

CHAPTER I

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A. Significance of the Proposed Study

The concept of public relations which originated in business and industry, and was then taken over by the U.S and British governments, particularly during the World War II, for engineering widespread public support in favour of their deeds and actions, was finally adopted by the governments of these countries to win over people's consent and sanction for administrative actions in the post-war period of reconstruction. It was realized from the outset that governments, when delivering goods to the people, needed the techniques of communication and the public relations machinery to inform people of government activities and to persuade them that the objectives and intentions of the government were identical with the interests of the people. In India, this realization came much later in the sixties when a number of public sector undertakings created

the office of Public Relations Officer in their organizations. However, in most of these enterprises, public relations is accorded a very low status in the administrative hierarchy, and it is little more than an ornament for the organization. It is more so in government departments where bureaucracy is bound by rules and precedents and shows little concern for change and innovation. Nevertheless, with the increasing tempo of Five Year Plans, the government departments were conferred with a new development-orientation with emphasis on self-development and participation, and as a corollary of this fact, the importance of public relations and communication gained momentum in administration. Public relations in government is justified on the assumption that a democratic government is obliged to report to its citizens, and that effective administration requires citizens' participation and support. Its practice at the governmental level evokes active cooperation of the people in action -programs, compliance in regulatory programs and support for administration's policies.¹ Unfortunately, this consciousness about the need for public relations and effective communication between the administration the citizens is not, as yet, felt seriously by the government departments. The low ebb in the successful implementation of public relations programmes in government can be attributed to the fact that most government programmes emphasize information -dissemination and neglect fact-finding and feedback as well as planning and programming.

B. Objectives of the Proposed Study

While the prospect of the practice of public relations in administration is rather unpromising in India in general and in West Bengal in particular, action and communication as a step in public relations practice is well in operation through an administrative effort to disseminate government information among the people and to evoke their participation, particularly in rural development programmes. In West Bengal, there is a complex network of administrative structures vertically and horizontally interlinked, performing the role of communicators between the governments and their people. The constituent units of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting have their regional district and sub-divisional level offices for propagating the development-oriented policies and programmes of the central government, particularly among the rural audience. These units are expected to make an extensive use of the media of mass communication placed at their disposal for the dissemination of government information among the rural people with the objectives of arousing awareness and creating favourable attitudes towards government policies and programmes, and finally, soliciting people's participation in the programmes of rural development. Therefore, one of the objectives of the proposed study is to find out to what extent these constituent units of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting are working successfully in facilitating

two-way communication between the government and the people and promoting meaningful understanding between them.

The Government of West Bengal, too, has its own network for communicating with its people in matters pertaining to development, particularly in the rural sector. Since the late seventies, there has been a concerted effort by the Government of West Bengal for bringing all the communication aspects of the government functions in all their dimensions under the supervision and control of one department, namely, the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs. The Department is supposed to act as a communication link between all the developmental departments of the state government and the people to whom the developmental messages are to be addressed. A realistic assessment of the actual and potential role of the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs in the process of communication, in improving social awareness towards administrative policies and programmes, in evoking people's involvement and participation, and in performing the function of an effective feedback mechanism in the systemic framework constitutes another major objective of the proposed study.

Apart from the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, the departments like those of Health and Family Welfare and Agriculture whose functions are developmental in nature and instrumental in the process of development and modernization of rural Bengal, have their own structural and

administrative arrangements for the dissemination of information among the rural masses about new innovations and practices in their respective fields of activities. These Departments use the various media of mass communication like posters, folders, brochures, booklets, exhibitions, films, and to a limited extent, electronic media like transistors, radio sets and television for transmitting the message of development to the rural audience. At the same time, along with these media of mass communication, a large number of field workers e.g. Krishi Prajukti Sahayaks in the Department of Agriculture, or Health Assistants in the Department of Health and Family Welfare, are employed by these Departments for doing extension work among the villagers. These people, working at the grass-root level, are supposed to act as intermediaries between the technical experts and the villagers by way of translating the development messages into simple, local idioms, easily comprehensible by the illiterate villagers. Thus, both the mass media and the traditional and interpersonal media of communication are put to use by the Departments for informing and educating the rural masses in new techniques and practices in their respective fields of activities. Therefore, another primary objective of the proposed study is to make an empirical assessment of the working of the process of communication among the village people in selected fields of Health and agricultural activities, and to see how far and to what extent the villagers have got access to different media of

communication, the relative ability of the different media in successfully communicating the content of the message to the rural people, along the level of their understanding, as well as the results of the communication efforts.

C. Research Questions

Keeping these objectives in mind, the present study seeks to answer the following questions :

- (1) Whether and to what extent the different units of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting are working successfully for promoting, facilitating and consolidating meaningful understanding and empathy between the government and the people.
- (2) Whether and to what extent the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs in West Bengal has been successful in performing its role as the principal administrative machinery for development-support-communication in rural areas.
- (3) How far and to what extent the people in the sampled villages have had access to the media of communication — mass media, little media as well as interpersonal media of communication.
- (4) How far and to what extent the media of communication

— mass media, little media and interpersonal media of communication — have been successful in the sampled villages in communicating correctly the message or the content of communication relating to specific programmes in the fields of Agriculture as well as Health and Family Welfare.

- (5) How far and to what extent the efforts in such development-support communication in the sampled villages relating to specific programmes in the fields of Agriculture as well as Health and Family Welfare, have yielded tangible results in terms of changing the behaviour of the beneficiaries and persuading them to apply the latest technologies in the respective development-sectors.

