INTRODUCTION

Political parties in every country perform certain functions for the political system. If one is interested in understanding the tasks performed by political parties, it is necessary to analyze the party as a functioning structural subsystem. This subsystem plays a role for the society as a whole. The role played by a party can be known only by observing how it functions. In this study, an attempt has been made to conduct an inquiry into the role performance of a political party in West Bengal - the Congress(O). As an integral part of this inquiry an attempt has also been made to assess the role perception of the leading activists of the Congress(O) in West Bengal.

In his study on the Congress party of India, Myron Weiner has tried to explain how the party works "by looking at the party itself, who is in it and what its cadres and leaders do". Weiner says:

... a major assumption of this study is that we can best understand how the party functions by observing the behavior of its members. ...In observing their behavior I was guided by two theoretical considerations. One is that behavior is patterned in some way - that is, that

the activities of the workers are institutionalized into roles. In other words, there are regular jobs which workers perform according to their own and others' expectations. I have tried to identify these roles and how they are carried out. My second assumption is that in a successful organization the roles which individuals play are not only related to one another but also are essential to the successful functioning of the whole organization.

In the present study, thus, reliance has been placed on the role theory which, with its focus on role enactment, bridges the gap between the individual and the group. On the assumption that role performance of the leading activists of a political party determines the role of a party, the author has tried to explain how a small party in West Bengal functions, and with what results, by trying to analyze the way in which the leading activists of the party behave or perform their role.

A successful role performance on the part of an individual depends upon a proper role perception. Unless the actor knows precisely what role he is to perform, what role enactments are appropriate or what sort of behaviour is needed for a successful role acting, his role performance will be inadequate. Lack of clarity in role perception leads to decreased effectiveness and productivity. Role performance is thus intimately related to role perception.

Role perception has a wide connotation. A proper role perception means, among other things, a correct assessment of others' expectations associated with the role; a proper role location, that is, a proper placement of others, and

3 ibid., pp.9-10.
coordinate, of self in the social system; an adequate appraisal of the role demands, that is, propriety norms which the actor has to abide by (of course, not in a rigidly formalized ritual manner); and also, necessarily, the learning and application of adaptative techniques for resolving the cognitive strain that results from a situation of role conflict. Role perception is very important for every individual leading activist of a political party since, ultimately his and his party's role performance depends upon his role perception. In this study, an attempt has been made to ascertain the nature of role perception on the part of the leading activists of a political party, in order, ultimately, to assess the role performance of those activists and that of the party they belonged to.

Review of Existing Literature

It is only since 1950 that political researchers in India have probed the field of stasiology in a scientific manner. As the ICSSR survey of researches on political parties in India made by V.M. Sirsikar shows, the science of political parties has made significant advance in India only recently. Considering the short period during which the modern techniques of inquiry have been employed in this field, the output has not been, on the whole, quite unsatisfactory.


5 The present author was very much benefited by the review of literature on Indian political parties made by Prof. V.M. Sirsikar.
There have been a few fundamentally important contributions in the field of Indian political party system as such, mostly by foreign scholars. W.H. Morris Jones' *Government and Politics of India* is a systematic study of the entire Indian political system in which there is a separate chapter on political parties. Though the work has a constitutional bias, it deals with the realities of the Indian politics and party-process. Norman D. Palmer's *The Indian Political System* is a similar study of the system per se.

Among the foreign scholars, it is Myron Weiner who has contributed to the literature in this field in a big way. Weiner's *Party Politics of India: The Development of a Multi-Party System* analyses how and why India has come to acquire the party system it possesses and what are its prospects and impact upon the political system. His *Politics of Scarcity: Public Pressure and Political Response in India* is a searching analysis of the Indian political and party systems against a broad socio-politico-economic canvass. The same author's *Political Change in South Asia* studies the changes in the political and party systems in South Asian States under the impact of the modernization process in these countries.

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Weiner has given an illuminating discussion on party functioning as a modernizing agency in a traditional society like that of India in his valuable paper, "Traditional Role Performance and the Development of Modern Political Parties: The Indian Case." This article discusses also how the successful role performance of political parties in India depends on their capability to reconcile the conflicting demands of traditionalism and modernization. Paul Brass and Marcus Franda have jointly worked on an ambitious project, *Radical Politics in South Asia* in which the authors have examined the role of the leading radical political parties belonging to both communist and democratic-socialist movements of South Asia including India to see how they have adapted to their local environments. Lloyd and Sussane H. Rudolph's, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* is another important work on the Indian political system emphasizing the aspects of traditionalism and modernization with their impact upon the system as well as on political parties.

