

India: Why the left's debacle in West Bengal good for the real left?

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People's Review: The [Left Front-Congress](#) party-[Indian Secular Front](#) (ISF) alliance's rout in the [2021 West Bengal Assembly elections](#) stirred a lot of controversies as it's for the first time in the history of the state since 1947 that neither the parliamentary left nor the Congress party could win a single seat in the assembly. The parliamentary *left's* debacle in West Bengal has even raised questions regarding its political relevance at present times.

Election results indicate that West Bengal's electoral politics is now polarised between Chief Minister [Mamata Bandopadhyay](#)'s [Trinamool Congress](#) (TMC) and Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#)'s [Bharatiya Janata Party](#) (BJP). The parliamentary left bloc, led by the [Communist Party of India \(Marxist\)](#) [CPI(M)], didn't even find a place in the fringes. It's a tragedy for the Left Front that ruled the state with an iron fist for 34 years. Even the Congress party, which once ruled the state, ended up with zero. Only the ISF of Muslim evangelist-turned-activist [Abbas Siddique](#) could manage to win one seat in Muslim-majority Bhangar, South 24 Paraganas district, for the front- Sanjukta Morcha.

This is so far the worst of the CPI(M)-led parliamentary left's performance in any election. But this wasn't surprising; the CPI(M) has been losing the principal opposition's space after losing power to the TMC in 2011. The CPI(M)-led Left Front won only two seats and gained 29.71% votes; the BJP, with two seats as well, got 17.02% votes, while Bandopadhyay's TMC got 39.05% votes and won 34 out of 42 seats. The Congress party could win four seats with 9.58% votes.

The [2019 Lok Sabha elections](#) showed how the [left votes shifted to the BJP](#). For the first time, the left was left without any Lok Sabha seat from West Bengal. While the TMC lost 12 seats—but increased vote share to 43.3%—and won only 22 seats, the BJP won 18 seats by getting 40.7% votes. The CPI(M) got only 6.33% of votes. It was assumed that the 23.38 percentage points drop in its vote share, vis-à-vis the 2014 general elections, was the votes shifted to the BJP, which gained 23.68 percentage points.

Since the 2019 Lok Sabha elections' results, the CPI(M) pinned its hope on the BJP, which was projected as the next ruling party, and amplified its anti-TMC cacophony. The CPI(M) raised the slogan "*Aagey Ram Porey Baam*" (first Ram, ie, the BJP, then the *left*). Most *left* leaders preached that it's important to uproot the TMC first with the BJP and then, as the principal opponent of the saffron camp, the CPI(M) will manage to return to power in 2026. This debauchery irked even a large section of the 3.5m traditional *left* voters.

But along with these, a few more factors played a crucial role in the *left's* debacle in West Bengal.

(i) The choice of principal enemy and tryst with Hindutva fascism

Even though at a pan-India level the CPI(M) leadership uses anti-BJP rhetoric, in West Bengal it mellows down a lot. Though the CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury doesn't mind [co-signing a letter with Bandopadhyay](#), opposing Modi's [Hindutva fascism](#), the West Bengal CPI(M) remained

tight-lipped about the BJP.

Throughout the campaigning for the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections, the CPI(M) didn't designate anyone as its principal enemy in the state, despite the central leadership tagging the BJP as its principal foe. The state CPI(M) invented an imaginary foe—*Bijemool* (BJP + Trinamool Congress)—and decided to fight against it. It didn't recognise the urgency to resist the BJP's Hindutva fascist juggernaut or even the existence of a bitter contradiction over power between the BJP and the TMC. For it, the BJP and the TMC were the two sides of the same coin and the TMC an equally dangerous force like the BJP.

Rather than taking any concrete step to show its anti-BJP and anti-Hindutva character, the CPI(M) continued to bracket the BJP and the TMC together. When the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist-Liberation) [CPI(M-L Liberation)] general secretary, Dipankar Bhattacharya, [offered the political line of consolidating anti-BJP votes](#) to thwart the saffron camp's evil designs, the [CPI\(M\) vehemently rejected the idea](#) and joined hands with Siddique's ISF to split the Muslim votes of the TMC and pave the way to the BJP's victory.

Bandopadhyay has always shown tyrannical traits and is averse to criticism or opposition. However, despite these traits and her role in suppressing the tribal movement against corporate aggression in Jangal Mahal, she was never complicit in any state-sponsored genocide or pogrom targeting the Muslims or other minorities. Her party, a loosely-held organisation where everyone claims to be a leader, isn't a match for a cadre-based, paramilitary organisation like the [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh](#) (RSS)—the BJP's parental body—funded by big global corporations.

Unlike the RSS, the TMC isn't driven by a mission to convert India into a monolithic identity and a theocratic dictatorship, yet Bandopadhyay is equated with Modi, which downplayed the real threat posed by the BJP-RSS. Modi, who was complicit in the [2002 Gujarat anti-Muslim pogrom](#) and the [2020 Delhi anti-Muslim pogrom](#), is globally recognised as a fascist, unlike Bandopadhyay, whose sphere of influence is limited. But the CPI(M) cares a lemon.

