

CHAPTER - 4

BALURGHAT MUNICIPALITY - THE NODAL AGENCY  
FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT

BALURGHAT MUNICIPALITY - THE NODAL AGENCY FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT

A. Legal - structural Framework of Municipal Board in West Bengal

In the preceding chapter, it was found that there has been some efforts of the Government to create an appropriate machinery for urban development. A good number of agencies have been working together to bring changes in the cities and towns of West Bengal. But the dilemma relating to extent of integration and coordination among elected and non-elected agencies has thwarted the recent attempts of the Government to bring urban development under the exclusive guidance of the district planning authority. In consequence, the municipal bodies have been the focal agency for urban development.

Municipal institutions, right from their inception, have been authorised to execute the urban development functions. From this point of view, the organisation of municipalities is of crucial importance. Therefore, the enquiry into the functioning of the municipalities calls for studying them as organisation. Municipalities are basically formal organisation in which the elected and the non-elected functionaries discharge their respective functions. From this point of view the status of the municipal bodies as formal organisation seems to be the starting point of enquiry. In the words of L.D. White formal organisation exhibits a declared pattern of relationships, and it is based on the nature

and volume of work to be done, and is dictated by the requirements of efficiency in the sense of securing the optimum use of men and materials.<sup>1</sup> But understanding municipal bodies as formal organisation does not enable actual comprehension of them. It is erroneous to believe that they will keep on functioning properly, remaining independent from the stresses and strains of the environment. They are always subject to influences, pressures, and prejudices.

Like any formal organisation, municipal bodies in West Bengal are built in conformity with the provisions of the Municipal Acts. As the nodal agency, their structure has been designed to enable them to undertake the functions of urban development. In the small and medium sized cities and towns Municipal Board has been constituted to discharge the civic functions.

Under the Act of 1932, the structure of the Board was framed to bestow the charge of municipal government on the Board of Commissioners as the repository of all powers. But the Chairman was given the pre-eminent position and was given all the powers of the Board unless directed otherwise by law or resolution, adopted by the Board of Commissioners at a meeting. The Act fixed the number of elected Commissioners between 9 and 30, to be decided by the state government for each municipal body. The Commissioners were elected for four years from the single-member constituencies, called 'wards'. Under this Act, the state government was entitled to reserve some seats of Commissioners for the members of the

scheduled tribe in case of proportionality in favour of representation. After election, the Commissioners had to elect the Chairman and Vice-Chairman from among them. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman could be removed from their offices by a resolution, adopted by more than one-half of the total number of Commissioners.

Prior to the amendment, made in 1980, the Act of 1932 provided four types of Committees, namely (i) Standing Committee; (ii) Special Committee; (iii) Education Committee; and (iv) Joint Committee. Of them, except the 'Education Committee' creation of all the committees were optional. But the amendments of the Act of 1932 in 1980 introduced the committee system as the integral part of municipal management. It provided a broad framework of standing committees, viz. (i) Finance and Establishment Standing Committee; (ii) Public Health and Sanitation Committee; (iii) Public Works Committee. Further, a municipality was entitled to constitute standing committee for specific purposes.

However, it is important to note that the Act of 1932 provided for three authorities in a municipality : a) the popularly elected Board of Commissioners; b) the Chairman, elected by the Commissioners; and c) the Executive Officer, whose appointment was not mandatory. This trinity of the three sets of functionaries constituted the management structure of the municipalities.

The Act of 1932 envisaged the supreme authority of the Chairman in the structure of the Municipal Board. But over the years, the functioning of the organisational framework often bred

confusion and dilemma among the functionaries of the municipality. The powers and functions of the key functionaries were often ambiguous, overlapping and antithetical to the principles of local self-government. For example, the position of the Chairman was bestowed with overriding importance in municipal administration under the Act of 1932. Besides, the appointment of Executive Officers from the pool of retired civil servants offered little help to the municipalities, as they failed to acclimatise new institutional culture, laws and procedures.<sup>2</sup>

The Municipal Act of 1993 has been enacted in tune with the 74th amendment to the Constitution of India. This Act has inserted a new section '9-A' and also new provisions from 243-P to 243 ZG. The new twelfth schedule, relating to the functions of the municipal bodies has been inserted in the Constitution. In this Amendment Act a stress has been laid upon adequate participation of the common people in the functioning of the municipality. The Act has laid down the provisions for the constitution of Chairman-in-Council system in the municipalities.

Section 15(1) of the Act lays down that 'there shall be a Chairman-in-Council, consisting of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman and the other members not exceeding, in case of municipal area included in a group A, five; in case of a municipal area included in group B, four; in case of a municipal area included in group C, three; in case of a municipal area included in group D, two; and in case of municipal area included in group E, one.' The Chairman-in-

Council under section 15(3) has been vested with all the executive powers of the Municipality and the Chairman as the executive head under section 16(1) and (2) has been entitled to allocate the business among the members of the Council. Another part of the municipal management system in respect of the municipal areas, having a population of three lakhs or more is the formation of borough committees and ward committees. These committees are for the municipalities, belonging to the category of group A. In accordance with the second amendment to the Municipal Act of 1993, made in 1994, borough committees have also to be constituted for the group A municipalities under section 22(1). Provision is also there for the constitution of such committees in a municipal area in accordance with such rules, as may be made by the state government and for the constitution of ward committee for each ward of a municipality, having a population of three lakhs or above. Further, in the new Act a provision is there under section 53(1) for some officials, prescribed for the municipal bodies. They are:

- a) an Executive Officer;
- b) a Health Officer;
- c) an Engineer;
- d) a Finance Officer;
- e) a Medical Officer;
- f) a Secretary;
- g) an Office Superintendent;
- h) one or more Sub-Assistant Engineer;
- i) One or more Sanitary Inspector;
- j) a Head Clerk;
- k) a Head Assistant;
- l) an Accountant;
- m) a Surveyor; and
- n) a Draftsman.

So, organisation of the municipality has undergone substantial changes, made by the Act of 1993.

