Politics of Identity in West Bengal-Analysis of Two Identities: Caste and Class

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ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed at enquiring the different modes of political demonstration/expression underpinned by caste hierarchical structure of the society living in the west Bengal. Naxalite movement has curtained the internal diverse structure of the society in the West Bengal. Inter-tribal relations and divergences in their visions of society and socio-political objectives make the societal trajectory more complex. In addition the contradiction of ideological, political, cultural/tribal and caste identities boggles the mind of keen outsider observer and compels him/her to think about Naxalites beyond the class identity and stimulate him/her to unearth the internal socio-political structure Naxal society which is actually diverse, different, complex and folded. For example how being a Santhali or being Oaransi contradict with caste identity or being naxalites? How identity of peasant and socio-political interests attached to it confronts with tribal identity? How this internal contradiction is impacting the overall sociopolitical structure and variation of political woes? To answer such questions, the fact that societies involved in the Naxalite Movement are not confined to West Bengal rather it is spilled over to various districts of India will not be unnoticed but state of West Bengal is selected as a place for analysis. The main question which will tend to envelop all of the above questions is how varying identities or habitats of West Bengal society effects/varies the socio-political practices of the society in West Bengal? However as multiple identities and its perceived contestation has been pointed out but class-caste contest in West Bengal with its consequent contradictions in society of West Bengal will be the core focus of this paper.

1.INTRODUCTION

Sinharay (2012)[18]regurgitates the argument of segregation of caste and class in West Bengal and considers less intertwined effect of the two on socio-political setup. He attempts to dispel the notion that caste matters a lot in West Bengal Politics. The question of caste for Sinharay creates a unique nature of politics in West Bengal vis-à-vis other provinces, due to apparently caste's dormant play in society of West Bengal. Sinharay proposes that the caste question is considered as antithetical to modern politics in West Bengal and didn't drive the electoral politics. He ascribe irrelevance of caste in political life of West Bengal to lack of united, shared and mutual caste interests. But empirical incidents about Matuas activities on the political scene have contested the Sinharay's postulates. Inter alia other symbols of activism among Matuas' political life temple controversy have further pushed up the question of caste in the province where politics usually is highlighted as class-based.

Roy(2012)[19] has held the irrelevance of caste as a years-followed myth. Her ethnographic study reveals that caste relations and caste identities have overarching dimensions in the day-to-day politics of the study villages. Though caste almost has less to function in relation to strict religious injunctions, under economic parameters the division of labor largely depends upon caste division. In the cultural-ideological field, the concept of caste-hierarchy seems to continue as an influencing factor, even in the operation of leftist politics.

Chatterjee (1997,2012)[5][6] has also stressed on the irrelevance of caste in society and politics of West Bengal. Class feeling has penetrated deep into the collective conscious of the society. Such collective conscious further speaks up in actions and daily life of the inhabitants due to dense presence of Left parties which are cutting across the fault lines of society not along caste lines but also along community-based divisions. But he doesn't ignore the role which caste plays in politics and society of West Bengal (Ibid). Dominance of upper-caste middle class Bhadralok in politics of northern Indian states draws some lines of differences between politics in West Bengal and in northern Indian states which is not translated in collective conscious and collective response of the people towards their grievances.

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1.1.LITERATURE REVIEW

Prasad and Gaijan(2007) while quoting "Caste-Class Situation in Rural West Bengal" by Srijan Halder, examine how the rural middle castes have become a political force to cobble with the concerned contemporary issues, due to improvement in their economic positions. But the situation in West Bengal is somewhat different from that of the neighboring state of Bihar and some other states like Maharashtra, Karnatka and Tamil Nadu. Despite economic betterment and some political clout, the middle castes in Bengal are not able to take their part from the upper caste over control of superior positions in professions bureaucracy and higher educational institutions. In fact the middle castes have not been able to come up to a level that they could challenge or compete with the near monopoly of upper castes.

Prasad and Gaijan(2007) while quoting "In Caste Class and Politics in Colonial Bengal:A case study of Namsudras Movement of 1872-1937," by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay showed how Namsudras had received support in a struggle against high caste Hindu from the colonial rulers, not because they espoused their cause but because the British wanted to show down the upper caste Mandarins in their own interests.

1.2THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main interest and argument this work is about the confrontation of two identities: class and caste in the west Bengal which constitutes and drives the politics of identity and hence at times shift of identities has been witnessed. Power is the reason behind such switch of identities between caste and class and confrontation involved in it. At a particular period of time, at particular space and against a particular common belligerent a group claim and hangs on one identity and with the change of time, place and belligerents, identity and vehement claims of identity changes. It means West Bengal and the society of Bengal seems to be united against the State at large on issue of class interests but when the society is analyzed from inside then aforementioned interests in case of Matuas and Namsudras are seen to be violated , which push up the claims of caste identity. For such analysis two ways of Michael Focault analysis about power: contract-oppression and dominant-repression. In the contract-oppression approach that power is a genuine right which is surrendered by one side i.e. governed of dichotomy: govern and would-be governors, in favor of would-be governed to establish the inalienable right of control, management and administration for the state and sacred right of achievement of their rights enshrined in a social contract which could be written as well as conventional. Theme of dominant-repression distances itself from the former in terms of absence of any social contract. So in an absence of social contract, rights and duties can't be claimed and invoked in the formal way but on the other side there will be disparity between privileges of some people and that of others. Such disparity, based on any power value such as land or any other means of ownership continues and goes on to continue, generation after generation. Such continuation establishes a conventional relation of dominant and repressed ones. Research will like to analyze the question of class in the prism of contract-oppression relationship because left parties-the symbol of class-based politics and society, are densely covering the West Bengal which through the instrument of elections paved way for entrance of the society in the framework of contract-oppression. Question of caste will be seen in the light of latter concept due to the element of continuity and resultant dominance accrued to a specific caste. But it does not mean that this division of analysis will be fixed because at times it can be observed that both the concepts will mix with one another in the realm of caste and class. Such mix-up will open the horizon for analysis of confrontation and contradiction between two identities.

