

## **WEST BENGAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES**

### **REPORT ON KHOTTA MUSLIM**

The West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes received a mass petition being forwarded under the signature of Abul Hossain, Secretary, Uttar Banga Anagrasar Muslim Sangram Samity praying for the inclusion of Khotta Muslim community in the list of Backward Classes in West Bengal in view of the social, educational and economic backwardness of the community as indicated in the said application. For a better appreciation of the merit of their petition the representatives of the community were requested to furnish a filled in proforma as is usual in cases such as this.

After receiving the filled in proforma contents of which appeared to have prima facie grounds for consideration of the prayer of the community the Commission decided to give the representatives of the Khotta Muslim class of people a hearing on 13.11.2009 being attended by the Director, CRI on behalf of the State Govt.

Abul Hossain, Secretary of Uttar Banga Anagrasar Muslim Sangram Samity though present in the hearing preferred to abstain from speaking. Soharab Hossain, a lawyer by profession and a member of the community made submissions before the Commission on oath about the community and their social, educational and economic status.

The total population of Khotta Muslim class of people is about 10 lakhs in the State. Now, the main concentration of their habitation is in Kaliachak I & II, Harishandrapur, Ratua, Manikchak block in the district of Malda and Farakka, Raghunathganj and Suti blocks in the district of Murshidabad. However, according to the submission made by them their origin may be traced to the district of Dwarvanga and Muzaffarpur, Bihar where they were known as "Das" class of people.

The Khotta Muslim class of people constitutes a distinct, separate, endogamous group of people. Their language, which is sort of a dialect, is an admixture of Hindi, Urdu and Bengali but acquiring with the passage of time a distinct character. According to Risley, however, the dialect of broken Hindi spoken in the North of Manbhum is known locally as “Khotta Muslim Bhasa” which perhaps warrants the conjecture that it has reference to the linguistic peculiarities of up-country men. But at present the language has only an intra community conversational status. Their medium of education is now Bengali.

The traditional occupation of the community is cultivation. But they have to fall back on the job of small farmers, land labours etc for their livelihood. In the past, some people of the community earned their bread by singing from door to door as minstrels. This is, however, no more in practice.

Only about 20% people of the community have their own land. About 10% are bargadars and about 70% are land-labours. Less than 1% people of the community are engaged in petty business. Of that insignificant percentage even only 40% have their own capital and the rest 60% run their business on borrowed capital.

The representation of the community in services, Govt. or non-Govt. is not mentionable. Only a negligible number are engaged as teachers in Primary and Secondary schools. There is no lecturer in Colleges and Universities from Khotta Muslim class of people and obviously their representation in the profession of Engineering, Medicine and law is almost nil.

The literacy rate among the Khotta Muslim class of people is very low. The drop out rate at every stage of education namely Primary, Secondary and College level varies from 60% to 85%. Their educational

standard is at par with that of other Backward Muslim classes of people in the district.

At the administrative level there are only 2 Members of Parliament and 2 Members of Legislative Assembly from the Khotta Muslim class of people but they have very few representatives in the three-tier Panchayat bodies namely Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samity, Gram Panchayat.

Representatives of the community stated in course of the hearing that people of other communities that live in the localities where the Khotta Muslim class of people do like Shershabadia, Uporatia, Rayeen regard them as inferiors. They also alluded to references from different literary works one of them being Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's "Srikanta" to show how contemptuously Khotta Muslim class of people are addressed and reprimanded.

Thus though the representatives of the Community tried to be illustrative and communicative on the viewpoints of their backwardness, social, educational and economic the Commission thought that the submissions made by the representatives of Khotta Muslim class of people in the course of hearing were not sufficiently and adequately informative.

It was, therefore, decided that Dr. Parimal Karmakar and Syed Masudal Hossain, Members of the Commission would go on a visit in the district of Murshidabad and Malda for an on the spot survey on the social and educational status of the Khotta Muslim class of people.

