Further to the 8th Report made by the Commission and submitted on the 25th March, 1998 the Commission has since considered further requests from different classes of citizens for inclusion of the said classes in the list of ‘Backward Classes’ of the State. The Commission in this 9th Report is making its recommendation and tendering its advice to the State Government with regard to further matters considered and decided by the Commission.

In the 8th Report submitted by the Commission, the Commission has held after careful consideration of all aspects and for detailed reasons stated in the Report that any class of citizens must be socially and educationally backward to constitute a ‘Backward Class’ within the meaning of the West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993. The Commission in the earlier Report has also laid down the criteria and tests for determining the social and educational backwardness of any particular class of citizens. It does not become necessary to repeat the same in this Report.

Bearing in mind the principles enunciated and the criteria and tests laid down for deciding the social and educational backwardness of any particular class, the Commission has proceeded to consider the requests for inclusion in the list of Backward Classes of the State made on behalf of a number of classes of citizens.

The Commission now proceeds to examine the requests of each class on its merits to come to its conclusion as to whether the said class constitutes backward class within the meaning of the West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993.
The Commission received requests from Shri Khagendra Nath Bakshi (Retired Teacher), President, Uttar Banga Khen Unnayan Parishad (P.O.- Bidhannagar, Dist.- Darjeeling) and Shri Kanu Krishna Sarkar (Teacher, Higher Secondary School), Vice president of the said organization for inclusion of the ‘Khen’ class of people in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal. Mass petitions containing the same prayer were also received from the Districts of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar.

The applicants were given hearings by the Commission on 22.11.1995 and again on 29.10.1997. Shri Khagendra Nath Bakshi and Shri Kanu Krishna Sarkar appeared before the Commission. They took oath and submitted necessary particulars. According to them the ‘Khen’ class ethnically reveals a tribal descant and at present is one of the most down-trodden, under privileged and socially, educationally and economically backward classes of the people residing in the State of West Bengal.

As per their submission, the ‘Khens’ are a small class of people of North Bengal confined to the Districts of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling. Majority of them live in rural areas. In the Cooch Behar District they number about 15,000 (Male – 7,830 and Female – 7,170) and in the Jalpaiguri District about 16,400 (Male – 9,100 and Female – 7,300). In the Darjeeling District they are mainly concentrated in Bidhannagar Gram Panchayat and adjacent areas under the Siliguri Sub-division where their population is only 500 (Male 275 and Female – 225).

They produced extracts from the ‘Census of India 1921 (Bengal)’ to show that the ‘Khen” class was included in the list of ‘Depressed Classes’ and it was mentioned against their entry in the Census that this class was an ‘Aboriginal race of Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur’. The Mandal Commission recommended their inclusion in the list prepared by Shri L. P. Naik, Member of the Mandal Commission and appended at the end of the report. They made the submission that all these facts indicate that they are placed in a very low position in the society and deserve to be included in the list of Backward Classes on account of their degraded social and cultural position and low standard of education. In the 1941 Census they were recorded as Sen Kayasthas (Risley wrongly identified them with Kalitas of Assam). Some literature
efforts have been made to establish their linkage with the Khen dynasty of Kamptapur – who were overrun by Allauddin Hussain Shah in 1498.

As per the submission made by Shri Khagendra Nath Bakshi, there are two divisions among the ‘Khen’ class namely, ‘Teli Khen’ and Bara Khen’. But in their deeds and documents they mention ‘Khen’ as their class name with their surname as Sen, Das, Sarkar etc.

The traditional occupation of this class of people is cultivation. In addition, many of them are agricultural labourers, Day labourers, Rickshaw pullers, Carpenters, masons. They are also engaged in bamboo crafts, growing fruits (pine apple) etc.

The figures furnished by them indicate that some of them own some land (25% in the case of Cooch Behar, 30% in Jalpaiguri and 22% in Darjeeling), and the land owned by them in most of the cases is much below the ceiling. In the District of Cooch Behar, 10% of them cultivate their own land as well as others’ land, the said percentages from Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling Districts are 20% and 13% respectively. The percentage of share croppers among them – in the Cooch Behar District, is 10%, the said percentages in the Jalpaiguri and the Darjeeling Districts are 54% and 11% respectively. The percentages of agricultural labourers among them who work on owners’ land are as high as 55% in Cooch Behar, 54% in Darjeeling and 45% in Jalpaiguri District. About 3% of them are engaged in petty family business. Majority of them live below the poverty line (about 85%) and about 10% of them are above the poverty line. The remaining 5% of them earn a little surplus.

