

WEST BENGAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

RAYEEN/KUNJRA CLASS

REPORT

The West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes received applications dated 05.03.2001 from the President, JAM-AIT-UR-RAYEEN, West Bengal, 10E, Gopal Chatterjee Road, Cossipore, Kolkata – 700 002, praying for inclusion of the 'Rayeen' class, also known as 'Kunjra', in the list Backward Classes in West Bengal, The applicant also submitted relevant information in the proforma prescribed by the Commission.

2. The applicant has stated that the population of the Rayeen/Kunjra class in West Bengal is about 26 lakh with equal distribution of males and females. Their population is spread over the district of Kolkata, North & South 24-Parganas, Howrah, Purulia, Malda, Murshidabad, Bardhaman, Birbhum and Jalpaiguri. It appears from the information furnished by the applicant that the class constitutes an endogamic social group and it is not possible for any other group to infiltrate into this social group unnoticed. The members of the class are mainly fruit and vegetable sellers. No one treats them as respectable persons; only 10% of the people in the locality treat them as ordinary persons without showing any voluntary disrespect, but 90% of the people in the locality treat them like persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

3. It has been stated that the people belonging to Rayeen/Kunjra class earn their livelihood by selling fruits and vegetables, by hawking and door-to-door selling and working as labourers in agriculture and industries.

4. It has been stated that 10% of the population of the Class live in thatched houses, 75% live in mud-wall and kutcha houses, 10% live in semi-pucca houses and only 5% live in pucca houses as tenants. Only 5% have bathrooms including toilet facilities, 10% use dug-well system, 25% have thatched sheds, while

60% attend to the nature's class in the open air. It has been stated that 5% of their population use piped water supply facility, 10% use tube-wells while 25% use big tanks and 60% use small ponds for water supply. The applicant has clarified that the information given by him on water supply covered the water used for bathing and washing also, but drinking water was largely available from tubewells.

5. It has been stated that only 5% of the population of the Class have their own land, 20% cultivate their own and others' land, 25% work as bargadars while 50% work as labourers on the land of others. It has been stated that 58% of the class are engaged in petty family business, 30% are small traders, and 10% have medium sized business while 2% have large business.

6. It has been stated that there are only 3 doctors, 5 Engineers, 2 Lawyers and 2 Chartered Accountants in the Rayeen/Kunjra class. There are about 100 primary school teachers, 40 secondary school teachers, 10 higher secondary school teachers and 10 teachers above the higher secondary level. There is none in higher services and only 6 in the middle rank of government service. There is no representative of the class in the Parliament, State Assembly, Zilla Parishads, Panchayat Samities and Gram Panchayats.

7. The educational attainment of the Class is not satisfactory, While 45% of males and 48% of females take the primary education, only 3% of males and 2% of females go to the secondary schools, only 1% of males and 0.5% of females go to higher secondary schools and 0.5% of males go up to graduation level. It has been stated that the children drop out from the schools mainly to help family business in hawking, vending and door-to-door selling of fruits and vegetables etc.

8. It has been stated that 90% of the males are married at the age of 15 to 17 years and 85% of females are given in marriage at the age of 13 to 15 years.

9. It has been stated that 80% of the population of the Rayeen/Kunjra class are below the poverty line 14% are above poverty line, 5% earn a little surplus and only 1% belong to affluent group.

10. It has been stated by the applicant that the upper caste people do not give them equal status in different social activities and the upper caste Muslims

refuse matrimonial alliance even with well-settled groom of the Class. The brides of the Rayeen/Kunjra class are not taken by the upper caste Muslims. The guardians are directionless regarding the future of their wards and they have only Madrasa education. The members of the Class live in sub-human conditions and they are happy with whatever they possess. A large percentage of the population of the Class does not get square meal. The high birth rate is an indicator of their social backwardness.

11. It has been stated by the applicant the most of the people belonging to the Class are illiterate. Majority of them are below the poverty line and children have to work to support their family.

12. The facts and figures as discussed above indicate that the people belonging to the Rayeen/Kunjra class are socially and educationally backward. Their economic condition is also bad.

13. It may be stated here that application had been received from the Rayen/Kunjra class in 1994 by the Commission and after hearing witnesses and considering the materials then on record, the Commission had come to the conclusion that the class did not qualify for inclusion in the list of Backward Classes and the State Government was informed accordingly at that time. The present application, although stated to be a review petition by the applicant, has been treated as fresh application from the Class and considered accordingly.

14. In course of consideration of the fresh application the Commission decided to obtain objective assessment about the social and educational status of Rayeen/Kunjra class by a competent research institution/agency such as the Cultural Research Institute, Government of West Bengal. At the request of the Commission the Directory, CRI, conducted a survey in July 2001 in respect of the Class in the districts of Kolkata, Howrah and Burdwan. His report dated 27.08.2001 was considered by the Commission in its meetings held on 17.10.2001 and 21.11.2001 and it was decided that the said Director should be heard in person for clarification of certain points made in the Report. The Report was discussed with the Directory and the Deputy Director, CRI in the meeting held on 28.01.2002. The Director

clarified certain aspects of the Report and he later furnished a revised report to the Commission on 15.03.2002.

15. In the Survey Report furnished by the Directory, CRI, as stated above, it has been mentioned that in the district of Kolkata survey was conducted in Rajabazar, Narkeldanga, Colin Street, New Market Area, Park Circus, Tantibagan, Kalabang and Metiaburuz. In the district of Howrah the areas covered by the survey were Lichubagan, Sultanpur and Radhanagar (Bauria) and in the district of Bardhaman the areas surveyed were Asansol, Kulti and Ranigunge. For the purpose of study, mostly the urban population was taken into consideration together with a small cross-section of the rural population of Rayeen/Kunjra class. Sample survey was carried on 330 families with a total population of 2248 of which 48.13% were males and 51.87% were females. It appears from the Survey Report that the Rayeen class is commonly known as Kunjra or Sabji Farosh and most of them are identified by that nomenclature. It is stated that it has been observed that the Rayeens/Kunjras live as an endogamous social group and that although other Muslim groups like Shekh, Syed Khan, Ansari, Kasai, hunia, Dhanuk (Mehtar) also live with them, the Rayeens/Kunjras are lower in status. The Rayeens/Kunjras usually marry within their own group. They generally speak Hindi and Urdu and a very few among them can speak Bengali.

