

CHAPTER III

THE STUDIED AREA AND BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDIED PEOPLE

The Studied Area

Anthropological research is primarily based upon the qualitative data which can be collected through the empirical intensive field work. To conduct the anthropological research and the field work, selection of the studied area is a very fundamental and crucial aspect. The study area will be certainly a human settlement like village, hamlet, urban centre, slum area etc. According to the purpose of the study and the target group of population the studied area was selected by the researcher.

Location: The present studied area is located in North Bengal. It is the portion of land lying from the bank of Ganges in the south and the Himalayas in the north, physically called as “North Bengal” within the state of West Bengal. It consisted of six districts viz. Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda. It is surrounded by Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan to the North, Bihar to the West, Assam to the East and Bangladesh and rest of West Bengal to the South. Mountains, valleys and undulated foothills and plains covered by forests and agriculture lands, crisscrossed by rivers and streams has given the place a natural background of unique character. North Bengal is considered to be a place of floral, faunal and cultural diversity. The people of this place are bewildering in socio-cultural variety and ethnicity. The entire region covered the vast Himalayan and sub Himalayan tracts as well as Barind plains spreading over 21, 855 sq.km. and had a population of 17, 204,239 (Census,2011). The region is approximately 0.87 per cent of the land area of India and 24.62 per cent of the total area of West Bengal. This included distinct climatic zones ranging from tropical to naval within its span from the Barind plains of Bengal to the high Himalayas. The climate of North Bengal varied from cold, temperate, alpine to sub tropical type. The elevation range within North Bengal and the resulting geological and pedagogical diversity led to the formation of distinct ecological

and floral zones. The extensive forests that lied along the Himalayan and the Sub Himalayan regions provided rich floral and faunal diversity in the place. Besides these it is very famous for various natural and mineral ores like graphite, calcium, magnesium, brass, lead, dolomite etc. North Bengal is very important to travelers and tourists owing to its scenic beauty and the historical and cultural significance of the place.

North Bengal is the abode of a number of ethnic groups consisting of tribes, castes, religious minorities and other communities who were dwelling since historical times. The entire region is a meeting ground of different ethnic, social and cultural groups. There is a harmony of races and cultures in this place. Different ethnic and social groups lived in North Bengal with their distinct cultures. Due to close interaction, the people of this place also developed some common traits that distinguished them from the people of other regions. Among the total population of North Bengal there were 34 per cent scheduled castes, 12 per cent scheduled tribes, 22 per cent Muslims and 32 per cent other castes and communities. Around 70 per cent of the regional population belonged to the under privileged section. It is to be mentioned here that the most significant aspect of the economic structure of North Bengal is that like others parts of the country, the presence of women in the regular paid workforce tended to be low. In recent years women marginal workers are gradually increasing in off-farm activities, particularly in the vicinity of urban centers, where opportunities are available in construction and house keeping works. On the basis of ecology, material culture and social behaviour, North Bengal could broadly be categorized into three distinguishable but overlapping sub cultural areas or cultural zones viz. i) Hill cultural zone, ii) Foothill cultural zone, iii) Plain cultural zone (Mondal , 2007: 127-141).

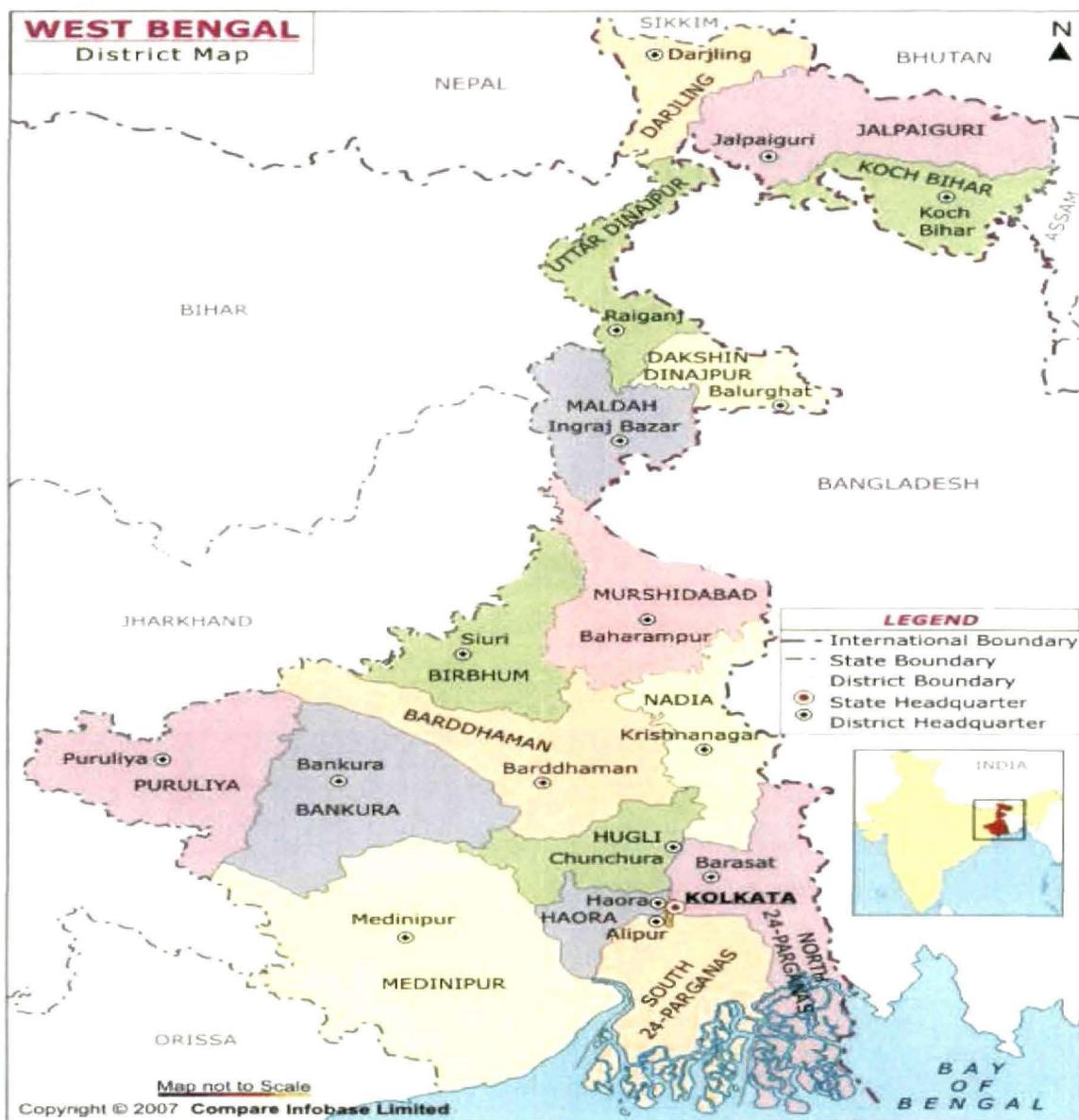
The studied area, Balasan Colony was located in the Sub Himalayan foot hill region beside the Balasan river. The said river had originated in the Darjeeling Himalaya from Lepchajagat peak ($27^{\circ}3'5''$ N latitude and $88^{\circ}14'12''$ E longitude) at an altitude of 2261 meter. It traversed a distance of about 48.60 km to join the river Mahananda at New Jalpaiguri ($26^{\circ}41'36''$ N latitude and $88^{\circ}24'48''$ E longitude). The total basin area of river Balasan was about 367.42 sq. km bounded by latitudes $26^{\circ}40'$ N to $27^{\circ}3'55''$ N and longitudes $88^{\circ}7'$ E to $88^{\circ}25'$ E (Basu and

De, 1998:294). That the river Balasan after entering in the Terai, divides into two streams- one is called as new Balasan, joins the Mahananda just below Siliguri; the other branch old Balasan, continues southward and passes out of the district to join the Mahananda lower down in the Purnea district (O' Malley,2001:6). The present studied area, Balasan colony was located on the Balasan river basin, in its flow under the Atharokhai Gram Panchayat of Matigara block in Darjeeling district. The detail administrative set up of the studied area is as follows. The studied village is named as Balasan Colony which is under the Tari or Tarijot mouza (J.L. no- 68). It is under the Atharokhai Gram Panchayat of Matigara Block. This is under the Sub Division of Siliguri Mahakuma Parishad of Darjeeling District in the state of West Bengal, India.

The location of Matigara block is $26^{\circ} 43' 0''$ N to $88^{\circ} 23' 0''$ E It is to be mentioned here that in the Tari mouza there were a number of villages like Balasan colony, Promadnagar, Palpara (little portion), Jyotirmoy colony, Ramkrishna jot, Helapakri. The total area of Tari mouza was 120.45 hectare,¹ and among the settlements Balasan colony is the oldest and biggest one comprising of an area of 36 hectare (Records of Atharokhai Gram Panchayat, 2007). Regarding the surroundings of the Balasan colony, Simulbari, Tindharia and Darjeeling Himalayan region are located to the North; Matigara, Khaprail are located to the South; Siliguri is situated in the East and Bagdogra, Naxalbari, Panitanki as well as Bihar are located to the West. Nepal is located to the North – west. The studied area is located beside the National Highway 31 which played the key entrance to the gateway of the Siliguri town. Through this way the prime communication of trade, commerce and tourism industry over the entire Northeast India was being executed. Besides it, the N.H.31 is the only transport communication between North Bengal to South Bengal and other adjacent states of India like Assam, Bihar. Moreover it is the sole transportation between India and other international countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. However, from economic and communicational perspective the location of the Siliguri town as well as the studied area had a very significant resemblance. The geographical maps related to the studied area are mentioned below sequentially-

¹ Hectare: The hectare is a unit of area, defined as being 10,000 square meters. 1 hectare = 10 000 m²

