'Cultural Misrecognition' and the Sustenance of Trinamool Congress in West Bengal

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The assembly elections in West Bengal in 2016 were historic not only because the Trinamool Congress was given a second chance with a massive mandate, but also because, for the first time in decades, a single political party managed to win the election. Moreover, the TMC secured victory in most of the traditional left bastions, making the Left Front virtually insignificant in state politics. While populist and direct-benefit schemes are most prominently seen as the reasons behind the party's success, there also exist the hitherto unaddressed alternatives to the Left Front government's systematic development of "party society." The promotion of traditional cultural expressions conceptualised as "cultural misrecognition" helped the TMC sustain its control and also attracted votes of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of the state who traditionally constituted the support base of the left.

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The people of West Bengal voted for political change by ending a 34-year-long rule, that of the longest democratically elected left regime in the world in 2011. The All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the Congress alliance ushered in this change in the state. Within a few months of the elections, the two parties ended the alliance and the TMC continued to rule the state. In the 2016 assembly elections, the TMC independently secured 211 out of 294 seats, sharing about 45% of the total votes to secure a second term (*Ei Samay* 2016). One of the crucial aspects of this election was the TMC's unprecedented popularity among the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), as they managed to secure victory in almost all of the reserved constituencies (*Ei Samay* 2016). It is popularly projected that direct cash benefits to the girl child through the Kanyashree Scheme (more than 30 lakh beneficiaries at present) (Government of West Bengal 2016), distribution of bicycles to all Class 10 and 11 students of virtually every school under the Sabooj Sathi (literally green companion, with green being identified as the party colour of TMC) scheme, and distribution of subsidised foodgrains to the poor under the National Food Security Act (Hafeez 2016) are some of the crucial direct measures that helped the TMC bag this landslide victory.

Moreover, it is argued that the last moment alliance between the Left Front and Congress was not accepted by the people at large. Samaddar (2016a, b) summarises the TMC's rise as "the 'subalternisation' of politics" which is unorganised compared to the Left Front, especially the Communist Party of India (Marxist)—CPI(M)—and should be seen as loosely organised primarily through movements. There is "an enormous involvement of poor people who saw the TMC as their new protector" (Samaddar 2016a). Although it is doubtful whether one can call the rise of TMC as "subalternisation," as most of the central leaders of the TMC belong to upper caste groups, it is important to note that people's support, especially in the rural areas of the state, was phenomenal. To conclude whether there is indeed a "subalternisation" of Bengal politics or not one requires a thorough investigation. However, there is no clear evidence of a power shift from elites to subalterns (Bhattacharya 2016). Under such circumstances it is important to unearth the stratagems used by the TMC to achieve this phenomenal victory. In this article, I introduce "cultural misrecognition" as one of the major characteristics of the TMC rule in the rural areas of the state. To do so, I focus on factors that led the TMC controlled government to significantly raise expenditure in organising

different festivals, which include holding different government-sponsored festivals and fairs like *Mati Utsav* (soil festival) (Figure 5, p 97). It is notable that such expenditure was made when the state was reeling under heavy debt. I argue that the promotion of festivals needs a political analysis to understand what attracted the masses at such an unprecedented scale. To address the issue, I present an ethnographic case study on the political transformation of one of the gram panchayats in the Khatra block of Bankura district. The time period of this study is from 2008 to 2014 when the state experienced major political transformations, including the left's defeat in the parliamentary, assembly and panchayat elections. Such expenditure on fairs and festivals is used as a "political weapon"—a counterpart of the "party society" developed by the Left Front government (LFG), as theorised by Bhattacharyya (2009, 2010 and 2016) and Chatterjee (2004).

Development of Party Society

The development initiatives in West Bengal revolve around a well-organised political regime often channelised through a three-tier panchayat system (Kohli 1987; Mallick 1993; Harriss 1994; Corbridge et al 2005). Land reform is seen to be more inclusive here, which virtually turns the rural power equation upside down (Banerjee et al 2002). Later on, the administrative and political control by the Bengali communists in the countryside began to depend on small landowners and not on the landless (Ghatak and Ghatak 2002). It is argued that "over time, new stakeholders developed—schoolteachers, party functionaries, a variety of white-collar employees, small landholders and tenant farmers—whose security depended on the regime; all became part of West Bengal's 'new class'" (Kohli 2011: 506–07). A variety of new stakeholders, especially schoolteachers, consolidated the party grid on local economy and politics (Bhattacharyya 2001). Bhattacharyya (2016: x) notes

> governmental projects of agrarian reforms and administrative decentralisation in the late 1970s … required a disciplined party and a complex structure of mass organisations for blending social democracy's ideological commitments with the everyday compulsions of post colonial democracy.

