

Changes in Level of Living in Rural West Bengal

Social Consumption

Nikhilesh Bhattacharya
Manabendu Chattopadhyay
Ashok Rudra

In the first of a series of articles comparing the results of a resurvey in 1985-86 of villages and households in three districts of West Bengal which had been covered by the NSS in its 27th and 28th rounds, the authors had reported stagnation in food consumption of households and only a mild improvement in non-food consumption. In this article, the second in the series, the authors study social consumption and find that there has been considerable improvement in the level of social consumption, although the absolute level even after the improvement remains most dismal.

THIS is the second of a series of papers reporting on the results of a resurvey of villages and households in rural areas of three districts of West Bengal—Bardhaman, Birbhum and Purulia—which were covered by NSS in its 27th (July 1972-June 1973) and 28th (October 1973-June 1974) rounds. The first paper, relating to private consumption, has already been published in this journal (July '71). This one relates to social consumption, i.e. availability and utilisation of public goods.

In our earlier paper we reported a total stagnation in the food part of total household consumption and only a mild improvement in the non-food part of it. In this paper we shall report that there has been considerable improvement in the level of social consumption, although the absolute level even after the improvement remains most dismal. In social consumption we include education, health, transport and communications, domestic lighting, drinking water supply, recreations, etc.

PLAN OF RESURVEY

The data on social consumption were collected from households that had been covered in the NSS 28th round enquiry on housing conditions (through schedule 1.2).¹

The 28th round enquiry was carried out in three sub-rounds beginning in October

1973, each sub-round lasting three months. The households of the second sub-round were omitted in the resurvey partly in view of resource constraints and partly anticipating that the sample size—72 villages and 1,153 households—would be adequate even after this reduction. Further, resurvey was carried out during July 1985-March 1986, and no effort was made to re-visit a household in the same season in the 28th round. Unlike private consumption, social consumption are not expected to be affected by seasonal factors. Hence the two features of the design of the resurvey noted above should not affect the quality of comparisons we have carried out over a time span of 12 years.

Some information about social consumption (e.g. domestic lighting and drinking water facilities) was included in the NSS 28th round schedule 1.2 meant for the enquiry on housing conditions and for these items of information we have compared data collected in the resurvey with those collected in the 28th round. For most of the items of social consumption, however, no information was collected through sch 1.2 of NSS 28th round. Data on these items were collected in the resurvey partly through a village schedule filled up by interviewing knowledgeable respondents and partly through blocks added to the resurvey schedule for housing condi-

tions. The comparisons for these items have been based on questions included in our village schedule for expanded housing conditions schedule relating to changes that were reported to have occurred during specified periods preceding the date of the enquiry.

The sampling design for the NSS 28th round enquiry on housing conditions and hence of the resurvey was self-weighting; unweighted frequency distributions, proportions, averages, etc. can therefore be used as estimates of population characteristics.

It may be of interest to briefly record the experience gained in the efforts to revisit and interview the NSS 28th round sample of households after an interval of 12 years. While all the 72 sample villages could be resurveyed, some of the sample households were missed for various reasons. Of the 1,000 households in the original sample, 810 had remained unchanged, excepting for births, deaths, etc. but 27 of them had been missed through death and 40 others had left the village and could not be interviewed. As many as 181 households had split between 1973-74 and 1985-86 forming 442 fragments, and 32 of these were missed as they had left the village by the time of the resurvey. Five households could not be traced and 4 others were not available at the time of the resurvey. Thus, the 1,000 households of the original

TABLE 7: PARTICULARS OF MEDICAL FACILITIES INCLUDING FACILITIES AT HOSPITAL/HEALTH CENTRE NEAREST TO THE 72 SAMPLE VILLAGES BASED ON THE RESURVEY

Facility	Nearest Institution: Hospital (No of Villages = 12)				Nearest Institution: Health Centre (No of Villages = 60)			
	No of Reporting Villages		Av Per Reporting Villages		No of Reporting Villages		Av Per Reporting Villages	
	10 Years Ago	During Resurvey	10 Years Ago	During Resurvey	10 Years ago	During Resurvey	10 Years Ago	During Resurvey
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(i) Beds	12	12	50.3	72.4	31	36	15.1	17.3
(b) Doctors	11	11	5.7	10.6	54	53	4.8	5.3
(c) Trained nurses	11	11	12.7	16.9	53	57	4.8	6.8
(d) Trained mid-wives	9	10	3.6	26.2	30	29	2.6	3.6
(e) Lady health visitors	6	6	1.0	10.2	17	24	1.9	3.3
(f) Delivery cases	10	11	1994.3	1922.6	39	55	425.7	372.8
(2) Graduate doctors in the village:								
Allopaths	0	0	—	—	7	9	1.7	1.9
Homoeopaths	3	3	1.0	1.0	6	11	1.0	1.5

