

Tracing the Rise and Evolution of Populism in India : A Curious Case of West Bengal under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee

SOURISHREE GHOSH¹

¹B.A (Hons.) Political Science, Jadavpur University.

Abstract

There has been a notable rise of populism across the world and especially in South Asia. Populism has been the recurrent feature of Indian politics. In today's period of neoliberal globalisation, the old class relations have been subsumed under the new politics of identity. This is aptly called the age of populist democracy. The paper aims to understand the rise of populism and its evolving trends since the time of leftist politics in the state of West Bengal. The political asceticism of Mamata Banerjee as one of the most influential political leaders leading the current incumbent party TMC has given the state a new dimension of populist politics. It would analyse the impact of the current populist politics on electoral democracy in West Bengal. It will be analysed through populist outreach of the various political parties with special focus on populist politics of Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal. The methodology of the paper is secondary in nature.

Keywords: Populism, Indian politics, electoral democracy, leftist politics

1. Introduction

1.1 The Politics of Welfare Vs Populism: A Comparative Analysis of West Bengal and India

The rise of populist politics is a new challenge to Indian democracy today. The origin of the welfare politics in India can be traced back to the late 1960s and the early 1970s. The contemporary populism of the ruling BJP at the centre is a mixed bag of faith, spirituality and modern technology. Strategic welfarism is one of the aspects of Modi's populism with 2014 marking the beginning of the era of 'new welfarism' which focuses on the tangible services such as cash transfers, cooking gas, electricity, shelter, water, etc which are directly related to welfare populism. The politics of freebies is directly related to the populist schemes which is focused on only short term gains and does not take into account the long term factors such as employment, health and education. The freebies, direct transfer schemes(mainly referred to as populist measures) are not sustainable in the long term because there are limits of liberal democracy. The populist measures are short term in nature and which leads to a fund-deficit economy and not sustainable from the long term point of view. Populism has its own set of limitations. This makes it different from welfarism, however today the line between populism and welfarism is very thin, which has given rise to various other forms of populism such as welfare populism and competitive populism.

Populism is based on making a distinction between the electorate by dividing them into 'we' vs 'them'. An instance of populism is the charismatic appeal of the party leaders for enjoying immense popularity among the common masses. Under today's welfare populism, there has been a development of the new patron-client relationship between the politicians and the voters which are aimed at transforming the citizens into clients expected to pay in votes in return for the welfare benefits received. There is little to no debate in the electoral space regarding the output and the implementation of these schemes or the tangible impact of these schemes on the marginalised sections at the lower level. These beneficiaries can be politically mobilised to some extent however their actual social and economic empowerment of that particular targeted group is under question. In this research paper, we are aiming to trace the various aspects of populism through the study of the style of functioning of the incumbent ruling party under the aegis of Mamata Banerjee. Moreover, we also aim to draw a comparative analysis at various levels and its impact on the society and politics at large.

2. The Shifting Sands of Populism in West Bengal

The Left Front in West Bengal had also used the political machinery to reinforce the populist politics, narratives and myths. The party successfully framed a rosy picture of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and this heavily charmed the resentment and sentiments of the common Bengalis, especially post the huge displacement from East Bengal (today's Bangladesh). The left has mainly been promoting a class based populism. It is an undeniable fact that over time, there has been an apparent shift from the class style of the Left to the Religious and Cultural Style of the TMC. Both of the political parties had to some extent employed populist tactics for running the political machinery of the state. The BJP is the new emerging force in West Bengal and that has added a flavour of saffronisation, developing a populism of a different kind.

