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MEMBER SECRETARY
NATIONAL COMMISSION
FOR BACKWARD CLASSES
NEW DELHI-110 066

NCBC Advice No.11 Orissa/96

21.6.1996

Dear Shri Saxena,

I am sending herewith the unanimous Advice of the National Commission for Backward Classes under Section 9(1) of the NCBC Act, 1993 in respect of "Chasa" of Orissa to include it in the Central List of Backward Classes for Orissa, for necessary action under Section 9(2) of the Act by the Central Government.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely

(P.S. KRISHNAN)

Shri K.B. Saxena
Secretary
Ministry of Welfare
Shastri Bhavan
NEW DELHI

Encl: As stated.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

ORISSA BENCH

CASE: Inclusion of CHASA in the Central List of Backward Classes for Orissa.

REQUEST: Mr. Surendra Kumar Sahoo on behalf of the Chasa Community and Mr. Gyanendra Kumar Pradhan and others made a request for the inclusion of CHASA Community in Central List of OBC for Orissa. The request, accompanied by a filled questionnaire states--

(a) the Chasas, are a community of cultivators comprising by and large of tenant cultivators, marginal farmers and land less labour and are socially and educationally backward.

(b) that the two other subdivisions of Chasas known as Paikos and Kultas are already included in the Central List of OBCs, whereas the Chasas are unjustifiably left out.

(c) that, because a few members of the Chasa community claim the status of Khandayat, whereas a large majority of of the community continue to be known by the name CHASA, the CHASAS, who have been included in the State List separately from Khandayat at entry No.138, should not be deprived of the benefit of Central Reservation for OBC.

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

PUBLIC

HEARINGS: The two-Member Bench of this Commission consisting of Justice R.N. Prasad and Prof. D.L. Sheth, held a Public Hearing at Bhubaneswar on 4.1.96 and at Dhenkanal on 5.1.96.

The Bench was assisted at Bhubaneswar by the Director of Welfare Department and Secretary of the State Commission

for Backward Classes and by the Collector of Dhenkanal and other Government officers at Dhenkanal.

FACTS OF THE CASE:

1. Chasa is among the most numerous peasant communities indigenous to Orissa. The name Chasa, literally, means cultivators of land. In some parts of Orissa, especially in the areas contiguous with Andhra Pradesh, Chasas use the prefix, oda, orha or odra meaning 'the first' or 'original' inhabitants of Orissa. The term Odia is possibly derived from Oda. According to Risely Chasas are of non-Aryan descent. The oriya writer Pyari Mohan says "Their forefathers were known as 'odha', who had migrated from the Bastar and Jayapur regions to different districts of Orissa, where they were granted land 'jagir' by the Rajas of Orissa for the service they rendered to the States as Padatika (foot soldiers). Later on they settled down and began to cultivate the soil" (quoted from Nirmal Kumar Bose (ed), Data on Caste: ORISSA: Antropological Survey of India; 1960 P.127). The same pre-fix oda or orha is also used by some members of another cognate caste of foot-soldiers turned cultivators called 'Paika' (included in the Central List of OBC) in orissa. In some parts of Orissa the term 'sudra' is also prefixed to both the chasas and the paikas.

2. W.W.Hunter in his Statistical Account of Bengal (chapter on Cuttack and Balasore, vol. XVIII Reprinted in 1976) lists Chasa as one of the Sudra communities of Orissa, along with, Napit/Bhandari or Barber, blacksmiths, Kansari/Thattari, Sadgop, Tambuli, Mali, etc. In their social and economic status Hunter equates them with such sudra castes of orissa as Golà, Kulta, (a sub-division of Chasa, included in the Central List of OBC) Gaur etc. (pp 274 275). All the communities with which Hunter equates Chasas are included in the Central List of OBC.