Existing literature focuses on a class-based analysis of the rural economy and the impact of local politics on it. The new party-backed class element consists of medium landowners, rich and middle-income peasants, merchants of rural and semi-rural townships, small-scale manufacturers, retailers and a group of white-collar professionals like schoolteachers. Harriss-White (2003: 53) argues that this group "consolidate[s] themselves above all in the informal and black economies," which accounts for at least 88% of the Indian economy as a whole. Their operations are not based on concretisation of class identity; rather they rely on particularistic tactics. Often, these are based on an oligopoly of cold storage networks (Harriss-White 2008; Nath and Chakrabarti 2011).

Kaviraj (1991) argues that the entire democratic aspiration of the country to a large extent is mediated by the local elites and middle class. Frankel (1978) notes that the ability of

dominant peasants to resist reform initiatives is a formidable one. Similarly, Bardhan (1984), Frankel (1978) and Chibber (2003) argue that rich peasants/farmers represent the dominant class interests of rural India. As Bhattacharyya (2016) notes, such a wide variety of professionals strongly connected with the party in West Bengal provides an anchor to the formation of a "party society." This concept is a modified extension of Chatterjee's (2004) "political society," which essentially talks about political mediation as the primary mechanism available to marginalised people to access state machinery. Bhattacharyya (2009) argues that political parties in West Bengal transcend caste, religion or ethnicity-based organisations. As a result, all disputes, familial, social or cultural, take very little time to become partisan. This party society has displaced the older patron–client form of relationships prevalent over the last three decades. Bhattacharyya (2009: 68) claims:

> Land reform legislations and local government bodies (the panchayats) were the tools and the CPI(M) (as well as its peasant wing, the Krishak Sabha) was the primary agent to bring about this change. The new politics set new norms of transaction to which every political outfit—the ruling side as well as the opposition—had to conform, willingly or unwillingly. In this organizational grid … [the] political party was largely accepted as the chief mediator, the central conduit, in the settling of every village matter: private or public, individual or collective, familial or associational.

He does not portray the party society in negative terms; rather he argues that it has played a vital role in democratising rural politics in early decades of the LFG.

Bhattacharyya (2010: 53) notes that the evolution of such party society germinated from the "violent class-based movements of the poor peasants as they fought against the domination of the landlords … These movements—facilitated by the left parties—for food, land, security of tenure, and freedom for 'the intrusion of the excluded.'" Eventually, the domination adopts what Ruud (2003) notes as a form of "symbolic capital" in Bourdieu's sense of the term. Bhattacharyya (2010: 55) further argues that "this enabled the communities to use political parties as conduits to pose their demands to the institutions of government, and allowed the party, in return, to transfer policies to the society by dissemination within the communities." He hints towards a clientelist mode of political operation, which is beyond formal institutions where political negotiations are held. The conceptualisation is quite helpful to explain the continuation of LFG for more than three decades. Bhattacharyya (2016: 126) also notes several unique characteristics of politics in West Bengal such as the (i) absence of "other channels of public transactions," (ii) lack of political focus on caste, religion or ethnicity-based social divisions, (iii) partisan forms of conflicts, (iv) accepted position of party as "moral guardians" of social life, and (v) party's exclusive control over the panchayat system. Bhattacharyya (2009, 2010, 2016) and also Chatterjee (2004) quite effectively relate these unique features with the long legacy of the CPI(M)-led LFG rule in the state. However, little information is available about the fate of the party control over society in the countryside of the state, especially during political change. It is also

important to study in what ways party society was affected by the advent of the TMC.

