

Eroded Lives

**Krishna Bandyopadhyay
Soma Ghosh
Nilanjan Dutta**

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Preface

This report is part of CRG's ongoing work on forced migration, which includes increasingly the critical issue of internal displacement. Mainstream media generally highlights the displacements that occur due to violence and different kinds of conflict. The endemic displacements due to man-made or natural disasters (these are often mixed) escape its eyes. Even more unknown remains the displacement and forced migration of women due to these environmental displacements. The present research, carried out in 2005-2006, is on one such largely unknown and neglected case of endemic displacement, which occurs due to riverbank erosion in Gangetic Bengal. There is no accurate figure of displacements due to such erosion, or in general due to other environmental displacements in West Bengal over the years, no concrete idea of what happens to the people after their lives are devastated, no administrative-political review of the results of government policies on relief, rehabilitation, and resettlement. If this report can draw the attention of media and administrators even in a small way, we shall think that some of the purpose of the research has been met.

While conducting this study on the women affected by riverbank erosion in West Bengal, the researchers' feelings oscillated between helplessness and hope. The helplessness was the kind often encountered by researchers working on a subject that involves human suffering. You visit a 'field' with the intention to collect data for research and are encircled by hundreds of people who after losing everything have become, on the one hand, bitter from their experience of being let down by the system and on the other, desperate to clutch any friendly hand stretched in front expecting that this time it might just pull them out of the misery. In such a situation, it is difficult to maintain the academic distance. So if the following report at times is unable to maintain that distance the researchers seek apology beforehand.

The authors are thankful to all who have helped them to carry out this study, particularly the National Commission for Women for commissioning the project, the members, particularly women members, of the Ganga Bhangon Pratirodh Nagarik Action Committee, Malda, Bhangon Bidhwasta Udbastu Colony O Punarbasan Samiti, Murshidabad, Saltia Bhangon Pratirodh Nagarik Committee, Cooch Behar and local women panchayet members. We are also thankful to Prof. Kalyan Rudra for his valuable suggestions and the Directorate of Census Operations for allowing us to use its library. Tariqul Islam, Sanjay Basak, Sujit Ghosh and Shukla Ghosh in Malda, Manoj Roy and Arup Das in Murshidabad and Tuli Ghosh, Sumanta Saha, Akshay Thakur and Debashis Banik in Cooch Behar have provided kind assistance during our fieldwork in the respective districts.

I. The Background

Floods occur almost every year in West Bengal, and riverbank erosion takes place almost every day. Hundreds die and thousands are displaced by these disasters. In large parts of North Bengal, particularly in Malda, Murshidabad and Cooch Behar districts, the problem has become endemic. Disaster-induced displacement has become as "natural" in these places as the calamities themselves.

Breaking one bank and building another is in the nature of rivers. If humans try to stop this break-and-make game by force by obstructing their flow by force, they become fiercer and take a double toll. Though barrages, bridges and dams are necessities for a country, one has to see how these can be built in harmony with nature. Otherwise, it might spell disaster. This is what millions of people in Malda, Murshidabad and Cooch Behar districts of the northern part of West Bengal are realising through their experience.

The issue has come up repeatedly in public forums. In a discussion in the state assembly on 3 August 2005, CPI(M) MLA Asima Chowdhury pointed out that about 100,000 people living at Bhutni in Malda were facing displacement because of river-bank erosion. Already, the inhabitants of at least four villages were forced to leave their homes and were "spending a nomadic life", she said. (*Ganashakti*, 4 August 2005)

In a recently published book, a researcher writes:

"The entire 174 km stretch along the Ganges, from Bhutni in Malda to Jalangi in Murshidabad, has been facing erosion. In 2001 alone, about 2,500 families were rendered homeless in Malda. Two school buildings, with a student population of 500, are now under water. About 191.41 sq.km and 356 sq.km of land in the districts of Malda and Murshidabad respectively have been eroded between 1931 and 1999. The thickly populated downtown of Dhuliyani in Murshidabad is now under threat. The District Planning Board estimated the loss in April 2000, as six high schools, one police station, three banks, one panchayat (local government) office and at least 42 primary schools, all of which are now completely under water. The problem is that erosion does not always inundate the homes and residential places. But remaining at homes without the basic conditions of life is as good as losing homes. In 1994, three-fourths of Jalangi town in Murshidabad district was submerged in the Ganges as a result of erosion. About 3,00,000 people of three blocks of Malda and eight blocks of Murshidabad faced the threat of being displaced. About 6,00,000 persons have been displaced in these two districts. Many have lost their cultivable lands. Moreover the number of times the same family has been displaced ranges from an average of four to 16 times. It means that the displaced families have nowhere to go but to move within the unsafe and threatened areas." (India: Homelessness at Home' by Samir Kumar Das, in Paula Banerjee and others, ed., *Internal Displacement in South Asia*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2005.)

The non-descript rural area of Panchanandapur of Malda district hit the headlines in 2003.

The Union water resources minister, during the parliamentary debate mentioned earlier, said:

In connection with the erosion problem on the left bank of the Ganga on the upstream of [Farakka] barrage near Panchanandapur, the Central Water and Power Research Station, Pune had submitted a report based on the Satellite Imageries indicating development of a new channel on the right bank downstream of

Rajmahal [hills in Bihar] which could develop in the coming years, thereby reducing the attack of the left bank. The above behaviour of the river is to be further studied by carrying out model studies through the CWPRS in association with the State Government.

Between 2.30 AM and 4 AM on 5 September 2003, two villages and the plush bungalow of the state irrigation department, Ganga Bhavan, at Panchanandapur were swept away by the surging waters of the Ganga. Four other villages had seen the same fate earlier the same year because of erosion.

The submergence of the villages did not make big news. But destruction of the bungalow did. All senior officials from the irrigation department, police and district offices rushed to the spot. There was only a passing reference in the following day's newspapers, however, that 125 families of the two villages along with 1,200 families of the four submerged earlier had no place to go. There was hardly any follow-up on how they were living afterwards. The papers quoted a block development officer claiming, "Relief materials had been reached to all families of Gangabhavantola and Mandirtola as these villages had the risk of being eroded." (*The Telegraph*, Kolkata, 6.9.03.)

The phenomenon of erosion has been going on for a long time. The problem becomes acute in monsoon, as water pressure on the natural banks and human-made embankments increases. In January 2003, chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee gave a call to "build up massive protests at every level from the state" to force the Centre to solve the erosion problem." (*Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 20.1.03.) The ruling Left Front officially recognised that 40,000 people have become "refugees" because of erosion of the Ganga banks and organised a march by them from Malda to Kolkata. (*ABP*, 14.2.03.) Left Front MPs marched to Parliament with the demand of checking erosion. (*ABP*, 3.3.03.) The Opposition parties have also been vocal over the issue.

In Cooch Behar, the otherwise docile river Torsha had engulfed the homes of about 200 families in the Madhupur gram panchayat area last year (*Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 14 June 2004). In the assembly discussion on 3 August 2005, member Akshyay Thakur narrated that the Saltiar Khal in the district had become known as a "canal of misery". Flooding its banks every monsoon, it has devastated 27 villages so far. Around 183 hectares of land have been engulfed by the river, 250 hectares have become mere sand banks and 20,000 hectares have lost fertility. As many as 735 families have been rendered homeless, 227 families become paupers and were compelled to migrate from the area and 10,000 to 12,000 people had become landless labourers (*Ganashakti*, 4 August 2005).

