Chapter I

Introduction

1.1. Introducing the Theme

The main aim of this thesis is to understand the relations between hunger and politics in India in general and in the Indian state of West Bengal in particular, in the first decade of the new century (2000-2010). While discussing the relationship between hunger and politics, the present researcher will focus on three case studies: 'starvation deaths' at Amlasol (a hamlet in erstwhile Paschim Medinipur, now Jhargram district of West Bengal); 'starvation deaths' in the tea gardens of Dooars region (in Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts of West Bengal); and the 'ration riots' that broke out in the villages in the districts of Birbhum and Burdwan, West Bengal. It will also try to probe, how the state government had allegedly 'failed' to mitigate hunger through its food-securing mechanisms and also 'failed' to ensure the Right to Life (Article 21) as enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

While discussing the issue of hunger in India, the present research would also take into account the Right to Food case that was incepted in 2001 in the Supreme Court of India. It will also try to understand how a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) became able to draw the attention of the apex court on the matter of hunger and malnutrition prevailing in the country. In this context, it should be noted that the time in which the Right to Food case had been in the motion inside the courtroom was also the time when news of alleged 'starvation deaths' was coming from the two border regions of West Bengal. And, the ignition of 'ration riots' as a popular

protest on the issue of malfunctioning of the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) in 2007 in central districts of the southern parts of the state, was something that brought the issue of food security in prominence in the contemporary politics in West Bengal.

Finally, the present research will also try to find out a plausible explanation for a very intriguing question: why despite the 'starvation deaths' in two peripheral districts not many political actions took place, while over the issue of malfunctioning of TPDS violent collective protests broke out in the central region of the state, which had far-reaching political implications? But before delving deep into these issues, let us first go through some of the basic concepts and general background of the present study in both practical and theoretical terms.

1.2. Defining Some of the Basic Concepts

1.2.1. Hunger

Hunger, as defined by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), is an uncomfortable and painful physical sensation caused by insufficient consumption of dietary energy.[1] This uncomforting and physical sensation has to do with the contractions of the stomach muscles. These contractions also are known as 'hunger pangs'. It becomes chronic when an individual at regular intervals does not consume sufficient calories to lead a normal, active, and healthy life. The Planning Commission of India has defined hunger in terms of calorie consumption. In rural areas people who consume less than 2400 kcal and in urban areas who consume less than 2100 kcal are hungry.[2] There are several causes of

hunger. The World Food Programme (WFP) has identified six important causes of hunger.[3]

1. **Poverty:** The people living in poverty cannot afford to buy nutritious food to meet the prescribed calorie level which makes them weaker both mentally and physically. And the outcome is: they become less able to earn money to drive themselves out of poverty and hunger. In developing countries, as WFP has noted, a large number of small farmers are too poor to buy seeds and this leads them to cultivate crops without proper fertilisers and modern tools at subsistence levels of themselves and their family members. In sum, hunger and poverty are in a vicious circle. To put it simply, the poor are hungry and the hungry are the poor.
2. **Lack of Investment in Agriculture:** In many developing countries there are inadequate subsidy, minimum support price, irrigation system, warehouse, logistics, and over and above, malfunctioned Public Distribution System (PDS) that keep the price of food high for the poor and create adverse conditions to farmers thus there emerges an uneven food procuring and delivering mechanism. The FAO has found that investment in agriculture can prove to be five times more effective in reducing poverty than investment in any other sector.[4]
3. **Climate and Weather:** Environmental derangement is one of the bitter realities of our time. Environmental disasters may also trigger off hunger. The droughts and water crisis are on the rise with calamitous consequences. Droughts have been already declared as the most common cause of food shortage in the present world.[5] In Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya, for instance, protracted lack of rain in 2011 caused crop failure and losses of heavy

livestock. Climate change is already magnifying the crises mostly in African countries. The cultivable land of the world is under threat from infertility, erosion, desertification, and salination. In Bengal, the October cyclone in the Midnapore district in 1942 is considered one of the reasons behind the Great Bengal Famine of 1943.[6]

4. **War and Displacement:** In the contemporary world war and conflict are continuing to obstruct firming and food production. Nonetheless, the protracted conflict has displaced millions of people from their homes and pushed them to suffer from hunger so much so that the *Global Hunger Index 2018* has identified forced migration as a big cause of hunger.[7] The Syrian conflict is a recent manifestation. The conflicts in Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo played a significant part in amplifying the hunger in these two countries. In comparison, hunger is recoiling in the peaceful zones of Africa such as Rwanda and Ghana.
5. **Unstable Markets:** The fluctuating nature of food products poses a challenge for poor people to buy adequate and nutritious food. The roller-coaster of food prices may temporarily keep the food out of the reach of the poor and it puts the most negative impact particularly on the children. When the price rises, poor people often shift to cheaper and less nutritious food which can amplify the risk of malnutrition.
6. **Food Wastage:** The WFP has noted that one-third of all food produced is never consumed (1.3 billion tons).[8] In a world where one in eight is hungry, this food wastage contributed to a failure to improve global food security. The quantity of food wastage can be compared with the annual flow of the Russian river Volga. And, 3.3 billion tons of greenhouse gases are added to the

atmosphere in order to produce this huge amount of never-consumed food which adversely affects the climate and ultimately the food production.

1.2.2. Food Scarcity

Food scarcity is a situation that occurs when enough food is not produced or available for purchase/distribution. It is caused by several factors like crop failure owing to droughts, floods, huge rise in anti-crop pests, etc. But it can also be a result of the maldistribution by human agencies like the government and/or market. Food scarcity may exist at the individual level, group level, or may even at the global level. It may even exist at the individual level or group level when at the state, national or global levels there is no shortage of food. We shall elaborate on this point later. On another count, the 2018 *Global Report on Food Crises* has identified Conflict, climate change, and displacement as the main drivers of food insecurity in 2018 and revealed that in 2017 across 51 countries and territories124 million people faced crisis levels of acute food insecurity or worse and required urgent humanitarian action.[9]

1.2.3. Food Security

Food security is an ever-changing and flexible concept that has been evolved since the 1970s. The term was first originated in 1974 in the World Food Conference, where ‘food security’ was defined in terms of food supply, taking into account, the availability and price stability of primary foodstuffs at the international and national level. Food security aims to ensure “availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic food stuffs to sustain a steady

expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in productions and prices."[10]

In 1983 the FAO's analysis of food security stressed food access which led to a definition encompassing the balance between demand and supply side of the food security equation:

'Ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need'.[11]

This definition was further revised in order to incorporate the individual and household levels. In addition, regional and national level aggregation was also included in the food security analysis. The highly influential *World Bank Report on Poverty and Hunger 1986* laid emphasis on the temporal dynamics of food insecurity.[12] The report divided the concept of food security into two, a) chronic food insecurity caused by structural or continuing poverty and low incomes; b) transitory food insecurity which is the outcome of economic conflict or collapse and natural disasters. This articulation was complemented by Professor Amartya Sen's thesis *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (1981) which highlighted the exchange-entitlement factor on food access i.e., labour, production, trade, and transfer based resources. However, the most accepted definition of food security was formed in the 1996 World Food Summit. It reinforces the multidimensional nature of food security thereby incorporating important factors such as food availability, access to food, utilisation of food, and stability of political and economic conditions.

