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Training helps SC/STs bag prize jobs

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Kolkata: If you've read about social justice only in books, here comes the practical knowledge.

Meet 24-year-old Gautam Das and Paritosh Sarkar who have been hired by a call centre at Salt Lake's Sector V. While their fathers are peasants, the pass-graduate sons are part of a quiet revolution currently engulfing Bengal's back of beyond.

This isn't tall. The youths are among the 442 backward caste candidates, empowered with a spoken English course from UK's century-old Bournville College and basic computer skills from Microsoft. They have also been exposed to intense lessons on etiquette.

"I never imagined I would reach this place," said Paritosh, looking around the tall buildings on Friday. He wasn't referring to the IT hub, but to his elevation from the peasantry to the class of the urban employed.

Gautam, on the other hand, said that his journey began the moment he left his village (it took him three hours by train and bus) to reach Tatwa Technologies in Sector V. "The training was good. Now with a job experience, I shall be able to make a respectable career. This is my first job, and the journey has only started", he said.

Perhaps this was exactly how Upen Biswas, minister of the backward classes welfare department, had planned it. "I kept working on the project, doing homework, and weighing the feasibility. First I thought of training of a high quality. Microsoft and Bournville were appointed through global tenders. But then, I realised that the training would go to a waste if it couldn't be put to immediate use. That's when we hired an agency that would arrange for campus interviews



Sudeshna Chatterjee at a language skill and etiquette training class for candidates from backward classes; (right) Paritosh Sarkar and Gautam Das have bagged jobs at a call centre in Sector V after doing the course

and ensure that these graduates from underprivileged sections got jobs at the end of the training," said Biswas.

In January this year, the department launched a three-month training at 10 "personal development centres" in North 24 Parganas and Nadia. At the end, 185 candidates appeared for interviews and 131 were selected by private companies. In the first batch, 12 have got placements. Fifty-five will be absorbed next. Ironically, another 64 have opted out. Sources said the backward classes welfare department has sanctioned Rs 2 crore to train around 2,000 SC/ST students in 100 centres across the state, including one at Lalgurha.

According to Biswas, the sociological implication was huge. "This is the social justice we educated people like to harp on without knowing how it will be achieved. If you empower the socially low people with skills appropriate for a globalised and liberal economy, you end up evolving an inclusive society,"

the minister added.

"Participating in this venture was extremely rewarding. We found ourselves as catalysts in helping people from abject poverty gain soft skills and find jobs. It was a challenge we couldn't resist," said Kushal Maitra, director and CEO, Indus Integrated Information Management Ltd (IIML) that helped implement the project.

The uphill task was made easier by the candidates themselves, averred Sudeshna Chatterjee, director, South Asia Development, Bournville. She led the language skill and etiquette training. "We were surprised by their enthusiasm, so it wasn't all that difficult bringing them out of their comfort zone and loosening their stiffness."

She recalled how one of the candidates had walked up to her and sought

to know if he was shaking hands correctly and the grip was firm enough. "And then someone had included 'gardening' in his CV. He said he wanted his employers to know that he was nurturing life," Chatterjee smiled.

"I had sat for many unsuccessful interviews earlier. It's only after this training that I have learnt that I would have exactly five seconds to make a first impression. We were told to enter the room with a smile and make eye contact with the interviewer and maintain an open body posture, after introducing ourselves politely.

We were shown how to sip tea from the cup," said Manab Kumar Biswas, who was trained at Cooper's Camp in Nadia. The 28-year-old has been hired by Bhandari Motors in Howrah.

In an one-and-a-half-hour class, the teacher would only be allowed 20 minutes for her talking. The rest would be reserved for the individual

candidates to communicate. Only in English, that is. "We allowed them to speak wrong English, telling them that it was a foreign language, after all. And that they should adopt the skill so that they were on equal footing with the rest of the world. I guess this is how they overcame their inhibition, their class struggle" said Chatterjee.

The class-struggle will continue, though. Das, Sarkar, Biswas and their brethren from their respective skill development centres must look for city accommodations, to begin with. Or they will have to commute for three or four hours from their rural homes every morning to reach thoroughly urbane Sector V.

