Defining Public Policy

An urban local government institution is a public authority. When an elected urban local body – a municipality or a municipal corporation – governs a town or a city, it is basically engaged in public policy making. Public policy is a complex phenomenon consisting of numerous decisions made by number of individuals and organizations. There are many competing definitions of public policy which differ considerably. Despite their variations, they all agree on certain key aspects. They agree that public policies result from decisions made by governments and that, decisions by governments to do nothing are just as much policy as are decisions to do something.¹ We can, here, briefly mention some of the competing definitions. Lasswell and Kaplan define policy as “a projected programme of goals, values and practices”.² According to J. Anderson, policy making involves “a pattern of action extending over time and involving many decisions”. Rackoff and Shaefer opine that “public policy consists of the action and inaction of the

(political) system in response to the demands made on it. Public policies result from the blend of politics and government. David Easton defines politics as "the authoritative allocation of values". Public policy, for him, then, is as important in defining prevailing values (politics) as it is in defining solutions to prevailing problems (through government). Even though examples of public policy come readily to mind, defining public policy in clear and unambiguous terms is not easy. Political Scientists have devoted considerable attention to the problem without reaching a consensus. The term public policy always refers to the actions of government and the intentions that determine those actions. Making policy requires choosing among goals and alternatives, and making a choice always involves intentions. Policy is seldom a single action, but is most often a series of actions coordinated to achieve a goal. Thus, Clarke E. Cochran defines public policy as "an intentional course of action followed by a government institution or official for resolving an issue of public concern." William Jenkins conceptualizes public policy as "a set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or a group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle, be within the power of those actors to achieve." Combining and summarizing the varied definitions stated above, we can have a more or less comprehensive meaning of the term 'public policy' which is as follows. Public policy involves a set of interrelated decisions and non-decisions, concerning certain desired outcomes and the means of achieving them and generating, over time, a pattern of the action and

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inaction of the political system in response to demand made on it. Policy making thus involves both statement of goals and objectives and their implementation. Policy involves a process whereby policy-makers attempt to deal with a problem, defining options, making decisions and implementing possible solutions. Essentially, policy is about three processes — the intentions of political and other key actors; the way decisions or non-decisions are made; and the consequences of these decisions.

Alternative Models of Public Policy Decision-Making

During the early development of the policy sciences, the decision-making stage of the policy cycle received the most attention of the scholars. By the mid 1960s, discussions about public policy decision-making centered around the debate concerning the ‘rational’ and the ‘incremental’ models. The analysts borrowed heavily from the models of decision-making in complex organizations developed by students of public administration and business organization. The mainstream position was that while the ‘rational’ model was more preferable as a model of how decisions ought to be taken, the ‘incremental’ model best described the actual practice of decision-making in governments. Since 1970s efforts were made to develop alternative models of decision-making. Some attempted to synthesize the rational and incremental models while others attempted to arrive at an alternative path beyond rationalism and incrementalism.

Theories of decision-making are important because they provide us with a framework for understanding the complex relationships which surround policy making. They shape definitions, provide guidance in structuring problems, make some types of enquiry more critical than others, and provide normative and empirical standards with which to judge the merit and adequacy of policy. They

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6 Howlett and Ramesh, *op.cit.* p. 137.
also shape the questions addressed and the values emphasized in policy analysis.\textsuperscript{7} We will here briefly look into some of the major models of public policy decision-making.

\textit{The Rational Model}

This model is rooted in the early attempts by scholars to establish a science of organizational behavior and public administration. Elements of the model can be found in the works of Henry Fayol, Luther Gulik and Lyndal Urwick. The PODSCORB model they developed suggests that organizations can maximize their performance by systematically Planning, Organizing, Deciding, Selecting, Coordinating, Recruiting and Budgeting. The rational model is based on the belief that society's problems ought to be solved in a 'scientific' or 'rational' manner by gathering all relevant information on the problems and the alternative solution to them, and then selecting the best alternative. The model is 'rational' in the sense that it prescribes procedures for decision making that will lead to the choice of the most efficient means of achieving policy goals. According to the Rational Model, decision making is a purposeful, consistent, sequential, and deliberate process. Rationality is considered as the ideal to be achieved during decision making. It is argued that in rational decision making: (a) the goals and objectives of decision makers are clear and known in advance; (b) the decision maker chooses the best alternative among all possible courses of action; (c) full information about the consequences of possible courses of action is available; and (d) there is no uncertainty involved.\textsuperscript{8} The rational model centres on the assumption that the policy maker already has clearly defined goals and has a range of tools for obtaining such objectives. The decision maker is assumed to be seeking solutions


to well determined problems and employing the most optimal (best) means for achieving clearly defined ends.\textsuperscript{9}

