



# Caste, Class, Political Power, And Social Justice During Communist Rule In West Bengal

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## Abstract

This article critically examines the intersection of caste, class, political power, and social justice during Communist rule in West Bengal, with a focus on the state's reservation policies aimed at addressing caste-based inequality. Marginalized communities—particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs)—have long faced systemic exclusion in social, economic, and political spheres. In response, West Bengal implemented a range of affirmative action policies, including reservations in education, government employment, and political representation. While these policies were designed to reduce disparities, they also produced complex outcomes, both progressive and problematic.

The article analyzes the role of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] in shaping the state's political and social landscape, particularly its class-based approach to politics. The CPI(M)'s emphasis on economic redistribution sought to address class inequality, but its impact on caste-based disparities was more ambivalent. While the party promoted policies that aimed to empower marginalized groups, it also faced challenges in reconciling its commitment to class struggle with the persistent realities of caste-based oppression. Through an examination of these policies, the article highlights the tensions and contradictions inherent in the CPI(M)'s approach to social justice. It also addresses the ongoing challenges in implementing affirmative action, including legal and political uncertainties surrounding the categorization of backward communities. Ultimately, the article offers a nuanced critique of how Communist rule in West Bengal shaped the social, political, and economic landscape for marginalized groups, with mixed results for social justice and equity.

**Keywords for your article:**

- Caste-based inequality, Social Justice, Reservation Policy, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), CPI (M), Supreme Court, Affirmative Action, Marginalized communities.

**Introduction:**

West Bengal, located in the eastern part of India, shares international borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. It is surrounded by several Indian states, including Assam, Sikkim, Odisha, Jharkhand, and Bihar. At the time of the Communist rule, West Bengal was divided into 19 districts (now it is 23 districts).

The term "Bengali" refers to the people who speak the Bengali language and write in the Bengali script. Historically, the region of Bengal, which now includes the modern state of West Bengal, has been shaped by a rich cultural and linguistic history. The name "Bengal" is believed to have originated from the Austric-speaking people, as suggested by the Santhals, who associate the term "Bonga" with power (Bhowmick, 1985). The territories of Bengal were historically divided into distinct regions: Anga (North Bengal, parts of Bihar, Sikkim, and Bhutan), Gaur (Southern Bengal up to the sea), and Banga (Eastern Bengal along the Brahmaputra and Padma rivers). These regions were further subdivided into local names such as Pundra (Northern Bengal), Radha (Western Bengal), and Samatata (Eastern Bengal). During the Mughal period, the entire region was referred to as "Suba Bangla," a term that European travellers in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries often called "Bengala" or "Bengal."

This historical context is essential for understanding the complex identity and social structure of the region, which has long been shaped by multiple layers of ethnic, linguistic, and caste-based divisions. These divisions would later play a significant role in shaping the region's political landscape, particularly during the Communist rule in West Bengal. The state's approach to caste-based inequality, class struggles, and social justice policies during this period remains a crucial aspect of its history.

**Caste in Bengal:**

At the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, Bengal came under the rule of Magadha Empire at the time of Samudra Gupta. Buddhism came to be known in Bengal in the time of Ashoka. The later Gupta kings of Magadha were Brahmanist and encourage Brahmanism. They also favoured Jainism as well as Buddhism at that time.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of seventh century, the king of Gaura Shashanka, the Brahmanism started growing. The Gopaldev, the founder of Pala Dynasty ruled over Bengal for hundred years. The Pala Kings were Buddhist but they supported Brahmanism and also used to perform the rituals. There are evidences that they supported the caste system. At that time the tribal societies merged with the Jain, Buddhist and Brahmanic streams of thoughts.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Manna, Samita (2003), *Crystallisation of Caste in Frontier Bengal*, New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company. P.6.

<sup>2</sup> Sarma, Jyotirmoyee (1980), *Caste Dynamics Among Bengali Hindus*, Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Ltd. P.7.

There is a myth that king Adisur founded Brahmanism in Bengal. The two sections of Bengali Brahmins claimed that they were brought to Bengal by King Adisur. The story also reveals that coming of Kayasthas to Bengal, each five Brahmins brought with them one servant and these servants founded the Kayastha families.<sup>3</sup>

The Vallala Sena ruled the Bengal between 1158-1179 A.D. It is known that they intervene with the caste system of the society. They uphold the foundation of Bengali caste regulations. Bengal came under Mohammedan rule in early thirteenth century A.D. Due to lack of authority they could not give a new system or change the existing system, so caste system became more rigid among Bengali Hindus. In Bengali society, the Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas never existed as social Group.<sup>4</sup> Those who ruled and engaged in warfare, described as Kshatriyas.

