

CHAPTER IV

The Machinery for Public Relations and Communication in
West Bengal Government

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A. Publication Relations and Communication : The Pre-Independence Position

In West Bengal, which is a constituent unit on the Indian federation, having similar governmental structure and administrative process as at the federal centre, the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs is performing functions almost similar to those discharged by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting at the Centre. The Department had its genesis in the early thirties or even before that when a publicity cell attached to the Home (Political) Department used to communicate the news concerning the various departments to the press.¹

The Department of Publicity and Information was created in 1944, its organization and functions being outlined on

the recommendation of A.H. Joyce, Information Officer, India Office, with some modifications necessitated by the prevailing political situation in (the then) Bengal at that time. Joyce, in his report to the Home Secretary, Govt. of India, made it clear that (a) all 'news' should be communicated to the press through the Publicity Bureau (Press Offices) and (b) in all departments, none, except the Honourable Member-in-charge and the Secretary, should be accessible to press correspondents and representatives of press associations.² The Member-in-charge might however, authorise a joint secretary for this purpose. The wave of nationalism at that time sparked off open hostility to government, and the press came closely to uphold the cause of nationalism. To confront this anti-government attitude, the Department was endowed with an additional responsibility to subvert this nationalistic feeling by presenting before the people a constructive idea of nation-building not only through its publicity work but also through propaganda.³ The Department was functioning under two wings, one for publicity and the other for propaganda and distribution, each under the charge of a deputy director. The deputy director of publicity was also the editor of publications. The Department brought out two Bengali publications, viz, Bengal Weekly and 'Banglar Katha' for publicity campaign among the rural people. The Deputy Director of Propaganda, who was in charge of distribution of pamphlets and other publications had under him district organizers, one each for the districts and

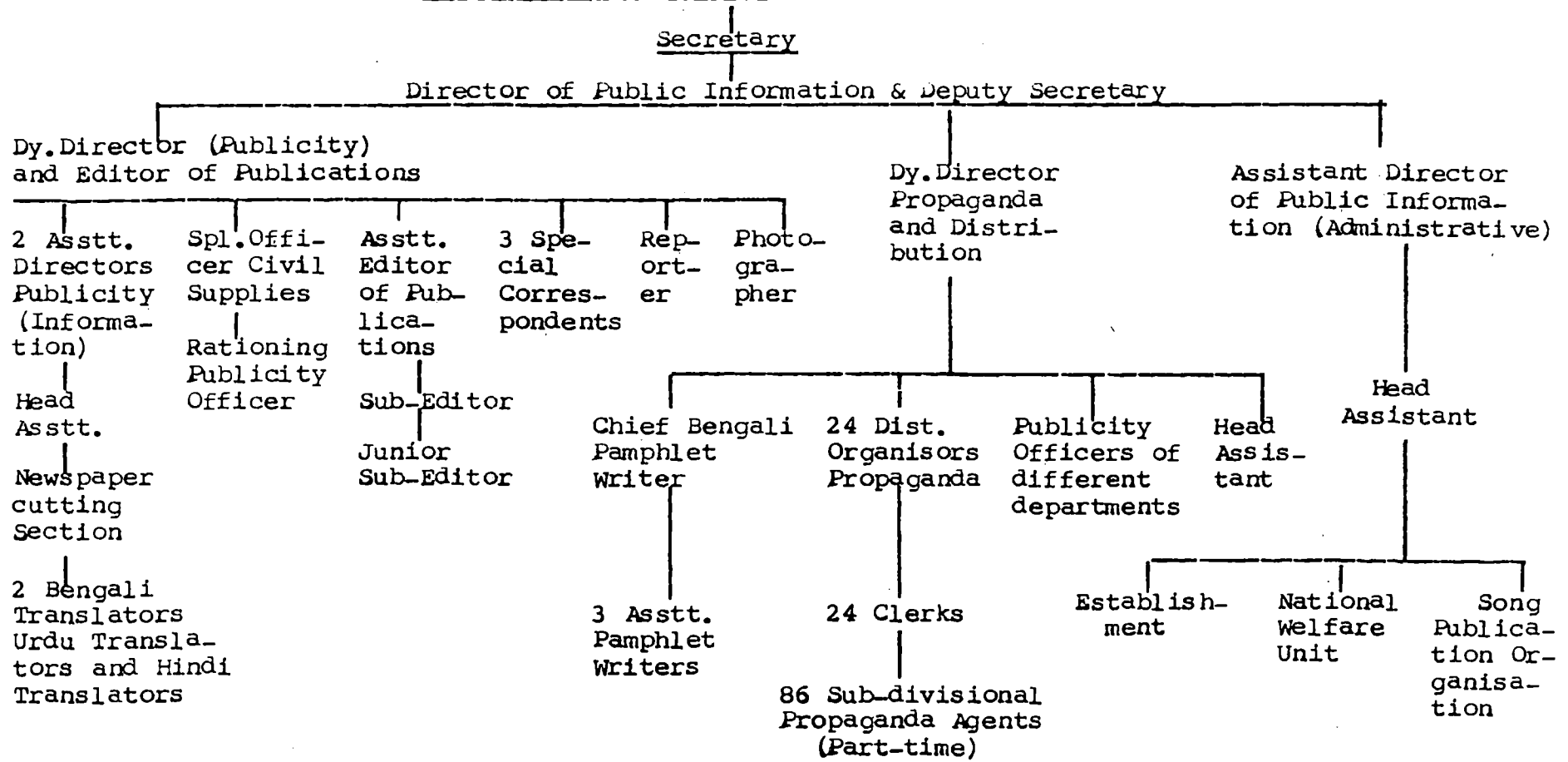
part-time sub-divisional propaganda agents. The structure of the Department will be made clear from Chart 4.1.

