



Negotiating Power: The Micro-Politics of Rural Bengal

Ayan Kundu

PhD Scholar, Dept. of History, Jadavpur University, Email:-ayankundu2@gmail.com

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18941760>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 24-02-2026

Published: 10-03-2026

Keywords:

Village Politics, State Formation, Intervening Variable, Family Politics, Party Society, Caste Politics

ABSTRACT

The political dynamics of West Bengal has been evolving since Independence. Hitherto what has drawn almost exclusive attention in its study is the role of the city. The political history of West Bengal mostly privileges the people of the city, city-based ideologues and politicians, and above all, ideologies and activities of different political parties run from the city. It is true that political parties have a significant impact on the general populace. However, people tend to receive and modify the party messages in their own terms and participate in politics accordingly. In rural areas in particular, local politics –based on an assortment of family/personal feuds and factionalism interwoven with social ties like caste and religion –thus get combined with the imperatives of higher politics. Class, too, is an important factor in the process, which, again, is largely shaped by local-level economy. I have selected an obscure village named Kodampur situated in the district of Hooghly to understand how the shift from Congress politics to Left Front regime happened in the 1970s. The inner dynamics of rural politics, the mentality and culture behind it, will be revealed through the lens of this watershed event. One or two more case studies done in the course of my doctoral research will be briefly touched upon to facilitate a comparative perspective, revealing the nuanced differences between different villages in this respect.

The political dynamics of West Bengal has been evolving since Independence. Hitherto what has drawn almost exclusive attention in its study is the role of the city. The political history of West Bengal mostly



privileges the people of the city, city-based ideologues and politicians, and above all, ideologies and activities of different political parties run from the city. It is true that political parties have a significant impact on the general populace. However, people tend to receive and modify the party messages in their own terms and participate in politics accordingly. In rural areas in particular, local politics – based on an assortment of family/personal feuds and factionalism interwoven with social ties like caste and religion – thus get combined with the imperatives of higher politics. Class, too, is an important factor in the process, which, again, is largely shaped by local-level economy. I have selected an obscure village named Kodampur situated in the district of Hooghly to understand how the shift from Congress rule to Left Front regime happened in the 1970s, and how the dynamics further evolved under the latter. The study will hopefully reveal the inner dynamics of rural politics, the mentality and culture behind it.

The mentality and culture we are talking about have their ultimate locus the individual subject-actor. However, an individual's unique subjectivity is not unrelated to his/her family background and broader social identity, which may also become a political identity depending on circumstances. All this is largely shaped by local culture and local experiences while being influenced by supra-local forces like regional or national-level polity, economic changes, technological innovations, the spread of literacy etc.

(1)

The village named Kodampur that we are going to discuss falls under 'Mundalika Gram Panchayat' in Hooghly District. The Panchayat Head Office is located there. The village was predominantly Hindu with Tilisⁱ being the majority. There is no 'dominant caste' in the village. It has only one Brahmin family, the Sarkhels, who depend mainly on agriculture and do not engage in *yajmani*ⁱⁱ. Consequently, priests are brought from neighbouring villages for pujas and various sacraments. Kodampur comprises several neighbourhoods, and understanding its complex demography is essential to gaining insight into the dynamics of the rural community. When one visits the village, the first neighbourhood to reach is the relatively large Muslim Para, located next to the red-soil main road leading to the village. After Muslim Para, there is a considerable expanse of agricultural land, followed by Ghoshⁱⁱⁱ Para. Most people in this *para* depend on agriculture and cattle rearing for their livelihood. They also provide milk to Kodampur and the surrounding areas. The next neighbourhood, 'Shivtala Para,' has grown around a Shiva temple. Most of the residents of Shivtala Para make a living through agriculture, teaching, and business. Four influential families residing in this neighbourhood are important for our discussion. These families are the Kundus, who hold Left-leaning political views, the Nandis, the Deys who are *jotedars*^{iv}, and the Sarkhels, the only Brahmin family mentioned above. Whereas Kundus and Nandis belong to the Tili



caste, the Deys are Suvarna Banik. There is a large pond called Talpukur located near this neighbourhood. Another neighbourhood is situated by a canal, where live the Hazras, a *jotedar* family of comparatively upper-caste Mahishya status. The village has only one primary school, which is located in this neighbourhood. Finally, there is the Bagdi Para inhabited by the Bagdis who are considered untouchable. Their para is situated far from all the other neighbourhoods.

