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सदस्य-सचिव
राष्ट्रीय पिछड़ा वर्ग आयोग 118

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. West Bengal 65, 66/2000

12. 01. 2000

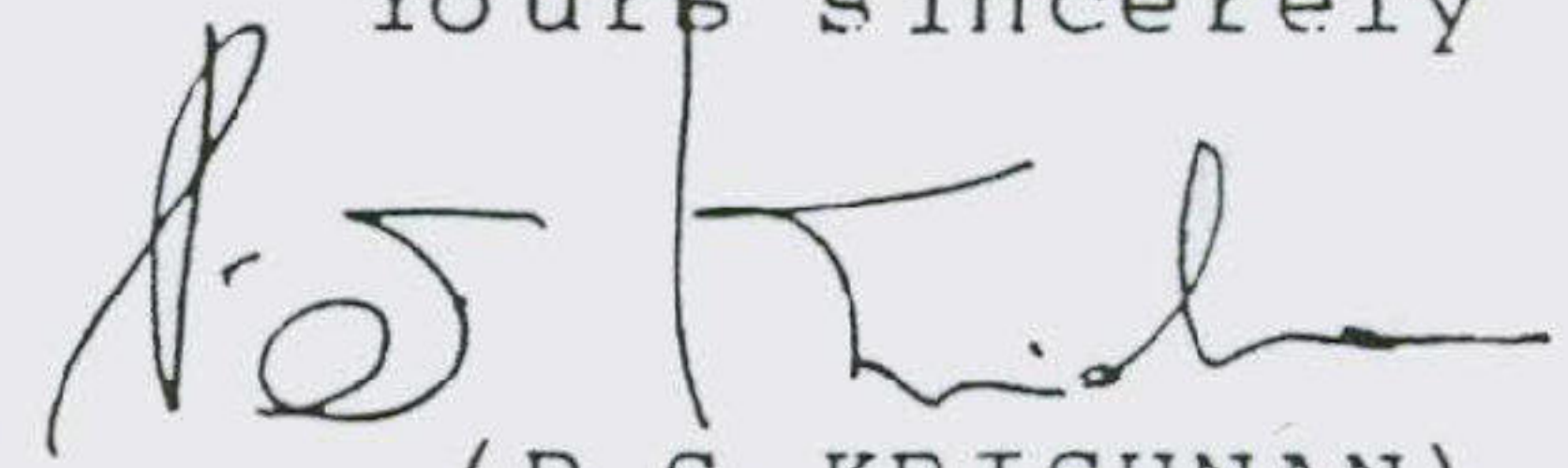
Dear Smt. Das,

I am sending herewith the Advices of the National Commission for Backward Classes under Section 9(1) of the NCBC Act, 1993 for the Rejection of the Requests for Inclusion of

- (1) "Sunuwar"
- (2) "Agrahari"

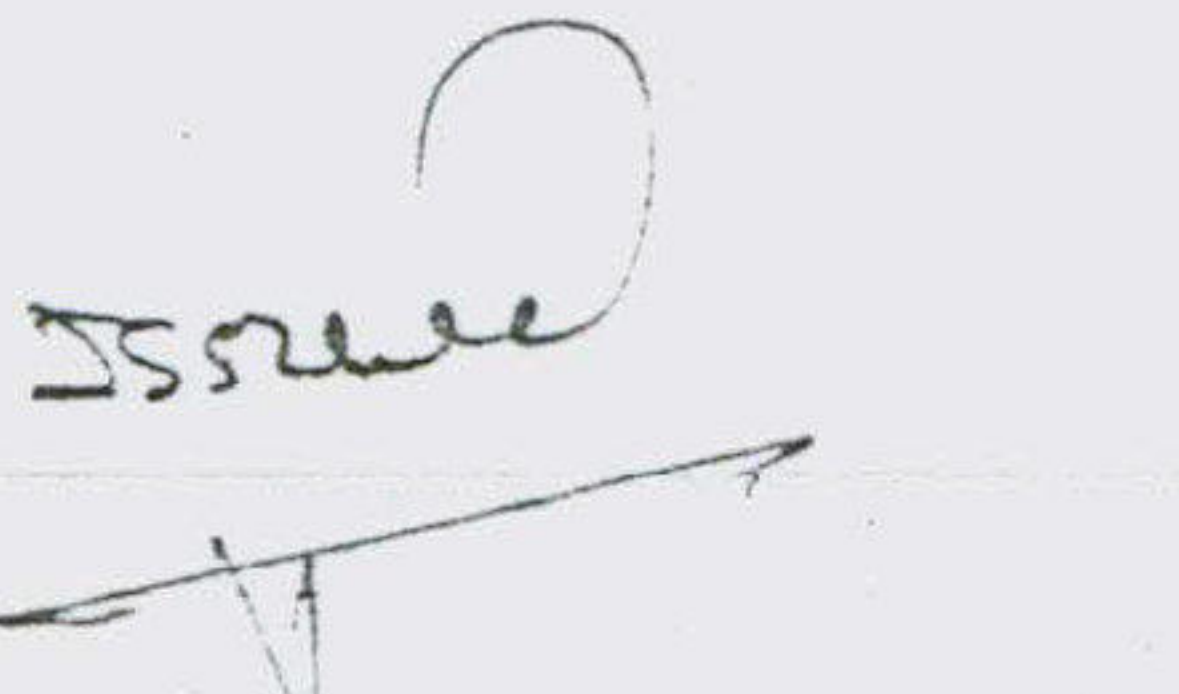
castes/communities in the Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal, duly authenticated, for necessary action by the Central Government under Section 9(2) of the NCBC Act.