The majority of the displaced people are poor, and at least half of them are women. As the poor are dispossessed of their right to shelter, the women, being the most vulnerable among them, are the worst sufferers. Losing their homes to the river, they have to struggle much harder given the compulsions of family and society.

II. The Objectives

- a) To find out how women are specially affected by the erosion and floods in North Bengal
- b) To document the women's struggles to rebuild their homes and reorganise their family life

- c) To investigate whether the displacement in the wake of the natural disasters marginalise the women further and how do marginalised women survive.
- d) To focus particularly on the impact of displacement on young women and girls and whether they become vulnerable to special hazards such as trafficking, loss of educational and economic opportunities, etc.
- e) To study the rehabilitation efforts – both organised efforts by government and non-government agencies and by the women themselves. Whether they are able to find work to sustain themselves and their families. If so, where and under what conditions. How their physical and mental health is affected in the process. What are the conditions of single women and women-centric families in particular.
- f) To help the voice of these women to be heard clearly on wider civil society platforms, using Forum Theatre or Interactive Theatre as a major means..
- g) To identify the rehabilitational needs and of the needs of the women through intensive interaction with them and recommend appropriate ways to fulfil such needs to government and civil society organisations.
- h) To analyse whether female-headed households have greater problems in accessing rehabilitation and care.

III. The Survey

A three-member study team, comprising the project co-ordinator, research officer and field investigator, visited the following settlements where the displaced families (whose number is given in brackets) are concentrated. The figures have been collected from the respective organisations of the displaced people in each district. Village-level Census figures are available only from the 1991 count and not from 2001. Moreover, as some of the places mentioned here do not constitute a village unit officially but is only a neighbourhood, the corresponding official population figures is not at all available. However, the available Census data are given in the appendix.

1. Malda district: Panchanandapur block
 - a) Bangitola Field (around 1,400)
 - b) Kagmari Rathbari Roadside (around 25)
 - c) Mistiripara or Gangabhangana Para (around 80)
 - d) Babla Roadside (around 200)
 - e) Kagmari Panchanandapur Roadside (around 60)
 - f) Asaf Mullah Tola (around 200)
 - g) Sakurullapur Roadside (around 300)
 - h) Panchkaritola (around 1,000)

2. Murshidabad district: Jalangi block
 - a) Taltali (around 600)
 - b) Paraspur (around 1,100)
 - c) Udaynagar (around 900)
 - d) Thakurnagar (around 600)
 - e) Suryanagar (around 300)

3. Cooch Behar district: Saltiar Khal area
Patchhara G.P. (around 1,000 families)

The team members visited the homes of the displaced women and talked to them at length individually, held focused group discussions in each of the three districts and met separately the members, particularly women members, of the Ganga Bahngan Pratirodh Nagarik Action Committee, Malda, Bhangon Bidhwasta Udbastu Colony O Punarbasan Samiti, Murshidabad, Saltia Bhangon Pratirodh Nagarik Committee, Cooch Behar and local women panchayet members.

Here we present some glimpses of the lives of the women affected by the erosion disaster.

Malda

Bangitola

The only organised rehabilitation effort for the displaced families can be seen at the 'Bangitola Field', on the way to Pagla Ghat in Panchanandapur. Here, the government has purchased land from private owners and distributed a kottah each among 1400 families who had lost their homes in 2003. However, a woman rushes forward leaving her housework to point out, "The plots are supposed to be for building homes. But the authorities have not given us what we need for the purpose." The temporary huts are bare bamboo structures, thatched with polythene sheets or straw. As soon as we stepped into the colony, we were surrounded by a lot of people, most of whom were women. Men, in fact, are few here. Most of them, having lost their land and livelihood, have gone to work as labourers in others' lands or to dig the soil in distant places. Some have migrated outside the state, to Mumbai, Delhi or Gujarat.

The tales of misery of these women reminded us of *Phullarar baromashya* (Phullara's lamentations in the mediaeval Bengali epic, Chandimangal). What surprised us was their spirit of struggle even in the midst of so much misery. A number of them have lost their homes three, four or more times because of the erosion.

The women complain in unison about the lack of sanitation. "We have no toilets here except the few that have been set up by the citizens' action committee recently. How long can we bear the humiliation of using open fields as toilets? If they can't provide us with toilets, why do they write on the walls of schools and other buildings that every house must have one?" There is only one deep well, which, too, has been constructed by the committee. Manjuli Mandal is a young woman, but it is difficult to tell her age by seeing her. She has to bear the pressure of maintaining her whole family alone. In the sowing season or the mango season, she has some work. At other times, she goes to the *char* lands in the middle of the river to fetch grass. Sometimes, she sells vegetables in the market.

The dream home Mahajani Das had once set up has broken down three times. She has a constant fear that the present bamboo-straw hut, too, would crumble in the next impact of erosion. Yet, she maintains it with great care. Her husband goes to work in others' lands and she fries *muri* (puffed rice) between her daily chores. If she can devote enough time, she earns Rs 20-Rs 30 a day. She tries to work as much as she can. Her daughter Tushi

is appearing for the Madhyamik examination this year (she has passed the exam by now) and she has to be given a little “nutritious” food. So, she tries to add a piece of fish to Tushi’s meal when she can.

Despite their own distress, the families insist that we have lunch with them.

A small potter community occupies a corner of the Field. A group of women are busy making earthen pots, pitchers and toys. One among them, in her 50s, tells us that they have to travel much farther nowadays hawking their products: “In this modern age of plastic goods, there’s less demand for earthenware is much less, except at occasional fairs, etc.” The other option open for women’s income is making *bidis*. The wage rates discriminate against them: while men get Rs 35 per 1,000 *bidis*, women get between Rs 30-Rs 33. Interestingly, the difference is not much. But, it seems, the gap is maintained only to underline the prevailing social notion of the lesser value of women’s work, even if the output is the same.

Aged women like Pano Bewa (80), who live alone, are the most distressed. Kachi Mandal, Bechni Mandal and others come forward with their requests: “Please note down my name,” thinking that entering their names in our little notebooks might entitle them to some relief. Telling them of our helplessness doesn’t help – they cling to us as a drowning person would clutch a straw.

Sakurullapur

Most of the displaced families living in the huts lining both sides of the main road at Sakurullapur live below the poverty line. When they lived beside the river, they used to be fishing community. Now, as they have had to move away, maintaining that profession involves travelling too far. So, some of the men have gone out of West Bengal to seek other occupations.

“The officials talk about relief, but what do we get?” asked Pushia Bewa. “Considering the number of members, my family should have been getting 20 kg of grains. But we get only 1.5 kg, that too, not every week. It doesn’t come free – we have to pay Rs 6 per kg,” she herself gave the answer.

Chandmani Chowdhury is the daughter of Pushia Bewa. At first, she didn’t want to come in front of us. At last she came, with her rickety son in her lap. Whatever we asked, she only stared with a blank look. Her husband had taken some advance from someone and gone to work for him as a labourer. He vomited blood and died. Chandmani was pregnant at that time. Abject poverty, broken home and her husband’s death made her silent. She does not cry or smile. The other women said, she doesn’t even feel hunger or thirst. The baby desperately searches for milk in his mother’s breast, but, like her tears, it has dried up, too.

