

DECLINE OF THE LEFT FRONT IN WEST
BENGAL AND THE RISE OF THE
TRINAMOOL CONGRESS

*Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillments of the requirements of
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled submitted by Mayuri Sengupta is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy of this university. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university and is her own work.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION (P.1-17)

CHAPTER 1: EMERGENCE AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE LEFT FRONT: A BACKGROUND (P. 18-49)

CHAPTER 2: ELECTORAL DECLINE OF THE CPI(M) IN WEST BENGAL: AN ANALYSIS (P. 50-69)

CHAPTER 3: EMERGENCE AND THE RISE OF THE TRINAMOOL CONGRESS (P. 70-86)

CONCLUSION (P. 87-94)

BIBLIOGRAPHY (P. 95-99)

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I have sought to analyze the electoral decline of the Left Front in West Bengal. In the course of this analysis, I have examined its engagement with democracy in West Bengal. It is very true that the aspirations for democracy are universal. As Tocqueville, rightly remarked, “a great democratic revolution is going on among us”. If this be so, then can we relate the electoral decline of the Left Front to the near absence of democracy in West Bengal under its governance? The Marxists have been very critical of the liberal model of democracy. They have referred it as an arena of oppression, which legitimizes capitalism. The concept of democracy under the Marxist understanding revolves around two principles. First, the initiation of a democratic revolution against the onslaughts of feudalism, and second, in establishing the radical “dictatorship of the proletariat”. Examining the state of democracy in West Bengal under the three decades of Left Front rule is my research concern.

At first, I have given a brief survey of the state of democracy in West Bengal. Followed by this there has been a theoretical understanding of the Marxist notion of democracy. There has, further been an attempt to examine the record of democracy in West Bengal since the inception of the Left rule in 1977. Finally, the electoral decline of the Left in West Bengal has given rise to oppositions in the form of the Trinamool Congress, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party. Thus this thesis is an attempt to understand the Left’s engagement with democracy in West Bengal.

The tradition of democracy in India, has been thrust upon the people through what writers like Sanjeeb Mukherjee, call 'a pre-emptive democratic revolution by the elites who formed the constituent assembly'¹. These elites supervised India's path of democracy. Despite voices of popular aspirations came from various corners of the country, these voices were not loud enough to lead India's future course of action. The Indian elites were able to hegemonize the people as they were leading the national movement. The political hegemony has been reflected, in the present era, where the Congress government has been able to win elections both at the Centre and the states. Post independence, the National Democratic Alliance has been the only coalition which could complete only one term in elections at the Centre.

The Nehruvian era, lasting till the mid 60s, saw the Congress rule over the entire Indian polity. Pre 1977, West Bengal has been no exception. However, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) came in to power in 1977. The Left had been able to make its presence felt in the inter-war and the post war years. It was successful in initiating political mobilization and party building. Youths, students, workers, peasantry and the poor became the support base for the Left in India. The Left played an important role in leading the anti-feudal struggle through political mobilization. It was also instrumental in negotiating between orthodox Marxist intellectuals, to which it belonged and parliamentary democracy. The Marxist writers thought of the liberal democracy as a mask to hide the actual intensions of capitalist exploitations. Thus this debate affected the fate of the Left in India. There was a divide amongst the Left post 1960. First, the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) was formed in 1969 which adopted a revolutionary struggle to

¹ As quoted in S. Mukherjee, 'The use and abuse of democracy in West Bengal', *EPW*, 2007, p. 102

establish people's democracy in India. Second, there was the CPI (Marxist) which participated in parliamentary elections and adopted this path to establish its dominance. In 1967, the communist became an alliance of the United Front Government. While on one hand the CPI(M) tried the path of parliamentary democracy, the CPI(ML) used the tactics of militant armed struggle to remove the existing social order. The state government was dismissed by the Centre owing to the breakdown of constitutional machinery. The CPI(M) came back to power, once again, in 1969. The period between 1960 and 1970 was very volatile for the Left as there was on one hand, subversion of democratic institutions and on the other hand there was 'heightened democratic ethos'. There was an anti-feudal struggle led by the Left followed by intense public discussions and deliberations. The Left, however, had very little faith in the democratic institutions. Hence, they had very little regard for their existence as they thought that these institutions were meant for the privileged class. The non Left centre has always been deeply suspicious of the Left.

The election of 1972 saw the Congress victory. The regime between 1972 and 1977 was one in which Bengal faced severe crisis in terms of an undemocratic regime. The civil society in Bengal was crushed and the 'culture of democracy was repressed'. Following this phase was the enormous victory of the Left in West Bengal. Ever since then, the Left has been able to successfully establish political hegemony on the people. It could control democratic institutions like police, bureaucracy and the civil society of Bengal. In the following section I shall analyze this hegemony at length.

The Marxist philosophy is deeply anti-liberal democracy. It claims that since the

underprivileged worker has nothing to benefit from the existing order, governed by the bourgeoisie, it alone can understand the laws of socialism and communism. Lenin furthered this argument that since the conditions of the workers under capitalism prevents them from 'achieving revolutionary consciousness'. The communist party plays an important role to lead the workers towards this path based on the study of history, science and reason. Anyone opposing the communist party is regarded as opposing this path based on truth and reason. Those lacking the knowledge of history and the scientific path based on reason should be 'forced to be free'. In light of this the communist party would undermine the importance of an opposition as it has regarded itself as the self custodian of the rights of the workers and peasantry. The CPI(M) in West Bengal, has justified its stay in political power by justifying means to the end.

The major problem that the CPI(M) faced in India is that it has to function in a liberal democratic state itself against the very notion of liberal democracy. The ideological dilemma that the party faces is that if it has to function within the set parameters of liberal democracy it will have to compromise its Marxist-Leninist principles, and if it adheres to these principles then it has to call for a revolution. The CPI(ML) has choose to take the later path unlike the CPI(M) which still functions within the liberal democratic Indian state. In West Bengal, the CPI(M) has used a combination of the Leninist principles of communist party as a vanguard along with the Marxist ideology to 'subvert the institutions of the state as well as the space for civil society'. The communist party occupied an important place in both rural and urban Bengal since 1977. In that chapters that follow, I have highlighted the role that the CPI(M) plays in Bengal. The party occupies a supreme place, above its members as well as the state. The CPI(M) is always

guarded by what Lenin called, “professional revolutionaries”², whose passion is the party and who projected the party’s decision as the ultimate doctrine. The CPI(M) in West Bengal, has projected the party as an umbrella head, bringing diverse social spheres like students, workers, trade unions, intellectuals, teacher’s associations etc under one head.

The turning point in the history of modern Bengal came with the state legislative election in 1977 bringing victory for the CPI(M) led Left with the majority. This victory was not only the electoral victory of the Left in Bengal but also the victory of the lower middle class, particularly, the teachers, students, workers, peasants etc. A close link between the party and the people was evident. If we define revolution in terms of Lenin, as the transfer of state power from one class to another, then the rise of the Left after 1977 could well be termed as a revolution.

However, the Left regime in Bengal was not without its share of problems. The economic problem was one major cause. The ruling class, particular, depends on the state revenue for its sustenance. The revenue of the state has faced severe fiscal crisis over the years resulting in the lack of economic and social infrastructure. This deficit has been primarily one major cause for the CPI(M) to compromise to capitalist principles. This has adversely alienated the party from its social base. Accommodating new social base in terms of the business class and the urban rich has distanced itself from its traditional support base.

The claims of the Left have been that it is the vanguard of the poor and the oppressed.

Marxism propagates that the Left rules on the basis of the ‘right knowledge of science of history’ and it alone has the decision with regard to the right of the people. However, the

² Originally a Leninist concept which states there is a body of devoted communist who organize the party towards a worker’s revolution.

Left in a constitutional democratic country like India has the task of winning elections to stay in power along with being the vanguard of the people. Thus winning elections has to compromise the ideology of the Left to include not only new social base but also to bring economic development of the state with the help of this new social base. When winning elections become central to the party, hegemony in the Gramscian sense is bound to arise. The Left in the past three decades has been able to gain the consent of the governed through the strategy of disciplined and controlled mobilization of the people and destroying the idea of an opposition. Marxism has stated that the ultimate truth and knowledge lies with the Left and hence any opposition is detrimental to the welfare of the people which the former claims to represent. The thesis is thus an attempt to understand a communist party path of electoral victory and continued rule over three decades in a constitutional democracy. In a constitutional democracy there is a system of checks and balances, presences of institutions and constitutional devices to uphold the rule of law and to prevent the abuse of power. In India, there is separation of power between the three organs- judiciary, legislature and the executive. In theoretical understanding the Left has regarded these organs as organs which have protected the privileges of the rich. There were several strategies adopted by the Left in order to retain political power and the ruling status in a constitutional democracy. The control over bureaucracy was an important task to be undertaken by the Left. The Left was suspicious of the bureaucracy owing to its “steal frame of empire” influenced by the colonial frame of mind. The lower rungs of police and civil servants were treated as the servants of the higher officers. There was a necessity to internally democratize the bureaucracy. In the chapters to come, I have

outlined how the CPI(M) has been able to organize the people as an extension of the party. The party, quite successfully could bring the bureaucracy under its control by favouring the officials with special grants, promotions and choice postings. The bureaucracy became loyal to the Left. There has been an incident where, the a Calcutta High Court judge was given subsidized land for a favourable judgment in favour of the government. Thus the centralized party has been able to misuse the constitutional doctrines of separation of power. The arbitrary fashion in which the party has functioned in terms of giving bribes, sanctioning contracts, giving jobs to party sympathizers has been further discussed in the thesis.

Let us now take a closer view about the nature of democracy in West Bengal. We all know that the term democracy has more to it than elections and parliament. Civil society plays an important place for active citizen participation and deliberations. Thus the civil society is an arena of democracy. In states where civil society is absent, majoritarianism prevails as had happened in the Soviet bloc. In Bengal, there is the presence of the civil society dominated by the Bengali middle class or the Bengali babu. This Bengali babu is synonymous with the classes of society including the bourgeoisie, workers, peasants and landlords. The Congress had faced challenges from this section of Bengal. The CPI(M) took advantage of this situation. There were new institutions that emerged within this civil society like theatre groups, para-addas (neighborhood associations). The CPI(M)'s strategy to control the civil society was evident post 1977. It controlled almost all public institutions like associations, clubs and universities. The Left in West Bengal has been successful in control most public institutions through its ability to grant promotions, sponsorships, jobs etc. When these failed to achieve results, the Left has resorted to

violence. Furthermore, the trade unions also played an important role in paralyzing the activities of the public institutions. Thus under the CPI(M) rule in Bengal, it can be said that Bengal has transformed into a state of a combination of Marxist philosophy, Leninist party doctrines and Stalinist state.

The Left opposition in the form of Trinamool Congress plays an important role in Bengal. In the third chapter I have elaborately discussed its inception, leadership, organization and ideology. Theoretically the Left is against the presence of any kind of opposition as it solely represents the people in their struggle for justice, and has access to the path of truth based on reason and science. In Bengal also the Left is averse to any form of opposition. Therefore, there has been a continued violent struggle between the Left and its primary opposition the Trinamool Congress. These violent clashes between the two oppositions occupy a unique place in the politics of India where most struggles are caste clashes. The Left's strategy involves crushing any independent political initiative of people.

This form of democracy has been termed by Aristotle as the rule of demagogues. Thus, in words of Aristotle,

“A fifth form of democracy, in other respects the same, is that in which not the law, but the multitude, have the supreme power, and supersede the law by their decrees. This is a state of affairs brought about by the demagogues...At all events this sort of democracy...grows into a despot; the flatterer is held in honour... The demagogues make the decrees of the people override the laws, by referring all things to the popular

assembly. And therefore they grow great, because the people have all things in their hands, and they hold in their hands the votes of the people, who obey them... and so the authority of every office is undermined”.

RATIONALE OF STUDY

The electoral decline of the Left in West Bengal in my research concern. The analysis this electoral decline over the last two state assembly elections shall help us to understand the causality of this decline. The CPI(M) has ruled the state over three decades now. The decline in its popularity and the growing presence of a strong opposition has posed a threat to the CPI(M) as the state assembly elections are to be held in 2011. This research is a humble contribution towards the understanding of this electoral decline.

This study is an effort to understand the relevance of the traditional Marxist philosophy in parliamentary democratic country like India. This is also an attempt to analyze some of the failures of the Indian Marxist. In my understanding, the Left Front debacle in the last decade has been primarily due to the ideology that it has pursued. There has been a shift in its ideology, from a revolutionary party to a party which has been trying to fit itself in the parliamentary democracy. Furthermore, the opposition has coalesced around the inability and the inefficiency of the ruling Left to bring economic stability in Bengal. This has been reflected in the series of clashes that took place in Nandigram and Singur where the indifferent behaviour of the government was reflected against the peasantry, despite the fact that the peasantry was one of the traditional social bases of the Left in Bengal. This study focuses on the shift in the traditional social base of the Left in order to

capture the votes of those hitherto excluded from its traditional base. As a result, the Left has to compromise with its ideology to include a support base from the rich and the business class. The issues remain the same with land rights, economic security and livelihood being in the forefront. These were the same issues that brought electoral victory to the Left in Bengal in 1977 and these are the same issues that have resulted in its electoral decline in the present time. The only difference is that there has been a shift of the rural electorate, which was historically the social base of the Left, towards the Trinamool Congress. The Trinamool is now championing the rights of the common man in Bengal. This explains the electoral decline of the Left in Bengal.

LITERATURE REVIEW.

There is a wide range of analysis available on the three decades of Left Front rule in West Bengal since 1977. However, not much has been focused on the contemporary electoral decline of the Left in Bengal. Broadly, there are two opposite view points professed by the academicians and intellectuals in their analysis of this decline. There are those who believe that the Left has been insensitive to the needs of its traditional social base (primarily the peasants and workers). It is now trying to appease the business class, foreign and private investors to include in their social base. Following this there are other arguments regarding the dismal performance of the Left in the health and education sectors with rampant nepotism and corruption in the government agencies. The 'party' sympathizers are the sole beneficiaries of the development projects, jobs and other economic facilities. Development, specifically in the neo-liberal terms, has been absent in West Bengal. While there are states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Delhi, Karnataka

attracting foreign investments and MNCs, West Bengal has done little to pursue this model of development. Most people attribute the failure to generate employment of the Left to this reason. On the other hand there is a second strand of arguments which focuses on the need for industrialization in order to bring economic prosperities in the state. Hence, the need for acquisition of rich arable land for such development is justified. Furthermore, there has been a division of opinion amongst the Leftist in terms of their policy of land acquisition for industrialization. The ruling CPI(M) headed by CM Buddhadev Bhattacharya has campaigned for industrialization of the state. In such a scenario, land acquisition for development becomes inevitable. For other Marxist thinkers and intellectuals, development is for the oppressed and economically downtrodden. Hence, any policy which excludes them should not be pursued.

Writers like Sumanta Banerjee, Abhirup Sarkar and D Bandhyopadhyaya, who believe that West Bengal needs a strong opposition to challenge its oppressive regime and hegemony, belongs to the former section of thinkers. According to him, the performance of national parties like the All India Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Dal is dismal. However, the Trinamool Congress has only been able to occupy similar popularity (amongst the urban and rural population), which the Left had hitherto occupied. By this I mean this party is now getting the support of those sections of society (oppressed, economically backward class, peasants and workers etc.), which hitherto supported the Left. The electoral decline of the Left has also been seen as the failure to appease the displaced in its drive for industrialization, especially post Nandigram and Singur massacre. The Left has been blamed for caring too much about the prospects of the investors rather than those affected

by land acquired in the name of development. In the last decade, the Trinamool Congress, headed by Mamata Banerjee, has been highlighted as the party to champion the cause of the masses in Bengal. These writers have focused on CPI(M)'s failure to continue with its economic and political policies which it has adopted since 1977. The leadership has failed to transform the Left as "people's democratic front". It has not been able to enter in to a dialogue with the Maoists. It has also distanced itself from the local social movements failing drastically to win support of the common man of Bengal.

