

## West Bengal

# The Left Regime and Dalits in West Bengal ?

By Chandra Bhan Prasad

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" WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having resolved to constitute India into a **SOVEREIGN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC\*** and *to secure* to all citizens :

**JUSTICE**, social, economic and political;

**LIBERTY** of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

**EQUALITY** of status, and of opportunity;

and to promote among them all

**FRATERNITY** assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity\*\* of The Nation;

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\* later amended as "**SOVEREIGN SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC**"

\*\* later amended as "**unity and integrity of the Nation**"

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The above lines set the Objective of the Indian Republic, as Preamble of any constitution is essentially objective of the State it may belong to.

In fact, the first Resolution moved in the Constituent Assembly on December 13, 1946, by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, was called **Objective**

**Resolution**, and when adopted in January 1947, the same became **Preamble** of the Constitution.

It is implicit in the usage of the term "**to secure to all its citizens**", in the Constitution, and explicit in the Constituent Assembly debates, that as of now, **JUSTICE, LIBERTY, EQUALITY** and **FRATERNITY** do not exist, and the same have to be secured under the new Republic.

In other words, what the Constitution recognizes is to right the wrong authored by the past. This was a mandate unanimously accepted by the Constituent Assembly, and given to the modern State to re-organize society on the lines categorically outlined in Preamble of the Constitution. It was assumed in no uncertain terms, that whichever political party, irrespective of its ideological persuasions, at the seat of power, the Constitutional Objectives will be its prime objective to accomplish.

Now, more than five decades have passed, the mainstream society has made no serious attempt to examine performances the State, as how far the Republic has fulfilled the mandate given to it by the Constituent Assembly. The ailing academic institutions of India are perennially opposed to the very idea of democratizing the 'knowledge system', and thus, nothing worthwhile can be expected from them. The media establishments, if given an opportunity, would have rather preferred not to have Preamble

at all, if Preamble meant a verdict against the traditional society.

But, the political parties, and politicians, who swear by that great Law Book,

except two-day special session of the Parliament, have made no attempt to examine performance of the State. The intelligentsia associated with several political formulations, have only tried to defend the outfit they are appended to. Since the Indian intelligentsia looks for patronage from political parties, it is inherently incapable of undertaking critical researches. Worst still, bound by its Varna origin, the intelligentsia tends to protect even its opponents, if opponents are charged of being hostile to Republic's goals as set in the Constitution.

The Dalit intelligentsia is yet to find any meaningful space in disciplines such as Economics, History and Sociology, the three crucial areas in social sciences. Further, frontal centers of research are still closed to Dalits. The agencies providing Fellowships for research purposes are averse in obliging Dalit scholars, and hence, community's intelligentsia lacks resources to undertake independent researches to effectively challenge policy paradigms and development models evolve so far.

**The post-independent India has witnessed three-models of development: (1) the Nehruvian- Congress model, (2) the Dravinian-Shudra model of the Tamil Nadu, and (3) the domesticated Left's model of West Bengal & Kerala.**

When the British withdrew from India in 1947, the Congress inherited political power. Since then, the Congress has ruled India for over four decades. In several states, the party continues to rule, and it is the main opposition party today. The model of development evolved by the Congress, pre-destined Dalits' continued exclusion from several crucial areas, which in turn, perpetuates Dalits marginalization.

For instance, Pt. Nehru's **Zamidari Abolition** initiated in 1948, ultimately turned into **Tenancy Reform**, where tenants, who generally belonged to the upper OBC segment, benefited. Dalits, who were generally Landless Agricultural Labourers, lost out in the race, and remain landless agricultural labourers even today. Thus, in Congress' scheme of things, land once liberated from Dvijas' hold, had to go Upper OBCs, in Socialists' lexicon, "**Kissan Jaties**", a social category immensely articulate in defining affairs of "booths" during elections. However, it is altogether a different question that the same class of people are spoiling Congress' game now.

In Nehruvian notion of Dalits' development, Dalits were to be confined to Parliament/state Assemblies, government jobs, and Municipal schooling. Dalits were unwelcome in areas of assets building, stock-exchanges, business & trade, English medium schooling, higher education, private/autonomous public institutions etc. In fact, Congress, the oldest political party, has not been able to draft a Cultural/Intellectual policy for Dalits so far.

The nation is largely aware of Congress' follies, which did not allow State to decisively intervene in the internal affairs of the traditional Chatur-Varna society. As a result, the Varna Society was prevented from achieving "civility". Thus, considering quantum of the pro-Dalit verdict in the Constitution, the Congress paid only 'lip-service' to Dalits' cause, who voted the party to power for several decades.

By critiquing Congress' failures at several fronts, a number of political outfits, and a host of intellectuals, claimed a high moral grounds. In fact, till 1989 when VP Singh spoiled Congress'

party, any one who wished to be bracketed in 'progressives' club, had to prove his/her '**anti-Congress**' credentials, in the same manner, as to be a 'progressive' today, one needs to prove his/her 'anti-BJP' credentials.

