PREFACE

Democratic decentralization in the spirit of the Indian Constitution started its operation in the rural areas in West Bengal in 1958. But very few publications based on field work on this grass-root democracy are available. Therefore, an attempt has been made to assess how far the basic objectives of the four-tier Panchayati Raj Institution — "remodelling of Local Government with a view to associating the local authorities with development activities and bringing about democratic decentralization and people's participation in planning and development" — have been realised. A critical discussion on some of the allied problems of the Panchayats — their constitutional structure, administration, functions, finance, government control, etc. — have also been made, and remedies suggested.

The present researcher personally visited the Districts of Burdwan, Howrah, Hooghly, 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, and also two Districts of North Bengal — Cooch Behar and Malda and collected information and materials. But the materials of other Districts were collected from the Directorate of Panchayats, Government of West Bengal, and through mailing method. In this connection it may be mentioned that the author received with thanks the financial assistance amounting to Rs.1,000.00 from
the University Grants Commission, New Delhi for buying books and undertaking field work.

The researcher has been much benefited by holding discussions with many officials, people's representatives and the common villagers. The lectures delivered by the researcher in the Panchayat training camps organised by the Government and the discussions with the trainees, have been utilised, where necessary, in the writing of this thesis.

Many dark aspects of the Panchayat administration have been revealed as a result of the discussions the researcher had with Sri S.T. Banerjoe, former Director of Panchayats and Sri A. De, Dy. Director of Panchayats, who are associated with the Departments of the Community Development and the Panchayat since their inception. Thanks are due to them as well as to my supervisor Dr. R.C. Ghosh, Centenary Professor of Public Administration, University of Calcutta, whose constant inspiration and guidance have been of immense value for completion of this work.