

Medha Chandra  
email: medhachandra@yahoo.com  
Development Planning Unit  
9, Endsleigh Gardens  
University College London  
London WC1H 0ED  
United Kingdom

## **Bridging Everyday and High Politics- the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA and Inclusion in Kolkata, India**

### **Introduction:**

This paper discusses the impact of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (74<sup>th</sup> CAA), on increasing the accessibility of municipal governance for citizens as well as their inclusion in it. The paper begins with setting the context for the study through a brief discussion of the salient features of the Act, emphasising those relevant for the study. The legislation has been adopted differently in the various states of India, and the choice of the state of West Bengal for the study is explained next. Since the paper illustrates its arguments using the case of Kolkata, hence the administrative structures and the recent political history of this city, with reference to that in West Bengal, are described next.

A number of municipalities in West Bengal, including of the capital Kolkata, have local governments led by emerging non-Left parties in a state ruled continuously by a coalition of Left leaning parties since 1977. As it is at the core of the paper's argument, hence a comparison of the political culture of the parties of the Left Front with that of the non-Left parties follows. The emergence of the non-Left parties in a previously Left ruled local polity has created a clash between the imbedded, centralised political culture of the Left parties with that of the emergent non-Left parties. This backdrop of political frictions has affected considerably the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA's attempts to decentralise and make local governance more inclusive. These outcomes have also been shaped by the bureaucratic culture of the city, which is detailed concurrently.

The paper concludes by examining in Kolkata the trajectory of two provisions of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA targeted at increasing the access of people to municipal governance and increasing its inclusiveness. These provisions are of the Ward Committees and reservation for women, illustrating how political clashes and unease with decentralisation have given rise to results that while appearing to make local governance more inclusive, actually propagate old power equations and stereotypes.

The paper is based on fieldwork done using qualitative methodologies carried out over a period of nine months in 2002 in Kolkata and in Madhyamgram near Kolkata, for the author's PhD thesis. This thesis is being undertaken at the Development Planning Unit of the University College London. The methods used included semi-structured interviews with elected municipal representatives like councillors and members of the Mayor-In-Council, middle class and poor respondents involved in two cases of environmental conflicts, politicians and party workers from different political parties, members from Ward Committees, bureaucrats and municipal officials. This was backed up by secondary sources like the printed media, television and radio programming related to the issues of the research. As this study is done in the qualitative framework, the emphasis is not on using quantitative methods or analysis techniques to prove arguments but on computer-based qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts and other data.

### **Devolution- A brief introduction**

A brief look at decentralisation is useful to begin with. Decentralisation can be understood in a narrow, techno-managerial sense to connote de-concentration spurred by essentially functional considerations of efficiency, speed and economy; or understood as devolution- referring to a process designed to effect redistribution of political power in society. Power sharing or power equalisation in society forms the principal motivation force behind the process of devolution (Burns, 1994). Within devolution, the strategies examined as relevant for this paper are the territorially and non-territorially based initiatives. The former focus on crafted institutions like wards and Ward Committees to access the voices of territorially defined groups of marginalised citizens and the latter focus on accessing their voices in the political arena through quota based representation.

Numerous authors have pointed to the significant role that territorially defined political institutions play in helping sustain civic vibrancy and in stimulating its growth along with helping to render communities legible, and codify the translation of individual into collective endeavour in a form that is visible, analysable and amenable to intervention and influence (Maloney et. al, 2000), (Scott, 1998), (Ostrom, 1990). However there are several problems with their ability to access the voices of the marginalised, based on the structure of these crafted institutions and the assumptions behind them. Their narrow focus on establishing new institutional mechanisms may obscure actual activities being undertaken by community members through other well established, familiar and locally adapted channels (Cleaver, 2000). Further, the institutional channels work on the assumption of very broad based conceptions of 'community' and 'the

marginalised' overlooking the multiple sites of exclusion emerging from social identity. Finally, crafted institutions based on geographically defined territories or political communities overlook the fact that people may define their 'community' such that these do not fit the geographical demarcations of the crafted institution.

The non-territorially based political devolution strategies have been described as being keyed to *groups* -specially weaker sections- rather than areas; arguing that vulnerable groups, most dependent on public services, are most often highly under represented in the local elected bodies (Sharma, 1996). This form of devolution mandates political quotas for vulnerable groups decided by the state's conceptualisations of such groups based on elements of their identity such as gender and caste- resulting in election quotas for them. This assumes that identity based representatives will represent a pre-existing collective interest and that they will do so accurately and in an unbiased fashion- all assumptions questionable in themselves. Apart from the question of the *ability* of political representatives in understanding, interpreting and stating the claims of every group in the public, is also the question of their *desire* to do so. The state further assumes that sex and caste based representation is adequate to increase the accessibility of the municipality to various 'categories' of marginalised actors.

Expanding these arguments using the case of municipal reservations for women, the implicit assumptions seem unjustified that gender rather than class, caste, political ambition or religion will be the unifying factor leading to greater social justice and improving the social status of women through increased political participation. Further, another questionable argument forwarded about reservation for women is that they are intrinsically more compassionate, fair and incorruptible- deriving from "ideal feminine values" perceived by a masculine polity. As Niranjana has said,

*Given the dispersal of identities across castes, religion and other axes, gender has rarely been the sole rallying point for women. Whether political reservations alone would be sufficient to transform them into political actors with clear-cut interests remains a doubtful matter* (Niranjana, 2001: 274)

Other doubts about women's political empowerment through political quotas range from fears of possible ghettoisation of women in politics, to the fear of women's representatives becoming mere dummies in the hands of the powerful. Though quotas may be empowering for the individual women representatives in question and in enhancing the visibility of women in

political life, they may still not translate into greater empowerment for women in the general polity. For providing real benefit to women, the importance of striking at skewed social power relations is stressed as,

*there is no simple correlation between an enhanced visibility of women in political institutions and a sense of empowerment of 'women' in the polity in general. In short, the question of empowerment cannot be disassociated from the question of relations of power within different socio-political systems. In order to challenge structural impediments to greater participation of women in political institutions, we need to have regard to the multi-faceted power relations which contextualise that challenge* (Rai, 1999: 98)

The presence of political quotas based on identity such as tribal or gender identity has the additional drawback of deepening and hardening the social divides based on these elements of identity. As benefits from reservations based on identity are available only by exploiting these elements of difference, the consequence is that political groupings start occurring largely around them. This is retrogressive for creating an equal society. This issue has been raised by Niranjana (2001) and by Ghosh (1996) in relation to gender based reservations in politics. They point out that these quotas have resulted in a separate category of women as *recipients* of political power, limiting women candidates in elections to just the few seats reserved by the quotas and the restriction of their political participation in other non-reserved seats. This vitiated the conduct of politics by making it dependent on identity above and beyond all other issues such as competence, honesty etc.

From the preceding discussion it seems apparent that territorially and non-territorially based strategies for devolution by states are not entirely effective in achieving increased participation of citizens in the state and may create additional problems in social and political life. The purpose of this paper being to explore these and other barriers to devolution, the next section turns to understanding the provisions of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA itself as a tool for devolution.

### **Background about the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA**

India is a union of twenty-eight states with a constitutionally demarcated list of subjects under the jurisdiction of the different levels of government. The chain of command and clear functional demarcation is established from the central level to the state government level, without any explicit definition of the powers and functions of the next tier of government- the rural and urban local government level. To remedy this, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts dealing with rural and urban local government respectively were passed in 1992. Before these

legislations, urban local bodies were marginalised with many cases of superseded and annulled municipalities. In many cities, municipal elections did not take place for decades with a moribund local government system (Sivaramakrishnan, 2000).

Two fundamental issues at the core of the disempowered municipal governance were depoliticisation of urban development and the extension of State functional domain. The attempt at keeping the municipal level apolitical was defended quoting the necessity of maintaining its impartial character. Existence of numerous para-statal and development authorities effectively resulted in the substance of urban municipal governance lying with the state rather than with local government, consequently reducing the relevance of this level of government for citizens. The hazy definition of municipal functions and narrow revenue base of municipalities further contributed to their weakening (Datta, 1999). A very significant outcome of this was the veritable lack of citizens' say in the running of their city or town. Ineffective, and occasionally absent representative systems resulted in elite domination of issues and priorities and an unreal idea of the needs of the poor. Women and other disadvantaged groups had a negligible say in the urban development plans and programmes.

The 74<sup>th</sup> CAA was formulated to address these shortcomings through the following main features:

- The redefined criteria of municipalisation: A new system has been set up comprising of different types of urban municipal bodies<sup>1</sup> created by a redefinition of urban agglomerations based on criteria of population, functional and revenue base of the area, demographic features etc. This ensures that considerations for municipalisation would also include socio-economic variables (Times, 1996)
- The redefined composition of municipalities: Municipal representation has been fixed mandating elected representatives in urban areas. State governments have been allowed to provide representation in the municipality of persons having special knowledge or experience in municipal administration as well as of members of the state and national legislatures.<sup>2</sup>
- The creation of Metropolitan Areas: Metropolitan areas, defined as having a population of 100,000 or more comprised in one or more districts and consisting of two or more municipalities or panchayats or other contiguous areas have been proposed. This is significant as it allows the

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<sup>1</sup> Nagar Panchayats, Municipal Councils and the Municipal Corporation

<sup>2</sup> However, these members are to have to voting powers, thus theoretically ensuring non-interference by other levels of government in the workings of local government.

recognition of the links that exist between rural, urban and peri urban areas in a region during planning processes.

