

WEST BENGAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

REPORT ON GURUNG CLASS

Prologue

The West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes had first received one (01) application in the prescribed proforma as early as in 2010 from Shri Anand Gurung, Secretary, Gurung (Tamu) Buddhist Association, Kurseong, Dist. Darjeeling praying for inclusion of '**Gurung**' class in the list of Other Backward Classes of the State of West Bengal in view of their social, educational and economic backwardness. Relevant information in support of the claim was furnished therein. The said application was subsequently withdrawn formally in 2012 under the signature of the same applicant Shri Anand Gurung as Secretary of the Gurung (Tamu) Buddhist Association, Kurseong, Darjeeling District in its letter-head. Thereafter, the Commission again received a fresh application in November, 2015 in the prescribed proforma from Shri Bikash Gurung and Shri Anand Gurung, General Secretary and President respectively of All India Gurung (Tamu) Buddhist Association, Darjeeling Sub Division Committee praying for inclusion of '**Gurung**' class in the list of Other Backward Classes of the State of West Bengal in view of their social, educational and economic backwardness. Relevant information in support of the claim was also furnished therein. Being more or less convinced of the prima facie grounds as evident from the contents of the application in the prescribed proforma, the Commission decided to give a hearing to the representatives of that class.

Accordingly, in terms of the decision taken in the 376th meeting of the Commission '**Gurung**' class had first been convened for a hearing in the office of the Commission on 29.08.2016. Some 06 representatives of the said class hailing from different areas viz., Kurseong, Kalimpong, Siliguri, Rongo etc., in Darjeeling Dist including the aforesaid two applicants attended the said hearing and submitted oral statements as well as an ethnological write-up and adduced some documents as well in support of their claim. The matter of the said hearing was discussed at length in subsequent two meetings of the Commission taking all the aspects into account.

Since the state of affairs at hand concerning the class in question still appeared to be inconclusive and was not found to suffice to arrive at a decision even after giving the aforesaid hearing, the Commission decided to hold a public hearing at Kurseong in the District of Darjeeling on 11th November, 2016 to assess the exact prevailing social, educational and economic standing of '**Gurung**' class of people as a whole with a view to arrive at a decision on the application filed by '**Gurung**' class of people for inclusion in the list of OBCs of West Bengal as it was reported that concentration of '**Gurung**' class of people was heavy at Kurseong.

Accordingly, the Commission held a public hearing u/s 9 of West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993 on 11.11.2016 at the auditorium of West Bengal Forest School at Dow-Hill, Kurseong in the District of Darjeeling serving proper notice on all the applicants in the prescribed proforma belonging to the said class and adopting all other means of publicity through print media, website of the Commission and the administrative channel of Darjeeling District. An attractive traditional folk cultural programme was presented by a group of men and women of '**Gurung**' class attired in their exquisite ceremonial robes in the preceding evening to the hearing.

A huge number of 752 odd people all belonging to '**Gurung**' class hailing from various parts of Darjeeling, Jalpalguri and Alipurduar Districts that included a hefty number of people from different Tea Gardens/Estates attended that hearing and were heard by the full bench of the Commission. Dr. P. Debbarman, Director, Cultural Research Institute, Govt. of West Bengal represented Backward Class Welfare Department of this Government in the hearing. That apart, Smt. Goma Lhamu, WBCS (Exe), Project Officer, Backward Class Welfare, Siliguri; Shri Samden Dukpa, WBCS(Exe), Deputy Magistrate & Deputy Collector, Kurseong Sub-Division, Darjeeling; Shri Tridib Sar, WBCS (Exe), Deputy Magistrate & Deputy Collector, Kurseong Sub-Division, Darjeeling; Shri Nilanjan Mondal, WBCS (Exe), Block Development Officer, Kurseong, Darjeeling and Shri Paritosh Kanti Sarkar, WBCS (Exe), Deputy Magistrate & Deputy Collector, Kurseong Sub-Division, Darjeeling were also present in the hearing as State Government representatives. In course of the said hearing also the attendee representatives submitted oral statements

pleading to establish their adequate social, educational and economic backwardness and adduced several documentary evidences to vindicate their eligibility for inclusion in the List of OBCs of West Bengal. The Cultural Research Institute conducted a couple of field studies in 2012 and 2016 respectively and a Benchmark Sample Survey on the class and submitted reports thereof. The report of the first field study conducted in 2012 was, however, not considered/examined earlier in the event of withdrawal of the application of **Gurung class** as aforesaid.