Kulbanti Chowdhury’s husband still goes for fishing. She has three children, whom she can barely feed by working in local households. Like many women in the colony, she, too, has grievances against her husband. “He spends whatever he earns by fishing on drinking, then he wants a share of my income and beats me if I don’t give him money. Most

of the time he doesn't go for work at all." Her neighbour Gangeswari commented, "Why do they beat us? The husband is supposed to be a friend. Why does he behave like an enemy?"

Asaf Mollatola

The village went into the waters in the erosion of 2002. The displaced people have named their temporary settlement after the original one. We noticed this trend at other places, too. Perhaps, it is an effort to preserve the tradition and culture of the community.

Momena Bibi (50) has six daughters and four sons. Her husband does not work. The eldest son has gone to Mumbai looking for work. The large family is maintained with whatever she and her daughters earn by making *bidis*. They closely survived the risk of being displaced for the second time when the waters rushed into their new home during the erosion of 2005.

Amina Bibi of the village once had some land. Now, she has none. Moreover, her health has deteriorated so much that she cannot work.

Samson Bibi makes *bidis* at home. She can make 200 to 400 *bidis* per day. Her husband goes out to work as a daily-wage labourer – sometimes to harvest the paddy, sometimes to dig up the soil.

Saleha Khatun has passed her B.A. from Kaliachak College. Rebeca Khatun is a graduate, too, but their condition is no better than Samson, as they have not got any job. The situation makes Rulekha Khatun, who is going to appear in her B.A. Part I exam, uncertain of her future. Her brother is a B.Sc. student in Malda College.

Even though many in this settlement do not even have a hut and just live under plastic sheets, they have an amazing interest in education. On the other hand, there is little work here and the women are afraid to go far for to seek a job. There is no provision of drinking water. They are forced to drink the water, which, they know, contains arsenic. There is no sanitation. This is a common picture in the erosion-affected areas.

Some villages in Malda have been completely lost in the erosion. For example, Dakshin Panchanandapur, Uttar Panchanandapur (1), Uttar Panchanandapur (2), Parampur GP (62) and Kankribandha (KB) Jhowbona have vanished without a trace between 1998 and 2003.

PWD Roadside

As one section of the displaced families have had to add a 'Field' to their address, another have added a 'Roadside'. Here, too, they have demarcated stretches of the roadside where people from a particular area have been squatting after the name of the village from where they had been displaced two years ago. Those who used to live at KB (Kankribandha) Jhaubana call their new settlement KB Jhaubana, too. It is a mixed settlement of Hindus and Muslims. Though women from the latter community mostly go out for work, those belonging to the former usually do not. They work at home, mostly as weavers. The men go

out to work as labourers in the fields or *bidi* factories. Some work as carpenters and blacksmiths.

The toughest job is that of digging the soil. For this, the men are sent to other districts on three to six month contracts. The women often do not get to know where they are and cannot contact them even in emergencies. On the other hand, they have reasons to worry about the wellbeing of the men. We learn from them that the labour contractors have a strange custom. They lay a wager that the one who would be able to dig up the maximum amount of soil would get Rs 50 extra. “My husband took up the challenge. And that led to his death. When I got the news much later, I was carrying our child,” narrates a woman. Now, she has to bring up her child without any support – financial or familial. Menaka Mandal, Sarala Karmakar, Sujata Karmakar, Anita Mandal – each one has a similar story to tell, which has a beginning but no end.

Fifty-year-old Mangli Bibi was displaced from KB Jhowbona in 1998. For the past eight years, she runs her family by working as a harvester outside the area. Her husband does not work. With her meagre income, she has brought up their two daughters and two sons. Both the daughters are married. Two of the sons work in carpet factories in Beneras, though they do not send any money home.

Women like Yasmin Bibi, Rauja Bibi, Zarina Bibi and Airun Bibi used to live at Momintola. According to them, as the new settlement of the displaced people of their village was in a “Hindu area”, they did not find a place there. They have set up their makeshift huts at Babla Roadside. They bring thread from the “mahajans” or merchant-moneylenders and weave *gamchhas* and lungis. One can make three to five pieces in a day and get Rs 5 per *gamchha*. Matulan Bibi is between 35 and 40 years of age. She has nine children, who are suffering from malnutrition. The family loom, she says, had been swept away by the waters. She took a loan of Rs 5000 from a moneylender on 10 per cent monthly interest to start the business afresh, but it is not running smoothly enough to repay the debt. There is no government assistance for these poor weavers. Their cooperative society is defunct for 12 years now. While some families have got Antyodaya ration cards, they have not. Her husband now works as a labourer in Delhi. He visits home briefly every two months and leaves half the advance wages he gets. It is not sufficient to run the family. “I have to borrow Rs 3/400 to Rs 1000 every month on 10 per cent interest to maintain my children.” In this way, the debt trap is widening. Only one of the children is studying at the local Shishu Shikha Kendra.

The husband of 30-year-old Zarina Bibi is unable to work, so she is the sole bread-earner. She has to look after eight children, including six from her husband’s previous marriage. Zarina supplements her income from weaving by making *bidis*, rolling 200-300 a day. The earning is Rs 30 for 1,000 *bidis*. Rajan Bewa stays with her widowed daughter. She gets 10 kg of rice as dole every month. Earlier, she used to hawk utensils. But now she cannot, following a waist injury.

Saira Bibi belongs to the Badia community, the most impoverished among the displaced populations living in the area. The 35-year-old woman stays with her widowed mother. Her husband has deserted her and lives in Malda. She makes *bidis* to feed her two-year-old son. However, she has not got any payments from the contractor for the last one

month. Initially, the local shopkeepers used to give some food on credit. Now, her mother brings some food by begging from others. Saira has a brother, who lives separately. He does not help her. "How can he? He himself earns little by digging the soil," she observes. Chenbani Bibi (32) of the same community makes *bidis*, too. Her husband digs the soil. They have four sons and four daughters, one of whom is married. Two of the daughters are learning to make *bidis*. Her entire house had gone into the river and nothing could be saved. She did not get any assistance from the panchayat or anyone. "I had to buy even this tarpauline sheet for Rs 100." The family has not received BPL cards.

Sabita Mandal, Prajapati Mandal, Minati Mandal, Saila Mandal, Kanchan Basak and their neighbours now live at Kagmari Roadside. The families got a tarpauline sheet each when they first set up their new "homes" or tents, beside 12 kg of rice. Most of them make *bidis*. The husbands of some of these women pull rickshaws in Malda town. Others have migrated far in search of work. Some visit them after a gap of four/five months or more. Some have died toiling in distant places. The news often does not even reach their wives, who wait indefinitely for them to return.

Kamala Basak is a 50-year-old widow living at Kagmari Roadside. Her family had a well-stocked grocery at Pagla Ghat, which has gone under water. Now, she runs a petty *pan* shop and fears that this last resort might suffer the same fate in the near future.

"We are no longer living, we're dead," is how a woman squatting on the roadside summed up their present existence. In these areas there is neither drinking water nor sanitation. The women are humiliated and abused daily when they go to answer nature's calls in the adjacent fields and orchards. Often they are accused of being thieves and beaten up. One woman, we heard, had died of the beatings a few months ago.