There are other writers like Dayabati Roy and Partha Sarathi Banerjee, who believe that the Left has been able to successfully retain its "old support base" in the rural areas of Bengal although its position has 'decayed' in the urban sectors. The working class in the urban sector is now looking for avenues beyond the Left. These writers focus on the fact that the role of the CPI(M) is different in urban and rural areas of Bengal. In the former, the party has limited role of mediating between the working class and the capitalists. While in the latter, the party has the role of mediating between the landed and the landless. It has involved itself in the everyday lives of the people. Hence the CPI(M) has a firm grip in the rural politics of Bengal and barring a minor decline the Left has been able to retain its popularity in rural Bengal.

Dwaipayan Bhattacharya, on the other hand, showed how the Left has tried to adjust itself within 'competitive federalism', one in which the different parts in a federal country try to compete against each other to attract foreign and private investments. The Left, since its inception in India, has used the 'anti-capitalist rhetoric' as an ideology to support the urban and rural workers. However, from the middle of 1980 (advent of liberalization

in India) it has been unable to use its anti-capitalist rhetoric as a means of initiating development. Prabhat Patnaik states that the situation in India and other countries (primarily the Latin American countries) is different. Economic liberalization has taken place in both these areas although the end result seems to be very different. There has been a strong anti-imperialist struggle in the Latin American countries and the rise of Left to power is due to this reason. Students, intellectuals and youth have faced the adversities of globalization which helped in their capacity to mobilize against such imperialist strategies. In India, economic liberalization has facilitated the urban middle class to a great extent. Although, the Indian workers, and agricultural labourers have faced the adversities of globalization, it has also seen high growth rates and increased income of the urban middle class workforce. Hence, most urban middle class, intellectuals and media professionals have shown support to the pro-imperialist development agenda of the Indian government. This has left the Left with little strategies for campaigning. Since the urban middle class has not faced the adversities of economic liberalization, it has been sympathetic to it. Hence, its support for the Left is miniscule as the latter is considered as an “old anti-imperialist shibboleth”. This is the main reason for the loss of support in the 15th Lok Sabha elections and also the decline of electoral support for the Left in the state assembly elections. The Left has been trying to bring this class to support it. Therefore, as a part of its strategy, the Left has now initiated in attracting private and foreign capital investment in the name of development. Thus there is a strong sense of suspicion amongst the traditional support base of the Left (urban and rural workers, agricultural labourers, landless poor).

Another section of writers, like Modh Sanjeer Alam, Frisbie and Neidert (1977) has

linked the size of the minority and the socio-economic inequalities that these minorities face as the main cause of electoral decline of the then present government. It has been seen that the larger the minorities and the greater the socio-economic difference between the minority and majority population, greater the chance electoral decline. In India, the Sachar Committee Report 2006 states that in areas where the Muslims were in majority is marked by greater underdevelopment. In studies conducted by writers like Zakir Husain and Amrita Chatterjee, it was seen that there has been lack of infrastructural deficiencies in Muslim dominated areas of Bengal. Even the state run Madrassas have not been improved in terms of infrastructure and syllabus reforms. These function in isolation doing little to bring the Muslims in the mainstream or removing poverty of them in Bengal. This neglect has also resulted in the decline of electoral support from the Muslims in Bengal.

METHODOLOGY

For the successful completion of my work I will depend on primary as well as secondary sources. Secondary sources would include libraries; internet and archives for collecting material related to my study. This will help in building the theme of study as well as sketching the history of my study. My secondary sources would include the documents collected from the UNDP West Bengal Human Development Report 2004.

Most of the election data in this dissertation come from the following sources. The data on the 15th Lok Sabha election results 2009 are taken from the Election Commission of India portal www.eci.nic.in/results/. The 2004 Lok Sabha election results are taken from

the 'Statistical Report on General Elections, 2004, to the 14th Lok Sabha', Volume 1 and Volume 3, New Delhi. (www.eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp).

CHAPERIZATION

In the introductory chapter, I have examined the Left's engagement with democracy by operationalizing the term democracy. I have sought to engage with the Marxist notion of liberal democracy and how the Left in West Bengal has been trying to function within the ambit of liberal democracy in India. The difference between the Marxist anti-liberal democratic principles, on one hand, and the functioning of the Left in a liberal democracy in India, has caused a major rift amongst the Left itself. The Communist party of India has been divided between the revolutionaries in the form of CPI(M-L) and CPI(M) which has choose to function within the liberal democratic institutions.

In the first chapter, I have I have given an overview of the decline of the Left front in West Bengal. In the first half of the chapter I have traced the advent of the Left in West Bengal, with special emphasis on the Communist Party of Indian (Marxist) to power, and in the second section I shall give reasons why there has been a decline of the electoral support of the CPI(M) in the contemporary era.

In the following chapter, I have outline the path of development that the CPI(M) led Left front government has initiated in West Bengal. The chapter focuses on the larger implications for the Left Front post the land acquisition policy in Singur and Nandigram for industrial development. I have sought to trace the electoral debacle of the Left Front to its neo-liberal policy of corporate industrialization policy by forcibly acquiring land.

In the third chapter, I have outlined the rise and growth of the main oppositional party, the Trinamool Congress (henceforth to be called TMC). The chapter is a humble contribution in understanding the role of TMC in the political scenario of the West Bengal. The TMC, post the industrialization policy of the CPI(M) through land acquisition, has been considered as a party championing the rights of the poor and common man in Bengal. The party now resembles the aspirations of the economically downtrodden. In this chapter, with the help of statistics from the Election Commission election results, I have shown the voting trends of different social categories in West Bengal.

The concluding chapter is a critique of the Left policy of industrialization within the neo-liberal paradigm. It highlights the necessity of a different and alternative path of economic development and industrialization. The path of development adopted by the Left Front in West Bengal distanced it from its traditional support base. The opposition in the form of Trinamool Congress took this opportunity and championed the cause of the peasants. The Left Front could have initiated in the process of industrialization under the aegis of the cooperative and public sectors. The peasants could have collectively owned these industries by cooperating with one another. The Left Front has been caught between the economic underdevelopment of the state of West Bengal, on one hand, and the wrath of the poor farmers, on the other. The demand for 'corporate industrialization' by the Indian urban middle class could not be ignored any more and the Left Front government initiated industrialization on the neo-liberal policy. Thus it ignored the needs and demands of the peasants and the workers resulting in loss of their votes.

CHAPTER 1

EMERGENCE AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE LEFT FRONT: A BACKGROUND

EMERGENCE AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE LEFT FRONT: A BACKGROUND

I begin this essay by presenting a vivid study of what West Bengal has experienced in more than three decades of Left Front rule. This analysis shall help us understand the voting trends in the Lok Sabha 2009 election polls of West Bengal. In this chapter, I have given an overview of the decline of the Left front in West Bengal. In the first half of the chapter I shall trace the advent of the Left in West Bengal, with special emphasis on the Communist Party of Indian (Marxist) to power, and in the second section I shall give reasons why there has been a decline of the electoral support of the CPI(M) in the contemporary era. In the following chapters, I shall analyze the electoral performance of the Left in the 15th Lok Sabha election, and its implications on the 2011 state assembly elections in Bengal. By Left, I mean the 'social democratic Left' comprising of the Communist Party of India-Marxist [CPI(M)], the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Revolutionary Socialist Party of India (RSP) and the Forward Bloc. By decline, I mean electoral decline. In the last Lok Sabha election of 2009, the Left Front in India has witnessed a steady decline in its vote share after a long time. Table 1 highlights this decline. In this Lok Sabha election, the CPI(M) won only 16 parliamentary seats. This can be compared to its performance in the previous Lok Sabha election of 2004. There has been a decline of around 27 seats. The CPI, on the other hand, won 4 seats in 2009, suffering a total decline of 6 Lok Sabha seats from its last performance in 2004.

Table 1: Vote shares polled by the parties in the 2004 and 2009 Lok Sabha Election (%)

PARTY	2004 LS ELECTION	2009 LS ELECTION
Bharatiya Janata Party	22.16	18.80
Bahujan Samaj Party	5.33	6.17
Communist Party of India	1.41	1.43
Communist Party of India(Marxist)	5.66	5.33
Indian National Congress	26.53	28.55

Source: The Election Commission of India – Lok Sabha election results of 2004 and 2009 www.eci.nic.in/results/

Table 2 highlights the decrease in the vote shares of Left Front in the various Parliamentary Constituencies in the last two Lok Sabha elections of 2004 and 2009.

There has been an overall decline in most of the constituencies.

Table 2: Decrease in the vote shares of the Left Front from 2004 to 2009

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY	VOTES SHARES- 2004	VOTE SHARES- 2009	DECREASE
Arambagh	76.73	54.18	22.55
Bishnupur	65.42	51.33	14.08
Bardhaman-Durgapur	63.62	50.52	13.10
Purulia	56.78	44.13	12.65
Jaynagar	55.36	42.86	12.50
Bolpur	62.36	49.91	12.45
Barrackpur	54.97	42.84	12.13
Bardhaman Purba	59.14	47.31	11.83
Birbhum	53.14	41.77	11.37
Diamond Harbour	49.98	39.17	10.81
Ghatal	64.30	53.50	10.80
Bankura	58.43	47.66	10.77
Hoogly	52.40	42.36	10.04
Basirhat	50.14	40.39	9.75
Howrah	52.58	44.27	8.31
Uluberia	49.33	41.12	8.21
Kolkata North	48.15	40.05	8.10
Mathurapur	49.49	41.55	7.94
Kanthi	50.33	42.48	7.85

Krishnanagar	42.51	35.03	7.48
Tamluk	47.67	40.49	7.18
Barasat	46.08	38.97	7.11
Coochbehar	51.44	44.66	6.78
Kolkata South	41.85	35.39	6.46
Darjeeling	31.41	25.29	6.12
Jhargram	62.88	56.89	5.99
Ranaghat	47.06	41.25	5.81
Dum Dum	50.66	44.94	5.72
Jadhavpur	50.28	44.65	5.63
Medinipur	51.86	47.29	4.57
Alipurduars	45.59	41.22	4.37
Sreerampur	44.08	40.00	4.08
Jangipur	44.34	40.52	3.82
Banga	44.88	42.08	2.80
Raiganj	41.20	38.58	2.62
Baharampur	39.87	37.28	2.59
Asansol	51.08	48.69	2.39
Balurghat	45.55	44.38	1.17
Murshidabad	44.84	43.82	1.02
Jalpaiguri	46.02	45.54	0.48
Maldaha South	35.37	37.02	-1.65
Maldaha North	40.90	41.25	-0.35

Source: The Election Commission of India – Lok Sabha election results of 2004 and 2009
www.eci.nic.in/results/

Table 3, on the other hand, shows the decline in the vote shares of the Left in the various states of the Indian Union in the 2004 and the 2009 Lok Sabha elections in India.

Table 3: Shift in vote shares going to the Congress (%) from 2004 to 2009

INDIAN STATES	2004 LS ELECTIONS	2009 LS ELECTIONS	DECREASE
Andhra Pradesh	41.56	38.95	2.61
Arunachal Pradesh	9.96	51.11	-41.15
Assam	35.07	34.89	0.18
Bihar	4.49	10.26	-5.77
Goa	29.76	22.6	7.16
Gujrat	43.86	43.38	0.48
Haryana	42.13	41.77	0.36
Himachal Pradesh	51.89	45.61	6.28
Jammu and	27.83	24.67	3.16



Kashmir			
Karnataka	36.82	37.65	-0.83
Kerala	32.13	40.13	-8
Madhya Pradesh	34.07	40.14	-6.07
Maharashtra	23.77	19.61	4.16
Manipur	14.88	42.96	-28.08
Meghalaya	45.55	44.84	0.71
Nagaland	25.78	29.36	-3.58
Orissa	40.43	32.75	7.68
Punjab	34.17	45.23	-11.06
Rajasthan	41.42	47.19	-5.77
Sikkim	27.43	29.59	-2.16
Tamil Nadu	14.4	15.03	-0.63
Tripura	14.28	30.75	-16.47
Uttar Pradesh	12.04	18.25	-6.21
West Bengal	35.32	44.62	-9.3
Jharkhand	21.44	15.02	6.42
Chattisgarh	40.16	37.31	2.85
Uttarakhand	38.31	43.13	-4.82

Source: The Election Commission of India – Lok Sabha election results of 2004 and 2009 www.eci.nic.in/results/

However before analyzing the causes of this decline further, I shall first trace the rise of the Left in West Bengal where I shall outline the methods it has adopted to remain in power for over three decades of its rule.

1: THE RISE OF THE LEFT IN WEST BENGAL

Prior to independence, Bengal was one of the ‘few areas in India where the Congress did not share power in the British dominated state legislature’. There were other parties dominated by the Muslims who were the majority in West Bengal. They had formed the state government. It was after the partition and the Muslim Leagues departure of Pakistan

that there was a 'serious power vacuum'³ in West Bengal. The Congress party had gained access to fill this vacuum. During the Congress dominance, the Left parties formed a strong oppositional force in this region. However, the opposition was not very effective because of the numerous divisions within the Left itself. Despite this certain important developments gave political advantages to the Left and exposed the inefficiency of the Congress. These include the two drought years of 1964 and 1965, rampant corruption, shortages of food and rising prices. As a result of this the Congress failed to secure majority seats in the 1967 elections. The United Front headed by Ajay Mukherjee and comprising of a coalition of fourteen parties, mostly Left, came to power. However, it did not help the chaotic situations which already prevailed. The Left forces within the government ordered the police not to interfere in class struggles. The frustrations of the people and the increasing decline of law and order resulted in the Presidential rule being imposed in West Bengal in 1967. This act of the Centre, though restored law and order, was never politically welcomed by West Bengal. The next time a presidential rule was imposed on West Bengal, on similar situations post the 1969 election, was when the United Front had acquired power. Justifications for such an act were given by New Delhi on the basis of chaos rising from forced redistribution of land, riots and political murders and gheraos.

The 1971 war-with.Bangladesh was yet another important milestone for political expediency of the Congress in West Bengal. It had two important consequences. First, 'Indira Gandhi's popularity soared high'. Second, with the presidential rule still imposed on West Bengal, and armed forces concentrated in this region, the Naxalities were

³ A Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1989 p. 125

eliminated. Thus with the elimination of the extreme left and the rise of popularity of Indira Gandhi, Congress had a massive victory in the 1972 elections in West Bengal. It is important for us to analyze the significance of Congress rule in West Bengal, in order to analyze the ascendancy of CPI(M) to power. It is at this point of time that, the Congress brought in to its party growing numbers of anti social elements or 'maastans'⁴ so as to maintain its dominance. The political leaders were in need of these maastans as allies in order to cope up with the growing militancy and violence in their lives. The use of violence to achieve ends became a common play in West Bengal. It became evident that most of them would ultimately become future party leaders. Another important development in this era was the growing importance of Congress Party's Youth Wing⁵ in channelizing their vigour to halt the growing influence of the Left among factory workers, clubs, white collar job holders and universities. The 1969 Gheraoes in Calcutta University by Chattra Parishad is one of such examples to site.

However, the issue to be focused here is the rise of CPI(M) in West Bengal. This can be analyzed by comparing certain elements of both the parties. As far as the organizational dimension goes, there are several differences between the various parties in Bengal. In sharp contrast to the Congress the CPI(M) is a party of with discipline cadres. The CPI(M) has been able to minimize its party factionalism and set out priorities by initiating in development activities. It has learned lessons from the past and had realized the need to broaden the electoral support base to win future elections. Thus there was a

⁴ Paraphrased from Sajal Basu, *West Bengal: The Violent Years*, Prachi Publications, Calcutta, 1979, p. 94-97

⁵ See Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's growing crisis of governability*, Cambridge University Press, Canada, 1989, p. 131

transition from 'revolutionary ideology to reformist ideology'⁶. On the other hand, there was increasing dissension within the Congress party workers. Squabbling over positions and patronage had been the characteristics of Congress.

