

**CRISIS OF LEFT IN WEST BENGAL
POLITICS FROM 1991 TO 2021**

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Preface

2021 West Bengal State Legislative Assembly Election constructed a historic picture in the state of West Bengal. The Left parties who are participating the electoral battle in this state since 1950s, have failed to win a single constituency. The electorate of West Bengal abandoned the Left parties in terms of Assembly election. The Left have been contesting the Assembly elections since 1950s but they could not face such kind of consequences in the earlier elections. The two right wing political party; specially, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) could win all the seats except two. One seat won by the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) and one by the Indian Secular Front (ISF). The TMC secured absolute majority by winning 213 seats out of 294 and formed the Government in West Bengal for third consecutive tenure.

The defeat of the CPI(M) led Left Front (LF) in 2011 election is considered for the cause of the decline and evaporation of the Left in the state of West Bengal to many thinkers. After the debacle of the LF in 2011 West Bengal Assembly election, the concept of 'Left no more exists' has been gripped within the mind of many thinkers as well as the common people of not only West Bengal but across the country also. But the real situation in 2011 was not like that. The votes shared by the Left were decreased of just 7 per cent in comparison to 2006 election. From 1950 to 2011 Left secured 25-50 per cent popular votes. They have not been marginalised in West Bengal as it is after 2011. What are the reasons behind the marginalisation of the Left? Are all the reasons were hidden in 2011 election? Or there is a misreading of 2011 for the erosion of Left. A much rigorous analysis is necessary of 2011. The decisions which had been taken by the Left were not followed by 2011 election only. There were certain extraneous considerations. The main causes are various strategic-tactical understanding of the Left which is subject to scrutiny from different level. The present study tries to understand the reasons behind the tremendous crisis of the Left in West Bengal through analysing the electoral data of Assembly and Parliamentary elections within the state during the period of 1991 to 2021. The study also analyses various burning issues in elections and various strategies of all the major political parties, both in power and in oppositions.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABMWF	All Bengal Municipal Workmen's Federation
ABTA	All Bengal Teachers Association
AIADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
AIFB/FB	All India Forward Bloc/ Forward Bloc
AICC	All India Congress Committee
AICC(T)	All India Indira Congress (Tiwari)
AITC	All India Trinamool Congress
BDO	Block Development Officer
BPL	Below Poverty Line
BRGF	Backward Region Grant Fund
BBF	Bangla Banchao Front
BJP	Bhartiya Janta Party
BJD	Biju Janata Dal
BPL	Below Poverty Line
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
BUPC	Bhumi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee
CAA	Citizenship Amendment Act
CII	Confederation of Indian Industry
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CITU	Centre of Indian Trade Unions
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI(ML)(L)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Lenninist) (Liberation)
CPI	Communist Party of India
CCU	Critical Care Unit
CSDS	Centre for the Study of Developing Societies
CWC	Congress Working Committee
DM	District Magistrate
DSP	Democratic Socialist Party
ECI	Election Commission of India
FB(M)	Forward Bloc (Marxist)
FB(S)	Forward Bloc (Socialist)
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment

GCC	Grassroot Congress Committee
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GJM	Gorkha Janmukti Morcha
GNLF	Gorakha National Liberation Front
GTA	Gorkhaland Territorial Administration
HAD	Haldia Development Authority
HJKP	Hul Jharkhand Party
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme
IDPP	Indian Democratic People's Party
IGNWPS	Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme
IGNOAPS	Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INC	Indian National Congress
IND	Independent
INDIA	Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance
IPAC	Indian Political Action Committee
IPTA	Indian People's Theater Association
ISF	Indian Secular Front
INL	Indian National League
IUML	Indian Union Muslim League
JBVBC	Jami Bachao Vasstu Bachao Committee
JD(U)	Janata Dal (United)
JD	Janata Dal
JD(S)	Janata Dal (Secular)
JKP	Jharkhand Party
JKP(N)	Jharkhand Party (Noren)
JMM	Jharkhand Mukti Morcha
JMM(M)	Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (Mardi)
KMC	Kolkata Metropolitan Corporation
KJRC	Krishi Jomi Raksha Committee
LA	Legislative Assembly
LF	Left Front
LFG	Left Front Government
LJP	Lok Jan Shakti Party

LPG	Liberalisation Privatisation and Globalisation
LS	Lok Sabha
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MNC	Multi-national Corporations
MOOC	Massive Open Online Courses
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
MSM	Micro and Small Scale Industries
MUL	Muslim League
NBC	Nano Bachao Committee
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NES	National Election Study
NFBS	National Family Benefit Scheme
NRC	Nutritional Rehabilitation Centre
NRC	National Register of Citizens
OBC	Other Backward Class
PBRML	Paschim Banga Rajya Muslim League
PDF	Progressive Democratic Front
PDS	Party for Democratic Socialism
PCC	Pradesh Congress Committee
RCPI(R)	Revolutionary Communist Party of India (Rasik Bhatt)
RJD	Rashtriya Janata Dal
RSP	Revolutionary Socialist Party
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
RSSCMJP	Rashtriya Secular Majlish Party
SAP	Social Action Party
SC	Schedule Caste
SDF	Secular Democratic Front
SDF	Sikkim Democratic Front
SEZ	Special Economic Zones
SHG	Self-Help Group
SKJRC	Singur Krishi Jomi Raksha Committee
SM	Sanyukta Morcha
SRA	Sharecropper's Registration Act

ST	Schedule Tribe
SUCI	Socialist Unity Centre of India
SUC/SUCI	Socialist Unity Centre of India (Communist)
TMC	Trinamool Congress
UNO	United Nation Organisation
UF	United Front
ULF	United Left Front
UNCHR	United Nations Commission on Human Rights
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad
VS	Vidhan Sabha
WB	West Bengal
WBIDC	West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation
WBLS	West Bengal Legislative Assembly
WBPC	West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee
WBSDM	West Bengal Skill Development Mission
WBSP	West Bengal Socialist Party
WBTC	West Bengal Trinamool Congress
WPP	Workers and Peasants Party

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CHAPTER- 1

INTRODUCTION

West Bengal has a different character in terms of social, political, economic and cultural as well as its geographic location in comparison with the other so-called federal units of independent India. The state is situated in the eastern part of India which surrounded its boundary by three independent countries and five other states of India. The northern boundary of Bengal is shared by Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. The Himalaya is situated as a crown of the state. The border of the eastern part is shared by Bangladesh and Assam. There is the Bay of Bengal in the south and in the western side the state is surrounded by three different Indian states; named Orisha, presently Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar having different socio-political features. People of different religions, languages, cultures, castes, classes etc. are living together in the land of Bengal from hundreds of years.

The West Bengal is distinguished itself from the other states of India in terms of political history also. The state was born due to the partition and independence of India in 1947 which immediately came under the rule of India National Congress (INC). From then the state remained under the rule of the INC till the year of 1977 with a few interventions of presidential rule and two United Front Governments (UFG) in 1967 and 1969 respectively. But in 1977, the political circumstances changed in the state and Left Front¹ (LF) under the leadership of Communist Party of India (Marxist)[CPI(M)] who came to power in the state. The CPI(M) led LF had been in power until the year of 2011 with massive electoral support. In 2011, the CPI(M) led LF was defeated before the combined challenges of the All India Trinamool Congress (AITMC/TMC) and the Congress. The state is now under the rule of the AITMC/TMC since 2011. So, the

¹ Communist Party of India (Marxist) {CPI(M)}, The Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), The Forward Bloc (FB), The Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI), The Forward Bloc Marxist (MFB), The Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), Socialist Party (SP), which was later became the Samajwadi Party and The Biplabhi Bangla Congress formed the Left Front coalition in 1977. A Left Front Committee was formed by the partners of the front to supervise the activity of the Left Front Government with Promode Dasgupta of the CPI (M) was become the first Chairman and served till 1982. The other LF chairman were Saroj Mukherjee (1982-1990), Sailen Dasgupta (1990-1998) and Biman Bose (1998- incumbent). The CPI was not within the LF in 1977. It joined with LF later. Some other left parties like; SUC or SUCI, CPI-ML etc. never became any part of the LF.

seventy-five years long ruling history of West Bengal experienced the stable rules of only three different political wings.

In the 2021 West Bengal State Legislative Assembly Election constructed a historic picture in the state of West Bengal. The Left parties who are fighting the electoral battle in this state since 1950s, have failed to win a single constituency. The crisis of the Left reached at extreme point. The electorate of West Bengal abandoned the Left parties in terms of assembly election. The Left have been contesting the assembly election since independent but they could not face such kind of consequences in the earlier elections. The two right wing political party; specially, the TMC and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) could win all the seats except two. One seat won by the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) and one by the Indian Secular Front (ISF). The TMC secured absolute majority by winning 213 seats and formed the Government in West Bengal for third consecutive tenure.

This is undoubtedly a remarkable trend in Indian state politics. In the history of any state in the post-colonial India, no political party or coalition has held state power for such a long and uninterrupted period. It is true that before 1990 the Indian National Congress (INC) was in power in Maharashtra for a relatively long time. Mention may also be made that the Sikkim Democratic Front in Sikkim, the BJP in Gujarat and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha which have been ruling the state since 1994, 1998 and 2000 respectively. But in all these states the ruling parties or coalitions have either not ruled the state for more than three decades or have not yet ruled as consistently as the Left coalition ruled in West Bengal².

The long viability of the Left Front rule in West Bengal has been approached and analysed from a number of viewpoints. Some scholars have ascribed it to the strong organisational clutches of the LF, particularly the CPI(M) over the rural electorates and the fruitful implementation of the land reform programmes with the name of ‘operation barga’- ‘‘Operation barga’ is the popular name of implementing land reform acts by the LFG in West Bengal during late 1970s and early 1980s. The main aim of this policy was to register the names of the sharecroppers with the land where they worked for certain

² The rule of Sikkim Democratic Front in Sikkim has ended in 2019 and the BJD failed to win assembly election in Odisha (Orisha) in 2024. So, in Sikkim and Odisha the political regime already changed. Only in the state of Gujrat, the BJP has been in power since 1998. But till date it has not completed 34 years of continuous rule of one particular party or alliance.

period of times. This gave them right to cultivate in that land permanently without the fear of eviction by the landlords' (Lieten 1996, 222-32), along with substantive expansion of democracy to the grassroots through panchayats (Lieten 1992, 268-99, Williams 1999, 229-52, Bhattacharyya 2004C, 5477-83 and Bhattacharyya 2010, 51-59). Someone talked about 'politics of middleness' - 'politics of middleness' is a consensus evoking unifying politics of mediation between several sectional interests. It was a strategy followed by the Left Front, the CPI(M) in particular in West Bengal since late 1980s where they followed to avoid any kind of extremist revolutionary way for social change led by the communist. They followed some strategies like; accommodating the dominant middle and rich peasant and non-peasant groups in Krishak Sabha, accompanied by the consolidation of a powerful literate section in society like school teacher, bringing the bureaucracy close to village in a manner that no previous regime could accomplish, making Gram Panchayat as a mediating mechanism for implementing rural policies, government for relief etc. This was a way of peaceful transition of society by using electoral process (Bhattacharyya 1999, 279-300) and 'party society'- the concept of 'party society' is mainly popularised by Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya through examining the ubiquitous presence and promises of political parties, the CPI(M) in particular and their supreme mediatory role in rural West Bengal. This was created a specific kind of sociability in the state which he called 'party society'. It is offer as a more appropriate conceptual tool to understand West Bengal rural politics. It was modular form of political society in West Bengal countryside (Bhattacharyya 2016, 123-54) are also reasons behind long durability of the Left in West Bengal. Others have mentioned about the useful delivery of the livelihood needs of the political society, the Left Front leadership successfully drawing upon the cultural elements of power and development of an environment of politics of clientelism- 'political clientelism is commonly believed to undermine the functioning of democracy in many middle or low-income countries. Voters are effectively coerced to express political support for current incumbent in by the threat of losing access to excludable government benefits, thereby diluting incentive of elected officials to be accountable and to deliver non excludable public goods. The key defining characteristics of clientelism is that excludable benefits allocated by incumbents to individual citizen conditional on their political support' (Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006, 303-27 and Sarkar 2006, 341-48) as the basic elements for its overlong stint at power in the state of West Bengal. A brief concise focus on these

may help the present study to perceive and analyse the social and political processes amalgamated with the exemplary role of the Left coalition (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 2).

In Indian politics the decade of 1990s unfolded with two significant changes posing long term challenge to the Left Front Government (LFG), i.e. the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which gave a hint to a re-look at leftist ideological parameters; and the union government at New Delhi embracing a liberalised market economy, necessitating contemplation of a policy switch. With harsh cuts in government expenditure, continuation of distributive reforms was performed difficult while the pro-market turned in the economic policy at the national level eclipsed the role of the in incentivising agriculture. “The land reform drive had already reached a plateau, and rising input costs and inadequate institutional support precipitated an impasse in the state’s agriculture by mid-1990s accompanied by an upward demographic pressure on land. Moreover, following rapid commercialisation of the rural economy, agricultural income as a share of family income steadily dwindled in many parts of Bengal’s countryside, highlighting the need to find employment opportunities outside agriculture especially for the younger generations” (Mukhopadhyay and Basu 2018, 30 and Bhattacharyya 2016, 190-98).

Another important challenge which was built a strong obstacle before the Left parties, particularly the CPI(M) and the CPI in West Bengal and as well as across India, was the rise of the BJP across India with its Hindutva agenda by upholding the ‘Ram Mandir’ issue. This signalled a caution particularly to the Left parties, like the CPI(M) in Bengal and CPI in other states in India during early 1990s. Although the CPI(M) could secure absolute majority in West Bengal but the interesting fact was that the BJP managed to collect more than 11 per cent vote share without any notable organisational grip in the state. From 1990s the Left in Bengal managed to defend these challenges and continued to rule the state without any major open crisis until 2011. In between this time the veteran communist leader Jyoti Basu had transferred the Chief Ministership of Bengal to the hands of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, a much pragmatic leftist leader in 2000. The LF managed to secure victory in 2001 West Bengal assembly election despite some big challenges of the newly formed TMC in Bengal.

The LF in Bengal secured the record victory in 2006 West Bengal Assembly election by winning 235 seats out of a total 294 along with more than 50 percentage of

total valid vote share. This established the importance of leadership of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee with the agenda of large-scale industrialisation in the state with the help of private corporation by the famous slogan of '*Krishi amader vitti, shilpo amader vobishyat*' (Agriculture is our base, industry is our future). But the problem began when the LFG had started to take the steps for industrialisation. Underlying apprehensions proved justified as the debate over the acquisition of agricultural land by Tata Motors for a proposed car manufacturing project beside National Highway at Singur, Hooghly, just about 40 km far from Kolkata, was rekindled immediately after the election. Showing the issues of conversion of multi-cropped land into industrial land, inadequate compensation packages for displaced farmers, possible displacement of population from the affected areas came forward to protest with the help of '*Singur Krishi Jomi Raksha Committee*' (Singur Save Farmland Committee).

This situation got more complicated when the smaller partners of the LF, the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and the All India Forward Bloc (AIFB/FB) - alleged that they were not aware of the agreement between the government and the Tata and Selim group regarding the proposed initiative. CPI(M)'s Land Revenue Minister Rezzak Mollah, who represents Bhangar constituency in South 24 Parganas in the state assembly, launched a scathing attack on the agricultural land acquisition policy by the Chief Minister and private industrialists, further embarrassing the government. Furthermore, in late 2006, Trinamool Congress' chief Mamata Banerjee gave an ultimatum to the government to abandon the Singur project and return land to the unwilling landowners and later she went on a 25 day hunger strike³ to press her party's demands (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 100).

As Apurba Mukhopadhyay and Partha Pratim Basu argued that "new dimensions were added to the land acquisition debate in early 2007 following announcement of steps to acquire a large swath of land in Nandigram, East Midnapore for a mega chemical hub

³ There is a debate regarding the number of days for Mamata Banerjee's hunger strike. As Chatterjee and Basu argued that "from 4 December Banerjee began an indefinite hunger strike protesting the land acquisition issue that she ended 25 days later on 29 December, upon the request of the then Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and the then President of India, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam" (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 100) . As per the Hindustan Times report on 29th December, 2006 "in a dramatic midnight denouement, Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee ended her 25-day fast protesting the location of a Tata car project after intervention by both the president and the prime minister" (Hindustan Times 29 Dec. 2006). Although TMC claims for 26-day hunger strike. On 4th December, 2020 in her official twitter handle Mamata Banerjee wrote "14 years ago on 4 Dec 2006, I began my 26-day hunger strike in Kolkata demanding that agricultural land cannot be forcefully acquired" (TheStatesmanOnline 1 December 2020).

of the Salim group which entailed even more aggressive and determined resistance by the local population. These controversies precipitated bloody clashes on both sides of the issue, and a large section of erstwhile CPI (M) supporters reportedly defected to the ‘Save Farmland’ agitation” (Mukhopadhyay and Basu 2018, 33).

Indeed, the industrialisation overdrive badly upset a longstanding equilibrium for after all “it was land reforms that constituted the key to LF’s electoral success in West Bengal and helped consolidate its support base in the rural areas. The changed approach of the government, its disregard for initiating dialogues, and the looming prospect of loss of livelihood instilled a fear of dispossession into the state’s peasantry and ruptured the organic link between LFG and the rural masses so carefully fashioned and nurtured over time” (Mukhopadhyay and Basu 2018, 33 and Basu 2007, 304).

In between this time the LF withdrew support from the Congress led UPA-1 government at the centre by raising the issue of Indo-US nuclear agreement and followed to oppose the Congress, the BJP and the TMC in the state as well as the national level. That gave an opportunity to the TMC in Bengal to re-build a non-Left opposition with the help of the Congress in Bengal. In 2008 West Bengal panchayat election, the left parties faced some crucial challenges by the TMC and lost in three ‘Zila Parishad’ (District Council, the third tier of panchayat system in WB). The non-Left vote bank has started to consolidate towards the TMC during this time which pushed the Left at back seats in West Bengal politics.

In 2009 Lok Sabha election, the LF could win only 15 seats out of 42 in West Bengal which is decreased by 20 seats in comparison to the previous Lok Sabha election in 2004. The LF lost nearly 6 per cent of its overall support base in the Lok Sabha election in 2009 against the combined opposition of the TMC and the Congress. This was not a case of alliance arithmetic overcoming the collective strength of the Left but a steadfast and major erosion of support, what any psephologist would term a huge swing, caused by a polarisation between the opposition and the ruling Front. This polarisation ensured that in the civic elections even the Congress did much worse than it did in the Lok Sabha elections, meaning that the Congress was only ‘riding piggyback’ on the anti-LF polarisation led by the TMC in the Lok Sabha elections (Sharma 2014, 104). That takes us to the crucial question: why has the LF’s core base, which has given it years of popular support, deserted it? The answer is not too difficult to find but is certainly

uncomfortable. Over the past few years, there has been a steady erosion in the class orientation of the LFG in terms of its policies and in the manner in which the CPI(M) has organised itself in many parts of the state. There is a distinctive shift in policy, predicated on the need to industrialise through big-ticket, capital-intensive investment, barely mindful of the consequences of this drive. This drift towards neoliberalism has steadily corroded its pro-poor image. The non-Left opposition led by mainly the TMC had tried to used that flow in favour of their party.

As per Assembly-wise result, the LF came out victorious in only 99 Assembly constituencies in 2009 Lok Sabha election and was therefore reduced to a minority in the state legislature. Its trauma deepened further in 2011 when it could secure only 62 seats in the State Assembly with 41 per cent of valid votes polled. The result was in favour of the TMC and Congress made alliance who secured 226 seats including almost 48 per cent of valid votes. The TMC secured 184 seats with 38.9 per cent popular votes. The Congress could win 42 seats with 9.09 per cent popular votes. As a result after 34 years, a non-Left political formation has come to power in West Bengal forcing the Left to a state of quandary (Mukhopadhyay 2016, 149-50).

Accepting the electoral verdict, the Left started to play the role of the responsible opposition in the state. But after the debacle of 2011 WB Assembly election, the Left in Bengal had been decreasing from its popular support continuously in almost every section of the society. In 2014, the number of Lok Sabha seats reduced in only two. After the debacle again in Lok Sabha election, the Left decided to make an electoral adjustment with the Congress in 2016 West Bengal Assembly election which has not showed any positive result again in favour of the Left. This time they trailed behind the Congress and lost the position of the principal opposition in the state legislature. On the other hands it marked remarkable success for Mamata Banerjee and her party. She fought the election in 2011 by making electoral alliance with the Congress and could win 184 seats in the state legislature. The TMC formed the government in West Bengal with the Chief Ministership of Mamata Banerjee. In 2016 WB Assembly elections, Mamata Banerjee surpassed her own record to win 211 seats out of 294 in the Assembly without any alliance with any other party.

The CPI(M) and other left parties within the LF have arrived at the most disastrous point in West Bengal in 2021 when it came down at naught in the Assembly.

This result is followed by the Parliamentary election in 2019. On the other hands the TMC secured third consecutive electoral victory by winning 213 seats out of 294 with almost 48 per cent votes alone. The BJP established itself as the second largest political party in the state in terms of securing almost 37 per cent valid votes and winning 77 seats out of 294 in the state Assembly.

Another important fact is that the left parties are trying to come back in electoral battle by joining hands with the Congress since 2016 and facing continuous failure where the TMC has been contesting the elections alone and secured continuous success since 2014 in West Bengal. The Left-Right combined struggle within the Left and the Congress has been failed to build any remarkable result against the ruling TMC in West Bengal. The shifting of electoral alliance is not giving any preference to the Left which already proved helpful for the TMC, the Congress and the BJP in the electoral politics of West Bengal.

After 2016 WB Assembly election, the CPI(M) and other left parties under the umbrella of LF has sank into the deeper crisis and marginalised more and more which has been clearly established through the out-come of the 17th Lok Sabha election's result in 2019. This time, the LF not only failed to win a single seat in the state of West Bengal but also reached at third place in terms of vote shared which has come down at almost 7.57 per cent which was decreased by almost 19 per cent in comparison to the last WB Assembly election in 2016 and almost 22 per cent in comparison to the 16th Lok Sabha election in 2014. The interesting fact was that the BJP was emerged as the second largest political party in the state by winning 18 Lok Sabha seats out of 42 and shared almost 40.5 per cent valid vote which was shifted from the Left because the TMC vote shared not decreased in comparison to the previous Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in 2016 and 2014 respectively.

Another important point is that in the 2021 West Bengal Assembly election, the LF made an electoral alliance named '*Sanjukta Morcha*' (or *Mohajot*) with the Congress and a newly formed local based political party, the ISF to face the BJP led NDA and TMC simultaneously. But the crisis of the Left reached at an extreme point in this election when they failed again to win a single assembly out of 294 and remained out of Vidhan Sabha. Only the ISF could manage to win one constituency, Bhangar. The CPI(M) and its allies within the LF shared only almost 6 per cent of popular votes,

whereas the Congress shared 3.03 per cent of popular votes. The ISF, who contested the election with the symbol of a Bihar based local political party, the Rashtriya Secular Majlish Party (RSSCMJP) and as per the data of the ECI, the party shared 1.35 per cent of popular votes. Nawsad Siddiqui won from Bhangar and became the only one Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) beyond the main two right-wing political parties, the TMC and the BJP. Although the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) won three seats but the party contested election as an ally of the TMC. The 2021 West Bengal Assembly election was also historic to the BJP. The BJP shared 37.97 per cent of popular votes with 77 seats in the state assembly. A right-wing political party like the BJP, for the first time in West Bengal, could manage to gain such kind of mandate since the year of the party's birth in 1980.

Thus, the CPI(M) led LF dislodged from power in 2011 by the TMC-Congress combined force. In 2021, the Left reduced to naught due the rise of the BJP with its Hindutva agenda and anti-Left, anti-TMC stands in West Bengal. So, the Left-Congress alliance was rejected by the electorate of Bengal again and showed faith towards the TMC as first preference and the BJP as the second in the horizon of the socio-political circumstances in West Bengal.

Scope of the Study:

The present research study titled, 'The crisis of Left in West Bengal politics from 1991 to 2021' mainly focuses to analyse the electoral data of West Bengal State Assembly elections and the Parliamentary elections of the 42 Parliamentary constituencies in West Bengal. In between the study period of 1991 to 2021, the state has experienced seven Assembly elections and eight Parliamentary elections. The study also focuses the crucial points like; important issues in the elections, election manifesto of major political parties, important comments of chief political leaders of main political parties that may be relevant in both the assembly and parliamentary elections.

The study also focuses to analyse the Left politics mainly in West Bengal during this period. The CPM-led LF came to power in West Bengal in the year of 1977 by winning huge electoral verdict. The LFG done some crucial work like; 'operation barga', decentralisation of powers through panchayats and municipalities, minimum wage for labourers etc. during the first three consecutive terms. During early 1990s two important

phenomenon alarmed the politics of West Bengal as well as across the country. These are the advent of neo-liberal economic policy with the name of Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG) and the polarisation of vote bank due to 'Ram Mandir' issue. From 1990s left politics had started to facing several challenges from global level to state level politics. They also changed their attitudes in terms of political mobilisation. The Left in Bengal as well as across the country had started to face some crucial crisis. The crises had started from that period not only in West Bengal but in the national and global level also.

The study analyses the seven consecutive WB Assembly elections and eight Parliamentary elections and try to spotlight attention on specific political situation, like; the burning political events, making or unmaking of coalition and electoral adjustment among political parties on the contour of state politics in general. The study also focuses on the electoral data and behaviour of the non-Left opposition to make their comparison with the Left.

Review of Literature:

The present study has gone through several literatures related to the present research topic. These are thematically presented as follows:

G. D. Overstreet and M. Windmiller (1959) in their book 'Communism in India' has analysed the origin of communism in India. This book is considers as of the basic writing to study of the origin of communism and its functions in the country which examined in detail the communist movement in India; historically and analytically; and also threw light on the complex arena of Indian and world Communist politics. This comprehensive detailed study contributed to a better understanding of the form and process of Indian politics and of the world Communist movement.

Marcus F. Franda (1969) in the *article 'Electoral Politics in West Bengal: The Growth of the United Front'* has described growth of communism in West Bengal till 1969. He argued that West Bengal is among the two states in India where communist parties succeed to gain political power. He also described a short history of assembly elections from 1952- 1969 by analysing the electoral data. He also analysed the fraction within the communist parties. Marcus F. Franda (1971) in his book '*Radical Politics in West Bengal*' has analysed the complex and rich culture of communism in West Bengal.

He argued that the Bengalis have adopted Marxism and communism to express their search for a regional identity and to have access to regional power. In doing so, they have drawn upon the traditions of their long struggle for autonomy from the central authorities at Delhi during the pre-British and British periods. He Also argued that the Indian federal structure has stoked the psychology of discrimination, and the Communists have exploited the sense of defeat of the Bengali gentlemanly classes, the '*Bhadraloks*', who feel that they have lost to the Hindi-speaking Gangetic heartland of Hinduism. He thinks that Marxism came to Bengal mainly as a package of ideas, and naturally its appeal is primarily to the educated, upper caste gentry, who dominate the Communist movement. Indeed, a logical extension of this elitist radicalism is the slogan of the Bengali Maoists that mass work and organizational effort lead to revisionism and economism.

Rakhahari Chatterjee (1985) in his edited volume '*Politics in West Bengal: Institutions, Processes and Problems*' has analysed the West Bengal politics from different point of view by a number of eminent scholars. The Scholars have analysed some serious economic, political and social crisis that the state of West Bengal had faced during this period. They also made an assessment about the impact of this crisis and found out the political forces in West Bengal. They also discussed reasons behind the decline of the Congress and the rise of the Left.

Rakhahari Chatterjee and Partha Pratim Basu (2018) in their edited book '*West Bengal Under the Left: 1977-2011*' have analysed different aspect of West Bengal through 15 chapters including the introduction and the conclusion written by numbers of scholars. The book also considers as a sequence of the earlier book '*Politics in West Bengal: Institutions, Processes and Problems*'(1985). The scholars cover different aspects of West Bengal politics during 1977-2011. Apurba Mukhopadhyay and Partha Pratim Basu analysed points of electoral politics by highlighting electoral data. Shibashish Chaterjee analysed the LF and regionalism in Bengal. In the introductory remark Mr. Rakharari Chatterjee stressed on few points like; 'operation barga', panchayat system, etc. which helped to sustain the Left at power for almost three decades. He also pointed many shortcomings, problems and weaknesses such as party dictatorship and domination, violence etc. during the Left rule. And through the concluding observation Rakhahari Chatterjee discussed a few reasons like; Singur and Nandigram movement, TMC-Congress alliance etc. behind the rise of the Trinamool Congress.

Jyotiprasad Chatterjee and Suprio Basu (2020) in the book 'Left Front and After: Understanding the Dynamics of *Poribarton* in West Bengal' have discussed and analysed a few crucial points of politics of West Bengal. Through the introductions the authors discussed the reason behind the long rule of the Left in the state. These are strong party organisation, land reforms, establishment of democracy at local level etc. The authors analysed rise and fall of Left politics in Bengal and also rise of the TMC. Singur and Nandigram case analysed as a social movement in West Bengal. TMC's welfare populism such as kanyashree, shikhsashree, various pensions schemes for poor and marginal people etc. helped the party to successfully win the elections and increase vote share.

Sudhir Roy (2007) in 'Marxist Parties in West Bengal: In Opposition and in Government, 1947-2001' highlights the impact of the Marxist parties in West Bengal politics and a critical appreciation of the LF in the state along with an assessment of the reasons behind the stability and continuity of Left politics in the state. He has gone into details of the origin, growth, organisational structures and ideological nuances of most of the Marxist parties in West Bengal including CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML), Forward Bloc, RSP and SUCI and analysed their role in opposition to Congress rule in West Bengal during 1947 to 77. He also examined electoral performances of Marxist parties in West Bengal during 1947-2001. He took their performances in Lok Sabha, state assembly, panchayats and municipalities into consideration and highlighted the various strategies such as movement against increased tram fare, food movement and political platform.

G. K. Lietaen (1992) in his book 'Continuity and Change in Rural West Bengal' has made a study of rural Bengal and the policies of the communist government. The aspects of decentralisation, land reforms, *Operation Barga*, Panchayats and increase in rural productivity came under his scanner. He concludes that the LFG has dismantled the traditional forces in rural Bengal i.e. landlord, moneylenders and '*morols*' by ushering in rural elections. The author, at the same time, noticed that there was also continuity in the village power structure. Though the dominance of the landlords and local zamindars has ended, the same upper caste educated men continue to rule the villages with the help of the party.

Neil Webster (1992) in his book 'Panchayati Raj and the Decentralization of Development Planning in West Bengal' has observed that despite the problems of fund

allocation for beneficiaries and high degree of party control, the Panchayats have brought about a marked change in the material life of the rural population. According to the view of the author, the poor sections and the SCs people have significant formal participation in the Panchayat of West Bengal. He points out the under representation of women in the Panchayat system but admits that the participation of marginal farmers and the poor during LFG was considerably higher than the pre-1978 situation.

Prasanta Sengupta (1989) in the article 'Politics in West Bengal: The Left Front versus the Congress (I)' analysed the West Bengal assembly election in 1987 through three sections. In the first section, the article discusses major contestants mainly the allies of the LF and the Congress with their campaigning styles including major issues. The second section deals with electoral performances of the contestants in terms of winning seats and sharing votes and the third section, the conclusion focuses on the reflections of postelections circumstances in the society of West Bengal.

Anindita Sarkar (2020) in the thesis 'From Oppositional Politics to Chief Ministership: A Study of the Leadership of Ms. Mamata Banerjee (1996-2016)' under the supervision of Dr. Bhagaban Behera of Jadavpur University has analysed the role of Ms. Mamata Banerjee as a strong leader of opposition in West Bengal during the last three Left Front rule. She also discussed role of Ms Mamata Banerjee as the Chief Minister of West Bengal during 2011-2016. Initially she started the analysis by discussing the theory of leadership and she compared Ms Mamata Banerjee as a charismatic leadership in India. She also discussed various performances of the LFG and role of Mamata Banerjee to assemble numbers of people in Bengal against the ruling Left.

Ross Mallick (1993) in his book 'Development Policy of a Communist Government: West Bengal since 1977' focuses on the development of West Bengal primarily to assess the successes and failures of the CPI(M)-led LF rule in West Bengal. Since 1977. For him, it is important to note that the Left Front government was "the longest ruling democratically elected communist government in world history." He further argues that "the Left Front has failed, not primarily because of the extent of its power and resources, but because of the lack of proper use of its power and resources". Again, he states that instead of promoting the interests of the rural and urban underclasses, it prioritized the traditional rural and urban middle class base of the

communist movement, which ultimately stood in the way of further advancement of the underclasses. interests and people of the revolutionary communist movement as a whole.

Ross Mallick (1994) in his book “Indian Communism: Opposition, Collaboration and Institutionalisation” has analysed that the history of Indian communist movement is important although communism has failed to hold its global status. However, it has been managed to exist in India, through different forms. He also argued that in India, it has been working in much democratic way. The author also pointed the process of democratisation and institutionalisation through focusing at the history of the CPI(M). Due to participating in the Parliamentary elections and it managed to gain success. It also has gained the shape of opportunist class which has a vested interest to fulfil it. Through winning seats in Parliamentary elections, it did not prefer the lower and marginal classes and failed to handle the question of underdevelopment or to invent any kind of revolutionary change in the society. The author argued that the communism in India has mainly collaborated with the upper classes.

Subho Basu and Auritro Majumder (2013) in the article ‘Dilemmas of parliamentary communism: the rise and fall of the Left in West Bengal’ argued that the primacy of the communist movement could be characterized by a social imaginary and a concept of ‘social citizenship’ that (undivided) communists developed through their participation in grassroots workers', peasants' and refugee movements and, equally importantly, hegemonic interventions in ‘culture’ since the 1940s. This social imaginary of the communist became the basis of a ‘commonsensical idiom’ in Bengal through parliamentary and otherwise political practice. The decline of parliamentary communist influence began when their core constituencies of peasants and workers saw their adaptation to the neoliberal policies of development that began in the 1990s as a violation of this basis of social citizenship. In 2011 the regional non-communist opposition party in West Bengal captured the imagination of voters by appropriating and translating this long-evolved concept of social citizenship against the Left government.

Tarak Nath Mallik (2004) in his research work ‘*The Left Front in West Bengal: From Movement to Government, 1977-1987*’ has analysed the rise of left politics in West Bengal through various movements like; food movement, land reform movement, movement against hike of tram fare etc. He also discussed various steps of Left Front Government during first two regime. These are like; implementation of land reforms

through 'operation barga' establishment of rural democracy through regular election of panchayat in the rural areas.

Aritra Chakraborty (2016) in his thesis titled '*A Socio-Spatial Analysis of Parliament and Assembly Election in West Bengal: 1977-2011*' has analysed the electoral data of all the parliamentary and assembly election in West Bengal during the study period. He has elaborately analysed the regional dimension of voting behaviour and tried to establish that there was a strong regional bias of voting behaviour. He showed that in greater Kolkata the voting behaviour favoured the Congress a long time and later it had shifted towards the TMC. Many times the oppositions secured massive support from the Kolkata region.

Suvashis Maitra (2012) in his book '*Rajniti Tajniti*' (in Bengali) has analysed 51 articles which were published during the different phases of the LF regime. These articles provide us with some critical issues relating to the ruling class and its regime during the Left Front rule. A number of articles provide us the electoral politics and the role of CPI(M) as main constituent of the Left Front and the role of police in administration and also its politicization. The articles were explained many incidents of Bengal with different types of irony. The author has tried to raise some important issues like, price hike, lack of rule of law, unemployment, party dictatorship etc. by ironically. The book also indicates the reason behind the decline of the Leftist politics in West Bengal.

Ranabir Samaddar (2013) in his book '*Passive Revolution in Bengal: 1977-2011*' has analysed West Bengal politics from different perspectives. After the introductory chapter, the first volume begins the narrative with a discussion of capital, labour and politics. They consider the 1980s and 1990s to be some of the most important, although many consider this period to be the golden age of Left Front rule. Samaddar shows how trade unions have ignored the politics of production, the way government apparatuses operate in the state, and how the left has become the guardian of the status quo amid skepticism, pettiness, corruption and apathy. A false sense of priority, and an overemphasis on polls and populism speak to the opportunities the left has missed. Gradually, the Left became a victim of its own 'success'. The third section deals with the structure of contentious politics. Major movements against land grabs, peasant evictions, ration revolts or the Lalgarh rebellion raised concerns about turning politics into almost

war. Similarly, the collapse of the panchayat system as a 'scandal' required a third wave of democratisation.

Sobhanlal Duttagupta (2022) in his book *'Akaler Bhabona'* (In Bengali) has analysed a few crucial points regarding contemporary politics of West Bengal including crisis of Left. He raised question regarding the point of Ranabir Samaddar's 'passive revolution in Bengal during 1977-2011. He also pointed the alienation of Marxist ideology with the activity of Marxist parties in Bengal and also raised question of broader accountability of the Left in contemporary Bengal.

Harihar Bhattacharjya (1998) in his book *'Micro-Foundation of Bengal Communism'* examined the Left Front regime and argued that West Bengal (during LF period) might be a highly mobilised regime, but it is difficult to prove that it was highly democratic.

Dwaipayan Bhattacharya (2016) in his book *'Government as Practice: Democratic Left in a Transforming India'* sets out to answer two main questions. First, how did the Communist Party-led Left coalition survive in office for so long in an electoral democracy? Second why did it finally fall during the election? Both questions have important implications for current debates about democratic political alternatives to neoliberalism in developing countries under formal democracy and open market conditions. The political and economic experiments that have taken place in many Latin American countries over the past two decades under elected left-wing governments have received the attention of many scholars in this context. He argued that with a current population of over 90 million, West Bengal is larger in population than all Latin American countries except Brazil and Mexico. The experience of bringing a Communist-dominated Left Front to power for seven consecutive terms in such a large demographic clearly deserves close analysis by political scientists, economists, political sociologists, policy makers and activists. Bhattacharya's contribution is thus a timely addition to the literature. The introductory chapter discusses the socio-political developments leading to the formation of the Left government in 1977.

MD. Ayub Mallick (2000) in his book *'Congress (1) in Opposition During the First Two Left Front Governments in West Bengal'* dealt with the Congress (1) as opposition in West Bengal Politics in the first 10 years of LF government in West Bengal.

Sujato Bhadra and Purnendu Mondal (2013) in their book '*Paschimbange Rajnaitic Hatyya (1977-2010) Ekti Samikhsha* (in Bengali) written by a compilation of figures on the political murder/killing that had taken place in West Bengal from 1977 to 2010. The book provides us year wise, party wise and district wise detail figures on political murder/killing in West Bengal. The book also provides us the party responsible for the murder/killing. Further, the book gives us an account of different forms of political murder/killing during the Left Front regime. The data on political murder/killing compiled in this volume indicate the extent of political violence in day-to-day politics in West Bengal. However, the book only provides us the political murders/killings during the Left Front period.

Sumanta Banerjee (2013) in the article '*why is the left is more divided than the right?*' has significantly compared functions of capitalist regimes and communist regimes of the world. In this article he showed the great injustices perpetrated by the left-wing regime. These injustices are: the infamous Moscow Trials in the Soviet Union, the repression of workers' resistance in Berlin and the uprising in Hungary in the 1950s and the entry of Russia's troops into Czechoslovakia in 1968, etc. The author also pointed how military regimes like capitalist regimes take steps to control the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Spain's Basque separatist armed movement (ETA) and the preservation of the black sub-elite class. The article highlights the errors committed by leftist regimes and the positive steps taken by capitalist regimes to control any undesirable situation. It also shows how the US employed spies to suppress the activities of leftist regimes. New enemies, namely religious fundamentalists like Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, have emerged on the global scene. It shows that capitalist regimes are joining hands with each other in crisis situations, but leftist regimes are blaming each other without joining hands to overcome the situation.

Paramesh Acharya (1993) in the article '*Panchayats and Left Politics in West Bengal*' states that West Bengal has a three-tier 'panchayati raj' system where the LF coalition is expected to prevail for the next few years. The LFG adopted democratic decentralisation as a state policy to save the rights of poor farmers, agricultural labourers, rural artisans etc. A new generation of leadership emerged in WB, but almost top positions in every level were captured and dominated by rich and middle peasants. Although poor farmers got some representation, they were still far from the decision-making process. Zilla Parishad Chairpersons (Sahadipaties) who were almost from

upper classes, they enjoyed supreme power and ruled all departments of development and administration within the district like the Chief Minister. The author also argued that almost all the presidents are elected or nominated from upper caste and some are lower caste; He was not low class. The party secretary enjoyed the ultimate authority and control. Sometimes activists who were selected from lower castes and classes; It soon manifested itself in an opposite manner and acquired the character of a ruling class. In order to empower the working class, it is necessary to free them from old dilemmas and make them aware of their position in society.

Supriyo Roy Choudhury (2007) in his article '*The Intellectual-Left Stand-off*' has analysed the incident scenario of post-Nandigram and a way to solve that type of problems. He argued that in the state of West Bengal, the LFG highly neglected intellectual classes and mainly focused on people at the grassroot level who were engaged with small jobs. so that it can remain in power. So, intellectuals classes lost their faith and hope gradually on the LFG to criticize the left government after Nandigram issue. He also argued that although the Lefts critical towards liberalisation policy of the centre, yet it advocated that same type of policy in WB by welcoming various domestic and foreign investors. The intellectual classes highlighted the problem of the acquisition of land issues which were being conducted without taking any consent of the owner of that land. The problem of Special Economic Zone (SEZ) until the controversial killing at Nandigram due to police firing on 14 March, 2007. He approached that intellectuals should examine each and every policy before it takes acute form, and at the same time a stable public engagement should be happened so that a bridge might be maintained among the left intellectuals and the left party itself.

Suranjan Das (2001) in the article '*New Left has to Please all*' analysed that in the 2001 WB Assembly elections, although all the major political parties, including the CPI(M), lost their vote percentage compared to 1996. In the assembly elections, however, the CPM won a majority to form the government. The author points out that TMC leader Mamata Banerjee has criticised the CPI(M) government and highlighted its negative aspects instead of showing LFG's developmental agenda for the people of WB while Buddhadev Bhattacharya-led CPI(M) has admitted its party's faults on industrialisation, education issues. and health, and has shown a promising path to the majority of Hindus towards these issues. Again, the population of Muslim in WB is 25 per cent in the Assembly elections. Mamata Banerjee was unconcerned about them, and

praised the Prime Minister who considered the RSS to be her soul. Thus, a large number of Muslims prefer the CPM as their party that should hold power.

Ranjit Das Gupta (1995) in his article *'Industrial Development Policy: A Critical View'* has tried to analyse the new industrial policy adopted by the government of West Bengal in 1994. According to him there were not much basic differences between the new economic policy of the government of India adopted in 1991 and the New Economic Policy taken by the Left government in West Bengal. This policy also has some serious flaws. He also argued that this policy weakened the fight of left against capitalism.

S. N. Roy (1996) in his article *'West Bengal's Industrial Development Policy'* has tried to show a critical view to Ranjit Das Gupta's article titled *'Industrial Development Policy: A Critical View'*. He argued that West Bengal is not an independent state of India. So, the state must follow the New Economic Policy, adopted by the union government in 1991 like the other states. Due to Left ideology of the government, the private investors had some political and psychological fixation to invest in the state.

Sumit Gunguly (1997) in his article *'India in 1996: A year of Upheaval'* analysed Indian politics during the time of 11th general election in 1996. He discussed a few points at the national level and state level which caused the reason of the Congress defeat in Lok Sabha election and emergence of BJP by winning largest number of seats. From international politics the government refused to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and at the regional level the United Front government tried to improve relations with the neighbours. Regarding electoral politics the author focused on 11th general election.

Bidyut Chakrabarty (1998) in the article *'1998 Election in West Bengal: Dwindling of the Left Front'* argued that the outcome of the 12th Parliamentary election brought in (ushered) coalition and federal politics at the national level in India. Many regional parties became crucial to run government at the centre because no single party could manage to secure sufficient majority in Lok Sabha. He also argued that the Left Front could manage to maintain hegemony in the state but decreased its support elsewhere in the nation including Bengal. In West Bengal, the left minded front decreased the percentage of vote shared in the previous 11th parliamentary election by almost two per cent. A non-left political consolidation was seen in West Bengal. He also argued that a polarization of urban and rural voters was seen in the election.

Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya (1999) in his article '*Ominous Outcome for Left in West Bengal*' has analysed the result of the 42 parliamentary constituencies of West Bengal in the Parliamentary election 1999. He compared the result of Left and other parties in Bengal with the previous parliamentary election in 1998. He focused to analyse the electoral data of the five Parliamentary constituencies in of Bengal where the Left secured electoral victory in last Parliamentary election, but failed to secure success in 1999. These constituencies were Raiganj, Berhampore, Krishnanagar, Nabadwip and Contai. He also argued that in the early two decades of Left Front rule the people of Bengal got the opportunities of land reforms and decentralisation of power through the panchayat and municipalities. But he also argued that opportunism, corruption, sectarianism, maladministration or misappropriation also some negative factor for shifting the support from Left to the AITC-BJP led non-left opposition.

Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya (2004) in his article '*Making and Unmaking of Trinamul Congress*' has analysed the origin of the Trinamool Congress in west Bengal politics. Before the emergence of the TMC there was absence of uniform swing in the state's electorate. The TMC changed the electoral swing immediately after its birth. The party also changed the patterns of coalition politics in the state. The BJP has emerged as a strong alternative to the electorate of Bengal. The TMC, basically focused in electoral politics and the politics of coalition making and breaking has become a common in West Bengal politics this time.

Ranjit Das Gupta (1998) in the article '*1998 Elections in West Bengal: A Major Setback for Left Front*' has analysed the result of 12th Parliamentary election in accordance to the 42 Parliamentary constituencies of West Bengal. He argued that the seats won by the LF in West Bengal remained unchanged in comparison to the 11th Parliamentary election but, it was a major setback to the left. According to him the result indicated the failure of the left parties as well as the leaders to understand the mood of the people of the grassroot levels in Bengal and extended party's distance from their own support base.

Arunabho Ghosh (2001) in his article '*West Bengal Assembly Election 2001: An Overview*' has analysed the assembly election in detail. He has tried to explain that despite many anti-incumbency factors how the LF could manage to register its sixth consecutive victory in West Bengal. However, several media and party's internal reports

said that the Left could never back in power this time. But, due to opposition ill organisation and the well organised ruling party's tactics managed to win the elections again. He argued that the 2001 W.B. assembly election fought between the personal charisma of Mamata Banerjee and organisational strength of the Left Front. The personal charisma failed to gather any major organisational support and finally lost before the organisational grip of the Left.

Surajit C. Mukhopadhyay (2001) in the article '*Left Front Win in West Bengal: Continuity, but also Change*' analysed a few important points behind the success of the Left and failure of the TMC in 2001 West Bengal assembly election. He argued that the TMC and other oppositions failed to understand the grip of the Left Front over the common people. Despite some serious challenges the LF again won the election due to lack of credibility of the oppositions. The TMC established itself as a strong opposition but the party shifted its alliance from BJP to the Congress before the election. But interestingly the TMC was formed due to broke out the Congress in 1998 which opted alliance with the Congress in 2001. This flip-flop was not accepted by a large section of voters in Bengal.

AM (2006) in the article '*Suffrage in West Bengal*' has analysed the 2006 West Bengal assembly election and focused on some important points in the election like; strict surveillance of the ECI, massive voter turn-out etc. There was no doubt that the Left parties under the banner Left Front gained a huge electoral support but beyond the success the left parties did not reach some section of the people of the state.

Bidyut Chakraborty (2006) in the article '*Left Front's 2006 Victory in West Bengal: Continuity or a Trendsetter?*' has analysed the reason behind the massive success of the LF in 2006 West Bengal state assembly election. He has put some light into the context and outcomes of the poll. According to him the concept of 'Brand Buddha' helped the LF to collect the massive popularity in rural and urban area in the election. He represented a comparison between the 2001 and 2006 assembly election in terms of the LF's success. Fragmented opposition was also a reason behind the success of the Left. In concluding observations, he said that numerically weak opposition in the assembly can affect the democratic practices in the legislature.

Bidyut Chakraborty (2008) in his book '*Indian Politics and Society Since Independence: Events, Processes and Ideology*' has presented a chapter named 'The Left

Front and the 2006 assembly elections in West Bengal: Marxism reinvented' has analysed the 2006 west Bengal Vidhan Sabha election. It is the modified version of his writing named 'Left Front's 2006 Victory in west Bengal: Continuity or a Trendsetter?' published in EPW in 12th August, 2006. In the book article he added some regarding land acquisition process of the LFG for industry in Bengal. In conclusion of the article, he remarked that the Chief Minister's eagerness for quick industrialization provoked strong criticism not only from the oppositions, but also from the LF's partners.

Partha Pratim Basu (2007) in his article '*Brand Buddha in India's West Bengal: The Left Reinvents Itself*' deals with the policy framework and behaviour of the LF government under Buddhadev Bhattacharya. Assimilation of selected elements of capitalism to reinvigorate the industrialization drive in the state marked the regime. Courting large scale private investment and FDI, acquisition of large chunk of land for industrial enterprises, taming trade unionism became the distinct features of the regime. But this dissertation dealt with the industrial policy of LF government in the entire globalisation period.

Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya (2009) in the field work-based paper named "*Of Control and Factions: The Changing 'Party-Society' in Rural West Bengal*" gave a deeper look into the operations of party-society in West Bengal. He presented a description the changing socio-economic and political landscape of two villages, Galsi (in Bardhaman) and Adhata (in North 24 Parganas). Despite their differences, both had CPI(M)-led panchayats and a growing non-agricultural commercial sector in the informal economy. Nevertheless, the villages dealt with quite different political issues, which this paper seeks to explain primarily in the context of party-society formation and transformation in West Bengal. He argued that the poor, specially the *dalit* and the tribal population – felt increasingly alienated from the institutional politics of 'party-society'. Indeed, if institutions fail to invent ways to accommodate the poor—as was done during the implementation of the Land Reform Act, the erosion of party-society can create space for various 'forbidden forms of claim making' that pay little regard to existing democratic norms.

Partha Chatterjee (2009) in '*The Coming Crisis in West Bengal*' has described some special issue on local government and politics in rural West Bengal. The studies were carried out during 2003-06. This paper based on two area; one based on large

sample quantitative survey across all district and another on close ethnographic observation of six purposively selected gram panchayats. find merit in both the explanations suggested in the literature on contemporary West Bengal politics: one, the institutional effectiveness of the structures of rural government and mobilisation of political support built by the Left Front, and, second, a form of clientelism in which the Left parties hold their supporters under some sort of permanent dependence. The studies, however, proposed several nuanced modifications of the arguments and also offered some new explanations for their consideration. However, some critical events took place in West Bengal since 2006 such as ‘Nandigram’, ‘Singur’, the result of the West Bengal panchayat election of 2008, he also raised questioned to understand the crisis of West Bengal.

Palshikar et. all (2014) in the edited book *‘Party Competition in Indian States: Electoral Politics in Post-Congress Polity’* focused on patterns of party competition at the state level in India by writings of a numbers of scholars including the editors. Most of the chapters compared the Parliamentary outcome with results of the Assembly elections from the states. The broader focus of the book is on party competition during the post-Congress period. The scholars also tried to portrait the relationship between consequences of Assembly and Parliamentary elections. This book attempts to unearth patterns of state-level electoral competition, and also to catch on the relationship among the state level party and the all-India patterns.

Keya Bag (2011) in the article *‘Red Bengal’s Rise and Fall’* has critically analyzed the Left politics in West Bengal. She argued some important point in the writing. She argued that LF had done some important work, like land reform, *‘operation barga’* etc. but they failed to played crucial role in education, health, industry etc. The *‘adivasi*, of the area in ‘Jangalmal, did not get much attention in this era. A majority are under the age of fifteen lives in West Midnapore suffered chronic malnutrition. The Muslim minority community also has not received much attention by the LFG

Anindita Sengupta (2011) in *‘The Impact of Economic Issue and Anti-incumbency Factor on Voter Choice in the 2011 Assembly Election of West Bengal: A Multinomial Probit Analysis’* has focused on mainly four points; Firstly, the anti-incumbency factor is the main reason behind the decline of the Left Front in the elections. Secondly; Except for local urban issues in the Kolkata Urban Agglomeration

area, no other regional issue significantly influenced voting behaviour in the respective areas. Thirdly, apart from the growth rate of NSDP, no other economic factor significantly influenced voter choice. Finally, although land acquisition, tribal people's issues and Maoist issues did not significantly affect the voting behaviour in the respective regions, they seem to be responsible for the overall decline of the Left Front's support-base in the state that was revealed in terms of highly significant anti-incumbency voting.

James Mayers (1998) in his article *'Transformation of Opposition Politics in West Bengal: Congress(I), Trinamul and 1998 Lok Sabha Elections'* has argued that the result of 12th parliamentary election has made a dramatic change in West Bengal. The LF faced the presence of a strong opposition in the state. The WBTC and BJP created some crucial challenges before the LF. If the number seats remained unchanged in comparison to the last Lok Sabha election in 1996, but percentage of votes shared by the decreased by almost two per cent. The result of the election was like a disaster for the Congress who was the principal opponent of the Left since 1977. The BJP, for the first time in Bengal could manage to win a single parliamentary constituency of Dumdum in the election. The congress remained in only one due to the win A.B.A. Gonikhan Choudhury at Malda. The WBTC fought the election and could win in seven. He argued that this was a signal for a crisis to the left. He also described the background of the emergence of the Trinamool Congress under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal.

Michael Gillan (1998) in the article *'BJP in 1998 Lok Sabha Elections in West Bengal: Transformation of Opposition Politics'* argued that not only the TMC emerged as strong opposition to the Left in Bengal, the BJP also emerged as a strong opponent to the Left. The BJP, won a Parliamentary constituency for the first time in Bengal which was the Dumdum. He also argued that population of the constituency helped the BJP to registered its win. Due to the social composition of the constituency the BJP succeed to gain political support in the election. There were a huge number of Hindu migrant refugees who came from formerly known as East Pakistan, the Bangladesh and hindi speaking non-bengali working class people. He also argued that the LF government had failed to solve some basic problems like, construction of roads, supply of sufficient drinking water, inadequate maintenance of canals etc. He also argued that it was a dramatic win for the BJP which showed an erosion of the Left support in the industrial belt.

Suman De (2012) in the book '*Didigiri*' (Bengali) wrote a collection of seventeen long television interviews with the then opposition leader Mamata Banerjee. These interviews had been taken by senior journalist Suman De between 27/ 03/2009 to 14/12/2011 for Star Ananda television channel presently known as ABP Ananda. Out of seventeen interviews, twelve interviews had been taken when Mamata Banerjee was the principal opposition leader of West Bengal. In these interviews, Mamata Banerjee as opposition leader had described the various obstacles created by the then LF government and LF as ruling front against the opposition parties. The book helps us to understand the problematic areas of opposition politics in West Bengal during the Left Front regime.

Monobina Gupta's (2012) book '*Didi: A Political Biography*' may be regarded as expressions of the appreciation of Mamata as a leader in West Bengal Politics. However, in real sense the role of opposition in general and opposition space in West Bengal politics in particular remained out of the purview of her work.

The '*Best of Mamata*' (2015) (in Bengali) is a compilation of all-important selected works written by Mamata Banerjee when she was opposition leader in West Bengal. The 'change' is one of the important compilations within the volume where she explains how the opposition was brutally handled by the then Marxist government and its cadres. She had written that in the mid-90s, very few people were ready to hear the opposition's voice. Even during Singur agitation as an opposition leader she was brutally treated by the Left government.

Swapan Kanti Ghosh (2011) in his book '*Rashtriy Santrash: Naxalbari Theke Nandigram*' (in Bengali) provides the description of different political violence that have taken place during the Left Front (LF) rule in West Bengal. Some of the landmark incidents of political violence has described by the author are; '*Naxalbari*' incident, '*Saibari*' incident, '*Marichjhapi*' incident, '*Netaigram*' massacre, '*Bantala*' incident, '*Suchpur*' incident ect. have been accommodated and analyse in this volume. Further, the author has not described any political violence during the regime of Trinamool Congress (TMC) in the state of West Bengal in this volume.

Prabrit Dasmahaptra and Rajesh Bhattachariya (2013) in their edited book '*Bamraj*' (in Bengali) analysed some points to understand the Left government and its politics in West Bengal. Altogether, 15 articles have been accommodated in this volume. Among them, three articles are relevant in the context to our proposed research work.

The most important article written by famous social scientist Partha Chatterjee which is titled as '*Paschim Banglar Assana Sankat*' (The coming crisis in West Bengal). In this article Prof. Chatterjee discussed the nature of party society established in West Bengal during the regime of LF. Prof. Chatterjee explained how all the social institutions, political and administrative institutions were controlled by the political parties in Bengal. He clearly mentioned in his article that from birth to death of human life is being controlled by political parties.

Sitaram Sharma (2014) in the book '*West Bengal: Changing Colours, Changing Challenges*' has critically examined the rise and fall of the Left in Bengal. Through 12 essays including the conclusion he described the red Bengal changed into green. The red is according to him more than a colour- a connotes as a philosophy.

Rup Kumar Barman (2020) in his book '*Samokalin Paschimanga*' (in bengali) has analysed the role of caste in West Bengal politics. He also presented some data regarding the participation of underprivileged classes in the West Bengal legislative assembly since independence. He also analysed the turn of the vote bank of the schedule cast communities from a right-wing political party, the Congress to the left-wing political parties like; CPI, CPI(M), RSP, Forward Block etc. and again the shifting of the vote bank of the underprivileged classes towards another right-wing political party, the TMC. So, this right-left-right shifting of voting behaviour is quite interesting.

Ajay Kumar Dutta (2020) in thesis title '*Electoral Performance of the Left Front Government in West Bengal Assembly Election (1977-2011): An Assessment of Downfall*' has analysed the electoral data of the assembly elections in West Bengal during the study period. He also analysed the reasons behind the success of the 34 years Left rule in Bengal. And finally, he has tried to analyse the major weaknesses of the LF in Bengal which pushed it into the debacle in 2011 assembly election.

Uday Basu (2012) in the book '*Left Out in Bengal: Mamata Mahout on Congress Elephant*' critically analysed politics of West Bengal during LF rule. He argued that the Marxist lost touch with her people long back of 2011, but they remained in power through manipulation electoral machinery and use of muscle power. The people of Bengal knew about it all, but were helpless due to absence of viable opposition. Sonia Gandhi and Mamata Banerjee inspired confidence among the people groaning under Marxist rule.

Piyali Basu (2018) in the thesis titled *'Dynamics of Opposition Politics in West Bengal (1998-2011)'* has analysed the evolution and electoral performance of opposition parties in West Bengal from 1947-2011. She also focused in the split of West Bengal Pradesh Congress and the birth of the TMC which changed the opposition politics in Bengal. The scholar also discussed the economic transition of Bengal from 1991 to 2008 and the issue of Singur and Nandigram which helped the TMC to win in the electoral battle.

Pratip Chattopadhyay (2023) in the article *'Changing Nature of West Bengal Politics: 2021 Assembly Election and Unreason'* has described the 2021 West Bengal assembly election from a different point of view. He discussed regarding the manifesto published by all the major political parties, mainly the CPI(M), the Congress, the TMC and the BJP just before the West Bengal assembly election in 2021. By referring the book *'The Cunning of Unreason: Making Sense of Politics'* written by John Dunn, the author remarked that there were numbers of unreason in the manifesto of every political party. And many unreason played crucial role in the election.

Research Gap:

There are huge numbers of research work available on Left politics in West Bengal as well as the other states in India also. Many researchers and scholars analysed the nature of West Bengal politics and the reason behind the rise and fall of left politics in various way. But the study believes beyond their analysis there are some other causes for decline of the left parties which is subject to scrutiny from various level.

First: The Crisis of the Left started at the end of the 20th century. After the advent of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (LPG) with the name of economic reforms, the Left had faced some serious challenges in international, national, state and also local level politics. In West Bengal, the Left's support was based from top educated population groups to marginal people, especially the small landholders, the peasants and workers. One of the main reasons for the sustainability of the LF rule in West Bengal was their land policy. When the Left changed its industrialisations and land acquisition policy, they faced serious challenges. The Left did not overcome their crisis, rather they tried to convince people. The Left also won 235 seats out of 294 in the West Bengal Assembly election, 2006. Although the CPI(M)-led LF reinstated huge victory all

around the state, but failed to win at Bhangar Constituency by a short margin of 2990 votes to the candidate of the TMC. According to a few scholars the LFG took an initiative to acquire land for an industry which raised a little challenge in Bangar which reflected through election.

Second: The 2011 West Bengal Assembly election has been considered as the benchmark for the erosion of the Left politics in West Bengal by many political scholars and researchers. Why they considered 2011 election as the ‘truth’? It is a post-facto analysis. Why did the Left face debacle in 2011? What were the antecedents of the electoral defeat of 2011 for the Left in West Bengal? Such types of analysis are very much necessary. It is a long-term history of the electoral scenario of West Bengal. The Left was in power for thirty-four years in West Bengal not only for the massive electoral support but for the lack of consolidation of the votes shared by the non-Left oppositions. The votes shared by the Left from 1977 to 2006 Assembly elections were near about fifty per cent. In the 2001 and 2006 West Bengal Assembly election the left parties came back in power but the vote shared by them was not increased in a large scale. In terms of Assembly seats, they had a huge number in 2006 but there was a question about their vote shared. So, they did not have support of the half of the electorate in West Bengal. The 2009 Lok Sabha election was more significant than the West Bengal Assembly election 2011. That was a point turn to the erosion of the support base of the Left. In 2009 Lok Sabha election the Left has secured majority support only in ninety-nine (99) constituencies in West Bengal out of 294. So, from the moral ground Left had no support of the majority sections of the electorate in West Bengal in 2009. One of the main points of Left parties was morality and ideology which was fully not followed then. They did not resign from power. If they did so, the debacle of 2011 might not been face by the Left which is subject to judge from the people perceptions of West Bengal.

Third: The defeat of 2011 election is considered for the cause of the evaporation of the Left in the state of West Bengal to many thinkers. After the debacle of the LF in West Bengal Assembly election in 2011, the concept of ‘Left no more exists’ has been gripped within the mind of many thinkers as well as the common people of not only the Bengal but across the country also. But the real situation in 2011 was not like that. The votes shared by the Left were decreased of just 7 percent in comparison to 2006 election. From 1950 to 2011 Left secured 25-50 per cent popular votes. They have not been marginalised in West Bengal as it is after 2011. What are the reasons behind the

marginalisation of the Left? Are all the reasons were hidden in 2011 election? Or there is a misreading of 2011 for the erosion of Left. A much rigorous analysis is necessary of 2011. The decisions which have been taken by the Left were not only followed by 2011. There were certain extraneous considerations. The main cause is various strategic-tactical understanding of the Left which is subject to scrutiny from different level.

What transpired behind the immediate visible fact? Methodologically that is very much important which has not been raised. It is an important exploration to be undertaken by the present research.

Is there any connection between the defeat of the Left and the wider social and political outlook of the electorate of West Bengal?

Research Objectives:

The present study explores this period from 1991 to 2021. This entire period of politics in West Bengal is marked by many turns and twists which call for in-depth exploration. The factors underlying the success and the failures of both the Left and the Trinamool Congress, the BJP and the Congress constitute the major objective of the present study. But focus is on the Left.

- i. To find out at all the reasons of success and failure of the LF during 1977 to 2021.
- ii. To find out the strengths and weaknesses of the organisations of the LF.
- iii. To find the role of non-Left political parties in opposition.
- iv. To find the sources of strength of Trinamool Congress and its legitimacy before the voters of West Bengal.
- v. To find the influence of ‘patronage’ and ‘dole’ in shaping the political attitude of the electorate of West Bengal.

Research Questions:

Keeping in view of the nature of the study, the present research work seeks to answers a few important research questions. These are

- i. Is the Crisis of the Left Front due to failure of the government's performance in West Bengal?
- ii. What were the ingredients of 'the anti-incumbency' voting?
- iii. Why did the Left parties fail to capture the electoral behaviour of urban as well as the rural and marginal areas of West Bengal since 2011?
- iv. How was the Trinamool Congress able to mobilise all the non-Left and anti-Left forces, scattered over West Bengal?

Research Hypotheses:

The study has formulated two hypotheses

- i. The CPI(M) led Left Front suffered with electoral defeats due to failure of long-term policy formulation, poor governance, arrogance and creeping of corruption in West Bengal.
- ii. Consolidation of non-Left opposition votes and rise of BJP with its Hindutva agenda pushed the Left into extreme crisis.

Research Methodology:

Keeping in view the objectives and nature of the study the research work adopts qualitative as well as quantitative method. In qualitative method the research work is supplemented by historical-descriptive analysis of political ideologies, nature of political mobilisation and pattern of leadership of all the major political parties both in power and in opposition but primary focus is on the Left parties. The policies and programmes of the Left and the TMC during the period also come in our consideration.

The study also analyses the electoral data and crucial issues of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha (Legislative Assembly) elections during the study period of 1991 to 2021.

Data also is generated through the open-ended interviews of a handful leaders and activists of both the Left and non-Left parties chosen from block, district and state levels through 'purposive sampling'. Perceptions of leaders have been cross checked in the light of experiences of the electorate as reflected in the various media, both print and audio-visual. Information and views are captured from local, state and national level news-paper, periodicals, etc. mostly in vernacular.

Chapterisation Scheme:

The present research work is divided into six chapters including the present to explore the answers of the research questions and testing of the hypotheses which have mentioned earlier. The first chapter deals with nature, scope, objectives, literatures review, research gaps, research questions and research methodologies of the present research work.

The second chapter deals with a very short historical evolution of the Left politics in the state of West Bengal since pre-independent period including a very short socio-political history of West Bengal. West Bengal had started its journey as one of the states in independent India under the rule of the Indian National Congress which we normally known as the Congress. It remained under the rule of the Congress political party until 1977. In between there were several intervals of imposing emergency. But in 1977, 'LF' led by CPI(M) succeed to win the state power. This chapter also presents a history of the birth of CPI(M) in 1964. Initially the CPI and the CPI(M) later, had been organised some crucial popular movement against the ruling Congress which helped the parties to attract support from different section of the society. After winning the state power, the LFG implemented some important policies which helped the left to win election again and again.

The focus of the third chapter is to draw a sketch of left politics in West Bengal through analysing the electoral data of the Lok Sabha and West Bengal Assembly elections in the period of 1991 -2006 in West Bengal. The left faced some crucial challenges due the collapse of socialism in eastern Europe in 1991. The wave of neo-liberal market economy with the term of 'LPG' had changed the shape of socio-political dimension not only in India but all around the world. The rise of the BJP in Indian politics with 'ram mandir' issue also presented crucial challenge before the left and the

Congress. The CPI(M) led LF had managed to defend neo-liberal challenge by adopting 'New Industrial Policy' in 1994. But in the end of the 20th century, the birth of another political party, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in the horizon of West Bengal politics added another dimension. BJP-TMC and Congress-TMC combined challenge presented strong wall before the continuous journey of the Left in elections. Although the CPI(M)-led LF had been succeeded to win in all the crucial election but its vote share and seat share decreased in 2001 in comparison to the previous election since 1977. Although the CPI(M) led LF registered massive electoral success in 2004 Lok Sabha and 2006 WB Assembly election.

Fourth chapter deals with an analysis of West Bengal politics from 2007 – 2021 through capturing data of Lok Sabha and Assembly election. In this period many twists and turns are seen in Bengal. After forming the seventh LFG in 2006, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee showed his clear approach to set up large scale industries with the help of private capital to generate employment and progress the development of the state is seen in this chapter. The LF received massive electoral support in 2004 Parliamentary election and 2006 West Bengal Assembly election. But when the LFG took steps for acquisition of farm land for industrialisation several protests led by non-Left oppositions had been organised which pushed the CPI(M) led LF into the backfoot of West Bengal politics. This chapter also picturised the process of starting consolidation of non-Left opposition votes, scattered till that time towards the TMC led political forces. A section of Muslim minority vote bank also started to shift towards the TMC-Congress alliance which resulted the defeats of left in Lok Sabha election in 2009 in many seats. And finally, the LF failed to win the 2011 WB Assembly election. After the defeat in 2011 Assembly election, the Left started to play the role of principal opposition but just after five years it failed to reach that position in the Assembly in 2016. And after that the Left suffered with continuous decrease from almost every section of the society. This chapter also deals with the Left-right political competition of Bengal which started to shift towards right-right competition. This trend established clearly in 2019 Parliamentary election when the LF failed to win a single Lok Sabha seat in the state by decreasing its votes share at almost 7 per cent. On the other hand the BJP secured 18 Lok Sabha seats and almost forty per cent valid votes.

The fifth chapter deals with some important issues during 1991 to 2021 which are related to the rise and fall of the left politics in West Bengal. Some important issues like;

advent of neo-liberal economy during 1990s, New Industrial Policy-1994, emergence of the TMC in 1998, Singur-Nandigram issue etc. The fifth chapter also represents a summary of the perceptions, views and opinions of a very few numbers of leaders and activists of different major political parties, mainly the CPI(M), the TMC, the BJP and the Congress in West Bengal. These views are collected through personal interview through a few specific unstructured questions related to the present study, with a handful leaders and activists of the CPI(M), the BJP, the TMC and the Congress. The story of success and failure of the Left parties also tried to compare with the opinion and counter opinion of those political leaders of state, district and local level chosen by judgement sampling.

The sixth chapter represents a summary and conclusion of the present study in very brief manner. This chapter also deals with the probable answer of the research questions which have taken in the first chapter and also portrays a few research findings through testing the hypotheses by lighting spot on the third, fourth and fifth chapter. The discussion about the crisis of the Left ends with a few concluding observations by referring the results of 42 Parliamentary constituencies in WB of recently completed 2024 Lok Sabha election.

CHAPTER- 2

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LEFT IN WEST BENGAL TILL

1990s

West Bengal is a state of India which situated on the monsoon-fed sedimentary plains of the lower part of the Ganges in South Asia. The state is a mainly agricultural place since the pre-independent period. The intervention of the colonial rule in the political economy of Bengal created a strange combination of rent-earning, middle social classes with enclaves of export-oriented, raw-material-processing industrial sectors and agricultural hinterlands. The introduction of 'rule of property' in Bengal in 1793 led to the emergence of a surplus-extracting tenant aristocracy under the conditions of colonial capitalism (Bhaduri 1976, 45-53). Early experiments in indigenous enterprise by Bengali entrepreneurs died an untimely death by 1848 with the collapse of the Union Bank of Calcutta. From then on, the Bengali tenant middle class, stratified internally along the lines of ingress to shares of peasant overplus, sought to transmute itself into an enlightened middle class for clerical job in the colonial government.

Subho Basu and Auritro Majumdar argued that the wish of Bengali middle classes to become the hegemonic capitalist class collapsed on "the quotidian reality of colonial economic relationships. At the turn of the century, despite their best efforts, Bengali intermediate classes failed to translate their ambition to become entrepreneurs into practice. The gap that resulted from the failure of the indigenous capitalist class to grow was filled by immigrant, north-Indian Marwari traders, who emerged as the intermediaries between British capital and Indian producers of raw materials" (Basu and Majumder 2013, 171).

The absence of a solid capitalist principle thus created a cultural climate of aversion to business among the Bengali servicemen elite and opened up opportunities for ideologies that would give these intellectuals control over the economic and political formations. Not unexpectedly many within the service elite of Bengali Hindu origin gravitated towards revolutionary nationalism, blaming British rule for the economic degeneration of Bengalis and justifying the politics of assassinating individual British officials and organising armed revolts against the colonial state. The first World War encouraged these revolutionaries to seek help from neighbouring Asian countries such as

Germany and China. After the 'Bolshevik' revolution in Russia in 1917, a large number of revolutionaries became attracted to Marxist-Leninist political principles in Bengal. However, a total turn to Marxism as a political epistemology was tempered by the landowner question at the edge of the Bengal colonial period between 1905 and 1947. The service elites and the intelligentsia, who became increasingly destitute and rent-seeking, consisted mainly of high-caste Hindus who survived by generating revenue. Surpluses of predominantly Muslims, Dalit and 'adivasi' (indigenous tribal people) peasantry (Basu and Majumder 2013, 171-172).

Since the late 19th century onwards, the colonial political economy also produced export-oriented, resource extraction industries and vast rail transport centres. Although the model of working-class formation was neither unilinear nor identical, some new working classes emerged in the coal mining, jute and tea plantation industries which was controlled by foreign British capital. In the aftermath of the first World War, this working class launched an unprecedented offensive against the control of the British colonial capital (Basu and Majumder 2013, 172).

During the year of 1919 and 1921, the undivided Bengal seen waves of strikes in the coal mining, jute and railway industries, which panicked Bengal's colonial administrative machinery. Against the backdrop of the Russian Revolution, this attack influenced a section of the Bengali intelligentsia and affected the effectiveness of the organized labour movement as a centre of anti-colonial movement (M. Roy 1920, 159-63). Though immature in nature the unionizations process flowed out both among the working classes and the so called white-collar lower level of employees. The formation of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in 1920 was an example of those incidents.

As Overstreet and Windmiller described that "modern trade unionism had its beginning in India after World War I, and the first national trade-union federation, the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was formed in 1920. The organizers of the All-India Trade Union Congress were not Marxian revolutionaries, but bourgeois nationalist with close ties to the Indian National Congress. Humanitarianism as well as nationalism motivated the leadership .. The first president of the AITUC was Lala Lajpat Roy whom, M. N. Roy and his wife had known in New York in 1917. Whatever his

personal friendship for Rai. Roy did not mistake him and his AITUC colleagues for Marxist revolutionaries” (Overstreet and Windmiller 1959, 367-68).

In the second annual session Manabendranath Roy wrote “the leadership of the working-class movement in India is not all that might be desired. Most of the important unions are headed either by English skilled workers indirectly connected with the Government, or by humanitarian reformist without any conception of class-struggle, or by opportunist nationalist politicians” (Overstreet and Windmiller 1959, 368).

Despite episodic internal conflicts between communities, labour movements opened a secular space in a province bifurcated by the Hindu and the Islamic religious nationalist philosophy for political intervention inspired by communist ideology. This was led by a section of the Bengali intelligentsia who came from the Muslim and the Hindu intermediate social classes. In Calcutta (now Kolkata), a Muslim nationalist writer Muzaffar Ahmad was among them, who understood alienated by the Hindu philosophy of combative revolutionary nationalism and charmed by result of the Russian revolution and the emergence of the new Soviet state. There were also others who were with Ahmad in this evolution towards revolutionary communist politics.

Younger nationalist revolutionary workers who rejected Gandhi’s policy of non-violent resistance against the British colonial domination. They wanted to experiment the Soviet revolution firsthand in the land ‘Bharat’. To gain this experience, many revolutionaries took jobs as sailors aboard merchant ships bound for Russia and secretly travelled to the Soviet Union. Their goal was to learn more about the Russian revolution and the communists’ organisational methods. They also wanted to get help for the Indian independence movement. Gopen Chakrabarty was one of them (Basu and Majumder 2013, 173).

S. Basu and A. Majumdar argued that this nascent radicalism began a process of ‘plebianisation’ of Bengali literary and cultural creations. The rebel poet Nazrul Islam, in his poems and authors such as Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, Manik Bandopadhyay etc. in their novels pictured a complex world of middle and working-class lives in Bengal. This wielded to the grounding of a new kind of social imaginaire that plainly broke from the prior practices of writing novels and poems on aristocratic features such as the landed gentry, Rajput generals, and even Mughal emperors (Dasgupta 2005, 79-98). This transformation in literary expression was

accompanied by the establishment of the Workers and Peasants Party (WPP) in 1928. The WPP sought to represent the interests of the Bengali peasantry and industrial workers by attempting to form a united front between sporadic peasant struggles and the labour movements among the jute mill workers (Basu 2004, 199-202).