Misrecognitions

While it is widely recognised that there was a strong party grid formed and supported by the LFG through its three-decade rule, sustenance of such a grid requires constant pursuance. This pursuance is important as "power" and according to Foucault (1978), it goes beyond the dichotomy of the haves and have-nots. Hence, those who are "weaker" are made to believe that they are weaker. One of the important conceptualisations of this exercise of power is that of Gramscian hegemony. To explain the continuous single party (in this case, the LFG) rule in West Bengal, it is important to consider aspects of political consciousness as an important factor. It is crucial because, conceptually, the hegemonic apparatus is supposed to be over-ruled with the rise of organic intellectuals. West Bengal's political change, and more importantly continuation of the TMC, defies such explanations. Although there have been land-related movements in Singur and Nandigram, they were not led by organic intellectuals, and the statewide impact of such movements has been limited (Bardhan et al 2014). Following Burawoy (2012), the situation could be explained through the use of Bourdieu's conception of misrecognition and symbolic violence. If we consider false consciousness as one of the major reasons for the weaker section's inability to see the exploitation within the system (Lukes 2005), we have two aspects to analyse. First, for Gramsci, it is the falseness and second, for Bourdieu it is the consciousness that is problematic. For Bourdieu (2000), a form of "misrecognition" is embedded within the habitus—roughly, the everydayness of people's lives—which cannot address the depth of symbolic domination within a system (Burawoy 2012). Through my ethnographic study on political transformation of a gram panchayat, I unearth two distinct forms of promotion of such misrecognitions in West Bengal, namely the "systemic misrecognition" during the LFG regime and the "cultural misrecognition" during the TMC regime.

Introducing the Field

I have done ethnographic fieldwork in a gram panchayat area[1] (I will call it GP–A, the village level and lowest tier of the panchayat system) which falls within the Khatra panchayat samiti (block level or intermediate tier), under Bankura zilla parishad (district level and the highest tier of the panchayat system). Out of the nine *sansads* (wards), GP–A at present has six tribal sansads, inhabited mostly by Santals, along with a few families of the Munda and Bhumij tribes. The residents here include a mix of upper caste Brahmins, Kayasthas and Vaishyas who have historically been landholders and now own businesses like brick factories. There are also SC groups like Mahatos and Kurmis who, along with the tribal people often seek work in these factories and depend mostly on fishing and alternate means of earning their livelihood. Apart from the small portions of land, which can use water from the nearby Kangsabati river dam, farming is not a profitable

Figure 1: Allocation of Individual Benefiting Schemes among the Tribal and Non-tribal Predominated Sansads in 2008–09 Financial Year (in numbers)
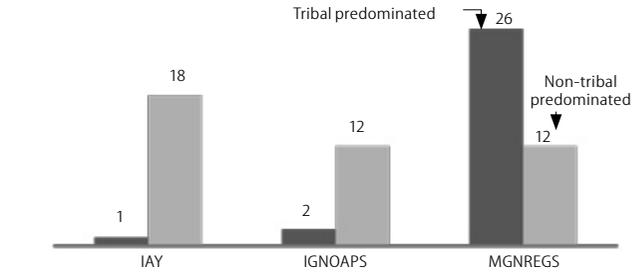
Source: Gram panchayat office.

Figure 2: Allocation of Mass Benefiting Resources in 2008–09 Financial Year (%)
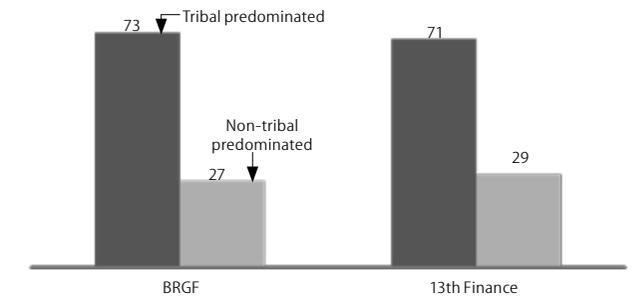
BRGF = Backward Region Grant Fund.
Source: Gram panchayat office.

livelihood opportunity (Nath 2004). It is nevertheless important to note that the tribals constitute a substantive number and their vote is often a decisive factor in panchayat elections in the region.