‘Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.’[13]

The four main dimensions of food security as defined in the 1996 World Food Summit are discussed below.

1. **Food *Availability*:** It deals with the ‘supply-side’ of food security and is determined by the levels of net trade, stock levels, and food production.
2. **Economic and Physical *Access* to Food:** At the international and national levels adequate supply of food may not guarantee food security at the household level. Household-level food insecurity may exist in so-called developed countries also. In the United States, in 2017, almost 50 million had fought hunger not because of food shortage but lack of access to food.[14]
3. **Food *Utilisation*:** The concept of utilisation of food as we commonly understand is that the body makes the most of the various nutrients in the food. The consumption of nutrients and sufficient energy of individuals are dependent on the factors such as good care, feeding practices, intra-household distribution of food, diversity of the diet, and food preparation. The nutritional status of the individuals determined by the good biological utilisation of the consumed food.
4. **Stability of the Other Three Dimensions over Time:** If we have inadequate access to food on a periodic basis, we will be considered food insecure though we have adequate food intake today. Because it can put our nutritional status at risk. Political instability, adverse weather conditions or economic factors (rising food prices, unemployment) may impact our status of food security.

1.2.4. Food Riot and Food Movement

Food riot is a form of collective action, occurs when there is a shortage of maldistribution of food. There have been several interrelated underlying causes behind the occurrence of food riots ranging from crop failure, hoarding to food shortage, malpractice in distribution, and logistical problems. The history of food riots has its mark throughout the world from Western Europe to Asia to Latin America.[15] It was the time of Cicero (106 BC-43 BC) when it was reported that he was attacked by a hungry mob who had disgorged their anger on the shortage of grain supply which was culminated in high bread prices,[16] however, especially from the middle ages food riots have been taken place in various countries all over the world and reached its peak during the eighteenth century in Britain and France where it had developed itself as a tool of collective protest and action and became a factor in shaking the political establishment and still carrying the legacy in the 21st century. The recent 2007-08 food price hike caused economic and political instability in both developed and poor nations. Food riots possess the capacity of tempering the processes of policy-making of the government as well as the implementation of the same for the citizens. According to the British historian, Edward Palmer Thompson, "in truth, the food riot did not require a high degree of organisation. It required a consensus of support in the community and an inherited pattern of action with its own objectives and restraints."[17]

Although they sound similar and have the common root-cause, food movements and food riots have certain differences too. While food riots are more spontaneous, sporadic, and short-lived, food movements involve a certain form of organisation and simultaneously retain the spontaneity of people's actions.

However, food riots reject any vertical political leadership that spreads its branches horizontally to the other areas, causes civil unrest in the areas it approaches. The diverse protestors are brought under the same umbrella by the issue of food because it has the same value across class, caste, race, nation, gender, gender, ethnicity, and creed. At the tipping point of food movements, getting adequate food itself becomes a religion, an ideology.

While these kinds of protests reinforce the point that the government has a prime role in securing the basic need of life, at the same some it unveils the inability of the State to do the same. And this inability forces the people to adopt the 'forbidden ways of claim-making'. And if demands of the people are not met then the popular anger can instantaneously jeopardise political stability and in the long run, can also alter the matrix of power through democratic means. So, often food movements start with the basic issue of food and go on snow-balling other issues of discontent and end bringing out a change in the political regime. Thus, food movements can also be seen as a form of popular politics.

The food movement is the outcome of popular anger over the food mechanisms, for instance, withdrawal of subsidies, black marketing, speculative hoarding or alleged 'malpractice' in the public distribution system. In recent times, *Time Magazine* while describing described the 'food riots' of 2007 in West Bengal, highlighted 'black marketing': "... And Indian protesters burned hundreds of food-ration stores in West Bengal last October, accusing the owners of selling government-subsidized food on the lucrative black market."[18] It also highlights the particular group/s who are excluded from the existing social safety net.

Some characteristics of food movements are:

A. It often leads to social unrest by gathering the common people under a common cause,
B. Food movements instigate common mass to get off the streets,
C. The protestors form issue-based organisations, rallying against the government,
D. The people seize the properties of the food merchants, looting the warehouses, destroying the governmental as well as the private properties, confrontment with the police, embracing bullets.

On the other hand, the WFP defined food riots as 'a violent, collective unrest leading to a loss of control, bodily harm or damage to property, and with the help of this definition, it identified that 51 riots had taken place across 37 countries between 2007-14 and also asserted that food riots whether directed against the government or groups are 'motivated by a lack of food availability, accessibility or affordability.[19] Thus, we can see that there is a close relationship between food insecurity and conflict. In 2008, rising food prices led to hunger revolts from Cameron to Egypt.[20]

Taking the cue from Charles Tilly, one can say that food riots coordinate efforts on behalf of shared interests and can also be viewed as contentious politics where protestors emerge as the maker of claims "bearing on other actors' interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims of third parties."[21] Contention brings together subjects, objects, and claims. In the case of a food riot, the common people became the Subject (maker of claims) whereas the other party becomes the object (receiver of claims).

Food riots can also occur during the time of larger political movements. We are familiar with the accounts of food riots during the larger movements like the French revolution and the Russian revolution. However, food movements/food riots as a form of collective protest do not occur everywhere, although an area may face an acute food crisis. And secondly, it is generally found that the capacity of a food movement/food riot to bring in a change in the political regime largely depends on its locational importance. Even a serious movement/protest in the peripheral areas (in terms of political and economic importance) has a lesser chance of influencing the main course of state-level/national politics unless supported by the parties/organisations/participants of comparatively 'central' areas of importance.

1.2.5. Right to Food

The Right to Food is an indispensable part of Human Rights. It can be said that any other right of humans cannot be thought of without it. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) proclaims that 'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or lack of livelihood in circumstances that beyond his control.'[22] The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its General Comment 12 has also defined the conditions for the right to food: 'The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman, and child, alone or in community with others, has the physical and economic access at all

times to adequate food or means for its procurement'.[23] The guidelines of the Right to Food were adopted by the FAO Council in November 2004. It defines the obligations of the State for realising the right of the citizens.

1. The Obligation to Respect: It notes that the state would not take any initiative that arbitrarily deprives the people of their right to food.
2. The Obligation to Protect: It means that the state should enact and enforce adequate laws in order to protect the right to food of the citizens from being violated by the third parties (individuals, corporations)
3. The Obligation to Fulfil: It entails that the state should engage itself in creative activities to strengthen the people's access to and utilisation of resources that would enable the individual citizens to feed themselves. At the last resort, whenever a citizen is unable to realise the right to food, the States would assert this right directly.

Moreover, the Right to Food, like other rights, can be seen as a 'negative' and a 'positive' right, and frequently they overlap. When it comes to conceptualising the right to food these two types/concepts of rights overlap each other. In the negative sense, it is the right of the individual to obtain food by its actions while in the positive sense the State must distribute adequate food among its citizens and make them able to access the same.

1.3. The 'Geography of Hunger'

By 'Geography of Hunger', we mean that hunger has its separate geography. Needless to say, that this 'Geography' is not the conventional one, defined as physical and political spaces rather it is about geographical locations in which a

large number of the population have suffered from hunger (owing to natural/social reasons) for a long time and/or on a recurring basis. Great famines throughout the time and space of human civilisation have wreaked the hungry population havoc.

