CHAPTER V
THE BJP IN WEST BENGAL

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came into existence in 1980. Atal Behari Vajpayee became the first president of the new party. The BJP welcomed the Janata Party leaders like Ram Jethmalani, Shanti Bhushan, Sikander Bakht to join the party "to avoid any comparison with the Jana Sangh which had been condemned to an existence on the very fringes of mainstream politics." ¹ Jethmalani and Bakht were given the post of Vice-Presidents of the BJP along with Vijaya Raje Scindia, L K Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi and entrusted with the task, together with S S Bhandari, of writing the party's constitution. ² The BJP feels proud of the fact that it has conducted the affairs of the party in accordance with its constitution.³

So far as the objectives of the party are concerned, the party constitution goes to state, "the objective of the party is to build India into a strong and prosperous state which will be a modern, progressive and enlightened in outlook and which will be based on the glorious traditional culture and values of India being able to play an important role." ⁴ Again "the objective of the party is to build such a democratic state in which there will exist political, social and economic justice and equal opportunity and the right to freedom of expression in all spheres for all citizens irrespective of nation, creed and gender." ⁵ The party will keep complete faith on the Indian constitution, socialist ideals, secularism and democracy and will strongly protect the independence and national unity of India.⁶

Article 3 of the constitution deals with the basic philosophy of the party where it is said that, 'the basic philosophy of the party will be 'Integral
Humanism. 7 Article 4 says that, the party is committed to Nationalism and National Integrity, Democracy, Positive Secularism, Gandhian Socialism or Decentralized economy and Value-based politics. 8

Membership

1. Any Indian Citizen aged 18 or more, not being members of any other political parties, can apply for membership in accordance with articles 2, 3 and 4 of the constitution and with membership fees in the prescribed form. 9

2. Duration of membership, as per the decision taken by the National Executive Committee, will be 6 years in general. On expiry of this period, every member has to renew his/her membership by filling up a new form. Death, removal, or resignation will cease the membership. 10

3. Any person can be a member of the party on the basis of his / her residence or daily work place. Nobody can be a member from more than one place. 11

The party has two types of members (a) Primary members (b) Active members. Article 12 of the constitution says that in order to be an active member,

(a) One's primary membership must be of at least 3 years' old.

(b) One has to deposit a sum of Rupees One hundred (Rs.100/-) either from his personal fund or collected from others, along with the active member’s form.

(c) One has to join the party programmes including agitational ones.

(d) One has to be a subscriber and reader of any journal of State or Centre published by the party. 12

It should be mentioned here that “only the active members are entitled to contest the Mandal Committee election and can be members from Mandal to highest Committees.” 13
Organizational Structure

Article VII of the constitution of the party deals with the organizational structure.

At the national level, the organizational structure consists of:
1. The plenary session of the party
2. The National Council
3. The National Executive

At the State level, it consists of:
1. State Council
2. State Executive

And below the state level, there are
1. Regional Committees
2. District Committees
3. Mandal Committees
4. Village / Town Centres
5. Local Committees

Morchas and Cells

At every level of the party organization, there are Morchas for the Women, the Kishan, the SC, the ST and the Minority. Cells can only be set up up to the state and district level.¹⁴

State Council

The state Council will be constituted through the following procedures:

(a) Members of the State Council will be elected by the District units.

(b) Ten percent MLAs nominated by the MLAs will be members of the State Council. If the number of MLAs is less than ten then all MLAs will be members of the State Council.

(c) Ten percent MPs elected from the state (at least 3) will be State Council members. If the number of MPs is less than 3, then all MPs will be members.
(d) All elected members of the National Council from the state will be members of the State Council.

(e) All former presidents and all members of the Executive Committee will be members of the State Council.

(f) All Office bearers of a Regional Committee.

(g) Party leaders of State Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council.

(h) Presidents and General Secretaries of all districts.

(i) Party Presidents, Chairman of Municipalities and Corporations, Sabhapati of Zilla Parishad and Presidents of the Panchayat Samities.

(j) Not more than 25 persons nominated by the State President.

(k) Presidents of all Morchas and Cells of the State.¹⁵

**State Executive (Art.17)**

(a) There will be the president and not more than 50 members among whom there will be 6 women and 4 SC/ST in 1<sup>st</sup> category state.

(b) There will be the president and not more than 60 members among whom there will be 8 women and 5 SC/STs.

(c) There will be the president and not more than 70 members among whom there will be at least 10 women and at least 6 SC/ST people.¹⁶

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Forum</th>
<th>Number of Members</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Council</td>
<td>42 Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Executive</td>
<td>61+ Invitee Members (not fixed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morchas (6)</td>
<td>11+30 = 41 Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cells (21)</td>
<td>Convener - 1 + Members 5 to 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Secretariat</td>
<td>18 + Invitee Members (not fixed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: BJP office, Kolkata.
BJP in West Bengal has 6 Morchas and 21 Cells. Morchas are:

1. Mohila Morcha
2. Yuva Morcha
3. Minority Morcha
4. S C Morcha
5. S T Morcha

Each Morcha consists of 1 President, 4 Vice-Presidents, 1 General Secretary, 4 Secretaries, 1 Treasurer and 30 other members.

It should be mentioned here that the BJP has no Student Front and Trade Union Front of its own. ABVP and BMS, set up by the RSS, act as the Student and the Trade Union Fronts respectively of the BJP or for that matter, the Sangh Parivar. One interesting fact is that the BJP in West Bengal has set up its own trade union front called Bharatiya Mazdoor Morcha in 1993.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Members</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Members</td>
<td>43,418</td>
<td>2,62,822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Members</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>11,563</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: BJP Office, Kolkata.

From table 5.2 it is seen that the number of primary members of the party in 2007 has increased 5 times the number as it was in 1980, the year in which the BJP came into being as a political party. The number of active members has gone up over 20 times the number as it was in 1980. But if we compare these figures with the population figure of West Bengal as per 2001 census then it shows that the number of primary members of the party in 2007 is just 0.33% of the total population of West Bengal. The total population of West Bengal, as per 2001 census, is 8,01,76,197 and the percentage of active members of the party to total population is 0.01 percent.
History of the BJP in West Bengal

The BJP in West Bengal was not known as the Bharatiya Janata Party initially. It was known as Jana Sangh of which Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee was one of its founders. It should be noted here that Dr Mukherjee joined the Nehru Cabinet after independence. But soon, he fell out with Nehru as he could not reconcile himself with some decisions taken by Nehru particularly on Kashmir and he resigned from the cabinet on 8 April 1950. Then to participate in the first General Election to Lok Sabha in 1952, he formed a political party called the Jana Sangh in 1951 virtually on the ruins of the Hindu Mahasabha and with close ideological connections with the RSS. The Hindu Muslim divide, created and nurtured by the British resulted in the partition of the country and the refugee problem between the two countries. Hindu nationalism got strengthened in the wake of the partition. This acted as the background for this new political party.

Table 5.3
Performance of the Jana Sangh in the Lok Sabha Elections in West Bengal from 1952 to 1971 (Seats won and share of votes in percentage).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1952</th>
<th>1957</th>
<th>1962</th>
<th>1967</th>
<th>1971</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seats</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 5.4
Performance of the Jana Sangh in Bidhan Sabha Elections in West Bengal from 1952 to 1972 (Seats won and No. of contesting candidates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seats</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 5.3 shows that the Jana Sangh got the maximum number seats (02) and the highest percentage of votes (5.9%) in the 1952 Lok Sabha election in West Bengal. The party could not win any seat in 1957,
1962, 1967 and 1971 Lok Sabha elections and its percentage of votes share was 1.4%, 1.1%, 1.4% and 0.9% respectively. It may be mentioned here that Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and Durga Charan Bandopadhyay were elected as members of the Lok Sabha from West Bengal in 1952 election.

In the 1977 Lok Sabha election, four national parties, namely, the Indian National Congress (Organization), Bharatiya Lok Dal, Jan Sangh and the Socialist Party merged informally to form the Janata Party. The Janata Party had an electoral understanding with the CPI (M). In the 1977 Lok Sabha election in West Bengal, the Janata Party won 15 seats out of 42.

From Table 5.4, it is seen that the Jana Sangh captured 9 seats in the 1952 Assembly election in West Bengal; most of them were from the Midnapore District. The party contested 81 out of 238 seats. It may be noted here that in this election, more than one candidate were elected from many constituencies. The party could not win any seat in 1957 election though it contested in 32 seats. In 1962, the party put up its candidates in 25 seats but drew a blank. In 1967, the party could secure only one seat out of 55 candidates contesting the election. In 1969, again, the party failed to secure any seat. Forty eight candidates of the party were in the fray in this election. In 1971, the party could bag only one seat out of 22 candidates fighting the elections. In 1972, the party went to field 16 candidates but could not win any seat.

Subsequently, “During the emergency phase of Indian politics of 1975-77, the Sangh leaders and activists were arrested or they became politically passive to escape any punishment from the Government of India.” The Lok Sabha elections of 1977 brought almost all opposition parties together including the Jan Sangh under a new platform called the Janata Dal. In this election, the Janata Dal defeated the Congress. In West Bengal Assembly election was held in 1977 and Janata Dal contested this election as a separate entity. In this election some old Jana Sanghis like Bishnukanta Shastri, Haripada Bharati were elected in the West Bengal Bidhan Sabha. Later, the Janata Dal broke and the old Jana Sanghis
regrouped and formed a new political party called ‘the Bharatiya Janata Party’ in 1980. In West Bengal, too, the old Jana Sanghis joined the Bharatiya Janata Party and they formed a unit of the party in West Bengal. But the Hindutvavadi policy of the party could not attract the politically conscious people of West Bengal.

BJP’S Electoral Journey

Although the BJP, as a political party, came into existence in 1980, it took almost a decade to make its organizational and electoral presence felt. In the case of West Bengal, “the BJP, from an extremely limited organizational base, secured 11.7% of the total votes cast in the state in the Lok Sabha polls of 1991.” Subsequently, the party suffered electorally “owing to organizational difficulties and the coalescence of the anti-left votes behind the Congress, as the BJP’s status as a potentially effective opposition force within the state was rejected.” Despite such electoral setbacks and the persistent failure of the party to win any parliamentary representation in Assembly or Lok Sabha polls in West Bengal, the BJP has improved its once very poor organizational base to the extent that now it has a party structure in place throughout the length and breadth of the State. While the BJP and associated Sangh Parivar organizations have adopted the strategy to propagate ideological programmes of Hindu nationalism in the unique social and cultural context of Bengali politics (particularly via a strident campaign against illegal migration from Bangladesh), the electoral base secured by the party, in part, is a reflection of the impact of the rise of the party to ‘national’ prominence at a state level. This has made it possible for the party to project itself as the natural successor to the Congress at the centre and as a potentially important opposition force to established political groupings even in previously unresponsive regions such as West Bengal.

“In 1998, the BJP was able to take advantage of gradual growth in West Bengal by positioning itself as a viable electoral opposition force at the state level.” Moreover, the BJP was able to secure a degree of legitimacy for itself as a dependable political entity in the 1998 election with the help of
a programme of seat adjustments, (in reality an undeclared electoral alliance) with the regionally based Trinamool Congress headed by Mamata Banerjee.” 25

The adjustment was indicative of the BJP’s general electoral strategy for the South and East, a strategy which was adopted in two regional party conclaves in late 1996 and which aimed at identifying opposition regional political formations led by leaders having local popularity with the short term objective of forming an accommodation with a potential BJP-led Central Government. Having, for a long time, struggled to create a regional profile for the party in terms of local leadership and media coverage beyond the campaign visits of recognized national party leaders from time to time, the state unit considered the limited alliance to be the culmination of an ongoing negotiation with Mamata Banerjee and a disgruntled section of the state Congress. 26

**Internal Squabbles in the West Bengal Unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party**

The BJP in West Bengal, like other bourgeois parties, is not free from internal dissension, squabbling etc. The party suffered heavily from internal squabbles within the state unit. 27 “In August, 1994, Dhananjoy Das, an executive member, resigned. Soon such popular figures like the litterateur Buddhadev Guha, well known football coach Amal Dutta, cricketer Raja Mukherjee, actor Victor Banerjee and host of others distanced themselves from saffron politics.” 28 A more recent example of lack of order in the BJP house is the resignation of one of its General Secretaries, Mr. Amalesh Mishra. In his resignation letter, Mr Mishra said that he has resigned ‘due to lack of consistency between the precept and practice of the party’. 29 When asked to tell the reason of his resignation, Mr Mishra further said:

The principle on the basis of which the party is running cannot be supported. We could not do anything during the last 25 years. The party could not grow. The electoral success rate of the party is only 2.83 percent, that is, we have only succeeded in securing less than 3 percent seats out of
61,500 seats of Lok Sabha, Bidhan Sabha, Zilla Parishad, Municipalities, Panchayat Samity and Gram Panchayats. Another stalwart and veteran BJP leader Mr Shantilal Jain quit the party in protest against a show-cause notice served on him by the party for having supported a rebel candidate in Ward No. 22 for the KMC Poll in 2005. It may be mentioned here that Mr Jain was one of the senior councilors of the party who had the distinction of being elected to the Kolkata Municipal Corporation since 1985. Tathagata Roy, the then president of the party, "had asked Jain to explain the nomination of independent candidate, Ratanlal Soni in Ward 22 against the BJP’s official candidate, Deputy Mayor Meena Devi Purohit, ostensibly with his support." The tallest of the stalwarts of West Bengal to quit the BJP is Mr Tapan Sikdar, the first ever BJP MP, creating history by winning from Dum Dum constituency and also ex-Minister of the NDA Government at the centre. In a statement, the then BJP president of the West Bengal unit of the BJP, Sri Sukumar Banerjee in Bankura on 11 March 2007 that Tapan is welcome if he wants to return to the BJP, Mr Sikdar, in a telephonic conversation, told a reporter that, “Once I have left BJP, I will not return. I was show caused. They have not been able to respond to my letter. There is no democracy in this party. The party has become a corporate house. Not only this, except one or two districts, the BJP has now become a signboard in West Bengal.” It may be stated here that Mr Sikdar had joined a new party called ‘Bharatiya Janashakti.’ Mr Sikdar has rejoined the BJP in 2009 and contested the Dum Dum constituency in 2009 Lok Sabha election and lost.