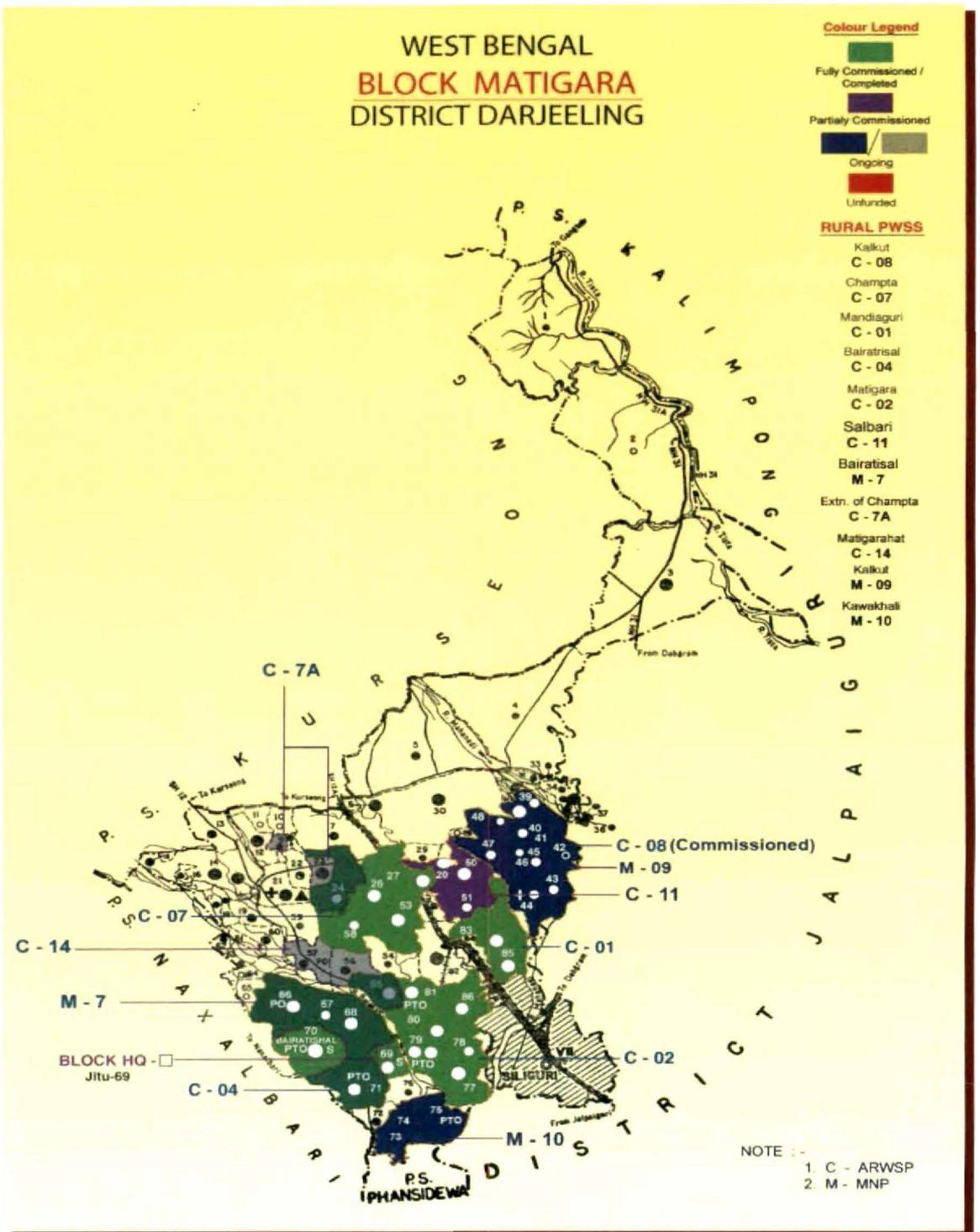
Map 1: MAP OF WEST BENGAL



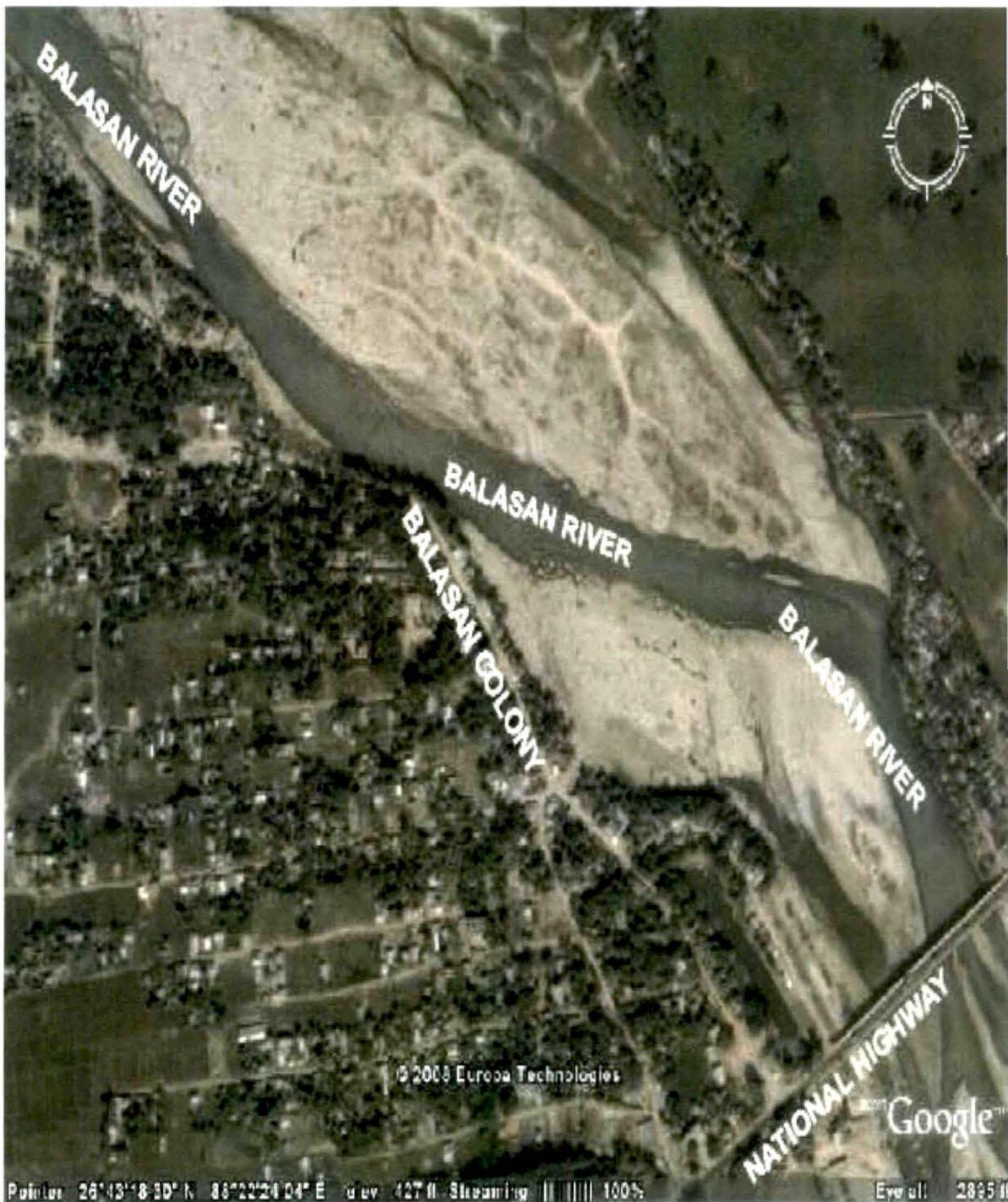
Map 2: MAP OF DARJEELING DISTRICT



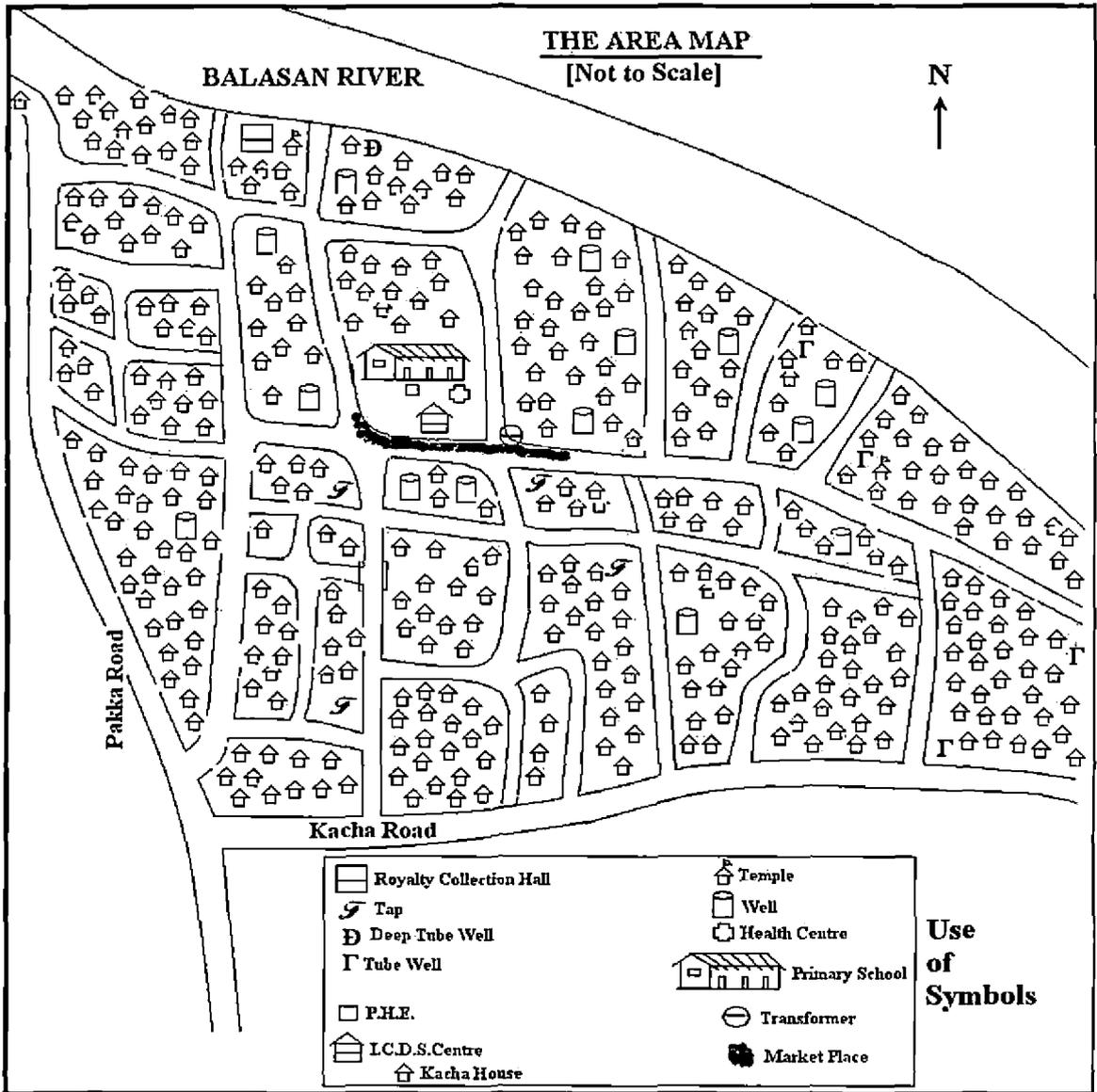
Map 3: MAP OF MATIGARA BLOCK



Map 4: AERIAL MAP OF BALASAN COLONY



Map 5: AREA MAP OF BALASAN COLONY



Geology and soil type: The geological formation of the Darjeeling district is consisted of unaltered sedimentary rocks, confined to the hills on the south and different grades of metamorphic rocks over the rest of the area. The foothills are made of similar but well cemented and more compact alluvial detritus consisted of soft, grey, massive sand stones, mud stones, shales, mottled clays, conglomerates and sub ordinate bands of earthy limestone and lignite. The rocks are of Tertiary age and have been included in the Nahan stage of the Siwalik system of the outer Himalaya. The material is laid down along the foot of the rising Himalaya by an old river system draining the young mountains and is incorporated in the foothills during the latter stages of uplift. Resting over the Siwalik bed is a group of still older rocks consisting of coarse, hard sand stone sometimes silicified into quartzites (O'Malley, 2001:6). Being located at the foothills and on the river bed, the studied area was mostly sandy and rocky. The prevalence of silica was mostly noticed on the land rather than clay or soil. It was mainly due to the fact that the Balasan river in its flow from the high hills carried the natural resources in the form of stone, sand and boulder which got deposited on the river bed since long.

Climatic condition: Weather conditions in different parts of the district had shown a wide variation and their diversity was not only due to the differences of altitude but also due to the configuration of mountains. It deflected winds and effected rainfall and temperature locally to an appreciable extent. During the period of November to May upper winds over the Himalayan region were predominantly westerly. In the pre monsoon months, a southerly air from the Bay of Bengal brought moisture in land in varying quantities. The impact of this current on the cool north- easternly current gave rise to local storms in the plains of Bengal and was with a diurnal convection of air between the hills and the plains at the foothills, the main cause of the frequent local storms which took place in the district during March, April and May. Hailstorm occurred throughout the region during the said months. During the rainy season precipitation was heavy throughout the monsoon months and the average rainfall was 135.60 inches. In the Darjeeling district temperature varied with the altitude. In the foothill region the maximum temperature was 40 degree centigrade and the minimum temperature was 3 degree centigrade. Spring began in March when

there were often strong winds. In the month of June the monsoon began and for three months Darjeeling was exposed to heavy monsoon rain and was usually shrouded in mist. In September a change was expected. The rain gave way to showers which become less and less frequent. During the months of winter from December to March fog occurs (O'Malley, 2001:14-21). However, in the studied area during the period of summer there occurred scorching heat waves due to prevalence of sand and stone. During the period of monsoon the river Balasan got over flooded and the water had a heavy tide, as it is passing to the downward from the high hill region.

Flora and Fauna: The richness and variety of the plants and vegetation of this district are the result of a number of physiographic, climatic, edaphic and biotic factors. The configuration of mountains and hills of the district and the impact upon them of strong moisture laden monsoon winds from the south greatly influenced the character of the vegetation from place to place. The entire Darjeeling district had near about 4,000 species of flowering plants, 300 ferns, and many non flowering plants. In the plains, communities of tall grass *Khagra* (*Saccharum arundinaceum*) and developmental association of *Sishu* (*Dalbergia sissoo*) and *Khaer* (*Acacia catechunoides*) sometimes mixed with Black Sirish (*Albizzia odoratissima*) and Sirish (*Albizzia procera*) cover open river banks and adjoining open areas. In swampy areas, groups *Phragmites karka* are met with. The tree association is mainly of *Sal* (*Shorea robusta*), *Sidha* (*Lagerstroemia parviflora*), *Sindure* (*Mallotus philippensis*), *Arjun*, *Bahera*, *Haritaki* (*Terminalia* sp.) *Madar* (*Erythina variegata*) (O'Malley, 2001:22-23). Particularly in the studied area small grass can be found in an isolated fashion because mostly the river bed is made of sand and stones. The trees are mostly Coconut (*Cocos nucifera*), Betel nut (*Areca catechue*), Mango (*Mangifera indica*), Jackfruit (*Artocarpus heterophyla*), Banyan (*Ficus bengalensis*). There are a few flowering plants like hibiscus or *Jaba* (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*), marigold or *Gada* (*Tajetis patula*), wax flower or *Tagar* (*Tabernaemontana divaricata*), Butterfly pea or *Aparajita* (*Clitoria ternatea*). The studied area was located on the river bed and mostly made up of sand, stones where the presence of soil is hardly to be found. As a result, the scope of vegetation and formation of kitchen garden was a rare occurrence.

On the other hand, the faunal variation of the studied area was quite common with other plain land zones. The prevalence of dog, cat, goat, cow, buffalo were mostly to be noticed. Among the birds' crows, pigeons, doves, sparrow, hens, ducks etc. are mainly observed. During the rainy season, few types of venomous snakes came to the studied area with the tide of water. Among the amphibians, frogs were quite abundant. The tide of the water in the Balasan river was quite noticeable and the concerned people were always engaged in the collection of natural resources from the river. It was not a well suitable habitation for the various types of fishes and they were hardly to be noticed here.

Local market: In the Balasan colony, adjacent to the primary school, there was a very small local market. It was made up of only a few shops of grocery, stationary products, tailoring, cycle repairing, dressing garments etc. There were three tea stalls in the colony and one of them was associated with a sweet shop, it was the biggest one and located adjacent to the primary school. It was a place of public gathering in the evening. In the Balasan colony there were two western medical stalls and one homeopathic medical stalls. All those had a good transaction of medicines among the common mass and in this regard the western medical stalls bore a special emphasis. In the market of Balasan colony very little amount of vegetables and fishes were found. Although they were a little bit cheap from the outward market but their quality and freshness were quite poor. Moreover, the market of Balasan colony was not at all provided with daily livelihood requirement. For this purpose the studied people mostly had to depend on the *haat*² or weekly village market, commenced on Tuesday in Matigara.

Educational institution: In the Balasan colony there was a primary school. Most of the children of the colony were pursuing their primary education in it. Considering the education in high school, the students had to go to *Shivmandir*³ or other distant places because there was no high school in the studied area. During the study there was an ICDS⁴ and a *Sishu Siksha Kendra*⁵ in the colony.

