

Supreme Court of India

Srish Kumar Choudhury vs State Of Tripura And Ors on 23 February, 1990

Equivalent citations: 1990 AIR 991, 1990 SCR (1) 576

Author: M Rangnath

Bench: Misra Rangnath

PETITIONER:

SRISH KUMAR CHOUDHURY

Vs.

RESPONDENT:

STATE OF TRIPURA AND ORS.

DATE OF JUDGMENT 23/02/1990

BENCH:

MISRA RANGNATH

BENCH:

MISRA RANGNATH

PUNCHHI, M.M.

AGRAWAL, S.C. (J)

CITATION:

1990 AIR 991                      1990 SCR (1) 576

1990 SCC Supl. 220              JT 1990 (2) 27

1990 SCALE (1) 300

ACT:

Constitution of India--Articles 341 and 342/Items  
15-18--Laskar Community--Inclusion in the list of Scheduled  
Tribes--Entertainment

HEADNOTE:

The appellant is a resident of Tripura State. He asserted that he belonged to the Laskar community which was included in State records in the Deshi Tripura community and in the former State of Tripura this community had always been treated as Scheduled Tribes, and the members of the community freely enjoyed all the benefits available to members of the Scheduled Tribes until 1976 when the State Government decided to treat members of this community as not belonging to the Scheduled Tribes and issued instructions to the state authorities to implement the Government decision. Being aggrieved the appellant filed a writ petition before the High Court in a representative capacity praying for appropriate directions directing the State Government to continue to treat the appellant and members of Laskar community as belonging to Scheduled Tribes and extend all the benefits available to Scheduled Tribes to this community. In

support of his claim the appellant relied upon the two circulars of the erstwhile State of Tripura dated December 1930 and February 1941 as also the census report of the ex-state of Tripura, besides the authorities of this Court. The respondent took the plea that Laskar community was never included in the Scheduled Tribes Order and as such there was no question of excluding it from the List. After considering the rival contentions of the parties coupled with the historical background bearing on the subject, the statement made by the Advocate-General that the Memos will be given prospective operation, the High Court dismissed the Writ Petition. Hence this appeal by Special Leave. This appeal initially came up before a two judges Bench for final hearing when on a statement made by the Counsel for the Union of India that a representation made by the appellant and members of his community for inclusion their caste-Laskar, in the Presidential order under Article 342 is being looked into and is being placed before the Parliamentary Committee for review of the position, the Court disposed of the appeal in terms of the assurance

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given on behalf of the Union. It was specifically stated in the Court's order that in case the community is not included in the Presidential Order, it would be open to the appellant to take such action as may be available to him in law. Nothing having happened at governmental level, with the consent of the parties, the order disposing of the appeal was recalled and the appeal has thus now come up for hearing.

Dismissing the appeal, this Court,

HELD: Reservation has become important in view of the increasing competition in society and that probably had led to the anxiety of the appellant and the people in his community to claim reservation. [586G]

In Tripura the Scheduled Tribes within the meaning of the definition given in Article 366 of the Constitution have been 'Jamatia, Noatia, Riang and Tripura/Tripuri/Tipperia' apart from 15 other tribes. It is the case of the appellant that Laskars are a part of the tribe named as 'Tripura, Tripuri and Tippera' covered by Entry 18. [581D]

This Court should not assume jurisdiction and enter into an enquiry to determine whether the three terms indicated in the Presidential Order include Deshi Tripura which covers the Laskar community; but it is appropriate to commend to the authorities concerned that as and when the question is reviewed it should be examined whether the claim of the appellant representing the Laskar community to be included in the scheduled tribes is genuine and should, therefore, be entertained. [586F-G]

Even if historically this tribe was covered by the general description of Tripura, that by itself may not justify its inclusion in the Order as a Scheduled Tribe. That is an additional feature which has weighed with us in

taking our decision not to interfere in the matter. [587C]

B. Basavalingappa v. D. Munichinnappa, [1966] 1 SCR 316; Bhaiyalal v. Harikishan Singh and Ors., [1965] 2 SCR 877; Parsram and Anr. v. Shivchand and Ors., [1969] 1 SCC 20; Kishorilal Hans v. Raja Ram Singh and Ors., [1972] 2 SCR 632; Dina v. Narayan Singh, 38 ELR 212 and Bhैया Ram Munda v. Anirudh Patarand Ors., [1971] 1 SCR 804, referred to.

