

# Politicization of Youth and Criminality in West Bengal: Selected Case Studies of Aspiring Undergraduate Students

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## **Abstract:**

Although politics seems to be the sole determinant of State existence, the current practice of politics in West Bengal is projecting a different reality from the societal perspective. However, involving youths in politics is essential or fruitful to produce aware citizens of the state and a better future for political management. The sociological concern of the study is analyzing the approach of a particular process, where youths are imbecile and shaped in favor of any particular political ideology. From the same phase of the development of self, the non-contaminate brain and intellectuality of such youths are manipulated through exerting ideological instrumentation by different political parties through the process of politicization. The notion of achieving power at any cost, irrespective of the conception of crime and violence, they imbibe through several processes that result in several forms of criminality by youth. At the same time, it is not any individual phenomenon, but a collective contextualization is significant. All inclusively, it encompasses collective performance. It expands falsified political consciousness among the youth. Such a condition demagnetizes them from other aspects of life and blurs the sight of the difference between politics and criminality. To conduct the study qualitative method has been used for collecting data. The snowball sampling method has been applied to select the respondents. Through the interview method and personal observation and experiences, detailed case studies have been used to analyze the data.

**Keywords:** crime, politics, politicization, ideology, youth.

## **Introduction:**

The present scenario of politics in West Bengal is a crucial aspect of understanding the collective behavior of common masses in terms of socio-political concern. Through a particular process of democratic competition in India, the nature and direction of the society are determined. It is formed with many conflicting interest groups, and such groups are equally influential in impacting different institutions of the state and its policies. The power is decentralized, widely shared, diffused, and fragmented, deriving from many social sources (Pierson, 1995). The pie of power is produced and reproduced at every moment within the interplay of equality and equity (Verian, 1973).

The fundamental political framework (i.e., the consensus of values, democratic traditions, procedures, and principles) in West Bengal has some distinctive connotations. Specifically, the youth's intimacy with politics has distinguishing characteristics that develop through several social processes. After seven decades of independence, democracy can be realized as a mere manipulative legitimating process

whereby elites consolidate their power by co-opting the masses to support the interests of the powerful for some specific social groups (rather than a true representation of the interests of the masses). The mass population is being controlled through manipulations, propaganda, and the like to serve the interests of powerful elites (Gerschewski, 2013). In such circumstances, the study has tried to analyze the youth's intimacy as a significant social category in the contemporary political sphere. Considering the fact, the group could be manipulated in favor of different political associations through the instrumentation of democracy as a revolutionary political theme. Eventually, such intimacy contributes to the interest and domination of a particular political ideology and agenda. It also contributes to enhancing legitimate power, which in turn secures a particular class's interest and reduces the youths' social accountability.

### **Youth's Intimacy in the Democratic Power Structure:**

Democracy, as a form of modern political theme in the path of the evolution process of several political ideologies, has been accepted as a power distribution process equal to all. It promotes the deserving condition for political pluralism. Multiple groups exist with distinguishing interests and agendas in the democratic competition. The maximum voting support consolidates the valid and legitimate power and the acceptance of all other political groups (Mainwaring, 1998). Starting from its evolving stage, it has undergone several modifications and changes over time, and ultimately, we are enjoying "*democracy*" today, which confirms the power of the common people (Cohen, 2004). The study has tried to analyze youth's intimacy with such a political process and the conceptualization of 'power' in their minds. It sets an exploration of how this intimacy is crucial in shaping and altering the personality of youths in everyday life.

### **Methodology:**

The study has covered an urban area named Siliguri and its surrounding locality, an emerging metropolitan city in West Bengal, India. I considered two renowned high schools in the city and three colleges under the same subdivision where my schooling and graduation also have been covered as a youth of the city. After completing my Master's degree, while I recalled the days I spent with my friends, seniors, and juniors for '*doing politics*', it became mesmerizing to me down memory lane. It was not just spending days; its influence and expansion in our minds replicate the process of politicization of us. As a vulnerable group with several possibilities, we have been a target group.

