Chapter 12

Summary And Conclusion

The Partition of India resulted in a huge influx of refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to India, specially its neighbouring States like West Bengal, Orissa, Assam and Tripura. The emergence of Bangladesh as an independent democratic nation in 1971 did not stem the flow of persons, primarily Hindus from Bangladesh in the face of continuing multiple ostracities, triggering a massive exodus to India.

Women not only came along with their families but also came singly. Uprooted from their motherland, and forced to accept the burden of a new refugee life, they began their grim battle for survival and struggle as wives, mothers and workers in their new country.

The objective of the present thesis is to assess the status of women who came from Bangladesh to India (specifically after 1971) to the States of West Bengal and Orissa. The work tries to gauge the status of these women in India. It analyses the various aspects of status like education and employment. The health situation of these women and its bearing on their status is also explored. Violence which is inexorably related to the status of women at home and outside, has also been examined. Further, the present work tries to evaluate what is the exposure to mass media and the participation of the women migrants in different organisations. Observations on the migrant women’s participation in decisions taken at home have also been made.

The present work attempts to address these issues, based on a primary survey of the women migrants from Bangladesh, settled in West Bengal and Orissa.

Chapter 1, the introduction, begins with a discussion on the need to focus on the status of women migrants, who are increasingly constituting an important part of global migration flows both in developed and developing countries, worldwide representing half the migrant population and in some countries even higher (almost 70-80% of total migrants).
Most migrant women move voluntarily, but women and girls are also forced migrants, leaving their countries in order to flee conflict, persecution, environmental degradation, natural disasters (Bogue 1969) or other situations that affect their security, livelihood or habitat (UN 2000). Their status will be different from women who have migrated in search of better prospects in the host country. These women are fighting for survival, for themselves and their families, often already disadvantaged due to their subordinate role in society (Hoy 1997). There is a need to focus on the status of these women. They lack education, mostly migrating penniless. Rehabilitation and settlement in society for them is often a painful process and general problems women migrants face when looking for work, seeking health care, protecting themselves against violence or fighting for their rights, are magnified many times over for them. Downtrodden and often ignored by mainstream society, their struggle for existence and re-establishment needs to be brought under the limelight also, in this new era in global efforts to promote advancement of women and gender equality. Especially so, when women are increasingly being viewed as full and equal partners to resources and opportunities, and the development of a new consensus, that development is not possible without their full participation.

Chapter 2, reviews the literature on the status of women in developed countries, developing countries and India. Examination of the studies on the status of international women migrants in developed and developing countries, and finally, the status of international women migrants in India, has also been presented.


Regarding the literature on the status of women in India, The Committee on the Status of Women(1974) found marginalisation of women in Indian society, exploitation in the economy, denial of access to power, exclusion from decision making and brutalising within and outside the household. Gopalan’s Report (2001) published in its wake, found evidence of performances to be mixed, with some improvements, but also barriers of development. Kishor and Gupta (2004) in general found average woman in India is disempowered absolutely and relative to men, with little change in women’s status over time. However, there are variations among the States.


Among the works on the status of women in West Bengal and Orissa (Ganguly-Scrase 2003, Bagchi 2005, Bhowmick 2005, Mohanty and Tripathy 2005), Bagchi’s (2005) observations that nothing much has changed for the State of West Bengal since the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women (1974) and Dr Gopalan’s report on the status of women in India (2001) were published, are noteworthy.


Butalia’s (1998) book provides for the first time, the voices of the women in the history of Partition. Akin to Butalia, Menon and Bhasin (1998) have presented through the stories of women and accompanying narratives, the impact of partition on women in Western India. Butalia and Menon and Bhasin have confined themselves mainly to Western India but Bagchi and Dasgupta (2003), Bagchi,
Dasgupta and Ghosh (2009) studied the Partition of Bengal in the East, thus filling the gap. Ritu Menon (2004) and Gera Roy and Bhatia (2008) have further contributed to the literature.

However, till date, no detailed and in-depth investigation has been made on the status of women migrants from Bangladesh to West Bengal and Orissa who came from Bangladesh after 1971, specifically during the period 1971-2001. This is the gap we have observed in the literature, and the present thesis focuses on this, based on a primary survey of the women migrants of the selected areas of West Bengal and Orissa.

Bangladesh is the primary source of international migrants to India primarily to the State of West Bengal, but migrants from that country have also settled in the coastal areas of Orissa. Chapter 3 traces the movement of migrants from Bangladesh during 1971-2001 to India and the States of West Bengal and Orissa, and also the districts of the two states where the survey on the status of women migrants from Bangladesh was conducted (namely Nadia and Murshidabad in West Bengal and Kendrapara in Orissa).

