

Trinamool and Ideology: Looking Beyond the Cacophony of Poribarton

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ABSTRACT: *The electoral victory of the Trinamool Congress in the 2011 Assembly elections in West Bengal has been hailed as one of the landmarks in the democratic history of not only the state but of the entire country. The thirty-four year uninterrupted rule of the Left Front came to an end. Under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee the Trinamool Congress gave the slogan of ‘Ma, Mati, Manush’ and this proved extremely beneficial for them. The change which came about in 2011 in West Bengal is not a simple case of regime change in a democratic set up. The results were basically a reflection of various fundamental changes which have come about in the societal and political fabric of the state. But in the entire gamete of affairs one issue which has not been brought under the scanner in a strong manner is the issue of ideology. There seems to be a peculiar silence as far as the act of defining the ideological base of the Trinamool Congress is concerned. Much of the derivations till date have been primarily based on the act of juxtaposing its activities with the other political formations in the state and not on studying its ideology in particular. This paper will examine in depth this particular aspect of ideology of the Trinamool Congress and will connect it to the much talked about ‘Poribarton’ in West Bengal. The apparent absence of a well defined ideology itself hints at the interesting developments which have cropped up in the politics of the state in recent times. The paper will highlight the interesting features and aspects of the ideology of Trinamool and ground it in the present political scenario of the state to derive a clear picture of the ideological currents currently in vogue. This paper will deal in a holistic fashion with an untouched aspect of one of the greatest political developments in the country.*

KEYWORDS: Trinamool, Ideology, Populist, Mamata, Marxist, Supernatural, Honour, Flexibility.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The 2011 Assembly elections in West Bengal witnessed the longest serving democratically elected Left government in the world collapse. The change which came about were a reflection of various fundamental changes which have come about in the societal and political fabric of the state which demands introspection and analysis at a much wider level rather than simple number crunching. In the overwhelming environment surrounding the phenomenal rise of Mamata Banerjee to prominence and power one issue which has not been brought under the scanner in a strong manner is the issue of ideology which though interestingly has occupied an important position in the political lexicon in the state. There seems to be a peculiar silence as far as the act of defining the ideological base of the TMC is concerned. This paper will examine in depth this particular aspect of ideology of the TMC and will connect it to the much talked about ‘Poribarton’ in West Bengal. The apparent absence of a well defined ideology itself hints at the interesting developments which have cropped up in the politics of the state in recent times. The paper will highlight the interesting features and aspects of the ideology of TMC and ground it in the present political scenario of the state to derive a clear picture of the ideological currents currently in vogue.

II. ABSENCE OF A FORMAL DISCOURSE

The absence of a formal ideological discourse in the TMC has been a marked feature of its political functioning and has till date proved beneficial for it. The high level of ambiguity in its ideological strand has opened up a wide space where interested individuals and parties can come and carve out new tactical and political framings and roles albeit in accordance with the larger module of conduct dictated by Mamata. TMC as a political formation can be addressed as one where the centripetal force is Mamata and is surrounded by multiple actors with diverse backgrounds. But there is also a flip side to this story where the ambiguity in the ideological strand has led to the encroachment of several unwanted and corrupt elements into the political space which has led to political scuffles at regular intervals. To transform this force of disjointed and cross-cutting interests into a disciplined cadre force is going to be a challenge for Mamata especially because of the fact that there is the absence of a codified ideological framework in the TMC. The TMC as a political force has

constantly relied on the ambiguity of its ideological strand to repeatedly strengthen its legitimacy. The conspicuous silence regarding the necessity of adoption of a formal set of ideology is in semblance with the populist political culture of TMC. It is reflective of the party's policy of discouraging the adoption of a utopian political ideal and instead redesigning and refashioning itself according to the practicalities of day to day politics. The important achievement of the TMC government has been the very fact that it has succeeded in dominating the political language of the state. What Mamata could successfully do is that she could extend her electoral dominance into the ideological realm and establish hegemony over it. But this in no way should impress upon us that there is a great amount of internal democracy in the party. Instead the broad outline of any ideological stand is given beforehand by the party supremo both in terms of content and implementation modules. This is then trickled down to the various ranks within the party. What the lower rung leaders are free to do is to add some sensational adjectives at best. But this lack of internal openness and discourse pluralism has already started to show some of its ill-effects. The Tapas Pal incident in the month of June, 2014 is a grim reminder of this.

III. CONSPICUOUS SILENCE AT THE PRACTICAL LEVEL

Though on a theoretical cum rhetorical level there has been an effort by the Left to define the form and content of its politics from the prism of ideology but at the practical level their fashion of conducting politics has not been starkly different from any other political force in the country. In the earlier Left regime political adjustments and compromises were made at several levels, which if one goes by the books are in total contradiction of the declared ideological positions and which cannot be justified even by the logic of pragmatism. The Left largely failed at the level of internalising the concept of ideology in the hearts and minds of the people. There has been a conspicuous absence of political education in the state and what was there was only a tactical cum opportunistic use of the concept of ideology by the Left. The point which needs to be considered at this juncture is as to how one situates the concept of ideology within the complex political matrix in Bengal. Ideology in Bengal in today's time is no more about a belief system but rather is a mechanism or a tactical mode of functioning deployed for the safeguard and growth of the political formation in power. What the TMC is trying to do in the state is nothing surprisingly new. Like the Left for the TMC also ideology acts as a tool for legitimising its rule through the structuring of the official language and the creation of a defined set of social reality. In case of the TMC this idea of legitimation acquires an additional importance keeping in view the autocratic and dictatorial style of governance. Thus what is at stake for the TMC as far as ideology is concerned is not much about its content, rather the performance which emanates from it. With such underlining thought process working in the party, the amount and level of modifications and modulations are boundless and highly fluid. The only static interest is the betterment of the party's electoral prospects and the tightening of its grip on the political and societal fabric.