Leftists could make their presence felt in British colonial Bengal when they formed a broad United Front that associated in the field of industry and agriculture. Its effectiveness declined when it blindly accepted the orders of the Comintern and derelict cooperation with non-communist allies. This was clear during the civil disobedience movement between 1930 and 1934. At the beginning of the movement, the Left took concerted action with other Socialists and Congress Nationalists and was very useful in methodize strikes. But its influence peaked in the early 1930s when the Left distanced itself from the Congress party and the anti-colonial insurgency.

Despite such unrest, an alternative political culture emerged in Bengal in the 1930s as an alternative to the rival nationalism led by the Congress and the Muslim League. These political policies, ideas and organizations were interconnected, yet they contained the seeds of a future development of a powerful communist movement in Bengal that overcame the increasingly polarised nationalism of the Bengali colonial social formation along Hindu-Muslim lines. Importantly, the National Liberation Left was based on and consistent with a practice that sought to build class coalitions, in contrast to both the Muslim League and the Congress, which prioritized tradition, religious identity and community.

S. Basu and A. Majumdar argued that politically, this new movement clarified the concept of inclusion '*social* citizenship', contrary to ideals *political* citizenship of the Congress Party, which was committed to maintaining harmony between capital and labour. During the 1928 Birla jute mill strike, Moni Singh, a communist activist, criticized nationalist leader Subhash Chandra Bose for protecting Birla's interests. The Communists in Bengal were able to coordinate a large strike movement among the industrial workers in the jute mills by 1937. The movement also saw the formation of the Red Factory Committee, which challenged the retention of capital in production organisations for about three months. The ruling Muslim League government, allied with British capital, was able to break the strike through repression, promoting the Hindu-

Muslim divide and making partial concessions to the demands of the working class (Basu 2004, 37-74).

In the 1940s, the communists first started to pierce in rural East Bengal through various movements within the farmers, such as; no taxes and no rent. While the Muslim League continued the representative of the wealthy peasant business class and the Congress supported the Hindu land-owning middlemen, the Communists created a new political constituency among tenant farmers, agricultural workers and small farmers. Led by the needy middle-class intelligentsia, this emerging class combination—composed of administrators, industrial workers, and poor farmers— turned out the hallmark of communist mobilization in Bengal. Thereafter, during the 1940s, particularly in the time of the Bengal famine, the communist intelligentsia founded a new cultural movement, the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association (IPTA). The IPTA, in the face of its mainly male and middle-class sensibilities, affixed a new existence in the common-sense politics of Bengal. Shambhu Mitra directed a play, the *Nabanna* (1943) marked the commencement of this new social imagination, which aimed to capture the vision of a future Bengali society built on socialist principles (Bhatia 2004, 76-94).

According to Overstreet and Windmiller “the Indian People’s Theater Association (IPTA), like the AIPWA was set up to inject Communist ideology into Indian cultural life. It was organised in Bombay in May, 1943, when the CPI was holding the First Congress. Travelling dance and drama troupes were organized and sent to many parts of India to perform ballets and plays dealing with Marxist and nationalist themes. The party claimed that one troupe that toured the country in 1943-44 collected Rs. 200,000 for Bengal famine relief. In 1947, the IPTA reported that during the previous year its 44 branch organizations had presented 52 stage productions and 800 new songs, and had entertained audiences numbering more than five million” (Overstreet and Windmiller 1959, 435-36).

S. Basu and A. Majumdar argued that during the famine, communists devoted themselves to grassroots relief work and mobilization. The Communist Party of India (CPI) has established a student health home run by supporters from the medical community on a voluntary basis for poor students who could not afford expensive treatment in private or government hospitals. Thus, the Communist Left was successful in establishing its strong presence in grassroots social movements. By the end of the war,

through their united front strategies, cultural movements, and peasant mobilization, the communists could create a mass-based social movement among sharecroppers demanding a better share of agricultural produce. More importantly, white-collar employees who considered themselves part of the culturally hegemonic Bengali middle classes participated in massive strike actions. Bank employees, post and telegraph as well as railway workers, alongside the peasantry and industrial working class, now became the new social constituency of the communists. Thus, through a combination of mass movements and cultural movements, the communists created a social imaginaire that influenced not only the war impacted middle classes but the urban working class and poor peasants as well (Basu and Majumder 2013, 175-76).

On the eve of India's independence from British bondage, the communists had emerged as an alternative to the Muslim League and the Congress. This social coalition was most strikingly manifested in the outcome of the 1945 elections, when Jyoti Basu, a representative of the Bengali middle class and its intelligentsia, won a seat in the Bengal Legislative Assembly for the Communists. Besides Basu, Ratanlal Brahman, a labour representative of Nepali-speaking tea garden workers, and farmer activist Rupnarayan Ray were also elected⁴.

The communist social imaginary at the time of the birth of the independent Indian nation therefore represented a social coalition of the unionized working class, office workers, the middle-class intelligentsia and the rural poor. It is also important to note that communist leadership remained firmly in the hands of high-castes, the Hindus, men, who had the potential to integrate into the mainstream Parliamentary politics of Bengal.

According to Marcus Franda the communist movement in WB can find its origins back as far as during early 1920s, when a number of Bengalis established working relations with the 'Comintern', "but the growth of the party as a significant factor in provincial and state politics dates from the late 1930s. As a result of a successful recruitment drive in the jails during the 1930s, the CPI was able to absorb a large number of the 'bhadralok' terrorists who had been active in Bengal since the first partition of the province in 1905. These recruits were later joined by Bengali intellectuals returning from England, by graduates of the colleges and universities in Bengal during the 1940s, and

⁴ Manikuntala Sen gave a details description of the election in '*sediner kotha*' (in Bengali) [those Dasy]. (Sen 1982)

eventually by a large section of the urban '*bhadralok*' living in and around Calcutta and the West Bengal industrial belt" (Franda 1971, 13-14) .

The development of the movement has been something sporadic, "with significant declines in membership taking place in 1948 and 1963, but despite these temporary setbacks it has on the whole grown fairly steadily. According to membership figures given by party leaders, the CPI in pre-Independence Bengal grew from 37 members in 1934 to more than 1000 members in 1942 and to almost 20,000 members in 1947. The partition of Bengal in 1947 divided the party between two international states, with more than half of the membership going over to East Bengal in Pakistan. From a membership of less than 10,000 in 1947 the party in West Bengal grew to more than 12,000 members in 1954 and to 17,600 in 1962" (Franda 1971, 13-14).

Another point of the Communist party, mainly the CPI regarding the post-independent status of Bengal, mainly the undivided Bengal was also important. According to Overstreet and Windmiller "as CPI policy revolved during World War-II, its nationality program showed growing partiality to the Muslim League and open acceptance of the League's case for Pakistan. This was illustrated by the Party's stand in the Congress-League dispute over the fate of two important regions, Bengal and Punjab. The CPI line offered major concession to the League and was declared in two extraordinary articles by P.C. Joshi, which appeared in mid-1944 and were latter published as a pamphlet. In these articles Joshi advocated, not two independent countries, India and Pakistan, but three, for he proposed that Bengal also be given sovereignty. . earlier the Party had proposed that Bengal be partitioned accordingly, but the League demanded that Bengal go to Pakistan. Now Joshi declared that Bengal should be a united 'sovereign and independent state' which would maintain 'relation of mutual assistance and friendly economic collaboration' with both India and Pakistan" (Overstreet and Windmiller 1959, 495).

Overstreet and Windmiller also argued that "an independent Bengal, Joshi's proposal would be established not by plebiscite but by the Congress-League agreement which, would determine as well as the new state's relation to India and Pakistan. The internal communal problem will be solved, he said, by a bicameral legislature on the Soviet model. He ignored the earlier Party decision that Hindu and Muslim Bengalis were different nationalities with different cultures; instead he asserted that 'Bengalis,

both Hindus and Muslims, realize in their heart of hearts that the free Bengal will have to be a United Bengal” (Overstreet and Windmiller 1959, 495-496).

Left in the Moments of Struggle:

The rise of the communist movement can be traced back to the struggle initiated by them during the crisis situation in the 1940s in Bengal. During this period, by their participation in grassroots social movements, the Communist Party of India had turned out a mass political party. Bengal suffered losses in the 1940s ‘dance of death’, a man-made famine that killed about 3.4 million people. As the effects of the famine receded, 1946 saw unprecedented levels of communal violence wracking Calcutta for nearly ten months. Known as the ‘Great Calcutta Killings’, the murders sparked violence in rural Bengal and the neighbouring state of Bihar.

In 1946–47, a million refugees, without access to shelter or other resources, entered Calcutta from East Bengal. The communal situation in West Bengal is volatile. Muslims are encouraged to seek refuge in areas deemed safe. While some Muslims settled in ghettos in Muslim-majority areas spread across West Bengal, others migrated to East Bengal. Communal tensions did not end with the partition of British India; They continued into the 1950s and even into the 1960s, leading to a renewed influx of refugees into West Bengal. As a result, the ancient regime in Bengal died violently. Partition brought an end to the dominance of the zamindar class and the former tenant aristocracy and the poorer sections of their dependents in Bengal (Basu and Majumder 2013, 176-77).

Amid these social unrests over refugee migrations and changing class structure between 1946 and 1950, Bengal also witnessed an intensification of the class struggle over land. The demands made by the ‘*Tebhaga*’ (share croppers) movement between 1946 and 1950 to obtain two-thirds of the total agricultural output from the land they cultivated moved both North Bengal and the ‘Sunderban’ area of South Bengal. Calcutta, a city built for 3 million inhabitants, experienced a massive influx of refugees, who squatted on landowners’ land. These Hindu refugees from East Bengal, who often came from high castes, blamed the Congress government for their unfortunate plight. They felt that despite their difficulties, they were being suffered as part of a deal between Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his Pakistani counterpart, Liaquat Ali Khan.

According to Overstreet and Windmiller through the Tebhaga movement, the CPI had gained great momentum (Overstreet and Windmiller 1959, 264).

A large majority of this dispossessed and impoverished part of the population has turned to the Left as a viable political alternative to guarantee their rights. The educated people of this group would later contribute their acquired cultural capital to the cause of the Left in West Bengal for generations, thus forming one of the key factors of the Left's hegemony in various cultural forums.

According to Subho Basu and Auritro Majumdar as the class struggle intensified in Bengal and elsewhere in India, particularly in the princely states of Tripura, Hyderabad and Travancore, the CPI itself faced deep internal struggles over appropriate strategies to capture the political power. While the party had a united front strategy and articulated a vision of the future through cultural movements, supported by the success of the agrarian struggle and its renewed acceptance by the people in a difficult postcolonial situation. The party decided to launch a revolutionary war against the Indian state. Postwar world history has certainly seen similar communist successes in regions as different as China, Korea, and Vietnam on the one hand, and France and Italy on the other. Both in agrarian societies and in advanced industrialized capitalist countries, the war highlighted communist successes (Basu and Majumder 2013, 178) .

According to Sekhar Bandyopadhyay however, the revolutionary line that advocated the seizure of power through urban guerrilla action and mass uprising in the countryside. But it had limited impact on the industrial working class and the rural poor. The CPI became isolated when the Indian state banned the party and arrested most of its leaders. In areas where the communists had established bases among the farmers, such as the Sundarban areas of South Bengal and the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh, the government sent armed forces to curb their activities. At this particular moment, when India's urban elites were moving towards parliamentary democracy, the CPI entered the arena of electoral politics. The CPI's demand for universal adult suffrage in the 1940s and the institutionalization of this process after India's independence facilitated the party's move towards parliamentary electoral democracy as a valid means of capturing state power. More importantly, the Soviet Union encouraged the CPI to participate in the parliamentary process in the hope of recruiting Nehru as an ally of the Soviet bloc (Bandyopadhyay 2008, 1-32) .

However, the participation in the election did not put an end to internal conflicts in the party. Radical supporters of the revolutionary war were skeptical of the new line. Within the party, there was intense debate over the nature of the Indian state and the party's relationship with the Congress government, which favoured a particular form of state-sponsored developmentalism. Nevertheless, the party's participation in a variety of local movements gave it a mass base in Bengal.

Hindu refugees in particular interpret the Congress Party's hostility to segregated settlements as a form of class oppression. The rhetoric of class oppression also appealed to former midterm holders who faced sudden ouster and had to seek their livelihood in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Although the refugee issue was a distinct caste composition, the group was embedded among upper-caste Hindus who had settled around Calcutta, though '*namasudra*', the (low caste) refugees sent to the remote areas of Madhya Pradesh received little concrete support from the party except for the slogan 'All refugees should be settled in Bengal'.

Despite their upper-caste character, the refugee movements in Calcutta remained a genuine urban land reform movement that exposed the state's inability to evict squatters. In fact, 'Vijaygarh' (literally, citadel of victory), a leftist bastion among the refugees in Calcutta, came to be known as a symbol of victory in the early stages of this urban class struggle.

Movement Against Tram Fare Enhancement:

The Marxist parties, then the CPI in particular launched an important movement and demonstration in the capital city of West Bengal after the independence and partition of India. It was against the increase of tram fare. As Sudhir Ray described that, in July, 1953 the Government of WB allowed Calcutta Tramways company, a British establishment, to hike second class tram fare by one paisa. "The left parties expressed their grave resentment over this increase in tram fare and asked the people to resist it. The government argued that the increase in tram fare was minimal, and was necessitated by the fact that the company was incurring a heavy loss. People however responded to the call of the left parties and refused to pay increased tram fare, later they even boycotted the trams. The tramway workers declared their solidarity with the fighting people" (Roy 2007, 128).

The government of WB deployed police force and armed forces to crush the movement. “Meetings were held to condemn police firings and lathi charges, even the newspaper editorials condemned police atrocities. Subsequently, journalists and newspapermen became victims of police attack, when they attended a meeting for the purpose of reporting. When this movement was going on, Dr. B. C. Roy was not in Calcutta. He had gone to Europe and Mr. P. C. Sen was serving as the officiating Chief Minister. When Dr. Ray came back, he made a rapprochement with the left parties. He ordered a judicial enquiry and postponed, for the time being, collection of increased tram fare” (Roy 2007, 128).

In West Bengal the “Secondary school teachers staged many movements, strikes and demonstrations soliciting early action on the part of the government regarding improvement of pay-scales, better service-conditions, increased dearness allowance etc. The school teachers in those days enjoyed a very low pay-scale and they had no service security. Their life was a tale of misery and eminent Bengali novelists like Bibhuti Bhusan Bandyopadhyay, Manoj Basu described their poverty, humiliations, and insecurity with consummate skill” (Roy 2007, 130).

The teachers naturally hoped that in independent India their job conditions would be better and they would at least enjoy living wage. During the 50s All Bengal Teachers’ Association or ABTA was the leading organization of Secondary teachers in West Bengal and all the left parties supported this teachers' association. In February 1954, the Secondary teachers of West Bengal under the leadership of ABTA started an indefinite cease work and they organised a squatting before Raj Bhawan, Calcutta. This direct action on the part of teachers created a strong public opinion in their favour. People from various walks of life went to the Esplanade area and declared their support for the striking teachers. The employees of the mercantile firms of Calcutta made large contributions to their strike funds.

As expected, the government of West Bengal “tried to suppress this movement by using force and in the process produced adverse reaction. There were cases of angry demonstrations, loot and arson, when the police arrested the ABTA leaders. Police firings and lathi charges worsened the situation. At last, the Chief Minister Dr. Bidhan Chandra Ray came to terms, and he accepted most of the demands made by the ABTA” (Roy 2007, 130).

Food Movement in -1959: After the agitation against the tram fare hike, the Left parties in West Bengal organized themselves as a strong opposition. In 1957 assembly elections, the Left parties increased their strength from 57 to 80 seats in the assembly. Hence, they were looking forward to another opportunity to expand their support base and become a ruling bloc. They got it through the food movement.

However, immediately after the independence of India, West Bengal faced severe food shortages. From the beginning, agriculture in Bengal was dependent on the blessings of nature. After the partition, a large area went to East Pakistan. Bengal was rich in jute cultivation and most of the jute mills were located on the banks of the Ganges River. At that time jute was one of the highest foreign exchange earning crops. So, after partition the paddy land was converted into jute cultivation land. *Secondly*, West Bengal is a border state. Hence a large number of refugees from East Pakistan came to West Bengal. Naturally, the problems of food shortage and unemployment intensified after partition and the Left parties used the grievances of large sections of the people to unite against the Congress government and increase their power in the process. Since 1952 food agitation has become a common thing in West Bengal almost every year.

Tarakanath Mallick described that in early 1959, the government decided on interstate marketing of foodgrains and it was also decided that the government would procure foodgrains by purchasing government agencies at a fixed price for distribution to the public through fair price shops. But as it came to light, the seeds were hidden underground. Naturally, the price of food grains has increased. In such a situation Dr. B.C. West Bengal Chief Minister Roy requested the representatives of Left parties to help the government. Left parties have demanded the formation of a mass committee comprising representatives of various political parties to monitor the collection and distribution of food grains. But the opposition rejected the proposal (Mallik 2004, 24-26).

Confrontation Through Trade Unions:

Marxist parties also intensified their activities in trade union fields during this period. As Sudhir Roy described that in dock areas of Calcutta, in tea gardens in North Bengal area, in the coal fields belt of Burdwan, in Burnpur and Durgapur the Left built up militant trade union movements. "During the years 1953-55, the AITUC built up a very strong movement of the dock workers, and the government at last had to declare emergency. In

Burnpur, the workers started movement in 1953 for organising a representative union which would voice their demands and deal effectively with the authorities. The demand of Burnpur workers was for a new election of the union on the basis of renewed membership. The management gave all possible help to Michael John, INTUC leader so that he might retain his leadership” (Roy 2007, 132).

The WB government was ignoring the valid grievances of the workers, clamped section 144 on Burnpur, Raniganj and Asansol “prohibiting all public meetings and demonstrations. 13000 workers, out of a total strength of 14000, elected the leaders of the Action Committee in an open meeting. But the government arrested these leaders. The agitated workers went to the SDO’s bungalow at Asansol for securing their release, and then the police opened fires and six workers were killed” (Roy 2007, 132) .

The Action Committee “was forced to give a strike call, when the management retaliated with a lockout. The opposition leaders argued that the govt. always showed its unwillingness to refer industrial disputes to labour tribunals. They accused the government of a pro-employer labour policy, as the government always helped the management with police force for suppressing labour unrest” (Roy 2007, 132) .

On 30 September 1953, almost 8 lacs workers responded to the call of a general strike given by the CITU with a view to reducing the price hike. A strike of almost three thousand paper mill workers in Titagarh for higher wages went on for 160 days, upto February, 1954. In West Bengal the trade unions affiliated to the left opposition parties gradually increased their following, though the INTUC was a formidable rival. In November 1954, the coal-miners of Raniganj organised a march to Calcutta for realising their demands. In July 1960, thousands of central government employees working in West Bengal responded to the strike call given by the all-India leadership. The trade unions partially succeeded in thwarting the attempts of the millowners to retrench workers in the name of rationalization. Meanwhile, movements for bonus gained momentum.

During 1967-68 the government owned Life Insurance Corporation tried to introduce automation threatening the jobs of thousands of office workers. The LIC workers carried on a determined fight against this move by organising meetings, conventions and cease- work. The Calcutta employees of the American Caltex Company put on a valiant fight, when the Company tried to close down its Calcutta office. In 1967,

between 1 March and 15 June 349 gheraos took place, and this militancy on the part of workers unnerved the establishment.

The Growth of the United Fronts:

The growth of communism in West Bengal “is only one aspect of the complicated political situation obtaining in this small, truncated state. Politicization of Bengalis into modern forms of organization began almost from the inception of British rule in India, and was quickly accentuated in this century by the first partition of the Province of Bengal in 1905 and the shifting of the capital of British India from the Bengali-speaking city of Calcutta to the traditional centre of imperial power in New Delhi in 1912. In response to these two events Bengal’s political leadership launched a number of political movements, some directed against the British, some directed against the Gandhians in the Indian National Congress, almost all seeking to reclaim the dominant position in India’s political life that Bengal had attained in the late nineteenth century” (Franda 1969, 279).

Political activities caught up a top of intensity during the early 1940s, when Calcutta and its outskirts areas were occupied by over two lacs allied troops, the Muslim League (MUL) was agitating for partition, and the Congress and the communist parties were involved in the Quit India movement. “This movement overshadowed the militant tradition of Bengali political life. Even before political activity reached this peak, there were a series of major famines in Bengal in 1943, the second partition of the province in 1947, and large-scale communal riots beginning in August 1946 and ending with an influx of more than five million refugees during the next twenty years. Amidst the immense economic hardship resulting from partition, the Communist Party launched a three-year post-independence revolutionary movement in Bengal, designed to overthrow the Nehru government at the centre and the newly-installed Congress government in the state” (Franda 1969, 279-80).

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that West Bengal has given rise to a wide variety of political movements. More than fifty political parties have contested state assembly elections since 1951-52 and many of them have won seats from time to time. It is also not surprising that many of these parties are dominated by Marxist-Leftist and Communist politicians. In fact, the questions that dominated discussion in West Bengal politics before the 1967 elections were not questions that sought to explain the

development of the Left in Bengal, but rather questions that sought to explain a significant (if tenuous) political stability behind twenty years of uninterrupted Congress rule.

Franda described that however, the elections of 1967 and 1969 changed the focus of our investigation. “With the defeat of the Congress Party in West Bengal and the subsequent formation of a government that is generally considered to be Communist-dominated, several new questions arise: How do we account for the Congress defeats in 1967 and 1969? To what extent do these electoral defeats reflect the growth of the left, or can they be explained by other factors? What impact has the United Front government had on Left unity and Left strength? In short, have the events set in motion by the elections of 1967 and 1969 created a greater potential for revolutionary forces in West Bengal, or have they served to constrain that potential?” (Franda 1969, 280).

These are difficult questions, for they confront the complexities of Bengal’s own regional politics, the politics of the Indian Union since 1947, and the political strategies of international communism and socialism in this century. While answering such questions would require a lot of research, an analysis of the election results provides some insight into the nature of non-Congress alliances formed in the state.

According to Franda at first glance, organisational politics in West Bengal appears to be a maze of hopeless confusion. Of the more than fifty political parties contesting elections for the state legislative assembly since 1947, many represent only factions that have broken away from older parties, many are splinter groups from various factions, and some are splinter groups. These in turn have divided themselves two or three times. In this environment it may be reassuring to remind ourselves that the scope of Bengali organisational life is limited, at least in some respects. Of the more than fifty parties that have contested elections since 1947, only twenty have ever won seats in the Legislative Assembly. Furthermore, there are some similarities between these twenty parties, despite the fact that they are organisationally different. From the point of view of programs, they can be divided into five major groups (Franda 1969, 280-81).

The most successful vote-getter in all five state assembly elections is the Indian National Congress, a collective party in Bengal committed to a “democratic socialism that needs constant redefinition” (Weiner 1968, 321-77). The Congress in Bengal remained relatively free of factionalism until 1966, or at least strong enough to split the

party. “A major split occurred in 1950, when Prafulla Chandra Ghosh resigned from the Congress, formed the Krishak Praja Mazdoor Party (Farmers, People and Labor Party) and eventually merged with the Socialist Party at the national level to form the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). But the PSP have since contested each election in West Bengal with little success and was seriously affected by subsequent factional splits. The most serious split in the PSP came in 1964, when most of its leadership shifted to form the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP), and in both the 1967 and 1969 elections the Samyukta Socialists narrowly defeated the PSP” (Franda 1969, 281).

The second split in the Congress, which involved a large number of Congressmen joining the Bangla Congress in 1966, has had a far greater impact on the politics of the state than the 1948 split. The Bangla Congress played a key role in the formation of the United Left Front in 1967, after defeating the Congress in enough constituencies to deny it a majority in the state legislative assembly for the first time since independence. Had played. While there have been some organizational defections in both the Congress and the Bangla Congress since 1967, only one of the resulting split parties (the Indian National Democratic Front or INDF) was able to win a seat in the Legislative Assembly in 1969. The universe of political parties that have seceded from the Congress and won seats in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly is limited to four: the PSP and SSP, the Bangla Congress and the INF. Programmatically, these four parties can be aligned with the Congress, because they all strive to be united like the Congress, and because they all talk about a commitment to democratic socialism. This group of parties dominated the electoral politics of West Bengal till 1967.

A second group of political parties have close ties to international communism: the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India-Marxist (Franda 1969, 284). The CPI was established in Bengal in the early 1920s and remained relatively free of major factional splits until 1964, when the CPM broke with the parent CPI over the question of communist strategy. John B. Wood explained that “on April 11, 1964, 32 of the 65 members attending a session of the National Council of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in New Delhi walked out of the meeting. This group proceeded to establish its own ‘Left’ organisation which was formalised at a convention held at Tenali in July and went on to hold a National Congress in October in the name of the whole party. In the light of the great ideological schism in the Communist bloc, which had already been

reflected in the Communist parties of a number of countries outside the bloc, a split in the CPI caused no particular surprise” (Wood 1965, 47-63) .

John B. Wood also explained that ‘it would be unwise, however, to dismiss this division as a simple alignment of the Party into a pro-Russian and a pro-Chinese faction. The profounder reasons for this cleavage are peculiar to the Indian Party, which compared to other Communist parties is in many respects atypical. The Sino-Soviet rift itself, which has been the determining factor in most other split Parties, was overshadowed by the Sino-Indian border episodes, which established quite different norms for the CPI” (Wood 1965, 47-63)⁵.

The CPI was the second largest party in the WB Legislative Assembly until the year of 1964, when it surrendered this place to the CPM. In the 1967 and 1969 elections, the CPM could manage to overcome the original CPI by a substantial margin (pie chart-2.1), “and the CPM is now the largest party in terms of seats in West Bengal, overtaking the Congress in 1969 (Narain 1970, 88-89) (column chart-3.1). Although the Communist parties are still in the minority in West Bengal (their combined vote total in 1969 was 26.33 per cent, the highest ever, and their combined number of seats was 110 out of 280 assemblies), they have grown greatly. Fast since independence and now occupies the most influential position in the ruling coalition of the state” (Franda 1969, 284).

According to Franda from the very first election in 1952 the Communist and leftist parties in West Bengal were conscious of the need to promote leftist unity in their attempt to outvote the Congress at the polls, and they have made increasingly successful attempts in every election to devise electoral coalitions. In 1952, there were two attempts at leftist electoral alliances, the United Socialist Organization of India (USOI) and the People's United Socialist Front (PUSF). The USOI was originally conceived as an alliance of all left parties, but it ultimately broke down over questions of ideology and leftist strategy and finally amounted to an alliance between the CPI, the Socialist Republicans (a small and unsuccessful leftist party that was founded in 1947), and the Forward Bloc. The PUSF was the rump of the USOI, consisting of those parties that were unable to reach an agreement with the Communists: the Socialist party, the RCPI, and the Subhasist Forward Bloc. In the context of the 1952 elections the USOI was a

⁵ John B. Wood gave a details description of the split of the CPI and origin of the CPI(M). He described almost all the historical background of the split since 1920s.

great success. Largely because of electoral alliances in which the parties in the front agreed not to work against one another, the Communists secured 28 seats in the Legislative Assembly, the Forward Bloc 2, and the Socialist Republicans (running as independent candidates) 4. The USOI therefore obtained a total of 43 seats in the new Legislative Assembly and was easily the largest non-Congress bloc (Congress secured 152 seats in a Legislative Assembly of 238). The PUSF, on the other hand, secured only 2 seats, with the result that two of the constituent parties in the PUSF (the Socialist party and the RCPI) eventually merged or coalesced with other leftist parties in future electoral fronts, while the third (the Subhasist Forward Bloc) went out of existence.

As a consequence of the relative prevalence of the first Electoral Front in 1952, nearly all the smaller political parties in West Bengal tried to organize or to join Electoral Fronts in 1957. The largest of the three coalitions of 1957 (United Left Election Committee or ULEC) was again led by the CPI and included the five main left parties at the time: the CPI, Forward Bloc (FB), Forward Bloc (Marxist), PSP and RSP.

Once again, the Communist-led electoral Front won the largest group of non-Congress seats (80 in the 252 Assembly), dwarfing the other two Electoral Fronts. In 1957 the CPI-led ULEC managed to win 80 seats, the non-communist United Left Front (consisting of the SUC, Bolshevik, Democratic Vanguard and Republican parties) managed only 2 seats; And the United Democratic People's Front (consisting of RCPI, Jan Sangh, Hindu Mahasabha and some independent Congressmen) failed to get even a single seat.

As in 1952, non-Communist Left Front parties were severely hampered by their failure to challenge the Communists: both the SUC and Bolshevik parties succeeded in forming Communist-led Electoral Fronts, merging with the Democratic Vanguard. The Workers' Party of India, which eventually joined the Communist-led Electoral Front, and the Republican Party became inactive.

Split within the Communist Party:

In the 1957 general elections, the CPI decided to support Nehru. This issue gradually created a controversy within the party. The CPI leadership in West Bengal, including West Bengal State Committee Secretary Pramod Dasgupta, disagreed with the central leadership and favoured a classic left communist strategy in the 1960s. They agreed that

the rebellious period indicated the great potential of the Indian peasantry for a revolutionary movement, the CPI's left in West Bengal leaned towards the Chinese model of revolution. He was ready to adopt guerilla warfare tactics following the Communist Party of China (CPC). West Bengal is less than thirty miles from Tibetan China and borders three foreign countries [Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan), Nepal, Bhutan]. But most of the party leaders were not ready to accept guerilla warfare tactics due to non-availability of weapons and the party's infiltration of police and military services (Mallik 2004, 31-32).

Disagreements arose again among CPI leaders over Chinese aggression in 1962. The right-wing faction of the party gave its full support to the Congress government. While the Left faction proposed a peaceful solution to the problem. There were dissensions among CPI leaders in West Bengal too.

Such differences have existed since independence. The Sino-Indian border conflict acted as a catalyst for its intensification. In 1962, the CPI passed a resolution asking its members to support the Nehru government against Chinese aggression. But a section of the leadership both at the Centre and in the state opposed this decision (Ray 1985, 61-80).

T. N. Mallick described that in West Bengal, nearly two-thirds of the state committee members who opposed the resolution of the party's central leadership were arrested under Defence of India Rule. The CPI's state committee was dissolved and a provincial organizing committee was formed with the help of the leaders of the right-wing factions. On the other hand, the leaders of the Left factions were equally organized both inside and outside the prison. At the 1963 National Council meeting, thirty-two leaders of Left factions demanded an investigation into Dange's activities after the Meerut conspiracy trial. As soon as their request was rejected, these thirty-two Left faction leaders, including Jyoti Basu, Muzaffar Ahmed and Pramod Dasgupta, walked out of the meeting. They launched an all-out attack on the central leadership and decided to form a new party at the Tenali conference in July 1964. Again, in October 1964, at the Calcutta (now Kolkata) Party Congress, the leaders of the Left parties formed a new Communist Party, known as the Communist Party of India (Marxist), CPI(M) (Mallik 2004, 32-33 and Wood 1965, 47-63).

Franda described that the most successful vote-getter in all five state assembly elections is the Indian National Congress, a collective party in Bengal committed to a democratic socialism that needs constant redefinition (Weiner 1968, 321-377). The Congress in Bengal remained relatively free of factionalism until 1966, or at least strong enough to split the party. “A major split occurred in 1950, when Prafulla Chandra Ghosh resigned from the Congress, formed the Krishak Praja Mazdoor Party (Farmers, People and Labor Party) and eventually merged with the Socialist Party at the national level to form the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). But the PSP have since contested each election in West Bengal with little success and was seriously affected by subsequent factional splits. The most serious split in the PSP came in 1964, when most of its leadership shifted to form the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP), and in both the 1967 and 1969 elections the Samyukta Socialists narrowly defeated the PSP (Franda 1969, 281).

Jhon B. Wood argued that “it can be seen that the split in India was not because of a simple alignment into a pro-Russian and pro-Chinese schism, “but rather to irreconcilable difference between those who wished to see a strong independent Party unified around a clear and closely argued Marxist programme resting on sound revolutionary base, and those who were content to maintain the less complicated role of political respectability within a parliamentary democracy and who hoped to ‘persuade’ the bourgeois government to carry out the task for social revolution for them” (Wood 1965, 63).

The Left had not advocated that “the Party should follow the Chinese model, and China was discussed mainly in the context of the Right having been guilty of fundamental errors in their class analysis of the Indian positions vis-à-vis China in the frontier dispute. It is interesting to reflect that Russia, rather than China, bears more responsibility to this split, since the CPSU’s developing hostility towards China (Wood 1965, 63)”.

Congress Domination Breaks Down:

The Indian National Congress was in power in the state of West Bengal from the first Assembly election in 1951-52 to the year 1967. But the year 1967 brought about a “watershed in the political history of post- independence India. In the fourth general elections, the Indian National Congress failed to win majority in a number of states. Its strength was considerably reduced in the Union Parliament as well, the communist and

other left parties were thus presented with a favourable political situation. But their united organizational strength, concentrated in a few regions, made the left parties ineffective on the national scene” (Mukhopadhyay 2016, 124-25).

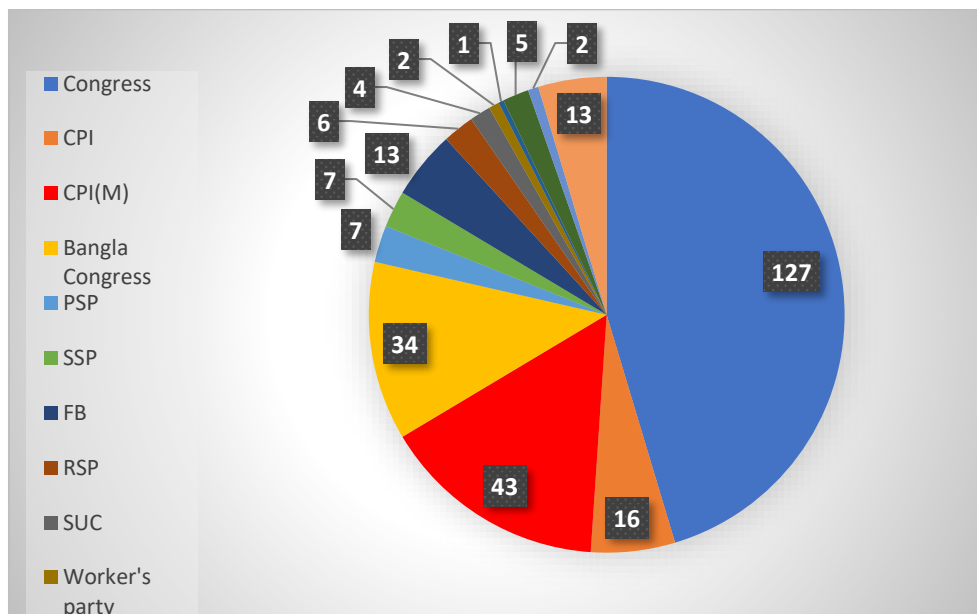
The state of West Bengal was, however, experiencing a process of radicalisation from the early 1960s. “Influx of refugees in large number to the state ever since independence, inadequate rehabilitation measures, swelling number of educated unemployed in the state and last but not least the discriminatory attitude of the central government towards the problems of West Bengal at a time when the latter's economy was almost on the verge of collapse, gave rise to spontaneous outbursts of mass upsurge against Congress rule in the state. Factional squabbles inside the Congress Party leading to defection of a section of the state leadership and formation of a new party, named Bangla Congress, around this time intensified the process” (Mukhopadhyay 2016, 124).

The CPI(M) leadership in the state worked out a programme of maximum electoral mobilization along with other non-congress left parties. The CPI also was trying to capitalize on the mood of anti-congressism of the people to make electoral gains in addition to capturing new bases of support. But the possibility of a broad united front of the entire democratic opposition did not materialize due to mutual mistrust between the two communist parties. Even on the question of seat adjustment, no agreement could be reached.

Hence in the elections, two different political combinations, one led by the CPI and the other by the CPI(M), confronted the Congress as well as each other. Almost all parties in West Bengal received more votes in 1967 than in 1962, but the Bangla Congress saw the largest increase in total votes. The Congress managed to get only 676,267 additional votes and the two Communist parties got a total of 801,802 votes, but the Bangla Congress got an impressive total of 1,325,013 votes, equal to about 42 per cent of the additional votes obtained in the 1967 elections. This alone would indicate that the 6.32 per cent vote loss to the Congress was not taken by the Communist parties (as their vote percentage was almost the same in the 1962 elections) but by the Bengali Congress. A disgruntled group that broke away from the Congress Party in 1966 itself. Moreover, the Bengali Congress has gained 4.2 per cent at the expense of other parties, even though it has cut into the Congress's total numbers.

According to Franda the impact of the Bangla Congress can be seen in another way by looking at the number and percentages of seats won in West Bengal in 1967. Taking into account the increase in the size of the State Assembly in 1967 (There were 280 seats in 1967 compared to 251 in 1962), the Congress Party would have had to win 176 seats in the new Assembly to retain the same percentage of seats who won it in 1962. In fact, it won only 127 seats, 49 fewer than would have been necessary to maintain its position in 1962. Comparing this with similar figures for other parties, it is clear that most of the seats lost by the Congress party were regained by the Bangla Congress with its 34 seats. The two communist parties together won three seats more than necessary to maintain their previous position in the General Assembly, and the smaller left-wing Marxist parties and independent parties won thirteen seats more than necessary to maintain their previous position. The overall picture is one of a narrow defeat for the Congress, partly because of the Congress's inability to convert its minority of votes into a majority of seats, but mainly because of the rise of the Bangla Congress (Franda 1969, 290).

Seats won by major political parties in West Bengal Assembly election 1967.



Pie chart- 2.1

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in and see also <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2753899>.

Franda argued that the reasons for the success of the CPI in forging electoral fronts during the first three elections “involve the use of party funds for electoral

purposes (the CPI has always been the wealthiest of the leftist parties) and the greater unity and strength that the CPI could gain as a result of its attachment to an all-India party and an international movement. These organizational aspects of leftist politics have been dealt with in another place, but for our present purposes it is important to note that the predominance of the CPI in leftist electoral fronts had been unquestionably established by 1962” (Franda 1969, 289).

By the time of the election in 1967, it was still essential for the different leftist and democratic socialist parties of WB to assign in a great deal of negotiating in terms of determine the types of electoral alliances they would join, “but in the final analysis it was agreed that both of the electoral alliances that would be created for 1967 would be led by Communist parties. As a result of the split in the CPI in 1964, there were two electoral fronts in 1967, the People's United Left Front (PULF), led by the regular CPI, and the United Left Front (ULF), led by the CPM. These two electoral fronts were able to secure the cooperation of all of the significant Marxist-left parties of West Bengal and of the Bangla Congress and SSP as well. The only democratic socialist party other than Congress that stood outside of the two electoral fronts (the PSP) was severely beaten at the polls” (Franda 1969, 289).

According to S. Basu and A. Majumdar the critical issue that undermined the UF ministry was the policy regarding procurement of food. The CPI and CPI-M collected popularity by organising movements, popularly known as the ‘food movement’, “against shortages of food supplies in West Bengal. They demanded stringent restrictions on the procurement of food by rich peasantry and wholesale dealers engaged in largescale trade. They were also dissatisfied with the central government’s allocation of food for Bengal and demanded that prices for essential food items be fixed. This led to clashes with P.C. Ghosh, the former Congress leader and then food minister in the United Front Government” (Basu and Majumder 2013, 183).

The CPI-M sharply criticized the food minister and held huge public meetings demanding for his resignation. The conditions became complicated as the Union Government sought to organise “a food supply agreement with the U.S. government. But the Lyndon B. Johnson administration was clear that it would not supply India food on an everyday basis unless the government of India followed a clear policy of adopting Green Revolution technologies. CPI-M leader A.K. Gopalan protested against such

dependence on U.S. aid and refused to participate in an all-India government– sponsored discussion of the issue” (Basu and Majumder 2013, 183).

Although the Left had a limited presence in the Indian Parliament in 1967, the rise of the Left in the province of West Bengal that year led to a revival of popular movements. In the United Front government of 1967, Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee came from the rebel faction in the Congress; Jyoti Basu, the leader of the CPI-M, became the finance minister, thus controlling the government's purse strings. Harekrishna Konar, the radical peasant leader of a once ‘untouchable’ caste, became minister of land reforms in the United Front government, while Subodh Banerjee of the SUCI controlled the Labor Ministry. Urban Bengal soon witnessed enormous unrest, characterized by a new form of agitation called gherao, confinement of management in its offices by agitating the workers. This movement emerged in response to the layoff of nearly 72,000 employees in 1967-68, a layoff made possible by the previous Congress government's close alliance with industry leaders.

In urban Bengal, strike action has crippled small and medium industries. This Left-led labour activism caused a flight of capital from the province. Nevertheless, the industrialists took a categorical stand against any compromise on the gherao issue. At a meeting on May 4, 1967, they rejected a government proposal for a six-month moratorium on closures, layoffs and layoffs, in exchange for a written commitment from the workers that they would forgo the gherao. More importantly, they even refused to accept a government representative as a member of the industrial committee set up to review individual cases of dismissals. They further refused to accept the committee's recommendations unless they were unanimous. The central government openly supported the industrialists' position. Instead, they encouraged industrialists to defy the orders of the state government. Meanwhile, within the state government, disagreements have arisen among voters. Because the strikes were mainly organized by the CPI and CPI-M affiliated AITUC, the Praja Socialist Party, a small non-communist socialist group, condemned the strike; Newspapers suggested that the Bangla Congress, which is part of the government, could switch sides and join forces with the Congress Party if such radical actions continue. The state government has remained adamant that it will not allow police intervention in ‘legitimate’ industrial disputes.

Across the India, english-language dailies unanimously condemned the gherao policy, while CPI leader S.A. Dange advocated the use of the gherao as a weapon in collective bargaining. Y.B. Chavan, the home minister of the central government, warned the United Front Ministry that if it failed to curb trade union militancy, the central government might intervene.

Tensions in the United Front: Right from its inception, the UF was marked by two opposite political strands. “At one end was the policy of democratic social reforms punctuated by populist stances of the Bangla Congress and the Socialist Parties. At the other end was the CPI(M), which looked upon the United Front government as a weapon of struggle. The former political trend found expression in a number of statements made by Ajoy Mukherjee, the Chief Minister of the state. For instance, he identified ‘democratic socialism’ as the goal of his government, and advised students to ‘shun’ politics. The CPI (M), on the other hand, looked upon the UF as a strategy for “the isolation of the main party of the bourgeoisie, advancement of the ideology of the party, and releasing the people and the working class from the grip of bourgeois ideology and increasing people’s confidence in themselves as against the bourgeois-landlord government led by the big bourgeoisie” (Mukhopadhyay 2016, 126-27).

According to the leadership of the party, the UF government “was a weapon of mass struggle directed to ‘unleash the discontent of the people rather than give relief,’ and “tell the masses of the impossibility of such governments developing themselves into the media of basic social transformation. With such an understanding the party concentrated more on class-based unity and less on party-based democratic unity to strengthen the UF. The CPI was striving to hold the balance between these two extreme currents, but with a decisive tilt in favour of the reformist current” (Mukhopadhyay 2016, 126-27).

Fall of the First UF Government:

The fall of the first UF government in November, 1967 was brought about by a number of factors. The rift among the partners over political issues, the advent of a more adventurous leftist trend through armed peasant uprising at Naxalbari which led to a major split within the CPI(M) and consequently, the emergence of a third communist party, the CPI (Marxist-Leninist), and the subtle political manoeuvres of the Congress leadership at the Centre and in the state-all combined to create an atmosphere of political

chaos and a justification for the imposition of President's rule in the state, Ironically, the imposition of President's rule helped the partners of the UF in more than one ways. It subdued the Naxalite movement for the time being, and thereby eased the tensions within the Front over the Naxalbari episode. Secondly, it enabled the partners of the UF to set aside their differences and disagreements for the time being in view of the fact that the Union government was once again intervening in the affairs of the state-encouraging defection and horse trading, and tightening the administrative control over the state.

This realisation helped to cement the crack, albeit temporarily, within the Front and induced it to contest the mid-term poll in 1969 as a single unit on the basis of a common political programme. The strategy paid off. The UF increased its strength dramatically. It secured 214 of the 280 State Assembly seats. Among the constituents of the Front, CPI(M) won the largest number of seats, capturing 80 followed by Bangla Congress (33) and CPI (30). Once again Ajoy Mukherjee was chosen the leader of the Front although the larger part of the Home Ministry was taken over by Jyoti Basu, the leader of the CPI(M), this time. This government set out to implement a 22-point programme chalked out before the election. It promised action in the fields of land reform, industrialisation, unemployment education, social inequalities and administrative efficiency, proposed to help the peasants in their struggle for detection, recovery, acquisition, and distribution of '*benami*' land and the realisation of other legitimate democratic demands, and decided to put pressure on the Central Government for adequate provision of finance required for the full implementation of its rehabilitation schemes.

The second UF government remained in office for a period of thirteen months before it collapsed, under pressure of intense infighting, among the parties in the Front, in March, 1970. "During this brief spell, it achieved some successes in recovering 300,000 acres of surplus lands and distributing the same among the landless and poor peasants, in securing better wages and working conditions to nearly 300,000 employees in jute, and tea industries through negotiated settlements with the employers, in helping the striking workers in the textile and engineering industries to gain substantial increase in wages" (Mukhopadhyay 2016, 128) . The labour minister, a CPI(M) leader, played a crucial role in this. He exerted considerable influence to further the interests of the workers. The fact that the portfolios of Land Reforms and Home (Police) were also held by CPI(M) members gave the party an edge over other constituents of the Front and this

was reflected in the sharp increase in the membership of the peasant and trade union organizations controlled by that party. The membership of the party also rose sharply with the recruitment of 7,000 new members during 1969.

Second United Front Government:

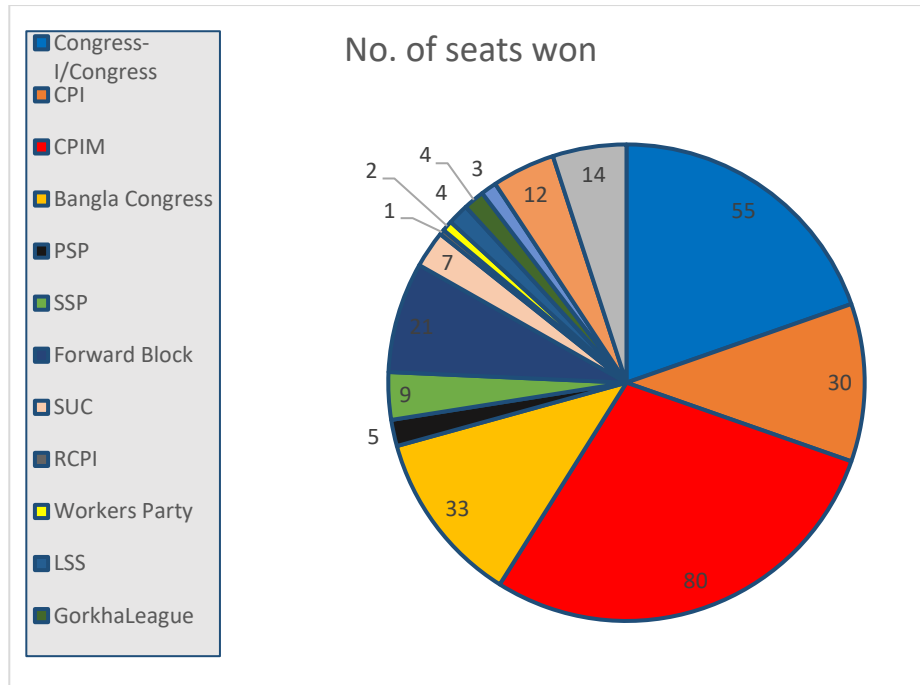
After the dismissal of the first United Front Government by the governor, the presidential rule was imposed in West Bengal till January 1969. A new fresh election was conducted for West Bengal Vidhan Sabha in February, 1969. Basu and Majumdar argued that in the election held in the midst of violence in February 1969, the Left could secure a huge electoral win; however, the Left factions could not remain united. “On the other side of the political divide, the Congress resurrected itself as the party of its leader, Indira Gandhi. Rebel congressmen returned to their natal political home, the Congress. The CPI remained committed to its ideology of viewing the Congress as a progressive bourgeois force and allied with the latter for the elections. However, the different segments of the parliamentary Left now clashed with one another over their respective political strategies and to preserve their constituencies through force. The CPI, the CPI-M, and the newly formed Communist Party of India–Marxist Leninist (CPI-ML), the breakaway Left faction of the CPI-M led by Charu Mazumdar, engaged in further violence against each other” (Basu and Majumder 2013, 184-85).

According to Franda the WB Assembly elections in 1969 resulted in an inevitable victory for the UF, but they were much more competitive than the wide gap in the number of seats would indicate. “The Front secured almost four times as many seats as the Congress (214 to 55 for the Congress, the remaining 2 seats being split among non-Congress, non-Front parties, and Independents), but the difference in the percentage of votes secured by the Front and the Congress was less than 10 per cent (Congress gained 40.42 per cent of the vote, compared to the 49.7 per cent of the vote gained by the United Front parties and Independents)” (Franda 1969, 292).

In almost a quarter of the competition in which the INC and the Front were pitted against each other (63 of 270 assemblies), “the margin between the two was less than 5 per cent, and in almost half of the instances where the two contested (117 of 270 constituencies) the gap between them was less than 10 per cent. This is not to minimize the decisiveness of the victory of the United Front, for the Front did win more than 50 per cent of the seats.” (Franda 1969, 292).

its seats by a margin of 15 per cent or more, but the voting figures do place the extent of the triumph of the Front in clearer perspective” (Franda 1969, 292).

Seats won by major political parties in West Bengal in 1969 Assembly Election

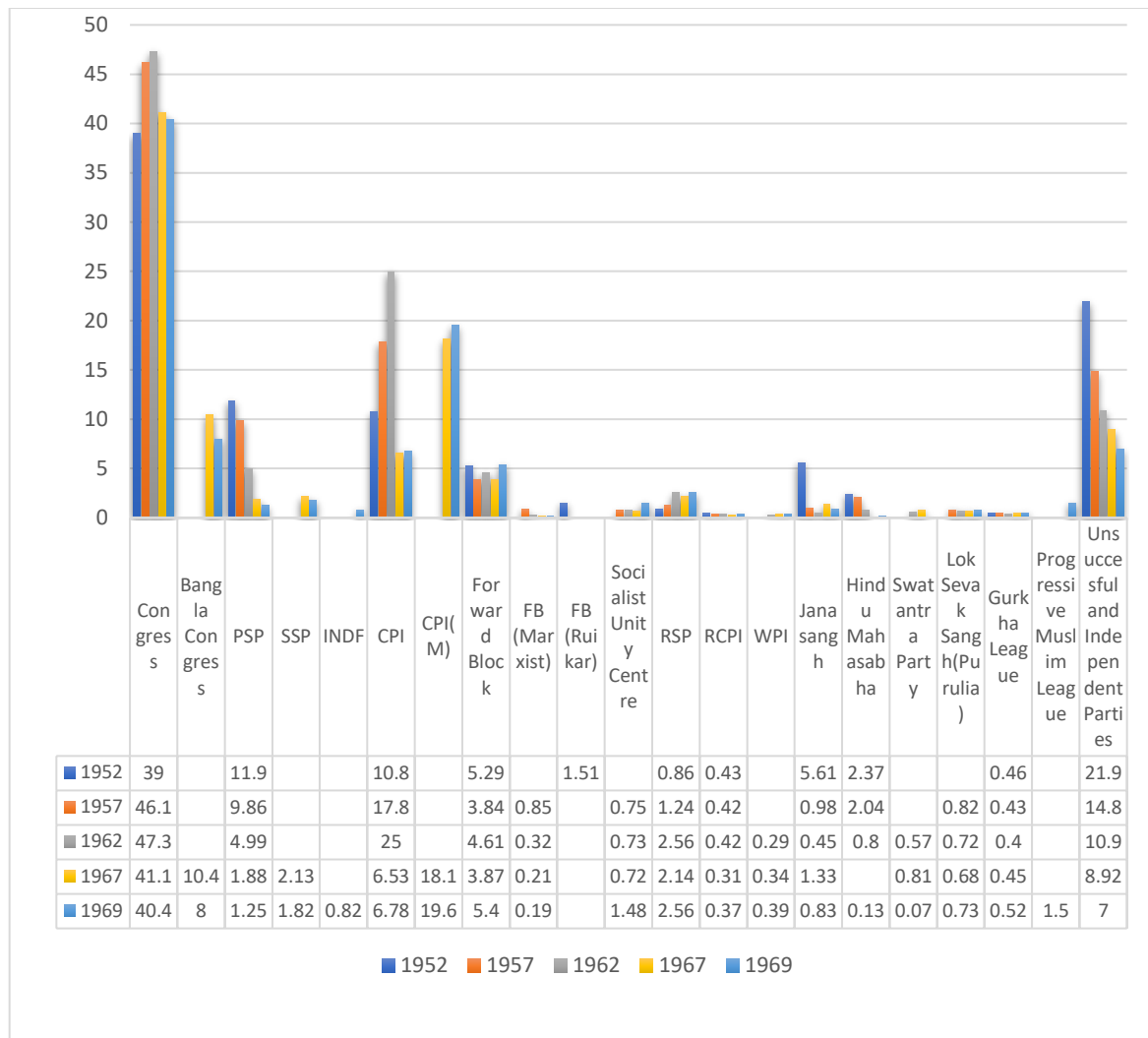


Pie chart- 2.2

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in and see also (Franda, Electoral Politics in West Bengal: The Growth of the United Front 1969)

What the election results indicate is the extent to which the West Bengal electorate was polarised between the Congress Party and the Left Communist-dominated Front during the 1969 elections. Ahead of the election, there was a feeling among some observers (and many politicians) that voters in the state were looking for a third option, or a ‘third force’ that could get the votes of both the Congress party and the United Front (Franda 1969, 292) .

Percentage of votes gained by different major political parties in West Bengal 1952-69



Column Chart-3.1

Source: Data compiled by www.eci.gov.in and Marcus Franda's article 'Electoral Politics in West Bengal: The Growth of the United Front' in Pacific Affairs, Autumn, 1969, Vol. 42, No. 3.

According to M. Franda the extent to which the voters of the state have come to conceive of the party system as one between the Congress and the Communist-leftist front is also indicated by other data. The number of Independents contesting in 1969 was only 90, compared to 602 in 1952, 346 in 1957, 324 in 1962, and 327 in 1967. The number of voters who voted for parties or Independents other than the Congress or the Communist-dominated left front was reduced to 10 per cent (compared with 45.02 per cent in 1952, 31.35 per cent in 1957, 29.84 per cent in 1962, and 14.17 per cent in 1967). For the first time since Independence, therefore, a coalition of leftist parties was able to face the Congress in virtually every constituency in the state (270 of the 280

constituencies), in every one of which they were unopposed by other leftist parties (in contrast, the two leftist electoral fronts that contested in the 1967 elections had opposed one another in 126 constituencies, each damaging the electoral efficiency of the other to a considerable extent.) (Franda 1969, 292-93).

Emergence of the Naxalite Movement:

The first spark of extra-parliamentary communism in 1967 was kindled by an armed peasant uprising in Naxalbari, Kharibari and Fansidewa-three contiguous areas in the district of Darjeeling in North Bengal. The background to the emergence of the Naxalite movement, as it was popularly called following the location of its origin in the Naxalbari area, was provided by the extremely backward living condition of the poor peasants, tribals and agricultural labourers-victims of the worst form of exploitation by the landed gentry in connivance with the state bureaucracy and the police, The organizers of the movement, who joined the CPI(M) after the split in the CPI, but who were not wholly in agreement with the political programme of the CPI(M), chose to escalate peasant and tribal militancy in these areas during 1966-67 and attempted an agrarian revolutionary mobilisation.

This region was also strategically suited to an armed uprising as it was situated very close to Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan in the north, Nepal in the west and Bangladesh (till then East Pakistan) in the east. Further, it was "located at the point of India's narrowest corridor, 13 to 14 miles wide which connects the main portion of India's landmass with its north-western states and territories of Assam, North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura. Whether the organisers of the movement chose this area specifically keeping in view its strategic significance for launching an armed revolution is not known for certain. But the stir it created immediately after the first violent clash between the peasant and the police is explicable to a large extent in terms of its geographical significance for the rulers of India and her neighbouring countries.

The tradition of peasant-tribal militancy in the rural areas of India is not unknown. Within the undivided communist party there were spokesmen and strategists of armed peasant revolution. After the first split in 1964, the left faction which consolidated itself into the rival communist party-the CPI(M). drew in its fold most of

the protagonists of armed peasant revolution. The new party's procrastination in settling certain crucial ideological and strategies tactical questions which have plagued the thinking of Indian communists throughout the post-independence period, also caused the emergence of diverse trends within the new party. The peasant movement in Naxalbari presented one such trend. Historically, however, it coincided with the first ever electoral success of the two rival communist parties in West Bengal. Sections of the leaders and cadres of CPI(M) remained unreconciled to the prospect of the party's participation in the UF government along with Bangla Congress and the CPI. Such disapproval found an outlet in the peasant uprising at Naxalbari, This movement was organized by some peasant leaders of the CPI(M) in the district of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, Between March and May of 1967 the three police stations in the Naxalbari area covering 250 square miles and 100,000 people, were reported to have registered sixty cases of peasants occupying or cultivating land that did not belong to them and seizing stocks of rice and paddy from the landlords.

A. Mukhopadhyay described that on 23 May, one police was killed and two other policemen injured by the rebellious peasants and “tribes as the police intruded into the villages to apprehend some of them. The police retaliated by killing nine persons including six women and two children. The incident caused much embarrassment to the United Front government and especially to the CPI(M). The central government spared no time in giving large publicity to the Naxalbari episode, accusing the CPI(M) of instigating violence in West Bengal, and putting pressure on the UF government to curb the movement with a firm hand. The provincial leadership of the CPI(M) tried to persuade the instigators of the movement not to escalate it into a violent class war immediately, conceded the urgency of the problems of landless and land-hungry peasants and agreed to take both administrative and political measures to remedy the social and economic deprivations of the rebellious masses. All this, however, had little quietening impact on the dissidents” (Mukhopadhyay 2016, 130) .

The final rupture between “the CPI(M) and the dissidents upholding the Naxalbari path of struggle was precipitated by the Chinese Communist Party's hailing of the Naxalbari movement as ‘the front paw of the revolutionary armed struggle launched by the Indian people under the guidance of Mao-Tse Tung's teaching’ and as signifying ‘a

new stage in the Indian people's surging struggle against reactionary rule.' The Chinese Communist Party also disparaged the non-congress United Front government in West Bengal which was 'serving as a tool of the Indian reactionaries to deceive the people and benumb their revolutionary militancy'. 'Rejecting the political lines of both the official communist parties of India, the Chinese Party charted out a new revolutionary course for the organizers of the Naxalbari uprising: 'the road of armed revolution to oppose armed counter-revolution, the establishment of rural bases, the concentration of forces in the villages, using the and then finally the taking over of the cities'' (Mukhopadhyay 2016, 130-31) .

Growth of the Left Front in West Bengal:

In 1969 the national political scenario changed. As T. N. Mallick described that due to conflicts among Congress leaders, the Indian National Congress split during this time. Mrs. Indira Gandhi and her followers formed the Congress (R). The CPI was also influenced by Mrs Gandhi's image. In the fifth general election, the Congress(R) won the polls and emerged as the de facto Congress. CPI has proved itself as a reliable partner of Congress(R) in these elections. In West Bengal too, the combination of CPI and Bengal Congress turned to Congress(R) to form an anti-CPI(M) front. The signing of the Indo-Soviet Peace Treaty and the rise of Bangladesh enhanced Mrs Gandhi's image as a true mass leader (Mallik 2004, 49).

Due to these factors and the disunity among the Left parties, the Congress (R) identified the CPI (M) and the CPI (ML) as their main enemies. Thus, creating a reign of terror and abandoning all democratic norms and rules, the Congress(R) returned to power in the 1972 assembly elections. The CPI(M) and other small left parties demanded an inquiry into the rigged elections, but the government remained silent on the matter. Hence, the CPI(M) protested against the government's activities by abstaining from the assembly (Mallik 2004, 49).

The Congress with the help of the police and the administration devised a plan to finish off the CPI(M) and other Left parties (except the CPI) through continuous violence and persecution. So, the leaders of CPI (M) and other left parties are busy escaping from the hands of terrorism. Only in the countryside did some resistance come from poor

peasants, sharecroppers and landless labourers. During the Congress rule in West Bengal from 1972 to 1977, the economic condition of the common people worsened day by day. Production in agriculture, industry etc. became minimal. Due to these factors, price rise, unemployment and other problems became serious in the state. Assistance from the central government was also inadequate to deal with the situation. Overall, West Bengal was going through a period of crisis. But CPI(M) and other left parties were unable to take advantage of the situation and also failed to play the role of opposition.

Even at the national level, the central government has disregarded all democratic rules and decorum. Opposition parties at the national level took advantage of this opportunity. A strong anti-government movement started in Gujarat and Bihar and the wave of this movement gradually started spreading across the country. So, the winds of change started blowing in the country. Jayaprakash Narayan started a democratic movement against the autocratic activities of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's government (Mukhopadhyay 1985, 96-97). This movement quickly spread throughout the country. But West Bengal was different from this. Because, the opposition parties [CPI(M) and other Left parties] were away from the movement. By this time, some important events, such as the defeat of the Congress in the Gujarat Assembly elections, the decision of the Allahabad High Court regarding the election of Mrs. Gandhi, etc., helped the movement to spread rapidly. The ruling party tried to control the situation by declaring a national emergency on June 26, 1975.

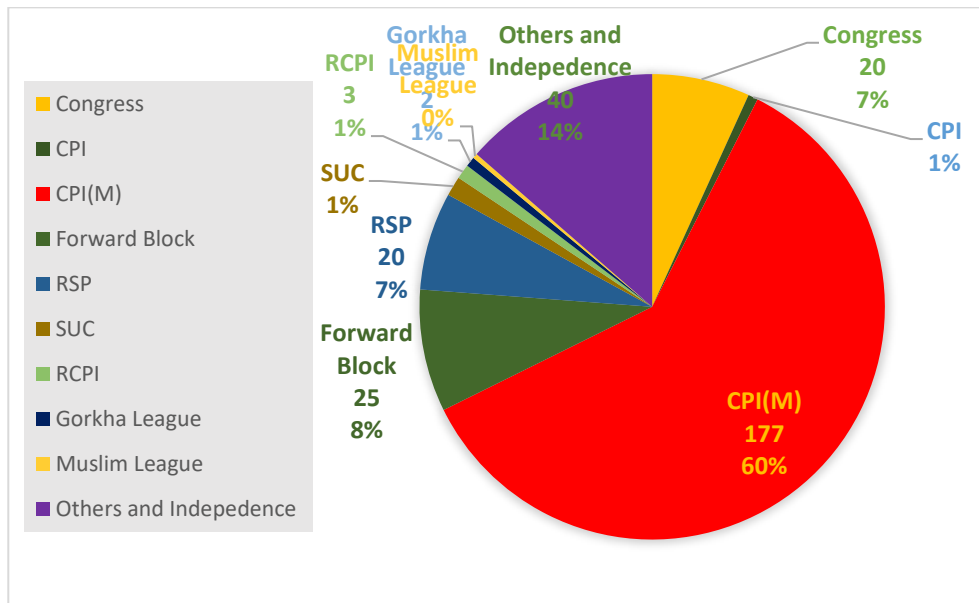
Leaders of CPI(M) and other left parties used to conduct their activities in secret. They could not do any movement against the government. However, the central government has announced general elections. The four main opposition parties, Congress(O), Jana Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal and Samajtantrik Dal merged to form the Janata Party to contest the sixth general election. CPI(M) and other left parties agreed to coordinate seats with the Janata Party. In the sixth general election, the Janata Party came to power at the centre. After forming the government, the Janata Party dissolved the West Bengal state assembly with the assemblies of some other States in order to conduct fresh elections (Mukhopadhyay 1985, 100).

The state assembly election took place in June, 1977 in West Bengal. The Janata Party and the CPI(M) Left Parties failed to make any electoral adjustment a coalition due to seat adjustment in the election. So, Communist Party of India (Marxist) {CPI(M)}, The Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), The Forward Bloc (FB), The Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI), The Forward Bloc Marxist (MFB), The Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), Socialist Party (SP), which was later became the Samajwadi Party and The Biplabhi Bangla Congress formed the Left Front coalition to fight the electoral battle in the assembly elections. This coalition of eight Left minded political parties defeated both the Congress and the Janata Party in the elections and won 230 seats in the assembly. The Left parties, led by the CPI(M), formed a coalition government in West Bengal in 1977, called the Left Front government (LFG). This government was not just a group of parties like the other two United Front governments in the past. It was developed through struggle, sacrifice, tears and bloodshed. The Left Front government started its journey in 1977 (Mallik 2004, 51) .

Subho Basu argued that “the Left’s moment of triumph at the hustings came about not by promising a people’s democratic revolution, but by heralding a social democratic program of agrarian and industrial reforms as well as an improved academic and health care environment. The Congress under Indira Gandhi appeared to have abandoned the party’s earlier vision for the establishment of a robust welfare state in India (championed most notably by Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi’s father and independent India’s first prime minister)” (Basu and Majumder 2013, 187-88) .

Ironically, despite protecting that people’s democratic revolution was its final aim, this social democratic goal of social justice was translated into a political goal by the CPI-M; “this political agenda provided the party with the moral capital to win the provincial elections in West Bengal. By 1977, a significant proportion of the people of West Bengal were regarding the CPI-M as the party that stood for social justice and redistribution. It was this understanding of the Left Front government (headed by the CPI-M) that inflected the popular imagination as well as the commonsensical idiom of politics in the province—an understanding that would sustain the Left Front and the CPI-M for over three decades at the helm of power in West Bengal” (Basu and Majumder 2013, 187-88) .

Seats won by the major political parties in West Bengal in 1977 Assembly election.



Pie-chart- 2.3

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in

The First Left Front Government (1977-1982):

The first LF government had started its journey on from 21 June, 1977. As Basu and Majumdar described that “in 1977, the CPI-M–led Left Front captured the national political imagination by implementing the Sharecroppers’ Registration Act (SRA) and holding panchayat elections in 1979, fulfilling the demands of the Tebhaga movement from 1945. The SRA stipulated that a sharecropper would retain 75 percent of the produce if s/he supplied seeds, ploughs, and other implements of production. The Act also declared the eviction of sharecroppers illegal and gave the rural poor bargaining power with rich and middle peasants. Critics of the Act claimed that through such tenancy reforms the CPI-M actually institutionalized the vestiges of neo-feudal social relationships instituted from the days of Permanent Settlement” (Basu and Majumder 2013, 188).

The first LFG was sworn in on June 21, 1977 under the leadership of Jyoti Bose. The LF contested the assembly elections on the basis of a 36-point Common Minimum Program which included distribution of surplus land to the landless; restoration of democratic norms; protection of personal freedom of students, teachers, private and

public sector employees; farmers against their respective authorities; etc. Therefore, after coming to power, the Left Front government had the responsibility to implement these programs quickly. A Left Front Committee was formed by the partners of the Front to oversee the activities of the Left Front government (Mallik 2004, 57). Promode Dasgupta, a veteran leftist leader and then, the secretary of West Bengal State Committee of the CPI(M) from 1964 to 1982, was elected as the chairman of the Left Front. Mr. Dasgupta served as the chairman of Left Front until his death in 1982 (Mallik 2004, 57).

Front committee later known as 'Left Front' (LF) is a coalition of left minded political parties in West Bengal which started its journey since 1977. It was based on an electoral agreement which is also known as 'Promode Formula' during the west Bengal State Legislative Assembly election 1977. As Keya Bag argued that "the CPI(M) further strengthened its position in 1977 by forming the Left Front coalition, which was based on the electoral agreements that became known as the 'Promode Formula', after the CPI(M)'s veteran General Secretary. Left Front parties would not contest against each other in any constituency in any types of assembly and Parliamentary election in West Bengal, whichever party had garnered most votes in the prior election would stand unchallenged, on its own manifesto" (Bag 2011, 79).

Keya bag also argued that he CPI(M)'s most important partners within the LF would be the RSP and the AIFB both were in a position of commanding support in the Siliguri Corridor and "tribal-dominated areas, specially, the relatively underdeveloped areas of North Bengal. In the 1977 West Bengal state-assembly elections, the AIFB secured 5 per cent of popular vote and could win 25 seats. The RSP secured 3 per cent of the popular votes gained with 20 seats. The CPM's allies were invited to be a part of the Left Front Government (LFG). A senior CPI(M) leader Mr. Jyoti Basu was selected as the Chief Minister by the party. Altogether, the Left Front won 230 seats in the assembly out of 294 constituencies which was nearly four-fifths of the state assembly, by securing 45 per cent of the popular support of the electorate" (Bag 2011, 79).

The Left Front Committee has recognised that the implementation of the common minimum programme is not so easy due to bureaucratic obstacles. Therefore, it is not enough to form policy and to put the policy into action, it is very urgent to build a strong bond between the government and the people. The Left Front Committee believed that this would be possible only if people's administration and initiative were established at

the lower level and the objectives could be achieved through Panchayati Raj. Therefore, the Left Front committee recommended panchayat elections.

Once installed in power, the Left Front government declared panchayat elections in June 1978. Earlier, the '*Panchayati Raj*' system was designed and constructed in the 1950s. But the system did not meet the minimum needs of the rural population, because the panchayats were in the hands of the influential and the new rich of the villages. In the thirty years since Independence, neither the central nor any state government has done anything to strengthen the panchayats (Sengupta 1979, 119 and Mallik 2004, 57-58).

According to Bhabani Sengupta the panchayats have been given neither the resources nor the powers, which alone can enable them to play meaningful role in rural development. The system of 'party-less' election has been systematically utilized by the rural rich to control the panchayat system and prevent structural change. In fact, the Panchayati Raj system was completely controlled by the rich and middle peasants all over the country and this has been to a large extent responsible for the blocking of agrarian reforms on the one hand and progressive multiplication of the village poor on the other (Sengupta 1979, 119).

Absence of panchayat elections for long has only strengthened rural interests and rendered panchayats inactive and ineffective. The State Panchayati Raj Act was enacted in 1957 and amended in 1963. The West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1973 made minor changes in the structure, powers and functioning of panchayats without disturbing the basic system. A three-tier panchayat system was introduced in West Bengal under the Panchayat Act of 1973, but the Congress government did not elect panchayats. After coming to power, the Left Front government decided to hold panchayat elections with full participation of political parties despite the disapproval of the Centre. In this context it may also be mentioned that the Ashoka Mehta Committee recommended that panchayats be elected on party basis in future (Mallik 2004, 58-59).

More than 60 percent of the voters had casted their voting right in the said panchayat election and in some area this rate reached up to 90 percent. Left Front got unexpected success in this election in all the three tiers. Left Front got more than 67 percent seats at Gram Panchayat. At Panchayat Samity Front succeeded to capture almost 70 percent seats. In Zilla Parishad the achievement of the front was maximum and it was more than 87 percent. Among the newly elected members a noticeable percentage

came from the marginal farmers and the rural landless section of the society. This election made a radical change in the rural set up of West Bengal.

West Bengal government conducted the panchayat election in 1978. Mallick described that more than 60 per cent people had exercised their franchise in the said Panchayat elections and in some areas this rate had reached 90 percent. In this election, the Left Front got unexpected success on all three fronts. The Left Front got more than 67 per cent seats in the Gram Panchayat. The Left Front was successful in capturing about 70 per cent of the seats in the Panchayat Samiti. Morcha's achievement in Zilla Parishad was the highest and it was more than 87 per cent. A significant percentage of the newly elected members came from marginal farmers and rural landless sections of the society. This election brought about a radical change in the rural system of West Bengal.

Very soon after the election of panchayat, the West Bengal government established a ministerial subcommittee to determine the activities and funds to be allocated to the elected bodies. The government has decided that all development projects will be carried out in villages through Panchayat. The Block Development Officers (BDO) would be under the discipline of the '*Panchayat Samities*' and District Magistrates (DM), the officers of the Zilla Parishad (Sengupta 1979, 138 and Mallik 2004, 60).

The Left Front founded its roots in West Bengal through the 1977 Assembly elections and through the panchayat elections, its roots became so deeper that the government remained in power for seven consecutive terms and more than three decades. West Bengal's panchayat system has become a model for the rest of the country. The activities and functions of the newly elected Panchayats have brought a new horizon for the rural people of West Bengal.

Almost 75 per cent population of West Bengal lived in the rural areas in 1970s. Agriculture and allied occupations account for about 60 per cent of the total workforce. According to the census in 1971, there were almost 39.6 lacs farmers and 32.7 lacs agricultural labourers. According to the Reserve Bank of India survey in 1971, the poorest 20 per cent of rural households in WB had either no assets, or assets worth less than Rs 1000/-. Only 6 per cent of the farmers owned about 30 percent of the property. Cultivable land while a large number of agricultural workers and labourer had no land at

all. In 1972–73, almost 64 per cent of the rural population in WB lived below the poverty line (Bengal 1984, 39). In 1977–78, the proportion of rural poor either remained unchanged or increased marginally (Mallik 2004, 61).

Mallik described that “the Left Front Government realised that without progressive change in the rural set up, the state cannot advance. Their industry cannot forge ahead without developing internal market. For developing the internal market, it is necessary to raise the purchasing power of the poorest section of the rural population. Agricultural production can-not be raised until the feudal and semi-feudal system of production is done away with. For more than two decades the Estates Acquisition Act of 1953 and the Land Reforms Act of 1955 were in practice. But there was a gulf of difference between the provisions of the law and their application” (Mallik 2004, 61).

After winning the electoral battle in 1977, the CPI(M)-led LF Government decided to change the situation by enacting these laws. The LF government also deeply felt that it is very much necessary to increase the standard and quality of living of the needy section of the rural population, specially, the farm labourers, ‘*bargadars*’, small and marginal landless farmers. The LF government also felt that radical change of the priority and pattern of investment is very much necessary, with an attitude to ensuring that the positive result of development reach to the marginal section of the rural poor people. But there were some challenges and barriers to implement these programmes.

In spite of many challenges and barriers, the LFG took some fruitful move to protect and ensure the rights of the ‘*bargadar*’ (share croppers). As an important part of land reform, the LFG had taken the step to record the names of the *bargadars*. And named the programme as ‘*Operation Barga*’. While there is nothing new in this recording, what is novel and commendable during that LF government is the process of recording the names of *bargadars* on a speedy and comprehensive scale for their safety and security. *Bargadars* and panchayats benefited from the collective efforts of rural labour organizations and facilitated rights. This special recording operation (Operation Barga) began in September 1978. After the introduction of this system, the average rate of recording increased significantly by about 300 per cent. Between 1977 and 31 December 1982, the number of registered ‘*bargadars*’ increased from 2.5 lakh to 12.06 lakh.

Second Left Front Government in West Bengal (1982-87):

After ruling successfully for five years (June 1977 to May 1982), the first Left Front government contested the Ninth Legislative Assembly elections in May 1982. In this election, the CPI (Communist Party of India) joined the Left Front. The Left Front increased its strength in the Assembly from 231 to 238. With almost 53 percent of the votes, the Left Front won 238 out of 294 seats and gained an absolute majority in the Assembly. Among the 238 seats, CPI(M) got 174 seats, FB 28 seats, RSP 19 seats, CPI 7 seats, RCPI 2 seats, Forward Bloc (Marxist) 2 seats, DSP 3 seats and SP 3 seats (Mallik 2004, 102).