## B. Legal - structural Framework of Balurghat Municipality

Till the enactment of the Act of 1993, the legal-structural framework of Balurghat Municipality had been governed by the Act of 1932. The structure, governed by the Act of 1932 remained unchanged upto the period of the sixth Board. After this the seventh elected Board has been built upon the provisions of the Act of 1993.

So, the legal-structural framework of the sixth and seventh elected Board, representing the previous and present system has been taken up for the enquiry.

In Balurghat, the structure of the municipal body was built upon the provision of the Act of 1932. But at the time of the establishment of the municipality in 1951, 9 members of the Board were nominated by the government and the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (Head Quarter) was nominated to the post of Chairman.<sup>3</sup> But the post of Vice-Chairman went to a member, nominated from the local members.<sup>4</sup> After the first nominated Board, elected members were regularly appointed to these posts. The members were elected from the constituencies, consisting of more than one ward. Subsequently, the system of single-ward constituency came into force and gradually the number of wards was increased from 13 to 23, after the delimitation of the municipal area.<sup>5</sup>

The structure of the sixth elected Board conformed to the powerful Chairman form of municipal government. During this

period, the Chairman was the nucleus of municipal administration. In the sixth elected Board of the Municipality, apart from the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, a broad committee system was supposed to get a key place as the integral part of municipal management. In the case of Balurghat Municipality, where the number of commissioners was not less than 13, formation of committees was mandatory. But during the sixth Board it was found that none of the committees was constituted. So, the Board failed to fulfill its responsibility in this respect.

Another part of the municipal organisation was the personnel structure, known as the non-political part of management. Under the Act of Engineer, Finance Officer and Health Officer were supposed to be appointed by the State Government. Further, the Board of Commissioners was authorised to create the post of a Secretary, a Medical Officer, one or more Sanitary Inspector, a Superintendent of Water Works, an Assessor, an Officer Superintendent and an Accountant. But except the Office Superintendent, Sanitary Inspector, Accountant and the Executive Officers, none of the high level officials was provided to the civic body. Once the civic authority sought to promote the sub-Assistant Engineer (PWD) to the post of Engineer,<sup>6</sup> but the proposal was not approved by the State Government. So, in the absence of these officials, who were supposed to hold the key positions in municipal personnel system, the non-political part of the municipal organisation was in disorder.



Another crucial aspect relating to the organisation of municipal body was the arrangement or placement of duties and responsibilities under different departments or sections i.e. the allocation of powers and functions among different departments. These departments or sections were constituted in terms of the functions and services discharged by the Municipality. In Balurghat Municipality, the organisational set-up was in the following manner : i) General and Establishment; ii) Collection Establishment; iii) License; iv) Public Works; v) Health and Sanitation; vi) Conservancy; and vii) Education. Creation of these departments or sections was for the smooth delivery of the services. Further for convenience, these departments were divided into two or more sub-sections. So, the General and Establishment section was divided into three sub-sections, such as tax collection, cash and assessment. Again the section, discharging the functions of public works was divided into three sub-sections, designated as civil, water-supply and electrical. Similarly, the section of Health and Sanitation was also divided into two sub-sections, namely sanitary and conservancy. This organisational set-up evolved in consonance with the volume and nature of functions discharged by the Municipality.

The employees of these departments had to work under the supervision of the Chairman and the Board of Councillors. In the absence of the Executive Officer and other higher officials, almost the entire work of these departments were done by the officials

like the Office Superintendent, Head Clerk, Accountant, Sanitary Inspector, Conservancy-In-Charge, License Inspector, sub-Assistant Engineer etc.

Organizational set-up of Balurghat Municipality, drawn out in the analysis reveals the predominance of the political functionaries in the sixth elected Board. Under the Act of 1932 and in practice too, the Chairman in particular and the Vice-Chairman and other Commissioners occupied prominent positions in the administration of Balurghat Municipality. Role of other functionaries, belonging to different ranks of municipal personnel system became trivial in importance in the wake of the expanding role of the political executives. The fall-out then, was the ascendancy of the commissioners and gradual diminution in the importance of the non-elected officials. This made the municipal body largely a political government at the local level in Balurghat.

The remarkable distinction that the seventh Board has owned is the Chairman-in-Council form of municipal government, which has been introduced in Balurghat under the Act of 1993. The Act has set-up a system of plural executive, constituted from among the councillors. After the delimitation of municipal area into 23 wards,<sup>7</sup> there has been wider permeation of popular will in the Board. In addition to the formation of Chairman-in-Charge the new Municipal Act too, has made provision for the appointment of some top-level officials. But except the Executive Officer and Health

Officer, none of the top officials so far has been appointed in Balurghat Municipality.

The Board as the civic body of a group C municipal town has been entitled to constitute the Chairman-in-Council of five members. Accordingly, the Chairman-in-Council has been constituted, inducting three councillors in addition to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman. In addition to the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman, the Councillors, elected from ward number 3, 6 and 21 have been inducted into the Council. Assignment and delegation of powers and duties by the Chairman is as the following :<sup>8</sup>

1. Chairman, elected from Ward no. 20

- i. Administration.
- ii. Establishment.
- iii. Finance.
- iv. Vehicles.
- v. Invitation and acceptance of tender/quotations.
- vi. Pathological laboratory.
- vii. Kshanika (guest house).
- viii. Preparation and execution of schemes.
- ix. Any other duty as per provision of the Act or in the interest, of the Municipality which has not been allocated to any other.

2. Vice-Chairman, elected from Ward no. 1

- i. Duties as defined in Section 19 of the West Bengal municipal Act, 1993.

- ii. Imposition and collection of Municipal rates and taxes.
- iii. Assessment.
- iv. License.
- v. Using of facsimile to any bill, receipts of the Municipality.
- vi. Any other duty which will be allocated, time to time by the Chairman.

3. Member, Chairman-in-Council, elected from Ward no. 21

- i. Approval of house building plans.
- ii. Disposal of disputes in regard to land and buildings.
- iii. Water supply (tube wells).
- iv. Execution of low cost sanitation.
- v. Relief.
- vi. Any duty which will be assigned to him time to time by the Chairman.

