Preface

The main theme that we have told in this thesis is not just an account of rural development and panchayats in West Bengal though these two variables have an important place in our narrative. Our purpose is to reveal the nature of the specific role played by panchayats in rural development in this state. We have tried to explain how and why it is that the Rural Bengal since 1977 has changed so much. We have also attempted to trace the main cause of the success story of different developmental programmes launched in this state from time to time. The nature of political participation under the left regime, which has properly implemented those programmes of rural development, has also been analysed in greater detail. In this analysis we have drawn a correlation between panchayats and rural development.

This is not a theoretical exercise, though we believe that it is sensibly informed by theory of rural development and panchayats and part of our endeavour has been to trace and understand ideology, if any, of the present regime in regard to rural development. How does an agency like Gram Panchayat or PRI ensure long sustenance of the LFG since 1977? How does it play as an actor of rural development seriously so that LFG has no danger in survival? Therefore, we have argued in our research study that panchayats make a conducive to rural environment where LFG can survive as a left political conglomeration. By citing case evidences from certain villages under survey we can prove this more strongly. In chapter-III of our thesis we have shown how panchayats are involved in successful implementation of the programmes of rural development. Here we have highlighted certain new programme like SHGs, which are engaged in empowering rural women both socially and economically. Their increasing political empowerment is also analysed by certain case studies where we have shown shortcomings particularly in regard to women participation in decision-making bodies like party or guide committee of the party, which is discussed in later part of the thesis. Therefore, issue of women empowerment is focused in our study, which has significance in rural Indian society and polity.

In the last part of our work we have noticed a shift in the approach of the current regime in the issue of rural development. For its survival in politics for a long time LFG has made rural development as a new ideology replacing its traditional ideological position for the very sake of its political sustenance. To make inroads to rural political base it has taken care of rural development through which it can convey its specific ideological position not so fundamentally different of India’s path of development. Therefore, we have tried to analyse in our discourse the politics of development which we are experiencing contemporary Rural Bengal. For the last instance the issue of environment has also been taken up for discussion where PRIs till date has no agenda or planning.

Niranjan Mandal
(NIRANJAN MANDAL) 10/07/2007

viii