JUDGMENT:

CIVIL APPELLATE JURISDICTION: Civil Appeal No. 479 of 1986.

From the Judgment and Order dated 18.3. 1985 of the Assam High Court in Civil Rule No. 139 of 1979. A.K. Ganguli, A. Mariarputham, A.D. Sikri and Dilip Tandon for the Appellant.

Kapil Sibal, Additional Solicitor General, Rajiv Dhawan, Gopal Singh, C.V.S. Rao, Adv. (NP) and R.B. Misra for the appearing respondents.

Hardev Singh and S. Ravindra Bhat for the intervenor. The Judgment of the Court was delivered by RANGANATH MISRA, J. This appeal by special leave calls in question the judgment of the Guwahati High Court dated March 18, 1985, dismissing the appellant's writ petition. The appellant is a resident of Tripura State. In his application in a representative capacity before the High court he maintained that he belonged to the Laskar community which had always been treated in the erstwhile State of Tripura as a Scheduled Tribe and on that basis in the State records was included in the Deshi Tripura community long before integration of the Ruler's State of Tripura with the Union of India. Members of the Laskar community freely enjoyed all the benefits available to members of the Schedule Tribes until in 1976 the State Government decided to treat members of that community as not belonging to the Scheduled Tribes and issued instructions to the State authorities to implement the Government decision. That led to the filing of the petition before the High Court. In the writ petition appellant prayed for appropriate directions to continue to treat the appellant and members of his community as belonging to the Scheduled Tribes and for a direction to the State Government to extend all the benefits admissible to members of the Scheduled Tribes to members of the Laskar community. Before the High Court the respondents disputed the claim and maintained that the Laskar community was never included in the Scheduled Tribes Order and as such there was no question of exclusion from the list. A historical study of the claim would show that in the past Tripura/Tripuri/Tipperas which have been included in the Presidential Notification never included the Laskar community. Tripuras were a Tibeto-Burman race akin to the Shan tribe and Tipperas were divided into four groups, namely, (i) Puran or original Tipperas; (ii) Jamatias; (iii) Noatias or Nutan Tripuras and (iv) Riangs. Respondents relied upon Government records and official publications in support of the aforesaid stand.

Before the High Court two circulars of the erstwhile State of Tripura, one being of December, 1930, and the other of February, 1941, as also the census report of the ex-State of Tripura were produced in support of the claim advanced by the appellant. Several authorities of this Court were relied upon

for finding out the scope of enquiry in a claim of this type and ultimately by the impugned judgment the High Court dismissed the writ petition but on the basis of a statement made by the Advocate-General appearing for the State, it recorded:

"We keep on record the statement made by the learned Advocate-General, Tripura, on instruction that as a result of the impugned Memorandum No. 18887-19077/TW/6-4(L-D) dated 28.4. 1979 the certificates already issued would be treated as infructuous prospectively and not retrospectively and those who have already enjoyed the benefits by virtue of such Scheduled Tribe certificates they shall not be deprived of the benefits they have already enjoyed and the Memorandum shall be effective from its date prospectively insofar as the future benefits are concerned."

This appeal had come up for final hearing earlier and by a brief judgment reported in [1987] 3 SCC 463, a two-Judge Bench recorded the following order:

"The record before us shows that the people of the Laskar community have been treated as members of the Scheduled Tribes and there have been some letters from the Government of India to the State Government in support of that position; it is, however, a fact that there has been no clear inclusion of the community in an appropriate Presidential Order. The appellant has maintained that even in the absence of such a clear specification in a Presidential Order, as a sub-group under one of the notified categories, the appellant's community has been enjoying the privileges. We have been told by the learned counsel for the Union of India that the representation made by the appellant and members of his community for inclusion in the Presidential Order under Article 342 of the Constitution is being looked into and is being placed before the Parliamentary Committee in accordance with the prescribed procedure for a review of the position. He has assured us that the Government of India will take steps to finalise the matter at an early date and may in compliance with the procedure as prescribed, take a final decision. In case the community is not included in the Presidential Order, it would be open to the appellant to take such action as may be available in law."