IV. A PINCH OF REGIONAL NATIONALISM

The very inception of TMC as a political party has been the resultant outcome of a series of events where the quotient of the 'regional' has been heavily loaded. In the due process of time Mamata has been able to improvise upon this very element with the skilful addition of the concept of nationalism. The syntax of Mamata's political language has a core message embedded within it that it is only the TMC that can provide quality leadership and governance to the state which will enable the state to regain its privileged position. The invocation of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his contributions has been a core ingredient in this endeavour. By invoking Netaji, Mamata has successfully reconfigured and re-established the idea of 'victimhood' in the political parlance of the state. Mamata has put into effective use this very sense of disgust by repeatedly talking about the discrimination of the Centre towards West Bengal. Mamata's credit lies in the fact that while showcasing this concept of discrimination she has been able to expand its ambit by moving beyond the rigid and complex economic argument which had been the major plank of the Left parties. Through this sort of invocations Mamata has successfully hit at the collective memory of the Bengali population and activated the deep sense of longing within them.

V. DISCOURSE ON BENGAL'S CULTURAL CAPITAL

In the ideological framework of Mamata's politics the discourse on Bengal's cultural capital holds a very important place. On innumerable occasions she has talked about reinstating Bengal on the cultural map of the world. Emphasising that Bengal has an enormous deposit of cultural capital from time immemorial, she has repeatedly invoked the names of the cultural icons of the state like Rabindranath Tagore, Nazrul, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Uttam Kumar, etc. Mamata has mastered over the skilful use of the element of pride which is deeply embedded in the Bengali psyche especially in relation to its glorious past. Moreover this sort of an exercise is in complete tandem with her populist scheme of politics as in this sphere there is hardly any requirement of an altogether new investment, instead what it just demands is a vigorous push to some dormant

and subdued sentiments and longings which she has successfully done with the help of her captivating oratory skills.

VI. REFORMULATING THE LEFT DISCOURSE

As far as Mamata's appropriation of the Left discourse is concerned the question on women presents in front of us a very interesting dimension of this exercise. Mamata in tune with her populist politics is more superficial on the question of women's empowerment and do not refer to their problems in particular. She leaves open a wide murky area where it is possible for her to include divergent and antithetical formations simultaneously. In carving out a distinct position for her Mamata has not opted for an outright rejection of the male-centric values. Instead she has put to use these very values to garner support and legitimacy. Through her own example she has redefined the participatory horizons of women in politics but at the same time she has not challenged the male-dictated norms sketched out for women. In her scheme of affairs the creation of an autonomous subject position is conspicuously absent. If we take a close look at the political biography of Mamata we see that there has been a profound element of rebellion in her and yet terminologies like 'Biplabi Nari' (Revolutionary women) and 'Bidrohi Nari' (Rebellious Women) are missing from her party's political terminology. Her infamous statement at the Kolkata Book Fair where she invoked the concept of 'Gharer Bou' is a sordid reminder of the fact that in her body of politics she deliberately invokes the male dominated idea of the 'home' where the patriarchal authority is still in vogue. Mamata in no way disturbs the patriarchal societal discourse and thereby does not take the slightest risk of harming her political prospects.

VII. CONCLUSION

Analysing the various dimensions one aspect which becomes clear is that as of now the ideological position of the Mamata led TMC government is interestingly in a state of inconclusiveness, flux and ferment at the same time. On tracking the developmental trajectory till date of the TMC government one aspect which comes to the fore is its conspicuous relation with the concept of political patronage. The people are being treated as mere recipients and not as active agents of development. In the name of development what actually is being done is building up a network of mutual understanding and give-and-take, where in lieu of certain benefits what is expected from the populace is uncritical and unflinching support. Any deviation from this pattern is not being tolerated and is being dealt with a heavy hand as is clearly evident from the recent Jadavpur University incident in September, 2014. Populism disrupts democracy by mounting its challenge on the redemptive face of democracy, often to the detriment of law and order. Whether Mamata Banerjee has been able to maintain the professed aim of restoring some dignity to politics is something which is highly debateable. As of now there is a clear emphasis on the process of ingratiation by the Mamata led TMC government which is bound to compromise the process of democratic governance in the long run. This is going to lead to a tacit continuance of the past practices; the only difference being that here the pretension is not under the garb of any puritanical codified ideological standpoint as was the case under the Left regime but rather under the pseudonym of a rectification or correctional campaign. Surely the over-charged political environment in the state often have discouraged the practical assessment of the various claims made by different and opposing quarters and in this regard the present situation is not very different.

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