The materials on record go to indicate that their participation in the field of education is also not at all encouraging. The data submitted and proved by them reveal that 40.5% of them (Male 26.7%, female 13.8%) have become literate in the Cooch Behar District as against 40% (Male 24.5%, Female 15.5%) in the Jalpaiguri District and 35% (Male 21.55%, Female 13.45%) in the Darjeeling District due to the recent literacy drive. Out of them about 25% (Male 15%, Female 10%) received education upto Primary level in the Cooch Behar District, about 30% in the Jalpaiguri District (Male 18%, Female
12%) and about 16% (Male 9% and Female 7%) in the Darjeeling District. Similarly 10% (Male 7% and Female 3%) of them received education up to Secondary level and 3% (Male 2.5% and Female 0.5%) Higher Secondary level in the Cooch Behar District. The said percentages for Jalpaiguri District are 7% (Male 4% and Female 35) and 2% (Male 1.75% and Female 0.25%) respectively; and 10% (Male 7%, Female 3%) and 5% (Male 3%, Female 2%) respectively in the Darjeeling District. In the Cooch Behar District 2% (Male 1.75%, female 0.25%) read up to Graduation level and 0.50% (Male 0.45%, Female 0.05%) up to Post Graduation level. There are 2 Engineers. In the Jalpaiguri district 0.75% (Male 55%, Female 0.20%) read up to Graduation level and 0.25% (Male 0.20%, Female 0.05%) up to Post Graduate level. In the Darjeeling District 3% (Male 2%, Female 1%) read up to Graduation level; 0.80% (Male 0.55%, Female 0.25%) up to Post Graduate level. The drop-out percentage is very high at all the levels of education, particularly at the primary level.

Due to lack of education among them, their representation in the services and in professional jobs is negligible. In the Cooch Behar District there is none from the ‘Khen’ class in Government services; below one per cent is employed in non-Government services. There are only 1 (one) Dentist, 2 (Two) Engineers, 0.5% Primary Teacher, 0.2% Secondary Teacher, 0.06% Higher Secondary Teacher, 0.13% teachers above Higher Secondary level.

In the Jalpaiguri District, 0.06% only are employed in ordinary jobs of the Government. In non-Government services below 1% are employed in middle ranks and ordinary jobs. There is no Doctor, no Engineer, no Chartered Accountant or other professionals excepting Lawyers who constitute about 0.2%.

In the Darjeeling District, there is only one Lawyer, 1.6% Primary Teacher, 1% Higher Secondary Teacher. In Government services, 6% are in middle ranks and in non Government organizations, the said percentage is only 1%. In ordinary jobs 1.6% are employed in non-Government services.

It was stated in evidence that the living standard of the Khens is very low. About 75% of them live in thatched hutments, 21% in Kutcha houses, 3% in brick wall
or semi pucca houses, 1% only in pucca houses. 98% of them have no bath rooms/toilet and they attend to the call of nature in the open fields. About 1% of them have bath room/toilet and 1% use dug-well.

For water, 95% depend on Tube wells (with iron/bamboo pipes), 3% depend on kutcha wells, 2% on pucca wells.

The Khens are a distinct identifiable endogamous social group. They are guided by Hindu traditions in their socio-religious affairs. In 60% of the cases their marriages take place at the age of 18/19 years for boys and 10/12 years in the case of girls. This trend of early marriage is prevalent among the illiterates among them. Divorce and widow re-marriages do not take place. As stated by them, previously bride price was prevalent but at present bride price/dowry system is totally absent among them. Pollution after birth as well as death remains upto one month. The purification ceremony is performed with the assistance of Brahmin priest and Barber.

The Khens in general do not enjoy a respectable position among their neighbours. Majority of them (90%) get more or less the kind of treatment which is meted out to the people belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. This is mainly due to their social environment, living conditions and Tribal heritage. They bear Mongoloid features.

They stated that poverty, apathy towards education, lack of healthy socio-educational environment were some of the causes for their social backwardness.

The facts established by evidences – oral and documentary go to establish that the ‘Khen class is socially and educationally backward and their economic condition is also not at all satisfactory.

