3

Introducing Medinipur

Location

Medinipur town is one of the oldest urban centres of West Bengal. It is the headquarters of Medinipur district. The district of Medinipur, the southernmost district of the Burdwan division is the largest and second most populous district in the state of West Bengal. It is situated between 21°36' and 22°57' north latitude and between 86°33' and 88°11' east longitude. It has an area of 14081 sq.km. and a population of 8332,000 persons. On the north, Medinipur is bounded by the districts of Bankura and Hugh, on the north-west by Purulia and on the west its boundary marches with the Balasore and Mayurbhanj districts of Orissa. On the east, the river Hugh and its tributary Rupnarayan separate Medinipur from the districts of Hugh, Haora and 24-Parganas. The southern boundary of the district is the coastline of the Bay of Bengal. The district of Medinipur is so called after its headquarters town situated on the north bank of river Kangsabati or Kasai. 87°19'E meridian of longitude and 22°25'N parallel of latitude cross each other at Medinipur town. The area over which the town stands is bounded by the State Highway NO. 5 on the east, by the forest and agricultural lands on the west, by the agricultural fields on the north and by river Kasai on the south. It lies at a distance of about 13 km. north from Kharagpur town and about 135 km. from the Calcutta.

Metropolis. The Medinipur high level canal is constructed just below the eastern end of the town. Though there is a direct functional linkage between Medinipur and Kharagpur, they are physically separated by river Kasai. There is road bridge (east) and rail bridge (west) across river Kasai connecting Medinipur with Kharagpur and other places of the district. (See Map No. 3.1).

An Urban Profile

Tracing back the origin of Medinipur town, Mahamahopadhyay Haraprasad Sastri opines that it was established and named after a chieftain called Medini Kar of the ‘Kar’ ruling family of the region. He was also the author of a famous Sanskrit lexicon: ‘Medinikosh’, which was written between 1200 to 1431 A.D. Therefore, the site of the town perhaps dates back to the 13th century. In the early days of British rule in India, the town was used as a cantonment. When the British took possession of the district of Medinipur in pursuance of their treaty with Nawab Mir Kasim Ali in 1760, they established a factory of piece goods at Medinipur town, which was controlled by the British Resident. In 1768, the Resident offered land at low rent in and around Medinipur town to the mulberry cultivators and silk-winders for improving the silk trade. The offer was renewed next year and a number of weavers deserted Khirpai and other places for Medinipur. In 1777 a European official was stationed at Medinipur as Commercial Resident and the town was first officially declared the headquarters of Medinipur district in 1783. During its long history, the site of the present town became a focal point of trade and commerce. Medinipur became municipalised in 1865. The first census of the town was taken in 1871, which was also the year of the first census of India.

According to that census, the town had a population of 31,491 persons. Medinipur can boast of a long and glorious heritage of nationalist movement and revolutionary activities against the British colonial rule. Due to deliberate negligence by the colonial masters, no serious developmental plans and programmes for the town was implemented and the normal urban expansion and growth was disturbed. The town's development was slow until independence.

After independence, the municipal limit of the town was expanded from 7.00 sq. km. to 10.36 sq. km. during 1961. But it remained constant up to 1981, which indicates that the degree of urban developmental activities within the town was not satisfactory. During the last decade and half, the state government has taken interest to introduce several integrated plans and programmes for the development of the town. Due to some interaction programmes of small and medium sized industries, improvement of infrastructure for trade and commerce took place. The establishment of a new centre of higher learning – Vidyasagar University, further stepped it up. The old municipal boundary of the town has engulfed the two mouzas of the western side of the railway line named Tantigeria and Rangamati enhancing the total area from 10.36 sq. km. to 18.13 sq. km., comprising of 21 municipal wards.

