



DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALIZATION, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

The notion of decentralisation and good governance are prominent in contemporary development discourse. It is now widely accepted that to be effective, governance should be pluralistic; authority should be spread across many levels and across 'multiple centers of authority' (Hooge and Marks 2003). India, considered as the largest democracy in the world, has had a long history of theory and practice in the field of decentralisation. Panchayats meaning 'assembly of five people', provide the institutional frame to the concept of democratic decentralisation in rural India.

Keywords: *Democratic Decentralization, Good Governance Rural Development, West Bengal*



1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of decentralisation and good governance are prominent in contemporary development discourse. It is now widely accepted that to be effective, governance should be pluralistic; authority should be spread across many levels and across 'multiple centers of authority' (Hooge and Marks 2003). India, considered as the largest democracy in the world, has had a long history of theory and practice in the field of decentralisation. Panchayats meaning 'assembly of five people', provide the institutional frame to the concept of democratic decentralisation in rural India. Since independence several attempts have been made to revitalize the system by constituting different committees and commissions. India has reached a landmark in the progress towards democratic decentralisation in 1992 when parliament passed a Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act. As a result, Panchayati raj institutions in the country are accorded with the constitutional status and came to be regarded as third tier of governance. The most important thing in our country is that the majority of the people live in rural areas. The rural development thus becomes the foremost task of public policies. And development in India will have relevance only when people in the rural areas are made its beneficiaries. Thus, to achieve the goal of development, the decentralization of power to the local bodies is necessary which generates the people's participation and help in the implementation of rural development programmes. Indeed, decentralization and good governance have been the sine quo non for development in the developing countries in general and India in particular.

Democratic Decentralization is one of the most popular terms used in the literature of development planning. The concept has been gaining ground in the present century both in the policy formulation as well as implementation and administration. It is indeed a broad term and covers many different phenomena and hence, lacks precise meaning and consensus (Mawhood 1985). In other words, it means different things to different scholars. The Chamber Dictionary of 21st Century defined the term 'decentralization' as 'the process of transferring the functions from the central governments to the local units'. In the Encyclopedia of Social Science, it denotes 'the transference of authority-legislative, judicial or administrative -from a higher level of government to a lower level'.



The term decentralization, whatever may be the meaning and definition, is the result of over centralization and also because of the theory of the construction of minimal state and strong and active civil society. Since, the concept of decentralization is closely related to civil society and good governance in that the civil society is activated with decentralization and if the governing mechanism is dispersed and decentralized it results in good governance. Thus, if the governance is decentralized with the civil society operating freely and effectively, it will pave the way for good governance which in turn will ensure the all round development of the state. A survey of the intellectual discourse of decentralization reveals three broad categories of theories: the classical liberal theories, development theories and neo-liberal theories. The intellectual case for decentralisation originates in the most basic arguments concerning democratic government and the effective representation of citizens' interest. The classical liberal democratic theorists like Mill, de Tocqueville, Laski, Madison and Wilson were the first to make a strong case for decentralisation considering possible benefits to be percolated to the national and local levels.

The idea of decentralisation is however the inevitable logical outcome of the neo-liberal theoretical construction of minimal state and strong and active civil society (Yasin and Sengupta 2004). The assumption underlying the paradigm is that if the state is minimized for effective democracy and individual freedom, and if the governing system is decentralised to involve and ascertain the choices of the people, it will lead to good governance that will result in development. It suggests that an order of minimal state with decentralised good governance for the existence and effectiveness of the civil society based on social capital will make the civil society vigilant on the governing process. It is on this neo-liberal premise that emphases have been shifted to decentralisation and good governance as the sine qua non for development (ibid). However, in recent years, the normative character of decentralization has been subjected to scathing criticism by a number of scholars who view these theories as rhetorical and camouflaged with ideological overtones (Yasin et al 2003). Conceptually rooted to the works of Marx and Gramsci, the writings of Fesler, Sarnoff, Heyden, Smith, Rakodi, Slater and Heaphey demonstrate with empirical evidence that decentralization had rarely facilitated development in the developing countries. Heaphey (1971) goes to the extent of arguing that decentralization is an obstacle to development. Similarly many have also criticized the argument put forward by the neoliberal in support of decentralisation and said decentralisation need not necessarily