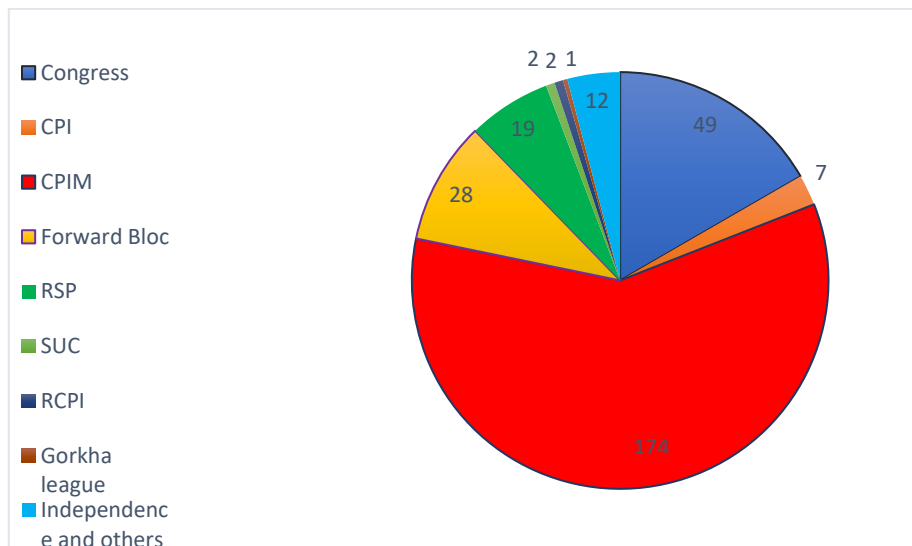
The Indian National Congress tried with all its might to regain political power, but was defeated in the election campaign by the combined forces of the Left Front. The Congress could get only 49 seats. The second Left Front government led by Sri Jyoti Basu was sworn in for the second time on 26 May 1982 and secured a four-fifths majority in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly.

Winning the state power for the second time, the second Left Front Government presented a 34-point programme before the people of West Bengal and the LFG also submitted the 18-point charter to the Union Government of India with demands in the interest of the people of this state. The Front said that, with the help and cooperation of the common people, the first Left Front Government had been able to completed most of the 36-point programmes in whole or in part. Based on these success', the second LFG would strive to fulfil the 34-point programs like; a) Establishment of a high-level Administrative Reform Commission to recommend structural and functional reforms in the state administrative apparatus; b) establishment of State Jute Corporation to protect the interests of farmers; unemployment benefit schemes should be maintained; c) measures to ensure autonomy for the mountainous areas of West Bengal; d) municipalities should be encouraged to coordinate their development activities; e) the irrigated area should be increased from thirty percent to at least fifty percent; f) the revival and reconstruction of closed and sick industrial units; g) strict enforcement of land reform laws; h) support for all legitimate and democratic movements of the working class and workers; ensure more effective mass participation in Panchayati Raj; i) more and better roads in rural areas, j) new industries in mountainous areas; k) promote cultural activities that reflect the rich heritage of the State and the aspirations of its people; l) an

effective and time-bound program for the use of Bengali and Nepali in official government work, where applicable; m) provide education in the mother tongue up to the highest level; n) ensure coverage for all children aged 6 to 14 in free primary education, *Tiffijn*, uniforms, medical aid and textbook distribution programs; etc. (Mallik 2004, 102-103).

Sudhir Roy argued that “after 1982, political scene in the country changed rapidly. For the first time, anti-Congress Governments were formed in Andhra and Karnataka. N. T. Rama Rao took initiative to convene a conclave of opposition parties which first met in Hyderabad. They also met in Calcutta and Srinagar, and they demanded more powers for the state governments, fiscal autonomy etc. Meanwhile N. T. Rama Rao's government was dismissed, but people did not take it easily. Indira Gandhi was compelled to restore the Telegu Desam government in Andhra. On the eve of the next Lok Sabha elections, Indira Gandhi was assassinated, and as a result of the sympathy wave, the Congress won this election hands down. In West Bengal, the Congress again started agitation against the Left Front Government. But in the next Assembly elections, the CPI(M) led Left Front repeated their performance. The following pie chart will illustrate this point” (Roy 2007, 168-69).

Seats won by major political parties in W.B. Assembly election 1982. (Total seats - 294).

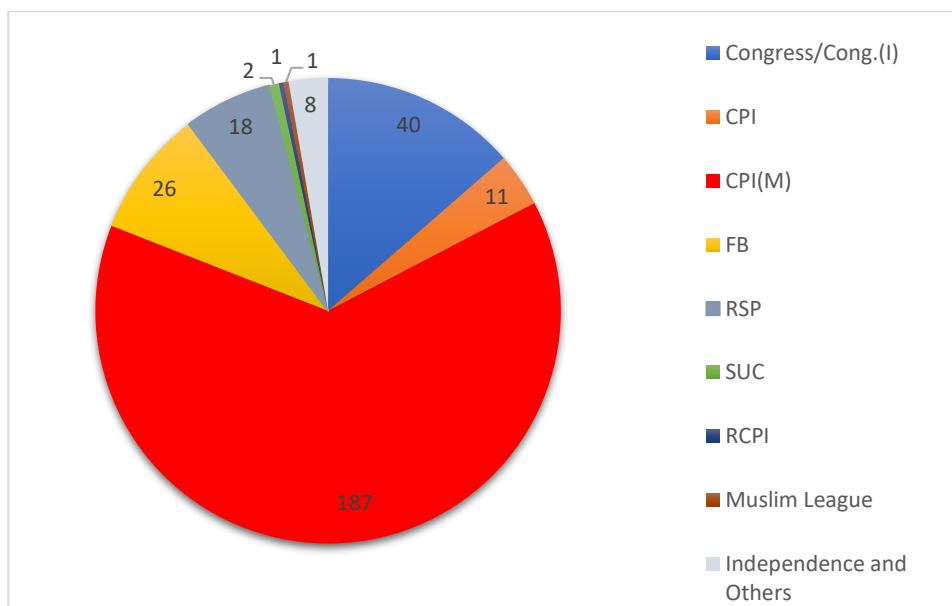


Pie chart- 2.4

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in and article by Ashoke Mukhopadhyay, named ‘Politics in West Bengal’ published in IJPS in 1994, vol. 55, No. 3.

However, the CPI(M) led LF succeed to regain state power in Bengal in 1987, but the bonding between the CPI(M) and the other smaller allies within the front, particularly, Forward Bloc (FB) and the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) had been not close from happiness. The clashes between the fronts intensified not only during the election of the three panchayat bodies - Gram Panchayat (GP), Panchayat Samiti (PS) and Zilla Parishad (ZP) - in February 1988, but also over some political issues. The clashes during the panchayat elections were, in a way, natural as there is a lot at stake in such elections. Panchayat authorities control about one billion rupees annually and are crucial to power in rural areas. Although the leaders of the LF communicated in regular basis to found out the ways to win over the Congress (I), power struggles between the partners over seat sharing intensified. The smaller allies felt that the CPI(M) slowly and surely increasing its base at their expense and this feeling was reflexed in the electoral campaign of the Panchayat election, 1988 (India Today, 31 March 1988)⁶.

Seats won by major political parties in W.B. Legislative Assembly election 1987.



Pie-chart-2.5

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in.

⁶ State Agriculture Minister Kamal Guha (FB) had slogans plastered all over Cooch Behar district stating: ‘Rajiv hatao desh bachao’, ‘CPI(M) hatao gram bachao’ (Remove Rajiv to save the country, and remove CPI(M) to save the villages). Minister for Irrigation and Waterways Debabrata Bandyopadhyay (RSP) equated the Marxists with ‘fascists who were trying to annihilate their partners in a Stalinist manner’. (India Today, March 31, 1988) and (Sengupta 1989, 892).

Prasanta Sengupta described that “the FB and the RSP campaign centered around the CPI (M)’s ‘corruption’ and the ‘reign of terror’ it was alleged to have unleashed to ensure victory. There was discontent among the Front partners over the ‘big -brotherly’ attitude of the CPI (M), which alone contested about 61,000 of the total 64,000 panchayat seats. The partners could not come to an agreement on candidates for as many as 25,000 seats and, as a result, the CPI (M), the FB, and the RSP all competed against one another” (Sengupta 1989, 892). LF Chairman Saroj Mukherjee admitted that “the area of disunity over the distribution of seats among the Front partners this time was much larger than in the last panchayat polls” (Chaudhury 1988, 347 and Sengupta 1989, 893).

Thus, while the LF was not in sound internal order before the panchayat polls, this did not stand in the way of its victory, partly because the Congress (I) organizational position was no better (Correspondent 1988, 561)⁷. Congress stalwarts like Asoke Sen, Somen Mitra, Ajit Panja, and Gani Khan Choudhury did not campaign due to their differences with the Pradesh Congress Committee (I) president. In such a situation the Congress (I) could not take advantage of the intra-LF disputes.

Prasanta Sengupta also argued that “LF’s internal problem lies in tensions among the Front partners to the extent of exposing the Front to political and administrative crises. The current internal disturbances point to the absence of a clear organizing principle to govern intra-Front relationships. Anti-Congressism (if that can be called a principle) is too vague and can hardly be expected to successfully manage intra-Front relationships. Program consensus is not sufficient either. The Front partners urgently require a clear principle by which to conduct their mutual relations” (Sengupta 1989, 896) .

Another internal problem results from the fact that, “the LF has come to depend too much on the chief minister for its maintenance. His plate is more than full with nine major and problematic departments-Home, Commerce and Industry, Higher Education, Public Undertaking, Industrial Reconstruction, Housing, Hill Affairs, Science and

⁷ The CPI(M) considerably improved its position in the GPs, PSs, and the ZPs. In the last election (1983), it won 54% of GP seats; 60% of the PS seats, and 68% of the ZP seats; the figures increased to 65%, 72%, and 85%, respectively, in 1988. In contrast, The Congress (I) position was severely weakened. In 1983 it won 32% of the GP seats, 29% of the PS seats, and 23% of the ZP seats, while in 1988 the figures dropped to 23%, 19%, and 7%, respectively. The position of the other LF partners remained more or less the same (Correspondent 1988, 561).

Technology, and now also the PWD. The danger of overdependence on one man is that if the pivot is immobilized the whole machinery tends to drift toward paralysis. 'Mr. Basu is under tremendous strain and pressure', said an LF minister. "Ours as well as the government's fate is interminably linked with Mr. Basu's in a set-up where nothing moves without the approval or assent of the indispensable Chief Minister whose own uncertainties have cast a spell on us" (Sengupta 1989, 896) .

This chapter discussed a very short history of the Left, in West Bengal. The Left, initially the CPI started its journey as a major opposition political force in West Bengal during 1950s through organising a few popular movements. Although the CPI was formed during early 1920s and played active role at different parts of the country during last three decades of the pre-independent India. The party faced split in the year of 1964 and the CPI(M) was born. Thereafter the CPI(M) captured the position of major opposition in the state which succeed to build crucial challenges to the ruling Congress. And finally, the CPI(M) got successful to win electoral battle in 1977 by making alliance with some other left parties like; FB, RSP, FB(M) etc. In 1977, a Left Front committee was formed which later popularly known as the Left Front. The CPI was not within the LF in 1977. It joined later with the LF. In between, the CPI(M) played an important role in the two United Front Governments in 1967 and 1969 respectively. After becoming the ruler of the state, the CPI(M) led LF took a few crucial steps to implement major reforms like 'land reforms', regular election of rural local democratic bodies, the Panchayat etc. These steps helped the LF to win in almost every election again and again. Although different opinions had also been raised among the smaller partners of the LF and the oppositions but that had not played any important role against the smooth journey of the LFG.

The next chapter is about the politics of West Bengal during 1991-2006. In this period the Left initially faced various challenges but could manage to win almost every election till 2006.

CHAPTER - 3

LEFT POLITICS IN WEST BENGAL FROM 1991 TO 2006: AN ANALYSIS OF LOK SABHA AND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

The previous chapters dealt with a brief history of the Left in Bengal since 1920s to the end of the 1980s. The present chapter deals with the electoral politics of West Bengal and the role of LF under the leadership of the CPI(M) from 1991 to 2006. The Left faced some crucial challenges which raised before the smooth journey of them during early 1990s. Politics of West Bengal during 1990s had presented some significant issues to everyone. The left parties in Bengal as well as in the world were facing some serious challenges due to the crisis of the first communist rule, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The first communist rule which was established in Russia after the Bolsheviks revolution in 1917, was facing some serious crisis for its survival. So, the communist ideology had been facing many crucial questions to the communist parties all over the world. Before discussing the impact of the crisis of the classical USSR to the communist parties in West Bengal, the CPI(M) in particular, a very short history of the communist rule in Russia is discussed below.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was established on the basis of “the union treaty of December 30, 1922, signed by Soviet Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, and the Caucasian Federated Socialist Republic, composed of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Formally, it was a treaty negotiated by parties possessing equal rights. In reality, the treaty signified the incorporation of the three republics into Russia. The territorial changes introduced between 1922 and 1930 resulted in the formation of the Soviet Union consisting of fifteen republics” (Slomczynski and Shabad 1998, 5-6).

As per the 1936 (Stalin) and 1977 (Brezhnev) constitutions “the Soviet Union was a federation. In practice, however, it remained centralized to an extreme degree, in spite of the formal right of each republic to secede contained in the 1977 constitution. Even after a secession bill was adopted on April 3, 1990, territorial control of the centre over the republics tight. According to the bill, secession procedures were complicated: they required carrying out two referenda, some years apart from each other, followed by

the ratification of all decisions by the federal authorities” (Slomczynski and Shabad 1998, 5-6).

In the face of “strong and still rising aspirations of several republics for independence, such legal regulations proved to be absolutely inadequate. The republics responded to Moscow’s efforts to save the unity of the federation by declaring their sovereignty. This process started with the Baltic republics: Estonia on November 16, 1988; Lithuania on May 26, 1989; and Latvia on July 28, 1989. The remaining republics followed suit with their own declarations of independence” (Slomczynski and Shabad 1998, 5-6).

In the autumn of 1991, the governmental authorities of Russia reformed the state structure of the Soviet Union. By this reform more powers were given to the Federal Republic of Russia. On the day of 8 December, 1991, Stanislav Shushkevich of Belarus, Boris Yeltsin of Russia and Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine signed a treaty in ‘Minsk’, the present capital of Belarus. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was founded by the treaty. So, participation in the new structure was kept open before all Soviet republics. “On 21st December, 1991, with the exception of those from the Baltic republics and Georgia, the presidents of all Soviet republics met in ‘Alma-Ata’, Kazakhstan, where they signed a declaration proposing the establishment of the CIS. Formally, this declaration constituted a treaty pertaining to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Although the process of dissolution had already been initiated by the Minsk agreement in which the cosignatories nullified the binding Soviet legal code, it was only the Alma-Ata declaration that clearly stated that the Soviet Union had ceased to exist and that it was not being replaced by the CIS. Thus, the conclusion seemed to be simple: the Soviet Union was dissolved” (Slomczynski and Shabad 1998, 6).

And as its successors the fifteen independent nations including Russia were emerged. So, the fall of communist world raised many questions before the communist parties all around the world regarding the survival of communist ideology. In West Bengal the coalition of some left-minded communist parties, the Left Front had been in the state power since 1977, was also facing the same questions.

The 10th Lok Sabha Election, 1991:

In between the transitional period of the communist world, the 11th West Bengal State Assembly election was conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in 1991. This time the voters and the political parties of Bengal faced both the Parliamentary and the Assembly election at the same time (The Statesman, 18 April, 1991, 1)⁸. The Parliamentary election was conducted in the month of May and June in this year⁹. This time, some crucial issues were raised all over the nation. These were;

First; Mandal Commission had recommended to provide 27 per cent reservation in all kind of government jobs for the Other Backward Castes (OBCs). The V. P. Singh government implemented the recommendations of the Mandal Commission report. Various types of protests, strikes etc. were organised by many upper caste people all over in India. Sometimes it converted to violent protest, students sat in fire. So, the country's politics was in a burning position due to the issue of reservation.

The second issue was the '*Ram Mandir*' (The Temple of Lord Ram) which presented as hallmark into the election. There was a controversy regarding the construction of the '*Babri Masjid*' (mosque) over the '*Ram Mandir*' for long time. The BJP raised this issue to win the electoral verdict with the major support of the Hindu community. The BJP declared for the construction of the '*Ram Mandir*' at Ayodhya in the electoral manifesto of the Parliamentary election. Although the CPI criticised BJP's agenda. Mr. Farooqi, the secretary of the National Council of the CPI remarked, "*the consequences are going to be dangerous, we are not against the building of Ram temple, but the communalization of politics is now becoming a serious law and order problem. The plans are extremely serious threat to national unity and inter-communal relations*" (The Statesman, 4 October, 1991, 12)¹⁰. A senior leader of the BJP, Lal Krishna Advani set out a '*Rathyatra*' in different parts of the country. Due to L. K. Advani's '*Rathyatra*' for the construction of the '*Rama Mandir*' in Ayodhya, a place in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP emerged as a gargantuan polarising factor across the India. The '*Rama Mandir*' issue resulted many protests, rally etc. in the different parts of our country. Few of them was also transformed into violence.

⁸ Election Commission declared poll in W. Bengal on 20th May, 1991.

⁹ The polls were schedule on 20th, 23rd and 26th May, 1991. In the seven states like; Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh the Lok Sabha polls were scheduled in two days. But the other remaining states were schedule in a single day poll. The West Bengal was scheduled on 20th May, 1991 for the election. (The Times of India, 18 April, 1991, 11) .

¹⁰ The central committee of the CPI criticised the statement of the BJP to build the Ram Temple in Ajothya. The committee also expressed concern at the aggressive design of VHP -BJP.

Third issue had played as the '*ghee*' (butter) in the burning situation of the Parliamentary election in 1991, was the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. Just after a day of the first-round election, the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi was busy in the election campaigning for Margatham Chandrasekar, the candidate of Indian National Congress (INC) in Sriperembudur, a Parliamentary constituency of Tamil Nadu. Due to the suicide bombing attack Mr. Gandhi was killed. This incident created some serious protest, violence etc. across the country. The remaining elections were postponed due to unrest. The remaining elections were conducted on 12 and 15 June, 1991 by the ECI. Interesting fact was that only near about fifty-three per cent of electorate participated in the Parliamentary election. This was the lowest voter turnout report since the first Parliamentary election, 1951-52 in India.

Although the assassination took place after the first phase of elections in 211 out of the 534 Parliamentary constituencies, and the polls of the remaining constituencies were conducted after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. The results of 1991 Parliamentary elections were varied greatly between phases. The Congress had almost invisible in the first round and caused a great ripple of compassion that swept the second phase. The end result was a Congress-led minority government was formed, headed by Pamulaparthi Venkata Narasimha Rao who was popularly known as P. V. Narasimha Rao. Although P.V. Narasimha Rao had earlier announced his retirement from politics. But nominated as the Prime Minister by the party and took the charge of Prime Ministership. So, P.V. Narsimha Rao had not contested at any Parliamentary constituency in the elections. Later he contested a bye election in Nandyal, a Lok Sabha constituency from Andhra Pradesh which he won by a record five lakh votes.

Elections were conducted only 521 seats out of 543 Parliamentary constituencies across the country in 1991 (The Statesman, 18 April, 1991)¹¹. Poll did not take place in the state of Panjab and the Jammu & Kashmir due to unrest. In Panjab several separatist violent protests were organised. As per police report, more than seventy-five people were killed. So, election was postponed in that states. The 10th Parliamentary elections were conducted in that two states in the month of February, 1992. The Congress could win 232 seats in Lok Sabha out of 521 seats and formed minority government at the centre (T. ECI 1991, 10).

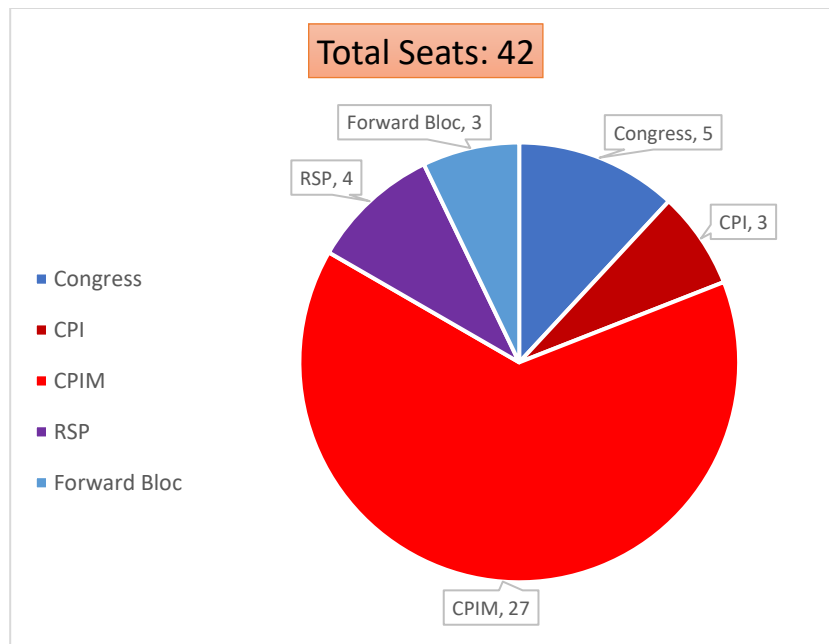
¹¹ The ECI declared the Lok Sabha election in three phases on 20th May, 23rd May and 26th May of 510 Lok Sabha out of 543. (The Times of India, 18 April 1991, 11).

However, the poll in the forty-two Parliamentary constituencies of West Bengal was conducted before the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on 20 May, 1991. So, its impact did not reflect in the election of the state of West Bengal. Result for the left parties was like better for than the previous election in 1989. The Left, this time secured thirty-seven Parliamentary constituencies out of forty-two in West Bengal. The CPI(M), alone could win 27 seats, the CPI won 3 seats, the RSP secured 4 and the Forward Bloc won 3 (pie-chart: 2.6). This win translated into a huge margin of victory for the Left in many constituencies. Out of an unprecedented 18 seats, the Left's margin of victory was over a lakh, thanks to the rise of the BJP that split the anti-Left votes. Especially in the '*Rahr*' region, a stronghold of the Left. The Left's winning margin in ten constituencies was more than one and a half lakh. Somnath Chattopadhyay had the highest margin of victory in his Bolpur constituency in Birbhum district with over two lakh votes. However, in the absence of competent leaders, as was the case for the BJP in other states, even in South India, in Bengal, the party could not gain a foothold in the many upcoming elections.

Although the Bengal was not beyond the issue of 'Ram Mandir' and reservation politics. In this election, the BJP emerged as a major challenge before the Congress and other regional political parties across the India. West Bengal was not exceptional in this matter. The BJP increased its votes share in West Bengal more than eleven per cent, but the BJP could not win any single Lok Sabha seat in West Bengal in the election. The Left parties faced an anti-incumbency factor for the first time in the state. The BJP captured a part of anti-Left votes and emerged as third alternative in the province. BJP's rise caused more damage to the Congress than to the Left. Although the Left's voting percentage fell to about 48 percent, almost three percentage less than the previous election.

The Congress could win only five seats out of forty-two, three of which were in from Calcutta, presently Kolkata. These were; Mamata Banerjee from Calcutta-South, Debiprasad Pal from Calcutta North-West and Ajit Kumar Panja from Calcutta North-East. The INC candidate Inder Jeet won from Darjeeling, previously he won in Darjeeling by GNLFF ticket in 1989. The fifth winning candidate of INC was Ghani Khan Chowdhury from Malda Parliamentary constituency. Although the Congress also won another seat in the bye-election of the Berhampore.

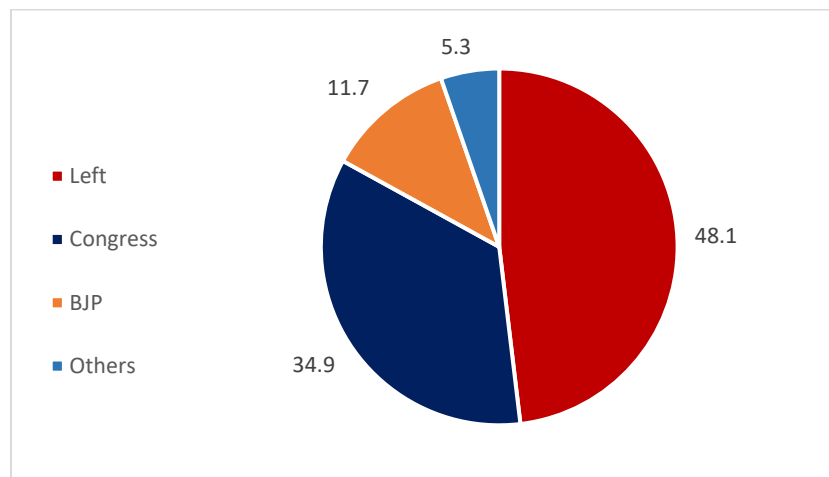
Seats won by various political parties in Parliamentary election in West Bengal in 1991.



Pie-chart – 2.6

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in

Percentage of vote shared by major political parties in 10th Lok Sabha election, 1991 in West Bengal¹².

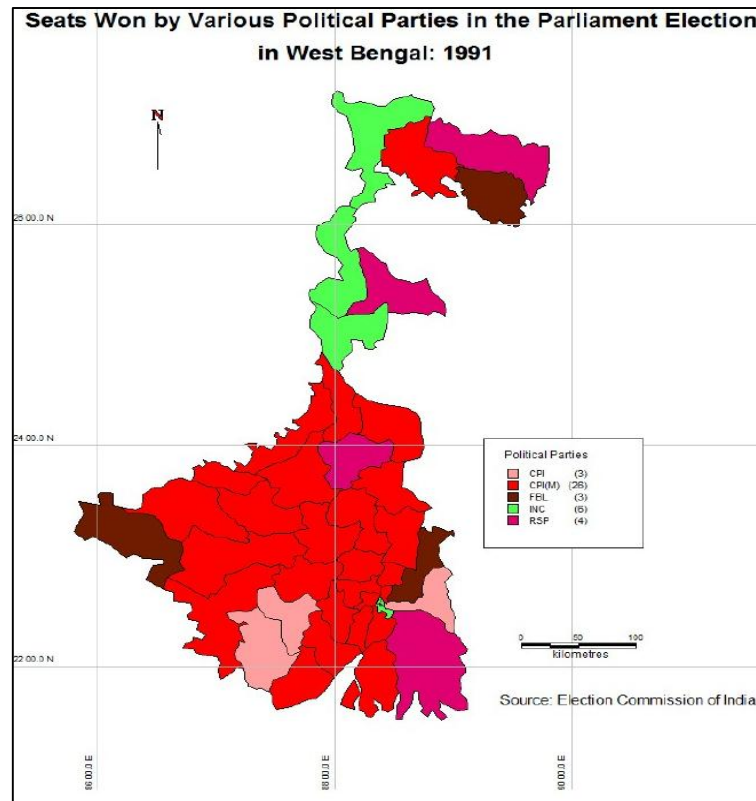


Pie-chart 2.7

(Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

¹² The LF included the CPI(M), the CPI, the RSP, the FB and the Janata Dal. The allies of the front the CPI(M), the CPI, the RSP, the FB and the Janata Dal could gather 35.2%, 3.7%, 4.5%, 3.6% and 1.1% votes respectively.

Seats won major political parties in the 1991 Lok Sabha election in West Bengal; a thematic map.



Map- 4.1

Source: www.eci.gov.in

11th West Bengal State Legislative Assembly Election 1991:

The 11th West Bengal Assembly election in the state was scheduled to conduct in the year of 1992 (The Statesman, 1 April, 1991)¹³. However, it was advanced by one year by the state government of West Bengal as the leaders of the LF thought that if the Congress could come back to power at the union government of India and create problems for the LF in the state. This fear of manipulating the state elections by the Congress had come in the minds of the Left leaders when they failed to win in Tripura, a small state in the North-Eastern part of India in 1987, where the Left alleged that the elections there were not free and fair at all. In Tripura, the INC won the assembly election in 1987 (Chakraborty 2016, 108-10) .

¹³ The honourable Governor, Nurul Hasan, dissolved the West Bengal Assembly on 31st March, 1991 on the basis of the advises of the Council of Minister. The Governor has directed that the Election Commission of India be informed the recommendation of the Council of Minister that the election of the state assembly be held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha polls.

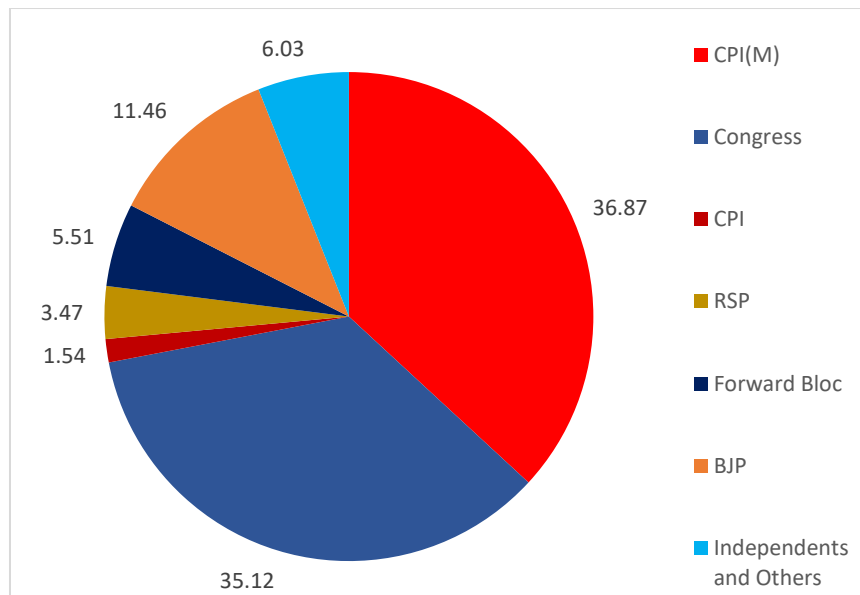
In the West Bengal Assembly elections 1991, the results were almost the carbon copy to those of 1982 and 1987. The Congress could win only 43 seats and secured 36.25 per cent of popular votes. However, their share of the vote fell further to almost 35 per cent in contrast to 42.87 per cent in 1987. The Left vote share also cut down slightly from the previous Assembly election in 1987, and after 1977, for the first time in the state Assembly elections, the vote share could not cross the fifty per cent mark and CPI(M) alone could get 36.87 per cent of the popular votes. The CPI(M) contested in 213 seats. However, the Left managed to win two hundred and forty-five seats, of which CPI(M) alone won one hundred and eighty-nine seats, which is the highest performance in the state so far. However, this count is a bit confusing as four SP candidates, one each of CPI, MFB and DSP candidates, fought the elections with CPI(M) symbols as CPI(M) candidates. In reality, however, they belonged to several other parties. Therefore, the CPI(M) actually won one hundred and eighty-two seats, which was less than the 1987 result. In the last West Bengal assembly election, the CPI(M) alone could secure 187 seats in Vidhan Sabha (The Hindustan Times 19 June 1991, 9). The allies of the LF like; the CPI contested in the eleven constituencies and won five with securing 1.54 per cent of popular mandate.

The FB contested in the 34 assembly seats and could win in 29 seats with securing almost 5.51 per cent of popular votes. The FB maintained party's strongholds in "Cooch Behar, Birbhum, Purulia, Hooghly and newly created North Twenty-Four Parganas districts where they won five, four, three, three and four seats respectively. The RSP contested in twenty-three seats and won in the eighteen seats with securing 3.47 per cent of popular votes. RSP's performance was more or less steady and they continued to hold their position in Duars region of Jalpaiguri (Northern part of the district, mainly infested by tea garden tribes and Gorkha population), southern part of West Dinajpur, Murshidabad and Sunderbans" (Chakraborty 2016, 109-10).

Although, the performance of CPI deteriorated, and the party "achieved to win only five seats, down six since 1987; four of those wins came from Medinipur district (though in Dantan constituency in Medinipur, CPI candidate won in a CPI(M) ticket, thus practically they won an extra seat) (Election Commission of India, 1991). Smaller Left parties held on to their positions, while Janata Dal also fought the election as a Left front ally, and won one seat, their only success in Bengal's electoral history" (Chakraborty 2016, 109-10).

The seat capturing picture between the two main political parties did not change very much. However, the votes of both of them decreased. This made room for a third option in the state for the first time since 1977. The BJP, with its ‘Ram Mandir’ agenda, managed to capture the imagination of a certain section of the electorate and thus captured the eleven percentage of votes. Although the BJP did not win any single seats, it still managed to come in the second position in more than ten constituencies in West Bengal. Their success was limited to non-Bengali-speaking areas as well as areas where there was Muslim dominance, allowing for consolidation of the Hindu vote. Thus, they have performed well in Barabazar area of Kolkata, Asansol industrial area of Bardhaman (at present Paschim Bardhaman/West Burdwan) district, some parts of Birbhum and border areas of Bangladesh. In Malda district the BJP emerged as strong political force (The Statesman 6 June 1991, 12)¹⁴. As per as the Congress was concerned, winning rural seats has eroded its urban character somewhat; and because of the division of BJP votes. Congress’s seats in urban areas have decreased slightly. The Congress did not get a single seat in the Asansol region, lost three seats in Howrah which it had won in the previous elections, won only nine seats out of 21 in Kolkata, and even managed to win only one seat in Barrackpore commercial area. However, his rural base increased somewhat, especially in Medinipur, Murshidabad and North Twenty-four Parganas.

Percentage of vote Shared by major political parties in W.B. Assembly Election 1991.

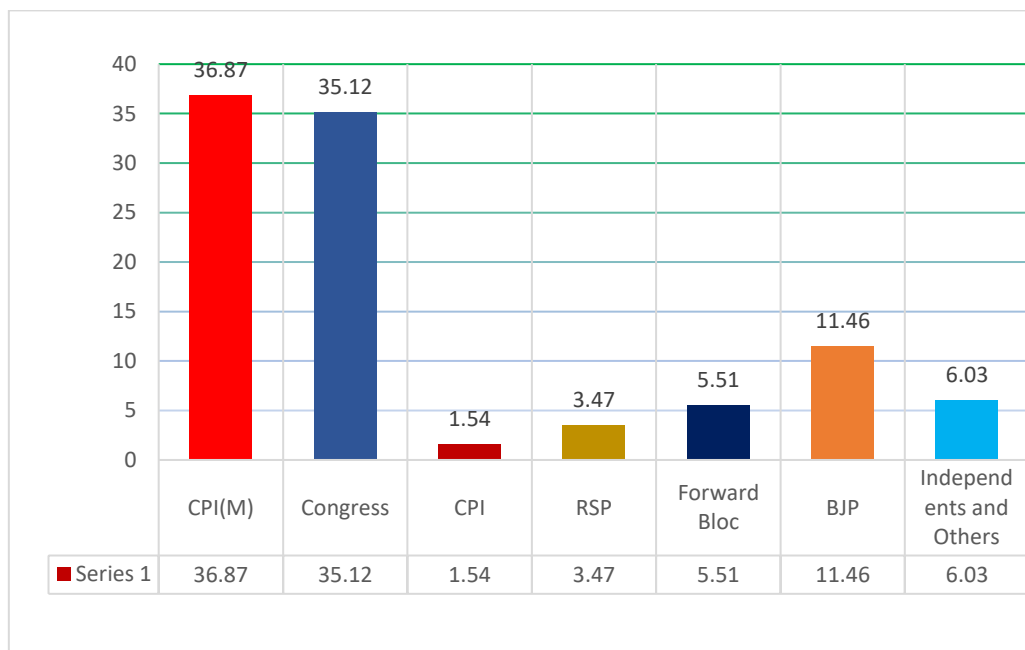


Pie chart- 2.8 (Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

¹⁴ In Kharba the BJP candidate got 12,369 votes and the Congress(I) 46,764, while the CPI(M) manage to slender lead by securing 48,925 votes. Similarly, in Gajol, the BJP got 24,850 votes.

The Smaller allies of the LF could manage to hold their positions. The Left again could win all the seats in the district of Cooch Behar, Bardhaman, Purulia and Bankura. “Barring Darjeeling, where independent Gorkha candidates won all the three hill constituencies, Left won the majority seats in every district. For the first time in ten years, they also got majority seats in Kolkata. SUCI was the solo alternative apart from Left and INC lead alliance, which again was able to win their two seats in Sunderbans, which they won as independent candidates. Three independent candidates of Darjeeling Hills won the election. The GNLF, though supported INC candidate in the parliament election, but boycotted the assembly election. However, unlike 1987, voting process in the Darjeeling was not boycotted, and elections took place as usual. Gorkha candidates not belonged to GNLF won from the hill” (Chakraborty 2016, 109).

Percentage of votes Shared by major political parties in West Bengal Assembly election-1991¹⁵.

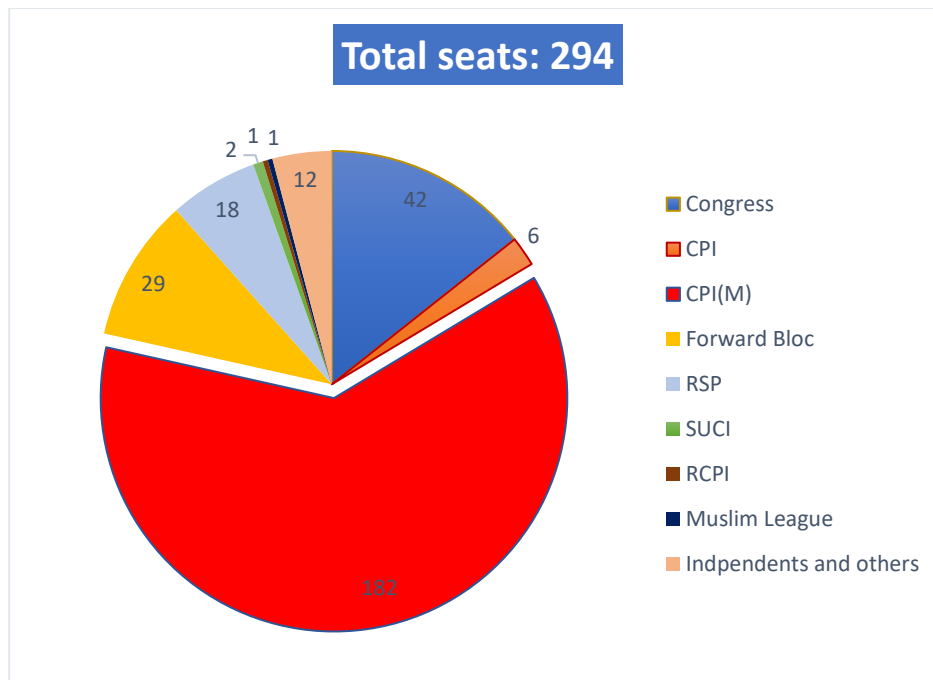


Column chart- 3.2

(Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

¹⁵ Independents and others included; Jharkhand Party-2, Janata Dal-1, GNLF-3, West Bengal Socialist Party-2, Forward Block (Marxist)-2.

Seats won by the political parties in the W.B. Assembly election, 1991.

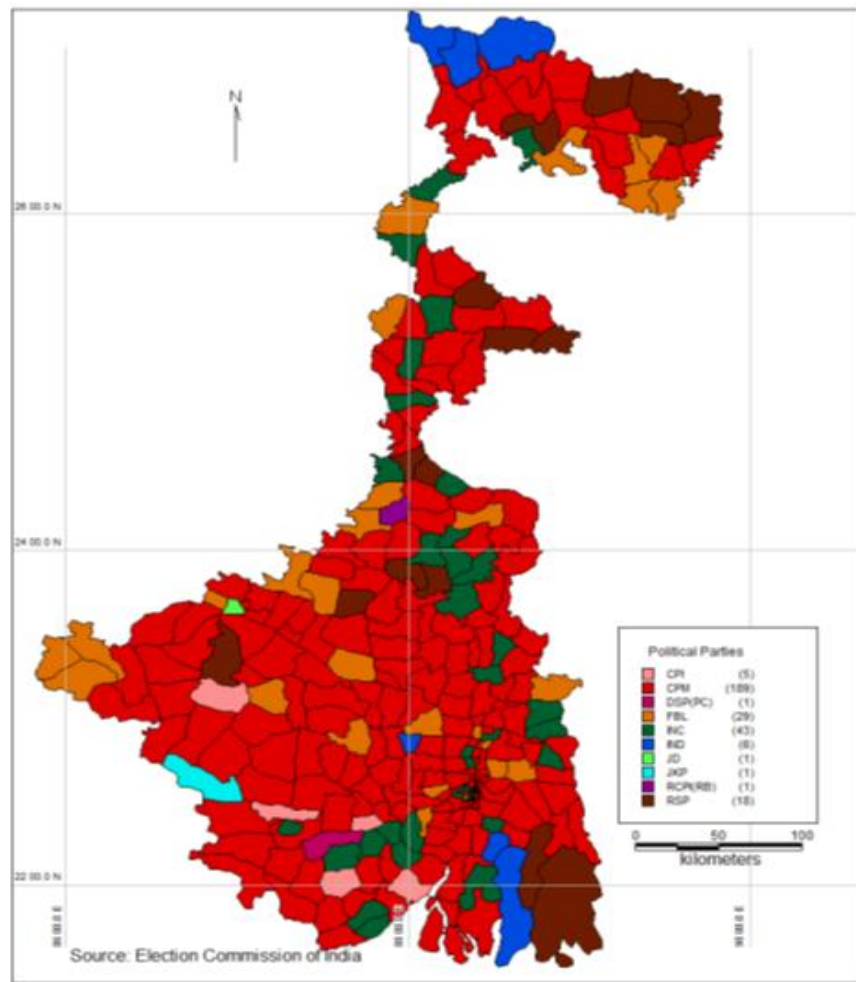


Pie-chart 2.9

(Source: www.eci.gov.in and (A. Mukhopadhyay 1994)

On the other hand, the Congress had contested in the elections in 284 Vidhan Sabha seats. The party also extended its support to the three Jharkhand Party (JKP) candidates in the district of Medinipur, a Janata Party and other UCPI candidates also from the same district and two independent candidates from the district of Bankura and Calcutta respectively. Together they could secure almost 37 per cent of the valid vote which was better performance in comparison with the previous legislative election in 1987. Although the INC could alone secure 35.12 per cent valid vote. A JKP candidate did the same win the elections. The INC had managed to regain in the areas of its minority base, particularly in the district of West Dinajpur while they gained maximum ground (Chakraborty 2016, 110).

Seats Won by political parties in West Bengal Assembly election 1991, a geographical picture.



Map-4.2

(Source: www.eci.gov.in)

The BJP had contested in 291 seats and could secure 11.34 per cent valid votes but failed to win a single seat. The rise of BJP in Bengal raised a few crucial questions and challenges before the secular image of the Left (T. ECI 1991, 12-13).

According to James Mayers however, despite these results, the 1991 elections marked the first signal of a not-insignificant style of electoral changes in West Bengal. “First, these elections witnessed a dramatic increase in support for the BJP in both urban and rural areas. Although the BJP had failed to win a single seat in either election, its share of the Lok Sabha vote had risen from just 0.41 per cent in 1984 and 1.71 per cent in 1989, to 11.7 per cent in the 1991 polls. In the assembly polls, its share of the vote had

risen from 0.61 per cent in 1982 and 0.52 per cent in 1987, to 11.37 per cent in 1991” (Mayers 2001, 36).

James Mayers also described that however the Congress(I) and the BJP primarily targeted the same class and caste bases among the electorate, and “both centred their respective campaigns around the perceived failures of the Left Front in areas hard hit by unemployment and industrial decay, the slight swing against the CPM in the rural areas highlights how the BJP, through its growing organisational network in the state, has been successful in its attempts to frame local rural issues within the party’s broader national agenda, not least its own *swadeshi* translation of economic sovereignty and liberalisation” (Mayers 2001, 36).

James Mayers also argued that “by capitalising on its heightened profile in the state at this time by way of the fall-out from the escalating communal unrest over the Ayodhya issue, the BJP had utilised their highly developed organisational base, superior to that of the CPM’s traditional opposition, the Congress, to arouse communal nationalist sentiments in border areas where the party had already undertaken a concerted campaign by exploiting issue such as alleged ‘illegal’ Bangladeshi migration and the proposed ‘*Tin Bigha*’ accord” (Mayers 2001, 36).

Second point was argued by James Mayers that most “contests were becoming decidedly triangular affairs rather than traditional two-way contests, the Congress(I) vote held up surprisingly well in the majority of the urban and industrial areas, and thus it was clear that, overall, the BJP had gained as much at the expense of the CPM as the Congress(I). Although it is clear from the results that the BJP vote no doubt cost the Congress the chance of wresting a number of seats away from the CPM, the fact that the Congress(I) vote in the so-called ‘industrial belt’ as a whole fell by less than four per cent indicates a decided swing against the CPM who failed to capitalise on a potentially substantial split in the anti-Left vote. To put the results in the industrial areas in perspective, we can compare them with results prior to 1991” (Mayers 2001, 36-37).

The 11th Lok Sabha election, 1996

The year was one of turmoil in India, “as it witnessed the indictment of a number of prominent politicians on charges of involvement in the so-called hawala scandal, the all-too-brief formation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government following the Eleventh General Election in May and June, the subsequent formation of the 15-party United Front coalition minority government, and the levelling of charges of corruption

and bribery against former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and a number of his associates” (Gunguly 1997, 126). The year 1996 was also notable by “the remarkable assertiveness of the Indian judiciary, which relentlessly investigated wrongdoing and corruption in high places. In marked contrast to the political upheavals at the national level, small hopes emerged for an end to the brutal, internecine civil war in the troubled state of Jammu and Kashmir with the election of a National Conference government under the leadership of Farooq Abdullah” (Gunguly 1997, 126).

The year 1996 was began with the then PM of India “Narasimha Rao unleashing the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against a number of his cabinet colleagues and prominent members of the opposition to investigate their involvement in hawala (illegal foreign exchange) transactions. The CBI apparently had had evidence about these illegal transactions for several years. More recently, a public interest petition was filed with the Supreme Court by two journalists, Rajinder Puri and Vineet Narain, which prompted the Court to enjoin the CBI to act on the accumulated evidence with greater dispatch” (Gunguly 1997, 127). Charges were levelled against three cabinet ministers, “Balram Jakhar, V. C. Shukla and Madhavrao Scindia. Simultaneously, the CBI implicated a number of opposition politicians, including L. K. Advani, Arjun Singh, Sharad Yadav, Yashwant Sinha, and Devi Lal. The net quickly widened to include a number of former Congress (I) ministers, including N. D. Tiwari, Buta Singh, Natwar Singh, R. K. Dhawan, Kamal Nath, and C. K. J. Sharief (Gunguly 1997, 127).

In the 1996 general elections, both the Lok Sabha and the WB State Assembly, the LF had some serious challenges which the Left parties of the LF had needed to face the electorate of the Bengal in particular and across the nation in at all. Some of them can be discussed in very brief.

First: The Left had already started to face the question of the survival of communist ideology for their political agenda. In the last Lok Sabha and the WB Assembly election in 1991, there was no any impact of the collapse of the USSR. Because the classical communist world, the USSR was in a transitional condition during that year. It was finally dissolved in December, 1991. So, this was the first election before the Left after the fall of the USSR (Socialist World in the eastern Europe). In between the period the worlds had been shifted its direction towards capitalism. So, the Left in Bengal as well as across the nations need to upheld their ideology to the common people. The left parties within the LF tried to express their views regarding the reason of the fall of the USSR.

The CPI blamed Stalin's policy for collapse of socialism in USSR. The party released a 12 pages document on 1 October 1991 and sharply criticised Stalin's of 'forcible collectivisation' (The Hindu 2 Oct. 1991, 9) ¹⁶. The party also said the soviet leadership has failed to comprehend the extent to which the ethnic tension had grown and the vast military expenditure, estimated to be totally disproportionate the share of other sectors, shucked the economy dry. The party finally emphasised on the validity and the continuing the relevance of the Russian revolution. The party said it was failure of a particular model of socialism, not socialism as a system of ideas.

The leading partner of the LF in Bengal, the CPI(M) also cleared party's stand regarding USSR. In the annual conference of the party's youth wing, the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), on 2 October, 1991 at Yuba Bharati stadium in Salt Lake, the LF chairman Sailen Dasgupta remarked that "Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe had committed mistakes in the application of socialist principles. Whatever might be the faults of the Communist Party leadership in the Soviet Union and the others Eastern European countries, it was a fact that they solved the basic problems of live being under the socialist system. The CPI(M) has never copied the functioning of others Communist parties, because it has been trying to practice socialism within the Indian context" (TheStatesman 3 October 1991, 3)¹⁷. Jyoti Basu, then the Chief Minister of West Bengal had stressed the need for waging a 'constant ideological war' to make the people stick to socialist principles (The Statesman, 6 October 1991, 1)¹⁸.

Second: Due to the fall of the USSR in 1991, the most dominant political ideology in 1990s was capitalism for trade, commerce and development in the national and international level. The Rao's government at the centre has already accepted the liberalisation policy in 1991. The LF government in West Bengal also accepted the New Industrial Policy in 1994. So, it was a challenge before the Left Front Government to continue developments by following socialist path. Although there was no any major difference between the New Industrial Policy had taken by the centre in 1991 and the

¹⁶ The document pointed out that a major mistake was in assessing the dept of the crisis in ethnic relation. The document also described that dictatorship of the proletariat turned into state dictatorship pushing millions of non-communist citizens beyond the pale of the 'socialist mainstream'. A 'state monopoly' developed in which only about 2 cores card holders became the arbiters of the destiny of the vast nation resulting in widespread alienation.

¹⁷ Mr. Dugupta said that despite the recent victory of the front in the election for the fourth time succession, the problems were multiplying for the front and the state government with the aspiration of the people soaring. At this critical juncture, the DYFI would have to take the responsibility of enlightening the people about on the limitation of working within the present social system.

¹⁸ Referring to the setback socialism had suffered in the Soviet Union as a 'great disaster' Mr. Basu said the leaders of the Communist party of the Soviet Union had lost touch to the people.

New Industrial Policy taken by the Jyoti Basu government in West Bengal in 1994 (TheHindu 9 August 1994, 16)¹⁹.

Third: During the early 1990s due to '*Ram Mandir*' issue, the BJP had emerged as one of the strong challenges before the Congress and the Left at the national level politics. As the BJP had already established itself as strong force at the national level politics during that time. So, the LF in West Bengal also had to face the challenge of the BJP and its '*Hindutva*' policy which they had to face the electorate of Bengal in the election in 1996. Although, several media had predicted for 'hung parliament' at the centre, but the BJP could get highest number of Lok Sabha seats (The Indian Express 7 May 1997, 6).

Fourth: The important question for the LFG in West Bengal was the progression of 'good governance'. After 19 years of enjoying state power, it was very much crucial for the Left, specially, the CPI(M). The World Bank popularised the concept of 'good governance' in its report titled 'Governance and Development' in 1992. 'Governance' means: the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national governance and local governance. And good governance has 8 major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society (World Bank 1992, 1-15). But the previous LFG had already been tried to implement some of those principles since 1977. So, the question is that how successful the LFG was to implement those principles for the development of the people of Bengal and to convince the electorate towards them.

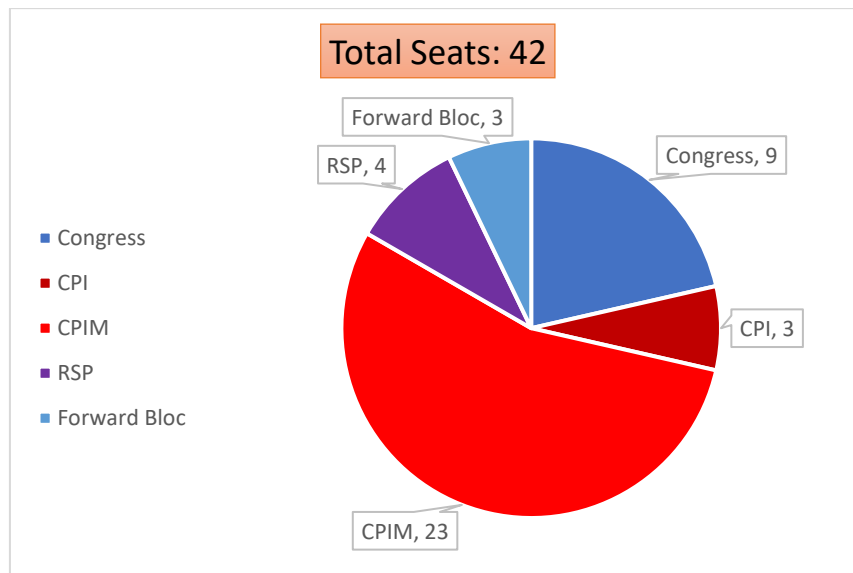
The eleventh Lok Sabha election in India was conducted in the month of April and May in 1996. The Election Commission of India conducted the 11th Lok Sabha election and Assembly election in six states including West Bengal on 19 March, 1996 (The Indian Express 20 March 1996, 1)²⁰. The outcome of the election was interesting to

¹⁹ Addressing the annual general meeting of Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mr. Basu said 'there are certain difference over the policy. We have the political will to go ahead to ensure industrial growth. Moreover, the state industrial policy would be reformulated and announced soon'.

²⁰ The ECI announced to conduct the 11th Lok Sabha and assembly election in six states through four phases on 27th April, 2nd May, 7th May and 21st May. Actually, three Lok Sabha seats of Jammu and

the nation. This time, no political party could secure absolute majority in the floor Lok Sabha as it was predicted by many political analysts (Bhalla and Kumar 1995, 1)²¹. The BJP has become the largest party in the Lok Sabha as it could win 160 Lok Sabha seats across the country. So, the situation of a ‘hung parliament’ was seen at the centre. But in West Bengal, the scenario was different. The LF contested in all the 42 Parliamentary constituencies and the CPI(M) led LF could secure 33 seats out of 42 in the state, within which the largest partner of the LF, the CPI(M) could alone secure 23 seats (TheStatesman 19 March 1996, 3). Other smaller partners of the LF such as the CPI, the RSP and the FB could win three, four and three seats respectively. The seat won by the LF was decreased by 4 in comparison to the Parliamentary election, 1991 (TheIndianExpress 14 May 1996, 7).

Seats won by major political parties in the Parliamentary election 1996 in West Bengal.



Pie chart- 2.10

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in

As per the data the given by the Election Commission of India, the CPI(M) shared 37.7 per cent popular support of the electorate of West Bengal in the election. The party contested in thirty-one Parliamentary constituencies in Bengal as the leading

Kashmir were scheduled to conduct election on 21st May. The election of 42 Parliamentary seats and 294 assembly seats in West Bengal were conducted by using two phases on 2nd May and 7th May. The result was declared on 11th May without conducting election in the remaining three Lok Sabha seats of Jammu and Kashmir.

²¹ According to the Times of India report a survey was conducted during that Lok Sabha election in two phases. If the result was different in two phases. But, in this report the most crucial issue was corruption and the BJP had a chance to win maximum number of Lok Sabha Seats across the country. In west Bengal, the report predicted to decrease of three seats of the LF.

partner of the LF and secured of 1,34,67,522 valid votes from West Bengal. The FB could secure 3.42 per cent of popular mandate. The number of valid votes secured by the FB was 12,53,700. The CPI fought election in three seats and could win the three with 3.81 per cent of popular support including 13,97,109 valid votes of the Bengali electorates. The RSP also contested in four Lok Sabha seats and could win the four, with 3.42 per cent of electoral supports including 17,45,683 valid votes of the total electorate of West Bengal.

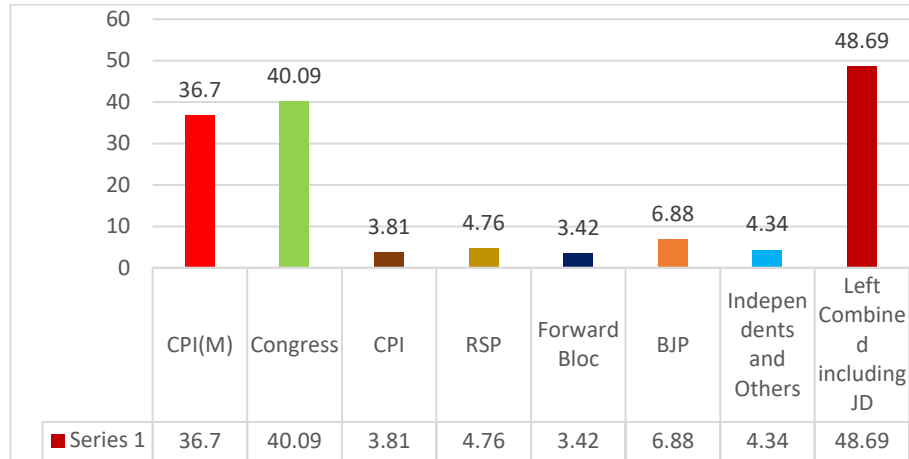
The Janata Dal (JD) also participated in the election as a partner of the LF from Calcutta North-West Lok Sabha constituency but unfortunately defeated by the Indian National Congress candidate, Debi Prasad Pal. The JD candidate, Shyamal Bhattachariya got 0.40 per cent of popular votes including 1,47,686 valid votes. The combined vote shared by the LF including the Janata Dal was near about 48.69 per cent (column chart-3.3).

The Congress could win nine Parliamentary Constituencies in the land of West Bengal which was almost double of the party's performance from the earlier Lok Sabha election in 1991. The party could secure 40.09 per cent of popular supports including 1,47,11,538 of valid votes. This was better, almost twelve lacs more votes from the CPI(M). The BJP, this time contested in all the forty-two Lok Sabha seats in Bengal but did not manage to win a single one. The party secured 6.88 per cent of popular mandate including 25,25,864 valid votes in the state. Although the BJP lost in all the seats but its total votes were more than the three small partners of the LF like the CPI, the RSP and the FB. The BJP again trying to picturized itself as the third alternative in the state (T. ECI 1996).

The CPI(M) with its left minded partners had continued their dominance in the North Bengal. Coochbehar, Alipurduars, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Balurghat and Raiganj constituency which were successfully won by the Left Front's candidates. But they failed to register electoral victory in Malda and Jangipur. However, the CPI(M) candidate Sailen Sarkar defeated by A. B. A. Goni Khan Choudhry with near about ninety thousand votes. But, in Jangipur this margin was near about only ten thousand. The Left continued its strong hold in the rural Bengal, specially the '*Rarh Bengal*' and south Bengal. In Bolpur, Burdwan and Bankura the Left candidates won by the margin of more than two lacs and fifty thousand votes. But the Left parties failed to secure all the three seats in Kolkata such as; Calcutta North East, Calcutta South and Calcutta North West. They

also lost election at Jadavpur, Howrah and Tamluk constituency (map 4.3) and all the remaining seats in the state, the Left could secure electoral success.

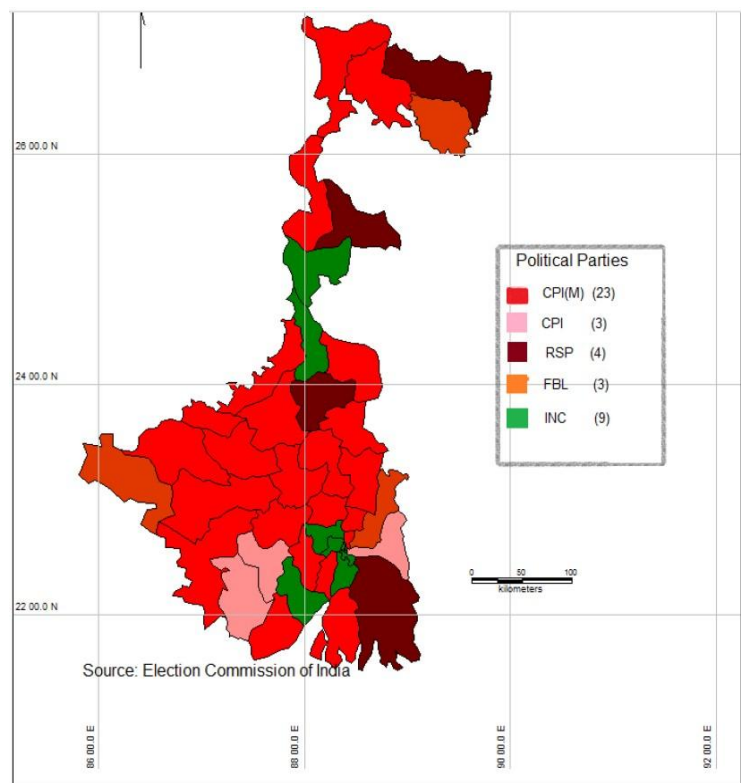
Percentage of vote shared by major political parties in West Bengal in 11th Parliamentary elections in 1996. (Figure prepared on the basis of vote shared in 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal)



Column chart- 3.3

(Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

Seats won by various political parties in West Bengal in 11th Parliamentary election 1996. A thematic map.



Map 4.3 Source: Election Commission of India

West Bengal Assembly Election 1996:

After successfully completion of the fourth consecutive LFG from 1991 to 1996, the front appeared in the West Bengal Assembly election in 1996. This time, the election was already scheduled by the Election Commission of India in the month of May and June, 1996. So, the electorates of Bengal experienced two elections at a same time, one for Parliamentary and other for the State Legislative Assembly.

The allies of the LF in this election were; the CPI(M), the CPI, the RSP, FBL, the Democratic Socialist Party (Probadh Chandra) [DSP(P)], the RCPI, the Janata Dal (JD), the Biplabi Bangla Congress and the Marxist Forward Bloc (FBM). Although, a few other leftist parties like; the SUCI, the Forward Bloc (Socialist), the CPI(ML) remained outside the LF in that West Bengal Vidhan Sabha election. The Left Front contested all the 294 assembly constituencies and could win in the 203 constituencies combinedly. The Front registered fifth consecutive success in the land of Bengal. The fifth LF Government had formed under the Chief Ministership of the veteran CPI(M) leader Jyoti Basu.

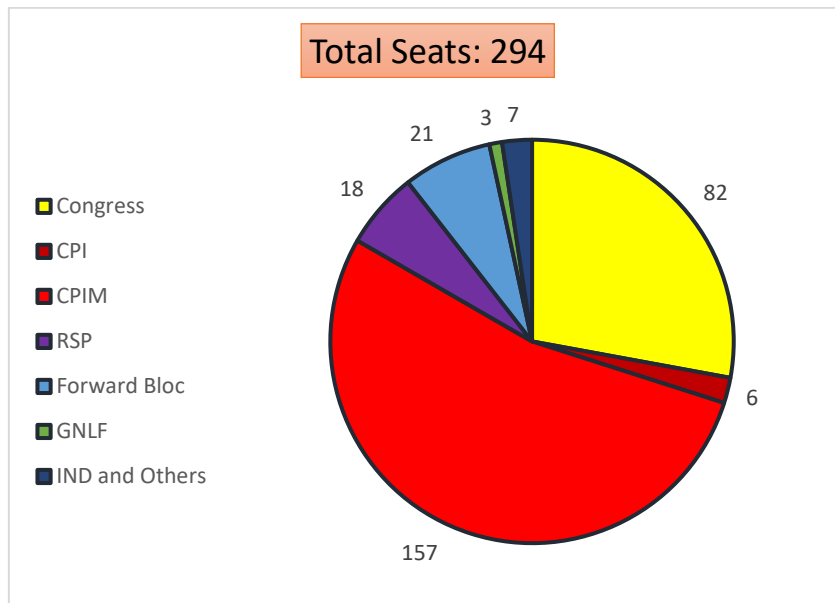
The Leading partner of the LF, the CPI(M) contested in 217 seats and could register their success in 157 seats (pie chart- 2.10) including 37.92 per cent of valid popular votes (column chart-3.4). The CPI(M) increased party's votes by one per cent in comparison with the previous Assembly election of the state but decreased number of seats by twenty-five. However, three candidates of the WBSP, two candidates of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), and two of the Marxist Forward Bloc participated in the election with the symbol of the CPI(M). The WBSP, which merged with the Socialist Party of Mulayam Singh in 2010, could not win any single seats. But the candidates of DSP and MFB could secure two seats each. The Forward Bloc contested in thirty-four seats and could win in twenty-one with gaining 5.20 per cent popular mandate. The percentage of votes shared by the Forward Bloc could not change much in comparison to the previous election but, its seats decreased eight from the last election in 1991. The RSP contested in twenty-three seats and won in the eighteen seats with 3.72 per cent of total valid popular votes. The percentage of votes and the number of seats remained almost unchanged for the RSP this time. The Janata Dal participated in the election as part of LF ally in five assembly constituencies but could not win any single seat. The other friend partner of the LF, the Biplabi Bangla Congress could win one seat as an

independent candidate. So, the Left could manage to secure almost forty-nine per cent electoral support of the electorates of West Bengal. It is an important point of the electoral out comes for the Left because their vote shared were almost same since 1977 but this was the lowest number of seats they won since 1977. The Left parties did well in the in the districts of North Bengal, the districts of South Bengal and 'rarh' Bengal. But failed to capture support in many constituencies in the districts of Maldaha, Murshidaba, Nadia, Howrah, Calcutta and Midnapore. This time Left also had faced tough competition in many constituencies.

The other major political parties; the Congress and the BJP also participated the same Assembly election actively but, failed to capture notable electoral support. One of the largest political parties in India, the India National Congress (INC) or the Congress had appeared in this election by projecting Mamata Banerjee against the Left (Mukherjee 1996, 3). The Congress contested in 288 assembly constituencies and could secure eighty-two only, including 39.46 per cent valid vote. Although it was a better performance of the party in the states in comparison to the previous election in 1991. The INC failed to secure majority at the centre and the state of West Bengal at the same time. But the party managed to increase its support in West Bengal.

As per the record of the election Commission of India, the Congress increased party's winning seats almost double and percentage of vote shared by almost 4 per cent in comparison to the previous West Bengal Assembly election in 1991. The Congress proved party's support specially in the district of Maldah, Murshidabad, Kolkata, Howrah and some parts of Midnapore district (map-4.4). The Bharatiya Janata Party contested in the 292 Assembly constituencies in the election. But the party did not win any single seat from the state. The percentage of vote shared by the BJP also decreased by 5 per cent in comparison to the last Assembly election in 1991. However, the party remained as third alternative before the electorate of West Bengal. The party secured third position in more than 150 assemblies. In the few seats, the BJP secured second position in the election like; Mayureswar, Rampurhat etc (T. ECI 1996).

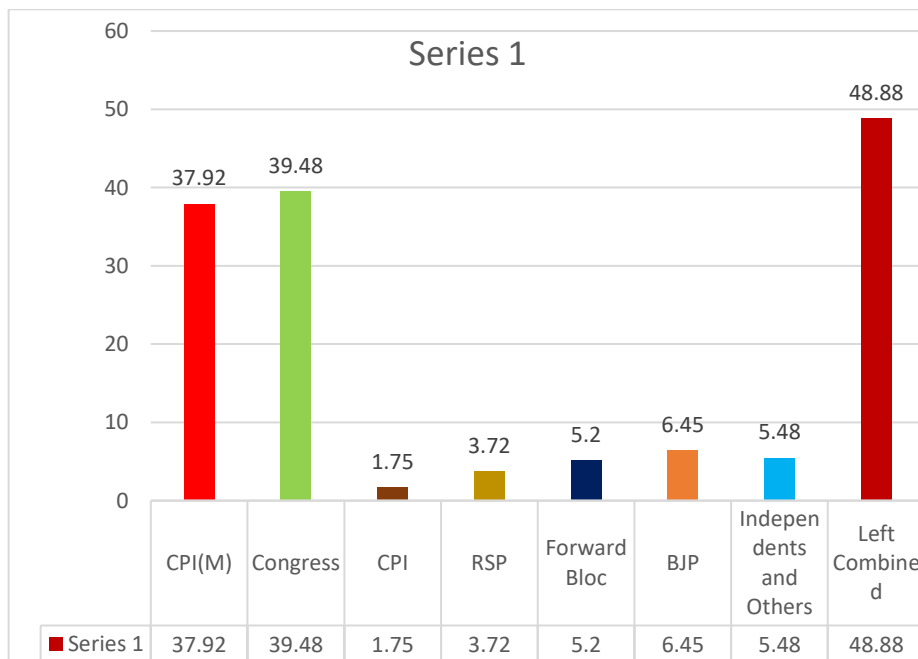
Seats won by major political parties in the West Bengal Assembly election 1996²²



Pie Chart: 2.11

(Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

Percentage of votes shared by major political parties in West Bengal Assembly election 1996²³.

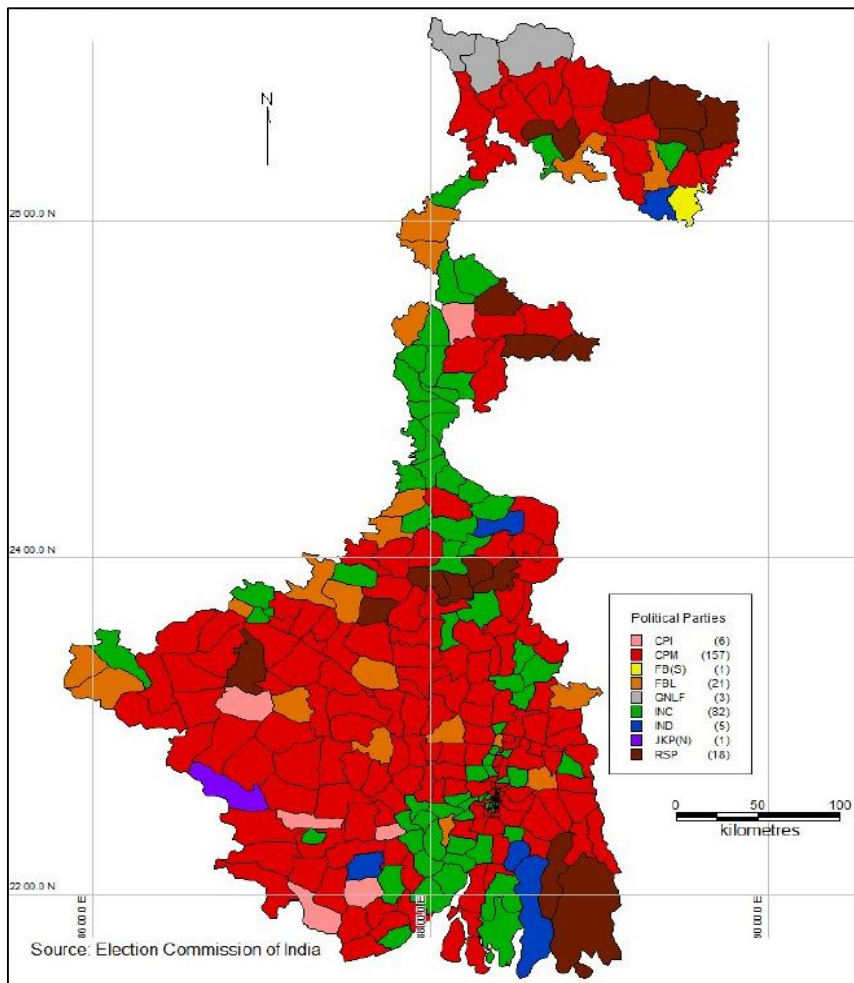


Column chart 3.4 (Source: Data Compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

²² 1 seat of Forward Bloc (Secular) [FB(S)] and 1 seat of Jharkhand Party (Noren) [JKP(N)] are included in the Independent and Others.

²³ In this column chart the data prepared of total 100 percentage vote shared by different party altogether. The column of Left Front is not included within that calculation. It is presented to make a comparison with the non-left vote and the percentage of vote shared by the LF only.

Seats won major political parties in the West Bengal assembly election 1996: A geographical picture



Map 4.4

(source: www.eci.gov.in)

12th Lok Sabha election, 1998:

After the 11th Parliamentary election in 1996, no party or alliance could gain sufficient majority in Lok Sabha. Although the BJP formed the government as it had the largest number of representatives in Lok Sabha, but it ended within 13 days of the date of oath of Atal Bihari Bajpayee as the Prime Minister. So, a stalemate situation was seen at the centre but continued with the rule of two Prime Ministership. After Atal Bihari Bajpayee’s resignation as the Prime Minister of India, H. D. Deve Gowda of Janata Dal took the charge of Prime Ministership with the support of United Front. But he resigned after ten months of work and Indra Kumar Gujral become the PM of India. It was lasted

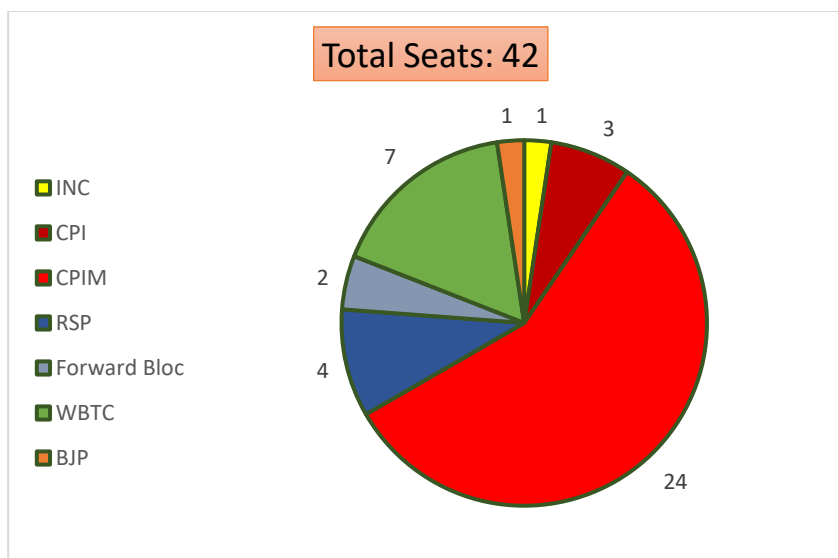
till the November 1997. The Congress(I) withdrew support from UF government. Again, the hung Parliament situation was seen. No party could form government at the centre. So, the mid-term election was conducted across the India including West Bengal in the month of February and March in 1998.

According to Shikha Mukherjee “these are changing times for the politics in West Bengal. The cosy politics of polarization between the CMP-led Left Front and the principal opposition from the Congress has ended with the entry of Ms Mamata Banerjee’s Trinamool Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party as serious player in the election game. Instead of a clear a choice between the CPM-led Left Front and Congress, voters in West Bengal will have multiple options this time. Ms Banerjee’s fledging party will eat into its traditional base, the CPM is equally worried that she will nibble at the politically unreliable fringe voters, creating an entirely new situation in the state” (Mukherjee 1998, 6).

In West Bengal, since 1970s a bio-polar electoral contest between the Left and the Congress had been experiencing by the voters of the state. But this time scenario had changed. The CPI(M) and its friend allies fought the 12th Lok Sabha election combinedly in the state under the banner of the LF. As per the data of Election Commission of India, the CPI(M) contested in thirty-two Parliamentary seats in West Bengal and could win twenty-four with securing 35.41 per cent of valid vote. The CPI contested in three seats and won all of them with securing 3.64 per cent valid popular votes.

The FB contested in three seats and could manage to win only two with 3.3 percentage of valid popular votes (pie chart 2.12). The RSP contested in four Parliamentary seats in Bengal and could manage to win all of them with securing 4.48 per cent popular mandate. However, the seats won by the Left was remained unchanged in contrast of the previous Parliamentary election in 1996 but the combined vote shared of the LF was decreased by almost three per cent. The Left combinedly secured 46.83 per cent popular votes.

Seats won by major political parties in the 12th Parliamentary election in 1998 within West Bengal.



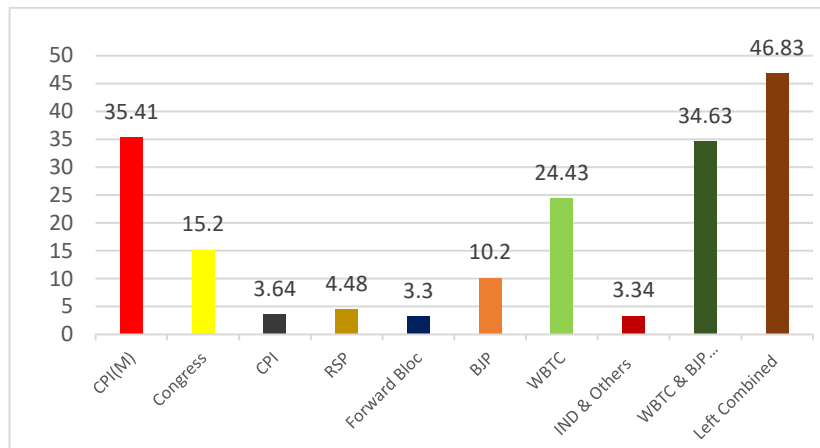
Pie Chart: 2.12

(Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

The principal opposition party of the Left in Bengal, the Congress lost its support in the state miserably. The Congress contested in the thirty-nine Parliamentary constituencies in West Bengal and could manage to win in only one seat of Malda with securing only 15.2 per cent popular votes which was the lowest vote share of the party since 1951-52. In the previous Parliamentary election in 1996, the party secured almost 40 per cent valid votes which is decreased by almost 25 per cent this time. A.B.A. Gonikhan Choudhury remained the only one MP of the party in Lok Sabha from Bengal.

