

# Changes in Level of Living in Rural West Bengal Housing Conditions

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*This, the third of a series of papers reporting on the results of a resurvey of villages and households in Bardhaman, Birbhum and Purulia districts, reports on changes in housing conditions in rural West Bengal between 1972-73 and 1985-86. The first two papers in the series described changes in private and social consumption.*

THIS is the third of a series of papers reporting on the results of a resurvey of villages and households in three districts of West Bengal—Bardhaman, Birbhum and Purulia—which were covered by NSS in its 17th (July 1972-June 1973) and 28th (October 1973-June 1974) rounds. The first paper relating to private consumption and the second to social consumption have already appeared in this journal (July 11 and August 15, 1987). The present paper is concerned with housing conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Some aspects of housing conditions were included in the paper on social consumption, viz., domestic lighting and drinking water supply, and improvements, mild in one case and appreciable in the other, were noted in these respects. Here we present data on the number of rooms, the area of rooms and the type of structure (*pucca semi-pucca or kacha*) of the dwellings occupied by the households and observe that there had been deterioration in the average number and area of rooms occupied per household and also in the type of structure of the dwellings between the 28th round period and the period of the resurvey (1985-86).

## PLAN OF THE RESURVEY

This has been outlined in the earlier communications. The data on housing conditions were collected by revisiting households that had been covered in the NSS 28th round survey on housing conditions (through schedule 12)<sup>2</sup> and filling up a similar schedule with some blocks added to it. Actually, the 28th round survey was conducted in the form of three subrounds beginning October 1973, each subround lasting three months. The households of the second subround were excluded in the resurvey in view of resource constraints anticipating that the sample size would be adequate even after this reduction. The survey was carried out during July 1985-March 1986 and there was no insistence that any sample household would be revisited in the same season as in the 28th round. Housing conditions are not likely to be affected by seasonal factors and therefore the two features of the resurvey mentioned above should not vitiate the comparisons made in this paper.

The sampling design of the NSS 28th round enquiry on housing conditions and hence of the resurvey was self-weighting. Hence one can use unweighted frequency

distributions, proportions, averages, etc., as estimates of corresponding population characteristics.

All the 72 sample villages of the 28th round enquiry could be resurveyed. The 1,000 households of the original sample had given rise to 1,234 households during the resurvey leaving out households that had become extinct through death. The increase was due to the splitting of many households during the intervening period. Actually, 1,153 of the 1,234 households/fragments of households were covered in the resurvey and the remaining 6% per cent were missed largely because they had left the sample villages between 1973-74 and 1985-86.

## THE RESULTS

Table 1 shows the distribution of sample

households by number of rooms occupied by the household during the NSS 28th round enquiry and during the resurvey. The number of rooms is counted in two ways, one including the annexes like kitchen, bathroom, store, etc. and again excluding these annexes.<sup>3</sup> Whichever count is adopted, the number of rooms per household seems to have declined during the intervening period. Thus, if we consider rooms including annexes, about 55% per cent of households had 1 or 2 rooms in 1973-74, against 64% per cent in 1985-86, and nearly 28 per cent of the households have 4 or more rooms in 1973-74 against 21% per cent in 1985-86. Note that a few households reported not a single room including or excluding annexes in both the enquiries.

Table 2 is similar to Table 1 but is con-

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF 1,153 SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS BY (i) NUMBER OF ROOMS INCLUDING ANNEXES AND (ii) NUMBER OF ROOMS EXCLUDING ANNEXES DURING NSS 28TH ROUND (1973-74) AND DURING THE RESURVEY (1985-86)

No of Rooms (1)	Percentage of Households			
	Rooms Including Annexes		Rooms Excluding Annexes	
	1973-74 (2)	1985-86 (3)	1973-74 (4)	1985-86 (5)
0	0	0.4	0.5	0.4
1	30.9	36.3	44.8	51.1
2	24.5	28.2	28.6	30.2
3	17.2	13.5	10.9	10.5
4	10.6	7.9	9.8	5.3
5	16.1	13.6	4.5	2.3
Not reported	0.7	0.2	0.8	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF 1,153 SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS BY (i) AREA OF ROOMS INCLUDING ANNEXES AND (ii) AREA OF ROOMS EXCLUDING ANNEXES DURING NSS 28TH ROUND (1973-74) AND DURING THE RESURVEY (1985-86)

