Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and Communism

Source: TH

Why in News?

Former West Bengal **Chief Minister** and veteran **communist** leader Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee (1944-2024) recently passed away in Kolkata.

- He was **CM** of West Bengal from 2000 to 2011 and his regime was marked by a push for **industrialisation** despite his association with communism.

Who was Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee?

- **About:**
    - He became the CM of West Bengal, succeeding Jyoti Basu. He led the **Communist Party of India (Marxist)** to power in two consecutive terms in 2001 and 2006.
    - He served as CM until 2011 when Trinamool Congress ended the Left Front's 34-year rule.
- **Regime and Policies:**
    - During his tenure, the Left Front government adopted a **relatively open policy towards business** despite following communism.
    - He was behind the **idea of setting up a Tata Nano plant** in Singur and planning a **special economic zone** in Nandigram. However, the plan was **abandoned after protests by local political parties** on the issue of land acquisition.
    - During his regime, West Bengal saw investments in sectors of **IT and IT-enabled services**.
- **Awards:** In 2022, the central government announced **the Padma Bhushan award** to him but **he refused to accept it because Marxists** are generally **reluctant** to accept awards for **public service**.
- **Death:** He had been suffering from **chronic obstructive pulmonary disease** and his body was donated to **NRS Medical College and Hospital**, Kolkata for medical research.

What is Communism?

- **About:**
    - Communism is a **political** and **economic ideology** associated with **Karl Marx**. It advocates for a **classless society** where all property and wealth are **collectively owned.**
    - Marx popularised these ideas in his 1848 work, "**The Communist Manifesto**".

- Marx argued that **capitalism** leads to **inequality** and **exploitation**, benefiting a wealthy few at the expense of the **working class (proletariat)**.
- **Objective:**
  - Marx envisioned a world where **labour was voluntary, and wealth** was **shared equally** among all citizens.
  - Marx proposed that **government control** of the economy would eliminate **class distinctions**.
  - Prominent examples of communism were the **Soviet Union** and **China**. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 but **China** has drastically **revised** its economy to include some **capitalism**.
- **Communist Economic System:**
  - The goal of communism was to establish a system where **class distinctions** were **eliminated** and the means of production were owned by the masses.
  - It is characterised by a **command economy** where property is owned by the State, and production levels and prices of goods are determined by the state.
    - **Individuals cannot own private assets** like shares or real estate.
  - Its main goal is to **abolish capitalism** (an economic system ruled by private ownership).
    - Marx abhorred capitalism **because the proletariat was exploited and unfairly represented in politics.**

What is the History and Impact of Communism in India?

- **Formation:** The **Communist Party of India (CPI)** was formed on 17th October 1920, in **Tashkent**, with contributions from Indian revolutionaries like **MN Roy**.
  - In **December 1925**, an open conference in **Kanpur** led to the establishment of the CPI with headquarters in **Bombay.**
- **Role in Freedom Struggle:**
  - Communist ideas influenced the Congress, pushing it towards a **stronger stance** against British rule, a departure from the mild resistance.
  - The British reacted by making arrests and launching conspiracy cases, most notably the **Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929-1933)**.
  - The communists organised relief efforts during the **Bengal Famine** of 1943.
  - **Mass Struggles:** Post **World War II** years saw a surge in working-class struggles and peasant mobilisations, including the **Royal Indian Navy mutiny 1946**.
  - **Tebhaga Movement:** A significant peasant agitation in Bengal demanding better **sharecropping rights**, showcasing Hindu-Muslim unity.
  - **Telangana Movement (1946-1951):** They fought against feudal exploitation and autocratic rule, leading to **land redistribution**.
- **Post Independence (1947):**
  - In the **first Lok Sabha (1952-57)**, the **single largest party** in the opposition was the Communist Party of India (CPI).
  - In **1957**, the CPI won the state elections in **Kerala**. Kerala was the **first State** in Independent India to **democratically elect** a communist government.
  - **Split in the Communism Movement: Some members of the CPI believed that the communists should cooperate with the left-leaning group within the Congress party who opposed both imperialism and feudalism.**
    - It led to the Communist Party of India **splitting** into two in **1964**.
    - The faction that **opposed** the path of cooperating with the Congress formed the **Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI (M)**, the other faction retained the name **Communist Party of India (CPI)**.
  - In **1969**, believing in the need for **armed struggle** like Mao Zedong, another group of communists formed the **Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) or CPI (ML)**.