Yours sincerely


(P.S. KRISHNAN)

Encl: As stated

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


13/1/2000





सत्यमेव जयते

पी. एस. कृष्णन्
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सदस्य-सचिव
राष्ट्रीय पिछड़ा वर्ग आयोग

भारत सरकार

ट्रिकूट-१, भीकाजी कामा प्लेस, नई दिल्ली - ११००६६

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Member - Secretary
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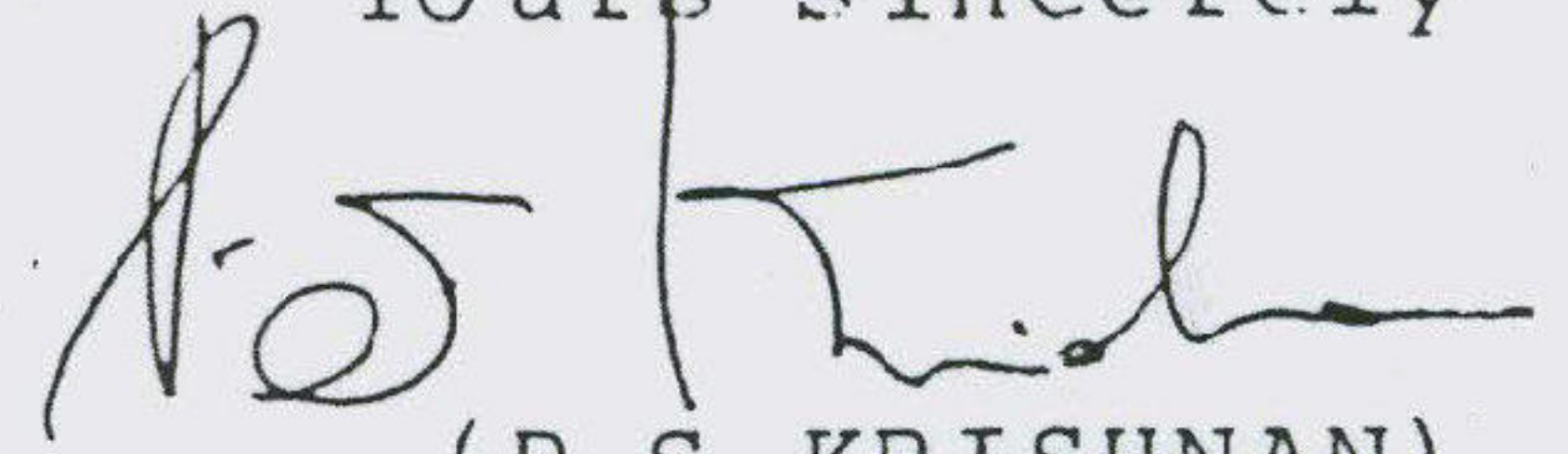
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(P.S. KRISHNAN)

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

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES
WEST BENGAL
FINDINGS

Case : Request for inclusion of "Sunuwar" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal.

Per Shri U.P. Singh, Member

I. Request

1. This case arises from the Request received in the National Commission for Backward Classes from Shri Deoraj Mukhia, General Secretary, Kurseong Sub-divisional Sunuwar Mukhia Samaj, Lower Dumaram Busty, P.O. Kurseong, Distt. Darjeeling, West Bengal for inclusion of "Sunuwar" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal.

II. Public Hearing

2. The two-Member Bench of the Commission consisting of Hon'ble Members, S/Shri U.P. Singh and Sahu Akshaya Bhai held a Public Hearing at Calcutta on 18.11.1999 to examine this Request for inclusion in the Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal. At the Public Hearing the State Govt. was represented by Dr. M.K. Chaudhari, Director and Dr. (Mrs.) R. Gupta, Cultural Research Officer from the Cultural Research Institute, Calcutta. The caste/community was represented by S/Shri H.B. Mukhia, K.B. Mukhia, D.K. Mukhia and M.S. Mukhia.