Under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee, there has been a rise of populist politics in West Bengal. The rise of a populist leader like Mamata Banerjee had been shaped by the social, political and cultural circumstances and aspirations of the voters. For example, the Lakshmi Bhandar, a pilot populist project of the TMC government, which is the largest cash transfer project in the state. The populist policies include the Swasthya Sathi (Health Insurance to Every Citizen), Duare Sarkar (Government at your doorstep), Paray Samadhan (Solution in your locality), Laxmi Bhandar, Khadya Sathi, Kanyashree, Sabuj Sathi, Special Package of Schemes for the tribal people. Special Package of schemes for the tribal people and special package of schemes for tribal people in the Jangalmahal region. The slew of measures announced just before the 2021 elections have played a crucial role in keeping the AITC (All India Trinamool Congress) to power even though a majority of the voters consider them to be corrupt. (Sarkar, 2022)

The two parties that had played an influential role in West Bengal, namely the CPM and the Congress, from 1947 to 2011, had virtually been wiped out today. The Dalit parties who once formed quite a large voter base of the CPM had left the party as the left has been seen as 'savarna' and 'arrogant' and another factor has been their successful integration into the Hindutva Project. (Pai & Kumar, 2023)

The left political parties (herein the CPM in West Bengal) understand the class discrimination but not caste discrimination. The left mainly emphasises class based politics. In Bengal, the Dalit votes, which used to be the voter base of the Communist Party has shifted towards the TMC. But now, the Dalit votes have been shifting towards the BJP. It has taken 57 years for India's largest political party to induct a dalit leader into the politburo.

This also shows that caste based politics has become an integral part of West Bengal politics. The Left has always referred to caste based politics as one of identity politics. (Jyoti, 2018) ??? Who said this? Complete impressionistic idea without any substantiation. Any reliable studies on this point? Provide references.

Political Scientist Maidul Islam from the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, points out that West Bengal, told the PTI, that Bengal was once known for its vibrant student politics, has been witnessing a shift towards dynastic politics from the previous class based politics.(PTI, April 21, 2024) (PTI, 2024)

The culture of addas in West Bengal which significantly shaped the political discourse has been dying down and the social fragmentation has also eroded the position of the urban middle class, intellectual elites and the various other radical thinkers. (Impressionistic. Provide reference) (Chowdhury, May 2024)

3. Cultural and Identity Politics as a Vehicle of Populism in West Bengal

Emotions have a crucial role to play in the populist politics. This is being said in the context of the charismatic personality of populist leaders. Cultural politics is also an important component of the competitive populism tactics of the TMC and the BJP. The TMC has also noted the surge in the ‘significant rise in Bengali nationalist pride’, especially in the context of the Hindi promotion(or imposition) by the central government. The TMC however has carefully strided the path of this conflict which might have led to the creation of the “Bengali and Bihari” narrative, so TMC had reached out to the Hindi speaking community by announcing 100 new schools in the state for instructions in Hindi, Nepali and Urdu. (Daniyal, 2017)

According to the political analyst and journalist Suman Bhattacharya, the TMC’s campaign has developed into a more mature version of itself and the narrative is not directionless as before. The party has been trying to reinvent bhadrak politics by emphasising Bengal’s cultural stalwarts. Their campaign has also tried to inculcate the various intellectual components. A similar tactic has been employed by the British.

4. Regionalism as a facet of populism in West Bengal

One of the most crucial components of Bengal's identity politics is the Bengali identity that has been used as populist measure by the TMC to assert Bengali culture and also delineate the state from North Indian Politics. She has described the crackdown on food habits by the BJP as an attempt to 'import foreign culture' in the state. The party has been attempting to successfully separate the Bengali Hindus from the BJP's brand of Hindutva. Secondly, the study of Bengali has also been made compulsory in the state. On the other hand, the BJP has supported the demands of Gorkhaland. The Bengali identity and cult shows the importance of regionalism in explaining the rise of populism in the state. Successive governments in the state have tried to create or rather brainwash with the image that Bengal's politics is absolutely different from the North India Politics. Regionalism in the form of cultural politics in West Bengal is also an important facet of populism.