Out of the nine sansads, GP–A at present has six tribal sansads, inhabited by the Santal along with a few families of Munda and Bhumij. When I started my fieldwork immediately after the 2008 panchayat election, GP–A was governed by the CPI(M). The CPI(M) (along with Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in one sansad) won six out of the eight sansads in the 2008 election. However, in the 2013 election, the verdict was completely reversed. Out of the nine sansads, the TMC won in seven sansads to secure a massive victory. As the gram panchayat shows a complete transformation during this period, I studied the series of events that took place over the years under consideration that could help explain such a major political alteration. Through my study, I argue that there is a shift from the party controlled "systemic misrecognition" to "cultural misrecognition." It is needless to mention that the present finding is local and "micro" in nature. However, looking at patterns of government expenditure in fairs and festivals (see Figure 5), it can be said that such promotion of "cultural misrecognition" as I will present in the following section has a wider and more generalised implication in most of the rural parts of the state.

Systemic Misrecognition—An Extension of Party Society

If one looks at the distribution of schemes during the CPI(M)-led LFG regime, there is a sharp contrast in the distribution of resources between tribal and non-tribal sansads (see Figures 1 and 2).

The CPI(M) local committee[2] secretary Mahato[3],—in several group discussions along with gram panchayat members focused on three reasons for such a skewed allocation:

(i) Tribals are unaware of the benefits of investing a small amount of money for getting bigger benefits from schemes such as the Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY). Therefore, they do not pay the amount necessary for getting these benefits.

(ii) Most of them do not have valid documents to prove their age, hence, we cannot make the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) available for them. They keep on losing their voter identity cards as well.

(iii) They are happy with their own houses and everything they have. They do not need any government benefits.

The only exception to this form of skewed allocation of resources is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which requires manual labour. The MGNREGA work is distributed mostly among tribal people. It is seen that these beneficiaries often work in sansads dominated by non-tribals, violating the policy of allocating works to the beneficiaries within their villages. During the CPI(M) regime, there was not much difference between tribal and non-tribal sansads in terms of road conditions and the availability of potable water. The skewed allocation of individual benefiting schemes, nevertheless, had a political bias. Most of the villagers argued that there was a purposive preparation of a faulty below poverty line (BPL) list. They pointed at the fact that the CPI(M) leaders had purposefully included only active party cadres of the region.

In my interviews with the tribals it appeared that they were quite aware about the extent of deprivation in the CPI(M) ruled gram panchayats. It was puzzling to see that even after constantly being denied the benefits of schemes meant for individuals, they continued to support the CPI(M). I attempted to understand what made them support the party for three decades. My exploration unearthed a systematic effort by the CPI(M) to make people dependent on the party grid. I found that their mechanism involved the effective use of a dependency network.

Dependency Network

The CPI(M) used to set up its party offices near the gram panchayat. In order to get access to the panchayat office, an individual was bound to report to the party office first. People looking for anything ranging from a residential certificate to the entitlement for MGNREGA work, were expected to meet the local political bosses in the first place. They could almost never meet the pradhan or the gram panchayat secretary by bypassing the party. One of the informants in this study who wished to enrol for the Provident Fund for Landless Agricultural Labourers (PROFLAL) scheme, said that he feared going to the panchayat office by himself. He said,

I should first go to S Murmu [a booth level CPM worker]. It is up to him to report it to S Mahato [CPM Local Committee Secretary] at his convenience. If Mahato takes up the proposal he may direct the panchayat member and/or any of the booth level party cadres to enquire about my economic status. If the member gives a positive feedback to him and Mahato manages to remember my requirement and informs it to the Panchayat Office then only this can be done. In between I have to remind

each of them at regular intervals. If I bypass these steps I will never be enrolled in the scheme. Moreover, I may have to face other adverse consequences because of ignoring them! (personal interview, 2008)

It was clear that an elaborate gatekeeping mechanism was pushing the villagers away from accessing the gram panchayat and empowering the party mechanism instead. On the one hand, the CPI(M) made people dependent on their party network and, on the other, they would delay the process to make them even more dependent. Through several conversations it was found that the following steps were followed to access public services (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The Elaborate Gatekeeping Mechanism Followed by the CPI(M)
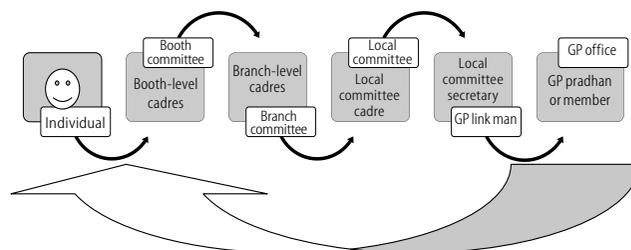
GP = Gram panchayat.
Source: Data collected by author.

