Chapter 3

SOCIO-ECONOMIC HISTORY OF BOLPUR:
Before and After Independence
Bolpur block is located amidst picturesque landscapes in Birbhum district of West-Bengal. Earlier, in appreciation of its scenic beauty, pleasant climate and plentiful natural resources available, Birbhum was also known to the foreign travellers as 'Switzerland of Bengal'. Locally, the name Birbhum had been explained as the land of the 'Vir'. However, a variety of interpretations are available for the word 'Vir'. It is said to reflect the richness of the soil or abundance of green jungle or the 'manlier' race of people that lived here or the title of the Hindu kings who had once ruled the place (Majumdar, 1975). Besides, the records reveal that the district has also had a significant place in the socio-economic history of Bengal (Hunter, 1876).

The attempt in this chapter is to develop a sketch - to the extent possible, of the socio-economic transformation that took place in and around Bolpur over the past two and a half centuries. This is more of an attempt to make a collage out of the available literature and people's recapitulation from memories, rather than conducting a purely historical investigation. This was necessary for understanding people's responses to the kind of socio-economic organisations that prevailed at the time of our study.

Birbhum has been ruled by a series of rulers of various origins. The modern period in history began with the gradual exit of the Muslim Nawabs following which the earlier Hindu Raja's reasserted their dominance, mostly in terms of land holding. The French, despite having a strong alliance with the Nawabs during the Battle of Plassey (1747), ultimately had to surrender to the British, who continued to rule the country till independence. The period following 1747 is also marked by a few instances of resistance such as the Santhal Rebellion of 1855, for the historical entry of the tribals to the district, and by one of the local kings (Raja) and big zamindars against the entry of the British to this particular area. Some of these
happenings had considerable influence on fixing the physical territory of the district till 1879. According to official records, though the district had undergone socio-economic transformation over centuries, the history of Bolpur per se does not go beyond mid-nineteenth Century (Mukherjee, 1961).

Bolpur existed as a small village of around 163 mud houses with agriculture of paddy, sugarcane and cotton. The name of the village originally refers to the place (Pur) of historic one thousand sacrifices (Boli) to the goddess by the local king Surath (O'Malley, 1910). The transformation of this traditional village Bolpur into the administrative block of today which includes 169 census villages and a municipality, has been influenced by the socio-economic and political developments not only within, but also outside the country. The socio-economic history of the three census villages under this study (Map -2 in Chapter two) unravels some of these developments.

Over the past century, the demographic and socio-economic structures of the villages in and around Bolpur have undergone considerable transformation. Existing literature and information provided by the local people and various institutions gives us some idea of the process of this transformation before and after independence. While the literature highlights the social components of overall change in the area, the local people helped in substantiating some of the processes which have influenced their living conditions.

Agriculture continued to be the prime occupation of the people till the devastating famine of the 1760s struck the entire district including Bolpur. During this and other famines in the following period, the cultivators fled to the cities; as a result the villages and large towns were abandoned. Communities of agriculturalists, iron smelters, charcoal burners disappeared or deserted their homes. The lands turned into
jungle. Moreover, there were very few households left for tilling the land. Later, though the zamindars got back their power over land and went back to agriculture, there was shortage of local labour. As a result, the Santhals from the neighbouring districts were invited (Majumdar, 1975). At this point in time, when cultivable land had grown into a jungle and the area was being plundered, the wave of industrialisation was brought over to this district of India. The rulers and traders of the West were its main beneficiaries as well as initiators. This had a great impact on the local production processes. The traders extensively explored and used the natural resources of the villages, and took away the raw materials as well as finished goods to their own countries.

After the former French rulers were defeated by the British, Mr. John Cheap came to Surul village, in 1795, as the first commercial resident of Birbhum. The business interests of the East India Company created new economic activities and opportunities among the local people. Apart from supervising the silk industry of the Company, Mr. Cheap, who was also a great merchant and manufacturer on his own account, introduced the cultivation of Indigo here and also encouraged the farmers to grow cotton, lac etc.

The East India Company started purchasing and leasing in land from the Birbhum Rajas, though later they often became defaulters and huge arrears accumulated due to non-payment of rent. While the village farmers were engaged in industry based agriculture such as cotton, indigo and sericulture, the local weavers produced finished cloth at home in exchange of annual advance paid to the families by the company. The zamindars of Surul, however, had a share of 25% in the business of the company (Amir Ali, 1960). In addition, people also worked as labourers in agriculture and other business activities. Sri Naran
Das Boiragi, a senior resident of Surul village recalled how his grandfather was engaged as a porter at the local port on Ajoy river, four kilometers away from Surul village, through which all these products were exported.

