

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Characteristics of North Bengal

North Bengal presents the most varied phenomenon. On the north are the towering Himalayas, followed southward by the hilly terrains of the Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts, with deep forests, low temperatures and heavy rains. On the southern end are the dry, hot and low lands of the West Dinajpur and Malda districts. The entire region slants down from north to south accounting for the turbulence of the hill streams like the Teesta, Torsha, etc. a number of which interperse the region and are mostly unnavigable. The perennial southward flow of the rivers washes away plant food from the soil and so reduces its productivity. The difficulty of retaining water on the hills also affects the yield rate of the crop there. What meagre yield is available is again, liable to large-scale destruction at short or no notice by the floods ( Government is, however, now keen on controlling such floods through effective implementation of a "Master Plan" for the same ) caused by the rivers swollen

by the heavy ( 120" to 150" ) and prolonged ( April to November ) rains. The rains also often force premature sales of their products by the growers at little or no profits. Crude rural pathways and river beds become impassable. Besides the floods, there are the wild animals to destroy the crops and the cattle.

Ethnologically, North Bengal constitutes the most complex mosaic of races and tribes. The bulk of the rural population consists of the original inhabitants like the Rajbanshis, Bahas, Coaches, Santhals, Polias, etc. and of hill tribes like the Lepchas, Bhutias, Totos, etc. To them have been added the 'outsiders' like the Bengalis from the districts of Rangpur, Rajshai etc. of united Bengal, who migrated here to seek fortune long before partition, business classes like the Rajasthanis and the tea-planters. The first group consists mostly of farmers and landless labourers, living in abject poverty in the countryside while the second comprises mostly the landlords, traders, and tea-magnates, generally living in comparative affluence. The different races and tribes zealously cling to their respective habits and customs but are united in their common distrust of the second group.

Sociologically, North Bengal has practically two classes ; namely, the very poor represented by the first group mentioned above and contributing about 90 per

cent of the population, and the rich to very rich represented by the second, there being practically no middle class as in South Bengal. The second class owns about 75 per cent of the cultivable lands and also most of whatever trade and industries there are. As a result, various systems of sharecropping galore and there is a large landless peasantry. It is this particular social set-up that explains the acute land hunger in North Bengal. It also explains the comparative, though deceptive, calm there, born of sheer mass helplessness and destitution, as well as the ferocity of the violences when they do occur, the sobering effect of a strong middle class being absent.

Politically, North Bengal is far more exposed than the rest of the State to developments in the neighbouring countries. The long international borders with Nepal, Sikkim and Bangladesh not only spell a chronic political uncertainty, so detrimental to normal pursuits of life, but also render its economy closely susceptible to the conditions across the borders. The market products of North Bengal's principal agricultural products like seed Potato, Cardamom, Orange, etc., for instance, depend largely on the condition of these crops in Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. Similarly, prices received by the rice and jute growers of North Bengal depend very much on the prices

of these crops prevailing in the adjacent markets of Bangladesh. Glandestine movements of the products between North Bengal and these countries frequently upset the crop and price forecasts, and hence, the official regulatory programme in this region. Besides, there are the foreign marauders to contend with.

Economically, the region is predominantly agricultural with practically no industry save tea. Return from agriculture is meagre for the average family due not only to the little quota of land available for it and the low yield rate but also to the difficulty of profitable disposal as a result of the physical and sociological conditions described. Again, the entire region has to depend mainly on South Bengal not only for the supply of its non-agricultural requirements but also for the marketing of the new surplus crops it grows like Jute, Cardamom, Ginger, etc. Moreover, markets in North Bengal are much fewer than in South Bengal, a medium sized market there having often to serve a radius as wide as 30 miles.

The average grower has necessarily to depend entirely on the village or middlemen for the sale of his products at whatever price the latter design to pay. The uncertainty of the transport to the distant southern markets ( now the position is somewhat better due to the completion of "Farraka Bridge" over river "Ganga" ) and also within

North Bengal during the rains, the risks of long storage and price fluctuation, and the high percentage of nonpayment of the monetary advance made to the cultivators by the middlemen, make it difficult even for the honest amongst the latter to pay to the former more than a mere fraction of the price that would be legitimate under normal conditions. The more common practice is for the 'outsiders' to carry on a flourishing trade in the interiors. They lend paltry sums to the cultivators almost for the asking, for any productive and unproductive purpose at high rates of interest, and accept the debtors' field products by way of repayment. As there is hardly any competition, and the zones are divided, amongst these middlemen, the prices are generally dictated by the latter. Often they run grocers' shops and advance the loans not in cash but in the form of rice, salt, clothings, etc. at arbitrary prices. The paddy, millets, potatoes, etc. taken at low prices during the harvest seasons by way of repayment, are again sold back to the cultivators at high prices on credit during the lean seasons. The average cultivator - debtor seldom cares for a correct account of his debts and dues, and is content so long as he can have his requirements on demand and his produce are accepted in return, never minding the prices either way. In consequence, his indebtedness hardly ends and often costs his meagre lands.