2.CASTE, CLASS AND POWER:

In 'Caste and Power in West Bengal' Ranabir Samaddar argues that the struggle of the Schedule Castes is social as well as political. The continuity of caste and class together indicates persistence caste-class nexus that existed in British period. The left-front government has not done much to break this rigid nexus as the middle peasantry has acquired a stable place in the system (Ibid). Though the middle peasantry has not pauperized further during the left-front regime, but class contradictions have not sharpened further as expected during the regime of the present government under the leadership of Jyoti Basu.

Castes are 'discrete', segmentary and flexible. Class relations can be analyzed by juxtaposing them with caste, kinship, marriage and family. Studies of the nexus between caste and class have highlighted the multifaceted nature of social stratification. The structural-historical perspective in particular is found relevant for analyzing the historicity of the nexus. What is more important here is the fact that the studies of caste and class have moved away considerably from the hierarchical model of consensus, resilience and summation of roles and statuses. These studies have emphasized the emergence of 'caste free areas', downward social mobility and incompatibility of pollution purity principle with the entrenchment of middle and lower castes in politics and modern jobs. The

increased quest for equality among the weaker sections as well as the highly aspiring middle castes and classes too overrides the traditional bases of status and power.

Both Caste and class are corporate as well as individualistic entities; and the two have fixity as well as flexibility. Caste is not being replaced by class, and caste is still changing rapidly finding a place for itself in non-conventional and secular domains of social, political and economic life. Whichever caste aspires to use it for upward social mobility makes use of the 'caste idiom'. The castes which become economically and politically dominant also make use of caste for further upward social and cultural mobility. Caste is appropriated for economic and political goals in the first instance and for socio-cultural mobility afterwards. It is opined that instead of 'caste and class' it would be appropriate to refer as 'class and caste'. However there is no uniform pattern of the nexus between caste and class.

The functional significance is one of the basic features of caste system. In the caste system the relationship is conceptualized as one of the 'economic interdependence' resting on the bonds of co-operation, the hierarchies are organically linked in the system. The relationship between the classes is, on the other hand, one of competition or in the Marxian sense hostile opposition. The complexities in the class structure are ultimately expected to be reduced into binary opposition between the two classes, the haves and have-nots. Bailey (1958)[] therefore distinguish between the two systems of stratification by describing the former as a 'closed organic stratification' and later as 'segmentary stratification', cooperation and competition being the two principles determining inter-group relationship in the two system. The former gives rise to dominant-repressive power and latter to contract-oppression when facilitated by the structure of the state and its institutions which vehemently relied on formal documentation and codification of law not only among individuals but also among have and haves-not i.e. among land title –holder or owner and sharecroppers. Cooperation and competition are two main reasons which trigger the shift of identity from class to caste and from caste to class in the context of social composition. When cooperation seizes competition emerges and class identity is emphasized and when competition seizes then cooperation determines an identity.

Cooperation and competition has a lot to do with the power which is inherently intertwined with the structure of society at any place. Same is the case with West Bengal. Roots of cooperation and competition lies in power which on the one side control the society on the other part it also changes. But before telling the reason why it does the two at the same point, it is first necessary to locate the catchment of power i.e. where it is existing or what is the source. It can be posited that the structure of West Bengal society is the first place to search out. Structure of society itself is the reason of producing a particular type of power pattern which compels the societal actor to cooperate and hence continuity of an identity sustains .On the other side the same power pattern makes the societal actors to compete with another and leave others behind, so that collective interests of a class can be preserved/cemented. How this power pattern of West Bengal is produced and modified,is a question which can be answered by analyzing the social composition of West Bengal. It will tell us how different actors of West Bengal society are linked to one another which as a result produce a pattern of power responsible for cooperation and competition.

3.SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF WEST BENGAL:

Social composition of West Bengal will further clarify this class-caste confrontation and hence knots tied between castes and classes of the West Bengal's society will be untied to grasp the complexities of politics of identity in west Bengal. As mentioned before the main reason behind interchangeable and interdependent shift of class and caste identities is power which is both dominant and constitutional, so in this context we can describe the social composition of West Bengal under the following identities: a) Tribal Elements b)Poor Peasants c)Landless labor. This division will be looked into historical context which underlines it as the background of naxalite movement but here reference to it is aimed at digging out the reasons of shift from one identity to another and the points where it contradicts with one another.

