

# WEST BENGAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

## REPORT ON KOTAL (MUSLIM) CLAS

### *Prologue*

The West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes received one (01) application in the prescribed proforma from one Akir Ali Kotal of Vill. Jadabnagar, P.O. Baital, P.S. Joypur, Dist. Bankura, PIN: 722138 praying for inclusion of '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class in the list of Other Backward Classes of the State of West Bengal in view of their social, educational and economic backwardness. They furnished some information including some instruments relating to land in support of their claim for inclusion in the list of OBC. Being more or less convinced of the prima facie grounds which merit consideration of their prayer as evident from the contents of the application in the prescribed proforma, the Commission decided to give a hearing to the representatives of this class.

Accordingly, after giving due notice, the Commission summoned the representatives of '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class to a hearing at its office at Salt Lake, Kolkata – 700064 on 25.07.2016 u/s 9 of West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993. Five (05) representatives including the applicant himself attended the hearing and were heard. Besides taking into account the oral statements of the attendee representatives, the documents including some instruments relating to land, as produced in course of the hearing, were examined.

On examination of the oral statements as well as the documentary evidence including the instruments relating to land adduced and over and above the reports of the field studies conducted by the official of the Commission and the ethnographic reports of Mr. H. H. Risley and the Cultural Research Institute, Govt. of West Bengal on the class the following points are noted:

### *Social Status*

Though '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class of people live as a socially distinct unit having their social identity different from their neighbours there is no bad blood with the neighbours of other classes. They live together with Muslims of other communities in their place of habitation but separately from the Hindus. They do not love to maintain that much commingling and close interaction with them also.

Neither they invite the Hindus in their social ceremonies nor do the Hindus do that, not to speak of sharing food and water. '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class of people originate from Bengal and the mother tongue of this class is Bengali.

Their traditional occupation was stated to be agricultural labour, daily labour, making jute-cord and cultivation. They complained that though they were of similar social status to many other classes already recognized in West Bengal as Backward Classes, they were not in receipt of the facilities accorded to the people belonging to those classes. Though a very insignificant number of people of this class possess marginal arable land and a more trivial number have the benefit of homestead settlement mostly inherited from their ancestors, bulk of them are landless. They are reported to be converted Muslims from Hindus. Though the representatives attended the hearing were not stated to be aware of the root of their class it is contemplated that may be they are converts from '**Hindu Kotal**' class which is a Scheduled Caste. As reported during the hearing though the people of this class were earlier being treated in contempt by their neighbours belonging to other higher Muslim communities that state of affairs does not prevail at present. The '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class of people belong to *Sunni* sect of Islam. There are two representatives of this class in Panchayat Bodies only.

*Geographical  
Distribution*

The '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class of people is reported to be concentrated mainly at Jadavnagar and Banpodua villages under Bankura District; Kharkusma village under West Medinipur District and scattered at some places in Hooghly District. Habitation of '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class in other districts of the State are reported to be not known. There are about 150 house-holds of this class of people in the State.

*Population*

'**Kotal (Muslim)**' class is reportedly not a big community. The total population of this class is roughly estimated at 1500 only with 775 male and 725 female persons.

*Matrimonial  
Alliance*

Though the matrimonial alliances of '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class were earlier being made mainly within their own class the attitude of the people being transformed with the passage of time, matrimonial negotiations are now-a-days being struck with almost all the Muslim classes with identical economic and social standing barring, of course, the Muslim classes belonging to higher social stratum. The marriageable age of the males is 17-20 years and that of the females is 16-18 years.

It is revealed from the Ethnographic Report of the Cultural Research Institute, Govt. of West Bengal that about 15% of boys and 31% of girls of this class are tied in marriage before 18 years of age.

*Educational  
Status*

The educational status of '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class of people, as reported, is relatively not bad with literacy rate being about 70%. It is, however, stated that though with the spread of education almost all the children of this class, both boys and girls, are of late sent to schools many of them cannot continue and drop out after VI/VII standard due to ignorance, financial stringency, engagement in economic pursuit and early marriage of bulk of the girls at their teens. Precisely, struggle for earning livelihood prevents the parents of '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class to continue education of their offspring beyond Class VI – VII. As estimated from the statements of the representatives attended the hearing and according to the Ethnographic Report of C.R.I. about 30% of the people of this class are illiterate, the females, however, being illiterate at a higher rate. It is reported that there are about 14 matriculates, 3 graduate and 1 post-graduate among them.

*Occupational  
and Economic  
Status*

Almost 100% of the males, some 70% of the females and about 20% of children of this class are engaged in labour intensive work for earning their livelihood. The present occupation of the '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class of people is reported to be agricultural labour, daily labour, making jute-cord and cultivation alike their ancestral occupation. One/two persons of them, however, are engaged in private tuition.

About 70% of the womenfolk of this class keep them engaged in agriculture labour, other labour intensive works and making jute-cord to supplement their family income besides doing household works. There is reportedly none among the people of this class engaged in any sort of employment in Govt. sector. A very insignificant number of people of this class are, however, engaged in menial employment in private sectors. They refrain themselves from borrowing money from any individual or institution, as reported, in apprehension of their failure to repay the same. However, in the event of any unavoidable compulsion they would take loan from their relatives or friends so that they do not have to pay interest thereon. It is reported that there are two representatives of this class in the Panchayat Bodies.

The economic condition of '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class of people is dismal. The people of this class have their average monthly family income of Rs. 3000 only.

*Dwelling Status*

The living condition of all the people of '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class is reported to be abysmal. All of them live in kuchha houses as stated. The Ethnographic Report of CRI also corroborates that 100% people of this class live in kuchha houses. While majority portion of the people of this class have to remain content with kuchha, makeshift thatched and dug-well latrines, a trifling number of them are blessed with the facility of using semi pucca toilets as reported. The people of '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class have supply of potable water from road-side tube wells at nearby places constructed by the Local Self Government Bodies.

