

Changes in Level of Living in Rural West Bengal

Consumer Durables, Clothing and Footwear

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This is the fourth of a series of papers reporting on changes in the level of living in rural West Bengal as reflected in the results of a survey of villages and households in Bardhaman, Birbhum and Purulia districts. It reports on changes in the stocks of consumer durables, clothing and footwear.

IN our earlier papers, we reported little change in consumption standards for the food component of household consumption, a mild improvement in the non-food part, a decline in housing standards and a considerable improvement in certain items of social consumption like supply of drinking water. In this paper, we shall be reporting that there has been some improvement in the stocks of some consumer durables but little improvement in the use of clothing and footwear by the rural households. The data

relate to a sample of rural households in three districts of West Bengal selected from those which were covered by the NSS 28th round, conducted in 1973-74, for enquiring into housing conditions.¹ The data on stocks of consumer durables, clothing and footwear have been collected by us by expanding the NSS schedule which was used for collecting information on housing conditions. These data were not collected in NSS 28th round. As such, the comparisons of these items have been based on changes

reported by the respondents over certain periods² preceding the date of enquiry.

For each of a number of items of durable consumer goods the number of articles possessed ten years ago and the number possessed on the date of survey were asked of each respondent household. Thus, the number of articles purchased, constructed or otherwise acquired during the last ten years and the number of articles broken or scrapped or lost during the same time period were obtained from which we derived the

TABLE 1: NET INCREASE IN THE POSSESSION OF SELECTED CONSUMER DURABLES DURING THE LAST TEN YEARS

Item	Percentage of Households Reporting Possession		Average No Possessed Per Household	
	10 Years Ago	During the Resurvey	10 Years Ago	During the Resurvey
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Furniture				
Bedstead	30.9	33.4	0.49	0.55
Almirah	1.6	5.3	0.04	0.07
Dressing table	0.8	2.0	0.00	0.02
Table, desk	6.2	7.6	0.08	0.10
Suitcase, attache case	54.1	61.1	1.05	1.39
Utensils				
Dining plate				
Bellmetal	48.4	50.8	2.16	2.13
Stainless steel	5.1	20.5	0.10	0.80
Plastic	0.2	0.9	0.00	0.01
Aluminium	78.4	88.0	3.42	4.72
Enamel	12.3	14.4	0.43	0.55
Metal pitcher	31.5	32.9	0.41	0.44
Bucket: Iron	42.2	51.7	0.63	0.81
Plastic	0.9	8.0	0.02	0.10
Equipment				
Torch light	29.9	49.1	0.34	0.55
Wrist watch	16.2	31.7	0.18	0.43
Saw	2.4	6.3	0.02	0.06
Sewing machine	0.9	1.9	0.01	0.02
Bicycle	19.4	34.4	0.21	0.38
Medical Instruments				
Harmonium	1.0	1.9	0.01	0.02
Radio/transistor	11.5	30.5	0.13	0.31
Miscellaneous				
Umbrella: Folding	6.0	10.7	0.08	0.14
Ordinary	28.4	41.3	0.38	0.57
Lantern	47.6	57.7	0.68	0.84
Mosquito net	44.1	54.0	0.77	1.08

Note: * Based on the resurvey of a sample of households covered in NSS 28th round enquiry on housing conditions (sample size: 1553 households).

