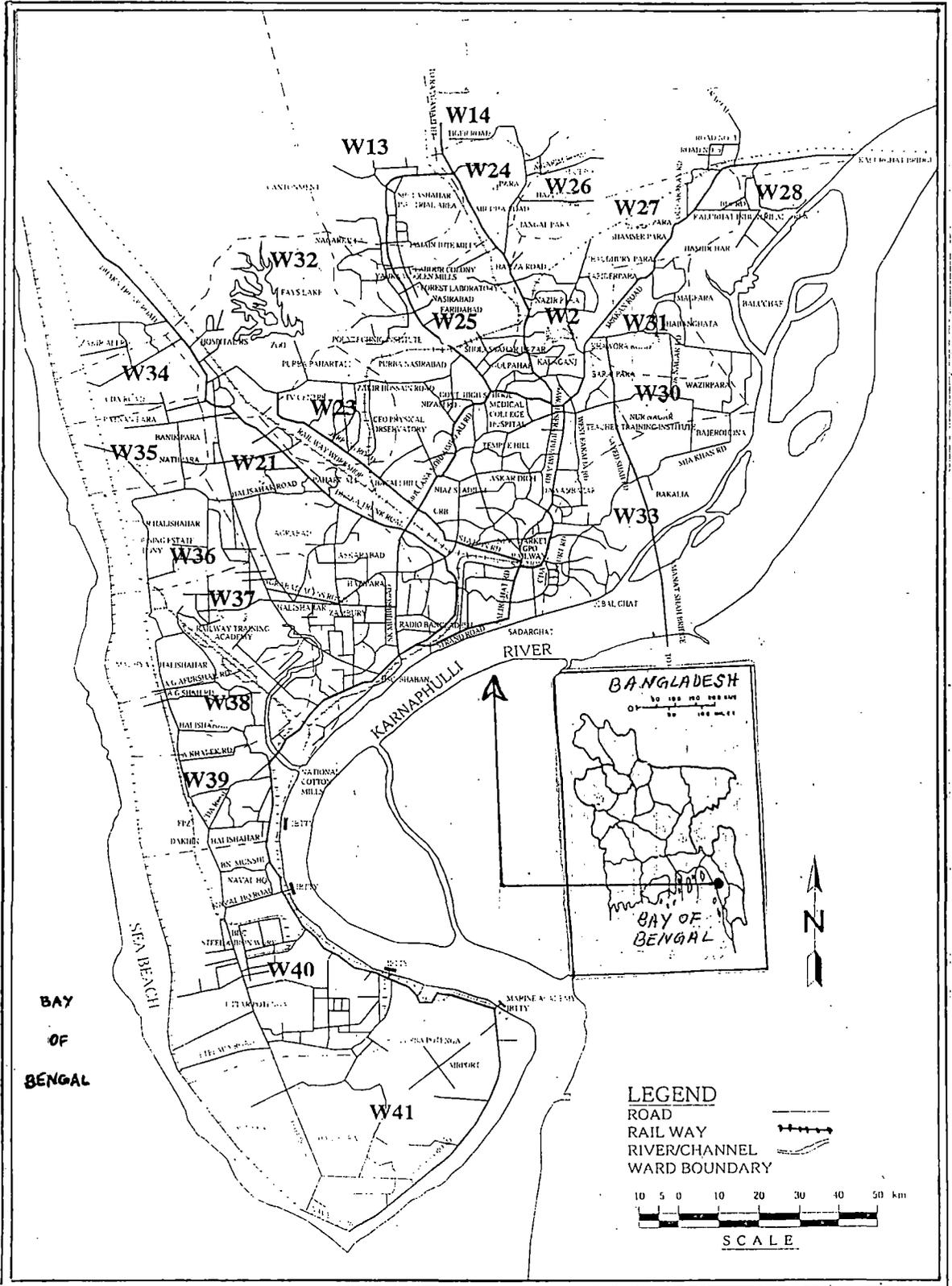
Chittagong is the second largest metropolitan city of Bangladesh. Situated in the southeastern side of the country and on the shore of the Bay of Bengal, Chittagong is an international seaport city. It is the biggest seaport as well as a major gateway of Bangladesh. It is the main site for the establishment of heavy, medium and light industries. The only steel mill and oil refinery of Bangladesh is located here.