4. Member, Chairman-in-Council, elected from Ward no. 6

- i. Electrical wing of the Municipality.
- ii. Markets.
- iii. Bus terminal complex.
- iv. Park and gardens.
- v. Ration card and food supplies
- vi. Any other duty which will be assigned to him time to time to the Chairman.

5. Member, Chairman-in-Council, elected from Ward no. 3

- i. Health and conservancy services.

- ii. Sanitary services.
- iii. Food and adulterations.
- iv. Social beneficiary services (NRY, UBSP, TLC, SESRU, SUME).
- v. Education.
- vi. Any other duty which will be assigned to him time to time by the Chairman.

The membership of Chairman-in-Council has changed owing to the death of the first Chairman. The Councillor of Ward no. 1, acting as the Vice-Chairman has taken the charge of the office of Chairman, and the corresponding vacancy in the Council has been filled in by the Councillor of Ward no. 2.<sup>9</sup> The Councillor of Ward no. 6 has taken the charge of the Vice-Chairman. According to the subsequent delegation of powers and duties, the Councillors of Ward no. 2 as the member of the Council has been given the charge <sup>entrusted</sup> to the Councillor of Ward no. 6, before his position as the Vice-Chairman. But only one change has been found when the item 'market' has been shifted to the functional jurisdiction of the Vice-Chairman. Apart from this change, distribution of powers and functions has been identical with the delegation of powers and functions which was made by the previous Chairman.<sup>10</sup>

Hence, in the organisational set-up of the Municipality, the formation of the Chairman-in-Council is a new addition during the tenure of the seventh elected Board. It has created

a new management set-up, admitting three Councillors, who did not have even a slice of executive power in the previous system. All the executive powers, previously within the domain of the Chairman have been distributed among the members of the Council. This has changed the exclusively Chairman-centered municipal administration into a more participative body. The old model of powerful Chairman has been replaced by this Chairman-in-Council system. Today, the Chairman is superior to others, but he is not anything other than the 'first among the equals'.

However, the change in the sphere of political management has not been associated with the change in the non-political side of municipal organisation. In the new Municipal Act of 1993, provision is there [sec. 53(1)] for some key officials for better area has remained the same. Apart from the presence of the officials, such as Executive Officers, Health Officer, Office Superintendent, Head Clerk, Head Assistant, Sanitary Inspector, Sub-Assistant Engineer, none of the officials like Engineer, Architect, Finance Officer, Assessor are present, except the occasional appointment of the Executive Officers. This has been a matter of concern when the Municipality is in dire need of those officials for the upgradation of its technical and administrative performance. But the State Government has remained indifferent to such a need of the Municipality. It is true that the technical needs of Balurghat Municipality have been fulfilled by the Municipal Engineering Directorate (henceforth referred as MED), which is

located in Malda. But this has created at least two problems. Firstly, it is difficult to make the day-to-day interaction between the civic body and the MED. Secondly, neither the Chairman-in-Council nor the Board of Councillors has been legally authorised to regulate the functioning of the MED, which is purely a government agency. Therefore, the help from the MED and the Executive Officer have failed to be the remedy to the administrative and technical deficiencies of the civic body. But in the wake of the increasing role of the Municipality as the focal agency of development, such personnel are highly required. In Balurghat, where almost all the areas of the civic amenity have been in deplorable condition, regular supervision and management of the works need to be borne by the competent officials, otherwise the expenditure is likely to result in squandering away of fund.

### C. Functions Discharged by the Municipality vis-a-vis the Magnitude of the Civic problems in Balurghat

#### I. Functions Discharged by the Municipal Boards in West Bengal

For several decades in West Bengal, the functions of the municipal governments in small and medium cities and towns had been governed by the Act of 1932. But the civic bodies were constrained to provide adequate civic facility for the want of fund. This problem crippled the entire functioning of the civic bodies during the period of colonial rule. After independence too, the municipalities have been driven to the position of paying lip-service to the problems for financial hardship. As a result, the

functions discharged by the municipal institutions have so far failed to live up to the expectations of the people. There has been a sharp disparity in the capacity and responsibility of the civic bodies.

In West Bengal, the Act of 1932 did not distinguish the various municipal functions into obligatory and discretionary categories, although the Act mentioned a few priority items of expenditure on account of loans, trusts, establishment and audit.<sup>11</sup> The Act specified the following activities indicating a very wide range of functions:

- i). removal of sewerage, rubbish and offensive water from all private latrines and urinals;
- ii). construction of public drains;
- iii). construction of sewerage system;
- iv). provision of water-supply and regulatory measures for ensuring purity of water-supply;
- v). adoption of special measures for preventing insanitary conditions of bustees;
- vi). controlling building operation and prevention of unauthorised construction;
- vii). prescribing building line and street alignments;
- viii). establishment and maintenance of Fire Brigade in places where the West Bengal Fire Services Act, 1950 is not in force;
- ix). adoption of regulatory measures against insanitary and dangerous property;
- x). controlling the operation of offensive and dangerous trades



and occupations;

- xi). adoption of preventive steps to restrain infectious diseases;
- xii). provisions for hospitals and dispensaries etc;
- xiii). registration of birth and deaths;
- xiv). establishment and maintenance of markets and slaughter houses etc.;
- xv). prevention of the sale of any article of food or drug which is unwholesome or unfit as human food or medicine;
- xvi). provision for burial and burning grounds;
- xvii). prevention of public nuisance which causes danger or injury to public life;
- xviii). maintenance and management of schools libraries and museums;
- xix). providing street and house electrification;
- xx). construction and up-keeping of public roads;
- xxi). creation of primary education facilities.

These were the functions which the municipal bodies normally performed, according to their capacity. But of these functions, education, water supply, medical and public health, transport and noxious trades were not undertaken by some municipalities due to their financial incapacity. This did not mean that the municipal bodies disowned some responsibilities, but the financial handicap made them incapable to undertake some functions of large expenditure.