At the primary level, every political party reaches every corner of society irrespective of caste, religion, race, language, age, gender, and many other such groups to enhance the voting population in favor of the party. In such a context, the youths become the target group for the political interests of different political parties at the primary level (Schneider and Ingram, 1993). In that case, the students in formal academic institutions, dropouts, and other informal working youth categories constitute such a target group (Hahn, 1998). In the next step, authorities of different political parties manipulated the identified youth population at their places, even the teenagers from the higher schooling group. It continues the counseling with their parents by showcasing the opportunity to participate in the democratic power structure of the family, and it continues by influencing the neighbors of the targeted youth as the representation of them and their locality in the power structure. It becomes irresistible for the person targeted whom such a process of manipulation is going on from the involvement of the assigned political parties. In such a way, it is hard to find a single youth who is out from such targeted politicization by the

political parties. Beyond the question of legality, the existence of political grouping in high schools or colleges is sociologically more relevant to the political literacy of the youth in terms of its approaches, methods, and practices in a developing nation like ours (Cassel and Lo, 1997). Such a condition of the modern democratic structure in every sphere of life of common people, youths become more vulnerable and easily affected from the very age of late schooling and at the graduation level. Henceforth, in the present political context in West Bengal, such an aged group becomes the target group for different political parties to have easier supporters in their runway.

Every political party represents the sectional interest groups based on some particular issues that bear the identity, which must be different from other sectional interest groups in the pluralist power structure because only one could gain the legitimized authority of the state system. Others would remain in the competition as the opposition. Therefore, the main significance of the whole scenario is to have legitimate power (Weber, 1922). The economy is the major attribute, and with several other things, the elites always remain dominant in such a power structure. It is still ambiguous whether such elites are representing the interests of the commons/masses or securing the interests of only them. Theoretically, through the 'circulation of elites' (Pareto, 1916), the elites always dominate others through legitimized power. In this way, it is beyond question about a particular person; the structure secures the attribute of domination where youths exist with potentiality as a social group.

### **The Politicization of Youth:**

Summarizing the recent history of Bengal politics, just about a few decades ago, a long period was dominated by a major political party of Bengal, the Communist Party of India, abbreviated as CPI (M), which ruled for thirty-four years from 1977 to 2011. It was the political group based on communist ideology monopolized over Bengal. In the meantime and after that, the people of Bengal started to experience active participation in politics more or less at every level of society. (Excluded the history of Independence politics). As part of a policy of greater democracy, with voting enfranchisement, such representatives of interest groups of commons are moved into every stratum of the society. As a result, we can see trade unions, student forums, teacher's associations, and employee federations of govt. And non-govt. Sectors, gender-based associations, farmers associations, and multiple varieties of different political subgroups. As such, the sub-association of two prominent groups of CPIM is the Student Federation of India (SFI) and the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI); in the case of All India Trinamool Congress (TMC), the present ruling party of Bengal has Trinomul Chatra Parishad (TMCP), Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) of BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party), Chatra Parishad (CP) of All India Congress. In a similar vein, different non-influential political parties are also maintaining a similar way of management. Among these variations, my study focuses on the student category. Apart from these, several ethnic political groups are also there, which merely represent the ethnic interest. Still, youths often include for power presentation of the group to others. This notion changes the youth's behavior pattern, frequently leading them to ethnic criminality.

It is an all-inclusive phenomenon made by all political groups, working as a social process in Bengal with the aim of extreme mass politicization of the population. It could be felt like there is no right to remain out of political affiliation and identity. Everybody has to be part of some political group or the other. Failing this condition, a person becomes socially isolated, debarred, and even threatened by different political levels and groups. So, for a successful 'mass politicization' at the root level, it tries to grasp the youth section of society. Considering the biological and psychological vulnerabilities,

influences, and temperaments of such aged youth, there is an alarming impact on account of youth in society.

### **The Impact upon the Social Account of Youth:**

From the very teenage, youths are being captured and targeted by such political sectional interest groups. At the initial stage, the agencies of those political groups interpret different modern political agendas of sovereignty, welfare, and freedom. It is not difficult to choose the political party of their representation and get influenced by such a group. Immediately after getting involved with any particular political group, they started to inject particular ideas and practices with their principle to be part of their particular ideology. From that moment, youths started to train rather dominated by a particular process by regular acculturation through different materials and ideal elements. They are made imbeciles and washed out by the political seniors and leaders representing a popular adhering figure.

Consequently, those particular political groups rather than elites earned their assiduous, responsible supporters for their voting interest through the successful operation. In such a situation, although they remain in the group behavior, they are still assigned with self-interest as I have personal experience with such activity, which helps me to sense how powerful regular practices of such influential personnel and processes used to impact our thinking and thoughts, making us more loyal and devotee to the party interest day to day.

