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Caste, Class, and Electoral Strategies: A Study of West Bengal in the Context of India Since 2011

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Abstract

The political landscape of West Bengal has undergone significant transformations since 2011, reflecting broader shifts in India's electoral politics. Traditionally viewed through the lens of class-based politics - especially under the long rule of the Left Front - West Bengal has in recent years witnessed the increasing salience of caste dynamics and identity-based mobilization. This study examines the evolving interplay of caste and class in shaping electoral strategies, with a focus on key political actors such as the Trinamool Congress (TMC), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and resurgent leftist and regional forces. The post-2011 period marks the end of an era dominated by class rhetoric and the beginning of a more fragmented, identity-conscious political narrative. The Trinamool Congress's rise to power in 2011 under Mamata Banerjee was driven by a populist model that sought to unify various caste and class groups under a common umbrella of anti-Left sentiment. However, with the emergence of the BJP as a formidable challenger, particularly after 2014, the state's electoral dynamics began to shift toward more overtly caste-based and religious strategies.

One of the central arguments of this study is that caste, long assumed to be a non-determinant factor in Bengal politics, has resurfaced in new forms. The increasing assertion of Matua Dalits, Mahishyas, Rajbanshis, Lepcha and tribal communities in electoral participation indicates a reconfiguration of the political imagination. While the Left had emphasized class solidarity and economic rights, newer parties have tactically used caste identities as instruments of political mobilization, often integrating them with religious and nationalistic narratives. The role of class, however, remains critical. The agrarian crisis, unemployment, and urban migration have shaped voter concerns, and parties have responded with promises of welfare schemes, subsidies, and employment generation. Yet, these class-based appeals are increasingly being layered with caste-sensitive strategies to ensure deeper penetration into specific vote banks. TMC is trying to stay in government power through Muslim vote Bank. The BJP, for instance, combined Hindu

consolidation with outreach to backward castes and tribal groups, particularly in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and 2021 Assembly elections.

This paper also highlights the importance of regional disparities - rural vs. urban, industrial vs. agrarian districts - in shaping the success of different electoral narratives. In urban centers like Kolkata, class-based concerns around infrastructure and employment dominate, whereas in rural and semi-urban areas, caste and religion-based appeals find stronger resonance, especially among communities historically excluded from mainstream political representation.

Keywords :- *Caste Politics, Class-Based Mobilization, Electoral Strategies, West Bengal Politics, Identity Politics, Trinamool Congress (TMC), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Post-Left Politics in Bengal*

Introduction

The political landscape of West Bengal, once considered a stronghold of class-based and ideologically driven politics, has undergone a remarkable transformation since 2011. The end of the Left Front's uninterrupted 34-years rule marked a turning point, not only in governance but also in the nature of electoral mobilization and political discourse. This study delves into how caste and class - two foundational pillars of India's social fabric - have evolved and intertwined within the state's electoral strategies, especially in the context of broader national developments over the past decade. According to Morris Jones "Without due attention to social forces, the study of Indian politics is partial and misleading."¹

West Bengal was viewed as an exception in Indian politics due to its relative suppression of caste-based politics for decades. The Left parties, particularly the CPI(M), emphasized economic class over social identity, championing labor rights, land reforms, and redistribution policies. However, this class-centric approach gradually lost its resonance amid growing economic aspirations, identity assertions, and changing political sentiments. The rise of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) under Mamata Banerjee in 2011 brought with it a new populist and welfare-centric model that appealed to a broad social base, including rural poor, women, and minority communities. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) began to expand its presence in Bengal after the 2014 general elections, employing a different strategy – like religious and caste identities alongside economic concerns. For the first time in decades, caste became a visible and strategic element of electoral politics in this state. Communities such as the Matuas (a Dalit group with roots in East Bengal), Rajbanshis, Mahishyas, and tribal populations started to assert themselves more forcefully, demanding representation, recognition, and resources. Political parties began tailoring their strategies to court these groups, acknowledging the electoral weight they carried.

