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## Kohli-Williams Debate And The Decline Of The Left In West Bengal

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### **Abstract:**

*Kohli gives emphasis to independent political variables and provides autonomous significance to political structures and processes. He believes in 'state-in-society' approach. In contrast with Kohli (1990), Glyn Williams (2001) regards that Kohli overemphasizes the political variables and the role of political parties and leadership in producing coherent rule, integrated domination, and social legitimization altogether. By emphasizing on the role of political organization Kohli disregards the role of political discourse and local political practice. The Left leaders were effective in engaging themselves with the everyday life processes of the rural people producing a politics of attachment through an organizational grid that has had skill and efficiency to keep attached at the local level. This type of leadership and organization promoted the Left and TMC failed to grasp. As a government the Left used 'non-hegemonic conquest' model to win electoral battles. The 'hegemonic' model was lapsed; hence, the Left as movement got a declining slope.*

**Key words:** Governability. Organization. Institution. Political discourse. Participation. Empowerment. Hegemony.

Since 1977 politics in West Bengal is dominated by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the leading partner of Left Front in West Bengal. West Bengal, according to Kohli, managed to reverse the 'crisis of governability' that dislodged political stability in other parts of India. This political turmoil was the resultant effect of the lack of consensual politics in Congress party and the party's failure to incorporate the diverse and dissatisfied groups and interests, 'a growing organizational vacuum at the core of India's political space' (Kohli, 1990: 5) and 'personalistic and centralising leaders' (Kohli, 1994: 105). Kohli's approach to the organizations and institutions that emphasizes the central importance to the role of political parties, political leaders and social forces is in contrast with the political discourse approach (Chatterjee, 1997 and Harriss, 1998). Kohli gives emphasis to independent political variables and provides autonomous significance to political structures and processes. He takes the capacity to govern as dependent variable and four interrelated factors like the changing role of political elite, capacity of political organization, mobilization for electoral competition and growing conflicts between contending social groups as independent variables. He believes in 'state-in-society' approach. This approach emphasizes that state comprises various interest groups and the nature and effectiveness of political regime can be considered in terms of the actions performed by the political actors who are at the 'commanding heights' of institutions (Migdal, 1994). There is the 'autonomy of the political' in the social sphere. Where social pressures are exposed through parties, society becomes peaceful, and where they fail to do, conflict and violence become the outcome. The structural-functionalist and Marxist approach tend to emphasize the dependent role of political variables of state and politics, which are determined by socio-political forces unlike Kohli and contemporary scholars like Samuel Huntington and Guillermo O'Donnell's emphasis on political considerations over societal considerations. Political variables like quality of leadership, choices of the leaders, the ideological orientation of the leaders, the degree of intra-elite harmony, dominant political institutions like parties and party system, and legislative and executive relations influence the functioning of the democratic institutions. Huntington proposes that political decay results from the failure of political institutions to accommodate social groups that are mobilized by a complex set of social forces. Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' and modern concept of 'institutionalization' becomes mutually overlapping concepts, when Gramsci (1971) puts forward the concept of 'crisis of authority': 'the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously etc.' (Gramsci, 1971: 276). Social conflicts, 'anomie', 'social disorganization', 'dysfunction' in transitional societies, according to structural-functionalists like Durkheim, Jhonson, and Smelser and Parsons, emerge out of the independent role of the socio-economic forces. Kohli regards the crisis of leadership and governability. To him, the CPI (M) leadership in West Bengal is shared by three wings of the party – the party organizational wing, peasant wing and parliamentary wing. Conflicts within these wings over the issue of sharing of power are kept under control by two important factors like party discipline based on democratic centralist lines producing coherent policy initiatives and shared perception of common enemy producing political unity.