Besides taking into account the oral statements of the representatives of '**Gurung**' class of people in course of the above-mentioned two hearings given to them, information furnished in the application in the prescribed proforma, documentary evidences adduced and the reports of the couple of field studies and the Benchmark Sample Survey conducted by the Cultural Research Institute, Govt. of West Bengal and over and above the ethnographic report of Mr. H. H. Risley on the class were examined and on examination thereof the following points are noted:

'Gurung' class of people reportedly live as a socially distinct unit having their social identity different from their neighbours. It is, however, reported that though there is no bad blood with their neighbours of other classes the elevated neighbours of '**Gurung**' class belonging to some other communities do not accept them as their equal rather, to some extent, treat them in contempt. As such they mainly remain confined to the ambit of their own community and tend to avoid that much commingling with the well off people of other classes so far as social interaction is concerned. A few of the attendee representatives complained of being subjected to social ostracism also. It is reported that though most of them are Buddhist they are not treated as equal by the 'Tibetan Lamas' in the Monasteries generally run by the 'Tibetan Lamas'. They firmly pleaded that they were backward in all respect in true sense. Though, socially they appear to be of similar status with many other classes recognized as Scheduled Tribe, they do not get least of the facilities accorded to the people belonging to such classes. The Gurungs are also known as 'TAMU' and mainly hill people. They are on the whole rural people though some of them inhabit urban areas also. The Gurungs are reported to be originated from Mongolia wherefrom they came about 1000 years back by virtue of 'Sugauli Treaty' (1816).

Social Status

They have reportedly been living from ancient times (Chandra Gupta Mourya Era) mainly in Nepal around the Annapurna Mountain range and a large number of them are settled since then in different States of India viz., West Bengal, Assam, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand etc. In West Bengal '**Gurung**' class of people have settled mainly in Darjeeling District besides Jalpalguri and Alipurduar. The Gurungs have their own language called 'Tamu koi', but most of them communicate in Nepali and Hindi, a few of them speak English too. The script of their vernacular is termed as 'Khema'. The ancestors of Gurung class of people were stated to be habituated to carry out pastoral life. Their traditional occupations, as reported, were agriculture, husbandry of cattle particularly sheep, honey hunting and working as unskilled labourer. Many of them were recruited in the British and thereafter Indian Regiments. It is reported that '**Gurung**' class is included as OBC in Assam and Sikkim States.

Geographical Status

'**Gurung**' class is mainly concentrated in the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar. There is reportedly scattered habitation of people belonging to '**Gurung**' class in some other districts also of this State. There are about 18,000 house-holds of this class of people in the State.

Population

The total population of '**Gurung**' class is roughly estimated at 90,000 with 52,000 male and 48,000 female persons. The number of members in their family is on an average five.

Educational Status

The educational status of '**Gurung**' class of people is not satisfactory. As reported by the representatives of the class the literacy rate of the males among them is estimated at 21% and that of the females is 10.5%, much lower than the State average. It is noted that though with the spread of education the children of this class, both boys and girls, are of late sent to schools, but very high percentage of them have to have their academic progress terminated at the threshold of higher secondary level and drop out at VII/VIII standard attributed to financial stringency, early engagement of both boys and girls in economic pursuit and engagement of girls in household activities. Precisely, struggle for earning livelihood prevents most of the parents of '**Gurung**' class of people to continue education of their offspring beyond Class VII/VIII. Though education is favoured for both boys and girls among this class, boys are slightly ahead in the pursuit of education at primary/secondary level.

However, as reported by the attendee representatives in the two hearings there are about 10.5% H.S. (10+2) pass outs and 2% graduates among them. There is reportedly one postgraduate among them. Elderly womenfolk of this class are mostly illiterate. Primary/Junior/High and Higher Secondary Schools are located at a distance of about 1-5 kms., on an average from their respective places of habitation. About 3% people among them never attend school, as reported.