B. Post-Independence Developments and Working

This structural and functional arrangement for the Department of Publicity and Information continued till 1950 when the Department was renamed as the Home (Publicity) Department. The new set-up of the Home (Publicity) Department separated the Secretariat part of the organization from its Directorate comprising the technical staff.⁴ In order to carry on intensive publicity campaign of all government activities among the rural people, the Department adopted a three-level working structure at the state, district and sub-divisional levels. At the state level, there was the State Rural Publicity Organization with the Chief Rural Publicity Officer to supervise the work of the district and sub-divisional publicity organizations, fulfil their requirements, and give necessary guidance to their work. The state organization was (i) to take policy-decisions for the district and sub-divisional publicity organizations and direct their activities. (ii) to produce such materials as literature, films, etc. for supply to the district and sub-divisional organizations and (iii) to maintain machinery and equipment.

Chart 4.1

Minister-in-charge of Publicity and Information



The District Publicity Officer was in charge of district publicity organization. The functions of the district organization, which was equipped with an audio-visual unit, were to exhibit films supplied by the state organization, broadcast radio programmes, give lectures and organise public meetings and group gatherings and distribute literature and medicines. Moreover, the unit was to make periodic tours to contact and seek cooperation from the leading persons in the execution of programmes, to invite official agencies associated with the task of development, and to explain to the local people the problems of the locality and their role in the solution of these problems.

The sub-divisional publicity organization comprising one or more sub-divisional officers was under the control and supervision of District Publicity Officer (DPO), its primary task being to extend assistance to the district publicity organization in the detailed execution of the policies. Thus, a chain of command with regard to the execution of policies was maintained through out these three levels. To this organizational set up, a little change was added during 1952-53 when three regional publicity officers were appointed at three divisional headquarters to supervise and provide necessary guidance to DPO and SPO and thereafter, the post of the Chief Rural Publicity Officer was converted into a post of Deputy Director who was to look after the rural publicity work.

The Department underwent a fundamental change in its organizational structure in 1965 when it was again renamed as 'Department of Information and Public Relations' with two divisions - Information Division and Public Relations Division headed by two directors, but under one secretary.⁵ The duties and functions of the Department were classified under two heads, to be run by two separate divisions, as follows :

