

CHAPTER - I1. Introduction : The Problem.The Theoretical Framework.

The political and economic situation in West Bengal has been a constant cause of worry to both the Central and the State Governments. To any student of Indian political system in general and that of state-politics in particular, the study of West Bengal politics appears to be a fascinating one. To any discerning student of the Indian political system, the situation demands a thorough understanding of the regional characteristics of a society, a serious study of the roles of different political parties, an in depth study of the Centre-State relations, specially under situations where different political parties with divergent economic and political ideologies remain in power at the Centre and the constituent states, besides pondering over its impact on the over-all development of a healthy federal structure.

It may not be out of place here to mention that the dominance of one party both at the centre and the states does not necessarily result in a concurrence of views or an assured implementation of the policies proclaimed by the central leaders.

The present study, while taking into account the general nature of political dynamics in the state, seeks to highlight the role of the Congress Party since 1950. This kind of study calls for

an exhaustive examination of the state political system and it should throw light on the patterns of relationship between socio-economic variables and policy outputs. In other words, these variables may, for the sake of convenience, be grouped as 'environmental variables,' 'political system' variables, and 'output' variables.

The relationship between these variables can be investigated within a broad framework, involving,

(a) the study of socio-economic and demographic environment or states political system, with particular reference to the structure of societal interests and conflicts;

(b) a study of the operation of the political process in the state with particular reference to the roles of political parties and pressure groups;

(c) a study of the 'conversion institutions' between inputs and outputs (i.e., executive, legislative, judicial and administrative branches of the State Government concerned with particular reference to the decision-making structures and process; and

(d) a study of the policy outputs, with particular reference to their 'welfare' context and their impact on the socio-economic environment.

Keeping this mind, the study has sought to explore the socio-political background, historical forces, intellectual foundations and leadership issues of the State Congress Party since 1950. It highlights the socio-political influence that the Congress Party was able to exert on the political process in the State during this period. It also analysis the role of the Congress Party in the State and its relationship with the Congress High Command, taking into account the following tentative periodisations:

(a) State Politics : The phase of Formation and Crystallisation (1950-66); and

(b) State Politics : The Phase of Assertion, Destabilisation and Consolidation.

The entire discussion has been made along the following lines:

(a) Sequential narration of state politics in terms of major events and episodes; and

(b) Analysis of the authority structures and power distribution with the State Congress Party under different political leaders and its impact on the interacting relationship with the Congress High Command.

Following major research questions have been sought to

be answered within the broad framework of the nature of political process in the State of West Bengal:

(1) What were the factors that led to the institutionalisation of the 'Congress System' in the State of West Bengal just immediately after the attainment of independence?

(2) What are the characteristics that accompany the politics of 'Congress System' in the State? What are the social and psychological base of such peculiarities?

(3) What has been the relationship of the Pradesh Congress with the Congress High Command in regard to the formulation and implementation of the programmes and ~~xxxxxxx~~ policies in the State?

(4) What has been the nature of the operational tactics of the State Congress leadership in West Bengal in the face of changing nature of socio-political environment?

(5) What has been the nature of strategies of the non-Congress Parties in the State towards the role of the Pradesh Congress in the actualisation of their policies?

(6) What had been the ~~xxxxxx~~ reasons for the erosion of the monolithic nature of the Congress Party in the State and the emergence of coalition politics in the State?

It has very correctly been observed that it is really

difficult to provide a theoretical framework for the study of state politics in India in view of wide differences in the patterns and trends of political processes in different states. However, attempts have been made to identify a number of determinants which may be of great help in evolving a theoretical framework for the study of the state politics in India.

First, state politics operates within the constitutional framework provided by the framers of the Indian Constitution.

Secondly, the states are in themselves both a 'whole' and a 'part' - both an individual political persons and a member of a larger political family.

Thirdly, the Indian political system is a three-tier system with the state standing between the Centre and the local government. The 'inter-locked mechanism' of State politics which represents a kind of 'inter-growth' between the union and the local tiers, with the former by and large 'opening into' and the latter tending to 'open out' to it, especially since the establishment of panchayati raj at the grass root level.

Fourthly, a study of state politics reveals that the process is marked by the existence of both centripetal forces such as planning and one party dominance and the centrifugal forces like democratic decentralization, regionalism, linguism and

other demands. The combination of these two types of forces generates elements of competitiveness and bargaining in the political process of the State.

Fifthly, any study of state politics should take into consideration the changing perspectives and it has been very correctly observed: "a probe into the dynamics of change in terms of the cultural milieu, pace of socio-economic transformation, ideological moorings and personality - orientations should form the core of a worth-while and meaningful study of state politics in India."⁽¹⁾

It has further been very correctly observed that "the political system of a state in India has got to be viewed as a point of confluence of national, state and local politics; as a system of inter-connections and inter actions between cultural milieu and politics, between leadership and political institutions and processes, between tradition and modernity, as a political society in question of self-identity through the somewhat self-neutralising process of continuity and change: as a split of political person fighting against its own self-alienation, and in sum,⁽²⁾ as a miniature replica of a state's life in its totality."