After the birth of the new political party, the Trinamool Congress or the West Bengal Trinamool Congress (WBTC) contested the 1998 Parliamentary election for the first time in the state. This time West Bengal Trinamool Congress participated the election as an electoral ally of the BJP (The Times of India 30 Jan. 1998, 1). The WBTC contested in the twenty-nine Parliamentary constituencies in Bengal and could win in seven seats with securing 24.43 per cent popular valid mandate (column chart-3.5). The BJP contested in 14 Parliamentary constituencies in West Bengal and could win in one seat with securing 10.2 per cent valid votes. This was the first win of the BJP in the state in terms of Parliamentary election since its birth in 1980s. However, in the Midnapore parliamentary constituency both the BJP and the WBTC nominated their candidate for the said election (T. ECI 1998).

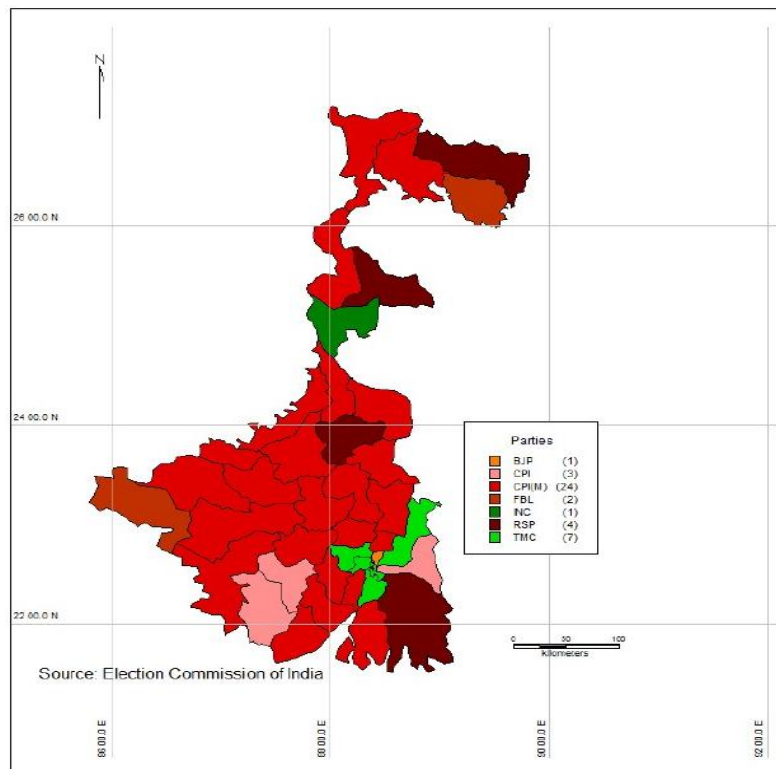
Vote shared by major political parties in West Bengal in 12th Parliamentary elections in 1998 ²⁴.



Column chart: 3.5

(Source: Data compiled from www.eci.com)

Seats won by various political parties in West Bengal in Parliamentary election, 1998. A geographical picture.



Map:4.5

(Source: www.eci.gov.in)

²⁴ Figure prepared on the basis of 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal. In this column chart the data prepared of total 100 per cent vote shared by different party altogether. The column of Left Front and the WBTC-BJP combined are not included within the calculation 100 per cent. These two columns are separately presented to make a comparison with the non-left vote, the per cent vote shared by the CPM alone and the LF combine.

The electoral outcome of the 12th Parliamentary election raised many crucial points for the Left as well as the other non-Left parties in West Bengal. According to Ranjit Dasgupta “though the number of seats won by the Left Front in West Bengal in the 1998 Lok Sabha election has remained unchanged, what has happened is nothing short of a major setback. The results also indicate the utter failure of the LF leaders and grass roots level activists to judge the popular mood and the extent of their distance from their own support base. There is no doubt that there have been serious lapses in the functioning of the LF state government and administration and in that way incumbency has certainly been a factor. But this is only a partial explanation. The need is to reckon with the reality of the political setback suffered by the LF, probe into the deeper reasons and seek answers in terms of ideological and political factors” (Dasgupta 1998, 1113).

According to Michael Gillan “the BJP campaign in West Bengal reflects the national strategy developed by the BJP to break its isolation and form important regional alliances throughout India. The basis for these alliances, as example of West Bengal, has been to form regional ties with state opposition political formations primary concern is the defeat of particular ruling parties at the state level. In order to facilitate its strategy, the BJP has been forced to adopt a political style which is as accommodating as possible for an avowedly ‘ideological’ party” (Gillan 1998, 2391) .

Michael Gillan also argued that whether the particular regional alliance between the TMC and “the BJP in West Bengal can be maintained is perhaps secondary to the short-term efficacy of the alliance allowing the state unit of the party to gain an electoral foothold in the state for the first time. Nevertheless, given the highly third opposition vote, shifting between opposition formations within the state on the basis of their perceived viability as an opposition force, the relation between the BJP and the Trinamul leaderships is one characterized by considerable rivalry, as both parties attempt to place themselves at the forefront of opposition politics” (Gillan 1998, 2391) .

Bidyut Chakrabarty argued that “despite a clear polarisation between urban and rural voters, the 1998 West Bengal poll results reconfirm the popularity of the left coalition at the grass roots. On the basis of evidence, it seems likely that what decided the election was not a positive vote for the Trinamul Congress-BJP combination but a negative one against the state government. The formation of the Trinamul Congress and

its electoral pact with the BJP provided a forum for those opposed to the Left Front” (Chakrabarty 1998, 3219).

Bidyut Chakrabarty also argued that “the forum became apparently strong probably because of the charisma that had built around Mamata Banerjee. This sustains, if not strengthens, the possibility that the CPI(M)-led front can rebuild its urban support base by paying adequate attention to the grievances of the city-dwellers. Since industrial regeneration depends partly on the central government's discretion in granting industrial licences and partly on the industrialist's/or other MNC's willingness to invest in West Bengal, Left Front is practically left with no choice” (Chakrabarty 1998, 3219).

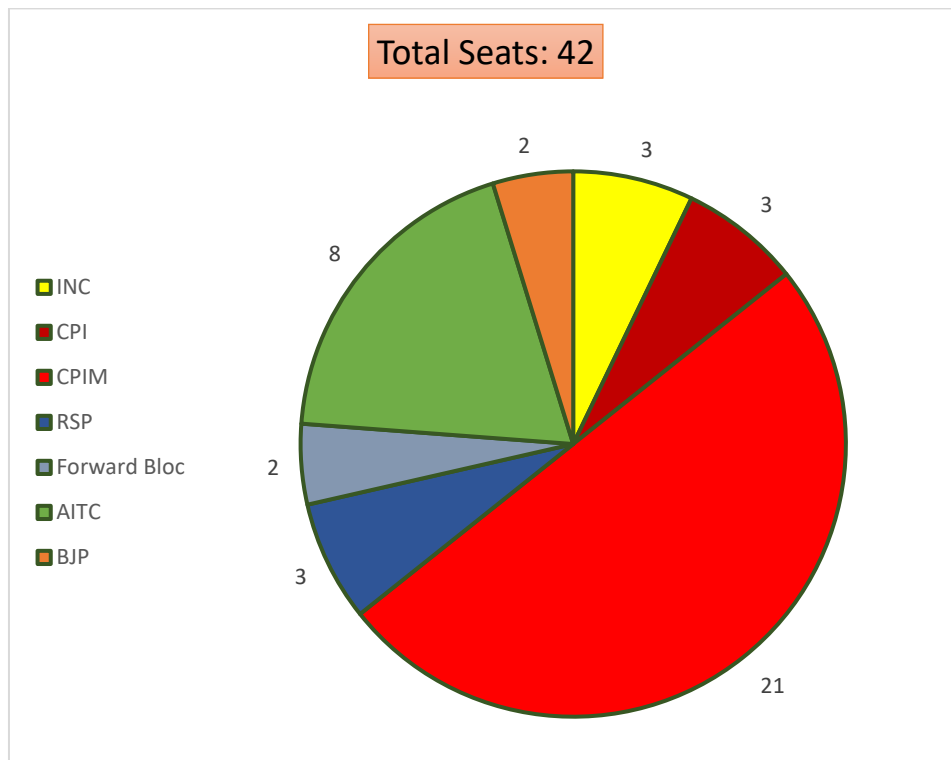
Bidyut Chakrabarty also argued that in an already handicapped situation, “the consistently declining industrial employment opportunities and labour retrenchment necessitated by strikes and lockouts, have rendered the Left Front and CPI(M) trade union, Centre for Indian Trade Union (CITU) in particular, unpopular with labour. Industrial population in West Bengal comprises one-third of the total urban votes which is not very significant given the massive number of rural votes. The fact that the Left Front has retained a majority of rural votes despite a wave for the Trinamul Congress-BJP alliance, demonstrates that the rural masses by and large are still with the left. Therefore, fears that the coalition is becoming ‘marginal’, much less ‘moribund’ political force, do not seem to be justified by the evidence” (Chakrabarty 1998, 3219).

13th Lok Sabha Election 1999:

The 12th Lok Sabha had not been continued for the full term of five years. As it was a coalition government under the Prime Ministership of Atal Bihari Bajpayee, and it failed to continue for full term. The BJP led NDA Government failed to win the confidence motion on 17 April, 1999 by only one vote in the popular house of Indian Parliament. After that, no party or coalition formed government at the centre. Again, a mid-term election was needed for the country. Finally, 13th Parliamentary election was declared by the Election Commission of India. The ECI conducted the election in the month of September and October in 1999. The BJP led NDA came back in power at the centre. West Bengal had seen a different picture in comparison to the centre.

The CPI(M) led LF again managed to gather huge support in the state. The CPI(M) contested in thirty-two Parliamentary constituencies of Bengal and could win twenty-one with 35.57 per cent valid votes. The party got support of 1,25,53,991 electorates out of 3,57,61,182 of the state (ECI 1999). The total number of registered voters were 4,76,49,856. But almost 76.5 per cent voters had casted their votes and out of them 1.27 per cent vote was rejected. The RSP contested in four seats and could win three with 4.25 per cent popular support. RSP managed to gain the support of 15,00,817 voters of Bengal. The FBL contested in three seats and could manage to win two with 3.45 percentage of popular support. The FB got 12,15,911 popular votes in West Bengal. The CPI contested the election in three seats of West Bengal and could win all the three (Pie Chart- 2.13).

Seats won by major political parties in W. B. in 13th Parliamentary election. 1999.



Pie- chart: 2.13

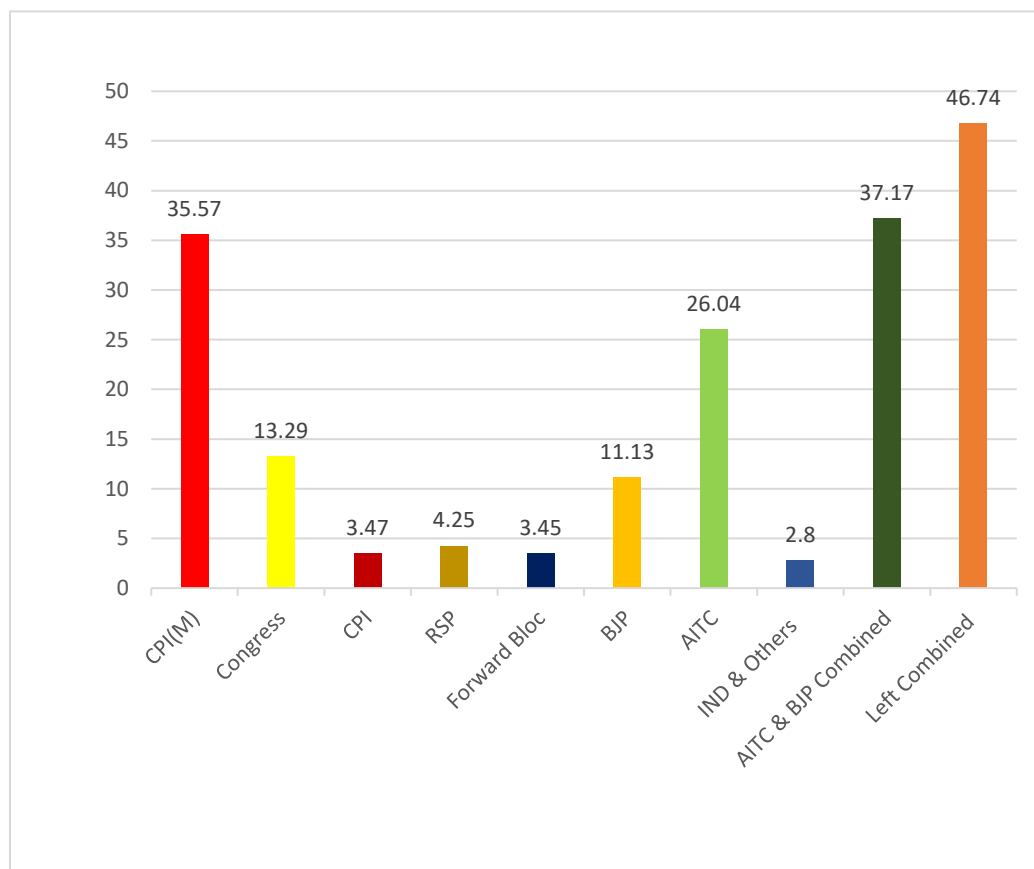
Source: data compiled from www.eci.gov.in

The Congress contested in 41 Parliamentary seats in the state and could win only three with 13.29 per cent popular support. In Jhargram Lok Sabha constituency, the INC extended its support to JKP(N). As per Election Commission of India's record, the TMC also contested in this Parliamentary election as named of All India Trinamool Congress

(AITC). The AITC contested the election as a partner of NDA and shared seats with the BJP in the state. The BJP contested in thirteen seats and could win in only 2 with 11.13 per cent popular votes. The AITC contested in twenty-eight seats and managed to win 8 seats. The AITC shared 26.04 per cent vote in the election. The BJP-AITC alliance extended its support to an independent candidate Natabar Bagdi in Bankura Lok Sabha constituency. The BJP and AITC combinedly shared 37.17 per cent support of the Bengali electorate which was almost 1.5 per cent more than the largest partner of the LF, the CPI(M). So, the outcomes of the election upheld some crucial points in West Bengal politics.

One of the noticeable upshots of that election in West Bengal was the CPI(M) led LF had faced a key reversal. The Congress actually eliminated as the principal opponent in the state and both the AITC and the BJP have improved their respective tallies. After continuous rule of more than two decades the Left met with some strong challenges before the combined forces of the BJP and the TMC. The Left lost in five winning seats and won in one new in comparison to the previous Lok Sabha tally. The Left could not win the Raiganj and Berhampore to the Congress, the Nabadwip and the Contai (Kanthi) to the AITC. The LF also lost the Krishnanagar Parliamentary constituency to the BJP and unexpectedly registered electoral victory in Howrah (Map -4.6). The CPI(M)'s candidate Swadesh Chakrabarty defeated the AITC's candidate, Dr. Kakali Ghosh Dastidar by more than one lakh votes. The CPM's candidate Subrata Mukherjee was defeated by Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi in Raiganj and the RSP's Promotes Mukherjee lost the election to Adhir Ranjan Choudhury of the Congress in Berhampore by almost one lakh votes. Left's electoral defeat in the other three Parliamentary constituencies, Contai, Nabadwip and Krishnanagar was by moderate margin except the Contai. In Contai, the CPI(M) candidate Sudhir Giri was defeated by AITC's candidate Neetish Senguta by almost 12 thousand votes. The number of seats shared by the LF dwindled from 33 to 29 (column chart-3.7). However, the votes shared by the LF had gone down marginally from 46.82 per cent to 46.74 per cent. This was 0.08 per cent decline of the LF's votes in comparison to the previous Lok Sabha election in 1998.

Percentage of votes shared by major political parties in West Bengal in 13th Parliamentary election 1999. (Data prepared only of the 42 Lok Sabha seats of West Bengal)²⁵



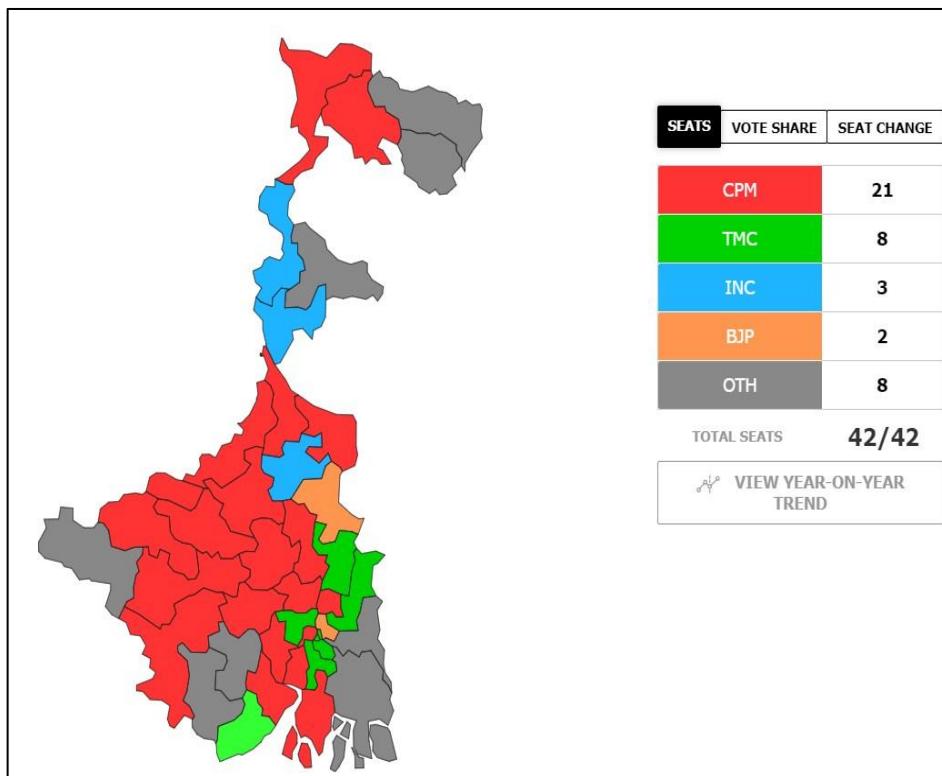
Column chart- 3.6

(Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya argued that “for the TMC-BJP, the verdict could not be more encouraging. For the first time since the abnormal election in 1984 (after Indira Gandhi's assassination) a non-Left outfit have been able to make such inroads in Nadia. In addition, these parties have inflicted a defeat on the CPI(M) in Contai and shocked the CPI out of possible complacency in Panskura and Midnapore by bringing about spectacular swings (10.32 per cent and 24.49 per cent, respectively)” (Bhattacharyya 1999, 3767-68).

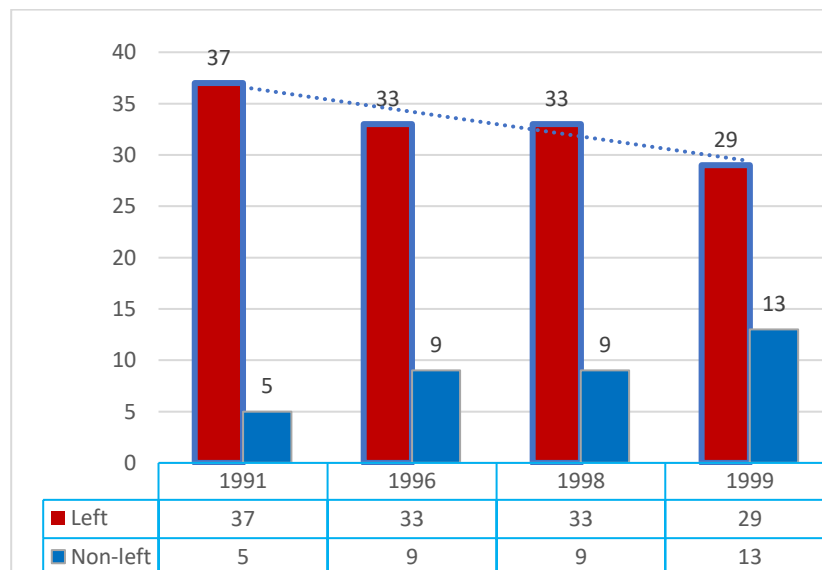
²⁵ By the following chart the votes shared by major political party represented. If the Left Front and the main non-left oppositions mainly the TMC-BJP alliance also represented. It has not been calculated on the basis of 100 per centage vote shared basis. The 100 per centage is represented on the basis of the votes shared by the CPI(M), the Congress, the CPI, the RSP, the forward Block, the BJP, the AITC and the Independents & other party candidates. The BJP-AITC combined and Left Front combined has kept beyond this calculation.

Seats won by major political parties in Parliamentary election, 1999 in West Bengal



Map: 4.6 Source:<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/elections/constituency-map/west-bengal>. (RSP, FBL and CPI are included in Other), also followed with the www.eci.gov.in.

Seats won by the Left and Non-Left parties in West Bengal from 1991 to 1999 parliamentary election. (Data prepared on the basis of 42 seats in W.B.)



Column Chart: 3.7 (Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya also argued that “in these two constituencies of Midnapore district, the largest in the state with 35 MLAs, heavyweights like Gita Mukherjee and Indrajit Gupta have faced stiff resistance. There can no longer be any doubt that the TMC-BJP joint venture has successfully dislodged the Congress as the LF’s main contender in West Bengal barring a few places in the north. According to an estimate, the TMC-BJP alliance was ahead of the LF in 80 out of 294 assembly segments in 1998, now in 105. The signs are rather foreboding for the Left” (Bhattacharyya 1999, 3767-68).

West Bengal Assembly Election 2001:

The LF Government had completed successfully its fifth consecutive rule between 1996 to 2001 in West Bengal. After completing 24 years of continuous rule the Left has appeared before another state assembly election in the year of 2001. During the last five years from 1996 to 2001, the LF faced some serious challenges in the state like; shifting of opposition votes banks towards a newly born political party, the TMC and decreased a little per cent of Left’s own vote bank, changes of party leadership, internal conflict within the CPI(M) and the Front etc. The people of Bengal also observed the change of the Chief Ministership of the state in 2000. Jyoti Basu, then the longest serving C.M. of any state in India stepped down from office on 5 November, 2000²⁶. Jyoti Basu was continuously in his office for more than twenty-three years which was also a record for the long-term serving elected C.M. in any Indian state. Basu proposed Buddhadeb Bhattachariya’s name as his successor in the state²⁷ (TheTelegraph 6 Nov. 2000, 1). The LF approved Basu’s proposal. On 21 August, 2000. The CPI(M) general secretary, Anil Biswas said to media that

“Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee will succeed Jyoti Basu after the ailing Chief Minister calls it a day. The CPI(M) will discuss Basu’s retirement at its next politburo meeting. He (Basu) will continue as Chief Minister as long as he chosen to. But he wishes to step down on his health ground, we will relieve him. When Bhattacharjee has been

²⁶ At that time Jyoti Basu was the longest serving Chief minister of any state in India. He served in his office for 23 years 138 days. After that this record had done by former C.M. of Sikkim, Pawan Kumar Chamling. Chamling served as the C.M. of Sikkim for 24 years and 165 days. Then Basu has become the second long-term serving C.M. But, recently former C.M. of Odisha, Naveen Patnaik become the second long-term serving C.M. who was continuously worked as the C.M. of Odisha for 24 years 98 days.

²⁷ In an interview with the telegraph Jyoti Basu said ‘a section of CPM has become complacent and is showing sign of alienation from the people .. in many areas we have stopped going to the people, listening to their woes and criticism. As a result, we have become weak .. Basu said Buddha was acceptable to the people, the party, the Front and the industry. He will be a fine leader’.

appointed as the Deputy Chief Minister; the choice is clear; he would be the next Chief Minister” (H. Correspondent 22 August 2000, 1).

So, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya took oath as the sixth Chief Minister of West Bengal on 6 November, 2000 during the tenure of twelfth West Bengal Vidhan Sabha. The governor of West Bengal, Viren J. Shah administered the oath of office and secrecy of Bhattacharjee at Durbar Hall of Raj Bhavan (H. Correspondent 7 Nov. 2000, 1). It was a grand ceremony, actress Aparna Sen, cricketer Sourav Ganguly, writer Buddhadeb Guha, politburo member Sitaram Yechury, Rabindra sangeet exponent Suchitra Mitra, singer Rama Guha Thakurata, many party leader and cabinet colleague and many others also were present in Bhattacharjee’s oath taking in ceremony²⁸. But, the principal opponent political parties, like the Congress and the TMC did not attend the session. Transport Minister Subhas Chakraborty said about Basu *“I still can’t believe he is no longer our Chief Minister. But the truth is even out of office nobody in Bengal stands as tall as Basu. He would continue to be the most important leader of the country’s Left movement”* (H. Correspondent 7 Nov. 2000, 1). Land Reforms Minister Suryakanta Mishra said *“Basu has become a legend in his lifetime. He took decisions none in the cabinet questioned. Buddhadeb, a competent man, will now run the Government through collective leadership. I am sure he will prove himself a worthy successor”* (H. Correspondent 7 Nov. 2000, 1). Bhattacharya’s image was something radical than the Basu. Just after the few months of his oath as the Chief Minister the time of 13th West Bengal State Legislative Assembly election has arrived.

The LF in Bengal had faced three major challenges in the 2001 West Bengal Assembly election. The first one was the change of leadership. However the left parties are concerned that leadership is not important than the party. After the change of CM in Bengal some new radical minded leader came at the forefront of the party. Initially that had no any major effect, but they had to prove their ability to mobilise the electorate of Bengal in the 2001 Assembly elections.

The second challenge was the internal conflict within the party, mainly the CPI(M). Saifuddin Chaudhury, a senior CPI(M)’s MP and former party’s central

²⁸ Before the ceremony began, the Governor of West Bengal, B. J. Shah requested Basu to come up and seat behind him. He later asked new-man-in-office Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee to occupy the chair on his right. Basu watched the solemn proceedings with rare smile playing in his face. All the show was over in ten minutes.

committee member and Samir Putatundu were arguing that the party was not functioning democratically. According to Saifuddin Chaudhury, the party was not liberal minded. The CPI(M) cautioned him for his work but he didn't. So, after many debate the CPI(M) cancelled his primary membership of the party. On 3 October, 2000, Saifuddin Chowdhury announced that he would float a new party with like-minded reform-oriented members of the CPI(M) before the year was out. He also said that the new party would be part of the emerging third force comprising Left, democratic and secular parties of the state. He said "*the new party will not try to break any of the existing political outfits, ruling or in the oppositions. People will be free to join our party believing in democracy, development and secularism. We will specially welcome those who want to free development from sectarian politics. We are not in for competition to grab people with muscle power or deceit. We will try to avoid mistakes which have made even the most negative forces get closer to people....the positive ideals of great leaders and thinkers from Marx, Lenin, Voltaire, George Washington, to Mahatma Gandhi would form the cornerstone of the new party*" (The Statesman 4 Oct. 2000, 1,8)²⁹. Just before the Assembly election 2001, Saifuddin Chowdhury and Samir Putatundu formed a new party named, Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS) on 21 February, 2001.

The third and most crucial challenge was the TMC and Congress combined challenge, named as '*Bangla Bachao Front*' (BBF)[Save Bengal Front]. This time challenges before the Left were much tough than the previous elections since 1996. The TMC, under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee had appeared in the horizon of Bengal politics in the late 1990s as a strong opponent against the ruling Left. The Left already faced two Parliamentary elections in 1998 and 1999 against the combined challenges BJP and TMC. But this time the Left had the challenge against the combined opposition forces of the TMC and the Congress. The TMC left the NDA government under the Prime Ministership of Atal Bihari Bajpayee after the disclosure of the 'Teelka.com' but continued party's support from outside. The TMC also assured to the NDA that the party would continue support from outside to NDA government in the Parliament (The Times of India 16 March 2001, 1).

The poll took place on 10 May, 2001 and almost 75 per cent electorates of Bengal participated in the voting procedures. The Left parties within the LF appeared in the electoral battle of the 13th West Bengal Legislative Assembly election in 2001

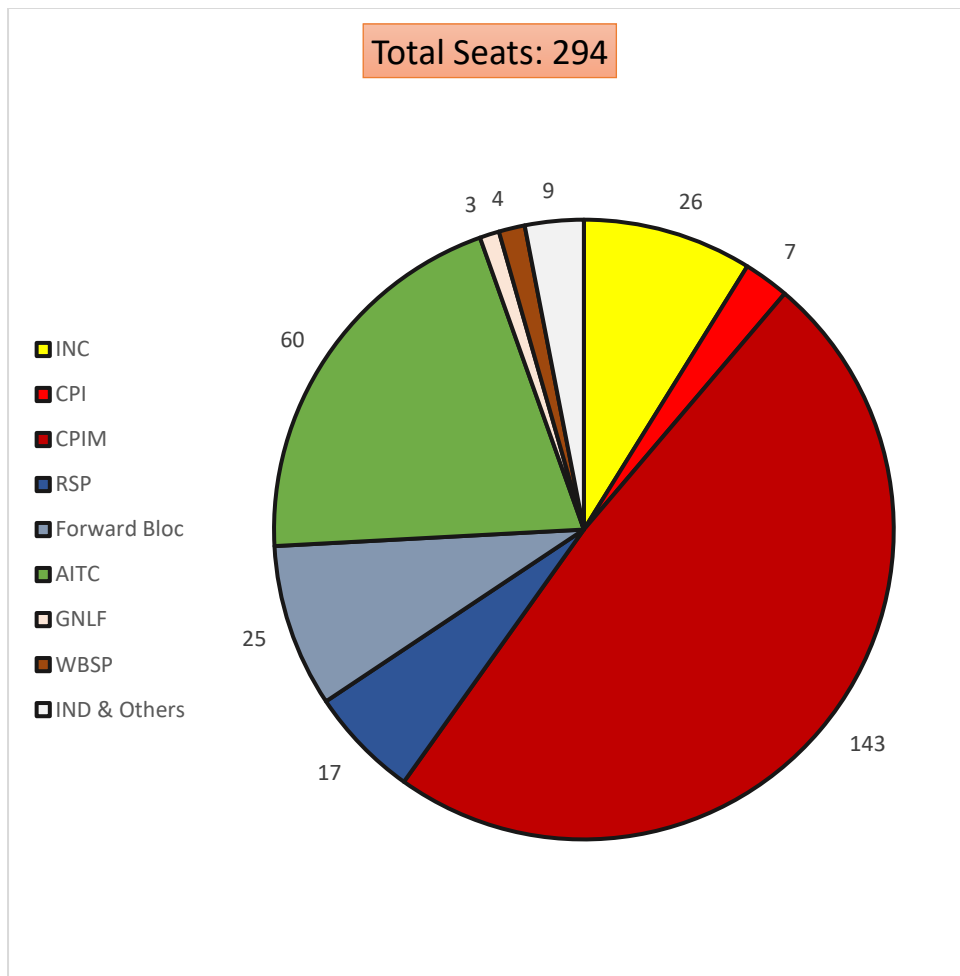
²⁹ The reformist Marxist leader, Saifuddin Chowdhury also said 'utopian ideas will find no place in our party as we are against all kind of force and violence. We will also discard dictatorship and authoritarianism of all kind. Over centralization of organization and power will also have no place'.

combinedly. The allies of the LF were the CPM, the CPI, the RSP, the FB, the WBSP, the RCPI(R). The DSP, the Forward Bloc (Marxist) [FB(M)] also the friend partners of the LF in the election. The LF offered two seats for the RJD and the JD(S) each in the election. So, the LF and its electoral friend partis contested in all the 294 seats of West Bengal in 2001 election. The largest partner and the guardian of the Front, the CPI(M) contested in the 211 Assembly constituencies and could win 143 with collecting 36.59 per cent popular electoral support. This was the lowest number of seats won by the CPM since 1977 Assembly election in the state.

The RSP contested in twenty-three assembly constituencies and could secure success in the 17 seats with getting 3.43 per cent popular mandate. The FBL contested in 34 Assembly seats and could win 25 with 5.65 per cent popular valid votes. The CPI contested the electoral battle in thirteen seats and could manage to win in seven. The WBSP contested in four seats and won all of them. Other two political friend of the LF, the DSP and the Forward Block (Marxist) contested as independent candidates with the support of the LF in two and one constituency respectively. The two DSP candidate won from the two constituencies of Pingla and Egra. The Forward Bloc (Marxist) candidate won from Tarakeswar. The LF did not contest in Hirapur, Barabazar, Chowringhee and Rasbihari Avenue constituency. The candidates of RJD contested from Hirapur and Barabazar and the candidates of the JD(S) contested from Chowringhee and Rasbihari Avenue. But they did not success to register electoral victory in any one of them. So, the LF combinedly won 199 Vidhan Sabha seats out of 294 in the 2001 West Bengal Vidhan Sabha election. This was for the first time since 1977 Assembly election of Bengal where the largest partner of the LF, the CPI(M) could not manage to win majority in the assembly alone.

The TMC, under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee had presented itself as the main opposition political force against the LF, the CPI(M) in particular in the election. After the birth of the TMC, the party already contested in two Parliamentary elections in 1998 and 1999. But it was the first state assembly election to the TMC where the party made an electoral alliance with its parent party, the Congress and named it the '*Bnagla Bachao Front*' (Save Bengal Front). The Jharkhand Party also fought the election as a partner of 'Bangla Bachao Front'. The Jharkhand Party also contested more than seven seats but the TMC and the Congress made electoral alliance in only seven seats with the Jharkhand Party.

Seats won by major political parties in the 13th West Bengal Assembly election 2001.

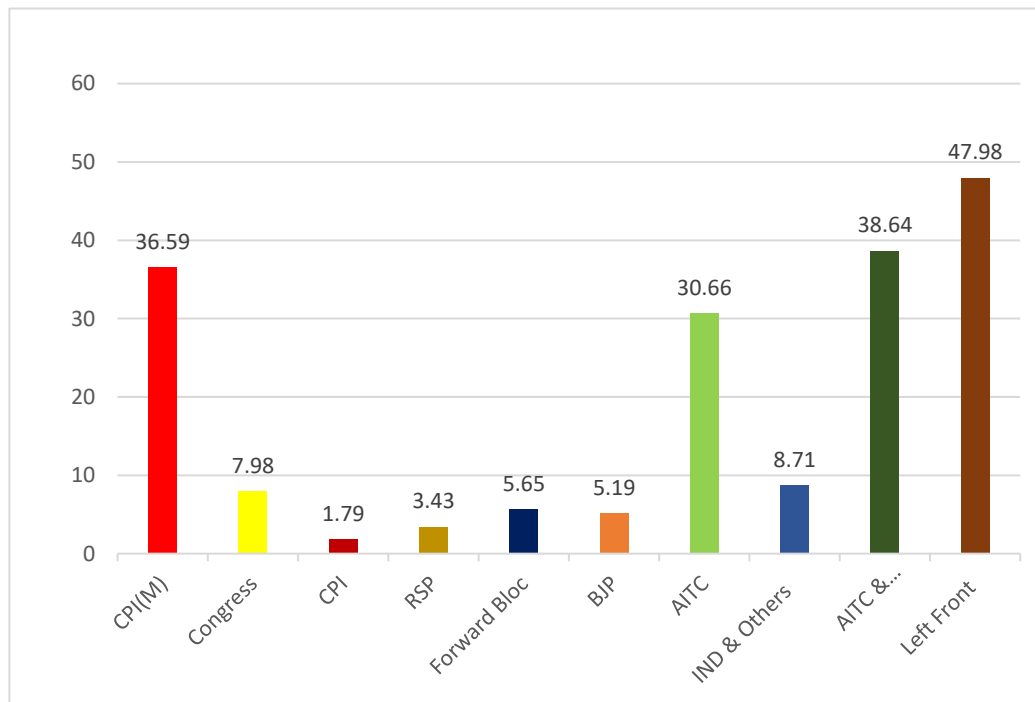


Pie Chart- 2.14

(Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

The TMC contested in 226 Assembly constituencies of Bengal and could manage to register victory in only 60 seats with getting 30.66 per cent valid popular votes. The Congress contested in 60 seats and could secure win in twenty-six with 7.98 per cent popular votes. The Jharkhand Party could not win a single one. So, the Bangla Bacaho Front won 86 seats in the election. The combined votes shared by the Congress and the TMC was 38.64 per cent (column chart-3.8). The BJP also contested in 266 seats but could not win a single seat in the election. The BJP managed to gather 5.19 per cent valid votes. The PDS, formed by former CPIM leader Saifudduin Chowdhiry just before the election, contested in 98 assembly constituencies but failed to win a single seat with just securing 0.6 per cent votes.

Percentage of votes shared by major political parties in 13th West Bengal assembly election
2001³⁰.



Column chart- 3.8

(source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in) (ECI, Statistical report on the general election 2001, to the legislative in West Bengal 2001) .

The LF has succeeded to maintain strong hold in the rural and agricultural area base districts. The LF gained more than 50 per cent electoral support in eight districts like; Birbhum, Bardhaman (presently Purba Bardhaman and Paschim Bardhaman), Purulia, Bankura, Howrah, Hoogly, Coochbehar and Medinipur. In the district of Malda, North and South 24 Pargana, Jalpaiguri and South Dinajpur the LF secured more than 45 per cent votes. In the district of Nadia, Kolkata, North Dinajpur and Murshidabad the LF gained more than 40 per cent poll. In the hill district Darjeeling, the LF's performance showed relatively poor to the GNLf. In Kolkata the 'Bangla Banchao Front' secured almost 48 percent poll and 15 seats (TheTelegraph 14 May 2001, 8)³¹. The remaining 9 seats won by the LF. In Coochbehar and South Dinajpur the LF won all the seats. In the

³⁰ The LF's vote shared here is excluded of two DSP, one Marxist Forward Bloc, two RJD, two JD(S) and two RCPI(R) candidates. The TMC and Congress total vote shared excluded the votes shared by Jharkhand Party in seven seats as the alliance of the *Bangla Banchao Front*.

³¹ District wise result of winning parties was published in details. There was also a district wise comparison of the performance of major political parties of 1996 and 2001 election. (The Telegraph, 14th May, 2001, 8)

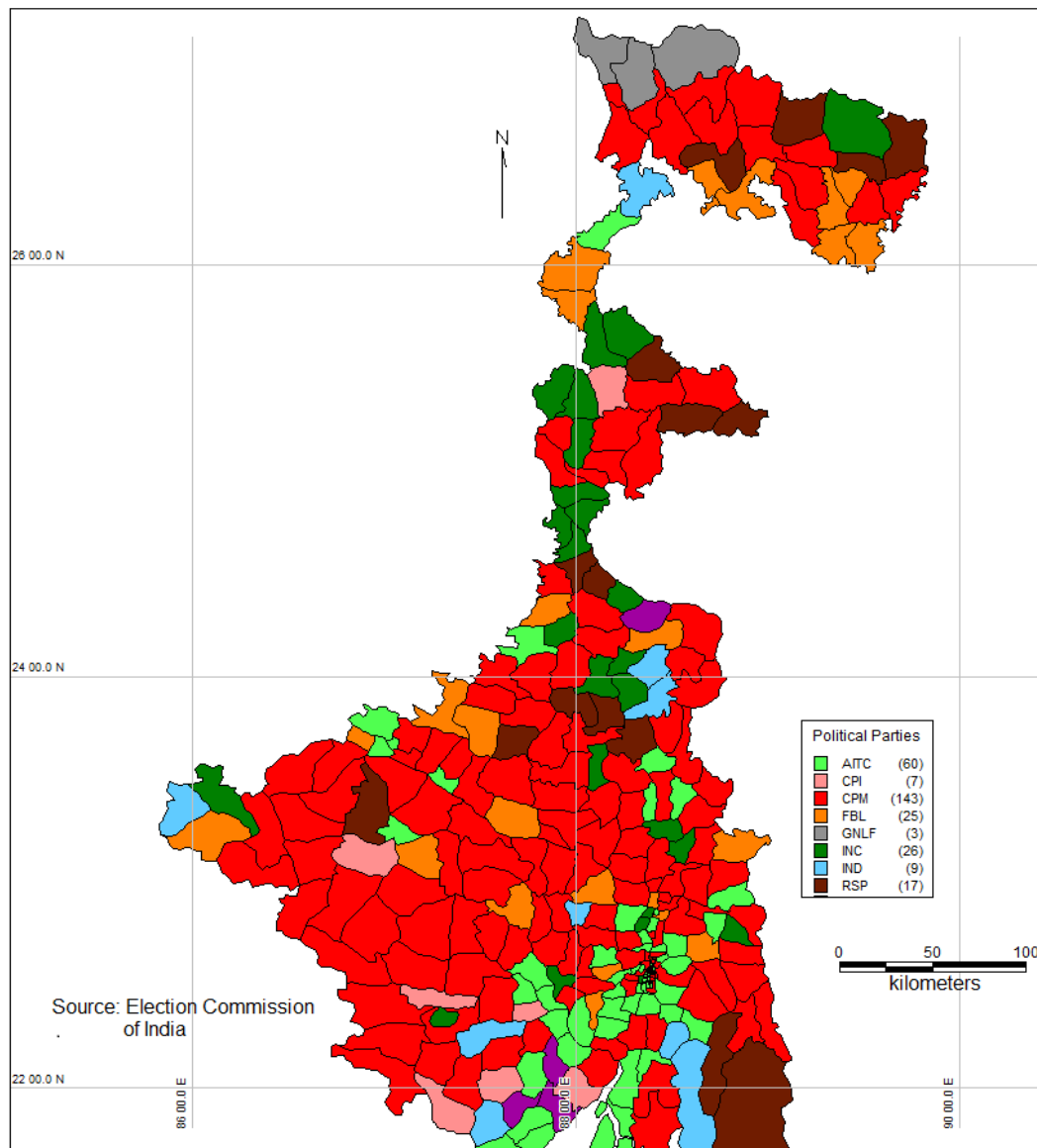
district of Birbhum, Burdwan, Purulia and Bankura the LF could win 10, 21, 12 and 9 seats respectively where the Bangla Banchao Front won only 9 seats in these districts. In Darjeeling, the LF won only two seats where the GNLF won three. In Maldah, Murshidabad, and Nadia the LF won total 27 seats and the TMC-Congress won 16 seats. Two seats won by others. The results showed that the LF hold has become loose specially the urban and industrial areas.

However, several media reports, political experts and others said that this time, the Left had a tough competition. They could may not come back to power. And if they came that was a close margin. They had a chance to get almost 150 seats in the Assembly. The statesman reported that *'the exit polls indicated the Left Front just managing to cling to power with a projected 150 seats The TMC-Congress combine was expected to manage 138 seats'* (The Statesman 12 May 2001, 1). The election result was out on 13 May, 2001 which was not matched with the predictions. The CPI(M) led LF registered its sixth consecutive electoral victory in the land of West Bengal and formed government under the Chief Ministership of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

2001 W B Assembly election raised a few crucial points in the politics of West Bengal. Arunabho Ghosh argued that "Left Front's victory in West Bengal for the sixth consecutive time is highly significant in India's electoral politics. At a time, when the parties in government have been tumbling due to 'anti-incumbency factor' in most of the state over the last two decades, West Bengal proved to be an exception. In the three states (Assam, Kerala and Tamil Nadu) which went to polls in May 2001, along with West Bengal, the ruling parties there were defeated. How could the ruling LF led by the CPI(M), could win in the face of the so called 'anti-incumbency factors' is a big question" (Ghosh 2001, 185-186).

According to Surajit C. Mukhopadhyay "in contrast to the steps taken by the CPI(M) and the LF, the Trinamul and Congress combine did not come up with an alternative vision that engaged with the task at hand. It presumed that the anger and frustration of the people with LF rule would easily translate into votes, notwithstanding the fact that it did not have an organisation to compete with the LF. The Trinamul as the main opposition party presumed that the task of defeating the LF lay in electoral arithmetic" (Mukhopadhyay 2001, 1942-43).

Seats won by major political parties in 2001 WB Assembly election



Map: 4.7

(Source: www.eci.gov.in)

Surajit C. Mukhopadhyay also argued that “to this end it started to come into alliance first with the BJP and then post-Tehelka with the Congress. This flip-flop was not taken very kindly by a large section of the people and the BJP did play the spoilsport in a number of constituencies. However, the most important problem that the Trinamul and others of its ilk failed to realise was the extent of the grip that the LF has over the people. This grip is obviously not an articulation of spontaneous and voluntary expression of the people always” (Mukhopadhyay 2001, 1942-43).

Surajit C. Mukhopadhyay also described that the fear of reprisal, retribution and much worse is a real fear and “an important factor in ‘loyalty’ that is much trumpeted around. But perhaps a more substantial reason is the way the LF has worked to create a patron-client relation and effectively organised and controlled all the institutions of the civil society. It is this strategy more than anything else that has been providing electoral success for the LF. The LF has effectively closed down the option of an individual exercising his or her judgment as an individual and has managed to canalise action as a collectivity, which is then politically controlled by the CPI(M) in particular and the LF in general. From the panchayat to the schools, from colleges to the universities, this strategy of controlling the civic institutions and the space of the civil society has consistently provided the LF with electoral returns” (Mukhopadhyay 2001, 1942-1943).

According to Auronabho Ghosh “the Assembly elections in West Bengal this time was an election fought between the personal charisma of Mamata Banerji and the organizational strength of the CPI(M) in particular and the Left Front in general, in which the latter became victorious. Only personal charisma, not backed by any organizational set up or founded on any alternative programme of development, proved to be inadequate to dislodge a government of over two decades” (Ghosh 2001, 187) .

Auronabho Ghosh also argued that “people even who supported Mamata Banerji as a firebrand opposition leader, it seems, could not accept her as the Chief Minister of the state. Her unpredictability, inconsistent and dramatic behaviour, irresponsible statements and dictatorial manner of functioning went against her as far as the post of Chief Ministership was concerned. An opinion poll showed that while 46% people preferred Buddhadeb Bhattacharya as the Chief Minister of the state, only 41% preferred Mamata Banerjee for the same post” (Ghosh 2001, 186-187) .

Auronabho Ghosh also argued that “people in West Bengal, it seems, have voted for stability and development as against adventurism and anarchy. They have preferred peace and have rejected the slogan of change for change’s sake without any definite and alternative programme or scheme of development. They preferred a democratically organised front of like-minded parties based on some common principles and programme than a one woman show based on the personal whims of a lady who talks of principles but makes unprincipled, opportunistic alliances. Though she was accepted as an opposition leader, could not successfully project herself as a responsible Chief Minister for the future” (Ghosh 2001, 187).

According to a voter, *“in Kolkata the CPI(M) is not a party we would vote for, but the Mamata Banerjee also failed to live up to our expectation. We decided to skip the poll this time. the lack of any political content in Mamata’s speech in the election campaign is a reason for her failure to convince the voters and the success of the Left. As she criss-crossed the state, covering 25000 kms by road during the campaign, not for once she did explain why the Trinamool has come out of the NDA. Or, why she has joined hands with someone whom she not too long ago had described as the ‘B’ team of the CPI(M) in West Bengal. Mamata Banerjee failed to outline a definite programme for the government should she be voted into power. Instead, it was all emotion and sentiment. Her rallies certainly received rousing reception but they obviously did not translate into votes. Mamata also kept silent herself about the BJP in the total campaigning of the election. The CPI(M) took full advantage of Mamata’s unexplained silence about BJP and harp on the theme that ‘divorce between the TMC and BJP is only superficial and temporary. The two will join hands soon”* (The Indian Express 18 May 2001, 9)³².

This thinking of any voter of Bengal had become true on last week of August, in 2001 when Mamata Banerjee rejoined with NDA on 27 August, 2011. However, some partners of the NDA were not happy for rejoining Mamata Banerjee with NDA³³. The LF chairman Anil Biswas criticised it and said *“the beggars have no choice .. the Trinamool has returned to the NDA like beggars”* (The Statesman 27 August 2001, 1)³⁴.

So, the final outcome of the 13th West Bengal Assembly election in 2001, was the left parties under the umbrella of the LF could manage to regain political power in West Bengal. Although there were some serious challenges before the Left, such as; party domination in citizen’s life, corruptions, anti-incumbency etc. during this Assembly election. In several exit polls by different organisations and medias had assumed that this time, the Left could not come back in power or if they could come that might be marginally. According to an exit poll report the Left Front could manage maximum 150

³² This statement of a voter was published in the ‘Indian Express’.

³³ Maneka Gandhi raised the issue of an apology from Mamata Banerjee and she was supported by all. PCC vice president. Pradip Bhattacharya remarked that this is politics of convenience, Mamata Banerjee has frustrated the hopes of millions of people in Bengal by rejoining the NDA.

³⁴ The BJP spokesman, Vijay Malhotra welcomed the Trinamool to the NDA. The BJP’s West Bengal unit which had opposed Miss Banerjee’s re-entry into the alliance. Anil Biswas also said ‘I gathered some Trinamool leaders had said if they were to return to the NDA, they would do so with their heads held high. My question is do they have head at all?’ The PCC Vice-President, Pradip Bhattacharya said “this is politics of convenience. Miss Banerjee has frustrated the hopes of millions of people in Bengal by re-joining the NDA”.

seats. But the Left could manage to register electoral victory again. The principal opposition leader Ms Mamata Banerjee appeared to have fallen short of her target to reach 'Writer's Building', exit poll indicated with the LF just managing to cling to power with projected 150 seats predicted for it (The Statesman 11 May 2001, 1)³⁵. But the post poll result showed some different pictures. The Left succeeded in registering their sixth consecutive electoral victory in the state of Bengal. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee took oath as the Chief Minister of West Bengal.

14th Lok Sabha election, 2004: Left in mid-sky

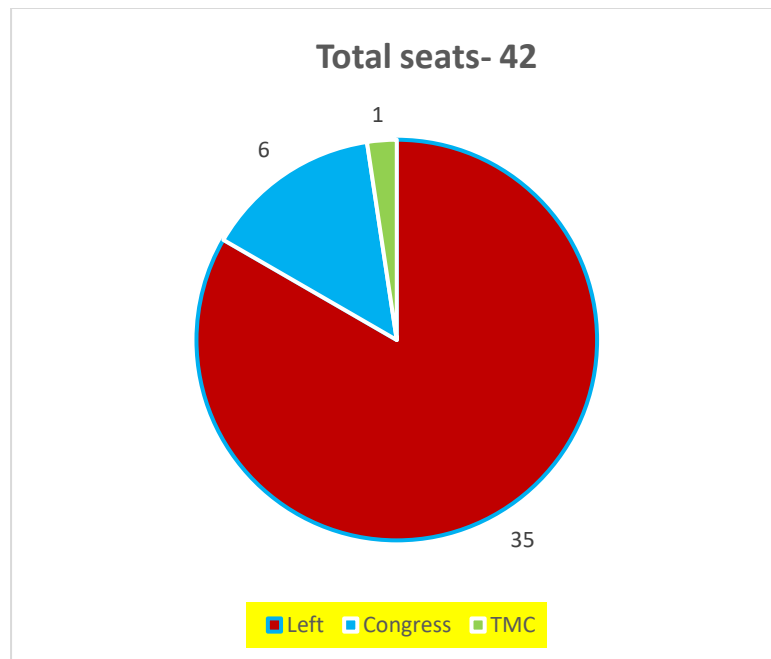
After winning the 2001 Vidhan Sabha election, the LF took several steps to regain support of the common people who did not support them in Bengal. The Left initiated correction within the party. Many leaders at block, district and state committee had been dropped due to several indiscipline party activities. In 2004 Lok Sabha election, the LF wanted to show their huge popularity in West Bengal.

In the 2004 Lok Sabha election, the left parties under the umbrella of LF did outstanding performance. The CPI(M) could secure 38.57 per cent votes of the Bengali voters. The total numbers of votes gained by the CPI(M) was 1,42,71,042 out of 3,70,21,478 valid votes. The party also won 26 Lok Sabha seats out of 42 seats in West Bengal. The INC, wanted to build a larger political opposition bloc with the help of non-NDA allies against the NDA at the national level. But, some allies of the LF in West Bengal did not agree to joined hands with the Congress. Forward Bloc state general secretary Debabrata Biswash said his party would not like be a "*junior partner of the Congress. ... Our party does not accept the view that communalism can be fought aligning with the congress. We refuse to be the B-team of the congress and remain its junior partner, through we, too, feel communalism is a real danger for the country*" (HindustanTimes 1 February 2004, 5)³⁶.

³⁵ As the exit polls were published in different daily news-papers which showed that LF might secure near about 150 seats out of 294 in the West Bengal Vidhan Sabha. The TMC-Congress might secure 138 seats. As per the exit poll there was a little difference of vote shared by the CPM and the TMC. The Statesman, 11th May, 2001. P. 1.

³⁶ Debabrata Biswas also said "we can't differentiate between the Congress and the BJP on economic policies. Also, the Congress itself toed a soft Hindutva line during recent concluded assembly polls".

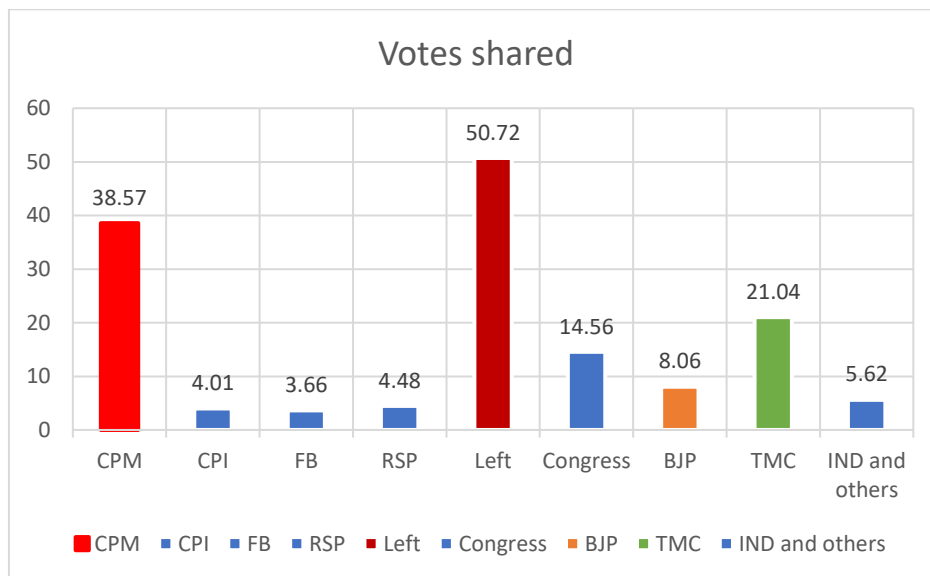
Seats won by major political parties in 2004 Lok Sabha in West Bengal



Pie Chart- 2.15

Source- Data Compiled from the Election Commission of India (www.cei.gov.in).

Votes shared by Major political parties in West Bengal in 2004 Lok Sabha election³⁷.



Column Chart- 3.9

Source: Data compiled from www.cei.gov.in

³⁷ In the following column chart, the graph represented for the LF is not calculated within the 100% votes in total. It presented to show a comparison of the vote shared by the LF and other major political parties, mainly the TMC, the Congress and the BJP. The votes shared by the LF partners also presented by separate graph of the CPI, CPM, RSP and FB.

Although the principal partners of the LF allies, the CPI(M) and the CPI was in favour of the support with the Congress at the national level to prevent the BJP in this election. One of the senior CPI(M) leaders and the former Chief Minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu said that he would initiate dialogue with the two front constituents so that they reconsider their 'rigid stand' on the Congress. Jyoti Basu also remarked "*the Congress, with the secular credentials, should not be equated with the BJP. And that is why there is no harm if we back the party from outside to help it return to power at the centre*" (The Telegraph 3 Feb. 2004, 9)³⁸. But in West Bengal there was no pre-poll electoral alliance between the Congress and the LF. The other three major allies of the LF; the RSP, the FB and the CPI could secure 4.48 per cent, 3.66 per cent and 4.01 per cent popular votes respectively (column Chart- 3.9) and three Lok Sabha seats by each. The combined votes shared by the LF was almost 50.72 per cent which was a better performance of the LF in comparison to the last ten years performance of the Left. The LF won 35 Lok Sabha seats out of 42 in this election (pie chart- 2.14) which was a record for the front (T. ECI 2004).

The other major opponent political forces of the LF in West Bengal suffered with some serious crisis during this election. The Congress, this time contested alone in the election³⁹. The Congress contested in thirty-seven Parliamentary constituencies and could manage to win in only six with securing almost 14.56 per cent votes. The TMC under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee joined hands with the BJP under the NDA banner but tremendously failed to collect sizable popular support that time. The TMC and the BJP contested 29 and 13 Lok Sabha seats respectively and could win only one. Only Mamata Banerjee won from Calcutta-South Parliamentary constituency with gaining 21.04 per cent valid votes by the TMC overall. From South-Calcutta Parliamentary constituency, Mamata Banerjee had defeated CPM's candidate Rabin Deb by almost one lakh votes. No any other candidates of the TMC and the BJP could win a single seat in this election. Many supporters of Mamata Banerjee called her emotional, criticised her for temperamental and lack of political wisdom. It's sitting MP, Krishna Bose (Jadavpur), Akbar Ali Khandekar (Serampore), Nitish Sengupta (Contai), Ranjit Panja (Barasat), Ajit Panja (Kolkata- North), all suffered electoral reverses and most by huge margins, all in handed of the CPM. The rebel Trinamool leader and siting MP,

³⁸ At the three days party politburo and central committee meeting in Hyderabad the CPM adopted a resolution saying it would even campaign for the Congress nominee in areas where the left is not a force to reckon with. (The Telegraph, 3rd February, 2004, p. 9.)

³⁹ In the last West Bengal assembly election in 2001, the Congress and the TMC made an electoral alliance. But just after few months of the election, the TMC left the hands of the congress and rejoined with the BJP led NDA by the end of the year 2001.

Sudip Bandyopadhyay who this time considered as a Congress backed independent candidate did get a pyrrhic victory for being denied ticket from his traditional constituency (TheEconomicTimes 14 May 2004, 3)⁴⁰. The BJP secured 8.06 per cent valid votes but the party lost its previous winning seats in the state.

The left parties registered a historic performance not only the rural areas of West Bengal but in the urban areas also. The RSP candidates contested from Jaynagar, Balurghat, Berhampore and Alipurduar Lok Sabha seats and won all of them except the Barhampore. The RSP candidate Promotes Mukherjee lost to the Congress' candidate Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury by 98901 votes. But the other three RSP candidate like Joachim Baxla from Alipurduar, Sanat Kumar Mondal from Jaynagar and Ranen Barman from Balurghat won the election by huge margin. The Forward Bloc's candidates contested from Coochbehar, Barasat and Purulia and won all the three seats. The FBL Candidate from Barasat could manage to win just by 12160 margins of valid votes. But the other two candidates like Hiten Barman from Coochbehar and Bir Sing Mahato from Purulia won by more than one lakh and fifty thousand of margin.

Another partner of LF, the CPI contested from Midnapore, Panskura, Basirhat and could secure all of the three Parliamentary constituencies. The CPI's candidates Probodh Panda from Midnapore, Gurudas Dasgupta from Panskura and Ajoy Chakroborty from Basirhat won by huge mandate.

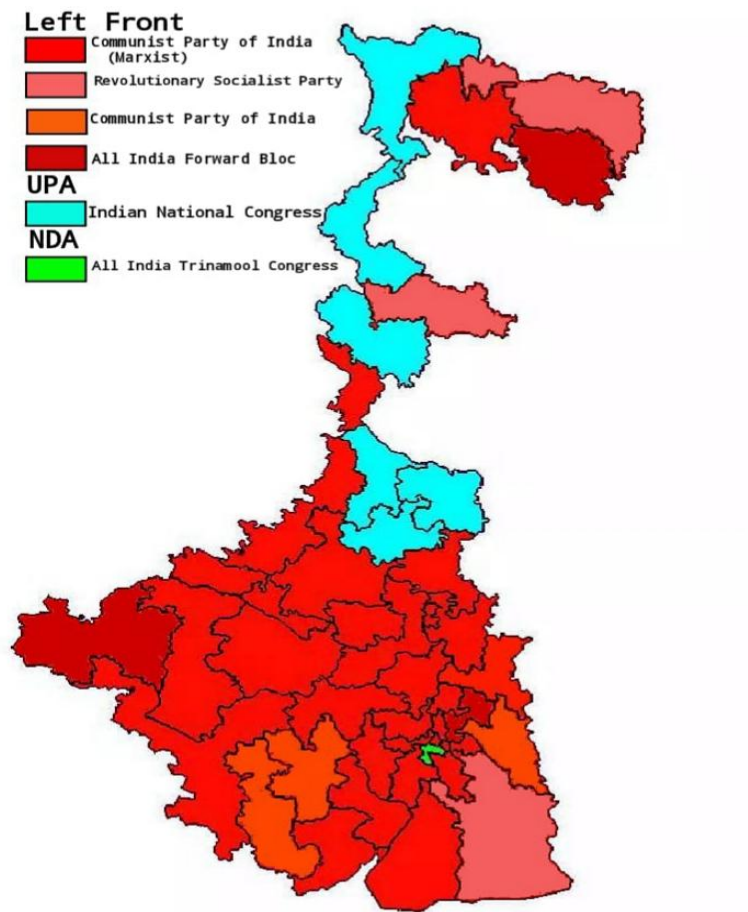
The Congress' candidates from all the three constituencies of the Murshidabad district; Berhampore, Jangipur and Murshidabad could win in the election. The Congress' candidates also won from Darjeeling, Malda and Raiganj Parliamentary constituencies in this election. The Congress leader Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi won from Raiganj and another senior Congress leader A.B.A. Ghani Ghan Chowdhury won from Malda seats. This time another senior congress leader Pranab Mukherjee also won from Jangipur Lok Sabha seat in the district of Murshidabad.

Except the three Lok Sabha seats of Murshidabad district and the other three was Malda, Raiganj and Darjeeling, the Left did outstanding performance in this election. Not only in the '*Rarh*' Bengal the Left succeeded to gain support from the south Bengal and the Kolkata also. In the district of Barddhaman, Howrah, Hoogly, two Twenty-Four Parganas, Birbhum, Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia etc. the leading partner of the LF, the

⁴⁰ Mamata Banerjee won by 98729 votes by defeating CPM candidate Rabin deb and Congress's Nafisa Ali. Her previous margin was over two lakhs. (TheEconomicTimes 14 May 2004).

CPM showed some kind of historic result of the party. The CPI(M) candidate Anil Basu from Arambag won by almost five lakhs of margin. The almost same scene also seen by the CPI(M) candidate Nikhilananda Swar from Barddhaman-Durgapur constituency and Somnath Chatterjee from Bolpur Lok Sabha Constituency. The CPI(M) contested in the 32 Parliamentary constituencies and could win 26. The party could secure 1,42,71,042 valid votes in the election. The CPM secured 38.57 per cent of valid votes. The LF could secure 50.72 per cent vote in this election (column chart:3.9). The, then West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said “*it was a shame in the first place that BJP had got a presence in the state. That shame has been cleansed by the people*” (TheEconomicTimes 14 May 2004, 3)⁴¹.

Constituency wise performance of the Major political parties in West Bengal in 2004 Lok Sabha election.



Map- 4.8

(Source- www.eci.gov.in)

⁴¹ The Left Front Chairman Biman Bose said “*it has been seen that since the last municipality and panchayat elections in the state the people on a micro level are shifting from Trinamool to the Congress. Trinamool is a party without any proper ideology, policy or manifesto*”. (The Economics Times, 14th May, 2004, Kolkata, p.3.)

After winning the Lok Sabha election 2004, with huge public support the Left parties in India has become a key factor at the national level politics. This time, at the Parliament the NDA failed to collect majority. The UPA-1 under the leadership of the Congress also failed to collect absolute majority at the centre. So, another ‘hung-parliament’ situation has arisen in India. There was no any pre-electoral alliance with the Left and the UPA in this election. But, after the result of this election the left parties decided to support the UPA-1 government from outside. They did not participate in the government, but assured to support from outside on the basis of some Common Minimum Programme. On 15 May, 2004 the CPI(M) politburo declared party’s stands to support the UPA-1 government from outside. Politburo member, Sitaram Yechury said *“it is not the mandate for the Left... It is a mandate for the formation of a secular combination”* (TheHindu 16 May 2004, 1)⁴². The senior CPI(M) Parliamentarian Somnath Chatterjee, the winning candidate from Bolpur Lok Sabha constituency, was elected as the 14th speaker of the Lok Sabha (Ajkal 15 May 2004, 1)⁴³. Somnath Chatterjee was also the first communist speaker in the country.

The CPI(M) and the LF proved their huge electoral victory not only in the state of West Bengal, but some other parts of the country. At the Union Legislature, the left parties at that time secured more than 50 seats. After the Lok Sabha election 2004, the CPI(M) in Bengal took some steps for the party members and supporters with the name of ‘*CPM-er truti sonshodhon avijan*’ (the CPM’s exercise to correct mistakes). The CPI(M) state secretary, Anil Biswas wrote an article regarding these steps in the party mouthpiece daily, ‘*Ganashakti*’. Biswas said *“there has been a lack of communist thinking (among members) leading to lack of development in the thought process. Corruption has been noticed, even in states where the party has a weak presence. Although the rate of corruption in the communist party is much less, but the trend is dangerous”* (TheStatesman 16 October 2004, 7)⁴⁴.

⁴² The left parties discussed among them to support the UPA government. All India Forward Block general secretary. Debabrata Biswas also agreed to support UPA-1 government.

⁴³ After a marathon discussion within the CPI(M) politburo meeting at Mujaffar Ahamad Bhaban, All India Secretary Harkishan Sing Surjeet declared that the party agreed to allow Somnath Chatterjee as the 14th speaker of Lok Sabha. CPM leader Biman Bose and Anil Biswas also present there. Mr. Singh also said that Mr. Chatterjee has long political experience. ‘*CPM raji, Somnath speaker*’ (in Bengali), Ajkal, 15th May, 2004, p.1,

⁴⁴ Using the typical Marxian analysis of class and class structure as a base of his article, the CPI(M)’s state secretary Anil Biswas had interpreted deviations, corruptions and anti-people behaviour as effect of change

West Bengal Assembly Elections, 2006: Test for ‘Brand Buddha’

The 14th West Bengal Assembly election was not very different from the previous elections as the election results were almost identical. The CPI(M) led LF succeed to return at the state power with gaining huge majority. Yet this election was also the most dramatic in some ways. The Election Commission of India (ECI) took charge of elections in the state for the first time without precedent. The state government was bypassed, if not completely, because of its alleged partisan role in the elections.

There were two reasons to explain such a ‘derogatory role’. First, the incumbent LFG was accused to manipulate the voter list and therefore the election commission’s intervention was welcomed by the oppositions to the ruling authorities. A big complaint was the inclusion of ‘fake’ voters. The ECI has found a large number of them in various districts. During the clearing operation, the observer found 13,00,000 voters in the voter list and deleted them (Banerjee 2006a, 864-66). Hence the allegation appeared to be true and the media thus blamed ‘fake voters’ (the bogus voters/ *bhuture voter*) for the continuous victory of the Left Front. However, the draconian measures taken by the commission alienated a large number of people who found them ‘undesirable’ and ‘undemocratic’ as the commission, in the name of revising the electoral roll, acted in a ‘fancy’ manner (Chakrabarty 2006, 3521).

Second; in order to conduct a free and fair election, the ECI decided to conduct the election on five evenly spaced dates spanning about two months. The Bihar formula was adopted in the sense that elections were held under the strict supervision of the coercive apparatus of the state. The ECI requisitioned police and paramilitary forces from outside the West Bengal as the state police did not seem trustworthy. Because the dates were spread out, it was possible to get enough of them to observe the polls on election day. The state, as it were, was occupied. It is almost true that, thanks to their active presence, these elections were virtually free from any kind of electoral violence that involved either of the warring political parties. Voters voted without any threats (Chakrabarty 2006, 3521 and Chakrabarty 2008, 135-36).

in a bourgeois society in his six-page article. He said the deviation witnessed among the part can not be called minor. Some important points he raised like;

- i. the attitudes of submission (among party functionaries), ignoring shortcomings.
- ii. Lack of transparency and coordination between the party and different organization of the LGF.
- iii. Lack of communist idealism and often getting involved in immoral activities.
- iv. The stipend given the whole-time member is less than adequate, etc.

AM argued that the common people including the voters have been faced some difficulties during the election at that time. The electoral process has been continued for the period of almost two months. A large numbers of government, semi-government, private buildings, mainly schools and colleges were taken to provide accommodations for the para-military and other forces which disturbed normal life. Many educational institutions were closed for almost two months. As I have an own experience that just before our final year examination of graduation, the college authority decided to close the main hostel for some days and noticed us to leave the hostel. The state government had also need to paid a huge amount of finance, almost Rs.120 crore to the ECI for conducting such election (AM 2006, 2048).

Finally, the ECI succeed to conduct the election without any major disturbance. The percentage of final voter turn-out report increased almost 7 per cent (6.68 per cent) in comparison to the previous West Bengal assembly election in 2001 when the final voter turn-out was almost 75 per cent (75.29 per cent). According to Bidyut Chakraborty “following the discovery of ‘bogus voters’ in various parts of the state, the apprehension of manipulation in preparing the voters’ list gained ground. It was also found out that with its enthusiasm for a free and fair poll, the commission also struck off names of a large number of genuine voters that surfaced only during the election. How was it possible for the commission to emerge as ‘a messiah’ in a state that is politically conscious and largely free from prejudices, linked with ascriptive identities? One of the reasons was surely ‘the media hype’ that arose once the commission-appointed observers emerged on the scene” (Chakrabarty 2006, 3522).

Bidyut Chakraborty also argued that “wherever the observers went, the leading newspapers gave an extensive coverage of what they discovered as ‘bogus voters. The purpose was to authenticate the allegation of ‘manipulation’ of voters' list. By so doing, the media actually upheld the charges of the parties in opposition that the sustained electoral popularity of the Left Front was largely possible due to ‘extraordinary corrupt practices at all levels’ that made ‘scientific rigging’, as it is euphemistically defined, possible. The local bureaucracy was held responsible. As a former bureaucrat argues, ‘either they slipped up negligently or more probably they connived stealthily with the interested political groups to manipulate the voters’ list in their favour’ (Bandyopadhyay

2006, 4826). The 2006 assembly election is thus a clear break with the past” (Chakrabarty 2006, 3522)⁴⁵.

After winning 35 Lok Sabha constituencies of West Bengal in 2004 Parliamentary election, the left parties under the LF’s banner in Bengal had proved their support in the electoral battle again in the 2006 West Bengal State Assembly election. This time, the Left was in a strong political situation in the state. The Left parties within the LF contested the 2006 Assembly election with seats adjustment of their allies. This time the partners of the LF were the CPI(M), the CPI, the RSP, the Forward Bloc, the WBSP, the DSP(PC), the JDS, the RJD etc. In 2006 election, the principal partner of the LF, the CPI(M) contested in the 212 seats and could secure 176 seats with 37.13 per centage of valid votes. The CPI contested in only 13 seats and could secure 9 seats out of the thirteen with 1.93 per cent votes. The RSP contested in 23 seats and won twenty seats with 3.71 per cent valid votes. The Forward Bloc contested in 34 Vidhan Sabha constituencies and could secure 23 of them with 5.66 per cent valid votes. The other smaller allies of the LF like; the WBSP, DSP(PC) etc. also won few seats in the electoral battle. The LF won 235 assembly seats altogether along with almost 50.2 per cent valid votes⁴⁶.

The Left this time, did much better performance almost all over the state. From North-Bengal to South Bengal, ‘*Rarh*’ Bengal to costal districts, the Left registered an outstanding victory. Except some seats of Maldah and Murshidabad, the Left performed something better since last 15 years. Not only in the agricultural areas, the Left parties did well in the industrial districts like; Howrah, Hooghly and North and South 24-Parganas.

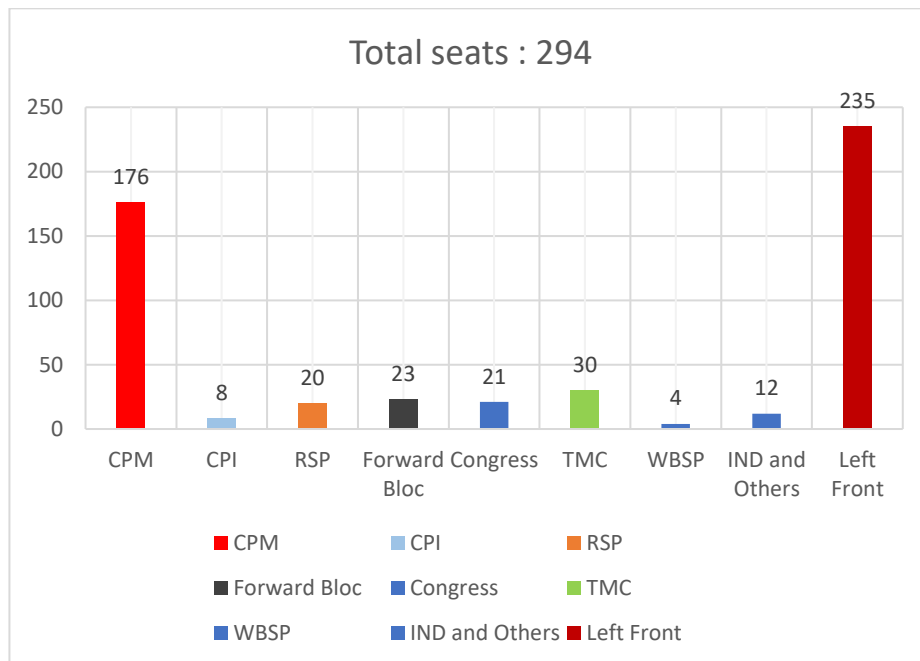
The other principal political forces like; the TMC, the Congress (INC), the BJP etc. also contested the election. This time, the Congress under the banner of UPA alliance contested the election with some relatively less active political parties in West Bengal politics like; GNLF, JMM, PDS, LJP etc. If the GNLF had an influence in few districts in the area of North-Bengal, specially, in the district of Darjeeling. The Congress contested

⁴⁵The major Bengali newspapers, like Ananda Bazaar Patrika and Bartaman, devoted a lot of space on the activities of these ‘central’ observers and hailed their role ‘in restoring democracy’ in West Bengal by ensuring a free and fair poll. (Chakrabarty 2006, 3527)

⁴⁶The Economic Times (an English daily newspaper) reported that the total number of seats won by the LF in Bengal was 234. But as per the data of the ECI, the total number of seats obtained by LF was 235. (TheEconomicTimes 12 May 2006, 1)

in 262 Assembly constituencies and could secure in only 21 with 14.71 per cent valid votes. The GNLFF, the JMM, the PDS etc. had contested in 5, 7 and 8 seats respectively. Only the GNLFF could win in the three seats in the Darjeeling district, but the other smaller allies of UPA failed to win a single seat in the election. The total numbers of seats won by the UPA alliance were 24 with almost 16 per cent popular votes (T. ECI 2006, 11-12).

Seats won by major political parties 2006 west Bengal Vidhan Sabha election⁴⁷.