The Rational Model, however, has come under attack because obvious problems arise in trying to meet its rigorous requirements. One of the first to challenge the assumptions behind the rational model was the American behavioural scientist Herbert Simon. He argued that decision makers are not "infallible machines" that make decisions in the most rational and analytical way and that, several hurdles prevent decision makers from attaining 'pure' comprehensive rationality in their decisions.\textsuperscript{10} First, there are cognitive limits to the decision maker's ability to consider all possible options, forcing them to consider alternatives selectively. Secondly, values and goals are not always clear. Thirdly, in reality, it is not possible for the decision makers to know the consequences of each decision in advance. Finally, each policy option entails a bundle of favourable and adverse consequences which makes comparisons among them difficult indeed.

In the conventional idea of a rational decision, a decision-maker 'maximizes' something – utility or want satisfaction, income, national security, the general welfare, or some other such value. Simon's assessment of the rational model concludes that public decisions in practice do not maximize benefits over costs, but merely tend to 'satisfy' whatever criteria decision makers set for themselves in the instance in question. He coined the term \textit{satisfying}\textsuperscript{11} and argued that the decision maker in fact merely 'satisfices' instead of 'maximizing'. Simon further stated that the decision makers, in fact, act with \textit{bounded rationality}.\textsuperscript{12} According to him, the decision makers are constrained by their personal values, the structure

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\textsuperscript{9} Barrie Axford et. al., \textit{Politics: An Introduction (2\textsuperscript{nd} edition)}, London and New York, Routledge, 2002.


\textsuperscript{11} ibid.

and culture of their organizations, and the unpredictability of a complex political environment.

The Incremental Model

Doubts about the practicality or even usefulness of the rational comprehensive model led to the development of a theory of decision making more closely approximate to the actual behaviour of decision makers in real life situations. The incremental model was born. It was first developed by Charles E. Lindblom who used the concept 'incrementalism'. The concept sees policy making as effecting incremental or marginal changes in policy. The decisional strategy for the policy maker is to concentrate on familiar, better known experience, reduce sharply the number of different alternative policies to be explored, and thereby reduce the number and complexity of analyzable factors. Lindblom proposes an alternative to the rational comprehensive model. This second method he describes as 'the method of successive limited comparisons', as contrasted with the first – 'the rational-comprehensive method'. In Lindblom's view, decision-makers develop policies through a process of making 'successive limited comparisons' with earlier decisions, those they are familiar with. According to him, decision making becomes "muddling through". In his oft-cited article 'The Science of Muddling Through', he argues that decision makers work through a process of continually building out from the current situation, step-by-step and by small degrees. Decisions thus arrived at are usually only marginally different from those that exist; in other words the changes from the status quo are 'incremental'.

The incremental model views decision making as a practical exercise concerned with solving problems at hand, rather than achieving lofty goals. In this model the

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means chosen for solving problems are discovered through trial-and-error rather than through the comprehensive evaluation of all possible means. Decision makers consider only a few familiar alternatives for appropriateness and stop the search when they believe an acceptable alternative has been found. In their joint work, Lindblom and Braybrook have postulated a continuum of decision process types ranging from the rational economic model to much less rationalistic types. They have coined the term "disjointed incrementalism" to refer to the least rational of all types. The contrast of their model with the ideal of comprehensive decision making is that the orderly sequence of adjusting means to a given number of ends is completely broken. Ends are chosen that are appropriate to available or nearly available means, and they are indefinitely explored, reconsidered, discovered, rather than relatively fixed. Disjointed incrementalism therefore involves a modified view of policy making. Instead of a process conceived in well-defined stages, Lindblom and Braybrooke argue that policy is continuous and cumulative. Policy makers often attempt to avoid innovative policy initiatives. They try to minimize or avoid problems rather than address issues directly.

