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रादरय-राधिव
राष्ट्रीय पिछडा वर्ग आयोग

भारत सरकार
त्रिकूट-१, भीकाजी कामा प्लेस, नई दिल्ली - ११००६६

Member - Secretary
National Commission for Backward Classes
Government of India
Trikoot - 1, Bhikaiji Cama Place, New Delhi - 110 066

NCBC Advice No. Tripura 17/98

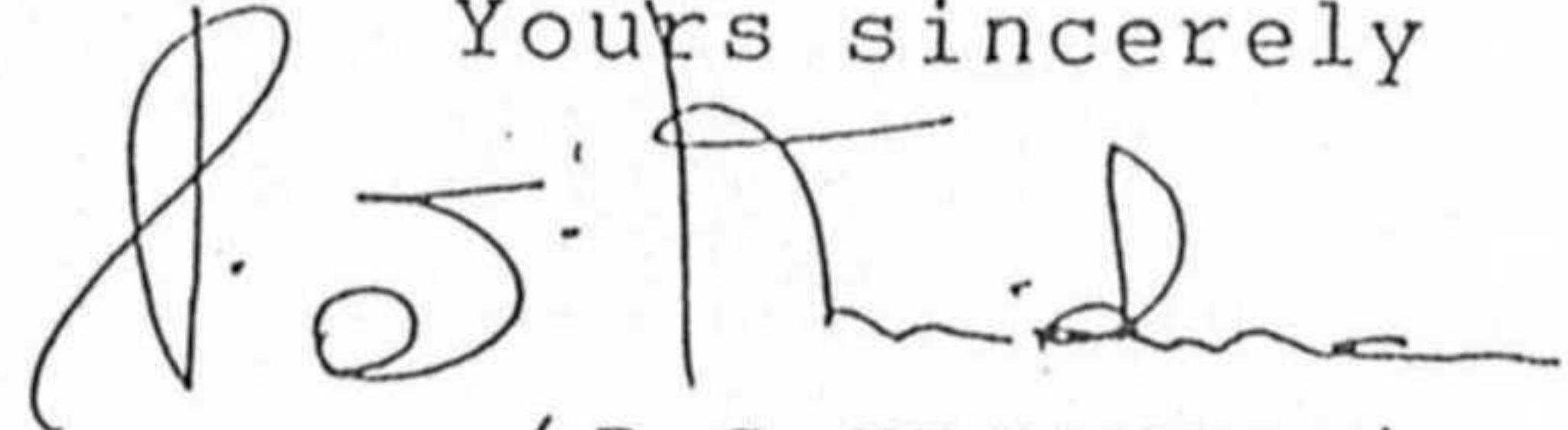
14.12.1998

Dear Shri Manavalan,

I am sending herewith the Advice of the National Commission for Backward Classes under Section 9(1) of the NCBC Act for the Rejection of the Request for Inclusion of "Saha" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for Tripura, duly authenticated, for necessary action by the Central Government under Section 9(2) of the Act.

2. With this, Advices on 488(281 for Inclusion + 207 for Rejection) castes, sub-castes, synonyms etc. have been tendered to the Government by the Commission, after its reconstitution in 1997, of which 482 (275 for Inclusion + 207 for Rejection) are still pending with the Government for Notification.

Yours sincerely


(P.S. KRISHNAN)

Encl: As stated.

Shri D.K. Manavalan
Secretary to Govt. of India
Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment
Shastri Bhavan
NEW DELHI

o/c

15/12/98

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

Tripura Bench

Findings

Per Justice P.K. Shyamsundar, Chairperson

Case: Request for Inclusion of "Saha" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for Tripura.

I. Request

This case arises from the Request received in this Commission from Shri Ranjit Saha, Rani Gaon, Maglishpur, West Tripura District & others and Shri Binay Bhorodan Saha, President, Tripura Backward Saha Samity, 24 Gangail Road, South of Netaji School, Agartala-799001 & Others.