D. Methodology of the Proposed Study

The Research Design

The practice of public relations in business and administration endeavours to identify organizational goals and interests as identical with those of its clients. It is a concerted effort and a process involving several phases of planning and action. Communication is a major step in the public relations process that itself is treated as a complex process with several parts and stages. The revolution in

communication technology and the new approach to communication in the context of development has made it the nerve centre of government activities. The search, therefore, was for a research design that would allow a study of the process of communication in the implementation of development programmes in the selected areas of government activity.

The developing countries in the so-called Third World display some common characteristics in terms of widespread illiteracy, unequal distribution of wealth, predominantly agriculture-based economy and unabated rural poverty and unemployment. The governments in these countries are faced with the challenge of improving the lot of the poor masses living in villages through a number of developmental programmes and projects. In the wake of political independence and plans for development in India, the expectations of the people about the ability of the government had been very high. There have been pressing demands upon the state to provide leadership and to act as the change-agent providing the necessary stimulus in bringing about socio-economic and cultural transformation in the country. However, it is true that no effective developmental plan or programme can be carried out by the government alone. The growth and the role of voluntary organizations are crucial in the process of social development as they can relieve the government of some of its burdens and responsibilities and at the same time help to provide a mechanism of social control over

bureaucracy. The changed role of voluntary organizations in bringing about socio-economic transformation in rural India by way of developing the innate faculties of human beings, filling up the communication gap between the planners and implementers, and initiating a participatory model of development, is well-recognized by the government and the planners of development that highlight the importance of voluntary organization as the eyes and ears of the beneficiaries, the weaker sections of the society who have been left out of the mainstream of the development activities. Nevertheless, the role of government, often aided by the voluntary organizations, in planning and implementation of anti-poverty and minimum needs programmes in the field of rural development, simply cannot be overlooked.

Agriculture is the main focus of rural economic development. But apart from agriculture, there are other areas for delivering goods and services to the rural masses. It was therefore, considered proper to concentrate on the study of the process of communication in agriculture and health, and the focus was on government-initiated communication, with other organizations playing the supportive and complementary role.

For a clear understanding of the new role of communication in rural development, the study needed to be conducted at the micro level. Hence, the study was done in the village

setting - at the bottom of the structure - and in the selection of villages, two things were kept in mind. One was the distance of the village from the nearby urban centre. If the village is far away from an urban centre and inaccessible, the communication network will not be easily available. Another was the socio-economic background of the villagers. People with higher socio-economic status, with more formal education, with higher reading and comprehension capabilities, with economically better-off positions and better social contact, cannot be the targets of rural development programmes. Instead, the programmes get their real meanings only in relation to the lower strata, the illiterate, uninformed and downtrodden segments of the rural community. Hence two villages were selected, one for studying the process of communication and its impact on the implementation of agricultural programmes and practices, and the other for carrying out a similar study in the field of health. The villages were not far away from the urban centres; channels of communication-electronic, interpersonal as well as other media of mass communication - were available in the villages; and, secondly, most of the villagers represented the lower strata of the society economically as well as socially.

Further, the federal character of the Indian state paves the way for the functioning of two parallel networks of communication by the central and the state governments. Although the dissemination of information and the integration

of development with communication is not the activity of a single department or ministry, yet, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in the Central government and the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs in the case of West Bengal are especially designed for initiating the dialogue between the benefactors and the beneficiaries in a participatory model of communication. Their organizational networks, the ways of their functioning and the techniques at their disposal required examination for an understanding of the nature of communication between the government and the people in the context of development.

The research design of the study thus, allowed to :

- (i) examine the communication networks of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting at the Centre and the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs in the State of West Bengal;
- (ii) study the media exposure and the level of understanding of the people at the micro level in selected fields of development i.e., health and agriculture;
- (iii) assess the effectiveness of communication among the beneficiaries of development.

Method of Data Collection

The study was done in two parts. For the first part of the study, which was mainly exploratory in nature, reliance was made primarily on documentary sources such as the annual reports, periodic official publications, reports of the different committees and commissions, official notifications and manuals and other published and unpublished source - materials. Nevertheless, the data collected from these documentary sources had been supplemented by way of adopting the empirical survey method of personal interview based on structured, as well as open-ended, unstructured questionnaire.

For the second part of the study, the data were collected solely and completely by using the personal interview method of survey research. A structured questionnaire was administered among the sampled respondents for obtaining information relevant for the present study.

At the macro level of the study, an insight was given into the process of communication between the government and the people both at the Centre and in the State of West Bengal in the context of development and people's participation in the development process. It had thus become necessary to identify the structures within the governments that were expected to initiate and sustain the process of communication both at the centre and in the state of West Bengal and to examine in depth the modes of their working and the techniques

at their disposal. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in the Central government and the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs in West Bengal were singled out as the nodal agencies with necessary infrastructure that stretched down the local levels for the dissemination of government information and initiation of the process of two-way communication between the government and the people. The first part of the study was thus exclusively concerned with examining the nature and style of functioning of these two agencies.