There are two schools that sought to interpret the causes of the famine in two very different ways. One is the classical interpretation advocated by Thomas Robert Malthus in his *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798). It claims that if the pace by which the population increases is not matched by the pace of food production, people will starve owing to a decline in per capita food availability. This approach is also known as Food Availability Decline (FAD) approach. Amartya Sen in his seminal *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (1981) challenged this orthodox interpretation and revealed that people had starved not because of a decline in per capita food availability but because of their failure in 'exchange entitlement'. In chapter II we will discuss some of the major famines in the history of the world.

1.4. The British Famine Code of 1883

During its occupation of India, the British had formulated the first modern code of conduct in response to famine. After the large scales famine of the 1870s that engulfed five million lives, the British administration decided to go for a solution.[24] The famine code (1883) defined the situation food security of India and underlined necessary guidelines and regulations that would be abiding by the government in order to predict and prevent the famine. It defined famine as "a rise in food prices to above 140% of the 'normal', the movement of people in search of food, and widespread mortality."[25] The Famine Commission was appointed in 1878 which proposed the first famine code and was accepted in 1883 and suitably adapted across the different regions ruled by the British. The famine code aimed

to save life at minimal cost to the colonial exchequer by employing the unemployed one sat public-relief works against the wage of subsistence level and to provide ‘gratuitous relief’ of fifty paise per day to unemployable like children, pregnant mothers, disabled ones and old-aged persons.[26] This code had been evolved over time and undergone many contextual changes as India became an independent democratic country.

1.5. Welfare Schemes in Independent India

The food crisis has also dramatically transformed its nature from large-scale famines to chronic hunger. After independence, India adopted several welfare policies. With these and through ‘planned economy’, the new State tried to contain poverty and distribute various types of aids to the poor. The Indian constitution has also recognised the right to food of its citizens and according to the Supreme Court of India, it includes the right to work. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a conditional statutory guarantee to the right to work was passed in the Parliament in 2005 and began its journey in 2006 as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The previous ‘Food for Work’ schemes of independent India can be regarded as predecessors of MGNREGA. Some other important schemes adopted by the central government are Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) – the wholesome rural employment scheme; TPDS; Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS); Mid-day Meal Scheme (MMS) for school students etc. Among these, the TPDS is the prime food securing mechanism by delivering the food grains to the eligible population at an

affordable price. Hence, it demands a separate discussion that will be undertaken in chapter II.

1.6. Hunger and Politics

Hunger is about inequality, poverty, and power and it exists even in a time, where globally agricultural advancement (through agricultural science and technology) is taking place and it is helping to grow more food like never before. In the post-colonial period, the causal understanding of hunger is political. We have already discussed that how, besides climatic reasons, war, ethnic conflicts, maldistribution of food grains has forced the people to go hungry. A detailed discussion on famines will corroborate this argument. In the next chapter, we will see how the miscalculations or misperception of the causes and mitigation of famines by the State have caused epochal catastrophes. However, there is another side of the coin. If the State's failure on several counts is one of the primary causes of hunger, it is only the State which can primarily alleviate hunger by framing a strong social safety net. If a State is incapable to mitigate hunger for a prolonged period, the outcome (of protests, food movements/riots) can seriously challenge its legitimacy.

Thus, there is a multi-layered relationship between hunger and politics. If in the first layer, hunger is primarily caused by politics (State's actions or lack of action), in the second level the politics itself is shaped and reshaped by the former. In short, we may argue there is a reciprocal relation between hunger and politics.

1.7. Food, Entitlement, Welfare State and Distributive Justice

Food constitutes the foremost element of the *Right to Life* as enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Thus, the supervision and control of production, accumulation, and distribution of food to the people are one of the basic obligations of the Indian State which is a welfare state. Our health and wellbeing are dependent upon the quality and the quantity of food we consume. In this way, food is to be desirable for every human being for living a healthy and active life. Human has the right to life so the right to food. The UDHR also states in Article 3 that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person".[27] In the sense of John Rawls's theory, food falls in the category of social primary goods.[28] In his celebrated book *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Rawls develops two principles that are to be taken into consideration to secure justice under a liberal welfare State. These principles are:

"First Principle

- Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.

Second Principle

- Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are

both:

(a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and

(b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity."[29]

Rawls wanted to argue in a nutshell that just allocation of social primary goods is indispensable to and the main concern of distributive justice. Thus, the absence of food will also mean the absence of distributive justice. And, the distribution will only then be just if the State follows certain just procedures.

Ideally speaking, modern welfare States should have political and legal structures to implement the proper allocation of goods in a flawless manner with an aim to include everyone and maintain a decent standard of life as directed by their constitutions. In India, various provisions have been made in order to properly realise the right to food like that of PDS. During the time of its inception in the late1930s, the PDS was perceived to be a general entitlement scheme. However, after independence and with the welfare goals of the new state the perception of the state changed. The new logic behind the formation of the world's largest food delivery mechanism[30] in India was to de-commodify the food and shielding its citizens from an unstable free market.

In this context, let us grasp the issue of hunger/food from Amartya Sen's perspective of 'Entitlement'. Sen has argued that the mere availability of food in the market or the economy does not make a person entitled to food.[31] It is only through the exchange of his endowment that she/he can able to acquire her/his entitlement. Sen defines 'entitlement' as "the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces".[32] He also refers to entitlement as the rights through which in each social structure, given the prevailing legal, political, and economic arrangements, a person can establish command over some alternative

commodity bundles (anyone bundle of which he or she can choose to consume).[33] The endowment can be in the form of land and labour that may be directly used to produce food. But since most of the people in the world do not possess the land, they do not accumulate food directly. They earn their ability to earn food by getting employment in the production of varying ranges of commodities such as industrial goods, cash crops, sundry services, and other various occupations. And, these all depend on the employment opportunities, prevailing wage rates, and the need of the market.

It also implies the direct or indirect role of the State to look after whether a person can acquire her/his entitlement or not and whether the food is evenly distributed in the society or not. The entitlement approach concentrates on the persons' ability to command over food, and *not* on if the person is not using his ability to avoid starvation. In addition, it focuses on the means of commanding food that is available and legitimised by the legal system in operation in that society.

After independence, since 1947 India has successfully avoided major famines. Its success in avoiding famines cannot be attributed to its steady improvement in food production because it coincides with a steady decline in food production per head. Its achievement lies in the fact that India adopted the path of protecting or creating lost entitlement. For achieving this end, two complementary force came into play '(1) an administrative system that is intelligently aimed at recreating lost entitlements (caused by droughts, floods, economic slumps, or whatever), and (2) a political system that acts as the prime mover in getting the administrative system to work as and when required.'[34] However, Sen also cautions us that owing to the

generality of this approach, "it makes no attempt to include all possible influences that can in principle cause starvation, for example, illegal transfers (e.g. looting) and choice failures (e.g. owing to inflexible food habits)".[35]

Thus, following Sen, one may say that malnutrition, hunger, and famines are not only the results of lack of productivity but the policy of the state for indulging and diminishing chronic hunger and famine. Therefore, it depends on how much the state is doing its job in order to make its citizens capable of acquiring their entitlements. People suffer from hunger when they cannot establish their entitlement over an adequate amount of food.[36]