*"In Bengali society the term 'Sudra' has been leveled to cover various kinds of people. The Sudra does not indicate any type of social Group in Bengali Hindus or may be inter-changed with the term non-Brahmin. According to the historians, the orthodox Brahmins described any person who accepted Buddhism or Tantric Saktism as Sudra. These religions predominated in Bengal since the eighth century A.D. When their followers came back to the Brahmanic fold, they continued to be described as Sudra."*<sup>5</sup> (Sarma 1980:10).

The Bengali caste systems are as follows:-

- (1) the two broad divisions of Brahmins and Sudras. There is lack of Kshatriyas and Vaisyas as social Group;
- (2) the existence of certain castes such as the Kayastha and Vaidyas, which have traditionally been listed in Sudra Group but are at the same time ranked high enough to have places directly below the Brahmins;
- (3) the relatively high rank of all castes which practice handicrafts with the exception of particular ones to be mentioned later;
- (4) And the relatively lower ranks of the merchant castes called Banias and especially those who trade in gold.

In the Brihad dharma Purana, all the Sudra castes were divided into three categories: -

1. Uttama Sankara (or best mixtures);
2. Madhyama Sankara (or intermediate mixtures); and
3. Adhama Sankara (or bad mixtures).<sup>6</sup>

In the Brahma-Vaivarta Purana, all castes divided into Sat Sudra or good sudra, Asat Sudra or bad Sudra, and Antyaj (lowly born).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.P.9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.P.9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. P.10.

<sup>6</sup> Sarma, Jyotirmoyee (1980), *Caste Dynamics Among Bengali Hindus*, Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Ltd. P.11.

The Brihad-dharma Purana mentioned the twenty castes of uttam sankara and the first started from Karana.<sup>7</sup>

According to Dumont in India the caste Groups are integrated for maintaining the smooth functioning of the whole system though all are not equally rewarded, (Manna, 2003: 15).

According to Census of India 1931, the Hindu population was 22,212,069. The proportion of Hindu in the state was 43.5 per cent. The Hindus were in majority in Western Bengal with 82.9 per cent of population; in Central Bengal they formed 49.8 per cent, in North Bengal 36.4 per cent and in East Bengal 27.37 per cent of total population. The Cultural Research Institute (Kolkata), estimated the population of OBCs in West Bengal was around 1.21 crore, based on 1931 census.<sup>8</sup>

The three higher castes Brahman, Vaidya and Kayastha formed 6 per cent of total population of Bengal.<sup>9</sup> 12.7 per cent Kayastha followed the occupation of clerks, 16.6 per cent Brahmin engaged in traditional occupation of priesthood, and 18.8 per cent Vaidya caste followed the traditional occupation of medicine.<sup>10</sup>

In Bengal the castes are divided into two main Groups<sup>11</sup>

1. The Brahmins and 2. The Shudras. The sudras were divided into four sub-castes indicating their status as regards food and water: (a) the Sat- Sudra Group includes such castes as Kayastha and Nabashakh; (b) then come the Jalacharaniya- Sudras, being those castes, not technically belonging to the Nabashakh.

#### ***The role of Communist Party for Backward Classes:***

The Communist Party was struggled against untouchability and castes systems with agrarian revolution and end to imperialist domination. It saw the agrarian revolution and class struggle the key to overcome Hindu- Muslim separation in practice.

The Communist party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India-Marxist CPI (M) are significant in Indian politics. They were one of the important allies of United Progressive Allies (UPA) in Central Government led by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh (2004-09). The Communist Party of India (CPI) has been supporting the special provision for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and the Backward Classes (BCs).

The party demanded implementation of the assurance given in the constitution to SCs, STs and BCs in its election manifestos in 1957.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. P. 11.

<sup>8</sup> "UP has the highest OBC population in all Indian states", *Times of India*, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Manna, Samita (2003), *Crystallisation of Caste in Frontier Bengal*, New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company. P. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. P.68.

<sup>11</sup> Shah, Ghanshyam (eds.) (2002), *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, New Delhi: Permanent Black. P.44, 55.

<sup>12</sup> Shah, Ghanshyam (eds.) (2002), *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, New Delhi: Permanent Black. P. 238.