Besides agriculture and the home-based production of clothes, there was also a factory of locomotives near Ballabhpur. This factory, which was earlier started by the French, had employed local people till 1870, i.e. nearly a decade after the rail line was laid in Bolpur by the British. People of Ballabhpur were also engaged in repairing the sails of cargo boats which were being used in the business. Many families had migrated here from the neighbouring villages in search of livelihood (Amir Ali, 1960; Biswas et al. 1975). Simultaneously, newer technologies from Europe were introduced to the home-based industries of sugar production and oil-extraction. This, however, had slowly pushed out the oil-pressers of Binuria from their traditional occupation. Later, they acquired land and took up agriculture as a major occupation (Amir Ali, 1960).

Apart from these, the commercial interests of the company in collecting raw material (mainly iron) in the region brought a community of iron smelters from Murshidabad district to Binuria census village, one hundred years after the battle of Plassey (1757). This additional settlement of Binuria is now known as Lohagarh (Loha meaning iron and garh- the fortress). However, the attempt of exploiting the soil for extraction of iron was a failure which left these people to seek livelihood as best as they could from cultivation. Now Lohagarh has a large proportion of Muslim population that depends on occupations other than iron smelting and some of them do have relations in the neighbouring district of Murshidabad.
While transforming the traditional occupational structure of various caste groups in the local communities, the business interests of the Company was able to maintain the power structure amongst them. This was a genesis of the present. The dominant occupational caste groups continued to dominate the social relationships. Business also encouraged a degree of migration and improved the communication system by building good roads. Mr. John Cheap, the Commercial Resident, had also gained some control over the non-economic aspects of people’s life. Despite having a local court for legal decisions, the villagers preferred to settle their conflicts through him. This was also reflected in the version of Sri Madhob Sarkar, one of the successors of the Zamindar family. Referring to a film showing the atrocities of the 'Nilkars', or the British who used to control the indigo cultivators in India, Sri Sarkar commented that 'Cheap Saheb' was unlike them. However, after the death of Mr. Cheap(1828), the East India Company gave up its mercantile dealing in 1835. The nearest port at Supur was abandoned due to the poor flow of Ajoy river. This had a major set back on the occupational structure of the area. Unfortunately the loco-engine factory was closed down during the 1870s, due to spread of epidemics. People had nothing but to depend on agriculture which was under the powerful caste groups, who were also the zamindars.

This transformation in the nature and extent of various economic activities in the villages co-existed with the development of Bolpur town since 1851-52. The change in the economy is reflected in the report of Burdwan Division in 1876-'77. The report states that, "Silk, lac, indigo are chief manufactures but former two are declining and the latter, cultivated in a small scale...... The trade in rice is reported to have been unprecedently large".
Bolpur, which was so far famous for trade, started turning into an agricultural zone under the control of the local zamindars. Records of the early part of the present century and local inquiries confirm that Bolpur and the surrounding villages were the chief rice-exporting centre in the district. Mustard was another crop grown in plenty. Oil produced in the home-based industries of the villages was popular for its quality. Bolpur also had some trade in export of raw hide and hukka tobacco. Fine cloth of high quality was made in - among other places - Bolpur also. In the decade following the World War I, paddy husking mills were set up in and around Bolpur, facilitating export-oriented industry, some of which still exist. During the years following World War II, however, there was stagnation and further decline in the functions of the secondary and tertiary sector's functions in the villages and the town (O'Malley, 1910).