This part of the work was done mostly on the basis of documentary sources. Nevertheless, the method of collecting information through personal interviews with officials, based on structured as well as unstructured questionnaire, had also been used along with documentary sources, particularly where documentary sources had been proved inadequate to reveal the real picture about the functioning of the government departments and agencies in giving communication support to development programmes among the target groups in the rural community. The Publication Division of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting has a number of annual publications like India, Mass Media in India or Annual Report. These publications were found portraying the lists of works done by the Ministry throughout the year. The reportings in these publications are stereotype and given the particular style of their writing, they neither reflect the processes

nor capture the essence of the dynamics of interactions between the government and the people. These are at best attempts to present a chart of what has been done by the government in numerical terms and have little research value. Nevertheless, government's concern about the problem of communication and the potential role of the mass media in rural development has been reflected at least in the constitution of the different working groups and study teams at different points of time to go into the examination of the actual and potential role of different media from the point of view of two-way participatory model of communication. The reports submitted by these working groups like the Report of the Committee on Broadcasting and Information Media, 1966, Verghese Committee Report on the Autonomy of Akashvani and Doordarshan, 1978, Report of the Working Group for Software Planning for Doordarshan, 1984, Report of the Working Group on National Film Policy, 1980, Report of the Press Commission, 1982, had been found immensely helpful for the purpose of the study.

The real difficulty arose when an attempt was being made to examine the role of the State government in West Bengal in this participatory model of development and communication. Since 1977, there had been a serious move towards the centralization of all activities pertaining to government's interaction with the people in a single department. Accordingly, the Department of Information and

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Cultural Affairs had been expanded in terms of its organizational structure as well as its functions and responsibilities, and was endowed with an increasing importance in the context of rural development. But while it had been possible to discern the changes that had taken place in the structural arrangements of the Department from the official notifications issued from time to time, the problem that had been experienced in the course of this study related to the functioning of the Department. There was neither any official document specifying the areas of operation of the Department or detailing its activities, nor any regular publication issued by the Department mentioning its success or failure in initiating and accelerating the process of communication between the government and the people. The Directors of the Department themselves admitted the shortcomings. The only source of information that was available was the annual budget speech of the concerned minister before the Legislative Assembly. The speech outlines a chart of the work done by the Department throughout the year and specifies information about the expansion of the infrastructure during the coming financial year. The whole exercise is done as a matter of routine. It neither reflects the perceptions of the government about the essence of communication in the new concept of participatory development, nor specifies the efforts made, and the constraints faced by the government in the operationalization of community participation in the process of development.

In the light of the foregoing scenario, it was felt that the most fruitful approach would be to collect the perceptions and views of the officials. This would perhaps help to get a clear picture about the mode and style of work of the Department among the target groups and individuals within the rural community. Consequently, personal interview was seen as the most appropriate way of obtaining data for the study. Further, apart from the Department of Information & Cultural Affairs which is the nodal agency for initiating interaction and sustaining the process of two-way communication between the government and the people, the Department of Agriculture, as well as the Department of Health and Family Welfare have their own arrangements for disseminating information to their clients about policies and programmes in their respective fields of activity. For instance, there is one Chief Publicity and Public Relations Officer in the Directorate of the Department of Agriculture. The CP & PRO maintains his own office staff and is in total charge of deciding on the policies relating to maintenance of cliental relationship with the farmers. At the district level, there are District Agricultural Information Officers and this hierarchical structure is stretched down to the lowest level of administration. Thus in the blocks, there are the Krishi Prajukti Sahayak. It was felt that the perceptions and opinions of the officials who were taking part in the formulation of policies dealing with the

communication aspect of any activity, either in the Department of Agriculture or the Department of Health and Family Welfare, were as important as those of the Department of Information & Cultural Affairs. Hence the respondents were taken from all the three departments and included those officials who were responsible for determining policies regarding the techniques and modes of communication with the people.

The second part of the study was aimed at examining the communication network as it was operating within the rural community and the communication effect in modifying the behavioural pattern of the people in the context of rural development. Here the focus of study was shifted from the macro level to the micro level of inquiry into the changes in the perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of those who were at the receiving end of development. Consequently, a survey research method of personal interview with a structured questionnaire was chosen as the principal source of data collection for this part of study. Since the study was conducted at the village level, it was thought fitting to approach the respondents with the same set of questions so that differences in responses could be fully attributed to the actual differences among the respondents. The selection of the district for the study was determined by the convenience of the researcher to get sufficient time for field survey as the work was done in the free time after fulfilling all the official

responsibilities and commitments of the researcher. There are twelve development blocks in the Darjeeling district of which four are in the plains. The blocks in the hills were excluded primarily because of their inaccessibility. The transport system is miserably poor. The villages are scattered over the hills and most of the villages donot have even any approach road. For a lady researcher, it was quite impossible to reach those inaccessible areas. The second constraint was the language-barrier. The villagers speak Nepali in their local accent which is very difficult to comprehend. The final selection of blocks was, however, made by using the lottery method of random selection. To keep the sample size adequately representative of the universe, finally, two villages were selected, one for studying the process of communication and its impact in the implementation of agricultural programs and practices and another for carrying out a similar study in the field of health. The selection of village within the selected block in each case was made by using a table of random numbers.