The appellant waited for some time and approached the Government of India for quick action but when nothing happened, an application for directions was made in this Court. Several adjournments were taken but Government could not take any decision. Ultimately, by consent of parties, the order disposing of the appeal was recalled and the appeal was directed to be set down for re-hearing. That is how the appeal is now before us.

Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution deal with Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes respectively and contain almost identical provision. We may extract Article 342 dealing with Scheduled Tribes:

"342.(1) The President may, with respect to any State or Union Territory and where it is a State after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification, specify the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes in relation to that State or Union Territory, as the case may be.

(2) parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of Scheduled Tribes specified in a notification issued under clause (1) any tribe or tribal community or part of or group within any tribe or tribal community, but save as aforesaid a notification issued under the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification."

Article 366(25) defines 'Scheduled Tribes' to mean such tribes or tribal communities or parts or groups within such tribal communities as are deemed under Art. 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this Constitution. The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) (Union Territories) Order, 1950 relating to Tripura included 19 tribes within the notification. Items 15, 16, 17 and 18 are relevant for our purpose and they were:

"15. Tripura or Tripuri, Tippera.

16. Jamatia

17. Noatia

18. Riang"

Following the Reorganisation Act (37 of 1956), the Ministry of Home Affairs on October 29, 1956, notified the list of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In respect of the then Union Territory of Tripura the same communities were relisted. Then came the North Eastern Area (Reorganisation) Act (81 of 1971) which in the Fourth Schedule contained amendment to the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950. Items 15 to 18 in the Scheduled contained the same descriptions. The Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, (108 of 1976) in relation to Tripura in the Second Schedule carried the same in Entries 7, 14, 16 and 18. It is, therefore, clear that in Tripura the scheduled tribes within the meaning of the definition given in Art. 366 of the Constitution have been the following: 'Jamatia, Noatia, Riang and Tripura/Tripuri/Tippera' apart from 15 other tribes as specified. It is not necessary to refer to the 15 others inasmuch as it is the case of the appellant that Laskars are a part of the tribe named as Tripura, Tripuri or Tippera covered by Entry 18. Before advertent to the evidence upon which the appellant relies in support of his stand, it is necessary that the scope of enquiry to be conducted in this regard by the Court may be determined. There are precedents of this Court which have to be first referred to. A Constitution Bench in the case of *B. Basavalingappa v. D. Munichinnappa*, [1965] 1 SCR 316 examined the provisions of Art. 341 which contained similar provisions for the scheduled castes with reference to an election dispute. Wanchoo, J. spoke for the Constitution Bench thus:

"Clause (1) provides that the President may with respect to any State, after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification, specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of the Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State. The object of this provision obviously is to avoid all disputes as to whether a particular caste is a Scheduled Caste or not and only those castes can be Scheduled Castes which are notified in the Order made by the President under Art. 341 after consultation with the Governor where it relates to such castes in a State. Clause (2) then provides

that Par- liament may by law include in or exclude from the list of scheduled castes specified in a notification issued under cl. (1) any caste, race or tribe or part of or group within any caste, race or tribe. The power was thus given to Par- liament to modify the notification made by the President under cl. (1). Further cl. (2) goes on to provide that a notification issued under cl. (1) shall not be varied by any subsequent notification, thus making the notification by the President final for all times except for modification by law as provided by cl. (2). Clearly therefore Art. 341 provides for a notification and for its finality except when altered by Parliament by law ..... Therefore in view of this stringent provision of the Constitution with respect to a notification issued under cl. (1) it is not open to any one to include any caste as coming within the notification on the basis of evidence--Oral or documentary,--if the caste in question does not find specific mention in the terms of the notification ..... It may be accepted that it is not open to make any modification in the Order by producing evidence to show (for example) that though caste A alone is mentioned in the Order, caste B is also a part of caste A and there- fore must be deemed to be included in caste A. It may also be accepted that wherever one caste has another name it has been mentioned in brackets after it in Order. Therefore, generally speaking it would not be open to any person to lead evidence to establish that caste B is part of caste A notified in the Order."

