Chapter 3: Field Research Context and Methods

Most people associate the word ‘research’ with activities which are substantially removed from day-to-day life and which are pursued by outstandingly gifted persons with an unusual level of commitment. There is of course a good deal of truth in this viewpoint, but we would argue that the pursuit is not restricted to this type of person and indeed can prove to be a stimulating and satisfying experience for many people with a trained and enquiring mind. (Howard and Sharp 1983:6, cited in Bell 1993:2)

The field research, which informs the rest of the thesis, was an intense period of learning, which was not limited to the research problem only but also extended to wider social, economic, political and cultural problems. Many of them were beyond my expectation though I belong to the same country, state and religious community.

This chapter contains two parts, ‘context’ and ‘methodology’. Under the heading ‘context’ I discuss various levels of context of the research, which starts with a brief discussion on the state, West Bengal, followed by the district, Murshidabad, and then the study locality, Jalpara¹. Under the heading ‘methodology’ I discuss the methodological approach developed in this research; from the conceptual level, which informed the previous chapters; to the empirical level, which informs the following chapters. Further relevant methodological issues are discussed alongside the research findings in chapters below as they arise in the context of discussion.

¹ The name of the village and the respondents living in and around it are changed to maintain the confidentiality.
There are very few studies, if at all, in West Bengal, substantially similar to this one. So the research approach was exploratory, the empirical work undertaken was based to a large part on trial and error and was varied, pragmatic and strategic.

3.1: Fieldwork context

Prior to the fieldwork visits, I was familiar with Jalpara, as I had lived there for one year between August 1999 and July 2000, in connection with a research project. During this study I had developed relationship with some households so deep that we started to pay visits each others’ house regularly on various occasions and it is still continued. Therefore, I was well known to the villagers. The fieldwork described here was carried out in two phases – in the first phase I lived in the locality for seven months between June 2005 and January 3006, and the second phase involved stay in the locality for three months between November 2008 and January 2009. This previous connection allowed me some degree of social proximity and a high degree of familiarity. Moreover, there were some advantages of being known that helped to contribute to better conditions for what Bourdieu and Ferguson call ‘non-violent communication’ (Bourdieu and Ferguson 1999) and outweighed the disadvantages of familiarity as a hindrance to objectivity. Furthermore, presence of a female co-researcher,

---

2 The title of the project was “Seasonal Migration for Rural Manual Work in Eastern India” and was conducted by the School of Development Studies, University of East Anglia, UK.

3 During both the phases the data was collected partly for my thesis and partly for the research project, “Social protection by and for the temporary work migrants in West Bengal and Bangladesh”, funded by DFID conducted by the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, University of Sussex, UK. During the first phase a female researcher, Deeptima Massey, from the said university was living in the village for data collection for her own doctoral thesis, “Experiencing staying behind: A study of women’s lives during the temporary absence of migrant men in rural West Bengal, India” as well as for the said project. She collected information mostly from the females whereas I collected mostly from the males. During the second phase I hired a local youth, who not only assisted me visiting various households but also helped me to clarify some information.
Deeptima Massey, during the first phase, allowed me access to more insightful information from female respondents, and during second phase the assistance of a local youth\textsuperscript{4} (male), who was studying at his 11\textsuperscript{th} standard, helped me to collect some in-depth information and triangulate some others.

**West Bengal**

With a population of over 91 million West Bengal is the fourth populous state in India (Census 2011). It is situated in the eastern part of India having common boundary with Nepal, Bhutan and the state of Sikkim on the North, Goalpara district of Assam and Bangladesh on the East, Orissa and Bay of Bengal on the South, and Bihar and Jharkhand on the West. It accounts for about 2.7 percent of the country’s geographical area (88,752 square kilometers) (GoWB 2004) but about 7.55 percent of country’s population (Census 2011). The population density in the state in 2011 was 1029 as against 382 per square kilometer in the country.

The state has a large share of backward communities. SC, ST and Minorities are the three most backward communities in the state and they together account for more than 50 percent of the total population. Among the minorities, Muslims are the dominant section. About 72 percent population lives in rural areas. However, the proportion of population living in rural and urban areas varies across the social groups. In rural areas the presence of backward communities is proportionately higher (GoWB 2004). For example, whereas 28 percent of

\textsuperscript{4} I hired this person, who was resident of this locality, for three months. The boy accompanied me at the time of visiting households and helped me in finding children if they were not at home at the moment of my visit to their households.
the state population lives in the urban areas the corresponding share of Muslims is only 11.8 percent though their share in the total population is 28.6 percent (GoWB 2004).

West Bengal is the only state in India where the Left Front (LF) government led by CPIM (Communist Party of India Marxist) was in power continuously for about three and half decades. Most important achievement during their rule was the successful implementation of land reform and decentralisation programmes. As part of the land reform programme ceiling of land holding was imposed and the surplus land was distributed among the poor, landless or close to landless families. The government also implemented the tenancy right that offered share croppers to get registered and relieve themselves from the fear of eviction from the land by owners. Likewise, as part of decentralization programme they successfully implemented the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) (local self government). Through this institution opened up the opportunity for many people, including those who traditionally belong to disadvantaged section of the society, to take part actively in the process and thus uplift their position in many ways (Bandyopadhaya and Roy 2005).

During their long tenure the LF government had opportunity to implement many development programmes, with the aim of poverty reduction. According to Singh (2009) these programmes fall broadly into four categories: (a) self employment programmes; (b) wage employment programmes; (c) public distribution system; and (d) social welfare oriented programmes. There are numerous schemes belonging to all the four categories sponsored by the union government. Some of them are Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM),
Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), which is renamed later as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), and many others. These schemes are designed by the centre, administered by the Ministry of Rural Development, but implemented by the state governments, which generally contribute 25 percent of their cost. With the help of several measures including these antipoverty programmes the extent of poverty in West Bengal along with other states in India has come down. But still to a large extent people in the state are living below the poverty line (BPL). According to an estimate 24.7 percent of population in the state, as against 27.5 percent in the country as a whole, is living below poverty line. Though the share of BPL population in West Bengal is lower compared to the country as a whole it is opposite for the rural people. In 1999-2000 about 84 percent of BPL population lived in rural West Bengal whereas the corresponding figure for the country as a whole was 74 percent (GoWB 2004). Moreover, the concentration of poverty is more in some pockets of West Bengal, particularly in some districts including Murshidabad.