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF 72 SAMPLE VILLAGES BY NUMBER OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS LOCATED WITHIN THE VILLAGE BOUNDARY DURING THE RESURVEY

Type of Institution (1)	Percentage of Villages by No of Institutions					Total (7)
	0 (2)	1 (3)	2 (4)	3 (5)	4 (6)	
Primary school	11.1	52.8	19.4	8.3	8.3	100.0
High school	81.9	16.7	1.4	0	0	100.0
Other schools*	66.7	27.8	4.2	1.4	0	100.0

Note: * Other schools include KG/nursery schools, middle/upper primary schools and technical schools.

TABLE 2: FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF EACH TYPE LOCATED WITHIN THE 72 SAMPLE VILLAGES BY SEX OF STUDENTS BASED ON THE RESURVEY

Type of Institution (1)	No of Institutions by Sex of Students				Total (5)
	Boys (2)	Girls (3)	Mixed (4)	Total (5)	
Primary school	3	6	107	116	
High school	3	0	11	14	
Other schools	0	2	27	29	

TABLE 3: FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF EACH TYPE LOCATED WITHIN THE 72 SAMPLE VILLAGES BY SOURCE OF FUNDS BASED ON THE RESURVEY

Type of Institution (1)	No of Institutions by Source of Funds				Total (5)
	Govern- ment (2)	Private (3)	Mixed (Gov- aided) (4)	Total (5)	
Primary school	95	5	16	116	
High school	3	1	10	14	
Other schools	22	2	5	29	

TABLE 4: FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF EACH TYPE LOCATED WITHIN THE 72 SAMPLE VILLAGES BY YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT BASED ON THE RESURVEY

Type of Institution (1)	No of Institution by Year of Establishment			Total (5)
	Before (2)	1972-76 (3)	1977-78 (4)	
Primary school	91	6	19	116
High school	10	2	2	14
Other schools	20	0	9	29

TABLE 5: NUMBER OF SAMPLE VILLAGES (OUT OF 72 SURVEYED) REPORTING DIFFERENT TYPES OF FACILITIES WITHIN 2 KMS DURING THE RESURVEY AND TEN YEARS AGO

Type of Facility	No of Villages Reporting the Facility			Difference Col (3) - Col (2)
	10 Years Ago	During Resurvey		
Primary school	66	71	5	
Health centre	5	8	3	
Health sub-centre	8	19	11	
Maternity home	2	6	4	
Doctor's chamber (allopath)	19	24	5	
Miscalled road	34	41	7	
Bus stop	36	39	3	
Post office	45	54	9	
Bank	5	24	19	
Manure shop	17	32	15	
Cinema hall	5	7	2	
Public library	25	37	12	

TABLE 6: PARTICULARS OF VILLAGE ROADS IN THE 72 VILLAGES DURING THE RESURVEY

Item (1)	Villages Reporting	
	Number (2)	Percentage (3)
(1) Nature of the connecting road to the nearest metalled road:		
(a) Type of the road:		
(i) Foot track	11	15.3
(ii) Other kachha	35	48.6
(iii) Semi-pucca	7	9.7
(iv) Pucca	1	1.4
(v) No connecting road	18	25.0
(b) Quality of the road:		
(i) Non-motorable	31	43.1
(ii) Motorable in dry season	12	16.7
(iii) Motorable in all seasons	11	15.3
(iv) Not applicable	18	25.0
(c) Since when the road is in existence:		
(i) Before 1972	33	45.8
(ii) 1972-76	2	2.8
(iii) 1977 and onwards	14	19.4
(iv) Not applicable including not available	23	32.0
2) (a) Any maintained road within the village:		
(i) Yes	36	50.0
(ii) No	36	50.0
(b) Since when the maintained road is in existence:		
(i) Before 1972	21	29.2
(ii) 1972-76	2	2.8
(iii) 1977 and onwards	13	18.1
(iv) Not applicable	36	50.0