Now let us try to understand the political structure of the village. The Hazras were the principal supporters of the ruling Congress party for many years after independence and actively motivated the people in their neighbourhood to join the party. The Congress connection of the people of this locality was useful to them, because the Hazras employed the people of their neighbourhood to cultivate their land as *bhag chashis* (sharecroppers). The other *jotedar* family of the village - the Dey family of Shivtala Para - was not a big *jotedar*. However, they, too, recruited many *bhag chashis* to cultivate their land, most of whom were not from their own locality, but from the Hazra and Bagdi neighbourhoods, as in Shivtala Para many families, even though small agriculturalists, had their own lands. The other three families of Shivtala Para - namely Nandis, Kundus, and Sarkhels - had their lands too. We may say they as middle-class agriculturalists. There were (still are) many common lands and ponds shared by the Nandis and the Kundus. Apparently, there was much goodwill between these two families. In Kodalpur and Mundalika, the Nandi family enjoyed widespread respect. Bankubihari Nandi of this family was a freedom fighter who spent time with Gandhiji and also went to jail. In the present era of rampant political corruption, the people of the village still speak of him as an ideal political leader. When the government arranged a pension for the freedom fighters^v, he refused to take it, and the government's people left his house disappointed. Because of this, his three sons are respected in the village too. Bankubihari Nandi was a Congress supporter, but his sons were Leftists keeping with the changing political environment of the age. The Kundus were Left-minded too. Kundu and Nandi families were instrumental in inspiring the lower echelons of their neighbourhood Shivtala Para to envision a brighter future as owners of land. Their contributions were invaluable in fostering a sense of community pride and aspiration for landownership. The Kundus and the Nandis also treated the poor landless people of Bagdi Para and Muslim Para quite well, while the prosperous people of Hazra Para did not. The sons and daughters of Kundu and Nandi families used to visit these two neighbourhoods and were friends with their sons and daughters. Thus the village bustled with lively political discussions, or *adda*, that took place every evening. The shopkeeper's store in the Hazra neighbourhood, the only grocery store in the village, was one of the popular spots. Another hotspot was the Shivtala Para. Broadly speaking, the Hazra Para's community was close to the Congress, whereas Shivtala was a hub of Leftists. The diversity of opinions



in the village added to the vibrancy and richness of the political discourse in the build-up to the Communist take-over. However, the people of Ghosh Para who were engaged in cow rearing and milk business did not profess to belong to any political party - maybe they preferred to remain neutral on account of their business interests.

Political rivalries as well as family feuds brought Shivtala and Hazra Para face to face. There were several incidents of confrontation between Kundu and Hazra families. Once, a storm caused part of the Kundu family's bamboo grove to fall on the Hazra premises. As a result, the Hazras placed a horizontal bamboo along the border between the two family houses, cutting off the part of the Kundu bamboo grove that was intruding their land. Such animosities were often reflected in local politics. Also, there was the standard issue of land theft, that is, people would increase their land size by eating into the road between two plots. In the early independence era, the *jotedar* families of Hazras and Deys held more influence in the village due to their financial power and ability to provide gainful employment to villagers. These two families were also the only ones to own *kotha* (brick-built) houses in the village, which were quite prominent compared to other houses in the area. But then Kundu and the Nandi families, although less prosperous, played a significant role in bringing about a change in the political scenario of the village during the 1960s and '70s, as part of the change in the broader polity that led to the establishment of Communist rule in West Bengal in 1977.