Content of Interview Schedule

In all, there were three groups of respondents. While the first group of respondents consisted of the officials from the Departments of Information & Cultural Affairs, Agriculture and Health and Family Welfare, the second and

third groups of respondents included the villagers who were selected for interview to study the process of communication in the fields of agriculture and health respectively. Consequently, three set of questionnaires were framed and administered. The first set of the questionnaires included both structured and unstructured questions that were framed for interviewing the officials. The major aspects of the interview were structured in the questionnaire in three parts. The first part dealt with some general questions which were put before all the officials for obtaining information regarding the style and mode of functioning of the concerned departments in initiating and sustaining communication and in building rapport with the people, the use of the media by the departments, the content of communication and the responses of the people. The second part included some questions on which opinions were sought only from the officials of the Department of Information & Cultural Affairs. This part included questions regarding the objectives of the Department of Information & Cultural Affairs, the changing role of the department as well as the importance of the Department in the changed context. The third part of the questionnaire was meant for the officials of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Family Welfare. The thrust of the questions in this part was on recording the perceptions and opinions of the officials of these departments about the importance that was given to the

Department of Information & Cultural Affairs under the new approach towards mass mobilization and communication, the dimensions of interaction and conflict between the Departments of Agriculture and Health and Family Welfare on the one hand and the Department of Information & Cultural Affairs on the other, and the resultant success or failure of the new approach.

For the purpose of interviewing the villagers who constituted the second and the third groups of respondents, two separate sets of questionnaire, one relating to agriculture and the other for health and family welfare activities, were framed. The questionnaire included, apart from questions on the general profile of the respondents, those for getting information in specific areas of query. Thus questions were put for an understanding of the working of the process of communication i.e., the access of the respondents to different media and their level of understanding of the content of communication in relation to age, sex, education, occupation, caste and religion, the knowledge of the respondents about specified agricultural and health development programmes and the sources of their knowledge and the results of the different programme campaigns.

The Interview

The interviews were in general held in very cordial and congenial atmosphere. To meet the requirements of the study, the officials were interviewed first. Each interview began with an explanation of the purpose of study. In each interview, the respondent was given a copy of the questionnaire first. By and large, the respondents spent a few minutes reading the questionnaire, asked for clarifications on some points and then started with any question that seemed most relevant to them. The actual filling of the questionnaire was personally done by the interviewer. Most of the respondents welcomed the study; the respondents belonging to the Department of Information & Cultural Affairs, in particular, were most fascinated and became proud about the importance of the work their Department was entrusted with. However, a few of the respondents refused to give interview on the pretext of paucity of time and excessive workload. Some others failed to keep appointments, for reasons not explained or known.

In general, each interview lasted 30 minutes. Some of the respondents prolonged their discussions, narrating their own experiences as officials of the Departments. Nevertheless, these discussions at times brought to light some important information regarding interdepartmental conflicts and lack of interdepartmental cooperation, particularly because of the policy of centralization of all publicity and

media-related activities in the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs. On the whole, the respondents were very frank and willing in their deliberations, and some of them even helped with some unpublished official documents which were otherwise inaccessible to an outsider.

Interviewing the villagers was quite a different experience. It was quite obvious that the idea of social science research was completely beyond the understanding of the villagers. They were curious about the work even when the purpose of the study was honestly explained to them. Nevertheless, they came forward and co-operated with the researcher, and this was made possible only by way of mixing with them freely and establishing a rapport before approaching them with a questionnaire as such. To get access to the villagers, first, a few days were spent only roaming in the villages, sometimes accompanying the Health Assistant or the KPS, and talking with the Panchayat members, the village leaders, the elderly people in the villages, and even the housewives. They offered tea and were in fact so simple that it took just a little time to be close to them. It was only when such a rapport was established that the villagers were individually approached with the questionnaire, and they ultimately found it a pleasure to answer the questions they were asked. As most of the villagers were not able to read the questionnaires, the researcher had to translate them and sometimes to elaborate them for their clear understanding. Some of them even

came forward and asked whether their names were included for interview. The villagers were very frank and free in giving reply to the questions. They revealed what they knew and although the questionnaire was mainly structured, a patient hearing was given to what they said out of their own experiences.

Data Processing and Analysis

The three sets of questionnaires that were prepared for interviewing the three groups of respondents included both open-ended and close-ended questions. The data gathered from close-ended questions were readily amenable to statistical analysis. Hence, the data that were obtained from the structured questions were first classified into categories and then arranged in the form of tables. Finally, the data were analyzed and measured to find out the relationship between the dependent variables and a set of independent variables and attributes.

For the purpose of measurement, reliance was made on the chi-square test. Considering the small size of the sample the .05 level of probability (P) was accepted as the standard of significance. The null hypothesis was retained in each case where P was greater than this level. The tests have been done by an electronic computer which is virtually error-free.

The open-ended questions, on the other hand, provided information that helped to improve upon the interpretation that was given with the help of data obtained from the documentary sources.

Locale of the Study

Darjeeling, the northernmost district of Jalpaiguri Division, is located between $27^{\circ}13'05''$ and $26^{\circ}27'10''$ North latitudes and $88^{\circ}53'00''$ and $87^{\circ}59'30''$ East longitudes. It roughly resembles an inverted wedge bounded in the west by Nepal, in the north by Sikkim, a constituent State of the Indian Union, in the east by Bhutan and Bangladesh, and in the south by three Indian districts, Uttar (North) Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri of West Bengal, and Purnea of Bihar.

The district has derived its name from its headquarters. The word Darjeeling came from Dorjeling — 'dorje' standing for the ecclesiastical sceptre or the double-headed thunder-bolt which the Lama holds in his hand during service and 'ling' meaning place. It was a Buddhist monastery that once stood on the Observatory Hill overlooking Mall, the nerve centre of the town.

The district covers an area of 3,149.0 sq.kilometers. It consists of a portion of the outlying hills of the lower Himalayas and a stretch of territory lying along their base

known as the Terai. The mean elevation of the Terai is 300 feet above sea level while some of the hills within the district rise to more than 10,000 feet.