Ignoring these qualitative differences, ignoring the fact that the TMC is only involved in petty crimes, extortions and local muscle-flexing vis-à-vis the world's largest state-sponsored terror outfit RSS and the world's richest political party, the BJP, the CPI(M) continued its endeavour to combat both and, as it was exposed over a period, it mostly attacked the TMC and wanted to oust it from power by hook or crook. Naturally, this made it the secret ally of the BJP.

This paved the way for the *left's* debacle in West Bengal in the 2021 polls and it's left with only a 5.67% vote share out of which the CPI(M) has 4.73%, ie 2.84m votes. Along with the Congress and the ISF, the total vote share of the Sanjukta Morcha is 9.95%. This shows how the coalition was rejected for its dubious stand on the BJP.

(ii) Pushing arrogance on top and blaming voters

One of the principal reasons behind the *left's* debacle in West Bengal polls is its reluctance to mend its ways and honour the voters' sentiments, which is a very crucial part of parliamentary democracy. While the CPI(M) had shed its 'communist' characteristics in 1967 and hitherto carried merely a hollow shell to hoodwink the masses, its arrogance in the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections exposed its hypocrisy and tryst with the Hindutva fascist forces, a nexus that dates back to the 1970s, as exposed by its former general secretary Puchalapalli Sundarayya in his [resignation letter](#).

The CPI(M) leaders, its so-called "new face" candidates and its virulent online troll army vehemently dug out the anti-people policies of the erstwhile Left Front government under Buddhadeb

Bhattacharya and started hyping them, much to the people's dismay. The CPI(M) vehemently defended the decision of forcible land acquisition at Hooghly district's Singur for Ratan Tata's Tata Nano factory—a car whose production ceased years ago—and at Purba Medinipur district's Nandigram for the infamous Indonesian Salem group's proposed special economic zone.

Rather than self-criticism and weeding out the wrong policies, the West Bengal CPI(M) stood adamant on its anti-people attitude and social-fascism, unapologetically. For the first time in West Bengal's legislative political history, the people saw a party, which swears by the parliamentary path and discards any lessons of Marxism that teaches otherwise, to blame the voters. This hubris, which makes the CPI(M) mock the voters' intellect and call them names, especially the poor who depend on Bandopadhyay's welfare schemes, acted as a catalyst in the left's debacle in West Bengal polls.

(iii) Caste supremacy and elitism

The CPI(M) was known in West Bengal as a Brahminical party for its closed-door attitude towards the *Dalits*, tribal people and Muslims, who seldom rise to policy-making positions in the organisation. Most ministers and parliamentarians of the CPI(M)-led Left Front were from upper-caste Hindu households during its 34-year-long rule. Yet, it was expected that the CPI(M) will, for the sake of its survival, promote people from marginal communities and sects in its ranks. But to no avail.

While the CPI(M) brought highlighted Deblina Hembram, a tribal woman, as a prominent face before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, in the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections it played around with its elitist figures like former Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) student union president Aishi Ghosh, Minakshi Mukherjee, Dipsita Dhar, etc, as candidates.

These candidates, who were parachuted to different constituencies, were projected as “educated” faces of the Sanjukta Morcha. The CPI(M) online troll army even lampooned the TMC candidates for lack of education. This sheer casteist and elitist outlook, the arrogance with which the party criticised the contestants from other parties, who didn't have as much education or privileges, and the way it insulted the poor TMC supporters as “*Chal Chor*” (rice thief due to accusations of TMC men siphoning off rice allocated for Amphan cyclone relief) and anyone who criticised the party as “*Choti Chata*” (slippers lick, referring to Bandopadhyay's ubiquitous footwear).

What's left after the *left's* debacle in West Bengal?

The West Bengal Assembly election results, especially in the working-class belts of Pashchim Bardhaman, North 24 Paraganas, Howrah and the tea garden belts of northern Bengal prove that the BJP has become the most favourable alternative to the TMC in the state. What made the CPI(M) a fringe? Why it lost the working class belts after antagonising the peasantry during the last phase of its rule?

Due to its ideological bankruptcy, the CPI(M) is now rendered as a non-factor in the state. While for many it will be considered as a setback for left-wing forces, but the diminishing of the opportunist parliamentary left under the CPI(M) provides an opportunity to the progressive working-class forces to fill the vacuum and fight for the position of principal opposition.

Though fighting the TMC is essential to become a reliable political force in the state, uprooting the BJP is imperative for the existence of the progressive working-class forces. It's only by uprooting the BJP and destroying its Hindutva fascist citadel that the progressive left forces can wean away poor people from the fascist camp and build up strong resistance.

The *left's* debacle in West Bengal is a blessing in disguise as it will end the era of the social-fascist CPI(M) and its hubris while paving the way for the progressive left forces to play greater roles and

build-up movements to come to the centre-stage of public discourse. It's the real left that will define the future narratives of West Bengal's politics if the opportunity is seized and the BJP is fought back with full zeal.

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