The BJP and the Sangh Parivar in West Bengal

The ideology of Hindutva is the mainstay of the BJP and its organizational pivot is the RSS and its other affiliates, like VHP, Bajrang Dal. “BJP has a commitment to the ideology of the Hindu Rashtra and it has a committed and army like trained and disciplined cadre of the RSS to spread and propagate this ideology.” In this respect C P Bhambhri remarks, “The BJP is different from every other political party of India
because of its exclusive Hindu ideology and its capacity to mobilize its well trained and ideologically committed cadre to work for the party of Hindus. The real backbone of the BJP is the RSS and other numerous Hindu organizations like VHP, Bajarang Dal etc. 35 Given the fact that many of its party cadres come from the RSS and its association with the RSS-VHP combine has proved to be decisive in its growth, the BJP can afford to snap its links with the RSS only at its own risk. 36

Like other states of India, West Bengal is also not free from the activities of the Sangh Parivar although the state can boast of its secular, democratic tradition and a Left Front Government is there which is committed to secular values fighting against all communal and fundamental forces irrespective of the religion they belong to. It may be mentioned here that when in the year 1990, the Karsevaks attacked the Babri Masjid, the police had to open fire in which one Karsevak from Kolkata was killed along with others. 37 According to another source, the casualties were 35. 38 Even in the aftermath of the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, as per official estimates, 33 people were killed in the riots organized in Calcutta and according to an unofficial source, the number of those killed was 50. The Sangh Parivar was behind the planning and execution of the Calcutta riots in 1992. 39

In West Bengal the RSS has 1450 Sakhas, 1150 Bidya Bharati Schools organized by the RSS where 5200 teachers teach. 40 Saraswati Vidyalayas are also on the rise in West Bengal. "In 1992, there were only 45 Saraswati Vidyalayas (Primary Schools) in West Bengal. 41 In 2003, the number of such schools has gone up to 150. 42 These schools are now called 'Shishumandirs'. Although the existing syllabi are followed here and English taught, emphasis is put on (a) Sanskrit learning (b) Yoga (c) Music (d) Sports and (e) Character building. 43 Teaching methods in these schools are different from other schools. Children of class two, three and four attend a 'Sishu Sabha' every Saturday. They are required to sing 'Saraswati Vandana' and chant 'Gayatri Mantra' every alternate day, the children play
in the field, the rest of the days they are required to undergo Yoga training. Children are taught to touch the feet of their parents every day after getting up from bed in the morning.\textsuperscript{44} According to \textit{Update}, “in states like West Bengal the shakhas of RSS are mushrooming. The activities of Parivar are being taken massively in the border districts of the W.B.”\textsuperscript{45} A report in \textit{The Statesman} dated 24.01.2003 shows that the \textit{Sangh Parivar} discussed things with the state BJP to combat the communists (who are in power in the state for more than 30 years). The report goes thus:

The state BJP leadership has been asked by the RSS Chief to concentrate on strengthening morning shakhas. After two rounds of discussions with state BJP leaders, Mr K.S.Sudarshan told them that the number of morning shakhas should be increased as it would help build a strong cadre-base. Front ranking state BJP leaders, including Chief Mr Tathagata Roy, were present at yesterday’s and today’s meetings with Mr Sudarshan, who will leave for Durgapur and Raiganj, tomorrow. Reports of organizational activity in the past few months were submitted at the meeting. The RSS Sarsanghachalak reviewed the activities of the 35 associate and fraternal organizations and party sources said he has asked state BJP leaders to be more active in the districts because recent RSS activities in rural areas have “yielded results”. The upshot of the meeting was, however, instructions from the RSS Chief to strengthen Shakhas and rope in as many “like minded” people as possible to combat the communists. Persuasion will centre around ideology rather than public issues. The BJP has been asked to mobilize people for Sakhas primarily through individual contacts and influences. Besides this, the state BJP leadership has been asked to review organizational achievements and lapses and to monitor the party’s growth in the city and districts through weekly meetings. It is learnt that Mr.Sudarshan has asked the state BJP leadership to use the mouthpiece Jagaran to reawaken Hindus in Bengal. The BJP, in fact, has already cranked up the propaganda machine.\textsuperscript{46}

According to the ‘\textit{Organizer}’, in 1992, there were 225 \textit{Pracharaks} in the state and 116 full-time VHP workers.\textsuperscript{47} That the RSS is very much active in West Bengal is also proved through a write-up by Goutam Roy in \textit{Deshhitaishi}. 
According to Mr Roy:

Arrangements are being made for holding a number of 'Yagnas' through clandestine means with a view to increasing the activities of the RSS in West Bengal. One such Yagna is going to be held from 19 December, 2004 to 25 December, 2004 at a place behind the Mohun Bagan Football ground under the banner of a branch of the RSS called 'Shri Hari Satsanga Samity'. The Sangha is going to perform this task in the garb of a discussion on the 'Gita' by one Bhupendra Bhai Panda. The 'Yagna' proves that after the defeat in the Lok Sabha elections, the RSS has started working somewhat keeping itself aloof from its own branches. It may be mentioned here that, right now, 'Sri Hari Satsanga Samity' is acting as an alternative to 'Banabasi Kalyan Samity' throughout the entire eastern region and with the help of 'Brindaban Dham Yagna', the RSS is trying to propagate its spiritual and educational ideals in the Adivasi dominated areas. According to Roy, "In this way, through a number of small and big organizations, the RSS is carrying on its activities not only in West Bengal, but also in the Eastern region of the country." We also learn from Mr Roy that 'Bastuhara Sahayak Samity', a sister organization of the RSS, is very active in the North Bengal. This organization is propagating its ideals in various ways in areas of mixed population of both the North and the South Dinazpur. There are a number of branches of 'Saraswati Shishu Mandir School' in North Dinazpur. Mention may be made here that the RSS has renamed 'Islampur' as 'Indrapur' in their own communal interests. Besides 'Purbanchal Kalyan Ashram', another sister organization of RSS, is now very active in North Bengal. This organization organized a function in the premises of the Chansapara Sishu Sikhsha Kendra of the Jalpaiguri District. Another story of RSS preparation to spread its wing in West Bengal was reported in The Statesman, dated 14 June 2004. The report runs thus:

The BJP's parent organization, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is likely to spread its activities across the district to combat the CPI(M)'s growing domination in the political scenario. Following the humiliating defeat in the
Problems and prospects of the BJP in West Bengal

Krishnagar Lok Sabha Constituency to the CPI(M) candidate Mrs. Jyaotirmoyee Sikdar, the RSS leaders have planned to expand their organization to the rural areas.56

Further, the report stated that:

According to the insiders of the Nadia RSS, the leaders have already started to strengthen their local units at Palashi, Debagram, Nakashipara, Bethuadahari, Krishnagar, Tehatta and Krishnaganj areas. In these areas, the RSS leaders have stressed on making strong organization by practicing their daily activities, camps, training courses, celebrations, fund raising, prayers, songs and Sanskrit sacraments among the youths.57

*The Vishwa Hindu Parishad* was established on 31 August 1964, to protect the Hindu religion and to coordinate the activities of those belonging to various Hindu sects in order that the *Hindutva* tradition remains in tact and continue unabated. According to a report published in the 'Swastika', "Uptil now, *Vishaw Hindu Parishad* is carrying on 7,272 service schemes throughout the country." 58 "The number of such schemes in West Bengal is 631" 59 Lakhs of people are being benefited by these schemes. These include schemes related to extending proper service at the time of sudden calamity.

It is well known that the *Bajrang Dal* has set up many camps in West Bengal. Reacting to the assertion of the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya that the RSS will not be allowed to function in West Bengal, the International General Secretary of the VHP, Dr Pravin Togadia said, "The administration of the country will be run in accordance with the Indian constitution, not according to the communist line of thinking" 60 He put his counter question, "If Madrasas can carry on here why not the *Bajrang Dal* camps?" 61 It may be pointed out here that in these camps education on patriotism is imparted. How to observe the Hindu religion is taught. The need for construction of *Ram Mandir* at Ayodhya is also stressed upon.

Dr Togadia came to visit a *Bajrang Dal* training camp on 8 June, 2002 in the VHP's 'Gopali Ashram' near Kharagpur. In this camp, training
was imparted to 150 select persons who came from 19 districts of the state. This was the first time that any state level camp of Bajrang Dal was held in Midnapur.  

'Aajkaal', a Bengali Daily Newspaper, also reported the activities of the VHP in West Bengal. A report in *Aajkaal* went thus:

Vishwa Hindu Parishad has finalized some programmes for West Bengal. It is also trying to increase its members here. This is the first time that the VHP is going to organize camps in 17 places in the state. Classes are being taken on Islamic terrorism in the world. Many new members are joining these camps. According to an own source of the VHP, *Trishul Diksha* will be given to one lakh youth. *Stridents* measuring less than six inches will be distributed among these youths as a symbolic gesture. Arrangements for training to enable the youth to stand up to the enemies will also be made. Leaflets, rules regarding all these things are being prepared.

In the report, Togadia was quoted as saying that if any Hindu found himself in danger or imprisoned while fighting for Hindutva, VHP would stand by him by (i) giving him legal aid, (ii) providing financial help to his family and (iii) helping him in medical treatment, etc.

*Hindustan Times*, dated 26 January 2007, published a report entitled 'Sangh plans rally against religious conversions' where it had been stated, “the RSS will hold what it calls a national awakening programme in Siliguri on February 4. It expects the event to be its biggest ever show of strength in North Bengal and Sikkim. The former RSS Chief K S Sudarshan and several senior leaders will take part in it.”

The report went on to state further that, “A public rally will be held at Siliguri's Baghajatin park on the birth centenary of Madhav Sadhashib Golwalkar, who was the RSS second in command for 33 years till 1973. The rally aims at highlighting infiltration, particularly from Bangladesh and conversion by missionaries of poor Hindus especially workers of closed tea gardens.” The reports quoted Bidyut Mukherjee, an RSS Pracharak for Sikkim and parts of North Bengal, as saying that “the February 4 rally was
expected to be the biggest ever to be held by any organization or political party in the region and a turnout of close to 20,000 people was expected." 67

Programmes and Issues of the Bharatiya Janata Party in West Bengal

The Bharatiya Janata Party in West Bengal speaks highly of the ideals of Swami Vivekananda, Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanyadev, Rammohun Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Prince Dwarakanath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Subhas Chandra Bose, but deplores that the state in which these great men were born is now in a very pathetic condition in all respects, be it in education, trade and commerce and standard of life of the people of the state etc. For all this, the party blames both the Congress and the Leftist parties, now ruling the state. The irony is that while, on the one hand, the party is all praise for these great men, on the other, it is not known to them that these great men never believed in cultural nationalism or Hindutva as espoused by the party where the minorities do not have equal status like the Hindus.