Both the Kundus and the Nandis were close to the Communist Party, but there was a religious issue involved in this political change. There was a time when Durga Puja was performed only in the houses of the Deys and the Hazras. The people of the Hazra neighbourhood used to go to the Hazra house for puja *prasad*. Bankubihari Nandi, the old freedom fighter of the Nandi family, used to go to the Dey house to receive *prasad*. However, on one occasion he had to wait for a long time for *prasad*^{vi} and thus felt humiliated. The following year, Barwari Durga Puja was organized in Shivtala, and a club called 'Jyoti Sangha' was established for this purpose. It brought a strong political message to the villagers, assuring them that it was possible to organize a big event like Durga Puja with the common people's money. This boosted the villagers' self-confidence and made them bold enough to defy the *jotedars*.

The Barwari Puja incident enhanced the villagers' awareness of their own rights. Now they had their own puja, in which they could do everything by themselves instead of having a marginal position. This puja had much more joy and fun for them than the *jotedars*' puja. This encouraged the club to start other religious activities as well. Firstly, the *Shiva thaan*^{vii} at Shivatala was renovated and turned into a temple. Secondly, an *atchala*^{viii} was built next to the temple, where villagers could gather and participate in



religious ceremonies. This led to the social isolation of the two *jotders* in the village. Later, when the Left Front government came to power and introduced Operation Barga^{ix}, Nandi and Kundu families helped the government's agents to implement it in the village. They stood and identified the lands of the Hazras and the Deys to the people sent by the state government. While the Dey family could sell some land clandestinely, the Hazras could not. The people of Bagdi Para especially benefited from Operation Barga. The first Panchayat Pradhan in Kodalpur village after the introduction of the Panchayat system^x came from the Kundu family. Thus, the political scenario of Kodalpur village underwent a major shift. The commonly held view that communist ideology and religious practices are inherently incompatible has been challenged by the local findings in Kodalpur village. After all, religion serves as a powerful symbol in the world of mentality and culture, hence even the Communists with their formal commitment to atheism could not ignore it at the village level. In politics, too, cultural symbols often play no less a role than the material aspirations of people.

(2)

In the previous section, we explored the political shift in Kodalpur village, which was primarily driven by internal forces with some external support. The Kundu and Nandi families, both aligned with the Communist ideology, played a significant role in mobilising the villagers. They shared a deep dissatisfaction with the existing power structure, which motivated them to take action and mobilise others. Overall, Kundu and Nandi families were key players in the political change that occurred in the village with the coming of the Left regime. But we need to do further psycho-social analysis to better understand the change in political scenario.

From the first part of this essay, it may seem that Kundu and Nandi families in Kodalpur village had a cordial relationship, as they were both close to the Communist Party, respected by the village community, and had more or less similar ritual status and financial standing. They also shared a disdain for the *jotedar* families and fought social and political battles together. However, a strained relationship developed between the two families as time passed. The Kundus emerged as the dominant family, surpassing the Nandis in terms of social and political status. This raises questions about how and why the Kundu family gained more acceptance from the villagers, what factors contributed to their newfound dominance in the village. It is crucial to analyse the new status values and dominance patterns that emerged in the village during the 1970s and '80s. Delving into these questions will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the social as well as political dynamics in Kodalpur village. So now we



will try to understand the factors that led to the Kundu family's dominance in the Communist regime, as political changes at the state level impacted the village community's social fabric.

A village is highly concerned with ranks and status. But criteria for the actual ranking keep changing. Over time, what had once been considered respectable in a rural society may not hold the same value due to changes in people's perceptions regarding wealth and social standing. There was a time when the prosperous *jotedars*, who were usually of high ritual status too, commanded maximum allegiance from their captive clients. But this gradually changed in independent India with the process of modernization, educational advancement, developmental projects and ideological changes, all of which had profound impact particularly on the youth. It is undeniable that after independence, the state's involvement in village society through its financial programs disrupted the seemingly stagnant mindset of rural areas. Mario Prayer offers an example by citing the Third Five-Year Plan^{xi}, during which a nationwide agricultural revolution was intended and new farming methods, equipment, and high-yield seeds were introduced. Prayer shows that despite the benefits of these, the highest castes in rural areas, such as the Brahmins and Kayasthas, were often hesitant to adapt to the new agricultural system. This allowed the middle-caste Sadgopas to seize the opportunities and become economically and politically powerful (Mario 2019: 16). We can confirm Mario Prayer's contention by the example of Kodalpur's Kundu family that purchased the first tractor in the village to increase their agricultural yield. This adaptive efficiency definitely enhanced their social status, especially as they could now employ many Bagdis to cultivate their land.