Murshidabad

Dayarampur

According to the members of Bhangar Bidhwasta Udbastu Colony O Punarbasan Samiti, more than 600 families used to live in Dayarampur. Now, 106 of them have taken shelter temporarily in lands and orchards belonging to others. Everything they had has gone into the river. About 500 other families have lost all their lands except their homestead. Seven persons, including a child, have died here reportedly of starvation and lack of medical attention. There were three women among them: Juneja Bibi, Afijen Bewa and Jayeda Bibi. The latter's husband, Aminuddin Sheikh, died on 19 February 2005 for the same reasons. About 200 others are said to be suffering acutely from hunger and malnutrition.

Dayarampur, close to the Bangladesh border, was declared an 'ideal village' in 1993 by the government. Today, it is stalked by death. The erosion of the banks of the river Padma has rendered landed farmers into landless labourers. Even labourers' jobs are not easy to get in the nearby areas. So, they are migrating to distant Mumbai, Delhi or Gujarat. Those who are unable to migrate are left starving.

Paraspur

All the 546 families who lived in this village have lost their homes to the Padma. Among them, 156 families belong to the Scheduled Tribes. Most of the rest are Muslims. Six people, including four children, have reportedly died of hunger and lack of treatment. We were told that at least 150 more are suffering from acute ill health.

Says Salita Haldar (Mandal), wiping her tears, “Didi, I cannot drag the family any more. The river has taken away everything. We have neither home nor land. My husband goes fishing, but the catch is decreasing. I have two daughters. Death was better than the way we are living.” Salita’s 15-year-old sister Shyamali works in the field. Besides them, Punni Mandal, Savitri Mandal, Usharani Mandal and others are also in distress.

Parul Mandal works in the field. Her husband has no regular job – he sometimes goes fishing, sometimes digs the soil and sometimes works as an agricultural labourer. The couple has three sons. Sumila Mandal, on the other hand, has no job besides her housework. Her husband is a soil-digger. He, too, does not have any work now and the family is almost starving.

The children are visibly malnourished, and so are old women in particular. Kalidasi Mandal (65) and Kutila Mandal (70) complain of acute gastric problems, but have had no medical attention. Sixty-year-old Zahira Mandal has lost the ability to work. She lives by begging a little food from the neighbours. She had a daughter, who, Zahira has “heard”, has left the area after marrying somebody.

Taltali

Ten of the 300 families living here have been rendered homeless because of the erosion. The rest have lost their cultivable land. About two-thirds of the population are Muslims. At least 50 people need immediate attention to their health conditions.

Many of the displaced families have settled temporarily on the *char* lands that have risen in the midst of the river. Life, however, is difficult there, with no civic facilities and little scope for work. Thirty-year-old Rokeya Bibi is one of the women who have relocated to the *char*. Her husband works as an irregular daily-wage labourer. She wants some work which she can do at the *char* to bring up her two daughters and a son. Despite the hardship, all three of the children are being sent to school.

Ganga Malik has seen her home being broken by erosion five times. Her husband goes to work as a labourer against advance payment (*dadan*). He goes away in the month of Chaitra (March-April) on a six-month labour contract and earns Rs 300 per *kottah*. During those six months, Ganga supports the entire family by making *bidis* and frying *muri*.

A group of women – Arati Mandal, Malati Mandal, Lakshmi Mandal, Rangbala Mandal, Rupali Mandal and Radharani Mandal – see us from a field and come up. Their hands and feet are covered with mud. “See how we live. This work of digging the soil fetches us a small income at the end of the day. And we get these lesions,” they say, showing the wounds all over their hands. They take us to show their makeshift homes: rows of tents

with tattered plastic. But, they are under constant fear of losing this foothold, too. They got the “right” to settle in these private lands for six months by paying whatever they had after their homes were devastated. The period was about to end when we visited the area and the owners had already started pestering them to leave. The husbands and sons of most of them have only one occupation: unloading from trucks the boulders that are brought here to “check” erosion and carrying them for dumping at the riverbank. Although they have seen from experience that blocking the path of the river with boulders do not prevent disasters in the long run and complain of “corruption” even in this work, the local people are forced to accept it as a means of income as they have no other option. It fetches them Rs 50 a day, of course, if they are able to wrest the full payment from the contractors. Carrying the huge 40-50 kg boulders is not an easy task though, for these undernourished men and boys. Pushpa Haldar’s 14-year-old son bears a severe injury in his leg. It happened when a boulder they were carrying fell. There was no question of compensation from the contractors. The wound is getting worst day by day in the absence of proper treatment. Pushpa’s husband digs the soil. The payment is irregular.

“Boulder politics” is a term that can be heard frequently while talking with the local people here. Members of the Samiti mentioned earlier alleged that for more than two decades, the dumping of boulders has benefited a “contractor-politician nexus”, while the erosion continues. Most of the boulders, dumped just before the onset of the monsoon, are washed away by the river during the rainy season and the cycle goes on. The local people have protested several times. At Akheriganj, Murshidabad, in July 2000, thousands of people staged a sit-in on the boulders at the banks of the Padma, responding to the call of Banya O Bhangana Pratirodh Committee. They demanded work in the dry season and stopping of boulder laying in the monsoon, pointing out that it resulted in millions of rupees going into the water every year. After a round of talks with the district officials failed, police and rapid action force lathi-charged and fired on them. One person was killed and scores of others including pregnant women and aged persons were injured. (*ABP*, 19.7.2000.)

Healthcare is scarce in the area. Dipali Mandal’s son has an acute infection in one of his eyes. She doesn’t have the money to take him to a doctor elsewhere. Her husband was a fisherman. Now, there is little water in the river nearby. Going far for fishing involves the risk of being harassed by the police.

Anjana Mandal has been able to get a cycle-van for Rs 4,800. The amount has to be repaid on a monthly instalment of Rs 150. Her husband has got tuberculosis and cannot work. It is difficult for her to go out for work and pay attention to her ailing husband. So, the van is lying at home for a couple of months.

Udaynagar

Bedana Biswas (32) has been displaced four times because of erosion. She has also had to live for some time in the *char*. Her husband works in the field. However, despite the distress, the family has not stopped the three children from going to school. The eldest son is in class VI, his brother in class V and the youngest, a daughter, in class II.

Shefali Roy and Pratima Biswas tell us that most of the men in this colony have migrated elsewhere, since there is no work here. Tilaka Sarkar’s husband has migrated, too.

He, however, has taken one of their three daughters with him. Tilaka has to bring up the two other daughters and a son. While the husband of Khukirani Baidya has gone “abroad” in search of work, she is seeing to it that her three children do not have to drop out of school. The eldest daughter studies in high school and her younger brother and sister in primary school. Like Khukirani, many women speak of their husbands having gone “abroad”, meaning Mumbai or some such distant place. Mankushi Mandal and Ranubala Biswas also have the same story to tell.

All of these women toil very hard to maintain their families, with little support from their husbands. Those who do not get work in the field try to find some alternative occupation. One of them is Kamala Biswas, who fries *muri* (puffed rice) for a living. It takes about two hours to fry 5 kg of *muri*, for which she gets Rs 5. Some, however, are more helpless. Kanaka Mandal, who cannot go out leaving her husband who is ill and unable to work, for example, has to depend on dole from her neighbours.

