CHAPTER VI
PROFILE OF SELECTED RICE MILLS

6.1 Introduction
The total number of rice mills in the Burdwan region was 52 at the time of the survey. We selected 18 from the list of rice mills for our survey. This selection was done entirely subjectively, the sample size being restricted due to constraints of time and cost. What we have tried to do in this chapter is to present a cross section of the rice mills for a better understanding of them before going into reporting and analysis of survey results. For this purpose, we looked at the location, past history of development, ownership changes, size and technology involved in production, strength of the presence of trade unions and such other factors of these individual rice mills. The selected mills, as a result, present a diversity of location, operation, history, technology etc. Among the 18 surveyed, 13 are within the municipal boundary of Burdwan city and rest are located in the adjoining areas of the city. The list of operational rice mills was collected from the District Industrial Centre.

The survey was conducted during 1999 to 2000 with the help of a structured questionnaire (Annexure I.A and Annexure I.B). The questionnaire was prepared to obtain information regarding processing and organizational, marketing socio-economic and demographic dimensions of the workers. Each rice mill was visited personally and questionnaires were filled up personally directly on the basis of replies obtained from the owners of the rice mill as well as a section of workers. Sometimes the accuracy of the information supplied by the mill owner was compared with the data made available from Shramik Bhavan.

The 18 surveyed rice mills were classified into three distinct groups – big, medium and small - on the basis of per day rice production, level of mechanization, power consumption, number of workers and invested capital. Among the surveyed rice mills as well as those located within the state, Shanti rice mill of Burdwan city (Alamganj) ranks first in total production of rice in West Bengal. The medium sized rice mills surveyed are Jessoria rice mill, New rice mill, Bardhmaneswar rice mill, Bharat Laxmi rice mill, Khetranath rice mill, Laxmishree rice mill, Nilkantha rice mill, Bhubaneshwar rice mill, Durgamata rice mill, Annapurna rice mill, Anand rice mill, Shibhakti rice mill, Ma Tara rice mill and Hara Gouri rice mill (Figure 6.1).
LOCATION OF SURVEYED RICE MILLS
BURDWAN CITY AND ADJOINING AREAS

Name of Rice Mills
1. Sree Shankar
2. Jessoria
3. Bardhamaneswar
4. Shanti
5. New
6. Bharat Laxmi
7. Khetra Nath
8. Laxmishree
9. Nilkantha
10. Laxmi Narayan
11. Bhurbaneshwar
12. Durgamata
13. Ma Tara
14. Hara Goun
15. Ananda
16. Shankari
17. Annapurna
18. Shib Shakti

Source: Based on Survey. 1999-2000

Figure 6.1
The surveyed rice mills included in the small category are Sree Shankar rice mill, Laxmi Narayan rice mill and Shankari rice mill.

In this chapter, we have first outlined the cases of eight rice mills from the 18 surveyed. These case studies will hopefully bring out specificities of rice mills as well as point out their commonalities. For example, Shanti rice mill is one of the largest mills of not only the region, but also the entire state of West Bengal, Laxmishree rice mill and Nilkantha rice mill are in the medium size category, a small mill is Laxmi Narayan, Ma Tara is a fully modernized mill, Ananda rice mill is located in Nandra gram panchayat about 6 kilometres away from the city running without proper electricity supply, Shibshakti rice mill in Saraitikar gram panchayat just beyond the municipal boundary, and lastly Hara Gouri mill, also in Nandra, which was fully dryer-based but has closed down. In this chapter, we will give the profiles of these rice mills before going into the survey results.

6.2 Common Features

Though rice mill differs from the other with regard to milling process, labour characteristics, marketing, number of workers and organizational structure of the mill, there are some features common to almost all of them. For example, majority of rice mills operate within the framework of a bilateral contract between Rice Mill Workers Association (C.I.T.U) and the Rice Mill Owners Association. Therefore, in outlining the profile of an individual rice mill, common features are imperative. We shall, therefore, briefly describe these common features in the following sub-sections of this chapter.

6.2.1 Job Specialization

Job specialization in the rice mills is a result of tradition as well as a matter of contract between the union and the owners. As a result, men or women traditionally do many jobs. There is a kind of gender discrimination with regards to job distribution within the milling operations. Women are not allowed to enter the machine room giving evidence of male dominance in technical work. There is no opportunity or infrastructure to train women and unskilled workers. In chatal-based or mixed type mills, women are mainly appointed for work on chatal. That includes the drying of paddy, spreading on the yard known as pata, frequent rolling or moving of paddy by a comb-like implement attached with a bamboo or stick locally known as chiruni, accumulation after drying, winnowing, cleaning of paddy etc. Besides chatal jobs, male workers perform all other skilled and machine work.
PLATE 7: LOADING AND UNLOADING OF RICE/PADDY BY RICE MILL WORKERS

PLATE 8: TOWARDS THE END OF A BUSY WORK DAY
6.2.2 Working Hours

The length of the working day in all the rice mills is eight hours. Duty of workers more than eight hours is considered as overtime and paid accordingly. In exceptional case of a rice mill operating for 24 hours, there may be shift jobs. Usually such shifting of duty varies according to the nature of operation involved and arrangements are made in consultation with the labour union.

6.2.3 Wage Structure

There are 2 categories of workers in a rice mill – white collar and blue collar. The white-collar workers are called gadi staff and are paid on a monthly basis. These gadi staff include the office staff as well as those operating machines. The machine mistri has to be a skilled person to determine for how long the paddy will be boiled etc., whereas the machine shramiks do the actual jobs and are treated as blue collar workers. Gadi staff, therefore, is not only the manager and accounts keeper, but also the boiler mistri and machine mistri, fireman, the cook and her/his helper and the night guard - even those who do not actually work in gadi or the office. In general, white-collar workers are those who draw salaries on a monthly basis. The salaries of the manager and accountant vary from Rs 1,200 to 2,500 per month. The fireman earns Rs 1,090 and 30 kilogram of rice and the night guard earn Rs 1,500 and 30 kilogram of rice per month.

The manual or blue-collar workers working on the chatal as well as those in the machines are all paid on a daily basis. Their payments are Rs 33 and one kilogram rice and Rs 35 and one kilogram of rice daily respectively, implying a token difference in the total amount. This difference remains more or less constant. These amounts are subject to periodic changes under bilateral agreements between the owners and the workers' union. The workers who work at the boiler also receive Rs 35 and one kilogram of rice daily. Beside these, there are contract labourers whose payments are fixed by mutual agreement between the rice mill owner and the leader of contract labourers, the sardar. The wage rates of contract labourers for different kinds of jobs are fixed by the CITU for all the rice mills. Contract labourers usually work as houze coolies, vapouring the paddy (bhapai), boiling the paddy (seddho), weighing of rice (kasti), and loading and unloading of rice and paddy. The wage rates for these jobs are as follows: for weighing of 80 kilogram rice (one bag) - 41 paisa; for steaming of 60 kilogram paddy - 52 paisa; for boiling of 60 kilograms paddy - 54 paisa; for loading of 80 kilogram rice on the truck - 28 paisa.
The payment of the *sardar* is determined by an average figure of total number of workers brought by him (including the *sardar* and cook, considered as two individual workers). He receives payment plus 5 per cent of the total workers payment per day.

Beside the above-mentioned workers, there is another category called *nagda* labours who serve purely on a temporary basis. They are required when a worker is on leave or is absent from duty. They are treated as additional labour and are paid daily wages or on an hourly work basis known as *nagda kaj*. *Nagda kaj* is usually against the blue-collar jobs and such labours never replace the *gadi* staff. Consequently, they get the payment of the persons they are replacing. Usually, women and younger children work as *nagda* labour.

An intricate system of labour has thus been evolved in rice mills over the years. Part of this is the result of tradition, but some are definitely the results of intervention by trade unions to ensure better wage security for workers. We shall come back to the issue of job protection later in this thesis.

### 6.2.4 Annual Leave with Pay

The workers who are engaged in *chatal* work enjoy 42 days' leave with pay annually. The workers working with machine usually enjoy 60 days' leave with pay annually. The machine *mistri*, night guard, pressure man as well as *gadi* staff usually enjoy 84 days' leave with pay annually. This variation occurs because of differences in status of these workers depending on their skill and workload.

### 6.2.5 Age of Retirement

The age of retirement of all rice mill workers is 58 years. This is in accordance with Government of India's rules. However, for illiterate mill hands, accurate age is difficult to ascertain and often workers much older than 58 can be found to be still working. Also, the union may intervene in specific cases where the worker is physically fit to work even after reaching 58 years of age and allow her/him to continue with the job.

### 6.2.6 Housing and Lodging

There is a free lodging arrangement for the majority of workers within the mill. This arrangement varies from mill to mill depending upon the availability of space and the economic condition of the owner. The number of workers using this facility may include small families or worker couples as well as outstation women workers. There is one room
and verandah space allotment per family of worker. There is also a separate arrangement for sleeping in dormitories for two or three unmarried workers. They reside in a single room and arrange their cooking jointly. The gadi staff who are single also reside within the mill’s quarter but in a separate one, and get free food. Each worker (whether he/she resides in mill quarter or not) is usually supplied with kura free of cost as domestic fuel. Clearly, the rice mill owners try to ensure a steady supply of labour through these arrangements. These measures have also helped to improve the living conditions of workers.

6.2.7 Job Protection

All the rice mill workers have unionized under the banner of CITU. Their union has tried hard to set up a provident fund and adoption of a cheap Janata policy to insure against accidental deaths of rice mill workers. The mill owners deposit Rs 15 annually for a death benefit of Rs 25,000 for each worker’s family. After 2002, this annual premium has increased to Rs 30 and the accidental benefit amount too has risen to Rs 100,000. The mill owners have also introduced a provident fund for the monthly paid staff since March 1989. At the time of retirement, the monthly-paid staff get 15 days’ payment per year of the total length of working years and others get 9 days' average payment per year for the entire duration of service. In case of an accident during the duty hour, the owner would bear the expenditure for treatment of that worker. If the worker is unable to work after accident for sometime, he/she will get 15 days’ leave with pay. The women workers also enjoy maternity leave and maternity benefits. Various bilateral agreements are given with critical comments at the end as Annexure II.

6.2.8 By-products

The by-products of all the rice mills are the same that is, bran, husk, coarse husk, and broken rice etc. These are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

6.2.9 Input-Output Ratio

In all dryer plus chatal based mills, the input and output ratio is more or less 100 : 63. Out of 100 kilograms of paddy, rice production is approximately 63 kilograms of which approximately 5 kilograms is broken rice (khud), bran approximately 3.5 kilograms, immature paddy (akra) 6-7 kilograms, coarse kura is about 3.5 kilograms and the rest is the fine kura (husk).
6.2.10. Source of Paddy

Among the 18-surveyed rice mills, all (excepting Hara Gouri rice mill, which generally collects major part of its paddy from Bihar) procure more than 50 per cent of their paddy supplies from Burdwan district itself. The rest of the paddy is supplied by other districts like Midnapore, Birbhum, Bankura and Murshidabad and other states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. All rice mills purchase their required paddy not from a fixed district or state but depending on the supply by the brokers. Mills having rural locations purchase local paddy (which is the major share) directly from the cultivators. The mills of Burdwan city also process the paddy of local villages. In other words it can be said that the above districts and states are the catchment area of the rice milling industry of Burdwan region. Each mill has its own distinct combination of supplier districts and states. For example Shanti rice mill, purchase 50 per cent of their total requirement from the Burdwan district and the rest from Birbhum, Bankura, Murshidabad districts, and the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The case of small rice mills like Laxmi Narayan is different. This mill runs on the paddy from only local sources in Burdwan district.