According to the 1991 census, there were 23,48,428 people in Chittagong city (BBS, 1999). After Dhaka, Chittagong is the major urban agglomeration in Bangladesh. The average annual rate of change of agglomeration was 4.34 per cent in 1950-55 and it increased to 8.67 per cent in 1965-70 (GOB & UNFPA, 1997: 162). It is important to note that, the population increase is slower in Chittagong than in Dhaka. It took 30 years to double the Chittagong population. The Chittagong population was 0.6 million in 1950 and reached 1.3 million in 1980; and after 1980, it took only 15 years for doubling whereas it was only 10 years for Dhaka (GOB & UNFPA, 1997: 161).

Chittagong city has the highest population density among all the metro cities in the country, i.e., 59,417 per square kilometer (more than double of Dhaka's population density). According to the 1991 census, there were 3,98,594 households in Chittagong with a household size of 5.89. The sex ratio of the city was 133:100. However, presently, the literacy rate of Chittagong city people – about 53 per cent – is the second highest among all the metro cities (DSS & UNDP, 2001: 17 & BBS, 1999). Like Dhaka, Chittagong is also a city of urban poor and slums.

After independence, a lot of slums and unplanned, unauthorized low-cost houses created hazardous and unhealthy conditions in Chittagong. According to the observation of '*Ghashful*', (a local non-governmental organization of Chittagong) since a long time ago, Chittagong attracts both the foreigners and the migrants. Severe rushing of migrants has created health hazards and is responsible for increasing slums in the city. Besides, the rapid growth of slums is also creating a parallel community characterized by vice, prostitution, female trafficking and drugs (Ghashful nd.).

Map 2.3: Map of the Chittagong City Corporation



Source: Baseline Survey of Street Children in Six Divisional Cities of Bangladesh (for ARISE Project); DSS of GOB and UNDP (BGD/97/028), Dhaka, 2001.

### **2.5.3. Khulna – the Industrial City:**

Situated in the south-western part, 'Khulna' is the third biggest metropolitan city of Bangladesh. Like Dhaka and Chittagong, it is a Divisional Headquarter. It is one of the major industrial cities in the country. The second largest seaport 'Mongla Seaport' is close by Khulna. The rivers 'Poshur' and 'Rupsa' are the hearts of this industrial city. It is also the gateway to the Sundarbans. Some of the biggest jute mills, newsprint and hardboard mills, shrimp processing and sea food industries are located here.

In 1991, the population size of the city was 10,01,825, which was 5.2 per cent of total urban population of the country. In recent years (as on 2000) Khulna Metropolitan City has a population of 15 lacs with 3,50,150 households. The population density of Khulna city is 32,609 persons per square kilometer, which is the third highest among the four cities. The average household size is 4.28 – the lowest among the four cities. The current literacy rate in Khulna city is 44.75 per cent, which is the lowest among the four metro cities. The sex ratio in Khulna city, however, is more favourable than that of Dhaka and Chittagong. In 1991, it was 119:100 (DSS & UNDP, 2001: 17 & BBS, 1999).

Khulna is also a major attraction for rural-urban migration specially of the poor villagers of the south-eastern districts of Bangladesh – as it is the famous river port, industrial town, business centre and also the divisional headquarter.<sup>10</sup> There are at least 55 slums and a lot of urban poor in Khulna city. Unplanned urbanization, hazardous urban life, hardcore poverty, lack of public service utility, congested housing among the poor, etc. are also the problems of Khulna city like Dhaka and Chittagong.