Besides the Teesta, which is the master stream of the district, the Mahanadi, the Balasone, the Jaldhaka and the Great Rangit are the other major rivers of the district. The Teesta which forms a part of the district boundary, leaves the district just after it comes down and enters into the plains. The Great Rangit is its chief affluent. The Mahanadi, or the Mahananda as it is known in Bengali, flows over the plains of the district along with its principal right bank tributary, the Balasan, and forms the principal river basin in the plains.

The climate of the district is conditioned by its position in relation to the Tibetan land mass, the wide differences in altitudes, the powerful effect of the monsoons against the Himalayan barrier, and the peculiar configuration of the neighbouring mountains. Spring and autumn are the most liked and comfortable seasons in the district, while the monsoon is a period of incessant rain. The local climate depends largely on the elevation which varies from 1000 feet in the Terai to 12,000 feet in the northern part of the district. In the Terai and the lower valleys, the climate is similar to that of the adjoining districts in the plains of Bengal and Bihar. In summer, from March to May, the heat in the plains and low valleys is as oppressive as in other

Sub-Himalayan districts of West Bengal.

Of the four sub-divisions of the district, Siliguri, comprising the plains and the Terai portion of the district was made a sub-division in 1907. It covers an area of 837.4 sq.kilometers and has the largest population. This is due to the fertility of its soil and the widespread industrial and commercial activities in and around the Sub-division. According to the 1981 Census, Siliguri, covering only 26.59 per cent of the total area of the district, accounted for 46.16 per cent of the total population while the percentage of rural population in this sub-division fell below the district average, the rate of literacy was lower compared with the percentage of literates in the district. According to the 1981 Census, the percentage of total workers in the district was 36.24, while that of Siliguri sub-division was 34.97. Of the total workers in Siliguri, 19.9 per cent were cultivators and 13.79 per cent were agricultural labours.

Table 1.1
Darjeeling and Siliguri : Certain Descriptive Statistics

	Darjeeling	Siliguri
Area (in km)	3,149.0 sq.km.	837.4 sq.km.
Population	1,024,269	4,72,897
Percentage of urban to total population	27.54	34.48
Percentage of literacy to total population	42.47	39.21
Percentage of Scheduled Caste population	14.25	20.97
Percentage of Scheduled Tribe population	14.75	19.13
Percentage of rural to total population	72.45	65.51

Source : Census of India, 1981.

There are four developmental blocks within the Siliguri sub-division, viz. Matigara, Naxalbari, Phansidewa and Kharibari. Of the two blocks, Matigara and Kharibari, which were selected for the study, Matigara is nearer to Siliguri urban township. The block covers an area of 39832.72 acres bounded in the east by Siliguri, in the north by Kurseong, in the West by Naxalbari block and in the south by Phansidewa block. According to the Block Record of the 1991 Census, the block has a total population of 77,543, of which 40,935 are males and 36,608 females. Of the total population, 38.69 per cent belong to scheduled castes and 10.54 per cent to scheduled tribes. The percentage of the literates is 53.03. There are five Gram Panchayats in the block with a total number of 65 mouzas. In the case of twenty mouzas, fifty per cent or more than fifty per cent of the total population belong to the scheduled castes. Of the total population, 6.49 per cent are cultivators and 4.95 per cent agricultural labours. The river Mahananda and its principal tributary Balasan are flowing across the block.

The block headquarters is located at Atharakhai (Sib-
mandir) on the National Highway 31, and there is regular bus service that connects the place with the subdivisioinal town. The metalled approach roads from the Highway or from the local roads linked the offices of all the five Gram Panchayats with the sub-divisional township. There are one Primary Health Centre, three high schools and a host of Primary and nursery schools in the block.

Kharibari, the other block that had been selected for study, is the farthest block in terms of its distance from the Siliguri sub-divisional headquarters. It covers an area of 13159.6 hectares, and is bounded by Phansidewa block in the east, Naxalbari block in north Nepal in the west and Bihar in the south. According to the Block Record of the 1991 Census, the block has a total population of 59,473 of which 30,982 are males and 28,491 females. Of the total population, 56.8 per cent belong to the scheduled castes and 18.17 per cent to scheduled tribes. The percentage of the literates in the block is 31.64. There are four gram panchayats in the block with a total number of seventy one mouzas. Of the total population, 18.51 per cent are cultivators and 12.61 per cent are agricultural labours. The block head-quarters is located at Kharibari and private as well as state-owned buses are plying between Siliguri and Kharibari at regular intervals. There are one Rural Hospital and two Primary Health Centres in the block. The number of high schools are four.

E. Overview of Literature

While the study of public relations as an institutionalized practice to influence opinion through responsible performance has received attention, particularly at the local government level and public sector undertakings, the role of

communication in development has received considerable attention among the scholars. As the objective of this section is to make a brief critical survey of initiative undertaken by the western and Indian scholars in this wide arena of public relations and communication research, the attempted exercise is done by classifying the available literature on the subject in four categories :

- (a) literature on communication by Western scholars.
- (b) literature on communication by Indian scholars.
- (c) literature on public relations by Western scholars.
- (d) literature on public relations by Indian scholars.

The Second World War can be considered as the turning point in the shift in communication theory and research. Harold Lasswell,² in his model of communication effects, discarded the Libertarian theory of public communication which emphasized the latent rationality in men and women and came with an innovative formula of mass media effects : WHO says WHAT in which CHANNEL, to WHOM and with what EFFECT ? Based on this conceptualization, David K. Berlo³ developed his SMRC model that explained communication as a linear and one-way process always flowing from the source of communication to a passive receiver.