Column Chart: 3.10

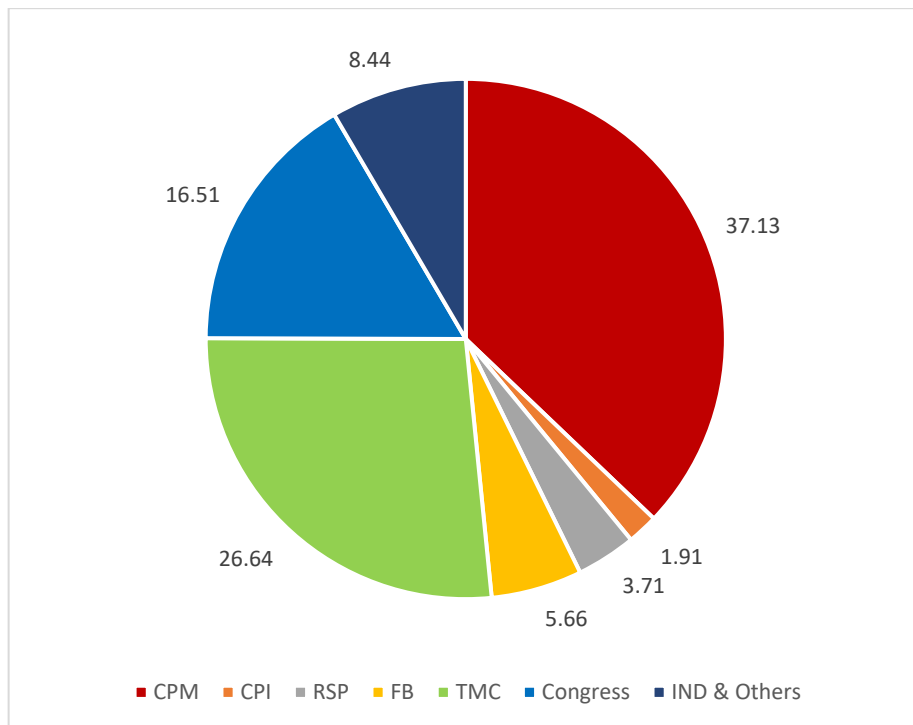
(Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

Another opposition political party of the Left in Bengal, the TMC has contested the assembly election as an electoral ally of the BJP led NDA. The other partners of the NDA in this election were- JKP(N), JD(U) etc. Mamata Banerjee led TMC had contested in 257 Vidhan Sabha constituencies and could win only 30 seats with 26.64 per cent valid votes. In the previous Assembly election in 2001, the TMC had registered its victory in 60 seats. But this time, it reduced to half in comparison to the previous

⁴⁷ In the following column chart the graph represented for the LF has not been compared to seat shared by the CPM, CPI, RSP, FB and WBSP. The seats won by the CPM, CPI, RSP, FB have also represented separately. The 235 seats of the LF are included of the seats won by the CPM, CPI, RSP, FB, WBSP and some other small allies of the LF who has contested in the election with any of those left party's symbol or contested independently, backed by the LF. The bar for LF has presented to make a comparison with the seats shared by the TMC and the Congress only.

election. The percentage of votes shared by the principal opponent of the ruling Left decreased by almost 4 per cent in comparison with the previous assembly election in (Table- 1). This performance of the TMC was disastrous in comparison with the previous West Bengal Assembly election. The BJP contested in 29 seats and failed to win a single one. The BJP secured only 1.93 percentage of popular votes. The other smaller allies of the NDA contested in a very few numbers of constituencies but totally failed to become a memorable picture before electorate in the election.

Vote shared by major political parties in West Bengal assembly election 2006.



Pie Chart- 2.16

(Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

Sumanta Banerjee argued that political observers are surprised and upset that the LF is in power in West Bengal despite nearly three decades of economic stagnation and the authoritarian arrogance of CPI(M) leaders and cadres, which make them unpopular among large sections of the common people. There is an interesting theory which postulates that due to the progress in ‘informalisation of the economy’, a large section of voters who work in the informal sector have to rely on the CPI(M) for job security and retention and hence they have voted for it. Additionally, strong political organization

with a wide network has helped the CPI(M) maintain a firm grip on both cadres and voters (Banerjee 2006a, 864-66) and (Sarkar 2006, 341-48).

Table- 1

Electoral performance of the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) in 2006

Region in Bengal	No. of Vidhan Sabha won	votes swing
Greater Kolkata	12	-5.7%
North Bengal	1	-6.5 %
South East Bengal	8	-2.4 %
South West Bengal	9	-3.4 %
Total	30	-4.3 %

Source: www.eci.gov.in, (Chakrabarty 2006, 3525 and Chakrabarty 2008, 148).

Although valid to some extent, these two factors alone cannot explain the phenomenon. We should not forget that formal sector workers also have a large stake in the CPI(M). Around 30,00,000 workers in the industrial sector are incorporated within the trade union fronts, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU). Association by school teacher, the ABTA (All Bengal Teachers' Association), by teachers of the government sponsor colleges and state universities, the WBCUTA (West Bengal College and University Teachers' Association) and West Bengal Government College Teachers' Association dominate the teaching profession in the state. Association of Government's Employees, the Coordination Committee is one of the largest trade union organisations in the state sector (Banerjee 2006a, 864-66).

Thanks to the Left Front government, workers in this huge organised sector have made huge gains over the years in terms of wages, housing facilities and other facilities and financial benefits. They provide a solid foundation for CPI(M)'s electoral success. The Krishak Sabha, the peasant wing of the party, with a membership of 1.4 crore, many of whom have benefited due to land reforms (operation barga), *panchayati* system and other socio-political changes in rural areas. These beneficiaries have today become loyal party bosses in their local areas, occupying positions of power and controlling every aspect of rural life. No farmer or herdsman dares disobey their orders because without

their help and protection they can never maintain their land and livelihood (Banerjee 2006a, 864-866).

Bidyut Chakraborty argued that the reason behind the outstanding result of the left parties under the LF in the 2006 West Bengal Assembly election, was 'Brand Buddha'⁴⁸ in rural and as well as in urban Bengal. The success of the LF in rural and marginal areas of Bengal in particular, the policy of land reforms, enlisted the name of sharecroppers (*Operation Barga*), the *panchayat* system had brought in a significant process of massive radical changes in the political environment of the state. The result of 2006 election has illustrated the success of 'Brand Buddha' in increasing the LF's support base even among those who were never in favour of the Left. The electoral consequences in the Kolkata centric seats indicated that polling was cleanly in favour of the Left parties. Kolkata had never been a fortress of the Left and anti-incumbency elements always had been remained critical in voter's preference. In this election, the LF could win 10 assembly constituencies in Kolkata and its outstanding supports translated into its increasing popularity among the voters of urban areas. The same result has shown in the industrial areas of Howrah and Hooghly district. In the district of Howrah, the LF could win 14 out of 16 seats, out of them the CP(I)M won 11 (Chakrabarty 2006, 3522-23).

In the district of Hooghly, the LF could secure 17 out of 19 Vidhan Sabha seats, of which the CPI(M) won 13 seats alone. The importance of party organisation for the victory of the Left Front is undeniable. What was new in the 2006 elections was the active role of Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya, the front's new face and symbol of continuity and change. Bhattacharya's efforts for industrialisation and securing investments for the state seemed to had paid electoral dividends in the Front that he led. With a greater focus on industrialisation, urban infrastructure, and the urban middle class, the new leadership's message 'kindled the hopes and aspirations of the new

⁴⁸ The expression referred to a specific style of electoral campaign that then, the incumbent Chief Minister, Buddhadev Bhattacharjee, undertook in the 2006 election. Designed to win over urban voters disenchanted with the Left Front, the campaign drew on well-defined plans for regeneration hopes and addressed by the grievances of urban dwellers by proposing rapid industrialisation, even by inviting private industrialisation and FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) in West Bengal. This did not appear to sit well with the Left Front leadership, which explains the historic victory in terms of 'organisation' and pro-people policies of the government over a lengthy period. The Left Front's Chairman, Biman Bose, made this point in his press statement on 15th May, 2006 (Chakrabarty 2008, 228-229). Source: Anandabazar Patrika, 16 May 2006.

electorate' (S. S. Chattopadhyay 2006, 2). In fact, the main objective of the new government was to adopt policies and programmes for the development of both rural and urban Bengal, to prevent the economic decline of the state which was the industrial hub of the country in the recent past (Chakrabarty 2006, 3523) and (Chakrabarty 2008, 141-42).

There is no any doubt that the CPI(M) led LF had registered an overwhelming victory in West Bengal. The left parties under LF succeed to show their huge support at every corner of the state. Many sections of voter in Bengal who had not been liked the Left in the previous elections, they preferred their choice towards the Left in the election. Not only the working class, a section of middle peasantry opted in favour of the Left at that time. But for the Left and for the politics of West Bengal few points were important. These are such as;

First: The leaders and the followers of the left parties were very much satisfied and overconfident with the poll outcome in 2006. It is true that it was a major triumph to the Left, but it was not unprecedented achievement to the Left. In 1987, West Bengal State Assembly election, the Left Front won 251 out of 294 seats, with more than 51 per cent valid votes⁴⁹. But this time the tally was 235. The principal partner and leader of the LF, the CPM won almost 39.30 percentage of valid votes and 187 Vidhan Sabha seats. But this time it obtained 176 seats with 37.13 per cent valid votes (AM 2006, 250).

Second: Over the past five years till 2006, a large part of the Left Front Government's efforts and resources had been spent on improving the infrastructure in and around Kolkata, including the establishment of luxury facilities that could appeal to the elite, especially the industrial circle. This apparent pro-rich and pro-big industry bias in state government policies has led to little improvement of electoral results. In fact, the Front won fewer number of seats in Kolkata in 2006 than in the past. Areas with civic upliftment like flyovers, smooth modern roads, shopping malls and such centres went to vote against the Left Front with a vengeance. The Front therefore faced a dilemma: a

⁴⁹ In 1987 West Bengal Assembly election the major allies of the LF like; the CPM, the CPI, the RSP and the Forward Bloc won 187, 11, 18 and 26 seats respectively. The other small allies of the LF like DSP (Probodh Chandra) and WBSP, the *Biplobi Bangla Congress*, the RCPI, the Marxist Forward Block won 6, 0,1 and 2 assembly constituencies respectively. Most of the small allies fought in that electoral battle as independent party but they had the support and seats adjustment with the LF. The combined vote shared by the LF was almost 53 (52.96%) per cent. (WestBengalLegislativeAssemblyElection 2024)

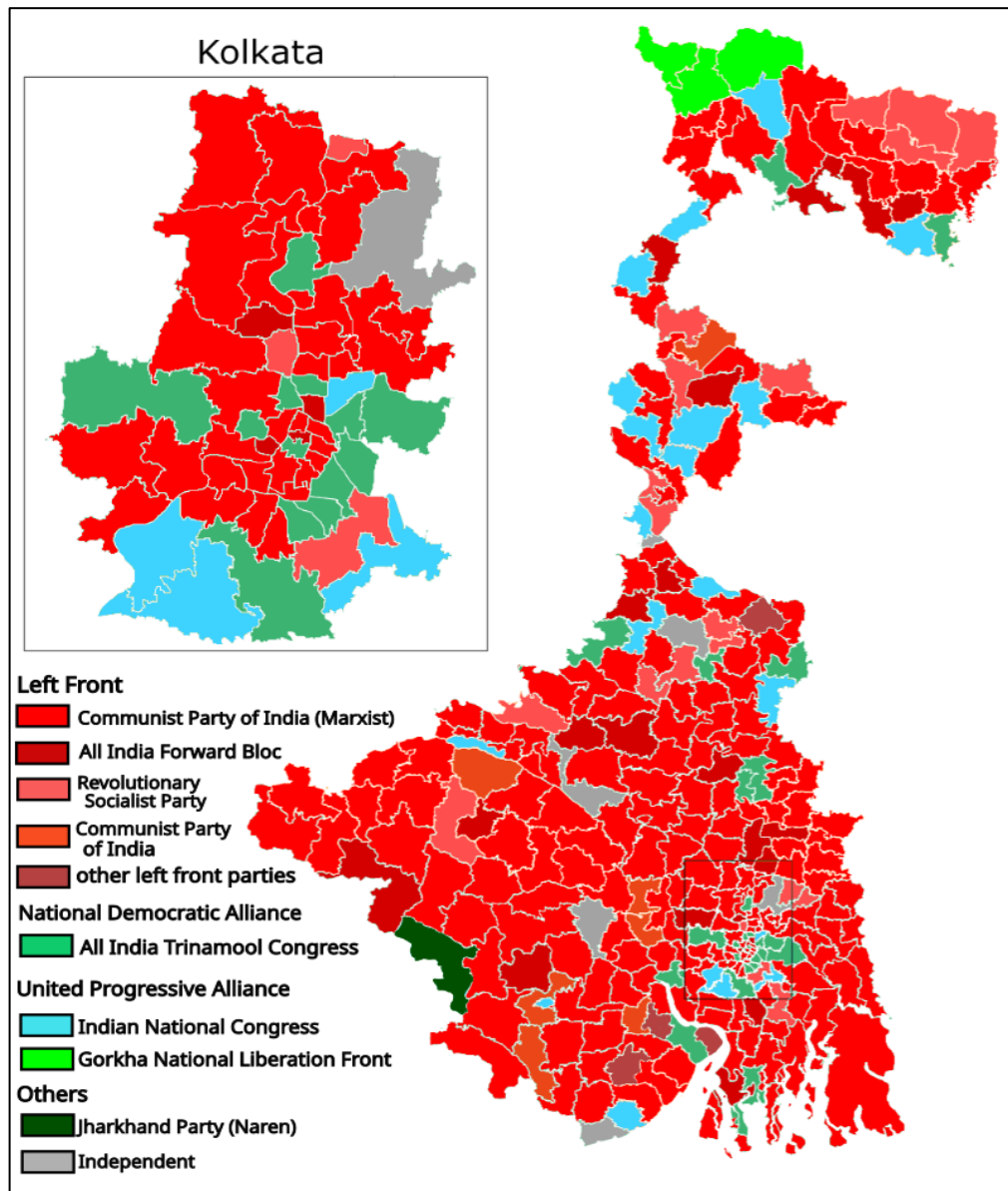
further progress in spending on luxuries may fail to pay electoral dividends, while a relative reduction in expenditure earmarked for the poor could result in a rapid erosion of its 'safe' vote bank (AM 2006, 2050).

Third: according to A. M. "the issue of conversion, at state initiative, of arable land for commercial exploitation, the poll results suggest, should be handled with some circumspection. In the rural belt of South 24 Parganas, the Left Front lost in just a single constituency, Bhangar, partly because of the involvement of this location in the controversy. Similarly, while the Front made a clean sweep of the rest of the seats in the district of Howrah, it failed to win in two constituencies where the issue of land sales had cropped up" (AM 2006, 2050).

Fourth: A.M. also described that "the state government has apparently made up its mind to pursue a vigorous programme of generally capital-intensive industrial growth with focus on the IT industry. It has, simultaneously, made explicit its determination to make the state more investor-friendly. The state administration, it follows, would from now on allocate a relatively higher proportion of its resources in the pursuit of these goals" (AM 2006, 2050). What impact such a policy is likely to have "on the life and living of close to seven million unemployed in the state remains an open question. The surprise defeat of the state labour minister. along with the loss of a number of seats on the fringes of Kolkata. should provide some sort of a warning. It is possible to trace an undercurrent of resentment at the resulting bias - howsoever unintentional - for labour economising industrialisation; there is similar disquiet over hasty handing over of lush agricultural land either for 'contract farming' or to fly-by-night adventurers from other shores" (AM 2006, 2050).

Fifthly: Bidyut Chakraborty explained that the "decimation of the opposition is also a source of weakness for the Left Front government unless it imbibes 'self-introspection' in its true spirit. The party representatives forming the government need to be critical despite being part of the Left Front. Unless a mechanism of 'checks and balances' is internalized, the Front government is likely to drift away from the ideological goal that accounts for a massive popular mandate in its favour" (Chakraborty 2006, 3526-27).

Performance of major political parties in West Bengal in 2006 assembly election. (A thematic map, not measured by scale.)



Map-4.9

(source: www.eci.gov.in)

Bidyut Chakraborty also argued that there is also the fear of ‘ideological distortion’ given the invincible majority of the of the LF; “there is also the tug-of-war between those following the ‘orthodox’ line of thinking and their counterpart refining Marxism underlying the Trotskyite observation that ‘socialism cannot strike roots in one corner of the country’. There is no doubt that the west Bengal chief minister has captured the lost ground in urban areas on the dream of what a liberalized economy can bring to

the state. Now he has to sell this brand of ‘economics’ to those ‘hardcore’ members of the party who are still critical to the organization” (Chakrabarty 2008, 149-50) and (Chakrabarty 2006, 3526-27).

Furthermore Bidyut Chakraborty also argued that “the opposition of the CPI(M) labour union, CITU, to ‘economic reforms’ is undoubtedly a deterrent to the electoral promises that the chief minister made to the voters . . . How to align with capitalist globalization and accrue its advantages without compromising its distinct ideology by appearing as its votary seems to be a serious political challenge to the Left” (Chakrabarty 2008, 149-150).

This chapter of the present study has analysed West Bengal politics during 1991-2006 by analysing electoral data of Lok Sabha and West Bengal Assembly elections. This chapter also analysed some crucial points during the period which were reflected on elections. This chapter has started by raising the question of survival of communism after the fall of the USSR in the Eastern Europe. After the fall of communism, the world-wide journey of the neo-liberal economy with the name of LPG got easy prospects. The Union Government of India had also welcomed those neo-liberal economic policies in early 1990s. The LFG in West Bengal had taken the ‘New Industrial Policy’ in 1994. The CPI(M)-led LF also faced serious challenge due the rise of the BJP at the national level. The BJP had emerged as the third political choice in 1991. “This was perhaps understandable in light of the BJP’s improved showing in the 1993 panchayat elections where it had won 3.9 per cent of the seats as compared to just 0.1 per cent of the seats in 1988” (Mayers 2001, 37) and (Lieten 1996, 58). The Left did well in all the Parliamentary and assembly elections in Bengal. But after birth of the Trinamool Congress in 1998 under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee, the Left started to face strong opposition in the state.

Another important political dialogue had also been seen in the late 1990s and early 21st century in West Bengal politics that the making and unmaking electoral alliance. ‘Left-Right’ and ‘Right-Right’ coalition politics had been played crucial role during 1960s and 1970s in Bengal. But the right-right coalitions were not got any significance picture from 1977 to 1997. However, the Left coalition with the name of Left Front had been worked in the state with their understanding. The year 1998, is considered as a benchmark of Bengal politics for electoral coalition. In 1998 and 1999

Lok Sabha election, the TMC made alliance with the BJP and secured a sizable popular support. But in 2001 West Bengal Vidhan Sabha election the TMC joined hands with the Congress.

Another important fact in this chapter had presented that the changes of Chief Ministership of Bengal. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya nominated as the new C.M. of Bengal in place of Jyoti Basu by the CPI(M) and the LF in 2000. And in 2001 Assembly election, Bhattacharya was succeed to win election despites several combined challenges of the Congress and the TMC. This chapter also analysed the data of 2004 Lok Sabha and 2006 West Bengal Assembly election where the Left could manage to collect huge success.

The next chapter is about the analysis of electoral data of Lok Sabha and WB Assembly election during the period of 2007 to 2021 by lighting spot on several significant issues which is reflected through the elections and the politics of West Bengal.

CHAPTER-4

LEFT AND WEST BENGAL POLITICS IN 2007-2021: AN ANALYSIS OF LOK SABHA AND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

The previous chapter of the present study has analysed Left politics in West Bengal during 1991 to 2006 through lighting spot of analysing electoral data of each Parliamentary and Assembly elections during that period. After the fall of the USSR in Eastern Europe, the Left in Bengal and in India had faced some crucial questions. The rise of BJP at the national level politics also had raised challenges before the journey of the Left in Bengal as well as across the country. The LFG in Bengal also faced challenges due to the advent of neo-liberal economy in the country. The LFG successfully managed all the challenges and registered massive win in almost every election. The year 1998, had created a benchmark in West Bengal politics due the birth of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee. The TMC could manage to secure a sizable vote in 1998 and 1999 Parliamentary elections which built challenge for the Left Front. In 2001 West Bengal Assembly election, the LF secured 6th consecutive electoral victory despites some serious challenges. Although the number of winning seats of the LF decreased in comparison to every Assembly election since 1977. However, the CPI(M), this time could fail to win absolute majority alone by a very short margin. But in 2004 Lok Sabha and 2006 WB Assembly elections the LF did very well.

This chapter deals the politics of West Bengal during 2007 to 2021 by focusing the role of the Left. This chapter also analyses the electoral data of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections of WB during 2007 to 2021. In this period the study analyses three Lok Sabha and three Vidhan Sabha election in different years. This period is also considered very much crucial for the Left politics in West Bengal. During this period the Left faced some serious challenges and could not manage to re-establish popularity. After the massive win in 2006 WB Assembly election, the support base of the LF and the CPI(M) had started to decrease. The Left had been passed through some serious crisis during this period. Some crisis like; ideology, leadership, party principles, policy formation, maintenance of governance etc. had been faced by the Left. So, started from

some kind of challenging situation it finally climbed down at the defeated position. This ultimate crisis has proved through the result of West Bengal Assembly election in 2011.

15th Lok Sabha Election, 2009: Consolidation of Non-Left Oppositions

The 2009 Lok Sabha election was much crucial for every major political party across the country in terms of many burning issues. Some major issues were price rise, Indo-US nuclear deal, terrorist attacks, unemployment, farmers suicides, 'Ram-setu' controversy etc. at the national level. At the national level the electoral competition was between the two main electoral alliance, the Congress led UPA and the BJP led NDA. However, there was also a presence of the Third Front, mainly led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (Rai 2009, 80). But, in West Bengal the electoral battle was between the CPI(M) led LF and the Congress led UPA. The Left had withdrawn its support from the UPA-1 government by raising the issue of 'Indo-US nuclear deal' which opened an opportunity to the non-Left principal oppositions, mainly the TMC in West Bengal to join hands with the UPA. Before the 2009 Lok Sabha election, the TMC broke off its alliance with the NDA and again joined hands with the Congress and had become a partner of the UPA. Although, the LF contested the state Assembly election 2001 against the Congress-TMC joint forces. But then the Congress-TMC alliance failed to draw any remarkable image before the electorate of West Bengal. But this time the socio-political environment was very much different in West Bengal. West Bengal had become a hot spot in political discussion due to some crucial issues in Singur-Nandigram controversy.

The Election Commission of India had conducted the 15th Lok Sabha election through five phases from 16 April to 13 May, 2009 across the country. West Bengal experienced the last three phases on 30 April, 7 May and 13 May (TheTelegraph 3 March 2009, 1). The LF already faced a serious challenge in 2008 panchayat election. The CPI(M), this time had contested the electoral battle with its other partners of the Front like; CPI, RSP, FBL etc. under the alliance of LF. The CPI(M) contested in thirty-two Lok Sabha constituencies in Bengal but could manage to win only 9 Parliamentary seats. This was the lowest number of seats won by the CPI(M) since 1977. In the previous Lok Sabha election in 2004, the CPI(M) won 26 Parliamentary seats, but its tally came down at almost one-third in comparison with the previous Parliamentary election. Not only the number of seats, the CPI(M) also got off its percentage of vote share. In 2004 Lok Sabha election, the party secured 38.57 per cent popular votes, but

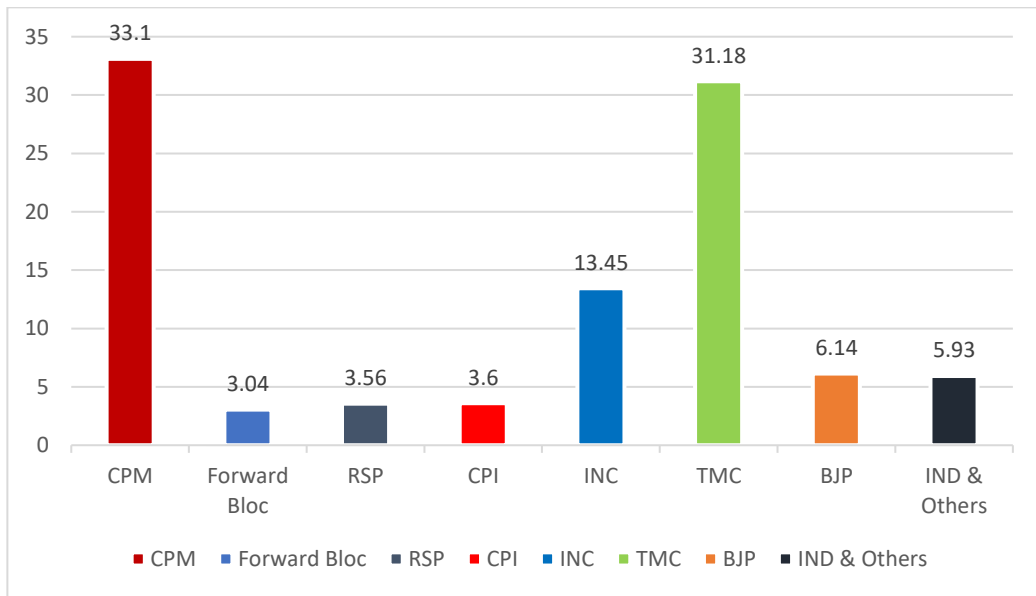
this time it came down at 33.1 percentage (Column chart- 3.11). The other LF's partners also suffered in this election. The other LF partners; the CPI, the RSP and the FB contested 3, 4 and 3 Parliamentary seats in the state respectively and could manage to win only two seats by each. In the last Lok Sabha election in 2004, each of them won three seats, but all of them decreased its position also as the CPI(M). The CPI, the FBL and the RSP secured 3.6 per cent, 3.04 per cent and 3.56 per cent votes respectively (T. ECI 2009).

Jyotiprasad Chatterjee and Supriyo Basu argued that “the 15th Lok Sabha elections in 2009 wrecked the winning rhythm of the LF. In this election, the LF in general and the CPI(M) in particular suffered a huge setback. In a complete reversal of the 2004 Lok Sabha election results, the CPI(M) won only nine seats as compared to the twenty-six seats it won earlier. The opposition alliance comprising primarily of the INC and the AITC increased their tally from seven to twenty-five” (Chatterjee and Basu 2014, 285).

J. Chatterjee and S. Basu also argued that “it is primarily due to the tremendous electoral success of the AITC in the current election where it won 19 seats compared to only one the party could win in the 2004 Lok Sabha Election. . The CPI(M)'s vote share in 2009 declined to 33.11 per cent from 38.56 per cent in 2004, while AITC increased its share from 21.04 per cent to 31.18 per cent during the same period. Not only in the two successive Parliamentary elections, the decline and the simultaneous increase in the percentage of votes polled by the CPI(M) and AITC respectively were also evident in the West Bengal Assembly Elections, 2006. Almost a similar trend was revealed in the 2008 Panchayat elections too” (Chatterjee and Basu 2014, 285).

In 2004 Lok Sabha election, the CPI, the FB and the RSP could secure 4.02 per cent, 3.66 per cent and 4.48 per cent popular votes respectively in West Bengal. But, in 2009 all the three allies of LF lost its support in comparison with the previous Lok Sabha election in 2004. The LF combined vote share in 2004 Lok Sabha election was almost 50.70 per cent which decreased at 43.4 per cent in 2009 (TheHindu 26 May 2009, 1). The loss of the Left had gone in favour of the TMC-Congress electoral alliance, the UPA. Some important leaders of the Left defeated in the election. Sujan Chakraborty defeated in Jadavpur, Rabin Dev from Kolkata-South, Hannan Mollah from Uluberia, Lakshman Seth from Tamluk etc.

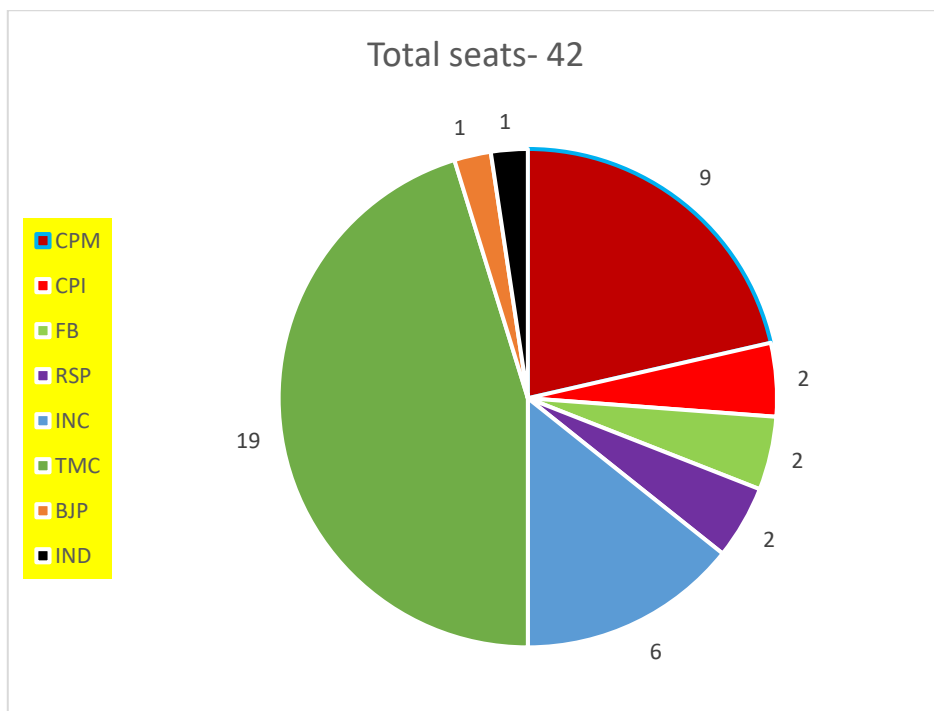
Votes shared by major political parties in West Bengal in 2009 Lok Sabha election



Column chart- 3.11

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in

Seats won by major political parties in 2009 Lok Sabha election in West Bengal



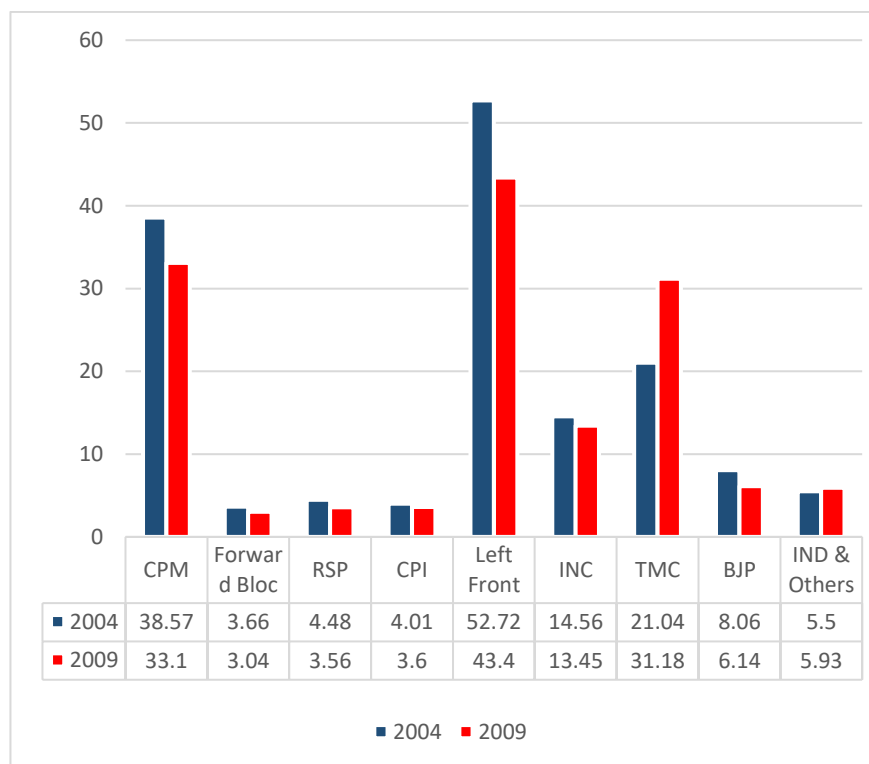
Pie Chart- 2.17

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in

(Chart prepared on the basis of 42 Lok Sabha constituencies of West Bengal only)

The principal opponent of the Left, the TMC this time appeared as strong political power in this election. After withdrawal support from UPA-1 by the Left at the centre, the TMC got a golden chance to join hand with the Congress and build challenge to the long-left rule in the state. In July, 2008 the four left parties, the CPI(M), the CPI, the RSP and the Forward Bloc withdrew support from the Congress led UPA-I government at the centre to showing the issue of Indo-US nuclear deal and price rise. The four left parties also followed the way of strongly criticise the Congress (Kumar 2008, 1)⁵⁰.

Votes shared by major political parties of Bengal in 2004 and 2009 Lok Sabha election



Column Chart- 3.12

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in

Rup Kumar Barman argued that the withdrawal of support from the UPA-1 government at the centre, the common people had not accepted well. CPI(M)'s behaviour

⁵⁰ After withdrawal support from UPA, the Left strongly condemned Congress. Addressing a public meeting, general secretary of the left parties- Prakash Karat of the CPI(M), T.J. Chandrachoodan of the RSP, Debashis Biswas of the Forward Bloc and A. B. Bardhan of the CPI - highlighted the 'unkept' promises of the UPA government which was 'obsessed' the operationalising the nuclear deal. Taking a pot-shot at the Congress slogan '*Congress ka Hat Aam Admi Ka Saath*', (Hand of Congress is with common people), Mr. Karat said it has now turn into '*Congress ka Hat America ka Saath*' (Hand of Congress is with America). (The Hindu, New Delhi, 15th July, 2008, p. 1)

was full of contradictions. In one hand the party opposed Indo-US nuclear deal by opposing capitalist USA but on the other hand the party was willing to invite capitalism for large industry in Bengal (Barman 2022, 65-66). This step of the Left opened an opportunity to the TMC to join hands with the Congress led UPA which was in ruling position at the centre in India. And finally, the TMC in Bengal joined hands with the Congress in 2009 Lok Sabha election. The Congress agreed to fight in 14 Lok Sabha seats including the six seats in which the party won in 2004 Lok Sabha election. Mamata Banerjee led TMC contested in 28 Lok Sabha seats in 2009 Lok Sabha election. Mamata Banerjee said “*we will fight together to bring an end to the 32 years mis-rule of the CPM*” (TheEconomicTimes 3 March 2009, 3)⁵¹.

However, the TMC supported an independent candidate, Tarun Mondal from Jaynagar Parliamentary constituency. So, the Number of candidates with TMC’s symbol were 27. Mamata Banerjee contested from her traditional constituency, Kolkata-South and defeated CPI(M)’s Rabin Deb by almost two lacs and twenty thousand votes. The TMC won 19 Lok Sabha seats with securing 31.16 per cent popular votes. The Congress could secure six seats with almost 13 per cent popular votes. The Congress-TMC supported independent candidate from Jaynagar Parliamentary constituency also registered victory. The combined votes shared by the UPA partners in the election was 44.7 per cent which was almost 1.3 per cent more than the combined vote shared by the LF. The BJP also contested as the leading partner of NDA. The BJP contested in all the 42 seats and managed to win in only one seats with securing 6.1 per cent popular votes.

Bidyut Chakraborty remarked that the electorate of WB seem to have rejected the LF because of its zeal for quick industrialisation. “Underlying currents of trouble and dissension started when Chief Minister Bhattacharjee implemented unabashed neoliberal development policies. This swerve seemed to substantiate the view that the Left Front government was drifting away from the ideological underpinning that had given it a massive popular mandate in the past” (Chakrabarty 2011, 294-95).

Bidyut Chakraborty also remarked that “the rural population that had previously supported the Left Front because of its radical land reforms felt cheated when the

⁵¹ Trinamool Congress and Congress finalised much awaited seat sharing in Bengal in 2009 Lok Sabha election. Congress leader K. Keshav Rao took initiative to finalising the 14 seats in Bengal. Then, the chief of WBPC and Minister of External Affairs, Pranab Mukherjee also took initiative for seat adjustment. LF chairman Biman Bose scoffed at the idea of the Congress-Trinamool Congress unity. (The Economic Times, 13th March, 2009, Kolkata, p. 1.)

government demonstrated a zeal for capturing large tracts of fertile land for setting up factories and establishing special economic zones (SEZs). As a result, the Left Front was increasingly ‘perceived as an ally of capital’s surging spree for primitive accumulation, for dislocating the close tie between labour and the means of production in the countryside’ (D. Bhattacharyya 2010, 52). There was also the fear of ideological distortion, given the apparently unassailable majority of the ruling coalition” (Chakrabarty 2011, 294-95).

A.M. described few points behind the debacle of the LF in 2009 Lok Sabha election in Bengal that “the Communist Party of India (Marxist), in its failure to maintain communion with the masses and the Party cadre, is responsible for the crisis of the Party in West Bengal. Its strategy of compulsory acquisition of even highly arable land to facilitate industrialisation under private auspices was ill-founded, and worse in its implementation” (AM 2009, 10-12).

A.M. also argued that on 14 March 2007, killings in Nandigram shocked the people of the West Bengal. “How on earth could a Left administration shoot down in cold blood women and children from impoverished peasant families? The resulting widespread public revulsion led to the erosion of the Party’s mass base. . . A series of mistakes followed in quick succession in different parts of the State, and not just over land acquisition, bearing the stamp of official overbearingness. There was, for instance, the episode of police high-handedness culminating in the suicide of a bright, young Muslim boy from a lower middle-class family; his only sin was to fall in love and marry a Hindu girl from an affluent Marwari family” (AM 2009, 10-12).

Prabhat Patnaik remarked that “the Left had managed to increase its support among the workers, peasants, petty producers and the rural poor, then it could have offset this loss among the urban middle class; even if it had managed to retain its support among the former, its overall loss would have still remained limited. But, notwithstanding its opposition to imperialism, it did not have an alternative policy on development, different from what the neoliberal paradigm dictated” (Patnaik 2009, 9) .

Prabhat Patnaik again argued that “in West Bengal, the government led by it pursued policies of ‘development’ similar to what the other states were following and in competition with them, which, being part of the neo-liberal paradigm, necessarily brought with them the threat of ‘primitive accumulation of capital’ (in the form

specifically of expropriation of peasants' land). These policies, though subsequently reversed in several instances, had an adverse impact on the 'basic classes' and caused a crucial erosion of the class base of the Left" (Patnaik 2009, 9).

Debraj Bhattacharriyya argued that the key factor was not the ideology that the LF has pursued but "the fact the oppositional movements of various kinds coalesced primarily around the inefficiency, arrogance and high-handedness of the regime. The issues were widely different - Singur and Nandigram were related to the imperious behaviour of the government on land rights of the peasantry; the Rizwanur episode showed how the police could be hand-in-glove with the rich; the case of Taslima Nasreen showed how the regime was desperately trying to please the Muslim fundamentalists; and, the Public Distribution System episode revealed how the government was unable to manage a vital element of the social security network" (Bhattacharya 2009a, 4).

Debraj Bhattacharya also argued that "Nandigram was probably the flashpoint which brought out in the open the disappointment and the anger against the regime that has been building up over the years but was not able to take any definite shape because of the weakness of the opposition. The fact that Mamata Banerjee and her team managed to play their cards well and also arrive at a historic understanding with the Congress helped to swing the voters away from Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] and its allies. Exactly how important has been the role of certain intellectuals is difficult to say but they have certainly played their part" (Bhattacharya 2009a, 4) .

Debraj Bhattacharya also remarked that "there is no hard data available, yet it can be said with confidence that the electoral swing was more about teaching the party 'dadas' a lesson than anything related to ideology or policy. There is a strong chance (which again cannot be proved without systematic research) that a large section of erstwhile CPI(M) followers, who for various reasons have over the years become alienated from the party, has waited for the opportunity to strike back, even going to the extent of favouring Mamata Banerjee, post-Nandigram, in order to create an opposition to the CPI(M). Many of the stalwarts of the CPI(M) who have lost had, over the years, become feudal bosses in their own pockets, more powerful than the party leaders in Alimuddin, and there has been a revolt against them" (Bhattacharya 2009a, 4).

Jyotiprasad Chatterjee and Supriyo Basu argued that "the leaders of the LF in their analysis have identified two reasons for their electoral defeat in the 15th Lok Sabha

elections. *First*, there had been an overall wave in favour of the INC-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) in this election, which touched the minds of the electorates of West Bengal as well; second, the alliance of the INC and the AITC proved to be strong enough for the LF to overcome” (Chatterjee and Basu 2014, 302-303).

Jyotiprasad Chatterjee and Supriyo Basu also argued that “although the alliance of the two major opposition parties consolidating the anti-Left votes might have put the LF in a vulnerable situation, the influence of the Congress wave failed to find much support from the facts .. Contesting independently (with-out alliance with the AITC), the INC won only seven municipalities out of a total of eighty-one in West Bengal, apart from Kolkata, while the AITC won thirty-three municipalities. The position of the INC was even worse in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, where the AITC made a clean sweep” (Chatterjee and Basu 2014, 302-303).

West Bengal State Legislative Assembly Election, 2011: Fall of the Left:

After facing serious challenge and crisis in 2009 Lok Sabha election, the CPI(M) led LF had appeared before another crucial electoral battle for West Bengal Legislative Assembly in 2011. This election was more challenging to the Left. They had already started to eroded from public support since 2008. Due to some important reasons like; decreasing of public support, consolidating of opposition votes, TMC-Congress combined forces, anti-incumbency factors, several protest by various groups in the state due to industrialisation policies and steps etc. the LF was already in backfoot in Bengal politics. A wave for change of political power in the state has already propagated by the leading opponent party, the TMC under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee. She called for ‘*poribortan*’ (change) and end the 34 years uninterrupted LF rule in the state of West Bengal. On the other hands, the LF also willing to form eighth consecutive LFG in West Bengal. The electorate of Bengal had to think about ‘*pratyabartan*’ (return) or ‘*paribortan*’ (change) in that election (Banerjee 2011, 15-16).

The Election Commission of India conducted polls of the 294 assemblies in six phases, spanning around almost two months from 18 April to 10 May, 2011. This time, the ECI arranged one phase more in comparison to the previous West Bengal Assembly election, 2006. Almost 5.62 cores voters were enlisted in the voter list of the state and almost 85 percent turned out to vote which was the highest turn out in the history of Bengal’s Assembly election (Dutta 2011, 1). In 2006 WB Assembly and 2009 Lok Sabha

election, the voter turned out were almost 82.5 per cent and 76.79 per cent respectively. Although there were few appeals to reject and boycott the electoral procedures by the Maoist in the district of Purulia, Bankura etc. In few places where people boycotted to vote due to some reason, but final voter turned out crossed all the previous records in the state. In 2011, the electoral fight was among three main coalition. These were- i) the CPM led Left Front, ii) the Congress led UPA where the TMC was the principal character in West Bengal in the election and iii) the BJP led NDA. The CPI(M) led LF had committed to form for a qualitatively better eighth LFG that would be different from the previous Left regimes, if they win the election (The Statesman 6 April 2011, 5)⁵².

In this election the LF's partners were- the CPI(M), the CPI, the FB, the RSP, the WBSP, the RCPI, Marxist Forward Block, the DSP, the RJD, the Biplabi Bangla Congress. Learning lesson from Singur and Nandigram (Anandabazar Patrika 17 March 2011, 7), the LF gave more focused in agriculture and industry in the electoral manifesto in this election (Dutta 2011, 1)⁵³. The LF chairman, Biman Bose announced the names of candidates in 292 constituencies (Chattapadhyay 2011, 1,4), except Kalimpong (Ananda Bazar Patrika 13 March 2011, 6) and Serampore on 12 March 2011 (The Statesman 14 March 2011, 1)⁵⁴.

The CPI(M) contested in 213 seats and could secure 30.08 per cent popular mandate along with 40 seats only. This was a serious debacle of the CPI(M) in comparison to the previous Assembly election 2006 in West Bengal. In the last election, the CPI(M) could secure 37.13 per cent votes along with 176 seats which is decreased by almost 7 per cent votes and 136 seats. Many principal faces like; Nirupam Sen, Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Sudarshan Raichaudhuri etc. lost in the election. A

⁵² In an attempt to convince the electorate about the Left Front's resolved to draw 'lesson' from the 'first ever defeat' it had suffered during the Red Regime then the Housing Minister, Goutam Deb remarked "*the LF, if returned to power, would form a government that would be qualitatively different from all previous government*". Goutam Deb also said "... if myself, the Chief Minister, and Mr. Nirupam Sen, all loses the poll and the LF wins around 190 seats". (The Statesman, 6th April, 2011, Kolkata, p. 5.)

⁵³ Releasing the electoral manifesto the Left Front Committee chairman Biman Bose said "*the new LF government will be focused on agriculture, industry, peace, democracy and progress in the State, if it returned to power .. ensuring dignity, development and employment to those who are in below poverty line are LF main objective*".

⁵⁴ In this election, the LF included 149 new faces along with 57 minority candidates. This time the LF dropped 9 minister and near about 100 sitting MLA in the list of candidates for 2011 assembly election. Ministers like; Partha De, Manab Mukherjee, Jogesh Burman, Binoy Krishna Biswash etc. was not enlisted as candidates.

senior CPI(M) leader, Nirupam Sen defeated from Bardhaman-Dakshin by 36916 votes to TMC candidate, Rabiranjana Chottapadhyay. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee lost from Jadavpur by almost sixteen thousand votes to TMC candidate Manis Gupta. Sudarshan Raychoudhuri lost the election from Jangipara by 13076 votes to TMC's Snehasish Chakraborty. The CPI contested in 14 seats and could manage to win only 2 along with 1.84 per cent votes which is decreased by 6 seats. Percentage of votes secured by the CPI was almost same in comparison with the last assembly election in 2006. The Forward Bloc contested in 34 seats and won only 11 along with 4.80 per cent valid votes which was decreased by 12 seats with 0.86 per cent votes in comparison with the 2006 Assembly election. The RSP contested in 23 seats and won only seven which was decreased by 13 seats and 0.75 percentage of votes. The other small allies of the LF, the WBSP, the RCPI(R), the DSP, the RJD had contested in 5, 2, 2 and 1 seats respectively. Only the WBSP and DSP managed to win one seat each. The combined seats won by the LF was only 62 which was decreased by 173 seats in comparison to the previous Assembly election in 2006. The vote shared by the LF was 41.05 per cent which was decreased by almost 9.13 per cent in comparison to the last West Bengal Assembly election, 2006 (T. ECI 2011, 13-15).

Mamata Banerjee led TMC had appeared in the election as a big challenge before the ruling Left. The party had already left the BJP led NDA alliance in 2009 and had joined hand with the Congress and become a part of the UPA-II in 2009 Lok Sabha election and established as a powerful political force in the state. In 2011, there was initially some problem due to seat adjustment between the TMC and Congress to form alliance. But, after the intervention of the Congress Chairperson Sonia Gandhi, the electoral alliance had finally done (The Statesman 22 March 2011, 1)⁵⁵. Although at the national level politics, the Congress was the principal political party of UPA alliance but in Bengal the TMC played the main role in opposing to the Left. The partners of the UPA were the Congress, the TMC, the NCP, the SUCI, the GNLF, the JMM, the PDS etc. The

⁵⁵ As per the Statesman report on 22 March, 2011 that brushing aside all acrimony, hurt-burns and bruised egos the congress formed an electoral alliance with TMC on 21st March, 2011 to fight the assembly election against the CPI(M) led LF. After returning from London Mrs Gandhi discussed with Pranab Mukherjee and agreed to take the offer of 64 seats for congress with some minor alteration. Hailing the alliance the TMC Chief Mamata Banerjee said *"we are indeed happy the Congress has formed the alliance in the historic fight to oust the Left Front from power. Our main aim is... to provide good governance and restore democracy in the state"*.

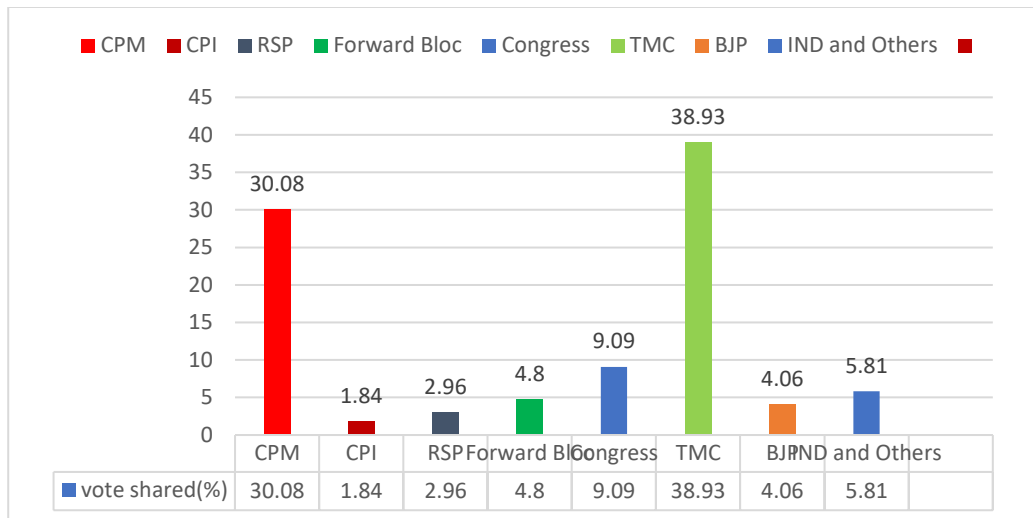
TMC Chief, Mamata Banerjee declared the list of the contesting candidates on 18 March 2011 for the election (Bhattacharya 2011, 1)⁵⁶.

The TMC contested in 226 seats and won 184 seats along with 38.93 per cent valid votes. This was increased by 154 seats and 12.29 per cent votes in comparison to the previous Assembly election in 2006. The Indian National Congress contested 66 seats and could win 42 along with 9.09 per cent vote. The result was interesting to everyone. The Congress increased its seats by 21 but lost sharing votes by 5.63 per cent in comparison to the 2006 Assembly elections. It was because of seat adjustment with the TMC. The SUCI contested in 30 seats but made alliance in only two seats with the TMC. In Kultali and Jaynagar constituency of North 24 Pargana district the TMC backed to the SUCI candidates. However, the Congress contested in these two seats named, Kultali and Jaynagar. The TMC-Congress alliance also offered support to a candidate of JKP(N), Chunibala Hansda who was defeated by CPI(M)'s candidate Dibakar Hansda at Binpur of Paschim Midnapore district. One NCP candidate from Dinhata assembly of Cooch Behar district contested the election with supported by the TMC-Congress alliance. The combined seats won by the UPA was 227 and vote shared was 48.35 per cent. The TMC and its allies increased votes by almost seven per cent and seats by number of 176 in comparison to the last election. After winning the election by huge mandate the TMC formed the government under the Chief Ministership of Mamata Banerjee, the first elected lady CM in the state. Although the party '*suprimo*' Mamata Banerjee had not contested in 2011 West Bengal Assembly election. She was elected as the chairperson of the TMC and nominated as the leader of Vidhan Sabha and the Chief Minister of West Bengal by her party, the TMC. Later within six months she contested in a by-election from Bhabanipur Vidhan Sabha and could secure win (T. ECI 2011, 320-393).

The BJP contested in 289 seats but failed to win a single one. The party secured only 4.06 per cent votes which was decreased by almost 2 per cent in comparison to the last Lok Sabha election in 2009. The allies of BJP, the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) contested in 3 seats and won all of them with gaining 0.72 per cent votes.

⁵⁶ Initially the TMC announced the list of 228 candidates and left 64 seats for the Congress and 2 seats for SUCI. At the time of declaring the names Mamata Banerjee said "*I waited 18 days (after the poll date announced) for the alliance, which could not be reached even after almost finalizing the seat-sharing arrangements*".

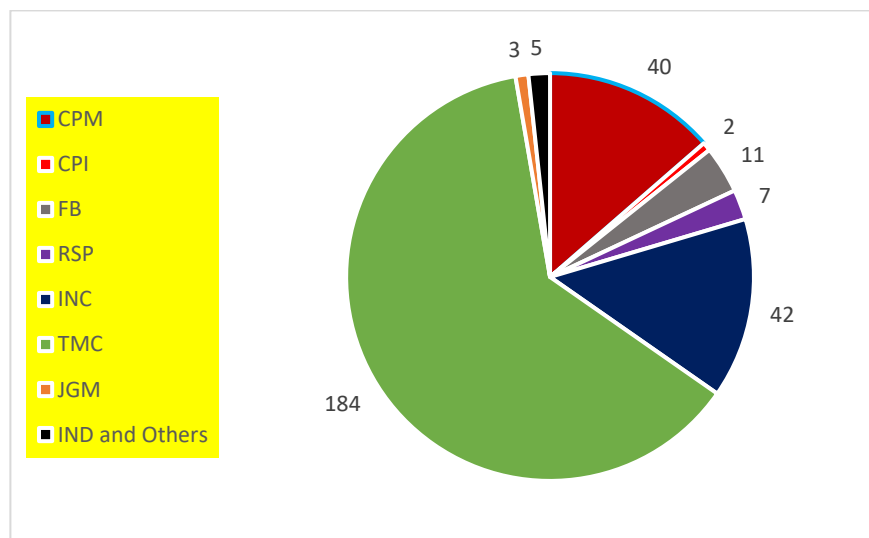
Percentage of votes shared by major political parties and alliances in 2011 WB Assembly election ⁵⁷.



Column Chart- 3.13

(Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

Seats won by major political parties in 2011 WB Assembly election.



Pie Chart -2.18

(Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

⁵⁷ The combined vote shared by LF was 41.05 per cent and the TMC-Congress alliance is 48.36 per cent. Some smaller allies of LF and TMC-Congress alliance has not given in the chart. It is also not included with Independents and the others. It is presented in table 1.1

Many important leaders of the LF like; Goutam Deb, Nirupam Sen, Kanti Ganguly, Asim Dasgupta, Asok Bhattacharyya etc. defeated in the election (TheStatesman 14 May 2011, 3). The LF lost its support base ground in all around the state. From North-Bengal to South-Bengal, urban to rural, the Left faced serious debacle in the election. In North Bengal, the LF could win only 16 seats out of 54 where the TMC led alliance won 33. However, in the district of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Uttar Dinajpur, the LF won a sizable seat but it failed to win a single seat in Darjeeling. In the district of Maldaha and Dakshin Dinajpur Left's performance was poor. The LF candidate won three seats in Maldaha out of 9 and only one seat in Dakshin Dinajpur out of five. However, the LF combined vote shared in North-Bengal was almost 1 percent more than the TMC led alliance, but it could not convert into winning of seats. LF's performance was also poor in the district of Murshidabad, Nadia, North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas in the 18, 17, 33 and 31 seats respectively. In the district of Murshidabad, Nadia, North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas the LF's candidates won 7, 3, 4 and 4 seats respectively.

The Left's performance was more tragic in the district of Kolkata, Howrah Hoogly and Purba Medinipur. In Howrah, Kolkata and Purba Medinipur the LF's candidates totally failed to win a single seat. All the 16 seats of Howrah district, 11 in Kolkata district and 16 seats of Purba Medinipur district won by TMC led alliance. However, only two candidates of LF alliance from Hoogly district could manage to register electoral victory in the election.

Table-1.2 Category-wise analysis seat shared and vote shared by major political parties in WB Assembly election result 2011.

Category	Total seats	Turnout	Left Front		TMC+		BJP		Others	
			Seats won	Vote (%)	Seats won	Vote (%)	Seats won	Vote (%)	Seats won	Vote (%)
SC	68	87.6	20	44.4	48	47.8	0	4.0	0	3.8
ST	16	85.4	10	40.0	5	36.0	0	6.3	1	17.7
General	210	83.9	32	40.0	174	49.5	0	3.9	4	6.6
Total	294	84.8	62	41.1	227	48.4	0	4.1	5	6.5

(Source: data compiled from www.eci.gov.in and election analysis was published in EPW on June 18-24, Vol. 46, No. 25 in 2011, pp. 142-146.)

Table- 1.3 Summary results of 2011 WB Assembly election⁵⁸

Political Party	No. of candidates contested	Seats won	Gain or loss of seats since 2006	Vote shared	Vote swing since	Alliance
CPI(M)+	213	40	-136	30.08	-7.05	Left Front
CPI	14	2	-6	1.84	0.07	
RSP	23	7	-13	2.96	-0.75	
AIFB	34	11	-12	4.80	0.86	
WBSP	5	1	-3	0.74	-0.15	
RCPI	02	0	0	0.23	+0.23	
DSP	2	1	0	0.35	-0.01	
RJD	1	0	-1	0.05	-0.03	
Left Front	294	62	-173	41.05	-9.13	
TMC	226	184	+154	38.93	+12.29	TMC+ Or UPA
Congress	66	42	+21	9.09	-5.63	
NCP	1	0	0	0.03	0.16	
SUCI (backed by TMC)	30(2)	1	+1	0.31	+0.31	
TMC + or UPA	294	227		+176	48.36	
BJP	289	0	0	4.06	+2.13	
JGM	3	3	+3	0.72	+0.072	
Independents And others	880+	2	-2	5.81	-0.72	
Total	1792	294	N.A.	100	N.A.	N.A.

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in

⁵⁸ i. Seats and vote changes since 2006 for Left Front and TMC+ constituents do not add up to the changes for the alliance as a whole because the composition of the alliances underwent a change after the last assembly elections. In 2006 election, the LF had also included NCP and LF backed few Independents. In 2006, the AITC/TMC was an alliance of the BJP led NDA. In 2011, the TMC had an alliance with the INC. So, for the purpose of calculating the seat change and vote swing between 2006 and 2011, TMC and INC figures of 2006 have been combined and the BJP has been kept separate.

ii. "Others" in 2011 include JDU, BSP, HMS, IUML, JDS, SMT, JNP, CPIML(L), RPI, JMM, JVM, RPI(A), LJNSP, SWJP, SJP(R), INL, AMB, AJSU, UP, GNLF, PDS, JKP(N), KSMUL, AIMF, SDPI and Other smaller parties.

iii. SUCI which contested 30 seats was supported by TMC on 2 seats in Kultali and Jaynagar where INC also contested. In 28 seats, the party pitted candidates against the Congress. The SUCI vote-share for those 28 seats has been included in 'Others'. Source: Detailed constituency level results downloaded from Election Commission of India website,

Region-wise and district-wise analysis - turnout and performance of major political Parties and their alliances in 2011 WB Assembly election⁵⁹.

Table: 1.4

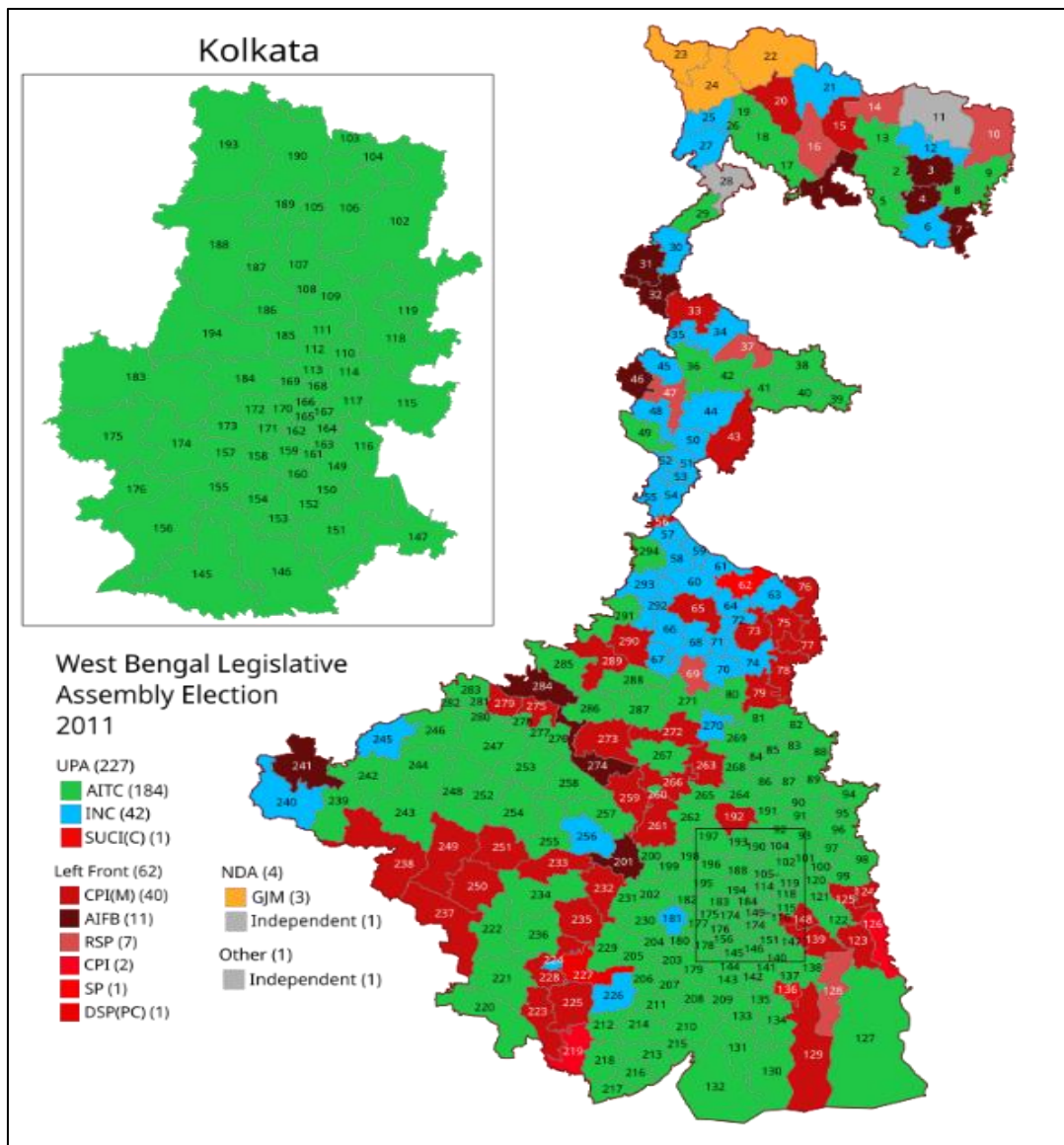
Regions	Total Seats	Turnout (%)	Left Front		TMC+		BJP		Others	
			Seats Won	Vote %	Seats Won	Vote %	Seats Won	Vote %	Seats Won	Vote %
North	54	84.2	16	39.8	33	38.8	0	5.2	5	16.2
Cooch Behar	9	86.1	4	45.4	5	39.1	0	5.1	0	10.3
Jalpaiguri	12	85.7	5	39.5	6	38.5	0	6.1	1	16.0
Darjeeling	6	79.6	0	23.2	3	24.4	0	2.1	3	50.3
Uttar Dinajpur	9	82.3	3	41.7	5	36.3	0	3.8	1	18.3
Dakshin Dinajpur	6	88.7	1	42.9	5	48.4	0	4.2	0	4.6
Maldaha	12	82.7	3	40.8	9	43.8	0	7.3	0	8.1
South East	71	87.1	18	41.9	53	47.9	0	4.3	0	6.0
Murshidabad	22	86.0	7	41.7	15	44.4	0	4.9	0	9.0
Nadia	15	87.7	3	40.6	12	48.7	0	5.0	0	5.7
North 24 Parganas	16	87.7	4	41.4	12	48.7	0	4.4	0	5.5
South 24 Parganas	18	87.3	4	43.7	14	50.3	0	2.8	0	3.2
Greater Kolkata	66	79.7	1	37.1	65	56.2	0	3.5	0	3.2
Nadia	2	90.3	0	42.3	2	50.5	0	3.8	0	3.4
North 24 Parganas	17	83.3	0	37.1	17	57.7	0	2.8	0	2.4
South 24 Parganas	13	80.7	0	38.2	13	55.7	0	2.3	0	3.8
Kolkata South	4	66.6	0	29.7	4	60.0	0	3.3	0	7.0
Kolkata North	7	65.7	0	32.7	7	59.3	0	4.3	0	3.7
Howrah	12	80.8	0	38.0	12	53.0	0	4.9	0	4.1
Hooghly	11	84.1	1	38.4	10	56.5	0	3.8	0	1.3
South West	103	86.9	27	43.5	76	48.4	0	3.7	0	4.4
Howrah	4	84.4	0	40.2	4	54.4	0	2.9	0	2.5
Hooghly	7	86.1	1	42.1	6	51.8	0	2.8	0	3.3
Purbo Medinipur	16	90.2	0	43.0	16	52.3	0	2.9	0	1.8
Paschim Medinipur	19	88.5	9	44.6	10	46.6	0	3.5	0	5.4
Purulia	9	81.1	2	41.5	7	42.7	0	2.8	0	13.0
Bankura	12	87.1	3	43.8	9	47.1	0	4.0	0	5.1
Bardhaman	25	86.3	9	44.8	16	48.5	0	3.9	0	2.8
Birbhum	11	86.9	3	42.3	8	47.1	0	6.5	0	4.1
Total	294	84.8	62	41.1	227	48.4	0	4.1	5	6.5

Source (www.eci.gov.in) and also followed and compared with data published in the election analysis of EPW on June 18-24, Vol. 46, No. 25 in 2011, pp. 142-146.

⁵⁹ 1. Others" in this table and in Table 2B, 2C and 2D include JDU, BSR HMS, IUML, JDS, SMT, JNP, CPIML(L), RPI, JMM, JVM, RPI(A), UNSP, SWJR SJP(R), INL, AMB, AJSU, UP, SUCI(C), GNLF, PDS, JKP(N), KSMUL, AIMF, SDPI, GJM, Other smaller parties and Independents.

2. Regional classification in West Bengal does not follow the district boundaries with some urban constituencies of the districts of North and South 24 Parganas, Nadia, Hooghly and Howrah lying cheek-by-jowl with the Kolkata district. These constituencies with AC ID 92, 93, 102, 104, 107, 118, 119, 137, 140, 144, 174-8, 180, 184, 188, 189, 198-202 are included in Greater Kolkata region.

Region wise seat shared by major political parties in WB Assembly election, 2011.



Map: 4.10 (Source: this picture is collected from www.eci.gov.in (This picture not measured by scale. It is presented to show the region wise winning seats of the political parties only)

The LF did relatively well in the district of Paschim Medinipur, where the Front's candidates succeed to win 9 seats out of 19. The remaining 10 seats won by TMC led alliance. In the Purulia and Bankura district where the LF faced challenge by Maoist, the LF could win only 2 and 3 seats out of 7 and 9 seats respectively. The LF also suffered seriously in its 'Red Forte' ('*Lal Durgo*') Bardhaman where the LF won nine seats out of 25. And finally, in Birbhum, the main part of '*Rarh*' Bengal the LF won only 3 seats out of 11. The region wise result did not go in favour of the LF. Not only the northern region but also the south east, south west and greater Kolkata the Left totally failed to

win public support. In the greater Kolkata region, the LF won only one seat out of 66. The LF had been rejected by the metropolitan 'bhadralok' this time.

The result showed that the LF not only failed to collect public support in the Kolkata region, it also failed to win the support of the rural and semi-urban voters also. Some reserved seats where the LF was in a strong support base that had also lost this time. In the 68 seats reserved for SC community, the LF could win only 20. If the LF did well in the seats reserved for ST candidate where the LF won 10 seats out of 16 (Table-1.6). Since 1977, the LF's important vote bank was the voters of the Muslim community. But this time, the LF also failed to gather their support also. The LF candidates could win only 25 seats out of 87 seats where the voters of the Muslim community play crucial role to elect winning candidate. So, in this election the opposition not only consolidated towards the TMC led alliance, but the left basic vote banks also started to eroded and has been shifted towards the TMC.

Although, the LF's topmost leadership had confident to form the eighth LF Government after the first phase poll⁶⁰ (TheHindu 19 April 2011, 8) and also after publication of exit poll in several news and media on 11 May, just two days before the declaration of the final result by the Election Commission of India. But on 13 May, the final result carried out disaster for the Left, the CPI(M) in particular. The Left was totally defeated in the election. TMC led alliance secured massive victory and Mamata Banerjee took oath as the Chief Minister of Bengal on 26th day of May, 2011. After accepting the popular verdict of the Bengal's electorate, the LF took the charge of a responsible opposition in the state legislature (TheHindu 14 May 2011, 11)⁶¹. In a joint statement on 14 May, 2011, by the Left Front chairman Biman Bose and senior CPI(M) leader Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee remarked "*it is an unexpected mandate. The Left Front humbly accepts the people's verdict and promises to be a responsible opposition*" (Ghosal 2011, 1). Another senior CPI(M) leader and former Health Minister, Suryakanta Mishra was elected as the leader of oppositions in the state legislature. Former Irrigation Minister,

⁶⁰ After the first phase poll, the Left Front's chairman said to some news media "*we will win the majority there .. we know that the eight Left Front government will be formed*".

⁶¹ The CPI(M) accepted the WB verdict and one of its Polit Bureau said "after the left being its office for a record of 34 years continuously, the people of opted for a change. The TMC led combined has been the beneficiary of this change... the CPI(M) and Left forces will not only continue to work for the people in West Bengal and in Kerala but will vigorously pursue the struggle against the neo-liberal economic policies, defend the livelihood and interest of the working people and combat communalism . . . in the country'

Subhas Naskar as was the elected MLA of Revolutionary Socialist Party from Basanti constituency in South 24 Parganas district also elected as the Deputy Leader of the Oppositions. (TheHindu 28 May 2011, 1)⁶².

Table- 1.5 Dominant community-wise analysis of performance of Major alliances in 2011 W.B. Assembly election⁶³.

Category	Total seats	Turnout	Left Front		TMC+		BJP		Others	
			Seats won	Vote (%)	Seats won	Vote (%)	Seats won	Vote (%)	Seats won	Vote (%)
Muslim 30% and above	87	85.4	25	41.8	61	45.3	0	4.6	1	8.3
SC 30% and Above	89	87.4	28	43.7	61	46.7	0	4.5	0	5.1
ST 30% and above	8	83.4	5	37.9	02	29.5	0	5.5	1	27.1

Source: data compiled from www.eci.gov.in and election analysis was published in EPW on June 18-24,

Locality-wise analysis, performance of major alliances in 2011 W.B. Assembly election⁶⁴.

Table- 1.6

Category	Total seats	Turn out	Left Front		TMC+		BJP		Others	
			Seats won	Vote (%)	Seats won	Vote (%)	Seats won	Vote (%)	Seats won	Vote (%)
Rural	197	86.9	57	42.7	136	45.7	0	4.2	4	7.4
Semi Urban	45	85.3	5	39.4	39	50.5	0	3.9	1	6.2
Urban	52	76.8	0	36.0	52	57.1	0	3.6	0	3.3
Total	294	84.8	62	41.1	227	48.4	0	4.1	5	6.5

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in and election analysis was published in EPW on June 18-24,

⁶² Making announcement of these names, the chairman of West Bengal State Left Front Committee said “we will not be nominating anyone for the post of speaker. . the party MLAs will have to learn the ropes so that they are able to fulfil the role of responsible opposition. Of the 62 LF MLAs, 31 have been elected for the first time”.

⁶³ The classification of constituencies by religious groups is based on Census 2001 and description of constituency boundary provided by the Delimitation Commission 2002. However, it may be noted that census does not provide information on religion below Tehsil/Taluka/Block level and that a constituency often cuts across these administrative units. So, in order to arrive at constituency level estimates of religious groups, the ‘principle of proportionality’ was used to aggregate and disaggregate population below these administrative units. It may also be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive, since the constituencies falling in each category defined by concentration of one community can and do overlap with concentration of another community as well.

⁶⁴ Rural constituencies are those constituencies where 75 per cent or more electors live in rural areas. Semi Urban constituencies are those constituencies where more than 25 per cent but less than 75% of electors live in urban areas. Urban constituencies are those constituencies where 75 per cent or more electors live in urban areas. The classification of constituencies is based on Census 2001 and description of constituency boundary provided by the Delimitation Commission 2002 read with the urban/rural location indicated on the top sheet of electoral rolls for each Polling Booth Area. Computation and classification done by the CSDS Data Unit.

Uday Basu argued that “Singur and Nandigram played their historic roles. They were symptoms and not the disease that plagued Bengal Marxist. The collapse of Left rule could not be brought by the development in the nondescript semi-urban and rural blocks of the state alone. They provided the fuse that detonated the people’s pent-up anger, frustration and sense of betrayal by the Left” (U. Basu 2012, 54).

After the debacle in 2011 Assembly election, the crisis of the LF in West Bengal had been unfolded continuously. Although, the leading partners of the LF took many steps to collect public support, but as the result has been gone in favour of the non-Left ruling, the TMC. The Left’s support base has been continuously decreased. A large portion of popular support has been openly started to shift towards the ruling party, the TMC. The left parties, specially, the CPI(M) was trying to manage such decrease. Different types of steps have been taken by the party to control and overcome the situations. Not only the supporters of the party, the members of the branch organisations of the left partis have been also decreased after 2011. The student wing of the CPI(M), the SFI lost almost five lakh members in between the year of 2010 to 2012 (TheStatesman 22 August 2012, 13)⁶⁵. Left parties declared strike, organised rallies, civil disobedience movement in the state and the country for social and political mobilization in favour of them. As an example;

First: The CPI(M) raised and mention some important issues in the 20th CPI(M) party-congress during 4-9 April, 2012 at Kozhikode. Prakash Karat was re-elected as the general secretary for third consecutive term (Bose 2012, 4). The Kozhikode party-congress was notable for the reconstitution of the politburo and the central committee pre-eminently the retention of former West Bengal’s CM Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and exclusion V. S. Achutandan. The leader of opposition of Bengal Assembly and CPI(M) leader Suryakanta Mishra was included within the new politburo as a new face (Chakraborty 2012, 1). In this party-congress the roadmap for the future activities of the CPI(M) has been prepared. Another important issue raised in this party congress that the individual responsibility for the party which was technically raised by Sitaram Yechurry (Chakraborty and Choudhury 2012, 1). In this party-congress Prakash Karat criticised the

⁶⁵ Addressing the annual conference of the SFI at Kolkata on 21st August, 2012, the state secretary of the student organisation, Sayandip Mitra said “we had 12 Lakh members in 2010, but the present figure stands at 7,11,220. Since the new government came to power at 13th May, 2011 we have been forced out of several colleges. Dipak Mitra, the general secretary of All Bengal Municipal Workmen’s Federation remarked that such kind of incident taken place within their organisation also.

policy taken by Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's government regarding Singur and Nandigram (Bose 2012b, 1).

Second: The LF organised a law violation programme at Esplanade in Kolkata, on 17 July, 2012 against hike of price and proposed FDI bill by the central government. Hundreds of LF leaders and workers took part in this programme (TheStatesman 18 July 2012, 1).

Third: The LF had called 12 hours strike across the nation on 20 September, 2012 for protesting of the UPA-II government's step to hike diesel price, allow FDI in retail, restriction on subsidise LPG cylinder (TheAsianAge 17 Sept. 2012, 9)⁶⁶. The BJP led NDA already announced nationwide strike on that same day. This was criticised and opposed by the Mamata Banerjee's government⁶⁷.

Fourth: The LF had also started 50-day-signature campaign for on 3rd December, 2012 in support of food security in support of the people of every section of society. Former CM, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Front's chairman Biman Bose, Forward Bloc leader Ashok Ghosh etc. launched the programme at Kolkata. But they faced many obstacles to organised such program. Addressing a gathering in Kolkata, the LF chairman, Biman Bose said *"foodgrains are being wasted in warehouses of the government, rats are eating it away and people are dying out of hunger"* (TheHindu 18 December 2012, 5)⁶⁸.

Fifth: The CPI(M) took steps for anti-party activities against some leaders during this time. The CPI(M) suspended senior leader Anil Basu for anti-party activity on to build a good image of the party (Ajkal 11 June 2012, 1,5). Anil Basu criticised this decision of the party (TheTelegraph 11 June 2012, 7). In the month of April of that year Anil Basu was suspended by the CPI(M). The CPM faced huge embarrassment due to him in the last Vidhan Sabha election. So, many controversies had raised due to him. Before the suspension, he had already dropped from party's state committee (TheStatesman 30 April 2012, 5).