But what we do not know, or know very little, is about performances of the non-Congress regimes.

Apart from Congress' model, the most defined ones, or the two most elaborated political experimentation in India are those of Dravinianism [read Shudra/upper OBC] model in Tamil Nadu and Left's in Kerala & West Bengal.

The Dravinian parties have ruled Tamil Nadu since 1967, never allowing Congress to make a come back . Where do Dalts of Tamil Nadu stand today? How far has the Dravinian experiment for over three decades of governance in Tamil Nadu impacted Dalit masses? Has that experiment a better report-card than Congress' ones? Very little we know.

Similarly, since formation of Kerala as state in 1956, the Left Front has ruled for about half of the period. But how far has the Left regime impacted Dalits' lives is yet to be examined. The West Bengal [hereafter WG] is being ruled by Left Front since 1977, without facing any kind of political instability. **Jyoti Basu**, who has just stepped down, ruled the state uninterruptedly for over two decades. He had the unique opportunity of translating his dreams into actions.

Not only did the Left Front in general, and Jyoti Basu in particular, had an unique opportunity of ruling a state for the longest period of 23 years, the party had tasted power earlier as well. In the United Front Ministry in WB in 1967, Jyoti Basu was the Deputy Chief Minister. The Land - Revenue Ministry [Ministry responsible for Land-Reforms] was headed by the famous 'Kisan' leader Harekrishna Konar of the CP[I]M Thus, the Left's intervention in WB polity does not begin from 1977, as many would like to believe.

The Left Front rule in WB, in terms of pro-Dalit policies, was expected to evolve into a role model for rest of India at least on three counts: (1) that the ideology of Communism seeks to address the social proletariat at a priority basis, (2) that the Left Front government, headed by a single leader, had ample opportunity to complete development projects initiated unhindered, and (3) the unique political stability in the state, providing government an equally unique opportunity to concentrate on the twine objective of the development and governance.

## II

But how to measure development during the Left Front rule in WB? What are the criterion to be adopted? What could the decisive indices of Dalits' development or lack of it? In Indian context, or in context of any developing society, the most crucial indices of development would be to see as:

- (1) what is the Sectoral composition of Main Workers, assuming that those within the Primary Sector [agricultural & allied], are the unluckiest ones, and those in Secondary and Tertiary Sectors relatively better positioned.
- (2) Within Primary Sector, whether Workers have their own sources of sustenance, assuming that those as Landless Agricultural Labourers are most unluckiest ones, and those with their own land, better off.
- (3) Similarly, whether those within Secondary and Tertiary sectors have their own sources of sustenance.
- (4) Educational attainments.
- (5) Access to public institutions.

In most academic discourses, **Census** reports are taken as the basic data resource base. The plan panels and various other government agencies too consider Census data as the most reliable reflections of the changes occurring in Indian society.

More so, Census reports mirror most representative indices of change or stagnation, i.e.: (1) Sectoral composition/ rate of shift of Workers, (2) Composition [fall or rise] of agricultural labourers/cultivators in the total Main Work Force, and (3) Rate of shift/decline/rise amongst various social groups, in various occupational categories, indicating rise or decline of inequality indices.

The period between 1971-'91 is very crucial as it was during this period that the second phase of Land Ceiling Legislations came into being all over India. In case of WB, the much talked about **Operation Bargha [OP]** was launched in 1978. The OP, after **Zamin-dari abolition**, is referred to by the domesticated Left intelligentsia as the most 'radical' piece of land-reforms in India. This one aspect of Left Front's experiment in WB accorded Jyoti Basu and his government an amazingly high moral ground in Indian politics.

"The most common use of the Sectoral composition of the Work Force is its utility as an index of economic development. Shifting of workers away from primary into secondary and tertiary sectors generally occurs as economic development takes place", says the Census Commissioner in 1991 report.

We will thus, first and foremost, see where did Dalits stand in WB in 1971, and compare their position within the state with non-Dalits, and contrast the same with all India figure for Dalits and others alike.

## Dalits in the year 1971

### Sectoral Distribution of Main Work Force

[by yardsticks of development economics, higher the proportion of main workers in Primary sector, lower the growth, and correspondingly, relatively higher the proportion of main workers in Tertiary and secondary sectors, better the growth]

Table A	WB			India		
	SC	ST	non-SC/STs	SC	ST	non-SC/STs
Primary	81.00	92.12	53.77	82.43	93.57	68.22
Secondary	7.53	3.49	18.57	8.09	2.54	13.59
Tertiary	11.47	4.97	27.71	9.47	3.89	19.67

#### Advantages/Dis-advantages

- (1) Table A shows that, WB SCs and STs are marginally better placed [ SCs by 1.43, and STs by 1.45 percentages points] in the sense that a relatively lower proportion of their Main Work Force is in Primary Sector than all India averages for SC/STs.
- (2) The Table A also shows that WB SC and STs are better placed in the

sense that, a little higher proportion [ **SCs by 2.00 and STs by 1.08** percentages points] of them are in the Tertiary sector than the all India averages for SC/STs.

