DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

MASTER OF ARTS-POLITICAL SCIENCES

SEMESTER -IV

ASPECTS OF POLITICS IN WEST BENGAL

ELECTIVE 405

BLOCK-2

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

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FOREWORD

The Self Learning Material (SLM) is written with the aim of providing simple and organized study content to all the learners. The SLMs are prepared on the framework of being mutually cohesive, internally consistent and structured as per the university's syllabi. It is a humble attempt to give glimpses of the various approaches and dimensions to the topic of study and to kindle the learner's interest to the subject

We have tried to put together information from various sources into this book that has been written in an engaging style with interesting and relevant examples. It introduces you to the insights of subject concepts and theories and presents them in a way that is easy to understand and comprehend.

We always believe in continuous improvement and would periodically update the content in the very interest of the learners. It may be added that despite enormous efforts and coordination, there is every possibility for some omission or inadequacy in few areas or topics, which would definitely be rectified in future.

We hope you enjoy learning from this book and the experience truly enrich your learning and help you to advance in your career and future endeavours.

ASPECTS OF POLITICS IN WEST BENGAL

BLOCK-1

BLOCK-2

BLOCK 2: ASPECTS OF POLITICS IN WEST BENGAL

Introduction to the Block

Unit 8 deals with Impact of Radical left policies on West Bengal Politics. Radicalism implies a conspicuously stressed attitude or frame of mind towards one particular institution or towards the social order as a whole.

Unit 9 deals with Socio –Economic Dimension of West Bengal Politics. The LF regime in WB, for example, dominated by the CPM (Communist Party of India) party as a 'monolithic machine' with relatively little competition from NGOs and others, could be seen as exemplary of a 'paradox of participation' that is, as long as the poor remain poor, public participation leaves public policy meagrely responsive to their needs

Unit 10 deals with Economic Dimension – Politics of Agrarian reforms. Land is the pre-eminent asset in rural sectors of developing countries, the primary determinant of livelihoods of the poor. Accordingly, the role of land reform on productivity, inequality, poverty, local governance and social capital in rural areas of LDCs is an important topic of academic research with significant policy relevance.

Unit 11 deals with Operation Barga and the Panchayati Raj. In the early seventies, the state of West Bengal, in the eastern part of India, had one of the highest poverty levels and the largest number of poor people in the rural areas of India.

Unit 12 deasl with Agriculture and Industry – Left Front. The foregoing sections consider various reasons why industry in West Bengal has gone downhill. None of these factors is either irrelevant or trivial.

Unit 13 deals with Role of Trinamul Congress in State Politics. The ruling Trinamool Congess on Friday decided to continue its protests against CAA and NRC and will make it the party"s main poll plank in the coming civic polls in West Bengal.

Unit 14 deals with Current Debates on Statehood Demands. The demand for a new state was raised in the context, where one region was more backward than rest of the state and the rulers of the state were failed to provide proper attention to the development of the region.

UNIT 8: IMPACT OF RADICAL LEFT POLICIES ON WEST BENGAL POLITICS

STRUCTURE

8.0   OBJECTIVES

After this unit, we can able to know:

- To discuss the Impact of Radical left policies on West Bengal Politics
- To know the National and International Dimension
- To know the Current scenario West Bengal Politics
- To know the Coalition Experience

8.1   INTRODUCTION

Radicalism implies a conspicuously stressed attitude or frame of mind towards one particular institution or towards the social order as a whole. Attitudes are identified as radical when their prevailing emotional tone is one of moral indignation vis-a-vis the existing institutional arrangements. It also implies a distinct philosophy and programme of social change aiming at systematic destruction of what is hated, and its replacement by

a faith, a science or a society - logically demonstrated as true, rational and just. Modern radicalism is manifest in two broad directions Right-wing radicalism in the form of a programme seeking to perfect an already existing liberal democratic power structure and left-wing radicalism in the form of a revolutionary programme seeking to alter the existing liberal polity which is based upon exploitation and private ownership'. This has largely been an outgrowth of Marxism. The states of Africa,- Asia and Latin America which came out from the yoke of colonial domination and are still struggling for survival constitute the fertile ground for the development of left-wing radicalism and left-radical political movements. In that sense political movements in India demand serious attention. West Bengal in particular, is important, since it fits in with the conditions broadly associated with the growth of radicalism in any system. Radicalism operates in a political system through political activism or movementalism which occurs when a fairly large number of people band together in order to alter or supplant some portion of the existing culture or social or political order. A political system almost agrees to be pregnant with ideas of radical change when there is a wide gap between agitators expectations and their actual achievements and when their sense of discontent and frustration arising out of gaps are successfully channelised against the corporate structure of power by political parties and pressure groups. Radicalism, therefore, has a major focus on the masses, particularly on the social, cultural and economically displaced and dislocated strata of society; it encourages peoples participation, not the least militant participation in the political process and aims at accelerating the process of modernisationo Radicalism is the resultant of a psychological process. It varies from system to system indicating variations in political culture. Political culture is the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations towards politics among the members of a political system. It is the subjective realm which underlines and gives meaning to political action The political culture underlying any political system is, beyond doubt, conditioned by different variables, as a political system by itself is a set of variables regardless of the degree of interrelationship among them' These variables, either dependent or independent, affect individuals'

attitudes and orientations toward politics and thereby condition the psychological propensity of the political leadership and to a great extent influence the political process. Radicalisation of the political process, therefore, depends up the prevalent political culture.

8.2 IMPACT OF RADICAL LEFT POLICIES ON WEST BENGAL POLITICS

Historically speaking, West Bengal has distinguished itself from the other provinces of India by its predominant inclination towards a radical political culture. Politics here has been highly reactive and inclined to 'ideological political ethos. The political process of West Bengal 'is to be designated as a pre-mobilised modern political system and its political culture unlike other provinces is relatively participant. It is the nerve centre of political activism and alternative (in comparison to the nationalist politics) tactics of movementalism. While West Bengal after independence experienced for quite a long time a stable congress Government headed by Dr B.c. Roy, the latter's hold was always rather tentative Throughout the early years of congress domination in West Bengal from 1947 to 1962 the communist Party of India and other left parties provided significant opposition to the congress. By mobilising people against the congress establishment and adopting multidimensional forms of struggle, the communists, in the main, were able to radicalise the political process of West Bengal. HOwever, there is virtually no full scale study on the growth and development of radical politics in West Bengal during the period 1947-1962. This is a serious research gap. Reference to political leadership, radical politics, communist politics and politics of mobilisation during the period is only incidental in most cases. A review of the existing literature would confirm it. In a major study, Elite Conflict in a Plural Society (1968), J.H. Broomfield introduced a new terminology for political leadership in Bengal, namely, the Bhadralok concept. According to the author, educated intellectuals who despised manual labour and adopted urban ways of life but retained a rural connection constituted the Bhadralok class. Three Hindu upper castes, namely, Brahmins, Vaidyas and Kayasthas, mainly constituted the Bhadralok class and though in principle a Muslim could also be a

Bhadralok in the early twentieth century they were remarkably few. This elite section of the Bengali society, namely, the Bhadralok faced serious problems and came out to lead the politics of Bengal. The communist movement in pre-independence Bengal, according to the author, was mainly led by this section. Although this work of Broomfield is mainly concerned with the pre-independence period of Bengal its methodological impact on subsequent studies dealing with the post-1947 period has been quite strong, criticisms of this thesis notwithstanding. According 6 to Sumit Sarkar, the term 'Bhadralok is devoid of any explanatory power, ranging presumably from the Maharaja of Mymensing to the East India Railway Clerk For GOrdon the so-called bhadraloks are rather 'diverse social groups with divergent political preferences and seek to explain everything. Major studies on the post-1947 west Bengal politics have been produced by Marcus F. Franda, a leading Western authority on the subject. These are Radical Politics in west Bengal (1971), 8 West Bengal and the Federalising Process in India (1968), Political Development and Political Decay in west Bengal (1971), and the articles in 'Electoral Politics in India and 'Radical Politics in south Asia. Franda has given elaborate information about the political developments in West Bengal, has gone into the roots of political leadership as provided by the congress, communists and other left parties, and placed the information in a wide canvas of historical perspective and sociological and cultural heterogenity. The most striking aspect of the Bengali communist movement, Franda believes, 'is its continued recruitment of leadership from the Bhadralok' ; the Bhadraloks, he argues, being frustrated were attracted to Marxism by late 1930, because they suffered a more rapid social decline in the twentieth century than any other comparable social group in India; yet the Group's attachment to communism is fragile as a result of the inner-contradictions of the Bhadralok-Marxist marriage. conceptualizing Bengali communist leaders as 14 'frustrated Bhadralok is, however, a rehash of Broomfield's argumento Although the studies for the first time give a sketchy account of the communists in West Bengal most of the discussions centre around post-1967 developments. Naturally, a vast

period of West Bengal politics emanating from 1947 remains untouched. Reference in many cases is incidental and based on secondary sources.

Nirmal Chandra Basu Roy Choudhury's article, west Bengal Vortex of Ideological Politics provides a kaleidoscopic view of West Bengal politics between 1967-71 but provides only to a limited extent some information about Bengal politics immediately after independence Atul Kohli's article Fran Elite Activism to Democratic consolidations The rise 16 of reform communism in West Bengal', and his work Democracy and Discontent, India's Growing crisis of Governability (1992) mainly deal with the political trends in west Bengal under the Left Front Government but undoubtedly provide valuable information about the historical roots of Bengali political exceptionalism. Kohli opines that communism in Bengal is regional in character and it hails regional nationalism. 7 The work, Politics in West Bengalr Institutions, Processes and Problems (1985); 9 edited by Rakhahari chatterji is a first humble attempt to analyse different facets of West Bengal politics but here also the priority is given to the post-1967 developments. Prasanta Sengupta's The congress Party in west Bengal: A study of Factionalism (1988t9 contains an interesting discussion on how the congress Party wrestled with the problem of factionalism and managed to retain the seat of power. The study touches only sketchily some political developments of west Bengal during 1947-1986o Prafulla Chakrabortys study The Marginal Men (1990), is a pioneering work which may be regarded as the first adequately comprehensive history of the refugees from East Pakistan and of their radical impact on the body politic of West Bengal since 1947. The work of Atul Sur, History and culture of Bengal (1992), recounts the spirit of independence of the Bencalis and its culture from the earliest times down to 1991. The work in Bengali, namely, Ranen Sen's Banglar Communist Party Gathaner Pratham Yua (1981), Saroj Mukherjee's Bharater Communist Party Oh Amra (1986), Amalendu Sengupta's Uttal Challish (1989) are full of information and provide a study of communist movement in Bengal. But these are primarily reminiscences and they lack in theorisation. They provide information primarily on the pre-independence Bengal except Uttal Challish which focuses on the developments up to 1950 The study of Ranen Sen's Bharater communist

Partyr Katha: 1948-64 (1992) furnishes some stray information of the communist movement in West Bengal. The study on Abhibakta Bang lay communist Andalan a Suchana Parba (1992) by Amitabha Chandra claims to have gone deep into the vortex of communist movement in Bengal but it focuses the developments only up to 1945. Some district level studies, namely, Sa¥ed Shahedulla's (1991), Bardhaman Jel ay commun~st Ando aner At~t t as Sanat Raha's communist An~Qlane Murshidabad (1981) and Mihir Roy's (edited) Bankura Jellar communist Andolaner Smritikatha (1987) are primarily reminiscences but provide same information of the communist movement in the districts. The work of Atulya Ghosh,Kasta Kalpita (1988), recounts the political developments of West Bengal and though primarily in the form of reminiscences it highlights some issues about the Communist Party and corrnnunist movement in West Bengal. Bharati Mukherjee's Political Culture and leadership in India (1991) is a study of political leadership of west Bengal from 1977-1980 and provides a broad review of the radical background of Bengali political culture.

A brief survey of the existing literature reveals that all these studies by eminent scholars have enriched the study of politics in Bengal. But almost all the studies are concerned either with the pre-independence or post 1967 developments of West Bengal politicso If the collapse of the congress Government and the emergence of the communist led left alternative Government in 1967 is an institutional shape of left radicalism, then it is organically linked with the political movements which the CPI along with other left parties had launched in west Bengal immediately after independence against the congress establishment. No attempt has been made so far to analyse and review this phenomenon of radicalisation of West Bengal's politics in this phase. All these make it necessary to bridge the gaps, at least partly. The present study deals with the role of the communist Party of India in radicalising the political process of West Bengal from 1952-1962.

The politics of left radicalism which frequently has found articulate expression in West Bengal through the activities of the communists and other left parties has been conditioned by the geographical, demographic, administrative and socio-historical environment of Bengal in which

ideological and political ethos with radical appeal and 'mild degree of non-conformism has always played a role. The study of political radicalism in West Bengal, therefore, demands a brief review of the most important foundations which dependently or independently have played a catalyst role in hastening left radicalism.

The undivided Bengal embraced a geographical diversity and was popularly depicted as Sonar Bangla (Golden Bengal). Tucked away in the eastern corner of British India, it stretches from the Bay of Bengal where it had a broad base in the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Padma-Megna delta and north and northeast words up to the foothills of the Himalayas. In one corner there were the wailings of barren, hard and uneven soil and in another corner there was the vast, fertile, alluvial soil together with a monsoonal climate and adequate rainfall. Some places were infested with deep forests. The eastern part of Bengal primarily centred on the vast network of rivers and was prone to regular flooding and natural calamities. The rivers were verdant even during the summer season. This nadi-matrik (riverain) geographical environment made the average people of Bengal culturally emotional, fertile, Pratibadi (protester) and sangrami (struggle oriented). This cultural make-up of the Bengalees largely shaped the birth of militant politics. All the terrorist groups were formed around the riverain areas of Bengal and were able to conduct secret operations in close touch with the people.

The political victory of the British in Bengal was followed by a cultural victory. With the penetration of British commerce in Bengal a process of westernization started and it struck its root through the introduction of different Western institutions like education, Chamber House, law courts, white-collar administrative service etc. Bengal soon became the centre of British political and economic activities. Thus Bengal, as distinguished from other parts of India, acquired an identity of its own as the centre of education, orientation and employment and attracted migrants from all over India - businessmen, jobseekers, students, artists and intellectuals. This resulted in a vast increase in population. It reached its climax when in August 1947 Bengal was partitioned and a large number of uprooted persons crossed border from East Bengal and took shelter in West Bengal. This overcrowding created serious pressure on

the economy of west Bengal and this, in turn, led to 'frustrations and discontentment among the people and made them susceptible to militant movements and violence.

The role of urbanisation in terms of growth of urban population in west Bengal is higher than that of India as a whole. This spread of urbanisation led to spread of literacy which is appreciably high in comparison to other parts of India. As the process started in Bengal earlier than any other region and as the pace has been conspicuously high, the level of political consciousness of the Bengali masses has also been correspondingly high and they are less conservative, more dynamic and radical.

8.3   NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

In the early 1990s, political observers and scientists alike announced the death of West European radical left parties (RLPs). The collapse of the Soviet Union, advancing economic globalisation and the continuing shift toward post-industrial societies had led them to suspect that parties of the far left would no longer play a relevant role in European politics (Bell 1993; Bull and Heywood 1994). More than 25 years later, communist and other radical left parties have undergone a phase of organisational and programmatic transformation with the consequence that they have seen remarkable electoral comebacks (Hudson 2012; March and Keith 2016a). On average, the electoral support for the West European radical left has increased from 7% in the early 1990s to 12% in most recent elections. Although this trend is far from uniform across countries,1 most RLPs have seen a remarkable increase in their public support in recent decades, with Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain being the most striking examples.2 As a result, RLPs even defeated their social democratic opponents in some of the last elections.3 This development raises the question of what explains the electoral success of this party family.

An increasing number of researchers have started to investigate the causes of RLPs' electoral performances. Two main approaches to identifying the determinants of radical left party success are discussed in

the current literature. First, studies have dealt with current trends and events in West European politics – such as European integration or the 2008 financial crisis – to explain the electoral fortunes of the far left (e.g. Beaudonnet and Gomez 2017; Dunphy 2004). Second, research has investigated the influence of individual-level factors from the perspective of cleavage theory (Ramiro 2016), theories focusing on economic distress and deprivation (March and Rommerskirchen 2015; Visser et al. 2014), or modernisation theory (Charalambous and Lamprianou 2017; Gomez et al. 2016). Although some of these studies also address factors related to the political supply side, little is known about the success and failure of RLPs' programmatic strategies. More concretely, no study has yet accounted for the question of how and to what extent RLPs' programmatic offers affect their electoral performances. This is surprising since the West European far left has undergone a profound process of programmatic re-orientation (March 2011). While a minority of (post-) communist parties continue to promote a rather orthodox programmatic profile, others have moderated their stances on economic issues and/or incorporated 'New Politics' issues into their programmes.

This study investigates how the supply side of electoral politics has influenced the electoral performance of radical left parties. To this end, the analysis focuses on the positions of radical left parties on the two dominant axes of conflict in Western Europe, i.e. an economic and a non-economic dimension. The core argument of this article is that radical left parties benefit from different strategies on these two dimensions during election campaigns. Relying on the Downsian framework of political competition, as well as on literature on niche and challenger parties, I argue that radical left parties profit electorally from centrifugal movements, i.e. more extreme positions, when it comes to non-economic issues, while they benefit from centripetal shifts, i.e. more moderate positions, on the economic conflict dimension. Moreover, the article demonstrates how the success of these strategies depends on the positions occupied by social democratic competitors. Using data between 1990 and 2017 for 17 West European countries provided by the MARPOR research group, the empirical analysis shows that the success

of RLPs' positional strategies does indeed vary with the conflict dimension in question.

The article at hand contributes to two strands of the literature. First, it facilitates a better understanding of the conditions explaining support for RLPs. More specifically, this is the first article to go beyond the analysis of demand-side factors to explain RLP support on a broad comparative basis. Second, this article adds to the ongoing debate on the electoral success of challenger parties. Few studies have considered both dimensions of political conflict (economic and non-economic) simultaneously when analysing the effect of positional shifts on parties' electoral performances.4 I argue that the success of parties' positional strategies depends on the conflict dimension in question – an aspect that previous literature has not explicitly dealt with. The framework developed in this article combines different perspectives of party competition and is thus not restricted to radical left parties, but can be applied to other challenger parties as well.

The article proceeds in four steps. First, I discuss how centrifugal and centripetal movements influence the electoral fortunes of challenger parties in general. The second section presents a series of hypotheses to explain RLPs' electoral fortunes from a supply-side perspective. Then the data, operationalisation, and methodological issues are discussed. The subsequent section presents the empirical results of the statistical analysis. The last section discusses the implications of the findings.

Challenger parties' success strategies: centripetal and centrifugal movements.

This article relies on the insight that challenger parties'5 positional strategies can be distinguished into two groups. The first group of strategies rests on the Downsian idea of political competition and therefore focuses on parties' proximity to the median voter to explain electoral success and failure. From this perspective, centripetal incentives are present for all parties within a party system, as voters will vote for the ideologically closest party (Downs 1957). The second group of strategies centres on centrifugal positional strategies. Especially political parties that introduce new issues into the political debate have been found to benefit from policy stances that deviate from those proposed by

competing parties (Adams et al. 2006; Ezrow 2008). Here, centrifugal incentives drive parties to more extreme policy stances, as these outsider positions are likely to increase parties' public visibility. Based on this, parties underline their ideological distinctiveness with the long-term perspective of establishing issue ownership (Wagner 2012).

In general terms, the Downsian perspective maintains that parties compete with each other by putting forward different stances on a policy dimension. Parties' vote shares are the result of the underlying voter distribution on this dimension, as people – conceptualised as rational actors – seek to maximise their utility function by voting for the party that is ideologically most proximate to them. Political parties are thus best advised to propose centrist policy positions close to the median voter to attract as many votes as possible. These centripetal incentives equally prevail for challenger parties as they 'are most likely to survive when there is an opportunity for them to cut off a large part of the support of an older party by sprouting up between it and its former voters' (Downs 1957: 128). Challenger parties thus increase their public support by shifting toward the position of their closest mainstream competitor. Nevertheless, putting forward more moderate policy stances does not imply that these parties abandon their challenger status. Instead, centripetal movements are a means for such parties to present themselves as more viable voting options to those parts of the electorate affiliated with mainstream parties.

Challenger parties do not only gain electoral successes by competing on established policy dimensions but also by introducing new issues into the political arena. They can thus act as issue entrepreneurs by underlining the relevance of issues that have been neglected by other competitors (Meguid 2008). In contrast to the Downsian approach to party competition, this perspective assumes that challenger parties do not improve their electoral performance by proclaiming more moderate political programs, but that extreme positions lead to vote gains (Adams et al. 2006, 2012; Ezrow et al. 2010). Non-centrist, radical stances are thus a way of attracting public attention by increasing a party's ideological distinctiveness as perceived by the voters (Hobolt and de Vries 2015). Based on this 'product differentiation' (Kitschelt 1994:

118), extreme stances might also help to establish a long-term association with a policy field in the voters' minds that may then translate into issue ownership in the long run (Petrocik 1996). Both product differentiation and (prospective) issue ownership provide strong centrifugal incentives for small parties and are considered crucial in convincing citizens to vote for challenger parties (Wagner 2012).

The question remains under which circumstances centrifugal or centripetal movements play to the electoral advantage of challenger parties. Although research widely acknowledges the importance of economic and non-economic issues in modern societies, analyses that focus on the simultaneous relevance of centrifugal and centripetal strategies in multi-dimensional political spaces are rare. Most of the recent work that is concerned with challenger and niche parties either focuses on the strategic behaviour of political parties on single non-economic issues such as immigration, environmental protection, or ethno-regionalism (Meguid 2008; Meyer and Miller 2015; Wagner 2011) or is concerned with positions on the general left-right dimension (Adams et al. 2006; Ezrow 2008). Few contributions deal with the impact of parties' positions on more than one dimension. However, these studies are mostly concerned with questions related to the predominance of single issues or dimensions rather than parties' strategic positioning within this space (Elias et al. 2015; Rovny 2013; Rovny and Edwards 2012). These perspectives do not take the dynamics of issue competition into account, which leads political parties to pursue more extreme or more centrist positions on different conflict dimensions.

One exception is Margit Tavits' work on 'principled' and 'pragmatic' issues. Tavits (2007) has shown that parties' policy shifts are punished and rewarded by the public in different ways depending on the policy domain in question. In her setting, voters welcome policy shifts on pragmatic, i.e. economic, issues, while disapproving shifts on principled, i.e. social, issues. Based on this, the electoral prospects of challenger parties' centrifugal and centripetal movements will vary with the conflict dimension in question. More concretely, I argue that they will depend on parties' reputation on a given issue dimension. The intensity of party-issue linkages will influence whether one of these two strategies plays to

their electoral advantage. Party-issue linkages are best understood as co-occurrences of parties and issues in the public debate (Walgrave et al. 2012) and are often considered as the main way to gain issue ownership in the long run (Tresch et al. 2015; Walgrave and De Swert 2007). Thus, the more frequently political parties are mentioned in association with a specific issue, the more will voters accept them as committed actors in the policy realm in question. This linkage manifests itself as a close identification between parties and specific issues in the voters' minds and is thus closely related to the concept of associative issue ownership.6

The varying intensity of these party-issue linkages will change the electoral prospects of centrifugal and centripetal movements. Zons (2016) shows in this context that challenger parties only benefit from high nicheness and programmatic concentration at the beginning of their lifecycle – i.e. when their linkage with their core issue is still low – and that this effect fades away over time and even becomes negative the more established they are – i.e. when the corresponding linkage intensity increases. Challenger parties thus profit electorally if they 'mainstream' their programmatic profiles after they have entered the parliamentary arena. In the same vein, Wagner (2012) suggests that putting forward extreme policy stances constitutes a promising strategy when less established political parties need to attract public attention. Due to their lower vote shares and a lack of media coverage, this is especially true for those challenger parties trying to gain visibility on new issues or competing for party-issue linkages with other parties (see also de Vries and Hobolt 2012: 247).

In contrast, the more a challenger party is a publicly accepted player on a particular issue dimension, the stronger its party-issue linkage will be. In some cases, the party might also own some of the issues that are part of the conflict dimension in question. In this situation, the positive effect of promoting extreme positions should diminish. Instead, challengers are incentivised to maximise their vote share to ensure their political survival (Spoon 2011). In line with the Downsian framework of party competition, abandoning policy purism in favour of more moderate positions is likely to increase their public support. Otherwise they run the risk of being perceived as political pariahs without any substantial

influence on policies (March and Keith 2016b; Krause and Wagner 2019).

Combining the incentives for centrifugal and centripetal positional strategies in this way conceptualises party competition as a multi-dimensional endeavour. The outlined theoretical framework is thus sensitive to the entire 'positional toolbox' that challenger parties have at hand to gain electoral advantages. In fact, the intensity of party-issue linkages centrally alters the prospects for success of centrifugal and centripetal positional movements. Building on this argument, the next section will elaborate on how these strategies impact RLPs' electoral performances. Moreover, I will argue that these effects will not be uniform for all far left challengers, but will be conditioned by the positions put forward by mainstream left parties.

The impact of differing positional strategies on radical left party success

Radical left parties are well established actors concerning the economic conflict dimension. It is especially the long-term programmatic history of the radical left party family that centres on economic issues such as socio-economic equality, welfare, or labour rights that dominates the public perception of RLPs (March 2011). Rooted in a common communist tradition, they share a distinctly critical view of the capitalist system and are united by the aspiration to transform society while rejecting neo-liberal and market-oriented policies (Charalambous and Lamprianou 2017; Chiocchetti 2017; March 2011). Although their policy goals vary from programmatic purism as put forward by the Greek KKE or the Portuguese PCP to more pragmatic, 'social-democratised' policy stances, all members of the radical left party family have been and continue to be fierce opponents of public spending cuts and welfare-state retrenchment (Hudson 2012). Moreover, far-left parties are frequently seen as the associative issue owners when it comes to state control of the economy (Williams and Ishiyama 2018). Based on this, a strong party-issue linkage on the economic dimension can be expected for RLPs as they are consequently closely affiliated with economy-related issues in the public debate. In line with the Downsian framework of party competition, favourable partisan realignment is thus most probable if far-

left parties take a more moderate stance on this conflict dimension. Moreover, centripetal movements may also signal policy pragmatism and prospective governing aspirations that might further boost far-left parties' electoral support (March and Keith 2016b). Moderating their position and pursuing a centripetal strategy is thus likely to increase their support at the ballot boxes.

The rise of non-economic issues since the late 1970s not only challenged traditional patterns of party competition as such (Inglehart 1977; Kriesi et al. 2008; Müller-Rommel 1984) but also altered the competitive environment of radical left parties. As already explained in the ground-breaking work by Herbert Kitschelt (1994), these new issues opened up new opportunities (and risks) to attract (and lose) voters in an increasingly fractionalized electorate. Although economic problems constitute the bread and butter of West European RLPs, they frequently started to pay attention to new cultural conflicts within society. With the increasing importance of socio-culturally liberal voters, RLPs underwent a profound process of programmatic re-orientation and renewal that focused on including cultural issues, such as environmentalism, gender equality, or minority rights (Hudson 2000). The most common rationale behind this process has been to attract new left-leaning voters who were no longer predominantly concerned with the question of social inequality from the perspective of class analysis, but who prioritised an idea of equality that focuses on non-economic categories (Fagerholm 2017). Hence, several RLPs have started to mobilise those segments of the middle class that are composed of younger, better educated and more libertarian voters (Chiocchetti 2017; Häusermann et al. 2013; Oesch 2013).[7]

Although far-left parties remain divided on their willingness to respond to the rise of left-libertarian values, several studies confirm the relevance of non-economic issues for their electoral performance (see e.g. Hudson 2012; Spierings and Zaslove 2017). Some parties became issue entrepreneurs or created long-lasting electoral alliances with green parties and movements, e.g. in Iceland, Portugal, Spain, Norway, Denmark, or Greece (Gomez et al. 2016).[8] Other far-left parties are directly competing with other libertarian and green parties, such as in

Germany, France, or Sweden. In both situations, RLPs need to compete for issue linkage on these less established 'New Politics' issues (see e.g. Charalambous and Lamprianou 2017). Pursuing a centrifugal strategy in this situation implies the chance to a) appeal to new voter groups and b) to establish a credible linkage with these new issues, which can brand them as prospective issue owners. Otherwise, they possibly lose culturally concerned voters to other leftist parties or even provide breeding ground for the emergence of further libertarian challengers.9

Hypothesis 2: Radical left parties' vote shares decrease the more they moderate their position on the non-economic conflict dimension.

While the primary focus of the above explanations is about RLPs' positioning in the political space, these supply-side factors do not operate in an isolated way. As maintained by Spoon (2011), challenger parties' optimal position can only be understood in relational terms; hence together with the position of their ideologically closest mainstream competitor. While, e.g. centrist shifts can have a beneficial impact on challenger parties, this does not imply that these parties can modify their positions without limitations. Rather, they are best advised to avoid both positional convergence with mainstream parties as well as too radical a stance that discourages more voters than it attracts. Whether and how the depicted strategies affect RLPs' electoral support thus depends on the positioning of mainstream parties.

Downs (1957: 131–2) argues that mainstream parties confronted with parties on their flanks are well advised to adopt some of the challenger's position to regain lost votes. Hence, mainstream party movements toward the extreme end of a conflict dimension are assumed to diminish electoral support for challenger parties. Although previous work has identified accommodative behaviour as a frequently used strategic tool of mainstream parties to deal with radical challenger parties (see e.g. Abou-Chadi and Krause 2018; van Spanje 2010), we have little empirical evidence indicating that policy-adaption indeed reduces challenger parties' vote shares. Instead, Hino (2012) has shown that challenger parties – once they are more established actors – are unaffected or even benefit electorally if mainstream parties pay increased attention to the issues they raised. Although Hino's study focuses on issue salience

rather than positions, it indicates that accommodative strategies might not affect challenger parties as expected by the literature.

Two aspects are likely to prevent the success of accommodative strategies. First, the agenda-setting power of mainstream parties in the context of multi-party competition might play an important role. As also acknowledged by Meguid (2008), mainstream parties have the capability to either put specific issues on the public agenda or to keep them out of the political debate. They therefore substantially influence which issues are at stake and which positions are viable options during election campaigns. Mainstream parties exert this influence not only on the basis of greater legislative experience and governmental efficacy but also by means of higher media coverage (Merz 2017). As a consequence, smaller political parties will suffer electorally if their ideologically closest mainstream competitor does not pay attention to issues and positions raised by them. Second, a closer stance between challenger and mainstream parties increases the chances of future cooperation in government. Hence, if mainstream parties promote non-centrist positions, voters possibly tend to vote for a challenger party because of future government options.

Based on these considerations, I assume that the success of far-left parties' centripetal and centrifugal strategies is conditioned by the policy position of their closest mainstream competitors, i.e. social democratic parties:

Electoral performance and radical left parties' policy positions – empirical analysis

Operationalisation and model specification

The research interest of this study on the determinants of RLPs' electoral performances requires information on vote shares and policy positions of West European RLPs between 1990 and 2017.10 The dependent variable measures the percentage of electoral support for RLPs.11 Following the literature on radical left parties, opposition to neoliberalism and exceeding capitalism constitutes the core ideological feature of these parties (Beaudonnet and Gomez 2017; Gomez et al. 2016; March 2011). In line with the academic consensus regarding the members of the West European radical left party family, 25 parties have been identified.12

Radical left parties' positions on the economic and non-economic conflict dimension are the first set of independent variables of interest in this study. The MARPOR project (Volkens et al. 2018) provides information to measure parties' positions on both problem dimensions. MARPOR uses manual coding of party manifestos, which are divided into quasi-sentences, whereby each sentence is assigned to a pre-designed list of policy positions or areas. As a result, the percentage of quasi-sentences referring to each code is computed. This dataset covers the vast majority of elections and parties of interest in this study. To estimate spatial positions, salience scores for left (libertarian) and right (authoritarian) categories are combined.13 The use of logit transformed scales as proposed by Lowe et al. (2011) solves two problems related to the construction of position scales with MARPOR data. First, former calculations have also taken the total number of quasi-sentences in a party manifesto into account. As a consequence, centrist tendencies have been indicated even though the numbers of quasi-sentences referring to leftist and rightist categories have remained constant (Fernandez-Vazquez 2014). Second, using log-odds ratios acknowledges that the marginal effect of additional quasi-sentences is decreasing in the amount that a party has already attributed to an issue.

Higher scores indicate more rightist (authoritarian) stances on the respective dimension, while lower values implicate more leftist (libertarian) positions.14 Figure 1 shows the distribution of RLPs' economic and non-economic positions during the time period that is under investigation. Although the majority of RLPs' is positioned in the left-libertarian quadrant of the plot, the distribution reveals considerable variation on both conflict dimensions. The question is which of the positions are electorally advantageous.

Finally, control variables that potentially influence the electoral performances of RLPs are added to the model. While macro-economic trends tend to explain only a small portion of the variation of RLPs' vote shares (see e.g. March and Rommerskirchen 2015), it is necessary to control for these factors. Given that the ideological focal point of RLPs relates to issues such as social justice, job security, and welfare extension, these parties are expected to do better in times of economic

downturns. Increasing unemployment rates (International Labour Organization 2019) and decreasing GDP per capita (World Bank 2019) should influence RLPs' electoral performances positively. In the latter case, the log of the variable is used to account for its skewed distribution. Next, the composition of ruling governments is likely to affect RLPs' electoral fortunes. Participation in government is likely to result in electoral losses due to lacking capacities to realise promised policy proposals. In addition, I control for RLPs that lend support to minority governments and left-wing governments without RLP participation. A measure differentiating between these three types of government coalitions prior to the election in question will be added to the model. The reference category subsumes all governments with at least one non-left-wing party. Moreover, in some countries multiple relevant radical left parties compete for votes. Vote gains and losses of rival RLPs are likely to affect a party's electoral support. I control for this factor by adding a continuous measure indicating the vote share gained by all rival RLPs in the election in question. Lastly, I control for voter turnout since lower participation rates in national elections are likely to benefit small parties.

Criticism of Coalition

Advocates of proportional representation suggest that a coalition government leads to more consensus-based politics, as a government comprising differing parties (often based on different ideologies) need to compromise about governmental policy. Another stated advantage is that a coalition government better reflects the popular opinion of the electorate within a country.

Those who disapprove of coalition governments believe that such governments have a tendency to be fractious and prone to disharmony, as their component parties hold differing beliefs and thus may not always agree on policy. Sometimes the results of an election mean that the coalitions which are mathematically most probable are ideologically infeasible, for example in Flanders or Northern Ireland. A second difficulty might be the ability of minor parties to play "kingmaker" and, particularly in close elections, gain far more power in exchange for their support than the size of their vote would otherwise justify.

Coalition governments have also been criticized for sustaining a consensus on issues when disagreement and the consequent discussion would be more fruitful. To forge a consensus, the leaders of ruling coalition parties can agree to silence their disagreements on an issue to unify the coalition against the opposition. The coalition partners, if they control the parliamentary majority, can collude to make the parliamentary discussion on the issue irrelevant by consistently disregarding the arguments of the opposition and voting against the opposition's proposals — even if there is disagreement within the ruling parties about the issue.

Powerful parties can also act in an oligocratic way to form an alliance to stifle the growth of emerging parties. Of course, such an event is rare in coalition governments when compared to two-party systems, which typically exist because of stifling of the growth of emerging parties, often through discriminatory nomination rules regulations and plurality voting systems, and so on.

A single, more powerful party can shape the policies of the coalition disproportionately. Smaller or less powerful parties can be intimidated to not openly disagree. In order to maintain the coalition, they would have to vote against their own party's platform in the parliament. If they do not, the party has to leave the government and loses executive power. However, this is contradicted by the "kingmaker" factor mentioned above.

8.4   CURRENT SCENARIO

In the light of the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the declining performance of the left in national politics has been a subject of debate. The current political turmoil in the country has raised crucial questions both about the continued relevance of the left and its future discourse in mainstream politics. How can the left reclaim its politics and re-imagine its future?

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) return to power with a thumping majority speaks volumes of a deep social churning that shaped the people's mandate in 2019. The discourse of nationalism and national

security, economic reform and developmental schemes has certainly contributed to Narendra Modi's return to the helm of India's political landscape. A significant outcome of the 2019 Lok Sabha election has been that the left stands weakest in terms of its presence in the Lok Sabha. The gradual erosion of the left raises pertinent questions about the relevance of the left in the country's political scene. West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala are cases in point. The left, once able to reach to the grass roots, has seen a gradual reduction in its electoral performance at the national level. Facing such a setback, what should the left do to mobilise the masses and reclaim the political space? How should it re-imagine its future?

History of Left Politics in India

The history of India's freedom struggle reflects the history of the left movement in the country. The emergence of the movement in India coincides with the radical trends in anti-imperialist movements in various other colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries, particularly in Asia (Namboodiripad 1986). Owing to the left's active involvement in the anti-colonial struggle, the ideology of the left acquired mass appeal to the extent that the Communist Party of India (CPI) and its later offshoots became the face of left politics in the country. Inspired by the international communist movement, the CPI focused on building a strong peasant–working class alliance, mobilising them towards a revolutionary cause. The rebellion against the Nizam of Hyderabad, radical peasant movements in West Bengal and Thane (Maharashtra) led by the party and its peasant front, the Kisan Sabha, and the tribal struggle in Tripura led by the Ganamukti Parishad are notable examples.

By embracing parliamentary politics in 1952, the CPI wanted to extend its political influence in the sphere of governance. In 1957, the party experienced its first ever electoral victory in the Kerala state legislative assembly elections. Two decades later, the party set its ground in West Bengal, followed by Tripura. During this time, the CPI emerged as the first leading opposition to the Congress in parliamentary politics (Roychowdhury 2018). Despite the recurrent splits within the party post the 1960s, the ground that it had gained in these three states in the 1950s and 1960s could not be easily shaken. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a

wave of struggles advanced by the left Front on the issue of land. Reforms leading to the distribution of surplus land, ending of rack-rented tenancy, or ensuring security of tenure for sharecroppers gained prominence during this period. The struggles in the sphere of land reform, decentralisation of powers, strengthening the rights of the working class for collective action, and defence of secularism by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI M)-led left governments in Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura had contributed to the advancement of the democratic agenda of the left (Karat 2019a).

During the late 1970s, when the Indira Gandhi government was in power and internal emergency was imposed, the left parties played a major role in uniting the opposition. Further, when in the late 1980s the Rajiv Gandhi government was rocked by the Bofors scandal, the left parties joined hands to oust Gandhi and form an alternative government. It can be seen that throughout the 1990s the left parties continued to influence politics at the national level. In the event of a hung Parliament in 2004, the opposition came together to install a coalition in order to keep the BJP out of power; this was again led by the left. The left parties were in the forefront influencing central government policies and schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Forest Rights Act and Right to Food, until the signing of the Indo-United States Nuclear Deal by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) in 2008 when the left withdrew itself. In the elections that followed, the Left Front has remained on the back foot.

The first major electoral jolt that the left suffered was its defeat against the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) led by Mamata Banerjee in 2011 in West Bengal. This was followed by the Tripura assembly elections in February 2018, when the BJP made significant inroads into the state unseating the ruling CPI(M) from power. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the people of Kerala managed to keep the BJP out of the state through their decisive political mandate in favour of the United Democratic Front (UDF), but they could not keep the BJP completely out of the political turf, as is evident from the increase in the BJP-led NDA's vote share from 10.85% (2014) to 15.2% (2019), with the BJP accounting for 12.93% of the votes (Hindu 2019). The political situation

for the left in West Bengal was no different, with the BJP gaining a pan-Bengal presence and the CPI (M) occupying the third position. These developments have raised serious concerns about the future of left politics in India and the extent to which the ideology is relevant in the absence of a strong grass roots presence.

Decline of the Left and Its impact on India's Democratic Credentials

Speculation about the future of the left in Indian politics started with the CPI(M)'s debacle in West Bengal in 2011. In his 2011 article, Prabhat Patnaik attributed the CPI(M)'s defeat to a deep-seated process of "empiricisation" plaguing the party. He defines empiricisation as the left's rejection of the communist goal of defeating capitalism. Responding to Patnaik, Gohain (2011) attributed the decline of the left to the change in the class-character of the party, which according to him explains its alienation from the masses. He further held that a non-revolutionary approach to parliamentary democracy was also responsible for CPI(M)'s alienation from the basic classes. Kripa Shankar (2011), on the other hand, argued that the reason why people considered the Left Front irrelevant was that they did not see it as very different from any other bourgeois party. Similarly, Baisya (2011) added to the discussion by writing that the left must now be considered a ruling class party. While the issues raised in these discussions are important, one needs to go beyond such sweeping generalisations about the left in order to understand its exit from power in the states where it ruled.

There are recent examples on the ground to show how the left has combined parliamentary work and powerful mass struggles to give a platform to the voice of the workers and the peasants. The Kisan Long March of 2018 from Nashik to Mumbai organised under the banner of All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), a mass organisation of the CPI (M), brought the issue of agrarian distress facing the farmers to the fore. Further, the workers and peasants' march in Delhi in September 2018, agitation of the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) and Anganwadi workers in Karnataka in January 2018, and the all-India workers' general strike in early January 2019 were all organised by the trade unions and peasant and agricultural workers' platforms of the left. The kisan mobilisations in Rajasthan by the AIKS in February–March

2018 and the Women's Wall for gender justice across Kerala in January 2019 are also remarkable examples of mass mobilisations. However, these struggles have not translated into electoral gains.