For India as a whole, the share of female migrants from Bangladesh has been rising over the decades (46.21% in 1971, 51.01% in 1971-1981, rising to 52.79% in 1991-2001) with female migrants displaying an increasing tendency to prefer rural areas for settlement (47% in 1971, 51.40% in 1971-81, increasing to 53.39% in 1991-2001). Examining the reasons for female migration reveals that though family migration is the dominant reason, marriage as a reason for female migration has been steadily rising over the decades (which was observed in the case of West Bengal and Orissa also). Post Partition, and even after the birth of Bangladesh, constant communal tension, unrest and upheaval continues to push families out of Bangladesh, and men, women and children migrate to India in droves - migrants preferring to go to destinations where social organisation is as similar as possible to their place of origin (Bandyopadhyay and Chakraborty 1999). In addition to this, there has been a rising trend in the number of girls in Bangladesh married off to Indian boys due to fear of attack on unmarried girls in Bangladesh. Insecurity
regarding their life and virtue has been forcing marriage and migration of many women from Bangladesh to India.

The share of females among migrants from Bangladesh, has been rising in the State of West Bengal also, but in Orissa the share (in contrast to India and West Bengal) rises till 1991 (37.15% in 1971, increasing from 52.50% in 1971-81 to 62.24% in 1981-1991) but records a sharp fall after that (52.24% in 1991-2001). However, the share of females continued to be higher than that of males.

In the districts of West Bengal, rural settlement is high in Nadia and Murshidabad, but a tendency among female migrants to prefer urban settlements was observed in Nadia (rising from 45.64% in 1971, 48.59% in 1971-1981 to 54.25% in 1991-2001). Also, in Nadia, the share of females rose above that of males only in 1991-2001. In Murshidabad, however, the share of females has generally been higher than that of males during 1971-2001 (except in 1971-81), and has exhibited a rising trend (50.27% in 1971, 48.05% in 1971-81 and 53.53% in 1991-2001).

Kendrapara, the district in Orissa where the present study was conducted, was formed in 1992, before which, it was a part of the district of Cuttack in Orissa. The examination of the features of migrants from Bangladesh to Kendrapara (presented in the next section), has thus been done for Cuttack district as a whole over the period 1971-2001, for ease of comparability over the period under study. Census of India data showed that the share of females rose till 1991, then registering a sharp fall after that, but in the Cuttack district of Orissa, the share of females rose above that of males in 1981-1991 only (when the difference was also substantial), but akin to Orissa as a whole, there was a substantial fall in the share of females in 1991-2001 (falling from 62.23% in 1981-1991 to 50.95% in 1991-2001). The share of females however remained slightly over the share of males. The reasons for female migration at the district level (West Bengal and Orissa), however, could not be examined, as information on reasons for migration is not available from Census of India data.

Chapter 4 discusses the features of the survey areas and households, beginning with the demographic features of the areas (based on the Census data), where the survey
on the status of the migrant women from Bangladesh was conducted for the present study, namely the districts of Murshidabad and Nadia in West Bengal and Kendrapara in Orissa.

The study is concentrated in a few blocks, where many migrant people from Bangladesh are settled. Four blocks were chosen from each district of West Bengal in consultation with local people, officials and Panchayat members. In Murshidabad, out of 26 blocks, Murshidabad - Jiaganj of Lalbagh subdivision, Raninagar II, Jangali and Domkal from Domkal subdivision were selected. Of the 17 blocks of Nadia, Chakdaha block from Kalyani subdivision and three blocks namely Karimpur-1, Karimpur-2 and Tehatta-1 from Tehatta subdivision were chosen.

In Orissa, Kendrapara district comprised 7 blocks in 2001, of which, Mahakalapada block was selected. The study areas of West Bengal are represented by the subdivisions Lalbagh, Domkal, Kalyani and Tehatta in West Bengal. In Orissa since the study was concentrated in one block, the survey area is henceforth referred to by Kendrapara district.

Households were selected randomly in the survey areas, spread over the villages of the blocks. In Nadia, out of the 959987 households in accordance to the Census of India, 2001, 150 households (approximately 0.01%). In Murshidabad too, 150 out of 1140095 households (0.01%) were selected. After processing and data cleansing, 140 households each, were considered for analysis from the two districts of West Bengal.

In Orissa, as mentioned before, one block (Mahakalapada) in Kendrapara district, had been chose for the purpose of our study. 150 households to maintain parity with West Bengal (out of the 271475 households in Kendrapara, which approximately comes to 0.05%). After data cleansing, 140 households were finalised. Since the total number of households in Kendrapara is smaller compared to survey districts of West Bengal, 150 constitutes a little higher percentage compared to survey districts of West Bengal.
The basic amenities of the survey villages have been discussed in this chapter, noting the differences between the survey areas. The chapter also highlights the features of the women migrants from Bangladesh under the survey. Based on the survey data, demographic features like age, religion, caste, marital status, age at marriage and consent to marriage and total fertility rate have been discussed. The age distribution is seen to vary amongst the different survey areas. The main concentration is in Lalbagh (30-54 years), but there is a substantial percentage (38.75%) in the 60 years plus age group. In Domkal and Kalyani the women under the survey belong to the 25-54 years age category mainly, though in Tehatta, the women were from a lower age cluster (20-49 years). In Kendrapara, the respondents primarily belonged to 25-49 years.