Structure of the Town

After 1981, the municipal boundary of the town has extended in two different directions i.e. towards the west up to the limits of the two mouzas mentioned above and towards the east up to the limit of the State Highway No. 5. From the present geographical centre of the town, it is found that the maximum extension occurred towards the direction of west. The western part of the town (i.e. from

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railway line to westwards) has come recently under the municipal jurisdiction. The town is expected to expand further in the same direction, centering on the Vidyasagar University campus and some new medium sized industries – such as oil mills, rice mills and one spinning mill – in the adjoining areas. Most of the public institutions and government offices and bungalows are situated in the north-central portion of the town. Famous Medinipur Central Jail is located to the extreme north-central corner of the town, while the police line and police hospital are located south of it. Various offices, courts, collectorate and its bungalows, and public works department office are located further east and southeast of the police line. At the initial stage of the town’s growth, most of the residential areas developed to the east of the public offices. After that, residential areas spread from north to south direction of the public institutions. The eastern half of the town is marked by the area called ‘Keranitola’ (the vernacular of clerk’s quarters of the British period) which is extended to the south and southeast direction of the town. This is the residential proper of the town characterised with various small streets and narrow lanes and bye lanes and old buildings. The area is one of the most densely populated ones. The major non-residential activities are distributed among two centres in the town – (a) the north-western part in between the railway line and Abash Road, and (b) the central part of the town bounded by Sepai Bazar Road, Library Road, Hospital Road and Baptist Mission Road. The two main commercial collection and distribution hubs of the town are School Bazar and Bara Bazar. The southernmost part of the town, along river Kasai, is covered by alluvium with gentle slope. The major portion here is agricultural land with some residential pockets such as Narampur and Najar Ganj. However, the town’s expansion towards the south may remain static due to a natural barrier of river Kasai.4 (See Map No. 3.2).

Demography of the Town and District

At the beginning of the present century, Medinipur town had a total population of 33,140 persons (1901 Census). It increased to more than 43 thousands in 1941. Due to the great influenza epidemic during 1911-21, the town suffered from depopulation, which caused negative growth of 1.21 per cent and 11.53 per cent respectively. During this decade, other towns of Medinipur district were also affected and suffered from depopulation, the extent of which was no less than 4.90 per cent. The population growth of the district and of the town of Medinipur during the next decade (1921-31) more or less counter-balanced the loss of the previous one. In 1941, the population of Medinipur town increased to a considerable percentage (34.82), while those for the district of Medinipur and the state of West Bengal as a whole were 35.69 per cent and 63.69 per cent respectively. During the decade 1941-51, the population growth rate of the town lagged much behind that of the district as well as the state. In the next decade (1951-61), the growth rate of the town population was more or less similar (30.93 per cent) of the district figure (32.19 per cent), but lower than that of the state (35.97). During the next twenty years, the town’s population growth rate has remained more or less stable without any major variations. It again increased during the last decade (1981-91). According to 1991 Census, Medinipur town had a total population of 125,000, the decadal change in population percentage during 1981-91 being 45.36 per cent. Table No. 3.1 reflects the growth of population in Medinipur town, the district of Medinipur and the state of West Bengal.

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### Table 3.1 Growth of Population in Medinipur Town, Medinipur District and West Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Medinipur Town</th>
<th>Medinipur District</th>
<th>West Bengal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>Per cent of Decennial Variation</td>
<td>Total Population (Urban)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>33,140</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>89,876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>32,740</td>
<td>-1.21</td>
<td>101,855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>28,965</td>
<td>-11.53</td>
<td>96,869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>32,021</td>
<td>10.55</td>
<td>138,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>43,171</td>
<td>34.82</td>
<td>188,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>45,476</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>252,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>59,532</td>
<td>30.93</td>
<td>334,286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>71,326</td>
<td>19.81</td>
<td>420,156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>86,118</td>
<td>20.74</td>
<td>572,757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>125,098</td>
<td>45.26</td>
<td>821,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:**
1) *Census of India 1991*

The slow growth and periodical decline of the urban population in Medinipur in the early part of the 20th century were no doubt partly due to the poor public health measures and high mortality prevailing at that time. The steady growth of the population since the 50s was largely due to the natural increase (the difference between births and deaths) and may be partially as a result of the migration of displaced persons from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) after the Partition. The district of Medinipur being predominantly rural and agricultural, urbanisation has taken place generally at a slow pace over the decades. In 1991, the last census year, the proportion of urban population in the district was only around 10.00 per cent as against 27.39 per cent in West Bengal and 25.71 in India. Khargapur with the biggest railway yard and workshop of the South Eastern Railway, Indian Institute of Technology and other socio-cultural centres is the major urban agglomeration. Haldia is an important modern port and petrochemical industrial complex.