Such an elaborate gatekeeping mechanism alienated the villagers from the activities of the panchayat. Ironically, on paper, the panchayat system strives for participatory governance, but in practice the reverse is observed. Consequently, there is a centralisation of power in local politics. During the course of the study, it was found that the CPI(M) party office worked as an information dissemination centre. Due to this, villagers accepted party affiliations as an essential criterion to benefit from government schemes. With such a strong mediating role played by the party workers, there was a systematic merging of the party with the government. In one of the group discussions conducted in 2009, the villagers equated the party with the government. An excerpt from the discussion is as follows:

Villager 1: Ashok *stambha* (the national emblem of India) signifies government; it is there at the Panchayat Office and in the PHE (Public Health Engineering) office.
Villager 2: Also, in the Kangsabati office [river dam office] and on the belts of the havildars (perceived to be lowest rank of police service)...
Villager 1: We cannot enter into the PHE because of the security guards. Entry to Kangsabati office is also restricted. Even tourists are not allowed to take any photographs.
(Some chaotic discussion continues regarding the government as something to fear, as a mechanism of the babus and for the educated few)
Villager 3: Our party is our government. Party men are accessible. So, in order to reach the government, we must go to the party, as party steers the government. Party, no matter what symbol it carries, is the representative of the government.

The popular perception of the government as something remote and inaccessible was systematically constructed in the minds of the villagers by the party. The CPI(M) provided an alternative to the "inaccessible" government to make people dependent on the party. As a consequence, distinctive party-based control at the local and micro level continued for decades. This mechanism can be called "systemic misrecognition." It is a form of misrecognition formalised by the CPI(M) that virtually equated the party with the government.

Such misrecognition had adverse consequences for the CPI(M) as well. From December 2009 to January 2011 the entire region came under activities of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) (or the Maoist). Due to this, from March 2010 onwards, when the armed forces started to interrogate villagers about their possible Maoist linkages, people misrecognised this step as a party step to contain the Maoists. The Maoists targeted the local CPI(M) leaders and active party workers. Many CPI(M) leaders rapidly lost village support because of state intervention and they were also afraid of being targeted by the Maoist rebels. Apart from the booth level CPI(M) workers, no active party workers could be found in the region. Due to the leadership vacuum at the local level, the gram panchayat came under exclusive control of the TMC and a new face, D Saha, owner of three brick factories in the region, became the most trusted and powerful local leader. While the CPI(M) used to capitalise on people's dependence on the party, the TMC adopted a different strategy to exercise political control over the villagers.

Cultural Misrecognition: A New Mechanism

Even under the informal leadership[4] of the TMC from 2010 to 2012, before the 2013 panchayat elections, there was a clear indication of the prioritisation of sansads predominated by non-tribals for carrying out developmental activities. The local leaders of the TMC initiated a process of diversion of the panchayat services towards the non-tribal-dominated sansads where most of the traditionally anti-CPI(M) people resided (Table 1). In particular, five concrete alleys that had originally been designed for the tribal-dominated sansads had been diverted to other areas. The TMC continued to emphasise labour-intensive schemes under the MGNREGS, such as land levelling, pond excavation and construction of earthen roads in tribe-dominated sansads. It was a strategy to arrange enough money from the MGNREGS to meet the material cost for constructing concrete alleys to connect non-tribal-predominated sansads, which were predominated by anti-CPI(M) people.

From 2010 onwards, the allocation of mass benefiting schemes showed a strong inclination towards the non-tribal-dominated sansads. Figure 4 represents the allocation of funds through different schemes in 2011–12 and 2012–13.