Taking into consideration, the facts established in evidence, the materials on record and the submissions made, the Commission has no hesitation in coming to the conclusion that the ‘Khen’ class constitutes socially and educationally a backward class in the State and the Commission recommends to the State Government that the ‘Khen’ class should be included in the list of Backward Classes in the State and the Commission, accordingly, advises the Government of West Bengal to do so.
No one appeared before the Commission on behalf of the State Government, although Notice was served on the Government of West Bengal. It may be mentioned that there is no objection to the inclusion of the ‘Khen’ class in the list of Backward Classes and no one has raised any objection to that effect before the Commission.

**SUKLI**

The West Bengal Commission for Backward Classed received a large number of mass petitions and also individual applications from many persons praying for inclusion of the ‘Sukli’ class in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal.

The Commission also received applications from the Paschimbanga Solanki Samaj for inclusion of the ‘Rajput-Solanki’ class in the list of Backward Classes of the State of West Bengal on the ground, as stated in their applications, that the ‘Solankis’ are known as ‘Suklis’ for which the ‘Solanki-Sukli’ class should be included in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal.

The Commission gave both the ‘Sukli’ and the ‘Rajput-Solanki’ class a hearing on 28.06.1994. The Commission after proper examination of the papers submitted by the ‘Solanki-Sukli’ class and the ‘Rajput-Solanki’ class took the view that the ‘Rajput-Solanki’ class who call them ‘Solanki-Sukli’ class cannot, in any event, be considered to be socially backward. This view of the Commission was communicated to the Government of West Bengal vide the West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes’ letter No. MP-1(94) dated 17th April, 1997. The Commission, however, decided that the ‘Sukli’ class be given the liberty to approach the Commission with a fresh prayer containing the relevant facts and figures for their inclusion in the list of Backward Classes of the State of West Bengal.
Shri Radhashyam Dua and Shri Ganesh Chandra Das, the President and the Secretary respectively of the Paschimbanga Sukli Sampradai submitted a petition dated 03.07.1997 for inclusion of the ‘Sukli’ class in the list of Backward Classes of the State of West Bengal. The petition was signed by a large number of people numbering 231. The Commission gave them a hearing on 05.09.1997.

Shri Radhashyam Dua and Shri Ganesh Chandra Das took oath, gave evidence and submitted papers required by the Commission. It was stated in evidence that the ‘Suklis’ are socially very backward. They referred to the Census of 1921 in which the ‘Suklis’ have been included in the list of Depressed Classes. They also referred to the book ‘Tribes & Castes of Bengal’, Vol.-II in which the ‘Sukli’ class has been stated to be a sub-caste of Weaver in West Bengal; the only difference between them is that the ‘Suklis’ use a wooden shuttle and ‘Tantis’ use an iron shuttle. It was emphasized in evidence that the ‘Suklis’ are like the untouchables because the Brahmin will take sweet meat from a ‘Tanti’, but not from a ‘Sukli’. It was further stated in evidence that the social position of the ‘Suklis’ is very low as they rank with the ‘Pods’ and the ‘Dhobas’ (who now belong to Scheduled Caste), and the Brahmans will not take even water from them. In support of these statements they again invited attention to the ‘Tribes & Castes of Bengal’, Vol.-II and the Anthropological Survey of India. It was mentioned in evidence that the ‘Tanti’, ‘Karmakar’, ‘Kumbhakar’ and the ‘Teli’ do not take cooked food from the ‘Suklis’ as they hold a higher position in the social hierarchy. But the ‘Tanti’, ‘Karmakar’, ‘Kumbhakar’ and the ‘Teli’ have been included in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal. Therefore, the ‘Suklis’ who are much below them in social status, may be considered for inclusion in the list of Backward Classes. It was mentioned in evidence that the name of the ‘Sukli’ class has been included in the list prepared by the Mandal Commission.

It was stated in evidence that the bulk of the ‘Sukli’ population reside in the District of Midnapore, although, they are found in small number in the Districts of Howrah, 24-Parganas (North & South), Burdwan and Birbhum.
The documentary evidence indicate that the literacy rated amongst the ‘Suklis’ was about 5% till the literacy programme was launched. The percentage of the males who received primary education was about 4% and the females 1%. It has been shown in the documentary evidence that the percentage of drop-out is very high and out of them 80% is for joining the family occupation and 20% for joining other occupations for helping the parents to run the family. They stated in evidence that there is a handful of graduates amongst them. But there is none in medicine, engineering, Law or any other professional lines. Their representation in the different services has been state to be ‘Nil’ in writing. Their source of livelihood is from farming, selling daily labour and working as servants in others’ houses. They live on agricultural occupations. But they have stated in writing that begging as Vaishnaba mendicant is one of their traditional occupations.

