

NCBC Advice No. A.P. 57/2002

**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES
ANDHRA PRADESH BENCH**

FINDINGS

Case: Request for inclusion of "Veerashaiva Lingayat / Linga Baliya"
in the Central list of backward classes for Andhra Pradesh.

I. Request

This case arises from the requests received in the Commission for inclusion of "Veerashaiva Lingayat / Linga Baliya" community in the Central list of backward classes for Andhra Pradesh from the following organisations:-

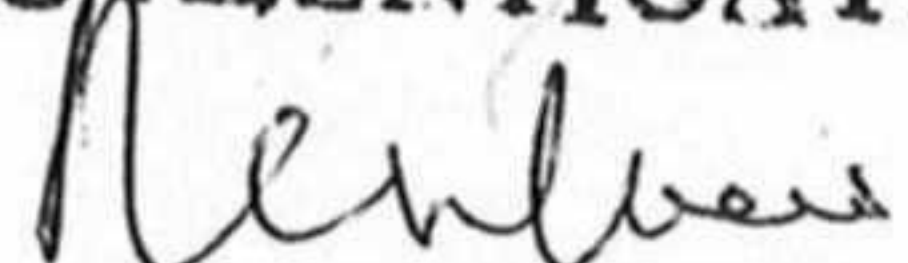
- (1) Andhra Pradesh Veerashaiva Lingayat Federation, Hyderabad
- (2) Kurnool Veerashaiva Sevasamithi, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh
- (3) Veerashaiva Samaj Seva Sangha, Adoni, Andhra Pradesh
- (4) Yemmiganur Veerashaiva Sangha, Yemmiganur, Kurnool District., Andhra Pradesh

II. Grounds / facts mentioned by the request-makers

2. The Andhra Pradesh Veerashaiva Lingayat Federation in their Memorandum dated 08-09-1994 has stated the following in support of their claim for inclusion in the list of backward classes:-

- (1) The Veerashaivas or Lingayats are persons belonging to and following the Veerashaiva religion, which came into existence at a time when the lower Hindu classes were oppressed and exploited in the name of religion by the upper classes among Hindus.

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Persons of all castes and communities embraced this religion since 12th century A.D. Though this religion had come into existence to uplift the downtrodden communities, in course of time, on account of lack of support from ruling communities and due to anti-propaganda and onslaught by other religious oligarchies, it could not progress further. But, these castes and communities continue to retain their usual caste customs and usages. There is no inter-marriages or inter-dining among them.

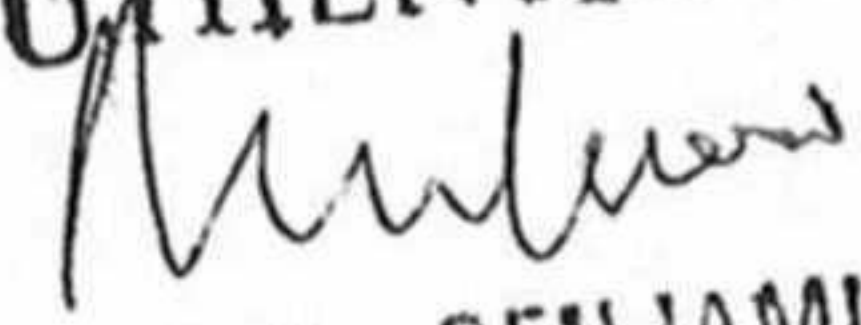
(2) The religion has its followers in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Maharashtra. In Andhra Pradesh, the Veerashaiva Lingayats are popularly called as Linga Baliyas. Approximately, there are 35,00,000 Lingayats in Andhra Pradesh.

(3) Veerashaiva Lingayats of Andhra Pradesh are backward in social, educational, economic, employment and political fields. Their main occupation is agriculture, petty business, agricultural labour, oil pressing, hair-cutting, cloth washing, pottery, blacksmithy, tailoring, weaving, carpentry, hawking, shoe-making and other occupations which have a social stigma attached to them.

(4) The majority of the Veerashaiva Lingayats are either uneducated or have studied upto middle school or high school. Their habitation in villages and underdeveloped areas has hampered their prospects in education. Due to these reasons the Lingayats are very backward in the educational field.