The ideological battle in Bengal is not also a battle of clash of identities, as in the cultural belief of the BJP to promote Hindutva and the TMC's focus on the 'Bengali Culture'. The TMC has heavily promoted the idea of the common Bengali identity, promotion of a common language, a common history linked to the territory of West Bengal and common references to make a political community in Bengal. This has been strengthened with the patronage of the festivals by the government. The emphasis on the common cultural history is being reinforced through the common Bengali identity. This is being called by some of the political scientists as being "cultural misrecognition" which has led to the overshadowing of the caste and class divide in West Bengal. This also makes TMC a right fit as a regional party in India.

The TMC also positioned itself as a defender from the outside forces, a rhetoric that was emphasised on the fact that BJP is an 'outsider' in Bengal. Bengal's resistance against the CAA implementation is more ideological, going beyond the state-centre scuffle. This also arises from the past fact that Bengal always had an anti-centre rhetoric in place. On the other hand, it also raised the various slogans against the BJP government at the centre, labelling it as a "BJP's Bangla Birodhi" on account of the non-release of funds for the MGNREGA. Secondly, the TMC has also been very successful in gaining the electoral mileage among the Muslim population in the state by protesting against the CAA 2019 acts of the Union. So, the narratives of regional deprivation, as Professor Jyotiparasad Chatterjee puts it, has thrown a new light on the regional politics in India. These factors can also be attributed to the populist image of Mamata Banerjee among the most vulnerable population (especially the religious minorities) of the state. (Pal, 2021)

5. Hindutva in West Bengal?

There are popular myths with regard to Bengal politics, first is that Bengalis are not communal and that the state is less violent compared to the other states. The Hindu nationalism did not emerge in the cow-belt of North-Central India but in Bengal itself. There had been past attempts by various leaders to inculcate the nationalist sentiments in the Bengali Bhadrak. The Hindu mela celebrated in the late 19th century, was an annual political and cultural festival, in 1867 in Calcutta, by Nabagopal Mitra, Rajnarayan Basu and Manmohan Bose for uniting the Indians. It was an attempt to make the Hindu jati nationally conscious with regard to the development of the idea of a Hindu rashtra. Similarly, the sentiments also grew within the Bengali Muslims community. Today, there has been a complete political polarisation along the religious lines and large scale Hindu Muslim riots which cannot be ruled out. (Bhattacharya, 2020)

Bengali is no stranger to identity politics as this place is the root of the Hindu and the Muslim Nationalism. (That does not mean that Dalit politics had started in Bengal.) With the rise of the Communists in 1960, the caste and communal matters of Bengal were pushed to the background and class came to dominate Bengali politics. The land reform was a moment of relief for the poor Muslims, the dalits and the landless. Yet the upper caste domination continued. The communists wanted a form of party society (This concept has been developed by historian Partha Chatterjee) and neglected the reality of the lower caste groups in West Bengal. (Ghosh, 2022). Over a period of time, the Dalit votes have shifted towards the BJP into the larger Hindutva framework. These trends show the caste divides and cleavages in the politics of West Bengal.

6. The Politics of Communalism as a Vehicle of Populism

According to the political analyst and journalist Suman Bhattacharya, the TMC's campaign has developed into a more mature version of itself and the narrative is not directionless as before. The party has been trying to reinvent bhadrak politics by emphasising Bengal's cultural stalwarts. Their campaign has also tried to inculcate the various intellectual components. He points out that the TMC never had any ideology unlike the BJP. initially, the party opposed the Left and now is opposing the BJP. They have mainly developed a regionalist ideology like the DMK in Tamil Nadu, while highlighting pluralism and democratic values as its ideological base. In 2019, the more the BJP emphasised on Hindutva, the more Mamata brought up secularism. However, it must also be noted that the TMC has refrained from a direct attack on Hindutva politics.