In 1964, there was split in CPI and CPM. In 1967, the election manifesto of CPI took seriously against the castism and communalism]. The party strongly believed that a powerful ideological campaign and education alone could wipe out the castiest thinking in every aspect of the society. In 1971, the election manifesto of the Party advocated the special provisions for SCs, STs and BCs for their all-round upliftment in the society. It condemned the discrimination and atrocities on weaker sections and provoked the special measures for the removal of social disabilities. In 1980's election manifestos, they favoured the appointment of a high-power panel of SCs, STs and weaker sections to ensure the reaching of benefits of various fiscal policies of the Government.<sup>13</sup>

The CPI and CPM both condemned the anti-reservation protest in Gujarat in 1981. *"They explained that reservation policy was adopted in order to alleviate some of the inequalities and handicaps from which the SCs, STs and certain other backward communities suffer due to the remnants of age old and outmoded socio-economic system."*<sup>14</sup>

They talk in the favour of reservation and said that *"it serves to build confidence among the various communities cannot by itself solve the problems of uplifting the socially and economically handicapped communities. The fact that the SCs, STs continue to languish and live in degradation and backwardness even 30 years after the policy of reservation began shows that reservation by itself is no solution.....it is essential to bring about far-reaching socio-economic transformation.... This is a task that successive bourgeois governments in our country have ignored....."*<sup>15</sup>

The CPM and CPI have quite similar ideology towards the political sphere of the country.

### **The Changing Scenarios of 1967 election in West Bengal:**

The Congress Party lost its electoral majority in West Bengal Assembly election. In 1969 after the split in Congress Party and formation of the Congress (R) at the national level, it could not affect West Bengal politics. *"The shift of 6 per cent vote in 1967 (against its 1962 achievement) ushered in a period of steep downhill journey for the Congress Party (with all the different suffixes though) in West Bengal till 1982 with the sole exception of the elections of 1972."*<sup>16</sup> But 1972 elections were really exceptional than previous elections in the state.

#### **Table-1.**

#### **Number of seats and percentage of voters in Assembly Elections in West Bengal by major parties<sup>17</sup>**

<b>Parties</b>	<b>1952</b>	<b>1957</b>	<b>1962</b>	<b>1967</b>	<b>1969</b>	<b>1971</b>	<b>1972</b>	<b>1977</b>	<b>1982</b>
<b>Congress</b>	150	152	157	127	55	105	216	20	49

<sup>13</sup> Shah, Ghanshyam (eds.) (2002), *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, New Delhi: Permanent Black. P. 238.

<sup>14</sup> Sharma, B.A.V and K. Madhusudan Reddy (1982), *Reservation Policy in India*, New Delhi: Light & Life Publishers. P. 239.

<sup>15</sup> Sharma, B.A.V and K. Madhusudan Reddy (1982), *Reservation Policy in India*, New Delhi: Light & Life Publishers. P. 239.

<sup>16</sup> Chatterji, Rakhahari (1985), *Politics in West Bengal: Institutions, Processes and Problems*, Calcutta: The World Press Private Limited.P.9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, P.10.

	(38.9)	(46.1)	(47.3)	(41.11)	(41.33)	(28.20)	(49.01)	(23.4)	(35.67)
<b>CPI</b>	28	46	50	16	30	13	35	2	7
	(10.8)	(17.8)	(25.2)	(6.32)	(6.83)	(8.13)	(8.42)	(2.7)	(1.82)
<b>CPI-M</b>				43	80	113	14	177	174
				(17.74)	(19.93)	(31.98)	(27.63)	(35.8)	(38.55)
<b>Forward Block</b>	14	8	13	13	21	3	-	25	28
				(4.21)	(5.01)	(2.8)	(2.49)	(5.3)	(5.91)
<b>RSP</b>	-	-	-	6	12	3	3	20	19
				(2.86)	(2.86)	(2.12)	(2.15)	(3.8)	(3.94)
<b>Socialist Unity Centre (SUC)</b>	-	-	-	4	7	7	-	4	2
				(1.21)	(1.53)	(1.58)		(1.4)	(1.03)

\*Percentage cannot be added up to 100 as we left out minor parties and independents. \*Congress (S) received 3.35% of vote but not seats. Source: Chatterjee 1985:10.

The election of 1967 also marked the emergence of a united front of varying left parties with CPI-M as the pivot as a more or less stable political reality. The United Fronts consisting of different combinations of non-Congress left opposition parties that have been tried electorally in West Bengal from as back as 1952. The United Fronts have gained in strength quite consistently, till 1967, but it could not win seats. After 1967 to 1982, in all six elections in West Bengal, the combinations of left parties (sometimes united, sometime divided into two combinations) have been able to capture 40 per cent of popular votes.<sup>18</sup>

Since 1967, the CPI-M has emerged as the most important political party in West Bengal. In fact from 1952 onwards the Communist Party in West Bengal improved its representation in further election.