Even if we consider the incremental model to be a more accurate description of how policies are made in reality, it is not free of shortcomings. Critics have found several faults with the implications of the line of inquiry it suggests. Firstly, it is criticized for its lack of any kind of goal orientation. Secondly, as Yehezkel Dror has argued, the incremental model is inherently conservative, given its suspicion of large-scale change and innovation. Finally, by discouraging systematic analysis and planning and undermining the need to search for promising new alternatives, the model is said to promote short-sighted decisions which can have adverse consequences for society in the long run.

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The limitations of both rational and incremental models led scholars to look for alternatives. Amitai Etzioni, for example, developed his *Mixed Scanning Model*. He attempted to bridge the shortcomings of both rational and incremental models by combining elements from both. The model suggests that optimal decision-making would consist of a cursory search ('scanning') for alternatives followed by a detailed probe of the most promising alternative. This would allow for more innovation than permitted by the incremental model, without imposing the unrealistic demands prescribed by the rational model. He further suggests that indeed this is how decisions are made in reality.

While the *Mixed Scanning Model* tried to strike a balance between rationalism and incrementalism, another model developed by March and Olsen during 1970s asserted the inherent lack of rationality in the decision making process. The model named as *Garbage Can Model* of decision making denied even the limited rationality permitted by incrementalism. They argued that the other models of decision making presume a level of intentionality, comprehension of problems, and predictability of relations among actors that, according to them, simply does not obtain in reality. They view decision making as a highly ambiguous and unpredictable process only distantly related to searching for means to achieve goals. March and Olson argued that decision opportunities were a garbage can into which various problems and solutions are dumped by participants. The mix of garbage in a single can depends on what garbage is being produced at the moment, on the mix of cans available, and on the speed with which garbage is collected and removed from the scene. They used the 'garbage-can' metaphor deliberately to strip away the elements of science and rationality attributed to decision making by earlier theorists. It seems that this model is an

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exaggeration of what actually occurs. While its principal assumptions may be a somewhat accurate description of how at times organizations make decisions, in other instances there definitely is much more order in the decision making process.

The brief overview of the alternative models of decision making presented above give us an idea of the process of decision making by public authorities. The two major models appear to be the 'rational' and the 'incremental'. While the rational model views policy as emerging from a systematic search for the most efficient means of achieving defined goals, the incremental model sees policy as resulting from a compromise between actors who have ill-defined, or even contradictory, goals. The rational model requires the policy makers to foresee the unforeseeable and measure the unmeasurable. It is an unrealistic counsel of perfection. The incremental model, on the contrary, is less demanding and more realistic. Let us have a diagrammatic presentation of the salient features of the two models as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rational Model</th>
<th>Incremental Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ Analysis is comprehensive, all effects of all options are addressed.</td>
<td>➢ Analysis is selective, the object is good policy, not the best policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Goals are set before means are considered.</td>
<td>➢ Goals and means are considered together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Emphasis on perfection.</td>
<td>➢ Less demanding about perfection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Describes how decision ought to be made.</td>
<td>➢ Describes the actual process of decision making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Speaks of ‘maximization’.</td>
<td>➢ Speaks of ‘satisfying’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Theory is heavily used.</td>
<td>➢ Comparison with similar problems is heavily used.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7.1 Models of Decision-Making
The present research has made an attempt to examine the process of policy making by an urban local government institution in West Bengal – Medinipur Municipality in the town of Medinipur. The previous chapter (Ch.6) of this dissertation has dealt with the policy makers and their performance in the city government of Medinipur. We tried to find out how responsive the policy makers have been to the demands of the city people; how efficiently they have performed the task of delivering civic goods and services; and how effectively they have dealt with problems related to municipal finance, municipal personnel, as well as the larger issue of overall and long term development of the urban area. Our study has revealed that the municipal government in Medinipur has not been much successful in solving the major problems of the city. Policy decisions of the local government and their consequences have not been compatible with the needs of the city dwellers. The policy makers in general have failed to tackle successfully the issues and problems stated above. The deplorable condition of basic civic services and amenities and the plight of the city people continue; municipal finance is in a sorry state; inadequate and inefficient staff pattern persists; and overall sustainable urban development remains a far city. The elected and politically responsible local body in the town of Medinipur has not been able to transform people’s needs into political actions.