**Murshidabad**

Murshidabad district is almost at the middle-east of West Bengal. Baharampur, the capital city of Murshidabad, is about 170 km from Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal. The National Highway No. 34 that connects Kolkata with Siliguri of North Bengal passes through Murshidabad district. Two railway tracts, one is between Sealdah (Kolkata) and Lalgola and

---

5 URP consumption: Uniform recall period consumption in which the consumer expenditure data for all the items are collected from a 30 day recall period.
the other between Howrah (Kolkata) and North Bengal, pass through the district. The district was given such name after Murshidabad, a town on the left bank of the river Bhagirathi, which was the last capital of Muslim ruler in Bengal (O’Malley 1914).

In shape it looks like an isosceles triangle with its apex in the north. It has common border along its whole eastern frontier, from the extreme north to the extreme south, with Bangladesh, the river Padma forming boundary between it and Bangladesh. On the south it is bounded by the districts of Barddhaman and Nadia; by Birbhum and Pakur (Jharkhand) on the West; and Malda on the North. The river Bhagirathi that flows from north to south through the district “divides it into two almost equal portions, which, in their geology, their physical characteristic, their agriculture, and even the religion of their inhabitants, form a striking contrast to each other. The tract to the west of the river is locally known as Rarh, and the tract to the east as Bagri…..” O’Malley (1914:1). Whereas land in Rarh is high and slightly undulating and less prone to flood, the whole Bagri area is low lying, and is exposed to annual inundation which occasionally causes widespread suffering to its inhabitants. Recurring soil erosion by the river Padma is also an important problem to many people living in Bagri. About 1000 acres of land, according to an authoritative source⁶, is eaten up every year by the river Padma.

The district is named after a town Murshidabad, which along with the whole district has a rich history. In the beginning of 17th century the town Murshidabad came to appear by the change of the name Makhsusabad. At that time the town was important commercial depot for its silk production. Having known about this the English established their factory in

---

⁶ Nripen Chakravarti, the then district Secretary, CPI(M).
Cossimbazar. Murshid Kuli Khan, who came to be in power as the Diwan of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1704, chose Murshidabad as his headquarters of his administration. Since then it has long been the capital city of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. After the fall of Siraj-ud-daula in 1957 the town perhaps started to lose its importance and surprisingly at present there is no town in the district known as Murshidabad. The place where traces of Muslim rule including a palace and several graveyards are found is known as Lalbag, where a sub-divisional headquarters of the district is located.

The jurisdiction of the district has changed several times. After the formation of collectorate by the British there have been disputes for long time with regard to jurisdiction of Murshidabad district. In 1875, for the first time, the district got its clear boundary by the notification of the then government. Even after that transfer of some areas with Birbhum and Barddhaman districts and Santal Parganas of Bihar (now Jharkhand).

According to Census 2001 Murshidabad has a population size of 5,866,569, which accounts one-fifth of the state population. Its population density is as high as 1102 per sq km, compared to 904 per sq km in the state. The share of population in the district is highly skewed towards Muslim though they belong to minority community in West Bengal and in the country as a whole. In 2001 about 63 percent population in Murshidabad belong to Muslim community as against 25 per cent in the state and 13.4 percent in the country. Muslims concentrate more in Bagri and perhaps that’s why it was believed to be the part of East Pakistan at the time of partition of India into India and Pakistan in 1947 by many of its
inhabitants including some in Jalpara, the study village. A large part of migrants, if not most, from the district are from this part.
Murshidabad has traditionally been a rural district. In 1911 the share of urban population in the district was only 6 percent. During last 90 years the share of urban population did not increase significantly. Only 12.5 percent of population in the district was enumerated as urban as against 28 percent in West Bengal in 2001. This indicates that people of the district highly depend on agriculture. Eighty percent of workers in Murshidabad district are engaged in agriculture. Although agriculture is crucial for the livelihood of the people in the district the land-holdings are very tiny. In 2001 per capita land was only 0.73 hectare (Census 2001). Seventy-four percent of households in the district have holdings of less than one acre (0.4 hectare); 19 percent own land between one and two acres; and only very few households have holdings of over 10 acres (4 hectare) (Rafique and Rogaly 2005). The size of population has increased. Therefore, per capita land is likely to come down indicating that the population pressure on land has further increased.

Not only the per capita land is small, they often cannot be cultivated due to excessive rain. Large parts of the district are regularly submerged during the monsoonal rice growing season. These problems are worse in the Bagri area, much of which is low-lying and traversed by small rivers and streams. Agriculture in Bagri is frequently disrupted due to recurring water logging, floods soil erosion by a number of rivers including Padma. The river Padma eats up a large area of Indian land every year, sometimes wiping out whole villages. This further not only intensifies the density of population but also reduces the availability of per capita land.
Rice and jute are the main agricultural crops. Nonetheless, it is not much labour absorbing because per capita land is very small. Moreover, submerging of cultivable land due to water logging during the monsoon and the lack of enough irrigation facility, less than 29 percent of cultivable land, during dry season limits the scope of cultivation in a large part of land to single crop, leading to the reduction of local employment market for agricultural workers. In the past the district had reputation for silk-production and weaving industry. This industry lost its popularity because of modernization techniques elsewhere, with which Murshidabad’s labour intensive production process could not compete. In 2001 only 12000 persons got their employment in this industry (Adhikari 2005). Apart from a small and low return biri-making industry, which is concentrated in one (Jangipur) out of four subdivisions and provided employment to 40,000 persons in the year 2001, there are very few ways of earning an income from outside agriculture. Moreover, since Murshidabad district has an international border many people are reported to be involved in transborder business.

Murshidabad is one of 150 most backward districts of the country indentified by the Planning Commission of India, to implement the National Food For Work Programme, on the basis of prevalence of poverty indicated by SC/ST population, agricultural productivity per worker and agricultural wage rate. These districts lack basic infrastructure facilities and employment opportunities. These districts are source of massive out migration (Government of India 2004).
The education picture of the district Murshidabad is also very poor. According to the Census 2011 only 67.53 per cent of total population in the district was recorded as literate as against 77.08 per cent in the state. The literacy rate in rural area is lower than this. Female literacy rate, both in the district as a whole and in the rural area, is further lower. It is only little more than 45 per cent in rural areas. In terms religion Muslims are educationally most backward in the district. In the Census 2001 only 48.63 per cent of Muslims were accounted to be literate.

The district was recorded as source as well as destination of migrants as early as in 1911. In the Census 1911 about 107 thousand persons migrated out to other districts, and about 75 thousand persons migrated in the district (O’Malley 1914). Whereas flood and soil erosion were among the major reasons that pushed away people of Murshidabad district the silting on the other side of the Ganges and the opening of Katihar-Godagari railway line pulled in them (ibid). The immigrants in the district were largely in the service of Zamindars but hardly they formed permanent settlement in the district (ibid). Hundreds of thousands of people from the district still migrate out (Rogaly et al 2001) in search of employment in agriculture or other non-farm activities. It is believed by people of Murshidabad district including several district level authorities that masons of Murshidabad are famous and they would be found out all over India.

