

Chapter - IV

The Changing Dimension of 'Development' and 'Development Administration' and the Present Concerns

The decade of 1960s which is assumed to be the 'First Decade of Development', was a period of 'great optimism', though it proposed a centralized approach to development with the tone of western capitalist models and followed the policy of accelerated economic growth with due emphasis on industrialization and modernization. To H.W. Arndt, "Modernization theorists have rarely, if ever, explicitly endorsed the 'trickle down' mechanism"¹. Here E.F. Trainer pointed out that the theorists have 'often admitted' since the decade of 1960s that "growth is an insufficient development goal and that automatic trickle down of wealth to the poor cannot be assumed"². The United Nations' Second Development decade of 1970s, a period of 'pessimism' gave rise to the alternative conceptions of development. The Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment of 1972, the Bucharest Conference on World Population and the Rome Conference on Food in 1974 were certain attempts to re-define the causes of underdevelopment. The 'political economy' approach came into being and the concept of 'Another Development' emerged with it. The concept stressed the fact that economic issues could only be understood in the context of the political reality, those political questions of resources ownership, power and distribution have a great influence on the process of development. Growth was distinguished from development, and structural change was seen as essential in order to expand capacity³.

Since it was felt by a group of economists in the middle of 1970s that equity was possible and desirable, the concept of development came to be defined in such a way that it included the 'concern for distribution'. The World Bank Study and the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex in England made a great contribution in this direction. The 1975 Dag Hammarskjold Report in the context of developing world notably in India, expressed concern for the need of cereals (as a working adult needs to have 4.5 kg of cereals per week) to

fulfil one's minimum energy requirements and suggested a poverty line... 'at the rock-bottom level of physical existence'. The situation required such a programme as would guarantee work to the rural adults who needed to have employment. The Report further expressed its concern that "such a policy would require, to set the process in motion, initial distribution of resources, even if increases in output are also necessary. However, in reality, distribution and production increases are organically linked".⁴

The prevailing two important factors – colonialism and imperialism which caused extensive affluence in the rich countries but severe and perpetual impoverishment of the poor nations and thereby, dependence of the poor countries on the rich, were 'conveniently' ignored by the 'western paradigm'. In this regard, Andre Gunder Frank proposed the 'dependency theory in the light of rethinking of the concept of development and stated, "it is capitalism, world and national, which produced under development in the present".⁵

The United Nations' Third Development Decade of 1980s, was a landmark in terms of the rethinking of the concept of development and restructuring of the North-South relationship. In fact, this development decade went through two lines: (i) The New International Economic Order (NIEO), called for by the UN Committee on Development Planning with a view to restructuring global economic relationship, and (ii) the Committee stressed on the "equity and participation, self reliance and structural reform, poverty removal and employment generation, and renewed efforts for rural development and attention to distressed regions and disadvantaged groups".⁶ The COCOYOC Declaration on self-reliance (Mexico: 1974); The Dag Hammarskjold Report – "What Now: Another Development" (Development Dialogue 1975:1/2); Marc Nerfin's edited: "Another Development: Approaches and Strategies" (Dag Hammarskjold Project); The two studies of United Nations' Asian Development Institute: "Towards a Theory of Rural Development" (1975) and "Micro-Level Development: Design and Evaluation of Rural Development Projects (1977) and Haque, Mehta, Rahman and Wignaraja's study on the subject (Development Dialogue 1977:2); the study of United Nations Research Institute of Social Development entitled: "The Quest for a United Approach to Development"

(1980); the study of International Foundation for Development Alternatives (IFDA); SAREC Report (Rural Development Research – the role of Power Relations – Edited by Bo Bengtsson – 1979); emphasized rethinking of ‘development’ and initiated the development of socio-economic sectors through the strategic process of ‘authentic participation of people’. However, these investigations have a contribution to the development of strategy for the 1980s and beyond, and also a contribution towards the concretization of the conceptual framework of ‘Another Development’ and ‘Alternative Development’.

The concept of ‘Another Development’, which draws certain key questions: Development of what, development for whom and development how, and encompasses certain key elements: ‘Need Oriented’, ‘endogenous’, ‘self-reliant’, ‘ecologically sound’ and ‘based on structural transformation’, rooted its philosophy in the COCOYOC Declaration of 1974 on self-reliance. The ‘applicability and feasibility’ of the vision ‘were tested in the fields of rural development’ by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation at the University of Uppsala, Sweden since 1975 (Dag Hammarskjold Report) and it got momentum in the subsequent period.

In 1977, under the directorship of Marc Nerfin, Development Dialogue was joined by the International Foundation for Development Alternatives (IFDA). The basic aim of IFDA was to highlight the ‘little known information’ regarding the initiatives and projects centred on “people organizing themselves so as to develop who they are and what they have, by themselves and for themselves”.⁷ The IFDA took a modest measure for the promotion of ‘Another Development’ and for strengthening the ‘Third System’ through the subsequently published IFDA Dossier. Nerfin, while analyzing and talking about the present crisis, took as his point of departure the fact that both the governmental power, the Prince or the ‘First System’ and the economic power, the Merchant or the ‘Second System’ have “more often than not proved unable by, themselves to offer solutions to the crisis and even less to contribute to the search for alternatives. (They have proved unable to respond to the cry for peace and Another Development). They are more a part of the problem than of the solution. There is thus a need to go back to fundamentals, and to discern in the function of human

agencies, those who may be better able to ensure the continuation of life in this planet, i.e., citizens and their associations together forming the third system".⁸ Marc Nerfin observed that the 'third system' which was first embodied in the 'third system project' is conceptually closer to 'third estate' than 'Third World' is to either. The latter concept is geographical; it concerns countries. The former two are socio-political; they concern people, and that is what the third system is about".⁹

In analyzing 'Alternative Development' in the global changing perspectives, Rajni Kothari emphasized the need of 'communication' playing its role for human survival. To him, "It should be communications that exposes the hypocrisy of the rhetoric in international forums, which is in direct contrast to the same elites' behaviour in their own societies. Communication should be a process that contains the process of backlash and promote the forces of transformation and survival. Even within the 'Third System', this will involve identifying new actors and constituencies and moving beyond the highly articulate and eloquent interpreters of the human condition to the real unheard voices. Some of these are occasionally found in the IFDA 'Dossier' but much more of this is needed".¹⁰

Rajni Kothari, in his recently published "Rethinking Development: In Search of Human Alternatives", attempted to make a conceptual framework of development and suggested that "there is a need to go beyond the original conception of 'another development' and 'alternative development strategies', beyond the Brandt Commission and North South Dialogues, beyond Cancun and mini-summits convened by Third World leaders and appeals by head of states."¹¹ In the conceptual framework of development what is characterised as 'alternatives in development,' Kothari suggested that the "policy of minima entails a policy of maxima. There should be a reasonable scale connecting the minima and the maxima, an admissible ratio between the two, thus limiting disparities and enabling society to implement the principles of natural justice. Participation of the hitherto marginalised groups of people in decision-making, at the desirable level and in optimum units, becomes the major focus in his alternative model for development."¹² The model of participation is explicitly stated in a number of sectors; this is what is called 'the integrated perspective.' Kothari's alternative

model for development is also reflected in the study of a group of scholars characterised as 'Human Scale Development.' It is focussed "and based on the satisfaction of fundamental human needs, on the generation of growing levels of self-reliance, and on the contradiction of organic articulations of people with nature and technology, of global processes with local activity, of the personal with the social, of planning with economy and of civil society with the state"¹³.

The concept of 'sustainable development' emerged as an important concept in 1987 following the report of the Brundtland Commission on 'Environment', and 'Development'. The report of the Commission envisages that the concept of 'sustainable development' contains two key issues: in the first place, it was need-oriented and wants to give overriding priority to the 'needs' of the world's poor. Secondly, it is 'the idea of limitation imposed by the state of technology and social organization and environments ability to meet present and future needs'. During the decade of 1990s, the concept got momentum and became an important tool of development strategy. The essence of 'sustainable development' in the context of the improvement of the concept of 'development' can be understood with reference to its basic characteristics: it is based on equity and justice. Secondly, it is a long-run process. Thirdly, it not only accepts the resource for development but also emphasizes the environmental phenomena for the survival of mankind. Fourthly, sustainable development ensures participatory development. It means that 'development is woven around people and not people around development'. Fifthly, the concept encompasses individuals, families, communities, corporate bodies, nations and the international society for development. And, sixthly, as a comprehensive concept, it encompasses also health care, education and social well-being¹⁴.

UNDP described sustainable development as "widening peoples' choices by enhancing their capabilities"¹⁵. In 1990, the Governing Council identified six areas which UNDP would stress to ensure sustainable human development. These areas are: (i) 'poverty eradication and grass-roots participation in development'; (ii) 'environmental problems and natural resources management'; (iii) 'management of development'; (iv) 'technical cooperation among developing countries'; (v) 'technology for development'; and (vi) 'women in development'.¹⁶ UNDP further

observed that “sustainable human development is development that not only stresses economic growth but distributes its benefits equitably”.¹⁷

The present concerns for the changing dimension of development and its linkage to peoples’ movement can further be understood in the light of what World Development Report 1999/2000 states, “sustainable development has many objectives. In so far as raising per capita income improves peoples’ living standards, it is one among many development objectives. The overarching aim of lifting living standards encompasses a number of more specific goals: bettering peoples’ health and educational opportunities, giving everyone the chance to participate in public life, helping to ensure a clean environment promoting intergenerational equity, and much more”.¹⁸

However, sustainable development calls for a changing condition that has to be created for grassroots empowerment with the real and effective participation of the people. It is to ensure control of the grassroots over the physical and social resources within the development process.

While development is conceived as peoples’ movement towards empowerment with environmental upgradation, Raff Carmen calls it a human-value-laden process. As he viewed, “Developments start in peoples’ minds, in their attitudes, value systems and judgements”.¹⁹ Faundez perceived that ‘development’ and ‘education’ are intertwined as “we cannot conceive of development in the absence of education any more than education in the absence of development”.²⁰ Here, Carmen is of the view that “Development, education, communication and humanization are all parts of same process”.²¹

Development of the Orientation of Rural Development Administration in the Developing Countries: A Brief Note on Present Concerns:

As ‘development’ is viewed as a goal oriented continuous process, it is a common view that development and development administration are inseparably linked up. In the developing nations where political systems and social institutions are relatively underdeveloped or less developed, their role is assumed more significant. It is also a common belief that necessary strategies of development applied in the developing world would be fruitful only when the proper and living

development administrative machineries are there, or their dependence on the rich countries would persist.

In fact, development administration got momentum as a sub-discipline in the 1950s. In the early 1960s, a considerable growth of concepts, hypothesis and theories of development is found in this field. In the newly liberated 'Third World' countries where a drastic socio-economic change is considered the first milestone for progress, the study is rooted in the liberal-pluralist theory of state. With a view to achieving this objective, the study of development strategies in this 'World' emphasizes the two key assumptions: necessary and efficient public management for the formulation and implementation of development programmes, and the bureaucratic effective instrument for development. In regard to this, it was observed: "scholars have identified several developmental underpinnings of development administration, namely, modernization by the diffusion of western values and technology; economic development defined in terms of growth of GNP; quantitative change bringing about social changes and political development; movement of societies from agraria to industria and traditional to modern through the transitional; and emphasis on harmony, stable and orderly change".²²

Interestingly, over the last five decades, like the concept of development, the core of development administration had changed dramatically in terms of its techniques and goal orientation. The development administration of the developing countries in the 1950s was primarily concerned with the transferring of the techniques of (public) management from the developed countries to developing nations. It was 'to create rational, politically neutral and impartial, efficient bureaucracies in the Weberian tradition'. During the UN First Development Decade, 'development administration' was supposedly based on 'professionally-oriented, technically competent, politically and ideologically neutral bureaucratic machinery'. Within the framework of the 'modernization approach', development was supposed to be dependent only on the country's administrative capacity. However, bureaucracy was considered the only acceptable instrument of development, which left no scope for the people in the total process of development. As a result, during the decade of 1970s the approach had to face an

ever-increasing criticism 'for being ethno-centric and for attempting to 'impose' Western concepts and values that were often irrelevant, inappropriate or adverse in poor countries'. And, the 'tools' of administration transferred to the developing world can do little to help the administrators to solve the complex and uncertain problems of change in their own socio-economic system.²³

During the UN Second Development Decade, especially in the mid 1970s, a considerable change of thinking in terms of development administration and a shift of focus had taken place. The aim was to expand the power of the machinery not only to perform the development projects efficiently but also to ensure 'more equitable distribution' of benefits of the programmes implemented. However, "greater attention was given to ways in which governments might alleviate the high levels of poverty in rural areas, elicit participation of the poor in development planning and management, and deliver essential public services to those groups who had previously been marginalized. Emphasis was on improving the capacity of public agencies to respond more efficiently to the needs of the poor, to provide for basic human needs, to stimulate productivity and raise the income of the disadvantaged groups, to create conditions in which community, private and voluntary organizations could play a stronger role in 'bottom-up' process of development planning, and to cope more effectively with the complexity and uncertainty of development activities".²⁴ However, rural development was considered the key-strategy and the decentralized process of planning is conceived more relevant than the centralized bureaucratic approach and management in the developing world. This decentralized approach, which was getting extensive recognition, was further supported even by a group of western exponents.²⁵

While "traditional society is non-participant...Modern society is participant".²⁶ While the government of a traditional society 'tends to remain the concern of a small elite group', modern society is characterized with popular participation, especially, of the large numbers who are poor. However, there has been a common but ever growing view that the people even of hinterlands should have a basic human right to take part actively in the decision-making process that may possibly affect their socio-economic lives. As a result, participation in Third world countries is being promoted by the United Nations Agencies and the

governments themselves.²⁷ In 1977, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, study entitled: "Towards a Theory of Rural Development" pointed out the grave concern that a bulk of rural masses of Asia were not yet liberated. They viewed: "some governments are trying top-down process of 'development' that seek to serve the masses through bureaucracies and the rural vested interests, the very agents from whom the rural masses need in fact to be liberated".²⁸

Surprisingly, while the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference of interventional economists and bankers was, essentially a conference about the monetary and financial problems of industrialized capitalist countries²⁹ and did not provide any prescription for the so-called "Third World" colonial countries, Cohen and Uphoff identified four very important kinds of 'participation' in their 1977 research report. These are: implementation, benefits, evaluation and decision-making, of which 'participation in implementation' was surprisingly found to be "the most common kind witnessed by the Cornell researchers".³⁰ Moreover, 'Putting People First' was promoted earlier to a great extent by the same powerful agencies, putting the view: "People are – and should be – the starting point, the centre and the end goal of development intervention [Sic]".³¹ It was revealing, rather interesting, that the two strands – the 'Putting People First' approach and the consensus of participation in development practice – merged in the title of Stan Burkey's (Burkey: 1993) work on rural development: "People First: a Guide to Self-Reliant, Participatory Rural Development".³² This 'People First' or 'Putting People First' or 'Putting the Last First' trend in rural development was pioneered by Robert Chambers. Chambers's 'Rapid Rural Appraisal Methodology' (1981) at the Institute of Development Studies in the University of Sussex was a counter-model to the 'quick and dirty' appraisal method or 'development tourists'³³. Chambers' counter approach: 'Putting the Last First' or 'reversals in learning' called for the learning 'at the other end' that "the farmer must educate outsiders; the poor must bring outsiders down to earth".³⁴ However, the revolutionary model of rural development seemingly forms the new basis of development administration, which tends to go beyond the 'elite centric', traditional development administration.

Need of Study: A Brief Account of West Bengal:

In the light of the above thumb-nail of discussion of some useful new concepts, methods, techniques and orientations of rural development administration that characterize rural development 'a meaningful enterprise' can be summed up: development as a human enterprise; community resource management at the local level, development as a learning process, decentralization and participation, involvement of local actors in the local actions, local beneficiary groups, local service organizations, local governments and so on.³⁵

The stress of community-based resource management on rural development, the policy of decentralization which envisages deconcentration or delegation or devolution or participatory or non-bureaucratic administrative structures, control of the community on resources and technologies etc. have evolved as a complete denial to the conventional or traditional vision of development.³⁶ However, the transition from the 'Top-down Approach' or delivered development to 'Bottom-up Approach' or 'Participatory development' signifies that the dream of 'participant development' becomes a reality only when the former approach is replaced by the latter. The present approach which signifies a new model of development for most of the developing nations, especially India is not an exception to this new emerging trend.

But, many investigations and researches have been carried out at the level of professionals, academics and other social scientists pointed out the grave concern that the goal of decentralized, people-oriented, participatory and self-reliant rural development and the policy of redistribution towards equity and justice is not achieved in India due to the fact that India followed precisely the "western capitalist model of development based on the theory of growth with 'trickle-down effect' and without redistributive justice. In the pursuit of capitalist path of development in practice, without doing away with the feudal relations of production and ever-increasing dependence of foreign aids, loans and financial capital, a paradigm of paradox was established".³⁷ While this necessarily calls for more intellectual investigation and clarity, the Government of West Bengal, which came to power in 1977 has been consistently claiming that its performance in the

country-side has been of a different kind than what existed before 1977. It is also claimed that the same Left Front has been able to retain and extend its mass support in the country-side of West Bengal because of its new approach: 'an alternative development approach, which has been projected in West Bengal, proved itself to be viable'...³⁸ While suggesting the need for an alternative approach to planning at the national level, Jyoti Basu expressed his concern that the entire approach undertaken earlier "has an inherent danger of taking the country into an international debt-trap. As an alternative to this strategy, a different approach to production planning has been attempted in West Bengal".³⁹ In regard to this he further added, "It is an approach which begins with laying utmost emphasis on the generation of purchasing power of the common people..."⁴⁰ However, the approach applied in West Bengal caused a success in implementing poverty alleviation programmes and the IRD programme as well. In 1984, Mr. Benoy Chowdhury, the then Minister for Panchayats claimed that West Bengal had exceeded the physical target in terms of IRDP by 17 percent during 1983-84. It was also claimed by Mr. Chowdhury that the state had exceeded the target in respect of at least nine point of Prime Minister's 20-Point Programme during 1983-84.⁴¹ In regard to these claims, Glyn Williams observed as CPI (M) claimed that the Panchayati Raj Institutions in West Bengal was central to achieving development aims: "by instituting a system of democratic local government, the party hoped there would be mass participation in the Panchayats and increased class-consciousness as a result".⁴²

The Left Front Government reiterates these claims even in late 1990s justifying its continued existence in power on which scholars have increasingly stressed to reveal more intellectual clarity. Ross Mallick viewed: "since 1977 the Communists have governed population larger than that of Britain or France. Its 68 million people re-elected the Communists repeatedly, indicating a continuing popularity and longevity not found by Marxists in any other democracy".⁴³ "Since the 1977 elections" as Lieten observed, "however, the state has had a remarkably stable government formed by the Left Front Parties led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI (M), and headed by Jyoti Basu as the longest-sitting Chief minister in any Indian state. The LFG, dominated by the CPI (M), had been in office since 1977 with a massive and growing mandate".⁴⁴

Keeping in view these claims of success, a modest attempt is made in the present section to examine the strategies and the role of administrative machineries of the Left Front Government of West Bengal to combat poverty through an individual beneficiary oriented programme i.e., IRDP. However, it is likely to be focussed on: whether there is any gap between strategies and facts, between purpose and action. Also, can we really say that a new form of participatory movement is emerging at the grassroots? Is the government representing a truly viable alternative?