Like Malda, the lack of toilets is an acute problem faced by the displaced women in Murshidabad. Going to others’ fields or orchards to relieve themselves is a daily humiliating experience for them. Women like Saraswati Mandal, Jhunu Mandal, Jayanti Mandal in Taltali and other places had a common complaint before us: “We don’t have any toilet. If we go to other’s fields [to answer nature’s call], they beat us.” When we later asked the block development officer of Jalangi about this problem, he assured us that 100 toilets had been built. This facility, however, could be availed by only those displaced families who could set up a new household with purchased land elsewhere. The overwhelming majority, who do not have a place to live which they can call their own, need at least temporary community toilets on an emergency basis which does not seem to be in the official scheme of things.

The district magistrate of Murshidabad, N. Manjunatha Prasad, told us that altogether 1040 families had become homeless because of erosion since 2001. Of them, 550 families had been “resettled” in the *char* lands. However, the settlement was still at a “rudimentary” stage in the *chars*. He also informed that five *mouzas* had been obliterated completely. These were: Paschim Udaynagar Khanda, Paschim Chandpara, Uttar Ghoshpara, Farazipara and Paraspur. Each displaced family was entitled to a compensation of Rs 2,500 as compensation. Till now, only those whose grants had been sanctioned till July 2005 had actually received the money. Though there was no special schemes for women, they should get one-third of the jobs under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the district magistrate said.

Judging by their experience, the displaced women do not see any hope. In Murshidabad, one of them told us without hesitation: “Would you write about us? Would you let the authorities know about us? Then please write what we actually want – the government should send us poison so that we may die once and for all.”

Cooch Behar

Patchhara

Her name seems striking to us at our first encounter: Gayna, which, in Bengali, means ‘ornament’. But, this beautiful name appears ironical when we hear the tragic life story of

this young woman. She is the most vocal and at the same time most friendly one among the multitude of women who surround us on our visit to Patchhara on the bank of the river Saltia. She gestures, screams and whispers in a desperate effort to make us understand how difficult life is for her and her community sisters. And in the end, she breaks into poetry. The essence of her self-composed four-liner is: All I had is lost, now I leave it up to my destiny. Gayna was once happily married into a family, which owned 12 bighas of fertile land. Having lost all because of erosion, her husband left her for some place unknown to her. The young housewife now works as an irregular daily-wage labourer on others' plots and just about manages to feed her little son and daughter. There are not too many people willing to give her work though, for, they suspect, her mental balance is in a delicate condition.

Erosion of the banks of river Saltia has practically led to desertification in this part of the Cooch Behar 1 block of the Cooch Behar district. The Patchhara panchayat area was once the home of well-to-do peasants, with a community of happy fisher folk living around them. The Saltia river was the most wide and lively here. Middle-aged women who had been living here since their childhood told us that 20 years ago, they had nothing to worry about. The land was quite fertile and there was enough water in the river, both for irrigation and fishing. The problem started when the river started changing its course. Every monsoon, the banks of the shallow river erode away and the lands on the sides are inundated. When the waters recede, what remains is only sand, which cannot be removed.

Scores of women accompanied us on an old culvert to from where the shift in the course was clearly visible. What was once the flowing river is now miles of sandy stretch. As the waters have moved away, they have covered the fertile fields with sand. No crop can be grown in this soil and no houses can be built. People have had to move away, some more than once, after their houses collapsed. They have not only lost their agricultural land, but also their homestead. As in the case of Malda and Murshidabad, most of the landed peasants have become landless labourers and their displaced families have had to find refuge on other's land further away from the eroded banks. The only difference is that here, no family is living in the roadside yet.

Getting jobs is not easy for the peasants turned paupers. So, there is a trend of mass migration of the men to Rajasthan, Delhi and Mumbai. The women have a tough time coping with the sudden impoverishment and feeding their children.

Sixty-year-old Baneswari Madak lives alone. She has a son and a daughter, none of whom looks after her any longer on the pretext that they themselves can hardly maintain their own families in today's situation. She cannot control her tears while speaking to us. In a choked voice she says, "Earlier, floods used to cause havoc here every year. We made friends with flood. Yet, we were ruined because of the erosion. Now, I have no other means of survival than begging." Anjali Ray of Uttar Patchhara village has lost her land and works as an agricultural labourer to maintain her family. Usharani, whose family once owned a large 14-bigha plot, has been losing land every year in the erosion. Now, she has only about one-and-a-half bighas left and is struggling to cope with the drastic loss of income. Others like Nupur Ray and Prankumari Ray have lost both land and homes. They earn not more than Rs 30 a day by working in other people's fields in the agricultural season.

Walking down by the eroded riverbank, we are stopped by the call of a woman. There she is, standing in waist-deep water with a net. The fisher woman, Ratna Ray Sarkar, has no objection to working hard to earn her day. But, she asks, where can she find some fish worth catching in this dying course of the river, which looks at best like a string of ponds amid miles of sand. We have no answer.

IV. The Findings

The nature of the disaster and displacement

Though erosion is the disaster causing the displacement in all the three districts, there are some differences among the agents of the disaster. In Malda, it is the erosion of the Ganga riverbanks, in Murshidabad, it is the erosion of the banks of Padma's tributary Jalangi and in Cooch Behar, it is erosion along the sides of Saltia, a remnant of the old course of Torsha. There are differences in the impact, too. In Malda and Murshidabad, when a displaced person points to a direction and says, "That was my home," or "That was my land," one can see just plain water. In Cooch Behar, it is a barren stretch of sand. In both cases though, the loss has been the same – below the watery or sandy grave lie people's homes, lands, hopes and dreams.

In Malda, after a piece of land goes under water, a silt-bank or *char* often rises on the other side. There, the displaced people settle amidst great difficulties and somehow make the land yield to their hard toil. In case of an erosion such as in Cooch Behar, however, the land just becomes a sandbank, where hardly any crop except mustard can be grown. The once-well-off peasants are now paupers. One can see almost no paddy fields, only scattered mustard patches. In Murshidabad, too, the *char* where the displaced people are being rehabilitated is very sandy, they complain. "My relative died a few days ago. When we dug the earth to bury him, we found no soil but only sand," said one of them.

Impact on Women

A. Economic

The economy of the erosion-affected areas in all the three districts is in a shambles as thousands of people have lost their home, land and livelihood. Whether it is a war, riot or natural disaster, women have to suffer the most. When the men go to war, the women have to maintain the family. The same is true in this case, too. Losing their livelihood, most of the men are forced to migrate in search of work, while the women are left with the responsibility to feed their children. The men who just sit at home without any work, too, pressure the women in various ways.

Women have less earning opportunities. Some of them are rolling *bidis*, some fry puffed rice (*muri*), make *badis* with gram or dal paste, or do pottery or other work. In Malda there are more skilled *bidi* workers among them than in Murshidabad and Cooch Behar. Many are trying to pick up the skill now under economic compulsions. Most of these women get less than the rates negotiated between the *bidi* workers' unions and the owners/contractors and are unorganised. Some of them go to work in the fields during the sowing season and to dig and carry the soil. In these two jobs, too, they are less paid than the

male workers. Women from the Bagdi community in Murshidabad go for fishing, but face complain of harassment by securitymen.