The documentary evidence submitted before the Commission indicates that about 99% of the ‘Suklis’ live in thatched hutmerts and mud-wall kutchha houses and the remaining about 1% have got brick-wall/semi pucca houses or pucca houses. About 99% of them go to the fields to attend the call of nature and the remaining 1% use dug-well system and thatched sheds. About 90% of them use the small ponds for water supply and the remaining 10% use the tube-wells.

The economic condition of the ‘Suklis’ is such that about 95% of them has been stated to be living below the poverty line. This is because only 9% of them possess some land measuring much below the ceiling limit; and about 90% of them work as labourers on others’ land. The ‘Suklis’ are not involved in the business profession, only 5% of them have got some petty family business which they run by borrowing capital from others.

It has been stated that there is no MLA, MP or Block Panchayat or Gram Panchayat Member from the ‘Sukli’ class; there is only one Member in the Zilla Parishad.

Taking into consideration all the facts established, materials furnished and submissions made, the Commission has arrived at the conclusion that the ‘Sukli’ class
constitutes socially and educationally a backward class in the State and the Commission recommends inclusion of the ‘Sukli’ class in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal and the Commission, accordingly, advises the Government of West Bengal to do so.

It may be noted that there is no objection to the inclusion of the ‘Sukli’ class in the list of Backward classes and no one has raised any objection to that effect before the Commission. No one appeared on behalf of the State Government, although Notice was served on the Government of West Bengal.

**SUNUWAR**

Representation has been made to the Commission on behalf of ‘Sunuwar (Mukhia)’, class of people by ‘Sunuwar (Mukhia)’ Samaj of Darjeeling for inclusion of this class in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal.

In the particular representation for consideration of the Commission, it has been stated that the number of population of this class is approximately 9000 of which 51000 (approximately) are males and 4000 (approximately) are females. It has been stated that this class is a distinct social group and this class constitutes an endogamic social entity and as such, is identifiable as a separate and different social group form the other social groups and it is not possible for any other group to infiltrate into this social group. It has also been mentioned that 50% of this class live in thatched hutments, 30% live in mud-wall thatched houses, 18% live in simi-pucca houses and 2% live in the pucca houses; and only 12% of them have bath-room/toilet facilities with pipe water supply. The rest of the people in this class do not have proper sanitation and
hygiene facilities, - 25% use thatched shed, 10% use open air system and 53% use public latrine. About 88% of the people have to depend on Municipal water supply.

It has been stated that the traditional occupation of this class is cultivation. About 2% of this class own land which they cultivate; and 10% own some land and also cultivate on others’ land; and 88% of this class work as labourers on owners’ land.

It has been further mentioned that there are no Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers and Chartered Accountants in this class. About 1.1% of them are teachers of whom 0.5% are employed as teacher (Primary), 0.3% as teacher (Secondary), 0.2% as teacher (Higher Secondary), 0.1% as teacher above Higher Secondary levels. It has been further stated that there is no person in this class employed in any Government or non-Government higher services; only a negligible percentage work in the middle ranks of the Government or non-Government services. About 2% of this class are employed in the ordinary jobs of the Government and 105% work in the non-Government organizations.

It has been stated that there is no MLA or MP or Zilla Parishad Member or any Block Panchayat Member from this class and the number of Members form this class even in Gram Panchayats is also negligible. With regard to the educational standard, it is stated that 14% of the males and 6% of the females are educated up to the primary level of education; 6% of the males and 4% of the females up to the secondary level of education; 3% of the males and 2% of the females up to the Higher Secondary level of education; and 0.6% of the males and 0.4% of the females up to the graduation level of education; and in the Post-Graduation level it is negligible. There is no one in any professional line like Medicine, education, Engineering and Law etc.

It has been stated that 65% of this class live below the poverty line; 30% are above poverty line and 5% earn a little surplus. There is no affluent or well-to-do person in this class. It has been further stated that in view of the educational and economic backwardness of this class and the kind of occupation in which the members of this class are engaged, there is hardly any person in this class with any social status or position; and 70% of the people in this class are treated just as ordinary human
beings without any importance, and 30% are treated in the way in which persons in the
scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes are treated, and this class has hardly any social
standing. The characteristic features of this class have also been mentioned and it has
been stated that in this class the widow marriage is admissible and the divorce of the
marriage is also permissible and the question of divorce is decided by the Panchayat
(consisting of 5 elderly persons). It is also stated that the origin of the class may be
traced to their counterparts in Nepal.