A sudden increase in food prices may lead the poor section of people to their entitlement failure. This happens in the case of famines. The threat of food shortages forces the food merchants to hoard the grains leading to a drastic increase in food prices. Besides, in a famine-stricken area, the sections of poor people who are worst hit are the daily wage labours, fish sellers, cobblers, barbers, and so on. In such a time of crisis labour market rate also falls and job seekers do not find work against the prevailing wages. In this way, their endowment is not enough to exchange with their entitlements. Hence, they lost access to food. They starved and died. If we take the examples of the Great Bengal famine (1943), the Ethiopian famine, drought and famine in the Sahel (1968-1985), famine in Bangladesh (1974), the potato famine of Ireland (1845-49), etc, Sen would argue that people in these instances did not die because of the lack of food but owing to their entitlement failure. It was also found that wherein one part of the country people was dying of starvation, people in the other part had been leading a normal

life by consuming adequate food because owing to their relative opulence they were able to command food. Sen argues[37] that famines are easy to prevent, partly because they affect rarely more than five percent and hardly ever more than ten percent of the total population. The path to combat famine, what he suggests, is to redistribute the existing food through immediate means such as emergency employment creation so that the indigents have an immediate income for purchasing food.

Hence, "Starvation is the characteristic of some people not *having* enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there *being* not enough food to eat. While the latter can be a cause of the former, it is but one of many *possible* causes. Whether or how starvation relates to food supply is a matter for factual investigation."[38] Following this line of argument of Amartya Sen, the present research will try to probe its inquiry through two axes: *first*, by exploring the status of TPDS in the areas of study; and *secondly*, by finding out the status of various targeted 'Food for Work' schemes.

1.8. Hunger and Power: A Foucauldian Understanding

The issues of hunger, politics, and delivery mechanisms can also be seen from another perspective which highlights the matrix of power and views the mechanisms of delivery of 'social primary goods' as tools for 'governmentality' i.e., 'controlling' the population by biological means. Michel Foucault is the originator of this thesis. Foucault calls it 'biopower'. It relates to the practice of modern nation States and the regulation of their subjects through "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and

the control of populations"[39]. Foucault first used the term in his lecture courses at the Collège de France but the term first appeared in print in *The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault's first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. In his lecture *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault states the fundamental difference between biopolitics and discipline: "Where discipline is the technology deployed to make individuals behave, to be efficient and productive workers, biopolitics is deployed to manage population; for example, to ensure a healthy workforce."[40]

Taking a cue from Michel Foucault one may argue that allocation proper food to the citizens can also be used as a technology to rule. This is one of the ways by which the power (at various levels) functions: by fulfilling the biological needs of the population it is able to control/manage it in a more efficient way. By administering the biological life of the population, the modern State wants to maintain, produce and reproduce social order. In this regard, the power has functioned in two basic forms: *first*, at the individual level, by treating the body as a machine ("anatomo-politics of the human body") and laying emphasis on the disciplining, optimisation of its capabilities, extortion of its forces and the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility; and at the social level, which came in the 'modern' time, through 'biopolitics of population', i.e. targeting the population as species with all its aggregated biological processes like birth, mortality, health condition, etc. All these processes are subjected to a series of innovations and interventions to facilitate "automatic functioning of power".[41]

Foucault conceptualised bio-power as an alternative to discipline and sovereignty that were previously deployed by the State (monarchs, princes) to rule the masses.

Previously the state used to rule by one technology that was of deduction where it can seize anything (time, wealth, their bodies) from its subjects by its sovereign power in order to preserve its rule. "With the advent of medicine and the series of other transformations to some extent freed the population from the shackles of sheer necessity (mostly agricultural improvements), a new technology of power, grounded by the scientific discourse of biology, pushed the biological existence of human into political existence."[42]

The French historian went on to unearth the various positive means possessed by the power to control their population by addressing their biological needs. Techniques of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions (the family, the army, the police, schools, individual medicine, administration of collective bodies) operated in the sphere of economic processes, their development, and the forces working to sustain them.[43] It can also be argued that the institutions have been reproducing their *power over* the population by their own *power to* enforce their norms. In addition, the power to enforce these norms in society depends on the biological knowledge of the population. Thus, it is the power/knowledge equation that serves as a basis for the socio-political control of individuals and groups.

In the eighteenth century, to deal with these various kinds of problems for achieving control over the population, the state had required accurate information of its population: for this, new tactics in the form of demography developed and the assessment of the wealth and its circulation, and their relations with the population were calculated. Following Foucault, it can be argued that in India,

PDS and other social security schemes were introduced to deliver the basic biological needs of its citizens through the help of the accumulated *bio-data* of the population and thereby trying to regulate or control it and draw legitimacy from the same. Under a welfare regime availability of food becomes the mark of legitimacy because the State cannot preside over hunger deaths as it signifies a condition of powerlessness on the part of the State.

What Foucault tried to show us is the ground on which the modern sovereign power differs from the classical mode because the latter wielded power over the populace by enforcing its Right to kill for the sake of its very existence while the former is concerned with the management of life or "to invest life through and through."[44] Hence, in the so-called 'neo-liberal' time, the State power is primarily concerned with the management of life ('governance' has become the *mantra* of the new rule) and also with creating conditions that will ensure a healthy and active life for its citizens which in turn will ensure the legitimacy of power. "If the power to kill established the sovereign power in earlier times, in the present time, death suggests the powerlessness of the state."[45]

1.9. The Right to Food in India

Despite India's efforts and image as one of the fastest-growing economies, it stands at 113 among 119 nations in the *Global Hunger Index* 2018,[46] two points fall from 2017[47]; whereas in 2003, it ranked 96 among 119 nations with a score of 25.73.[48] And score-wise, India has scored 38.8 in 2000, and within a decade, in 2010, it reduced to 32.2.[49] Although, during 2000-2010, there were adequate food stocks to feed hungry bellies in India! In 2001, the People's Union for Civil

Liberties (PUCL) discovered that notwithstanding the fact that food stocks reached an unprecedented level (around 40 million tonnes),[50] the hunger regime had also consolidated its 'empire' in many parts of the country. This finding coincided with the *Global Hunger Index* of 2000. This again confirms our understanding that in most cases, lack of food is not the real reason for hunger, rather the mal-distribution of food grains through State agencies is.

In 2001, during a visit to an FCI warehouse, 5km away from the city of Jaipur, it was found that the warehouse was overflowing with food grains in such abundance that the grains were kept outside without any shed ad that grains were rotting due to the fermentation of rainwater. While in a nearby village people were eating in rotation also called 'rotation hunger' which means if some members of the family eat on one day and the remaining persons eat on the other day. In this background, the PUCL filed a case (196/2001) in Rajasthan which came to the Supreme Court of India (in the second chapter we will discuss the case in detail).[51] Initially, the case was brought against the Government of India (GOI), Food Corporation of India (FCI), and six state governments on the specific charge of inadequate drought relief but later it was sought to address the larger context of the Right to Food by including all states and union territories within its purview.