## Jalpara

Jalpara is a village in Bagri area of Murshidabad district. It is about five kilometers from Topedanga, a small town on the East bank of the river Bhagirathi. A moram road runs from

---

7 A person, who can read newspaper and write letter, is regarded as literate in the Census.
Topedanga through neighbouring village, which is about half km from Jalpara, and on towards the river Padma. This road was built only after the construction of new bridge over the stream between Jalpara and Topedanga, and has allowed all-weather access for villagers. The village has a primary school and two ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) centres. For secondary or higher education children have to travel at least four km and many children attend schools further than that. To avail the medical facilities, government or private, people have to travel five km or more. Therefore, people tend to see unqualified doctors, who see the patients and sell medicine to them, available in Jalpara itself and in the neighbouring villages. There has been a spectacular improvement in telephone connection over the period between 1999 and 2008. Whereas in 1999 people had to travel about five km to make a telephone call now they can do it from the village itself. Several households, including some laboring families, were found to have mobile phones. Such development is parallel to other rural areas across India, if not other countries.

As said by an old informant, who lived in a neighbouring village and was in his late 70s in the year 2000, Jalpara occupies an area of land which was depopulated following desertion of an earlier village that had been decimated by cholera and bandits. The new settlement started to develop only when the Left Front government established a colony during the late 1970s to distribute home to homeless people. Almost all of the new inhabitants came from the neighbouring villages where they faced shortage of homestead land after they got separated from their siblings. Whereas the older village had been predominantly Hindu, in 2008 more than 90 percent of households were Muslims. The two communities live side-by-side, though mostly in separate para (neighbourhoods). The Hindus are mostly Namasudras by caste – a
formerly untouchable, now Scheduled Caste group, whose traditional occupation was fishing. Among the Muslims there were two social groups – Sheikh and Kulu (Sah by title). The former have long been cultivators and the later were traditionally oil-pressers.

In November 2008 there were 1400 people spread over 351 households in Jalpara. In June 2005 and in August 1999 the numbers of households were 328 and 248 respectively. The increase of the number of households was mainly due to the split up of families between siblings. The houses in the village lie either side of a road, part of which was made of moram and the other part of the road was of mud, stretching north to south. Except few, the houses were consisted of mud wall with a bamboo framed roof covered with burnt earthen tiles. Almost every house had room with porch and a courtyard in front of that. The courtyard was generally surrounded by boundary walls or fence made of jute sticks. The courtyards were used for various purposes such as cooking food, drying harvested crops, keeping cattle, storing fire wood and so on. Often some vegetables such as sim, lau, pumpkin etc. were grown at corners of courtyard.

People of Jalpara earn their livelihoods from various sources such as cultivation, hiring out labour, vending several seasonal agricultural produces and fishes, begging, trading in straws carried on manually run cycle rickshaw vans. Often the families combine a number of livelihoods. For example, to contribute to family income Samsed begs and his sons hire out labour. Even the families of single earner combine more than one sources of livelihoods. For example, Rakeeb cultivated three bighas (0.4 ha) of land and supplemented this by trading in straw using his cycle rickshaw van throughout the year. Lobu, who had slightly more land
(0.52 ha), hired out his plough and his own labour and engaged in the cattle trade from time to time. Only the combination of livelihoods allows food security to many households round the year. As life histories suggest if there is opportunity people may change their source of livelihood in a life course. For instance, Hamidul used to be a wage earner but when he managed to get hold of a cycle rickshaw van he almost stopped his wage earning and started trading in straw that allowed him to save some money and lease in some land for cultivation with that savings. Though the villagers opt several sources of livelihoods almost all of them earn a part of their income from agriculture – may be through cultivating own or leased in land, or through hiring out labour. The primary sources of livelihoods, as reported at the time of fieldwork in November 2008, are given in the table below.

Table 3.1: Primary Occupation distribution (2008) in Jalpara

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Namosudra</th>
<th>Sah</th>
<th>Sk</th>
<th>Total Muslim</th>
<th>Total hh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Begging</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>23 (8.6)</td>
<td>23 (7.3)</td>
<td>23 (6.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivation</td>
<td>1 (2.9)</td>
<td>9 (18.4)</td>
<td>52 (19.4)</td>
<td>61 (19.2)</td>
<td>62 (17.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring out labour</td>
<td>9 (26.5)</td>
<td>21 (42.9)</td>
<td>127 (47.4)</td>
<td>148 (46.7)</td>
<td>157 (44.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>14 (41.2)</td>
<td>16 (32.6)</td>
<td>39 (14.5)</td>
<td>55 (17.3)</td>
<td>69 (19.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van pulling</td>
<td>9 (26.5)</td>
<td>1 (2.0)</td>
<td>12 (4.5)</td>
<td>13 (4.1)</td>
<td>22 (6.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1 (2.9)</td>
<td>2 (4.1)</td>
<td>15 (5.6)</td>
<td>17 (5.4)</td>
<td>18 (5.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34 (100)</td>
<td>49 (100)</td>
<td>268 (100)</td>
<td>317 (100)</td>
<td>351 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Others” include barber, domestic worker, job, money lending, quack doctor, rent receiver (help from children), self employed, and truck driver.
Though the major source of livelihood for the people of Jalpara is agriculture it was only rain-fed when the village was first re-settled. A large part of the fields would remain uncultivated due to lack of assured irrigation. The rice would not be transplanted as now. It would be sown before the monsoon after the start of rains. After the rice was harvested pulses were sown. Jute cultivation was also widespread. The soil of Jalpara is sandy alluvial that has very low water retaining power on its surface. But lifting ground water is quite easy because the water layer is not very far from the surface of land. This allowed cultivators to use ground water for irrigation. During the 1980s and 1990s, private investments in ground water led to change in the cropping pattern. Diesel-powered pumpsets were followed by electric ones with the introduction of electricity, which was provided at a subsidized rate. Now much of the village is double-cropped in monsoonal and summer rice, both of which are transplanted, and some land is triple cropped. Some cultivators have continued to produce jute, which is harvested during the rains in August and September. Chilli production is also significant. The coverage of land has been maximized and it is cultivated right up to the edge of homesteads, with implications for livestock-rearing in which very poor households and others had long engaged.