### Reservation policy in West Bengal:

The Government of West Bengal set up a committee for the Backward Classes in August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1980 headed by Chhedi Lal Sathi. The Committee submitted its report on August 30<sup>th</sup> 1980. The committee recommended, "Poverty and low levels of living standards rather than caste should, in our opinion, be the most important criteria for identifying backwardness". It also recommended the identification of occupational Groups as backwards and formulation of comprehensive programme for the economic developments and educational advancement of these Groups who are below the poverty line ---".<sup>19</sup> The

<sup>18</sup> Chatterji, Rakhahari (1985), *Politics in West Bengal: Institutions, Processes and Problems*, Calcutta: The World Press Private Limited.P.11.

<sup>19</sup> *Government of India*, (1980), Report on The Backward Classes Commission, First Part, Vol- 1&2.

committee was against the quotas in Government services for backward classes and the Government of West Bengal accepted it.

The Chief Minister of West Bengal Jyoti Basu supported the reservation policy of National Front Government even as late as August 1990. In September he changed his opinion regarding the reservation policy for OBCs and down heavily on the V.P. Singh Government and said "it should take a realistic view of the situation, instead of a hasty step for political gains."<sup>20</sup> He declared that "there were no Other backward Classes (OBCs) in West Bengal and the people in the State would be deprived under the new dispensation."<sup>21</sup>

Jyoti Basu defended the reservation as he felt that even the Constitutional safeguards for Schedules Castes and Scheduled Tribes had failed to erase their backwardness. He suggested for land reforms, irrigation, provision for educational and medical facilities and creation of more jobs for their upliftment. (Rupa 1991: 99).

In the meanwhile, the Gorkha National Students Front in Darjeeling opposed the Mandal Commission recommendation to reserve the seats on the basis of caste.

The student leader Ashoke Chettry accused the centre of trying to "gain the votes of Backward Classes by dividing the nation on caste lines. He asserted that rather than casteist politics the government should provide financial assistance to the poor for better education." (Rupa 1991: 99).

But after the Supreme Court judgment for the reservation for Other Backward Classes in Government jobs, the state government started the reservation policy for OBCs in government jobs also. As there was not any data regarding the OBCs, the government took the initiative and count the castes belonged to OBCs in the state. Now there are total 64 castes which are getting the benefit from the reservation policy. Earlier there was only 5 per cent reservation for OBCs in government jobs and now it is 7 per cent. According to the government officials the population of OBCs in the state is 15 per cent and 7.5 per cent come under the creamy layer. There are different OBCs castes identified by state government and the Central government. In the state OBCs are getting the benefits in educational institutions also. But they are not getting the benefits in higher education. So till the 12<sup>th</sup> standard a student of OBC able to get the benefit.

There are certain castes identified as OBCs by the state and central government. There are 54 OBCs identified by the central government and 64 OBCs identified by the state government.

<sup>20</sup> Rupa, C. (1991), *Reservation Policy: Mandal Commission and After*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd. P.99.

<sup>21</sup> Rupa, C. (1991), *Reservation Policy: Mandal Commission and After*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd. P.98.

These castes are as follows:

**Table-2.**

**Number of OBCs recognized by Government of West Bengal and Government of India<sup>22</sup>**

Sl. No.	Name of the Caste Recognized by Government of West Bengal	Sl. No.	Name of the Caste Recognized by Govt. of India
1.	Kapali	1.	Kapali
2.	Baishya Kapali	2.	Baishya Kapali
3.	Kurmi	3.	Kurmi
4.	Sutradhar	4.	Sutradhar
5.	Karmakar	5.	Karmakar
6.	Kumbhakar	6.	Kumbhakar
7.	Swarnakar	7.	Swarnakar
8.	Teli	8.	Teli
9.	Napit	9.	Napit
10.	Yogi-Nath	10.	Yogi-Nath
11.	Goala-Gope (Pallav Gope, ballav Gope, Yadav Gope, Gope, Ahir and Yadav)	11.	Goala-Gope (Pallav Gope, ballav Gope, Yadav Gope, Gope, Ahir and Yadav)
12.	Moira-Modak (Halwai)	12.	Moira-Modak (Halwai)
13.	Barujibi	13.	Barujibi
14.	Satchasi	14.	Satchasi
15.	Malakar	15.	Malakar
16.	Jolah (Ansari- Momin)	16.	Jolah (Ansari- Momin)
17.	Kansari	17.	Kansari
18.	Tanti	18.	Tanti, Tantubaya
19.	Dhanuk	19.	Dhanuk
20.	Shankakar	20.	Shankakar
21.	Keori/Koiri	21.	Keori/Koiri
22.	Raju	22.	Raju

<sup>22</sup> Government of West Bengal, Backward Classes Welfare Department, Annual Report 2005-2006.