The factual dispute raised in the case before the Con- stitution Bench was whether Voddar caste was included in Bhovi caste which was one of the notified castes. The Con- stitution Bench dealt with the evidence and ultimately said: "In the circumstances therefore we agree with the High Court that respondent No. 1 though Voddar by caste belongs to the scheduled caste of Bhovi mentioned in the Order. We may again repeat that we have referred to the evidence in this case only because there was undoubtedly no caste known as Bhovi in the Mysore State as it was before 1956 and we had to find out therefore which caste was meant by the word 'Bhovi' as used in the Order. But for this fact it would not have been open to any party to give evidence to the effect that caste A mentioned in the Order includes or was the same as caste B where caste A does exist in the area to which the Order applies."

A similar dispute again came before a Constitution Bench in Bhaiyalal v. Harikishan Singh & Ors., [1965] 2 SCR 877 with reference to a scheduled tribe in an election dispute. Gajendragadkar, CJ speaking for the Court said: "It is obvious that in specifying castes, races or tribes, the President has been expressly authorised to limit the notification to parts of or groups within the castes, races or tribes, and that must mean that after examining the educational and social backwardness of a caste, race or tribe, the President may well come to the conclusion that not the whole caste, race or tribe but parts of or groups within them should be specified. Similarly, the President can specify castes, races or tribes or parts thereof in relation not only to the entire State, but in relation to parts of the State where he is satisfied that the examina- tion of the social and educational backwardness of the race, caste or tribe justifies such specification. In fact, it is well-known that before a notification is issued under Art. 341(1), an elaborate enquiry is made and it is as a result of this enquiry that social justice is sought to be done to the castes, races or tribes as may appear to be necessary, and in doing justice, it would obviously be expedient not only to specify parts or groups of castes, races or tribes, but to make the said specification by reference to different areas in the State."

What we have extracted above clearly supports the view of the other Constitution Bench, namely, the list is intended to be final.

We may now refer to a two-Judge Bench decision in the case of *Parsram & Anr. v. Shivchand & Ors.*, [1969] 1 SCC 20. Here again, the Scheduled Castes Order was in issue in an election dispute and the question for consideration was whether *mochi* was included in the notified caste of *chamar*. The Court referred to both the Constitution Bench judgments and indicated:

"These judgments are binding on us and we do not therefore think that it would be of any use to look into the gazeteers and the glossaries on the Punjab castes and tribes to which reference was made at the Bar to find out whether *Mochi* and *Chamar* in some parts of the State at least meant the same caste although there might be some difference in the professions followed by their members, the main difference being that *Chamars* skin dead animals which *Mochis* do not. However that may be, the question not being open to agitation by evidence and being one the determination of which lies within the exclusive power of the President, it is not for us to examine it and come to a conclusion that if a person was in fact a *Mochi*, he could still claim to belong to the scheduled caste of *Chamars* and be allowed to contest an election on that basis."

In *Kishorilal Hans v. Raja Ram Singh & Ors.*, [1972] 2 SCR 632 a two-Judge Bench was called upon to decide whether *jatav* caste not mentioned in the scheduled castes of *Datia* district of *Madhya Pradesh* in the Order was included in *chamar* caste. The Court indicated:

"If the matter were *res-integra* we would have felt a good deal of difficulty in reconciling with the constitutional provisions the scheme followed in the state and the Orders concerned by which some caste has been included in some districts of the same State and excluded in the other districts. This Court, however, has in *Bhaiyalal v. Harikishan Singh & Ors.*, *supra*, made observations repelling the contention that under Art. 341 of the Constitution the President was not authorised to limit the notification to parts of a State .... In *Bhaiyalal's* case the appellant's election had been challenged on the ground that he belonged to the *Dohar* caste which was not recognised as a scheduled caste for the district in question and so his declaration that he belonged to the *Chamar* caste which was a Scheduled Caste was improperly and illegally accepted by the Returning Officer. It was held that the plea that though the appellant was not a *Chamar* as such he could claim the same status by reason of the fact that he belonged to *Dohar* caste which is a sub-caste of the *Chamar* caste could not be accepted. An enquiry of that kind would not be permissible having regard to the provisions contained in Art. 341 of the Constitution."