Agricultural changes in Jalpara ran parallel to the intensification of agriculture in the Bagri region as a whole. The lack of such development is often held to be the major driving force for labour outmigration (Rogaly et. al 2001, Deshinkar 2006, Smita 2008). Whereas the improved facility of irrigation has reduced the possibility of outmigration elsewhere (see the edited book of Deshinkar) this could not do so from Jalpara. They migrate out to rice fields in
Baradhaman, Birbhum, Hoogly and sometimes Nadia districts; and to cities in West Bengal and beyond for non-farm activities.

When the cause of migration is asked to the villagers they were almost universally agreed with the view that there is less land and more people, i.e. per capita land is very small and that too has been concentrated in few hands. “Sixteen of the 34 sampled households [in 1999] were landless, seven had less than half an acre, and three had landholdings of between one and three acres. Of the remainder, only one was a large farm household, with just over 13 acres” (Rafique and Rogaly 2005:364). By now, the year 2008, many of the joint families with bigger landholdings have broken into smaller ones, resulting the split up of landholdings too. For example, the household that had 13 acres of land in 1999 split into four that led the split of landholding size too. Therefore, each of these households have little more than three acres of land.

The division of wage labour in Jalpara, as in many parts of West Bengal including Bagri, is strongly gendered. Men are mainly responsible for family income. Only few women were found to be involved in wage work. Working of women in the field is considered to be loss of dignity in the local society. However, some females were found to hire out labour in the field, most of them being young girls, and widowed or abandoned women from economically poor families. They worked mainly for harvesting chilli, which is very seasonal work and last for only two to three months in a year. During the rest of the year their activities are like other women and it is mostly limited to the household boundary or around it, cooking and taking care of the household chores being the main activities. Some widowed and elderly
women earned their livelihood by begging in villages. Some other such women earned their livelihood by rice processing, that is making rice ready to cook and sell them, the return of which is very poor.

The landed households in Jalpara tend to maximise the use of their home labour. Since the size of land holding is not very big the intensification of agriculture did not increase the scope of employment for those who are landless. Therefore, most of the landless households earn their livelihoods by hiring out labour and this is not only in their own village but also in other local villages, surrounding ones or further than that. This is revealed from the sayings of Badsa Ali, an informant from Jalpara. He says, “I have two bullocks – I hire them out for ploughing in this village and in the next village......Sometimes, I have to travel over four and a half miles to hire out the plough. I wake up at two and feed the cows with shredded rice straw. Then at 4 a.m. when the ajan is called, I read the namaz, and then set off.......I reach my destination at around 7 a.m.” Still the local labour market that involves Jalpara and some other nearby villages did not meet the need of local labourers. The availability of employment in this labour market is very seasonal and the length of a season is very small. In this regard Anwar Sheikh says, “There is not enough work. We’re all poor. The poor here don’t get work every day. Not even for ten days”.

The working hour in Jalpara is from sunrise to mid-day, about six hours, in contrast to the working hour, from sunrise to sunset or sometimes longer than that, in the destination when they migrate out. The working hour that lasted from sunrise to sunset was in practice in the local labour market even in late 1980s. But how this new system of working hour replaced
the old one is a matter of further investigation. Another major change is the employer-labourer relation. From the life histories it reveals that labourers in earlier days were highly vulnerable to their employers. To make sure the availability of employment they had to show their loyalty. As a result often they had to provide free labour. But at present the situation of the labourers has largely improved. They are not as dependent on a particular employer as before. Perhaps the launch of several rural development programmes including employment generation, improvement in agriculture, and opportunity to migrate out are among the major factors responsible for this. In addition, the risks involved in cultivating the new crops also make significant contribution to this change.

The wage rate in Jalpara is low and the payment is often delayed, often made in installments. At the time of aman harvest in 2005 the wage rates in Jalpara were somewhere between Rs30 and Rs50 with a cooked meal. But in the same year the labourers, who migrated from Jalpara for same work, received wage rate ranging between Rs54 and Rs75 with three times cooked meal provided by employers. Many of the labourers earned more than that by working on piece rate. Sometimes the cooked meal is not included in the wage rate. The migrants from Jalpara received much higher wage rates when worked for non-farm activities, and this was not less than Rs 100. Food was not included in this. The access to lump sum amount of money is the most important advantage of migration for the people of Jalpara.
Land tenancy:

There were many evidences of the tenancy of sharecropping, that is, the tenant would cultivate land and would receive a part of the produce from landlord. For instance, Anwar Sheikh said,

“We did not have much land – only two or three bighas. Father used to fall ill frequently. He could not work. As a result he used to hire out the land for sharecropping. The land used to produce some years, other years it didn’t. The bhadoi paddy would get flattened, and then the crop doesn’t yield. So we would not get anything. If there was no crop on the land, what would the tenant have to share?”

Presently such tenancy is no more in practice in Jalpara. This is partly because of small size of landholdings where the landlords try to maximize their home labours leaving very limited scope for others who largely depend on hiring out labour, and partly because the Operation Barga, a land tenancy Act that does not allow the landlord to evict the cultivators who cultivate his land. Disappearance of such tenancy has some profound implication to the life of poor. Samsed Sheikh said,

“My father’s second brother [leaving Jalpara who has been living in his in-law’s place, which is in different village] owned some land and I used to work on it as a sharecropper. But that’s come to an end and I cannot get any other land in the village to sharecrop on. If I could, a few days of work would be sufficient to feed the family”.

62
The lack of availability of any land on sharecropping system contributed to the driving force of migration for many inhabitants of Jalpara like Samsed Sheikh.

Though the share cropping system has disappeared from Jalpara there are other tenancies in practice. They are locally known as takaback and reehen. Under takaback tenancy the tenant gives some money to the landowner against the right (informal) to cultivate a particular area of land and enjoys the entire crop produced from that land. After some time, normally one year, whenever the landowner returns the money he received from the tenant the tenant’s right come to an end and the right of cultivation of that land goes back to the landowner.

The reehen tenancy is one in which the tenant purchases the right to cultivate certain area of land from the landowner for a certain period. After the completion of the tenure the right of the tenant expires and the land returns to the landowner. The takaback tenancy is not as common as reehen in Jalpara mainly because the reehen involves much less amount of money than takaback and thus higher number of people, including many labouring households, can afford it. Only when the landowners are in urgent need of money they go for such tenancy systems. The households having small land size often choose to lease out his/her land to overcome the crisis and get back the land when they can manage. Sometimes income from migration plays important role in getting back the land.
Credit

The people of Jalpara reported to incur cash loan from various sources. The important sources are relatives and friends, moneylenders and banks. In addition, the local grocers often sales their goods, the local doctors, who are unqualified, see and sale medicines on credit. Loans from friends and relatives are often free of interest. In this regard the case of Monirul Sheikh is mention worthy. He said, “At the moment I have an outstanding loan of Rs 15,000. Its not really a loan; I borrowed that money from my neighbours. From three or four different people. There’s no interest on it because they’re all my friends”. Data show that the availability of loan from friends and relatives depends not only on the ability of the lenders to do so but also on the quality of relationship of the borrower with them.