AUTHENTICATED



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

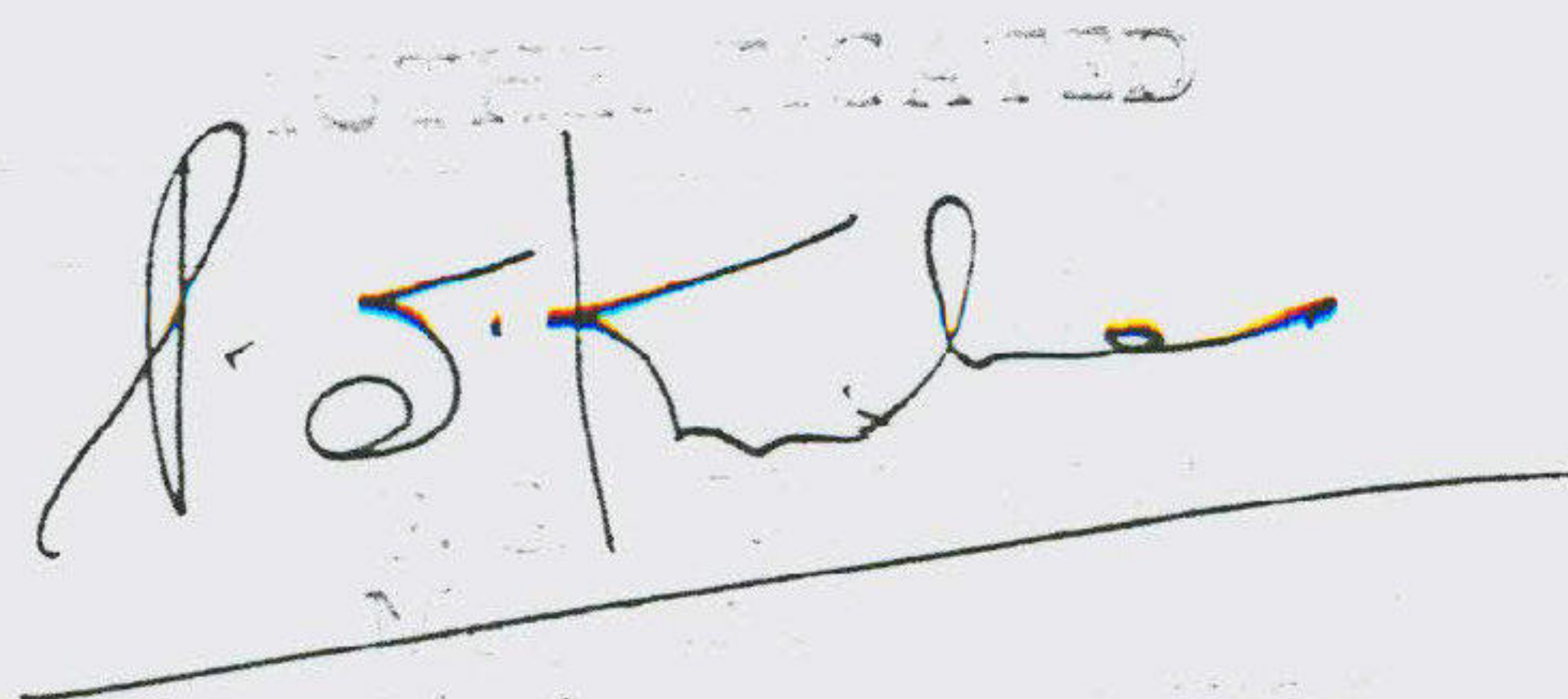
III. Facts

3. The caste/community was not included in the Mandal List.

4. State Government of West Bengal had no list of Backward Classes till after the Supreme Court Judgement in the Mandal Case delivered on 16th November, 1992. For this reason, the Expert Committee on Backward Classes could not, on the basis of the "Principle of Commonality", recommend a Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal as done in the case of 14 other States, and therefore the Central Government also could not issue a Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal in 1993. The Government of West Bengal issued its first list of Backward Classes by its Notification No. 346-TW/EC/M-6/82 (I) dated 13th July, 1994 in the Calcutta Gazette. The Government of India, Ministry of Welfare by its Notification No. 163 dated 19.10.94, published in the Gazette of India of 20.10.1994 issued a "common list" of OBCs for West Bengal included the same castes/communities. In its series of issuance of lists of Backward Classes, the Government of West Bengal issued its eighth list of Backward Classes vide The Calcutta Gazette Notification No. 84-BCW/RC/MR-302/97 dated 1st March, 1999 which included "Sunuwar" at entry No. 6 as follows:-

"6. Sunuwar" (List-8)

5. The representatives of the caste/community who were present at the Public Hearing stated that they migrated from Nepal and their traditional occupation was agriculture but in Darjeeling most of them are working as tea garden labourers. It was further stated by them that in the social scale they were somewhat equal to Magars, Thapas but below Chhetris, Newars, Gurungs and above Kami, Damai, Sarki who are Scheduled Castes. It was also requested by them to include "Mukhia" with "Sunuwar". However, in response to a query raised by the Bench, it was stated by them that "Mukhia" is a title only. The Bench made it clear that only caste is to be included in the list of Backward Classes and not titles, the representatives of the caste agreed to it and did not press for inclusion of the title "Mukhia" with the main caste "Sunuwar".

NOTED


6. At the Public Hearing the representatives of the caste/community submitted the filled up NCBC's Questionnaire in respect of Sunuwar (Mukhia) which mentions approximate population of the caste as 8,500, mainly concentrated in Darjeeling and negligible number in Jalpaiguri district. The caste has already been included in the Central List of Backward Classes for Sikkim. It further states that the caste/community is socially backward and mainly engaged as tea garden labourers. A negligible number of them are said to be working as 'D' category staff and primary school teachers. The women of the caste/community are also stated to be engaged as tea garden labourers. 99.5 per cent population of the caste/community (male, female and children taken together) are stated to be landless manual labourers and 99 per cent of their adult members engaged as tea garden labourers. The occupation in which they are said to be involved is non-agricultural and involve manual labour. 99.5 per cent families of the caste is stated to be living in kachha houses. The literacy rate of the community is given 11.3 per cent in the district they are mainly concentrated.