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3. Binod Sankar Das in his The Economic History of Orissa (Firma KLM, Calcutta 1978) describes Chasas as a tenant-cultivator community belonging to labourers and wage earners class of Muleya

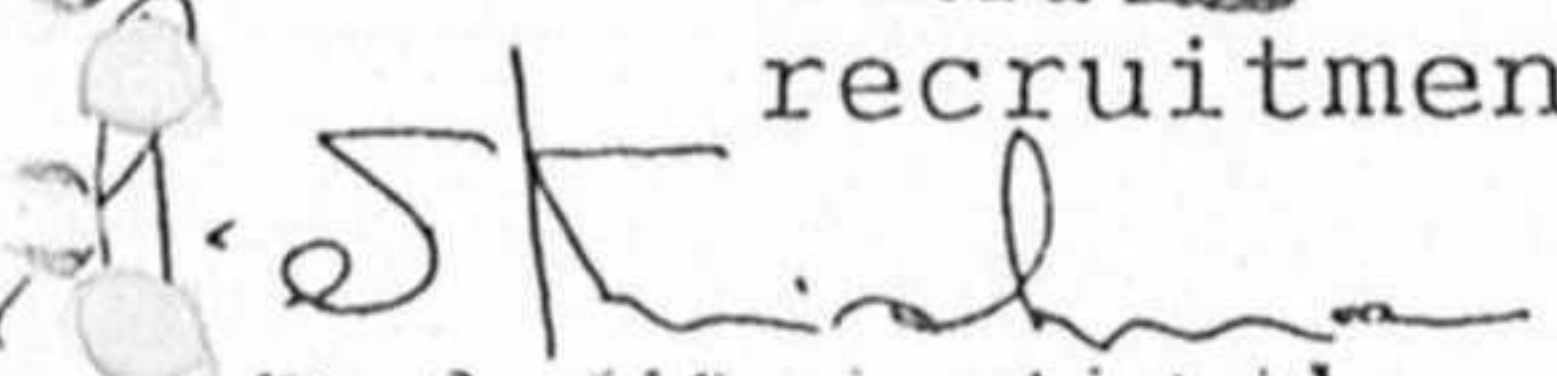
P. S. KRISHNAN
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for Backward Classes

and in terms of their social backwardness clubs them with such tribal groups as Santhas and Khonds. Chasas, according to Das, cultivated hired land on lease-hold basis from the middle- peasantry which itself was pauperised by the revenue policy of the British." "Enhancement of the land-rent which was the new feature of agrarian economy affected their (i.e. chasas, khonds, santhas and other lower peasantry) economic position also. In the agrarian resistance movements of the 19th century Orissa, this class of people (the lower peasantry) supplied the real strength of revolt under the leadership of dalbeharas and lakherajdars" (the middle peasantry) (p 206). The author vividly describes the historical process of pauperization of the cultivating castes in orissa. He equates the deterioration of social and economic condition of Chasas during the colonial period with that of such communities as Pansahara, Bouris and Khonds (P.215)

4. Different tilling communities, although they, by and large, belong to the class of lower peasantry, are known by different names in different parts of Orissa. Thus, according to Dr. Manoranjan Mohanty, the peasantry in the coastal orissa "belonged to the broad category of Chasa, in the inland region their counter part was the Kulta caste". (Manoranjan Mohanty: Class, caste and Dominance in Orissa, in Francine Frankel & M.S.A. Rao(ed), Dominance and state power in Modern India (Oxford 1990 p.328). In Khurda area and in some other parts of Orissa they belonged to the category of paika. Thus, Paika and Kulta (the two communities included in the Central OBC List for Orissa) are regarded to be sub-divisions of the larger category of lower peasantry in Orissa, known as Chasas.

5. The condition of these peasant communities especially of the Chasa and the Paika in Orissa, who were also used by the Rajas as the reserved armies of the peasant militia and were called to service in times of war in return of which they were given modest land-grants, sharply deteriorated with the retaliative measures taken by the British administration after the peasant rebellion, commonly known as the Paik Rebellion of 1817. The express objective of the British was to desperse and wipe them out as a class of peasant militia, by physically disarming them, by prohibiting their recruitment to the army, and by confiscating their 'jagiri' lands

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granted to them by the Rajas. They were declared by the British as a 'non-martial race'. As the doors of recruitment to Government service were closed to them as back as in the early 19th century, there was little enthusiasm left in them to acquire modern education. They also lost the social position they once held as the militia men maintaining law and order in local areas on behalf of the Rajas. (see: W.W.Hunter, A History of Orissa, pp 126-28). At the time of Independence, the peasant communities of Chasas, Kultas and Paiks found themselves in an acute state of economic, social and educational backwardness. Not surprisingly, the Oriya Dictionary compiled by Gopalchandra Praharaj, describes Chasas as 'sudras' or Itar (meaning the "other lowly and uncivilized people").