While discussing the programmes and issues of the BJP in West Bengal, it should be remembered that the party in West Bengal does not highlight the core issues of the party like Hindutva, Ram Temple, Article 370, Uniform Civil Code, etc in West Bengal as its election manifestoes and other literature suggest. Instead, it highlights such issues, at regular intervals, like Bangladeshi infiltration, unemployment, lack of investment and infrastructure, inflated, inactive and anti-people administration, law and order, corruption, absence of individual liberty, change in the population pattern in border districts, lack of irrigation, sick and closed industries, health, education, etc.

Still, the campaign speeches resorted to by the party during elections suggest that “while there was a significant concentration upon ‘opposition’ politics in a state context, the campaign continued to propagate a number of issues which have occupied a central place within BJP political rhetoric and ideology in West Bengal during the 1990s.” 68 In trying to create a
space for itself within the particular political context of West Bengal, “the BJP has developed campaigns based around issues which have significant local resonances yet which remain intrinsically ‘national’ in orientation and which are simultaneously capable of being associated with the broad conceptions of hindutva ideology.”. As a result, the party has focused upon the supposed dangers to the Indian sovereignty in a local context by branding Bangladesh as a state of the threatening Muslim ‘other’, and accordingly by opposing any concession being granted to that nation such as the Tin Bigha Corridor transfer in North Bengal and the Indo-Bangladesh Ganga water sharing agreement of 1996. In this respect, the BJP has placed much emphasis on the issue of the illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators in West Bengal and the consequences of this movement on unemployment, resources, illegal trade, crime and social tensions.  

The BJP in West Bengal not only highlights the issues but also places before the electorate its programmes which it will implement in case the party is voted to power.

**Industrialization**

For Industrial degradation, the BJP in West Bengal blames aggressive trade unionism resorted to by the leftist trade unions and lack of infrastructure. The party is opposed to the Marxist theory of class struggle and thinks that it can do no good for the people. In its election manifesto of 1991, it had been stated, “The Bharatiya Janata Party believes in coordination and cooperation not in meaningless ‘continuous struggle’. If it comes to power, the BJP will never indulge in anarchy and the principle of inactivity in the industrial sphere.” It may be mentioned here that the *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh* run by Duttapant Thengdi, an RSS ideologue, is a trade union of the *Sangh Parivar*. “The BMS seeks to cultivate harmonious relations between the employers and employees. It does not believe in the concept of class struggle, which it holds, is contrary to the Hindu culture”. In fact, “The BMS was established to counter the communist influence among the working classes”. Believing in Deen
Dayal's 'Integral Humanism,' "its leaders hold the view that neither communism nor capitalism has the capacity to solve the problems faced by the Indian economy." The party also thinks that West Bengal lacks the infrastructure required for industries like roads, electricity, transport, governmental sanction, telecommunications, etc. If voted to power, the BJP pledges to do away with that situation. It will try to create work culture in the State, and will create necessary atmosphere for industrialization.

The BJP's programmes towards these ends are: (a) Private enterprise will be encouraged in the sphere of electricity. (b) Fundamental changes will be effected in the Tele Communications System. (c) Politics will have no place in Administration and politicization of Administration will be done away with. (d) Administrative System will be revamped in order that common people do not suffer due to red-tapism. The processes for governmental sanction for industries and public grant for industrialization will be made easier. (e) The relevance of unionization in hospitals and welfare institutions will be looked into.

The irony is that although BJP wants depoliticization of administration, it is well known that the BJP Government in Gujarat once issued a circular to the effect that the government employees can join the RSS. Again, no BJP state government had ever looked into the relevance of unionization in hospitals and welfare institutions or had done away with unionization. Another irony is that, recently, when the West Bengal government is taking steps for industrialization in West Bengal, the party is opposing vehemently on the ground that agriculture will suffer. The party's position regarding industrialization has been made clear in its Draft Economic-Political Resolution taken in the party's state conference held from 21 to 22 April 2007 at Tapan Roy Nagar, Sanat Ghosal Mancha, Uluberia, where it has been stated that "the Bharatiya Janata Party wants industrial development but not at the cost of agriculture." In the draft it has also been said that "In states where the BJP is in power only the no-crop land has been taken for SEZ, one crop land has been taken only in one or two cases but that too with adequate compensation and alternative
livelihood. But the Left-Front government has acquisitioned mainly the fertile and multi-crop land." What the draft has forgotten to note is that the compensation given by the LF Government in West Bengal is one of the most attractive packages in the country.

**Agriculture**

The BJP never fails to criticize the land reform policy of the Left Front Government although this policy is highly acclaimed not only by both the indigenous and foreign scholars but also by the Central Governments. Still, according to the party, the land reforms initiated by the Left Front Government of West Bengal have benefited the leaders and the cadres of the party more than the landless people. According to the party, the problems facing the agriculture in West Bengal are one of agricultural production and supply, lack of irrigation, electricity, diesel, roads or bad condition of roads including the movement of agricultural produce from the place of production to the market place; insufficiency of the grain preservation system, excessive rise in prices of fertilizers, etc.

To solve these problems, the BJP pledges to undertake the following programmes:

a) Uncultivable lands will be brought under cultivation and these lands will be distributed among the landless farmers.

b) To meet the additional food requirements of the rising population, not the hollow sound of land reforms, but cultivation on the basis of scientific method will be resorted to.

c) Improvement will be made in the system relating to supply of irrigation, electricity and diesel.

d) The party is determined to arrange for appropriate support prices of the agricultural produce of the farmers.

e) Steps will be taken to supply modern implements in agriculture.

f) Antyodaya Schemes will be implemented in villages to improve the economic condition of the people living below the poverty line within a limited time.
Problems and prospects of the BJP in West Bengal

- **g)** Steps will be taken to provide every village in West Bengal with electricity supply with 440 Volts.

- **h)** Steps will be taken to make use of the 'Food for Work' programme for public welfare.

- **i)** Fertilizers and best quality seeds will be distributed to the farmers at fair prices; insufficiency of godowns and cold storages will be removed, post production remunerative prices will be ensured and the safety and security of the farmers will be ensured through grain and animal insurance.\(^{81}\)

- **j)** The BJP in West Bengal, in its election manifesto, 1996, stated that "fundamental land reforms will be undertaken." \(^{82}\) Again, "Steps will be taken to enhance the socio-economic power, status and dignity of the Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes and women through involving them increasingly in various activities." \(^{83}\) But the irony is that neither the then BJP-led Government at the centre nor in the states had undertaken any land reforms measures, let alone taking steps for the welfare of the SCs and STs. "The theory and practice of caste differences is very much in vogue in RSS and its offshoot bodies" \(^{84}\) Even though M S Golwalkar and Balasaheb Deoras, the second and third Sarsanghchalaks of the RSS, spoke against the caste system in its degenerative form, they did not call for its complete abolition \(^{85}\).

So far as the women are concerned, the BJP wants them to be confined to homes and doing household chores. Women are looked upon as the second class citizens in the *Sangh* vocabulary. Again, in a text book produced by the BJP in 1992, it had been stated, "Legislation which has given rights to women is also responsible for family disorganization. All such acts have raised the status of women. The total result of these progressive legislative measures by the government in favour of women is tension and strife in the family." \(^{86}\) Mridula Sinha, President of BJP's *Mahila Morcha* once announced, "We, in the Bharatiya Janata Party, are opposed to women's liberation because it is against men. We tell women to be more
adjusting, because they will have nowhere to go if they leave their husbands.” 87 “Progressiveness, equal rights, and cultural freedom are rejected outright by Sangh Parivar. They believe that the ideals for a woman must be Sita, Savitri, Gargi or Damayanti.” 88

It is well known that RSS considers Manu as one of the chief proponents of the ‘correct’ Hindu social system. Manu framed social codes that go to undermine the Hindu woman to such an extent that she does not have any human rights and is destined to be treated as man’s marketable property. 89

**Good Governance**

According to the BJP, it is committed to Suraj — good governance, and rule of law is one of its pillars. The party is opposed to party rule as is being practiced at present in West Bengal.

**Programmes**

If voted to power, the BJP will undertake the following programmes towards good governance;

a) A ‘Lakshman Rekha’ will be drawn between the political party and the administration.

b) Political interference in the administration will be stopped.

c) The administration will be made non-political as it should be in a parliamentary form of Government. 90

d) The relevance of the organizations like the Coordination Committee and Non-Gazetted Police Employees’ Association, Associations of other parties will be looked into. 91

e) Politics will be confined to its own place. Politics will be practiced in the ‘Bidhan Sabha’ and for determining policy decisions at the highest Governmental level. 92

**Education and Culture**

The BJP is known to be vehemently opposed to Marxism-Leninism. Against this background, the party pledges to ensure public welfare in the sphere of education. The party thinks that the education system in West
Bengal has got fully politicized and the party wants to undertake the following measures in the educational and cultural sphere in case it is voted to power.

(a) Recruitment of teachers will be made not on the basis of their political colour but on the basis of their eligibility.

(b) Political infiltration in the administration of the colleges and the universities will be stopped.

(c) Full concession will be given to the Ram Krishna Mission, Ram Krishna-Vivekananda Mission, Bharat Sevashram Sangh, etc. for their public welfare activities.

(d) Such an education will be imparted in schools that every boy and girl will feel proud being himself or herself called an Indian irrespective of religion.  

In its election manifesto of 1991, the West Bengal BJP went to the extent of pledging that “Marxist infiltration and mal-propaganda will be stopped in culture and the use of books particularly of history and geography as instruments of appeasement will be stopped.”

So far as education and culture is concerned, the BJP is the only party which never fails to make the best use of it to promote its ‘Hindutva ideology’. In this respect, Praful Bidwai observes:

The Bharatiya Janata Party has pursued no other agenda since it came to power at the centre as aggressively as the communalization of education. Indeed, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) acknowledges that Human Resource Development Minister, Murli Manohar Joshi is the one functionary of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) who has pushed for “saffronization” with single-minded determination and zeal undeterred by considerations of decency or consensus.

Again, Arjun Dev remarks almost in the same vein:

It is a fact that the government headed by a political formation which has always exploited and misused religion for political purposes and to foment communal strife, has been giving in its educational programme, primacy to religious education for promoting moral and
ethical values. The text books brought out by state Governments, whenever they were under BJP control, have been found to be replete with communal biases. The NCERT has in the past, brought out reports on the text books, prepared in the BJP ruled states. In fact, "The educational materials brought out by the Sangh Parivar's organizations have always spread hatred against other religions as an integral part of their 'educational' agenda."  

Last of all, it is well known that the former HRD Minister of the BJP-led NDA Government, Mr Murli Manohar Joshi, convened a conference of the state education ministers in October 1998 to introduce a document prepared by the RSS for 'the spiritualization, Indianization and nationalization of curriculum'. The conference ended in a failure.

Health System

The BJP strongly criticizes the health system in West Bengal. The party thinks that the problems afflicting the health sector in West Bengal is due to politicization. If elected to power, "the BJP will put down all politics in Hospitals with an iron hand and bring back an environment of work and professionalism".

Panchayat System

As regards the Panchayat system, the BJP is of the opinion that the Panchayat system in West Bengal, instead of doing good to the common people, has created a parasitic opportunist class who exploit as well as lord over the rural folk. If voted to power, "the BJP will revamp this Panchayat system." Here, it should be taken note of the fact that no state government led by the BJP had ever taken any initiative to make the Panchayat system work in favour of the poor, the underprivileged, the marginalized sections of society. West Bengal is one of those states which can boast of its Panchayat System. In this respect, it can be said that, "The present Panchayat system in West Bengal has made a departure by transferring institutional power from the hands of the dominant propertied groups to a lower middle stratum. Politics in rural West Bengal is
undergoing structural changes. Political institutions are seeking to strike deep roots in the rural society. 102

In addition to what has been discussed above, the BJP also highlighted the following demands and issues:

(a) Reopening of the closed Tea gardens in North Bengal.

(b) Ganga erosion in North and Central Bengal. Implementation of Ganga Action Plan and payment of adequate compensation to those who have lost their houses and lands, and their rehabilitation.

(c) Industrialization of North Bengal to cope with the separatist forces.

(d) Corruption in the BPL list and its cancellation and publication of fresh BPL list.

(e) Non-entry of the Big Companies in retail trade in the interests of the small traders.

(f) Handing over the job cards to all below poverty line boys and girls irrespective of party affiliation. 103

(g) Introduction of Women’s Reservation Bill in Parliament.

(h) Reservation for all those economically backward people. 104

Electoral performance of the Bharatiya Janata Party in West Bengal

Performance in the Lok Sabha elections

The BJP emerged on the political scene of India in 1980 and entered the electoral arena in the same year as a separate political party when elections to nine Bidhan Sabhas were declared. Thereafter, the party has fought many elections and it had even been able to come to power at the centre in alliance with other parties as well as in states. Although the party had lost both the 2004 and 2009 Lok Sabha elections, it is still in power in a few states.