Table 6.1: Source of Paddy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of rice mills</th>
<th>Sources of paddy (district, states)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sree Shankar rice mill</td>
<td>- Midnapore and Burdwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Jessoria rice mill</td>
<td>- Burdwan, Bankura, Birbhum, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bardhamaneswar rice mill</td>
<td>- Burdwan and Birbhum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Shanti rice mill</td>
<td>- Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura, Murshidabad, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. New rice mill</td>
<td>- Burdwan and Midnapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Bharat Laxmi rice mill</td>
<td>- Burdwan, Midnapore, Birbhum, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Khetranath rice mill</td>
<td>- Burdwan, Midnapore, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Laxmishree rice mill</td>
<td>- Burdwan, Midnapore, Bankura, Birbhum, and Bihar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Nilkanta rice mill</td>
<td>- Burdwan, Birbhum, Purulia, Bankura, Midnapore, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Laxmi Narayan rice mill</td>
<td>- Burdwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Bhubaneshwar rice mill</td>
<td>- Burdwan, Midnapore, Bankura and Birbhum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Durgamata rice mill</td>
<td>- Burdwan and Midnapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Ma Tara rice mill</td>
<td>- Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura and Midnapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Hara Gouri rice mill</td>
<td>- Bihar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.2.11 Marketing of Finished Rice

The sphere of influence of rice milling industry of Burdwan region was greater than it is now, till about early 1999 as there was demand for rice from this region in neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka (the reasons of decline are discussed elaborately in chapter IX). According to the owner of Khetranath rice mill, till the crop year 1997-'98 a major share of rice product was exported to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh from his mill. Among the 18 surveyed rice mills the owner of 9 exported rice to Bangladesh in addition to other parts within the state/country. There are 3 rice mills, which had a good market in Sri Lanka. During interviews with the rice millers, it was evident that a major share of rice of Burdwan region (7 mills) is consumed in North Bengal. Siliguri, the heart of North Bengal, acts as a focal point for transportation of rice of Burdwan region to the northeastern states of India. The northeastern region is backward in paddy cultivation and consequently imports some rice from Burdwan. However, the economic situation has changed considerably since the full impact of economic reforms in India has been felt. In the post-reforms economic situation, demand for Burdwan’s rice has decreased considerably but the demand for murir chal, which has a local market, has not ebbed. It is also sent up to areas near Nepal border. According to the owner of Jessoria and Ma Tara rice mills, their rice is now also sent to Delhi markets along with North Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Assam and other less or non-paddy producing parts of West Bengal such as Purulia, Nadia, North and South 24 Parganas, Howrah, and the western part of Burdwan district.

Other good markets of rice of Burdwan are Calcutta, Amtala (Howrah), Krishnanagar, Baruipara, Singgur, Kalyani, Ranaghat, Bongaon (located on Nadia-Bangladesh border, acting as a transfer point for export of rice to the Bangladesh). No rice mill has hard and fast rules of marketing the rice to a particular combination of regions but the destination of finished rice depends upon market demands or prices.
6.2.12. Labour Requirements in Traditional, Mixed and Fully Modernized Mills

As mentioned before, rice mills that can process 600 bags of paddy in a day are of 3 types – traditional *chatal*-based, mixed and fully modernized. There is a negative relationship between the number of workers required and the degree of modernization. Here we have analyzed and compared the labour requirements of these 3 types of mills (Figure 6.2). In traditional *chatal*-based mills, as there is no other means of drying paddy mechanically, the proportion of *chatal* worker among the total is maximum (about 48 per cent). This percentage share is somewhat similar in case of mixed type mills (about 47 per cent) because they try to utilize sunny days. However, there is no *chatal* worker at all in fully dryer based mills. So the total requirement of workers is more or less half than the total workers of traditional and mixed type mills. In the first and second type of mills, the proportion of contract plus *basta sarai shramik* is quite same – about 29 per cent and 28 per cent respectively. This proportion is nearly double (about 55 per cent) and constitutes a major share of the total number of workers in fully modernized mills. The main reason is their higher milling capacity than the rest 2. The percentage of machine *coolies* is also like in the first two, about 11 per cent. However, their share is higher (about 19 per cent) in fully modernized mills, where these *coolies* usually carry all raw materials near the machine. The milling *mistris* (including pressure and parboiling) constitute about 2 per cent of total workers in traditional mills, but is somewhat higher in the second (about 4 per cent) and third type (about 8 per cent). The cause is higher production capacity in the last 2 types of mills than the traditional one. Naturally, the proportion of white-collar workers is double (about 19 per cent) in modern mills than the first two. In modern mills, for different mechanical sections separate logs recording details of work done by labourers must be maintained.

6.2.13 Common Problems

Of all the common problems faced by rice mills (except the Ma Tara rice mill, which has a smokeless chimney), the most acute are pollution related, that is air, water and sound pollution created by them. These problems of pollution often lead to objections by local residents. The last chapter of this dissertation discusses pollution problems and remedies. Another common problem concerns the marketing of the finished product, rice, and the imbalance between demand and supply of raw material as well as for the finished product. Other problems are related to the proposed modernization of plant and its impact on the subsequent number of workers, the sanction of bonus even during mill closure for a month or even when the mills run at a loss. All these problems are discussed in detail in the concluding chapter.
LABOUR REQUIREMENTS IN TRADITIONAL, MIXED AND FULLY MODERNIZED MILLS
BURDWAN CITY AND ADJOINING AREAS

Types of workers
- Chatal worker
- Contract worker and basta shramik
- Machine coolie
- Milling mistry (including pressure & parboiling)
- Official staff

Figure 6.2
6.3 Large Rice Mill

6.3.1 Shanti Rice Mill

There is only one large rice mill in Burdwan town, which is also the largest in the entire state called Shanti rice mill. A well-known *Ugrakhatriya* Koner family of Burdwan town established this mill 52 years ago. The present owner, Aloke Agarwal, originally from Sikar district of Rajasthan desert region, purchased this mill from Koner family in the year 1974. Notably, the changeover of ownership was from local to a traditional non-Bengalee business community. This mill is specialized for producing rice for puffed rice (*murir chal*).

**Location**

The mill is located within the city at Alamganj, the old core of Burdwan and the central hub of rice milling industry with close proximity to the highway. This mill provides an important example of informal manufacturing unit along with some formal characteristics in respect of production, number of workers employed, their lodging arrangements, presence of weigh bridge facility and financial investment. Its location in the old congested central part of the city is also significant.

**Per Day Milling**

This mill crushes on an average 120 tons of raw paddy per day, fabricating about 80 tons of *murir chal*. Its raw material and finished product ratio is 100:63. The rest of the product comprises 3 per cent bran and 24 per cent husk, immature paddy, dust, mud clots etc.

**Total Working Days**

The mill operates nearly throughout the year. Though this mill is of the mixed type (*chatal* plus dryer), the owner uses dryer all the year round to enhance the production. For fabrication of rice from paddy, the time requirement is 24 hours, which is reasonably short. The system is profitable too.

**Raw Paddy**

This mill procures raw paddy from Burdwan (50 per cent), Birbhum, Bankura, Murshidabad districts through brokers.
Labour Characteristics

Origin of Workers

Workers are primarily from the rural areas of Burdwan district itself, there are workers also from Birbhum, Murshidabad and 24 Parganas as well as from the city proper.

Total Number of Workers

The total number of workers of Shanti rice mill is 205, among which 63 are women (engaged in chatal work), 76 are contract labourers, 40 are technical workers like boiler, dryer, machine, pressure, engine, generator operators, and 26 are gadi staff.

Maximum number of workers belong to the age group of 20-40 years, revealing a young age profile. All the gadi staff are graduates except 2. Other blue collared workers' qualifications vary from illiterate to school level.

About 10 per cent of total workers have given service here for an average of 13 years at a stretch in this mill and most of them are male workers.

The minimum number of labourers required for continuing the milling operations per day in one shift is 75, reflecting the labour intensiveness of the work in spite of mechanization. This is because of the mixed nature of the milling process.

Perception of the Owner about Levy

In the procurement year (1998-99), Shanti rice mill paid the levy of 20,500 quintals rice to the government. For rendering this amount of paddy to Government, the mill owner is said to have incurred a loss of over Rs 60 lakhs. This is because at that time the market rate was Rs 10 per kilograms whereas the government rate for levied rice was Rs 7.24 (Surveyed in year 2000).

Interestingly, the rice mill owners deposit the quota of levied rice (payable during a whole year) in a period of a month or so in place of doing so by installment spread over the year. They take advantage of procuring the distress sale by the marginal farmers, themselves artificially influencing the market price which remains far below the remunerative price. Thus the poor stratum of agricultural sector helplessly submit to the organized movement of the rice mill owners.
Distinguishing Characteristics

- This mill has constructed a separate building outside its boundary for housing the workers. About 195 workers live there.
- This mill has its own weigh-bridge to facilitate truck transport of paddy/rice.
- According to the owner, the peak season for milling paddy is from November-March and May-July.
- Shanti rice mill of Burdwan is the only export license holder mill in the region, indicating that this mill has a wider market than other mills.
- The finished rice produced by this mill usually goes to Calcutta and its various suburbs like Howrah, Krishnanagar, Baruipara, Singur, Kalyani, Ranaghat, Bongaon, and is exported to Bangladesh.
- This mill has a waste disposal site outside the mill boundary but on own land, which is a low land. When the low land is filled with ash, it is withdrawn and carried near the banks of Banka nallah by trucks. Sometimes farmers carry this ash waste away putting it in a soak pit to rot and for use later as fertilizer.
- Power consumption of this mill is on an average 40,000 units per month.
- The mill has 4 computers, indicating modernization.
- This mill has diesel engine and generator sets for regulating power supply.

6.4 Medium-Sized Mills

6.4.1 Laxmishree rice mill

Laxmishree rice mill of Alamganj was established in the year 1965. It is run as a family partnership business; Mr Amar Nath Kundu is the eldest of the 3 brothers who spoke with us at length. His father was the one to establish the mill from capital made in rice cultivation in Burdwan area. This mill is specialized for producing bhater chal and it is a mixed type mill.

Location

Laxmishree rice mill is located in Alamganj, having easy access to the highway for procuring raw material and marketing of finished product.

Per Day Milling

This mill crushes on an average 42 tons of paddy, fabricating about 28 tons of rice daily. The raw material and finished product ratio in this mill is 100 : 66.67.
Total Working Days
The mill operates for about 330 days a year, as it is a mixed mill. It must be noted here that even with dryer, some workdays are bound to be lost due to the lack of market demand.

Raw Paddy
This mill procures raw paddy from Burdwan (approximately 60 per cent), Midnapore, Bankura and Birbhum districts, and from other states like Bihar through brokers.

Labour Characteristics
In this mill there are local workers as well as workers from outside. The majority of migrant workers came from nearby Dumka district of the poverty-stricken Jharkhand state. Other migrant workers are from the districts of Midnapore, South 24 Parganas, Bankura etc.

The total number of workers of Laxmishree rice mill is 90. Among the total workers, there are 39 women. The number of contract labourers is 23 and the number of gadi staff is seven.

The largest number of workers belongs to the age group of 25–40 years, but there are some rather old workers too as there is no system of date of birth verification at the time of employment. Consequently, many workers, if able-bodied, continue with their jobs even after getting old in years. Among the gadi staff 4 are graduates, one staff has a post-graduate qualification and the rest 2 are high school qualified. The qualification of manual labourers varies from illiterate to even Madhyamik.

