

**POLICIES AND  
PRACTICES**

**128**

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**November 2021**



Policies and Practices 128

November 2021

Published by:  
Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group  
IA-48, Sector-III, Ground Floor  
Salt Lake City  
Kolkata-700097  
India  
Web: <http://www.mcrg.ac.in>

ISSN 2348 0297

Printed by:  
Graphic Image  
New Market, New Complex, West Block  
2nd Floor, Room No. 115, Kolkata-87

*This publication is brought out with the support of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. It is a part of the research programme of the Calcutta Research Group on migration and forced migration. It is conducted in collaboration with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, Institute of Human Science, Vienna, and Several Universities and Institution in India.*

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# **Election Campaigns as Performance: Migrants and Refugees as an Issue in West Bengal Elections**

**Rajat Kanti Sur**

**2021**



# Election Campaigns as Performance: Migrants and Refugees as an Issue in West Bengal Elections

Rajat Kanti Sur<sup>\*</sup>

## Introduction

During the campaign of the by election at the Bhawanipore, Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee made an accusation against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for (mis)using the PM Care funds to purchase the Pegasus software for keeping an eye on the political leaders, judges and eminent civil rights activists. She also accused that the PM Care fund which has been created to collect money during the first wave of the pandemic for helping the poor and helpless. The news also said that Banerjee repeatedly blamed the government at the centre for doing nothing to save the migrants during the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

The assembly election in West Bengal was one of the crucial elections of this year. While on the one hand the issues like corruption, violence and mismanagement or bad governance against the ruling TMC government by the opposition parties, several key decisions taken by the central government since the end of 2019 also became a major factor. The amendment of the citizenship policies is one of them. Apart from citizenship amendment act, the pandemic, displacement and job loss due to pandemic caused huge suffering for the migrant workers to return back to their homes. Political parties especially the TMC used the opportunity to bring the crisis of the migrant labours and other displaced people in the forefront, to make the BJP uneasy at the election. Therefore, the question to secure the rights of migrants and refugees became crucial for this election after many years.

## The Idea: Election Campaign as ‘Performance’

This paper will analyse the election campaigns as a form of political culture and from 1972 to 2021 and try to understand the evolution of the migrant issue as one of the important components in the election campaigns. The paper considered the election campaign as a form of political performance in any democratic system where an election has been held to choose the government for the citizens of a state. According to an article by political scientist Paul Freedman and his colleagues, the leader has been elected on the basis of assumptions. The assumptions have been based on the set of relevant political data on different subjects and gathered from different sources. According to Freedman and his colleagues, the main source of these sources based on campaign advertisements.<sup>2</sup> Freedman and his colleagues’ idea has been based on the context of US elections. They observed the

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Policies and Practices, Issue No. 128, November 2021

role of the advertisement agencies hired by different political parties. These agencies used radio & television channels, newspapers and other electronic media for providing information to provoke the voters to cast their vote in favour of the party for whom they run these campaigns. Thus, they created an impact on the less politically informed voters. As a result, the campaigns become a vehicle for “the transmission of political information to decide between ‘good’, ‘bad’ and ‘evil’.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it can be said that the hypocritical nature of political campaigns during the elections can be made more convincing through different performance activities. American political scientist David Runciman gave an example of using performances to convince voters. During the election US election campaigns in 2007 Runciman observed that despite strong prospects of Hillary Clinton, one of the contenders for the post of the president of United States among the Democrats, Barack Obama, the then a lesser known candidate for this post within his own party got the chance to contest. According to Runciman’s explanation, although Clinton had many capabilities, Obama’s performance and his advantages to be the first black person for the nomination of presidential candidature played a crucial role. His campaigns, according to Runciman, “with conviction and lyrical grace” also worked in favour of his nomination. Runciman explained this as a fight between the performance of a “honest hypocrite” like Clinton and “sincere liar” like Obama. Obama’s campaign performed well and therefore he got the nomination.<sup>4</sup>

Runciman’s idea on the presence of hypocrisy in the electoral politics, especially in election campaigns clearly showed that the performance of two contesting candidates became a crucial element to get the nomination as well as winning the election. India is not an exception. Ashis Nandy described Indian society as a protean civilization which has carried many identities simultaneously. Therefore, the political culture also varied from time to time. Nandy argued that the values that governing politics is largely inconsistent than in different other aspects of Indian society.<sup>5</sup>