Tribes of West Bengal have been distinguished for their peculiar traditional pattern of life. They were divided into two significant entities not only within the urban sector but also in the rural sector. They did not wish to give up their distinct traditions (Irani 1968; Patel 1972,1974) [13][7][16]

List of schedule castes in West Bengal, taken from data of Backward classes Welfare Department, government of West Bengal, is as following:

1.	**BAGDI, DULEY**	31.	**KAUR**
2.	BAHELIA	32.	KEOT, KEYOT
3.	BAITI	33.	KHAIRA
4.	BANTAR	34.	KHATIK
5.	BAURI	35.	KOCH
6.	BELDAR	36.	KONAI
7.	BHOGTA	37.	KONWAR
8.	BHUIMALI	38.	KOTAL
9.	BHUIYA	39.	KURARIAR
10.	BIND	40.	LALBEGI
11.	CHAMAR, CHARMAKAR, MOCHI, MUCHI, RABIDS, RUIDAS, RISHI	41.	LOHAR
12.	CHAUPAL	42.	MAHAR
13.	DABGAR	43.	MAL
14.	DAMAI (NEPALI)	44.	MALLAH
15.	DHOBA, DHOBI	45.	MUSAHAR
16.	DOAI	46.	NAMASUDRA
17.	DOM, DHANGAD	47.	NAT
18.	DOSADH, DUSADH, DHARI, DHARBI	48.	NUNIYA
19.	GHASI	49.	PAILYA
20.	GONRHI	50.	PAN, SAWASI
21.	HALALKHOR	50.	PASI
22.	HARI, MEHTAR, METHOR, BHANGI, BALMIKI	52.	PATNI
23.	JALIA KAIBARTTA	53.	POD, POUNDRA
24.	JHALA MALO, MALO	54.	RAJBANSHI
25.	KADAR	55.	RAJWAR
26.	KAMI (NEPALI)	56.	SARKI (NEPALI)
27.	KANDRA	57.	SUNRI (Excluding SAHA)
28.	KANJAR	58.	TIYAR
29.	KAORA	59.	TURI
30.	KARENGA, KORANGA	60.	CHAIN (in Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia and Dakshin Dinajpur Districts)

Similarly list of scheduled tribes taken from the same source is as following:

1.	**ASUR**	21.	**KORWA**
2.	BAIGA	22.	LEPCHA
3.	BEDIA, BEDIYA	23.	LODHA, KHERIA, KHARIA
4.	BHUMIJ	24.	LOHARA, LOHRA
5.	BHUTIA, SHERPA, TOTO, DUKPA, KAGATAY, TIBETAN, YOLMO	25.	MAGH
6.	BIRHOR	26.	MAHALI
7.	BIRJIA	27.	MAHLI
8.	CHAKMA	28.	MAL PAHARIYA
9.	CHERO	29.	MECH
10.	CHIK BARAIK	30.	MRU
11.	GARO	31.	MUNDA
12.	GOND	32.	NAGESIA
13.	GORAIT	33.	ORAON
14.	HAJANG	34.	PAHARIYA
15.	HO	35.	RABHA
16.	KARMALI	36.	SANTAL
17.	KHARWAR	37.	SAURIA PAHARIA
18.	KHOND	38.	SAVAR
19.	KISAN	39.	LIMBU
20.	KORA	40.	TAMANG

According to the census of 1961 the population of tribes in West Bengal was a)Santhal Tribe 1,200,000 b) Oarans 297,000 c) Mundas 160,000 d) Bhumijas 91000; other small communities, for example Tarai Gurkhas, Gondas, Hajongs came to about 37904(Irani 1968,Franda 1971,Gupta 1974)[13][8][12]. The same proportion existed in Naxalite area. Thus since the proportion of Santhal tribe was comparatively large, the leadership of the 'naxalite' or 'Maoist' movement remained in the hands of Santhal tribe. Leadership role of Santhal tribe will help us

out in understanding the leadership pattern of tribal people and its role as one of causes in shift of identity between caste and class. It will be discussed later on.

This statistical data was though old and confined to the boundaries of rural areas, more particularly to Sarbanapur of Birbhum district, but it holds good for understanding of reasons behind class-caste shift and a number of other similar cases. It has already been mentioned that the Santhal tribes comprised 87 per cent of the total population of the tribes and that among these 87 to 89 percent were directly engaged as agricultural laborers(Patel 1972)[7]

In the proceeding section how aforementioned tribes cooperates or competes with one another which ultimately lead to switch/shift of identity, will be discussed. The main thing which connects various societal actors with one another and then gives rives to a particular kind of aforementioned power pattern is the means of production. This means of production demarcates the boundaries of identities. Here two identities which are relevant to means of production and is the focus of discussion, are class and caste. On one side means put one in the box of class but when interests of class start getting offended, actors present in it initiate a process of change by jumping to the box where caste identity is highlighted/stressed. It further means that when certain rights associated to identity of class is not fulfilled then actors involved in it start saying that since they belong to certain tribe or a caste their rights are denied and these political, social, economical and socio-political rights are intertwined with means of production. It can also be done in reverse direction. But it does not mean that means of production is the only reason behind this switch over of identities. In fact there are other reasons which work in its individual as well as in connective way among aforementioned tribes and class actors of West Bengal society which triggers this switch over. Others reason will be discussed in next sections.