About 7 per cent of total workers have worked here for 15 years at a stretch in this mill since 1985. This indicates, contrary to popular belief, a lack of mobility among the workers. This is because the gadi staff working in the office has fewer opportunities in other jobs.

The minimum number of labour requirement for continuing the milling operation per day is 65-70.

Distinguishing Characteristics
• This mill has a steam engine. Steam engines help in running the plant directly without the aid of a generator.
• The main markets of the finished product of this mill are Bihar, Bangladesh, Calcutta, South India etc. and transported through brokers by trucks.
• According to one of the owners, the peak season for production is from December to March.
• The waste disposal site of Laxmishree rice mill is situated outside the mill boundary, at a distance of a few metres from the mill. The spot is a low-lying land and the mill owns it. Workers carry the waste to this spot in baskets over the head.
• As this mill produces bhater chal using parboiling method, its water requirement is 3000–4000 litres per day. The source of water in this mill is shallow tube well and well.

6.4.2 Nilkantha Rice Mill
Nilkantha Rice Mill is one of the oldest mills of the town established during pre-independence period in 1942. Since the time of its establishment, the ownership was transferred about five times. The present owners have been running this mill since end-August, 1997. This mill is now owned by four partners, three of whom are from the same family (father and two sons) and one is an outsider. The eldest partner is Subodh Roy whose father Ramapada Roy founded this mill. The mill is not a modernized one, and there is no mechanical drying facility in it. Therefore, milling processes still depend on conventional sunning chatal within its boundary.

Location
This mill, also located in Alamganj just to the south-central part of the town close to the Banka, has easy accessibility to the road transport network.

Per Day Milling
This mill usually processes on an average 30 tons of paddy and fabricates about 18 tons of rice, that is murir chal. Other byproducts are bran (weighing 2 tons), broken rice (about a ton) and the rest is husk, immature paddy, dust, mud clots etc.

Total Working Days
The total working day of this mill varies between 250-300 days in a year because this mill has no special arrangement for drying during the rainy season for increasing production.
Raw Paddy
In this mill the major share of raw paddy usually comes from Burdwan district proper. Other suppliers are neighbouring districts like Birbhum, Purulia, Bankura, Midnapore and states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar through brokers.

Labour Characteristics
The total number of workers engaged in direct and indirect milling operations is 115. Among the daily wage labourers, the number of women is greater. However, in terms of total workers of the mill, men are more in number. The number of women workers is 51, in addition to 3 gadi staff, and 50 contract labourers. There is 11 supervisory staff overseeing the functions of boiler, machine and chatal.

The largest number of workers belongs to the age group of 35-45 years as in other mills but this average hides a large range. The age of the junior-most worker is 22 years, whereas the oldest one is over 60. The accountant is a graduate and both the clerk and godown keeper are school passed. Many blue-collar workers are either just literate or illiterate. Of the total 115 workers, seven have worked in this mill since 1976 at a stretch.

The minimum number of labour requirement for continuing the milling operation per day is also 115. This is because the mill has no dryer and milling fully depends upon the sun drying of paddy on chatal, where most of the workers are engaged. In the absence of any labour, a substitute labourer may join in place of the absentee on a nagda basis (cash basis). Majority of the workers in this mill are local. Labourers also originate from Murshidabad and from Bihar.

Distinguishing Characteristics
- According to the owner of this mill there are two peak seasons of production, March to June and November to March. Production is affected during the rainy season, as there is no special arrangement for mechanical drying of paddy.
- The main markets for rice of this mill are home market of the district proper as well as Bihar, Orissa, North Eastern States and other neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal etc.
- This mill is run by steam engine without the aid of electricity.
- Though the mill is not fully modernized, but 2 shift milling has been practiced in this mill indicating higher productivity.
- No worker is liable to deliver double duties.
- This mill provides 32 rooms for about lodging of 125 workers.
- The mill used to fabricate *murir chal* and that’s why the per day water requirement of this mill is about 750 litres, which is comparatively lower than *bhater chal* producing mills like Laxmishree rice mill.
- The disposal site of Nilkantha rice mill is about 15 *kathas* inside the boundary wall. When the site filled up, the rotted mass usually carried by truck to the bands of Banka.

### 6.4.3 Ananda Rice Mill

Ananda Rice Mill is one of the newly established modernized rice mills situated in the rural periphery of Burdwan city. The mill was established in 1997. After the establishment of the mill it ran for only eight months before closing down. It reopened in 2001 after a couple of change in ownership. The third owner – Mr Shaw – is the sole owner. As this mill is fully dryer-based so there is no dependence on conventional sun drying.

**Location**

This mill is situated in Nandra *gram panchayat* on the Burdwan-Kalna road within about three kilometres from the municipal boundary. The location of this mill is in the middle of a rich paddy producing region.

**Per day Milling**

This mill usually processes on an average 18 tons of paddy and fabricates about 12 tons of rice. From 100 kilogram of paddy, the amount of rice available is about 67 kilogram, broken rice two kilograms, bran 5 kilograms, dust and mud mixed with paddy is 6 kilogram and the rest amount is husk.

**Total Working Days**

The total number of working days of this mill varies between 330-342 days in a year. In a fully drier based mill like this, the few non-working days are explained by the lack of market demand.

**Raw Paddy**

As this mill is situated within the rice producing fields of Burdwan, it procures the maximum amount of paddy locally. The owner purchases paddy also from other districts like Birbhum.
and Midnapore, and other states like Bihar. The owner directly purchases paddy from the local farmers for which the procurement price of paddy is lower than indirect purchasing through brokers or middlemen.

**Labour Characteristics**

The total number of workers engaged in milling operation both directly and indirectly are only 18 as compared to Nilkantha mill's 115. Beside 2 winnowers, there are no female workers in this mill as it is a fully dryer based mill with no dependence on *chatal* drying where women workers are usually employed. The 2 women workers are generally engaged in winnowing of the sample of paddy for assessment of the proportion of dust, mud clots and immature paddy. This mill reveals that within rice milling industry, the role of women changes with increasing levels of technology.

There are only 2 *gadi* staff, 2 mechanics, one fireman and one night guard looking after most of the jobs. The rest 10 workers work in the machine room for direct milling operations. This low number of workers indicates a lower production cost (though the initial capital investment for installing the dryer is high), which increases the profitability of the mill.

Maximum number of workers belongs to the category of 25-45 years of mature working age. The numbers of workers who have continued their service in this mill since its establishment are only 2. The ages of the senior most worker and junior most worker in this mill are 46 years and 23 years respectively.

The qualifications of the *gadi* staff are graduate and Madhyamik. The qualification of two mechanics and the fireman is school level (below Madhyamik). We have seen in the case of an older mill’s mechanic that he is illiterate but has acquired practical knowledge and technical know-how through experience. The women workers are literate. Except one, all workers have been to primary school and approximately 50 per cent have studied well into the school.

Minimum number of labour requirement for continuing the milling operation in a day is only 13 as this mill is a modernized one.
Majority of the workers in this mill have usually come from the villages of Burdwan district, at a distance of about 10, 30 and 70 kilometres from this area. Beside the district’s labour force, some workers have also come in this mill from Orissa.

**Distinguishing Characteristics**

- This mill is situated on the right hand side of Burdwan-Kalna road in an area, which is not electrified. The mill has to depend on diesel set generator for running the milling operation. This is a major hindrance in increasing production and to the number of operating shifts.
- This mill directly purchases bulk of the paddy from local farmers indicating its lack of dependence on brokers assuring lower price of paddy for the plant.
- According to the owner, the peak season for milling paddy is from November to March.
- The finished rice produced by this mill usually remains within the district, especially in the western coalfield area. The rice is also sent to North and South 24 Parganas.
- The mill has the total area of 6 bighas within a boundary wall. As this mill is a dryer-based one, there is sufficient space for further installations. Its spacious character has been possible only because of its peripheral location.
- In this area the residential localities are far away from the mill. This mill has a disposal site within the mill boundary covering about 2 bighas of plain land. Therefore, there have not been any objections raised about the pollution created by the mill. The waste product is carried in head load baskets by the workers.
- According to the owner of this mill there are seasonal variations in the amount of waste product. Waste is maximum during the month of December and January.
- For fabricating rice from raw paddy time requirement is 20 hours.

### 6.4.4 Shib Shakti Rice Mill

Shib Shakti Rice mill is one of the early-established rice mills in the rural urban fringe of Burdwan. This rice mill was established in 1962 and milling is now being controlled by the descendents of the founder. At present it is run by two brothers, Debnath Mondal and Jitendranath Mondal, indicating family partnership. This mill is a mixed type mill.
Location
Shib Shakti mill is situated within the jurisdiction of Saraitikar gram panchayat on Burdwan–Katwa Road just beyond the municipal boundary of Burdwan city.

Per Day Milling
This mill usually produces on an average 250 quintal of paddy and fabricates about 162.50 quintals of rice. From 100 kilogram of paddy, the amount of rice is 65 kilograms, broken rice three kilograms, bran 20 kilograms, dust and mud clots mixed with paddy is six kilograms and the rest amount is husk.

Total Working Days
The total working days of this mill varies between 300-310 in a year. The dryer system helps in drying paddy in rainy season thus increasing the total production.

Raw Paddy
This mill gets its raw paddy supplies from neighbouring villages like Jhinguti, Talit and Fagupur etc. as this unit is located close to the paddy producing areas. Maximum amount of paddy comes from home district and also small amounts from Birbhum district through brokers.

Labour Characteristics
Total number of workers engaged in milling operation directly and indirectly are 38 including 8 gadi staff. The number of women workers is 20. There are 2 mechanics and two firemen. The number of male workers directly engaged in milling operation is 10. It can be said that the females outnumber males due to the partially chatal-based nature of work.

The maximum number of workers belong to the age-category of 30-40 years. There is one worker who has worked in this mill for about 28 years uninterruptedly. There is one graduate gadi staff and five are school qualified. The mechanics and the fireman had school level education.

Minimum number of labour requirement for continuing milling operation in a day is 20, which is not very high. This is because of the mixed nature of the mill.
Majority of workers in this mill usually come from neighbouring villages of Burdwan like Raina, Guskara, Balgona, Hatgobindapur, Palsa etc. Workers also originate from the district of Birbhum and even from the state of Orissa.

Distinguishing Characteristics

- There is only one shift of milling between 8 am and 4 pm meaning that the full capacity of machine is not utilized.
- This mill usually fabricates two types of rice – bhater chal and murir chal depending upon the demand of the market. For producing rice from raw paddy the time requirement is 12 hours for murir chal and 20-24 hours for bhater chal.
- The major share of finished rice of this mill mainly goes to 24 Parganas and Howrah districts and is sold within the state.
- The area for dumping the wastes is not very large - about 15,000 square feet of land within the mill boundary. As this mill is situated within the rural-urban fringe and the dumping ground is on own land, the mill does not experience pollution related problems.
- The daily water requirement for milling operations is about 6000 – 7000 litres and the source is underground water lifted by a powerful submersible pump.
- The used water of the mill passes through a narrow nullah locally known as Sapjola, which eventually joins with the Banka nullah finally contaminating the stream.
- This mill is situated in an area of the rural-urban fringe that is not electrified. Therefore, the milling operations are done with the help of generators. This is a problem for the owner who cannot increase the production of rice even if he wishes to.
- Also, as a consequence, this mill has not been able to computerize the accounts.
- This mill introduced a dryer for the rainy season resulting in enhanced production. The owner is now interested in stopping all chatal work and operating the entire production with the help of dryer. However, according to the contract with the union, the labourers who used to do chatal work cannot be sacked from their work. This retention of excess labour retards full modernization of the mill.