A careful study of the Annual Action Plan (AAP) made it clear that in its initial phase of control over the gram panchayat, the TMC bypassed the AAP. Eventually, from 2010

Figure 4: Allocation of Funds in GP–A in 2012–13 (₹)
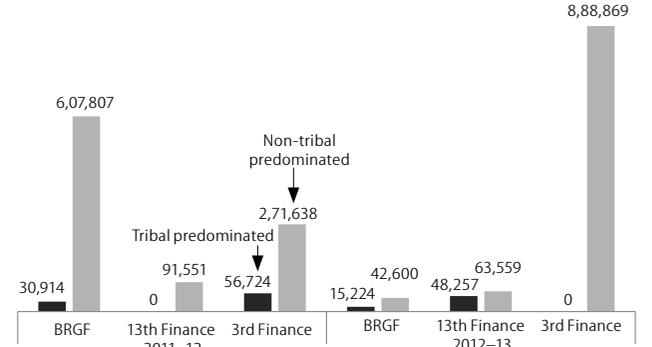
BRGF = Backward Region Grant Fund.
Source: Gram panchayat office.

onwards, they prepared AAPs to deliver mass-benefiting schemes according to the same formula, that is to give maximum thrust towards sansads predominated by non-tribals. Clearly, while the CPI(M) during their time siphoned the individual benefiting schemes while maintaining more or less equitable distribution of the mass-benefiting schemes, the TMC took away both.

It is important to understand that, because of their numerical strength, the TMC, just like the CPI(M), needed tribal support to win in GP–A. To ensure the tribal support, the two parties adopted two different strategies. As discussed earlier, the CPI(M) made local tribal people dependent on the strictly formed party grid. The TMC took a different approach. First, they used the traditional Santal political hierarchy to get their decisions sanctioned by the tribal people of the region, and second, they systematically funded the Santal festivals. Both steps constitute what I call "cultural misrecognition."

The Santal people of the region follow a three-tier hierarchy as their traditional political system. It starts with the village-level *sholo aana* or the lowest tier, where each of the heads of the families is a member. The sholo aana is headed by the *majhi* (village chief) and his assistant *jak majhi*. Village-level conflicts are primarily resolved by organising sholo aana meeting at a common place within the village boundaries. An unresolved issue in sholo aana goes to the intermediate *pargana,* formed by all the majhis from different villages of a region and chaired by its chief, the *parganayat.* On top of the pargana there is the *disam,* which is the highest position in the hierarchy. Disam being the most powerful of the hierarchy also possesses the capacity to execute capital punishments. Villagers commonly stated that most of the village-level conflicts are resolved in sholo aana. Pargana and disam meetings are held only once a year during the Sendra—the hunting festival, which takes place in January and March, to decide on the forest territories so that hunting-related territorial conflicts can be avoided. As a mechanism of exercising political control, each of the majhis is made a member of the TMC booth-level organisations.

The mechanism of using a traditional cultural value-based political hierarchy has been effective for the TMC. While the CPI(M) never tried to intervene in such traditional mechanisms, the TMC used them to generate consensus about the decisions

Table 1: Diversion of Schemes by the TMC after Gaining Control over GP–A in 2009–10

MGNREGS		BRGF		13th Finance Commission	
Original Schemes	Diverted Schemes	Original Scheme	Diverted Scheme	Original Scheme	Diverted Scheme
• Levelling of land	Concrete road	Installation of 5 tube wells	3 tube wells are diverged from their original location	Construction of the shed for kitchen of Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) centre	Construction of dustbins in nearby picnic spots
• Earth work in road					
• Pond re-excavation					
• Concrete road					

Source: Field data collected from gram panchayat officials and the TMC leaders during 2009 to 2011.

taken at the gram panchayat level. Since 2010, before organising the annual gram sabha[5] meeting, a sholo aana meeting is organised by the majhis in each village to convince the villagers to support the decisions taken by the party. It was observed during my fieldwork that tribal people asked about the nature of MGNREGA work and the construction work to be carried out in the region to their majhis in sholo aana but they always remained silent in the actual gram sabha meetings which never attained the quorum. In several sholo aana meetings, majhis would be seen explaining the importance of supporting the TMC's decisions because of four reasons:

(i) The TMC will fund and promote their hunting festivals and each year one of the groups of dancers will get a chance to perform in the Kolkata Durgotsav,[6] (ii) The TMC will simplify access to the panchayat and there will be no more party mediation but the Majhi will take the issues directly to the panchayat, (iii) The TMC will withdraw all the false cases registered against their fellow villagers for their alleged Maoist links, and (iv) The TMC will amend the BPL list.