Here comes the importance of *Right to life* (Article 21) of Indian Constitution. In *Maneka Gandhi vs. Union of India* case (1978), the apex court stated that "…. the right to life as enshrined in Art.21 means something more than survival or animal existence and would include the right to live with human dignity…"[52] Nonetheless, in 1981 the court had also held the same in the case of *Francis*

Coralie Mullin vs. The Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi & Others that right to life includes the right to live with dignity and all that goes along with it, including the right to food.[53] This interpretation of the supreme court of article 21 became the basis of the PUCL petition. It demanded that every citizen's right to freedom from hunger as incorporated in Article 21 is to be clubbed with the obligation of the State guaranteed in Articles 39(a) and 47. The reading of Article 21 with Articles 39(a) and 47 brings the matter of food security in an accurate perspective. In this way, the Right to Food became a guaranteed Fundamental Right that is to be enforced by the virtue of constitutional remedy provided under Article 32 of the Indian constitution.

1.9.1. The Commissioners

The Supreme Court on 8th May 2002 appointed Dr. N.C. Saxena (former secretary, Planning Commission of India) and Mr. S.R. Sankaran (former secretary, Ministry of Rural Development) as commissioners. Harsh Mander (retired Indian Administrative Officer) was appointed as a commissioner in November 2004 in place of Mr. Sankaran who had to resign owing to personal reasons. The commissioners were empowered to inquire into any violations of the interim orders and to seek redressal, with full authority from the Supreme Court. They were also to report to the court from time-to-time to make the court aware of the real scenario and if required, demand intervention by going beyond the orders. The commissioners played a vital part in ensuring the interim orders were perceived seriously and made the central and the state governments alert on this issue.

The state governments were also directed to appoint nodal officers for ensuring the due implementation of the food security-related programs and also to provide to the commissioners' full access to the relevant records and information. Till 2009, nine reports had been submitted by the commissioners.[54] In the first report, the commissioners had identified eight states that were not cooperated or partially cooperated with them. Those states were Bihar Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujrat, and West Bengal.[55]

1.10. A Brief History of Hunger in Bengal

1.10.1. Chiattarer Manbantar

Before delving deep into our subject, let us take a brief look on the history of hunger in both partitioned (independent) and pre-partitioned (colonial) Bengal. Bengal had a long history of hunger. (A detailed description of the famines and food crises of 1959 and 1966 in West Bengal will be given in Chapter II.)

The first major famine in Bengal under the British *raj* occurred during 1769-1773.[56] Popular in Bengal as *Chiattarer Manbantar* (as 1769 CE was 1176 in Bengali calendar, and the '76' is pronounced as *Chiattarer* in Bengali) or the Famine of Seventy-Six, it devastated the lower Gangetic plain of India from Southern Bengal to the region of present-day Bihar. The mortality reached 10 million.[57] The tragedy and pangs of the famine and a rebellion of the Sannyasins (Hindu religious ascetics) that broke out in 1770 have been captured by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) in his nationalist novel, *Anandamath* (The Abbey of Bliss) in 1882. A hymn-like song in the novel, famous as *Vandemataram* (Hail to Mother [land]) later fuelled the nationalist imagination of

the Indian freedom struggle and was adopted as a National Song after independence.

1.10.2. The Great famine of Bengal (1943)

At the beginning of British colonial rule, the Bengal province witnessed a famine. In the concluding years too, the province was made to witness a famine in 1943. The famine, known as the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 (or *Panchasher Manbantar* in Bengali), which occurred in the backdrop of World War II took a heavy toll in the province. The official figure revealed that about 1.5 million[58] people died of starvation and other disease caused by malnutrition, lack of healthcare, displacement. Among major factors (including natural factors), the 'denial policy' of the British colonial government, especially after the Japanese occupation of Burma, caused a halt on the rice import. The crisis further intensified when the British adopted two scorched-earth initiatives in eastern and coastal Bengal by anticipating that Japan might invade India via the eastern border of Bengal.

1.10.3. Food Crises of 1959 & 1966

The long shadow of the food crisis continued to make its presence felt in the post-independent (and partitioned) Indian state of West Bengal. In the initial years after independence in 1947, a massive exodus came from erstwhile East Pakistan (presently Bangladesh). The pressure of millions of refugees, lack of industrial development, and most importantly the food shortages put the post-independence West Bengal ruled by the Congress under the leadership of Dr. Bidhanchandra Roy under the abysmal crisis. Though the food movements of 1959 and 1966, historically have their unique existence but also, they are often seen as a

continuation of the legacy that started with the post-1943 famine by the Left initiatives which went through the Tebhaga movement (which shouted one-third of the crop to the landowner and two-third of the crop to the tiller) during the last years of British rule. The protests over an inadequate and corrupt PDS between 1956 and 1958 laid down the background of the Food Movement of 1959.

In this context, the Price Increase and Famine Resistance Committee (PIFRC) came into existence in early 1959 by a special initiative from the Communist Party of India (CPI). In this regard, the Left leaders took a twine policy. On the one hand, they floored the matter of food scarcity in the West Bengal state assembly as well as in the Indian parliament in New Delhi, on the other they started to mobilise the masses through PIFRC and party machinery. On 31st August 1959 people from urban, semi-urban, and rural areas gather around Howrah and Kolkata to attend a rally at Maidan. Soon pandemonium broke out, and the police retaliated with heavy hands. The movement continued for three consecutive days (31st August – 3rd September). On the 4th of September, Jyoti Basu, the opposition leader, along with other members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) claimed that in the previous days thousand were missing, about 80 people were killed and many went missing.[59] Although, according to the government statement, the number was far less.

The second food movement took place in 1966, following the scarcity of rice and kerosene and extreme difficulties of the common people for a faulty PDS. In the food movement of 1966, there was more active participation by the rural people than in 1959. The second spell of movement was more popular and spontaneous.

In 1966 the rice was sold Rs. 5/kg and as the days were passing by kerosene which was mainly used by the urban poor and villagers went scarce. Wherein the 1959 food movement there were two antagonists, the food movement of 1966 involved three parties, and the epicentre shifted from the Kolkata to the districts.

The movement saw a month-long violent episode, from 16th February to 14th March, of clashes between the police and the protestors. Like 1959, in 1966 too, the issue of price hike of essential food commodities, public anger, arrests of the opposition leaders, and police atrocities became the issues of heated debates (sometimes even became violent) of the state assembly. The second Food Movement Left over 40 dead in five days and several thousand were badly injured. The food movements of 1959 & 1966 proved to be game-changers for the change of political regime in the state. In the assembly elections of 1967, the United Front (composed of the Left ists and Bangla Congress, a break-away group of the State Congress Party) ended the two-decade rule of the Congress after the electoral debacle of the latter.

1.11. 'Hunger Deaths' and Ration Crisis in Left Front Rule

The UF government of 1967 lived only a few months amidst conflicts among partners, radical Left movements, especially peasant uprising in Naxalbari in North Bengal. It came back to power in 1969 and again the differences between Bangla Congress and the major partner, CPI(M) (which emerged in 1964 after the split in CPI) loomed large leading to the collapse of the second UF government. The Congress came back to power in the first part of the 1970s and retained it till the assembly elections of 1977 (in the aftermath of the fall of the Congress

government at the centre after the end of National Emergency, which lasted for 19 months between 1975 and 1977), in which the Left Front (LF) led by CPI(M) came to power in the state. In its initial years, the LF took the question of food security very seriously and implemented various legal as well as social policies from radical land reforms (Operation *Barga*, which allowed three-fourths share to share-croppers) and the establishment of three-tire Panchayat (rural local government) to the effective functioning of PDS and successful running of many Central Government-sponsored programmes.