6.4.5 Ma Tara Rice Mill

Ma Tara Rice Mill is one of the fully modernized rice mills of Burdwan. Established in the year 1995, this mill has achieved a separate entity within the district by adopting non-
conventional sources of energy for the overall milling processes. Since the time of its establishment, there has been no change in ownership. The proprietor of this unit is Ram Narayan Bhagat, originally from Ballia district of Uttar Pradesh. Mr Bhagat is a person, who always tries to keep pace with changing technology, makes day to day innovations and adjusts to the changing economy. He has installed a gasifier in 2000-2001 for generating energy/gas to run the mill and the mill generally produces murir chal.

Location
The mill is located in Tejganj under Burdwan Municipality along the Bypass of the National Highway near the Damodar river course. It enjoys easy accessibility to raw material and facilities for the transportation of finished products without traffic congestion.

Per day Milling
This mill crushes on an average 30 tons of paddy and produces 21 tons of rice daily. The raw material and finished product ratio in this mill is approximately 100:68.

Total Working Days
As it is a fully modernized mill, the rains do not hamper milling operations. Thus, the mill operates almost throughout the year.

Raw Paddy
This mill procures raw paddy from districts of Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura, and Midnapore. Of these places, the maximum amount comes from Burdwan district itself (neighbouring villages of Burdwan town).

Distinguishing Characteristics
- Total number of workers in this mill is 22 (including four office/gadi staff), which is comparatively lower than the number of workers of mills having the same production capacity. This has been possible as the whole milling operation is done in a mechanized way, indicating less dependence on manual labour and rains. As the number of labourers are low, there is a savings in labour cost (which is a part of the production cost) indicating higher profitability than chatal-based mills.
- There are no women directly engaged in milling operations, as in rice milling industry technical jobs are usually meant exclusively for male workers. So gender discrimination is more prominent in this mill. There are only four workers generally
appointed for testing (by winnowing) the amount of dust, mud clots, immature paddy mixed with the paddy of sample bags of 60 kilogram weight for milling later.

- One interesting feature in this mill is, that all the blue-collar workers except one are literate ranging from school level to Madhyamik. Four office staff are graduates. The blue-collar workers have taken training for the proper use and maintenance of gasifier and milling operation by the Grain Processing Industries (India) Pvt. Ltd. who supplied the machinery for the gasifier. This awareness indicates the upgrading of this mill towards formalization because in all other rice mills, for entry of labour no minimum educational qualifications are required.

- All the workers are young - except 2 and the majority of them have started their careers in this mill.

- In this fully modernized and non-conventional energy driven mill, there is no provision for hard labour of the worker but utmost care and attention are necessary. So whereas frequent migration of workers is a regular feature of other mills, the workers of this mill have no such tendency.

- Here all the workers are local except the 2 office staff and there is no arrangement for the lodging of workers. In this mill there is arrangement for cooking of free midday meal for all workers collectively. This system actually helps to improve the continuous presence of workers within the campus during working hours without interrupting milling operations.

- In this mill there is no wage discrimination among manual labourers. All the manual labourers irrespective of whether they engage in machine, boiler or gasifier get the same pay – Rs 41 and one kilogram of rice per day. This higher amount is usually received by only the machine workers in other mills.

- This mill continues its production in two shifts of 10 hours indicating that time requirement is also low due to the presence of machines.

- The amount of investment for plant machinery and gasifier is very high indicating that this particular mill is difficult to categorize as an informal manufacturing unit.

- As this rice mill generates power through gasification² of rice husk, its expenditure for power is 80 per cent less than the fuel costs of other mills using conventional energy. Out of total production cost, the expenditure for power and diesel is only 55–60 per cent. Though the initial investment for installation of gasifier is very high but it is more profitable in the long run. So in this mill production cost is much lower than the production costs of other traditional mills but the selling price of rice would be the
same as others depending on market demands. Thus this milling unit fabricates rice more profitably.

- There is no pollution problem except noise. Due to internal combustion of husk within the gasifier, there is no suspended burned husk particulate in the surrounding atmosphere. In this mill there is a loco boiler and fluebed type furnace that have created a smokeless environment. Smoke is generally emitted in negligible amounts during the switching on and off of the gasifier/or first firing and extinction of the furnace.

- In this mill in spite of the use of husk for producing energy, some amount of husk remains as excess, which is usually sold in the market.

- The waste of this mill is burned husk, which the owner usually disposes off on the lowlands along the river Damodar by trucks (burned husk covering 300 cubic square feet) with a transportation cost of Rs 110 daily. The burned husk has a carbon content of about 13 per cent. The recent trend is the people of the neighbouring slum areas of the Damodar embankment to carry this husk away to produce briquettes mixed with mud for use as domestic fuel. Therefore, the mill has actually helped in creating a downstream chain of economic use of its waste instead of creating environmental hazards.

- The owner of Ma Tara rice mill also owns 2 other rice mills – both are partnership mills but there are variations in their natures. The original mill of Mr Bhagat’s family was Bharat Mata rice mill located in the nearby town of Guskara, now running for 2 generations. There are 6 partners in this mill (three brothers including Mr. Bhagat and three friends). Another mill of the owner of Ma Tara rice mill is Kamakhya rice mill in village Nasigram. It is also run by partnership. Mr Bhagat did not install gasifier at the above 2 partnership mills because the partners did not want to take the risk of huge investment.

- In the last 2 years or so when majority of rice mill owners have become concerned about existence of their mill, the owner of Ma Tara rice mill is optimist about the market. He has taken a decision for extension of the mill and has initiated another project for producing finished puffed raw rice. This ready made raw rice would be readily puffed like popcorn by small amount of heat without the help of sand, very quickly.

- The District controller of Food and Supply have given permission of delivering 45 metric tons of rice as levy for the procurement year 2001-2002 for this mill as an exceptional case at a time when the government is unwilling to procure rice levy.

- The rice produced in this mill is sent to North Bengal, Delhi and Bihar through brokers.
PLATE 9: WORKERS QUARTER PROVIDED BY MILL OWNER

PLATE 10: GASIFIER (MA TARA RICE MILL)
6.4.6 Hara Gouri Rice Mill

Among the surveyed rice mills, Hara Gouri rice mill of Kalyanpur on Kalna Road is a fully dryer-based mill. It exhibits some notable features necessitating special mention.

**Characteristics**

- Located just beyond the municipal boundary of Burdwan, the mill occupies an area of about 2.5 *bighas* of land including 0.5 *bighas* for putting the waste. Starting its operation in June 2000, the mill was locked in March, 2001 by the State Bank of India as the owner had failed to repay the Bank loan. Even before closure, only 2-3 trucks of rice were being processed in the mill. The quantity is negligible for a fully dryer-based mill, indicating a lack of total capacity utilization.

- There are 2 partners who established this mill and they are distantly related. The only probable cause of closure of the mill is the fact that they took a great risk by investing a large amount of capital for installing modern machinery. Both of them have had previous experience of running rice mills as they have their individual rice mills with single ownership or different partnership.

- The total number of workers employed in this mill was 15. Among the 15, 6 were from Burdwan district mainly Nigon, Jabui, Gobindapur and Dewandighi villages around Burdwan. The six *mutiyas* mainly came from 24 Parganas and Orissa and the about 3 workers came from within one kilometer radius of the mill. The largest proportion of workers is within the age group of 20-45 years.

- One important feature of the mill is that there are no women workers as there was no use of *chatal*. Only one women worker was employed for winnowing on *nagda* basis. This gender discrimination is increasing with increasing modernization of rice mills.

- There was just one office staff in the mill who only went to primary school. When the mill was running, he used to get a monthly wage of Rs 1500 with free food and lodging. Even now at the time of mill closure, this office staff lives in the mill campus as a caretaker. Even though the mill was running, it was only in name and that too at a loss. In spite of this, the mill owner had to pay the bonus to 11 workers with minor cuts as per the resolution of the joint meeting of Rice Mill Owners Association and Rice Mill Workers Association in the year 2000-2001 (see Annexure II).

- As this mill was a fully dryer-based one, its working hours were determined by the mechanical operator but not exceeding 8 hours. The general working hours of this mill was from 7 am to 2 pm. The time requirement for processing of paddy into rice is 18 hours, which is comparatively less than other fully modernized mills.
• The raw paddy milling capacity of this rice mill was 18 tons. The amount of finished rice was varied from 11.5 – 12 tons.

• There is a toilet and a urinal within the mill campus, indicating the owner's greater awareness and concern for improved work environment. Also this mill has a capacity to accommodate about 22 workers.

• The chimney height of the mill is 75 feet following the Pollution Control Board norm and the path of the chimney is usually cleaned after every 600 bags of paddy is processed. The dumping ground of the waste product of this mill is low-lying land and situated within the mill's boundary. These wastes are carried by workers in baskets and sacks, and have never given reason for complaints from neighbours. The used water of this mill would generally flow into the Banka nullah.

• This mill is located in an area that is yet to be electrified, and hence is run by 2 diesel generators. A smaller capacity generator was used for general lighting of the rice mill. The per day diesel requirement for running the generator as well as the mill was 200 litres. The sources of water in this mill are submersible pumps and tube wells.

In spite of better infrastructure and facilities, the mill failed to make a profit. The reasons are not quite clear. Even now, this mill has remained closed for about a year. During the period of survey this mill was running but at a loss.

6.5 Small-Sized Mill
6.5.1 Laxmi Naryan Rice Mill
There is only one chatkal-based mill left not only in Burdwan city but also in the state – in case of small sized mill, named Laxmi Narayan rice mill. The mill was established in the year 1969 by Mr Kalikrishna Roy. There has been no change in ownership either through lease or sale. It is run as a partnership firm, belonging to a father and son. Production in this mill has been stopped for 3 years since the latter part of 1998. The mill has been closed for about a year, but at the time of survey it was in a running condition.

Location
This mill is located in the Bhatchhala area of Shree Palli, Burdwan city, with a close proximity to Sadarghat road. This too used to be an old industrial area of the city, but many of the older units have become obsolete and unprofitable. Also there is much community pressure on the mill owners to improve cleanliness standards.
Per day Milling
This mill crushes on an average 30 quintals of raw paddy per day fabricating about 18-19 quintals rice. Thus the raw material to finished product ratio is 100:60. Of the rest 40 per cent, about eight per cent is bran and the rest includes husk, immature paddy, dust, mud clots etc.

Total Working days
As this mill does not have a dryer facility, its production is hampered during the rainy season and the number of working days varies between 265 and 270 days.

Raw Paddy
This mill purchases its required paddy mainly from the open market in Burdwan district through brokers.

Labour Characteristics
In this mill there are workers from villages Burdwan district as well as from elsewhere. The contract labourers are mainly from Purulia. A small fraction of labourers is local.

Total Number of Workers
The total number of workers in Laxmi Narayan rice mill is 26. Among them, there are 10 female workers. There are 9 contract labourers, 2 mistris, 2 machine men, 1 fireman and 2 office staff in this mill. Though the mill follows a labour intensive process, its size does not allow for a larger workforce.

Maximum number of workers belongs to the age group of 30-40 years. There is no worker whose age is below 30 years. The academic qualification of 2 office staff is Higher Secondary. The qualification of manual labourers varies from illiterate to Madhyamik.

The oldest worker has worked in this mill is 15 years. The mill is run by only one owner from it’s inception.

Distinguishing characteristics
• This mill generally produces ‘common’ (not so fine) rice, demand for which is less in the market.
This mill is unable to process superfine rice because of older machinery which cannot perform parboiling. The production capacity is also very low. The owners are apprehensive of taking the risk of installing modern machinery, dryer and parboiling system in view of a fluctuating market. A discussion in the joint meeting of Labour Union and Owners’ Association recommended a 450-quintal paddy license for the mill, but the mill could not afford to produce that amount, consequently facing closure. Even when the mill is in a running condition, it does not operate daily.