Thus it is seen that for the proper understanding of the nature of political process in the state, a sound theoretical framework is required. While explaining the need of such a theoretical framework, it has been noted that "a framework is needed to

identity and articulate the points of study and research; to provide for a refracting structure for observing the changing political phenomena and locating the constants and variables in the panorama of state politics and to encourage scientific investigations into the labyrinth of state politics, which may ultimately lead to the emergence of a possible theory of state politics".⁽³⁾

But it is equally important to note that "the question of developing a theoretical framework for the study of state politics in the specific Indian context is an intriguing one. It can at best be an exercise in analytical political theory rather than an empiricist's attempt at model building from scientifically collected field data, which are not available in good measure even after thirty-five years of independence".⁽⁴⁾

While trying to analyse the nature of political process in the state, one has to take into consideration the fact that "the risk ~~is~~ inherent in employing the important western based tools in the analytical understanding of a problem of Indian political system are very much there. Particularly, the task of projecting comparative perspective, drawing on the tools provided by the functional school of comparative analysis seems to be baffling as the states here are not homogeneous political units having striking infra-structural diversities in terms of

religion, communities, castes and religions. There exists an appalling gap among states in respect of the levels of literacy, urbanisation, industrialisation and economic viability." (5)

Right from the beginning, the state of West Bengal has been called "a problem state" (6). It has already been mentioned that West Bengal's relations with the Centre took a radical turn and gradually slipped out of the control of the Congress leadership after the death of Dr. B.C. Roy who was able to exert influence on the Central leaders and get the state its due from the Centre. That is why, the present study has laid great stress on the leadership - issues and leadership qualities both at the organizational and governmental levels. While explaining the social and economic environment of the political process in West Bengal, attempt has been made to select a number of variables. Special attention has been given to the social configurations on the grounds that the system of social stratification is an important determinant of patterns of political organisation. (7) Attempts have been made to use sociological tools, census reports pattern of land tenure, urban-rural distribution and issues relating to social linkages. (8)

Regarding the nature of political process, special attention has been given to the configuration of political parties in the state. It has very correctly observed that "though Congress easily dominates the nations' parliament, there is far more competitive party situation in the some of the states." (9)

Keeping this mind, a detailed discussion has been made on the nature of interaction of the Congress Party in the state with other opposition parties.

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Lastly, the question of leadership - qualities has been sought to be studied from two separate perspectives. The first approach is concerned with 'leadership as a phenomenon in all societies' and second deals with leadership as being a set of attributes which are required for achieving organisational objectives.

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It is written these broad historical and political contexts that the present study seeks to analyse in depth the role played by the Congress party in the State of West Bengal in the very important formative period.

Lastly, attempts have also been made to examine the performance of the Congress Government in West Bengal, keeping in mind a number of compulsions that the Government faced at the initial phase. There had been greater demand for equal distribution of goods and services by the common people in general, compulsions of bringing about land and agrarian reforms and other related issues. In other words, the study has tried to examine the limits and capabilities of the political system in the State.

Another very important dimension in this discussion has ^{been} the issue of factionalism within the Congress Party itself.

The entire discussion has been sought to be made in two broad dimensions -- Governmental and Organisational. In this discussion, factors relating to modernization, development and greater political participation have also been taken into consideration.

Broadly conceived, the study is concerned with the social basis of power in all institutional sectors of society with patterns of social stratification and their impact on organised politics. It is with this end in view, this study tries to focus on the organisational analysis of political groups and political leadership, the study of both formal and informal party organisation with its linkage with all other sectors of society. (12)

2. Overview of the Existing Literature.

It should be made clear at the outset that no specific attempt has so far been made to find out the actual role of the Pradesh Congress Committee vis-a-vis the Congress High Command in the political process of West Bengal. In fact, very few works have been done on the course and trends of State politics in general.

It may not be out of place here to mention that the dominance of one party at both the ends does not necessarily result in a concurrence of views or an assured implementation of the policies proclaimed by the Central leaders. This has been beautifully explained by Marcus F. Frände in his book "West Bengal and the

"Federalizing Process". The period covered by him was from the time of the States Reorganisation to the year 1967, i.e. before West Bengal experienced a coalition government.

Nevertheless, there are some important insights in Franda's work on the electoral system. Both Franda and Broomfield ("Elite conflict in a Plural Society - Twentieth Century Bengal") have identified different 'levels' of political activity. Broomfield had shown that the disparity between the electoral failure of the Moderate under Surendra Nath Banerjee and their simultaneous success within the Legislative Council, was due to the existence of two distinct idioms of electoral appeal. They had failed to understand that elections to the Council required to talk the language of personal obligation and interest, just as the rhetoric of nationalism counted within Council.

In a similar vein, Franda traces Atulya Ghosh's success as a State Party boss to his ability to politic in three different idioms -- one is a 'modern' idiom, concerned with formulations of programmes, policies and plans; the second is 'traditional' idiom, addressed to caste and related factors; the third is a saintly style; as typified in Vinoba Bhave's political figure. It would be interesting to study how much this has changed.