Public Relations Division

Information Division

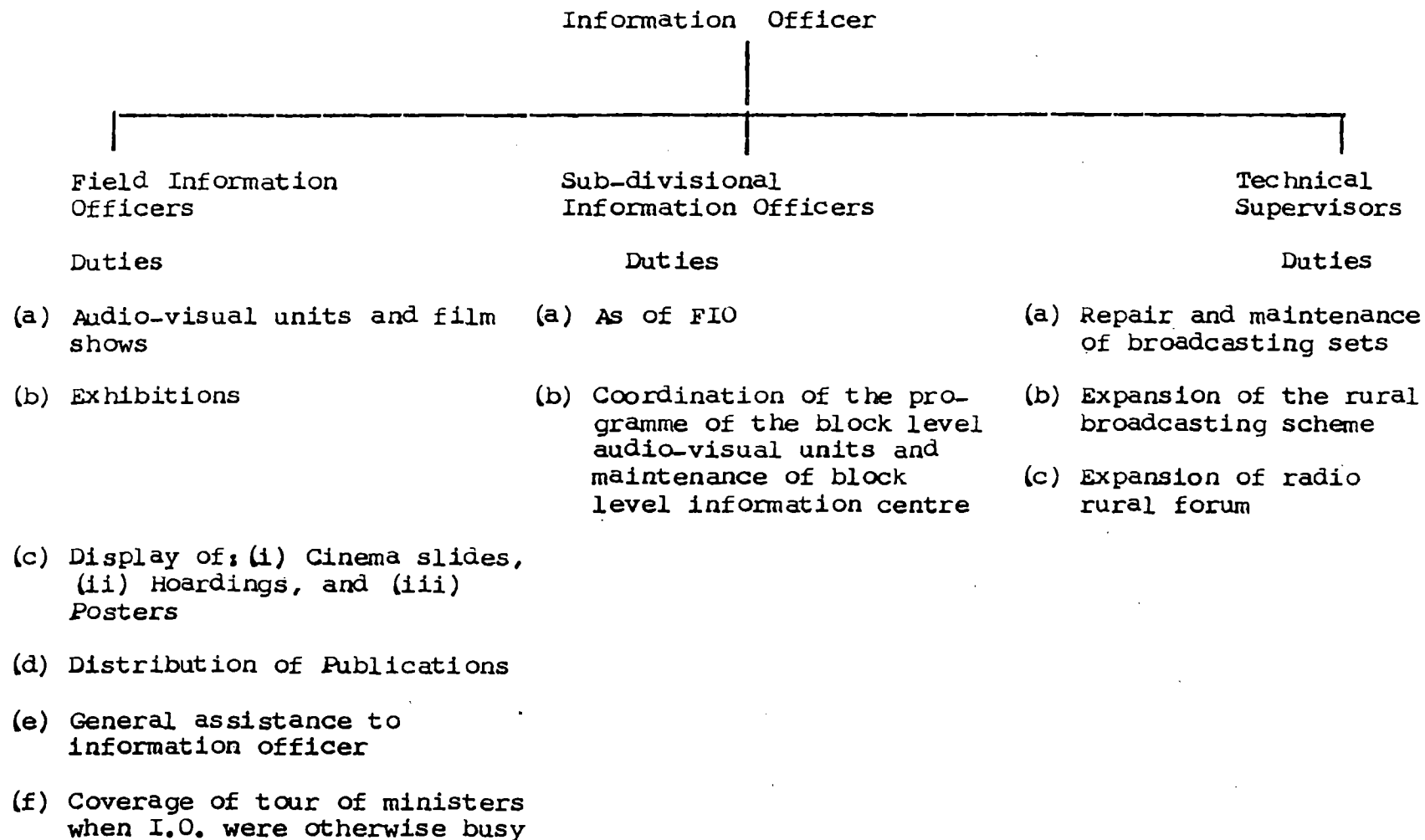
- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ceremonies and functions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. State ceremonies b. State functions and conferences c. State hospitality d. State receptions. 2. Visits <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. VIP visits from abroad b. Foreign delegations c. Visits of Indian VIP's d. Public meetings and functions sponsored by government. 3. Films <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Film Production b. Film Advisory Board c. Film Publicity censorship | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Press <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Advertisement b. Press release c. Press Photography d. News agency. 2. Publications <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Periodicals b. Casual publications c. Annual Administrative report. 3. Radio <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Radio talks b. Radio features c. Radio news bulletins. |
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- d. International film festival
 - e. Matters relating to film industry
 - f. Film shows through commercial circuits.
4. Entertainment
- a. Folk entertainment sections
 - b. Cultural programme
 - c. Inter-state cultural exchange programme
 - d. Musical records, tape records.
4. Field Information
- a. Audio-visual units
 - b. Exhibitions
 - c. Information centres
 - d. Rural broadcasting.
5. Teleprinter service
- a. Teleprinter service at Calcutta
 - b. Teleprinter service at Delhi.

However, as a consequence of this division, the new set-up did not last long and in 1967, the divisions were merged under one director who was the ex-officio deputy secretary of the department.⁶ Besides, the set-up at the district level was rearranged with the recruitment of a number of information officers who were put in charge of the districts. The DPOs and SPOs were renamed as Field Information Officers (FIO) and Sub-Divisional Information Officers (SDIO) respectively. The new set-up at the district level was as shown in Chart 4.2. However, within a few years, this

Chart 4.2

THE NEW SET-UP AT DISTRICT



arrangement at the district underwent a further change with the withdrawal of the information officer and the FIOs and SDIOs were redesignated as District Information and Public Relations Officer and Sub-Divisional Information and Public Relations Officer. Meanwhile, the scope of its activities was gradually wrinkled in view of its relatively low importance in the whole administrative process, particularly during the period from 1967 to 1976. During this time, much of the information and public relations work of the different departments of the state government was carried on by the concerned departments themselves.

C. Public Relations and Communication Since 1977

A major break through came in the structure as well as functional content of the Department after 1977. One of the measures taken by the government was to centralise all the information and public relations work of the state government in the Department of Information and Public relations and to use the Department as the chief vehicle in bringing about changes desired in the social and cultural spheres in West Bengal. It was very aptly realized by the government that a revitalized citizen-administration relationship, which is the key to the success of a democratic system, demands, as one of its prerequisites, an enriched cultural level for its citizens and this led the government to get distinctly defined programmes for encouraging healthy cultural pursuits

in the state.⁷

Keeping in view this objective, the government introduced a number of reforms in the structure of the Department in 1978. The Department was redesignated as the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs.⁸ The cultural affairs portion of the Education Department and the Archaeological Directorate of the Public Works Department were taken out and tagged with this department. The department was divided into five wings : viz. (i) information wing (ii) cultural wing (iii) film wing (iv) administrative branch and (v) language branch.