II. Public Hearing

2. The two-Member Tripura Bench of the Commission consisting of Justice P.K. Shyamsundar, Hon'ble Chairperson and Shri P.S. Krishnan, Hon'ble Member-Secretary, NCBC held a Public Hearing in respect of this Request at Agartala on 06.04.98. At the Public Hearing the State Government was represented by Shri S.C. Das, Secretary SC & ST Welfare Department and other officials. Shri K.R. Das, Chairperson, Shri S. Bhowmik, Member-Secretary and Shri Matilal Sarkar, Member of Tripura State Backward Classes Commission were also present at the Public Hearing who gave valuable information. The community was represented by Shri Deepti Roy & others.

AUTHENTICATED
P. S. KRISHNAN
Member Secretary
National Commission
for Backward Classes

III. Facts

3. The Written representation received from Shri Ranjit Saha states that 'Originally the entire "Saha" community of undivided Bengal was engaged in their main occupation of preparation and sale of country liquor. According to the applicants, nearly 96% of people of "Saha" community of Tripura migrated from the then East Pakistan after partition of India as refugees and almost all of them (about 82%) are living under the poverty line and also backward in education. They pointed out that in West Bengal Mandal Commission had identified and included "Saha" community in the List of Backward Classes. They referred to the latest Voter List published by the Govt. of Tripura and the last census report of Tripura stating that "Sahas" constitute 10% of the total population of Tripura (27,57,205) and are known by surname/title as Saha, Roy, Chowdhury, Poddar, Roy Chowdhary, Das, Bhowmik etc. Nearly 80% of the members of the community live in Katcha houses and are engaged in manual labour. The information furnished in the NCBC questionnaire states that the Saha Community is identified as sellers of essential commodities and in terms of caste system this occupation is regarded as undignified resulting in social, educational and economic backwardness.
4. Be that as it may, the representation received on behalf of the 'Saha' community adverted to supra was taken up for consideration at the Public Hearing where we heard a number of representatives on behalf of the community who stated that most of the members of the community are engaged in small business. According to them, 30-40% of the families of the community live in the city of Agartala. They also stated that they are socially on par with Nathjogis, but the representatives of the Nathjoghi community who were also present emphatically denied this statement and argued that Sahas are a socially advanced caste/community. On the whole, from the evidence adduced before the Bench, it does appear that Saha is one of the relatively prosperous communities in Tripura. They also claimed that they are the same as Sunris, but admitted that in Tripura, even in rural areas, the name 'Sunri' is unpopular. They further pointed out that their

Enpooverished condition has prevented them from being educationally advanced leading to retardation in social status.

5. Ethnographic literature (Tribes and Castes of Bengal Vol-III by Risley) accounts "Saha" as under:

"Saha, Sahu, a title of the Desa sub-caste of Gandhbaniks in Bengal, a title of Napits, Sonar, Telis and Sunris "

6. The above excerpt makes it is apparent that 'Saha' is only a title assumed by people of many castes, both of forward and backward castes. Therefore, "Saha" in our view is only a title, not being a caste cannot be included in the Central List of Backward Classes because only a caste can be accommodated but not the title assumed by a caste.

7. In 1931 Census Report of Bengal and Sikkim observations regarding "Saha" as a caste and a caste title are summed up as under:

"The word Saha is borne as a title or surname by many persons among the mercantile classes in Bengal, Bihar and the United Provinces. It is derived from the Sanskrit word Sadhu, meaning a money-lender and a trader, through the intermediate forms, Sahu, Sawoo and Sah. *Both the words Saha and Sadhu are to be found in use as a title or surname among different trading classes in Bengal.* Thus there are Saha and Sadhu families among the Gandhabanik, Sankhabanik, Tili, Tanti and Shundi Castes. *In this respect Saha may be compared with the titles of Rai, Chaudhuri, Majundar etc which are borne by men of different castes, high and low, with the difference that the former is used only among the mercantile castes.....*

.....There are many families who use the titles or surname of Pramanik, Poddar, Das etc., but belong to the Saha Caste.....