What is Maoism?

- **About:**
  - **Maoism** is a form of communism developed by **Mao Tse Tung of China**.
  - It is a doctrine to **capture state power** through a combination of **armed insurgency, mass mobilisation** and **strategic alliances**.

- The Maoists also use **propaganda** and **disinformation** against State institutions as other components of their insurgency doctrine.
    - Mao called this process, the **"Protracted People's War"**, where the emphasis is on the **"military line"** to capture power.
- **Central Theme:**
    - The central theme of Maoist ideology is the use of **violence** and **armed insurrection** as a means to capture State power.
        - **'Bearing of arms is non-negotiable'** as per the Maoist insurgency doctrine.
    - The Maoist ideology glorifies violence and the **People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA)** cadres are trained specifically in the **worst forms of violence** to evoke **terror** among the population under their domination.
- **Maoists' Influence in India:**

    - The largest and the most violent Maoist formation in India is the **Communist Party of India (Maoist)**.
    - The **Communist Party of India (Maoist)** was formed in **2004**, through the merger of the **Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist) People's War (People's War Group)**, and the **Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI)**.
    - The **CPI (Maoist)** and all its **front organisation** formations have been included in the list of banned terrorist organisations under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967**.
        - The Front Organisations are the **off-shoots** of the parent Maoist party, which professes a **separate existence** to escape legal liability.

What is the Difference Between Marxism and Maoism?

- **Focus of Revolution:** Both focus on a **proletariat revolution** that would change society.
    - **Marxism** focuses on the **urban workers** while **Maoism** focuses on the peasant or farming population.
- **View on Industrialization:** Marxism believes in an **economically strong state** that is industrialised.
    - Maoism has a **broader economic view** giving necessary importance to agriculture as well.
- **Driving Force of Social Change:** Marxism says that social change is driven by the economy.
    - However, Maoism puts emphasis on the **'malleability of human nature.'** Maoism talks about how human nature can be changed by using only **willpower**.
- **Influence of Economy on Society:** Marxism believed that **everything that happens in a society is linked to the economy.**
    - Maoism believed everything that happens in a society is a result of **human will**.

Conclusion

Communism has had a significant and complex history in India, influencing both political and social landscapes. Leaders like Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee played pivotal roles in shaping state policies, particularly in West Bengal, where communism held sway for decades. While the ideology promoted social justice and worker's rights, its implementation often faced challenges, particularly in balancing industrial growth with the principles of equity and communal harmony.

> ***Drishti Mains Question:***
>
> Q. Discuss the role of the communist movement in pre and post-independent India. How did they help strengthen Indian democracy by voicing the concerns of vulnerable sections?

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following events: (2018)

1. The first democratically elected communist party government formed in a State in India.
2. India's then largest bank, 'Imperial Bank of India', was renamed 'State Bank of India'.
3. Air India was nationalised and became the national carrier.
4. Goa became a part of independent India.

Which of the following is the correct chronological sequence of the above events?

(a) 4 – 1 – 2 – 3

(b) 3 – 2 – 1 – 4

(c) 4 – 2 – 1 – 3

(d) 3 – 1 – 2 – 4

Ans: (b)

Q. With reference to Indian National Movement, consider the following pairs: (2019)

Person   -   Position held

1. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru : President, All India Liberal Federation
2. K. C. Neogy : Member, The Constituent Assembly
3. P. C. Joshi : General Secretary, Communist Party of India

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

(a) 1 only

(b) 1 and 2 only

(c) 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. Since the decade of the 1920s, the national movement acquired various ideological strands and thereby expanded its social base. Discuss. **(2020)**

Q. Highlight the importance of new objectives that got added to the vision of Indian independence since the twenties of the last century. **(2017)**

Q. What were the major political, economic and social developments in the world which motivated the anti-colonial struggle in India? **(2014)**