Among the Indian scholars contributing to a systematic research in the field of the political system and political parties, Rajni Kothari's works are the most well-known. Kothari's *Politics in India* is an interesting study of the

power structure in the Indian political process and particularly of the dominant Congress system. Kothari has contributed a large number of articles in different journals analyzing the various aspects of the political and party systems of India. Particular mention may be made of his "Party Politics and Party Development" in which the functioning of the system in the Nehru-era has been analyzed to show how inter-party and intra-party competition in India would pave the way for the emergence of a stronger opposition. Kothari's "Politics of Fragmentation and Political Integration" deals with the interactions among various political groups against the background of a changing society. Reference in this connection may also be made to his articles, "Prospects for Democracy", "Congress and Consensus", "India's Political Transition", and "From Electoral Manipulation to Policy Performance". In these papers political events and elections were analyzed in the perspective of the system in operation. Iqbal Kairin, V.M. Sirsikar and other Indian political scientists have made significant contributions to the

16 Political Science Review. 6(1), January-March 1967, pp.1-10.
17 Economic Weekly, 13(23) 10 June 1961.
18 Seminar, June 1967.
study of the political system and the party system in India. Mention may be made in this connection of Iqbal Narain’s papers, "Decentralization, Development and Democracy", and "Democratic Politics and Political Development in India", and Sirsikar’s "Political Leadership in India", Patterns and Trends in Indian Politics: An Ecological Analysis of Aggregate Data on Society and Elections by Biplab Dasgupta and Morris Jones is an important contribution to the study of the political system.

The phenomenon of coalition-politics in India, particularly after the 1967 elections, aroused the curiosity of many scholars because coalitions are often identified with instability of the political system. Among foreign scholars, H. Hartman wrote an illuminating paper, "Change and Stability in Indian Party-system", while Paul Brass in his paper, "Coalition Politics in North India" discussed the problems and prospects of coalition governments in the north Indian states after the 1967 elections. Paul Wallace in his article,

21 Political Science Review, 5(1).
22 Asian Survey 10(2), February 1970.
25 Political Science Review, 7(3 and 4), July-December 1968.
26 American Political Science Review, December 1968.
"India: the Dispersion of Political Power" argues that the coalition experience has positive effects towards accommodation, integration and legitimization of the political system. Norman D. Palmer in his article, "India: The Politics of Coalition and Survival" discusses the inter-party relationship in the coalition-formation process. V.M. Sirsikar's paper, "Coalitions and Democracy" holds that coalitions are the natural development of the political heterogeneity of the Indian society. Iqbal Narain's "Coalitional Politics in India and the Political System: The Crisis of Compatibility" is another paper on the subject worth mentioning. It discusses the effects of coalition-formations among parties and also on their (the parties') role in the process of coalition-building and maintenance. Iqbal Narain and Mohan Lal Sharma's, "Coalition Politics, Nation Building and Administration: From Myths to Realities" attempts to establish the truth that coalitions are not destabilizing factors, nor harmful for nation-building purposes and the administration. Bueno de Mesquita Bruce discusses in his book, Strategy, Risk and Personality in Coalition Politics: The Case of India, the different pulls and counter-pulls.

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27 Asian Survey 8(2), February 1968.
28 Current History, April 1968.
29 Seminar, March 1971.
of power politics that prompt the parties even with contradictory ideologies to combine in a coalition.

Much of the literature on political parties that we possess relate to their histories emphasizing their programmes and ideologies. One of such pioneering works is M.R. Masani's *Communist Party of India: A Short History* which makes a comprehensive study of the Indian Communist Party from 1946 to 1971. C.F. Andrews and G.K. Mukherjee have traced the genesis and early development of the Indian National Congress in their laborious work, *The Rise and Growth of the Congress in India*. Factual narratives about the growth of the Indian National Congress have been given by many authors like P.C. Ghosh, M.V. Ramana Rao, D. Chakrabarti, P.D. Kaushik, Hemendranath Dasgupta, A.C. Majumdar, and others.