## **1.2 Rural Development in North Bengal**

Planning for rural development to bring dynamic forces in the countryside of North Bengal should consist of two inter-dependent forces in the true sense. One is the setting up of the targets for the production of different commodities according to the primary consumption needs of the population, of industries, of building up stocks, of exports, etc. and the capacity for outlay needed for achieving these targets. The second phase is mainly concerned with the organisational apparatus which has to be built up for the effective implementation of these targets. This second phase emphasises the careful laying down of the tasks to be carried out by the production units according to their own requirements, potentialities and special environmental and economic situation in which they are located, in order to ensure that resources will be utilised with maximum efficiency towards achievement of the targets. It is in this second phase, concerned with the organisational problem, which has not been systematically tackled in the formulation of policies and programmes for the rural reconstruction of North Bengal particularly so in agriculture. Those who are connected with plans and programmes for rural development in North Bengal rightly recognise that the accelerated rate of growth in the countryside may not be achieved by the present approach and

repeatedly stress the need of detailed organisational planning at village, block and district level and of utilising the virtues of local leaders in the task of rural development.

1.3 Object and Scope of the Study

North Bengal is typically backward in rural development in the State of West Bengal and it is interesting to study why it is so. What is the nature of rural development in this region ? What are the problems and difficulties rural North Bengal has been facing on the road to progress ? What is the expected role of rural leaders in bringing dynamism in the vast countryside of North Bengal ? What is the nature and role played by rural leaders to pioneer progress in this region ? What are the problems and difficulties they have been facing to deliver the goods to the rural people ?

The above and many other questions related to North Bengal's development may be raised but in a single project with an individual researcher, confronted with paucity of time, money and other factors, it is not perhaps, possible to tackle all such questions and therefore, for the present study, role<sup>1</sup> of rural leaders in rural development in one of the districts viz. Jalpaiguri, of

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<sup>1</sup> Such a role has been studied through individuals, institutions/organisations and groups.

North Bengal has been studied. Rural development in North Bengal depends to a great extent upon how the rural leaders behave now and in the years to come and therefore, the aforesaid study is meaningful in the wider context of North Bengal's rural development.

The period of study is 1973 - 75.

#### 1.4 Available Scholarly Literature on Rural Development and Leadership in North Bengal -- A Brief Reference

Apart from a few stray Government Publications, a very few scholastic literature are available on the aforesaid subjects. The lion-share of such works originates from mainly a single source namely, Bhattacharya, S. N., who since 1962 has been working on various research projects individually on various aspects of rural North Bengal. Such an effort has produced upto now, the following which may be divided into two groups : (a) Thesis ; and (b) Articles.

(a) Thesis : "Rural Conditions in Agricultural North Bengal" for which he was awarded the Ph.D.(Arts) degree in Economics of the Calcutta University ( the thesis was prepared without any supervisor and it was submitted independently ).

(b) Articles : (1) "Finances of Panchayats in North Bengal

— A study" in Economic and Political Weekly, No. 9, 1968, PP. 1734 - 35.

(2) "Rural Leadership Problems — A study of Mainaguri Block", in "Kurukshetra", Vol. 17, No. 7, April, 1969, PP. 10-11.

(3) "Rural Upliftment and Leader Groups — A study of Mainaguri Block", in "Kurukshetra", Vol. 18, No. 3, December, 1969, PP. 10-12.

✓(4) "Panchayats in the Hills — A study in North Bengal Hills", in "Kurukshetra", Vol. 18, No. 10, June, 1970, PP. 7 - 8.

(5) "Service Conditions in Development Blocks — A study", in "Kurukshetra", Vol. 19, No. 10, February, 1971, PP. 6 - 7.

(6) "Development of North Bengal Hill Areas — A study" in "Yojana", February, 1969, PP.10-13.

(7) "Green Revolution, Small Farmers and Rural Cooperatives — A study in North Bengal Villages" in "Indian Cooperative Review", April, 1971, Vol. 8, No. 3, PP. 321-32.

(8) "Service Problems of Panchayati Raj in North Bengal — A study", in "Kurukshetra", Vol. 19, No. 20, July, 1971, PP. 8 - 9.

(9) "Problems of North Bengal Small Farmers — A study", in "Kurukshetra", June, 1972, Vol. 20, No. 17, PP. 12 - 13.

(10) "Economics of North Bengal Cooperative Farming — A study", in "Industrial and Economic Trade Journal", June, 1972, Vol. 1, No. 3, PP. 43 - 47.

(11) "Vested Interests in North Bengal Rural Credit Cooperatives — A study", in "Kurukshetra", Vol. 20, July, 1972, PP. 17 - 18.