imply downsizing the state, a favourite argument of neo-liberals. Decentralisation is a means of making the state more effective. Devolution can be a strategic response of the 'affirmative democratic state' to the neo-liberal onslaught (Fung and Wright 2000). As a result of these criticisms, there emerged an alternative paradigm in the study of decentralisation. One of the important paradigms that is emerging is privatization as a form of decentralisation in contrast to decentralisation through the local government entities.

1.1 Problem Statement

From the review of the existing literature, it appears that most of the studies deal with the democratic decentralization of the country as a whole. There are however very few literature on decentralization in Sikkim. Thus, the present study seeks to make an indepth study of democratic decentralisation and rural development in Sikkim and thereby seeks to fill the research gap that is there on the relationship between decentralized governance and rural development in Sikkim.

With the beginning of British rule, the changes started occurring in cultural, sociopolitical and economic profiles of Indian villages. The British's highly centralized system of administration had deeply affected the village institutions including the Panchayats. All the powers and responsibilities were withdrawn from the people of India and concentrated in the hands of Governor General. The Report of the Congress Village Panchayat Committee states that, the inordinate greed of the East India Company caused slow but steady disintegration of these village Panchayats. The deliberate introduction of land-lordism and Ryotwari system as against the Mauzwari or village tenure system dealt almost a deathblow to the corporate life of the village communities. The excessive centralization of the executive and judicial powers in the hands of the government officials deprived the village functionaries of their age long powers and influence" (ALCC 1954). While looking on the administrative system of British government, a noted political philosopher James Bryce said that "There was under Rome and there is in British India no room for popular institutions or popular interference with the acts of rulers from the Viceroy down to a district official" (Bryce 1901). As the Britisher in India had no real interest in the well-being of the people and hence they had no any intention of introducing the local bodies that serve best the people residing at the village level. They believed that Indians were illiterate and backward in the art of government and hence unfit and

incompetent to work in democratic institutions. It was because of this attitude of Britishers towards Indians that they had framed no major policy for the introduction of local bodies in India. However after the Indian Mutiny of 1857, with the governance of India being transferred from the hands of the East India Company to the Crown, attempts were made to co-opt the native elite by establishing representative local governments. The British government sought to transfer responsibility for roads and public work to local bodies (Tinker 1967). These local governments were formed in a "top-down" manner in urban and rural areas, with extremely circumscribed functions and members who were not locally elected but nominated by the British bureaucracy (Cheema et al 2004). Further, the British administrators themselves wanted to be relieved of the heavy burden of the highly centralized functions of local self-government from the top for their own convenience. Consequently, a few steps were taken by the government for setting up some local bodies to serve the villages.

1.2 Rationale of the study

The government is therefore giving more emphasis on the good governance for the successful implementation of the programmes with active participation of people through local bodies institutions. The government considered good governance as one of the most crucial factors required to achieve the goals outlined in different plans and hence taken several steps to restructure the administration in response to the impetus, both from domestic and external sources. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992), one of such steps, appears to be significant because of the felt-impact on the prevalent governance. Interestingly, this Amendment to the Constitution made especially to reform in the governance system coincide not only with the liberalization impetus of the central government, but also with the World Bank's marked emphasis on 'good governance' and decentralisation. As a fundamental impulse of policy making moves away from centralized state institutions towards the markets, this Amendment, in principle, facilitates the creation of structures that devolve power to the localized bodies (Chakrabarty 2007). The Act has eroded the bureaucratic monopoly over the development processes and has shifted the locus of power to the people at the grass roots. Democratic decentralisation of administration and development will percolate down to the gram Sabha and panchayats at the village, block and district levels. The people at the grass root will get an opportunity to enhance their capabilities to frame plans from below, to execute developmental activities with effective participation of people. Guided by the idea of good governance, the policy makers have



designed and launched new programmes that are different from earlier programmes. All the new programmes seek to enable the people to participate in the programme. Every programme of recent years aims to establish close linkage with decentralised institutions and achieve the development outcomes through good governance principles of participation, transparency, accountability and openness.