Many of the rest say candidly that they are engaged in an “illegal profession”. In Jalangi, one can see scores of women crossing the Bangladesh borders with sugar, electronic items, cloth, etc. Besides their daily toil, some of them admit, they have to “please” the securitymen for carrying out their unlawful livelihood. Making daily visits to the newly emerged *chars* to fetch as big a load of wild grass as they can carry and selling them for a meager Rs 5 to Rs 10 has also become a major occupation for women in Malda. They, too, have to keep people at the *ghats* “pleased”.

This has been going on as there is no official programme to provide alternative and long-term means of livelihood to the displaced women.

B. Health

i) Toilets

The greatest problem for the displaced women is related to health and sanitation. As they are mostly occupying the land of others, they have no toilet facilities. This essential facility is lacking even at the ‘rehabilitation colony’ on the land acquired under government scheme in Malda, except a few toilets and a well built by non-governmental efforts. Here, one has to remember that most of these women did have toilets where they used to live before the rivers took away their homes.

The severity of the toilet problem cannot be explained unless one sees it. It is affecting their very biological cycle. Learning to remain silent to nature’s call during the long hours between daybreak and the dead of night is no easy task. Going to the deserted orchards, fields or canalsides for their daily needs in unearthly hours is causing a security risk to many. Often, they have to run for life or face abuses and even physical assaults from the owners of the orchards or fields. In this scenario, the government-sponsored awareness campaign calling people to have proper sanitation facilities at their homes carry no meaning for them. Although the block development officer of Jalangi stressed that 100 toilets had been built for the displaced families, these could be availed only by a small minority having ownership of their residential plots.

We sought the opinion of Dr Sujit Ghosh of Malda on what effects could the lack of toilet facilities have on the women. According to him, as the problem continues for a long period of time, it could lead to a wide range of illnesses, including urinary tract infection, gastric irritation, anorexia, etc.

ii) Drinking water

As it is, getting safe and clean drinking water is a general problem in the arsenic-prone districts. For the displaced people, the problem is much more acute. In most places, the women have to fetch drinking water with hardship from a distance. Arsenic poisoning has become manifest in the bodies of many. They complain that they do not get “proper behaviour”, let alone proper treatment or medicines, at the local health centres for

arsenicosis or any other disease. The victims of malnutrition-related ailments are also mostly women and children.

iii) Medical attention

A pregnant woman living in a *char* after displacement had developed some complications before childbirth. She was being brought by boat to the mainland, from where she was to be taken to the Malda hospital, quite far away. On the way, she gave birth to her baby in the middle of the river. A long tussle between life and death followed for both the mother and the child. Narrating this incident, a woman from the *char* said, “There’s no way we can reach a doctor in case of emergencies. We are particularly worried about our children.”

Not only in the *chars*, but also in the colonies of the displaced people, the lack of medical attention is quite apparent. The starvation and malnutrition deaths that have occurred in Jalangi could perhaps be avoided if at least some medical facilities were available. As it is, women’s health is a neglected issue. Displacement has made them more vulnerable.

C. Education

The women show great interest in matters of education. Even the poorest of families send their girls to schools. However, though many of the women stress the need to educate their girl children – a chance they themselves did not have even if they wished to – other reasons have been heard, too. These are: “a girl’s value in today’s marriage market falls if she is not educated to some extent”, “the boys get jobs such as handling the boulders (for embankments), girls better go to school and get mid-day meals than sit idle at home”, etc. Studies are also being affected as many schools have to shut down or shift in the wake of erosion.

Even as we were wrapping up our study, an incident occurred in Panchanandapur in Malda, which was a telling example of how a struggling woman’s dream of getting her child properly educated hit the roadblocks because of repeated post-erosion displacement. Early in June, 2006, the day the Madhyamik examination results were published, a boy named Nasim Akhtar attempted to commit suicide, though he was ultimately saved by neighbours. It was not the case of an unsuccessful candidate taking the extreme step in despair. Nasim had done well in the exams, securing ‘star’ marks with two ‘letters’. He went home with his mark-sheet and told his grandfather that he would like to fulfil his dream of pursuing science studies. The aged man, however, told him that he did not have resources to support his studies any longer and he should look for a job instead.

Nasim’s father was once a well-to-do peasant. The family lost their home and land in the erosion of the Ganga riverbanks in 1998 and his father went off to Mumbai as a labourer. His mother had to maintain her children on her own. She learnt the skill of making *bidis* and brought up Nasim and his sisters with much hardship. After educating her two daughters up to middle school levels and getting them married, she placed her son in the custody of her father, who had some property and could support his studies. Staying at his grandfather’s house, Nasim kept up his reputation as the ‘first boy’ of Nayabazar High School, year after year. On 24 August 2005, his grandfather’s house went under the waters. We have seen the spot where the house was – it now looks like a large pond. We have also visited colony of makeshift huts beside the high road at Bangitola, where the grandfather’s

family has been living since the disaster, along with many others. Nasim's mother refused to go anywhere from her devastated village, where she lives in a bare bamboo structure. After hearing from his grandfather the plain truth, Nasim went there to tell his mother about his results, and hung a noose from a bamboo beam at the back of the hut.

D. Domestic violence

With the loss of income and increasing economic hardships for men, many of them want to lay their hands on the women's meager income. The demands go on increasing and if not met, is expressed in domestic violence. Many of the women who try to keep their menfolk satisfied by giving them a share of their income, too, often find that they waste it on liquor and come back for more. The cycle of domestic violence keeps revolving. In some places such as Sakurullapur in Malda, the problem is often reported.

E. Sexual risks

The displaced women face various sexual risks. Their compulsion to "please" securitymen and others at the instance of those who run the smuggling rackets has been mentioned earlier. There is also a racket operating which arranges the "marriage" of girls from displaced families in "Bihar" or other distant places. During our investigation, we found that this phenomenon is particularly prevalent in Murshidabad. Many of the families in Jalangi say one or two of their daughters had been married off in Bihar. In a prolonged conversation, their mothers admit that the marriage might have been only in name and that they often do not hear of their girls after that. But, they express their helplessness and defend the "marriage" saying that they might not have lived a better life here. Horror stories of someone's husband returning from work-sites in Mumbai or Delhi are heard, too. The panic is spreading considerably below the surface, even as there is no system of health-checks, even irregular ones.

F. Self-organisation of the displaced people

The people devastated and displaced by erosion have formed their own organisations in each of the three districts, such as the Ganga Bahngan Pratirodh Nagarik Action Committee, Malda, Bhangon Bidhwasta Udbastu Colony O Punarbasan Samiti, Murshidabad, Saltia Bhangon Pratirodh Nagarik Committee in Cooch Behar. These organisations have brought together people from diverse political affiliations and various communities and age groups. Women, though fewer in number, participate actively in all of these forums. We have also found that the displaced women show remarkable forwardness in narrating their conditions and voicing their needs and demands, even to the male member of the research team.

Women's self-help groups exist in wide parts of the erosion-affected areas and there is no dearth of the women's enthusiasm to join them. The organiser women of these groups are trying their best to help the others cope with the difficulties. The support of the SHGs extends far beyond financial contexts, even to social and familial contexts.