Another side of Mamata's populism can be analysed as being communal in nature. There has been an increase in communal polarisation in West Bengal, which has resulted in a slew of low-intensity communal riots like those seen in the state's Basirhat subdivision in July and in Dhulagarh in December. The TMC had declined the invitation for the Ram temple ceremony. The BJP has called Mamata's ban on the idol immersions during Muharram and restrictions on the Saraswati Puja celebrations, as the 'politics of appeasement' and 'vote bank politics'. The TMC's movement against the NRC and CAA is a case in point that garnered its support in the areas such as Malda and Murshidabad. Traditionally, the Hindu right wing has played a small role in West Bengal politics and the BJP aims to change that. The BJP had also referred to Mamata Banerjee's politics as the 'politics of appeasement' and 'vote bank politics.' This is the only ideological divide that also emphasises upon the fact that the TMC "uses" the Muslim electorate and also a resistant narrative against the hegemonic BJP-led national government. The regionalist and nationalist narratives are political dynamics of West Bengal. The decades of Congress and then the rule of the Communist Party in West Bengal is centred on the economic and class-based political issues and not on the cultural identities. This is the break from the class based politics since TMC came to power.

Another important facet of populism in West Bengal is the Bangladesh crisis. In the backdrop of the Bangladesh crisis, Mamata Banerjee remarked that she would keep the doors of West Bengal open to the distressed migration from Bangladesh. This has been largely disapproved by the Union Government. The external affairs has been included in the seventh schedule under the Union list, making foreign affairs a prerogative of the Union Government. But, time and again, we have seen the clash between the state government and the Centre over various bilateral issues between India and Bangladesh. West Bengal's current political discourse has been reflective of the current situation in Bangladesh given the twin effects of communal violence and the distress migration. This is more so given the close historical, cultural ties between West Bengal and Bangladesh. One can also notice the sympathetic tone of the TMC reflecting the politics of a 'Bengali culture' on either side of the border. This is largely the political side of the dynamism in their relations. However, on the policy side, one can see countries adopting the policies of paradiplomacy which is largely missing from the Indian Context leading to clash between India and Bangladesh and delay of international agreements. Thus, the interplay of the factors of regionalism, nationalism and populism has been working jointly impacting the political dynamics of West Bengal.

7. The Romantic Era of ‘Maa, Mati, Manush era’ and ‘didi’ in West Bengal : The Rise and Rise of Mamata Banerjee

Since 2011, West Bengal has entered a new kind of politics with the slogan ‘Ma Mati Manush’. Mamata’s direct and informal outreach to the people has been one of her populist facets. During the left front rule, there has been more about the party and less about the individual which reflects the Party Society Model (as pointed out by Dwaipayan Bhattacharjee) and in case of TMC, it has been centred around the Mamata Banerjee accepting that the “core of TMC is one and only Mamata Banerjee and her decisions.”

For the left, it was mostly around the organisation building however the left politics was centred around organisation building but for the TMC, the focus is more on loyalty. The rise of Hindutva in Bengal is also a subaltern politics and the mass campaign of the Tapashili Sanglap launched by the party dominated by the SC and ST population. The state government also announced a holiday in the name of Panchana Barma, the leader of the Rajbongshi Community and also opened up schools in Nepali, Konami, languages. The state government also named Panchanan Barma, the leader of Rajbangshi community and also announced the creation of Dalit Sahitya Academy for promoting the Dalit literature. She also identified herself as a Brahmin and it is futile to debate with her on Hinduism. This also shows the shifting strategy of Mamata Banerjee to maintain their populist identity.