Total Area of Rooms (sq m) (1)	Percentage of Households			
	Rooms Including Annexes		Rooms Excluding Annexes	
	1973-74 (2)	1985-86 (3)	1973-74 (4)	1985-86 (5)
Upto 10	16.7	25.9	32.5	32.9
10 - 20	29.1	33.8	34.3	39.1
20 - 30	16.0	17.5	17.3	15.4
30 - 40	13.0	9.2	12.1	5.5
40 - 50	7.5	6.3	4.9	3.6
50 - 75	9.7	4.6	4.8	2.5
75 - 100	3.6	1.5	2.2	0.4
100 -	3.6	1.0	1.1	0.5
Not reported	0.8	0.2	1.0	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Median area per household	22	17	18	14

TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF 1,153 SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE OF STRUCTURE OF DWELLING DURING NSS 28TH ROUND (1973-74) AND DURING THE RESERVEY (1985-86)

Type of Structure in 1973-74 (1)	Type of Structure in 1985-86				
	Pucca (2)	Semi-Pucca (3)	Katcha (4)	Not Reported (5)	Total (6)
Pucca	66	11	28	0	105
Semi-pucca	29	59	140	0	228
Katcha	37	46	724	6	813
Not reported	4	0	3	0	7
Total	136	116	895	6	1153

cerned with total area of the rooms including or excluding the annexes. It confirms the impression formed from Table 1 that there was deterioration in level of living over time in regard to availability of living space per household. If annexes are included, about 46 per cent of the households had no more than 20 sq metres of living space during the NSS 28th round enquiry (1973-74) and this percentage had risen to 66, nearly, during the reservey in 1985-86; the percentage of households occupying 50 sq metres or more decreased from 17 to 7, roughly speaking, during the same period. The figures for rooms excluding annexes present more or less the same picture.

Median values of area per household presented in the bottom row of Table 3 sum up the findings in a succinct manner.

Table 3, the last table, relates to the type of structure of the dwelling house. It is based on a joint consideration of the materials used for roof, walls and floor. NSS definitions of the three types of structures have been followed. Pucca houses are those where both walls and roof are made of even burnt bricks, stone, cement concrete, jackboard (cement plastered reeds) and timber. Tiles, galvanised iron or asbestos cement sheets used in roofs is also regarded as pucca material. A semi-pucca house is one which is not pucca but where either plinth or wall or roof is made of oven-burnt bricks, stones, cement concrete or timber. A katcha house is one where the walls, roof and plinth are all made of unburnt bricks, bamboo, mud, grass or leaves, reeds and/or thatch.

Table 3 shows the joint distribution of households by type of structure of dwelling house as found during the NSS 28th round enquiry and during the reservey. It shows that the number of pucca dwellings increased from 105 to 136 during the intervening period.<sup>1</sup> However, the number of katcha dwellings increased even more, from 813 to 895, during the same period. Naturally, the intermediate, semi-pucca category, shrank in relative importance. Closer examination shows that over the period of 12 years, 28 pucca and 140 semi-pucca dwellings had become katcha while 83 katcha dwellings had become pucca or semi-pucca. On the whole, judging by type of structure also, the level of living of the rural population in the three districts seems to have worsened between 1973-74 and 1985-86.

Two remarks should be made before concluding this paper. First, it is necessary to

compare average household size between the NSS 28th round enquiry and the reservey because a decline in number of rooms or living space per household may not imply a corresponding decline in number of rooms or living space per capita. The method of comparison adopted in this paper contains one feature—for any household that had split since the 28th round period, each fragment formed was compared with the original household before the split, and the latter could be larger, on the average, than its fragments.<sup>2</sup> Second, findings like the numerous changes in type of structure from pucca to katcha merit further probing. To what extent these were due to splits of original households deserve closer study. We may however recall that in 1978 there were some devastating floods in some parts of West Bengal. Whether this calamity contributed significantly to this decline in housing conditions require also to be investigated.

## Notes

- The problem of housing, particularly for the weaker sections of society, has been engaging so much attention that the U'g has declared the year 1987 as the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.
- The authors wish to thank the authorities of the NSS organisation, government of India, for supplying them all necessary information including household lists and filled up schedule no 2 of NSS 28th round enquiry on housing conditions.
- The NSSO used the expressions 'living rooms' for the former category of rooms and 'total rooms' for the latter. This usage of the term 'living rooms' is being avoided here.
- We do not go into variation across socio-economic classes in this paper. The increase in the number of pucca dwellings may reflect the increased prosperity of richer sections of the rural population.
- Note that in Tables 1 to 3, a sample household in the NSS 28th round that got split has been included as many times as the number of its fragments covered in the 1985-86 reservey.

## References

- Bhattacharya, Nikhilesh, Manabendu Chattopadhyay and Ashok Rudra: 'Changes in Level of Living in Rural West Bengal: Private Consumption', *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 11, 1987.
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