This mill is constructed over only two bighas of land, which is very small with regards to chatal size.

The main market of the finished rice is local and the rest goes to North and South 24 Parganas districts.

The time requirement for producing rice from paddy is two days as the drying of paddy mainly depends on sunshine.

Important feature of the mill is that there is no temporary worker as the workers go home by rotation.

The mill usually has no excess kura (husk) for selling, as it is used for firing the boiler.

The mill’s quarters can house 27/28 workers.

The dumping ground of waste product of this mill is 5-7 kathas of high ground beyond the boundary wall. These wastes are cleared at an interval of six-eight months creating no major problem. Due to its low production capacity, the mill produces small amount of waste that is loaded by contract trucks at the rate of Rs 150 per trip.

The source of water in this mill is tube well.

6.6. Interpretation of Survey Results

In this section we shall now discuss the results of our field survey among the rice mill workers and mill owners. As stated earlier, we interviewed about ten per cent of workers on an average in 17 rice mills. We had to leave out Ma Tara mill workers, as the owner was unwilling to let me speak with the workers while they are within the mill campus. The survey was done with a structured questionnaire, but flexibility was maintained with regard to the specificities of individual mill. The entire exercise took about two years to complete. We first made contact with a particular trade union leader connecting us to a key contact in a rice mill. Alternatively, we made contacts with the rice mill owners through the Association or a common friend. After making a few introductory visits to the mill to familiarize ourselves to
both workers and the owner, we started to take notes on individual mill and created a profile of it. The questionnaire was revised accordingly several times, and the final interviews were done over a period of 6 months during peak work season, that is November-March. Before interviewing the workers, contacts were made with them and some amount of personal familiarity was developed. Each interview with the questionnaire took approximately an hour to complete. In total, we interviewed 126 persons. The following sub-sections give our interpretations of survey findings.

6.6.1. Demographic Characteristics
Age-sex structure, family size and structure, and the number of children are analyzed as they have a direct bearing on economic background of rice mill workers.

Age-sex Structure of Workers
The age-sex pyramid of workers reflects typical third world city characteristics. Among the total workers 41 per cent are female and the rest 59 per cent are male. The maximum concentration of workers is within the age group of 18 to 47 years (Table 6.2), as noted before. Though theoretically there are no labourers below 18 years due to the abolition of child labour, there is still a tiny percentage (0.79) of female workers in the below 18 years category. These small girls work in mills as substitutes of their parents. The young adults (18–35 years) are attracted to this sector due to ease of entry, no educational and skill requirement, excess labourer in agricultural field. The older adults (36–59 years) are compelled to work in rice mills to earn a livelihood considering their lack of other skills. About 11 per cent of male workers and about six per cent of female workers are within the age group of 42–53 years. After 53 years the numbers of workers decrease, as their health does not permit to deliver hard labour. Old workers either return to their original home or die early due to poor health. Common health problems of rice mill workers are bronchial ailments and hearing problems – both caused by this particular occupation. However, a general awareness about occupational health of workers is yet to develop among the mill owners.

Table 6.2: Age-sex Break-up of Rice Mill Workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group (Years)</th>
<th>Number of male</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
<th>Number of female</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 18</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 - 23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 - 29</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 35</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family Size and Structure

The average family size is not very large among rice mill workers of Burdwan region. About 74 per cent workers have a family size Raniganj between 1 to 6 persons (Table 6.3, Figure 6.3). Only about 26 per cent of them have a large size of family (7 to 8 and more persons).

The permanent residents and the second generation migrants usually maintain their families in the city as about 25 per cent of workers have their own house in the city. However, most of the workers are first generation migrants. The degree of rural-urban contracts is much higher among the first generation migrants.

Table 6.3: Distribution of Rice Mill Workers Among Different Family Sizes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family size (person)</th>
<th>No. of workers</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – 4</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – 6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>40.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 and Above</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey. 1999-2000
FAMILY SIZE AND STRUCTURE OF RICE MILL WORKERS
BURDWAN CITY AND ADJOINING AREAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Persons per Family</th>
<th>Percentage of Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above 8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Children per Worker
BURDWAN CITY AND ADJOINING AREAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Children per Worker</th>
<th>Percentage of Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 and above</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.3

Figure 6.4
Number of Children

The average number of children is not uniformly high among rice mill workers. About 45 per cent among them have one or two children (Table 6.4, Figure 6.4). The number of children is relatively high, that is 3-4 among about 26 per cent of the respondents. The proportion of rice mill workers with 5 and more children is about 17 per cent and they are mainly recent migrants. They still maintain their families in their rural houses and often bring over relatives and contacts/friends who help in bringing up children. About 12 per cent of rice mill workers do not have any children. A majority (about 72 per cent) among them is still unmarried. The rest 28 per cent are either infertile (about 7 per cent) or yet to have any children. There is also an amount of social awareness among the younger generation of workers and indicates urban influence. A male tribal migrant worker often marries again in case the wife is infertile.

Table 6.4: Number of Children, Rice Mill Workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children (presently alive)</th>
<th>Number of rice mill workers</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 2</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>45.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 and Above</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000

Original Home

There is a popular notion in Indian urban context that only the rural poor are the ones who migrate to urban centres (Mukherji, 1981). In is not completely true in our case of Burdwan region. Not all rural poor but only those rural poor who are unable to get other jobs in the villages usually migrate to cities. In the informal sector rice milling industry (in our case of study) of the city and its periphery, we found many who have migrated due to lack of jobs in villages. A major share of workers (about 22 per cent) have come from different villages like Paraj, Galsi, Hatgobindapur, Ketagram, Mongolkote etc. of the district proper. A negligible portion of workers commute daily with their nearby village home. The contract workers mainly come from the dry, infertile lands of Purulia (about 13 per cent), Birbhum (4 per cent), Bankura (about 7 per cent) districts of West Bengal (Table 6.5, Figure 6.5). The majority of contract labourers, about 18 per cent and about 10 per cent had come from the neighbouring states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa (mainly from Ganjam district) respectively, indicating spread of the sphere of influence of rice milling industry over the other states also. This informal sector also absorbs local people who are from the city proper (about 13 per cent). The workers also came to this industry from the other districts of West Bengal like Midnapore (about 2 per cent), North 24 Parganas (about 1 per cent), South 24 Parganas due to less amount of agricultural land and saline soil (about 7 per cent), Murshidabad (about 2 per cent) and Hooghly (about 2 per cent).
MIGRATION PATTERN OF RICE MILL WORKERS

Source: Based on data collected from socio-economic survey, 1999-2000.

Figure 6.5
The causes of migration of all migrants are not always economic; other causes include breakdown of joint families and the development of nuclear families (affected by higher degree of rural-urban interaction).

### Table 6.5: Original Home of Rice Mill Workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City/District/State</th>
<th>Number of workers</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burdwan city</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burdwan district</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midnapore</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purulia</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North 24 Parganas</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South 24 Parganas</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birbhum</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murshidabad</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooghly</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000

**Duration of Stay in Burdwan**

As joint families split up, a nuclear section migrates to Burdwan leaving their rural homes. After a period of adaptation to urban life, their preference for urban amenities and comparatively easier life grows. The average length of stay of surveyed workers in Burdwan region is 8 years, which corresponds to the average length of stay of workers in a particular mill. This correlation indicates that the workers came in this region only for joining in the rice mill. Majority of the respondent workers of about 25 per cent reside at Burdwan city for 11-15 years long (Table 6.6, Figure 6.6). Some of them started their urban life by joining the rice mill or after coming Burdwan they started their livelihood with other means of work and later took decision (by comparing other jobs) to join the rice mill. The next percentage shares of about 17 workers have been staying at Burdwan for 16-20 years. Also a major share of the rice mill workers (about 15 per cent) has been living at Burdwan city for 21-35 years. Some of the workers have their original house in this city. There is a strong correlation between length of stay of workers in Burdwan city and length of service in a particular rice mill. The
percentage of workers who reside here for 10 years and 5 years are about 12 and 14 respectively.

This type of migration of workers increases self-confidence and self-reliance of the migrant on the one hand making them more individualistic and self-centred on the other. They get, in this process of change, separated not only from the stream of village life, but also from that of their families, due to their changed outlook of life and the way of living. The other family members along with older parents continue to live in rural areas. However, these migrated groups usually maintain strong links with their rural counterpart to retain their share of landed property, mostly agricultural land and bastu bhita (ancestral home) there (Dasgupta, 1988). Sometimes the workers partially depend on incomes from landed property in rural areas to supplement urban incomes.

The percentage of new comers in the city (few days) is about 2 per cent. The percentage of workers who have lived here for about 6 months, less than one year or one year are about 5, 2 and 6 respectively. These workers are usually in search of better jobs, and often leave the mill after a brief stint.

Table 6.6: Length of Stay of Workers in Burdwan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of stay</th>
<th>Number of workers</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newcomers (few days)</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to six months</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one year</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to five years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to ten years</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 15 years</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 – 20 years</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 35 years</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 – 45 years</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000
6.6.2. Economic Conditions

To analyze the economic condition of the rice mill workers of Burdwan and its adjoining areas, 6 characteristics namely income, savings, number of earning members in the family, land ownership, house ownership, and domestic fuel use are studied in detail.

Income

Turning to the informal sector incomes, it is of course true that because of its irregular nature, the income of workers is difficult to establish with precision (Bhattacharya, 1998). This situation is also found in measuring the real income of rice mill workers. The daily wage labourers earned their income in terms of cash, rice (one kilogram of rice per day) and fuel (one bag kura in a week). Whereas the monthly wage labourers get monthly salary as well as free food. The provision of shelter is free of cost for all categories of migrant workers. The case of contract labourers is more critical as their money wage is not fixed and depends on the per day workload of the mill at the rate of contract. In spite of these, the survey has been done very carefully to draw out the actual income of the rice mill workers.

Unlike most other informal workers, the income of rice mill workers has been slightly improving (Table 6.2). However, the rate of improvement is not equivalent to industrial workers. The average daily income of chatal shramiks and machine shramiks are Rs 33 and Rs 35 respectively. Among the total surveyed rice mill workers, 32.54 per cent constitute chatal shramiks and about 24 per cent constitute by machine shramiks.

The contract labourers are weekly paid. The percentage share of contract labourers in the category of weekly income below Rs 300 and above Rs 500 are 17.14 and about 25 respectively (Table 6.7). The majority of the age-old workers are still in the income group of below Rs 300. About 57 per cent contract labourers earn between Rs 300 and 500. Both the income groups of Rs 300 to 500 and above Rs 500 are generally constituted by younger labourers, with good physical strength.

The average payment of monthly staff varies between Rs 600 and 2500. The major section of them (55 per cent) earns between Rs 1000 and 1600 (Table 6.8). The pressure mistri, math babu, fireman and in some cases the manager cum accountant fall in this category. The income of above Rs 1600 is basically earned by the manager and accountant and their percentage share is 30 among the total monthly staff. A small percentage share (15 per cent)
of monthly staff usually enjoy below Rs 1000. This income category constitutes some office staff and night guards.