TABLE 2: INCREASES AND DECREASES IN THE STOCKS OF SELECTED CONSUMER DURABLES DURING THE LAST TEN YEARS

Item	Percentage of Households Reporting		Average Number Per Household		Net Increase Per Household (6)
	Increase (2)	Decrease (3)	Increase (4)	Decrease (5)	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Furniture					
Bedstead	5.7	1.0	1.29	1.00	0.06
Almirah	2.3	0.0	1.42	0.00	0.03
Dressing table	1.7	0.0	1.00	0.00	0.02
Table, desk	2.1	0.1	1.21	1.00	0.02
Suitcase, attache case	25.1	2.3	1.45	1.11	0.34
Utensils					
Dining plate					
Bellmetal	6.1	4.7	2.47	3.74	-0.05
Stainless steel	19.6	0.0	3.56	0.00	0.70
Plastic	0.7	0.0	1.88	0.00	0.01
Aluminium	59.5	6.5	2.32	1.13	1.30
Enamel	7.6	1.0	1.71	1.00	0.12
Metal pitcher	3.2	0.4	1.19	1.00	0.03
Bucket: Iron	17.8	1.8	1.11	1.14	0.18
Plastic	7.2	0.3	1.21	1.33	0.08
Equipment					
Torch light	23.5	2.7	1.02	1.00	0.21
Wrist watch	21.7	0.4	1.19	1.20	0.25
Saw	3.9	0.2	1.02	1.00	0.04
Sewing machine	1.0	0.0	1.00	0.00	0.01
Bicycle	18.0	1.1	1.02	1.00	0.17
Medical Instruments					
Harmonium	1.0	0.2	1.00	1.00	0.01
Radio/transistor	19.4	1.5	1.00	1.00	0.18
Miscellaneous					
Umbrella:					
Folding	5.2	0.0	1.22	0.00	0.06
Ordinary	19.3	3.0	1.13	1.03	0.19
Lantern	16.6	1.8	1.08	1.05	0.16
Mosquito net	25.5	1.6	1.30	1.06	0.31

figures of net additions during the last ten years. Following the same method, the number of net additions during the last two years were collected for different items of clothing and footwear.

Table 1 indicates the relative importance of different kinds of durable goods for domestic use in the rural population of the three districts under study—Bardhaman, Birbhum and Purulia. It is seen that the most important among these goods are aluminium dining plates, suitcases/attaché cases, lanterns and mosquito nets which were possessed by the majority of the households at least at the end of the 10-year period. It is noticed that for some non-traditional items such as radio/transistor, torch light, wrist watch, bicycle, stainless steel dining plates, etc. the incidence of possession increased considerably during the 10-year period. Net additions in the cases of traditional items like bellmetal dining plates, mosquito nets, iron buckets, etc. are less impressive. Curiously, plastic utensils, a non-traditional cheap item that seems to have replaced bellmetal utensils in urban areas seem to be quite unpopular in rural areas. It is seen that there was a considerable

increase in proportional terms in the stocks of these non-traditional items even though the absolute levels remain abysmally low. Table 2 further supports these conclusions while showing separately the gross additions and the withdrawals from use of each item resulting in the net figures cited in Table 1.

In Tables 3 to 5 we present some results on classification of households by occupation, land possessed and the caste-tribe factor of those households that reported substantial net additions to stock of certain items, viz. radio/transistor, torch light, wrist watch, bicycle and stainless steel dining plates. As Table 3 shows, it is the white-collar workers who have largely responded to incorporate the non-traditional items in their consumption pattern which is in conformity with our expectations. Again, as is to be expected, the incidence of acquisition of these items increases as land possessed by households increases. This is true of all durable items considered with the probable exception of torch lights which being a necessity might have reached saturation among the better off families even in the earlier period (vide Table 4). As Table 5 shows, people belonging to scheduled castes

and scheduled tribes are generally outside the purview of the use of these durables, which is once again in conformity with our expectations.

Coming now to the data on net addition to stock of clothing and footwear during the last two years, it may be seen from Table 6 that 61 per cent of households reported an increase in the stock of handloom sarees against about 2 per cent reported decrease in the same stock. There was a net increase of 1.3 handloom sarees per household during these two years. The importance of non-handloom sarees in the rural areas seem to be negligible. A very important finding

TABLE 7: PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS REPORTING THE USE OF FOOTWEAR BY DIFFERENT TYPES OF HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

Type of Member	Percentage of Households Reporting			
	Using (1)	Not Using (2)	Data NA (3)	All (4)
Men	73.1	25.0	1.9	100.0
Women	41.5	57.3	1.2	100.0
Children	48.6	46.3	5.1	100.0

TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS REPORTING SIZEABLE NET ADDITION TO STOCK OF SELECTED CONSUMER DURABLES DURING THE LAST TEN YEARS BY OCCUPATION GROUPS

Household Occupation	No of Sample Households (1)	Percentage of Households Reporting Sizeable Net Addition				
		Radio/Transistor (2)	Stainless Steel Dining Plates (3)	Torch Light (4)	Wrist Watch (5)	Bicycle (6)
Agricultural labour	374	6.6	7.2	12.0	3.0	3.6
Tenant cultivator	57	14.0	8.8	19.3	8.8	14.0
Owner cultivator	459	25.3	21.4	26.6	30.1	22.9
Artisan, retail trader	56	19.6	21.4	33.9	33.9	41.1
Non-white-collar worker	110	17.2	20.0	28.2	20.9	17.3
White-collar worker	60	73.3	86.7	76.7	88.3	63.3
Others	77	3.9	3.9	1.3	1.3	2.6
All occupations	1153	19.3	18.7	23.4	21.6	18.0

Note: * We treat net addition as sizeable when this amounts to at least 50 per cent of the base year stock.