With the inception of the Municipal Act of 1993, municipal functions have undergone some changes. These changes have

led to a transformation in the nature and scope of the municipal functions. Unlike the previous enactments, this new Act has made classification of functions into two broad heads, namely the obligatory and discretionary. In the list of obligatory functions, there are four parts. These parts are brought under the following sub-headings : i) sphere of public works; ii) sphere of public health and sanitation; iii) sphere of town planning and development; and iv) sphere of administration. Again, the list of discretionary functions is also divided into sub-headings such as: i) sphere of public works; ii) sphere of education; iii) sphere of public health and sanitation; iv) sphere of administration; and v) sphere of development.

Section 63 and Section 64, set out in chapter VI of the new municipal legislation provide a wide range of functions of the municipalities. There has been a number of additions, except a few transfer from the obligatory list to discretionary list. Almost all the previous functions have been retained in the obligatory list with some changes. In the list of obligatory functions there have been some new insertions, enabling the civic bodies to assume greater role for the maintenance of civic order. Among the newly added functions, the following are worth-mentioning:

i) planting and care of trees on road-side and elsewhere

[63(1) (i);]

ii) maintenance of all monuments, vested in the municipality

[63(1) (ii);]

iii) maintenance of all public tanks and regulating the re-excavation, repair and up-keep of all private wells and other sources of water-supply on such terms and conditions as the municipality may deem proper [63(2) (g)] and

iv) conversion of service privies into sanitary latrines and providing adequate facilities for sanitation so that open defecation may completely be done away with [63(2) (n)].

The sphere of town planning and development is entirely a new insertion, which entitles the municipal bodies to have leadership role in planning and development of the towns. In the fourth category of obligatory functions i.e. the sphere of administration, the civic bodies have been given some functions, which were not obligatory under the previous Act. In addition to some normal administrative functions, the municipalities have been given some new responsibilities such as:

(i) survey of buildings and lands and preparation and maintenance from time to time of survey maps and plans of the town and other records relating to survey [63(4) (a)];

(ii) removal of unauthorised encroachment on, or obstruction or projections in or upon streets, bridges and other public

places [ 63(4) (b) ] ; and

(iii) providing adequate training facilities for the municipal employees and equipping and motivating them for public service [ 63 (4) (n) ].

Most of the responsibilities were previously borne more or less by the municipalities, but their specification in the list of obligatory functions indicated the pressing needs of such services on regular basis. Other than the functions cited in the sub-sections, almost all the functions in some form were mentioned in the Act of 1932.

Section 63 deals with the list of functions, the performance of which lies at the discretion of a Municipality. This category of municipal functions contains five classes of functions namely i) the sphere of public works; ii) the sphere of education; iii) sphere of public health and sanitation; iv) the sphere of administration and lastly; v) the sphere of development. In this list of functions where as many as forty items have been inserted, a number of them were hitherto unknown in the municipal field. Some notable insertions are as under :

Section 64(1) (a) makes provision for giving relief to, and establishing and maintaining, in times of famine or scarcity, relief works for destitute persons within the limits of the municipal area;

(b) construction or maintenance of, or providing or

giving aids for, passengers' sheds, libraries, museums, community halls, offices, godowns, shops, markets, dharmasalas, rest houses, sports complex, place of entertainment, swimming pools, public wash houses and bathing places and home for the disabled and destitute and other public buildings designed for convenience of the community;

(c) Construction and maintenance of old age homes and orphanages, domiciliary care of the sick, orphan, destitute and aged people;

(d) construction of dwellings for the inhabitants, specially low-cost dwellings for the socially backward classes of citizens;

(e) provision of accommodation for all classes of employees of the Municipality;

The item of primary education has been shifted from the obligatory list to the discretionary list. However, other items relating to education such as promotion of civic education, adult education, social education, non-formal education, promotion of cultural activities, advancement of science and technology and civic consciousness and publication of journals, magazines, newspapers etc. are entirely a new insertion, found in the sub-sections from 2(a) to 2(g) of section 64.

In the sphere of public health and sanitation the new insertions, made in 2(c) and (e) are in respect of promotion of bio-gas and non-conventional energy, setting up of milk dairies

etc., which need special mention. In the sphere of administration, the functions relating to organisation and management of fairs and exhibitions, organisation and maintenance of art galleries, botanical or zoological collections, preventive measures against the use of liquor and drug and organising voluntary labour and coordinating the activities of voluntary agencies for community welfare have been provided under sub-section 2(c) (d) (f) and (g) of section 64. The fifth category of discretionary functions is in the sphere of development, which did not exist in the previous Act. They are relating to encouraging the formation and assistance to housing cooperative societies, provision of greenery, liberation of scavengers, income-generation of women of backward classes, integration of the development plans and schemes of the town with the district or regional development plan.

So, in comparison to the responsibilities and functions given to the municipalities under previous enactments, the volume of functions under section 63 and section 64 of the Act of 1993 is larger than before. These two provisions of the new Act have empowered the municipal bodies to play greater role in the development of the cities and towns. Various functions of the State Government have been delegated to the municipalities which seem to be a step in the direction of setting up of powerful local government.

But it is interesting to note that a large body of functions is outside the scope of obligatory functions. Particu-

larly those functions relating to social welfare, education etc. which are found in the discretionary list. This part of the new Act resembles 'the Directive Principles of State Policy' in Part IV of the Constitution of India, wheretoo a number of welfare-oriented functions have been enlisted. Like the government, the municipalities are also given the opportunity to shirk many of the responsibilities, if they so desire. But it should be maintained, that their insertion for the first time under the discretionary list has undeniably opened a new dimension. This has expanded the scope of municipal functions. Therefore, the Municipal Act, enacted in 1993 is the landmark in the evolution of municipal functions.

## II. Problems of Balurghat

Unplanned urbanisation has produced innumerable problems in Balurghat. Over the years haphazard settlement and uncontrolled privatisation of land, have distorted the growth of the town. Consequently, future development works, like the construction of roads, public drains etc., have been effected by the unplanned growth of residential settlement, office buildings, shops and market places.

Previous arrangement of civic amenities was not up to the requirements of a growing town.<sup>12</sup> Large portion of land was used for residential and commercial purposes in an unplanned manner. The condition of the roads was very poor and the entire town was almost devoid of any sanitation facilities.