It is important to mention here the three broad assumptions which run through Franda's analysis.

In the first place, the family is seen as a microcosm of authoritarian political leadership. For example, Atulya Ghosh has been depicted as a paternal - aggregative political personality during the formative period of the Congress Party in post-independent West Bengal.

Secondly, the political process, the proliferation of political parties and splintering correspond to a rationalisation of group interests.

Thirdly, the most distinctive feature of Franda's analysis on a macro-level, is the perception of a lack of political cohesion within the Indian State system.

West Bengal's relations with the Centre took a radical turn and gradually slipped out of the control of the Congress leadership after the death of Dr. B.C. Roy who was able to influence the Central leaders and get the State its due from the Centre. The utter neglect of land reforms increasingly weakened the hold of the Congress in the rural areas. Anti-Congressism became the common factor among different political parties which joined together to defeat the Congress at the polls. Although the opposition parties were able to wrest powers from the Congress, it continued to be the largest single party in the State and it continued to play a very significant role in the political process of the state.

It is interesting to note that Indian scholars started

analysing the nature and course of state politics with all seriousness only after 1967. Since then a number of scholarly works have been accomplished on the theme both from micro and macro stand points. In this respect, two books deserve special mentioning, namely (a) Iqbal Narain's State Politics in India and (b) Myron Weiner's State Politics in India, both edited and published in 1965 and 1968 respectively. Apart from these books, mention must be made of Subhash C. Kashyap's book. "The Politics of Defection: A Study of State Politics in India (1969) and K. E. Kamal's "Party - Politics in an Indian State " (1969).

On the specific issues relating to West Bengal Politics, a few other works have been accomplished. Notable them are:

1. Ranjit Roy - The Agony of West Bengal, 1971.
2. J. H. Broomfield - Elite Conflict in a Rural Society : Twentieth Century Bengal, O.U.P. 1968.
3. M. F. Franda - Political Development and Political Decay in Bengal, Firm K. L. M. 1971.
4. Sankar Bhosh - The Disinherited State - A Study of West Bengal, Orient Longman, 1971.

It should be mentioned here that all these works are generally concerned with specific issues and hence undimensional and narrow in coverage. Besides, no work on Congress Politics in West Bengal have either been undertaken on some hitherto unexplo-

red areas and it might open new areas for further research in this field.

3. Chapterwise Arrangements:

The following plan has been adopted in connection with the present study.

Chapter I of the present study deals with the introductory part. An attempt has been made to throw some light on the theoretical framework for the study of State politics in general and that of West Bengal in particular.

Chapter II analysis the socio-political and historical setting as well as some of the important problems confronting the State of West Bengal immediately before Independence. Some references have been made to peculiar geographical setting, economic condition and political problems.

Chapter III deals with the nature of political process in the post-partition situation in West Bengal. Special attention has been given on the emergence of Congress Party in the State. Equal stress has been laid on the discussion of leadership issues -- both organisational and governmental.

Chapter IV reviews the working of the State Congress Party under successive PCC leaders as well as successive Chief Ministers. Here attention has been paid on the problems of perio-

disation. Its impact on the general nature of political process in the state has been analysed in greater details.

Chapter V analyses the relations between the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) and the Congress High Command. It also discusses the nature of interactions of the PCC with other opposition parties in the state. Attempts have been made to find out the reasons of deviations from the declared policies of the Congress High Command.

Chapter VI identifies a number of basic socio-political and economic issues. It also discuss the attitude of the State Congress leaders towards these problems. A critical appraisal has been sought to be made regarding the performance of the state apparatus in tackling these problems.

Chapter VII is concerned with the concluding observation and it has been established that it is futile to judge the role of a state unit of the Congress Party without taking into account the peculiar and compelling circumstances in which it operates. Each state in the Indian federal set-up has its own historical perspective, economic condition and political milieu. Moreover, individual and collective leadership qualities also play an important role in this regard. The state of West Bengal offers a unique example in this respect and rightly deserves serious attention from a researcher interested in the study of state politics in its macro as well as micro dimension.

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Notes and References:

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
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5. Haridwari Rai and Jawahar Lal Pandey, "State Politics: In Need of a Framework of Analysis", Indian Journal of Political Science, June, 1979, pp. 132-133.
6. Subhash C. Kashyap, The Politics of Power, New Delhi, 1974, p. 501.
7. For details see, Myron Weiner (ed.), State Politics in India, Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 7.
8. Ibid.,
9. Ibid.
10. For leadership issues, a number of works can be cited for the purpose of formulating a theoretical framework. For greater details see

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11. Myron Winer, "Changing Patterns of Political leadership in West Bengal" in Political change in South Asia, Firms KLM Calcutta, 1963.
12. For a proper and ~~xxxxxx~~ Comprehensive understanding of the theoretical formulation, also see Rudolf d' Mellow, "Review" of Iqbal Narain's State Politics in India, Published in Seminar, April, 1978.