

By A.M. Jigeesh
in New Delhi

MAYAWATI may be nursing prime ministerial ambitions today, but thousands of Dalits are still forcibly denied their right to vote.

A Dalit rights group has filed more than 500 cases with the Election Commission. It claims that everyone from local panchayat leaders and political workers to polling officials and the police conspired to disallow this basic political right to Dalits in the just-concluded Lok Sabha elections.

Andhra Pradesh recorded the most number of cases, followed by Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Maharashtra.

The denial is generally violent, says the National Dalit Election Watch (NDEW). As many as 28 per cent cases relate to threatening and intimidation of Dalits by upper caste members in their localities — sometimes through attacks on Dalit colonies on election day.

Most cases in AP, UP, Rajasthan & Bihar

"They belong to different political parties, but are united in their antagonism towards Dalit voters," said P.S. Krishnan, a champion of Dalit causes and an adviser to the Union human resource development ministry.

Another 22 per cent cases relate to Dalits being prevented from voting by the village panchayats, which are generally headed by upper caste members.

The official machinery is not far behind. About 13 per cent of cases are about the exclusion of Dalits from voters' lists. And in another 11 per cent cases, polling officials disallow them simply by not accepting their identity cards.

In 10 per cent of the cases, upper caste members cast bogus votes in the name of Dalit voters. Three per cent relate to police violence against Dalit voters. The rest are about the influence

Upper castes bar Dalits from voting in several states

DENIAL BY FORCE

More than 500 cases of Dalits' forcible exclusion from the election process have come to light

Cases	How and by whom
28%	Threats and intimidation by upper castes, irrespective of political affiliations
22%	By panchayat chiefs
13%	Exclusion of Dalit names from the voters list
11%	Blocking of Dalit votes by polling officials who won't accept their IDs
10%	Rigging and casting of bogus votes in the name of Dalits
3%	Violence against Dalit voters by the police
Rest	Influencing of Dalit voters through money, liquor and other means



of Dalit voters with the use of money, liquor and other means.

Fearing a second round of anti-Dalit violence in the wake of the declaration of results, the NDEW and other Dalit groups have met party presidents, chief ministers and the three election commissioners.

"The law is not being enforced," said Krishnan "The EC has an obligation to ensure free and fair

elections. It should order investigations into all the complaints and extend security cover after the declaration of results to ensure Dalits are not targeted again." as an obligation to ensure free and fair elections. It should order investigations into all the complaints and extend security cover after the declaration of results to ensure Dalits are not targeted again."