

Child Marriage in Borderlands Eroding Land & Culture

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1 Introduction

Marriage is a formalized relationship with legal standing between two individuals. It is legally sanctioned contract between two adult individuals wherein they are entitled to some rights, at the same time are bound by some responsibilities. Apart from understanding the social implications of marriage there are many legal aspects that are involved in it. According to McGoldrick (1989), becoming a couple is one of the most complex and difficult transitions of the family life cycle even though it is often perceived as the least complicated and most joyous (Planning commission). Obviously, one would expect such a complex relationship to take place between two consenting adults only.

Child marriage – that is marriage below the age of eighteen (in Indian context the legal age of marriage is 18 for women and 21 men) is illegal in most parts of the world, yet is widely condoned under religious and customary laws. The lawbreakers are seldom brought to books for their offence, rather as the Planning Commission report on the issue states that – “It is not uncommon for political leaders and government officials to attend these ceremonies to bless newly married children and impart legitimacy to the practice. The society in turn, instead of playing a watchdog role, is an enthusiastic participant in a deliberate perpetuation of entrenched interests, including property and social considerations, all which make child marriages so common (Planning Commission)”, though it

On the other hand declaring a marriage void due to involvement of a child does not help, as the minor wife in that case is left with no social or

legal protection. Girls married at an early age, or without consent can expect little from the judiciary, even if she is able to approach it. Society, on the other hand which is keen to get the girls married at an early age, does not show any compassion if they are abandoned by their in-laws on whatever unsubstantiated and fictitious grounds. Rather it blames the girl for her incapability to please her in-laws for her "misfortune". Early marriage of girls therefore, is the most prevalent and sordid form of abuse of minor girls in India in particular and in developing world in general. Though it is punishable in India for the person who marries a minor girl, the person who solemnize the marriage and a person promoting or permitting (including the parents/guardian of a child) under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, it is practiced commonly without being punished. It also infringes the legal safeguards for children like the age of consent for sexual intercourse under the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 etc.

Moreover, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, states – "marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses". The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as a person below 18 years and identifies the rights of children. A woman's right to free and informed choice in the matter of a marital relationship is a fundamental human right which is secured by the provisions of a number of international human rights instruments, viz, Article 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 10 of the international Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). These international covenants and treaties enumerate various Human rights standards for the protection of children, choice of relationship and the age at marriage, and inform the laws on child marriage in India (Gupta 2012).

Child marriage also violets a number of international treaties and conventions like the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention

on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to slavery. The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action (1993). The International Conference on Population and Development Program of Action (1994) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) all promised to eliminate this practice (Samar 2016). Therefore persisting prevalence of child marriage in the country is a blatant denial of human rights of the minor girls.

Yet unfortunately, India reports to have over 10 million women married before attaining 15 years of age and in absolute terms there is no other country in the world to have such huge female population married at such early age (Vogelstein 2013).

Table 1.1: Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before ages 15 and 18 years in select Asian countries.

| Countries and areas | Married by 15 | Married by 18 | Source and Year |
|----------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Bangladesh | 18 | 52 | MICS 2012-2013 |
| India | 18 | 47 | NFHS 2005-2006 |
| Afghanistan | 15 | 40 | MICS 2010-2011 |
| Nepal | 10 | 37 | MICS 2014 KFR |
| Bhutan | 6 | 26 | MICS 2010 |
| Thailand | 4 | 22 | MICS 2012 |
| Pakistan | 3 | 21 | DHS 2012-2013 |
| Cambodia | 2 | 19 | DHS 2014 |
| Iran (Islamic Republic of) | 3 | 17 | MIDHS 2010 |
| Philippines | 2 | 15 | DHS 2013 |
| Sri Lanka | 2 | 12 | DHS 2006-2007 |
| Viet Nam | 1 | 11 | MICS 2014 |

Source: State of the world's children 2015, UNICEF

In 2005-06, National Family Health Survey-3 (NFHS-3) reported that almost half of the female population (47%) of age 20 to 24 in India were

married before they were 18 years old. This figure is worse than some of the sub-Saharan African countries like Somalia, Nigeria, and Zambia. A comparison with some of the South and South-East Asian countries (Table 1.1) show prevalence of child marriage in India is much higher than neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

The National Strategy Document on Child Marriage, 2013 states that India with 23 millions child (below 18 years) brides, constituted 40 percent of total child brides worldwide. Disconcertingly the report also states the rate of decline in the number of child brides in the country is far too slow at just 11 percent in 15 years.

Bangladesh, which tops the list in Table 1.1, reports fourth highest prevalence of child marriage in the world, the other three nations Niger, Central African Republic and Chad are all from Africa. West Bengal on the other side of the border too suffers from this cultural malaise, and reported a huge number of girls being married before they reached legal age for marriage. In 2005-06, the State reported that 54 percent of women aged 20 to 24 were married before attaining the legal age of 18 years (NFHS-3), the incidence of child marriage were almost two times as high in rural areas (63.2%) than the urban areas (32%). Moreover, the figure was 7 percentage points higher than the Indian average and 2 percentage points above the 2012-13 figure of Bangladesh. Implying that prevalence of child marriage in the state is among the highest in all regions worldwide. These facts indicate that the issue of child marriage is particularly very high in the Bangla speaking regions of the south Asian subcontinent. Even after a decade since NFHS-3, the findings of NFHS-4 (2015-16) appear to be far from satisfactory. The survey reveals that 40.7 percent of the women (46.3% in rural and 27.7% in urban areas) of the same age group (20-24 years) get married before attaining the legal age of marriage in the State. The results show that recent progress in economic growth and women's development had only a limited effect on the prevailing practice of child marriage in the State.

The existing policies and governmental efforts to prevent child marriage had not yielded desired results. The prohibition of child marriage act, 2006 (POCMA), has also failed to dissuade the offenders almost after a decade of its enactment in November 2007. Therefore, the lingering issue of child marriage in the state requires extra attention. As there are innumerable factors behind the social disease, depending on various social settings, a careful treatment of each and every factor is needed for its cure. These factors vary widely according to time and space.

In Section 1 of the present report, while we discuss various issues of child marriage with special reference to West Bengal, we also discuss how it violets basic rights of children. We also discuss here the prevalence of child marriage in various countries and states of India, we briefly discuss how prevalent child marriage had been in our society during the three broadly segregated historical periods of ancient, medieval and modern times.

In section 2 we discuss the research settings including the geography, economy and culture of the region where the study was conducted, objective and rationality of the study and the method implied thereon.

In Section 3 of the report, we discuss status of women in India and cause and consequences of child marriage, mainly using the secondary data and literatures and investigate the reasons behind the huge number of child marriages taking place in the country and the state as well as in the region (Indo-Bangladesh borderlands) where the survey was conducted followed by a brief discussion on various government and non-government efforts to curb it.

In section 4 onwards we have used primary data extensively, supported by secondary data to discuss three main issues that influence child marriage namely education, economy and vulnerability of women, laws and public action, and related it with the settings of borderlands. The issue of education of adolescent girls, access and quality of education

they get, which indeed is single most important factor of child marriage is discussed in section 4.

In section 5, we discuss the issues of river erosion and displacement, occupation, migration, poverty and degree of indebtedness in length. We have also discussed how presence of Border Security Personnel hinders people of the borderlands from their day to day domestic and economic activities, mainly cultivating their land near the international border.

In Section 6, the prevailing lawlessness in the borderland is discussed, explained how particularly the life of women of the region is affected due to presence of Border Security Forces, their vulnerability to crime and non-enforcement of law, for the purpose we have used a separate questionnaire (see appendix 2B) to gauge the level of women's empowerment, their access to various institutions and their level of satisfaction over these institutions. We also have a glance into the cultural decay in the borderlands through the eyes of the women and how their lives are affected due to this decay. At the end we once again get back to our central topic of this report namely age at marriage of women and its influencing factors. We extensively discuss here various perceptions of women regarding the appropriate and legal age of marriage for women, how their marriages were arranged, and how various socio-cultural customs influence age at marriage of women, the financial burden on their family during their own marriage etc.

1.1 Prevalence of Child marriage in India & West Bengal

It is interesting to note that West Bengal shows much better gender composition in its demography compared to many other states and the national average (Table 1.2). West Bengal's sex ration in the 0 to 6 age group is better than its overall sex ratio by a slender margin of 0.6 percent; the country on the other hand recorded a 2.4 percentage points lower sex ratio in the same age group when compared with its overall sex ratio. The state has achieved remarkable feat in reducing Total Fertility

Rate (TFR)¹, which is not only an important demographic indicator, rather is a pointer of gender equity in the society. The state has also achieved some success in the field of female literacy and education. Furthermore, the life expectancy of women in the state is also comparatively better. A comparison of these data with the national average and the state's rank is provided in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Demographic indicators of India and West Bengal

| | India | West Bengal | Rank among 35 Indian States & UTs |
|----------------------------|-------|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| Female Male Ratio | 943 | 950 | 16 |
| Child Sex Ratio (0-6 year) | 919 | 956 | 11 |
| Total Fertility Rate | 2.4 | 1.7 | 1* |
| IMR | 44 | 32 | 16 |

Source: Census of India, 2011;

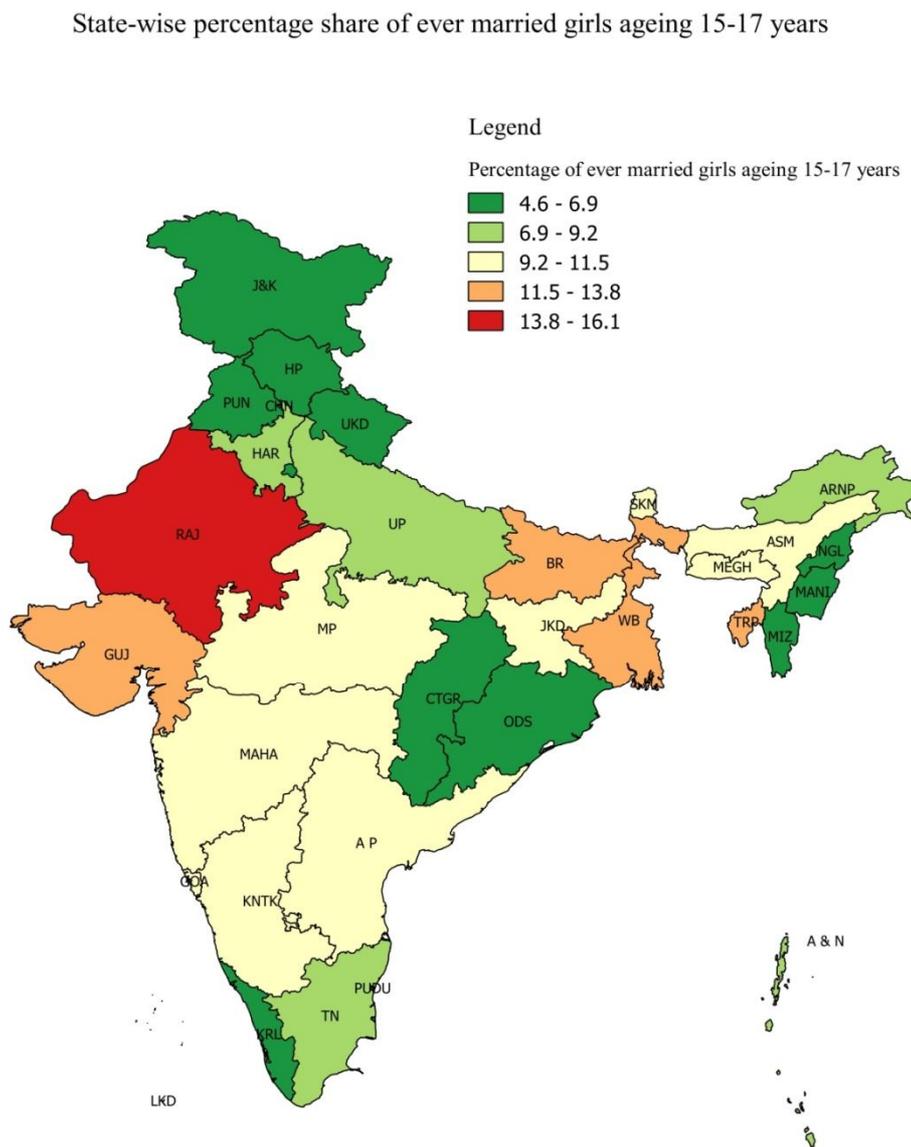
* Jointly with Tamil Nadu

All these achievements do not match with the appallingly high prevalence of child marriage in the state; neither these achievements match with the poor gender development index reported in recent times. When observed its achievements through the prism of gender, i.e. comparing achievements of women with that of the men, the results show a huge disparity among the genders. As a result, in terms of Gendered Development Index (GDI) of 2006, the states rank has been dismal. According to the report of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the state ranked 24th among 35 states and Union Territories (UT) of India, four ranks down compared to GDI of 1996 and 2 ranks down compared to HDI of 2006 (MOWCD 2009). Though the state's rank in terms of health indicator is 16th, its achievements in the other two indicators namely economy and education (ranked 24th in both the cases) pulled down its overall achievement in GDI. It is very well

¹ Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is the average number of children expected to be born per woman during her entire span of reproductive period.

accepted fact that these two indicators hugely influence child marriage which we will discuss shortly.

Figure 1.1



Source: Census of India, 2011

Overall the state has failed miserably in the field of prevention of child marriage. Furthermore, West Bengal reports an appallingly high rate of girl child trafficking, which is estimated to be a whopping 42 percent of total incidents of trafficking of minor girls in the country (Indian Express 2016). The report citing the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) data also mentioned three other eastern Indian states namely Assam, Bihar and Odisha for reporting very high incidences of girl child trafficking; together these four states contributes to 75 percent of all such incidents in the country. Many of these girls are trafficked after marriage. In many cases, these marriages are found to be arranged with the motive of trafficking these girls. So child marriage in the state is also responsible for increasing vulnerability of girls being trafficked to other parts of the country, where they are treated as slaves, or even forced to work in the sex market.

Ogni Oraon, a victim of starvation, stays with her younger daughter, Sarathi Oraon at Char Saheb nagar. All of her five sons are now staying at Lalbag. Sarathi's husband Kalu is an agricultural labourer and lost his dwelling in river erosion. Sarathi was married when she was thirteen. Ogni's elder daughter, Minoti was married in Bihar while she was a minor. Ogni has no information about her present status. Her neighbours however told that the incident was a case of trafficking of the minor girl with false promise of marriage
Field Survey

Let us focus on the revelations of various official data in India namely the Census of India, the National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4) and District Level Household Survey-4 (DLHS-4) on the prevalence of child marriage in India and its constituent territories. The Census very clearly reports the number of girls (or boys) been ever married in a particular age group. According to Census 2011 there were no girl ageing less than 10 years been found to be ever married in the country, in the age group 10 to 14 years however, 2.86 percent of girls in the country were found to be married; in case of West Bengal the figure is marginally lower at 2.6 percent. But the percentage of girls being

Table 1.3: Age at marriage of women and percentage of women married before attaining legal age of marriage in Indian States

| States | DLHS 4 (2012-13) | | NFHS 4 (2015-16) | |
|-------------------|---|---|---|--|
| | Mean age at marriage for girls (marriages that occurred during the reference period*) | Percentage of currently married women married below age 18 years (marriages that occurred during the reference period*) | Women age 20-24 years married before age 18 years (%) | Women age 15-19 years who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey (%) |
| A & N Islands | 21.1 | 7.8 | 17.1 | 4.7 |
| Andhra Pradesh | 19.8 | 15.9 | 32.7 | 11.8 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 21.3 | 13 | N/A | N/A |
| Assam | N/A | N/A | 32.6 | 13.6 |
| Bihar | N/A | N/A | 39.1 | 12.2 |
| Chandigarh | 22.5 | 1.9 | N/A | N/A |
| Goa | 25.3 | 0 | 9.8 | 2.9 |
| Haryana | 20.8 | 5.9 | 18.5 | 5.9 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 22.3 | 0.5 | N/A | N/A |
| Karnataka | 20.5 | 14.1 | 23.2 | 7.8 |
| Kerala | 22.6 | 2.8 | N/A | N/A |
| Maharashtra | 20.1 | 12 | 25.1 | 8.3 |
| Manipur | 24 | 7 | 13.1 | 7.4 |
| Meghalaya | 23.4 | 5.7 | 16.5 | 8.6 |
| Mizoram | 23.1 | 6 | N/A | N/A |
| Madhya Pradesh | N/A | N/A | 30 | 7.3 |
| Nagaland | 24.6 | 6 | N/A | N/A |
| Puducherry | 22.8 | 4.9 | 10.7 | 3.5 |
| Punjab | 21.9 | 3.9 | N/A | N/A |
| Sikkim | 22.8 | 8.3 | 14.5 | 2.8 |
| Tamil Nadu | 22 | 5.3 | 15.7 | 5 |
| Telangana | 19.8 | 10.7 | 25.7 | 10.6 |
| Tripura | 20.9 | 18.9 | 32.2 | 18.8 |
| Uttarakhand | N/A | N/A | 13.9 | 2.9 |
| West Bengal | 19.2 | 31.6 | 40.7 | 18.3 |

*Reference period is 01.01.2008 to date of survey

N/A= Data Not Available

Table 1.4: Age at marriage of women and percentage of women married before attaining legal age of marriage in districts of West Bengal

| Districts | DLHS-4 (2012-13) | | NFHS-4 (2015-16) | |
|-------------------|---|---|---|--|
| | Mean age at marriage for girls (marriages that occurred during the reference period*) | Percentage of currently married women below age 18 years (marriages that occurred during the reference period*) | Women age 20-24 years married before age 18 years (%) | Women age 15-19 years who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey (%) |
| Bankura | 18.5 | 40 | 38.3 | 16.6 |
| Bardhaman | 18.7 | 34.3 | 40.1 | 14.4 |
| Birbhum | 18.5 | 35.2 | 52 | 24.9 |
| Dakhin Dinajpur | 19.4 | 32.1 | 44.4 | 19.5 |
| Darjeeling | 21.5 | 10.2 | 20.4 | 10.1 |
| Haora | 20.3 | 20.6 | 24.4 | 7.2 |
| Hugli | 19.7 | 25 | 31.9 | 19.6 |
| Jalpaiguri | 21.4 | 16.9 | 32.7 | 9.7 |
| Koch Bihar | 19.9 | 31.5 | 41.2 | 23.6 |
| Kolkata | 23.4 | 8.5 | 13.1 | 4.8 |
| Maldah | 19.2 | 25.8 | 54.8 | 24.9 |
| Murshidabad | 18.3 | 39.1 | 52.6 | 29.5 |
| Nadia | 19.3 | 31.2 | 40.5 | 21.9 |
| North 24 parganas | 19.8 | 29.7 | 36 | 18.7 |
| Paschim Medinipur | 19.4 | 39.2 | 52.1 | 15.6 |
| Purba Medinipur | 19 | 26.5 | 43.1 | 19.6 |
| Puruliya | 19.5 | 30.7 | 38.3 | 21.7 |
| South 24 Parganas | 19 | 29.1 | 49.7 | 19.3 |
| Uttar Dinajpur | 19.4 | 31.4 | 39.1 | 17.4 |

*Reference period is 01.01.2008 to date of survey

married in the age group of 15 to 17, i.e. in post puberty age, the figure abruptly increases to 10 percent for the country as a whole, and for the particular case of West Bengal the figure is even higher at 13.3 percent; prevalence of marriage in this age group is lower to only Rajasthan which has recorded a highest 16.1 percent girls of the particular age group as being married (See Figure 1.1). The other two data namely DLHS and NFHS, report age at marriage related data in their own unique way (Table 1.3 & 1.4). While DLHS report mean age at marriage as well as percentage of currently (during the survey) married women married below age 18 years during the reference period (the period between the last and the present DLHS survey), NFHS reports the percentage of women of a particular age group (20 to 24years) married before 18 years of age. Latest rounds of these surveys were not conducted throughout the country, and some of the most populous states with very high prevalence of child marriage like Jharkhand, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh and some Union Territories (UTs) were not surveyed. Barring these states, with which we cannot make any comparison, these two surveys clearly shows that the prevalence of child marriage in West Bengal is highest among the states which has reported under these two surveys. Moreover, DLHS-4 has also reported that the mean age at marriage is lowest in West Bengal among the states.

1.2 Child Marriage in India: A Brief History

Early marriage of women was very much common in the medieval Indian society and was practiced throughout its geographic limits during the period, which consisted much of the south Asian region. Moreover, a huge majority of these marriages lacked the consent of the bride and even the bridegroom. Interestingly, in contrary to this widely practiced phenomenon, ancient Indian scriptures like the *Vedas* have no mention of early marriages of girl. *Vedic Mantras*, especially those in *Rig Veda* indeed suggests that a girl should be married only when she is fully

developed, both physically and mentally (Altekar1959). On the other hand, there are examples, in the Hindu mythological texts, though not many in number, in which women choose their life partners themselves through *Swayamvar*. Which is not only a proof of consent, rather it indicates that women had right to choose their partners.

The ancient scriptures of the land, mentions eight types of marriages viz. love marriage (*Gandharva Vivaha*), marriage by force (*Rakshasa Vivaha*) and even marriage of a women abducted or seduced while in sleep or under the influence of intoxicants (*Pisacha Vivaaha*), the other types of marriages, namely *Brahma*, *Daiva*, *Arya*, *Prajapatya* and *Asura*² were arranged by the father or the guardian of the bride (Altekar 1959); but strange to notice, there are no categorization of marriage on the basis of age of the bridegroom at the time of marriage in the ancient history of the land, which is otherwise was preached and categorized during 400 BC onwards; neither there is any mention of a girl being married at her nascent age or what we call *Balya Vivaha* during the Vedic period, or the disastrous outcome of such marriages, though the society during the period was overwhelmingly dominated by the male. The Cambridge History of India, while discussing the marriage customs during the age of the *Rigveda*, states – “Child marriages so usual in later times, was evidently unknown; and much freedom of choice seems to have existed. Women lived under the protection of their fathers during the life of the latter, and then they fell if still unmarried under the care of their brothers (Cambridge 1922)”. Similar observations are made by renowned historians like A. S. Altekar. According to him, girls were married at a fairly advanced age in the Vedic period; there are several references in the scriptures, of unmarried girls growing old in their parents’ homes. He strongly and categorically dismisses the arguments of some historians that child marriages were performed in the Vedic ages and provided detailed explanations to negate such misinterpretations.

² In *Asura Vivaha* the bridegroom had to pay his in-laws for the marriage

Women in India, down to about 3rd century B. C. could remain unmarried till the age of 16 and the period before marriage was utilized for imparting education to them. Till about the beginning of the Christian era, *Upanayana* or the ceremonial initiation into Vedic studies was as common in the case of girls as it was in the case of boys. The *Atharvaveda* observes that a maiden can succeed in her marriage only if she has been properly trained during the period of studentship. That women are like *Sudras*, ineligible for Vedic studies is the view of a later age, rather as recorded in the *Sarvanukramanika*, there are as many as twenty women among the 'seers' or authors of *Rigveda*. Women were involved in the cultivation of fine arts like music, dance and painting; there were scholars and poetesses among women, women, mostly among *Kshatriyas* were even adepts in the use of the sword and the spear and there are mentions of women participating in the battles. If needed they were also capable to meet the financial requirements of the family mostly through spinning, as Indian fabrics were in great demand throughout the three continents down to the beginning of the 18th century (Altekar 1959).