Moneylenders are the most common source of loan for the residents of Jalpara. When people are in urgent need of money they go to the moneylenders with some gold items to pawn. When people don’t have any gold item in hand it is difficult to get the loan from them. But there were some instances where people borrowed gold items from relatives and pawned it to the moneylender. Rakib’s case is an example. He said, “I borrowed four annas of gold from my sister on loan. I pawned that and got Rs 2000”. This lending of his sister is free of charge but had to pay interest to the moneylender at the rate of three percent per month. The availability of loan from moneylender without any gold item is very rare but if it happens the rate of interest is ten percent per month. Instances of loan from bank were also available but not much common. One of the main reasons behind this is that the problem of accessibility.
To get loan from banks it involves too much formality compared to moneylenders and this is very difficult to fulfill for the people of Jalpara, who are mostly illiterate.

**Migration**

Migration is more common for landless households than landed ones (Rafique and Rogaly 2005). But there have been some changes in migration pattern. Until the end of fieldwork in 2000 no woman was reported to migrate out for employment but in 2005 some women were found to do so for agricultural work. Moreover, migration for wage work was mostly limited to agricultural activities in 2000. This is mostly migration for winter and summer rice harvest and transplantation. There were also some instances of migration for potato plantation and harvest, and jute harvest. Migration for non-agricultural activities was mostly for brickfield. Migration towards cities and towns was not much known. Some migrated for trade in mangoes, saplings or molasses made of sap from date tree. In 2005 we came to know that some new areas of activity have been included. Members from many households migrated in cities and towns in West Bengal and beyond as helper in building construction, digging earth for laying telephone line, construction of road and so on. In 2008 migration for all of these activities continued and migration for work site in urban areas further intensified.

The destinations for agricultural activities are mainly the neighbouring districts – Barddhaman, Birbhum, Hoogly. Sometimes their destinations are in Nadia district or somewhere within Murshidabad district. All these destinations are mainly between 50 ~150 kms. The destinations for brick kiln work are mainly within Murshadabad district and they are between 35-70 kms. The people of Jalpara migrate for begging mostly in Muslim
dominated area. This is mostly in other part of Murshidabad district but sometimes, particularly some male beggars, migrate to the neighbouring state like Jharkhand. The distance of destination for other non-agricultural activities is more than 200 kms, mostly it is in Kolkata, the capital city of West Bengal, and sometimes in Orissa, the neighbouring state. Migrants of Jalpara are of wide range of age group. From the life histories it appears that people of Jalpara start out-migration mostly at their early teenage and it starts for wage work. They tend to continue out migration unless they get alternative option of livelihoods or they become physically unable. Hamidul stopped out-migration when he got a cycle rickshaw van. Leaving out-migration he started trading in straw. Tahsen used to migrate out for wage work in the agricultural field but at some point of his age his physical ability did not allow to do so and consequently he left it and started out migration for begging. But for Monirul it was not physical inability that led him to stop out-migration for wage work. He found an alternative option for earning livelihoods and it was out migration for trading in various seasonal goods. The wage work migrants tend to be younger age group and most of them are below 40 years of age, i.e. many of them are either children of school going age or their father.

Migration for agricultural activities is very seasonal. Length of a season is generally not more than one month. Migration for other than agricultural activities, i.e. trading, begging or other non-agricultural wage work, except work in the brickfield, goes round the year. The length of a migration trip for construction-work may be more than one month but length of a trip for other works tend to be less than that. Regarding duration of absence of her husband due to migration Sarjina Bibi said, “As a labour for mason work he goes and stays as long as one
month to two months or half a month. And in case of illness he comes back in 2-10 days. And if he goes to Barddhaman [for rice plantation and harvest] he stays there for less than 15 days 20 days, 12 days or 10 days and comes back home”. The length of a trip of migrant beggars, traders, and brick workers often is not more than two weeks.

The amount of earning depends on various factors including the type of work, length of migration trip, nature of contract (daily or piece rate) and so on. For agricultural activities the migrants from Jalpara worked either on piece rate or on daily rate. They earned higher on piece rate than on daily rate. In case of piece rate they exerted harder labour and for longer hours compared to the daily rate. During summer rice harvest they worked mostly on piece rate whereas at the time of winter harvest it was mostly daily rate. For construction work nobody reported to work on piece rate. As the labourers from construction work return after longer duration they reported to bring higher amount of money. However, the amount is not very high. Sarjina Bibi said about her husband’s earning from migration, “When he goes to Barddhaman he brings about Rs 500/- to 600/- but from Kolkata if he stays for one month he brings Rs 1000/- or 1500/-“. According to her the highest amount of earning in a trip was Rs 3800 in two months when he migrated to Orissa as a helper of mason.

From the discussion with migrants from Jalpara it appears that the availability of work in construction site is not very difficult. They migrate in group, formed by people of Jalpara itself or by people of more than one village, and mostly one or more members of the group have prior contact with the destination. Labourers can migrate at any point of time in the year
except few days during Durga Puja. It also reveals that leaving employment is also not very
difficult. Within very short notice, may be one or two days a labour can leave work.

Education

At the time of conducting door-to-door census in November 2008 data was collected on
education status of all of the family members. According to this 68 percent of population,
aged above 5 years, either received some level of education or was continuing schooling.
This is little higher than the district figure as a whole, which is 67.53 percent according to the
Census 2011. The level of literacy in Jalpara is not very high. Only nine persons have
reported to complete school level education, i.e. twelfth standard, and 13 have completed
tenth standard of education. The level of education was poorer in 1999-2000. At that time the
number of persons, who have completed twelfth level schooling, was only one. The level of
education is poorer among the older people. There were several reasons behind this including
the level of interest and lack of adequate government measures. Earlier the level of interest
among the parents in Jalpara in educating their children was not as much as at present. At
present, whereas the parents not only put their children in school but also try to meet their
needs related to their schooling and take an interest to see whether the children are going to
school as it should be. But earlier, as it is evident from the life histories, the parents wanted
their children to go to school but often the effort made behind it was very poor. For example,
parents often did not put necessary efforts to make a child to go to school if he/she was
unwilling to do so. Anwar Sheikh, a respondent of about 45 years age said about his own
education,
No one told me to go to school, and perhaps I did not make the effort. At that time we were still loved a lot, hugged, so nobody would beat us to force us to go to school. Or maybe I was too naughty to go to school…..Maybe they told me to go and I still refused to go. Or maybe another reason to it. my parents had 12 children, out of whom only six are alive today. The other six, five boys and one girl, died. As all their [earlier] children had died, their first surviving son became quite special. So they probably thought that, even if their boy didn’t go to school, it wouldn’t matter. There was a kind of fear that if their only child [at the time] died too, who would they beat then? As a result I never learned to read. (Words in bracket were added).