Within the party, concerned leaders classify youths into different categories. After a formal introduction, a few were selected as representatives based on their popularity in the classroom. A few were allotted for the party advertisement through regular campaigning based on their speaking abilities and communication skills. Overall, some individuals keep important status in the group because of their rich economic background and status; they can ungrudgingly donate to the party fund for all sorts of necessities and crises.

Another important aspect that leads to a finding is that many youths are trained as immediate actors or jump into any conflicting chaos or sensitive violent situation, without hesitation, regarding party matters. The common tendency to select such youths would identify from the family's poor, marginal, and socially backward condition. They worked as party cadre crops under the necessary conditions. Based on this fact, an unconscious class categorization within these groups is formed that directly and indirectly impacts the social division pattern.

According to Cohen (1955), the youths living in economically disadvantaged conditions judge themselves by the standards of the more affluent population, which creates a separate subculture with an expectation of middle-class goals but is unable to meet those goals with socially approved means. In this condition, local political groups target and use such youths for their political interest. Cohen said this subculture has inverted middle-class values, and this culture is malicious, negativistic, and youths are versatile. But the present condition exposes the situation where such youths are not only offered negative political practices but also developed a particular separate subculture with the collaboration of middle-class values and the lust for power exertion over others, which very often push them to criminality. However, cryptically, this separate subculture is unattached to middle-class appearance. They are just being operated and devoted to the political leaders with numerous crimes and criminal activity. Henceforth, a condition emerges where they always remain in the same subculture and never could mobilize to the status of the middle class or more socially approved leadership. Their whole activity aimed at that particular goal of achieving social status.

Similarly, in the field, youths like us enjoy short-run hedonism by possessing underground support and illegitimate power from the political sphere. After a certain period, such negative social structure and relationships produced strain among particular youths, again producing deviance and resulting in criminality. Robert Agnew (2006) noted that the gap between expectations and achievements might result in disappointment, resentment, or anger. It includes the person's impression that there is a difference between the actual outcome and what the outcome should be.

In every locality, every political group organizes a youth gang through clubs, associations, groups, and communities to maintain the local political threat management to the common masses. In return, youths enjoy a politocoholic culture containing unauthorized illegitimate power and support, easy money, easy and favorable administrative access, and other similar short-term hedonism. Continuation with this particular culture brings cut in the social account and other social responsibilities of such youth; moreover, it degrades the society's values and moral and legal code and ultimately develops a criminal behavioral pattern among youth, exclusively from the political sphere in the society. At the same time, common people are also getting habituated to it, particularly from rural and suburban areas. They do not question it because it comes through the political leaders they know and respect as administrators or at least superior to them.

### **Ideological Instrumentation:**

An essential element of any organization is the maintenance of a specific ideology to develop consensus in its favor. Through the democratic process in the Indian political structure, some particular ideology exists at every layer of the power distribution mechanism. In short, the whole process concentrates on the pie of validly authorized power achievement competition. In such conditions, every political group set up their different ideological principle as the instruments to make the wider sectional interest representation. In the case of West Bengal, particularly while the authorities or leaders deal with the youth, all parties commonly advertise the principle of being powerful and getting special treatment from the government associated with their group. Political leaders keep a flow of assurance to the youth to have a better future with powerful status in society at the cost of voting and other support. Such effort by the leaders and seniors initiates the mentality among individuals, which becomes dependent on political adherence and smoothly discards the possibilities of self-effort and obligation. Even once a youth becomes linked with such an identity, they could never be out of it because such status would lead them to a more critical situation regarding their further career.

In present Bengal, it is very hard to see a youth with no political affiliation or attachment, even if some are not at the age of voting enfranchisement. Every group maintains regular meetings, processions, conferences, road shows, and other get-together programs. Although these happenings look normal, a regular process and training prepare such aged youth physically and mentally to build consensus in a particular way. In a gradual process, such youths become an auto-active part of the particular political group and represent full-fledged support for the group.