The migrant women are Hindus in Lalbagh, Kalyani and Kendrapara, but in Domkal and Tehatta, they are distributed between Hindus and Muslims. Most of the women under the survey are married, and the mean age at marriage was found to be generally low in the survey areas of West Bengal (varying from 13.6 years in the survey areas under Lalbagh subdivision to 16.5 years in those under Kalyani subdivision), compared to the mean age at marriage in the survey area of Kendrapara district of Orissa which was relatively high (18.29 years).

Economic features of the migrant households including income distribution, savings behaviour of the women, land holdings of their families, possession of durable consumer goods have also been touched upon, and in this context, it is noteworthy that a degree of reluctance was observed among some of the women migrants to reveal details of their economic condition. Most of the women migrants in the survey areas of West Bengal (except in Tehatta and Domkal subdivisions where 15.27% and 9.21% respectively belong to the Rs 15000 plus category), and those in Kendrapara district, Orissa, were found to be from lower income groups earning less than Rs 6000 a month.

The chapter also discusses the facilities in the migrant households like electricity, water, toilet facilities, drainage, waste disposal, availability of separate kitchen etc. Most of the migrant families live in their own houses, though there are differences in permanency of structure (Kachcha/Pacca). Toilet facilities are fairly good in the
survey areas, though drainage and wastage disposal are quite deplorable. Also, none of the migrant households in Kendrapara, Orissa are electrified.

Other details about the migration of the women under the survey like origin of migration, duration of residence in India, reasons for migration to India, financial situation at time of migration, reasons for settlement, marital status at time of migration and whether the women migrated to India alone or with their families have also been discussed. The women migrants have mainly been in India for 10-30 years and most of them migrated to India with their families because of intolerable conditions due to religious, social and political disturbances in Bangladesh. A substantial percentage of women in the survey areas of Domkal (53.94%) and Tehatta (61%) in West Bengal were married off to Indian grooms.

Over the next few chapters the various aspects of migrant women’s lives, like their education, health, work, violence, media exposure and participation in various organisations that shape their status both at home and outside, have been discussed in detail, based on the analysis of the primary survey data.

Chapter 5 concentrates on the educational status of the women migrants, and the findings reveal a picture not indicative of a very high educational status of the women migrants in the survey areas, especially in West Bengal. Literacy rate of the women migrants in Kendrapara, Orissa (66%) is much better compared to most of the survey areas of West Bengal (32.5% in Lalbagh, 42.10% in Domkal, 61.42% in Kalyani and 41.66% in Tehatta), and the analysis also reveals that the education level of women migrants in Kendrapara is higher. Unlike in Kendrapara, very few women in the survey areas of West Bengal have proceeded to the higher secondary level. Between the survey areas of West Bengal, non uniformities were observed for secondary level (varying from 41.66% in Lalbagh to 72.34% in Kalyani).

In Domkal and Tehatta in West Bengal, income distribution patterns show a relatively high concentration in the high income groups, compared to Kendrapara in Orissa where most of the women belong to families earning less than Rs 6000 a month. However, very few women migrants in these areas have proceeded beyond the secondary level.
Regarding the importance of education, the India Gender Gap Review (2009) and Ozpalot and Yildirim (2009) note that the multiplier effect of women’s education on development is often lost due to the missing girls after a certain level of education, and since no education means no meaningful work, this in turn means productivity is not reached to the fullest potential. It is thus imperative in this regard to explore the reasons for the low level of female education. Discontinuity in education at both the primary and the secondary levels among the women migrants in West Bengal and Orissa were due to a variety of factors, demand and supply, which were found to have interacted to discontinue the women’s education. Discouragement at parental and sometimes marital home was a recurrent issue in the migrant households in West Bengal. The findings in the survey reinforce the observations of Rana et al. (2003), Bagchi and Guha (2005), Dasgupta and Bandopadhyay (2005) and Levine (2006) regarding deeply ensconced conservatism of tradition bound families about the futility of female education.