Class, however, remains deeply relevant. Economic issues such as unemployment, agrarian distress, urban poverty, and the demand for development continue to shape political narratives. But unlike earlier decades, these class-based concerns are now increasingly articulated through the lens of identity. The Political Parties today do not simply promise economic relief; they frame those promises in a way that resonates with specific caste and community groups. For instance, job schemes or welfare benefits are often advertised with targeted messaging toward SC/ST or OBC communities. This introduction sets the stage for a deeper analysis of how caste and class

have come to operate in tandem in West Bengal's political sphere since 2011. It also seeks to place this regional shift within the larger framework of Indian politics, where identity-based mobilization and economic populism have become dominant strategies across many states. As an electoral competition intensifies and political parties seek to build multi-layered coalitions, understanding the complex interplay between caste, class, and electoral strategies becomes essential.

Historical Background

West Bengal's political landscape was dominated by the Left Front, a coalition led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) from 1977 to 2011, which left a deep imprint on the state's political culture. The period of these 34 years is often characterized by the prominence of class-based politics, in which the working class, landless laborers, and marginal farmers were mobilized under a strong ideological framework rooted in leftist thought. This era witnessed significant land reforms such as *Operation Barga*, which aimed to secure tenancy rights for sharecroppers. Another reform was decentralization of power through the Panchayati Raj system for villagers. These reforms were instrumental in building a loyal rural support base for the Left.

In West Bengal, one of the defining features of this period was the relative invisibility of caste in political discourse. Caste played a central role in electoral strategies in the many state of India; West Bengal appeared to operate on a different axis - primarily class. The Left leadership consciously avoided explicit caste-based mobilization, believing that it would fragment class solidarity. As a result, even Dalit and backward caste movements were often absorbed within broader class-based narratives, and caste identities were rendered politically marginal in formal electoral politics. However, this erasure of caste in political discourse did not mean the end of caste-based inequality. Many critics argue that the Left's emphasis on class over caste created a kind of political silence around the structural and everyday discriminations faced by marginalized caste groups. While the Left Front government ensured basic economic rights for large sections of the rural poor, it did not foster a parallel recognition of social identities and caste-based exclusion. This contradiction - between economic upliftment and social invisibility - laid the groundwork for future political realignments.²

Ideology played a crucial role in this era, not only in shaping party platforms but also in everyday mobilization. The Left invested heavily in building mass organizations - youth wings, trade unions, farmers' collectives, and women's groups - that helped sustain a political culture rooted in grassroots activism. Political education and public discourse were dominated by ideas of equality, anti-capitalism, and worker solidarity. The emphasis on mass mobilization and ideological discipline enabled the Left to maintain control over both urban working-class populations and rural agrarian communities for decades. However, over the time, this ideological model began to show signs of fatigue. Economic stagnation, bureaucratic rigidity, and a disconnection with emerging aspirations - especially among the youth and marginalized social groups - contributed to the decline of Left hegemony. The absence of a meaningful engagement with caste politics also created a vacuum that other political actors would later exploit. In essence, the pre-2011 political history of West Bengal is one where class politics dominated, caste remained politically subdued, and ideological mass mobilization served as the primary mode of political

engagement. This historical context is essential to understanding the dramatic shifts in electoral strategies and identity politics that unfolded in the state after 2011. Robert. W. Stern said “Caste is the warp and woof of Indian civilization and India’s civilization is the warp and woof of caste”³

Political Transition in Post era of 2011

The year 2011 marked a dramatic shift in West Bengal’s political landscape with the fall of the Left Front government and the ascendance of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee. This political transition was not just a change in party power but also signaled a fundamental transformation in the nature of political engagement, electoral strategies, and the relationship between caste, class, and governance in the state of West Bengal.