The process runs through a particular bureaucratic model with a concrete rationale of profit and interest, not for monetary capital but for the social and physical (workforce) capital. More or less, starting with college election to different modes of state election, even elections of governing bodies of different organizations, every political party arranges regular meeting every week/month and at every locality in their own party office or anywhere else suitable. At the starting phase, they delivered some positive motivation through lectures like the classroom in front of them by explaining the prime interest of youth

(i.e., being powerful, social work, leadership, mitigation of needs, facilitation from the government, living with vigor, etc.). At the next stage, everyone has been given roles and responsibilities and familiarized with the nick and techniques to fulfil allotted responsibilities with special treatment individually. They trained to maintain membership through funding management and were asked to manipulate family, peer groups, and others wherever possible with an all-inclusive approach. To have strong support, every political group has a prime interest in grasping the local youths. They are being provided money and other primary and secondary necessities from the chain of political leaders. This process institutionalizes gang activity among the youths and many other forms of criminality. This pretending politocoholic environment causes the estrangement of youths from other dimensions of life. At such a significant point in life, the youths are involved with these political engagements, fully investing in them with their heart and soul. Gradually, they become detached from the other social sphere, the lust of becoming powerful and dominant; they try to invest full effort through different political assignments allotted by the party.

### **Relevance Criminality:**

The declared condition in the particular socio-cultural setting shows us a different reality emerging out of the political practice in West Bengal. It is the issue of a changing political era where youths are important. Hence, a sociological analysis of such integrity in the political sphere tries to hinter a different reality. It is relevant to understand the motivation of youth and the mechanism of functioning of the particular political structure. The political system is manipulating such aged youths; they are motivated and imbecile for their party interest and are being operated by the political leader and authorities. Many youths will be involved in criminality only at the leader's command. They do such activities with heart and soul because they have been trained and motivated in such a way through a long process. It has always been a psychological input on the youths, which tempts them to criminality in the name of devotion and deliberation. They are being sent to collect the party funds from different sources, where they frequently threaten and often beat others, resulting in terrible violence. In such a way, they are involved in a kind of extortion, even if sometimes it goes to abduction, kidnapping, and murder. In such a context, legal and moral charges against violators are often diluted by the intervention of the leaders under which they engage. The leaders have high accessibility in the legal and judicial system and influence the community, which not only helps in thinning the charges against them but also motivates them to sustain their criminal careers and further criminal conduct. Henceforth, it becomes an easy remedy because of such direct and indirect stakeholding in politics and access to the concerned institutions. However, these activities go for the status of institutionalization and social recognition. Normalization of such a specific form of crime and criminality also happens to those youths and others. In fact, such a context of negotiating crime and criminality in everyday life of such aged youths produces and reproduces the cultural context of criminal behavior.

If we summarize the recent history of political culture in West Bengal, we can see how such youths who are active in any political group are being criminalized. In the academic field, many youths are often threatening and even attack their teachers, arranging separate rooms for coping in exams. Several such incidents occur out of political attachment by the youth with the backing of unauthorized political power. Such turmoil in the political condition brought changes in the ethics, morality, and social responsibility among youth in society; moreover, it indulges in breaking the moral code in society. The political support for those activities fosters violence and intolerance in society. It has always been shown

to them as power, and to have such political support and power, which they can exert over others, increasingly results in different recorded and unrecorded criminality.

### **Elitism and Power Strategy:**

Although democracy represents the socialist principle, there is still inequality and manipulation in the political interest of classes. According to Pareto (1916), elites are continuously circulated among the ruling classes. His elite theory interprets that with a different special personality, a group of people remain within the circulation system as elite. Their special organizational ability makes and helps them remain elite (Mosca, 1939). In such a context, as part of the masses, common youths hoped for upward mobility through political participation. However, they remained out of the circulation cycle even though they could never enter into circulation. They materialize the interest of the ruling group. Although some power is allotted among them, it is within a certain limitation, which is never comparable to the elite group; rather, that particular temptation leads them to more criminal activity.

It consists of the scope of being into criminality because it seems that such youths are politically powerful, but the question of legitimacy puts them into more crises. Their engagements with political activity and other relevant performances are sometimes similar to any significant political leader. Still, in the case of power applicability, there are differences where the leader is associated with valid power, which is socially approved and accepted. Still, such youth's power is never conceived as legitimate in terms of usability (Weber, 1922). It could only be possible forcefully when they exert their power over others. So, the classified youths would be the power holders, but they could never possess the status of legal authority. It only proves that the power associated with such youth is illegal, which they exert over others intensifies their criminal behavior.

### **Case Studies:**

From a qualitative approach to examine the issue, I focused on some individuals who were the study's respondents. Being close to them as classmates and peers made it possible to establish a deep connection to know their experiences and recall many concerning memories from those contemporary days. It shaped their personality and attitudes toward life, guided by their political activity. Through these case studies, I have tried to understand the source of youths' interests, motivation, and regret and analyzed their career achievements and sufferings. The study critically put an effort to hinder the role of the state to its population regarding security, welfare, and victimization as the consequence of such a vicious circle of youth backwardness.