TABLE 10: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS BY SOURCE OF DRINKING WATER DURING NSS 28TH ROUND (1973-74) AND DURING THE RESURVEY (1985-86)

Source of Drinking Water (1)	No of Sample Households in	
	Original Enquiry (2)	Resurvey (3)
Tap		
: Private	8	14
: Public	3	41
Tubewell		
: Private	71	204
: Public	579	717
Well		
: Private	45	37
: Public	351	144
Bank		
: Private	0	1
: Public	66	0
River		
: Public	20	1
Others		
: Private	1	0
: Public	1	0
Not known		
: Public	8	0
Total	1153	1153

TABLE 11: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE HOUSEHOLD BY TYPE OF DOMESTIC LIGHTING DURING NSS 28TH ROUND (1973-74) AND DURING THE RESURVEY (1985-86)

Type of Lighting (1)	No of Sample Households in	
	Original Enquiry (2)	Resurvey (3)
No arrangement	4	1
Kerosene	1121	1069
Electricity	21	80
Bio-gas	0	3
Not known	7	0
Total	1153	1153

sample had given rise to 1,234 households during the resurvey (leaving out the extinct households) and 1,153 of them were covered. The remaining 6.9 per cent were missed mainly because they had left the sample village.¹ No attempt was also made to cover households that had come to the sample villages after the NSS 28th round period.

THE RESULTS

It may be seen from Table 1 that 89 per cent of the sample villages had at least one primary school within their boundaries (during 1985-86) whereas 36 per cent had more than one² high school, however, were much more scarce. Tables 2 and 3 show the

classification of schools according to type. As may be seen, the large majority of them are co-educational; and most high schools are government-aided whereas most primary and other schools are entirely dependent on the government for their finance.

Table 4 shows that in terms of numbers, the increase in the number of schools during the last ten years has not been very remarkable. Most of the moderate increase has, however, taken place since 1977, which marks the beginning of the Left Front rule in West Bengal (vide Table 5). Increase in the number of students and teachers has been somewhat greater but again not particularly impressive, excepting for the category of

'other teachers'. The student-teacher ratio has worsened for all the categories (vide Table 6).³

Table 7 shows that there was some improvement in the facilities available in the nearest hospital or health centre. For 12 villages, the hospital was nearer the village and for the remaining 60 villages, the health centre was nearer. The data on item 1 in Table 7 relates to whichever institution was reported to be nearer. The figures in Table 8 show that only 8 of the 72 villages had a health centre within 2 kms of the village during 1985-86 and 3 of them had come up during the ten years preceding the resurvey. That is to say, most villages did not have a health centre within 2 kms, and the conditions did not alter materially during the 10 year period under study. However, the number of villages having health sub-centres within 2 kms rose from 8 to 19 during this period. Likewise, there was some rise in the availability of maternity homes during this reference period. Nevertheless, the end situation appears to be quite unsatisfactory.

Table 9 shows that the conditions of village roads remain dismal. One quarter of the villages remain without any connecting road whatsoever with the nearest metalled road. And more than a sixth of the connecting roads are connected by foot tracks. Three quarters of the *kachha* roads are not motorable in any season. Maintained roads are in existence in half the villages. A good fraction of them came into existence in 1977, i.e. during the regime of the present government, and the same can be said of the connecting roads mentioned earlier.⁴

If there is one single matter among the public facilities which has improved markedly, that is the supply of drinking water (Table 10). Use of taps (most public and tubewells (both private and public) has increased considerably while the dependence on ordinary wells had decreased, and that on tanks and rivers practically disappeared. Even then about 16 per cent of the surveyed households were still deprived of any dependable source of drinking water supply.

As to domestic lighting, there has been a four-fold increase of households with electric lighting (Table 11). But the absolute number getting the benefit remains insignificant.

The other facilities which show significant increase are banks, public libraries and manure shops, reflecting the emphasis given on them in the country's planning (Table 8). Judging by the habit of newspaper reading and radio listening the villagers have become more news conscious and conscious about the outside world (Table 12). Even that, however, remains unsatisfactory in absolute terms, given the state's reputation of being politically conscious.