Evidence mainly oral and partly documentary had been adduced to prove
the claim of this class. Shri K.B. Mukhia, Secretary of the Samaj has filed an affidavit
and he has also appeared to give evidence in support of the claim of this class. He has
stated that the geographical distribution of the population of this class which is
approximately 8500, as furnished in the prescribed Proforma, is mainly confined to the
district of Darjeeling.

The following details have been given:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Population (approximately)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darjeeling</td>
<td>6300 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurseong</td>
<td>2000 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalimpong</td>
<td>150 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siliguri</td>
<td>50 persons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He has stated that majority of this class are mainly concentrated in
Darjeeling and Kurseong where they are employed in Tea Gardens as labourers; and in
Kalimpong this class works as cultivators; and in Siliguri which is a thickly populated
area the persons in this class do odd jobs. He has also deposed pointing out the very
low educational standard of the persons in this class. He has stated in evidence that in
the Post-Graduate level of education, there is less than 0.01%, LLB level – nil, in the
Medical line – nil, in the Graduation level – 1%, in the Higher Secondary level – 5%, in
the Madhyamik level – 8%, in the Primary level – 20%; and the entire remaining
population of the class are illiterate.
He stated in his evidence that the original occupation of this class was cultivation. However, as there is no scope for cultivation of land in the district, this class now mainly works as labourers in Tea Gardens. A negligible section of this class are engaged in sundry and other odd professions.

It has been deposed that in the non-Government or Public Undertakings a very small percentage is employed in small jobs. It has been stated in evidence that because of very poor education and impoverished economic they are looked down upon by the people in the society and as such, they do not enjoy any social status or position, though no particular animosity is shown to them, and at present there is no question of the members being considered untouchables. Brahmins perform the rituals of this class. He has in course of his evidence also produced a copy of the letter dated 23rd September, 1993 which was addressed to Shri Sitaram Kesri, the then Central Welfare Minister, New Delhi, seeking inclusion of this class in the list of Other Backward classes and he has also produced a copy of the Government Gazette Notification of the Sikkim Government which indicated that ‘Sunuwar’ class has been recognised as a Backward Class in the State of Sikkim.

There is another witness Shri Deoraj Mukhia who is a Member of the ‘Sunuwar (Mukhia) Samaj’ of Darjeeling. He has given evidence and substantially corroborated the evidence as given by Shri K.B.Mukhia, Secretary of the Samaj which has been earlier noted, confirming that the materials which have been submitted to the Commission have been carefully collected and prepared by them by making house to house survey as far as was possible and he gave categorical assurance that the said materials are correct to the best of his knowledge. In answer to questions put to him by the members of the Commission, he has further elucidated as to the manner of collecting the materials which have been furnished by him to the Commission. His evidence appears to be satisfactory and is convincing.

On the materials before the Commission including the oral testimony of the two witnesses, the Commission is satisfied on a proper consideration thereof that the materials which have been placed before the Commission to establish social and
educational backwardness and also the very poor economic condition of the people in
this class are properly proved and there is no reason not to accept the same. It may also
be noted that there is no evidence contrary to and contradicting the evidence of the
witnesses.

On a proper consideration of the materials placed before the Commission, the Commission is satisfied that the persons in the ‘Sunuwar’ class who reside mainly in
the Hill Areas of Darjeeling District with a very small population residing in Siliguri are
socially and educationally backward and they are also economically highly
impoverished and this class deserves to be included in the list of Backward Classes in
the State.

The Commission also carefully considered another aspect as to whether Mukhia as such can also be recommended to be included in the list of Backward Classes
in the State. It has been elucidated in course of evidence that Mukhia happens to be the
surname of some persons in the ‘Sunuwar’ class and the persons in ‘Sunuwar’ class also
have other surnames. It also appears that the persons who may not belong to the
‘Sunuwar’ class and may belong to other classes also have the surname of Mukhia and
any recommendation to include Mukhia as such in the list of Backward Classes may
create confusion and problems, as Mukhias who do not belong to the ‘Sunuwar’ class
and belong to the other classes, not necessarily backward, may by virtue of only the
surname ‘Mukhia’ as such be included in the list of Backward Classes to claim the
benefits to which the ‘Sunuwar’ class is actually entitled with the surname Mukhia in
this class, because of the inclusion of ‘Sunuwar’ class in the list backward Classes. It is
the ‘Sunuwar’ class which deserves to be included in the list of Backward Classes,
whatever may be the surnames used by the members of this class.