² Haat: In Indian villages a local market is organized once in a week. Here people can purchase their essential commodities at a moderate price. Even they can purchase by exchange of goods too. It is known as *haat*.

³ Shivmandir: A location adjacent to the studied area at a distance of around 1 km named after the temple of Lord Shiva.

⁴ ICDS: Integrated Child Development Scheme, a special developmental programme of Government of India. It is related with the educational and social development of children particularly in the poverty stricken families.

Health care facilities: In the studied area there was only a health sub centre. People with their ailment were mostly dependent on it. But the concerned sub centre was not provided with adequate medical facilities or other pathological instruments. In this regard, often in serious cases the patients of the studied area had to go either to Matigara Primary Health Centre located at a distance of around four kilometers from the studied area or directly to North Bengal Medical College located at a distance of more than six kilometer from the studied area. Regarding pathological tests and other clinical diagnosis, they had to depend on the concerned centres located at a farther distance from the studied area.

Water sources: In the Balasan colony there were four tap line connections, however two were functional, four tube wells and thirteen wells. The tap line and tube wells were for the common usage. Most of the wells were common accessible while only a few were used individually for domestic courses. These were established primarily under the initiative of the local Panchayat of the studied area. Meanwhile, due to the influence of a local doctor, few years ago the World Bank provided monetary support to the local Panchayat of the studied area to establish a PHE for purified drinking water under the observation of Dutch engineers. But the villagers could not get the concerned facility due to malfunctioning of the machine since half a decade. Despite the above mentioned sources of water, often in many cases the studied people directly use the water of the Balasan river for their household courses and even sometime for drinking.

Means of communication: The path within the Balasan Colony was mostly made up of narrow lanes of sand and stones. On the other hand, the road which passed through the Balasan bazaar to the outside areas was also similarly constructed. The huts within the colony or the individual dwelling houses were not demarcated from their adjacent houses with distinct boundary. In most of the cases, communication between two adjacent huts could be made easily through the courtyard. The people often crossed the river by walking to go to other end. Among the common dwellers of the colony the prime means of outside communication was the bicycle and in many case they used the rickshaw too.

⁵ *Sishu Siksha Kendra*: A mission of the Government of India, related to the education of children in rural areas.

Settlement type: The Balasan colony was a densely populated area. The huts were very close to one another and were arranged continuously along the both sides of the ways. Throughout the entire colony there were no such vacant places or discontinuation of settlement. It would be rather very tough to demarcate a house from the other or to identify it as a separate entity. Moreover, due to such congestion of the household, the prevalence of improper sanitation, sewage and drainage system was a common phenomenon in the entire studied area. Most of the houses were located adjacent to the Balasan river and only a few houses were a little bit distant from the river in comparison. Even most of the houses were so much close to the river that their household courses were often being executed with the river water.

Playground and recreational sectors: In the studied area, due to huge population density, there were hardly any vacant places as a playground for the children. Most of the children and even the teenagers seldom used to play in the primary school ground. There was a big play ground adjacent to the Balasan river where most of the youths and the adults played a number of games if they rarely got any leisure period. Mainly the youths and the young cumulatively approached to build up a local club in the studied area which was situated on the primary school ground. The middle aged males and females were very much busy with their work throughout the entire day time and they had a very mere scope to spend in leisure. Generally the male folk spent their leisure time in the evening by gossiping and playing cards as well as by several other means. On the other hand females had a very mere scope for it even after the dusk due to their household courses. The older male generation of the colony was also very much attached with the work throughout the entire day. Their means of recreation was to sit together in the tea stalls and spent their times by several other means. The older females were mostly engaged in their household courses after the dusk. A number of religious celebrations used to take place in the primary school ground. In the big ground located on the river bed, the major merriments of the common people were happened during the festive days along with local fairs.

Brief demographic aspects of the studied area: The studied area namely Balasan colony was located in Tari mouza (area code 00040400) of Matigara block (area code 0009) in Darjeeling district (Area code 01) of West Bengal (State code 19).

According to Census 2011 the population of Darjeeling district was 1842034. The total population of Matigara block was 1,29,326 among which 68004 were males and 61322 were females. Among the total population of Matigara block, the literate population was 71006 among whom 43505 (61.27%) were male and 27,501 (38.73%) were female. Among the total population of the block the total workers were 47063 (36.40%). Among them the main workers were 41625 (32.20%) and the marginal workers were 5438 (4.20%). The total working population was engaged in a number of activities like cultivation (5.20%), agricultural labour (4.0%), household industry works (2.20%) and other works (88.60%) (Census, 2011).

Further in the Tari mouza, there were total 10037 people among whom 5047 were male, 4990 were female and the sex ratio was 989. The household size was 4.9. Among the total population, 3818 (47.20%) were literate. Out of total literate population 2482 (60.60%) were male and 1336 (33.40) were female, while the gender gap in literacy was 27.2. Out of total population the working population was 4455 (44.40%) among whom the male were 2845 (56.40%) and the female were 1610 (32.30%). Among the total working population the main workers were 3933 and the marginal workers were 522. The working population of Tari mouza could broadly be categorized into cultivation (3.0%), agriculture labour (0.90%), household industry (9.60%) and other worker (86.50%) (Census, 2011).

During the field work from 2006-2013 it was reported from the local Panchayat that there were total 1079 number of families covering the areas of Promadnagar, Balasan colony, Ramkrishna jot, Jyotirmoy colony with a population of 5895. Among these settlements, the Balasan colony was the largest area and it was mostly populated. It was broadly divided into two sections, viz. (i) *ucha* or upper Balasan colony which was comparatively far from the river bed and (ii) *nicha* or lower Balasan colony which was comparatively very much close to the river bed. The population structure and sex ratio of the studied area is represented through the following tables.

Table 3.1: Distribution of population on the basis of age and sex

Age Group (in years)	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
0-4	180	48.52	191	51.48	371	100
5-9	102	48.34	109	51.66	211	100
10-14	85	57.43	63	42.57	148	100
15-19	75	58.14	54	41.86	129	100

20-24	73	50.69	71	49.31	144	100
25-29	68	51.91	63	48.09	131	100
30-34	51	48.11	55	51.89	106	100
35-39	46	56.1	36	43.9	82	100
40-44	48	51.06	46	48.94	94	100
45-49	32	46.38	37	53.62	69	100
50-54	40	61.54	25	38.46	65	100
55-59	15	50	15	50	30	100
60-64	19	57.58	14	42.42	33	100
65-69	8	66.66	4	33.33	12	100
70 and above	8	66.66	4	33.33	12	100
TOTAL	850	51.92	787	48.08	1637	100

Source: Field Study

Table 3.2: Distribution of the population on the basis of sex ratio

Age Group (in years)	Male	Female	Sex Ratio
0-4	180	191	1061
5-9	102	109	1068
10-14	85	63	741
15-19	75	54	720
20-24	73	71	972
25-29	68	63	926
30-34	51	55	1078
35-39	46	36	782
40-44	48	46	958
45-49	32	37	1156
50-54	40	25	625
55-59	15	15	1000
60-64	19	14	736
65-69	8	4	500
70 and above	8	4	500
TOTAL	850	787	925

Source: Field Study

In the entire Balasan Colony there were total 357 families with a population of 1793 and among them 931 were males, 862 were females and the sex ratio was 925. Among them 325 families were involved in the stone based occupation. The present study has been done on all of the 325 families who were involved in the stone based occupation and it was their major source of earning. However the total population of the studied families in the Balasan Colony was 1637 among whom 850 (51.92%) were males and 787 (48.08%) were females, while the sex ratio was 925 (Table 3.1 and Table 3.2). Most of the concerned people were involved in the stone crushing economy irrespective of any age or sex biasness. The formation of Balasan Colony and the detail socio-economic and socio-cultural analysis of the concerned people are described simultaneously in further.

By demography we primarily mean the statistical or numerical representation of human population and their different socio-economic and livelihood indicators. In any anthropological research it is very essential to know about the demographic composition of the studied population to get a brief about the different socio-economic parameters and probable cause of emerging social issues. The brief demographic feature of the studied area is represented below through the following table-

Table 3.3: Demographic profile of the studied area

Demographic criterion	West Bengal	Darjeeling	Matigara Block	Tari Mouza
Area (in Km ²)	88,752	3,149	143	120.45 hecter
Population	91,347,197	1,842,034	129326	10037
Male	46,927,389	93,47,96	68004	5047
Female	44,420,347	9,07,328	61322	4990
Sex Ratio	947	971	901	989
Density of population	1029	585	904	930
Literate population	62,614,556	13,28,218	71,006	3818
Literacy rate	77.08	79.92	64.23	47.2
Total worker	36,53,8878	6,99,972	47,063	4,455
Work participation rate	40	38	36.4	44.4

Source: Census of India, 2011.

It is to be mentioned here that the studied people in the Balasan colony were all belonged to the Rajbanshi community, which was the numerically dominant scheduled caste group of North Bengal. In this regard, before discussing their issue of migration it would be quite relevant if their earlier settlement, as well as socio-economic and socio-cultural life can be discussed in brief.

Historical Background of the Studied People

Rajbanshi- The Dominant Scheduled Caste Group of North Bengal: In North Bengal after absorption of Hinduism through the process of Sanskritization (Kshatriyaization), some indigenous groups were initiated into the caste system and through this process some mongoloid communities have entered in Bengal caste society. A caste known as Rajbanshi Kshatriya has emerged through this process. Their physical characteristics are mainly fair, yellow, darker and black skin, their nose is flat, tip of nose is broad, high cheekbones and thick lips, eyes are generally small and slightly oblique. This caste has a definite position in the local Hindu caste society. The Rajbanshis were a heterogeneous group as there

were segments among them whose social background and attributes of culture were based on the Sanskritization process (Mondal, 2007:38). Previously they were the tribal Koch but gradually they got the status of caste population (Doshi and Jain, 1999). They were considered as the largest group of scheduled castes of North Bengal. The Rajbanshis lived in almost all the districts of North Bengal. They were primarily agriculturists. Some were involved in petty business, a few were in service sector and a large section of them were wage earners. They considered themselves as a Kshatriya Varna and worshiped Hindu Gods and Goddesses along with some folk deities (Mondal, 2007: 138). They were very much influenced by Vaishnavism and their folk tradition was very rich. They had their own dialect (*Bahe*). Due to agro-based economy they mainly followed the joint family pattern. The kinship bond among the kin members was very strong, and interaction with neighbourhood was full of affection and co-operation. The community sentiment was very much prevalent in their whole society.

The Rajbanshis were found throughout the undivided Bengal from a prolonged period and it was mainly in Rangpur, Dhaka, Dinajpur; Purnea in Bihar; Goalpara in Assam. In the present West Bengal they were mainly concentrated in Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling (Terai Region), Malda, and North and South Dinajpur districts. Different census records highlights the distribution of Rajbanshi population in West Bengal as mentioned below-

Table 3.4: Census record of Rajbanshi population

Census Year	The Rajbanshi population
1872	290,584
1891	30,508
1901	939,291
1911	1,218,346
1921	1,165,141
1931	1,209,612
1941	826,640
1951	742,619
1991	2839481
2001	3,386,617
2011	3,801,677

Source: Sanyal, 1965:1; Census 1991, Census 2001, Census 2011

Table 3.5: Scheduled Caste Population in North Bengal

District	Total Population	Schedule castes Population	Percentage	Rajbanshi population
Darjeeling	1846823	317275	17.18	163,391
Jalpaiguri	3872846	1458278	37.65	922,603
Koch Bihar	2819086	1414336	50.17	1,063,369
Uttar Dinajpur	3007134	807950	26.87	498,004
Dakshin Dinajpur	1676276	482754	28.50	260958
Malda	3988845	835430	20.94	159456

Source: Census of India 2011

Socio-Cultural Life of the Traditional Rajbanshis

The Rajbanshis were mostly agricultural people. Their villages were not found inside the forests but in the open space in the middle of their agricultural land. They preferred to build their houses on their own lands, rather than selecting a common land to build a village for a group of persons having their cultivated lands elsewhere. The traditional Rajbanshis had their own means of cultural heritages in every aspect. These were discussed below in brief-

Formation of Household: When a Rajbanshi bought or took settlement of a plot of land for house building, he called a *panijar* (Rajbanshi pandit) to see if the land would be suitable for the purpose. He came and drew some figures on the earth to determine the position of the stars and other astrological factors. If the reports were favourable then the owner was advised to build a house. There was a common saying about the plan of house- *Areca* on the north, open on the south, ducks (Pond) on the east, bamboo on the west. Hence an areca grove on the north served as a wind break. Refreshing wind came from the south and hence it should be kept open. The pond was the prime source of water for the household and thus it should be kept in the east to get the ample sunshine. Western setting of the sun was not good for health and the storm came from the western side. Hence a bamboo grove should have grown in the western side. A Rajbanshi house had two portions- an outer portion and an inner fenced portion.

The outer portion was the biggest portion of their house. It was the parlour, guest room, meeting place and business room. The posts, stringers and purlins of a straw hut were all made of bamboo. The walls were made of bamboo mats called *chatai*. The doors were usually an opening on one side of the greatest length of

the front wall. The door cover was made up of a bamboo mat encased within a bamboo frame. The door latch is also made up of a piece of bamboo. The opening of the bamboo was considered as the window. In the Rajbanshi villages there were plentiful of bamboo bushes. The requirements of their household implements could be achieved at close vicinity and without any sort of financial expenditure. At a fair distance from the dwelling rooms the cattle bier was located, made up of thatched hut and earthen floor. Its walls were made up of bamboo splits. It was present in every household. The presence of cattle wealth in almost every household reveals the fact that the concerned people could easily accumulate the fodder for their animals. On the contrary, they could have the access of animal protein in their regular diet. In almost all the cultivating houses granary was present in one corner of the courtyard whose floor were made up of bamboo platform and roof made up of straw. Further, on one side of the outer yard, two very small huts of bamboo enclosures could be seen. Between them, the northern hut facing the south contained the image of goddess Kali and the one which was placed to the right angles of the former was for *Monosa devi* or snake goddess.