### **Inequality Indices**

- (1) Table A shows that, out of every 100 SC/ST main worker in WB, 81.00 and 92.12 respectively, are in the Primary Sector, as against 53.77 per 100 for non-SC/STs: a difference of - 27.23 and -38.35 percentages points for them respectively. At all India level, the difference stands at out -14.21 and -25.35 percentages points for SC/STs respectively. That means, the inequality index within WB between SC/STs and non-SC/STs is higher [ **-13.02 for SCs and -13.00 percentages points for STs**] than the inequality index between SC/ST and non-SC/STs at all India level.
- (2) Table A shows that, out of every 100 SC/ST main worker in WB, 11.47 SCs, and 4.97 STs are in Tertiary Sector, as against 27.71 per 100 for non-SC/STs: a difference of -16.24 for SCs and -22.74 percentages points for STs. At all India level, the difference stands out at -14.77 for SCs, and -20.35 percentages points for STs. That means, the inequality index within WB between SC/ST and non-SC/STs is higher [ -1.47 for SCs, and -2.39 percentages points for STs] than the inequality index between SC/STs and non-SC/STs at all India level.

### **Observation:**

- (1) In terms of Sectoral distribution of the Main Work Force, WB SC/STs are better placed in 1971 than their counterparts at all India level.
- (2) But, when it comes to measuring inequality within WB between Dalits and non-Dalits, it is wider than what exists at all India level between Dalits and non-Dalits.

## **What Happened 20 Years Later?**

[West Bengal Dalits In the Year 1991]

Sectoral Distribution Of Main Work Force

<b>Table B</b>	<b>WB</b>			<b>India</b>		
	SC	ST	non-SC/STs	SC	ST	non-SC/STs
Primary	72.39	90.85	46.75	77.00	90.02	62.17
Secondary	12.00	04.80	21.44	09.83	03.86	06.12
Tertiary	15.61	04.35	31.82	13.17	06.12	24.24

### **Advantages/Disadvantages:**

- (1) Table B shows that, in 1991, 72.39 percent SCs and 90.85 percent STs are in Primary Sector in WB, a shift away from Primary to other sectors [from 1971] of 8.73 in case of SCs, and 1.27 percentages points in case of STs. At all India level, the rate of shift was at 5.43 in case of SCs and, 3.55 percentages points in case of STs. This shows that SC in WB, continue to do better than their counterparts at all India level, but STs in the state lag behind their counterparts at all India level. Has SCs' performance in WB anything to do with Left Front Govt.'s policies, or there are other factors responsible? An answer could be found a little later.
- (2) Table B shows that, in 1991, 15.61 percent SCs and 04.35 percent STs in WB are in the Tertiary Sector, as against the all India averages of 13.17 per cent in case of SCs and 06.12 per cent in case of STs. This shows that, in WB, SCs' entry in Tertiary Sectors was at the rate of 4.14 percentages points [during 1971'91], whereas at all India level, the rate of entry was at 3.7 percentages points, indicating to better growth rate for SCs in WB. But, strangely, STs' rate of entry in the Tertiary Sector declined by 0.62 percentages points, whereas, at all India level, STs' rate of entry into Tertiary Sector went up by 2.23 percentages points.

## **Table C Changes During 1971-1991**

## Shift Away From Primary to Other Two Sectors

[In percentages points]

	WB	India
SC	8.61	5.43
ST	1.27	3.55
Non-SC/ST	7.02	6.05

- (1) **Table C** shows that, **WB SCs** have done better than not only their brethren at all India level, but also excel over Non-Dalits within the State. But STs not only lag behind their counterparts at all India level, but also are far behind within the state from the rest all.
- (2) **Table C** also shows that, SC and non-SC/STs both, have performed better than the national trend, indicating the WB, due to its historical legacy of being one of the first region in India to undergo industrialization, impacted SCs as well. Further, the non-Dalits in the state, by 1971 itself, in a larger proportion, in fact, by 14.45 percentages points, was ahead of the national trend.

### But Where Did WB Dalits settle in Other Sectors?

	1991-WB							1991-India										
	Second./ Ter. together [%]		Secondary			Tertiary				Second/Ter. together {%}		Secondary			Tertiary			
			Ia	Ib	II	III	IV	V			Ia	Ib	II	III	IV	V		
<b>SC</b>	<b>27.61</b>		3.24	7.24	1.52	5.68	3.49	6.44	<b>23.00</b>		2.41	5.13	2.29	2.95	2.25	7.97		
<b>ST</b>	<b>09.15</b>		1.27	3.05	0.48	0.70	0.98	2.68	<b>10.97</b>		1.04	1.98	0.83	1.19	0.96	4.07		
Non-SC/STs	<b>53.25</b>		4.45	14.85	2.13	13.71	4.86	13.25	<b>37.84</b>		2.56	9.03	2.01	9.39	3.20	11.65		

**NB: Ia-** The Census Report defines Household Industry as "an industry conducted by the head of the household himself or herself and/or by the members of the household at home or within the village in rural areas and only within the precincts of the house where the household lives in urban areas. The larger proportion of workers in household industry consists of members of the household including the head. The industry is not run on the scale of a registered factory which would qualify or has to be registered under the Indian Factories Act."