Nandy analyses the role of the organization of power and authority. He commented that one of the bases of the Indian political system lied on the basis of mass mobilization, especially the electoral mobilization, played a crucial role in the changes in political culture in post-independence India.<sup>6</sup> Election campaigns are essentially a part of this cultural mobilization and become institutionalized as a part of everyday life. The agendas set by the political parties as said by Nandy, are not representing any uniform political culture, but based from ideologies varied from place to places and party to party. The article is based on the dilemmas on the question of refugees and migrants in the last ten assembly election campaigns in West Bengal. It has been tried to analyse through this study that, how the issues raised in the election campaigns gradually changed with the changes in the position of different political parties in terms of power or closer to the power. with the changes in the power positions of different political parties and how the changes in the techniques of campaigning reflected changes in the nature of campaigns. This paper is highlighting the transformation of the questions related to the basic rights of the refugees. Through this paper, I have shown that how the refugee question was addressed in different election campaigns and how the question lost and regain its importance. This article is focussing on whether the migrants and refugees are the real concerns for the ruling parties and the opposition or they are just as one of the many constituencies for parties to attract the attention of the people during the elections.

## **Concerns about the Refugee & Migrant Question (1952-1972)**

There are seven general elections prior to 1977. The communists, who made the migrants as a key issue of the election campaign. Apart from the poverty and price rise, coming of refugees and the refugee rehabilitation became one of the major issues. The news clippings and memoirs witnessed

the major thrust areas of the election campaign on those days. Swadhinata, the mouthpiece of the then undivided Communist Party of India (CPI) listed the main themes from the party manifesto. Proper rehabilitation of the refugees was one of them.<sup>7</sup> However Jyoti Basu, one of the eminent leaders of the party and the then leader of the opposition in the legislative assembly marked some of the major fault lines. He said that the party (CPI) was busy to strengthen their base in the city (Kolkata). Therefore, their campaign focussed on the problems and demands raised from the city. According to Basu, that was the reason behind the failure to win expected number of seats in the first assembly election.<sup>8</sup>

Basu was more confident about the second legislative assembly election in post-independence West Bengal. He wrote in his autobiography that the CPI took the resolution to go to the remote villages and the border areas of West Bengal to create their bases among the refugees, labours, especially among the agricultural labours and labours of small factories, the migrant labours in the jute mills and tea gardens. The resolution also said that the party should organize small scale mass movements with this groups and demand basic rights to get proper food-grains in a suitable price and right to get proper treatments as citizens of an independent state.<sup>9</sup> These policies reflected in the campaigns by the communist party in the second assembly election in West Bengal. The CPI mostly focussed on the refugees and migrant labours as well as the migrated agrarian workers stayed here for a long time. According to Basu, the CPI was focussed on the rehabilitation policies of the 29 lakh (2.9 million) refugees in Dandakaranya area of the then Madhya Pradesh (currently in Chattisgarh). The Congress led West Bengal government took the decision to rehabilitate the refugees far from the state. CPI took this issue as one of the burning problems and as a harassment of Bengali refugees by a Bengali speaking government as one of the major agendas for the election campaign in 1957 assembly election.<sup>10</sup>

Manikuntala Sen on the other hand described the cultural performances done by the left during the elections. These performances usually happened in the street corners, slums and refugee colonies. Sen described the gradual changes in the mind of the poor along with demographic changes. The influx of the large number of subaltern refugees in the slum areas and border districts of West Bengal changed the dimensions of election campaigns. Sen accepted the fact that the party faced problems to deal with the demands of the refugees and new migrants in the slum areas during both second and third assembly elections of 1957 and 1962.<sup>11</sup>

There is no doubt that the food movement in 1959 created a major impact in the 1962 assembly elections. While the campaigns by the ruling Congress surrounded with the nationalist sentiment and the growing anti-China sentiment (the conflict started in October 1962), CPI focussed on the lack of basic citizenship facilities in the state. Both Manikuntala Sen and Jyoti Basu commented about the changes in the characters of the election campaigns in the 1962 assembly election. Labours, marginal communities and price rise became the major issues instead of refugee rehabilitation. However, the party emphasized to increase campaigning among the migrant labours in the Hindi speaking jute mill areas to increase their vote bank.<sup>12</sup> The election in 1967 was almost the same. However, the agrarian question and the mismanagement of the government policies became crucial concerns. The issue on migration and refugees gradually gone behind in next two assembly elections (1967 & 1969). However, the newly bifurcated Communist Party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) mentioned this issue in their election manifesto. The section headed as “sustainable rehabilitation of the refugees” argued about the poor condition of the camp areas, legitimacy of the colonies etc as one of the major agendas of the election campaigns.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the complain against the negligence of the refugees and other migrant communities the issue lost its importance in 1967 and 1969 election despite several socio-economic and political



changes in West Bengal. The conflicts and war in different parts of the state legitimized the ruling congress to use hypocrisy in the election campaigns to keep the political power. The multidimensional performativity reflected in the radio messages, advertisements published by in the newspapers and the patriotic slogans that made the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as the face of “free Asia”. The experience of enjoying absolute and enormous power and the success of social development policies of made the ruling Congress as much confident that they forgot about the basic thumb rule of the governance. Therefore, the first instance of mass protest made the party and its president leader Indira Gandhi unsettled. As a result, the internal emergency has imposed. The autocratic nature of governance along with mismanagements in rehabilitating the refugees from East-Bengal, gave the golden opportunities to the hands of the opposition. That was the major cause behind the changes in the governments and the transformation of power from the Congress to the Left Front for next three decades.