The government programmes with the intention of facilitating child education were not as extensive as at present. At present, there are special drive to admit children in primary schools, incentives such as free books, grant for school uniform, and free cooked mid-day-meals.

All the school going children in Jalpara go to schools run by government. There is facility of private schooling in neighbouring village but none was reported to avail that facility in 2008. The school education in Jalpara is as it is in the government-run schooling system in West Bengal in general. It is provided in four different levels – primary (grade 1 to 4), upper primary (grade 5 to 8), secondary (grades 9 and 10) and higher secondary (grades 11 and 12). As said before Jalpara has a primary school in the village itself. Since there is no higher-level school in Jalpara children go to schools in other villages. One of these schools provides education only up to grade 8 and in other schools facilities are available to continue education up to 12th grade. Grade one starts at the age of five years, that is, school education
is supposed to be completed by the age of 18 years. The pre-primary education is supposed to be provided by ICDS centers but often their performance is not satisfactory (Pratichi Research Team 2009) including in Jalpara.
3.2: Methodology

Research “add[s] to one’s body of knowledge and, hopefully, to that of others, by the discovery of non-trivial facts and insights” (Howard and Sharp 1983, cited in Bell 1993:2). It seeks systematic way of asking questions and a systematic method of inquiry. It is the systematic approach that is important in the conduct of a research. In this section I present the research approach, methods, approach to data collection, characteristics of data gathered and method of data analysis, including how it achieved findings that are accurate, relevant and valid. It also includes the description of the triangulation techniques used and limitation of the study.

Case Study: The research approach

Availability of time and manpower are among the important determinants in the selection process of research approach. As in almost every research I was supposed to complete my thesis within a limited time and do the fieldwork on my own. Taking into account these constraints it was wise for me to choose case study as the research approach. This approach is relatively better than any other research approach particularly for individual researchers “because it gives an aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale” (Bell 1993:8). The great strength of this method, as Bell (1993) continues, “is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify, or attempt to identify, the various interactive process at work” (p 8).
Each individual informant or household is likely to have some common as well as some unique features even with relation to the process of making migration decision, response to the situation that emerge due to migration, which may be identical and/or different depending upon various factors such as cultural, economic, demographic, social and political. The case-study approach would allow me to identify in greater detail of these dimensions with regard to migration and the education of children. Broadly a case may be a person, social communities, organisations, and institutions as the subject of a case analysis. Here the case for this thesis refers to the Muslim community residing in a village of Murshidabad district in West Bengal. Though it is a particular case the aim is not to make statements only about the concrete case. Rather I will study it because it is of typical nature and particularly instructive example for a more general problem.

There might be danger of distortion and problem of generalization of case-study approach; still the supporters of case study make a strong case for this approach. According to Bassey (1981), as cited in Bell (1993:9),

An important criterion for judging the merit of a case study is the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his decision making to that described in the case study. The relatability of a case study is more important than its generalisability.

Bassey further claims, if case studies
are carried out systematically and critically, ..... if they are relatable, and if by publication of the findings they extend the boundaries of existing knowledge, then they are valid forms of ....[a] research.

Bell (1993) views that “a successful study will provide the reader with a three-dimensional picture and will illustrate relationships, micropolitical issues and patterns of influences in a particular context” (p 9).

**Research method**

In social science the selection of research method is guided largely by the nature of the research question posed. Yin (1989) suggests that selection of research method depends upon (a) the type of research question, (b) the extent of control of the investigator over actual behavioural events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. In accordance with these conditions I have chosen the qualitative research method. This method allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin 1989) rather than presenting them with abstract theories or principles (Cohen et al 2000). This results in information, which can best be described in words such as “description of situations, events, people, interactions and observed behaviors” (Casley and Kumar 1988). Moreover, this method helps

in understanding the complex….sociological, cultural, and other situations…..They can also provide an in-depth understanding of the perspectives, attitudes and behavior
patterns of the target population, which will not be fully captured by other modes of data gathering (Casley and Kumar 1988:11).

To argue about the superiority of qualitative over quantitative research Flick (2009) claims that qualitative methods are able to provide the actual scientific explanations of facts; it can live very well without later use of quantitative methods, whereas quantitative methods need qualitative methods for explaining the relations they find; it is especially appropriate in answering micro sociological questions.

Although the qualitative research method is a distinctive form of empirical inquiry, there are debates against it (Yin 1989). The major weakness as pointed out by Yin (1989), includes that it is prone to observer bias; and it has little basis for scientific generalization; and it is time consuming. However, Yin (1989) has countered all these allegations. Firstly, the bias may occur in other social science research methods as well. Moreover, Yin (1989) believes that it can be avoided if the investigator works hard. Secondly, Yin (1989) argues, the qualitative method may be unable to contribute to statistical generalization (which considers frequencies) but it can contribute to the expansion of theories and analytic generalisation. Thirdly, the matter of time consumption in the qualitative method is often misconceived. Yin (1989) argues that it is possible to do a valid and high-quality qualitative research without leaving the library and the telephone, depending upon the topic being studied’ (p 22).

Another important concern of the qualitative research method is the validity and reliability of the collected data. According to Yin (1989) it is difficult to identify a specific tactic to overcome these issues. However, prior research experience is likely to be of great use in this regard and I believe my long field research experience helped me a lot to overcome these
problems largely. Moreover, according to Kane (1995), in order to increase the validity and reliability of data it is important to look back to the theories involved and think about how to confirm the conclusion reached. Much attention has been made in my research to increase the validity and reliability and to reduce the bias through data triangulation. However, I would not claim that it is free from limitations.

The data was collected through face to face contact. Denscombe (2003), data collected through face to face contact is rich and “offers some immediate means of validating the data. The researcher can sense if she is being given false information in the face to face context in a way that is not possible with questionnaires and less feasible with telephone surveys” (p8). By using multiple sources of information and looking at the data collected through participant observation, I was able to incorporate a data-triangulation technique in this study. I have also incorporated various theories that have contributed to the understanding the impact of migration on education. These theories have been explained in the chapter on conceptual framework and will be applied later during the analysis.