*Matrimonial
Status*

'Gurung' Class of people follow strict endogamy. The average marriageable age of the males is 20-22 years and that of the females is 18-19 years.

*Occupational &
Economic Status*

Almost 95% of the males, most of the females and a considerable percentage of children of Gurung Class are reportedly engaged in labour intensive work for earning their livelihood. The ancestral occupations of **'Gurung' class**, as reported, were agriculture, husbandry of cattle particularly sheep, honey hunting and working as unskilled labourer. Since with the passage of time those occupations do not yield them much of their livelihood any longer most of them presently eke out a living by adopting many other occupations also in addition to their traditional ones such as agricultural labour, daily labour, working as security guard/watchman in govt./private sectors, driving vehicle, running small snack food shops/kiosk, grocery etc. A significant number of them are soldiers in the Indian Army. Some of them are also engaged in menial employment in Govt./Local Self Government and private sectors and a few have migrated to other States to work as hotel boys and watchman/guard mostly in private sectors. Most of the womenfolk of **'Gurung' class** of people work as tea garden and Cinchona plantation labourer and make/stitch apparel of different sorts to supplement their family income besides doing house-hold works. It is ascertained that a trivial number of people of this class possess marginal arable land and majority of them are landless.

The economic condition of **'Gurung' class** of people as a whole is stringent. The people of this class have their average monthly family income within a range of Rs.4000 to 5000.

Dwelling Status

Due to heavy rainfall and frequent land slide it is difficult to maintain kuchha houses in hill areas. Naturally, people whatever their economic condition may be try to construct at least semi pucca houses for their safe living. Even under such condition it is found that more than 26% of them live in kuchha houses and thatched huts leaving some in semi-pucca houses. Most of the residuals are bustee dwellers.

The sanitation system of this class of people is still bad. Only an insignificant portion of people of this class use semi-pucca latrines constructed by the Local Self Government Bodies, while the residual majority portion use kuchha, makeshift thatched latrines. The people of **'Gurung' class** have supply of potable water from common taps constructed by the Local Self Govt. Bodies at nearby places. The main source of their drinking water is natural spring (Jhora).

*Identification
Criteria*

Though most of the 'Gurungs' are reported to be 'Buddhist', there are also a minuscule number of Hindus, Christians etc., among them. All the Gurungs use **'Gurung'** or **'Ghale'** as their surname.

Special Feature

'Gurung' class of people is mainly concentrated in the District of Darjeeling besides Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar Districts. Community endogamy is strictly followed in making matrimonial alliances. Matrimonial alliance of **'Gurung class** are, as reported, almost restricted with their own class and not beyond since the people of other communities refrain from having any matrimonial relation with them as they do not treat them as their equal. A very insignificant number of matrimonial negotiations are, however, being struck with other classes with identical economic and social standing also of late. They have more or less 145 clans but marriage within same clan is not permissible. A unique system of marriage between cousins descending from a maternal uncle is in vogue among '

Gurung' Class of people which is in fact treated as the best wedlock in their society. **'Gurung' class** of people use common burial grounds. 'Bride-price' system was earlier in vogue among the **'Gurung' class** of people; stray cases thereof are still found among them. The females particularly the elderly ones of this class are not at all free and frank to the outsiders and hesitant in commingling and interacting with them and participating in social and religious rituals/ceremonies. As stated by the representatives attended the hearings though they are not opposed to pulse polio vaccination they cannot always get their children given the same due to their strict engagement in work place and in fear of forfeiture of wages in the event of absence therein.

*Field Studies &
Benchmark
Sample Survey on
the Class*

The Cultural Research Institute, Backward Classes Welfare Department of this Government conducted a couple of field studies and a Benchmark Sample Survey on the **'Gurung' class**.

They used method and technique as stipulated by the Mandal Commission in identifying Backward Classes in India in course of their Benchmark Sample Survey, analogously as adopted during the Sample Surveys conducted by them earlier in regard to other classes.

