Though relatively young, the co-operative movement in our country has been assuming increasing importance and is intimately connected with the political and economic transformation of the society. A democratic polity committed to bring about social justice along with material prosperity has possibly one avenue open to it, if it remains wedded to the western style formal democracy. That avenue undoubtedly emanates from the spirit of co-operation and self help among the enterprising but weaker section of the society. Small wonder, therefore, so much of public rhetoric and policy documents have piled up in devising a proper institutional frame for the spread of co-operative movement in the country. The literature on the subject has also kept pace with these efforts, if not in quality, at least in volume.

One important area which has received relatively less attention in the current discourses on co-operative movement in India is the administrative implications of co-operation as it has actually been practised over the last few decades. What is lacking is not the study of the ramifications of administrative structures but an analysis of their relations inter se
as well as the results of their confrontation with the powerful social forces in the country. The present study is inspired by the belief that the administrative problems of co-operative movement cannot be fully appreciated without trying to relate it to the broad context of political development of the country and the social and economic forces that tend to foster or arrest the emergence of an egalitarian society. Coming within the fold of such study is a whole network of issues ranging from the place assigned to the Co-operative movement in the five year plans, the balance that is so difficult to strike between State control and individual initiative, the rigidity of conventional bureaucratic practice in co-operative administration, the problem of ineffective delegation of authority and the frustrating experience of well-meaning officials trying to monitor and encourage self-help in the face of powerful vested interests. All these issues have been ably thrashed out in the present dissertation which takes a holistic view of the familiar aspects of co-operation such as credit, marketing, banking, consumer support and so on. It seeks to present the problems in clear perspective, which has become so much the easier for the present investigator by virtue of his long and intimate association with the State Co-operative administration in West Bengal.

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