The inner apartment consisted of four separate huts on four sides with a courtyard in the middle. The *Bastu ghar* was located at the northern side facing southward is reserved for the family deity. The whole area was plastered with a cow dung solution. The raised platform thus made forms the seat of the deity. In it a decorated bamboo wrapped in red coloured cloth represents the house hold deity. Usually nobody slept in this room. The cooking hut was located on the southern side of the yard facing north, having a floor area of 108 square foot. The sleeping huts were made on the eastern and western side of the yard. At the north-east corner of the inner yard there was a space for tulsi plant (*Ocimum sanctum*) raised on the earthen platform. At one side of the inner yard there were two earthen woven to boil the paddy for the daily use and other household purposes. They had no latrine in their household. The people generally went to the farthest distance in the open field or jungle for this purpose. Usually they had an open well in one side of their courtyard. In every Rajbanshi household the kitchen garden was present in which they could cultivate a number of mucillagenous plants, garlic, chilly, radish, brinjal, onion, sweet gourd, white gourd, gourd, pumpkin, cucumber and so on (Sanyal, 1965: 22-27). The said vegetables could be a part of

their daily diet. They had plentiful of opportunity to consume the fresh and nutritive food within their own premises without any sort of financial expenditure or dependency on market. The refuses of the households and cattle were heaped to the back side of their houses and at a farther distance from the living quarters to prepare the compost. In this way the household of the traditional Rajbanshi people were made up, where they had an ample opportunity to live in a healthy and pollution free atmosphere.

Dress and Ornaments: The Rajbanshi male wore only a loin cloth while engaged in cultivation work, but while went out of the village they wore full cloth and a shirt to cover their body and in the winter they wore a chuddar. The adult women wore one piece of cloth called *phota*⁶ tied around the chest which hangs upto the knees. They were all hand woven and dyed in red and blue. The married women with husband living did not always use vermilion on their fore head nor did they wear iron bangles on their wrist. The women with husband living could be identified by the conch shell bangles of 8-12 pieces fixed together. But the widows if got remarried they were not permitted to use conch shell bangles or any sort of vermilion. The women used several silver ornaments which were rather the specialities of their material culture and were not seen any where else in Bengal. Rajbanshi men usually did not wear ornaments. Some of them were found to wear a thin silver ring on the right index or little finger. Their women used variety of ornaments which were mostly made up of silver and were usually thick and heavy. The surplus money was deposited in the form of ornaments. They had a number of ornaments for their head, ear, nose, neck, finger, wrist, hand, arm, waist, leg and foot. All of them were not always worn. Many of them were reserved for ceremonial occasion (Sanyal, 1965:37-39).

Daily Livelihood: An adult Rajbanshi male cultivator woke up from bed before the sun had risen and after that he went to the cattle shed, took the agricultural implements and went to the field for ploughing. When the sun rises a little bit, around 8-9 a.m. he came back with the domestic cattle like cows, bullocks to take rest for a little while and to have some food either with puffed rice and molasses or the rice cooked in the previous night. It was not the custom of the Rajbanshi Hindus to have the food carried to the field. A Rajbanshi cultivator would never

⁶ Phota: In the villages of Bengal women wore a piece of cloth, which covers their body from chest upto knee.

touch any food until he washed himself clean after his field work. He went to the field again and worked until he can bear the heat of the sun. After returning home he took his bath and lunch. Then he took rest for a little while and when the heat of the sun abates he went out to the field to work until evening. After the tiffin with tea and puffed rice, he went on gossiping and other merriments in the evening with his fellow neighbourhood. A Rajbanshi woman of a village woke up from bed before the day break. She washed her face with cold water. She took a broom and swept the house. Then she put some paddy in an earthen pitcher and poured some water. She then set fire to the woven and allowed the paddy to boil. Thereafter she plastered the floor of the kitchen with a bundle of jute dipped in the cow-dung emulsion. Then it was the time for her to prepare food for husband and the children. When the men had gone out for the ploughing for the second time the women had to busy to cook the rice etc. which was believed to be nutritious and tasteful for them. They also prepared chattered rice (*tsura*) and puffed rice (*muri*) at their home. The adult males were served with food at noon. The adult women and daughters never took food in presence of adult male. The women never tilled the land with plough but they helped the male with allied agricultural works.

After taking her bath she smeared the *thakurbari* or *tulsi mancha*⁷ with cow dung emulsion. The women also looked after the kitchen garden and collection of fuel. The children had their tasks too. The boys after getting a little elder helped their father in agricultural works while the girls were mainly busy with their mother in household courses. The elder people did not go to the agricultural works but they looked after the young in the houses.

Living conditions: A Rajbanshi cultivator led a very simple life. A common Rajbanshi male took bath every day in all season and smeared his hair with oil occasionally. Every day after bathing he washed the cloth for more than one day except his acute illness. A Rajbanshi woman was also very clean in her habit. She must took bath every day before her cooking and also came back from the toilet. She wore the *phota* without any other dress and wore a fresh cloth regularly after the bathing. Besides she often cleaned her with locally available materials.

⁷ Tulsi mancha: It is the sacred place for the Rajbanshi families within their household territory. Here they kept the throne of their household deity.

Sleeping and Sitting: A simple Rajbanshi cultivator family prepared *machang* made up of bamboo or areca stem. Straw from the paddy plants was spread on the *machang* and a jute bed cover was laid on the straw. They had a few regulations on sleeping. The unmarried aged girls slept with the wife of father's elder brother or with the grand mother. She must slept separately from their parents. Generally they used bamboo made *machang* for the sitting particularly in shadow covered places while the crude chairs or wooden benches were used as a seat of honour for government officials and other very respectable person.

Cleaning of Cloths and Utensils: Generally they cleaned the cloths by locally made alkali produced from ash and straw. They cleaned their utensils with ash and soil. The exterior portion of the heavy utensils made up of bell metal, brass or iron were cleaned twice a week and their interior portions were cleaned daily (Sanyal, 1965:27-32).

Social Structure of the Traditional Rajbanshi Community

A poor Rajbanshi cultivator had a simple family. Among them the practice of joint family or extended family could be noticed easily. The family was patrilineal and patrilocal with recognition of social relations with the kin on both sides. The household contained the dependent members from the fathers' side and sometimes from the mothers' side also. Rarely a married son broke away from the family and lived elsewhere. The oldest man or woman of a family was the head, whom everybody was expected to obey (Sanyal, 1965:124). Among them a division of labour could be seen between the male and female which was ultimately related with their prime economic pursuit of agricultural works. The cumulative effort was to ensure the production of crop. They had a common sharing on the resources of daily livelihood. Among the agricultural Rajbanshi families the food and other common minimum resources of daily livelihood could be accumulated easily from their local environment without any sort of economic expenditure mostly. Ultimately a Rajbanshi cultivator family in the village was almost dependent on nature for their daily livelihood.

Among the traditional Rajbanshi families, the kinship based social interaction was very strong. The kinship based norms, regulations as well as its rules of avoidance was practiced by them very strictly to maintain their social regulations, customs, rather to sustain their social structure and social solidarity. The kin bound

relatives inhabited mostly in the same village or to the adjacent villages. They shared their joys and sorrows with each other. In almost every familial occasion all the kin members had a common participation and merriment. They uphold their relation not for the sake of any material interest but to maintain their familial integrity and affection to each other.

In a traditional Rajbanshi village almost all the families were engaged in agricultural work but any sort of competition or conflict over the economic pursuits could never be seen. Moreover, quarrel regarding the production of crop or any other allied issues was rarely to notice. Throughout the entire village social peace and communal integrity could be noticed. The entire village community participated altogether in each others joys with utter merriment. On the contrary they shared their sorrows with each other. The family and their kin members played the prime role in the psychological development of the children. They learnt the first lesson of their social and cultural heritage from the family members. The social interaction with the neighbourhood gradually developed the community consciousness among the children and it created fellow feelings among the members of the society. Being an agricultural community, the adult males were engaged in the field for the entire day, while the females were mostly busy in the household courses. Under this circumstance, children were kept by their grandparents. In a traditional Rajbanshi society co-operation, peace and social harmony was well prevalent. It is to be mentioned here that the headmen of the families in the village functioned as the village panchayat and disposed the issues related to quarrel and conflict under the domain of village Panchayat. However these types of contradictions rarely occurred. It is to be mentioned here that in the village panchayat women were not entertained at all (Sanyal, 1965:124).

Customs Related to Birth- Marriage and Death

(i) *Issues related to child birth:* When a married woman missed the menstrual courses then she was believed to be pregnant. She informed the matter to her husband and other elderly members of the family. In this period she was not considered unclean and she was allowed to go about her regular household works of cooking and allied courses. She might eat whatever she likes. But there were few restrictions on her during this period. She was not allowed to move alone at

night or to attend any funeral or to attend any post funeral ceremony. If she did then evil spirits may possess her. She should not move out from the houses on Tuesday and Saturday and she should not cross any river that might harm her baby in the womb or even cause death. On the other hand, the husband was restricted to carry a funeral bier or to kill or sacrifice any animal with own hand. He must not took any food in the post funeral ceremony. In case of any health problem during this period they never used any sort of allopathic medicine, rather they called an *ojha*⁸. During the period of sixth or ninth month they offered a prayer to the household *tulsi mancha* or *thakur bari*. Generally they used the living room as the lying-in room. The birth was successfully completed by the mid-wife and immediately after birth the child was allowed to get a touch of the bare earth to take the blessing of the mother earth. Then the umbilical cord of the child was cut with the thin and freshly prepared green bamboo split. The cord was tied up with a fine rope made of jute. After cutting off the placenta, a hole was made inside the room. Then the mother covered the placenta with a plantain leaf then puts it inside the hole and covers it tightly. The placenta was not buried outside the hut. The child was washed with cold water and mustard oil. The mother after a little rest cleaned the rooms with the emulsion of cow dung. She took bath and cleaned her blood stained cloths with hot water. However, she was not allowed to touch the well and the water for the said purposes was drawn by the other woman of the house. During labour pain and child birth the mother was not given any food. After four to five hours of child birth she was given fried rice with juice of ginger or boiled rice with black pepper. During this period she was not given rice at night and fish, milk for a week. She mainly took puffed rice or chattered rice in the said period. After about a week from 7th to 9th day, a village barber was called. He foremostly cut a little hair of the village headman. Afterwards, he shaved the hair of the child with a razor and the nails of the mother were paired. These were covered in plantain leaf and dipped under the plantain tree. Then the mother took a ceremonial bath from the pond and changed her clothing. Then some *Ganga*⁹ water or water dipped with basil leaves was sprinkled on her and the child as well as on all the objects of the lying- in-room which made the uncleaned period over.

⁸ Ojha: In the villages of India ojha is the traditional magico-religious healer. The villagers were depended on him for the ailment of different diseases. He used local medicinal plant resources for the same. He even could redress the venomous effects of the poisonous snakes.

⁹ Ganga: It is the longest and mythologically most scared river of India.

Even the father of the child remained unclean for these days and he was not allowed to do the field work. The barber also made him purify by shaving the hairs and cutting the nails. Then he took bath and wore a fresh cloth. He got sanctified with the sprinkling of tulsī leaf dipped water and purified thereby. Meanwhile, the child was fed by breast milk for two to three years, even in some cases it was continued upto five years. The grand parents selected an auspicious day and the mother took her child to the local temple of *Lord Shiva*¹⁰ in the village where the name of the child was given by the *Adhikary*¹¹. Often the entire ceremony was being performed in front of the *thakurbari* or *tulsī manch* along with the offerings and other concerned rituals by the priest. The first rice feeding ceremony took place during the sixth to ninth month of age of the child. The maternal uncle had the first claim to officiate the ceremony. The rituals were performed under the supervision of *Adhikary*. These rituals were celebrated with utter enthusiasm by the close kin members, neighbours along with music, dance and other rituals altogether (Sanyal, 1965:61-64, 68, 71-73).

(ii) *Issues related to marriage*: The Rajbanshis were generally endogamous in the rules of marriage. But in many cases they had formed marital relation with the Meches, BabuKoch, Dhimal and caste Hindus. In most of the cases they practiced the monogamy but Polygyny was also common among them. The practice of marrying elder brother's widow was not uncommon. Regarding the age at marriage about half a century ago the marriageable age of the girl was 16 and 17, while that of the boy was 21 and 22. There was always a bride-price attached to a girl and as such marriage by purchase was the rule. Among the Rajbanshis the marriages were organized on the basis of negotiation. It was generally settled by the parents or by the elders of the family. The matter of consent did not arise at all. Previously the mother of the boy or an elderly woman of the family used to go to the girl's house to talk about the marriage, but in many cases the father of the boys went to the girl's house. Before starting to go to the girl's house for talking about the first negotiation of the marriage, a cow worship ceremony was done. They had a number of rituals in the marriage from the *adhibas*¹² to the *bashi bia*¹³ (rituals

¹⁰ Shiva: He is the most powerful God according to Hindu mythology, who is also known as the destructor.

¹¹ Adhikary: He is the local priest of the Rajbanshi community.