Historical documents reveal that the transport and communication systems were improved considerably across Bolpur since mid-nineteenth century. Many important government offices were also shifted to Bolpur and a high school was established. Moreover, Missionaries of the Methodist Church also started functioning here. In the beginning of the current century, Visva-Bharati, an educational institution was started. All these events had encouraged a degree of migration from the neighbouring villages mostly in connection with economic interests of the Hindu non-schedule caste groups of the village communities. According to the government records, there was a dispensary in Bolpur to handle unusually high prevalence of fevers. While epidemics had already made an entry into the district in the 1870s, not much was done about their control. Later, about five years after Visva-Bharati was established, the Rural Reconstruction unit had also joined in and set up health co-operatives to handle the health problems of the local people.
Over the following decades, the district was paralysed by a series of epidemics including Burdwan Fever of 1872, followed by Malaria and Kala-azar. The department of Public Health had also reported an epidemic of small-pox in 1926. In the thirties they noticed that there was a decrease in the birth rate against a steady increase in the death rate over the preceding decade. Kala-azar was spreading rapidly and a large proportion of cases went undetected and continued to receive treatment as Malaria. 'Fever' was the major cause of death (80%). Simultaneously, it was also observed that yields of agricultural land were reducing with the increasing prevalence of 'fever' (O'Malley, 1910). Many families started migrating out of the villages and many had disappeared. The economic activities in the district began to decline and it underwent yet another transformation marked not only by the epidemics but also souring of social relationships. Mr Emlherst, a friend of the Nobel Laureate Sri Rabindranath Tagore, who was also engaged in the rural reconstruction unit of Visva-Bharati, had noticed that 'mistrust' among the local people was a major human factor behind the socio-economic decay. Which came first, however, is a question that needs to be answered but lies beyond the scope of the present study.

As the families started disappearing, there was scarcity of agricultural labour. The tribals of the neighbouring district of Bihar, who had earlier made an entry to Birbhum through the historical 'Santhal Rebellion of 1855', now overwhelmingly joined in the socio-economic structure as agricultural labour. They settled down in groups on the highlands away from the already existing settlements. These Santhals till today are identified as 'non-Bengali' or the 'other' in the area. During those days their understanding of epidemic and death was associated with 'evil eye, which is still associated with any kind of illness or disease. As there were attacks of epidemics leading to death, they kept on shifting from one place to another. Sri Tambar Murmu, a student of high school, heard from his father Sri Rasik Murmu that his
grandfather had shifted with his family to this cluster when 'Bonga' (evil eye) was killing the fellow community men in the highland where they had previously lived.

During this period, when settlements, production and social relations were transforming in the villages, the role of rural-reconstruction unit of Visva-Bharati was of much significance. In addition to providing medical relief, they also encouraged education and village based industries and economic activities specially for the poor. Local youth clubs were organised and co-operatives were formed to provide medical care to the people and assisting them in their economic endeavour. Moreover, this was the first organised effort in these villages that had valued women outside their homes. However, according to the oldest generation of women of Surul village, "it was not so easy for women to ignore the social norms during those days, but with time, the situation has also changed slowly. Now we, the mothers, encourage our daughters to go for higher education and employment even before marriage."

Even earlier, when the socio-economic structure of Binuria and Surul were dominated by the zamindars, Ballabhpur became the hideout for the freedom fighters. Being exceptionally inspired by the National Movement, the local people wanted to become economically independent of the British Raj. A small handicrafts production unit was set up which is now known as 'Amar Kutir Society for Rural Development' (amar kutir meaning my home). Even today, majority of the households, specially the women of Ballabhpur make their living from this. Thus, historically the socio-economic transformation of Ballabhpur has been different from the other two villages covered under this study.
AFTER INDEPENDENCE

As the wave of social reconstruction continued in free India, the villages under this study were also influenced by events around them after independence. The 1935 enactment of the British Law of Scheduled Castes to protect the economic interests of these castes by introducing reservations and land allotments, began to benefit the by now wine-dealer 'Sahas' of Surul and Ballabhpur. The 'Kundus (oil-pressers )' of Binuria who, due to their higher social status, were hesitant to declare themselves scheduled caste, however, were deprived of these facilities (Amir Ali, 1960).

The land reform movement in the Seventies, by changing the land holding pattern, altered the importance of caste in power structure. People began to identify themselves through occupation and became conscious of their economic position. Majority of the scheduled castes who were poor and landless, acquired some land, but not all of them could necessarily produce enough from the land. Although agriculture remained the prime source of occupation, people started looking for other supportive sources of income.