'Organizational decline within the Congress party and the many power disputes have both contributed to the erosion of established patterns of local authority. Barring a few exceptions, new institutional patterns of authority have not emerged. The institutional vacuum in the periphery, in turn, helps explain a number of political trends, including coalitional instability and subnational fluctuations...' (Kohli, 1990: 15). Absence of effective political institutionalization leads to the violent politicization of social conflicts. Strong leaders and disciplined ruling parties can bring about cohesive political structures. Along with this cohesive political structure growth-oriented and redistribution-based social coalitions can bring about political order replacing violence. As a disciplined and left-of-the centre party the CPI (M) in West Bengal has achieved to penetrate deep into the countryside without depending on the rural gentry of the past regime and without undergoing 'fundamental structural change'. 'While the class structure remains intact, not only has institutional penetration been achieved but also institutional power has been transferred from the hands of the dominant propertied groups to a politicized lower strata.' (Kohli, 1987: 113). The 'social-democratic' strategy is the ruling strategy of the Left Front led by the CPI (M) that has eschewed the revolutionary mobilization. They have concentrated on consolidating their positions in the rural areas by providing reform measures on hoping that reform measures would improve the conditions of middle and rich peasants and make possible the repeated electoral victories. Przeworski (1980) regards that 'To win the votes of people other than workers, particularly the petty bourgeoisie, to form alliances and coalitions, to administer the government in the interests of workers, a party cannot appear to be irresponsible, to give any indication of being less than wholehearted about its commitment to the rules and limits of the parliamentary game.' (Przeworski, 1980: 30-31). In addition to this, the Left Front government has pursued a policy of discouraging labour militancy for attracting business and environment. The reform-oriented communists have provided some reliefs for the people of West Bengal from chaos and instability with the help of organizational strongholds. Hence, Kohli (1987) emphasizes four characteristics of Left Front rule in West Bengal for understanding CPI (M)'s reformism – the unified and coherent leadership takes policy decisions and gives political attention to the tasks of development, the ideological goals and disciplined organizational attachments do not allow the CPI (M)'s access to the upper classes, the organizational arrangement is concentrated, combined with local initiative and knowledge, and flexible ideology makes reform tolerable to the socially powerful. Ideologically and organizationally, the CPI (M) has sought to exclude the propertied classes from 'political governance, while allowing them to maintain their social power'. In fact, reformism requires 'institutionalization of pro-lower-class goals' within the governing structures. The political characteristics allow such institutionalization. 'A well-organized, parliamentary communist regime in West Bengal – more social democratic than communist – has initiated systematic social reforms. The fragmented, commercial-peasant oriented regime in U.P., by contrast, failed in its reformist initiatives. The case of Karnataka lies in between: a strong leader presiding over a populist political arrangement had limited success in channelling resources to some select groups among lower rural classes.' (Kohli, 1984: 669). For electoral success the CPI (M) needed broad-based electoral support and decided to go slow for socialist options. The CPI (M) tried to accommodate landowners and urban capitalists to influence economic performance, to survive within the framework of democratic-capitalism, to win elections and to gain power. Regime legitimacy depends on the ability of the leaders to manage the economy. This autonomy of the political space is also supported by Rudolph and Rudolph (1987) in their study on Indian political economy that 'a decline in state autonomy..., a decline that encompasses both authoritarian and democratic regimes... deterioration in state autonomy is associated with two phenomena: (i) a long-term increase in social mobilization...; and (ii) de-institutionalization – i.e., a secular decline in the authority and capacity of state agencies and political parties to articulate a public philosophy and to respond to and broker political demands within the framework of that philosophy... the best economic performance in India was achieved under a democratic regime with a strong state.' (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1997: 177-178). For this, the CPI (M) as strong political party with its ideological political strongholds could not perform as revolutionary party to ensure the imperatives of 'demand politics': 'short-term goals, competitive processes of determining policies and the public interest, and the provision of private goods... constrained and directed by the imperatives of electoral victory and pluralist and class bargaining.' (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1997: 179). It is oriented towards of incremental policy choice. Following figure (Fig. 1) explains the reformist orientation of CPI (M).