- New structure of the Ward Committees: These are structures of local representation at ward level<sup>3</sup>. The composition of ward committees and the manner of filling their seats has been left to the discretion of the individual states. An important point about the composition of the Ward Committees is that elected municipal representatives from the ward, the councillors, are given primacy in area level decisions.
- Reservation of seats: A significant contribution of the CAA is the reservation for women candidates, one-third of the total seats for municipal councillors in any municipality, including the office of Mayor. Furthermore, reservation is also envisioned for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) members, the number of seats being determined by the proportion of SC/ST population in the overall population of the municipality.
- Increased and explicit functional domain of the municipal government: The Twelfth Schedule of the constitution- also added as part of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA -for the first time states the subjects that should be under the jurisdiction of the urban local body.
- Emphasis on fiscal autonomy of urban local bodies: State Financial Commissions have been formulated with the power to enunciate principles for revenue assignments to the municipal bodies, tax sharing between local and state level governments and grants-in-aid by the state government to the local levels.
- Emphasis on continuity of elected municipalities: By the setting up of State Election Commissions, it has been ensured that no urban area would remain without an elected municipality for more than six months.

The conformity legislations enacted by different Indian states range from mere lip service to the constitutional amendment to fairly elaborate amendments to existing State laws. The West Bengal Municipal (WBM) Act of 1993 introduced wide-ranging changes to the pre existing municipal scenario in the state. This, combined with its history of municipal reform and devolution of power to urban local bodies even before the advent of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA, makes West Bengal<sup>4</sup> one of the most interesting states for study.

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<sup>3</sup> A ward is a constituency of an urban area. The entire urban area is divided into several administrative units called wards based on population and area considerations, with elected municipal representative and budget allocation for each ward.

<sup>4</sup> West Bengal is located in the northeastern part of India. Although the state ranks as one of the smaller states in area, it is one of the largest in population. The capital is Kolkata, India's second largest city. West Bengal is one of the most urbanised states of India with 27.5% of total population residing in various urban areas in 2001. The rate of growth of the urban population between 1991-2001 has been 20.2%, with the total urban population registering an increase from

### **West Bengal and the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA: a bit of relevant background**

Prior to the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA, West Bengal had existing structures of local governance called Borough Committees (BCs) composed of councillors from the wards in the borough. After the WBM Act was enacted, Ward Committees (WCs) were also introduced, with the state legislating for one WC per ward, significant, as many other states have clubbed two or more



**Figure 1: West Bengal in India**

wards together for the formation of WCs. In West Bengal the population covered per WC is about 31,000, a figure lower than in many other states, thus increasing the proximity of the represented and the representatives (Nagarpalika Network Newsletter, Mar 2001). The councillor is the chairperson of the WC and is empowered to select the other members drawn from amongst prominent residents and the ‘vulnerable sections’ in the ward. The chairperson of the municipality also has the power to nominate a certain number of members to each WC.

The state has implemented reservation of seats for women in municipalities. West Bengal has had two rounds of municipal elections since the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA was enacted, with enthusiastic participation by women in both rounds. (Nagarpalika Network Newsletter, Nov 2000). The state is one of the few where regular elections to rural and urban local bodies have been taking place since the 1980s, giving the electorate an experience of participation in local government (Ghosh, 1996). It is also one of the few to have made out a comprehensive law devolving functions to municipalities with an elaborate listing of 49 obligatory and 40 discretionary functions. (Nagarpalika Network Newsletter, Aug 1999) None of the other Indian states has the history of consistent municipal elections to urban local bodies that West Bengal has.

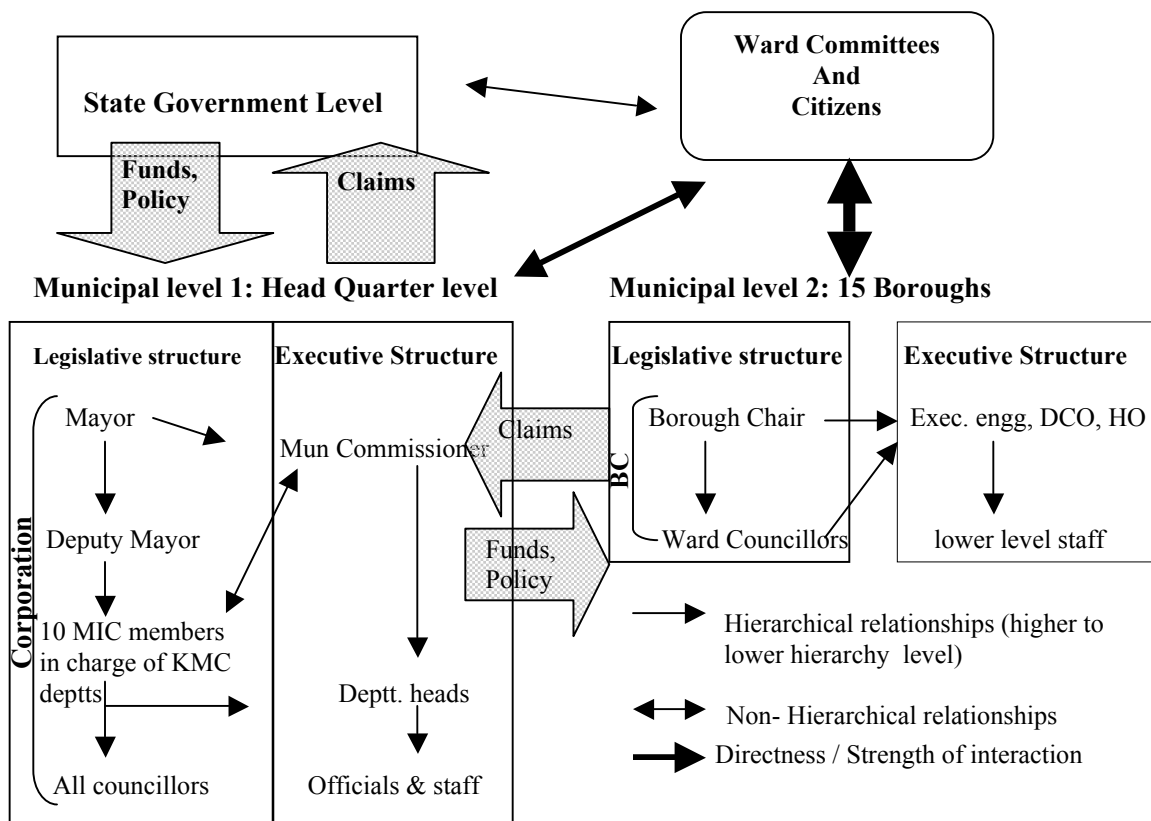
These attributes of West Bengal- a long standing tradition of uninterrupted municipal governance and the historical precedence of reservations for women and other marginalised actors in rural governance make it an ideal context to study the impacts of these reservations in urban municipalities

### **Understanding Kolkata**

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18.62 millions in 1991 to 22.5 million in 2000. One of the unique features of urbanisation in the state has been that of high urban residential density. (<http://www.gisdevelopment.net/>) At 24,760 persons / sq.km, Kolkata has one of the highest densities in the world leading to acute urban problems.

The Calcutta Corporation Act of 1980<sup>5</sup> sought to democratise the entire administration by providing a Mayor-in-Council system of government in Kolkata. This system promised accountability, transparency, responsiveness and greater inclusion of people in urban governance through involvement of their representatives in municipal issues through committees (Pinto, 1999). In this form of government there are three authorities of city government- the Corporation comprising of the councillors, the Mayor in Council (MIC) which is the full “cabinet” of the KMC and the Mayor as the Chief Executive. The MIC is made of elected councillors selected by the mayor as his cabinet. The management structure consists of two tiers- at the headquarter level and at the borough<sup>6</sup> level. The entire area of the KMC is divided into fifteen boroughs, with a Borough Committee (BC) in each. The BCs comprise of the councillors from the wards in the borough. Though BC members have no power for planning the development of the area but have the responsibility of discussing and forwarding their suggestions regarding needs of the area to the Mayor and MIC. The Municipal Commissioner is the head of the municipal administration and remains accountable to the Mayor, not the MIC. Each member of the MIC is in charge of certain functional departments of the KMC. (Mukhopadhyaya,1999)



<sup>5</sup> Municipal government in Kolkata was established in 1726. After independence from the British in 1947, the Calcutta (now Kolkata) Corporation was superseded; to be returned after the CPI (M) government came into power in 1977.

<sup>6</sup> Eight to ten municipal wards usually making up a borough



Expansion of short forms used in diagram: Mun Commissioner- Municipal Commissioner, BC- Borough Committee, DCO- District Conservancy Officer, HO- Health Officer, Exec. engg- Executive Engineer

## **Figure 2: Relation between different structures of governance**

This administration system ensures that elected politicians have a strong involvement and powers in the running of the city, tempering bureaucratic powers with political considerations. The MIC system has brought political responsibility into the functioning of the KMC. This ensures that the political culture of the city affects the working of the KMC as well as the city government's bureaucratic culture.

### **A theoretical insight into political culture:**

Political culture describes the attitudes, beliefs and rules that guide a political system, which are determined jointly by the history of the system and the experiences and ideologies of its members (Abercombie et.al.2000) If the history of a system presents trends of elite domination, bureaucratic hegemony and non-elite marginalisation through an organisational culture run on hierarchy and authority, then this also affects the ideologies and experiences of its members. Hence, political culture tends to be self-perpetuating unless there is a conscious effort by the elites to alter its terms.

Political culture is a composite of High Politics comprising of elements of formal party politics such as party organisational structure, party discipline etc; as well as of everyday politics. Here I differentiate between everyday politics and High Politics in the way that 'politics' and 'Politics' are differentiated in the political science literature. Everyday politics is the politics behind everyday interactions of formal channel members with the public and what it reflects about their inherent attitudes towards people from different social and economic backgrounds at times when not controlled overtly by an ideology and in an explicitly Political situation (such as in a political party meeting). Behaviour under the direction of a defined political ideology in a defined political arena and for a defined political end- in other words -under the framework of High Politics, is different from the behaviour influenced by everyday politics. When present in situations of High Politics, subjects have a *consciousness* of being under the influence of a political ideology. It is not to say that a Political ideology may not be internalised by a party member and start influencing the politics of their everyday interactions. However, the probability of party ideology impacting everyday praxis would be dependant on the extent to which the ideology is known and understood by the political party member. In this paper both aspects of the political culture- that emanating from High Politics and that from everyday politics is considered.