7 ibid.
Growth of Towns

Urban growth in any region usually has two distinct components — continued growth of the already existing cities and towns and the emergence of new townships at industrial centres, railheads, seats of administration, etc. In the year 1872, when the first census of Medinipur district was organised, there were only four towns in the district, viz. Medinipur, Ghatal, Tamluk and Chandrakona. The number increased to eleven in 1951. Five more towns came up during the next two decades (1951-71). There was a further increase in 1981, when the town of Kharagpur was bifurcated and a new town, viz. Kharagpur Railway Settlement stepped in. At present (according to 1991 Census) the district has twenty-three towns, the recent most additions being the Kolaghat Thermal Project Town and Digha Township. Apart from Kharagpur, which was a late-starter (1911) but has a phenomenal growth, most of the towns of the district have increased very slowly in size. In fact, many of the older towns — Medinipur (1872) itself being one of the oldest — have declined in population number at some stage. Some of them showed signs of revival only in recent times.8 During the last decade, the population growth of Kharagpur Railway Settlement has been the highest followed by Haldia, Kharagpur (municipal area) and Amlagora. The population growth rate of Kharar in the last decade was the lowest due to outward migration and decline in natural increase. Of the twenty-three towns in the district of Medinipur, twelve are municipal urban areas and the rest are non-municipal urban towns. Medinipur Municipality — established in 1865 — is one of the oldest in the district. The first town to be municipalised was Tamluk (1864). The other ten municipal towns, in order of the year of the establishment of the municipalities are: Chandrakona (1869), Ghatal (1869), Ramjibanpur (1876), Kshirpai (1876), Kharar (1888), Kharagpur (1954), Contai (1958), Jhargram (1982), Haldia (1983) and Egra

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Haldia started with a Notified Area Authority. It has very recently been converted into a municipality.\(^9\)

As mentioned before, the urban growth of the district has generally been at a slow pace. Approximately every twelfth person is a town dweller in Medinipur district as against little less than every fourth person in the state of West Bengal. Most of the towns in the district, including the district headquarters Medinipur, have emerged as administrative-cum service centres. The district has been divided into seven sub-divisions – Medinipur, Kharagpur, Jhargram, Kanthi, Tamluk, Ghatal and Haldia. The town of Medinipur is within Medinipur sub-division. Garhbeta and Amlagora towns in the Medinipur sub-division, for example, function as trade centres of local timber and other jungle products. The Kharagpur Urban Agglomeration has emerged as the transport nodal point and a centre of higher education in the district. Kharar and Ramjibanpur towns in Ghatal sub-division are important for manufacturing and trading of cottage industries and agricultural products. The newly emerging port town of Haldia is a centre of multifunctional industrial complex cum port activities. Some other new urban centres such as Kolaghat and Kolaghat Thermal Power Project area are mainly service towns, while Digha township functions as a tourism trade centre.\(^{10}\) Besides the sub-divisions, the district comprises of 46 police stations, 54 development blocks, 54 panchayat samities and 514 gram panchayats. According to 1991 census, Medinipur district has an urban population of 8,20,995 persons, its percentage to total population being 9.85 per cent. In the earlier decade (1981) it was 8.49 per cent. The corresponding figures for the state of West Bengal as a whole were 26.47 (1981) and 27.48 (1991) per cents. Table No. 3.2 represents the total population, the rural-urban divide and the percentage of urban to total population in the district of Medinipur and the state of West Bengal during 1981-91.

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\(^9\) Institute of Local Government and Urban Studies, \textit{Urban West Bengal}, pp.43-44.