While the earliest theoretical models on media effects conceptualized the impact of mass media as direct, powerful and uniform on individuals, Lazarsfeld Berelson and Gaudet,⁴

in their study of the 1940 US Presidential election, pointed to the minimal impact of mass media and discovered that "certain people in every stratum of a community serve relay roles in the mass communication of election information and influence". This was the notion developed by Katz and Lazarsfeld⁵ in the two-step flow theory of communication. It was suggested that in every society one segment of the community which was more exposed to the media acted as opinion leaders in influencing others in the community. In a similar way, Klapper⁶ suggested that the mass media acted more as agents of reinforcement than as causal agents of behavioural or attitudinal change in individuals.

Carl Hovland and colleagues⁷ did a pioneering work in the area of communication and persuasion. Their research findings undermined the great power of mass media and showed that people responded to persuasive messages in selective ways. To Hovland, the communication effects of mass media were being restricted by several factors like the social categories to which people belonged, their individual characteristics and social relationships. John McNelly,⁸ on the contrary, saw mass communication as neither a simple injection into an entire population nor a neat two-step flow from mass media to opinion-leader to the general public, but rather as the complex, multi-stage, multi-directional process. McCroske⁹ pointed out two dimensions of communication : (a) transmission vs. stimulation and (b) purposeful vs. accidental. From the social development point of view,

stimulation and purposeful communication are the most important and significant. Campbell¹⁰ spoke of three purposes of communication - informative, persuasive and entertainment.

The role of communication in the process of modernization and development was first stressed in the writings of Daniel Lerner, Wilbur Schramm and Everett Rogers. Daniel Lerner,¹¹ viewed communication as 'the great multiplier in the development of new ideas, attitudes and knowledge'. In Lerner's model, mass media were both an index and an agent of modernization. Underdevelopment was perceived as a cultural problem, and the interpersonal networks of communication which were considered as supportive of traditional structures and indigenous cultures were treated as anti-development. So mass media were hailed to wean people away from traditional culture and structures and draw them towards the modern system. Lerner noted that the process of modernization began when something 'stimulates the peasant to want to be a free-holding farmer, the farmer's son to want to learn reading, so he can work in the town, the farmer's wife to stop bearing children, the farmer's daughter to want to wear a dress and do her hair.'¹² In a similar vein, Schramm¹³ recommended that the task of mass media of information and the new media of education was to speed and ease the long slow social transformation required for economic development, and, in particular, to speed and smooth the task of

mobilizing human resources, behind the national effort. Schramm's observation indicates that the structure of communication in a particular society is directly related to the stage of development of that society. Modernization and development was seen by Rogers¹⁴ as "the process by which individuals changed from a traditional way of life to a more complex, technologically advanced and rapidly changing style of life". Communication was, therefore, visualized as the important link through which new exogenous ideas could be diffused for bringing about necessary change in the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of individuals.

Juan Diaz Bordenave¹⁵ made a perceptive analysis of the western theoretical models of communication and their relevances in the process of modernization and development in the third world countries. He started with a critical analysis of the early models of communication as one-way, top-down and linear, and called this the 'transmission mentality', a conceptualization that did not incorporate the transactional or the multi-dimensional nature of communication. In the marketing and agricultural extension models, he viewed communication as transmission of information and persuasion having pre-occupation with effects that came to be extensively used in the developing countries in rural development programmes. However, he pointed to the incompatibility of the western models with the problems and needs of the developing countries where the main barriers to development are not

psychological and attitudinal, but mainly structural, and a restructuring of society is a prerequisite to development.

In a similar way, Larry Shore¹⁶ mentioned the need to consider communication not as a simple independent variable, but as both a dependent and an independent variable in a complex set of relationships with social economic and political structures and processes. The limited access and exposure of the rural poor who are supposed to be the prime beneficiaries of development to media resources, the quality and content of messages, and the time and space accorded to developmental information in the mass media, are the crucial constraints in development communication in the third world countries. Shore pointed out that in the developing countries, mass media gave less preference to developmental information than trivial and non-developmental subjects.

Everett Rogers, whose work was seminal in diffusion of innovations research, pointed out that social-structural constraints that had produced unequal distribution of resources among different segments of population, had invariably favoured adoption of innovations by individuals with higher socio-economic status, thus widening the socio-economic benefits and communication gap. Being concerned with the more equitable distribution of socio economic benefits as the goal of development activities, Rogers came out with a new communication strategy in terms of (a) using the traditional mass media as credible channels to reach the most

disadvantaged audiences, (b) identifying the opinion-leaders among the disadvantaged segments of the total audience and concentrating development activities on them (c) using change-agent aides selected from this audience to work for development agencies, (d) providing means for this audience to participate in the planning and execution of development activities and in the setting of development priorities (e) establishing special development agencies that work with this audience, like the Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) in 1970 in India to provide agricultural information and credit only to small-sized farmers, and (f) producing and disseminating communication messages that are of need and interest to the downtrodden and the deprived.¹⁷ While observing the pro-elitist bias of the modern mass media, Rogers cited the perceptions of some scholars, especially Latin American, who perceived mass media in their nations as an exploitative relationship with the U.S.-based multinational corporations, especially through advertising the commercial products, and stressed the need to examine the relationship between the institutional structures of the media, elitist in ownership and control, and their impact on the media content.