There was no pucca drainage system and most of the houses were served by service privies. Disposal of night soil from the service privies were done by human carriers.

In Balurghat, earthen roads were impassable in the rainy season. Most of the houses were made of earth. Besides, there were no provision for water supply and electricity and the existence of only one charitable health centre indicated that health facility in Balurghat was almost absent. The Union Board in Balurghat failed to restrict haphazard growth and to ensure balanced development of the town. The financial handicap and ineptitude made the Board incapable to cease the unplanned growth of the town.

With this backdrop, Municipal Board was constituted in Balurghat in 18.6.1951.<sup>13</sup> Since then, the Municipality has been the focal agency for the development of the town. But the discrepancy between the responsibility and resource-capacity has made the Board incapable in the face of the growing problems of the city. As a consequence, the problems have grown into nightmarish condition.

Problems of Balurghat are manifold in nature. They are mainly relating to drainage, roads, housing, insanitary conditions, water supply street-lighting etc.

#### Drainages

The town of Balurghat has traditionally been deficient of drainage facility. It is found that adequate measures have



never been taken up to upgrade the drainage condition. Consequently, none of the wards in Balurghat has adequate provision of drainage. Of late the Municipality and the PWD have made some provision of drainage along the roads, under their respective jurisdiction.

This problem has assumed an acute shape with the awesome growth of population in the town. Unplanned growth of buildings and mushrooming of bustees in different parts of the town made the upgradation of the existing provision of drainage a compelling necessity. But, owing to the supersession of the Board from 1973 to 1981, the local civic authority has failed to take steps for the creation of adequate drainage facilities.

Resumption of the elected Board in 1981 has intensified the activities of the Board. Of late, the Municipality and the PWD have constructed some drains in different parts of the town. The PWD has also built some culverts for the easy removal of water from different parts of the town such as Bazarpara, Biswaspara, Mangalpur and Narayanpur in the wards of 13, 14, 15 etc. The Municipality has also constructed drains in some areas of the city. The provision of drainage available in Balurghat in 1993 is presented in the Table 4.1. The Table is presented to show the length of drains urban municipal supervision.

Table - 4.1

Length of Drains under the Supervision of the Municipality

Length of underground drains	..	.. 1.5 Km
Length of open pucca drains	..	..14 Km
Length of open Kutcha drains	..	..153 Km
Total	..	..168.5 Km

It is undeniable that 15.5 Km of Pucca (cemented) drain out of the total coverage of 168.5 Km shows the poor state of drainage facility in the city. Later, the length of drain has increased to 300 Kms, which is said to be poorly maintained for the want of adequate staff. Out of the total length, only 43 Km is Pucca and 257 Kms is Kutcha (earthen).<sup>14</sup>

It is found that none of the wards possesses adequate provision of drainage. This problem is acute particularly in the wards 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 12, 16, 26, 17, 20, 22 and 23. Hence, the large part of the interior areas of the town have been left out of the provision of drainage. Besides, none of the bustee areas has pucca drainage provision. In fact, municipal activities for the amelioration of drainage facility have been largely confined within the selective middle-class residential areas in the town.

Although the Municipality has extended the provision of drainage in different parts of the town, existing drainage

provision has not been effective due to some constructional lapses. Uneven height and breadth of the surface drains has lowered the efficacy of the existing drainage provision. Such defects in the construction of drains hinder easy passage of water, for which the drains have become the breeding ground of mosquito and several water-borne diseases.

Hence, there is no denying the fact that although the Municipality has constructed drains in some parts of the town, existing provision is still inadequate.

#### Roads:

Unplanned urbanisation of Balurghat has paved the way for the growth of arterial roads in a disorderly manner. Unplanned growth of residential constructions and market places have been responsible for the haphazard growth of the roads. Prior to independence, both the Local Board and Union Board owing to the paucity of fund failed to ameliorate the living conditions. The local authorities were even unable to upkeep the road which were impassable in the rainy season.<sup>15</sup> Evidence of sordid condition of the roads is found in the Cadastral Survey Map.<sup>16</sup> This lagging condition of the arterial roads remained for long time even after the constitution of the Municipal Board in 1951. It was reported that the roads were in wretched condition. Out of about 18 miles of roads, only about 2 miles were paved.<sup>17</sup>

Towards the end of 1960s, notable improvement in previous road condition was found as a consequence of the

acceleration of municipal services. During the period of the Fourth Board the civic authority took some definite steps to make an improvement upon the prevailing state of the roads of the town. The Board from 1969-1973 undertook intensive programme for the upgradation of the road condition in the town.<sup>18</sup> Some of the important roads were then constructed by the Municipality. A concrete bridge was built upon the 'khazi' for the betterment of communication between the eastern and western part of the town.

But despite some improvement in civic facilities during the tenure of the Fourth Board, the civic authority failed to upgrade the living conditions of the inhabitants. This was largely due to the supervision of the Board by the State Government. The administration of the Executive Officers, during the period of supersession made no significant improvements on the prevailing civic facilities including the roads.

Of late, some improvement have been noticed after the introduction of the scheme of IDSWP, sponsored by the Central and the State Government. Construction of the link roads were undertaken under this programme. Of them, a link road between the 'Dunlop Crossing' in Ward no. 1 and 'Sahab Kachari Municipal Market' in Ward no. 2, a link road from 'Municipal Bus Stand' to 'Telephone Exchange', and the road from the 'Town Club Field' to the 'Garrage of North Bengal State Transport Corporation' were built. Besides, the construction of a link road from the 'Outdoor Hospital' via College Square in Ward no. 17 and from Uttanasha

Pally in Ward no. 21 to the P.W.D. road, near the Office of the 'District Inspector of Schools' were worth mentioning.

But even after implementation of the programme of IDNST, some parts of the town are still devoid of metalled link roads with the central places of the town. The interior areas in Ward no. 8,9,10,14 and 15 still remain without link road facility. The impoverished state of arterial roads is profound in the bustee areas. Position in April 1983 shows a dismal state of road facility in the bustee areas. Only 6 Kms. of roads were metalled against the total length of 30.5 Kms. But even after a gap of more than a decade, position has remained almost unchanged.