In 2021, the TMC had launched the campaign theme Bangla Nijer Meyke Chai which proposed the idea that Banerjee as the daughter of the soil and Bengal for governing need no outsider but the TMC and the Mamata. There has been a political swing in Bengal from Left to Right can be tracked on the streets, a state which used to chant “Tomar naam amar naam Vietnam”. (Your name and My name is Vietnam) has now supported the Bharatiya Janata Party, “Jai Shri Ram”. It is true that cartoons, rhymes, and slogans are a part of the Bengal’s political culture. In Bengal, the BJP tune has referred to Mamata Banerjee as “pishi” (aunt) and rhyming with the words “bella ciao” declared “pishi jao’ (Aunty, you go). The BJP has been accused of corruption, nepotism and playing dynasty politics. A recent study by a group at the National University of Singapore also noted that the party has been using Left imagery in its social media campaign for the state elections- with a Hindutva touch. Banerjee has been projected as an Everywoman image and started with the ‘Didi Ke Bolo’ (Tell it to Elder Sister) effort post the Trinamool’s Lok Sabha Election in 2019. Kakoli Ghosh launched “Mamata Banerjee is the pride of Bengal. She enjoys popular support.

The state wants her own daughter (to be the chief minister) to protect Bengal from the evil forces.” The slogan of ‘Maa Mati Manush’ (Mother, Land and People) with careful blending of socialism and secularism which counters communism. Mamata Banerjee has often invoked Bengali sub-nationalism and called BJP a party of “outsiders”. (Mahapatra & D’Souza, 2021).

By and large, there has been no incidence of the same party in power at the centre and the state of West Bengal. West Bengal has largely been excluded from the national mainstream politics post Gandhi and this has led to a feeling that ‘any decision of the Union Government has to be opposed’. This was even evident in the case of the Teesta water treaty that had been postponed. The low level of economic activity in the state is also responsible for the rise of the populist politics in the state.

8. Case Study on the West Bengal Assembly Elections 2021: General Trends on Populism

The BJP and the TMC have attempted to mobilise the various segments of the population through their own populist machinery. This has been analysed by the author from the politico-sociological lens. The competition was mainly between the welfarist political party (TMC) and right wing political party, BJP. so, populism was right wing on one hand and welfare populism on the other. The TMC is mainly based on the ‘dole politics’ (an important facet of populism) in managing various social groups such as the various social strata like from upper to lower castes, from the Hindu to Muslims, from women to young generations from urban to rural people. On the other hand, the right wing politics was limited to Hindutva politics. The TMC tried to rein in the populist narratives through those welfarist schemes, regional pride and promotion of Bengali identity and protection of the BJP as a ‘cultural outsider’.

Another important political outreach was reaching out to the tribal population, scheduled castes, women and population. A large section of women in West Bengal also look up to Mamta Banjeee as an idol who has been making considerable efforts to make the women of West Bengal economically and politically empowered. During the Covid19, such populist measures as the Duare Government, Swastha Sathi and free school uniforms like Kanyashree, Rupashree and Sabuj Sathi. On the other hand, the BJP also counted the TMC through its development model of inclusivity and launched the Sonar Bangla programme. The BJP lacked any popular face of CM in West Bengal. The issue of the centralisation of the Centre-State relations leading to trouble in the state due to Cyclone Amphan and the Covid 19 crisis especially the migrant workers crisis.

The different populist schemes, especially the ones that are women centric, have remained the hallmark of the TMC. The scheme that has been in focus largely is the Lakshmi Bhandar Scheme that provides direct cash transfer (DCT) to the women of all categories aged 25 to 60 years. And just a few weeks before the 2021 elections, the amounts had been enhanced. The vote share of the women increased by about 10.6% in the elections and one can infer that this populist measure had yielded rich dividends for the TMC party. However, one must note that this is also an assumption and there might be other factors involved and studies have shown that it is not always necessary that the social welfare schemes positively tilt the voting behaviour of the people in favour of such a party. These measures however are fiscally viable as West Bengal is facing a severe cash crunch, so it can be seen particularly as a freebie and a populist measure. These measures are not sustainable long term, once these schemes are forced to stop or there's an expenditure cut, it is to question how this would impact the politics of the state. We don't have any data to show that the cash transfers actually led to the empowerment of women in the state. Duarre Sraakr is another scheme for providing the government services at the doorstep and politically, this is also aimed at making an emotional and grassroots level contact with the people. Schemes on the lines are also ways of leveraging the populist pulse and spirit of the people. (Ghosh & Sahoo, 2021)