Then, after 38 years of the food movement of 1966, and 27 years after the uninterrupted Left rule, uneasy news of 'starvation deaths' started to come from the two geographically marginalised places of West Bengal namely Amlasol in the then Paschim Medinipur district and Dooars region of erstwhile Jalpaiguri district. And these incidents took place in a period when since 2004 the right to food case had been in motion in the apex court. Again, in 2007, the districts of Bankura, Birbhum, and Burdwan witnessed tumultuous protests popularly known as 'ration riots' over the issues of 'corruptions and malpractice' in TPDS. And in 2008, in the *panchayat* elections (elections of the rural local self-governments) several village *panchayats* (which were considered as the fortress of the Left) where protests over the rations broke out, went out of the hands of the ruling Left. These losses became more significant in the larger background of the fierce anti-eviction movements in Singur and Nandigram (which reached the zenith in 2007) that shook the foundation of 34 years' Left rule in the state in 2011.

1.12. Statement of the Problem

The above discussion brings before us some crucial interrelated issues which demand further scrutiny and probing. First, the interrelations between hunger and politics – how far they affect each other – need special focus. This is to be understood as a general problem and also in the particular context of West Bengal. Secondly, the events of Amlasol and Dooars also demand deep analysis along with the incidents of 'ration riots' in a few southern districts of the state. This will provide us with the practical opportunity of understanding the interrelations between hunger and politics. Thirdly, the development of the Right to Food initiatives and movement at the national level has to be analysed further and to see whether Right to Food initiatives had affected in any capacity the issues of 'hunger deaths' and ration crisis in the state. Fourthly, the interrelations between hunger and politics need to be understood both from the rights and entitlement perspective (which upholds the liberal ethics of 'distributive justice') and the perspective of 'power dynamics'. Fifthly, in case of politics and movements on food crisis in the state, we need to compare with the instances of the past movements and the politics and protests over food crisis that occurred during the time of the present research (2000-2010) and further probe why the cases of hunger and food crisis took different shape and magnitude of politics in different places of the state in the same decade?

1.13. Review of Literature

There are many theoretical works on the general themes under research as well as some researched books and articles on the particular fields of study. As the study also demands that the particular cases for research, especially the 'politics' and

'movements' parts, should be placed in the broader context of social movements, we have to understand the issue of the food crisis and other related issues in the state since its inception in 1947. We may add here that notwithstanding a good number of existing works that deal with the issues of our research, there is no well-researched book that addresses all the interrelated issues, mentioned in the 'Statement of the Problem'.

In the following paragraphs, we have discussed some of the important previous works and set the discussion in their contexts. This contextual discussion is necessary to understand the merits of these works better. But first, let us begin with a general/theoretical understanding of the problem. Below are the two theoretical perspectives: the first tries to understand the problem of chronic hunger and famine as crises of maldistribution, entitlement, and capacity building; while the second approaches the problem from the perspective of power and governmentality.

In his *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*[60], Amartya Sen has proposed the "entitlement" approach to understand the causes of famines. Here he cites the examples of some great famines that occurred in different continents: from the great Bengal famine of 1943, for instance, to the great Chinese famine of 1958-1962, and concludes by saying that in these instances, people died owing to failure in "exchange entitlement" rather than "food availability decline". The book holds that the decline in food availability is the direct result of the failure of the state to protect the citizens from hunger. Sen has made a similar argument in his previous and subsequent works that it is *not* the decline in food production which causes a decline in food availability in a

country, rather the *maldistribution of food* leads to unavailability and subsequent famine.

Sen has further elaborated his above argument in his 1998-masterpiece, *Development as Freedom*[61]. Like the previous book, it also contains an ethical overtone. Here the main argument is about the capacity-building duty of the state. The State has to pay attention to the matter of how much an individual is free to buy her/his entitlement through their endowment. Hence, the state should create paths by which an individual can extend her/his capability and able enough to have a command over her/his entitlement.

Sen has reiterated what he had said to define the term 'entitlement' in his book, *Hunger and Public Action*[62], co-authored with Jean Drèze. In his words, entitlement is "the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces"[63]. And there is always an indirect role of public activism both socially and politically in order to get their entitlements earned. In this book, the authors examined the problem of hunger of our time and the role public opinion might play in combating it. By so doing the authors presented a coherent perspective on the complex social, political, nutritional, and economic issues connected in the analysis of hunger.

From another perspective, all the welfare policies for the population can also be seen as techniques to manage the population at the micro or the biological level. And this leads us to rethink the distinction between citizen and population. While

the citizen inhabits the domain of theory, the concept of population is very empirical, free from a normative burden, and related to policy.[64] The population is congenial to various statistical techniques like census, sample surveys because it is classifiable, identifiable, and describable. And these characteristics of the population make it targetable of various administrative measures, economic and "welfare" policies, and sometimes political mobilisation.

Michel Foucault has identified this whole bunch of techniques as an indispensable characteristic of the modern regime of power. In his words, it is the 'governmentalization of the state'.[65] In his *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-78* Foucault undertook a broad study of what he called "biopolitics". By biopolitics, he referred to the new technology of power over the populace which is distinct from its classical punitive mode. Though in this transcript the author discussed the concept in detail it introduced by him in the first volume of the trilogy of *The History of Sexuality*. In part five titled 'Right of Death and Power over Life' the first volume of this trilogy titled *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*[66] originally published in 1977, the author traced the genealogy of governmentality. He showed how the notion, as well as the fundamental characteristic of power, had undergone a dramatic change. In its classical mode the sovereign used to assert its power in a sense of "right to death" means exercising his power to kill or refrain from it.

In other words, the sovereign betokened his power over life only through the death he was capable of prescribing. Whereas, the modern sovereign State is more concerned with the 'Right to Live' means how people should live,

whereupon, the power becomes about how to inculcate life. This motto of flowering life aims to produce docile bodies. These innoxiously docile bodies, in turn, help to maintain the status quo and refute any possibilities of alteration in the matrix of power.

Another crucial part of the present research is to have a theoretical understanding of social movements. It would help us understand that the movements, especially associated with the food crisis, are not a one-time mass meeting, declaration, or petition rather a campaign, a sustained challenge to power holders not concerned about the welfare of the people. Apart from the causal analysis of social movements, we need to understand other dynamics shown by Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow in their *Contentious Politics*[67]and *Social Movements,1768-2004*[68]. These dynamics are Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, and Commitment. Tilly called these WUNC. To have a theoretical understanding of a social movement we have to bear this in mind. According to Tilly and Tarrow social movement is a form of contentious politics. Based on empirical research and historical evidence the authors have provided an analytical tool to study different forms of contention. The framework proposed by Tilly and Tarrow would be very helpful for us when we will discuss the tumultuous events in the districts of Birbhum and Burdwan.