The Hindutva strategy of the BJP in West Bengal, Tripura, and Kerala points to the reality of the dangers that the left faces not only electorally, but also ideologically. This ideological onslaught of Hindutva was accomplished by making the Left Front suffer electoral defeats in states like West Bengal and Kerala. The Hindutva project of building a "communist free India" (Asian Age 2018; Roy 2018) is not only a perilous idea at its roots, but also a threat to the inclusive and secular idea of India that the left espoused through its many years of struggles beginning from the freedom struggle. In the recent elections, there seemed to be a constant dilemma in the minds of the voters: "If not Modi, then who?" This articulation reflects two important points: First, the decisive rejection of the Congress by the people, and second, the absence of a viable third force at the national level. The second postulation particularly affected the left and other political formations marginalised by Hindutva's victory. In the absence of a "viable political alternative" in many states, the traditional anti-Congress votes went to the BJP-led alliance. In the absence of a strong grass roots presence, the slogan of "a secular government at the centre" raised by the left did not appeal to a large section of the society in its traditional bastions of West Bengal, Tripura, and Kerala. In other words, the left's vision of an alternative was vague and did not carry conviction among the masses.

Despite the massive struggles undertaken in the 1930s and 1940s, the left has remained confined to only a few regions in the country. Even there, the left ended up contributing to its own stagnation. For instance, its attempts to pursue industrialisation in West Bengal and incidents like Singur–Nandigram resulted in a backlash against the state government, with the Left Front losing its credibility in the state (Patnaik 2011). By the time the left lost power in West Bengal, it also lost the support of three of its fundamental constituencies—the peasants, the tribals, and the Muslims—who were once its major support base. This decline in the mass base of the party and the inability to expand its influence cost the left heavily in the elections that followed. Besides the recurrent electoral

debacles, the failure to enjoy popular support amongst those who would be the ideal beneficiaries of a left government is a major concern to be addressed for the future of the mainstream left.

In the case of Bengal, it is noteworthy that the BJP's steady rise is not only due to the activities undertaken by the party, but also the support received from a host of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)- and Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP)-affiliated organisations like Hindu Jagran Manch and Bajrang Dal in the state which were deployed at the grass roots. These supporting organisational networks established over the last three decades have multiplied since the decline of the left and the TMC's ascendency to power (Bagchi 2019). Not only was the void created by defeat of the left in West Bengal filled by the Banerjee-led TMC which projected itself as the "real left" (Pramanik 2019), but the agenda of the BJP and the RSS along with the TMC in creating an anti-communist offensive in the state also got bolstered.

Owing to the lack of a concrete political ideology and direction, the TMC is found to be borrowing the narratives of its rivals (both the left and BJP) from time to time. Taking a critical stand against land acquisition, Banerjee adopted the pro-peasant narrative which she had borrowed from the left (Bagchi 2019). Now, by giving grants to puja mandaps and to clubs for festivals, undertaking the task of beautifying the Ganga Sagar, etc, she is trying to adopt a pro-Hindutva stand borrowing it from the right (Datta 2018; Statesman 2018; Lolwal 2019). A blend of nationalism and Hindutva symbolism on the one hand, and absence of ideology on the other has found resonance in the politics of Bengal today. Somewhere, it is the electoral setback to the left and its dwindling political influence in the state that has contributed to the rise and reinforcement of competing communalisms between the TMC and the BJP. Moreover, in the absence of a strong left alternative, Banerjee's pro-Muslim welfare policies have increasingly angered an upwardly mobile class among Hindus who found solace in the "development" slogan of the BJP further consolidating their grip in Bengal.

Reinventing the Left: What Does it Mean?

The task of reinventing the left can come to fruition only when the urge to reclaim the "political" takes precedence over immediate electoral success. The "political" is the field within which social groups are shaped by institutions, norms, culture, and ideology constituting deeper opinions and values (Roy 2019). In order to understand how the peasantry, the working class, and agricultural labour have voted, and what caused alienation of the masses from the left, a concrete analysis of the political, economic and sociocultural factors and conditions, and careful configuration of the definition of the "political" should be undertaken. The resounding victory of the BJP is illustrative of how religious divisions couched in their agenda of ultra-nationalism and development discourse became the defining principle that influenced the political mandate in the recent elections. According to Karat (2019b), global finance capital and the neo-liberal regime globally have fostered identities based on religion, ethnicity, and race. And the right-wing has made these the basis of their identity politics and sectarian nationalisms. Taking cognisance of the right-wing hegemonic discourse, the left has to build a political field that is inclusive of the multiple identities constructed along the lines of "class" rather than "religion." The left can achieve this by increasing its presence at the grass roots organisationally, ideologically and politically so that it can improve its future electoral prospects. By broadening the definition of the political, the left in India has to reclaim and communicate in a language that has mass appeal, a language that effectively bridges the existing gap between ideology and grass roots presence, and finally a language that purports its stand against Hindutva communalism, the neo-liberal agenda and authoritarian attacks on democracy, while not alienating people from its fold. The slogan of mass struggles should extend beyond fighting for economic demands of the basic classes to include a larger political struggle. As it has been pointed out in the Communist Manifesto, "The class struggle is essentially a political struggle" (cited in Karat 2019b).

Across the globe, a political rightward shift is slowly and steadily gaining momentum. This shift can be seen taking place from Australia to Turkey to Latin America and recently in the European Union. The deepening world economic crisis since 2008 and rising unemployment

created the impetus for a global surge in right-wing forces (Patnaik 2019). At the same time, resistance against the political right is also simultaneously growing in different parts of the world. Issues like unemployment, jobless growth, agrarian distress, and inflation which are plaguing the Indian economy created discontent among the masses and were thought to have generated an aversion to the "Modi factor" in the recently concluded elections. Instead, the contrary happened. Explaining the crisis phenomenon, Patnaik (2017) writes:

"Such fascist elements exist normally as a fringe phenomenon in all bourgeois societies, but they come centre-stage in periods of crisis, when established bourgeois political formations are incapable of providing any solutions to the crisis and when working-class parties are too weakened and debilitated to fill the void; and they do so with the support of big business which uses them as a bulwark against any potential threat to its hegemony. Their agenda for resolving the crisis consists not of any concrete thought-out measures, but in projecting a "messianic" leader and ruthlessly subjugating the "other", usually some hapless minority group, which is made responsible for the crisis."

This is the mechanism that neo-liberal capitalism along with the pursuit of an aggressive communal trajectory generates for itself in order to contain the growing discontent from emerging as a political alternative.

Moreover, the fact that unemployment rose and growth rate had come down during UPA II, was also essentially because of the crisis of neo-liberalism. The Congress could no longer pretend that neo-liberalism could bring about development. This not only led to a deterioration of the material conditions of a large section of the population, but also exacerbated inequalities to a large extent.

The merit of the left is based on the recognition that any opposition to the political right must necessarily entail a break from neo-liberal politics and economics which has been the hallmark of policymaking for both the BJP and the Congress. Indian society is riddled with such deep-rooted economic and social inequalities that mere initiation of reforms by the state without necessarily transcending neo-liberal capitalism is seen as a means to improve the material conditions of the people. It is the crisis in capitalism that enabled the Modi–Shah duo to create a macro wave, but

deliver micro results in the form of flagship welfare schemes in five key areas such as financial inclusion, rural electrification, sanitation, and cooking fuel to woo the voters. To an average voter, these schemes despite the caveats appeared more impressive than the government's macroeconomic record. The left in its analysis of the current crisis should grasp the dialectical relationship between politics and economics and create an alternate approach to development.

Both the BJP and the Congress have emerged as bourgeoisie–landlord parties representing the interests of a section of the ruling class. Therefore, in order to represent the interests of the basic classes, the left has to maintain equidistance from both the BJP and the Congress. In order to build a strong working class–peasantry alliance, the left has to defend its ideological position and independent vision without giving in to the Congress's idea of India. The ugly manifestations of ultra nationalist politics promoted by the BJP and the RSS have to be countered with the pursuit of a progressive reworking of nationalism espoused by the Indian left. Patnaik (2016) argued that even though in India the bourgeoisie was in a position of leadership of the anti-colonial struggle, the struggle in itself was not a bourgeoisie struggle but a multi-class struggle which included the workers and peasants within its ambit. The nationalism that is being propagated by the Hindutva forces today, however, is not the inclusive nationalism of the anti-colonial struggle. It is an aggrandising nationalism which privileges the nation over its people, and the caste system is an integral part of the Hindutva agenda. What is needed is an alternative vision that may resonate with public aspirations and inherent progressive values of ordinary people.

Class intertwined with the questions of caste and gender should appear much more strongly in the policies and public action espoused by the left. With caste atrocities and gender-based violence and discrimination increasing at an alarming rate, the role of the left in the country amplifies manifold. Class struggles should be constructed through caste struggles. There should be consolidation of unity between left movements and Dalit protest movements at a larger level. To be effective, the working-class movement must adopt a politics that rejects social hierarchy and social oppression of all kinds. The left must act on an alternative to the rhetoric

of "development" offered by the Modi-led BJP government. It has to treat with caution the very idea of "development" because solely focusing on the rights of the disadvantaged and marginalised groups might prove critical for the left movement.

The primary task of the left in India is to go back to its basics: the masses. This is because the ultimate strength of the left was and still is the masses. There has to be a 'Left Minimum Programme' (LMP) which will unite all the left parties together to fight against the right-wing authoritarian policies. While wider alliances and joint fronts with other democratic political formations are forged, the left should be able to maintain its independent political and ideological stand which it should effectively bring to the people. This can be made possible only when the interests of the left parties find resonance with the interests of the basic classes of the society. Historian Irfan Habib stresses on the need to move with the times. He says that it is important for the left to change its slogans. He gives example of the fight against landlordism which had helped the party to make inroads among the people in the 1950s and 1960s. Similarly, today it is the fight against Hindutva politics and big corporates (Jigeesh 2019).

The declining political influence of the left should be concomitantly seen as the decline of secular and democratic values that the Constitution upholds. Pragmatic decisions and a shift in perception is all the left needs to do at this juncture. When people say the left has been wiped off from the country, we ask if we should celebrate the left's decline, or do we want the left to recover its lost ground?

8.5   COALITION EXPERIENCE

It undertakes a comparative analysis of how radical left parties themselves evaluate the measure of their achievements and failings in coalition government — a critical exercise for such parties that can influence their tactical and strategic decisions about future government participation, as well as the ability of the parties to survive political and electoral setbacks. The approach we adopt is one that takes the policy, office and votes triad developed by political scientists seriously, but also factors in the principles, political outlook and goals of the parties

themselves. It concludes that the experience of coalition government for radical left parties is far from encouraging to date. Their few achievements have to be set against many potential pitfalls. Whilst there may be no alternative to government participation if these parties wish to be taken seriously as actors, a more strategic and cautious approach to coalition formation seems advisable in many instances.

Reflecting on Government Participation: what constitutes Success and Failure? The `policy, office and votes' triad, developed by Müller and Strøm, is a useful place to start. As with other types of parties, and especially with other small parties, the radical left parties face difficult decisions about, and trade-offs between policy implementation (or lack thereof), getting into government, and vote maximisation. Has the party in question achieved clear implementation of key policies? Can it claim credit for policy achievements, or is credit likely to go to, for example, a larger social democratic partner? If the party's main policy achievement is `negative '– for example, preventing a more pronounced drift towards neo-liberalism – can it articulate this achievement to voters convincingly? Did the party achieve the cabinet positions that would have enabled it to implement its minimal demands? Has government participation consolidated its vote or led to electoral losses?

But there are other considerations beyond the familiar triad that reflect more specifically the ideological concerns of the radical left, as well as its historical trajectory in recent years. One such consideration is whether assuming office has helped to legitimise the party and remove any lingering Cold War era suspicion of the democratic credentials of the radical left? Another is that of reinvigorating the party format so as to preserve the party as a credible vehicle of social and political transformation. This may involve evaluations of the party's participation in government in terms of how the experience has impacted on party unity, ideological credibility, and the ability to satisfy members' and voters' expectations of social and political change – has the party had to choose between these goals and to risk a split or a loss of idealism? Has it risked a (perhaps fatal) loss of identity by becoming too closely associated with its larger coalition partners, especially the social democrats? Has government participation impacted on the party's

relationship with progressive social movements and, in particular (if it sees itself as part of the wider movement against neo-liberal globalisation and as the harbinger of a new type of participatory politics) on its credibility with the anti-globalisation movement? Are there key social groups – core voters, or trade unions, for example – with which a small party of the radical left dare not risk loss of purchase? Another measure of success or failure may well be whether the party has managed to carry out a successful generational and leadership renewal while preserving its identity, or has it risked absorption by the institutions of government in which it is now participating? For example, for some small radical left parties, the first experience of participation in government can see virtually the entire top tier of party leadership absorbed in government business with little time, resources or energy left for the task of party-building and party maintenance. This can lead, or contribute, to party atrophy. For some parties, the first taste of government office can attract new potential cadres to the party. Some parties fear attracting careerists, opportunists or `moderates' and either place obstacles in the way of their selection as candidates or insist upon rigorous socialisation into the culture of the party. Others may welcome incomers as an essential, and long-overdue, infusion of new blood. Greater involvement in the institutions of government may also mean heavy dependence on those party leaders appointed to cabinet office. This may mean that a radical left party's public persona – its very perception by members and voters and the wider public – becomes reduced to media portrayal of the views of a tiny group of leaders. These leaders, in turn, whilst developing a taste for government office, may find themselves less tolerant of internal criticism from within the party ranks about policy or presentation shortcomings. If a radical left party remains true to its declared aim of using government office as a means to achieve social transformation rather than an end in itself, and if it wishes to avoid assimilation by a larger partner, there may well come a point at which it prefers to withdraw from office. At this point, can party structures and traditions cope with greater vulnerability to shocks (such as the defection or loss, or feared loss, of a charismatic leader)? For radical left parties, one very positive outcome of government participation may well be the removal

of the residue of the popular view that such parties are purely for protest and not for governing – that they are either `unsuitable' for government office because of lingering Cold War anti-communism and the myth that socialism is incompatible with Western democracy (which, in turn, is seen as synonymous with capitalism); or that they are the vehicle of undisciplined idealists who will inevitably disrupt and undermine any coalition government that they are invited to join. Successful participation may, in other words, enhance the democratic legitimacy of the party and consolidate its reputation as a force for practical change as well as long-term vision. Successful participation, then, may play a role in moving the axis of the political system to the left as the radical left is revealed as a positive force in government. Conversely, a failure to maintain the balance between steady and reliable participation and fidelity to membership beliefs and expectations can prove disastrous in a variety of ways, from paralysing the party through internal divisions to sacrificing party identity on the altar of democratic legitimacy to the point where its ministers are widely praised as effective politicians, while the party itself withers on the vine. Finally, a measure of success or failure for the radical left is undoubtedly whether or not government participation leads to greater and fairer coverage in the mass media. Given the overwhelmingly reliance of modern politics on the mass media, and the dearth of mass-circulation newspapers (and indeed television and radio stations) sympathetic to the radical left; and given what small parties in general, and the radical left in particular, perceive as biased reporting and under-reporting of their views, a more positive media image that transcends past stereotypes and stigmas would undoubtedly be an achievement. Let us now examine each of these sets of criteria in more depth. We should of course bear in mind that government participation is a very recent phenomenon for some radical left parties, and an as yet unrealised possibility for others; therefore only short-term effects or anticipated outcomes will tend to be available for analysis at this stage. But we should note also a growing tendency for these parties to share experiences and analyses, to seek to learn explicitly from each other's experience in respect of government participation. This has involved not only reports to each other's party conferences, but also

summer-school-style gatherings at which coalition formation is discussed. In such ways, the radical left is itself developing a comparative awareness of the costs and the opportunities associated with government participation.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Discuss the Impact of Radical left policies on West Bengal Politics.

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2. How do you know the National and International Dimension?

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3. How do you know the Current scenario West Bengal Politics?

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4. How do you know the Coalition Experience?

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8.6 LET US SUM UP

The evidence from our interviews is that key leaders and strategists within left parties, having studied each other's experiences and shared views and opinions, are already learning a number of tentative lessons. First, that it may pay left parties to negotiate a detailed and concrete government programme that can be referred to, as opposed to a vague and open-ended agreement that can be more easily manipulated by the

larger parties. Second, that selling government compromises to the party membership is easier if serious attention is paid to questions of party organisation and communications. Third, that there is a need to keep key social groups – for example, trade unions – on board. Fourth, that effective government participation, especially in a media-driven age, may require strong leadership and party discipline: left parties with strong traditions of maximum internal party democracy may – like the Greens before them – experience a jolt to their party culture. Finally, that approaching coalition from a position of electoral growth is always preferable to entering government after a set-back, with its attendant loss of morale and direction.

8.7 KEY WORDS

Radical: (especially of change or action) relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something; far-reaching or thorough

Coalition: The term "coalition" is the denotation for a group formed when two or more people, factions, states, political parties, militaries etc. agree to work together temporarily in a partnership to achieve a common goal. The word coalition connotes a coming together to achieve a goal

8.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Discuss the Impact of Radical left policies on West Bengal Politics.
2. How do you know the National and International Dimension?
3. How do you know the Current scenario West Bengal Politics?
4. How do you know the Coalition Experience?

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8.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 8.2
2. See Section 8.3
3. See Section 8.4
4. See Section 8.5

UNIT 9: SOCIO –ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF WEST BENGAL POLITICS

STRUCTURE

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After this unit, we can able to know:

- To know about the Socio –Economic Dimension of West Bengal Politics
    a. Demographic Transition
    b. Socio-Economic Development
    c. Physical and Social Infrastructure and Human Development
    d. Fertility Decline amidst Poverty in West Bengal: A Further Illustration

e. Ideational Change and its Diffusion towards Fertility Control: The Role of Grassroots Political Mobilisation Network of the Left Front

- To discuss the Issues relating to Social Change

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Good or bad, the states of India of late are frequently put to comparative scrutiny by various agencies including individual analysts, print media (for example, magazines), government agencies, and even high-profiled international organisations like the World Bank. The relative position of West Bengal (WB hereafter), one major state in eastern India, is clubbed in most assessments of socio-economic and infrastructural development neither with the well performing nor the worst performing states.1 Yet, conspicuously enough, a coalition of Leftist parties, popularly known as the Left Front (LF), has been returning to power with undimished electoral success since 1977. In some influential appraisals WB is cited as exemplary of successful redistributive land and tenancy reforms and of political decentralisation and participation. The land reform experience under the LF rule has often been described as a success story of the 'West Bengal model', with many lessons for other parts of the Third World (Hanstad and Brown, 2001; Raychaudhuri, 2004: 1). While this has possibly fed into some complacency of the long-ruling Left Front, this at the same time leaves a lingering confusion about the state's real overall performance in relative and consequentialist terms. Indeed, WB's oft-glorified success in land reforms, decentralisation and political participation presumably has been instrumental in blurring some of what Amartya Sen calls its 'conspicuous failures', particularly in expanding basic education and literacy and public health (Sen, 1997: 3). Documenting WB's relative downfall vis-a`-vis a state like Maharashtra (which was roughly at par with WB in the early 1960s in terms of its chief economic indicators), some recent careful studies have identified some proximate causes such as low aggregate productivity, and poor functioning labour markets and sectoral misallocation, which in turn appear substantially linked with the rises of leftist politics and influences (for example Lahiri and Yi, 2005).2 This of course generates curiosity as

to how sustained mass electoral support for the LF continues amidst persistently mediocre (and even below average) performance in a wide variety of socio-economic and human development indicators – to be elaborated on in sections III and IV. While demography has been extraordinarily important in the region, particularly since the partition of erstwhile Bengal at the time of India's independence, this has, curiously enough, remained meagrely incorporated in the existing (academic) evaluations and interpretations of its experience/performance during the recent past.3 For example, there have been some notable achievements, such as substantial fertility decline, effective political decentralisation and one of the highest growth rates of food grains and agricultural production in WB between the early 1980s and mid-1990s (see Bhat, 1996: Table 3; Bhalla and Singh, 1997; Gazdar and Sengupta, 1999; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Visaria, 2004: Table 4.2). These have been accompanied by incredibly large increases in population density (by about 15 persons per square km annually over 1981–2001, against only five persons at an allIndia level) and in-migration within the state. Although the latter generally slows the pace of human and material improvement, their ramifications could well turn favourable (at least in the medium term) to an organised mass political mobilisation strategy for electoral success. For example, it is somewhat commonly held – though not always clearly systematically documented and established – that growth and sustenance of Leftist politics and parties in post-independence WB has been linked to their effective political mobilisation among a protracted stream of 'refugees' and 'displaced' people from bordering Bangladesh, as well as among migrant asset-less people from neighbouring states (see for example Chakrabarty, 1990; Samaddar, 1999; Nagchaudhury, 2004). Indeed, a disciplined grassroots political mobilisation network serves as an effective ideological and ideational diffusion mechanism, which could be instrumental for fertility transition and hence, in turn, could contribute to poverty alleviation itself. In understanding and interpreting a curiously stable 'marriage' between fuzzy (relative) performance/position in terms of broad socioeconomic development indicators and sustained mass electoral support for the LF rule during 25 years, demographic considerations undoubtedly loom

large. This issue clearly has a wider significance, particularly from the standpoint of broad interrelationships between electoral politics, participation, governance, and development.

The LF regime in WB, for example, dominated by the CPM (Communist Party of India) party as a 'monolithic machine' with relatively little competition from NGOs and others, could be seen as exemplary of a 'paradox of participation' that is, as long as the poor remain poor, public participation leaves public policy meagrely responsive to their needs (Echeverri-Gent, 1993: 169); or as a system 'lacking in imaginative initiatives to benefit the rural poor' (Echeverri-Gent, 1993: xx); or it highlights fallacies and limits of redistributive strategy for mass mobilisation at the expense of accumulation and growth. In this context it would be useful to undertake a comprehensive assessment of WB's demographic and socio-economic changes in comparison not with the most 'prosperous' states like Punjab and Maharashtra nor with the worst-performing (BIMARU) states but with much of south India, which having been on a similar (or even worse on some indicators) economic footing at the time of Independence, has since performed distinctly well in major socio-economic spheres. South India commonly connotes the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu (TN), Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh (AP). For instance, there was hardly much difference between south India and WB in the early post-independence period in terms of such indicators of economic growth and structure as yield of rice production (respectively 0.41 and 0.37 tones per acre in 1952–53), extent of irrigation (25 and 21 per cent of net sown area in 1951–52), real per capita net domestic product (Rs 2,717 and Rs 3,641 in 1961 (at 1990 rupees)), share of manufacturing in net domestic product (11 and 17 per cent in 1961), percentage of rural population in poverty (55 and 50 per cent in 1961–62).4 Indeed in the early 1960s, WB was one of the 'richest' states of India (Larhiri and Yi, 2005). But, by 1980–81, WB's performance in terms of infrastructure development was only slightly above the all-India average, while it was already far surpassed by TN and Kerala, with Karnataka and AP's indices being close to the national level (CMIE, 1997). Additionally, the increase of India's index of industrial production from 1980 to 1993–94 has been nearly four times that of WB's, with the

share of manufacturing in the latter's domestic product slipping down from 34 per cent in 1982–83 to 26.5 per cent in 1995–96 (see for example Burange, 2002). Placing the WB experience in a comparative light, we would include Kerala, TN, and AP as a broad proxy for south India, and exclude Karnataka chiefly for the sake of simplicity. (The broad comparative picture would not be altered greatly by its inclusion, since the overall patterns of its development and demographic experience resemble pretty closely those of south India.) The reason behind the inclusion of AP, despite some apparent dissimilarities with Kerala and TN, is its broad symmetries with WB (more on this later). As our comparative study would show, a wellorganised and disciplined grassroots mobilisation network of ruling LF parties, somewhat conditioned by rising population density along with protracted inmigration, could be highly instrumental for such achievements as electoral success, political participation/stability, and an impressive pace of fertility transition in an otherwise lagging development environment. In addition, an almost overwhelming reliance on grassroots mobilisation networks and machinery for electoral success could well deflect a government from taking 'encompassing interest' in all-round development, and could indeed exacerbate the disadvantages of such relative neglect of social, economic and infrastructural build-up.

9.2   SOCIO –ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF WEST BENGAL POLITICS

9.2.1 Demographic Transition

It is useful to begin by reviewing the trends in WB's broad demographic scene in the post-independence period in a comparative light. Table 1 presents data time series on major demographic indicators and their proportionate changes. While WB appears to have been an above-average performer in achieving the avowed goal of reducing birth and population growth rates, the south Indian states overall have fared better than WB. However, WB has experienced a relatively faster fertility decline in comparison with the all-India average. WB's distinction as an above-average performer holds broadly true also in terms of the

reduction of infant mortality, as well as improvement of life expectancy during this period.5 However, two disquieting demographic features of WB deserve particular mention. First, unlike most of the south Indian states, the sex-ratio (which is widely used as a broad index of gender biases) in WB is suggestive of longstanding anti-female biases. WB's female-male ratio has not only been vastly less than that of south India generally, and Kerala in particular, but it has been noticeably below the all-India figure until recently. Although the overall proportion of females in WB has increased recently, the current prevailing sex-ratio still suggests a major undercurrent of gender discrimination. Second, population density, historically high, has increased enormously over last several decades to become the highest in India. This certainly has much to do with trends and patterns of migration – both internal and with the neighbouring countries.6 On the whole, however, so far as demographic transition (fertility decline in particular) is concerned, WB's achievement has been substantial and quite closely behind much of the south. Indeed, as we shall see shortly, WB's pace of fertility transition has surpassed what could be warranted in light of its relative stagnation in the socio-economic and infrastructural spheres. In the existing multitude of explanations for fertility transition, two broad but distinct (but not mutually exclusive) perspectives stand out: the first assigns a key role to socioeconomic changes (including mortality improvements) and a concomitant escalation of economic security and aspirations conducive to lowering demand for children. The other highlights the significance of ideational changes towards a small family norm and its diffusion (via various mechanisms), and of innovation in contraceptive methods. The ideational change, even though it often originates in a small section of population, could well be influenced by changes in household economics, macroeconomic scenario and policy, and demographic and sociological circumstances. Yet its wider diffusion (that is, the process of individuals' decisions being shaped by knowledge, attitude and behaviours of others), across the entire society, is generally facilitated by expansion of education, communications, social interactions, demonstration effects, media exposure, and an effective broadbased family planning programme (see Cleland and Wilson, 1987; Bongaarts

and Watkins, 1996; Caldwell, 2001; Cleland, 2001). The two fundamental behavioural mechanisms for diffusion include social learning (that is the acquisition of information from others) and social influence, the power that 'individuals exercise over each through authority, deference, and pressures for social conformity' (Montgomery and Casterline, 1998: 39). India, with its distinct regional diversities, is almost a test-ground for these major perspectives and their variants.7 First, Kerala's fertility decline to below replacement level by 1980s is widely known to have resulted, broadly in a low-income setting, from rapid 'human development' via expansion of education and primary health care. Kerala's experience is sometimes interpreted as a 'poverty-led' fertility transition (Basu, 1986), arising from poor peoples' inability to sustain large families vis-a`-vis their growing aspirations. By contrast, the Punjab story is, broadly, one of faster economic growth, rising incomes, security of life and livelihood (see for example Das Gupta, 1995, 1999). On the other hand, TN's achievement of nearreplacement fertility by the early 1990s entails a combination of elements – namely, well-managed family welfare and health care programmes (Anthony, 1992; Srinivasan, 1995; Nagarajan, 1997; Dre`ze and Sen, 2002: 212–218), wide exposure to mass media (cinema in particular), weakening of the joint family system and patriarchal control with social-reform movements since the early twentieth century (see Bhat, 1998; Kulkarni et al., 2002), and 'exclusionary' development forcing the poor to reduce family size (Kishor, 1994).

Recently, a remarkable fertility transition in AP – at nearly twice the speed of the all-India level since the mid-1980s – has occurred without significant improvements in social and human development indicators (for example low literacy, high infant/ child mortality). While the diffusion mechanism has certainly been very important, it has been accompanied and arguably facilitated by a drastic reduction of poverty via effective implementation of anti-poverty programmes (for example, subsidised rice reaching 80 per cent of the population, favourable changes in the wage rate and labour market). Several conventional diffusion channels seem to have been prominent – namely, expansion of media in the coastal belt with low literacy, the organised labour

movements in Telengana-Rayalaseema region, which apart from widening the reach of media and self-help groups and enhancing the scope for social interactions, labour movements with a bent on female economic interests (James, 1999; Dev et al., 2002). While WB's experience of fertility transition seems to have some apparent similarities with that of AP (particularly in timing, limited human development, pro-poor posture of the government, importance of diffusion), the diffusion of a small family norm in the former, as we will demonstrate, has occurred largely as a by-product of an organised grassroots political mobilisation network of the LF.

9.2.2 Socio-Economic Development

As most of the information is gathered from standard large-scale surveys and official sources, we refrain from discussing wellknown issues pertaining to the quality and reliability of the data used. First, despite rises in per capita agricultural and total state domestic product in WB during the 1980s and 1990s, they have hardly been larger than in southern regions and India as a whole. In fact, per capita agricultural output of WB has always remained lower than the all-India level, despite the dynamism shown by WB's agriculture (particularly cereal production) during this period (see for example Saha and Swaminathan, 1994; Ghosh, 1998; Sanyal et al., 1998). This is probably a distinct reflection of steady and large increases of population density in the postindependence period in the state already afflicted by land scarcity in relation to the population (Table 1). Furthermore, the unemployment rate in WB has remained not only higher than that of much of south India (except Kerala) and India as a whole, but it has shown a rising trend too. Even fairly fast agricultural growth, because of its low employment elasticity, has been of limited help in ameliorating rural unemployment. Indeed WB's performance has been particularly limited in the expansion of non-farm output, which appears to have the highest poverty-reducing potential (that is, its estimated elasticity) among all major states (Ravallion and Datt, 2002). Similarly, per capita consumption expenditure in rural WB has almost consistently been lower than that of the southern states and of India as a whole. According to national

accounts statistics, WB's rank in per capita net domestic product at 1980–81 prices slipped from the second highest in the early 1960s to the sixth (below the all-India figure) by the early 1990s (Shaban, 2002). All this appears broadly consistent with rather sluggish improvement in nutritional levels (especially among children) in WB, compared with much of the south.8 Evaluating WB's relative performance in poverty reduction is of particular interest. There are two parallel series of poverty estimates, official and non-official, both based on National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) consumption expenditure data. Table 3 presents multiple time series of rural head-count ratios (HCR for short), which is the proportion of population below 'poverty line', derived by using 'official' (the Planning Commission's Expert Group) methodology as well as by its various modifications introduced by individual researchers. In assessing the trend of poverty, choosing between the methods is of little significance so long as one is consistently applied across all time points.

Yet recent years have witnessed fairly fierce controversies surrounding a change in the NSSO criterion for collection of consumption data after 1993–94 (Deaton and Dre`ze, 2002 for a summary of the issues involved). In the early 1970s, WB had one of the highest rural poverty rates, with more than 70 per cent below the 'poverty line' .Thereafter, the state during the 1980s and 1990s, like most other states, has experienced considerable reduction of poverty. In comparison with the worse-performing states (Bihar, Orissa), WB's declines in rural poverty and improvements in distribution of consumption, appear both 'rapid' and 'substantial' (Sengupta and Gazdar, 1997: 196), but this superiority vanishes when comparison is made with better-performing states, especially much of the south. A tendency, in some quarters, to overstate (or even glorify) WB's achievement in poverty reduction could perhaps be generated by a perceived opportunity of publicising the merits of redistributive land reforms and democratic decentralisations, in which the state has made commendable progress (see Hanstad and Brown, 2001).

Yet more penetrative and objective evaluation of WB's achievements in poverty alleviation – particularly in comparison with well-performing states – has remained overdue so far.

First, despite WB's below-average performance in poverty reduction, it has often been accredited because of its much higher initial level of poverty (e.g. Raychaudhuri, 2004: 10). But, it is this very high initial poverty itself which provides greater scope as well as need for a large drop in poverty. As Deaton and Dre`ze rightly point out, 'looking at absolute changes in (say) HCRs would seem to give an unfair ''advantage'' to states that start off with high levels of poverty, and where there tends to be a large number of households close to the poverty line' (Deaton and Dre`ze, 2002: 3735). For example, even a large absolute reduction in HCR (for example by 14.3 points in WB during 1983–88) from its high initial level, may not suffice to get its poverty level down to that of a state in which the HCR decline has been much smaller (4 points in AP) (Table 2).12 The gains in poverty alleviation in WB during the late 1970s and much of the 1980s could at most redress its initial high level of poverty and reach only the national average. Thus, despite substantial poverty reduction by the 1990s, WB's achievement judged in terms of existing or remaining levels of poverty appears at best modest, as compared to the whole of India and much of the south. Amidst immediate attention drawn by large absolute declines from acute deprivation levels in WB (poverty, calorie consumption and so forth, see Dre`ze and Sen, 2002: 95), the remaining high levels are often inadequately noticed.

Thus, neither the pace of poverty reduction, nor the overall growth of income per capita in WB, compares favourably with much of south India (and even the all-India average). Although its performance may appear 'remarkable' in comparison with the bad-performing neighbouring states (Bihar, Orissa), the remaining scales of poverty and related indicators of ill-being in the 1990s have remained glaringly large. As we will see, all this has clear corroboration in limited improvement in such matters as safe child delivery, awareness about AIDS, rural electrification, provision of medical services per capita, distribution of food under public distribution system, and various infrastructural provisions. The following section provides evidence suggesting relatively slow progress in social and physical infrastructures and human development.

9.2.3 Physical and Social Infrastructure and Human Development

First, WB's progress in literacy and basic education (especially among females), though it appears considerable from its very low initial levels, is far from adequate in comparison with TN and Kerala. The record of literacy and education can camouflage the truly acquired educational skills. For example, WB's edge in the female literacy record over India and AP disappears when judged in terms of the proportion of females (6 years þ) who have completed primary education, calling for proper care in interpreting literacy statistics. Indeed, a recent survey among select schools in rural WB reports that only seven per cent of children in class three and four, who were not privately tutored, were found able to write their names (Kumar, 2003). Consistent with this is the record of the much lower proportion of trained teachers at lower primary stage (only two thirds) in WB vis-a`-vis southern and the whole of India – a fact, which qualifies WB for being 'the only enigmatic state in the country' (Seetharamu, 2002: 194). With due care in evaluating expansion of effective female education, WB, though not in comparison with BIMARU states and AP, turns out to have been distinctly laggard relative to much of the south. Indeed, Dre`ze and Sen conclude thus after reviewing WB's performance in elementary education: '[t]he Left Front government has a long way to go in addressing this problem' (Dre`ze and Sen, 2002: 96). Likewise, in terms of reach of electricity, road, transport, communications, health facilities, public distribution network in villages, WB's performance fares badly relative to most of the southern Indian economy. For instance, per capita consumption of food grains delivered by public distribution system of only about 3 kg per year in WB appears horrifyingly low compared to south Indian states including AP (and indeed much less than the all-India level). WB's glaring failure in using such a direct instrument for protecting poor workers' economic security testifies to its slower pace of poverty reduction, as noted already. As per NSS 55th (1999–2000) round survey on household food intake and its perceived sufficiency, the percentage of households not having enough food everyday is highest in WB, followed by Orissa (Governmentt of India, 2001). Further, the poorest 20 per cent population's share in public

health subsidies is the least in WB, with its richest 20 per cent enjoying the highest share, belying a pro-poor stance in its public health provisions. Telephone connections reached more than 80 per cent of villages of Kerala as far back as 1991, a time when only 17 per cent of WB villages had this facility. Likewise, only 25 per cent of villages in WB could be connected by pucca road by 1991, while Kerala had already built almost hundred per cent rural-urban road-linking network by that time, followed by TN and AP. The picture is also the same for other basic amenities including medical, public transport, electricity, postal services. Such sluggish infrastructural development reaffirms its reduction in rural poverty (as discussed above), as the former is strongly complementary to the latter (see Ali and Pernia, 2003; Yao, 2003; Mitra et al., 2004). There are a few areas where WB has fared relatively well, namely, coverage of safe drinking water, natal and antenatal care, and vaccinations, but its overall impact understandably remains overshadowed by relative stagnation on many other fronts. Therefore, it is not only on the educational front that much of south India (particularly of TN and Kerala) has had a distinct lead over WB, but it is also the case in poverty eradication, provision and distribution of basic human amenities, and in social and physical infrastructure development. WB's lagged performance is put into sharper focus in Table 4. For example, WB's rank in composite indices of economic infrastructure, capability poverty, educational development has not only been behind much of the south, but it hovers around the bottom zone of the performance scale. No less notably, its rank in social and economic infrastructure has slipped back during 1981–91 – signifying a distinct relative retrogression in social and economic infrastructure development. WB's relative infrastructure development index (with all-India being 100) has slipped down from 110.6 to 92 between 1981 and 1991, while these indices for Kerala and TN have hovered around 150 during this period (see CMIE, 1997: 7). Indeed WB's rank in human development has seen no upward movement from its pretty mediocre position since 1981, with indices in educational development and capability poverty having been among the worst. Ironically, WB's position in the ranking of state per capita incomes, which used to be among the highest (second and next only to

Maharashtra) in the early 1960s (Clark and Wolcott, 2003) has slipped somewhat steadily down to ninth by 1998. It is true that the forces and processes of relative economic stagnation in the state had set in much earlier than when the LF regime took over in the late 1970s, but the latter's failure in arresting pre-existing trends of relative retrogression is glaring enough. Interestingly, however, WB's rank in fertility transition has been, in the course of the LF regime, among the few topperforming states, far outstripping its achievement in economic, social, human, infrastructural and infant mortality improvement, particularly by the mid71990s. WB's fertility transition has proceeded fairly fast at a time (that is, during early 1980s to early 1990s) when not only material and human developments were at best moderate but existing levels of human deprivation were still very substantial. In fact, a part of the poverty decline itself could well be attributed to fertility decline per se in the first place (see Birdsall and Sinding (2001) for evidence in developing countries; and Bhat (2005) for Indian evidence). All this points to the significance of diffusion mechanisms that could work somewhat independently of economic, social, infrastructural and human development. The following section provides further illustration with a disaggregated analysis of fertility between different socioeconomic groups within WB.

9.2.4 Fertility Decline amidst Poverty in West Bengal: A Further Illustration

This section throws comparative light on the fertility transition between three socio-economic groups of WB: scheduled tribes (ST) – the most deprived – and the scheduled castes (SC), and others (non-ST/SC).16 Table 5 presents evidence for the 1990s showing the ST group as the most vulnerable in economic terms. Take, for example, their relative position in respect of land ownership. Not only is landlessness the greatest among tribal peoples, but their access to irrigation facilities is the least. While the proportion of households owning irrigated landholding of less than two acres is only 19 per cent among tribal people, the corresponding figure for the SC group is about 2.5 times larger. Likewise, a very meagre proportion of tribal villages have had a

fair price shop, primary health centre and a market within 2km as late as the 1990s. All this clearly reflects the tribals' economic disadvantage relative to SC and others.

The tribal people are also the least literate and behind their SC counterparts in these terms. Similar is the pattern of differential deprivation of basic amenities: while about 40 per cent of tribal households have no access to minimum civic amenities (for example, electricity, safe drinking water and toilet), the corresponding figure for SC and other households is only 16 and 9 per cent respectively. More than two thirds of tribal households use surface pond/lake for bathing and washing purposes, and they need to spend the longest time fetching water, with their proportion using wood as a prime fuel for cooking being nearly twice as much as for the SC. Notwithstanding considerable deprivations of their own, the SC people clearly appear better off vis-a`-vis tribal counterparts, who stand at the bottom of the scale of well-being based on such criteria as average number of rooms, and consumer durables/assets (for example, radio, clock, bicycle). Similarly, tribal women show a noticeable lag in media exposure. Indeed, as much as 73 per cent of the tribal population are in absolute poverty, and it is of course larger than that for the SC in rural WB, as per large scale household surveys in 1993–94 by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). This is also well corroborated by higher infant/child mortality levels among tribal peoples in the 1980s and 1990s. A more balanced female-male ratio in tribes, however, points to their lower gender biases and discrimination.

First, tribal fertility has been consistently lower (indeed lowest until the early 1990s) compared to non-tribal counterparts, especially SC well up to the late 1990s, though the gap has narrowed over time and has probably vanished more recently. The record of lower fertility of tribes is in line with historical and contemporary evidence (see Maharatna, 2005: chapters 3 and 4). Second, current (period) fertility seems to have declined among all three groups by a somewhat uniform pace during the 1970s and 1980s (Table 6). Somewhat larger fertility decline in 1971–81 than in the following decade is related to the coercive sterilisation

programme enforced during the Emergency of the 1970s, apart from a larger scope for absolute declines of fertility in the 1970s. In contrast to declines in period fertility, the mean number of children ever born to women at the end of their reproductive span (that is, a measure of completed cohort fertility) seems to have increased – albeit marginally – between 1981 and 1990–92 for both SC and ST groups (see Table 6). This reflects an increase of cohort fertility of women, who had begun their reproductive career in the 1950s, as compared to those who entered their reproductive span a decade earlier (in the 1940s) – an increase which probably represents the 'pre-transition rise of fertility' often associated with an early modernisation process (Dyson and Somawat, 1983; Dyson and Murphy, 1985), and is consistent with a belated modernisation among tribes vis-a`-vis the SC people. This said, it is almost certain that there has been a distinct decline in the current fertility rate across all three groups during the recent past. Note too a similar magnitude of fertility decline (in proportionate terms) between ST and SC groups, especially up to the early 1990s. These fertility declines in terms of (absolute) number of births per woman for these social groups testify to an almost uniform magnitude of decline between these groups, which is corroborated by a very similar extent of sterilisation between them, despite a considerable gap in the media exposure (36 and 34 per cent of currently married women sterilised in SC and ST communities in 1992–93 as per NFHS-1). All this brings out two revelations: first, a substantial (voluntary) fertility decline has occurred amidst mass overall illiteracy, large-scale material deprivation (for example, in living conditions, civic amenities, basic human needs, food, and media exposure) and slow infrastructural improvements. Second, the pace of fertility decline has been nearly uniform between two social groups with distinct differentials in economic and material levels and circumstances. Thus, with an actual scale of improvement in material, human and infrastructural levels having lagged behind the pace of fertility transition by the early 1990s, the role of ideational change and its diffusion must have been crucial in WB. However, the conventional channels of diffusion (via expansion of female education, media exposure, transport/communications, and via enhanced scope for social interactions

and a well-organised family planning programme) do not appear significant enough to explain WB's fertility transition, pointing to a major role played, directly and/or indirectly, by the organised grassroots political mobilisation network of the LF – a hypothesis which we examine now.