(5) 90% of the people of the community live below the poverty line. The majority of the Veerashaiva Lingayats, who migrated to Andhra Pradesh from Karnataka, in search of livelihood could not get any employment except as manual labour or as street hawkers. A few persons who could get employment in Government service are in Class III or Class IV. Only a negligible percentage has got employment in gazetted ranks.

(6) The Mandal Commission had included "Linga Baliya" in the list of backward classes recommended by it for Andhra Pradesh.

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(7) The earlier Backward Classes Commissions of Andhra Pradesh, particularly the Muralidhara Rao Commission, was not properly advised of the facts and figures regarding the Veerashaiva community which disallowed the claim for inclusion in the Andhra Pradesh State list of backward classes.

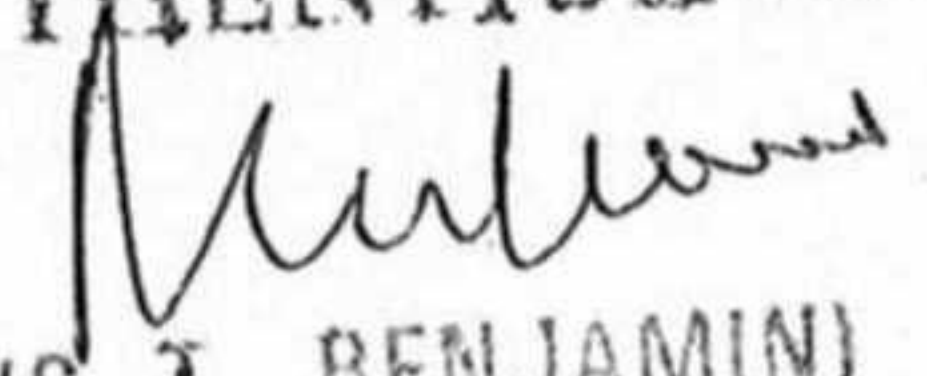
In the NCBC's questionnaire filled by the AP Veerasaiva Lingayat Federation, it is indicated that the members of the community mainly depend on agriculture for livelihood. Their other occupations as given in the questionnaire are "petty business / artisans / agricultural labour for wages / carpenters / tailors / potters / oil extractors"

3. The Kurnool Veerasaiva Sevasamithi in their letter of request dated 08-10-1994 has stated that the Veerasaiva Lingayats are otherwise known as **Linga Baliya**. Their main occupation is agriculture and some people eke out their livelihood by manual labour. They are not well educated and very few persons are employed in Govt. service, or in public or private sector. They are not economically sound as most of them are labourers or agriculturists. Thus they are below the poverty line and deserve special facilities and opportunities for their upliftment.

4. According to the Veerasaiva Samaj Seva Sangha, Adoni, the social status of the community is "below standard". They have no representation in the State Assembly. Their number in civic bodies is negligible. Their representation in the employment sector is meagre. There is every need of uplifting the living standards of Veerasaiva Lingayats of AP. The community has been included in the list of backward classes in Karnataka.

5. While the grounds mentioned by the Yemmiganur Veerasaiva Sangham, Yemmiganur, Kurnool District are same as those mentioned by Veerasaiva Samaj Seva Sangha, Adoni, they have also stated that "there are a number of occupational sub-sects among Lingayats, viz., Jangams, Linga Baliyas, Chippigas, Gouds, Gandlas etc. Some of these sects are already included in the list of backward classes. Their occupations are varied. Some are agriculturists, some are artisans and agricultural labourers, some are

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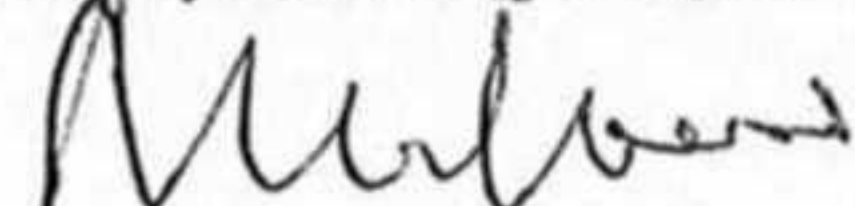
cooks and some eke out livelihood by taking up petty works in the unorganised sector ...”