Let us now move our focus on the leadership pattern of both the parties. The Left leaders have been older and largely accepted by their party. They belonged to the upper caste educated bhadrolok Bengali class. Leaders like Jyoti Basu, Kamal Basu and Mani Sanyal have all been experienced party leaders. Most of them have also held important positions prior to their becoming a leader. Kamal Basu for example has been a lawyer before joining the Communist Party in 1942. On the other hand most of the then Congress leaders in West Bengal, like, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and Somen Mitra, have been appointed from Delhi. Hence they were seldom accepted by the local party structures. Therefore the Congress reputation in West Bengal was tarred with its record of being a party of 'indiscipline and impropriety'⁷. Thus with the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975, the 1977 election, Congress was defeated and CPI(M) became the single most important political force in West Bengal.

Another important issue is to analyze the rise of CPI(M) with majority of seats, despite the strong presence of CPI and Naxalites in West Bengal. It can be stated that the CPI had supported Indira Gandhi's declaration of the Emergency under the Soviet instruction.

This severely delegitimized CPI's presence in West Bengal. Thus with the elimination of

⁶ See A. Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's growing crisis of governability*, Cambridge University Press, Canada, 1990, p. 137. Here the author explains the transition from a revolutionary approach to a reformist path by the CPM so as to widen the electoral base and the need to attract private investment for development.

⁷ A. Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1989, p. 137

the extreme left by the Congress and the delegitimation of the CPI, the CPM became a dominant political party establishing its rule for more than three decades in West Bengal. With Jyoti Basu as the Chief Minister, and later Buddhadev Bhattacharya taking hold, the party has engaged itself in 'piecemeal reform'⁸ along with curbing labour movements, gheraoues, instability and chaos which dominated the political scenario in West Bengal earlier.

2: THE RULE OF THE LEFT FRONT IN WEST BENGAL

In this section, I shall deal with the phenomena of how the Communist Party of India (Marxist) maintains its rule in West Bengal. For Atul Kohli it is the 'rise of reform communism'. The creation of 'red panchayats', 'facilitation for credits for small landholders, the registration of sharecroppers and the mobilization of the landless for higher wages were all aimed at securing political positions in the state'⁹. For Kohli, 'the CPI(M) alone has made systematic and impressive beginnings toward the goal of redistribution of benefits'¹⁰. However, this is definitely not to suggest that CPI(M)'s regime is without its own share of problems and failures. Hence the major question that arises is what is the difference between the CPI(M) regime in West Bengal from other ruling parties in other parts of India? The CPI(M) has been able to consolidate its power

⁸ See A. Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's growing crisis of governability*, Cambridge University Press, Canada, 1990, p. 127. By piecemeal reform, the author stated that a reformist agenda could bring about economic improvement in the conditions of the middle and the lower peasantry, on the one hand, and not alienating the rich on the other.

⁹ A. Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1989, p. 104

¹⁰ As quoted in A. Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1989, p. 107

through two main channels- these include their involvement in the rural areas 'without being attacked by the landed class' and second, there has been 'controlled mobilization'¹¹ and inclusion of the lower class agenda in its manifesto.

However, on evaluating the dilemmas facing the CPI(M) in West Bengal, stagnant economy is important to analyze. As Amrita Basu has outlined, the adoption of the 'Leninist two stage theory'¹², which postpones the socialist stage after capitalism has occurred, by CPI(M) has led to a price that it had to pay in terms of refusal to challenge capitalist exploitation. Secondly, the relation between the CPI(M) and the central government has been strained on various occasions. Hence, CPI(M)'s reformism is a product of necessity and choice. Although the Left Front had an alternative strategy in terms of the course of action it intended to follow for the people of Bengal, which was different from the path adopted by the then central government, its survival rested on the central government's sanction. The CPM, thus, came as an opposition to the bourgeoisie, the state and the Congress party in India. However, its approach was far from being a revolutionary party [like the CPI(M-L)] in India. Lets us analyze the reason for the adoption of this approach and taking up the path of parliamentary communism as opposed to 'revolutionary adventurism'. The main answer to this is the fact that India's 'durable democratic tradition' makes it difficult for the communist parties in India to reject the parliamentary means and adopt a revolutionary approach. To pose an example, the present Maoist insurgency in parts of India has received full fledged challenges from

¹¹ As quoted in A. Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1989, p. 137

¹² Amrita Basu, *Two faces of protests: contrasting modes of women's activism in India*, University of California Press, California, 1992, p. 28

the CPM as well as the other parties in the country. Its has received strong opposition from the other parties functioning with this democratic polity.

The CPM has affirmed its opposition to radical methods and goals. Let us now critically evaluate the various sectors in which this reformist path had been adopted by the CPM in West Bengal. This shall help us to understand the extent to which success has been achieved and the reasons for its decline in the recent years. It is also of utmost importance to explain the concept 'decline' of the CPM. By decline I mean, after thirty two years of uninterrupted power, the CPI(M) has been able to secure just 9 seats in the Lok Sabha as opposed to 26 seats that it had achieved in the last Lok Sabha election in 2004. In the following section, I shall explore the reformist agenda that the CPI(M) has adopted since its inception. This shall help me to understand the causes of decline in the recent electoral polls.

2A: THE PANCHAYAT REFORMS

Decentralization of political power has been one of the major goals of the CPI(M) since it's inception. Decentralization has been achieved through the various local self governments (panchayats), in West Bengal. Since its inception the party has been able to secure majority in the panchayats across West Bengal. If we see the electoral statistics of 1978, the CPI(M) won almost 67 per cent of the total seats of 55,801 in the gram sabha and zilla parishad level panchayats. Furthermore, in the years 1983 and then in 1988, it once again attained majority of votes. The panchayats implemented various rural developmental schemes in West Bengal. The highest record of the Left victory reached

its peak around 1987-88. It was after this that their performance trended downwards in the three elections after that. This became, further, evident in the recently held panchayat elections of 2008. In contrast to the 2003 election, where the Left secured around 71% of the gram panchayat, 86% of panchayat samitis and 88% of the zilla parishad, in 2008 these statistics were reduced to almost 49% for gram panchayats, 69% for panchayat samitis and 76% for zilla parishads. The decline of vote shares in the panchayats has risen several questions to be answered.

The role of the 'party' is well known in the history of West Bengal. Partha Chatterjee outlines that the party is such an institution which mediated almost every sphere of social activities. All other social institutions like schools, trader's associations, caste councils, landlord's house has been 'marginalized and subordinated to the party'¹³. Hence this can be termed as a 'party society'. The role of party was not only to manage village governance but also to resolve village, family disputes. This reflects a preference of avoiding the legal mechanisms, like police, law courts, in solving problems as it is regarded by many as corrupt, time consuming and expensive. There is a daily process of consensus making so as to keep the majority of people satisfied in order to ensure their continued electoral support. A close study of the leadership pattern of the CPI(M) in West Bengal shall give us an answer to the above mentioned question. The leadership is not concentrated in the hands of any individual alone. The leadership power is shared by the three essential forums of power, namely, the organization of the party, the Kisan Sabha and the parliamentary fraction. The CPI(M) rule in India, unlike most political parties, is not marred by factional conflicts. There is a strong link and bond between party

¹³ See P. Chatterjee, 'The Coming Crisis in West Bengal', *EPW*, Vol 44, No. 9, 2009, p. 47-52

leadership and cadres. Hence, the 'organizational goals can be translated in to the grass root level'. The electoral success of the Left Front rule in India cannot be explained by economic parameters alone. The active involvement of party cadres in everyday lives of the people gives the CPI(M) added advantages in electoral campaigns. Control over the lives and minds of the people, is another channel through which the party establishes its dominance and control through the active consent of the governed. Partha Chatterjee, has noted in this connection: ".....Especially in the rural areas, a large part of that party's cadre is in any case engaged on an everyday basis in political work at the village level in connection with the running of the Panchayat. The party can even at a short notice, without much difficulty, set up effective machinery for a door-to-door campaign in almost every constituency in West Bengal"¹⁴.

However, the initial optimism towards decentralization in West Bengal, by the CPI(M) has given way to a critical inquiry in to their dominance in the countryside. The result of the recent concluded panchayat elections in West Bengal raised doubt as has never been witnessed in the thirty years of Left Front rule in the state. The electoral losses suffered by the Left and particularly the CPM have been so intense that it has shaken the roots of the Left politics in the state. The opposition, comprising of the Trinamul Congress, have won the Zilla Parishads of East Midnapore and 24-Parganas (South). These are the two districts which have a large number of seats in the Parliament and the assembly constituencies. Of the 18 districts of West Bengal the Left front has captured 13 Zilla Parishads and the opposition, including the Congress and Trinamul Congress, has won

¹⁴ See A. Gupta, 'Left Front rule in West Bengal: Domination without hegemony', *EPW*, Vol 36, No. 45, 2001, p. 4319

five. The Zilla Parishad electoral results, however, do not reveal the actual ground facts. At the gram panchayat and the panchayat samiti levels, the two main tiers in the working of the panchayat system, the Left Front has faced enormous losses. It has virtually been removed from the districts of East Midnapore, 24-Parganas (North), 24 Parganas (South), Nadia, and North Dinajpur. The Congress and the Trinamul Congress have performed very well at the panchayat samiti and gram panchayat levels even in those districts where the Left Front has been able to secure and maintain its domination in the Zilla Parishads.

Table 4 highlights the shares of vote the Left Font secured from 1978 to 2003

Table 4: Share of the Left Front votes in the Zilla Parishad (1978-2003)

Year	Gram Panchayat	Panchayat Samiti	Zilla Parishad
1978	70.3	77.0	71.5
1983	61.2	66.2	62.2
1988	72.3	79.0	73.5
1993	64.4	72.8	65.7
1998	56.1	67.1	58.1
2003	65.8	74.1	67.2

Source: Pashchim Banger Panchayat Nivarchan Tathya O Samikha (1978-2003)

The major reason for this debacle has been primarily the land acquisition policy of the Budhadeb Bhattacharjee's government, which I shall deal at length, in the next chapter. However, in this section I shall outline the role of the party in the process of decentralization through the PRIs in West Bengal. Harihar Bhattacharya in Micro Foundations of Bengal Communism has shown that the party's local organizations has retain complete control over rural panchayats. 'The panchayats are emptied of all its real content. All major decisions are taken in the sub committees of the Panchayats sub

committee'. Moitree Bhattacharya also showed that the real authority lies with the 'appropriate party unit'. The party takes the decisions. 'The elected representatives only endorse and implement them'.

D Bandyopadhyay outlines that much of the policies implemented and executed by the zilla parishad are in accordance with those that are prescribed and decided by the party's district committees. The panchayat samitis are always controlled by the zonal committees. The gram panchayats, on the other hand, is controlled by the party's local committee. Thus the PRI's in West Bengal are controlled through the 'network of party organization'. One of the claims of the opposition has been that their candidates were being physically prevented from filing nomination papers. Most of the complaints came from Bankura, Burdwan, Medinipur and Hoogly. This phenomenon outlines the fact that under the CPI(M) led Left regime, democracy has been reduced to elections¹⁵.

However, it is important to analyze the West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment) Act of 2003. There has been severe controversy related to the formation of the 'Gram Unnayan Samiti' or the Village Development Committee (VDC). The function of the VDC was outlined as an organization to encourage in the active participation and deliberation of the people in the implementation and execution of developmental schemes. The major issue to be noticed here is that there has been an absence in the 'manner in which the VDC's would be constituted'. There has been a lack of interest on the part of the government to initiate a democratic means to elect the people to these VDCs. It would have already

¹⁵ See Bandyopadhyay, D. 'License to Kill?' , *EPW*, Vol 36, No. 1, 2001, p. 12

stated clearly, it in the legislation about the method of selection to be adopted. The option of including the people elected in the gram sansad to constitute the VDCs was ruled out. The second option also provides a dismal picture. The election of the members of the VDC could only be done by the members of the gram sabha present in a particular meeting. The lack of attendance in these gram sansad, in this case, poses a threat. The only remaining option is in the form of nominations by the members of the ruling party of West Bengal or any other authority. This nomination was to be done under the advice of gram sansad. The PRIs, in this case, can hardly be called or can actually be institutions of self governments. The 'formula of devolution to make panchayats autonomous institutions of self governance' is missing.

The party seems to have occupied an important area of importance and domination. There is a form of 'clientelism'¹⁶ in which the Left parties draw support from their supporters in return of the several benefits given to them which is conditional upon their electoral support. Such a form of clientelism is also evident in the Left's distribution of governmental benefits in the gram panchayats. There have been severe complaints about the beneficiaries of these schemes are evidently close supporters of the Left. However what is interesting is that 'there a system of rotation of the system of beneficiaries'. It is difficult to accommodate so many beneficiaries in a specific programme. Furthermore, it is important to understand another significant finding. A village gets more benefits when the same party is in power in both the village and the district. Hence, since it is the function of the zilla parishad that to distribute the benefits to the gram panchayats, the

¹⁶ P. Chatterjee, 'The Coming Crisis in West Bengal', *EPW*, Vol 44, No. 9, 2009, p. 52

party in power in the former, favours the village that votes for the dominant party. This is true for all parties in power.

The political scenario in West Bengal can also be deciphered from the corruption and illegalities which prevail. 'The control of such menaces in society has become an important aspect in the Left rule. The management and distribution of benefits and hence management of illegalities is the task at hand for any party in power'. The issue is whether such a task can be successfully undertaken by the Left. Partha Chatterjee has highlighted the party's control of the bureaucracy resulting in the growth of 'bureaucratic corruption, unlicensed mills, education and government employment'¹⁷. As far as teaching is concerned, the vacancies are filled up by the official public service commissions but these institutions are said to be politically manipulated. There have been several unlicensed tutorial centres which are said to be politically regulated. 'When the Left has been a part of this nexus it is difficult to view it as a party managing such illegalities'. Furthermore, curbing illegalities mean that there should be certain degree of negotiation with the structures of law and police. However, what is evident from the given scenario is that the rising cases of violence in dealing conflicts have become an important phenomena worth noticing. 'Mediators have always used violence as a mechanism to bring peace and build consensus'.

Let us now look at how the CPI(M) establishes its dominance on the rural and urban sectors in West Bengal. On the rural front, the Panchayat (local governance) becomes an important medium of controlling the lives of the people and also legitimizing its rule on

¹⁷ P. Chatterjee, 'The Coming Crisis in West Bengal', *EPW*, Vol 44, No. 9, 2009, p. 52

the subjects. The rural middle class plays an enormous role. An overwhelming majority of participants in state conferences of Pradeshik Krishik Sabha during the 1980s were both the peasant and non peasant middle class. It is here that deliberations takes place on rural issues. The school teachers played an important role in as they were the 'important link' between the party and the peasants. Much of the party's strategies have been closely linked to managing demands so that its control is not threatened. Hence, in such a situation what becomes evident is that the people's voices are heard through the party and not directly through individual deliberations and participations. If in the Aristotelian understanding participation of citizen mean 'sharing in decision and office' then can it be said that the masses of West Bengal has never been a 'governing citizen' who take part in government by discussions. In the understanding of Manabi Mazumder, the masses instead are 'beneficiary-citizens'¹⁸.