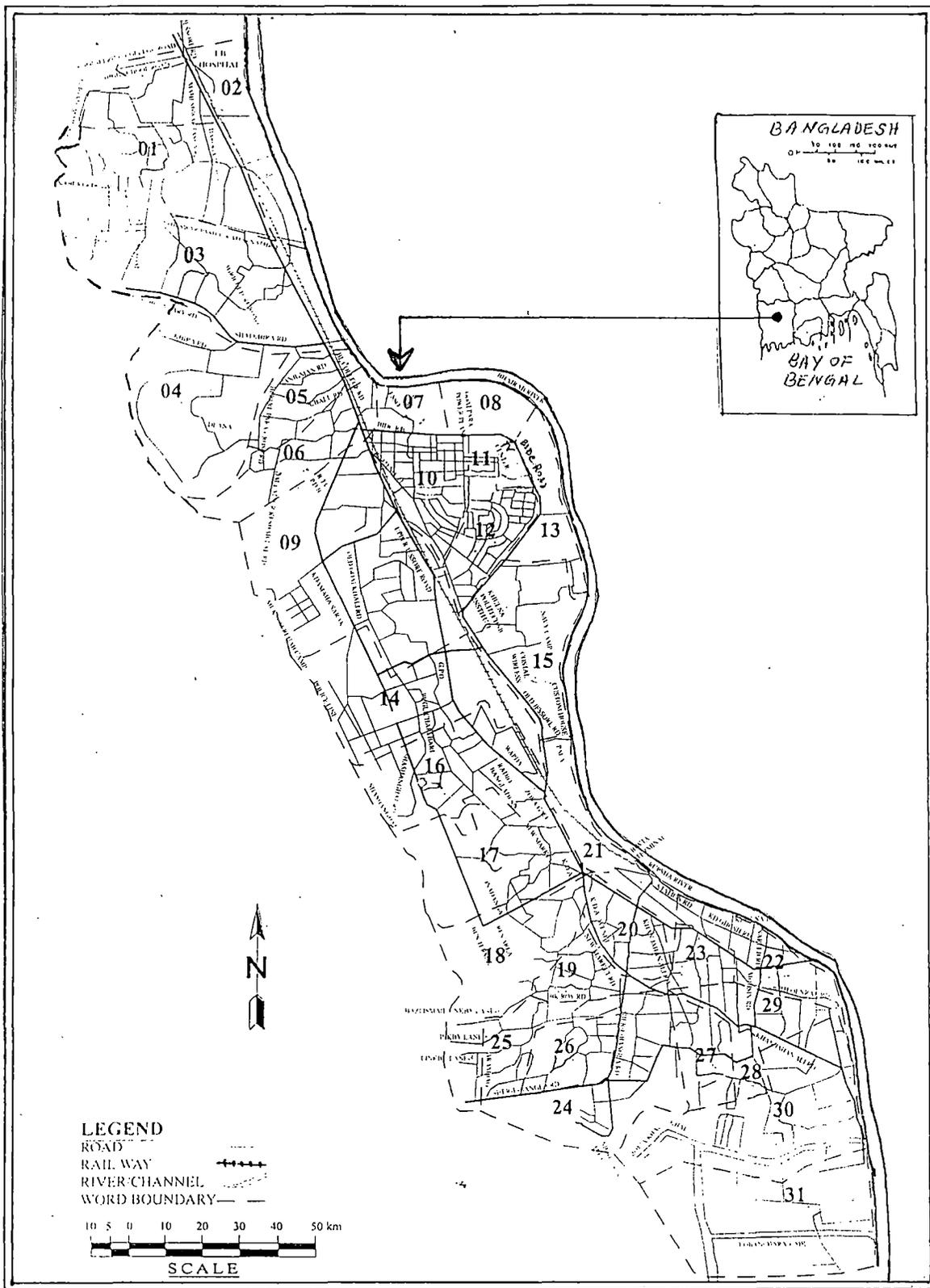
### **2.5.4: Rajshahi City<sup>11</sup> – the Heart of North Bengal:**

Rajshahi city is the north-western divisional and district headquarter of the same name. It is located on the northern bank of the river Padma. The city became a municipality in 1876 and a Municipal Corporation in 1987 and finally a Metropolitan City Corporation in 1992. Rajshahi city can be characterized as an

<sup>10</sup> It may be mentioned that the Barisal Division was under Khulna Division till early 1990s.