II. Public Hearings

6. A full bench of the Commission under our predecessor members had a held a public hearing to examine the request for “Veerashaiva Lingayat / Linga Baliya” in the Central list of backward classes for Andhra Pradesh on 08-12-1999 at Hyderabad. But since that public hearing remained inconclusive, the Commission could not take a decision on the request and tender advice to the Government before the term of the then Members was completed on different dates between February to April, 2000. The present Commission, therefore, took up the case afresh and a public hearing was held by a bench, consisting of Justice B.L. Yadav, Chairperson, Shri C.T. Benjamin, Member-Secretary, Shri M.S. Matharoo and Dr. B.M. Das, Members, on 06-02-2002 at Hyderabad. Smt. Neera Shastri, who is also a member of the AP bench of the Commission could not attend the public hearing. At the public hearing, the Veerashaiva Lingayat Federation was represented by its President Shri Heroor Vijay Kumar and General Secretary S. G. Shantappa. Shri K. Ramalingappa and Shri M. Shanmukhappa, President and Secretary respectively of the Veerasaiva Samaja Seva Sangha; Shri Margam Viswanathan, Shri V. Nagappa and Shri Basavanagaiah also appeared before the Bench representing the community. The State Government was represented at the public hearing by Shri P. Sundar Kumar, Commissioner for Backward Classes Welfare and other officers in the Office of the Commissioner for Backward Classes Welfare.

7. At the public hearing, Shri Heroor Vijay Kumar, President, Veerashaiva Lingayat Federation, stated that the Lingayats of Andhra Pradesh are a minority community as they are migrants from Karnataka. Therefore, in Andhra Pradesh the members of the community are treated as outsiders and they are not given “any recognition”. It is a totally neglected community. “The people in AP do not even understand what the ‘Veerasaiva Lingayat’ is. They just wonder and ask, ‘what do you mean by Veerasaiva Lingayat?’. No society recognises us, no community recognises us, no political party

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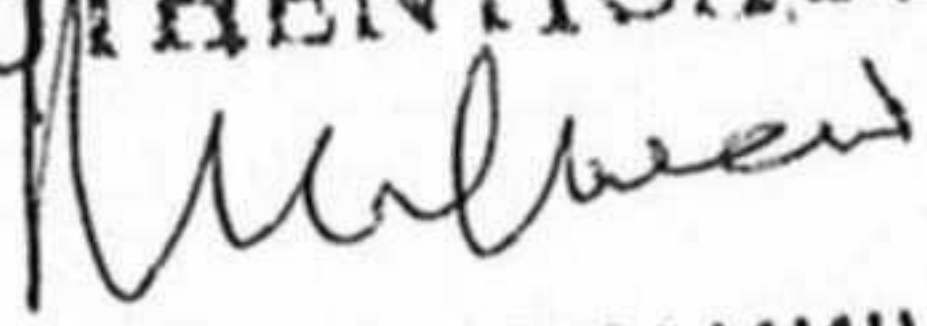
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recognises us, we are just living here. The Virasaiva Lingayats are concentrated in the districts bordering Karnataka like Kurnool, Anantapur, Mehboob Nagar, Medak, Raga Reddy etc. 90% of our people are landless agricultural labourers. There is only one IAS officer from the community. There is no one in IPS. There are no doctors in the community. The educational status of the community is very poor. Only 0.01% of the members of the community go upto graduation level. 70% of people do not even know how to sign. "Our ladies work as maid servants".

8. He also stated that the Hyderabad state under the rule of Nizam and the Government of the erstwhile Madras Presidency had recognised Veerashaiva Lingayats as backward and given certain concessions including reservation in education. He said that the community is backward even now and therefore it should be included in the list of backward classes. When the bench asked him why the community could not convince the earlier State Commissions about its backwardness and get the community included in the State list, Shri Vijay Kumar stated that the Anantharaman and Muralidhara Rao Commissions were not properly advised of the facts and figures regarding the community and the community people also could not present their case properly because of their backwardness. He also stated that indeed there are some businessmen and industrialists in the community but they constitute only about 10% and the rest 90% are absolutely backward. There has not been a single MP from the community till today. The community hardly had 1 or 2 MLAs since the inception of the Legislative Assembly in Andhra Pradesh. When the bench specifically asked him whether the community is actually "socially backward" or not, he repeated that "since nobody recognises our community, nobody helps our community, the stigma for me first of all is that I am an outsider, they say I am not educated, I am not well placed. The work we undertake is menial work. So my humble submission is that because of our poor living conditions, and because most of our people reside in remote villages and engage in agricultural operations, there is no recognition at all and the community is socially and educationally backward and needs to be sympathetically considered and included in the list of backward classes".