Historians observe that the advocacy of early marriages of girls started from about 4th century B.C. Initially *Vasistha* and *Baudhayana* recommended that marriages of girls should not be delayed long after their puberty, though they also recommended that girls may be kept unmarried for a period of three years after their puberty, if there are difficulties in properly settling their marriages, *Manu* and *Kautilya* were of the same opinion. But *Gautama* and *Vishnu* insisted that marriages must be celebrated within three months of the time of puberty. These recommendations coincided with developing economy in the subcontinent and its early external invasions. During the period, the Vedic tribal societies were rapidly disintegrating under the influence of spread of agriculture on the one hand and urbanization that was taking place as a consequence on the other. Concurrently as a result of surplus generated, the society was undergoing large scale socio-economic

stratification and women were started being considered as commodities. Secondly, the invasion of the Greeks during 3rd century B.C. and the continuation of the wars in the subcontinent further jeopardized the status of women in the society. As it happened always in the history of mankind, whoever is on the opposite side, whatever is the issue, battles were fought over the bodies of women, and they were the worst sufferers of all political conflicts. As atrocities on women were increasing, the patriarchy, concerned about the chastity and virginity of the probable bride perhaps responded with the solution of early marriage of girls, as they were treated as the 'property' and 'honour' of the clan. The Mahabharata suggests that absolute chastity is to be most desired, and so one should select a bride who should not have even dreamt of sexual love (Altekar 1959).

During the first millennium, the age at marriage for girls continued to decline in accordance to the Hindu scriptures, from about 200 A. D. pre-puberty marriages became order of the day. During the same time, Yajnavalkya recommended that girls should be married before the age of puberty, otherwise every month their guardians will be guilty of the destruction of an embryo.

By the time Muslim invaders arrived in India, in most parts of the subcontinent, girls were used to be married before they attained their puberty (Pande 2013). This is relevant because some historians blame the Muslim invasions during the medieval and early modern period as one of the reasons behind under-age marriage of girls (Planning commission). Though this proposition may not be correct, it certainly accepts the fact that military conflicts and over-militarization does have its impact on the freedom of women and their age at marriage.

During the late nineteenth century, under the British occupation, Indian society witnessed social movements against child marriage that also demanded state intervention to curb this malaise. The first legal sanction came in the form of age of consent for cohabitation, which was

fixed at 10 years for girls in the Indian Penal Code of 1860 (Agnes 2013). In 1890, following the death of *Phulmonee* a young bride due to violent sexual intercourse by her husband, the age was raised to 12 years. It took another 39 years to fix the minimum age of marriage for girls to be fixed at 14 years through the enactment of Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) 1929, which is more commonly known as the Sarda Act. The bill is named after the then member of Central Legislative council Mr. Harbilas Sarda. The legal age for marriage of women was raised to 15 years by enacting the Special Marriage Act of 1954 and Hindu Marriage Act of 1955. CMRA 1929 was amended in 1978, to raise the legal age of

"In fact, the Indian political class woke up to the reality when Census of 1921 reported that there were 600 brides between the ages of one and 12 months. It is said that a shocked Mahatma Gandhi urged the member of Central Legislative Council, Harbilas Sarda, to introduce a bill restraining child marriages"

Planning Commission, 2010

marriage for women and men further to 18 and 21 respectively, which continues till date under the prevailing law in this context namely, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006 (POCMA).

Historically, the earliest and the most prominent reasons behind child marriage are therefore inherent to the prevailing socio-economic conditions of the period, gender relation persisting in the

society and women's vulnerability within the native society or to the invaders. The planning commission's list of new complex causes of child marriage too includes "the growing insecurity of girls and increasing violence against them"³ as one of the major reasons for high prevalence of child marriages in the country. The report states – "It is also the observation of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) that poor families may regard a young as an economic burden and her marriage as a necessary survival strategy for her family. UNICEF is of the opinion that there may be several reasons why parents get their daughters

³ Restraining Child Marriage, EPW, April 11, 2009. Vol.-XLIV, No. 15

married off early. They may think that early marriage offers protection from the dangers of sexual assault or more generally, offers the care of a male guardian. Early marriage may also be seen as a strategy to avoid girls becoming pregnant outside marriage. But there is no doubt that these notions get an impetus in an environment that basically goes against the girl child and women. There is no doubt that the affluent and the well off do not indulge in this practice, as the system is favorable to them in every sense (Planning commission)". The report not only identified vulnerability of girls as the cause of early marriage, it admitted that the vulnerability is higher in case of the girls from poor families, as the system is not favorable to them.

Even in the present day context, early Marriage continues to have close bearing with the socio-economic and cultural variables of the concerned society, which we will discuss in detail later in the present report.

While the minimum age for marriage is affirmed in POCMA, 2006 with no ambiguity, there remain some confusion about whether the minorities of the country, who have their own effective personal law, are covered under POCMA. Particularly in case of West Bengal with 27 percent share of Muslims in the population, the issue is a significant one. West Bengal ranks third among the states in terms of percentage share of Muslim population, two other states with higher percentage share of Muslims are Jammu & Kashmir (68.3% Muslim population according to census of India, 2011) and Assam (34.2%). Census of India 2011 also reveals – in three of the bordering districts of West Bengal namely, Murshidabad (with 66.3% Muslim population), Maldah (51.3%) and Uttar Dinajpur (50.9%) Muslims constitute majority of the total population. In view of the fact that the Muslim share in the population of the Indian side of borderlands between West Bengal and Bangladesh is considerably higher compared to the average Muslim population of the state and its bordering districts, it becomes important for the present research to look into the Muslim personal law that governs the marriages of the second largest religious group in the state. The Muslim

personal law connects minimum age of marriage for girls with puberty; it states – the girls no sooner than she attains the puberty or completes 15 years of age, whichever is earlier, is competent to get married without the consent of her parents. The Gujarat High Court recently in an order⁴ made observations in accordance to the Muslim Personal Law. But, there are instances when the judiciary has claimed that the prohibition under POCMA is no way against the religious rights guaranteed under article 25 and 29 of Indian constitution and therefore prevails over the Muslim Personal Law⁵. West Bengal with a very high Muslim population and equally high incidences of child marriages, surprisingly prefer to remain silent about the issue.

⁴ Yusuf Ibrahim Mohammed Lokhat V/S State of Gujarat, dated 02.12.2014

⁵ M Mohammed Abbas V/S The Chief Secretary, Madurai Bench of Madras High Court, 2015 etc.

2. Milieu, Method and Motivation

2.1 The Research Settings

Murshidabad district is the fourth largest district in West Bengal in terms of population, and seventh in terms of area. Resultantly, the population density of the district is very high. Only Kolkata and its highly urbanized adjoining districts, namely Haora, North 24 Parganas and Hugli recorded higher density of population in Census of India, 2011. With almost three quarters of land being used for agricultural purposes, much higher than the state average of 61 percent, the population in the district forms a predominantly agrarian society (Planning commission 2010). According to Census 2011, 48.1 percent of the main workers in the district are engaged in one or the other type of agricultural activity as against a state average of 39.2 percent. The district is divided by the Bhagirathi River into two distinctly different regions; the eastern part in which our survey area falls is known as *Bagri*, consists of low-lying alluvial soil and vastly irrigated by the rivers Padma and Bhagirathi, there are a good number of other smaller rivers too like the Jalangi river. West to river Bhagirathi is continuation of Chhotanagpur plateau, part of the *Rarh* region of West Bengal. Previously this region was not considered as a fertile land due to its height and scarcity of water for irrigation, yet its character has changed rapidly during the last two to three decades with the help of widespread use of subsoil water for the agricultural purposes in the region. Despite being situated in the fertile *Bagri* region, the Community Development

Blocks adjacent to the international border with Bangladesh⁶ reported to have much lower percentage of people relying on agriculture as their profession (Table 2.1). We will discuss the reasons of such uncharacteristic practice in length while we discuss the economy of the region.

The district ranked second from the bottom in terms of per capita income in 2012-13⁷, and placed at the same rank when considered in terms of human poverty index (HPI), which is an indicator of standard of living and comprises three basic aspects of human deprivations namely, Education, Health and Provisioning both from public and private sources (Planning Commission 2010).

Table 2.1: Involvement of people in agricultural activities in bordering and other Community Development Blocks (CDBs)

| Type of Blocks | Total Main Worker | Total Main Worker (Cultivator) | Total Main Worker (Agricultural Laborer) | Percentage of population engaged mainly in Agriculture |
|----------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Bordering | 627786 | 73956 | 168840 | 38.7 |
| Other | 1394297 | 272093 | 458286 | 52.4 |
| Murshidabad | 2022083 | 346049 | 627126 | 48.1 |

Source: Census of India, 2011

The literacy rate in the district is only 66.6 percent and it ranks 16th out of 19 districts, yet interestingly the gender gap in literacy is only 6.9 percentage points and second only to the corresponding figure of Kolkata (4.3%). This is unlike the general trend of gender gap in literacy, which changes inversely compared to the overall literacy rate.

⁶ The bordering Community Development Blocks (CDBs) are Bhagawangola-I, Bhagawangola-II, Jalangi, Lalgola, Raghunathganj-II, Raninagar-II, Samsanganj, Suti-I, Suti-II

⁷ Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Department of Statistics and Program Implementation, Government of West Bengal

The district is known for being the political centre of Bengal and named after Murshid Quli Khan, the first Nawab of Bengal who ruled it almost entirely from this centrally located place during the early 18th Century, his reign was followed, though not immediately, by another popular name in the history of the region – Siraj ud-Daula. The history of Bengal also remembers Mir Jafar, one of the contemporaries of Siraj, but for some wrong reasons. In the context of independence of India and its subsequent partition, Cyril Radcliffe is named for another wrong reason, to almost similar extent. In fact he bisected (or trisected later with the formation of Bangladesh) a country of a size of a continent with innumerable diverse cultural groups in just one and a half months time, and according to his own words “I was so rushed that I had not time to go into the details” (Van Schendel 2004). The Radcliffe line, which is named after Cyril Radcliffe, was the official demarcating line between the two newly formed neighboring countries – India and Pakistan (including erstwhile East Pakistan), In the eastern side, i.e. in the border along Bangladesh, it passes through some of the most densely populated areas in South Asia and marked by some occasional fences or border pillars. “As borders go, the Bengal border was an amazing innovation. With a length of over 4000 kilometres (total length of border between Bangladesh and India), it was huge. And moreover, no part of it had ever been an international border before. In fact, the inhabitants of this region had no previous experience with modern international boundaries at all; other territories under British control had long surrounded their territory. Remarkably, the Bengal border was the longest new international boundary to come into existence during the worldwide decolonization process of the second half of the twentieth century. It also turned out to be the longest border that India shares with any country” (Van Schendel 2004). In case of our

*“Radcliffe, who headed the Boundary Commission to partition India in 1947, botched up the job in the east by drawing a straight line through villages and rivers, houses and market places”
Banerjee 2001*

research area, the job of demarcating the international border is done mainly by the river *Padma*, which changes its course almost every monsoon season due to floods or huge erosions. River *Padma* presently criss-crosses the international border at multiple points, smaller rivers also join this giant in its effort to violate the Radcliffe line. People have to move back and forth according to the swinging moods of the mighty river. Moreover, 'char' areas, that emerge during the dry season is cultivated for pulses, which contribute handsomely to the income of the people in the border areas, are situated too close to the international border without fences. The changing landscape results into lingering

“Establishing the border in the rivers of Bengal held more surprise. Many of the silt-laden larger rivers are dotted with silt banks islands that are inherently unstable. These are known as ‘Chors’. One day a small chor may appear in the middle of a river and grow rapidly. Next year it may be gone but, if not, it will be colonized by plants, animals and people”

Van Schendel 2004

issues of adverse possession. While around 2062.23 acres of land from West Bengal alone is under adverse possession of Bangladesh, West Bengal has adverse possession of 1437.6 acres of Bangladeshi land (Jamwal 2004).

On the one hand due to grueling poverty and dense population, people have to exploit up to the last inch of land available, for the purpose they have to move beyond the border fences to cultivate their

land on the other side; on the other hand the border guidelines of having no temporary or permanent border security within 150 yards from the international border pushes the Border Security Force personnel inside the habitations, the resultant is a lingering conflict between the forces and the inhabitants of borderlands. The beneficiaries of the conflict are the criminals and the smugglers, who make a fortune out of the porous and fluid border as shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Estimate of illegal trade on Indo-Bangladesh border

| S.No. | Agency | Year | Amount(million takas) |
|-------|--------|---------|-----------------------|
| 1 | MARC | 1998-99 | 73,339.58 |
| 2 | Rahman | 1998 | 7,951.00 |
| 3 | BIDS | 1994 | 25,282.00 |
| 4 | NCAER | 1994 | 13,976.00 |

Source: Jamwal 2004

There are complains of criminal-administration nexus, while illegal migrants procure identification documents illegally, the original inhabitants are harassed unnecessarily.

2.2 Objective and Research Questions

The direct external military threats are not much of an issue in the present geo-political setup of South Asia, but that does not imply that the borders are calm and quiet and conducive for women to live with freedom and dignity, borders are rather restive under the politically created war like situation. While the security forces are admired regularly for “protecting” the nation from some flimsy and fanciful threats from the other side of the imposed border across people akin, their atrocities against their own people are deliberately drowned under the rhetoric of nationalism. Voices raised against their brutal acts are suppressed. The security forces, in many a case are actually deployed against their own people as military solution of persisting domestic political issues, make them habituated to offences against common co-citizens and torturing innocent people, undermine their rights, and for the purpose of suppressing the voice of dissent, in many parts of the country they even enjoy impunity under the legal framework itself like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA); in other places they enjoy

this “privilege” through the help of the local administration, which either remain ignorant to these issues or even work in collusion with them. In a nation like India, almost of a size of a continent, with people so different in their culture is a country of multi-nationalism, security forces often treat the local people as alien and find them more akin in terms of appearance, language, religion and other cultural aspects to the so called enemies on the other side of the border, and do not hesitate to unleash their brutal act on co-citizens.

“A crowd of Muslims attending Id prayers at a mosque in Cooch Behar (India), yards from the border, in December 2000. Among the thousands were Bangladeshis who had crossed the border to attend. As they were returning home, Indian border guards challenged them. Both Bangladeshis and Indians protested. Suddenly one of the guards opened fire, killing four Indians and one Bangladeshi, and injuring Six”
Van Schendel 2004

The border separating Murshidabad District of West Bengal from Bangladesh stands as a remnant of the colonial imagination, haphazardly bisecting the Bengali cultural heartland. The occasional barbed wire fencing, pillars in the river and Border Security Forces (BSF) outposts mark the only evidence of an international border as the people on either side of the line share language, culture, religion and even familial ties. Unsurprisingly, a porous border, crushing poverty and lack of job opportunities facilitate a flourishing

illicit border trade ranging from household goods to cattle to forcibly trafficked women. Millions of people and billions of dollars of goods move back and forth the border illegally, and it happens right under the nose of Border Security Forces. So much so that it becomes difficult to believe that they are only mute spectators of the entire illegal business. In an attempt to improve border security and halt the tide of illegal trade that sometimes includes narcotics and weapons, the Indian government beefed up the BSF presence along the Bangladesh border. But the BSF

personnel have scant respect for basic human rights of borderlanders. They routinely make a mockery out of the right to life, the right to free movement and the right to due process. The BSF has apparently allotted itself the role of judge and executioner when it comes to dealing with smugglers, regularly expressing the belief that they have the right to kill criminals and even common people at their will, at the border. Women in the bordering areas not only have to suffer everyday humiliation and subjugation by the Jawans, they remain continuously under fear and threat of sexual abuse of various kinds by BSF Jawans. Even when villagers manage to avoid physical violence, the BSF is a negative presence in their lives, denying them access to their lands and livelihoods. The women and minor girls are being subjected to sexual offences of various forms. Apart from the extreme subjugation they are facing voyeurism, verbal abuses with sexual connotations and misconducts. Murshidabad is a remote, predominantly Muslim rural border district. Perhaps because of this, the district receives sparse attention from the civil government and exists in a state of suffocating underdevelopment. According to National Sample Survey (NSS) data of 2009, the district is the poorest in India. It is shocking that 30 lakh people, almost half the population of the district, are forced to survive on less than 30 rupees per capita per day income.

“Worst is the attitude of the guards. On and off they check us, we are women, but they do not spare us, they take their weapon and nudge us with it, feel us up to see if we are hiding anything on our person. As if! But no one will complain, no one will speak up, we are at their mercy, if we speak up then it’s our fault and we have to bear the consequences”

Bhaduri (Undated)

For the purpose of the present research we will discuss the issue of presence of bordering guards as a cause of broader vulnerability of women in the borderlands and its influence on the age of marriage of women thereon, with special reference to Indo-Bangladesh border areas

of Murshidabad district, apart from the established attributes of child marriage like the gender relations, institutions of patriarchy, control over sexuality, economic reasons, lack of better educational and economic opportunities, lack of awareness about adverse health consequences, lack of legal awareness and political commitments. We will also try to relate these attributes with the overwhelming presence of security forces, and try to gauge whether or not these attributes are influenced by the presence of security forces; in other words, the central research question in this paper will remain – whether or not the presence of security forces directly or indirectly influence the age at marriage of women in the border areas. We will also try to investigate to some extent the effect of river erosion, which has direct bearing with the economy of the region of investigation, has any relation with the prevailing practice of child marriage in the region.

Most of the studies done on the subject, i.e. child marriage are based on the available data –though these data enquire the state of insecurity and vulnerability of women as a whole they hardly have ever enquired the prevailing state's oppression as a particular area of the investigation and try to connect it with incidences of child marriage.

As Collins et al. states “most gender theories are based on a particular range of empirical materials. Thus, many theories appear to be at least partially true. The problem is that they are not comprehensive, and they lack explanatory leverage outside of particular context”⁸. On the other hand observers argue that borders have historically evolved as gendered entity and thereby these have become spaces of extraordinary control and violence against women (Banerjee 2011).

Referring to the 1997 Bollywood movie ‘Border’, Karen Gabriel observed that – the ‘nation’ comes to be located in all its ideological significations,

⁸Collins, R., J.S. Chafetz, R.L. Blumberg, S. Coltrane, and J.H. Turner. 1993. “Toward an Integrated Theory of Gender Stratification.” *Sociological Perspectives* 36:185–216. As quoted in *Gender Scripts and age at marriage*, Sonalde Desai and Lester Andrist. *Demography*, Vol 47, Number 3, 2010

at its geographical borders – so that the male, military community that mans them comes to be constructed as its most authentic representatives, because they stake their lives on their ‘national’ identity. War is the catalyst that distillates not just this identity but conversely also the gender of the nation that ‘confers’ that identity as masculine. The conferring of this identity however remains an uneasy and unresolved process; as is repeatedly projected, the masculinity of this community derives (partly) from its relentless feminisation of the nation as ‘Mother’ – a process perfectly commensurate with the relegation of its women to the ‘interiors’, away from border (Gabriel 1998)

Therefore the common perception in the society is, that the borders are not for the women, it is a man’s domain, women who have no other option but to live in the border are to be subjected to various atrocities. As a result it becomes obvious to investigate the issue of restive borders as an attribute to the phenomenon of child marriage in the State of West Bengal. Though the research is conducted only in a small segment of the 2217 km long international border shared by the State with Bangladesh, the narratives of torture and humiliation of common people, especially of the women of the region remains almost similar throughout the border.

2.3 Methodology

The present study employed a mixed method comprising a detailed study of the available literatures on the subject to understand various aspects of child marriage namely, Economic, Social, Legal, Religious etc. It also examined the most important attributes of child marriage in West Bengal and other states of India. The exercises involved in the research are as described hereunder.

- Secondary Data analysis and literature review

For the purpose of better understanding of situation, the study included secondary data analysis. Large scale unit level data like the India Human Development Study (IHDS), District Level Household Survey (DLHS) were thoroughly analyzed. It also studied the aggregate data like Census of India 2011 and the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) fact sheets for various states.

- Field survey with formatted questionnaire

The survey for gathering primary data is done using a pre designed questionnaire (attached as appendix 2) at two sets of locations in Raninagar I and Raninagr II blocks of Murshidabad District; first set of two villages comprised of a predominantly Muslim village and the other a Hindu – Schedule Caste (Chai) village at the bordering area, having regular presence of BSF and the other set of two villages with almost similar socio-economic and religious pattern but without presence of BSF and far from actual bordering area. The name and nature of the villages is provided below (table 2.3). Two habitations, namely Nichushalbana and Taltala falls under different blocks, yet these habitations are contiguous in nature and treated as one village in the present report.

Overall 396 households responded to the survey and basic details of 1999 members of these families were gathered. Out of 595 eligible women (all women except age less than 18 years), 403 responded to the specially designed questionnaire to understand their level of empowerment, awareness about child marriage, marriage expenditure, their perception about reasons of child marriage, their level of satisfaction regarding various public institutions and overall social condition prevailing in their respective villages.

Table 2.3: List of Habitations surveyed with Gram Panchayat, Community Development Block and their position with respect to border

| Village | Gram Panchayat | Block | Nature |
|------------------|----------------|--------------|------------------|
| Char Saheb Nagar | Malibari-I | Raninagar-II | Away from border |
| Char Rajapur | Rajapur | Raninagar-II | Away from border |
| Taltala | Malibari-I | Raninagar-II | Near border |
| Nichushalbona | Hurshi | Raninagar-I | Near border |
| Lalkup Colony | Rajapur | Raninagar-II | Near border |

Table 2.4: Village wise distribution of household according to the religion of head of the household

| Village | Religion of head of the household | | | Total |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|-------|-------|
| | Hindu | Muslim | Other | |
| Char Rajapur | 69 | 2 | 0 | 71 |
| Char Saheb Nagar | 129 | 1 | 1 | 131 |
| Taltala/Nichusalbana | 90 | 1 | 0 | 91 |
| Lalkup Colony | 1 | 102 | 0 | 103 |
| Other Villages Total | 198 | 3 | 1 | 202 |
| Bordering Villages | 91 | 103 | 0 | 194 |
| Total | 289 | 106 | 1 | 396 |

Source: Field Survey

- Case Studies

The victims of BSF torture were interviewed separately in length to understand the level of fear persisting in the families; details of marriages that had taken place in these households in recent past were documented with special mention of age at marriage, how the marriages were arranged and the reasons behind early marriage that has taken place if any.