¹² *Adhibas*: According to the rules of Hindu marriage *adhibas* is the concerned rituals which are performed before the day of marriage.

after the day of marriage). In the entire marriage ceremony the kin members, other relatives and neighbourhood enjoyed with utter merriment. It was a rare happening that any of the close kin member was absent in the marriage ceremony. Particularly the female folk enjoyed a lot with the newly married bride and a strong kinship attachment was being formed between the bride and her relatives of in-laws. Meanwhile, divorce was a simple affair. There was no question of any maintenance allowance because the women were economically independent too. Divorce occurred very smoothly and not overburdened with complications like caste- Hindus. After the marriage, the newly married bride had to follow strict restriction on her movements in front of her male- in- law. She never sat beside her father-in-law or elder brother-in-law. These restrictions were mainly imposed to abide by the kinship norms of avoidance (Sanyal, 1965:88-117).

(iii) *Issues related with death*: When a man was about to die then he was made to drink a little amount of water from the *Ganga* or the water in which a few tulsi leaves were dipped. He was allowed to die in the bed room. After death the corpse was brought out and laid on the ground on a jute or reed mat which was spread near the *thakur bari*. The place where the body was to be laid is first cleaned, besmeared with cow dung emulsion and sprinkled with water in which a few basil leaves were dipped. The head of the corpse was always placed in north. After the death, friends and other relatives prepared a bamboo bier. The body was placed on the bier with crosses of ropes passed round the body. Normally the sons and very near relatives carried the body to the adjacent river. The Rajbanshis burnt their dead body. Generally in case of death due to cholera, snake bite, small pox, suicide, children before teething the bodies were buried. During study they burnt the dead bodies except in the cases of the children before teething. They made the pyre made up of wood or bamboo. After having bath, the corpse was laid fully stretched on the pyre with the face towards the sky and the head towards the north. The eldest or the youngest son of the deceased took a torch of the jute sticks and ignited it. Then they dug up the frontal bone. Before coming back to the home they took their bath in a nearby pond or river. They must had to touch the fire lit by other people and be sprinkled on the head with water on which a few basil leaves were dipped. On the third or twelfth day the frontal bone was taken out and broken

¹³ *Bashi bia* : According to the rules of Hindu marriage bashi bia is the concerned rituals which are performed after the day of marriage.

into eight pieces to form the miniature of a human being and some offerings were made. The son who lighted the pyre was laid on the earthen floor for twelve days and he wore the same cloth for the said period. On this very day, a village barber was called and the head was shaved. The purification ceremony of the body in the burning ghat was performed and the cloth was changed. A number of rituals were performed in the said occasion. On the thirteenth day the *sraddha*¹⁴ ceremony was organized in the house of the deceased in presence of an *Agrodani Brahmin*¹⁵ (a Brahmin of lower order than priest) with a number of rituals for the peace of the departed soul. In the evening of the same day the close kin members and other relatives were invited for the feast with rice, fish and meat. However, with their permission the sons of the deceased and the others were allowed to take non vegetarian food as well as their mourning period was over. After the death of the father, the eldest son became the familial headman and everybody should abide by his advices. But their mothers also took part to decide the familial matters along with the eldest son.

The social structure and social organization of the traditional Rajbanshi society was based on strong kinship bondage and community consensus. They had a strong in-group feeling and their community sentiment was continued through generation after generation. Being an agricultural community, land was their prime property and their entire family had an affiliation with the agricultural work. They practiced joint family system because it required a hard manual labour to cultivate the crops. They entire family worked as the production unit and they equally shared the common resources. Even, when the aged persons became physically weak to work regularly, they were not neglected by the other family members because they had the access over plentiful of resources. On the other hand, their all sorts of livelihood requirements could be accumulated from the nature very easily without any sort of strenuous effort or economic expenditure. Their access over natural resources was so much plentiful and its production was such in a good level that they could celebrate their familial occasions and warmly welcome their near and dear ones without any sort of financial constraints. They had the tradition of joint family system, strong kinship

¹⁴ *Sraddha* : According to Hindu rituals after the purification, it is the religious performance with a prayer for the peace of soul to the deceased body.

¹⁵ *Agrodani Brahmin* : According to Hindu religion the Ogrodani Brahmins are categorically lower than the priests and they are primarily involved with the rituals related with death.

based social interaction and it was the fundamental aspect of their social structure and social organization.

Economic Feature of the Traditional Rajbanshis

The anthropological study of economic organization is a focal point for discovering the relationship between material and non material aspects of the environment and human behaviour as well as the social system within which it is exchanged and redistributed as cultural goods and services. The economic organization is treated as a link between the material base to culture and social structure. The traditional economic organization of the Rajbansi people is mentioned below-

i) Agriculture: The Rajbanshis were primarily agriculturist. They mainly produced paddy (*Oryza sativa*). This was their prime source of food as well as prime source of income. They mainly cultivated *aus* and *aman* variety of paddy. The division of labour in the family was very much related with the agricultural work. In every Rajbanshi family the agricultural implements bore a special attention among the possession of material cultural implements. Each of them had some definite function and mostly these were made up of wood and iron. From the local bamboo bushes or other trees they could get the required wood or bamboo. To conduct the agricultural work, most of the families had their own cattle wealth. The entire work almost depended on monsoon water. The produced agricultural crops were the prime source of food for the most of the families. The production of paddy was quite proportionate according to the familial need. Beside the preparation of rice from the paddy, a number of other food products were also prepared from the rice by the women folk in their own household. Among the other agricultural crops mustard and varieties of pulses deserved some special attention. They also produced different types of vegetables both in their agricultural field and in their kitchen garden adjacent to the huts. All these sorts of activities provided them the major sources of their food. Regarding the items of daily feeding they mostly depended on local resources rather than the expensive market based products. Along with several agricultural crops they also cultivated a number of cash crops like jute, tobacco, betel nut, betel leaf etc. These cash crops were their major source of income and a number of varieties could be noticed according to the region wise distinction. The leaves of the jute were also used as food item and the

dried up jute sticks were used as fuel and building material for their fencing and thatching of the houses. The betel nut and betel leaf deserved a special attention because it was closely related with their cultural heritages. These were used in a number of religious performances as well as they welcome the neighbours and guests to their houses with a betel leaf and betel nut. The agricultural activities were done not merely for their food and income but it was very much associated with their rituals and cultural performances too. The entire agricultural work was done with the involvement of all family members and every member of the family had an equal access of the produced agricultural crops. The practice of joint family system, its norms, values and customs as well as common sharing had a very close affiliation with their economic pursuits and daily livelihood requirements altogether.

ii) Fishing: In the village areas there were a number of pond and river. These sources of water provided the Rajbanshi people an ample opportunity for fishing. This was not only a mere sporting event for the said people but also a part of economic life of the villagers. They mostly caught the fishes to sell and they also took it as a food item. To catch the fishes they had a number of implements made up of bamboo. These bamboos were mostly collected from their own territory. They had a number of fishing nets fixed to a bamboo cross and tied to a bamboo pole. The fishing implements were very important aspect of their material cultural possession. Even in many cases the families had their own wooden boat and they went to the river to catch the fishes. The boats were also primarily made up of wooden materials available from the surrounding environment. Meanwhile, the Rajbanshi families were primarily depended on agricultural production for their food but the varieties of local fishes collected from adjacent rivers and ponds provided them ample opportunity to accumulate animal protein regularly without any sort of financial burden.

iii) Spinning and weaving: Among the Rajbanshi people of the villages spinning and weaving were a common occurrence. The women of the household were generally involved in this work. Jute strings from fibers were made at home for making household articles of use. They generally used ordinary handlooms for weaving their daily usable cloths. Their different types of spindle were made up of bamboo and they were manually operated by hand. The raw materials got changed

according to the items they were going to prepare. They used both cotton and jute strings in this purpose. Most of their weaving implements were made up of bamboo and they could easily avail the adequate repairing of those from the locally available bamboo bushes. They had the loom to weave both the cotton and jute cloth. The prime material required for weaving were jute and cotton. They got the jute in their own village as it was cultivated. On the other hand the cotton was either cultivated in their own village or they collected it from neighbourhood areas. The concerned people could easily avail their requirement of dress and other garments by utilizing their locally available resources as weaving implement and raw material. Moreover, as the women folk of the families were involved in it, thus any sort of financial burden or dependency on market was not noticed among them.

iv) Animal husbandry: The Rajbanshi cultivators domesticated bullocks for ploughing and cows for milk production. The people consumed milk and prepared a number of milk products from it. All of these were ultimately used as their source of diet. Even in many cases they sold the milk and milk based products. Goats were also reared by them primarily for the meat. The ducks and the hens were commonly reared by the people because they were the source of both egg and meat. They also domesticated hogs but it was primarily for the business purpose.

The economic life of the traditional Rajbanshi people was mostly dependent on the natural resources. Their major economic pursuits were primarily confined within own village territory. The daily livelihood requirements of food, dress and shelters were mostly accumulated from the surrounding environment within own village and in this regard they were least dependent on the expensive market based products. Meanwhile, the resources were quite plentiful to meet the demand of the people and all of the members had an equal share on it. It was the fact that economic scarcity was still present among them, but the security of the common minimum livelihood requirements of food, dress and shelter had not faced any serious challenge which might rather create an adverse impact on the surveillance of the community.

Religious life of the traditional Rajbanshis

The Rajbanshis worshiped nature gods and goddess such as the goddess of rivers, god of the forest etc. They worshiped ghosts and made offerings to them for their propitiation. They were mainly *saiva*¹⁶ but the impact of Saktism¹⁷, Vaishnavism¹⁸, Buddhism, Tantraism¹⁹ can also be observed among them. They also believed in witchcraft. They worshiped Lord Shiva (*Mahakal*), *Bisahari* (*Manasa*)²⁰, *Durga*²¹, *Kali*²², *Laxmi*²³, *Narayan*²⁴, the sacred Basil plant and took part in *kirtans*²⁵. They also performed *Dharma Thakur puja*²⁶, *Chandi puja*²⁷. They had a strong faith in the transmigration of soul. There were certain divine orders among the Rajbanshis who were respected and held in high esteem by the people. The village priest was called as *adhikary*. In some sense his office was hereditary. The *adhikary* belonged to two classes namely the *paddhari* who was the priest of first order and could initiate disciples. He conducted marriage, funeral ceremony and other religious festivals. His credential was that he possessed the copper chakra. The other one was the *kantulsi* who worked as an assistant to *paddhari* for some years and then he might perform rituals independently. Further, the *deosi* performed worship in the temples and the *deori* worked as an assistant in the temple. *Deodha* performed *homa* or fire sacrifice and other rights belonging to Tantraism. In the traditional Rajbanshi society exorcist were present. They were not strictly priests but their assistance was sought in times of trouble when the

¹⁶ Saiva: According to Hindu mythology the Saivas' are the worshipper of lord Shiva.

¹⁷ Shakta: According to Hindu mythology the Saktas' are the worshipper of mother Goddess.

¹⁸ Vaishnav According to Hindu mythology the Vaisnavs' are the worshipper of Lord Sri Krishna.

¹⁹ Tantrik: According to Hindu mythology the Tantriks are the worshipper of supernatural powers.

²⁰ Manasa: According to Hindu mythology Manasa is the Goddess of snakes.

²¹ Durga: According to Hindu mythology Durga is the most powerful Goddess and the wife of Lord Shiva.

²² Kali: Kali is another image of Goddess Durga and the wife of Lord Shiva.

²³ Laxmi: According to Hindu mythology Laxmi is the Goddess of wealth and wife of Lord Narayan.

²⁴ Narayan: According to Hindu mythology Narayan is the prime God. He protects the entire universe from the evil effect of the demons and other destructive forces.

²⁵ Kirtan: During religious occasions it is the musical forms of mythological songs where a large section of community participated.

²⁶ Dharma Thakur puja: Among the Rajbanshis the Dharma Thakur was treated as the main village deity.

²⁷ Chandi : According to Hindu mythology Chandi is worshipped as the form of Goddess Durga as the source of energy. She was worshipped for the safety and security of the village and its people.

influence of evil spirit was suspected. They belonged to two classes viz. *Dhami*, who was a Rajbanshi and was engaged to offer worship to village deities and *Ojha* who might not be a Rajbanshi and was engaged to exorcise powerful evil spirits and to perform necessary worship. They made the images of Gods and Goddesses with clay which were the conventional feature of the images as found in other parts of Bengal. Throughout the entire calendar year a number of religious festivals were present among the Rajbanshis of rural Bengal. Among these, number of pujas were related to their major economic pursuit i.e. agriculture. In the traditional Rajbanshi society the religious festivals were *Meceni khela*(worship of river *Tista*), *Madan kam* puja which was related to agriculture, Kali puja i.e. the worship of village goddess, *Dhorom* thakur puja or worship of Sun God, *Roa Gara* Puja which was performed during the first transplantation of paddy, *Satyonarayan Puja*, *Jitua Puja*, *Othai Pothai Puja* or the worship of road, *Goraknath Puja*, *Devi Puja* or Durga Puja, *Bhandani Puja*, *Lokhi dak* during the flowering of paddy, Manasa Puja or the worship of snake goddess, *utthan akadasi*, *Dhan kata* puja when the paddy got ripen, *Naya khawa* or the *nabanna* i.e. the new rice ceremony, *Siva ratri* or puja of Lord Mahakal or *Mahadeb*, *Dham Puja*, *Bisua Puja* to hunt the spirit, *Chorok puja*, *Hudum deo puja* to protect the draught, *Tista Buri puja* or worship of river *Tista*, *Saleswari puja* or the worship of forest God. Along with these, few specific worships were also present among them. The religious festivals and rituals were associated with a number of musical performances like song, dance etc. In these songs their social and political matters were mainly highlighted. Even in the said occasions numbers of festivals were celebrated within their houses. In those festivals kin members and the neighbourhood took active participation as well as enjoyed with utter merriment. The religious festivals were not confined within community merriment but mostly they had a close affiliation with the nature. They prayed to god for the better and prosperous living of their close kin members and fellow neighbourhood. They got humble to the nature for the heavy showers which will make plentiful of crop production and would fulfill their common livelihood requirements in a sufficient manner. They concerned people were very closely attached with the forest and forest based natural products. They worshiped the forest to protect their livelihood. Forest provided ample resources to avail their other material requirements which was necessary for their survival. They also worshiped the river to redress her turbulent effect as well as to provide plentiful of

fish production. The Rajbanshis worshiped the cattle wealth with utter dedication, because they had a strong faith that the physical fitness of their cattle was a prime essential factor for the better crop production. Moreover, the cattle and other sorts of domestication provided the major sources of animal protein to them without any sort of dependency on expensive market based products.