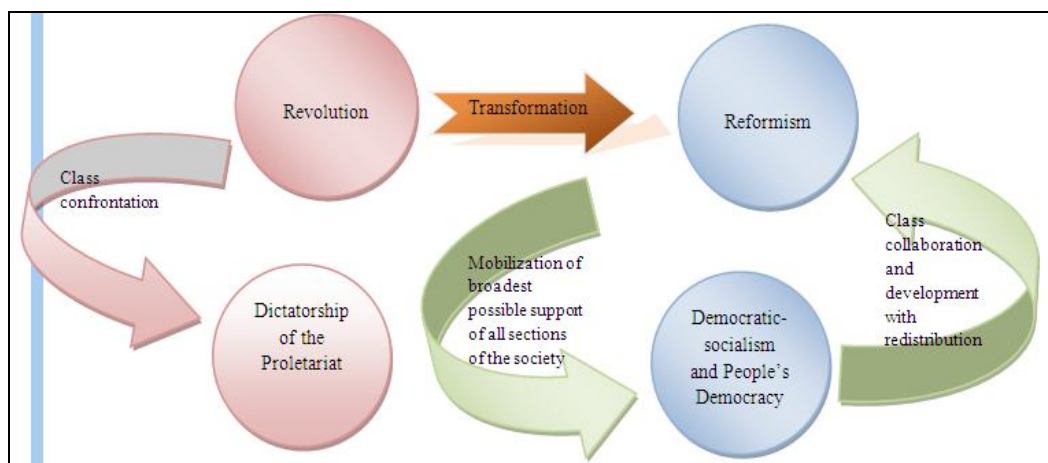


Figure 1

The CPI (M) party programme recommends democratic-socialist measures and mobilization of broadest possible support against authoritarianism, feudalism and capitalism like agrarian reforms programmes seeking the support of the rich, middle and poor peasants, addresses the problems of irrigation, seeds and fair prices for the produce. The exploiting classes are class enemies as long as they remain productive and willing to extend political support (CPI-M, 1978; Report, 1979).

In contrast with Kohli (1990), Glyn Williams (2001) regards that Kohli overemphasizes the political variables and the role of political parties and leadership in producing coherent rule, integrated domination, and social legitimization altogether. The ideas and policies from higher echelons are transmitted to the lower echelons through hierarchical organizations. Kohli separates political institutions from the social and gives less emphasis on the social and its dependent role. The role of political discourse or culture is absent from Kohli's work. Populism and public choice approach cannot be traced in his work. In fact, the primordial loyalties of caste, ethnicity and religion are of great importance in analysing modern India. Policy decisions and electoral battles are located within the wider political discourse of politics. West Bengal's political history is a part of the political discourse or the state's political culture, which may be placed as the leadership was changed through continued struggle and thereby the values and ideas of the people was changed. 'There was an overall change of leadership:... after election (1978 Panchayat elections), people did not go to the landlord, but the people came to us... This change of leadership did not come easily.' (Williams, 2001: 610). In few cases local leaders were aiming to link their actions to a discourse of a good government with greater participation, equality and fair play. The concept of 'good governance' is a-political and 'party work' is political and partisan in character. 'Politicians' attempts to demonstrate "impartiality" focuses the attention of public debate on corruption, nepotism and the correct implementation of government rules, while drawing it away from questions of what rule should be used for, and how this relates to real and healthy differences between parties' political projects.' (Williams, 2001: 612). The official party ideology of class struggle and progression towards socialism from the central party offices is transformed to Panchayats and grassroots leaders, who are primarily concerned with local narratives, public choices and mass feelings. Williams cites Partha Chatterjee (1997) about left political discourse that 'leftism in Bengal is parasitic upon a whole cultural heritage among the Bengali intelligentsia in which patriotism has been intimately tied with a distinctly religious expression of the signs of power, in which the celebration of the power of the masses has been accompanied by an unquestioned assumption of the natural right of the intelligentsia to represent the whole people, in which utopian dreams of liberation have found expression in a barely concealed admiration for the politics of terrorism.' (Chatterjee, 1997: 3-4). Therefore, the approach should be on understanding the importance of political discourse in the creation of political stability or instability, ideas of good government, democratization and participatory politics and governance. By emphasizing on the role of political organization Kohli disregards the role of political discourse and local political practice. The concepts of democracy and political citizenship are also important dimensions of studying political stability or instability in West Bengal. Greater attention should be paid on political culture and practice through ethnographic investigation, decentralization and democratization processes, and approach to from 'margins to mainstream' (World Development Report, 2001).