Accordingly, the Commission is of the opinion that Mukhias as such
should not be recommended to be included in the list of Backward Classes and only
‘Sunuwar’ class should be recommended for inclusion in the list of Backward Classes in
the State. There will be no difficulty for any persons with the surname of Mukhia in the
‘Sunuwar’ class to be included in the list of Backward Classes along with the persons
with other surnames in the ‘Sunuwar’ class to be considered as persons belonging to Backward classes, inasmuch as, they all belong to the ‘Sunuwar’ class which is being recommended for inclusion in the list of Backward Classes; and persons with surname ‘Mukhia’ belonging to other classes and not the ‘Sunuwar’ class will not belong to the Backward Classes and will not be entitled to claim the benefit of being a member of the Backward Classes. It may also be noted that in the State of Sikkim the ‘Sunuwar’ class has been included in the list of Backward Classes and there is no mention of ‘Mukhias’ in the said list.

Accordingly the Commission is of the view that the ‘Sunuwar’ class should be recommended to be included in the list of Backward Classes in the State.

The Commission, therefore, recommends that the ‘Sunuwar’ class be included in the list of Backward Classes in the State and the Commission, accordingly, advises the State Government to include the ‘Sunuwar’ class in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal.

The Commission also notes and places on record that there has been no opposition towards inclusion of the ‘Sunuwar class in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal. No one appeared on behalf of the State Government although ‘Notice was served on the Government of West Bengal.

**BHARBHUJA**

The West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes received representations for inclusion of the ‘Bharbhuja’/’Bhujawalla’ class in the list of Backward Classes in the State. The requests were made by Shri J.K. Gupta, General Secretary, Shri Kanyakubj Vaishya Navayubak Sangh (West Bengal), 31, S. R. Das Road, Calcutta – 26 on behalf of this class for inclusion of the ‘Bharbhuja’/’Bhujawalla’ class in
the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal. The representatives of this class were given hearing by the Commission on the 13.05.1996 and again on the 25.07.1997.

Shri Radheshyam Gupta, President and Shri J. K. Gupta, General Secretary, Shri Kanyakubj Vaishya Navayubak Sangh (W.B.) appeared before the Commission, took oath and gave evidence. They submitted necessary particulars. They gave oral evidence and made the submission that the ‘Bharbhuja’ class is an endogamous social group. They have got distinct identity in the social hierarchy and it is not possible for the persons belonging to other classes to infiltrate into their class. They marry within their own class. Their main occupation is to fry and sell food-grains etc. mostly by hawking in the lanes and by-lanes and also in the ‘Maidans’ and the Parks.

The total population of their class has been stated to be about 50,000 in West Bengal who are found in Calcutta and also in the districts of 24-Parganas (North & South), Howrah, Hooghly, Midnapore, Burdwan and Murshidabad. They conducted house to house survey to identify the people belonging to the ‘Barbhuja’ class and submitted the papers in respect of Calcutta and the seven districts mentioned above. The papers indicate the names and addresses of the people, their ages, their education, their occupation as also their income. Shri Radheshyam Gupta, President and Shri J. K. Gupta, General Secretary confirmed in course of giving their evidence that the materials which have been submitted before the Commission, have been carefully collected by them by making house to house survey as far as possible and they made a categorical statement that the said materials are correct to the best of their knowledge. In reply to questions put to them by the Members of the Commission, they further explained the manner of collecting the facts and figures which have been furnished by them before the Commission. Their evidence in regard to collection of facts and figures appeared to be satisfactory.

