

WEST BENGAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

SHERSHABADIA (BHATIA/BADIA) CLASS

REPORT

The Anagrasar Muslim Sangram Samiti (Uttar Banga) made application to the West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes praying for inclusion of the Shershabadia (Bhatia/Badia) Class in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal. The Samiti furnished all the requisite information in the preformed prescribed by the Commission. On 23rd March 1999, the Commission heard Shri Bazlay Rahaman, Vice-President, and Shri Abdus Samad, Member, of the said Samiti and recorded their evidence. The witnesses furnished some further written information on the date of hearing.

2. From the materials furnished to the Commission it appears that Shershabadia is a small community of Muslims. The term Shershabadia is derived from the name of the Pargana called Shershabad which had grown up during the rule of the Pathan king Shersha of Gour. The Pargana Shershabad was located in the area of southern Malda and northern Murshidabad. The Shershabadias had been cultivators traditionally, but during the Pathan and Moghal rules of Gour they were compelled to work as part-time soldiers also.

3. The approximate population of the Shershabadia community is about 7 lakh in West Bengal, distributed as follows: (1) Uttar Dinajpur district – 1.50 Lakh; (2) Dakshin Dinajpur district – 0.25 Lakh; (3) Malda district – 3.00 Lakh and (4) Murshidabad district – 2.25 Lakh. It has been stated that Shershabadias are treated as respectable persons by only 2% of the local population, as ordinary persons without any disrespect by 5% and as most ordinary persons like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes by 78% of the local population. The source of their livelihood is cultivation, agricultural labour and other lower profession.

4. The living conditions of the Shershabadias are poor. Only 1.5% of them have pucca houses, 5% have semi-pucca houses while 70% live in mud-wall kuchcha houses and 23.5% live thatched huts. More than 95% of them attend to nature's call in the open air. However, 90% of them obtain drinking water from tubewells provided by Local Bodies like Panchyats or arranged by themselves and 10% use big tanks for water. More than 50% cultivate their own land. Only 2% have land upto the ceiling while 48.5% have land much below the ceiling. The percentages of Shershabadias cultivating own land along with the land of others, working as bargadar and working as agricultural labour are 13.5, 3.5 and 32.5 respectively, As many as 95% of the Shershabadias are below the poverty line, only 4.5% are above the poverty line and 0.5% earn a little surplus. From these figures it is evident that the Shershabadias are primarily manual workers with very small holdings and low income.

5. The educational backwardness of the Shershabadias is similarly evident from the facts that only 6% of males and 2.5% of females attend primary schools, only 1.5% of males and 0.25% of females go up to the secondary level, only 0.5% males reach up to higher secondary level and only 0.25% of males go up to the graduation level. The girls do not reach even the higher secondary level. There is no student from the Class in the medical, engineering and law colleges and there is none at the post-graduate level. At the primary school level, as many as 79% drop out for joining family occupations or for other jobs. At the secondary level, 55% drop out for similar purposes while 42% drop out at the higher secondary level. As many as 90% of the females and 74% of the males are married below the age of 17 years. .

6. There is no doctor, engineer, lawyer or chartered accountant in the Class. As low as 0.5% are primary school teachers, 0.04% are secondary school teachers and 0.02% are teaching in the higher secondary schools. There is no representation of the Class in higher services. Only 0.02% are in middle rank jobs and 0.02% are in ordinary jobs in the government. There is no MP or MLA from the Class while there are only 5 members in Zilla Parishad, 30 members in Panchayat

Samiti and 110 members in the Gram Panchayat in the districts having Shershabadia population.

7. After careful consideration of the materials on record as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, the Commission is of the view that the Shershabadia (Bhatia/Badia) Class qualifies to be treated as socially and educationally backward. .

8. The representatives of Shershabadias have mentioned the following identifiable features of the class: They speak local Badia dialect, It is a variation of Barendra – Bengali language. They do not follow orthodox Muslim law and they do not follow Pir-Darvesh (Saint), during marriages they use ‘Haldi-Makha’, ‘Baina’, ‘Khirkachi’, ‘Badia Geet’ (female song), ‘Bavar’, ‘Thubra’, ‘Singrano’ etc. Marriages are held only at day time. For new born baby they observe the rituals by Chhyala Dhaka, Kamani, Akhika, etc. Their peculiar food items are Uti (a kind of bread made of mash, dal and rice powder), Aikharkhir, Andhesa (cake made of rice powder and gur), Pantha (Stale rice prepared with special procedure) and Chitai (sweetles cake made of rice powder).

9. The Commission accordingly recommends to the State Government that Shershabadia (Bhatia/Badia) Class may be included in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal.

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(Buddhadeb Choudhury)
Member

Sd/-

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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