

## INTRODUCTION

The history of the congress politics of colonial Bengal is no less fascinating than that of India. In fact, many phases of the national movements of India had its exposition in different forms. It is clear that prior to independence this party was essentially involved in a political-oriented process of activities. All the more it was neither in a position to suggest any complete autonomy of politics nor with any concern of material development of the people. As a result until the time of the First World War the congress in Bengal as well as in India had a relatively narrow set of aims either in the form of political representation for western educated Indians or movement for Home Rule as well as some insignificant programmes. During the inter war period Mahatma Gandhi was successful in turning the Indian national congress into a political organization of the masses. But in the context of Bengal the factional politics could not be minimized and it resulted in the emergence of numerous political platforms dominated by a few political parties like Swarajya Party, Krishak Praja Party and so on. The decade before Indian partition (1947) was again critical as Bengal was turned gradually as an epicenter or nerve-centre of Indian politics. All these issues may be taken as significant features of Bengal politics and its relevance has been thoroughly investigated as the prefatory part of the present dissertation.

One of the important features of Bengal politics during the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century was that the partition (1905) proved to be a significant point as because with the annulment of the Bengal partition in 1911, there was a clear picture of the doldrums of the politics that prevailed in Bengal and its consequences were followed in the decades to come. In fact from 1911 all most all the politicians of Bengal lost power in Indian politics and eventually their political platform ‘shrank from the national to the regional level.’ In another way the divisions of Bengalese on regional terms by and large strengthen the identity of the ‘Bengaliness’ in many respects. At the same time the trend of the regional politics with special reference to Bengal from 1905 to 1911 took inevitably a new turn in the form of religious identity which had virtually surpassed all regional or class identities. Thus the history of colonial Bengal as we have stated in our research had experienced one of the most critical times where the Muslims and the Hindus irrespective of their class identity appeared in the frontiers of ‘separate and antagonistic identity politics.’

It is thus quite clear that the 1940s, immediately after the Second World War, the nature of the Bengal politics represented a critical moments of its own and most of the political parties were deeply concerned in politics of separatism rather than to look after the conditions of the people at large. In the meanwhile, the repeated disillusion and formations of Bengal Governments in one side and the natural calamities and communal riots (the great Calcutta killings, August, 1946 and Noakhali riots, October, 1946) on the other turned Bengal to be a burning centre of Indian politics. This trend of politics got intensified in course of time and the destiny of India particularly of Bengal was thus decided by the disaster in the name of partition.

A new phase of politics after partition started in West Bengal. The first Chief Minister was Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and after a short term he was replaced by Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy. Fact remains that the province of West Bengal had to bear the full brunt and first of all the undivided Bengal was divided into two new states. Naturally, the immediate task of the West Bengal Government was to reconstruct the province keeping pace with the process of building a new India. It may be noted that partition of India and obviously that of Bengal was a geographical solution and naturally West Bengal was over burdened with various problems including the migration of the refugees from East Pakistan and of course the factional politics that dictated the era of Dr. B.C. Roy and afterwards. In the meantime, West Bengal had to experience the consequences of the sudden death of Dr. B.C. Roy and no less was the impact that shaped Indian politics after the death of Jawaharlal Nehru (27<sup>th</sup> May, 1964), the then prime minister of India. In our study we have tried to pick up all these issues and to present a systematic analysis in the light of available materials related with the theme.

This may also be seen that the situation as it appears in the subsequent period was such that there was internal conflict within the congress party in west Bengal as well as in the centre and the entire political picture was a crisis moment in the politics of west Bengal. It has been stated that the central government headed by Smt. Indira Gandhi had to take up steps to tackle the situations but the inner crisis of the congress party was such that a few disgruntled congress leaders could not find any alternative but to form new political party. Thus the emergence and creation of Bangla Congress came to a reality and the following years witnessed the emergence of new government namely United Front Government headed by Sri Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee. But a grand

reality of the politics of the then Bengal was that the congress as a political party became gradually unpopular being de-touched from the people of Bengal. It lost the support base and in course of time the leaders were much more concerned about clash of interest rather than political solidarity or well being of the people.

Although in the meantime there were presidential rules in West Bengal for three consecutive times. At long last so far as our research period is concerned the West Bengal Government under the congress headed by Siddhartha Sankar Ray came into existence in 1972. But this government had not only to face the consequences of the emergence of Bangladesh, its huge number of refugees and also the peasant movement of the Naxalites. Incidentally, there was also crisis in the central government and through various ups and downs the government under Siddhartha Sankar Ray had to suffer in some way or other. Side by side, taking advantage of the crisis and political instability of West Bengal the Communist parties and a few other non-congress political parties came forward to utilize the political crisis and the time was not far to bring about the end of the congress rule in West Bengal and in the long run there was the formation of the left front government under Jyoti Basu in 1977.