Political culture is thus a combination of the formal aspects of institutional behaviour as predicated by High Politics and the informal aspects of it as seen in everyday politics. Opportunities for accessing the formal channel may be available in theory, but it is often the informal aspects of the relationships between public authorities and non-state actors which generate trust and norms of reciprocity essential for the non-state actors accessing the formal channel. It has been shown that where the formal channel members and the non-state actors share similar characteristics and expectations, there is easier 'closure' of issues and opportunities of engagement (Maloney et. al., 2000), raising the possibility of discursive coalitions between socially similarly positioned bureaucrats, politicians and the community elites. This can also result in the formal channel having clientelistic or semiclientelistic relations with non-elite actors unable to break into these coalitions (Fox, 1994, 1996). These elements of the political culture of Kolkata are explored in the following section

#### **Political History of West Bengal and its implications for political culture:**

West Bengal has been governed by the Left Front government led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) - the CPI(M) without a break since 1977. The Left Front describes itself as

*A coalition of democratic and progressive forces- not all of whom are Marxists- under the leadership of the CPI(M).* (Basu, 1997 :xxii)

Before the Front came to power in West Bengal, there were two periods of rule by a United Front government- a coalition of parties led by the CPI(M) in 1967 and 1969 (Williams, 2001). These were the first instances of non-Congress rule in West Bengal since 1947. The Congress suffered a resounding defeat in the 1977 state elections marking the reversal of fortunes for the Left parties, who came into power) and have stayed in power at the state level since then (Basu, 1997), (Chatterjee, 1997. The relationships between the parties constituting the Left Front<sup>7</sup> are often problematic, with a fair amount of infighting between them. The CPI(M) has held together 10 other like-minded parties in a coalition for 24 years. Due to this long stint of the Left Front in government under the leadership of the CPI(M), the political culture, the bureaucratic discourse, the dominant discourse at the social level, have all been influenced by the class based rationale aggressively articulated and promoted by the Leftists, especially the CPI(M) (Bhattacharya,

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<sup>7</sup> Some of the other Left Front parties are the Revolutionary Socialist party (RSP), Forward Block (FB), Communist Party India (CPI), West Bengal Socialist Party (WBS), and the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), the Forward Bloc (Marxist) (FB-M). (Chaudhuri: 2001)

1998). This is expanded in the section on everyday politics illustrating that this has important consequences for decentralisation initiatives in West Bengal.

Of the emergent parties in West Bengal, the recently formed Trinamool Congress (TC) is posing the biggest challenge to the Left Front. The infighting within the Indian National Congress (INC) in the state ultimately led to a rift within the party, with the emergence in 1996 of the Trinamool Congress, later re-named the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC). The party was formed out of its leader Mamata Banerjee's dissatisfaction with the INC's relations with the Communist Government of West Bengal and the lack of prominence that Bengal affairs got at the INC's national level discussions. A large number of INC members defected to the TC in support of its Bengal focussed, anti- Leftist agenda. The Trinamool's agenda has been defeat of the Leftists in the state and

*ending once and for all the oppression and tyranny of the Communists.* (from Mamata Banerjee's speech [www.trinamoolindia.org](http://www.trinamoolindia.org))

In the 1998 and 1999 national elections, the TC allied with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and was part of the BJP lead National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which formed the national government. Concurrently, the TC won all the four national parliamentary seats from Kolkata in these elections. In state wide municipal elections in West Bengal held in 2000, the TC won the prestigious Kolkata Corporation from the Left Front. The TC has emerged as the largest opposition party in West Bengal after the last elections. Since then the TC has participated in and broken successive alliances with the BJP and INC at the state level. For the national Parliamentary Elections to be held in 2004, the TC<sup>8</sup> is part of the BJP coalition. In all these shifts and alliances, one thing has remained constant- the TC's antipathy towards the CPI(M). The TC's effort has always been to align with any party that would help in defeating the Left Front; even unsuccessfully trying to float a 'grand alliance' of all non- Left parties before the West Bengal state legislature elections in 2001.

The fact that the state capital's municipality, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) is run by the TC while the state is run by the Left Front has important repercussions for decentralisation. The acrimony between the two political groups has lead to the KMC and the state government

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<sup>8</sup> For the 2004 parliamentary elections, Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress merged with the Nationalist Congress Party led by P A Sangma in March 2004 saying that it would help the Trinamool to spread its presence outside West Bengal.

passing the responsibility of decentralising Kolkata's municipal governance onto each other and also hampering the decentralisation efforts of either level. This is elaborated later in the paper.

### **Political culture of Kolkata:**

#### **High Politics:**

Any initiative like the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA in West Bengal, attempting to disturb the status quo in the socio-political sphere has to grapple with the uneasy interaction between the entrenched political culture of the Left and the emerging one of the non-Left parties. This has already been seen in Kolkata, resulting in disturbances in the political status quo, in participation of the general public in governance and effects on the bureaucratic culture of the city government. The CPI(M) as the leading member of the Left Front coalition largely defines its activities and policies (Chatterjee, 1997). Hence the political culture of the Leftists is discussed with specific reference to CPI(M). The non-Left political culture is discussed with reference to the TC as it is the non-Left party of most visibility in Kolkata and West Bengal. The aspects of High Politics being considered are those, which illustrate how the parties have penetrated the polity and bureaucracy in Kolkata. These issues include the support bases of the parties, the party structures, their mechanisms of penetration in the polity and party discipline.

#### ▪ Support Base:

The Left Front gained its hold over the people of West Bengal through its land reform programme called 'Operation Barga' in the rural districts, aimed at redistribution of excess land owned by rich peasants among rural sharecroppers and landless. This created a strong rural support base for the Left Front, which it has maintained and cultivated to date. (Basu, 1997), (Kohli, 1987), (CPI(M) Programme, 2001). The Left Front and CPI(M)'s support base in urban areas is weaker and they have been losing hold of municipal areas, as demonstrated by the Left's defeat in municipal polls in 1995 and 2001 in several areas of the state (Bhattacharya, 1998), (State Election Commission, 2001).

The TC has a growing support base, especially among the middle classes. It is trying to emulate the Left's organisational structure, which has good mass penetration, as well as attempting to create its support base in rural areas of the state. In their study of rural West Bengal, Vernon describes this as

*The TC felt that its interests are best served by intervening around the issue of land conflicts between share croppers and land owners- an area which has traditionally been a centrepiece of*

*CPI-M campaigns in West Bengal and an important basis of that party's Assembly election victories since 1977. (Rogaly cited in Vernon) Although the TC has made inroads into the labouring class, its main constituency is drawn from the middle class (Vernon, R. et. al, 2003 : 13)*

The TC has been quite successful in capturing power at the municipal level and has a hold over number of urban local bodies, including the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC).

▪ Party structures and mechanisms of penetration:

The CPI(M) has maintained a hold over its support base through an impressive party organisation working under a strongly centralised party discipline. The CPI(M) includes party structures comprising of its core members at different levels of the party hierarchy as well as workers of the mass organisations associated with it. The CPI(M) has a hierarchical structure of party committees<sup>9</sup>. The wing closest to the people is the branch or 'shakha' of the party, followed by the local, zonal, district, state and central levels (Biswas, 2002), (Williams, 2001). The functions of the branch, the 'living link with the people', include winning the masses for the political and organisational decisions of the party (CPI(M) Constitution, 2000).

One of the main factors considered while accepting party workers from the mass organisations into core membership of the party is the closeness of their links with the general public of their area (Biswas, 2002). Thus one of the party's mechanisms to penetrate the local polity is its recruiting of only such persons into its membership, who have strong local networks and will actively propagate the party's message and image in their locality. This mechanism has been very successful with the Left Front having polled 53% of votes in the 1990 Kolkata municipal elections and 45% in the 1995 elections in Kolkata (Ghosh, 1996). In municipal elections in 1995, statewide the Left Front combine polled more than 60% votes in 3 of 14 districts and more than 40% of votes in 6 more districts for which data was available (ibid).

This party structure creates a strong presence at the grassroots level through mass organisations like farmers' groups or 'Kisan Sabhas' at the rural level; and at the urban level through workers' wings, women's wings and youth wings. The party has left hardly any institutions of importance beyond its penetration and control. The party's 'design of control' extends to all social platforms in West Bengal such as literacy campaigns, the science movement, the library movement etc. to

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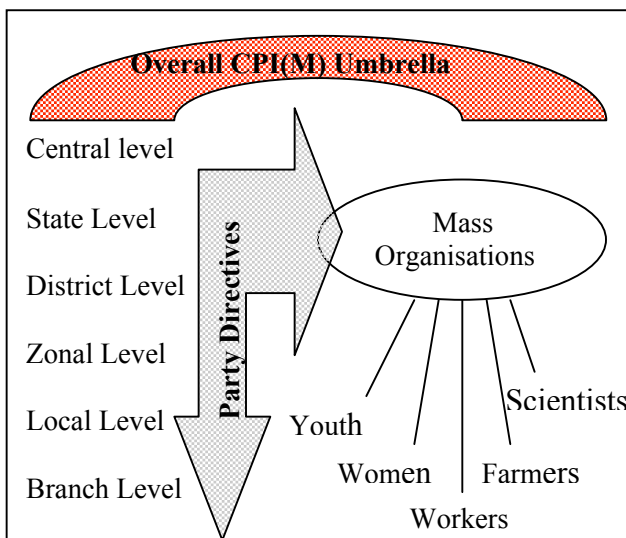
<sup>9</sup> The CPI(M) has its organisation in most of the states of the Indian Union. It has 19 State Committees and 7 state organising committees. Party units in the states are guided by the respective state committees, who have under them district, zonal, area and local committees. (www.cpim.org)

maximise its penetration in the polity (Bhattacharya, 1998). Even though the party overtly professes that these mass organisations are not political bodies, yet also ensures that core members of the party are part of the mass organisations, involved in guiding them according to the party's central commands (CPI(M) Constitution, 2000). These mass organisations are also utilised in canvassing for the party during elections (Chatterjee, 1997). The link of the mass organisations with expanding the support base of the CPI(M) becomes clear from the statement of a West Bengal Planning Board member and long time member of the CPI,

*The actual conception for having these wings in the party is to cultivate a vote bank. Overt discourse of the party about these structures was -bringing these people into the mainstream and entering into their specific worlds and understanding their problems. (ANB and SB, 21.3.03, Kolkata)<sup>10</sup>*

The TC is also trying to emulate this and has set up its own mass organisations for youth, students, women, a trade union for workers, for teachers, a cell for minorities, for scheduled caste and tribe members, a municipalities a panchayat cell ([www.trinamoolindia.org](http://www.trinamoolindia.org)). The party structure has a national committee, a state working committee and district level committees. A TC councillor in Kolkata as describes the structure as

*The TC party structure is there at Block or Ward level (in urban areas). These two are the same thing. Block is used at party level while the word Ward is used in the Corporation. There is a president, a vice president, a general secretary etc. at the block level. After the block level there are two other levels- the Zila (District) committee and the Pradesh (State) level. There are representatives at these two levels also. There are focus wings for the youth, women, students, workers etc (AB, 10.4.03, Kolkata)*



However, the structures of the TC are much less organised than that of the CPI(M), with a number of TC members blaming this for their inability to capture the polity the way the Left has managed. The TC runs on the charisma of its leader and unlike the CPI(M), is a leader-focussed party rather than an organisation focussed party (from fieldwork). The difference in the public presentation of the two parties is based on

<sup>10</sup> Wherever extracts from the field interviews have been used the names of people have been camouflaged to protect their identity, followed by the interview date and place.