Table 3.2 Total Population, Rural/Urban Population and Percentage of Urban to Total Population in Medinipur District and West Bengal, 1981 - 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Medinipur</th>
<th></th>
<th>West Bengal</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Total Population</td>
<td>672796</td>
<td>8331912</td>
<td>54580647</td>
<td>68077965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rural Population</td>
<td>6170039</td>
<td>7510917</td>
<td>40133926</td>
<td>49370364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Urban Population</td>
<td>572757</td>
<td>820995</td>
<td>14446721</td>
<td>18707601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Urban Population (per cent of total)</td>
<td>8.49</td>
<td>9.85</td>
<td>26.47</td>
<td>27.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Key Statistics of Midnapore District 1993-94, District Statistical Office, Govt. of West Bengal, Midnapore.

Density of Population

The density of urban population in Medinipur district (as per 1991 Censers) is 593 persons per sq.km. as against 766 persons in the state of West Bengal. There are, of course, variations in population density in different municipal urban centres within the district. Medinipur town is the second most densely populated area (12066 persons per sq.km.), while Kharagpur registers the highest population density (18446 persons). Medinipur is followed by Ghatal (4247 persons), Tamluk (4305 persons), Contai/Kanthi (3719 persons) and others. Kharar has the lowest population density – that of 965 persons per sq.km. The density of urban population in the district has all along been much lower than that of the state of West Bengal.

The density of population within Medinipur town also varies from one municipal ward to another. Density is highest in ward no. 8 followed by ward nos. 16 and 11. These are the old core areas of the town along the important trade and commercial ribbons. Due to large plinth areas of public offices and buildings with officers’ quarters, central jail and police line, the density of population in ward no. 4 is comparatively low. Population density is lowest in the newly extended municipal areas comprising wards 20 and 21 due to vast open land, less number of residential houses and lack of trade and commercial activities. However, as the
future expansion of the town is projected to centre on these two wards, the population density in the area is also likely to increase.

Functional Morphology of the Town

Functional morphology of an urban unit generally refers to its responses to human activities, which are directly related to the urban land. Medinipur is a non-industrial administrative headquarters town of the district. This urban unit is divided into four portions such as – (a) the Western side, i.e. west of the railway line, (b) North-Central portion – the cluster of administrative built-up areas, (c) Eastern and South-Eastern portion – compact of residential-cum-commercial zone and (d) South of the Judges’ Court area – the newly developed residential complex. The functional zones or the land use zones of the town can be classified into the following broad categories – (i) Residential, (ii) Commercial, (iii) Industrial, (iv) Administrative, (v) Educational, (vi) Medical, (vii) Transport and Communication, (viii) Public Utilities and (ix) Vacant/Unutilised area.11 A brief description of each category is given below.

Residential

The residential landuse of the town has been developed in a non-planned way. The residential area covers more than 51.40 per cent of the total area of the town. Maximum density of houses is on the east of Adam Bazar Street, Bazar Street, Nutan Mahatabpur Road and north of Kaikata lane. To the northeastern and southern sides, i.e. along the river Kasai, the principal houses are kuccha, having a typical rural outlook. Among the total pucca and kuccha houses, 97.00 per cent are privately owned and remaining are owned by the government. There are 19 slums in the town. The slum areas are marked by absence of sanitation, drinking water, electricity and ventilation. Towards the periphery of the town’s built-up areas, considerable portions of vacant land exist, which in near future may be developed as modern residential complex.

11 ibid., p.33.
Commercial

The total commercial area of the town may be grouped under (a) market and shop, (b) godown and (c) commercial-cum-residential. The central business district or the commercial core of the town accounts for about 2.60 per cent of the town’s total area. There are two main commercial complexes – one at Bara Bazar and the other at School Bazar area – where both wholesale and retail activities take place. Most of the licensed shops lie along the streets with the upper floor of the houses being used for residential purposes. A new mini-market has recently been set up by the municipality with planned houses and modernised shops. Another planned commercial complex is being constructed on the northern bank of Harson Dighi near Battala Chak. Due to local demands, some unplanned daily open markets are found in different parts of the western side of the town.