7. H H Risley in his book "The Tribes And Castes of Bengal" (Published by Firma Mukhapadhyay, Calcutta, India, 1981, Reprint, Ist Published, Calcutta, 1891, Vol. II, p. 281-283) describes "Sunuwar, Sonwar, a cultivating tribe of Nepal, forming with Mangar, Gurung and Khas the class known as Mukhya or chief. Although in theory the Sunuwars are a strictly endogamous group, intermarriage with Mangars and Gurungs is tacitly recognized. The ceremony cannot be performed in public but such unions are admitted to be valid, and the children are counted in all respects as Sunuwars, except that during the first generation Sunuwars of the whole blood may not take rice or dal from their hands. In the second generation this disability ceases to have effect. Sunuwars say that they came originally from Simungarh near Bara Chhatri in Western Nepal, and that wandering east they came to Chuplu on the Likhukhola river and took possession of it. Infant-marriage, however, is sometimes resorted to by well-to-do families which have been infected by Hindu ideas. Polygamy is allowed, but is not largely resorted to..... In point of religion the Sunuwars may be described as undeveloped Hindus, still retaining many traces of an earlier animistic faith..... Upadhya Brahmans serve

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them as priests and are received on equal terms by other members of the sacred order in Nepal. The tribe believe hunting to have been their original occupation, and many of them are still strongly addicted to the chase. The bulk of the tribe, however, live by agriculture and pastoral pursuits."

8. Risley describes "Mangar" and "Gurung" as follow:-

i) **Mangar, Magar**, one of the fighting tribes of Nepal, belonging, with Gurung Khas and Sunuwar, to the Mukhya group, and highly esteemed for their military qualities. (Vol. II, p. 74)

ii) **Gurung, Gurunga, Gurungah**, one of the best of the fighting tribes of Nepal.....Brahmans serve them as priests, but if not Brahman is available, a member of the Guaburi thar may take his place and may perform the ceremonies of marriage and disposal of the dead and nuarmi or purification after childbirth. The four castes – Chattri or Khas, Gurung, Mangar, and Sunuwar – are classed together as Mukhya or chief. Vol. I, p. 304-305)

9. Sanchita Ghatak describes "Sunuwar" in the book "People of India – Sikkim" (Volume XXXIX, General Editor, K.S. Singh). She writes that the "Sunuwars, or Sunwars, are a cultivating community who are also known as Mukhiyas, only to differentiate them from the Sonars, or goldsmiths. 'Mukhiya' has become synonymous with 'Sunuwar' in recent years, specially in Sikkim and the contiguous hill areas of Darjeeling. The title 'Mukhiya' is assumed from the king or chief of Sikkim.The Sunuwars believe that they were higher than the Chhettri caste in the past but lower than the Brahmans. Now in Nepal they have the same status as the Chhettris. But in Sikkim other communities do not accept this. Here the Sunuwars are Vaishyas, i.e. they are below the Brahmans and Chhettris. In the caste hierarchy they are in the third tier alongwith the Gurungs, Mangars, etc. Their self-perception at the regional level is medium and is accepted by other communities.

AUTHENTICATED

J. S. Krishna

Though in earlier days the Sunuwars had been a hunting community, at present their main economic resource is land. Among the communities, the Brahmans, Chhettris, and Bhutias exercise considerable control over the cultivable and semi-forest lands. Among the Sunuwars, there are landowners but the majority are landless. Agriculture and working as agricultural labourers constitute their primary occupations. As a subsidiary mode they work as labourers in road construction. They sell their excess agricultural products in the market to obtain cash.

Traditionally a Sunuwar accepts water and *pucca* food from Brahmans, Chhettris and Vaishyas, but do not accept these from communities in the Shudra group, e.g. Kamis, Sarkis, Damais etc. They exchange food and water with other Vaishya groups like Mangars, Rais, Limbus etc. Brahmans and Chhettris do not accept water or *pucca* food from Sunuwars, but *kachcha* and *siddha* food are accepted from all other communities and can be exchanged with others too. Inter-community marriages do not take place. They share wells and water sources with other communities, but do not share the crematorium..... The community has businessmen, scholars, teachers, administrators etc. Political leadership has emerged at the village panchayat and at the regional levels.....”

10. K.S. Singh describes “Sunwar” in the book “People of India – India’s Communities” (National Series Volume IV-VI, Anthropological Survey of India, Oxford University Press, Delhi Calcutta Chennai Mumbai, 1998, p. 3384-3386). He writes about “Sunwar” that “They are a community distributed in Sikkim and Uttar Pradesh. According to a myth, the people living on the bank of river Sunkoshi are called Sunwar. They are non-vegetarian. They take fish, goat meat, chicken and egg..... They are largely engaged in cultivation.

He further writes that in Sikkim, the Sunwar have three subgroups of Barathare, Dasthare and Jirel. They have synonyms like Sonwar and Mukhya (chief); Mukhya is also used as their title. They have migrated in recent years from the east and are distributed in the west, south and east districts of Sikkim There are both landowners and landless in the community. Hunting and food gathering were the