4. BHADRALOK-CHOTOLOK: ANOTHER DICHOTOMY OF CASTE AND CLASS

Having explained the means of production and imbalance involved in it, one can't attribute means of production altogether to dichotomy of two identities: class and caste. The class based patterns of social stratification of advanced capitalist societies cannot fully explain the values of social interaction govern the relationship with Bengalis with Dalit. Nor are the rules based solely notion of purity and pollution could explain it. We can't analyze the two identities and confrontation between the two in black and white. On many occasions identities particularly caste and class come across and doesn't necessarily confront one another. It can also merge with one another and vies with one another to produce a hybrid identity. It means if a person belonging to a schedule caste gets an opportunity to fill his/her coffers and he/she becomes able to make himself/herself economically sound then in a capitalist society where traditions remain intact in one way or another and the value of power is measured by presence of money then mobility occurs which elevates a less privileged and less prestigious to another class in an upward direction. On the other side it is also possible that a person belonging to a caste which is considered/accepted as socially high and his economic status may decline and hence in context of capitalistic society he/she becomes a class-wise low figure. But one identity or this injunction of two identities produces a particular cultural pattern. Such a cultural pattern seems to be rainbow of many identities whose hinges could be different. Most of the Indian social scientists emphasized on the inter-linkages of class and caste, kinship and family systems. But in Bengal, there is yet another notion in organizing society. Cultural perception about Dalits is not opened to any rapid change in the society but contemplation on social mobility of Dalits make it essential to understand the cultural background of Dalits. Identity of Dalits is made in the context of their relationship with hegemonic Bengali culture. The dichotomy of this interaction drives the interaction between groups is of *bhadralok* (respectable people) and *chotolok* (lowly people). Here, the word *chotolok* is used rather as a cultural term denoting scheduled castes. The elites of Bengal use this term to express their superiority. This term is used in this text with the intension to portray their daily humiliating existence in the mainstream society. *Bhadralok* (*bhôdrolok*, literally 'well-mannered person') is a Bengali term used to denote the new class of 'gentlefolk', who arose during colonial times (approximately 1757 A.D. to 1947 A.D.), drawn from the upper caste pre-colonial Bengal. The term is multivalent but means most of all 'respectable people'. The *bhadralok* were distinguished by their refined behavior and cultural taste, but did not necessarily possessed substantial wealth and power. A major characteristic of *bhadralok* came to be their aversion to manual labour. Aversion to manual labor, belonging to upper caste, and absence of owning of substantial wealth here is defining and defining the identity of being Bhadralok. Two features in itself contradicting with one another and are symbols of two separate identities. One is the absence of substantial wealth coupled with aversion to manual work which is a symbol of class identity. The other is their belongingness to upper caste which is no doubt a symbol of caste identity. These two different identities merged together and had given rise to a composite-type identity known as bhadralok which further impacted socio-political setup of Bengal in large. Here it is pertinent to mention that *Bhadralok* was a group of people who placed themselves between the aristocracy of and those who were living

in the lowest tier and were managing their lively from labor. They were far above untouchables or people from other religion.

Talking about interjection of two identities, caste and class, Bose (1986) discovered a three branch system of social sectioning which he considered as 'demense labour complex'. Various communities of this system are 'bhadralok', 'chashi' and 'majur' or 'chotolok'. Bhadralok in this system are observed as handful of major landowners. They enjoy highest status in the ladder of this system. After that the category of owner cultivators comes, who enjoy the middle position in the system. Tribes which come in the perimeters of this section of the system are Mahisya, Sadgop and Aguri etc. In the lowest section of society lives those who don't own land and only put their labor to earn basic livelihood. This section consists of tribes such as Bagdis, Bauri and Namasudra. Now here in contention of Bose it is required to draw attention towards few complicated points. Is it the capacity of landownership which is making the caste of Bhadralok 'clean' or high? or is it the religious-rooted link which some social scientists in their typical urban centric view classified the rural world into two social groups, i.e. *bhadralok* and *chotolok*, which is vastly oversimplified. Such a view emphasized on the social differentiation among the part of the population ranked below the landlord classes.

Here in case of identities such as bhadralok and chotolok, both type of relations: contract-oppression and dominant-repression. When identity based on caste is pushed up then it maintains the former type of relations and when the means of production i.e. land, its production and labor is highlighted, the latter one comes on the screen and dominates all other identities. But as in certain cases where the analysis of both caste and class has been done, it has been inferred that both type of relationships cross one another and grey areas in the realm of identity emerge. On the other side middle-class status and high caste of Bhadralok determines the shifting nature of the identity which one can easily observe in state elections. In class-oriented politics of West Bengal they secure their financial support from their co-caste people by clinging on their caste identity and secure votes of people by chanting slogans of classless society.

5.MEANS OF PRODUCTION-COOPERATION AND COMPETITION AS A REASON OF SHIFT OF IDENTITIES (CASTE/TRIBAL TO CLASS/MAOISTS):

Tribes living in Terai area of West Bengal cultivate tea on land. Land is the basic means of production. Tea is the crop which brings cash money for them to run their houses. But the lands on which cultivate tea do not belong or are not owned by them. Landlords are the real owner of the land who can set and change the terms of engagement. Permanent ownership can't be secured by them without use of violent and rebellious means. Where there dream of having their own land dusked, there they hardly manage their basic necessities of life from the money they get in return of the labor they employ in land. Colonial era maneuvered this hierarchical structure of society for maximum extraction of revenue. Therefore, such extraction accrued final say in major decisions to colonial power. Under this trajectory caste can also be termed as building up of power in cultural context. In cultural context, construction of power passed through various changes which give a clear understanding of how power relations work in Indian society. Such power relations premised on economic means of production give leverage to a specific group to claim the privileged status from where it can steer the whole structure of power and system of distribution of power. On the other side, landless cultivators have rare chances to change the pattern of power. Such a situation narrows down their alternatives for negotiations with those who are in possession of power. Under these depressive economic conditions they had no alternative but to join the Maoists who were pleading their cause and teaching them effective methods to emancipate themselves and to expropriate the expropriators. When the cooperation broke down due to its failure of catering the basic needs identity from caste(tribe) shifted to class identity(Maoists) struggling to create and define its position in the competition process.