The officially recognized forms of participatory development are compatible with liberalization and poor people's voices. Here, in the era of Participatory Rural Appraisal boom, participatory practices and discourses represent a new paradigm, where participation cannot always be considered as de-politicization, rather it can also be considered as re-politicization. Participatory development is a form of 'political control'. 'Participatory development today stands accused of three interrelated feelings: of emphasizing personal reform over political struggle, of obscuring local power differences by uncritically celebrating the community, and of using a language of emancipation to incorporate marginalised populations' (Williams, 2004: 558). In Chambers's (1997) words, the development-as-de-politicization paradigm treats people as people, multiple realities as homogeneous and singular, and combines decentralization, democracy, dynamism and diversity into one. But by homogenising the multiples into a singular, by providing the local as the site for action participatory development is in danger when it acts like de-politicization of development. It is only to hide the repressive structure and the bitter taste of exploitation. It is necessary to explain the local power relationships in the participatory development process within particular times and spaces (Cornwall, 2002). The more participatory the enquiry, the more it will mask the community power structure (Kothari, 2001). It is the process of re-politicization and encirclement of the peripheral power relations. Participatory development process as de-politicization refers to social inclusion of the marginalized individuals and groups into the process so that they cannot question the process. The development practitioners shift responsibility on to the participating people (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001). In the development process the discourse of participation refers to the 'anti-politics machine', that is 'the entrenchment and expansion of institutional state power almost invisibly, under cover of a neutral,' bureaucratic power' or 'bureaucratic state power' or 'state power' or a kind 'of trying together, multiplying and coordinating power relations' (Ferguson, 1994: 255-256, 273). It is nothing but re-politicization rather than de-politicization. The participatory discourse plays an important role in the recognition and legitimation of non-state power centres. There persists opportunities for re-politicization of the people. People here become empowered subjects. Limited engagement or tactical engagement or exit of the people in the development process is nothing but re-politicization and provide means of passive resistance to the tyranny of participation. The development initiatives seek to improve the political capabilities of the poor, which essentially means the 'institutional and organizational resources as well as collective ideas available for effective political action' (Whitehead and Gray-Molina, 1999: 6), mobilization and sustained political action of the poor, and poor people's political empowerment (Moore and Putzel, 1999). The spaces of participation of the poor and disadvantaged people means movements and moments of participation, which means the regularised relations through which citizens become part of the governance (Cornwall, 2002). Therefore, it is the re-politicization of the development process, where the overemphasis on political variables is not tenable. The role of political discourse, political culture and action are important in understanding the political and development process.

What experiences can we garner from Indian federal polity in the faces of momentous decline of communist regime in Eastern Europe? In India we need to have a federal polity with satisfactory human development, need to decentralize economic power by empowering the people. What is necessary is to empower the people. A multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious and cultural Indian polity is best suited to democratic centralization rather than centralization as the desire for change must come from the people, such type of people-oriented change must be compatible with the genius and capabilities of the people, and such type of change costs less and this transition is less painful. There cannot be a conflict between Marxism and adherents of social democracy, because the objective of both is the same like empowering the people or self-governance by the people, which is the highest form of democracy (Ghosh, 1991). The Left in West Bengal follows this objective of social democracy and empowering the people for gaining power and political stability. This discourse of participation is performed within the 'anti-politics machine' of Ferguson or bureaucratic state power. The dictatorship of the proletariat has been reduced to the dictatorship of the party, which has often been reduced to the dictatorship of the coterie of the party resulting in the growth of bureaucratism. For consolidating its power and rule the CPI (M) uses the instruments of popular participation, people's empowerment and the anti-politics machine and the instrument of ideology of social democratic reformism. The Central Committee of the CPI (M) concedes that socialism is like capitalism and does not require enemies and do require broadest support bases. 'If the Central Committee, nevertheless, insists that the "transition between socialism and communism" which it posits in its document and the "transition between capitalism and communism" which textually appears in Marx and Lenin are equivalent statements, then the only logical conclusion would be that in the eyes of the Central Committee socialism is the same as capitalism. Truly,...., with such friends socialism does not require enemies.' (Chattopadhyay, 1990: 2121). It needs broadest political support from all corners of the society. To this end, land reforms through panchayats have been made and that will bring the panchayat system closer to the ideal of participatory governance. Resources for various poverty alleviation programmes are distributed through Panchayats. People from the lower and middle classes, poor peasants, sharecroppers, agricultural labourers and teachers have come to hold power and resource distribution. Village constituency meetings are instruments of direct participation of the people in the planning process. For successful democratic decentralization, there has to be decentralization and devolution of power. Power should be dispersed, not localized. The greater is the extent of decentralization, the greater will be the consciousness of the people concerned. This would act as counterweight to reduce the degree of politicization of the people's planning process. Another counterweight is the involvement of the voluntary organizations. The enthusiasm and energy of the people through the introduction of Panchayats have waned. Growth in agricultural production, breakdown of the power of rural landed elite and moneylenders, and the empowerment of the poor and marginalized at the periphery have all contributed to the growth of a new middle class, which is prone to anti-incumbency wave (Crook, 1999). In the panchayat elections in 1998 the Left Front lost ground to the main opposition party, Trinamul Congress.

