

National Commission for Backward Classes

Orissa Bench

Findings

Case: Request for inclusion of **Belama** in the Central List of Other Backward Classes for the State of Orissa.

I. Request

The case arises from the request received in this Commission from State Government of Orissa for inclusion of Belama Caste in the Central List of Backward Classes for Orissa.

II. Public Hearing

The Bench of the Commission consisting of Hon'ble Chairman Justice S. Ratnavel Pandian, Hon'ble Member Dr. Subbha Somu and Member Secretary Shri S.K. Purkayastha held a public hearing at Bhubaneshwar on 17.04.2007 to examine the request for inclusion of Belama caste in the Central List of Backward Classes for Orissa.

The State Government was represented by Shri Taradatt, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, ST & SC Development Department, Shri Jyoti Prakash Das, Director & Addt. Secretary OBC, Govt; of Orissa, Shri H. Behera, Member-Secretary, Orissa Backward Classes Commission, Shri G.N.Sethi, Deputy Secretary, ST/SC Development Department and other officials.

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III. Facts

The relevant entries relating to Belama in different lists are given below: -

Mandal List

Not included

State List

188. Belama, Ellama.

Central List

Not included

IV. Submissions at the Public Hearing

Sh. Biswanath Nayak, Ex. Secretary Nikhila Utkal Belema Samaj, Orissa who appeared on behalf of the Belema caste/community requested for inclusion of Belama in the Central OBC List of Orissa. He pointed out that whilst Belama caste has not yet been included in the Central OBC list, it is included in the SEBC list of Orissa State at Serial No. 188. The caste/community has a limited population and are considered as weaker section of the society. Their financial condition is very poor. In the last 50 years very few from their community got education and less than 5% of the caste/community boys are going to school. They are not only economically backward but also down trodden people of the society. Not a single person from their caste/community is MLA in the State Assembly. There is no instance after independence of any Belama person having occupied the status of a petty officer even in their State. These persons are very innocent and never alert about their rights. The Alia caste who are very rich and enlightened are included in the Central OBC List but the people of their caste who are of lower status

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than the Alia Caste have not been included. He also stated that 99% people of the caste people are daily labourers in their respective villages or in Surat.

He further informed the Commission that their traditional occupation is cultivation. They mostly work as agricultural and migrant labourers in other states, such as Gujarat (Surat, Ahmedabad), Maharashtra (Mumbai) and Kerala. As per data collected by the organization their population is 50,670. They are mostly concentrated in Ganjam, Koraput, Dhenkanal and Kalahandi districts of Orissa. Their caste/community is economically backward as most of them live below the poverty line. The literacy rate of the caste/community in the state is 35.08 percent (2005). He also stated that there is no IAS, OAS and other Executive Officers from the community in the State or Central Government, except teachers and fourth class Govt. employees.

The social status of their caste/ community members is also low and they are not allowed to dine with the upper castes during social functions, such as marriages, funerals, birth ceremonies and other religious ceremonies. If anybody, by chance, takes food before the upper castes, then they are subjected to social boycott and also reprimanded in society and penalty is imposed upon them.

He informed the Commission that in Orissa they are known as Belema and that the Belama's are the original inhabitant of this state. These people reside mostly in the districts of Ganjam, Dhenkanal and Koraput. He clarified that there is a different caste called Ellama, which migrated from Andhra Pradesh. Whilst 'Belama' and 'Belema' are same they are different from Ellama. The Ellama people speak Telugu as well as Oriya. There is no connection between Belama and Ellama. Belama

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hails originally from Orissa whereas Ellama migrated from Andhra Pradesh to Orissa

At the end, he stated that his caste/community is socially, educationally and economically backward and requested for inclusion of Belema in the Central List of OBCs for the State of Orissa, so that the people of their caste/community may receive benefits provided by the Government in future.

V. During the Public Hearing Orissa Backward Classes Commission submitted a written statement to the NCBC, containing following facts: The average annual income of the families of this community range between Rs. 3000 and Rs. 5000. Most members of the community live in thatched houses. The places of their habitation are connected by village road and are easily accessible. educational and medical facilities are available in their villages.