While analyzing the party strategies and engagement with the people and the society in West Bengal what can be gathered is that during elections to the panchayats, 'the party holds on to the land pattas of villagers in a bid to coerce the voters to vote for them. This has been true for almost all political parties contesting elections in rural Bengal'¹⁹. Given this situation, what eventually takes place is that citizen activism may not reach its potential. Let us now simplify the above mentioned statement. If we follow Harriss's thesis of the success of representative democracy in India, we can gather that

¹⁸ See Manabi Mazumdar, 'Democracy in Praxis: Two Non-Left Gram Panchayats in West Bengal'. *EPW*, Vol 44. No. 9, 2009, p. 92. By beneficiary citizen, Mazumder meant that the rural poor of Bengal are not governing citizens but beneficiary citizens being granted benefits by the ruling Left in return of the electoral support that are given to the party. They do not take part in a government of deliberations and discussions.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.92

‘..... even if there are severe imperfections in the functioning of political parties and their leaders, (in terms of corrupt practices and failure to deliver) representative democracy has been able to provide space for subaltern activism and struggles. The principle possibility to get representation is through the political parties’²⁰. This phenomenon is very true when we analyze the role of the Left parties in rural West Bengal. Even after acknowledging this, we still need to focus on the importance and the role of party centered politics. In rural Bengal what is evident is that people are ‘aware of this party centered politics but remain distant and disengaged from participatory politics and planning’. Citizens involve and are more engaged in voting and less in active political participation. However, the present scenario show signals of ‘social mobilizational politics’²¹ against neo liberal agenda of the CPI(M) in terms of their land acquisition policy. This has been like a reminder to the parties, both in power and the opposition to meet the demands of larger political activities.

2B: THE RULE OF THE LEFT FRONT IN THE URBAN AREA OF WEST BENGAL

In this part of the section it is essential to evaluate CPM’s hold over the urban areas. Although the electoral success of the Left is limited, the CPM led government has been more or less successful in winning the confidence of the prominent Bengali intellectuals. As Partha Chatterjee stated, “Several prominent theatre groups of Calcutta

²⁰ J. Harriss, *Antinomies of Empowerment: Observations in civil society, politics and urban governance in India*, *EPW*, 2007, p. 2718

²¹ Manabi Mazumdar, ‘Democracy in Praxis: Two Non-Left Gram Panchayats in West Bengal’. *EPW*, Vol 44. No. 9, 2009, p. 92.

regularly produce plays on campaign themes and hold performances at the Left Front election meetings in and around Calcutta.....The CPM also organizes as a matter of routine, a conventions of intellectuals in each constituency; teachers, writers, lawyers, doctors and other professionals sympathetic towards the Left Front to issue statements in support of the Left Front candidates. Such appeals are said to provide a respectable and non partisan legitimacy to the party's campaign"²².

In the urban areas the local committees and 'mahila samitis' play an important role legitimizing CPI(M)'s control over the masses. "This grip is obviously not an articulation of spontaneous and voluntary expression of the people always. It is this strategy more than anything else that has been providing electoral success for the Left Front till now. From the panchayats to the schools, from colleges to the universities, this strategy of controlling the civic institutions"²³ and the 'space of the civil society has consistently provided the Left Front with electoral gains'. To give an example, the Left has firmly laid its grip on most student's body, universities, and teacher's associations. Elections to these democratic forums have not taken place for long. Thus according to Mukhopadhyay, "the organizations ensure that grievances of the members of the university are capped within the campus and do not become issues of embarrassment for the friendly government. Thus one has not seen a single movement of any import on issues that affect the university leading to demonstrations against the government"²⁴.

²² As quoted in A. Gupta, 'Left Front rule in West Bengal: Domination without hegemony', *EPW*, Vol 36, No. 45, 2001, p. 4319

²³ See Surajit Mukhopadhyay, 'Left Front in West Bengal: Continuity but also Change', *EPW*, Vol 36, No.22 June 2-8, 2001) pp. 1942-1944

²⁴ See Surajit Mukhopadhyay, 'Left Front in West Bengal: Continuity but also Change', *EPW*, Vol 36, No.22, 2001, pp. 1942-1944

There are other issues of grave importance that has resulted in the decline of popularity of the Left Front in West Bengal. Sumanta Banerjee has raised the issue of the nexus between the party members and the 'underworld'. The emergence of 'lumpen underworld as a powerful arbiter both in politics and civil society'²⁵ has further deteriorated the condition. This can be traced to the 1970s when armed squads to protect the CPI(M) from the Congress party leaders. Furthermore, they needed them to fight the CPI (M-L) who posed a major challenge to the existence. In a drive to increase its hold and influence, the CPM engaged in violent conflicts with the other partners in the Left front including the Forward Bloc and the RSP. As a result violent conflicts increased to a large extent and replaced the political and ideological debates. Their control and spheres of operation did not remain confined to politics only, but extended to the daily social life of the citizens.

Dissatisfaction with unkept promises, and retaliation by CPI(M) functionaries if they protest, are also driving a large number of the party's supporters to switch over to the Trinamul Congress. This is what happened in Midnapore, leading to the Panshkura disaster²⁶. Contemporary examples of such trends are evident from the Nandigram-Singur agitations. Such trends are spreading to other parts of the countryside, threatening the CPI(M)'s hitherto assured rural base. In urban areas, the electoral success of the Left is limited. There is a strong presence of opposition parties like the TMC and an anti-Left sentiment that prevails in urban Kolkata. It is here that the Trinamool Congress has been

²⁵ See Sumanta Banerjee, 'West Bengal Today: An Anticipatory Post-Mortem', *EPW*, Vol 25, No. 33, 1990, pp 1812-1816.

²⁶ The Panshkura disaster in Midnapore is referred to the revolt by the landless and agricultural poor against the land acquisition policy of the Left parties in West Bengal.

able to secure 13 seats out of 16 in the civic polls. The election in these 16 municipalities was held on June 28, 2009. The Left suffered yet another defeat in West Bengal within one and half months of the Lok Sabha election. Of the 13 municipalities won by the opposition, 9 are in the region which became 'killing field' for the Left in Lok Sabha election (Left Front loses further ground in Bengal municipal elections). The opposition of the Left was able to win all but one region in the municipality in this region. The Left barely managed to secure the seats in the Rajarhat-Gopalpur municipality. There was election also held in the Siliguri Mahakuma Parishad. This is a truncated three tier panchayat administration in the district of Darjeeling, where the three areas of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Karsueng were under the 'Gorkha Hill Council'. The Mahakuma Parishad was retained by the Left with a 'slender' margin; it performed poorly in the panchayat samiti and gram sabha level. All these indicate to one point that support base of the Left is steadily weakening.

Let us now move on to the Left Fronts policy on peaceful settlements of industrial conflicts. The history of West Bengal has been tainted with bitter worker management struggles, especially in the jute industries. In 1983, Jyoti Basu, the then chief minister, in his speech at the All India Organization of Employees stated that the workers and the management needs to adopt a more 'realistic and reasonable attitude' to resolve the problems. The services of the government, as stated by him, were at their disposal. The workers were asked to abstain from the path of conflict and confrontation. However, it is to be noted that the government always used police force to curb any disturbances

that took place as a result of the labour management conflicts in the jute industries²⁷. One major criticism against the Left rule has been this usage of police force against any form of resistance of its rule in West Bengal. Recently, several such brutal attacks were waged by the police in most villages of Nandigram, Singur and Midnapore. Severe clashes have taken place between the Trinamul Congress and the Left.

To take this point further, Bandyopadhyay, raises the issue that by giving the “police force license to kill at will, West Bengal chief minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, has transgressed the nation’s Constitution and violated his oath of office”²⁸. When he became the Chief Minister of west Bengal, he went to the flood victims and admitted that the relief distribution has not been proper. This was a ‘refreshing change.....from the icy aloofness of his predecessor’²⁹. He also tried to improve efficiency in government offices by introducing ‘yearly assessment system’ which was abandoned long ago when the Left Front government came to power. He also requested the Kamtapuri agitators to give up their demand for a separate state as they did not have a legitimate grievance which he would try to remedy. It is of utmost importance to discuss the role of the ‘predecessor’ that I mentioned. Jyoti Basu was a very charismatic leader. He was an impeccable ‘bhadralok babu’ of the south Calcutta. His short, agile, firm stature with an unsmiling face and ‘cold frozen look commanded attention more than loving adoration’. He was a ‘crowd-puller’, never lipping, never wavering or faltering. The ‘bhadralok’ in him started ignoring the masses to such an extent that ‘gross aberrations of governance were attributed to the faults of the victims’. That was Jyoti Basu. Succeeding a political

²⁷ See D Bandyopadhyay ‘Licence To Kill?’, *EPW*, Vol 36. No. 1, 2001, p.12

²⁸ *Ibid* p. 12

²⁹ As quoted in D Bandyopadhyay ‘Licence To Kill?’, *EPW*, Vol 36. No. 1, 2001, p.13

colossus as Basu has its own problems. People expect Bhattacharjee to match up to him at every point.

However, maintaining law and order in the state led him to make some shocking comments on December 25, 2000 Buddhadev Bhattachayra declared, “Those who roam the roads with arms cannot enjoy human rights. Just shoot them and leave me to handle the repercussions”³⁰. Severe criticisms poured in from all corners staging the comment as unconstitutional. Freedom and liberty of individuals are to be guaranteed under any circumstances. The article 21 of our Constitution guarantees right to life. This article is closely related to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 3 of the Declaration states that, “everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of persons”. On the other hand, Article 9 states that’ “No person can be subjected to arbitrary arrests, detention or exile”. One indicators of progress of human society and civilization has been the degree of restraint to be put on state sponsored terrorism. Movements for restoration of the rule of law have been evident in the history of mankind. The Magna Carter, the great Charter of Liberties, adopted in England restricted the powers of sheriffs so that no man can be delayed or denied justice. The French Revolution has been another indication of freedom. The newly independent nations also incorporated lessons from these documents and struggles in order to secure to all its citizens right to life and liberty. The Supreme Court of India, in its various rulings, has reaffirmed its faith in the doctrines enshrined in our Constitution. In the Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samity vs the State of West Bengal³¹,

³⁰ The Statesman, Calcutta, December 26, 2000.

³¹ Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samity & Ors v State of West Bengal & Anor. Cited as: (1996) AIR SC 2426/ (1996) 4 SCC 37. The case was the first in which the Supreme Court held that the right to life included an obligation to provide timely medical treatment necessary to preserve human life.

the Supreme Court ruling stated that failure of the government hospitals to provide timely treatment to its patients is also a violation of Article 21. Furthermore, in the *Bandhua Mukti Morcha vs Union of India*³², the Supreme Court stated that everyone in this country has the right to live with dignity and free from exploitation.

On the other hand we see that the police force in our country enjoys power to arrest under the Criminal Procedure Code and other special laws. Hence, this power has been misused by the police to a great extent. In order to substantiate my argument, I would like to place the Third Report of the National Police Commission report where it was observed that nearly 60% of the arrests were unjustified. Recently several cases have been registered against police officials for fake encounters. There has been severe criticism against the police in West Bengal. They have been considered to be 'ineffective' and 'incompetent'. Most murder cases remain unresolved today. There is a lack of technical knowledge, expertise and forensic skills to solve cases. Those officers who do not favour any particular party and take a neutral stand are often left isolated. The reign of terror by the police has been evident in the days of naxal movement in West Bengal and in suppression of militancy in Punjab. Contemporary incident of rift amongst the Left Front stalwarts in dealing with the Maoist insurgency in West Bengal is another example restoration of law and order. In this case also Buddhadev Bhattacharya, the then Chief Minister has used police force to deal with the issue. What is important is that any further

³² According to the *Bandhua Mukti Morcha vs Union of India* case, the Supreme Court ruling stated that welfare measures for labourers working in the mining leases. The court laid down comprehensive measures for the rehabilitation and supportive working environment of the labourers working in mine leases. The court also directed that the Assistant Labour Commissioner and the Deputy Labour Commissioner should verify whether the nine mining lessees to whom notice had been issued were paying the labourers wages that was commensurate with the provisions of the Minimum Wages Act. According to the facts stated before the court the mine lessees had been repeatedly and continuously committed gross violation of labour laws including non-payment of minimum wages and the State of Haryana must consider cancellation the leases of the defaulters.

misdemeanor would render him unworthy of the high office he holds.

Let us now move on to the issue of why has there been a change in the mindset of the voters of West Bengal. I shall deal with the trends in the voting pattern separately.

The West Bengal poll results have come as a surprise to many, including the ruling Left Front and the opposition. The reasons are different but there is that element of surprise that is common. For once no one thought that the LF would win by the margin that it did. The opposition was sure that the populace was tired of the LF and wanted a change. It can be argued that the central theme of the election was change. So what eventually led to this drive for a change in the mindset of the masses? The CPI(M)'s record as a ruling party in West Bengal is a 'sad story'. What was expected of CPM in power was a regime free from corruption, and a social order free from criminal domination. The people did not expect a revolutionary change in their economic conditions when they voted the CPI(M) to power in 1977. For the last three decades, the people kept their support to the CPI(M) rule in West Bengal so as to live in a state free from corruption and discrimination.

There have been very few economic benefits that the rural poor have received initially. There has been tremendous dissatisfaction about the unkept promises, and retaliation by CPI(M) functionaries, if they protest, are also driving a large number of the party's supporters to switch over to the Trinamul Congress. This is what happened in Midnapore, leading to the Panshkura disaster. Contemporary examples of such trends are evident from the Nandigram- Singur agitations on land acquisition policies of the Left front. Such trends are spreading to other parts of the countryside, threatening the CPI(M)'s hitherto

assured rural base.

Under the CPI(M) led Left Front rule, the sanctity of the institutions that are aligned with the state have been questioned. The party comes as a saviour to those who have undertaken illegal acts. Thus a person undertaking illegal activities may not be arrested by the police if he is 'protected' by the CPI(M) party bosses; a building promoter can neglect and bypass all municipal laws if he has the 'blessings of the party' and so on. The state has been witnessing a growing instance of criminality involving, robbery, dacoity, theft and abduction³³. The police force is regarded as incompetent to deal with the present crisis. People's faith in administration has been shaken. In West Bengal it is often seen that the irate mobs lynch the anti social elements. There is a trend towards mob violence which has initiated in a mockery of laws. Who can be blamed or held responsible for this state of affairs in West Bengal? It is the Left Front government and particularly the CPI(M) as a political party. The local committee of the CPI(M) which is a 'powerful extra-legal agency of governance operating in an area' assumes power unmatched to any other institutions. Mr. Buddhadev Bhattacharya, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, and a member of the Left front government is directly responsible for this indisciplined, self seeking mob rule. What he should have noticed till now is that ordering license of killing to the police will jeopardize the basic rights of life and liberty of the common man. Instead of this he should have been able to check the arbitrary powers of his party leaders and bring them under the law of the country. In his oath of office he had solemnly affirmed that he would "bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India as by

³³ See D Bandhyopadhyay 'Licence To Kill?', *EPW*, 2001, p. 13

law established", that he would "uphold the sovereignty and integrity of India" and would "do right to all manner of people in accordance with the Constitution and the law without fear or favour, affection or ill will". By ordering the police licenses to kill, he has gone against Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Elections are of utmost importance to a democratic culture. It is important to analyze the election results in order to understand the paradox of the Left in West Bengal. We are all aware of the rich legacy of the Left since 1930s in 'popularising radical idealism, propagating norms of equality and justice among the marginal, and in shaping a unique sensitivity for human dignity not readily available in many parts of the country'. However, recent works by political scientist have confirmed that the Left has been unable to bridge the gulf between its speech and action, between theory and practice. Its elitism has become a stumbling block to its universal ideology. Let us try and find an answer to this dilemma. Eric Hobsbawm has outlined this dilemma. Identity groups were not central to the Left. The American and French revolution, where indeed coalition or group alliance, but held together not by specific ideology and aims that were specific to the groups. There was an universal approach of democracy that did bind all groups together. The political project of the Left is universalist which means that it is for all human beings. Hence, the Left Front in West Bengal has to make tremendous efforts in retaining its support base and in fact recapturing some. But now it needs to steer a careful course, for instance, balancing industrial growth and harmonious industrial relations and focusing on such issues as gender justice, health, welfare and quality of life issues.

