

CONGRESS IN THE POLITICS OF WEST BENGAL: FROM DOMINANCE TO MARGINALITY (1947-1977)

ABSTRACT

Fact remains that the Indian national movement found its full-flagged expression in the activities and programmes of the Indian National Congress. But Factionalism, rival groupism sought to acquire control over the Congress time to time and naturally there were confusion centering a vital question regarding 'to be or not to be'. The situation was such that the task of political independence from the British in 1947 became a long chapter with a heavy cost in the form of partition of the country. The next question about the Indian National Congress and its seriousness was centered in a situation to adopt a fresh role to build a new India. In this promise what a few historians call 'social creation' was designed to pursue revolutionary steps to reconstruct the new nation.

After independence, the Indian national Congress became the ruling party for decades in the national level as well as in most of the provinces of India including West Bengal. It is a fact that the first congress government was dominated by Dr. B.C. Roy, although at the initial stage Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh had the privilege to chair the Chiefministership for a short time. The 1952 general election gave a full verdict on the Congress party and all other non congress parties made a poor show and naturally they had to enter into the West Bengal Legislative Assembly as the opposition group.

From 1952 to 1967 the Congress could enjoy single majority in West Bengal politics and it obviously drew the attention of the all India politics. There were many factors especially some political programmes and economic policies of the Congress which brought them a favourable position in West Bengal. In addition the plans and achievements of Dr. B.C. Roy as chief minister had far reaching consequences during his time and a few years by and large after his death in 1962. But after 1962 a crisis moment came over the Congress and consequently there were symptoms of rift in the

organizational level and as well as systematic decline leading to the detachment with the general masses i.e. voters of West Bengal. The years from 1962 to 1967 and even from 1967 to 1971 were much eventful period of west Bengal politics. The present dissertation has not only incorporated all the factors above in detail and how a series of provincial governments were formed and also broken up within short intervals have also been included. Incidentally, the central government had to interfere into the internal administration of the province and as an alternative it had to declare presidential rule at least three times. On the other side of the scene was a direct involvement of Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India to handle the situation and if possible to win over the crises at any cost that had come over in West Bengal politics. The appointment of Siddhartha Sankar Ray, a Cabinet Minister in - charge of West Bengal Affairs was made to minimize the overall crisis of the province. But at this moment the Chhatra Parishad, students' wing of the Congress party had also to come forward to get over the problems and gradually they became successful in ameliorating the crisis. It may be noted that the Liberation War of Bangladesh and also the Naxalite movement in the 1970s put West Bengal in doldrums and the situation gave a lesson to the people of West Bengal to aspire for a stable government. The result was a sweeping victory of the Congress in the general election of 1972 when the Indian National Congress got its main stream of voice in the politics and virtually continued to rule upto 1977.

Keeping in mind the above background of the Congress politics in West Bengal, the proposed dissertation intends to explore the issues that favoured the Congress to dominate the politics and Government of West Bengal during the initial years of the post partition period and at the same time to highlight the factors which subsequently marginalized the party in the later period.

OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The proposed work intends to

- a) Judge the political situation of Bengal on the eve of partition and the dilemma that the leaders of Indian National Congress of Bengal expressed during partition.

- b) Explore the background of the first general election, 1952 and how the Congress could come to power in West Bengal.
- c) Evaluate the leadership and charisma of Dr. BC Roy who dominated Bengal politics and subsided other political parties upto 1962.
- d) Explore and assess the failure of the non-congress political parties of West Bengal to counter pre-dominance of the congress party and capture power of the province.
- e) Highlight the undercurrents of West Bengal politics leading to factionalism within the congress party of West Bengal and how the leadership of the Congress party had to lose the support base inherited by them as a national party immediately after the independence.
- f) Analyze the forces that loosened the integrity and unity of the congress party resulting in the internal crisis of the party.
- g) Explore the historical situation leading to the emergence of the leftist in the front politics who virtually became the funding force of the mass politics and also to have a share in the formation of government.
- h) Study in detail the crises of West Bengal politics and the situation which favoured Presidential rule in West Bengal and virtually gave political space to the Congress and to form again a stable government for five years (1972-1977).
- i) Review the historical and political shift of the Congress politics from a commanding position to the marginality.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to prepare the dissertation the following methodology has been followed:

- 1) Materials has been collected from the State Archives of West Bengal, National Achieves, New Delhi, National Library Kolkata, Bidhan Sishu Uddyan, Kolkata, Bidhan Bhavan, Kolkata, Hemanta Basu Bhavan, Kolkata, and also some district libraries of West Bengal.
- 2) Contemporary publications, newspapers, memories and biographies of the political personalities and the records of the West Bengal ministry has been consulted meticulously.

- 3) Interviews of some outstanding political leaders, their dairies and documents preserved in the political party offices have also been taken into account to prepare the dissertation.
- 4) Some auto-biographies of the political leaders are essential and this has been consulted to justify the political ups and downs of the politics of West Bengal during the period of our study.

HYPOTHESIS

1. There was a dilemma on the part of the Congress leaders of West Bengal to decide the partition question and to welcome the verdict of partition. The 1952 general election was a starting point of the pre-dominance of the Congress in the politics of West Bengal.
2. The Congress as a political party could win over the sentiment of the people of West Bengal as the protagonist of the national movement.
3. The charismatic leadership of Dr. BC Roy had a guiding spirit behind the support base of the Congress in West Bengal politics.
4. The sudden demise of Dr. BC Roy was a shattering blow to the prospect of dominance in the political activities of the provincial Congress of West Bengal.
5. The factionalism sabotaged the future prospect of the Congress of West Bengal and the platform which was created immediately after the independence was demolished in no time.
6. The landlords, the entrepreneurs, business community and the elite society who proved to be the pillars of Congress politics were demoralized and the political shift was turned to the question of welfare of the working class and peasantry.
7. The communist party and their associates had an advantage to share the sentiment of the common people and within a short time they got the capacity to mobilize them within their camp.
8. The factional politics not only weakened the stability of the Congress but also prompted some leaders to create separate party and political forum.

9. The political crisis was so deepened that a presidential rule became inevitable and the political trend of West Bengal had a shift to some other direction in the form of tension, killing and bloodshed.

CHAPTARISATION

Chapter-I Introduction

Chapter- II The Partition Colossus and the Politics of Bengal

Chapter-III Tasks and Goals of the Indian National Congress in West Bengal after
Independence

Chapter-IV State Entrepreneurship and the Congress Party in the Era of Dr. Bidhan
Chandra Roy – Ideology versus Necessity and Reconstruction

Chapter- V Dominance with Difference: Strains and Challenges (1962-1967)

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a. Non-Congress Coalition Government b. Presidential Rule

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