We may now refer to two separate judgments of this Court in the case *Dina v. Narayan Singh*, 38 ELR 212 and *Bhaiya Ram Munda v.*

*Anirudh Patar & Ors.*, [1971] 1 SCR 804. Both were rendered by a common Bench of Shah (as he then was) and Bhargava, JJ. In the first case the question for consideration was interpretation of Entry 12 in the Scheduled Tribes Order. The entry read. '*Gond* including *Mana*'. The Court interpreted that *Mana* community was a substitute of *Gond* and on a proper construction of the entry *Manas* not being *Gonds* were not intended to be included. The decision in that case is not

relevant for our purpose.

In Bhaiya Ram's case, the tribe specified in the Scheduled Tribes Order was Munda. The respondent was a Patar but he maintained that it was included in the notified tribe. The Bench was of the view that evidence was admissible for the purpose of showing what an entry in the Presidential Order was intended to mean though evidence could not be accepted for modifying the order by including a new tribe. Since the respondents' case was that Patars were Mundas, evidence could be given to show that the entry 'Munda' included 'Patar'.

These authorities clearly indicate, therefore, that the entries in the Presidential Order have to be taken as final and the scope of enquiry and admissibility of evidence is confined within the limitations indicated. It is, however, not open to the Court to make any addition or subtraction from the Presidential Order.

The evidence in this case on which reliance has been placed in support of the claim that Laskars are included in the tribe described as 'Tripura/Tripuri/Tipperia' mainly consists of two circulars of the erstwhile State of Tripura. Circular No. 9 is of December, 1930. There is a narration therein to the following effect:

"In this State Tripura Sampradaya means the following five communities'

1. Puratan Tripura
2. Deshi Tripura (related to Laskar Class)
3. Noatia
4. Jamatia
5. Riang"

In Circular No. 10 which is of the year 1941, it has been said:

"In this State Tripura--Kshatriya denotes the following classes:

1. Puratan Tripura
2. Deshi Tripura (related to Laskar Class)
3. Noatia
4. Jamatia
5. Riang"



The latter document related to census operation in the State. From these two documents it is clear that Deshi Tripura covered the Laskar class while there was another class called 'Tripura/Tripuri/Tippura' which did not relate to Laskar class. The Presidential Order has admitted the three tribes of Noatia, Jamatia and Riang in terms but while dealing with the two classes of Puratan Tripura and Deshi Tripura covering the Laskar class, it has adopted the description of those three terms without referring to Puratan or Deshi.

The two Constitution Bench judgments indicate that enquiry is contemplated before the Presidential Order is made but any amendment to the Presidential Order can only be by legislation. We do not think we should assume jurisdiction and enter into an enquiry to determine whether the three terms indicated in the Presidential Order include Deshi Tripura which covers the Laskar community; but we consider it appropriate to commend to the authorities concerned that as and when the question is reviewed it should be examined whether the claim of the appellant representing the Laskar community to be included in the scheduled tribes is genuine and should, therefore, be entertained. Reservation has become important in view of the increasing competition in society and that probably had led to the anxiety of the appellant and the people in his community to claim reservation. As pointed out by the Constitution Bench judgments which we have referred to above, the basis on which inclusion into or exclusion from the enumerated list made under Art. 342 is contemplated is the changing economic, educational and other situations of the members of any particular tribe. Keeping that in view the State Government may initiate appropriate proposals for modification in case it is satisfied and after appropriate enquiry if the authorities are satisfied that the claim is genuine and tenable, amendment may be undertaken as provided by the Constitution. This Court has indicated in some of the judgments referred to above that as a result of the detailed enquiry made as to the economic status, the level of education and the necessity of protection, inclusion into or exclusion from the Order is made. This material relating to the Laskar tribe in 1930 or 1941 may not have been considered sufficient before the respective Orders were made for including the Laskars, said to have been covered by the description of Deshi Tripura. Therefore, even if historically this tribe was covered by the general description of Tripura, that by itself may not justify its inclusion in the Order as a scheduled tribe. That is an additional feature which has weighed with us in taking our decision not to interfere in the matter.

The claim of the appellant is dismissed so far as this Court is concerned but the observations which we have made may be kept in view. There shall be no order for costs throughout.

Y. Lal

Appeal dismissed.