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सदस्य-सचिव
राष्ट्रीय पिछड़ा वर्ग आयोग

17

भारत सरकार
त्रिकूट-१, भीकाएजी 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 21/99

08. 11. 1999

Dear Smt. Das,

I am sending herewith the Advice of the National Commission for Backward Classes under Section 9(1) of the NCBC Act, 1993 for the Rejection of the Request for Inclusion of "Banik" 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 NCBC Act.

2. With this Advices in resepect of the a total of 766 (379 for Inclusion + 387 for Rejection) castes/sub-castes/communities have been tendered by the NCBC after its reconstitution in 1997 of which 628 (241 for Inclusion + 387 for Rejection) are stil pending with the Government for Notification.

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9/11/99

Yours sincerely

[Handwritten signature of P.S. Krishnan]
(P.S. KRISHNAN)

Encl: As stated

Smt. Asha Das
Secretary
Ministry of Social Justice & Emperment
Shastri Bhavan
NEW DELHI

o/c

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

TRIPURA BENCH

FINDINGS

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

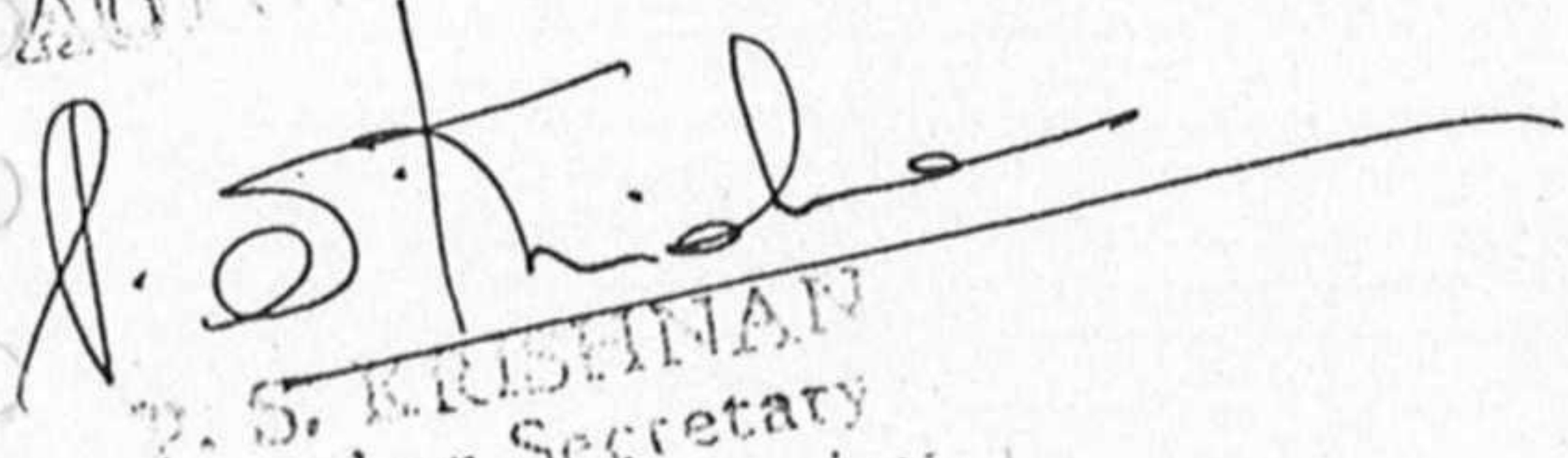
Per Shri P.S. Krishnan, Member-Secretary

I. Request

This case arises from the Request received in this Commission from Banik Kalyan Sabha, Agartala, West Tripura for the inclusion of "Banik" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for Tripura.

II. Public Hearing

2. The two-Member Tripura Bench of the NCBC consisting of Hon'ble Justice P.K. Shyamsundar, Chairperson and Shri P.S. Krishnan, Hon'ble Member-Secretary held a Public Hearing on 6.4.98 at Agartala in respect of this Request. 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 and gave valuable information. The caste/community was represented by Shri Satish Banik, Secretary, Banik Samaj Kalyan Sabha and others.


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

III. Facts

3. The "Banik" caste/community under consideration is not included in the State List of Tripura and the Mandal Commission's List of BCs for Tripura. Obviously for this reason, it is also not included in the Central List of BCs for Tripura notified by the Govt. of India in 1994.
4. The Banik Samaj Kalyan Sabha in their letter of Request has inter alia submitted that there are more than 1 lakh citizens belonging to the Banik community in Tripura and "leaving aside a handful of businessmen in the towns of Tripura almost 70% of Baniks are very backward in economic fields and consequently are under the poverty line. 15 to 20% Baniks are unable to arrange two square meals a day and are half-fed or on the verge of starvation. In the matter of services only 0.5 to 1% of them are employed in Govt. services....." In the NCBC's Questionnaire filled up and furnished by the Sabha, it is stated that the Banik community is also known as "Gandha, Swarna, Sankha, Shaha Banik" and the members of the community are "mostly artisans". In terms of the caste system, the community is identified with "Manufacturing/repairing of ornaments, brass metals, conch-shells" and approxiamtely 25% of their members are still engaged in their traditionl occupation. Apart from this, they were also engaged in "cane and bamboo works, carpentry, masonry".
5. The representatives of the State Govt/State Commission informed during the Public Hearing that the State Commission could not examine the Request received from Shri Satish Ch. Banik, Secretary, Banik Samaj Kalyan Sabha for the Inclusion