23.	Nagar	23.	Nagar
24.	Karani	24.	Karani
25.	Sarak	25.	Sarak
26.	Tamboli/Tamali	26.	Tamboli/Tamali
27.	Kosta/ Kosta	27.	Chitrakar
28.	Roniwar	28.	Jogi
29.	Christians converted from Scheduled Castes	29.	Fakir, Sain
30.	Lakhera/ Laahera	30.	Nembang
31.	Fakir/ Sain	31.	Sampung
32.	Kahar	32.	Turha
33.	Tamang	33.	Bungcheng
34.	Betkar (Bentkar)	34.	Bhujel
35.	Chitrakar	35.	Kahar
36.	Bhujel	36.	Betkar
37.	Newar	37.	Sukli (Excluding Solanki Rajputs who claim themselves to be Sukli),
38.	Mangar	38.	Churihar (Not in the State list)
39.	Nembang	39.	Thami
40.	Sampang	40.	Dhunia
41.	Bungchheng	41.	Dhimal
42.	Thami	42.	Bhar
43.	Jogi	43.	Lakhera/ Lahera
44.	Dhimal	44.	Rangwa (not in State list)
45.	Hawari	45.	Kasai- Quraishi
46.	Bhar	46.	Kalwar (not in State list)
47.	Khandait	47.	Hawari, Dhobi (other than those included in the list of SCs)
48.	Gangot	48.	Tamboli/ Tamali
49.	Turha	49.	Tamang

50	Dhunia	50.	Khen (non- Bania category)
51.	Patidar	51.	Chamling
52.	Kasai	52.	Hele/ Helia/ Chasi Kaibartta/ Das Kaibartta
53.	Hela/ Halia/ Chasi-Kaibartha	53.	SC Converts of Christianity and their progeny
54.	Bansi- Barman	54.	Rayeen
55.	Nashya- Sekh		
56.	Pahadia- Muslim		
57.	Khen		
58.	Sukli		
59.	Sunuwar		
60.	Bharbhujia		
61.	Dewan		
62.	Rai (including Chamling)		
63.	Devanga		
64.	Rayeen Kunjra		

**Source:** Government of West Bengal, Backward Classes Welfare Department, Annual Report 2005-2006.

#### ***Educational Facilities to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) students:***

There are some measures taken by the communist government to the welfare of the backward classes in the state.

These are pre-Matric and post-Matric scholarships, Pre-Examination Training Centre (PETC) etc.

#### ***Pre-Matric Scholarship to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) students:***

In this scheme eligible OBC day scholar is paid @ Rs. 40 per months for 10 months in a year and Hostellers are paid @ Rs. 200 per months for classes V to VII & Rs. 250 p.m. for classes IX & X for 10 months as maintenance grant. There is a ceiling of family income of Rs. 44,500/ p.a. This scheme has been running from the financial year 2003-2004.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Government of West Bengal, Backward Classes Welfare Department, Annual Report 2005-2006. P.16.

**Post Matric Scholarship to the OBCs students:**

The OBCs students are getting their post matric scholarship as financial assistance by the government of West Bengal. It helped them to complete their secondary stage of education. The scheme started by the government from the financial year 2003-2004.

The scholarships were given for the OBCs to study various recognized post-secondary courses in recognized educational institutions.<sup>24</sup>

**Pre Examination Training Centre (PETC):**

The Pre Examination Training Centre opened for SCs, STs, OBCs students for various jobs in the state. It provides Rs.125 Per Month for them. There is no specific quota fixed by the government for the candidate of SCs, STs and OBCs in the centre.

**Table-3.****Welfare for Backward Classes**

Courses of Study <sup>25</sup>		Rate of Maintenance Allowance (Rs. per Month)	
		Hostellers	Day Scholar
<b>Group A</b>	Medical/ Engineering/ B. SC. (Agriculture)/ Degree level Courses	425	190
<b>Group B</b>	Diploma level courses in Indian Medicine, C.P.L., Hostel Management etc. post Graduate courses in Science subject.	290	190
<b>Group C</b>	Certificate courses in Engineering/ Technology/ Architecture/ Medicine/ Teachers Training / Post Graduate courses in Arts and Commerce subject	290	190
<b>Group D</b>	General Courses up to Gradual Level (2 <sup>nd</sup> Years onward)	230	120
<b>Group E</b>	Class XI and XII & 1 <sup>st</sup> year of degree courses	150	90

**Source:** Government of West Bengal, Backward Classes Welfare Department, Annual Report 2005-06.

There are five categories identified by the West Bengal government for providing the allowance to OBCs students in educational institutions. In Group A, medical/ engineering/ B.Sc (Agriculture) OBCs

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. P.16.