But it was not just by the dint of technology that the Kundus of Kodalpur went ahead of the Nandis in politics and social influence. After uncovering the story of this social change, I had a question for the Nandis^{xiii}: Why didn't any of you hold posts in the Panchayat? The educational background of the Kundus seemingly played a big role in this. All three of the Kundu brothers were primary school teachers in the village during the 1970s and '80s. In his book *Government as Practice: Democratic Left in a Transforming India*, Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya studied the Left-era schoolteachers in depth. These teachers became a loyal and supportive class for the government, and the government relied on them as a bridge to reach out to the common people of the village. In this context, Bhattacharyya writes –

“... the teachers were key mediators in the local society's interaction with the agencies of the government. That the teachers were more educated and better equipped to handle legal and regulatory protocols of officialdom was not only reason for them being able to function as local agents and



interlocutors with the government. As a precondition, they also had to earn credibility in the local society and prove themselves as trusted members of the community whose knowledge was not just useful but also accessible.”

(Bhattacharya 2016: 97)

The Kundu family was highly respected in the Kodolpur village due to their contributions to the community along the above line. As schoolteachers, they had the experience of dealing with government agencies, which made them knowledgeable and capable of raising awareness about various governmental projects. Besides, they were educational advisors for both boys and girls, which made them even more respected in the village. The Kundu children were also considered ideal role models in the community, further elevating their family's social status. They sought to give the impression of being modern-minded, part of the high-status world outside and different from the old-style village leaders. The Nandi family lagged behind in this respect.

Due to their contributions, when the Kundus became Panchayat chiefs, they commanded great awe and reverence among the villagers. Their leadership was appreciated, and the villagers trusted them to make the right decisions for the community's benefit. The Kundu family's past and present services and modern-style leadership made them a prominent and respected family in Kodolpur village. And with the growth of formal institutional bodies in local politics, particularly the Panchayat, with their impact on the legitimacy and clout of village leaders, things further changed in favour of the Kundus. The Nandi family got gradually marginalized.

To gain insight into the power dynamics of the village, we also need to observe the religious and other traditional practices in the village. However, while doing so, we will see how changes can affect these traditional practices. Even before the Communist rule, the Kundu family had gradually gained pre-eminence in the religious ceremonies of the village. Their influence grew during the Communist regime, thanks to both religious and secular events. The newly established club Jyoti Sangha started organizing an annual cultural event in the village, where the Kundu children showcased their classical music and dance performances. It is to be noted that developing such skills in a remote village was both expensive and prestigious, especially since most villagers were not able to educate their children beyond high school. *Yatra* troupes from the city were also invited to put up shows as part of the cultural programme^{xiii} with the Kundu family being the leading donor. Besides, Kodolpur village holds four annual religious events: *Harisabha*, *Durga Puja*, *Kali Puja*, and the Puja of the village deity Panchanan



Thakur (local deity). Additionally, there are private religious ceremonies like *Navanna*^{xiv} and *Ranna Puja*^{xv}. One could write an entire essay about these events to uncover the power dynamics of Kodalpur.

Clifford Geertz's essay "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight"(Geertz 1973: 412) provides insight into how cultural events like cockfighting can be analyzed from political, social, and cultural perspectives to understand the interrelationship between regional culture and political power at different levels. Let us study the event of *Hari-Sabha*^{xvi} in the village Kodalpur using his insights. The religious gathering was held in front of the main Shiva temple in the village. The two main parts of the ritual are *Harir loot* and *Dhuloti*. *Harir loot* is the distribution of *prasad* (specifically *batasa*, a special kind of sweet) among the people present after the *Naam-Gaan*. *Dhuloti* is rolling in the mud made artificially under the *Dhuloti/Tulsi mancha* (platform). Both are performed for religious purposes – to acquire *punya* (virtue) that would benefit one in this and the next birth.^{xvii} But it is also about money and social status. The Kundu family patronizes *Harir loot* by sponsoring the huge amount of *batasa* that is distributed in the *Harisabha*. Also, the sons of the Kundu family get the opportunity to access *Dhuloti* ahead of everyone else. The members of the family also get the lion's share of the *prasad* that is distributed after *Harisabha*. The communist-minded Kundu family gained in importance in these local religious practices in this way and became important in the power structure of the village.