The Congress got a clear majority in the parliamentary elections of 1971 and state legislative assembly elections in 1972 in West Bengal. The government that was elected in 1972 had campaigned about their successful victory in the Bangladesh liberation war (1971) and taking care of Bangladeshi freedom fighters as well as the refugees. The election victories were big. According to the available records of the Election Commission of India, the Congress managed a sweeping victory. They got 216 seats out of total 280 seats in 1972 state legislative assembly elections of West Bengal.<sup>14</sup> The CPI(M) led Left Front had opposed the entire process of electoral campaigns. They accused that the Congress did several malpractices and corruptions since the time of election campaign. The main accusation from the Left parties was that the Congress used the policy of the Indian government to help Bangladesh liberation warriors as well as the refugees who crossed border and came to West Bengal during the conflict. Apart from accusing the government, the Left parties also mentioned about the refugees who came to the other side of Bengal during the liberation. They criticised both the central and state governments for not adopting any proper rehabilitation policies for these refugees. The manifesto also mentioned that the economically bankrupt Congress government tried to get sympathy vote through this sentiment. The Left also mentioned that any piecemeal approach was not a proper solution for the refugee problem because the government did not issue any lease papers for the squatter colonies or slum areas in the surrounding areas of Kolkata. There was no assurance in the amendment in the tenancy policies either. Therefore, according to the Left, caring about the refugees was nothing but the gimmick to cover up the key issues of killing the democratic politics, price rise due to war, unemployment, draconian labour rights etc.<sup>15</sup> Jugantar, one of the leading Bengali newspapers in the 1970s, also reported that there was not any mention to solve the refugee problem or regarding the rehabilitation policies for the refugees in the manifestos of the ruling Congress party. They were more focussed on the issues like poverty eradication, land reform, emphasis to increase the agricultural production, minority welfare and stability in the governance and good relationship with the central government for overall development of the state.<sup>16</sup> There was a news on the same date where the CPI(M) leaders expressed their concern on several issues including the implementation of proper rehabilitation policies for the refugees and reformation in the wage policies for the workers in different factories, false accusation from Mrs Indira Gandhi of spreading communalism by the Left leaders etc. They said that the voters would reply back against this kind of mismanagements and false accusations.<sup>17</sup>

Due to this absolute mandate in the state, the ministers of Siddhartha Shankar Ray led Congress government and other Congress leaders claimed that the opposition lost because of their mismanagement.<sup>18</sup> This overconfidence about the stability of the Congress party in the government in both centre and the states forever led the top leaders to make big mistakes like imposing



emergency due to the failure of constitutional machinery in several states, and forcefully suppressing the railway strikes etc. The announcement of emergency knelt in the coffin of the overconfident Congress governments and makes the opportunity to form the non-Congress governments at the centre as well as in the states. The CPI (M) got the opportunity to come with their political agendas. Preparing proper rehabilitation policies for the refugees was one of them. United Central Rehabilitation Council (UCRC), the Left dominated body of the refugees and refugee rights activists have released a set of pamphlets where they demand a proper rehabilitation policy from the new state governments. They emphasized on the refugees living in the refugee camps and squatter colonies and demanded a permanent land or tenancy rights and citizenship rights for the refugees in the camps and colonies.<sup>19</sup> The CPI (M) led Left Front also made it an important issue in their manifesto. They demanded legitimising the acquired lands where the refugees were staying and particularly for those who were living in the camps as well as in the squatter colonies.<sup>20</sup> The Congress led government understood the damages that they have already made their own and issued an order to provide 90 years lease of the lands (with the provision of renewal of the lease) in the refugee squatter colonies in West Bengal. However, there was no mention about the refugees in the permanent liability camps in that order.<sup>21</sup>

However, the refugees and other displaced persons were not the major concerns in many subsequent elections as it did in the 2021 assembly elections. The main issues in the election campaigns in 1977 were based on three-four major themes. According to the newspaper reports, the issues in the election were poverty eradication, re-establishments of democratic rights, corruption of the top leaders in the Congress party and releasing political prisoners from jail. Reformation of the rights of creating trade unions in the essential services was also one of the major concerns in the assembly election in 1977.<sup>22</sup> The Left Front put their thrust towards land reforms and redistribution of land through operation Barga. Jyoti Basu, one of the main leaders in the opposition blamed the previous Congress governments for not taking any proper land distribution policies and claimed in almost all of his election campaigns that the Left Front government will take a land reform policy which would give land to the people and benefit the small and medium farmers.<sup>23</sup>