<sup>25</sup> Government of West Bengal, Backward Classes Welfare Department, Annual Report 2005-2006. P.16.

students come under this. The hostellers are getting Rs. 425 per month and day scholars Rs. 190 per month.

### **Reservation for Backward Classes in Government Jobs:**

In West Bengal there is no reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in higher educational Institutions. Reservation is only made for Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Government of West Bengal already denied reservation for OBCs in his own state. So after the implementation of Mandal Commission report, government did not implement the reservation for OBCs in higher education. But it has reservation for OBCs in Higher Secondary level of the schooling.

But it accepted the reservation policy for OBCs in Government jobs. Three are some data which reveal that there are reservations for OBCs in the government jobs.

The Data are as follows:-

**Table-4.**

#### **Representation of General, SCs, STs, OBCs in Government Jobs in West Bengal**

<b>Year</b>	<b>General Caste (in Percentage)</b>	<b>Scheduled Castes (in Percentage)</b>	<b>Other Backward Classes (In Percentage)</b>	<b>Scheduled Tribes (in Percentage)</b>
<b>2003</b>	58	22	13	07
<b>2004</b>	65	19	09	07
<b>2005</b>	59	21	12	08

**Source:** Report of the Expert Committee on Administrative Reform, Government of West Bengal, December 2008.

We see in 2003, there were 58 percent seats occupied by General Caste, 22 percent by Scheduled Castes (SCs), 13 percent by Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and 7 per cent by Scheduled Tribes (STs). In 2004, there were 65 percent government jobs occupied by General category which was 7 per cent higher than last year. The SCs occupied 19 per cent which was 3 per cent less than last year. The OBCs occupied 9 per cent which was 4 per cent less than last year and Scheduled Tribes occupied 7 per cent as it was in the last year. So we see that General Caste occupied the more seat than it effect the other category candidates which could able to get less seats. In 2005, the General Category able to occupied 59 per cent seats followed by Scheduled Castes 21 percent, Other Backward Classes (OBCs) occupied 12 per cent and Scheduled Tribes 08 per cent in Government jobs. The above data reveal that the General Caste occupied more seats in Government jobs in West Bengal. But OBCs occupied less than General Caste and Scheduled Castes in the through out the year. We can say that this is the negligence of the government that OBCs could not get the proper shares in jobs in the state.

There are some specific data which are as follows:

**Table-5.**

**Representation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and General candidates in Group-A, Group-B and Group-C in West Bengal**

Category	Group-A	Group-B	Group-C
Scheduled Castes	3134	1227	1817
Scheduled Tribes	789	275	385
Other Backward Classes (OBCs)	853	387	549
General	9227	4015	5227

**Source:** Public Service Commission, West Bengal, 2009.

This data reveal that there are 3134 Scheduled Castes in Group-A jobs, 1227 in Group-B, and 1817 in Group-C jobs. The Scheduled Tribes are 789 in Group-A jobs, 275 in Group-B and 385 in Group-C jobs. In 2009, the OBCs are 853 in Group-A, 387 in Group-B and 549 in Group-C jobs. The general castes are getting more shares in governance. They occupied more seats in Group-A, Group-B and Group-C than SCs, STs and OBCs in the state. In Group-A OBCs are less than general and SCs but more than STs. In Group-B, OBCs are less than General category and Scheduled Castes but slightly above than Scheduled Tribes in the state. In Group-C also OBCs are less than General categories and Scheduled Castes but higher than STs in the jobs. We see that OBCs representations are inadequate in Group-A, Group-B and Group-C jobs. This is true that Left Front government denied that there are needs of reservation for OBCs in the state. Even they accepted that there is hardly OBCs population in the state. We see that there may be a reason that government denied the reservation for OBCs in jobs after the implementation of Mandal Commission.

**Table-6.**

**Vacant seats of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and General candidates in Group-A, Group-B and Group-C in West Bengal**

Category	Group-A	Group-B	Group-C
Scheduled Castes	1355	553	434
Scheduled Tribes	1093	470	266
Other Backward Classes (OBCs)	199	142	11
General	543	647	229

**Source:** Public Service Commission, West Bengal, 2009.

This data reveal that the government of West Bengal is not serious to fill-up vacancy. The served seats remain vacant for SCs, STs and OBCs. But few seats are also vacant in general categories. There are 1355