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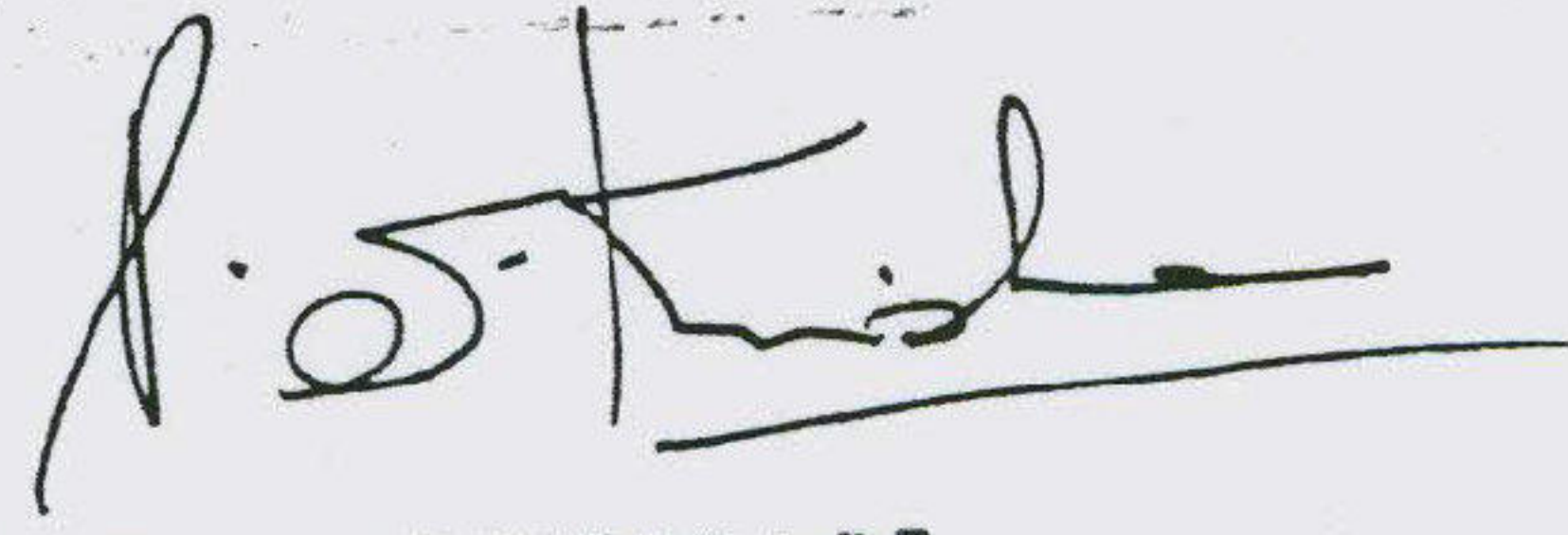
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traditional occupations of the Sunwar in Sikkim. Terrace cultivation, labour, business, government service, self-employment, etc. are their present occupations. The Sunwar are Hindu by religion..... The Sunwar invite Brahmans, Chettries, Limboos, Rais, Lepchas, Newars, Bhutias and others in their social and religious functions. A Brahman worships in a Sunwar house though the community has its own sacred specialists. As agricultural labourers they engage Damai, Limboo, Rai, Sarki, etc. They have landlord-tenant as well as cultivator-labourer relationship with the Damai, Sarki, Rai and Limboo. Businessmen, scholarss, teachers, administrators, etc. are found among them. Political leadership has emerged at the village and regional levels. Formal education favoured for boys but only partially for girls. They use both modern and traditional medicare systems."

11. Census of India 1931 – Bengal And Sikkim by A E Porter (Part II Tables, Vol. V, p. 486) mentions about the **Sunuwar** that "Figures for this tribe in 1921 were shown, for Bengal, only in Darjeeling where they numbered 3,691. On the present occasion in the same district they number 4,055 out of a total for the whole province amounting to 4,427 compared with 4,323 in 1911. In Sikkim their numbers have increased from 695 to 790." The majority of the tribe returned themselves as Hindus both in Sikkim and in Darjeeling where only 23 and 48 respectively were returned under tribal religion.

12. K.S. Singh in his book "People of India – Communities, Segments, Synonyms, Surnames & Titles" (National Series Volume VIII, Anthropological Survey of India, Oxford University Press, 1996) shows the present distribution of "Sunwar" throuout the State of Sikkim and Darjeeling, Jalpaigudi and West Dinajpur districts of West Bengal according to census years 1989, 1901, 1911 and 1931. (p. 929)

13. "Sunuwar (including Koincha/Mukhia)" has already been included in the Central List of Backward Classes for Sikkim.


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

IV. Findings

14. From the Risley's ethnographic account and People of India for Sikkim the Bench finds that the position of "Sunuwars" is at par with the "Mangars" and "Gurungs" which are known for their military prowess. Ethnographic accounts further reveal that the "Sunuwar" with Chattri or Khas, Gurung and Mangar is classed together as Mukhya or chief. They are in the third tier alongwith the Gurungs, Mangars, etc. in so far as the caste hierarchy is concerned and this is accepted by other communities. This fact, that they are equal to Mangars, Thapas, has also been concurred in by the representatives of community present at the Public Hearing. Ethnographic account further reveals that though it is an endogamous group, intermarriage with Mangars and Gurungs is tacitly recognized. The ceremony is not performed in public but they are counted as Sunuwars but the first generation of Sunuwars may not take rice or dal from their hands and it ceases to have effect in the second generation only. This fact explicitly shows superior social status of Sunuwars than Mangars and Gurungs. Sanchita Ghatak writes that in Nepal they have the same status as Chhettris but in Sikkim they are below Brahmans and Chhettris and equal to Gurungs, Mangars, etc. and this is accepted by all other communities. In Darjeeling too, being the adjoining hilly region to Sikkim, they must be enjoying the same social position as in Sikkim. The National Commission for Backward Classes has already tendered its Advice to the Govt. of India for rejection of Request for inclusion of "Mangar (Thapa, Rana)" in the Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal vide Advice No. West Bengal 35/98 dated 26.3.1998. Though Gurung, Mangar and Sunuwar (including Koincha/Mukhia) have been included in the Central List of Backward Classes for Sikkim on the basis of common listing of castes/communities common to the both the State List of BCs that existed at that time and the Mandal List without indepth scrutiny, this alone by itself does not merit inclusion of "Sunuwar" in the Central List of BCs for West Bengal. They may be landless and majority of them employed as tea garden labourers in Darjeeling, as stated by the representatives, they are known as Mukhya or chief which reflects their superior social status. **The Bench therefore holds that the Request for inclusion of "Sunuwar" caste/community in the**

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Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal should be rejected, as they are not socially backward.

