

Preface and Acknowledgement

India's main problem, in the immediate post-independence era, was to bring about rural development and to improve the socio-economic conditions of the rural people since she inherited from the British an economy crippled in all respects at the time of independence. But the formulation and implementation of the various programmes of development, pursued during the last three decades, had been without any significant representation of the people and hence the Asoka Mehta Committee recommended the three-tier Panchayati Raj institutions consisting of the elected representatives of the people and entrusted with comprehensive developmental activities. The new Panchayati Raj institutions which were adopted and made functional in West Bengal in 1978 brought about a significant and qualitative change in the scheme of democratic decentralization in the rural areas. As a result of the reorganisation of the Panchayati Raj institutions in West Bengal, several issues, most persistent of which centred round the pattern of relationship between the officials and the non-officials, have cropped up.

Rural development is a vast and variegated phenomenon and the Panchayat institutions are the most effective instruments for carrying out the multipurpose and multiprocessed programmes of rural development. The institutions are characterised by (a) the philosophy of serving the rural people, and (b) the philosophy of rejuvenating their elans and ethos. These characteristics require a new spirit, a new outlook and a new attitude on the part of both the officials and the non-officials. Officials are expected to sharply break away from their traditional concern of maintenance of law and order, strict adherence to rules paternalistic orientations and impatience. They must be responsive, flexible, dynamic and development-oriented. On the other hand, the non-officials are expected to change their attitudes towards the legitimate political authority and the officials. They must be guided by the consideration of general interest and not by any parochial and sectoral outlook.

Malda, in comparison with other districts in North and South Bengal, is an underdeveloped region. Agriculture, where the traditional techniques are used till today, constitutes the key sector of the economy of the Malda district. Low per capita income is one of the important characteristics of the backwardness of this district. The industrial scene of this district is also deplorable and also lacks infrastructural facilities. Backwardness has also been manifested in its poor literacy rate in comparison with other districts of West Bengal.

To improve the socio-economic conditions of the people of the Malda district and also to alleviate their poverty, the Panchayati Raj institutions at the three levels have been assigned the primary responsibility of policy formulation and implementation of rural development programmes.

The Panchayati Raj institutions are the hubs of rural developmental activities in Malda district. They are considered to be the instruments for expressing popular aspirations and for translating these aspirations into reality. Besides implementation of policies, the officials give advice and provide information to non-officials. The non-officials also guide and supervise the officials in the implementation procedures, in addition to their normal functions of policy formulation. Therefore, the two sets of actors, viz., the officials and the non-officials in the Panchayati Raj institutions, will have to change their attitudes, normative orientations and behavioural patterns.

All these factors emphasize the importance of studying the emerging relationship-pattern between the officials and the non-officials at the three tiers of Panchayati Raj institutions in the Malda district. In this context, the study seeks to explore the normative orientations and image-perceptions of both groups of actors, which have an important bearing upon their mutual relationship. Finally, an attempt has also been made to identify

the tension areas as well as to find out the emerging pattern of relationship between the officials and the non-officials at the three levels.

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