**Ib-** Workers in all big and small industries registered under Indian Factories Act- in other words factory workers.

**II-** Construction, workers involved in construction works.

**III-** Trade & Commerce

**IV-** Transport and Storage

**V-** Other Services [ all government servants, Municipal employees, teachers, artists, social, political activists/leaders etc.

**Observations:** The industrial category **V** is one such category, entry in which is largely determined by State's proactive measures. Thus, to assess WB Govts. Performance, it will be most logical to as what is the trend in WB, and contrast it with the all India trend.

## The Main Work Force Composition in Other Services [V]

1991

	WB [in percentages]		India	
	Second/Tertiary Together	Proportion of Other Services *	Second/Tertiary Together	Proportion of Other Services *
<b>SC</b>	<b>27.61</b>	<b>23.32</b>	<b>23.00</b>	<b>34.65</b>
<b>ST</b>	<b>09.15</b>	<b>29.28</b>	<b>10.07</b>	<b>40.41</b>
Non-SC/ST	<b>53.25</b>	<b>24.88</b>	<b>37.84</b>	<b>30.78</b>

\* percentage of the total Main Work Force in Secondary & Tertiary sectors put together.

**Observations:**

- (1) **Table E** shows that for all social groups in West Bengal, industrial category of **Other Services** creates very little space for Workers, or much less than the all India averages. In that, WB SC/STs lag far behind their counterparts at all India level.
- (2) That means, the state in WB has been relatively less active, or neutral, in terms of regulating economic affairs of the society, which also suggests that the State in WB has ignored Constitutional verdict of initiating special measures for SC/STs.
- (3) Table D clearly shows that the Workers' shift away from Primary to other two sectors has led them to join the army of factory workers, a process which owes to the relatively more industrialized nature of the WB economy, than to any governmental initiative during the past two decades.
- (4) Table D also shows that a relatively higher proportion of SC/ST and non-SC/ST Main Work Force as well, is in Business & Trade, which nothing but an associated feature of a relatively more industrialized nature of the WB economy. This does not owe to any government initiative under Left rule, as *WB enjoyed this advantage in 1971 as well*, when Left was no where at the center of political power structure in the state.

## The West Bengal's Riddle in Occupational Changes

After land question, and infrastructure related questions, it is occupational category Other Services [V] where State's action or inaction which matters most. The WB Dalit Workers' position in this category presents a shockingly reverse picture. Dalits' share from this occupational category in the State has declined during 1971-1991. Consider the Table F below:

### SC/STs Share in The Other Services

Table F	[Figures in Percentages]					
	WB			India		
	1971	1991	Changes	1971	1991	Changes
<b>SC</b>	8.97	6.44	- 2.53	6.43	7.97	1.54
<b>ST</b>	3.44	2.68	- 0.76	2.71	4.07	1.36
<b>Non-SC/ST</b>	12.29	13.25	0.96	9.88	11.65	1.77

**Observations:** (1) Table B shows that, defying the all India trend for all social groups, and trend within WB for non-Dalits, the WB Dalits have witnessed a negative Change, their gradual decline from occupational category of The Other Services points to the hostile attitude of the state in WB towards Dalits.

(2) Apart from WB, there are only two instances [ For STs in Karnataka, for SC/STs both in Orissa], where Dalits have witnessed a decline from the most lucrative occupational category of Other Services.

## III

# The Land Question in West Bengal

In India's development economics, WB's policy of Land Reform, the much hyped *OPERATION BARGHA* is treated as a reference point. We now proceed to examine As how far has the Left Front Government's Land Reform policy impacted the Dalit masses in the state.

## SC/ST Landless Agricultural Labourers in West Bengal

[Composition of Landless Agricultural Labourers in the total Main Work Force]

	Situation in 1971		Situation in 1991				
	WB	India	WB	Changes during during 1971-'91	India	Changes during 1971-'91	
SC	42.57	51.75	SC	41.12	- 01.54	49.06	- 2.69
ST	48.85	33.04	ST	50.70	+01.85	32.69	- 0.35
Non- SC/ST	19.45	20.20	Non- SC/ST	15.55	- 03.9	19.66	- 0.54