Keeping in view the above background and facts the present dissertation titled '*CONGRESS IN THE POLITICS OF WEST BENGAL: FROM DOMINANCE TO MARGINALITY (1947-1977)*' is an humble attempt to represent the congress politics from dominance to marginality with an outcome of its collapse. All the more the arguments and explanations have been scanned carefully through some chapters and a short sketch is presented as follows:

The 'Introduction' of the dissertation is intended to highlight the basic concept and the theme of the dissertation. It also focuses the main approach of the work and in short the issues of politics of Bengal that dictated the subsequent political atmosphere of the region as a whole.

This has been followed by the first chapter 'The Partition Colossus and the Politics of Bengal' which deals with exploring the very roots of the spread of hated communal politics in the country particularly in Bengal. In that context, Role of Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das and his famous 'Bengal Pact' for the sake of Hindu-Muslim unity in Bengal and the troubled politics with the rejection of the pact have been detailed in this chapter. There was also dissolution of a large number of congress

leaders due to various factors that dominated the politics of the time. Incidentally the emergence of the Krishak Praja Party under A.K. Fazlul Huq came to the surface of Bengal politics and how did it get involved in politics have been included in detail.

In the second chapter under the caption ‘Task and Goals of the Indian National Congress in Bengal after Independence (1947-1948)’ – is to focus the position of the Congress Party and the Muslim League in West Bengal after Partition, acute factionalism within the congress party in the politics of West Bengal in the name of Gandhian Group, Jugantor Group and Hooghly Group, background of the formation of the ‘Shadow Ministry’, Mahatma Gandhi along with H.S. Suharawardhy’s attempts to restore communal amity between the Hindus and the Muslims, background of the resignation of Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh from the seat of the first Premier of West Bengal and how Dr. B.C. Roy took up the responsibility of West Bengal as its Chief Minister etc. have been discussed systematically.

The third chapter ‘State Entrepreneurship and the Congress Party in the Era of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy— Ideology verses Necessity and Reconstruction’ is on a thorough analysis as to how Bidhan Chandra Roy perpetrated various numerous welfare schemes for the all round development of the ‘problematic state in India’ i.e. West Bengal.

Side by side, attempts have been made to show Bidhan Chandra Roy and his mechanisms to overcome the crises that had befallen on him and his Government at that point of time. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy had however, explore mechanism to overcome all the problems and to some extent he was successful.

The forth chapter is a study to bring out all the issues related to a peculiar politics of West Bengal which denoted to highlight the nature of politics dealing with ‘Dominance with Difference: Strains and Challenges (1962-1967)’. Many issues such as factionalism within the congress, emergence of Bangla Congress and the leadership crisis due to the sudden death of Dr. B.C. Roy, Jawaharlal Nehru and also that of Lal Bahadur Shastri have been discussed in detail. In the long last a part of the chapter is devoted to scan the issues which led to the fall of the Congress Government in 1967.

The period of marginalization of the Congress party is the main theme of the fifth chapter of the dissertation. The entire chapter under the caption of ‘Period of marginalization (1967-1971)’ has however been examined from two angles – (i). Non-

Congress Coalition Government and (ii). Impositions of Presidential Rule. In this chapter, attempt has been made to explore the various ups and downs of the political parties in West Bengal. It has categorically discussed about dissolution and formation of the Non-Congress Coalition United Front Government. A significant issue has also been taken up here to show how acute anti-Congress feelings helped to unite the various political parties keeping aside their ideological differences. This chapter has also incorporated the historical development about the formation of the various governments consecutively i.e. first (2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1967 to 21<sup>st</sup> November, 1967); second (25<sup>th</sup> February, 1969 to 16<sup>th</sup> March, 1970) United Front and Democratic Coalition Front (2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1971 to 28<sup>th</sup> June, 1971)) Government headed by Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee and of course the declaration of the presidential rule as many as three times in the stop gaps ((20<sup>th</sup> February, 1968 to 25<sup>th</sup> February 1969; 19<sup>th</sup> March, 1970 to 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1971; and 29<sup>th</sup> June, 1971 to 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1972). Most interestingly, another Government namely 'Progressive Democratic Front' (21<sup>st</sup> November, 1967 to 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1968) headed by Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, and its activities have also been discussed in this chapter.

The sixth chapter captioned 'Progressive Democratic Alliances (PDA) Government – Promises and Performances' concentrates to discuss the causes behind the victory of the Congress party in the election of 1972. In this regard, the role of the Chhatra Parishad during the bloody activities of the Naxalites and the left Communists during the time of first and second United Front government has been discussed meticulously. In that context, the role of Siddhartha Sankar Ray as leader of the opposition during the very odd moment of the Congress party in West Bengal and his fearlessness as well as dynamic leadership have also been included.

In spite of the victory of the Congress party in West Bengal in 1972, what circumstances led to the landslide defeat of the Congress party in the election of 1977, has also been taken into account as a part of this chapter.

The last part of the dissertation happens to be the 'Conclusion' that tends to make a survey of the entire dissertation which has been depicted in the relevant chapters. By the way some of the issues have been incorporated here in order to identify some gaps which could not be successfully dealt with in spite of our efforts. There are controversies, counter arguments and debates as to our analysis and these

may be handled and clarified afterwards in the light of fresh look at the available documents.