9.2.5 Ideational Change and its Diffusion towards Fertility Control:

The Role of Grassroots Political Mobilisation Network of the Left Front Poverty reduction in rural WB since the early 1980s, whatever its pace, is widely known to have accompanied a 'largely successful agrarian reform', and enhanced political participation (see Chatterjee, 1998; Sengupta and Gazdar, 1999; Dre`ze and Sen, 2002: 94–95). Although the contribution of political participation towards material elevation of rural masses is not very easy to quantify, its role in bringing broad social changes and/or intensification of political awareness, empowerment and participation is more readily and widely recognised (Ruud, 1994, 1999, 2003; Leiten, 1996; Chatterjee, 1997). Despite limited/inadequate increases in incomes, rural employment and large-scale surviving rural poverty, '[t]he creation of an environment conducive to growth and change through the mass mobilisation' appears particularly notable in WB (Basu and Amin, 2000: 783). These processes, particularly in rural areas, have contributed to a distinct rise in the social standing, dignity, selfconfidence of hitherto low-ranking groups (the SC) (Ruud, 2003). All this is very likely to have augmented their aspirations, alertness and awareness pertaining to key aspects of well-being (including family size/fertility). Indeed, a well-disciplined grassroots political mobilisation and politicisation process/network has been the hallmark – or perhaps even the bedrock – of the LF regime, in which the CPI(M) is overwhelmingly dominant (e.g. Kohli, 1991; Chatterjee et al., 1998; Bhattacharyya, 1999). It is plausible that the broad-based political mobilisation network of the ruling LF has been instrumental – somewhat indirectly – in widening the acceptance of family planning. While the issue of population control has not been advanced by the LF's agenda, it could not remain buried either. For instance, the elites of undivided Bengal, because of specific local historical and cultural circumstances,

are known to have become relatively more open, secular, and receptive to new/innovative ideas, ideologies and attitudes, as compared to their counterparts in many other Indian regions. Indeed, they were among the earliest acceptors of modern contraceptive methods within India, with Bengal's 'elite fertility' [fertility of women with secondary or above education] having being the least among all major Indian states.

However, the Bengali elites' distinction in the sphere of modern, innovative ideas and behaviour vis-a`-vis those of their counterparts outside, has historically failed to produce an echo in the fertility of its 'subalterns' in a colonial social structure marked by overwhelming illiteracy and poverty (Chatterjee, 1997: see chapter 2). Bengal's rate of literacy in the population aged 5þ years was less than 11 per cent as late as 1931. As Bengal did not witness major anti-upper caste social movements such as those that had happened in the Dravidian south, the scope for ideational diffusion from elite to subalterns has remained restricted there. It is in this broad historical milieu that the organised grassroots political mobilisation network of the LF could become highly instrumental in removing structural insulation of the masses from newer/innovative ideas including those pertaining to family planning. As we will show, the mobilisation, monitoring and participatory activities of CPI(M)'s major organs (among farmers, women, and students) have facilitated the health and family planning department's performance – chiefly via diffusion of ideational change, motivation and awareness for fertility control. First, family planning, reproductive health, infant and child mortality have been a feature for a long time on the agendas for action of the West Bengal Democratic Women's Association (WBDWA), the women's organ of the CPI(M) (see WB Unit's annual conference proceedings). Given concern for population pressure by the political leadership, and their awareness and perceptions of the matter, it seems highly likely for the growing network of organised mobilisation to have played a facilitating (catalyst) role – particularly in the form of its motivation/awareness creation/expansion effects favourable to fertility control. For example, as Partha Chatterjee notes, '[e]specially in the rural areas, a large part of that party's [i.e. CPI(M), the biggest partner in the ruling Left Front coalition] cadre is in any case engaged on an everyday

basis in political work at the village level in connection with the running of panchayats. The party can, even at short notice, without much difficulty, set up an effective machinery for a door-to-door campaign in almost every constituency in West Bengal' (Gupta, 2001: 4320, my italics). Family planning and population control) must have been – though implicitly (at least initially) – a part of the broad agenda of the LF.

Indeed the LF government's family planning drive has, according to some observers, met with 'much more success' than its other drives such as adult literacy or movement against drinking (Lieten, 1996: 210–221). The spread of awareness/motivation for fertility regulation has been facilitated also by a panchayat-and-party monitored adult literacy campaign, which prepared textbooks containing a few stories and lessons that highlighted the problems of large families. In addition, this literacy programme (though it lost its initial tempo within a few years), together with participatory governance with mandatory female representation, have drawn women into public life (Lieten, 1996: 210), and this should have helped contribute to a wider acceptance of family planning. Members of Gram Panchayat (village civic body) and local party cadres generally take an active interest in motivating mothers to send their children to the Anganwadi (the lady worker responsible for health of infants and children, child immunisations, nutrition in each village) under the Integrated Child Development Programme (see Bhattacharya, 2002: 120). Likewise, the local political leadership – especially of women's organisations – did take active interest in making eligible couples aware of, and motivated and available for, undergoing sterilisation and/or other contraceptives. For illustration, roughly 70–80 per cent of Anganwadi workers come from the local pool of members/cadres of the WBDWA (gathered by the author from the Kolkata unit), reaffirming the envisaged link between LF's grassroots mobilisation network and the relatively fast fertility transition in rural WB. Even a quick browsing of the printed resolutions of several annual conferences of the WBDWA reflects its concern and commitment towards making the state's family welfare programmes successful. Also, my field conversations with several grassroots party cadres and villagers

in some rural areas of WB have provided convincing indications that day-to-day informal mobilisation, monitoring, campaigns, and conversations often touch upon inter alia the family planning matters.

9.3 ISSUES RELATING TO SOCIAL CHANGE

THE state of West Bengal is a puzzle for most analysts and critics. They are hard put to explain the absence of political change or, more precisely, any change in government. After all, if all states face an ubiquitous anti-incumbency factor, what makes West Bengal an exception?

Though the CPI(M) led government has not changed for more than three decades, much nevertheless has changed in this part of India – more specifically that the Left has become Right and the Right Left. This essay addresses some of these puzzles and takes a somewhat longer view of political change and its prospects in Bengal, especially in the wake of popular struggles against the regime and the slow awakening of civil society.

The first period of major social and political change in recent times came about between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s. In the mid-1960s, the Left led United Front governments and militant peoples' movements frontally attacked the old structures of power and privilege in the economy, society and polity. This led to a violent counter-attack by the Indian state and the return to power of the Congress in 1972. The parliamentary Left then made a historic compromise with the state and capital.

This Left which came to power in 1977 introduced three major changes: first, agrarian reforms put a formal end to semi-feudal landlordism in rural Bengal and created the most enduring and widespread social basis of support among the rural poor for the government. Second, through panchayati raj, the Left created a powerful ally in the rural middle classes – rich and middle peasants and teachers. Third, the Left-led Bengali middle class, especially the lower middle classes, came to establish its political and cultural hegemony over the state of Bengal. This accounts for the continuity of the Left government. Moreover, the Congress still remains discredited for its violence and misrule between 1972 and 1977.

Officially, though the CPM does not believe that anything of significance can be achieved within the parliamentary frame without a revolution, not only has the revolution not happened, the party itself soon ceased to believe in its possibility. In fact, it had not even expected to remain in power. As Jyoti Basu admitted, 'We never before had imagined that we would be able to form a government and that it would last so long.'1 Likewise, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya said, 'We never imagined we would rule from Writers' Building.'2

Despite having introduced agrarian changes and provided some 'immediate relief' to the people, the CPM's ideology did not allow it to believe that anything more substantial could be achieved. In fact, it soon started losing support in urban areas; it could not address the normal, everyday bourgeois aspirations of the middle classes. Nor could the Left restructure the constitutional order and acquire greater powers to pursue a Nehruvian development model. Ideology came in the way of a new imaginary of social change and development within the parliamentary frame.

Even as its support base enabled it to win elections, a lack-lustre performance in key areas of development and well-being started pushing Bengal to add 'B' to the infamous acronym BIMARU, much like Ekta Kapoor's soaps. Finally, with the liberalizing of the economy in the 1990s, the Left Front could no longer blame the Centre for denying it opportunities for growth.

It is against this background that major changes came about in the politics and perspectives of the Left. To get out of this impasse it sought the help of international consultancy firms, who advised the government to pursue an openly pro-capitalist economic growth model. Consequently, it went all out to attract investment and do all that was necessary to make Bengal an attractive and safe investment destination. Calcutta's roads were sought to be cleared of hawkers, flyovers constructed, modern townships came up by displacing peasants, and 'closed' industries provided sites for shopping malls and high-end flats. Yet, despite its best efforts, the promised investments were unable to match the hype.

It was only after Buddhadeb Bhattacharya became chief minister in 2001, that the party went the whole hog to get investments. The CPM embarked on a project to bring about a new transformation of Bengal – a transition to capitalism in the time of globalization, with the communists acting as midwives.

Bhattacharya is generally known to be candid, often to the point of being brusque, unlike his predecessor Jyoti Basu. His slogan was 'reform or perish' and his inspiration and model was contemporary China. It meant building a capitalism which combines living in hi-tech cities, complete with the glitz and glamour of shopping malls and entertainment, alongside the violent and brutal state-led primitive accumulation of capital by dispossessing the direct producers of their means of production and a renewed bid to extract natural resources. Industry may need to be set up in Special Economic Zones, which for all practical purposes have become sovereign enclaves enjoying special privileges without bothering about political rules and responsibility.

Under this model, the government initiated a series of projects, all claiming to bring about prosperity to the poor of Bengal. Of these the chemical hub in Nandigram and the Tata Motors plant in Singur are the most well-known, but the others were equally impressive – ranging from private highways, hi-tech cities, steel plants, nuclear plants and knowledge industries to Formula 1 motor race courses and a tourist paradise in Sundarbans, one of the most ecologically fragile deltas of the world. Many of these, of course, did not take off.

This phenomenon caused both a real dislocation – eviction, loss of livelihoods, cultures and communities accompanied by increased suffering and inequality – and a deep fear of an impending disaster, especially among the peasantry. The peasants felt betrayed by a government which had given them land, power and dignity and towards which they were steadfastly loyal. This immense resentment and anger culminated in the peasant upsurge in Singur and Nandigram against the forcible acquisition of land. Soon, it became evident that the chief minister's grandiose schemes were not bringing about any improvement in the lives of the people; consequently, the Left started slowly losing its

credibility. This was the beginning of the coming of political change in Bengal.

The Left's popularity rested on three major claims. First, that it represented the poor and the forces of long-term historical progress, meaning socialism and, second, its promise to reverse the general decline of Bengal on account of the Centre's discriminatory attitude. Nevertheless, after nearly three decades of Left rule, it was found that Bengal was lagging in many of the key indicators of development, as revealed in the state's Human Development Report. The contrast with Kerala was obvious. Poverty was widespread and there were nagging reports of starvation deaths in villages and suicides of a large numbers of workers of closed industries.3 According to a recent government survey, close to half a million people in the state are living under starvation conditions.4

The Bengali middle class, who prides itself on its education, culture and intelligentsia, increasingly found a stifling mediocrity buttressed by political power calling the shots in all fields. In fact, a third reason for the Left's claim to fame was its immaculate secular credentials and as a champion of the minorities. Unfortunately for the LF government, a series of events worked to explode its secular myth: first, the banning of Tasleema Nasreen's autobiography and her subsequent banishment from Bengal to pander to conservative Muslim sentiments. In this the Left appeared no different from the Right, which had to always keep its vote banks in mind. The second event was the role of the government, including top police officials close to Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, in the Rizwan-ur-Rahman case. The government till date continues to support the police officials making evident its class and communal bias. Finally, the Sachar Committee report on the state of the minorities in West Bengal came as a big shock.

Behind the facade of its radical ideology and image, the Left had become the new rulers, who not only displayed their power, arrogance and intolerance of any dissent, but also had come to ally with global capital to embark on the renewed primitive accumulation process. The CPM dominated the entire state machinery and in the process subverted the rule of law and the Constitution. It captured civil society and turned both

the form and substance of democracy into a near farce.5 It openly espoused a neo-liberal growth model.

The Left had developed deep stakes in the state and government. It was this transformation of the Left, which led it to not only acquire prime farmland in Singur and Nandigram, but also explains the intensity of state and party repression and violence on the protesting peasants. Over time the Left lost its passion, its intellectual and cultural resources; it essentially became a mammoth machine and a pretty efficient one at that. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and his government, however, became the darling of the big media and chambers of commerce.

The political opposition was for long in a sorry state in West Bengal. The Congress was not only discredited, demoralized and often in disarray, many of its leaders were seriously accused of being hand in glove with the government. In fact, a committee was set up by the Congress to enquire into these charges against its own leaders, some of whom were called 'watermelons' – green outside but red within. Mamata Banerjee left the Congress and formed the Trinamool Congress (TMC), charging that the former had become the B-team of the CPM. To counter the opposition's B-team image, Mamata Banerjee relentlessly fought the CPM.

The Left too identified her as its principal enemy and the relationship between the ruling party and the opposition was conducted in the language of enmity, hatred and war. Civility was the main casualty in this political scenario. Early in her career, Mamata was even physically attacked by the CPM. Slowly, the TMC seemed to be emerging as a match for the CPM. It was a no holds barred fight for political supremacy.

Mamata's politics was personalized, passionate and populist; she took to the streets to protest against any injustice. She did not, however, invest in organization building, sustained political work at the grassroots level, or engage in ideological and cultural interventions; nor did she have a solid political programme or a vision for the future. Incidentally it is precisely on all these counts that the Left had become almost invincible in Bengal. Nonetheless, Mamata's battle against the Left was conducted in the style and tactics of the Left itself. Her spartan lifestyle, honesty, militancy, a

passion for taking up peoples' issues and her lack of any personal political ambition or greed for power went a long way in forging her charisma and popular appeal. She built herself on the image of the dedicated communist cadres of the 1950s and 1960s on whose work the present regime rests. Actually, many communists privately remark that she is the right person in the wrong party; that she would have been an asset for any communist party was not in doubt. She conducted militant street protests in the copybook communist style of the past. She also resisted the CPM using both parliamentary and what communists call 'extra-parliamentary' methods.

This enabled the TMC to build a strong support base among the urban poor and the unorganized working and lower middle classes. Mamata even defeated CPM heavyweight Somnath Chatterjee in South Calcutta and forced him to flee to a safe rural seat in Birbhum. Yet, in spite of some sustained effort, she could not make much of a dent in rural Bengal, especially among the peasantry. The CPM with its organized strength, peasant support, muscle power and state backing crushed all such attempts.

The TMC's greatest weakness, especially in Bengal's context, was its inability to make any inroads in the intellectual and cultural world of the middle classes. This is crucial for making any claim for political leadership in West Bengal. Moreover, it is precisely on this count that the CPM has constantly criticized and ridiculed Mamata Banerjee. She was publicly called mad, irrational, whimsical; someone who could not be trusted or dealt with; in short, that she was not an intellectual. She was even likened to a domestic, belonging to the lower order of society, lacking culture, taste and education.

Such accusations, the Left believed, would never make her dear to the Bengali bhadralok, given its derision for the menials. In a bid to make herself acceptable to the bhadralok, Mamata tried to prove that she too was a woman of many parts, nothing less than the secret desire of Bengali intellectuals to be a versatile renaissance personality. She wrote poetry and prose, painted and recorded her songs, and was even duped into getting an American degree, all in an effort to gain respectability.

In the last two and a half years, there has been a spate of protest movements involving peasants, the urban and the rural poor, minorities, workers and all kinds of citizens' initiatives in Bengal. The peasant struggles in Singur and Nandigram, the awakening of Bengali civil society, and the rise of the political opposition have all been turning points in the unchanging politics of Bengal. In May 2006, the Buddhadeb Bhattacharya led Left Front government came back to power with a massive majority with the promise of industrialization and new employment and a renewal of West Bengal which was fast sliding into decay. The people did not realize that this transition to capitalism, though shepherded by the Left, would demand a heavy price. In fact, the day the new government came to power, the chief minister announced Tata's small car project in Singur. This was followed by a litany of projects by global capitalist firms. The opposition was in disarray and the government seemed to have won over everybody. However, the situation on the ground was not encouraging. Some of the gains made in agriculture had come to a halt in the 1990s; the number of agricultural labourers had grown phenomenally, and the sharecroppers and small peasants could not hold on.

The compulsory acquisition of highly fertile land in Singur for private capital failed to get the consent of considerable sections of the peasantry, even though it was touted as benefiting the public interest. The government's claim that it was acquiring single cropland and was giving the best compensation package in the country came as an arrogant retort. Soon a powerful movement erupted to protect farmland. The government, which had long claimed to represent peasants, workers and the poor, was now pushed into taking extremely repressive measures for taking away land from the peasants.

All this was seen as a major act of betrayal. The government imposed prohibitory orders to prevent people from assembling and used both state and political violence to crush all protest. The intervention of the High Court, however, set aside the prohibitory order against any assembly. The government increasingly became discredited for its violence and illegal actions. Soon the protest in Singur started gathering support from across the state and outside, as several committees at the grassroots level

were formed to carry on this struggle. The opposition parties, especially Mamata Banerjee, further galvanized this struggle. She undertook a 25-day fast at a dharna mancha in Calcutta, which became an important site of protest and coordination of the re-emerging civil society of Bengal.

A predominant section of the middle class and intellectuals who had earlier been feted by the government for the first time felt outraged by the government's actions in Singur and Nandigram. Several intellectuals resigned from government bodies and joined the civil society protests. Quite a few new citizens' organizations emerged, which came to play a crucial role in this mobilization against the government. Citizens' activism gave immense encouragement to the peasant struggle on the ground. Even when Mamata was fasting, a young girl, Tapasi Malik, in the forefront of protest in Singur was raped, bludgeoned, and then burnt alive by ruling party activists. This further outraged the moral conscience of Bengal. The role of the State Women's Commission and the police further antagonized the people. A CBI inquiry led to the arrest of an important district leader of the CPM as the key suspect.

Nandigram followed Singur in quick succession as the next destination of capital's desire for farmland. This time it was for a dangerous chemical hub to be set up over several thousand acres. On receiving the land acquisition notices, the villagers of Nandigram barricaded their area as a kind of zone free of the control of the state. The struggle in Nandigram saw high levels of violence by the state and the armed cadres of the CPM and massive public protest by citizens, something unprecedented in the 32-year rule of the Left Front.

For the first time in the state several political forces and formations were converging to form an alternative to the Left Front. Some of the allies of the CPM, like the RSP and Forward Bloc, put intense pressure on the government to retract from its policy of compulsory acquisition of fertile farmland and brutal repression of democratic movements in its drive to attract capital. Bengal's season of protest led to a near statewide movement against corrupt ration dealers and the local CPM bosses. Popular protests in rural Bengal led to the crumbling of the authority of the CPM and the erosion of trust of the people.

Meanwhile, a new culture of silent and nonviolent public protest emerged over the death of Rizwanur. The media joined hands to expose both the role of top police officials and the support they received from the government. This mood of defiance was reflected in the panchayat and municipal elections of 2008. Both the SUCI and several Naxalite groups formally allied with TMC, which earlier would have been unthinkable. The opposition, including the Trinamool, had become Left and the ruling Left openly Right.

The patterns of social and political change in Bengal have been distinct from most parts of the country. Here class politics, especially a politics dominated by the left-wing middle class, has for long ruled the state in close alliance with the peasantry, the working class and enjoyed a groundswell of support among the poor. The middle class, especially the intellectuals, forged this alliance by acting as the self-appointed guardian of these classes. The Bengali middle class became the leader and representative of the people. The communist parties and left-wing intellectuals perfected this role.

It is now grudgingly accepted that this middle class is overwhelmingly Hindu upper caste and male though, of course, it did not draw upon caste ideology to claim hegemony. The success of this strategy hinged on the peoples' acceptance of the hegemony of the left-wing middle class. Thus, we find that in Bengal, neither a phenomenon like the backward caste or dalit movement grew.

The problem with this perspective and strategy was that it did not have any serious programme of reforms and justice for the present. This strategy was entirely ideology driven and its success hinged on the making of a revolution, which eluded Indian communism. This, we have seen, led to the reversal of policies and surrender to capital. The entire opposition, including Mamata, played upon this betrayal and took up a Left position, not realizing that that this kind of leftism would inevitably lead to an impasse. The problem with this leftism is that it does not have any serious positive programme. It flourishes on negative politics, a politics of popular protest – the cholbe na cholbe na syndrome.

The Mamata phenomenon reflected another crucial aspect; it was not an intellectual or middle class led movement. Her initial support base was

the urban and semi-urban slums, unorganized workers, and the self-employed youth, what in Marxist language is called the lumpen proletariat and the riff-raff. Later, she was successful in reaching out to the peasantry and the minorities. In other words, the Left led middle class hegemony of the largely male bhadralok was first put to test by Mamata Banerjee. It was primarily a populist challenge, which grew around Mamata's personal charisma.

The Gurkhas and the Rajbongshis in North Bengal had earlier challenged the Left hegemonic model, but only in certain pockets. Now following Singur and Nandigram, the Muslims are fast withdrawing their support from the Left. Some are independently asserting themselves under the leadership of Siddiqullah Choudhury; others are drifting closer to the TMC. I think that these processes are the harbinger of a major social and political change in West Bengal. For the first time in Marxist Bengal, the bhadralok elite faces a challenge from the so-called chhotolok or the subalterns.

The left-wing Bengali bhadralok reaction to this challenge has been resolute, often even brutal and uncivil. Intellectuals have openly expressed their fear, anxiety and disgust of these masses. For example, when there was a mammoth rally, a civil society initiative against the carnage in Nandigram, a respected critic and poet openly warned Mamata against joining the rally. Likewise, when Subhas Mukhopadhyay, Bengal's leading leftist poet passed away, AM in Economic and Political Weekly lamented that towards the end of his life the poet had started keeping 'coarse company'; meaning, he had become close to Mamata. However, the middle class is splitting and a section is coming out against the Left Front and supporting popular struggles.

In the long run the prospects of change will depend upon the peoples' ability to come up with new imaginaries and strategies of social and political change and development. Unfortunately, on this count even apparently radical Bengali intellectuals have badly failed Bengal. The mere reversal of the role of the Left and the Right is unlikely to take the state anywhere. The independent emergence of popular forces and a new leadership from below, per se, is no guarantee of change for they often

mimic the old elites. The first glimmer of new thinking and ideas can, however faintly, be discerned.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. How do you know about the Socio –Economic Dimension of West Bengal Politics?

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2. Discuss the Issues relating to Social Change.

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9.4   LET US SUM UP

Whatever limited pace with which India's economic growth, modernisation, and industrialisation occurred during the period of British colonial rule, Bengal has been at the forefront among other regions. Even though Bengal suffered heavily from the Partition-related social and demographic turmoil, it happened to be rated as one of the 'richest' and most industrialised among major Indian states up to a decade after Independence (Clark and Wolcott, 2003). Subsequently, however, it has witnessed a relative retrogression in most of the socio-economic indicators relative to many other states, including much of the south. Yet the pace of decline in fertility and population growth since the late 1970s has been substantial and indeed larger than what seems warranted by its very moderate achievements in key human, social and infrastructural development. WB's poverty reduction, though considerable from very high levels of the early 1970s and probably commendable vis-a`-vis worst-performing states, does not appear enough (judged on experiences elsewhere) to boost economic security and material aspirations to a level commensurate with its achieved pace of fertility reduction. Nor can it be

seen as a case of 'poverty-led' fertility transition, as the poor did not show a greater interest in fertility control (as has been the case in Kerala). On the contrary, the fertility decline itself has evidently contributed considerably to poverty reduction via its favourable demographic ramification, namely by augmenting adult-composition within households (Bhat, 2005).31 Nor does a scenario marked by rapid expansion of education and public health, with its well-known agency roles in facilitating demographic transition, fit in with the relevant records of WB (at least up to the 1990s). Instead, the LF rule, though acclaimed for its redistributive land reforms and decentralisation/participation initiatives, has remained comparatively ambivalent towards deep-rooted gender discrimination and exclusion (in political participation and property rights) and major inequities against women, until very recently (Lieten, 1988; Webster, 1990; Ghosh, 2004). Yet substantial fertility decline has occurred across the broad spectrum of socio-economic groups in the state well before anything resembling mass education, health and nutritional security was put in place, suggesting major instrumentality of large-scale motivational change and its diffusion mechanisms, independent of social, infrastructural, and human development. Largely as a by-product, the LF's organised grassroots mobilisation network has served as a vehicle for diffusion, which happens to be akin to the Indian family planning programme's predilection (at least up to the mid-1990s) towards camps, campaigns and mobilisation, rather than sustained extension and motivationcreation efforts and services at doorsteps (as in Bangladesh).32 For example, despite the least media exposure/accessibility, as well as literacy, among tribal women, they do not appear far behind their non-tribal counterparts in terms of knowledge, acceptance of sterilisation, and pace of fertility reduction. A diffusion-driven fertility transition amidst sluggish material and human development is not very rare (neighbouring Bangladesh being a glaring case in point), but what distinguishes WB is the predominance of a diffusion mechanism which falls outside common/ conventional channels (expansion of female education and empowerment, enhancement of mass media/communication and social interactions, and/or effective family planning programme with grassroots reach). The

importance of ideational changes/diffusion has grown across the entire country during the recent past, as exemplified by illiterate/uneducated women's predominant contribution to India's overall fertility decline in the 1990s (Bhat, 2002). A recent econometric study of the determinants of contraceptive use among uneducated women has shown that most of the districts with large unexplained 'residuals' (after accounting for the effects of major common/conventional diffusion channels at family, community and individual levels) typically belong to WB, hinting at the relative dominance of 'unconventional' diffusion channels in much of the state (McNay et al., 2003: 37–38). The key point of the present paper – namely, that LF's organised grassroots mobilisation network has played a significant catalyst role in diffusing ideational changes – provides a clue. This, however, does not require one to deny the cumulated and combined contributions to a growing demand for fertility regulation of even slow improvements in social and physical infrastructures and human wellbeing.

9.5 KEY WORDS

Dimension: a measurable extent of a particular kind, such as length, breadth, depth, or height.

Social Change: Social change involves alteration of the social order of a society. It may include changes in social institutions, social behaviours or social relations.

9.6 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. How do you know about the Socio –Economic Dimension of West Bengal Politics?
2. Discuss the Issues relating to Social Change.

9.7 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 9.2
2. See Section 9.3

UNIT 10: ECONOMIC DIMENSION – POLITICS OF AGRARIAN REFORMS

STRUCTURE

10.0 Objectives

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Economic Dimension by left in West Bengal

10.3 History of Land Reform Relations in West Bengal

10.4 Land Reform

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

After this unit, we can able to know:

- To know the Economic Dimension by left in West Bengal
- To discuss History of Land Reform Relations in West Bengal
- To know Land Reform
- To describe Evolution of Land Inequality in West Bengal (1967-2004)

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Land is the pre-eminent asset in rural sectors of developing countries, the primary determinant of livelihoods of the poor. Accordingly, the role of land reform on productivity, inequality, poverty, local governance and social capital in rural areas of LDCs is an important topic of academic research with significant policy relevance (e.g. Berry and Cline, 1979; Binswanger et al., 1993; Besley and Burgess, 2000; Banerjee et al., 2001; Banerjee et al., 2002; Bardhan, 2004; Besley and Ghatak, 2010; DFID, 2004; The World Bank, 2008). The bulk of the academic literature has focused primarily on the effects of land reform on agricultural

productivity. A variety of channels by which productivity might be affected have been studied: relation between farm size and productivity, sharecropping tenancy distortions, access to credit, investment incentives and labor supply resulting from security of property rights. Effects on inequality and poverty have not received comparable attention. The effectiveness of land reforms in changing the distribution of landownership has not been studied seriously. An exception is Assunção [2008] who studies the effects of the Brazilian land reform between 1992-2003 on the household land distribution, and finds it raised land inequality among landowning households, without having any significant effect on landlessness (after controlling for household and location characteristics). The reasons for this are not well understood.1 There are a number of possible reasons why land redistribution programs may be ineffective in lowering land inequality and landlessness. Apart from imposing political and legal obstacles to implementation of such programs, large landowners frequently attempt to circumvent them by selling land, splitting their households and subdividing properties so as to avoid being targeted for expropriation. On the other hand, small landowning households might be induced to sub-divide so that some resulting fragments own no land and thereby qualify to receive some of the land being distributed by the program. Landless households receiving land titles may subsequently sell them in times of distress. Areas embarking on larger redistributions could attract more landless immigrants, swelling the number of landless households. These induced effects on land market transactions, household division and immigration patterns can indirectly affect the distribution of land in complex ways that could either augment or offset the direct impacts. Tenancy regulations which are intended to increase empowerment of tenants (by increasing their post-rent shares and/or security of tenure) do not directly affect the distribution of land ownership. But they may have important indirect effects. Those owning and leasing out large amounts of land may see a decline in their returns from leasing, and may subsequently be induced to sell much of their land. Additional effects on household division or sale incentives would arise if the reforms affect the relative profitability of landholdings of various sizes, owing to induced effects on

productivity or local wage rates. For instance, productivity changes could arise owing to greater reliance on family labor in smaller owner-cultivated farms (Eswaran and Kotwal, 1986), changes in sharecropping distortions (Banerjee et al., 2002), access to credit for land reform beneficiaries (de Soto, 2000) or effects on irrigation investments (Bardhan et al., 2012). Wage rates could be altered as a result of changes in demand for hired labor from large landowners, the supply of wage labor by reform beneficiaries (Besley and Burgess, 2000) or increased flow of immigrants hoping to benefit from future reform implementations. These indirect general equilibrium effects could supplement or offset the direct partial equilibrium effects. The task of evaluating implementation difficulties and obtaining evidence of these indirect effects is complicated by the fact that the process of development simultaneously involves significant demographic and sociological changes that affect household structure, and thereby the land distribution. Traditional family structures in LDCs involving cohabitation and joint ownership of productive land by multiple nuclear units tend to give way to nuclear households as a result of a desire for increasing economic independence and rising intra-household conflicts (Guirkinger and Platteau, 2011, 2012). This may be a response to increases in household size resulting from falling mortality rates. Economic growth and increased financial development reduce the need for members to stay in the same household in order to share risk or avail of household collective goods (Foster and Rosenzweig, 2002). Household divisions can significantly affect the distribution of land measured at the household level in a variety of possible ways. Land inequality would tend to fall (resp. rise) if large landowning households divide at faster (resp. lower) rates compared with small landowning households. Isolating the indirect effect of land reforms on land distributions and quantifying their importance vis-a-vis demographic factors in affecting household divisions and land market transactions is therefore an important and challenging research task. This paper focuses on the experience of the eastern Indian state of West Bengal during the last three decades of the 20th century. West Bengal witnessed large changes in land distribution, high rates of household division and a large land reform program during

the 1970s and 1980s compared to other Indian states. Approximately 20% of the rural population directly benefited from this program, which covered 11% of agricultural land. The size of this program was comparable to the land reform carried out in Brazil over the period 1992-2003 (Assunção, 2008; Lambais, 2008).

There were two principal land reform programs implemented in West Bengal: distribution of land titles to the landless, and registration and regulation of tenancy contracts. Earlier research on the West Bengal land reforms have shown evidence of 4% increases in farm productivity for the tenancy registration program (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2011), and a 20% rise in aggregate rice yields at the district level (Banerjee et al., 2002). On the other hand, Bardhan and Mookherjee [2011] find no significant effects of the land distribution program on farm productivity or on wage rates for hired workers for either program. The main purpose of this paper is to assess the role of the two land reform programs in changing the land distribution, separating out their respective direct and indirect effects operating through induced impacts on household division, land market transactions and migration. We also seek to assess the significance of these effects relative to the direct effects of growth of population for natural reasons (i.e., difference between birth and death rates). We use a household and village panel in a sample of 89 villages from the state, spanning the period from the late 1960s until 2004. During this period, West Bengal witnessed a marked rise in land inequality, owing principally to increased landlessness. Households divided at a rapid rate, resulting in a sharp decline in land per household.

A decomposition exercise helps to measure the direct effects of land reforms, household division and land market transactions. It shows high rates of household divisions as the principal driver of increased land inequality. Household divisions may of course be affected by land reforms. This may represent an important indirect effect of the land reforms which need to be assessed to evaluate their overall impact. Land market transactions may also be influenced by land reforms. One therefore needs to treat household division rates and land market transactions as (potentially) endogenously affected by the land reforms and demographic changes respectively. Before proceeding to this

analysis, we perform a simple reduced form village panel regression to assess the total (sum of direct and indirect) effects of land reform and natural growth of population between 1978 and 1998. The land distribution program significantly reduced landlessness, but by an extent less than the direct impact. Both programs reduced inequality, and the tenancy registration program reduced landlessness, but these effects are less precisely estimated and less robust with respect to the dataset used. In contrast, natural increases in population raised inequality significantly, by an extent that dominated the effects of the land reforms, thereby explaining the overall increase in inequality. The fact that the net impact of the land distribution program was much smaller than the direct impact, and that the tenancy reform affected landlessness, suggest the presence of important indirect effects of the land reform. The rest of the paper seeks to understand the channels through which these effects may have operated. We treat household divisions and land market transactions as endogenously determined by underlying changes in household demographics and changes in farm profitability induced by the land reforms. To this end, we develop a theoretical model of intra-household joint production among adult members. The model emphasizes free-riding among members when land is jointly owned and cultivated, which becomes more significant when household size is large relative to joint land holdings. Growth in household size relative to land owned gives rise to incentives to subdivide the household, or for some members to out-migrate. Alternatively, it generates incentives for the household to buy land. The model characterizes stable distributions of household sizes and landownership, given the prevailing wage rate for hired workers, productivity of farms and transaction costs associated with land sales. The model is used to derive comparative static effects on household division and land transactions of exogenous shocks to household size (owing to demographic changes) and farm productivity (owing to the land reform), which generate empirically testable predictions.3 With regard to the tenancy registration program, the model predicts (given the observed productivity effects) lower rates of household division and out-migration uniformly across disparate land-size classes. Incorporating additional effects on anticipated future reforms by large landowners, and

reduced profitability of leasing out land, it predicts division rates would drop by less for large landowning households. There would also be increased incentives for large landowners to sell land to small landowners. Owing to these reasons, the indirect effects of the tenancy registration program operating through their influence on household divisions and land market transactions should cause land inequality and landlessness to fall. Their net indirect effect would be expected to be negative.4 In contrast, the model makes different predictions regarding the net effects of the land distribution program. One reason is the absence of any significant observed effects of this program on farm productivity (owing to poor quality and small size of plots distributed) in the West Bengal context. Hence a key factor generating inequality reducing effects of the tenancy reform through their effect on household division and market transactions were missing in the case of the West Bengal land distribution program. Moreover, the land distribution program could cause land inequality to rise for a number of reasons that do not apply for the tenancy registration program. Since the plots were distributed to those owning no or little land, it would generate incentives among landowning households to sub-divide so that some of them would be entitled to enter the beneficiary queue. Such motives are more likely amongst small landowning households, thereby generating increased landlessness. Moreover, land distribution to the landless in any given village could induce land-poor households in other areas to immigrate, thereby swelling the ranks of the landless. A countervailing effect would arise, however, if large landowning households become motivated to sub-divide or sell land as stepped-up implementation of the program could signal greater redistributive resolve of the government in future.

We test these predictions on data concerning changes in landholding and household demographics for the West Bengal household panel. To identify the effect of land reforms on land inequality, one needs to observe variation in the amount of reform that is plausibly uncorrelated with other determinants of household division and land transactions. Our main specification exploits differences in the timing and extent of reforms across villages. A difference-in-differences design can then filter out common underlying trends and examine how these variations were

associated with changes in division and land market transactions across households located in different villages. The assumption underlying this identification strategy is that variations in timing and extent of land reform were uncorrelated with other time-varying village-specific factors that may influence household division and land transactions. Banerjee et al. [2002] use this difference-in-differences approach to examine the effect of the tenancy reforms on farm productivity, and argue that the variations in implementation rates of the tenancy registration program arose primarily owing to idiosyncratic administrative compulsions of the state government. Moreover, Bardhan and Mookherjee [2010] show that a determinant of reform was the extent of political competition among the two rival parties at higher (district, state and national) levels, interacted with lagged incumbency at the village level. This reflects greater incentives for elected officials to implement land reforms owing to re-election pressures in more contested elections. This allows us to examine robustness of the OLS double-difference estimates when we use political competition at higher levels as an instrument for tenancy reform, interacted with lagged local incumbency patterns.

Using this approach, we estimate the effects of the two land reform programs on household division and land market transactions. Controlling for household fixed effects, lagged household size and lagged land owned, we find higher implementation rates of the tenancy reform in the past three years in the village significantly reduced rates of division of small landowning households, and raised division rates among large landowning households. It raised the likelihood of land purchases by small landowning households. These findings are robust with respect to estimation methods and dataset used. Consistent with the theoretical predictions, we therefore find that tenancy reforms lowered land inequality owing to their effects on household divisions and land transactions.

Finally, the results help explain why land inequality rose overall during this period: the negative effects of the tenancy reform were quantitatively overshadowed by the effects of population growth. The effect of expanding household size by 1.3 members (the average effect of population growth observed during this period) on rates of household

division turned out to range between four and twenty five times the effect of either land reform program, depending on the specification.

