

WEST BENGAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

DEVANGA CLASS

REPORT

Shri E. Veera Raju, President, Joint Council of SC/Tribes & B.C. Associations of West Bengal P.O.-Barrackpore, District- North 24 Parganas requested vide his letter no. JCSTBCA-WOBCC -1/02 dated 24.07.2002 for inclusion of 'Devanga (weaver)' class in the list of Backward Classes of West Bengal.

After receipt of the letter, Prescribed Proforma was handed over to him on 07.08.2002 with request to furnish particulars as per Proforma for considering the request.

Again on 14.08.2002 after examination of the letter of Shri E. Veera Raju by the Commission, President, Joint Council of SC/Tribes & B.C. Associations was again requested vide Commission's letter no. 129-RI-2/02 dated 14.08.2002 to furnish the particulars to this office as early as possible.

On 04.09.2002 the Head Master, Mahesh Sri Potti Sriramulu Andhra High School, P.O.- Mahesh, District- Hooghly requested the Commission vide his letter no. 60/02 dated 04.09.2002 to kindly look into the matter for inclusion of 'Devanga (weaver)' class, a backward class of Andhra Pradesh, in the State list of OBC in West Bengal. He stated that 98% students of his school belong to the caste 'Devanga (weaver)' which is recognised by Government of India as OBC vide list of OBC serial no. 55 and Andhra Pradesh Government list of OBC serial no. 41 'Devanga' sub-caste. He has also stated that such Telugu people of three generations from Andhra Pradesh have settled permanently in West Bengal since the period of British rule.

In reply to this, the Head Master of the said Institution was also requested in the Commission memo No. 149-RI-2/2002 dated 18.09.2002 to furnish the required particulars in the Proforma to the office of the Commission immediately.

Again citing reference no. CBRAM- HD/WBBCD-3/02 dated 25.07.2002 from Secretary, Calcutta Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Mission, Hooghly District, Officer on Special Duty, Backward Classes Welfare Department in his memo no. 3531-BCW/ MRC-66/2000 dated 27.08.2002 requested the Commission for early disposal of the matter.

Subsequently, Secretary, Calcutta Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Mission in letter no. CBRAM- HD / WBBCD - 5/02 dated 4.6.2003 requested to let him know the decision of the Commission in this regard at the earliest.

The details in prescribed Proforma were not received either from (i) E. Veera Raju, President, Joint Council of SC/Tribes & B.C. Associations West Bengal or from (ii) the Head Master, Mahesh Sri Potti Sriramulu Andhra High School for considering request for inclusion of "Devanga (Weaver)" class in the list of Backward Classes for the State of West

Bengal. The matter was again considered by West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes at its meeting on the 20th May 2004 and it was resolved that formats be again sent to both the petitioners for filing the necessary documentary evidence for considering their requests for inclusion of "Devanga" in the list of Backward Classes for the State of West Bengal.

In pursuance of the resolution of the Commission at the 130th meeting of the Commission held on the 20th May 2004, Shri E. Veera Raju, President, Joint Council of SC/ST & B.C. Associations, West Bengal was addressed in Memo No. 161-RI-2/2002 dated 10.06.2004 of the Commission to furnish the details as per Proformas which were already received by him in person on 07.08.2002. Along with the memo two copies of the proformas were also again sent to him for the said purpose.

Shri E. Veera Raju, President, Joint Council of SC/Tribes & B.C. Associations and Shri V. Appa Rao, the Head Master, Mahesh Sri Potti Sriramulu Andhra High School furnished facts and figures in respect of Devanga class for the State of West Bengal as a whole. Information in the proforma prescribed by the Commission were also received from four persons in respect of Serampore-Uttarpara area of Hooghly district covering 700 families.

It was resolved at the 134th meeting of the Commission that both the petitioners be requested to appear before the Commission to give evidence in support of their claim for inclusion of "Devanga" in the list of Backward Classes for the State of West Bengal on 26th August 2004 at 2-30 P.M.