All that is stated above is basically about policy outputs – about what the city government has done. The discussions made in chapter 6 have primarily focused on the decisions made by Medinipur Municipality to address and solve the civic problems. How the decisions were reached at and why a particular decision was taken/or not taken, were not highlighted. In the present chapter, we will make a modest attempt to throw some light on that. In fact, we will try to reveal what goes on within the black box of decision making mechanism. Policy making is a continuous process. One of the principal models used by political scientists to
understand public policy making is Process Model/Policy Cycle Model. This model tries to simplify the complexity of public policy making by breaking the policy making process down into a number of stages starting with agenda setting and passing through policy formulation, decision making, policy implementation, and finally policy evaluation. First initiated by Harold Lasswell in 1950s, it gained popularity during 1970s and 80s with the works of Charles Jones and James Anderson. This model has been criticized on the basis that it depicts a neat, sequential process, when in fact policy making is actually complicated and interactive. However, the policy cycle is meant as an analytical device highlighting the various points at which critical policy decisions are made rather than as a description of an actual process for all policies. The Policy Cycle model treats the different stages of the policy process as equally significant for comprehending the nature of public policy making. Thus the input components of policies are no less important than the policy outputs. That is why we want to look inside the mechanism of municipal decision making in the city of Medinipur.

The Three Case Studies

We have selected three case studies related to three different areas of urban governance in Medinipur – municipal services, municipal personnel, and urban infrastructure development – with reference to which we attempt to analyse the decision making process in the city government. One of the major features of urban politics is that it is the politics of want, of basic services, of minimum security of life and property. The processes, by which these needs are perceived, combined, advocated and fulfilled, constitute the crux of urban politics. The city can be viewed as a distributional mechanism. This is true of the city as a whole and of the government within it. An elected local government in an urban area is

expected to look after and manage the local issues and problems. City people depend upon the urban local government for basic civic services and amenities. The city government, in response to public needs, is to allocate resources among the urban residents through its policies and actions. Thus municipal service delivery constitutes one of the major components of municipal decision making. We have discussed in detail in chapter 5 of this dissertation about the major issues of city politics in Medinipur. Day-to-day needs of the city people for the basic civic amenities and services constitute one such major issue. And among the various civic needs, the lack of adequate supply of drinking water for the town people has been the most serious problem of everyday civic life in Medinipur. That is why we take up this issue of municipal service delivery as a case study to inquire how decisions were taken by the municipal government to solve this problem.

Case Study: 1 – Drinking Water Supply

Lack of adequate supply of drinking water to the people has been a perennial problem in the town of Medinipur. Presently the daily requirement of drinking water in the town is about 40 lakh gallons against which the municipality can supply only 22 lakh gallons. Scarcity of pure pipe water has been a daily affair for the town dwellers. Out of the total 20,543 holdings in the town only 4736 have been provided with water supply. Due to its typical geological feature, the town of Medinipur has no underground reserve of water. The bed of river Kangsabati (Kasai) which flows adjacent to the town, is the only water source. The sub-soil source of water from Kasai is tapped by using deep tubewells and then supplied to the town. The crisis persists throughout the year and reaches its extreme during the summer. A steady increase of the population in Medinipur town has accelerated the amount of the daily requirement of drinking water and the supply has always lagged behind. The problem of drinking water supply has been raised

