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The Umbrella Ideology in Indian Politics: Merely Existing since 1947 (Case in Point: Contemporary West Bengal)

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ABSTRACT

Regionalism is one of the most important phenomena currently colonizing political science and the world of social science as a whole. India has always been diverse in every way. Let it be social stratifications, culture, languages and of course political parties. We have seen many regional parties and their ideologies in India creating new trends over the last few decades, which are increasingly blurring the line between Global and Local. But how concrete are these ideations? What can be their long-term implications on the democratic processes of this nation? This article discusses one such exceedingly aggressive ideology originating in West Bengal, which has proven to be a suitable opposition to the ruling party at the Union, thus providing interesting potential for research, not only including the concept of ideology but also the possible return to a more decentralised federal structure in India.

Keywords: Ideology, AITMC, Regionalism.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this research, the author explores and cultivates one of the lesser-known yet precariously generic ideologies developed by a rapidly growing, once regional (nationalized by EC of India in 2016) political party: The All India Trinamool Congress (AITMC). Since its inception as an **anti-communist** offshoot of the old Congress party of India in 1998, its ideology has fluidly grown, evolved, and spread not only in West Bengal but in many major states of India.



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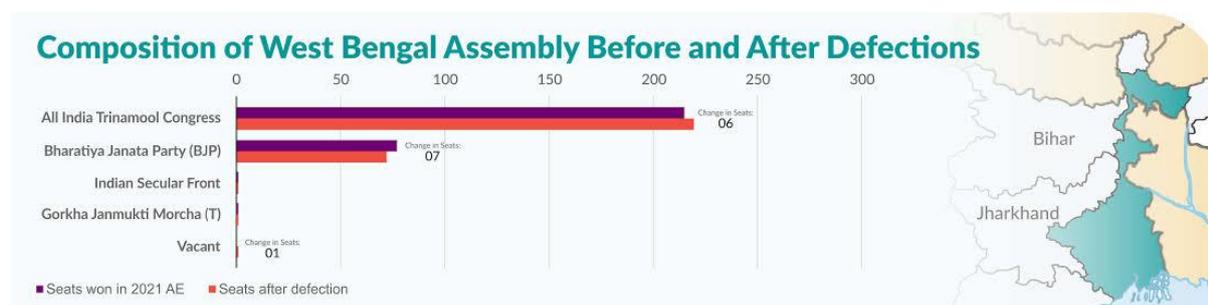
The above picture depicts the AITMC founder and current chief minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee and the ambitious expansion of her party and ideology all over India.

More importantly, this paper seeks to solidify an argument based on the question of pursuing and academically evaluating any particular ideology in India and tracks any pattern relating to it as a whole. It also questions the validity of AITMC and by extension, most of the Indian political factions' key "ideologies". Can these be termed as ideologies at all?

To answer this, my research will be focused mostly on the unique nature of the ideology propounded by Banerjee and her party vis-à-vis the more generic ideologies of the more traditionally national level political parties, how they are interconnected and in some ways, similar. For that my field of study is concentrated around West Bengal (WB).

II. TRACKING THE TRAJECTORY

It is important to mention, first hand, the key ideologies AITMC (previously TMC) adopted and developed over years and how they were adapted as political situations progressed or deteriorated. Its founder, Mamata Banerjee was the Union's Railway Minister for almost 26 years and finally broke off in 1998 to form her own party i.e. Trinamool (transl. Grass root) Congress. What does 'grass root' signify? It is an important part and parcel of the party's ideology: The bottom-up approach in political, representative, social and economic affairs of the state. The party's most major victory against the 34 year Communist regime in WB in 2011 gives us further insight into the ideology under observation. It is, in every sense of the word, an **anti-communist** ideology. It claimed to be the main opposition against the most key communist traits like class opposition, violent revolution and grass root level corruption (red-tapism) mostly evident in WB's Panchayat and Municipality elections. The main problem was lack of opposition against the ruling party in the above mentioned areas. It is interesting to note that TMC now stands completely opposition-less at both state-level and grass root level, recently attracting major parties like BJP to replace CPI (M) as the major opposition in the State Legislatives.



The defection pattern and number of seats acquired by the two major parties now in existence

in WB, after the 2021 legislative elections.

Evidently, the TMC was successful in obliterating any communist sentiment in Bengal by 2021, so this part of their ideology arguably stands. What was the anti-thesis? The nail in the coffin was of course the controversial Nandigram/Singur land movements. The CPI (M)'s another ideological stand off against the TMC was the battlefield of Singur where the then CM, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya's economic policy of industrialization and job security by the ascension of corporates like TATA, was thwarted by TMC's ideology for agricultural and land related rights. Clearly, grass root in the truest sense. But what did it mean for the long term economy? Did it improve the predicament of the people of Nandigram or Singur? TMC based their ideology and election victories over the fight in Nandigram/ Singur, yet the leader herself faced defeat in Nandigram in 2021 elections. The party's complete 180 over its own agricultural, anti industrialist policies in Singur, speaks more than any theorization.