While the administrative machineries and the strategies of the 'alternative approach' implemented in West Bengal attracted the interests of the scholars and experts, professionals and various institutions, many of them studied the anti-poverty programmes and their implementing agencies of the State of West Bengal.

Review of Literature on West Bengal - A Synoptic Note:

In 1986, Kirsten Westergaard in a study of West Bengal found considerable success of Left Front government in providing employment to the poor in terms of NREP.⁴⁵ She observed: "In West Bengal, the CPI (M) has, by contrast, used the local government institutions to mobilize the rural poor and to implement structured reform programmes. Needless to say, the interest of the poor are served..."⁴⁶ Swaminathan, in 1990, while working out a comparative study in terms of IRDP performance in West Bengal and Tamilnadu, found similar success with certain variations. Swaminathan concluded, "panchayats played an important role in improving the implementation of the programme in West Bengal".⁴⁷ Webster noticed in his case study in Burdwan District of West Bengal that most of the IRDP funds had gone to the poor, their condition had been considerably improved and 'a clear improvement in development work under the new gram panchayats' took place.⁴⁸ V.S. Vyas and Pradip Bhargava viewed: "it is significant to observe that states such as Karnataka, Kerala and West Bengal have better records in the implementation of PAP".⁴⁹

Biplab Dasgupta found in the IRDP concurrent evaluation of 1987-88 that in terms of actual felt needs, maintenance and after care of assets in the way to generate additional income and to cross the poverty-line, 'West Bengal has

performed relatively better'. Dasgupta further found in his 1989 evaluation that 'West Bengal performed better than average in terms of the proportion crossing the poverty line of Rs. 3,500.00, maintenance and quality of assets created, inclusion of working capital in costs and the sufficiency of help'.⁵⁰ While Dasgupta noticed a relatively better performance of Public Distribution System in West Bengal, the report of Alternative Survey of 1998-99 suggested that except Kerala and West Bengal, 'the PDS has never attempted to cover rural areas'.⁵¹ In 1990, Jean Dreze in his field based study on West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, also found that IRD Programme noticeably benefited the landless labourers and improved their living conditions.⁵² Sengupta and Gazdar observed that in West Bengal, most of the beneficiaries were found to be from the target groups and the transaction costs of obtaining the loan were found relatively small.⁵³ The state government further received considerable praise in the analysis of Atul Kohli who analyzed government in terms of leadership, ideology, organization and class. To him, the living condition of the poor rural people is improved considerably. And, "the role of the party was central in overcoming socio-structural and bureaucratic obstacles, enabling the governments' reformist intervention to achieve a modicum of success".⁵⁴

Besides, many political analysts and investigators have concentrated on the fact that the involvement of local level representatives in the planning and development activities at the grassroots is considered significant. It is viewed that at the time when the future of PRIs appeared to be uncertain, West Bengal 'made a remarkable headway towards their revival' and the respective government has successfully involved the panchayats in implementing all rural development programmes.⁵⁵ It is further similarly viewed that in sharp contrast with failure elsewhere, West Bengal elected panchayats have done remarkably well in the implementation of all state and centrally sponsored beneficiary oriented and employment generating anti-poverty programmes like NREP, RLEGP, IRDP, JRY, etc.⁵⁶ The implementation of these programmes through panchayats has created desired results in the way to the alleviation of poverty⁵⁷. In 1991, L.C. Jain viewed in his analytical study that West Bengal and Karnataka showed better results on a state-wise scale in terms of Panchayats' initiative to implement

development programmes related to local needs and priorities⁵⁸. These results have created a sharp contrast with the national result. And, the model introduced in West Bengal has declined the scale of rural poverty from 58.3 percent in 1977-78 to around 40 percent in 1994-95. Perhaps, it is one of the reasons to find out “the root cause” of success in this state due to its pro-poor nature⁵⁹. In regard to the decline of poverty trend, it was stated in the “Executive Summary” of Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) that “the pace of poverty reduction⁶⁰ was relatively rapid in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Gujarat, Punjab and West Bengal”.⁶¹

Contrarily, in a detailed World Bank Commissioned Study done by the Institute for Financial Management and Research found that unlike the implementation of the NREP in West Bengal, the IRDP came in for serious criticism. It was found in the study that West Bengal achieved only 18.6 percent in the first year and 33.5 percent in the second year of its target. And, it was the lowest of all the states in the country⁶². Sundaram and Tendulkar observed in their study that ‘less than 5 percent of the target group was covered’⁶³. Both analysts further viewed about the World Bank-commissioned Study that “the village Panchayats lacked administrative expertise, and found the task of decision-making tough.... Under the burden of these numerous responsibilities, lack of bureaucratic support, communication gap etc, the whole set up nearly collapsed. No decisions could be made, no activities could be undertaken and no programme was implemented. This explains the poor performance of the State in IRDP”⁶⁴. During the early years of Left Front government when it initially started to formulate new strategic policies, it appeared from the writings of Ashok Rudra that the policies of Left Front government were ‘fraud’ both in principle and in practice⁶⁵. In the same breath Ross Mallick concluded his study with the observation that Left Front Government failed to ensure any revolutionary change and its ‘reformism’ was less impressive than that of “Capitalist” ruling in other states. He asserted “The justification for its continued existence in office is therefore in serious doubt”⁶⁶.

In 1992, in a case study of Burdwan District of West Bengal Lieten (though in many cases Lieten acknowledged positive role of Left Front government) found the limitation that the Panchayat members in West Bengal did

not allow in many cases its benefit to percolate down to the rural poor⁶⁷. Initially, slow-started IRD Programme in the state as Lieten further observed in his study suffered from a serious set back and caused a dismal performance due to the exclusion of bureaucrats in the process. Poor administrative expertise of the Panchayats, to whom responsibility was entrusted, delays in the communication channels slow administrative machinery, poor repayment system etc. But, the implementation of the programme 'smoothed out' after its 'initial teething trouble'. "Targets were reached both in terms of credit mobilization and in terms of beneficiaries"⁶⁸

Moreover, while the role of the government, party-men, and Panchayats are claimed positive in the development process, a mixed reaction was focused in the words of Olle Tornquist. For Tornquist "the Communists in West Bengal do not only have their main base in rural areas with deep feudal roots, but have also right there and since the mid-seventies, managed to generate India's most impressive democratic decentralization, and a good deal of community cooperation and development too (despite using more alternative patronage and many top-down policies, as compared with Kerala)"⁶⁹. In the study of Roychoudhury and Biswas, it was observed that in terms of the choice of investment project, training of beneficiaries, back-up services etc., the West Bengal's record was not much better than that of most other parts of India⁷⁰.

Glenn Williams, while studying three villages of Birbhum District, West Bengal found that: (i) Left Front's model of panchayat for popular participation was not achieved in practice. (ii) As popular participation was not achieved, the Panchayat members came to play the role of the 'traditional headman'. And, however, the control of development funds of the programmes like IRDP and JRY gave them more power of economic influence than that of the landlords. And, (iii) as a result, panchayats' power was highly personalized and the possibility of malpractice grew up. Despite the fact, in the concluding observation Williams viewed: "Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Panchayati Raj has helped to produce positive change in the livelihood of labouring families"⁷¹. Arild Engelsen Ruud found in his study of two gram panchayats of Burdwan District (Udaynala and Gopinathpur – the primary data were collected at the time when Ruud was

carrying out his Ph.D. work, entitled: 'Socio-Cultural Change in Rural West Bengal') that the distribution of lands and IRDP assets were given mainly to the 'jatis' that comprise poor households, favoured them in the way to development. It was found that most of the low Caste recipients were poor and 'Bagdis' (a low Caste-group) received more land grants per population than others, and more IRDP loans (with the exception of the 'Santals' known as Scheduled Tribe)⁷². Ruud argued that the Communists played the role of patrons 'in a centrally constructed system of hierarchy and, however, they have been able to create vote banks in the rural areas and the top of rural hierarchy is dominated by 'middle-class peasants'⁷³.

A Critical Assessment on the Development Administration and Strategies of the Left Front Government in the Implementation of IRDP:

The major findings emerging from above review of relevant studies on the subjects are carefully attempted to focus in the subsequent chapters. Keeping in mind certain questions (related to IRDP and its implementation in West Bengal), as put forward, it is endeavoured to make a critical assessment on the subjects in the present section. The assessment is comprehensively portrayed based on certain main points: (1) Left Front Government's 'Alternative Development Approach', rural governance and IRDP – a historical context; (2) Policy of decentralization, devolution of power and PRIs as a tool of development; (3) Democratization at the grassroots and people's participation in the process; (4) Restructuring for better coordination in planning for IRDP implementation; (5) Local Politics, role of Leaderships and potential beneficiaries of IRDP; and (6) Grassroots empowerment and PRIs – whether people's control or party participation.

1. Left Front Government's 'Alternative Development Approach', Rural Governance and IRDP – A Historical Context:

As it is found in the foregoing discussions, the late 1970s gave rise to a development paradigm beyond the praxis of prevailing mode of planning and mode of economic development that created a new direction towards the

emergence of alternative approach and the 'paradigm shift' of 1980s. Here, the eminent Indian scholar S.C. Dube, who found ambiguities and contradictions in the previous models, observed that this, 'paradigm shift' "is represented by the progressive replacement of the more conventional 'economic development' by 'social development' and the linking of it to the notions of 'human needs' and 'quality of life', both of which offer conceptual novelties"⁷⁴. And, however, Dubey offered an alternative paradigm and policy framework as "an agenda for reflection and action' based on 'conscientization', 'affirmative action' and 'institution building' "⁷⁵. While the mid-to-late 1970s made a milestone for the emergence of basic human needs approach or an alternative model for rural development, a coalition of left-wing parties, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI (M) – came to power in West Bengal in 1977 'on the basis of a radical movement of the rural poor majority'⁷⁶. The party Communist in name but essentially socio-democratic in its ideology, social programmes and policies⁷⁷ was installed after a period of national crisis, political upheaval of state of about a decade and a stringent economic crisis in West Bengal.

Atul Kohli showed a sharp increase of political violence and governmental instability between 1967-77. As he viewed "The decade of 1967-77 in West Bengal politics is characterized by a severe governmentality crisis'. The crisis of governmentality is defined by Kohli with reference to three criteria: 'Coalitional instability', 'policy ineffectiveness' and 'most important, escalating violence in politics'⁷⁸. These crises, to him, were rampant during the decade of pre-left regime in West Bengal.

Similar to this, Sunil Sengupta and Haris Gazdar found in their study that during the late 1970s West Bengal experienced 'extremely high rates of rural poverty, stagnation in agriculture, relative decline in non-agricultural sectors, high and rising demographic pressure and the near absence of economic diversification'⁷⁹. In estimating the incidence of poverty in rural and urban areas of West Bengal, and India, the Planning Commission Methodology presented in 1993 that the percentage and the number of poor people were found 56.80 percent (64.00 percent in rural and 35.90 percent in urban areas) with 262.50 lakh (220.90 lakh is rural and 41.60 lakh in urban areas) in West Bengal in 1972-73

compared to the all India average 51.50 percent (54.10 percent in rural and 41.20 percent in urban areas). The Commission found that in 1977-78 it was 47.30 percent (53.16 percent in rural and 30.35 percent in urban areas) with 240.65 lakh (200.97 lakh in rural areas and 39.68 lakh in urban areas) in West Bengal compared to the all India average 43.40 Percent (46.13 percent in rural areas and 33.82 percent in urban areas)⁸⁰. According to the Expert Group Methodology, the percentage and number of poor people in West Bengal were 63.39 percent (73.16 percent in rural and 34.50 percent in urban areas) with 299.10 lakh (257.96 lakh in rural and 41.14 lakh in urban areas) in 1972-73 compared to the all India average of 54.93 percent (56.44 percent in rural areas and 49.23 percent in urban areas). The Group found that in the state of West Bengal in 1977-78, the percentage and number of poor people were 69.65 percent (68.34 percent in rural and 38.71 percent in urban areas) with 311.24 lakh (259.69 lakh in rural and 51.55 lakh in urban areas) compared to the all India records of 51.81 percent (53.07 percent in rural and 47.40 percent in urban areas)⁸¹. The main reasons for the backwardness of rural West Bengal as put forward by Biplab Dasgupta that the proportion of Scheduled Caste, Muslims and Scheduled Tribes together constitute more than half of the total population of West Bengal. Dasgupta viewed that this proportion, 'half the districts and half the population – country-wise – are backward'⁸².

The Left-Front Government's assumption of office in the crucial post-emergency 1977 election and its objectives, content, thrust and administrative strategy designed towards 'alternative approach' for rural development can be understood under the foregoing overall backdrops of situation in West Bengal. While the above situation called for a concrete change, the Left Front Government primarily emphasised for the restoration of the 'political order' when it came to office at the state level. In regard to this, Atul Kohli observed, "The most impressive achievement of the CPM, however, has been the restoration of the political order, and that without repression"⁸³. Kohli further observed: "...West Bengal under the CPI(M) is probably India's best governed state: the coalition that supports the CPI(M) is relatively stable; the gap between the government's commitments and its capabilities is modest, and political violence along caste, class or religion lines has been minimal."⁸⁴

Secondly, the Left-Front Government's policy of rural development pursued by 'the philosophy of what may be called redistribution before growth to ensure growth with social justice'⁸⁵ is the key-stone of the alternative approach. This thrust for rural development was reflected in the first 36-Point Common Minimum Programme, which 'gave top priority to upliftment and improving the economic condition of rural poor, mainly small and marginal farmers, share-croppers and agricultural labourers, through land reforms'⁸⁶.

The major constraints which the Left Front government had to face in the way to the above significant change of rural economy were: (i) to regenerate stagnant rural economy; (ii) to establish a new democratic set-up in rural areas; and (iii) to undermine 'rock departmentalism' rooted in deep elitism and conservatism permeating the bureaucratic structures⁸⁷. However, with a view to implementing 'Alternative Approach', 'an approach entirely different', the Left-Front government adopted a 'tactical approach' as the remedial measures. It had three-fold objectives, which are: First, it aimed to involve the people not only in the process of development programmes but also in the process of formulation and monitoring of development plans. Secondly, it aimed also 'to bring about a change in the correlation of class forces in favour of the poor and working people by involving them in an organized manner in the process of development'. Thirdly, during the economic crisis situation, when maximum possible reliefs are provided to the poor, "utmost restraint was considered necessary to see that people do not suffer from any illusion that their basic needs could be achieved without a radical structural change of the existing production relations"⁸⁸.

The implications of the objectives, which drew considerable attention of the scholars are that it was endeavoured a 'bottom-up approach' in terms of plan preparation and its implementation with adequate mobilization of the rural poor. In other words, as it was assumed, the disadvantaged groups should be aware of the fact that they are the prime actors of the system because they have an important role to play in the development process and can ensure the radical socio-economic change of the structure. It is commonly viewed that an effective promotion of basic equity and least social security in the rural areas depend upon the existence of credible institutions for local governance. The present

development policy discourse envisages that 'governance' is "the way state power is used in managing economic and social resources for development of society"⁸⁹. And, the 'good governance' is essentially responsible development management in the direction of democracy for peoples' empowerment through active participation of the actors in terms of development. The local government institutions, which are essentially the creation of the positive effort of 'good governance', are to restructure the socio-economic fabric in order to set it on the path of development.

During the period of this kind of elite-led crisis of rural governmentality in West Bengal, the Left Front government came to power, restructured the rural system and brought about 'a very successful development process with a strong pro-poor dimension'. The machinery used here was the 'radical improvement of local democracy' that was pointed out as the relatively successful experience of West Bengal⁹⁰. In reality, this successful experience was mainly ushered in by the CPI (M), the biggest partner of the Left Front. The party participated in the government to use it as an instrument for the mobilization of the masses and to lead struggle of the causes of people's democracy⁹¹. In regard to this, Atul Kohli arguably observed that while some problems are unresolved and some new problems are created by the CPI (M), "it is undeniable that a reform-oriented, disciplined party has generated moderately effective government in West Bengal"⁹².

With a view to regenerating rural governance, the CPI (M) found reasons at a greater degree the need of policy formulation and to identify the areas in which the government could utilize its powers in the effective way. As a result, the significance of local politics got momentum and the local panchayats pushed by the party began to play important role not only in the field of rural development but also in the process of the mobilization of the masses. In this way the rural West Bengal has been highly politicized in the second generation of PRIs which augmented rural awareness to a considerable extent. However, in contrast with national scenario, the disadvantaged groups were given adequate priority. And, their close political relation with the local party units and the considerable

influence of the party over the 'political panchayats' have been the spectacular development in rural West Bengal.

While rural governance got a new shape in the second generation of PRIs in West Bengal, a new type of rural leadership has emerged that is unheard of the modern panchayat tradition in India. In regard to this Atul Kohli observed that the panchayats of West Bengal and most part of India, "have seldom been free of domination of landlords or rich peasants. This is beginning to change in West Bengal. The CPM is curving out a pattern of political organization in rural West Bengal rare in India, namely, that of involving a penetration in the country-side without depending on the larger land owners"⁹³. And, however, the restoration of political order, revitalization of local governance and the prioritization to the rural poor are certain spectacular events, which accelerated a significant rural development. But, mention must be made here of what Atul Kohli opined in this context is that "the CPI (M)'s record on economic policy is not spectacular, but not without merit: its growth record is no worse than those of many other Indian states and its redistribution record is distinctively superior"⁹⁴. While South Asia is facing a crisis of governance, the Left Front government is more successful in establishing political governance than economic and civic governance. Perhaps, it could hardly overcome the restraints of a well-balanced governmentality in the state.