When the means of power and the value attached will be a piece of land then it will give rise to particular agrarian relations defined on the terms of various actors of power. Agrarian relations in India varied from state to state because there were no uniform laws governing them in the past. Such agrarian relations constituted the dominant-repressive and remained intact till the emergence of constitutional-oppressive power. There were no customs and traditions either and the landlord's sweet will determined the economic status of the poor peasants. Tenancy Act 1954 didn't unravel the oppressive structure of power in any manner. Weight and gravity of seriousness towards the demands of oppressed people by various stakeholders involved in it drives their life standards. India at one time was an agricultural country which she still is to a great extent where more than 50% of population depends upon primitive tools and outmoded methods of production and they produce barely sufficient to keep the bodies and soul of their people together. Out of this meager produce a big chunk is embezzled by the influential landlords-the rural elite. Because of these factors, the phenomenon which was common in these areas was that in this agricultural society the poor peasants and share croppers did not draw the attention of the society. Their interests were not protected from any quarters and they suffered in two ways: the misuse of the labor by landlords

and insufficient facilities provided by the judiciary to the poor peasants against this exploitation (Mellor, Weaver and Simon 1968;Jawaid 1979)[15][14].

There was a particular pattern of dealings and share of activities attached to land and its ownership. There were three categories of groups were involved in activities pertaining to it. As already mentioned, that dealings and activities associated to land, attains variety and hence subsequently produce different power patterns. For an instance, it is a long-practiced dealing that big landlords who were the owners of land give their land on contract to petty or intermediate landlords known as *jotedar*s. These *jotedar*s arrange all of required tools, raw material and machines for cultivation. Then they give it to landless laborer and cultivators on the condition that half of the production will be retained by croppers and remaining will be given to *jotedar*s. This pattern changes with the change of terms of engagement. For an instance, if *jotedar* don't arrange the required material for share croppers then in that case share cropper can retain sixty percent of total production. These systems of dealings between various categories of actors linked to land have its own consequences. *Jotedar*s in this system of dealing usually do not keep one group of sharecroppers engaged. Less time of engagement creates fear of insecurity and uncertainty among share croppers. Juxtaposed to the system of direct dependency upon big landlords, such engagement seems to be more unreliable for their basic survival as it puts employment into inconsistency and unreliability. This lack of security forced them not to see beyond certain limits (Irani 1968)[13]. Such changing patterns of dealings produce various pattern of dependency in power patterns. There would be a sort of increased dependency fuelled by insecurity and unreliability. Sharecroppers rely on *jotedar*s for their problems. During the time of famine, drought, floods, epidemic diseases they seek financial help on stringent conditions. Such conditions losses the grip of nooses around their necks for temporary period of time, but in the long run put them in a vicious circle of dependency.

In complex system of caste and tribes, cooperation under the aforementioned patterns of powers, in economic sphere was forced on the classes and castes in the vulnerable category. Such imbalance of power in the result of material dealings of production of land categorizes the characteristics, roles, functions and statuses. Big landlords, *jotedar*s and sharecroppers held specific category with specific features in the hierarchy of statuses. The *jotedar*s of West Bengal served three purposes in village economy. First, they were absentee landlords; secondly they were money lenders; and thirdly they ultimately became political leaders (contractual-oppressors). In all position they could protect their interest against the poor disgruntled poor peasants as well as the land reform enactments of the governments. When the crops get ready for cutting, the *jotedar*s became happy and the poor sharecroppers felt miserable. The *jotedar*s went about collecting their debts with interest in the form of cash, seeds and foodgrains, and became prosperous, while the sharecroppers had to pay back the loans with unbearable of rates of interest and were unhappy (Gupta 1972)[10]. In this web of interactive relations determination of cooperation, dependency and interdependency are not decided by the demand of any class or caste rather it is the given chunk of power which set the red lines between those who sets the rules and those who have only option to obey the rules.

It may also be noted that all contracts and other relevant papers and legal documents were prepared by the *Jotedar*s, sharecroppers being utterly ignorant. It was the initial stage of introduction of contract-oppression power which had been harnessed by *jotedar*s. The sharecroppers were made to affix their thumb impression at the place pointed out by the wicked *jotedar*. He read out the terms and conditions of these loans and charged whatever he wanted. In these circumstances *jotedar* became masters of sharecropper. The *jotedar* refrained from using fertilizers as they thought that it was not in their interest.

Demographic status of landless labor in West Bengal further clarify their vulnerability vis-à-vis other castes and classes in context of time. Out of total population recorded in 1968, 15.3 % were laborers. Two categories dichotomize that portion of population. First category was of ascribed landless laborers and second category was of those who were holding minimal tracts of land and had given away under various conditions of loan to money lenders. Ascribed landless laborers mean those who were landless by birth. Many of them failed to secure back their mortgaged land because of their failure to fulfill the stringent conditions including high rate of interest. So as an alternative they have to work for very less amount of money and such vulnerability out of indebtedness had to continue for generations. According to the report of Agriculture Labor Enquiry Commissions the laborers were mainly drawn from local tribes and were generally indebted to their employers from whom they obtained loans when they were urgently in need of money. The commission also stated in its report that some employers allotted one *bigha* of land to attached workers on the condition that they would work in employer's field during the busy season on daily wages. The way in which these laborers were treated inevitably led them to the acceptance of the Maoist Revolutionary strategy.