TABLE 5: PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS REPORTING SIZEABLE NET ADDITION TO STOCK OF SELECTED CONSUMER DURABLES DURING THE LAST TEN YEARS AMONG SCHEDULED CASTES/SCHEDULED TRIBES AND OTHERS

Household Occupation	No of Sample Households (1)	Percentage of Households Reporting Sizeable Net Addition				
		Radio/Transistor (2)	Stainless Steel Dining Plates (3)	Torch Light (4)	Wrist Watch (5)	Bicycle (6)
Scheduled caste	407	13.3	13.0	19.7	11.3	11.8
Scheduled tribe	53	13.2	3.8	11.3	9.4	9.4
Others	693	23.4	23.2	26.6	28.6	22.2
All groups	1153	19.3	18.7	23.4	21.6	18.0

TABLE 4: PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS REPORTING SIZEABLE NET ADDITION TO STOCK OF SELECTED CONSUMER DURABLES DURING THE LAST TEN YEARS BY SIZE CLASSES OF LAND POSSESSED

Land Possessed (in acres)	No of Sample Households (1)	Percentage of Households Reporting Sizeable Net Addition				
		Radio/Transistor (2)	Stainless Steel Dining Plates (3)	Torch Light (4)	Wrist Watch (5)	Bicycle (6)
0.00	46	8.7	19.6	30.4	6.5	10.9
0.01-1.25	651	12.9	12.1	16.0	12.0	12.0
1.26-2.50	186	21.5	22.0	30.6	23.7	20.4
2.51-3.75	107	41.1	29.0	35.5	41.1	29.0
3.76-5.00	51	29.4	31.4	37.3	52.9	33.3
5.01-7.50	73	30.1	28.8	34.2	39.7	32.9
7.51-10.00	21	33.3	42.9	47.6	52.4	33.3
10.01-above	18	38.9	55.6	16.7	72.2	38.9
All size groups	1153	19.3	18.7	23.4	21.6	18.0

TABLE 6: INCREASES AND DECREASES IN STOCKS OF SELECTED CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR ITEMS DURING THE LAST TWO YEARS

Item	Percentage of Households Reporting Increase (1)	Percentage of Households Reporting Decrease (2)	Average Number Per Reporting Households of		Net Addition Per Household (6)
			Increase (3)	Decrease (4)	
I Saree					
Handloom	61.5	1.7	2.1	0.9	1.3
Synthetic	16.2	0.1	1.6	4.0	0.3
Silk	6.4	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.1
II Blouse	51.4	0.6	2.0	1.1	1.0
III Trousers					
Cotton	14.1	0.3	2.0	0.7	0.3
Synthetic	16.5	0.0	2.2	0.0	0.4
IV Shoes					
Leather	25.4	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.4
Plastic	23.2	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.3
Rubber	40.1	0.0	1.7	0.7	0.7

is that the habit of wearing blouses is increasing among rural women. As to footwear, only 40 per cent of households have reported any net increase at all; and that increase amounts to no more than 0.7 (pair of) rubber shoes per household. As to other kinds of shoes, the incidence of infirmity is even further less. The habit of using footwear seems not to be so common in the rural areas and it has not increased much [vide Table 7]. Further, those who use footwear are mostly the adult male members of the households, and the majority of women and children do not.

Notes

[The field work for the resurvey was done by H N Kar, R P Datta, P B Ghosh, J L Chakraborty, S R Mukherjee and S Bhattacharya.

DISCUSSION

Net Domestic Product per Worker in Indian Agriculture

S Mahendra Dev

QUOTING Dandekar's article (1986), Dandekar (pp 153, 1987) says "Due to the combined effect of the decline in agriculture's share in NDP and the near-stagnancy of population dependent on agriculture, the per worker NDP in agriculture, forestry, fisheries' sector declined from Rs 1,305 in 1970-71 to Rs 1,293 in 1981".