## **Reluctance towards the Refugee & Migrant Question (Since 1977)**

The result of the 1977 assembly election showed the change of orientation towards the refugee problem on behalf of the Left Front. The CPI (M) led Left Front got a total of 223 seats out of total 294 seats and the Congress was limited to 20 seats. The newly built Janata Party, which was the ruling party at the centre and captured more seats (29) than Congress, got the opportunity to become the main opposition in the legislative assembly.<sup>24</sup> As per the statistical report, the winning margin of votes for the CPI (M) led Left Front was much higher in the rural areas and border districts than in the city.

The 1977 assembly election was one of the major breakthrough successes for the Left parties. The two most important policies taken by the Left front gave them a strong foothold in West Bengal's electoral politics for next 34 years. The land reform and decentralization of rural governments through Panchayats and installing local governance system in the countryside through municipalities made the opportunity to control the vote bank through various party units. The control had established from every sector of the government through different trade unions and other party activities. The policies along with the expansion of the party in every corner of the governance make them so stronger that none of the acquisitions could taste them a defeat for the next three decades. The massacre of the Dalit East Bengali refugees in Marichjhapi in May 1979 will

always remain a black spot in the history of a mass murder under the Left regime. The claim from the Left parties and their allied organizations like the UCRC was that it once asked the refugees settled at the Dandakaranya area of erstwhile Madhya Pradesh (currently in Chattishgarh) to come to Bengal. The Marichjhapi killings showed two important transitions in the policies of the Left Front government. Firstly they did not want to increase their liability because most of the settlers at Marichjhapi were from the Dalit (Matua) community and almost all of them are landless farmers. One of the recent researches claimed that the caste, ethnicity and cultural differences played a significant role behind the attitude of the Left-Front government towards the settlers at Marichjhapi.<sup>25</sup>

Hamdi Bey, one of the well-known journalists wrote a series of articles during the 1982 assembly elections in the Bengali daily Aajkaal. In one of these articles, Bey accused that the CPI(M) became the party of the middle class who were not at all concerned about the landless poor refugees. He cited the example of the Marichjhapi massacre and said that the government became careless about the healthcare and other facilities at the refugee camps and other squatter colonies.<sup>26</sup> The Congress-I, the main opposition at that time never mentioned about the refugees and other people in any of their campaigns. Their concerns surrounded the mismanagement and labour unrest in the industries, closure of jute mills, politicizing educational institutions and lack of several civic facilities (water, electricity etc.) in Kolkata and its surrounding areas. The manifesto of the party did not mention a single word about the rights of the refugees or the displaced person. Even the issue of the Marichjhapi massacre was not raised during the campaigns.<sup>27</sup> However, the ruling left front did mention about the refugees. They claimed that they would allot money for the development of the existing refugee camps and the refugee colonies and process the proper legal papers to provide land ownership to the 'landlords' of those colonies.<sup>28</sup>

## **Communalizing the Refugee Question**

The question of rehabilitation and the rights of the refugees became an important concern in the 1991 assembly election. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took this agenda in the election campaigns and gave it a communal shape. While on one hand the BJP began its campaign in West Bengal with the issue of illegal infiltration from the other side of the border (i.e. Bangladesh), they express concern towards the proper development of the Hindu refugees in West Bengal. Murli Manohar Joshi, the president of BJP brought the communal angle in his inaugural speech at a meeting to prevent infiltration across the border. He said that the government indirectly helped to infiltrate people in the border districts which disturbed the demographic structure of the state.<sup>29</sup> One of the surveys had found that Tapan Sikdar, one of the leading BJP leaders from the Matua community raised the issue in his every campaign speeches. They prepared audio cassettes of Sikdar's campaigns and distributed among their party workers in the border areas and refugee colonies.<sup>30</sup> CPI(M) also brought this issue again in their election manifesto and demanded money from the central government to redesign the refugee rehabilitation policies.<sup>31</sup> It seems that the CPI (M) understood the dangers of communal political games which would be one of the major concerns in Indian politics within one or two year, especially in border states like West Bengal. Congress, the main opposition on the other hand was more focussed on the issues like unemployment, deindustrialization, corruption at the highest level of the government and other civic problems.<sup>32</sup>

The assembly election results of 1991 showed that although the BJP did not able to become as one of the important forces in the state, it increased its vote percentage from 2.68% to 11.46%.