*Special Feature*

The people of this class belong to *sunni* sect of Islam. '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class of people use '**Kotal**' as their surname. The people of this class now-a-days undergo Family Planning programme and their children are given pulse polio vaccination without any hindrance. They are aware of Family Planning Programme and not superstitious on that any longer. Though the people of **Kotal (Muslim)**' class generally avail of modern medical facilities at hospitals, the womenfolk of this class mostly refrain from availing the hospital services and prefer old indigenous system at home for the purpose of parturition. Since the people belonging to other higher Muslim communities do not allow them to use their burial ground treating them in contempt the '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class of people have to use separate burial ground. They, however, offer 'Namaj' in common Mosque. The girls of this class of people are of late striding neck and neck with boys in the pursuit of education though their quest remain restricted to school level only.

*Authorities on the class*

Mr. H.H.Risley in his book 'Tribes and Castes of Bengal' wrote - "*Kotal, Kotwal*, a small Dravidian cultivating caste of Central Bengal, frequently employed as village watchmen. They believe themselves to be descendants of Guhak Muni, the traditional ancestor of the 'Chandals' and it is possible that they may be a branch of that caste separated from the main group by their adopting the profession of *Kotwal* or village policeman. ....Kotals marry their daughters by the regular ceremony followed by the lower castes of about their own standing.

Polygamy is permitted when a man's first wife is barren, but is rarely resorted to. ... Their priests are a low class of Brahmans, who are looked down upon by other members of the sacred order. Their original occupation they believe to be to perform the duties of village watchman, an office for which they sometimes hold small allotments of land rent free. Of late years, however, and especially since the introduction of the Chaukidari Act, they have rather tended to abandon these functions, their place being taken by members of other low castes. As cultivators, they usually hold land as non-occupancy raiyats or work as agricultural labourers. Their social rank is much the same as that of the Chandals." Kotal (Muslim) class of people are reportedly converted ones from the Hindu Kotals.

The Cultural Research Institute, Govt. of West Bengal conducted an Ethnographic study on the '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class of people. It is observed therein that "Kotal is a synonym for 'Kotwal' – a title of rural policemen. In Bihar, Kotal/Kotwal is a section of Bansphor Doms and Doshads but in Bengal it is a title of Bagdi, Hari, Chandal and other castes who employed as chaukidars for village guards. **Kotal (Muslim) class** is considered to be the counterpart of these aforementioned groups of people who, later on, converted to Islam." In course of their study the following picture in regard to social, educational and economic status of the class could be found out:

*Ethnographic  
Study on the  
class*

Criterion	Item	Data
Social	% of Agricultural Labour/ Manual Labour	100%
	% of women in Agricultural labour	70%
	% of child labour	20%
	Incidence of marriage before 18 years of age	Male 14.81% , Female 31.29%
	Representation in PRI etc.	02
Educational	Literacy rate	70%
	Matriculation	2.01%
	Graduation and above	1.67%
	Drop-out rate	30.20%
	Distance to reach a High School	1 Km.
	Distance to reach a College	20 km.
Economic	% of kutcha houses	100%
	Govt. Service holder	Nil
	Doctor/ Engineer etc.	Nil
	Source of drinking water	Tube well
	Average family income	Rs. 3000/- per month

*Benchmark  
Sample Survey  
on the class by  
C.R.I.*

The Backward Classes Welfare Department also conducted a Benchmark Sample Survey on the '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class of people through the Cultural Research Institute. The Cultural Research Institute used method and techniques as stipulated by the Mandal Commission in identifying Backward Classes in India in course of the Benchmark Sample Survey, analogous to that as followed during the Sample Surveys conducted by them in regard to other classes.

As per the guidelines adopted by Mandal Commission criteria grouped under three major heads viz., social, educational and economic were adopted for identifying Other Backward Classes by attributing 12 points on social backwardness, 6 points on educational backwardness and 4 points on economic backwardness. Using this method it was seen that the '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class obtained a score of 12 points in aggregate on social, educational and economic backwardness out of a total of 22 points.

In terms of the Mandal Commission guidelines a community obtaining 11 points or above is treated as backward and those scoring below 11 are not considered backward. Moreover, as per the scoring pattern followed in the sample survey, giving weightage on all major social, educational and economic criteria for determining the degree of backwardness in a class, a class obtaining a score from 11 – 15 is considered backward (Category – B) and a class obtaining a score of 15.5 or above is considered more backward (Category – A) in the State of West Bengal.

As such, based on the findings of that Benchmark Sample Survey, the Cultural Research Institute, Govt. of West Bengal has concluded that '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class in West Bengal is backward (Category – B) in terms of the yardstick of the Mandal Commission.

The Commission considered all the factors and parameters for determination of social, educational and economic backwardness in the State of West Bengal. On consideration of the contents in the application in the prescribed proforma, the materials made available to the Commission, the oral and documentary evidences adduced and submissions made in the hearing, the Ethnographic Report of the Cultural Research Institute, Govt. of West Bengal and over and above the Ethnographic Report of Mr. H.H.Risley on '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class,

*Recommendation*

the Commission is of the opinion that '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class of people constitutes a **Backward Class** in the State and accordingly the Commission recommends to the Government to include the '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class in the list of Other Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal u/s 9 of the West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993. Considering all the factors and parameters, the Commission also recommends that '**Kotal (Muslim)**' class be placed under **Other Backward Class Category – B** and **only the people of this class using 'Kotal' as their surname** be eligible for being considered as OBC and obtaining OBC certificate .

Sd/-

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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