Apparently, Dandekar (1986) used 1971 and 1981 census data on cultivators, agricultural labourers and workers in livestock, etc. for both males and females as denominator in estimating Net Domestic Product (NDP) per worker in agricultural sector. This note shows that the decline in NDP per worker was due to the use of data on female workers which showed very high growth during the period 1971 to 1981. It raises doubts on the comparability of data on female workers from censuses. Once we use comparable workforce figures, NDP per worker does not show any decline.

Table 1 shows that female workers in agriculture grow at a very high rate of around 3.6 per cent per annum during the period 1971 to 1981 while the corresponding figure for males was about 1.1 per cent per annum. The growth rate of female workers is unprecedented. It indicates that one may have to use only male workers when census data are compared. The estimate of NDP per male worker (which is more comparable) shows a positive growth of 0.44 per cent per annum.

To have a check on census data, we have estimated, using NSS data, growth rates for male and female workforce in agriculture between 1972-73 (27th Round of NSS) and 1983 (38th Round of NSS). The population figures of the 38th Round seem to be under

Sujata Ganguly, Kanika Ghosal, Sanat Maish, Amar Sen, Ajoy Bose, R L Banerjee, N Chatterjee, B Ghosh and P Roy helped in scrutiny and analysis of statistical data. The authors are thankful to all these workers for their co-operation.]

- 1 About the sample design and other details regarding the survey on which the paper is based, see our earlier paper: "Changes in Level of Living in Rural West Bengal: Housing Conditions", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XXII, Nos 36 and 37, September 5-12, 1987.
- 2 We have considered a period of ten years for consumer durables and only two years for clothing and footwears for our comparisons. The period for the latter items has been lowered to minimise recall lapse for the items considered.

38th Round (NSS) to the estimate made by the expert committee on population projections. The estimates are given in Table 2. It reveals that the rate of growth in female workforce between 1972-73 and 1983 was around 2 per cent per annum. Table 2b gives NDP per worker for the years 1972-73, 1973-74, 1982-83 and 1983-84. The estimates clearly show that there was no decline in NDP per worker.

It may be noted that one has to use both male and female workers in analysing changes in output per worker in agriculture. Also, it may be better to use at least triennial averages of NDP in agriculture rather than single years. Mahendra Dev (footnote 8, 1986) estimated NDP per worker in agriculture and allied activities for three triennia, viz, 1959-62, 1969-72 and 1976-79. The estimates are presented in Table 3. It shows that NDP per worker grew at the rate of around 0.5 per cent per annum during the period 1959-62 to 1969-72 while the growth during the period 1959-62 to 1976-79 was around 0.6 per cent per annum.

This will be clearer if we analyse the two components of output (NDP) per worker, namely land productivity and land-man

TABLE 2b: NDP PER WORKER IN AGRICULTURE (Rs)

1972-73	932.7
1973-74	1002.2
1982-83	1049.5
1983-84	1167.6

Note: 1972-73 workforce figures are used for 1972-73 and 1973-74 while 1983 workforce figures are used for 1982-83 and 1983-84.

TABLE 1: NDP AND WORKFORCE IN AGRICULTURE—LEVELS AND GROWTH RATES

	1971	1981	Compound Growth between 1971 and 1981 (Per Cent Per Annum)
Male workers (000s)*	104175	116108	1.09
Female workers (000s)			
(a) Cultivators	9304	14932	4.84
(b) Agricultural labourers	15796	20767	2.77
(c) Workers in livestock, etc	783	1078	3.25
(d) Total (a + b + c)	25883	36777	3.57
NDP in agriculture** (Rs crore)	16980	19782	1.54
NDP per total worker (Rs)	1306	1294	(-0.69)
NDP per male worker (Rs)	1630	1704	0.44

- * Male workers are cultivators, agricultural labourers and workers in plantations, livestock, etc. 1971 proportion is applied to obtain workers in livestock, etc. in 1981.
 ** NDP in agriculture refers to agricultural production, forestry and fishing.

TABLE 2a: WORKFORCE IN AGRICULTURE—LEVELS AND GROWTH RATES

	1972-73	1983	Compound Growth between 1972-73 and 1983 (Per Cent Per Annum)
Male workers (000s)	105843.0	118089.4	1.10
Female workers (000s)	63335.2	78668.5	2.19
Total workers (000s)	169178.2	196774.9	1.52

Note: The expert committee population figures for 1983 are obtained from K Sundaram.