ATTACHED
P. S. KRISHNAM
Commissioner
Board Classes

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.....If the occupation of a caste be the sole determining factor in the matter of social gradation, *the Saha caste of Bengal, at least those of them who are associated with trade and banking, must be given the status of the Vaishya.....*

.....It is mainly on account of the diverse origins of the Saha families of Bengal and of their juxtaposition in relation to the liquor-selling Shundis that there are a comparatively large number of subdivisions in the Saha community.....While the Sahas proper are numerous in Eastern Bengal and few in the western districts, the case is exactly the reverse with the Gandhabaniks and Suvarnabaniks. *This geographical distribution of the mercantile communities leads to the supposition that the original differences between the various trading groups were not very great, most of them being regarded as Vaisyas, and that the later differences in status were in a large and revived Brahmanism. Thus it is not unlikely that some of the Sahas of Eastern Bengal and the Gandhabaniks of Western Bengal may have been descended from a common stock and that the separation took place not more than one thousand years ago. Tradition is not wanting to show that the forefathers of some of the Saha families of Eastern Bengal traded in those articles which are nowadays regarded as the monopoly of the Gandhabanik caste.....*

8. Jyotirmoyee Sarma (Caste Dynamic Among the Bengali Hindus, Firma KLM Private Ltd., Calcutta, 1980) gives the cases of Sahas as an example of castes which gained higher status, and became identified with new names. To establish this, Jyotirmoyee Sarma gives the following account:-

“The Shaha caste is another merchant caste which has a low ceremonial rank but high secular rank. The literacy rates of the Subarnabaniks and the Shahas came, in the order mentioned, directly after that of the Kayasthas in the 1921 Census of India. The Shahas, as well as the Subarnabaniks, associate with other high caste members in educational and occupational situations as equal persons.....

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The Saha caste of Bengal has made claims for Vaisya status. In the Census of India, 1901, the Shahas were listed with the Sunris under the heading of "Sunri or Shaha", the name Shaha being taken to be another name of the Sunri Caste. According to the Census of India, 1911:

'one progressive section aspired to a separate record of their community and to recognition as Vaisyas, as they disclaim all connections with the Sunris, and have nothing to do with the manufacture and sale of liquor, the traditional occupation of the Sunris, but are engaged in trade, money-lending and zamindari. Their claim to be Vaisyas has been recognised by certain Hindu authorities, but it was obviously impossible to allow the use of the generic term, and in any case the question of status was beyond the scope of the census....A separate entry has been made for Shahas in the caste table...This heading is by no means a satisfactory one, as the Bengali Sunris from whom they wish to be dissociated, also has the same name. In Calcutta the members of this community (Shahas) returned their caste as Sadhubani - a new and distinctive name used exclusively by them, which means simply a trader and is therefore an appropriate designation.'

By 1931, the status of the Shahas as different from the Sunris was fully established not only in the census returns but also in general estimation. There was now a claim of differentiation within the Shaha caste itself. The two sub-castes of the Shaha caste both claimed to be recorded in the Vaisya varna, but the Varendra Shahas claimed to be of a more pure blood than the Rarhi Shahas. The professed object of the latter sub-caste was to promote the solidarity of all groups of Shahas through their Vaishya Shaha Mahasabha, while preserving their separation from the Sunris. 'The claim to inclusion within the Vaishya varna is not supported unanimously by the caste and protests against it were received from caste members who alleged that the caste does not wear the sacred thread or recite the gayatri mantra, that they practice sagotra marriage and observe on bereavement the ceremonial period of pollution for thirty days.' A decision of the Calcutta High Court in 1925 implied that the Shahas were of Sudra Status."