⁶⁶ The CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat announced the strike in at West Bengal party headquarters at Alimuddin Street. Prakash Karat said that "we have decided to call a 12 hours all India general strike after discussing the issue with other political parties".

⁶⁷ West Bengal panchayat minister Subrata Mukherjee said *"the left's call for band is influenced by jealousy and greed. L. K. Adbani and Biman Bose have become one now. . all necessary measures will be taken on our part to keep public life normal in the state"*.

⁶⁸ The LF had set a target to collect 1.5 core signature during the campaign. The leader of opposition of the assembly Mr. Suryakanta Mishra said "there is no urgency shown on the part of government to implement food security, but it has hurried allowed foreign direct investment".

16th Lok Sabha Election, 2014:

After the defeat in 2011, the left parties under the LF have been appeared before another election in 2014. The 16th Lok Sabha election was conducted by the Election Commission of India through nine phases from 7 April to 12 May throughout the country (Deccan Herald 6 March 2014, 1). The West Bengal had experienced last five phases election from 17 April to 12 May. This was the longest time taking election in the state in terms of Lok Sabha election (Muder 2014, 1). This time, there was an anti-incumbency and trend to change the Congress led UPA-II government at the centre. Due to the grievances of several scams like; Commonwealth games, 2G spectrum, Coalgate scams etc. the UPA-II was in backfoot situation in this election at the national level. The BJP with the voice of '*agli bar Modi Sarkar*' (next time Modi government) had appeared as a strong political force. So, there was a clear sign of the change of political power at the centre under the leadership of Narendra Modi.

In West Bengal, this was the first election when the LF fought the electoral battle as an opposition in state after 1977. The TMC was ruling the state for only three years and there were no any strong issues for the Left against the ruling party to approach and mobilise the electorate of Bengal. The CPI(M) this time, also has appeared in the election with seat adjustment among its partners; the CPI, the RSP and the FB. The CPI(M) contested in 32 Parliamentary constituencies in the state but could win only 2 with 22.96 per cent popular vote. The winning MPs of CPI(M) from Bengal were MD. Selim from Raiganj and Badaruddoza Khan from Murshidabad Lok Sabha constituency. This was again a debacle for the CPI(M) in comparison with 2009 Lok Sabha and 2011 Vidhan Sabha election when the party secured 33.1 per cent and 30.08 per cent votes respectively.

The other allies of the LF, the CPI, the RSP, the FB contested 3, 4 and 3 seats in Bengal, but unsuccessful to win a single one. The CPI, the RSP and the FB secured 2.36 per cent, 2.46 per cent and 2.17 per cent popular votes respectively. These LF partners also faced crisis in comparison to the 2009 Lok Sabha and 2011 WB Assembly election. In 2009 Lok Sabha election, all the LF's partners won only two seats. Although there were some exit polls by several media to win a minimum number of seats and sizable votes for the LF in the beginning of the year 2014 (AnandaBazarPatrika 25 January

2014, 1)⁶⁹. Exit polls published after the election in different media has showed decreased the support of the Left (AnandaBazarPatrika 14 May 2014, 1). But the final result was not matched to the exit polls reports which remained more disasters for the Left. The LF could secure only two Lok Sabha seats in the state with almost 30 per cent popular votes (Roy 2014, 1). This was decreased by almost 11 percent of vote in comparison of 2011 West Bengal assembly election and almost thirteen percent of vote in comparison to 2009 Lok Sabha election (T. ECI 2014, 7-29).

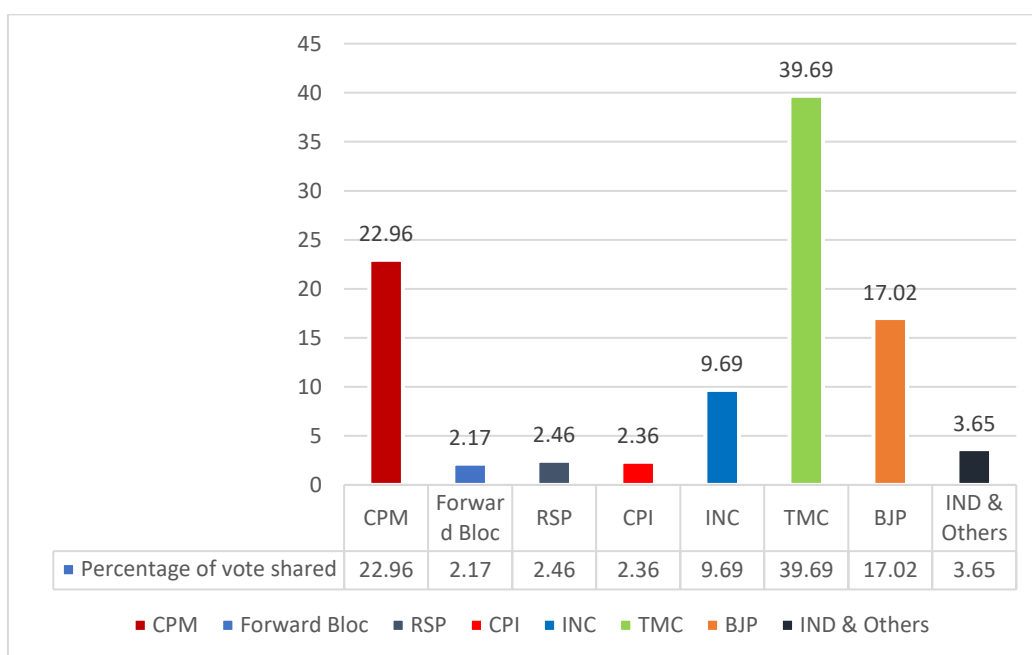
16th Lok Sabha election in terms of West Bengal was interesting to everyone due its nature of alliance among the major political parties. The TMC contested by making alliance either the Congress or the BJP after its birth in 1998 to the previous election in the year of 2011. But, this time, the TMC fought the electoral battle alone. There was no any electoral alliance in Bengal by any right-wing political party except the alliance by some left minded political parties, the LF. The TMC fought alone against three major political forces; the BJP, the Congress and the LF, the party established itself as the most powerful political force in Bengal in terms of winning seats and sharing votes. The TMC, this time could win 34 Parliamentary seats and 39.69 per cent popular votes (Chottapadhyay 2014, 1,14). It was increased by almost 1 per cent more in comparison to the previous West Bengal Assembly election in 2011.

The rest of the country was witnessing a saffron surge but the Bengal was becoming greener (TheTimesOfIndia 17 May 2014, 1). This was the highest tally of the party since it is born in the land of Bengal. Although it was also raised many questions before the common people due to its some booth centric result (Biswash 2014, 6)⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ A survey report was published in Ananda Bazar Patrika on 25 January, 2014. The survey of three media, ABP Ananda- AC Nielson, Ajtak C Voter and IBN AC DCS where ABP Ananda-AC Nielson's report showed that Left could get almost 34 percent vote and 13 Lok Sabha seats. According to Ajtak C Voter the Left could win 16 seats and according to IBN AC DCS survey the Left could win 7-13 seats.

⁷⁰ Some polling booth centric result raised many questions regarding the success of the TMC. As examples booth number 99, 100, 101 and 102 in Haroah Vidhan Sabha of Basirhat Lok Sabha, the number of total votes polled 863, 877, 642 and 675 respectively. The TMC candidate got 853, 857, 607 and 624 votes respectively. The LF candidate got 1, 4, 15 and 13 votes in the booths respectively. The BJP candidate got 3,6,11 and 33 votes respectively and the Congress candidate got 3, 13, 9 and 5 votes respectively. Polling booth number 215, 216, 218, 222 and 224 of Garbeta Vidhan Sabha in Jhargram Lok Sabha, the total vote polled 759, 737, 896, 547 and 1014 where the TMC candidate got 743, 816, 874, 531 and 1005. The LF candidate got 5,5,8,3 and 4 votes respectively. The BJP candidate got 9, 12, 8, 12 and 2 votes respectively. The Congress candidate got 2, 4, 6, 1 and 3 votes. Same kind of picture has seen at many polling booths of Keshpur Vidhan Sabha of Ghatal Parliamentary constituency, Kotulpur Vidhan Sabha of Bishnupur Lok Sabha, Magrahat in Jaynagar Lok Sabha, Natabari in Coochbehar Lok Sabha, Bolpur, Nanoor, Labhpur, Mayureswar, Ketugram Vidhan Sabha of Bolpur Lok Sabha.

Votes shared by major political parties in West Bengal in 2014 Lok Sabha election

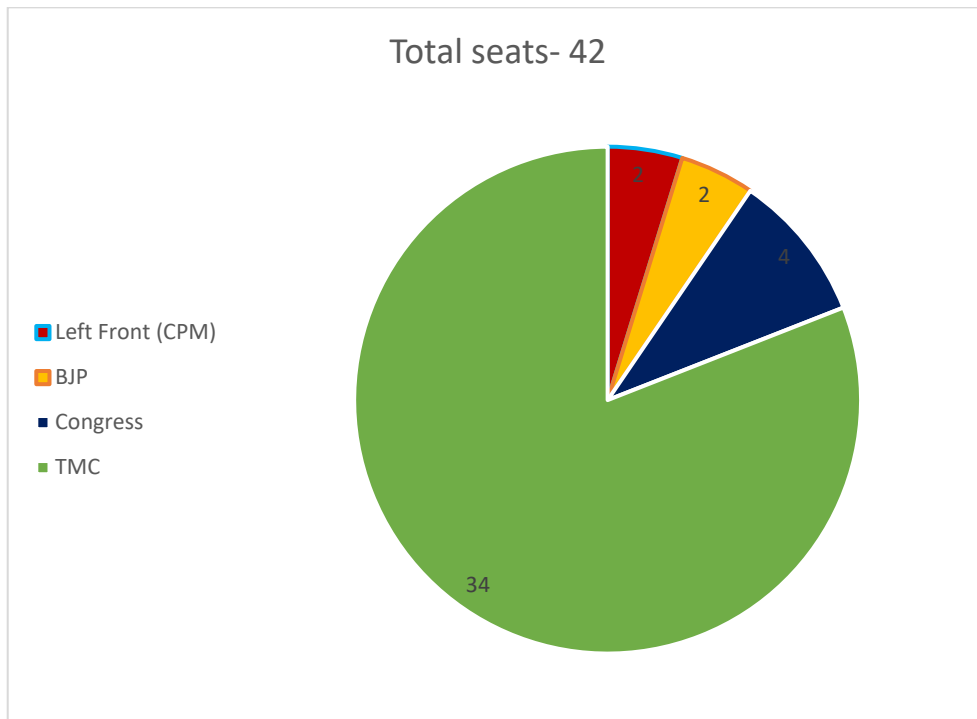


Column chart- 3.14

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in (Data prepared on the basis of the votes polled in 42 Parliamentary Constituencies of WB only.)

The Congress and the BJP also contested in the election without any alliance with any major state party in West Bengal. The Congress contested in all the 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal but could win only 4 by sharing 9.69 per cent popular votes. Mausam Noor from Maldaha Uttar (Malda North), Abu H.K. Chowdhury from Maldaha Dakshin (Malda South), Abhijit Mukherjee from Jangipur and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury from Baharampur were the Congress' MPs who could manage to win. The vote shared by the Congress was almost remained same in comparison to the previous Lok Sabha election in 2009, but the party decreased winning number seats by two. The success of the Congress was restricted in the district of Malda and Murshidabad only.

Seats won by major political parties in West Bengal in 2014 Lok Sabha election ⁷¹.



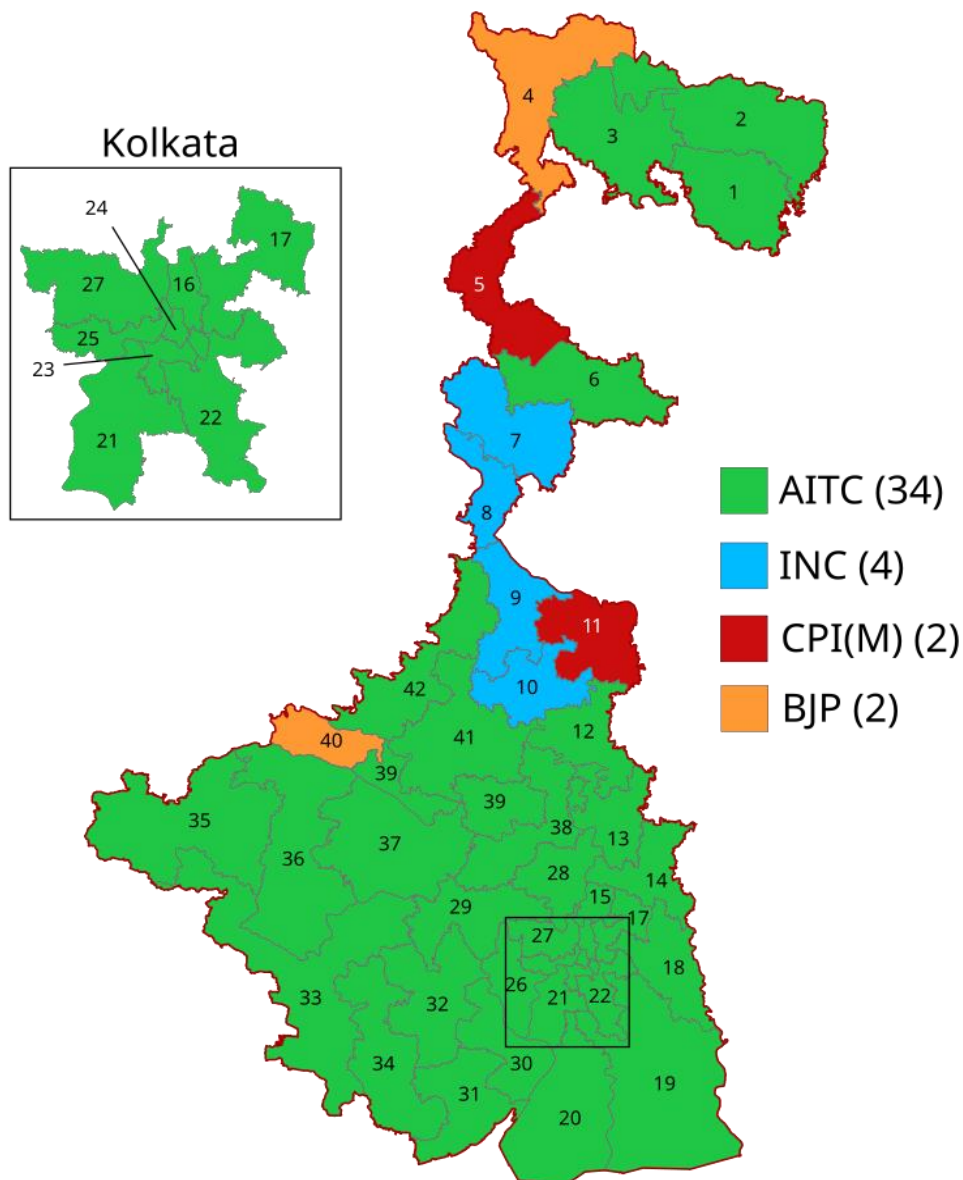
Pie Chart- 2.19

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in

The BJP, this time has presented as an emerging political force in Bengal by winning two Lok Sabha seats and 17.02 per cent popular votes. Although, the BJP led NDA secured 334 Lok Sabha Seats across the country where the BJP could secure 282 alone. But in West Bengal, the BJP managed to win only two Lok Sabha seats. S. S. Ahluwalia from Darjeeling and Babul Supriyo from Asansol Lok Sabha seats. The BJP has not only increased its number of winning seats but also increased the vote share in terms of all the previous elections of Lok Sabha and West Bengal Vidhan Sabha. In 1991, the BJP shared almost 11 per cent votes in West Bengal, but thereafter, the party had not been crossed over 10 percent of vote share till 2011.

⁷¹ The pie chart is prepared on the basis of 42 Parliamentary constituencies in West Bengal only. The LF had three other allies like; the CPI, the RSP and the Forward Block who fought the electoral battle in 2014, but could not secured any single seats.

Seat sharing picture of different political parties in Lok Sabha election, 2014 in West Bengal.



Map: 4.11

Source: The picture collected from www.eci.gov.in

The result of 16th Lok Sabha election unfolded deeper crisis for the Left not only in Bengal but also all around the country. The Left parties won only 10 Lok Sabha seats in all around the country where the CPI won only one seat from the state of Kerala. The remaining nine MPs of the Left were CPI(M)'s candidates, among them five from the state of Kerala, two from the state of Tripura which was still then a bastion of Left and two from West Bengal. The Left also has decreased its vote share at the national level in

comparison to the 15th Lok Sabha election in 2009. The CPI reduced from 1.4 per cent in 2009 to 0.8 in 2014 and the CPI(M) decreased its vote share from 5.3 per cent in 2009 to 3.2 per cent in 2014. The crisis of the Left has seen much deeper in West Bengal where the Parliamentary Left had a strong hold for almost for four decades.

The Left faced serious crisis in terms of public support in almost each area of the state, except some part of the district of Murshidabad and North Dinajpur. Asansole is an industrial belt constituency of Bardhaman district, presently Paschim Bardhaman (West Burdwan) where the Left had a stronghold for long time due its organised working-class supporters. But in this election, the Left candidate got third position in terms of vote share where the BJP secured first position and the TMC secured the second. Even in different parts of greater Kolkata where the Left was supported by the pavement, street hawkers, daily workers, slum dwellers etc. the Left also failed to gain sizable support. Although, there were many charges made by the left against the ruling TMC of large-scale ballot-rigging, but the ultimate outcome was that the Left was alienated itself from its core support base areas. It was also same in the agriculture base district like Birbhum, Bankura, east part of Burdwan where once the Left had strong '*red fort*'. All of these went in favour of the TMC, the main political rival of the Left in the state of Bengal that time.

The crisis of the left parties was also continuing after the 16th Lok Sabha election. In the municipal election in 2015, the Left again decreased its support based at various urban areas. In this election, the Left secured majority in only six municipalities in the state which was decreased by three in contrast of 2010 municipal election in Bengal (The Times of India 29 April 2015, 1). In the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) election the Left also decreased its support. In the KMC election, the LF registered win at only 15 wards out of 144 wards which was decreased by 18 in comparison to the 2010 KMC election (HTCorrespondence 29 April 2015, 1).

The ruling TMC again increased its win in the election by winning 70 municipalities out of 92 in the state including the KMC. In the KMC election, the TMC won 114 wards out of 144 which was increased by 19 in comparison to the 2010 KMC election. If, after declaration of the polling booth wise votes shared, the opponent including the Left raised many questions behind the success of the TMC (AnandaBazarPartika 2015, 1). Not only in the municipal election, the Left also

decreased its vote share in Bangaon Parliamentary constituency and Krishnaganj assembly by-poll in February, 2015, just before the municipal election in the state. The vote shared by the Left decreased by almost five percent in comparison to the last Lok Sabha election at those constituency in 2014 (Sarkar 2015, 1). In the Krishnaganj Vidhan Sabha by-election the Left also decreased its vote shared in comparison to the 2011 and 2014 by almost 10 per cent and 12 per cent respectively.

Another important factor was seen with the result of by-polls and municipal election that the BJP was rising as an alternative political force before the electorate of Bengal. In the Bangaon Lok Sabha area, the BJP secured almost 25 per cent votes which increased by six percent in comparison to the 2014 Lok Sabha and almost 22 per cent in respect of 2011 Assembly election (Bera 2015, 1). In Bangoan, the BJP added almost 70,000 thousand votes and the CPI(M) decreased by almost 77,000 votes compared with 2014 Lok Sabha. Although, the CPI(M) secured second position and was ahead but the difference of vote shared decreased between them significantly. In the Krishnaganj assembly by-poll, the BJP got almost 11,000 more votes than the CPI(M) (TheHindu 17 Feb. 2015, 1). However, the votes shared by the TMC almost remained same in Bangoan Lok Sabha compared to 2014 and decreased by almost three percent in Krishnaganj compared to 2011 election. But the party finally, registered victory again and stayed ahead from the Left and the BJP (TheHindu 17 Feb. 2015, 1)⁷².

The Left in Bengal were taking preparation for 2016 West Bengal State Assembly election also. In between this time, there were some changed of leadership of the CPI(M) at the national level. Sitaram Yechury was elected as the Party's All India General Secretary at Vizag (Vishakapattanam) in the 21st CPI(M) party-congress in April, 2015 (Chatterji 2015, 1). Two new faces from Bengal, Md. Salim and Hannan Mollah was included in the list of Politburo. After electing as the general secretary, Yechury focused on 'Left Unity' (Theodore 2015, 1)⁷³. Yechury remarked "*communist unity is not merger on the basis of tactical consideration, but will have to be on ideological and programmatic consideration. After all, why did the left split in the first place? Those*

⁷² Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said "people have replied to all the conspiracies. The Trinamool is committed to the people at the grassroots level. That is why they (oppositions) hatch so many... we are transparent enough".

⁷³ Sitaram Yechury said "our task is to strengthen the unity of the left and democratic forces. The unmistakable conclusion of this congress is the crisis of capitalism continues to deepen in the world. And there is no alternative except to strengthen the struggle for socialism".

ideological issues have to be resolved first. ... the agenda is working together, that will be much more sustainable” (Joshua 2015, 5).

West Bengal Assembly Election 2016: Amazing Alliance with Congress

Just after one year of the 21st party-congress of the CPI(M) and debacle in the municipal election, including Kolkata Municipal Corporation election, the Left parties under the leadership of the CPI(M) in Bengal was appeared before another crucial election in the state of Bengal. It was the 16th West Bengal Assembly election for the electorate of Bengal which was first as opposition to the Left after 1977 in terms of Assembly election. As the left parties under the CPI(M)-led LF already had been suffering in all the elections since 2011 in the state of West Bengal. So, this election was very much crucial for the Left because they had to prove their active presence in the Bengal politics again.

The Left had already been decreased its large number of popular supports from almost every section of the society in Bengal in the span of just five years since 2011, the year of the tragic debacle in the assembly election. So, the Left in Bengal raised a voice for combine electoral fight against the ruling TMC in the state. The CPI(M)’s state unit in Bengal was trying hard to make an electoral adjustment with the Congress’s state unit (Acharya and Chakraborty 2016, 1). Because the TMC-Congress alliance had already ended just after the election of 15th West Bengal Vidhan Sabha in 2011. Although there were a lot of different opinions among the national level leadership and state level leadership of the CPI(M) and the other allies of the LF (TheStatesman 8 April 2016, 1)⁷⁴. There were also some confusions and different opinions between the Left and the Congress (Bartaman 14 March 2016, 1). Initially, the politburo of the CPI(M) had denied the electoral adjustment with the Congress but finally, the state leadership succeed to form the alliance (Bagchi and Das 2014, 12).

The Election Commission of India has declared the six phases of polls on 4 March, 2016, for West Bengal Assembly including three other states; Assam, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Although the Assam was scheduled for two-phases election but Kerala and Tamil Nadu had only a single phase on 16 May, 2016 (Pandey 2016, 1). But in West Bengal the poll was scheduled from 4 April to 16 May and the result was declared on 19

⁷⁴ General secretary Sitaram Yechury denied to share any platform for electoral campaign with congress leader Rahul Gandhi. He said it was an alliance due to the need of the state CPIM. Ei Somoy (Bengali), “*ek CPM-e anek sur* (Many voices in one CPIM)”, 8th April, 2016, p. 1

May. The opposition parties in Bengal wanted multi-phase elections but the ruling TMC raised many arguments for ECI's steps for multi-phase elections (TheTimesOfIndia 5 March, 2016, 1)⁷⁵.

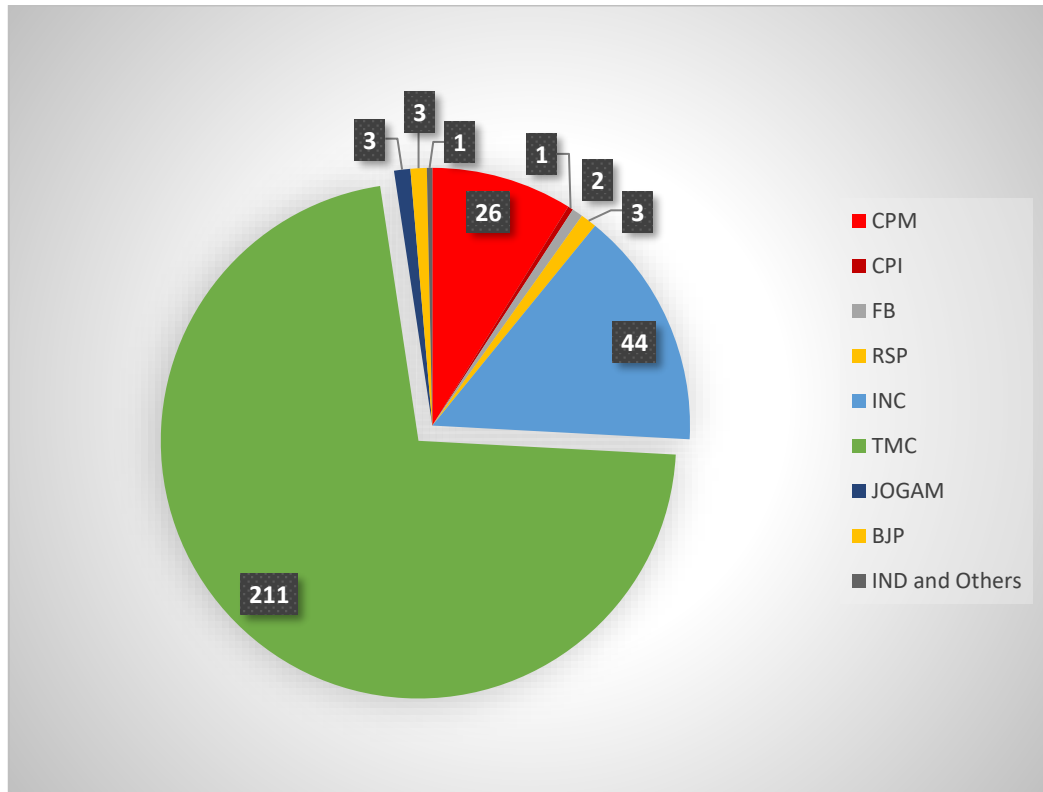
The left parties under the LF, finally, contested the 16th West Bengal Assembly election by joining hands with the Congress. The CPI(M), this time contested in 148 seats across the state and could win only 26 which was the lowest performance for the party since 1977. In 2011, the party had 42 seats. It decreased by 16 in 2016 in comparison to the 2011. Not only the winning seats, the party also decreased its vote share. The CPI(M) managed to collect almost 19.75 per cent popular votes which was decreased by almost 22 per cent in respect of the previous Assembly election in 2011 and decreased by almost three per cent in comparison to the previous Lok Sabha election in 2014. Many important leaders including the leader of the oppositions Surya Kanta Misra defeated in the election. Misra defeated from Narayangarh, an Assembly constituency of Paschim Midnapore district. Although there was a hope for Mishra's win that time, because the Bengal CPI(M) wanted to be revived under the leadership of him. But that hope had not lived. Mishra defeated by almost 13500 votes to TMC's Prodyut Kumar Ghosh (T. ECI 2016).

The other LF partners like; the CPI, the RSP, the AIFB, the WBSP etc. also contested in the election. The CPI contested in 11 seats and could secure only one with 1.45 per cent popular votes which was decreased by 1 seat and 0.4 per cent vote share in comparison to the 2011. The AIFB contested in 25 assemblies and won only 2 with 2.82 per cent popular vote which was also decreased by 9 seats and almost 2 per cent votes in comparison to the 2011 election. The RSP also contested in the election, but the party made alliance in some seats and contested independently. The RSP contested in 19 seats, among them the party contested as the broader part of Left-Congress alliance at 10 seats like; Moynaguri, Chatna, Balurghat, Basanti, Gosaba, Kumargram, Madarihat, Bolpur etc. But at the other nine seats like; Bharatpur, Suti, Raghunathganj, Burwan, Nowda, Tapan, Alipurduar, Kalchini and Malatipur, the party contested as independent candidates. The RSP secured to win only 1.67 per cent popular votes including 3 seats

⁷⁵ TMC '*suprimo*' and the CM of Bengal remarked "I don't want to comment on EC but would prefer to call it a political conspiracy the Congress, BJP and CPM have all conspired against us. They can't fight us politically so they are restoring such tactics".

only which is decreased by 4 seats and almost 1.3 per cent vote share in comparison to the 2011 Vidhan Sabha election in Bengal (Bhattacharyya 2016b, 5).

Seats shared by major political parties in 2016 West Bengal Assembly election

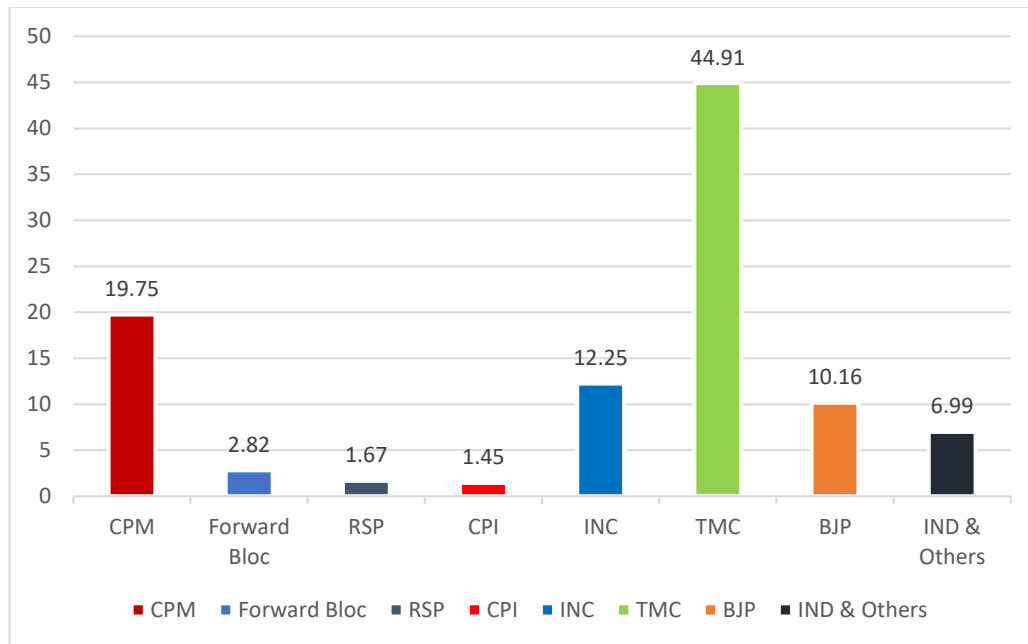


Pie-chart : 2.20

Source: Data prepared from www.eci.gov.in

The other allies of the LF like; the RCPI(R), WBSP, DSP etc. also contested in the election but also decreased their performance. So, the entire LF secured almost 26 per cent vote and 32 seats. The CPI(M) not only decreased its vote-share and seat-share but also lost the position of main opposition political party in the West Bengal Vidhan Sabha because it trailed behind the Congress by 16 seats which was also tragic for the Left.

Percentage of vote shared by major political parties in 2016 West Bengal assembly election.



Column Chart- 3.15

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in

The Congress has also contested in the Assembly election as a strong political force in the West Bengal. This election was also interesting and unprecedented in terms of electoral alliance for the Left and the Congress both. After the birth of the TMC, the Congress made electoral alliance with the TMC for two times in the horizon of West Bengal politics i.e. in 2001 and 2011 Assembly elections. That was such an alliance between the two right-wing political parties but, this time the Right-Left electoral adjustment surprised the electorate of Bengal. Although there were some different opinions among the leadership at national level and the state level of the Congress and within the state leadership also. But finally, the Congress agreed for seat adjustment with the LF allies. The Congress this time contested in contested at 92 seats across the state and managed to win 42 with 12.25 per cent popular votes which was increased by 2 seats and almost three per cent popular votes in comparison to the 2011 WB Assembly election. It was much interesting for the scholars, where the number of seats and percentage of vote shared decreased for the LF allies, then the Congress succeed to increased its seats and vote shared in comparison to the 2011 election. And finally, the Congress became the main opponent political party in the Assembly again after 1996.

Abdul Mannan, one of the senior leaders of the Congress in Bengal was elected as the leader of opposition in the Assembly.

The 2016 WB Assembly election was crucial for the TMC also. During the completion of five-year rule, the TMC established itself as the largest political party in the state which had already proved in 2014 Parliamentary election. After the birth of the party in 1998, the TMC contested in all the Assembly election in the state i.e. in 2001, 2006 and 2011 by making electoral alliance with either the Congress or the BJP. But this time, the party contested the election alone. The party supported only one independent candidate, Harka Bahadur Chhetri in Kalimpong. So, it was an acid test for the party to prove as the biggest party in Bengal. The TMC, this time contested in 293 Vidhan Sabha seats and could win 211 seats with 44.91 per cent popular votes which was the highest success for the party in terms of Assembly elections in West Bengal. The TMC increased its vote share by almost 6 per cent and seat share by 27 and defeat all the oppositions challenges; specially, the Left-Congress combined electoral forces in the horizon of West Bengal politics.

The BJP also contested in the election as an emerging force in the state. The party did not make any electoral alliance with any major political party except the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GOJAM), a local based influential party, mainly in the district of Darjeeling and Kalimpong of North Bengal. The GOJAM contested at five seats, in three seats like; Kalimpong, Kurseong and Darjeeling the party made alliance with BJP and won all of them. The GOJAM also contested other two seats named Chopra and Islampur independently, but failed to win in these seats. The BJP, this time contested in 291 assemblies and could win only 3 seats with 10.16 per cent popular votes. In 2011, the BJP contested in 289 seats and failed to win a single one but this time the party not only entered to the Assembly but increased its vote share from 4.06 per cent in 2011 to 10.16 in 2016. Although the party already registered a win at Basirhat Dakshin Assembly bye-election held in Sept. 2014. Samik Bhattacharya become the first and only one MLA of BJP in the Assembly during the last two years of 15th West Bengal Vidhan Sabha. The BJP's win by three seats with almost 10 per cent votes shared was a signal for the rise of third political choice before the electorate of Bengal which had started to turn into reality just immediate after the serious debacle of the Left-Congress electoral alliance in 2016 West Bengal Assembly election.

Summary result of W.B. Assembly election, 2016

Table: 1.7

Political Party	No. of candidates contested	Seats won	Gain or loss of seats since 2011	Vote shared	Vote swing since	Alliance
CPI(M)+	148	26	-14	19.75	-10.33	Left Front
CPI	11	1	- 1	1.45	-0.39	
RSP	19	3	- 4	1.67	-1.29	
AIFB	25	2	- 9	2.82	-1.98	
WBSP	4	0	-1	0.01	-0.14	
RCPI	01	0	0	0.00	00	
DSP(P)	2	0	-1	0.31	-0.01	
RJD	1	0	0	0.03	-0.03	
Left Front	211	32	-30	26.04	-4.68	
Congress	92	44	+2	12.25	+3.16	
AITC	293	211	+ 27	44.91	+5.98	
NCP	1	0	0	0.13	-0.01	
BJP	291	3	+3	10.16	+6.10	
JOGAM	5	3	0	0.47	-0.25	
Independents And others	400+	1	-1	4.52	-1.29	
NOTA	294	0	0	1.52	N.A.	
Total	1587+	294	N.A.	100	N.A.	

Source: Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in (Accessed on 01/03/2024)

So, the position of the LF, the CPI(M) in particular at in the Vidhan Sabha reached at third place in terms of winning seats in 15th West Bengal Vidhan Sabha election. The rise of the BJP has seen as third alternative as political preference to the electorate of West Bengal which pushed the Left towards deeper crisis again which has unfolded to us in 2019 Lok Sabha election.

After the debacle in 2016 West Bengal Assembly election, the Left, the CPM in particular were constantly decreasing in Bengal. Not only in the Assembly election but also in Panchayat and Municipal elections, the CPI(M) was losing political support in the state. In 2018 West Bengal Panchayat election the CPI, the CPI(M) and the RSP failed to win a single seat at any Zila Parishad in all around the state. Only the Forward Bloc

could manage to win a seat from Uttar Dinajpur district. So, at the Zila Parishad level the LF had only one winning representative out of 825 zila parishad seats all over the state which was the very sad picture to the left parties in Bengal. For the panchayat samities at block level, the CPI(M) won only 110 seats and the LF won 129 in total out of 9217 seats in the state. And for the gram panchayats level the CPI(M) won 1483 seats and the LF won only 1703 seats out of 48649 seats across the state. Once the distribution of powers through the panchayat was a key element for the success of the Left in the state, but now they are million miles away from their support. On the other hands the lion shared by the ruling TMC in Bengal. The TMC won all the 20 Zila Parishads in the state (TheStatesman 18 May 2018, 1) and (Bartaman 18 May 2018, 1). But the party suffered in the '*Jangalmahal*' area before the challenges of the BJP. In the district of Jhargram, the TMC lost 28 Gram Panchayats out of 79 where the BJP established as a strong challenge to the TMC (Mandal 2018, 9 and Jana 2018, 1).

Ranabir Samaddar had described that the result of the 2016 West Bengal Assembly election presents a set of unique character. "First, this election must be considered as one that involved the deepest dynamics of social divisions and stratification. A second trait of this election was its confrontation with an abyss created by the powerful forces in the West Bengal society bent upon achieving an absolute negation of the presence of the lower orders in politics. This was evident by the absence of any positive programme on the part of the major political parties. Instead, they relied on the negative vote" (Samaddar 2016, 23-24).

Ranabir Samaddar also described that the TMC claimed that it done development for the state, "but avoided any call to the lower classes to defend the government scared of powerful in society. The TMC seemed reluctant to raise the focal point, namely, development for whom, and spell out why its developmental policy marked a departure from the neo-liberal developmental policy of the previous regime. On the other hand, the left-liberal - Congress-Communist Party of India-Marxist CPI(M) - combine attempted a restoration of power lost in the elections of 2011, avoiding any politics, any references to classes, divisions, and programmes" (Samaddar 2016, 23-24).

The third point according to Samaddar is logistics became the essence of the exercise in election. "Elections governed by logistical considerations do not furnish political arguments to any party, holding others to be adversaries. The more elections

became a logistical exercise, the louder became the liberal call to freedom through law and order, strengthening the state machinery of policing so that citizens could enjoy democracy, with the police forces guiding them. Elections had to be regimented, garrisoned, phased, policed, patrolled, monitored, relayed, measured, evaluated, and judged as they progressed. With calculated deployment of guns and men, democracy was to be ensured. This was a logistical operation, the hallmark of neo-liberal governance” (Samaddar 2016, 23-24).

The review of CPI(M) central committee⁷⁶ described that “however, the results show that the Trinamool Congress’ victory was not only on the basis of the terror and violence. The other measures that were undertaken like the provision of grains under the Food Security Act passed by the Central government to the poor, schemes such as provision of cycles to girls, patronization of clubs to mobilize the youth and ensure their loyalty to the TMC also played a positive role in favour of the TMC. Notwithstanding the charges of blatant corruption, the Narada and the Saradha cases etc, the TMC was able to overcome those negative factors” (Committee 2016, 5). The review of CPI(M) central committee also described that “Trinamool Congress’s linkage with some Muslim fundamentalist organizations saw a communal polarization. This, on the other hand, had benefitted the BJP with the counter Hindutva communal consolidation. There is, thus, a very serious situation before the Party. The West Bengal unit of the CPI(M) is our biggest unit and even today, in these adverse circumstances, they have polled a sizeable vote. The Party, at the cost of tremendous sacrifice continues to uphold the CPI(M)’s flag facing terror and violence which, in many instances, is much worse than what the Party faced during the semi-fascist period in the 1970s. This struggle continues. The post-poll violence, which is both widespread and intense, appears clearly designed to cripple the CPI(M) in West Bengal thereby marginalizing the CPI(M)’s presence in national politics” (Committee 2016, 5).

17th Lok Sabha Election, 2019: Rise of the BJP

After the year of 2014, the LF had only two representatives at Lok Sabha from Bengal and in 2017 the LF had only two MPs at Rajya Sabha. So, the LF had only four members

⁷⁶ The CPI(M) central committee published a review after the result of the 2016 assembly election in West Bengal and few other states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu. This report was published on the basis of the discussion of the CPI(M) central committee meeting 18th -20th June, 2016 at A. K. Gopalan Bhawan, New Delhi.

in Parliament just two years before the 17th Parliamentary election in 2019 (Bera 2017, 1). But, after the expulsion of Rajya Sabha MP, Ritabrata Bandyopadhyay for ‘gross anti-party activity’ the members at the Parliament again decreased for the state CPI(M) (TheAsianAge 3 June 2017, 9)⁷⁷. All the political parties in Bengal and also in India were preparing themselves for the 17th Parliamentary election in 2019. So, the political parties in Bengal were trying to establish themselves as strong political forces in the political geography of West Bengal. The BJP led NDA at the centre already established itself as the largest and strongest political machinery during the last five years i.e. from 2014 to 2019. There was also a chance for second consecutive win for the BJP led NDA at the centre. And in the political scenario of West Bengal, there was also a sign for a kind of different picture in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

This time, different political parties and alliances were raising different issues in the election to capture or retain in power at the national level. The BJP was strongly propagating some crucial issues like; i) to build the ‘Ram temple’ at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, ii) abolish article 370, iii) fight against terrorism, iv) build a financially strong nation etc. On the other hand the Congress and the Left were propagating to stop BJP’s religious politics and dictatorship. The TMC ‘*suprimo*’ Mamata Banerjee was trying to assemble many non-NDA and non-UPA parties under an umbrella.

So, in West Bengal, there was an electoral competition among four major political forces; the TMC, the LF led by CPI(M), the BJP and the Congress. Although the Left had made an electoral adjustment with the Congress in the 2016 WB Assembly election in the state but this time, they did not make any electoral alliance with any right-wing political party. So, the left parties under the LF have contested the 17th Parliamentary election in West Bengal as LF allies.

The Election Commission of India has declared the seven-phases election of 17th Lok Sabha on 10 March (EconomicTimesOnline 11 March 2019). The first phase had scheduled on 11 April and the seventh phase was scheduled on 19 April, 2019. The result

⁷⁷ The state CPI(M) announced the three months suspension to CPM Rajya Sabha MP from Bengal due to his lavish lifestyle. Bengal state secretary and politburo member Mr. Suryakanta Mishra made this announcement by saying ‘our party ideologically encourage an austere lifestyle .. the party ideology has surfaced against him’. Mamata Banerjee remarked “thy colour of RED d end”. And after getting the politburo’s final approval, the state committee of the Bengal CPM expelled Ritabrata Bandyopadhyay from primary membership of the party. Mr. Suryakanta Mishra said “he was asked to rectify himself, but several attempts of rectifying him failed and instead of rectifying himself, he continued to malign the image of the party..” (The Statesman 16 Sept. 2017, 5)

was declared on 23 May 2019⁷⁸. In West Bengal, the 17th Lok Sabha election had been conducted through all the seven phases along with few other states like; Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The ruling party, the TMC had raised questions for multi-phases election schedule in the state. Although, the oppositions had welcomed the multi-phases election. After almost one and half month of election exercise the final result had declared on 23 May. The BJP led NDA won the election with huge margin by winning almost 350 Lok Sabha seats from all over the country where the BJP could alone win 303 (TheStatesman 24 May 2019, 1). The BJP led NDA had increased its success all over the country except some part of south India.

The LF chairman, Biman Bose declared its first list of 25 candidates on 15 March after a long meeting at Mujaffar Ahammad Bhaban, the headquarter of the West Bengal CPI(M). Biman Bose said that the main aim of the LF in the 17th Lok Sabha election was to protect peace, unity, integrity of the nation and public interest of the common people of the country (Ganashakti 16 March 2019, 1). Initially, there was a chance for supporting some Congress' candidates by the Left but finally, the LF had contested from 41 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal except Maldaha Dakshin⁷⁹. At Maldaha Dakshin the LF backed Abu Hasem Khan Chowdhury of the Congress. The CPI(M) contested in 31 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal but failed to secure win a single one with collecting only 6.34 per cent of valid votes which was the lowest performance for the party since 1977. Not only that many important candidates like; Md. Salim from Raiganj, Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharyya from Jadavpur, Debalina Hembram from Jhargram, Abhas Roy Chowdhury from Bardhaman-Durgapur, Gouranga Chatterjee from Asansol, Ram Chandra Dome from Bolpur etc. have failed to secure a standard size of valid votes. The CPI has contested from Basirhat, Ghatal and Midnapore but failed to win anyone of them with gaining only 0.40 per cent valid votes in context of Bengal. The other two partners of the LF, the RSP and the FB have contested from four and three Lok Sabha constituencies in Bengal respectively. The contested from Alipurduar, Balurghat, Baharampur and Jaynagar Lok Sabha seats and did not win any one with gaining just 0.36 per cent popular votes only. The FB contested from Coochbehar, Barasat and

⁷⁸ The Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora declared the dates of 17th Lok Sabha election on 10th March, 2019.

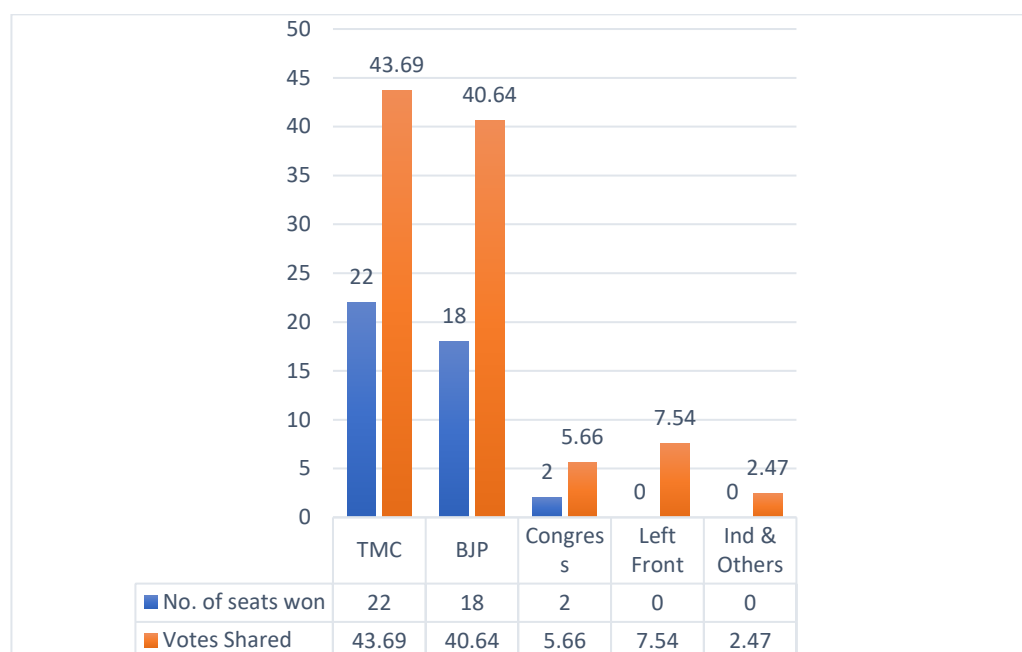
⁷⁹ At the time of declaring the name of twenty-five LF candidates, the LF chairman Biman Bose said that the LF has decided earlier that they will not nominate any candidates in the four winning seats by the Congress in the 16th Lok Sabha election. In this meeting the LF has discussed about 25 seats and in the remaining 17 Lok Sabha seats, the Congress and the Left candidates will compete the election.

Purulia Lok Sabha constituency and also failed to win any one with securing only 0.42 per cent valid votes of Bengal's electorate.

This was the first time in the election history of post independent India that the leading left parties in West Bengal have reached at naught in terms of winning seats from Bengal. Although, the Parliamentary Left had managed to secure only five Lok Sabha seats across the country, four from the state of Karnataka and one from the state of Kerala (Ganashakti 24 May 2019, 1). But the West Bengal, once known as '*Red Forte*' where they failed seriously and became too marginalised in terms of vote share in almost every constituency. The total vote shared by the LF was only 7.54 per cent which was decreased by almost 22 per cent in comparison to the 16th Lok Sabha election in 2014. The candidates of the LF lost the identity as the second alternative before the electorate of Bengal and reached at third place almost in every Parliamentary constituency. Not only that, in some constituencies, the LF failed to secure third place and reached at fourth place according to sharing of votes. So, the left parties under the umbrella of LF have reached at extreme crisis in the state which has been continuing till present.

The TMC, in the 17th Lok Sabha election had presented itself as a strongest and largest political force in Bengal as well as one of the largest regional political forces in India. For the TMC, it was the third consecutive important election that has competed alone without any electoral alliance with any big national and state political party after 2011 in Bengal. The party made electoral alliance for the last time in 2011 with the Congress and successfully managed to secure political victory in the state. After 2011, the party has been participating in all the major elections in Bengal without any electoral alliance with any major political party like the BJP and the Congress. The TMC topmost leader, Mamata Banerjee declared the name of 42 candidates on 12 March, 2019 including 17 women candidates which is almost 40 per cent of total candidates (Chatterji and Ghosal 2019, 1).

Votes shared and seats shared by major political parties in WB in 2019 Lok Sabah election.



Column Chart – 3.16

Source: Data compiled from the report given by the Election Commission of India (T. ECI 2019)⁸⁰.

The TMC mentioned many crucial matters in the electoral manifesto published before the 17th Lok Sabha election. Some of them were; *kanyashree, samabyathi, khadyasathi, gatidhare, minority development, Utkarsh Bangla* etc. (Baksi and Chattopadhyay 2019). For the TMC, this time had a tough competition against the BJP, the LF and the Congress. After the final result the TMC could secure 22 Lok Sabha seats including 43.69 per cent valid votes. In 2014, the party won 34 seats but this time it decreased 12 before the ‘*Modi wave*’ across the country. If the percentage of vote share increased for the TMC in Bengal in comparison to the 16th Lok Sabha election but decreased by almost 1 per cent in comparison to the West Bengal Assembly election in 2016. Many winning candidates in the previous Parliamentary election in 2014, defeated before the challenges of ‘*Modi wave*’.

Another important political party, the INC also participated in the election with high hope to gain some important Lok Sabha seats from the state. The party has been suffering with serious debacle since the 16th Lok Sabha election in 2014 to face the

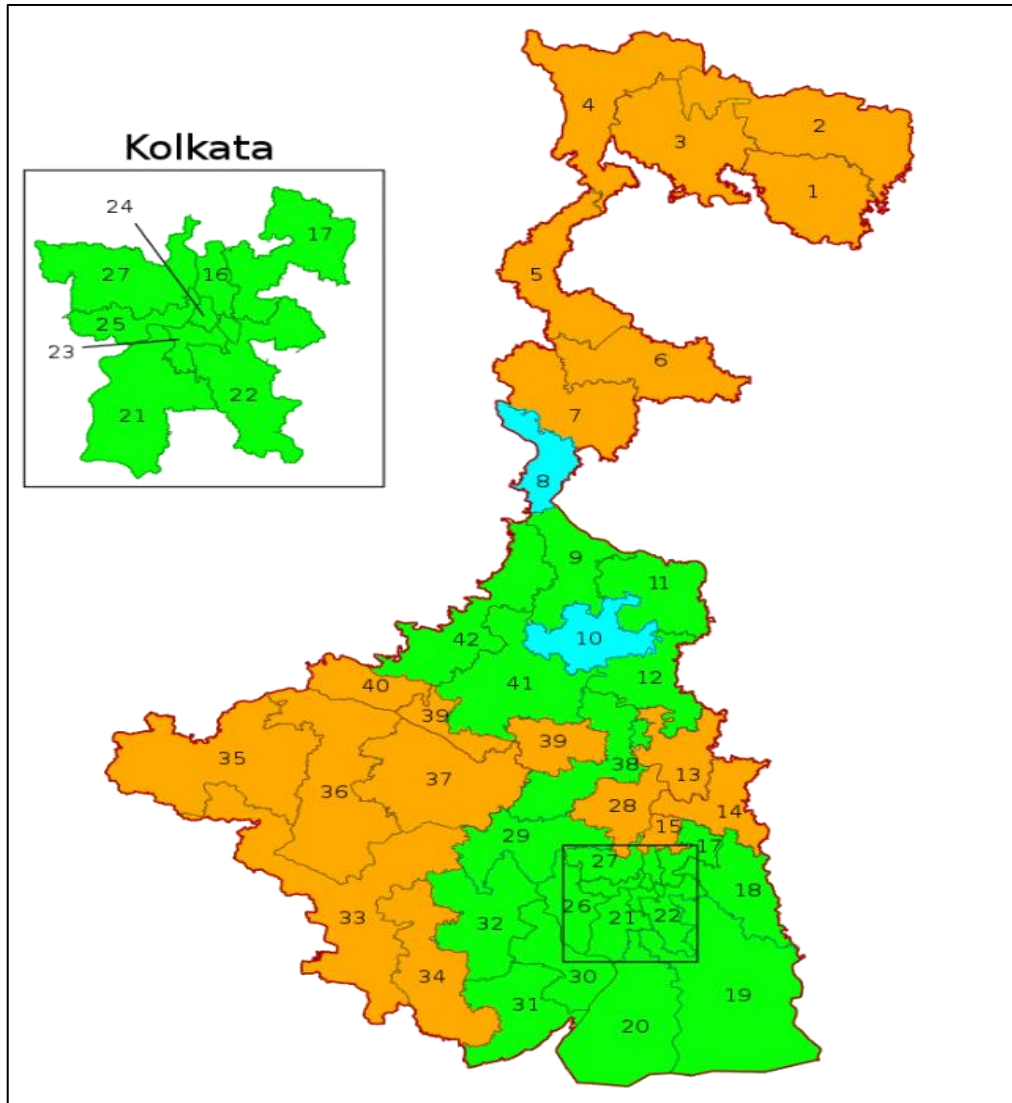
⁸⁰ As per the ECI report this report is based on Index Cards data made available by concerned Returning Officers on the basis of Statutory data maintained in the forms. In case of any dispute, the data maintained in the Statutory Forms by the concerned Returning Officers shall prevail.

challenge of the 'Modi wave' in across the country which also seen in West Bengal too. The Congress contested alone in 40 seats out of 42 in West Bengal. The party did not contest at Jadavpur and Bankura Lok Sabha constituencies. This time the party managed to win only 2 seats including 5.6 per cent valid votes which is decreased by two seats and almost four per cent of valid votes in comparison to the 16th Lok Sabha election in West Bengal. Abu Hasem Khan Chowdhury from Maldaha Dakshin and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury from Baharampur Lok Sabha seats could manage to register victory in this election. The Party lost the two winning seats, Jangipur and Maldaha of the 16th Lok Sabha to the TMC's candidate Mr. Khalilur Rahaman and BJP's candidate Khagen Murmu respectively. Not only that the Congress failed to secure second place in terms of vote shared and reached at the third place in those two seats.

Another important political party, the BJP also has contested the election as the strongest political force across the country which was also seen in the state of West Bengal also. As the BJP has been completed successful rule from 2014 to 2019 in the union government and has established itself as overwhelming political force before the fragmented oppositions. But, in Bengal the BJP faced strong challenge from the TMC to spread its ideology and gathered political support within the electorate of the state. The BJP mentioned several points in the party's electoral manifesto in 2019. Some of those were Sabarimala issue, Citizenship amendment act, abolition of article 35(A), pension for small and marginal farmers etc. In West Bengal, the party contested in all the 42 Lok Sabha seats alone and broke all the previous record of the party in terms of winning seats and sharing votes.

The BJP won 18 Lok Sabha seats and shared 40.64 per cent valid votes which was increased by 16 Lok Sabha seats and almost 23 per cent valid votes in comparison to the 16th Lok Sabha election in 2014. The success of the BJP in Bengal not only established as the second political alternative before many people of Bengal but also as the strong opponent to the TMC in future. The BJP achieved success in the North-Bengal, some seats of the border district like; Nadia and North 24 Parganas, some seats of Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia. The rise of the in the BJP in Bengal mainly decreased the vote-bank of the Left. Although the Congress and the TMC have also suffered for decreasing of vote shared but the Left suffered maximum in comparison to the others.

Seat wise performance of political parties in 2019 Parliamentary election in West Bengal. (A thematic map) ⁸¹



Map: 4.12

Source: information collected from the official website of the National Election Commission of India. (www.eci.gov.in)

The outcome of the 17th Lok Sabha election is the West Bengal has become the field of bio-party competitive political system between the TMC and the BJP. The comparison of vote shared among the four major political parties; the CPI(M), the TMC,

⁸¹ The colours of green, saffron and blue have represented the seats won by the TMC, the BJP and the Congress respectively. This map has not measured by scale. It is represented the position of the 42 Parliamentary constituencies only in terms of regional location only. The area of the constituencies was not measured by scale.

the BJP and the Congress in the last three major election in 2014 Lok Sabha, 2016 WB Assembly and 2019 Lok Sabha shows that the votes shred by the Left, the CPI(M) in particular, has been shifted towards the BJP. So, the emergence of the BJP as a strong opponent to the TMC in the state become one of the reasons behind the more and more marginalisation for the Left in Bengal. Although there are many other reasons also.

The Congress had managed to hold a little place in Malda and Murshidabad district but the Left, the CPI(M) in particular had failed to did it. The combined vote shared of the LF was almost two per cent more than the Congress, but the LF was behind the Congress in terms of winning Lok Sabha seats. So, from 2019 West Bengal become the political field of two right-wing political party, the TMC and the BJP. So, the political preference of Bengal's electorate has started to seen towards the two party either the TMC or the BJP which has pushed the Left into deeper crisis again. The Left remained marginalised in terms of political preferences before the Bengal's voters.

Jyotiprasad Chatterjee and Suprio Basu mentioned four crucial points with the analysis of the 2019 Lok Sabha election's result in context of West Bengal. These are; First: "it have brought decade-long process of political change continuing since 2009, to near completion. The electorate of West Bengal seems to have responded positively to the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) call of '*real poribarton*' (change) displaying scepticism over the All India Trinamool Congress's (AITC) much fancied narrative of *poribarton*. Second, the success of the BJP might be a popular referendum on its nationalist project against the similar effort either of the AITC to showcase the regional Bangla identity, or the Communist Party of India (Marxist)'s— CPI(M)—version of Bengali left politics" (Chatterjee and Basu 2019, 16) .

The other two points mentioned by Jyotiprasad Chatterjee and Suprio Basu are "third, the success of the BJP vis-à-vis the AITC might be indicative of the political futility of the loosely organised "individual centric" politics of the latter. Finally, the future course of party competition in West Bengal might acquire a new configuration of bipolarity, where the ruling AITC would be facing off against an upbeat BJP.. Compared to the 16th Lok Sabha election of 2014, it has secured 16 more seats with a significant increase of more than 23% in its vote share. Although the AITC has managed to increase its vote share a bit, its seat share has fallen by 12 seats as compared to 2014. Both the Indian National Congress (INC) and the left have been pushed to the background, but the

magnitude of this is indeed very steep for the latter. The left parties, particularly the CPI(M), besides failing to win the two seats it had in 2014, have registered a massive decline in vote share to the tune of 22 percentage points” (Chatterjee and Basu 2019, 16)⁸².

According to J. Chatterjee and S. Basu “the AITC and the BJP, as the election results show, have between themselves garnered over 80% of the votes in a four-cornered electoral contest. The drive towards polarisation between these two parties has been so powerful that even the traditional left voters appeared to switch towards the right as data showed that four of every 10 of those who earlier voted with the left indicated that they had voted for the BJP this time. The fact that three of every 10 of the traditional left voters voted for the left’s arch-rival, the AITC is also indicative of the decline of the left and challenges the currently popular discourse regarding the success of the BJP being exclusively built upon the frustrated traditional left supporters” (Chatterjee and Basu 2019, 16).

West Bengal Assembly Election, 2021: The Left in Naught

Just after two years of 17th Lok Sabha election in 2019, the electorate of Bengal has appeared before another important election, the 17th West Bengal Assembly election, 2021. The election was conducted from March 27, 2021 to April 29, 2021 through eight phases and the result was declared on 2nd day of May by the Election Commission of India. In this election, the politics of Bengal has witnessed many crucial unprecedented political incidents. The social and political outlook has unfolded many important matters regarding the activities and presence of the Left parties in Bengal. Many important issues were raised in this election by the different major political parties in this election. During the last ten years of TMC rule several challenges like Sarada, Narada (The Statesma, 16 March 2016, 1), school teaches and non-teaching recruitment scams, party dictatorship in all levels, polarisation of Muslim vote bank, political violence and killing, family centric politics, de-industrialisation, dole and patronage politics, repression of opposition politics etc. had been faced by the ruling party. So, these issues raised some serious questions regarding the rule of TMC government in Bengal which used by the leading opposition parties, the BJP in particular for political mobilisation in the

⁸² The authors conducted a survey under National Election Study (NES) in West Bengal before and after the 2019 Lok Sabha election. They seen a clear polarisation of votes in West Bengal which also a major cause for the marginalization of the Left in West Bengal politics.

Assembly election. After 2019 Lok Sabha election the BJP started to raised voices to defeat the TMC.

The left parties under the banner of the LF contested the election by making electoral adjustment with the Congress and the ISF. This was the second incident where the LF made electoral alliance with the Congress in West Bengal, because in 2016 the same picture had seen in the horizon of Bengal politics. The picture of 2021 West Bengal State Assembly election has become more amazing and historic in West Bengal as well as any other Indian states. In this election the Left and the Congress made an alliance named '*Sanjukta Morcha*' (Sanyukta Morcha or United Front) with a newly formed regional party, the Indian Secular Front (ISF), as an alternative political force against the TMC and the BJP in Bengal. The Indian Secular Front is formed by Abbas Siddiqui, an influential cleric of the shrine of Furfura Sharif in Hooghly district in West Bengal. The party is formed just before the 2021 West Bengal Vidhansabha election and was not able to collect its symbol from the Election Commission of India (ECI). The ISF participated in the electoral battle under the borrowed symbol, 'envelope' of Rashtriya Secular Majlish Party (RSSCMJP), a Bihar based local political party. Despite several controversies and differences had seen in terms of party discipline, ideology etc. within the Left and the Congress, at last an electoral adjustment had been done. At the major number of constituencies, they have tried to keep an adjustment but somewhere they contested together. After the election Adhir Ranjan Choudhury declared to an end to the alliance with ISF⁸³.

The LF had tried to regain popular support by an interesting slogan '*lal ferao, hal ferao*' (bring back the red and bring back the situation) that means they appealed the electorate of West Bengal to return the left parties in state power to develop the socio-economic situation of the state. The LF propagated many notable points in their electoral manifesto. The LF chairman Biman Bose formally released the electoral manifest on 20 March, 2021 in Kolkata on focusing the democratic rights, solutions for unemployment, protection the human rights etc. (TheEconomicTimes 2021, 1). Some others were; combat with communalism and upheld secularism, increase employment, set up industry, extend 100 day's work, at least 20 per cent of total state-budget spend in education,

⁸³ At some constituencies like; Sujapur, Murshidabad, Raninagar, Farakka etc. both the Congress and the ISF have contested and constituency such as Sumserganj, the CPI(M) and the Congress contested. Due to that reason, If the number assembly constituencies were 294 but the total contestant of the '*Sanyukta Morcha*' made by the LF, the Congress and the ISF were almost 305.

special emphasis on health, establish strong co-operative system, democratisation of panchayet system, launch more programme and skill development for minority and Muslim community, special security for children, women and senior citizen etc⁸⁴.

The leading partner of LF, the CPI(M) had contested in the maximum numbers of seats as a member of alliance of the United Front (Sanyukta Morcha). The CPI(M)'s candidates have contested in 139 Assembly seats but interestingly failed to win any one of them with securing just 4.71 per cent of valid votes. This was the lowest tally of the party since the last four decades in the electoral history of West Bengal. The vote shared by the CPI(M) was decreased by almost 1.5 per cent in comparison to the 2019 Parliamentary election in context of West Bengal only. Another disastrous outcome for the CPI(M) in the election was that forfeited deposit of the candidates of the party in 120 seats out of 139 which raised many serious questions regarding the existence and acceptability of the party before the common people of Bengal.

The CPI contested in only ten seats under the alliance of the '*Sanyukta Morcha*' and failed to win a single one with securing just only 0.2 per cent valid votes which was declined by almost half in comparison to the 17th Parliamentary election in 2019 in context of West Bengal only. The CPI also failed to secure deposited money in all the seats. The AIFB and the RSP contested 21 and 11 Assembly constituencies only and secured only 0.53 per cent and 0.22 per cent valid votes respectively. But failed to win a single seat. The AIFB and RSP also failed to secure deposit money in 20 and 10 seats respectively. Other small allies of the like; WBSP, DSPI etc also contested in very few numbers of constituencies but totally failed to show any remarkable success (T. ECI 2021).

The Congress also released election manifesto named '*Banglar Disha*' on 22 March, 2021 on highlighting with the slogan "*Ebar aar phool na, Ebar kono bhul na* (No flower this time, no mistake this time)"⁸⁵ (TheTimesOfIndia 2021). The Congress

⁸⁴ If the Left Front candidates had contested under the alliance of '*Sanyukta Morcha*' (Sanyukta Morcha or United Front) but the LF and the Congress released separate electoral manifesto before the 2021 West Bengal assembly election. As we know that the LF is itself a coalition of some left minded political party, so the front decided to propagate many points to combat the election in 2021. In the election's manifesto the LF clearly mentioned many important points such as restoration of democracy, emphasis on secularism, industry, employment generation, public health, North Bengal development, urban development, education, backward class development etc.

⁸⁵ The West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee (WBPC) president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury released the manifesto at the party head quarter in Kolkata. In the manifesto, the party promised for social security for most of the marginalized families and to provide monthly support of Rs. 5000 thousand to every poor family. The congress also gave importance for industry in Bengal in the electoral manifesto this time.

contested in 92 constituencies, mainly in the district of North and South Dinajpur, Malda and Murshidabad. Although the party contested in other districts also but the party preferred to contest more seats from those districts where the party had a strong hold for a long time. The electoral outcome of the Congress was disastrous like the left. The party did not win any single seat across the state with securing just 3.03 per cent popular votes. Only 13 candidates of the Congress party managed to secure deposited money to the ECI, but others 79 candidates deposited money had forfeited due not securing minimum percentage of valid votes.

Another important political party, the TMC under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee contested the 2021 West Bengal Assembly election with high hope to secure hat-trick success in the state of Bengal. During the ten years continuous rule the party had been faced many challenges which raised various questions. Pratip Chattopadhyay described that “from 2011 till 2019 TMC leader Mamata Banerjee continued to force the public to remember the miscreants of CPI(M)-led Left Front firstly for undercover conspiracies to destabilise her government and secondly to vote for BJP enmass to teach Trinamul Congress a lesson as reflected in 2019 Lok Sabha poll results. However, a shift is noticeable in the 2021 poll campaign of Mamata Banerjee – seeking a vote with a footnote of forgiveness” (Chattopadhyay 2023, 66-67). In North Bengal and *Junglemahal* which simply deserted TMC in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Mamata Banerjee plainly states “What was our fault that you did not vote for us? We have done so many things for you but still.. ..forgive us...there may be some miscommunications and gaps but do not vote for BJP as they will simply rob you off” (Chattopadhyay 2023, 66-67).

Pratip Chattopadhyay also described that “going by the Derridian logic, she mixes forgiveness with her usual tactics of remembering the unforgivable, the Left Front, which to her reading, halted the development of the state earlier and now helping BJP to rise to prominence to defeat TMC. In addition, an open display of accepting some fault lines in TMC governance (cut money, syndicate and corruption) by Mamata Banerjee herself (in an election rally speech on 25th March she states – “*give me a slap if I do wrong*”) and also by senior leader and MP, Sougato Roy is something new in the last one decade where brushing aside such allegations as baseless was the norm” (Chattopadhyay 2023, 66-67).

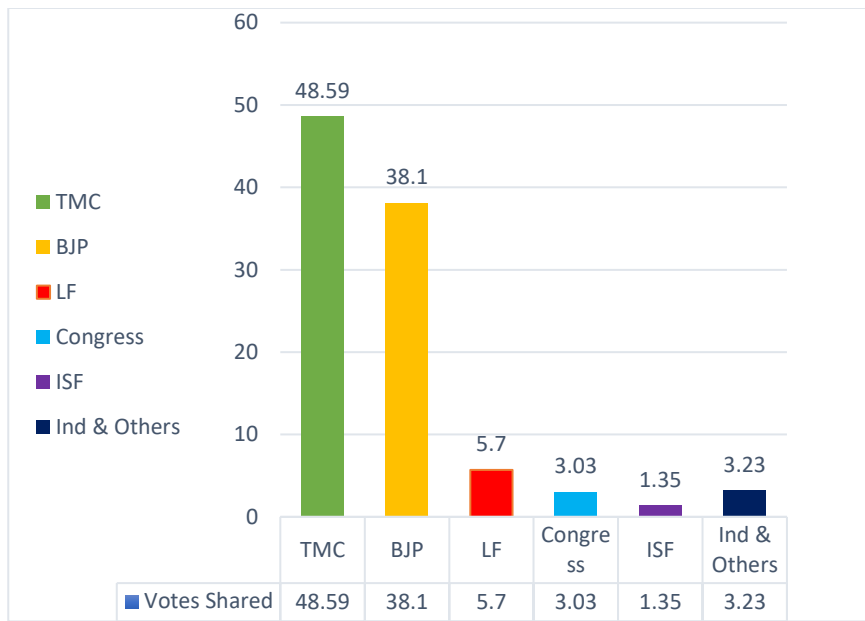
Pratip Chattopadhyay also argued that “riding on party programmes structured by Prashant Kishor and his team, like ‘*Didi ke bolo*’ (tell your problem directly to Didi/Mamata Banerjee by dialling a number), government programmes like ‘*Duayre sarkar*’ (government at your doorstep), ‘*paray paray somadhan*’ (neighbourhood settlement of disputes) and an electoral slogan like ‘*Bangla nijer meyeke chay*’ (Bengal wants her own girl as against outside state-leaders of BJP), TMC is set to reverse the non-zero-sum game (prisoner’s dilemma) that was in place with TMC leaders and workers shifting to BJP into a zero-sum game in this assembly election through its election manifesto named ‘*ongikar*’ (commitment) for people-welfare, with the catch-line ‘*khela hobe, jeta hobe*’ (the game is on and will be won)” (Chattopadhyay 2023, 66-67).

The TMC chief Mamata Banerjee has declared the list of 291 candidates out of 294 on 5 March, 2021 and kept remaining three seats open for the its Derjeeling allies (ExpressWebDesk 5 March 2021, 3). The party this time made history in the land of Bengal by winning 213 Vidhan Sabha seats with more than 48 per cent popular votes which was increased by four seats and almost three percent votes in comparison of the last West Bengali assembly election in 2016. But the interesting fact of that election for the TMC was that Mamata Banerjee had contested at Nandigram Vidhan Sabha rather than Bhabanipur where she won last two consecutives elections and took the charge of the Chief Ministership of Bengal and Mamata Banerjee had been defeated in Nandigram by a short margin by her former colleague Subhendu Adhikary, turned a strong proponent of the BJP⁸⁶.

Many debates and controversies have been raised in the last ten years of TMC rule in Bengal. But despite that, in 2021 West Bengal Legislative Assembly election, the TMC registered a hat trick win in the land of Bengal which is the best performance of the single lady led party since the previous Assembly elections. The TMC won 213 seats and near about 48 per cent popular votes.

⁸⁶ On 18 December, 2020, just before a couple of months of the assembly election Mr. Subhendu Adhikary joined the BJP at a huge rally in West Midnapore in presence of Union Home Minister, Amit Shah. Before joining BJP, he left all the portfolio of the TMC. And few days after joining the BJP he challenged Mamata Banerjee to fight assembly election from Nandigram assembly and declared to defeat her in election. Mamata Banerjee contested at Nandigram. In the primary result Mr. Subhendu Adhikary was defeated by Mamata Banerjee by very short margin, but Subhendu Adhikary challenged the result and asked the election commission for recounting. And in the recounting, Mamata Banerjee was defeated by Subhendu Adhikari by 1956 votes.

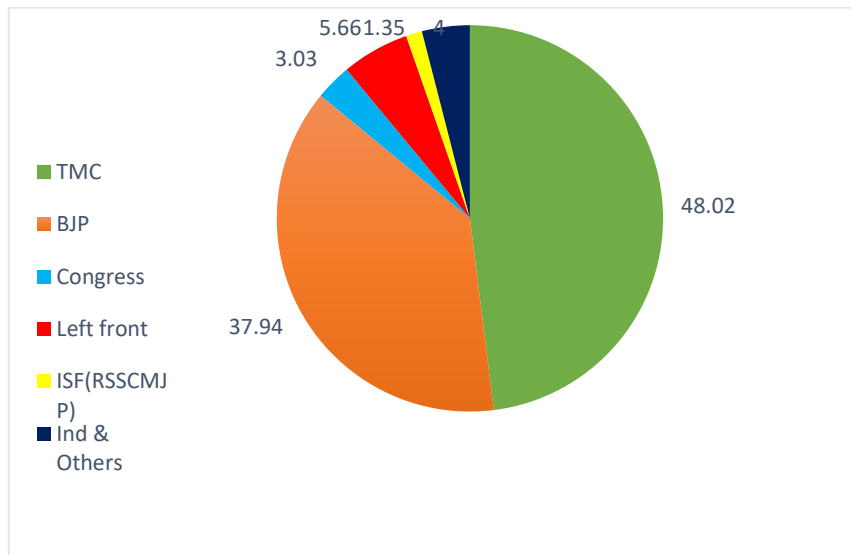
Vote shared by major political parties in 2021 West Bengal assembly election



Column Chart-3.17

(Source: www.eci.gov.in)

Votes shared by major political parties in 2021 west Bengal assembly elections⁸⁷. (also presented through column chart)

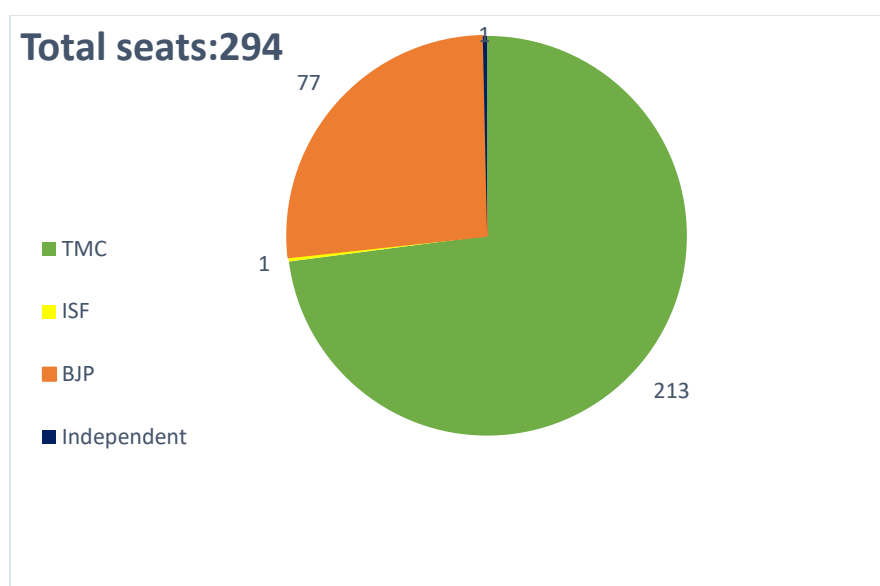


Pie Chart- 2.21

(Source: data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

⁸⁷ This data is taken from the data given by the Election Commission of India. Initially, election result was declared of 292 Assemblies. Election was conducted in the remaining two seats, Sumserganj and Jangipur later. It is calculated after the election of all the 294 assemblies. Initially the vote shared by the TMC, BJP, Congress and the LF was 47.94, 38.13, 2.93 and 5.67 respectively.

Seats won by major political parties in 2021 West Bengal assembly election⁸⁸.