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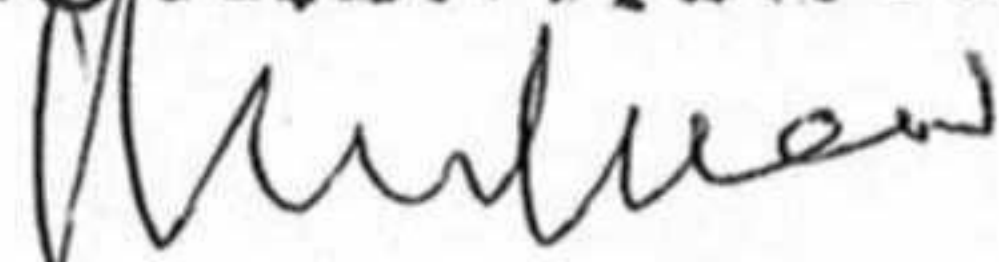
9. Sri S.G. Shanthappa, Shri Margam Viswanathan, Shri V. Nagappa and Shri Basavanagaiah also made submissions before the Bench supporting the claims of Shri Heroor Vijay Kumar. They also added that "the total population of the community in Andhra Pradesh is about 25-30 lakhs, mostly concentrated in the districts adjoining Karnataka, but some are also scattered over other parts of AP. We constitute 4 to 5% of the total population of AP. Our literacy is 25 to 30% as against the State average of 60 to 65%. Out of these literates, 90% are under matriculates. There are only a handful of graduates, engineers, doctors etc. Those in Government service are employed normally as Class IV employees or as LDCs, UDCs etc. They are working as gumasthas, office boys in the private sector business etc. From these, our social status can be imagined. In villages, we are mostly agricultural labourers and those who have land have got only 2 to 5 acres of agricultural holdings. In Hyderabad area, our people are mostly hawkers. Admission of our community people to colleges is 'almost meagre'. So, considering all these, please give protection to the community, which though constitutes only 5%, is considerable in number, by including it in the list of backward classes".

III. Objections

10. At the public hearing, a number of individuals appeared before the bench representing different castes/communities and their organisations and stated their objection to the inclusion of Veerashaiva Lingayat community in the list of backward classes.

11. Dr. M. Bagaiah, General Secretary, Andhra Pradesh Nayee Brahmin Employees Cultural and Welfare Association, Hyderabad, stated that the Veerashaiva Lingayat or Linga Baliya is a forward community. They are traditionally businessmen. Most of them have land holdings. They are agriculturists, shopkeepers, cloth merchants, grain dealers, stockists, bankers, rice millers, oil millers, petrol dealers. The community on the whole is wealthy. They are economically more sound than even the Vysyas or Komatis who are

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a business community proper. They have not suffered from any social stigma. They are respected by other caste people. There are many engineers, doctors and business managers among them. The community owns Sri Basaveshwara Institute of Technology. Their occupations are not inferior or unclean or undignified or unremunerative or which do not carry influence or power. Their request for inclusion in the list of backward classes should be rejected.