Now let us turn to the question of the Right to Food in India, which occupies a central place in the present research. In 2001, the nation saw the inception of the Right to Food case in the Supreme Court of India which revealed that many sections of the population were not having two square meals a day while the huge food stocks remained unutilised in the warehouses of the Food Corporation of

India (FCI). Measuring the food crisis by statistics is a different thing and sharing the field experience and opting for an action-research is the other. The advocacy of the latter path can be found in the work of Jean Drèze, a well-known activist-economist of India. In his book *Sense and Solidarity: Jholawala Economics for everyone*,[69] he has argued in favour of action-oriented research in development policy. Categorised under ten broad themes like drought and hunger, poverty, health care, employment guarantee, school meals, food security and public distribution system, the essays in the book are the op-editorials written by the author in the leading dailies of India, mostly in *The Hindu* over a large span of time (mostly during 2001-2013), has presented social policy debates in India in last fifteen years. Besides the insightful observation on other social security schemes, one can find the evolution of NFSA and the debates that had been emerged from it in this book.

However, understanding the value of National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 to the millions of hungry in India and the evolution of the same through right to food case will remain incomplete if one dodges an insider's account. Harsh Mander, one of the commissioners of the apex court in the case of Right to Food, in his book *Ash in the Belly: India's Unfinished Battle Against Hunger*,[70] has presented penetrating accounts of the lives of million poor in the country and has placed their narrative before the figures. As a commissioner of the Supreme Court of India in the case of the right to food, the author traveled across the poorest of the poor regions of the country, brought up their melancholic accounts in the pages by delving deep into the lives of the victims of extreme poverty while investigating into the political economy of hunger in India.

The author argued for the formation of a universal Right to Food law that ensures food for all citizens not as a charity from the state but as a legal entitlement. Because the notion of charity has two shortfalls: firstly, if the state rolls back itself from charity than it cannot be challenged on the judicial grounds because our constitutional settings (vide the sub-point 'The Right to Food Case') does not allow to do so and secondly, the charity cannot be considered as a step towards the development of the individual or society as a whole as it is indulging the individual to rely on the state. Dependence on the State resists an individual from achieving her/his freedom.

Another major focus of this research is politics (and thereby movements) around the two-pronged questions of food scarcity and hunger, especially in West Bengal. To read it properly, one should understand these relations historically. The history of food scarcity and the Left oppositional politics (mainly based on the refugees) that followed in the state should be traced back from the days of its inception. India was bifurcated (later trifurcated with the creation of Bangladesh in 1971) in 1947. The partition created two sovereign States of India and Pakistan. Pakistan, primarily created for Indian Muslims, had two broad divisions: The West and East Pakistan (presently Bangladesh) which lay on the western and the eastern boundaries of India. East Pakistan was created dissecting the erstwhile Bengal Province of British India, while the western part of the British Punjab Province went to West Pakistan. The partition wreaked havoc on the lives of a huge population which were compelled to cross the borders of the two new states. For

India, millions of people from the western part of Punjab came to the eastern side of Punjab (the new Indian Punjab province) and other places of North India.

While following a so-called 'land-man exchange' between the eastern and western parts of Punjab, the new Indian state of Punjab province of India could handle the situation better, the new state of West Bengal had to witness one of the largest refugees flows with a very lesser reverse flow of population from West Bengal to East Pakistan and without any 'land-man exchange' like Punjab. Thus, since its inception, the infant state of West Bengal had to accommodate a huge population from the eastern side, which occupied two-thirds of the territory of the British Bengal.

In his monumental study on partition refugees in West Bengal, *The Marginal Man: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal*,[71] Prafulla Kumar Chakrabarty sought to probe a riddle that why and how the refugees from East Pakistan became attracted to and in course of time became a very reliable support plank of the Left parties – first CPI and then (after the CPI split in 1964) CPI(M). Chakravarty had shown that at the initial stage, many small refugee organisations were formed. These ad-hoc organisations were formed for voicing the basic demands of the refugees like food and shelter and erecting *Jabardakhal Colonies* – squatter colonies on forcibly occupied land – of the government and the big landholders, within and outside Calcutta. Under the leadership of *Nikhil Bongo Bastuhara Kormoporishod,* the refugees had started to gather for a common cause by leaving behind their political affiliations and often they resorted to organised rallies, starvation sit-ins, etc. These refugee movements became the

foundation of popular movements in post-independent Bengal. Later, these small organisations were merged into one umbrella organisation called the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC) on 13th August 1950. The formation of this organisation can be seen as the emergence of a new society was adopting a culture of protest. In the decades of 1950s and 1960s, the Left conglomeration started to mobilise the masses on a host of these diverse issues.

In one of his seminal works titled *Radical Politics in West Bengal*[72], Marcus Franda had also traced the experience and social origins of communism in Bengal. He argued that factors like general economic decline, unemployment, and communal conflict contributed to the flowering of the communist movement against the regime of Indian National Congress (INC) in West Bengal. The book provides a study of state politics in the immediate years after independence in West Bengal. We know that a culture of "movement-based" politics was prevailing in the state. Franda particularly took note of the food movements of 1959 and 1966 that according to him became a major factor for gathering huge state-wide support in favour of the Left parties that translated in the legislative election in 1967. The said movements broke out in the state over the issue of improper working of the public distribution system under the Congress government. These types of movements that focus on the materialistic issue, particularly the economic wellbeing of people is known as social/popular movement.

These movements, which often turned violent, were indeed the testimonies of the popular actions, mass agitations, collective claim makings, and networks of

activism. The narratives of these movements were aptly presented in the book *From Popular Movements to Rebellion: The Naxalite decade*[73] edited by Ranabir Samaddar. The essays on the movements also draw our attention to the matter that how democracy expanded in the postcolonial structure of a newly independent country. It also argues that it is only by the help of these accounts of the preceding popular movements like the refugee movement, the anti-tram fare rise movement of 1953-54, the two food movements of 1959 and 1966 – we may be able to understand the outbreak of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal, some parts of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh in 1967. Among the popular movements narrated in this book, the food movements are very significant for the present research, which arguably became the prime factors behind the change of guards in the state in 1967.

In another major work, *The Present History of West Bengal: Essays in Political Criticism*[74], Partha Chatterjee argues that it is the agrarian movements of the 1930s in colonial Bengal that had shaped the contours of land reform legislation and rural politics in West Bengal. According to the author, it is only by having a general idea of the 1930s that we can understand the politics in West Bengal after independence. The book is a collection of essays by the author which can also be seen as a re-evaluation of the 'Bengal Renaissance', the legacy of the Naxalbari movement, and the supposed absence of caste in West Bengal politics.

While Samaddar's edited volume deals with the radicalisation of the political culture of the state, the monograph by Monobina Gupta titled *Left Politics in Bengal: Time Travels among Bhadralok Marxists*[75] deals with questions of party

defections of both within CPI and the Congress at the national level and its resonance in state politics. Gupta has immaculately sketched the pictures of the state legislative elections of 1967, 1969, and 1971 and the breakdown of the subsequent coalition governments while telling the stories of popular outrage, radical activism, violence, police encountering the youths in the boulevards of the city, and the knaggy paths in the countryside who were once the students of premier institutions of the state. Then the decade of the volatile 1970s began. Under the chief ministership of Siddhartha Shankar Ray, the Congress regained its throne in 1972 and the stage was all set to take action against the ongoing communist movement across the state. The next five years were proved to be a tough period for the communist cadres and leaders; therefore, many of them went underground. But this phase ended with first the Parliamentary elections followed by the assembly elections in 1977, through which the first LF government took over the power in the state.