(3)

The above narrative leads to some distinct conclusions. Kundu and Nandi families, residing in the hamlet of Kodalpur, initially collaborated and also appeared to be on par. Over time, their disparities grew increasingly evident. Should we still keep these two families on the same level in the hierarchy of the agricultural families of Kodalpur? Or should we conclude that even though the two families initially belonged to the same socio-economic category in the village, gradually there was a divergence in their social role and status? It is not practical to consider only the economically determined horizontal divisions in a community to understand its social environment. Cutting across the horizontal divisions there may be vertical ones based on social and cultural capital. One's education, cultural accomplishments, character traits, social behaviour etc. can play a big role here.

The notion of the 'intermediate variable' can also aid us in comprehending the reason why the Kundus overshadowed the Nandis in Kodalpur, both socially and politically. Obtaining accreditation at the highest political level is crucial for attaining political prestige in a small area. When a prominent leadership arises in a peripheral community, the upper echelons of any political party acknowledge it in order to enhance its influence in that area. However, the local leadership also needs support and



assistance of higher-level politicians in order to uphold the validity of its position, both social dignity and political reputation. While it may not be entirely accurate to label this only as a 'patron-client relationship' akin to feudalism, there are indeed similarities between the two. And the local leaders in their turn have patron-client relationships with their subordinates in their locality.

Actually, the very principle of governmentality in India calls for this kind of a relationship, which has been recognized by a number of scholars. The political leaders of the independent Indian state tried to evolve an all-India frame based on a centralized bureaucratic edifice, which would constantly mediate between various social factions in an old and plural society, on the one hand, and a modern structure of institutions and interests on the other. It was hoped that state and society in India would converge through this dynamic political process in which the state would become an instrument of wide-ranging transformation from the top down as well as from the bottom up. This necessitated the emergence of intermediate elites between the two levels, who were usually well-informed and influential families in the rural areas. The government utilized such families to affirm governmental control. Indeed, the government or the state is considered the 'independent variable' in the process, while the marginal or rural areas are considered the 'dependent variable' so far as people's access to governmental facilities is concerned. The influential families in the village serve as the 'intermediate variable'. The degree of the government's impact and the availability of governmental facilities or services in a village is determined by these 'intermediate variables', that is, locally influential households.

The notion of 'intermediate variables' may also be used to assess the impact of political parties, particularly in West Bengal, where the government has historically been associated with one political party or the other. The government and the party that runs it often seem inseparable. Thus the 'intermediary variables' work for both the ruling party and the government. In the early independence era, the Congress deliberately used them to secure its dominance in rural areas.^{xviii} In rural West Bengal, the locally influential jotedar-zamindar families acted as such 'intermediaries' during the Congress regime. This technique was employed by the renowned Congress politician Atulya Ghosh and is widely known as the 'Ghosh Mechanism'^{xix} (Mario 2009: 119-228), which left a lot of scope for manoeuvre, accommodating different class and group interests within the ruling political formation. Thus, West Bengal became a good example of what Partha Chatterjee calls 'political society', on the site of which the state and society meet in our country^{xx}. The mechanism was further streamlined and strengthened under the Left regime. Indeed, Dwaipayana Bhattacharyya has expanded Chatterjee's proposition of 'political society' in the specific context of Bengal by introducing the idea of 'party society', which provides an enormous advantage to whatever political party rules the state at a given time.^{xxi} (



Bhattacharyya 2016: 123-127)The advantage remains valid at least for a long stretch of time, beyond which the ruling party can be rejected, and a suitable substitute sought. This is more or less true of the Congress, the Left and the present TMC regimes.