The documentary evidence placed before the Commission indicate that the ‘Bharbhuja’/Bhujawalla’ class celebrates the birth of a child by holding a ceremony called “Chati” or “Barhi”. They also observe the other Hindu rites and rituals like
funerals followed by ‘Sharadh’ ceremony etc. Their social position is, however, very much degraded and for this reason their business of selling fried good-grains has to be fried out in the localities where they cannot be easily identified. They apprehend that any buyer who is aware of their degraded social position would not make purchase from them for their consumption. It was explained in evidence that the upper class people do not take food from them and that is primarily the reason for which they cannot go in for starting business by setting up shops for selling edible items for the consumption of the people. It is because of their low caste and degraded social position that they have to confine their professional activities mainly to the Parks and Maidans. They go for hawking to the lanes and by-lanes where their identity is not known. It was stated that now-a-days very big ‘Bhuja shops have been set up in Calcutta and also in the districts where the upper and the richer section of people come for purchasing the ‘Bhuja’ products. But the real ‘Bharbhuja’/Bhujawalla’ class cannot set up a shop, even a small or medium one, simply because of the fact that they apprehend that their business will be liquidated in no time by the upper class people who have set up their big Bhuja shops under popular brand names by spreading and publicizing the low and degraded social position of the ‘Bharbhuja’/Bhujawalla’ class from whom no one would knowingly like to purchase edibles for consumption.

It was stated in evidence that the degraded social position of the ‘Bharbhuja’ class stands in the way to their improving educational and economic position. It is because of their social position that they cannot expand their business which they have attained professional expertise. Now that big shops of upper class people are being opened in the cities and towns, the ‘Bharbhuja’ class is being ousted from their traditional business. They are now to get themselves engaged in sundry odd jobs as labourers, rickshaw puller etc. As a result their women folk who used to fry the food items in the house for sale by the ‘Bharbhuja’ males are also sitting idle and not in a position to help the males in running the family. Therefore, the women folk have also to go out for working as maids in houses or as labourers in different work places. It was submitted before the Commission that the Mandal Commission has included the
‘Bharbhuja’ class in the list of Backward Classes. Mr. H. H. Risley in his book ‘The Tribes & Castes of Bengal’ has stated – “Bhar-Bhunja, grain-parcher or fryer. The name of a sub-caste of Kandus who are employed in parching and frying different sorts of grain, pulse, etc. They are said to spring from a ‘Kahar’ father and ‘Sudra’ Mother, and pretend to be divided into seven tribes, which do not inter-marry”. Mr. H. H. Risley has also referred to another class which is distinct from the ‘Bharbhujas’, but they also follow the same business. He has stated “there is also a class of Kayasthas in Behar, distinct from these, who follow the same business. A synonym for Kandu in Behar”.

It was stated in evidence that the ‘Barbhija’/Bhujawalla’ class of people do not take interest in education. It was submitted that about 25% of them received Primary education (20% males and 5% females); about 10% Secondary level (8% males & females); about 5% Higher Secondary level (4% males and 1% females) and about 2% of the males reach the graduation level. Their percentage in the professional lines like medicine, engineering, law, post-graduate, etc. is negligible. It was submitted in evidence that the females of this class have to keep themselves busy with the frying of the food-grains and other edibles which the males would hawk from door to door. Therefore, the females are the worst casualty to the programmes of education in spite of the literacy drive in West Bengal. In fact, whatever little deficiency is there in securing 100% literacy in some districts, it was stated with emphasis that the main defaulters are the females belonging to the ‘Barbhija’/Bhujawalla’ class. So far as the males are concerned, although 20% of them reach the Primary level, the drop-out rate is as high as 50% at the Primary level, 25% in the Secondary level, 12% in the Higher Secondary level, and thereafter hardly a few are left for reaching the graduation level.

The girls are given in marriage very early, mostly within the age of 18 years and the boys are generally given in marriage within 21 years. Due to their low standard of education, their representation in the different services of the Government and non-Government organizations is also very insignificant. Similarly, the number of Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, chartered Accountants and other professional is also
negligible in this class. There is no MLA, no MP, no Member of the Zilla Parishad, Block Panchayat or Gram Panchayat from among them.

The documentary evidence produced by them indicate that they do not possess any land in West Bengal. They have also got no petty family business, small trade or medium size business in West Bengal. It has also been submitted in the documentary evidence that 75% of them live below the poverty line; 15% above the poverty line; 5% earn a little surplus; and about 5% of them belong to the affluent group.

The documentary evidence indicate that 35% of them live in thatched hutments; 50% in mud-wall kutcha house; 10% in brick-wall semi pucca houses; and 5% in pucca houses.

About 5% of them have got bath-room/toilet; 10% of them use dug-well system; 35% of them use thatched sheds; and 50% of them go to the fields to attend the call of nature. About 5% of them receive pipe-water supply; 10% of them use tube-wells; 35% of them use big tanks; and 50% of them use small ponds.