In West Bengal the BJP took part in the 1982 Assembly Election for the first time and then in the 1984 Lok Sabha election and the party has
since been participating in both the Assembly and the Lok Sabha elections. So far as the Panchayat elections are concerned, it was the 1983 Panchayat election in which the party took part for the first time.

Table 5.5

Performance of the BJP in the Lok Sabha Elections in West Bengal (1984 to 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Seats</th>
<th>No. of seats contested by BJP</th>
<th>No. of seats won by BJP</th>
<th>Total valid votes</th>
<th>No. of votes polled by BJP</th>
<th>% of votes secured by BJP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>25333785</td>
<td>101165</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>31658487</td>
<td>529618</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>31066827</td>
<td>3624924</td>
<td>11.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>36700029</td>
<td>2525864</td>
<td>6.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>36522234</td>
<td>3724662</td>
<td>10.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>35292945</td>
<td>3928424</td>
<td>11.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>37196437</td>
<td>2983950</td>
<td>8.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>42730548</td>
<td>2625182</td>
<td>6.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:


ii) *West Bengal* (A special number on 12th Lok Sabha General Elections, 1998) Vol. XXXX, Nos. 5 - 6, 1 March to 16 April 1998.

iii) *Www. banglarmukh. com*, (Accessed on 24.09.09 and 25.09.09)
### Table 5.6

**Name of the constituency with highest and lowest number and percentage of votes secured by BJP in the Lok Sabha Elections in West Bengal (1984-2009)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name of the constituency with Highest % of votes</th>
<th>Name of the constituency with Lowest % of votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Murshidabad – 19542 (votes polled) -2.90%</td>
<td>Basirhat – 2781 (votes polled) - 0.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Jangipur – 82675 (votes polled) - 11.49%</td>
<td>Tamluk – 5100 (votes polled) – 0.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Calcutta, North-West – 22.20% (highest % of votes)</td>
<td>Purulia - 25115 (votes polled) – 3.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dumdum – 163070 (highest votes polled)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Balurghat – 145257 (votes polled) – 16.17%</td>
<td>Panskura – 15563 (votes polled) – 1.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Dumdum – 631383 (votes polled) – 50.6%</td>
<td>Purulia – 97996 (votes polled) – 13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Dumdum – 614471 (votes polled) – 51.5%</td>
<td>Berhampur – 134569 (votes polled) – 14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Dumdum – 521073 (votes polled) – 41.74%</td>
<td>Berhampur – 41490 (votes polled) – 4.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Darjeeling – 497649 (votes polled) – 51.50%</td>
<td>Tamluk – 20573 (votes polled) – 1.79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


ii) *Paschimbanga*, May -June 2009, pp.18 – 66
Table 5.7

Total number of valid votes, percentage of votes, number of seats contested, number of candidates elected and number of candidates forfeiting their deposits in Lok Sabha Elections (1984 to 1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total valid votes</td>
<td>101165</td>
<td>529618</td>
<td>3624974</td>
<td>2525864</td>
<td>3724662</td>
<td>3928424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of votes</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>11.67</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>10.20</td>
<td>11.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number Seats contested</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of candidates elected</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of candidates forfeiting their deposits</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In this section, we will discuss the performance of the West Bengal BJP in the Lok Sabha elections held during 1984-2009. In 1984, the BJP contested 9 seats out of the total 42 seats (Table 5.5). The party polled 101165 votes out of the total valid votes of 25333785 and the percentage of votes secured by the party was 0.40% (Table 5.5). The party polled the highest number of votes (19542) as well as highest percentage of votes (2.09%) in Murshidabad (Table 5.6) and the lowest percentage of votes (0.46%) in the Basirhat parliamentary constituency (Table 5.6). In this election, the party could not win any seat and all the 9 candidates forfeited their deposits.\(^{105}\)

In 1989 Lok Sabha election, the BJP put up candidates in 19 seats but none of them was able to win. The party secured 529618 valid votes out of 31658487 and the percentage share of votes of the party was 1.67% (Table 5.5). It may be mentioned here that 13 candidates of the party were in the
3rd position. The party secured the highest number of votes (82675) as well as the highest percentage of votes (11.49%) in Jangipur parliamentary constituency (Table 5.6). Like the 1984 election, in this election also, all the 19 candidates lost their deposits (Table 5.7). Mention may be made here that 1989 was the year in which the BJP, at the national level, took the momentous decision to take part in the 'Ram Janmabhoomi' movement launched by the VHP and it could raise its parliamentary tally to 88 from 2 in 1984.

In 1991 Lok Sabha election, the BJP in West Bengal contested all the 42 seats, secured 3624974 votes but could not win any seat (Table 5.5). The party could not place itself in the 2nd position anywhere, but it was able to obtain 3rd position in as many as 40 seats. The party got the highest number of votes (163070) in Dum Dum parliamentary constituency and the highest percentage of votes (22.20%) in Calcutta North-West constituency. The party got the lowest percentage of votes (3.85%) in Purulia (Table 5.6). The overall percentage of votes secured by the party was 11.67% (Table 5.5). Out of 42 candidates put up by the party, 34 candidates lost their deposits (Table 5.7). It should be noted here that in this election the BJP in West Bengal secured the highest ever percentage of votes (11.67%).

Ajit Roy, an ex-MP from Dhanbad, compared the 1991 election with 1989 and said that the depth of support for the party was greater in 1991 than in 1989. According to him, “In 1989, the BJP polled an aggregate of 1.7 percentage of the total votes cast by fielding only 19 candidates. In other words, it secured 0.089 percent votes per candidate. In 1991, it got almost 12 percent votes by fielding 42 candidates or 0.285 percent per candidate. In other words, it increased the depth of support by about 320 percent.”106 Again, “The BJP polled over a lakh votes in 15 Lok Sabha constituencies; thus radically changing the bi-polar character of West Bengal politics.”107 In this election, “It received heavy support among the non-Bengali community of Calcutta where Businessmen from the Hindi-belt, Marwaris and Gujaratis, traditionally opposed to CPI (M).”108 “Every Maruti Car in the Burrabazar area sported a ‘Jai Shri Ram’ sticker”109 Not only this,
“Bengali voters in Calcutta were also attracted to the BJP.”  

Not only in Calcutta, the BJP in this election, made its presence felt even in rural areas of West Bengal. Ajit Roy analyzed the danger it posed to the secular progressive forces of West Bengal. According to him, “But in terms of more fundamental political interests, the BJP’s rise as a mass force is a very serious danger to Left and progressive forces, not only because its banner of militant Hindutva is a grave threat to communal harmony and peace, but also and more importantly, as many discerning newspaper reports have noted in their analysis of the West Bengal electoral scene, the BJP in the countryside has been able to establish linkages with rural social forces who have been adversely affected by the Left Front’s not so radical agrarian reforms. It has thus become the forces of combined social and political reaction.”  

Though there is no doubt that the BJP was able to increase its vote share in 1991 Lok Sabha election, “Yet the party was miles away from occupying meaningful political space in West Bengal. Its Hindutva plank has managed to receive a modicum of acceptance in the border districts because of party’s ardent advocacy of the Hindu refugees from Bangladesh.”  

Another account also contributed the cause of the rise of the party more to its propaganda on illegal Bangladeshi infiltration than to the Ayodhya issue. “In West Bengal the rise of the party was not predicated on the exploitation of the Ayodhya issue partly because as Sumit Ganguly points out, owing to the particular translation of Ram myth into Bengali, he is not considered to be particularly God like and the Krishna cult that had developed in Bengal was opposed to one centered around Ram.”  

Rather, “The BJP’s propaganda focused instead on the issue of illegal; predominantly Muslim immigration from Bangladesh. This tactic was especially successful in border districts and among those who had been displaced at partition.”  

One sentimental question often asked by the BJP activists is: “Do you want to become refugees for the second time in your life because of Bangladeshi infiltrators?” In 1996 Lok Sabha election, the BJP contested all the 42 seats, secured 2525864 votes but could not
capture any seat (Table 5.5). The party got the highest number of votes (145257) and the highest percentage of votes (16.17%) in the Balurghat constituency. The party received the lowest percentage of votes (1.87%) (15563 votes) in Panskura (Table 5.6). It may be noted here that the party was placed in 3rd position in 36 seats but second in none. The average percentage of votes secured by the party was 6.88% (Table 5.5). The party failed to open its account in terms of seats in this election. All the candidates failed to save their deposits (Table 5.5). This poor showing was "owing to organizational difficulties and the coalescence of the anti-left votes behind the Congress as the BJP's status as a potentially effective opposition force within the state was rejected." \(^{116}\)

It is worth pointing out here that in the 1996 Lok Sabha election, the BJP emerged as the largest party in the Lok Sabha with a highest ever tallies of 161 seats and was able to form a government for 13 days. Despite all these, "its vote share remained stagnant at 20.3 percent and it failed to win parliamentary support from enough other parties to form a minority or coalition government." \(^{117}\) In the 1996 General election in West Bengal, the BJP made the illegal Bangladeshi infiltration "a major election issue in the border towns of West Bengal. The party which has a low presence in the state knows it can capitalize upon the issue in border districts." \(^{118}\)

The 1998 election was different because in this election the BJP shelved its overt *Hindutva* agenda to make alliances with a number of state based parties, both regional and other, many of them earlier remained with UF, a strategy which got consolidated after its victory. \(^{119}\) Thus, in 1998, the BJP contested the elections with as many as 13 pre-election allies, including two independents, with seat sharing arrangements covering nine states. \(^{120}\) In West Bengal, the party allied with the Trinamool Congress. In this respect, Partha Ghosh observes:

In West Bengal after some initial problems, the BJP entered into an electoral alliance with the Trinamool Congress, a break away group of the Congress under the leadership of the fiery Mamata Banerjee. She did not subscribe to the BJP's platform for she had ideological differences with the party but
considering her prime motive was the defeat of the ruling CPI(M) in the state, she agreed to a seat sharing arrangement with the BJP. It was decided that of the 42 Lok Sabha seats from West Bengal, the BJP would put up candidates in 15, namely, Alipurduar, Darjeeling, Raiganj, Malda, Berhampore, Krishnanagar, Birbhum, Durgapur, Burdwan, Purulia, Jaynagar, Dum Dum, Bankura, Arambagh and Midnapore. Since the BJP was keen to contest from the bordering districts in view of the popular sentiments there against Bangladeshi infiltration the list included several border district constituencies.¹²¹

The 1998 Lok Sabha election in West Bengal was a historic one for the BJP. The party contested 14 seats and for the first time ever in West Bengal, it won a seat – Dum Dum parliamentary seat, a left bastion and the winner was no other than Mr Tapan Sikdar who became a Minister in the Vajpayee-led government at the centre. In 1996, the BJP won less than 9 percent of total votes in the constituency, a considerable fall from the vote share recorded in 1991 (16.83 %).¹²² Mr Sikdar got the highest number of votes (631383) as well as the highest percentage of votes for the party (50.6%) from Dum Dum and the lowest (13.35%) in Purulia (Table 5.6). The party could get an overall percentage of votes share of 10.20% and the total number of valid votes cast in favour of the party was 3724662 (Table 5.5). What is worth mentioning is the fact that nine out of fourteen candidates were in the 2nd position whereas no candidate was able to secure 2nd position in the 1989, 1991 and 1996 Lok Sabha elections respectively. Out of 14 candidates fielded by the party, one candidate lost deposits (Table 5.7).

It will be pertinent here to mention what Professor C P Bhambhri said with regard to the alliance between the BJP and the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal in 1998 Lok Sabha elections. According to Professor Bhambhri, "The secular Mamata Banerjee of Trinamool Congress is politically legitimizing Hindutva in West Bengal not only by sharing power at the centre with the BJP- led NDA but also by accommodating the BJP in the forthcoming Assembly elections. ... Anti-Congressism of the left has
been replaced by Anti-Frontism of the Trinamool leadership. It is advantage BJP."  

One of the important features of the 1998 Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal was that, “in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, instead of polarization between the Left Front and the Congress, the BJP–TMC alliance emerged as the third force. Not only this, the alliance came to occupy the second position so far as the numbers of seats and votes share are concerned. The alliance was able to snatch away 6 seats from the Congress and two (Dum Dum and Barasat) from the Left Front.”  