The landless laborers were so desperate that they did not worry about the dire consequences which could be expected as a result of resorting to the Maoist revolutionary activities. Actually they didn't find any fruit in cooperation with big or intermediate landlords, which was actually strengthening the dominant-repression and also accruing results of initial contractual-oppression in favor of owner who owned means of production. On the other

side state was also indifferent to their deteriorating vulnerability. State policies in many cases reinforced the predatory structure. So if all the choices in front of them were worst then they had to go for lesser worst choice. They have not been left with anything to lose so that out of fear of losing anything they could cooperate or continue to accept dependency. The basic reason for this was that they thought that for them there was not much for them to lose.

Above data gives us understanding and in-depth structure of the society at West Bengal. Society is complex and divided, not only along the tribal or class lines but also along the caste lines. So it will not be enough to divide the society in upper, middle and lower classes. The cross-tribal, cross-class and also cross-caste nature of the society, manifested by leftist parties is usually stressed by many writers(as mentioned in the beginning of the paper) to eclipse the fault lines of caste. Most of the reasons which navigate the identities over different hinges and anchors have been discussed in preceding paragraphs and more will be discussed from different vintages to sketch a coherent picture of politics of identity and the power value underpinning such politics driving confrontation and contradiction of diverse identities.

6.EMPIRICAL EVIDENCES AND FACTS-RELIGION AS A REASON OF IDENTITY SHIFT (FROM CLASS TO CASTE/TRIBAL)

Dalits are different from Adivasis in the sense that they hold a central portion in mainstream culture, society, and economy but have been put in the lowest tier. Such hierarchical position of Dalits or any other section of society in social structure is made complex by Hindu theology rooted in doctrine of Karma and the Dharma. Sometimes, such complexity is noticed in the form of cementing of hierarchical caste system. Divisions in the society are not only on the basis of financial means but it is also dependent upon gender, caste or faith. None of the above factor effects or determines the position of an individual and his/her behavior in society independently. All of these factors affect the individual's social position at a time. Sometimes, one factor affect more than other. For an instance, accumulation of wealth may enhance the bargaining power and subsequent strength of say of an individual in day-to-day decisions in spite of his/her low caste.

As religion and culture have intertwining relationship with one another, division of the society on the basis of Hindu theology has cemented the hierarchical caste system. Tiers within society, interaction among them in various spheres of life and privileges and incentives attached to it depend upon not only theological divisions but also on other identities. These identities include gender, tribe, caste, and economic class. The complexity in this scenario of identities emerges when various identities are contested and confronted. Such contestation and confrontation do not come into play across the groups only, rather it operates in relations among individuals within the same group and sometime individual finds it in his/her behavior in different time and different place. Such complexity usually increases the dispossession of that group which has been put at lower tier of society in a relative way. Same is the case with untouchables in West Bengal. Theologically speaking they are known with different names *Panchama* (the fifth) or *Antaja and* Pariah or *Atisudra*. Weather is not sunny for these adivasis to make inroads to variety of resources of power and social mobility involved in it. Exclusive behavior of state towards them practically categorizes their citizenship. Such exclusive behavior can be witnessed by a cold-blooded incident, occurred in April 2004, at Bengal, which had not been highlighted by media to its due extent because of elections which were approaching at that time. Local people also didn't react to it the manner it must be reacted to. The real story was about a girl hailing from Hari community (mentioned in the above table) and a boy who was a Brahmin. Boy's family was not in favor of wedlock between the couple due to low caste status of girl which in their view could impure the family goddess. As a reaction, fallen-in-love couple in extreme frustration, committed suicide. Here two points can be raised. One, inter-caste rift in the context of class-based polity of West Bengal and dynamics of society are not in sync with that of politics. Former is the symbol of dominant-repression and the latter is voicing the melody of contract-oppression as mentioned in my main argument.

Such exclusion from incentives created by different institutions of the state at local level spearheads their reaction to policies of state, class movement of Maoists and their inter-group alliances. Such ascribed dispossession and expropriated position in society affects their behavior and interaction with those who form and run the overall movement in West Bengal against the state i.e. 'Maoists' or 'adivasis'. These restrictions are still witnessed particularly in West Bengal, in one form or another, where presence of Leftist parties tends to ensure the absence of caste conscious (Bayopadhyay 2004) [4]. Therefore it can be said safely that contestation of sharply variant identities translates into function and performance of overall movement.

The heart-burning event didn't stop here. Later treatment meted out to the dead bodies of lovers spoke volumes about embedded existence of caste's conscious in West Bengal society. Local people, by any prick of conscious didn't feel humane to pick the dead bodies for cremation. All this was happening during the phase of election when candidates were campaigning in the name of caste-less society which would further bridge up the gap between classes of society. Days after the climax of the luxury which the couple tried to have dead bodies got rotten. Here the

element which boggles one mind is that caste is so much entrenched in the society that the politics based on class pegged to it has failed to penetrate. It could also be conceived as failure of penetration of class-conscious in the impervious society embodying caste sentiments, still at some noticeable level. Secondly, the social recognition and sustenance of caste-conscious is also a barrier and reason behind confrontation and contradiction of two identities caste and class. Same is the case with the politics of west Bengal. These two identities and confrontation involved in it speaks up in the polity and due to the same reason factionalism among the political parties is demonstrated by splinter groups which usually emerge after specific period of time.   .