**Fig. 3: Diagrammatic Representation of CPI(M) Organisational Structure**

the fiery, charismatic style of the leader and cadres of the TC, contrasted with the organised, monolithic self-presentation of the CPI(M).

Having been in power at the state level since 1977, the Left Front, especially CPI(M), has power to distribute government patronage to its supporters, which it does in many instances. This has lured large numbers of people into joining up and is illustrated by the fact that 80% of the party members joined the party after it came into power in 1977 (Chatterjee, 1997). Though it is not to say that it is only the party supporters who are beneficiaries of the party's largesse, but Kohli (1987) and Williams (2001) point to how areas with larger numbers of CPI(M) supporters appropriate more benefits than that obtained by other areas.

The extracts below from the field study bear out this aspect of the CPI(M)'s political culture. The first extract is from an interview with an activist who comments on CPI(M)'s politics of getting things done for increasing its support base. In the second extract, an old CPI(M) party member rues the fact that now CPI(M) cadres join the party with the mentality of grabbing what they can get because of this affiliation.

*CPI(M) has this 'paie dewar rajniti' (politics of making things available by force for people)-being the "Robin Hood" for the poor. A state of politics which depends on grabbing goods from the well off to appease the voter block in focus- to be the champion and deliver it (the goods or service) for them (VR, 14.3.03, Kolkata)*

*Many bad elements are coming to the CPI(M) and are giving a bad name to the CPI(M) now. We can't imagine this greedy mentality of the new generation. We used to go to jail etc., sacrificed so much. Now everyone is only interested in what they can get for themselves (SB, 24.3.03, Kolkata)*

Kolkata newspapers also repeatedly report instances where the CPI(M) tries to protect its party members from prosecution when they commit a crime (The Statesman, The Telegraph, Ananda Bajara Patrika). Taking one of numerous examples, The Telegraph reported on the CPI(M)'s maxim of "Party First" which has led to instances of suppression of cases against and of ignoring criminal activities of party members, as in two separate instances of rapes carried out by CPI(M) cadres (12.3.03, 21.2.03).

The TC also mirrors the Left's strategy for increasing their support base by distributing benefits and patronage to their own supporters while ignoring and sometimes actively opposing the claims of people who don't support them. This was repeated by many of the people interviewed during

the fieldwork. In the first extract, a CPI(M) supporter complains of discrimination by a TC councillor. In the second extract, a slum dweller in Kolkata complains about the partisan attitude of the local TC councillor.

*We face problems with the Trinamul Congress Corporation because the local councillor doesn't cooperate with us. He doesn't give us time, though at the surface level he talks nicely with us. Also he is not doing any work for our ward. Reason for this is that most people of the ward have a Left leaning mentality* (PB 20.2.03, Kolkata)

*The councillor also doesn't help us because we are largely CPI(M) supporters and he says you are not our people, why should I help your basti (slum)? Some basti people now support the TC because the TC is in power in the Corporation now..* (BL, 8.1.03, Kolkata)

Thus, the impact of political affiliations reflects in the way that the Corporation functions and the way parties pass on patronage and benefits. The identity of the claimant as supporting a certain party shows itself to be important to the way elected councillors react to a claimant or group of claimants. The fieldwork extract below supports this through the statement of a group of poor people evicted from their home, who claim this happened

*because we are simple people without power and no political party has been able to bring us to a 'colour' (bring us into their fold). Therefore parties got angry on us and tried to take revenge this way.* (HF 22.10.02, Kolkata )

This shows why people find it beneficial in belonging to or supporting a party as opposed to making their claims through the formal government channels such as the Ward Committees etc.

- Party structures in Kolkata and their function as quasi government parallel channels.

An important aspect of the CPI(M)'s political culture is that its mass organisations have so penetrated the polity and bureaucracy that they often act as the 'brokers' for peoples' claims, acting as the non-formal channels through which public claim making occurs. Their ability to influence and interfere in the bureaucracy's work has given these channels a quasi- formal status. These observations were re-affirmed during the fieldwork, as well as from Veron et. al's study of rural West Bengal (2003). They found that it was customary for CPI(M) party cadres and organisations to assist the local bureaucracy, resulting in the party encroaching on the functions of the local administration, thus blurring boundaries between state and society. They analysed that this strategy could deepen poor peoples' dependency on the party, broadening scope for



political favouritism. They also found that people gave up trying to bypass this ‘political society’, seeing it as futile to go directly to the formal administration (Vernon et. al, 2003).

The CPI(M) itself encourages its members to use the municipal administrative structures to increase the party’s visibility and relationship with the public. This is apparent from this exhortation to its party members by the CPI(M) in its party literature-

*It is the organisational responsibility of our party members to utilise the administration for the good of the people....The administrative structures of the government have been democratised to increase the interaction of the public with the party. It is important to utilise these arrangements properly. If the party is unaware of the peoples’ benefits, problems, needs, claims, proposals and advice then the government administration running under the aegis of the party will also not function well.... This is a crucial activity from the organisational point of view. (Biswas, 2002: 85)*

In this context the working of the Nagarik Committees<sup>11</sup> (NCs) of urban West Bengal is particularly interesting. As described by CPI(M) members,

*Nagarik Committee was created to improve citizen’s lives. Without taking any party’s name, cutting across party barriers and with citizens cooperation the Nagarik Committees were made.... (The Nagarik Committee deals with) roads, lights, drainage, water, and transportation etc.... To develop areas and increase citizens’ participation (in the running of their own areas), these are the roles of Nagarik Committees. (DB, TG , 6.1.03, Kolkata)*

This statement in conjunction with the party’s directives to its members shows that NCs intervene in jobs meant for local municipalities. This, combined with their patronage networks make them appear to local people as easier to access, also because parties co-opt the non-political options available. From fieldwork interviews in Kolkata it emerged that a large proportion of people preferred approaching party channels like NCs directly rather than going to the local administration. Despite being conscious of the NCs’ political identity, they felt that party channels had more influence and control over the bureaucrats and local councillors

*We have not gone to the Mayor-in-Council members etc. People don’t trust government officials. They believe the political party is the only which can do things. (CP 19.2.03, Kolkata)*

As Vernon et.al. showed in their study of rural West Bengal, most poor households rely upon their party patrons for access to many government projects and schemes. These households are

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<sup>11</sup> The structure for NCs is as follows: 1 state legislature assembly seat makes 1 zone with 6/7 wards. Each ward has its own NC. Each zone has its zonal level NC. District level NC comes after zone, after which is the state level. Most Left parties have adopted this structure (PS, 6.4.03)

aware of their disadvantaged position in relation to rent-seeking forces in political society but are unable to rebel against this due to their reliance on the party structures (Vernon et. al, 2003). This was also observed in the fieldwork for this study.

These observations, coupled with the statements of the party members about the NCs, support the case put earlier that the party structures end up behaving like quasi-formal channels and become an added layer of politically coloured distance between the citizens and the local government channels. These increase the dependence of citizens on the party channel and extract costs from them by way of requiring compulsory participation in party events and loyalty to the party. An additional drawback of party channels is their uneven effectiveness in the city. The level of support the NC got from the municipal channels and elected councillors varied from ward to ward. TC Councillors did not give much credence to the NC in their ward as it was not elected by the people. This was mirrored in those Borough administrative offices where the TC was the dominant party. Here the municipal officials too did not attach much importance to the NC and other CPI(M) mass organisations. The case was very different in the Left dominated Boroughs and in Left councillor's wards as is illustrated by an ex-councillor's statement regarding this relation between the NCs and the Left councillors.

*Because the NC is Left-oriented therefore the amount of help and co-operation between the NC and a Left councillor is high. In other areas (this) is not much because other party councillors may not agree and think that the NC is trying to dictate him/her. (PS 6.4.03, Kolkata)*

Thus mass organisations behave like claim making channels parallel to municipal channels, and also provide party patronage to the people using them. They thus effectively reduce the importance of governmental channels of claim making while extracting costs from people using party channels. Having looked at the behaviour of party channels, the paper now turns to the municipal channels to see how far the considerations of political culture impact the bureaucratic culture and functioning of the municipal channels.

▪ Impact of political identity and political culture on bureaucratic culture:

The attitude of Borough officials towards party mass organisations like the NC varies with the party in majority at the Borough level. In the extract below, the chairman of a Borough dominated by the TC denies giving any special preference to NCs, in opposition to his colleague in a Left dominated Borough.