The rice mill workers are more privileged than the agricultural labourer as they earn Rs 33-35 per day on an average along with rice, kura, and assured shelter, leaves with pay, whereas an average agricultural labourer earns a wage of Rs 30 per day only. Another advantage of rice mill workers is the availability of work/job throughout the year in comparison to the seasonality of the job of agricultural labourers. This possibly explains why agricultural labourers from poor agricultural areas migrate to Burdwan region in search of perennial employment and job security.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly income</th>
<th>Number of rice mill workers</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below Rs 300</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs 300 – Rs 500</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>57.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Rs 500</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly payment</th>
<th>Number of rice mill workers</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below Rs 1000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs 1000 – Rs 1600</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Rs 1600</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000

**Savings**

The practice of savings is very limited among the rice mill workers. They earn just about enough by which they can barely subsist. About 17 per cent of the rice mill workers have a savings account either in banks or in post office. This 17 per cent constitute, the machine mistri, pressure mistri, and office staff. This section of labourers either have no liability to their family in the original home or they are owner of negligible amount of cultivable land in their rural counterpart or they are engaged in second job like coil wiring of motor, bidi making etc. (though their number is very low). However, having savings in fixed deposit
schemes is certainly rare with only 1 or 2 exceptions. Therefore, their income do not provide sufficient economic security. This saving extends only marginal support and is in no way sufficient for supporting their families at times of emergency. At times of emergency the contract labourer usually take money from sardar. Majority of rice mill workers (about 83 per cent) does not have even any savings account. However, all the labourers have compulsory accident insurance – Janata Policy – run by rice mill owner. This insurance benefit provides economic support in times of accident, where as agricultural labourers do not enjoy such benefits.

**Number of Earning Members per Family**

The number of earning member per family is also an important indicator of the economic condition of any group. The double income family is predominant among the rice mill workers with about 40 per cent of them in this category (Figure 6.7). About 47 per cent are in the category of families with 3 or more earning members (Table 6.9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of earning member per family</th>
<th>Number of rice mill workers</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>40.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 4</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000

From the above table it is quite clear that the economic condition of rice mill workers is not very miserable. In spite of dominance of more than one earning member family, they are poverty-stricken because of alcoholism of male workers.

**Land Ownership**

From the survey of rice mill workers it is evident that the majority of rice mill workers (about 42 per cent) are not landless but owner of 2-10 bighas agricultural land (Table 6.10, Figure 6.8). But the question then arises: why do they migrate to the rice mills? The main cause is, these agricultural lands are mostly highland, barren and also there is scarcity of water in districts like Purulia, Birbhum and some areas of Bihar. About 37 per cent workers are landless, so they have to depend on other types of work for their livelihood. Sometimes about 6 per cent workers have highest 11-20 bighas of land in their original homes. The percentage of workers having up to one bigha of land is about 8. The percentages of workers with 5 kathas and up to 10 kathas of agricultural lands are about 2 and 5 respectively. Though the workers live in Burdwan, they maintain strong ties with their rural homes.
LENGTH OF STAY IN BURDWAN

Duration of stay

- New
- Less than 1 year
- Upto 5 years
- 1-5 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- More than 20 years

Percentage of workers

Figure 6.6

EARNING MEMBER PER RICE MILL WORKERS FAMILY
BURDWAN CITY AND ADJOINING AREAS

Number of earning members

- 1
- 2
- 3-4
- Above 4

Percentage of workers

Figure 6.7
Table 6.10: Ownership of Land

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land ownership</th>
<th>Number of worker</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 5 kathas</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 10 kathas</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 1 bigha</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – 10 bighas</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>42.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 20 bighas</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landless</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>36.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000

House Ownership

From the survey of the workers, it is evident that a large percentage has migrated from other districts or states or has come from villages of Burdwan district itself. The original homes of most are so distant that they cannot commute to their place of work daily/regularly. Therefore, they need residential accommodation in Burdwan. About 70 per cent of the workers reside in quarters provided by rice mills (Table 6.11, Figure 6.9), locally known as dhaora, often located within the mill. About 25 per cent of workers have their own house, as they want to reside at Burdwan permanently. The migrant workers are attracted to Burdwan only for the job availability in rice milling industry. A small percentage of workers, that is about 6 live in rented houses. The reason may be non-availability of mill’s housing facility or the wish to live independently. In most cases, such groups comprise those who are yet to make up their minds about whether to live permanently in Burdwan or not.

Table 6.11: Ownership of House

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership of house</th>
<th>Number of workers</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mills quarter</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>70.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own house</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented house</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>5.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000
Figure 6.8

Figure 6.9
Domestic Fuel

Harnessing and utilizing energy has always been a key factor in improving the quality of life. The case of rice mill workers too is no exception to this fact. An indication of the overall development of an economic class is provided by its per capita consumption of fuel. Not only that, the type of fuel used is an important indicator of the income levels and standards of living. In our case, most rice mill workers (about 65 per cent) generally use kura for cooking purposes because each worker gets one 40 kilograms bag or more kura per week free of cost from the mill. As per labour agreement, only one member would enjoy this facility if two or three family members work in the mill. Thus, there is never an excess of kura in the household. However, the use of kura introduces smoky environment at the kitchen while reducing the cost of cooking/living. The use of kura also indicates the low standard of living of mill workers. Only a negligible proportion (about 5 per cent) of workers use gas for cooking, but they do not own a gas oven or cylinder. Workers who use gas for cooking live jointly with others in workers mess where the mill owner provides the facility. This facility is mainly enjoyed by the gadi staff whose standard of living is somewhat better than blue-collar workers. The percentage of coal, kerosene, wood, and cow dung cake plus kura users are 19.04, 1.58, 3.17 and 6.34 respectively (Table 6.12, Figure 6.10) indicating lower expenditures for domestic fuel. Among the purchased fuel, the prices of coal and cowdung cakes are somewhat cheaper than the price of kerosene and gas. The first 2 are more accessible than kerosene, as it is sold at higher price in free market than ration rate. Another cause is majority of workers do not yet have a ration card, making them unable to procure kerosene at cheap rate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fuel Types</th>
<th>Number of Rice Mill Workers</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kura</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>65.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cow dung cake and kura</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>6.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel wood</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerosene</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000
6.6.3 Socio-cultural Characteristics

The socio-cultural characteristics are analyzed on the basis of religion and caste structure, literacy, length of stay at present mill, traditional occupation, house types (in original home), leisure hour, sources of information for migration, intention of the worker about children’s occupation, and unionization.

Religion and Caste Structure

The analysis shows that the proportion of Muslims is low compared to Hindus among the rice mill workers. This proportion is in tune with the general population structure of the region. The proportion of general caste Hindu in this industry is also low. Backward, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are predominant among them.

Literacy Status of Workers

Illiteracy is still prevalent among the workers, in spite of CITU’s genuine efforts to eradicate illiteracy among rice mill workers. About 41 per cent of total workers are illiterate, among which most are women. Workers who can only read and write in his/her own language constitute about 14 per cent. The second major concentration of workers is about 23 per cent whose educational qualification is up to class V. The percentage of workers who read up to class eight is 14. About 3 per cent of workers are less than Madhyamik passed. All of them left school midway in their study. The percentage of workers who had already passed Madhyamik examination is two. There are even fewer workers with higher qualifications. Percentage of workers with Higher Secondary and Graduate degrees are negligible, 0.79 and 1.59 respectively (Table 6.13, Figure 6.11).

Here we can remember the factors determining the literacy rate of a place. Following Chandna (1999) these are as follows:

- cost of education,
- political/ideological background,
- type of economy,
- standard of living of people,
- degree of urbanization,
- stage of technological advancement of a region,
- degree of development of means of transportation and communication,
- religious background,
• medium of instruction,
• status of women in the society,
• prejudice against women’s mobility and education,
• availability of educational institution,
• general value system, and
• public policies.

In our study we felt that some of these factors have great relevance in determining literacy status of workers. Most of the workers come from rural backward families, with little or no family background of education and economic difficulties to support a good education. In many of these villages, there are no proper means of communication yet. Primary schools are often located far away from the residences. Since independence, there has been significant improvement in literacy levels, but much is yet to be done in this front. The main objective is to somehow learn the three R’s (basic reading-writing skills) to enable them to ‘sign the name’ on the payroll as it is commonly said. A few words can also be said here about the quality of education itself; most primary schools have rather poor infrastructure and lack of adequate teachers. Teaching is often done in a mass scale and no special attention is given to the individual student coming from poor background. As a result, children of poorer families often drop out midway. Thus, the average rice mill workers’ rural poor background is reflected in the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational status</th>
<th>Number of workers</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>40.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to class V</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to class VIII</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than Madhyamik</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhyamik</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Secondary</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000
DOMESTIC FUEL USED BY RICE MILL WORKERS
BURDWAN CITY AND ADJOINING AREA

- Kura
- Coal
- Cowdung cake and kura
- Gas
- Fuel wood
- Kerosene

Figure 6.10

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF WORKERS
BURDWAN CITY AND ADJOINING AREAS

Figure 6.11
Length of Stay at Present Mill

On an average, rice mill workers have been in the same location for about 8 years. The largest share of the respondents (about 22 per cent) has worked in a particular rice mill for up to ten years. The next percentage share of about 18 has stayed in that mill for 11-15 years. The long-term work in one mill for 21-35 years and the percentage of workers in such long service in a mill is about 9. This indicates that the long-term workers have adapted well to the working environment of that rice mill. About 13 per cent workers have worked in the rice mill for 16-20 years. There are about 14 per cent workers with about 5 years working experience in one mill indicating the intention of future work in that mill. The percentage of newcomers in this industry staying here for only a few days is only 2. Now they are at the stage of selection of suitable jobs. They would either persist in the mill or would go back to their homes. The percentages of workers residing up to 6 months, less than one year and up to one year are 9, 6 and 7 respectively (Table 6.14, Figure 6.12). Clearly, both trends are to be noted here and no generalization can be made. Workers either leave a mill within a year in search of better job environment elsewhere or in other rice mills, or get adjusted to the working conditions and have long-term services. This finding does not match up with what is so commonly said about the mobility of informal employment. This is because the unemployment situation has assumed such serious proportions in India that leaving a job, whatever it is, entails great risk of not finding another one to replace it with.

Table 6.14: Duration of Stay at a Particular Mill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of stay</th>
<th>Number of workers</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newcomers (few days)</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to six months</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one year</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>7.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to five years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to ten years</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 15 years</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 – 20 years</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 35 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000
Traditional Occupation

In India, the occupation of the father often affected the occupation of his son and daughter, especially so in rural societies. If father’s occupation fulfills their material well being, then the children want to follow that path, but if the condition becomes unfavourable then the situation would be reversed. In our case of study, the occupation of the father of the major share of workers is related to agriculture – either they work as agricultural labourer (about 29 per cent), or cultivate own agricultural land (about 28 per cent) or plough the land as tenant croppers, or sometimes not only they cultivate their own agricultural land but also work as agricultural labourer on other’s land (about 6 per cent). About 9 per cent of the worker’s father have spent their lives as rice mill workers. They brought their children in this industry without getting any alternative job situation. About 5 per cent of worker’s fathers are in small and petty businesses. The profession of about 6 per cent worker’s father is related to masonry/building construction. About 3 per cent and about one per cent worker’s fathers are engaged in government services and non-government services respectively. The rest about 12 per cent worker’s father’s occupation was sculpturing, rickshaw pulling, pottery or such other (Table 6.15, Figure 6.13).