In Kendrapara, Orissa, migration upset the education prospects of the women by discontinuing their education, but instead of becoming victims of circumstances, most of the women decided to be engaged in economically gainful employment (99%). This is where the women migrants in West Bengal and those in Kendrapara, Orissa differ. In both the States, migration stopped education of many (especially in Domkal and Tehatta 30% and 50% respectively), but in Kendrapara, the women managed to carve out a life for themselves. They did not get sucked into a never ending cycle of housework and drudgery like many of their counterparts in the study areas of West Bengal. Almost all the women in Kendrapara, Orissa started working, the process of migration bringing about a transformation in their lives. The changes in the life of the women migrants in Kendrapara are almost similar to what Buijs (1993) and Zentgraf (2002) noted regarding the metamorphosis that comes in the lives of many women migrants who find exigencies of being migrants and refugees forcing them to examine the preconceptions, and to adopt roles both social and economic, which is very often different from what is expected of them.

However, overall the educational status is not very high among the women migrants in the survey areas, though there are differences between the five study areas.
Chapter 6, a perusal of the health status of the women migrants, reveals a mixed scenario. Anaemia is the most common ailment among the women (varying from 33.34% in Lalbagh to 87.5% in Kalyani). The daily food intake of the women migrants is primarily vegetarian, with inadequate intake of protein and high value foods. This is not much different in the economically better areas of Domkal and Tehatta either. The tradition of eating last and often the least, is also very much prevalent in the migrant households. The percentage of women eating with their families is highest in Tehatta at 51.96%, and figures in the other survey areas are even lower.

The women migrants in Domkal and Tehatta also exhibit a strong preference for cheap unscientific alternatives for medical care like quacks (62.74% and 83.72% respectively), for which they appear to be largely influenced by their families, compounded further by their low level of literacy and awareness.

Among the women from Kalyani, West Bengal and Kendrapara, Orissa, however, where they are from a relatively modest economic background compared to those in Tehatta and Domkal (10-20% belonging to the higher income groups in Domkal and Tehatta), the preference for doctors is high (53.84% in Kalyani and 87% in Kendrapara prefer to go to doctors). This maybe largely influenced by the higher level of literacy and awareness of the women migrants.

Regarding decision taking related to preference for medical care, women migrants in Kendrapara, Orissa and Kalyani in West Bengal have comparatively more autonomy than the other three areas of West Bengal, where dominance by husbands is more prominent, as in Tehatta and more so in Domkal.

Decisions are primarily taken jointly in conjunction with husbands by the women in Kalyani, West Bengal and Kendrapara, Orissa. In Domkal and Tehatta in West Bengal, a clear dominance of husbands is observed.

In the light of the differences observed in the involvement of the women migrants in decisions regarding their medical care, an index of medical decision taker was constructed, which gives an indication of the power distribution in the migrant womens’ households. The indexing method used, follows that of Jejeebhoy and
Sathar (2001) in their construction of the index of autonomy in their study on women in North and South India, and Punjab, Pakistan.

There are primarily three decision takers involved - the women themselves, their husbands and the women jointly with their husbands or family members. There was a last option, namely, others, but none of the women chose this response during the interviews. The responses (due to the inability to quantify) were ranked in order of decreasing importance of the women in the decision. Self decision was ranked 1, Joint decision (rank 2), decision by husband (rank 3) and decision by others (rank 4).

The index is created by weighting every response with its rank value, and the total of these is then divided by the total number of responses. The index value ranges from 1-4. Lower the index value, closer it is self decision.

The indices (shown in Table 12.1) reflect limited autonomy of women migrants in decisions related to their medical care, but suggest strong regional differences (2.13 in Kendrapara, Orissa, and 2.15 in Kalyani, 2.48 in Lalbagh, 2.61 in Tehatta, 2.75 in Domkal).

However in the survey areas of West Bengal and Orissa, very few women take decisions regarding their health, solely by themselves. Joint decision is perhaps better than the decision being completely dominated by spouses, nevertheless some element of influence of husbands cannot be ruled out. This is especially so in Kalyani, where care received during pregnancy was observed to be quite poor, reflecting that women cannot always exercise their choices even when they are making joint decisions. It is when they can take decisions completely by themselves (probably aided by their education or awareness levels also), that they can take decisions beneficial to their overall betterment. However this is still far off, not only for this group of women migrants, but also women in developing countries in general (World Bank Development Report 2012). The report observes, estimates from the most recent Demographic and Health Surveys in 40 countries reveal that overall, only 20 to 25 percent of women decide on their own health care in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. 30 to 40 percent decide jointly with their husbands or
another household member, while over 40 percent have no say at all in the matter. As far as health decisions are concerned, women in developing countries still have a far way to go to take this decision by themselves, it is observed.

Chapter 7 on the work status of the women migrants, observes that a very low percentage of women in West Bengal are engaged in employment (varying from 7.14% in Kalyani to 25% in Lalbagh). In comparison, almost all the women migrants in Kendrapara are employed as agricultural labourers, in livestock tending and construction. Irrespective of whether they work or not, however, the women migrants in all the survey areas have to spend fairly long hours in housework, in addition to hours spent at their work place.