Mamata Banerjee at Nandigram (2011)



The 'SingurAndolan' (2011)

After successfully sweeping off the communist party, TMC further established itself as a **populist secularist party**. Now we are aware of Nehruvian secularism i.e., equal rights and respect for every religion in India both legally and in spirit. It is one of the hall marks of Indian democracy and by extension, an irrevocable political ideology of any and every political party in India. So how is TMC's secularism different? As evident from its policies, its secularism is more radical in the sense that it does not only grant equal rights to all religions but more privilege to minorities, especially Muslims, triggering all kinds of communal sentiments. Or is it the rapid expansion of the Hindutva ideology at the national level that persuades regional cum national parties like TMC to take such radical stances towards secularism although it is perverted in nature?

Row after several killed in violence post Bengal polls

West Bengal Assembly Election

Updated on May 04, 2021 06:23 AM IST

The violence prompted Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar to summon the state's director general of police.



BJP office and shops vandalized by unidentified persons in Ghoshpara road of Bhatpara on Monday.

OPEN APP

Electoral violence between TMC and BJP triggered by “secularist policies”

Another very interesting ideological standpoint TMC follows, which is *sui generis* in every sense, is **Bengali nationalism**. Popular slogans like ‘maa mati manush’ (transl. mother, motherland and people) gives us hints of their social policies like uplifting women via policies such as ‘lokkhir bhandaar’ and ‘kanyasri’, patriotism, and standing at the grass root, defending the common masses. These are nothing new ideologically from the Indian perspective, but what is interesting to notice is how the “patriotism” has grown more parochial with time. It is no longer ‘Indian nationalism’ but a ‘Bengali nationalism’. The constant and unnerving promotion of solely Bengal’s culture like the durga puja carnival (granted heritage status by the UNESCO), planning to boost economy via traditional arts and crafts of Bengal, often mocked for its impracticality, termed by netizens as “chop shilpo”, slogans like ‘Joy Bangla’ followed closely

after 'Jai Hind' and of course the CM taking sole credit for almost every "unnoyon" (transl. progress) in Bengal, many such initiatives and the bitter contestation with any and every national party, especially the one at the centre, indicates a dangerous pattern which at worst might lead to complete separation WB from the map of India.



Meme posted by netizens upholding Banerjee's economic plan as object of ridicule.



Tapati Guha-Thakurta, the historian whose research paper got the Durga Puja Carnival its UNESCO tag, even though credit is given to Mamata Banerjee and her party.



The 'Pakoda Plan', as dubbed by TV News channels outside Bengal.

III. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

As we can observe, most of the ideology of TMC is coined by only one prominent leader, which begs the question, if this ideology is sustainable, and if so, to what end? As noticed in the previous sections, there are grave inconsistencies in the party's core ideologies, cracks that can be easily exploited and prone to both internal and external corruption. We also notice a generic pattern in this ideology. Unlike CPI (M) it is not an ideology based on any particular political philosophy, or unlike the rightist parties who have a concrete and narrow nationalist and borderline anti secular agenda. It is not rigid and changes in line with electoral needs. Does this even count as an ideology then? Is 'staying in power' not the ideology of every political party in existence? The father party of TMC, the INC, as pointed out many years ago by Gandhiji himself, also did not have an ideology of its own. It was meant to be a mere conglomeration of different ideologies as diverse as India herself. We are still not out of that structure. So how are we to track one particular political ideology in India anyway? Why is it even necessary? It is necessary because it gives us insight into the process of regional politics which, as evinced by TMC's undoubted success, is bound to create opposing and more flexible ideologies, more in tune with today's unconventional political competition. As stated by The Hindu, "Trinamool offers ideological haven for Congress dissenters".



NEWS > INDIA

Trinamool offers ideological haven for Congress dissenters

TMC's expansion an ideal political option for opposition leaders

Sandeep Phukan

NEW DELHI

DECEMBER 12, 2021 19:56 IST

TMC's expansion is deemed as ideal for most political leaders against BJP's NDA government at the centre and simultaneously not having faith at their own party to form a strong opposition.

So basically, in the pattern of words woven by the political economist, Richard Peet, I can safely say that TMC's ideology is of a "dismal scientist who could almost philosophize and get away with it" because the situation required an antithesis so it was readily accepted. I am not trying to demerit anyone's sentiments because clearly the TMC is doing something right. But I hope this article helps open up avenues for researching more concrete alternatives to such potentially destructive and dividing ideologies, which according to me, is sure to prove harmful in the near future for every strata of society as whole.

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