Among the Latin American scholars, Beltran¹⁸ and Fjes¹⁹ also examined the relevance of western communication models with elitist bias to the socio-economic, political and cultural conditions of the so-called third world countries

and pointed to the need for evolving a new approach for the mass media to address to the people of the third world nations. Peter Golding²⁰ highlighted the need for a qualitative approach for the measurement of media message preferences in relation to media exposure.

During the seventies and the eighties, scholars and researchers accorded a new role to communication with emphasis on self-development, participation and two-way communication. Paulo Freire,²¹ who first introduced the concept of conscientization in participatory communication, opined that the goal of participation would be conscientization of peasants about the extremely unequal social, political and spatial structures in their societies so as to enable them to identify their real needs and problems and to plan for their overcome. Ascroft and Masilela²² have come out with a new communication model which envisages knowledge-sharing on a co-equal basis between the benefactor and the beneficiary. It is fundamentally two-way, interactive and participatory at all levels. Nair and White²³ also propose a transactional model that would very well complement Ascroft's model of communication. The transactional process is a two-way persuasion process where the development communicator and the target group interact over a period of time to arrive at a consensual agreement. In this proposed model, the development support communicators are the inter-

mediaries who are expected to bridge the communication gap between the technical specialists and the users by way of translating the technical knowledge and ideas into messages that would be comprehensible to users.

The studies and researches by the Indian scholars in the field of communication are marked by their heavy dependence on the western models and by the absence of indigenous models for understanding Indian reality. Among those who have made some significant contribution to the study of communication in India, mention should be made of S.C.Dube²⁴, Y.V.L.Rao²⁵ and Kusum Nair.²⁶ Dube has dealt with the beliefs, habits, attitudes and values of the people as they affect the process of communication in his study of two villages of western Uttar Pradesh. He has concluded that communication, which is probably the most essential part of the programme of community development, has proved to be the weakest, and suggested 'a more dynamic approach using not only the language and idiom but also the themes that will stir the masses'. Y.V.L Rao has provided the background to the problems of development from the communication angle in a comparative study of two Indian villages in Andhra Pradesh. J.C.Mathur²⁷ has discussed the role of the mass media in the context of development. The study by Kivlin, Prodipto Roy, Frederick Fliegel and Lalit K.Sen²⁸ projected a two-nation comparative analysis on the level of knowledge trial and adoption of certain agricultural, health and family planning

practices. The importance of interpersonal communication in the diffusion of innovation in rural societies has been dealt with by Lalit K. Sen.²⁹ Damle³⁰ has studied the differences of modern ideas and kinds of knowledge in seven villages. C.R. Prasada Rao and K. Ranga Rao³¹ have studied the village communication channels in three villages in Andhra Pradesh.

Shinghi and Mody³² have carried out a communication experiment on the basis of an assumption that in developing countries like India, the better-off segments of the society, because of their higher levels of knowledge, capital and social contact, achieve greater effects from exposure to most interpersonal and mass media information sources, thus widening the socio economic benefits gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', and observed that such a knowledge or communication effects gap can be reduced or even eliminated by using proper communication strategies. Mehra Masani³³ has pointed to the inadequate consideration given to the media message content due to the largely urban control of media production and the absence of programming in regional language or major dialects in most of the developing nations and concluded that "unless policies are changed, the services expanded and decentralized, there is little chance of the mass media playing a significant role in bringing about rural change". Myron Weiner³⁴ has also recognised the role of mass communication in arousing political awareness in a society.

"There is considerable evidence", he says, "that the spread of education, increased transportation and communication between urban centres and the hinterland and the spread of newspapers and radio - all serve to arouse a greater awareness of the effect of government policies on individual citizens."³⁵

In the late seventies and the early eighties, notable works were done by Krishan Sondhi,³⁶ M.V.Desai,³⁷ M.R.Dua,³⁸ N.K.Jaiswal,³⁹ B.Kuppuswamy,⁴⁰ Sachidananda and N.N.Jha,⁴¹ Arvind K Sinha,⁴² I.P.Tewari,⁴³ Binod C. Agrawal,⁴⁴ P.R.R. Sinha, N.V.Kolte and H.P.S.Arya.⁴⁵ Two other works deserve mention : one by Paul Hartmann, B.R.Patil and Anita Dighe,⁴⁶ and the other by M.Seetharam.⁴⁷ While Hartman and others assess the actual and potential role of the mass media to the process of development in the Third world in general and India in particular, based on intensive anthropological studies in the five villages in three Indian states, Seetharam has made an attempt to ascertain the structure and process of participation by citizens in rural development activities with special reference to the Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP) in a particular block in Andhra Pradesh. The importance of communication in rural development is also highlighted by S.N.Ray.⁴⁸ Ray has tried to explore the supportive role of communication in the process of development, particularly the contemporary reconceptualised rural development scenario, and pointed to India's failure in

evolving a conceptual framework in the field of development support communication.

The study of the practice of public relations in government first received attention in the United States, particularly at the local government level. Edward L. Bernays,⁴⁹ who did the pioneering work in the field of public relations practice, regarded it as a vital tool of adjustment, interpretation and integration between individuals, groups and society.

Sam Black⁵⁰ dealt with different aspects of public relations practice. He clearly pointed out the distinction between public relations and press relations, and observed public relations as both an advisory and an executive function. Howard Stephenson⁵¹ described public relations as the art of convincing people that they should adopt a certain attitude or pursue a certain course of action usually associated with management. Paul Burton⁵² observed that public relations personnel, by keeping abreast of the mainstream of public thought, could and should assist management in predicting reaction to and the effectiveness of major decisions.