Table 6.15: Occupation of Workers’ Fathers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational categories</th>
<th>Number of persons</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice mill</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivation in own land</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenant</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural labourer</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivation in own land plus Agricultural labourer</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>6.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service in government sector</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services in non-government / private sector</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pottery</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building construction/mason</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sculptures</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rickshaw puller</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000
**LENGTH OF STAY AT PRESENT MILL**

**BURDWAN CITY AND ADJOINING AREAS**

![Bar chart showing Duration of stay](image)

**TRADITIONAL OCCUPATION OF RICE MILL WORKERS' FATHER**

**BURDWAN CITY AND ADJOINING AREAS**

![Bar chart showing Occupational categories](image)
House Types (in original home)
The majority (89 per cent) of rice mill workers own a *kutcha* house, usually located at the city's periphery, or in their own villages or in other neighbouring states. Only about two per cent workers have *pucca* houses. They are economically better off than the majority. Also about 2 per cent workers had *kutcha* houses but those houses became derelict, sometimes the houses were submerged under flood. About 6 per cent workers have no such permanent house (Table 6.16, Figure 6.14).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>House types</th>
<th>Number of worker</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Pucca</em></td>
<td>03</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kutcha</em></td>
<td>112</td>
<td>88.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derelict house</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No fixed home</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>6.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000

Leisure Hours
Pleasant passing of leisure hours helps increasing the efficiency of workers. The largest segment of the workforce (25 per cent) has at least one way to pass leisure hours, that is a transistor radio. The percentage of television viewers, tape recorder listeners and both television and radio listeners are about 13, 3 and 2 respectively. In most of the mills, there is a television set in the office/gadi. During leisure hours, mainly in evenings, male workers living in the *dhaora* of the mill watch television programmes. Among the prevalent means of recreation is the daily consumption of alcohol by most male workers during the evening. However, they were not frank about admitting this habit due to social stigma and only about 15 confessed to this fact. This habit has now decreased a lot through the strict intervention of CITU. Only about nine per cent workers generally spend their leisure time by card and carrom board playing. A small percentage of workers generally go to marketing, voluntary political service, cinema hall and *adda* (chit chats) are 3, 2, 6 and 3 respectively. A very small fraction (0.8 per cent) of workers engages in a second job like the wiring of motor coils (Table 6.17). Women workers pass their leisure mainly by resting (13 per cent) and sleeping (5 per cent). They generally get no leisure time because after duty hours they have to do household chores like cooking and caring of children and family.
HOUSE TYPES OF RICE MILL WORKERS
BURDWAN CITY AND ADJOINING AREAS

House Types
- Pucca
- Kutch
- Derelict house
- No fixed home

Figure 6.14
Table 6.17: Means of Spending of Leisure Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Different means</th>
<th>Number of rice mill workers</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transistor listening</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television viewers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tape recorder listeners</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television viewing and transistor</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol drinking</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Card and carrom board playing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing, union or party work, movies and</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second job</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000

Sources of Information for Migration

The workers migrated at the rice mills of Burdwan region by knowing the information from various sources and sometimes they themselves identified this sector for their absorption. About 32 per cent of the workers have joined in this industry, himself/herself by virtue of their own effort while searching their jobs. This fact proves that these agro-processing industries are able to become an attractive job to fresh migrants. The percentage share of workers who have joined this rice milling industry by information of relatives about the job availability in these mills are 24. The percentage of workers who have joined this industry being influenced by suggestions of friends and neighbours are about 21. The percentage of contract labourers coming to the rice mills mainly through the sardar and their percentage is about 12. About 10 per cent rice mill workers came by following the tradition of their parents. A negligible percentage of workers joined this industry by suggestions of brokers (both paddy and rice) (Table 6.18, Figure 6.15).
Table 6.18: Sources of Information for Migration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information source</th>
<th>Number of worker</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends and neighbours</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokers</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sardar</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>11.90</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000

**Intention of the Worker about Children's Occupation or Present Occupation of Workers' Wards**

From our interview of 126 rice mill workers it was clear that the perception of workers about the rice milling industry is not good. In absence of a better job, the workers feel compelled to stay in this industry. They do not want that their next generation would be employed in this job. Only about 3 per cent of respondent workers expressed their wish to put their wards in this industry, only if they do not get any other job. Even then, we see that rice mill work is not a better choice for them but arises from economic need for survival. In the case where either a son or a daughter of a worker is already employed in the mill, it is usually as a mechanic having practical knowledge or know-how. In case of daughters, especially married daughters, they have joined the mill to assist husband or families. In most cases, the daughter's husband is also employed in the same rice mill, and in this situation, the wish of the father or mother does not matter. Overall, such negative perception may be attributed to the poor working condition of the mills and the fact that all parents envisage a better future for their children.

About 72 per cent of respondents' choice about the future of their son is to educate them and get them into an office job, in a private or in government undertakings (Table 6.19, Figure 6.16). That is, the aspiration is to have a 'better' and more secure future for children. Only a white-collar job, they perceive, can provide that security. The percentage share of workers who want their ward to become skilled/specialist in some kind of mechanical job is about 17, because if they possess practical knowledge, they will have access to jobs in any other sectors. This type of jobs includes repairing of electronic goods like radio, tape recorder, television, repairing of car/automobiles, working in lathe machine, and wielding machine etc.
The rest of the workers wish their sons to be absorbed in other activities – like helper of mason, tailoring work, cooking, cleaner of bus or truck, work in agricultural land, sweet shop, and carpentry etc.

However, the futures of daughters are envisaged quite differently. The worker parent always want early marriage for their daughters and feel that by marrying her off, the parent’s responsibility to the girl has been completed. Therefore, parents do not think much about the future employment of the girl child. It is strange to see how middle class social values have penetrated into the minds of the workers; the status of women in a labourer family is actually not low as revealed from our survey. In working class families, women are treated as a partner as they take part in production. In tribal societies, even a dowry is often given to the bridegroom’s parents during marriage. In factory environments, the society changes and becomes quite masculine; the male worker comes back home at the end of the day in a drunken state and can beat up the wife. Men feel that they have the right to avoid doing household chores because they are earning cash wages. Even in families where both partners work, such patriarchal values tend to dominate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation types</th>
<th>Number of workers</th>
<th>Percentage share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice milling</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education plus white collar job</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>72.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical job</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Socio-economic survey, 1999-2000

**Unionization**

From the previous analysis it is quite clear that all the characteristics (demographic, economic, and socio-cultural) of the rice mill workers of Burdwan region bear all imprints of third world tertiary informal sector except the case of unionization. The lack of unionization and job protection are important characteristics of the informal or unorganized sector (Joshi and Joshi, 1976). However the rice mill workers of Burdwan are unionized properly. Almost all rice mill workers have come under one unionized organization – Centre of Indian Trade Union (CITU) supported Rice Mill Workers’ Association.
Figure 6.15 SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR MIGRATION BURDWAN CITY AND ADJOINING AREAS

Figure 6.16 DESIRE OF WORKERS ABOUT CHILDRENS' OCCUPATION BURDWAN CITY AND ADJOINING AREAS
6.7. Social Well Being of Rice Mill Workers

Salient Features

The welfare approach is of recent origin (1970s) and developed as a positive reaction to the positivist/spatial science tradition in geography, and to the quantitative approach and model building. Its emphasis is on ‘who gets what, where and how’. The welfare approach in geography requires the development of social indicators for empirical identification of social inequality and injustice in territorial distribution (Adhikari, 1995). The approach becomes relevant here from the point of view of labour situation in this informal agro-processing sector. The traditional concept of informal sector emphasizes that there is no job security to the labourers, that they usually live in squalid sub-standard houses, there is discrimination of work according to gender. The health and sanitation facilities literacy rates - all the indicators of standard of living are poor for rice mill workers. This is indeed a low income earning sector and exclusively meant for poor and unskilled immigrant labour from agricultural peripheries. However, it is also true that some participants in this sector earn a comparatively higher level of income than the daily wage labourers in other sectors of work offered by the urban economy of Burdwan. The cash wage earning, especially the slightly more assured work than the most irregular and labour intensive agricultural jobs in villages, also attracts labourers in rice milling work. For many rural poor women, a rice mill job is much better than working as a domestic help or as a field-hand. However, inequalities within and without continue to persist and take up diverse shapes in rice mill jobs. Identification of these social inequalities is crucial to the improvement of social conditions.

In investigating rice mills it is, therefore, insufficient to demonstrate that here the workers suffer disproportionately from poor housing conditions, nutritional deficiencies and low wages. These inequalities are dependent not only upon conventional locational considerations, but are found in job patterns, gender and such other hierarchies inherent in the social groupings.

A few words on social well being will not be irrelevant here. It will help us to focus briefly on human aspects of labour in rice mills.

In a genetic sense, the term ‘social well-being’ includes level of living, the quality of life, social satisfaction, social welfare, and standard of living. However, there are problems of defining and measuring almost all of the above features. The elaboration of concepts like social welfare, social satisfaction must depend to some extent on the time period, region and
context of their use (Smith, 1973). Smith (1973) had established 7 ‘general criteria’ of social well-being relevant to contemporary conditions in the United States. These are as follows:

- **Income, Wealth and Employment** – Under this category are income and wealth, employment status, and income supplements.

- **The Living Environment** – Under this category are housing, the neighbourhood, and the physical environment.

- **Health** – Health includes both physical and mental health conditions.

- **Education** – Education is a wide concept that explains not only the achievement, but also the duration and quality of knowledge-gathering.

- **Social Order** – Can be explained through features such as personal pathologies, family breakdown, crime and delinquency, and public order and safety.

- **Social Belonging (alienation and participation)** – Evident through democratic participation, criminal justice and the lack of segregation.

- **Recreation and Leisure** – Recreation facilities, culture and the arts and leisure available.

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) defines and measures levels of living at the international scale. Using the framework provided by the research, it is possible to list 9 basic components of social well-being:

- Nutrition,
- Shelter,
- Health,
- Education,
- Leisure,
- Security,
- Social stability,
- Physical environment, and
- Surplus income.

In our study of rice milling industry in Burdwan, the inequalities among mill workers, and those between workers and the owners had drawn attention of the trade union movements. They have now largely minimized such inequalities through active movements and interventions of various kinds. Of the above nine components of social well-being about six components are under the close scrutiny by the CITU, who ensure that the workers are provided with these basic needs.
Nutrition: CITU has emphasized upon the subsistence of the worker, but has not yet emphasized the nutrition levels of the worker – mainly women and the children.

Shelter: In each rice mill, there are provisions of quarters for the workers especially for the migrant and needy labourers. The number of workers accommodated varies from one mill to another depending upon the size of the mill. For example there is facility of accommodating 25–27 workers in the smallest chatatal- based mill – Laxmi Narayan Rice Mill Burdwan district. In contrast, Shanti Rice Mill - Burdwan’s largest rice mill - can accommodate 226 workers. This compulsory free housing arrangement for workers is the contribution of the movement of CITU and has immensely helped in a better circulation of labour from rural hinterlands to the city.

Health: There is a growing health consciousness among the workers. For any ailment, the workers frequently go to the Doctor rather than using public hospital, where a long time is required for medical help. As per the contract of the union with the mill owner, the workers may enjoy medical leave. The mills having electricity must provide one connection for lightening each room. Even workers who work at high temperatures (such as fireman and houze shramiks) all day, the rooms have generator connections facility during power cuts. If the workers meet with any accident during the working hours, the mill owner must bear the expenditure for the treatment of that worker. Beside the above, ‘Janata policy’ has been introduced by the owner for workers – which is a kind of life insurance, valid in case of accidental death with very low premium rates. According to the contract of 1986, the CITU have emphasized that the quarters allotted to the workers must be made habitable.

For women workers, it has been noted that there must be provision of urinals within the mill’s boundary and those mills, which have toilet, must let these be used by women. According to contract of CITU with the mill owner, women workers during pregnancy can enjoy maternity leave of 45 days (15 days before and 30 days after delivery) with Rs 4 and a kilogram of common rice per day. For machine and jharai shramik there is provision for musk and white glass to protect the eyes. However, that is about all. The rice mill workers often suffer from ill health due to over work and exhaustion. The stress of adjusting to a new environment, may lead migrant workers from villages to alcoholism.