## Observations ☹️

- {1} Table G shows that, WB SCs in 1971 were better placed than their counterparts at all India level, for only 42.57 percent of them were landless agricultural labourers, as against their all India average of 51.75 percent. This was the scenario in pre-Operation Bargha phase.
- {2} STs were less fortunate, or more unfortunate, as a much larger proportion of, in comparison to their all India averages, were landless agricultural labourers.
- {3} In pre-Operation Bargha phase in 1971, the non-SC/STs of WB, in terms of share of landless agricultural labourers in their total Main Work Force, were about at par with non-SC/STs at all India level.
- {4} While figure for 1991 show WB SCs still in a better position in comparison to their all India averages, the period between 1971-1991, the period of Operation Bargha under Left Front rule, seems to have negatively impacted SC/STs both.
- {5} Table G shows that, during 1971-1991, the WB SCs have registered minimum decline in landless agricultural labourers' [-01.54 percentages points as against all India averages of -02.69 percentages points]category, whereas, STs have registered a rise in that category, suggesting that the Operation Bargha has impacted negatively on the occupational mobility of WB Dalits.
- {6} Table G also shows that, the rate of decline for Non-SC/STs in WB has been highest, both within the state, and also in comparison with all India figures for all social categories. This is a strange phenomenon, as land reforms during 1971-1991 at all India level has been dubious in nature, but, even by that standard, WB presents a very even uglier picture for Dalits. This only suggests that the much hyped Operation Bargha, whether designed or not, actually went against Dalits.

## The Inequality Index

Dalits are at the margin of Indian economy, in the same manner as they are at the margin of Indian social organisation. This is a fact, which has a pan-India characteristics, and thus, it does not require much elaboration. However, every political outfit which has ruled India since independence, claims a better governance, claims greater results. What has been experience of the Left Front rule in West Bengal, which, theoretically speaking, represents the social proletariat?

### Inequality\* Level in 1971

### Inequality\* Level in 1971

Table H-1	WB		India	
	SC	ST	SC	ST
Gap [in Percentages Points] in Composition of Landless Agricultural Labourers in the Total Main Work Force {between SC/STs and non-SC/STs}	23.12	29.40	31.55	12.84

### Table H-2

	Inequality* Level in 1991	Inequality* Level in 1991
Gap [in Percentages Points]		

in Composition of	SC	ST	SC	ST
Landless Agricultural	25.57 [+2.45]	35.15 [+5.17]	29.40 [- 2.15]	13.03 [-0.19]
Labourers in Total Main				
Work Force				

{Figures in bracket show the rate of rise or decline in gap during 1971-1991}

### Observations: (1)

**Table H-1** shows that, the gap between SC/STs and Non-SC/STs in terms of composition of landless agricultural labourers in the total Main Work Force in 1971, is much less for WB SCs in comparison to their all India average, but very high for STs.

### (2)

But **Table H-2** also shows that, while the WB SCs are still better placed than their counterparts at all India level in 1991 as well, [owing to large advantage they had in 1971] but the gap between SC/STs and Non-SC/STs has widened in WB during 1971-1991, whereas, at all India, the gap has witnessed a fall. That means, without **Operation-Bargha**, Dalits have done better at all India level, but worsened in WB! This only proves that the Left Front Government's **Operation Bargha** has negatively impacted Dalits in West Bengal.

\*Inequality level derived by comparing composition of landless agricultural labourers in SC/STs' total Main Work Force in 1971 with non-SC/STs, and contrasted it with figures of 1991, and further with all India figures amongst all social groups.

## Left Front Government's Land Reforms and Dalit Cultivators:

Any progressive Land Reform Policy in developing countries must lead to in reduction of the share of landless agricultural labourers in the total Main Work Force, and correspondingly, an increase in the proportion of cultivators. We now proceed to examine the Left Front Government's land reform policy during 1971-1991, and its impact on Dalit cultivators in West Bengal.

### Proportion of Cultivators in total Main Work Force

**Table I**

[Percentage Share of Cultivators in the total Main Work Force]

	WB			India		
	1971	1991	Changes	1971	1991	Changes
SC	33.40	27.47	- 5.93	27.87	25.44	-2.43
ST	31.18	29.74	-1.44	57.56	54.50	-3.06
Non- SCSTs	31.65	28.57	- 3.08	45.11	39.74	- 5.37

### Observations:

- (1)** **Table I** shows that, a much larger proportion of WB SCs, in comparison to their all India averages were Cultivators in 1971, but STs were not fortunate enough, as a much lower proportion of them were cultivators in 1971.

- (2) In case of Non-SC/STs, proportion of cultivators was less than their All India averages, even less than SCs within the State. This unique phenomenon can be partially explained by the fact that only about half of Non-SC/ST Main Work Force[53.77 ] was in Primary Sector in 1971, and hence lesser proportion of them as cultivators.
- (3) But, as **Table I** shows, situation seems to have reversed by 1991. The WB SCs have witnessed a decline of 5.93 percentages points, highest for any social category within the State, or at all India level. This considerable decline in cultivators' category, resolves many riddles. It shows that, a considerable WB SC Main Workers added during 1971-1991, turned into landless agricultural labourers, proving that the **Operation Barga** negatively impacted SCs of the State.
- (4) **Table I** also shows that, STs' rate of decline in cultivators' category has been least, the only silver lining in the Left Front's notion of governance.
- (5) **Table I** clearly shows that the WB Non-SC/STs' rate of decline in cultivators' category is 2.29 percentages points lower than their all India averages, suggesting that the Left Front rule has been more friendly to non-Dalits in WB than elsewhere in the country.