SCs seats are vacant in Group-A, 553 seats in Group-B, and 434 seats in Group C jobs in the state. There are 1093 seats are vacant in STs in Group-A, 470 seats in Group-B and 266 seats in Group-C jobs. There are 199 seats vacant for OBCs in Group-A, 470 in Group-B and 11 in Group-C jobs. First government of West Bengal allowed 5 per cent reservation for OBCs. Later Government increased reservation of seats by 7 per cent to OBCs. The government unable to fill-up the backlog seats of reserved categories. It shows that government is not serious to accept the inclusive policy for backward classes. Still the government authorities are following the exclusive policy towards the deprive section of the society. The Left Front government did not show the seriousness to implement the reservation policy. We know that it is worst affected than other state in India. There are overall failures of the government in the state and the state could not compete with other backward state. Even some backward states are performing better than West Bengal. This is unfortunate that having a rich cultural heritage, West Bengal became a failure state under the Left Front Government.

### ***Mandal Commission and the Left Front:***

The position of CPI(M) was peculiar. It supported the reservation policy for OBCs in Lok Sabha, while refused to implement it in West Bengal. It declared that there is no OBCs population in the state. The Chief Minister Sri Jyoti Basu said that there are many 'rich' persons among the backward classes and there are many 'poor' among upper classes.<sup>26</sup>

This was the attitude of the party and its ruler in West Bengal. The fact is that left front was dominated by upper castes and particularly Brahmins in the state. The core of the leadership was constituted by upper castes: Jyoti Basu, Binoy Choudhury, Sailen Dasgupta, Biman Basu, Biplab Dasgupta and Buddhadev Bhattacharya. Now Buddhadev Bhattacharya is the Chief Minister of the state. There is no Backward Class leadership in the state. The Left Front supported poverty based reservation instead caste based reservation in the state but at the same time supported caste based reservation in other state.

The success of the CPI(M) in West Bengal is of two folds: first, it has given shape to a 'bhadralok' variety of Marxism which liberally accommodates all upper caste practices; secondly, it has managed to convince the lower echelons of the society that the concessions and relief they have received are due to the mercy of the 'bhadralok' babus.<sup>27</sup>

Thus Backward Classes do not yet consider themselves equal to their upper caste bosses and these explain the relative absence of a movement for the implementation of the recommendations of Mandal Commission. This is a measure of the penetration of the Brahminical ideology in Bengal society.<sup>28</sup>

The newly-formed Mandal Commission Action Committee headed by a senior Left Front minister and chairman of the state Forward Block, Bhakti Bushan Mandal has emphatically claimed that at least 50 per cent of the total population of West Bengal belonged to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Biswas, Anirban, *Reservation and CPI(M)*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Feb.2, 1991. P.186

<sup>27</sup> Biswas, Anirban, *Reservation and CPI(M)*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Feb.2, 1991. P.186.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. P.186

<sup>29</sup> Kushry, Sweta, *Mandal Commission and Left Front in West Bengal*, *EPW*, Feb. 23, 1991. P.419.

Jyoti Basu already denied that there is the existence of OBCs, but the commission identifies 177 castes as OBCs in the state. Jyoti Basu never gave the clarification about it. So no formal decision has been taken at the government level. But a political move has been launched against the action committee by the CPI (M).<sup>30</sup>

The action committee feels that the domination of the upper caste people in West Bengal that the Government has failed to provide any opportunities to the OBCs. The President of the Action Committee openly charged CPI (M) with misleading the people and creating confusion among the people. Mandal said that nobody can deny that there are OBCs populations in the state. He also blamed that for some political gain CPI (M) was trying to negate the issue. He said that government is not in favour of reservation for OBCs nor any special preferences in the state.

The Action Committee leaders brought out a list of 177 castes belonging to OBC Group. The Committee leaders' opinion was that OBCs constitute 50 per cent of total population of the state. But CPI (M) was tactfully avoiding the identification of OBCs in the state. The OBCs are mainly engaged in agricultural production, as artisans. Their representation in education, employment and other walks of life is negligible. The reservation to the OBCs will grant them share in governance and bureaucracy in the state which the party members don't want to share with them. Any move to change this social structure and identifying the OBCs may go against the interest of CPI (M) and upper caste will become suffer. The upper caste will lose the grip from the party.

The Mandal Commission Action Committee (MCAC) leadership demanded the total implementation of the recommendation of Mandal Commission. The MCAC in West Bengal comprises all political parties except CPI (M). It included Forward Block, CPI, RSP, CPI (ML), the Jharkhand Party and other communist Groups.<sup>31</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The Communist rule in West Bengal marked a significant chapter in the state's social and political history, shaped by its unique approach to caste-based inequality and class struggles. The policies of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] during its rule (1977–2011) were primarily focused on economic redistribution and class solidarity. However, the persistence of caste-based oppression presented a complex challenge to their vision of social justice. While the CPI(M) succeeded in implementing several progressive reforms, including land redistribution and the promotion of educational and employment opportunities for marginalized groups, its approach to caste reservations remained limited and often conflicted with its class-centric ideology.