In 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the party could increase its tally to 2 from 1 in 1998. It won the Dum Dum and the Krishnanagar parliamentary seats. The party fielded 13 candidates in this election, secured 3928424 valid votes out of 35292945. The percentage of votes secured by the party was 11.13% (Table 5.5). The party got the highest number of votes (614471) as well as highest percentage of votes (51.5%) in Dum Dum constituency (Table 5.6). Berhampur was the constituency where the party got the lowest percentage of votes (14.5) with 134569 votes (Table 5.6). The party was in 2nd position in 9 seats. In this election, one candidate lost his deposits like in the 1998 election (Table 5.7). It may be noted here that "The BJP-Trinamool congress alliance increased their votes by 2.6 percent while the congress votes declined by 2.9 percent. The elections were fought in the state in the face of the unfavorable national situation where the failure to form an alternative Government and the absence of a third force was utilized by the TMC-BJP combination to launch a big offensive." A review made by the West Bengal State Committee of the CPI (M) noted that “in the rural belt in villages and towns dominated by the middle class our influence has declined. Similarly, the youth belonging to the middle classes have been turned away from us.” “An important fact is that sections of the refugees from Bangladesh have rallied to the BJP-TMC combine. This is especially true of sections of the new generation among the refugee families, and the post-1971 influx of refugees who have come under BJP influence”
Outlook, a Weekly English Magazine commented, “After decades of profitless scrounging, it’s the BJP’s turn to pick the easy meat. Two Lok Sabha seats, an assembly seat and the bigger vote share that it garnered in the recent elections is its first pay off.” Shibdas Banerjee, a political observer, felt “the BJP has grown ‘negatively’ as people are frustrated over the lack of economic opportunities and the LF’s pro-minorities stance.”

Rahul Sinha, then a state BJP leader, went to the extent of refuting the charge that BJP’s base in West Bengal is restricted to the East Bengal refugees in the border districts. He said, “Our base is not restricted to East Bengal’ refugees in the border districts. We have grown in Nadia and 24 Parganas where we won two LF seats and nearly unseated Indrajit Gupta in Midnapore. Our vote percentage rose by 5 percent, the biggest increase among all parties, between 96 and 99. We are the alternative to Left.”

A review made by the CPI on the 1999 Lok Sabha poll brought to the fore certain startling facts. According to it, “the TMC-BJP combine outstripped the Left in 103 out of 294 assembly segments in the ’99 poll. This means they are only 44 short of a majority.” Again, the review revealed that “between ’98 and ’99, the overall left vote dropped by over 6 lakh votes (although the CPI (M)’s share has not) while the TMC-BJP tally rose by nearly 7.5 lakhs, a 3.3 percent rise in a year.” The TMC-BJP alliance garnered votes in far away rural segments, minority areas and industrial pockets for the first time.

In 2004 Lok Sabha election, the BJP contested 13 seats out of 42 and secured 2988950 votes out of 37196437 (Table 5.5). The percentage of votes secured by the party was 8.02%. It could not win any seat in this election (Table 5.5). The party secured the highest number of votes (521073) and also the highest percentage of votes (41.74) in the Dum Dum parliamentary constituency. The party got the lowest percentage of votes (4.18%) with 41490 votes in the Berhampur Constituency in Murshidabad district (Table 5.6). The party was in 2nd position in 9 seats and 3rd in 4 seats.
It should be pointed out here that in this election, "The Trinamool congress-BJP alliance vote went down by 8.84 percent." A number of factors worked towards disenchantment of the voters with the TMC-BJP combine. "While the progressive lowering of the interest rate hit the fixed income groups, the disinvestment of profitable public sector enterprises (PSES), a large number of them in West Bengal led to widespread redundancy and retrenchment. Voluntary retirement schemes could offer little solace." In the 2009 Lok Sabha election, the BJP contested all the 42 seats and won the Darjeeling parliamentary constituency mainly with the help of the Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha which was spearheading the movement for separate statehood of Darjeeling. The BJP secured 2625182 out of 42730548 valid votes and had a vote share of 6.14% which was more compared to only 1984 and 1989 Lok Sabha elections (0.40% and 1.67% respectively as shown by Table 5.5).

Performances of the BJP in Bidhan Sabha Elections in West Bengal from 1982 to 2006

The Bharatiya Janata Party took part in the Assembly election for the first time in 1982 in West Bengal. In this election, the party secured 137915 votes out of 2147757 valid votes cast. The percentage of votes, the party secured was 0.64% and drew a blank so far as winning of seats was concerned. (Table 5.8). The party secured the highest number and percentage of votes in Gopal Pokhar Assembly constituency in West Dinajpur District. The party got 14,938 votes and 22.06% of votes (See Table 5.9). It is worth mentioning here that out of 54 candidates the party put up in the elections, 53 candidates lost their deposits.
Table 5.8
Performance of the BJP in Assembly Elections in West Bengal
(From 1982 to 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of seats</th>
<th>No. of seats contested by BJP</th>
<th>No. of seats won by BJP</th>
<th>Total valid votes</th>
<th>No. of votes secured by BJP</th>
<th>% of votes secured by BJP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>2,14,77,577</td>
<td>1,37,915</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>2,45,52,664</td>
<td>1,34,865</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>30,98,577</td>
<td>35,12,357</td>
<td>11.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>3,58,64,356</td>
<td>23,69,294</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>3,66,45,309</td>
<td>18,98,130</td>
<td>5.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>3,94,58,003</td>
<td>7,60,202</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 5.9
Constituency-wise valid votes, highest number of votes and percentage of votes secured by the BJP in West Bengal Assembly Elections (1982 to 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name of the constituency</th>
<th>Total number of valid votes</th>
<th>Votes secured by the BJP</th>
<th>% of votes secured by the BJP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Goalpokhar</td>
<td>67,712</td>
<td>14,938</td>
<td>22.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Goalpokhar</td>
<td>6,94,70,999</td>
<td>16,584</td>
<td>23.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Dhaniakhali (S.C)</td>
<td>1,12,200</td>
<td>39,209</td>
<td>34.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Gangarampuri</td>
<td>1,51,416</td>
<td>61,881</td>
<td>40.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Shantipur</td>
<td>1,60,000</td>
<td>37,453</td>
<td>23.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Khardah</td>
<td>1,82,004</td>
<td>60,690</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 5.10

Assembly Elections in West Bengal from 1982-2006 (name of the constituency, highest number of votes & highest percentage of votes secured by BJP).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of the constituency</td>
<td>Goalpokhar (West Dinajpur)</td>
<td>Goalpokhar (West Dinajpur)</td>
<td>Dhaniakhali (Hooghly)</td>
<td>Rampurhat (Birbhum)</td>
<td>Shantipur (Nadia)</td>
<td>Khardah (N-24 pgs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest number of votes &amp; no. of valid votes</td>
<td>14,938</td>
<td>16,584</td>
<td>1,12,200</td>
<td>1,14,216</td>
<td>1,60,000</td>
<td>1,82,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest percentage of votes</td>
<td>67,712</td>
<td>69370</td>
<td>39,209</td>
<td>40,916</td>
<td>37,453</td>
<td>60690</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The dismal performance of the BJP in 1984 Lok Sabha election when it got 2 seats, forced the party “to move closer to its Jana Singh identity than its immediate past of the Janata’s identity.” The BJP’s decision to revive the Jana Singh’s demand to do away with Article 370 of the Indian Constitution was an indication of this shift. “The leaders’ decision not to be part of any national front showed another shift in its strategy to emphasize the party’s separate identity, in an attempt to regain the confidence of the traditional supporters of the Jana Sangh.” With these small changes in its outlook and strategies, the BJP entered the Vidan Sabha contests in March 1985 and to its satisfaction it regained its losses to some extent in these elections. In 1987 six states went to the polls, namely, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Mizoram, Nagaland, and West Bengal, and the party’s performance was better than the last elections in all states but without having any impact in West Bengal. In West Bengal, the BJP contested 57 seats out of 294 but could not win any
The party, secured 134865 votes out of 2455664 and the percentage of votes of the party went down to 0.54% from 0.64% in the previous elections (Table 5.8). The party, as in the 1982 elections, received the highest number of votes and also the highest percentage of votes in Goal Pokhar Assembly constituency in West Dinajpur District. It secured 16,582 votes and 23.87% of votes (Table 5.9) in the said constituency.

The BJP, anticipating the negative impact of its association with the V P Singh Government and threatened by the consolidation of the backward castes through the Mandal politics of the Janata Dal, perhaps had no option but to fall back on its old source of identity, Hindutva and went all out to agitate, organize and mobilize Hindus to ensure their support. Enthused by the rich dividends it received from the Ram Shila Pujan ceremony during the previous Lok Sabha elections in 1989, the BJP launched Advani's Ram Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya, during which the party symbol was nakedly displayed to raise the religious passions among the Hindus and to garner their support for the party.
According to Jyoti Basu, the former Chief Minister of West Bengal, the reasons for good performance of the BJP in 1991 Assembly Elections could be attributed to the fact that the BJP in this election spent a lot of money; it was able to attract a section of the educated middle class voters; a section of the rural Jotedars, who used to support the Congress party earlier, worked in favour of BJP in 1991 elections and along with these, the BJP also took advantage of the Left Front’s weaknesses in campaignings.

In the 1996 Assembly election, the BJP contested 292 seats out of 294, but could not bag any seat. The party secured 2369294 votes out of 35864356 votes cast altogether and could have a vote share of 6.60% (Table 5.8). The party got the highest number of votes (40,916) and the highest percentage of votes (35.82%) from Rampurhat Assembly constituency in Birbhum district (Table 4.1). In this election, the West Bengal unit of the BJP, through its election manifesto, went to the extent of appealing to the voters of the state that “You have tasted the Congress and the Left Front for the last fifty years. Now give the BJP a chance by voting it so that the lost glory of West Bengal can be restored.”

It should be noted here that in the 1996 Lok Sabha election, the BJP emerged as the largest party at the centre and even formed the Government, although it could stay in power only for 13 days. But in West Bengal, the party’s performance was much to be desired. One reason for poor performance of the party in 1996 Assembly Election in West Bengal, as Jyoti Basu had put it, was that “the Left Front government had put much importance on the success the BJP achieved in 1991 Assembly Election and also put great emphasis on the activities of the communal forces and on conducting continuous ideological battle against such forces. That’s why the BJP could not derive much benefit from the subsequent election”.

In the 2001 Assembly election, the BJP put up its candidates in 265 seats out of 294. The party secured 1898130 votes out of 36645309 with the percentage of votes being 5.18% (Table 5.8) The party secured the highest number of votes (37,453) in Shantipur Assembly constituency, Nadia (Table 5.9) and the highest percentage of votes (27.22%) in Habibpur (ST)
Assembly constituency in Malda (Table 5.10). Its vote share in Purulia, Nadia, Darjeeling and Midnapore increased. The increase was by 2.32% in Purulia and 0.37% in Midnapore. One important feature of this election was that although the support for the BJP declined among other sections of people, “it was able to make some headway among scheduled tribes, Nepalis and Bodos. This was seen in Jalpaiguri, Malda etc.” The BJP could increase its vote share quite well in some seats. They played the traditional communal card over and above their anti-left Front slandering. They launched attacks on the Ganga water-sharing agreement and infiltration. They also campaigned that the policy of liberalization was in the interest of the country.” The BJP which had been trying to make inroad in the political scene of West Bengal “riding on the shoulders of the Trinamool Congress, lost the only seat it had in the state Assembly.” Badal Bhattacharya, who was the only MLA of the party but failed to retain his Asoknagar seat said, “My personal loss is of little concern. More important is that the BJP has lost its face and standing as a prominent national party.”

Again, one important feature of this election to be noted here is that in this election, an alliance was made between the Trinamool Congress and Congress (I). The BJP and its allies tried every trick to prevent Mamata Banerjee from coming to power. The BJP fielded its candidates in every seat to split the anti-Left Front vote. Hence, “its leaders seemed to derive satisfaction from the drubbing the Trinamool Congress-Congress (I) alliance received from the Left Front.” The party also hoped that “the resentment among the rank and file of the Trinamool Congress and the ‘popular disenchantment’ with Mamata Banerjee might help the BJP to increase its share of votes marginally and also win a few seats.” It may be noted here that had TMC-BJP alliance had taken shape in 2001 Assembly election, the alliance could have secured 42 seats more.