The religious festivals and the rituals of the traditional Rajbanshi people were closely related with the environment and nature. It was also for the betterment of their livelihood and happy, prosperous life for all of their community members. They worshiped their Gods for ample source of production to meet up with the requirement of daily life. Those cultural heritages and the concerned rituals were executed generation after generation merely with any sort of alternation. Their religious festivals were celebrated altogether by the community members. Even the household rituals were performed with kin members and neighbourhood. In this regard, the religion played a key role in the social interaction of the concerned people. It hold the fellow feelings among the kin members and neighbourhood. The social norms, regulations and customs were quite inter-related with the religious aspects which were abided by the community members. As a result, in the traditional Rajbanshi society religion played a key role to keep solidarity and community integrity.

From the overall discussion it may be summarized that the traditional Rajbanshi families were completely the dwellers of the rural society and were far from any other urban attraction. They were mainly dependent on agriculture and most of them cultivated their own land. Along with that a number of other economic sources were present but they were totally dependent on the locally available natural resources. The concerned people mainly practiced the joint family system. The prime decision making authority of the family was the senior most member. The kinship based social interaction was very strong and the practice of norms and regulations related with it were executed by all the community members. Their prime economic pursuit i.e. agriculture was performed by all the family members with specific division of work on the basis of age and sex. Behind the economic productions, all of the family members had their role to play and their cumulative effort provided the equal security of food and economy to all the family members. Their social integrity provided the base of their livelihood security. Moreover, from the locally available resources their shelter and dressing materials could be

easily accumulated. In this regard, the concerned people could easily avail their livelihood requirements without any hardship. Meanwhile, their domestication, ponds and rivers were the prime source of the animal protein and regular security of their food and nutrition. Further, it provided them the security of least financial expenditure and a mere dependency on costly market based products. It is the fact that the Rajbanshi people who inhabited in rural areas were economically poor but in their daily life they did not face any hard struggle for survival. On the other hand among the neighbourhood no competitive mind was prevailed regarding the accumulation of common minimum livelihood. Whatever they produced or accumulated from their surrounding environment they utilized it equally among the family members to lead a peaceful life. In the said society, conflict or quarrel among the neighbourhood was a rare happening; if such incident took place then it was solved under the authority of the local Panchayat rather than any administrative influence. Their social ceremonies were not only confined within their household premises rather these were shared by all of their close kin members and neighbourhood. They had a strong fellow feeling and they always participated in each others joys and sorrows. Their religious festivals were not merely for their merriment but it was noted with the prayer of devotion for the betterment of the entire community members and a prosperous well being for every one. All of their community members participated in the religious festivals with utter enthusiasm; even mere household rituals were also celebrated in co-operation of neighbourhood and close kin members. The religious festivals were very much related with their social solidarity and community integration. From the overall discussion it can be stated that the traditional Rajbanshi people who dwelled in the rural areas were quite peaceful with full of affection, co-operation and social integrity. They obeyed their social customs and cultural traditions. Ultimately, their livelihood was very simple and they were not exposed to any struggle for their survival. They had a permanent settlement, stable economic pursuit and minimum security of their daily livelihood requirements. It can be said truly that the traditional Rajbanshi society was mostly confined within their village territory and were far from any urban impact.

Displacement and migration of the studied people

In earlier discussions it became quite evident that ever since the independence, India has been facing the problem of migratory population particularly from Bangladesh. The people who were migrated from Bangladesh left their settlement, economy and all sorts of common minimum livelihood. In search of new means of livelihood they started to settle down in different parts of North Bengal. A section of them was settled on the Balasan river bed in the Balasan colony, where the concerned study has been done.

The studied people were completely roofless and resourceless in condition. Earlier they were agriculturist in occupation and land was their prime wealth inspite of cash money. But when they lost their land it suddenly freezed their all sorts of daily livelihood requirements and they were forced to search new sources of income. At that time the matter of settlement and source of earning emerged as a major problem. On the contrary, the Siliguri town got started to flourish as the largest urban centre of North Bengal. Besides a number of new working oppurtunities, the urban construction works were on a rapid progress. In this regard, there was a huge demand of raw materials like stones, sand, and boulders for the construction works. Meanwhile, adjacent to Siliguri town, the Balasan river with its flow from the hills carried out plentiful of natural resources like stones, sand, boulders which were quite appropriate as raw materials for the urban construction works. The studied people who were in search of resettlement as well as source of income, found this scope as their best possible alternative to start a new way of life. The studied families were all migrant and most of them were migrated from Bangladesh. The other families were migrated from different places of North Bengal to the studied area. The studied families directly came to the Balasan river bed form their earlier settlement. All of them were the dwellers of villages before migration and after migration they came to the adjacent places of Siliguri town. This process of migration started from the decade of 1970's due to the political turmoil in Bangladesh and most of the studied families got migrated in between the period of two decades i.e. from 1970 to 1990. But the same process was also continued after 1990 and it was going on. It is to be mentioned here that the political turmoil in Bangladesh during 1971 was the prime cause of migration for most of the studied families. During this period, there took place violent clashes among the distinct religious communities and the insecurity of livelihood

prevailed through the entire nation. In this circumstance people of the minority community were forced to flee from their native places by leaving their settlement and almost all sorts of daily livelihood requisites for the sake of their life. This political turmoil effected to the backbone of the rural economy worstly. Their prime occupational pursuit i.e. agriculture suffered a major setback because at that time there prevailed a fatal conflict regarding the forceful capture and authorization of the agricultural and homestead land. It particularly happened to the people of the Hindu communities and it was continued for a long time even after the political turmoil was over. Further, there was a very little scope for the people of the rural societies to get involved in other occupational pursuits because such opportunities were very much confined in the entire Bangladesh. The severe political turmoil emerged into acute socio-economic crisis in the entire nation and the scope of earning for the people of the rural areas became very much limited. It turned into acute economic scarcity for them and became very hard for them to accumulate their common minimum livelihood. The political crisis and allied communal tension spread out into the depth of rural society due to which the economic backbone of the entire rural society went into a disastrous condition. The people who were involved in the traditional agricultural occupation were forced to loss their cultivable land, domestication and household belongings. They became landless, roofless and resourceless while it turned out as rather impossible for them to accumulate a fold of rice. In Bangladesh they neither had the security of life nor had any source of income for their livelihood. The entire adverse condition forced them to leave their birth place and migrate to other areas for the sake of survival (Table- 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, and 3.11).

Table 3.6: Distribution of the families on the basis of migration

Total migrant	Total non migrant	Total family
325	--	325
100.00		100.00

Source: Field Study

Table 3.7: Distribution of the families on the basis of period of migration

Period of migration					Total family
1960-1969	1970-1979	1980-1989	1990-1999	After 1999	
1	116	119	54	35	325
0.31	35.69	36.62	16.62	10.77	100.00

Source: Field Study

Table 3.8: Distribution of the families on the basis of status of migration

Status of migration				Total family
Continuous	Step	Rural-Urban	Urban -Urban	
325	--	325	--	325
100.00		100.00		100.00

Table 3.9: Distribution of the families on the basis of cause of migration

Cause of migration		Total family
Political unrest	Lack of occupational pursuit	
167	158	325
51.38	48.62	100.00

Source: Field Study

Table 3.10: Distribution of the families on the basis of place of migration

International		National		Total family
Bangladesh	Others	West Bengal	Others	
298	-	27	-	325
91.69		8.31		100.00

Source: Field Study

Table 3.11: Migration to Balasan Colony from districts of West Bengal

Districts of West Bengal				Total family
Cooch Behar	Jalpaiguri	Dinajpur	Darjeeling	
6	14	5	2	27
22.22	51.85	18.52	7.41	100.00

Source: Field Study

New Occupational Involvement, Formation of Balasan Colony and Emerging Issues

After displacement and migration, the question of resettlement and new occupational pursuit was the prime requisite for the studied people. Naturally they were looking for such a place which would provide them both the scope of habitation and a source of income. But there were a number of issues in this regard which deserved a special attention such as-

- i) How they got the information about their present settlement?
- ii) How did the new comers managed a place of habitation in the studied area?
- iii) Was there any administrative record of their settlement?

- iv) Whether they had any national identity till date, even after such a prolonged settlement?
- v) Whether any sort of emerging inconveniences had arisen for the studied people?

The following case studies will illustrate the factors more clearly-

Case Study 1: Ramesh Chandra Barman of 60 years got migrated from Bangladesh during 1971. He had a three membered family during the study. He came to the studied area along with his wife during the last phase of 1971. They were one of the first groups of migrant in the Balasan Colony. He stated that their earlier residence was in the village of *Mymansingh* district. There they had two bighas of agricultural and one bigha of homestead land. Agriculture was their prime occupational pursuit. But the severe political turmoil of Bangladesh had created all sorts of adversities to their means of livelihood. He remembered with utter grief that they had to loss their land, settlement and everything. He fearfully remembered that often bombing occurred in their village during night and the people started to flee to save their lives. They also did the same and came at first to their relatives in Matigara. From them they came to know about the natural resources of Balasan river and during the month of May they came and started to settle down on the Balasan river bed. He remembered that at that time only four families resided there. They gave the name of the present settlement as Balasan colony. He stated that their own adjustment and contemporary political influence helped them to build up this settlement. Gradually he accepted the stone crushing work as the mode of occupational pursuit. He further could not resist his annoyance to state that although he was residing since the formation of the settlement but till date his family was residing as a refugee. They had no Government official record related with the settlement and even they were devoid of from ration card. Although they got their voter identity very recently but it was documented with a number of mistakes. He told that his family came here as a refugee and still they were the same; because they had no Government authorization. He had tried a lot for the ration card both in the Panchayat and block level, but there were hardly anyone to pay a little attention to his words. He exclaimed with grief sorrow that after displacement he and his family members as if had lost even their identity as a human being.

Case Study 2: Mohini Barman of 70 years got migrated from Bangladesh during 1972. He had a six membered family during the study. He stated that he came to the Balasan colony with his wife and two children in 1972. Earlier they were resided in the village of *Pabna* district and there they had six bighas agricultural land and two bighas of homestead land. However, the severe political turmoil ultimately turned into communal violence. He shattered with fear to remember that often the miscreants came to their villages with fire arms and severe conflict took place. Soon the settlements of the Hindus were burnt into ashes. He broke into tears and stated that one of his son was shot dead and one of his daughter was kidnapped by unidentified persons. After three days her dead body was recovered from adjacent village. She was physically assaulted and it was quite hard for Mohini to tolerate the incidence being a father. During the contemporary period, the Hindus had no social security, and it forced them to escape from Bangladesh without any penny pence. Mohini told that he had a few cousins in Jalpaiguri, who often went in earlier to their settlement in Bangladesh. From them, he had listened about the Balasan river and its natural resources. After the displacement, Mohini came with his family members directly to Balasan river bed and started a new means of settlement. He remembered clearly that during that period the said region was quite vacant and only 12 to 15 families were settled during that period. It was completely based on local understanding. He could easily remember that at that moment they had nothing of their own. Government provided them tarpaulin and bamboos and with it they had started their settlement. The contemporary political party provided them various implements to get involved with the stone crushing work. He further remembered that they were devoid of from required utensils; and they had to cook a very little by collecting a very little fuel from adjacent areas. Their poverty was so severe that they hardly paid an attention to the starving people who. He stated that at that moment they were settled on the sand dunes of river. But severe soil erosion occurred due to flood. All the families joined each others hand and the formulation of the present settlement occurred long before 25 years ago. At the new settlement a few political conflict arose regarding the occupancy of the land. However the contemporary Panchayat solved the problem and the concerned people were provided with bamboo, tarpaulin and fencing to build up the huts. He further started the work and from his mere savings gradually built up the settlement. He had a deep resentment to

state that his settlement had no administrative affiliation and till date none of his family members were provided with ration card. He ironically stated that although administrative authority had assured him to provide the same for a number of times but those were far to meet up with implementation. His experience had made him to felt that as his family had no administrative affiliation, so they had to face all sorts of inconveniences related with any government official works.

Case Study 3: Bipin Barman of 45 years got migrated from Jalpaiguri district during 1975. He had his parental settlement there and they maintained joint family system. They had 10 bighas of agricultural land and 2 bighas of homestead land. Afterwards the familial conflicts became a common phenomenon regarding the division of the land property. Soon the problems got more complicated and the entire family had to face a severe economic crisis. He exclaimed that in such circumstances his father called the meeting of their traditional political authority and he was completely deprived from his share. As a result his studies were dropped and he came to the studied area during 1975. At that time there were 30-35 families. He could remember those days of struggle and soon started to work in a jute mill. But soon he left the job and started to do the stone based work. His settlement had no adequate government documentation. In earlier his family was enlisted in the BPL level, but there occurred a number of mistakes and ultimately the name of his family from the BPL list had been chalked out. With frustration he exclaimed about his repeated trial to get a ration card but all his efforts were repeatedly went into vain. He even stated that the political authority had a plan to uproot the concerned people and some urban construction would be made there. He had sorrow to state that they were the migrants and till date they were yet to get any administrative affiliation. His tone denoted a psychological fear that if they were displaced from the Balasan colony, then had no more alternatives would be left in their hand.