in the meetings of the Board of Councilors of Medinipur Municipality - the elected policy making body - at regular intervals. The ward councilors belonging to the government side as well as those in the opposition made it a point to consider the issue as a policy agenda. The city people have also on certain occasions taken resort to collective actions such as mass petitions to the city government on this issue. Once the water problem emerged as a policy agenda of the municipal authority, the policy makers discussed and debated on the issue and its possible solutions in its board meetings. Since 1980-81 to the present (the span of this research work) the problem of drinking water supply has always remained one of the major issues before the policy makers. Going through the official records of Medinipur Municipality as well as from interviews of councilors and citizen respondents, we have found that no major long term plan was chalked out for a permanent solution of the problem. The municipal authority has paid only lip services. Interim measures were taken from time to time - such as increasing the size of the water ferule, temporary repairing of deep tubewells - for the improvement of water supply in tune with the gradual growth of localities and city population. In face of the public grievance, the municipal authority has often shifted its responsibility by complaining about and making responsible the Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department of the Government of West Bengal and West Bengal State Electricity Board (WBSEB). They have argued that recurrent power failures and lack of proper maintenance of the pump sets in different pumping stations in the town have chronically cut short their fullest utilization. Though there has been some amount of truth in such arguments, political considerations played a major role in such passing of responsibility by the municipal authority. Since 1980-81 all the elected municipal boards in the town were run by opposition parties (other than Left Front). As a result, political rivalry played a major role in state-municipal relations which also affected the issue of municipal service delivery such as drinking water supply.

Pressures from business and commercial lobbies in the town have also on occasions moulded the process of decision making on water issues. Policy makers have yielded to such pressures and granted illegal water connections to private
market complexes and commercial buildings depriving the common city dwellers. Money power has played a vital role in such situations. Certain measures which could have effectively addressed the problem of water supply — such as controlling daily wastage of tapped water on the streets, repairing and relaying of main supply pipe lines, making arrangements for standby pump sets, deploying skilled personnel in charge of water supply works — have seldom been taken and implemented by the municipal authority. Lack of consensus among the policy makers, internal power struggles within the Board of Councilors, and their overall lackadaisical approach have been the major reasons for the non-decisions by the city government. During 1993-94, the state government approved a master plan for a permanent solution of the problem of drinking water in Medinipur. It proposed the construction of an underground reservoir near Kasai riverbed and a few others at different parts of the town, erection of three more overhead tanks in addition to the existing four and an elaborate network of pipelines. The plan projected a supply of 60 lakh gallons of water per day. The financial burden was to be borne by the West Bengal Government, the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO), and Medinipur Municipality. Unfortunately, till date very little work has been done in this respect. Money has not been a problem. The municipal authority has already received 70% of the total fund. Only one overhead reservoir has been constructed and few pipelines laid. Since 1993 two more elected municipal boards have been constituted in Medinipur after 1998 and 2003 civic polls respectively. None of these two boards have taken any serious step to implement the master plan for a long term and permanent solution of the drinking water problem. Whenever the issue came before the Board of Councilors, it was sidetracked on flimsy reasons of lack of fund, skilled manpower shortage, etc. The policy makers have been more interested in some short term cosmetic measures to deal with the problem. That too with a populist stance just before the municipal elections to mobilize and persuade the electorate and win the civic poll. Shortsightedness and non-futuristic attitude of the city policy makers over the years have resulted in the persisting problem of drinking water supply in the town of Medinipur.
Case Study: 2 – Problems Regarding Conservancy Workers

The second case study we take up is concerned with the municipal personnel system and staff pattern. According to the West Bengal Municipal Act, 1993 the authority structure of a municipality consists of the elected and the non-elected wing. The elected wing is composed of the Board of Councilors and the Chairman-in-Council. The non-elected wing comprise state government appointed bureaucrats and staffs (both general and technical) at different grades below the officers. Usually, there are executive officer, health officer, municipal engineer, finance officer as top echelons of the municipal personnel system. The officers and other staffs function under the administrative control of the board of councilors. Other staffs are appointed by the Chairman-in-Council in consultation with the Municipal service Commission. The staff pattern in Medinipur municipality more or less conforms to this general model of municipal authority in West Bengal. Both the elected and non-elected wings of the municipality play important role in the process of urban management.