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D. K. KUMAR
Member Secretary
Social Committee
and Classes

The Baniks consider the Brahmans to hold the highest

The Baniks co
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social position. They consider the Kayasthas to be their equal in social ranking. The Barujibis, Karmakars, Namasudara, Kahars, Haluadases and Chamars are considered to be lower in position. The Baniks believe in the Varna system, and consider themselves to be Vaisyas according to the Varna order. Other communities in the neighbourhood consider the Baniks to be a clean Hindu caste group.

.....

Land is a major economic resource for the Banik community. Individual ownership of land exists. The community has both land-owning and landless families. Traditionally the Baniks have depended on trade, business and agriculture to earn their living. Trade and business are primary to them, while agriculture and service jobs are subsidiary means of earning money. They are fully dependent on cash-based trading.

.....

The Baniks appreciate the modern educational facilities available these days. They are eager to get their children educated, irrespective of their sex....."

8. According to Risley (The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Ethnographic Glossary', Firma Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1981, first edition 1891) the term Banik "is synonymous with Bania, Banika, Banikar, all derived from the Sansk. vanij, 'a merchant', being generic terms for most of the banking and trading castes, and specifically denoting those who deal in money as distinguished from commodities". Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya in his 'Hindu Castes and Sects' (Munshiram Manoharlal, 199, originally published in 1896) classifies the "Baniyas of Bengal" under the "The Mercantile Classes" along with the Baniyas of North India. Bhattacharya writes that "the Baniyas proper of Bengal are divided into two classes, namely,----

1. Suvarna Banika. ---- gold merchants

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2. Gandha Banikas ---- spice merchants."

As Bhattacharya further writes, the "Suvarna Baniks are popularly called as Sonar Baniyas. They are a very intelligent and well-to-do class..." and "The free admission of all the castes into the English schools and colleges set up in the country, since the commencement of British rule, has enabled many of the Sonar Baniyas to distinguish themselves, more or less, as English scholars. The greatest among these was the late Mr. Lal Behari Dey, the well-known author of the Govinda Samanta and the Folk Tales of Bengal. Babu Bholā Nath Chandra, the author of Travels in India, is also of the Sonar Baniya caste. I do not know any Sonar Baniya who has yet attained much eminence in the Bar; but in the Judicial Service, there are many who hold very high positions. The most notable among them is Babu Brajendra Kumal Seal, who has now the rank of a District Court Judge, and who may one day prove an ornament of the Bengal High Court. In the Medical Service also there are some Sonar Baniyas holding very high positions."

9. Regarding the Gandh Baniks, Bhattacharya writes that, they "though entitled to be regarded as Vaishyas, are treated in Bengal as middle class Sudras, from whom a Brahman may take a drink of water without any hesitation. A Brahman may even condescend so far as to accept their gifts and officiate at their religious ceremonies, without losing altogether his connection with his caste." Bhattacharya further writes about them as follows:-

"The Gandh Baniks usually live by keeping shops, where they sell spices, sugar, ghi, salt, medicines and foodgrainings... The majority of the shopkeepers of Bengal are either Gandh Baniks or Telis. There are not among the ... Gandh Baniks, such big capitalists as are to be found among the Sonar Baniyas, nor such big traders as among the Telis. But, generally speaking, the Gandh-Baniks are a well-to-do

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class.....".

10. Risley (op.cit) describes "Gandhbanik, Gandhabania, Putuli" as "the spice-selling, druggist, and grocer caste of Bengal proper". Quoting Dr. Wise, Risley further writes that a Gandha Banik "will not sell rice, vegetables, salt, oil, or spirits, but keeps almost every other grocery in stock. He is often called by the Hindi term Pansari, which signifies a dealer in groceries, spices, and herbs." About the social position of the community, Risley gives the following quotation from Dr. Wise: "The comparatively high position of Gandhabaniks among Sudra castes is owing to the circumstances that the sandal-wood and spices, essential for Hindu religious rites, can only be procured at their shops.....".

11. Risley describes "Subarnabanik" as "a mercantile caste of Bengal proper", who "claim to be the modern representatives of the ancient Vaisya, but in spite of their wealth, influence and their high bred-appearance, their claim to this distinguished ancestry has failed to obtain general recognition.....".