CHASAS AND KHANDAYATS:

6. Since Independence the educational level and economic position of Chasas have relatively improved. Particularly their numerical strength is being increasingly expressed in representational, competitive politics. As is the case with similar caste-groupings of the peasantry in other states, Chasa along with its other cognate castes like Paiks and kultas have become politically more salient than they were in the colonial periods. But in their social and economic position they are no where near the numerically small but economically and socially powerful castes constituting the ruling elite of Orissa, namely the Brahmins, the Karnas and the Kshatriyas. Dr. Manoranjan Mohanty commenting on the post-Independence developments in Orissa, observes, "other cultivating castes, such as the chasas, and the broad section of artisan castes have not experienced any such increase in political influence. The chasas are primarily small and marginal farmers, or landless labourers. They are yet to be fully accepted by the Khandayats, into their political grouping. On the contrary, Khandayats with their militia background and larger land holdings seek the status and power of the Karnas or Kshatriyas. This is a situation in which class differentiation among the peasantry has divided the cultivator castes. In addition, the agricultural labourers, divided among Chasas and Dalits (Scheduled Castes) are divided on caste lines, since the chasas place them above the Dalits in the social hierarchy". ("Caste, Class and Dominance in Orissa, in Frankel & Rao cited above, emphasis added) P.352.

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While there has been a caste of Khandayats claiming more credibly the Kshatriya status and kinship relations with the Rajas and in possession of larger land-holdings, the Khandayat category is socially porous. Many a peasant caste, in pursuit of upward social mobility, stake its claim to being Khandayat. In effect the category Khandayats, like the Kshatriyas in Gujarat has become a socio-political category, a caste conglomerate comprising of the rajput-kshatriya castes as well as several other lower castes of the peasantry. (see Ghanshyam Shah: Caste Association and Political Process in Gujarat: A study of Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha (Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1975 - especially chapter 2 and 3). It is therefore appropriate that chasa are treated separately from the generic grouping of Khandayats, even though some among them may claim to be Khandayats.

8. In the older colonial records of land-settlement and in the 1931 census, Chasas are listed and enumerated separately from the Khandayats. However, there have been intermittent efforts on the part of various castes of the lower peasantry of Orissa, including the chasa, to claim a higher social status of 'Khandayat'. Despite such efforts a vast majority of this peasant community in Orissa has continued to be known, as chasa. It is probably for this reason that chasas merited a separate entry from Khandayat in the State List of Orissa.

9. The following extracts from the Census of India, 1931 (part II, Mayurbhang State, P 186) illustrate the efforts made by some wealthier and educated Chasas to get their names enter in the Government Records as 'Khandayats' and how such efforts were not encouraged by the Colonial administration:

"In his report on the present census of Bihar and Orissa Mr. Lacay makes mention of the desire of the Chasa to improve their social status by converting themselves into Khandait and records the fact that 'the census returns indicate that they have met with no little success in this ambition'. In every census the tendency of the Chasas to become Khandaits has been particularly marked and restricted as far as possible The Chasa is a great

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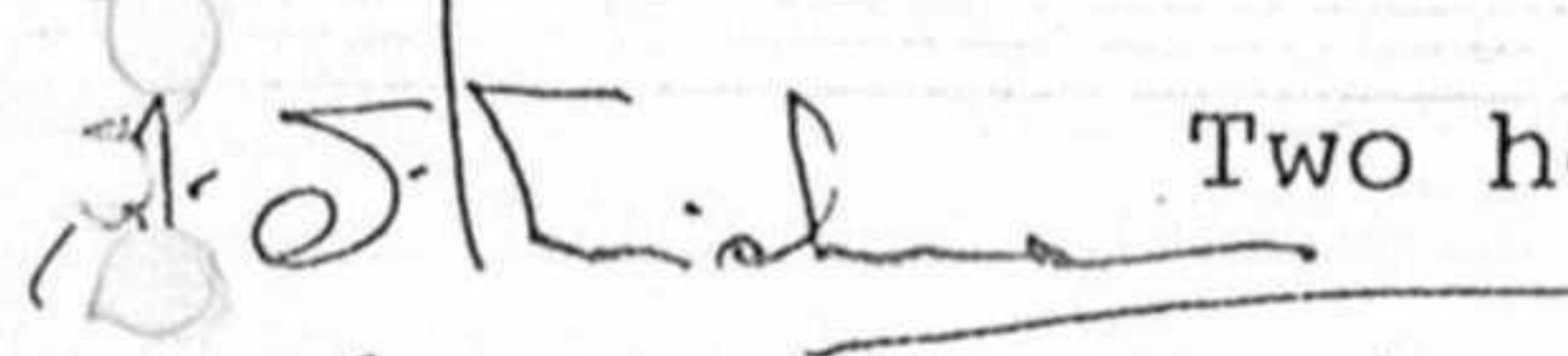
cultivating caste of Orissa. It is known to be recruited from various aboriginal tribes. Many Chasas profess to be Khandaits. In the Census of 1901, in course of checking schedules, the Magistrate of Cuttack, as Sir Edward A. Gait records, reported that many entries of Khandaits were changed to Chasas Loose Organization of caste-system made it possible on the one hand for outsiders to be admitted into the caste (Khandait) and on the other for the wealthy chasas, who gave up ploughing with their own hands, to assume the respectable title of Mohanty, which Russel observes was a broader term than Karan or Oriya Kayastha".