Using that method of distribution of points it was seen that on social backwardness the '**Gurung**' class obtained a score of 07 points out of a total of 12 points, 03 points out of 6 points on educational backwardness and 2.5 points out of 4 on economic backwardness. Thus, the total score obtained by '**Gurung**' class of people out of a total of 22 points was 12.5.

In terms of the Mandal Commission guidelines a community obtaining 11 to 15 points is treated as 'backward'. Those obtaining 15 points and above are considered 'more backward' and those scoring below 11 are not considered 'backward'. As such, based on the findings of that Benchmark Sample Survey as well as the field studies, the Cultural Research Institute, Govt. of West Bengal has concluded that '**Gurung**' class in West Bengal is 'backward' in terms of the yardstick of the Mandal Commission.

As per their studies the following picture in regard to social, educational and economic status of the class was found out:

Criterion	Item	Data
Social	% of people engaged in agricultural and manual labour	93%
	% of working women in manual labour	94%
	% of child labour	7%
	Incidence of marriage below 18 years	Negligible
Educational	Literacy rate	>25%
	Matriculation	8%
	Graduation and above	3%
Economic	% of kutcha houses	30%
	Govt. Service holder	3%
	Source of drinking water	Mostly Spring (Jhora)
	Average family income	Rs. 4500/- per month

Mr. H.H.Risley in his book 'Tribes and Castes of Bengal' wrote - "*Gurung, Gurunga, Gurungah*, one of the best of the fighting tribes of Nepal, divided into two endogamous sub-castes and a number of septs. Gurungs marry their daughters as adults, and like most Nepalese castes allow great license in the matter of divorce on repayment of the bride-price to the woman's father. Divorced women may marry again by the full ceremony, a privilege denied to the widow who may live with a man, especially with her late husband's brother (but not the elder) as his concubine, but cannot go through any ceremony." "They still retain pronounced traces of the primitive animism which they professed before their conversion to Buddhism, and worship the mountains and rivers, offering flowers and grass to the former and food to the latter. This worship seems to be of a propitiatory kind, and is celebrated more particularly for recovery from illness or relief from domestic calamity. Brahmans serve them as priests, but if no Brahman is available, a member of the *Guaburi thar* may take his place and may perform the ceremonies of marriage and disposal of the dead and *nuarmi* or purification after childbirth. All Gurungs bury their dead, except members of the *Urunta thar*, who burn their dead on a hill top and throw the ashes in the air. At funerals a man of the *Leh-lama thar* casts earth on the grave and recites mystical formulae (*mantras*) supposed to put the soul of the dead man to rest. In other respects the ceremony is the same as that used by the *Sunuw'ar* tribe. Gurungs abstain from beef, pork, or vermin, but eat the flesh of the buffalo and wild pigs and the domestic fowl." If a Gurung steals a wife from one of the other castes ..., her children will be admitted into the Gurung caste, but once admitted they may not eat rice cooked by their mother. If he marries a girl of the Kiranti group, her children are not reckoned a Gurungs."

On consideration of the materials made available to the Commission, the oral submissions made, documentary evidences adduced in course of all the hearings and taking into account the report of the Benchmark Sample Survey as well as a couple of field studies

conducted by the Cultural Research Institute, Govt. of West Bengal and considering all the factors and parameters for determination of social, educational and economic backwardness of a class in the State of West Bengal, the Commission infers that **'Gurung' class** of people constitutes a Backward Class in the State and accordingly the Commission recommends to the Government to include the **'Gurung' class** in the list of Backward Classes of the State of West Bengal u/s 9 of the West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993. Following the principle adopted by the Commission regarding categorization of OBCs in West Bengal and in view of the score obtained by the class in the Benchmark Sample Survey conducted by the Cultural Research Institute, Govt. of West Bengal **'Gurung' class** is also recommended to be placed under Other Backward Classes 'Category-B'.

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Manatosh Pandit
Member Secretary

Sd/-

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Justice Malay Sengupta
Chairman

Sd/-

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Dr. Dilip Kumar Halder
Member

Sd/-

.....
Shri Jayanta Naskar
Member

Sd/-

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Shri Dulal Murmu
Member