## IV

# Dalits' Education In West Bengal

Education is considered the most reliable tool of emancipation. It not only emancipates learners from ignorance, but also sharpens their minds to understand things in more coherent and rational manner. To Dalits, education accomplish an added role- it liberates them from the traditional occupations imposed by the Chatur-Varna order. Name any Dalit today who has life of dignity, and some prosperity, it is all due his/her educational attainments. Thus, it is not for nothing that Dr. Ambedkar accorded highest priority to education when he coined his famous slogan- **Educate, Organize, Agitate**. We proceed to assess performance of the Left Front governance in WB, and its impact on Dalits' education.

**(a) Literacy:** Literacy is considered one of the major indices of development worldwide. India is no exception. However, what we must keep in mind is the fact that major organisations involved in improving literacy often tend to forge figures to show their 'achievements'. This has been an all India phenomenon, and WB cannot be an exception. Still, in absence of any other credible data base, we have no option but to rely upon data supplied by the **Human Resource Development Ministry**. Following is an analysis of WB, which is being contrasted with all India figures.

**Table J** **Literacy Rates (%):**

	WB			India		
	SC	ST	Non-SC/ST.....	SC	ST	Non-SC/ST
<b>1971</b>	<b>17.80</b>	<b>08.92</b>	<b>33.20</b>	<b>14.67</b>	<b>11.30</b>	<b>29.45</b>
<b>1991</b>	42.21	07.78	57.70	37.41	29.60	52.21

As **Table J** shows, barring WB STs, both, SCs and Non-SC/STs of the state had better literacy averages than their counterparts at all India level. In 1991 too, both SCs and Non-SC/STs enjoy that advantage. But, what more has happened during 1971-1991?

**Table K** **The Inequality Index**  
**Difference In Literacy Rates, and Changes by 1991**  
 [in percentages points]

1971		1991	
WB	India	WB	India

SCs with *					
Non-SC/STs	15.4	14.78	15.49	[0.09]	14.80 [0.02]
STs with *					
Non-SC/STs	24.28	18.15	29.92	[5.64]	22.61 [4.46]

\* figure under this head derived by deducting SC/STs' literacy rates from non-SC/STs', to find out the level of difference [of literacy rates] between them during 1971'91.

(1) **Table K** shows that in 1971, the inequality level was higher in WB for SC/STs both, and by 1991 also, the inequality is higher in comparison to all India averages. Table K also shows that, the inequality level for WB STs has risen at a higher rate than witnessed at all India level.

(2) **Table K** also shows that, the WB SCs have witnessed almost same rate of inequality or stagnation in terms of bridging the inequality gap as witnessed at all India level suggesting that Left Front government in WB has been equally indifferent to Dalits' literacy as the governments in rest of India.

(3) If we put performance of SC/STs together, then the Left Front government in WB has been more indifferent to the literacy question of Dalits than governments in rest of India.

### (B) Education:

Dalits' exclusion finds its purest and most concrete expression in denial or share or contributing in the **knowledge system** of the **Chatur-Varna Order**, or of the mainstream society. India evolved into a modern Republic with this historical legacy. Correspondingly, the Dalit leadership has laid maximum emphasis on the question of education. In fact, in historic Pune Pact, signed in 1932, education was one of the subjects. Also, the first British action in favour of Dalits took place in 1956-57, and it was in the area of education. Taking into account Dalits' economic conditions, and the social contexts live in, the State was assigned the role of ensuring expansion of education amongst Dalits.

Thus, after the question of land, education is the second most crucial area where a government's attitude towards Dalits can be best assessed. To assess WB Dalits' performance in the area of education, the method used is to contrast share of WB Dalits in the all India Dalit population, and then, contrast WB Dalit Student population with the all India Dalit student population at various stages of learning. An attempt is made to compare figures for the year 1971 with those of 1998, only in order to get a more clearer picture. But, figures relating to College/University level are not comparable as Subjects' categorization in both the surveys [1971, 1998] do not match.

