

The Emergence of Trinamul Congress

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Abstract: Finding the weak leadership and organizational form of Pradesh Congress as an active soldier of Congress Mamata Banerjee felt Pradesh Congress can't play a strong opposition role against Left Front Government. Mamata Banerjee felt she is the only leader who can challenge the strong Left Front Government. Mamata Banerjee alleged that, the Congress leaders were not critical enough of the CPI (M) and the Left Front Government since they secretly were in the payroll of the regime. The Congress was now full such 'watermelons' she accused, green only in the surface and red inside. The Congress (I)'s increasing dependence upon such expedient alliances at the centre has only further compromised the party at the state level. In the case of West Bengal, the central leadership of the Congress (I) has fostered a somewhat accommodating stance towards the ruling left front government. In part, the rift which developed between Mamata Banerjee and the leadership of Pradesh Congress is a direct consequence of such electoral strategies. In other ways it may be argued that the rift, and the ensuing split in the West Bengal Congress (I), is representative of a more general organizational malaise with the Congress (I) and an increasing opposition to the central leadership's control over the state branches of the party. Gradually Mamata Banerjee had become more marginalized within the party. Mamata Banerjee faced numerous challenges. On January 1998 Trinamul Congress emerged by the leadership of Mamata Banerjee. Trinamul Congress contested in the mid-term national election of February 1998 with the seat adjustment of BJP. In this election Trinamul Congress emerged as West Bengal's second largest party and as the state's principal opposition.

Key Words: Party, Opposition, Congressional, Parliamentary, Congress (I), Left Front, Trinamul Congress.

1. INTRODUCTION:

From 1977 to the end of 1997, Congress played as opposition party to the Left Front government in West Bengal state politics. As a competent soldier of Congress, Mamata Banerjee was deeply involved in opposition politics against CPI(M). The Left Front Government, by the leadership of CPI(M), created an example of how to remain in power for a long time in Parliamentary politics. Contextually, the importance of regional parties in the formation of government at the center increased dramatically from the 1980 and 1990 decades. No government formed at the center such as Congress or BJP without a coalition of regional parties. As a member of a progressive front, the Left Front has helped the Congress, either directly or indirectly, by fighting against the communal forces at the center. As a result, Congress has never been raised the voice against Left Front in West Bengal state politics, especially against the Left Front government. So the Pradesh Congress was weakening day by day. Mamata Banerjee was well-known as the only fighting leader of the West Bengal State Congress. Mamata Banerjee, a soldier of numerous movements, felt that this is to be needed more frightened, tight and concentrated movement against Left Front Government. Mamata Banerjee felt that it is needed another platform other than Congress. In 1993, before the birth of the Trinamool Congress, at that time, Mamata Banerjee, president of the West Bengal Youth Congress, was known as the leader of fire. The CPIM-led Left Front government is in power in the state and the chief minister was on the chared Jyoti Basu. At that time serious accusations like riding by CPI (M) were raised. In such a situation, the young lady Mamata Banerjee called for a Mahakaran campaign on July 23 demanding a credible voter's identity card for transparency in the electoral process. The date was fixed on July 14. But the program was delayed on July 23 because former Governor Nurul Hassan died at that time. "On July 27, 1993 thousands of Youth Congress workers took to the streets of Kolkata for a Mahakaran campaign called by the young lady Mamata Banerjee. Police were quick to stop the operation at the chief administrative secretariat of the state. The brackets are formed at different crossings. But disobeying that barricade, the police opened fire on the youth workers. Thirteen youth workers were killed in police firing. These are Bandana Das, Murari Chakraborty, Ratna Mandal, Kalyan Bandyopadhyay, Vishwanath Roy, Asim Das, Keshab Bairagi, Srikant Sharma, Dilip Das, Ranjit Das, Pradeep Das, Mohammad Khalek and Inu. The politics of the state became billowy in the death of these thirteen Congress workers." (Express, July 21, 2019).