Generally women who are engaged in regular employment exercise better leverage at home regarding the involvement of their families in helping the women with housework and childcare (Sen 1990 and Hashemi et al.1996), but this is not operable in the migrant households of the survey area. The women are also mostly unable to afford outside childcare. The majority of the women who are employed in the survey areas, seek work mainly on account of poverty. The findings in the survey areas support the views of scholars like Chaudhury (1978), Krishnaji (1995) and Hossain (1998) who identify poverty as the main reason why women go out to work, poverty overriding the patriarchal tradition of confining women at home.

In this context, an examination of the decision taker regarding whether a woman should work or not, is of crucial importance. An index related to decision to work was constructed in the same way as the index of medical decision taker in Chapter 6. As shown in Table 12.1 values of the indices in the different survey areas lie between 1.18 in Lalbagh and 2.16 in Domkal (1.50 in Kalyani, 1.57 in Tehatta in West Bengal and 2.03 in Kendrapara, Orissa).

Researchers opine that what is critical for women’s status is her level of earnings and having control over them (Youssef 1982, Bardhan 1985, Sen 1990, Mahmud and Johnston 1994, Desai and Jain 1994, Goetz and Sengupta 1996, Kabeer 1999, 2000, Kishor and Gupta 2004). Working does not necessarily imply power of decision in the family (Viswanathan 2001), and how much importance women have
in family decision making, gives a stronger illustration of the extent of her status in the family. One of these decisions is how much a woman contributes to the household kitty.

Most of the women in the survey areas contribute their income fully to the household kitty (except a few in Tehatta and Kendrapara). Joint decision regarding contribution of a migrant woman’s earnings was found to be fairly prevalent in Kalyani and Tehatta in West Bengal and Kendrapara in Orissa. However, in Domkal, the domination by spouses is quite noticeable. In Lalbagh, West Bengal, the women migrants take the decision mainly by themselves, but by and large, in most of the survey areas, the women migrants do not appear to be taking this decision much by themselves. The decision is either joint or dominated by their spouses. The index of decision taker of the women’s contribution to the household kitty, constructed following the methodology mentioned earlier, and shown in Table 12.1, reflects the different degrees of involvement of the women migrants in the various survey areas (1.18 in Lalbagh, 1.5 in Kalyani, 1.71 in Tehatta, 2.12 in Kendrapara and 2.66 in Domkal).

Few women migrants in Tehatta and Kendrapara retain some part of their earnings. Also, the women engaged in regular employment in Tehatta, come from relatively better economic backgrounds compared to the women migrants in the other survey areas. They take the decision to work primarily by themselves and are probably not so influenced by economic reasons. A few of them manage to retain a part of their earnings for themselves. An indication of relatively better status of the women in the latter group in Tehatta, could be tentatively inferred.

In the work sphere, awareness level of the women migrants regarding their rights and entitlements was generally observed to be low, in spite of differences in their education levels. This is especially so in Kalyani, West Bengal and Kendrapara, Orissa, where literacy and education levels of the women are higher compared to the other survey areas. Interestingly, the women migrants in Lalbagh, despite their low educational and economic backgrounds, appeared more aware and involved in fighting for their rights. They also take the decision to work, as well as the decision regarding their contribution to the household fund, by themselves. In many ways the
status of the women workers in Lalbagh, West Bengal, appear to be higher than their counterparts.

Chapter 8 deals with violence faced by the women migrants at home and society, and the implication on their status. Very few women divulged any information about violence they faced within the confines of their homes (varying from 1.42% of the women migrants in Kalyani to 13.15% in Domkal) and whatever information was available, shows husbands as the major perpetrators of violence (more than 67%) that many are forced to accept. Some of the women in Domkal even tried to rationalise it, a feature that is not unique to the women migrants, but common in traditionally patriarchal societies like India as observe Jaisingh (1995) Jejeebhoy (1998), Karlekar (1998) and Garcia (2004). Kishor and Johnson (2004) call this ‘double disempowerment’ - women not only suffering from violence, but actually trying to rationalise it. Education level and awareness of women very often influences women in trying to justify violence faced at home (Simister and Macowiec 2008), and in the survey area of Domkal, the women migrants were all found to be illiterate.

The chapter also tried to examine the relationship of violence faced, with education, employment and income distribution. Not much link was observed with education, as the women facing violence revealed a distribution over different education levels. The women facing violence are primarily housewives, though working women also face violence. The migrant women facing violence are mainly from low income families whose monthly earnings are less than Rs 3000. However, a substantial percentage of women migrants facing violence in Tehatta (67%), belong to comparatively better off families, as evident from the survey data.