12. Nripendra Kumar Dutta in his "Origin and Growth of Caste in India, Vol.II" (Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1986, first published in 1965) in chapter III deals with the "Abolition of Kshatriya and Vaisya Varnas" by the "modern expounders of Hindu sastras in Bengal", who "when referring to varnas and castes and their rights and duties often cite a text to the effect that according to Yama there are in this Kali age only two varnas, Brahmana and Sudra." In explaining the two-Varna theory propounded by the Brahminical authorities in Bengal, Dutta writes that, "As in medieval Europe so in ancient India there had been jealousy between the spiritual and temporal lords, and the Brahmans had been seeking to widen the gulf between the two orders and to prove the inferiority

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of the Kshatriyas."... "Yet so long as the Kshatriyas possessed temporal powers, the Brahmanas could not suppress them appreciably by means of their writings. It was not until the Muslim conquest of the country when the function of ruling had passed away from the hands of Hindu royal families that any question could arise about the extinction of the Kshatriya race." Regarding the absence of Vaisyas in Bengal, N.K. Dutta attributes it to the stronger Brahminical orthodoxy in social practices in Bengal assisted by the two facts that adversely affected the trader classes of Bengal, viz., "First, most of them were heretics in faith, being Buddhist or Jain, which together with their connections with the Pala rulers drew upon them the displeasure of the Sena kings and their Brahmana supporters. Secondly, sea-voyage was freely indulged in by the traders of Bengal even when it was definitely prohibited in the Sastras."

13. Regarding "Baniks", N.K. Dutta writes that "In modern times it is said on the authority of a comparatively recent work, entitled *Parasarapaddhati*, that there are five classes of Baniks, viz., dealers in scents, conch shell ware, bell-metal ware, jewelleryes, and gold." "In this list", Dutta mentions, "no distinction is made between traders and artisans or manufacturers". Dutta further refers to two Puranas, *Brahmavaivarta* and *Brihaddharma* as mentioning about "two classes of merchants" in Bengal, viz. "Gandhika" and "Suvarana". Of these, "Gandhika is ranked as a good Sudra, and Suvarna as a degraded person like washerman, oilman, fisherman, etc." Dutta then examines and explains the reason for the degradation of the Suvarna Banik to a status worse than that of ordinary Sudras and writes inter alia as follows:-

"The first cause seems to be that the Suvarnas being the proudest of the mercantile community in Bengal offered greater resistance to the Brahmanical attempts in the post-

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Pala period to enforce the dictum of two **varnas** in the Kali age with the result that when the Brahmanas had succeeded in their object the Suvarnas were punished for their contumacy by degradation to a lower rank than others. But even then they on account of their previous position in society continued to secure the services of good Brahmanas from the Rarhi, Varendra and Vaidika communities, though their priests, too, were punished with degradation for that."