Table 2.5: Village wise distribution of adult women by their marital status

| Village | Marital Status of Women aged 18 and above | | | | Total |
|----------------------|---|-------------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| | Never Married | Currently Married | Widow | Separated | |
| Char Rajapur | 9 | 114 | 11 | 1 | 135 |
| Char Sahebnagar | 14 | 149 | 21 | 3 | 187 |
| Taltala/Nichusalbana | 11 | 105 | 13 | 4 | 133 |
| Lalkup Colony | 11 | 110 | 16 | 3 | 140 |
| Other Villages Total | 23 | 263 | 31 | 4 | 322 |
| Bordering Villages | 22 | 215 | 29 | 7 | 273 |
| Total | 45 | 478 | 61 | 11 | 595 |

Source: Field Survey

- Participatory problem mapping

The research team interviewed the elected representatives of the area of study including Gram Panchayat members and Pradhan, the Members of Legislative Assembly and the Member of Parliament to understand their perspective of the problem and how they are planning to mitigate. Government officials were also consulted for the purpose including the District Social Welfare Officer and Chairperson of District Child Welfare Committee.

At the outset we wish to furnish the facts that have emerged out of field survey, data related to the mean age at marriage of women, mean expenditure on marriage and the mean number of invitees by villages and their position in respect to the international border are provided in Table 2.6. We are furnishing information regarding mean expenditure and mean number of invitees here mainly to understand whether there is any relation of these two with the mean age at marriage.

For long what was merely our hypothesis has been proved during this study. The mean age at marriage of women in the bordering villages, irrespective of their religious identity, is much lower compared to other villages, Charrajapur and Charsaheb Nagar, both Hindu majority villages and away from international border reported the mean age of marriage of women at 19.6 and 17.0 years respectively, averaging 18.1 years. Both these villages reported similar expenditure on marriage too. On the other hand, the other two villages adjacent to the international border namely Taltala/Nichusalbana reported the average age of marriage of women to be 16.7 and 15.8 respectively. Overall mean age at marriage in the bordering villages is 16.2, significantly lower than the mean age at marriage in other villages.

The other eye opener is the fact that despite the mean age at marriage being lower (16.7 years) in Taltala/Nichushalbana, the average expenditure on marriage is higher in this village compared to both Charrajapur and Charsaheb Nagar, despite the fact that all three villages are Hindu villages and the marriage ceremonies involve similar rituals.

Table 2.6: Mean age at marriage, Mean expenditure on Marriage and mean of number of invitees in marriage, by villages, type of villages

| Village | Mean age at marriage (Female) | Mean expenditure on marriage | Mean of number of invitees |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Charrajapur | 19.6 | 33118 | 289 |
| Charsaheb Nagar | 17.0 | 34115 | 226 |
| Taltala/Nichusalbana | 16.7 | 37699 | 247 |
| Lalkup Colony | 15.8 | 25393 | 200 |
| Other Villages Total | 18.1 | 33882 | 247 |
| Bordering Villages Total | 16.2 | 30770 | 219 |
| All | 17.2 | 32392 | 234 |

Source: Field Survey

Lalkup colony, with predominantly Muslim population, reported an alarmingly low mean age at marriage (15.8 years). Overall the gap between the reported mean age at marriage of women in bordering villages and other villages is significantly high at 1.9 years.

3 Early Marriage: Cause and Consequence

3.1 Status of Women in India

The entire issue of gender disadvantage, of which child marriage is only a part, is precariously self-replicating in nature. Under a vicious cycle, its causes and consequences further exacerbate each other. In India, women face discrimination even before they are born. The female male ratio (FMR) in India, which stands at only 943 women per 1000 men according to census 2011, is strong evidence in support of this fact.

Table 3.1: Female Male Ratio (FMR) of India and West Bengal by age-group

| Age group | India | | | West Bengal | | |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|-------|-------|
| | Total | Rural | Urban | Total | Rural | Urban |
| 0 to 10 | 917 | 923 | 900 | 956 | 959 | 946 |
| 11 to 20 | 903 | 905 | 898 | 956 | 955 | 960 |
| 21 to 30 | 955 | 955 | 954 | 974 | 963 | 995 |
| 31 to 40 | 973 | 985 | 950 | 972 | 975 | 965 |
| 41 to 50 | 938 | 947 | 921 | 896 | 894 | 898 |
| 51 to 60 | 985 | 1021 | 919 | 868 | 875 | 856 |
| 61 & above | 1029 | 1036 | 1013 | 1001 | 1041 | 937 |
| All | 943 | 949 | 929 | 950 | 953 | 944 |

Source: Census of India 2011

Analysis of the figures for various age groups further establishes the fact that the menace is far from over, rather it has further strengthened in recent times as we find that the FMR is much lower in the lower age group than the higher age group (see Table 2.1), though this phenomenon is partly influenced by the fact that the expectancy of life for elderly women is slightly higher than those of elderly men.

Estimates by Amartya Sen revealed that around 41.6 million women or 10.2 percent of existing female population were 'missing' in India during early 1990s (Klasen 2003). Using the same method, Klasen estimated the number of missing women to be 42.6 million during early 2000s, which although have increased in absolute terms, nevertheless considering the growth of the female population in the country itself, the percentage figure has declined by 1.6 percentage points to 8.6 percent (ibid). As Sen explains, existence of most of these women was eliminated by sex selective abortion, infanticide or left to die under severe malnutrition or diseases for which they were not treated.

Figure 3.1: Cycle of Gender Disadvantage

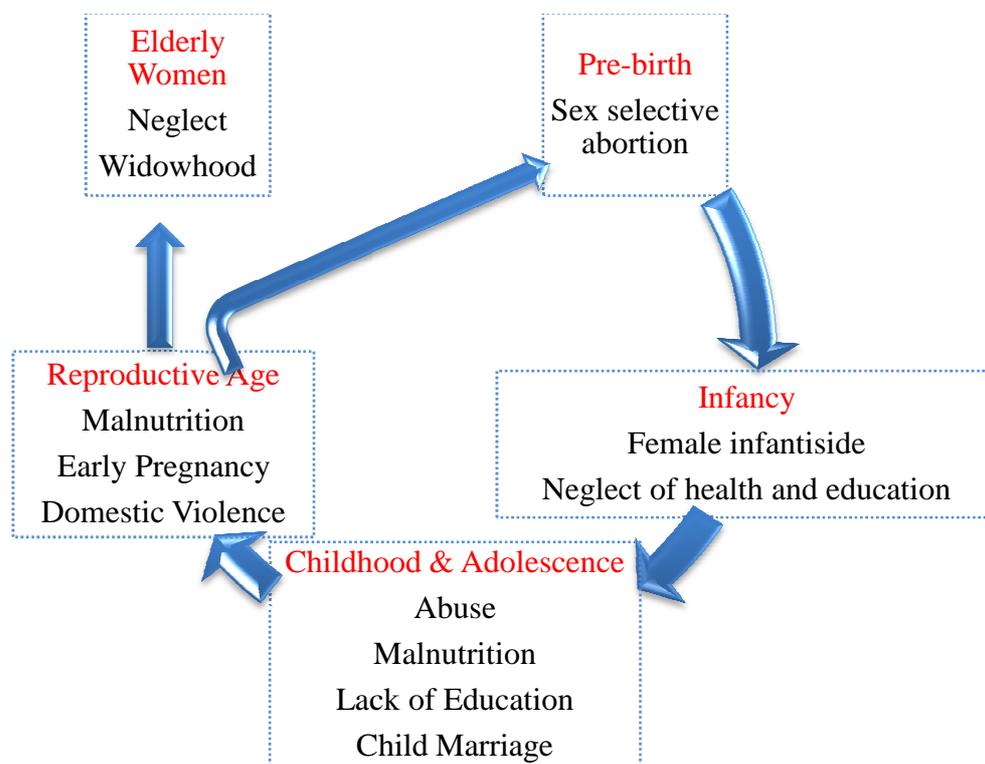
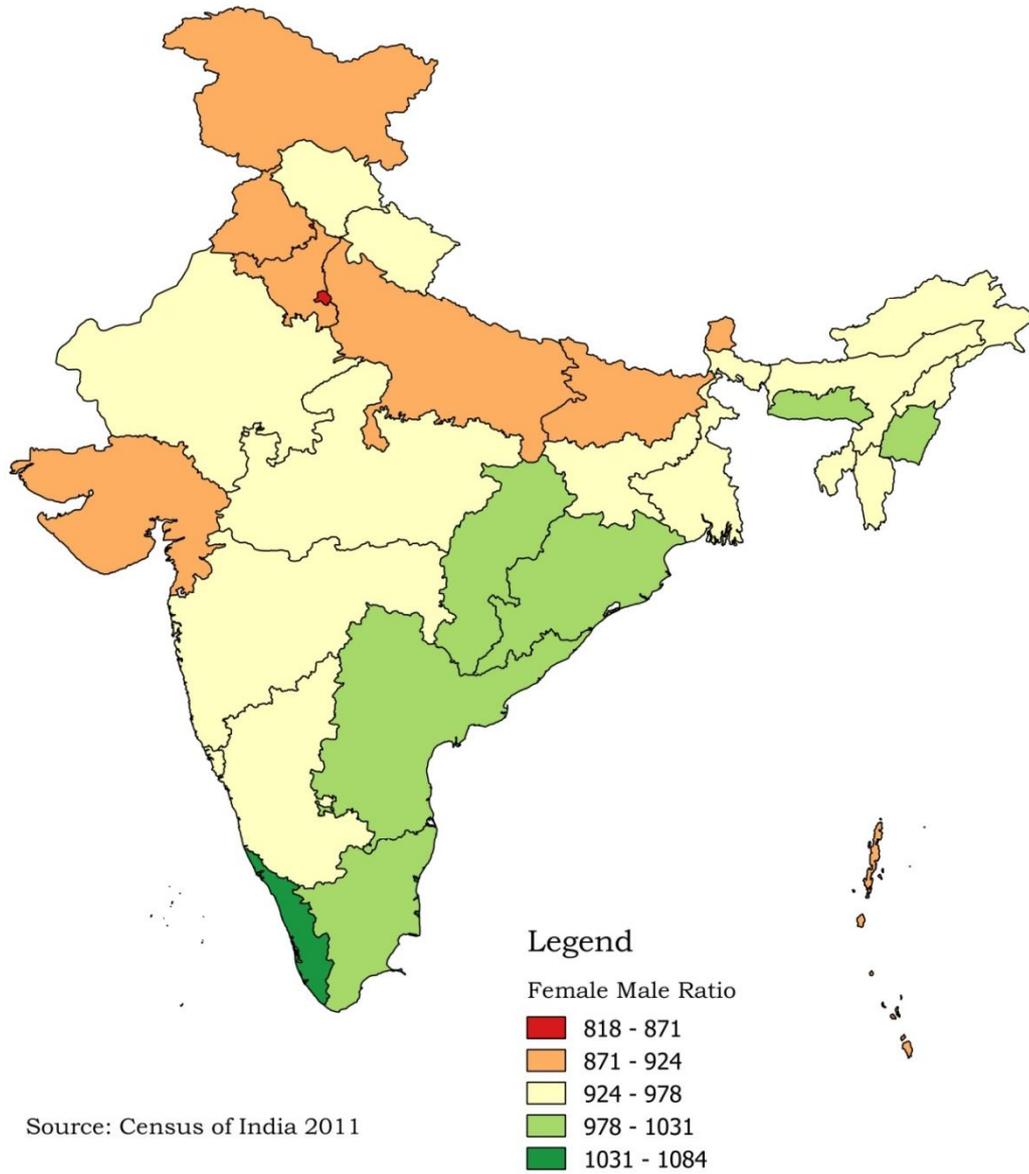


Figure: 3.2

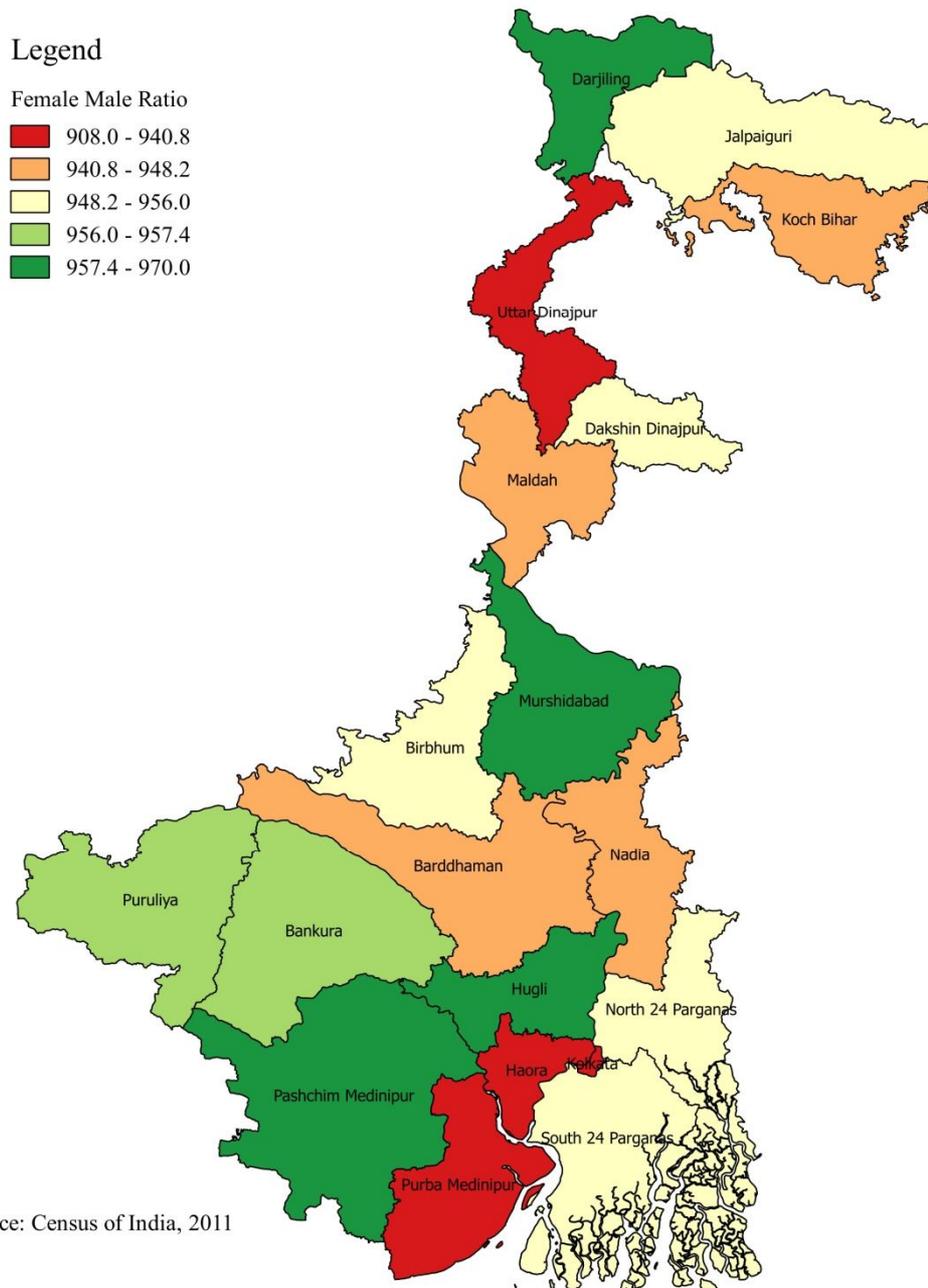
Female Male Ratio (FMR) of Indian States



Source: Census of India 2011

Figure 3.3

Female Male Ratio of West Bengal Districts



Source: Census of India, 2011

These facts are strongly corroborated by most reliable sources available. Survey data like the NFHS-3 (2005-16) revealed while the complete immunization rate for boys was 45.3 percent, for girls the rate is only 41.5 percent. In another survey (Coverage Evaluation Survey 2009) by the UNICEF, the rates were reported to be 61.9 and 59.9 percent respectively. No wonder the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) for girls is higher than boys, 42 out of 1000 newborn girls die before completing the first year whereas the figure is 39 for boys (SRS 2013). The gap is much wider in case of some of the North-Eastern States. Malnutrition and anemia among women is much higher than men. The latest report by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) shows that in case of ailments, males avail expensive private treatment in greater number than female

Girls who survive these extreme hostilities are deprived of adequate education. A third of female population in the country is yet to be freed from the incarceration of illiteracy, though the gender gap in literacy has declined by 5.8 percent points during last decade, the gap is still a huge

Table 3.2: Gender parity in educational indicators at various levels, India

| Gender related educational indicators | 1990-91 | 2007-08 |
|---|---------|---------|
| Gender Parity Index for education (Primary) | 0.76 | 0.98 |
| Gender Parity Index for education (Secondary) | 0.6 | 0.85 |
| Gender Parity Index for education (Tertiary) | 0.54 | 0.7 |

Source: Gender and Social Exclusion Indicators, United Nations Development Program

16.7 percent points according to the census of India 2011. Similarly, the gender parity index⁹ at primary level has improved but it has not improved to the same tune at the secondary and tertiary levels of education (Table 3.2).

As a consequence gender parity in educational indicators like the mean years of schooling or expected years of schooling are yet to achieve the desired levels. In India, while mean years of schooling for female is only 3.6 years, the same figure for the males is double at 7.2 years.

“Unwanted” in their own family and in the society, girls are actually considered a socio-financial burden. The family does not allow her to get adequate education; neither as we will see later in this report, are allowed to participate equally in the workforce and confine them in non-paying household works. The sooner she is married off is supposed to be better for the family, as the dowry required is lower in case the girls are married young and the parents/guardians can shrug off their responsibility of “protecting” the girls from the hostile “men’s world”.

Overwhelming social pressure compels even the girls to believe that they have not much option but to get married, and sooner is better. As Simon De Beauvoir puts “The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage. Even today, most women are, were, or plan to be married, or they suffer from not being so. Marriage is the reference by which the single woman is defined, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institution (Beauvoir 2010).”

Together all these disadvantages accrue to produce a dismal figure of gender development in India in general and the state of West Bengal in particular. Although in recent past, India has regularly featured in the league of countries that has performed much better than average in terms of economic growth, Human Development achievements in India

⁹ The gender parity index in primary, secondary and tertiary education is the ratio of the number of female students enrolled at respective levels to the number of male students in each level. To standardize the effects of the population structure of the appropriate age groups the gender parity index (GPI) of the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for each level of education is used.

has remained appallingly low. Be it educational achievements like rate of literacy, mean years of schooling and Expected years of schooling, or health outcomes like Life Expectancy at Birth, Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), India's performance appears to be dismal compared to almost all of its neighbors in South Asia and in some cases worse than the most disadvantaged countries in the entire globe; for example, India's Human Development Index (HDI) is poorer than some of the sub-Saharan African countries like Angola and Botswana. India, with Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.609, ranks 130th out of 188 countries. India further slips to 151st rank (out of 161 countries that have been reported in the list) in terms of Gender Development Index (GDI) and placed in the worst group of eleven countries in this regards.¹⁰ Out of the ten nations that have reported to have performed worse than India, six are from sub-Saharan Africa (Liberia, Guinea, Mali, Central African Republic, Chad and Niger), two are from West Asia (Iraq and Yemen) and the rest two from South Asia (Afghanistan and Pakistan). Apart from being situated in the so-called underdeveloped areas, these countries are known for their status of war ravaged countries with persisting political turmoil within. It is relevant to mention here that except Pakistan, all the neighbouring countries of India, namely Sri Lanka (85th), China (94th) Bangladesh (109th), Nepal (114th), Bhutan (120th) ranked much better than India in terms of GDI.¹¹

Table 3.3: Human Development Indicators of Female and Male in India

| Life Expectancy at Birth | | Expected Years of Schooling | | Mean Years of schooling | | Per Capita Gross National Income (2011 PPP \$) | |
|--------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|--|------|
| Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| 69.5 | 66.6 | 11.3 | 11.8 | 3.6 | 7.2 | 2116 | 8656 |

Source: United Nations Development Program, 2014

¹⁰ United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2014.

¹¹ *ibid*

In the coming sections of this report we will discuss the status of various human development and gender development indicators of India and its states with special reference to the state of West Bengal, its district Murshidabad and the borderlands of the state and gauge the disadvantages faced by the borderlands using both secondary and primary data, simultaneously we also try to relate the impact of these factors on the age at marriage of women in the borderlands. These indicators mentioned hereunder are universally acknowledged as the prime attributes to the practice of child marriage.

- i. Lack of Education
- ii. Economy
- iii. Vulnerability of Women, Laws and Child Marriage

Our study has recorded the opinion of adult women in the surveyed villages about reasons behind the child marriage in the region. The answers to the questions were noted in a scaled manner, wherein their perception about cause of early marriage of girls was registered with their level of agreement.

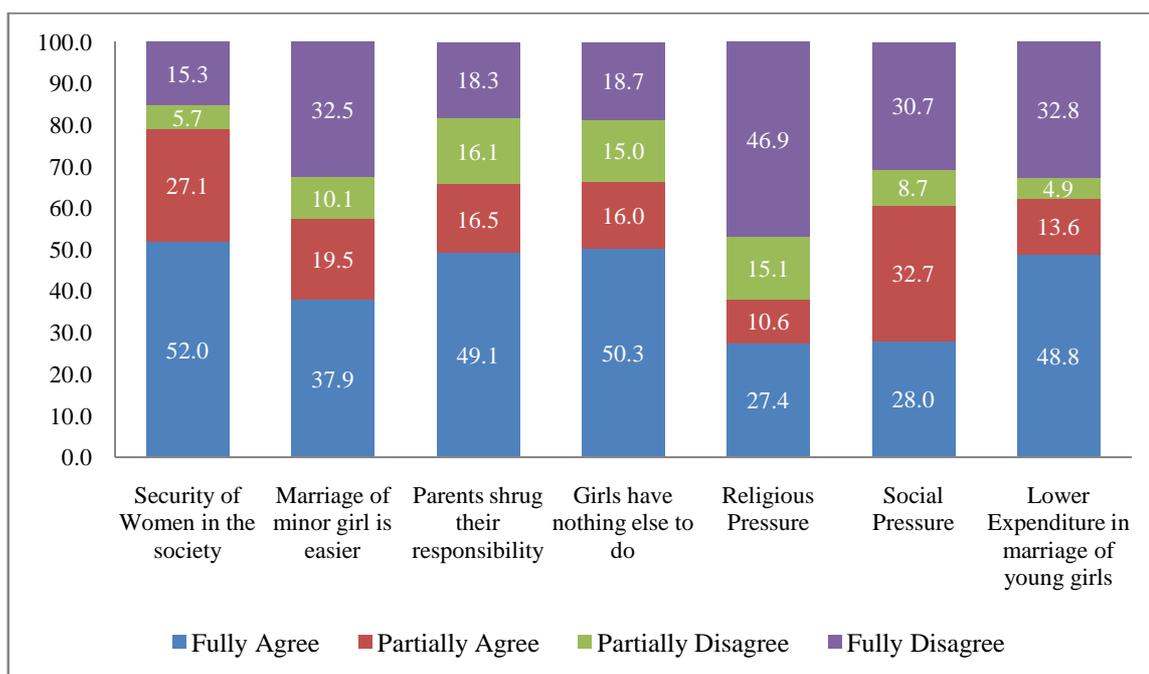
A huge majority of women agreed that the lack of security of women in the region is the primary reason behind early marriage. While 52 percent of them fully agreed to the proposition another 27 percent agreed partially to it, together they constitute 79 percent of all women respondents (see figure 3.4). Other reasons for early marriages as agreed by the women of the region are mentioned according to reducing level of agreement by them. What is interesting to note is the fact that the women do not perceive religious or social pressure to be serious reasons of early marriage. They even discarded the wide perception among us that getting a child married is easier. They primarily pointed towards the prevailing sense of insecurity among women as the major cause of child marriage. We will discuss how this perception aggravates as one nears the borderland in section 6.