Trinamul Congress had a better tally in 1998 Panchayat elections and the solid superiority of the Left Front once again was vindicated. However, the Left rule continued up to 2009. After spectacular victory in 2004 Lok Sabha polls gaining 34 seats out of 42 and 50.7 percent of voters the Left showed its strength in the 2006 assembly polls with 235 seats and 50.3 per cent of the votes. But in 2009 Lok Sabha elections the Left bagged only 15 seats out of 42 and only 43.3 per cent of the votes. In this year's assembly election the Left partners won only 99 seats and were reduced to a minority status in electoral terms. This situation was further worsened during the 2011 assembly elections when the Left partners secured only 62 seats and 41 per cent of the votes. The opposition parties successfully outnumbered Left's electoral support by more than 2 millions. This was a tragic scene on the part of the Left movement in West Bengal. The land and tenurial reforms, democratic decentralization, agricultural growth and rise in the income level of the poor, cadre-based organizations and well-functioning election machinery with a command structure, maintenance of peace by bridging the social gaps between various segments and communities along with the loose oppositional forces contributed to the continuing supremacy of the Left. In spite of that the Left as a movement lost its original political spaces. The Left leaders were effective in engaging themselves with the everyday life processes of the rural people producing a politics of attachment through an organizational grid that has had skill and efficiency to keep attached at the local level. This type of leadership and organization promoted the Left and TMC failed to grasp. As a government the Left used 'non-hegemonic conquest' model to win electoral battles. The 'hegemonic' model was lapsed; hence, the Left as movement got a declining slope. Similarly, with TMC that should have to use the non-hegemonic model rather than creating the threats of imposing hegemonic presidential rule over the people of West Bengal. TMC has not learnt the lessons that 'a vertical or centralized control over the party will not do, what's needed is lateral linkage between various mass organs of the party within a concerted frame of established objectives; that only episodic mobilization during elections will yield little results, a more engaging kind of social politics is needed; that cobbling together various constituents on the eve of the polls confuse the electorate, what needed was an enduring form of alliance based on ideology rather than exclusive pragmatism; and that a close identification with external agencies such as the central government can have only detrimental effects, what's required is active involvement in local issues, in the distinctive political ethos of the state or locality rather than periodic threats of imposing president's rule on the state's people.' (Bhattacharyya, 2004: 1533). Please see Figures 2 and 3 for further clarification.