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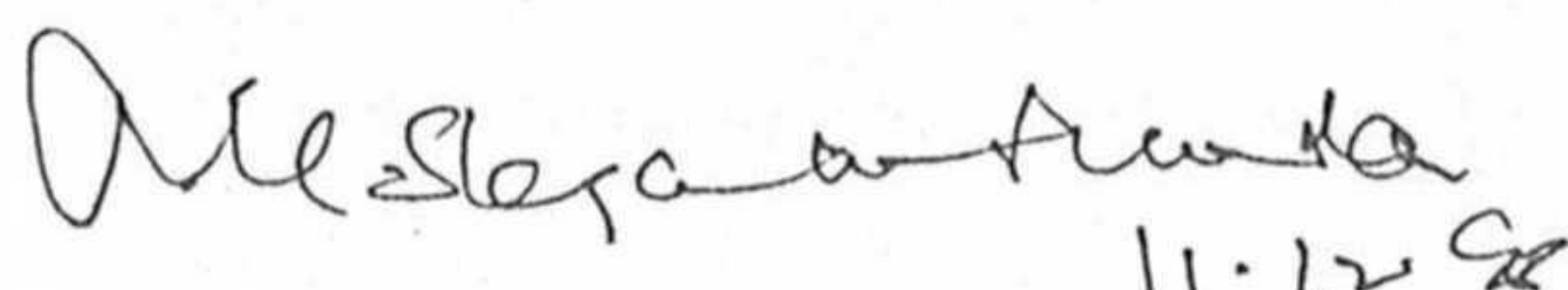
P. S. KRISHNAN
Member of the Commission
for Scheduled Castes

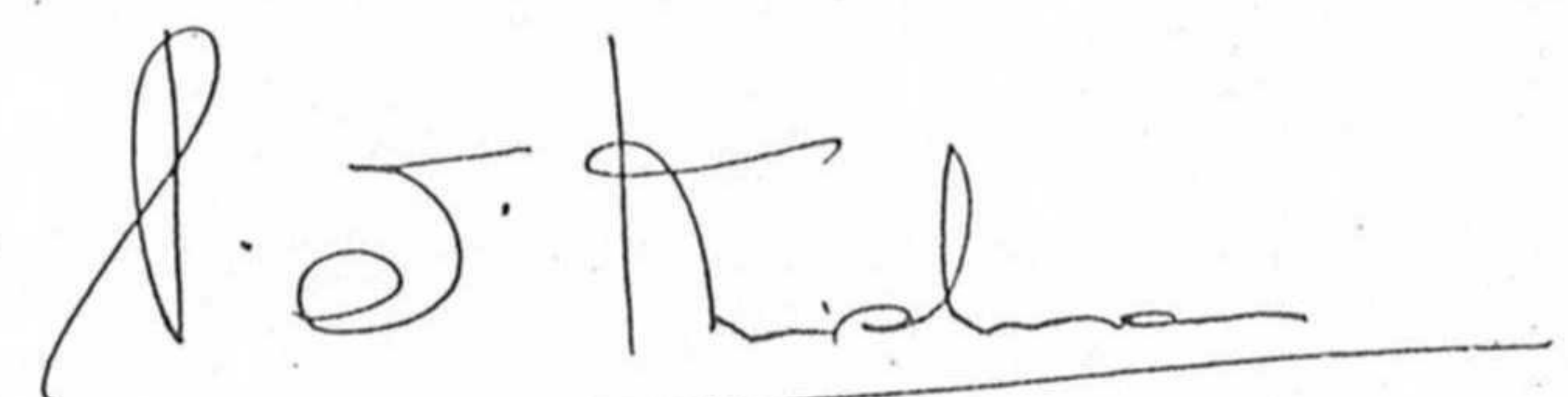
9. From the above account, it is evident that the evolution of "Saha" as a distinct and separate caste from the Sunris has been well established by the time of 1931. The confirmation of this separation can also be seen from the fact, mentioned by Jyotirmoyee Sarma while pointing out endogamy as a significant feature of caste, that "the Shahas do not intermarry with the Sunris."