Table 3.4: Rank of causes of child marriage according to perception of adult women respondents

| Rank | Cause of early marriage |
|------|--|
| 1 | Security of Women in the society |
| 2 | Girls have nothing else to do |
| 3 | Parents shrug their responsibility |
| 4 | Lower Expenditure in marriage of young girls |
| 5 | Social Pressure |
| 6 | Marriage of minor girl is easier |
| 7 | Religious Pressure |

Source: Field Survey

Figure 3.4: Causes of Child Marriage according to adult women



Source: Field Survey

3.2 Consequences of Child Marriage

Marriage itself is considered as an inequality escalating institution by the feminists for quite long. According to them, marriage has been a fundamental site of women's oppression and the whole symbolism of

marriage is full of gendered portrayal of the man-woman relation; where the male promises “maintenance” and “protection” of his partner and the bride in return vows for her selfless services to her matrimonial family and promises her subservience to her in-laws for rest of her life. The degree of subservience and the cruelty by the in-laws increases accordingly to the age gap between the bride and bridegroom. In fact “child marriage serves as a means of perpetuating power imbalances between men and women, both in the home and outside (Ghosh et al 2010)”.

Worldwide researches confirm that girls who are married early are more vulnerable to domestic violence. The violence may range from physical and mental torture to threat of abandonment and verbal abuses. More disconcertingly, these early married girls are more likely to believe that these atrocities by their husbands and in-laws are justifiable. In a study by the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) on wellbeing of adolescents in the states of Bihar and Jharkhand revealed that girls married before 18 years of age were twice as likely to report being

Sabina Sheikh, daughter of Salim Sheikh (both name changed), of Uttar Char Majherdiyar (P.S-Raninagar) was married at 14 to a man, 10 years elder than her was seriously injured during sexual intercourse. Salim is trying to get his youngest daughter married who is studying in class IX, despite his neighbours advises to delay her marriage.

Field Survey

beaten, slapped or threatened by their husbands than girls who married later. The same study also revealed that they were three times more vulnerable to forced sex¹². In many of these cases the young brides find them unable to cope up with the situation and either succumb to it or desert their matrimonial home. A recent study by Child Rehabilitation and You (CRY) has also revealed that in Karnataka every third marriage in which a child bride is involved ends

¹² Child Marriage and Domestic Violence, ICRW (Undated)

up in a broken marriage. Apart from extreme

emotional damages, early marriages are known to severely affect the health of girls married at young age. As the young brides have little knowledge of use of contraceptives and lesser say in sexual preferences, early marriages and early sexual activities almost inevitably leads to

Parvina Bibi, daughter of Rajjak Molla and Tohura Bibi of village Lalkup, married when was only thirteen years old with Feru Sardar of Natun Bamnabad in 2007. Rajjak is a landless labourer, who lost agricultural land and dwelling to river erosion. His second daughter Sabrina, was also married at the age of thirteen. Parvina was deserted by her husband, and living with her parents since 2013. Parvina has two children (a son of 5 years and a daughter aged 7 years). She has no job card, depending entirely on her poor father. According to her, suicide is the only option she is left with.

Fima Bibi is only 17 years old. She has a only 10 months old son. Her husband Indajul Sekh forced her to leave her matrimonial house and preparing for divorce. Fima's marriage was solemnized in 2010 under Muslim Marriage Act by a Qazi. She was just eleven years old at the time of her marriage. Fima is now staying in Lalkup, in her maternal house. Her father, Amir Hamja Sekh is a landless labourer and victim of river erosion. Fima dropped out of school during her marriage.

Field Survey

early pregnancy (see tables 1.2 and 1.3, column 5). In many cases these early pregnancies are unwanted or not planned, resulting into termination of pregnancies which leads to serious health hazards. It neither helps the adolescent girls who decide to follow through their pregnancy and have a child at an early age; as in their growing phase they require much better nutrition themselves compared to the adult women. As a result both the

young mother and her child are vulnerable to malnutrition, susceptible to illnesses which may lead to their subsequent mortality. An estimated 14 million adolescents between 15 and 19 in the world give birth each year and girls under 15 are five-times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than women in their twenties. Also, if a mother

is under 18, her baby's chance of dying in the first year of life is 60 percent greater than that of a baby born to a mother older than 19 (UNICEF).

3.3 Prevention of Child Marriage: Recent Government Efforts

Apart from the stringent legal reform, the central government and various state governments are trying to curb child marriage in their respective capacities. Some of the central government programs that had been focused to empowerment of girls, improving their health and educational status and preventing child marriage namely Balika Samriddhi Yojana, Kishori Shakti Yojana etc. has failed to amend the prevailing situation in this regard.

Recently, in 2013 the West Bengal Government has introduced a cash transfer scheme for adolescent girls named *Kanyashree*. The scheme directly focuses on prolongation of schooling and delay of marriage of girls of economically disadvantaged families. Apart from an annual scholarship of Rs. 750 for girls pursuing education till they turn 18, the scheme offers a onetime grant of Rs. 25000 if the girl remains unmarried till that age and pursues study in an academic or vocational institution. The scheme is only meant for girls belong to families with annual income up to Rs. 120000/- only.

*Mr. Sarkar Riyajuddin,
Panchayat Pradhan,
G. P –Kalinagar I
Border areas are exceptional for
their location. It is our societal
practice to arrange early marriage
for girls and boys. Kanyashree
Prakalpa has changed the scenario
to some extent. The Panchayat has
no specific campaign program
related to child marriage.*

*Ms. Nirupoma Mondal,
G.P Member (Char Durgapur),
G.P-Kalinagar –I
Incidences of child marriage are
decreasing. Various schemes like
Mid-day Meal, Kanyashree has a
positive impact on continuation of
school education and minimization
of early marriage. Parents want to
educate their daughters as it brings
financial benefits.*

Our data reveal that out of 73 eligible¹³ girl students reported in the study area, only 37 (50.7%) are registered under the scheme; of these 22 (59.5% of total registered girls) reported that they are not getting their scholarship regularly. Though the figures do not appear to be encouraging, the scheme has created a noise in the society and the need of governmental intervention is felt at

higher administrative levels.

In an interview, Mr. Shayamal Mondal, District Social Welfare Officer of Murshidabad District expressed similar views, keeping his fingers crossed, as according to him the benefits of social welfare schemes does not benefit all classes equally. Excerpts of the interview are provided hereunder:

“I have no idea about national average of child marriage but it is definitely high in 24 Parganas and Murshidabad districts compared to the average of West Bengal. Poverty, lack of consciousness and backward mindsets are the major reasons behind high prevalence of child marriage in these two districts. Societal violence has its impacts as bordering areas are full with illegal activities and antisocial activities; prompting worried parents to marry their girls in an early stage but I have no idea about BSF’s positioning and violence inflicted by their presence.

The situation is changing, incidents of marriage at 12-14 years have decreased sharply and Kannyashree scheme is proving to be instrumental to check early marriage of girls. The tendency of parents to marry off their daughters at early age has decreased due to this scheme.

¹³ According to age, status of schooling and annual income of family

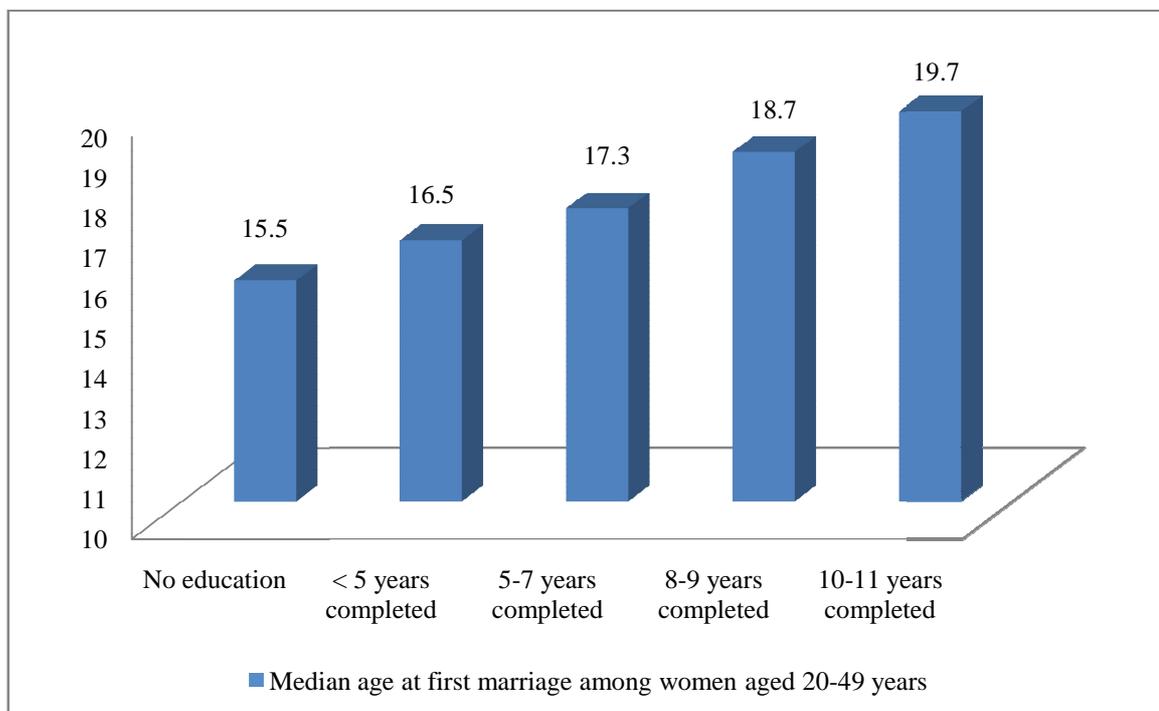
On 16.06.2016, the target for enrolment of beneficiaries for this scheme was fixed at 1,76,039 but achievement was 2,0600. The schemes related to social and family security always usable for comparatively well off and conscious people; the backward sections are always lagging behind, this is again a reality for this scheme. Around 15-16 organizations are working with early marriage issue in district."

During our study many of the respondents mentioned that schooling is one of the prime requirements for reducing early marriage of girls, keeping this fact in mind, we turn to the status of school education in Murshidabad and its bordering areas in the next section, with special reference to our area of study.

4. Education & Child Marriage

Level of education attained by women, or in other words the years spent in school is perhaps the single most important factor to their age at marriage. While it is a common practice that a girl is not considered for marriage till she attends an educational institution (though there are exceptions), on the other hand, immediately after her attainment of desired level of education or leaving it under various compelling circumstances and as she gets very little opportunity in the employment market, it is a common perception of the society that she has no other thing to do but to get married as marriage of girls is regarded as obligatory in Indian society. As figure 4.1 reveals, the age at marriage of girls depends hugely on their schooling years.

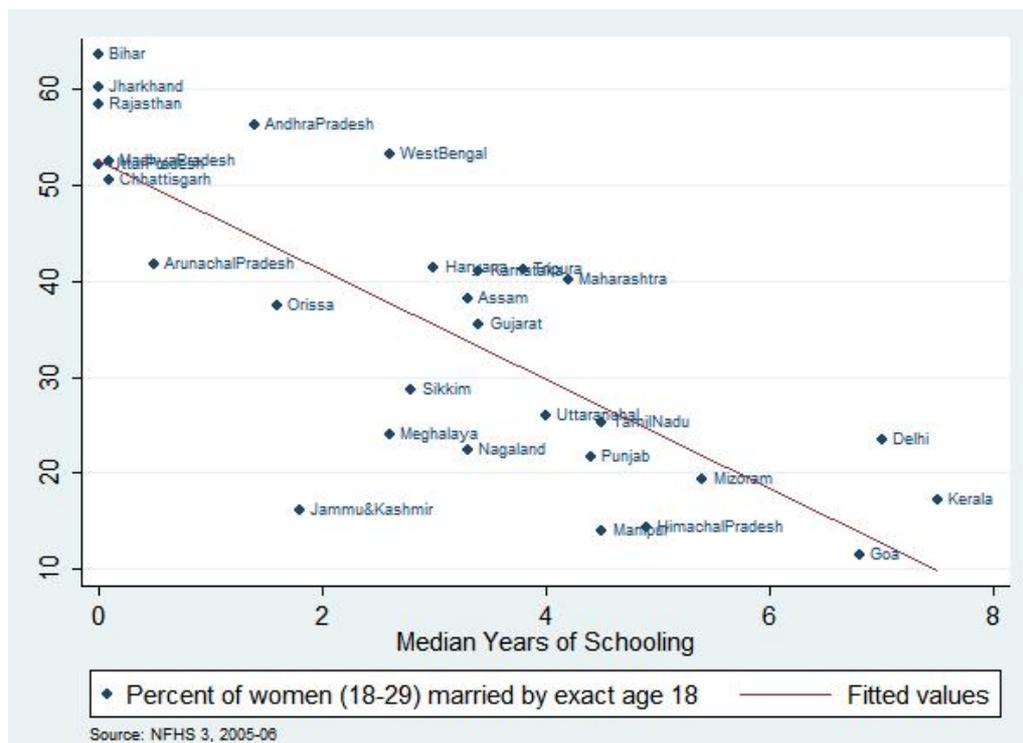
Figure 4.1: Median age at first marriage among women aged 20-49 years by years of schooling, India



Source: National Family Health Survey 3, 2005-06

Median age at first marriage for girls who have completed even 7 years of schooling is 17.3 years, below the legal age of marriage; in other words, half of girls who have completed 7 years of schooling were married by the age of 17.3 years. It is important here to note that the mean years of schooling in the country is only 3.6 years, as mentioned earlier in this report. Corresponding median age at marriage crosses the legal age only in case of the girls who have completed at least 8 to 9 years of schooling, i.e. completion of upper primary level of education. As we are considering median age at marriage, it is understandable that there are girls who are married below 18 years of age, even if they attend school for 8-9 years.

Figure 4.2: State-wise median years of schooling for women ageing 6 years and above and percent of women (18-29 years) married by exact age of 18 years

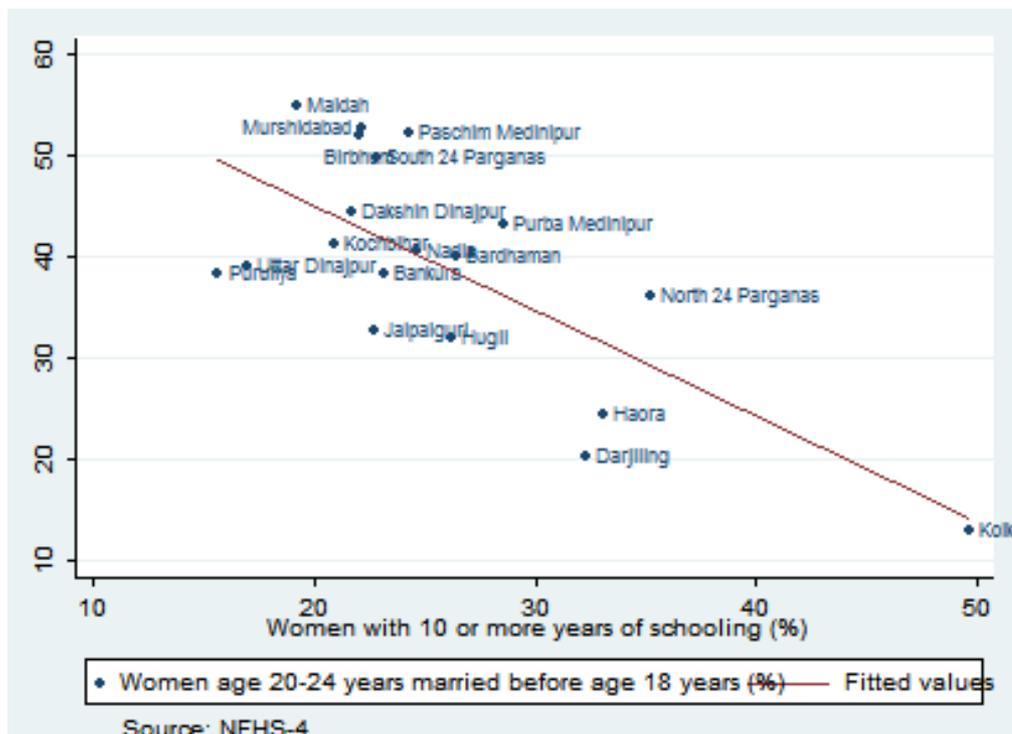


States which have succeeded in engaging the girl's in education have done much better in terms of extending the age at first marriage of girls. Figure 4.2 reveals that the so called 'BIMARU' states (Bihar & Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Uttar

Pradesh), the states known for their poor status of human development, are the worst performers in terms of median years of schooling of women as well as percentage women (18-29 years) married by exact age of 18.

Figure 4.2 also reveals that there are other socio-cultural factors that govern the age at marriage for women. While states appearing below the fitted line performed better than expected, considering median years of schooling of women, those above it have done worse. As it appears the situation in West Bengal is worst, closely followed by Andhra Pradesh, Bihar etc. It means that despite achieving longer schooling, women of West Bengal are married at a very early age. A similar comparison of educational attainment of women and age at marriage among the districts of West Bengal reveals that the bordering districts namely, Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and North 24 Parganas are positioned way up the fitted line.

Figure 4.3: District-wise percentage women with 10 or more years of schooling and percentage women (age 20-24 years) married before age 18 years



4.1 Access to Education in Borderland

Let us investigate whether or not the borderlands are deprived of essential public educational facilities. In absence of adequate spatial data we confine our analysis in a binary way i.e. whether or not some part of the boundary of a particular Community Development Block (CDB) is shared with Bangladesh. In case of Murshidabad district, 9 out of 33 CDBs share their boundaries with Bangladesh¹⁴.

Table 4.1: Availability of schools and population served by level and type of CDB

| Type of CDB | Population | Number of school with various levels | | | |
|------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| | | Primary | U Primary | Secondary | H Secondary |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Bordering | 2147526 | 1,449 | 329 | 108 | 83 |
| Other | 7103807 | 3,598 | 875 | 380 | 238 |
| All | 9251333 | 5,047 | 1,204 | 488 | 321 |
| Population Served per School | | | | | |
| Bordering | | 1482 | 6527 | 19885 | 25874 |
| Other | | 1974 | 8119 | 18694 | 29848 |
| All | | 1833 | 7684 | 18958 | 28820 |

Source: Column 2-Census of India, 2011; Column 3 to 6 U-DISE, 2012-13

We first look into the availability of government schools¹⁵ of various levels of school education in the two types of blocks and population served by each school. As it appears in table 4.1, barring at the lower

¹⁴ The bordering CDBs are Bhagawangola-I, Bhagawangola-II, Jalangi, Lalgola, Raghunathganj-II, Raninagar-II, Samserganj, Suti-I, Suti-II

¹⁵ Government schools which are 90 percent of all schools, mostly comprise of schools under the Department of Education (64%), the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development (29%) and Government Madrasas, schools under the Municipal bodies and NCLP

secondary level, the number of schools in bordering CDBs is higher than the other blocks if we compare in terms of population served by them.

Yet, it does not explain the entire scenario, as merely having schools does not make any sense unless these schools are adequately provided with basic infrastructure, quality teachers to draw students; in the particular context of the present research, we need to know how effectively these schools attracts the girls of secondary level to attend these school.

For this purpose we further analyze the Unified District Information System for Education 2012-13 (U-DISE 2012-13) data. The result shows a huge deprivation in terms of essential provisions in the schools in border adjacent CDBs compared to other blocks. We discuss here only three of the most vital indicators, namely, availability of girl's secondary schools, availability of teachers and classrooms in these schools. Please note that we have compared the schools with secondary or/and higher secondary level only.

Availability of government girls schools with secondary or/and higher secondary section in the bordering blocks, which is only 6.5 percent of all such schools, is much lesser to 12.4 percent in other blocks of

Table 4.2: Distribution of Government Schools Secondary or/and Higher Secondary Section by type and Location

| School Type | Bordering Blocks | Other Blocks | All |
|--------------|------------------|--------------|------|
| Boy's | 3.7 | 7.4 | 6.6 |
| Co-education | 89.8 | 80.2 | 82.4 |
| Girl's | 6.5 | 12.4 | 11.0 |

Source: U-DISE, 2012-13

Murshidabad (Table 4.2). Though it is true that the girls need to be acquainted to learn and work with the boys, considering the prevailing prohibitive mindset of the parents/guardians, who can hardly accept

their adolescent girls to attend a school where they have to sit along with the boys of their own age, non-availability of girls secondary schools itself is a hindrance to high school education of girls. As we have observed earlier, availability of secondary-schools in the bordering areas is almost at par with the rest of the district; teachers, who come mostly from urban areas, try to avoid these schools due lack of conveyance, frequent disturbances arising out of social, political and criminal issues. As a result the schools in border areas severely suffer from paucity of teachers (Table 4.3).

Disconcertingly, the shortage is much higher in co-education and girl's schools compared to the boy's schools in these areas, showing abject neglect of the handful schools that are meant for only girls. Similarly table 4.4 reveals the pathetic state of infrastructure in these schools; as the data reveals, each class room is expected to accommodate 142 students in Girl's school.

Table 4.3: Pupil Teacher Ratio of Government Secondary and/or Higher Secondary schools by type and Location

| Type of School | Bordering Blocks | Other Blocks | All |
|----------------|------------------|--------------|------|
| Boy's | 65.0 | 51.7 | 53.5 |
| Co-education | 75.6 | 58.5 | 63.1 |
| Girl's | 101.4 | 59.2 | 65.0 |

Source: U-DISE, 2012-13

Table 4.4: Student Classroom Ratio of Government Secondary and/or Higher Secondary schools by type and Location

| Type of School | Bordering Blocks | Other Blocks | All |
|----------------|------------------|--------------|-----|
| Boy's | 88 | 90 | 90 |
| Co-education | 121 | 103 | 108 |
| Girl's | 142 | 100 | 107 |

Source: U-DISE, 2012-13

4.2 Educational Expenditure

Burden of expenditure on education is a hurdle for boys and girls alike. We have roughly calculated the educational expenditure of the respondent families, irrespective of level of education attended by the students (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Educational expenditure under various heads by gender

| Gender | Books | Stationery | Conveyance | School/College Fees | Private Tutorial Fees | Average Annual Expenditure on Education |
|--------|-------|------------|------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Male | 586 | 542 | 405 | 294 | 961 | 2767 |
| Female | 589 | 503 | 120 | 233 | 1269 | 2693 |

Source: Field Data

While the educational expenditure is marginally higher in case of boys, the pattern of expenditure on various heads is interesting. Expenditure by girls under the head of conveyance is much lower than that of boys; on the other hand expenditure under the head of private tuition for girls is higher by almost equal amount. While overall equal expenditure for girls and boys are indicate towards the fact that the parents are equally concerned about education of daughters, at least in terms of spending on their education, they prefer their girls to be taught at home by private tutors and the boys travel more to get quality education. This is perhaps due to the prevailing fear of harassment the girls face outside home. As we will see next in this section that how BSF jawans directly harass women, and also how local males in the village treat them under a decaying culture in the borderlands.