2. Four representatives of the Devanga class tendered evidence on oath before the Commission on 26.08.2004. In their evidence they stated as following:

Devanga class of people came to West Bengal sometimes prior to 2nd World War. Most of the people of Devanga class are settled in the districts of North 24-Parganas, Hooghly, Howrah, Burdwan, West Midnapore, Purulia and Kolkata. A large number of people who belong to Devanga class live in Mahesh in the district of Hooghly. The Government of Andhra Pradesh as well as the Central Government have included Devanga class in the list of OBC. In the state of Orissa they are treated as OBC. They are both educationally and socially backward. Guardians of the wards of the class are not in a position to bear the educational expenditure for their children. Normally they live in the jute and cotton mill areas in West Bengal. As they are not financially sound, they are not in a position to

guide their wards properly. Devanga class belongs to "Sudra" community. They requested to include Devanga class in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal. They cannot marry women of other community. Usually the Brahmins are regarded as Upper Class in their community, though they are very poor. Devangas only call them at the time of rituals at their homes. There are only two Higher Secondary Schools and three High Schools where Devanga children study. Previously Devangas used to send their wards to Andhra Pradesh in order to get admission in Primary Schools as there was no such school in West Bengal where education was imparted through Telugu. But the situation has improved at present. Devangas have twenty surnames and ten gotras. There is only one lawyer in their community. In Hooghly district there is no medical practitioner or Gazetted Officer. Basically they are Telugu speaking people. Some people are engaged in the profession of teaching and others in Banking sector and some of them in Railway service. Usually Devangas migrated from Andhra Pradesh. Their main profession was weaving. Some of them appeared but became unsuccessful in All India Services. Devangas are found in many States of India. They are looked down upon by other people as inferiors. Here lies their social backwardness. Devanga means those who make clothes for God. They also mentioned that the people of Devanga class also live in Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Orissa. They are also educationally, socially and economically backward •

The traditional occupation of the Devangas is weaving. The Devangas are a caste of weavers, speaking Telugu or Kanarese, who are found all over the Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Devangas are generally employed in weaving women's saris in pure cotton, or with a silk border, which were sold to rich merchants. The Devengas are also called Jadaru, Dendra , Devara, Dera, Seniyan and Sedan.

In Andhra Pradesh, the Devanga are referred to as Devangulu, Jandra, Devra and Devanga. They speak Telugu language and use its script. The Devanga are mostly short-statured and compared, with the other communities of the state, which show a greater tendency towards a round head shape, they are predominantly dolichocephalic. They exhibit a broad, and often round facial contour with a long and narrow nasal profile, which is remarkably different from the caste and the tribal communities of the area as a whole. The Devangas of Andhra Pradesh are of short to below-medium stature with an average height of 161cm. They are predominantly long-headed with narrow to medium noses and medium to broad faces. They wear a jandhyam and shivalingam and shaivite marks on the

forehead. They have a kashai (thick yellow) flag on which the Basaveswara symbol is printed. They are non-vegetarian.

The Devanga is an endogamous community with gotras and surnames. The ten gotras identified among them are Angeerasa, Dhurvasa, Gargeya, Karunya, Manmadha, Padma, Parasare, Parvatha, Vardhanti and verthantha. The twelve major surnames reported are Dayadulu, Banlaru, Bojjwarudlu, Goggi, Jakkala, Kampala, Katta, Perneti, Pinjala, Puli, Sajja and surati. Marriage takes place with the father's sister's daughter, mother's brother's daughter or sister's daughter. Adult marriage is the practice, and spouses are acquired through negotiation, by illarikam or by exchange. Monogamy is the norm, but polygamy is also permitted. Dowry is prevalent in the southern districts, while bride price exists in the northern districts. Divorce and remarriage are permitted. The Devanga women assist the menfolk in weaving operation. All sons have equal rights in the ancestral property. The eldest son succeeds as the head of the family. Women have to observe certain pre-delivery and post-natal restrictions. Birth pollution is observed for eight days. They perform the naming, tonsure (mundan) and thread-wearing ceremonies, and puberty (pushpavati) rites for girls. The important marriage rituals are vakkalu sastram, nischitartham, nadugu muhurtham, kanyadanam and the tying of the marriage badge, thali bottu and nagavalli. They bury the dead in a sitting posture (gudidi) and observe pollution for ten to twelve days. The Karmakriyalu are observed on the eleventh or thirteenth day after a death.

Largely a landless community, the primary and traditional occupation of the Devanga is weaving. Some own land and practise cultivation, while some are employed as coolies or agricultural labourers. They are shaivite Hindu and their community deity is Chaudeshwari. They are weavers as well as experts in drawing and painting on cloth. They accept water and food from all communities of higher status and interdine with other weaving communities.