Already has been witnessed that Mamata Banerjee, the fire lady of Congress Youth leader can challenge the strong Left Front Government. "Banerjee's political career occurred on July 21, 1993. The youth wing of Congress in West Bengal, which she led, organized an *abhijaan* (march) on the red-brick colonial-era building in central Kolkata that houses the administrative headquarters of the state government. As a journalist who covered the day's events

recalled 17 years later, “usually these ‘marches’ are symbolic and political activists walk to a certain point where they are prevented [intercepted] by police [cordons] and then ‘court’ arrest [are loaded into buses and vans and taken away to be released within a few hours].” This march, however, turned violent, and pitched battles ensued between tens of thousands of protesters and a heavily outnumbered police force. The police fired teargas shells to disperse the huge crowds, and this aggravated the situation. The police then fired live ammunition in several locations in central Kolkata, killing 13 protesters. Since July 21, 1994, the first anniversary of the deadly clash, Mamata Banerjee has held an annual rally in central Kolkata to commemorate the 13 young men killed on July 21, 1993. Since the formation of the Trinamool Congress on January 1, 1998, the July 21 rally has been the biggest day in the annual calendar of the party.” (Sumantra Bose, 2013, p. 144) The allegations were increasing steadily against Prodesh Congress. However, in 1991, in the Narasimha Rao government, Mamata Banerjee was nominated as Minister of State for Human Resource Development, Sports and Youth Welfare and Women and Child Development. But due to the governments utter neglect of this office; she announced her decision to resign from the ministry at the beginning of the year 1993. Mamata Banerjee did gradually increasing distance with Congress. On August 9, Mamata Banerjee alleged that, “The Congress leaders were not critical enough of the CPI (M) and the Left Front Government since they secretly where in the payroll of the regime, busy taking money and accepting larges in the form of prime property at Salt Lake, Calcutta’s posh suburb. The Congress was now full such ‘watermelons’ she accused, green only in the surface and red inside” (Bhattacharya, 2004).

From 1977, after the Left Front power in West Bengal, the Congress and its allies have never been equal to the Left Front in electoral politics or won a significant number of seats in parliamentary or assembly election. In the Lok Sabha elections in 1984, Congress and its allies get 48.2 percent of the vote and the Left Front 48.4 percent. Both were equal in terms of the percentage of votes they got, but the opposition, including Congress, got 16 seats. In the 1991 assembly elections, Congress got 36.92% of the vote and won 43 seats. In the 1996 Assembly election, Congress won 39.84 percent of the vote and won 82 seats. In this election, Congress increased the percentage of vote but they have to stay away from power. In the same year, the Left Front got 49.08 percent of the vote in the Lok Sabha elections, but Congress alone got 40.09 percent of the vote. However, the Left gets 33 seats and Congress gets 9 seats. The election proved that Congress was a major opposition power in West Bengal state politics. However, Congress did not play a significant role in electoral politics and the Left Front did not face strong opposition force in that sense. Because Congress could not provide qualified leadership and the Pradesh Congress faced a leadership crisis. During this time, both the UPA and NDA have dependent on regional parties. As a result, the central leadership of the Congress did not agree with the way the extremist leadership of the state Congress sought to oppose the powerful Left Front. It was clear that, “The Congress (I)’s increasing dependence upon such expedient alliances at the centre has only further compromised the party at the state level. In the case of West Bengal, the central leadership of the Congress (I) has fostered a somewhat accommodating stance towards the ruling left front government of Jyoti Basu. In part, the rift which developed between Mamata Banerjee and the state leadership of Congress is a direct consequence of such electoral strategies. In other ways it may be argued that the rift, and the ensuing split in the West Benal Congress (I), is representative of a more general organizational malaise with the Congress (I) and an increasing opposition to the central leadership’s control over the state branches of the party” (Mayers, 1998).

Again, a section of the state Congress agrees with the central leadership. Even within the Congress, not a single group has attempted to create such intense mass movements against the powerful Left Front government. Mamata Banerjee accused other leaders of the state Congress of tampering with the CPI (M). Mamata Banerjee accused the leadership of the state Congress as well as the central leadership of 'faith-killing'. Reviewing the Lok Sabha elections in 1996, he commented, “Congress extended support to a government which was being ‘remote controlled’ by CP (M), the very CPN against whom we had fought the election. Why had it been necessary for the congress to fight with pattern of the united front at the time of the elections the Telegu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, the Janata Dall in Orisa, Behar and Uttar Pradesh, the CPM in Bengal, Kerala and Tripura? . . . Now, the totally confused Congress leadership supplied the life giving oxygen to the United Front” (Banerjee, 1998). Mamata Banerjee further alleged that the Congress’s ominous relationship with the CPI (M). According to Mamata Banerjee, it was, “Hand in glove arrangement had rendered the Congress (I) in West Bengal important against a Left Front to which at face value, it was already obligated” (Sarkar, 1997). In the May 1996 Lok Sabha elections, Congress received 40 percent of the vote, which is 3 percent more than the 1991 election. This is a good result for Congress in the 1996 elections after 1971. In 1984, the Congress gained sympathy all over India, as well as West Bengal. In 1991, Congress got 139 seats all over India and the Congress formed the government under the leadership of P.V. Narasimha Rao with the help of other regional political parties. In West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee and her followers are strongly opposed to the strong Left Front. In September 1996, a serious crisis was witnessed by the party leadership in the Prodesh Congress. Conflicts come to the fore in the focus of the renewal of Youth Congress activist membership. Mamata Banerjee sought the nomination of state party president in the upcoming organizational elections. For that purpose, she instructed her followers to have a large number of staff members enlisted. As promised, 1/5 of the 100000 forms were initially distributed to the Youth Congress, and Sommen Mitra announced that the remaining forms would be distributed in the interest of the party, and he was ready to accept