10.2 ECONOMIC DIMENSION BY LEFT IN WEST BENGAL

Land reform is potentially the most significant programme the Communist government might be expected to undertake. As it is a state subject under the Indian constitution it was within the jurisdiction of the Left Front government. Though plaintiffs have recourse to court challenges and new legislation is subject to Presidential approval, the legal and extra-legal powers open to a state government are considerable. These include the use of the state police and administration, as well as the Left peasant organisations. Central government dismissal of a state government is constitutionally allowed, and has been used to dismiss previous Communist governments, placing limits on how far revolutionary methods can be taken. At the macro-level the radical objectives of the state land reform programme appeared unambiguous in their devotion to helping the lower classes, especially in the West Bengal government's Seventh Five Year Plan. However, by the time the Left Front came to power there had already been a gradual lowering and tightening of land ceiling laws to the point where the small minority of Zamindars and big landlords had been eliminated. Any further expropriation of progressively smaller landholding units would have antagonised increasing numbers of villagers in the 6 large and the middle peasant category. Any equalisation of landholdings would therefore have resulted in a very large minority of villagers being deprived of some of their land, thus threatening the Left's rural base. Greater political mobilisation of agricultural labourers and marginal cultivators with enforcement of land expropriations by the state government would have increased polarisation in rural society, resulting in a backlash which might have driven the Left Front from power earlier than 2011. Since organisation of the lowest strata was weak or non-existent, the safe option for the CPI(M) was to soft-pedal serious and meaningful attempts at land distribution. The radical alternative would have been the collectivisation of land. However, experiences in China and the USSR

indicate decreased productivity under this system, aside from the violence that would have been required to implement it. Some economists argue that with the provision of credit and agricultural inputs, small peasants are more efficient and productive than their larger counterparts, thereby rendering collectivisation unnecessary and counter-productive. However, in Bengal this small peasant class lacked the financial resources to implement improvement schemes and the state's resources in 1977 were limited. The land-person ratio continued to deteriorate as cultivable area could not be significantly increased, and population growth continued unabated. Between 1961 and 1971 the landperson ratio decreased by 28 per cent from 0.444 acres to 0.321 acres. Any possible solution was bound to adversely affect a sizeable class in rural Bengal. The villages were not homogeneous and peasant unity only artificial if it could be developed at all. It was no longer possible to benefit the many by sacrificing the few large landowners. Complete or even partial expropriation would have antagonised a large number of people, many of them not particularly well-off. In an analysis of the antagonisms among the different strata of the Bengal peasantry, West Bengal Board of Revenue, in fact, highlighted the difficulty of choosing the expropriators from the expropriated: "Questions of what administrative or fiscal action benefits whom, how, why and where have grown in complexity and so have the consequences of these actions on shifting interest alignments and conflicts within the rural structure." While simplistic trends of Marxism tend to classify peasantry as exploiters and exploited according to whether or not they employ labour, in West Bengal there was a wide variation of employment patterns with a large intermediate class which simultaneously hires labour, works on their own land and hires themselves out as labourers. According to Utsa Patnaik, a class breakdown by landholdings in Bengal would classify poor peasants as owning less than 1.60 acres, lower middle between 1.61 and 4.60, upper middle as between 4.61 and 9.80, and the rich peasants and landlords as over 9.81 acres. With the decreasing land-man ratio and the increasing use of high-yielding varieties this might be considered slightly on the high side. For Bengal, P. Sundarayya's upper limit of 5 acres for the middle peasantry would seem more accurate for our time

period.18 With varied local conditions any categorisation can only be an approximation rather than a definite classification. Even within West Bengal there are seven different agro-climatic regions resulting in wide variations in land productivity and cropping patterns. Any classification of landownership would have to take these productivity variations into account in a land reform programme. Another factor that must be kept in mind is the small absolute sizes involved. In an equitable land reform, a third of an acre per person would have to be the maximum allowable. Supplementary income through outside work is very common in rural India and would have to be taken into consideration. Many small farmers must work elsewhere to make a living while leasing out their land. One Bengal survey found that marginal farmers (defined as owning less than 1 hectare) derived 68.9 percent of their income from property rather than from their own or family labour. Integration into the market economy is also considerable. Even landless agricultural labourers, according to this survey, spent 23.1 percent of their income on industrially produced consumption 7 goods.23 Some crops such as jute were produced exclusively for the market while food crops were also traded extensively. Though private moneylenders remain the major source of rural credit, institutional sources have increased significantly, giving the state an increased role in the rural economy. Most spectacular of all has been the green revolution, which has produced significant increases in fertiliser and High Yielding Variety use as well as in irrigation and output. Though not as early and rapidly as in the Punjab, the 1970s show substantial increases in these outputs. This resulted in increased productivity and market surplus, which, because of the strength of the surplus farmer lobby, the government had to subsidise with higher food procurement prices than a free market might provide. Food self-sufficiency was achieved but at a gain to the dominant segment of rural society. In categorising rural social classes the landless agricultural labour category is straightforward, but many minute landowners lease out land to bigger landowners and vice versa. If one uses the employment of hired labour, rather than size of landholdings, as a definition of class, then by this definition there would be little land left to give to the tillers since only landholdings over 10 hectares used hired

labour for most farm work. Production of a surplus for a market is even more difficult to define as a class category since some crops like jute or sugar cane are only for the market, while rice, wheat, and potatoes can be for both, and the portion sold depends on seasonal prices and productivity. Furthermore, peasants with as little as 2 or 3 hectares were often connected to urban employment and have relatives completely integrated into the urban sector. A single criterion, even the most commonly used one of landownership, is therefore in itself inadequate. The use of hired labour and land leasing must also be taken into account as well as additional sources of income. A small farmer might be defined as having land or equivalent sources of income around the 0.321 acre per land-man ratio or about 2 acres per household, anything less than half this being defined as marginal farming. The middle peasantry, as commonly suggested, would be those who work their own land without normally employing non-family labour. This would be placed somewhat arbitrarily at 5 acres. The law of 12 to17 irrigated acres current in the 1980s was more than this. Confiscation of land over 5 acres, which could be defined as rich peasant, and over the current ceiling limit as landlord, would provide 44 percent of cultivable land for redistribution and leave 87 percent of agricultural households either the gainers or unaffected by the reform. This should have been the minimal first step towards land reform, a short-term goal that had to be followed at an opportune time by equalisation of land as the mid-term goal. This categorisation differs from the agricultural census definition, but has the advantage of including use of hired labour as a criterion as well as indicates what could have been a workable guideline for a land reform programme in 1977-82 that would have allowed large-scale land redistribution without alienating the vast majority of the agricultural population. The use of the 5-acre limit has been chosen because the number of households with more land than this is significantly less than those with less than 5 acres. Within this framework, therefore, there would have been less opposition to implementation than would have arisen from a lower ceiling limit. According to Benoy Choudhury, the Communist Party of India (Marxist)'s Land Reforms and Land Revenue Minister during the Left Front government's first term, only the complete confiscation of all

holdings over 10 acres would enable the agricultural labourers and marginal farmers to receive 1.5 acres per household. According to him, only 4.2 percent of households owned over 10 acres, controlling 33.3 percent of agricultural land or 4.53 million acres. With 3,751,000 landless and marginal farmer households, equalisation of landholdings at 1.5 acres per household would have required complete confiscation of all lands held by these largest landowners. The Land 8 Reforms minister stated that the biggest lacuna is allowing the landlords to retain land up to the ceiling limit. The basic land reform slogan (for Choudhury writing in May 1977) should be taking over all the land from feudal and capitalist landlords without compensation and distributing it among landless labourers free. All the land must be taken from the landlords, otherwise the Ceiling Act would end up as a farce and not enough land would be available to distribute. This is, however, precisely what happened. The ceiling being too high, there was insufficient land available for a significant land redistribution, and whatever may have been the Land Reforms minister's view on the subject, the CPI(M)-led government showed no intention of changing the status quo in this regard or the Minister himself of implementing his own recommendations. When the CPI(M) first published Benoy Choudhury's booklet in May 1977 on the eve of the election of the CPI(M) to power, his position could be taken as a statement of party policy, but by its fifth reprinting in January 1981 (which has been cited here) it had ceased to have any meaning except to show how far short the political practice had fallen from its original policy. The original CPI(M) position as formulated in the resolution of the Central Committee on Tasks on the Kisan Front of 1967 and on Certain Agrarian Issues in 1973 was far different from the CPI(M) policies in the Left Front government. This difference reflected part of the general trend towards moderation in the CPI(M). The 1967 and 1973 documents bear the orientation of the then General Secretary P. Sundarayya who subsequently resigned from the party leadership and Politburo in 1976, when his positions were no longer being accepted in the drift towards moderation. Though these resolutions were repudiated in the late 1970s they illustrate the change that had taken place in party policy, resulting in the West Bengal government position post-1977. The

difference on the agrarian question between the former Central Committee position and that of the West Bengal party members which later became the state government and CPI(M) policy is brought out in P. Sundarayya's explanatory note on Certain Agrarian Issues. Sundarayya's critique of the Bengal position is only a thinly disguised accusation of reformism in the West Bengal party and by implication of the post-1977 party position. "Some comrades in West Bengal argue that the ownership right to the tenants should not be campaigned for now ... as it would antagonise these sections" of landowners "and they would go away from the democratic alliance." That "these critics have gone to the extremely ridiculous position" of hesitating to raise popular demands when "the Congress itself is forced to come forward to satisfy ... the masses with such legislation, though only to cheat them, is something queer ... This attitude, if logically extended, would mean that we should formulate and advance demands of tenants in such a way as would be acceptable to the landlords." Sundarayya rejected the position of some West Bengal peasant leaders that a ceiling of 25 acres would be "a very big step." "With such an amount of ceiling ... no land will be available for distribution." He reiterated the Central Committee policy of expropriating all the land of the landlords including that below the ceiling. To allow retention of land below the ceiling would only perpetuate landlordism, "cheating the agricultural labour and poor peasants," leaving the CPI(M) policy of distributing land free to the landless as an "empty slogan." The reason for this wrong position in the CPI(M) lies, according to Sundarayya, in the rich and middle peasant composition of the party and their orientation to these classes. The CPI(M) Central Committee itself had earlier admitted peasant unity in the party was erroneously "based upon the middle and rich peasantry, instead of building it round the rural labour and the poor and ... organising these sections as the main backbone and driving force of the movement." The Central Committee admitted this task would not be easy as the rich and middle peasant orientation was "deeprooted and long-accumulated" and because "the bulk of our leading kisan activists come from the rich and middle peasant class" rather than the poor peasants and agricultural labour. Harekrishna Konar took the same position, noting

that "today the old practice of building peasant unity based on the middle peasants is not useful for agrarian revolution but this old outlook still holds the activists of the peasant movement back." Though he argued "particular emphasis" had to be "laid on the task of organising the agricultural labourers and poor peasants and making them conscious," this was almost totally absent from the policy implementation of the Left Front government.

10.3 HISTORY OF LAND REFORM RELATIONS IN WEST BENGAL

(i) Pre- Independence:

The Mughal period before the arrival of the British was marked by changes in the system of land taxation or revenue. Peasants continued to enjoy customary rights over land they occupied and generally could not be evicted unless they failed to pay the required land revenue (land tax) to the state. The task of collecting land revenue was assigned to a class of agents called zamindars. With the arrival of the East India Company (EIC) in the Seventeenth Century, the agrarian structure underwent radical change. The EIC first purchased the right to receive the collected land revenue and later, under the Permanent Settlement introduced in 1793, declared the zamindars to be proprietors of land in exchange for the payment of land revenue fixed in perpetuity. Zamindars, or those to whom they sold their proprietary rights, typically delegated revenue collection to a series of middlemen. The increasing layers of intermediaries meant that there was an appreciable increase in rent (or tax) extracted from the tillers and failure to pay this increased amount resulted in large-scale evictions, widespread unrest, and declining agricultural production. The British sought to stabilize the situation through legislated tenancy reform. The Bengal Rent Act of 1859 placed restrictions on the power of landlords' to increase rent or evict tenants. However, the Act only protected fixed-rent tenants and did not protect bargadars or agricultural laborers. Moreover; it only protected those fixed-rent tenants who could prove they had cultivated the land for consecutive years. Continuous cultivation was difficult to prove due to poor records and the Act resulted in an increase in evictions by

zamindars to prevent tenants from possessing land for the required time period. The 1885 Bengal Tenancy Act also sought to protect long-standing tenants, and was similarly unsuccessful.

During this period, another form of landholder emerged in Bengal. The jotedars were a rich class of peasants who reclaimed and gained control of large quantities of uncultivated forests and wetlands outside the territory governed by the Permanent Settlement. The jotedars cultivated some of this land through the direct supervision of hired labor or servants. However, the bulk of the jotedars' land, like much of the land in Bengal, was farmed by bargadars. Rural agitations over the plight of bargadars were common in the decades prior to and after Independence. In the 1940s, the Tebhaga movement called for a smaller crop share payment and also created the slogan, "He who tills the land, owns the land." The movement is given credit for shaping post Independence land reform legislation in West Bengal.

(ii) Post-Independence Land Reform

In the decades since Independence, West Bengal's land reform progress can be divided into three phases. The first phase (1953-1966) saw the adoption of the basic legislation (although it was significantly amended in later years), little progress in redistribution of above-ceiling land, and deterioration in the protection of bargadars. In the second phase (1967-1976) West Bengal made most of the overall achievements in above-ceiling redistribution, but made little progress in protecting the rights of bargadars. In the third phase (1977-present) tremendous progress was made in recording and protecting the rights of bargadars, and the redistribution of above-ceiling land continued, but at a slower pace. West Bengal inherited very complex production relations, which were widely acknowledged to be obstacles to the development of agriculture. This may be why West Bengal continued to be a poor-performing state in terms of agricultural output, until the end of the 1970s. These relations were historically the result of the 'Permanent Settlement' system adopted by the British in Bengal. The system created a class of parasitic, non-cultivating landlords who expropriated rent from the actual tillers who cultivated their lands. In particular, the system was associated with a

high prevalence of sub-infeudation, with many layers of intermediaries between the actual cultivator and the 'landlord', all of whom had some rights or claims upon the produce of the land.

Phase I (1953-1966)

Land reform in post-independence West Bengal had assumed a special significance following the partition of Bengal and the continuation of influx of refugees from East to West Bengal shrunk in size and the influx of refugees put a very heavy pressure on land. These two factors affected the land-man ratio calling for serious and careful attention to the land reforms. The intermediaries (Jotedars, Zamindars) system continued even after independence, when the period of Permanent Settlement was over. There remained a large group of sub-infeudaries with varying types of claims to the land. Most of the cultivation was carried out by sharecroppers, who cultivated relatively small plots of land and were generally indebted and impoverished. They were not in any position to make improvements on lands, nor did they have any incentive to do so. However, there were some larger landowners who cultivated their land themselves, and many among them also hired out part of their land to sharecroppers. There was also a small group of middle peasants who based their cultivation on family labour with some use of hired labour. Finally, there was a large and growing class of poor landless labourers. Both production and distribution was adversely affected by the existing state of land relations. The land tenure system served as and obstruction to agricultural production, affected incomes and access to productive employment for the landless, and created unequal access to social and political power as well. Land reforms in post-independence West Bengal began with the passage of the West Bengal Bargadar Act (1950), followed by the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act (1952), and the West Bengal Land Reforms Act (1955). These three Acts were enacted at the initiative of the congress governments of the State. But the legal provisions were not seriously enforced. To the local level administrators and the police nothing seemed to be more natural than to see their role as defenders of the vested interests irrespective of the changes in law. More importantly, there was a conspicuous lack of political will. This was in

line with the general Indian situation. While some LRA (Land Reform Act) provisions broke new ground, little implementation was accomplished. In fact, the LRA led to some perverse consequences as, counter to the intentions of the LRA, many landlords evicted those cultivating their land, resulting in a large increase in the percentage of landless agricultural laborers throughout the state.3 The aspect of the LRA most often blamed for its negative impact is the provision that allowed landowners to resume "personal cultivation" (including through the use of hired labor or servants) to reclaim land from bargadars. 4 Others were evicted because they did not possess documents necessary to prove that they were bargadars. During this first-phase of land reform in West Bengal, 300,000 acres of above-ceiling land was redistributed,5 a little less than 3 per cent of the cropped land in the state. However, much above ceiling land was retained by intermediaries through evasive transfers to relatives, friends or fictitious persons (benami transactions).6 46 2.

Phase II (1967-1977)

Movement for land reforms gained momentum when the United Front (U.F.) consisting of the centrist and the leftist parties was voted to power in the state for two short spells in 1967 and 1969. In 1967, left-wing and centrist parties formed a coalition government known as the United Front. The countryside was seething with social unrest and a militant peasant movement was growing. The United Front government sought to address the underlying concerns of the peasants by improving the position of the bargadars and distributing more surplus land. However, because bargadar rights remained unrecorded, little could be done to grant bargadars greater security without causing widespread evictions. Significant success was achieved, however, in redistributing ceiling-surplus land. Between 1967-1970 an additional 600,000 acres of such land was redistributed. Much of this redistributed land had been invaded by peasants during the 1960s. When the United Front government collapsed in 1970, President's rule was imposed. During this period, important amendments were made to the LRA that offered the potential to improve the position of bargadars. However, these amendments, while

groundbreaking, were not adequately implemented. Those who did try to exercise their rights under the law were often evicted and large amounts of the surplus land that had been acquired during 1967-1970 was taken back by former landowners during this period. In 1975, West Bengal adopted the West Bengal Acquisition of Homestead Land for Agricultural Laborers, Artisans and Fishermen Act. The Act aimed to enhance the position of landless agricultural laborers by severing the power that landowners could exercise over laborers through control of their home plots. The Act called for the allocation of ownership over a home plot of up to 0.08 acre for poor and landless agricultural laborers, artisans, and fishermen.12 The United Front's land reform policy had two elements: (a) breaking the hold of land lordism through effective implementation of ceiling laws and quick redistribution of surplus land among the landless and poor peasantry (Dasgupta, S., 1986), and (b) the stopping of eviction of sharecroppers in consultation with the members of the gram panchayats, representative of the peasants and the members of the legislature (Dutta, P.K. 47 1988). Clearly, the United Front Govt. could not rely exclusively on the bureaucracy for implementing land reforms. This was in conformity with their assessment of the nature and character of bureaucracy in a capitalist system. However, it had paid good dividends. Till the first congress ministry (1953-67) only about 3.5 lakh acres of land were vested in the state. But during the United Front (1967-72) regime nearly 6 lakh acres of land were vested in the State (Source: Ghosh 1981 and Basu 2000).

Phase III (1977-Present)

The Left Front government, led by the Communist Party of India–Marxist (CPIM), came to power in 1977 on the promise of extensive agrarian and political reform. CPIM has remained in power ever since. The government has achieved some incremental progress in redistributing ceiling-surplus land during this period, but it's most notable success has been in recording and protecting bargadar rights. The Left Front acted more aggressively to take over land that exceeded ceiling limits and to close loopholes that previously allowed exemptions to the ceiling for religious and charitable trusts, plantations and fisheries.

Furthermore, in 1979 the State Government amended the LRA to narrow the definition of "personal cultivation" to better ensure that those that owned the land were the actual cultivators. The Left Front's most notable land reform achievement was in launching Operation Barga, under which government functionaries recorded the names of bargadars in order to provide them with greater tenure security. By recording their status, bargadars were finally able to avail themselves of the protections of the LRA without fear of eviction. No new legislation was passed. Rather this program sought to record names as originally provided for, but never actually done, under the LRA.16 Reform of land relations was one of the earliest and most consistent aspects of state government policy for the first two decades after the Left Front came to power in West Bengal in 1977. It reflected part of a more general vision of the ruling party and governing essential for social and economic change in progressive directions, for greater empowerment of ordinary peasant and workers, and indeed for meaningful democracy. From the early 1950s, therefore, in West Bengal as in other states of India, land reform was a concern of the government. Nevertheless, West Bengal is till date the only 48 state in India, with the exception of Kerala, to have undertaken both tenancy reform and redistributive land reforms. The amount of land redistributed in West Bengal has by far surpassed that in any of the other states. More spectacular and widely discussed, has been West Bengal's programme of tenancy reform or 'Operation Barga', as it is more popularly known. This effort marked a solid departure from the earlier attempts at land reform.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. How do you know the Economic Dimension by left in West Bengal?

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2. Discuss History of Land Reform Relations in West Bengal.

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10.4 LAND REFORM

There were two principal land reform programs in West Bengal since the 1960s. The first represented appropriation of lands (a process known as vesting) above the legislated ceilings from large landowners, and subsequent distribution of this land to the landless in the form of titles to small land plots (called pattas). For the state as a whole, P.S. Appu (1996, Appendix IV.3) estimates the extent of land distributed until 1992 at 6.72% of its operated area, against a national average for the rest of India of 1.34%. In our sample villages, approximately 15% of all households in 1998 had received land titles (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2010). However, many of the distributed land titles pertained to very small plots: in our sample, the average plots distributed were approximately half an acre in size. According to most accounts, these plots were of low quality. Recipients were unable to use them as collateral for obtaining loans from banks. The other land reform program was Operation Barga, involving registration and regulation of tenancy contracts. In order to plug loopholes on prior legislation, a new Land Reform Act was passed in the West Bengal state legislature in 1971. This was subsequently amended in 1977 by the incoming Left Front government to lend further legislative teeth to the program. The 1977 Amendment made sharecropping hereditary, rendered eviction by landlords a punishable offense, and shifted the onus of proof concerning identity of the actual tiller on the landlord. The state government subsequently undertook a massive drive to identify and register tenants with the aid of local governments and farmer unions. Registration was accompanied by a floor on the share accruing to tenants, amounting to 75% (replaced by 50% if the landlord paid for all non-labor inputs). Over a million tenants were registered by 1981, up from 242,000 in 1978 (Lieten (1992, Table 5.1)), increasing to almost one and a half million by 1990. Estimates of the proportion of tenants registered by the mid-90s vary between 80% (Lieten (1992, p. 161)) and 65% (Banerjee et al.,

2002). In the villages in our sample approximately 48% tenants had been registered; these amounted to about 6% of all households by the late 1990s (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2010). The average size of plot registered averaged 1.5 acres, and registered tenants could use the registration document as collateral for a loan from a state financial institution. As with the land title distribution program, most of the implementation of Operation Barga was carried out between the late 1970s and late 1980s. Banerjee et al. [2002] found a significant positive effect of the tenancy registration rate on district rice yields in a double difference OLS regression after controlling for district and year dummies, crop patterns, infrastructure provided by the state government. Their estimates imply that the program raised aggregate rice yields at the district level by 20%. Using a farm cost of cultivation survey for a sample of 89 villages, Bardhan and Mookherjee [2011] also found a significant but smaller positive effect of the cultivation area within a village registered under the program on farm value added per acre, after controlling for farm and year dummies and a range of controls for other farm support programs implemented by local and state governments.6 No significant effects of the reform on wage rates or employment for hired labor were found, except in farms leasing in land (which constituted less than 5% of all farms by the mid-1980s). The productivity increases accrued to farms of all sizes, except the smallest, with substantial spillover effects on owner cultivated farms. This spillover was explained in Bardhan et al. [2012] by effects of the reform in reducing the cost of groundwater owing to induced investments in minor and medium irrigation. There were no significant effects of the land title program on farm productivity, nor on wage rates.

The land history constructed for each household over the period 1967-2004 on the basis of a one-time survey in 2004 is potentially prone to serious recall problems, as recalling the details of past changes in landholdings over the past three decades can be a challenging task. Investigators were specially trained to conduct interviews in a manner that would help respondents remember and relate the land histories of their household in a consistent manner. In order to gauge the significance of recall problems, we checked the consistency of reported landholdings

in 1967 and 2004 with reports of land changes in the intervening period. Starting with the 2004 land holdings, we added in all transactions for any given year to compute the total land holding in the previous year. Repeating this iteratively, we calculated landholdings for every previous year until 1967.11 We compare the estimated landholding in 1967 with that actually reported for that year. For households immigrating into the village since 1967, we carry out the match for the initial year that the household arrived in the village. An additional difficulty arose with the individual exit data: no distinction was made in the questionnaire between agricultural and non-agricultural land lost thereby (i.e., associated with the exit). This complicated our calculation of agricultural landholdings. To deal with this problem we considered three different alternatives. The first assumes that all land reported in individual exits involved non-agricultural land, and is thereafter dropped. The second assumes the opposite, i.e. that all land reported in individual exits corresponds to (unirrigated) agricultural land. Finally, the third alternative assumes that whenever there is "missing" agricultural land (by the iterative procedure described above), it is accounted by land lost because of individual exits.

10.5 EVOLUTION OF LAND INEQUALITY IN WEST BENGAL (1967-2004)

In this section we exploit our dataset to analyze the trends in demographics and land inequality in West Bengal during our period of study. Panel A of table 4 shows household size fell from 5.9 in 1968 to 5.1 in 2004. At the same time, population grew due to natural causes (i.e, excess of births over deaths) by 50% between 1968 and 1998. The discrepancy between these owes to divisions of households, which we describe further below. Panel B of table 4 shows land inequality measures for select years between 1967 and 2004. For the restricted sample within-village inequality (averaged across villages) rose by 17% for the Gini and 29% for the coefficient of variation. The proportion of households that were either landless or marginal (owning less than 1 acre) rose from 60% to 81% among the entire population. This was accounted for by a drop mainly of small landowners (owning between 1

and 2.5 acres) and big landowners (owning more than 5 acres). In the online appendix we provide descriptive statistics for the evolution of land ownership, as well as for other covariates of interest such as household size and migration. Average landownership per household declined 58% between 1967 and 2004, and this decline is not explained away by looking only at natives (i.e. excluding households who immigrated during this period), or because agricultural land was converted to non-agricultural purposes. Households divisions were the main driving force of this decline – they accounted for over 80% of the loss of land per household. The second channel was land transactions (sales and purchases), followed by gifts/transfers and land lost or gained due to land reform.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. How do you know Land Reform?

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2. Describe Evolution of Land Inequality in West Bengal (1967-2004).

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10.6 LET US SUM UP

The land reforms initiated in West Bengal had three major components: (i) effective imposition of land ceiling and vesting of ceiling surplus land (ii) redistribution of vested land among the landless cultivators and (iii) securing of tenancy rights of sharecroppers (bargadars) through a system of universal registration of tenant cultivators (Operation Barga). As a result of this thoroughgoing land reform programme, West Bengal today has the most egalitarian land ownership pattern in the entire country. While West Bengal accounts for only around 3% of agricultural land in

India, it accounted for over 21% of ceiling surplus land that has been redistributed in India till date. The total number of beneficiaries of land redistribution in West Bengal is over 28 lakhs, which is almost 50% of all beneficiaries of land redistribution in post-independence India. The security of tenancy rights provided to the sharecroppers under Operation Barga was also unprecedented in India. The total number of recorded sharecroppers had reached over 15 lakhs, which accounted for over 20% of the total agricultural households in the State. Over 11 lakh acres of land was permanently brought under the control of sharecroppers and their right to cultivate land was firmly established.

After 30 years of Left Front rule, 84% of land in West Bengal is owned by small (2.5 acres to 5 acres) and marginal farmers (less than 2.5 acres) today, while the all-India figure is only 43%. Over 12 lakh acres of ceiling surplus vested land is lying with various State governments today but not being distributed among the landless. This shows the difference in the political will of the Left Front government in West Bengal and other State governments run by bourgeois parties. Moreover, around 56% of the total beneficiaries of land redistribution in West Bengal were dalits and adivasis. Dalits and adivasis also comprised over 41% of the registered sharecroppers. Till date, over 5.35 lakh women have been given joint pattas and 1.57 lakh women given individual pattas (ownership rights over land). Muslims have also benefited significantly from the land reforms programme. Proportion of land owned by Muslims in West Bengal is the highest among all Indian States which have a significant share (over 10%) of Muslim households in total rural households.

Following the onset of the neoliberal policies in the decade of 1990s, whatever land reform measures were undertaken in most Indian States in the post-independence period were sought to be reversed. However, in West Bengal an additional 95,000 acres of land was acquired in the 1990s under the land reform legislation and 94,000 acres redistributed. These figures for the decade of the 1990s account for almost all the land acquired and over 40 per cent of the land redistributed in the entire country. The Left Front government has continued with the land

redistribution programme. 30,000 acres of land was distributed among landless families in 2006-07.

10.7 KEY WORDS

Dimension: In physics and mathematics, the dimension of a mathematical space is informally defined as the minimum number of coordinates needed to specify any point within it. Thus a line has a dimension of one because only one coordinate is needed to specify a point on it – for example, the point at 5 on a number line.

Land Reform: Land reform involves the changing of laws, regulations or customs regarding land ownership. Land reform may consist of a government-initiated or government-backed property redistribution, generally of agricultural land.

10.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. How do you know the Economic Dimension by left in West Bengal?
2. Discuss History of Land Reform Relations in West Bengal.
3. How do you know Land Reform?
4. Describe Evolution of Land Inequality in West Bengal (1967-2004).

10.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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10.10   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 10.2
2. See Section 10.3

Check Your Progress 2

1. See Section 10.4
2. See Section 10.5

UNIT 11: OPERATION BARGA AND THE PANCHAYATI RAJ

STRUCTURE

11.0 OBJECTIVES

After this unit, we can able to know:

- To know about the Implementation Process
- To discuss about the Operation Barga, Agricultural Productivity and Poverty
- To highlight the Driving Factors
- To know about the Lessons Learned
- To discuss the Panchayati Raj Systems

11.1 INTRODUCTION

In the early seventies, the state of West Bengal, in the eastern part of India, had one of the highest poverty levels and the largest number of poor people in the rural areas of India. West-Bengal saw two major turnarounds in the rural sector in the eighties: a spectacular jump in the growth rate of production of rice, the major food-crop, from 1.8 percent during 1960-80 to 4.68 percent during 1977 to 1994; and a remarkable

fall in the rural poverty level from 73 percent in 1973 to 31 percent in 1999. West Bengal greatly surpassed the achievements of other states. This coincided with the 1977 election of a coalition of left parties, led by Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, which has held uninterrupted power for the last 26 years. The CPM instituted a series of major rural reforms guaranteeing heritable rights to sharecropping tenants (known as ìOperation Bargaî), ensured better distribution of products between tenants and owners, and confiscated surplus landholdings from big land-owners and distributed part of this to the poor farmers. Effectively, this gave quasi-property rights to the sharecroppers and eliminated absentee landlordism to a large extent. This was followed by decentralization of village power structures through a three-tier system known as panchayati raj, which started effective functioning from 1985 onwards through fiscal devolutions. It is not easy to determine the extent to which land reforms were responsible for the spectacular turnarounds in West-Bengal, since a number of catalysts worked simultaneously in bringing this change. Some writers identify land reforms and decentralization as the major institutional innovations, along with strong political will of the leftists as the catalysts; others give the credit to the rapid rise in the use of inputs, which in many cases were simply market-driven. The studies do not address the interlinkages and interdependence of different land reform measures, decentralization in decision-making, and autonomous and induced technological changes. After analyzing the essential historical background that leads to the whole reform process, the technique applied for identifying the crucial factors behind West-Bengalís rural success is the use of cross-section time-series pooled data regressions over districts of WestBengal. The results show that Operation Barga has some effect in raising productivity of yield along with irrigation, fertilizer, rural roads, and labor use. The impact of recording of sharecroppers was captured by cut-off dummies which represent different levels of recording. One significant result is that optimal level of recording seems to be 25 percent of operating households in a district, since setting cut-off below this seems to capture too poor peasants, having insufficient complementary inputs. Setting cut-off above it tends to ignore some genuine success cases. The regressions

show that yield-raising effect appears to be a combination of land reform and technological factors where perhaps the Panchayats also played the role of spreading the use of inputs through extensive construction of unsurfaced rural roads as well as through their dispute settlement and intermediary roles. Political will in carrying out land reforms was very important. The ruling coalition in West Bengal used its massive historical support of poor peasants through its peasants organizations. It had a clear vision of the sequence of reforms that began with Operation Barga, and continued in 1985 through empowerment of the local level bodies or the three-tier panchayats, with fiscal devolution. This created the right incentive and power structure to increase investment in land through better irrigation, rural roads, seeds, and higher labor use. The poor farmers could avail themselves of the fruits of technological progress only once they were made more secure and given more incentives to use better inputs with the help of locally elected bodies. The panchayats played an effective role since 1985 in mediating water disputes and ensuring steady labor supply and minimum wages. The current phase of reform encourages crop diversification and promotes agro-based industries across West-Bengal. Agricultural reforms in West-Bengal produced some desirable reforms through an interlinkage and interface of several variables. These are Operation Barga, decentralization of decision making and conflict resolution through the panchayats and spread of modern inputs to the poorer sections of the cultivators. None of them can be viewed as stand-alone strategies. However, every success also highlights some weaknesses which need to be looked into for fruitful replications across Indian states and similar countries elsewhere. While democratic decentralization could very well be replicated given right political will, the weaknesses which came to the forefront are (a) neglect of wage demands of the other major poor stratum namely, agricultural laborers; (b) alienation of land from the sharecroppers or redistributed landholders; (c) paying little attention to gender inequality in succession acts of land ownership or redistribution of land titles; (d) erosion of democracy at grassroots levels; and (e) neglect of action in case of complementary inputs. Also, it shows the opportunity cost of not taking appropriate actions along with land

reforms, the most important of which is the lack of diversification of crop and other rural industries.

11.2 IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The state of West-Bengal in India has caught the attention of policy planners and economists involved in rural development around the world for several reasons. One needs to know the salient features of the state so that the discussion makes some obvious sense. The Statistical Handbook of the Government of West Bengal, 2000 provides the most important facts relevant to our discussion. West Bengal had a population density of 767 per square kilometers against overall Indian average of 267. The reason was an influx of refugees from the eastern side of the borders after independence in 1947 due to religious division. In 1991, 72.52 per cent of workers used to be in rural areas. Also, the budget surveys show much heavier dependence of the population on food items (dominated by rice consumption) in West Bengal (65.9 per cent) compared to Indian average (59.4 per cent) in 1999-2000. At the same time, the rural population earns the maximum from rice production since it occupied 84.87 per cent of total foodgrains area in 1980-81 going up to 90.62 per cent in 1999-2000. This is crucial since area under foodgrains was roughly 4.9 times the area under non-foodgrains (cash crops and vegetables) in 1980-81, coming down to about 4.1 times in 1999-2000. The production of rice as a percentage to total foodgrains production had moved from 90.15 per cent to 92.68 per cent during the same time-period. Hence, the majority of the population in West Bengal stays in rural areas with overwhelming dependence on rice cultivation in their production and consumption. The dependence is more as one moves down the income ladder to the small peasants and agricultural labourers (NSS data, 1999-2000). In 2000, from administrative point of view, West Bengal has 17 districts, divided into 341 development Blocks and 3248 cluster of villages, having altogether 40,911 villages (called mouzas). Given the above statistics, the major distinguishing feature of this state is that it is under a left party coalition rule for the last 26 years without a break. In this period, the agricultural scenario in West-Bengal evolved around the fact that rice production, which determines the fortune of millions in West-Bengal, had a

phenomenal rise in the last 20 years or so. Along with that, poverty in rural areas declined appreciably during 1977 to 1993.What role did land reform play in this transformation? This section will highlight two major implementation processes in this context- the first is the enormous drive on the part of the Left front government to record the names of the thousands of unregistered sharecroppers, known more commonly as ìOperation Bargaî and to identify surplus land over legal ceiling for distribution among the Landless, known as vesting of ìPattaî. The maximum land to be distributed to any person having cultivable land less than 1 acre. The second is the implementation of rural local self-government through elections to three-tier bodies called ìPanchayatsî in short. One must understand the background of this process from the historical perspective as well as through the recent political scenario. Historically, West Bengal (part of the state of Bengal before independence of India in 1947) was under a system known as Permanent Settlement, which was introduced by the British Rulers in 1793. The basic rationale behind such a system was to ensure land revenue from the landed gentry, known as Zamindars. Throughout the 19th Century, writes one historian (Sen, 1979), land revenue yielded the highest share among all categories. Since revenue collection was the sole aim of such a land system, landlords became proprietors, whereas, cultivators became tenants. However, the pressure for increased revenue in the 19th century forced many landlords to lease out or in acute cases, sell their lands to non-cultivating families residing in towns and having trading interests and government jobs. These new tenants, mostly absentee, are known as jotedars (jote means plot of land). They were rentiers from the Zamindar and usually known as Ryots. This was the beginning of multiplicity of tenures in Bengal (Sen, 1979). Majority of Jotedars rented out their land to sub-tenants known as sharecroppers or bargadars. With the onset of depression (1929-33), agricultural product prices declined and as a result more lands passed onto non-agriculturist jotedars. This also increased sub-letting and led to a rise in the incidence of sharecropping. Meanwhile, the jotedars were given occupancy rights if they were cultivating the any plot of land for 12 years by the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885, known as the first major land reform act in Bengal (Bhattacharya,

1979). Thus jotedars acquired security and occupancy rights, but those below in the ladder, namely the sharecroppers, also known as tenants-at-will, did not enjoy any such rights. The Unfortunate part of the Land Reform Acts of West Bengal till the late 1970ís was that the laws were seldom honored and they were either ignored or contested in the court (Raychaudhuri and Chakraborty, 1981). This led to sporadic peasant protests, the most famous of which in the history of Bengal is the Tebhaga Movement during 1948-51. This was essentially a movement by the sharecroppers, supported by the peasant organizations on the left, for example All India Kisan Sabha, which came under complete control of the communist from 1945 onwards (Sen, 1979). The demand was to ensure 2/3rd share (meaning of tebhaga) of gross produce to the sharecroppers if they had supplied inputs. The Tebhaga movement had put pressure on the government to recognize the rights of the Sharecroppers. Some steps were initiated through changes in the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, known as Land Reforms Act of 1955 and 1966. The changes in the act and search for ceilingsurplus land during mid-1950s and mid-1960s, according to one author, made that decade ìreplete with the story of rampant malafide transfer of ownership holdings for evading ceiling provisions and of technical eviction of sharecroppers on an unheard-of scale making the tardy and often turbid attempts at land reform, totally infructuous for the interest of the rural people.î (Bandyopadhyay, 1981, p. 202). Several studies reveal the tendency of underreporting and concealment of the tenancy status in the face of land reform legislations during the 60ís and 70ís (Ghosh and Dutt, 1977, pp.187-188; Bandyopadhyay, 1981, p. 204). Left Front government, a coalition of left oriented parties, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (popularly known as CPM), assumed office in 1977. What started earlier as amendments to Land Reforms Act of 1955 in the years 1966, 1970 and 1971, got a boost by the amendment in 1977.This amendment virtually made cultivation in absentia an exclusionary clause for a landlord to evict a sharecropper. Also, the onus for proving a person not a sharecropper was shifted to the landowner. Apart from that, every landowner was made legally bound to issue receipts for delivery of products to sharecroppers. These were all steps towards providing

security and heritable rights to the sharecroppers. In 1978, there was a frontal attack on forces preventing the recording of names of sharecroppers under the name ìOperation Bargaî. More details will be said about it later in section 5. The above discussion falls in place once one questions the success of ìOperation Bargaî, effectively from 1978 onwards, since this measure of land reform placed unregistered sharecroppers at the top of the menu for reshaping land tenure relationships in West-Bengal. There is a belief that the area cultivated by sharecroppers in the 80ís is less than 8 per cent of the cultivated area (Gazdar and Sengupta, 1999, p.87; Rogaly, Harriss-White and Bose, p.14), hence any policy giving primacy to the sharecroppers gives wrong signals and incentives to the cultivators and agricultural labourers (Lahiri, 1981, p. 120). As a result, this kind of a policy could not bring about a turnaround in West-Bengalís agricultural growth rate. The discussion in the earlier paragraphs is specifically addressed to this question. The painstaking research by some eminent agricultural experts lend support to the fact that there were defacto or unregistered sharecropping on a large scale during the period of mid 60ís to mid 70ís and the concealment and misreporting naturally assumed significant scale when the news of an impending drive towards name registration spread around as a rumour. The policy question which had to be solved by the CPM led left front government thus was which agricultural group should get priority- Share croppers or the other deprived section, namely agricultural labourers. If agricultural labourers as a class are the lowest segment in the income scale, then safeguarding their interests through a movement to increase their wages would have been the best policy. This differentiation is made more difficult due to the existence of mixed categories like sharecroppers cum labourers who are actually small farmers augmenting their income by working in other peoplesí lands off seasons. After all, land reform does not necessarily mean those in possession of land should only get attention in the reform process. If it is found that most of the poor rural families had to depend on sharecropping as a means of livelihood, then establishing rights of the sharecroppers (known as Bargadars in Bengal) would have been the prime target of peasants movement in the state. Otherwise, the best

option should have been to target agricultural labourers alone. Historical data on Bengalís agriculture were collected both at the behest of the British rulers as well as by Research organisations like Indian Statistical Institute. One may find a good account of the statistical aspect in the book by Ghosh and Dutt (1977). One may quote the following table from the book to gauge the extent of sharecropping in Undivided Bengal and post-partitioned West-Bengal (Ghosh and Dutt, 1977, Table 13.3, p. 118):

Table 1: Sharecropping in Bengal

Source of Inquiry	Coverage of the Inquiry	Year under Observation	Percentage of area under Sharecropping
Floud Commission	Bengal	1938(Pre-Independence)	20.0
Bengal Famine Inquiry	14 districts of Bengal	1944(Pre-Independence)	27.0
Plot to plot enumeration	Bengal	1944(Pre-Independence)	39.3
Bengal Rural Survey	Bengal	1946(Pre-Independence)	24.7
West-Bengal Rural Survey	West-Bengal	1952(Post-Independence)	35.2

A similar table may be reproduced from the same book to understand the dependence of rural families on agricultural labour (Ghosh and Dutt, 1977, Table 14.9(b), p. 130):

Table 2: Extent of Agricultural Labour in Bengal

Source of the Inquiry	Period of Inquiry	Percentage of Families with Agricultural Labour as Primary Occupation
Census of India	1931	22.2
Floud Commission	1938	22.5
Famine Inquiry	1943	17.1
Famine Inquiry	1944	16.9
Rural Survey	1945	11.9

A cursory look at the above tables clearly reveals a couple of facts, namely, (a) Sharecropping was an important facet of Bengal agriculture before and just after independence. The reasons were many, but the most important ones seems to be intrusion of some non-cultivating as well as non-agriculturists households in Bengalís agriculture right after the depression in the 1930ís and war in the early 1940ís (See Ghosh and

Dutt, 1977, Chapters 12 and 13; Raychaudhuri and Chakraborty, 1981, pp. 122-125). (b) The decline in the number of agricultural labourers is mainly on account of rapid rise in the foodgrains prices since the 1940s, making existence of this class extremely hard (Ghosh and Dutt, 1977, p.130). Thus, the decision of the CPM led left front government to assign topmost priority to sharecropping and not agricultural labourers, was dictated by the historical reality of the state. Thus, if poverty was to be reduced in the rural areas, the sharecroppers had to be given their due share along with more security. So, the decision could not be criticized as historically unjustified or statistically misguided. This is the necessary condition for the success of any policy including land reform measures.

The second major success of the Left front government of West Bengal is to initiate local self-government through three tier elected bodies known as ìPanchayatsî. The state of West Bengal is administratively divided into three levels, namely districts, and within a district blocks and within a block anchals. The topmost tier works at the district level known as the Zilla Parishad. Then at the block level (consisting of large number of villages), it is the Panchayat Samitis, At the grassroots level of anchals (having a small number of villages, typically 12-15), the elected body is Gram Panchayat (GP). The idea of local self-government was not new in India, but elected bodies to implement them was quite rare. It certainly has the goal of bringing democracy at the grassroots level. Indian constitution was amended in 1993 (73rd amendment) by which State Legislatures are required by law to endow panchayats with powers and authority that are necessary for them to function. By this amendment, 1/3rd of seats were reserved for women. The panchayats were also supposed to (1) prepare plans for the development at the appropriate level and (2) to implement other schemes sponsored by higher authorities. In West Bengal, first election to Panchayats was held in 1978. For every five years from then onwards, elections were held in 1983, 1988, 1993, 1998 and most recently in 2003. One of the key functions performed by the Panchayats, especially by the panchayat samitis and the GPs, were to assist in the ìoperation Bargaî processes. This will be highlighted more in section 5 below. Apart from this, the panchayats were actively involved in the execution of the Central

government sponsored schemes of employment, namely National Rural Employment Programes (NREP), Intensive Rural Development Programme (IRDP) or Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) schemes. This was quite successful in creating and expanding some rural infrastructure, especially rural roads (mainly un-surfaced) maintained by the Zilla Parishads. Apart from this, they also ensured distribution of a package of seeds (mainly rice), fertilizer and pesticide, called Minikits although its coverage was limited (Chakraborti, 2002; Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2003). The other important task was the maintenance of tubewells for irrigation of both high and medium capacity by the panchayat samitis through Beneficiaries committees. The question is, how democratic and effective the panchayats were in promoting widespread use of infrastructure and inputs in the villages.

11.3 OPERATION BARGA, AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY AND POVERTY

The preceding section has shown in no uncertain terms the importance of rice in the production and consumption of rural population, who form an overwhelming majority in total population. Now, who are the stakeholders in the Left front endeavour towards more justice in the rural areas through land reforms. The most obvious beneficiaries are the sharecroppers and the pattadars, who are the owners of the ceiling-surplus land confiscated and then distributed by the government. Understandably, as also argued later in this section, it is the so called small and very small (called marginal) farmers who really could benefit from the sharecropping registration. The Pattadars, who were previously landless, were also one of the poor groups who benefited. However, the land distributed to each pattadar was not to exceed 1 acre. What about the agricultural labourers, whose main occupation is to work in others lands? They would benefit provided the agricultural wages had increased. This might well have been done by the active intervention of the lower two tiers of the panchayats, called Panchayat Samitis amd Gram Panchayats. We will look at some available data below. The importance of land reform in case of West-Bengal came to limelight

because of several events. The first and foremost is a spectacular jump in the growth rate of rice production in West-Bengal in the later half of the eighties. Let us first summarise some of the data about growth rates of rice production in West-Bengal in Table 3, noting rice is the major food crop in this region.