The sense of territory may be another important psychosocial factor in the political process. We all love our native land/birthplace. However, usually, we decide on a spatial distance within which the sense of 'my territory' operates most intimately. We put up an imaginary boundary around it, which we consider our essential sphere of influence and want to maintain. I feel that this sense of territorial belonging among the people of the village is much stronger than in the city. And I think the Kundus of Kodalpur were able to greatly extend the imaginary boundary of their intimate territorial belonging. They did not remain limited to their own village but went beyond it for higher studies and other reasons. In this way, they went ahead of the Nandi family, building relations with the powerful party leadership at the top or going quite far in grabbing the benefits offered by the government. I feel that the Nandis suffered from a kind of complacency after the coming of the Communist regime. They did not much care to make contacts and spread their influence outside their village.

Looking at the political changes in Kodalpur village, it can be seen that different rural families became powerful at different times and controlled the rural people - the erstwhile *jotedar* families, the two communist families, and then one of those Communist families. But using the same standards to assess the role and status all these families will hinder a proper understanding of this shift of power. Even if we put the *jotedar* families and the communist ones who rose later in the same economic bracket of 'middle-class', we will see that the type of authority these families enjoyed underwent big changes. This was because of the changes in the moral basis of society, its values and norms, and hence its political culture. Max Weber noticed three kinds of authority in his *The Theory of Social and Economic Organizations*^{xxii} (Weber 1947) . These are 1. Traditional authority - where the recognition of power has the sanction of tradition and hereditary rule. 2. Charismatic authority - where authority is based on the leader's personal qualities. 3. Legal-rational authority – where the law of the State is the measure of authority - a person is entitled by the law to rule. Of these three kinds of authority, the old *jotedar* families enjoyed chiefly traditional authority and much less of legal authority. The communist families like the Kundus and the Nandis enjoyed charismatic authority and also legal authority after the change of guard. But while the Kundus could retain their authority for long, the Nandis could not. The latter lost their charisma and could not gain legal authority either. Perhaps they could not realize that the criteria of leadership in the village had changed with the emergence of a new political culture.



Let me end with an afterword. In this essay, I have foregrounded the local leadership, which was middle-class in character. But we should not assume that people lower down the social scale simply followed the leaders willy-nilly. In the heterogeneous village society, perceptions involved in different social groups' political participation would naturally be different. Some scholars would perhaps use a broad framework of patron-client relationships and transactional alliances with contextual shifts to understand their participation vis-à-vis the leaders. But things are never that easy, because, as we have pointed out, mentality and culture play a big role in politics. The acceptance of leadership by ordinary people depends on many factors: not only material ones, but also what they perceive as customary and fair. However, hopefully, I have been able to establish at least this – it was not just the radical political ideology propagated by some urbanites and the radicalization of the rural middle classes under its impact that led to the watershed event of the establishment of Communist rule in West Bengal. If we take a long-term view, we will see that the factors behind political allegiance further changed during the 34-year-long Left-front regime itself. And also, that regime, the longest-running rule in any state in India till date, ended one-day yielding place to the TMC government (2011). No simplistic explanation in terms of ideology or even a political party's hegemony will be able to explain this long and ongoing history.

ⁱ The Hindu Tili caste is named after the Sanskrit word "talika" or "taila," which implies sesame and mustard oil. This name reflects their history as oil-makers. They are part of Bengal's fourteen middle-caste 'Nabasakh' group.

ⁱⁱ The term *Yajmani* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Yaj*, which denotes the act of *puja* or worship. A priest performs *pooja* on behalf of a *Yajman*. Although the Sarkhel family belongs to the Brahmin caste, they do not engage in priestly duties.

ⁱⁱⁱ Members of the Sadgop (milkman) community having a middle-caste status use the surname Ghosh.