Pie Chart-2.22

(Source: www.eci.gov.in)

Another important national political party, the BJP has participated in the election with high hope to win electoral battle in this election also. After winning of 18 Lok Sabha seats in 2019 Parliamentary election in Bengal, the party has captured a strong position in the state and became the first challenge to the ruling TMC. The party also has been contesting election actively since 1990s in West Bengal but not succeed to portrait any crucial picture as it was showing during 2021 Assembly election. Earlier the party had participated in in the elections by using some other campaigning style. But the party has already changed its campaign style after the year 2016 in comparison to the previous election. Pratip Chattopadhyay argued that “the new campaign strategy is to usher in sub-nationalism by reviving the idea of ‘sonar bangla’ (the golden era of Bengal) for a new renaissance period free of the party-government of Left Front and the corrupted dynasty-government of Trinamul Congress. In its mission to wipe out TMC from the state with the slogan ‘*unishe half ekushe saaf*’ (half in 2019 and total wipeout in 2021), the BJP election manifesto is presented as a *sankalpa patra* (document of oath) to provide free, transparent, just, fair and futuristic government with ‘double-engine’ (similar party

⁸⁸ Total number of Vidhan Sabha in West Bengal were 294, but the result was declared of 292 assemblies. Election in the two assemblies, the Sumserganj and the Jangipur is not included in this pie-chart. Election in the two remaining assemblies was conducted later which were won by TMC. So, at the time of main election result the TMC won 213 seats but later it reached at 215.

ruling in centre and state) for inclusive development. Giving a choice between ‘party of scams’ (TMC) and ‘party of schemes’ (BJP), Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, urges the West Bengal electorate to vote for the later by bidding farewell to Mamata Banerjee’s reign of terror” (Chattopadhyay 2023, 67).

The BJP put five non-Bengali leaders who were mainly from outside of West Bengal to operate and observed the electoral campaign and divided the states into five zones in which Vidhan Sabha areas have been grouped by the party. The party declared the names of candidates for 294 constituencies from party-headquarter in New Delhi (TheTimesOfIndia 2021, 1)⁸⁹. Pratip Chattopadhyay also argued that “inauguration of party-manifesto spelt out by Amit Shah himself at one level shows the eagerness of the central leadership to ‘connect’ with the hearts and minds of West Bengal electorate but at other level exposes the lack of confidence of the central leadership on their state counterparts. While the campaign is structured around the sub-national renaissance idea based on the ‘developmental’ leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the dominance of the ‘national’ (central leadership) gives room for the opposition to treating it as an idea tailored by ‘outsiders’ (*bohiragoto*) having no connection with the cultural, social and political history of the state” (Chattopadhyay 2023, 68).

Pratip Chattopadhyay also argued that “in order to address that criticism, Prime Minister Modi in an election rally speech on 19th March referred to Pulwama and the surgical strikes incident to show that the security of the people in border states like Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal remains a concern of BJP. Home Minister Amit Shah declares implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act after coming to power to dignify the presence of migrants in the state. Intertwining ideas of nationalism (external security) and sub-national renaissance (internal security of livelihood), BJP promises to be the alternative to the perceived suffocating milieu of TMC ‘rule for development and job’ (*bikash hobe, chakri hobe*) and declares ‘*Mamatar khela sesh hobe*’ (end of the game for Mamata) with an important electoral slogan ‘*aar noy onnay*’ (no more injustice)” (Chattopadhyay 2023, 67-68).

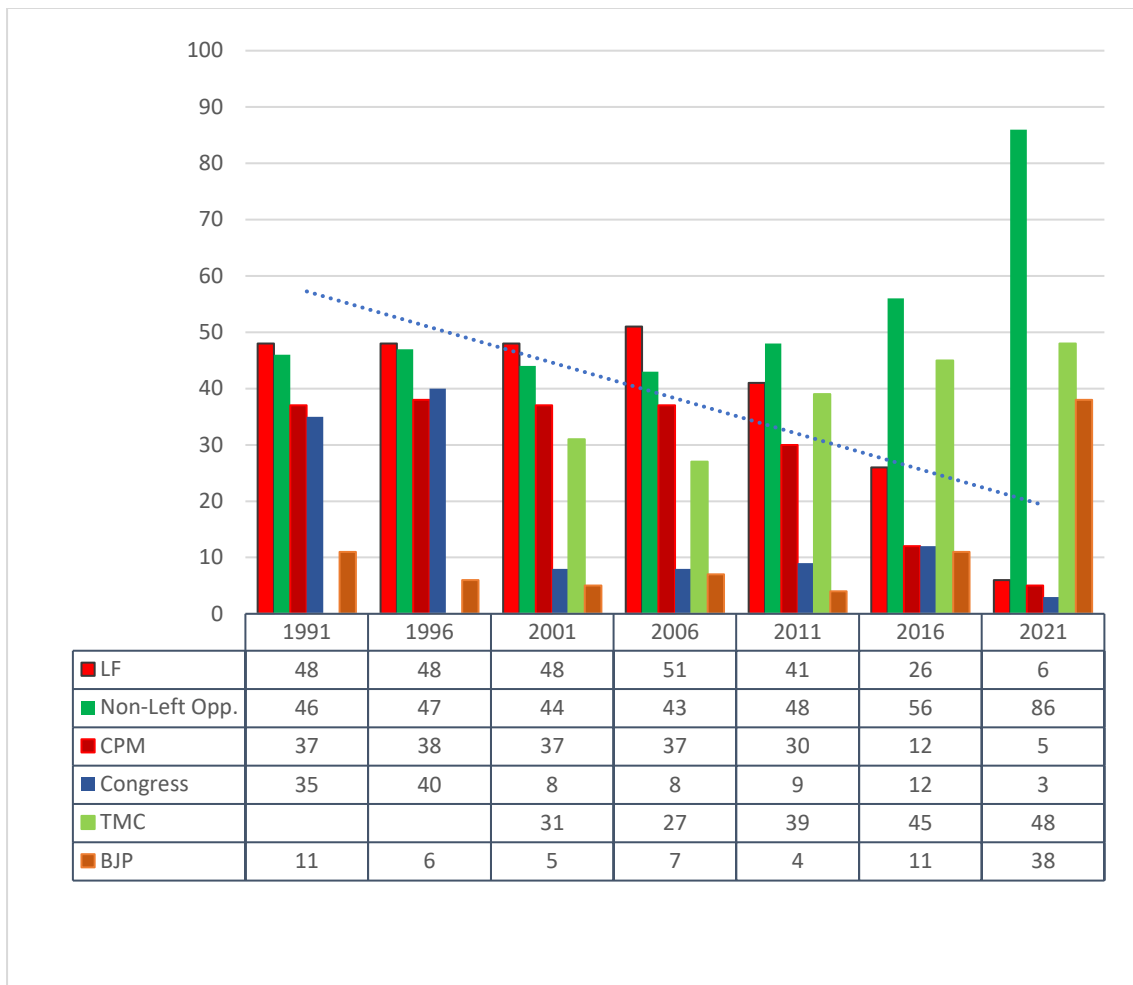
⁸⁹ BJP released its first list of 57 candidates on 7th March, 2021 just the next day of the TMC released its name. Welcoming Mamata's decision, Subhendu Adhikari had told his supporters that he will see the Chief Minister in the battlefield and asserted that she would lose and leave on May 2, when the results will be declared.

The BJP also raised voice for implementation of CAA on the first day of government and provide Rs. 10,000/ to each refugee families per year if the party would come to power in the state of West Bengal (The Times of India 22 March 2021). The BJP contested in 293 Assemblies in this election and won 77 seats with securing 37.97 per cent valid votes. The winning number of seats and percentage of vote shared by the BJP has increased by 74 seats and almost 28 per cent votes respectively in comparison to the West Bengal Assembly election in 2016. But the percentage of vote secured by the BJP has decreased by almost 2.7 percent in comparison to the 2019 Parliamentary election in context of West Bengal only. And finally, the BJP secured the position of main opposition party within the Vidhan Sabha and Subhendu Adhikary, the winning M.L.A. of BJP from Nandigram become the leader of opposition.

The final outcome of the 17th Assembly election in Bengal was catastrophic for the Left and the Congress both. The left parties under the LF had been suffered most as they totally failed to win a single assembly across the state. Just before ten years they were in power with huge electoral support. But they ultimately became naught within the state Assembly. They are fully rejected by the electorate of Bengal. The people of Bengal have opted another political force, the BJP as the main rival of the ruling TMC for the state of Bengal. Although, this trend had seen in 2019, but that was in terms of Parliamentary election. So, through the 17th West Bengal Assembly election result, the ultimate crisis of the Left has clearly unfolded before the people with which they are passing through till now.

The crisis of the Left has faced final tragedy in 2021. This time, the Left parties had some strong issues and as well as strong agendas against the ruling TMC before the electorate of Bengal. There were many chances to regain their lost land through the electoral battle in West Bengal. But they totally failed to do so. The popular votes shared by the Left in the earlier elections has been shifted towards another extreme right-wing party, the BJP. The Lefts were rejected by the electorate. Why it is that? A titanic become naught in a just span of ten years. Such kind of electoral outcomes have not seen in any state of India since independence.

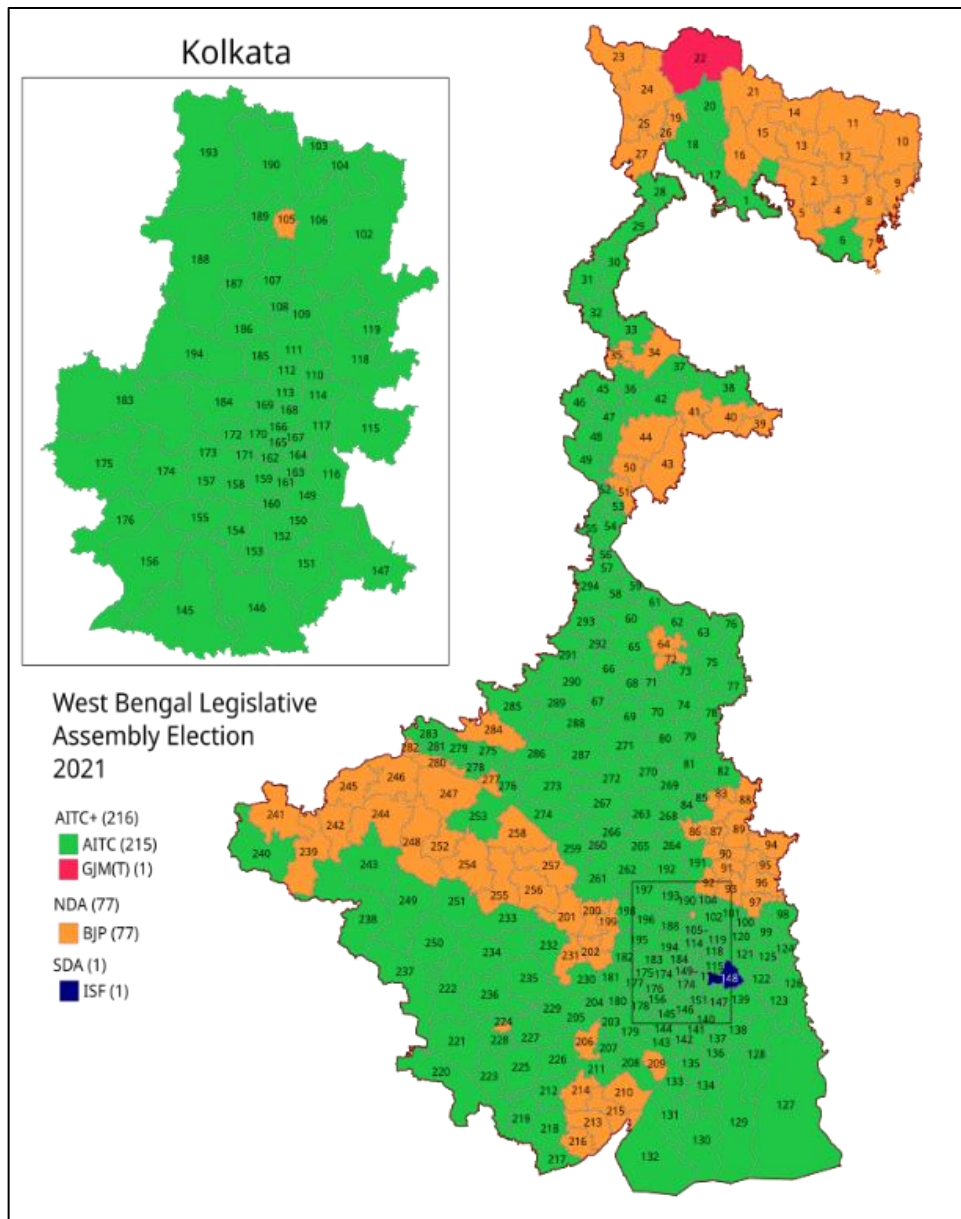
Vote shared by major political parties in WB since 1991 to 2021 WB assembly election.



Column Chart: 3.18

(Source: data compiled from www.eci.gov.in. Data is rounded of nearest hundred)

A picture of region wise seat winning position of major political parties in W.B. Assembly election 2021⁹⁰.



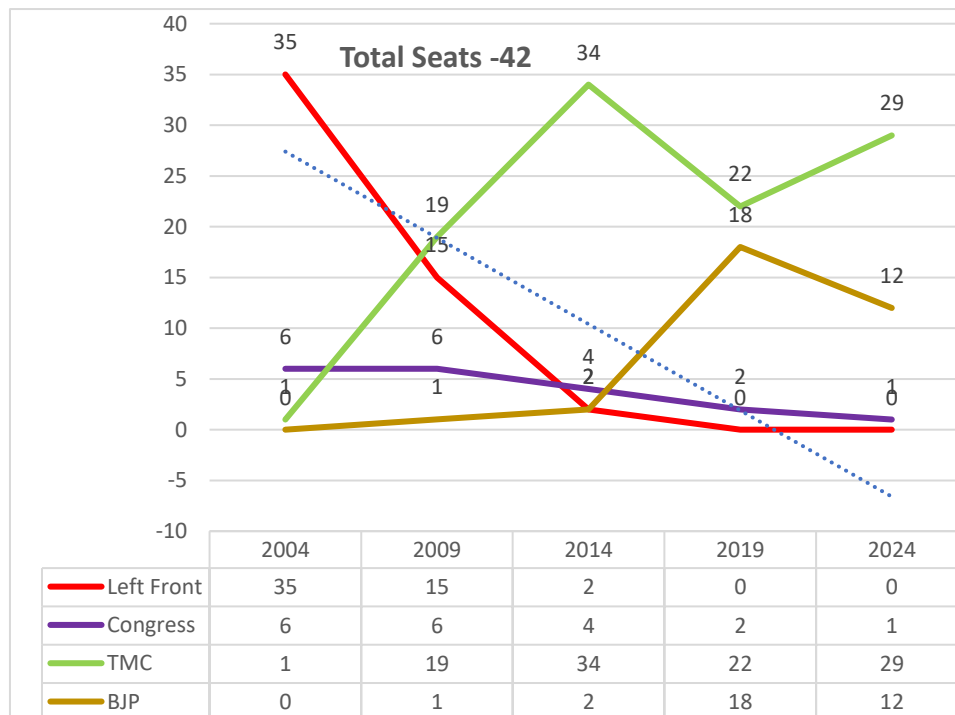
Map : 4.13 (source: www.eci.gov.in)

The Left-Right ideological combination has been rejected by the electorate of Bengal. The final electoral outcomes have showed it clearly. In this election the Left got marginalised and lost the identity of principal opposition party in the state legislature. The ideological crisis has been continuing till today for the Left. They have been suffering to determine their common political enemy in the states and national level. In

⁹⁰ This map is not measured by scale. It is used to represent the region wise assembly seats winning picture of the major political parties only. The numbers in the map represent the number of assemblies.

the present socio-political scenario of West Bengal, the TMC is the principal political force in WB. The CPI(M) leading Left parties are facing very much obstacles by the TMC. Many of the party supporters and workers are killed in Bengal which is showing a very miserable character of the state in contrast with the other federal units of India. But, in the national level the left parties, specially, the CPI(M), is determining that BJP is the principal political enemy. In the electoral battle they are trying to combine against the BJP where the left parties are trying to join with TMC along with the other political parties. But they are not getting united with all the anti TMC parties. This stands of the Left does not carry better images before the electorate of Bengal. The dialectical twists and turns of the ‘Marxist ideology’ passing over the heads of the Bengal’s hapless majority.

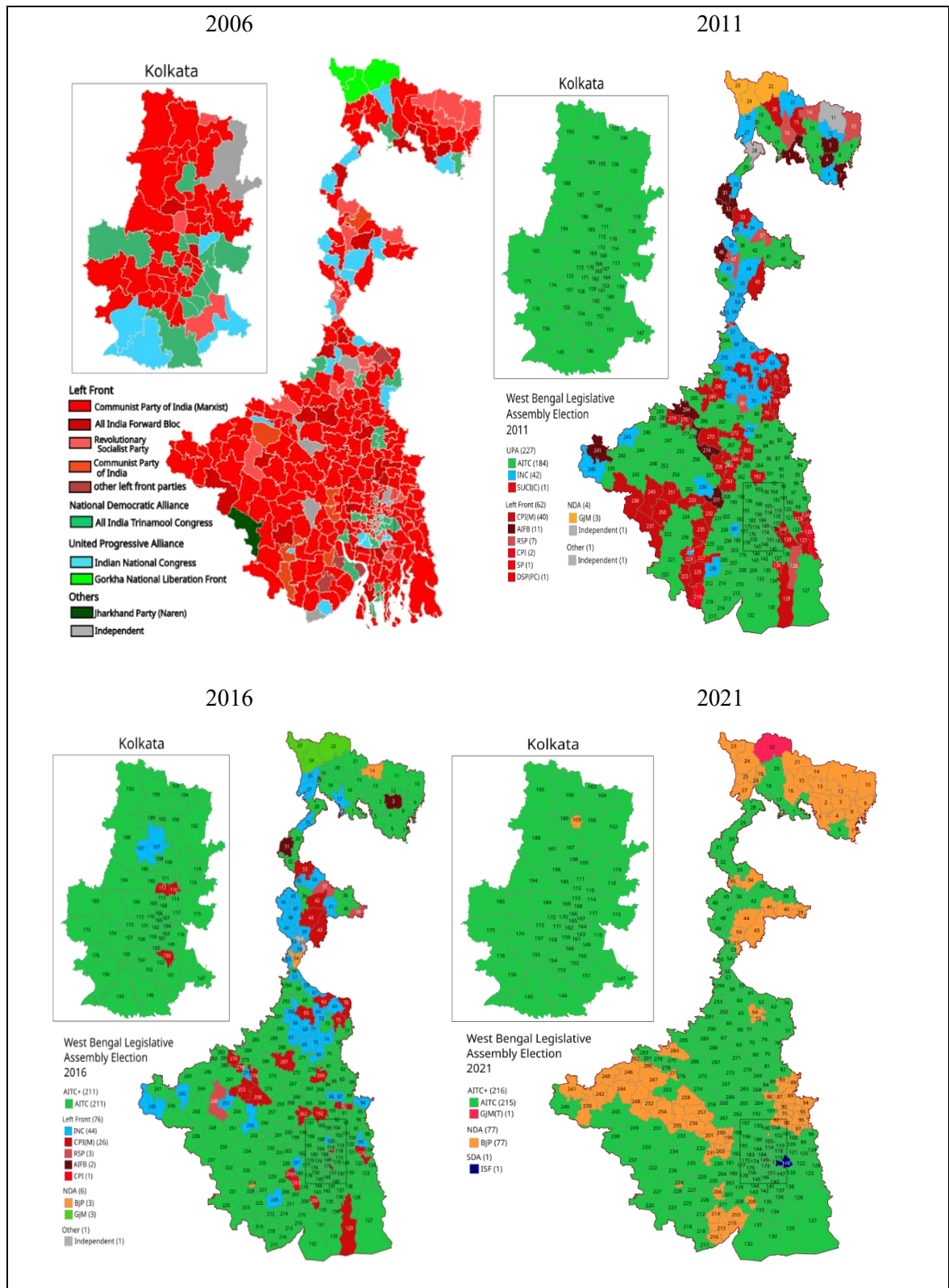
Seat shared by major political parties from 2004 Lok Sabha election to 2024 Lok Sabha election in West Bengal*



Column chart- 3.19

Source: Data compiled from <https://eci.gov.in> (*In 2009 Lok Sabha election an independent candidate Dr. Tarun Mondal won from Jaynagar Lok Sabha constituency backed by the TMC-Congress alliance).

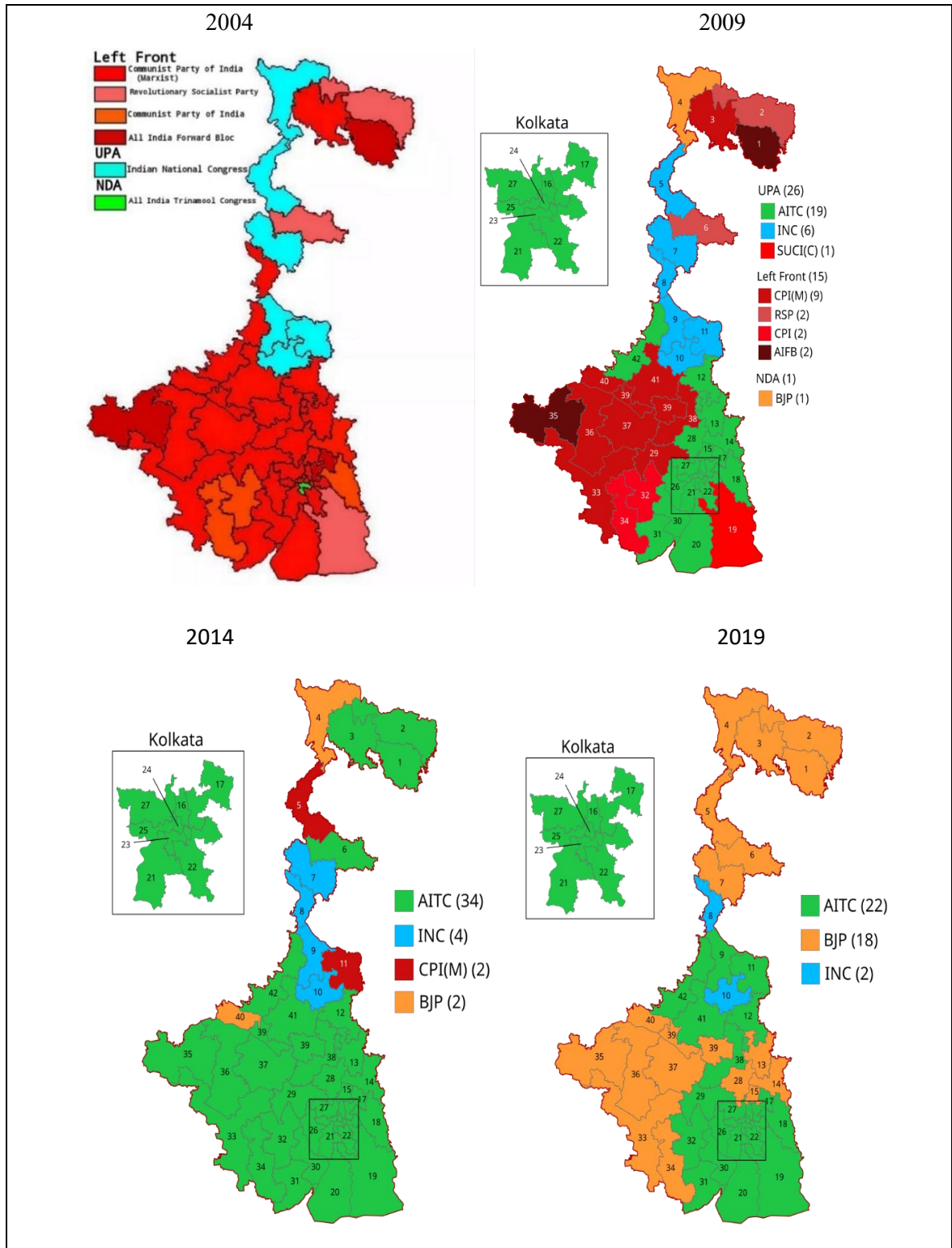
Region wise performance of major political parties from 2006 to 2021 W.B. Assembly election.
 (These maps are not measured by scale)



Map: 4.14

(Source: www.eci.gov.in)

Region wise seats performance of major political parties in W.B. from 2004 to 2019 Parliamentary election. (These are thematical map, not measured by scale)



Map: 4.15

(Source: www.eci.gov.in)

This chapter analysed that the Left have been decreased constantly from almost each area of the state and every election in West Bengal. The previous figures, charts, tables and thematic maps of this chapter represented this picture very well (Map 4.14 and 4.15). After the debacle in 2011 WB Assembly election, the CPI(M)-led LF has been suffered not only electoral defeats in almost every election, but day by day become marginal in terms of sharing votes and winning seats in Lok Sabha and Assembly election. In terms of Assembly election, the CPI(M) trailed behind the Congress and lost the position of principal opposition in Assembly in 2016. The ultimate crisis faced by the Left when it failed to secured a single seat in 2021 West Bengal Assembly election. The titanic has become naught just a span of ten years which is most unfortunate for any national level political party in the largest democracy like India. And in terms of Parliamentary elections, the left parties under the LF in West Bengal faced same problems in the state. The CPI(M) could secure only two Lok Sabha seats in 2014 and failed to win a single one in 2019 Lok Sabha election. So, before 2021 Assembly election, the Left already in naught in Bengal in terms of winning seats which is reestablished in 2021.

On the other hands the BJP emerged as the second largest political party in Bengal, in terms of winning seats and sharing votes since 2019. The TMC is become an unstoppable political force in Bengal. The electoral competition is now continuing between the TMC and BJP. The Congress and the Left are suffering with serious crisis. Although in 2024 Lok Sabha election the Congress could manage to win only one Lok Sabha seats, but the Left parties are in remain in naught since 2019 in respect of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha both. The result of 18th Parliamentary election in the context of West Bengal, the TMC succeed to increase its vote share and seats share in comparison to 2019. The BJP also decreased in comparison to the previous Parliamentary election in 2019 but not marginalised like the Left. But the CPI(M) and other left parties under the LF remain the looser.

The next chapter is about the analysis of a few notable issues related to the left politics in West Bengal during 1991-2021 which also related to the downfall and crisis of the Left in the state.

CHAPTER- 5

DOWNFALL OF LEFT POLITICS IN WEST BENGAL: AN ANALYSIS OF SOME IMPORTANT ISSUES

The previous chapter of the study analysed the dialogue between the Left and the non-Left politics in West Bengal by focusing the electoral data of the Assembly and Parliamentary elections during the time in context of West Bengal only. The previous chapter also has dealt with a few important burning issues during the time of elections in West Bengal politics which are caused for the crisis of the LF, the CPI(M) in particular and the rise of the two right-wing political parties as the main significant political rivals of the Left in the horizon of West Bengal politics. It is very clear that the CPI(M) and the other Left parties have been getting marginal in electoral politics after the debacle in 2011 W.B. Assembly election. The decline of the Left was much clear when they managed to secure only two Lok Sabha seats in 2014 and trailed behind the Congress in 2016 WB Assembly election by winning only 32 seats in Vidhan Sabha. And furthermore, the LF failed to secure a single seat in the three consecutive elections; in 2019 Lok Sabha, 2021 Vidhan Sabha and 2024 Lok Sabha in Bengal. On the other hands the BJP has emerged as the second option to the electorate of Bengal which has been established through the electoral outcome of those three elections. The TMC secured third consecutive victory in 2021 WB Assembly election despite some serious challenges.

The present chapter also tries to understand the crisis of the Left by discussing a few notable issues during 1991 to 2021. Some important issues during that time are i. advent of neo-liberal economy, ii. New Economic Policy- 1994, iii. emergence of the TMC, iv. steps towards large industrialisation and Singur-Nandigram controversy, v. rise of the BJP etc. This chapter also analyses the views and perceptions of a handful leaders and activists of major political parties at different level in West Bengal. For this purpose, we have conducted face to face interviews with a few political leaders and activists of different political parties specially, the CPI(M), the BJP, the TMC and the Congress in West Bengal. The study received some remarks and opinion and counter opinion regarding the success and failure of the Left politics in Bengal. The study tries to understand the perceptions of a few leaders of the CPI(M) initially and there after it tries

to understand other opinions and counter opinions of a few leaders and activists of other non-Left opposition parties.

Neo-Liberal Challenges:

Communist parties all around the world had faced some serious challenges before the growth and expansion of capitalism with the name of Globalisation, Privatisation and Liberalisation (LPG) in the early 1990s. The way of the spreading of LPG had become easier after the fall of the former USSR in 1991. The LF, formed by some Left minded political parties had been in political power in West Bengal from 1977 to 2011, was not beyond that crisis after the Lok Sabha election in 1991. J. Chatterjee and S. Basu argued that “the neoliberal reform measures accepted by the Government of India in 1991, however, complicated the situation even more, particularly for the electoral Left parties. Not only in agriculture in other aspects of the economy as well, the neoliberal reform, as a strategy to ‘*activate global process of capital accumulation*’, had been instrumental in widening the disparity between the classes. It therefore becomes imperative to the communist parties to resist the onslaught of such a policy of economic reform”. (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 94)

J. Chatterjee and S. Basu also argued that “alike its counterparts throughout the world, the CPI(M) also quite unequivocally had taken political resolution to organize struggle against neoliberal economic policies as one of its key tasks (CPI [M] 2005). It was really a challenge before the CPI (M) to maintain such ideological commitment under the overall structure of parliamentary democracy, where the party had certain genuine stake. The ideological deviation of the CPI(M), continuing since the mid-1990s, however had prevented it to do justice to its avowed ideological goal. The resultant dilemma had its toll on the political fortune of the CPI (M). In West Bengal, even after ruling for record 34 years it could neither provide any alternative nor did it show any positive intent to resist the rapid forward march of neoliberal development” (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 94).

Perhaps, the CPI(M)’s alienation from the grassroots classes, as Patnaik mentions (Patnaik 2011, 12-16), and the growing priorities of the middle class were the main reasons for this. These two intertwined elements separated the party from its previous tradition of social movements to such an extent that it may no longer be able to organise a protest movement against neoliberalism. This happened despite the fact that the

CPI(M) Central Committee repeatedly recognised the role of neoliberalism in widening inequality and called for a fight against it. While some sections of the middle class might have found an opportunity to improve their economic fortunes through the liberalised market economy, the policy was not Deregulation of the economy and the abolition of government protection measures can therefore have devastating consequences. But while the CPI(M) failed to mobilize resistance movements against neoliberalism, it was also not open to embracing the economic reforms that came with it. To meet the aspirations of its newly emerging middle-class constituency, the CPI(M) perhaps could not risk losing its traditional core constituency, which had continued to provide it with electoral support despite all ideological shifts.

So, a duality gripped the LFG in West Bengal. West Bengal caught in the duality of ‘social movements’ and electoral politics, the LFG in West Bengal under Chief Ministership of Jyoti Basu eventually developed the importance of private capital for accelerated growth and developed the ‘New Industrial Policy’ in 1994, which encouraged private sector investment in welcomed industrial development. The same policy also emphasised the need for foreign technology and investment. The CPI(M)’s ambivalence was reflected in the said policy which emphasised on the small business development. Instead of improve infrastructure facilities, taking measures to eliminate over-regulation and develop the skills of the workforce. The three elements of industrial growth in West Bengal should be taken into account, as revealed by a joint study from the World Bank and the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) (Banerjee, et al. 2002, 4203-18), the LF’s push for the development of small industries has not made a serious contribution for the advancement of West Bengal’s industrial prosperity.

Instead of a steady focus on large-scale industrialisation initiatives to address the significant decline in the growth rate of industrial production and employment scope, this emphasis on small-scale industry led to West Bengal in the late 1990s. As Ajitava Raychoudhury and Goutam Kumar Basu argued that “...a small-scale production-dominated economy, most of these units were unregistered, thereby posing serious issues regarding social security of those who were employed” (Raychaudhuri and Basu 2007, 21).

Since these units are not registered under the Factories Act, 1948, the workers there are largely not subject to legal provisions such as the ‘Minimum Wage Act’ or the

provisions of social security schemes etc. To protect their rights, the workers of these units are also unable to established trade unions, as they mainly worked in the organised sector. With the withdrawal of government patronage following the economic reforms of the 1990s (Government of India 2010), their vulnerability had increased dramatically. Therefore, the sharp increase in this labour force in West Bengal in the 1990s was not a good sign for industrial development. Such poor industrial performance of the LF government, characterised by the declining growth rate of the organised industrial sector, coupled with the dire conditions of the unorganized sector, were the major factors that gave the necessary impetus to the people to look for a political alternative in the state (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 95-96).

New Economic Policy and Industry: 1994

After coming to power in 1977, the Government of West Bengal passed an industrial policy resolution aimed at self-reliance, building industry by strengthening the public sector, and loosening the grip of monopoly houses and multinationals on the world economy of the state. First, it should be kept in mind that the policy framework of 1977 was generally in line with the then industrial and economic policies of the Government of India. Therefore, if there was a change in the economic policies of the Government of India, changes would automatically follow in the economic and industrial policies of the states. Leaving aside the dependencies due to constitutional limitations, it is a fact to be kept in mind that the policy guidelines of 1977, even though considered largely positive, did not actually help in expanding the industrial base of the state (Roy 1996, 1094).

West Bengal, however, managed to attract very little investment between 1977 and 1993, either in the state or in the private sector; and, according to LFG, one of the main factors causing this impasse was the obstructionist attitude of the central government. To boost industrialisation, the LFG claimed to give top priority to power generation and infrastructure development, but these initiatives fell short of the cooperation expected from the Centre. In fact, Left Front Government demanded that it took Delhi 7 years for the sanction of the thermal power plant project at Brakeswar, near Siuri, the district head office of Birbhum district in West Bengal. Likewise, it had to wait more than eleven years to collect all kind of licenses for Haldia Petrochemicals project in Midnapore, a port-based city in the lower part of the Bhagirathi-Hoogli river in West Bengal. However, given the requirement of central approval for setting up medium and

large industries, the government had no option but to approach the Union government (Bandyopadhyay and Basu 2020, 117-118).

Although obtaining clearance from central agencies of the union government was a major hurdle for any investment proposal in West Bengal, it was not the only explanation for the motionless investment scenario. We must also take into account the reluctance of private companies to invest in the state; and the look for the probable reasons of such lack of effort on their side has imminently led to questioning the stubborn industrial relations in the state. But the fact is that although the Left Front Government initially supported militant unionism in the industry, it soon began to promote bilateral negotiations between labour and management rather than encounter as the primary ways of resolving industrial disputes. If we look at some figures, in the year of 1977 there were 397 cases of work stoppages because of industrial disputes, among which two hundred and six cases were strikes and the residual 191 were lockouts. However, by 1980 the total number of major labour disputes had fallen to 208, including 130 lockouts and 78 strikes (Bandyopadhyay and Basu 2020, 117).

In fact, the number of strikes continued to decline in the years that followed in 1991, there were only 21 strikes, compared to 192 lockouts. This data appears to reflect the decline in LFG support for the militant labour movement compared to the past. On the other hand, the steady increase in lockouts over time indicates that management is becoming increasingly insistent on resolving disputes and that workers are becoming increasingly vulnerable under a staunchly pro-labour government. Indeed, there are many examples of corporate failures due to management incompetence, including Kesoram Cotton Mills, Metal Box and Hind Motors (Roy 1996, 1094-96).

How then can we explain the unenthusiastic attitude of private investors towards West Bengal? Apart from complaints about poor infrastructure facilities (including power plants, ports or industrial areas), their doubts stem from two sources. Firstly, the negligent attitude of the government. For example, the state government introduced a wing '*Shipa Bandhu*' (industry friendly)— within the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC) to implement the single window concept, but the department did not function effectively until it was revived and restructured in 1994. Moreover, formally available incentives such as capital subsidies were never made available on time. Even information about stimuli or existence '*Shipa Bandhu*' it is not

presented to investors in a coherent manner. Second, industrialists noted that despite the government reining in workers, the state's labour productivity, as measured by value-added income, remained much lower compared to states like Maharashtra or Gujarat. They also had problems recruiting skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers and often had to give in to the demands of local union leaders who insisted on the membership of people they proposed, regardless of their suitability for the job in question (Bandyopadhyay and Basu 2020, 113-134).

At the beginning of the 1990s, India's economic policy passed through a radical change: the Nehruvian socialist model was abandoned in favour of a market-oriented metamorphosis of the economy. Initially, this shift to the rightward was denounced by left-wing parties as it was believed to have taken place under the dictates of the IMF-World Bank grouping. However, the liberal route of the ruling party and the state quickly recognized the positive impact of the new policy rule on the state's industrial development. Particularly noteworthy in this context are the abolition of permit on the one hand and the abolition of the goods equalization policy on the other. With the abrogation of the 'Permit-License-Quota-Raj' the central government's one-sided control over the industrialisation process ended. Likewise, with the partial withdrawal of the goods equalisation policy, the state's geographical advantage in terms of vicinity to steel-producing regions was given back. At the same time, responsibility for attracting investment and creating new industries within their territorial jurisdiction was after all transferred to states. The fierce competition between states to attract national and foreign industrial investment has therefore led them to project an image favourable to industry and investment. This change in image included several factors: simple and rapid elimination of proposals to create new industries, elimination of bureaucratic Gordian knots, improvement of infrastructure and other facilities, granting tax advantages to entrepreneurs and confirming favourable friendly industrial relations (Bandyopadhyay and Basu 2020, 119).

Finally, despite continued mixed private and public signals regarding its stance on the liberalisation process, Jyoti Basu, then, the Chief Minister of West Bengal formally declared the state government's New Industrial/Economic Policy (NEP) on September 12, 1994. Despite some minimal differences, there was little choice between the major elements of the New Economic Policy and those of the union government (Mayers 2001, 32).

Mayers also argued that “the main thrust of the reforms included: privatisation of selected public sector units [hereafter PSUs]; a virtual open-door policy with regard to MNCs, foreign capital and foreign technology; development of the infrastructural sector through public, private and joint sectors; the encouragement of almost unregulated and unrestricted growth and penetration of market forces into various spheres of the economy, including health, education, tourism, housing and commercial complexes; and a fostering of ‘class peace’ between labour and capital. If there was one significant difference it was that the state government's new policy placed a greater emphasis on cottage and small-scale industries” (Mayers 2001, 32).

Key pillars of the reforms included:

- i. virtual absence of any mention of promotion and expansion of government and public sector and by implication gradual withdrawal of the government from many key areas;
- ii. privatisation of several state public sector units (PSUs) as well as social sectors;
- iii. virtual open-door policy with regard to MNCs and foreign capital and foreign technology;
- iv. development of the infrastructural sector through government or through private and joint sectors, including MNCs and foreign capital;
- v. encouragement to almost unregulated, unbridled growth and penetration of market forces in various spheres of the economy and society, including townships, housing, health, education, hotels, commercial complexes, etc; and
- vi. advocacy of a labour policy amounting to class peace between labour and capital. (Dasgupta 1995, 1896-1897).

Some important points are also important. These are;

- i. Foreign technology and investment as may be appropriate and mutually advantageous were welcomed.
- ii. While the role of public sector as the ‘vehicle for social justice and balanced economic growth’ was acknowledged especially in the big and infrastructure-related industries, the government welcomed the private sector as an agent of accelerated growth; and the potential of the joint sector was recognized as an effective instrument of mobilisation of resources and expertise.
- iii. Especial emphasis was laid on upgradation of infrastructure such as road, power, communication etc.

- iv. Development of social infrastructure – housing, health, education, water supply, technical education institutions etc was also underscored.
- v. As to sick and closed public sector units, the government promised to extend its help and support to the management and workers in evolving rehabilitation packages for consideration by the Bureau of Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR). In the case of sick and closed private sector factories, the government sought to reopen them under the existing management wherever possible or by inducting new promoters where necessary.
- vi. In the field of industrial relations, the mechanism of tri-partite negotiations among the workers, management and the government were prioritized. The pursuit of such a policy cannot but weaken struggles against the Fund-Bank strategy and the centre's new economic policy.

As a part of these industrialisation efforts, the LFG appointed Somnath Chatterjee, a senior CPI-M parliamentarian, as chairman of the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC), bringing dynamism to the body meant to promote business interests in the state to look after. Chatterjee tried to reach out to the media to convey that the government is serious about implementing economic reforms and encouraging private investment. To improve the industrial prospects of the state, LFG also organised a conference ‘Destination West Bengal’ in 1999, where the McKinsey Advisory Board delivered a paper on the competitive advantages and opportunities of industrialisation in the state. Certain sectors – infrastructure, petrochemicals, related industries, agribusiness – received special attention (Bandyopadhyay and Basu 2020, 120).

According to Ranjit Das Gupta “the adoption and pursuance of this policy are being justified on several grounds: (a) West Bengal has been suffering from industrial stagnation and even deindustrialisation since as far back as the mid- 1960s. Much of this was due to the licensing system which was deliberately used by the central government as a means of discrimination against West Bengal and the freight equalisation policy which militated against the natural advantages enjoyed by the eastern region. The remarkable agricultural performance in the state, the delicensing of most of the industries and partial freight equalisation have opened up new opportunities for industrial regeneration of the state. Industrial growth and technological change and upgradation are

urgent imperatives and full advantage has to be taken of the new opportunities in the broader interests of the state. The new state industrial policy is also sought to be justified by projecting the hope that it would create large-scale new employment” (Dasgupta 1995, 1897).

Ranjit Dasgupta also argued that “(b) West Bengal is not a sovereign independent republic and the Left Front government has to function within the constitutional, political and financial constraints of the Indian Union. Though many aspects of the centre’s policy are detrimental to national interests, the Left Front government cannot go beyond that policy and work out and pursue a different one. Any criticism is met with the answer: ‘The state cannot be allowed to be turned into an industrial desert by taking a dogmatic and unrealistic position. In other words, the Left Front government has no other alternative” (Dasgupta 1995, 1897).

Ranjit Dasgupta also argued that “following the announcement of the new state industrial policy many circles traditionally hostile to the Left Front government, including many sections of business and industry as well as important sections of the media, are full of praise for the chief minister and the Left Front leadership for adopting a non-doctrinaire and pragmatic approach. Some have been euphoric about the changes in the industrial scene in the recent months. A leading mass circulation Bengali daily came out with a full-page story titled ‘*bam durge dhanatantrik biplab*’ (‘capitalist revolution in the left citadel’). Several statements and press interviews by government leaders including the chief minister himself and the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation chairman Somnath Chatterjee have tended to give the impression that the state is already in the midst or at least on the verge of an industrial upsurge. Such euphoria was seen most at and around the time of the centenary celebrations of the Confederation of Indian Industry last January. But it has been continuing since then” (Dasgupta 1995, 1897).

According to James Mayers “it is also important to stress that reaction to the CPM’s new policies has revealed a lack of ideological consensus within the Left Front coalition. The CPM has come under increasing pressure from Left partners such as the Revolutionary Socialist Party [hereafter RSP], the Forward Bloc and the Socialist Unity Centre of India who threatened to quit the Left Front, complaining that the new industrial

policy was 'Jyoti Basu's opinion and not the voice of the Left Front and accusing the CPM' of 'toeing the capitalist path' (Mayers 2001, 34) .

James Mayor also argued that for its part, the Communist Party of India [hereafter CPI], although cautioning the CPM to first initiate an investigation into the state's existing resource base, essentially approved of the state government's stance on allowing MNCs and private firms to enter the state sector. "However, the muted opposition voiced by those like the RSP and the Forward Bloc can be construed as little more than an example of vented frustration at their ostensibly impotent position *vis-a-vis* the leadership and policy formulation within the CPM-dominated Left Front. In reality, despite their protestations, the potential of these minor players has little scope beyond the Front, save for the unlikely scenario of their aligning with the Congress(I). Nevertheless, it is clear that the reforms have further strained relations between the CPM and its coalition partners" (Mayers 2001, 34).

At the national level "the CPM central committee's guarded response to the LF government's policy initiatives was ostensibly a confirmation of the communists' acceptance that its overall strategy would have to change in order to adapt to the changing ground rules. Following the central committee's resolution at the party's 14th Congress in December 1993, the CPM had embarked on a two-month long series of all-India general strikes, mass sit-ins and civil disobedience campaigns against the economic policies of the Rao government, culminating in the 5 April 1994 mass demonstration in Delhi" (Mayers 2001, 34).

Emergence of Trinamool Congress: Challenges to the Left:

The year 1998 set a benchmark for the Left in the politics of West Bengal, because in this year the Trinamool Congress under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee was born in the horizon of Bengal politics. The emergence of the Trinamool Congress had changed the focus of West Bengal politics into a new direction. The Left faced a strong opposition in Bengal which could prove in the 1998 mid-term Parliamentary elections. The year 1998 also presented a new pattern of coalition politics in Bengal. The electorate of Bengal experienced the major split of the Congress and birth of a new political party, the TMC or WBTC under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee. This split has certain history.

According to Dwaipayan Bhattacharya, the Congress suffered many factional struggles in many states of India. West Bengal is not beyond of these experiences. Here, the state level leaderships and the energetic workers, the so-called conservative-radical element of the opposition clashed during 1990s. Indira Gandhi's intra-party coup in the late 1960s also exemplified similar patterns. This happens when the Congress leadership's network of influence is disrupted for whatever reason, creating a crisis of legitimacy in the structure of personal control exercised by local/regional party leaders. Normally, these leaders placed their ultimate loyalty in a charismatic central leadership known in party parlance as the 'High Command'. The Nehru family provided a single, unambiguous leadership (except under the impact of a crushing electoral setback or a serious accusation of corruption), and regional Congress leaders competed for the personal favours of the 'high command'. So, more than lateral ties inside the Congress, the party in the dynastic phase induced layers of upright patronage, culminating at the top in the AICC president. However, the tragic death of Rajiv Gandhi fatally disrupted this line of loyalty, fragmenting the party structure. It was no wonder that Rajiv Gandhi's apolitical widow Sonia Gandhi, had to be sidelined to save the Congress party from ultimate disintegration, and again it was no wonder that those who left the Congress did so because they believed she was not the authentic heir of the party's throne. Mamata did not belong to either category, her situation turned out to be much more complicated in Bengal (Bhattacharyya 2004, 1530-31).

The present AITMC '*suprimo*' (head) Mamata Banerjee had started her political career as the Unit President of the Congress student's wing, the 'Chhatra Parishad' in the South Calcutta Girl's College in early 1970s and got a membership of Calcutta District Committee of the Congress. The turning point, she got in 1984 when the Congress nominated her as the candidate of Lok Sabha election at Jadavpur constituency against Somnath Chattopadhyay, a renounce leader of CPI(M). Jadavpur was one of the safest constituencies to the Left during that time. The result came as surprise not only the CPI(M), but the Congress also when Mamata Banerjee defeated a heavyweight political figure, Somnath Chattopadhyay after the election. This made Mamata Banerjee an instant celebrity in West Bengal politics.

Although in the 9th Parliamentary election in 1989, Mamata Banerjee was defeated in the same constituency by the CPI(M) candidate Malini Bhattacharyya with the difference of almost thirty thousand votes. But Mamata Banerjee had been continued

her voice regarding many issues against the LFG in West Bengal and the central government. She was nominated as a member of the court in Viswabharati University by Rajiv Gandhi. This time, a controversy arose regarding her Ph. D. degree from a non-existing university. Another turning point she got in 1991 when she won from Calcutta-South Parliamentary constituency in the 10th Parliamentary election. She defeated her close competitor, the CPI(M) candidate, Biplab Das Gupta by margin of 93663 votes. After that she became minister in the department of the ministry of sports and youth welfare of the Narasimha Rao government but, resigned just after a couple of months by the allegation that the government was backed by the Left (Bhattacharyya 2004, 1529-30).

In the early 1990s, when Mamata Banerjee was becoming a popular icon within the Congress circle, an incident took place at the Hazra crossing in south Kolkata, near her Kalighat residence. While leading a protest march against the government, she was hit on the head by one Laloo Alam, a CPI(M) activist, and had to be hospitalized with a crack in her skull. While recovering in a private hospital, she was appointed President of the Youth Congress (I) on 21 August, 1990. When she left the hospital with a bandage on her head, her photo made the front page of all the major newspapers; A new crusader against the Left was born, one who was not afraid to attack Marxists, even in the face of bloody attacks. The new designation helped her in a crucial way: it helped her transact with grassroots Congress workers across the state. She again organised a protest against the Left Front Government with hundreds of people to ‘attack’ the west Bengal headquarters, the ‘Writers Building’ on 21 July, 1993. She led the mob and the police took actions with firing indiscriminately which resulted death of 13 people. In the next month She claimed that the Congress was not much critical against the Left Front led government. She was also claiming that the Congress secretly benefitted by the Left. She compared the Congress with watermelon, only green in the outside and red in the inside. When the state Congress top brass agreed to set up an inquiry committee to probe such serious allegations and asked Mamata to head it, she remained silent. Indeed, she was more interested in the performative aspects of her protest than in attempting to prove the truth of her own claims (Bhattacharyya 2004, 1530).

Mamata Banerjee’s distance increased with the Congress when she declined to campaign for the Congress in 1993 West Bengal panchayat election and municipal election in 1995. She got snub from Narasimha Rao for not showing active in Congress.

She again, disobey the party's whip by opposing the Bangla bandh called by WBPCCI(I). She wished to resign from Lok Sabha in 1995 to protest against TADA but later she withdrew her resignation. The rift between the Congress leadership and Mamata increased during the both Parliamentary and Assembly election 1996 in West Bengal. But finally, she contested as a Congress' candidate at Calcutta South Parliamentary constituency and could manage to win. But distance was going on with the Congress leader, mainly the WBPCCI(I) president Soumen Mitra. Somen Mitra, the president of Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) and Mamata Banerjee had a falling out over the issue for the renewal of the membership of Youth Congress (I) workers in September, 1996. Mamata Banerjee, who wanted to be a candidate for the post of state party president in the upcoming organisational elections, had directed her followers to launch a massive registration drive. At the Youth Conference (I), 1,00,000 forms had been made available, only a fifth of the originally promised total. Mitra declared that the balanced forms would be distributed gradually and that 'for the sake of the Congress party', he would be willing to offer party leadership to Mamata Banerjee (Mayers 1998, 2253-55).

James Mayers argued that "her unwillingness to commit fully to a formal split with the party was influenced by challenges at this time in New Delhi to Kesri's leadership of the party. When Sharad Pawar, A. R. Antulay and Rajesh Pilot filed their nominations, past loyalties demanded a 'wait-and-see' approach for all concerned in the West Bengal imbroglio. However, once it became clear that Kesri had the numbers in the CWC, the challengers withdrew and the mini-crisis passed. For her part, however, Banerjee had grown impatient at New Delhi's reluctance to intervene and by late July she was calling on the AICC to expel her from the party before August 9 - the date now set for the AICC plenary session in Calcutta" (Mayers 1998, 2255).

James Mayers also argued that the leadership in New Delhi refused to be drawn, no doubt still optimistic, "even at this late stage, of averting a crisis during the plenary. Banerjee finally announced the formation of her Trinamul Congress on August 9 at a mass rally she had organised to clash with opening of the AICC meeting. She stated that she would also form units of frontal organisations like the Mahila (Women's) Congress. the Chhatra Parishad, the Seva Dal (social services organisation) and student units in all districts in the state, indicating that she intended the Trinamul Congress to be more regional than pan-India in character" (Mayers 1998, 2255).

Mamata Banerjee organised a rally at Esplanade, Calcutta on 21st July, 1997 to commemorate the death of 13 Youth Congressmen(I) in police firing on 21st July, 1993. In this rally, she remarked *“the AICC leaders, especially the president MR. Sitaram Keshri were sacrificing the party’s loyal supporters to seize power in New Delhi with help from the communist .. she announced that she would organise a string of meeting on August 9 coinciding with the second day of the three-day plenary in Calcutta to prove her strength . . Toda’s rally is semifinal. The final will be played on August 9”* (TheHindu 22 July 1997, 14)⁹¹.

On 7 August, 1997, Mamata Banerjee virtually disassociate herself with the AICC and said *“we are not members of the AICC or PCC. We are the grassroot level Congress workers .. We will decide our next programme on 9th August. I am getting good response from congress workers in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Bihar* (TheStatesman 8 August 1997, 3)⁹². On 9 August Mamata Banerjee floated the Trinamool Congress, vowing to continue her fight from within the Congress. She told at a massive gathering at Calcutta Maidan that *“this is the real Congress. soon a Bangla Banchao Front welcoming smaller political parties. Mr. Pankaj Banerjee will be the president of Grassroot Congress Committee”* (TheStatesman 10 August 1997, 1)⁹³ and (Kamath 1997, 1,5). From the month of August to the mid of December, 1997, the process for formation of the new party, the Trinamool Congress was in motion. In between this time, the national leaders of the Congress tried to prevent the split of Bengal Congress. Sitaram Keshri and Sonia Gandhi tried to do this. On 15 December, Sonia Gandhi called a meeting at her ‘10-Janapath’ resident with Mamata Banerjee and personally heard Mamata’s opinion. Mamata was accompanied by Ajit Panja and Sudip Bandyapadhyay. (Iyer 1997, 12)⁹⁴. In the next day Banerjee also had a meeting with AICC general

⁹¹ Banerjee said *“Keshri-ji is dreaming of becoming the Prime Minister and Pranab Mukherjee is egging him on so that he can become the country’s Vice President .. I dare them to expel me from the party”*. In this meeting she asked the grassroots Congress(I) workers in West Bengal to chart out their own course of action against the ruling communist. Because according to her the Congress leaders were keen on securing positions in New Delhi with the help of the communist.

⁹² Mamata Banerjee said *“there is no lacunae on our side. The leaders are deviating from their ideas. I had written a letter to Keshri-ji on 14 May, explaining our grievances. We did not get any response”*.

⁹³ Mamata. Banerjee exhorted the crowd to raise both hands and endorsed the decision. A roar went up and crowd prompted Mamata Banerjee to show the committee has been formed by grassroot workers. She said *“use one flag, the tricolour. Don’t let go of it for we are the original congress.*

⁹⁴ After the meeting with Sonia Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee said to the news reporters that she would not let out the thousands of congress workers who rallied behind her when she floated the Trinamool Congress. She said *“I will not betray my workers and settle for any compromise that does not ensure the recognise the Congress grassroot. . I do not intend to talk to anyone other than Mrs Gandhi”*. She also remarked about the BJP that it is not untouchable. So, a signal with BJP’s connection had seen then. She said *“our*

secretary in charge of West Bengal, Oscar Farnandes (TheStatesman 16 December1997, 1).

Bhattacharyya described that “with the Congress High Command striving to strike a deal with Mamata, on one hand, and with the state leadership under Somen, on the other, the last date for the submission of application to the EC for registration of political parties was approaching. Mamata realised that it was a part of the Congress strategy to cross the deadline and then compel her to accept the terms of the Pradesh Committee. She secretly sent her emissaries to make a submission on December 17 without revealing this news to anybody, including her trusted lieutenants” (Bhattacharyya 2004, 1531). He also argued that “subsequently, a deal was reached with the central leadership that agreed to strike out the Congress Election Committee and form a Congress Electioneering Committee instead appointing Mamata its chairperson. This she found acceptable. Meanwhile, in Hyderabad Sitaram Kesari, the president of the AICC, announced in a press conference that all problems in West Bengal have been resolved and Mamata has been appointed the chairperson of the Publicity Committee for the forthcoming poll. This infuriated Mamata to no ends, she immediately called the press and, on December 22, announced that she was severing all ties with the Congress”⁹⁵ (Bhattacharyya 2004, 1531), (TheHindu 23 December 1997, 1) and (Ghosh 1997, 6).

As Sambuddha Mitra Mustafi argued that Sonia Gandhi tried to manage Mamata Banerjee, but in spite of Sonia’s efforts to keep her in the party, Banerjee was suspended from the Congress for six years on 22 December 1997, bringing her nearly twenty-year relationship with the party to a close. She took with her several senior leaders and thousands of Congress workers, claiming to despise the central leadership’s soft approach to the communists (Mustafi 2014, 02). “On January 1, 1998, at the 250,

political enemy in West Bengal is not the BJP, but the Left. The Congress workers in different perception of their political rivals who are not same in everywhere”.

⁹⁵ As per The Hindu, an English daily newspaper report, Mamata Banerjee was expelled from the Congress(I) on 22nd December, 1997 because she announced to contest the then upcoming Lok Sabha election under the banner of Trinamool Congress. After getting the expulsion report from the high command of the Congress she said “I am very happy at what they had done. I have not left the Congress. I have been driven out of it”. As per The Telegraph, an english newspaper report She also said “it is due to my respect for Soniaji that I agreed to hold talks. I waited for nine days for a positive outcome. But, what we eventually got indicated that Mr. Sitaram Keshri does not care for *Soniaji’s* feelings.. What we wanted was some kind of recognition for the Trinamool Congress workers. But Mr. Keshri deliberately and intentionally chose to ignore it. We have no other option but to give him a befitting reply” (Ghosh 1997, 6) . Mamata Banerjee had already approached the Election Commission of India for a symbol to contest the polls.

Chittaranjan Avenue residence of Ajit Panja, a new party was born” (Bhattacharyya 2004, 1531).

Although its leader afterwards demanded that the birth day of the TMC was also distinctive as it was the commemorating ‘*Kalpataru*’ festival in memory of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramhamnsa Dev* and also the first day of *Ramdan*.

Steps Towards Industrialisations: Question of Ideology?

The CPI(M)-led LF came at the political power in Bengal in 1977 with the commitment to provide and sustain a better life for the marginalised people of the state; specially the workers, peasants, landless, daily labourers etc. In the first three tenure of the LFG, it achieved many successes. But after the ‘neo liberal turn’ of the world, the Front initially tried to keep distance from the wave of capitalism across the world market. Although the LFG adopted the ‘New Industrial Policy-1994’ but it had not opened to the way of large investment of private capital. In 2000, then the longest serving Chief Minister in any state of post independent India, Jyoti Basu stepped down. Then the deputy C. M., Buddhadeb selected as the new CM of the state. After taking charge as the C.M. of the state, Mr. Bhattacharjee showed his interest towards many reforms in terms of policy, economy, industrialisation etc. for greater employment and development of the state. To express his views in an interview with Hindustan Times, Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya said *“I am very clear in my mind. This is capitalism. I just cannot build socialism in one part of the country. They (the leftist critics) theoretically cannot accept this position .. The world is changing. Communist are also changing. We cant’s stick to our old dogmas. Deng Xiaoping used to say ‘learn truth from the fact not from dogmas”* (Kalbag 2007, 1)⁹⁶.

Chief Minister Bhattacharjee opened a new and dynamic vision of greater development with distinctly capitalist tinge. Investment by private initiative, including foreign capital, was aggressively promoted with the aim of increasing employment, and investors were reassured by promises of improvements within the infrastructure, industrial peace, and administrative restructuring. At the same time, new directions were sought in agriculture and the links between agriculture and industry were strengthened

⁹⁶ In an exclusive two hours interview, Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya said the LF won powers for seventh straight times in May, 2006, riding on the slogan of industrialisation. He also said ‘there is no place for jobless growth, and now that the communists’ radical land reform which broke up large zamindar land holding among small and marginal share-croppers.. we should speed up the process of industrialisation’.

by encouraging agriculture-based industries. Facilities in the urban areas were vigorously regenerated in an attempt to transform West Bengal into a vibrant business hub. These included identifying the construction of a new airport and a deep-sea port as topmost priorities for the government for which feasibility studies have been carried out. At that same situation, though, Bhattacharjee had been taken great pains to continually highlighted distinctions between the approaches of the LF and the neo-liberal development model adopted by the Union government of India at New Delhi. In particular, Bhattacharjee emphasised that the LFG sought foreign investment on its own terms, as opposed to those of investors, and that it favoured Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) only if it brought advanced technology and increased both production capacity and employment. Initially there were some confusions and barriers to introduce and welcome any kind of economic reform by following capitalistic approach. But finally, the state CPM succeed to collect consent from the central committee (Acharyya 2005, 1,7)⁹⁷. The CM of West Bengal remarked that the LF was completely converse to ‘mindless investment’ which according to him hamper the interests of the workers in the urban areas. The mainstream media in Bengal *enamored* with Bhattacharjee’s such kind of ‘accomplishments’- tended to set aside all these dispensable footnotes and instead assumed that the election results represented unambiguous public support for ‘change’ (Basu 2007, 288-306).

At the CII partnership summit 2005, West Bengal showed interest towards FDI and industry friendly attitudes. CM of Bengal said “*the Marxist are not fools. The world is changing, we are also changing. . here, the Left is Right*” (TheStatesman 14 January 2005, 11)⁹⁸.

On a stuffy day of August in 2005, then the Chief Minister of Bengal, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya left for Jakarta with a 22 members team to sign a MoU with the Salim groups of Companies, one of the largest companies of Indonesia. If it was not the first foreign trip to invite foreign investment of any CM of Bengal who believed in Marxist

⁹⁷ Finally, the CPI(M) central committee gave consent for reform in economy and industry to the state unit on 2nd June, 2005. The CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya and industrial minister Nirupam Sen were present in the meeting. Nirupam Sen said “reform programmes will be more speed up, state will be benefitted”. (Ananda Bazar Patrika, 5th June 2005, 1, 7).

⁹⁸ Addressing the galaxy entrepreneurs and dignitaries from all over the world at the CII (Confederation of Indian Industry) partnership summit 2005, the CM of Bengal said that the state would readily to cooperate with the foreign investors from different countries and urged then to include West Bengal in their global investment map. Nirupam Sen, then the Minister of Industry and Commerce was also present at the stage. (The Statesman, 14th January, 2005, 11).

principles. Jyoti Basu, the longest serving CM of Bengal and presently third longest⁹⁹ in the country made several such tour in many countries of Europe and America to get in investment in the state. Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya argued that “this was, however, Buddhadeb’s first major trip outside the country, and the investment proposed - to the tune of 50,000 crores was extraordinarily high for the state’s dwindling economy. A debate triggered off within the left over whether the government should invite a foreign multinational, if the Salim group- which allegedly had an anti-communist past - should be allowed to invest in the state. On both counts, Buddhadeb got the state committee and the politburo of the CPI(M) to come round his way” (Bhattacharyya 2016, 155).

On the eve of his departure the CM met with media and said “that there was no other alternative, but the government was committed to protect the interests of the state’s workers and the peasants. Three days later, on 25 August, the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC) signed a MoU with the Salim Group to promote an industrial park in the form of a special economic zone (SEZ)¹⁰⁰ in West Bengal. The final agreement was to be inked later, after the company submitted a detailed project report to the government” (Bhattacharyya 2016, 155).

The huge victory of the LF in 2006 had considered as the supports of the manifestations of industrialisation of the common people of Bengal to the front and the newly elected state government. The liberal orientation of the Marxist party led government had been seen on more and more towards the private investment. Initially the LFG abled to manage to convinced the people but problems had been begun with the question of acquisitions of land in Singur and Nandigram. It all commenced on 18 May, 2006, just a few days later of the newly elected LF came to state power in West Bengal, when the then Chairman of the TATA Group, Mr. Ratan Tata, declared that a small car project would be set up in Singur, in the district of Hoogly in West Bengal. The land sought by the company was from six *maujas* – *Bajemelia*, *Khaserbheri*, *Gopalnagar*, *Beraberi*, *Singherberi*, and *Joymalyarbheri*. Days later, from May 25, protests against

⁹⁹ In 2005, Jyoti Basu was the first longest serving CM in India, but later Pawan Kumar Chamling in Sikkim and Mr. Naveen Patnaik in Odisha became the first and second longest term serving CM in India.

¹⁰⁰ To create an enabling environment for private businesses, the Left Front government passed the SEZ Act in 2003, two years before it was passed by the central government of India. SEZs are generally defined as special restricted zones that are exempted from various tariffs and duties based on their treatment as foreign zones for the purpose of trade. The scheme offers a wide range of economic activities included with manufacturing, servicing, trading, labelling, reconditioning, repacking and warehousing.

the state government's proposal to acquire 997 acres of agricultural land started (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 99-100).

Chatterjee and Basu argued that Some people of the villages “immediately formed an informal platform named ‘*Singur Krishi Jomi Raksha Committee*’ (Singur save agricultural land committee; SKJRC) to voice their collective protest. The then opposition leader Mamata Banerjee entered the scene on 25 September; the very same day, the police beat up the protesters and Banerjee alleged that she herself was manhandled. On 2 December the work of fencing the acquired 997 acres of land started amidst protest by the villagers. In the ensued police action, a large number of villagers were injured, some of them critically” (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 99-100). Mamata Banerjee started an indefinite hunger strike from 4 December, 2006 for “protesting the land acquisition issue that she ended 25 days later on 29 December, upon the request of the then Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and the then President of India, Dr A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. Tata Motors started the construction of the factory from 21 January 2007 when women torched the factory fencing and on 9 March Tata Motors finally got possession of the land. Three days later, on 12 March, a protesting farmer committed suicide, the earliest of a row of suicides. On 16 March a fierce mob attacked the factory, and on 25 March it was reported that five of the factory guards were injured in another attack, and frequent attacks followed henceforth. On 10 January 2008 Tata Motors unveiled the Nano at New Delhi Auto Expo, and the protesters burnt down its replica in Singur on the very same day. On 18 January the Calcutta High Court delivered its judgement in favour of the state government regarding land acquisition” (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 100).

On 15th February, 2008, the Tata Motors declared that the small car, ‘Nano’ would be launched by the month of October, 2008. This was the time of the state's largest festival, the Durga Puja and Diwali. But, “meanwhile, with an unexpected gain in panchayat elections, winning a majority in the Singur Panchayat, TMC began to make its comeback from 21 May. On 27 June protesters broke into the Tata Motors factory. Between 18 to 20 August a series of events followed—the then Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya invited Mamata Banerjee for talks, where Banerjee claimed that at least 400 acres of land have to be returned to the (unwilling) farmers who received no compensation in lieu of their land which has been acquired for the automobile project. They failed to come to terms, and the talks failed. Meanwhile, on 22 August Ratan Tata

made the earliest warning to relocate the Nano production out of Singur if violence continued. Tata Motors had by that time begun to receive invitations from other states to relocate the factory (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 100-101).

On 2 September, 2008, the Tata Motors officially declared “the suspension of work at Singur, on the logic that alternate sites were being explored. A section of the peasant protestors, perhaps being gradually convinced about the economic benefits of the project, formed the ‘*Nano Bachao Committee*’ (save the Nano committee) on 2 October 2008. On 3 October Ratan Tata declared that Tata Motors would pull out of Singur, and finally on 7 October Tata Motors confirmed the relocation of the Nano project at Sanand in Gujarat, abandoning the Singur factory” (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 100-101).

The LFG had faced another serious challenge in Nandigram in terms of acquisition of land for industrialisation. Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya described that “for Nandigram, the state government signed a contract with the WBIDC and the Salim Group rather ceremoniously on 31 July. The project was named ‘New Kolkata International Development’ (NKID) involving 38,650 acres of farmland and a proposed investment to the scale of 40,000 crore in East Medinipur and South 24 Parganas districts. West Bengal never received any investment of this magnitude, which the chief minister described as a ‘historic’. Both the CPI(M) and the Krishak Sabha fell in line with the government leaving a large space open for potential detractors” (Bhattacharyya 2016, 159).

D. Bhattacharyya also described that “by July-August 2006 several mass organizations spawned with the backing of various opposition parties. They criticized the state government’s initiatives on the ground that policies were made without any consultation with those who stood to get affected, who would lose lands and other productive assets to accommodate a mega corporate expansion. *Krishak Uchchhed Birodhhi O Janaswartha Raksha Committee* (Committee against Peasants’ Eviction and for Protection of People’s Interests) was set up by the SUCI. *Krishi Jomi Raksha Committee* (Committee for the Protection of Agricultural Land or KJRC) was set up in Nandigram and Khejuri with the state-wide initiative of the TMC. *Gana Unnayan O Jana Adhikar Sangram Samiti* (Association for the Struggle of People’s Development and Rights) was formed jointly by *Jamait Ulema-i-Hind* and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist Santosh Rana faction)” (Bhattacharyya 2016, 159-60).

D. Bhattacharyya also described that “the signs were clear. The peasants were concerned because the panchayat or the grassroots party workers knew almost nothing about what the government was up to. All they saw was that the corporate bosses were accorded a reception by the left that people in West Bengal never witnessed before. Such change in government’s approach, its disregard for a dialogue, and the looming prospect of losing livelihood combined to instil a dark fear of dispossession into a large peasant population in southern West Bengal” (Bhattacharyya 2016, 159-60) .

Problems began on 28 December, 2006 when the Haldia Development Authority (HDA), had issued a notice to identifying 27 mouzas of land in Nandigram and 2 mouzas of land in Khejuri, consisting 25,000 acres of land for acquisition, to set up a chemical hub by an Indonesia based Salim group. On the third day of January, 2007 when a protest against land acquisition gathered before the panchayet office to seek clarification for the land acquisition. “They were manhandled by the police and a police van caught fire, which could either be an accident or a deliberate action on the part of the masses. This was the beginning of violence in Nandigram. In the next couple of day, the people of Nandigram put up roadblocks and made the interior parts inaccessible by police and administration. On 5 January 2007, several opposition parties such as the AITC, Congress, Socialist Unity Centre of India came together to form the ‘*Bhumi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee*’ (BUPC). On January 7 armed CPI (M) cadre allegedly hurled bombs and fired bullets in Nandigram, killing at least five people” (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 101-102).

J. Chatterjee and S. Basu argued that “the dug-up roads were proposed to be rebuilt and police camps were to be set up again wherever required. The then, Chief Minister of West Bengal, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya declaring that it was a mistake of the HDA to issue such a notice, asked it to be torn down and affirmed that in further dealings with the issue, the interests of everybody concerned would be kept in mind. However, violence continued between CPI (M) cadre and BUPC on a regular basis” (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 101-102 and Bose 2013, 112-16).

A police sub-inspector was killed on 7 February, 2007 and the Home Secretary of the government of West Bengal declared that “in view of the prevailing violence the administration would have to think differently about the police action in the villages in Nandigram, where police action was restricted so far. On February 12 the then chief

minister assured that no land would be taken from those unwilling to give it. However, the very next day, the CPI(M) MP from Haldia of the *Purba Medinipur* district, Mr Lakshman Seth said that the land mentioned in the ‘notice’ issued by the HDA ‘would be acquired’. On 10 March the district magistrate summoned a meeting of all the political parties which was boycotted by the opposition on grounds that the earlier proposals were not fulfilled” (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 102-103). During this time controversial incident took place. “On 14 March, police gathered around Nandigram on grounds to reconnect it with the mainstream. On being held up by protesters, they fired after a number of warnings, killing 14 of the protesters and injuring many. On the next day the Calcutta High Court called for a special inquiry of the incidence by the CBI. On 19 March the state government issued written notice declaring withdrawal of the special economic zone from Nandigram. The BUPC, with utter disbelief, kept up its blockade of the area till 11 November when allegedly the CPI (M) cadres ‘liberated’ the area or ‘*gram dakhla*’ (‘capture of the village’ as say the villagers). With the deployment of CRPF and their camps in Nandigram the overt violence came to an end” (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 102-103).

On 17 March, 2007, the then Chief Minister of Bengal Buddhadeb Bhattacharya took the responsibility of Nandigram massacre and said “*I am the head of the government. It was my decision. Whatever happened there is my responsibility .. we did not understand that there would be such resistance in Nandigram. Our assessment of the resistance was wrong. I did not know that there would be police excesses of such proportion. I am shocked. I am sad*” (Banerjee 2007, 1)¹⁰¹.

In the meeting, the small partners of the LF like; the CPI, RSP, Forward Bloc etc. were also present. Some crucial decisions were taken. Some of those were- a) government would not acquire any land in Nandigram for industry, b) police contingents will be withdrawn from Nandigram, c) LF partners will normalised the situation through social and political exercises, d) the government will act according to the policy of Left Front, e) government will be careful to ensure that such incident is not repeated, f) all

¹⁰¹ After attending a LF meeting with former CM Jyoti Basu, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee made this remarked. He also said “there will be no SEZ in Nandigram and no land acquisition for the industry there. The chemical hub may come up Haldia instead . . I will also withdraw the police phases”. The Hindustan Times, ‘No SEZ in Nandigram. Police to be withdrawn from this area, My Mistakes, Buddha owns up’. 18th March, Kolkata, 1.

allies have agreed that the Front was united, is united and will remain united etc. (TheStatesman 18 March 2007, 1) and (TheTimesOfIndia 18 March 2007, 1)¹⁰².

The protest that the LFG faced in Singur and Nandigram in terms of acquisition for large scale land for industrialisation, have raised some important points. First is the nature of the protest. As J. Chatterjee and S. Basu described that “Everywhere the affected villagers spontaneously reacted to the issue of land acquisition for industrialization and urbanization. Following Blumer’s (1946) typology of social movements this can be termed as a ‘general social movement’ since it lacked proper formal organization, established or recognized leadership with formal guidance and control. From the standpoint of Hobsbawm (1971), these can be termed as rural movements although critiques tend to differ from Hobsbawm’s characterization of these movements to have less developed class consciousness, hence ‘archaic’ or pre-political in nature. The tradition of peasant movements in Bengal also contradicts Hobsbawm’s point of view since it amply demonstrates the existence of class solidarities in a variable degree along with other relevant dimensions among the exploited and oppressed peasantry” (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 103).

Second point is that about the participation of the women in the protest. Women were actively participated in the protests. As Parthasarathi Banerjee described that “in all these protests, a significant presence and active participation of peasant women was noteworthy. On many occasions they formed the majority among the agitators. Particularly whenever the government officials tried to enter the villages to serve the notifications to the farmers for acquiring land, the women appeared in spontaneous resistance with brooms and sticks in their hands after alerting others by blowing conch shells” (Banerjee 2006, 2718-19). The involvement of women in the movement and “the intensity of their participation might only be compared with women’s role in the Tebhaga movement in the late 1940s. But in sharp contrast to the Tebhaga movement, which was led by the undivided communist party, this peasant movement is spearheaded principally by the Trinamool Congress Party (TMC) while the ruling left parties in the state stand in opposition. TMC has a strong presence in Singur,

¹⁰² Being present in the meeting former CM Jyoti Basu minced no words in the criticizing. Senior RSP leader and PWD Minister Mr. Kshiti Gowsami said ‘we are happy that the crisis has ended temporarily. We are at one meeting point. We will have to watch the situation’.

which is represented in the state assembly by a retired teacher elected on a TMC ticket for the last two terms” (Banerjee 2006, 2718-19).

Parthasarathi Banerjee also described that “the only left party other than the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) that has some organisational network in the five villages affected by land acquisition is Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI), which is also active in organising the farmers against land acquisition. With the unilateral decision of land acquisition by the state government, the CPI(M) seems to have lost much of its base among the local farmers. Even the local CPI(M) leaders, including the panchayat pradhan and block level panchayat samiti president expressed their unhappiness over the way the land acquisition decision was taken at the top level of the party, keeping them in the dark at the initial phase” (Banerjee 2006, 2718-19).

The third point was “the informal nature of the organization formed to carry forward the movements. In Singur, as has been already mentioned, the anti-land acquisition protestors formed the SKJRC, while those supporting the Tata Motors factory at Singur formed the Nano Bachao Committee. In Nandigram we come across BUPC (committee to resist eviction from land) formed by the village people to resist the proposed land acquisition drive. Similarly, in Raiganj in Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal, peasants organized themselves under the Krishi Jomi Bachao Committee (committee to save the farmland) in January 2007 to resist land acquisition for a proposed army training camp there” (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 104-105) and (Nielsen 2018, 17-36). Nielsen also mentions about “the *Jami Bachao Vasstu Bachao Committee* (committee to save land and homes) in Mahishadal, in Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal, Panskura Jomi Suraksha Sangram Committee (action committee to secure land) in Panskura of the same district, Krishi Jomi Raksha Committee (committee to save farm land) in Kharagpur of Paschim Medinipur district, *Krishi Jomi Jiban o Jibika Raksha Committee* (committee to protect farmland, live and livelihood) in Andal of Burdwan district and many others, which were formed to oppose acquisition of agricultural land. All these organizations were informal people’s forums to resist the land acquisition drive of the LF government in West Bengal formed during the second half of the first decade of the 21st century. They lacked the formal organizational structure of an organized political party” (Chatterjee and Basu 2020, 104-105) and (Nielsen 2018, 17-36).