Case Study 4: Ukil Barman of 45 years got migrated from Bangladesh during 1980. He had a seven membered family in the Balasan colony. On their issue of early settlement, he stated that in the *Rajsahi* of Bangladesh they were in a well-to-do condition. They maintained a joint family system and their traditional familial occupation was agriculture. But during 1970's there took place severe political turmoil in Bangladesh and soon it turned into communal tension. He

remembered with fear that the Hindu families were severely tortured. Moreover, dacoity and theft became a very common phenomenon and they kept vigil for nights after nights. His eye got moistened to remember that one such a day, a group of miscreants came to their house in night and tied all the members with rope in the courtyard. They looted all of their personal belongings and blazed their entire agricultural land with fire. It severely told upon their economic holds and their common minimum livelihood had to face an utter challenge. In earlier a number of his known families started to settle down here and started the stone crushing work. He further said that from them he was informed about this occupation and readily came here in 1980 for the sake of survival. Contemporary political party gave his family the land of settlement and helped in all sorts to start the stone crushing work. During that period there were near about 100 settled families in the concerned area. At that time they were resided on the sand bank of the river. However, latter on massive fold took place and it forced them to shift over to the upper portion of the river bed. He remembered that since that period the population of the Balasan colony gradually started to increase. He had a grief sorrow that in spite of his dwelling for near about thirty years, till date his settlement had no administrative authorization and it was totally recognized as a vested land. He was spending his valuable days of life in an utter fear that if Government thought to uproot their settlement then they could do it easily and nothing could be done in their favour. He explained very clearly that there lied an acute discrimination over the distribution of *patta* in their settlement. Further, he accepted the truth that on regular occasion he gave subscription to the local political wing and it had reduced any scope of chaos related with the settlement of his family. Meanwhile, although they had voter identity but it had a number of mistakes but he his family members did not get the ration card till date. His anger exclaimed that different government official sectors paid a mere attention to their words and they treated them only as a resourceless refugee, even after their prolonged settlement here.

Case Study 5: Yudhistir Barman of 32 years got migrated from Bangladesh during 1985. Mr. Yudhistir Barman along with his parents migrated from the *Pabna* district of Bangladesh in 1985. He had two bighas of agricultural land and the concerned work was his prime occupational pursuit. He remembered that

when the political conflict took place in the erstwhile East Pakistan, their basic economic resource had to face all sorts of inconveniences. Gradually it became hard for him even to fulfill the common minimum livelihood. Through radio he came to know about the Balasan colony and the stone crushing occupation. Then he came to the studied area and further local political party provided him the settlement on a donation of Rs. 1000/-. Earlier the colony was quite vacant and its two zones were easily visible. He also stated that however, since the last decade the population got immensely increased and till now the people were coming. He expressed grief sorrow that neither they had any administrative affiliation nor their settlement received any Governmental recognition. He stated that his personal life started in the studied area and the stone crushing occupation was his only occupational pursuit. He always spent the moments with fear that as they were dwelling in the vested land, so they always had the fear to get uprooted at any moment.

Case Study 6: Subhas Barman of 50 years got migrated from Cooch Behar during 1990. In the Balasan colony he resided with a five membered family. They came here from Cooch Behar district. Earlier they did agricultural works. But the severe flood of 1990 had severely told upon the fertility of their land. For near about six months they had no scope of income and it created an acute financial crisis to the family. He had an idea that in Siliguri there were plentiful of working opportunities. He sold his entire property and came to one of his cousin in Dabgram. However, his cousin became unhappy to greet him. He informed him about the working scope of Balasan river bed. In the last phase of the year he brought the land at an expense of Rs. 3500/- from the owner. The local political party also claimed a donation of Rs. 1000/- from him and he also paid the same. In this way he spent all of his savings. In this settlement he had a few relatives but hardly any sort of close interaction was maintained. He said with sorrow that his family was an unauthorized migrant. He was residing on the vested land; although a few years ago some patta was distributed, but he lamented over his misfortune as he became deprived from the same. On the other hand, when BPL survey occurred in earlier his family was enlisted but that was cancelled and it was yet to be conducted further. He briefed very clearly that administration paid a least attention to their words. He helplessly exclaimed that they were forced to obey

the directions of the local political party; frequently they had to provide different subscriptions from their very little amount of income, otherwise they would get uprooted at once. In every sector, whether it was the block office, the office of the Panchayat pradhan or the medical college, no one paid a little sympathy to their grief.

Case Study 7: Pulin Barman of 55 years got migrated from Mymansingh district of Bangladesh during 1995. They had a joint family system and they did agricultural works on two bighas of land. After the political turmoil of 1971, a number of allied incidences started to emerge very rapidly. Due to communal factors, there crops were burnt into ashes and their pond water was poisoned. Moreover, his younger bother was stabbed by some unidentified person and a hand of his father was slewed; so he became physically handicapped. At that time a number of his near and dear ones were settled here. During this turmoil all of his relatives came to the studied area but his father was quite reluctant to leave their parental house. After the mishap of his father, the entire familial responsibility was bestowed upon the shoulder of the informant. He stated that he worked as a share cropper and agricultural labourer in the land of others. But that mere income was quite disproportionate to fulfill the common minimum livelihood requirement. The crisis forced him to take a debt of Rs. 4000/- from the local moneylender. However, he was cheated on the condition of interest and in total the entire amount raised upto Rs. 10,000/- . Afterwards in 1992 his father passed away. He stated that from 1980's he often came to the Balasan colony to his relatives. Further, they advised him to come there. Then he sold the land in Bangladesh but hardly had any cash in hand; because the amount was almost equivalent with his amount of debt. He remembered with grief sorrow that during the said period one of his children was suffering from serious illness, but he hardly had any scope to provide him the treatment; soon he passed away. In such a disastrous condition he came to Balasan colony with only Rs. 2000/- in hand. Since then the population of the area started to get increased by leaps and bounds. He stated local political wing provided him the place of settlement on a donation of Rs. 1500/-. But then he had no Government authorization related with the settlement. He mentioned very clearly that although there were several official beneficiaries for them but in its implementation there were alarming

discrimination and it made his family very much deprived of every perspective. Even the higher administrative authorities paid a least attention to their word. He accepted the truth that then people were coming to the studied area but they had to inhabit on the sand bank of the river because there was merely any vacant place left in the colony.

Case Study 8: Shankar Barman of 30 years had a four membered family in the Balasan colony. They got migrated from Jasohar district of Bangladesh during 2000. They had two bighas of agricultural land and they were totally involved in agricultural works. But political conflict was a common occurrence there. Particularly the religious minorities had to face all sorts of discrepancies. Even they could not get the adequate price of their crops. It created an acute financial crisis for them. He could remember easily those fearful days when his house was repeatedly being broken up and when they were regularly beaten up by unidentified persons. His sister and her husband resided adjacent to their settlement. He (brother-in-law) was stabbed violently by miscreants in his house in 1999. It frightened them a lot. Many of his close relatives were settled in Balasan colony since long. Mr. Barman agreed that according to their advices he came to the Balasan colony in the year 2000. He was unable to sell the land in Bangladesh; rather it was forcefully grabbed by his neighbourers and in turn they offered him a mere amount of Rs. 4000/-. At that time there were more than 300 families in the colony. He communicated with the local political wing and gave them a donation of Rs. 2000/-. It provided him a square feet to settle down. He revealed the truth that for resettlement he had taken a bank loan and yet to refund it in full. He expressed utter annoyance related with their un-authorization of settlement and lack of national identity. He stated that when he had to go to some government official sector, he got mentally prepared to face all sorts of unpleasant behaviour.

Case Study 9: Mahen Barman of 50 years got migrated from Khulna district of Bangladesh during 2005. The informant had a seven membered family in the studied area. They were associated with agricultural works on two bighas of land. As they were the religious minority, often their crops were being stolen during night or those were charred into ashes. In such a situation he decided to sell the land but could only managed an amount of Rs. 3000/-. He finally came to the

studied area in 2005, when near about 350 families were settled. At first he built a settlement of bamboos and canes on the sandy bank of the river. Although he had a good number of relatives in the colony, but nobody among them had shown any interest to bring them in their own settlement. Further, he requested the local Panchayat for a number of times to get a settlement. Ultimately in the end of 2006 he got a settlement in the colony by providing them a donation. He stated the fact that although it was quite hard for them to provide regular donation to the political wing but such disobedience might result an adverse impact on their settlement. He realized that although agriculture did not provide a huge amount of profit, still they could easily manage a fold of rice from local resources. But in the stone crushing such opportunities were seized. He had a bitter experience when he tried to enroll his child in school. However, it was solved by the local Panchayat. During the study, they had no administrative authorization of their settlement and were treated worsely by the higher official in a number of occasions.

Case Study 10: Brojen Barman of 50 years got migrated from Pabna district of Bangladesh during 2008. The studied family of the informant was comprised of five members. Earlier they were resided in sand bank of river Mahananda and were involved in the work of day labourer. But the massive flood of 2006 grabbed all their personal belongings and even washed away their settlement. Then he came to the Balasan colony where near about 400 families were settled. He expressed his sorrow to state that the local Panchayat had refused his prayer to provide a settlement within the colony. He and the other family members were resided on the sand bank of river under the tarpaulins. His eyes got moistened to state that they were struggling to survive without any administrative support. His daughter in law was pregnant and was in a very serious condition, but the Panchayat or higher officials paid a least attention. He was still unknown that how long they would spend their life in such a situation. He further stated that they had no scope to establish a new settlement because neither he had money, nor any other means of occupational pursuit.

From the above all case studies it can be summarized that the political turmoil and lack of socio-economic security forced the concerned people to leave their ancestral land and property. Merely for the sake of survival they were forced to get displaced and got a scope of resettlement in the studied area. However, they

had no documentation related to resettlement and were facing a number of administrative obstacles in different circumstances. Meanwhile, in case of the other studied families the situations were not much different. It can be taken into account that issues of political turmoil and consequent displacement as well as refugeeism created a major impact on the affected people irrespective of their caste identity. Simultaneously it does not distinguish between the rich and poor. It can be noted that every studied family became the victim of a socio-political turmoil and co-related displacement. All of them were completely uprooted from their permanent settlement and stable traditional caste based occupational pursuit. They had lost their close kin members or they became scattered from one another. Even in some cases they had lost their spouse and children. Every members of the studied families had lost their nationality, identity and fundamental rights of being a human. Being almost resourceless, they were searching for common minimum alternative means of livelihood for their survival. Gradually they got the information about stone crushing occupation. It provided them the scope of resettlement and alternative means of economic pursuit. It was the only scope of resettlement left for them and they readily accepted it. In many cases the concerned people got here remarried and started a new familial life. Even they got separated from their traditional joint familial practice and established his own family. The Balasan river bed and its natural resource gave them a raise of hope to sustain their livelihood. On the other hand the concerned people also looking after some oppurtunities to get stabilize because the trauma of political turmoil and its resultant factors had exhausted their physical strength and mental peace. Thus they got settled down in the studied area and gradually became affiliated with the stone based and stone crushing work. From the field study it could be revealed that the studied people were mostly settled agriculturists in earlier. Their previous land holding pattern is represented through the following table.

Table 3.12: Distribution of the families on the basis of land holding pattern before migration

Purpose	Land Holding (in bighas)					Total family
	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9 and above	
Agriculture	245	37	15	10	18	325
	75.38	11.38	4.62	3.08	5.54	100
Homestead	302	20	3			
	92.92	6.15	0.92	-	-	

Source: Field Study

Most of the studied families (86.76 %) had quite a reasonable amount of agricultural land even upto four Bighas and the others had more than that. Thus in earlier there prevailed a socio-political stability which had also provided a stable socio-economic condition and permanent occupational pursuit. Along with that most of the said families (92.92%) had the homestead land of 1-2 bighas while very few families had land upto 3 to 4 bighas (Table 3.12). Thus these settlements were also permanent in nature. However, severe socio-political unrest in Bangladesh and other factors forced the people to leave their permanent settlement and stable economic pursuit. Although they were not economically rich but earlier the agricultural produces and other natural resources provided them the daily livelihood requirements. Being an agricultural community the studied people were devoid of any sort of cash and for them the land was the sole resource. However the sudden crisis forced them to get displaced from their native land; even the contemporary situation hindered them to sell their land. Thus they came here as completely landless and resourceless in condition. In that situation they were urgently needed to survive by any means. Meanwhile, at that moment Siliguri started to get flourished as the largest urban center of North Bengal and huge amount of raw materials like stones, sand etc were needed for several constructions. The same demand could also be noticed in several other districts and states adjacent to Siliguri town. In such a situation the natural resources of Balasan river attracted the studied people because it could easily meet up with the availability of raw materials required for urban construction. Moreover, this new working opportunity was neither required any sort of machinery or technical skills nor it required any sort of financial investment to start up; what it required was only the ability of hard manual labour. The studied

people readily accepted this working opportunity and they started to collect the stones, sand, boulders from the Balasan river. Further, they started to break up the stones and boulders into several requisite shapes and sizes related with the urban construction work. In this regard, the stone crushing work provided them a source of income to avail the common minimum livelihood. In this context their generation wise can be represented through the following table.