M. Frederic De Mello gives a good historical sketch and the

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33 Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 1967.
36 A Short History of the Indian National Congress, S. Chand, Delhi 1959.
37 Congress in Evolution (A collection of Congress Resolutions from 1885 to 1954 and other Document), Book Co., Calcutta 1940.
social background of the Indian National Congress in his
The Indian National Congress: An Historical Sketch. 41
R.P. Dua's book, Social Factors in the Birth and Growth of
the Indian National Congress Movement with Reference to the
Period Leading to 1885 till 1935 42 deals with the programmes
and social policies of the Congress. Pattabhi Sitaramayya's
History of the Indian National Congress 43 may serve as an
encyclopaedia on the Congress.

Some authors have attempted to present reviews of the
activities of different political parties in particular periods
of history. B.B. Mishra's Indian Political Parties: An
Historical Analysis of Political Behaviour up to 1947 44 gives
us a review of the political parties of India during the
British period. H. Hartman's Political Parties of India 45
analyzes the roles of the more well-known political parties
of India during the first twenty-five years of Indian
independence. Asoke Mehta's A Decade of Indian Politics,
1966-1977 46 discusses the party-system, its stresses and
strains and the role of different political parties during
the period under review.

42 S. Chand, Delhi 1967.
43 Padma Publishers, Bombay 1946-47.
44 Oxford University Press, Delhi 1976.
45 Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut 1977.
46 S. Chand & Co., Delhi 1979.
Studies of individual political parties have been made by some authors on a critical level through an analysis of their programmes, ideologies and policies. Gopal Krishna's article, "The Development of the Indian National Congress as a Mass Organisation 1918-1923", traces the development of the Congress from an organization of the professionals and businessmen to a national mass movement. In an organizational study of the Congress, Iqbal Narain discusses in his paper, "The Congress at Crossroads: Hypotheses and Imponderables in the Kamaraj Plan", the background and the possible impact of the Kamaraj Plan upon the organizational and parliamentary wings of the party.

Craig Baxter's, Jan Sangh: A Biography of an Indian Political Party gives us a narrative of the political happenings in India from the time of the country's independence to 1967 with the Jan Sangh as the focus of attention. Similarly, Motilal Jhangiani's Jan Sangh and the Swatantra: A Profile of the Rightist Parties in India presents a detailed account of the genesis, structure, organization, ideology and electoral performance of the two parties. M.R. Masani's Congress Misrule and the Swatantra Alternative is an exposition of the Swatantra party's policies, while H.L. Erdman's The Swatantra Party and Indian Conservatism discusses the genesis of the

50 Manaktalas, Bombay 1967.
51 Manaktalas, Bombay 1961.
party in the wider context of a historical perspective of the rightist elements within the Congress. J.A. Curran (Jr.)'s Militant Hindutva in India: A Study of the R.S.S. examines the organization and methods of activities of the militant volunteer wing of the Jan Sangh. The role of the DMK in developing a politics of regionalism in south India has been discussed by Robert Hardgrave in his article, "The DMK and the Politics of Tamil Nationalism".

The Communist parties of India - the CPI, the CPI(N) and the CPI(ML) have been subjected to serious analytical studies by many scholars. One of the competent studies on the Communist Party and the communist movement in India have been made by Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller in their famous work, Communism in India. We have already referred to Masani's book on the Communist Party of India, V.B. Sinha's Red Rebel in India: A Study of the Communist Strategy and Practice is an analysis of the strategies and methods of activities of the Communist party of India, while Kautsky's Moscow and the Communist Party of India attempts to bring out the links between the Communist party of the Soviet Union and the CPI. In another similar study, Victor M. Pic in his Peaceful Transition to Communism in India:

53 Institute of Pacific Relations, New York 1952.
Strategy of the Communist Party\textsuperscript{58} has explained how the Soviet policy influenced the CPI to adopt the line of peaceful transition to communism. Mohan Ram's \textit{Indian Commumism: Split within Split}\textsuperscript{59} reviews the role of the Indian communists to throw light on the prospects of Maoism in India. Bhabani Sengupta's \textit{Communism in Indian Politics}\textsuperscript{60} explains how the failure of the Indian parliamentary democratic system in coping with the challenges faced by it might pave the way for the success of communism in India. Sengupta also discusses the problems before the Indian Communists and to what extent they have been able to resolve them.