The electorate of Bengal expressed growing frustration with the regime’s perceived stagnation, bureaucratic inertia, and detachment from evolving public aspirations after more than three decades of Left ruled government. Issues such as industrial decline, rural distress, lack of employment opportunities, and the authoritarian tendencies of local party structures eroded the Left’s mass base. In this situation, Mamata Banerjee emerged as a symbol of resistance and changed the left ruled government. Her political narrative was shaped around the image of a grassroots leader - one who walked with the people, spoke their language, and understood their daily struggles.

Mamata Banerjee’s popularity was central power to the TMC’s strategy. Unlike the ideological rigidity of the Left, her approach was pragmatic and emotionally resonant. Through direct communication, symbolism (such as wearing humble attire and avoiding ostentation), and constant presence in people’s movements (e.g., Singur and Nandigram agitations), she crafted an image of a leader connected to the poor and marginalized. Her government launched several welfare schemes such as *Kanyashree* (for girl child education), *Rupashree* (for women’s marriage aid), *Swasthya Sathi* (health insurance), and *Sabuj Sathi* (bicycles for school students), which appealed especially to women, rural voters, and economically weaker sections.

This shift also signified a reconfiguration of political support bases. The TMC broke into constituencies previously loyal to the Left, especially among the rural poor, small farmers, and working-class communities. What was once a class-based support structure slowly transformed into a mosaic of targeted welfare recipients and identity-based affiliations. While Mamata avoided overt caste mobilization initially, her party increasingly acknowledged the importance of caste identities such as Matuas (a Dalit community), Mahishyas, Rajbanshis and other backward classes in electoral politics—especially as the BJP started gaining ground by appealing to those very groups. The TMC’s inclusive political strategy was also characterized by the co-opting of minority votes, particularly Muslims, who had grown wary of both the Left and the rising BJP. Mamata Banerjee positioned herself as a protector of minority rights, celebrating festivals of different religions and ensuring representation of minority voices in government. According to S. L. Sikri “Indeed, within the framework of modernization and political change, caste has taken on new dimensions and has also acquired a new emphasis.”⁴

However, the TMC’s growing dominance and personalized style of governance also drew criticism. Allegations of corruption, political violence, and local-level nepotism began surfacing

by the mid of this decade. Yet, the party's deep entrenchment in welfare delivery mechanisms helped it retain a loyal base, particularly among women and the economically disadvantaged.

In summary, the post-2011 period in West Bengal witnessed a transition from ideological class politics to a populist, welfare-driven model, with caste and identity considerations slowly becoming part of mainstream electoral strategies. Mamata Banerjee's leadership redefined the contours of political engagement in the state, laying the foundation for the complex caste-class dynamics that would come to define Bengal's political narrative in the following decade.

Rising Identity Politics in West Bengal

The post-2011 political shift in West Bengal paved the way for a new chapter in the state's electoral politics—marked by the resurgence of identity-based mobilization, particularly around caste and religion. While West Bengal historically maintained a narrative of class solidarity, downplaying caste-based affiliations, the last decade has seen an undeniable rise in identity politics. Communities that once remained on the margins of political discourse have begun asserting themselves more visibly, reshaping electoral strategies and political alliances. The most prominent examples of this change is the growing political assertion of the Matua community—a Dalit group with roots in East Bengal, comprising largely Namasudra migrants who settled in Bengal post-Partition period. They treated for a long as a loyal vote bank by the TMC due to welfare schemes and symbolic recognition, the Matuas began demanding greater political representation, legal citizenship rights (especially under the backdrop of the Citizenship Amendment Act), and social dignity. Taking this opportunity, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) strategically reached out to them, promising to address their concerns through central legislation, fielding Matua candidates, and building emotional narratives around migration and belonging. Similarly, the Mahishyas, a dominant OBC group in parts of southern Bengal, and the Rajbanshis of North Bengal, have emerged as electorally influential castes. While these groups may not have historically aligned themselves with identity-based demands, the intensifying political competition has encouraged them to seek recognition, reservations, and regional development. Political parties have responded by offering targeted welfare programs, reserved leadership positions, and community-specific promises.

The Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), who form a significant part of the rural electorate in districts like Purulia, Bankura, and Jhargram, have also been drawn into this new electoral calculus. The BJP, in particular, made concerted efforts to engage these groups by invoking tribal cultural pride, religious identity, and accusations of neglect under TMC governance. This has led to a growing polarization in these regions, where tribal identity, development concerns, and religious affiliations intersect.

A central element of the BJP's rise in Bengal has been its blend of religious nationalism with caste-based outreach. This dual approach allowed it to move beyond its traditional urban upper-caste support and penetrate rural and marginalized caste demographics. Campaigns emphasizing Hindu identity, slogans like "Jai Shri Ram," and narratives around national security and cultural pride were carefully woven with caste-specific appeals and promises. As a result, there has been a clear shift in community-based voting behavior. Identity, both religious and caste-

based, has begun influencing voting preferences more strongly than in previous decades. Many voters now view political parties not just through the lens of policy performance or class alignment but also in terms of how they engage with their community's specific issues, status, and representation.

In the conclusion, the rise of identity politics in West Bengal since 2011 reflects a broader national trend with unique regional dynamics. Caste groups like the Matuas, Mahishyas, and Rajbanshis have emerged from political invisibility to become key actors in shaping the state's electoral outcomes. This transformation signifies a deeper structural shift in how political allegiance is formed, sustained, and contested in contemporary Bengal.

Electoral Strategies and Class Dynamics

Since 2011, West Bengal's political parties have increasingly adapted their electoral strategies to address a complex intersection of class-based anxieties and emerging caste identities. While class concerns with such as unemployment, rural distress, inflation, and urban migration remained central point of political discourse, they are now often layered with identity-based appeals to maximize political reach across diverse communities. This evolving strategy has played out prominently in major elections including the **2016 Assembly, 2019 Lok Sabha, 2021 Assembly and 2024 Lok Sabha elections**. Class-based issues such as **employment generation, rural livelihoods, agricultural subsidies, and urban infrastructure development** have consistently featured in the manifestos of major political parties like the **Trinamool Congress (TMC), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Left-Congress alliance**. But, the way these issues are framed and addressed has undergone a significant change. The **TMC**, for instance, has rooted its welfare politics in schemes that simultaneously address economic and social insecurities—**Kanyashree, Swasthya Sathi, Krishak Bandhu, and Lakshmir Bhandar** are not only economic interventions but also carry a distinct messaging targeted at women, farmers, and low-income caste groups.

The **2016 Assembly elections** highlighted the TMC's dominance through a narrative focused on grassroots development, decentralization, and populist welfare. The Left and Congress failed to counter this strategy effectively, as their class-centric language appeared out dated amid changing aspirations. Although they addressed economic stagnation and industrial decline, they lacked localized outreach and did not adapt to the new language of identity-sensitive development. However, BJP had successfully repackaged class issues within a broader framework of cultural nationalism and caste recognition in the **2019 Lok Sabha elections**. It raised concerns about illegal immigration, national security, and underdevelopment in backward districts. Alongside these macro-themes, it promised job creation, support for farmers, and social schemes directed explicitly at **OBCs, SCs, and STs**. This layered approach helped the BJP break into areas that were previously TMC or Left strongholds, especially in **North Bengal, Jangalmahal, and border districts**. The **2021 Assembly election** was culmination of these strategies. Both the TMC and BJP extensively used **booth-level data, caste mapping, and class-segmented campaign teams** to tailor messages for specific demographic blocks. While the BJP emphasized central schemes and national pride, it also fielded candidates from marginalized castes, and organized community-

specific outreach events. The TMC, on the other hand, focused on showcasing successful state schemes, promised expansion of welfare benefits, and increased representation of **Matuas**, **Mahishyas**, Rajbanshis and **minority groups** in political platforms. Same scenario had been observed in the 2024 Lok Sabha election.