*Nagarik Committee is a party body. No legal status is given to the NC given by us. They have no right to be entertained by us because of their political backing. Because BXII chairman is a*

*CPI(M) man- therefore he was praising the NC. He was talking about the Nagarik Committee-Borough Committee link but NC has no rights regarding this...No special preference is given to the Nagarik Committee by us. (AB, 03. 03, Kolkata)*

Similarly an NC member reiterates below, the impact of the political identity of the claimant on the response of officials.

*We are sometimes not able to proceed because we need councillors & Mayor-in-Council's co-operation. When CPI (M) Board was there in the past, then the Corporation officials were more co-operative than now because of the Left parties running the Corporation then. (PB 20.2.03, Kolkata)*

This shows how party structures and political identity of claimants influence the attitude of bureaucrats and thus affect their working. The clientelism existing between bureaucrats and party people ensures that the bureaucrats respond to a claim makers based on their party affiliation and this response changes with change in political party in power. This seemed verified by the few bureaucrats interviewed during the fieldwork. They were all quite supportive of their political bosses, said little against them, and if did, in very diplomatic tones. The lower level bureaucrats- at Borough level who were in daily contact with councillors and local politicians- seemed closer to the politicians than the bureaucrats in the Headquarters. The Higher-level bureaucrats, were able to occasionally resist the influence of politicians. However, as it appeared from some interviews with municipality trade union leaders, the bureaucrats just show camaraderie and links with their current political boss and may be ready to switch sides and become friendly with their next political boss, as the politicians come and go. A borough level official indicated by the following statement, the compulsion of the bureaucracy to stay on good terms with their political bosses irrespective of which party is in power,

*We as government employees will always say that the situation has become better and the speed of work has increased. (SEE 13.3.03, Kolkata)*

Thus, the bureaucratic culture gets affected by the power and privilege equations of the political party in power- both at local and state government levels, also seen in the case of Vernon et. al's study of rural West Bengal. (2003). This marginalises the effectiveness of formal claim making channels further. This point will be further illustrated in the paper. Thus the effectiveness of a decentralising initiative like the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA, with a focus on greater inclusion of people in governance and increasing the accessibility of formal channels, is reduced by such a political

culture strongly affecting the bureaucratic culture. The paper now turns to further aspects of political culture that affect the implementation of such initiatives.

- Party discipline and organisation:

The discussion of party structure is incomplete without describing party discipline, especially in the case of Left parties, which binds this structure together. Chatterjee describes the success of the CPI(M) on its projection as a party of ‘discipline and development’ (Chatterjee, 1997). Its organisational arrangement is both centralised and decentralised- with decision making power being concentrated- but modifiable at local level based on knowledge and initiative. Atul Kohli has a positive view of the party’s discipline, crediting the balance created by dissipation of power among the various wings of leadership on the one hand, with a unifying party umbrella on the other hand, in being able to limit power conflicts and disagreements at the top (Kohli, 1987) Partha Chatterjee agrees with this conclusion partially, describing the nature of this discipline as an ethic in which the ideals of scientific knowledge, of bureaucratic rationality and of the efficacy of the structure and system are taken with utmost seriousness. This discipline is derived from the principles of Democratic Centralism described by the party as

*...centralised leadership based on inner-party democracy and democracy under the guidance of the centralised leadership. (CPI(M) Constitution, 2000: 7)*

Under such a system, there is a ‘line of control’ established with the lower party organisations carrying out decisions and directives of the higher party organs. Though there is a system of lower party structures voicing their opinion to higher party structures, there is no compulsion for higher levels to follow these opinions in formulating binding party directives. Lower party organs are however bound to follow the directives of higher levels. The drawbacks of this are explained by a CPI(M) member,

*The Communist Party is run by democratic centralism -which is Lenin’s ideology. This means that all upper posts of the party are democratically elected. Once elected, you must obey them. In a cell, you are able to express your opinion, but once the cell’s decision is taken you have to follow it. It is very centralised functioning. Here when you think in terms of decentralisation, every region has its own peculiarity but the party upper level decisions are based on an average condition (ANB, 21.3.03, Kolkata)*

Thus, in practice there is a dichotomous denial of specific local realities, which instead are addressed using centralised party directives based on average conditions. The CPI(M) being a party of strong centralised structure and discipline, is inherently undemocratic in its functioning,

despite the emphasis on democracy in the party's programme and rules. The impact of the Leninist-Stalinist political theory that informs the beliefs of the CPI(M) inherently reduces the scope for democratic participation by people in governance in the state (Bhattacharyya, 1998).

This, combined with the corruption of the rank and file of the CPI(M) make it difficult for intra-party decentralised functioning, also negatively affecting the party's support, in practice, for decentralisation initiatives for the general polity. The extract below, of an interview with a State Planning Commission member illustrates both these facts.

*It is a monarchical pattern of functioning of CPIM's politics. The outgoing leaders suggest their replacement panel (in party committees) and people either vote for that panel or not. Most people vote for the panel because they are scared to not do so. Hence it is no longer democratic. CPI(M) thinking is against decentralisation inherently. Example: when we tried to decentralise planning to lower than block level in rural areas, CPI(M) asked us –“Can the lower levels do planning?” We said “yes they can”. Medinipur Zila Committee decided that not just at block level but village people would do the planning. Then I heard the party people saying “if village people do the planning, then what will happen to us?” They were worried that where will our power come from? Then they stopped village level planning. (ANB, 3.03, Kolkata)*

The inner functioning of the Left parties affects the decentralisation agenda since the parties have been in power for long and have deeply penetrated the polity, causing their functioning style to be imbibed by the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy has got used to receiving centralised commands from the party bosses. Thus, this has effectively centralised the political and bureaucratic culture of Kolkata and West Bengal. In such a scenario, for municipal officials to accept decentralisation, for Left councillors to propagate decentralisation and participation of the public in governance, would need to overcome this culture of centralised command and functioning.

Further, the structure and discipline in the CPI(M) which Kohli found salutary, does not prevent the emergence of negative tendencies like corruption, dissidence, self serving greed and a degree of factionalism in the party members (Chatterjee,1997), (Williams,2001). Williams bolsters this view, adding that sporadic corruption-weeding drives were necessitated in the party during his field study, demonstrating the prevalence of such practices in the party. The most vivid examples of the party's breakdown in ideological commitment and its electoral greed are the violence and tactics of intimidation used by CPI(M) workers during elections to ensure the party's support base. (numerous newspaper reports and websites)

These things indicate the gap between CPI(M)'s party discipline, its theoretical emphasis on democracy and decentralisation and the reality of its practice. This gap weakens disciplinary barriers to autocratism in the party and results in reduced democracy in the party cadres' dealing with the public. The efforts of corrupt party cadres are targeted at power accumulation, inherently antithetical to decentralisation. Another factor that prevents the CPI(M) functioning as a party of true decentralisation, is its emphasis on vanguardism (Vernon et. al., 2003). This is a political philosophy mandating a vanguard composed of party members leading the public in the revolution to establish socialism. Though this reformist goal of the CPI(M) has been altered by the party's own admission, yet the emphasis remains on party members acting as the vanguard for common people. The inherent opposition to decentralisation in vanguardism is demonstrated by a party member's critique

*The criteria should have been to make the working class self-sufficient, make them the vanguard and step back- an empowerment ideology. This does not happen now because working class dependence on party leaders is good for votes. (ANB 21.3.03, Kolkata)*

From various media reports and field observations, it was seen that unlike the CPI(M)'s organised party dictates, (howsoever flawed and non-participatory for the rank and file of the party), the TC's party structures are ruled by the dictates of only their leader, Mamata Banerjee. There is little theoretical grounding to the party's functioning comparable to that of the Left parties which function, at least on paper, according to democratic centralism. This has resulted in the TC having a very centralised functioning. The Statesman newspaper reported dissatisfaction among grassroots level TC workers alleging that

*Miss Mamata Banerjee was working in the style of the Congress by forming committees with her chosen men, disregarding the opinion of grassroots-level worker (The Statesman, 20.10.03).*

The TC seems to have one overarching agenda- that of overthrowing the Leftist government. In this pursuit, the party has changed political partners as dissimilar as the overtly secular INC to the overtly non-secular BJP, showing a lack of ideological commitment to any other agenda. This was reinforced by the party's attempt at forming a grand alliance of mutually incompatible non-Left parties to overthrow the Communists in the 2001 state legislature elections in West Bengal.

*Even Mamata, for all her fiery self-righteousness, has no programme, no principled agenda, except a pathological hatred of the CPM (sic). (Kishwar, 1999)*

There are many schisms within the party due to this centralised functioning, especially between the senior leaders and Mamata Banerjee. She has a record of dictating the working of the party,

even causing the mayor of Kolkata (from the TC), to overturn decisions taken and implemented by the KMC. This was exemplified through several cases in 2003 ranging from a forced overturning by Mamata Banerjee of water and other taxes imposed by the KMC for increasing its revenue base<sup>12</sup>; to protests led by her against evictions by the TC ruled KMC of squatters living on the banks of a drainage canal named Tolly Nallah<sup>13</sup>.

*The functioning of the Calcutta (sic) Municipal Corporation, which is run by her party, is often held hostage to the Trinamool shenanigan. The Mayor of Kolkata, Mr. Subrata Mukherjee, would thus find himself at odds with members of his own council, who defy him in her (Mamata Banerjee's) name. Worse still important development schemes or administrative steps are sacrificed at the altar of the leaders' personality clashes. (The Telegraph, 1.4.03)*

Referring to the embarrassing opposition between two factions of the TC over the issue of the Tolly Nallah evictions in Kolkata in 2003, a TC councillor explained the workings of the party as

*In TC there is no complete planning of strategies. The reaction of the two groups was spontaneous. Our party's and the Corporation's split was not a thought out strategy... Ours is a one-person vote- whatever Mamata says we all agree to. (AB-10.4.03, Kolkata)*

This ends up sending a confused message to the polity and the bureaucrats in the KMC about the intentions and target of the party. The TC has a track record similar to the CPI(M) of promising grand civic projects to the Kolkata public before elections to ensure votes. Thus, the TC has its own focus on votes and uses these kinds of mechanisms, often different (and sometimes similar) to the Left's mechanisms, to penetrate the polity and increase its support base. The political culture of the TC is symbolised by the fiery personality of its leader, who takes to the streets calling upon citizens' support at injustice perceived by her on any section of the polity, though the TC does profess to have a pro-poor focus ([www. trinamoolindia.org](http://www.trinamoolindia.org)). However, the lack of clarity in the party's agenda is seen from the fact that despite his party professing to have a pro-poor focus, a councillor from the TC in Kolkata felt that

*our party's focus group (for votes) is the middle class and above. The votes of the lower classes were with the CPM, are with it and will remain with the CP(M) (AB, 10.4.03, Kolkata)*

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<sup>12</sup> The water tax imposed by the mayor in 2002 was part of the KMC's drive to increase revenues. Mamata Banerjee forced the mayor to withdraw this 'anti-people' tax in 2003 by threatening the TC lead KMC Board with dissolution, as she did not want to alienate the traditionally urban support base of the party.

