1. Introduction:

Geography is the study of areal differentiation and areal association of the phenomenon of the earth. The Earth is an inseparable part of organic whole. The symbiotic relationship of the phenomenon is too complex to understand. To find out the laws inherent in its harmony of nature one has to look into the segment of earth or part of it. Thus the idea of regional concept comes into being. In the initial stage, the analysis of regional phenomenon was not so complex to understand because the interaction of man in environment was very simple. But gradually and slowly the pace of industrialisation, commercialisation, liberalisation and globalisation has brought radical transformation in their relationship to such an extent that becomes too dynamic and complex. The most significant aspect of regional studies is to identify region based on certain criteria under definite boundaries for planning and development. Some time it is happened that the movement of consumers and consumerable goods do not follow the range of goods because of improved socio-economic conditions, developed accessible infrastructure and social amenities and facilities. Therefore, the regional planning based on administrative boundary is not as much applicable as it had been considered earlier. To find out the ground reality of region regarding the functional behaviour of service centres and consumer’s behaviour, an empirical observation is highly needed.

The problem of regional disparities is not new thing, it is as old as the British colonial period in India. During the British regime resources were allocated and industrialisation was made only in coastal areas like Calcutta (Kolkata), Bombay (Mumbai) and Madras (Chennai) for their easy accessibility by sea way transportation from their home country. Such industrialisation in certain pockets in the country led to the coming out of regional disparities. Again, the brain drain and resource drain led to intense regional disparities in the socio-economic development.

Malda district- study area is socio-economically one of the lagged behind districts in the state of West Bengal. It is inflicted with dire socio-economic and cultural disparities at
district and block level as well. Regional disparities are caused by the unplanned distribution of socio-economic amenities and facilities. However, the government provided facilities for the development of agriculture, education, medical, transport and communication which are neither located at appropriate settlement nor are sufficient to keep pace with the alarming growth of population. Subsequently, mass of illiteracy, poverty, unemployment becomes the common features of the region. The district accounts for 24.78 percent growth of population during 1991-2001 against the state average 17.77 percent. Of the total population, 7.32 percent live in urban centres in the district against the state average 27.97 percent. During 2001, district has registered the literacy rate of 50.28 percent, rural literacy rate of 47.76 percent and female literacy rate of 41.25 percent while that of 68.64 percent, 63.42 percent and 59.61 percent have been recorded in the state respectively.

The significance of the study lies to the fact that it enables to understand the local resource base, local needs and demands. District and block administrative unit has been taken as the unit of study for the convenience of planning purposes because of the availability of data and most of the assessment and implementative decisions are taken by the district administrative authorities. The analysis of levels of socio-economic development at block and gram panchayat level attract greater attention of planners towards achieving the goal of balanced regional development. The delineation of complementary region of central places helps in estimating the adequacy and inadequacy of existing facilities within the region. No doubt, the identification of functional gaps (ratio of functions between complementary region and district as a whole) helps planners and policy makers to determine the required number of facilities and their optimal location in achieving balanced regional socio-economic development. The present study provides a base for diagnostic planning model to reduce the existing disparities pertaining to socio-economic development.