Following its huge setback in the Calcutta civic polls of 2010, the CPI(M) has retaliated

in a very violent way, by physically attacking its political opponents and also journalists. There were also instances of violent clashes that breaking out between Trinamul supporters and CPI(M) cadres in several villages in West Bengal, when the latter took it out on the villagers who had voted against the CPI(M) by forcibly evicting them from their homes. The history of violence is not new to West Bengal. In 2000, several attacks on media persons and journalists in different parts of the state during the municipality elections that month had taken place. This violence reached its climax when on August 10, right inside the government headquarters, Writers' Building in Calcutta, members of the CPI(M)- led Coordination Committee of State Government Employees assaulted journalists who were covering an anti-government agitation organized by their rivals. There were several injured and hospitalized.³⁴

The common people are serious victims of such violence. Whether it is an urban area or a rural one, violence is evident in its entire corner. 'The system exposes a series of bribing local party bosses without which they cannot get anything done, and the vindictiveness of the entire party organization if they dare to criticize, let alone challenge, the CPI(M) monopoly'. If we compare the ratio of violence between rural West Bengal and other states then we can decipher that in most other states like Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, situations are worst than in West Bengal. Most of the killings are due to land, caste based conflicts and honour killings. In West Bengal, violence is party based mostly. In the urban region, Kolkata is in a much better state when compared to metropolitans like Delhi and Mumbai where, international mafia dons,

³⁴ As mentioned in Sumanta Banerjee, 'West Bengal Today: An Anticipatory Post-Motem', *EPW*, Vol 25, No. 33, 1990, pp. 1816.

smugglers and property dealers rule. In other parts of India, like North East India, Kashmir, and Tripura, violence has taken the form of brutal killings, insurgency attacks and social unrest killing thousands of innocent citizens. In comparison to these states, the political and social situation in West Bengal does not look that dismal. Hence, the Trinamul leader Mamata Banerjee's demand for the 'imposition of president's rule on West Bengal therefore sounds hollow, and should be dismissed as yet another populist slogan of political opportunism that is the hallmark of her politics'.³⁵

It is however of importance for us to notice the nature and causes of violence in West Bengal. It is also different from the caste- based violence that can be seen in parts of north India. The clashes are purely 'utilitarian' in nature where two parties are in conflict-- the CPI(M) to retain its power and the Trinamul Congress to capture power. It is important here to understand the nature of composition of the Trinamul Congress, which I shall discuss at length in the following chapters. This party is composed of ex-Congress man. They focus id to oust CPI (M) from West Bengal. This is the only 'one point programme' that they have without much agenda for alternative development path. Its leader Mamata Banerjee, is thus "filling the vast void of a politically disillusioned Bengali public mind with hate filled rhetoric against the CPI(M), goading her followers into violent confrontations with its cadres, and leading to a vicious cycle of attacks and counter-attacks between the CPI(M) and the Trinamul".

Let us now look at the socio economic causes underlying the violence. In West Bengal, the benefits from rural development schemes like Operation Barga have been

³⁵ As quoted in Sumanta Banerjee, 'West Bengal Today: An Anticipatory Post-Motem', *EPW*, Vol 25, No. 33, 1990, pp. 1812.

stagnant now. Their beneficiaries have now joined the middle class and there has been a fierce competition among them to control money whether it be money in the name of development, or contracts for road building, or licenses to run buses or trucks, or power and position as members of panchayats and MLAs. There has been a natural gravitation towards the CPI(M) as it is the party in power. But the party does not have enough to distribute among all. The left-outs remain disgruntled. Dissatisfaction with unkept promises, and retaliation by CPI(M) functionaries if they protest, are also driving a large number of the party's supporters to the Trinamul Congress. This has been happening in the rural areas in West Bengal threatening CPI(M) hitherto rural base. After the initial enthusiasm of Operation Barga, the CPI(M) failed to initiate in the follow up development programmes and schemes that could have generated socio-economic prosperity and rid West Bengal of its stagnation. The hopes aroused by the panchayat system dissipated into widespread frustration with the nepotism and corruption on which the local leaders are thriving. The adult literacy programme, which held promises of some change in the early 1990s, failed to keep up its momentum.

In Sumanta Banerjee's understanding, "the problem with the CPI(M) in West Bengal is that one half of its leadership - the elderly lot - is bogged down politically and instinctively in old Stalinist thinking and methods. The other half - those in the 40-50 years age group - has come to a sticky end with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the somersault of the Chinese Communist Party. Ideologically confused and politically unable to shape a believable and coherent vision, this leadership has reared up during the last 20 years or so, a generation of young cadres who have never been trained in the ideology of Marxism, but brought upon the values of a militant servility to their

immediate leaders. Useful morons with a vague and untutored enthusiasm for the CPI(M), they are adept at yelling slogans without respect for words and meanings". Hence, these leaders can switch to other parties if these come to power in future. They can switch their loyalties in accordance to the benefits that they derive.

Having said so, I shall now move on to analyzing the electoral decline of Left Front in West Bengal with special emphasis on the issue of development through industrialization. The CPI(M) has, in the recent years, propagated the path of industrialization, foreign and private investment for initiating development within a neo-liberal paradigm. The dilemma that the Left has faced as a result of this approach has been the loss of its traditional support base. This is primarily one of the reasons of electoral decline of the Left Front. The Left has been unable to develop an alternative path of development different from the neo-liberal approach. The next chapter is a contribution in understanding this dilemma that the Left Front has faced over the years.

CHAPTER 2

ELECTORAL DECLINE OF THE CPI(M) IN WEST BENGAL: AN ANALYSIS

ELECTORAL DECLINE OF THE CPI(M) IN WEST BENGAL: AN ANALYSIS

The position of the left in India and especially in West Bengal has been analyzed by several commentators over the years. This position can be explained to a great extent with the international happenings in the last two decades. The fall of the Soviet Union has been explained by many. For some, it has been the conspiracy of the imperialist. For example, play in Calcutta portrayed Gorbachev as a CIA agent. Following this logic, democratic modes of expression like the elections in countries like Hungary, Russia, Nicaragua and Hungary are 'false consciousness' supported by capitalist money and power. There have been others who think that the corrupt leaders in socialist countries for their personal aggrandizement distanced the common man from the share of the profit. Hence, despite the Russians having great military and defense potentials bad management caused the major problems. Therefore, changes in history are evident when there are structural problems. The problem with this set of argument is that military and defense strategies and the money spend on these, hide the massive inefficiencies of civilian economy. It also portrays the defeat in competition with capitalism.

Some commentators stated that when eastern European countries realize the problems of unemployment and inflation, they will resort to socialism. First, unemployment and inflation are not only problems of capitalist nations but also in many socialist countries. According to Pranab Bardhan. "the huge subsidies and budget deficits in the stagnant economies of many socialist countries feed the inflationary potential.....and after years

of 'repressed inflation' and rampant black markets it ultimately bursts out into hyper inflation as it did in Poland in the late 1980s before the fall of communism there"³⁶. He also sites other examples like China and Vietnam, where the rate of unemployment has been very high. If we take the example of China, the reform of the Chinese system has taken place without giving up the all powerful communist party of China and the doctrine of communism. There has been a state guided economic liberalization in the Chinese model of development. The fact that the Chinese are opening up to foreign investment is a 'pro IMF' policy.

The first important question that the Left in India has to rethink is the importance of planning in the era of globalization. The notion of planning is of utmost importance even in the contemporary scenario. It is essential in matters of 'investment co-ordination', investment in the cooperatives and the public sector the absence of future market, a case where market fails. However, the model which compliments planning is not a bureaucratic or centralized 'allocation of resources'. Planning can be still used in implementing the plans in accordance with the market signals.

One problem with this sought of an argument can be that market signals are in favour of the purchasing powers of the rich. However, with high taxation policies, redistributive mechanisms (land reforms, educational facilities, health services etc) this onslaught can be curtailed. It is inefficient to achieve redistributive goals through mechanisms like high restrictions on competitions (foreign and domestic) and productions (through licensing).

A major point of conflict between the neo classical and Marxist view in the area of

³⁶ As quoted from P. Bardhan, 'Avoidable Tragedy of the Left in India', *EPW*, 1991, p.2408

development economics focuses on the gains from foreign investment and trade. The dependency school of thought³⁷ has regarded such foreign intrusion as detrimental to those countries in the 'periphery'. The periphery would have been better off if there was a more egalitarian distribution of assets in the international arena. The theory of imperialism focuses on the penetration of foreign economies in the undeveloped countries. This 'brutal but necessary' involvement is needed for the destruction of the pre-capitalist structures. The imperialist theories, moreover, point out the weak nature of the local bourgeoisie in the underdeveloped nations. Writers like Baran have concluded that as a result of 'foreign investment there are chances of surplus expropriation by the foreign nations along with the domestic pre-capitalist oligarchies'. Transnational alliances and foreign investment have led to rapid transformations in states like Brazil, Malaysia and Mexico.³⁸ However, it failed to generate employment and did not lead to export dynamism.

The path of development in this era of globalization to be adopted by the Left is highly contested even amongst Leftist thinkers. This paper is an attempt in this direction to unfold the various strands of opinion that has emerged from among the Left themselves.

This is a case study of West Bengal, an Indian state which has not only been governed by

³⁷ The Dependency school of thought states that resources flow from the peripheral underdeveloped economies to the core or wealthy states. Developed around 1960, this theory opposed free market economist. According to this school of thought, the undeveloped countries should not stay connected to the world market in order to pursue an independent path of economic development without any dictated external pressures by the developed states.

³⁸ Many Latin American countries like Argentina, Brazil and Mexico opened their economies during the 1990s. One major shift was from import substitution involving capital control and trade barriers to a more open market. This was supposed to increase trade, export led growth and technological gains and reduce poverty. In one of the studies conducted by Cristoph Ernst [(http://natlex.ilo.ch/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_elm/documents/publication/wcms_114031.pdf) accessed on 12/05/2010] it was seen that economic openings in these states did not lead to export dynamism and had a disappointing impact on employment.

Left over the past three decades but also has passed a maximum number of 'pro-labour'³⁹ regulations in the Vidhan Sabha.

During independence, West Bengal was a highly industrialized state in India. The main focus was industries which were export oriented like jute etc. The British controlled these industries before the Second World War. During the 1930s industries all over the world were hit by the global recession. West Bengal was no exception. These industries had gone through massive recession and investment had drastically slowed down. In many cases, investment in these industries had completely stopped. Following the partition of India, West Bengal remained one of the worst hit states in terms of economic development owing to the strained trade relations between East and West Bengal.

Therefore, important industries like jute and tea began to suffer. Secondly, another factor posed a grave problem in terms of efficiency and economic development. There was transfer of ownership from British hands Indian entrepreneurs who were not so efficient and competent to manage and handle these industries. In comparison to the other parts of India, like Bombay, industrial development failed because of these reasons. In Bombay, there was no transfer of ownership from the British. The most important sectors like cotton and textile industries were handled by indigenous entrepreneurs.

Post independence, there were primarily two reasons for the steady decline of industries (especially jute industries) in the greater part of West Bengal. The first major reason has been explained by Deepti Chakravarty where she blames the policy of import substitution adopted by the Indian government, which overlooked the various problems faced by the

³⁹ A compendium of 10 volumes contains the labour regulations in Indian industries. <http://isidev.nic.in/book'0806.html> accessed on 13/05/2010.

labour intensive jute industries. The second reason for the absence of development in this region has been due to the policy of 'freight equalization'⁴⁰ adopted by the Indian government. According to this policy, the industrialist could now set up industries in any part of India without having to worry about the cost of transportation of minerals from mineral rich states to non mineral rich states. The cost of transportation would be subsidized by the central government. This policy was adopted so private investments could be made in states which were previously not made owing to the high cost incurred by the industrialist as a result of the cost of transportation of minerals from the mineral rich states. One of the major criticisms against this policy has been that as a result of this initiative, on the one hand, states like Bihar and West Bengal remained impoverished whereas states like Maharashtra and Gujarat developed enormously. Despite being mineral rich states, these places could not retain the huge competitive advantage of being rich in terms of its mineral and natural resources. Apart from these policies, the militant trade unionism in the industries, the frequent strikes and gheraos, scared new private investors. Therefore, West Bengal did not remain a lucrative option for private investment for most investors.

Moreover, the centre state relations became sour after the Left defeated the Congress in West Bengal assumed power in 1977. This created impediments for the flow of private investments in the state. The centre levied its control through 'industrial licensing policy'. Furthermore, low productivity caused serious problems for most investors in this region. As a result of this, the big farms started 'farming out production' to small scale farms. The unorganized sectors started playing a major role in this process. Thus in this process they

⁴⁰ D. Chakravarty, 'Trade Unions and Business Firms: Unorganized manufacturing in West Bengal', *EPW*, Vol 44. No. 6, 2010, p.

could avoid the onslaught caused by trade unionism. As a result there has been a steady decline in the presence of traditional industries like cotton, tea and jute. Various industries closed down, since 1980s. As a result of this, the workers became very vulnerable, thus losing their jobs at a high rate. Many workers shifted to the unorganized sectors to earn. Trade unions in most part of West Bengal became less effective as they agreed to the settlements given to them by the management industrialists.

During the 1990s as a result of two important industrial policies adopted by the Indian government- first the removal of freight equalization and second, the abolition of industrial licensing- economic development was initiated in many states. West Bengal was no exception to this. The Left government in West Bengal initiated the new industrial policy for attracting foreign and private investment and with such positive measures then why has the position of West Bengal has not improved than other states as Maharashtra and Gujarat? The prime reason, as outlined by some scholars, has been the better utilization of liberalization policies by the latter states than West Bengal. Hence there has been a decline in terms of employment generation, wage rates and labour productivity in West Bengal (post 1990s) than the other two states mentioned. However, the lack of an alternative economic policy different from the neo-liberal paradigm can be the cause of this decline. There is a need for the Left Front to rejuvenate the dying public sectors and initiate in investments in the cooperative which can be collectively owned by the rural poor⁴¹.

Another development became evident post 2000 in most states of India- employing

⁴¹ As paraphrased from P.Patnaik, 'In the aftermath of Nandigram', *EPW*, Vol 42, No. 21. 2007.

contract labourers. West Bengal is no exception to this. In a research undertaken by Ahmed (2008), he has shown the increase in the use of contractual workers headed by a small and permanent management. The rest of the workers are generally hired on a contractual basis. This gives the employer the flexibility in terms of work requirements and also in terms of lower wage cost given to the workers. This is evident mostly in small and medium sized firms. There were hardly any new permanent jobs created. The vacancies were filled in not by hiring permanent workers but by delegating the job to workers hired on the contractual basis. On top of that with the growth of militant trade unionism in West Bengal, there has been a decline in 'organized workforce' in this state.

With a large number of industries closing down, even after the abolition of freight equalization and industrial licensing, work being given out on a contractual basis, the rate of unemployment increasing over the years, how do trade unions view this situation? Most of the contract workers have played a major role in the trade unions themselves. Does this imply that the trade unions in West Bengal have lost their strength and have accepted the managerial decisions silently? There has been a change of attitude in the governance of the Left ever since its coming to power in 1977. This change of attitude is related to a state favouring business and foreign investment. This became all the more evident with the initiative of the Buddhadev Bhattacharya government seeking investments from the Tatas Nano project in Nandigram and Singur regions of Bengal. However, presently our focus is that why is it not possible to get the jobs done from permanent workers by utilizing the present capacity of the firms? It is true that the attitude of the government of India, in general, and West Bengal, in particular, has changed post 1990s. Pro-investment policies has reduced the time that was previously required to get

clearance for setting up a new production unit, a new firm or/and getting permission for exporting goods. Despite such positive initiatives, the problem of implementation at the grassroots level remains a major impediment in terms of investment profit. It is important to note here that in the 'context of production' the management and the workers are two different parties working under a common contract. It is the duty of the government to protect the property rights of both the sides.