However, the Left Front government in West Bengal had built up a relatively strong base of rural governmentality with the help of its party organizations for the implementation of different anti-poverty programmes at the local level. While the Left Front government hoped of an increasing involvement of the PRIs to ensure the reversal of the process of 'dependence, indifference and corruption', a significant development took place in 1988, when it decided to make the panchayats directly responsible for various development work⁹⁵. In the implementation of IRD Programme, the routine procedure elsewhere was departed and the panchayats were directly involved and assigned the responsibility for selecting/distributing the production assets and for implementing the programme in collaboration with the commercial banks. There have been the village level Coordination Committees consisting of both panchayat members and

non-members at the village level. These village level committees performed their functions in a very effective way in terms of the identification of the IRDP beneficiaries and executed necessary formalities to get loans from banks. But the responsibility of the identification of beneficiaries, selection of schemes and monitoring was primarily given to the panchayat samiti at the block level supported by the block level officials under the guidance of the District Rural Development Agency.

2. *Policy of Decentralization, Devolution of Power and PRIs as the Tool of Development:*

The aims of the policy of decentralization and decentralized planning in the development process are not the new discourses, but these are evidently the needful efforts in the developing countries. In fact, decentralization denotes the sharing of decision-making authority with lower levels within the system or with the newly created organizations or agencies in the system or even with the organizations outside the system. Rondenelli, Nellis and Cheema beautifully explained the basic idea of decentralization and indicated four types of decentralization: (a) 'Deconcentration' (transference of some administrative authority to lower levels within the system); (b) 'delegation' (transference of responsibility for certain functions to the organization outside the bureaucratic structures and indirectly controlled only by the Central government); (c) 'devolution' (the need for the creation and strengthening of certain 'sub-national units' of the government but these agencies are outside the direct control of the central government); and (d) 'Privatization' (entrusting responsibility to the non-government organizations which are independent of the government)⁹⁶.

Decentralization, however, envisages that it is a more responsive process and aims to create 'a corporate sense of responsibility' in the decision-making institutions at the local level. In regard to this, Webster observed, "Decentralization has for sometime been seen as a means by which the state can be made more responsive, more adaptable to regional and local needs than is the case with a concentration of administrative power and responsibility in the central

state.... The extension of the state outwards and downwards can equally serve the objective of consolidating the power of a state at the centre as well as that of devolving power away from the central state; it can both extend, the state's control over people as well as the peoples' control over the state and its activities. Decentralization is a two-edged sword".⁹⁷ Webster further added, "If decentralization is about the organization of the state, popular participation is about the location of power and questions of responsibility and accountability in the state and its institutions"⁹⁸.

Obviously, while decentralization, primarily emphasizes the creation and strengthening of local organizations or agencies, functions of which are necessarily democratic in nature, these organizations at the local level demand peoples' participation in the process. To some, these are democratic institutions and capable of promoting local interest with their representatives. Rajni Kothari observed that "the entire process of decentralization should thus be seen as a means of effective democratic functioning. In such a process, social problems should be given due considerations, both in respect of building the necessary social prerequisites of nation-building and the removal of poverty and unemployment and in the context of resolving fundamental social and economic problems faced by diverse communities and across constellations of class and ethnicity. Decentralized governments should, therefore, be seen as instruments of social and economic transformation"⁹⁹. Thus, the spirit of decentralization process is genuinely democratic and its basic goal is to establish local government institutions to promote local needs. As Iqbal Narain observed: "democratic decentralization is a political ideal and local self-government is its institutional form"¹⁰⁰.

For the purpose of analysis, it can be argued that when the Left Front government came to power in West Bengal in 1977, the CPI (M) emphasized equally on two factors: (a) restructuring of development administration and implementation of development programmes within the state jurisdiction; and (b) establishment of a strong party base mainly in the rural areas not only by using its party organisations but also by the development approach started to implement statewide. However, L.F. Government found remedy to implement

decentralization policy so that the transfer of power to the local people would be possible to a considerable extent. In this way, the revitalization or resurrection of PRIs on the basis of 'direct party-based election' took place in 1978 on the realization that it would be the most effective means for the alleviation of rural poverty. Rather, it was considered that it was a means by which "the interests of the poor could be protected and the needs of the party could best be served."¹⁰¹

The government was also aware of the fact that the effectiveness of PRIs largely depends upon the backward class representation in the institution. Subsequently, the government considered land reforms as the precondition of such representation and peoples' empowerment in the rural areas. As it was argued: "...land reforms in West Bengal has helped in the transfer of power in the countryside from the hands of the parasitic, absentee and big landlords to the small landlords."¹⁰² And, the most spectacular event what happened to West Bengal in 1977 was the recognition of CPI (M) to its party-men to play an effective role towards the implementation of development programmes. As a result, the activities of political parties and government agencies have become inseparably linked up. Maheshwari observed, "the rural population is now vested with real power in West Bengal. Soon after its assumption of power, the party engaged itself in a bold and novel programme of ruralisation of its cadres."¹⁰³

Despite the pro-poor 'alternative approach' with the policy of decentralization with reliance on land reforms and PRIs started/implemented in West Bengal made a success story, upto 1985 the working of PRIs was primarily concerned with 'the local implementation of state policy' and the programmes of both the central and state governments.

But, "the decentralization planning in West Bengal adopted from 1985-86 was preceded by the politicization of Panchayat elections in 1978 and 1983, by the introduction of land reform through Panchayats and finally by the implementation of rural development programmes like, IRDP, NREP, RLEGP through Panchayats."¹⁰⁴ Mention must be made here that in August, 1985, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, in his letter written to Mr. Jyoti Basu stressed on the need for more active PRIs with peoples' participation and their active involvement in the local level planning. He further indicated: "A more direct attack on poverty was called

for and for the first time an effort in this direction was made through the Integrated Rural Development Programme....”¹⁰⁵ In response to this, Mr. Jyoti Basu highlighted a long ‘confident record of performance’ giving primary importance to PRIs that was in action in the state.¹⁰⁶

In order to materialise the policy objective of the devolution of power, the L.F. Government constituted a three-tier grass-roots planning organisation: the Block Planning Committee (BPC) at the block level; and, the District Planning and Coordination Council (DPCC) and District Planning Committee (DPC) at the district level. In addition to this, there is a Standing Committee both at the Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad levels for the formulation of plan and development. All these Committees are composed of government officials and mainly local representatives.

Subsequently, the long awaited significant 73rd Constitutional Amendment helped for the formulation of laws with basic structural frameworks in the way to declining external interference and securing sufficient representation of the weaker sections in the PRIs. Besides, making it mandatory for all state governments to establish, it empowered the state legislations to have provisions for decentralizing powers and responsibilities of the panchayats at the local level. The West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1992 was ‘a bold step’ in the direction. The Act created a provision of a new tier called “Gram Sabha’ which is to be constituted at each electoral constituency. The Gram Sabhas, ‘the soul panchayats’ have been substituted by ‘Gram Samsad’ which “is an institutional innovation for ensuring effective participation of the people.”¹⁰⁷

The PRIs is, no doubt, the most important dimension of rural development. Thus, while an objective condition was created in West Bengal for the involvement of common people and they were involved in the planning process, development process got a momentum in the direction of debureaucratizing the process. The approach introduced in this direction with PRIs “has proved to be the real basis of a people-centred rural development process”¹⁰⁸ and, the state “has emerged as a model state as far as the functioning of PRIs is considered.”¹⁰⁹

Although West Bengal at the initial stage experienced a conflicting situation caused from the tensions developed by politicians and bureaucracy, it disappeared “as soon as both the parties began to realize their respective roles in the changed situation.”¹¹⁰ Keeping in mind these views, a modest attempt is made to focus in the subsequent chapter the role of panchayats and bureaucracy in implementing IRDP and its component i.e. DWCRA in a backward district of West Bengal.

3. Democratization at the Grass-roots and Peoples' Participation in the Process:

During the decade of 1970s, there was a growing feeling among the institutions, policy planners and experts that “the failure of the earlier policy of development was due to its inability to activate grass-roots level socio-economic institutions in regions and sub-regions of rural area to ensure people's participation in rural development.”¹¹¹ In fact, there are many studies such as the Fifth International Action for Development/FFHC Conference which stressed on the fact that “development can be a reality with the involvement of people only.”¹¹² The study of Dag Hammarskjold Foundation which emphasised on the involvement of rural masses ‘steered by’ committed leadership and stressed on the ‘participatory democracy’ which is ‘more fundamentally’ governed ‘by the people’ in case of Asia, the research project entitled: “Apathy Protest and Participation in Rural Development Projects” of the Centre for Study of Development in India, the Working Group Report on “Block Level Planning” under the chairmanship of Dr. M.L.Dantwala and the World Bank report entitled: “The assault on World Poverty” published in 1975 emphasised the need of ‘greater decentralization’ and ‘local participation’ for rural development. As the World Bank Report highlighted: “Community involvement in the selection, design, construction and implementation of rural development programme has often been the first step in the acceptance of change leading to adaptation of new techniques of production and further, local institutions, such as farmers’ associations and cooperatives have obvious potential advantages for coping with administrative difficulties in reaching the rural poor.”¹¹³ Similarly, the UNDP in its Human Development Report, 1993 has expressed its concern that “peoples’ participation is becoming cultural issue of our times.”¹¹⁴

While there has been an ever growing demand of peoples' participation in the development process, some viewed that it means "getting people to agree to and go along with a project which has already been designed for them, or to get support of a few leaders."¹¹⁵ This project followed the policy of "I Manage, you participate" what was characterised as 'the dominant underlying principle.' And, however, "these tended to try to make people aware of their responsibility without giving them any authority to spend funds or to manage assets. People's participation was then expressed not in a manner that would establish their rights over assets, land or its produce."¹¹⁶ Commonly this view tends to raise a question: what does participation actually signify and it is for whose benefit?

Thus, as it is viewed, "participation should include the notions of contributing, influencing sharing, redistributing power and of control, resources, benefits, knowledge and skills to be gained through beneficiary involvement in decision making. Participation is a voluntary process by which people, including the disadvantages (in income, gender, caste or education), influence or control the decisions that affect them. The essence of participation is exercising voice and choice, and developing the human, organisational and management capacity to solve problems as they arise in order to sustain the improvements."¹¹⁷ It is defined further that "participation is a process and it could be viewed as a means to an end and in one sense as an end in itself. In a broader sense, people's participation is beyond rural or urban development. It is organising building, responsive, active and democratic communities. Participation is a learning process."¹¹⁸

In case of India, the scholars and observers, found in their evaluations as it is commented that several rural development programmes have failed to offer a solution to the alleviation of rural poverty without peoples' participation.¹¹⁹ Even in the late 1970s, the experts and policy makers on the basis of their realization of which the 'central theme that lack of peoples' participation has been the major lacuna of earlier policy, concentrated to mobilize the rural people in the process of development.¹²⁰ However, it was emphatically stated in the draft of the Sixth Plan (1978-83) : "The Plan, whose primary emphasis is on rural development and rural

services, will demand a much greater level of organisation and public participation than past plans....”¹²¹

Under these scenario it was claimed, prevailing all over the country accompanied by the centralized bureaucratic approach, and, at the same time when the panchayats were “a network of toothless symbols of a non-existent rural democracy”¹²² in West Bengal, the L.F. Government took initiatives for ‘the revitalization and democratization of the Panchayat system.’¹²³ Promod Dasgupta, the then Chairman of the Left Front characterised these elections on the basis of the Marxist-Leninist approach as the struggle for establishing the rights of the rural poor against the vested interests and exploiting classes in the rural areas.¹²⁴ The L.F. Government explained the need for the involvement of ‘village councils’ in the direction of grass-roots democracy in the following words: “The involvement is based on the consideration that in the planning with an emphasis on the rural poor...there is a need for participation of these poorer sections in an organised manner and, given the detailed nature of the programme, it is also important that this organisational structure be correspondingly decentralized.”¹²⁵

So far as the Panchayat activities are concerned, the CPI(M) provided definite directions to the panchayats at each level. As the CPI(M) West Bengal State Committee explained: this does not mean acting at will. It means activation of panchayats in accordance with the principles and ideals of the party....”¹²⁶ And, thereby the Panchayat sub-committee was formed at each level which is the ‘Parichalan Committee’ of the party. In explaining the activities of these committees, the State Committee indicates: “The final decision at each level will be taken by the Parichalan Committee of the party although the elected members may offer recommendation.”¹²⁷

Mention must be made here that on the basis of relevant experiences gathered from the first three consecutive panchayat elections held in West Bengal, Benoy Krishna Chowdhury, the then Minister for Land Reforms and Panchayats explained: “The people should not be treated as object of compassion and the administration should not arrogate to themselves a superior position above the people, to dole out relief to them and thereby to oblige them with the expectation of compliance to their dictates as indebted persons.... So people should be treated

with due respect.”¹²⁸ In regard to IRDP Jyoti Basu added: “The involvement of the Panchayats in the Integrated Rural Development Programme...has ensured people’s participation, and, in the process, acted as an insurance against machination of unscrupulous touts and middlemen.”¹²⁹

In order to conform the peoples’ participation more relevant the West Bengal CPI (M) State Committee further explains: “we must involve the people irrespective of all classes and creed in the activities of the Panchayat. The people of the area must be made aware of the fact that it is their money and work. They will decide the priority of expenditure and implementation of development works...The process of decision must start from the people.”¹³⁰

In West Bengal, the pro-poor character of the PRIs and the people’s participation in the institution can be attributed in terms of class composition of the representatives and the class interest represented by them. The study of the Government of West Bengal, Development and Planning Department done (1978-79) soon after the first Panchayat election revealed the fact that more than 71 percent of the representatives were small and marginal farmers (having land holdings less than 2 acres –42.9%, 2-5 acres-28.2%, 5-8acres – 13%, 8-10 acres – 8.1%, more than 10 acres –7.87%).¹³¹ Other subsequent studies done by Atul Kohli (1983), Kirsten Westergaard (1986), G.K. Lieten (1988-1992), Neil Webster (1992), Prabhat Datta (1996), K.D. Gangrade (1997) found a pro-poor character of the PRIs on the basis of class background of the members with the evaluation of subsequent elections following 1977. On the basis of data of the first three consecutive elections held in 1978, 1983, and 1988, Jyoti Basu explained its pro-poor character that ‘it has been found that about 85 percent of them have come from small farmers and below.’¹³²

However, observations and studies clearly envisage the approach of the Left Front Government to the panchayats and the rural people. It can be argued that the L.F. Government presented the PRIs with decentralizing powers, as the only way to give democracy to the masses. It is evident that the PRIs are based on the direct party election and adequate party control. Despite the fact, it can also be argued that neither the democracy ‘has taken a backseat’ nor the party is a ‘centralizing operational mechanism’ in West Bengal. Rather, “Panchayat Raj

legislation and the parallel institutions of the CPI(M) are designed to 'empower the poor', to bring the poor collectively into the process of local government and local rural development. This empowerment of the poor, or the establishment of a 'peoples' democracy' as CPI(M) prefers to call it, is intended to go beyond the passive act of voting, its goal is to mobilise the poor into active participation in all aspects of local government and politics."¹³³ It can also be argued that the level of political participation in West Bengal is widespread what helps to build mass political consciousness, peoples' participation in the local government as well as in the implementation of development programmes. With the changing agrarian structure and the previous subordinate socio-economic condition, the common people have now accepted the local government as part of their life. The thrust of people's participation has been further augmented by the 'Gram Sabha' and mainly 'Gram Samsad', which have attempted to institutionalize grassroots participation to a considerable extent. All voters in each electoral constituency of the Gram Panchayat constitute a 'Gram Samsad' and all voters of a 'Gram Panchayat' constitute a 'Gram Sabha'. A 'Gram Samsad' is empowered "to guide and advise the Gram Panchayat in regard to the schemes for economic development and social justice undertaken or proposed to be undertaken in its area...West Bengal has...given extensive powers to the Gram Samsad and Gram Sabha."¹³⁴

Keeping in mind the above discourses, we shall try to focus in our findings as to what extent the Panchayats were involved in the IRD Programme and ensured people's participation in West Bengal.

4. Restructuring for Better Coordination in Planning for IRDP Implementation:

It is imperative to note that the Asoke Mehta Committee, appointed by the Central Government in December 1977 emphasised the need for the decentralization of power, planning process and developmental activities below the state level. As the Committee suggested: "The growth and complexity of development programmes for rural areas also increasingly call for closer coordination at levels below the state."¹³⁵

It is evident from the segments of total 132 recommendations of the Committee that, it strongly appealed for the need of participatory decentralized planning with relevant coordination at the district, block as well as village level. In West Bengal, the proposed strategy has been applied in 1985-86 and the Left Front Government is promoting the process as a tool of economic development¹³⁶ with great vigour. The ever growing responsibility of the PRIs and the departure from 'routine procedure elsewhere, in the implementation of district level development programmes i.e., NREP, RLEGP, IRDP including land reforms, made a new dimension in the way to better coordination in planning. The Evaluation Organisation of the Planning Commission observed in its final report in 1984 what is cited by Jyoti Basu that "the involvement of Panchayats has led to a much better coordination in the planning and implementation of the programme in West Bengal."¹³⁷

On the basis of 'Confident record' of performance and experience on the panchayats, the Left Front Government initiated the decentralized system (1985-86) by providing that the state rural development plan could be formulated 'from a more localised base.' This restructuring of planning system required that each gram-panchayat would prepare a statement of the pressing needs of the people in its constituency called 'basic needs statements.' The statements were to be passed to the Block Planning Committee (BPC) at the Panchayat Samiti level. The responsibility of the BPC was to prepare a block level plan on works under different development programmes to meet both the basic needs proposals of the Gram Panchayats and the budget limit of the block. These blocks' consolidated plans were then passed on to the District Planning Committee (DPC). These were discussed and consolidated into the Annual District Plan which were finally placed before the District Planning and Consolidating Committee for final approval.¹³⁸ This was obviously 'a new step towards decentralized and coordinated planning at the district and the block level.'¹³⁹

Keeping in mind the above changes in the direction towards a decentralized and coordinated planning structure, an attempt is made to focus briefly on the restructuring of planning in terms of the implementation of IRD Programme.

Although IRD Programme was in essence a centrally sponsored subsidised credit scheme and its implementing responsibility was entrusted to the state governments, the IRDP guidelines assigned the primary responsibility to the departmental officials at the block level. In West Bengal, the Left Front Government departed from this usual process of IRDP similar to the administrative structure in the way to establish coordinated planning. In regard to this Jyoti Basu observed: "The responsibility of implementation of the Integrated Rural Development Programme – the identification of beneficiaries, selection of schemes and monitoring –has...been given primarily to the Panchayat Samity, which is supported by the Block level staff under the guidance of the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA). Integrated functioning of the DRDA and the Zilla Parishad has been ensured by involving the Sabhadipati and the concerned members of the Zilla Parishad as chairman and members respectively of the DRDA along with the District Magistrate being involved as the Vice-chairman."¹⁴⁰

However, the agency was 'a departure from the all-India pattern'¹⁴¹ and it was thereby "tied into the Panchayat framework, its autonomy and lack of accountability undermined."¹⁴² In West Bengal, the DRDA was kept outside the scope of the PRIs¹⁴³ for a long time. By a recent policy pronouncement in 1999-2000 of the Left Front Government, the DRDA has been merged with the Zilla Parishad. Here, it is to be noted that in order to create a closer linkage and effective cooperation between PRIs and DRDA and to make the DRDA more representatives, certain proposals had been adopted centrally which had already been explained in the foregoing chapter.