IV. Findings

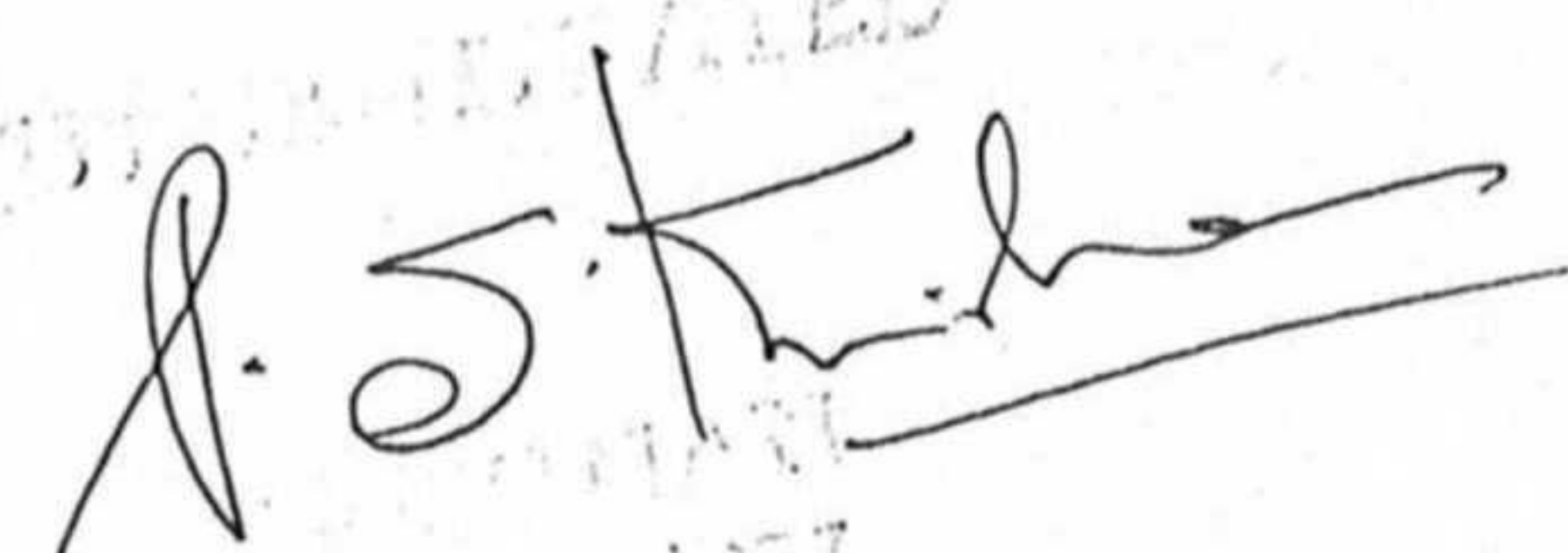
14. The description of Baniks of Tripura in the Anthropological Survey of India's People of India account and of the Gandha Baniks and Suvarna Baniks in the accounts of Risley and Bhattacharya quoted above clearly belies the claim of the Request-makers and the other representatives of the community who appeared before the Bench that they are an aritsan community and not a trader caste. The profile that emerges from the above accounts is that Baniks or Gandha Baniks or Suvarnabaniks are acclaimed traders or merchants or businessmen. As seen from Bhattacharya's account, the level of progress, including achievements in the field of education, of Suvarnabaniks was remarkable even as long back as more than 100 years back when Bhattacharya wrote. Bhattacharya also mentions "Gandha Baniks" to be a "well-to-do class" and Risley's account attests to their "high social position" among Shudras --- in Bengal society, there being virtually no Kshatriya or Vaisya varna, recognised as such by Brahmin orthodoxy in control of social order. Following N.K. Dutta, in Bengal the Baniks are classified as Shudras or lower than Shudras because in Bengal the four Varnas of the Caste System had not been fully developed on account of the non-recognition, by the Brahmanical authorities, of the two next-

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below Varnas of 'Kshatriya' and 'Vaishya' as the Brahmins who were spiritual lords sought to make all non-Brahmin castes including the Kshatriyas, from whom temporal lords or kings emerged, and Vaishyas decidedly inferior to themselves in order to put their own position in the social order beyond the possibility of challenge. This is the reason why the Baniks of Bengal are categorised as Shudras. The absence or non-recognition of Vaishya varna in Bengal does not mean that there was no trading class or trader castes in Bengal. In fact that they did exist in Bengal is mentioned by N.K. Dutta when he refers to the fact that they freely indulged in sea-voyage. Thus the reference to the trader castes/communities of Bengal as Shudras should only be taken to mean that they were denied the luxury of being recognised as belonging to the Vaishya Varna. But, irrespective of this denial of recognition as part of the Vaishya varna, their status as trader castes must have remained. Their traditional association with trade and business makes them, in so far as their position in society and also in economy vis-a-vis all other castes/communities are concerned, the counterparts of the Baniyas of North India, who are of the Vaishya Varna. It is significant to note Bhattacharya's observation that the Gandha Baniks are "entitled to be regarded as Vaishyas". The respectable and prestigious social position enjoyed by the members of castes/communities coming under the Bania/Vaishya category from the early historical times have been attested to in socio-historical, ethnographic and other literature by many scholars. This also applies to the trader castes of Bengal even though formal recognition of Vaishya category was denied to them. A review of such literature and socio-historical analysis on that basis have been made in the Findings/Advice regarding Requests for inclusion of 12 such Vaishya/Bania castes in the Central List of Backward Classes for Bihar vide NCBC Advice No. 7-18 Bihar/98 tendered to the Government on 13.08.1998. This Commission has also separately tendered


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Advices for the Rejection of the Request for Inclusion of "Gandha Banik" in the Central List of Backward Classes for Bihar (Advice No. Bihar 33/99 dated 21.5.99) and West Bengal (Advice No. West Bengal 53/99 dated 10.5.99). The Bengali-speaking population of Tripura being mainly immigrants from Bengal, whatever is applicable to the Baniks of Bengal are also applicable to the Baniks of Tripura. In view of this position, the Baniks of Tripura cannot be a socially and educationally backward caste/community, but on the contrary they are a socially advanced caste or socially advanced class, and, therefore, the Request for Inclusion of "Banik" in the Central List of Backward Classes for Tripura should be rejected.

Alleged
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P. S. Krishna
1.11.1999

V. Advice of the Commission

15. 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, for necessary action by the Central Government under Section 9(2) of the Act:-

The Request for Inclusion of "Banik" in the Central

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for B.C. Classes

List of Backward Classes for Tripura be rejected as it is not a socially backward caste/community and on the contrary is a socially advanced class.

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For D. S.