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P. S. KRISHNAN

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DO NCBC Advice No.Kerala 56/98

Dear Shri Manavalan,

I am sending herewith the Advice of the National Commission for Backward Classes under Section 9(1) of the National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993 for the Rejection of the Request for Inclusion of "Nair" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for Kerala, duly authenticated, for necessary action by the Central Government under Section 9(2) of the Act.

2. With this, Advices on 491 (281 for Inclusion + 210 for Rejection) have been tendered to the Government by the Commission, after its reconstitution in 1997, of which 485 (275 for Inclusion + 210 for Rejection) are still pending with the Government for Notification.

24/12/98

Encl: As stated.

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

सदस्य-रायिब

राष्ट्रीय पिछड़ा 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

24.12.98

Yours sincerely

P. S. Krishnan

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NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

KERALA BENCH

FINDINGS

Per Shri P.S.Krishnan, Member-Secretary

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

I. Requests

This case arises from the Request received in this Commission from Shri V.P. Prasad (K.C.A.E.T, Tavanur PO, Malappuram District) and others for the Inclusion of "Nair" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for Kerala.

II. Public Hearing

2. The two-Member Kerala Bench of the NCBC consisting of Shri P.S.Krishnan, Hon'ble Member-Secretary and Shri Navtej Puadhi, Hon'ble Member held a Public Hearing in respect of these Requests at Thiruvananthapuram on the 17th September 1997. At the Public Hearing the State Government was represented by Shri R.K.Raghunathan, Joint-Secretary to the Government of Kerala in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Welfare Department, Shri V.R. Padmanabhan, Director, Scheduled Tribes Development, Shri Viswanatha Menon, Director, Kerala Institute for Research Training and Development Studies and other officers. No representative of the "Nair" caste/community and none of the Request-making individuals was present at the time of the the Public Hearing.

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

1 III. Facts & Findings

3. "Nair" caste/community is not included in the State Government's List of Backward Classes and the Mandal Commission's List of Backward Classes for Kerala. Therefore, it is also not included in the first-phase Central List of Backward Classes for Kerala prepared in 1993 on the basis of the principle of commonality. "Nair" caste/community as a whole has never been included in the List of Backward Classes.

4. The Request-makers in their letter of Request state that "The Nair community of the State of Kerala as a whole is one of the most economically backward communities. Only two subdivisions of the community have been however included in the Backward Classes list. This is an injustice done to the rest of the deserving Nair community."

5. As a matter of fact "Nair" caste/community traditionally enjoyed a dominant position in Kerala society. There is plenty of ethnographic and other literature including William Logan's Malabar Manual and Thurston & Rangachari's Castes and Tribes of Southern India which bring out the dominant and prestigious position occupied by this community in the society, economy and polity of Kerala. Many of the rulers of the principalities of Kerala were Nairs including the Maharaja of the large of them, viz., Travancore, though they assumed some sort of Kshatriyahood as a mark of their superiority. In spite of such "Kshatriyahood", they were recognised as Nairs. The soldiery of the principalities was also made up of Nairs and has been referred to as 'Nair Pattalam' or Nair Army. Many of the Dewans or Prime Ministers of the principalities also belonged to this community except those who came from outside Kerala, such outsiders being usually Brahmins. Under the circumstances, Nairs were traditionally categorised as a "military feudal" caste. Very recently, the traditional position of Nairs and the change in that position have been brought out in detail by Robin Jeffrey

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0 in his book 'The Decline of Nair Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908' (Manohar, New Delhi, 1994). Jeffrey summarises the extent of their dominance in the 19th century is in the following words:-

"Travancore fell under British suzerainty and received a British resident in 1800, but it was fifty years before the effects of the British connection began to show upon the dominance of high caste Hindus, particularly Nairs. What was the extent of that dominance in the mid-19th century? In most villages or desams of Travancore, Nairs, or their much less numerous Nambudiri or Kshatriya patrons, were the chief landholders. To be sure, in north and central Travancore there were desams in which the biggest landholders were Syrian Christians, but in most of Travancore they were Nairs. Nairs, moreover, held slaves, and in the pre-British period had been responsible for maintaining order. In the Administration of Travancore, they held more than sixty percent of the posts; their only rivals were non-Malayali Brahmins..... In a State dedicated to a Hindu deity, such as Travancore, Nairs enjoyed the privileges and power of being by far the most numerous 'clean' Hindu caste. Syrian Christians they could largely ignore, while from their caste inferiors -- artisan castes, Shanars, Iravas and slave castes --- they could compel the most exxagerated forms of submission and subservience.

