

WEST BENGAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

REPORT ON ABDAL

The West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes received an application under the signature of Abul Hossain, Secretary, Uttar Banga Anagrasar Muslim Sangram Samity praying for the inclusion of Abdal Community in the list of Backward Classes in West Bengal in view of the social, educational and economic backwardness of the Community.

Mr. Abul Hossain was requested to furnish a filled-in Proforma along with a mass petition from Abdal class of people for a better appreciation of the merit of his petition. It, however, bears mention here that meanwhile the Commission had decided to conduct an on-the-spot study on the social and educational background of Abdal class of people in areas with habitational concentration of the community.

Accordingly, Dr. Parimal Karmakar & Syed Masudal Hossain, Members of the Commission went on a visit to the district of Murshidabad for an on the spot study on the social and educational status of Abdal class of people. The study was conducted covering more than 250 families in different villages in Raghunathgung-1 Block in the district of Murshidabad where the Abdal class of people mostly reside. They submitted their report before the Commission and shared their ideas with other members of the Commission.

Going by the statement made by the local people to the study team the traditional occupation of the Abdal class of people is cultivation. For their subsistence, however, they work as small farmers, masons, bidi-binders, hawkers, daily labours on others' land or as small businessmen. Only a very few of this class of people have their own land. The study reveals that most of the people covered have income between Rs. 1000 and Rs. 2000 only per month. This also however is not always guaranteed.

The standard of education among the Abdal class of people is very poor. It transpired from the study report that a very insignificant percentage of the total people covered are Madhyamik qualifiers. Most of them have their education up to Primary level. The percentage of dropout at the Primary level, to say nothing of Secondary level or Graduate level, is very high.

The standard of living of Abdal class of people is very low. In point of sanitation and health consciousness they are also very backward. Now some people collect drinking water from tube-wells of Gram Panchayats. But till now most of them use the pond-water for their daily usage. Almost all of them go to the fields to attend the call of nature.

Normally, marriage outside their own community is not in vogue. The S condition of women in the society is lamentable. They are married at the tender age of 14-15 and become mothers at a premature age. Family planning is still a taboo in their society. The social status & standing of the Abdal class of people are deplorable. Modern enlightenment is still alien to them. Both the Hindus and the people of other Muslim community in the locality look down upon them.

The representatives of the Abdal class of people residing in some villages of Sagardighi Block in the district of Murshidabad submitted a filled-in Proforma supported by a mass petition. Thereafter, the Commission decided to give Abdal class of people a hearing on 10.02.2010 at Farakka in Murshidabad district being attended by Director, CRI on behalf of the State Government. In the hearing representatives of the community namely Basir Seikh from Balia Panchayat, Rafik Seikh, Mangal Biswas and Karim Seikh from Raguathganj Block-II, Nurul Seikh from Lalgola, Omar Seikh from Suti and Yasin Seikh, Chand Seikh, Ekramul Seikh from Balia made their submissions before the Commission on oath.

It was stated in evidence that a good number of Abdal people reside in Sagardighi, Raghunathgang, Berhampur, Suti, Nabagram and Lalgola Blocks in the district of Murshidabad. They further added that the Abdal class of people also reside in the districts of Birbhum, Burdwan, North and South 24-Parganas. The total population of the Abdal class of people in the state is about 75,000.

The traditional occupation of the Community is cultivation. But they have to fall back on the job of small farmers, agricultural labours, bidi binders, porters etc. for their livelihood. Some have petty business like teashop, grocery, vegetable shop etc. Very few of them have their own land. So most of them have to work as labourers on others' land. The representation of the community in services, Govt. or non-govt., is not mentionable. Only a negligible number are engaged as teachers in Primary & Secondary schools. There is none in the discipline of Medicine, Engineering and Law. It has been stated that there is no MLA or MP or Zilla Parishad Member from this class and number of Members from this class even in Gram Panchayat is also negligible.

The documentary evidence indicates that the literacy rate amongst the Abdal is very low. The percentage of dropout rate is very high and in most of the cases this sorry state of affair is attributable to the children joining some engagement or other for helping their parents financially. Poverty and lack of consciousness dissuade them from pursuit of education. Few boys and girls in the age group of 5-15 attend school. There are a few number of Madhyamik qualified among

them. A microscopic minority reaches the Higher Secondary or Graduation level. Their medium of education is Bengali.

The documentary evidence submitted before the Commission makes it clear that their dwelling condition is very miserable. A high percentage of Abdal class of people live in thatched hutments and mudwall kuchcha houses.

Religious rites & rituals observed by the Abdal Class of people make them distinguishable both from the Hindu and other Muslim communities. Abdals follow both the Hindu and the Muslim rites and rituals. A well enough percentage of them still maintain the Hindu rituals like worshipping Goddess like Bhagavati, Manasa. They also practise Muslim rites of Namaz. On account of their observance of rites and rituals of both the religions of the Hindus & the Muslims, they are hated & ridiculed by their Hindu neighbours like Poundra-khatrion, Chain-Mandal, Ghosh, Mahishya as well as by Muslim neighbours.

Thus, on a consideration of materials made available to the Commission including the oral and documentary evidence adduced and the submissions made and applying all factors and parameters for determination of social and educational backwardness of a Community in the State of West Bengal the Commission is clearly of the opinion that the Abdal Class of people constitutes a Backward Class in the State and accordingly the Commission recommends to the State Government to include the Abdal Class in the list of Backward Classes for the State of West Bengal.

Sd/-

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Shri S. B. Mandal
Member Secretary

Sd/-

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Justice Malay Sengupta
Chairman

Sd/-

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Dr. Parimal Karmakar
Member

Sd/-

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Dr. Debjani Sengupta
Member

Sd/-

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Syed Masudal Hossain
Member