Nevertheless, it has been observed in regard to the extent of success on decentralization process that "the success of the decentralization experiment in West Bengal, especially the introduction of the scheme of formulating village-based district planning process is attributed to the commitment of the state government towards decentralization."¹⁴⁴ Obviously, the observation indicates what the Left Front Government has done in respect of the implementation of centrally sponsored anti-poverty programmes i.e., IRDP. Commonly the list of IRDP beneficiaries was to be prepared by the Gram Panchayats. These findings of

the concurrent evaluation of 1987-88 also brought out the fact that all beneficiaries were selected by the Gram Panchayats. But, in reality the work was done by the branch committees and peasant organisations of the party which had to get formal recognition by the IRDP sub-committee.¹⁴⁵ In fact, in the local level the programme was officially being implemented by the Gram Panchayats and the Panchayat Samities. The Panchayats had to identify the beneficiaries and the Samities were then required to perform the household survey in accordance with the guidelines in the selected villages in order to enable the Gram Panchayats to do their work successfully.¹⁴⁶

Lieten, in his study, found that the elected members at the village level “have a dominant say in earmarking the funds available from departmental outlays, district plan funds and special programme outlays, (such as the IRDP, NREP, and RLEGP).”¹⁴⁷ In addition to this, the members have a decisive role in the distribution/selection and recovery of bank loans. As it was stated: “Panchayats should take responsibility for the formulation of schemes under the IRDP and implementation of the same in collaboration with banks. They should identify the persons eligible for getting loan under IRDP and sponsor their case to the banks... They should assist the bank in the follow-up and recovery of loans. In short, they should extend all kinds of help to commercial banks and other departments for the best utilization of bank credit.”¹⁴⁸

Although the Panchayats had a ‘decisive role’ to play in respect of IRDP beneficiaries, the Gram Panchayats could not make it figure in their budgets. It was the responsibility of the Gram Panchayats to recommend the list of potential beneficiaries to the Panchayat Samities. In the Panchayat Samiti level, the recommendations were discussed by a special sub-committee, which was chaired by the Sabhapati and the B.D.O. as the Convenor and composed of the elected members, some other block officials and the representatives of the local banks. Some of the important functions as performed by the said sub-committee were as follows:¹⁴⁹

- (a) to make final selection of the recipients according to the prescribed guidelines from the list selected at the Gram Panchayat level;

- (b) to prepare the feasible the bankable schemes for each of the beneficiaries;
- (c) to process the bankable cases to expedite their acceptance by the financial institutions; and
- (d) to monitor the progress of the programme on the basis of field visits.

However, it is clear that there had been a considerable coordination in planning for IRDP even below the apex body in the district level i.e., DRDA. Commonly, the planning was envisaged by the panchayats and the operational guidelines for the block plans were prepared at the Panchayat Samiti level. The aim was to carry out the programme on a planned basis. In addition, the Samities had to maintain the village plan register stating details about the identified families and the programme designed for them under IRDP.

Mention must be made here that the level of peoples' participation and planning at the grass-root level got momentum at the time when 'Gram Sabha' at the Gram Panchayat level and 'Gram Samsad' at each Panchayat Constituency have been introduced. In fact, the 'Gram Sabha' has been substituted by 'Gram Samsad.' All adults of each Gram Panchayat have an opportunity to meet annually in the Gram Sabha meeting in which the Panchayats have to place a complete report of the resolutions of the Gram Samsads and the views of the Gram Panchayats, mainly, the works done or proposed to be done for deliberation and recommendations of the Gram Sabha.

While the Gram Sabha has been introduced to ensure peoples' participation in the coordinated planning process, the Gram Samsad, the 'institutional innovation' aims to enhance the ability of the masses to participate in the direction to economic development.

Lieten found that in the gram sabha meetings, "the issues are usually more down-to-earth, and although the *boktrita* culture is not altogether absent, participation takes place."¹⁵⁰ It is revealed in another study that the meetings of the Gram Sabha "are held regularly. The beneficiaries are consulted about the schemes to be taken up and sites to be selected for launching projects."¹⁵¹

Notwithstanding limitations and control of higher bodies, the Gram Sabha and Gram Samsad keep a door simultaneously open to political consideration and

nepotism in case of failure to achieve the objectives properly. The state government is empowered to take disciplinary actions against the Gram Panchayats in case of inability on the part of the Gram Panchayat to hold the meetings of the Gram Samsad. As it is argued: "It shows the seriousness of the government and the political will."¹⁵²

On the basis of above discussion if we consider people's participation in all the stages of development process such as the identification and selection in the more localised base, implementation and monitoring and benefit sharing in the restructured planning system, then it can be argued that the Left Front Government has been able to establish a coordinated development process for poverty alleviation. Subsequently, we shall try to focus how the system was well equipped in achieving the objectives of IRDP and its sub-component i.e., DWCRA.

5. Local Politics, Role of Leaderships and Potential Beneficiaries of IRDP:

One of the remarkable features of the Asoke Mehta Committee Report is that it recognized the fact and favoured the 'open participation' of political parties in Panchayati Raj affairs.¹⁵³ The step was, however, 'pragmatic' and 'desirable' because "Not only are political parties the main channels of mass involvement in current issues including local ones, but they also become accountable when they are openly involved in panchayati raj institutions."¹⁵⁴ –This foundation stone of political competitiveness made a new dimension of local politics "for which West Bengal has shown the way."¹⁵⁵

In fact, it was a spectacular event that the Left allied parties came to power in West Bengal in the post-emergency period situation in 1977 with the total sharing of 50 percent of votes and nearly 80 percent of total seats. Besides, CPI(M) emerged as the largest party with 35.8 percent of votes and 177 seats in the House of 280. Whereas the party (CPI(M)) secured only 14 seats in 1972 election. On the contrary, the political strength of INC has declined remarkably (In 1972, the INC won 216 or, 49.1 percent of votes in 1972 and 23.4 percent of votes in 1977).¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Congress Party is not to be considered as an

insignificant force in the Left Front ruled West Bengal. For, it is found in the long history of INC in its electoral support in the Assembly elections that it secured more than 40 percent or nearly 40 percent of total votes except 1997. (As it secured 43.3 percent, 41.1 percent, 46.3 percent, 35.4 percent and 36.9 percent in the elections held in 1962, 1967, 1969, 1971, 1972, 1977, 1982, 1987 and 1991 respectively).¹⁵⁷

While the role of politics for rural development at the local level has been recognised, it was observed that its role for rural development has to be seen at three levels of governance: national, state and local. To make stable its power the state level political party always 'look for its political base' at the local level. "Hence state politics seeks to homogenize politics within the state by forging a vertical nexus between the state and grassroots level politics. Politics at the local level loses much of its terrain. Still these are enough local level problems to energize local politics. Also, local politics being closest to the people has necessarily to respond to local socio-economic milieu. Rural development takes place at local sites where the rural social structure lends form to politics."¹⁵⁸

In this connection, a significant observation was made that rural development depends upon the need for the 'radical restructuring of rural power structure.' So long as the local power remained the handmaid of rural elites, it would help to persist 'the benefit monopolization by a minority of power grabbers.' However, the local power structure needs support of the higher level structure specially when the existing state power structure has to be changed. The aim is to ensure the radicalization of politics. "Only then can the rural local power structure be challenged and changed. That is what happened in States like Kerala and West Bengal led by the CPI (M) which struggled hard to occupy the political space at the rural local level. Through steady concientization of the rural poor and their involvement in rural local institutions, it has been possible, to a large extent, to alter the rural power structure and thus to reallocate resources largely in favour of the rural poor."¹⁵⁹

In this process of restructuring, in 1977 the CPI (M) followed a dual policy: 'a more disciplined approach towards policy implementation' and a strategy to build a strong party base capable of resisting the type of onslaught unleashed upon

it...’ –a strategy as the party believed, through which the interests of the masses could be protected and the need of the party to ensure political mobilization could best be served. However, the Left Front Government, soon after its coming to power, has taken a moderately effective measure with the influence of the CPI (M), for agrarian reform to ensure benefits to the poor farmers and agricultural labourers in one hand, and, a programme for the revitalization of the local government institutions (PRIs) contested on the basis of party lines. The first panchayat election held in June, 1978, after a full year of the government came to power, ‘gave the Left Front an overwhelming mandate.’¹⁶⁰ Since then there have been four consecutive panchayat elections. “The success of Left Front candidates in these elections has been overwhelming and consistent.”¹⁶¹ In regard to this, Paul R. Brass observed: “The CPI (M) in West Bengal, of course, has controlled the resources of the state government since 1977 and has used that control to extend its support throughout the countryside by gaining control of village panchayats (councils) and by implementing legislation for the production of the rights of tenants, sharecroppers, and the landless.”¹⁶²

Here, it is relevant to have a closer look on the results of the different consecutive gram panchayat elections which may reveal the political support to Left Front and different major political parties and a regional variation in trust in centre, state and local governments. Table 1.1 and 1.2 show the same:

Table No. 1.1
Seat-division in Panchayat Elections:

Parties	1978	1983	1988	1993	1998*
CPI(M)	60.4	53.4	64.5	58.0	49.79
LF	69.3	60.1	71.9	63.8	55.74
Cong(I)	9.8	32.3	23.3	26.7	12.05
BJP	--	0.1	0.1	3.9	7.69
TMC	--	--	--	--	19.97
Others	20.9	7.6	4.7	5.6	4.54

Source: Election Commission, West Bengal; Cited in Lieten, G.K. (1996), p-57, and West Bengal – A West Bengal Government Fortnightly, Vol. XXXX, No.12, June, 16,1998, p-265

*** The records of the election held in 1998 shows the results excluding the district of Darjeeling.**

Table No. 1.2
Regional Variation in Trust in Central, State and Local Government
 (in percent)

Trust in Different Levels of Govt.	Central	State	Local
All India	35.3	37.5	39.9
Bihar	29.9	30.0	29.9
Gujrat	22.7	22.1	39.7
Maharashtra	30.8	34.0	40.7
Punjab	14.9	16.0	13.9
Tamilnadu	28.6	36.5	40.3
West Bengal	35.9	40.8	50.6

Source: Mitra, Subrata K and Singh, V.B. (1999), p-227

Table 1.1 shows that in 1978, the Left Front achieves a landslide victory and captured 69.3 percent of the seats and CPI (M) secured as many as 60.4 percent of seats whereas the Cong (I) was able to secure only 9.8 percent of seats. The records show that the overall results of the Left Front and even the CPI (M) are 'overwhelming and consistent.' Similarly, Table 1.2 shows that in terms of the level of trust in central, state and local government, West Bengal ranked the first position. The remarkable feature is to be stated that the level of trust in the local governments is higher than both the levels of central and state governments. Here, West Bengal ranked not only the highest position (50.6 percent), but its position is remarkably higher than Maharashtra (40.7 percent) and Tamilnadu (40.3 percent).

Obviously, during the Left Front regime, the overwhelming mandate to Left parties, specially to CPI (M) and the high level of trust in local governments are the spectacular events in the political process developed with the radical restructuring of local power. Here, it is pertinent to raise a question to which emphasis can be given –why did the Left Front implement the programme of PRIs immediately and continue it in the subsequent period?

Many scholars, such as Webster, observed that it is the ideological basis from which the programme of PRIs was introduced which is "a central element in the CPI (M)'s strategy to entrench its political position within the state of West Bengal.' And, CPI (M) does not deny its political aims in the implementation of Panchayati Raj.¹⁶³

With a view to justifying its stand in this regard CPI (M) argued, what is put forward by Webster indicates that the interests of the party and of the 'poor' and the 'weak' are 'one and the same.' In this connection, the party suggested: "a 'peoples' democracy' is a common and unifying interest, and that decentralized government, the devolution of the process of planning, the participation achieved through direct elections to the panchayats, and reforms that enable the poorest to participate as the poor and not as clients of the powerful, are all important steps towards political development, economic development, and a 'peoples' democracy."¹⁶⁴

Towards this direction of this change Webster further pointed out that the introduction of direct party based elections and the ending of 'rock departmentalism' ushered in by the 'strong political will' of the Left Front were the significant changes to ensure the implementation of the Panchayati Raj programme successfully. As Theodore Bergmann commented in his concluding observation of his comparative study of four states (West Bengal, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka) in terms of agrarian reforms of West Bengal that "that prerequisite of success of agrarian reforms is not the availability or abundance of land for distribution; it is rather the political will to implement."¹⁶⁵ These have 'facilitated the subsequent change in rural development and the politics of rural West Bengal.'¹⁶⁶ The instruments which caused innovative changes in terms of rural development in West Bengal are the recording of sharecroppers, distribution of land deeds to the poor peasants and 'causing a more accessible and transparent bureaucratic process.' These are some of the important achievements in which panchayats assumed a significant role.¹⁶⁷ In fact, Benoy Choudhury made the 'difference' clear by saying that 'then' people "had no initiative, no involvement in their local politics, in their development. Now the poor have say, they can seize the initiative."¹⁶⁸ In this way, the 'class-based' organisations emerged and the poor peasants i.e., *bargadars*, *pattaholders*, etc. were organised and encouraged 'to take up the critical issues of the community.' As Westergaard observed: "These 'class-based' organizations were involved in the development process and panchayat activities were instrumental in effective people's participation in the administration of development programmes."¹⁶⁹ She further illustrated it as a 'political' strategy of

the Left Front Government by which it 'mobilized the rural poor without alienating their small and middle peasants.'¹⁷⁰

Perhaps, the most significant achievement of Panchayati Raj which it enabled to establish, is an effective link between the rural society and the state. As a result, "panchayati raj democracy became an optimal instrument of parliamentary communism."¹⁷¹

While the scholars have analysed the Left Front Government in terms of 'leadership', 'ideology,' 'organisation' and 'class' and fairly represented the functioning of Panchayati Raj and have credited them highly, many of them have portrayed the role of the parties and given considerable emphasis. As Webster further observed: "In the long term, the introduction of parties has politicised development in the minds of the villagers. Development is now associated with a party, its programmes and policies and it involves the voter, the local politician and the departmental officer in a single set of institutions and processes."¹⁷² On this standpoint, it is endeavoured to focus on a brief account of what the relation is between the organisational leadership of the party, panchayat leaders and the people and their role in progress? In addition, if so, another question is equally important as to what extent the people have become 'the centre of power' and 'the basic engine of the development process'. As Rajni Kothari beautifully illustrated: "Decentralization soon began to be seen as an alternative system of governance where a 'people-centred' approach to resolving local problems is followed to ensure economic and social justice. The entire process would be for locating people at the centre of power so that they become the basic engine of the development process and not, as hitherto, merely its beneficiaries."¹⁷³

Neil Webster explained the factors through which the electoral growth of the CPI (M) has taken place in the subsequent period. These factors are: (I) the growth of the CPI (M)'s organisation and the role of the mass front organisations; (II) Left Front government's successful agrarian programme; and (III) the organizational weakness of the opposition i.e., Congress (I). It is illustrated that the CPI (M) has extended its organisational structure 'along strong democratic-centralist lines.' Besides, the party has created a number of mass front organisations. The purpose is 'to mobilize particular social groups to the CPI (M)

political cause.' These organisations are: Kisan Sabha (peasant association) with its village Kisan Samities (local committees), the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), the Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti, etc.¹⁷⁴ Among different social groups organised by the organisations, in the rural areas the landless labourers, sharecroppers and small landowners which constitute the majority of the rural population in West Bengal, work a considerable role in the political mobilization. These are also the groups that have become the CPI (M)'s main supporters.¹⁷⁵

While studying the organisational structure of the party, Webster found that the CPI (M) and its front organisational structure are closely parallel to the panchayat structure. The party establishes a strong control not only over the members of the party and the supporters in the front organisations but also those who serve as the members of the panchayats. At the higher two levels (Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad), almost all elected members of the CPI (M) and other left parties are full party members. At the lower level while all members are not party members, in most cases the full party members hold the position of Pradhan (Chairperson) and Upa-Pradhan (Vice Chairperson) where the left parties are in power. "The gram panchayats' affairs are discussed by the local party members in closed meetings and the elected supporters are then advised as to how party policy should be carried out through the gram Panchayats."¹⁷⁶

It is stated earlier that the Panchayat Parichalana Nirदेशिका (PPN) or 'Directives of the West Bengal State Committee on Running the Panchayats' developed by the CPI (M) is an effective policy with regard to the functioning of panchayat institutions. The State Committee of the CPI (M) issued the PPN in the form of a 'newsletter' and sent to the panchayats through the district committee 'in order to coordinate its ideological and political work with that of the panchayat institutions.'¹⁷⁷ The basic purpose is, as it is explained, to "strengthen democratic method(s) in running the panchayats, and to encourage more active popular participation in panchayats."¹⁷⁸ The PPN states, "...the basic issue involved here is giving party leadership to panchayats. This leadership consists of (a) political leadership and (b) organisational leadership."¹⁷⁹ The Directive further states: "All elected party members of Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad will act under the respective committees. Generally, the local and Zonal Committees of the party

will look after the Gram Panchayat Samitis respectively. The final decision at each level will be taken by the Parichalan Committee of the Party although the elected members may offer recommendation.”¹⁸⁰

However, it is evident from the directives, as it is stated: “The party has clear directives about the way a revolutionary party should use and utilize these panchayats”¹⁸¹ These Panchayati Raj functionaries are controlled and guided by the extra-constitutional political leaderships. Here, there has been a sharp contrast with the activities of the members of PRIs of the opposition specially Congress (I). Unlike opposition, the CPI (M)’s activities are attributed by the political will and the ideological commitment of the members of the party and its front organisations. In regard to the equation between the organisational leadership and the functionaries representing the party, it is illustrated: “This constant struggle between the public and the private – in an environment that has increasingly become more conscious of democratic rights and the need for transparency – has become the hallmark of CPM politics in contemporary West Bengal.”¹⁸²

While the CPI (M) has characterised the directives as the democratic way for maintaining and strengthening democratic methods, many scholars and investigators, political opponents, administrative officials and civil servants have characterised it as an ‘undemocratic interference’ in the working of the panchayats. Some have denounced it as ‘a so-called process of decentralization’ a ‘power centric operation’ which remains a strong challenge to democracy in rural West Bengal.”¹⁸³ Ross Mallick denoted the CPI (M) regime a captive of “its landlord base” and the “dominant elite” of which panchayat activities ‘to be something of a distortion.’¹⁸⁴

Ashok Rudra and Ratan Khasnabis, the two ultra leftism inspired intellectuals and renowned outspoken left critics raised their accusing finger at and launched a strong attack against the ideological and theoretical basis of the CPI (M). Khasnabis denounced the party policy of going through ‘the institution of the class society’ as ‘the shameless compromise’ with the state structure.¹⁸⁵

On the contrary, the CPI (M) and its spokesmen found adequate reasons in the roles played by the party and, even essential to implement the given commitment of rural democracy. Here Panchayati Raj programme is supposed to

challenge the vested interests and to ensure the real positive impact on rural development by improving the bargaining power of the rural poor. "Likewise, if there is to be efficiency and accountability and the prevention of corruption in the work of panchayat, this type of discipline that a committed party can impose is important. Without these the programme would be largely ineffective."¹⁸⁶

It is to mention here that the institutionalization and regularization of local electoral process have ensured the popular participation, 'electoral accountability' and responsiveness of the major political parties. And, these have contributed in running the PRIs in West Bengal with credit. In regard to this, Echeverri-Gent observed that 'democratic competition between political parties has given incentives to the CPM and the Left Front leadership to 'monitor the performance of panchayat members and weed out those engaged in corruption'.¹⁸⁷

Besides, another important factor which has contributed in the way to the revitalization of Panchayati Raj Programme is the participation of socially deprived sections, such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the poor class people, such as agricultural labour/small peasant families in the process. The high visibility of such candidates is found on the CPI (M) panels which is claimed to reflect 'the changing class character of public life.' Such participation not only in the electoral process but also in the process of planning and the implementation of the programmes as well, has been involved in the realization that the upper caste and economically better-off sections' representation will not percolate the benefits to the lower strata. As Lieten observed, "a new type of leadership has come to dominate the stage at the lower levels in the system of political devolution. Poor peasants and agricultural labourers, and therefore also the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, have very much come to the forefront mainly on account of the composition of the CPI (M) panels....it appears that the FB and particularly the Cong(I) are engaged in the catching up process, but that the bigger landowners are still dominant, particularly in the Congress(I)."¹⁸⁸

Perhaps, the above thumbnail discussions and references noted may confirm the scale of participation which may presumably show the political empowerment of the rural people. The participation of the people in the electoral process as voters and also as candidates, their involvement in the bodies,

particularly gram panchayats in the decision-making process and their role in the implementation of programmes which have also an advantage in bringing 'local information into the picture' are all important factors towards decentralized and democratized local government. All these, in fact, have caused a dramatic change in the rural power structure and, thereby, the rural people have supposedly been enabled to become the centre of power.