Stephen Heald⁵³ highlighted the importance of public relations in government and observed that every member of the staff from the messenger to the senior officers in each ministry was, in fact, engaged in public relations function.

Pan Dodd Eimon⁵⁴ stressed the need for good public relations in the successful running of public organizations like public schools and municipal governments.

John E. Marston,⁵⁵ while observing that public relations is a means of influencing citizens and of obtaining their cooperations, upheld the importance of public relations practice in government, democratically elected. Charles S. Steinberg,⁵⁶ while underlining the importance of public opinion in a democratic society, concluded that the purpose of public relations techniques, applied through the mass media, was to inform people and influence public opinion through an intelligent presentation of facts. Frank Jefkins⁵⁷ stated that public relations consisted of all forms of planned communication, outwards and inwards, between an organization and its publics for the purpose of achieving specific objectives concerning mutual understanding.

Scot M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center⁵⁸ examined the reasons behind the failure of public relations practice in government. James L. MacCamy⁵⁹ in his book pointed out that the bureaucrats engaged in administrative publicity as surely as business men did.

Schoenfeld⁶⁰ used the term public relations communication as distinct from public relations. Public relations communication, according to him, is the act of planning and producing the written, spoken and pictorial messages that form the pulse of a public relations program, the objective

being to help develop favourable attitudes towards the organization on the part of the individuals that compose the public.

In India, although a number of serious attempts have been made to examine the role of communication and the problems of people's participation in the accomplishment of rural development programmes, and the attitude of the Indian people towards government and the process of modernization, literature on public relations is very scanty and inadequate. The concept of public relations and its practice, particularly in the public sector undertakings, has been dealt with by J.M.Kaul,⁶¹ Nita Sanghvi,⁶² K.Srinivasan,⁶³ and V.N. Dhekney.⁶⁴ Srinivasan has explained public relations as the continued process of keying policies, services and actions to the best interests of those individuals and groups whose confidence and goodwill an individual or institution covets; and secondly, as the interpretation of those policies, services and actions to assure complete understanding and appreciation. The concept has also found favour in the writings of R.K.Chatterjee⁶⁵ and D.S.Mehta.⁶⁶ Mehta has made a comprehensive study of mass media and public relations in India.

Among articles and papers, mention must be made of A. N. Jha,⁶⁷ J.M.Kaul,⁶⁸ A.J.Palimkar,⁶⁹ Dalip Singh,⁷⁰ and B.N. Abasie-Kong.⁷¹ B.S.D. Baliga⁷² has examined how public

relations can aid administration. Shyam Ratna Gupta⁷³ has analysed problems of government publicity and described the institutional arrangements for publicity. M. Jadolkar⁷⁴ has dealt with public cooperation in the context of the plans. The relationship between the administration and the public has been dealt with by P.S. Jha.⁷⁵

Thus, as the brief overview of the existing literature, attempted above, suggests, most of the studies in the field of communication have been made on the role of mass media in the context of development. The whole literature is marked by the conspicuous absence of any serious study on small media-based communication in India between the government and the people in general, and in West Bengal in particular. In West Bengal, since the late seventies, the administrative departments that are especially charged with the rural development programmes, have been giving a new dimension to their work by way of putting more emphasis on self-help, grass-roots participation, socio-cultural development and two-way communication. Communication, particularly small media-based, including interpersonal communication, is widely expected to help positively in unfolding the new world of development among the rural masses. This has led to a reorientation in the study of the role of communication in rural development. Unfortunately, this aspect of communication as a step in any public relations campaign and the role of administration in the process of development, is

left almost unnoticed by the scholars in West Bengal. The present study is a sincere attempt to fill up this research gap in an important segment of development policies, programmes and activities.

F. Plan of Study

The study consists of seven chapters. The opening chapter outlines the significance and objectives of the study and the research design for the study. Starting with the objectives of the study, it goes on to expound the research questions and discusses the methods of enquiry for the study including the method of data collection. Content of interview schedules, interview, and data processing and analysis. It also incorporates a review of the literature in this area of study. Chapter 2 deals with the theoretical framework for the study of public relations and communication in the context of development, especially rural development. It analyses the concept of public relations in all its ramifications,- the origin of the concept in management science and the subsequent introduction of its practice in government and administration. Finally, it examines the role of communication both as a step in public relations practice and in a participatory model of development in the context of third world countries. Chapter 3 discusses the role of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting as the

nodal agency in disseminating information among the rural masses, creating awareness among them and evoking their participation in the process of development. It is an attempt to examine the working of the different media units at the disposal of the Ministry from the point of view of their actual and potential role in facilitating the two-way communication between the government and the people. Chapter 4 analyses the institutional structure and the operation and performance of the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs in the Government of West Bengal as the central agency in initiating and sustaining communication between the government and the people in the context of rural development. Chapter 5 and 6 present the findings of the empirical investigation into the working of the process of communication among the villagers in terms of their access to different media of mass communication, their ability to comprehend the meanings of messages communicated through these media, the relative importance of different media in the dissemination of developmental information and the communication effects in two related fields of development i.e., health and agriculture. The final chapter presents the summary and conclusions of the study by highlighting the nature and effectiveness of communication, and offering some suggestions for future researchers as well as public policy makers in the government.

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