Therefore, even after the implementation of the programme of IDNST problem of road still persists in the town. This position is evident in condition of the roads in the town under municipal supervision. The following figures show the length of roads maintained by the Municipality upto 1993.

Table - 4.2

Length of roads under municipal supervision

Type of roads	Length of Roads main- tained by the Municipality
Metalled motorable Road	18 Km.
Non-metalled motorable Road	18.217 Km.
Non-metalled motorable Road	23.395 Km.
Total	69.612 Km

The above-stated position of roads in the town shows

lesser length of motorable metalled road is far lower than the length of non-metalled roads. At present the total length of road is about 300 Km which is poorly maintained for the lack of adequate staff.<sup>19</sup> Out of this length, 179 Km. is Ducca and 121 Km is Kutchra. The position is never satisfactory which requires adequate attention from the civic authority.

### Sanitation:

Adequate provision for sanitation is a sine qua non for hygienic living of the inhabitants of the cities and towns. In West Bengal, one of the reasons for the fall in the quality of urban living has been the persistence of insanitary condition. This is due to inadequate sanitation facility in the cities and towns.

In Balurghat too, sanitation has always been one of the main problems and it has fallen short of the required standard. Over the years there has been <sup>an</sup> acceleration of the size and density of population but almost no improvement has been made in this area. The problem of insanitary condition in the town has increased as a result of unceasing flow of evauees across the border, after the Indo-Pak War of 1971.

The service relating to sanitation is discharged by the 'conservancy' department of the Municipality. Sanitation refers to the disposal of night soil, cleansing of public latrines and urinals. It is one of the obligatory functions of the

Municipality under section 63 (1) of the Act of 1993. During the early eighties, Balurghat was brought under the government financed programmes called, 'Conversion of Service Privies into Sanitary Latrine' and 'Integrated Low Cost Sanitation' (henceforth referred as ILCS). These were not only the removal of human carriage system for cleansing latrines and urinals, but also for creating necessary provision of sanitation. Implementation of the programmes made some improvement, as 28 per cent of the latrines were converted into low cost - two pit sanitary latrines from service privies. But still 7231 of service privies are yet to be converted into sanitary latrine.<sup>20</sup> So, the existing provision is far from being adequate.

#### Water Supply:

Another major handicap of civic life in Balurghat is the absence of piped supply of water for drinking. Although the service is obligatory for the civic body under section 63(1) (a) of the new Act, supply of drinking water is yet to take place. A scheme had been commissioned in 1980 by the PHE but the growing demand for water, suitable for drinking made the existing provision inappropriate.

Afterwards in 1989, a scheme for the augmentation of water supply had been prepared for an estimated population 191,000 in 2011.<sup>21</sup> It is to mention here that the analysis of water samples in the laboratory of the All India Institute of

Hygiene and Public Health did not show the presence of arsenic but finds the Iron-level beyond the acceptable limit, fixed by the Ministry of Works and Housing, Government of India. In view of this, the proposed scheme had suggested the installation of an 'iron elimination plant' and 'chlorination' for supplying water suitable for drinking. But the scheme awaits implementation for the paucity of fund.

In this context, it needs to be pointed out that the Municipality, as has been mentioned in Chapter 3, has not taken up the responsibility for the maintenance of the present provision of water supply through street-taps, implemented by the PHE. At present, the Municipality operates 1002 tube-wells at different places of the city.<sup>22</sup> Besides, it provides 10 pumps for its own offices, guest house, town hall, municipal markets, working women's hostel, bus stand etc.

It is then irrefutable that there is actually no provision for water supply in Balurghat and the civic body has failed to live up to the necessity of the inhabitants, so far as the supply of drinking water is concerned.

#### Street lightings:

Under section 63 (1) (f) of the Act of 1993 the Municipal Boards have been given the responsibility relating to street lighting and lighting of the public places. In the case of street lighting in Balurghat it is found that the pressure is increasing day by day due to the growth of population and delimitation of the



municipal area. At present, there is 300 Km. roads in the municipal area and the Municipality has installed 2750 poles alongside the road with the technical assistance of the WSEB.<sup>23</sup> The present provision of street lighting is found inadequate because a number of schemes are still to be implemented by the WSEB, which is presented in table 3.1 of Chapter 3. Although it may appear that most of the main thoroughfares are properly furnished with the provision of lighting, the interior and bustee areas are not proportionately equipped with this provision. Therefore, if the present deficiency which is now at moderate level, is not removed, it will have to be met at higher cost afterwards.

### Housing

Housing has never been an item of municipal service in Balurghat. In the new Act too, housing has not been considered as one of the important duties, except section 64(1) where there is provision for shelter and low cost housing for the homeless and poor people, to be provided by the Municipality.

The problem is acute in Balurghat because every year water gushes into the low-lying areas, which damages the dwelling-structure of the poor, made of earth and slips of bamboo. The civic body everytime provides relief to the affected people but so far has failed to solve the problem. Once during the period of the sixth elected Board, the civic authority proposed a housing scheme for the people of middle and lower-middle class, but it was

subsequently dropped for some reasons.

But the problem of housing does not worry the civic authority mainly due to the inability of the houseless people to make their difficulties, felt at the level of municipal decision-making.

So, the inquiry into the present state of civic facilities like road, drainage, sanitation, water supply, street-lighting and housing reveals that in all these areas of living, Balurghat is lagging behind the required standard. There is little doubt that the inhabitants of the city are deprived of many of their basic needs and they are forced to endure the difficulties of inferior quality of living. The problems have grown to nightmarish level in recent years for the fast rate of population growth in the city.

#### Results of the Field Survey

In the enquiry to understand the magnitude of the problems in terms of the research question mentioned in section C Chapter 1 perception of the inhabitants is significant. It is found that the respondents are aware of the problems and difficulties of living in Balurghat. They in general, perceive that the civic facilities are not adequately available to them. But an understanding of public awareness regarding the civic problem requires to be understood in terms of the social and economic differentials. It is found that public awareness regarding the

magnitude of the problems is considerably influenced by social and economic status of the respondents. To understand the variations in their perception, the variables like formal education and income indicating the social and economic status of the respondents need to be explored in the study. At first it is found that acquaintance with the problems of Balurghat is closely related with the standard of formal education of the rate-payers.