^{iv} By the late eighteenth century, several zamindars were experiencing a crisis, while a section of affluent peasants was strengthening their dominance in rural areas. These wealthy peasants are known as *jotedars*, who amassed vast expanses of land in rural regions. In addition, they exerted dominance over the local marketplaces, engaged in money lending operations, and exercised authority on impoverished peasants. The *jotedars* utilised the service of *bhag hashis* or sharecroppers, also referred to as bargadars, who tilled the *jotedars*' lands and would yield fifty percent of the harvested crop to the latter.



^v The Ministry of Home Affairs launched the "Swatantrata Sainik Samman Pension Scheme" on August 15, 1972. The plan offers pensions to families of martyrs as well as to liberation fighters who had passed away or were still alive.

^{vi} Food offered to a deity and distributed in his or her name after the ritual is over.

^{vii} 'Thaan' commonly denotes a sacred site of devotion to a Hindu deity. However, Thaan is not a temple. Typically, it is located in an outdoor space, beneath a sacred tree (in Hindu mythology, Peepal, Belpatra, Banyan, Amla, and Ashoka trees are considered sacred).

^{viii} "Aatchala" is a term that refers to a structure with eight roofs. The design consists of eight separate pieces, which together resemble the sloping roofs of cottages.

^{ix} Operation Barga was a land redistribution initiative carried out in the rural areas of West Bengal. The main goal was to document the names of *bargadars* (sharecroppers), without depending on the lengthy settlement machinery process. It gave them legal protection against eviction. This, together with the redistribution of ceiling-surplus land, brought about big changes in the economy of rural Bengal. The implementation of Operation Barga commenced in 1978 and was completed by the mid-1980s.

^x The Panchayat system in West Bengal was introduced on October 2, 1964, and has four levels: Gramme Panchayats, Anchalik Panchayats, Panchayat Samities, and Zilla Parishads. It enables local communities to have authority and control over the management, growth, and well-being initiatives.

^{xi} The Third Five-Year Plan in India (1961-1966) sought to double the income level of the Indian people, taking into account projected population growth for the following 15 years. The main focus was on agriculture, with a special emphasis on enhancing the output of rice and wheat. Additionally, there was a strong emphasis on the development of education and social services. The plan commenced on April 1, 1961, and terminated on March 31, 1966.

^{xii} Extensive conversations have been used to write this essay. The story talks about the Nandis, who are my maternal family and live in Kodalpur, which is my maternal village. I also talked to people from the Kundu family, the Sarkhel family, the Dey family, and members of the Jyoti Sangha.

^{xiii} The club Jyoti Sangha and the village community continue to uphold the tradition of hosting an annual cultural programme. However, the All-India Trinamool Congress currently holds a dominant



position in the cultural realm of the village, while the Bharatiya Janata Party, the current opposition party in West Bengal, is attempting to establish a presence in the cultural sphere of the village.

^{xiv} The Bengali harvest festival called *Navanna* features feasting, dancing, and music to honour the new crop. It is observed as a symbol of gratitude to the gods and praying for prosperity.

^{xv} *Ranna Puja* is a customary Hindu ritual that is widely observed in West Bengal, particularly in rural areas. It happens biannually. The *Bhadro Ranna Puja* takes place on Sankranti in the month of Bhadro, whereas the *Shitalashashti Ranna Puja* occurs after Saraswati Puja in the month of Magh. During Ranna Puja, the kitchen is well cleaned, a variety of food items are prepared, and the cooking of banned dishes (*Arandhan*) is carried out.

^{xvi} Hari Sabha is a Hindu-Vaisnavite tradition that can be seen in the rural areas of West Bengal. It is usually held in four *prahars* (one prahar equals one hour), eight prahars, sixteen prahars, sixty-four prahars, and seventy-two prahars. The ceremony features the chanting of *Krishna-nam* and *Kirtan* music, also known as *Naam-Gaan*.

^{xvii} Reincarnation is a fundamental concept in Hinduism. According to this belief, the soul (atman) is eternal and goes through a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

^{xviii} This has been called ‘intermediate aggregation’ by Rajni Kothari (*Politics in India*, 1970) in the all-India context. And because it was shaped by the Congress everywhere, Kothari has also called it the ‘Congress System’. In West Bengal, the Congress System took the form of the ‘Ghosh Mechanism’.