However, both the ruling coalition (Left Front) and the main opposition (Congress-I) had reduced their electoral support than the previous assembly election.<sup>33</sup>

## **Forgetting the Question**

The refugee question was not in the forefront in the next few assembly elections in West Bengal. There were lots of other important issues that got prominence due to the abolition of licence raj and introduction of the new economic policies. While initially the CPI (M) led Left Front criticized Congress for introducing globalization and new economic policies, they gradually adopted the ideas of new economic policies and tried to implement them to attract investments from private players in the market. At the same time the issue of communalization in politics became more important with the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. Among other important issues, the CPI (M) led Left Front mentioned it in their election manifesto and demanded reviving or reforming the National Integration Council to prevent communal hatred.<sup>34</sup> However they did not forget to address the refugees in their manifesto. The manifesto said that the refugees are not a 'burden' for India. They have also strongly contributed in the process of development. The Left Front demanded a special package (of Rupees 1726 crore) from centre to complete the proper rehabilitation of the refugees.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, the BJP kept playing their communal cards. They were sticking to their logic of treating the cross border migrants from different religious background as "infiltrators" and campaigned in the old refugee colonies against the government for not taking proper care of the Hindu refugees.<sup>36</sup>

The assembly elections of 2001 and 2006 were mostly based on the issues of reformation in the governance and industrialization in West Bengal to prevent the flow of domestic labour outside the state.<sup>37</sup> Buddhadev Bhattacharya, the newly appointed leader of the Left Front emphasized on the corruption less good governance and making West Bengal as one of the potential places for investments from the big industrialists. The manifesto hardly mentioned any word about the refugees. The Trinamool Congress (TMC), the new opposition born due to ideological conflicts between the state leadership of the Congress (I), on the other hand, gradually became popular among the marginal communities, settlers in the squatters and economically backward people. They also made their base among the Dalits and low-caste refugees in different parts of Bengal.

The overconfidence of the Left Front government after winning total 235 seats out of total 294 seats<sup>38</sup> in the assembly made them to commit some serious mistakes. Due to government's promises of bringing industries in West Bengal, the Left Front government promised fertile agricultural lands to the big industries. The fertile lands of Singur in Hooghly district was given to the Tata Motors for a small car factory. This decision caused a major disappointment for a large number of landless farmers and share croppers who earned their livelihood from these farmlands. The government only announced compensations for the landowners who mostly lived in the cities. The landless farmers only got an assurance of jobs in the factories. Assuming for a huge financial loss, the farmers started protesting against the decision of the government. This protest turned violent in December 2006 when a daughter of one of the landless farmers was gang raped by the local supporters of the ruling party. A series of protest has started near the acquired factory land. The rights organization claimed the land back from the government. The movements of the farmers took a bad turn when the rumour of taking lands had been spread in Nandigram in East Midnapore district. The land of the poor fishermen communities was planned to be taken for building a chemical hub. The Left Front government took the same steps like Singur and wanted to take land from the poor fishermen. The fishermen protested violently to prevent the government. As a result,

the incident of firing at Nandigram to suppress an on-going agitation against taking agricultural land for a chemical hub killed 14 farmers in 2007.<sup>39</sup> Both the incidents created a civil society movement from 2008. Mamata Banerjee, the main face in the opposition at that time took both the issues of displacement and started campaigning against the state government. She compared the issues with the Marichjhapi massacre and said that the claims of the Left parties as the protector of the poor and marginal people and the refugees are baseless.<sup>40</sup> The issue of displacement and protection of the rights of the poor and marginalized people became one of the main issues for the opposition parties in 2011 which had a similarity with the 1977 elections when the CPI(M) led Left Front raised the same accusations against the ruling Congress. The CPI (M) did not able to alienate themselves from the industrialization policy although they claimed in their manifesto that they would not take fertile lands from any unwilling farmers. They also claimed that they would not take any decisions which will displace the marginalized.<sup>41</sup>

The 2011 showed the complete debacle of the CPI (M) led Left Front. They got only 60 seats and their vote percentage was reduced from 50.83% in 2006 to 41.39% in 2011.<sup>42</sup> They lost most of support base that came from the villages.<sup>43</sup> Projecting the ruling party as the enemy of the poor farmers and fishermen and therefore determined to displace them from their land created an anti-establishment narrative. Technology played an important role to build this narrative. The video footage of firing, the barricade at the Khejuri, East Midnapore (a village near Nandigram), the police attacks on the protest at Singur and the live comments by the scholars, educationist and intellectuals created an anti-establishment wave against the ruling Left Front.