Table 3: Rates of Growth per annum of Rice Production in West- Bengal

Year	Aman	Total	Author	Year	All-India
1950/51 to 1966/67		1.804	Bandopadhyay, 1989	1950/51 to 1998/99	2.47
1967/68 to 1984/85		0.77	Ibid, 1989		
1982/83 to 1989/90		8.85	Mukherjee et al., 1994		
1960 to 1980	0.62	1.85	Rawal and Swaminathan, 1998		
1980 to 1995	4.03	5.03	Ibid, 1998		
1977/78 to 1993/94	3.56	4.58	Sanyal et al., 1998	1977/78 to 1994/95	0.81

The above table clearly shows the jump in the production of rice in West-Bengal in the eighties. The reason a column for Aman production figure is separately given is that till the middle of the nineties, the latest period for which the above growth figures are quoted, Aman or Kharif or winter(or monsoon, from July to November) crop constituted the biggest cultivation of paddy in West-Bengal. The other crops, like Autumn or Aus (May to September) or the muchhyped Boro or Summer (November to June) did not figure that prominently till the mid-nineties, although the area under the Boro and its production had the fastest growth among all crops. But till the early or mid-nineties, Aman, and especially the local variety, was cultivated by the majority of the poorer sections of cultivating households. The Following Table gives the picture:

Table 3A: Percentage of Area under Different Crops of Rice in West Bengal

Rice Season (Harvest)	1980-81	1990-91	1998-99
Aus (Spring)	11.88	10.49	7.20
Aman (Winter)	81.43	74.09	68.24
Boro (Summer)	6.68	15.41	24.56

Source: Statistical Handbook, 2000, BAES, Govt. of West Bengal, 2001.

Table 3B: Share of West Bengal in Rice Production in India and Relative Yield

States	1982-83	2001-02	Yield (Kg/hectare), 2001-02
West Bengal	10.5	16.39	2513
Uttar Pradesh	13.39	11.98	2120
Andhra Pradesh	16.28	12.24	2978
Tamil Nadu	7.44	7.98	3263

Source: Economic Survey, 1987-88 and Ministry of Agricultural Cooperation dataset,

However, as table 3B above shows, although West Bengal has gone to the top among all rice producers in India, its yield rates are lower than some other states. So there should be no place of complacency. In West Bengal, the major crop Aman being a monsoon crop, it is needless to say, that the Local variety of Aman has the least cost and hence, is easily practiced by the poorer households from the marginal and small farmers groups. Also, one should note that Boro cultivation has lowest growth in yield or productivity over the years compared to Aus or Aman. Between 1980-95, Aman cultivation had a growth of per hectare production (or yield) of 3.67 per cent and Aus had a growth rate of productivity of 4.78 per cent, as against 1.25 per cent growth rate of productivity for Boro. The reason is that Boro being a summer crop always uses HYV seeds, hence yield happens to be always high. The second most noteworthy impact of land reforms is regarding implementation of the laws of land ceilings and distribution of surplus lands among the landless and poor peasants, known as pattadars. The following table shows the results:

Table 3C: Share of West Bengal in implementation of land-ceilings among all major rice producing states in India as in March, 2001

States	Area Distributed (in acres)	Percentage to All-India Total	Number of Beneficiaries	Percentage to All-India Total
West Bengal	1048005	19.74	2564931	47.14
Andhra Pradesh	581568	10.95	534603	9.83
Uttar Pradesh	258698	4.87	294062	5.40
Tamil Nadu	179683	3.38	142347	2.62
Total INDIA	5309035	100	5440676	100

Source: Anil K. Chakraborti-"Beneficiaries of Land Reforms", 2002

The above table requires little explanation. Some commentators have questioned the credit of the left front in achieving this, since this is a

cumulative result, which started from abolition of Zamindari system in the previous Congress Party regime (Mallik, 1993). But the whole process picked up in the left front regime can never be questioned (Gazdar and Sengupta, 1997). Next, one may focus on poverty alleviation and land equalization efforts of the left front. Tables 4 and 5 below highlight these issues.

Table 4: Poverty estimates (Percentage of People Below Poverty Line of Rs.49 per capita per month in 1973-74 prices in Rural Areas)

Year	Official Planning Commission Estimates (Experts Committee Methods)	Deaton-Dreze Adjusted Estimates		
	West Bengal	India	West Bengal	India
1972-73	73.16	56.44		
1987-88	48.8	39.4	36.3	39.0
1993-94	41.2	37.1	25.1	33.0
1999-00	31.7	26.8	21.9	26.3

Source: Report of the Expert Group on Estimation of Proportion and Number of Poor, PPD, Planning Commission, Govt. of India, July, 1993; Angus Deaton and Jean Dreze, "Poverty and Inequality in India: A Re-examaination", *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 7, 2002.

Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Operational Holdings and area operated by size-groups, 1990-91

Year	West-Bengal		India	
1990-91	Marginal (Below 1 hectare)	Small (1-2 hectares)	Marginal (Below 1 hectare)	Small (1-2 hectares)
No. of Operational holdings	73.8	17.6	59.4	18.8
Area Operated	36.51	29.95	15.0	17.4

The table 4 above on poverty shows that by head-count ratio, number of rural poor in West-Bengal declined by 56.67 per cent between 1972-73 and 1999-00 following the Experts committee of Planning Commission methodology. The corresponding All-India percentage decline is 52.52. It is not that West-Bengal has been able to eliminate rural poverty faster than All India performance, but it is more creditable since West-Bengal had one of the highest numbers of relatively poor people in India. This lends more credit to the pro-poor policies of the government in West Bengal, since the number of Marginal and Small farmers is not only much greater in West Bengal but the amount of area they operate is also much larger compared to All India figures, as can be seen from Table 5

above. Can we show more rigorously the interaction between yield of rice and different parameters of land reforms. To note, from the mid-1980ís, the decentralized decision making through the Panchayats started to leave some imprint on the agrarian scene, once formally funds were devolved to them and duties were assigned to formulate village plans (Webster, 1999). This presence of panchayats became quite visible in the late eighties (Datta, 2001), which does not, however, imply that Panchayats always acted as politically neutral or corruption free local bodies (Williams, 1999, p.236). One of the key roles played by Panchayats all over West-Bengal, irrespective of political affiliations, happens to be ìDispute-settlementî (Williams, 1999, p. 235; Gazdar and Sengupta, 1997, p.175) or ìconflict-resolutionî (Rawal and Swaminathan , 1998, p. 2001). This always eases things, especially in the controversies surrounding water-use and rising wage rates of agricultural labourers. Also, the funds utilized for national programmes, and in many cases utilized through the panchayats like IRDP or JRY created durable assets, helping to create employment and more irrigation potentials. Another group of writers stressed the enhanced bargaining power and security of tenancy as incentive factors in tenantís production activities. One of the good references is Banerjee, Gertler and Ghatak (1998). They argued that ìOperation Bargaî involved a limited transfer as opposed to a full transfer of property rights. This creates two effects on sharecroppers termed as ìbargaining power effectî and ìsecurity of tenure effectî. The first is really an empowerment effect whereby the legally enforceable contract of tenancy consequent upon ìOperation Bargaî provides an ëoutside optioní for the tenant. This increases the bargaining strength of the tenant and increases his crop share. The security of tenant effect on the other hand produces two counteracting results ñ one causes the tenant to put in less work effort if the threat of eviction was used as a device to force the tenant to work harder. The other effect is a positive one that gives more incentive to the tenants to increase the investment on land, both short-term and long-term. Banerjee et al (1998) conducted a survey in 1995 of 480 sharecroppers in West-Bengal and studied the nature of their contracts for both the pre and post-reform periods. Their survey indicated both these effects have positive effects on tenantís incentives and as a

result, in the words of the authors, ìOperation Barga had a large and positive effect on productivity (Banerjee et al., 1998, p.3)î. The problem of estimating the impact of any land reform measures in the context of an agrarian economy is several. One is already mentioned before ñ a long time-series captures a number of effects simultaneously and it becomes difficult to segregate them. The other is arguably the problem of quantifying something that has several intangible effects, like sense of security of tenants and noise-free communications from Bureaucrats and Technocrats to farmers through the Panchayats (Mukerjee and Mukhopadhayay, 1996). Also, the role of panchayats in resolving conflicts regarding disputes regarding water use or use of agricultural labour is almost impossible to be measured. Under the circumstances, it is best to go for the method of panel data estimation for marginal and small farmers separately, since these groups are the major beneficiaries of Sharecropping registration system. However, the Panel data estimation for both Marginal and Small farmers reveal clearly that classical regression model is better than either fixed effects or Random effects models In both cases. This led us to try out more standard pooled regressions over districts and time, using barga recording as a dummy and introducing some factors which might capture the role of panchayats. Again, for data limitations, to accommodate panchayat related activities, like minikit distribution and rural road constructed, we took two years 1985 and 1994, and pooled them over districts. The major sources used are all publications of different departments of Government of West Bengal (GOWB), namely,

• Agricultural Census of 1985-86 and 1995-96 for area of operational holdings and net irrigated area data and

• Economic Reviews, 1985 and 1995, for Fertiliser use data (in tons)

• Study of Farm Management and Cost of Production of Crops in West Bengal for 1984-85 and 1994-95 for cost of fertiliser per acre, yield per acre (in quintals) and total labour (Manual and hired in Man-days) per acre data.

• Statistical Abstract, 1997-98 for Rural Roads in Kilometers Before proceeding with the regression let us have a glance at the figures for some of the major variables over districts and time, to indicate the scale of operations of Operation Barga and Panchayats. All data are for small and marginal farmers.

Table 6: Summary Statistics of some key variables related to Operation Barga and Panchayats over districts and time

Variable	Mean	Coefficient of variation	Maximum	Minimum
Fertiliser in Kg per acre	18.89	1.29	65.46	4.06
Labour in mandays	55.36	5.14	85.3	37.2
Yield in kg per acre	953	4.34	1442	494
Roads in kilometers (1985)	1205.77	1.32	3852	23
Roads in kilometers (1995)	1857.99	1.73	3982	605
Minikit numbers per operating household (1984-85)	.01	2.05		
Minikit numbers per operating household (1994-95)	.04	2.00		
Barga recording as percent of operating household (1984-85)	22.3	2.36		
Barga recording as percent of operating household (1994-85)	24.9	3.35		

Thus, minikit distribution is not a success for Panchayats, whereas roads are. Also Barga recording increased marginally over time and across districts, although coefficient of variation also increased. To capture the effects of Barga registration, for pooled regression, we calculated percentage of barga households as percentage of total number of households operating and ranked the districts. Four alternative measures were used to denote strong effects of barga-in one measure those districts which had more than 15 percent of households registered for Barga, are labeled High Barga Districts (represented by a dummy barga20 taking the value 1) and the rest of the districts was labeled Low Barga Districts (represented by the dummy mentioned above taking the value 0). Similarly, in other measures, cut-offs at 20, 25 and 30 per cents. These variables were labeled Barga 15, Barga 20, and so on. Also, four interactive variables inter 15, 20, 25 and 30 are created which are interaction between barga registration and fertilizer use. The idea is that very low barga registration per se may not induce higher production

unless supported by complementary inputs. Thus the interactive variables capture fertilizer use coupled with barga registration percentage. In other words, they are fertilizer use per hectare times the anount of barga registration. Hence the following variables were incorporated in the regression: Dependent Variable: Yield rate per acre of Aman (Local variety) for either marginal or small farmer for the relevant districts (in Quintals) Independent or Explanatory Variables: Net irrigated area per acre of operational holdings (percentage); fertiliser use per acre (in tonnes); Labour use per acre (in Man-days, Hired plus Family); minikit distribution (in numbers); length of roads maintained by Zilla Parishads (in kilometres), Barga 15, 20, 25, or 30 (High or low Braga recording districts at 15,20,25 and 30 percent cutoff), inter 15, 20, 25, and 30 (fertiliser times Barga recording at the aforesaid cutoffs).

The log linear regression results produce the following graph for the interactive variable:

Figure 1: Impact of Interactive Variable on Growth of Yield
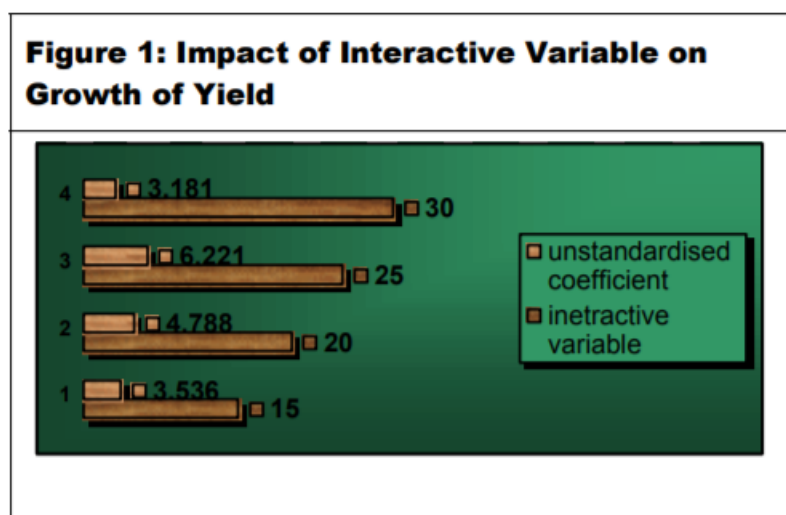
The best fit lines are reported below (coefficients are unstandardized coefficients): (1) Log(yield) = -0.144 + 0.457***log(roads) + 0.070** log(labour) + 6.221***inter 25, Adjusted R^2 = 0.310, F=7.747*** Note: *, **, and *** refer to significant at 10, 5 and 1 per cent levels respectively

As figure 1 reveals, the barga registration is most successful when the cutoff is taken at 25 per cent since fertilizer per hectare was most

fruitfully utilized by the recorded bargadars at that level. Cutoff below or above that not only produced weakened effects, they were also insignificant for 15 and 30 per cent levels. This means, at low levels of cutoff, numbers may brand recording successful, but the recorded bargadars did not get requisite complementary inputs like fertilizers. On the other hand, at a very high cutoff level, one may unjustifiably ignore some genuine successful cases of recording, hence artificially weakening the impact of barga recording. The procedure establishes that a 25 per cent minimum recording percentage is apparently optimal in terms of its yield raising effects. The associated regression captures yield raising effects of • barga recording through its influence on fertilizer use • the role of panchayats through rural roads and • greater use of labour. Since the use of fertilizer also depends on availability of water, irrigation was by definition also an important determinant, but high multicollinearity precludes the use of both. Thus an interdistrict comparison of the performance of the major beneficiaries of land reforms in west Bengal, namely the small and marginal farmers, does bear out the importance of reform. Does it reduce poverty? It is obvious, given the great importance attached to rice in both consumption and production of rural people in West Bengal as highlighted in the start of the paper. Also, why are the pattadars left out from the above regression? For the simple reason that their landholding size is too small to make any difference in the general conclusion.

11.4 DRIVING FACTORS

Analysing the regressions done above, it looks like operation barga, aimed at reducing risk of sharecroppers and ensuring better distributive justice to them, did have some influence in raising productivity of the marginal and small farmers. The Panchayats, among other activities, carried out a number of Central Government employment schemes like Rural Labour Employment programme (RLEP) and Jawahar Rojgar Yojna (JRY). Most of them went towards creation of rural roads and some towards excavation of tanks and ponds. It is clear that this effort of improving the rural infrastructure bore fruit.

Commitment and Political Economy for Change

The major political economy questions behind the land reforms efforts of West Bengal and also raised in the paper are as follows:

• What is the commitment of the constituents of Left parties towards a genuine land reform?

• Is it a politically correct decision on the part of the left front government to choose the sharecroppers and pattadars as the main target group, since this has implications for long term survival of the main party CPM? The first question may be answered in several ways. The first is the history of Bengal. As discussed in the implementation section, the peasant organizations attached to the Communist Party, especially, All India Kishan Sabha (AIKS), sided with the struggle of the sharecroppers for their longstanding demand for 2/3rds share (in case they supply all inputs). This started with the famous Tebhaga movement in the 1940s. The division of political parties were quite clear on the eve of independence of India in 1947- the landlords (or jotedars) were backed by the Congress party while the sharecroppers (or Bargadars) and the agricultural labourers (or Khetmajurs) sided with the Communists and their allies (Mallick, 1993; Leiten, 1992). This is further supported by the fact that recording of Bargadars (sharecroppers) peaked in the first three years (1978-81) and slowed down thereafter. The total number of bargadars is variously put at 2.3 million (Banerjee, Gertler and Ghatak, 1998) to 3 million (Mallick, 1993). The actual figure seems to be close to first figure quoted above. The volume of barga recording may be gauged in the following figures

Table 7 : Number of Bargadars registered

Year	Cumulative Numbers registered (Cumulative percentage to total)
Up to 1978 (Pre Operation Barga)	0.25 million (11 per cent)
1981	1.20 million (52 per cent)
1984	1.31 million (57 per cent)
1991	1.43 million (62 per cent)
1995	1.47 million (64 per cent)

Source: Bardhan and Mookherjee (2002) for figure upto 1978; Economic Review, Government of West Bengal, Various years.

Thus it is clear that the efforts to ensure hereditary rights and distributive justice to sharecroppers got a real boost under the left front regime which started in 1977. About the second question, sufficient discussion is made about the importance of sharecroppers as a group vis-a- vis the agricultural labourers. One pertinent fact in this context is the mixed nature of small and marginal shrecroppers in West Bengal. They are both sharecroppers and agricultural labourers since they work on others land to augment their income (Leiten, 1992; Bandyopadhyay, 1981). So a thin veil divides the two groups- they could be classified either way. Thus guaranteeing more returns to poorer shrecroppers certainly help the majority of the poor people some way or other. So it is not really either only electoral politics or a trick played by middle peasantry in disguise since they also had lands under sharecropping as argued by some (Mallik, 1993). Given the preponderance of marginal and small holdings in West Bengal, there is no doubt about the right political will of the Left front government (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2002; Bandyopadhyay, 2003; Hanstad and Brown, 2001). But as one author cautions (Bhattacharya, 1999), CPM, the leader of the Left Front, allowed middle peasantry to get some control back again through its policy of appeasing all sections in the rural community.

Institutional Innovation

The two major institutional innovations in the Land Reform process are

(1) ëbringing bureaucracy close to the Villagesí (Bhattacharya, 1999) and

(2) Delegating financial and planning activities to elected local governing bodies.

The first one, which centered around Operation Barga, is to replace the age-old and traditional Revenue Court approach to register names of sharecroppers by the Rural Camp method (Bandyopadhyay, 2003). The former method was heavily biased against the sharecroppers since they did not have the necessary wherewithal to put up their cases in the

revenue courts. In the second approach, the government machinery came closer to the ground reality. There were broadly six stages to operation barga (Hanstad and Brown, 2001,p.36). In the first stage, officials identified areas with large concentration of bargadars, determined from settlement records and information passed on by the peasant organizations. Second, squads composed of Kanungos (Land settlement branch) and Junior Land Reforms Officers (Land Management Branch) were organized. Third, Dates of evening camps were settled. Fourth, in the evening camp, government officials stressed the benefits that the Bargadars will enjoy after recording their names. Fifth, the day after the camp public meeting, field officials investigated the Bargadarsí claims. Lastly, on the third day of the camp, government officers recorded Bargadarsí names, noted any objections and disposed of them. Recorded Bargadars were given certificates which were later entered into village records. Devolution of financial and planning responsibilities to Panchayats started from 1985 onwards. In each electoral constituency, the members were supposed to meet at least twice in a year in what is called ìGram Sansadsî. This itself is empowering the masses since they now have a collective voice to air their grievances (Datta, 2002). This is more than just reserving seats for the women by constitutional amendments. All gram panchayats are supposed to seriously consider and implement comments and suggestions of Gram Sansads. As per data available till 2000 from the department of Panchayats and Rural Development of the government of West Bengal, there were more than 3000 gram Sansads, and almost 90 per cent of them held meetings. The worrying point, however, is the rapidly dwindling attendance in these gram sansad meetingsfrom a figure of 30 per cent in 1996, it has steadily fallen to 5 per cent in 2000. However, it is not to be denied that the panchayats played an important role in mediating conflicts and disputes in matters relating to water or labour use or even in social disputes (Bhattacharya, 1999; Williams, 1999; Gazdar and Sengupta, 1997))

Learning and Experimentation

The major lesson learnt in the process may be divided into two segments- one about the positive aspects and the other on some undesirable

developments in the last few years (alienation, rise of ag labour, wages, compositions of gram sansad etc.). To start with the positive aspects, the first and foremost surely is the importance of political will in carrying out land reforms. The Left front in West Bengal utilized its massive historical support of poor peasants through its peasants organizations. This is all the more important keeping in mind the fact that West-Bengal has population density per square kilometers three times the national average as well as the largest number of poor people in rural areas in the seventies. Second is the clear vision on the part of rulers to have a sequence of reforms starting with the operation barga. The second phase clearly started in 1985 with empowering of the local level bodies or the three-tier panchayats with fiscal devolution. This, when combined with the already executed operation barga created the right incentive and power structure to increase investment in land through better irrigation, seeds and higher labour use. The poor farmers could only avail of the fruits of technological progress once they were made more secure and given more incentives to use better inputs with the help of elected local bodies. Now comes the third phase of reform of encouraging crop diversification and promoting agro-based industries across West-Bengal (New Agricultural Policy, Govt. of West Bengal, 2003). Unfortunately, although the sequencing is done correctly, the time-lags of the whole process seems unjustified (Raychaudhuri and Sen, 1996). This really slowed down growth rates in the agricultural sector considerably after a period of sustained high growth. However, there are some disturbing trends, which the land reform measures in West Bengal failed to prevent. The first is the dispossession of lands of the pattadars and bargadars. A study sponsored by the state institute of panchayats and Rural Development (Chakraborti, 2002) shows that about 13.23 per cent of pattadars and about 14.37 per cent of bargadars have lost possession of their lands. The study did not go into the reasons, but the trend is itself worrying. The second major disturbing feature is the rapid fall in the number of cultivators during 1991 to 2001 in West Bengal by about 1.30 per cent and a rise of agricultural labourers by 3.01 per cent (Singh, 2003, p.894). For India as a whole, cultivators have increased in numbers along with a rise in the number of agricultural labourers. This fall in the

number of cultivators in West Bengal, in spite of empowerment through land reforms and local governments, is a disquieting feature. The third point of worry is the data of last elections held for Panchayats in 2003. In the previous elections, held in five yearly intervals since 1978, seats where no contest was held amounted to less than 1 per cent of seats in the first two years, and except for 1988, it was less than three percent (about zero per cent in the lowest tier) in 1993 and 1998. In 2003, in the upper two tiers, more than 10 per cent of the seats and about 4.5 per cent of seats in the lowest tier were not contested and almost all of them went in favour of the left front (Institute of Social Sciences, 2003). This may have two implications- either the left front has done extra-ordinary work or they had resorted to coercion and intimidation to drive away voters. One needs investigative studies for this trend to understand its effect on grass roots democracy that was the backbone of the Panchayati system. Next, one notes that the agricultural labourers in West Bengal, who are also a major stakeholder in the agricultural sector, did not gain much in the process. As Gazdar and Sengupta (1997, pp.177-178) had shown, the real wage in West Bengal grew at the rate 5.5 per cent between 1980 and 1991, but almost the same rate is achieved by Bihar (4.8 percent), Orissa (5.5 percent) and India as a whole (4.8 percent), who did not have the spectacular land reforms like West Bengal. So, as apprehended by some authors (Bhattacharya, 1999; Mallik, 1993), agricultural labourers could not gain much in the process since the CPM played a middle role of appeasement of cultivators for electoral gains. What about the position of women in case of ceiling-surplus land redistribution and inheritance? This is a matter of concern since one study highlights that although the Hindu Law of Succession, under which property inheritance really worked, specifies equal shares to sons, daughters and widow, in most cases it is the sons who got the shares (Hanstad and Brown, 2001). On the other hand, the pattas (land ownership rights) which were granted for the redistribution of the ceiling-surplus land, did not envisage joint ownership of both the spouses until 1994-95 (Chakraborti, 2003). Thus, only 9.70 per cent of total pattas granted had joint ownership till 2002, which shows discrimination against women quite significantly. The last weakness of the programme is the absence of concomitant development

in the fields of credit and agricultural inputs. As studies show, the initial spurt in lending activities by specialized rural banks dissipated quickly (Raychaudhuri and Sen, 1996). Commercial Bank credit per hactare, which was higher in West Bengal than national average in 1983, went well below that in 1993 (Bhattacharyya, 1996). In case of other agricultural inputs, be it pumpsets, tractors, threshers, or fertilsers, it is all private initiatives which really mattered. It is not exactly appropriate to say that the left rulers in West Bengal did not allow market related activities to function, although they perhaps, did not directly encourage these activities. The land reform provided the opportunities for the small producers to interact with the market driven activities more widely.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. How do you know about the Implementation Process?

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2. Discuss about the Operation Barga, Agricultural Productivity and Poverty.

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3. Highlight the Driving Factors.

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11.5 LESSONS LEARNED

In the end, it is natural to pose the question how far is West Bengalís experiment with land reforms replicable in other Indian states and in other countries with similar land tenure systems. The above discussion on the role of land reforms brings out some very important aspects of

agricultural development and rural poverty reduction in the state. To understand the dynamics of change in West-Bengalís agriculture, one has to keep the perspectives clear. West Bengal, historically, had a system of absentee landlords, who depended heavily on tenants. Since unregistered tenants could be exploited at will, there was a strong resistance towards registration of their names. The left parties historically sided with the peasant resistance as ideologically the communists and their allies were aligned towards the interests of the poor peasants. The recording of sharecroppers or operation barga was somewhat dictated by the peasants organization which assumed sharecropping had a big presence among the poor farmers. The goal however was to bestow quasi property rights to ensure heritable rights of the sharecroppers as well as to allow a greater share of the product to the sharecroppers. The standard approach of revenue courts, which depended on the bureaucrats, was replaced by field camps, guided and dominated by left party activists and sympathizers. At the same time, the land reform programme successfully confiscated ceiling surplus land and distributed them among landless and the poor peasants. Then came the effective use of the three tier panchayats in the decision making process and execution of centrally funded schemes, especially in the infrastructure and irrigation related projects. Also, Panchayats ensured settlement of water and wage disputes very effectively, which are things that could not be quantified very easily. The impact of the reform was perceptible on yield of rice. Rice was the staple of poor people and agriculture in West Bengal was completely dominated by rice cultivation. Thus, across districts and over time, higher the registration of bargadars and the more successful the activities of the panchayats in creating infrastructure like roads, higher was the yield. The natural outcome of this is to reduce rural poverty faster than other states in West Bengal, bring more equality in land distribution and activate grass roots decision making through ëgram sansadsí of Panchayats. However, there are failures on some other fronts also. Among the major stakeholders, agricultural labourers did not gain much. Their real wages did not increase appreciably. The number of cultivators is going down although this is not the trend for India as a whole. In addition, there is dispossession of land distributed to the

landless as well as those cultivated by recorded bargadars. The grass root involvement of Panchayats is facing a serious challenge due to poor participation of the electorates in village level meetings. Also, untied fund allocation to Panchayats to carry out plans for the future of the villages is getting seriously jeopardized due to apathy of state governments. The New Agricultural Policy of West Bengal admits that overdependence of farmers on rice is causing problem of oversupply and falling prices and they need be encouraged to diversify to other crops and non-farm activities. Without this, the fruits of land reform cannot be sustained. Thus replication of West Bengal model critically rests on (a) History of land tenure, which was dominated by absentee landlordism (b) Political reality of leftwing peasant movement aligned with the poorer stakeholders (c) bestowing quasi property rights through law of inheritance for sharecroppers through non-traditional methods of name registration (d) grass roots participation of villagers through local level elected governments (e) active role of local bodies in rural infrastructure development and dispute settlements in case of land, water and wages. Although history in general cannot be repeated, some other factors, especially strengthening of the grass roots participation in the decision making process, can well be emulated. At the same time, replication must take caution regarding some of the weaknesses of the movement, namely (a) inadequate attention to agricultural labourers (b) dispossession of land over time and reduction in the proportion of cultivators (e) fiscal constraints of the state impinging upon untied fiscal devolutions of panchayats (f) over dependence of poor farmers on rice cultivation (g) Less attention to the problems of credit and other agricultural implements and (g) a tendency towards weakening of the grass roots democratic institutions.

11.6 PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEMS

Reorganisation of the system of local government was one of the most important of the institutional changes brought about by the Left Front government. In the process, West Bengal has created a history of participation of the common people through the process of decentralisation, which is unique in India. A system of democratic

elections to local bodies at anchal, block and district level was instituted: gram panchayats at the anchal level, panchayat samitis at the block level and zilla parishads at the district level. Elections to these local bodies were held in June 1978. The newly elected panchayats were involved with the execution of land reforms. Panchayats took the initiative in exposing benami land holdings, ensured the identification of excess land and the declaration of vested land and were also given charge of ensuring the legal rights of recipients of vested land and bargadars over land. The panchayats were also involved in arrangements for the provision of institutional credit for the beneficiaries of vested land and for bargadars. After the rural development projects were devolved to panchayats for implementation, the beneficiaries of land reform were given priority in the receipt of benefits from these projects. This was possible because through the panchayat election of 1978, a new leadership was established at the helm of the rural bodies from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds. The erstwhile village elite, including landlords and moneylenders, lost their dominance over the newly elected local bodies. The new leadership after 1978 came out of the tradition of peasant upsurge and struggle for land reform of the past three decades.

West Bengal is the only State in India to have had regular elections to local bodies every five years for the past 30 years. The aim has been to provide a substantial share of fiscal resources of the state to the local bodies. West Bengal was the first state in the country to make a serious effort at devolving funds from the state government level to the lower tiers of administration. The panchayats have also been assigned a large and substantial range of responsibilities that were earlier seen as under the purview of the district-level bureaucracy. The panchayats perform civic duties and undertake developmental activities like construction and maintenance of hospitals, schools and libraries, promotion of agriculture, cooperatives and cottage industries, child welfare activities, etc. They play an important role in the local-level planning and implementation of government schemes. Panchayats in West Bengal have played an important role in activities like mobilising cooperation for improving agricultural production, management of local resources, and identification of beneficiaries for housing, poverty alleviation and social

security programmes. This has made the panchayats a critical institution of local governance in the West Bengal countryside.

Over time, there has been substantial representation of the rural poor and of socially deprived groups like dalits and adivasis, as well as women, in the elected bodies. All this has helped to change the power equations in rural society as well as encouraged the social and political empowerment of social groups that were earlier marginalised. The proportions of dalit and adivasi panchayat representatives in all the three tiers were over 37% and 7% respectively, well over their share in population. Since 1995, one third of the seats and positions of chairpersons in the panchayati raj institutions have been reserved for women. It is, however, noteworthy that the actual representation of women exceeds one third as a number of women candidates also win in the general constituencies. Over 35% of the gram panchayat members are women. Also, 7 out of 17 zilla parishads have a woman sabhadhipati and 155 out of 351 panchayat samities have a woman sabhapati. In the late 1990s, the Panchayat Raj system in West Bengal was further strengthened by introducing gram sansads. These are the general councils of voters in every ward, that are required to meet twice a year with a minimum quorum of 10 per cent of voters to discuss the work done by the panchayats and utilisation of funds.

1. Panchayat and Democracy:

Democracy is considered as one of the best forms of government because it ensures liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunity, fraternity as well as the right to participate in political decision-making. Participation control of governance by the people of the country is the essence of democracy. Such participation is possible only when the powers of the state are decentralized to the district, block and village levels where all the sections of the people can sit together, discuss their problems and suggest solutions and plan execute as well as monitor the implementation of the programmes. It is called the crux of democratic decentralization. Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as "the government of the people, by the people and for the people". But, in the present context, people can

participate in the government at the top level only indirectly by electing their representatives to run the administration, but at the lower levels, they can participate directly by identifying their needs and prepare micro-level plans as well as execute such plans. In India, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Jai Prakash Narayan described democracy as the government that gives 'power to the people'. Gandhi said: "True democracy could not be worked by some persons sitting at the top. It had to be worked from below by the people of every village." (Joshi & Narwani, 2011) Nehru also advocated democracy at the lower levels when he opined: "Local self-government was and must be the basis of any true system of democracy. People had got into the habit of thinking of democracy at the top and not so much below. Democracy at the top could not be success unless it was built on this foundation below." (Ibid.) Jai Prakash Narayan also favoured power to the people of the village along with the government at the centre when he remarked: "To me the Gram Sabha signifies village democracy. Let us not have only representative government from the village up to Delhi, one place, at least let there be direct government, direct democracy. The relationship between the Panchayat and the Gram Sabha should be that of Cabinet and the Assembly." (Ibid.) Mahatma Gandhi's vision was that democracy through people's participation could be ensured only by way of 'Gram Swarajya'. wanted Gram Swarajya in villages where there will be a village republic and the management of the village would be done by the people themselves. They would elect their president and common decisions would be taken unanimously by the Gram Sabha of the village. According to Gandhiji's Gram Swarajya, "every village should be a democracy in which they will not depend even on neighbour for major needs. They should be self sufficient. For other needs, where ~· cooperation of others would be essential, it would be done through mutual cooperation. It will be swarajya of the poor. No one should be without food and clothing. Everybody should get sufficient work to meet one's necessities. This ideal can be asset only when the means of production to meet to the primary needs of life are under the control of the people. True swarajya cannot be achieved by power to a few people. People should have the capacity to prevent misuse of power. People have

the capacity to get hold of power and regulate it." (Gram Swarajya, October, 2000) The late Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri, was also opined that only the panchayats know the needs of villages and hence development of villages should be done only by the panchayats. Prosperous people in villages should ensure that powers given to the panchayats are used in the interest of the poor. The panchayats are the foundation of democracy and if the foundation is based on correct leadership and social justice, there can be no danger to democracy in this country. After independence, many functions were included in the State List, consequent to the objective of a welfare state as enunciated Article 38 of Constitution of India. Besides law and order and public administration, many welfare functions like education, health family welfare, transport, social security, agriculture extension, animal husbandry, irrigation and power, urban development, rural development, poverty alleviation and employment generation, population control, pollution control and environment regulation, etc., became the concern of the states. Consequently, many new departments were created, resulting in a huge expansion of the service cadre and bureaucracy. Therefore, it became essential to decentralize the powers, especially relating to the social services sectors and welfare functions. Moreover, it was also necessary to consult people for whom such schemes were being implemented. It was also laid down in Article 40 of the Constitution that "the state shall endow such powers and responsibilities to the Panchayats so as to make them institutions of self-government." (Joshi & Narwani, 2011) In pursuance the Directive Principles also, it was conceived to decentralize powers and functions to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRis). When five-year plans were launched, community development in rural areas was being done through bureaucrats who were not conversant with the local needs of the people. People's participation was missing. The Balwant Rai Mehta Study Team recommended the association of the people's elected representatives for effective rural development, which led to the establishment of Panchayat Raj in 1959. S. K. Dey, the then minister for Community Development, announced that "Panchayati Raj as we now visualize will, therefore, mean progressive increase in competence from the ground upwards and corresponding transfer of

responsibilities from the centre to the ground. Our centre must be relieved of responsibilities which should be discharged by the State Government, the State Government should be relieved likewise, of responsibilities such as can be discharged by the Panchayati Raj Institutions along the line - the Zila Parishad, Pannchayat Samiti, Panchayat, associate voluntary institutions and individual families. Panchayat Raj will, thus, grow to be a way of life and a new approach to government as against a unit of government. will bring about a complete link up of our people from the Gram Sabha to the Lok Sabha." (Joshi, R.P. 1999) In a democracy, the decision-makers should use their powers, as far as possible, with the consent and understanding of all concerned. By way of Pannchayati Raj, people participate more and more in politics and administration. The Key to the success of democracy lies where more and more strength is given to people's elected bodies at the district, block and village levels. At the village level, even the poor people, including the SCs, STs, women and other marginalized section of the community get a chance to participate in the administration of the village. Thus, Panchayati Raj is a system which ensures people's participation at the lowest levels.

2. Guiding Principles for Panchayati Raj (R.P. Joshi, Jaipur, 1999) The credo of Panchayati Raj is :

* Give power to the people.

* Power is about people's participation.

* Build democracy bottom up.

* A waken the collective consciousness of the masses.

* Start with the Gram Sabha.

* Through elected representatives, not bureaucrats.

* Give the feeling of participation.

* Bring about transformation through real devolution of power.

* Teach by showing, learn by doing.

* Plan with people's consensus.

* Work with the people in cooperation.

* Motivate people to strive for their own good.

* Approach with humility and measure of faith.

* Lead the people to achieve their goals.

* Not a show- case but a pattern.

* Not coercion but consensus.

* Not order but participation.

* Not rule but representation.

* Not relief but realizing their potential power.

* Not to conform but to transform.

* Not a piecemeal but integrated approach.

These principles have universal value and the effort to put them into concrete reality, however have met with little success. Panchayati Raj has been no exception in this regions a sustained attempt to relay the goals of democracy at the grass roots level has yielded a vocabulary of suggestions which, if implemented faithfully, can go a long way in

realizing the goals a swarajya. These are, of course, and outcome of researches on experiments with Panchyati Raj during the last four decades and are being outlined here to focus on the basic issues concern across the different states in India since these continue to be the core of the debate on the new Panchyati Raj.

3. History of Panchayati Raj in India The history of Panchayati Raj in India can be divided into the following periods from the analytical point of view: 1. Vedic era 2. Epic era 3. Ancient period 4. Medieval period 5. British period 6. Post-independence period Historically, every village in the country had a panchayat which was responsible for finding the solutions to the local problems within the village itself. Panchayats or the village councils are as old as India's history and have been a part of her tradition. In Discovery of India, Pandit Nehru has provided a fairly exhaustive India about the working of the Village Panchayats in ancient India. Panchayats had vast powers, both executive and judicial. Its members were treated with great respect by the king's countries and the public. Land was allotted by the panchayats.

Vedic Age 'Panch-Ayat' means a group of five persons selected by the villagers. In the old Sanskrit scriptures, there is a word 'Panchayatan', which means a group of five persons, including some spiritual man. But, gradually, the concept of the inclusion of a spiritual man in such groups vanished. In the Rigveda, there is a mention of 'Sabha', 'Samiti' and 'Vidath' as local self-units (Rigveda-X,71,10). Subsequently, the panchayat became a group of any five selected persons of the village at decide village disputes. The concept of 'Panchayat Permeshwar' or 'Panch'- the God' existed in the ancient age. 'Yagna' or sacrifice, to be successful, must be done by five devoted persons as per the Vedic saying. It indicates the pious conscience of Panchas. There is a description of 'Sabha' and 'Samiti', which were the democratic bodies at the local level. The king used to get the approval of the 'Sabha' or 'Samiti 'regarding certain functions and decisions.

Epic Era The study of the Ramayana indicates that administration was divided into two parts- 'Pur' and 'Janpad' or city and village. Villages were]anpad' and the village people were called the 'Janpada'. 'Gram', and

'Ghosh' (village, big village and group of village) are mentioned in the Ramayana. Even in the Ramcharit- Manas by Tulsidas, the welfare of the people has been described as the main object of the ruler. The system of governance was divided into the rule of the king (Raj- Tantra), the rule of the people (Praja-Tantra) and the rule of the wise men (Vidvat-Tantra) or educated and knowledgeable persons. Self-government of a village finds ample expression in 'Shanti Parva' of Mahabharata and Manu Smriti as well as in Kautilya's Arthashastra. 'Sabha' and 'Samiti' played a part in controlling the decisions of the king. As per the Mahabharata, over and above the village, there were units of 10, 20, 100 and 1,000 village groups. 'Gramik' was the chief official of the village. 'Dashap' was the chief of ten villages. 'Vinshya Adhipati', 'Shat Gram Adhyaksha' and 'Sahasra Gram Pati' were the chiefs of 20, 100 and 1,000 villages respectively .There were small and big towns. There was also 'guptachar' (CID) system in towns to search for the offenders. The village heads also protected people against the cruelty of the king. 'Sabha Parva' of the Mahabharata mentions the Gram Panchayats it is not clear whether the Panchas were elected by the people or nominated by the kings. Manu Smriti stresses on organized system of local selfgovernment. Manu has mentioned 'village' as a smallest unit of governance. Units of 10, 20, 100, 1,000 village groups were also groups were also a part of the system of self-government. 'Rakshak' (saviour) was responsible for the village. His function was to maintain law and order. Lower Rakshak owed responsibility to the higher Rakshak.

Ancient Period: Kautilya, in his Arthashastra advised the king to of villages having 100-500 families. There would be centres of 10 villages, 200 villages, 400 villages and 800 villages. These centres would be respectively known as 'Sangrahan', 'Karvatik', 'Drpna Mukh' and 'Sthaneeya'. Town was termed as 'Pur'. Its chief was 'Nagrik'. Local bodies were free from any interference from the king's side. The village headman was designated as Gramik and appointed by the king. He continued to be the most influential adviser to the king who constantly by and large consulted him about rural affairs. Initiative and administrative responsibility in particular was vested exclusively with him. Kautilya sated their rural administration was mainly so designed as to meet

revenue administration needs. The Somaharta was the head of Janapada, primarily responsible for revenue assessment assisted by Sthanik and Gopa who was local leaders, carried out detailed census periodically for revenue administration. Besides revenue assessment and collection, this official enforce law and order showing the revenue, police and magisterial functions were vested together in one hand. (Ram Sharan Sharma, 1959).

Medieval Period During the early medieval period despite the civil strife and unsettlement under the Mohamuddan rulers, the fabric of the Indian economic, social and political life remained largely the same as the Sultan of Delhi did not find it profitable and practicable to interfere with it, leaving it to its own devices - the village communities, thus continued as autonomous unit throughout this period. The most marked Hindu officials, sometimes with their ancient designations, continued to function with little changes in their duties. The administration of the smaller areas and revenue was left entirely hands of the Hindus. (Chach Nanh, WL Kiran, Hasan Kureshi, 1971). During the Sultanate period at the top of hierarchy was the province, divided into districts, further sub-divided into smaller units. The basic unit of the administration was the village self sufficient in functioning. There was a village assembly like the Panchayat of North India in every village it carried on the village administration through its hereditary officers such as the village account, village weight-man, village watch man and the village officer in charge of forced labour. These officers were paid by grants of land or by a portion of agricultural produce. The central administration maintained contact to the village through an officer called Mahanayakcharya who had a kind of supervisory authority over the administration of the village. (A.L. Srivastava, S.L. Agarwal, 1972). The Sultans of Delhi also knew that it would be impracticable to govern a vast country like India from the centre directly. Hence, they divided their kingdom into provinces called 'Vilayat'. 'Amir' or 'Vali' was the head of a province. Management of finance, collection of taxes and selection of judicial officers were under their charge. For governance of a village, there were three important officials. Mukkadam for administration, Patwari for collection of revenues and Choudhrie for decision on disputes with the help of the

Panch. A village was the smallest unit where the management was looked after by Lambardar, Patwari and Chowkidar. Marathas also constituted local self-government institutions in rural and urban areas during the rule of the Peshwas in the Maharashtra area.