Importantly, the **urban-rural divide** influenced how class appeals were perceived. In urban areas like **Kolkata** and **Asansol**, issues like job opportunities, infrastructure, and education dominated; in contrast, rural voters responded more to agricultural support, direct cash transfers, and identity-based outreach. In sum, electoral strategies in post-2011 Bengal reveal a deep entanglement of class with caste. Political parties now recognize that **economic anxieties and identity aspirations** must be addressed in tandem. This hybrid model of political mobilization represents a significant departure from older ideological frameworks, replacing them with **targeted populism** grounded in both **material relief** and **symbolic recognition**.

Intersection of Caste and Class

The intersection of caste and class in West Bengal's political landscape has become increasingly significant in the post-2011 era. While the state has long been regarded as an outlier in terms of caste-based politics - due to the historical dominance of Left-led class narratives - recent political developments suggest a much more nuanced and layered reality. Today, caste and class do not function in isolation; rather, they interact in complex ways that shape both voter behaviour and party strategies. One of the key features of this inter-sectionality is the way caste identities often correlate with specific class locations. For instance, Dalit communities such as the **Matuas** and **Namasudra**, despite being historically marginalized in terms of social status, also face economic vulnerabilities like poor housing, underemployment, and lack of access to quality education. This dual disadvantage makes them particularly receptive to policies that simultaneously address economic and identity-based exclusions. Political parties have recognized this and increasingly design welfare schemes that cater to both the **material needs** and **symbolic recognition** of such communities (Bardhan, 2020).

Regional disparities within West Bengal further deepen the caste-class interaction. In **rural and border areas** - such as **North 24 Parganas**, **Cooch Behar**, and the **Jangalmahal region** - marginalized castes tend to occupy the lowest rungs of the agrarian economy. Here, economic deprivation is often reinforced by geographic and social isolation. Political parties have adapted their outreach accordingly: while the **TMC** focuses on welfare penetration through schemes like **Rupashree** and **Lakshmir Bhandar**, the **BJP** combines promises of economic upliftment with appeals to cultural pride and religious identity, especially among tribal and SC populations.

In **urban and industrial belts**, such as **Kolkata**, **Howrah**, and **Asansol**, the dynamic changes have come. Here, caste identities are somewhat diluted in the public sphere but remain active in private networks and community associations. The working class in these areas includes a diverse set of caste groups—OBCs, Mahishyas, SCs, and Muslims—many of whom are engaged in informal labour or small-scale industries. Their political expectations often revolve around job creation, regularization of employment, and improved public services, but they are also responsive to candidates or parties who signal recognition of their caste identity or community heritage.

Voter perception is crucial in understanding this intersectionality. Many voters do not see economic and identity-based demands as separate; instead, they evaluate political parties on how effectively they integrate the two. For example, a voter from the Rajbanshi community may seek better irrigation and roads but also prefer candidates who speak their language, represent their culture, or come from their caste. This dual lens of evaluation leads to a more complex pattern of political alignment—one where symbolic gestures, local representation, and tangible benefits must all come together to gain support.

Ultimately, the caste-class intersection in West Bengal reflects the shifting terrain of Indian democracy. It reveals how social identities are not static but interact with economic conditions to produce evolving political expectations. As parties attempt to build coalitions in a competitive environment, understanding and addressing this intersectionality has become not just a strategy—but a necessity.

Comparative Analysis with other States

The caste and class dynamics of West Bengal, while increasingly visible in recent years, unfold within a framework that sets the state apart from the more overt caste mobilizations seen in places like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Tamil Nadu.⁵ A comparative look reveals both overlaps and stark contrasts in how caste and class interact across different regional political cultures.