This changing dimension has been further augmented considerably when the Left Front government established the comprehensive participative institutions, i.e., 'Gram Sabha' and 'Gram Samsad' and brought them to the doorstep of the rural poor. It is, in fact, the 'effective method of mass-mobilization' in order to establish direct contact between the leaders and the people.'

Although the constitutional functionaries, extra constitutional leadership and beneficiary-actors are involved in a single set of institution and development process, it is envisaged in the above discussion that the party (CPI (M)) has a dominant say in respect of the two most significant measures, land reforms and the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes i.e., IRDP, NREP, JRY, etc. with the decentralized decision-making process. While Nossiter described the tenancy and Operation Barga of the Left Front government as the 'truly remarkable accomplishment,'¹⁸⁹ and Kohli observed that it is an area in which CPI (M) achieved a spectacular success,¹⁹⁰ the Report of the Club of Rome stated that at the time when IRDP "is often accused of favouring the better-off farmers and above all filling the pockets of civil servants," the Left Front government "has carried out a genuine land reform, by distributing to the share-croppers title deeds for the lands they were working."¹⁹¹

But, in case of West Bengal it is claimed that the beneficiaries were properly identified, assets went to the poorest and, thereby Panchayats have done remarkably well in respect of the implementation of IRDP and its components. Because the recipients have been enabled to get loan 'without the help of any middleman.' The gram panchayats in West Bengal are entrusted with a high degree of responsibility in identifying potential beneficiaries and in implementing the programme. And, the panchayats as "a part of a grid of organisations are engaged

in giving loans, supervising the welfare, making lists of minor developmental works that should be taken up, and making lists of beneficiaries who would be entitled to different forms of resources once they are available.”¹⁹² The WIDER Project (Study) on the villages of West Bengal also found that ‘in general the panchayat leaders reflected the opinions of their constituents.’¹⁹³

As the Panchayats are undercontrolled by the political leaders and the bureaucracy and hardly independent, perhaps it is more politically expedient to identify/select or distribute assets to the recipients. Thus, the possibility of political consideration in selection or panchayat leadership’s role or political leadership’s role as ‘traditional headman’ cannot be denied. However, an allegation against the panchayats in West Bengal is that the assets under IRDP and its components are given only to the supporters/voters and members of the party. And, the people of the opposition bloc are not given any asset.

But many investigators have tried to analyse it on the popular support base of the left parties. These social scientists have argued that as the left parties are largely supported by the lower class people, and, even though there is political consideration in practice, most of the beneficiaries are found from the lower income groups. It is also found in another study that “more or less these beneficiaries belong to lower income categories and it would be difficult for any party not to enlist them as beneficiaries for any kind of poverty eradication programmes.”¹⁹⁴

However, keeping in mind the view that development is associated with the party and its politics and its relevance in depth, an attempt is also explored to focus on the level of local politics and its impact in distributing the assets under IRDP and its component i.e., DWCRA.

6. Grass-roots’ Empowerment and PRIs – Whether Peoples’ Control or Party Participation:

The issue of grass-root empowerment and people’s participation which have been considered the necessary ideals of social development, got momentum during the last two decades. While Robert Chambers identified the causes of poverty that ‘powerlessness contributes to poverty in many way’ and it ‘also makes

the poor more vulnerable....'¹⁹⁵ Michael Edwards defined 'empowerment' as "increasing the control which poor and powerless people (and specifically the poorest and the most powerless) are able to exert over aspects of their lives which they consider to be important to them."¹⁹⁶ It is believed that this ultimately results in a degree of both economic and political change in the society. It must be mentioned here that during these decades, the political view of empowerment on which the scholars have focussed their own attention, has become a part of the 'alternative development' approach. In regard to this Friedmann's view is more relevant what is explained by Glyn Williams that "improving the political control which the powerless have over their own lives is important both as an end in itself, and as a means by which economic empowerment can be achieved."¹⁹⁷ It is, however, believed that this political empowerment leads a considerable change in the relationship between the state and its people.

In West Bengal, while the 'alternative development approach' has been in operation, Lieten, in his study of rural West Bengal found decentralization policy to public institutions as an important arena that 'may provide a good alternative.' (Although Lieten indicated 'empowerment' as an elusive term...)¹⁹⁸ However, in this direction, the decentralized and democratized local institutions, initiated by the government and the involvement of the local people in the process initiated mainly by the left parties, was intended to ensure such a political change through popular participation which would ultimately lead to the economic change of the society.

In reality, even though the investigators found regularity in the 'Gram Sabha' and 'Gram Samsad' meetings, the participation of the people has been found 'much below the desired level.' Only in the places where the party has been active and taken keen interest, the meetings have become successful.¹⁹⁹ The scholars like Webster observed that the trend of peoples' participation has in effect taken the form of party participation... While examining the CPI (M)'s role with respect to the gram panchayats in particular to 'actually empower the people', Webster found a good degree of success in terms of the involvement of Panchayats in the decision-making process which indicated 'a radical departure from the past.' At the same time Webster found many constraints upon the

involvement of the panchayats “both in their ability to achieve membership for reasons of poverty (time equals lost wages etc.) gender and ethnicity, and in the problems faced by them as a result of their low status once they are members, lack of education, gender, etc. Finally they face, as do all members, the structural limitations imposed on the gram panchayats’ work by finance and legislation, plus the close monitoring of the local committee of the CPI (M). The combination of all these renders their involvement somewhat circumscribed.”²⁰⁰ However, in the concluding observation he viewed that these are, no doubt important steps towards decentralized and democratized local government in the area of development planning but ‘Panchayati Raj has not as yet resulted in the empowerment of the poor’²⁰¹ in West Bengal. Other scholars argued that in reality the political organisation avoided community empowerment “for fear of losing influence. They think that unfortunately this is today the reality in West Bengal which has otherwise made good progress on the rural front.”²⁰² Williams, even though found in his study a considerable success in meeting the ‘idealized role’ (the role beyond the official work of the panchayats) and they were reliant upon the resources provided by IRDP, ‘the Left Front’s model of the panchayat as a medium for popular participation was not being achieved in practice’ and ‘the control of development funds for JRY and IRDP schemes gave the members a degree of economic influence beyond that of most land lords, and thus supported them in fulfilling this leadership role.’²⁰³ Similarly, Webster found a significant material change in sections of the rural poor ensured by the panchayats, but, at the same time he found that the ‘financial resources are limited and the range of responsibilities passed down to the gram panchayats is also restricted to involvement’ with the development programme i.e., IRDP.

Lieten, also found ‘many of the goods’ in the restructuring process of the Left Front government and agreed with Westergaard’s view that ‘the changes set in motion as regards the rural power structure are considerable. Certainly, the first steps necessary for a process of increased popular participation ‘have been taken’. But, he expressed his hesitation with the statement that “however, there are few indication that Left Front parties gave priority to furthering this process.”²⁰⁴

It is certainly true that empowering the people of the hinterlands is 'a very complicated task.' Perhaps, it needs more intellectual clarity on how rural people have been empowered and to what extent PRIs helped to ensure peoples' empowerment in rural West Bengal. While the task of grassroots' empowerment primarily needs multi-pronged initiatives to be taken both by the state and non-state agencies, the role of the party and its decisive participation in the democratic process of West Bengal may also indicate an opposite tendency. Webster, however, observed that the "support in the rural areas is CPI (M)'s greatest strength it is also potentially its greatest weakness. Loss of political dynamism in its rural strategy will open the door to both internal and external interests determined to achieve its downfall and demonstrate the failure of Marxism to the Indian people as a whole."²⁰⁵ It has supposedly indicated what Williams concluded "...that panchayati raj has helped to produce positive changes in the livelihoods of labouring families in the villages...It is these changes that the CPM needs to build upon over the coming years if its rhetorical claims of empowering the rural poor are to be realized in practice."²⁰⁶

A Comparative Assessment of IRDP Progress in West Bengal and All India Level:

Keeping in mind the above strategies and diversity of forces used for IRDP implementation in West Bengal, the need of a comparative assessment is felt between the state and national level during the period under study. Various indicators of achievements are, however, used for the assessment, which are percentages of physical and financial achievements to the respective targets, percentages of achievements on the Sc/ST beneficiaries, achievements on women beneficiaries, etc.

As IRD Programme was introduced in 1978-79, 6.24 lakh beneficiaries were assisted with the credit mobilization of Rs. 54.60 crores in the 2300 blocks during the initial year. In the following year, there had been an impressive performance, 14.75 lakh beneficiaries were covered with the credit mobilization amounting to Rs. 84.50 crores. During the Sixth Plan period (1980-85), the total investment under the programme was Rs. 4762.79 crores (total subsidy Rs.

1661.18 crores) and the total term credit mobilization Rs. 3101.61 crores against the target fixed at Rs. 4500.00 crores or 105.84 percent achievement. On the contrary in West Bengal, the total investment was Rs. 142.15 crores (total subsidy Rs. 53.93 crores and the total credit mobilization Rs. 88.21 crores) with (only) 2.98 percent to the total central investment. And, taking the figures of the entire period (1980-85) 165.62 lakh families were covered against the target of 151.02 lakh with 110.0 percent achievement in the national levels whereas it was 71.38 percent achievement (as 717351 beneficiaries were assisted against the target fixed at 1005000) in West Bengal. In case of Sc/ST beneficiaries, West Bengal achieved 36.63 percent to the total achievement with the coverage of 262793 beneficiaries while it was achieved 39.02 percent in the national level.²⁰⁷

Despite major breakthrough was achieved specially after 1982-83 at the national level in the Sixth Plan it was found that most of the assisted beneficiaries could not generate desired additional income and cross the poverty line. Keeping this view the setbacks from which this programme suffered from some modifications were undertaken in the Seventh Plan period.²⁰⁸

During the Seventh Plan period the total number of 181.77 lakh beneficiaries were assisted against the target of 160.37 lakh with 113.34 percent achievement. However, the growth rate compared to the Sixth Plan was 109.75 percent. In West Bengal, it was achieved 127.95 percent (as 13,98,210 beneficiaries were assisted against the target of 10,92,750) with 194.91 percent growth rate compared to the Sixth Plan. In case of the total financial investment in the national level, it was Rs. 8080.56 crores (credit mobilized Rs. 5372.53 crores and subsidy disbursed Rs. 2708.03 crores) against the target Rs. 6358.1 crores (or 127.09% achievement) with 169.66 percent growth rate compared to the Sixth Plan. On the contrary, in West Bengal it was Rs. 698.08 crores (total credit mobilized Rs. 446.94 crores and subsidy disbursed 251.14 crores) with 491.09 percent growth rate compared to the previous plan. During this plan period the per-family investment was installed on an average Rs. 4445 with 154.55 percent growth rate compared to the Sixth Plan. In West Bengal, it was Rs. 4986 with 251.56 percent growth rate. In case of the coverage of SC/ST beneficiaries, while it was recorded on an average 45.09 percent to the total coverage in the national

level, in West Bengal it was found 37.26 percent during the Seventh Plan. Similarly, in regard to the coverage of women beneficiaries, the trends at the national level envisaged that 18.89 percent women beneficiaries were covered whereas it was recorded 24.35 percent in West Bengal.²⁰⁹

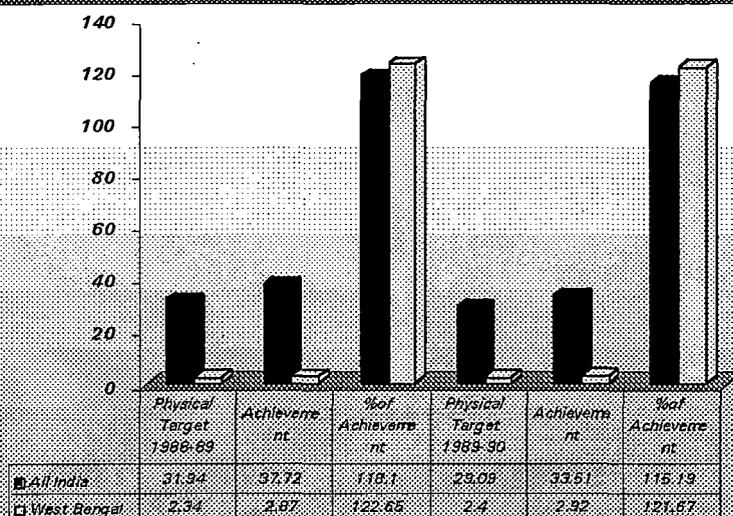
The present attempt is, however, to make a comparative assessment between the State of West Bengal and All India level on IRDP by using certain major indicators: (i) the Physical and Financial progress and (ii) the progress of SC/ST and Women beneficiaries.

(i) The Physical and Financial Progress:

So far as the physical and financial progress of the programme is concerned, the Charts (1.1 to 1.9) depict the year-wise and plan-wise appraisal of the period under study (1988-89 to 1998-99) between West Bengal and All India level:

Chart-1.1

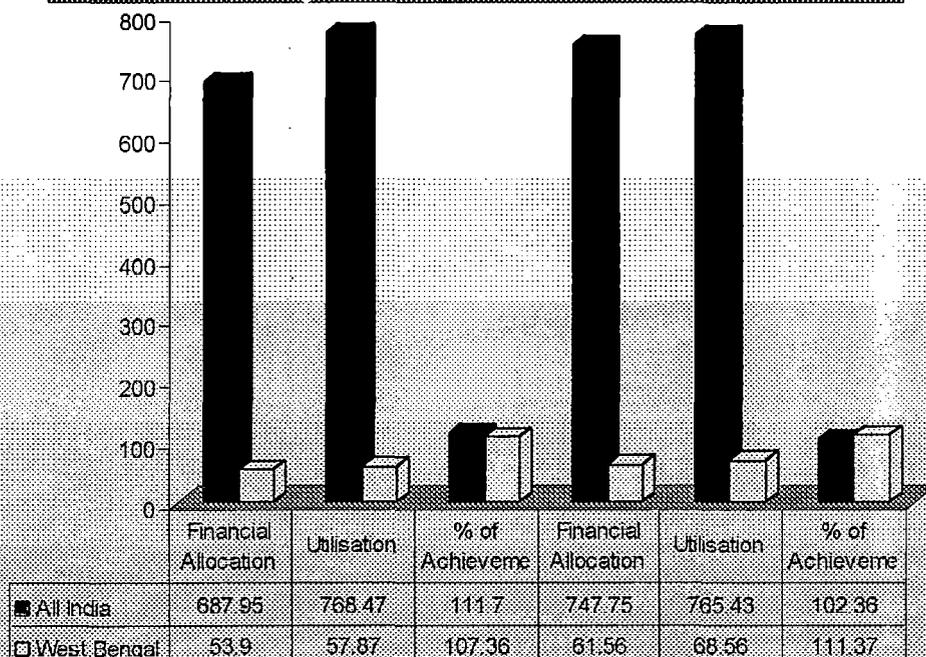
Physical Progress under IRDP in West Bengal and All India Level During the Period 1988-89 to 1989-90



Source: Compiled from the Annual Reports (of Different Years), Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Government of India, New Delhi, and The Records Collected from the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta.