One of the major reasons given by the management for the increase of contractual jobs in the organized sectors in West Bengal has been due to the negative role of the trade unions. According to them, the union leaders always resist any increase in work loads. On the other hand, the contract clearly states the clauses which outline the responsibilities of the contractual workers and the load of work to be finished in that stipulated period. The management feels that in the past the permanent workers in West Bengal do not work unless they are paid extra or over time. Overtime payment in this part of India actually means 'extra payment without extra hours of work'. Furthermore, the rate of absenteeism has increased amongst the permanent workers. Therefore, even if the ruling Left front in West Bengal has adopted a pro industrial investment attitude, the work force at the grass root level has remained inefficient in terms of delivery. Why should the permanent labourers who have previously received wages without doing much work start working diligently at the initiative of the ruling Left?

This question has initiated another important question which pertains to the aspect that why a party like the CPI(M) and its mass organization CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions) did let workers behave like this over a period of time? One of the two

explanations behind this has been the loss of vote bank which was feared by the CPM post 1977. The ruling party was not in a position to risk its vote bank. Over the years the trade union leaders of the CITU and the local party bosses assumed enormous independence in their area of dominance. There is a 'patron client relationship' which dominates West Bengal. Most of these trade union leaders with the help of the party are able to provide help to the 'retrenched workers' by giving them license for riskshaw pulling, jobs in construction sectors, and other helpers jobs. Thus this has led to the growth of a patron client relationship in West Bengal and has secured a stable vote bank especially in rural part of the state.

In order to understand the recent happenings in West Bengal we need to make an in depth study of the model of development being propagated by the Left under the leadership of Buddhadev Bhattacharya. This new model of development, for the capitalist class, was followed after Buddhadev Bhattacharya became the Chief Minister of West Bengal. The CPI(M) played an important role in Singur after the election victory in 2006. The Chief Minister was keen in announcing the Tatas car project factory in West Bengal. The primary concern for such a huge project was the availability of land. More than, 1000 acres of land was required by the Tatas to build this project. The availability of cheap agricultural land with transport facilities were a necessity. However, the necessity of consulting the elected Gram Sabha was not felt by the party.

There is plenty of poor quality land available in West Bengal. Furthermore, many industries have closed down. The CPI(M) could have utilized these areas for the Tata

project. There are several reasons for which the Tatas pressed for this area. The prime reason was its connectivity with the Delhi Road which could solve the problem of accessibility and transportation. The State Government applied the Land Acquisition Act to acquire land. The compensation worked out was nothing in comparison to the land that was been taken away by the government.. The claims of the government were that this massive project is a developmental project bringing jobs and prosperity to West Bengal. The world has faced economic recession and depression many times in history. The recent economic meltdown saw the job loss of several people all over the world. The Tatas are not an exception. A study shows that between 1980-1994 Ford, General Motors and Chrysler (top three US car manufacturing companies) cut down their employees over 50%. If the Tatas had wanted to sell the cars at the rate of Rs 1 lakh then cost cutting is evident in its agenda.

The second question that came into light in this endeavour is with regard to the amount of land demanded by the Tatas. 1000 acres of land is way too much for assembling cars. Maruti Suzuki manufactures cars in approximately 296 acres of land. Such a situation indicated the possibility of the Tatas of converting this excess land into agribusiness of their own. Previous examples of such initiations have been seen by Reliance in Gujrata and the Birla Group in Konnagar. The question that remains yet to be answered is that what is the alternative model of development being initiated for the Left front government?

Nandigram represents only one of the examples of failure of constitutional machinery in India. Incidents like the Sikh riots of 1984, Gujarat riots in 2002 are other incidents

which portray a similar opinion. In these incidents the line that draws commonality is excessive state repression. The Salwa Judum⁴², brutal assault by police force, firing on Tribals and peasants reinforce the above mentioned phenomena. The series of question that rises are that can the state act like an individual? Will it be fair to suggest that our democracy is facing a basic challenge? The CPM failed to realize that there is something fundamentally wrong when the inhabitants of Nandigram and Singur protested against them and their endeavour for industrialization of the state. What the ruling party gathered was that the opposition was lead by the vicious motives of the Trinamool Congress headed by Mamata Banerjee and the Maoist to keep the CPM out of the area. The issue is one of democratic functioning of the state and the revolt of the people in Nandigram and the adjoining villages against the insensitive nature of the government which has acted in a partisan manner. The revolt was against the state's failure to protect its citizens.

I have argued that there is an element of continuity and change in the development policy of the Left in West Bengal. Though Buddhadev Bhattacharjee has initiated elements of capitalism in to the developmental agenda of the Left, his action represents both continuity and change in several ways. Furthermore this development agenda has given a strong support base among the urban middle class in West Bengal. In this course of action there is a strong challenge that the Left is facing to reconcile the difference of opinion between its traditional support base and the newly emerging support base. After taking charge of the state in 2000, the CM of West Bengal unraveled a new and dynamic

⁴² Meaning Peace March in Gondi Language. It is a movement against the Naxals in Chattisgarh in 2005. It was a people's resistance against the naxals. It is received bi-partisan support from both the opposition and the ruling party.

vision of development. The major focus was to initiate employment. Along with this what would also have evolved is the development of infrastructural improvement, industrial expansion and effective governance. Along with this, urban facilities were improved drastically so as to attract investment and rendering West Bengal in to a vibrant business hub.

Throughout this course of operation the Left has defined its development policy as different from the one initiated by the Central Government in New Delhi. The left has been highly critical of the economic initiatives of the Congress. This has been termed as neo liberal agenda by the Left as opposed to the path taken by the Left. In West Bengal the Left stated that the foreign investment has always been in accordance to their terms as opposed to the terms of the investor unlike the Central government agenda. Furthermore, the Left has sought to justify that its agenda should be favoured because it allows investment in West Bengal only when the investor brings in high technology and employment guarantee.

As I have already mentioned earlier, there has been an element of continuity in the developmental agenda of the Left in West Bengal.⁴³ On the industrial front, the Left faced severe working class militancy from the very beginning. Strikes and shut down of industries were evident throughout West Bengal. It was around 1978 that the CPM leader Pramod Dasgupta stated that stimulating investment and participation of private sector and multinational corporations was not incompatible with the Marxist ideology. Under the then Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, new incentives were clubbed under the 'new

⁴³ P.P Basu, 'Brand Buddha in India's West Bengal- The Left reinvents itself', *Asian Survey*, Vol 47, 2007

industrial policy' officially adopted by the CPM to attract private investment. There was a special focus in the infrastructural sector. The late chief minister himself went on trips abroad to gather foreign investment. However, after the tenure of CM Basu expired, Buddhadev Bhattacharya took this initiative further.

Soon after occupying the position as the Chief Minister of the state, Bhattacharya faced onslaught ranging from stagnation of the land reform process, fall in the agricultural productivity, reduced performances of the Panchayats in West Bengal, administrative corruptions and inefficiencies. The new industrial policy was hit by these problems in addition to lack of investment, 'intra-party' and 'labour-party' disputes. Unemployment figures soared high and anti poverty mechanisms failed drastically. Given this situation, the Left wanted to reinvent itself. It wanted to create an image that would not tamper with the neo liberal policies adopted by the central government of India and the international scenario of globalization. In an interview to the Ananda Bazar Patrika, he confirmed that "we are not in a pre-revolutionary situation. Capitalism is unlikely to collapse now."⁴⁴ He went further to state that "we are surrounded on all sides by capitalism. You cannot practice socialism by insulting yourself from the environment. This is the biggest error committed by the Soviet Union."⁴⁵ Buddhadev Basu reaffirmed his faith on classical Marxism which states that socialism cannot arrive without capitalism in a feudal society. According to him the Soviet experience proved us wrong. Instead the Chinese model of development, where the state sector, private sector, joint sectors and cooperative sectors co exists together. Having said so the leader brushed aside any claims that their

⁴⁴ 'Corporates in West Bengal Laud Government', Ananda Bazar Patrika, May 1, 2006.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*

government where harsh on the workers and soft on the capitalist. However, the CM of West Bengal firmly stated that they were not soft on capitalists and hard on the workers and the 'toiling masses'. The justifications lay in the fact since the workers and the masses lacked capital they should look towards the industrialist for it. The CM further stated that since investment from the socialist countries is way beyond the amount required for development, the only alternative remains in terms of investment from capitalist countries. In light of this the course of action involved 'confidence building measure' with the 'captains of the Indian industry'. The barons included Sanjiv Goenka, Ratan Tata, and Azim Premji. The Indian business class could help develop the economy of West Bengal.

First policy to have been initiated by the Left in West Bengal has been in the mid of 2005 with the plans of acquiring agricultural land for new development in the form of infrastructural ventures and industrial upgradation. For example in the mid 2005, there was an initiative relating to the relaxation of land ceiling act in connection with the acquisition of agricultural and for the purpose of business development in the area. Severe controversy appeared when some 5000 acres of land was to be handed over to the Indonesian Salim Group for building a township near Kolkata. Similar endeavours were visual when post 2006 Left electoral victory the state government passed proposals to acquire some 32000 acres of agricultural farmland for industrial construction. This new perspective of the Left was justified by them by showcasing the fact that an industrialized state was better off economically than a small landholder's economy. In the light of a reduced land to individual ratio this transition was the only way in which 'livelihood of

future generations of farmers- especially small and marginal ones- could be ensured into future'. This intention was very vehemently incorporated into the Left manifesto prior the 2006 election which stated that "Agriculture our foundation, Industry our future"⁴⁶.

Having said so, I would like to remind the readers, that this is the same Indonesian Salim Group that had killed several communist under the Suharto regime in Indonesia⁴⁷.

According to the CM Bhattacharya it is illogical to risk development investment by raising such sensitive issues and questions. Nirupam Sen, the then industries minister, went further stating that the era of command economy is no longer evident in India. Hence the investor's choice is the priority. Moreover, he suggested that he would not negotiate with the investor's regarding assured jobs of those displaced and marginal farmers as included in their compensational package.

Second, CM Bhattacharya tried to curb the worker's strikes and limit the active role of trade unionism, an act greatly appreciated by the entrepreneur class and investors in West Bengal. He stated that the workers should 'deliver' first and not 'clamor' for more. "Do not say *dite hobe dite hobe* (we want more), say *korte hobe* (we have to deliver)"⁴⁸.

The continuity and change in the Left's policy has been not the only concern with the

⁴⁶ As quoted in Chakyaborty, "Kintu Purano Model aar cholbe na" Ananda Bazar Patrika. May16, 2006.

⁴⁷ Under the rule of the second President of Indonesia, Suharto, the anti communist massacres of 1965 took place. It was the biggest conundrum in the history of Indonesia where several communists and their partisans were killed by the military. The killings took place post the failure of the coup attempt by the communists. Parallel to this there was the transition of power from Sukarno to Suharto who ruled over three decades after that.

⁴⁸ As quoted in Chakyaborty, "Kintu Purano Model aar cholbe na" Ananda Bazar Patrika. May16, 2006.

party leaders. Apart from the ideological rifts among party bosses on the path of development adopted by the CM in West Bengal, there were other concerns in the party. It has become increasingly difficult to reconcile the difference between the aspirations of the new support base of the Left and the traditional support base comprising of the rural poor and farmers. Previously, the electoral results emphasized that the Left significantly lost out on many constituencies in Kolkata. The primary reason for this is said to have been the long discontentment associated with the displacement of urban population cluster, unemployment, worker strikes, and lack of infrastructure. These have been the major reasons for the Left's failure to perform in Kolkata⁴⁹.

One of the major problems with Buddhadev Bhattacharya's developmental blueprint has been its capital intensive approach which focuses towards the information technology enabled services. This blueprint had little to offer to the unemployed people of West Bengal. It had little to offer in terms of reviving the traditional and manufacturing industries. These included tea, textile and jute. These are areas which could be revived for granting more employment opportunities for people outside the agricultural sectors.

There have been several comments on Left electoral victory even after such policies in the rural areas. Despite the stark reduction in votes in major constituencies in rural areas (which has been the traditional area of dominance of the Left), the Left has been able to sustain themselves as ruling party in West Bengal. In the eight districts of Birbhum, Purulia, Burdwan, Bankura, Dakshin Dinajpur, East Midnapur, and West Midnapur, the

⁴⁹ As paraphrased from B. Chakrabarty, 'Left Front's 2006 victory in West Bengal: Continuity or Trendsetter?', *EPW*. 2006, p. 3521-3527

Left has been able to maintain its dominance. However, the overall decline of vote shares of the Left has posed severe concern among the various Left Leaders. If we compare Left electoral record with that of former chief minister of Andhra Pradesh Shri Chandrababu Naidu, we will find that the later was voted out of office in 2004 because his development approach did not include the rural aspirations of Andhra Pradesh. The countryside was neglected. Therefore it is for CM Bhattacharya to decide that such policies that do not include the aspirations of the people might pose a threat to the present ruling status of the party. It has often been argued that the Left's position of West Bengal has been very stable for the past three decades now, particularly due to the continuing support from the rural voters. However, rural vote bank cannot be taken for granted because the potential effect of liberalization has yet to be felt in this part of the country.

In particular there have been concerns expressed over the ill effects of 'contract farming'. When parallels have been drawn with most of the Latin American countries, it was seen that absence of a government backing has posed a threat to most of the farmers in these countries are placed under an unequal contract with the corporate bodies. The multinationals would keep their terms and maximize their profit by the indiscriminate use of land. Moreover concessions may not be given in the case of failure of crops. Other problems may also crop up owing to the commercialization of crops which include the problem of food security. There has been stagnation in the production of major food crops due to lack to modern technology and investment in this sector.

Apart from the onslaught of commercialization of agriculture, there has been another

issue which has been debated over the years. Investors would always look for a land which is well connected, arable, has basic facilities like water, and fertile. The underlying focus of all investors is profit. Hence, rich arable farm land has been demanded by many investors in the past. In West Bengal, the Tata project demanded an agricultural land which was highly arable. In protest, a Krishi Bachao Andolan, was formed which protested against the government's demand for such an agricultural land. Their primary demand was that multi crop land should not be taken as opposed to one crop land. Furthermore, the compensation given to them were not adequate enough for the displacement they had to undergo. It should have been noticed by the West Bengal government to locate areas where land has been of a poorer quality as land was not directly utilized in car production (as has been used by Tata Motors for their Nano project). Moreover, land where mills and factories were closed down could also be used for the purpose of the Nano project. However, the failure to take such initiatives doubted the Left governments credentials and intentions in the welfare of the rural masses in West Bengal. The land acquisition policy of the Left government in West Bengal poses a serious threat to their survival in the state in the eve of the assembly elections in 2011.

CPI(M) led Left policy in West Bengal has not only been criticized by the opposition comprising of the Trinamool Congress but also by other orthodox Marxists in West Bengal. For the latter, the issue has been of abandoning its traditional pro poor agenda for the urban capitalist and the middle class. Measures including the investor's choice in selecting industrial sites, inadequate compensation, stripping the IT sector employees to form their own unions and policies on trade unions. What has been particularly feared is

that West Bengal might not eventually end up with socialism. The assumption that a full fledged capitalist state is essential for the advent of socialism may not be true in the case of West Bengal. Instead the state might move more closely to the neo liberal agenda of the Congress government in the Centre. The Left in West Bengal is standing at an ideological crossroad where on the one hand it has to maintain its traditional pro poor policy and on the other hand balance its position in the era of globalization. There has been a dilution of the party's ideological stances by the 'severe fiscal squeeze applied to the state by a dominant capitalist national and international economic system'.

What needs to be seen is whether the reform oriented Leftist agenda can win over the traditional support base on one hand and extend its support base in future electoral endeavour. The government has launched several other campaigns to maintain its hold on the minorities. These include announcing job quotas for Muslims in the state. It is for us to see whether such experiments ease the current pro bourgeoisie image of the CPI(M) in West Bengal.