But did the questions of land reforms or the promises of radical redistributions leave the political scene with the end of the Naxalite decade (1967-1977) or did they survive? Did these questions were addressed by the newly enthroned LF? Had they managed to hold the popular trust with them? If they did then what was the path? Was it radical or it was in a passive form? Ranabir Samaddar has sought answers to these questions in his *Passive Revolution in West Bengal 1977-2011*.[76] The book is a collection of essays that provide us with a clue about the gradual metamorphosis of the state under the LF since 1977. The author argues that while the new regime claimed the credit of implementing land reforms, three-tier Panchayati Raj system, operation *barga* (registration of sharecroppers), etc, it

lacked focus on other key factors like health, education, industrialisation, urban affairs, infrastructures, which contributed in losing their base among the middle class of the state. Besides, the militant trade union movements reached their zenith resulting in the closures of many traditional industries like jute mills, tanneries, engineering ateliers, etc in the 1980s, and thereby successfully weakening the support from the working class. The state government also failed to decentralise the modern development process throughout the state especially in terms of modern logistics, required to establish more technology-based industries. Mainly due to this, it failed to encash the 'investment friendly' atmosphere of 1991 in the wake of globalisation and liberalisation. When proposals for setting up new industries came from a few industrial groups, the only places the state had to offer were the peripheral areas of Kolkata like Howrah, Hooghly, North and South 24 Parganas.

The author further argues that the Front had forgotten how to engage in dialogue or converse with the society thus the longevity of the Left rule became the source of its decline. Therefore, the Left found itself skirting around a fundamental question of how to govern in a democracy? Limited reforms, small changes, big compromises, failure in assessing the popular discontent, corruption, therefore, as the author has argued, the end of the revolution in a passive form, in other words, the LF tenure in West Bengal was an epoch of passive revolution.

The way the Left forgot to imagine new popular politics for rejuvenating its democratic credentials has been elaborated by Dwaipayan Bhattacharya in his book *Government as Practice: Democratic Left in a Transforming India*[77].

Grounded by archival and empirical research, this book opens up a whole new way of looking at the Left politics from land distribution to the messy land acquisition. Nonetheless, two chapters of the book namely ‘Agency: School Teachers’ and ‘Machinery: Party Society’, disclose the path adopted by the Front to became an omnipresent living reality all over West Bengal particularly in rural Bengal before its maiden defeat in 2011 legislative election.

We have already discussed Article 21 of the Indian constitution which has directed the state to safeguard the citizens’ right to life which includes the right to food. It is needless to recapitulate that all the food security initiatives like PDS, MGNREGS, ICDS, MMS by the State were designed to meet said end. But despite all of the mechanisms and huge stocks of accumulated food grains, alleged news of ‘starvation deaths’ was coming from all over the country. News of ‘starvation deaths’ was also coming from West Bengal. Sibaji Pratim Basu and Geetisha Dasgupta in their book *Politics in Hunger Regime: Essays on the Right to Food in West Bengal*[78] have presented the ground-level realities of the status of the right to food in various regions of West Bengal. From the Nayagram block of Paschim Medinipur to the Dooars region of West Bengal, this book describes the way in which people had been struggling in their daily life for having two square meals a day. The book also discusses the inability on the part of the LF regime to arrest food insecurity of this section of the population by portraying the inadequacy of the Food for Work schemes and especially the TPDS. However, the first news of ‘starvation deaths’ came from a village named Amlasol in 2004 which the book has not covered. The village of Amlasol installed at West Bengal-Jharkhand border, in the Jhargram district (erstwhile in Paschim Medinipur

district). The district of Paschim Medinipur belongs to the region of Junglemahal – the region which had its own colonial and political history and occupies a separate place in popular Bengali imagination. Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's (1894-1950) famous novel *Aranyak* only reasserts this claim.

Another account on 'Junglemahal' region is worth mentioning. It is written by Chandan Sinha, the erstwhile district collector who served Paschim Medinipur from 2004 to 2005. In this work, Sinha has shared his personal experiences in his book *Kindling of an Insurrection: Notes from Junglemahas*[79] where he has provided gripping accounts of the lives of the people of Junglemahals by depicting their living conditions, unstable occupations, almost non-existent education, inadequate access to developmental programs both from the government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). In this book, one can find a balance between a personal travelogue and official documentation which makes this book a rare chronicle of rural life of this southern district of West Bengal. Before the Lalgarh movement, this southern part of the state came under the public/media gaze, especially owing to the news of alleged 'starvation deaths' of five tribal persons in 2004. However, the author does not accept 'hunger' or 'starvation' as the cause of deaths. Again, on the alleged 'starvation deaths' in the Dooars region in North Bengal, the book also remained almost silent.

Two books, written in Bengali: *Anahare Mrittyu: Amlasoltheke Kathalguri* [80] and *Dooarser Cha Aboluptir Pothe?*[81] By Soumen Nag are also of considerable help. In these books, the author has nicely narrated the situation of the right to food in

the tea gardens of Dooars region. In both cases, the government claimed that those deaths were due to diseases, not starvation.

1.14. Research gap

The above books are undoubtedly highly valuable and useful to understand the complexities and magnitude of the problems that the present research wants to address. Indeed, these works are illuminative theoretically and in terms of narratives. However, despite being of such great value, there is no *single* work that has taken into account the problem of the research in a holistic way. Herein lies the justification of the proposed work.

1.15. Research Questions

The above discussion and analyses lead us to pose the following research questions.

1. a) How should we approach to understand the interrelations between hunger and politics both generally (theoretically) and particularly (in West Bengal and in the areas of our case-studies)?

b) How did the Right to Food movement develop in India and what were its impacts in West Bengal?

c) How should we understand the dynamics of social movements in general and the nature and effects of social movements, especially, food movements in West Bengal?

2. a) What were the socio-economic conditions at Amlasol in Paschim Medinipur and tea-gardens in Dooars before and during the alleged ‘hunger-deaths’? What were the administrative and political responses?

b) What were the immediate and deeper probable factors behind the TPDS/ 'Ration Riots' in the southern districts of West Bengal? What were the administrative and political responses?

3. Does the factor of hunger/food crisis impact everywhere in the same way, especially in the realm of politics and social/political movements? Or, in other words, are there some more politically sensitive areas in a state/country than others, in which the impact of food scarcity might be felt in a bigger way than other areas?

1.16. Hypotheses

1. The failure of the state government in West Bengal in terms of procurement and distribution of food and implementation of other welfare schemes led to the food crisis and the alleged 'starvation deaths' in the decade (2000-2010) of our study.
2. The corruption in TPDS and mal-distribution on one hand and the failure of the state government to check the corruption and ensure fair distribution on the other led to the 'ration riots' in few districts of West Bengal.
3. The mismanagement of TPDS in some southern districts followed by popular protests and disturbances had impacts over the results in the election of a few panchayat constituencies in 2008, which in the larger context of anti-eviction movements in Singur and Nandigram, also signalled shifts in the rural support base of the LF.

1.17. Methodology

The present research focuses on both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Necessary data have been collected data from primary and secondary sources. For primary data, the field survey method (through interviews following random and targeted-sampling) has been applied. In some cases, during the field study the snow-bowling method has also been followed. The researcher has also taken the interviews of some political leaders and civil society members. Some important data have been collected from government offices and websites. For secondary data/inputs, the study of relevant books, journals, magazines, articles, newspapers in the library, archives and also from the relevant websites on the internet etc have also been undertaken.