In the Indian context where there is underrepresentation of women in the higher echelon of politics. The gendered populist self-making of didi and the manush (people). There has been a populist reconstruction of the people of Bengal by Banerjee. Banerjee claims the position of moral representation and reconstructed the idea of the people against the Bengali Bhadrakalok while also the display of street-style courage and willpower. Her careful cultivation of an austere style of dress including a plain cotton saree, rubber flip flops and the jhola bag and her demonstrative frugal lifestyle has also given her a lot of popular legitimacy. The author also points out that she has also attempted to claim the anti-colonial legacy of the Swadeshi Movement.

The party documents of 'Maa, Mati , Manush', is illustrative of this fact, which illustrates the influence of Bengali regional pride and the iconography of the Mother Goddess. The documents seeks to inculcate the idea of a populist impact of Mammata Banerjee and reinforce herself as the one as the compassionate 'Didi' and this fits very well within the Bengal's familial culture. she has also been equated with the symbolism of Durga as in case of a ritual worship of Ms Banerjee during Durga Puja has been recorded in the Nadia District in Bengal. There is also the ritual of extending patronage to clubs during Durga Puja. This is the aestheticism of political power. Her leadership is a mixture of upper-caste social hierarchical positions.

And seen as also a representative of the marginalised people. Banerjee's politics reinstates religion at the heart of Bengali political culture. Her close relationship with the cleric platforms belonging to both Hinduism and Islam. The recent administrative public policy outreach activities such as 'Didi Ke Bolo' and 'Duare Sarkar' and 'Paray Paray Samadhan' make her a more accessible and establishment of direct connection between the leaders and the citizens. This has also led to the decisive shift in the political culture in contemporary West Bengal due to Mamata Banerjee's populist self-making. There has been a shift from the communist era political rhetoric of class to that of religion and caste and the politics of recognition while approving the socialist discourse of welfarism and redistribution in her policy orientation. This has been an apparent shift from the party-society structure of the Left Front Era. (Mridha, 2021)

One of the important pillars of Mamata Banerjee's populist machinery is the media. The dominant media in the state largely favours the regime and has been crucial in the rise of Mamata Banerjee in the state. This can be seen when Rajiv Gandhi assumed charge post the assassination of the former Indian Prime Minister, the leading newspapers in Kolkata, the Ananda Bazar Patrika, were largely biased in reporting against the Congress.

9. Subaltern Currents in Bengal's Politics and Populism

Immigration has also been the centre of populist politics in West Bengal. Mamata Banerjee's reaching out to Matuas, which is a religious order populated exclusively by the Dalit Immigrants from Bangladesh. (Why?) Though the CPI's rise to power was also based on the plank of refugee welfare. Banerjee also reached out to the potential Muslim voters who were economically very disadvantaged. The CPI has too largely excluded the factor of Gorkha Identity as an instrument of political lineage which has been taken into consideration by the TMC. With the rise of a new kind of populism under Ms. Banerjee, the party-society was broken. The Trinamool took adequate steps in order to consolidate their voter base of the Dalit Immigrants. Each of the parties, namely the BJP and the TMC has been trying to woo the Matua community, which has been one of the great contestation grounds of politics in the state. However, one thing is clear that the Hindu Right has been able to break itself from the mold of isolation to the centre state and one of the formidable opponents of the TMC. Both the parties, i.e the TMC and the BJP are a show of one-upmanship with almost absence of any formidable voices within their parties. Secondly, both the parties have "subalternised" politics by breaking the hold of the liberal elite milieu of the Congress and the Communist Party of India. the differences in their populism is mainly arising out of the organisational machinery. For the BJP, the main component is its Hindutva ideology. On the other hand, for the TMC, it is more personality driven as her party has a history of aligning with the Vajpayee government and also held an important position in the UPA.