In all such meetings, almost half of the time was devoted to discuss the preparation of the hunting festival and the annual celebration of Makar Sangkranti[7] fair. The nature of such meetings largely remained the same from 2011 to 2014. Accordingly, I saw a complete transformation of the hunting festivals and yearly Makar Sangkranti fair from a small-scale village-level festival to a grand spectacle. Earlier, the entire fair was organised during daylight and by evening people used to go back to their villages. With the TMC assuming power in the region 2010 onwards, the festivals started continuing into the night. In 2011, for the first time a dance competition between teams from different villages continued even after dusk and a grand prize was awarded. From 2012 onwards, several government departments (for example, departments of information and culture, agriculture, etc) started organising stalls at the fair grounds and the festival had enough government funding to continue round the clock for five days.

Figure 5 shows the extent to which the funding pattern has drastically changed for the Department of Information and Culture Affairs, Government of West Bengal. It is evident that, with a more than threefold increase in the budget allocation over five years, there is a systematic fund boost in this sector.

The Broad Spectrum of Cultural Misrecognition

This form of promotion of erstwhile ignored aspects of cultural expressions has become a popular weapon of the TMC-led government to fight against the mighty "party society." It is quite clear that regime continuity in West Bengal is not simply the result of a hegemonic establishment of power relations; rather it should be seen as an active and creative construction of misrecognitions. While in some senses hegemony is overt, symbolic violence is covert and, hence, often remains unnoticed, especially to the "organic intellectuals."

As already discussed, for Gramsci (1971), exploited people are exploited because their consciousness is false, but for Bourdieu (1977), people misrecognise their real interest because real interest is mystified and often incomprehensible by

Figure 5: Budget Allocation to the Department of Information and Culture Affairs, Government of West Bengal over the Years (₹ crore)
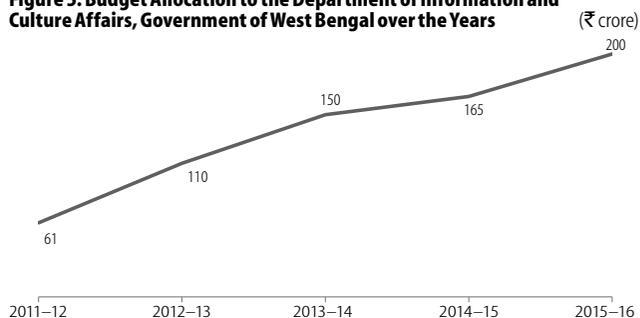
Source: Computed from budget statements, accessed from www.wbfin.nic.in.

consciousness itself. This brings to focus the importance of misrecognition. The study of GP–A as a case unearths the mechanisms by which party cadres and leaders, often with distinct class, caste and tribe identities, can exercise political control over a large section of the population by mystifying their "real interests" through everyday practices. These are actively constructed (systemic and cultural) misrecognitions and subtler than the simple and common-sensical idea of mistaken recognition. Bourdieu (1984) finds that instead of direct violence, symbolic violence is what contemporary society experiences. Symbolic domination settles within the unconscious because people accumulate sedimentations of the social structure through their position in the habitus. To explore the ways in which such misrecognition and symbolic violence is generated, according to Bourdieu (1984), it is important to look at habitus. Here, habitus is seen as an outcome of the conflict for prestige and status, between the relatively powerful and the relatively powerless. The relatively powerful reify their particular manners as "natural" and this manages to define what constitutes "proper" socialisation. Once a particular habitus is "naturalised" as superior to the habitus of others, it constitutes cultural capital, which is another resource for the constitution of the power hierarchy. If we consider Gramsci's (1971) idea of the capitalist system as having endless fortifications and ditches, cultural capital constitutes some such ditches. Drawing from such theoretical insights, I have shown the ways in which such symbolic violence is formulated in two different ways as a legitimising mechanism by local political parties.

Such naturalisation of exploitation by the two parties and the continuation of domination is conceptualised as (i) "systemic misrecognition" and (ii) "cultural misrecognition." These are ethnographically located and require a little more elaboration.