John P. Reis in his thought-provoking paper, "Political Stance of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)\textsuperscript{61}" discusses the difficulties of the CPI(M) in resolving its basic contradiction of an extra-territorial allegiance and its need to preserve a radical image at home. Subimal Pal has given a brief account of the leftist alliances with the CPI and the CPI(M) at their head, in his paper, "The Leftist Alliance in India".\textsuperscript{62} The most interesting study of the two Communist parties of West Bengal - the CPI and the CPI(M) - have been made by John Osgood Field and Marcus Franka in their \textit{Electoral Politics in the Indian States: The Communist Parties of West Bengal}.\textsuperscript{63} The authors have attempted through

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} Nachiketa Publishers, Delhi 1960.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Vikas Publications, Delhi 1969.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Columbia University Press, New York 1972.
\item \textsuperscript{61} \textit{Indian Journal of Political Science}, 30, 1969.
\item \textsuperscript{62} ibid, 1(3 and 4), April-September, 1967.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Manohar Book Service, Delhi 1974.
\end{itemize}
a careful analysis of computerized electoral data to show how the two parties have been able to maintain and even to increase their strength in spite of their own split. Another noteworthy recent contribution towards the study of the communist movement in India has been made by Bhabani Sengupta in his well-reasoned analytical work, *CPI(N)- Promises, Prospects, Problems*. The author holds that the success of the CPI(N) in West Bengal is due to the various weaknesses of the "bourgeois" parties.

About the CPI(ML), the genesis of the party has been lucidly discussed by Marcus. F. Franda in his "India's Third Communist Party" wherein the author has analyzed the interrelationship among the CPI, the CPI(N) and the CPI(ML) in regard to strategy pursued and their extra-territorial allegiance. Biplab Dasgupta in his *The Naxalite Movement* has given an account of the Naxalite revolt within the CPI(N) and also without, in the political arena of West Bengal.

The Socialist parties have been studied historically by a few scholars. Notable among them are Hari Kishore Singh and L.P. Sinha. Singh's *A History of the Praja Socialist Party* traces the growth of the PSP against a historical

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64 Young Asia, New Delhi, 1979.
67 Lucknow, 1959.
background while Sinha's *Left-Wing in India 1919-1947* is a chronological account of different left-wing parties in India in the pre-independence days.

Many Indian scholars have made comparative studies of different political parties, their manifestos and their ideologies and programmes. Of these studies, special mention may be made of C.P. Bhambhi's article, "Ideology and Political Parties in India" which stresses that the social background, interest-group representation and class interest orientation account for ideological differences among parties. M. Venkatarangiah in "The Manifestos: A Critical Review" and C.J. Gena in his article, "Party Manifestos: A Review" have given comparative estimates of the election manifestos of different political parties of India.

A large number of publications have appeared in India on party performance in elections. Comprehensive studies of election results and party performance are being made in Myron Weiner and John Osgood Field (eds) *Studies in Electoral Politics in Indian States*. Such electoral studies have been made in a compilation of essays edited by Rajni Kothari titled *Party System and Election Studies* and K.L. Kamal and Ralph C. Meyer's *Democratic Politics in India*. In this connection,

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69 *Economic and Political Review*, 20 April 1963.
72 *Center for International Studies, M.I.T., Massachussets 1974*.
mention may be made of the following publications: Shiv Lall, *National Parties of India*; L.P. Sen's *Socialism in India: Challenges and Responses*; R.M. Mathur's "Mid-term Elections in U.P., Bihar, Punjab, Haryana and West Bengal"; Lewis P. Fiskett's (Jr.), "The Major Socialist Parties of India in the 1967 Elections"; Harcharan Singh's, "Mid-term Elections in Punjab: Emerging Trends"; Rajinder Gujral's "General Elections in Nagaland-1969"; Thomas A. Rusch's, "Socialists in the Fourth General Elections"; O.P. Goyal and Rahn Harlan's, "Nature of Party Competition in Five Indian States" and Bashiruddin Ahmed's "Communist and Congress Prospects in Kerala". Besides these papers, a novel study of party competition and voter preferences and their implications for the Indian political system have been made by several eminent Indian political scientists, namely, Rajni Kothari, D.L. Sheth, Bashiruddin Ahmed and V.B. Singh in their essays compiled in N.L. Sheeth (ed) *Citizens and Parties*. The contributions in the first part of the book present the emerging civic and political profiles of the Indian electorate and examine their implications for the larger system. The articles in the second part examine the demographic and social bases of the competitive structure of
the Indian party system.

