Framing of a New Political: Land, Gender and Embodiment in West Bengal’s Politics

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Concluding the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in India, 14.36 per cent of the total number of seats is occupied by women (which is the highest ever) and West Bengal is one of the two states which has elected the highest number of women parliamentarians. West Bengal encountered an important moment in contemporary political history when a land rights movement was instrumental in overthrowing a 34-year old state government in power. An important feature of this movement—which took place simultaneously at Singur and Nandigram—was the presence of women, both as a voice of resistance and as victims/survivors of violence. The findings of my ethnographic research on these two crucial land rights movements of contemporary West Bengal vis-à-vis India indicate a need to situate the women’s question at the crossroads of the “local”/movement and the national/parliamentary politics. By engaging with indigenous feminisms of the movement, and using political ethnography as a tool, this paper has reflected on the questions of land and gender as they have been configured within the movement and also further appropriated by political parties to attain political ends. This paper engages with the questions of representation and re-presentation across caste, gender and religious identities in both movement politics and party politics towards analysing and framing a comprehensive women’s question.