In the next chapter, I have outlined the rise and growth of the main oppositional party, the Trinamool Congress (henceforth to be called TMC). The chapter is a humble contribution in understanding the role of TMC in the political scenario of the West Bengal. The TMC, post the industrialization policy of the CPI(M) through land acquisition, has been considered as a party championing the rights of the poor and common man in Bengal. The party now resembles the aspirations of the economically downtrodden.

CHAPTER 3

EMERGENCE AND THE RISE OF THE TRINAMOOL CONGRESS

EMERGENCE AND THE RISE OF THE TRINAMOOOL CONGRESS

In this chapter, I have highlighted the vote swing from the Left Front to the Trinamool Congress (henceforth called TMC) in West Bengal. This shift in vote bank is clear as far as the 15th Lok Sabha elections and the recent Municipal corporation elections in Kolkata are concerned. In the first section of the chapter, I have outlined the history of the Trinamool Congress, its ideology, organization and leadership. In the next section, I have shown statistics establishing the fact that there has been a shift in vote bank from the Left to the Trinamool Congress.

The main opposition of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has been the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal. The major focus of this party ever since its formation has been of unseating the CPM in West Bengal. In order to keep up to its opposition the TMC has joined several alliances which have been in opposition to the Communist Party. The recent Parliamentary alliance, post 2009 Lok Sabha election, with the UPA headed by the Congress has shown this party's long term plan of eradicating the Communist Party and providing for a steady opposition to the Left's agenda. The TMC can be stated as a party which is very volatile and unpredictable in terms of its long term agenda and alliances. However, one thing remains common even in this unpredictable nature of the TMC- its opposition to the Left and the Communist Party in particular. The enormous drive of the TMC in ridding Bengal of the decades of 'misrule' by the Communists has led it to join even those parties which are ideologically opposite from it. Hence when the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) emerged victorious in the 1999 Lok Sabha

elections the Trinamool Congress emerged as an important coalition alliance with it against the Left and the Congress. In the following decade the 2009 Lok Sabha elections brought it in coalition with the Congress. The primary reason behind this is the failure of the United Progressive Alliance henceforth called UPA) coalition (which followed the 2004 elections and included the Left) to continue with its alliance after their tenure of five years in the Lok Sabha. The Left broke out of the alliance leading the TMC to occupy an important place in the current UPA alliance.

In this chapter I have tried to locate the TMC history amidst certain assumptions that I have raised. First, post 1989 coalition politics emerged. Hence, the practice of making and breaking alliances were evident. In order to stay in power, parties sought to form coalition. Therefore, the regional parties also gained importance and were accommodated in such coalitions. Second, pragmatic calculations, of staying in power, has been the priority for most of these regional parties and their leaders. Such calculations assumed greater position than ideological affinities in forming and breaking coalitions. Third, such 'opportunism' did not affect their social base which depended on the caste, regional, linguistic and ethnic lines. While the first two assumptions can be traced to the TMC, the last seem to be missing. The durable social base has been absent when it comes to the history of the TMC. Due to the lack of a stable social segment the TMC has failed to recover in its bad times as it did not have any section to fall back upon. Before we move on to the recent developments in the TMC's anti left agenda on the eve of the legislative assembly elections in West Bengal in 2011, let us first outline the history, ideology, leadership of the Trinamool Congress.

The TMC evolved out of the break up of the Congress in West Bengal. Factionalism in the Congress was nothing new in the West Bengal scenario. It failed to provide a steady opposition to the ruling Left. The TMC formally came to existence on the 1st January 1998. Soon after its emergence, the party decided to join the coalition with the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) in the forth coming Lok Sabha election. The leader of the TMC, Mamata Banerjee refused to treat the BJP as a communal party. It came as a shock to most political analyst. The history of TMC and cannot be stated without referring to the leadership of Mamata Banerjee. She joined the Indian National Congress in 1972. She began working as the Unit Secretary of the South Calcutta Girls' college. In 1984 she was nominated by the Congress to fight CPM's Sommanth Chatterjee from the parliamentary constituency of Jadhavpur. To the surprise of many she won the seat which was one of the safest of the CPMs area of dominance. She became iconic for many Congress workers who thought that this might perhaps be the beginning of the CPM rule in West Bengal. She took up many populist issues and gained public support. Banerjee led and supported public demonstrations where she and her supporters were beaten up on several occasions by the police and the poosition party works. Despite the fact that Banerjee was an MP now she understood the long term necessity of continued demonstrations and struggle against the ruling Left in West Bengal to secure political power.

The next turning point for Ms Banerjee has been her victory during the 1992 elections from the South Calcutta constituency that led her to the ministry of sports and youth welfare under the PM Narsimha Rao's government of the Congress. This was soon followed by her resignation from the government as according to her the ruling Congress

government was unable to curb the atrocities happening in West Bengal. The primary reason for this has been the Left support of the Congress at this time. The next incident that further rendered her as a political icon was she was assaulted by CPM activist leading to a crack in her skull and her hospitalization for a couple of weeks. Her pictures splashed newspaper as a crusader, fearless of the assaults by the CPM. Soon she became the president of the Youth Congress (I) which gave her access to the various grass root workers of the Congress.

The Congress has always been marred by factionalism. West Bengal was no exception. There has been difference of opinion between the conservative and the radical element, between the organizational wing and the young workers in the party. This has been the primary reason why the party has been unsuccessful in retaining power in West Bengal since 1972. Such factionalism was also evident between Mamata Banerjee and other party bosses within the Congress. According to Banerjee, the then Congress party was not strong enough in its opposition to the Left in West Bengal. This was the primary reason for the breakup of the Congress in 1998 forming the TMC headed by Mamata Banerjee. Her difference with the leader was so acute that she stopped campaigning for the Congress during the Panchayat elections of 1993 and the Municipal elections during 1995. She also opposed the Bengal Bandh that the WBPC(I) declared. Her major rival was Soumen Mitra a political patriarch of the Congress. This was the time when two eminent leaders, Priyaranjan Das Munshi and Subhrata Mukherjee, of the Congress decided to join Banerjee. Thus in 'Trinamul' published in Bengali, the Banerjee declared her reasons behind forming the Trinamool Congress. She declared her supporters as extremist in struggle with the moderates who have already been sold out to the

CPI(M). Mamata Banerjee's principle was simple. The other members of the Congress (termed as the moderates) were siding with the CPM. Hence amidst such turmoil and turbulence, she formed her own party.

Soon after filing the Election Commissions papers for formation of a new party, TMC's tilt towards BJP has been much discussed about. Banerjee had to rationalize her party's alliance with the BJP in the forthcoming elections to the Lok Sabha. On the eve of the Babri Masjid demolition, there was the fear of losing Muslim support base during the election by TMC. She portrayed her pacifist role between the BJP and the Muslims after the demolition. Political calculations and implications suggested that on the one hand Congress would face a steep opposition from the BJP and the TMC. Eventually the CPM shall also face stark opposition from this coalition. In the election that followed in West Bengal, out of 29 seats the TMC won 7, and the BJP won 1. On the other hand the Congress only won only 1 out of 39 seats. Thus the Congress existence became minimal in the light of the rise of the TMC. Therefore, the TMC became the main opposition to the Left rule in West Bengal. For a party that was so young it was an enormous victory.

Although an opposition, it established its firm hold in the politics of West Bengal. It became essential for Banerjee to show her difference with her parent party- the Congress. One major demand that Ms Banerjee had throughout her political career has been the demand for a President's rule in West Bengal. According to her, the major reason behind such a demand has been due to the fact that law and order has been broken down under the CPM rule. She pressurized her allies on several counts to initiate the imposition of

President's rule in the state.

There are two issues that need to be highlighted at this point. The reasons for enormous vote bank of the Left in rural West Bengal have been indicated in the previous chapters. First, some commentators suggest that West Bengal can be called as a 'red bastion' as the Left has successfully occupied an important hold over the state in the last three decades. However, the decline in the percentage of vote shares, even in the rural regions, indicates the shift in the vote bank. The assembly and the parliamentary polls in the last decade portray a different reality altogether, suggesting that the Left's control over the electorate is not complete. Statistics reveal that the Left vote shares have been slightly lower than 50 percent of the total vote shares. This states that more than half of the vote shares could not be bagged by the Left. This decline in the percentage of votes has been a matter of concern for the Left. It is only due to the lack of unity amongst opposition that the Left has remained a ruling party in West Bengal till now.

The Left Front in West Bengal has served as one of the longest ruling front in the history of parliamentary democracy. The vision of the LF about the people's empowerment through participatory democratic practices at the grassroot level has pushed its major oppositions to the background. However, this trend has been smooth and successful till the 15th Lok Sabha elections in 2009. The LF witnessed major setback in this election in terms of its vote count. The margin from the last election was a huge defeat. It had won 26 seats in 2004 elections which were reduced to just 9 in 2009. The opposition comprising of the Indian National Congress and the Trinamool Congress gained 18 seats from 7 in 2004 to 25 in 2009. The victory has also been for the tremendous success in

this election by the Trinamool Congress winning 19 seats. The CPI(M)'s share of votes declined from 38.57% in 2004 to 33.10 % in 2009. Trinamool Congress, on the other hand, has shown an increase from 21.04% to 31.20 % in 2009.

Table 1: Shares of votes and number of seats won by political parties in the Lok Sabha Election in West Bengal⁵⁰

Left shares of vote

Parties	CPM	CPI	RSP	AIFB	TOTAL
2004	38.57 (26)	4.0 (3)	4.48 (3)	3.66 (3)	50.81
2009	33.10 (9)	3.60 (2)	3.56 (2)	3.04 (2)	43.3 (15)

BJP shares of vote

Parties	BJP	TMC*	Total
2004	8.06 (0)	21.04 (1)	29.1 (6)
2009	6.15 (1)	–	6.15 (1)

*TMC was an ally of the BJP in 2004

Congress shares of vote

Parties	Congress	TMC**	Total
2004	14.56	–	14.56 (6)
2009	13.47 (6)	31.20 (19)	44.67 (25)

** TMC was Congress ally in 2009

Source: The Election Commission of India. Lok Sabha election results of 2004 and 2009

www.eci.nic.in/results/

⁵⁰ Lok Sabha election results of 2004 and 2009 www.eci.nic.in/results/

As I have mentioned earlier, the social base of the Left has been primarily the rural sections of West Bengal. Its enormous success has been due to its pro poor development agenda in the past. The priorities being implementations of land ceiling measures in the form of Operation Barga, acquiring land from the zamindars and redistributing it amongst the poor landless agricultural labourers. The 2009 election results made shocking revelations about the shift in rural vote shares to the oppositions of the LF mainly INC and TMC. Almost 4% of the rural votes have gone to the opposition of the LF. The shift has been more prominent in the rural sections of West Bengal where approximately 26% of the vote shares have been lost by the LF. The section included in this vote count comprises of skilled and semi skilled workers. This suggests that the LF has failed to make any breakthrough in the development of these people. In the urban sectors also the LF has lost considerably, specially the urban businessmen. One of the main reasons cited by Jyotiprasad Chatterjee and Suprio Basu has been due to the problems the businessmen faced as a result of the forcible collection of monthly subscription by the CPM (tola in Bengal).

Table 2: Shifting support of the Left among occupational groups in rural and urban West Bengal.

Occupational Groups	Vote share % by Left	Vote share % by Congress	Gain loss of the Left since 2004 (percentage points)
Rural agricultural workers	46	41	-2
Skilled and semi-skilled workers	30	59	-16
Marginal farmers and share croppers	44	53	+1
Farmers	31	65	-28
Salaried	62	35	+23
Urban professional and salaried	44	44	-3

Business	39	51	-15
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Source: CSDS NES 2004-2009 post poll survey.

Caste has been another indicator in the 15th Lok Sabha elections and also the 2006 State assembly elections in West Bengal. Both the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribe have continued to vote for the LF as previously. The support base has not changed much and the vote shares continued to remain loyal to the LF. From this it can be deciphered that the LF managed to prevent more loss in the 2009 LS elections due to this unperturbed support from these groups. On the other hand, the Other Backward Classes (OBC's) and the upper caste have shown a different voting trend. From the statistics gathers it can be said that there has been a shift in the votes from Left to non Left parties. In comparison to the 2004 LS elections the OBC share of votes have gone down by almost 25 %. The non Left parties have registered a gain in the OBC votes. The TMC have gained from 18% in 2004 to 23% in 2009 and the INC has gained from 12% to 28% in 2009. The reluctance in the part of the LF to recognize the OBC as an official category can be an explanation to the decline in popularity of the LF amongst the OBCs. The economically backward section within this section is finding difficulty in coping up with the 'economically economic brethren'. Hence, there has been demand from them for terming them as STs rather than OBCs like the Rajbanshi's⁵¹ in Assam and the Gujjars⁵² in Rajasthan. The Kudmi- Mahato OBC community in West Bengal has been demanding for a ST status for quite sometime now. The neglect of the LF towards such demands of the OBC can partially explain for this shift in the vote towards non Left

⁵¹ The Rajbanshi caste group has been initiating the Kamtapur agitation in West Bengal. Their demand is for the revival of the historical Kamtapur kingdom. There has been a demand for a separate Kamtapur state in both West Bengal and Assam post 1990s.

⁵² The Gujjars in Rajasthan are a caste community struggling for a scheduled tribe status.

parties in the 2009 LS elections.

The upper caste has also demonstrated an anti Left pattern in terms of vote shares. The Congress has been able to secure, 53% of vote shares from the upper caste in comparison to the LF which has only secured 39% in 2009. The difference becomes more prominent by portraying the decline that the Left has faced from 2004 elections. In 2004, it received 50% of the upper caste votes which was reduced by 11% in 2009. If we now move towards the religious affiliations of the LF we will see that there has been a vote loss in terms of Muslim votes in West Bengal. LF's share of Muslim votes has been less than 36% while its contenders have received almost 58% of the Muslim votes. There has been a steady decline of Muslim votes from the 2004 LS elections.

The main reason for this decline can be traced back to the land acquisition policy of the LF for the proposed chemical plant in Nandigram and also some places in the 24 Parganas South. This has caused fear among the Muslims who numerically dominate these places. Individual cases also play an important role in this decline. The minority sentiments might have been hurt by the way in which the LF dealt with the Rizwanur Rahman⁵³ case.

Table 3: Percentage of vote shares by Social Categories

Caste Group	Cong 2009	Cong 2004	Left 2009	Left 2004	BJP 2009	BJP 2004	Others 2009	Others 2004	N 2009	N 2004
Upper caste	53	18	39	50	4	28	3	5	975	479
SC	26	7	55	55	9	33	10	5	414	266
ST	31	26	47	39	7	27	15	8	116	107
OBC	52	12	34	59	10	27	4	2	169	104

⁵³ Rizwanur Rahman was a computer graphics trainer married to a Hindu girl, Priyanka Todi, daughter of industrialist Ashok Todi. The murder of Rahman highlighted the nexus between wealthy industrialists, police officials and politicians in West Bengal. The other fallout of this case has been that the Muslims became suspicious of the CPI(M) led Left Front rule in West Bengal.

Muslims	58	24	36	47	1	21	5	7	526	134
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Source: CSDS NES 2004-2009 post poll survey.

The next table shows the voting trends among gender in West Bengal. Unlike the religious trend, there has been stability in the voting shares between the Left and non Left votes. There has been a slight edge towards the non Left parties. There has, however, been a decline in the vote shares of women towards the LF in the 15th LS elections. The unfavourable working conditions in which women work might be the primary cause of concern. Increased crime against women, ranking West Bengal 3rd among the other Indian states in 2007 by the National Crime Records Bureau, raises important answers as to why there has been a shift in the voting patters from Left to non Left parties in Bengal by women. West Bengal has been ranked within the top five Indian states as far a rape, domestic violence; kidnap and abduction of women are concerned. The demands of a safe environment by women, did not receive adequate amount of attention from the ruling Left. There has hardly been any positive approach of the ruling CPM in terms of checking the rising rate of violence against women.