Political opposition in India as an institution has been discussed by H.S. Fartyal in his *Role of the Opposition in Parliament*, by Robert W. Stern in his *The Process of Opposition in India: Two Case Studies of How Policy Shapes Politics* and by Angella Sutherland Burger in *Opposition in a Dominant Party System: A Study of the Jan Sangh, the Praja Socialist Party and the Socialist Party in Uttar Pradesh, India.* One of the illuminating writings on the Indian opposition has been Rajni Kothari's "Opposition in India: Pervasive and Weak". C.P. Bhambri in some of his articles, e.g., "Role of Opposition in the House of People: 1952-1956", "Role of Opposition in the House of People", and "Left in Indian Politics: Problems and Prospects" has devoted attention to the classification, quality and role of the opposition in India. S.K. Nandy in his article, "Reflections on the Nature and Significance of Opposition in Parliamentary Government in India", has classified the Indian opposition. R.T. Jangam in his paper, "Why There Has Been No Effective Opposition So Far?", has analyzed the causes for the absence of effective opposition in Indian politics.

89 Modern Review 101, June 1957.
91 Political Science Review, April 1965.
92 Indian Journal of Political Science, 19, 1957.
Parliament. K. Raman Pillai has discussed the role of the Jan Sangh as a rightist opposition and S.K. Mukherji in his article, "Role of the Opposition in House of People" has dealt with the weaknesses of the opposition parties in parliament. One theme of considerable importance which has received some theoretical attention is public protest. Rajni Kothari, in his "Direct Action: A Pattern of Political Behaviour" posed the subject of extra-parliamentary opposition and the issues raised by him were debated by A.R. Desai in his article, "Public Protest and Parliamentary Democracy" and by K.K. Sinha in his paper, "Problem of Public Protest."

Political defection has also been the subject-matter of analysis by some scholars in India. Subhash C. Kashyap in his book, The Politics of Defection: A Study of State Politics in India has concluded that defections sometimes widen the democratic base and do not always harm the working of the political system. An article by Kapila Jain, "Impact of Defections in the Mid-term Elections of Haryana" also discusses defection in political parties.

94 Political Scientist, 2 July 1955.
95 Calcutta Review, 156, August-September 1960.
96 Quest, January-March 1930.
100 Indian Political Science Review, 4(2), 1970.
Analytical studies of the organizational functioning of political parties have been made by some authors. Two of such notable works are by Myron Weiner and Stanley A. Kochanek, both foreign scholars. Weiner in his near-classic (on political parties) *Party Building in a New Nation: The Indian National Congress*, has analyzed, on the basis of empirical inquiries, the factors which enabled the Indian National Congress to successfully face the challenges of modernization in a traditional society. Kochanek in his *The Congress Party of India: The Dynamics of One-Party Democracy* discusses the different aspects of the Indian National Congress - the organization of the different bodies of the party, the party's parliamentary and the organizational wings, the relationship between the Working Committee and the government, the party's decision-making process and so on. Weiner's study of the Congress has been made on the basis of the modern behavioural approach. An eminent Indian scientist, V.M. Sirsikar has also made a similar study of the militants in the Poona city organizations of different political parties in his *A Study of Political Workers in Poona*. Myron Weiner's *Congress Party Elites* is another behavioural study worth mentioning. Sirsikar's *Rural Elite in a Developing Society* and Iqbal Narain, K.C. Pande and Mohan Lal Sharma's *The Rural Elite in an Indian State: A Case Study of Rajasthan* are important

103 Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Poona, Poona 1961.
104 Indiana University, Bloomington 1967.
contributions to the field of behavioural research on political parties. Thomas Pahtham's Political Parties and Democratic Consensus is an interesting behavioural study of political workers in Ahmedabad. Pahtham's article, "The Ideological Perspectives of Party Organization Activists in an Urban Setting" is another similar study. Mention may be made in this connection of another important work on political activists - The Gentle Anarchists by Geoffrey Ostregard and Currel Melville.