<sup>11</sup> Unless otherwise mentioned, the sources of data for this section is: A Review of Existing Services Relating to Street Children (Rajshahi, Bogra and Rangpur) (prepared for ARISE Project), DSS of GOB and UNDP, Dhaka, 1999; pp. 10-13.

Map 2.4: Map of the Khulna City Corporation



Source: *Baseline Survey of Street Children in Six Divisional Cities of Bangladesh* (for ARISE Project); DSS of GOB and UNDP (BGD/97/028), Dhaka, 2001.

administrative and educational centre. As an administrative centre, the city has grown over the years. From the mid-fifties onwards, its growth was due to the establishment of many educational and government institutions.

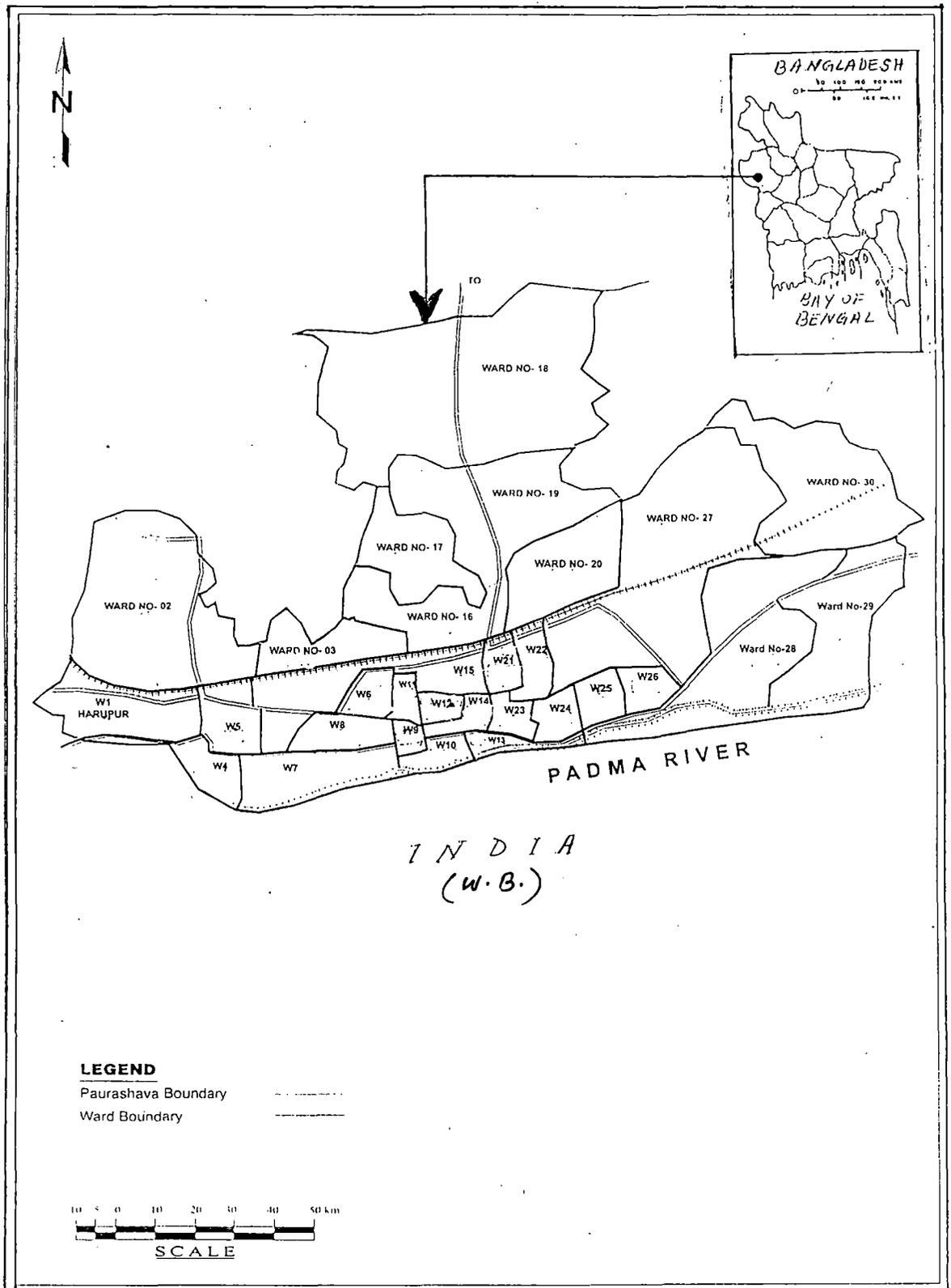
Rajshahi's population density of 6,053 per sq. km. is comparatively very favourable against that of the other metro and major cities (e.g. Barisal, Sylhet, Cumilla, etc.) of Bangladesh. The literacy rate and sex ratio among the city population are also comparatively favourable. In Rajshahi, 58.30 per cent of the city population are literate which is the highest of all the four metro cities. The sex ratio 110:100 (1991) is also the most favourable among all four cities (DSS & UNDP, 2001: 17 & BBS, 1999).