Mitra Sarkar of Jalangi, Murshidabad, is a woman in her early 20s secondary school graduate, who is the organiser of 10 SHGs on behalf of a local organisation, Milan Sangha. She told us that the success of the women's SNGs sometimes led to an ironic situation in these places. The men, rendered jobless by the erosion, are not only envious of the women family members who are benefiting economically by participating in these groups, but also keep on

pressuring them for money. “A member in one of the groups had taken Rs 20 from the SHG for doing business. After some time, she came back and took Rs 200 more. When she came back for the third time, we asked her what she was doing with the money. She broke down and told us that her husband had been forcing her to bring cash from the SHG and spending it in no time. We went to her home and after several sessions, convinced her husband to share the business with her rather than pester her for money. There he sits now,” she said complacently, pointing at a man sitting by the roadside with a small stock of vegetables.

G. Attitude towards women’s problems

Even though women are the worst sufferers in the erosion disaster and there is evidently a need for special strategies to help them cope with the hard situation, this need is not reflected in the attitudes of those who are concerned with policy making and implementation, or even civil society organisations. This became apparent to us during our interactions at various levels.

When we met the district magistrate of Murshidabad, we asked him what measures were being taken or planned to help the displaced women. There is no special plan for women, he said, adding as an afterthought that one-third of the beneficiaries of the schemes under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act would be women. Women panchayat members in Cooch Behar’s Patchhara – Parbati Barman, Nidhu Roy and Manju Roy – said that officially there was no particular strategy in respect of women affected by the disaster, but they were trying to reach out to them and discuss their problems with them. However, in Murshidabad as well as Cooch Behar, the SHG organisers complained that the local bank officials often discriminated against the displaced women, refused to understand their situation and blocked transactions on various “pretexts” such as mismatching of signatures, a common problem with neo-literates. Even the local citizens’ organisations do not see the need for special strategies. Responses to our queries in this regard ranged from indifference to dislike. A senior teacher who drafts most of the English petitions and correspondences of the Ganga Bhangon Pratirodh Nagarik Action Committee in Malda questioned the very basis of a survey like ours, saying, “Why focus only on women when both men and women are suffering?” These organisations, in their charters, have never placed any special demands concerning the women. However, in course of our discussions with them, most of the organisers admitted, “We haven’t thought of this earlier. It is true that women have special problems,” and took us to show how the erosion-displaced women were struggling.

V. The Recommendations

From the field survey, it is apparent that women in the areas affected by erosion, as in every disaster caused by human beings or nature, are suffering from double disadvantages because of their status as members of a displaced or threatened to be displaced community, as well as their gender status. Any rehabilitation or even relief measure must take into account their special status. This outlook, however, has not yet reflected itself in the official paradigms of disaster management planning as far as the areas under study are concerned. Unless this is done, the sufferings of the women affected by erosion in Malda, Murshidabad and Cooch Behar districts are bound to increase. It will not only put the individual women in a position of more disadvantage, but also give rise to more social and familial tensions.

In order to rectify the situation, corrective measures must be applied immediately by making the entire disaster management policy gender conscious as well as by positive interventions in favour of and with the active involvement of the affected women in every aspect of their sufferings mentioned above.

We feel that the following steps should be taken on an urgent basis:

1. Special attention must be given towards the rehabilitation of women displaced by erosion. All the displaced people must be rehabilitated in a proper place where the women, as well as men, can have adequate access to the means of decent living and livelihood.
2. In the resettlement areas, families that are being financially supported chiefly by women and women who are living alone or with their children must be identified and a special economic and social support system must be developed for them.
3. Self-employment and income-generating schemes must be implemented more extensively for women in these areas.
4. Sanitation and community toilet facilities must be arranged immediately in order to end the health hazards and humiliation that the women have to face every day.
5. Adequate sources of arsenic-free safe drinking water must be provided in every place where the displaced people are living to free the women from the hardship they face in procuring drinking water from distant places.
6. Healthcare must be available and easily accessible. Government health centres nearest to the areas where the erosion-displaced people are living should be equipped particularly to treat problems relating to the health of women and children. Emergency health centres should be set up in the vicinity of the resettlement areas with staff trained to deal with situations such as pregnancies.
7. Stress must be laid on the education of girls as well as boys, not only on primary but also on higher levels, honouring the keen interest of the people in this respect even amid hardship.
8. The administration, outreach workers and civil society organisations in the erosion-affected localities must be sensitised to the special needs of women. Women's self-help groups must be extended all support and the banking system in these areas must also be made sensitive to their situation and requirements.
9. Vigilance must be maintained through outreach workers and civil society groups to ensure that the women who have lost their homes because of erosion are not made to suffer doubly because of domestic violence and sexual exploitation. Trafficking must be checked strictly.
10. Rehabilitation in the long term has to be planned in the context of sustainable anti-erosion measures. While such measures need to be adopted in consultation with experts and taking all the affected people, including those already displaced, into confidence, care must be taken to ensure that women find their proper place in such schemes. For example, long-term rehabilitation measures should help women overcome the economic imbalance they had to suffer earlier by making them equal owners of the new properties that the displaced families acquire by way of rehabilitation. Similarly, if long-term employment can be provided for the displaced people, the jobs should be distributed equally between women and men.

The displaced women have asked for poison. The civil society and the state must hear their plea of desperation. And we would like to add: there is no need for providing *Amrita* instead of poison. Just ensuring that they get their basic rights such as shelter, food, education and healthcare would be enough.

Appendix I: Damage and displacement due to erosion

Malda

Year	Land area eroded (hectares)	Affected population
1931-78	14335	—
1979	60	340
1980	104	552
1981	259	1374
1982	65	345
1983	92	489
1984	68	361
1985	91	483
1986	106	563
1987	240	1276
1988	72	808
1989	152	850
1990	160	887
1991	167	680
1992	130	770
1993	145	850
1994	160	770
1995	145	1687
1996	450	50000 (including flood-affected)
1997	450	—
1998	395	—
1999	480	—

Source: Government of West Bengal irrigation department data, cited in Kalyan Rudra: *Ganga Bhangon Katha* (Bengali), Mrityika, Kolkata, 2004.

Murshidabad

Year	Land area eroded (hectares)	Affected population	Houses damaged
1931-78	28289.00	—	56000
1979	100.00	900	180
1980	100.91	1271	318
1981	79.28	990	200
1982	88.20	1123	280
1983	103.44	1203	300
1984	635.63	8006	2000
1985	242.95	3021	600
1986	178.41	2147	502
1987	106.39	1340	270
1988	253.50	3093	618
1989	173.20	2182	543
1990	121.80	1400	280
1991	116.70	1470	360
1992	114.30	1340	270
1993	271.00	3513	702
1994	2585.00	32559	6512
1995	272.00	2062	515
1996	465.22	5860	1172
1997	415.00	4050	1010
1998	395.00	5610	1125
1999	480.00	5005	1024

Source: Murshidabad district planning committee data, cited in Kalyan Rudra: *Ganga Bhangon Katha*.