Site selection

The research questions shape the selection of a place. As the title of the thesis indicates temporary out-migration by Muslim is at the heart of the research questions. Therefore, an ideal site for this research should have sizeable number of Muslim people who migrate out temporarily in search of livelihood. The village Jalpara in Murshidabad district was a suitable place for this and it was selected purposively. Most of the migrants from Murshidabad district are Muslim (Rogaly et. al. 2001). In this sense Jalpara is largely representative to the
district (Rogaly et. al. 2001, Rogaly and Rafique 2003, Rafique and Rogaly 2005, Rafique 2003, Rafique et al 2006). Seventy two percent household had at least one member having migration experience and 90 percent of household was resided by Muslims.

Though the primary criterion of site selection was migration, the availability of accommodation in the study village was also an important condition for this research because the method of data collection was decided to be ethnographic. Jalpara met this condition too. However, selection of Jalpara in the year 1999, when it was selected for a site for another research that investigated causes and consequences of seasonal migration, was not as easy as for this time. At that time a village was selected after discussion with a number of government authorities and peoples representatives at different levels, from district to Gram Panchayat, to find a village from where a sizeable number of people migrate. Following this process a village was selected in the district, which was rejected because of unavailability of accommodation and finally Jalpara replaced it.

I had another advantage to select Jalpara as the study area for my thesis. I was doing fieldwork in the same village as a part of a research project (see next section) and thus there was the opportunity to combine fieldwork for my own research with my professional work.

Ethnography: The style of fieldwork

For this thesis I chose ethnographic style of fieldwork because this allows the researchers to understand the problem in better detail (Bell 1993). Though this method of data collection is strongly challenged by several limitations, including lengthy fieldwork and problem of
acceptance (Bell 1993), I was fortunate to encounter them relatively easily. I had opportunity to combine my fieldwork with my professional work. This was possible when I got the opportunity to get engaged with a research institute\(^8\) that wanted me to do ethnographic research, for a research project\(^9\), in Jalpara, and I was allowed to collect data for my own thesis along with the data collection for the project. Moreover, a large part of data, collected for this project, served the purpose of my thesis as well. Thus spending 10 months for fieldwork was not too difficult to afford for me.

The challenge of acceptance was also very limited to me because previously I stayed in Jalpara for one year between 1999 and 2000 in connection with another ethnographic research that investigated the pattern, causes and consequences of migration. The relationship developed with many villagers at that time continued even after the completion of the fieldwork in the ways that include paying social visit to places of each other.

**Tools for data collection**

This research is based on two sources of information – primary and secondary. For primary data collection I stayed in the village for ten months over two phases. In the first phase, when I collected most of the data, I lived in the village for seven months during June 2005 and January 2006, and in the second phase I stayed there for three months between November 2008 and January 2009. Moreover, although my thesis is based mainly on the data collected during these two phases, this is not limited to that only. For the purpose of an ethnographic study I lived in the same village for one year between August 1999 and July 2000 and I

---

8 Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, based in the University of Sussex and funded by the Department for International Development, UK.
9 Social protection by and for the temporary work migrants in Bangladesh and West Bengal, India.
believe drawing from that experience would enrich the quality of my thesis. The secondary sources of information include data provided by several district-level authorities and published materials.

The research tools employed during the fieldwork were interview and participant observation. The interviews were carried out with selected people of target group and key informants. It is not to mention that all the target group population was from Jalpara village itself but not necessarily all the key informants. They were from within and outside the village. They were purposively selected from various levels, from district to village, and most of them held some sort of offices of government, NGO or political party. In the village the respondents were selected after door to door surveys that were carried out at the very beginning of the fieldworks. These surveys included some basic information on individual household in Jalpara. The information provided by the survey in June 2005 includes adult and child (age below 14 years) members in the family, type of family (nuclear or joint), para\textsuperscript{10}, religion, labour hiring status, and migration status of the family. The labour hiring status refers to whether the household had hired out or in any labour during the period of one year prior to the survey. Similarly migration status refers to whether any member from the family had migrated out from the household during the period prior to the survey.

The information provided by the survey in November 2008 includes age, sex, education, occupation and migration status of every member in the household. During the surveys information of some special interest, if any, were also noted down. Based on some characteristics, such as economic, labour hiring, and migration status households were

\textsuperscript{10} Neighbourhood
categorized and from each category households were randomly selected for deeper investigation. The numbers of sampled households were 26 and 35 households in 2005 and 2008 respectively. At the time of sampling in 2005, attention was paid so that households from all *paras*, economic classes and social groups were represented. The intention behind such representation was to understand the relationships of these determinants with the impact of migration on education in a life course. At the time of sampling in 2008 the main focus was the schooling status of children and effect of migration on them. Therefore, the total population for sampling was the total number of household having children of school going age. Attention was also paid on location of residence in the village, social groups and gender of children with the intention that if these factors play any role in the process of impact of migration on education.

In phase-1 of fieldwork life histories of 14 women and 13 men were audio recorded from 26 households, one member, either husband or wife, from 25 households and both husband and wife from one household. A checklist was prepared in advance for the life history interview. However, this was modified as the life history interview progressed. For life history interview a house was visited for several times. But not necessarily discussion in every visit was audio recorded. In addition to discussion eyes were kept open to observe various things happening in the house. The main points of discussion and observation were noted down in small notebook and they were written in detail in the field notes at home. The field notes were completed as soon as possible after visiting the households. Most of the field notes were completed within 24 hours of field visit but sometimes it was not possible to complete within this time frame.
I found that there were a number of advantages of using life history methodology as part of the methodology to this research. These advantages become more and more clear as the interviews progressed. Life history methods allowed a much longer and more detailed interview to take place without boring the interviewee, mainly because of the fascination we all have with our life histories when they are mapped out. In this connection it would be worthwhile the words of a respondent from Jalpara. When I requested him to tell about his life he said, “If I wrote my memoirs, a whole exercise book would be filled. Only I know the amount of suffering that I’ve faced in my life. And it’s only my children who give me strength to forget about them”. When he was saying these, his eyes became watered.

The life history methodology also reduced the sense of objectification felt by interviewees because interviewees could take much greater control of the interview process and much more freedom of expression resulted and the contextual detail and nuanced historical story of a person’s life more accurately reflected people’s own understanding of their own experiences. This helped to reduce the ‘symbolic violence’ of the research interview.