IV. Findings

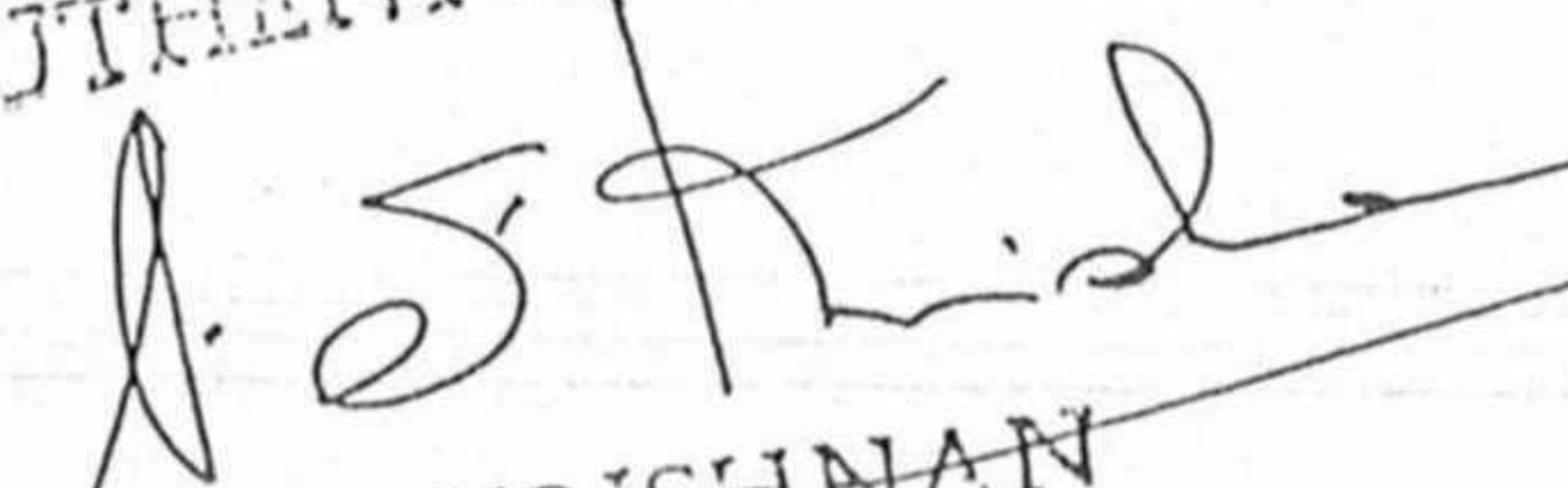
10. It transpires from the foregoing material that "Saha" is a title used by both backward and forward castes' members, and even otherwise if it is indeed a caste it is of trading people such as that of the Gandhabaniks, who enjoy a high social status in society and more in Tripura.

11. The claim of the representatives of the community that they are Sunris cannot be acceded to because the Sahas have disassociated themselves and separated from Sunris long back, although "Saha" as a title or surname is also used by Sunris as well as by some other castes. From the evidence adduced before the Bench, particularly from the statement of the representatives of the community that they are mostly engaged in 'small business', mainly in pharmaceutical line, the 'Saha', in Tripura at any rate, is an advanced caste/community. In any view of the matter, 'Saha' being a trading caste which enjoys a high social status in society even now, does not merit inclusion in the Central List of Backward Classes for Tripura. Hence, we recommend that the Request for Inclusion of 'Saha' caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for Tripura be rejected for reasons supra.


11.12.98
(Justice P.K. SHYAMSUNDAR)


11.12.98 (P.S. KRISHNAN)

AUTHENTICATED


P. S. KRISHNAN
Member
for Backward
Classes

V. ADVICE OF THE COMMISSION

12. The Commission considered and agreed in full with the above Findings of the Tripura Bench and decided to tender the following Advice to the Central Government under Section 9(1) of the NCBC Act 1993 for action by the Central Government under section 9(2) of the Act:-

The Request for inclusion of "Saha" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for Tripura be **rejected**.

P. K. Dasgupta
11.12.98

P. J. Thakur
11.12.98

Ashayan
11.11.98

Madan Mohan
11.12.98

On account of the unfortunate demise of one of the Members Shri Navtej Puadhi on 16.08.1998 this unanimous Advice of the Commission does not bear the signature of that Member. The validity of the Advice, notwithstanding the Vacancy caused by the demise of the aforesaid Member, is protected by Section 7 of the NCBC Act, 1993.

P. J. Thakur
Secretary
Commission
for Backward Classes