In 2006 Assembly election, the BJP in West Bengal fielded its candidates in 29 Assembly constituencies. The party was unable to win any seat. It could secure 760202 votes out of 39458003 with a vote share of
Problems and prospects of the BJP in West Bengal

1.93. (Table 5.8). It obtained the highest number of votes (60690) in Khardah Assembly constituency, North 24 Parganas (Table 5.9) and the highest percentage of votes (40.23) in Jagaddal Assembly constituency, North 24 Parganas (see Table 5.10). It may be stated here that BJP and Trinamool Congress made an alliance in this election unlike in 2001 when Trinamool Congress aligned with the Congress and the performance of both these two parties was one of the worst. In this election, the Trinamool Congress won 30 seats and secured 26.34% votes while the party got 60 seats and 30.66% votes in 2001 Assembly election. The Trinamool leader, Mamata Banerjee, was so frustrated that she went to the extent of saying “people have not rejected us, instead we are victims of a deep-rooted conspiracy involving the State Government, the Centre and a section of the media.”

The BJP, in its manifesto of 2006 Assembly election, expressed its characteristically ugly tirade against the Left Front Government of West Bengal and expected that the people of West Bengal, who became desperate as a result of misrule of 29 years by the Left Front Government would cast their votes against it. The party identified education, health, law and order, infrastructure, unemployment, Bangladeshi infiltration and demographic changes as problems facing West Bengal. Among these problems, the party considered unemployment and infiltration to be the most serious problems. In this manifesto, the BJP criticized the allegation made against it as being communal and the alliance it made with the Trinamool congress as unprincipled. The programmes announced by the party in this election included good governance and depoliticization, reindustrialization and employment, rural development through agriculture, adoption of appropriate steps towards management of water resources, education and culture, health system etc.

Performance of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Panchayat elections in West Bengal

"Local self government institutions had been working in the villages of Bengal since 1920. The union board, constituted in accordance with the
Act of 1919, had occupied a prominent place in the daily lives of rural Bengal. So, after independence, the political decision makers of West Bengal were a bit sceptical about introducing Panchayati Raj in place of the previous arrangement. The four-tiered Panchayati Raj system was introduced in West Bengal as per the Acts of 1957 and 1963, consisting of Gram Panchayat, Anchal Panchayat, Anchalik Parishad and Zilla Parishad.

The four-tier Panchayati Raj in West Bengal could not function smoothly like its all-India counterparts. A number of factors can be cited for the failure, such as, political uncertainties in the 1960s, Indo-Pak war, centralizing tendencies, inordinate governmental control over the Panchayats, hold of the landed classes and the high castes and so on. These non-functioning Panchayats had to carry their pitiable existence till they were dissolved in 1969.

The West Bengal Panchayats Act was passed in 1973 when the congress party was in power. The objective of this new act was to introduce three-tier Panchayats system in place of the formerly four-tier one. But the government of that time did very little for implementing the act. Finally, the Left Front came to power in 1977 and gave a try to revitalize these institutions and utilize them as instruments for mobilization of the rural people. “After coming to power in 1977, the Left Front government made arrangements for direct election to the Panchayat bodies in 1978. The election was held at the three tiers of Panchayats in accordance with the Panchayat Acts of 1973.”

That the BJP gives much importance to the Panchayati Raj system is proved when we go through the election manifestoes and other literature of the party. The party in West Bengal has published two booklets called ‘Dalke Panchayat Mukhi Ebong Panchayatke Dalmukhi Karun’ and ‘Dal O Rajniti’, where the party’s views on Panchayats have been discussed.

The Bharatiya Janata Party thinks that unlike in many states where Panchayat elections are held on non-party basis, in West Bengal it is held
on party basis and hence the entire Panchayat system has been politicized here.\textsuperscript{166} At the same time, the party is of the opinion that, Panchayat is the government at the lowest level of the country. As the Panchayat system in this state is run by the political parties and their workers, we must also be the directors of this lowest instrument of governance through the Panchayati Raj. The local representatives of the party can easily reach the people living on the borders of society. Hence, if we can utilize this system in our favour, considerable political success is sure to accrue to the party.\textsuperscript{167} The party has no doubt that it is through spreading the party's support and influence in the Panchayat areas that the party may taste success even in Bidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha.\textsuperscript{168}

Election manifestoes of the party have also dealt with the panchayats. In its 1991 Election manifesto, it had been stated that "corruption in panchayats will be investigated into and they will be made free of corruption in order to make them instruments of public welfare."\textsuperscript{169} Although the party did not spend a single word on Panchayat in its 1996 Election manifesto, it devoted a small paragraph to Panchayat in its election manifesto, 2006, meant for the 2006 Assembly election in West Bengal where it was said that "the Panchayat system in West Bengal did not benefit the common people much, rather had created an opportunist parasitic class who exploited and lorded the rural people over. The BJP would revamp this Panchayat system."\textsuperscript{170}

It is worth mentioning here that despite BJP's criticisms, the party itself has not been able to prevent its own men in panchayats from being involved in immoral activities. Two instances may be cited here. According to a report published in a Bengali daily, "the SDPO of Kalna with a large contingent of police from Purbasthali and Kalna raided the house of the BJP Upa-Pradhan of the Nasratpur Gram Panchayat, Sri Balai Roy, in the village Hatsimla, on getting the information that the Upa-Pradhan was involved with an International hashish smuggling gang. The police recovered 5/6 Kgs of illegal hashish from his house and arrested both Roy and his son."\textsuperscript{171} Another report published in another Bengali daily went thus : "the BJP Upa-
Pradhan of Purbasthali Panchayat led by TMC-BJP, had to resign as a result of an altercation between him and some Trinamool members on the issue of granting contract for a job.  

After this event, the Block Trinamool president of Purbasthali-II, Tapan Chattopadhyay said, “The way the BJP is getting corrupted, we have no other way but to take clear-cut decisions within a few days.” These two incidents go to show that BJP men in panchayats in West Bengal are not free from corruption or immoral activities.

Before going into the performance of the BJP in Panchayat elections in West Bengal, a few words should be devoted to what the BJP, as a national political party, think of panchayats. In its manifesto for the 1996 elections, emphasis was put on the necessity for making changes in the constitution 73rd amendments to further strengthen the Panchayati Raj system and on efforts to make the panchayats financially self-sufficient. In its 1998 Election manifesto, the party went to the extent of saying that for better local self-governance at the village level, the BJP will make suitable changes in the 73rd amendment to the constitution for strengthening the Panchayati Raj institutions and providing them with greater autonomy and ensuring the financial self-reliance of these institutions. But the irony is that the BJP governments had done very little towards creating viable panchayats where they were in power. In this respect, Mahi Pal, in his article ‘Panchayats in Election Manifestoes : A Comparative Analysis in Economic and Political Weekly, had shown that when the BJP was in power in three states, namely, Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, it had done almost nothing which ‘exposed BJP’s pseudo-concern for the Panchayat’ as well as its ‘orientation towards centralization.’

Till now, seven elections to the three-tier Panchayati Raj system in West Bengal have been held in 1978, 1983, 1988, 1993, 1998, 2003 and 2008 respectively. All the political parties in West Bengal have been participating in these elections but the Left Front has been able to maintain its hold on the panchayats at all the three tiers.
As BJP emerged as a political party in 1980 at the all-India level, the West Bengal unit of the party participated in the West Bengal Panchayat election for the first time in 1983. Since then, the BJP has been participating in every Panchayat election which is being held on a regular basis.

The performance of the BJP in West Bengal in panchayats elections, like its performance in Lok Sabha and Bidhan Sabha elections, has not been very significant, capturing some Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samity seats here and there but failing to obtain any Zilla Parishad seat till the 1998 Panchayat election.

Table 5.11
Panchayat Election results in West Bengal from 1978 to 2003
(Performance of various Political Parties)
(Seats and % of Seats Own)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Parties / Front</th>
<th>Year of Election</th>
<th>Gram Panchayat</th>
<th>Panchayat Samity</th>
<th>Zilla Parishad</th>
<th>Three Tiers Taken Together</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seats won</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Seats won</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Seats won</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI(M)</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>27886</td>
<td>61.03</td>
<td>5555</td>
<td>67.15</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>24171</td>
<td>54.06</td>
<td>5023</td>
<td>59.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>33918</td>
<td>64.62</td>
<td>6549</td>
<td>71.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>35328</td>
<td>57.94</td>
<td>6341</td>
<td>67.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>24454</td>
<td>49.72</td>
<td>5160</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>28683</td>
<td>58.37</td>
<td>5710</td>
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<td>CPI</td>
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<td>816</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>896</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>95</td>
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<td>1983</td>
<td>1080</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>1405</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>222</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>959</td>
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<td>1230</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>2.27</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSP</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1665</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>4.22</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>1232</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>2.95</td>
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</table>

Contd. on the next page
Problems and prospects of the BJP in West Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Parties / Front</th>
<th>Year of Election</th>
<th>Gram Panchayat</th>
<th>Panchayat Samity</th>
<th>Zilla Parishad</th>
<th>Three Tiers Taken Together</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seats won</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Seats won</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Seats won</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Front &amp; Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1983</td>
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<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>1998</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Left Front as a whole</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>32114</td>
<td>70.28</td>
<td>6366</td>
<td>76.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>27360</td>
<td>61.20</td>
<td>5567</td>
<td>66.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>37959</td>
<td>72.32</td>
<td>7170</td>
<td>78.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>39232</td>
<td>64.35</td>
<td>6873</td>
<td>72.75</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>27587</td>
<td>56.09</td>
<td>5712</td>
<td>67.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>32360</td>
<td>65.75</td>
<td>6294</td>
<td>74.05</td>
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<td>Cong.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>13435</td>
<td>29.40</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>22.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>14641</td>
<td>32.75</td>
<td>2526</td>
<td>30.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>12298</td>
<td>23.43</td>
<td>1712</td>
<td>18.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>16300</td>
<td>26.73</td>
<td>2155</td>
<td>22.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>5962</td>
<td>12.12</td>
<td>831</td>
<td>9.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>6724</td>
<td>1368</td>
<td>1048</td>
<td>12.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1978</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>1993</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>9773</td>
<td>19.87</td>
<td>1439</td>
<td>16.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>6439</td>
<td>13.10</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>9.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>2372</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>3830</td>
<td>7.78</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Problems and prospects of the BJP in West Bengal

In 1983 Panchayat election, BJP bagged just 34 Gram Panchayat seats (0.08%) out of 44709, 02 Panchayat Samity seats (0.02%) out of 8400 seats and failed to win any Zilla Parishad seat (Table 5.11) The total number of Zilla Parishad seats was 660 in this election.

In 1988 Panchayat election, the BJP could secure only 36 Gram Panchayat seats (0.07%) out of 52489 seats, only 03 Panchayat Samity seats (0.03%) out of 9100 seats and this time too the party could not open its account in Zilla Parishad where the total number of seats was 658. In this election, the percentage share of Gram Panchayat seat's went down at the Gram Panchayat level, although at the Panchayat Samity level, the party
was able to raise its share of seats to 3 from 2 in 1983 election thereby increasing its percentage share of seats by 0.01 percent (Table 5.11).

In 1993 Panchayat election the party's performance at Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samity level improved a lot. It got 2372 Gram Panchayat seats (3.89%) out of 60971 seats, 121 Panchayat Samity seats (1.28%) out of 9448 seats but could not win any Zilla Parishad seat out of 655 seats (Table 5.11).

But it was in 1998 Panchayat election that the BJP obtained the highest number of Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samity seats and even the party was able to secure a Zilla Parishad seat. The party secured 3830 Gram Panchayat seats (7.78%) out of 49191 seats, 328 Panchayat Samity seats (3.85%) out of 8515 seats and 01 Zilla Parishad seat (0.14%) out of 716 seats (Table 5.11). In this election, an alliance between the BJP and the Trinamool congress was forged. The number of Pradhans of the two parties was 524 (TMC) and 153 (BJP), Upa-Pradhans 468 (TMC), 236 (BJP) respectively. The Trinamool had 17 Sabhapatis and 20 Sahakari Sabhapatis at the Panchayat Samity level.¹⁷⁷

In 2003 Panchayat election, the performance of the BJP at both the Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samity levels got worse compared to 1993 and 1998 elections. In this election, the party was able to win only 1612 Gram Panchayat seats (3.28%) out of 49137 seats, 159 Panchayat Samity seats (1.87%) out of 8500 seats. But at the Zilla Parishad level, the party could increase its tally to 2 seats from 1 in 1998 (2.28%) out of 713 Zilla Parishad seats. (Table 5.11) Mention may be made here that the BJP-TMC combine has 385 Pradhans, 372 Upa-Pradhans, 12 Panchayat Samity Sabhapatis, 12 Sahakari Sabhapatis.¹⁷⁸ One interesting thing to be noted here is that in this election, the BJP-TMC combine had issued a common election manifesto.