Ashayan
10.01.2000
(Sahu Akshya Bhai)

U.P. Singh
10.1.2000
(U.P. Singh)

V. Advice of the Commission

15. The Commission considered and agreed in full with the above Findings of the West Bengal Bench and decided to tender the following Advice to the Central Government under Section 9(1) of the National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993 for necessary action by the Central Government under Section 9(2) of the Act:-

The Request for inclusion of "Sunuwar" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal be rejected, as it is not a socially backward class.

Ashayan
10.01.2000

U.P. Singh
10.1.2000

Dr. S. K. Mishra
10.11.2000

P. S. Mishra
10.1.2000

P. S. Mishra
11.1.2000

P. S. Mishra

NCBC Advice No. West Bengal 66/99

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

WEST BENGAL

FINDINGS

Case : Request for inclusion of "Agrahari" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal.

Per Shri U.P. Singh, Member

I. Request

1. This case arises from the Request received in the National Commission for Backward Classes from Shri Dinesh Kumar Agrahari, President, Akhil Bhartiya Agrahari Vaishya Samaj, B-1/403, Janakpuri, New Delhi for inclusion of "Agrahari" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal.

II. Public Hearing

2. The two-Member Bench of the Commission consisting of Hon'ble Members, S/Shri U.P. Singh and Sahu Akshaya Bhai held a Public Hearing at Calcutta on 18.11.1999 to examine this Request for inclusion in the Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal. At the Public Hearing the State Govt. was represented by Dr. M.K. Chaudhari, Director and Dr. (Mrs.) R. Gupta, Cultural Research Officer from the Cultural Research Institute, Calcutta. Nobody appeared at the Public Hearing to represent the caste/community.

ATTEST



D. S. KRIHNAN
Member Secretary
National Commission
for Backward Classes

III. Facts

3. The caste/community has not been included either in the Mandal List or the State List of Backward Classes for West Bengal.

4. The Request-maker stated that "Agrahari" is the most backward caste and therefore should be included in the Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal. We also notice that the "Agrahari" caste/community, like Rauniyar, Gandhabanik and Kamlapuri Vaishya, seeks inclusion in the Central List of Backward Classes placing great reliance on the fact that they are included in the State List of Bihar for Backward Classes.

5. The caste/community under consideration, as its very name indicates and as is evident from the ethnographic accounts cited hereafter, belongs to Vaishya or Bania or trader category of castes/sub-castes/communities. The caste/sub-caste given above, "Vaishya" and "Bania" are generic names to denote all the castes of this category. The association of such castes/communities with trade, commerce, money-lending, etc. and the respectable and prestigious social position consequently enjoyed by the members of these castes/communities from the early historical times have been attested to in socio-historical, ethnographic and other literature by many scholars. A review of such literature and socio-historical analysis on that basis have been made in the Findings/Advices regarding Requests of 12 such Vaishya/Bania castes for Bihar, 14 for Orissa, 10 for Uttar Pradesh and 3 for West Bengal for Inclusion in the Central Lists of Backward Classes for Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal tendered to the Government vide NCBC Advices No. 7-18 Bihar/98 dated 13.8.1998, 28-43 Orissa/99 dated 4.5.99, 65-74 Uttar Pradesh/99 dated 2.2.99 and 52-54 West Bengal/99 dated 10.5.99 advising their Rejection and Government has also accepted these Advices of Rejection and thus all these Requests stand rejected. In the light of the analysis in the above Findings/Advices, it can be seen that the socio-occupational profile of these castes/communities of traditional traders/merchants are such that they cannot in any



