

Title: “CRISIS OF LEFT IN WEST BENGAL POLITICS FROM 1991 TO 2021”

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Abstract

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 as the Left Front was in West Bengal. 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 rule in West Bengal.

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 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 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 percent 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. but in terms of winning Parliamentary seats 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 Assembly which was decreased by almost 7 percent 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.

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. After that 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 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 by six chapters. 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.

Key words: Left, Left Front, non-Left, crisis, historic, unprecedented, marginalised etc.