Table 3.13: Distribution of families on the basis of generation wise occupation

Generation	Occupation					Total family
	Agriculture	Day labour	Stone crushing	Others	None	
Grand Father	325 100.00		-	-	-	325 100.00
Father	294 90.46	28 8.62	3 0.92	-	-	
Ego	-	-	322 99.08	3 0.92	-	
Ego's Child	-	-	191 58.77	72 22.15	62 19.08	

Source: Field Study

It is to be mentioned here that due to displacement, migration and struggle for survival the studied people got totally shifted over from their traditional caste based occupation of agriculture to a new occupational pursuit i.e. the stone crushing work. Among the studied families, in all the cases, the grand parents of the egos were related to agricultural work. However, in the studied families all the egos were involved in the stone crushing work either primarily or secondarily while in 191 (58.77%) cases the child of the egos were involved in the stone crushing work (Table 3.13). It can be noted that in between the parental generation and the generation of descendants, there took place a complete shift over from the traditional caste based occupational pursuit of agriculture and the studied families who were associated with stone based occupation had almost forgotten their knowledge of cultivation. During the study it was noticed that the stone based occupation was the prime source of earning for most of the studied families and they were primarily depended on it to accumulate their daily livelihood requisites.

Besides the scope of an economic pursuit, the Balasan river bed was also very important from another perspective. The concerned people were mostly roofless and were completely devoid of any sort of permanent settlement. In those circumstances, the vested land of the Balasan river provided them the opportunity of resettlement without any sort of financial expenditure or against some mere donation. Further, the studied people got started to settle down directly on the sand bank surrounded by the flow of the Balasan river by their own local adjustment along with the contemporary political support. In this way the Balasan colony was formed in 1977. In those days the colony was quite vacant. The contemporary local Panchayat took the leading role regarding the settlement of the migrated people and the formation of the colony. They gave tarpaulin sheet, polythene and bamboo fencing to the concerned families to build up their settlements. Further, the *Sardars* who were related with the stone crushing work, in consensus with the local political wing provided iron implements, bamboo baskets and other essentially required particulars to the concerned people for the stone crushing work. Even, in a number of occasions they supplied food to the newly settled families. In this way, with the initiative and co-operation of the authorities of local political party and *Sardars* of the stone field, the migrated families were able to find their means of resettlement and new sources of income as well as gradually they started to adjust with their new means of livelihood. At that time there were 25-30 families who were inhabited on the sand bank of the said river and it was persisted upto 1982. In those days the vested land located on the comparatively high areas was a delta like feature because the Balasan river and one of its tributary flowed through both the ways and the location of the colony lied in between them. Moreover, it was covered with forests and there was no settlement at all. In the studied area, flood was a common occurrence in every year during the rainy season. In such a situation the concerned people were forced to take shelter in adjacent highland areas. In those days the river was mere 15 feet in breadth. But due to repeated floods, the lands located within its flow gradually started to get eroded and the river got expanded in its breadth. In 1983, there took place a massive flood in the Balasan river which almost ruined up the contemporary settlements located on the sand bank of the river. It forced the people to search for alternative land on the comparatively higher areas adjacent to the river. Moreover this flood severely told upon the river banks and the adjacent

areas were also under the threshold of erosion. In this regard, there was an urgent requirement to provide adequate embankment of river for the sake of existence of the contemporary settlement. In that situation the local Panchayat and the common mass decided in consensus to do the needful for the construction of the embankment. The local Panchayat took a subscription of Rs. 200/- from each family for this purpose. During 1986-1987 the embankment was completed and also a small dam was built up. It resulted in the fact that the tributary of the river within the colony gradually got weaker and the main Balasan river became deeper. As a result, its capacitance for the storage of water also increased a lot. Meanwhile, the families who came to the vested land of the high areas started to clear up the jungles and got settled according to their own local adjustment along with political consensus. Further, onwards from 1984 a large number of people started to come to the colony and got settled here permanently. In this area the first official survey was conducted in 1992 and the *patta* or official record of land holding was provided to a few families but most of the families did not get it. Such official record was not distributed further but the work was still going on. The entire Balasan colony was divided in two sectors namely ucha or upper Balasan colony and niche or lower Balasan colony. Among them the inhabitants of the lower Balasan Colony were all involved in the stone crushing work either primarily or secondarily. On the other hand a few families of the upper portion of the colony were associated with shop keeping. In this way the migrated families got anew occupational pursuit and new place of resettlement on the Balasan river bed. However related to resettlement, or for urgent familial requirements, construction of huts among the studied families 54 (16.62%) families had taken loan. It was mostly taken from the *Gramin* bank or from local money lenders to redress their inconveniences (Table 3.14).

Table 3.14: Distribution of the families on the basis of resettlement by loan

Yes	No	Total Family	If Yes					Total
			Purpose		Source		Amount	
54	271	325	Repair of house	Others	Gramin Bank	Others	More than Rs. 1000/-	
16.62	83.38	100.00	42	12	26	28	54	54
			77.78	22.22	48.15	51.85	100.00	100.00
								0

Source: Field Study

The studied families were all migrated and got the resettlement on the vested land of Balasan river bed. But near about all of them were devoid of any sort of official records related with their resettlement and occupancy of the land, under the Panchayat, block or sub divisional administrative level. Even most of the inhabitants of the colony had not their own ration card, although they were dwelling in the area since the last three decades. The issues of their voting identity and ration card facility is represented through the following tables.

Table 3.15: Ration card facility to at least one member of the families

Sex	Category			If yes how long		
	Yes	No	Total population	Less than 3 yr	More than 3 yr	Total
Male	74 8.71	776 91.29	850 100.00	57 77.03	17 22.97	74 100.00
Female	51 6.48	736 93.52	787 100.00	39 76.47	12 23.53	51 100.00

Source: Field Study

Table 3.16: Issue of voter identity card among the studied people

Sex	Category			If yes how long		
	Yes	No	Total population	Less than 3 yr	More than 3 yr	Total
Male	318 75.36	104 24.64	422 100.00	276 86.79	42 13.21	318 100.00
Female	279 73.04	103 26.46	382 100.00	233 83.51	46 16.49	279 100.00

Source: Field Study

From the field study, it was revealed that among the total studied population a very few of them had their own ration card while most of them had become the beneficiary merely a year ago (Table 3.15). They repeatedly sought the appeal to higher administration for the provision of ration card but all their efforts went into vain to focus the attention of the authorities over their problem. It is to be mentioned here that among the studied families there were 422 males and 382 females who attained their age (as directed by Indian Constitution) to opine the electoral franchise. Among them 318 (75.36%) male and 279 (73.04%) female had their voter identity card, while a larger section of them got it only a year ago (Table 3.16).

Meanwhile, during the field study it was noticed that there were a number of irregularities in most of the voter identity cards and the concerned persons were in communication with the local Panchayat to redress the faults. Further, it is to be mentioned here that in the year 2002, a B.P.L survey was done in the Balasan colony but it was not conducted properly and most of the studied families were not enlisted in it although the standard criteria mentioned by the Government of India applicable in case of the studied families. In this concern, under the initiative of the local Panchayat, the said survey was conducted again in the year 2007 but the result was yet to be settled. From the overall circumstances, it can be stated that the studied families were dwelling in the Balasan colony since a decade or more but they had no proper administrative authorization. There were no official records regarding the personal land holding in the Balasan colony whereas the entire situation was getting managed under the influence of local political party. On the contrary, it was also true that if Government wants to uproot the studied people from their settlement then the common mass had no way to highlight their authorization and demand over their land. Although a few families were the holder of the *patta* but most of the families were completely devoid of this facility. Further, the ration card and voter identity proof were the very important documents related with the nationality in India. In spite of that most of the families were completely debarred from those facilities. The entire situation made an acute identity crisis for the studied people. They had no legal authenticity regarding their citizenship as an Indian. Moreover, as they had no adequate permission related with their settlement, so they were always under stress that any administrative action might tell upon their habitation and it would again force them into roofless and resourceless in condition. Meanwhile, they went to the administrative authorities in a number of occasions regarding their issues of voter identity and for the Indian citizenship through ration card. But the higher officials had seldom paid any attention to them and most of their efforts went into vain. Even whenever they went to higher administrative or legal authorities, it had only given them inattentiveness and humiliating behaviour. The studied people had their own personal identity and authority over the land and resources when they were settled in Bangladesh. Although they got the chance of resettlement after the political turmoil but till date they were treated as the roofless and resourceless refugees. They had no identity of their own and the

people of the outside areas knew them only as an occupational group who were related with the stone based work on Balasan river bed. They had no individual identity as an Indian citizen in the surrounding society rather they were known only as a working labour to the outer world. However in the studied area even a child was facing the problem of his identity by birth and the issue of identity crisis had become a community matter for them.

The overall scenario of the Balasan Colony can be analyzed from multidimensional aspects. Due to major socio-political crisis the people were forced to get displaced from their early settlement and ultimately they lost all round well being. Their simple way of livelihood had to face utter constraints to survive. Naturally it affected on their traditional socio-cultural system a lot. They are mostly undocumented and unauthorized migrants. As a result they are devoid of administrative facilities like rationing, voting, proper justice. They came here as disintegrated and still now they are on the way of disintegration. It may be said that the political factor can obviously lead towards the displacement of a well established community, on the way disintegration. Most of their traditional cultural pattern had changed. With the changing dimension of time their stable life security was totally got disbalanced more than 50 years ago and still now they are facing the consequent result. In the studied area, the studied families belonged to the Rajbanshis, the dominant scheduled caste community of North Bengal. The early settlement of the studied families were in Bangladesh. They were the villagers and their prime occupational pursuit was settled agriculture. They were far from urban accessories and their livelihood was confined within the village. Their daily life was deeply co-related with the surrounding environment. They utilized the natural resources as raw materials to fulfill their requirements like food, dress and shelter in daily livelihood. Although they were not economically wealthy, but their livelihood was quite secured because they could easily accumulate their common minimum essentialities from the surrounding environment without any financial expenditure. Agriculture was their prime economic pursuit and in this regard the entire family was related with the work. Their family type was joint in nature and strong kinship bondage was prevailed among the family members. They always participated in each others will and woe. They had their own traditional cultural practices and it was enculturated through generation after generation. They had a number of religious festivals

among which a few were related with their traditional agricultural occupation. All of those festivals were celebrated by the entire community members and those were primarily performed with a prayer for the betterment, safety and protection of the entire community. Their social life was very much peaceful and co-operative. Earlier the social life and the associated cultural practices of the studied people were not merely confined among the community members rather it was very much associated with the surrounding nature and all other living objects as a whole. Ultimately, during their earlier settlement in Bangladesh, the studied people had their own social security and they had the scope to perform their traditional cultural heritage. Earlier their arrangements of activities were organized by keeping in view the broader interest of the community inspite of any individual's vested desire. The productions from the land and the resources collected from the neighbourhood were equally distributed among the members of the family. All of the family members were collectively involved to fulfil the essential requirements for the purpose of their common minimum livelihood. In this regard the issues of individual betterment and personal sharing were strictly forbidden. In earlier they had a strong community consensus and in their livelihood peace, harmony and co-operation was always prevailed.

Ever since the independence, India has been facing the problem of migrated population particularly from Bangladesh. Further during the political turmoil of Bangladesh in 1971, this influx reached to the optimum level and a huge section of people took shelter in several districts of North Bengal located in the Indo-Bangladesh border region. The people were almost devoid of their common minimum sources of daily livelihood. They were urgently needed any sort of economic pursuit for their survival. In such a condition a section of the migrated people came to the bed of the Balasan river. The said river was provided with a plentiful of natural resources like stones, boulders and sand. Those could supply the demand of raw materials required for the urban construction in Siliguri and adjacent neighbourhood areas. The concerned people started to collect the natural resources from the river as well as started to break up the stones and boulders into different shapes and sizes according to the requirement. On the contrary, they were able to get involved in a new economic pursuit which was commonly known as the stone crushing occupation. In this way they were totally shifted from their traditional agricultural occupation to a new occupational pursuit. Moreover, the

vested land of the Balasan river provided them an opportunity of resettlement. The concerned people by their own local adjustment and along with the help of the local political authority started to resettle on the vested land of the Balasan river and in this way they established the studied settlement named as Balasan Colony. In the earlier days there were only a few families in the colony but gradually with the passage of time, more and more people got started to migrate here from Bangladesh and during the study it was noticed that there was almost no vacant place in the colony. In this way the Balasan river provided an opportunity of resettlement and new occupational pursuit to the migrated, roofless and resourceless refugees. Although the concerned people were able to find here an alternative means of livelihood, but most of the studied families had no official records regarding their establishment of settlement on the vested land of Balasan river. Further, most of studied people had neither the voter identity card nor the ration card which could authenticate their Indian citizenship or any sort of personal identity authorized by the Government of India. The concerned people were known to the outside world by virtue of their occupational pursuit. The higher administrative authorities had seldom paid any attention to their inconveniences and even the concerned people could find a mere opportunity to state their problems to the authorities. They tried a lot to collect the authorized document of Indian citizenship according to proper official procedure. However, all of their efforts went into vain. It is to be mentioned here that due to socio-political turmoil, displacement and migration their settlement and economic organization became seriously affected. Within the period of two generations the entire scenario of their daily life had almost changed in totality. They were completely shifted over from their traditional caste based occupation of settled agriculture to the stone based work. Further, due to displacement and migration their social life and allied cultural practices had changed a lot. In this regard, in front of the greater human society the studied people had no identity on the basis of their traditional socio-cultural heritage. Even they had no personal identity as a citizen of this country. They almost lost everything. Even after the resettlement they were leading their livelihood in a state of psychological insecurity related with their identity crisis and unauthorized settlement. But they were yet to find any sort of assurance from the higher authorities to redress their inconveniences. Ultimately, it can be stated that they came here as a group of refugee people and

further became treated as the same by the nation, state and entire administrative authority.

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