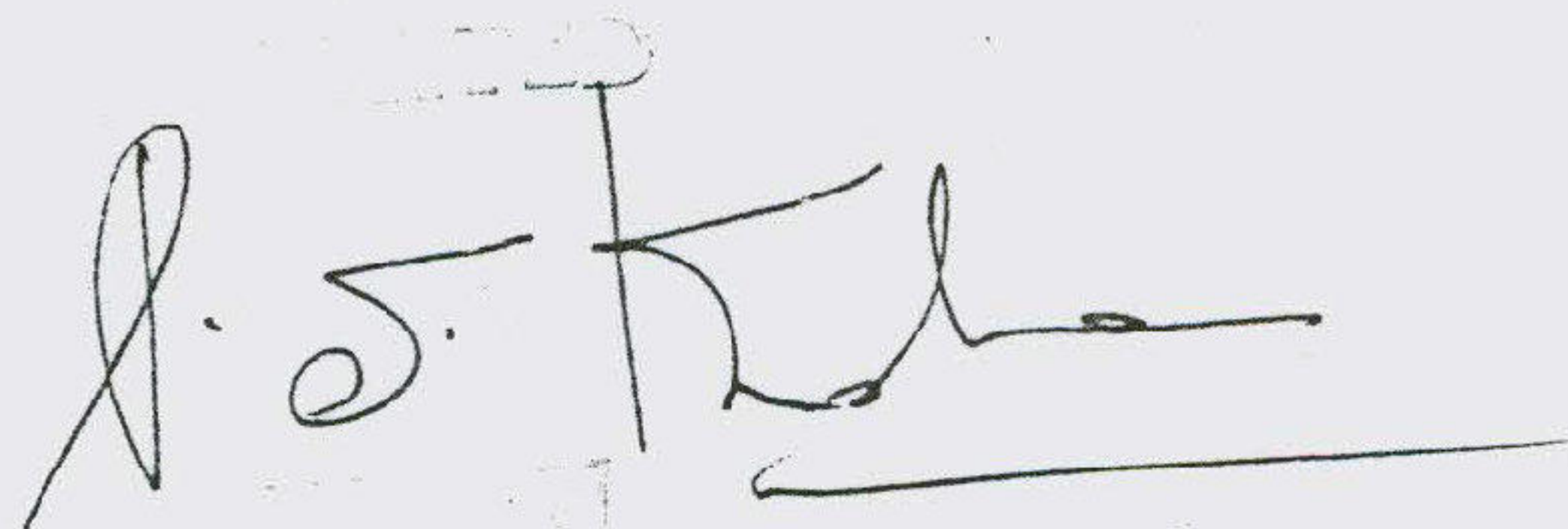
way be considered as socially backward. Moreover, it transpires from the ethnographic literature that "Agrahari" is a sub-caste of the trading caste "Bania".

6. In "The Tribes And Castes of Bengal" (Published by Firma Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, India, 1981, Vol. I, P. 11-12) H.H. Risley writes under the title "Agrahari, Agrahri" as follows:-

"Agrahari, Agrahri, a trading and cultivating caste of Behar and Upper India, who are probably closely related to the Agrawals. Mr. Nesfield thinks that the two groups must originally have been "sections of one and the same caste, which quarrelled on some triffling question connected with cooking or eating and have remained seperated ever since." Agraharis marry their daughters as infants, forbid widows to marry again, and do not recognise divorce. Unlike the Agarwals, they allow polygamy; and on this account, says Mr. Sherring, they are believed to have lost the high position they formerly held. In point of social standing the caste, though reckoned among the Vaisyas and wearing the sacred thread, ranks below the Agarwals, and their business is generally on a smaller scale. They are, in fact, tradesmen rather than bankers. The proper home of the caste is in Hindustan, and their numbers in the Lower Provinces of Bengal are comparatively small."

7. K.S. Singh writes about "Agrahari/Agrahari Bania" in the book "People of India – India's Communities" (Anthropological Survey of India, Oxford University Press, Delhi Calcutta Chennai Mumbai, 1998, Vol. IV, p. 49-50) as follows:-

"Agrahari/Agrahari Bania – A community of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, the Agrahari have synonyms like Agrahri and Agrari. Some of them claim that their name is derived from Agroha, the kingdom of Agrasen. They also claim that they are descendants of Agrasen and migrated from Agroha to Uttar Pradesh and from there to several parts of the country....."



The Agrahari of Uttar Pradesh are a Bania community who live in the Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Faizabad and Lucknow districts. It is reported that the name Agrahari is etymologically connected with the place name Agra. They claim partly Vaisya and partly Brahmanical descent."

8. In "The Tribes And Castes of the North Western India, Vol. I" W. Crooke writes that the "Agrahari, Agrehri – A sub-caste of Banyas found in considerable number in Allahabad, Benares, Gorakhpur, Lucknow, a Brahmanical descent, and wear the sacred cord. Their name has been connected with the cities of Agra and Agroha..... They are principally dealers in provisions and they have acquired some discredit as compared with their kinsfolk the Agarwalas by not isolating their women and allowing them to attend the shop. They also specially deal in various sweet-smelling woods which are used in religious ceremonies, such as agara or aloe-wood and sandal-wood, besides various medicines and simples. The richer members of the caste are bankers, dealers in grain etc. or pawnbrokers....."

9. Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya states that "the Agraharis are found chiefly in the districts round Benares..... They take the sacred thread, and, like the other leading Baniya clans, are strict vegetarians and teetotalers. There are many Agraharis who have embraced the Sikh faith....."

10. Sherring brings out the social status of Agraharis as follows:-

"This clan has the tradition of being descended partly from a Vaishya and partly from a Brahmanical ancestor. It is, however, regarded as of a Vaisya tribe, and, like other Baniyas, is engaged in trade. The members of the clan wear the sacred cord; but this also is the practice of many other clans of this great tribe..... The Agrahris form a very numerous class of tradesmen in that city, many of whom are slender means....."