Caste is a central political mobilized element in **Uttar Pradesh (UP)** and **Bihar** since long time. Parties like the **Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)** and the **Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)** were built on the explicit political assertion of Dalits, OBCs, and other backward groups. These states witnessed a phase where caste became not just a social identity but a political tool for empowerment. Leaders such as **Mayawati** and **Lalu Prasad Yadav** created mass support bases through the symbolic and material elevation of historically marginalized groups. Class, while relevant, often took a backseat to caste identity in political rhetoric and strategy (Jaffrelot, 2003).

In contrast, **Tamil Nadu** presents a unique model where caste and class are deeply interwoven into the legacy of **Dravidian politics**. Since the mid-20th century, the Dravidian movement led by parties like **DMK** and **AIADMK** transformed caste hierarchies into platforms for social justice and welfare. While caste identities are still strong, Tamil Nadu's political discourse integrates them into a broader ideological framework that includes anti-Brahmanism, linguistic pride, and redistributive policies. The result is a relatively cohesive system of caste-class negotiation embedded within state-sponsored welfare (Wyatt, 2010).

West Bengal, until recently, stood in contrast to all three. Its political ethos shaped by the **Left Front's long rule**, downplayed caste in favour of class. While Dalits, Adivasis, and OBCs were economically disadvantaged, their identities were subsumed under the larger umbrella of the proletariat. As such, explicit caste mobilization was rare, and caste identity was not politically vocalised in the same way as in the Hindi heartland or the south. However, since 2011, Bengal has started converging with broader national trends. The rise of identity-based demands from communities like **Matuas**, **Rajbanshis**, and **Mahishyas**, and targeted political outreach by both the **TMC** and **BJP**, signal a shift towards what other states have long experienced—a politics where identity and economy are intertwined. Yet, Bengal retains a certain ambivalence. Unlike

UP or Bihar, caste does not dominate the political language; rather, it appears layered within welfare schemes, symbolic gestures, and community-based outreach. What makes Bengal unique is the **hybridization of class-rooted political culture with emerging caste awareness**. Here, political parties must navigate a legacy of ideological class mobilization while adapting to new identity-driven aspirations. This dual terrain demands a fine balance: the need to deliver economic relief while acknowledging the socio-cultural distinctiveness of caste communities.

In sum, Bengal's evolving caste-class dynamics reflect a complex blend of historical suppression, recent assertion, and strategic adaptation—placing it somewhere between the overt caste politics of the north and the integrated social justice model of the south.

Challenges and Emerging Trends

Political landscape of West Bengal is undergoing a profound transformation, marked by the increasing politicization of caste, growing religious polarization, and the rise of new actors and platforms in political communication since 2011. These changes bring both opportunities for inclusion and challenges to the state's long held image of social cohesion and ideological politics. One of the most notable trends is the **politicization of backward communities**. Historically, West Bengal under the Left Front suppressed overt caste mobilization instead of class-based unity. But with changing political equations, backward communities such as the **Matuas (Dalits)**, **Mahishyas (OBCs)**, and **Rajbanshis** have started asserting themselves more vocally. This shift stems from a growing awareness of political power, combined with a desire for representation, recognition, and targeted development. Political parties have responded by tailoring their outreach, promising reservations, welfare schemes, and symbolic representation. However, this politicization often remains **instrumental** rather than transformative - it offers short-term electoral gains but risks deepening social divisions if not accompanied by genuine empowerment (Chandra, 2004).

Alongside caste-based mobilization, **religious polarization** has emerged as a serious concern in West Bengal. The state, known for its syncretic culture and history of communal harmony, has witnessed increased tension between communities, particularly Hindus and Muslims. Political narratives - especially those employed by the **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)** - have leaned into Hindu nationalist rhetoric, using slogans, historical grievances, and fears of cultural erosion to mobilize voters. In contrast, the **Trinamool Congress (TMC)** has positioned itself as the defender of minority rights, often highlighting inclusive festivals, linguistic pluralism, and religious harmony. While such positioning has helped both parties secure their respective support bases, it has also **fragmented the social fabric**, particularly in border areas and mixed-population districts (Banerjee, 2021).