Box 4.1

Student commits suicide after molestation by BSF Jawan

Our own fact finding team visited the family of victim immediately after the incident and found that the girl, a student of Class VII, was returning from her private tutorial class on 7th May, 2016. As the weather was cloudy on the day, villagers preferred to remain in their houses than go out to work in their fields. One BSF personnel stopped the innocent little girl very near to her home and demanded a proof of ownership of the bicycle that she was riding back to her home. The BSF jawan insisted that the bicycle is new and blamed her of being involved in smuggling the bicycle. He also blamed her of carrying other illegal goods and molested her in the name of searching for such fictitious “illegal goods”. The BSF jawan detained her for around half an hour. Alarmed by her delay, family members started searching her in and around the village. Ultimately the mother of the victim found her at the check post where she was detained. She was on tears and narrated the whole incident to her mother. After some more altercation, she was brought back to home by her mother. As her mother became engaged in household works, she bolted her room from inside and hung herself from the ceiling using her *dupatta*. She could not bear the humiliation by the BSF jawan. The girl succumbed late in the night at around 11.00 p.m. at the District Hospital at Balurghat.

The father of the deceased girl complained about the incident to the local police station, an FIR was also lodged, on 2nd June the investigating officer of the case informed us that the presence of the accused at the place of occurrence has been proved, yet no one was arrested. The father of the deceased has made a written complaint of the incident to the Superintendent of Police, South Dinajpur demanding a fair investigation of the incident and punishment of the culprit.

Md. Badruddoza Khan (MP- Murshidabad)



Only spread of education can change the situation. The overall scenario of literacy in Murshidabad is alarmingly low. The literacy rate among Muslims is even lower and Murshidabad is a Muslim majority district. The governments in the state as well as in the centre are indifferent towards the border issues. The overall backwardness of bordering area is the major reason for widespread marginalization of girls and early marriage is a major manifestation of the problem. The stationing of BSF inside the villages is causing various problems. They are flouting the norms and stationed 10-15 kilometers inside the territory. BSF should have training to mingle with the common people of the area. Unnecessary restriction of movements causes decline in the number of the marriages outside community or neighborhood and force the populace to arrange marriages within close proximity; which in other hand minimizes choice for parents while getting their daughter married.

Though, governmental schemes have positive impacts but all these governmental schemes lack proper implementation. I have noticed in other states like Tamil Nadu, government delivery is much better, enabling them to check the menace.

4.3 Harassment and Vulnerability

While this report is being prepared, the leading newspaper¹⁶ in West Bengal reported an incident in Hili, a border area in Dakshin Dinajpur district of West Bengal. A girl of around 12 years committed suicide after being molested by a BSF Jawan in the name of search (see Box 4.1). The newspaper report shows only the tip of the iceberg, there are layers beneath it, which seldom gets noticed by media or

“My elder daughter goes to the school – it’s a government school and I am always uneasy from the moment she leaves home till she is safely back. She has to pass all these constables, sometimes they call out and sing songs, tease. They don’t understand Bengali and I think they don’t like Bengali People.”

administration. The incident draw the attention of the media only because the girl committed suicide; no one seems to be interested to listen to the ordeal of these poor girls who suffer such atrocities almost every day while going to market or returning from the school. (see details in section 6)

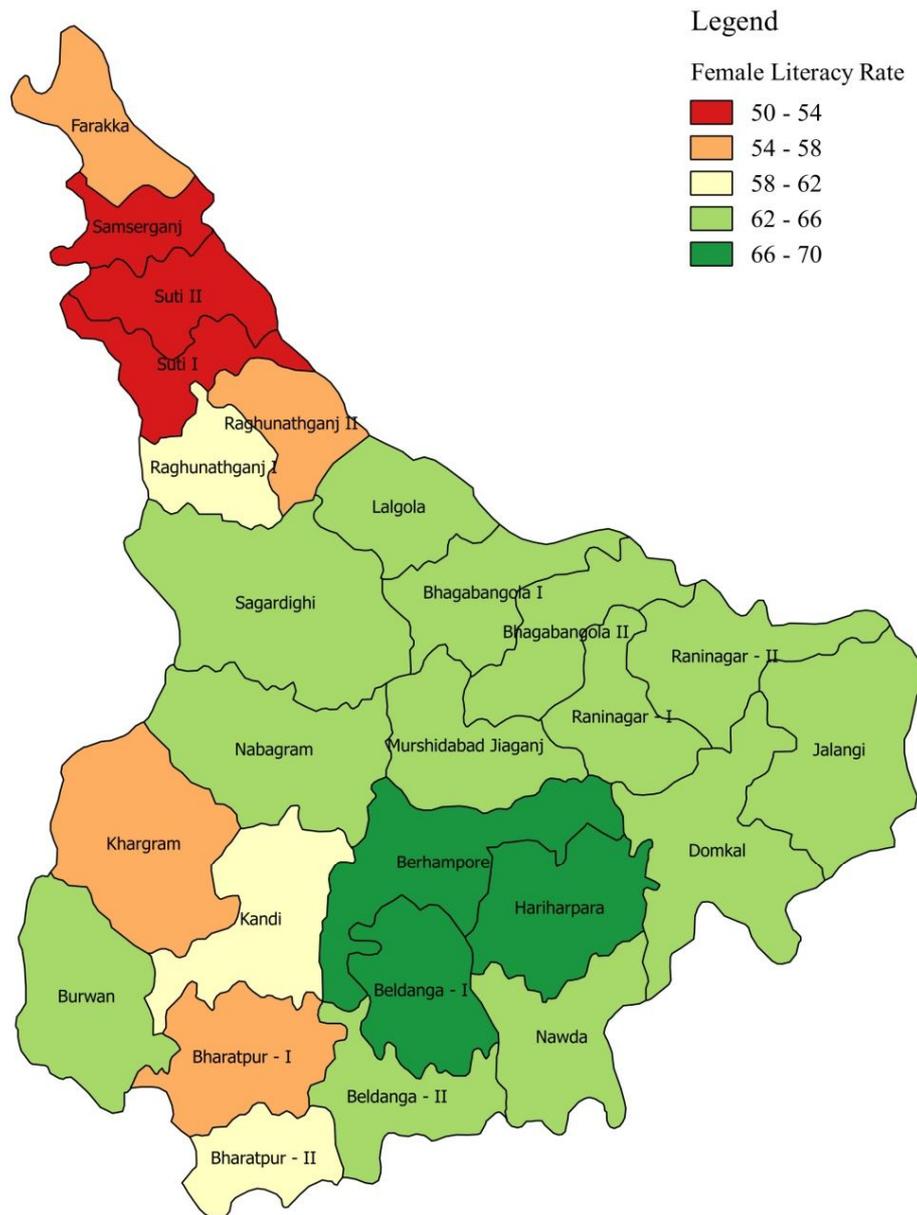
4.4 Educational Attainment of Women

Despite all odds as it is evident from figure 4.5, female literacy rate in the bordering blocks of the district is rather better than the northern and western part of the district, and poorer only to the female literacy

¹⁶ বি এস এফ ‘স্মীলতাহানি’ করায় ছাত্রী আত্মঘাতী, Anandabazar Patrika dated 09.05.2016, <http://www.anandabazar.com/state/student-commits-suicide-after-alleged-molestation-by-bsf-1.381653#>

Figure 4.5

Female Literacy Rate of Murshidaba Blocks



Source: Census of India, 2011

Table 4.6: Gender wise educational qualification of persons 7 years and above

| Educational Qualification | Male | Female | Total |
|---------------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| Illiterate | 24.28 | 29.28 | 26.71 |
| Literate Without Scho | 9.48 | 8.78 | 9.14 |
| Below Primary | 9.58 | 6.87 | 8.26 |
| Primary | 12.25 | 13.4 | 12.81 |
| Upper Primary | 27.26 | 25.9 | 26.6 |
| Secondary | 10.97 | 9.57 | 10.29 |
| H. Secondary | 3.62 | 3.83 | 3.72 |
| Graduate/Pg | 1.92 | 0.9 | 1.42 |
| Other | 0.64 | 1.46 | 1.04 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Field Data

Table 4.7: Distribution of persons of age 7 to 18 years by occupation and gender

| Primary Occupation | Male | Female | Total |
|-----------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| Agricultural Labourer | 1.84 | 0 | 0.9 |
| Non Agricultural Labo | 1.1 | 0 | 0.54 |
| Artisan | 0.37 | 0 | 0.18 |
| Self Employed | 0.37 | 0 | 0.18 |
| House Wife | 0 | 7.72 | 3.95 |
| Unemployed | 6.99 | 3.16 | 5.03 |
| Unable to Work | 0.74 | 1.05 | 0.9 |
| Student | 84.56 | 88.07 | 86.36 |
| Migrant Labourer | 3.68 | 0 | 1.8 |
| Other | 0.37 | 0 | 0.18 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Field Data

rate of the central part of the district in and around the district head quarter. We have already mentioned at the outset that the gender gap in literacy in the district is very narrow. Our survey data also confirms, though the women of the borderlands have to pay a great deal for their education, yet they are not averse to acquire education and knowledge. Table 4.6 and Table 4.7 reveal the educational attainment and attendance of women vis-à-vis men.

While the percentage of illiterate among women is 5 percentage points higher, their share in the secondary and higher secondary level is almost at par with their male counterpart. In case of children of 7 to 18 years the figures are actually marginally in favor of the girls (see appendix tables). It compels us to believe that there is something more behind the prevailing practice of child marriage to be further investigated in the coming sections of the report.

Similarly there is not much difference found in educational attainments of women across two types of villages, bordering and other (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8: Percentage distribution of women (7 years and above) according to educational qualification residence

| Qualification | Bordering Village | Other Village | Total |
|---------------------------|-------------------|---------------|-------|
| Illiterate | 27.59 | 30.91 | 29.28 |
| Literate Without Scholing | 11.03 | 6.62 | 8.78 |
| Below Primary | 6.67 | 7.06 | 6.87 |
| Primary | 12.64 | 14.13 | 13.4 |
| Upper Primary | 27.59 | 24.28 | 25.9 |
| Secondary | 8.74 | 10.38 | 9.57 |
| H. Secondary | 4.6 | 3.09 | 3.83 |
| Graduate/Pg | 1.15 | 0.66 | 0.9 |
| Other | 0 | 2.87 | 1.46 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey

It is interesting to note in table 4.7, while 7.7 percent of girls between 7 to 18 years reported to be married, 3.16 percent reported their status as unemployed, implying after completion of education they are waiting for an opportunity in the job market, 88 percent pursuing some or the other educational course, which is 3.5 percentage points higher than their male counterpart. On the other hand 7.7 percent of boys (incidentally exactly the same percentage of girls who are married) are already involved in some or the other economic activity, most of them (3.7%) have already migrated to other places for the purpose; and 7 percent reported to be unemployed, pointing towards the serious economic issues persisting in the region which we will discuss next.

5. Economy and Child Marriage

"This is a place affected by river erosion," Azima B's parents told her, explaining why she had to marry at age 13. "If the river takes our house it will be hard for you to get married so it's better if you get married now."

Azima said, "I am the oldest (among four sisters) and only after I get married can my sisters think about getting married. If the river takes the house it will be hard for them to get married." Azima's sisters are ages 12, 10, and 8 years old; her parents are now considering a marriage for the 12 years old.¹⁷

Though the conversation mentioned above took place on the other side of the international border, narratives are similar and equally common across the Radcliff line. Extreme poverty, frequent floods and erosion, high prevalence of displacement and alarming level of migration are among the common phenomenon in the Indian side of border. To make the things worse, the presence of BSF personnel and their whimsical diktats hampers the rural people from practicing the only economic activity that they are proficient at.

5.1 Erosion

Once the land of Nawabs, Murshidabad is reduced to a laggard both in terms of economic growth and overall human development. One of the major reasons of such dismal economic performance lies in the fact that the district lost huge amount of fertile land due to frequent floods and land erosion, mostly by the river *Padma*. An estimate of the amount of land eroded is to the tune of 356 km² (Rudra Undated), which is around

¹⁷ Marry before your house is swept away: Child Marriage in Bangladesh, Human Rights Watch, June, 2015

6.7 percent of the total area of the entire district. Considering the fact that the land eroded is in and around the banks of the mighty river, which stretches roughly a 100 km in the district, one can gauge the severity of impact of erosion the region suffered from. The emotional shock of sudden homelessness, the severe impoverishment that resulted due to one of the largest incidences of river erosion that took place between 1988 and 1994 in the region, around 206.6 km² of land eroded during these 6 years.

The recurrent floods and encroachment of the river not only affected the poor people of districts of Murshidabad and Malda, rather it is threatening the present road and rail link between north and south Bengal at multiple points. As around 10000 persons are displaced every year from their homeland by erosion in Murshidabad district alone, it has created a class of neo-refugees. These people are not only uprooted from their place rather they are compelled to indulge in smuggling activities which has now become an organized business along the Indo-Bangladesh border (Rudra K).

Table 5.1: Land loss and population displacement in Murshidabad during 1988-1994

| Year | Amount of land eroded (in km ²) | Number of families affected | Projected Population displaced |
|-------|---|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1988 | 4.35 | 872 | 4,360 |
| 1989 | 107.00 | 8,875 | 44,475 |
| 1990 | 7.50 | 612 | 3,060 |
| 1991 | 8.90 | 763 | 3,815 |
| 1992 | 34.00 | 1,197 | 5,985 |
| 1993 | 19.00 | 1,099 | 5,495 |
| 1994 | 25.85 | 818 | 12,000 |
| Total | 206.60 | 14,236 | 79,190 |

Source: The Encroaching Ganga and Social Conflict: The Case of West Bengal, India

Year-wise amount of land eroded and number of families affected during 1988 to 1994 is provided in table 5.1. During 1989-90, almost whole of a small town, Akheriganj, literally meaning the “last habitation” was swept away leaving around 23394 homeless people stranded. Though the menace continues through the years till the date, another major incident of erosion is remembered by the local people, when a huge portion of the Jalangi town was swept away in 1994. A number of government establishments and around 450 houses were engulfed (ibid). Our research area falls between these two places.

As the incidences of erosion has increased manifold after the construction of the Farakka barrage, many experts has the opinion that the menace is a result of an ill-planned construction of the dam. The victims were never compensated adequately for the environmental problem created by the law-makers. During our study, only 6 percent of households reported to have received any government assistance for construction of their house (table 5.2). Furthermore, 35.5 percent of the household members had no ration card (Appendix Table A4) pointing towards the way the law-makers abandoned the victims of the Farakka barrage.

Table 5.2: Number of rooms constructed with government assistance

| Number of rooms | Number of households reported | Percent |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|---------|
| 0 | 372 | 93.94 |
| 1 | 15 | 3.79 |
| 2 | 7 | 1.77 |
| 3 | 2 | 0.51 |
| Total | 396 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey

All four villages under our survey are inhabited mostly by the families displaced due to river erosion. Overall 381 families out of 396 or in other words 96.2 percent of all families responded to the survey, had been

victims of erosion in the last 50 years (see Appendix Table A2). Moreover, more than three quarters of these families faced this calamity more than once during the same period. The households reported an average of 2.75 Bighas of land lost due to erosion, the amount being higher in case of the villages adjacent to border (3.32 Bighas) than the other villages (2.2 Bighas).

Table 5.3: Basic household information and amenities by type of village

| | | Bordering | Other |
|-------------------|---|-----------|-------|
| Household details | Number of households | 194 | 202 |
| | Number of Persons | 937 | 1,062 |
| | Average Household Size | 4.8 | 5.3 |
| | Number of livable rooms | 345 | 406 |
| | Person accommodated per room | 2.7 | 2.6 |
| | Number of livable room per family | 1.8 | 2.0 |
| Type of Latrine | Pit Latrine | 63.92 | 81.68 |
| | Sanitary | 9.28 | 4.46 |
| | Public Sanitary | 1.03 | 0 |
| | No Latrine | 25.77 | 13.86 |
| Electricity | Average duration of availability of electricity (in hour) in households with electricity connection | 1.43 | 3.64 |

Source: Field Survey

Continuous threat of erosion compels them to live in makeshift houses (Appendix Table A3). The types of constructions in the bordering and other villages are almost similar; they do not differ much in terms of number of rooms per family and persons accommodated per room. The difference lies mainly in provision of basic amenities in these houses, electricity and sanitation (Table 5.3). One of the habitations, namely Nichushalbana, did not have electricity during our survey, though electrification of the village has been completed recently. Even if we consider the household with electricity, the duration of availability of electricity in two types of villages vary to a large extent. The average duration of availability of electricity in the villages is reported to be only 3 hours a day.

The dwellings in two types of villages differ in terms of availability of items of everyday use, a detail is provided in Appendix Table A1. Clear sign of economic deprivation in the bordering villages is evident from the table.

5.2 Livelihood

“The erosion victims migrate to *chars* losing everything into the river. The skill and experience of the displaced population in agriculture help force to start a new struggle for existence. Evidently, the neo-refugees lead their life under the shadow of poverty and insecurity. The erosion and resultant homelessness cause an oversupply of agricultural labour. The labourers are often engaged at a wage lower than the minimum fixed by the government” (Rudra K). Those who cannot manage with the meager income offered in their homeland migrate to other places. The number of migrated persons is astonishingly high in the region, which we will discuss shortly.

We have already discussed in section 2 (Table 2.1) of this report that despite the fact that the land adjacent to the banks of river *Padma* is highly fertile, involvement of people of the bordering blocks of Murshidabad is much lower compared to the rest of the district. This may partially explain the observations (by Rudra) mentioned in the previous paragraph that the low agricultural wage rate does not attract people to agriculture sector. But then there raises another question, why the farmers too are not interested in cultivating their land despite having agricultural laborers in abundance, that too at a very low rate? This leads us to another factor that has been rarely reported in media and requires a deeper investigation. The presence of BSF personnel and the hurdles laid by them prevents the agricultural workers in the border areas to work freely in their own land

It is true that the livelihood options are shrinking in both sides of the border as cultivable land is shrinking. But at the same time as we have

observed during our day to day activities in the region and revelations from this survey, points towards another truth – that the poor farmers and the agricultural labourers have restricted access to their own land and in some extreme cases are even barred from cultivating border adjacent farm lands. The BSF

“We had much greenery and gardens around our house, but now see the land is bare. That’s because we cannot grow plants and trees higher than three feet from the ground, they have cut down all mango and coconut trees here.”

Bhaduri Undated

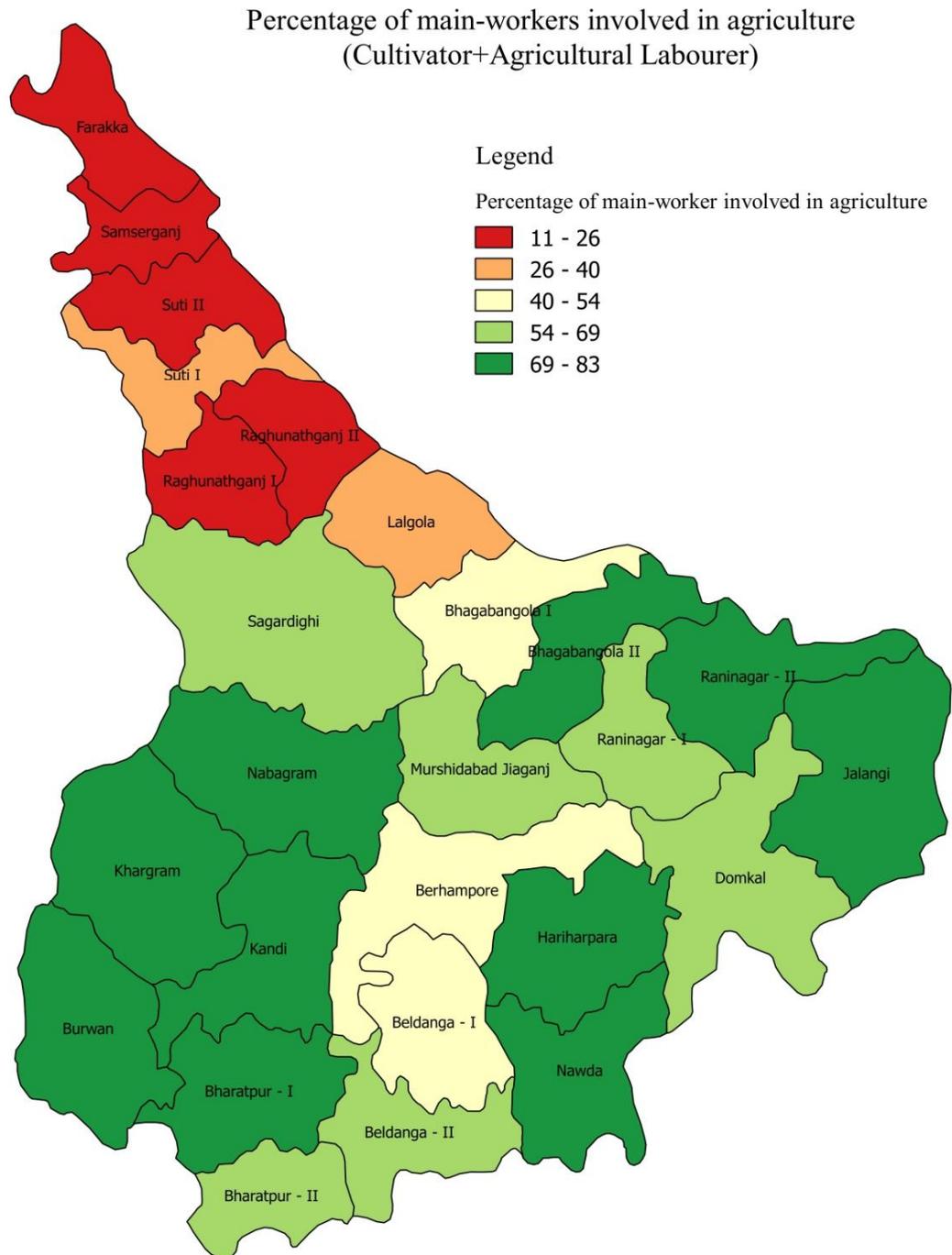
personnel create hindrances during cultivation and even harvesting. They dictate what to grow and what not; there had been incidences when Jute crop was destroyed just before harvesting season by the BSF, as crops higher than 3 feet are not allowed to be cultivated. Their excuse – that the high bushes of jute helps the infiltrators to hide. They restrict the agricultural workers from entering the fields which are situated beyond the fences; BSF also decides about the timing of entry and exit from their own fields. In case some of the agricultural workers fail to return by the time prescribed by the BSF, their identity cards, which the workers have to deposit while entering their fields, are seized. Despite so much of restrictions imposed by the BSF, it is not uncommon for the poor farmers to find their crops being harvested by the Bangladeshi intruders during the darkness of night.