^{xix} Mario discusses Congress leader Atulya Ghosh's strategies. The Congress used the elite and 'bhadralok' class to control rural areas in the early days of independence, when there was no political opposition. Large land holdings gave this gentry class rural dignity and authority. Brahmins and Kayasthas possessed most of the property, but Sadgopas did too. Land reforms in 1956 reduced land ownership to 25 acres, making it difficult for Congress to gain support. Ghosh's party system fixes this. In return, these Congress leaders with landed property but no land got social esteem and endless rural leadership opportunities.



^{xx} Partha Chatterjee tells us that we must understand that the society that the state deals within India is not so much a 'civil society' as a 'political society'. The civil society in the Western sense is constituted by the elementary units of homogenous families and individuals, and based on equality, autonomy, freedom of entry and exit, deliberative procedures of decision-making, recognized rights and duties of members and suchlike principles. In India, however, such a society could be rooted in a handful of educated urban elites only and there remained a huge gap between the idea of civil society as and that of a differentiated population in reality. In his book *The Politics of the Governed*, Chatterjee argues that in India the government tries to reach these differentiated groups as the target of its developmental policy, which is done on the site of a 'political society' through a different kind of mediation. The state seeks to relate to different sections of the population through the governmental functions of welfare, often bending the rules of civil society in the process, in which political parties and political leaders play a big role.

^{xxi} A 'political society' developed in this nation due to the inability of the 'civil society' to exert control over the state. A community had formed around a particular political party. Initially, it occurred during the Congress era, and then it improved under the Communists. Dwaipayan Bhattacharjee referred to this as the "party society."

Bibliography:

- Bhattacharyya, Dwaipayan (2016), *Government as Practice: Democratic Left in a Transforming India*, Delhi: Cambridge University Press
- Dumont, Louis. Homo Hierarhicus (1980) *The Cast System and Its Implications*, translated by Mark Sainsbury, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press
- Geertz, Clifford (1973), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York: Inc., Publishers
- Kothari, Rajni (1970) *Politics in India*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970
- Prayer, Mario (2009), 'The Social Context of Politics in Rural West Bengal (1947-92)' in *The Changing Identity of Rural India: A Socio-Historic Analysis* eds. Elisabetta Basile and Ishita Mukhopadhyay, New Delhi: Anthem Press



- Roy, Dayabati (2014), *Rural Politics in India: Political Stratification and Governance in West Bengal*, Delhi: Cambridge University Press
- Tim. “Intervening Variable: Simple Definition & Examples - Statistics How To.” accessed July 29, 2024. <https://www.statisticshowto.com/intervening-variable/>
- Weber, Max (1947), *Theory of Social and Economic Organisations*, New York: Oxford University Press

Bengali Books

- Basu, Asit Kumar (1983), *Paschimbanga Panchayet Byabostha*, Kolkata: Paschimbanga Rajya Pustak Parsad
- Ghosh, Ratantanu (2010), eds. *Uttaradhunikata*, Dhaka: Kathaprakash
- Haquq, Hasan Ajizul (2007), *Sanaskriti: Ki Ache Tomar Petikay*, Kolkata: Gangchil
- Mukhopadhyaya, Chandidas (2011), *Samajtattwa o Bharatiya Samaj*, Kolkata: Progotisil Prakasak , 2011
- Rana, Santosh (2018) *Rajnitir Ak Jibon*, Kolkata: Ananda

Bengali Journal Article

- Ali, Sk Asad (2018) ‘Belgramer Rajniti: Gramin Rajnitir Gati-prokriti o Palabadal’, Kolkata: *Anustup*, 52, no.2
- Roy, Anuradha(2019) ‘Madhyabitter Itihas Theke Madhyabittatar Itihas: Adhunik Bharater Prekkhapate’, Kolkata: *Anustup*

Personal communication and Fieldwork

- Conversations have been used to write down different facts about Kodalpur village. The story talks about the Nandis, who are my maternal family and live in Kodalpur, which is my maternal village. I also talked to people from the Kundu family, the Sarkhel family, the Dey family, and the Jyoti Sangh.