Education: ‘Education for all’ has been the watchword of CITU. Education is fundamental to an individual’s enjoyment of certain recreational pursuits and to the fulfillment of
democratic opportunities as well as to occupational status and social mobility. Similarly raising aggregate levels of education may be seen as an investment in human capital, which pays dividends not only in economic development and material well being but also in cultural development, social equality and political emancipation. (Smith, 1973). Therefore, Bongiyo Shakharata Prasar Samiti, a state-sponsored NGO, organized illiteracy eradication campaigns for rice mill workers with the help of CITU in year 2000-2001. This attempt was fulfilled partly. The programmers use to take evening class in the dhavoras after sun down. Some of the male workers used to became drunk so all of them did not attend the class. For women workers they are rather shaky about reaching out to outsider teachers. After working for the whole day, they usually go for shopping and other household chores such as preparation of food and caring for the children, with little or no interest in studies. Naturally, ‘lack of time’ was the main excuse among women for not learning to read and write.

Leisure: Leisure time is defined as the amount of time free from work, excluding the time spent in travel to and from work, the time spent on domestic work and the estimated 10 hours a day spent in sleeping, eating and dressing. The working hours of the rice mill workers are 8 hours. After the duty hour, the majority of male workers pass their leisure time by sleeping, drinking, playing and marketing (as they work hard). But the women workers get little time as leisure because their engagement in domestic chores. Leisure is necessary for revitalizing the spent-up energy during work. The age of retirement of the workers of the rice mill is 58 years. With increasing age, their physical strength decreases and their tiredness increases. So leisure is essential for social well-being to all.

Security: Security is a heterogeneous component, depending upon prevailing political, legal and economic systems and related in a complex manner to many other aspects of social well-being. Basically security has two important dimensions – the first, security of the person or public safety, second, the security of the way of life – in other words being able to maintain a given level of well-being once it has been achieved. But in our case of study, the security of the worker’s way of life is increasing because they have provident fund, gratuity and enjoy after retirement allowance. The owners (as with contract with CITU) have introduced Janata policy for the workers. Even in a rice mill if the owner want to replace the chatatal-based mill by fully dryer based mill, the owner would not disappoint/cut off the additional workers from his mill (though the workers are not required due to establishment of dryer). The total number of workers must remain the same as before and after modernization. So the social
security, job security of the workers all are improving – thus gradually achieving formal characteristics from the informal one.

How far have the jobs in rice mills been assured by the Trade Union? This aspect may be understood from the levels of wage/salary fixed by the bi-lateral contracts since 1986 (given below in Table 6.20 and Figure 6.17).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Math shramik</th>
<th>Machine shramik</th>
<th>Monthly staff (minimum rate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986 – December, 1988</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March, 1989 – September, 1991</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December, 1991 – December, 1993</td>
<td>17.50</td>
<td>19.50</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January, 1994, - June, 1995</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July, 1998 – February, 1999</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February, 1999 – December, 1999</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January, 2000 – December, 2000</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January, 2001 – December, 2001</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January, 2002 – December, 2002</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1625</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


N.B.: All blue collar workers. usually get one kilogram of common rice every day along with their daily wage.

Social Stability: Although good relations with other members of the society are felt to be a fundamental human need, this is the most ambiguous and culturally relative component of social well being. Thus most would agree economic stability and social stability are ‘good things’, but we must also recognize the importance of the rights of the mill worker to strike, to protest and in some circumstances to promote social revolution.

Physical Environment: There often exists a negative relationship between environmental quality and economic development. The environment of the habitat as well as the working environment must be healthy in order to generating the energy to work of the worker. There is a growing awareness for improving the quality of the physical environment around the worker.
TEMPORAL CHANGE IN LABOUR WAGE / SALARY
RICE MILLS OF BURDAN REGION

Source: Data collected from Bilateral contract paper between Rice Mill Workers Association and Rice Mill Owners Association of Burdwan district (1986-2002)

Figure 6.17
6.8 Women Worker

Women's needs in the workplace are categorized into two – strategic and gender, the first indicating critical issues such as opportunities to work and the latter implying the specific needs of a woman (such as the provision of a separate toilet or creche etc.).

We have seen that the rice milling industry of Burdwan employs a significant number of women workers. However, by virtue of being an unorganized industry, there is no special recognition of the role and needs of women workers in the rice mills. This neglect of gender needs is characteristic of the entire gamut of agro-processing industry - starting from the smallest husking or oil/chira mill to the most sophisticated rice mill-cum-bran solvent plant.

However, the trade union has, in its various bilateral agreements, have begun to incorporate gender issue. This increasing awareness is evident in issues related to health, sanitation, protection of women’s worker from physical assault/molestation and in safety of children during the working hours of their mothers.

In traditional rice mills (whether it is only chatal-based or mixed type) a major portion (per cent of total workers) of worker is female and they are employed in chatal based works like spreading of raw paddy on the yard for sun drying, winnowing, sun-drying of wet paddy, piling up of raw paddy, covering of piled raw paddy by large straw cones during sudden showers, etc. For these activities women in Burdwan mills work in the open, under the scorching rays of mid day sun, not much different from the jua kali sector of Kenya.

The bilateral agreements between the Rice Mill Owner’s Association and the Rice Mill Workers Union are beginning to ensure job security, personal health, civic amenities, and some amount of leisure for all workers. Women workers enjoy all these facilities. In addition, they get certain special facilities. These are as follows.

- **Toilet for Women Worker:** In 1986, a provision for toilet was made for women workers within the boundary of the rice mill. As per the contract, their toilets must be built where not in existence already. In this year too, the issue which drew the greatest attention of the union was the construction of a bathing place for women workers.
• **Maternity Leave:** Already in existence in 1989, there was a clause offering 21 days maternity leave with one kilogram rice and Rs 3 per day for food. In 1991, the maternity leave has been extended to 30 days.

• **Maternity Benefits:** Regarding other maternity benefits, another clause in the 1993 agreement was that 15 days prior to the delivery, women workers would get a kilogram of rice each day (for 15 days) and after the delivery for 30 days she would get a kilogram of common/good quality rice including Rs 4 as daily allowance.

In 1996, the benefit during maternity leave has been extended, and women workers became entitled to get a kilogram of common rice and Rs 4 from 15 days prior to, and 30 days after delivery daily.

### 6.9. Summary

In this chapter, we have discussed the profiles of selected 8 rice mills of varying size and nature. We tried to give an idea of the varied nature of the mills and their histories through these profiles. It became apparent that our size-based classification was only a tentative one, as there were many labor characteristics that were common among mills of varying sizes. However, one thing became clear, a large modern mill like Ma Tara has far less informal characteristics than the smallest non-mechanized Laxmi Narayan mill.

After examining the individual mills, we have outlined our survey results with explanations as much as possible. We selected 18 rice mills for the survey, and looked into both workers’ and owners’ situations and perspectives. We have also analyzed some features common to almost all of them. The important common features are job specialization, wage structure and job protection. Job specialization in the rice mills is a result of tradition as well as a matter of contract between the trade union and the mill owners. We made a study of the age sex structure of mill workers, their educational status, length of stay in present mill, house ownership, types of domestic fuel use, leisure and recreation, land ownership situation, original homes, sources of information for migration, duration of stay of workers in Burdwan, occupation of workers’ father, and finally the perception for children’s future etc. While interviewing the mill owners, we examined the minimum worker requirement for continuing milling operation and comparisons among three types of mills, sources of paddy, and marketing of rice. In the next section, we have discussed social well-being of rice mill workers and have shown that many of them are in this job due to poverty. Finally, we have looked at women workers’ situation in this industry. Gender discrimination with regards to
job distribution is prevalent within milling operations. Women are not allowed to enter the machine room giving proof of male dominance in technical work. In rice milling industry, women are considered to be brainless, unskilled (without offering infrastructure to train women) and full of patience. For this, in chatal-based or mixed type mills they are mainly appointed for work on chatal and perform the monotonous job like spreading of paddy on the yard, frequent rolling, drying, winnowing and cleaning of paddy. Besides chatal jobs, male workers perform all other skilled and machine work. In rice mills there are two categories of workers – white collar, including office staff and machine operator paid on a monthly basis, and blue collar including chatal shramik and machine coolie (shramik) paid on a daily basis.

It is notable that the status of women in rice mills becomes lower with increasing modernization. This survey is an essential part of our theoretical standpoint of categorizing rice mills as informal industrial units. The survey results established well our thesis that these are unorganized industrial units having characteristics of informality in varying degrees.

For identifying the status of rice mill workers in the economy, we have divided the survey results into three categories – demographic characteristics, economic condition and socio-cultural characteristics. The analysis like age-sex structure, family size and structure, number of children is included in the first. The income, savings, number of earning members per family, land ownership, house ownership and domestic fuel use are indicators of economic condition. The socio-cultural characteristics are reflected by features like religion and caste structure, literacy, length of stay at present mill, traditional occupation, house type, leisure hours, sources of information for migration, intention of the worker about children's occupation, and unionization. By analyzing the above indicators following facts become clear. Firstly, majority of workers has engaged in this industry because there is surplus labour in agriculture in their village or some cases the workers migrated from Purulia and Birbhum districts, or Bihar state to Burdwan region due to poor agriculture in their homeland. Secondly, the causes of migration are not only economic but also social. The main cause is breakdown of joint family system in rural hinterland. Thirdly, the ease of entry in rice mills in comparison to solvent plants or other formal industries encourages rural illiterate and unskilled (though sometimes literate, semi-skilled and skilled workers too come here) persons to join this industry. Fourthly, though about 9 per cent workers' fathers have been engaged in this industry, the majority of workers are first generation migrants who came here through information from relatives or members of their villages. Fifthly, in this industry there is dominance of more than one earning member workers' families (about 88 per cent). Finally, the rice mill workers are better advantaged than agricultural labourers and
other informal industrial workers like chira mill workers, muri workers, mustard oil mill workers, husking mill workers, atta and spice grinding workers. Among the industrial workers in general, rice mill workers are at the lowest level in terms of prestige. However, they have a little better amount of job security and wage, mostly due to the active role adopted by the trade union in the region. The rice mill workers, thus, are in transition between the agricultural labourer and industrial workers in the formal sector where entirely capitalistic production relations are prevalent.

In this chapter we have also analyzed the social well being of rice mill workers. From these discussions it is clear that the trade union has been trying their best in its various bilateral agreements for social being of rice mill workers by providing various opportunities indirectly. The trade union has yet to take up issues related to women workers.

Above all this chapter reveals that the rice mill workers lie at the lowermost stratum of the economy of Burdwan region with their rural roots, impoverishment and changing social and family structure. As evident from our study, the rice mill workers live a reality that straddles both 'rural' and 'urban', and creates a new form of synthesis of these two forms of economy. They also represent how the first generation migrants struggle to survival in a radically different environment of industrial relationship as against the rural ones.

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1 The gas is generated from the gasification of rice husk. For thermal conversion the gas is burnt in specialized burners and for electricity generation, it is fed into a dual fuel engine. This engine generates electricity through the revolution of turbine. This gas also sent for firing the boiler and running the dryer.

2 Gasification is a chemical conversion of a solid mass into a gaseous mixture. The conversions occur at the temperature range of 1000-1200°C at an atmospheric pressure in presence of steam and little amount of two. In chemical conversion the solid mass is not only converted into gas but also produce tar and ash. The quality of gas depends upon the input materials and the moisture contained in it (School of Energy Studies, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, 2001)