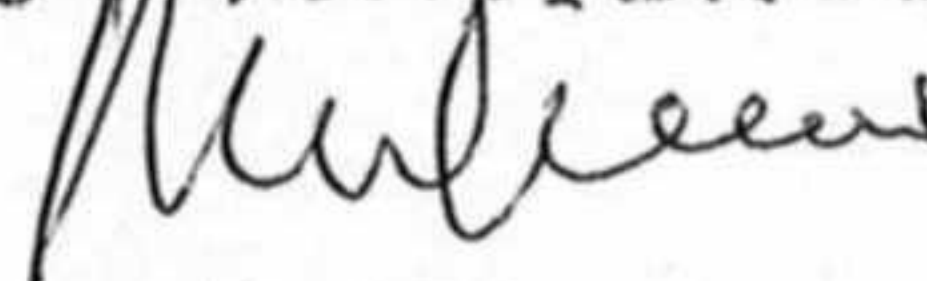
12. Shri Kondala Rao, Vice President for BC Affairs, Gowda Officials and Professionals Association, Andhra Pradesh, said that the Lingayats are mainly a trading community. They are not socially backward. If they are included in the list of backward classes, they will also be eligible for reservation in political representation which will be detrimental to the interests of real backward classes.

13. Shri Ramesh Kumar, General Secretary, Andhra Pradesh Kuruma Sangham, stated that in the villages the Virasaiva Lingayats are treated by backward castes and Scheduled Castes just like Brahmins. They are a forward community. They will not allow backward castes to sit with them. Most of the Lingayats are village officers. They are the priests in most of the temples run privately by them. There are landlords and business magnates among the Lingayats of Andhra Pradesh. They should not be included in the list of backward classes.

IV. Facts

14. Linga Baliya is included in the list of backward classes for Andhra Pradesh recommended by the Mandal Commission, as "146. Linga Baliya", but since it was not included in the Andhra Pradesh Government's list of backward classes, it was also not included in the Central list of backward classes for Andhra Pradesh prepared and notified in 1993 on the basis of the principle of commonality (ie., inclusion in the Central list of castes/communities which were commonly found included both in the Mandal Commission's list and the State Government's list). Even now, the Veerashaiva Lingayat

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or Linga Baliya is not included in the Andhra Pradesh State Government's list of backward classes.

15. The Anantharaman Commission (1968-1970), based on whose recommendations the present State list of backward classes was originally prepared, did not recommend the inclusion of Veerashaiva Lingayat or Linga Baliya in the State List. No discussion about this community is found in the report of this Commission. The community perhaps did not approach this Commission to get the community included in the State list.

16. Later the Muralidhara Rao Commission, appointed by the State Government in 1982 to review the recommendations of the Anantharaman Commission and the implementation thereof, considered the claim of the community for inclusion in the State list, but the Commission rejected their claim on the ground that they are not socially and educationally backward. In its report, the Commission made the following observation about the community:-

".....The Lingayats or Linga Baliya in general are engaged in trade. Some of them are shopkeepers, cloth merchants, grain dealers and bankers and a few of them have become rich and are regarded as the wealthiest section of the community. Even as per their own admission literacy is relatively high in this community. Some have entered Government service and are also members of learned professions. But the majority of the Veerasaivas are agriculturists. A small proportion of them are cattle-breeders and confectioners. They are thus not socially and educationally backward."

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V. Reference in literature/ethnographic accounts

17. Thurston and Rangachari in "Castes and Tribes of Southern India" (Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, Madras, 1993, first published in 1909) write about Linga Balijas as follows:-

"The Linga Balijas (traders) are summed up, in the Madras Census Report, 1901, as a **Lingayat sub-caste of Balija**. In a note on Lingayats, Mr. R.C.C. Carr records that the **Linga Balijas or Banajigas** are essentially traders, though many are now cultivators, and that **Telugu Lingayats** often call themselves **Linga Balijas.....**

In a note on the Linga Balijas of the North Arcot district, Mr. H.A. Stuart writes that 'Linga Balija appears rather to be the name of the followers of a religious faith than of a distinct caste, for the Linga Balijas state that their caste contains eleven sub-divisions, each with a separate occupation, viz., Jangam (priests), Reddi (cultivators), Gandla (oil-mongers), and the like. Almost all the Linga Balijas of North Arcot are traders, who speak Canarese and are immigrants from Mysore, At one time they enjoyed much importance in this district, particularly in its large trading towns. Headmen among them, styled Chetties, were by the Arcot Nawabs assigned districts, in which they possessed both magisterial and civil authority, and levied taxes from other merchants for their own personal use.'"