In 2007, by-elections were held in 398 seats at the Gram Panchayat level, 94 seats at the Panchayat Samity level and 24 seats at the Zilla Parishad level.
Table 5.12
Results of Panchayat By-Elections-2007 in West Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Total no. of GP seats =398</th>
<th>Total no. of PS seats =94</th>
<th>Total no. of Zilla Parishad seats =24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPI (M)</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.B</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSP</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cong</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMC</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IND</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From Table 5.12, it is seen that in the Panchayat by-elections, the BJP could win only 8 seats (2.01%) in the Gram Panchayat, 1 (1.06%) in the Panchayat Samity and none in the Zilla Parishad. However, it is also seen from Table 5.12 that the TMC-BJP combine have got more seats than the Congress, one of the main opposition parties in West Bengal in the Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samity.

Table 5.13
Panchayat Election in West Bengal, 2008
(Seats and % of seats won by various Political Parties)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Gram Panchayat Total seats</th>
<th>Panchayat Samity Total seats</th>
<th>Zilla Parishad Total seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>21,770</td>
<td>52.45</td>
<td>4,929 56.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cong</td>
<td>6837</td>
<td>16.47</td>
<td>1405 15.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AITMC</td>
<td>9375</td>
<td>22.59</td>
<td>2127 24.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>1169</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>133 1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2353</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>203 2.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Election to 2 seats in Bankura and Burdwan postponed and the result of 1 seat in Murshidabad undecided.

Sources: (1) *Ganashakti*, 22 & 23 May 2008 (2) *Paschimbanga*, July 2008,
From Table 5.13, it is observed that while in the 2003 Panchayat Election the BJP got 1612 seats (3.28%), the Party could secure only 1169 seats in the 2008 Panchayat election (2.82%), that is, the Party got 0.46% less seats in 2008 Panchayat election. So far as the Panchayat Samity seats are concerned, it has been seen that the BJP secured 159 seats (1.87%) in the 2003 Panchayat election (Table 5.11) but in the 2008 election the Party was able to bag only 133 seats, that is, 1.51% seats, less than in the 2003 Panchayat election. As regards the Zilla Parishad seats, the BJP could retain its tally of 2 seats like in the 2003 election. But the percentage of seats won got reduced. It was 2.28% in 2003 but it came down to 0.27% in 2008 Panchayat election.

From what has been discussed above, it can be said that the performance of the BJP in Panchayat elections of West Bengal has been far from satisfactory. It was only in 1993 and 1998 elections that the BJP could perform better than in other elections and it was in alliance with the Trinamool Congress that the BJP could come to power in some Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samities here and there. From Table 5.11 and Table 5.13, it is seen that it is the Left Front which has called the shots in every Panchayat election in West Bengal.

The reasons for the Left Front's impressive performance in one Panchayat election after another in West Bengal have been a debating point. According to one scholar, "sustained land reform measures and democratically elected Panchayats have tilted the balance of power in favour of the rural poor in West Bengal and this has helped the CPI(M) to build a wide circle of social and political support." In fact, in West Bengal, the political power is no longer in the hands of the propertied classes as it was earlier. "As in most other states, the propertied classes remain dominant in the sphere of production but unlike other states, they do not control political power."
Problems and prospects of the BJP in West Bengal

Bharatiya Janata Party’s performance in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation and in Municipality Elections in West Bengal

Kolkata Municipal Corporation elections

The BJP is said mainly to be an urban party and electorally, the party has always had the support of the urbanites. But in West Bengal, the party's performance in Municipal elections is not up to the mark. In Kolkata Municipal Corporation election, the party could be a part of the powers that be only in 2000 Kolkata Municipal Corporation elections as a result of its coming together with the Trinamool Congress and the Congress. In Municipality elections, the party could secure a few seats here and there, but could not form any board.

At first, an analysis has been made on the BJP’s performance in Kolkata Municipal Corporation elections and then its performance in Municipal elections.

Elections to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation under the new Calcutta Corporation Act, 1980, were held in 1985. In this election, the Left Front got 70 seats, Congress 67 seats, the BJP 2 and the Independents 2 seats. In the 1990 Calcutta Municipal corporation election, out of 141 seats, the Left Front secured 97 seats and formed the Board. Congress(1) got 37 seats, BJP secured 2 seats and the Independents bagged 5 seats. Shantiram Jain and Bhagatram Agarwal of the BJP won from ward nos. 22 and 42 respectively. Shantiram Jain secured 5811 votes and Bhagatram Agarwal secured 4522 votes.

In 1995, election to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation was held on 9 July and the Left Front came to power in the Corporation. Out of 141 seats, the Left Front got 70 seats, the Congress 66 seats, the BJP got 2 seats and the Independent bagged 3 seats.

In the 2000 Calcutta Corporation election, the BJP won the highest ever 4 seats. The Left Front got 60 seats, Congress 15 seats, RJP 1 seat and the Independents 5 seats. It may be stated here that the Trinamool Congress, the congress and the BJP came together and formed the Board.
What is significant is that Mina Devi Purohit of the BJP became the Deputy Mayor of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation.

In 2005 Kolkata Municipal Corporation election, the Left Front secured 51.73% votes, up from 47.86% in 2000 and formed the Board in the Corporation. TMC – BJP combine secured 27.38% votes, down from 33.50% in 2000 election, Congress 15.66% votes, up from 14.60% in 2000 and others 5.23% votes up from 4.40% in 2000. The BJP secured 34351 votes in all and won 3 seats out of 141.

**Municipal Elections**

The first major elections to the Municipalities in West Bengal were held in the year 1986. In 1986, elections to 75 Municipalities were held on 15 June. In that election, the Left Front captured 63 Municipalities, Congress 10 Municipalities and the rest 2 Municipalities went to the hands of the Independents and others. The Left Front got 50.13% votes and the opposition, which included the BJP, got 49.87% votes. The next Municipal election was held on 27 May, 1990. 74 Municipalities of 14 Districts went to the polls. In this election, the BJP got only 9 seats and it could not form any Board in any Municipality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties &amp; Alliances</th>
<th>Total no. of Municipalities-79</th>
<th>Total no. of Municipalities-79</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left Front</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>16</td>
<td><em>(Congress won 10 Municipalities and led in the race to form Board in 3)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinamool Congress</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNLF</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Grand Alliance) TMC + Cong + BJP</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tie</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Problems and prospects of the BJP in West Bengal

Table 5.15

2005 Municipality Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Municipalities where elections were held</th>
<th>Total No. of Wards in all Municipalities taken together and seats and % of seats won</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1578 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td></td>
<td>922 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cong.</td>
<td></td>
<td>313 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMC</td>
<td></td>
<td>196 (12.42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td></td>
<td>18 (1.14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IND</td>
<td></td>
<td>111 (7.03%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td>18 (1.14%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Paschimbanga, July 2005, Year-38, No - 12, pp. 61-64.

From table 5.14, it is seen that both in 2000 and 2005 Municipal elections, 79 Municipalities went to the polls. In these elections, while the Left Front captured 37 and 49 Municipalities, the Congress 16 and 10+3 Municipalities, TMC 7 and 02 Municipalities, GNLF 1 and 1 Municipality, Grand alliance (TMC + Cong + BJP) 18 and 2 Municipalities, respectively. The BJP alone could not capture any Municipality. It is also seen from Table 5.13 that while the number of Municipalities captured by other parties and alliances in 2000 election went down in 2005 election, the number of Municipalities captured by the Left Front in 2000 Municipal election went up in 2005 election.

From Table 5.15, it is seen that out of the total 1578 wards of 79 Municipalities which went to the polls Left Front got 922 wards (58.45 %), the Congress 313 wards (19.83 %), the TMC 196 wards (12.42 %), the BJP only 18 wards (1.14 %), Independent 111 wards (07.03 %) and others 18 wards (1.14%). What is interesting to note here is the fact that the Independents got more wards than the BJP in 2005 Municipality election. As recently as in 2007, elections were held in 1 Municipal Corporation and 4 Municipalities, namely, Durgapur Municipal Corporation, Panskura, Nalhati, Cooper's Camp and Dhupguri, on 27 May. So far as BJP’s performance in this election is concerned, it may be noted here that the BJP had one seat.
in Durgapur Municipal Corporation in 2002, but it lost the seat in 2007 election. However, the party won a seat in Dhupguri in 2007. That is, the party has been able to maintain its status quo in 2007 elections. But the fact is that the party’s performance in Municipal elections has been very dismal.

On 29 June 2008, 12 Municipalities in West Bengal went to the polls. These are Burdwan, Guskara, Mekhliganj, Haldibari, Alipurduar, Balurghat, Chakdaha, Panihati, Habra, Diamond Harbour, Medinipur, Dubrajpur and Dalkhola. Like earlier elections, the BJP was able to win a few seats here and there but could not capture any Municipality. The Municipalities where the BJP won any seats are: 1 seat in Alipurduar, 2 seats in Diamond Harbour, 2 seats in Guskara, 2-seats in Dubrajpur. Taking into view its performance in Municipal elections, the People’s Democracy, CPI(M)’s official Weekly, commented, “The BJP has consistently maintained its record of drawing a pristine blank in terms of Municipalities won in secular and democratic Bengal.”

**Bangladeshi Infiltration and the BJP**

The BJP in West Bengal places “great emphasis on the issue of illegal Bangladeshi ‘infiltration’ into West Bengal and the impact of this movement on unemployment, pressure on resources, illegal trade, crime and social tensions.” This is an issue which has significant local relevance yet it has national importance and easily fits in the party’s broad perceptions of Hindutva ideology.

The word ‘infiltration’ first came to be a matter of debate in the entire north-east including Assam towards the end of the 1970s and in its wake ‘separatism’, one of the main political problems of independent India, emerged. Bangladeshi infiltrators were the main targets of the movements launched in various states of the North-East, particularly, in Assam. The basic allegation against the Bangladeshi infiltrators was that they were disturbing the population pattern of these states.

But the credit for bringing this issue in Indian politics goes to the Bharatiya Janata Party. According to the party, the Bangladeshi infiltrators are responsible for changing the community pattern of population of the
country. What is amazing is that the BJP has identified West Bengal for creating a hullabaloo on this issue despite the fact that this problem is not only limited to West Bengal but also to the other states of the country.

Before proceeding further, let us have a look at the definition of the 'infiltrators'. It may be noted here that after the birth of Bangladesh, an agreement was signed between Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India and Mujibar Rahaman, the then President of Bangladesh, which is popularly known as 'Indira-Mujib' Pact. This Pact assumed that after independence, a secular democratic rule will be established in Bangladesh and no Bangladeshi citizen will have to take shelter in India. It was also agreed upon that those who came to India before 1971 could return to Bangladesh if they so wished and if they wanted to stay back in India, they could do so as citizens of India. So it can be said that “those who came to India before 1971 were legal refugees and those who came to India after 1971 were required to have with them Bangladeshi passport and Indian visa. They were required to return before the expiry of the visa. And if anybody came and stayed back without the passports and visas, they would be treated as illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators.”

But the problem is that the BJP will not accept this definition of infiltrators. They argue, with a communal point of view in mind, that the Bangladeshi Hindus, coming to India, are not infiltrators, they are refugees. But the Bangladeshi Muslims who cross over to India are infiltrators. The party thinks that the Bangladeshi Hindus are forced to come to India for being persecuted on religious grounds while the Bangladeshi Muslims come to India to consciously change the community pattern of the Hindus in India. BJP does not support the theory that Bangladeshi infiltrators are forced to come to West Bengal due to poverty. To BJP, the reality is that it is a Pan-Islamic conspiracy to capture India. Lakhs of Jehadis have already entered this country in the guise of infiltrators.