The Director of Information is in charge of the Information wing. He is the ex-officio joint secretary or deputy secretary as the case may be. The cultural wing and the film wing are headed by two separate directors who enjoy the rank of ex-officio Deputy Secretary in the Department. The Department in addition to performing the functions similar to those discharged by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting at the centre, is called upon to discharge functions similar to those of the protocol Division of the Ministry of External Affairs in respect of visits of the foreign dignitaries and delegations. State hospitality and state ceremonies are also a special charge of this department. Above all, keeping in view the conception of regional growth and development in terms of culture and language, the

Department is being endowed with an ever increasing responsibility in the field of culture and education aimed at promoting cultural activities reflecting the rich heritage of the state and the aspirations of its people. Now 'the main task of this Department is to reach the details regarding the policies and activities of the Government to all sections of the people and to help in the formulation of its subsequent courses of action through a correct review of the reactions and opinion of the people. To win the trust and cooperation of the people for a smooth conduct of public affairs has been the goal of this department.⁹

(i) Information Wing

The public relations and publicity part of the activities of the department is carried out by the information wing. The objective of the department in its information wing is to project the correct image of the government to the people, to propagate the policies and programmes of the government among the people for ensuring and evoking greater political awareness and people's participation and to remove any misunderstanding about government policies that might have been cropped up in the minds of the people. It is also the task of this wing to evolve methods and techniques to assess the response of the people to the policies and programmes of the government. The department under this wing maintains press relations, decides on advertisement

policy, holds exhibitions, produces and distributes literature, strengthens rural information set ups, receives VIPs and foreign delegations and partakes in state hospitality and reception.¹⁰

Press Relations

The Department of Information and Cultural Affairs is the normal exclusive channel for communication to the press either by way of press notes, unofficial notes, special handouts or articles of the plans, policies and activities of the state government. Apart from press releases, publicity is also obtained through conducted press tours and press conferences called by the chief minister and other ministers to explain and elucidate major policy-decisions from time to time. For better press relations and news coverage, there is a News Bureau under this Department.¹¹ The chief of News Bureau holds the rank of a Joint Director. Besides, there are a Deputy Chief of News Bureau of the rank of a deputy director and a host of Information Officers. The posts of these information officers are vital in the entire set-up as they are the contact points between this Department and all other departments under the state government. The News Bureau maintains liaison with the different departments through the information officers attached to these departments. The duty of the Information Officer attached to a particular Department is to keep himself always in touch with

the minister, secretary and other senior officers of the concerned Department, roam about freely in every division and section of the Department, collect news for press release and pursue the officials to give background materials for news stories. Besides, there is a press room in the Writers' Building for the reporters and journalists, and the Information Officer attached to a particular Department is responsible for making arrangement for 'Meet the Press' programme of the minister-in-charge of the concerned Department. He should stand by him during the meeting, and help him with supplying the required materials in hand. The role of the Information Officer on such occasions is very significant, as he is supposed to be skilled in handling a press meeting and is expected to master and control the situation even by stepping into the conversation with one or two well-chosen remarks to clarify the point or bring the discussion back to the objectives, since his minister, even if efficient in his work, may not be expert in dealing with the press.

The News Bureau, besides collecting news, background materials, photographs and pictorial features of important development activities and major official events from different departments, receives news also from district and sub-divisional Information Officers whose functions at the district and sub-divisional levels bear some proximity to those carried out by the Information Officers at the headquarters. The news and other materials, thus accumulated,

are catered to the public through press and other media like radio or television in the form of press notes, unofficial notes, special handouts or feature articles.

Apart from this, the Bureau arranges press conferences attended by ministers when the news to be issued to the press cannot be adequately covered by a press note and where the government is willing to impart additional background information and to answer queries from press. Press conferences are generally arranged on important events relating to policies, programmes and activities of the government having bearing on the wellbeing of the people. There are a few occasions, like the installation of a government project, inauguration of a programme or observance of state ceremonies, in which ministers explain the stand of the government on important issues and development activities, and publicity is obtained on such occasions through conducted press tours sponsored by this section.

A summary of the day's news and views in the press and also important news received over the News Agency teleprinters are daily distributed to the various government departments in the form of a bulletin "The Press Today".¹²

Advertisement

Advertisement is pointed communication, the point being to sell a product, a service or an idea.¹³ The major

advantage of advertisement is that it enables the sponsor to tell his story in his own words when he chooses and to the audience he selects. But at the same time, the citizen instantly recognises this as paid pleading. However, as a tool of effective public relations programme, advertisement has proved its efficacy. Government advertisements are to a large extent informative as the object of the Government campaigns in most cases is to sell an idea or to tell its achievements in particular fields of development. Sri Provash Phadikar, a former Minister-in-charge of the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, said during his budget speech before the Assembly on April 18, 1984, "our advertisement policy is always guided by a democratic outlook".¹⁴