(12) "Rural Development and Technologists in North Bengal — A study", in "Industrial and Economic Trade Journal", July, 1972, Vol. 1, No. 5, PP. 36 - 37.

(13) "Women in Rural Development in North Bengal Villages — A study", in "Industrial and Economic Trade Journal", Vol. 1, No. 7, Sept., 1972, PP. 33 - 35.

(14) "A Development Project For Landless Agriculturists in North Bengal — A study", in "Kurukshetra", April, 1973.

(15) "Cooperatives and Rural Leadership in North Bengal — A study", in "Vandar", July, 1973, Vol. 11, No. 8, PP. 15 - 17.

(16) "A New Look To North Bengal Rural Co-operative Leadership", in "Vandar", Vol. 11, No.11, October, 1973, PP. 31 - 34.

(17) "Trends in Co-operative Movement in North Bengal", in "Samabay", December, 1973, PP. 6 - 9.

(18) "C.A.D.P. and Rural Co-operatives in North Bengal — A study", in "Indian Co-operative Review", April, 1974, Vol. 11, No. 3, PP. 297-301.

Apart from Bhattacharya, S.N., Lahiri, Chandidas and Chakravorty, Shymal had submitted their dissertations under the supervision of Bhattacharya, S.N., on "Agricultural Enterprise in North Bengal — A study in Fara Economy in Jalpaiguri District ( 1973 - 75 )" on 19.1.78 and on "Rural Credit — its nature and problems — A study of six villages in a Block in Jalpaiguri District ( 1975 - 77 )" on 26.6.78 respectively for the Ph.D. (Arts) degree in Economics of the North Bengal University. Dutta, Haripada also submitted his thesis on "Nature and Problems of Small Farmers — A study of North Bengal Villages" for the Ph.D. (Arts) degree in Commerce of the North Bengal University under the supervision of Bhattacharya, S.N., on 24.8.78.

Seven other researchers who had been registered for the Ph.D. (Arts) degree in different branches of Social Sciences (Political Science, Economics, Sociology and Commerce), of the North Bengal University, have been working under the supervision of Bhattacharya, S.N., on different

aspects of rural North Bengal. As they are in the process of the completion of their respective projects, names of the aforesaid projects have not been referred to here.

### 1.5 Significance of the Present Study

North Bengal is typically backward area in the State of West Bengal. An accelerated rate of growth in these regions perhaps, is an imperative need of the hour but unless development takes place in a significant manner in various North Bengal villages, it is futile to talk of any real development in these regions.

But development cannot take place in vacuum. It needs some institutions/organisations/individuals who can lead other fellow rural people in their respective areas to go ahead with their respective development in an integrated and meaningful manner.

Whether such institutions/organisations/individuals can be located in North Bengal villages? If so, what would be the conceptual framework in locating them? What is the relation between rural development and rural leadership? Can we develop a conceptual framework indicating precisely the relationship between the two? What are the problems these institutions/organisations/individuals identified to provide leadership following a reasonable conceptual framework have been facing to deliver the goods to the rural people in their

respective areas ? Can we divide the leaders located as such into different leader groups to differentiate various actions of different leaders under different groups and if so, in what manner ?

These and various other questions associated with that may be raised in this connection. Not nearly sufficient discussions ( vide, section 1.4 of this chapter ) seem to have taken place on the aforesaid issues in these regions and hence, the study under reference appears to be significant. This study is expected to cover a gap in the availability of scholastic literature on the subject under study to a certain extent in these parts of West Bengal.

#### 1.6 Importance of the Study

Prof. V. M. Sirsikar in his illuminating, much thought-provoking and pioneering work on "The Rural Elite In A Developing Society" has observed ( P. 1 ) : "Indian Social Scientists have recently evinced a growing interest in the study of leadership. Behavioural orientation was almost absent in Indian Social Scientists. That accounted for the comparative neglect of this vital area. With growing interest in the behavioural study of politics, the study of leadership has assumed a new significance. In India, there is a great dearth of materials which give basic information

about leaders and leadership processes. It is hardly necessary to emphasise the importance of the building up of such basic data about the leadership at all levels — specially the local level. The grass-root leadership is the agency through which developmental work is carried out. They are also the innovators, carriers of new ideas, norms and values to the rural people. The success of Panchayati Raj institutions depends largely on the quality of leadership available at the grass-root level. Political development and democratic growth depend on the local leadership and its functioning in the Panchayati Raj institutions."

He further observes ( P. 1 ) : "The study of leadership is both intellectually fascinating and politically relevant." Section 1.4 of this chapter has clearly indicated that not nearly sufficient discussions have taken place on the question of rural leadership in the context of growth-oriented activities in rural areas of North Bengal which is typically a backward region in the State of West Bengal. It is believed that unless one knows how these rural leaders are behaving in the context of rural development in their respective areas, one may not be able to understand and to appreciate nature of rural developmental activities in these parts of West Bengal adequately.