AUTHENTICATED


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

IV. Findings

11. From the foregoing factual material, it is evident that the "Agrahari" caste/community is indeed section of Bania/Vaishya or trader category of castes/communities which are not generally perceived to be socially backward but on the contrary are considered to be castes/communities with considerable social clout on account of their very association with trade, commerce, business, money-lending etc. We are satisfied from the submissions made on behalf of the community and the factual admission that this community is of traders, whether petty or high. We do not find that this caste/community and this category of communities had suffered any kind of social ostracism or social deprivation practiced by either of the two superior castes, the Brahmans and Kshatriyas or any other communities. Occupations traditionally associated with different castes/communities in terms of caste system are an important indicator of the social position of a caste/community

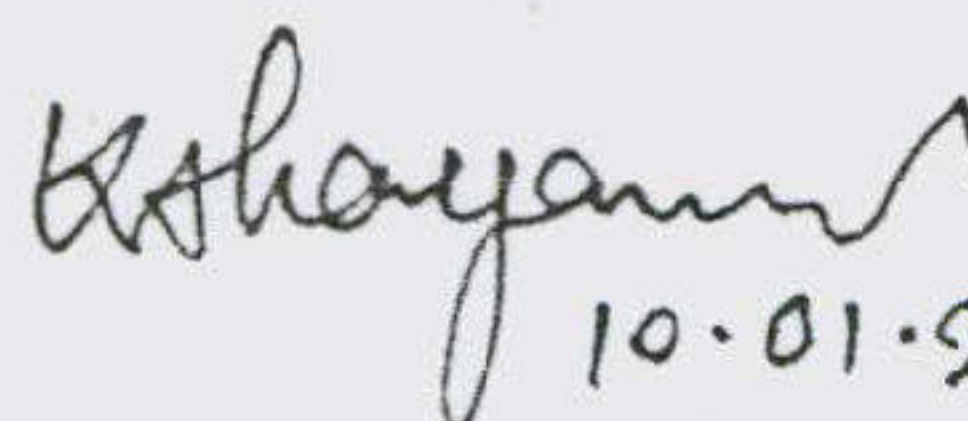
12. Inclusion of "Agrahari" in the list of BCs for Bihar has been particularly mentioned by the Request-maker. But this argument merits no importance. The Mungerilal Commission, on the basis of which "Agrahari" has found acceptance in the State List of BCs for Bihar, also certified that this community is regarded as "Vaishya". The Commission has already taken note of certain deficiencies, inconsistencies and internal contradictions in the Report of the Mungerilal Commission with respect of certain castes/communities of Vaishya/Bania/Trader caste category and brought them out in the NCBC's Findings/Advice on the Request for Inclusion of 12 Bania/Vaishya castes of Bihar, which put a question mark on the tenability of inclusion of a large number of Bania/Vaishya castes in the Bihar State List. As a matter of fact Bihar is the only State where a large number of Bania/Vaishya category of castes/communities are included in the List of BCs. This is obviously an aberration which has provided a handle a spate of untenable claims

APPROPRIATE



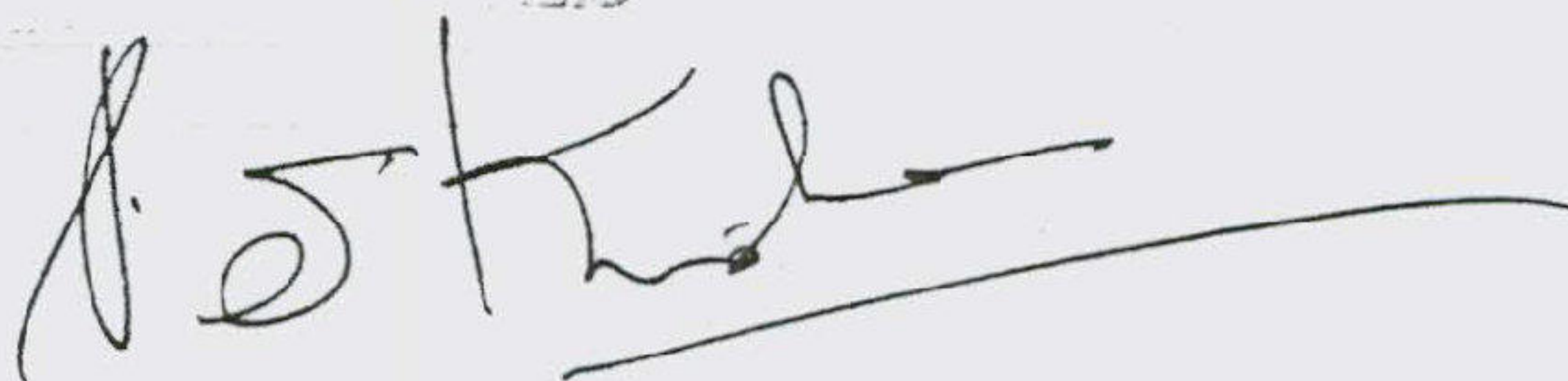
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Classes

from the same/similar castes in other States like the present one. In view of their high social position as noted above the castes/communities under consideration do not deserve inclusion in the List of Backward Classes.. However, it must be mentioned that trade, business, money-lending even when at local/village level require a modicum of the three Rs and maintenance of accounts, even though in a rudimentary form, and therefore it is unlikely that a trader caste is lower in literacy than the general level of its State/region. To summarise **"Agrahari"** caste/community of West Bengal is not socially backward but on the contrary is socially advanced. Therefore, the Request for inclusion of "Agrahari" in the Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal should be rejected.


10.01.2000

(Sahu Akshaya Bhai)


10.1.2000
(U.P. Singh)



V. Advice of the Commission

13. The Commission considered and agreed in full with the above Findings of the West Bengal 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 Requests for Inclusion of "Agrahari" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for West Bengal be rejected as it is not Socially Backward, on the contrary is Socially Advanced.

Kshayam
10.01.2000

Madan Mohan
10.1.2000

Dr. S. K. Mishra
10.1.2000

A. S. Krishna
10.1.2000

AUTHENTICATED

K. K. Singh
11.1.2000

A. S. Krishna