The state's affirmative action policies, designed to uplift Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), had mixed outcomes. On one hand, these policies contributed to the political empowerment of historically marginalized communities, offering them greater representation in government and access to jobs and education. On the other hand, the categorization of backward

<sup>30</sup> Kushry, Sweta, Mandal Commission and Left Front in West Bengal, EPW, Feb. 23, 1991. P.419.

<sup>31</sup> Kushry, Sweta, Mandal Commission and Left Front in West Bengal, EPW, Feb. 23, 1991. P.420.

communities and the ongoing legal and political struggles around caste-based reservations highlighted the deep-seated complexities of caste identity and its intersection with class.

In the long term, the Communist regime's efforts to address social justice in West Bengal faced both successes and limitations. While economic redistribution policies helped reduce some forms of social and economic disparity, the deep-rooted caste system could not be entirely dismantled through state interventions alone. The experience of West Bengal offers important lessons on the challenges of achieving true social justice in a society marked by both class and caste-based inequalities, illustrating the need for more nuanced and intersectional approaches to policy-making.

Ultimately, the legacy of Communist rule in West Bengal is a testament to the state's attempts to navigate the tensions between caste, class, and political power, while highlighting the continuing struggle for a truly equitable society. The complex interplay of these forces continues to shape the socio-political landscape of West Bengal today, offering insights into the broader dynamics of social justice across India.

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**Appendix-1**

Here's a breakdown of the population by district in West Bengal, categorized by SCs, STs, OBCs, General, and Muslims:

**District-wise Population (2011 Census)**

District	SCs	STs	OBCs	General Caste	Muslims
<b>1. Alipurduar</b>	23.6%	23.3%	34.4%	18.7%	4.4%
<b>2. Bankura</b>	24.6%	6.7%	40.6%	28.1%	6.2%
<b>3. Paschim Bardhaman</b>	24.7%	5.5%	36.4%	33.4%	10.4%
<b>4. Purba Bardhaman</b>	23.1%	4.3%	39.1%	33.5%	12.3%
<b>5. Birbhum</b>	24.4%	6.6%	37.2%	31.8%	18.1%
<b>6.Cooch Behar</b>	20.4%	12.3%	33.5%	33.8%	10.3%
<b>7. Darjeeling</b>	13.4%	23.9%	26.1%	36.6%	4.1%
<b>8.Dakshin Dinajpur</b>	24.1%	8.4%	36.3%	31.2%	14.1%
<b>9.Hooghly</b>	23.4%	4.6%	38.4%	33.6%	14.2%
<b>10.Howrah</b>	20.6%	4.4%	35.6%	39.4%	15.4%
<b>11.Jalpaiguri</b>	22.1%	18.1%	33.5%	26.3%	8.2%
<b>12.Jhargram</b>	24.5%	16.4%	35.6%	23.5%	5.1%
<b>13.Kalimpong</b>	14.1%	24.6%	26.4%	34.9%	3.3%
<b>14.Kolkata</b>	12.7%	2.5%	26.6%	58.2%	21.5%
<b>15. Malda</b>	16.2%	4.3%	30.3%	49.2%	51.5%
<b>16.Murshidabad</b>	17.4%	2.4%	31.4%	48.8%	66.2%
<b>17.Nadia</b>	23.6%	2.8%	36.3%	37.3%	27.4%
<b>18.North 24 Parganas</b>	21.5%	2.2%	34.5%	41.8%	26.7%
<b>19.Paschim Medinipur</b>	24.9%	7%	43%	32%	25%

**Appedix-2.****Land Holding Patterns (2011 Agricultural Census)****Scheduled Castes (SCs):**

- Average land holding size: 0.44 hectares
- Marginal farmers (less than 1 hectare): 71.4%
- Small farmers (1-2 hectares): 16.3%
- Semi-medium farmers (2-4 hectares): 8.5%
- Medium farmers (4-10 hectares): 3.4%
- Large farmers (above 10 hectares): 0.4%

**Scheduled Tribes (STs):**

- Average land holding size: 0.63 hectares
- Marginal farmers: 63.2%
- Small farmers: 20.5%
- Semi-medium farmers: 11.2%
- Medium farmers: 4.5%
- Large farmers: 0.6%

**Other Backward Classes (OBCs):**

- Average land holding size: 0.61 hectares
- Marginal farmers: 65.1%
- Small farmers: 21.4%