Bayopadhyay (2004) [4] summarized what he had come across. In a question-answer session with a teacher of a school at Rajarhat near Calucutta, engendering of identities has come into discussion. Stereotypes play an important role in construction of identities. Inter-tribal nostalgia was rooted in the perception of childer belonging to a particular tribe. The teacher claimed that schools were hosting children of all the families. Byopadhay(2004) responded to that claim by referring to number of children fishing in a canal, on his way to the school and asked the teacher about their status. The reason with the teacher for their not joining of schools was their belongingness to the tribe of Kaoras. Such perception on the part of that teacher was akin to process of making of identities and inter-tribal conflicts emanating out of this process. Here, one result can also be deduced that identity is not just about what particular group claims to be, rather it is an interactive process of what others think about a particular group. Socially, such thinking of both sides about each other, creates the sense of a feeling which can be put in the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them'. Such otherness and recipients of it give rise to that social interaction which hampers organization and collective function of overall class movement against the state.

He noticed the same phenomenon in response of other teachers. A teacher of a secondary school in Bankura village expressed same feelings about the children of Bagdi, Bauri and Khaira families. He attributed deteriorating situation of education to studying of children of above families in schools(Ibid).Such perception clearly shows the exclusionary mentality on micro level. It takes a serious situation when such caste-based perception and intolerant ideas about other groups and tribes are in operation in social institutions such as education houses where a part of process of socialization of individuals take place

7.SOCIAL MOBILITY/TRANSITION:

Societies all over the world are organized in a hierarchical manner which gives rise to different social echelons within the society and also variations among different societies of the world in general and India in particular. This has definite impact on the dialectical interaction among the individuals, their social prestige, influence and importance in West Bengal particularly. Individuals or groups are normally engaged in endless endeavor to enhance their statuses, move from lower position to higher position and vice versa. Simplistically, such movement across the strata constitutes social mobility, can be defined as transmission of an individual or social object or value-anything that has been created or modified by human activity-from one social position, such as economic, political and occupational to another. In caste stratified society, such definitions become problematic more so in case of upward mobility as it becomes meaningful only when the consequent change of social status is accepted by the larger society more particularly by the peers in new stratum. But in caste based society, such social acceptance of achieved status of those who moves or who tends to move from one stratum/echelon to other stratum/echelon, by the larger society is seriously limited. It can be viewed as social mobility as shift and ranking occupations, consumptions, social power and social class composed of individual accepting each other as equals and qualified for intimate association. Their view appears to be more amenable to understand social mobility in caste based society. But qualifying for equal treatment and intimate association alone won't suffice our need. It is also crucial that the mobile individuals are accepted and accorded due respect befitting their newly acquired positions by their subordinates in the official hierarchy and the larger public outside, irrespective of their caste status. This may be termed as social acceptance. Suitably modifying the aforesaid view, social mobility as a positional shift of individuals in the social, economic, occupational and political structures are described in such a manner that the new incumbents qualify for social acceptance irrespective of their caste or ascribed ties. So two things social recognition as discussed in preceding section and social acceptance of newly introduced ingredients of globalized world in context of free market economy has also to do with changing and switching of identities.

Though Indian state in the shape of its constitution and political parties has tried to downplay and feeble the caste identity by attempting to integrate west Bengal in liberal free market wave of globalization but still it is intact and has to be addressed properly by juggling with the determinants triggering the privileged behavior of one caste over the other or one class over the other or at that junctures where it intersects with one another. Natural resources in West Bengal are abundant. Technology couple with the process of globalization has put life in economic progress. Calcutta in this regard is worth referring to. Natural resources, availability of lands for installation of industries and interests of investors have made West Bengal an attractive place. State, both at local and central level, is thus

supportive towards corporate sector and takes every essential step to ensure law and order, stability and peace because investors always need prior guarantee and security of their investments. Such encouragement from the side of the state has made flourishing of industries of information technology possible. Industrialization is gaining momentum. NASSCOM-Gartner has declared West Bengal as most suitable place for establishment of power infrastructure in entire India. Such variety of corporate and market-oriented activities have enhanced the importance of land and people living on it. Social environment is a moderator in abovementioned number of processes and stakeholders associated to these processes, involved in it. For long term, reliable and sustainable economic growth state willingly or unwillingly has to take aforementioned complex contested identities into consideration. Such cognition by the state will enable the state to negotiate with holder of these identities, so that grey areas can be found out.

Calcutta is now host of range of corporate companies. Headquarter of every major company is now situated in Calcutta. In these range of companies, names of the companies which are worth mentioning here are: ITC Limited, India Government Mint, Kolkata, Haldia Petrochemicals, Exide Industries, Hindustan Motors, Britannia Industries, Bata India, Birla Corporation, CESC Limited, Coal India Limited, Damodar Valley Corporation, PwC India, Peerless Group, United Bank of India, UCO Bank and Allahabad Bank. All of above companies are carrying out their economic projects in West Bengal in different sectors. ITC Limited is in dealing of businesses such as agri-business, Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs),Hotels, Paper boards and speciality papers etc. Like ITCs, all of above companies are engaged in diverse economic activities at various forest-abundant places of West Bengal. Land, people and infrastructure are fundamentals to performance of diverse businesses.