### Share of WB SC/STs in all India SC/ST Students Population at various levels

Share of WB SC/ST Population  
in the all India SC/ST  
Population in 1971: **9.58 %**

Share of WB SC/ST Population  
in the all India SC/ST  
Population in 1991: **9.61 %**

Table K	1971				1998			
	All India SC/ST Student Population	WB SC/ST students' share	{figures in Lakhs}	[%] short-fall	All India SC/ST student population	WB SC/STs' students' share	[%] short-fall	
<b>Primary</b> <b>[I-V]</b>	<b>106.81</b>	<b>8.92</b>	<b>[8.35]</b>	{1.23}	<b>287.99</b>	<b>27.69</b>	<b>[9.61]</b>	<b>[0.00]</b>
<b>Middle</b> <b>[VI-VIII]</b>	<b>17.13</b>	<b>1.30</b>	<b>[7.63]</b>	{1.95}	<b>86.91</b>	<b>7.34</b>	<b>[8.44]</b>	<b>[1.17]</b>
<b>Secondary/ Higher Secondary</b> <b>Pre-Uni.</b> <b>[IX-XII]</b>	<b>8.92</b>	<b>0.53</b>	<b>[5.95]</b>	{3.63}	<b>48.72</b>	<b>3.27</b>	<b>[6.71]</b>	<b>[2.9]</b>

### Observations:

- (1) Table K shows that, the WB Dalits' population share in the all India Dalits population did not reflect the same in the all India Dalit student population, indicating a slower progress in their educational performance vis a vis Dalits at all India level in 1971.
- (2) Table K shows that, WB Dalits, barring enrolment at Primary

stage, still lag behind their brethren at all India level.

- (3) Table K also shows that, although, there is some improvement during 1971-1998, where WB Dalits have narrowed the gap a bit, but, the Left Front Rule has done nothing exemplary to ensure that the WB Dalits at least equal their position with their brethren at all India level.

## Higher Education:

Needless to add, higher education plays a crucial role in shaping intellectual life of a community or of a society. Although, the area falling under modern day WB, along with Bombay and Madras Presidency, had a head start in terms of the expansion of modern education in British-India. The WB Dalits are yet to register their presence in the Dalits' intellectual movement at all India level. Has it anything to do with WB Dalits' position in the area of higher education?

### WB Dalits in Higher Education

**Table L**

**The Comparative Position of West Bengal SC/STs in Higher Education**

[figures below relating to 1998 are not comparable with 1971 as survey-heads do not match]

Educational Stages	All India SC/ST Students' Population	WB SC/ST Students' Population	%	Short Fall
<b>Graduation :</b>	<b>06.05 Lakhs</b>	<b>0.26 Lakhs</b>	<b>[4.29]</b>	<b>5.32</b>
<b>Post-Graduation:</b>	<b>76928</b>	<b>781</b>	<b>[1.01]</b>	<b>8.6</b>
<b>Medical/Engineering</b>	<b>54726</b>	<b>2848</b>	<b>[5.20]</b>	<b>4.41</b>
<hr/>				
<b>Science Stream</b>				
<b>B.Sc/B.S.s[Hons]:</b>	<b>1.19 Lakhs</b>	<b>7388</b>	<b>[6.20]</b>	<b>3.41</b>
<hr/>				
<b>Ph.D/D.Sc./D.Phil</b>	<b>: 2618</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>[0.34]</b>	<b>9.27</b>

[Source: Progress of Education of SC/STs 1971-'73, and Selected Educational Statistics, [ as on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1998],1998-1999, Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi. 2000]

#### Observations:

- {1} Table L shows that, even at graduation level, WB Dalits are far behind their brethren at all India level.
- {2} Worst still, as Table L shows, the WB Dalits are far behind their brethren in medical/engineering, and science education in general.
- {3} Table L shows that, WB Dalits have a very poor presence in research courses[ Ph. D./D.Sc./D.Phil.
- {5} Table K & L, together, expose the reactionary character of the WB state during the Left Front rule for over two decades.

# V

## WB Dalits In Public Institutions

Societies produce institutions. Institutions in turn, mirror their character, dynamics, and also, nature of changes underway. Institutions, under State or private hands, demonstrate collective conscience of the society. Public conscience produced by traditional societies come face to face with the new conscience of industrial societies—modern notions of democracy, liberty and egalitarianism. Dalits' exclusion in the traditional Chatur-Varna society has been one of its fundamental characteristics. But, with evolution of India into a modern democratic Republic, Dalits' participation became legally possible.

Dalits' participation in legislatures was realized long back, but in executive, the process is under way. At lower levels, Dalits have a substantial presence, but at higher level, situation is yet improve. The data relating to WB Dalits' position in executive are not available with the present analyst. Although, in Dalit circles, it is believed that the Left Front government's attitude in implementing provision of reservation for Dalits is far from being satisfactory.

The institutions, where State's control is less, or technically non-existent, are black spots. Such institutions, education-related in particular, have shown acute hostility in sharing educational opportunities with Dalits. The area of higher and quality education is still the exclusive preserve of the four Varnas. The "knowledge-system" remains pathetically authoritarian, undemocratic. This hostility against Dalits in the arena of knowledge has a pan-India character.

We would now proceed to examine position of Dalits as School Teachers [figures for College/University teachers not available] in West Bengal.

School teachers play a decisive role in expansion of education. Also, school teachers make greater impact on society, by intervening in social/cultural movements. They greatly contribute in consciousness building, and considerably influence polity at grass-root level. Thus, it is not for nothing that the employment question in schools/colleges/universities occupies a very high place in Dalit movements in the country.