Many things may be said about rural development in North Bengal. Yet, what is important is not to say them all, but to pick and choose, to leave most things unsaid, so that attention may fall on a few things that are more important than the rest.

Nothing perhaps, is more important for the success of rural development in North Bengal than to have an effective role of enlightened rural leadership. How can we 'disturb' the peaceful life of the farmers, 'stir' them out of age-old inertia and inspire them to new efforts? How can young people, with education and a spirit of innovation, be attracted to agriculture to produce such a result?

There is no simple answer to all these questions. But the Planner in North Bengal must constantly keep this question at the back of his mind. In Planning North Bengal's education, its form and content and the location of new educational institutions, in deciding on question of land ceilings, he must treat it as one of the relevant considerations, and not the least important among them. For, if one factor more than any other is acting as a brake on the speed of North Bengal's economic progress, it is still near-stagnant condition of the vast countryside of rural North Bengal.

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To promote the growth of enlightened leadership in the rural areas, to create, or widen, the channels through which credit and essential inputs, such as water and fertiliser, may evenly flow to the rural sector, to introduce the necessary incentives to production - these are essential requirements for setting North Bengal's rural sector on the road to progress.

There is, indeed, a need to have adequate research to know as far as possible where the shoe pinches to get rid of the various problems of this region through appropriate measures in both the short and long-run.

The present project has been undertaken mainly to study what the rural leaders are doing in growth-oriented activities in rural North Bengal under a democratic set-up and it is expected that the project may go to a certain extent to bridge the gap on the availability of scholarly literature in this subject in these regions and may also be considered as a timely and meaningful addition to the growing demand for such a type of work on such an important and interesting subject on rural North Bengal.

#### 1.7 Plan of the Research Project

The plan of the research project is as follows :

In chapter I, characteristics of North Bengal, rural development in North Bengal, object and scope of the study, available scholarly literature on rural development and leadership in North Bengal, significance of the study, importance of the present study and the plan of the research project have been given.

In chapter II, various concepts used in the present study as well as conceptual framework and theoretical concepts of rural leadership and rural development have been given.

In chapter III, an attempt has been made to discuss in brief, on the methodology and sampling design used to analyse the topics in chapters IV, V, VI, VII, VIII and IX.

In chapter IV, an attempt has been made to study "Rural Conditions in North Bengal — A study of a village in Jalpaiguri district." Such a study may help us for a better comprehension of the problem at hand, though, one may note varying conditions/trends in different villages in the sample district. Even then, the study in this section may provide us with fruitful information and insights about what is really going on economically, socially and politically in rural areas, which in turn, may help us to better analyse the problem under study. Therefore, before closely analysing the problem at hand, it has been decided to study the aforesaid conditions. The sample village for this purpose is, "JATESWAR" in "PALAKATA BLOCK". The period of study is 1973 - 75.

In chapter V, nature and problems of rural leadership in rural development have been studied in "BALAPARA" village in Jalpaiguri district. The period of study is 1973 - 75.

In chapter VI, an attempt has, however, been made to understand rural leadership in growth-oriented activities in the village "GURUDEVPUR" in the sample district. The period of study is 1973 - 75.

In chapter VII, leadership in agriculture has been studied in "DEVNAGAR" village in the sample district. The period of study is 1974 - 75.

In chapter VIII, a further attempt has, however, been made to study the role of leader groups in rural development. For this, "Mainaguri Block" in the sample district has been taken up as our sample area. The reasons for considering a block instead of a single village are mainly that, the problem for its greater understanding, may need a larger area in the context of studying the role of leader groups in the growth-oriented activities in the sample area. Thus, in a wider canvas, the study of such actions and reactions of different leader groups may better be appreciated than that of in the smaller area. Such a contention may or may not be tenable but the present author has, however, decided in the aforesaid line while studying the said problem. The period of study is 1973 - 75.

In chapter IX, an attempt has been made to test the hypothesis that "Leadership in agriculture is higher in the scheduled castes group than the 'rest' or the non-scheduled castes group in Mainaguri Block in Jalpaiguri district, North Bengal during 1973 - 75."

In chapter X, a further attempt has, however, been made to analyse some of the facts gathered and used in preparing the earlier chapters referred to already.

In Appendix, select information of Jalpaiguri district have been given to describe the background information of the sample district. Before going for the subject, it is, perhaps, desirable to know some information about the sample district for a better understanding of the project.

The present study is then, not based on armchair research. It is primarily based on field research. However, the author wishes to acknowledge his intellectual debts to some select books and articles from which he has fruitfully appropriated insights for the present work and a select "Bibliography" is added for the reasons referred to above.