British Period : Self-governance was not the objective of the British government their main objective was the protection of imperial interests. It was only with such and objects that the powers were given at the local level more attention was paid to urban administration rather than rural areas. According to, S.R. Maheshwari, the beginning of local government can be presumed from 1687, when the Madras City Corporation was established. The subsequent history can be detailed as follows: a) 1687-1881. Local government established to share the burden of resources of the central and provincial governments b) 1882-1919: Local government was seen as local self- government. c) 1920-1937: Local government was established in the provinces and people's representatives were controlling the provincial administration also. d) 1938-194 7: Local Government was 1n the state of rejuvenation and reconstruction.

1687-1881 In 1687, the Madras Corporation was made responsible for the public services. Besides collection of taxes, civil and criminal matters were also dealt with by it. In 1726, Bombay and Calcutta municipal bodies were established. In 1773, under the Regulating Act, Justice of Peace was appointed in presidency towns. They supervised health and sanitation in these cities. Sir Charles Metcalfe, the Governor General of India (1835-36) called the Indian communities the "little republics". In 1863, the Calcutta City Corporation was formed. The year 1870 was a landmark when Lord Mayo passed a resolution suggesting the decentralization of powers and the necessity of associating Indians in administration.

1882-1919 Lord Ripon carne as the Viceroy in 1880. The Local Selfgovernment resolution, 1882 was the most important act of his tenure. It is regarded as the 'Magna Carta'. Since political education of people starts at the local level, Ripon wanted to develop municipal bodies. Local boards were established in rural areas districts and tehsils were formed. During 1883-85, the local self--government acts were

passed in many provinces. Local boards could be superseded in case of abuse of powers. The British bureaucracy did not think of Indians as mature and experienced enough for local self-government. Hence, Lord Curzon subsequently opposed such liberalism and increased government control over such local bodies. The Royal commission (1909) reported on decentralization paucity of funds and caste and religious disputes were the main obstacles in effective functioning of the local bodies. Many suggestions were given to make the village Panchayats, the sub-district boards and the municipalities more powerful. But, this remained on paper. In 1918, the Montague-Chelmsford report suggested that the local boards be made representative bodies, state intervention should be minimum. They should learn from their mistakes.

1920-1937 Notwithstanding the Montague-Chelmsford scheme, PRis did not become truly democratic and vibrant instruments of local selfgovernment at the level of village, due to constraints- organizational and fiscal. In 1930, evaluation of the implementation of selfgovernment was done by the Simon Commission. It reported that except Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Madras, they did not find any progress the rural areas. The condition of the local bodies deteriorated between 1919 and 1930. During the period between 1920 and 1937, the local boards were elected bodies, chairman were nonofficial persons and more administrative and financial powers had been given to local bodies. Bengal Self-government Act (1920), Central Provinces and Behar Panchayat Act (1920), Uttar Pradesh Village Panchayat Act (1920), Punjab Panchayat Act (1922) and Assam Selfgovernment Act (1925-26) were passed by the native states. The Congress party passed a resolution for self- government in the Nagpur Convention in 1931. Gandhiji also wrote an article in the newspaper.

1937-1947 The Government of India act, 1935 gave powers to the provincial governments. Popular elected governments in the provinces got provincial autonomy and they were duty bound to enact legislation for further democratization of the local self-government institutions, including the Village Panchayats. In almost all the provinces, local bodies were given more functions. Powers to impose taxes were reduced. Thus, the local bodies were organized properly during the British period,

though during the Second World War in 1939, the popular government vacated the office. But, the position of the local self-government institutions remained unchanged till August 194 7, when the country attended independence. Thus, the spirit of democratic decentralization at the village level was existent right since the ancient period. It became more and more organized and took proper shape by the time India became independent in 1947. The Village Panchayats were a part of the ideology National Movement. Gandhiji had given the idea of 'Gram Swarajya': "The Government of the village will be conducted by the panchyat five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, males and females, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications." Gandhiji considered Gram Swaraj to have self-sufficiency in villages where people would be self dependent and have an autonomous self-government. Acharya Vinoba Bhave organized the 'Gram Daan' movement. Many villages were donated. People became masters. There was perfect swarajya. The Gram Sabha exercised all the powers in the village. It is a sad commentary on India's commitment to democratic decentralization that despite the nationalist movement's commitment to panchayat and Mahatma Gandhi's propagation of the ideal, the first draft of India's constitution did not include a provision for panchyats. Dr. Ambedkar opined that villages in India were caste-ridden and had little prospects of success as institutions of self-government. Arguments of those who pleaded for inclusion of Village Panchayat in the Constitution, however, finally prevailed and found place in Article 40 of the Indian Constitution which reads as under: "The state should take steps to organize Village Panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government." (P.M. Bakshi, 1998).

1947-1957 During this era, Mahatma Gandhi's conception regarding the Village Panchayat as the primary grass roots level democratic unit prevailed. People's participation came to be considered as necessary so that India's perception as a welfare state could be fulfilled. According Gandhiji, "greater the power of the panchayat, the better for the people as true democracy." Community Development Program (CDP) was started in 1952 under the major influence of the Etawah Project undertaken by

the American expert, Albert Mayaer. Community development sought to motivate the rural people to take community-based approach for the improvement of the economic and social condition of their life. The government was expected to provide general guidance and technicalcum -financial assistance in some blocks in a phased manner. National Extension Service (NES) was also introduced in 1953, as a prelude to community development in various blocks. (NES 1957) Panchayats at the village level took interest 1n development schemes. The programmes were more or less bureaucratic and excessively politicized. SDO-cum-BDO fulfilled the local demand like road, drinking water wells, panchayat ghar, school building, etc. All schemes were treated as government schemes were treated as government schemes rather than people's programmes.

1957-1961: Complaints of wastage of funds, corruption, malpractices and favoritisms began to mar the public image of the development process. A study team under the chairmanship of Balwant Rai Mehta was appointed in 1956 to critically review the CDP and NES and suggest measures for effecting economy and improving efficiency 1n implementation of schemes. At the same time, the planning commission had already been advocating that village panchayats should be strengthened and given the responsibility for taking over development administration.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. How do you know about the Lessons Learned?

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2. Discuss the Panchayati Raj Systems.

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11.7 LET US SUM UP

The defeat of the Left Front in the West Bengal State Assembly election in May 2011, after 35 years in government, marks a historic break in the development trajectory of West Bengal. Under Left Front rule, West Bengal followed a development path distinct from the rest of India. Though economic growth in terms of growth of the State Domestic Product (SDP) was modest during these years, it was a period characterised by land reform, decentralisation of political and financial power through the panchayat system, and high rates of agricultural growth in the State. As a result of the pro-poor policies implemented by the Left Front government, West Bengal today is characterised by low economic inequality with respect to land ownership and consumption expenditure.

Given the economic and social history of rural development in West Bengal over the last 35 years, the rural development policy of the new State government, led by the Trinamool Congress (TMC), is a matter of substantial public interest. The fact that, during its pre-election political campaign, the TMC received support both from extreme Left groups and from the Congress Party, adds to public interest and curiosity with regard to the policies it is likely to implement.

The new State government, however, is yet to make a clear statement of the development path it intends to follow in the countryside. It has neither revealed its development agenda nor tabled a revised budget in the Legislative Assembly, which would provide a measure of its commitments and priorities.

In the absence of any such explicit statement, the question that arises is: will the TMC-led coalition government seek to undo the past? Will it build on the institutional changes that have so radically transformed the West Bengal countryside, or will it undermine – or reverse – land reform and the panchayat system, as part of its new rural development regime?

Some reports have appeared in the media on these issues. A team of scholars who have recently conducted a study in the districts of North and South 24 Parganas, Bardhaman, and Birbhum, on behalf of the forum Punarba, report clear evidence on the ground of agrarian counter-reform – of an attempt to reverse land reforms in practice.

With respect to the institutional underpinnings of the panchayat system, too, the signs are disturbing. The Bengali newspaper Bartaman reported, on 31 October 2011, that the West Bengal government plans to employ Executive Officers at the panchayat level to implement development programmes. These bureaucrats will have the sole power to sign and release funds on behalf of the panchayat, a power thus far vested in the panchayat pradhan and the Block Development Officer, who is also an ex-officio member of the panchayat samiti or block-level panchayat. Further, these Executive Officers can be hired and dismissed by the State government. The need for this legislation has arisen, according to the newspaper report, because each panchayat has an allocated annual expenditure of Rs 1 crore to Rs 2 crores, and such large sums "cannot" be left to the disposal of elected panchayat members who are, "in many cases, corrupt." Further, under the new system, panchayat members are to be relieved of their financial duties, a move that will ostensibly give them more time to concentrate on the development of their constituencies.

11.8 KEY WORDS

Implementation: Implementation is the realization of an application, or execution of a plan, idea, model, design, specification, standard, algorithm, or policy.

Barga: Operation Barga was a land reform movement throughout rural West Bengal for recording the names of sharecroppers (bargadars).

Panchayati Raj: In India, the Panchayati Raj generally refers to the system of local self-government in India introduced by a constitutional amendment in 1992, although it is based upon the traditional panchayat system of the Indian subcontinent. The recommendation of L.M Singhvi Committee was accepted.

11.9 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. How do you know about the Implementation Process?
2. Discuss about the Operation Barga, Agricultural Productivity and Poverty.
3. Highlight the Driving Factors.
4. How do you know about the Lessons Learned?
5. Discuss the Panchayati Raj Systems.

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11.11   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 11.2

2. See Section 11.3

3. See Section 11.4

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 11.5

2. See Section 11.6

UNIT 12: AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY- LEFT FRONT

STRUCTURE

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After this unit, we can able to know:

- To know the Successes in Agriculture- left front
- To discuss the Industrialization: An Imperative
- To discuss the Welfare Initiatives and Constraints

12.1 INTRODUCTION

The foregoing sections consider various reasons why industry in West Bengal has gone downhill. None of these factors is either irrelevant or trivial. The Left Front has faced hostility from the government at the Center over the decades of its rule in the state. But there is no convincing evidence to suggest that this has hindered investment in the public sector industries in the state. Militant Trade Unionism did scare the business owners in the initial phase. But things have changed remarkably on the labor front. At present, labor unions are the underdogs taking extra care not to offend the management. Production costs are somewhat higher in West Bengal when compared with Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, or Gujarat. Bureaucratic delay is longer in the state relative to its competitors. All

this is true. But there still remains a missing piece of the puzzle. These factors taken together still fail to adequately explain the precipitous decline in the state's share in the country's total industrial production from 13.5% in 1970-71 to a miserable 3.9% in 2007-8! A root cause of this sad demise of industry in West Bengal is total administrative failure that has been spreading like cancer steadily robbing the economy and the polity of its vitality. Responsibility for this anarchy rests squarely on the shoulders of all of the political parties in the state. CPM, Trinamool Congress, the Congress Party, even the minor partners of CPM in the Left Front all must share the blame. Every party calls for a 'Bandh' (general strike) at the slightest pretext in order to pursue its own narrow political goals. Just as the pomp and splendor of the Durga Puja in a locality in Calcutta depends on the fund raising ability of its organizers, the scale and size of a 'Bandh' (whether it will be statewide or more localized within a municipal jurisdiction) depends on the political clout of the party promoting the 'Bandh'. In this regard, CPM and Trinamool Congress are the main offenders. Consider CPM first. Every political party has the right to protest on various issues related to the state, the nation, or the world. Holding mass meetings and leading peaceful processions are perfectly legitimate forms of protest against what the party considers unjust. But no one has the right to disrupt rail, road, and air transportation jeopardizing the normal life of others. What is particularly shameful is that when political rallies are organized by his party blocking traffic in the busy streets of Chowringhee, the Chief Minister feels no qualms to come and address the gathering in spite of the fact that as the executive head of the state he is responsible for maintaining law and order in the city. Obviously, his allegiance is to his party, not to the people of the state. On its part, Trinamool Congress, the chief opposition party in the state, is hardly a model of political restraint! Of late Mamata Banerjee, their fire breathing leader, has eschewed the use of 'Bandh' as a political weapon. This, admittedly, bodes well for the state. But a question remains. Over many years she has resorted to calling 'Bandh's depriving the poor day laborer and others living from hand to mouth of their day's earning. Why did she not care about denying these unfortunate souls of a meager meal at the day's end? Nor

did she stop to think how her truculent politics of the street was antagonizing potential investors and prompting them to give West Bengal the widest possible berth. At that time there was no serious possibility of her becoming the Chief Minister and opposing the CPM on every issue was the sole objective of her political existence. But in the altered scenario of 2011 the Chief Minister's position is for her to lose. Naturally, she has to appear more reasonable so that people are not scared away. Statistics published by the Central Ministry of Labor for the year 2009 show that 6,835,000 man days lost in the year 2008 throughout the nation were unrelated to any industrial dispute. West Bengal alone accounted for 5,854,000 of this national total. This one statistic tells the whole story! The negative effect of party politics on business and industry in the state is hardly limited to 'Bandh's alone. At present the Party acts like a government by itself. In order to set up a factory or to start a new business, one must appease al the three protagonists – the government, the ruling party, and the opposition party. At the local level, neither the police nor the government executive official has the courage to defy the local party bosses. Because of the necessity to rely on the muscle power supplied by the local units to keep the opposition parties on a leash, the party leaders at the top avoid antagonizing the local ruffians within the party. This is a problem endemic to all of the political parties in the state – CPM and the opposition alike. This state of anarchy must end if industry and the overall economy of West Bengal are to revive. The only way out of this chaos is to seize back the administration from the clutches of the political parties. Courts have repeatedly and unequivocally ruled that no political party has the right to block traffic for its own political gain thereby stopping the common man from going to work or restraining the vehicle carrying the critically ill to the hospital. But no political party has deferred to this judgment. Morale of the man on the street is so low that when a political party declares a 'Bandh', instead of defying the self-serving party leaders, people mutely accept that as immutable like an act of the providence like a cyclone from the Bay of Bengal! In the ultimate analysis, failure of governance has turned West Bengal into an industrial wasteland. It is up to the common man to put an end to this anarchy.

12.2 SUCCESSES IN AGRICULTURE-LEFT FRONT

This "walking on two legs" strategy of the Left Front government; implementing land reforms and the establishment of an effective panchayati raj in West Bengal; has not only led to the political empowerment of the rural poor but has also brought about a rejuvenation of agriculture in the State. Since the Left Front came into office in 1977, foodgrains production in West Bengal has grown at the rate of 6 per cent per annum, which is the highest among seventeen most populous States of India. From a food deficit State witnessing famines and food riots during the Congress rule, West Bengal has emerged as a leading food producer in the country under the Left Front rule. West Bengal has emerged as the topmost producer of rice, vegetables and fish among all Indian States. Cropping intensity in West Bengal has increased from about 136 per cent in 1980-81 to about 180 per cent in 2000-01, second highest in the country. This has been achieved through significant expansion of irrigated land area through small and minor irrigation projects. In the backdrop of the neoliberal policies being adopted by the Centre since early 1990s, agricultural growth has slowed down across the country. While agriculture grew at less than 2% in India during the Tenth Plan period (2002-2007), the growth rate of agriculture in West Bengal has been over 3.5%. The Left Front Government has not only been successful in insulating the agrarian economy of West Bengal from the acute agrarian distress currently being witnessed across the country, agricultural production continues to rise in West Bengal even today.

12.3 INDUSTRIALIZATION: AN IMPERATIVE

For most parts of its lengthy tenure, the Left Front government has had to encounter hostile governments at the Centre. There was a conscious effort on the part of successive Central governments, particularly those run by the Congress, to discourage industrialization in West Bengal since it was a Left ruled State. This was done both through a denial of public sector investment as well as licenses for setting up private industries.

During Indira Gandhi's tenure as the Prime minister in the early 1980s, a proposal for setting up an electronics complex in Salt Lake near Kolkata was shot down by the Central government on security grounds, because West Bengal was a border State! Permission for the Haldia Petrochemical project was withheld by the Central government for 11 long years. Moreover, the freight equalization policy for coal and iron ore robbed West Bengal, along with the other states in the Eastern region of India, of its locational advantage of being the most mineral rich region of the country. Following these discriminatory policies pursued by the Centre and the vitriolic anti-Communist propaganda carried out by the bourgeois media, which led to some degree of capital flight, West Bengal experienced industrial stagnation during the decade of the 1980s. Traditional industries like tea, jute and engineering were on a decline. This aggravated the unemployment situation in the State, especially in the urban areas, besides causing hardships for the workers in the sick industries. The need was felt to make special efforts to reverse the trend towards industrial stagnation and re-industrialize West Bengal.

Meanwhile, a big policy shift had come at the national level when the Narasimha Rao led Congress Government adopted the "New Economic Policies" in 1991 following the dictates of the IMF and the World Bank. The neoliberal "economic reforms" initiated by the Central government abandoned the earlier emphasis on public sector investment, devised a strategy of liberalizing and deregulating the economy and laid emphasis on private capital, both domestic and foreign, as the main driver of economic growth. On the one hand these policy changes were clearly in the rightwing direction, which was opposed by the CPI (M) and the Left. On the other hand, it also meant an end to the discriminatory policy regime of the Central government, based upon licensing and freight equalization policy, which had caused enormous harm to the economic interests of West Bengal. It was in this backdrop that the he Left Front government had to devise its industrialization strategy. In September 1994, Comrade Jyoti Basu announced the Industrial Policy of the Left Front government in the changed scenario, which stated: "we are all for new technology and investment in selective spheres where they help our economy and which are of mutual interest. The goal of self-reliance,

however, is as needed today as earlier. We have the state sector, the private sector and also the joint sector. All these have a role to play". Following the adoption of the Industrial Policy, the industrial scenario in the state witnessed a turnaround, with important projects like Haldia Petrochemicals and Bakreshwar Thermal Power plants finally being set up.

This process of industrialization received further impetus after the Left Front government registered its sixth consecutive victory with Comrade Buddhadeb Bhattacharya as Chief Minister in 2001 and subsequently its seventh victory in 2006, with an enhanced majority. During the period from 1991 to 2006 a total number of 1,391 industrial units have been set up in West Bengal with a realized investment of Rs. 32,338.95 crore and creating direct organized employment for 2.03 lakh persons. The number of new industrial proposals in West Bengal is increasing progressively, especially in sectors like Iron and Steel, Chemical and Petrochemicals, Food Processing and Information Technology. Since the thrust of the West Bengal government's industrial strategy is on employment generation, the focus is not limited to big industries alone. The state government has consciously provided policy support to small and medium enterprises, because of which the number of working small scale industries in West Bengal has increased from 19.1 lakhs in 1994-95 to 27.7 lakhs in 2000-01, with employment in small scale industries during this period increasing from 43.8 lakhs to 58.7 lakh. West Bengal now ranks first among all States in respect to both the number of working units and employment generation in the small-scale industrial sector.

Unlike other State governments, which succumbed to the neoliberal prescriptions of the Centre, the Left Front government has followed an independent approach towards industrialization. Rather than following the policy of indiscriminate privatization of public sector units, the Left Front government has sought to strengthen them and earnestly tried to revive sick or closed industrial units. By repeatedly placing its views before the BIFR in the interest of industry and workers, the Left Front government has been able to obtain the sanction of revival scheme in respect of 79 units. Of these, 22 units have already been revived and about 25 more units are likely to be revived. SAIL has recently decided

to invest Rs. 10,000 crore in the modernisation of the IISCO factory at Burnpur, which will be one of the biggest public sector investment projects currently being undertaken in the country. The Central government had earlier decided to privatize this sick unit. It was the protracted struggle waged by the IISCO workers and the principled position adopted by the West Bengal Government, which prevented privatization and has subsequently led to the revival of IISCO. Similarly, Bengal Chemicals, which had become a sick PSU, is being revived with Central investments worth Rs 440 crore. Recently, two public sector units, Coal India Limited and Damodar Valley Corporation have come together to acquire and revive the Mining and Allied Machineries Corporation (MAMC) based in Durgapur, a prestigious PSU that was closed few years ago. Closed units like Jessop and Dunlop have also been reopened.

Some controversy has arisen recently over acquisition of agricultural land for setting up industries in West Bengal, especially in the context of the Tata Motors plant in Singur and a proposed chemical hub near Haldia. While the opportunistic gang-up of the entire opposition, from the ultra-Right to the ultra-Left led by the reactionary Trinamul Congress, has sought to pitch the debate in terms of industry versus agriculture, the Left Front government has repeatedly emphasized the need for a balanced and harmonious development of both sectors. The slogan of "agriculture is our foundation, industry our future", put forward by the Left Front before the Assembly elections of 2006 received wide acceptance among the people.

The Industrial Policy of the Left Front government announced in 1978 gave high priority to small scale and cottage industries in an effort to create employment in industry. Side by side, its stated objective was also to curtail the monopoly power of big business companies (especially the multi-nationals) in the organized sector. The government had to concede that it would not be practicable to eliminate foreign capital from industry altogether. But it declared than no new investment by multi-nationals would be allowed in the state. One should not forget that the Left Front government was locked in an ongoing battle with the Congress ministry at the Center. Memories of devious machinations by the Congress

leadership in Delhi that successfully brought down the Front ministries in the recent past were too fresh for the Front to forget. At the same time the leaders in Delhi had to grudgingly accept that in the changed scenario it would no longer be possible to sabotage the game by moving a few chips. The electoral majority that brought the Front to power practically insulated them from any political mischief designed to bring them down. Mistrust and mutual dislike between the two sides resulted in a continuing stream of bickering and confrontation on every conceivable issue. Hoping for an industrial rejuvenation in the state, the Front government came up with a four-point demand from the Center: (i) more licenses should be granted for investment in the private sector in the state; (ii) government investment in the public sector should be increased; (iii) fund allocated for development in the state should be increased; and (iv) a host of regulations hindering establishment of new industries in the state should be relaxed. Jyoti Basu, the incumbent Chief Minister at that time, even made an effort to mobilize non-Congress chief ministers from a number of other states, to put collective pressure on the government at the Center. In the end, nothing came out of it. In any discussion of the deplorable state of industry in West Bengal, leaders of the Left Front invariably lament over the 'step motherly' attitude of the Center. It is true that in many instances many new projects in the state have been delayed due to procrastination at the Center. The thermal power plant a Bakreshwar is a glaring example where the state had to wait seven years for central clearance. But if the Marxists in West Bengal were hated by Delhi, Jayalalitha of Tamil Nadu was no apple of their eyes either! Then, why did industrial development grind to a halt due to a hostile government at the Center only in West Bengal while Tamil Nadu continued to flourish? There is no statistical evidence to substantiate the claim that the Center has denied the rightful claim of the state in respect of industrial investment4 . In fact, during the period 1960-69 West Bengal was the recipient of 13.8% of investment in the public sector in the entire country. During the same period Tamil Nadu received 7.7% and Gujarat a paltry 1.2%. During 1970-79 West Bengal's share fell marginally to 10.7% while the combined share of Tamil Nadu and Gujarat was 9.7%. During 1980-89 also West Bengal accounted for

10.5%, Tamil Nadu for 7.3% and Gujarat for 3.6%. It is not true, therefore, that the government at the Center maliciously withheld public sector investment in West Bengal. During 2006-07 Gujarat's share was, indeed, much higher (at 13.8%). But in the same year, West Bengal's share was 10.46%. Thus, even though Gujarat succeeded in attracting considerably more resources for public sector investment from the Center, it was, by no means, at the expense of West Bengal. The picture is entirely different in the private sector. In the post-liberalization period during the years 1991 through 2003 one third of all applications for investment in the private sector was for Maharashtra and Gujarat. By contrast, West Bengal attracted only 4.73%. If one considers the amount of proposed investment (rather than the number of applications) the share is even lower (at 3.85%). Moreover, while 55% of the planned investment in Gujarat was actually implemented, for West Bengal the percentage of implementation was 35.4%. Over the period August 1991-January 2003, per capita investment in the private sector was Rs. 20,725 in Gujarat compared to Rs. 1952 in West Bengal. That is equivalent to Rs. 16.60 invested in Gujarat for every rupee invested in West Bengal! In 1978 amounts of per capita industrial investment were Rs.670 for India as a whole, Rs. 805 in Gujarat, Rs. 779 in Maharashtra, and Rs.428 in West Bengal. The 1994 figures were Rs. 9,177 All-India, Rs. 22,776 in Gujarat, Rs.12,385 in Maharashtra, and Rs.4,376 in West Bengal. It is obvious that during the Left Front regime, West Bengal has lagged not only behind Maharashtra-Gujarat but also the nation as a whole. Even if one concedes that hostility on the part of the Central government has hindered industry in West Bengal, there is no denying that private industrialists have shown virtually no interest in starting new business in the state.

In 1994 the Left Front government announced a new industrial policy of the state in light of economic liberalization measures adopted by the Center. The main thrust of the earlier industrial policy framed in 1978 was opposition to foreign and multi-national investment. In the new industrial policy the government declared that it would welcome foreign investment and technology, wherever such investment is mutually beneficial. Priority was also given to domestic private investment in

industry. Of course, safeguarding industries in the public sector in the interest of social justice and equitable distribution remained its top priority. Private investment was to be allowed in the power sector, which had been off limits in the past. In some important sectors within manufacturing projects were to be launched as public-private joint ventures. Infrastructure development was given high priority. In sum, the Left Front government made a deliberate effort to project itself as a born again 'business friendly' government. Side by side with its new industrial policy announcement, the government launched an all out drive to attract industrial investment from foreign and domestic investors through its newly established West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation. Promotional campaigns were undertaken in collaboration with various Chambers of Commerce and industries. Even a full page ad in Wall Street Journal, the ultimate bourgeoisie outlet abhorrent to the Left ideologues, was not spared. The Chief Minister looked towards Thailand-Malaysia in search of foreign capital with some success. Mitsubishi and Chatterjee Soros Fund Management from abroad and Tata Group within the country collaborated with the state in a public-private joint venture at the Haldia Petro Chemical Project. Everyone believed that a high tide has finally arrived in the dried up stream of industry in West Bengal. The golden chariot of prosperity will roll in any moment. But before that the Tata's will come to Singur; the Salim Group will build a fitting International City at Rajarjhat.

In spite of all this fanfare, we find that by 1997-98 West Bengal has fallen even further behind other state in the field of industrial production as shown below:

Table 12.1 Share in Industrial Production and Employment (1997-98)

State	Production	Employment	State	Production	Employment
West Bengal	5.10%	8.30%	Uttar Pradesh	8.70%	7.70%
Karnataka	5.20%	6.30%	Tamil Nadu	10.00%	12.80%
Andhra Pradesh	5.40%	4.70%	Gujarat	12.90%	8.80%

One may argue that a period of only 3-4 years is too short for the beneficial effects of the new industrial policy to become evident. One must wait at least 5-6 years. That it is a fair point. Let's wait a few more years and take stock of the situation in 2001-2.

Table 12.2 Share in Industrial Production and Employment (2001-02)

State	Production	Employment	State	Production	Employment
West Bengal	4.60%	7.00%	Uttar Pradesh	7.00%	6.60%
Haryana	4.70%	3.70%	Tamil Nadu	9.80%	14.10%
Karnataka	5.70%	6.30%	Gujarat	15.30%	9.20%
Andhra Pradesh	6.60%	11.60%	Maharashtra	18.80%	15.00%

There is nothing to suggest that even 6-7 years after the new policy was introduced things were improving in industry in the state. In the post-reform period, a license from the Central government is no longer needed for investment in most industries. However, a formal approval of an application for new investment is still required. But even in that respect, restrictions have been greatly relaxed. The following tables show the numbers of application for and actual implementation of new investment over the last two decades.

Table 12.3 Applications for New Investment and Amounts (1991-2003)

State	Letters of Intent	Proposed Investment (Rs. Million)
Andhra Pradesh	5,875	4,982,040
Gujarat	9,369	7,247,880
Maharashtra	14,411	5,484,260
Tamil Nadu	6,805	2,610,720
West Bengal	4,542	2,915,320

Table 12.4 Investment Applications actually implemented (1991-2003)

State	Letters of Intent	Proposed Investment (Rs. Million)	Employment
Andhra Pradesh	813(13.83%)	197780(3.97%)	158,651
Gujarat	1500(16.01%)	819510(11.3%)	211,795
Maharashtra	1445(10.02%)	364740(6.65%)	235,727
Tamil Nadu	530(7.79%)	138310(5.3%)	82,129
West Bengal	663(14.6%)	306920(10.53%)	110,956

As is apparent from Table 12.3, the number of proposals for investment in West Bengal was even less than half of what it was for Gujarat. In respect of the proposed amount of investment, the state ranked lower than Andhra Pradesh (besides Gujarat and Maharashtra). Of course, what really matters is the number of actually implemented projects rather than the number of proposals. In that respect, West Bengal comes ahead of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. About 10.53% of the funds proposed

for investment actually materialized. But compared to Gujarat, West Bengal came up short both in respect of funds invested and employment generated. But why have investors stayed away from the state even though the Left Front went out of its way to roll out a red carpet to welcome the capitalists instead of raising the Red Flag to chase them away? We have already seen that the militant labor unions of the past have been squarely tamed by newly empowered aggressive management. Hence, the root cause must be lying elsewhere. One should never forget that the ultimate goal of business is to make profits. Therefore, location decision across states is largely driven by their relative cost competitiveness. The four broad factors of production are labor, fuel, materials, and capital (consisting of plant and machinery, building and structures, and working capital). The associated items of expenditure are (a) wages and salaries (including benefits), (b) cost of fuel and power, (c) cost of raw material, and (d) depreciation, rent and repair, and amortization and interest costs. There is a popular belief that that compared to other states labor costs much more in West Bengal. This is not entirely correct. In 2006, labor cost (including wages, bonus, provident fund, and other welfare expenses) per worker was Rs. 472.62 in Maharashtra, Rs. 333.86 in Gujarat, Rs. 313.80 in West Bengal, and Rs. 256.53 in Tamil Nadu. Clearly, high cost of labor is not what has deterred investment in West Bengal. Of course, when one takes all items of expenditure (ad not only labor cost) into consideration West Bengal is decidedly at a disadvantage relative to these other states.

Table 12.5 Production cost (Rs) per Rs 1,000 of Gross Output (sub-period I: 1976-95)

State\Year	1976-77	1980-81	1985-86	1989-90	1993-94	1994-95
Gujarat	786	860	951	880	845	818
Maharashtra	760	796	846	861	814	820
Tamil Nadu	793	828	889	845	797	827
West Bengal	843	877	925	941	871	883

Table 12.6 Production cost (Rs) per Rs 1,000 of Gross Output (sub-period II: 1999-2009)

State\Year	1999-2000	2002-03	2005-06	2006-07	2008-09
Gujarat	802	840	778	801	810
Maharashtra	751	767	734	728	716
Tamil Nadu	795	822	777	771	791
West Bengal	878	860	607	907	794

Two things can be concluded from tables 12.5 and 12.6. First, in first sub-period, average cost in West Bengal was comparatively much higher. In that respect, the high cost in Gujarat during 1985-86 is more of an aberration. Second, during the later period, costs were generally lower. Moreover, towards the end West Bengal has become quite competitive with Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. Hence, production cost does not appear to be the reason why the state has failed to attract investment. It is true, indeed, that Wt Bengal has a slight cost disadvantage. But then, why should investors flock to Gujarat where production is much more costly than in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu?

The question of Singur, Tata-Nano, and Mamata Banerjee inevitably arises at this point. Many will argue that the reason why industrialists shy away from West Bengal going in stead to the 'business friendly' state of Gujarat is hardly a mystery. This is how the story goes.The way the populist committee resisted eviction of farmers and tenants from land designated for takeover by the state for the upcoming automobile factor of the Tatas effectively serves as a banner displaying to the nation the chaotic state and the dismal prospect of industry in West Bengal. The resistance committee actively supported by the cadres of the Trinamool Congress and with Mamata Banerjee in charge succeeded to bring all construction activity at the plant site to a standstill for weeks. No investor can hold on indefinitely under such uncertainty. Ratan Tata, the chief of the Tata Group, is an experienced businessman who knows very well when to pull out instead of incurring further loss. At the other end, Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, is savvy enough to realize

what is good for industry in his state. Little wonder that he readily welcomed the Tata Nano project driven out of West Bengal. This popular perception is not entirely false; nor is it entirely true. It is true, for sure, that a prolonged period of unrest and disruption of work at the construction site caused significant loss to the company. The state government never disclosed publicly the details of the subsidy for land and other concessions that were extended to the Tatas. It is not possible, therefore, to accurately estimate how much the company lost. Nor is it possible to figure out, how much, if anything, did the people of West Bengal lose due their untimely departure. But judging by the royal welcome they received from Modi in Gujarat it would appear that the Tatas were generously compensated for any loss them incurrent for their misadventure at Singur. One can gather from snippets appearing in the media (e.g. Indian Express.com) and other sources that the state government in Gujarat would lend Rs. 97,500 million virtually interest free (at the interest rate of Re 1 per Rs 1,000) repayable over 20 years. Public land worth Rs 11,000 million would be handed over to them free of any stamp duty and other transfer charges. Payment for the land was to be made in 8 installments at 8% interest. Many knowledgeable people (like Malladi Rama Rao, the editor of Asian Tribune) have claimed that the Modi government incurred a loss of Rs 180,000 million in its effort to attract the Tata-Nano project worth Rs 150,00 million to Rs 200,000 million. At the end of the day, the Tatas should actually be grateful to Mamata Banerjee for creating an opportunity for them to pull out of Singur for the greener pastures of Gujarat! The Tata-Nano incident in Singur is an exception. There are few precedents of companies pulling up their stakes halfway through a major project under construction. Never the less, political turmoil can have grave negative impact on industrialization in a state. But there are two other points that must be emphasized before we talk about political hurdles faced by potential investors. First, efficient production at the factories requires infrastructural development. Inadequate transportation leads to delays in the inflow of materials and delivery of the finished products to the customers. Without sufficient and dependable supply of power, machines remain idle. With frequent breakdown of telephone lines, business

operations cannot be carried on. Even when direct production costs are low, lack of infrastructures results in lower profit. A study published a few years back in Economic and Political Weekly constructed a physical infrastructure index based on road and rail transportation, irrigation, per capita availability of electricity , and number of telephones per capita. In terms of physical infrastructures, West Bengal ranked 8th across the different states in 1970-71. In 1980-81 the state fell one notch to the 9th position. But by 1990-91 it had fallen towards the bottom ranking ahead of only one state, Assam. The poor state of infrastructures is a stumbling block on the road to industrial development in the West Bengal. Second, aggravating the problem further is the stifling stranglehold of bureaucratic red tape. In a bold campaign to project its image as 'business friendly', the state government has claimed in pages of glossy brochures and other publicity material that the new 'one window' policy has eliminated the need to run back and forth between a never ending series of counters in government offices in order to launch a new business. But the reality is quite different. Recently World Bank has conducted a comparative study of the difficulty of 'doing business' in a number of cities within India15. Among the 17 cities compared, Ludhiana in Punjab came at the top overall followed by Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh. It is not fair, of course, to compare megacities like Calcutta with much smaller cities like Bhubaneswar in Orissa or Ranchi in Jharkhand. It is much more logical to compare only the metropolitan cities of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. Among these four cities, Ahmadabad stood at the top. Mumbai(Bombay) came next followed by Chennai (Madras). Calcutta came last. A more detailed explanation should be helpful. In starting up a mid-size business, two of the most important bureaucratic hurdles to cross relate to securing a building permit and registration. For both of these one needs to visit various state government departments and the municipal office in order to ensure that the file keeps moving from one table to the next. States vary in respect of the legal requirements and the number of forms that must be completed. Here is how the major cities compare in terms of the average number of days needed to complete the various formalities:

Days Needed	Ahmadabad	Mumbai	Chennai	Calcutta
Building Permit	55	60	45	90
Occupancy Certificate	21	30	15	30
Power Connection	45	10	45	45
Water/ Sewer Connection	30	30	30	30
Total (days)	144	200	143	258

Note: Many of the documents are secured concurrently. The total days include time required for other documents also.

At the next stage, one needs to file for mutation and other recording at the municipal office. Time required at this stage in the different cities are 40 days in Ahmadabad, 44 days in Mumbai, 48 days in Chennai, and 107 days in Calcutta. It is clear that compared to alternative locations, the red tape still holds back potential investors much more tightly in Calcutta.

12.4 WELFARE INITIATIVES AND CONSTRAINTS

The Left Front government in West Bengal has undertaken several pro-people initiatives to ensure all-round development of the State. The Left Front government has ensured significant expansion in the spheres of public education and health. The number of schools in West Bengal has seen a substantial increase in the post-1977 period, with the number of secondary and higher secondary schools registering a fourfold increase, from 4600 in 1977 to over 22,500 in 2006. Accordingly, the number of students appearing for the secondary board examination has increased from a little over 2 lakhs in 1977 to over 7.5 lakhs in 2006. Around 80% of the indoor patients in West Bengal today are treated in Government hospitals. These reflect the commitment of the Left Front government towards human development. The Left Front government has also taken some important steps to provide social security to workers like introducing a provident fund scheme for unorganised sector workers for the first time in the country (nearly 7.9 lakh workers have already joined the scheme so far), providing financial assistance of Rs. 750 per month to workers of closed factories and tea gardens and providing social security

to the construction workers. Another important development in the recent years from the point of view of self-employment in West Bengal is the phenomenal growth of Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The total number of SHGs in West Bengal reached 3.8 lakhs in 2005-06, involving nearly 38 lakh persons, 90% of whom are women. This has opened up new possibilities for employment generation and women's empowerment. When the seventh Left Front government assumed office in 2006, a dedicated Ministry to provide policy support to these SHGs was created.

The Left Front government has also taken positive initiatives to uplift the Muslim minorities, who comprise over 26% of the State's population. The West Bengal Minority Development Finance Corporation, which was formed in 1996, provides training as well as soft loans for self-employment and scholarships for meritorious students among Muslims. The reforms brought about in Madarsa education in West Bengal are also noteworthy, especially the modernisation of curriculum including introduction of vocational courses and computer training and bringing the recruitment of teachers in madrasas under the purview of the School Service Commission. It is significant that 65% of students studying in the madarsas of West Bengal are girl students and 12% of students are non-Muslims.

There is no doubt that much more needs to be done as far as people's welfare is concerned, especially for the socio-economically disadvantaged groups, as has been noted by the West Bengal Human Development Report 2004 or the Sachar Committee Report 2006. The Left Front government has been proactive in taking initiatives to do away with the shortcomings that continue to exist in its developmental effort. For instance, the Left Front government was the first State government to announce a sub-plan for minorities at the state level to implement the recommendations of the Sachar Committee. Several new initiatives have also been taken to improve the quality of public service in school education and public health in order to improve the human development scenario. However, the capacity of the Left Front government to deliver in the spheres of peoples' welfare and social infrastructure have been severely constrained by the limited availability of resources. Unless the resource constraint is overcome, major welfare initiatives cannot be

undertaken. While a part of the additional resources can be generated through internal resource mobilization, much depends upon the direction of economic and social policies of the Central government too. The power to take crucial economic policy decisions in India rests with the Central government and not the State governments.