Again, the BJP says that the distinction between the refugees and the infiltrators is not the making of the party. It is the Covenant of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in which the definitions of both
the refugees and the infiltrators are to be found. According to the Covenant, "A refugee is essentially any person who is outside his home country and in another country owing to well-founded fear of persecutions for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion." 194

The BJP hardly fails to make its concern public with regard to the rising muslim population in India. Part of this growth is attributed to unauthorized migrations from Bangladesh. 195 According to the party, Muslim population in West Bengal has grown at the rate of 25.92% while the rate of growth for the Hindus is 14.22% during the period from 1991-2001. 196 Again, while the Hindu population during 1981-91 was 74.72%, it came down to 72.5% in 1991-2001 period. On the other hand, the Muslim population in 1981-91 was 23.61%, it rose to 25.20% in 1991-2001. 197

The party argues that in border districts of West Bengal the ratio between the Hindus and the Muslims has got altered and the Muslim population have become majority in many areas, blocks and even districts. 198 The party refers to a central census report to prove it's contention that the Muslim population in the border districts of West Bengal have gone up alarmingly. According to this report, in the decade between 1991 and 2001, the percentage of growth of Muslim population in various districts of West Bengal was 34% in South 24 Parganas, 23% in North 24 parganas, 22% in Nadia, 28% in Murshidabad, 31% in Malda, 19% in Kolkata, 32% in Jalpaiguri and almost 80% in bordering districts of North and South Dinajpur. 199 In this connection, it may be mentioned that the West Bengal BJP undertook a ‘padayatra’ programme on the issue of infiltration from Katwa to Kalna for consecutive three days. State and District level leaders were present. The BJP leaders drew attention to the rise of population in the four blocks of Kalna, two blocks of Purbasthali, Ausgram, Bhatar and Galsi-2 blocks as proved by the 2001 census. 200

The party thinks that the Muslim infiltrators create communal tensions in the districts bordering Bangladesh. For this reason, the BJP considers the Bangladeshi Muslims as a serious security threat to India. 201 According to the party, "Many Hindu majority areas have now become
Muslim majority." It also believes that, "serious efforts are going on to create a belt inhabited totally by the Bangladeshi infiltrators along the entire Indo-Bangladesh border. The pattern also reflects a silent but planned population invasion in West Bengal." The ‘demographic invasion’ has changed the population structure and upset the communal balance in the border areas of Assam and West Bengal. Bangladeshi migrants in Assam are in a position to decide the outcome of election in 56 of the total 120 Assembly constituencies. A similar situation exists in West Bengal.

According to Bharatiya Jatiyatabadi Mancha, “the main reason for the Bangladeshi Muslim infiltrators entering India along with West Bengal, the entire north-eastern states is to create the largest Islamic state in the world first with Bangladesh including West Bengal and the states of the North-East, then to convert India into an Islamic state step by step.” The Mancha thinks that failing to capture India through war, the Islamic collaborators realized that India could not be subdued in future too. So they adopted the strategy of silent attack to harm India. This silent attack strategy consisted of the following three components:

(a) Growth of Muslim population in India,
(b) Conversion of the Hindus into Muslims, and
(c) Muslim infiltration from Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The first strategy being time-consuming and the second full of complexities; the Islamic conspirators chose infiltration as the main weapon for converting India into an Islamic state.

Debate over the number of Infiltrators

There is no direct method of determining the number of infiltrators. Anybody can come to any conclusion regarding the number of infiltrators by adopting any indirect method and the number may vary from person to person. The BJP is the only political party which presents the picture of the largest number of Bangladeshi infiltrators. According to Murli Manohar Joshi, the BJP leader, the number of Bangladeshis living in this country was between 1 crore 75 lakhs to 2 crores. According to Arun Shourie, another
leader of the party, “During the period from 1981 to 1991, at least 1 crore 20 lakhs Bangladeshi people had entered India, the number might even be higher.” Sanjoy Hazarika, a journalist, put the figure between 1 crore and 1.4 crore. According to a noted historian, Professor Amalendu De, “Analysing the census reports of Bangladesh and the number of new ration cards distributed in West Bengal some said that 10 million or 10 million to 14 million Bangladeshis had settled in India in the last decade.” Professor De is one among those who, with the help of census data, linked the decrease in Bangladeshi Hindu population to the increase in population in India and particularly in West Bengal.

Table 5.16
Percentage-wise growth of Hindu-Muslim population in Bangladesh between 1981 and 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1981</th>
<th>1991</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
<td>88.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Amalendu De, *Prasanga Anuprabesh*, p.110.

From table 5.16, it is found that the Muslim population in Bangladesh increased while that of the Hindus decreased. Professor De quoted Mahiuddin Ahmed, who in an article in *Holiday*, wrote about the disappearance of the Bangladeshi Hindus and linked it to migration. He, then, went to the extent of saying that, “the remarkable growth of population in West Bengal and the massive decrease in Bangladeshi population in the decade 1981-1991 is worth noting.” According to a source at the Home Ministry of 1986, the number of infiltrators in India was 1.1 crore. Kamal Bhattacharya, a noted journalist, wrote in a Bengali Daily that “according to some quarters, the number of infiltrators has gone up beyond 3 crores in India.” In a confidential report of the Central Home Ministry, it was stated that more than 2 crore Bangladeshi citizens had entered the country illegally.
So far as the number of infiltrators in West Bengal is concerned, the figure is said to be between a few lakhs to a few crores. *India Today*, quoting Home Ministry / IB estimates, has put the figure at 54 lakhs.\(^{217}\) According to another source, "Since 1971, 50 lakhs of Bangladeshis had entered West Bengal."\(^{218}\) The State Committee of the BJP stated that between 1980 and 1990, 60 lakhs Bangladeshis had entered West Bengal and 12 lakhs of them had been living in Calcutta alone.\(^{219}\) Prakash Singh Jaiswal, the former Minister of State for Home Affairs, in a written statement, told the Rajya Sabha that in West Bengal there are more than 57 lakhs Bangladeshis infiltrators.\(^{220}\) A fortnightly newspaper reported that "the number of infiltrators in India is 1 crore 80 lakhs. Out of this, 80 lakhs live in West Bengal as genuine citizens having ration cards and names registered in the voter's lists."\(^{221}\) L K Advani, when he was the Home Minister, said that more than two crores Bangladeshis citizens had entered India. Out of this, almost 1.5 crore were living in Assam and West Bengal.\(^{222}\) According to the BJP in West Bengal, Bangladeshi infiltration is a burning problem of West Bengal. More than two crore infiltrators have entered West Bengal on a continuous basis during the first 25 years of Left Front rule.\(^{223}\)

Professor Amalendu De thinks that despite the fact that a leftist Government is there in West Bengal and the Government is determined to deal with communalism and communal riots with a heavy hand to maintain communal amity, as a consequence of infiltration from Bangladesh, "Socio-political life of this state is changing in such a way that the majority Hindu fundamentalist forces are getting a favourable environment for increasing their influence. On the other hand, minority Muslim fundamentalist forces are making efforts to further consolidate their strength."\(^{224}\)

According to him, 'Two types of people are coming to India from Bangladesh. The minorities are coming due to religious discrimination and the majority Muslim people due to economic reasons.'\(^{225}\) He further says that:

there is no abnormality in the Bangladeshis coming over here as there is more scope for making a living in India than in Bangladesh. So it is quite natural. But the matter of concern for the secularists and the leftists is that
with what ideas they are coming. They are not coming with secular ideas. The Muslims are being captured by the communal organizations here. On the other hand, the Hindus are being captured by the Hindutva forces, as no left movement exists today to fight for the refugees. And this is being reflected in population pattern and also in social, cultural and political processes.  

Professor De warns, “If we cannot instil secular spirit among the additional population coming here from Bangladesh, if we cannot imbibe them with secular mental disposition, they will fall pray to the communalists and will act as instruments in their hands.”

It cannot be denied that the infiltration problem has assumed alarming proportions in the state of West Bengal. Even the Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya expressed his concern over the Bangladeshi infiltration. In a seminar organized by the Border Security Force in the Auditorium of the National Library, Kolkata on 23 June, 2005 on ‘BSF and Human Rights’, the Chief Minister said, “the situation along the Bangladeshi border in the eastern region is grave and more BSF forces will have to be deployed.” He further said, “Due to infiltration, the population pattern of West Bengal is changing like some other parts of our country.” Again, according to the Chief Minister:

Three types of infiltrators are entering India from other sides of the border. Firstly, some infiltrators come to propagate Islamic fundamentalism. They recruit ‘Jehadies’ here. Secondly, some infiltrators are directly involved in subversive activities and thirdly, there are the ultras who are associated with the Kamtapuri Liberation Army.

From the above, it becomes quite evident that Bangladeshi infiltration is a serious problem and it needs to be tackled in all earnestness. But the problem is that the Sangh Parivar and the BJP are hell bent on politicizing the issue in their own ugly communal interests. The Government should also see that Hindu communal sentiments are not exploited in the name of infiltration.

That the BJP looks at the Bangladeshi infiltration problem from a communal angle becomes quite clear when we see that the BJP calls the
Bangladeshi Muslims coming to India 'infiltrators', but the Hindus 'refugees'. This is also proved by the party's efforts at exploiting the issue for political and electoral gains. BJP's continuous reference to Bangladeshi infiltrators paid it desired political dividend. It increased its percentage of votes in West Bengal from 0.5 to 11.4 between 1987 and 1991. \(^{231}\) Again, "In the 1996 general election, the BJP made a major election issue in the border towns of West Bengal." \(^{232}\), Adhir Chandra Karmakar, the Malda district leader of the BJP, alleged that "the number of voters in Malda district had increased by at least 10 percent as a result of infiltration during 1991-96." \(^{233}\) In the 1998 Lok Sabha Election, the BJP made an alliance with the Trinamool Congress and wanted to contest in the border districts keeping Bangladeshi infiltration in mind. "Since BJP was keen to contest from bordering districts in view of the popular sentiments there against Bangladeshi infiltration the list included several border district constituencies." \(^{234}\) It may also be recalled that the BJP leader Tapan Sikdar won from Dum Dum Parliamentary constituency in 1998 election which had 'a considerable population of Hindu refugees with a past history of migration from East Bengal or latterly from Bangladesh.' \(^{235}\) Again, in the same election, the party fared very well in Krishnanagar in Nadia, "a seat adjacent to the Bangladesh border that the party lost to the CPI (M) by only 40,000 votes." \(^{236}\)

With this communal view of Bangladeshi infiltration and its utilization in elections, the BJP in West Bengal commits itself to taking certain steps to stop infiltration in the event of its being catapulted to power. "The party will identify and deport the Muslim infiltrators and photo identity cards will be introduced in the border areas." \(^{237}\) Again, "the party will lodge criminal cases against those bureaucrats and political leaders who have helped the infiltrators get ration cards and voting rights." \(^{238}\) The party thinks that after Bangladesh became an Islamic State, the Indira-Mujib Agreement has lost all its meaning. The party will create pressures on Bangladesh to ensure the security of minorities there like Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and will give citizenship to all minority refugees.
There is no denying the fact that Bangladeshi infiltration should stop. Everybody wants it to end. But we should remember that the problem of infiltration cannot be understood if its causes are not properly perceived. Does infiltration take place because of political reasons or mainly due to economic reasons? It cannot be denied that people leave their countries mainly for economic reasons. This is true of India as well as of other countries including Bangladesh. The people who are coming to India from Bangladesh are doing so in search of a living and to these people the political boundary between these two states has no meaning. If this reality is forgotten, the infiltration problem will remain unsolved for ever. So it is a problem, which is not only economic but also humanitarian. As such, the problem should be faced with a humanitarian approach. We cannot treat these Bangladeshi people as our enemies. According to Jyoti Basu, the former Chief Minister of West Bengal:

To find a solution to the difficult problem of infiltration, we need to adopt a comprehensive and realistic approach. Our border features with Bangladesh are one of the main hindrances to the solution of the problem. Again, infiltration takes place as a reaction to events taking place on the other side of the border. It is very difficult to identify the illegal infiltrators as a result of ethnic and linguistic resemblance. It is as much easy in Delhi to identify the infiltrators as it is so difficult to identify them in West Bengal.\(^{239}\)

For Basu, certain measures can be taken to find a solution to the infiltration problem, like 'to make the Visa Act stringent, to computerize the system of controlling the visas, to make registration compulsory under Foreigners Act etc. as well as to increase the presence of BSF forces in the borders'.\(^{240}\) Basu goes on to say:

It is necessary to first determine the number of those Bangladeshis who have been coming to India since 1971. Once this number is determined, it will be easier to go deep into the problem. On the basis of this, both the Government of India and the State governments will be able to sit together to determine the status of these people and subsequent course of action can be sorted out. We should also keep in mind the humanitarian aspect of pushing these people back to Bangladesh.\(^{241}\)
On top of all, the Government should see that Hindu communal sentiments are not roused in the name of infiltration. One thing should be clear to all that Hindu communal forces in India and the Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh feed on each other. The Muslim fundamentalists try to politically capitalize on the issue of Muslim opposition in India and on the same pretext, the Hindu communal forces try to gain political capital here in India.

To understand the BJP's stand on Bangladeshi infiltration, it is important to keep in mind that "hardcore Hindutva is its essence and this ideology is directed against all minorities both culturally and politically. Issues such as conversions, the Bangladeshi refugee influx, repeal of Article 370 and the Uniform Civil Code are essentially being used to target the minorities." 242 It is well known that Advani, the then Home Minister, wanted "compulsory identity cards for multi-religious and very sensitive border states of India. Bangladeshi Muslims in India have been always a target of hate campaign by the forces of Hindutva and Advani at the helm of affairs has to stop this by converting 'soft' into 'hard' law and order police state on the borders." 243
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