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18. Anthropological Survey of India's 'People of India' national series volume titled "India's Communities" writes about the "Veerasaiva Lingayats" of Andhra Pradesh, as follows:-

"In Andhra Pradesh, the Veerasaiva Lingayat are a cluster of communities who profess Veerasaivism preached by the great saint and social reformer Sri Basaveswara. The communities which come under this fold in the local area are Jangama (priests), Baliya (traders), Reddy (peasants), Gandla (oil-pressers), Jeera (flower-vendors), Gouli (milkmen) and Jain Lingayat"

The same volume writes under the head "Linga Baliya" as follows:-

"The Linga Baliya live in the West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur and Kurnool districts of Andhra Pradesh The Linga Baliya are vegetarian but eat garlic and onion. ...

While the traditional occupation of the Linga Baliya is agriculture, many of them are engaged in business, petty trade, and jobs in Government offices and in factories. ... They are satisfied with the government's developmental programmes and have reported that of late their dependence on moneylenders has declined considerably."

VI. Findings

19. Veerasaivism or Lingayatism can be said to be a religio-philosophical faith, the fundamental doctrines and tenets of which are believed to have been originally formulated by the 12th century A.D. social reformer Basaveswara. Members of different castes/communities were believed to have embraced this new faith which in its inception attempted to abolish all caste distinctions. But, in the present day practice, there has been

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a noticeable departure from Basaveswara's teachings with respect to the attitude originally assumed towards caste distinctions. This fact has been attested to by R.E. Enthoven in 'The Tribes and Castes of Bombay' [Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, Madras, 1990, first edition 1922, Vol. II]. It is also confirmed by the Andhra Pradesh Veerashaiva Lingayat Federation in its Memorandum where they have stated that "there is no inter-marriages and inter-dining" among the various Lingayat communities.

20. It is seen from the evidence in ethnographic accounts cited above and also from the statement made by the Yemmiganur Veerashaiva Sangham, Yemmiganur, Kurnool District in their letter of request, that there are a number of occupational sub-sects among Lingayats of Andhra Pradesh, viz., Jangams, Linga Balijas, Reddis, Chippigas, Gouds, Gandlas, Gowlis, etc. But, since the Veerashaivas of Andhra Pradesh are generally called as Linga Balijas, as claimed by the request-makers and as also attested to in the report of Muralidhara Rao Commission as well as in Thurston's account, it appears that a significant proportion of Veerashaivas of Andhra Pradesh are actually Linga Balijas, who are a section of Balija community who follow Lingayatism. Balija is generally regarded as a community originally of traders. Presently they are both agriculturists and traders. After enquiry in respect of requests received for inclusion of Balija community in the Central list of BCs for Andhra Pradesh, the Commission has found that the Balijas are not a backward community, but, on the contrary, are an advanced caste/community [refer NCBC Advice No. AP ____/2002]. That the Lingayats among Balijas or the Linga Balijas are also not socially backward is clear from the Anthropological Survey of India's account which states that, "while the traditional occupation of the Linga Balija is agriculture, many of them are engaged in business, petty trade, and jobs in Government offices and in factories". According to Thurston, they are "essentially traders". Clearly, the profile of the community that emerges from these accounts is not of a socially backward community. In view of these facts the bench is of the opinion that the Veerashaiva Lingayats of Andhra Pradesh, who are also known as Linga Balijas, are not socially and educationally backward and hence do not deserve inclusion in the list of

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backward classes. Therefore, the requests for inclusion of "Veerashaiva Lingayat / Linga Baliya" in the Central list of backward classes for Andhra Pradesh should be rejected.

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P.S: The bench met on 14-03-2002 and unanimously took the decision to reject the request for inclusion of "Veerashaiva Lingayat / Linga Baliya" in the Central list of backward classes for Andhra Pradesh. However, on account of the unfortunate demise of Chairperson Justice B.L. Yadav on 24-03-2002 the findings of the bench do not bear the signature of the Chairperson.

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VII. Advice of the Commission

21. Based on the above findings, the Commission tenders the following advice to the Central Government under Section 9(1) of the NCBC Act, 1993 for necessary action by the Central Government under Section 9(2) of the Act:-

Requests for inclusion of "Veerashaiva Lingayat / Linga Baliya" community in the Central list of backward classes for Andhra Pradesh be rejected as it is not a socially and educationally backward class.

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