It is found that the rate-payers interviewed, belong to different categories of formal education and also their perception about the problems of the town is governed by their educational background.

The educational differential has been taken up to examine the perception of the rate-payers because it has revealed their views from significant standpoints. When their views have been studied in terms of their educational background some interesting results have been found. Hence, Table 4.3 is presented to show the perception of the rate-payers in terms of education differential. Findings of the survey in this respect reveal that the respondents of each of the categories have widely differed from each other in identifying the problems of the town.

Table - 4.3

Perception of the rate-payers, arranged according to their formal education regarding the magnitude of the problems of Balurghat.

Categories of Respondents	No. of Respondents	Drainage	Road	Insanitary conditions	Water Supply	Street lighting	Housing
Illiterate	18	-	-	4 (22.2)	-	-	14 (77.8) N=18 P=100
Primary	33	-	-	10 (30.3)	-	-	23 (69.7) N=33 P=100
Secondary	30	21 (70)	-	9 (30)	-	-	N=30 P=100
Graduate above	19	14 (73.7)	-	5 (26.3)	-	-	N=19 P=100

Figures in parentheses show percentages

The data in terms of education differential, shown in the Table suggest that the rate-payers who do not have higher level of formal education view housing as the major problem. It is found that 77.8 per cent and 69.7 per cent from the category of illiterate rate-payers and those, having education upto the primary level respectively view that housing is the major problem. But in the perception of 70 per cent and 73.7 per cent of the rate-payers, having education upto secondary and graduation or more, find the problem of drainage acute in Balurghat. So, the differences in the formal education of the rate-payers have produced differences in the perception of the rate-payers regarding the problems of the town.

It is also found that the income of the rate-payers is one of determinants of their perception regarding the magnitude of the problems of Balurghat. The income differential always governs the mind of the rate-payers in respect of understanding the intensity of the problems. So, in view of the different income of the rate-payers it is imperative to enquire the correlation between the income and perception of the rate-payers. Table 4.4 is presented to show how the rate-payers from their different economic status perceive the problems of the town.

Table - 4.4

Perception of the rate-payers arranged according to their income regarding the magnitude of the problems of the town.

Category of Respondents	No. of Respondents	Drainage	Road	Insanitary conditions	Water Supply	street lighting	Housing	
Rs. 300 - 500	13	-	-	3 (13.1)	-	-	10 (76.9)	N=13 P=100
Rs. 501 - 1000	26	-	-	6	-	-	20	N=26 P=100
Rs. 1001 - 2000	36	17 (47.2)	-	5 (13.9)	7 (19.4)	-	7 (19.4)	N=36 P=100
Rs. 2001 - 3000	10	7 (70)	-	-	3 (30)	-	-	N=10 P=100
Rs. 3001 - 5000	31	7 (63.6)	-	-	4 (36.4)	-	-	N=11 P=100
Rs. 5000 & above	4	4	-	-	-	-	-	N=4 P=100

Figures in parenthesis show percentages.

Drainage therefore, in the perception of the rate-payers of higher income brackets is the problem of the town. Only 76.9 per cent of the rate-payers, belonging to the income category of Rs. 301 - 500 perceive housing as the major problem of the town.

In the study of the differentials such as, the formal education and income of the rate-payers, it is found that the rate-payers have identified housing, drainage, water supply and insanitary condition as the major problems of the town. In their view the condition of roads and street lighting is much better than other problems. Perception of rate-payers conforms to the intensity of the problems of drainage and housing, as found in the data about the progress, made by the Municipality so far. But their perception does not fully conform to the intensity of the problem of road and insanitary condition as found in the data about municipal performance. Differences are found, when the perception of the rate-payers is studied in issues of the differentials and official data, obtained from the Municipality. However given the differences, it is apparent from the study that the civic body is required to improve its performance in the area of housing, drainage, water supply and sanitation.

Perception of the members of the Board is significant in order to understand the intensity of the problem. In the case of the elected civic functionaries also, the differentials in terms of their formal education, and income showing their economic status are the indices to explore the perception of the elected

functionaries of the civic body. The point to mention here is that the perception of the members of the sixth and seventh elected Board in terms of the differentials have been clubbed together to derive an overall impression of their perception of the problems of the town.

In the Table 4.5 it is found that the problem of drainage and insanitary condition have drawn the attention of the members of the sixth and seventh elected Board. Unlike the rate-payers, the members of the Boards have identified drainage as the main and perennial problem, followed by the prevalence of insanitary conditions.

Educational background of the members of the sixth and seventh elected Board is significant because offers better comprehension of the actual nature of the civic problems in Balurghat. In Table 4.5 it is found that the members of both the Boards irrespective of their differences in respect of educational background have noticed drainage as the major problem. In times of discussion they have pointed out that not only the length of drains is inadequate, the existing drainage system is also ineffective due to its defective design and unplanned construction. Most of them have strongly argued for a 'master plan' to remove the problem.



Table - 4.5

Perception of the members of the sixth and seventh elected Board, taken together according to their formal education regarding the problems of the town

Category of Respondents	No. of Respondents	Drainage	Road	Insanitary conditions	Water supply	Street lighting	Housing	
Illiterate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	N=0 P=0
Primary	3	2 (66.7)	1 (33.3)	-	-	-	-	N=3 P=100
Secondary	11	8 (72.7)	-	3 (27.3)	-	-	-	N=11 P=100
Graduate & above	22	15 (68.1)	-	7 (31.8)	-	-	-	N=22 P=100

Figures in the parentheses show percentages

Income of the members of the Boards, indicating their economic status is the index for understanding the awareness of the elected civic functionaries. Therefore, the differential in terms of the income of the members of the Boards, taken together in the same manner helps understand their perception from another viewpoint (Table 4.6).