Simultaneously, with the fast development of the university as well as the adjacent town, Bolpur, there was a significant increase and diversification of both organised and unorganised trading and industrial activities. While the rice-milling industry continued to dominate the scene, several smaller wholesale business establishments were created to meet the daily household needs of the growing urban population. Development of transport, communication and maintenance services created a set of activities both in the public as well as private sector in the year of 1985 and the need to administer and regulate these. Thus, Bolpur was declared as a sub-divisional town. Huge expansion of the construction work in and around the
town created yet another set of economic activities. The historical and cultural importance of Visva-Bharati, attached a lot of tourist importance to the block as a whole. Local handicrafts were appreciated giving an impetus to the growth of household industries in the area. All these have widened employment opportunities in the area. While for the poor, occupations based on merely physical or skilled labour is now often substantiated by marginal agriculture, petty job or activities related to petty business or household industries, the lower or middle class families primarily hold on to moderate scale of traditional agriculture or government services below class one category. They may also have additional petty jobs, small business or activities in the household industries. The families belonging to upper middle-class have primarily large agricultural land holdings or Class I government service post, big business, occasionally supported by government services of lower categories or private jobs or petty business or smaller agricultural land holdings.

The credit system in the area too has undergone significant changes. Traditionally, the better-off people in the villages and few specific caste groups (such as the goldsmith) enjoyed the privilege of giving loan and considered it as an additional occupation. Later, the Central Co-operative Bank of Visva-Bharati started functioning at Surul since 1927 and, much later, United Bank of India had opened its commercial branch in the town. At present, however, the local Mayurakshi Gramin Bank at Surul has opened up its facilities for the rural people. In addition, in serious crisis the government employed or the lower middle class families, who have some assets to pay off the loan, are often supported by the network of 'Kabuliwalas' (from Afghanistan). The kabuliwalas are often seen at the doorsteps of households in remote villages. According to those who have some direct experience with them, 'the Kabuliwalas are much more humane than the village mahajans'. The poor, however, continue to take recourse to loans from the better-off in the village, who no longer belong to a particular caste as before. In these sections most of the deals are handled
by women of both categories through a system of mortgaging assets like bronze vessels, silver jewellery etc.

It is the better-off women who evaluate the articles to be mortgaged, evaluate the price and then the amount of cash which could be lent out to the other women from the poorer communities.

Migration of families to this area in search of livelihood continues to be an important social phenomenon associated with the socio-economic transformation in the post-independent period. However, enormous pressure of migration has partially engulfed the surrounding rural areas by the expanded urban periphery. And new settlements are growing at the fringes of the villages closer to the town. While those with enough resources have their own pucca residences with the popular modern architecture and technology, various schemes by the governmental as well as non-governmental agencies have attempted to provide free accommodation for the poor. This has often created pressure on the earlier isolated settlements of the Tribal families. However, due to their recent interest in the life styles and opportunities of the mainstream communities and better wage conditions, they have also started moving towards the town or neighbouring districts. Besides migration within the block itself, families have also moved in from other parts of the district, or even from other states. For instance, Jadavs of Ballabhpur came from Bihar, and Malhotras around Santiniketan came from Uttar Pradesh. There were yet others who came from the other parts of the country, and also from other countries such as Bangladesh, Japan, Germany etc. Such families, however, are few and connected to the educational institution Visva-Bharati. However, the rural block of Bolpur does bear some load of refugees who had migrated at different points in time from Bangladesh, prior to its independence.
Over time, the settlement pattern of the villages too has been changing. The impact of socio-economic transformation has been more evident in the settlements closer to the major harbingers of change in the study area. While the census village Surul reflects a spill over of the urban way of life to its settlements which are closest to the town or to the educational institution Visva-Bharati, most of these settlements have grown as families have migrated from other places with a traditional tribal cluster Baganpara. Whereas the rest of it, which is comparatively away from the town, includes the traditional settlement of Surul village as well as the tribal pocket of Mouldanga. However, both these clusters have also witnessed some degree of transformation in terms of settlement and certain parts of it still reminds one of the cultural heritage that existed here in the past. The urban influence on the settlements in other two census villages Ballabhpur and Binuria are much less. It is worthwhile mentioning here that these two villages are located at a distance of seven kilometers from the town which is nearly double that of the traditional cluster of Surul. Moreover, unlike Surul, outmigration is the more important feature as compared to inward migration.