One of the reasons for the electoral success of the TMC is that the BJP's absence of a CM face and heavy reliance on the two stalwarts of the party i.e, Dilip Ghosh and Kailash Vijayvargiya. The BJP leadership also employs different popular icons of the state such as Swami Vivekananda, Subhas Chandra Bose and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee. (Sinharay, P., 2024, April 24)

In recent years, there has been a rise in the politics of religious identity in the state. For example, the BJP has conducted armed marches during the Hindu festivals and in turn the Trinamool Congress has been reaching out to the various religious leaders. This is a completely new trajectory of politics in the state. The Trinamool had in fact employed identity politics to win the 2011 elections. There is a wide difference between the identity politics as employed by the TMC and the BJP, however that is not the current context of discussion. Overall, it can be inferred that the multiple strands of identity politics point towards the populist pulse of the people. The subaltern politics can be understood from the complex interplay of the different communities, mainly the Mautuas and the Rajbanshis of the SC community in West Bengal Politics.

The term "subaltern Hindutva" refers to the BJP's outreach to the marginal communities like the SCs and the STs and inculcating them into the Hindutva framework as a division of the caste would also divide the Hindu vote bank. In the 2014 elections, the BJP had been backed by the tribal communities in the Northern Bengal backed them in tribal dominated segments in the Kalchini, Nagrakata, Madarihata and Phansidewa. In the 2019 elections, BJP had a clean sweep in North Bengal with the overwhelming support of the tea tribes and the Rajbanshi communities and the BJP won the seats like Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Alirpurdar. The BJP also won Jhargram and Bishnupur with the large SC population. In 2021, the BJP retained its stronghold over these regions, however, in 2024, there was a clear sign of the decline of the BJP's influence (loss of the Jhargram LS seat) among the SCs and STs in West Bengal as the vote share of the SCs came down from 50.5% (2019) dropped to 45.2% in 2024. According to the 2011 Census. SCs account for around 23.5% of the state's population, Rajbanshis are the largest sub-category of the SCs in West Bengal mostly residing in North Bengal, mostly concentrated in Cooch Behar. On the other hand, the TMC garnered their support by forming a Narayani Battalion in West Bengal Police. There is also a section of Rajbanshi and Kamtapur voters who demand a separate state and the BJP has entertained this demand in this year's Lok Sabha monsoon session for a separate state. Mamata also believed in direct connection with the people and often bypassed bureaucratic norms. The TMC had also been trying to placate the Rajbanshi Community in North Bengal by inducting Chhatradhar Mahato into the Jangalmahal unit of the TMC.

Mamata also appointed Manjul Krishna Thakur as the sons of the Binapani Devi famously known as Boro Ma, the custodian of the Matua Community. (Reference: West Bengal: Ground Issues Keep the ‘Subaltern Hindus’ Away from the BJP, Spandan Roy Basunia, June 14, 2024, the wire)

Matuas have been at the centre of the political tussle between the BJP and the TMC. Matuas also known as Namasudras, are the second largest sub-category of the SCs in West Bengal, comprising 17.4% of the entire SC population. The BJP continues to enjoy the support of the Matua community as it had retained the Bangaon and Ranaghat seats in the latest elections. One of the core demands of the community was the implementation of the Matuas and the BJP had promised its implementation and that had as well yielded rich dividends in the 2019 and 2021 elections. On the other hand, the TMC had largely spoken against the implementation of the CAA and had also failed to come up with a strong Matua face. Another reason is that the Rajnanshis and the Matuas share borders with Bangladesh has made the issues of the CAA more prominent as their local issues. (Sinharay, 2024)

10. Conclusion

To conclude, Mamata Banerjee’s style of populism is a challenge to the century old hegemony of Bhadraklok Politics. This has reshaped Identity politics over the years. The paper also concludes that Mamata Banerjee is a populist leader, and proves all aspects of populism from her charismatic personality to the populist schemes.

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