There is also an important point need to write about the peasant resistant in the two areas which has raised by Partha N. Mukherjee and Bholanath Ghosh. According to Mukherjee and Ghosh “While it is true that the agrarian contradiction surfacing on account of acquisition of agricultural lands for mega-industrial projects fuelled opposition forces, there are at least three compelling reasons to suggest that the primary contradiction is not between agriculture and industry. First, agricultural lands acquired in Rajarhat, Howrah, Siliguri, and other projects went unnoticed. There was not a whimper over these land acquisitions” (Mukherji and Ghosh 2010, 207-08).

Partha N. Mukherjee and Bholanath Ghosh’s second point is that “in Singur, there was a spontaneous peasant resistance, irrespective of party affiliation or support, from the time the acquisition of lands for the Tata Motors was at the stage of just a possibility. Yet a section of the very same peasantry became the main voice of the *‘Nano Bachao Committee’* (Save Nano Committee). The composition of this Committee is well represented by both CPM and TMC support-base, heavily weighted with peasants” (Mukherji and Ghosh 2010, 207-08). Finally, the huge mobilisations by Mamata Banerjee “in Singur that shook the West Bengal government have shown a drastic decline in their appeal over time. The inference is that if the government had designed a compensation package that could ensure the reproduction of livelihoods, particularly of the poor and marginalised, at existing or better levels, this acute dislocating situation would probably not have arisen” (Mukherji and Ghosh 2010, 207-08).

Last, but not least it is also important to mention that what had actually happened at the micro level in Singur and Nandigram has not been properly unfolded till date before the common people of the state and all over the world also. What we have been acknowledged that was by the hype and hide of the mainstream media. So many cases have not been dissolved now till today after almost 17 years of the incidents. As an independent researcher this point must be raised before the readers.

But it is very much undeniable that the incidents had been happened in Singur and Nandigram unfolded one kind of governance failure of the LFG during that time. That failure had led the Left Front, the CPI(M) in particular, towards a larger crisis in the state and the country for future politics. It had been showed as truth in the West Bengal Panchayat election in 2008.

The issue of Singur and Nandigram had become headline of daily life with the initiative of medias and political parties. The LFG failed to build any counter approach against those oppositions. And finally, the LFG stopped the process of industrialisation. Another important factor was that the death of a Muslim young man, Rizwanur Rahaman raised questions for the role of the CPI(M) led LFG for the Muslim minority community. TMC leader Mamata Banerjee succeed to collect sympathy of a large section of the Muslim community due to the issue of Rizwanur Rahaman¹⁰³.

Rise of the BJP in West Bengal: Challenge to the Left

Another important point related to the crisis and marginalisation of the left politics in West Bengal is the rise and expansion of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the state since last 10 years. The BJP is born in the year of 1980 and had become a popular political party at the national level during early 1990s. In the 1991 Lok Sabha and West Bengal Assembly election, the party established it's presence in the state by securing almost 11 per cent votes without any solid organisational grip. Although the BJP failed to secure any Lok Sabha and Assembly Constituency in WB in 1991 but it's presence was a caution to the LF, the CPI(M) in particular. After that the BJP had not secured any kind of strong hold in the state till 1997, except a few areas. In 1998 Lok Sabha election, the BJP could manage to register it's first win in the state by making electoral alliance with a newly formed political party, the TMC. In 1999 Lok Sabha election, the BJP could win two Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal by making alliance with the TMC.

From 2001 to 2011 the BJP could not win any seats in any major election, the Lok Sabha and the Assembly both, except 2009 Lok Sabah. After the debacle of the LF in 2011 West Bengal Legislative Assembly election, the socio-political circumstances had started to change. The Left started to decrease in terms of vote share in Lok Sabha and WB Assembly elections. On the other hands the BJP has emerged again as a strong

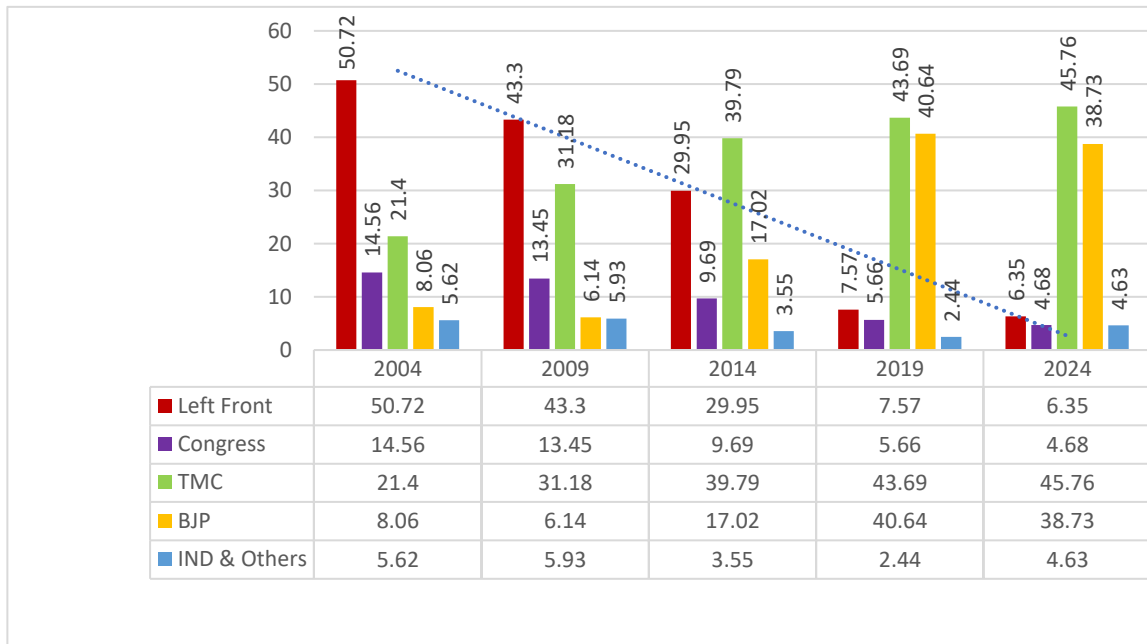
¹⁰³ Rizwanur Rahman, a 30-year-old computer graphics designer, 'was found dead beside a railway track in Kolkata on 21 September 2007, with his head smashed, barely a month after marrying Priyanka, daughter of industrialist Ashok Todi. The Todi family did not approve of the marriage of Rizwanur and Priyanka (either due to religious or economic reasons, or may be both) and apprehensions had been there that Rizwanur was murdered. The cause of death, however, possibly was suicide (according to CBI report). Allegations had been there that the authorities were covering up the incident under pressure of Ashok Todi, who heads the Rs. 400 crore firm Lux Cozi. It is widely believed that the inept handling of the Rizwanur case by the Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee (also holding the Police Department portfolio), was one of the factors that led to the defeat of the Left Front government in West Bengal in 2011, after thirty-four years of uninterrupted rule. His inability to take swift action against Police Commissioner Prasun Mukherjee, perceived to be due to his close personal association, cost him the support of the general public' (Chatterjee and Basu 2014, 306-307).

political force to counter the Left, the TMC and the Congress. It was first visible through the result of 16th Lok Sabha election. In 2014 Lok Sabha election, the BJP contested in West Bengal without making any electoral alliance with any strong powerful state or national political party but could secure two important Lok Sabha seats like; Asansol and Darjeeling. The BJP also secured almost 17 per cent vote also.

Asansol was one of the Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal which also known as the strong base of the Left during the 34 years of LFG because of the strong presence of the trade union organisations of the Left. In 2016 West Bengal Assembly election, the BJP registered its historic win by winning only three seats in the state. Although vote shared by the BJP was decreased by almost 7 per cent in comparison to the 2014 Lok Sabha election. In terms of number of sharing seat, it was minimum. But in terms of vote share it was a caution to the other non-BJP political party in the state of West Bengal. BJP shared almost 10 per cent vote in 2016 West Bengal Assembly election which was almost same in comparison to the vote secured by the BJP in the year of 1991.

In 2019 Lok Sabha election, the party could secure 18 Lok Sabha seats out of 42 and almost 40 per cent vote in the state. On the other hands the Left reduced to a naught in terms of winning Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal. This was the most disastrous consequences for the left parties in West Bengal who are contesting the election since 1950s. In 2021 WB Assembly election the BJP secured 77 seats along with almost 38 per cent votes. The TMC secure 43.69 per cent votes which is decreased by almost two per cent in comparison to the 2016 WB Assembly election. But in 2021 Assembly and 2024 Lok Sabha election, the TMC secured almost 48 per cent and 46 per cent vote respectively. The BJP secured almost 38 per cent vote in 2021 and 2024 election. On the other hands the LF shared 7.57 per cent, 6 per cent and 6.35 per cent votes in 2019 Lok Sabha, 2021 WB Assembly and 2024 Lok Sabha elections respectively. So, the analysis of electoral data of last 10 years, it is clear that a section of Left vote bank has been shifted towards the BJP because the others remain almost same position.

Vote shared by major political parties or alliance in West Bengal in 2004 to 2024 Lok Sabha elections



Column Chart- 3.20

(Source: Data compiled from <https://eci.gov.in>)

Vote Shared by major political parties in WB during 2011 to 2024 Lok Sabha (LS) and Legislative Assembly (LA) elections in WB. (Data rounded off to nearest hundred)

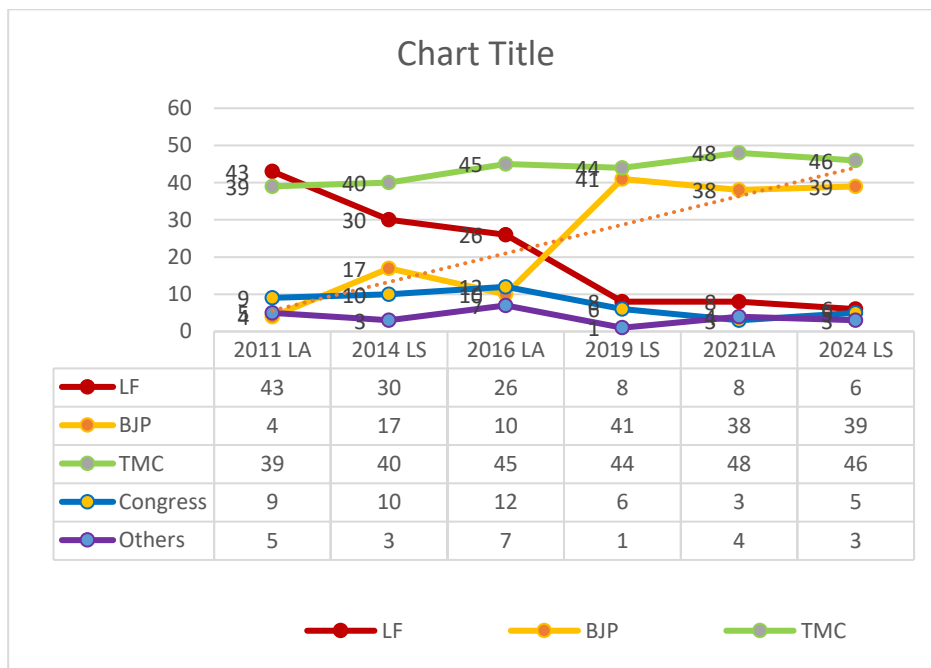


Chart- 3.21

(Data compiled from www.eci.gov.in)

Perceptions of the Leaders and Activists: An Analysis

The present chapter also analyses the views and perceptions of a handful leaders and activists of major political parties at different level in West Bengal. For this purpose, we have conducted face to face interviews with a few political leaders and activists of different political parties specially, the CPI(M), the BJP, the TMC and the Congress in West Bengal. The study received some remarks and opinion and counter opinion regarding the crisis of the Left politics in Bengal. The study also tries to understand the perceptions of a few leaders of the CPI(M) initially and there after it tries to understand other opinions and counter opinions of a few leaders and activists of other non-Left oppositions parties.

In response to the question of *'success and failure of the Left in West Bengal during 1977-2011 and 2011 to till date'*, one of the respondents (Abhas Roy Chowdhury is a full-time party member of the CPI(M). At present, he is a member of the CPI(M) central committee. Roy Chowdhury has expressed his views in an interview. He was also a leading leader and activist of the CPI(M) student wing, the SFI) who is also a member of the central committee of CPI(M), argued that there were some socio-economic and political background for coming to power of the CPI(M) led LF in the state of West Bengal in 1977. One of them was the working-class movement after India's independence. He also argued that West Bengal had experiences of food movement during 1950s and 1960s along with the other parts of the country. Moreover, the development of industry in West Bengal did not take place in the same way during the Congress rule after independence. He also argued that India is one of the rarest countries in the world where feudalism and capitalism have always worked together. As a result, even if the rulers thought about the industry, but land reform for it did not happen in that way in India. As a result, the main reason behind the leftists to coming at power in West Bengal was the land movement. Besides, the promises for creating scope of job opportunity for the common people, improving the quality of their living, protecting the rights of marginalised people, freeing them from the exploitation of landlords and *'jotdars'* etc. had been played important roles for getting victory by the LF in the West Bengal assembly election 1977.

He also argued that when the Left came to power in West Bengal in 1977, the percentage of people was living above the poverty line in the state was around 20 per

cent. But by the time the Left was ousted from power in West Bengal in 2011, that figure had risen to around 70 per cent. Even before 1977, laws for land reform were made in the state, but no effort was made to implement the act by the then government. The land reform act taken by the Left Front government in 1977 was merely an implementation of the law made by the Congress regime to determine the upper limit of land in the state. Here the originality of the Left Front government was not there, what was there, the political will of the government. Although, later LFG was made several changes to that law. Handed over of minimum area of land to landless marginal people, mainly the Schedule Castes, Schedule Tribes and minorities through land reform program called '*Operation Barga*', was one of the reasons to remained in power of the Left for 34 years in the state. Besides land reform, the transfer of power to common people through panchayats at rural levels was another important factor that helped the LF to remain in power for 34 years. Through the West Bengal Panchayat elections in 1978, the first political power reached to the hands of the common labouring, poor, marginalised people of West Bengal whom we call the 'rural proletariat'. As a result, the regular elections in the Panchayat system and the participation in power of the common people of the villages through it further accelerated the success of the Left.

In terms of the failure of the Left Front Government in West Bengal, Abhash Roychowdhury divided the ruling period of the LFG in Bengal into two tenures. The first one was the first three LFG i.e. from 1977 to 1991. And the second was since 1991 to 2011. He also argued that new liberalisation process had started from 1991 and the Union Government of India opted the structural adjustment. As a result, when the country went through structural adjustment, its impact is bound to fall on the states. Although our country is federal, it has moved towards centralization since time immemorial. Which has a direct impact on the states. One of the cornerstones of the success of the Left Front was the rural economy centred around villages. As a result, there was a change in the expectations of the landless poor family who had a small amount of land in their hands in the 1980s. In the 1980s, the next generation of the marginal man who made a living as a farm labourer continued to emerge from that mindset. Along with urbanisation, population growth, crisis in rural agriculture-based economy. As a result, when agriculture began to develop, a large part of the rural economy naturally became connected with urban and small-town markets. Education continued to expand as well. There was a need to build more schools and colleges. This necessitated the creation of a

large sector for employment. Moreover, when of common marginal people got cash in hand, their expectations began to change. This is a change in expectations with to maintain consistency. In many cases Left Front Government failed to fulfil those expectations. As a result, after 2003, the Left Front Government took the initiative to set up large industries in West Bengal with the aim of creating massive employment. Industrialisation was the main agenda in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections and the 2006 Vidhan Sabha elections. As a reflection of which there is no doubt that the Left Front got a massive electoral victory. The need for industrialisation cannot be denied in any way. But the problem is that the Left Front has failed to convince its own support-based classes of the idea that this industrialisation was so necessary. This is one of their failures. As a result, for example, in 2006, the CPI(M) was defeated in the Bhangar Legislative Assembly despite a massive electoral victory all over the state. The reason for which is believed to be that before 2006 some land was acquired for setting up industries there. Which the Left Front government could not seriously realize at that time. Most left's supporters felt that land acquisition was essential for industrial establishment, but excluding their land.

In response to the question of success and failure of the Left in Bengal, another respondent [Sayed Hussain is a party member of the CPI(M). He is also the present secretary of the Purba Bardhaman (East Burdwan) district committee of the CPI(M). He expressed his views in an interview] who is also a leader of CPI(M) argued that the socio-economic development of the marginal classes in Bengal by the LFG after 1977 was a point. He argued that the LFG had successfully developed the socio-economic conditions of the rural and marginal people during its first 15 years of rule. The LFG also succeed to increase income level of the poor and marginal people. At the same time people's expectations had also been started to change after the first fifteen years of LF rule in Bengal. These expectations created several challenges to the government. It is true that the government failed to fulfil those needs and demands. So, a contradiction had been arisen between the newly developed sections and the ruling Left. The initial contradiction was between the rural exploited landless workers and the feudal lords, the '*jotdar*, and '*jamidars*' (owner of large-scale land). But the contradictions of post 1990s was between the newly educated marginal class who did not have the experience of 1970s and 1980s in Bengal and the ruling Left. And to fulfil those need and expectation

and alleviate those contradictions the LFG decided to set up large scale industries with the help of private capital in the state.

Another CPI(M) leader and activist and former M.L.A. of Mayureswar assembly in Birbhum, Asok Kumar Ray (Asoke Kumar Ray is a senior CPI(M) leader and activist from Mayureswar Assembly in the district of Birbhum, West Bengal. He is a party member of the CPI(M) since 1967. He was also an elected M.L.A. from Mayureswar Vidhan Sabha during 2011-2016 as the candidate of the CPIM. He expressed his views in an informal interview on 11 May, 2025 at his resident at Mayureswar) referred some important point for the long-term success of the Left in Bengal. These are democratization of political powers through local elected bodies like Panchayats, regular elections of panchayats, implementations of land reforms through 'operation barga', steps for free and compulsory primary education, to generate employment created pressure to implement MGNREGS on UPA-I government etc.

Some different opinions and arguments also sought through the interviews with a few leaders and activists of other notable non-Left political parties, mainly the Congress, the TMC and the BJP also. In response to the question of the success and failure of the Left in West Bengal since 1977, one of the respondents who also a leader of the Congress like; Mrinal Sarkar (Mrinal Sarkar is a senior member of the Indian National Congress from West Bengal. Mr. Sarkar is also member of the AICC at present. He expressed his view in an interview with the researcher at his resident on 20th March, 2025) and Jayanta Das (Jayanta Das is a member and mouth piece of Murshidabad district congress. He expressed his views in a personal interview with the researcher at the Murshidabad district congress party office, Baharampore on 16 January, 2025.) argued that there were some unfinished and unresolved works of the Congress led government before 1977. The LFG took initiatives to implement that unfinished works. Mr. Das argued that the first initiative for land reform act taken by the Congress government. The LFG implemented of some provisions of land reform act with a few changes of them. Dr. Mrinal Sarkar argued that the working bases were prepared during the 1960s and early 1970s period. In that period the CPI(M) organised some important movement, raised some important issues which attracted a section of people to join the party. But after one decade many privilege and opportunist classes specially, the middle class had started to come under the umbrella of the party who actually captured the control of the party at lower level. The top leadership failed to control those opportunist classes. So, after some years of LF rule, many sections

of the common people were very much unhappy with the LFG. Another respondent of the Congress argued that the most important reason for the defeat of the Left in 2011 Assembly election was anti-incumbency.

One of the respondents who [Ardhendu Biswas is a former district president of the BJP in Bardhaman (undivided) districts. At present he is a member of BJP's district advisory council. He has expressed his view in an open interview at the district party office of Purba Bardhaman (East Burdwan) on 18th February, 2025. The conversation was Bengali.] is also a representative of the BJP argued that the Left were successful during 1977 to convince the people regarding their rights with land which helped them to win election in 1977. He also argued that due to some negative issues of the Congress like; oppression, violence, emergency throughout the country, elite attitude of the Congress etc. the people of Bengal sought a change in West Bengal. He also thinks that in the 1980s the LFG implemented a few policies which helped the CPI(M) to win in the election. The LFG recovered a large scale of vested land and distributed among poor and landless people, specially, the Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes through 'operation barga'. But many violent incidents like; 'netai', 'marichjhapi' 'sujpur' etc. controversies were took place in West Bengal and the LFG did not take sufficient actions to protect people's rights.

Another counter opinion has been found from a respondent who is from the TMC. TMC leader Chandranath Singha (Chandranath Singha is a leader and activist of All India Trinamool Congress. He is an elected MLA from Bolpur assembly for three times, 2011, 2016 and 2021. He also took Minister-in-Charge of several time to time) thinks that the CPI(M) led LF came to power due to authoritarian, oppressive and coercive activities of the Congress party during 1970s in the state. There was no any alternative of the CPM during that time. So, the LF was in power for long time. But the policy of land acquisition and industrialisation of the LFG raised some crucial question. These hit left's vote bank and got defeat in 2011.

In response to the question of *'the massive electoral defeat of the Left Front in 2011 assembly election despite the massive victory in 2006'* different arguments and opinions are received by different political party's activists. One of the respondents who represents the CPI(M) argued that the reason behind the Left Front's victory in West Bengal in the 2006 election was the single point agenda of industrialisation. He also argued that the verdict of the 2006 Assembly election was undoubtedly in favour of the

industry because the Left Front won the largest number of Assembly seats in the industrial areas. This election result was as expected as in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections. He also argued that it is necessary to remember that political change in West Bengal has always been associated with all India change although it can be positive or negative. He pointed that in the 2006 Assembly elections, the Left could secure massive win, but was defeated in the Bhangar Assembly. The main reason was acquisition of land for industry. As a result, despite the massive victory in the 2006 elections, there was a caution for land acquisition for industry. The Left Front did not give importance to analyse the defeat of the CPI(M) in Bhangar. He also argued that it cannot be denied that there was a hurry within the Left Front Government to set up industry in the state.

The respondent also argued another important point was BJP's Hindutva politics. Since 1990s, the BJP's temple politics in India, the Left started to face challenges. He also argued that a reflection of which was seen in the result of the panchayat elections, 2008. In the three district councils (Zila Parishad) where the Left was defeated, religious issues had played a role in vote politics. As a result, due to communalization of politics the Left suffered with many problems. He also argued that there was an alienation of the Left leaders and workers from its own support base due to many reasons like; ideological, social, political, in terms of movement, organisational etc. Due to long stay in power in Panchayats and Municipalities, those who were with the Left wings, they moved to the right wings. A part of those who were with the right wings moved to the Left wings. He also argued that the Left could not convince the classes for which they worked for long time. The opposition used a strong campaign backed by the centre against the Left. The Left failed to counter it.

Another respondent who is also an activist and leader of the CPI(M) argued that there was a consolidation of opposition votes against the Left after the Singur and Nandigram issue. It was first seen in 2008 panchayat election. And in 2009 Parliamentary election and 2011 West Bengal Assembly election, the same strategies and techniques had been followed by the non-Left oppositions. He also argued that not only the Congress and the TMC joined hand to counter the Left Front Government, but some other extreme left parties like; SUCI and CPI(ML) also showed supports towards the Congress-TMC alliance. SUCI secured 1 seat in 2009 Parliamentary election and one assembly in 2011 which were backed by the Congress-TMC alliance. So, consolidation of opposition votes was also a reason for the defeat of the Left.

Some other respondents who represent the Congress and the TMC argued that there was a crisis of ideology, crisis of leadership behind the defeat of the LF in 2011 West Bengal Assembly election. There were many kinds of anti-incumbency with the long ruling LFG. Many times, the leaders of CPI(M) and other left parties were intervened within the family matter, within family quarrel and disputes which created an anti-ruling approach among many people. Dr. Mrinal Sarkar argued that a kind of displeasure had present against the Left rule within a large section of the Bengali people which exploded through Singur and Nandigram.

Another respondent who also represents the BJP argued that the control of the CPI(M) in every section of the society of West Bengal created an anti-incumbency towards the Left. The CPI(M) had established a kind of party dictatorship rather than democracy which disgusted a larger section of the society. People started to vote against the Left since 2008 panchayat election. He also argued that when the LF leaders said inside the assembly '*we are 235 and the are thirty*', people did not accept this arrogance. Another respondent (Miltan Rasid is a leader and activist of Indian National Congress (INC) from Birbhum district, West Bengal. He was also an elected M.L.A. from Nalhati assembly during 2016-2021, as the candidate of Congress supported by the Left and ISF. Miltan Rasid expressed his views in an Online interview with the researcher. The mode conversation was in Bengali.) who from the INC, argued that the main reason behind the defeat of the Left in Bengal in 2011 assembly election was the Singur and Nandigram controversy and anti-incumbency of voting.

In response to the question of '*failure of the governance*' behind the historic defeat of the Left Front in 2011 in West Bengal, different arguments have found among the respondents. One of the respondents who is also from the CPI(M) did not accept the principle of the '*failure of good governance*' behind the electoral defeat of the CPI(M)-led LF in 2011. He argued that the main aims and objectives of the LFG in West Bengal were to provide relief to the people by giving them different types of government support in their lives. So, just after coming at power, the LFG had been implemented many pro-people policies. Later the LGF took the steps for large-scale industrialisation to increase the relief for the common people with the help of private enterprises. According to him the Left in West Bengal was victim of international conspiracy supported by the international capitalism. Another respondent who also represents the CPI(M) argued that the LFG took the steps for industrialisation to generate employment to fulfil the needs of

new generation. The combined opposition of corporate, media, central government and major opposition parties built much obstacles to implement the steps. An anti-CPI(M) approach was propagated and tried to mobilised the voter against the CPI(M) by the oppositions which was difficult to counter by the LF, the CPI(M) in particular. It is true that there were a few different opinions within a few sections which utilised by the oppositions. But he also is not agreed regarding the concept of failure of good governance.

But various counter opinions have also received from the leaders and activists of non-Left parties, specially the TMC, the BJP and the Congress. One of the respondents who also from the TMC argued that the CPI(M) led LF used violence, corruption, oppression, ragging etc. to win elections during its regime. He also argued that many people were killed and murdered by the CPI(M) party cadre when they defend the oppression and corruption. In Singur and Nandigram, the government used forced over unwilling farmers to give land for industrialisation. Another respondent like Ardhendu Biswas also expressed same arguments regarding those issues.

In response to the question of *'anti-incumbency of voting behind the electoral defeat of the Left'* the respondents of all political parties expressed almost similar views. One of the respondents who also represents the CPI(M) argued that anti-incumbency is a common factor in any democratic political system. The Left rule in West Bengal was not beyond that matter. He also argued that due to staying at power for more than three decades, the government took many decisions to implement various policies. Some people were not happy with those decisions, they stood against the ruling party. Almost similar opinion also received from other respondents of the CPI(M) also. Other respondents of the BJP and the TMC argued that an anti-incumbency was always there during left rule. But a larger section of voter opted the Left because there were no any strong oppositions. When the TMC succeed to established itself as a strong opponent to the Left, a larger part of anti-incumbency votes shifted towards the TMC-Congress alliance. The respondents of the Congress also argued almost same opinions regarding anti-incumbency factors for the defeat of the Left in 2009 and 2011.

In response to the question of *'crisis of ideology behind the defeat of the Left'* one of the respondents argued that it cannot be denied that there was an ideological and organisational crisis among the Left during the last phase. He also argued that there was

no any mistake for the steps of industrialisation with the help of private enterprises. But the Left failed to convinced and mobilised the support bases and classes for those it worked for long time. Staying at power for long time, a mentality to sit at power captured within their mind. So, an organisational weakness increased among them. So, he and other CPI(M) leaders do not think that the steps for Industrialisation were not ideologically wrong because in the era of neo liberal economy only the private industries are interested to build factories. The mistake was according to him was that the process which had been followed by the LFG. One of the respondents who also a member of the CPI(M) argued that the crisis of ideology had not played an important role for the defeat of the Left in 2011, rather he argued that conflict among the Left Front's partners was more important. Although one of the respondents who is also a member of the CPI(M) does not consider that crisis of ideology as a reason for crisis of Left.

Although counter arguments also have found from the views of the respondents of the BJP, the TMC and the Congress. One of the respondents argued that the land acquisition policy did not accept by a larger section of the society. Almost same kind of arguments also found from a respondent of TMC. They also argued that the issue of violence, oppression, coercion over the unwilling people through the process of land acquisition. So, the Left who came to power due to land movement, it failed to stay in power due to land movement.

In response to the question of '*crisis of leadership is a reason behind the crisis of the Left*' the respondents expressed different views. One of the respondents do not thinks that change of leadership is a reason for the crisis and failure of the Left in West Bengal. According to him ideology, principles etc. are primary elements for the Left parties and leadership is secondary. Change of leadership is a normal process. Same opinions also received from another respondent. Another respondent argued that behaviour and attitude of the leadership with common people at different level was an important reason behind the defeat of the LF in 2011. He also argued that an arrogance was visible within the attitudes and behaviours of many leaders and activists from local level to state level which created an apathetic approach among a large section of people of Bengal. Same views also received from other respondents like; Chandranath Sinha, Ardhendu Biswas etc.

In response to the question of *'the time of the commencement of crisis of the Left in West Bengal'* the respondents argued different opinion. One of the respondents who is also a member of the CPI(M) has divided the Left rule into two periods. The first period was the first three LFG government from 1977-91 and the second period was post 1991 to 2011. He argued that the Left faced challenges during early 1990s due to the wave of open market economy all over the world, fall of communism in USSR and specially the temple politics by the BJP in the country. In response to the same question the other respondents expressed different views. One of the respondents who also a member of the CPI(M) argued that the crisis started with the Left during early 21st century. Another respondent argued that the crisis started within the Left during 2006-2007 when the LFG failed to manage the challenges related to the issue of Singur, Nandigram, Rizwanur Rahaman etc. Another respondent who is a member of the Congress party argued that the root of the crisis of the Left can be seen during mid-1990s. Almost same views also gathered from another respondent who is a member of the BJP. A respondent of the TMC also argued same opinion for this question. Although one of the respondents who is a member of the AICC argued that during the first 20 years, the LFG worked well. But since mid-1990s the leaders of the Left changed their attitudes. They preferred the policy to win election at any cost. A large opportunist middle class who had shifted towards the Left and captured the control of the party at different level, specially, at the lower level. The top leadership failed to control that opportunist middle class. Another respondent who also a member of the Congress argued that the crisis of the Left started during the period of Singur-Nandigram movement when the LFG failed to resist the movement of the oppositions led by the Mamata Banerjee. He also argued that the LFG failed to take any remarkable actions against the blockages of National Highway for almost two weeks, vandalism within the Vidhan Sabha by a few leaders and activists of the TMC led by Mamata Banerjee, 26 days hunger strike by Mamata Banerjee etc.

Another respondent argued the crisis of the Left started since the year of 1996. He also argued that the Congress had a hidden support to the Left which opposed by Mamata Banerjee. On the other hands a respondent of the BJP argued that the Left faced crisis in the early 1990s period. But the left was in power for another 20 years because there was no any strong opposition in West Bengal.

In response to the question of *'the change of leadership related to the failure of the Left Front in West Bengal'* respondents like; Abhash Roychowdhury and Sayed

Hussin etc. argued that the change of leadership is not a reason for the crisis of Left parties, especially the CPI(M) in West Bengal. According to them it is not possible to compare one generation of leadership with the next generation. Leadership is born out of various social and political needs and circumstances. Each generation finds solutions to the problems of its time by dealing with them in its own way. Although they also argued that need of leadership to run a political party cannot be denied. But to the left-wing political parties, party ideology and programmes play more important role than leadership. However, it must be remembered that the impact of various social events had seen on the left-wing political parties. How to deal with them while upholding the party ideology and program depends on the role of the key leadership at that time. The party has been able to sustain itself in electoral politics even today because the leadership is still functioning actively.

One of the respondents argued that to continue the mobility of any political party, change of leadership is a common thing. The older generation of leaders always unfold the way to the new generation of leadership. So, passing the baton by Jyoti Basu in the hand of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was not a wrong decision of the party. He also argued that we cannot view the efficiency to operate and control any party of all leaders from a particular approach. Change of leadership is a common matter for every party and for the left parties, leadership is secondary, the primary elements are party ideology, discipline etc. Another respondent who also is a Congress leader viewed almost same opinion but he thinks that leadership also important.

Although counter opinion also found from the respondents of the TMC and the BJP. Both of them argued that an arrogance attitudes, power hungriness, corruptions etc. had been found within many leaders during the last 20 years of Left rule. Top leadership failed to control these things which raised an anti-Left attitudes among a large section of the people. They also argued that the new generation leaders were much arrogant, corrupt etc. So, people were very unhappy due the party's control in almost every spere of life.

In response to the question of '*relevance of the Left in contemporary politics of West Bengal*' the respondents of the Left and the Congress are strongly argued and recognised the relevance and need of the Left in the state not only in contemporary circumstances but also for future. One of the respondents argued that one of the main

aims of the left-wing political parties is to establish a socio-economic and political equality by eliminating class divisions and class discrimination as much as possible from the society. And as long as these inequalities will be existed in the world, the Left will remain relevant. He also argued that only the CPI(M) can't be able to eliminate all kinds of class divisions and discriminations within the society without the support of others. So, he argued for combined actions against that kind of discriminations with the help of other Left and non-Left forces who have pro-poor sentiments and feelings. One of the respondents who is also a member of CPI(M) argued that only the Left parties raise voice, organise movements against unemployment, hike of price of daily needed commodities, oppression on marginal and poor people etc. So, as long as such kind of discriminations persists until then, the Left will remain relevant not only in West Bengal but in the world also.

Another respondent argued that the Left are not only relevance in the context of Bengal but in the context of the country also. According to him only the Left parties work for the deprived, exploited, oppressed classes. A respondent of the Congress has also argued that Left parties are still relevance not only in West Bengal, but also in India. According to him the Left and Congress are the only forces in West Bengal and as well as in India who can prevent religious polarization of politics. One of the respondents also argued that the people have to choose those political parties which have specific ideology, principles, philosophy etc. to sustain democracy in society. He also argued that the Congress and the Left follow such kind of attributes.

Counter opinions also received from the respondents of the AITMC and the BJP in response to the same question. A respondent argued that the CPI(M) led Left Front had ruled the state by using violence, coercion, for long time. The electorate of Bengal rejected the Left in 2011 and welcomed the rule of TMC under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee. People of Bengal showed their faith and choice towards the leadership of Mamata Banerjee again and again since 2011. The TMC is only relevant in Bengal for the present and the future.

Another respondent argued that the Left are completely irrelevance in politics. He argued that people of Bengal voted the CPI(M) for three decades because they had no any alternative choice. When Mamata Banerjee succeed to established her as a strong alternative against the CPI(M), the people shifted their choice towards her and the TMC.

But the TMC has also raised many issues and questions of corruptions, politicisation of police and administration, partisan in almost every section of the state, criminalization of politics, use of violence in election, oppressing the oppositions etc. So, the BJP is only relevance in Bengal for present and future.

In response to the question of '*point of strengths of the Left in Bengal*' the study has found different opinion. One of the respondents argued that the workers, farmers, marginal people, students, the young generation etc. those who are suffering from various uncertainties in the field of education, health and those who are suffering from unemployment are the main point of strengths of the Left. He also argued that at present, the corporate and capitalist intervention has started in the agricultural sector, as a result common lower and middle peasant are also being exploited. They are also strength of Left. One of the respondents who is also a member of CPI(M) argued that the working class, poor people are the strength of Left. He also argued that It's true, at that situation the Left are not getting support of those classes for them the party served for long time, but time is factor. Other respondents like; Ashok Roy, Mrinal Sarkar etc. also argued almost same opinion regarding the points of strengths of the Left.

But counter arguments also found in terms of 'point of strength of the Left' in contemporary politics of West Bengal. A respondent of the TMC argued that the Left has no such point of strength except a few sections of trade union and students. He also argued that 'the people of Bengal are very much happy for the development of the TMC government under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee. Bengali electorate rejected the Left'.

In response to the question of '*reason behind the success of the TMC in West Bengal politics*' different arguments are received from respondents. One of the respondents who is also a member of the CPI(M) argued that the TMC is successful only in the electoral politics. He has not considered the success of TMC in terms of development, generating employment, set up industries, increase job-opportunities etc. in the state. Another respondent argued that the success of corporate rather than the TMC. He also argued that the corporate promoted the TMC backed by the RSS. He also argued that the central governments saved the government of West Bengal during last ten years in many crucial issues. Corporate wanted to remove the Left at any cost from West Bengal. So, the corporate wanted a political party which was non-BJP and non-Congress.

The TMC was the better option to the corporate. This is proved after the case of 'electoral bond' where the TMC shared second highest fund after the BJP. Another respondent argued that TMC using coercion, repression, violence on the oppositions to win election. So, there is no any success for the TMC. Almost same arguments also argued by another respondents.

One of the respondents who is also an activist of the BJP argued that since 2016, there was no any strong oppositions against the TMC. So, people voted the TMC. He also argued that the TMC government implemented many vote-centric populist schemes for people which were helpful for the TMC to get support in the election. Another respondent argued that the LF had done thousands of injustices with the common people of Bengal for almost three decades. Mamata Banerjee raised voice against that injustices and organised movements, mobilised people and finally defeat the Left in 2011. After coming at power under the Chief Ministership of Mamata Banerjee, the government implemented numbers of social-developmental policies which is the key of success of the TMC.

In response to the question of '*success of TMC can be considered as a personal success*' different arguments are found. One of the respondents argued that it can be partially consider as a personal success. But on the other hands other respondent have not considered it is a personal success. One of the respondents argued that the absence of strong opposition the people of Bengal have voted the TMC. Political leaders like Mrinal Sarkar, Jayanta Das, Abhash Roy Chowdhury etc. do not consider that the win and success of the TMC in 2011 under the leadership of Mrs Mamata Banerjee is a personal success. According to them a decent was there during the Left rule which was exploded through Singur and Nandigram issue. A section of electorate was searching an alternative of the CPI(M) in Bengal. The TMC under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee managed to utilise the anti-CPI(M) wave. Most of the voter did not vote TMC with love and care but as an alternative of the Left. A few respondents also argued that it was an international conspiracy operated by international capitalism to remove the Left from power.

In response to the question of '*the main points of opposition to the TMC at present situation*' one of the respondents argued that there is no any point to opposed the TMC because the TMC government leading by Mamata Banerjee serving for the interest of every section of the society. Every people are enjoying the results of development of

the government. There are numbers of economic and social projects which upgrading the lives of common people in the state. Although different arguments also found regarding the points of oppositions of the TMC at the present situation. One of the respondents argued that there are numbers of points against the TMC, such as; i) party dictatorship, ii) corruptions in almost every section in society, iii) threat culture in government institutions, iv) internal conflict and group conflict and violence among many leaders and activists, v) cut money, vi) massive deterioration in health and education, vii) electoral violence, viii) soft attitudes towards a few particular class and community etc. One of the respondents who is from Congress argued that corruption is one of the main points to oppose the TMC.

Another respondent who is a member of the CPI(M) argued that there is no doubt that the Trinamool Congress has achieved great success in electoral politics since 2011. He also argued that a large section of voters always wants to stay close to the government. The Left Front Government got that benefit and the TMC is also getting it. But West Bengal is lagging far behind in comparison to the other states in India in terms of social development in various areas. Corruptions and criminalisation captured the whole system at present. Opposition parties suffering with oppression, violence using by state power. These are main points to opposed the TMC.

In response to the question of *'the problems and prospects of anti-TMC political forces at present and in future in West Bengal'* one of the respondents of the TMC argued that there is no any prospect for any anti-TMC political forces in the state. Because according to him the TMC government is working in favour of every section of society. Although counter arguments also found in response to that question. One of the respondents argued that there is a lot of prospects for anti-TMC political forces. Respondent like; Abhash Roy Chowdhury, Sayed Hussain, Milton Rasid, A. K. Ray, Mrinal Sarkar, Ardhendu Biswas etc. argued that the present TMC government as well as the party sank under corruptions, partisan, malpractice, criminalisation of politics etc. A. Roychowdhury argued that there is an absence of democratic environment in the state. Same opinions also received from M. Rasid, M. Sarkar, A. Biswas etc. also.

In terms of problems one of the respondents argued that coercion and repression of the ruling party using by the state police and administration. He also argued that

corporate media is also a problem. Another respondent argued that lack of funds is one of the reasons for the Left and the Congress to oppose the TMC.

In response to the question of '*shifting of electoral alliances as a reason for the marginalisation of Left in Bengal*' most of the respondents argued that the electoral alliance helped the BJP, the Congress and the TMC between 2001-2011. But it is not visible helpful for the Left since 2016. One of the respondents argued that one of a main reason for TMC's victory in 2011 assembly election was electoral alliance. It was helpful for consolidation of opposition votes towards the TMC which were scattered throughout the years. One of the respondents who is also a member of the Congress argued that a few sections of Congress supporters have not voted the Left in 2016. Although he also argued that at the contemporary socio-political circumstances a combined political force is important against the TMC in the state and the BJP at the national level. This combined force must be democratic and secular. So, Left-Congress alliance is a part of that combined force.

It is very much clear that the right-wing political parties had benefitted earlier which had been proved through the result of many elections. Most benefits went in favour of the TMC. But it is not showing favourable picture for the Left when they have made alliance with any right-wing political party, the Congress in the state. Although one of the respondents argued that it is not an electoral alliance rather it can be called electoral adjustment. He also argued that as much as leaders can understand regarding this alliance, the common supporters of the Left and the Congress cannot. The leadership failed to convince their supporters and common people properly regarding the importance of that alliance. He also argued that electoral alliance is not the main focus to the Left in the contemporary Bengal as well as across the country. He argued that the main focus of the Left is to prevent fascist forces in the country, communalization of politics, political and corporate Hindutva of BJP. Another respondent argued that electoral alliance changes its character according to need of circumstances. The Left parties can make alliance only those political forces who are secular, democratic and ideology oriented. He also argued that main purposes of the Left for making alliance with non-Left forces is to protect Indian constitution, prevent BJP and its politics of Hindutva. The main objective to the Left for making alliance is to save democracy rather than electoral victory. Another respondent who is a member of the CPI(M) argued that in 2016, there were a few confusions and oscillation among a large section of Left and

Congress workers and activists regarding Left-Congress-ISF electoral adjustment. But finally, they accepted it to protect the interest of the masses. He also argued that the Left organising various movement for people but the media not propagating these. He also alleged that there is an understanding between the TMC and the BJP which helped the TMC to oppressed the Left at different level of society. He also raised questions regarding the free and fair elections, independent space to organise peaceful movement, participating in the election, to caste vote without any threat etc. He also argued that there is lack of democratic environment in the state.

Another respondent argued that the electoral alliance between the Congress and the Left is not a reason behind the crisis of the Left. This alliance was made to protect a broader responsibility and liability of the country. Another respondent argued that a section of Congress supporter has not voted the Left despites electoral alliance in 2016 and 2021 assembly election. Another respondent argued that only the combined force of the Congress and the Left can save the moribund Bengal. He also argued that Left-Congress alliance is necessary not only in the election but also in everyday life. Another respondent who is from the TMC argued that the Left have suffered losses more for making alliance with the ISF. Secular character of the Left faced question for that alliance.

In response to the question of *'the attempt to win state power of the BJP in West Bengal with its Hindutva agenda'* one of the respondents argued that the corporate media are playing an important role to propagate the religious polarisation of politics. He also argued that the Left are in movements at different level in the society against this polarisation but the media not showing any important. Sometimes hide the activities of the Left by making a political environment that either TMC or BJP is relevant in contemporary politics of West Bengal. One of the respondents who is also a member of the BJP argued that there is no any doubt that the BJP trying to win electoral battle by highlighting an agenda of Hindutva, but this space has got from the previous Left and present TMC government. Both of them took numbers of anti-Hindu steps and policies which raised the question of security among a large section of the Hindu. He also argued that Hindu refers a unity, a humanism not a particular community.

In response to the question of *'public support of the Left has been continuously decreasing due to the BJP's challenge of Hindutva in the contemporary West Bengal'* one

of a respondents argued that religious polarization of politics in Bengal started in large scale by the ruling TMC which helped the rise of the BJP in the state. He also argued that the vote share shifted towards the BJP recently is not the votes decreased of the Left only. A portion of TMC's vote also shifted towards the BJP. So, the demise of the Left is not because of the rise of the BJP during the last 10 years. A section of voters thinks that TMC is their protector. And another section thinks that BJP is their protector in the state. This communal division played a crucial role for the rise of BJP in the state.

The same opinion has also been found from a few respondents who also member of the Congress. Another respondent argued that the Left had also favoured the Islamic community which raised question within common people of the Hindu community.

This chapter analyses a few important issues during 1991 to 2021 which are significant for the downfall of the Left and the rise of the TMC in West Bengal. These are: wave of neo-liberal economy, rise of the BJP, birth of the TMC and steps for large scale industrialisation. However, the Left in West Bengal could manage to face the first three issues till 2006. But they failed to manage the anti-Left consolidation after Singur and Nandigram movement which resulted the end of 34 years of LFG in Bengal through 2011 W B Assembly election.

This chapter of the present study also analyses the different views and opinions of a few questions which asked to the respondents. The study tries to collect opinions from activists and leaders of all the notable active political parties in present Bengal. Different types of views and opinions are found from respondents of major political parties in present Bengal. The respondents of left parties argued that the land is the key elements to the LFG for long-term ruling history in the state. But the leaders of the Congress argued that the Congress had a few unfinished programmes which positively finished by the Left Front Government. And this helped it to stay in power for long times. One of a respondent who is also a representative of the CPI(M) argued that changing generations and changing aspirations etc. are main reason for defeat of the Left. A few respondents of TMC and BJP argued that the electorate of Bengal had no any alternative beyond the Left during first four tenure of the Left rule. So, the voters of Bengal had been opted and preferred the CPI(M) led LF, but when they found an alternative with the image of Mamata Banerjee, they voted against the Left. One of the respondents of the TMC argued partisan, coercion and corruption became an important element during left rule.

For the question of delivery of 'good governance' the respondents of the left parties expressed different views. But, the other respondents of the non-left parties almost agreed that there was a failure of governance during last decade of LFG in West Bengal. Respondents of BJP and TMC argued that that the Left stayed at power by using violence and coercion in the state. So, arguments and counter arguments have been found from the field regarding the success and failure of the Left in Bengal which are also corroborated in the views and writings of many scholars. The ultimate outcome is that the Left in the present socio-political circumstances in West Bengal are in serious crisis. Although there are different opinions, arguments and counter arguments regarding the reasons and starting times of the crisis.

The next chapter is about the summary and conclusion of the study which also analyses a summary of research questions and research findings in very brief way.

CHAPTER- 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The study has discussed a very short history of the left parties in West Bengal since 1920s. Before the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] in 1964, the Communist Party of India (CPI) was the principal Left party in West Bengal and as well as across the country. The CPI was formed during 1920s by the initiative of M. N. Roy. During 1930s the CPI could manage to attract very limited people in West Bengal. But during 1940s the party succeed to draw attention of different sections of the society. The party organised Tebhaga farmers movement. After the independent, the CPI organised movement against the hike of one paisa tram fare in Calcutta which provided huge response to the party. The government of WB finally stopped the step of tram fare hike. During the end of 1950s and early 1960s different opinion arisen among the members and supporters of the party regarding the Chinese aggression in 1962 which led to the split of the CPI and the formation of the new communist party, the CPI(M) in 1964. Most of the notable communist leaders in West Bengal, like; Jyoti Basu, Promod Dasgupta etc. were the founding member of the CPI(M). After that the CPI became less popular in West Bengal. The CPI(M) had played crucial role to form the two United Front Governments in 1967 and 1969 respectively. And finally, the CPI(M) succeed to win the state power through electoral verdict in 1977. During the election a Left Front Committee was also formed by some Left minded political parties, mainly the CPI(M), Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), Forward Bloc (FB/AIFB), Forward Bloc (Marxist), Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), Socialist Party (SP) etc. under the chairmanship of Promod Dasgupta. The Left Front Committee later became popular as the Left Front (LF). Jyoti Basu took oath as the Chief Minister of the first Left Front Government (LFG) of West Bengal in 1977. After forming the LFG, it had implemented land reforms act, distribution of powers to the marginal classes through panchayat and many other policies and programmes in the state which helped the party to win election again and again.

The research work deals with the electoral performances of the Left and non-Left oppositions along with a few important burning issues during the period of 1991 to 2006 in West Bengal. In this period, the Left in Bengal had contested four Assembly election

and five Lok Sabha election along with other non-Left political parties. In the early 1990s, the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the East Europe and the wave of neo-liberal economy in the name of Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG) had brought many challenges before the Left not only in West Bengal but across the country also. Another important challenge was the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in national level politics with the 'Ram Mandir' issue also threw challenge to the Left and the Congress in the Country. In 1991 Lok Sabha and West Bengal Assembly election, three issues were crucial. These were; i. Mondal Commission's recommendation to provide 27 per cent reservation for the Other Backward Classes (OBC), ii. issue of Ram mandir by the BJP and iii. assassination of former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. The third issue, assassination of Rajiv Gandhi had no any reflection in West Bengal because it was happened after the date of election in West Bengal. Although the issue of 'Ram mandir' had a reflection in the election. The LF decreased its vote share in comparison to the previous election in 1987. The BJP surprisingly could secure almost 11 per cent vote in West Bengal. The result of this election was a signal for the rise of the BJP in West Bengal.

After formation of the fourth LFG in 1991, the ruling LF had been faced some crucial challenges like; the fall of the USSR, advent of neo liberal economy etc. In 1996 Lok Sabha and WB State Assembly election, the LF could secure victory but its vote share decreased in comparison to the previous election in 1991. In the late 1990s, the birth of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in the horizon of West Bengal politics had unfolded a new direction of state. In between the time Jyoti Basu transferred the baton of Chief Ministership to Buddhadeb Bhattacharya in 2000. In 2001 WB State Assembly election, the CPI(M) led LF faced serious challenge before the combined force of the Congress and the TMC. Although the LF could manage to win the 2001 WB State Assembly election but the CPI(M)'s vote share and seat share was decreased in comparison to the previous elections since 1977. This was the first time when the CPI(M) failed to secure absolute majority on its own by winning 143 seats out of 294 with 36.59 per cent valid votes. This was the lowest tally of the party since it was in power in the state. Although the LF's combined seat share was 196. On the other hands the TMC-Congress alliance could secure 86 assemblies and its combined vote share was 38.64 per cent which was almost two per cent more than the CPI(M) which was alarming to the Left. The TMC under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee had presented itself as a

strong opposition against the CPI(M) and the LF. The TMC could secure almost 30 per cent vote and 60 seats. Although Mamata Banerjee failed to defeat the Left, but it was a caution to the Left. The remaining 12 seats were won by the GNLFF, Independents and others.

After 2001, the LF again started to regain more support of the electorate of West Bengal. Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharaya showed his interest towards large-scale industrialisation with the help of the private companies. In 2004 Lok Sabha election, the LF registered massive victory in West Bengal by securing more than 50 per cent votes along with 35 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal. The Left had become a key determinant at the national level also as it could win more than 55 Lok Sabha seats in all around the country. The CPI(M) led LF upheld the propaganda of large industrialisation with the slogan of '*krishi amader vitti, shilpo amader vabistyat*' (agriculture is our base, industry is our future). In 2006 WB State Assembly election, the LF secured huge electoral victory by winning 235 Vidhan Sabha seats out of 294. The CPI(M) could alone secure 176 seats. The combined vote share of the LF was almost 50.50 per cent. Oppositions parties, mainly the TMC and the Congress failed to build any significant challenges against the LF in this election. The TMC could win only 30 seats along with 26.66 per cent vote share where the Congress only 21 seats along with 16.51 per cent vote share.

The LF secured victory in almost every region of West Bengal. From urban to rural, North Bengal to South Bengal, '*Rarh*' Bengal to border district, the LF candidates received massive support. The result of 2006 election had illustrated the success of 'Brand Buddha' which increased the LF's support base withing those people who were never in favour of the Left. Despite the massive victory the Left failed to win 'Bhangar', a constituency near Kolkata in the district of South 24 Pargana in the election which was a caution to the LGF against the policy of acquisition of land due to industrialisation. Because the LFG tried to acquire land for a project in Bhangar and faced obstacle from the common people before 2006 assembly election.

The research work also revolves with the discussion of electoral politics of West Bengal within the period of 2007 to 2021. During the period the state has experienced three Lok Sabha elections in 2009, 2014 and 2019 and three State Assembly elections in 2011, 2016 and 2021 with some crucial burning issues related to the politics of West Bengal. The LF registered historic victory in 2006 West Bengal State Assembly election

with upholding the one-point agenda of large-scale industrialization to generate greater employment and spread development in the state. But when the LFG took the steps for industrialisation it faced serious challenges. After the Singur-Nandigram controversy the Left's support started to decrease which shifted towards the non-Left oppositions, mainly the TMC. During this time the left parties withdrew support and broke all understanding with the Congress at the national level by raising the issue of Indo-US nuclear agreement in 2007. The Left faced first serious challenge in 2008 WB panchayat election when they failed to win in many seats at different level of panchayat. Another important fact was the shifting of alliances of the non-Left opposition during this period. The LF itself as a front of some Left minded political parties in Bengal but it backed the UPA alliance after 2004 Lok Sabha election but did not take any ministership of the UPA-1 government. Only Somnath Chatterjee was played the role of speaker in UPA-1 government. The TMC left the alliance with the Congress after 2001 assembly election and joined with the NDA. The TMC contested in 2004 Lok Sabha and 2006 assembly election by forming alliance with BJP led NDA. But the TMC shifted its alliance from NDA to UPA in 2009 Lok Sabha election.

In 2009 Parliamentary election, the LF suffered with serious crisis as it could win only 15 Lok Sabha seats along with almost 43 per cent vote which was decreased by almost 7 per cent in comparison to the previous Lok Sabha election in 2004. The largest partner of the LF, the CPI(M) could alone secure only 9 seats and almost 33 per cent votes. on the other hands the TMC-Congress secured 25 seats along with almost 45 per cent votes. This huge victory of the TMC-Congress alliance continued to the historic win in 2011 West Bengal State Assembly election. Opposition vote bank started to consolidate towards the TMC which resulted victory for the TMC-Congress alliance by winning 226 Vidhan Sabha seats along with almost 48 per cent votes. The combined seat share of the LF was only 62. The largest partner of the LF, the CPI(M) could secure only 40 seats along with 30.08 per cent votes which was the lowest tally for the party since 1977.

The politics of West Bengal has changed its shape towards a new direction during the period. After the defeat in 2011, the Left have been marginalised and the ruling TMC has increased its support base in terms of vote share and seat share. In 2014 Lok Sabha election the LF could secure only 2 seats along with almost 30 per cent vote share. It was decreased by almost 11 per cent vote in comparison to the previous WB Assembly

election in 2011. On the other hands the TMC could win 34 seats out of 42 which was the highest win for the party since 1998. The Left opted for an interesting way to make electoral alliance and adjustment by joining hands with the Congress against the TMC and the BJP in 2016 WB Assembly election, but they not only failed to gain success but trailed behind the Congress and lost the identity of the principal opposition political party withing the Assembly. In 2016 WB Assembly election the LF secured only 32 seats along with sharing of almost 26 per cent vote. The most disastrous situation faced by the left parties, specially, the CPI(M) when it failed to win a single constituency in 2021 Assembly election in across the state. On the other hands the TMC who contested in all the election with making alliance with either BJP or Congress till 2011, the party started to contest alone from 2014 Parliamentary election. The TMC shared almost 45 per cent votes with 211 seats in 2016. The TMC increased its vote shared in every election since 2011, except 2019 Lok Sabha election. Another important fact is that the BJP has emerged as a strong opponent before the ruling TMC during this period. The CPI(M) could manage to win two Parliamentary seats in 2014 but could not manage to win none in 2019. The BJP won two seats in 2014 and increased the number of winning seats up to 18 in 2019 by securing more than 40 per cent vote. The Left came down from 43 per cent in 2009 to almost 7.5 per cent in 2019 in terms of Lok Sabha election. The electoral battle in West Bengal has been picturised between the two right-wing political party; the TMC and the BJP. The Left are abandoned by the electorate of Bengal. The Congress also failed to win a single seat in 2021 WB Assembly election but the Congress won a seat through by-election from Sagardighi, an assembly of Murshidabad district which was backed by the Left. But the Left remained at naught in the assembly.

The study also deals with some important issues during 1991 to 2021 which are significant for the downfall of the Left and the rise of the TMC in West Bengal. The CPI(M) and other leftist parties in West Bengal faced serious challenges during the early 1990s due to the world-wide wave of neo-liberal economy with the name of LPG. The central government of India had accepted neo liberal economic policy and made economic reforms in early 1990s. The CPI(M) and other left parties under the umbrella of the LF opposed that policies. But the LFG had not able to take any major initiatives to increase growth of industry and scope of employment in the state.

In 1994, the LFG adopted the 'New Industrial/Economic Policy' keeping some minimal difference with the 'New Economic Policy' taken by the union government.

Another important factor is the emergence of the TMC in 1998 in the horizon the socio-political circumstances of West Bengal. The LF could manage to win every election till 1996 despite some challenges of the Congress. But, from 1998 the LF, the CPI(M) in particular faced more difficulties to face the challenge of the TMC.

Another important issue is the steps of large-scale industrialisation with the help of private initiatives and acquisition of agricultural land. After securing massive win in 2004 Lok Sabha election in West Bengal, the LFG started to take that initiatives. But problem began when the LFG declared mega projects in Singur and Nandigram and acquisition of agricultural land. Several protests, strikes were organised by the oppositions and sometime those converted into violence. The LFG failed to counter the oppositions and provide good governance to the common people. This unfolded a kind of failure of the governance which successfully mobilised by the non-Left opposition, mainly the TMC. As a result, the non-Left oppositions vote bank started to consolidate towards the TMC which was clear through the result of 2009 Lok Sabha election.

The study also seeks to analyse the different views and opinions of a handful leaders of CPI(M), BJP, TMC and Congress and also tried to compare the opinion and counter opinion of those political leaders of state, district and local level. Different types of views and opinions are collected from the respondents of major political parties of West Bengal. Observations of the leaders and activists is pin pointed. The respondents of left parties argued that the land is the key elements to the LFG for long-term ruling history in the state. One of the respondents of the CPI(M) argued that the main reasons for success of the Left in West Bengal for more than three decades are land reforms, democratisations of power through panchayats etc. He also argued that the LFG failed to fulfil the changing aspirations, changing behaviour of the new generation electorates which created a kind of apathy towards the Left. He also agreed with the steps of industrialisation with the investment of the private capital. But he argued that the Left failed to convince their support base regarding the importance of industry. One of the respondents argued that there was an international conspiracy particularly against the LFG. A respondent of the CPI(M) argued that there was an absence of self-criticism within the party. The respondents of the Congress argued that the Congress had a few unfinished programmes which positively finished by the Left and that helped them to stay in power for long times. A respondent of the Congress argued that an 'opportunistic middle-class' was shifted towards the Left after 1977 which helped the Left win election.

He also argued that those opportunist middle classes captured control of the party at different level which helped to enter corruption and opportunist at different level in the government and the party also. The top leaderships failed to understand or overlooked this opportunism. Some respondents of the CPI(M) and the Congress argued that the oppositions parties in West Bengal after 2011 are facing violence, coercion, obstacles using by the present police and administration. The present oppositions parties are not getting democratic environments which are also reasons for the marginalisation of the Left in West Bengal. A few respondents of TMC and BJP argued that the electorate of Bengal had no any alternative beyond the Left. They also remarked that the Left stayed at power by using violence and coercion in the state. A respondent of TMC argued that the present TMC government is taking various policies and programmes for the development of every section of the society. So, the people of Bengal are not showing any interest towards the Left.

Findings:

The study found that the CPI(M)-led LF was in power during the first three consecutive terms by formulation and implementation of some important policies successfully. Implementation of land reforms act through '*operation barga*', distribution of powers among the common marginal people through panchayat etc. were a few examples of them. But after the global challenge due to the advent of LPG it faced serious problem. But it managed the challenges until the year 2000. But during the first decade of 21st century it opted the way of direct adjustment with capitalism. That followed by set up of large-scale industries in Nandigram and Singur which faced various serious protests by different oppositions with the help of different sections of the society including land looser and a few local people in those areas. So, a complex arose between the demands of capitalism and popular politics. The Left government not only failed to form an effective strategy to deal with complex demands of capital and of popular politics, its analysis of '*neo-liberal globalisation*' also went well off the track. *Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee* remark established that '*Nandigram was an administrative and political failure*'. Oppositions parties, the TMC in particular called many '*bandhs*', strike, blockage of road to raise protest against the policies of the LFG. The LFG failed to counter these protests and deliver service to the common people. But after coming in power, the TMC Government took all kinds of steps against bandh, strike etc. called by

the non-TMC oppositions. This answer is corroborated through the research findings of the fourth, fifth and sixth chapter of the present study. On 14 March, 2007, after the controversy of police firing at Nandigram, the principal opposition party declared 12-hours strike on 16 March, 2007. On 16 March, 2007 examination of Higher Secondary was scheduled. The government failed to counter the strike and changed the date of H.S. examination by upholding the security of the students. Not only that the government had failed to take any strong steps against blockage of high way for almost two weeks which caused problems for many people. Police and intelligence failed to collect information against the attempts of landmine attack on Chief Minister by Maoists at Lalgarh, in West Bengal.

The study also finds that the CPI(M) had been secured absolute majority in all the assembly elections from the year of 1977 till 2006 assembly election except 2001 and formed government. But the vote share secured by the party had not been exceeded fifty per cent for a single election. Although combined vote share of the LF in the seven consecutive assembly elections from 1977 to 2006 was almost near about fifty percent, but not secured more than fifty percent votes in all election except a few. So, almost fifty percentage of vote share was not in favour of the CPI(M) and the LF. The interesting fact was that it was scattered and it started to consolidate towards the TMC led opposition which threw a serious challenge to the Left in 2008 panchayat election. In 2009 Lok Sabha election, the Left vote share was more than 43 per cent and on the other hand the TMC-Congress alliance secured almost 45 per cent valid votes. In terms of winning Parliamentary seat, the Left Front could win only 15 where the TMC-Congress alliance could win 25 Parliamentary seats out of 42. According to election experts the Left Front could win only 99 Assemblies which was decreased by almost 7 per cent in comparison to the 2006 WB Assembly election when the LF secured 235 seats out of 294. So, an anti-incumbency was always there during the entire LF regime but its elements were not consolidated and organised by the mainstream oppositions.

Since 2009 Parliamentary election the scattered oppositions votes not only consolidated towards the TMC but LF's own votes was started to shift towards another right-wing political party, the BJP also. This has been clearly visible after 2016 West Bengal Assembly election which pushed the Left, specially, the CPI(M) out from the assembly in 2021. The region wise seat winning pictures of Bengal have clearly described that in 2011 Assembly election the TMC-Congress registered much success in

the urban areas, boarder districts and minority community-based districts. But in 2019 Lok Sabha and 2021 West Bengal assembly election results showed that the Left has virtually vanished from other parts, like North Bengal, 'Rarh Bengal', South Bengal and a few border districts (map: 4.14 and 4.15). People's disenchantment at different level due to arrogance attitudes of leaders, specially, in the grassroot level had lost the faith on the Left. The TMC had managed to capture these flows towards the party. This answer has corroborated from the discussion of the fourth, fifth and sixth chapter of the present study. Most of the respondents argued that anti-incumbency voting was a reason for the defeat of the Left Front in 2011 Assembly election.

In dealing with the question of 'reasons of *failure to capture the electoral behaviour of urban as well as the rural and marginal areas of West Bengal since 2011*' it has been found the opportunist middle class who came within the Left after 1977 and they have shifted into the ruling TMC during post 2011 scenario politics. Another point is that when the Left participated in the Parliamentary democracy and sought and hold powers in the states that means it accepted the central policies to some extent, acquiescence in the anti-people role of the police, and made adjustment with the bureaucracy. Although it is true that there has been some degree of power sharing at grassroot levels and the panchayats had a more popular character. But it is also true that the party became an instrument of domination rather than service to the people. Another important fact is that in present West Bengal's politics, issue of corruption is not reflecting any more. It is also true that corruption had not captured the leaders of the left parties and officials of the LFG as it in the present socio-economic-political situation. But it is undeniable that due to long staying in power a few left leaders not free from corruption. Although that magnitude was very much less but it is not desirable for the left parties who generally known for their sacrifice and pro-people behaviour. So, in the present political situation when the leaders and workers of the left parties are trying to mobilised the anti-TMC forces by raising the issue of corruption in the state, an anti-Left mobilisation stands are parallely showing by the ruling TMC and main opposition party, the BJP. They are describing the issue of a few violence and corruption against the LF and the Left are not being able to counter successfully these stands. Members of various branch organisations like; trade union, working class, peasant, student, youth etc. has decreased very much during the last 14 years. The Left parties tried to implement policies for community development. But the present policies are shifted from

community development to direct individual benefit and the Left are becoming unsuccessful to counter these policies and regain the trust of the electorate.

Further it has been found that the TMC won the 2011 West Bengal Assembly election by making alliance with the Congress. The combined vote shared of the TMC-Congress alliance was almost 48 per cent which was almost 9 per cent higher than the vote shared by entire LF. The TMC could alone share 38.93 per cent votes which was almost 1 per cent less than the votes shared by LF combined. As Abhas Roy Chowdhury, Mrinal Sarkar and others think that people voted the TMC as an alternative of the Left in 2011. Since 2011, the TMC government implemented numbers of populist individual centric policies and programmes. These are *Shikshasree, Kanyashree, Rupashree, Yubashree, Sabuj Sathi, Khadya Sathi, Patha Sathi, Gati Dhara, Gitanjali, Fair Price Medicine Shop, Swasthya Sathi, Sabala, Anandhara, Samabyathi and Baitarani, Safe Drive Save Life* etc. Although many crucial controversies like; political and caste violence, political murder and killings, cut money, corruptions in the recruitment of government services (TET and civic volunteer, 2016 SLST issue etc.), religious polarisation with politics, family centric politics, party dictatorship in all sphere of every social and education institutions etc. have also been raised against the TMC during the last 10 years but these are not reflected in voting machines. The TMC has succeed to hold its votes banks and continued party's victory in the land of Bengal despites the crucial challenges. As a result, the CPI(M) and the Left has sunk under deeper crisis and the electorate of Bengal have been showed their second choice towards the BJP. These findings are corroborated through the electoral outcome of 2019 Parliamentary and 2021 WB Assembly elections.

Since 2011 the Left in West Bengal has virtually gone in political limbo. After the debacle in 2011, the CPI(M) and other left parties are consistently suffering in electoral defeat till date. In terms of Lok Sabha, WB State Assembly, panchayat, municipalities etc. the Left failed to register a standard success. The Left contested 2016 West Bengal Assembly election by making electoral adjustment with the Congress, but it trailed behind the Congress and lost the position of principal opposition in Vidhan Sabha. But the Left decided to contest the 17th Parliamentary election in Bengal alone and failed to secure a single Lok Sabha seat out of 42 in West Bengal in 2019. Although, the Congress won two Parliamentary seats in Bengal. In 2021, the Left reduced to naught in the assembly also. The Left has been suffering from long-term crisis of planning and

activities since last decade. As a result, they have been increasingly cornered and marginalised by both the TMC and the BJP, both electorally and organisationally.

The study also finds that the shifting of electoral alliances has not preferred any success to the Left rather it proved successful for the non-Left oppositions, mainly the TMC and the Congress. Since the year of 1998 Lok Sabha election, the TMC made alliance either the BJP or the Congress. In 1998 Lok Sabha election, the TMC formed alliance with the BJP and contested election in WB. As a result, TMC secured almost 24 per cent votes along with 7 Lok Sabha seats. The combined vote shared by the TMC-BJP alliance was almost 35 per cent which was almost same with the vote shared by the CPI(M). On the other hands the LF secured almost 47 per cent vote in 1998. In 1999 Lok Sabha election the TMC again formed alliance with the BJP and increased its vote share by almost 1 per cent. On the other hands the LF decreased its vote share by almost 1 per cent. The TMC shifted its alliance from the BJP to the Congress in 2001 WB Assembly election. Although the party failed to defeat the Left but could not marginalise. The combined vote share of the TMC-Congress alliance was almost 35 per cent which was almost 3 per cent less than the CPI(M). There after the TMC rejoined with the BJP and contested in 2004 Lok Sabha and 2006 WB Assembly election. The TMC again broke alliance with the BJP and joined hands with the Congress in 2009 Lok Sabha and 2011 WB Assembly election and finally defeat the Left in 2011. But after 2011 WB Assembly election the TMC has been contesting Lok Sabha and WB Assembly election alone. But since 2016, except 2019 Lok Sabha election when the Left tried to join hands with any non-Left others, they failed miserably. In 2016 WB Assembly the LF made an electoral adjustment with the Congress to contest the TMC. The leading partner of the LF, the CPI(M) not only failed to collect standard number of seats but trailed behind the Congress and lost the identity of the principal opposition party within the Assembly. In 2021 WB Assembly election, the Left again formed alliance not only with the Congress, but a newly formed local base party, the Indian Secular Front (ISF). As a result, the Left has reduced to a naught in terms of winning seat in the assembly by securing only almost 7 per cent vote.

This is also needed to mention again that within the limited scope of present discussion, it is not possible to explain and analyse all the reasons behind the gradual evaporation of the political parties that have existed for more than seven decades. It is widely acknowledged that the crisis of Left politics in West Bengal has been progressing since 2011 which is an unprecedented event in the history of any state politics in post-

independent India. Since 2016, except 2019, the Left are trying to fight electoral battle by joining hands with some other non-TMC, non-BJP alliance, the 'Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance' (I.N.D.I.A.) in the state. Being a part of the I.N.D.I.A. alliance the LF joined hands with the Congress, but interestingly strongly opposed to another significant partner of the I.N.D.I.A, the TMC in the state and participated in 30 Lok Sabha seats in 2024. At some constituencies like; Asansol, Hoogly, Srerampore, Howrah, Kolkata Dakshin, Basirhat, Dum Dum, Barackpore, Krishnanagar, Murshidabad etc. except Ranaghat where the Left-Congress combined vote share increased in comparison to the votes shared by the LF's alone in the 17th Lok Sabha election in 2019, the TMC secured victory.

The vote shared by the Left and the Congress combined was even lower than that hold by the Left alone in the previous Lok Sabha election in 2019 and it therefore helped both the TMC and the BJP at the cost of the Left. The seats like; Barasat, Jaynagar, Mathurapur, Bolpur, Bankura, Medinipur, Arambag, Ghatal, Jhargram, Barddhaman-Durgapur, Jadavpur, barddhaman Purba etc. won by the TMC and Alipurduar, Balurghat, Tamluk, Bishnupur etc. won by the BJP. There are some exceptions also. But, in the 12 Lok seats, except Baharampur, where the candidates of the Congress supported by the LF contested, have increased their vote share in comparison to the votes shared by the Congress alone in 2019 Lok Sabha. The deep-rooted melody is that no matter who wins the election, the Left ultimately remains the loser.

The Parliamentary Left in India focuses on communist ideology which is basically followed by the philosophy and writings of Karl Marx and his followers. Marx tried to represent his philosophy by studying the society and the people. Although there are also many differences found within the writings of Karl Marx due to change of time. Marx changed and revised his opinions in accordance to the need of the society. Marx argued in the eighth theses of the 'Theses on Feuerbach' that 'social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which mislead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice'. But the Left in Bengal have alienated from the principle of 'learning from the masses and learning with the masses' rather they focused to teach the masses about the need of the society not only in West Bengal but across the country also. This activity of the Left raised a question of crisis of epistemology which is still present.

The initial hypothesis of the study ‘the electoral defeats and failure of the LF due to failure of long-term policy formulation, poor governance, arrogance and creeping of corruption in West Bengal’ is validated. The CPI(M) led LF successfully formulated policies regarding land in 1980s but failed to formulate policies in the first decade of 21st century. Many thinkers including the left leaders agreed that the industrialisation was needed but policies regarding land acquisition had not been accepted by the land looser. That helped the opposition to organise protest with the help of the land looser. Left failed to convince the common people regarding the importance of industrialisation. On the other hands the non-Left opposition specially the TMC succeed to build an anti-left approach among a large section of electorate of Bengal. The left also failed to formulate any fruitful policy to counter the anti-LFG attitudes which resulted the massive defeat for them in 2011. Due to long staying in state power, an arrogance within the leaders and workers at different level was gripped which had created an apathetic approach among some section of the society. Party domination had created in every section of the society. There were thousands of instances of the intervention of the party in the personal domain of the people. Many people lost their faith on the Left and felt very much apathetic towards the Left. So, the issue of Singur and Nandigram was just an explosion of that reaction which was successfully utilised by the non-Left oppositions, specially the TMC.

The second hypothesis, ‘consolidation of non-Left opposition votes and rise of BJP with its Hindutva agenda pushed the Left into extreme crisis’ is also validated. As per the electoral data, it is proved that the Left were defeated in 2011 not only due to failure of governance, long-term planning, policy mobilisation, arrogance of some leaders and activists etc. but the consolidation of the opposition votes also. The combined vote shared by the LF (41.05 per cent) was almost two per cent more than the TMC (38.93 per cent) but in terms of winning seat the LF has trailed in 124 seats behind the TMC. Because the TMC managed to collect support from other non-Left oppositions. The rise of BJP was first signalled in 1991 Lok Sabha and West Bengal Assembly election when the BJP secured almost 11 per cent votes in West Bengal. The Left had managed to contain the rise and spread of the BJP in West Bengal till 2011 because they were in state power. But after 2011, the socio-political conditions have changed. All non-Left forces join hands to mobilise support of different classes, castes and communities denying the Left any access to these vote banks. This picture has been cleared through the result of 2019 Lok Sabha, 2021 WB Assembly and recently completed 2024 Parliamentary elections.

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Appendix

Sample questions for interviews to the leaders and activists.

1. What are your views regarding the success and failure of the Left in West Bengal during 1977-2011?
2. What is your opinion regarding the massive electoral defeat of the Left Front in 2011 despite the massive victory in 2006?
 - 2.a) Had LF failed to provide good governance?
 - 2.b) Were there some anti-incumbency factors worked?
 - 2.c) Was there any ideological crisis?
 - 2.d) During which time the crisis of the Left actually started? Your opinion.
3. How do you see the change of leadership related to the failure of the Left Front in West Bengal?
 - 3.a) Is it described as the crisis of leadership? What is your opinion?
4. Are the weaknesses of the Left Front ultimately leading to its crisis? Your opinion.
5. Is there any relevance of left politics in contemporary West Bengal?
6. What are the points of strengths of the Left, the CPM in particular in West Bengal? your views.
7. What are your opinions regarding the success of TMC in west Bengal politics?
 - 7.a) Can it be said as personal success?
8. What are the main points of opposition to Trinamool Congress? What is your opinion.
9. what are your opinions regarding the problems and prospects of anti-TMC political forces at present and in future in West Bengal?
10. How do you see the shifting of electoral alliances in the politics of West Bengal from 2001-2011 and from 2011 to present?
11. How could you see the attempt to win state power of the BJP in West Bengal with its Hindutva agenda?
12. Is the public support of the Left have been continuously decreasing due to the BJP's challenge of Hindutva in the contemporary West Bengal? your opinion.

Dinmuth Mandal
06/11/2025

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contains literature survey and original research work done by me as part of Doctoral studies. All 32 information in this thesis have been obtained and presented in accordance with existing academic rules and ethical conduct. I declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referred all materials and results that are not original to this work. I also declare that I have checked this thesis as per the "Policy on Anti Plagiarism, Jadavpur University, 2019", and the level of similarity as checked by iThenticate software is%. Signature of Candidate : Dinanath Mandal Date: Certified by Supervisor(s): (Signature with date, seal

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