1.3 Geographical Location

Geography of West Bengal, a state in eastern India, is diverse, of high peaks of Himalaya in the northern extremes to where Himalayas are in the north and sea is at the south, with both plains and plateaus covering the remaining region. West Bengal is on the eastern bottleneck of India, stretching from the Himalayas in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south. It lies between 85 degree 50 minutes and 89 degree 50 minutes east longitude, and 21 degrees 25 minutes and 27 degrees 13 minutes north latitude. The state has a total area of 88,752 square kilometres (34,267 sq mi). With Bangladesh, which lies on its eastern border, the state forms the ethno-linguistic region of Bengal. To its northeast lie the states of Assam and Sikkim and the country Bhutan, and to its southwest, the state of Orissa. To the west it borders the state of Jharkhand and Bihar, and to the northwest, Nepal. The capital of the state is Kolkata, the third-largest urban agglomeration and the seventh-largest city in India.

West Bengal is a state in the eastern region of India along the Bay of Bengal. With over 91 million inhabitants, it is the fourth-most populous state and the fourteenth-largest state by area in India. Covering an area of 88,752 km² (34,267 sq mi), it is also the seventh-most populous country subdivision of the world. Part of the Bengal region of the Indian subcontinent, it borders Bangladesh in the east, and Nepal and Bhutan in the north. It also borders the Indian states of Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Sikkim and Assam. The state capital is Kolkata, the third-largest metropolis, and seventh largest city by population in India. West Bengal includes the Darjeeling Himalayan hill region, the Ganges delta, the Rarh region and the coastal Sundarbans. The state's main ethnic group is the Bengalis, with the Bengali Hindus forming the demographic majority.



1.4 Scope of the Study

The rural development in India has been one of the constant goals of the Five Year Plan. It forms the crux of country's development strategy. The main objective of rural development programmes is to raise the living standard of the rural poor by providing them opportunities for the fullest utilization of their potential through active participation in the process of goal-oriented change. However, any form of community development could be effective only in a decentralised governance system. The many scholars have justified the argument. James Manor (1999), for instance, identifies a number of ways in which democratic decentralisation can promote rural development. Most promising, he argues, is the impact it can have on local participation, government transparency and public accountability. Slightly less promising is the notion that decentralised and democratic arrangements can encourage more flexible government programmes and policies (in particular, ones that move away from agricultural productivity), enhance government commitment to rural development and reduce economic disparities within region. Hence, the decentralisation is a necessary precondition for rural development. Realising the need for good governance and to achieve the goals of rural upliftment, the administrative machinery at different level has been restructured. Though the provision for the Panchayati Raj, as a framework of rural local self-government with inbuilt decentralizing tendencies, was incorporated in the Part IV of the Constitution of India, it was only in 1992 the PRis in India has been provided with statutory status. In order to revitalize the system of PRis the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act 1992 was passed which accord a constitutional recognition to the PRis. This constitutional mandate in 73rd Amendment envisaging empowerment of panchayats with financial and functional responsibilities has opened a new vista for good governance. Considered as a landmark in Indian political development, the Act of 1992 enabled the decentralisation of highly centralized state governments. This Amendment gave the panchayats decision-making powers in 29 areas identified in the XI schedule. As per the provisions of the schedule XI of the constitution, panchayats have been devolved to prepare their plans in respect of 29 subjects for their economic development and social justice and to implement their schemes. Besides, the Act aims at reducing political and bureaucratic interference in rural development programmes. Furthermore, the statutory recognition of gram Sabha as the locus of local governance has radically altered the power structure at the grass roots. Now, these gram Sabha are authorized to discuss and suggest policies for development, identify beneficiaries for