Matters relating to the internal administration of Medinipur Municipality – staff pattern, appointments, and employee’s demands – have been the important policy agenda of the municipal authority. It was found in our course of study going through the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Councilors. The issues discussed most were the lack of sufficient number of technical staff; presence of a large number of non-technical, lower-graded general employees; the increasing number of casual workers; and the problem of disguised unemployment. All this has been perceived by the elected people’s representatives as one of the major constraints that stand in the way of smooth functioning of the municipal body. We have selected one particular incident concerning the conservancy workers of the municipality which created quite an uproar in the civic administration of the town during 2001-02. An attempt has been made to look into the manner the municipal authority tackled the problem through its policy decisions. Though they belong to the lowest grade of municipal staffs, the conservancy workers in the municipality perform the vital functions of sanitation and garbage removal, thereby helping the
maintenance of a healthy and pollution-free civic atmosphere. The number of conservancy workers in Medinipur Municipality is not adequate. Moreover, a large number of them are casual workers. There is a shortage of permanent conservancy workers in the municipality. They are also ill paid. The conservancy workers have been raising their voices against the city administration since long. Their major demands have been pay hike, better working conditions, and making casual workers permanent. But the municipality has done little to redress their grievances. The situation reached to a serious scale during November-December 2001 when the workers en masse resorted to go-slow and ultimately, indefinite strike. The strike continued for almost a month. Ultimately they were forced to withdraw the strike facing the threat of lay-offs. There was only partial fulfillment of their demands when a handful of casual workers were made permanent, but neither there was any pay-hike nor any improvements in their working conditions. The municipal authority bothered little about any long-term solution of the problem. In Medinipur Municipality there are two unions of the conservancy workers—one affiliated to the CITU and the other to HMS. It was through these labour unions that the demands of the workers were ventilated and placed before the policy makers. The elected municipal government during the period mentioned, was a coalition of Congress (I) and TMC. The two labour unions, though otherwise maintaining opposite political stances, raised the same kinds of demands in favour of the workers. It was revealed from our study that party political considerations played a decisive role in dealing with the problems of the conservancy workers. The elected municipal board did not take into consideration the genuine demands of the workers. Rather it adopted the tactics of playing one labour union against the other. The demand for pay hike was refused on the ground of fund crunch, but at the same time, the municipal authority failed to realize that 'disguised unemployment' has really been a burden to the local body and a large sum of money was being spent yearly to maintain this non-productive contingent. Councilors belonging to the opposite bench in the elected municipal board demanded that the state government be approached for taking necessary steps to streamline the staff pattern and increase the number of skilled permanent workers. But the municipal government did not pay any heed to that. Ultimately,
when the sanitary and health situation in the town became quite deplorable and reached an extreme point due to the month-long strike of the conservancy workers, the municipal authority managed the situation for the time being by deciding to make some casual workers permanent. Thus, the case under study shows the lack of goodwill and rational thinking, and long-term planning by the policy makers while deciding to solve the urban problems.

Case Study: 3 – Transportation Infrastructure Development

Our third and final case study is about urban infrastructure development in the town of Medinipur. To be more precise, it is about transportation infrastructure. During the last decade and half the municipal territorial jurisdiction of the town has steadily increased. This urban expansion is going on mainly in the western part of the town – from Medinipur railway station to westwards. A South-Eastern Railway branch line from Kharagpur to Purulia passes through Medinipur railway station in the western part of Medinipur town. The town is expected to expand further in the western direction centering around Vidyasagar University and Medinipur Girls’ College Campuses, new upcoming medium sized industries, an industrial training institute, a private hospital, and new residential areas. The main road that connects the heart of the town with this newly expanding areas and which crosses over the railway lines besides the railway station is becoming busier day by day. There is an ever increasing traffic flow on the road for obvious reasons. The rail route is also a busy one. As a result, road traffic has to face closed level crossing for a number of times throughout the day creating road jams. This has created quite a problem for the town people.

The people have been demanding since last four/five years for the construction of a road bridge (flyover) over the railway lines so that jams can be avoided and traffic flow made smoother and faster. The issue was raised in the meetings of the Board of Councilors of the municipality. But deciding on the matter appears to be a complex one as it involved multiple authorities – the state government as well as the central government (in charge of railways) besides the municipality. The main road mentioned above was constructed and being mentioned by the Public Works
Department (PWD) of the state government. The land adjacent to the railway lines is owned by the rail authority. The shops on both sides of the road, a daily market, residential buildings and other commercial establishments are constructed on municipal land. The construction of the proposed flyover was to encroach upon all these territories. Thus while the matter of taking a concrete decision came into the forefront, governments at three different levels – local, state, and central got entangled. Though, after much debates and discussions there was an unanimity that the flyover would be constructed, differences of opinions prevailed regarding the various details of the construction process including its financial and engineering aspects. Ultimately, the construction started two years back. As the work is going on, vehicular traffic on the road has almost stopped and no proper temporary by-pass has been constructed. This is creating a lot of troubles to the city people. They have appealed to the municipal authority time and again, but in vain. The plight continues.