<sup>13</sup> Tolly Nallah evictions had become an issue causing a schism in the TC. The KMC administration was engaged in evictions ordered by the TC mayor, while Mamata Banerjee- supporting the cause of the squatters- opposed this with some TC cadres. Ultimately the KMC was successful in the evictions.

Thus, the TC's organisational structure and discipline indicate an inherent centralisation and ideological confusion in the party. This is not conducive to inspiring confidence about the party among the bureaucrats of the state, long used to a stable Leftist government. This inherently reduces the efficacy of the officials, lacking a sense of political direction from the TC. Further, the centralised political culture of the TC reinforces the centralisation that the bureaucratic culture of the state inherited from the Leftist governments in the KMC. These factors are thus not conducive to the decentralisation and inclusiveness agenda of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA.

The TC members are also show corruption and greed similar to the Leftist party members. This is reported in numerous newspapers in Kolkata, and reinforced due to the TC's ideological vacuum. Similar to the Leftists, this corruption and greed of the TC rank and file is not conducive for ushering in decentralisation initiatives, which try to increase public inclusion in governance. The 74<sup>th</sup> CAA is further weakened by the suspicion expressed by many TC councillors towards the state's conformity legislation, since it was enacted by the Leftists. They were unwilling to accept the state government's directives regarding the law, with a number of them stalling its implementation, as they thought of it as intrusive and unnecessary. The manoeuvrings of the TC councillors to bypass these requirements and co-opt the provisions of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA will be illustrated later in the paper, where the status of WCs and reservation for women is discussed.

So far the paper has argued how despite surface differences in elements of High Politics in the political culture of both parties, such as their public presentation and organisational structures, the inherent party discipline and organisation of both the Left and non-Left parties are antithetical to decentralisation. Their impact on the bureaucratic culture of the state has also been demonstrated to be not conducive to increasing the accessibility of governance structures for the public.

The following section looks at the elements of everyday politics in the state's political culture. This starts with looking at the membership profile of the state's political parties and their attitude towards the identity of the public accessing the municipality. Governance processes themselves generate relational networks, which may cut across or draw together and interlink the relational webs of communities and people (Healy, 1997). As seen in the section on political culture previously, there is the possibility that constituents of the municipal channels may form coalitions with social actors having identity elements similar to theirs and being part of similar relational networks, resultantly being exclusionary towards other actors. This would show the failure of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA's inclusionary agenda predicated on factors other than of High Politics.



### **Everyday Politics in Kolkata**

- Membership profile of the parties:

The profile of members in a party is an important factor in determining their political practice. Many of the inherent biases of the members arising from their social identity may play out in the everyday practice of politics, away from the scrutiny of Political ideology and emphases of High Politics. A playing out of class and other identity-based biases in an unconscious (and sometimes conscious) way in everyday political practice was observed in the fieldwork.

In his study of CPI(M) politics, Atul Kohli disagrees with the fact that social identity has much of an impact on the CPI(M)'s members. He agrees that the social backgrounds of political representatives are important as they sensitise us to the interests these actors may bring to their political roles. However, he states that the more incorporated political actors are into the party, the less significant their social backgrounds become as guides to their political behaviour. Since the CPI(M) is a 'reasonably well-disciplined party', hence Kohli says that party members are more likely to comply with their leadership's directives (Kohli, 1987). However, as Glyn Williams and Partha Chatterjee both observe, the party has attracted large numbers of opportunistic and self interested persons, with commitment to party ideology conditional on its fulfilling their personal interests (Williams, 2001), (Chatterjee, 1997). Further, the problem with Kohli's argument is that he has looked at only the arena of High Politics- at the behaviour of party members in a defined Political situation and for a defined Political end, and not at the politics of their everyday interaction.

The knowledge about these everyday interactions is important to understand the issue of peoples' inclusion in governance, especially in a political culture containing the quasi-formal claim making channels provided by the Left parties to the citizens. Inclusion, as a project is not just achieved by Political ideologies, howsoever inclusive, dictated by parties. They are also impacted by the attitudes towards inclusion of the people who make up the governance system. This system in this case of Kolkata is affected by the quasi-formal claim making channels provided by the CPI(M) as well as the members of the TC. Therefore, studying the politics of everyday interactions of the CPI(M) and of the TC members with the public is important, for which understanding the social profile of the members of these political parties is necessary. Though compliance with party directives may serve the personal goals of the members, it is not a natural progression of logic that, for example, the class focussed ideology of the CPI(M) denying the

relevance of 'primordial loyalties' will get translated in equally inclusive and class focussed behaviour of CPI(M) members at all times and in all interactions with the general public.

Bhattacharya (1998) points out to the nature of membership of the CPI(M) showing the virtual absence of any working class element in the municipal boards or committees, predominantly controlled by middle class people. This middle class leadership over micro institutions has parallels in the party units in municipal areas. This ironic middle class domination, of a party that is by discourse for the working classes, was reinforced in the field interviews, adding the dimensions of caste and religious identity to the class identity profiled by Bhattacharya.

*though it (CPIM) is a party claiming to work for the dispossessed, it is actually another organisations of caste Hindus. It is fundamentally far from the Bengali folk. It is another narcissistic project of caste Bengal. Very few lower castes, Scheduled Castes and backward castes have been able to reach leadership or dominant position in the CPI(M). Therefore, caste as an issue has been downplayed by CPIM.... The CPI(M) is completely caste dominated.. CPI(M) is supposed to be largely the champions of the have-nots. CPI(M) is not a communal party but the rank and file of the CPI(M) is communal in its fibre. Muslim leaders are there in the CPI(M), yet Muslims have a strange feel towards the CPI(M)- it is for us yet not us. (VR 14.3.03, Kolkata)*

Statistics regarding the social profile of Left councillors from the 1995 elections of the KMC, support this statement, showing that the councillors were largely higher caste, highly educated and from dominant religious groups. Only three of the sixty nine councillors interviewed by Ghosh were from SC groups and only five from minority religious communities (Ghosh, 1996).

The TC is also composed of primarily middle class members from the dominant religion, Hinduism. The leadership profile shows majority of TC leaders having middle class backgrounds. The alliances that the TC had formed with the communal BJP have alienated the Muslim minority from the party resulting in few members of the TC who are Muslim and low support for the TC from this group. (Ashfaque, 2004), (Times of India 11.2.04), (The Telegraph 28.6.00)

Thus the brief profile of both the CPI(M) and the TC show a similar upper class, upper caste, and religious bias. It would be relevant to see how this impacts the attitude of the councillors from these parties towards the social identities of the claim makers from the public.

- Elements of identity in the city's political culture:

The CPI(M) presents itself as a party of the working classes with an aim to establish socialist society through class struggle. The CPI(M) describes its strategic objective

*... to be achieved by the revolutionary forces in the present stage of the revolutionary movement. The Party sets out a programme which will guide the workers, peasants, all sections of the working people and the progressive, democratic forces in their fight against the ruling classes to achieve People's Democracy as a step towards the goal of a socialist society. (CPI(M) Programme, 2001: 4)*

The theoretical discourse of the communists in West Bengal has tried to couch identity-based social problems such as caste, tribe etc. in a class based logic. In the party's theoretical discourse, the solution for all ills seems to lie in class struggle. This is apparent from its statements about the issues of caste and atrocities on tribal people, in which the CPI(M) using Marxist terminology and discursive patterns says,

*There is no doubt that caste system is the super structure of the society and feudal and semi-feudal sections of society in their own interests are striving hard to maintain this system. Without abolition of feudalism, and semi-feudalism, it will not be possible to transform society to a level where the Indian caste system could be abolished. Even the sufferings of the Scheduled Castes and Schedules Tribes cannot be mitigated without attacking this feudal and semi-feudal landlordism. (Basu, 1997 :98)*

Thus, within West Bengal, the CPI(M)'s theoretical and public presentation of itself as a class-based party has created a political culture that overtly excludes 'primordial loyalties' such as of caste, ethnicity and religion from the overtly accepted political sphere. However, these very elements are covertly used to the party's benefit (Williams, 2001). This use of elements of identity other than (and in combination with) class in a tactical way for electoral success was explained by CPI(M) party activists and a member of the West Bengal State Planning Board interviewed during the fieldwork as part of this study.

*Now caste gets recognition in CPI(M), but they haven't defined any caste based organisation in the party, but use caste and religion in working of politics. For example: (the party) gives SC candidates and Muslim candidates tickets for contesting elections from such areas as are dominated by SCs or Muslims. On the other hand, in our young age we defied religion and talked openly against it. But now there is no such defiance of religion because of two reasons- tactical and practical (ANB and SB, 21.3.03, Kolkata)*

Kohli taking the example of caste, elaborates this use of elements of ID in a tactical way to increase electoral success. He explains that caste and other 'local loyalties' are used by the

CPI(M) while selecting local candidates for elections (Kohli, 1987). For maximising the votes won by a candidate, not only do the candidates need to be appropriate politically, but also attract support based on “primordial loyalties” (ibid). Thus, despite its propaganda to the contrary, the CPI(M) government in West Bengal has shown departures from its pro-poor, class based overt discourse in its political practice. There are religious, caste, ethnic biases that show up in practice (Chatterjee, 1997). Local understandings of the operation of political power draw on these non-class based elements of social identity.

