

## PREFACE

The development of any society is judged in terms of the position held by women in that society. Since men and women are considered as two wheels of vehicles of a society, both wheels should work equally to move the vehicle of society properly. But in reality, the status of women and men are not same and compared to men, women are usually seen to have a more deprived and subordinate status, in terms of access to resources and enjoyment of rights and freedoms that together the quality and worth of human life.

In a tradition bound society like India, women have been socially, economically, physically, psychologically and sexually exploited, sometimes in the name of religion and sometimes by the social sanctions. But in ancient India, the position of women was different. The girl child was welcome in the families. The son was not an absolute necessity. The widow remarriage was permitted. As the *Rig Veda* says, “the wife is the household” and the *Manusmriti* proclaims, “wherever women are worshipped, there are god pleased, and all noble deeds go futile wherever they are dishonoured”. This ideal declined in the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The child marriage, ban on widow remarriage, complete disregard of women’s education became social practice. For reasons like foreign invasions in India and prolonged alien rule, the position of women deteriorated and they lost their original status. The purdah system, the Sati system, polygamy, the dowry system etc. reduced women’s position and made them liability.

Discrimination suffered by women is reflected in the steep deterioration in the sex ratio over the last century. It has declined, in the whole country, from 972 females per 1000 males in 1901 to 933 females per 1000 males in 2001, and for the state of West Bengal it has declined from 945 in 1901 to 934 females per 1000 males in 2001. The decline in sex ratio in the North Bengal, that is in the northern part of the state of West Bengal, is continued till 1961 from 909 in 1901 to 898 females per 1000 males in 1961 and after that it increased continuously and become 944 females per 1000 males in 2001.

Inspite of this, except Darjiling, the Human Development Index and Gender Development Index for all the districts of North Bengal is much lower than that of the

state's average. Biology tells us, that at the time of birth, there should be balance between the number of girl child and the number of boy child. But this balance, unfortunately, cannot continue till death due to several biological, social as well as environmental factors. This is why the number of females per 1000 males, which is known as sex ratio of a region also vary from one region to another based on the region's social, economic, cultural as well as environmental conditions. Another interesting fact in the demographic scenario of the developing countries is that, there is a large gap between the sex ratio of child population of the age of 0-6 and the sex ratio of total population. The low sex ratio for child population of the age of 0-6 also affect inversely towards the development of the study region. Not only that, the effect of low sex ratio of all age groups plays a very crucial role in shaping the sex composition of the whole region.

In the present thesis, this world-wide problem has been studied with relevance to northern part of the state of West Bengal in the light of the sex structure in relation to the question of socio-economic development. The study is basically explanatory in nature and apart from the observation at macro level of the districts of North Bengal, it is also based on micro level analysis of Community Development Block wise and on some field survey.

Suggestions towards the solution of the problem have been made here taking into consideration the local situations comprising available resources, transport, market and the socio-economic and cultural environment. The policy recommendations have been made in view of the idea that the improvement of the status of women is necessary for sustainable regional development.

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02/02/04  
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