Twitter Thread by M Reyaz, PhD || ■■■■ ■■■■



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THREAD on how economically Muslims maybe poorer (the state is overall also not as rich) in #Bengal but have relatively got socio-political empowerment (part of Threads I am writing for the understanding of Bengal politics in the context of upcoming assembly election):

1/20

The socio-economic status of Muslims in the state is far behind other communities as the Sachar Committee Report (2006) and Pratichi-SNAP's "Living Reality of Muslims in West Bengal" (2016) attest.

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But it has not witnessed the rule of the BJP yet although the founder of the predecessor of the saffron party, Bharatiya Jan-Sangh, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee was himself a Bengali.

3/20

During both the Congress and the Left Front rule earlier, and now under TMC Muslims did get some leverage although political marginalization even at block level had continued.

4/20

Across India, the last two general elections, and even the recent Bihar assembly elections, have resulted in the further marginalization of Muslims.

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In contrast, the representations of Muslims in Bengal have improved numerically, even though marginally – and often symbolically. Although it is still nowhere close to proportional representation in the state where more than 27 % of the population are Muslims.

6/20

From 46 MLAs in 2006, the number increased to 59 in 2011 when Banerjee became the chief minister for the first time, with 25 MLAs from TMC alone. In 2016, the total number remained the same, but TMC's tally went up to 32.

7/20

In the current Lok Sabha, there are 6 Muslim MPs (2 less than last time) - 5 from ruling TMC.

8/20

But more importantly, it is at the panchayat and block level where besides political representatives, you have several party representatives in Muslim majority blocks/villages which give them a sense of power and political empowerment.

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Like RJD, TMC is not afraid to publicly acknowledge its pro-Muslim stances on several issues even at the cost of being accused from left to right of indulging in “appeasement” politics.

10/20

Although Didi has become guarded in public appearances, she has kept the Minority Affairs portfolio with her, and her government did extend many welfare schemes to the Muslims, from putting maximum Muslim communities of the state in the OBC-A category.

11/

In the last couple of years, we have seen small scale communal riots like Dhulagarh (my @DailyO_ article: https://t.co/XFeI00IN2X) and Basirhat (https://t.co/Ci4yttAotg).

12/20

There has been increasing communal rhetoric on social media, particularly in the run-up to the 2019 elections and afterward, but Muslims still feel more empowered here politically to respond in contrast to the BJP ruled states.

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Of course, not everything is honky dowry for TMC. Although numerically numbers of MLA have increased, there is practically no Bengali Muslim face in the party, except Firhad Hakim whose area of influence is mainly in parts of Kolkata, who has mass appeal.

14/20

There is increasing frustration not just among the common voters, but also among TMC cadres, who feel sidelined, practically now that the electoral campaign is directly being managed by Prashant Kishore’s team.

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That is, there are several anti-incumbency grievances against Banerjee’s government, from discrimination in jobs to not doing enough for the community.

16/20

But still, you will hardly find any Muslim who will compare the situations in Bengal with any north-Indian states even though the majority of them still live-in abject poverty and lakhs migrate from Kerala to Punjab in search of better opportunities.

17/20

Put simply, in Bengal, in local blocks and panchayats, Muslims have not seen the kind of hostility and suppression that Muslims in BJP ruled states might have been subjected to.

18/20

Consequently, Muslims may have several grievances, but it has not accentuated to the extent of “teaching” lessons to TMC. Besides, in some pockets, particularly in Muslim-dominated Malda-Murshidabad region Congress still has a strong base (and thus offers an alternative).

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That's it for today, soon I will cover why and how Bengal is not yet ready fully for identity-based politics, although there is some clamour already.

20/20

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