CHAPTER I
Introduction

This study deals with local administration in the context of urbanisation. In West Bengal, continuous urbanisation along both banks of the Hooghly River extending in all directions from the two cities of Calcutta (East Bank) and Howrah (West Bank) has generated some important problems of local government. In view of the inter-related problems of this wide stretch of urbanised tract, the Government of West Bengal set up in 1961 the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation (CMPO) "to secure and promote the development of the Calcutta Metropolitan area according to plan." Later the metropolitan area was delineated by the CMPO geographers and came to be called the Calcutta Metropolitan District (CMD). Since urbanisability in the near future was also taken into consideration, some rural units lying in the periphery of the compact built-up area were also included in the CMD. As of July, 1964, the already urbanised area contains the city of Calcutta and thirty-five other urban local bodies and some non-municipal towns where, in spite of urbanisation, rural local authorities still exist, indicating thereby the inability of local administrative apparatus to keep in step with developing urbanisation (Fig. 1).

This study examines the organisation, functions, personnel and finances of the municipal authorities in the CMD, relates the problems of municipal government to the metropolitan
situation, and evaluates the machinery of local government for the metropolitan area as a whole. The thirty-six municipal bodies including the Calcutta Corporation together have a total area of 176.98 square miles and, according to the 1961 census, their total population is slightly more than 5.6 million. The Calcutta Metropolitan District covers an area of about 450 square miles with a population of over 6 million. Thus, the municipal authorities under study account for about 39 per cent of total CMD area and more than 85 per cent of its total population. The way in which these authorities manage their affairs determines the quality and quantity of civic services enjoyed by the bulk of the CMD population, and the extent to which they cooperate and conflict with each other or with other authorities has a decisive impact on the effectiveness of the totality of administrative apparatus in the CMD.

The municipal authorities under study are divisible into two broad groups. The first group consists of an assortment of thirty-five big and small authorities including the Barrackpore Cantonment and the Chandernagore Corporation. The Corporation of Calcutta stands out as a class by itself and is treated separately. Thirty-two of the thirty-three municipalities in the first group are governed by the Bengal Municipal Act, 1932; only one, viz. Howrah, is governed partly by the Calcutta Municipal Act, 1923 as extended to this Municipality, and partly by the
The Corporation of Chandernagore came into existence in its present form after it had ceased to be a French Territory, and it is now governed by the Chandernagore Municipal Act, 1955. Its activities are broadly similar to the municipalities functioning under the Bengal Municipal Act, 1932. This applies equally well to the Barrackpore Cantonment which functions under the Cantonments Act, 1924 (a Union Act). Aside from some organisational peculiarities which are mentioned later, its activities are more or less similar to those undertaken by the municipalities.

Calcutta Corporation has been given less space, but not less importance, in this study. As the largest municipal body in terms of population, area and scale of organisation, the Corporation dominates the local government scene in the CMD and indeed demands a separate, full-scale study. Such a study has actually been done recently by Ali Ashraf in his 'The City Government of Calcutta: A Study of Inertia', in which the diverse problems relating to the organisation, functions, finances and politics of the Calcutta Corporation have been

1. Of the thirty three municipalities, Kotrung and Utterpara were amalgamated in August, 1964, to form the Kotrung-Utterpara Municipality, and Howrah and Bally along with some of the adjoining urban-rural tracts were converted into the Municipal Corporation of Howrah in 1967. Other changes in the CMD have been mentioned in Chapter XIII.

covered in great detail, and which obviates the necessity for detailed analysis of the city government of Calcutta in this study, unless one wants deliberately to be repetitive. Still, acknowledging the crucial importance of Calcutta Corporation in a study of government in the CMD, a fairly detailed analysis has been done in Chapter X, where the major organisational and financial problems of the Corporation have been critically discussed. Also, in portraying a pen-picture of the 'environment of government' in the CMD, the role of the city has been clearly pointed out in Chapter II; the relationships of the Corporation with other authorities have been mentioned in Chapter XI dealing with 'inter-governmental relations'; and in the final chapter the Corporation along with other municipal authorities have been cast in the metropolitan mould.

Appropriate references to other local and higher level authorities have been made in Chapters XI and XII, with a view to drawing a complete picture of the web of government interacting in the CMD. In the last chapter, metropolitan solution patterns have been examined drawing upon international experience and the analyses of earlier chapters.