Mamata Banerjee's leadership of the state Congress. Mamata Banerjee and her followers called it 'Stalling Strategy' run by Pranab Mukherjee from Delhi. Mr. Pranab Mukherjee was aware that personalities like Priyadarjan Das Munshi, Krishna Bose, Sudeep Bandyopadhyay, and former Chief Minister Siddhartha Shankar Roy were staying at Mamata Banerjee's camp. At this stage, the party could bring down under the leadership of Somen Mitra and all control of the state Congress has gone to Mamata Banerjee's camp. At last, it was clear that Priyadarjan Das Munshi and his associates would be responsible for the periodic distribution of membership as the 'think tank' of Mamata Banerjee. In this situation, "Pranab Mukherjee's only option was for a protracted impasse while continuing to guarantee the contral leadership support for Soumen Mitra" (Mayers, 1998). In November 1996, "Relations between Mitra and Banerjee were further strained as a result of the Congress (I)'s response to 'Operation Sunshine' – the West Bengal Government's controversial plan to rid Calcutta of street hawkers" (Mayers, 1998) On November 27, Mamata Banerjee called off in support of hawkers in response to hawker abductions across Kolkata city. Somen Mitra supported the strike to a certain extent. Somen Mitra supported the strike because he thought that this step by Mamata Banerjee would fail. The Allies felt that if the issue of hawker removal was applied to electoral politics, the Bose government could be established as an anti-poor government. But Mamata Banerjee eventually withdrew support from the movement for no apparent reason. However, in doing so, Mamata Banerjee distanced herself from such a person as Subrata Mukherjee, president of INTUC. However, Subrata Mukherjee came out in support of the hawker strike. Under these circumstances the hawker strike either became ineffective or failed. The governing party benefited more from the land of the opposition created by the Congress as much as the internal crisis, the leadership and the hotly contested decision of the province. Opponents repeatedly conceded defeat to the ruling party's tactics or their wrong decisions. In this crisis, "The apparent lack of support among Calcutta's citizenry was compounded by the fact that the strike threatened to disrupt the first cricket. Test to be held in Calcutta for four years. this only caused further resentment among those who had supported the CPM's initial sweep against the hawkers and who were now calling for more of the same" (Mayers, 1998). Subrata Mukherjee and the INTUC failed to assess the attitude of the people. This incident has aroused public support for the Left Front. These programs really hurt Congress. The program widened distance from Mamata Banerjee and Prodesh Congress.