The position of Nairs, therefore, squared fairly closely with the definition of a 'dominant caste' given by a modern anthropologist....."

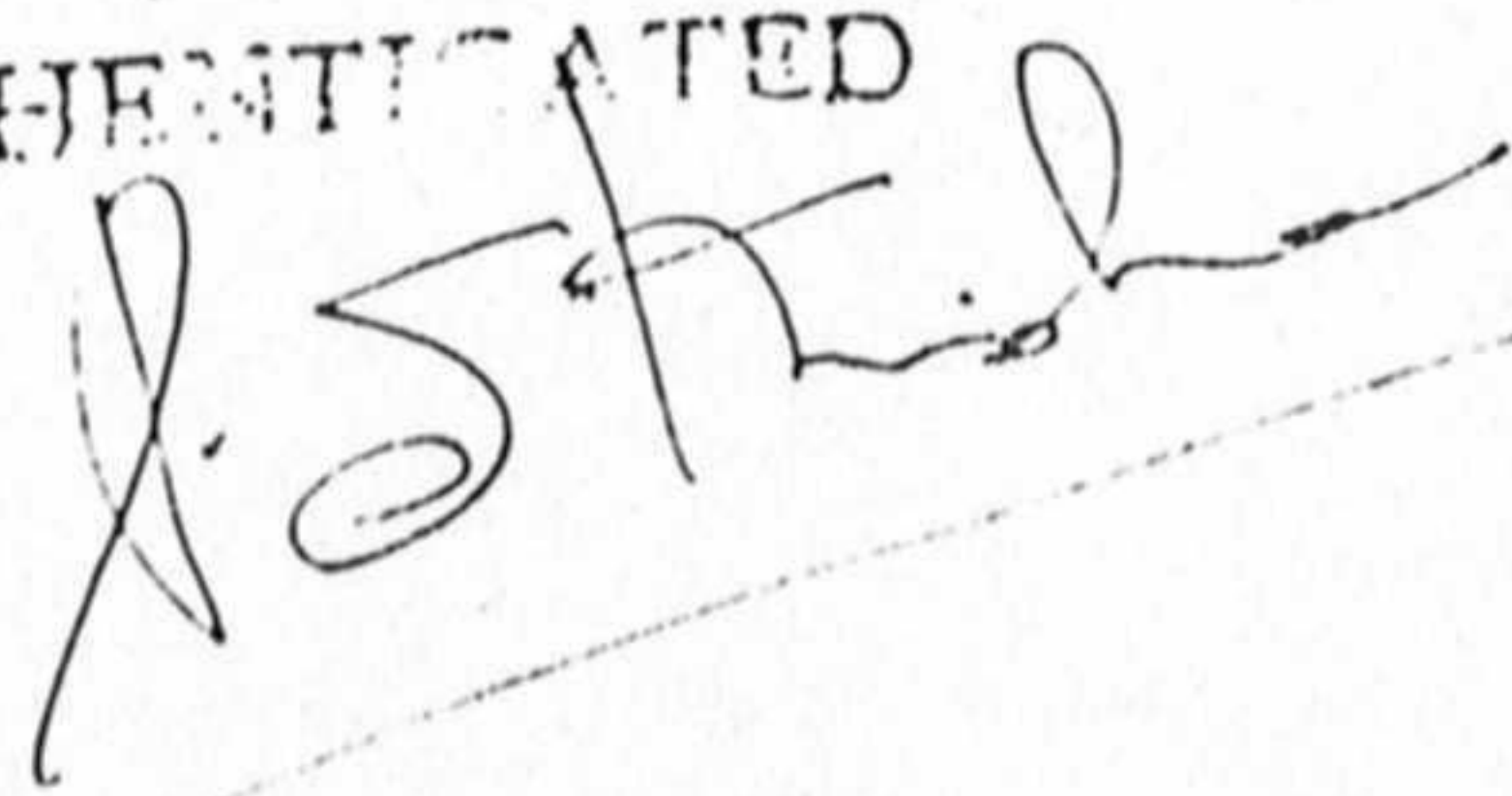
Robin Jeffrey's book is the story of the Nair community being brought down from the heights of superiority over virtually all other castes/communities to a level of keen competition with some of them within a period of 60 years(1847-1908) in the context of rapid social and political changes "resulting from the impact of a cash economy, western style education, improved communications and a British-inspired sytem of law on the complex social structure of an Indian princely state." This reduction or negation of the dominance however does not mean that their social position as an advanced caste/community

10/5/2012

as changed. As Jeffrey concludes "Nairs did not plunge to the bottom of some social and political sea", though "by the beginning of the twentieth century, it was apparent that they could no longer regard buoyancy as their birthright....". Obviously, the situation was only that other castes/communities, particularly Ezhavas and Syrian Christians, started seeking a level-playing field by questioning the dominance hitherto enjoyed by the upper castes, including the Nairs, particularly in the fields of education and Government employment. It is significant that Jeffrey's book is titled "The Decline of Nair dominance" and not the decline of Nairs.