In the case of dowry torture, which is an important reason for domestic violence, it was observed that the women suffering because of this are primarily illiterate and from low income backgrounds, but it is very much prevalent also among secondary educated women from high income backgrounds as well, as observed in the case of Tehatta (60%). The finding on Tehatta support the observations of Jejeebhoy (2000) and Bloch and Rao (2002) that dowry violence occurs irrespective of income or education. A substantial portion of women facing dowry related violence in Tehatta
and Lalbagh in West Bengal, reported mental ill health. Davar(1995) and Vachher et al.’s (2010) observations that mental ill health of women is largely influenced by the violence that they face in their homes, was also observed among women migrants in these two areas.

Regarding outside violence experienced by the women migrants, very few came forward with any information (only 1.25% in Lalbagh and 3.94% in Domkal), and whatever was available, shows violence mainly in the work place.

However, no matter how hard the women migrants tried to camouflage their experience of violence at home or outside, violence appears to be prevalent among different educational and income strata of the migrant households, which the women are often forced to accept, as dictated by social norms. Most of the women who volunteered information have low levels of education and belong to families dogged by poverty. Nevertheless, violence is also very much prevalent among women with relatively better education and economic levels, findings that do not bode well for their status and dignity in their families.

**Chapter 9** looks into the exposure to mass media and status of the women. Media not only open windows to the outside world, but also act as an important source of information and awareness. TV, radio and jatra are the popular options of entertainment and information among the women migrants from Bangladesh, settled in West Bengal. In Kendrapara, Orissa on the other hand, radio is the most resorted to (90%). Despite fairly good literacy rate (66%) however, none of the women in Kendrapara, Orissa, read the newspaper paper or magazines. However, the percentage of women reading the paper or magazines is comparatively high in most of the survey areas of West Bengal, even in Domkal and Tehatta, where the literacy rates among the women migrants are much lower (42.10% in Domkal and 41.66% in Tehatta) compared to their counterparts in Kendrapara, Orissa (66%).

A feature common to most of the women in the survey areas of West Bengal is that they face interventions from their families when they try to watch TV, listen to the radio or read. The women in Kendrapara, Orissa comparatively face less amount of problem(19%). Findings on women migrants in the survey areas of West Bengal
more or less echo the general observations made by Pazarzi and Tsangaris (2008) that women are neglecting their family responsibilities and their children while resorting to entertainment. Bhattacharya (2005) also notes that regarding the interventions faced by women in seeking entertainment and relaxation, the domestic power equation has remained unchanged in spite of increased television viewing in India. Even after finishing all their work, when they sit down to watch TV, they have to concede to the male members of the family, and also children, if any.

But beside entertainment, media also offer women useful information for women’s benefit and betterment, which sometimes makes the existing power relations of patriarchal society feel threatened, which feels the need to assert itself, ignoring the fact, that intervention or curtailment of time for relaxation infringes on the independent right of women and their status in the family and society.

Interventions faced by the women in the survey areas come primarily from the husbands of the women migrants (varying between 93.54% in Tehatta to 100% in Domkal), and this is very often irrespective of literacy and education level (as in Kalyani where the literacy rate of 61.42% is one of the highest among the survey areas) or income background (as in Tehatta or Domkal where 10-20% of the women migrants belong to higher income families). This appears to be prevalent among all strata of the migrants families, the overall patriarchal views of the society acting as a great leveller of the status of the women migrants, despite variations in their education and economic backgrounds.

**Chapter 10** deals with the participation of women migrants in different organisation, political or social. The chapter observes a low level of affiliation (the highest being 8.34% in Tehatta). Given the better education level of the women in Kalyani, West Bengal (61.42% of the women are literate and 72.34% of the literate women are secondary educated) and Kendrapara, Orissa (where literacy rate among the women migrants is 66%, and nearly 33% of the literate women higher secondary educated) one would expect better participation in organisations in these two areas, especially in Kendrapara where 99% of the women migrants are engaged in outside employment. However, the women in Orissa exhibited a curious lack of interest and an element of hesitancy to be associated to any organisation.
Agarwal (1989) and Sharma (1991) stress the importance of women’s organisations to combat constrained faced by poor women workers stemming not only from class position but also from gender. Sharma’s work (1991) highlights the experience of women workers in the bidi industry in this context. In Chapter 7 which discusses the work sphere of the women migrants in the survey areas of the present study, it was observed that a substantial percentage of the women who are employed, were found to work in the bidi industry (varying between 52.63% in Lalbagh to 75% in Kalyani). However, participation in organizations was not found to be significant among the women migrant workers.

In Kalyani, West Bengal, 20% of the women migrants have occasional earnings from self employment activities like sewing or rice processing. With a little bit of organisation they could have a steady flow of earnings as Sundar (1983) prescribes, but the women in Kalyani appeared to be quite disinterested towards such pursuits,despite better education levels.