various development programmes, discuss the panchayat budget and review and monitor the implementation of various development programmes (Chakrabarty 2007). The role of gram Sabha is stress equally much. It is intended to be the platform for widespread transparency and accountability. Its central function is to take stock of past developments, review expenditure and to decide about new developmental activities in the light of budgetary provisions (Rajasekhar et al 2007). The implementation of the rural development programmes, in general, will get boost as a result of strengthening the panchayats. Hence, it will be no exaggeration to say that it is in a decentralised local government system that most of the attributes of good governance have a chance to 86 survive and prosper.

1.5 Limitations

1. Decentralisation can overcome the severe limitations of multi-sectoral national planning by delegating responsibility for planning to officials who are working closer to the problems
2. Decentralisation can provide better services to local preferences strengthening local accountability and supporting local economic development
3. It strengthens accountability because it increases proximity between representatives and electorate
4. Decentralisation promotes corruption, red tape and inefficiency because of low incomes and a parochial democratic set up
5. Another danger inherent in the movement of greater decentralisation and local autonomy is that local entities have narrow perspective and thus effort to implement broad public policy for a country can be thwarted by the actions of local governmental authorities.

1.6 Hypothesis

A hypothesis is in the nature of a statement that makes some assertion which the researcher wants to prove or disprove by means of evidence(facts) and argument, or which can be put to test to determine whether it is true or not. In order to explain and analyse the above-mentioned objectives, following hypotheses were formed. They are as follows: -



1. Democratic decentralization or Panchayati Raj aims at ensuring inclusion of excluded sections of society especially women, SCs,STs
2. Inadequate devolution of functions, functionaries and funds to PRIs tends to lead to inefficiency in decentralized rural governance.
3. The successful implementation of welfare programmes is dependent on empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions.
4. Democratic decentralization is the basic pre-requisite for the deepening of grassroots democracy.
5. The effective PRIs are the best instruments for ensuring responsive and accountable governance at the grassroots and it leads to good governance.
6. Democratic decentralization is a basic requirement for ensuring people's participation and empowerment at the local level.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rajiv Sen (2013) After forty years of experiments in democratic decentralization, the constitutional directive was taken seriously and by 73rd (Amendment) Constitution Act of the Indian Constitution, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) were accorded constitutional sanction. In order to ensure effective participation of the people in line with the requirements of local democracy as well as to revitalize and reorient the civil society, new institutions in the form of Gram Sabha were brought into being. The state of West Bengal pushed the idea of local democracy a step further by devising another institution below the Gram Sabha, namely, Gram Sansad to ensure more effective and more functional grassroots democracy.

Soumyadip Chattopadhyay (2012) One of the major promises of decentralization is that it brings popular participation and accountability to local governance and, therefore, makes local government more responsive to citizens' desires and more effective in delivering services. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act in India provides the much-needed platform to operationalize the rhetoric of decentralization into reality. This amendment marks a distinct watershed in the concept and practice of citizens' participation in urban governance. Acknowledging the importance of participation in democratic local government, this article, using primary data, evaluates the implications of constitutional provisions for participation and accountability at the municipal level in West Bengal.



The study finds that a large gap exists between the rhetoric surrounding the constitutional provisions and their actual implementations. Political nature of the ward committee and thin attendance of the citizens in the meetings put a question mark on the efficacy of the WC as a true participative forum at the municipal level. The numerical representation has not transformed into effective representation with respect to participation of elected representatives and their accountability in municipal governments.