The political parties of India and their role in state politics have been analytically discussed by some eminent foreign and Indian political scientists in their articles in Myron Weiner (ed) State Politics in India and Iqbal Harain (ed) State Politics in India. Marcus, F. Franda's Political Development and Political Decay in West Bengal is a novel study of the process of political development in West Bengal till the decline of the Congress system in the state and the rise of the united left parties in 1967 and 1969. Richard Sisson's Congress Politics in Rajasthan: Political Integration and Nation-Building in an Indian State and K.L. Kamal's Party Politics in an Indian State: A Study of the Major Political Parties in Rajasthan are treatises.

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107 Macmillan, Delhi, 1976
113 Oxford University Press, Delhi 1972.
114 S. Chand, Delhi 1970.
on political parties and their role in state politics.

Similar is a work by Phillip Spratt - D.M.K. in Power.115

How the weakness of organizations and institutionalization of party systems have an adverse impact on the stability of governments in states have been discussed by Paul R. Brass in his article, "Party Systems and Government Instability in the Indian States".116

Mention may be made of another important work on state politics. Marguerite Ross Barnett and others in a compilation of essays titled Electoral Politics in the Indian States; Party Systems and Cleaveages117 have analyzed the party process in the state politics.

On factionalism in Indian political parties, the most notable work is by Paul Brass. His book Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh118 gives an interesting description of the working of factional politics within the U.P. State Congress and the U.P. State Government run by the Congress. Ramashray Ray's article, "Factionalism and Stratarchy : The Experience of the Congress Party"119 is a searching analysis of the nature of factionalism that operates in the Indian National Congress before and during an election.

Political parties have been studied from the perspectives of the modern developmental approach by certain scientists.

Rajni Kothari, D.L. Sheth and others are authors of important works in this field. Kothari's article, "Politics of Fragmentation and Political Integration" and D.L. Sheth's, "Profile of Party Support in 1967" discuss the relationship between the social structure and political parties.

Political parties being essentially social groups, they have been subjected to political-sociological inquiries by some researchers. An excellent work on political sociology can be found in F.G. Bailey's Politics and Social Change: Orissa in 1959. The interaction between the political system and the social structure has been studied by Rajni Kothari and others in Caste in Indian Politics. The aspect of political recruitment to the Congress in Bihar and Rajasthan has been studied by Ramashray Ray in his "Selection of Congress Candidates". Stanley A. Kochanek's study of recruitment to the Congress during the 1967 elections, "Political Recruitment in the Indian National Congress" has come out with interesting findings. Ratna Datta has also undertaken a sociological study of the representatives of different parties in the fourth Lok Sabha in her paper, "The Party Representative in the Fourth Lok Sabha".

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120 Political Science Review 6(1), January-March 1967, pp 1-10
121 Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number 1971.
126 Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number, January 1969.
Delimitation

A brief review of the existing literature on Indian political parties reveals significant research gaps in spite of valuable contributions by researchers. An attempt is being made here to bridge a small part of this gap.

A political party can be understood not only from an analysis of its activities, programmes and performances, but perhaps much more intimately from an analysis of the individuals that populate a party. A political party's performance depends ultimately on the performance of its leaders and cadres. And the performance of these leaders and cadres is determined by their role skill, which, in its turn, is conditioned by their role perception. On the leaders' adequate perception of their roles as partymen will depend their performance as party activists. Therefore, it is essential that an attempt is made to understand the party process on the basis of an inquiry into the role perception and role performance of the leading activists of a political party. Here exists, the author believes, an obvious gap in the researches on Indian political parties. Hence this attempt to explain the role performance of a small political party of West Bengal on the basis of an investigation about the role performance and role perception of the leading activists of that party.