The density of population is very high in the slums. There are about 91 slums in Rajshahi city with a population size of 93,577 – which is more than 16 per cent of the total city population. The growth of the city has taken place, like others, in a haphazard way. There is a greater density of housing in the inner parts around the commercial core and along the major arteries. The lower and poorer class residential areas cover larger areas of the city. (DSS & UNDP, 1999a: 11-12). There are some areas where people live in extreme environmental hazards, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, malnutrition and lack of health, medical and sanitation facilities etc.

### **2.5.5. The General Picture of the Four Metropolitan Cities:**

All these four metropolitan cities are, however, facing urban poverty and many other problems. Nearly half of all the slum population of the country lives in these four cities. The Centre for Urban Studies observed that these urban slums are the most neglected areas in terms of various basic facilities such as housing, sanitation, food, health and education. Very low-income peasants, landless labourers, victims of natural disasters together with a number of rural unemployed comprise bulk of these slum populations (CUS, 1995 as cited in Ehsan M.A. 1999: 157). Naturally, these slum people are extremely poor and have little or no productive resources. These urban poor work mostly in the informal and unorganized sector of the economy. They have a high level of participation in the labour force, yet incomes are low and often irregular. Some 55 per cent of Dhaka's poor have no

Map 2.5: Map of the Rajshahi City Corporation



Source: Baseline Survey of Street Children in Six Divisional Cities of Bangladesh (for ARISE Project); DSS of GOB and UNDP (BGD/97/028, Dhaka, 2001).

access to sanitary latrines. Security is precarious, with threats of eviction from both landowners and statutory authorities – and violence from muscleman. Women are particularly disadvantaged in many ways and they suffer low incomes and threats of violence and abuse (AB, 1999: 5).

Tens of thousands of urban poor in these four metro cities are destitute people, many of whom are homeless. Some are particularly at risk. They are street and working children,<sup>12</sup> working and unemployed adolescents, single mothers with children and the aged beggars, young sex workers, young working migrant women and domestic servants. These poor people also have precarious lives with little security and no protection from those who would abuse or exploit them everyday. Situation in the slums and urban fringes are far worse than that in the rural areas. Compared to the general situation in urban and rural areas, the mortality and morbidity rates are very high in urban slums. The estimates of infant mortality are much higher than that of the national level (152/180 per thousand). The condition of older children (1-4 years) appears to be even worse (114 per thousand). It has been reported in many studies that the prevalence of diseases in slum areas is higher than that of the national average.

However, the issues related to urban hardcore poverty, unemployment, slum and slum-life, illiteracy, gender discrimination, child survival and development problems have been recognized and over the years, specially in the current decade, some initiatives have been in place. The opportunity for improvement and continuity of maintenance of the required intervention need appropriate attention. These relate to maternal and child health, nutrition, accesses to education – specially non-formal primary and technical education, employment opportunity, child rights and survival initiatives, reduction of gaps between socio-economic strata, reduction of gender discrimination and violence against children, etc.