Government of India formulated a policy of 'Look East' in 2010 and laid a trade route to China with the name Nathu La Pass in Sikkim. Adoption of this policy and number of projects triggered by it, has engulfed different areas of West Bengal in General and Calcutta in particular. Web of engagements have opened West Bengal not only for investors from neighboring countries but also for investors from the west. Position of West Bengal in this context of economic growth and development has enhanced the importance of West Bengal regionally and globally (wikipedia). But every business has its cost. As mentioned above land is required. For some businesses, wood extractable from forests is also important as a raw material for industries. In the near past, provincial and local governments of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal have come into nascent agreements with corporate tanks. These parties will invest in power sector, mining sector, and factories of minerals. Materialization of these behind-the-screen agreements requires ejection of people from the local land (Roy 2010, outlookindia.com)[20]. Reactions, resistances, and frictions are results of conflicting identities. Corporate involvement has added to complexity of identities in social domain which is pertinent for smooth function of corporate sector in West Bengal. Given all this, negotiation must be preceded by the understanding of power dynamics predicated on mosaic of identities. It is interesting to know that attempts have been made by merging two approaches of Focault concept of power: contract-oppression and dominant-repressiveness, in case of West Bengal but in both cases identities are not obliterated, rather it raised more as a vibrant voice. Perhaps reasons behind such owning of identities such as tribal and caste and its shift to other identities, voicing class consciousness might be lack of gearing of globalized and capital-oriented programs to caste patterns of society. It means that there is a need to co-opt or to create a breathing space for these tribal people and the people aligned on the lines of caste in growth-led projects. An insensitive and unmindful gap between the significance of society and growth-led policies of state can be witnessed in such futile attempts of suppressing the caste-based identities.

Failure of the state to understand the dynamics of identities and power attached to it, has created a difficult-to-manage gulf between state and society with multiple and interjecting identities. Steps to transpire trust in dissenters have been lukewarm. State prioritizes the market results over the concerns of locales in its negotiations with aggrieved. Such divergent objects have led to complete and absolute mistrust of Maoists in state-headed processes of election, parliament, and negotiations. They now want nothing less than independence for which overthrow of state structure in their places is first requirement. Given the entrenched power of the state, overthrow of state structure is far from possibility in near future but such conflict will consume the energies of both sides. Result will be a pendulum-like. Sometimes government will be victorious when it launches successful operations against secessionists and sometime rebels are successful when it launch onslaughts on government officials and installations. Economic progress will also continue along all this but speed will not be like that which can be achieved in the case of inclusive and integrated arrangement between the state and local inhabitants. Any thinking on the part of the state that it can crush or bulldoze the resisting voices of oppressed people is without any foundation. History of tribal people and other oppressed classes and castes reveal that resistance before and after the Independence of India, against the state have never been uprooted completely. Case of Naxalbhari village in West Bengal is an ample example where such conflict didn't end in silence and invasion of people, rather it resulted in creation of a vibrant identity with the name naxals. Again, it should not be left unattended that these class based

identities involve various other tribal identities such as The Ho, the Oraon, the Kols, the Santhals, the Mundas and the Gonds underneath (Ibid).

8.CONCLUSION:

In the light of above various aspects of politics of identity which has explained confrontation between class and caste, various reasons have been witnessed behind the shift of one identity to another identity. The framework which is followed for this shift is contract-oppression and dominant-repression relationship among different factions of the society. Four major cases which can later on be opened for observation in further directions, have been discussed. First was the social composition of West Bengal in which it has been noted that both kinds of approaches of power: contract-oppression and dominant repression was inherently present. Such approach was actually determining the structure of society. The reason for shift of identity to Maoist was the imbalance in this approach which started depriving lower class and low caste people. There were various tribes and various scheduled castes which were actually downtrodden. They were diverse within themselves. The identity which can embody their diverse identities for fulfillment of their basic subsistence was of Maoists.

In second case of Bhadralok and chotolok, both class and caste seemed to cross one another or intersect one another. Identity of class and caste first seemed to be crossing one another in case of Bhadralok. The their relationship with other classes was not only of contract-oppressive type but also of dominant-repressive type depending upon the caste.

Third major reason behind the shift and confrontation of identities is social mobility. Social stratification is continuously going through the change. Competition among different actors is at its peak. Everyone wants to grab more and more. Globalisation and free market economy has added to this mess. Identities seem to be shifted from caste to class based on free capital.

Fourth one is the confrontation of religion and the class-based politics in West Bengal. In this case both identities has maintained its boundaries till now. They neither intersect nor merge. Depending upon the time and space both of the identities came to surface by pushing down the other. This case is strange keeping culture of politics in West Bengal which totally stamps out the presence of caste in society.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Methods, principles, ways, and channels are required to have its place in institutions of state and society where various identities can not only be accommodated but also can negotiate with one another. Exclusion of identity of any kind will absorb energy and time with no results. There will be no win-win result at the end. Both sides: powerful and powerless lose something.

When it comes to state, then the first institution which warrant attention in the discussion of inclusive policies making for indigenous identities is constitution. India has already done in this regard. But it still needs much to do for complete implementation. Implementation will create sense of ownership.

Local governance which is on its way with full swing in India can make a difference. But it requires specific apparatus and outlets through which dissenters can enter into the mainstream political life of the country. Functions of local governance need to be taken over by the local people.

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