10. Commenting on the caste-movements for upward social mobility in Orissa, W.W.Dalziel, Settlement Officer of Orissa observed: Many families were found to have improved their caste designation since last settlement, or attempted to do so at this settlement. These changes were given effect to in the records in exceptional cases, when the claim was found to be particularly well grounded. In this way many families designated as Jana at last settlement sought to be recorded as Rays or Mahapatras at this settlement and Khandaits wished to become Mahalayaks or Karna, Sariks or Lankas to become Patnaiks, and Chasas to become Khandaits. (Final Report on the Revision Settlement of Orissa: 1922-2923 A.D., P.8)

It is clear from the above cited sources, old as well as contemporary, that (a) Chasas have been historically a distinct community from that of the 'Khandayats'. (b) chasas have been socially and politically aspiring to the status of 'Khandayats', a community akin to Kshatriyas' (c) it is possible that a section constituting an upper stratum of the chasas succeeded in its aspiration and got merged into the Khandayat category and they no longer identify themselves with chasas (d) a vast majority of this peasant community called Chasas belong to the class of middle and lower-peasantry, largely comprising of the class of middle and lower-peasantry.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

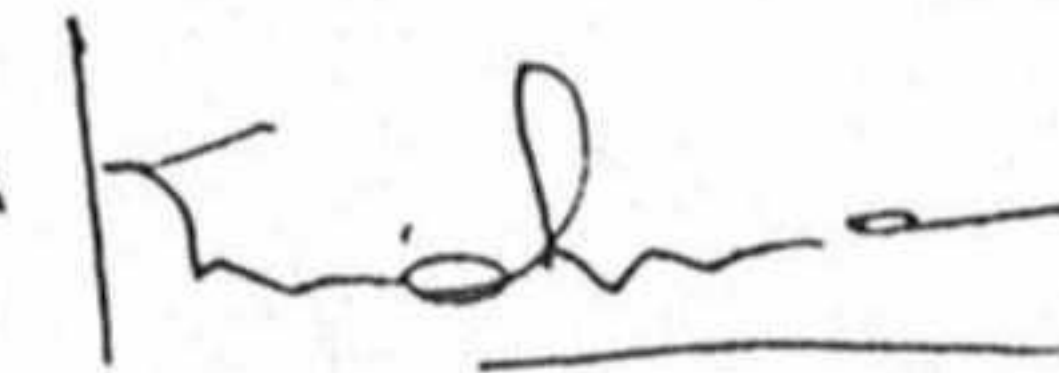
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 Two hearings were held, one on 4.1.96 at Bhuvaneshwar and the

other on 5.1.96 at Dhenkanal. At Dhenkanal a written representation was submitted by Shri Gyanendra Kumar Pradhan and over two hundred other members of the Chasa community requesting to consider the "Chasa caste of Orissa whose percentage of concentration are high in Angul and Dhenkanal District" for inclusion in the central list of OBC for Orissa. From over twenty representatives of the Chasa community who were present at the hearing were: Shri Dolagobinda Pradhan (Freedom Fighter and former Minister of Orissa); Shri R.P. Swain (M.L.A.) and Mr. B. Bhutia, on behalf of the Orissa Anagra Jati Maha Sabha, who is also its President. The Bench was assisted at Bhubaneswar by the Director of Welfare Department and Secretary of the State Commission of Backward Classes and by the Collector of Dhenkanal and other Government Officers at Dhenkanal. The following points were made in the course of hearings by the representatives of the Chasa community and by other present:

- (1) Mr. Bhutia, President of Orissa Backward Classes Association in his submission to the Bench emphasized that the category Khandayat represents an advanced and powerful section of upper peasants recognised as kshatriyas and that they now contract matrimonial alliances with karna; whereas the Chasas are much inferior in social status. He also presented some clippings from the matrimonial columns of Orissa newspapers in support of his contention.
- (2) Although spread all over Orissa, the Chasas are mainly concentrated in and around Angul and Dhenkanal District. Their main occupation is the tilling of land. A vast majority among them work as tenants, share-croppers and landless labourer and few work on their own small land-holdings. Their women work for wage as agricultural labour, in construction works such as canal digging and road building. With the spread of education in the younger post-independence generation some among the community are now settled in urban areas and are engaged in independent professions and Government jobs. Over 80% of the Chasas live in kuccha houses. Though educational statistics are not available separately for the Chasa Caste, compared to

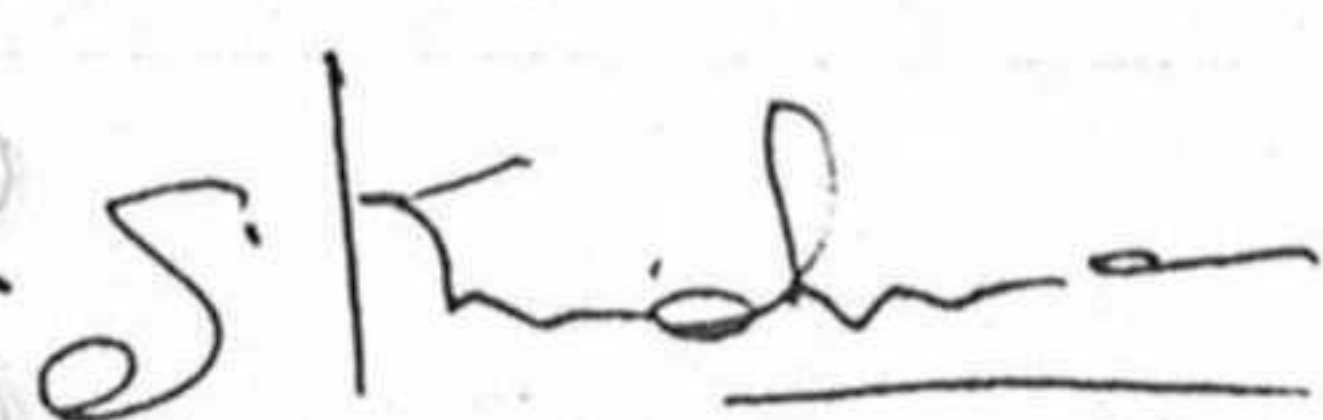
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the State average of 48% literacy, their literacy level is estimated to be about 30%.

- (3) Chasas are regarded as the "Shudras, belonging to the fourth varna". This is how the community is referred to even to-day, by the upper castes of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and the Kayasthas. Pointing this out the representatives of the community quoted the phrase describing Chasas as Sudras, and 'uncivilized people' from Purna Chandra Bhasha Kosh, with great resentment. They also emphasized the fact that how 12% of the upper castes, i.e. Brahmin, Kayasthas and Kshatriyas controlled 80% resources of the state and thus dominated in legislatures, and in the economy at large. In their support they quoted from the studies of Majoranjan Mohanty (op. cit) and Jagganath Pathi: Underdevelopment and Destitution: Essays on Orissa society (excerpts of which were submitted). Mohanty's study ;shows that from the 1980 IAS cadres of Orissa only 14 came from the Khandayats and the backward communities (such as Chasa) whereas 57 belonged to Brahmins, 29 to Karnas and 187 came from outside the state. Similarly, from 299 Class I officers, 112 were Brahmins and 88 were Karnas, the rest 56 belonging to Khandayats and the backward communities (p.343).

- (4) In most villages Chasas belong to the category commonly known as Muliya, meaning the class of landless labour and wage-earners. They supported this statement by quoting from Jagannath Pathi's article, "Social Stratification in an Orissa Village" (E.P.W. VOX, June 7, 1975).