6. The facts being as above, the "Nair" community does not deserve any consideration for inclusion in the List of BCs. "Economic Backwardness" claimed by the request-making individuals is not a criterion for considering a caste/community's eligibility for inclusion in the BC List. The present request therefore is misguided. Considering the fact that the request-makers did not bother to appear before the Bench during the Public Hearing, it appears that they are also non-serious. As a matter of fact, the Nair Service Society which is a well-known and established representative Association of the community, which is responsible for bringing about many social reforms in the community and also in Kerala society as a whole, has never claimed the community to be socially backward, but has been consistently arguing for reservation on the basis of economic criteria which, however, is not in accord with the Constitutional provisions under Articles 15(4) and 16(4). The reference by the request-makers in the letter of Request to the two sub-divisions of the community seems to be to "Veluthedathu Nair" and "Vilakkithala Nair" which are included in the State and Central Lists of Backward Classes for Kerala. Their inclusion in the List of BCs cannot be a ground for inclusion of "Nair" caste/community as a whole in the List. Veluthedathu Nair and Vilakkithala Nair are in fact two communities who are traditionally

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associated with the lowly and stigmatised occupations of washing of clothes (Veluthedathu Nair) and hair-cutting (Vilakkithala Nair) and, therefore, they can in no way be compared with the "Nair" caste/community. All over India, it is common for castes/communities which are considered to be socially lowly and which are traditionally associated with occupations regarded as inferior or stigmatised to attach suffixes to their names which indicate a link with a higher or prestigious caste, like, for example, in Andhra Pradesh the fisherman caste which is inter alia known as "Vanne" or "Palli" has added the prestigious "Kapu" and "Reddy" with its names so that the community now figures also as "Vannekapu", "Vannereddy", "Pallikapu" and "Palliredy". Examples can be multiplied. "Veluthedathu Nair" and "Vilakkithala Nair" have nothing to do with the larger community which has been referred to as "Nair" whose traditional dominant position has been well-reflected in many modern fields of activities including higher education, professions and higher Government jobs. The community has also been able to provide a long line of eminent persons whose services to the society as a whole are well recognised. As a result, not only have the rulers of various principalities of Kerala like Travancore, which had a long tradition of identifying Backward Classes and providing some supportive measures for them, not ever thought of including this community in the list of BCs, but the Commissions appointed in modern times have also excluded this community from the List of BCs. The Nettur Damodaran Commission of Kerala had specifically examined the position of Nairs along various parameters and had found it not fit for inclusion in the list of BCs. It is a matter for appreciation that no representative organisation of the Nair community has sought the inclusion of the community in the BC List and this is as it should be. In view of the facts as above, the Bench came to the Finding that the Request for Inclusion of "Nair" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for Kerala should be rejected, as it is not a backward class but is a socially advanced and prestigious community of Kerala.

ATTACHED

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P. S. KRISHNAN
Member Secretary
M. S. Commission
Backward Classes

7. As one of the Members of the Bench, Shri Navtej Puadhi unfortunately passed away on 16.8.1998, subsequent to the Public Hearing, the Findings are signed only by one Member, who is also the coordinating Member of the Bench, but the Findings represent the conclusion jointly arrived at by both the Members.

P. S. Krishnan

15.12.98

IV. Advice of the Commission

8. The Commission considered and agreed in full with the above Findings of the Kerala 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 "Nair" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for Kerala should be rejected as this caste/community does not constitute a socially backward class, but on the contrary is a socially advanced and prestigious community of Kerala.

9. On account of the unfortunate demise of one of the Members Shri Navtej Puadhi on 16.8.1998, this unanimous Advice

AUTHENTICATED

P. S. Krishnan

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

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.

Madan Mohan Singh
22.12.98

P. S. Krishnan
15.12.98

R. Shyam
23.11.98

P. U. Narayana Reddy
22.12.98

AUTHENTICATED

P. S. Krishnan

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