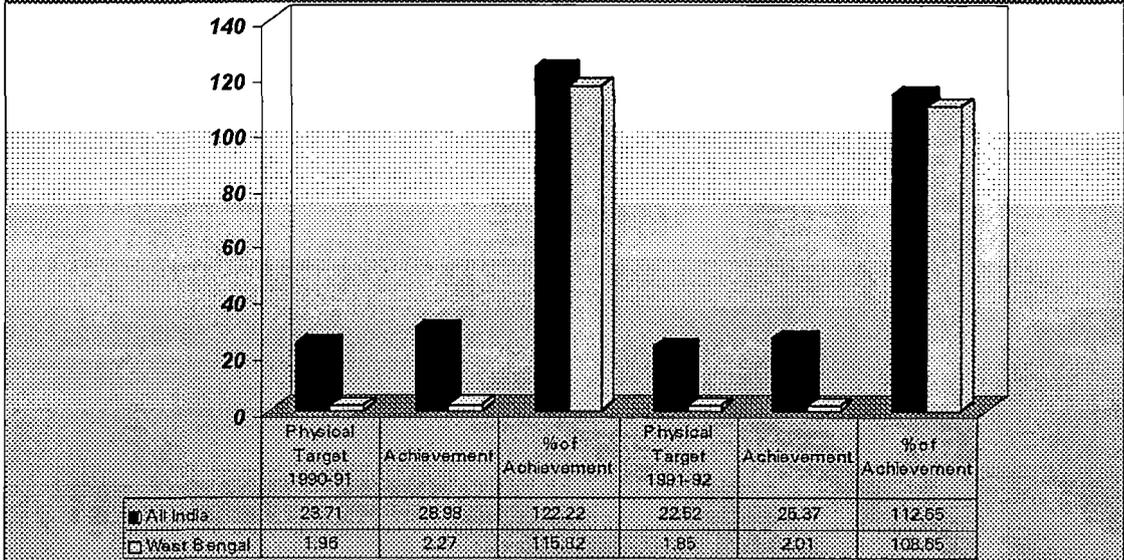
Chart - 1.2

Financial Progress under IRDP in West Bengal and All India Level during the Period 1988-89 to 1989-90



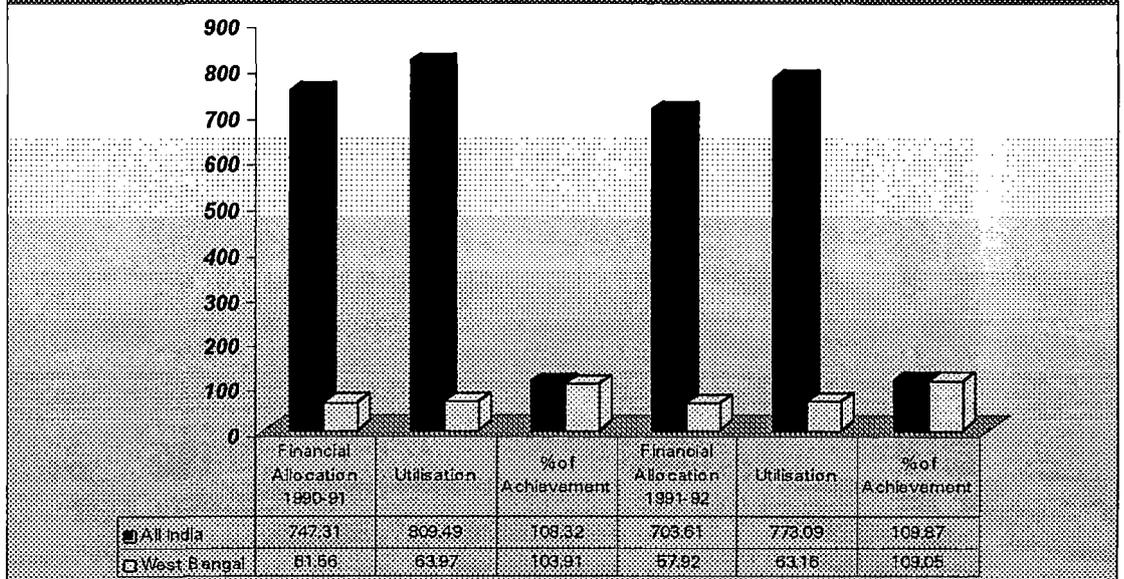
Source: As in Chart-1.1

Chart- 1.3
Physical Progress under IRDP in West Bengal and All India Level During the Annual Plan Periods 1990-91 and 1991-92



Source: As in Chart-1.1

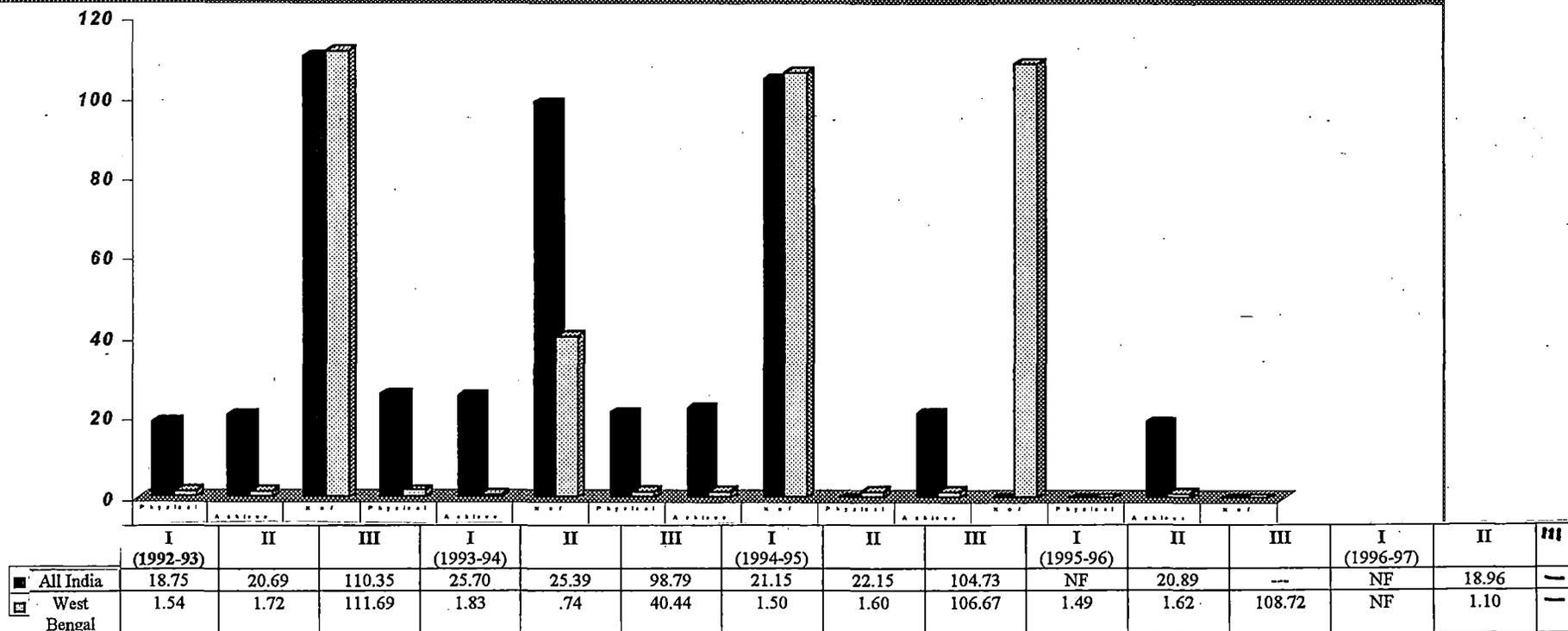
Chart- 1.4
Financial Progress under IRDP in West Bengal and All India Level during the Annual Plan Periods 1990-91 and 1991-92



Source: As in Chart-1.1

Nos. in Lakh

Chart- 1.5,
Physical Progress under IRDP in West Bengal and All India Level during the Eighth Plan,
1992-93 to 1996-97

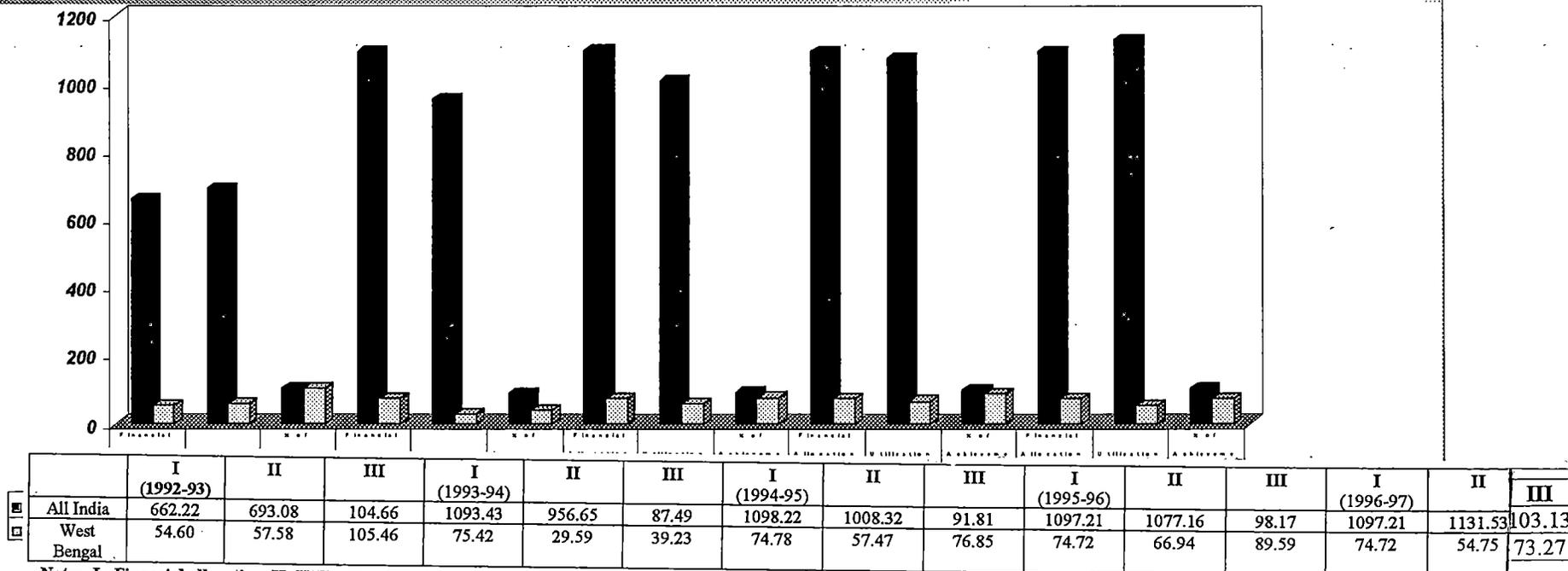


Notes: I: Physical Target, II: Achievement, III: Percentage of achievement ; NF: Not Fixed

Source: As in Chart-1.1

Chart-1.6,
Financial Progress under IRDP in West Bengal and All India Level during the Eighth Plan, 1992-93 to 1996-97

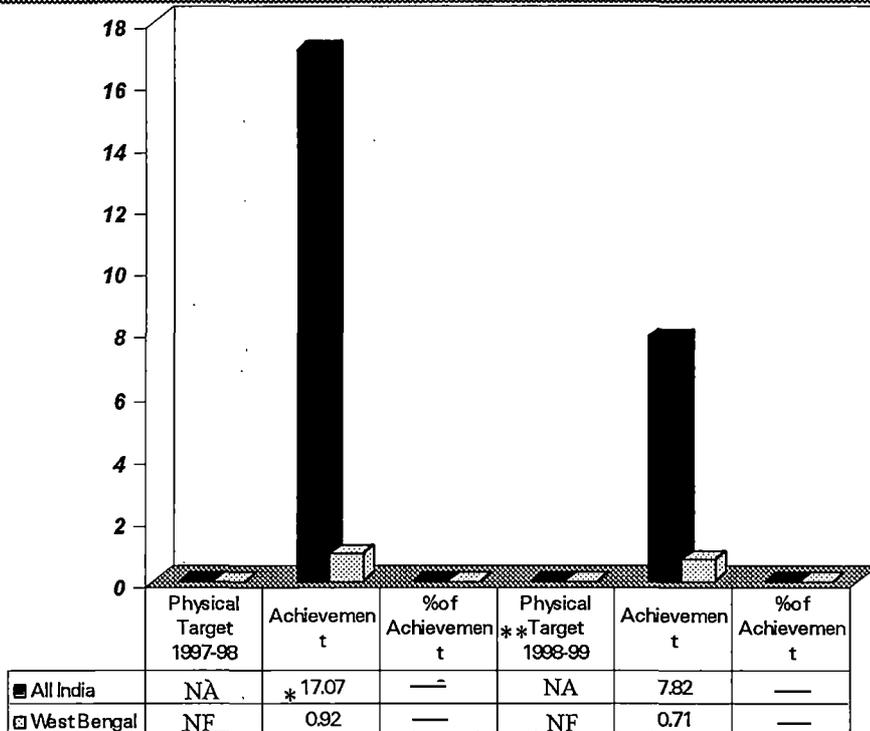
Rs. in Crore



Notes: I: Financial allocation, II- Utilization, III: Percentage of achievement

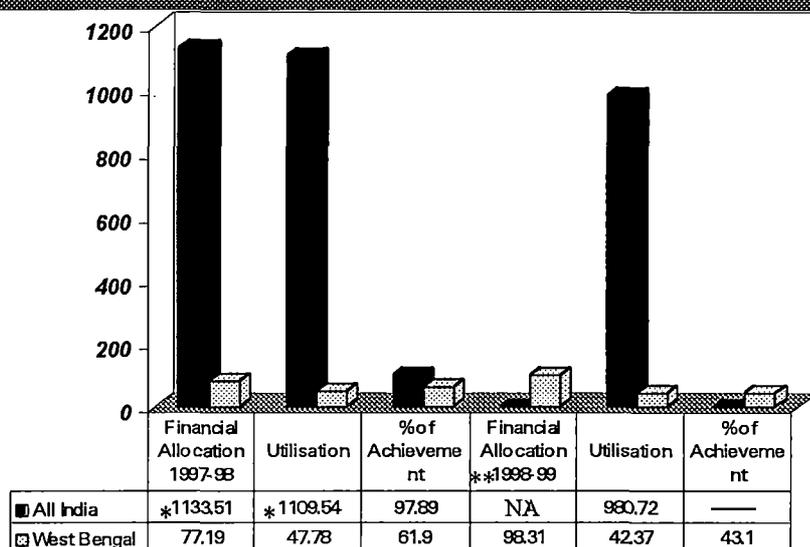
Source: As in Chart-1.1

Chart- 1.7,
Physical Progress under IRDP In West Bengal and All India Level during the
Period 1997-98 and 1998-99



Notes: (i) N.A. : Not Available, ; NF: Not Fixed, (ii) * Shows Provisional Records at National Level, (iii) ** Shows the Records upto Nov.1998 (National Level) Source: As in Chart 1.1 and, INDIA 1999, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Govt. of India, New Delhi

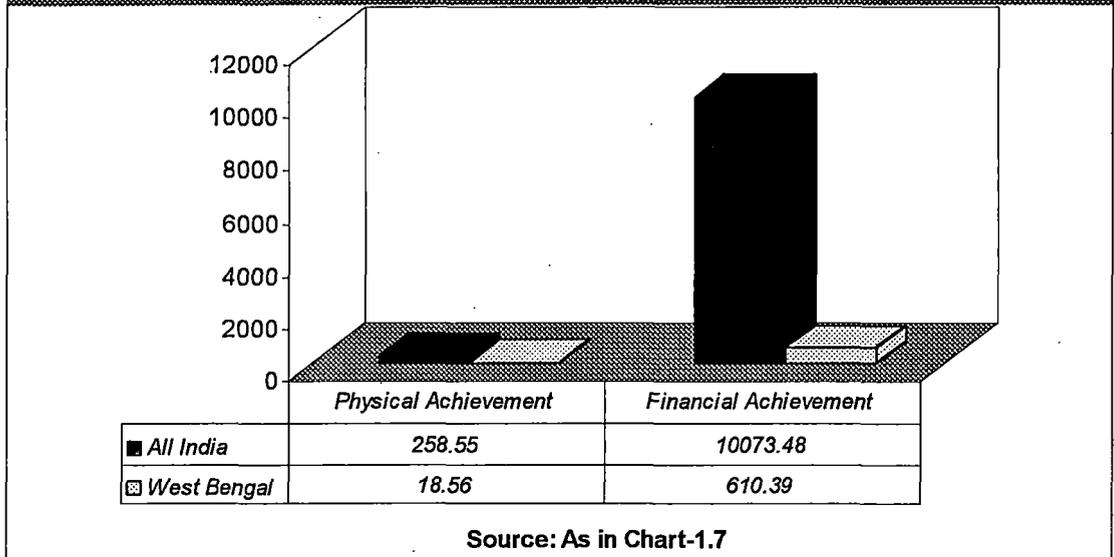
Chart- 1.8,
Financial Progress under IRDP in West Bengal and All India Level during the year
1997-98 and 1998-99



Notes: (i) NA: Not Available; (ii) * Shows Provisional Records at the National Level; (iii) ** Shows the Records upto Nov. 1998 (National Level) Source: As in Chart 1.7

(Nos. in Lakh and Rs. in Crore)

Chart- 1.9,
Physical and Financial Progress under IRDP in West Bengal
and All India Level during 1988-89 to 1998-99.



The data furnished in the Chart Nos. 1.1 and 1.2 envisage that during the last two years (1988-89 to 1989-90) of Seventh Plan, the performance in terms of physical and financial achievement was 116.71 percent and 106.84 percent respectively at the national level and it was almost similar to the records of West Bengal (122.15% and 109.50% respectively), as also shown in Table No. 2.1 below:

Table No. 2.1
Aggregate Target and Achievement for 1988-89 and 1989-90
(Nos. in lakh & Rs. in Crore)

Level	Physical			Financial		
	Target	Achievement	% of Achievement	Target	Achievement	% of Achievement
All India	61.03	71.23	116.71	1435.70	1533.90	106.84
West Bengal	4.74	5.79	122.15	115.46	126.43	109.50

Source: Compiled from the Annual Reports (of different years), Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Govt. of India, New Delhi and, the Records collected from the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development, Govt. of West Bengal, Calcutta.

Similarly, the Charts 1.3 and 1.4 depict that (1990-91 to 1991-92) during the annual plan period (1990-91 to 1991-92), 54.35 lakh families had been assisted against the target of 46.23 lakhs (or 117.56% achievement). In West Bengal, the total coverage of families was 4.28 lakhs against the target fixed at 3.81 lakhs with 112.34% achievement. During this period, the Financial Allocation was Rs. 1450.92 crores of which Rs. 1582.58 crores had been utilized (with 109.07 percent achievement) at the All India level. In West Bengal, it was recorded Rs. 127.13 crores against the target of Rs. 119.48 crores (or 106.40% achievement), as also shown in Table No. 2.2. below:

Table No. 2.2
Aggregate Target and Achievement for 1990-91 and 1991-92
(Nos. in lakh and Rs. in crore)

Level	Physical			Financial		
	Target	Achievement	% of Achievement	Target	Achievement	% of Achievement
All India	46.23	54.35	117.56	1450.92	1582.58	109.07
West Bengal	3.81	4.28	112.34	119.48	127.13	106.40

Source: Compiled from the Annual Reports (of different years), Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Govt. of India, New Delhi and, the Records collected from the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development, Govt. of West Bengal, Calcutta.