Their survey covered 30000 people of 5000 families in 15 villages of Dhuliyon Municipality Ward-4, Suti-I, Samsergang in the district of Murshidabad and Kaliachak Block in Malda. They submitted the survey report before the Commission. The members also enlightened the Chairman and the Member-Secretary and other Members of the

Commission as to the ideas they formed and the general impressions they had in course of the survey conducted by them.

The survey report shows that the Khotta Muslim class of people mostly lives in the district of Murshidabad and Malda. Their traditional occupation was cultivation of paddy etc. Now they eke out a living by cultivation, working as bidi-binders, brick field labours, rickshaw-pullers, taxi drivers, tailors, working on others' land as daily labours etc. Some families have petty business like stationary, teashop, grocery, medicine shop, leather business etc. With all this their pecuniary condition is so lamentable that even 75 % of the women folk of the community have to work out-doors for their subsistence breaking cordons of general conservatism characteristic of a backward Muslim society.

Very few people of Khotta Muslim class have their own land and that too of very small area of a few kathas. An insignificant number has holdings of land of a few bighas. There are only a few number of schoolteachers, para teachers, and State and Central Govt employees among this community.

The survey also reveals that most of the people surveyed have income between Rs 1000/- and 2000/- p.m. Only a microscopic minority have an income over Rs. 3000/- p.m.

The literacy rate among the Khotta Muslim class of people is very low. It also transpired from the survey report that of the 30000 or more people covered only about 4% were Madhyamik pass, less than 1% were Higher Secondary qualifiers and only very few persons were educated upto graduation level. 80% of them have their education up to primary level. A large number of children in the age group of 5-15 do not ever attend school. Even among those who attend school belonging to the said age group the percentage of dropouts at the primary level and secondary level , to say nothing of college levels is very high. Actually, they find

their children's labour more meaningful to supplement their meagre income than their schooling. Age-old conservatism has also insulated them from the pursuit of education. The most striking feature about the literacy status of the community as emerged from the survey is that almost all of the women irrespective of their age and economic condition are illiterate.

Most of the people of this community live in Mudwall Kuchha houses. Recently some semi-pukka, and very few pukka houses have been built by Panchayat bodies with financial assistance from the Government.

Normally, marriage outside their own community is not in vogue. Women are married in the tender age of 14-16 years and become mothers at a very premature age.

The standard of living of the Khotta Muslim class of people is very low. In point of sanitation and health consciousness the Khotta Muslim class of people are very backward even by unsatisfactory rural standard. Almost 60% of the people attend nature's call in the open air. People collect drinking water from tubewells of Gram Panchayat.

There is also nothing much to right home about the social status and standing of the Khotta Muslim class of people. Modern enlightenment is still alien to their society. They still remain bogged down in the antiquity so to say. In case of any dispute be it a family dispute or property dispute or any kind of dispute for that matter "Samaj" comprising old people of the village play a role of mediator. After hearing both the parties the 'Morols' deliver their judgments and their judgment is final and binding on all concerned. In the case of any dispute remaining unsettled through the intervention of the "Samaj" of one village the matter is referred to a body known as "Baishe Samaj" consisting of the representatives of few villages.

The Khotta Muslim class of people has some rites and rituals, which make them distinguishable from other classes and communities.

- (1) The Khotta Muslim class of people as already mentioned are migrated from Dwarvanga, Muzaffarpur district of Bihar.
- (2) Their Lok Sahitya, Lok Sangeet, funeral rites, marriages etc having traits and features peculiar to their community only.
- (3) Their special food habits constituted among others by kadoka gillbhat, gurbhatta, chinaka gillabhat etc.

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 has no hesitation to come to the conclusion that the Khotta Muslim class of people constitutes a backward class in the state and therefore the Commission recommends to the State Government that the Khotta Muslim class of people be included in the list of Backward Classes for the State of West Bengal.

Sd/-

.....  
Dr.Parimal Karmakar  
Member

Sd/-

.....  
Syed Masudal Hossain  
Member

Sd/-

.....  
Shri S. B. Mandal  
Member Secretary

Sd/-

.....  
Justice Malay Sengupta  
Chairman