The Government ensures that newspapers should receive government advertisements on the basis of their circulation, standard and readership. A policy for giving greater attention and allotting a large quota of advertisements to the small newspapers and other literary and cultural journals in the districts has been adopted by the Government.¹⁵ Besides normal classified advertisements, the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs issues a large number of display and campaign advertisements each year on agriculture, small savings, health and family welfare, education etc. The intention behind the various schemes of press advertising campaign is to create public opinion in favour of government plans, programmes and activities. For the purpose of using

the medium of press advertising in the journals published from the districts, there are District Press Advertising Advisory Committees in all the districts. The function of these committees is to prepare an approved panel of papers and journals to which government advertisements can be released.¹⁶ The annual allotment on advertisement during 1984-85 was to the tune of Rs. 1 crore 10 lakhs.¹⁷ In 1985-86, this amount increased to Rs. 1 crore 39 lakhs and the total number of display and classified press advertisements issued during this year was 4044.¹⁸ In the budget of 1991-92, an amount of Rs. 2 crores was earmarked for spending on advertisements.¹⁹

Exhibition

Exhibition constitutes a very important medium of field publicity today. Because of its greater visual appeal, exhibition has been a regular feature of the activities of the Information and Cultural Affairs Department. The object of frequently holding exhibitions is to explain to the general public through charts, posters, maps, photographs, models, etc., the various welfare and development plans, projects and activities of the government, the peculiar problems of the state and government efforts in successfully tackling them. The exhibitions held at the instance of the government may be either informative or educative. Taking into account the intensity of mass appeal through this

medium of visual publicity, an exhibition section with a number of artists and technicians was set up by the Home (Publicity) Department as early as in 1954.²⁰ During the succeeding years, the Section successfully organized and participated in a large number of exhibitions at the state and national levels in and outside the state. After 1977, this Section was revamped to meet the new challenges in the social, cultural and economic spheres, particularly in the rural areas, and a Deputy Director was held in charge of this section.²¹ Besides, there are one Information Officer, Exhibition Officers, artists, helpers, and other auxiliary staff. Apart from producing posters on general themes, this Section produces poster sets on particular themes of educative and informative value, e.g., National Integration and Rabindranath or History of the Evolution of Human Life, etc.²²

In the rural areas, exhibitions are mostly organized by the voluntary organizations, and the Exhibition Section participates by way of supplying the exhibited materials to them. Posters prepared by this Section on different subjects like agriculture, health and family welfare, small savings, co-operation, anti-violence, etc. are also displayed and exhibited in the rural areas through the district and sub-divisional Information Officers. During the year 1983-84, the Exhibition Section organized 95 exhibition in all.²³ The number of exhibitions organized and participated by

this Section during 1984-85 and 1985-86 were 58 and 92 respectively.²⁴ The annual grant on exhibition for the year of 1984-85 was Rs. 18 lakhs, while in 1991-92, the amount increased to 35 lakhs.²⁵

Publications

As a part of the centralized scheme, the task of printing, publishing and distributing periodicals, pamphlets, leaflets, etc. in different languages on behalf of the state government is entrusted to this Department. The Department brings out journals, annual administrative reports and other casual and non-periodical publications for the purpose of keeping people informed of the important events and happenings throughout the state, the initiatives taken by the government in different spheres of rural development, and summary of important news and reports of important speeches and statements made by the ministers relating to the plans, programmes and achievements of their respective Departments. The contents of the journals published by the Department also include articles on outstanding national and international personalities and events by non-official authors and thus fulfil the literary needs of the people. The Department publishes a number of weekly, fortnightly and monthly journals in six different languages (Bengali, English, Hindi, Urdu, Nepali and Santhali) e.g. Paschim Banga, West Bengal,

Maghrebi Banga, Pachim Bangla, Paschim Bangal, Panchayati Raj, Lok Banga.²⁶ In addition to regular periodicals and journals, the Department also brings out a large number of brochures, booklets, pamphlets and leaflets in Bengali, English and Hindi dealing with the problems and activities of the various departments every year. The annual allotment on publications during 1984-85 was Rs. 52 lakhs.²⁷ In 1985-86, an amount of Rs. 80 lakhs was spent on publications. During this period, the Department published 38 pamphlets in different languages containing publicity materials relating to the activities of various Departments. In all, a total number of 18,27,300 copies of pamphlets and 27,31,500 leaflets were brought out by the Department during this year.²⁸ The financial outlay on publications during 1991-92 was fixed at Rs. 2 crores.²⁹

The distribution of this huge quantity of publications is also one of the important activities of this Department. Apart from the distribution of publications, both periodical and casual, of the state government, the distribution section is also in charge of distributing the publicity materials received from the various ministries of the Government of India from time to time. Leaflets, booklets, pamphlets, brochures and journals are also distributed through the district and sub-divisional Information Officers to different organizations in rural areas like clubs, libraries, educational institutions, and in group gatherings, as part of the rural publicity campaign by the Department.