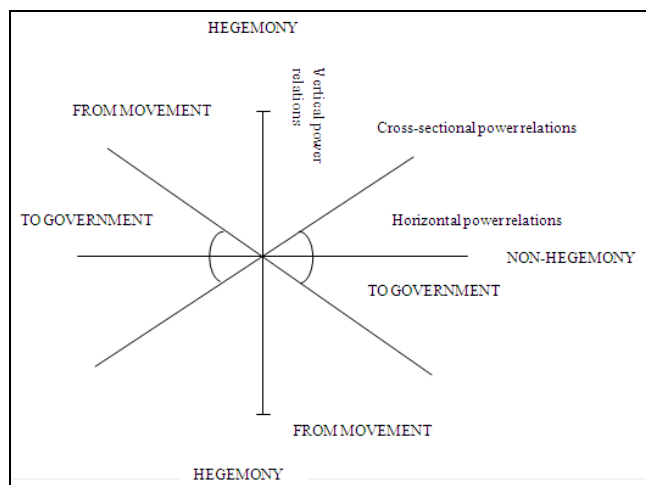


Figure 2

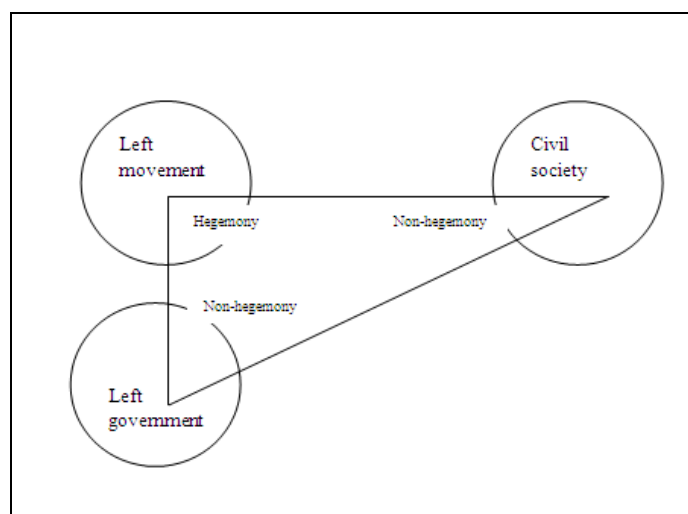


Figure 3

Apart from non-hegemonic control over the populace directly CPI (M) provides hegemonic control over party leaders and elected representatives of the party in assembly, and also in panchayati raj bodies. The downward devolution of power has given rise to middle class, who now controls the devolution of power through panchayats that may be called as 'elected popular bureaucracy' (Bhattacharyya, 1994: 86). The CPI (M) justifies its control in terms of political-organizational perspective of democratic centralism. The CPI (M) state committee directives on panchayats may be pointed out as 'democratic participation does not mean acting at will. It means the activation of panchayats in accordance with the principles of and ideals of the party. The basic issues involved here are giving party leadership to panchayats. The leadership consists of (a) political leadership, and (b) organizational leadership... The political leadership of the party is established only when people in their own experience, accept the political perspective of the party as their own... Panchayat activities should be conducted in such a way that they conform to the basic goals of the party.' (CPI-M, 1994). Again, it was stated that all elected members of the panchayats would act under the directives of the state committee. Local and zonal committees would look after the panchayat matters. The final decision would have to be taken by the Parichalan Committee of the party. This growing hegemony of the party has had provided the organizational strength to the panchayats and party functionaries, which created the 'politicization of the planning process and implementation of the public projects' (Ghatak and Ghatak, 2002: 56). It is argued that the Left Front has had created an environment of security around the marginals and deprived sections of the populace that any other state government has not done with a subtle combination of hegemony and non-hegemony, when and where needed like that of the unique class-community coalition and coalition of socially marginalized groups that included dalits, adivasis and Muslims (Yadav and Kumar, 2006). Recently, TMC has been able to break the coalition in favour of the Left and draw the support of the marginalized sections, especially the minority groups in its own favour. Tactically, CPI (M) shifted its attention status from a party of industrial proletariat to that of marginal farmers, share-croppers and landless poor. Recently, this space has been hijacked by TMC especially after Nandigram and Singur incidents. The rural bedrocks of the Left were turned into pieces. The Brand Buddha strategy

failed to maintain the support bases for the Left. Buddha pursued neo-liberalism that insists on 'corporate industrialization and that too without any "reservation price", imparts an anti-people character to the process of "industrialization", where protests and even tragedies like Nandigram become inevitable fall-out.' (Patnaik, 2007: 1895). This strategy was nothing but 'accumulation through encroachment' (Ibid). But due to fragmented opposition and lack of opportune atmosphere the Left won 2006 assembly polls. The Left secured more than 50 per cent, which was better than that of any opposition party like TMC, Congress and BJP, which secured 26 per cent, 15 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively. However, the messages of industrialization, development of urban infrastructure, and promotion of the living conditions of the urban middle classes that kindled the hopes and aspirations of the new voters in 2006 elections turned into opposition direction after 2009 and especially in the year of 2011. Mamata Banerjee supported the Krishi Jami Bachao movement and got the support of farmers. The challenge for the Left Front government centred around the issue of converting arable farm lands into industrial and commercial purposes produced anti-left sentiments that impacted on the election results later on and provided ample opportunities for the opposition parties, especially the TMC to capture the rural base. The Left is alienated from the basic classes (Patnaik, 2011) and practical assimilation to the attitudes of ruling classes was seen at its worst in the suppression of popular protests at Singur and Nandigram. There "party interest" has overcome the interest of basic classes. (Gohain, 2011). In this connection the stand of the party central committee may be explained as Mr. Prakash Karat explained that land would have to be identified and acquired for the growing needs of infrastructure development, industry, planned urbanization, and other sectors. Acquisition of some agricultural land would be unavoidable in certain large projects where contiguity is also required. (Karat, 2005).