A search for the possible causes of such reluctance on the part of private companies to invest in West Bengal inevitably leads to the turbulent industrial relations in the state as the prime suspect. In many ways, it is only natural. When a revolutionary party comes to power through elections, it faces the dilemma of acting out its conflicting roles as a party and the government. Its political ideology puts it on the side of the workers in what it sees as a class struggle. At the same time, as a democratically elected government it is responsible for the safety and welfare of every resident of the state. The leader is accountable to the party; the government is accountable to the whole population. There cannot be any 'us against them' consideration in day to day governance. The new Left Front government did initially lend support to militant trade unionism in industry. But before long, it began to promote bilateral negotiations between labor and the management avoiding confrontation. In 1977 there were 397 instances of work stoppage due to industrial disputes. Of them 206 were strikes and the remaining 191were lockouts. By 1980 the total number of major industrial disputes came down to 208 consisting of 78 strikes and 130 lockouts. In fact, in the years that followed, the number of strikes continued to fall. In the year 1991 there were only 21 strikes. By contrast, there were 192 lockouts6 . As is apparent from the data, this time around the Left Front government did not support militant labor movement the way it did in the past. In fact, while number of strikes continued to fall, the number of lockouts increased steadily over time. This shows that management has been much less flexible than unions in settling disputes. The irony is that labor has become increasingly more vulnerable under the present avowedly pro-labor government. It is hard to believe this. In light of what appears to be an endless stream of processions, meetings, and road blocks, the average person will find it difficult to accept that the workers in mills and factories have become worse off than before. But it would be wrong

to conclude that all cases of factory closures and relocation of companies elsewhere in the country are due to labor militancy. There are numerous instances of company failure due to managerial incompetence. Kesoram Cotton Mills and Metal Box are two glaring examples. Hind Motors also seems to be on its last gasp. In reality, the problem is far more complex and one has to think much more deeply in order to fully comprehend the situation. During the 1980s there was a massive retrenchment of labor in organized industry all across the country. West Bengal lost 177,000 jobs, Maharashtra lost 100,000, and Gujarat lost 38,000. Following the economic reforms, thousands of industrial jobs were created anew in different states in the 1990s. But while Andhra Pradesh created 366,000 new jobs, Tamil Nadu created 309,000, Maharashtra 227,000, and Karnataka 206,000, only 91,000 new jobs were created in West Bengal. This means that about half of the jobs lost in organized industry in the state were never recovered7 . On one hand, the state government gave priority to promoting small and medium enterprises at the expense of large industrial houses. On the other hand, countless factories have either closed down or have laid off a large number of workers. In many cases, these experienced displaced workers have themselves started their own factories in small sheds. These small entrepreneurs have emerged as sub-contractors of the bigger factories from which they had been laid off. As a result numerous small industrial establishment in the unorganized sector have mushroomed in West Bengal – especially in the greaterCalcutta area. In the early 1980s, 60% of the industrial output in the state came from the organized sector and the remaining 40% from the small establishments in the unorganized sector. But from 1995 onwards more than half of the total industrial production in the state came from the unorganized sector. While this has helped towards solving the unemployment problem, overall the economic condition of industrial workers has deteriorated drastically. Many people have lost pension, provident fund, and other retirement benefits. As a result, they have been forced to meekly accept many unfair demands by the management. Even in the organized sector, the labor unions have had to accept downsizing through different voluntary retirement schemes. Careful observation will reveal that in many cases the primary objective of militant trade

unionism has been to fight off a competing union in order to establish the monopoly of a union affiliated with a particular political party8 . In factories where multiple unions are present, the most militant of them often came up with a totally unrealistic charter of demands that the management could never accept. In doing this, their main objective was to project themselves as the best champions of the interest of the workers thereby drawing away members from the competing unions. But once they emerged as the only surviving union in the factory, these fire breathing union leaders meekly concede the demands made by the management. Ultimately, the much publicized class struggle of CITU (an affiliate of CPM) and other militant unions is against rival unions rather than against the mill and factory owners. Apart from this, a new trend has started regarding employment in the organized sector9 . Increasingly, permanent workers are being replaced with temporary and contract workers. In many companies, only 30% or 40% of the total workforce are permanent employees. All others are either temporary workers or are employed through a contractor. The temporary workers are actually directly employed by the company. But their employment contract clearly specifies that their employment will be terminated on a specified date in the future. In many cases, such workers are rehired. But that is a new employment contract and not a continuation of the previous employment. As a result, they are deprived of labor welfare benefits based on tenure on the job. A worker needs to be continuously employed for at least 100 days before the individual becomes eligible for Employees, Health Insurance. But if employment is terminated before this period as per contract, the employer escapes having to pay its share of the premium for such insurance. Companies save a huge sum of money through this practice. There is another class of workers who are actually employed by some other agency in contract with the company. Although they work on the premises of the company, they get paid by the contracting agency. Needless to say, the company where they actually work has no obligation for these workers. The labor unions in these companies do not fight for any rights or benefits of these contract workers. Their main objective is to look after the interest of their members who are permanent employees of the company. Not only that.

The unions fully realize that exploitation of the temporary and contract workers will yield higher profits for the firm and will make it that much easier to extract wage concessions from the management. In this new environment it is the mill and factory owners who call the shots while the labor unions make compromises. A tally of work stoppages dues to industrial disputes makes it quite clear. In the year 2003 there were 432 instances of work stoppage. Of them 400 were due to lockouts and only 32 due to strikes. One should not forget that during that year there was one industry-wide strike in the Jute industry. The total number of man days lost that year due to strikes was 1,600,000. On the other hand lockouts resulted in a loss of 25,600,000 man days. Over the years 2001-2006 there were 152 strikes and 2,266 lockouts. In the past, unions would come up with a charter of demands over which the two sides would bargain. In the altered scenario, it is the owners who declare a list of demands effectively on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. If the unions disagree, lockout is sure to follow. In most collective bargaining agreements these days, the management has the upper hand. Here is one example10. In 1994 Berger Paints signed a 5-year agreement collectively with the unions covering all of its factories in and around Calcutta. The agreement explicitly spelt out that employment in all positions not directly related to the production and distribution of the products of the company will be phased out over time. When an employee retires or voluntarily leaves, the company would not be obligated to fill the resulting vacancy. Current employees will not get any priority in future recruitments. Dependents or family members of workers will get a priority in hiring only in the case of death of a worker who is in current employment. In numerous other smaller details, the company has been quite aggressive. For example, as per the agreement no worker can refuse to perform any duty that he is assigned. It even goes on to specify that every worker must clean up own work area and the tools after use. Needless to say, the unions had to accept these terms. This one example should be enough to convince anyone that the days when unions used to dictate terms are over. Hopefully, nobody would still argue that militant trade unionism is the principal reason why private investment has largely shunned the state.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. How do you know the Successes in Agriculture- left front?

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2. Discuss the Industrialization: An Imperative.

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3. Discuss the Welfare Initiatives and Constraints.

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12.5 LET US SUM UP

A big achievement of the Left Front government in West Bengal is its record in safeguarding democratic rights. Notwithstanding the vicious campaigns unleashed against it from time to time by its opponents, the Left Front government continues to remain firmly committed to democratic values and principles. Its impeccable record in upholding secularism, dealing with communal elements with a firm hand and defending the rights of minorities is a welcome exception to the programmatic or pragmatic communalism practiced by the bourgeois parties and the state governments led by them. While dalits and adivasis across the country continue to be victims of caste violence, it is indeed heartening to find that West Bengal has an almost zero rate of atrocities against dalits and adivasis. Born out of the struggles against authoritarianism and State repression, it is the commitment of the Left Front government to democracy, which has won it enormous credibility in the eyes of the people of West Bengal and enabled it to complete thirty years in office.

12.6 KEY WORDS

Agriculture: Agriculture is the science and art of cultivating plants and livestock. Agriculture was the key development in the rise of sedentary human civilization, whereby farming of domesticated species created food surpluses that enabled people to live in cities. The history of agriculture began thousands of years ago.

Welfare: the health, happiness, and fortunes of a person or group.

Initiatives: In political science, an initiative is a means by which a petition signed by a certain minimum number of registered voters can force a government to choose to either enact a law or hold a public vote

Constraints: In mathematics, a constraint is a condition of an optimization problem that the solution must satisfy. There are several types of constraints—primarily equality constraints, inequality constraints, and integer constraints. The set of candidate solutions that satisfy all constraints is called the feasible set.

12.7 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. How do you know the Successes in Agriculture- left front?
2. Discuss the Industrialization: An Imperative.
3. Discuss the Welfare Initiatives and Constraints.

12.8 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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12.9   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 12.2
2. See Section 12.3
3. See Section 12.4

UNIT 13: ROLE OF TRINAMUL CONGRESS IN STATE POLITICS (TMC)

STRUCTURE

13.0 OBJECTIVES

After this unit 13, we can able to know:

- To know the History and Rise of TMC
- To discuss the Role of TMC
- To discuss the Strategy of TMC

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Riding the wave against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the Trinamool Congress (TMC) has started gaining lost ground it ceded during this year's Lok Sabha polls to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The BJP, in the meantime, has launched a counter offensive against the TMC in support of the amendment.

TMC supremo and chief minister Mamata Banerjee has been on the forefront in the political movement against CAA and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), opposing it tooth and nail and has decided to intensify protests against the Act.

Political observer Sabyasachi Basu Roy Chowdhuri said this way the TMC has been able to regain some lost ground by connecting with the masses. If the Centre feels pressurised and opts for changing its course of action, it will be a resounding victory for Mamata.

"For the time being, the TMC is at an advantage. When violence spread earlier, it looked as if Mamata was losing control but soon, she was able to contain the situation. Now, the TMC stands to gain the most," Roy Chowdhuri said.

According to him, while in southern West Bengal, the issue of non-inclusion of Muslims and other neighbouring countries is the primary contention, in northern West Bengal, the ground of opposition to CAA is over rehabilitation.

The Gorkhas and Nepali community in the Hills are suspicious that Hindu migrants will be settled in the Hills, and as a result, they will lose land as well as jobs.

A similar suspicion is being voiced in Assam and other Northeastern states that are opposing CAA.

The TMC, which otherwise had a poor show in the Hills and northern West Bengal, could also benefit in this region with the common opposition to CAA.

In the Lok Sabha polls, the TMC had maintained it will not allow NRC or CAA in West Bengal and opposed the BJP on political and economic issues primarily.

The BJP, promising NRC and CAA, besides alleging deteriorating law and order situation in the state, posted its best tally ever in West Bengal, bagging 18 seats with a 40.25 per cent vote share.

On the other hand, the TMC, despite increasing its vote share by 3.48 per cent at 43.28 per cent in the state, lost 12 seats to the BJP, finishing with 22.

The BJP gained vote share and seats in pockets which had an indigenous Bengali Hindu majority, Hindu migrant belt and areas dotted by the backward class and scheduled caste and tribes.

The TMC gained vote share particularly in Muslim majority constituencies like Jangipur, Murshidabad and Basirhat, among others.

BJP leadership credited polarisation of votes and prime minister Narendra Modi's leadership for its success in the state but political observers noted that the voting pattern was based on the anger against the state administration and anti-incumbency factor.

However, in the Assembly by-elections, TMC defeated the BJP in its own stronghold in Kharagpur Sadar and won the other two Assembly seats of Kaliaganj and Karimpur.

While the TMC credited its leadership, organisation capabilities and support of the people for the resounding victory, BJP leaders clandestinely blamed CAA (then Citizenship Amendment Bill) and NRC for the failure.

However, a systemic wave of violence, allegedly carried out by the minorities, broke out across West Bengal, targeted at the railways, highways as well as government and private property. This left the chief minister worried.

The BJP took the opportunity to blame the state administration for failing to contain the incidents and also put the onus on Bangladeshi immigrants for the violence.

The state's urban development and municipal affairs minister Firhad Hakim warned, "The fight over CAA and NRC is not a fight between the Hindus and Muslims. If the majority community suffers as a result of the actions of a particular community, it will only benefit the BJP. If 70 per cent of the Hindu population vote for BJP (in the forthcoming Assembly elections), they will come to power here."

Dilip Ghosh, Bengal president of BJP, has resorted to a series of "thanksgiving" marches after the Centre introduced CAA.

Political analysts said factors that would determine the political landscape of Bengal include: How the Centre tackles the protests and whether it goes ahead with the CAA.

13.2 HISTORY AND RISE OF TMC

After being a member of the Indian National Congress for over 26 years, Mamata Banerjee formed her own party of Bengal, the "Trinamool Congress", which was registered with the Election Commission of India during mid-December 1999. The Election Commission allotted to the

party an exclusive symbol of Jora Ghas Phul. On 2 September 2016 election commission recognized AITC as a national political party.

Nandigram movement

In December 2006, the people of Nandigram were given notice by Haldia Development Authority that major portion of Nandigram would be seized and 70,000 people be evicted from their homes. People started movement against this land acquisition and Trinamool Congress led the movement. Bhumi Uchchhed Pratirodh Committee (BUPC) was formed against land grabbing and eviction. On 14 March 2007 the police opened firing and killed 14 villagers. Many more went missing. Many sources claimed which was supported by CBI in its report, that armed CPM cadres, along with police, fired on protesters in Nandigram A large number of intellectuals protested on the streets and this incident gave birth to a new movement. SUCI (C) leader Nanda Patra led the movement.

Post-Nandigram/Singur elections

In the 2009 Lok Sabha election, Trinamool Congress won 19 seats in West Bengal.

In the 2010 Kolkata municipal election, the party won 97 out of 141 seats. It also won a majority of other municipalities.

13.3 ROLE OF TMC

For the first time after the formation of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) 22 years back, the party has won the Kharagpur Sadar and Kaliaganj seats and retained its hold over the Karimpur seat in the Assembly by-poll elections.

The opposition BJP drew a blank in all of the three seats which went for the by-polls and lost the prestigious Kharagpur Sadar seat which was vacated after Dilip Ghosh, BJP's state president won the Lok Sabha election from the Medinipur constituency.

The Kharagpur Sadar traditionally had been a Congress bastion with the party posting repeated wins till it was toppled by the BJP in the 2016 Assembly elections by Ghosh. In case of Kaliaganj, the Congress had

won this seat 11 times since independence while the Left Front managed to control it thrice. After the Left Front lost in 2011, its allegiance had been strong towards the Congress till it shifted in favour of the TMC this year.

In total, the TMC's vote share stood at 47.5 per cent while the BJP managed to get a 39.3 per cent vote share and the Congress and the Left Front managed at a distant 7.2 per cent and 3.2 per cent respectively.

"People of all caste, creed, communities and background have voted for us. This is the victory of the people and is on account of our good governance and connect with the people. We dedicate this victory to the people of Bengal. The BJP is getting paid back for its arrogance of power and for insulting the people of Bengal," the state's chief minister and TMC supremo, Mamata Banerjee said.

In the early hours of counting, Prem Chandra Jha, BJP's candidate from Kharagpur was leading while in Kaliaganj, the Congress was the lead party. As the counting progressed, the margin of votes widened and it seemed the TMC will lose both the Kharagpur and Kaliaganj seats. However, not only did the party manage to stage a comeback, but overtook the BJP in both of these seats.

At the end of the counting, the BJP had secured 34 per cent votes in its esteemed Kharagpur seat while the TMC beat the saffron party by having a 47.7 per cent vote share.

"People did not like the BJP's divisive agenda and drawing votes on lines of religion and NRC," the state's parliamentary affairs and education minister, Partha Chatterjee said.

In Kaliaganj, known as a Congress stronghold, the TMC got 44.65 per cent of the total votes while the BJP closed in at 43.54 per cent. The Congress on the other hand, was left red-faced at only 8.6 per cent vote share.

13.4 STRATEGY OF TMC

The National Manifesto of All India Trinamool Congress

Our Vision & Mission

To achieve these goals, we present a pointed Manifesto of our Party.

1. We believe in a United India characterised by its unique diversities.

It is time that a new model be unveiled in which the Unity of India is strengthened while the Diversity of India is fully protected.

2. We believe in a Secular India.

3. The commitment to Federalism in our Constitution has not been carried out in spirit or in practice. Therefore, after 66 years of Independence, the time has come for us to empower the States while the Centre concentrates on its appropriate domain (like foreign policy, defence, etc. for the genuine).

4. A major proportion of our nation consists of Minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and OBCs, many of whom still continue to remain at the margins of our economy, society and polity. They must be empowered and mainstreamed so that they can live with pride and self-confidence.

Similarly, reservation of OBCs in Higher Education, to the tune of 17% has been introduced in Bengal (in addition to the SC, ST reservation). This has opened up the possibility of 94% of the Muslim population of Bengal, to avail Higher Educational opportunities - this, without reducing the seats of the General category students by suitable expansion.

"Safety and security of linguistic minorities will be fully protected.

"A Special Thrust will be given for the social and economic empowerment of Backward Classes - dalits, tribals and OBCs.

"A Special Drive will be given to eliminate the backlog of caste certificates of the SC, ST and OBC communities across India.

"All underprivileged tribal population of the nation will be given a special status equivalent to the BPL.

5. Special thrust will be given to all local languages of our Nation. We have already implemented a policy in West Bengal of recognising languages as official languages in the Districts or Sub-divisions or Blocks or Municipalities as the case may be, where the population of such language speaking people exceeds 10% as a whole. Accordingly, in addition to Bengali, Nepali and Urdu we have also recognised Hindi, Santhali, Oriya and Punjabi languages as an official language as applicable.

6. The women of this nation represent almost half of its population.

"Empowering them in every walk of life in our society, economy and polity is at the core of our thinking for the future.
"A special thrust will be given on empowering the 'Girl Child'.

7. We belief that 'jobless growth' is intolerable and is dangerous for our democracy. Employment generation and growth must go hand in hand, complementing each other. For this, we will rethink our current economic policies. Employment must become the fulcrum of future economic growth, keeping in view India's demographic dividend.

8. Rising prices have hurt all Indians, irrespective of whether they are farmers, workers, white-collared professionals or home-makers. Hence, controlling inflation will be our top priority.
We were deeply troubled by the UPA-II's repeated increases in petroleum and diesel prices, badly hurting the lives of the common people. We were equally troubled by the sudden and irresponsible removal of subsidy on cooking gas cylinders adversely affecting the mothers and the sisters across the spectrum. When we could not tolerate this anymore and our voices of protest were not heard anymore, we chose to withdraw from all the Ministerial portfolios and withdrew from UPA-II altogether to protect the interest of the common man.

Our voices of protest against the withdrawal of subsidy on fertilizers used by our farmers were also ignored. We could not remain in the UPAII government while our farmers suffered every day.

9. At the same time we protested strongly against the policy of introducing FDI in retail, keeping in view the interest of millions of small and tiny retailers spread across the country. Our manifesto clearly opposed FDI in retail and UPA-II was fully aware of our commitment to the people on this matter. But our voices were simply ignored and the vested interest of global retailers was succumbed to by the UPA-II government. When we give a word to the people we strongly believe in upholding it and not betraying the trust of the people. Therefore, on the issue of FDI in retail too, we had to resign from UPA-II. Principles matter to us rather than devious political expediency.

10. Similar was the case on our repeated protests against FDI in insurance. We were equally strong in protesting against the placement of Provident Funds of Employees into the stock market, risking their life savings. But once again our voices were not heard in UPA-II.

11. We repeatedly expressed our apprehension and disagreement on SEZs which had become a land leveraging device for a handful of deceitful businessmen. Once again our voices were not heard and the mistake on this count continued to be made. Today most people agree that SEZs have failed the nation and have become a tool in the hands of a few vested interests and land mafias.

12. We will give a big thrust to Administrative Reforms to make government more accountable to the people. We will universalize and intensify all forms of e-governance in the country to bring further efficiency and transparency in governance.
We will create an e-structure which will monitor the outcomes of all government projects.

We will tighten all timelines of deliverables to the people.

13. To eradicate corruption we will set up Lokpal and Lokayukta in every State.

14. We will deepen the Panchayati Raj System and will give full protection to this important institutional mechanism.

15. We believe in massive comprehensive Electoral Reforms drawing on international best practices so that the corrupt and the criminals do not become people's representatives.
We believe that to reach this goal of corruption-free politics, the time has come for the nation to adopt Government Funding of Elections which is already functioning in many nations of the world, including U.K., Germany, France, Russian Republic, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Thailand, Mexico, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, etc.

16. We believe in major Judicial Reforms, the basis of which must be to bring timely and speedy justice to the poor in particular.

"A Review Committee will be set up for pro-people systemic changes in the Judiciary.

"We will set up Human Rights Courts to deal with all human rights violations.

"We believe that time has come to set up exclusive Women's Courts.

"We strongly believe in setting up Fast Track Courts across the country keeping in mind the delivery of speedy justice in cases of atrocities on women, so that strong punishment is meted out to culprits immediately. Justice delayed is justice denied.

"For this, we will target the appointing of significant number of Judges in the Lower Courts and Higher Courts within a time frame.

17. We believe in 'Health For All' in a time bound manner.

"Comprehensive change in providing health services to each and every village will be at the heart of this 'health for all' programme.

"Mother and child care will be at the heart of 'health for all'.

"Many more maternal care wards will be set up in different district and State hospitals.

"Every senior citizen, below a certain level of family income, will be provided with free medical care.

"Our commitment is to cover every Indian with health insurance on a compulsory basis in a time bound manner.

"Special focus will be given on preventative care and research on traditional medicines.

"A big push will be given to produce significantly larger number of doctors, nurses, paramedics, diagnostic technicians, trained dais, etc.

"A massive emphasis will be given to the entire vertical of health for all with a commitment to spend a significantly higher proportion of the GDP for health care.

18. We believe that one of the drivers of pro-people growth is rural roads. We will target 100% rural connectivity in a time bound manner.

We will also introduce Major Initiatives for Connectivity of All State and District Highways with National Highways.

19. It is a tragedy that drinking water is still not available to the rural people after sixty-six years of Independence. We propose to cover 100%

of the population with safe drinking water in a time bound manner. Our effort will include appropriate technologies for providing safety and purity of drinking water, with a special thrust on the rural population.

We will create a Special Initiative for providing safe drinking water to all arid areas of the nation and those with special problems like salinity, arsenic, fluoride etc.

20. National Yuva Vista will focus on the youth of the country and produce a comprehensive and time bound Plan of Action to cover rural youth and urban youth across India.

21. A Talent Bank will be created for the youth for exchange and sharing of ideas, cutting-edge research and employment opportunities in the knowledge domain, also covering the Indian youth living abroad.

22. A massive emphasis needs to be given to the entire vertical of primary schools, secondary schools, vocational institutes, colleges and Central Universities with a commitment to spend a significantly higher proportion of the GDR

An Expert's Committee will be set up for an employment oriented Educational Policy in the country.

"New Central Universities of high quality will be set up across the country within a time frame.

"New All India Medical Institutes will be set up in all of the 4 regions of the country within a time frame.

"Madrasahs will be empowered and mainstreamed as per their own requirement.

"A nationwide programme of Long Term Educational Loans for Students will be put in place drawing on global best practices.

23. For the General Category of people in our Population a new scheme will be created for the economically backward population within the general category.

This scheme will address their needs of housing, education, health, skill development and employment. We will also provide special interest subsidy for educational loans for the youth of the General Category Population and also support their entrepreneurial development.

24. We will create a National Cultural Development Council which will work with each and every State to generate and stimulate local and traditional cultures of the States.

"The artists and folk performers, particularly at the rural level, will be provided with a stipend and medical insurance as we have successfully done in West Bengal.

"The regional cultural activities like regional films, theatres, jatras, etc. will be given a special push.

25. Backward Districts across the nation will be given special focus for suitably empowering and mainstreaming them.

26. The hill people of our nation need a helping hand. In addition to the '7 Sisters' and the other 3 Hill States of North India, a Special Scheme will be introduced for the remaining Hill People, including those of Darjeeling.

27. Despite a special financial dispensation for the North-Eastern States of India, their growth and development has not been satisfactory specially Tripura, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Sikkim. We will strongly focus on real, sustainable, people centric and environment friendly development of the North-Eastern States which have over 66% of forest cover, huge hydel

power potential, major agroprocessing opportunities, traditional textiles capabilities, massive tourism potential, etc. and is also the Gateway to ASEAN Nations and can be the Gateway to the Look East Policy.

28. In the State of Jharkhand, the upliftment of the downtrodden people and the development of Jharkhand as a whole is not at all encouraging. Special focus will be given on the growth and development of the state in all spheres for suitably mainstreaming them.

29. Tourism is an employment intensive sector which employs people from all segments of society. In order to further stimulate tourism we will give Industry Status to the Tourism Sector and launch a National Tourism Initiative. The objective will be to strengthen current tourist destinations, develop new tourism destinations across the country and significantly strengthen the tourism infrastructure of our nation including Rural Tourism.

30. We will give top priority to the growth and development of the agricultural sector, allied services, fisheries and animal husbandry.

"We will ensure that farmers get an appropriate procurement price for rice, jute, wheat, etc.

"We will create a major Farmers Productivity Initiative to increase productivity of farmers exponentially.

"We will give a special focus on production, distribution and research of high quality seeds for farmers.

"We will also focus on crop diversification and multi-cropping to bring higher incomes to farmers.

"A fresh credit policy will be created for the farmers.

"Small farmers who have taken loans and are unable to repay them will be considered for a National Loan Waiver Scheme of the Government.

"We will implement a village centric and people centric policy of industrialization of the agricultural and allied services sector to combat rural unemployment.

"A New Scheme will be created for Skill Development and Educational Opportunities for the Children of the Farmers of our nation, with a futuristic and integrative vision.

"We will create a Landless Labour Livelihood Initiative.

"An integrated policy on the development of coastal and inland fish cultivation will be formulated to bring about a significant and sustainable growth of this sector. Welfare of the small and marginal fishermen will be kept in view.

"The National Livestock Policy will be reviewed and restructured keeping in view the interests of the farmers and small livestock growers of the country.

31. We will formulate and implement a National Policy for the Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises. This will be a key driver for generating employment and entrepreneurship at the grassroots level.

32. The time has come for the formulation of a holistic and sustainable Industrial Policy. A thorough review of the current manufacturing policy is also called for. We will frame a National Industrial Policy keeping in view employment generation potential in manufacturing, mining, power sectors and engineering.

33. A new forward looking IT Policy focusing on both software and hardware will be put in place keeping in view the fast changing global technologies.

34. A special thrust will be given for the mainstreaming and empowerment of the entrepreneurs of the Unorganised and Informal

Sector while ushering in welfare measures for the workers of this major area.

35. Labour Friendly Laws will be created through a High Powered Committee which will also have representation from various stake holders.

36. Nature has been tortured for many years. Therefore, eco friendly and people friendly Environmental Law will be developed.

37. A New Forward Looking Motor Vehicles Law will be created, given the quantum growth of motor vehicles in the country in recent years.

38. It is our objective to create an infrastructure and communication network vertically from village to district, district to State and State to the National, using cutting edge technology.

39. A major Highway Corridor Project will be initiated on a Mission Mode basis, connecting the North to the South and East to the West - Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Kohima to Dwarka. This North South East West Corridor will be called the 'Four Sisters'.

40. With an objective of creating a holistic, sustainable and forward looking reform in the Indian Railways, the VISION 2020 document which was formulated in the year 2009 and tabled in the Parliament, will be further enriched and fully implemented.

41. We will launch Water Transportation Corridors for Rivers to utilize their full potential for cargo transportation, tourist cruises and heritage tourism. These would include the rivers of Ganga and Hooghly, Brahmaputra and Teesta, Brahmani, Mahanadi, Krishna, Godavari, Narmada, Riverine Sunderban Delta, the Backwaters of Kerala and other such rivers and water-bodies across the country.

42. A new people friendly, industry friendly, environment friendly and employment friendly PPP policy will be put in place to augment government's investable resources.

43. A new National Investment Policy will be formulated keeping in view employment intensity, productivity and appropriate technology.

44. IPC and CrPC which were created in the colonial era will be revamped in the modern context. Stringent laws will be framed keeping in mind atrocities against women.

45. The Land Acquisition Act will be amended such that the legitimate interests of farmers will be fully protected. We have passed a Land Act in West Bengal which totally eliminates any scope for forcible acquisition of land by the government or any private entity.

46. We will not allow any forceful acquisition of land in the country.

47. A New Land Bank and Land Use Policy will be put in place.

48. New Forest Law will be enacted. Rights of Tribal people and forest dwellers will be restored.

49. New Energy Policy will be implemented with a target of 'Electricity for All'. All villages of India will be electrified in a time bound manner.

The New Energy Policy will also focus on issues relating to natural gas, thermal and hydel power, CBM and all forms of non-conventional sources of energy.

50. Development of Modern Infrastructure across the country will be given the highest priority.

51. An action plan will be formulated on Rainwater Harvesting and Water Distribution for domestic use and irrigation.

52. New Education Policy with a focus on employment orientation will be implemented.

53. A mechanism will be devised through which black money will be identified and unearthed from wherever it may have been parked, including those in foreign banks.

54. Tough laws will be made against adulteration of foods, fuels, medicines, etc. to save the common people.

55. A New Law will be formulated for the judicious use of natural resources.

56. A judicious Tax Policy will be brought in place that keeps in view the interests of the common people. We support the introduction of the GST on condition that there is a consensus among all States on the nature of the GST to be introduced. Interests of States cannot be trampled on this matter.

57. We will implement 'Banking for All' such that there will be NO unbanked villages in the country. Financial empowerment must reach the grassroots level using Post Offices as an instrument of financial inclusion.

58. A fresh, holistic and sustainable policy will be formulated on Urban Development with clear plans of decentralization of urban facilities. A focus will be given on solving the problems of the urban poor.

59. A new Foreign Trade Policy will be introduced which strongly supports the growth of exports from India, particularly those from Small & Medium Enterprises which tend to be labour intensive.

60. We are emphatic that bifurcation of States in India can take place only after such proposal is cleared by the concerned State Government.

61. Our Foreign Policy with all countries including the neighbouring countries will be guided by the following:-

"Peaceful co-existence with all.

"Self-interest of our nation.

"Greater promotion of social, economic, technological and cultural ties with all nations.

"Resolving territorial or other disputes through talks and negotiations.

"The World must be looked upon as one single family.

62. Our Defence Policy will be guided by the following:

"National Security will be upper most.

"A corruption free and transparent procurement policy for all defence equipments through e-tendering and other transparent e-processes based on full integrity. More efforts will be made on self-reliance and indigenous production.

"Emphasis will be spread equally for proper maintenance of defence assets on the basis of regular checking and monitoring mechanism and also for fresh acquisition on need basis.

"A proper plan of action for recruitment of defence personnel and taking full care of the welfare of the defence personnel and their families at all times is our imperative.

This 'people centric', 'development centric', 'growth centric' and 'employment centric' manifesto, covering the empowerment of all weaker sections of our great democracy, including SC, ST, OBC, Minorities, economically disadvantaged among the general category, will lead to a RESURGENT India.

It will bring back the moral fibre of the Nation. It will create a strong India, a just India and a dynamic India that will hold its head high once again in the comity of Nations.

"Therefore, a Special Thrust will be given for the social and economic empowerment of Minorities. A shining example of this comes from the sincere action taken in West Bengal regarding the reservation of OBCs which has, in turn, led to the inclusion of a large number of minorities within the reservation category. 17% of the population of Bengal fall under the OBC category. By implementing reservation for these OBC communities, 94% of the Muslim population of Bengal has been covered, who can now avail the benefits of reservation under the OBC category.

West Bengal (WB) is the third largest state in India, with 42 seats in the Lok Sabha after Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Maharashtra, which have 80 and 48 seats, respectively, in the lower house of India's parliament.

West Bengal is also a state that has witnessed political stability and a system of rule by one dominant party over the last four decades. Such stability and party dominance was not provided by any of the big national parties, such as the Indian National Congress (INC) or the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), but instead by the smaller national parties and regional players – first by the Left Front (led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [(CPI)M]) from 1977 to 2011 and then by the Trinamool Congress from 2011 onwards.

The Trinamool was a state party from 1998 to 2016. Since September 2016, the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) has been recognised as the seventh national party by the Election Commission of India (ECI) along with the BJP, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the CPI(M), the CPI, the INC and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Trinamool as a regional party aims to play a decisive role in the formation of an alternative government at the centre

In the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections of 2019, a new AITC logo has been showcased in propaganda campaigns, posters and party manifestos. The new logo focusses on the single word 'Trinamool' (meaning grassroots) and drops the word 'Congress' – even though the party is

still registered as AITC with the ECI. Thus, two decades after the original split from the INC, the Trinamool has consciously and symbolically distanced itself from its parent party.

Over the last four decades, the big national parties have been unable to have any major impact in West Bengal. In fact, from the 1998 Lok Sabha election onwards and in all subsequent parliamentary and assembly elections, the big national parties have always been relegated to third or fourth place in terms of vote share.

Ever since the late 1990s, the main political battle has been fought between the CPI(M)-led Left Front and the Trinamool. In this respect, West Bengal is very similar to politics in Tamil Nadu (TN), where the big national parties have been marginal players in the state for almost five decades.

The story of political stability in West Bengal anchored by small national parties has effectively led to a different electoral system operating there that has been mostly immune to the political appeal of the big national parties. The consolidation of the Trinamool in the state has been taking place since 2009, with increasing levels of support for the party in successive elections (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Vote Share and Seat Share of the Trinamool in West Bengal, 2009–2016

LS: Lok Sabha; VS: Vidhan Sabha; Source: Election Commission of India

In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal, for the first time, the Trinamool contested without being an alliance partner of either the BJP or the Congress and won 34 of the 42 seats. The Trinamool achieved its success with a regionalist agenda and without being part of any major political alliance.

The trend of increasing support from the poor and the Muslims for the Trinamool can be noticed in the 2016 assembly election. According to the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) post-poll survey data for 2016, the Trinamool was able to increase its support base among the poor from 21 per cent in 2006 to 52 per cent in 2016. Similarly, among Muslims, it enhanced its support from 22 per cent in

2006 and 35 per cent in 2011 to 40 per cent in 2014 and 51 per cent in 2016.

Moreover, the popularity of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee among significant sections of the electorate and the increasing support of women voters (as high as 48 per cent in the 2016 assembly election) have been essential factors for the consolidation of the Trinamool. Keeping an eye on the increasing support of women for the party, the Trinamool has also fielded 41 per cent of women candidates in West Bengal for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The Trinamool-led West Bengal government has been giving various kinds of assistance to the poor, among which four welfare schemes have ensured high levels of popular support: Khadyasathi (rice and wheat at INR 2 per kilogram), Sabooj Sathi (free bicycles for schoolchildren), Kanyashree (cash incentives to girls for continuing school education) and Yubashree (financial assistance to unemployed youth).

In the context of an impending agrarian crisis in rural Bengal and farmer indebtedness, these welfare schemes have ensured a solid rural support base for the Trinamool. Such government assistance has helped the Trinamool to manage considerable sections of non-corporate capital and the informal sector labour force.

Moreover, the CSDS 2016 post-poll survey suggests that voters think the performance of the Trinamool-led government has been much better than that of the Left Front in three respects: the condition of the roads, the electricity supply, and the supply of drinking water. My own fieldwork in South 24 Parganas, Malda and Burdwan districts between 2014 and 2018 likewise found that people are satisfied with these visible developments.

Today, the Trinamool has transformed itself from being a party articulating a centre-right political agenda as during its proximity to the BJP in the 1998–2006 phase into a party and leader espousing centre-left populist politics, dating back to the Singur agitation following the 2006 assembly election. The Trinamool's hands-off policy on Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and land acquisition as well as its opposition to foreign direct investment (FDI) in retail, demonetisation and the rapid

implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) all indicate that the party's main focus is on its prime constituency in the informal sector. Simultaneously, the Trinamool's anti-centre politics – demanding more powers for the state, opposing the centre's decision to cut interest rates for bank savings schemes, and also opposing the delay in funds being disbursed by the central government for several welfare schemes – has plenty of traction among the electorate of West Bengal.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Trinamool as a regional party aims to play a decisive role in the formation of an alternative government at the centre. It has the precedent of the Left playing such a role in the Lok Sabha elections in 1989, 1996 and 2004.

The political articulation of regional populist parties with a federalist orientation is one among several possibilities for a new political discourse in twenty-first century India, as I have argued in the epilogue to my recent book. However, we shall have to wait until 23 May 2019 to see whether the Trinamool's objective to form an alternative national government at the centre comes true.

Our nation's youth is the driving force for tomorrow. We all have certain responsibilities which we must acknowledge and start practicing. Let's recall 1947 – the last time we decided to 'do or die'. As a result, we shook off the shackles from the British rule and gained independence which changed the world map. Today, the eyes of the universe are on us again. We are considered the largest democracy in the world (on one side) and a nation where a majority of the population below 35 elects a majority of people above 60 to power. Strange, but true.

Should it not bother or disappoint us that at an age where people generally take retirement and rest, our politicians actually become eligible to be at the helm of affairs. This must stop. A state or a country cannot think of creating tomorrow with yesterday's ideas. We need young people who personify energy, enthusiasm, integrity, conviction and diligence.

Today, young people and students are advised by their parents to refrain from joining the current political system. But do we ever consider how to change the political scenario? How to make it clean? Who will take the responsibility? The youth can do so, if they are given the opportunity and

the guidance. Instead of blaming the political system and the bureaucracy, we must come together and mould the nation for a better tomorrow. At this age, we all are strong, defiant and passionate. Let us choose our respective roles, get up and act appropriately. After all, "You are young only once. And if you work it right, then once is enough!"

Why was demonetisation carried out? To serve whose interests? We want a judicial probe monitored by a former Supreme Court judge

Our aim is to generate employment for youths and students. We are proud to say we have reduced unemployment by 40% in Bangla

Every vacant seat for SC/ST/OBCs must be filled

Economic security of farmers and ensuring their livelihood must be ensured. We will see to it that farmers do not have to sell their products at low price. Social security of the workers in the unorganised sector must be taken care of. We will lay special emphasis on the empowerment of women

The basic idea behind the GST was initially completely different. But the way the Central Government implemented the GST, it did not benefit anybody from the small business to the general consumer. So, the GST will be reviewed so that the public, buyers and small and medium enterprises benefit from it.

We want 100 Days' Work to be increased to 200 days, and their daily wages to be doubled. This will ensure their livelihood and improve their quality of life. We will try to ensure employment and double the labourer's wage.

To further strengthen the federal structure, a new model of Planning Commission will be established. Continuous communication with the States will be maintained. The Planning Commission will become the focal point of development.

To create better social infrastructure, we will increase investment in education and health sectors.

We will lay stress on science, research, economic progress, agriculture, industry and service so that there are new investments and holistic development of the country

We will encourage sports and all cultural thoughts for the betterment of the people of the nation.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. How do you know the History and Rise of TMC?

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2. Discuss the Role of TMC.

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3. Discuss the Strategy of TMC.

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13.5 LET US SUM UP

The ruling Trinamool Congess on Friday decided to continue its protests against CAA and NRC and will make it the party"s main poll plank in the coming civic polls in West Bengal.

The civic polls will be held in 107 municipalities across the state and in Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) in April-May 2020.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Friday held a closed door meeting with party functionaries during the day and discussed TMC"s strategy for the civic polls.

According to party sources, during the meeting Banerjee, who is the TMC supremo, asked its leaders to intensify campaign against NRC and CAA across the state and reach out to the people with the developmental work it had done in the last eight years.

"It has been decided that our protest against CAA will continue till it is revoked. We will carry out door-to- door campaign against both CAA and NRC and will be our poll plank in the coming civic poll," said a senior TMC leader on condition of anoynymity.

TMC is at the forefront of the opposition to the contentious CAA, proposed NRC and the NPR.

The party has already conducted a survey to assess its support base and the penetration of BJP in the state. The survey will play a key role in adopting strategy and in the selection of candidates for the civic polls, the sources said.

The civic polls, in which about 60 per cent voters of the state will be eligible to take part, are being tipped as the "mini assembly election" ahead of the crucial 2021 state polls.

The polls have assumed significance as the BJP has emerged as a tough challenger to the ruling Trinamool Congress by making deep inroads in the state and pushing the opposition Congress and Left Front to distant third and fourth spots respectively.

TMC secretary general Partha Chatterjee said the party will organise human chains in various parts of the state to protest against the contentious law.

13.6 KEY WORDS

Assembly: The Assembly demoparty is a demoscene and gaming event in Finland. The main organizers of the event are Pekka Aakko and Jussi Laakkonen. The Summer event takes place every year between late July and early August, and lasts three to four days, and the Winter event is held in January or February.

Election: The Election Commission of India is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering election processes in India at national, state and district level.

13.7 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. How do you know the History and Rise of TMC?

2. Discuss the Role of TMC.

3. Discuss the Strategy of TMC.

13.8 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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13.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 13.2
2. See Section 13.2
3. See Section 13.3

UNIT 14: CURRENT DEBATES ON STATEHOOD DEMANDS

STRUCTURE

14.0 OBJECTIVES

After this unit, students should able to understand:

- To know Current Debates on Statehood Demands;
- To discuss the Concept of Separatism ;
- To know the Impact of Separatism and Regionalism;
- To discuss the Politics of nationality and the Gorkha statehood movement.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Initially, the linguistic states were formed which predicted that unification of the people speaking the same language as a geographic region under one state ,would paved the way for equal and rapid development of the states. However, the expectation of uniform development could not be satisfied in some of the states. As a result, demands for creation of new states started being made with greater enthusiasm. These demands of smaller states in have the following features:

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a) The region, where demand for a separate state was being claimed had a distinct culture of its own; it was further beyond the language of the state. Consequently, the region needed a separate state of its own in order to protect its distinct culture.

b) The demand for a new state was raised in the context, where one region was more backward than rest of the state and the rulers of the state were failed to provide proper attention to the development of the region. Thus, the region demands a separate state in order to promote its own development.

c) The demand for a separate state was being claimed, where the region was more developed than rest of the state. As a result, higher revenue from the region was spending on other regions of the state, thereby denying this region meanwhile the right share of its development. Therefore, demand was made that the region needed a state of its own in order to further its own development.

At present the demands for separate statehood both present and past share a number of characteristics like Language, control of resources and, preservation of culture and identity. In Modern days India is being asked to change the position of federal system into smaller units that encourage local-based politics. Nevertheless, what is the different from past claims for separate state is the expected outcome of these contemporary demands for new states. This is because of the initiative NDA (National Democratic Alliance) government formed three new states in 2000, which increased hopes for more demands for statehood. Moreover, the Congress party announcement in case of Telangana in 2009 also in the same way created hopes among the people to agitate for few smaller states.

14.2 CURRENT DEBATES ON STATEHOOD DEMANDS

- Modern states are large and complex with several cultural and economic problems and historical experiences add complexity to their problems.

- Since independence Indian state has to deal with the demands of separate statehood largely based on language, culture, ethnicity, religion etc.

- Later the basis for separate statehood demands were largely shifted to better governance and greater participation, administrative convenience, economic viability in the developmental needs of sub regions.

- The very beginning of 21st century in India also witnessed the creation of three new states- Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand and more recently Telangana got the separate statehood.

- As democracy takes firm roots such aspirations also grow. The hitherto neglected sections of the populations realise their own importance, demand new provinces or states want new borders and secure autonomy.

History

- In the 1950's there was urging demand in the people, especially in the Telugu speaking population, for reorganisation of states on lingual lines. Potti Sreeramulu started indefinite fast for supporting his cause of states reorganisation.

- His death on 56th day of fast resulted in widespread violence and the government was forced to constitute a State Reorganisation Commission. In 1953, the first state of Andhra Pradesh was created on basis of language.

- On the basis of the recommendations of State Reorganisation Commission in 1956, 14 states and 6 UTs were created.

- The chronology of states' bifurcation in India after 1956:
- 1960 - Bombay state split into Maharashtra and Gujarat
- 1963 - Nagaland carved out of Assam
- 1966 - Haryana and Himachal Pradesh carved out of Punjab state
- 1972 - Meghalaya , Manipur and Tripura were formed
- 1975 - Sikkim became part of Indian union
- 1987 - Goa and Arunachal Pradesh became states (earlier these were UTs)
- 2000 - Uttaranchal (out of UP), Jharkhand (out of Bihar) and Chhattisgarh (out of Madhya Pradesh) were formed
- Telangana (out of Andhra Pradesh), when it was eventually created in 2014, became India's 29th state.