Participation in organisations is highest among the women migrants in Tehatta (8.34% each are associated to political and social organisations). 50% of these women belong to the Rs 9000-12000 income category and 15% to the highest income bracket (as revealed by the survey data). This reiterates Mercer’s (2002) view on the representation of better-off and higher-status women in women’s organisations. However, in general, the participation level among the women migrants in the survey areas of West Bengal and Orissa is not very encouraging.

**Chapter 11** discusses the participation of women migrants in household decisions. It is observed that household decisions are taken either jointly by the women and their husbands or by the husbands alone. Very few in the survey regions take decisions by themselves.

In Kalyani, West Bengal and Kendrapara, Orissa, household decisions are mainly taken jointly (90.62% in Kalyani and 78.72% in Kendrapara). In Domkal and Tehatta, the influence of husbands is prominent (64.38% and 53.12% respectively).
An index of household decision making was constructed (in the same way as the previous indices), and the indices (shown in Table 12.1), reveal regional differences. The lowest value is 2.01 for Kalyani and the highest 2.64 in Domkal, the indices for the other regions lying between the two (2.15 in Kendrapara, 2.33 in Lalbagh and 2.51 in Tehatta).

Freedom of movement of the women migrants in Orissa is quite restricted, though women migrants in West Bengal are relatively better off. In the study area of Kendrapara, Orissa, only 34% of the women migrants are allowed to go alone to the market, health centres or outside the village. 99% of the women in the survey area of Kendrapara are engaged in outside employment, but for their needs to go to the market or the hospital or doctor (none of them go to quacks), and especially venturing outside the village, the women are advised by their families to take somebody with them. When the women go to their workplaces, they normally do so in groups.

The women migrants in West Bengal, on the other hand, are a study of contrast. The women are relatively free to go to the market, medical centre or outside the village alone (varying from 55.26% in Domkal to 98.75% in Lalbagh). The findings in the survey areas are adhering to the pattern exhibited by the two States at the national level (NFHS -3, 2005-2006), regarding freedom of movement.

Finally regarding the consent to marriage findings presented in Chapter 11 reveal that consent was observed to be high in the survey areas, except Domkal and Tehatta, irrespective of education or work status. In these two areas a fairly good percentage of women expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that they were married early. 35.52% in Domkal and 59.72% in Tehatta were married against their wishes.

Intriguing facets of the women migrants have been revealed in this chapter, the women in Kalyani and Kendrapara are relatively better involved in household decision making, but the movement of the women in the latter area is quite restricted. On the other hand, in Domkal, West Bengal, domination of husbands is the strongest in household decisions and the outside movement of the women migrants most limited among the survey areas of West Bengal. An undercurrent of
dissatisfaction regarding early marriage and choice of marriage partners was detected among these women who appeared helpless to do much about it, however.

We have constructed various indices reflecting the status of the women migrants in their different walks of life, namely those related to their decision to work, decision to contribute to the family fund, decision regarding the women’s health and decision in household matters. The values of the different indices have been presented in Table 12.1.

For each decision involving the lives of the women migrants, according to the value of the index, the study areas have now been ranked, the highest rank being given to the area with the lowest index value for a particular decision. This is because a lower index value signifies that the index is closer to self decision taking, desirable for stronger status of women in their families. The study area where the index value is the lowest, that is, closest to self decision, has been given rank one. The region with the next higher value of the index, is awarded rank two, and so on. Consequently, the region where the index value is highest, has the lowest rank.

The table also gives the simple ranking of the survey areas of the two States of the different indicators specified. Rankings are provided for each survey area on the four different facets of the status (health decision, decision to work, decision to contribute to family kitty, and household decisions). An overall rank for each area has also been constructed and is shown in the last row of Table 12.1. This is a simplistic exercise that assumes that all the indices have equal weight and does not account for the differences in levels represented by differences in ranks. Nonetheless, Table 12.1 effectively highlights the relative position of survey areas in West Bengal and Orissa according to the status of women migrants from Bangladesh.

Table 12.1 shows that, status as measured by ‘health decision’ is highest in Kendrapara, followed by Kalyani and Lalbagh; status as measured by ‘decision to work’ is highest in Lalbagh, followed by Kalyani and Tehatta; status as measured by ‘decision regarding contribution to household kitty’ is highest in Lalbagh, followed by Kalyani and Tehatta; and status as measured by ‘household decisions’ is highest
in Kalyani, followed by Kendrapara and Lalbagh. Not surprisingly then, Kalyani has the highest overall status (Rank 1). The other survey areas at the top too are Lalbagh and Kendrapara. Again this ranking is only relative and does not imply that the absolute level in any of the survey areas of the two States is satisfactory.