Dr Sujit Kumar Paul (2014) The term ‘decentralisation’ has generally been used to refer to a variety of institutional reforms. It has sometimes been considered as a change in the organisational framework in which political, social and economic decisions are made and implemented. It is also understood as a mechanism to transfer responsibility and authority. In recent years, decentralisation has received singular attention all over the world. It has been considered as one of the most important elements in development strategy. It is a global and regional phenomenon, and most countries have attempted to implement it as a tool for development, as a political philosophy, and as a mechanism for sharing responsibility at different levels. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in West Bengal are very strong bodies, which function as real institutions of self-governance. In West Bengal, the planning process of grass-root level has some stages from proposal to implementation. After introduction of 3-tier Panchayat system in 1978, the Government of West Bengal brought about need-based reforms in the system from time to time from the very beginning. Encouraged by the State Government’s strong commitment to rural decentralisation, Department for International Development (DFID), Government of UK came forward to support the ongoing rural decentralisation initiatives and upscale the bottom-up planning process. In the present study, an attempt has been made to understand the role of DFID for strengthening decentralisation in rural Bengal.

Pranab Bardhan (2014) Since the late 1970s the West Bengal government has implemented comprehensive reforms of agrarian institutions including land reform (land redistribution, tenancy registration) and democratic decentralization (devolution of agricultural development program delivery to elected local governments). We provide an overview of our research findings concerning the accountability of local governments and the impact of their program interventions on farm yields and agricultural incomes. Programs administered by the local governments were reasonably well targeted to the poor, with a few exceptions. Targeting improved as local elections became more



contested and deteriorated with greater socioeconomic inequality. The tenancy registration program, distribution of agricultural minikits, IRDP credit, and irrigation programs administered by local governments had significant effects on subsequent growth in farm productivity and incomes. The benefits diffused widely among farms within the village and trickled down to landless agricultural workers in the form of higher wage rates.

A Udayaadithya (2011) This paper critically evaluates the popular representation of rural decision making in India as guided by socio-cultural dynamics and as a resort from various social alignments. It investigates how decisions get taken about a decentralized governance scheme in rural India, what variables impact these decisions – namely, social, political, administrative or economic – and how these variables impact the scheme performance. Case studies and empirical analysis of performance of a decentralized welfare scheme in India, the Andhra Pradesh Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (APREGS), demonstrates significant influence of agriculture-based economic dynamics and administrative efficiency factors. Local social hierarchies and cultural complexities do not come as the main concerns. These results challenge the traditional understanding of rural dynamics as totally controlled by caste hierarchies and authority of the large land owners and are discussed in the light of the institutional rational choice framework proposed by Elinor Ostrom. The results also call for a fresh and wider debate of whether India is witnessing a longer term indirect developmental outcome of empowerment which actively started in 1993 with the recognition of local governance systems (Panchayati Raj) as a formal democratic body.

Bhaskar Chakrabarti (2013) In order to overcome inefficient allocation of natural resources, there is a trend to make government more accountable to local people through decentralisation. Today, when farmers are moving away from the agricultural sector in West Bengal, India, for which water scarcity is one of the main causes, low participation in the local government are a cause for alarm. I search for the causes behind the low level of participation of local people in decision-making processes regarding water management. I analyse the complex process of decentralisation, and show how water allocation at the village level is nested within various levels of hierarchy. These involve politics over access to water and relations of power that include interactions between political parties, government agencies and the local elite. The political interference in the decentralisation process creates problems in local participation and decision-making that lead to a skewed allocation of water.

Pranab Bardhan (2008) This paper uses results of a household survey to study patterns of political participation (turnout, awareness, attendance at political and civic meetings, involvement in political campaigns, voting) and their relation to local governance in rural West Bengal, a state in Eastern India. With the exception of education and immigrant status, reported participation rates varied remarkably little with socio-economic status. Allocation of government-disbursed benefits within villages displayed no significant association with wealth, caste, education, gender or political affiliation of household head. In contrast, allocation of benefits across villages displayed bias against poor and low caste groups; these biases were larger in villages with more unequal land distribution and lower participation rates in village meetings. Political support among voters for the incumbent party dominating the local government was positively correlated with receipt of recurring benefits and help provided by local governments in times of personal need, but independent of more long-term, one-time benefits or local public goods provided.