- (5) The representatives of the Chasa Community drew the attention of the Bench to the fact that the other two subdivisions of the Chasa community known as Paikas and Kultas have been already included in the Central List of Backward Classes respectively at entry No.133 and 86. They held that eventhough the Chasas, by common knowledge in Orissa are more backward than the Paiks and that the Kultas are their counterpart residing in the inland areas

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of Orissa. Both these communities having been included in the Central List, they argued that the non-inclusion of Chasas in the Central O.B.C. List is the case of injustice done to them.

FINDINGS OF THE BENCH:

1. Chasa are separately included at entry No.27 in the State List and they do not figure in the Mandal List. The cognate caste of Chasas, namely, PAIKO and KULTA are in Mandal List at entry No.163 and 118 respectively, and they are in the Central List at entry No.133 & 86 respectively.

2. Khandayat as a community is included in the State List at entry No.138 along with many other communities as follows: "Paiko, Khandayat, Chasa Paiko, Paikali, Khandayat, Kalingi Sudra Khandayat, Alia, Mahanayak Sudra, Nama Sudra and Baisya Karan." Chasa qua Chasa does not appear in this entry.

3. Chasas are the caste of Cultivators, belonging to the middle and lower peasantry. They are socially and educationally backward community. Being numerically a very large community, some among them may be found in Class I Government jobs and in professions, but, by land large, their representation in professions and Govt. jobs is very low compared to their population size.

4. Their counter-parts in other areas of Orissa known as Paikas and Kultas have been included in the Central OBC list, Chasas are included in the State List of OBC at entry No. 27, separately from Khandayats who are included at entry No.138. Paikas and Kultas, the two sub-divisions of the Chasa community are included in the Central List of OBC for Orissa, respectively at entry Nos.133 and 86. To conclude, Chasa is a peasant community largely comprising of small and marginal farmers, share-croppers, tenants and landless labour. They exhibit relatively lower literacy rates compared to the literacy average of the State. Their representation in the government jobs, professions, business and even in elected positions is much lower in proportion to their size in the population. Since their counter-parts in other regions of Orissa known as Paikas and

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Member

Commission

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Kultas are already included in the Central List of OBC for Orissa
Chasas represent the case of 'non-inclusion'.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE BENCH

Chasas are, without doubt, a socially and educationally backward community of Orissa, and should be included in the Central List of OBC for Orissa as "Chasa". This inclusion is in conformity with the entry of 'Chasa' at Serial No.27 in the Orissa State OBC List.

D. L. Sheth

(PROF. D.L. SHETH)

R. N. Prasad

(JUSTICE R.N. PRASAD)

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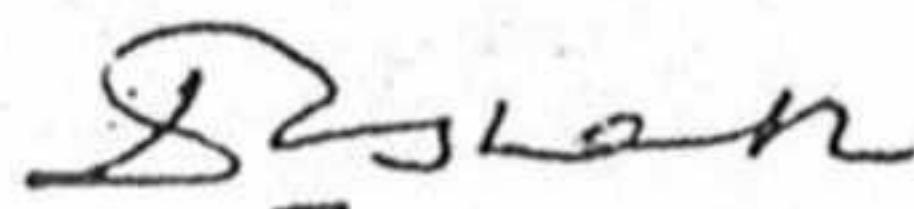
P. S. KRISHNAN
Member Secretary
National Commission
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ADVICE OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES IN RESPECT OF
CENTRAL LIST OF ORISSA

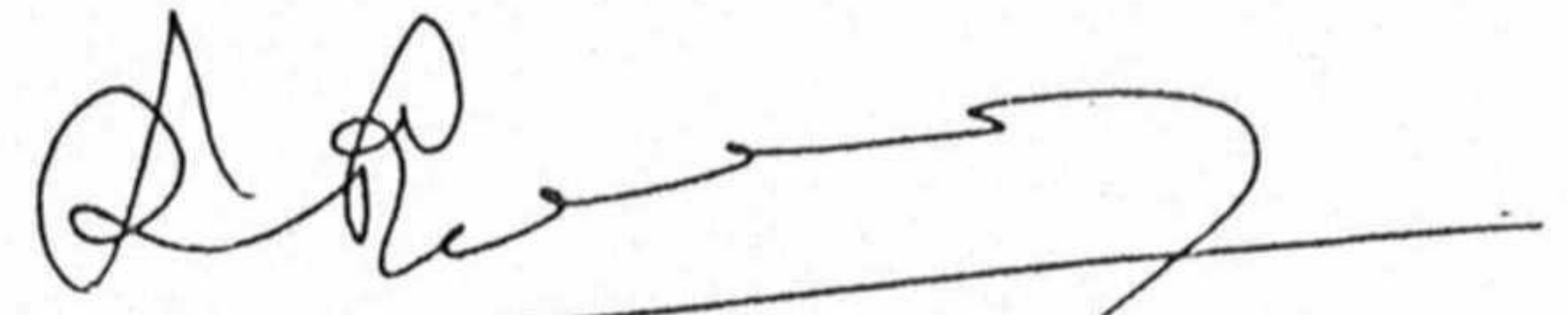
The Commission considered the findings of the Orissa Bench and formulated its ADVICE to the Government of India as follows:

"The Caste CHASA be added in the Central List of Backward Classes for Orissa as given below:

"CHASA" This entry of CHASA is meant to conform to entry No.27 'CHASA' in Orissa State OBC List.



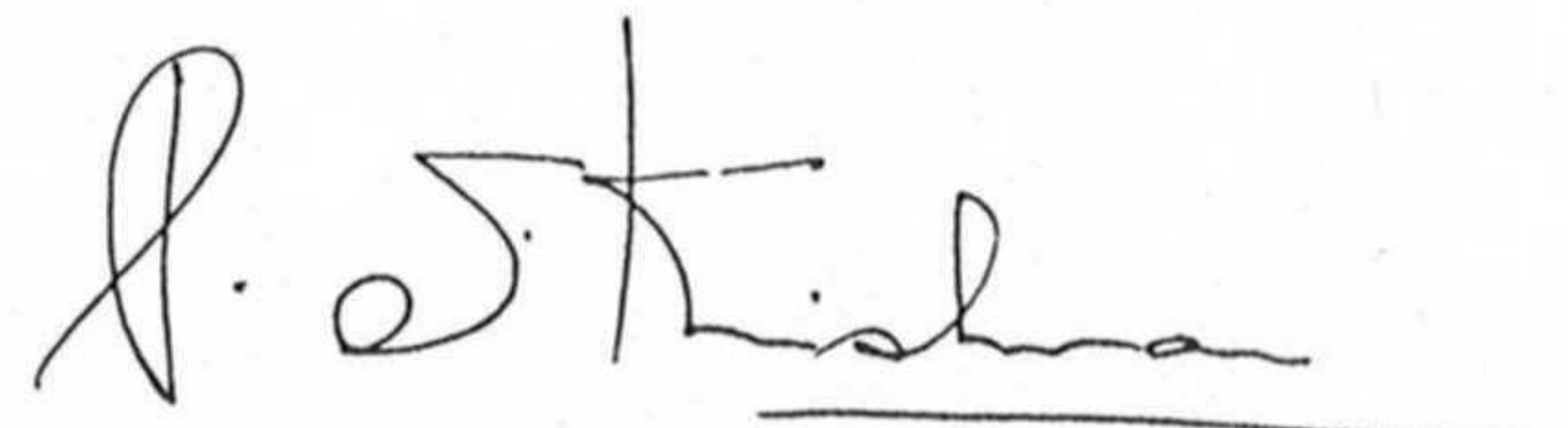
(D.L. SHETH)
21-6-'96.