Mobile phones started playing an important role in the election campaigns since 2011. The ruling left or the opposition TMC both used the short message service (SMS) facilities to influence the voters. While the slogan from the ruling left “2011, Bam Front Ebaro” (2011: Left Front Again) had been circulated through SMS services, the TMC, simply appealed to cast votes in favour of them to finish the exploitation.<sup>44</sup> It can be said that the use of new technologies in election campaigns destabilized the old form of anti-establishment campaigns which had been controlled by the organized political cedars. So, the changes in the nature of political performances and the increasing use of technologies (mobile phones, SMS services and increasing popularity of the live telecasts in private news channels) helped a new kind of mobilizations that ultimately reflected to the ballot papers.

## **Re-Establishing the Refugee Question (Since 2011)**

The victory of 2011 election showed that the idea of rehabilitation of the refugees were not a viable question any more. It lost its relevance with time. Although the leaders of UCRC and other refugee rights activists said that the tenancy rights of the refugees were not secured in some of the refugee families, the TMC government mentioned in their election manifesto for this year's election that they have acknowledged 244 refugee camps in last 10 years and issued legal ownership of land. The manifesto also claimed that the step benefitted 45000 refugee families.<sup>45</sup> The manifesto criticized the policies of the BJP led central government to make the identity of the refugees vulnerable through the new citizenship laws. A recent survey by the researchers of Calcutta Research Group showed that the new citizenship act created a fear among the cross-border migrants (a large section of the Hindus) about losing their citizenship if they are unable to produce necessary documents as per the new act.<sup>46</sup> The BJP did not mention a single line regarding their long promises to protect the Hindu refugees in West Bengal. They only used a few words about securing the identities of Matua community for securing their votes among the Namashudras.<sup>47</sup> Apart from mentioning to create

separate ministry for the helpless migrant workers, the CPI (M) led Left Front also opposed the new citizenship policies in their election manifesto for this year. Like TMC and the other civil rights groups, the CPI (M) and its allied organizations like UCRC also raised the concern of protecting the refugees.<sup>48</sup>

In the assembly election of 2021, West Bengal witnessed uniquely organized civil society efforts in voter mobilization against BJP after many years. Different civil society efforts like the 'No Vote to BJP' campaign ran a highly spirited campaign in the state cutting across old and new mediums of campaigns against the communal, fascist, xenophobic, and anti-people politics of BJP, especially its NRC-NPR-CAA policies.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

The campaigns in the assembly elections showed that the concerns about the migrant and refugees was initially an ideological concern. But later it became a political issue to pressurize the ruling government. The refugee rehabilitation policies and the movement against the refugee rehabilitation policies was one of the major issues because of the socio-economic conditions of the majority of voters. Although the success of CPI (M) ruled left front in the assembly elections had an important contribution of their politics towards the alternative rehabilitation of the refugees and migrant labours, the Marichjhapi massacre in 1978 and the closure of the jute mills and decline of the in the tea industry pointed the helplessness of the refugees and migrant labours. The "proper rehabilitation" issue had raised in the manifestos of every election campaign, but it seems clear that the ruling Left Front gradually lost their interest because the larger problem of the refugees from the middle class had over by the end of 1970s. The Dalits or the lower income group refugees, migrant labours, had been managed through the new form of governmentality<sup>50</sup> established by the left-front government till the beginning of the new millennium. The transformations in the media, emergence of private channels, use of mobile phone and internet as well as increasing use of social media in the election campaigns broke the form and gave opportunity to a new party to rule the state. The Trinamool Congress (TMC) brought the Dalits and unorganised workers, agrarian labours and small businessmen in the forefront of the campaigns to attract the lower middle class, a section gradually became important in electoral politics since the new millennium.

The TMC led government got more support from the cross-border migrants, migrant labours due to their stand on giving shelters for the migrant labours during COVID-19 pandemic and sympathetic attitude towards the cross-border migrants who might be affected due to the recent amendment in the citizenship amendment laws. A recent study by Calcutta Research Group on the role of the migrants in 2021 elections explored that the returnee migrant labours were more sympathetic towards the ruling TMC due to their role to give access to the social welfare schemes and provide free ration and several other financial helps. The assurance from Mamata Benerjee, Chief Minister and the supreme leader of TMC to the cross-border migrants and other people from the minority communities regarding the non-implementation of new citizenship amendments in her every election campaign in the border districts helped to mobilize votes.