Further, The Charts (No. 1.5 and 1.6) envisage that the Eighth Plan, which was due to have started in April 1990, has been launched from April 1992 with 'the vision to create employment, eradicate poverty and reduce inequality'²¹⁰. Thus, the Eighth Plan has continued its basic thrust on the prevailing special

employment programme, like the IRDP. However, certain major steps were taken and some further modifications were made to improve the implementation of the IRD Programme during the Eighth Plan. The major changes undertaken were as below:

- (a) A new 'cut-off' income level has been raised to Rs. 11,000 at 1991-92 prices instead of the previous level. Thus, the later thrust of the IRD Programme covered rural families with annual income below Rs. 11,000.
- (b) To enhance the coverage of women beneficiaries within the target groups, a new set of target had been established from 30 percent to 40 percent to the total beneficiaries with effect from 1.4.1990. Similarly, the target for the SC/ST beneficiaries had been increased from 40 percent to 50 percent.
- (c) The policy of supplementary assistance had further been pronounced to provide to the families who were assisted during the Sixth or Seventh Plans but could not be able to cross the poverty line for no fault of their own. From 1991-92, land purchasing under IRDP had also been treated as a permissible activity. In the same financial year, the Purchase Committees for purchasing the assets for the Programme had been continued to purchase quality assets in the districts of the country.

The Charts 1.5 and 1.6 indicate that during the different years of Eighth Plan, it was almost achieved or simply achieved or even over-achieved the targets fixed in case of both physical and financial performance in the national level. In case of West Bengal, the analyses do not present an appreciable performance –the performance is found remarkably low (40.44%) in terms of physical achievement and only 39.23% in terms of financial achievement in 1993-94 and, the expenditure increased in different years (except 1992-93) was not satisfactory. Further, the total Financial Allocation during the period aggregated to Rs. 5048.29 crores of which the total utilization was to the tune of Rs. 4866.74 crores with 96.40 percent achievement at the All India Level whereas in West Bengal the total utilization amounted to Rs. 266.33 crores against the target fixed at Rs. 354.24 crores (or 75.18% achievement). In the All India level, the number of families assisted was 108.08 lakh whereas in West Bengal it was found 6.78 lakh

(or 6.27% to the total coverage of All India level). The Plan-wise facts are also presented in Table No. 2.3 below:

Table No. 2.3
Aggregate Target and Achievement for the Eighth Plan (1992-93 to 1996-97)
(Nos. in lakh and Rs. in crore)

Level	Physical			Financial		
	Target	Achievement	% of Achievement	Target	Achievement	% of Achievement
All India	----	108.08	-----	5048.29	4866.74	96.40
West Bengal	----	6.78	----	354.24	266.33	75.18

Note: The Plan-wise physical target is not aggregated because it was not fixed in the years 1995-96 and 1996-97 in the All India level and in 1996-97 in Est Bengal (as it is shown in the Charts 1.5 and 1.6).

Source: Compiled from the Annual Reports (of different years), Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Govt. of India, New Delhi and, the Records collected from the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development, Govt. of West Bengal, Calcutta.

Further, for the better implementation of the Programme, a few important modifications and changes²¹¹ have been made for the Ninth Plan (1997-98 to 2001-2002) which have been pointed out in the foregoing Chapter (No.-III). In the first year of Ninth Plan (Charts 1.7 and 1.8) including the terminal year of the Programme, the total number of families assisted (Charts 1.7 and 1.8) was 24.89 lakh with the utilization of fund amounting to Rs. 2,090.26 crores. In West Bengal the total coverage of families was 1.63 lakh with the total utilization aggregated to Rs. 90.15, as is shown below in Table No. 2.4:

Table No. 2.4
Aggregate Target and Achievement for 1997-98 and 1998-99
(Nos. in lakh and Rs. in crore)

Level	Physical			Financial		
	Target	Achievement	% of Achievement	Target	Achievement	% of Achievement
All India	----	24.89	----	----	2090.26	----
West Bengal	----	1.63	----	175.50	90.15	51.37

Notes: i) The physical and financial targets are not aggregated due to the non-availability of data (National level) and, due to the fact that it was not fixed (West Bengal) – as shown in Charts 1.7 and 1.8.

ii) Details in regard to the records (year-wise) are shown in the Charts 1.7 and 1.8.

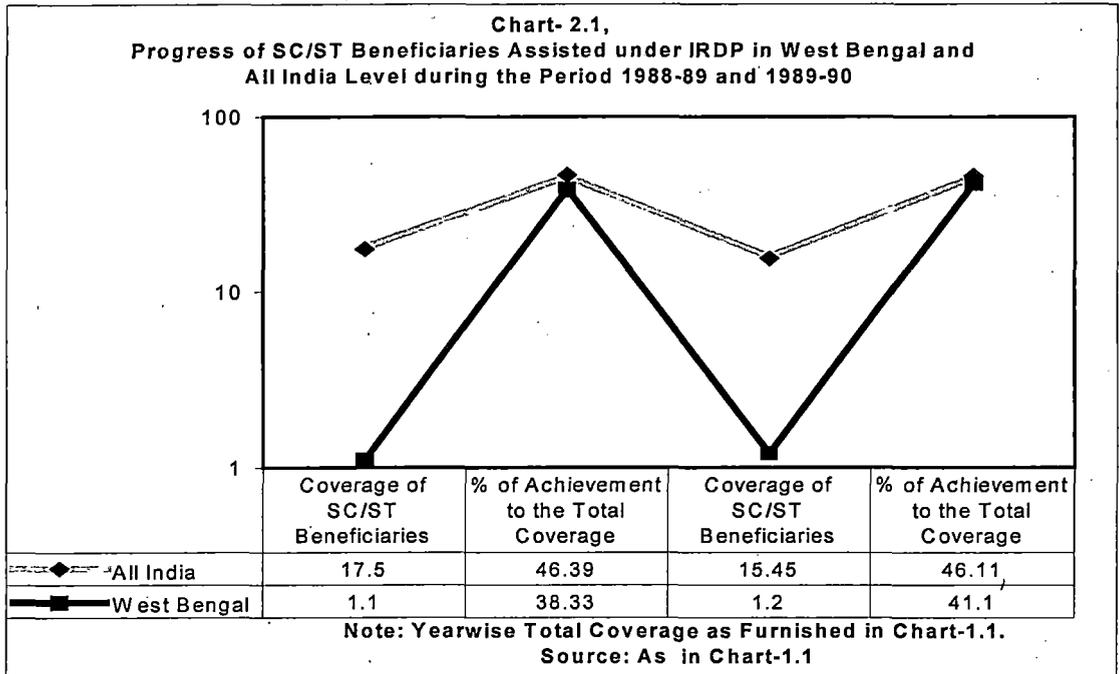
Source: Compiled from the Annual Reports (of different years), Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Govt. of India, New Delhi and, the Records collected from the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development, Govt. of West Bengal, Calcutta.

As shown in Chart No. 1.9, the total physical achievement was 258.55 lakhs at National level and 18.56 lakhs in West Bengal and the corresponding figures of financial achievement are respectively 10,073.48 crores and 610.39 crores.

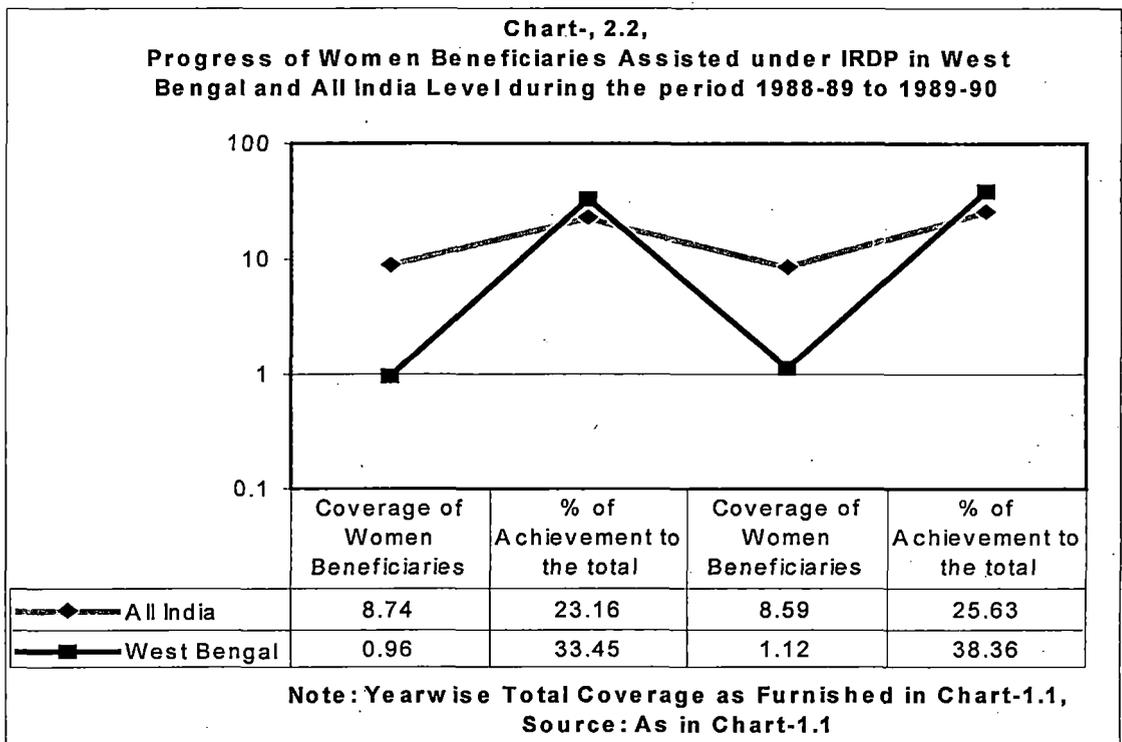
ii) The Progress of SC/ST and Women Beneficiaries:

While it was considered important to make a focus on the progress of SC/ST and Women Beneficiaries for our present comparative assessment, the Charts (2.1 to 2.9) depict the year-wise and planwise appraisal of the period under study (1988-89 to 1998-99) between West Bengal and All India level:

Nos. in Lakh

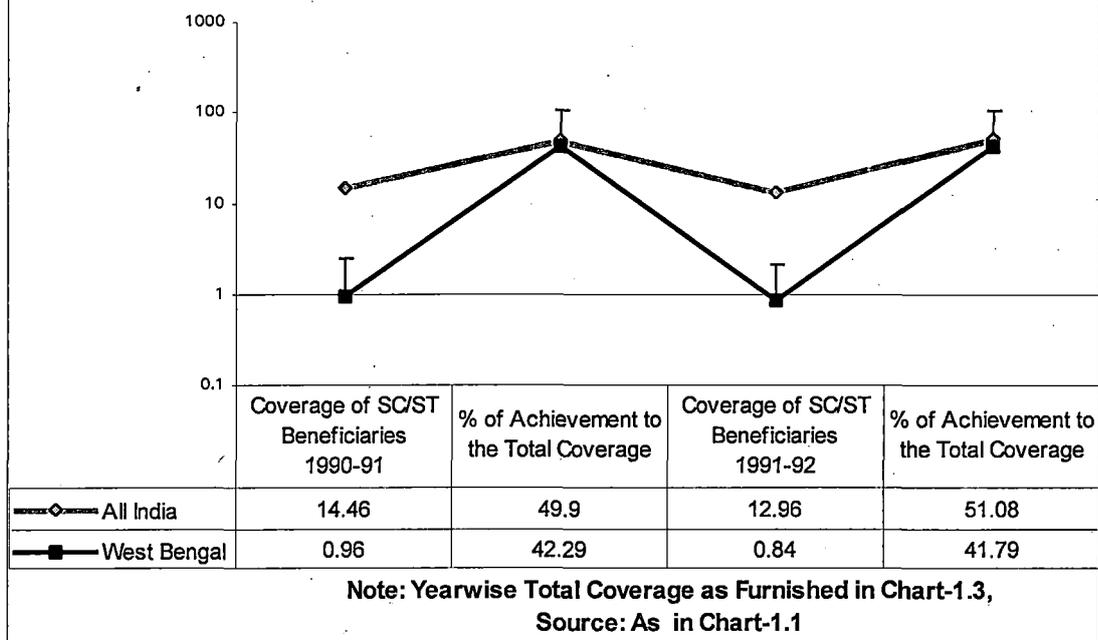


Nos. in Lakh



Nos. in Lakh

Chart- 2.3,
Progress of SC/ST Beneficiaries Assisted under IRDP in West Bengal and
All India Level during the Annual Plan Periods 1990-91 and 1991-92



Nos. in Lakh

Chart- 2.4,
Progress of Women Beneficiaries Assisted under IRDP in West
Bengal and All India Level during the Annual Plan Periods 1990-91
and 1991-92

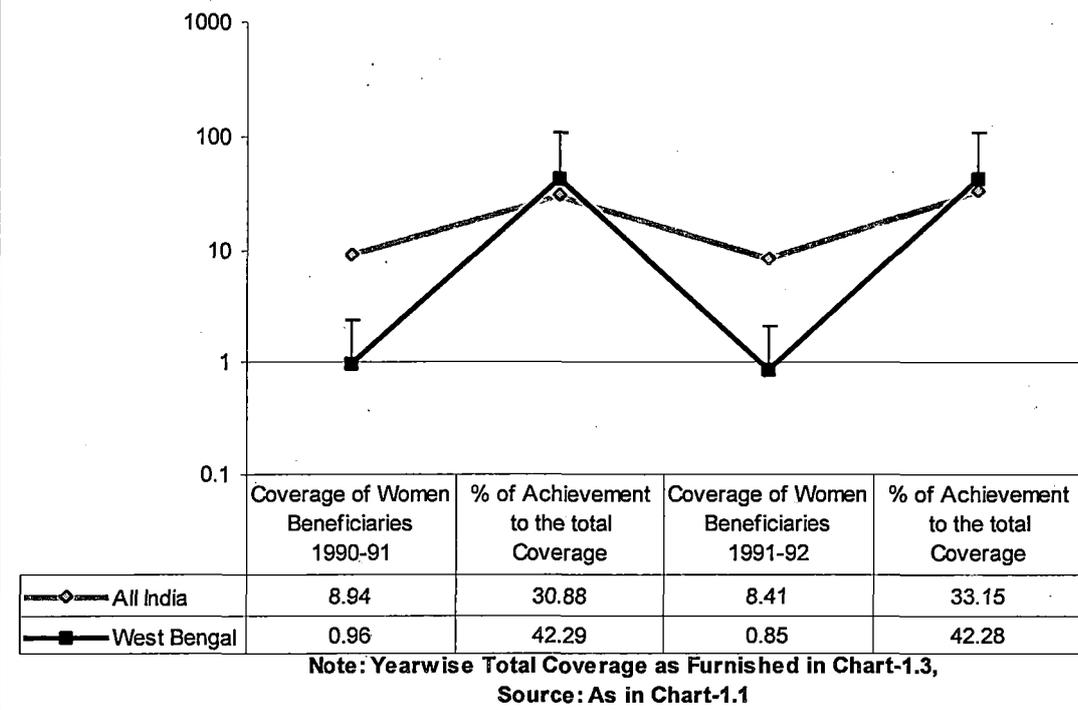
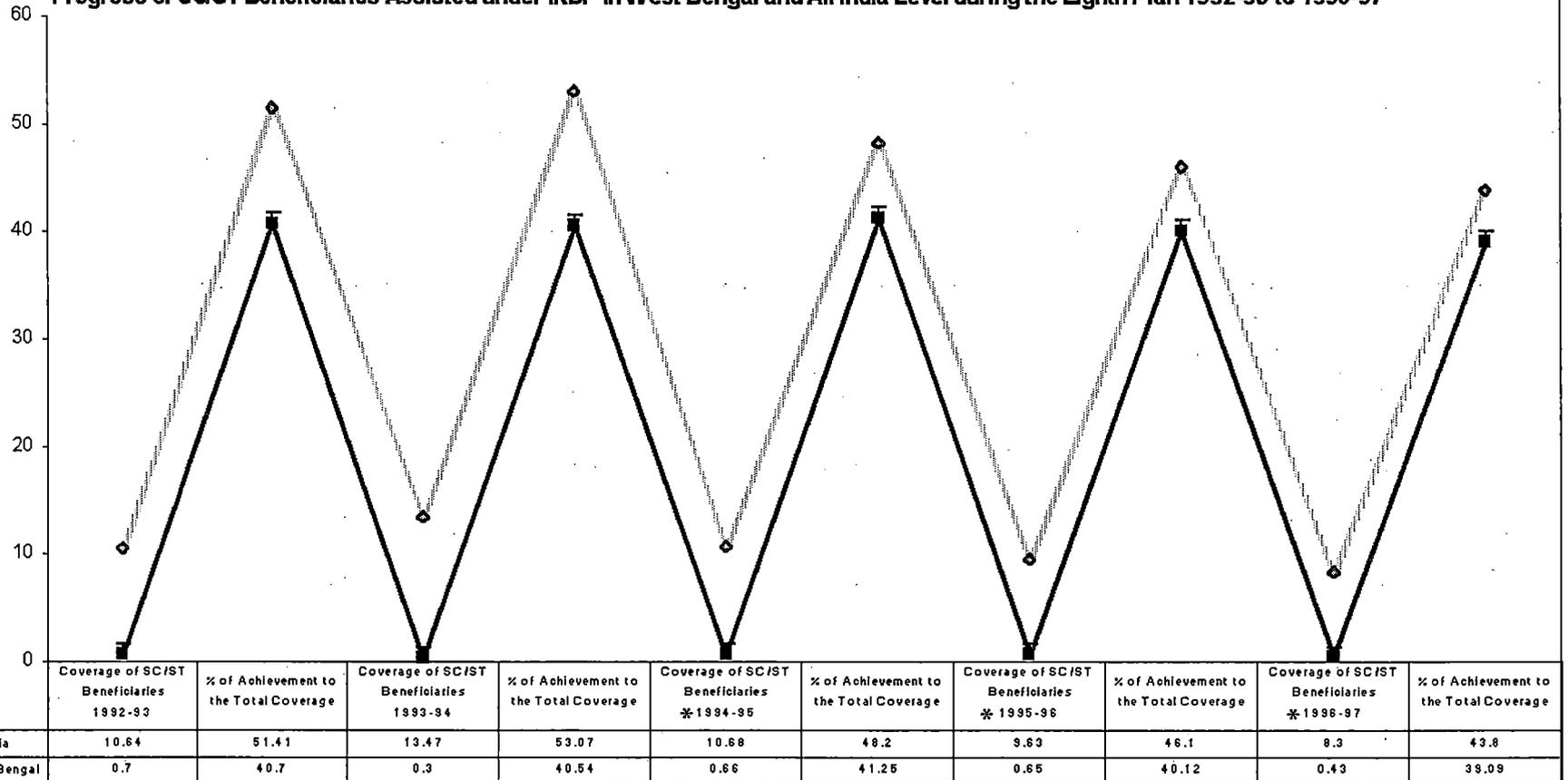