Industrial

Compared to other activities (administrative, trade and commerce), industrial activity in Medinipur town is less important. Except Medinipur Cotton Mill, Shankar Spinning Mill and a few oil mills and rice mills, there are no other sizeable industrial units within the town. Most of these mills are located in Rangamati and Tantigeria areas. There are about 300 small-scale units in the town, employing around 2,500 persons. These units deal with automobile repair and maintenance, ready-made garments and tailoring, brick and tiles, wooden furniture, printing, hosiery products, bakery products etc. Earthen pot and clay doll making, weaving, bellmetal are some of the traditional cottage industries of the town. As a whole, the industrial zone of the town accounts for about 2.40 per cent of the total town’s area.

Administrative

All government and semi-government offices including their adjacent campus areas are included in this functional zone. Estimated covered area of this group is about 4.00 per cent of the town’s land. A large number of government
offices of the district such as Collectorate, SDO office, PWD office, Police Line, Central Jail, Courts, Zilla Parishad, State Electricity Board, Police Station and Municipality are located within the town.

**Educational**

A large number of educational institutions in the town, including Vidyasagar University, the centre of higher learning, indicate that the degree of educational activities is quite high here compared to other urban units of the district. All educational institutions together account for about 2.20 per cent of the total land of the town. There are 95 primary schools, 22 high schools, 4 colleges, 1 technical college and 1 University within Medinipur town.

**Medical**

Public health and medical facilities are important elements of urban community life. At present, besides the District Hospital, there are three more hospitals – Medinipur Homeopathic College and Hospital, Medinipur Leprosy Hospital and Red Cross Hospital – in Medinipur town. Moreover, there are several dispensaries, private nursing homes and health centres in different corners of the town. As a whole, medical facility built-up areas account for approximately 2.00 per cent of the town’s total area.

**Transport and Communication**

Included within this group are the town’s railway and roadway networks, rail station, bus terminus, post and telegraph offices. Total area occupied by roads, rails and communicational function within the town is more than 9.00 per cent of the total land. A South-Eastern Railway branch line from Kharagpur to Purulia passes through the western side of Medinipur town. However, with regard to the flow of commodities and daily commuters to and from the town, it is less important than the roadways. The State Highway No.5 passes by the eastern side of the town and connects Kharagpur city in the south at a distance of about 13 km across river Kasai over a road bridge. Besides, the Highway connects the town with other major urban agglomerations and industrial complexes such as Ranigunge, Asansol, Bankura, Durgapur, Barddhaman, Calcutta, Howrah and
Haldia industrial complex. Within the municipal area there are both metalled and unmetalled roads. Most of the roads, streets and lanes in the residential core areas and trade and commercial zones are quite narrow. This hinders the easy flow of increasing number of present day traffic. Construction of new roads is also required to the western side of the town so that easy transport linkages be made possible with this newly developing industrial zone.

Though an extensive bus service network with about 70 bus routes passes through Medinipur town, linking it with various places nearby and far away, bus service exclusively for and within the town has not yet developed. With the growing town-size and increasing population, internal movement for the town dwellers has become a major problem. Cycle-rickshaws serve as the only mode of public transport within the municipal area of the town.

So far as communication facilities are concerned, there is one head post-office and four sub-offices. The town has only one telegraph office, which is a part of the head post-office.

Public Utilities

All types of water supply, drainage and sanitary installations, electric supply installations, public burning ghats and grave yards are included in this category. Total coverage of this functional zone is estimated to 1.1 per cent of the total land of the town. Water supply installations of the town are controlled by the Medinipur Municipality's Water Supply Department. Presently, there are two major sources of water supply to the town – ground water through big-diameter tubewells within the municipal limit and surface/sub-surface water source of river Kasai. Due to the flat terrain of the town with a mild slope, the natural drainage system is somewhat affected. From modern sanitation point of view, Medinipur Municipality still lags behind to provide necessary facilities to the town people. Till date, the town does not have any underground sewerage system. The disposal of the town's sewage is done through septic tanks and house to house collection of night soil. The main source of electric supply to the town is the intake point of the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) at Hijli. From Hijli, electricity is supplied to the town by State Electricity Board through a sub-station.
Vacant/Unutilised Area

In Medinipur town, total vacant or unutilised lands are decreasing day by day as a result of growing urbanisation. At present, most of the vacant lands are found along the riverbed in the south and southwestern part of Rangamati area. About 3.00 per cent of the total land are still vacant.