Rural Information

West Bengal, like the rest of India, lives in villages. It is, therefore, necessary to strengthen the rural information set-up.³⁰ The Department has an extensive rural information network at the district and sub-divisional levels to cope with the problem of face-to-face communication through extension work. In the absence of facilities for an upward flow of information, mass media have become one-way channels and cannot ensure people's involvement in the programme. It is the officials who can provide information to the people, help them to be organized and involved in the programmes for development, attend to their problems, and inform the Government about the reactions of the people to its programmes. For the purpose of carrying out the extension work among the rural people and strengthening the rural information network, the Department after 1977 initiated a plan of getting one Field Information Assistant for each district and one field worker in each development block. In 1989, there were altogether ninety field workers in ninety development blocks.³¹

The rural information set-up of the Department is equipped with audio-visual units for intensive field publicity campaigns among the rural people. In 1989, there were 104 audio-visual units in the districts through which documentary films, film strips and educative slides were shown in the

rural areas.³² Generally, the district and sub-divisional Information Officers address the people during the projections of such films and explain to them the major policies and activities of the government. The information officers also meet and address people in villages in small groups. To have better infrastructural facilities for the dissemination of information about government policies and programmes among the rural people through exhibition, film-shows, cinema slides, public meetings and group discussions, the distribution of pamphlets and leaflets and the organization of cultural programmes, the information centres have been set up at the district and sub-divisional levels and the emphasis is on initiating and carrying on intensive public relations campaign in an organized form among the rural people through these institutionalized structures.

For the purpose of providing facilities for mass listening of the special rural and school programmes broadcast by All India Radio, the Department, under its extended community listening scheme, distributes radio-sets with free repair and servicing facilities to voluntary organizations like clubs, libraries and educational institutions. Till 1986, 3,890 radio-sets have been installed in different districts and 622 Radio Rural Forums are in operation under this Department.³³ Besides, the Department also distributes television sets to various social and cultural organizations. Under this programme, the Department has distributed 320 television sets.

(ii) Cultural Wing

The Department of Information and Cultural Affairs in its cultural wing cherishes the objective of creating an enriched cultural environment, which will serve as a background, to shape the attitudes, beliefs and values of the people towards social, economic and political phenomena. The activities and performances of the Department in the cultural arena were initiated as early as in 1954-55 when a Folk Entertainment Section was set up by the Home (Publicity) Department.³⁴ The purpose of this Section was to develop and make use of the traditional media of folk song, drama and folk dance for the purpose of entertaining the rural people, strengthening their national character, and improving the level of their social consciousness. It was also intended to help in reviving the cultural and artistic tradition of West Bengal. Between 1953 and 1958, this Section had several units, namely and drama unit, the dance unit, the music unit and the tarja unit. The function of these units was to travel throughout the state and stage dramas, dance-dramas and tarja performances. After 1965, when the Department was renamed as the Department of Information and Public Relations, this Section was placed under the direct control of the Deputy Director of Public Relations who was assisted by an Administrative Officer and an adviser.³⁵

A major change in the objective and functioning of the Department in its cultural sphere came after 1977 when the Department was redesignated as the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, and the cultural part of the activities of the Department was entrusted to a separate wing under the control of a Director.³⁶ It was correctly felt that mere dissemination of information about the policies, programmes and activities of the government would not evoke a sense of participation and involvement among the rural people unless they were educated through the process of communication. Communication is reciprocal, and effective communication between the government and the people needs, inter-alia, a higher level of social and political awareness among the people, since people must have the ability to comprehend the message communicated. A skillful use of the traditional media of communication like folk song, folk dance, drama or jatra, along with the enrichment of the cultural environment, can promote social and political consciousness of the people, and very well serve the purpose of communicating the development messages to the rural people. In the field of folk-art and culture, the Department organizes folk cultural festivals and workshops at district, division and state levels with the help of Panchayats. A journal on folk culture, 'Lokshruti', is also published by the Department and the state level Folk Culture Institute tries to fill up the void in the matter of conservation of and research in

folk art and culture. Similarly, cultural centres have also been set up in the tribal belt for the preservation and promotion of tribal culture.³⁷ The expansion of Folk Entertainment Section, the setting up of two additional Lokranjan Units, one at Siliguri and the other with the adivasis at Jhargram, and a Nepali song and Drama Unit at Darjeeling explicate the expanding horizon of activity of the cultural wing of the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs.

(iii) Film Wing — Film is the most potent and emotionally penetrating medium of visual and aural communication. It has movement, sound, and colour, and the messages can be conveyed realistically. The Government of West Bengal under the aegis of the Department of Publicity and Information, had started producing short or feature films, particularly to combat anti-violence and anti-government attitudes since the inception of the Department in 1944. These films were exhibited through the National Welfare Units and Public Relations Committees.³⁸ After 1950, publicity of government policies, programmes and activities among the rural people through film-shows came to be recognized as one of the most important tools of communication and the Home (Publicity) Department of the Government of West Bengal, like the Film Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, began to produce and exhibit documentary films covering a wide range of subjects in consultation with the

various departments of government. These films were shown through the Department's audio-visual units in the districts and sub-divisions. Apart from the Department's own production, the Government also used to purchase documentaries produced by private film makers. Subsequently, the documentary films produced by the state government as well as the private parties were exhibited in the cinema houses along with the documentaries and newsreels produced by the Government of India on fifty-fifty basis.³⁹