Individual-oriented hegemonic, whimsical and autocratic leadership did not produce organizational effectiveness of the TMC, which came to power with emotional anti-left anti-establishment spirit. Miss Mamata Banerjee used the language of the underworld. The middle classes that had earlier applauded her from the side-lines soon turned against her. Businessmen, industrialists and small traders who wanted a stable administration knew there would be chaos with this lady. They wanted to function within the modalities of the system. (Mitra, 2001). In spite of various loopholes, after 2009 the Trinamul Congress succeeded to win the assembly elections, especially due to the non-Left wave among the populace throughout West Bengal. But TMC has not able to garner the support of the larger sections of SCs and STs as the party has failed to make a durable or stable connecting links between political and social spaces or the state and the civil society with everyday aspirations of the marginalized population within the periphery. The aggressive anti-establishment spirit and middle class life style produced for her a number of supporters from different ranks of hawkers, slum dwellers, illegal settlers and workers in the informal sectors and middle ranking people from urban and rural sectors. She and her party captured the emotional Bengali culture of 'goddesses of deliverance', anti-Left sentiments of substantial electorates, and the vacant social and political spaces left by the Left parties. The people of West Bengal is fascinated by 'goddesses of deliverance' and few sections like newspaper groups, slum dwellers, underworlds, bureaucrats etc. were looking for deliverance from the Left Front which was not fulfilled altogether. Again, the Left partners, especially the CPI (M) also were not able to pursue successfully the non-hegemonic rule. Essentially, land and tenurial reforms, democratic decentralization, agricultural growth and rise in the income level of the poor, cadre-based organizations and well-functioning election machinery with a command structure, maintenance of peace by bridging the social gaps between various segments and communities did not produce electoral success, especially due to nepotism and corruption within the party organization, inefficient functioning of decentralized institutions, underdevelopment in health and education, over-ambitious and self-contained motivations of the leaders, and lack of adequate knowledge and attention to the local political discourse and practices. In spite of lower per capita income in West Bengal, there has been significant redistribution within the state that provided political support to the Left Front to become stable. Redistribution through land reforms provided substitute for growth, which reached its peak in the 1980s that showed a decline in the 1990s. The factors that contributed to the political stability of West Bengal under Left Front rule as noticed by Kohli (1990) came into being as the determining factors for the decline of the Left in West Bengal from 2009. Political organization is one of the factors for political domination, which worked hard to gain political supremacy. Economic stagnation or ever-increasing informalization of the economy helped to maintain stability through political organization. During 1980s the real value added for organized industries in West Bengal was 11.53 per cent that went down to 5.79 per cent in 1990s. In the manufacturing sector the real value added was below 2 per cent in the 1980s that went up to 3 per cent in the 1990s. There was stagnation in industrial production. This state is below the national average in the spheres of per capita consumption and poverty, in spite of its place above the national average with respect to literacy, infant mortality and life expectancy at birth (West Bengal Human Development Report, 2004). There is an essential correlation between increasing informalization of the economy and strong political organization that in turn is correlated with electoral victory and political stability. Political society takes that party for granted to rule which is strongest, and political party produces itself as strongest through its organization. The informal employees, such as small manufacturers, rickshaw pullers, auto-rickshaw drivers, taxi drivers, traders, hawkers, shopkeepers etc. are more vulnerable and have to well-defined property rights. This sector has been captured by TMC left vacant by the Left. In market democracy an individual in a 'political society' (Chatterjee, 2004) has to sell his voting right and economic stagnation serves to ensure the votes of the people, who are dependent on them. Poor people like to lead a political life than that of the rich (Yadav, 2000). 'Interestingly, the highly educated are the only group among whom enthusiasm for democracy has declined during this period. Faith in democracy has registered highly significant gains among the most marginalized groups: dalits, tribals and Muslims.' (Yadav, 2000: 139-140). Economic dependency of the poor and political control by the political party – this correlation makes political stability possible and provides opportunity to the political party for further control. TMC, now-a-days, has taken to extend its support bases and control out of this capital of dependency of the poor, especially in the informal sector. 'It is the increasing informalization of the economy and the breakdown of the formal legal system, which forms the basis of a political society... if the economy had become substantially formalized and if the legal system were less costly, most people would have voted independently where ideology and

other considerations would have become more important. Organization would play a lesser role in such a case... It demonstrates that a strong political organization is indeed necessary to reap the fruits of informalization.' (Sarkar, 2006: 346-347).