Appendix II: Population in some of the affected areas (1991 Census)

Malda

Kaliachak Block II

Village	Area (ha)	Households	Population		
			Total	Male	Female
Panchanandapur	2,301.87	2,871	16,456	8,514	7,942
Jhowbona	2,738.82	1,035	5,587	2,863	2,724
Sakurullapur	118.67	304	1,609	837	772
Babla	70.31	300	573	290	283

Murshidabad

Jalangi Block

Village	Area (ha)	Households	Population		
			Total	Male	Female
Udaynagar Diar	636.57	343	2,077	1,089	988
Paraspur	74.06	39	214	105	109
Dayarampur	163.43	448	2,720	1,406	1,314

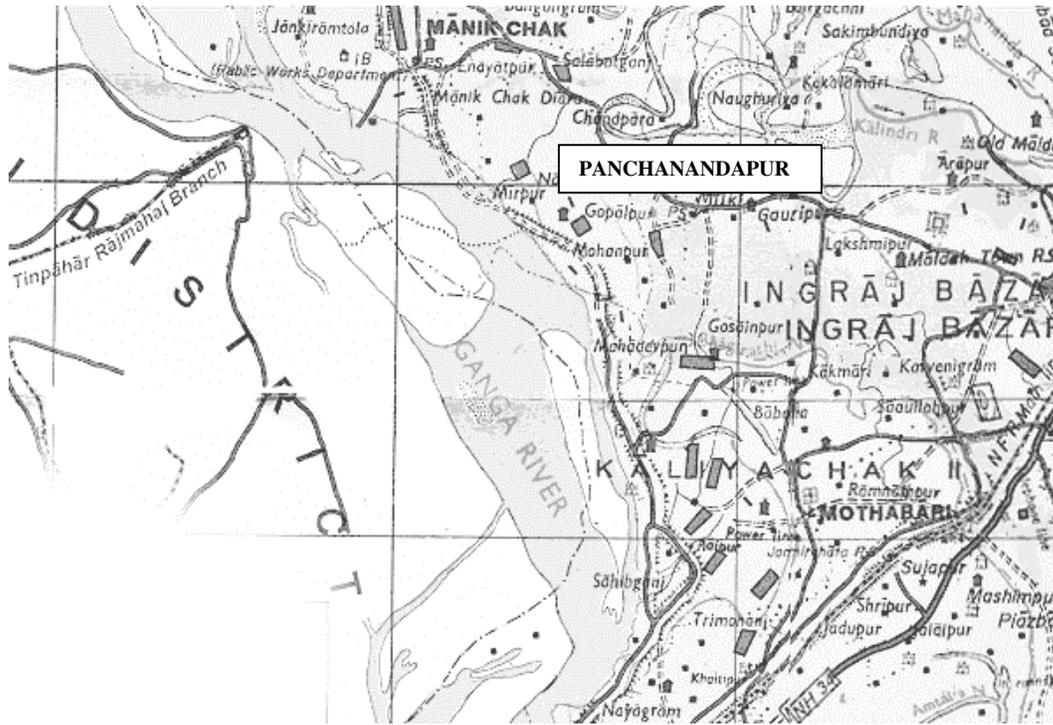
Cooch Behar

Cooch Behar Block I

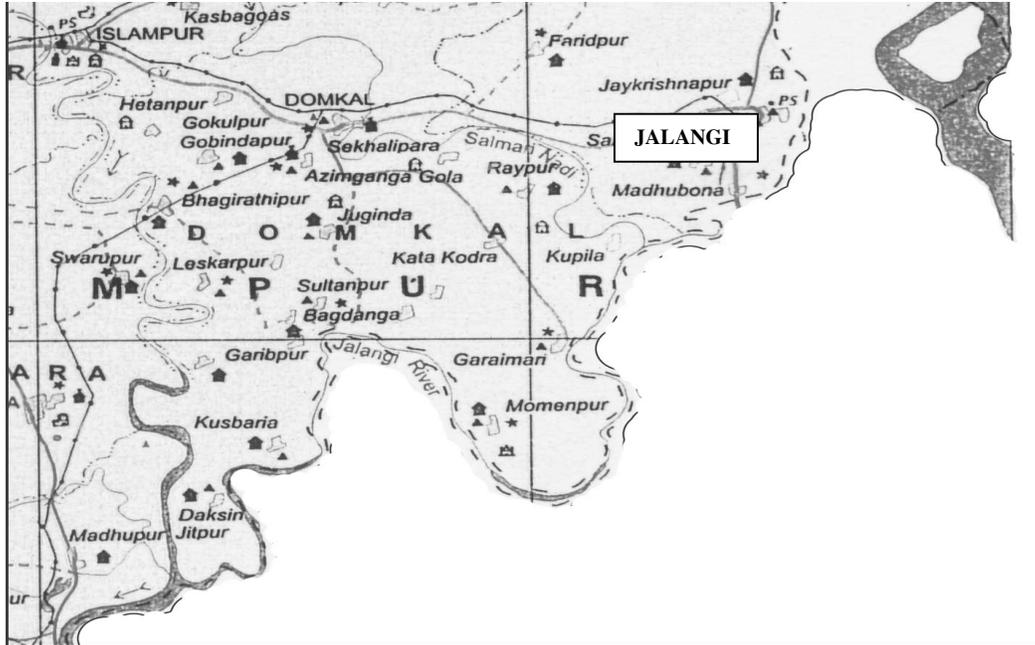
Village	Area (ha)	Households	Population		
			Total	Male	Female
Patchhara	1,231.80	1,554	8,013	4,094	3,916

Appendix III: Maps showing location of the areas under study in the respective districts

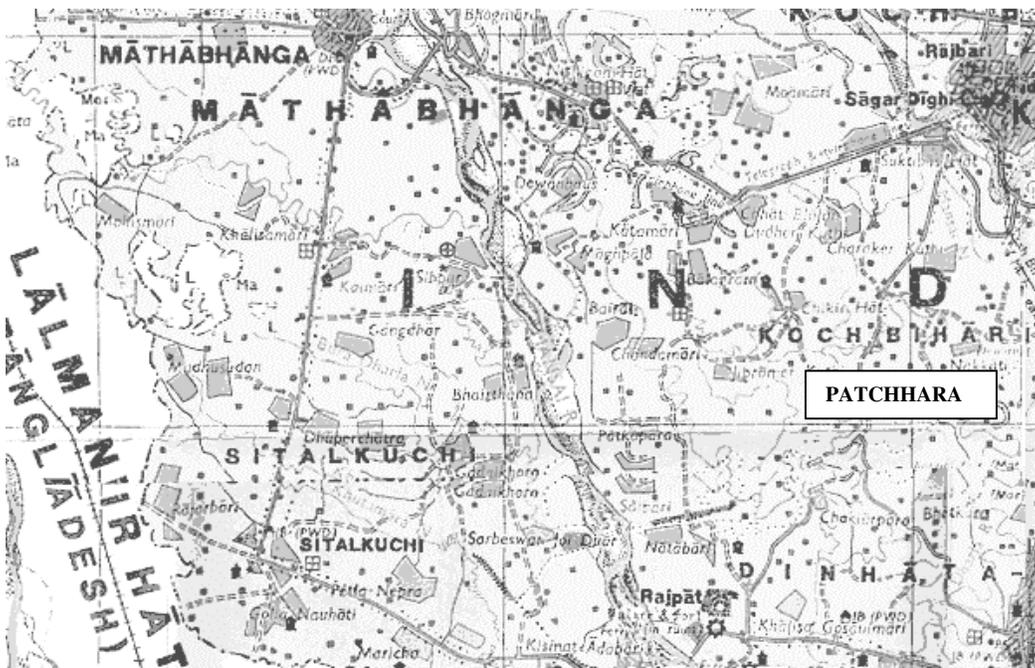
Malda: Kaliachak II



Murshidabad: Jalangi



Cooch Behar: Cooch Behar I



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