“During harvest, we have to specify the number of sacks of harvest we will be collecting and have to enter them in their register. Now, just tell me, is it possible to be absolutely accurate? Sometimes we may enter a certain number and then have a sack or two extra, but that will just be confiscated by them. I cannot tell you how many times they have done this. Sometimes, if they are hungry they will just take away stuff to eat, maybe a chicken and they won’t even pay for them”

Bhaduri Undated

There are complains by the villagers that the BSF personnel force them to work without any payment to keep their gardens, fetch water from distant sources or even cleaning and sweeping their offices and barracks. Any refusal results into verbal abuse,

Figure 5.1: Main Worker Cultivator and Agricultural Labourer as Percentage of Total Main Worker



Source: Census of India, 2011

Box 5.1

Mr. Aizuddin Biswas, son of Late Munaruddin Biswas, a resident of Char Parashpur village, Post- Parashpur under Jalangi police station of Murshidabad district is an agricultural labourer. He lost his land and other property during the erosion by the river Padma. He owned arable land at Dayarampur village till 2005, the entire land eroded and he was forced to migrate at Char Parashpur, he received Patta (land title by the government) at the said village for his subsistence, where he is living with his wife and minor children. His means of livelihood are cattle rearing and part time employment as agricultural labourer. He bought 4 cows and 4 calves from adjoining villages to add to his income, spent nearly Rs. 40000 for the purpose. Before the said purchase, he duly informed the respective Gram Panchayet, Panchayet Samity and Block Development Officer and obtained approval on his request letter for the purchase. While Aizuddin was trying to bring the cattle to his home in Char Parashpur village, the Border Security Force personnel restricted him to cross the river Padma with the cattle to his village. The cattle were stranded at the village Raypara, on the other side of the river. Aizuddin made a request to the Deputy Inspector General of BSF; Roshanbagh to direct his force to allow him to bring the cattle. The DIG instructed the 'A' Company of Charbhadra Company Headquarter of 91 BSF Battalion. Aizuddin met the Company Commander several times, as well as the personnel at the Farazipara BSF- Out Post of the said Company with his request. He also made complaint to the District Superintendent of Police, Murshidabad. But he was either mocked or jeered for his complaint to DIG- BSF and the SP. He even verbally abused by the said BSF personnel on duty at Raypara. The matter was referred to the National Human Rights and inquiry report conducted by Mr. R. R. Jha, Joint Secretary (Human Rights) Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India and duly submitted by Mr. Yashpal Dabas; Director to the Government of India; Ministry of Home Affairs. In the report the Ministry informed the Commission about the visit of Joint Secretary (HR) to Char Paraspur village, who submitted an inquiry report with some recommendations. In his recommendations the Joint Secretary categorically mentioned i) BSF as a Border Guarding Force should not be involved in regulating movement of rice and other grocery items purchased by persons in border areas either for their consumption or for local trade. Though, the recommendation was made on a complaint related to the issue of movement of groceries and rice but the recommendation is self explanatory in nature while dealing with movements of anything without an ulterior motive of smuggling and in this case, the victim made it clear before the civil authorities and BSF authorities and elected representatives of local self government about his bona fide reasons, the civil administration, elected local government and BSF higher authorities made approval for the same, yet the poor person was pushed from pillar to post for no fault of his.

further restrictions on agricultural activities and even physical torture.

Through the entire bordering roads which are laid and maintained by the Central Public Works Department (CPWD), the BSF personnel pretend to have the ownership of these roads and restrict movements of common people.

Even the option of rearing cattle and goat with abundance of natural pastures in the area is not possible due to the unlawful restrictions imposed by the BSF (See Box 5.1).

5.3 Migration

As we hypothesized the situation before we started the survey that the region is expected to report very high incidences of migration – for the purpose of this report, we deliberately included the migrated members of the family in the family roster to gauge the level of incidence of migration, their age, educational qualification, relation with the head of the household, marital status, economic status etc. Astonishingly total 290 persons (14.5% of total population) out of 1999 had reported to migrate in last five years (Table 5.4). If we consider only the male members of these families, 288 of total 1023 male members had migrated during last 5 years or were in migration during the survey period. As we have seen in Section 4, there is a good number of minor boys (3.7% of boys of age 7-18 years) who had migrated at such an early age.

If we look into the figures to assess how it affects the families, overall 240 (60%) households reported one or the other member of the family had migrated to other states for livelihood during last 5 years. Out of these families 34 reported 2 persons had done so and 8 families reported that the number of out-migrant from the family is 3 in last five years to be.

Table 5.4: Distribution of population according to primary occupation

| Primary Occupation | Number of Persons. | Percent |
|---------------------------|--------------------|---------|
| Agricultural Labourer | 176 | 8.8 |
| Non-Agricultural Labourer | 19 | 1.0 |
| Farmer | 36 | 1.8 |
| Artisan | 5 | 0.3 |
| Self Employed | 38 | 1.9 |
| Service | 6 | 0.3 |
| Land Holder | 2 | 0.1 |
| House Wife | 482 | 24.1 |
| Unemployed | 52 | 2.6 |
| Unable To Work | 275 | 13.8 |
| Student | 603 | 30.2 |
| Migrant Labourer | 290 | 14.5 |
| Other | 15 | 0.8 |
| Total | 1,999 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey

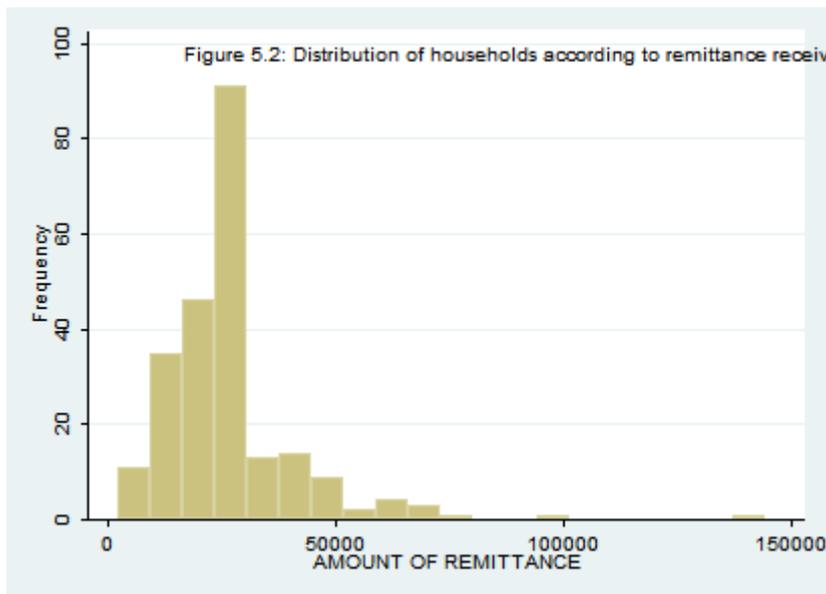
As economic opportunities back at home are scarce, huge number of youths prefers to migrate to other states for work. Most of the migrated men (55%) used to work as agricultural labourer, with meager income, or were unemployed (30%).

The economy of the region vastly depends on the remittance from these migrated people; overall 51 percent household reported that they depend primarily on the income of the migrant labourers of the family for their living, as they reported "labour in migration" as the primary occupation of the household. The yearly remittance varies from a meager Rs. 2000 to an exceptional Rs. 144000, averages Rs. 27351 per reporting household. Figure 5.2 provides a detailed picture of the remittance received by the household from migrated members. In most of the cases the amount of remittance is below Rs. 50000 and a spike is observable at the level of around Rs. 25000. A back calculation confirms that most of these households survive on around Rs. 2000 per month.

More than 75 percent of these migrant workers are of the age below 40 years and eligible men are mostly married (82 percent of migrant workers of age 21 to 40 married), yet have to live alone at their

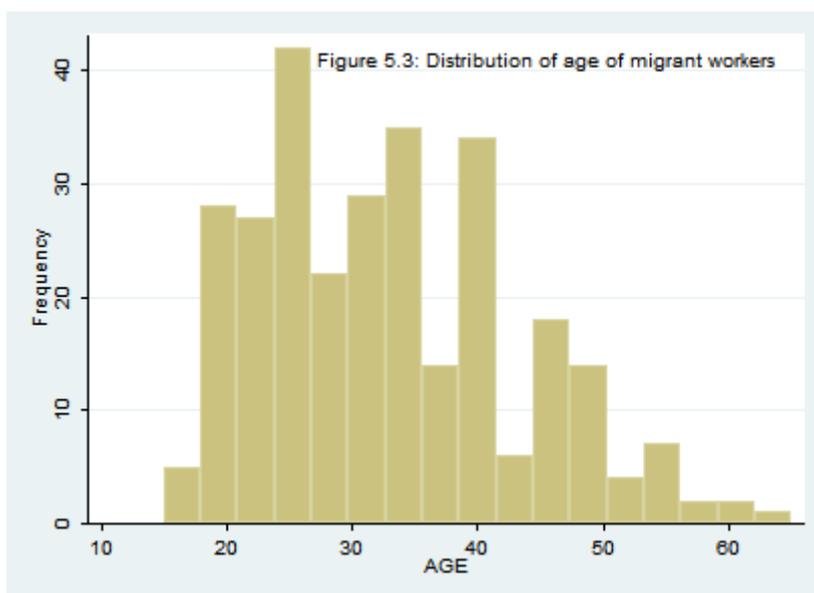
workplace. Only 2 had reported to afford to take their spouses along with them while migrating. This is because the fact that most of them had to migrate to extreme northern states like Punjab and even trouble torn Kashmir (39.2%), extreme southern states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu (28.4%) and in the West, Maharashtra and Goa (25.2%), rest reported to migrate to states like Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi, Gujarat etc.

Figure 5.2: Distribution of households according to remittance received



Source: Field Survey

Figure 5.3: Distribution of age of migrant labourers



Source: Field Survey

5.4 Financial Shock & Indebtedness

Financial status of the families in the region under consideration of the present study is so poor that even a slight alteration in day to day expenditure appears as a financial shock to them. When asked whether or not they have encountered any financial shock in the preceding year, 199 (50.3%) of the households responded affirmatively. When further queried about the reasons behind the financial shock, most of them (111 or 28%) reported the reason to be some or the other health issues. The reason ranked second in the list is issues to related to livelihood, as 45 (11%) of the households reported to have suffered financial shock due to mostly purchase of agricultural land or setting some small businesses. At third place comes expenditure in house building, and the next one is marriage. Overall 27 households (6.8%) reported to have faced financial crisis due to expenditure occurred in marriage ceremony. Our primary data lack information about whether or not any marriage has taken place in the family in preceding year, yet anyone will agree to the proposition that only in very few households in a village a marriage takes place in a single year. Considering this fact it appears that marriage is synonymous to financial shock. What is more concerning is the fact that most of the families (24 out of 27 or 89%) which reported financial shock due to marriage, have also mentioned that they managed the crisis by borrowing from sources which have charged interest for the loan, which is much lower in all other cases.

5.5 Poverty and Child Marriage

It is extremely difficult to analyze individual attributes of child marriage separately. While we have observed in the previous section that education has a huge impact on the age at marriage of women, education, especially secondary education itself, remains a distant dream for children of lower economic classes.

Mr. ABDUR RAZZAK (Member of Legislative Assembly from JALANGI)



The incidents of early marriage are rampant but the average age at marriage has increased. Earlier, the underprivileged sections arranged marriage of their wards at the age of 10-12 years but now it is not before 15. There are various reasons for early marriages. The district is underdeveloped in many accounts. The governmental schemes are not working adequately. The affected area of river erosion is under abysmal condition of economical distress. People lost their land and living in distress and in this process the suitability for a groom has changed in parent's mind during the time. Till date girls are supposed to be a socio-financial burden for the family and provision of dowry is a major factor. By getting their daughters married at early age, parents can arrange the marriage with a lower amount of dowry. Local male youths have association with many illegal activities, resulting with an overall degeneration of society, which worried the parents and when they found any suitable boy they ignore the age of the girl. False social reputation is another reason, which encourages the parents to negate the choice of the girls and prompt them to marry their girls before they attain the age of marriage or get married according to their own choice. Another reason is financial stability of girl's family, as financial stability of families in the region is vulnerable to many factors, prompt the families to get their daughters married whenever they have money in their hand.

The situation has changed after governmental schemes on education for girls; especially from the initiatives by the Sarva Shiksha Mission. The boys are normally going out in search of job while girls are in schools. Early marriage of girls rampant irrespective of the religion of the family and depend mostly on the economic background of the family or its overall educational attainment.

On the other way round, better education leads to better economic opportunities, forming a spiral for the upward movement of the affluent class whereas the same cycle pulls the poor down under a whirlpool. As we have already discussed the issue – how poverty reduces voice of people and access to administrative and political system in the first section of this report. In this way economy has a multilayered and multipronged impact on the age of marriage of girls. It affects the age of marriage of girls at various levels – first as an individual, her own economic status i.e. her participation in the workforce and thereby being able to earn her own livelihood, secondly, the financial condition of her family, and thirdly, the economy of the society she belongs to, all has immense impact on her freedom to decide on her own marriage. Resultantly, any phenomenon that hampers the economic wellbeing of a society is bound to affect prevalence of child marriage in it. As we have seen in the beginning of this section, presence of BSF is a hindrance in the day to day economic activities of the inhabitants of the bordering areas, and therefore directly acts as an obstacle in the economic development of the region and obliquely responsible for child marriage, we discuss hereunder how.

“Rational decision making theories imply that parents respond to economic incentives and constraints as they choose optimal marriage timing for their daughters. Availability of wage works for women increase the returns from daughters and may lead to delayed marriage” (Desai 2010). On the other hand, wedding expenses and dowry may have some effects on the age at marriage of women. To some “increased expenses associated with a daughter’s marriage may lead to postponement of marriage as parents struggle to accumulate resources in order to provide appropriate dowry and pay for the wedding (ibid)”; on the contrary if these expenditures have some association with the age at marriage of girls itself, i.e. if the amount of dowry and marriage expenditures are lower

Table 5.5: Work Participation Rate of Murshidabad Blocks by Gender

| Name | Work Participation Rate | | | Percentage of Main Worker | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|------|--------|---------------------------|------|--------|
| | Persons | Male | Female | Persons | Male | Female |
| Samsorganj | 43.1 | 45.2 | 41.0 | 74.0 | 85.3 | 61.6 |
| Suti - I | 43.9 | 50.5 | 37.0 | 69.1 | 82.7 | 49.7 |
| Suti - II | 46.1 | 48.7 | 43.5 | 75.6 | 83.8 | 66.3 |
| Raghunathganj - II | 43.8 | 51.8 | 35.4 | 82.7 | 90.6 | 70.7 |
| Lalgola | 34.8 | 51.6 | 17.5 | 69.7 | 77.4 | 46.1 |
| Bhagawangola - I | 31.8 | 54.4 | 8.0 | 78.5 | 82.2 | 51.7 |
| Bhagawangola - II | 30.7 | 55.0 | 5.2 | 74.4 | 77.6 | 39.2 |
| Raninagar - II | 33.7 | 56.2 | 10.3 | 78.9 | 84.2 | 49.0 |
| Jalangi | 34.1 | 57.5 | 9.4 | 81.9 | 86.2 | 54.3 |
| Bordering Blocks | 38.5 | 52.0 | 24.5 | 76.0 | 83.4 | 59.6 |
| Farakka | 44.1 | 48.2 | 40.0 | 72.2 | 77.9 | 65.2 |
| Raghunathganj - I | 43.6 | 54.9 | 31.8 | 82.1 | 88.4 | 70.7 |
| Sagardighi | 36.0 | 54.2 | 17.0 | 74.3 | 82.5 | 47.1 |
| Domkal | 35.2 | 58.4 | 11.0 | 78.2 | 84.5 | 43.0 |
| Raninagar - I | 33.5 | 57.1 | 9.0 | 79.9 | 84.0 | 53.3 |
| Murshidabad Jiaganj | 36.5 | 58.1 | 13.3 | 81.8 | 87.1 | 57.2 |
| Nabagram | 34.3 | 55.8 | 11.9 | 77.2 | 82.3 | 52.3 |
| Khargram | 32.9 | 56.1 | 8.9 | 71.4 | 76.7 | 36.9 |
| Kandi | 32.0 | 54.8 | 8.0 | 78.4 | 81.9 | 52.7 |
| Berhampore | 34.5 | 57.3 | 10.7 | 80.0 | 84.7 | 54.0 |
| Hariharpara | 34.3 | 58.5 | 9.0 | 75.0 | 79.8 | 42.2 |
| Nawda | 32.6 | 58.9 | 5.0 | 81.9 | 84.2 | 53.1 |
| Beldanga - I | 33.3 | 53.6 | 11.8 | 81.0 | 86.1 | 56.6 |
| Beldanga - II | 33.5 | 55.1 | 10.5 | 80.4 | 84.8 | 55.8 |
| Bharatpur - II | 35.5 | 57.1 | 12.9 | 79.2 | 83.8 | 58.0 |
| Bharatpur - I | 33.6 | 58.0 | 7.5 | 81.7 | 86.3 | 43.6 |
| Burwan | 32.8 | 57.5 | 6.7 | 69.7 | 72.6 | 43.2 |
| Other Blocks | 36.5 | 54.7 | 17.4 | 78.1 | 83.7 | 59.5 |

Source: Census of India, 2011

in case the girls are married at a lower age, which is common in our research area as 48.8 percent of adult women strongly believe that marriage of younger girl involves lesser expenditure (see figure 3.4), then the parents are tempted to get their daughters married at an early age. In fact these two conflicting trends may actually neutralize the overall effect of dowry and marriage expenditures on the prevalence of child

marriage when considered across various societies, as Desai (2010) observes “the coefficients for dowry and wedding expenditures are neither large nor statistically significant”, i.e. age at marriage is not influenced much by dowry and wedding expenditure.

Quoting the India Human Development Study (2005) data, Desai (2010) revealed that the relationship between wage labor (of women) and age at marriage is significant but in the opposite direction – that is, higher prevalence of wage labor seems to lead to earlier rather than later marriage. She offers an explanation – “Economic arguments suggest that when daughters have a higher likelihood of engaging in wage labor, parents may be more motivated to delay marriage and women themselves may have other options available to them besides marriage. However, greater participation in the labor market also brings with it risks that challenge gender scripts. Girls may be more likely to come in contact with men outside their families, resulting in a potential love affair. Since families may perceive greater threat to their control over their daughters’ sexuality with increased labor force participation, many may prefer to avoid any potential pitfalls by arranging early marriages”.

In rural India, where labor participation of women is linked more with poverty rather than gender empowerment, women from poor families cannot afford to opt out of the labor force, families on the other hand try to get their daughters married at an early age to control their sexuality and avoid sexual abuses, which is more common in case of the unmarried young girls. In our area of study with pervasive poverty, the male members are being away from home (due to migration); women cannot afford to be economically inactive. Analysis of census data reveal that work participation rate of women in the bordering blocks of Murshidabad is much higher compared to other blocks (Table 5.5). In the highly militarized zones like the international borders, families suffer from the additional fear of their daughters being sexually abused by the security personnel while working.

6. Vulnerability of Women, Laws & Child Marriage

6.1 No Man's Land is Everyone's Land

As we discussed earlier, that the area under the present study is one of the most densely populated rural regions in the world. Agricultural fertility of the land in the region must be one of the primary reasons for it being so densely populated. Moreover, pervasive illiteracy, other socio-economic backwardness and migration from the other side of the border marks this region as having a population with one of the highest rate of growth. Land being scarce, as a result, there are around 187 villages in the south Bengal region alone where houses are located within the 150 yards of the international border (Jamwal 2004) what should be effectively no man's land.

Partition of the country during the independence bisected the region in such a way that the people were no way prepared for it. It not only slashed the land in two, but left families estranged and their properties detached. As the newly formed boundary ran through villages and agricultural land, unlike in the natural borders created by rivers, mountains and sea, people in both sides of the border in the region tried to have access to their loved ones on the other side of the border and to use their farm land to optimum level, which often stretched right up to the markings of the international border. Though there are number of rivers in the region, many were used to demarcate the border initially, but even nature does not appear to be happy with the separation and violated the border time and again at various points, exacerbating the issue further.

Initially, in the post independence time there was not much of restrictions imposed from either side of the border between India and East Pakistan (Bangladesh). Unlike the western frontier, where travel between the two countries was restricted in 1948, immediately after partition, people of this region used to cross the border if required and come back. Border was loosely guarded mostly by untrained police forces.

Innocent ignorance of border by common people gradually degenerated to deliberate breaching due to personal greed and easy income, creating a new group of people who were involved in smuggling. As a result what was a quiet and friendly border, with common people having almost free access through the border to the other side, became a hotbed of criminal activities as the border found another group of interested people in the form of these criminals. To curb the menace, and of course to establish the territoriality, the administration deployed the third interested party in the form of border guards after almost 20 years of partition. They were heavily armed, culturally poles apart from local people, and were specially trained to kill. They became self styled judges and executioner and were determined to establish their "Rifle Raj". They had little knowledge of the law of the land, which does not allow them to kill innocent people or for that matter the criminals and intruders at their will, rather instructs them only to apprehend and book under the passport and visa regulation, if the required; even if they have the knowledge of law, they have hardly any respect to it. They fire on anyone found near the borders, as they themselves accept that they cannot distinguish between the people of the two sides of the border, nor do they try to identify who is a criminal and who is not. They have no idea about the ground reality of the region, the dense population, ownership of the land near the border, the only thing they have is the notion that the border is sacrosanct; anyone found near it is punishable. And punishment is nothing but opening fire to kill. Most of these atrocities are overlooked by the local administration. Even if they stand against it;

they are silenced by the higher authorities, and the people are consoled with false assurances.

The politicians on the other hand either keep silence or exploit the situation. They have become the fourth and the latest entrant in the list of interested parties in the border disputes. As Willem van Schendel states:

“To make matters worse, politicians in India and Bangladesh are increasingly focusing on the border as a zone of national vulnerability. This new interest is linked to the emergence of hypernationalism (including forms of Hindutva and Islamism), an ideology that emphasizes the supremacy of the nation and demands safe territorial borders in order to construct a nation with clear-cut social boundaries. For hypernationalist politicians, unauthorized cross-border trade and population movements are an affront to the nation and a threat to its very survival as a territorial identity: they cannot be seen to be ‘soft’ on such issues. To them, pushing for an open border does not make political sense, and the lifting of border controls in the name of globalization is out of the question. Quite the opposite: they turn the border into a sacred symbol of the nation, thereby employing it as a useful resource in creating moral panic around border-related issues such as illegal immigration, infiltration international terrorism, human trafficking and smuggling (Van Schendel 2004)”.

6.2 Nearer to Border Farther from Order

With so many interested parties in action, borders are continuously growing as land of contention – “It forces us to abandon the idea that borders are remote peripheries and that what happens there is of little wider concern – as remote from important issues of the state as the border itself is from the state capital (Van Schendel 2004).”

Clashes among these interested parties are common, and in all these cases of unrest, common people in the borderland, especially the women are the worst affected. In both sides of the border, there are reported incidents in which common people has been either tortured or even killed by the border guards of opposite side, though the Indian border guards claim little extra notoriety in this regard.

Second, even if the border guards of the opposite sides clash with each other, common people are affected as their movement is restricted within their own land; there are plenty of reports when they are injured during such clashes and in worst cases even been killed. The administration shrugs it's responsible by calling these incidents as collateral damages.