Between 1977 and 1981, the Film wing of the Department produced thirty seven documentaries, nine children's films and one newsreel per month.⁴⁰ During 1984-85 three documentaries and eleven newsreels were produced by the Department. An amount of Rs. 71 lakhs was earmarked for the production and exhibition of films during 1984-85.⁴¹ In 1991-92, this amount came down to Rs. 55 lakhs.⁴²

With the changes in the structure and functions of the Department at the state level, aimed at centralization of all the public relations and publicity works of the government and promotion of a healthy culture, the organizational set-up at the divisional and district level was also revamped with the expectation of making it the most effective instrument of implementing the programmes of the Department. At the divisional level, the posts of Regional Publicity Officers were converted into the posts of Deputy Directors.

The duty of the Deputy Director at the divisional level is purely of administrative and supervisory nature and his prime responsibility is to coordinate the functions of the district and sub-divisional Information Officers.

It was apparent from the very beginning that official documents, notes and reports, outlining the nature of jobs and responsibilities of field officers working at the lowest level of official hierarchy and among the village people were absolutely non-existent. But, at the same time, for a clear understanding about the role of the Department in initiating and sustaining the process of communication between the government and the people, an assessment and evaluation of job performance of these officials, particularly of the SDIO, is of decisive importance. Hence, realizing the practical difficulties in such a venture, a complete reliance was made on personal interview with the concerned officials. Although a semi-structured questionnaire was used for interviewing the officials, they were encouraged to speak on their own, and a patient hearing was given to them while they were elaborating their experiences, perceptions and views about their job.

(D) Sub-Divisional Information Officer (SDIO)

The office of the SDIO at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy constitutes the key unit in the entire gamut

of administrative set-up. The rapid technological development of the present century has unquestionably brought about a revolution in the media of mass communication that have become vital centres for the transmission of knowledge, the dissemination of facts and the direction of various emotional appeals to influence public opinion. But communication is usually a two-way process involving stimulus and response. Mass media in the absence of an upward flow of information serve basically as one-way channels. Extensive feedback is essential for an effective communication programme, and this can be ensured through personal and group interactions, in addition to other impersonal media of mass communication. The SDIO stationed at each sub-division having jurisdiction over a number of blocks and being assisted by block level field works, is the driving force towards the attainment of the twin objectives of getting the people involved in the process of administration and enriching the cultural level of the masses.

The first and foremost duty of the SDIO is to disseminate information about government policies and programmes. But mere dissemination of information is not enough. Information may be diffused through press, television, radio, the motion picture and the printed materials. But information so diffused cannot ensure involvement on the part of the people, nor can facilitate evaluation of the responses and reactions of the people towards the policies and

programmes of the government. Thus, the success of government public relations activities depends largely on the use of such tools of communication as personal visit, meeting with the group leaders, group discussion, public speaking, etc. and this brings to the forefront the vital role that the SDIO would have to play as a perfect government-public relations practitioner. The chief objective of his function is to educate people about the policies and programmes of the government and to motivate them to action. Thus it is basically an extension work. Communication is meaningless if it fails to register the desired effect on its audience.

In each sub-division, the SDIO is required to perform a number of routine works. The SDIO acts as the press relations officer of the government at the sub-divisional level. As a press relations officer, it is his duty to collect news regarding the implementation of government programmes and projects and people's involvement in them for publicity through press and radio at the local and state levels. In order to perform his duty effectively and efficiently, the SDIO must have friendly access to all the government departments, voluntary organizations and associations, as well as to the local people. The SDIO collects news, summarizes them and sends them to local press and the press reporters as well as to the state level newspapers. Apart from direct service to the press, the SDIO transmits

important news items to the chief of the News Bureau so that the News Bureau may use these news in preparing press notes issued every afternoon for ensuring coverage in the national newspapers.

In every sub-division, the SDIO is equipped with an audio visual unit to organize at least fifteen filmshows every month with the objective of popularizing government policies and programmes among the rural people. The films are produced by the film production unit under the supervision of the Film Wing of the Department in the form of both Newsreels and documentaries. Before arranging a film-show, the SDIO makes a preliminary survey of the locality, finds out the village leaders whom the villages respect and trust, makes every possible effort to make them convinced in the objectives and programmes of government and motivates them to action. This method is based on the principle of 'work with people' instead of 'work for the people'. In this way, the Information Officers get the help of village leaders in mobilizing the support of the village people. Besides, the communication system in village is working wherever the villagers meet. Through scores of channels like fairs, bazars, bathing ghats, harvest fields, temples, news of film-show spread swiftly throughout the village. The villagers gather to see the movie and the SDIO and his staff use it as a platform to propagate government policies and programmes for development in various fields. An interval during the

projection of the film gives the SDIO an opportunity to speak on development plans and programmes and the citizens' role in carrying out these programmes. The villagers are also asked to speak on the occasion. The selection of speakers from the audience, however, requires great care so that a wrong selection may nip the entire mission in the bud.