However, the Left Front in West Bengal began to change the terms of politics in the rural areas of the state coupled with decentralization, local democracy, distribution of khas and patta lands in excess of ceiling and 'Operation Barga' and made a stable solution to the 'crisis of governability' that credited the Left Front for offering a good blend of political mobility and bureaucratic stability that turned governance into an institutionalized process. The Left regime with coherent leadership, ideology, organization and flexibility was politically capable to initiate effective action in the eradication of rural poverty, to penetrate local level decision-making by strengthening panchayati raj institutions, by implementing beneficiary oriented programmes, by holding regular elections, and by putting candidates relating to the depressed classes (Kohli, 1987, Lieten, 1988, and Roy, 1983). CPI (M)'s commitment to the programmes of tenurial reforms and registration of bargadars contributed to its success (Bandopadhyay, 1981). Further, with regard to the implementation of IRDP the beneficiaries are mainly from the poorer sections of the rural society, where the CPI (M) is largely in control of the allocation of IRDP loans in the villages. The disadvantaged sections of the population are the main constituency of the CPI (M). These are the key factors that should be understood in the functioning of IRDP in West Bengal (Dreze, 1990). '... the success of the Naxalites among the peasantry forced the CPM to take peasant support seriously. The result was that over the last two decades the CPM increasingly became a rural party with the bulk of its seats being own in the rural constituencies and its programme being concentrated in the villages.' (Kohli, 1990: 371). The Left partners, especially the CPI (M) were able not only to use and employ local norms but also political discourse in the informal domains of social politics through skilful mobilization of organizational resources. The Left Front headed by CPI (M) always favoured coherent and active organization to expand the effects of their activities, but did not encourage the people to engage in political affairs. The Left Front in general and the CPI (M) in particular, closed down the option of an individual exercising his judgement as individual and has managed to exercise that action as a collectivity. The party-oriented activities have emerged in rural West Bengal with the institutionalization of panchayats. The CPI (M) from panchayats to schools, from colleges to universities pursued the strategy of controlling the civic institutions and the space of civil society, which consistently provided Left Front essential electoral turn-outs. CPI (M)'s control was obviously not the articulation of spontaneous and voluntary expression of the people always, it was also the patron-client relations that effectively organized and controlled all the institutions of the civil society. The Left Front led by the CPI (M) has managed 'to integrate the government, the civil society institutions and the various bodies... through a policy of proverbial carrot and the stick.' (Mukhopadhyay, 2001: 1943). '... Especially in the rural areas, a large part of that party's cadre is in any case engaged on an everyday basis in political work at the village level in connection with the running of the 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.' (Chatterjee et.al., 1998: 149). Left Front's electoral success during previous years may be explained in terms of 'governmental performance', 'locality-based political conduct' and 'ideological rhetoric as well as the availability of a consensus building mechanism built into the state's institutional processes.' (Bhattacharyya, 2004: 5483). 'Left's objectives were facilitated by the success of its agrarian reforms, by the execution of administrative decentralization, a sustained campaign against the centre's "step-motherly" attitude towards the state and the uninterrupted cultural hegemony of the urban middle classes (Bhattacharyya, 2004: 5483). The role of re-politicization through decentralization and civil society are important. But, it would be better to say that a non-hegemonic conquest model is more specifically applied to the CPI (M) that can help to explain the abandonment of radical politics of 1960s than that of Bhattacharyya's 'cultural hegemony of the middle classes'. CPI (M)'s approach to rule is non-hegemonic on the ground that in hegemonic rule manufacturing of the consent of the people is a one-way traffic, where the discourses of the people is not negotiated with the discourses of the people. But this has not been possible in West Bengal, where the role of institutionalization of party, decentralization and re-politicization of the masses are important and have taken important place in the socio-political structures and discourses of the state. CPI (M) has abandoned class discourses and adopted a non-class, diffused and general discourses of national integration, mobilization, participation and development that must incorporate the demands and aspirations of every strata or largest cross-section of the society that are affected by the state policies. Retreated from class politics it is the hegemonised politics that rules the left politics in West Bengal. The non-hegemonic left rule has declined in West Bengal. Javed Alam (1991) regards that the 'non-hegemonic conquest' model is the main factor for the failure of communist movement in India and same is the case with the CPI (M) and Left movement in West Bengal. The ability to assess the situation, movement and the political space and to take proper tactical approach is the precondition of hegemonic politics of a political party. 'The concept of hegemony is not simply a cultural concept but evolves all arena of political activity. Whenever a party fails to properly assess the situation and accordingly utilise all opportunities of extending its political-ideological hegemony, the "inevitable" result is the "paradoxical propensity" among the people who look towards that party for leadership. In other words, we would suggest, social and political spaces do not lie vacant, ever. The inability to fill them up, that is, not to fight battles will create the scope for others to walk in and fill in those spaces.' (Nigam, 1996: 905). Opposition parties, especially Congress-TMC alliance has filled up the vacant spheres.

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