In May 1997, Mamata Banerjee had become more marginalized within the party. She is now an outcast leader in the party from one of the faces of the party. In the wake of this political upheaval, most of the members, like the Congress-favored Soman Mitra, returned to the camp. March of that year, "Prospects of a mid-term election increased substantially when the congress (I) announced that any counting support to HD Deve Gowda's United Front Government would now be specifically issue based rather than any unconditional blanket measure" (Hindu, 1997). In April, Congress leader Sitaram Keshari withdrew his support from the Devegoura government and brought a motion of no confidence to the Lok Sabha. As a result, the Devegoura Government has fallen and formed new government under the leadership of I.K. Gujral. In the meantime, deep crisis is seen in the Congress as well as across the country. Significantly, when Mrs. Sonia Gandhi took the primary membership of the Congress on 8 May 1997, speculation spread that she would indirectly pressure Keshari for the post of Congress president. In this situation, the 80th Conference of the All-India Committee was planned to be held in Kolkata in August. But the Pradesh Congress was extreme uncertainty about the conference. Overall, when Priyadarjan Das Munshi and his associates returned to the Mitra camp, Mamata Banerjee became virtually alone. Mamata Banerjee has faced challenges in three directions - central leadership of the Congress, the province leadership of the Congress and CPI(M). What would be the position of Mamata Banerjee in this situation? In this situation, Mamata Banerjee had to think of an alternative. At the 80th Conference of the All-India Congress Committee (AICC), Somen Mitra announced a list of 421 members to be nominated for the WBPC. "Banerjee's name was absent, as were those of her associates such as MLA's Sadhan Pande, Sudip Bandyopadhyay, Sovondeb Chottopadhyay and Pankaj Banerjee. Mamta Banerjee's response was to publish won list of nominees and announce her intention to float a 'parallel' state congress." (HindustanTimes, May 27, 1997). At the same time, Mamata Banerjee launched an intense attack on the party members who have been utterly disrespectful to the workers at the grassroots level. In particular, "She was critical of Kesri's ambition to become prime minister and, hence, his obvious efforts to keep the left, onside, and of Pranab Mukherjee's declared intention to stand for the office of the Congress (I) Vice President. However she was careful at this stage not to entirely sever ties with the party, declaring she had no intention of leaving, and that the Congress (I) was as much my party anyone else's" (Mayers, 1998). This negative attitude of Prodesh Congress to Mamata Banerjee, she gradually distances from Prodesh Congress as well as the central leadership. He even publicly challenged the party leadership. It can be said that, "her unwillingness to commit fully to a formal split with the party was influenced by challenges at this time in New Delhi to Keshri's leadership of the party. When Sharad Power, A.R. Antulay and Rajesh Pilot filed their nominations, past loyalties demanded a wait and see approach for all concerned in the West Bengal imbroglio. However, once it become clear that Kesri has the numbers in the CWC, the challengers withdrew and the mini-crisis passed. For her, part, however, Bengerjee had grown impatient at New Delhi's reluctance to intervene and by the late July she was calling on the AICC to expel her from the party before August 9 – the date now set for the AICC plenary session in Calcutta" (Statesman, 1997).

Finally, on the opening day of the AICC meeting in Kolkata on August 9, Mamata Banerjee announced the formation of a separate party called the Trinamool Congress. “The started that she would also form units of frontal organizations like the Mahila (Women’s) Congress, the Chhatra Parishad, the Seva Dal (Social services organization) and student unit in all districts in the state, indicating that she intended the Trinamul Congress to be more regional than pan India in character” (Kamath, 1997, August 10). Mamata Banerjee felt that the image of the Congress in the all-India basis is field and the functioning of the Congress in West Bengal cannot be fought against the strong left front. In comparison, a strong regional party can fight against the Left Front. On 27 December 1997, in Kolkata, Mamata Banerjee announced the new party Trinamul Congress and the new party's responsibility. Apart from Mamata Banerjee, one of the nine MPs in the Congress, Ajit Panja and Krishna Basu participated in this new party. On December 1997, Mamata Banerjee announced that, the new party would be form, but 1st January 1998, the Trinamool Congress was declared as its birthday. Different responsibilities were assigned to different leaders to pave the organizational structure of the newly organized Trinamul Congress party. Mamata Banerjee announced the popular MLA Subrata Boxi as the President of the Youth Trinamul Congress, Pankaj Banerjee joined the Trinamool Congress Committee, Kamlesh Ghosh and Jyotiriya Mallick as the Trinamul Youth Congress Acting President. Pankaj Banerjee announced the name of the working committee of 116 members, of which 12 were MLAs. Such organizational activity proved that the Trinamul Congress would play a much more effective role as a regional party and not the Congress as a rival to the Left Front government in West Bengal. Mamata Banerjee also alleged that the Congress did not play as real opposition against Left Front and Congress has been cheating to the people of West Bengal. Mamata Banerjee declared that the Trinamul Congress as a Congress would fight against CPI(M). It can be said that without a separate organizational structure, the Trinamul Congress is not an ideologically oriented party apart from the National Congress. As a result, at the initial stage, the Trinamul Congress did not seek any permission from a separate party from the Election Commission. Pankaj Banerjee declared, “The Trinamul Congress would not seek any formal registration from the election commission because we are not a different party” (Telegraph, August 13, 1997). This clear Mamata Banerjee opted to return to AICC and Sitaram Kesari. But the Congress, in the meantime, withdrew support from the United Front government of Gujral, and during the 11th Lok Sabha, President KR Narayan broke the Lok Sabha. As a result, the Lok Sabha elections were held in February-March 1998. In this situation, the Trinamul Congress decides to participate in the Lok Sabha elections. As a result, the newly organized political party couldn't return to the Congress party. In this election, the Trinamul Congress seat adjusts with the BJP. Trinamul Congress / Mamata Banerjee's compromised with a conservative communal party. The coalition with BJP, Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee identified herself as a controversial leader. Many of the leaders of the newly formed party returned to Congress. They alleged that the Trinamul leader's stubborn decision would contest with the BJP will have a profound impact on voting politics. Especially the leadership like Subrata Mukherjee, Saugat Roy and Siddhartha Roy returned to the Congress. They alleged that if it would coalition with the BJP it is impossible to oust to the Left government and the people of West Bengal Muslim community would consider the Trinamul Congress as a communal party. However, “The Trinamul Congress emerged in spectacular fashion as West Bengal’s second largest party after the CPIM and as the state’s principal opposition in the mid-term national election of February 1998. The new born party contacted 28 of West Bengal’s 42 constituencies and own in 7 of them, and polled over 9 million votes across the state. Congress contested all 42 constituencies and won in just one. The bulk of Congress’s mass base in West Bengal had gone over to its regional splinter. In the autumn 1999 national midterm election the Trinamul Congress consolidated its mass base. Its candidates own in eight constituencies in West Bengal, and the party maintained its share of the seat wide popular vote.” (Sumantra Bose, 2013, p. 145). Since its birth, the Trinamool Congress has been known for its strong presence in West Bengal and its growing and attacking opposition to the CPI (M). In West Bengal, the Congress workers were disappointed by the lack of a congressional role. There would need a strong opposition party to quell the frustration of the Congress workers. Right now this time, the Trinamul Congress, under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee, will be playing a leading role in the grassroots activist supporters of the Congress. In the early stages of the birth of the Trinamul Congress, Congress leader Sonia Gandhi tried to make a compromise between the Congress and Mamata Banerjee. “Sonia Gandhi attempt to resolved the crisis by brokering a deal with would appoint Benerjee as head of the state election committee” (Singh, 1997, Dec 21). Sonia Gandhi tried to compromise, but the ice did not melt. Mamata Banerjee publicly announced that she would not back down from her decision. Even so, “Benerjee’s only response was to reiterate that there had been no change in her stand that her Trinamul Congress was the real Congress and that she would not back down from her soft line on the BJP” (Mayers, 1998). When all efforts failed, the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee had no other option. As a result, Congress had no choice but to abandon Mamata Banerjee. “The WBPCCC was now left with little option but to expel Mamata Banerjee from the Congress (I), a decision they made on December 21. This was immediately endorsed by the AICE.” (Express, Congs West Bengal Party is over, 23 Dec, 1997).