Certain general considerations prompted the choice of a small party for an in-depth analysis. First, in a multi-party electoral system that India possesses, small parties have an impact upon the political system which cannot be
Ignored. Small parties might often influence the party processes of the bigger ones. Secondly, in the state politics of India today, small parties often assume an importance quite disproportionate to their size and strength. The frequent coalition-building and coalition-rebuilding processes that, at present, obtain in the states' political systems due to the operation of various factors, result in the attachment of "surplus value" to the small parties. Finally, the consequences of political defections and floor-crossings (a common practice among Indian legislators today) have also been responsible for the artificially magnified importance of small parties.

Besides these general considerations, the author felt a special urge to examine the role of a small political party of West Bengal because of a curiously peculiar development that is, of late, discernible in the political process of the state. This development in the state politics of West Bengal demonstrates that it (the state) does not fall entirely in line with the general trend of the political process obtaining in the rest of India. An analysis of the election data of West Bengal clearly indicates that West Bengal is steadily emerging as a bi-party political system dominated by two political giants - the Congress led by Mrs. Gandhi and the Marxists-leftists led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Previously, there had been numerous political parties in West Bengal. The phenomenon of "more than fifty political parties" contesting elections to the state legislative assembly since 1947, prompted an expert on the
state politics of West Bengal to remark, "At first sight organizational politics in West Bengal seems like a hopeless maze of confusion". But this "maze of confusion" now seems to have been resolved; a more or less clearly demarcated bipolar politics has replaced the former confusion of mutual jostling among a large number of small parties. The recent Lok Sabha election of 1980 has demonstrated that the West Bengal electorate now feels inclined to make its choice mainly from two political parties - the Congress (I) and the CPI(M). No doubt, some left-front partners of the CPI(M) - the Forward Bloc and the R.S.P. - and the CPI (another recent electoral ally of the left-front led by the CPI-M) have their representation in parliament from West Bengal, but the political reality is that, had these parties not been actively supported by the CPI(M), they would not have been able to win the laurels of victory in the election.

Parties like the Janata Party, the Lok Dal, the Congress (U) and the Muslim League have, for all practical purposes, been wiped out of existence in the state's electoral arena. Marcus Franda, in 1971, had spoken of a trend in the political culture of West Bengal which has, at last been explicitly observable in 1980. Franda says:

The factors which produce a political process in which two strong party traditions exist, and in which parties pursue widely divergent political strategies, are deeply embedded in the social, cultural, economic and political background of West Bengal.

128 Marcus F. Franda, Political Development and Political Decay in West Bengal, Firma K.L.Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1971, p.64.
Those factors have, it seems, at last given birth to bi-polar politics in West Bengal and the state is rapidly emerging as a bi-party system.

The small parties outside the Left Front, except the SUCI, have withered away in West Bengal. Because of a sharp political polarization taking place in the state, these parties are now compelled to wind up or suspend their day-to-day normal activities. The Congress (0) is one such party. In 1969, it started its career in West Bengal with high hopes and rich expectations. But within just ten years, it has declined to the position of a small group struggling hard to maintain only a semblance of existence. In 1977, the group attempted a borrowed extension of its life by merging itself in the Janata party (actually, a large and loose confederation of sub-coalitional groups) but even that Janata party lost its teeth in West Bengal in 1980.

Barring only a handful of "political desperates", most of the former Congress (0) activists have now veered round Mrs. Gandhi's Congress (I), others have become politically inactive. In short, like the other small parties - the Bangla Congress, the SSP, the PSF, the Jan Sangh, the Hindu Mahasabha, the LSS, the Swatantra party, the RCPI (Tagore group), the INDF, the Subhasist Forward Bloc and others - the Congress (0) has ceased to remain an effective political force. In spite of a rich heritage and possessing a good number of front-rank state leaders (many of them, former ministers) the party has gone downstream to political obliteration.
What, then, is the reason behind such political decline of a small party like the Congress (O) in West Bengal politics? Franda, as we have seen, has maintained that it is in the very nature of West Bengal's political culture to have "two strong party traditions". He says that the factors responsible for this phenomenon are embedded in "the social, cultural, economic and political background of West Bengal". But Franda's explanation, though fully justified as a broad theory, is negative (for purposes of this inquiry) in the sense that it accounts for the rise of two strong parties but does not look at the other side of the picture - the extinction of the small ones.