Chart-2.5,

Nos. in Lakh

Progress of SC/ST Beneficiaries Assisted under IRDP in West Bengal and All India Level during the Eighth Plan 1992-93 to 1996-97

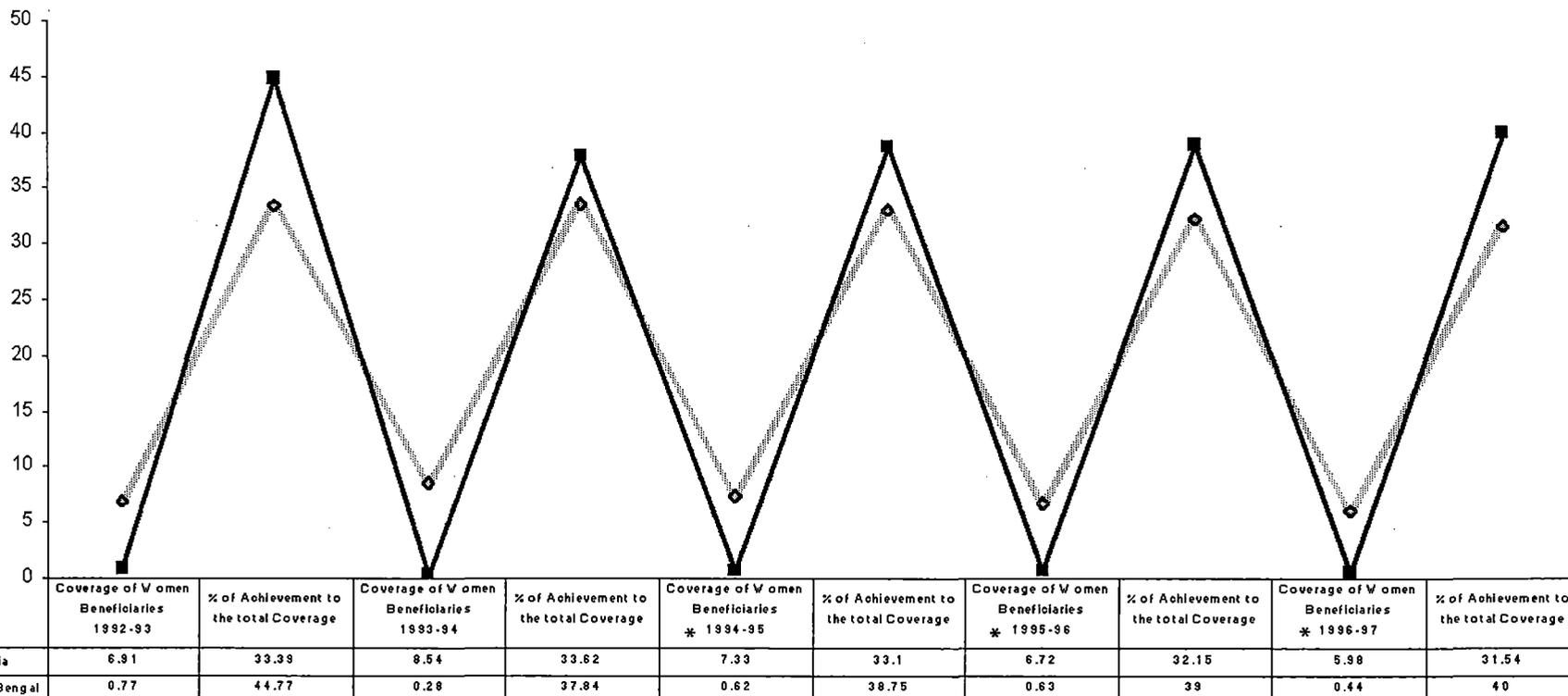


**Note: (i) Yearwise Total Coverage as Furnished in Chart-1.5,
 (ii) * Data Shown Approximately from 1994-95 to 1996-97 in
 All India Level as Derived from the Chart Displayed in Annual Report 1997-98,
 Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Govt. of India, New Delhi.**

Source: As in Chart-1.1

Chart-2.6,
Progress of Women Beneficiaries Assisted under IRDP in West Bengal and All India Level during the Eighth Plan
1992-93 to 1996-97

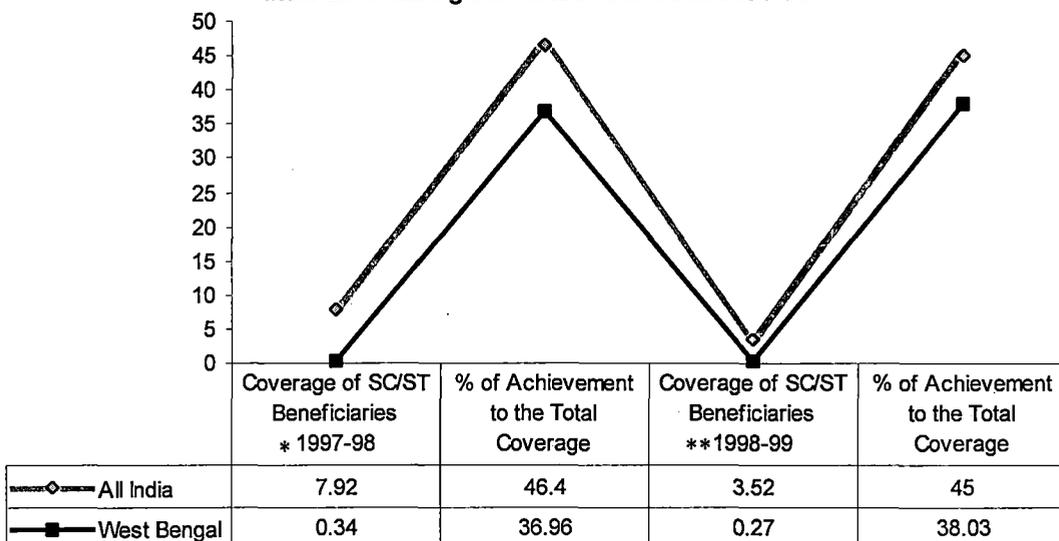
Nos. in Lakh



Note: (i) Yearwise Total Coverage as Furnished in Chart-1.5, (ii) * Data Shown Approximately as Furnished in Chart-1.5 in All India Level
(as Derived from the Chart- Displayed in Annual Report- 1997-98,
Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment,
Govt. of India, New Delhi).

Source: As in Chart-1.1

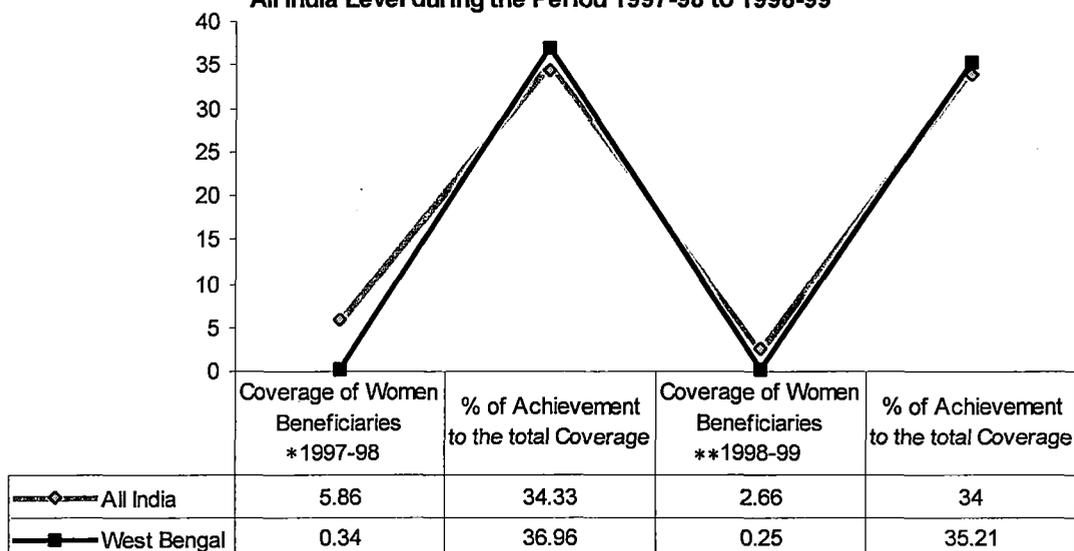
Chart- 2.7,
Progress Of SC/ST Beneficiaries Assisted under IRDP in West Bengal and All
India Level during the Period 1997-98 to 1998-99



Notes: (i) Yearwise Total Coverage as Furnished in Chart-1.7, (ii) * Shows the Provisional Records at the National Level,
(iii) ** Shows the Records upto Nov. 1998 (National Level),

Source: As in Chart- 1.7

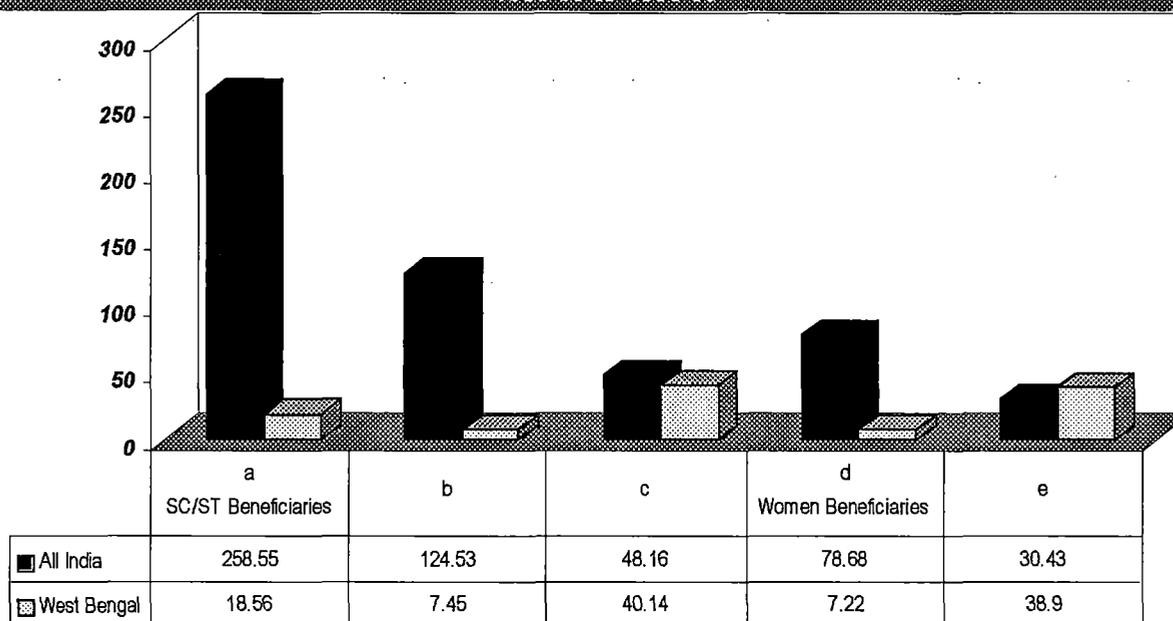
Chart- 2.8,
Progress of Women Beneficiaries Assisted under IRDP in West Bengal and
All India Level during the Period 1997-98 to 1998-99



Notes: (i) Yearwise Total Coverage as Furnished in Chart - 1.7, (ii) * Shows the Provisional Records at the National Level,
(iii) **Shows the Records upto Nov. 1998 (National Level).

Source: As in Chart- 1.7

Chart, 2.9:
Progress of SC/ST and Women Beneficiaries Assisted under IRDP in West Bengal and All India Level during 1988-89 to 1998-99



Notes: (1) a: Total Coverage, b: SC/ST Beneficiaries, c: % of Achievement; d: Coverage of Women Beneficiaries, e: % of Achievement; Source: As in Chart 1.7.

Notes:
(2) Data, counted of the period during 1994-95 to 1996-97 are 'approximate' figures, as noted in Chart 2.6.
(3) Data aggregated for the year 1997-98 are provisional records at the National Level.
(4) Data aggregated for the year 1998-99 are upto Nov. 1998

While the target was fixed at 40 percent for SC/ST and 30 percent for women beneficiaries to the total coverage during the last two years of Seventh Plan, Chart Nos. 2.1 and 2.2 depict that 32.95 lakh scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes beneficiaries were assisted with 46.26 percent achievement. Whereas in West Bengal it was achieved 39.72 percent with the coverage of 2.30 lakh beneficiaries. On the contrary, in case of women beneficiaries while it was over-achieved the target (35.92 percent achievement with the coverage of 2.08 lakh beneficiaries) in West Bengal, 17.33 lakh women beneficiaries were assisted with 24.33 percent achievement at the national level, as also shown in Table No. 3.1 below:

Table No. 3.1
Aggregate Achievement of SC/ST and Women Beneficiaries for 1988-89 and 1989-90
(Nos. in lakh)

Level	Total Coverage	SC/ST beneficiaries		Women beneficiaries	
		Coverage	% of achievement	Coverage	% of achievement
All India	71.23	32.95	46.26	17.33	24.33
West Bengal	5.79	2.30	39.72	2.08	35.92

Source: Compiled from the Annual Reports (of different years), Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Govt. of India, New Delhi and, the Records collected from the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development, Govt. of West Bengal, Calcutta.

Afterwards the target of the SC/ST and Women Beneficiaries had been extended to 50 percent and 40 percent respectively and the target was fixed from 1990-91. However, during the Annual Plan years (1990-92), the target was reached with the coverage of 27.42 SC/ST beneficiaries with 50.45 percent achievement at the National level whereas it was recorded 42.06 percent with the coverage of 1.80 lakh beneficiaries in the State of West Bengal (Chart 2.3). in case of Women beneficiaries, while West Bengal could reach (42.29 percent) the prescribed new target of 40 percent to the total coverage, the All India level had a coverage below the target. Showing 31.92 percent achievement with the coverage of 17.35 lakh women beneficiaries (Chart 2.4), as also shown in Table No. 3.2 below:

Table No. 3.2
Aggregate Achievement of SC/ST and Women Beneficiaries for 1990-91 and 1991-92
(Nos. in lakh)

Level	Total Coverage	SC/ST beneficiaries		Women beneficiaries	
		Coverage	% of achievement	Coverage	% of achievement
All India	54.35	27.42	50.45	17.35	31.92
West Bengal	4.28	1.80	42.06	1.81	42.29

Source: Compiled from the Annual Reports (of different years), Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Govt. of India, New Delhi and, the Records collected from the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development, Govt. of West Bengal, Calcutta.

The Charts 2.5 and 2.6 under reference depict that during the Eighth Plan period, West Bengal recorded an average of 40.41 percent achievement with slight downfall trend in relation to the Annual Plan years in terms of SC/ST coverage but reached the target showing an average of 40.41 percent achievement with the coverage of 2.74 lakh women beneficiaries. On the contrary, even though in 1992-93 and 1993-94, it was over-achieved the target (51.41% and 53.07% respectively) in terms of the coverage of SC/ST beneficiaries, a downfall trend was found in the following years at the National level. On overall basis, it recorded 48.78 percent (approx.) with the coverage of 52.72 lakh (approx.) SC/ST beneficiaries. In case of the coverage of women beneficiaries it recorded an average of 32.83 percent (approx.) with the coverage of 35.48 lakhs (approx.). However, it is evident that during the different years of this Plan, in case of the coverage of SC/ST beneficiaries, the position is found higher at the National level than that of West Bengal. By contrast, in case of the achievement of women beneficiaries, the records of West Bengal show better in position than that of the National level. As it is also shown in the Table No. 3.3 below:

Table No. 3.3
Aggregate Achievement of SC/ST and Women Beneficiaries for the Eighth Plan (1992-93 to 1996-97) [Nos. in lakh]

Level	Total Coverage	SC/ST beneficiaries		Women beneficiaries	
		Coverage	% of achievement	Coverage	% of achievement
All India	108.08	52.72	48.78	35.48	32.83
West Bengal	6.78	2.74	40.41	2.74	40.41

Note: The National level records are presented approximately (as the data from 1994-95 to 1996-97 are derived from the Graph displayed in Annual Report 1997-98, Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Government of India, New Delhi).

Source: Compiled from the Annual Reports (of different years), Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Govt. of India, New Delhi and, the Records collected from the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development, Govt. of West Bengal, Calcutta.

Further Charts 2.7 and 2.8 depict that in the first two years of Ninth Plan (1997-98 to 1998-99), it was recorded an average of 45.96 percent (with the coverage of 11.44 lakhs) SC/ST beneficiaries at the National level whereas it was recorded an average of 37.42 percent (with the coverage of 0.61 lakh SC/ST beneficiaries) in West Bengal. In case of the coverage of Women beneficiaries, West Bengal recorded an average of 36.20 percent (with the coverage of 0.59

lakh). In the National level it was recorded 34.23 percent with the coverage of 8.52 lakh women beneficiaries, as also in the table No. 3.4 below:

Table No. 3.4
Aggregate Achievement of SC/ST and Women Beneficiaries for
1997-98 and 1998-99

(Nos. in lakh)

Level	Total Coverage	SC/ST beneficiaries		Women beneficiaries	
		Coverage	% of achievement	Coverage	% of achievement
All India	24.89	11.44	45.96	8.52	34.23
West Bengal	1.63	0.61	37.42	0.59	36.20

Notes: i) Data aggregated for the year 1997-98 are provisional at the National level.

ii) Data aggregated for the year 1998-99 are upto November 1998.

Source: Compiled from the Annual Reports (of different years), Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, Govt. of India, New Delhi; INDLA – 1999, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, New Delhi, and, the Records collected from the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development, Govt. of West Bengal, Calcutta.

Furthermore, as shown in the Chart No. 2.9, the total SC/ST beneficiaries were assisted 124.53 lakhs (with 48.16% to the total coverage) during the period under study (1988-89 to 1998-99) at the National level. Whereas in West Bengal, it had been 40.14 percent with the coverage of 7.45 lakh SC/ST beneficiaries. On the contrary, in case of the coverage of Women beneficiaries, West Bengal recorded 38.90 percent with the coverage of 7.22 lakhs whereas it was recorded 30.43 percent with the coverage of 78.68 lakhs at the All India level during the period under reference.

To conclude, while in the important backdrop of situation (explained in foregoing sections), the IRD Programme as well as the DWCRA Scheme had been implemented in the State of West Bengal with great vigour, the major issues including the above comparative assessment coupled here, however, prove our proposed study more relevant and a challenging area of Research Work so far. The detailed study is, however, attempted to reveal the reality in the subsequent Chapters.

Notes and References

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