Like other two differentials, perception of the members of the Board, when analysed in terms of their income confirms the findings of other Tables relating to the perception of the elected functionaries. Drainage, in their view is the foremost problem and the problem of sanitation is also serious than the problem of road, water supply and housing.

Analysis of the Tables taken together produces some interesting results. This is not unusual for them to indicate drainage and insanitary condition as the two major problem of the town, but overlooking the problem of water supply is unusual, which is not expected from the elected representatives, particularly when they are supposed to plead for the immediate implementation of a scheme for the supply of drinking water in the town. Similar thing is found when the members of the Board claim that there is no problem of street lighting. But data show several schemes are pending with the WSSB. So, in view of these anomalies, it appears that the members of the Board lack full comprehension of the problems of the town. Their

Table - 4.6

Perception of the members of the sixth and seventh elected Board, arranged according to their income regarding the magnitude of the problems of the town.

Category of Respondents	No. of Respondents	Drainage	Roads	Insanitary conditions	Water Supply	Street lighting	Housing
301 - 500	-	-	-	-	-	-	N=0 P=0
501 - 1000	-	-	-	-	-	-	N=0 P=0
1001 - 2000	1	-	1 (100)	-	-	-	N=1 P=100
2001 - 3000	11	8 (72.7)	-	3 (27.2)	-	-	N=11 P=100
3001 - 5000	9	7 (77.8)	-	2 (22.2)	-	-	N=9 P=100
5001 & above	15	10 (66.7)	-	5 (33.3)	-	-	N=15 P=100

Figures in the parentheses show percentage.

perception also on some of the problems like road, water supply, street lighting and housing is asymmetrical with the data on the progress in those areas, made by the civic body.

Perception of the Political leaders is different from other respondents. As the local leaders of various political parties their views are supposed to be different from the common rate-payers and the members of the Board. It is expected that they are more aware and candid than the rate-payers and the members of the Board. Here also, their perception is studied in terms of the differential of the formal education, and income; (Table 4.7).

Analysis of the data presented in Table 4.7, pertaining to the views of the political leaders shows that all the respondents are fairly educated and 70 per cent of them having education upto the level of secondary and graduation or more, view drainage as the main problem. They also point out the absence of the provision of water supply in the town. Other problems are not so acute as the problem of drainage and water supply, although there is no provision of housing from the municipality till now.

Table - 4.7

Perception of the Political leaders, arranged according to their formal education regarding the magnitude of the problems of the town.

Category of Respondents	No. of Respondents	Drainage	Road	Insanitary	Water supply	Street lighting	Housing	
Illiterate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	N=0 P=0
Primary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	N=0 P=0
Secondary	4	2 (50)	-	-	2 (50)	-	-	N=4 P=100
Graduate & above	6	5 (83.3)	-	-	1 (16.7)	-	-	N=6 P=100

Figures in parenthesis show the percentage.

Income of the leaders is also supposed to be one of the main factor in the perception of the civic problems of the town. A correlation always exists between the perception and income showing the economic status of the leaders.

The figures, shown in the Table reveal no remarkable difference. It is found that while the leaders of lower income brackets are divided in their views but those, belonging to the higher income brackets almost unequivocally point out drainage as the major problem. It is also found that some of the leaders i.e. 30 per cent of them are aware of the problem of water supply.

So, the field data regarding the perception of the respondents unfolds certain significant points. In the study it is found that the difference prevail in the perception of the respondents. Unanimity is not found, when the perceptions of the rate-payers, members of the Board and political leaders are studied as separate categories. Differences are found among the respondents of a same category due to the differential in respect of education and income. So, the critical analysis of the perception of the respondents suggests that public awareness is fragile which handicaps the common people to press their demands upon the civic authority.

Table - 4.8

Perception of the political leaders, arranged according to their income regarding the problems of the town.

Category of Respondents	No. of Respondents	Drainage	Road	Insanitary condition	Water Supply	Street lighting	Housing
Rs. 301 - 500	1	-	-	-	-	-	N=0 P=0
Rs. 501 - 1000	2	1 (50)	-	-	1 (50)	-	N=2 P=100
Rs. 1001 - 2000	1	-	-	-	-	-	N=0 P=0
Rs. 2001 - 3000	2	1 (50)	-	-	1 (50)	-	N=2 P=100
Rs. 3001 - 5000	3	2 (66.7)	-	-	1 (33.3)	-	N=3 P=100
Rs. 5001 and above	3	3 (100)	-	-	-	-	N=3 P=100

Figures in parentheses show percentage

## B. Concluding Observations

In the study of the legal structural framework and functions of Balurghat Municipality against the civic problems of the town, an attempt has been made to assess the competence of the civic body in respect of its growing responsibilities. It is found that although the constitution of the Municipality apparently seems to be governed by the municipal legislations, its constitution and functioning in accordance with the principle of participatory democracy have enabled the admission of local elements. Introduction of Chairman-in-Council has not only made greater diffusion of powers and functions, it has also enabled greater interaction of the Municipality with the locality. Regarding the performance-standard of the Municipality against the problems, it is found that municipal performance needs improvement in many areas of civic life in Balurghat. In respect of the perception of the respondents it is found that it has not always been consistent with the magnitude of the problems. For instance, perception of the rate-payers in respect of the problems of road, water supply, housing has either been different from the views of the members of the Board and political leaders or has been inconsistent with the magnitude of the problems.

In this enquiry it is found that the Municipality has to perform a variety of functions. Now-a-days, the types of its functions have changed from the traditional civic service-oriented functions to developmental functions, but there has been



no effort from either the government or the civic authority to enhance its capacity. Till now, no top level personnel, which the Municipality<sup>is</sup> entitled to possess, has been provided to enhance its competence for the proper delivery of the new services, laid down in the Act of 1993. So, a yawning gap exists between the responsibility and capacity of the Municipality and if it is allowed to persist for indefinite period, the effect will be disastrous in future.

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In this connection it should be noted that the civic body was constituted in Balugghat by the untiring efforts of the local Congress leaders. Apathetic attitude of the district authority compelled them to pursue the case at the ministe-

rial level. The facts regarding this are available in 'Balurghater Katha', written by Suren Bagchi in Bengali.

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