Mamata Banerjee was able to study the psyche of the left opposition people in West Bengal. He realized that a strong platform was needed to strengthen the movement against the Left Front government without a passive political party like the Congress. The Congress, as an opposition party on the left, has failed completely. Even the kind of

movement that Mamata Banerjee organized from within the Congress was a hindrance in every field. The Trinamool Congress was born on January 1, 1998, based on the thought of Mamata Banerjee. Mamata Banerjee felt that as a skilled, combatant and experienced public leader, this was the right time to separate from the Congress and form a separate political party. Now it will be understood in the mind of the left opposition people in West Bengal. Mamata Banerjee said after the formation of the Trinamool Congress, after the departure of the Bengal Congress, the movement was silently in Bengal, the people were writing new history, a new era was about to begin. Mamata Banerjee drew the logo the Trinamool Congress is grass-roots. He thought, “if the Election Commission approves the logo then she will achieve two goals: one, the launch of her party and two, of simultaneously taking the philosophy of the party and explaining to the people her deep thought behind the logo, which was the message of secularism, “Ek e brinte duti kusum, Hindu Musalman, ekjon tar noyonmoni onno ti tar pran” (two buds on the tree, Hindu and Muslim. If one of them is the eye, then the other is life). The Election Commission did approve the logo but had also issued a stricture which read if the Trinamool Congress failed to get six-percentage of votes in the 12th Lok Sabha elections, then the pre-symbol will be cancelled. Trinamool Congress well passed the cut-off percentage and the party was born. This was a challenge for any political party as it was not easy to go to people with a new party and ask for their valuable vote.” (<http://aitcofficial.org>, 2018). When Mamata Banerjee was preparing to form a new party from the Congress, she initially felt that the new party needed an umbrella to save her. That is why Mamata Banerjee compromised with the BJP. Mamata Banerjee said in December 1997, before the formation of Trinamool Congress, that "the BJP is not untouchable". From 12th Lok Sabha 1998, the Trinamool Congress began its hand to hands journey in electoral politics with the BJP.

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