It is also interesting to note that, while various communities in each of these census villages have grown in size over the decades, they have also created some kind of physical and social pressures on one another. The difference in the trends in locations of the tribal and non-tribal settlements in each census village cites an ideal example of it. In Ballabhpur the tribals live in hamlets which are generally located in the highlands away from the main non-tribal settlement and are surrounded by lot more greenery as compared to their non-tribal counterparts. However, few non-tribal families are also found in the smallest tribal settlement of Ballabhpur, known as Khejurdanga or Aliabandh. These families, however, have roots in the main non-tribal settlement of Ballabhpur and have shifted over to take care of their agriculture there. Despite
Having cultural differences between these two social groups there exists more or less a caring relationship between them in which the Youth club of Ballabhpur plays an important role. In Binuria there are three major cultural groups. While the non-tribal community is composed of the two different cultural groups, the Muslims and the Hindus, the smallest group of tribals also have two different cultural origins. They are the 'Kora's and the 'Santhal's. The population of tribal settlements in Binuria, however, live in very close proximity to the non-tribals namely the Hindus. This closeness may be contributed by two major forces. One, it is already recorded in the history that the tribal communities in this region kept on shifting from one place to another due to the panic that resulted from the fatality of the epidemics. As a consequence, the tribal community settled closer to the non-tribals of Binuria. The physical distance between them got further reduced as the two communities expanded and merged with each other. Binuria village, however, lacks in the kind of organized initiatives demonstrated by the people of Ballabhpur. The tribals of Surul had to sacrifice their living environment too. Growth of resettlement colonies in Mouldanga and construction of concrete houses surrounding Baganpara had disturbed the qualities of tribal settlements. Over the past few years many of the paddy fields were sold out to the urban elite and businessmen who constructed rest houses and holiday resorts within the periphery of Surul. Although this has created alternate employment opportunity for the poor, a group of middlemen have been making high profits by reselling land at a higher price. Such constructions at the urban periphery of Surul have also reduced its difference with the town.

With the establishment of the rural reconstruction unit of Visva-Bharati, a co-operative movement for creating common granary (Dharmagola) in the study villages had also failed. This failure was mostly due to class conflicts in the material interests of the villagers. The power structure in the traditional village communities have changed over the years. These changes have created certain implications for social living. It is true that the land reform movement helped the poor to exert certain rights on the produce of the
land they had been tilling but most of them agreed to settle for a much lower level of holding with the hope of maintaining a humane relationship with the owner of the agricultural land. This is reflected by the range of relationships that exist between the owners and tillers of the land. However, implications of social transformation were also expressed by the people at a more general level. While Sri Hemonto Bauri, a wage labourer of Surul, considered the change positive, as it partially released the poor from the control of the well-off zamindars, a school teacher Sri Sushil Mazumder perceived this change as destructive not only for the poor but also for the society as a whole. He said, "Since the land relationships started changing in favour of the poor, the ponds which were being used by the poor for drinking were no longer protected by the zamindars. The mango groves surrounding the village which had earlier provided some fuel for the poor, were auctioned to the timber merchants who by removing trees converted the village into a skeleton".

The better-off women in the urban settlements considered the changes mostly in terms of the scarcity of greenery and missed the beautiful birds and the tunes of tribal women at the corners of their settlements. The poor women in the village said that though they now can safely move around outside home and need not be scared of the men of the zamindar's family, life has otherwise been difficult for them. Sixty year old Smt. Tulsi Bauri said, "Our women have been working for survival over the past generations. Day by day, life is becoming more difficult. No time to sit for a while and take a full breath".

The new settlements had opened up avenues for women's employment. While the poor women of Surul became more secure as maid servants compared to similar occupations in their own village settlement, some women of the village cluster who had some formal education were able to find jobs in schools and other service institutions. Others who underwent some vocational training at the panchayat or other local institutions, joined the men in some of the household industries. The ‘Kantha industry’ which has engaged mostly women, has helped the poor Muslim women who, according to social norms, preferred to
stay at home. Though welfare measures to improve the situation of the poor have been a constant component of the government policies since independence, women were the last to receive attention. Moreover, the welfare policies as such suffer from various limitations to address women’s problems. As a consequence, the State statistics show that women have gradually lost even the status that was conferred by society during the early part of the century.

While the sex ratio of rural Bengal reflected in the Census data has always remained against women, the data of rural Birbhum has shown just the opposite trend till the census of 1941 indicating a higher social status for them in the district (GOI, 1961). During this period, much is not known about Bolpur per se, which was a village with merely 163 households in the early fifties and was known mostly as a commercial centre where men had migrated in search of livelihood leaving their families behind in their own villages. Since then, though the trend in west-Bengal as a whole has improved, the situation in the district of Birbhum, despite remaining better than the state, has shown a gradual decline (GOI, 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991). Whereas the overall situation in the sub-division of Bolpur has worsened significantly during the eighties as compared to the Seventies (Government of West Bengal, 1995). In brief, the available information revealed that the higher social status that was given to women in Birbhum district till the three early decades of the century has gradually weakened over the following decades. In Bolpur, at present, women worked in agriculture, as wage earners, in household industries, government institutions and a few also in money lending. Their social status however, continued to be secondary to men.