Notes

1 The data on private household consumption were collected by revisiting a random subset of households covered in the 7th round NSS enquiry on consumption expenditure. Details have been given in the earlier communication. The authors are grateful to the

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS LOCATED WITHIN THE 72 SAMPLE VILLAGES BY TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION DURING THE RESURVEY AND TEN YEARS AGO

Type of Institution	No of Schools		No of Students			No of Teachers		
	10 Years Ago	During Resurvey	10 Years Ago	During Resurvey	Percent Rise	10 Years Ago	During Resurvey	Percent Rise
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Primary school	96	116	10332	13588	31.5	321	376	17.1
High school	12	14	4299	5996	39.5	138	166	20.3
Other schools	20	29	3758	6889	83.3	137	198	44.5

TABLE 5: STUDENT-TEACHER RATIO AND AVERAGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS PER SCHOOL LOCATED WITHIN THE 72 SAMPLE VILLAGES BY TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION DURING THE RESURVEY AND TEN YEARS AGO

Type of Institution	Average No of Students		Average No of Teachers		Student-Teacher Ratio	
	10 Years Ago	During Resurvey	10 Years Ago	During Resurvey	10 Years Ago	During Resurvey
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Primary school	107.6	117.1	3.3	3.2	32.2	36.1
High school	358.2	428.3	11.5	11.9	31.2	36.1
Other schools	187.9	237.6	6.8	6.8	27.4	34.8

TABLE 12: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS BY RECREATION AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES DURING THE RESURVEY (1985-86)

Item	Number of Households	Per Cent of Households
(1)	(2)	(3)
(1) (a) Do some members of the household read newspaper?	Yes : 172 No : 981	14.9 85.1
(b) If yes, since when	Before 1975 : 57 1975-79 : 52 1980 and above : 63	4.9 4.5 5.5
(2) (a) Does the respondent subscribe to daily newspaper?	Yes : 35 No : 1118	3.0 97.0
(b) If yes, since when	Before 1975 : 8 1975-79 : 9 1980 and above : 18	0.7 0.8 1.6
(3) Do some members read weekly or monthly magazine?	Yes : 60 No : 1093	5.2 94.8
(4) Does any member listen to radio?	Regularly : 365 Occasionally : 449 Never : 339	31.7 38.9 29.4
(5) Does the respondent have access to TV?	Yes : 17 No : 1136	1.5 98.5
Total No of Sample Households	1153	

authorities of the NSS organisation, government of India, for supplying them necessary information including household lists and filled up schedules of NSS 27th and 28th round enquiry on consumer expenditure and housing conditions, respectively.

- 2 The corresponding percentage of households (or fragments of households) missed in the resurvey of sample households covered in the NSS 27th round enquiry on consumer expenditure was somewhat greater—10, to be precise (vide the first annexure to this paper). This difference can be partly explained in the following manner. In the resurvey of 28th round households reported in this paper, the lists of all households in sample villages (NSS acts 0.1) and the filled up household schedules for 'housing conditions' (NSS acts 1.2) were used for tracing the 28th round households; but for the resurvey of 27th round households, the 27th round household lists (acts 0.1) were not available and only the name of head/informant and the demo-

graphic particulars of the households (occupation, age-sex composition of members, etc) extracted from the 27th round schedules for consumer expenditure (acts 1.0) were utilised for tracing the original survey households. The number of households that could not be traced was 5 in the resurvey of 28th round households but 18 in that of 27th round households.

- 3 All the villages excepting one had got a primary school during the resurvey, if not within the village, then at least within two kilometres of it (vide Table 9).
- 4 However, as is well known, student enrolment figures are generally inflated and the observed change in student-teacher ratio may be partly due to differentials in the rate of over-reporting.
- 5 Increase in the number of metalled roads and bus stops within a 2 kms radius has also been very low (vide Table 8) and the end situation continues to be unsatisfactory. The same is true of post offices.

famine-induced epidemics the impact of which the Commission considered only for 1943 and the first half of 1944. [Sen: 1981: 21.]

While the gigantic size of excess mortality attributable to the famine is of a certain amount of interest, the *time pattern* of mortality is of possibly greater relevance. Very substantially more than half the deaths attributable to the famine of 1943 took place after 1943. [Sen: 1981: 21; emphasis Sen's.] (ii) Firth argues that the relief was not 'nominal', as I have stated and "there was much assessment of needs. The assessment was made both by Tikopia leaders and the anthropologists as well as between the research teams and the officials. 40 tons of food were sent as a government cost of 5,000 pounds. Though not enough to avert starvation, the food gave about six weeks' support, helping to bridge the gap while ground crops were maturing."