16. The Survey Report shows that the Rayeen/Kunjra class were mostly migrants from the State of Bihar in the long past and some of them also came from Uttar Pradesh. Their traditional occupation was fruit and vegetable vending and although a large section of them still follow their traditional occupation, they have given up their traditional occupation due to lack of capital and local demand and many of them are now engaged in selling cloth, stationery etc. They are also engaged as petty shop keepers selling betels, tea etc. Other occupations of the class are making of cardboard box, kite making, zaris, book-binding and masonry etc. as they do not have fixed employment.

17. The Survey revealed that 58.48% of the population covered had income between Rs. 7000/- and Rs. 2500/- per month, 27.89% had income between

Rs. 2500/- and Rs. 5000/- per month, while only 5.75% had monthly income above Rs. 5000/-.

18. The Survey revealed that the percentage of literate persons in the Rayeen/Kunjra class is much lower than that of the Scheduled Castes. After excluding the children in the age group of 0-6 years from the surveyed population, it was found that 71.28% of the covered population was illiterate and only 28.72% was literate. Only 47.53% of the literate population have primary education, 16.61% have read upto middle school, 2.3% are Matriculates and above, 1.94% have passed Higher Secondary and above and only 0.53% are Graduates. Most of the children attend the schools run by Kolkata Municipal Corporation, private schools and Madrasas and the maximum number of drop-outs are at the primary level. The female section of the present generation has greater inclination towards education than the males. The housing condition of the Rayeen/Kunjra class is very poor. Most of them live in slum areas having one rented room per family. The average number of family members in many cases ranges from 10 to 12. In the rural areas some have thatched huts and mud wall houses, but in the urban areas 90% of them live in the semi-pucca houses with roofs of corrugated sheets of iron or asbestos. In the rural areas of Bardhaman district the sanitation system is very poor and they use open air or dug well system for attending to nature's call. In Kolkata and Howrah they usually have common latrine (one latrine per 10-15 houses). The slums are not provided with proper drainage. Drinking water supply is also poor. It has been observed in the Survey Report that large family size, low per capita income, low literacy rate etc. are the contributing factors for the economic, social and educational backwardness of the Rayeen/Kunjra class.

19. In course of discussion with the Commission, the Director, CRI, had stated that he and his officers had personally visited the areas covered by the Survey and that the findings as contained in the Survey Report were the result of the personal experience gained by them during the visit to the localities.

20. An examination of the facts and figures furnished by the applicant and of the findings in the Survey Report of the Director, CRI, establishes that the persons

belonging to the Rayeen/Kunjra class are socially and educationally backward. The figures about their population as indicated by the applicant may not be absolutely correct, but the claim of the applicant Class, as supported by the findings of independent agency CRI, about the social and educational backwardness of the Class is fairly established.

21. After careful consideration of the materials on record as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, the Commission is of the view that the Rayeen/Kunjra Class qualifies to be treated as socially and educationally backward.

22. The President of the JAM-AIT-UR-RAYEEN was requested for furnishing the identifiable features of the Class and he has submitted the same relating to customs on the occasions of births, marriages and deaths prevalent in the Class, which may be regarded their identifiable features. The customs observed by Rayeens/Kunjras are as follows.

1) BIRTH

- i) In Kunjra/Rayeen Community shaving of head of new born baby is performed on 5th day of the birth.
- ii) The new born baby is bathed by his/her grandmother or paternal aunt only and essentially.
- iii) A special dish known as "GHANTO" is served essentially among the relatives on that day. "GHANTO" is prepared with at least five types of vegetables and it must contain small prawns known as 'Chingri'.

2) MARRIAGE

- i) Pre-marriage night is called "MARWA RAAT". In this night women belonging to both bride and bridegroom sides performs "TAQ BHARAI". They cook Gulgula, Puri, Malida, Haham and go to nearby Mosque/Idgah singing songs and put some food there, which is called "TAQ BHARNA".
- ii) On arrival of Baraat at bride's door, the women from the bride side welcome them by singing "ABUSIVE SONGS" as a joke.

- iii) The father of bridegroom known as “Samdhi” is served with a special dish which is “MURGH-MUSSALLAM”/HEAD of GOAT for giving special honour to him.

3) DEATH

- i) On the fourth day from death “Quran Khwani” is to be performed and cooking is resumed from that very day. On that specific day a special dish known as “GHANTO” is served.
- ii) On the fortieth (40th) day of death, after the performance of Quran Khwani, the ‘Moulvi’ or ‘religious head’ has to leave the house at midnight followed by any older/elderly member of the family with a broomstick brooming the floor and at the end of the door touching the body of Moulvi with the broom. It is a “SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEF” that the touch of broom to the body and stepping out of Moulvi means that he is taking away the soul of the dead person alongwith him so that it could never return back to his house and his soul will rest in peace.

23. The Commission accordingly recommends to the State Government that Rayeen / Kunjra class may be included in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal.

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(Buddhadeb Choudhuri)
Member

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(Bharati Mukherjee)
Member

Sd/-

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Ramen Poddar
Member

Sd/-

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(Syed Zakir Hussain)
Member Secretary

Sd/-

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(Justice G. N. Ray)
Chairman