In health, the district has a rich heritage of Ayurvedic treatment (since 11 Century AD). The practice of homeopathic system of treatment started much later, around 1905. Both these systems of
medicine have contributed considerably to the development of related literature in the country (Majumdar, 1975). Simultaneously with the Aryan Ayurvedic system, the non-Aryan system of treatment based largely on magical and religious rites prevailed among the Santhals of the district (Majumdar, 1975). However, the tribals including the Santhals did have a rich understanding of the available herbs and plants which is still reflected in the practices of home based health care in some of those families. But with scarcity of plants in the fast fading jungles and pressure of changing work conditions on the life styles, and in absence of growth of local care systems, these practices were on the verge of abolition. The use of herbal medicines was now confined to a few individuals or religious institutions. For instance, sixty year old Seikh Nausad, a rickshaw puller of Mouldanga settlement, who was once offering his knowledge to cure common ailments in the neighbourhood, now thought that people have 'quick solutions in pills and capsules'. The reminiscences of the traditional practices still reflected in the folk traditions of medical relief which got mixed up with the rituals that were advised by the institutions of various religions, such as the Muslim mosques, Hindu temples or Tribal beliefs of god 'Bonga' or evil spirits. However, an understanding of why and how the traditional practices of medicine withered away from the study area needs a deeper investigation and is beyond the limits of the present exercise.

Though Western Medicine was introduced by the British during the epidemics, it became more popular in these villages through the Health co-operative movement of Visva-Bharati in early twentieth century. Qualified doctors were invited for curative care and a few independent physicians or Registered Medical Practitioners became popular for their medical care. Following the Bhore Committee recommendations in 1948, western medicine was institutionalised through the rural hospitals set up by the state government under the Union Board and later the primary health care network was initiated in the mid-
fifties (1955). Over the decades the infrastructure for modern medicine has grown and extended its services. At present it structurally follows the latest norms laid by the central authorities. Besides the government network, western medicine was also being practised through various private or voluntary social service organisations such as Pearson Memorial Hospital of 1928 located in Surul Mouza (census village) at the initiative of Visva-Bharati and the charitable Methodist Episcopal Mission in Bolpur. The latter has been functioning since the end of 19th Century.

In brief, despite having a rich cultural heritage of Ayurvedic or Homeopathic system of medicine the local health care system was influenced more by the modern western medicine. This was due to the business interests of the British who were attracted to the area and established their business. They also introduced their system of medicine which later got institutionalised as the political powers were convinced of its value. However, in independent India, though the state was to provide health services to the people, in practice it left vast areas either uncovered or to the voluntary organisations. As a consequence voluntary social service organisations multiplied in number and extended their coverage of limited services to the villages under this study. It is worthwhile noting here that these are the villages where once the co-operative experiments, refuting the concept of welfare approach in achieving health, were initiated (Visva-Bharati, 1938). The remains of the co-operative still exists in Surul village but the services are too limited for the villagers. Moreover, the philosophy of co-operative intervention did not reflect in the representation of oppressed groups in the various activities of the co-operatives any more.

Three distinct components now exist in the health care delivery system. While the State provided services were delivered through the wide but inadequate primary health care network, it coexisted with the
more powerful private medical care sector which delivers through practitioners ranging from self-trained hawkers to specialist doctors attached to the clinic or diagnostic laboratories. Compared to these, the voluntary sector was scattered and thin. The social groups or individuals, however, choose certain levels of health care depending on their respective position in the hierarchical structures.

People's perception of health or ill-health was closely knit with various social, economic, cultural and political realities of life. Accepting the folk or traditional cures and often combining it with religious rites became a supportive strategy for the poor and helpless in scarcity situations or in their lack of access to health care. For the better-off this became a recourse in despair. Thus, within the changing production processes in the area of study, the sources of health care have also changed.

Briefly the transformation at village level always operated within the larger forces of change. Over time, with changing power relations in the society, the material sources of livelihood have transformed; various social organisations and relationships developed around the changing economic activities. Simultaneously, the meaning of illness, health and health care have also undergone transformation. Though apparently this transformation has led to diversification of certain kind of institutions, their role in the transformation of village life, specially the lives of women, needs to be further explored.