This study holds that the bi-party system has emerged in West Bengal because of the failure of the small parties. This failure, this study maintains, is due not only to the extraneous factors as are "embedded" in the socio-political background of West Bengal, but also to an inherent malady from which the small parties suffered - a malady that has caused the extinction of political parties in all countries and in all ages. The malady is a politico-psychological one - the incongruence between the role performance and the role perception of a party's leading activists.

The political party is an ongoing process; it is also a mechanism consisting of various parts. If the parts go the wrong way, the whole mechanism fails. Similarly, if the leading activists of a political party do not perform their roles adequately because of improper role perception, their role performance fails. With the failure of the role performance of its leading cadres, the party as a whole fails to
play its due role in the political system. And hence comes the death of a party. In short, this study attempts to establish that the success or failure of a party depends, to a great extent, upon the role perception and role performance of its leading activists. The case of the Congress (0) has been chosen as an object of this broad inquiry.

Methodology
This study is based mainly on three primary sources: (i) newspaper reports; (ii) party documents, both published and unpublished; and (iii) interviews (both focused and structured) of party leaders at the state level and also in the districts of West Bengal.

The author has used only such newspaper reports which amounted to presentation of facts. The newspaper reports cover the period from October 1969 to March 1980. Reliance has been placed mainly on reports appearing at The Statesman, Calcutta and at times, on those appearing in the Ananda Bazar Patrika, the most widely circulated vernacular daily of West Bengal. Along with newspaper reports, certain books and political journals were also used because these were considered helpful in the process of analysis.

Party documents and records regarding the activities of the Congress (0) of West Bengal were used mainly to describe the operations of the party. These are mainly the resolutions of the party's executive committee and the state council, the election manifestos and statements by the party's functionaries on different public issues. Many of the documents are un-
published records access to which could be had at the party's state headquarters.

In order to assess the role perception of the leading activists of the Congress (O), the author undertook structured interviews of 101 Congress (O) leaders. Most of the state leaders, the presidents, the general secretaries and other functionaries of the district committees of the party and the leaders of the party's front organisations - student, youth and labour - were subjected to structured interviews based on a schedule prepared beforehand. The schedule contained questions on important social, political, economic and party issues. Apart from this, some eminent leaders of the state party were subjected to focused interviews. Such interviews threw light on many political developments (within and outside the party circle) not fully known to the public. Information on the party's activities during the 1975-1977 emergency period was gathered mainly from such focused interviews. All interviewees were office-bearers or executive members of either the state committee or a district committee or a local committee of the party. The interviews were carried out between December 1977 and July 1979.

In determining which party functionaries ought to be interviewed or which district or local committees of the party ought to be studied, no attempt at random selection was made. It was not possible to study all the district and local committees or to meet their functionaries. It was also impossible to select statistically "typical" party units or leaders. The author tried to interview the more well-known
among the state and the district party's leaders (their number was not too large, the party being a small one) and went to all the districts of the state barring three (where the Congress-O organization did not exist) to study the Congress (O) organization.

In-depth interviews were undertaken in respect of a few all-India leaders of the party also. But these were concerning incidents in the state party in which those leaders were involved. The former Janata Prime Minister, Morarji Desai was interviewed in this way. Moreover, a few leaders of the Jan Sangh, the SSP and the Socialist Party were subjected to in-depth interviews in order to verify statements (of the Congress-O leaders) concerning the activities of those parties and of the Congress (O) during the emergency.

The responses of the leading activists of the Congress (O) on different issues as collected through the interviews were used to ascertain their attitudes and opinions. The data collected through structured interviews were processed at the Regional Computer Centre, Calcutta. The data were analyzed with the purpose of inquiring into (a) the correlation of the background variables of the respondents and their attitudes, and (b) intercorrelation among the attitudinal variables. From a study of such correlations, certain conclusions have been sought to be drawn regarding the nature of the role perception of the leading activists of the West Bengal Congress (O). The object of this study has been, as already stated, an attempt to find out how the role per-
formance of individuals occupying social positions depends on their role perception, because,

The occupant of a social position ought to do particular things in specified ways and ought to hold certain beliefs instead of others.129

This study tries to inquire if the beliefs and opinions held by the leading activists of the West Bengal Congress (O) were appropriate and helpful in their proper role performance. This study thus attempts to establish that role performance of the West Bengal Congress (O) was determined by the role perception and role performance on the part of the party's leading activists.