A life history approach also allows a different type of analysis to occur. Life cycle patterns can be identified much more easily, patterns of cumulative causation emerge and individual episodes of crisis, coping, and opportunity can be seen within the interrelated and wider context of community, and family life courses. On the coping side it also allows patterns to emerge of diminishing or accumulating resources and allows repeated behaviour patterns to be seen. A particular person or household may favour a certain strategy because it has been effective in the past or people may favour certain strategies because this ‘is done’ in that type of crisis or there is an understanding that others are obliged to help because of established relationship norms.
A life history interview allows a researcher the experience of respondent’s in a comprehensive way in a structured world (Flick 2009). Thus it was expected that this approach would help in better way to understand the impact of migration, on different aspects of life including migration-education relation, at different stage of life course. In this approach the data was not limited to the person whose life history was recorded. It also reflected the light on their experience related to their child rearing including child education. However, it was felt that a life history was not able to give much detail on what their children do at the time of their absence. Does their daily routine change? Does this routine affect their education? Is their any gender role in this regard? To find answer to these questions I further made a door to door census and sorted out the households.

At the time of life history interview my prior knowledge was useful to triangulate some information. Many others were triangulated during the course of discussion, through careful questioning. The discussion with key informants from the village itself sometimes were very useful for triangulation.

**Limitations**

Like other research this research also has some limitations. Within a short time frame I had to complete all the associated activities such as literature review, fieldwork, data analysis and the writing up of the thesis. This limited the scope of the study in terms of both its depth and breadth. The study focuses on Muslim community in a village in West Bengal, India, with a small sample. Ninety percent of population of this village belong to Muslim community, which, according to Census 2001, constitutes 63 percent of Murshidabad district, one fourth
of the state and about one seventh of the country’s population. Therefore, in terms of religious identity it is representative neither of the district or state nor of the country.

The study is based largely on life history where many events recalled by the respondents were very old. For the respondents it was difficult to remember in details many of these events. Furthermore, there was not equal scope of triangulation of many of the data given by the respondents since they happened within the personal or family life and other people knew very little or even nothing about them. I had to depend highly on tactful questioning for this. However, I had greater opportunity to triangulate the newer events. For example, what are the strategies taken to continue schooling of their children.

Participant observation was also a major source of data for this thesis. There is a danger of bias in the participant observation method (Bell 1993). For a researcher, it is difficult to stand back and adopt the role of objective observer when the members are known to him/her (ibid). Although I was known to many villagers most of the respondents were new to me particularly in terms of their life events. Moreover, the child respondents were too young at the time of my previous fieldwork. Rather, my pre-acquaintance with many of the respondents was very useful in building rapport with the interviewees. Although at the beginning the child respondents were a bit shy to me, the presence of a local boy as my assistant helped a lot to reduce this shyness.

As well as limitations there were some advantages to the study. The study was conducted in a village where I stayed for a year as a researcher prior to the fieldwork for my thesis and
although I left it five years ago I had maintained close relations with it through regular visits to some families in the village. Crucially one advantage is that I share the language of the villagers, which is Bengali, my mother tongue, and I am also fluent in English, which is the language of the thesis. Therefore, there is less possibility of losing any data in the process of translation between two languages (Bujra 2006). In addition, because of my prior experience in research, for about ten years, in the field of education as well as ethnographic data collection, I have some degree of expertise in understanding my positionality amongst the participants, and I realise the significance of building trust and strictly adhering to ethical concerns.

Data analysis

“The method of analysis is integrated from the start with other parts of research, rather than being an afterthought” (Punch 2005, p.194). This indicates that data analysis for a research project starts before going to do the fieldwork, namely during the literature review. This includes the sorting out of literature.

As it is quite common, if not universal, particularly in social science research, the amount of data collected during the fieldwork was much larger than was possible to analyse within the time constraints of this study so the analysis was selective. The taped life histories were transcribed and translated from Bengali to English and they were computerized. There were field notes from participant observation. Separate files were made for each sampled household where field notes and life history were taken together so that all the data of a particular household were available from a single file. Separate file was maintained for key
informant interviews, and the field notes on observation in the village as a whole and informal talking with people from other than the sampled households.

The analysis of primary data was started during the fieldwork. It started during the interviews and observation when I was trying to triangulate the data from different sources. It took place while I was writing the field notes from which some primary themes emerged. Later on I went through the field notes and transcribed life histories several times that helped with my development and confirmation of themes. These themes emerged in relation to research questions. Codes and sub codes were developed according to the themes and after coding marker pens of different colours were used so that it made easier to sort out different themes.

**Ethical consideration**

Ethical consideration is an important part of a study. The idea of the ethics of representation (Kleinman *et. al.* 1997) is central to many of these concerns. The purpose of the study was clarified to all respondents and to their parents where the respondents were minor. It was also made clear that the participation was voluntary, and there was no penalty for non-participation. It is important to keep ‘confidentiality and anonymity’ of the research subjects (Akeroyd 1984, p.138). Taking this into account the names of all respondents have been changed. I was also careful to keep the anonymity of the study village so that none can identify it. For this purpose I have changed not only the name of the study village but also the names of some other places.

After the sampling consent was sought from every household. All the interviews including the life history interviews were carried out at some mutually convenient time. The

---

11 I have edited a book, ‘Known faces, unknown life: Voices of temporary migrants in West Bengal” based on thirteen such life histories.
respondents were free to withdraw their permission at any stage of interview or tape recording. They also had freedom to ask me to delete entire recording of discussion with them even at the end of it\textsuperscript{12}. Throughout the research, pseudonyms were used to maintain the anonymity of the respondents. Actual names along with their corresponding pseudonyms were kept securely and separately and were not disclosed to anybody else beyond the research team. The tapes, used for recording interviews, were labeled with the pseudonyms only.

More difficult issues are associated with the idea that I, as a researcher, am benefiting from the stories of suffering and hardship told to me. Sometimes, the research data become commodity (Davis 2005). David Hulme, as cited in Davis (2005), has highlighted some of the problems associated with commodification with research data in Bangladesh. I have no intention of selling it. This will be used only for my thesis and the findings will be shared with others only in the form of publication so that the research can contribute to the understanding the problem under study.

Many of the respondents were not used to the term of research or university. They were aware only with the people from government or company. It was difficult to make it clear to them what is research and what is university. In that case I told them that I was not from government. Moreover, I would make it clear that probably they would not gain any benefit out of this, and I would be the one who benefited. Most people seemed to appreciate this frankness. However, in some cases where dire need was uncovered in the course of the interview I did provide help from time to time.

\textsuperscript{12} I can mention here that one of the respondents wanted not to proceed further with the tape recording of his life history interview even after it progressed for some time.