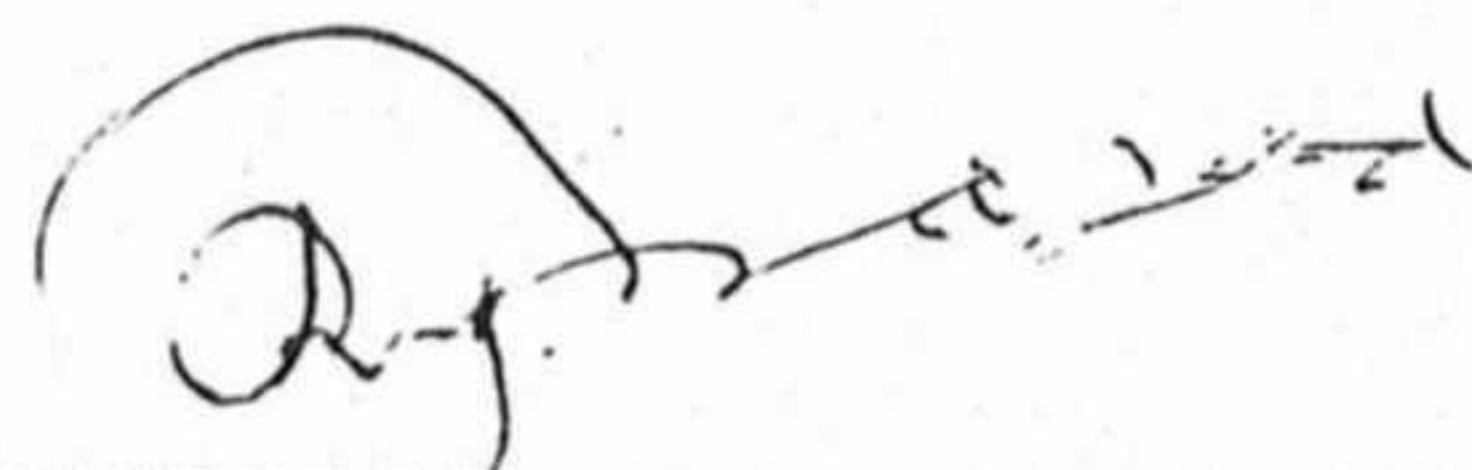
(DR. R. PRASANNAN)



(DR. D.S. YADAV)



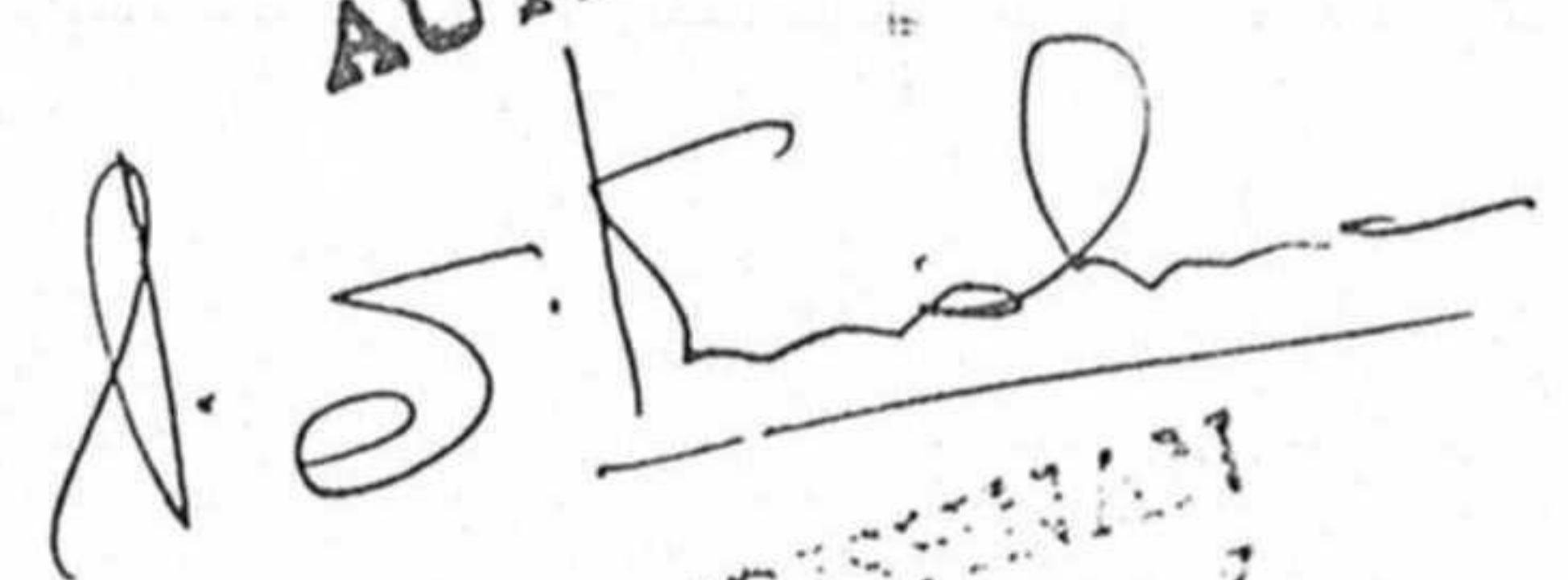
(P.S. KRISHNAN)



(JUSTICE R.N. PRASAD)

Justice R. N. Prasad
Chairman
National Commission for
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New Delhi

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