The case study stated above reveals an interesting aspect of municipal decision making. The issue involved (need for constructing the fly over) affected the town people directly. It was they who were facing the problems of traffic jams and congestion in their day-to-day civic life. For redressal of their demands they approached the government nearest and most accessible to them – the local government in their town. Though the municipal authority prima facie agreed to their demands and realized the emergent necessity, it was not in a position to decide alone on the matter. Presence of multiple and overlapping government jurisdictions made the situation complex. It also brought into fore the question of the autonomy of the urban local government. On this occasion it was clear that the process of decision making by the city government was penetrated from above by higher levels of governments. Common people in the town are not in a position to understand the intricacies of the relationship between multiple authorities and their jurisdictional overlappings. When the people suffer, they straightway blame the city government. It is the municipal authority which has to bear the burden of public grievance. This ultimately may lead to the gradual erosion of legitimacy of the local government.
Concluding Remarks

The three cases of municipal policy making in Medinipur discussed in this chapter give us some idea about the inside story of the decision making process. A number of factors – financial, institutional, political – affect the course of reaching to a decision while trying to solve the issues and problems of urban management. On an overall count, the municipal authority in Medinipur has lacked futuristic visions while dealing with the urban problems and mostly resorted to short-term piecemeal solutions. The three case studies dealt with in this chapter have certain features in common. In all the three instances, there were lack of any comprehensive long-term planning; shortsightedness and non-futuristic attitude of the decision makers prevailed; and political factors played a major role. Decision makers were far away from being rational in considering all the possible policy options and choosing the best one. In the issue of drinking water supply, the municipal decision makers preferred some short term measures to the implementation of the master plan. The problem relating to the conservancy workers was tackled by taking some piecemeal measures for the time being. And in case of the construction of the fly over, the municipal authority did not pay any heed to the resultant problems faced by the city people during the construction work. Politics affected the process of municipal decision making in all the three cases stated above. Political rivalry between the ruling Left Front at the state level and the non-left parties in power at Medinipur Municipality, played a major role in state-municipal relations and had its impact on municipal service delivery in the case of drinking water supply. In the second instance (the problem relating to conservancy workers), it was the political difference between the party in power in the municipality and the two labour unions affiliated to other political parties, that played a decisive role. The third case study reveals the interference of higher level politics in the process of municipal decision making in Medinipur.

Certain differences can also be identified between the three instances of decision making stated above. Internal power struggles within the Board of Councilors, pressures from business and commercial lobbies, and the tendency of the municipal authority to shift responsibility to other authorities characterize the
first case study (drinking water supply). In the second instance, it was the lack of goodwill and rational thinking on the part of the policy makers that played the major role. And in case of the construction of the fly over, it was the problem of multiple and overlapping government jurisdictions, and lack of municipal authority that became the determining factors.

The features of the three case studies dealt with here can be presented by the following diagram:-

Fig. 7.2 Features of Municipal Decision Making in Medinipur
If we look into the process of municipal decision making in Medinipur in the perspective of the models of decision making discussed in this chapter, it appears that, the process conforms more to the incremental model than the rational one. Policy making in the city government has not been always purposeful, consistent, and sequential. The goals and objectives of the decision makers were not always clear and known in advance. They have bothered little to choose the best alternative among all possible courses of action. On the contrary, the decision makers in the municipal government resorted to incremental or marginal changes in policy. They adopted the strategy of concentrating on familiar, better known experience, and reducing the number of different alternatives and analyzable factors. They were not at all interested in innovative policy initiatives. In short, decision making has been more incremental than rational in nature. It perhaps speaks of the reality. A full-proof rational-comprehensive process of decision making may be an ideal situation, but most often unrealizable in practice.