Another critical emerging trend is the **increased role of media, digital platforms, and youth participation** in shaping electoral outcomes. With the rapid expansion of internet access and smartphone penetration, digital campaigns have become central to political outreach. Social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube are now key tools for messaging, mobilization, and counter-narratives. Political parties use these platforms not only to promote schemes but also to **shape perceptions**, often through memes, emotional appeals, and micro-

targeted content. This trend has both democratized and distorted political engagement - it gives voice to new participants but also enables the spread of misinformation and polarization.

Youth participation, in particular, reflects an important shift. A large section of Bengal's voters today are under 35, and their concerns differ from traditional political categories. Employment, education, identity, and aspirations dominate their political thinking. Yet, they are also highly susceptible to **identity-based appeals**, especially when packaged in culturally resonant or digitally savvy formats. Political parties that effectively bridge welfare with aspiration, and identity with inclusion, are better positioned to tap into this dynamic demographic.

Conclusion

The evolving political narrative of West Bengal since 2011 represents a significant departure from its historically class-centric orientation. Once known for its ideological rigor under Left rule and its emphasis on economic class solidarity, the state has entered a complex phase where **caste, class, religion, and identity politics** intersect in new and often unpredictable ways. This transformation reflects not just a regional shift but also mirrors broader trends in Indian politics, where the boundaries between economic demands and social identities are increasingly blurred.

The rise of **identity-based politics** - particularly among Dalit, tribal, and backward caste communities -has challenged the earlier assumption that Bengal was immune to caste-driven mobilization. Communities like the **Matuas, Mahishyas, Rajbanshis**, and others, long politically invisible, are now central to electoral strategies. Their growing assertion has pushed political parties, including the **Trinamool Congress (TMC)** and **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**, to engage more directly with caste and community-specific demands, often blending welfare initiatives with symbolic gestures of inclusion. The **layering of caste and class** in electoral strategies has created a more fragmented yet responsive political landscape.

At the same time, **religious identity and polarization** have gained momentum, especially with the BJP's entry into Bengal's political space. The party's deployment of cultural symbols, nationalist narratives, and majoritarian appeals has influenced how political engagement is conducted, even in regions that once prided themselves on secularism and cultural pluralism. The **TMC's counter-positioning** as a secular and inclusive force has helped it maintain its appeal among minorities, but the polarization has nonetheless created fissures in Bengal's social fabric.

An important takeaway from this transformation is that **economic class concerns have not disappeared**, but they are now often refracted through the lens of identity. Issues such as unemployment, rural distress, urban migration, and access to welfare are still central to political discourse. However, the way these issues are framed and communicated has changed. Voters now seek not only material benefits but also dignity, recognition, and a sense of belonging. Electoral success today often depends on a party's ability to **speak to both economic anxieties and identity aspirations** in a coherent and credible manner. According to Rajni Kothari "(Cast in Politics) has been seriously is understood and its positive contribution neglected."⁶

The rise of digital media, youth participation, and targeted campaigning has further altered the modes of political mobilization. Younger voters, in particular, are playing a more active role—not

just as voters but as participants in shaping narratives through social media and local activism. Political messaging that once reeled solely on traditional rallies or ideological leaflets now competes with **memes, mobile videos, and online influencers**.

In conclusion, the political evolution of West Bengal since 2011 encapsulates the **dynamic and multi-layered nature of democratic politics in India**. The state's shift from class-dominated ideology to a more diversified identity- and welfare-driven politics reflects both regional specificity and national trends. As caste, class, and community continue to shape electoral strategies and voter behaviour, it becomes essential to view Bengal not as an outlier but as a vital lens through which to understand the changing contours of Indian democracy.

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