VI. The filled in NCBC's Questionnaire submitted by Nikhil Utkal Belema Samaj contains the following information:-

- Name of the caste/community is Belama.
- Population of the caste/community in the State is 50,670 which is 0.14 percent of the State population, and is mainly concentrated in the districts of Ganjam, Koraput and Dhenkanal.
- The occupation of this caste/community is agriculture. Most of them work as daily wage earner on others land. 96.0 percent of the population of the caste are landless manual labourers.
- Women of the caste/community are engaged in construction of road and building.
- Children are engaged in hotel, shop and business organizations for supplementing their family income.

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- Number of posts in the services of the State government held by the members of the caste/community in year 2005 is as follows:

GroupA/Class 1	Nil
GroupB/Class 11	2
GroupC/Class 111	70
GroupD/Class 1V	32

- No member of the Legislative assembly belongs to this caste. The number of caste/community people elected to local bodies in 2007 is as follows:-

Zilla Parishad	-	One
Samiti Sabha	-	Five
Sarpanch	-	Five

- Literacy rate of the caste/community in the State is 35.08 percent.
- 80.0 percent of the families of the caste in the State live in Kaccha houses and the remaining 20.0 percent lives in Pucca houses.
- The caste is generally regarded as socially, educationally and economically backward.
- The caste/community immediately higher in rank than this caste/community is Alia, and Kudumbo.

VII. The Commission took note of the following ethnographic accounts in respect of the caste/community **"Belama"**:-

India's Communities, Vol.IV, Sh. K.S. Singh (Page 356)

Belama. A little-known community of Orissa, the Belama speak Oriya and use the Oriya script. They are non-vegetarian and rice is their staple food. The community has two clans, namely Kounchhasa and Nageswar. Their surnames are Nahak, Sasmal, Khuntia Silha etc., but some of them have changed these, e.g. Nayak to Nahak. The Belama practice community endogamy and clan as well as surname exogamy. They prefer cross-cousin and junior sororal and junior levirate marriages. Adult marriages settled through the modes of negotiation, exchange or mutual consent are practiced by them. Vermilion and conch-shell

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bangles are the symbols of married women. Dowry exists in both cash and kind. The rule of residence is patrilocal. Divorce is Judicially and Socially approved of in cases of adultery, maladjustment etc. Remarriage is permissible of divorcees and the widowed. Family property is equally distributed among the sons but the eldest son gets a little larger share. Women play a role in agricultural operations, animal husbandry, collection of fuelwood and in the socio-religious sphere.

The primary as well as traditional occupation of the landholding Belema is agriculture. Trade and business, private and government service, wage-labour etc. are the subsidiary occupations. Patron-client and cultivator-labour relations are maintained at the village level. Modern intercommunity linkages are forged by the businessmen, scholars and white-collar workers. The Belema prefer indigenous medicare but also make use of modern medicines.

VIII. Findings

From the evidence and documents presented at the time of the Public Hearing and also on perusal of ethnographic literatures by eminent authors and other available information, it is the finding of the Bench that Belema is a little-known community of Orissa, speaking Oriya language and using Oriya script.

The population of the caste/community in the State is stated to be 50,670 which is 0.14 percent of the State population, and is mainly concentrated in the districts of Ganjam, Koraput and Dhenkanal. They are engaged in agricultural activities with 96.0 percent of them working as daily wage labourers on others land. Women of the caste/community are engaged in construction of road and building whereas children are engaged in hotel, shop and business organizations for supplementing

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their family income. The Bench finds that the literacy rate of the caste/community in the State is 35.08 percent, which is far below the State average literacy (63.61 percent). They are also given a low social status by the rural society. Also the representation of this caste/community in State government services as well as Central services is low. Similarly their representation in elected bodies is also low. Most of the community members live below the poverty line, so they are deprived of educational and medical facilities. The Bench is convinced that Belama community is a socially and educationally backward community and therefore the Bench recommend for inclusion of Belama in the Central List of Backward Classes for Orissa at Sl.No.195.

The entry after inclusion will be as under:

195. Belama


(Justice S. Ratnavel Pandian)
Chairperson


(S.K. Purkayastha)
Member-Secretary


(Dr. Subbha Somu)
Member

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IX. Advice of the Commission

The Commission considered and agreed in full with the above Finding of the Orissa 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 castes/community **"Belama"** are socially and educationally backward and should be included in the Central List of Other Backward Classes for the State of Orissa at entry No.195. The entry after inclusion will read as under:-

195. Belama



(Justice S. Ratnavel Pandian)
Chairperson



(S.K. Purkayastha)
Member-Secretary



(Dr. Subbha Somu)
Member

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