I have already referred to Spillius' admission that they did not have the appropriate knowledge to make reliable forecasts and that their assessments proved to be wrong. [Spillius: 1957: 11.]

As regards the relief provided, certainly in monetary terms it seems considerable. But there were 89 deaths and widespread suffering. If one applies the elementary principles of relief administration one should ask, was the relief adequate to cover the affected population? Was the relief spasmodic or continual? Was the relief of sufficient duration?

According to Firth, by the end of April 1952, Tikopia had already begun to resort to secondary foods, such as sago pith, foraging even for hard roots; children had begun to chew cereal roots and the practice was ascribed by Firth's informant to 'famine' [Firth: 1959: 61]. This was five to six months before the three-month period that Firth denotes as 'famine' [Firth: 1959: 60]. Presumably this was the three-month period when a large number of deaths took place. How could relief supplies sufficient for six weeks be held to be adequate?

As the relief system had failed on all three counts, I had inferred that the relief provided to the Tikopia was 'nominal'. And as for the 5,000 pounds by way of relief expenditure referred to, as I have pointed out elsewhere, the sums debited under the head of account "relief" can bear little relation to the actual relief available to the affected population. In some cases, the actual relief could be one-fifth or even a tenth of the total in which a number of elements including even (as Firth has pointed out) the costs of freight had been included.

(iii) My inference regarding the pressure that had been applied to the Tikopia to force them to recruit was derived from the evidence Spillius had to offer. I have already referred to the tragic voyage of the married men. To argue as Firth has done that the men were eventually returned to the island, obviously when their contract run out does not appear to be relevant. My statement that

DISCUSSION

Famine: The Anthropological Account

Amrita Rangasami

I HAD not hastened to reply to Firth's rejoinder (*EPW*, November 29, 1986) to my article (*EPW*, September 6, 1986) because I wished to carefully reconsider my postulates for a study of "The Anthropological Account of Famine". I wish to reaffirm that famine in Tikopia, in my view, can only be explained with reference to the collapse of all of those activities that sustained the food production of the victim community as well as the pressures exerted by the 'beneficiary' who was responsible for bringing about such a collapse. Firth has limited his rejoinder to the issue of whether famine was due to the withdrawal of labour or crop failure. This is not merely to simplify my thesis but to set aside the very postulates that Firth has offered for the study of the economy, the society.

I wish to plead that my postulates for a study of famine in primitive societies derive legitimacy from Firth's study of the society, the economy, that "every phase of social life, religion, kinship and political organisation must be related to the material implements of production and the organisation which regulates their use". I have ventured to add only one postulate of Firth's own, namely, the implications of gender differentiation in the participation in the economic activities of the society. It was in the context of male pre-eminence in all of those activities that sustained the society, that I had pointed out that the withdrawal of male labour had brought about ruin in all of the institutions and consequently affected the functioning of that economy. I had identified the famine process with the effect of the gradually increasing export of labour upon

all of those institutions that sustained the economy. And I had argued that, as a corollary, the inferences on modernisation and social change that Firth's study offered needed to be questioned.

'CRITICAL OMISSIONS'

To begin with I will respond to "the critical omissions and misunderstandings" Firth has referred to.

(i) In attributing the 200 deaths (presumably due to epidemics) that had occurred in 1955—two years after the famine described in Firth's study—to famine (which Firth regards as 'spontaneous') I had only followed accepted practice. In the absence of adequate relief, the decline in the nutritional status of the population during the famine is rendered chronic and mortality persists for years after the 'official' termination relief. Perhaps I may be permitted to quote from Sen's well known case study on famine mortality during the Bengal Famine.

But what emerges most powerfully from our analysis is not so much the largeness of the size of total mortality, but its time pattern—lasting for years after the famine. [Sen: 1981: 202.]

What it is not possible to say at all precisely how many people were killed by the Bengal Famine of 1943, there is evidence that an estimate of around 3 million would be closer to the mark than the figure of 1.5 million arrived at by the official Famine Inquiry Commission (and widely quoted in later works). The difference is largely due to: (i) continued high 'excess mortality' for several years after the famine, caused by