RICHARD C. CROOK (2003) Decentralisation advocates argue that decentralised governments are more responsive to the needs of the poor than central governments and thus are more likely to conceive and implement pro-poor policies. Recent evidence from a selected group of subSaharan African countries is reviewed in a comparative framework that highlights factors associated with success in poverty reduction. It is argued that the degree of responsiveness to the poor and the extent to which there is an impact on poverty are determined primarily by the politics of local–central relations and the general regime context—particularly the ideological commitment of central political authorities to poverty reduction. In most of the cases, ‘elite capture’ of local power structures has been facilitated by the desire of ruling elites to create and sustain power bases in the countryside. Popular perceptions of the logic of patronage politics, combined with weak accountability mechanisms, have reinforced this outcome. The conclusion from these African cases is that decentralisation has not empowered challenges to local elites who are resistant or indifferent to pro-poor policies. Thus, decentralisation is unlikely to lead to more pro-poor outcomes without a serious effort to strengthen and broaden accountability mechanisms at both local and national levels.

Richard C. Crook and Alan Sturla Sverrison, (2008) two researcher of England at the end of the decade searched out a new theory of interrelationship between erasing poverty and decentralization. Their research with the data of eight countries voiced the outcome that the positive relation between



decentralization and development has only been observed in West Bengal. Other than these, from economic perspectives also, the state of West Bengal seems stable. The SRD Cell (Strengthening Rural Development) of Government of West Bengal has revealed that between 1973-74 and 2004-05, population below poverty line has come down from 73.2 per cent to 28.6 per cent. That is, the rate of poverty reduction in West Bengal (44.6 per cent) during this period is just after Kerala (46 per cent) 1. Not only that, during 1980- 1999, agriculture has grown at 6.5 per cent in the state which is highest among the states in India. During the same period, State Domestic Product (SDP) in West Bengal has increased almost eight times.

Datta, P.K (2020) In India, the idea of decentralized planning gained momentum after the country became independent in 1947 but its rudimentary practice was not completely unknown before 1947. In post-independent India a number of government committees and commissions had recommended for introduction of decentralized planning at different points of time. The most remarkable event in this regard were twin Constitutional amendments which clarified the role of local bodies and institutionalized participation of the people which signaled what is often called a paradigmatic change. The amendments gave decentralized planning constitutional sanction and sanctity, and provided a model of planning for the whole country. In this paper, an attempt has been made to capture the different phases in the evolution of the decentralized planning processes in India as a backdrop and to assess and analyze the experiences of introduction of decentralized planning in one state of the Union of Indian states called West Bengal. It is one of the states where the exercise was done through active participation of people sought to be achieved through institutional structures created in the villages. This paper tries to make use of the available secondary data to arrive at some of the major conclusions and to justify the contentions made. Reference has also been made to some limited field work which was done through village survey. The authors have also highlighted some of the key emerging issues which call for further research. It also seeks to explore what could be the probable lessons the developing countries in general, and India, in particular.

2.1 Research Gap

Presently, people's participation has emerged as a political slogan as it has become the pre-condition for development. Broadly, the people's participation in rural panchayat means their total involvement with its programme and activities. In democracy, the role of political parties is of utmost significance.