Table 12.1: Rank related to the different indices, and the Overall Rank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lalbagh</th>
<th>Domkal</th>
<th>Kalyani</th>
<th>Tehatta</th>
<th>Kendrapara</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health decision</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.48)</td>
<td>(2.75)</td>
<td>(2.15)</td>
<td>(2.61)</td>
<td>(2.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision to work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.18)</td>
<td>(2.16)</td>
<td>(1.50)</td>
<td>(1.57)</td>
<td>(2.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision regarding</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contribution to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>household kitty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.18)</td>
<td>(2.66)</td>
<td>(1.50)</td>
<td>(1.71)</td>
<td>(2.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household decisions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.33)</td>
<td>(2.64)</td>
<td>(2.01)</td>
<td>(2.51)</td>
<td>(2.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Rank</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(N.B: Figures in brackets represent value of the indices for the different survey areas)

Source: Calculated from Survey Data

The multifaceted nature of status is evident even the survey areas that have the highest overall ranking on the status. The women migrants in Kalyani, West Bengal are most involved in the various decisions compared to the women migrants in the other survey areas. Most of the decisions that they take are joint decisions. Their choice of health care reflects that they prefer visiting doctors and hospitals only, forsaking cheap unscientific alternatives like quacks. Care received in pregnancy is however low in Kalyani (26.56%), especially in comparison to the other survey areas.
areas where it varies between 45-55%. Awareness regarding rights at work and participation in organizations is also low among the women in Kalyani.

Lalbagh scores high on decision to work and contribution to household kitty. Regarding their rights at work, awareness is also quite high compared to the other survey areas. This is despite the lowest literacy rate among the survey areas (32.5%). But it performs poorly in health and household decisions.

Kendrapara, Orissa also performs relatively poorly in decision to work and contribution to household kitty.

In Tehatta, West Bengal, health and household decision indices put the women on a lower rank as seen from Table 12.1. Though in the work sphere, it was observed in chapter 7 that the women in employment have not been compelled to seek work due to poverty, and are fairly involved in decisions related to work. Some of the women also manage to retain a part of their earnings for themselves. Participation in organizations is highest in this area.

But the survey area that performs most dissatisfactorily on status overall, is Domkal. This area has poor rankings in all four indicators. The decisions regarding health, work and households is dominated by husbands. Though a low percentage of the women migrants spoke about violence faced at home, some even tried to rationalize it. Movement outside home is most restricted among the women migrants in this area, compared to the other survey areas of West Bengal. Some of the women spoke of frustration about their early marriage or choice of marriage partners, but were helpless to do anything about it.

Thus Table 12.1 shows a great amount of variation across the survey areas in terms of the status of the women migrants from Bangladesh. However, in general, the area that is doing very poorly, appears to be poor on the four aspects of the status assessed; but among survey areas that are doing relatively well overall on the status, there is also variation in their performance on the different indicators. These results underscore the need for all areas to improve their performance, even those doing relatively well.
Partition is an important landmark in the history of India and in its aftermath there has been a huge influx of refugees who have permeated slowly into the country. Even after Bangladesh was born in 1971, the flow of migrants has remained unabated. Women constitute an important part of this flow. However till date, no detailed and in depth investigation has been made on the status of women migrants from Bangladesh to West Bengal and Orissa who came during the period 1971-2001. As it has been observed in the literature review, (Bagchi and Dasgupta 2003, Bagchi, Dasgupta and Ghosh 2009, Menon 2004 and Gera Roy and Bhatia 2008), not much detailed and indepth investigation has been conducted, on the status of women migrants from Bangladesh to West Bengal and Orissa who came during the period 1971-2001, based on primary household survey. The present thesis makes a modest attempt to fill up this gap. It attempts to present an analysis of the status of women migrants who have been coming in a steady stream from Bangladesh to West Bengal and Orissa in India between 1971-2001, covering various aspects of their lives like their education, health, work sphere, experience of violence, exposure to mass media, participation in organisations, involment in household decisions and freedom of movement, based on a primary survey of the women migrants in selected areas (Lalbagh, Domkal, Kalyani and Tehatta in West Bengal and Kendrapara in Orissa).

Buijs (1993) observes that large scale population movement is a prominent feature of modern society, and feels that there is an urgent need to disentangle specific experience of women who are critically involved in process of adaptation to new worlds and way of life. Women migrants from Bangladesh studied in this thesis had to leave their motherland under extenuating circumstances and were forced to accept the burden of a new refugee life. They began their grim battle for survival and struggle as wives, mothers and workers. Different facets of their status has been revealed in the thesis, with variations across the different areas under study. Some have been doing poorly in all the indicators of status, but others show different degrees of involvement in various decisions related to their lives. This is a positive step in the direction towards the growing consensus that, improvement in women’s status is possible, only when women are equally involved with men in decisions regarding their different walks of life.