3. The consideration of the applications of the Devanga class has been based on information furnished in the prescribed proforma and oral evidence. The materials furnished to the Commission are discussed hereinafter.

As per information furnished by Shri E. Veera Raju, President, Joint Council of SC/Tribes & B.C. Association, in respect of Devanga class for the State as a whole, the total population of Devanga class in West Bengal is 20000 (males –

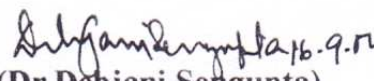
10500 and females – 9500) as per their calculation in the year 2004. The people of Devanga Class ordinarily live in the urban areas in West Bengal. The people belonging to Devanga class are treated like ordinary persons by 100% of the people of the State but with disrespect. The main occupation of the Devanga class is labour in factory, small business like tailoring, stationery goods, etc. All the Devangas enjoy piped water supply. Only 14.28% of the Devanga live in own pucca houses and 85.72% live in rental brick wall houses. 100 families of the Devanga class have own house. 14.28% of the Devangas have own bath-rooms and 85.72% of the Devanga use common rental bath-rooms. The Devangas have no cultivatable lands. There is no Doctor, Engineer, Lawyer, C.A., and Teacher above Secondary School level. There are 12 primary teachers and 10 secondary teachers. Total number of government employees is only 27 and non-government employees is 1400 only. It has been stated that all are in ordinary Government jobs and 40% are in non-government jobs (jute mills). The representation of the Devanga class in higher services and middle ranks and in elected bodies in the State as a whole is almost nil. It has been reported by Shri Raju that 57.15% of males and only 28.58% of females are literate. 42.85% of males and 71.42% of females never go to Schools. The education standard of the Devangas is below the State level average. Only 16.06% of males and 22.22% of females read upto Primary level, 20.83% of males and 16.66% of females read upto Secondary level, 3.57% of males and 1.04% of females read upto Graduation level. There is no student at Post Graduate level. There is no student in medicine, engineering, law, chartered accountancy, or any other higher sphere of education. The average age of marriage for males is 20-25 years and for females it is 18-20 years. It has been stated that 96.14% of the Devanga families' average monthly income is below five thousand rupees and only 3.85% of the Devanga families' average monthly income is above five thousand rupees only. There is no M.P., M.L.A. There is also no representatives in Municipal bodies, Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samity or Gram Panchayat. There is only one representative in Hooghly District Primary School Council.

4. Among the witnesses tendering evidence before the Commission, Shri E. Veera Raju, President, Joint Council of SC/Tribes & B.C. Associations of West Bengal stated that the total population of the Devanga class in West Bengal is about 20000 out of which 3500 live in Hooghly district alone. This information

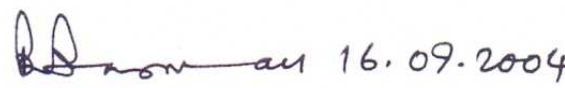
confirm to the figures furnished by Shri E. Veera Raju, President, Joint Council of SC/Tribes & B.C. Associations of West Bengal on the basis of calculation in the year 2004. Shri Raju also stated that there is no IAS, IPS, Doctor, Engineer, etc. among the Devangas. This statement about Doctors and Engineers in Devanga class is correct.

5. A careful consideration of the facts and figures furnished by the applicants and of the materials on record, makes it clear that the people belonging to Devanga class do suffer from social and educational backwardness and they qualify to be treated as Backward Class in the State of West Bengal. It may also be mentioned that representative on behalf of the Government of West Bengal was present at the time of taking of evidence. Here it may also be mentioned that no one has raised any objection in regard to the eligibility of "Devanga" Class of people for inclusion in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal.

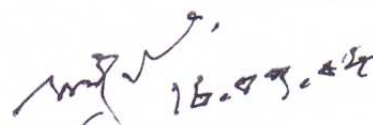
6. On consideration of the materials made available to the Commission including oral and documentary evidence adduced and the submissions made, the Commission is clearly of the opinion that Devanga class constitutes a backward class in the State and the Commission recommends to the State Government that Devanga community should be included in the list of "Backward Classes" in the State. The Commission accordingly advises the State Government to include the class of "Devanga" in the list of "Backward Classes" of the State.


(Dr Debjani Sengupta)
Member


(Dr Parimal Karmakar)
Member


(Prof Basudeb Barman)
Member


(Dr U. K. Ray)
Member-Secretary


(Justice Malay Sengupta)
Chairman