Third, clashes between the border guards and smugglers or criminals from whichever side they belong, often results to similar incidences when common people are injured or killed. More disconcertingly, the border guards unaware of the local miscreants look at innocent people with the same suspicious view that they have for the miscreants.

"Indian border guards frequently complaint that they cannot tell Indian and Bangladeshi citizens apart translates easily into their categorizing the entire borderland population as suspect, unworthy of civil rights, and outside the nation. From this it is but a small step to treating all borderlanders as sub-humans and disciplining them by physical means. For this reason, Indian border guards take out their frustration on the bodies of Indian inhabitants of the borderland by beating, shooting, raping and killing them without compunction (Van Schendel 2004)". This is important because the mutual suspicion is the root cause of frequent cases of clash between the BSF and the local people.

The fourth type of clashes occurs between the border guards and the local people are generally incidental to the third type. Most of such clashes originate from overactive stance of the BSF and their confusion regarding anti-socials and common people. The highhanded nature of the BSF aggravates the situation. As a result "Between 1998 and 2002 border guards killed 59 co-nationals and injured no less than 464 others. Quite a number of these casualties occurred in pitched battles between border guards and borderlanders (Van Schendel 2004)".

"BSF suspects someone smuggling something or if any intruder from Bangladesh comes here then we have had it. They come knocking, search our homes, turn it upside down, with no respect for anyone or anything. If sometimes that happens at night, we just lock ourselves in, pretend to be sleeping, not knowing anything. We do not like to get caught in such stuff"

In some areas, there had been clashes between the BSF and the local people when they tried to fence the border with dwellings and farmland falling on the other side of the fence. Such clashes are the only cases where the local people proactively resist activities of the BSF, as allowing the fences to be erected would make the inhabitants more vulnerable to the Indian as well as Bangladeshi border guards and even the criminals. Residing other side of the fence leads to restricted entry to Indian side, first people have to produce or even deposit their identity cards during passing through the fences, secondly their movement is barred during the time between early evening and early morning.

*"We are living in fear all the time. The BSF people keep coming and measuring land. They came last week too. They want to fence this place for security. What will happen to us then? We will be fenced out. We do not want that. It is bad enough living in a border village...
And if they fence this place they would also acquire land from us. They have offered very cheap price. The BDO came once and he offered only Rs. 5000/- for one bigha. Just imagine!"*

In fifth type of clashes, rival gangs clash to prove their dominance. Though these fights generally do not lead to injury or death of common people, their presence itself has a negative impact on the society as a whole. They organize and control the dens of gambling and illicit liquor;

they are involved in the illegal border trade, trafficking and what not.

***Criminal-Administration-Police
nexus***

“The Trans-border crimes in the border regions flourish due to the connivance and close nexus of the criminal-police-administration triumvirate. It has been found in certain cases that before the illegal migrants enter India, certain important documents like ration cards, gas connection papers etc. showing them as Indian citizens are all prepared and handed over to them to allow them escape detention on the border...

A glaring instance of connivance can be seen from the fact that the cattle smuggled from India to Bangladesh reach the Bangladesh border from places as far as MP (Madhya Pradesh), UP (Uttar Pradesh), Bihar, Orissa etc., on the basis of fictitious documents and bribing the officials at respective checkpoints.”

(Jamwal 2004)

Apart from these ground level clashes, the political classes of the two countries periodically scale up their rhetoric of hypernationalism, which influence everyone in the borderland. While the border guards are directly influenced and become hyperactive, in reflex the others follow it. As the population in the region comprises a delicate mix of various religions, distrust among them heightens, unable to understand the reasons behind such rhetoric, sometimes ends up in clashes among themselves.

The common people in the region are caught between these interested parties can neither offend the BSF nor the criminals continue a balancing job, yet they can hardly manage to win the confidence of the BSF. And the politicians and lawmakers remain

out of their reach.

Like other basic amenities, the borderlands lack judicial and law enforcement infrastructures, leading to a kind of anarchy in the region. People have little access to administration which itself is inadequate

compared to the prevalence of antisocial activities reported in the borderland. As a whole, as one approaches the border through the borderland, s/he experience the deteriorating law and order situation and poorer enforcement of the same.

Referring to recent works¹⁸ on the issues of borderlands Paula Banerjee suggests that “the border is part of larger zone or the borderland that at once constructs and subverts the nation (Banerjee 2011)”.

6.3 Women: Victims of Lawlessness

To understand the issue of child marriage in the borderlands and the perception of adult women about the decaying culture of the region, we canvassed all available adult women with the help of a separate section in the questionnaire (see Appendix 2). Respondents were questioned about their participation in everyday household decision making, how freely they can move around in their neighbourhood, about their perception about the appropriate age of marriage for girls and the boys, their awareness about the official age of marriage of girls and boys, the reasons behind child marriage, and overall socio-cultural setting of their respective villages. The married women were asked about their own marriage, how it was arranged and the expenditure thereon.

Table 6.1: Percentage women reported to be consulted during important family decisions

| | Village Type | | Total |
|---|--------------|-----------|-------|
| | Bordering | Other Vil | |
| Consulted for land and property | 83.6 | 91.4 | 87.6 |
| Consulted for purchase of expensive items | 84.1 | 94.2 | 89.3 |
| Consulted for health issues | 85.6 | 94.2 | 90.1 |
| Consulted for children's education | 83.1 | 93.2 | 88.3 |
| Consulted for girls marriage | 86.1 | 94.2 | 90.3 |

Source: Field Survey

¹⁸ Samaddar, R. *The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal* and Schendel, W V. *The Bengal borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*.

We have already observed in previous sections that the women's participation in education and work in border areas is relatively better than the other regions. Table 6.1 shows that they enjoy adequate importance in day to day decision making in their families, though the percentage of women involved in family decisions is marginally lower in bordering villages.

Similarly, barring political and social activities women reported that they enjoy freedom to move according to their wishes and requirement. In some cases they might have to require permission of family, in other cases they just have to inform. Political and social activities are exceptions, where many of the women reported that they are not allowed to participate (Appendix Table A5). The degree of freedom is once again little higher in villages away from the border.

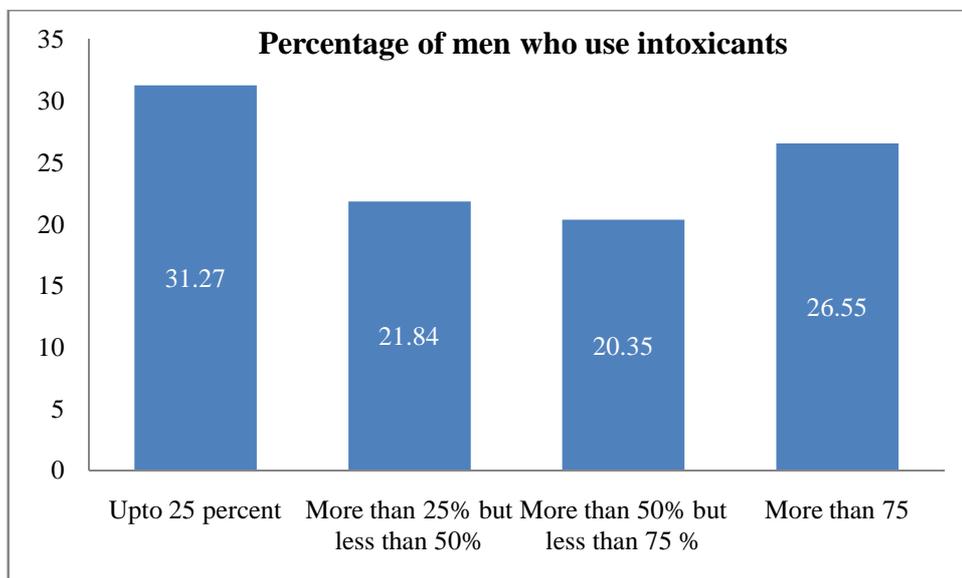
Despite these perceptions a huge share of women reported some acute cultural decay that makes them frightened, we have a glance at the pattern of ill behavior from the BSF met by them. A glimpse of the degenerating culture in the borderlands through their eyes is provided hereunder.

According to 33.6 percent of the adult female respondents under the present study, BSF jawans regularly abuse women verbally. In most of these cases women try to digest the humiliation, as protesting against such incidents does not help due to the fact that the administration shows no empathy towards the victim, on the other hand, protesting leads to further persecution, this may amount to physical assault, sexual abuse, and even rape. Keeping in mind that the victims may not come out and share their sufferings with the investigators, the question regarding harassment by the BSF was asked in an indirect way. Women were asked whether or not any of their friends were harassed by the BSF; in response 5.6 percent of the female respondents reported that one or more of their friends had been harassed by the BSF, in most of these cases (3.8 percent) these women were physically assaulted.

Moreover, 3.7 percent of the respondents themselves admitted being harassed, or badly treated by the BSF.

Beside the atrocities by BSF jawans, responding to the questions related to the overall atmosphere of the villages, 73.1 percent of the adult women reported about continuing conflicts among various anti-social groups in the village, frequent skirmishes are a common day-to-day affair. A good percentage of (26.7%) of the adult women reported that even the village men tease women, especially the young one. Of these women, 68 percent believe the men do so frequently. While questioned about the identity of these people, which was an open question, most of the women responded that the alcoholics and drug addicts are responsible for such incidents. An overwhelming 47 percent of women believe that more than 50 percent of men use intoxicants, 22 percent other believe that more than 25 percent of men use intoxicants (Figure 6.1).

Figure: 6.1: Percentage of men who use intoxicants according to adult female respondents



Source: Field Data

As a result, women suffer from sense of acute insecurity, which according to them is the one of the primary reasons of early marriage in the borderlands (Please refer to Table 3.4 & Figure 3.4). We now analyze

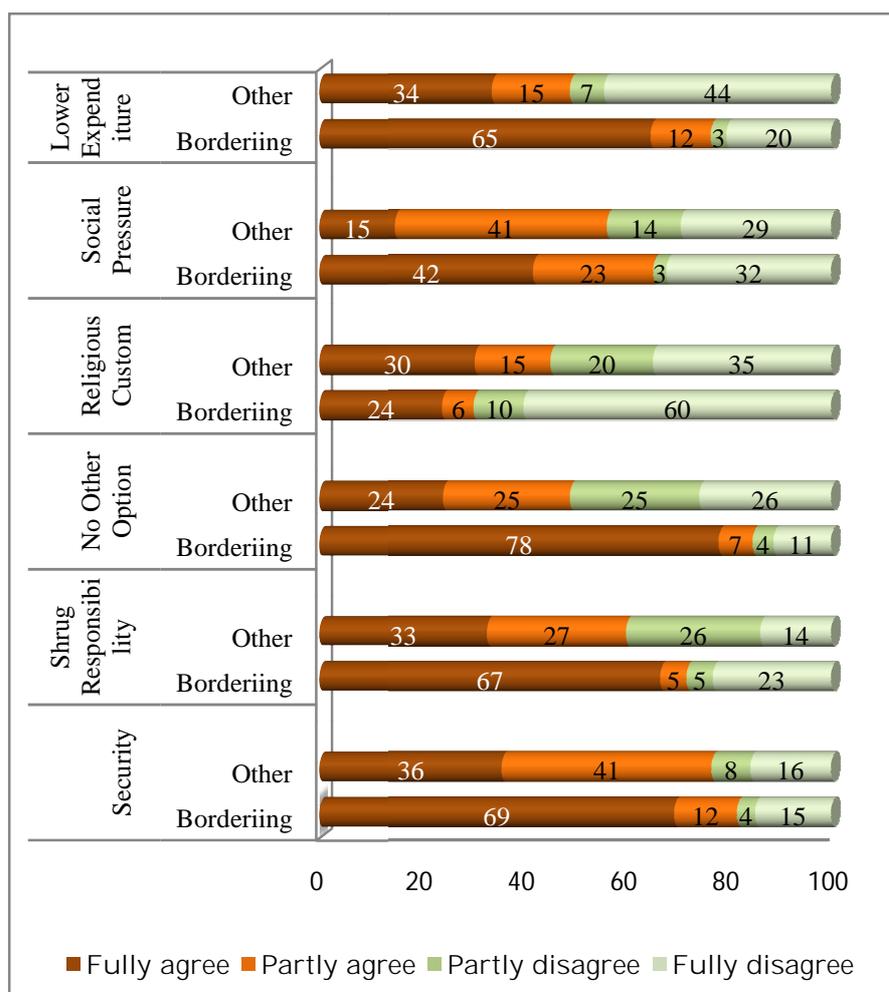
the data to gauge this sense of vulnerability by the two types of villages we surveyed, bordering and other (Figure 6.2).

Table 6.2: Cultural decay as perceived by women

| | Type of Village | | |
|---|-----------------|-------|-------|
| | Bordering | Other | Total |
| Do the addicts tease women | 42.4 | 22.4 | 32 |
| Are men involved in gambling | 64.8 | 56.7 | 60.6 |
| Is cross-border illegal trade practiced | 55.6 | 49.3 | 52.4 |

Source: Field Survey

Figure 6.2: Percentage women agreeing to various causes of child marriage, by degree of agreement and type of village



Source: Field Survey

A huge 69 percent of the women in the bordering villages fully agreed that lack of security of women is a reason behind child marriage, another 12 percent partly agreed to it; the figures for other villages are 36 and 41 percent respectively. Though the aggregate of percentage of women agreed to the proposition (81 and 77 percent in bordering and other villages) is almost same, the degree of their agreement varies to a great extent. A closure look into figure 6.2 reveals that one reason, i.e. religious custom, women from the bordering villages strongly agreed to our proposition for all other causes as attributes of child marriage be it lower expenditure in marriage of young girls, social pressure,

Ms. Shabnam Ramasway

(Chairperson- District Child Welfare Committee)



Incidents of child marriage are high among the girls in Murshidabad district. Poverty is the major reason. Roads are not safe for the girls just after they attain the age of puberty; completing their 5th standard education. Security of girls is a big issue; the nonresponsive police are not willing to even lodge the complaints of the families suffered sexual harassments. In this given situation, the parents are trying to marry off their girls to ensure their security with a hope that husbands would protect their daughters. Introduction of various social networks definitely exposed the girls to increased number of violence. The false family pride and ego further worsening the situation. As far BSF is concern; the male in families are much more violent towards women than the male outside i.e. the BSF.

To check this malaise, government has to reorient the educational curriculum; it is needed to introduce reproductive child health in regular curriculum. The governmental schemes; such as Kannyashree has positive impact to curb the widespread incidences of child marriage.

lack of opportunities or parents attempt to shrug their responsibility. We have already seen in previous sections that these causes are interlinked and are common in borderlands.

When asked what according to them appropriate age for marriage for girls and boys is separately, most of the women expressed that girls should be married by the age of 18, i.e. by the legal age of marriage. On the other hand, larger section of the women expressed that the boys should get married at an age beyond their legal age of marriage (Table 6.3). This clearly shows there is an acute social pressure evolving out of the persisting volatile atmosphere in the borderlands to get the girls married at earliest.

Table 6.3: Appropriate age at marriage of girls and boys according to the adult women respondents

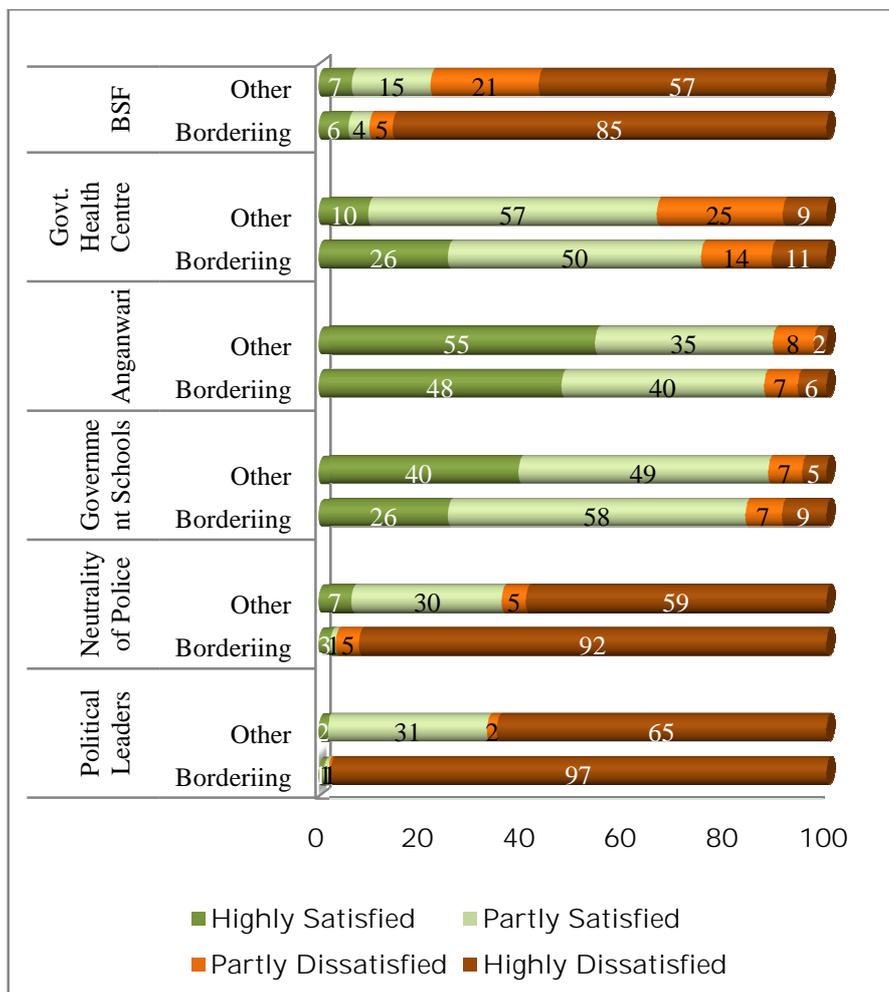
| Age | Girls | | | Age | Boys | | |
|----------|-----------------|-------|-------|----------|-----------------|-------|-------|
| | Type of Village | | | | Type of Village | | |
| | Bordering | Other | Total | | Bordering | Other | Total |
| Below 18 | 11.3 | 10.5 | 10.9 | Below 21 | 21.67 | 19.14 | 20.35 |
| 18 | 74.9 | 60.5 | 67.4 | 21 | 17.53 | 7.18 | 12.16 |
| Above 18 | 13.8 | 29.1 | 21.7 | Above 21 | 60.8 | 73.68 | 67.49 |

Source: Field Survey

Bharat Mondal a landless labour of Char Saheb Nagar (P.S-Raninagar) unlawfully arrested and detained tortured and faced caste based discrimination. The BSF stripped him naked and assaulted him severely. The BSF hit him repeatedly with wooden sticks and rifle butts and kicked him also. His daughter Parulbala married in the year 2014, a case of early marriage. Bharat Mondal and his wife Chintamoni Mondal both narrated that they had no option but to arrange marriage for their daughter as the BSF continuously tortured and terrorized the family. They were apprehending offensives on the girl from the BSF. At Lalbag, Parulbala lives with her in-laws. Parulbala told that her parents preferred for a distant place for her marriage, not at the bordering area and adjacent to their home for her safety from the BSF.

What is shocking to note is the fact that the women reported that they are more dissatisfied with the politicians and the police force than the acts of BSF (Figure 6.3). In fact, we expect them (the politicians and the police force) to intervene if common people of the region suffer due to the atrocities of BSF, unfortunately the borderlanders apparently cannot expect it to happen.

Figure 6.3: Percentage women satisfied to various government institutions and law enforcing agencies, by degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction and type of village



Source: Field Survey

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Table A1: Availability of household utilities by type of village

| Item | | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 and above |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|-------------|
| Mobile Phone | Bordering Village | 35.54 | 55.28 | 7.47 | 1.71 | 0 | |
| | Other Village | 21.66 | 63.94 | 10.55 | 2.35 | 1.51 | |
| | Total | 28.16 | 59.88 | 9.1 | 2.05 | 0.8 | |
| Cycle | Bordering Village | 36.29 | 51.76 | 11.95 | 0 | 0 | |
| | Other Village | 24.86 | 60.83 | 12.62 | 0.94 | 0.75 | |
| | Total | 30.22 | 56.58 | 12.31 | 0.5 | 0.4 | |
| Water Filter | Bordering Village | 99.15 | 0.85 | | | | |
| | Other Village | 100 | 0 | | | | |
| | Total | 99.6 | 0.4 | | | | |
| Electric Fan | Bordering Village | 56.88 | 30.74 | 10.25 | 1.6 | 0.53 | 0 |
| | Other Village | 26.93 | 38.42 | 17.42 | 9.89 | 5.37 | 1.98 |
| | Total | 40.97 | 34.82 | 14.06 | 6 | 3.1 | 0.7 |
| Wrist Watch | Bordering Village | 89.54 | 7.04 | 2.88 | 0.53 | | |
| | Other Village | 74.76 | 19.87 | 4.43 | 0.94 | | |
| | Total | 81.69 | 13.86 | 3.7 | 0.75 | | |
| Motor Cycle | Bordering Village | 95.94 | 4.06 | | | | |
| | Other Village | 90.4 | 9.6 | | | | |
| | Total | 93 | 7 | | | | |
| Color TV | Bordering Village | 91.89 | 8.11 | | | | |
| | Other Village | 68.74 | 31.26 | | | | |
| | Total | 79.59 | 20.41 | | | | |
| Pressure Cooker | Bordering Village | 96.58 | 2.45 | 0.96 | | | |
| | Other Village | 89.36 | 10.64 | 0 | | | |
| | Total | 92.75 | 6.8 | 0.45 | | | |
| Wall Clock | Bordering Village | 78.87 | 19.96 | 1.17 | | | |
| | Other Village | 65.73 | 30.41 | 3.86 | | | |
| | Total | 71.89 | 25.51 | 2.6 | | | |
| Radio | Bordering Village | 97.33 | 2.67 | | | | |
| | Other Village | 98.31 | 1.69 | | | | |
| | Total | 97.85 | 2.15 | | | | |
| CFL/Fluorescent Tube | Bordering Village | 33.08 | 41.41 | 16.65 | 7.58 | 1.28 | 0 |
| | Other Village | 23.82 | 31.45 | 29.28 | 9.32 | 3.86 | 2.26 |
| | Total | 28.16 | 36.12 | 23.36 | 8.5 | 2.65 | 1.2 |
| Almirah | Bordering Village | 95.62 | 4.38 | 0 | | | |
| | Other Village | 94.63 | 3.77 | 1.6 | | | |
| | Total | 95.1 | 4.05 | 0.85 | | | |

Source: Field Survey

Table A2: Distribution of households according to number of displacements reported

| Number of Displacements | Number of households reported. | Percent of households reported |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 0 | 10 | 2.53 |
| 1 | 85 | 21.46 |
| 2 | 98 | 24.75 |
| 3 | 123 | 31.06 |
| 4 | 34 | 8.59 |
| 5 | 19 | 4.8 |
| 6 | 6 | 1.52 |
| 7 | 12 | 3.03 |
| 8 | 4 | 1.01 |
| 9 | 5 | 1.26 |
| Total | 396 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey

Table A3: Type of dwellings by type of village

| Type of Dwelling | Bordering | | Other | | Total | |
|------------------|-----------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Pucca | 21 | 10.82 | 13 | 6.44 | 34 | 8.59 |
| Partially Pucca | 43 | 22.16 | 53 | 26.24 | 96 | 24.24 |
| Kutchra | 128 | 65.98 | 136 | 67.33 | 264 | 66.67 |
| Other | 2 | 1.03 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0.51 |
| Total | 194 | 100 | 202 | 100 | 396 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey

Table A4: Distribution family members by type of ration card

| Type of Ration Card | Number of members. | Percent |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------|
| APL | 688 | 34.42 |
| BPL | 558 | 27.91 |
| Antyodaya | 4 | 0.2 |
| Annapurna | 4 | 0.2 |
| Not Registered | 710 | 35.52 |
| Do Not Know | 35 | 1.75 |
| Total | 1,999 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey

Table A5: Freedom of movement of women by type of village

| | | Type of Village | | | |
|---|---|-----------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| | | Market | Bordering | Other | Total |
| Permission to go to market | Elderly Male Member | | 39.4 | 52.4 | 46.2 |
| | Elderly Female Member | | 4.2 | 5.7 | 5.0 |
| | Have To Inform, But Permission not needed | | 45.1 | 39.5 | 42.2 |
| | Not Allowed | | 9.3 | 1.0 | 5.0 |
| | Other | | 2.1 | 1.4 | 1.7 |
| Permission to go to government office | Elderly Male Member | | 58.6 | 79.5 | 69.5 |
| | Elderly Female Member | | 1.6 | 4.8 | 3.2 |
| | Have To Inform, But Permission not needed | | 20.7 | 11.0 | 15.6 |
| | Not Allowed | | 16.6 | 2.9 | 9.4 |
| | Other | | 2.6 | 1.9 | 2.2 |
| Permission to participate in political activity | Elderly Male Member | | 48.4 | 71.5 | 60.4 |
| | Elderly Female Member | | 1.0 | 4.4 | 2.8 |
| | Have To Inform, But Permission not needed | | 13.0 | 10.1 | 11.5 |
| | Not Allowed | | 35.4 | 11.6 | 23.1 |
| | Other | | 2.1 | 2.4 | 2.3 |
| Permission to visit friend/relative | Elderly Male Member | | 51.8 | 73.7 | 63.2 |
| | Elderly Female Member | | 4.2 | 7.2 | 5.7 |
| | Have To Inform, But Permission not needed | | 38.3 | 15.3 | 26.4 |
| | Not Allowed | | 3.6 | 1.0 | 2.2 |
| | Other | | 2.1 | 2.9 | 2.5 |
| Permission to participate in social activity | Elderly Male Member | | 60.9 | 74.2 | 67.8 |
| | Elderly Female Member | | 3.1 | 5.3 | 4.2 |
| | Have To Inform, But Permission not needed | | 20.3 | 16.3 | 18.2 |
| | Not Allowed | | 13.5 | 1.4 | 7.2 |
| | Other | | 2.1 | 2.9 | 2.5 |

Source: Field Survey

সীমান্তে বালিকা বিবাহ- সামাজিক অবক্ষয়ের বহিঃপ্রকাশ

পরিবার সমীক্ষা প্রশ্নাবলী

সমীক্ষার তারিখ

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1. পরিবারের পরিচয়

১.১ গ্রামের/পাড়ার নাম..... কোড

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১.২ উত্তরদাতার ক্রমিক সংখ্যা (৩ নং প্রশ্নের উত্তর অনুযায়ী)

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১.৩ ফোন/মোবাইল নং-

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2. পরিবারের আর্থ-সামাজিক অবস্থা

২.১ পরিবারের প্রধানের সামাজিক পরিচয়

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 [তপশিলী জাতি-১ তপশিলী জনজাতি-২ ও.বি.সি.-৩ অন্যান্য-৯]

২.২ পরিবারের প্রধানের ধর্মীয় পরিচয়

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 [হিন্দু-১, মুসলমান-২, অন্যান্য(উল্লেখ করুন)-৯]

২.৩ পরিবারের মুখ্য পেশা

২.৪ পরিবারের গৌণ পেশা

২.৫ কতদিন আগে এই গ্রামে/পাড়ায় আপনাদের পরিবারের লোকেরা প্রথম আসেন

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[সমীক্ষক: এক বছরের কম হলে '০' এবং ৯৯ বছর বা তার চেয়ে বেশি হলে '৯৯' লিখুন]

২.৬ আপনাদের পরিবার কোথা থেকে এই গ্রামে/পাড়ায় এসেছিল?

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[এই জেলার অন্য জায়গা থেকে-১ এই রাজ্যের অন্য জেলা থেকে-২ অন্য রাজ্য থেকে-৩ বাংলাদেশ থেকে-৪ অন্য দেশ থেকে (উল্লেখ করুন)-৫ এই গ্রামেরই আদি বাসিন্দা-৬ অন্যান্য-৯]

২.৭ প্রশ্ন ২.৫ এর উত্তর ২৫ এর কম হলে, বাসস্থান বদলের কারণ?

২.৮ গত ৫০ বছরে আপনার পরিবার নদী ভাঙনের জন্য কতবার বাসস্থান বদলাতে বাধ্য হয়েছে

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২.৯ পরিবারের সদস্য সংখ্যা

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3. পরিবারের বর্ণনা

| ক্রমিক সংখ্যা | নাম | লিঙ্গ | বয়স (পূর্ণ বছরে) | প্রতিবন্ধী কিনা | পরিবারের প্রধানের সঙ্গে সম্পর্ক | শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা | বৈবাহিক অবস্থা | বিবাহের সময় বয়স | পতি/পত্নীর ক্র. সংখ্যা | মুখ্য পেশা | রেশন কার্ড | গত ১ বছরের মধ্যে কোন অসুখ হয়েছিল কিনা | ব্যাঙ্ক/ পোস্ট অফিস অ্যাকাউন্ট বিবরণ | কর্মসূত্রে গত ৫ বছরে রাজ্যের বাইরে গেছিলেন/আছেন? |
|---------------|-----------------------|-------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------------|------------|------------|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| (১) | (২) | (৩) | (৪) | (৫) | (৬) | (৭) | (৮) | (৯) | (১০) | (১১) | (১২) | (১৩) | (১৪) | (১৫) |
| ১ | পরিবারের প্রধানের নাম | | | | ১ | | | | | | | | | |
| ২ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ৩ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| ১০ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ১১ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Column 3: পুরুষ-১ মহিলা-২ **Column 4:** ব্যক্তির বয়স completed years এ লিখতে হবে, যেমন: ১৫ বছর ৮ মাস হলে ১৫ বছর

Column 5: জন্মসূত্রে প্রতিবন্ধী-১ দুর্ঘটনার কারণে প্রতিবন্ধী-২ বয়স জনিত কারণে প্রতিবন্ধী-৩ প্রতিবন্ধী নয়-৪ [এই প্রশ্ন সদস্যের মানসিক ও শারীরিক প্রতিবন্ধকতার কারণে চলা-ফেরায় অসুবিধে হয় কিনা জানার জন্য]

Column 6: স্বয়ং-১ পতি/পত্নী-২ সন্তান-৩ সন্তানের পতি/পত্নী-৪ নাতি/নাতনি-৫ মাতা/পিতা/শুশ্রূ/শাশুড়ি-৬ ভাই/বোন/বৌদি/দেওর/ভাসুর ইত্যাদি-৭ অন্যান্য (নির্দিষ্ট করুন)-৯

Column 7: বিদ্যালয়ে যাওয়ার বয়স হয়নি-০ নিরক্ষর-১ সাক্ষর (প্রথা-বহির্ভূত)-২ প্রাথমিকের নিচে-৩ প্রাথমিক-৪ উচ্চ-প্রাথমিক-৫ মাধ্যমিক-৬ উচ্চমাধ্যমিক-৭ স্নাতক/স্নাতকোত্তর-৮ অন্যান্য-৯

Column 8: অবিবাহিত-১ বর্তমানে বিবাহিত-২ বিধবা/বিপত্নীক-৩ বিবাহ বিচ্ছিন্ন-৪

Column 11: কৃষি-শ্রমিক-১ অকৃষি-শ্রমিক-২ কৃষক (নিজ জমিতে)-৩ কারকশিল্পী-৪ স্ব-নিযুক্ত/ছোট ব্যবসা-৫ পেশাগত স্বনির্ভর (উকিল, ডাক্তার, গৃহশিক্ষক ইত্যাদি)-৬ চাকরি-৭ চাষের জমির মালিক (মূলত

অন্যের শ্রম-নির্ভর)-৮ গৃহবধূ-৯ বেকার-১০ কর্মক্ষম নয়-১১ ছাত্র-১২ অন্যান্য (নির্দিষ্ট করুন)-১৯ **Column 12:** এ.পি.এল-১ বি.পি.এল-২ অন্ত্যদয়-৩ অল্পপূর্ণা-৪ পঞ্জীকৃত নয়-৬ জানি না-৯; **Column 13:** হ্যাঁ-১ না-২

Column 14: সরকারি ব্যাঙ্ক/পোস্ট অফিসে অ্যাকাউন্ট আছে-১ বেসরকারি ব্যাঙ্ক ইত্যাদি সংস্থায় অ্যাকাউন্ট আছে-২ সরকারি ও বেসরকারি ব্যাঙ্ক উভয়েই অ্যাকাউন্ট আছে-৩ কোন রকম অ্যাকাউন্ট নেই-৪,

Column 15: হ্যাঁ, এক বছরের কম সময়ের জন্য-১, হ্যাঁ, এক বছরের বেশি সময়ের জন্য-২

4. বাড়ি-ঘর

- 8.1 বাড়ির মালিকানা [নিজস্ব-1 ভাড়া-2 বাড়ি নেই-3 অন্যান্য-৯]
- 8.2 বাড়ির ধরণ [পাকা-1 আধ-পাকা-2 কাঁচা-3 তাঁবু ইত্যাদি-৪ অন্যান্য-৯]
- 8.3 বাসযোগ্য ঘরের সংখ্যা
- 8.4 সরকারি অনুদানে তৈরি ঘরের সংখ্যা
- 8.5 রান্নাঘরের ব্যবস্থা

[বাড়ির মধ্যে আলাদা রান্নাঘর-1 বাড়ির বাইরে আলাদা রান্নাঘর-2 আলাদা রান্নাঘর নেই, বাড়ির মধ্যেই রান্না করা হয়-3 আলাদা রান্নাঘর নেই, বারান্দায় রান্না করা হয়-4 আলাদা রান্নাঘর নেই, খোলা জায়গায় রান্না করা হয়-5]

- 8.6 রান্নার জন্য ব্যবহৃত মুখ্য জ্বালানি
[কয়লা/গুল-1 কাঠ/পাটকাঠি/খড় ইত্যাদি-2 এল পি জি-3 বায়ো/গোবর গ্যাস-4 ঘুঁটে-5 কাঠ কয়লা-6 কেরোসিন-7 বিদ্যুৎ-8
অন্যান্য-9(উল্লেখ করুন)_____]

- 8.9 শৌচাগারের ধরণ
[গর্তযুক্ত-1 স্যানেটারি-2 সর্বজনীন স্যানেটারি শৌচালয়-3 শৌচাগার নেই-4]
- 8.8 শৌচাগারের জন্য সরকারি সাহায্য পেয়েছেন কিনা [হ্যাঁ-1না-2]

- 8.9 কত বছর আগে বাড়িতে বিদ্যুৎ সংযোগ নেওয়া হয়েছে?
[সমীক্ষক: এক বছরের কম হলে '0', 50 বছর বা তার চেয়ে বেশি হলে '50' বাড়িতে বিদ্যুৎ না থাকলে 98 বা বেআইনি সংযোগ হলে '99' লিখুন]

- 8.10 বিদ্যুৎ সংযোগ নেওয়ার সময় সরকারি ভর্তুকি পাওয়া গিয়েছে কিনা
[প্রযোজ্য নয়-0 হ্যাঁ-1 না-2 জানি না-3]

- 8.11 দৈনিক কত ঘণ্টা বিদ্যুৎ পাওয়া যায়
- 8.12 সাধারণ বিদ্যুৎ ছাড়া অন্য ধরনের বিদ্যুতের ব্যবহার (মাল্টিপল কোডিং)

[ব্যাটারি চালিত-1 সৌর বিদ্যুৎ -2 জেনারেটর-3 অন্য ধরনের বিদ্যুতের ব্যবহার নেই- 4 অন্যান্য-৯]

5. আয়-ব্যয়

- 5.1 পরিবারের সর্বমোট বার্ষিক আয় কত
- 5.2 আন্তর্জাতিক সীমানার সংলগ্ন এলাকায় কি আপনার কোন চাষের জমি আছে? [হ্যাঁ-1না-2]
- 5.3 যদি থাকে, সেটিতে চাষ করার ক্ষেত্রে আপনি কি কোন ধরণের অসুবিধের সম্মুখীন হন? [হ্যাঁ-1না-2]
- 5.3.ক. যদি অসুবিধা হয়ে থাকে, তার বর্ণনা দিন:

৫.৩.খ. গত ৩০ বছরে নদী ভাঙনের জন্য কত জমি চাষের অনুপযোগী হয়েছে? (বিঘায়)

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৫.৪ পরিবারে রাজ্যের বাইরে রোজগারের সঙ্গে যুক্ত ব্যক্তির সংখ্যা

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৫.৫ রাজ্যের বাইরে রোজগারের সঙ্গে যুক্ত ব্যক্তির বছরে মোট কত টাকা পাঠান/নিয়ে আসেন

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৫.৬ নিত্য ব্যবহার্য জিনিসের মধ্যে আপনার বাড়িতে নিম্নলিখিত জিনিসগুলি ক'টি করে আছে ?

| | সংখ্যা | | সংখ্যা | | সংখ্যা | | সংখ্যা |
|--------------|--------|-----------|--------|----------------|--------|-----------------|--------|
| মোবাইল | | সাইকেল | | জলের ফিলটার | | ইলেকট্রিক ফ্যান | |
| হাত- ঘড়ি | | মোটর বাইক | | রঙ্গিন টি. ভি | | প্রেশার কুকার | |
| দেওয়াল ঘড়ি | | রেডিও | | CFL/Tube light | | আলমারি | |

৫.৭ গত পাঁচ বছরে রাজ্যের বাইরে রোজগারের সঙ্গে যুক্ত ব্যক্তিদের বিবরণ

| ৩ নং প্রশ্নে ব্যক্তির ক্রমিক সংখ্যা (১) | নাম (২) | স্থান (৩) | সঙ্গে পরিবারের কে কে গেছিলেন (৪) | কত মাসের জন্য (৫) | কত বছর আগে (৬) | অন্য রাজ্যে যাওয়ার আগে কি করতেন? (৭) |
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[column 4 একা-১ পত্নী/পতি-২ পত্নী/পতি ও সন্তান-৩ অন্যান্য-৯]

৫.৮ গত এক বছরে কোনও কারণে বড় আর্থিক সমস্যার সম্মুখীন হতে হয়েছে? [হ্যাঁ-১ না-২]

৫.৯ কি কারণে এই আর্থিক সমস্যার সম্মুখীন হতে হয়েছে? [হ্যাঁ-১ না-২]

অসুস্থতা- শিশুর জন্ম- বাড়ি তৈরি- বিবাহ- অন্যান্য-৯(উল্লেখ করুন)

৫.১০ এই আর্থিক সমস্যার জন্য কীভাবে টাকা জোগাড় করেছেন?

[সঞ্চিৎ অর্থ- বিনা সুদে টাকা ধার - সুদসহ টাকা ধার - সম্পত্তি বন্ধক রাখা-

সম্পত্তি বিক্রি করা- অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)

৫.১১ আপনার সর্বমোট ঋণের পরিমাণ কত

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৫.১২ সুদ দিতে হয় এমন ঋণের পরিমাণ কত

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6. শিক্ষা

৬.১ বর্তমানে পাঠরত ও বছর ও তার উর্ধ্বের ব্যক্তিদের শিক্ষাগত অবস্থা ও খরচ

| ৩ নং প্রশ্নে ব্যক্তির ক্রমিক সংখ্যা | নামের প্রথম অংশ | কোথায় পাঠরত | স্কুল/কলেজের দূরত্ব (কি.মি) | স্কুল/কলেজে নিয়মিত যায় কি না | প্রাইভেট টিউশন নেন কি না | প্রাইভেট টিউশন কে করেন | বাড়িতে কে পড়ান | এক বছরের শিক্ষার খরচ | | | | | কন্যাশ্রী প্রকল্পে পঞ্জীকরণ হয়েছে? | কন্যাশ্রী প্রকল্পের অর্থ নিয়মিত পাচ্ছেন? |
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| | | | | | | | | বই | খাতা পেন ইত্যাদি | যাতায়াত | স্কুল/কলেজের ফি | প্রাইভেট টিউশন | | |
| (১) | (২) | (৩) | (৪) | (৫) | (৬) | (৭) | (৮) | (৯) | (১০) | (১১) | (১২) | (১৩) | (১৪) | |
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[Column 3: অঙ্গনওয়াড়ী-১ বে-সরকারি নার্সারি-২ অঙ্গনওয়াড়ী ও বে-সরকারি নার্সারি দুইই-৩ সরকারি স্কুল-৪ বে-সরকারি স্কুল-৫ সরকারি ও বে-সরকারি স্কুল দুজায়গাতেই-৬ সরকারি কলেজ-৭ বে-সরকারি কলেজ-৮ অন্যান্য(নির্দিষ্ট করুন)-৯

Column 4, 5: হ্যাঁ-১ না-২

Column 6: স্কুল-শিক্ষক-১কলেজেরশিক্ষক-২গ্রামের বেকার যুবক-৩ গ্রামের বেকার যুবতী-৪অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন) -৯

Column 7: মা-১ বাবা-২ মা-বাবা দুজনেই-৩ দাদা/দিদি-৪ কেউনা-৫অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন) -৯

Column 13: হ্যাঁ-১ না-২ Column 14: হ্যাঁ-১ না-২ এখনও সময় হয়নি-৩

পরিবারে প্রত্যেক ১৮ বছরের উর্ধ্বে অথবা বিবাহিতা মহিলাদের জন্য

১০.১ পরিবারের ক্রমিক সংখ্যা (প্রথম পৃষ্ঠার থেকে)

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১০.২ মহিলা উত্তরদাতার নাম ও ক্রমিক সংখ্যা (৩ নং প্রশ্নের উত্তর অনুযায়ী)

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১০.৩ আপনার পরিবারে নিম্নলিখিত বিষয়গুলিতে সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার সময় আপনার মত নেওয়া হয়?

হ্যাঁ-১ না-২

১০.৩.ক. জমি সম্পত্তি বিষয়ে

১০.৩.খ. দামী জিনিস কিনবার সময়

১০.৩.গ. পরিবারের সদস্য অসুস্থ হলে

১০.৩.ঘ. শিশুদের শিক্ষার বিষয়ে

১০.৩.ঙ. মেয়েদের বিয়ের বিষয়ে

১০.২ নিম্নলিখিত বিষয়গুলিতে মূলত কার অনুমতি নিতে হয়

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| ক. দোকান বাজারের কাজে ঘরের বাইরে যেতে | | খ. পঞ্চগয়েত বা অন্য সরকারি অফিসে যেতে | | গ. রাজনৈতিক কাজকর্মে অংশগ্রহণ করতে | |
| ঙ. আত্মীয়-স্বজন/বন্ধু-বান্ধবের বাড়ি যেতে | | চ. সামাজিক কাজকর্মে অংশগ্রহণ করতে | | ছ. অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করবেন) | |

[বয়োজ্যেষ্ঠ পুরুষ-১ বয়োজ্যেষ্ঠ নারী-২ জানিয়ে যাওয়া হয়, কারো অনুমতি নিতে হয় না-৩ যেতে দেওয়া/অংশগ্রহণ করতে দেওয়া হয় না-৪ অন্যান্য (উল্লেখ করুন)-৯]

১০.৩. আপনার মতে মেয়েদের জন্য আদর্শ বিয়ের বয়স কত?

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১০.৪. আপনার মতে ছেলেদের জন্য আদর্শ বিয়ের বয়স কত?

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১০.৫. আপনি কি জানেন আইনত মেয়েদের বিয়ে কত বছর বয়সে হওয়া উচিত?

হ্যাঁ (সঠিক উত্তর)-১ না-২ হ্যাঁ (ভুল উত্তর)-৩

১০.৬. আপনার বিবাহ কীভাবে হয়েছিল

[নিজের মতে-১ পিতার মতে-২ মাতার মতে-৩ পিতা মাতা দুজনের মতে-৪ পরিচিত ব্যক্তির মাধ্যমে-৫ অন্যান্য -৯]

১০.৭. আপনার বিয়ের অনুষ্ঠানে কতজন অতিথি নিমন্ত্রিত ছিলেন?

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১০.৮. আপনার বিয়েতে আপনার পরিবারের কত টাকা খরচ হয়ে ছিল?

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১০.৯. নিম্নলিখিত কোনটি আঠারো বছরের কম বয়সে

মেয়েদের বিয়ের মুখ্য কারণ? (যথাযথ বক্সে টিক দিন)

১০.৯.ক. সমাজে মেয়েদের সুরক্ষার অভাব

১০.৯.খ. কম বয়সে বিয়ে দেওয়া সুবিধাজনক

১০.৯.গ. বাবা মা মেয়ের দায়িত্ব থেকে মুক্তি পেতে চান

১০.৯.ঘ. মেয়েদের জন্য অন্য কিছু করার স্বাধীনতা নেই

১০.৯.ঙ. ধার্মিক রীতি

১০.৯.চ. সামাজিক চাপ

১০.৯.ছ. কম বয়সে বিয়েতে খরচ কম হয়

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সম্পূর্ণ সহমত
আংশিক সহমত
আংশিক অসহমত
সম্পূর্ণ অসহমত

১০.২০. যদি হয়ে থাকেন তার বিবরণ

১০.২১. বি এস এফ-এর উপস্থিতিতে আপনি কতটা সুরক্ষিত অনুভব করেন?

১০.২২. বি এস এফ-এর জওয়ানরা কি মহিলাদের প্রতি কটুক্তি করেন?

[হ্যাঁ-১ না-২]

১০.২৩. আপনার পরিচিত মহিলাদের মধ্যে কি কেউ বি এস এফ-এর জওয়ানদের দ্বারা উত্যক্ত হয়েছেন?

[হ্যাঁ-১ না-২]

১০.২৪. যদি হয়ে থাকেন, তবে কত জন এমন অভিজ্ঞতার কথা আপনাকে বলেছেন?

১০.২৫. এঁদের মধ্যে কত জনকে শারীরিক ভাবে হেনস্তার শিকার হতে হয়েছে?

১০.২৬. আপনার কি এধরণের কোন খারাপ অভিজ্ঞতা আছে?

[হ্যাঁ-১ না-২]

১০.২৭. যদি থেকে থাকে আপনি কি সেটি আমাদের জানাবেন?