The former LFG promoted mechanism of misrecognition is "systemic" because the nature of misrecognition is deeply engrained within the system itself. It is perpetuated over a very long period of time and as a consequence, it has become part of people's everyday practices. This is typical of the CPI(M) regime. Because of their long-term political control, the CPI(M) formed elaborate mediating mechanisms, which are compatible with the theoretical constructions of "political society" and "party society." The nature of party mediation is no longer an overt mechanism; rather it has become a part of people's everyday practices. One can still study such mediating mechanisms as rooted in several cultural constructs, which are subtle, symbolic, "natural" in appearance and are always pre-given (almost ontological). Therefore, people continue to misrecognise the domination of the party and its mediating role in getting access to local governance institutions as an essential part of their everyday practices. As a consequence, government institutions are commonly perceived as unknown systems of paperwork, bureaucracy and restrictions. They equate the restrictions at the irrigation office and the oppression by police as variants of expressions of the "government," all denoting a lack of access. The gap between the people and the government is, therefore, filled by the party, which then reaps electoral benefits over decades. The party is constructed as a "friendly" and accessible extension of the government. The steps which an individual has to go through in order to access the government institutions is a mental map that people over the years have taken for granted and forgotten to question. Actual access to government institutions is always mystified. Therefore, what appears as the "consent" from the people in Gramscian sense is actually misrecognitions "manufactured" by the local political leaders.

The TMC capitalised first on the leadership vacuum resulting from the absconding CPI(M) leaders to exercise control over the gram panchayat. Due to the lack of an organisational base to establish political control over the everyday lives of the people like the CPI(M), the TMC successfully adopted a different strategy. They combined the promotion of historically ignored tribal cultural traditions by funding hunting festivals, with an existing tribal traditional political network base in exchange for political patronage. Therefore, the tribal section, which constitutes a substantive percentage of voters to determine the political fate of the gram panchayat, is pushed towards a new form of symbolic violence. The TMC networked with important traditional village leaders, organised traditional meetings such as the sholo aana and gained consensus about the decisions, unlike earlier processes, which had clearly excluded the tribal people from the decision-making process. The traditional Santal majhis busily celebrated their festivals, legitimised the decisions made by the gram panchayats and did not question the skewed allocation of resources. This form of consensus building by the new regime made explicit use of

"cultural" traditions, a much-valued sentiment that largely remained unaddressed by the CPI(M). As a contrast to the "systemic misrecognition," the TMC needed a quick alternative, primarily to exercise and sustain political control over the tribal sections of the region. As the patterns of expenditure indicate, the TMC successfully used tribal "cultural" expressions to construct the "cultural misrecognition" after political change in the region. This new form of misrecognition, unlike party mediated "systemic misrecognition" is apparently, radically free of strict party mediation. In contrast to what Bhattacharyya (2016) notes as moral guardianship of the party, or making every issue partisan, the new form of political control seeps within the existing "cultural" mechanisms. Instead of bypassing or substituting existing channels of public transactions, the TMC is inviting existing channels of public transactions to take place but within the templates provided by them. Conceptually, the idea of "cultural misrecognition" as a political mechanism is different from some of the earlier conceptualisations, such as Fraser's (2003). While scholars like Fraser (2003) find "cultural mechanism" as a source of status subordination and injustice—hindrance in "participatory parity"—here, as the ethnographic findings denote, "cultural misrecognition" refers to a process of using of existing "cultural" apparatus for political gain.

It is quite expected that such "cultural misrecognition" has different forms and localised manifestations that require further enquiry. Meanwhile there are sporadic reports of resurgence of village-level *shalishi sabha* (kangaroo court) in tribal areas such as in Birbhum and Jalpaiguri, where local TMC leaders are allegedly involved. Clearly, the TMC's political mechanism is taking a distinct shape, ontologically different from that of "party society." It is reasonable to believe that this approach was politically fruitful for the TMC as in 2016 they managed to secure victory in most of the constituencies reserved for SCs and STs. The mighty "party society" dependent LFG continues to lose its position even among the weaker sections which traditionally constituted their support base for three decades (*Ei Samay* 2016).

NOTES

1 For ethical reasons I will not reveal the name of the gram panchayat.
2 Locally, it is the most powerful body in the political hierarchy of the CPI(M) which usually controls two or more gram panchayats.
3 All the names of the individuals used here, are pseudonyms.
4 It is informal, because formally the GP was under CPI(M)'s control till 2013, but the entire activities of the GP was controlled by the local TMC leaders since 2010 from backstage.
5 Gram sabha is an annual meeting of all the residents of voting age in a gram panchayat to discuss and debate the plans to be taken up.
6 The biggest festival celebrated in the capital city of Kolkata.
7 The grand January festival which is of special importance for the tribal people of the region.

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