The campaigns in the social media played probably the most crucial role. All the contestant parties (the TMC, the BJP and the Left Front-Congress (I) coalition) used the social media along with rallies, using radio and television and through posters, leaflets, booklets and wall graffities. But, the pro-migrant attitude of TMC in every mode of campaigning won the heart of the people than the hate campaigns run by BJP or the social welfare schemes proposed by the Left-Congress (I) coalition. Although, some political commentators termed the policies of the ruling TMC as "dole politics", but

could not be able to find out any fruitful way to fight with the hate politics. The election campaigns also proved the same. Therefore, it can be said that the migrants will remain one of the key issues in the election campaigns, especially in border states like West Bengal with some modifications with the time and contemporary politics.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> “Pegasus, PM fund on CM radar” in *The Telegraph* (Print edition), 25 .09.2021, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Freedman, Michael Franz and Kenneth Goldstein. “Campaign Advertising and Democratic Citizenship” in *American Journal of Political Science*, Volume VIII, No. 4, October 2004, pp. 723-741. This particular reference has been taken from p. 723.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 724.

<sup>4</sup> David Runciman (2018), *Political Hypocrisy: The Mask of Power from Hobbes to Orwell and Beyond*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2018, pp. 227-228.

<sup>5</sup> Ashis Nandy (2005), “Political Cultures in India” in *Exiled at Home*, New Delhi, OUP, 2005, pp. 47-48.

<sup>6</sup> Nandy, *ibid*, p.54.

<sup>7</sup> Swadhinata, 8.12.1951, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Jyoti Basu, Jotodur Mone Pore (As far as I Remember), Kolkata, National Book Agency Pvt. Limited, 2006, pp.87-91.

<sup>9</sup> Basu, *ibid*, p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 159.

<sup>11</sup> Manikuntala Sen, Sedin er Katha (Stories about those Days), Calcutta, Nabapatra Prakashan, 1982, pp. 264-267.

<sup>12</sup> Basu, *op.cit*, p. 209.

<sup>13</sup> *Bampanthi Dalgulir Nirbachani Istehar: Pancham Bidansabha Nirbachan 1967* (Election Manifesto for the Fifth Assembly Elections, 1967), March 1967. Reprinted in Anil Biswas (Ed.). *Bangla r Communist Andolan: Dalil o Prasangik Tatthya* (Communist Movement in Bengal: Collected Documents and Important Informations), Kolkata, National Book Agency Private Limited, 2006. Pp. 34-47.

<sup>14</sup> Statistical Report on General Election 1972 to the Legislative Assembly of West Bengal, New Delhi, Election Commission of India, 1972. P. 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Bampanthi Dalgulir Nirbachani Istehar: Saptam Bidansabha Nirbachan 1972* (Election Manifesto for the Seventh Assembly Elections, 1972), March 1972. Reprinted in Anil Biswas (Ed.). *Bangla r Communist Andolan: Dalil o Prasangik Tatthya* (Communist Movement in Bengal: Collected Documents and Important Informations), Kolkata, National Book Agency Private Limited, 2006. Pp. 59-69.

<sup>16</sup> Jugantar, 13.02.1972, p. 1. (taken from the Endangered Archives Programme Repository of the British Library. The date in of the electronic file is 29Januray due to some cataloguing error.)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Jugantar, 29.04.1972, p.5.

<sup>19</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nagarik: Prapandha Samkalan* (The Citizens: A collection of Essays), Kolkata, Anustup, 2021, pp. 108-116. (I have contacted Dipak Bhattacharya, Gen. Secretary UCRC for these documents. The UCRC office has all the documents and will be able to show these documents after October 2021).

<sup>20</sup> *Bampanthi Front er Nynnatama Sadharan Karmasuchi: Bidhansabha Nirbachan 1977* (Common Minimum Programme of the Left Front for the Assembly Election, 1977). Kolkata, 19 May 1977. The document was reprinted in a collection of election manifestos of the left front (1977-2006). Kolkata, CPI(M), January, 2008. P. 14. These collection of documents was published in the occasion of the 22<sup>nd</sup> State Convention (13-17 January 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Jugantar, 1.05.1977, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 12.3.1977, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 3.05.1977, p. 6.

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<sup>24</sup> Statistical Report on General Election 1977 to the Legislative Assembly of West Bengal, New Delhi, Election Commission of India, 1977. P.11. (This report showed that among the left front the CPIM got 178 seats, Forward Block 25 and RSP 20 seats).

<sup>25</sup>Debdatta Chowdhury, *Identity and Experience at the India-Bangladesh Border: The Crisis of Belonging*, London, Routledge, 2018, pp. 144-149. Chowdhury claimed that the left front government got the sign that there might be chances to create a separatist movement because a group named Nikhil Banga Nagarik Sangha supported the Namashudra settlers at Marichjhapi. The organization was in favour of creating a separate united Bengal which include both West Bengal and Bangladesh. On the other hand, the left parties could not able to control the Marichjhapi settlers because they were already unified under a special subaltern cultural sect, the Namashudras.

<sup>26</sup>Aajkaal, 5.05.1982, pp. 1&8.