## SC/ST Teachers In Schools

**Table M**

[Primary, Upper Primary, Secondary, Higher Secondary]

	All India					West Bengal			
	All----	SC/ST seats filled up	*SC/ST Quota	Short Fall	All	SC/ST seats filled up	SC/ST ** Quota	Short Fall	
Govt/LB	2888535	501620 [17.36]	24.56	[07.20]	174793	23590 [13.49]	29.27	[15.78]	
<b>PA</b>	0848438	084074 [09.90]	24.56	[14.66]	105250	10333 [09.81]	29.27	[19.46]	
PUA	0460582	032569 [07.07]	24.56	[17.49]	03036	00058 [1.91]	29.27	[27.89]	
<b>Total:</b>	4197555	618263 [14.73]	24.56	[09.83]	<b>283097</b>	<b>33981</b> [12.00]	[29.27]	[17.26]	

[Source: The Sixth All India Educational Survey [ National Tables Volume III], April 1998, brought out NCERT, New Delhi]

**Govt:** school run by Govt, **LB,** schools run by Local Bodies, both ultimately under State control, and hence, put together.

**PA:** Private Aided; run by private trusts/societies, but funded by State, thus, under semi-govt. control.

**PUA:** Private Un-Aided, schools run by private bodies, without any aid from Govt., and thus, fully private.

\* The SC/ST Quota in Central Services is fixed at 22.50 %, which is yet to be raised to 24.56 %, as the SC/ST Population has crossed 24 %.

\*\* The SC/ST quota in states is determined by the percentage share of their population in states' total population. Thus, in consonance with SC/ST population in West Bengal, the SC/ST quota is expected to be above or at 29 %. In UP, during Ms. Mayawati's rule, SC/ST quota was raised from 20% to 21%.

## The 'Class' Character of WB State & Society Shows Its True Clours ?

"Dalits are unfit to teach" - Isn't a 'national anthem'? And who can sing this song louder than the pitch in which WB State & Society together seem to be singing?

{1} Table M shows that, the WB Dalits are far behind their all India averages in terms of appointment on teaching positions. While at India level, picture is bad, it is worst in WB, where short-fall in SC/ST share is 17.26 per cent, 7.43 percentages points more than The short-fall at all India level.

{2} Table M also shows that, the WB society is more hostile to Dalits than the society at all India level. WB Dalits' share in private schools, where State control is non-existent, is 5.16 percentages points less than the all India averages for them in the same category of schools. This clearly proves that the social contest created by the Left Front rule in WB is more reactionary in content than elsewhere in India.

The reactionary character of the Left Front rule in WB becomes more pronounced when compared with some other states, known for backwardness and indifference towards people.

## The *BIMAROO* States & West Bengal

The four states of the north- **Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar**, are called the *Bimaroo* [ailing] states of India. A considerable area falling under these four states, form hub of the Hindi-heart land, the nerve center of obscurantism. Further, with exception of Bihar, all the four states in question are traditionally ruled by the Congress, which till 1989, was a reference point of 'right wing' politics. Thus, it will be in order to compare West Bengal's position with *Bimaroo* states, to see as how good or bad the WB under Left Front Rule has performed.

### SC/ST Teachers in Schools

Table N	SC/ST Population Share in percentages	SC/ST Teachers {%}	Short-Fall {percentages points}
<b>Rajasthan</b>	<b>: 29.73</b>	<b>13.33</b>	<b>16.40</b>
<b>Madhya Pradesh</b>	<b>: 37.82</b>	<b>22.70</b>	<b>15.12</b>
<b>Uttar Pradesh</b>	<b>: 21.34</b>	<b>09.71</b>	<b>11.63</b>
<b>Bihar</b>	<b>: 22.21</b>	<b>14.77</b>	<b>07.44</b>
<b>West Bengal</b>	<b>: 29.21</b>	<b>12.01</b>	<b>17.20</b>
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<b>All India</b>	<b>: 24.56</b>	<b>14.73</b>	<b>09.83</b>
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**NB: The NCERT's Sixth All India Educational Survey, Vol. III**, was published in 1988, but, information collected dates back to October 1994. By 1994, the Left Front was completing 17 years of uninterrupted rule in West Bengal.

**Observations:**

- {1} **Table N** shows that, the **WB** lags behind all the four *Bimaroo* States, including Bihar, in implementing reservations on school teaching positions.
- {2} **Table N** clearly establishes that, while all the **Bimaroo** states appear to be hostile to the Constitutional provision of according due representation to Dalits in teaching positions, the hostility of the Left Front government is without any parallel.
- {3} Assuming that the Dalits' position may not have been good enough even in 1977, as we do not have relevant data of that period, 17 years is long enough period to right the wrong, which the government under Jyoti Basu has failed to do.

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## **Why Did Dalits' Position Deteriorate During Jyoti Basu Led Left Front Rule In WB?**