In the fieldwork, this changed emphasis on elements of identity other than class in the Left’s praxis, was also seen to impact their behaviour and attitudes towards the claimants to their party structures and Left Front councillors. This was not just limited to the Left party politicians and members, the TC members and politicians also demonstrated this same bias. The everyday politics in the interactions between party leadership and representatives showed itself to be impacted by the social identity of the party members themselves. Since most of the leadership and councillors are middle class, upper caste as has been previously demonstrated, it was hypothesised that they would have ‘natural’ sympathies to claimants from their own social profile. Several examples of this were observed in the fieldwork.

A typical example outlined here was observed during successive observations of interactions of a middle class Left councillor with claimants at her office. Though she was attentive to them, she displayed a bias against claimants from lower classes through the difference in behaviour towards middle class and lower class claimants. Her attitude became more patronising while talking to lower class people. Further, in the discursive patterns observed when she described her poorer constituents, she naturally linked words like ‘drunkards’, ‘scary’ and other negative stereotypes with poorer people. This was also observed in non-party middle class groups, thus providing evidence to support the hypothesis of discursive coalitions and attitudinal similarities between party councillors and their own social group. (fieldwork observations- HC 12.1.02, 9.2.02, 12.2.02, 13.2.02, 12.4.03, Kolkata)

Similarly, another typical example is seen in the conversations with a TC Ward Committee member from a Kolkata suburb. His comments on the profile of the community in his area demonstrated his own bias as a middle class, upper caste person. He kept stressing that in his area the demographic profile was more uniformly Hindu, with a majority of middle and lower middle class Bengalis resulting in greater community cohesion. He emphasised the low level of

‘outsiders’ in the community, stressing that any minority community person has to adopt to majority community to ‘blend’ in. (PB, 25.2.03, Kolkata) This kind of view of cohesion resulting out of sameness, not tolerance and acceptance, points to class based differentiation, regionalism and religious bigotry. These views were repeatedly encountered among middle class people in the course of the fieldwork.

The link between bureaucratic and political culture was illustrated previously. Hence, the political culture of the Left showing such attitudes towards the social identity of claim makers also affects the bureaucratic culture. Bureaucrats in the fieldwork did not explicitly say anything reflecting a bias when directly questioned about it. However, their comments about social identity like class, caste etc. of the claim makers who come to them reflected these biases arising from their own social position or from their acquired social position as bureaucrats. As explained by a senior bureaucrat, impact of the identity of claimants on bureaucrats depends on the claim in question. People at municipal level are products of the same society and part of the same social system and hence subject to similar prejudices and attitudes as larger society (KCS 28.3.03, London).

Fieldwork observations and interviews with bureaucrats and municipal officials reflected this bias as well. A typical example is that of an engineer at the Borough administration level, whose attitude towards the claimants coming to him depended upon their class. He persisted in calling upper class people ‘high class’, while being dismissive of poorer people as ‘these slum people’ (SJB 13.2.03, Kolkata). In another typical instance, in a focus group conducted with officials and slum dwellers, the officials continuously demonstrated behaviour reflecting their sense of social superiority. They cut in while the slum dwellers were speaking, refused to let them finish and manipulated the conversation trying to dominate it. They also insisted on repeating slowly for the slum dwellers questions put to them even though focus group participants from the slum understood the questions in the first place (RD 28.2.03, Kolkata). Through such attitudes, the officials tried to overtly establish their social and professional superiority over slum dwellers.

The preceding examples thus show, that while the members of Left parties profess only a class-based understanding at a theoretical level, their praxis- tactically as well as arising out of their inherent social biases, shows a different picture. Similar influence of social biases on praxis is also observed in non-Left parties, with the city’s bureaucratic culture mirroring this. In most cases, social identity is able to overcome the political ideology or administrative rationality that these groups ascribe to, bolstered by the fact that political ideology of the Left has got diluted and

corrupted and that of the TC is virtually non-existent. The political and bureaucratic culture of Kolkata demonstrates these biases resulting in coalition formation between the municipal channels and social elites in the city based on identity and similarity. This is illustrated by the following quote by a politician from the Left about Corporation officials in the TC dominated KMC.

*If a person has good contacts with Corporation officials- like has relatives in the Corporation- then it is easy (to complain to the Corporation). Now we have to send a slip in (into the official's office) and sit around for hours. As soon as they know whose people (we are), they don't listen to us ,but make us wait. (SB 24.3.03, Kolkata)*

The formation of seemingly 'natural' coalitions between bureaucrats and middle and upper class people predicated on social identity; and between politicians and their targeted groups based on the vote equations in an area is thus commonly observed. Clearly these coalitions- due to their exclusionary and limiting nature- point to the barriers in the path of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA's success.

Both the High Political culture originating from party ideology and praxis, as well as the everyday politics of the parties and the bureaucrats reflect the tendency for centralisation, for exclusion based on social identity and overarching corruption and greed pushing aside ideological considerations. Hence, the prospects for the inclusion agendas of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA seem dim in this scenario.

- Clashes between the TC and Left and impact on the agenda of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA:

Another negative condition for the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA is the clash between the non-Left parties lead by the TC and the Left parties lead by the CPI(M). Kolkata is the capital of the state with the Leftist state government in physical proximity with the non-Leftist municipal government. The interaction between the KMC and state government is thus much higher than that of any other municipality with the state government in West Bengal. This proximity presents challenges when the parties leading the two levels of government are as antagonistic as the Leftists and the TC. This has negative consequences for the TC administration as it is dependant on the state government for part of its finances and is also subject to the regulations regarding municipal governance of the state government.

Allegations of the TC lead KMC make it seem that as a result of the clash between the CPI(M) at the state level and the TC at the local level, the KMC is not released adequate funds. Further as

seen earlier, this schism plays out in the Boroughs and wards also, where the Left councillors in turn allege that the TC dominated Corporation Board does not co-operate with them, as demonstrated by the statement of this Left councillor

*On the face of it there is no bad behaviour from the party in power, but when it comes to actually delivering stuff to us, we see a lack. The Mayor-in-council members do take sides and favour some over others because of political reasons. The Mayor-in-council members oppose (political opponents) in a hidden way. Example the Mayor in Council member in-charge of Roads said he would supply construction materials etc. to us, but he supplied his own party first. (HC 13.12.02, Kolkata)*

Similarly, a TC councillor complains of the KMC getting a bad deal from the state government.

*Yes there is conflict between local and state government...For example, the local body is supposed to get statutory funds from state government but KMC hasn't got the full amount because of conflict due to party differences. We (KMC) are trying to be self-sufficient. (AB 10.4.03, Kolkata)*

In summary, political considerations of the parties, councillors and officials collude with their inherent social biases to create an exclusionary political culture for those citizens who do not have either the resources emanating from High Politics (i.e. affiliation with a political party) or those that help them negotiate everyday politics in the municipal channels. On paper West Bengal has been very receptive to the idea of decentralisation, as demonstrated through its conformity legislation for the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA and lower level of identity based politicking than in many other Indian states. Yet the city of Kolkata, as representative of urban West Bengal, exhibits the barriers to the inclusionary agenda of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA in the state.

### **Illustrations of 74<sup>th</sup> CAA's inclusion agenda provisions in Kolkata**

#### ▪ Ward Committees and municipal women's reservations in Kolkata

The paper now examines with examples, the outcome of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA's efforts to increase inclusion and make formal claim making accessible to the polity by tracking two of its provisions- Ward Committees and reservation for women councillors. The issues discussed so far about the political and bureaucratic culture will be elaborated in this context to assess their impact on the two provisions of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA in Kolkata. Ward Committees were envisioned as separate apolitical citizens' bodies increasing the points at which the public could make claims and have them forwarded to the municipality. WCs were envisioned to be able to work with the administration, represent peoples' claims as well as assist the elected councillor in doing so. The reservation for women was intended to increase the participation and voice of women in the

municipality, premised on gender solidarity between women councillors and women in the public.

- Ward Committees in Kolkata

Regarding the inclusionary agenda of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA, the West Bengal government mandated to have one WC per ward comprising of a population of approximately 31,000. The government legislated 4 to 14 members in a WC depending on the actual population of the ward (Nagarpalika Network Newsletter, March 2001). Further, West Bengal also legislated for a few seats on the WCs to be reserved for social workers, educationists, cultural workers, women from backward classes (sic) etc (Ghosh, A., 1996).

In the city of Kolkata, ward committees were made compulsory by the TC ruled KMC through a Mayor-In-Council (MIC) recommendation in December 2002. Part of the number of WC members were to be nominated by the councillor and the remaining to be nominated by the Kolkata Municipal Corporation. The MIC recommended the Corporation to submit names of Corporation nominees for the different Ward Committees. However, till the fieldwork was finished in May 2003, a total of 64 WCs had been formed out of a total of 144 wards. The ones that had been formed had not started working by then (PG 9.1.03). The WCs have some nominees of the Corporation and others suggested by the councillor. Usually doctors, engineers, teachers etc. were selected as WC members. The State government was repeatedly pressurising the Corporation to expedite forming Ward Committees and linked release of funds with WC formation to overcome any opposition to these bodies (ibid)

Opposition by councillors cut across party lines demonstrating the reluctance of councillors to increase the access points for the citizens to municipal governance. This opposition was based on fears ranging from loss of power to the WC members, to suspicion of the state government or the municipal government's motives in mandating the WCs. The Left councillors alleged the TC was trying to spy on their activities through the Corporation nominated members. Despite knowing that the state government had mandated the formation of WCs in compliance with the national law, a Left councillor felt that

*Trinamul Congress has floated this idea of Ward Committees, because the TC wants to know what will be happening in each ward. Ward Committees can bypass the councillor because they have a direct link with the Head Office and Borough Offices....Councillors will have to be puppets of Ward Committees, if they are formed. Therefore, we of the Left Front are trying to block their formation. (HC 13.12.02, Kolkata)*



Similarly despite the WC regulation being implemented by their own party in power in the municipality, the TC councillors were also unhappy with the WCs.