<sup>27</sup>Aajkaal, 4.05.1982, p. 6; 5.05.1982, p. 3; 7.05.1982, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup>*Nirbachani Ishtehaar: Bidhan Sabha Nirbachan, 1982* (Election Manifesto for the 1982 Assembly Election), Kolkata, CPI(M), 10 April, 1982. The document was reprinted in a collection of election manifestos of the left front (1977-2006). Kolkata, CPI(M), January, 2008. P.25.

<sup>29</sup>Ananda Bazar Patrika, 22.04.1991, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup>Ranabir Samaddar, "Vote babuderpicchonepicchone" (Behind the campaigners during the 1991 election), in *Baromas: Nirbachita Samkalan* (Collection of essays from Baromas), Kolkata, Dey's Publishing, 2019, pp. 402-403.

<sup>31</sup>*Nirbachani Ishtehaar: Bidhan Sabha Nirbachan, 1991* (Election Manifesto for the 1991 Assembly Election), Kolkata, CPI(M), 16 April 1991. The document was reprinted in a collection of election manifestos of the left front (1977-2006). Kolkata, CPI(M), January, 2008. P.52.

<sup>32</sup>Ananda Bazar Patrika, 29.04.1991, p. 1&3.

<sup>33</sup> Statistical Report on General Election 1987 to the Legislative Assembly of West Bengal & Statistical Report on General Election 1991 to the Legislative Assembly of West Bengal , New Delhi, Election Commission of India, 1987 & 1991. PP.11 (in both the cases).

<sup>34</sup>*Nirbachani Ishtehaar: Bidhan Sabha Nirbachan, 1996* (Election Manifesto for the 1996 Assembly Election), Kolkata, CPI(M), 26 March 1996. The document was reprinted in a collection of election manifestos of the left front (1977-2006). Kolkata, CPI(M), January, 2008. P.57.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ananda Bazar Patrika, 3.04.1996, p.5.

<sup>37</sup>*Nirbachani Ishtehaar: Bidhan Sabha Nirbachan, 2001* (Election Manifesto for the 2001 Assembly Election), Kolkata, CPI(M), 19 March 2001. & *Nirbachani Ishtehaar: Bidhan Sabha Nirbachan, 2006* (Election Manifesto for the 2006 Assembly Election) Kolkata, CPI(M), 11 March 2006. Both the documents were reprinted in a collection of election manifestos of the left front (1977-2006). Kolkata, CPI(M), January, 2008. P.62 & 67.

<sup>38</sup> Statistical Report on General Election 2006 to the Legislative Assembly of West Bengal, New Delhi, Election Commission of India 2006, p. 11.

<sup>39</sup>Ananda Bazar Patrika March 15, 2007. Pp. 1& 5.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 1.03.2011, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 5.03.2011, p. 8

<sup>42</sup> Statistical Report on General Election 2011 to the Legislative Assembly of West Bengal, New Delhi, Election Commission of India 2011, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> According to a National election survey between 2001-2009 in West Bengal, the left parties registered a solid support from the SC(53.5%), STs(53.25%), Upper casts (43.25%)and Muslims (46.25%). Source: National Election Survey (NES) quoted in *Government in Practice: Democratic Left in a Transforming India* by Dwaipayan Bhattacharya, New Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> Ananda Bazar Partrika, 13 April, 2011, p. Kolkata 1 (the city page of the newspaper).

<sup>45</sup>*Istehaar 2021* (Manifesto 2021), Kolkata, All India Trinamool Congress, 2021, p. 9.



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<sup>46</sup> The Survey titled as “The Migrants the Electoral Time” compiled the study about how the migrant represent themselves during the assembly elections in Assam, west Bengal and Bihar. The study was done by a team of researchers in CRG. Report will be available in CRG website soon.

<sup>47</sup> Sonar Bangla: Sankalpa Patra 2021, New Delhi, Bharatiya Janata Party, 2021, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> Saptadash Bidhansabha Nirbachan 2021: Bamfronter Ishtehar (Election Manifesto of the Left front in the occasion of Seventeenth Assembly elections in 2021), Kolkata, CPI(M), p.16.

<sup>49</sup> The details about the campaigns has mentioned in the election survey by CRG.

<sup>50</sup> According to Ranabir Samaddar, the bureaucratic system raised due to various ideas on social development during the Indira Gandhi led Congress government can be defined as “developmental bureaucracy”. This developmental bureaucracy was complemented by the political parties in the states which as a partner in the new governmental area now supplied mobilizational bureaucracy. ...With continuous party cadre mobilization towards the implementation of the reform measures earlier mentioned, West Bengal stabilized under a new form of governmentality. Ranabir Samaddar, *The Passive Revolution in West Bengal (1977-2011)*, New Delhi, Sage, 2013, p. xv.

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ISSN 2348-0297