One of my friends, Mr Santosh (pseudonym), from our late school days; we were then at the age of seventeen in senior secondary. He has a brave personality and is not very good at results but enthusiastic in the classroom. He wanted to be a soldier or social worker in alternative. Suddenly, on a school day, from the contemporary ruling party in Bengal, a local political group (CPIM) came to us at the time of lunch break and dictated to gather in the hall room at our school premises and form a group of students (Student Federation of India) in our school and declared him a leading position as the president of it. Immediately by the very day, he was ordered to increase the group members in school and smoothly pressurized to make a party fund from the school. After a few days, out of motivation, we started to pressure the other students to collect funds, initially from our classroom; later on, it was increased to many other classes, while we were given five to ten rupees from home for a day. Gradually, this pressure

has transformed into a force, threat, and even violence. Specifically, he got a legal charge from the police for complaining against him by some guardians and teachers of our school.

My contemporary friend from another school in my city, named Mr Samrat (pseudonym), was being preferred by the local body of the Indian National Congress party. He was good at studying and belonged to a wealthy family background. He wanted to be a businessman while we were at school, keeping such aim after high schooling, and got admitted to the commerce stream in the undergraduate course. After college admission, he started to represent the student organization of Chatra Parisad. After that, his focus became only obeying the party command and leading in front of all political gatherings and conflicts, which often resulted in violence for which he had been arrested two times. To make it the carrier, he intentionally failed thrice in undergraduate courses to hold the post of general secretary of the college's student union.

In my college days, with many of my friends, I became more active in student politics, while often being involved in violence was habituated to us and considered as a normal happening. However, many have been affected by severe physical damage. During the election process in our college, before the election, the class representatives and their nominators had a very significant role up to the withdrawal day. In the meantime, I had the task of somehow withdrawing the application of representation or nomination of the candidate from the opposition party so that we could win without an election. Usually, I started through a simple mutual conversation. But often, we three or four together forcefully locked those candidates for the whole stipulated day to withdraw the application, which was a kind of abduction.

I could feel that we were just the reflector of some political interest of a particular group, whereas it was projected as our benefits in front of us. Most of us turned out differently from the expected carrier while we had the time to build it accordingly. We were honestly devoted to the party emblem and demagnetized from other parts of life and always focused on the party ideas. From those days, we were being lessoned in corruption by manipulating the college union fund, which is another form of criminality that has much more impact on an individual's behavioral pattern. Therefore, including youths in criminality through such apolitical activities where they are imbeciles remains an everyday phenomenon in the academic periphery of West Bengal.

### **Conclusion:**

Due to the isolation from the desired status where youths often want to fit in with legitimate power and dignity, youths are alienated from society and get involved in criminality out of frustration. As part of the process of such political organization, they work hard but are unaware of their important contribution and the following consequences. After a long dedication with some expectation, they become dissatisfied, alienated from the process, and involved in several crimes. Sometimes, it is just for being against and harming that particular political group. In such alienation, the elites are the political capitalists who own compelling power, designation, economic support, security, and all other appropriate things to be dominated. And the youths remain just the part of their supplement who always remain in expectation to be elite, which is impossible or an illusion. On the one side, they are the elites responsible for state operations, law enforcement, and obligations. At the same time, they provide illegitimate power and support to such youths for the sake of their interest. So it is a condition where they neither could be elite nor in any better social life. In every particular political group, such youths are categorized as per the requirement and maintained as a political reserve army in politics (Marx and Engels, 1846). By analyzing the activity of all the existing political parties, it could be noticed that by



investing in youth, a large part of activity favors criminality, which the youths accept as party order. They are always commanded to be ready for political turmoil to create chaos with physical force. Kidnapping and threatening opposition or other persons is a very common crime by such youth. Although such minor criminalities are often neglected everywhere, the prolonged impact of such conditions would lead us to a different situation, where we can see the impact on the structure and functioning of society by considering the youth as an important social group. Such impact in their everyday life makes them normal with many recorded and unrecorded criminality, bringing changes and challenges in forming values, morality, and social control. Such political involvement of youths would help to make mass political awareness, but behind the appearance, it secures the interest of the political capitalist (Holcombe, 2015).

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