Exhibitions in rural areas are mostly organized by the voluntary organizations, clubs or schools in cooperation with the district or sub-divisional information offices. The SDIO supplies the exhibited materials to the voluntary organizations for display and extends necessary help and cooperation. The themes of exhibition may be classified into two categories : informative and educative. There are some sets of exhibits that display the objectives, policies, plans and programmes of the government whose sole purpose is to create mass awareness and involvement in development programmes; there are others for highlighting the cultural level of the people and educating them in such subjects as national integration, rural development or social reform.

Thus, communication is most effective in face-to-face relations with people. The SDIO with his field workers may properly make use of this direct contact method⁴³ to understand the interests, problems, felt needs and attitudes of the people. Moreover, direct communication with the people makes it possible for the communicator to judge the success of communication by the latter's reaction. The SDIO under

the present system uses this method to a limited extent in the form of group talks on common problems of the people and their solution with the help of different development schemes of the government. Here, the office of the SDIO serves as a service agency for the other departments of government by way of carrying to the people the schemes of development of different departments like health and Family Planning, Agriculture, Education and so on.

(E) An Assessment

There is no doubt that the revamped organizational set-up of the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, with its wide administrative network down to the block level, provides the necessary infrastructural facilities for ensuring a continuous, candid and persuasive two-way communication between the government and the people. The elaborate arrangements that have been made for the dissemination of information and for reinvigorating the cultural heritage of the state points to the bold attempt made by the state in this direction. But what is missing in the grandeur and fanfare is the real objective and the basic purpose of communication in development. First of all, although the government was thinking in terms of centralization of public relations and publicity works of all the departments, a number of departments like Agriculture and Community Development or Health

and Family Welfare, that are pursuing the programmes of development among the rural people, have their own arrangements for whatever public relations and publicity works they do in their respective fields of activity and in fact, do not like the idea of centralization. They maintain that keeping in view the specialized technical nature of jobs of their departments, it is not prudent to leave public relations and communication functions to the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs which is a common-service department. For instance, The Chief Publicity and Public Relations Officer of the Department of Agriculture, when asked about the necessity and use of having a Public Relations Cell in the Department of Agriculture in the context of centralization of activities, got infuriated and replied. "Are they agricultural specialists" ? Besides, the open-ended discussion with the respondents during the interviews revealed that there was ambiguity and overlapping between the public relations and publicity activities of the other departments and those pursued by the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs. Identical functions are performed by the departments lacking coordination and integration in their works. This is apparent not only in the decision-making process at the higher echelons of administration, but also at the bottom level where field-level functionaries are carrying out extension works among the rural people. For example, a health assistant who is the extension worker of

the Department of Health and Family Welfare, does not even know the field worker of the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs.

Secondly, there are also doubts and misgivings about the content of information. The information disseminated by the Department mostly projects the performance of the government as a political party in power and the basic objective of public relations and communication and the necessity of it in government for transmitting development message to the rural people is almost non-existent.

Since 1977, when the Department changed its nomenclature, and was designated as the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, the cultural aspect of its activity received a jolt and special attention was given for enriching the cultural environment of the state and preserving the rich cultural heritage of its people. For the preservation and promotion of traditional arts and culture like folk-song, folk-dance, drama, music, painting and sculpture, several programmes like extension of financial assistance to individuals and institutions working in these fields, setting up of centres with full government assistance for the purpose of research and development in different fields of arts and culture, institution of awards for excellency in these fields, preservation of arts by way of setting up museums and art galleries, have been initiated by the Department. Notwith-

standing the fact that the efforts are praiseworthy, they prove the urban inclination in the activities of the Department while the majority of people live in the villages. The more disheartening part is that the government does not make the right use of these traditional media whose importance is universally acknowledged now-a-days in a participatory model of development. These traditional media have immense potentiality to bring to the people the messages of development in their own language and that is yet to be realized by the Department. This is chiefly due to lack of knowledge and training in modern use of the media of communication in the newer concepts of development. The interview with the officials clearly revealed that the people who were handling the media were guided by time-worn official rules and procedures. One will be struck at seeing the level of their ignorance about new innovations in the field of communication.

As a corollary of the fact it may also be pointed out that every exercise in the department is stereotype. In matters of advertisement, the Department spends more money on classified advertisements which are part of routine administrative works of government, and do not generally have any informative value. Moreover, in the absence of detailed readership survey, it is difficult to assess the impact of such advertisements. Similarly, publications of the Department which mostly contain articles on important events or life and work of outstanding personalities, serve to some

extent the literary interests of educated urban people, but from the point of view of creating a climate of understanding among the rural masses and establishing a rapport between government and the people, these publications have failed to produce the desired result.

Above all, effective communication, which is a two-way process, requires organized feedback mechanisms for assessing the responses of the people towards government policies and programmes. But in the absence of requisite infrastructural arrangements and for poor extension service, evaluation of the impact of communication is a neglected field in the functioning of the Department.

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