Various Statehood Demands in India

- **Vidarbha:** It comprises the Amravati and Nagpur divisions of eastern Maharashtra.

- The **State Reorganisation Act of 1956** recommended the creation of Vidarbha state with Nagpur as the capital, but instead it was included in Maharashtra state, which was formed on May 1, 1960.

- Backwardness of region due to the neglect of successive state governments, is justified as the basis for demand of separate state of Vidarbha.

- **Delhi:** 69th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1991, inserted Article 239AA in Indian constitution which grants Special Status to Delhi among Union Territories (UTs).

- The amendment does not provide Delhi with the recognition of a full fledged state as Public Order, Police & Land in NCT of Delhi fall within the domain and control of Central Government.

- To gain the control of such substantive powers, Delhi government is aspiring for full statehood.

- The question of the division of Uttar Pradesh into four states was a major poll issue during the build up to the 2012 UP Assembly Elections.

- In 2011, then UP Chief Minister and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief, Mayawati, passed a resolution in the Assembly to split UP into

four smaller states – **Purvanchal, Bundelkhand, Awadh Pradesh** and **Paschim Pradesh** – in the interest of providing better administration. The resolution later got stuck with the Congress government at the centre.

- Historically, the state comprised provinces that were collectively called 'The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh'. This was shortened by the Government of India Act 1935 to United Provinces and was later renamed Uttar Pradesh (as the term 'province' didn't fit in with the idea of Republic).

- In 1955, Ambedkar proposed the idea of splitting UP into three states – through his book, 'Thoughts On Linguistic States'.

- He suggested the creation of three states, with Meerut as the capital of the Western Region, Allahabad as the capital of the Eastern Region and Kanpur as the capital of the Central region. This is what the BSP had in mind while proposing the split in 2011.

- **Harit Pradesh:** It consists agriculturally dominated districts of Western Uttar Pradesh.

- **Purvanchal:** It is a geographic region of north-central India, which comprises the eastern end of Uttar Pradesh state. It is bounded by Nepal to the north, Bihar state to the east, Bagelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh state to the south, the Awadh region of Uttar Pradesh to the west. Purvanchal comprises three divisions – Awadhi region in the west, Bhojpuri region in the east and the Baghelkhand region in the south.
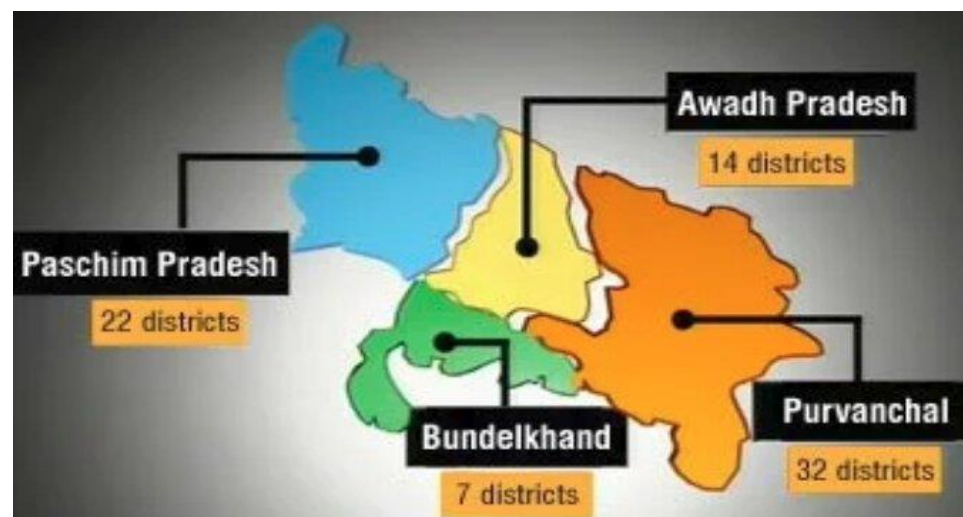
- **Bodoland:** The Bodos are the largest ethnic and linguistic community in northern Assam. The agitation for the creation of a separate Bodoland state resulted in an agreement in 2003 between the GoI, the Assam state government and the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force. According to the agreement, Bodos were granted the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), within the State of Assam under Sixth Schedule.

- **Saurashtra:** The movement for separate Saurashtra state was initiated in 1972 by Ratilal Tanna. Lack of better water supply to the region, lack of job opportunities and subsequent youth migration have been cited as major reasons for the demand of statehood. Saurashtra is also linguistically different from the rest of the state.

- **Gorkhaland** is a proposed state covering areas inhabited by the ethnic Gorkha (Nepali) people, namely Darjeeling hills and Dooars in the northern part of West Bengal.

Constitutional Provisions

- Indian constitution empowers the Union government to create new states out of existing states or two merge one state with other. This process is called reorganisation of the states.

- The basis of reorganisation could be linguistic, religious, ethnic or administrative.

- Article 3 provides the following procedure:

  o Presidential reference is sent to State Assembly.

- o After presidential reference, a resolution is tabled and passed in Assembly.
- o Assembly has to pass a Bill creating the new State/States.
- o A separate Bill has to be ratified by Parliament.

Reasons for Demand

- All these demands are from regions which are poor in spite of being rich in natural resources and disputes exist over sharing and utilisation of natural resources with the mother states.
- Linguistic and cultural reasons, which were the primary basis for creating new states in the country, have now become secondary in most of these cases.
- Other factors being:
  - o Competition for local resources.
  - o Government negligence towards certain regions
  - o Improper allocation of the resources,
  - o Difference in culture, language, religion, etc.
  - o The economy's failure to create enough employment opportunities
  - o Popular mobilization and the democratic political process is also one of the reasons.
  - o 'The sons of the soil' sentiments

Issues Arising due to creation of New States

- Different statehood may lead to the hegemony of the dominant community/ caste/ tribe over their power structures.
- This can lead to emergence of intra-regional rivalries among the sub-regions.
- The creation of new states may also lead to certain negative political consequences like a small group of legislators could make or break a government at will.
- There is also possibility of increase in the inter-State water, power and boundary disputes.
- The division of states would require huge funds for building new capitals and maintaining a large number of Governors, Chief Ministers, Ministers and administrators as the case in division of

Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (establishment of new capital at Amravati).

- Creation of smaller states only transfers power from the old state capital to new state capital without empowering already existing institutions like Gram Panchayat, District Collector, etc. rather diffusion of development in the backward areas of the states.

Way Forward

- Economic and social viability rather than political considerations must be given primacy.

- Parent states that lose out in terms of physical and human capital may be adequately compensated.

- There should be certain clear-cut parameters and safeguards to check the unfettered demands.

- It is better to allow democratic concerns like development, decentralisation and governance rather than religion, caste, language or dialect to be the valid bases for conceding the demands for a new state.

- Apart from this the fundamental problems of development and governance deficit such as concentration of power, corruption, administrative inefficiency etc must be addressed.

14.3 CONCEPT OF SEPARATISM

Some experts believe that the contemporary world is in the state of the end of the third wave that gives them right to say that ethnical conflict will take place very seldom (Gurr, 1993). In the author's opinion the world is in the state of the final stage of international security architecture construction due to which not only each state but also each people must decide which role it wants to play in the future international affairs. It can influence the stability of any country cause ethnical minorities can have different opinion as for the priorities of the foreign policy course of the country. Such a bright example is Ukraine in which the society has been divided for 25 years into two groups, the first believes that Ukraine should integrate into EU and NATO and the second part considers close cooperation with Russia as the most profitable policy. Catalonia also announced about the process of

disintegration from Spain as it prevents this region from developing. Taking into account these facts we can say that the world can be absorbed by the fourth wave of ethnic conflicts that would be caused by the final stage of political, economic, ideological and civilizational structuring of the world. As it was already mentioned the issue of identity is going to become the integral part of the process of formation of borders in the XXI century. Today we already observe how some countries try to leave the unions and organizations (Great Britain) or states (Catalonia, Donbass). So today a great number of countries can face a problem of separatism movement due to activization of ethnic minorities.

Nationalism as a catalyst for separatism

There is no doubt that separatism is based on nationalism that is driving force of such processes and events. There is such an opinion that in the epoch of globalization when the borders disappear there wouldn't be such a problem as nationalism and it will be a part of the past. But as we can see nationalism is becoming again the determining element of the political processes that take place in this or that region. Especially it could be seen in Europe and post-Soviet space countries where right-wing radical politicians or parties win the elections to the national parliaments or succeed during the elections to the European parliament. The radicalization of the European political system is connected with the immigration crises that EU fails to solve. It influenced such events as Brexit, the Hungarian referendum, the desire of France, the Netherlands, Hungary, Greece to leave EU. Besides the population of the Western Europe has negative attitude not only to the immigrants for the Middle East countries but also from the Central and Eastern Europe states such as Poland, Bulgaria, Romania. In Ukraine it is getting harder for the Russians to protect their rights because the radical political parties demand total ukrainization of the whole country that presupposes the demand to speak only Ukrainian, recognize UPA as the fighters for freedom of Ukraine during the WWII, restriction of freedom of speech. In Russia we can observe negative attitude of the Russians towards the people from the North Caucuses. So we can make a conclusion that the

separatism movements are fed by the identity factor that in its turn is based on the nationalism. In my opinion nationalism could be only negative and aggressive as it can be the reason for conflict between different groups of people. As E. Smith (Сміт, 2009) says nationalism appears on the ruins of the states and those who can't develop anymore. It could be popular because it can provide alternative for unstable status-quo and it will be more viable because it corresponds to the people's hopes. The example could be the USSR that collapsed and we could/can observe severe conflicts on the nationalism ground – Chechen republic, Abkhazia, S. Ossetia, Pridnestrovie, Donbass, Nagorny Karabakh. The radicalization of conflicts in former USSR republics is connected with collapse of totalitarian system that controlled all the processes in the country. Nationalism contains such a point as imposing identity. It is done in my opinion in order to avoid problems in future that can occur from the side of ethnic minority that doesn't consider itself to be a part of the people that is a titular nation. So Catalonians don't consider themselves to be Spaniards, the Rusins or Hungarians don't consider themselves to be Ukrainians, the same situation with the Russians in Donbass region. Imposing new holidays, traditions, language, history on the Russians has the adverse reaction – the more severe Ukrainian radicals impose their politics and values the more the Russians don't want to accept it. So nationalism is the basic ground for separatism. Let's consider this phenomenon more thoroughly. According to the definition that is given by "Politological encyclopedic dictionary" (Політологічний енциклопедичний словник, 1997) separatism is the movement for territorial secession of this or that part of the country with the purpose of formation of a new state or receiving a certain degree of autonomy as for language, religion and national issues. As I have already mentioned the majority of states are polyethnic that can cause social and ethnic conflicts. Separatism also can be considered to be a certain form of political opposition the subject of which is ethnic unit that is a minority of population and object is the states government that at the same time represents the dominating majority. The beginning of separatism movement can start under two conditions: firstly, the discrimination of ethnic minority, secondly active national political elite.

One of the forms of discrimination is cultural imperialism the essence of which is that culture of so-called great nation is represented as progressive, modern and culture of the ethnic minority is considered to be primitive. There are several opinions as for the basic reasons that cause separatism – economical disbalance, cultural contradictions or different political preferences. It is necessary to emphasize that there is no just one reason of separatism movement. There are some cases when more economically developed regions don't want to donate less developed regions. And on the contrary less developed regions say that if they leave the country they could develop their economy because the current government doesn't finance them as it should be. K. Boyle and P. Englebert in their book "The Primacy of Politics in Separatist Dynamics" (Boyle, Englebert 2006) think that separatism today is the reaction as for political conditions than the manifestation of cultural differences or exploitation of economic opportunities. We can agree with this opinion because dissatisfaction with economic situation is the first reason why regions especially those which have ethnic minorities start to rebel. The political activity is the only sphere in terms of which it is possible to draw attention to the problems of the ethnic minority. Conducting some cultural events it is impossible to prove its originality but if to politicize the identity emphasizing that the central authorities press on this region it is possible not just to attract attention but also to head antigovernmental movement on ethnic ground. The authors also say that the younger the country is the more active the separatism movements could be. It can be seen on the example of postSoviet countries where we could observe a lot of separatism movements due to the weakness of the central government, its impossibility to provide efficient economic policy, its orientation on nationalism as tool of uniting the country. Also it is necessary to emphasize that the bigger the country is geographically the more separatism movements it can have (Boyle, Englebert 2006). Besides the authors also single out such reasons as political regime, process of democratization and economic transformation and international atmosphere or the geopolitical situation in the region (Boyle, Englebert 2006). Taking into account all above-mentioned facts it is necessary to say that it is impossible to say uniquely

whether separatism is positive or negative phenomenon. We must say that on the one hand it leads to destruction of the country, but on the other hand it leads to the creation of another country that can be more successful and developed. If separatism movement is not accompanied with bloodshed of civil war but only in a democratic way (e.g. Czechoslovakia) it is a right way of solution to the problem.

Classification of separatism

Separatism according to the author's opinion could base on different integral parts, i.e. cultural, religious, economic, ideological, ethnic, civilizational. As for the degree of activity it could be active when the ethnic group actively supports the idea of secession; moderate – when ethnic group demands only autonomy status; passive – when ethnic group is dissatisfied with its position in the country but doesn't proclaim any demands. It could also be open, when the ethnic group openly says about its desire to leave the country; and closed – it can be only under conditions when the government strictly forbids to discuss and speak about the possibility of secession. Each case of separatism could go through several stages of its development such as (1) imposing of identity; (2) prohibition of language, culture, history; (3) criminal prosecution; (4) absorption of ethnic group by the titular group; (5) genocide.

There is an opinion that separatism is a phenomenon that could develop from within. There are several domestic factors that work as a catalyst for the strengthening of ethno/separatist processes in this or that region. But besides domestic factors it is necessary to single out external factors too. Due to it an important role is played by the neighboring states or "great powers" (state-subjects) which are interested in weakening or even collapse of the country in order to improve their position in the region or to increase its territory if it has borders with the state-object. External processes have an important influence on the domestic development of the country. That is the reason and character of conflicts are connected with the peculiarities of the geopolitical and geosocial system and its dynamics. Ethno/separatist conflicts occur within one state no matter what kind of territorial structure it has. In some cases they develop

without intrusion of the third party, in another cases – with the support of the state that is interested in the development of this conflict. During the cold war the relations of the main actors of foreign affairs, i.e. USSR and USA, had ideological basis. Especially ideological background was imposed by the USSR. If the disintegration of the country was profitable for the USSR such a conflict was considered to be a nationally liberation movement. And vise versa ideologically adverse processes were called separatist with negative meaning. Today politologists say that globalization makes the notion of sovereignty quite conditional and insist on the fact that it is necessary to support politically and legally the right of the peoples for self-determination including the secession of the regions from countries that are called failed-states (Баранов, 2006). The same policy is supported by mainly Russia and USA. If the separatist conflict is profitable for them they support the rebellious region if not – they say that it violates the sovereignty principle of the country (Kosovo, S. Ossetia, Abkhazia). V.A. Tishkov (Тишков, 2005) states that separatism would not have become a global problem, if it hadn't been an instrument of rivalry between states and a means of geopolitical engineering. If separatist movement in Europe is developing due to the internal factors (Catalonia), in the third world or on the post-Soviet space we could observe the influence of the external factors. The brightest examples are observed in former Yugoslavia (Kosovo) and Ukraine (Donbass). The external factor could be seen by different methods – soft and hard. The hard one has one expression – military invasion and could be fulfilled in the following way:

• region is supplied with military support;

• interference of peacekeeping forces with the purpose of the further solution to the conflict but taking into account the interest either of rebellious region or the government of the state;

• conducting humanitarian intervention that presupposes the participation in hostilities on the side of the rebellious region.

The soft support could be divided into soft active and soft passive. Soft passive is showed just in existence of the neighboring country with ethnically close population and that wants the uniting of the peoples. Soft active support is showed in the following way: economical (financing the fight, financing NGOs), technical (supply of lethal weaponry), humanitarian (making the ties with ethically close people in the sphere of culture, education and science, financing the educational programs, scientific projects, internships), the support of the rebellious region or the authorities in international organizations such as UN, OSCE, the construction of religious objects, informational (demonization of the rebellious region or the authorities of the state).

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit
 1.   How do you know Current Debates on Statehood Demands?
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 2.   Discuss the Concept of Separatism.
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14.4 IMPACT OF SEPARATISM AND REGIONALISM

• Views ideological moderation on secession as prerequisite for conflict resolution.

• Conceptualises ideological moderation as outcome of internal debate and conflict.

• Offers nuance to argument that fragmentation leads to radicalization.

- Takes into account geographies of secessionist movements.

- Analyses the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) as critical case study.

Secessionist movements rarely succeed in their quests for separate statehood. Hence, conflict resolution efforts in secessionist wars tend to focus on making autonomy frameworks acceptable to both sides. This article posits that de-radicalization on the issue of secession and specifically the endorsement of regionalism over secessionism is an important prerequisite for such autonomy arrangements to succeed. A programmatic shift toward regionalism represents a determinant shift in the ideology and raison d'être of secessionist movements. Drawing on insights from the literature on party change and rebel group transformation, a twofold contribution is made. First, moderation can occur in the absence of electoral participation as a result of internal shifts in the dominant faction of a rebel group. Second, identifying two mechanisms as drivers for group identity change, organizational diversification and internal debate, it shows how under certain condition fragmentation may induce moderation on core ideological issues of the armed movement. These arguments are developed through an inductive analysis of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). In this case, moderation on the issue of secession was the outcome of the formation and strengthening of a moderate domestic wing, increased internal debate and the subsequent weakening of the symbolic powers of a long-standing insurgent leadership.

- Regionalism is the expression of a common sense of identity and purpose by people within a specific geographical region, united by its unique language, culture, language, etc.
- In a positive sense, it encourages people to develop a sense of brotherhood and oneness which seeks to protect the interests of a particular region and promotes the welfare and development of the state and its people.

- In the negative sense, it implies excessive attachment to one's region which is a great threat to the unity and integrity of the country.

- In the Indian context generally, the term 'regionalism' has been used in the negative sense.

History of Regional Movements in India

- The roots of regional consciousness in India can be found in the colonial policies.

- Differential attitudes and treatment by the British towards princely states and those of the presidencies developed regionalist tendencies among them.

- British exploitative economic policies completely neglected some regions, giving way to economic disparities and regional imbalances.

- On the other side, the Indian national movement furthered a pluralistic idea of India.

- The history of regional movements in India can be traced back to the 1940s Dravida Movement or the Non-Brahmin movement that started in the present day Tamil Nadu.

- Later, the movement was resulted into the demand of a separate and independent Tamil state.

- This, in turn, led to several other parties like the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) springing up in the Andhra region, with the demands of separate statehood.

- The decades of 1950s and 1960s witnessed intense mass mobilisation, often taking on a violent character for the demands of statehood.

- In 1954, the revolt for the separate state of Andhra for Telugu - speaking people spearheaded by Potti Sri Ramulu and his eventual death triggered the wave of political regionalism in India with many princely states and other states making a demand for a separate state.

- This resulted in formation of the States Reorganisation Committee (headed by Faisal Ali) which recommended re-

organisation of Indian states on linguistic lines, thus reinforcing the regionalist tendencies.

- With the enactment of the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, linguistic states became a reality.

- During 1970s and 1980s, owing to the intensification of tribal insurgency for separation and statehood, the Union government passed the North-eastern States Reorganisation Act, 1971.

- It upgraded the Union Territories of Manipur and Tripura, and the Sub-State of Meghalaya to full statehood, and Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh (then Tribal Districts) to Union Territories which became states in 1986.

- The decade of 2000s, witnessed vigorous movements for the creation of separate states due to a rising sense of regional deprivation.

- It resulted in the formation of the three new states – Chhattisgarh out of Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand out of Bihar and Uttarakhand out of Uttar Pradesh.

- The latest addition to this is the state of Telangana created by the division of Andhra Pradesh in 2014.

Types of Regional Movements

- **Secessionism** is a form of regionalism that involves militant and fundamentalist groups advocating a separation from India on the basis of ethnicity or any other factor.

- Isac Muivah's National Socialist Council of Nagaland, the Islamic fundamentalist groups in J&K, ULFA in Assam are examples of such an extreme dimension of regionalism.

- **Separatism** is a demand for separate statehood within the Indian Union.

- Many times, linguistic or ethnic minorities within the states come together and unite against the majority community in that state.

- This kind of sub-regionalism was validated by the State Reorganisation Act of 1956. The most recent examples include the formation of Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Telangana.

- Meanwhile, there have been many demands including the creation of Bodoland for the Bodo-speakers in Assam; Gorkhaland for ethnic Gorkha (Nepali) people in West Bengal; a Bundelkhand state (covering part of Madhya Pradesh and part of Uttar Pradesh) for promoting the development of the region.

- **Demand for Full Statehood,** the union territories have been forwarding such demands like the NCT of Delhi.

- Most of such demands have already been accepted. In 1971, Himachal Pradesh got the status of a full state and thereafter Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh (former NEFA) and Sikkim got full statehoods

- **The Demand for Autonomy,** since 1960's, with the emergence of regional parties, the demand for state autonomy has been gaining more and more strength due to the central political interferences.

- In Tamil Nadu the DMK, in Punjab the Akali Dal, in Andhra Pradesh the Telgu Desham, in Assam the Assam Gana Parishad, the National conference in J&K and in West Bengal the Forward Bloc have been continuously demanding a larger share of powers for the states.

- **Demand for Regional Autonomy within a State,** in some of the states, people belonging to various regions have been demanding recognition of their regional identities.

- The genesis of such demands lies in the regional imbalances resulting from inefficient planning for instance in J & K, the Ladakhis are demanding a regional status.

Reasons behind Growth of Regionalism in India

- Historical and geographical isolation
- Lop-sided development
- Continuous neglect of a region
- Insider-outsider complex that nurturers nativism and son-of-the-soil ideology
- Internal colonialism, i.e., despite being rich in natural resources some regions remain economically underdeveloped.

- The reasons being either ill-conceived top-down approach or survival of one region at the cost of the other region. Chhota Nagpur plateau is an example of this type of underdevelopment.

- Political vested interests can accentuate and exploit regional loyalties.

- Reaction to an imposed ideology that can make its appearance as a reaction against the perceived imposition of a particular ideology, language or cultural pattern on all people and groups.

- Linguistic aspirations that have remained a formidable basis of regionalism.

- Expression of ethnicity.

Impact of Regionalism on Indian Polity

- Rise of regional parties.

- Re-focus on regional issues.

- Regionalist tendencies often stir inter-state hostility as its spillover effect.

- Regional movements often result in violent agitations, disturbs not only the law and order situation but also have negative implications on the economy of the state as well as the nation.

- Regionalism sometimes undercuts the national interest by being a hurdle in international diplomacy.

- For instance- the opposition of regional/state parties of Tamil against the stand of the central government had a direct implication on the relation of India with Sri Lanka.

- The disagreement of political leadership in West Bengal with the central government over the Land Boundary Agreement and Teesta River Water sharing treaty with Bangladesh resulted in increased tensions between the two nations.

- Regionalism can become a shield for militancy, extremism to create an internal security threat. Kashmir militancy is an example of this type of regionalism.

Regionalism vs. Nationalism

- Nationalism is a sense of belonging to one nation, a feeling one shares with all the citizens of the country regardless of their caste, creed, culture, religion or region.

- This association with a nation is the primary mode of identification for a person and every nation encourages its citizens to take pride in being its citizen.

- However, when people begin identifying more strongly with their region than with their nation, it is alleged that nationalism is undercut by a sense of regionalism.

- While a nation tries to establish harmony between all its citizens by uniting them through a constitution, national symbols, and songs, regionalism glorifies the heritage of only one particular region and of one culture.

- This leads to the formation of multiple communities within one nation and restricts the efforts of national integration.

Is regionalism a threat to national unity and integrity?

- Parochial regionalism poses a threat to the sovereignty of the nation.

- The anti-migrant or anti-Bihari stance of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) which opposes the employment and residence of non-Maharashtrian people in the state of Maharashtra is a prime example of negative regionalism.

- Regionalism beyond a point can lead to secessionism, such as strong regionalism in Punjab ultimately resulted in the growth of Khalistani terrorism.

- Regionalism often promotes Vote- Bank politics, thereby weakens the national integration.

- Regionalism can weaken the time tested fabric of 'Unity in Diversity', if promoted in an ultra manner.

- Positive regionalism promotes a sense of pride in connecting to one's roots and culture.

- It has been noticed that often regional movements have helped the art and culture of many neglected regions to flourish by increasing their exposure through local emphasis.

- Therefore, in principle, regionalism need not be regarded as an unhealthy or anti-national phenomenon, unless it takes a militant, aggressive turn to encourage the growth of secessionist tendencies.

Constitutional Safeguards Against Separatist Tendencies

- Indian Constitution provides various institutional arrangements to resolve such problem, including the threats posed by violent regionalism.

- The provisions of the fifth and sixth schedules of the Indian constitution have been applied by the government with intended objectives of constraining ethnic separatism and tribal alienation in different regions, particularly in the North-east.

- Also institutionally, the government has become more receptive to the creation of an autonomous regional council or district council for the people of ethnic enclaves.

- The state language policy has been fine tuned to accommodate the claims of various dialect or language groups. This has been done by:

  o By including the major languages in the eighth schedule, and

  o Granting official recognition to culturally significant languages of the state as the language of education and official transaction.

- All these policies have a significant impact on integrating the diverse regional communities within the mould and measures of Indian nationalism.

Way Forward

- Unity in Diversity ethos needs to be preserved for the pluralistic character of the Indian nation state.

- The accommodation of multiple aspirations of a diverse population is necessary.

- Formation of the NITI Aayog has been a positive step to enhance co-operative federalism by fostering the involvement of the State Governments of India in the economic policy-making process using a bottom-up approach.

- While a number of steps such as the launch of centrally sponsored schemes, incentives to private players for development in backward states have been taken by the government for

inclusive development, there is a greater need for their effective implementation.

- There is a need to increase the level of social expenditure by the states on education, health, and sanitation which are the core for human resource development.

- Introducing a system of national education that would help people to overcome regional feelings and develop an attachment towards the nation can act as a long-term solution to the problem of sub-nationalism.

- While the National Integration Council was set up in 1961, there is a need to utilise its potential more effectively.

- Schemes like "Ek Bharat-Shreshtha Bharat" have been launched by the GOI to celebrate unity in diversity culture of the nation and to strengthen sentiment for National Unity between the citizens of states, is a welcomed step.

- National unity is not impaired if the people of a region have genuine pride in their language and culture.

14.5 POLITICS OF NATIONALITY AND THE GORKHA STATEHOOD MOVEMENT

"Aren't you a Nepali? Go back to Nepal" has often been used to question the credibility of the Nepali-speaking Gorkha community living in India. The 'Nepali' card has always been used to discredit any demand for constitutional or political rights, deny social welfare benefits, or economic development for the community.

The most recent example of the 'Born in Nepal' jibe comes from none other than senior BJP leader SS Ahluwalia, who, ironically, is the sitting MP from Darjeeling constituency, a Gorkha-majority region of West Bengal. However, Ahluwalia promptly issued a clarification that the jibe was intended towards specific people and not to the entire Gorkha community.

However, the point remains why such a senior and respected Parliamentarian can casually use the nationality card against Gorkhas just to score a few political points against his opponents. It reflects the

mentality of the mainstream political parties and leaders towards the people of our community. It also exposes how rooted the bias against Gorkha community is within the political establishments and Indian bureaucracy.

In 2017, during the Gorkhaland agitation, Pawan Khera, spokesperson of the Congress party, called the Gorkha's demand for statehood as a separatist movement on national television. Khera also apologised for his comments, but the point here is not about the apology, but how could people in power and position allow such a biased mindset to exist and thrive.

In February 2019, there was a video being circulated in the social media where an MLA from Meghalaya was seen threatening local Gorkhas in Langpih to 'go back to Nepal' because of a border dispute between Assam and Meghalaya. It is surprising that politicians could go and threaten people to leave a place, instead of resolving a political dispute in the spirit of the constitution.

The West Bengal government has time and again used the nationality card to sabotage the Gorkha statehood demand and accused it as a secessionist agenda. By conveniently playing the nationality card, the government continues to deny the constitutional right for self-rule and demand for a state within India's democratic framework.

Throughout the history of independent India, the Gorkha community has been a victim and continue to suffer because of the political biases and untrusting leaders who conveniently play the 'Nepali' card to suppress the demand for constitutional protection of the Gorkhas. However, the fact remains that the demand for Gorkhaland state has always been a demand for constitutional protection of the Gorkha community within India.

Historically speaking, the Nepali-speaking community was integrated into India after the Treaty of Sugauli signed in 1816 between the British Indian government and Nepalese King. Territories were negotiated including Darjeeling, Sikkim to the east, Nainital to the south-west and the Kumaon Kingdom and the Garhwal Kingdom to the west. People living in these areas became part of the new political Indian territory because the borders shifted for them without having to migrate

anywhere. Following the treaty, huge numbers of soldiers were recruited from both India and Nepal to serve in the British government.

During the Anglo-Burmese war (1824 - 1826) the Gorkha soldiers formed an integral part of the British forces fighting to push back the Burmese troops advancing from the Northeast. The Kingdom of Manipur was liberated from the Burmese king after seven years when the British and the Burmese signed the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826.

With the settlement of the British soldiers in the region after the war, more Gorkhas were brought into the region to work in construction projects, forest, mines, agriculture workers, and local security forces. Grazing fields and the land was allocated for workers and their families to settle. Today, you will find small pockets of Gorkha community in also every part of the Northeast region. Most of the families trace back their roots to the grandparents who had come to the region as a soldier, farmer, or as labor in construction and mining fields.

A historical bias

Thanks to media, movies, and popular culture, the word Gorkha is today a synonym for soldiers and bravery. The legends of Khukuri have become even more potent than a nuclear weapon. The Gorkha troops have been at the forefront of nation's security, be it representing India's contingencies during the World Wars, wars with Pakistan, China, or India's peace-keeping missions and UN troops. Thousands of Gorkha people drafted into the INA forces, while others joined the civil movement against the British occupation under Mahatma Gandhi.

Sadly, however, after the independence of India, Delhi's political and personal biases have always clouded policymakers and bureaucracy. The biases are not new and have run deep well in the architects of modern India. The correspondence of Sardar Vallabh Patel to Prime Minister Nehru in 1951 with regards to Tibet and the Eastern mountain regions speaks volume about such prejudices.

In 1979, then Prime Minister Morarji publicly declared Nepali as a 'foreign language' to a request for inclusion of the language in the Eighth Schedule of the constitution. In 1992, finally, the Nepali language was included in the constitution as a scheduled Indian language.

In the 1980s, thousands of Gorkha families were forcefully evicted and displaced during the 'Bhumiputra' movement that swept across the Northeast region. Since then, the Gorkha community has been at the receiving end of all 'nativity' propaganda that began primarily against illegal immigration from Bangladesh. The mass exodus gave rise to fear that the Gorkha community will gradually be evicted from across the country without the protection of a state of their own within India.

Subash Ghisingh, leader of Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), led an armed uprising demand a separate state of Gorkhaland for the protection of Gorkha people and preserve their cultural identity in India. More than 1300 people lost their lives trying to prove their belongingness to India and demanding their constitutional right to self-rule.

A stateless identity

From the ominous beginning of the new political wave in the Northeast region in the 1980s, the Gorkha community has gradually been excluded from active political participation, jobs, education support, or welfare benefits. You can ask any Gorkha living in the Northeast about how discriminated they feel in their respective states, how they are treated by their fellow citizens and leaders. The 'you are from Nepal' jibe is an everyday living reality for the people and become political fodder for opportunist leaders and parties.

Even after 50 years since the violence of 1980s for Gorkhaland statehood demand, the fear and the issue of constitutional protection still remains unresolved. Although the Gorkha state movement withstood the test of time and remains uncorrupted by the various allegations, people leading the movement have often crumbled under the West Bengal's propaganda and administrative pressures.

The Gorkhaland issue to this day remains as relevant as it was in 1907 when the Hillmen association for the first time submitted a memorandum seeking separate administration for Darjeeling hills. With politicians and people in power, time and again raising the question of nationality to push their personal agenda, the threat to Cultural and Political Identity of the Gorkhas in India is still a big reality. Excluded from active political

participation in most states, the Gorkha community continues to wait for justice to be delivered and inclusion into the political identity of the nation.

History

In the 1980s, Subhash Ghisingh raised the demand for the creation of a state called Gorkhaland within India to be carved out of the hills of Darjeeling and areas of Dooars and Siliguri terai contiguous to Darjeeling. The Gorkhas have been demanding for separation from West Bengal since 1907 on the grounds that they are culturally, ethnically different from West Bengal. The demand took a violent turn, which led to the death of over 1,200 people. This movement culminated with the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988. The DGHC administered the Darjeeling hills for 23 years with some degree of autonomy.

Proposed map of Gorkhaland state in India

A new violent movement for a separate state of Gorkhaland was started in 1986 by Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) led by Subhash Ghisingh. The agitation ultimately led to the establishment of a semiautonomous body in 1988 called the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) to govern certain areas of Darjeeling district. However, in 2007, a new party called the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) raised the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland once again.

The fourth DGHC elections were due in 2004. However, the government decided not to hold elections and instead made Subhash Ghisingh the sole caretaker of the DGHC till a new Sixth Schedule tribal council was established. Resentment among the former councillors of DGHC grew rapidly. Among them, Bimal Gurung, once the trusted aide of Ghising, decided to break away from the GNLF. Riding on a mass support for Prashant Tamang, an Indian Idol contestant from Darjeeling, Bimal quickly capitalized on the public support he received for supporting Prashant, and was able to overthrow Ghisingh from the seat of power. He went on to found the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha raising the demand a state of Gorkhaland.

Torch rally in support of Gorkhaland in Darjeeling district.

The demand for Gorkhaland took a new turn with the assassination of Madan Tamang, leader of Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League. He was stabbed to death allegedly by Gorkha Janmukti Morcha supporters on 21 May 2010, in Darjeeling, which led to a spontaneous shutdown in the three Darjeeling hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong. After the murder of Madan Tamang, the West Bengal government threatened action against Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, whose senior leaders are named in the FIR, meanwhile hinting discontinuation of ongoing talks over interim arrangement with the Gorkha party, saying it had "lost popular support following the assassination"

On 8 February 2011, three GJM activists were shot dead (one of whom succumbed to her injuries later) by the police as they tried to enter Jalpaiguri district on a padyatra led by Bimal Gurung from Gorubathan to Jaigaon. This led to violence in the Darjeeling hills and an indefinite strike was called by GJM that lasted 9 days

In the 2011 West Bengal state assembly election held on 18 April 2011, GJM candidates won three Darjeeling hill assembly seats, proving that the demand for Gorkhaland was still strong in Darjeeling. GJM candidates Trilok Dewan won from Darjeeling constituency Harka Bahadur Chhetri from Kalimpong constituency, and Rohit Sharma from Kurseong constituency. Wilson Champramari, an independent candidate supported by GJM, also won from Kalchini constituency in the Dooars.

2013 agitation

Gorkhaland supporters demonstrating in Mirik, Darjeeling.

On 30 July 2013, the Congress Working Committee unanimously passed a resolution to recommend the formation of a separate Telangana state from Andhra Pradesh to the INC-led central government. This resulted in flaring up of demands throughout India, prominent among them were the demands for statehood for Gorkhaland in West Bengal and Bodoland in Assam.

Following a 3 days bandh, GJM announced an indefinite bandh from 3 August. Largely peaceful, political development took place in the background. With the West Bengal government armed with Calcutta

high court order declaring the bandh as illegal, the government toughened its stand by sending a total of 10 companies of paramilitary force to quell any violent protest and arresting prominent GJM leaders and workers. In response GJM announced a unique form of protest 'Janta Bandh', in which with no picketing or the use of force, the people in the hills were asked to voluntarily stay inside on 13 and 14 August. This proved to be a major success and an embarrassment for the government.

After a marathon 'all party meeting' convened by the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) on 16 August at Darjeeling, the pro Gorkhaland parties informally formed 'Gorkhaland Joint Action Committee'.

2017 agitation

Between June and September 2017, there was another agitation in Darjeeling. Protests first started after the West Bengal government announced on 16 May that Bengali language should be a compulsory subject in all schools across the state. This was interpreted as an imposition of an alien culture by the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) administered area where the majority of the people speak Nepali. Initially, the protests were peaceful. They were stepped up around 5–8 June when the Chief Minister was visiting the regions. After initially ignoring the situation, the Government softened its tone when the protests and rallies intensified. After a cabinet meeting at Raj Bhavan in Darjeeling on 8 June, the Government clarified that Bengali will be an optional subject in the hills. But the GJM leadership decided to not take this on face value, and intensified the protests further. The protesters then revived the old demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland. On 9 June, the Government called in the para-military to control the situation.

There were a few clashes between the police and the agitators initially. Strikes were called on a few occasions. The situation worsened on 15 June, when the police raided a GJM office and seized spade,sickle,bow,arrow,hoe,and shovel. This was followed by violent clashes between the police and the agitators. And following this, the GJM called an indefinite strike and shut down in the region.

There were widespread instances of violence including riots, arson, torching of vehicles, government properties and houses. In one of these protests, the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway was torched by the protesters. Mass rallies were taken out regularly by the supporters of the Gorkhaland agitation. There have been multiple injuries of both the Gorkhaland supporters and security personnel. A total of 11 people have died in the protests till date. The internet services of the region were also suspended by the government for the duration of the shutdown. There were complaints of the violation of human right in the region, and an APDR (Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights) team was sent to the region to investigate the issue.

On 9 July, the protests reach New Delhi. Supporters staged a march from Raj Ghat to Jantar Mantar. This was followed by the GJM rejecting the State Government's offer of talks. On 29 August, the state Government called a meeting with the hill parties. But the meeting was fruitless and they could not arrive at a conclusion. This was followed by another round of talks where there was a consensus to end the shutdown. The supporters met the Home Minister on 19 September. This was followed by the hills slowly returning to normalcy. On 26 September, internet services were restored in the region. Then on 27 September, GJM headed by new chairperson Binay Tamang finally called off the strike after 104 days.

Even after the strike was called off, there were a few stray incidents of violence and protests in the region. But the region as a whole was much calmer than before. And so on 27 October, the Supreme Court directed the Centre to withdraw 7 of the 15 central armed forces deployed in the region.

Bimal Gurung has been in hiding since then for fear of being arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

Gorkhaland Territorial Administration

The memorandum of agreement for the formation of a Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), a semi-autonomous administrative body for the Darjeeling hills, was signed on 18 July 2011. Earlier, during the West Bengal assembly election (2011) campaign, Mamata Banerjee

had told that the Darjeeling is integrated part of Bengal. While Mamata implied that this would be the end of the Gorkhaland movement, Bimal Gurung reiterated that this was just another step towards statehood. Both spoke publicly at the same venue in Pintail Village near Siliguri, where the tripartite agreement was signed. A bill for the creation of GTA was passed in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly on 2 September 2011. The West Bengal government issued a gazette notification for the GTA Act on 14 March 2012, signalling preparations for elections for the GTA. In the elections of the GTA held on 29 July 2012, GJM candidates won from 17 constituencies and the rest 28 seats unopposed. After an agitation of about two years, the GJM also agreed to the setting up of another autonomous body, called Gorkhaland Territorial Administration. Gurung is currently the chief executive of the GTA. However, over the last few months, the GJM has expressed severe dissatisfaction over the functioning of the GTA and have revived the call for the separate state of Gorkhaland.

On 30 July 2013, Gurung resigned from the GTA citing both interference from the West Bengal government and the renewed agitation for Gorkhaland.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. How do you know the Impact of Separatism and Regionalism?

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2. Discuss the Politics of nationality and the Gorkha statehood movement.

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14.6 LET US SUM UP

So the processes of separatism can develop for a long period of time and can transform into civil wars that can cause genocide or humanitarian intervention from the side of main actors of international affairs. In the majority of cases separatism is the ethnic phenomenon that could be considered to be very complex and multiaspect phenomenon. And taking into account that each case has its own peculiarities there is no just one solution to all cases of separatism. It is necessary to emphasize that influential actors of international affairs for the solution to their geopolitical tasks use ethnic and/or confessional contradictions for stimulating separatist conflicts the basic objective of which setting the direct of control over the country or region. Under conditions of the transmission of the contemporary world from bipolar to multipolar system of international relations, above mentioned types of conflict will occur more often and the degree of such conflicts more severe.

The National Gorkhaland Committee (NGC), a non-political organisation of Gorkhas, has urged the BJP government to look into their longstanding demand for the creation of a separate state of Gorkhaland in West Bengal's Darjeeling hill region. The office bearers of NGC said for the Gorkhas, a separate state would be the only political solution to the more than 100-year-old demand.

Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) leader Neeraj Zimba, who had won the Darjeeling assembly bypoll in May as a BJP candidate, too supported the demand at the meeting.

Headed by Lieutenant General (retd) Shakti Gurung, NGC, a pan-India non-political organisation of Gorkhas, has several former army officers, bureaucrats, activists as its members.

Apart from office bearers, representatives of various pro-Gorkhaland parties such as Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (Bimal Gurung faction), GNLF, All India Gorkha League (AIGL) were also present during the meeting held Sunday evening.

14.7 KEY WORDS

Regionalism: In politics, regionalism is a political ideology focusing on the "development of a political or social system based on one or more" regions and/or the national, normative or economic interests of a

Separatism: A common definition of separatism is that it is the advocacy of a state of cultural, ethnic, tribal, religious, racial, governmental or gender separation from the larger group. While it often refers to full political secession, separatist groups may seek nothing more than greater autonomy.

14.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1.   How do you know Current Debates on Statehood Demands?

2.   Discuss the Concept of Separatism

3.   How do you know the Impact of Separatism and Regionalism?

4.   Discuss the Politics of nationality and the Gorkha statehood movement.

14.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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14.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 14.2
2. See Section 14.3

Check Your Progress 2

1. See Section 14.4
2. See Section 14.5