*I have not created a ward committee in my ward, because they are useless and interfering things. Our party whips have forced some councillors to form the WCs in their areas....Rajiv Gandhi (the former Prime Minister of India) did not think while formulating the 74th CAA because if one gives too much democracy in India, work won't happen (AB, 3.03, Kolkata)*

The non-political character of the WCs as envisaged by the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA was lost as the councillors tried to offset the influence of the Corporation nominees by putting in nominees from among their own party supporters. This fear of power sharing and manipulations based on political party affiliations illustrates how these WCs lost their purpose as apolitical citizens' bodies working to increase the contact points of an ordinary citizen with the municipality. A TC councillor expressed this fear as follows

*If Ward Committees are there then other people come into the picture apart from the councillor. There will be a loss of power of the councillor. Also there is the possibility of alternate power centres coming up to undermine the councillor's position. In a Ward Committee, some are members put by the councillor, others by the Corporation. Therefore councillors are insecure and against Ward Committee. (RD 27.10.02, Kolkata)*

In a neighbouring municipality near Kolkata, the chairperson of the municipality was able to get the WCs formed and running because he took into account this objection to the apolitical nature of WCs and manipulated the WC rules to make them more acceptable to the councillors.

*We were able to make Ward Committees because councillors were given the complete liberty to select Ward Committee's members. We had said that the councillors could give their own nominations even for municipality nominees. (RG, 6.3.03, Madhyamgram)*

Apart from controlling the Corporation's WC nominations, another tactic to co-opt the WCs employed by Left councillors was their effort to allot the remaining places in the WC to their party supporters, thus converting the WC into an extension of their party. Some Left councillors felt that their party organisations were sufficient to act as a citizens' body and found the WCs to be useless and interfering.

*even though members of Ward Committee are supposed to be non-political, but actually will all be politically motivated individuals. The difference between the Nagarik Committee and the Ward Committee from this angle is that the NC can't do things alone. The NCs have to take councillor*

*along in their work....(On the other hand) Ward Committees can get permissions and clearances direct from the Head Office. The Ward Committees will have lots of power. Therefore we (the Left councillors) think that if surrounding ward councillors, Nagarik Committee and Mahila Sangha (Women's organisations in the party) there, then there is no need for Ward Committee. (HC 13.12.02, Kolkata)*

The bureaucrats of the city also showed a degree of reluctance regarding WCs, especially the lower level bureaucrats who had more public dealings than the higher-level officials. The higher-level officials had a problem with the basic aspect of decentralisation considering it problematic to handle as seems apparent from the extract from an interview with a high-ranking KMC official.

*I have great doubt in India about public participation, because some amount of dictatorship is required to get work done here. Our public is very selfish and everyone looks after their own interest. The public has no overall vision of the city's planning. Public participation is therefore not possible in urban development. It is difficult to do the things in democratically in this country. (GM, 25.2.03, Kolkata)*

Thus from the evidence provided in this section it is reasonable to conclude that the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA's agenda of increasing the accessibility of municipal governance for people through the Ward Committees is facing hurdles in the shape of the political culture of the parties in power at the state and municipal level and their schisms with each other. The politicians from both Left and non-Left parties are attempting to co-opt the WCs and make them toothless as instruments of decentralised governance. The bureaucratic culture is largely in agreement with the political culture, though there are rare exceptions in officials in the Corporation who think that these WCs, if constituted properly, could help reduce political interference in their work.

- Reservation for women in Kolkata Municipal Corporation

As described earlier, the state went to elections with reserved seats in the local elections of 1993-94. Having already introduced reservations for women in the three-tier panchayat system for rural areas even before the 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA, the extension of reservations for women into urban areas did not create the social discomfort that it did in some other states.

In Kolkata, the overtly class-based discourse ascribed to by the Leftists on a theoretical plane denies the importance of gender as an element of interest or focus. This was observed even in the functioning of the women councillors of the Left. They accepted the fact that their presence in the municipality increased the profile of women in governance. However, in their work they did not

raise any questions in the KMC Board meetings that addressed the strategic gender interests<sup>14</sup> of their constituency women, and occasionally raised issues pertaining to practical gender interests. This was observed by studying the municipal records of the KMC Board meetings for the period from 2000 to 2003. Thus the presence of the women councillors did not significantly raise awareness of gender related issues in governance. The level of gender solidarity exhibited by women councillors also varied, with some of them denying that women of their constituency could have any problems or issues different than men. Their focus was the poverty of the people in their ward and at the maximum extended to the issues related to municipal provisions for women's health and maternity.

Further, the women councillors were often 'dummy councillors'- merely holding the councillorship for a male relative to take back once the reservation for that ward was finished. This was possible because the wards were not reserved permanently but only for one term, with the reservation status rotating between wards. The women acted like a 'front' while in reality the male councillors continued to interact with the ward people and administration. This obviously points to the short- term failure of the amendment in getting real political power in the hands of women. It is hoped that with time, the percentage of women councillors who are not 'dummies' for their male relatives will increase.

During interviews with women councillors, problems faced by them in functioning effectively also came across. These ranged from the women's self-discrimination, lack of confidence, to people's negative perceptions of women councillors' capability, knowledge and desire to work. This translated into women's own lack of seriousness- as they internalise the perception of others. They also faced family pressures and had to resolve the clash between their role at home and their work outside. Also there was a lack of sensitivity to their requirements such as municipal meetings held at times in which it is difficult for them to come. Thus, the three levels at which women in general get discriminated against- the self, family and society- at all three levels, women councillors also faced discrimination. Only a few were able to overcome some of these problems through force of personality, education or support of a male family member. This was illustrated in the statement of a woman councillor from the TC,

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<sup>14</sup> Strategic gender interests (SGI) are interests of women that arise out of an analysis of their subordination. Practical gender interests (PGI) arise from the 'concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gender division of labour' (Molyneux, 1985). These are usually interests in response to an immediate perceived need, without entailing a strategic goal such as gender equality. Thus the difference between the two sets of interests is based on the impact they have on men and women's gender roles- with SGI being those which would challenge stereotypical notions of gender roles and relations, while PGIs being those related to fulfilling of established gender roles.

*We have to face the ego of male councillors. People don't feel secure about a woman councillor as they think she'll go away in 5 years and won't stand again for elections...Also party decisions are all male-dominated. Many women may even think "I won't be sustained by the party after reservations are over in the ward". Therefore they may not work hard enough and feel like "I am just caretaker". Some men tell us that "in 5 years we are the ones who will do municipal work again, so you might as well work according to us now also" (MR, 22.03.03, Madhyamgram)*

The attitude of male officials and politicians was also found to be largely derogatory and condescending towards women councillors. Many officials complained of women councillors' inability to handle municipal administrative work, while others tried to overcome their bias by essentialising the 'womanly' qualities of the councillors. Words and phrases such as 'maternal', 'like a good housekeeper' were used to describe the women councillors, essentially creating a divide between the more aggressively described male councillors, as seen in the following description of women councillors by a male politician,

*Even men can speak freely to women councillors because of the "maternal" characteristic of women councillors. Men Councillors always talk about the law. Psychological, social and family matters- women councillors can take up all these issues. (KS, 12.1.03, Madhyamgram)*

A KMC bureaucrat expressed the typical attitude of many officials through the following quote

*(There are) lots of problems with them –they don't understand things, can't talk with people. People expect councillors to come at all times in health, family, law emergencies ,at night etc Women can't do (these things). Women very often don't understand issues and technicalities and even making them understand is difficult. With these reservations for scheduled casts, women etc., where will men go? In House meetings women councillors come all dressed up and don't have any interest in the work of the House. They don't read about the agenda. (AB, 03.03, Kolkata)*

From the evidence seen in this section, the state of women's reservations can be seen as a mixed case. On the one hand, the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA has certainly increased women's visibility in the municipality and in the general polity. It is providing women with experience in municipal administration as councillors. However, the full aim of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA- to increase the access of women to the municipal government and increase women's voice at the municipal level has not been completely fulfilled. In this, the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA not only faced the barriers due to people's social identity and perception but also because of the political culture encouraging exclusionary coalitions, corruption and greed for power.

## **Conclusion**

The paper thus makes the argument that despite the case of West Bengal, particularly Kolkata, being one where the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA's inclusionary and access agendas had a very high chance of succeeding due to the social, political and administrative characteristics of the state, the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA could not completely fulfil this agenda here. Of factors that cause this, the political culture of the city of Kolkata had an important role to play. This included the role of both High Politics and the everyday politics of the city. In both cases, one saw that the ideology of the party in power did not make much of a difference. Though overtly the TC and CPI(M) are very different with different political styles and party structures, but on closer examination, these differences appear to be only on the surface. The Leftist parties and the non-Leftists parties have similar centralised, exclusionary practices towards the general polity, creating barriers for any decentralisation initiative to succeed. They make the party so overarching and co-opt the mechanisms of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA to make them so weak that people are forced to bypass the formal mechanisms and use the party structures and patronage for accessing the municipal government. In the process they end up suffering party control over them. The political culture impacts the bureaucratic culture of the city and thus the decentralisation antipathy inherent in the political culture gets transferred to the bureaucratic culture as well. This has the outcome of making municipal administration exclusionary and limiting access of the polity to it.

These issues are visible clearly in the cases of the Ward Committees and reservations for women in Kolkata. The failure of the Ward Committees resulted from the political and bureaucratic cultures antithetical to the inclusionary agenda of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA. Politicians and bureaucrats found ways to bypass the WCs totally or to co-opt them. The case of the women's reservations is less bleak. It shows partial gains obtained by women through the force of personality, work and from some sympathetic insiders. However, the deeper agenda of the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA to increase the voice of women in the municipal governance has not been achieved. This also can be linked to the political and bureaucratic culture of the city which is both affected by the social attitudes of the dominant group in the city and by greed for power. This continues to deny the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA achieving fully its aim of increasing access for the public and the inclusion of a wider section of the public in municipal governance.

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