Table 4: Percentage of vote share by gender.

Gender	Congress 2009	Congress 2004	Left 2009	Left 2004	BJP 2009	BJP 2004	Other 2009	Others 2004	N 2009	N 2004
Male	46	16	44	46	6	33	4	5	906	539
Female	46	13	43	56	6	24	7	7	795	416

Source: CSDS NES 2004-2009 post poll survey.

Second, electorates in West Bengal are on the party lines and not on cultural, religious, caste, ethnic and linguistically affinities. There has been a robust system of participatory democracy that has taken place in the political culture of West Bengal. Everyday

negotiations and deliberation are evident. According to Partha Chatterjee, the party plays an important role in these everyday politics of conflict and dispute⁵⁴. Hence, for any leadership to gain access to the vote bank, must engage with the people on an everyday basis. The party must protect the underprivileged from all sought of adversaries, like bureaucratic control, socio-economic onslaughts. In the political history of West Bengal no other party has been able to take such a grip over the lives of the people as the CPM. Therefore, it is very important for any party to involve themselves in the everyday lives of the people rather than focus on one time campaigning. This has been the main reason for Left victory in West Bengal over three decades. By contrast, the TMC and the opposition parties have focused on individual leaders and their areas of influence rather than on the everyday problems of the people of West Bengal. They demonstrate very little control over the party factions. It is only when the opposition parties demonstrate such organizational capacity that they would pose a real challenge to the Left in West Bengal. The TMC has, over the years, taken up individual issues and policies of the Left and criticized these. However, it is not until the land acquisition policy of the Left in the Nandigram Singur case that the TMC has taken initiative in the everyday politics of the people, safeguarding the underprivileged.

One of the major characteristics of the leaders of TMC has been the doctrine that it can sacrifice its position for the welfare of the people of West Bengal. This has led to the resignation of Mamata Banerjee and withdrawal of TMC support from the ruling coalitions in the Centre. It has over the years readily sacrificed positions of authority to

⁵⁴ See P. Chatterjee, 'The Coming Crisis in West Bengal', *EPW*, Vol 44, No. 9, 2009, p. 47-52

protect the people of West Bengal from atrocities of the CPM. However, the paradox lies in the fact that despite several resignations, the TMC has had no other choice but to join coalitions with parties with which it had problems before. For example, the TMC has now joined the alliance with the ruling Congress to form the UPA. The party wobbled between its long and short term objectives. TMC has always portrayed itself as a party with a difference. However, this difference has not reflected in terms of its ideologies and policies. It hardly has anything to offer as an alternative to the Left policy of development. The only agenda that TMC has is opposition to the Left policies in West Bengal.

Briefly, the TMC has failed to realize that the centralized authority controlling the entire party will not do. What is needed is a party which is decentralized in its outlook and party workers directly relating themselves to the problems of the masses. The only 'episodic mobilization' during the elections and campaigning will not do enough to sustain the party for a long term. This might only increase a couple of seats for the TMC but for winning the elections and forming government, it is of utmost importance to the party to involve themselves in the local issues of the people of West Bengal. Active involvement, rather than imposing President's rule in West Bengal might grant long term opportunity to this party. Though we know the problems that plague TMC, we need to know why these problems exist. In her books, *Upalabdh* (1995), *Anubhuti* (2002) and *Trinamool* (1999), Mamata Banerjee has outlined the grave problems she faced and sacrifices she made for the party. She also pointed out that most commentators find her decision making capacity as whimsical. However, all her decisions have been necessary. These, according to her, were not mistakes committed by her. There is a profound sense of

‘abhiman’, distress caused by a feeling of being wronged by others⁵⁵.

Mamata Banerjee’s party members have criticized her as an authoritarian leader. In an interview to the Frontline, Ajit Panja had commented that it was essential to follow her as the party was new. According to him, “she has all along been the most whimsical and autocratic. We all followed only because the party was new. She would change election manifestos, pick and choose candidates at random, even at the expense of sitting MLAs and tested leaders. The last straw was her secret alignment with the Congress(I), which till the other day she called the ‘B team of the CPI(M)’”⁵⁶. This can typically be called the ‘Mamata Khomota’ as outlined by Mukulika Banerjee. She is an ordinary woman with an extraordinary capacity to gain support of the lower middle class and local supporters ranging from slum dwellers to hawkers and toilers. Most of her supporters support her not because of her policies, but because she is the only existing opposition to the decades old Left rule in West Bengal. Her ordinary lifestyle, white clad sari and usage of plebian *bangla*, relates her directly to the masses.

A close analysis of the supporters of TMC is very important for us to understand the electoral support and the social base that the TMC has. It will also help us to understand the social and economic characteristics of the people. Contrary to the expectation of many the younger voters prefer the Left rule in West Bengal along with the rural sections of the state. Maximum votes from the Muslims, tribals and the other backward classes go

⁵⁵ As paraphrased from D. Bhattacharya, ‘Making and Unmaking of Trinamool Congress’, *EPW*, Vol 39(14), 2004, p. 1531

⁵⁶ As quoted from D. Bhattacharya, ‘Making and Unmaking of Trinamool Congress’, *EPW*, Vol 39(14), 2004, p. 1531

to the Left. The TMC has a strong hold on the economically powerful sections of the state. After the Nandigram protest of the TMC on the land acquisition policy it has become apprehensive whether or not this section will any longer support the TMC in future. Hence, it will not be wrong to suggest that electoral support from this social base is temporary for the TMC. Therefore, sustainable dominance for the TMC in West Bengal has failed in the past.

While comparing other leaders like Laloo Prasad Yadav, Jayalalita or Mayawati, with Mamata Banerjee, it can be said the formers have been victorious in the assembly elections of their state unlike Ms Banerjee. The answer to this has been hidden in the issue of social base on which they could fall back on has their disparate alliance failed. For the other leaders, there is a caste, regional and linguistic base from where they secure their vote bank unlike TMC. The TMC, though a regional party, has failed to secure that social base. In West Bengal, the Left has a firm grip unlike the TMC which is comparative a newer and recent formation. Hence any disparate alliance has proved fatal for Ms Banerjee and her party.

There is no negating the fact that despite a recent formation, the TMC has grown as an opposition to the Left more than the decades old Congress. However, TMC has failed to capitalize this. Ms Banerjee has failed to 'depersonalize' and 'decentralize' TMC working for the aspirations of the economically and socially marginal people. There is the absence of grass root politics required to build relations with the voters by associating themselves as a part of their everyday lives. Furthermore, there is an absence of an alternative path of development in West Bengal that has been propagated by this party.

Its only involvement in the politics of Bengal is in the form of its anti Left struggle, whether in the form of Nandigram and Singur, when it comes to land acquisition policy, or against rigging of votes by the Left, or corruption of the officials. West Bengal's economy has become stagnant with high rate of migration to other states for jobs and education. Following this, this state has failed to attract investments from private and foreign investors. Its public sectors and cooperatives are also inefficient. Hence, despite a clear shift in the vote shares in the various social categories, as outlined above, no alternative developmental policies are formulated or proposed by either of the parties. As a result the people has very little to choose from.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of my thesis has been to trace the electoral decline of the Left Front in West Bengal. In order to pursue this, I have outlined some of the criticisms that the Left Front has faced over the years with reference to its development policies. The most significant outcome of the recent Lok Sabha 2009 elections held in India has perhaps been the loss suffered by the Left. As a result of this the Left is no longer a part of the ruling coalition at the centre. There has also been a serious setback that the Left has faced in states like West Bengal and Kerala. This dissertation is a humble contribution in understanding this electoral decline that the Left has faced in these areas. It is important to analyze this setback because, although the Left is longer a part of the ruling coalition at the centre, it has been a 'major driving force behind India's journey towards a modern, secular and democratic society'. The Left is not the only force behind this journey as many other political and social movements have also played a major role in it. However, what renders the Left different from these movements is the fact that it also posses an electoral strength. This electoral strength is of utmost importance in a parliamentary democratic country like India. Since, the Left has to function within a liberal democracy; winning elections have become a necessity.

The Left Front, in India, has to operate within the ambit of a liberal democracy. On the other hand, post liberalization, it also has to operate within a country where the urban

educated middle class is largely the beneficiaries of globalization. The dilemma that the Left has faced in India is that when it resists forces of globalization to penetrate in the economy of West Bengal, it faces the criticism of being anti development. Here the term development is within a neo-liberal framework. On the other hand, if the Left takes initiatives in industrialization and foreign investments for West Bengal, it has been stated as a party, supporting the business class for vote bank, hence against its traditional support base (workers and peasantry).

Since the Indian urban middle class has not yet faced the onslaughts of globalization, as outlined by the dependency school of thought, the Left Front will hardly get any electoral support from this class. Hence, when the Left Front left the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition due to its anti-imperialist stands on the Indo-US Nuclear Deal, it lost many of the electoral support from the urban middle class in India. Had the Left Front managed to retain the support of its traditional social base, its electoral massacre could have been avoided. However, the Left Front in India had no alternative development policy which is different from the neo-liberal agenda professed by the UPA government. Therefore, in West Bengal, the Left wanted to adopt a policy similar to the other Indian states so as to face the competition with them. This policy followed the neo-liberal policy to bring about development in the state. Functioning within the framework of this neo-liberal agenda, there was the threat of “primitive accumulation of wealth” in terms of the land acquisition for industrial development. Thus there was erosion in the traditional social base of the Left.

While this loss of the traditional support base of the Left was anticipated, it was also thought that the opposition to this path of development (neo-liberal agenda of foreign and private investment) by the Trinamool Congress could bring the Indian middle class to support the Left. It was felt as a part of the election strategy that the opposition could be portrayed as a party thwarting industrialization and thus development in the state.

However, the outcome of the 2009 Lok Sabha elections and the 2010 civic polls in Kolkata showed results contrary to what had been anticipated by the Left. The decline in electoral support was not only from the peasant and the workers but also from the urban middle class. The urban middle class did not support the Left because of its long drawn policy of anti-imperialism and also its fallout of the UPA coalition. The peasant and the workers also did not support the Left Front because the anti-imperialist agenda of the Left was not sufficient enough to generate economic development in the state and the newly acquired model of development based on neo-liberal paradigm of foreign and private investment was anti poor. Therefore, the Left in India has to build an alternative model of development, different from neo-liberal paradigm.

The central feature of an alternative model of development should be the defense of the interest of the traditional social base of the Left (peasant and the workers). Development should be carved out for this class and not anti this class. Hence, any policy which takes away the rights of the workers reduces their wages, grabs lands from peasants in the name of industrialization cannot be a policy of development professed by the Left Front. Focus should not only be on the growth of GDP. This is perhaps the main debate that takes place between the two concept of growth and development. If private and foreign

investments do not come to the state of West Bengal as a result of this approach of the Left, then alternative model of investment (through private sector investment) must be professed.

There has been a strand of argument been put forward by scholar like Amartya Sen, which states that the deprivation of the workers and the peasants in the path of neo-liberal development should not be taken seriously as it is only temporary in nature⁵⁷. The development that can be generated following this path can bring about enormous prosperity which can compensate these deprivations. The issue of land acquisition in Nandigram and other parts of the country, in the name of development has been a part of the neo-liberal strategy been forced upon the country and all its states. There is a debate between the need for industrial development and the need for development of the workers and the peasant. There are those who have professed that industrialization would bring about economic prosperity to the peasants and workers by giving them compensation for their land and employment opportunities for their family. However, Nandigram and similar incidents of land acquisition in the name of development involves 'accumulation through encroachment'. The neo-liberal principles of development have unleashed its effect throughout the country, by camouflaging the 'corporate nature of industrialization' with development for all. This is not exclusive to West Bengal but to all states of the Indian Union, which has involved them in a neo-liberal drive to attract foreign and private investment. The fault of the Left Front government in West Bengal has been to not have protested against this path of development.

⁵⁷ As stated in P.Patnaik, 'In the aftermath of Nandigram', *EPW*, Vol 42(21), 2007. p.47

Many traditional supporters of CPI(M) have now criticized the party for its Stalist approach in initiating development. However, tragedies like Nandigram do not only happen under the Left Front government of West Bengal. Similar drives have also been initiated by other state governments like Gujrata⁵⁸ and Orissa⁵⁹. The problem lies in the intrinsic nature of a neo-liberal paradigm and not in the nature of CPI(M) rule. Hence, the opposition's active role in disgracing the CPI(M) in initiating a Stalinist methodology in its developmental path is problematic.

According to Prabhat Patnaik, industrialization under the neo-liberal approach is basically 'corporate industrialization'. This form of industrialization is for profit of the investors and anti-people. Since 1991, it has been able to create very few direct employment opportunities. Therefore, total industrial employment has hardly ever increased in India though there has been an increase in the growth rate. The only sections benefiting in getting employments are the urban middle class of India. This is one of the main reasons for the reluctance of the peasants in giving away their land for industrialization. Despite being given compensation, their employment prospects in future remain bleak. The negative employment generation that takes place with land acquisition is more than that employment been granted as a result of industrialization.

⁵⁸ In the name of 'Vibrant Gujarat', land acquisition is taking place by the Gujarat government for industrial development in Gujarat. Several industries like Ultra tech Cement, Gujarat Heavy Chemicals Limited and Gujarat Pipavav Port Gujarat have been set up in areas of Rajula, Kadiyali, Bherai and Bhachadar.

⁵⁹ In Orissa, agricultural land has been acquired by the state government for steel projects at Kalinga Nagar, 100 Kms from Bhubaneswar. Violent clashes have taken place between the police and the peasants over land dispute.

One of the arguments put forward by scholars professing a path of development on the neo-liberal model has been that industrialization can take out the surplus labour from agriculture and engage them in industrialization. It is true that in countries like the Soviet Union and former socialist countries, this process of shifting the surplus labours from agriculture to industrialization has taken place, but this was possible because the government in these countries were able to control the rate technological and structural changes. By this, I mean that these changes were a part of a planned growth and not a market led growth. By this argument, it is not meant that industrialization should not take place but that the destructive effects of industrialization should not be faced by the peasantry or the workers. This can not take place unless corporate industrialization is the only form of industrialization initiated.

Under the neo-liberal paradigm, the public sector plays a miniscule role and any investment in this sector is detrimental to development. The public sector is no longer taken as an investment option because of its inefficiency. Hence, it is not considered to be profitable when investments are made in this sector. Furthermore, it is also argued that the public sector does not possess resources for initiating investment. What these arguments fail to develop is that private companies like Ambanis and Tatas invest from their savings but from the finance they obtain from the various financial institutions. The public sector, in India, can do the same for making investment. The Left Front in West Bengal could have revived the public sector by raising finance for investments. In this way the Left Front could have developed an alternative path for development without succumbing to the neo-liberal principles for development. What is happening in India

today is not the capitalist competing against each other for acquiring government projects but the state governments competition against one another to attract private investment. To this the conditions laid out by the capitalist is so stringent that any negotiation by the government may loose them to other states. Thus if the Tatas were not given the agricultural land in Singur and Nandigram for their Nano project, they would be given similar land in other states like Gujrata and Uttarakhand. The Left Front government failed to negotiate with the Tatas resulting in their withdrawal from West Bengal.

The path of development adopted by the Left Front in West Bengal distanced it from its traditional support base. The opposition in the form of Trinamool Congress took this opportunity and championed the cause of the peasants. The Left Front could have initiated in the process of industrialization under the aegis of the cooperative and public sectors. The peasants could have collectively owned these industries by cooperating with one another. The Left Front has been caught between the economic underdevelopment of the state of West Bengal, on one hand, and the wrath of the poor farmers, on the other. The demand for 'corporate industrialization' by the Indian urban middle class could not be ignored any more and the Left Front government initiated industrialization on the neo-liberal policy. Thus it ignored the needs and demands of the peasants and the workers resulting in loss of their votes.

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