The Members of the Commission asked questions in order to ascertain whether the ‘Barbhuya’/Bhujawalla’ class is actually one class or they belong to two different classes. The Commission had drawn their attention to their evidence stating that the ‘Barbhuya’ class is an identifiable endogamous social group in which infiltration from outside is not possible. But the term ‘Bhujawalla’ appears to be connected with the profession of dealing with ‘Bhujas’, and as such, anyone making business with ‘Bhujas’ may claim to belong to the ‘Bhujawalla’ class; although those persons engaged in the preparation and selling of ‘Bhujas’ may belong to classes other than the ‘Bharbhuya’. The representatives of Shri Kanyakubj Navayubak Sing (W.B.), who appeared before the Commission on the dates of hearing could not satisfactorily analyse the position as to how the ‘Bhujawalla’ class, which may be comprised of several classes and do not actually belong to the category of ‘Bharbhuya’ class, could be indentified and excluded if the ‘Bharbhuya’ class is recognised to be a backward class. In view of this position, the Commission took the view that the ‘Bhujawalla’ class should not be linked up with the
‘Bharbhuja’ class while considering the backwardness of the ‘Bharbhuja’ class. The Commission observed that it would not be appropriate to consider the eligibility of the ‘Bharbhuja’ class in the list of Backward Classes, along with the ‘Bhujawalla’ class as it will lead to confusion in the identification of the persons if the ‘Bharbhuja’ class is recognised to be a backward class.

The Commission further observed that the ‘Bhujawalla’ class has not made any request for inclusion of their class in the list of Backward Classes. It is the ‘Bharbhuja’ class who stated that they are locally known as ‘Bhujawalla’, and that is why they have made request for inclusion of the ‘Bharbhuja’/’Bhujawalla’ class in the list of Backward Classes. They are identified by their class-name as ‘Bharbhuja’, and the name ‘Bhujawalla’ is nothing but their professional name. Taking all these facts into consideration, the Commission felt that if the ‘Bharbhuja’/’Bhujawalla’ class is included in the list of Backward Classes, the ‘Bhujawalla’ people who are engaged in the profession of selling of ‘Bhujas’ but actually do not belong to the ‘Bharbhuja’ class – and might belong to some other upper class who are not necessarily backward – may by virtue of the use of the professional term – ‘Bhujawalla’, claim the benefits to which the ‘Bharbhuja’ class may be entitled if that class is recognised to be a backward class. In the circumstances, the ‘Bharbhuja’ class which deserves to be included in the list of Backward Classes, irrespective of the question whether they are locally known as ‘Bhujawalla’ or by any other professional name in the localities in which they live in West Bengal, may be included in the list of Backward Classes.

Accordingly, the Commission took the view that the ‘Bhujawalla’ class as such, should not be recommended for inclusion in the list of Backward Classes, and it is only the ‘Bharbhuja’ class which should be recommended for inclusion in the list of Backward Classes in the State. There will be no difficulty for any person in the ‘Bharbhuja’ class to be included in the list of Backward Classes along with the other persons in their class, even if they are locally known as ‘Bhujawalla’ or by any other name, as they all belong to the ‘Bharbhuja’ class which is proposed to be recommended for inclusion in the list of Backward Classes. This will ensure that any person who is a
‘Bhujawalla’ and does not belong to the ‘Bharbhuja’ class will not be entitled to claim the benefits which may be available to the members of the ‘Bharbhuja’ class which is considered to be a backward class and is to be included in the list of Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal.

Taking into consideration the facts stated, the materials furnished and the submissions made, the Commission has arrived at the conclusion that the ‘Bharbhuja’ class constitutes socially and educationally a backward class in the State and the Commission recommends to the State Government that the ‘Bharbhuja’ class should be included in the list of Backward Classes in the State and the Commission, accordingly advises the Government of West Bengal to do so.

No one appeared on behalf of the State Government, although Notice was served on the Government of West Bengal. It may be noted that there is no objection in giving benefit to this class and nobody has raised and objection to that effect.

Sd/-
(Amal Kumar Das)
Member

Sd/-
(Bela Bhattacharya)
Member

Sd/-
(Ramen Poddar)
Member

Sd/-
(J. Misra)
Member-Secretary

Sd/-
(A. N. Sen)
Chairman