It is termed as 'life of democracy'. It is the responsibility of the political parties to keep alive the spirit of democracy. In democracy, the political parties not only create the consciousness among the citizen, but, in fact, they also act as a weapon of working class to establish their rights. But in the research of those economists and political theorists, it has emerged that the whole operation of the Panchayat system in West Bengal during Left Front regime has been determined by its political strategy. This view has also been reflected in the research findings of scholars like Bandyopadhyay (1999), Webster (1999) and Bhattacharya (1998) that the CPM party has increasingly organized itself along strong democratic centralized lines. The party asserts a strong control over its members and supporters, including the members of the Panchayats. Those studies brings one unique conclusion that the affairs of the GPs are discussed by the local party members in closed door meetings and the elected supporters are then advised as to how party policy should be carried out through the GPs.

3. OBJECTIVES

- (i) The study seeks to find out how and to what extent the decentralization of power has ensured good governance and these two together helped in the proper implementation of the rural development programmes in the state and rural areas in particular.
- (ii) to find out the interrelationship between decentralization, good governance and rural development
- (iii) To what extent has the decentralized governance led to rural development
- (iv) to make an in-depth study of democratic decentralisation and rural development
- (v) Whether the present state of decentralized governance in West Bengal fulfils the criteria of good governance.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology that is followed in the present study is the combination of observation and survey. The present research proceeds along a combination of exploratory, descriptive and diagnostic research designs. First, available literature on decentralization, good governance and rural development in

general and with reference to West Bengal in particular has been surveyed to gain insight into the state of decentralized governance in West Bengal in both historical and analytical perspective. Then, the observation method has been adopted to comprehend the structural, operational and behavioural aspects of decentralised governance in West Bengal and its role in the process of rural development in West Bengal. Finally, a sample survey has been conducted in the four districts of West Bengal to find out precisely the present status of decentralised governance and its role in achieving the goals of good governance and development in West Bengal. Here sample of common people living in rural areas, politicians from the village level up to the state level and the officials from village level to state level has been interviewed on the basis of a prepared schedule. The information that will be collected under the exploratory design were processed manually and were supplemented by the insights of the researcher that will be gathered throughout the investigation. As for the information collected through the survey method, data will be analysed through computer using the software of the Statistical Package for Social Science to measure the relationship and diagnose the reasons for positive/negative role of decentralized governing institutions in the process of achieving the goals of good governance and development in West Bengal.

Universe of the Study

The universe of the present research comprised all the different categories of respondents of all the districts of West Bengal.

5. EXPECTED OUTCOME

Decentralisation has become one of the most debated policy issues since 1980s throughout both developed and developing worlds. It is seen as central to the development efforts of countries as far afield as Chile, China, Gautemala and Nepal. And in the multiple guises of subsidiarity, devolution and federalism it is also squarely in the foreground of policy discourse in the US, UK and EU (Faguet 2003;2005). It becomes more popular among the developing countries than the developed where devolution of power may be the answer to central governments' sub-par achievement of good governance. Decentralisation as it was argued can make government more responsive to the governed by 'tailoring levels of consumption to the preferences of smaller, more homogeneous groups' (Wallis



and Oates 1988). According to the World Bank, decentralisation 'permits a degree of institutional competition between centres of authority that can reduce the risk that governments will expropriate wealth' (World Bank 2005). However, the positive impact of decentralisation on governance is not as obvious as it might look at first sight (Dreher 2006). Decentralisation can create coordination problems thereby delaying or preventing reforms (Oates 1999). Local governments are too susceptible to elite capture. Notwithstanding of these disadvantages of decentralisation, many countries in the world adopted the decentralisation as a major national policy in response to the many failings of centralized government. The local government is the bulwark against centralisation of state power. It will make the government more responsive, transparent and accountable. Thus, decentralisation in all its constituent elements has a close relationship with responsive administration and good governance. Good governance, when seen in terms of effective decentralisation is equivalent to purposive and development-oriented administration, which is committed to the improvement in quality of life of the people (Pal 2003). In a unique econometric analysis of decentralisation as a tool to achieve good governance, Ruther and Shah construct Governance Quality Index (GQI) and estimate the impact of decentralisation on that Index. The results indicate that the quality of governance is increasing with decentralisation levels.

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