

WEST BENGAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

REPORT ON MAL

An application under the signature of Abul Hossain, Secretary, Central Committee, U. B. Anagrasar Muslim Sangram Samity for the inclusion of 'Besati Muslim' Community in the list of Backward Classes in view of their social, educational and economic backwardness kickstarted the process of consideration of inclusion of 'Besati' or 'Besati / Mal' community in the list of Backward Classes for the State of West Bengal. The appellation of 'Mal' added to Besati according to the application was justified by their profession of vending Bangles and their being Churiwala or Mal.

But before the Commission could arrive at a decision regarding the prayer of 'Besati' or 'Besati / Mal' for their inclusion in the list of Backward Classes taking into account all the aspects, applications from a few people from Bhangar, South 24-Parganas were submitted with the prayer for the inclusion of 'Mal' class of people in the list of Backward Classes for the State of West Bengal. That gave rise to the confusion as to the real nomenclature of the community to be included in the list of Backward Classes. To make the confusion more confounded the applications in the prescribed proforma were almost identical in respect of their social, educational and economic standing as indicated therein. To put all the confusion and misgivings at rest an in-depth discussion was held by all the Members of the Commission. At last in the light of the ethnographic and anthropological study conducted the Commission came to the conclusion that the appellation of 'Besati' was redundant and the communities professing themselves to be 'Besati', 'Besati / Mal' and 'Mal' should be treated as 'Mal'.

Accordingly, the representatives of the 'Mal' community were requested to submit their applications in the prescribed proforma of the Commission. In response to the request of the Commission two filled-in proformae were received in the Commission – one from Hasnabad Block, North 24-Parganas over the signatures of a few applicants like Abdul Gani Mandal, Sanatan Mandal, Manirul Mandal etc. and the other from Bhangar-II Block, South 24-Parganas over the signature of Jahiruddin Mal. The proformae were both informative and illustrative and the facts and figures contained therein may be summed up as follows.

The Mal class of people mostly reside in the Minakhan, Haroa, Hasnabad and Deganga Blocks in North 24-Parganas district, Bhangar-I, Bhangar –II, Jaynagar-I and Jaynagar-II Blocks in South 24-Parganas district, Ranaghat-I Block in Nadia district and Memari Block in Burdwan district. The total population of the community in the State is about 25,000. Their traditional occupation is vending of Bangles made of Glass, Ghunsi and Conch Shell Bangles usually worn by married Hindu Women as a mark of their marital status and their husbands' living state. But this vending job hardly suffices to guarantee them even a square meal a day. To make matters worse for them they have to borrow money at a high rate of interest from the money lenders to purchase raw materials and they have to make repayment of the principal together with the interest accrued thereon which leads to their impoverishment. So they have to fall back on other sources of livelihood like that of the job of agricultural labourers, van-pullers etc.

The other classes of people who reside in the places of habitation of Mal class of people are Chouduli, Goyala Ghosh, Santal, Poundro and other Muslim communities like Kolu, Molla, Goyala etc. Their standard of living and financial condition is not very high by average standard but it is still higher than that of Mal community.

The educational status of Mal class of people is very low according to the statements indicated in the proformae submitted by the Mal community. Though the literacy rate registers an encouraging percentage of about 50, the high drop out rate at subsequent stages of education viz. Primary, Secondary and College level more than neutralize the good early start. Therefore the percentage of Madhyamik qualifiers in the whole community is as low as deserving no mention. The number of Graduates almost verges on the nil. In the backdrop of the academic standard narrated above it scarcely needs any mention that there is neither Post-Graduate Degree holder nor any enrolment in Medicine, Law and Engineering from the community. This pathetic state of affairs is, as mentioned in the proforma, attributable to socio-economic condition and resultant mind-set of the people. It is also symptomatic of the perennial malady of the poor parents perforce having to engage their wards in some job or others. Naturally, the representation of the people of the community in services Govt. or non-Govt., or any other services for that matter is quite negligible or bordering on the naught.

The economic status of the community is very deplorable. Very few of them possess land of their own. Only very few families have property worth any substantial amount. No family has a monthly income of more than Rs. 2500/- only. Thus the standard of living of the Mal class of people is quite sub-standard. Most of them live in

thatched hutments or mudwall kuchcha houses. Not to speak of any sanitary latrine or lavatory none of the community members has even a service latrine. Almost all of them attend nature's call in the open air. Though people collect drinking water from tube-wells of Gram Panchayats they use untreated river-water for other purposes.

The social standing of the Mal class of people is not anything to write home much about. The girls are married off at a tender age of 13 or 14. Marriage outside their own community was not in practice in the past but now marriages with communities like Molla, Pahar, Gaji belonging to almost same strata of the society are being negotiated. But such cases are few and far between. The system of 'Talak' is prevalent in the society of the Mal though it is not very rampant. The people of Mal community generally do not take to more than one wife. This is not, however, thanks to any advanced social outlook of the people of the community but it is so due to poverty. They can hardly maintain a single wife with her children. So the question of adding to the number does not arise.

The proformae were properly and elaborately filled in and were informative and illustrative as already mentioned. The Commission, however, deemed it proper to ascertain and verify the veracity of the statements contained therein. Accordingly, Syed Masudal Hossain and Dr. P. Karmakar, Members of the Commission, went on a visit to the districts of North & South 24-Parganas for an on-the-spot study on the social and educational background of Mal class of people. Their study covered a large number of people in different villages in Hasnabad and Bangaon Blocks in North 24-Parganas and Bhangar-I and Bhangar-II Blocks in South 24-Parganas districts.

The Members submitted the Study report before the Commission and had exchanged their views and ideas with other Members of the Commission. It revealed from the finding of the study report that the facts, figures and statistics reflected therein were identical to those contained in the proforma so far as the social, educational and economic backwardness of the Mal community were concerned.

Thereafter, the Commission decided to give the Mal class of people a hearing at Basirhat on 26.02.2010. A large number of people from the Mal community attended the hearing. Only a few of them namely Jahiruddin Mal, Narul Islam (Mal), Nanda Mandal and others made their submissions on oath before the Commission regarding the community and its social, educational and economic backwardness.

However, some distinctive features about the community emerged in course of the hearing. The most striking among them is that they were a few generations back descendents of the Hindus. They have Hindu names like Nanda, Sanatan and surnames

like Mandal. They also added in course of hearing that they vend conch shell bangles worn by Hindu ladies. This they were allowed to do because of their Hindu antecedence. Some of them have forsaken their original surname of Mal as the very term 'Mal' is derisively looked upon by the people belonging to other communities. People of the Mal community are so slighted and neglected by the people of other communities that they would not vote for them in the election for Panchayat Bodies for only offence of their being Mal.

Therefore, taking into consideration all the facts stated, materials on record and submissions made and applying all the factors and parameters for determination of social and educational backwardness of a community in the State of West Bengal the Commission decided to recommend to the State Government that the Mal class of people be included in the list of Backward Classes for the State of West Bengal.

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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