The rest of the town’s land – not covered by the above functional zones and amounting to about 22 per cent of the total land – is occupied by parks, play grounds, recreational and open spaces, religious institutions and functional zones, agricultural lands, wood lands and water bodies. The percentage distribution of land in different functional categories of the town, as discussed above, however, does not conform to the standard land use pattern of a planned urban unit. Particularly, categories such as industrial zones, transport and communication, open space, parks and playgrounds account for a lower percentage than the standard pattern. The morphology of the town indicates that there is little scope for the expansion of the town towards the south of river Kasai. The river makes a natural boundary not only for Medinipur, but also between Medinipur and Kharagpur. The present municipal boundary of the town may be further extended towards the west, north and eastern sides over the adjacent rural areas. (See Map No. 3.3).

The Growing Problems

A steady increase of urban population over the years has obviously led to an ever-growing demand for basic civic services and amenities. At present, there are about 24,000 holdings under the municipality and the number is ever increasing. Around 50,000 people come daily from outside to the town during the daytime for various activities. Newly established government and semi-government offices, the University, commercial and trading firms, hotels and lodges are creating pressures upon the resources of the town. Increasing population is leading to a spate in the construction of new residential houses and other buildings in the town. According to an estimate of the municipal authority, every year around five thousand of such new constructions are being made. In many areas, residential houses are being constructed on filled up agricultural/paddy lands. New colonies such as
Ramkrishnanagar, Sarada Nagar, Deshbandhunagar are coming up. People prefer to settle in Medinipur, because the town is relatively peaceful and crime-free to other urban centres in the district. Political disturbance is also less in degree. Kharagpur, which is only 13 kms. away, is, for example, a much more disturbed and insecure place to live in. The increasing number of residents in Medinipur town in recent times comprise mainly of affluent peasants from the rural hinterland, the professionals such as doctors and lawyers and government officers and teachers. The establishment of the Vidyasagar University in 1985 has also been a factor for increasing population in the town. This steady increase of urban population has created a pressure upon the city government. The municipal authority, due to its limited power and jurisdiction, paucity of funds, lack of autonomy and absence of skilled personnel, is often unable to provide the necessary civic services and amenities. The town dwellers face a number of pressing problems such as drinking water crisis, proper sanitation and sewerage, transport and road conditions and so on. These need serious attention by the city government. Moreover, the increasing problem of housing and the issue of better shopping/marketing facilities are to be dealt with by the municipal authority keeping in mind a proper and rational land use policy, which would be able to keep balances with each functional zones. Experts and town planners suggest that new industrial developments in the town should be oriented on local resources and their locations should be along the rail route and state highway, instead at town’s core to avoid congestion and environmental pollution. To protect urban environment, the local authority may reserve some percentage of existing agricultural land within the town which, in future, may act as a ‘green belt’.

City life in general is becoming increasingly strenuous and stressful. Growing urbanisation casts its spell on the lives of city dwellers. Local needs of basic civic services and amenities are becoming pressing day by day, which calls for a local solution. And it is the city government, the government next-door, which is generally bestowed with the responsibility to solve the problems of the local residents. Demands are generated and transmitted to the city government, which then tries to fulfil the same. A continuous interaction between the city people on the one hand and the local authority on the other is involved.
Medinipur, as a growing town, obviously is no exception to this process. We, in our study, attempt to delve deep into this process of interaction. We have, in the above, briefly sketched some of the major problem areas in Medinipur town. To comprehend the process of interaction between the people and the government better, it needs an elaboration, and we should also look into the structure of the city government in Medinipur. The following chapter deals with the structural pattern of city government in Medinipur.