

National Commission for Backward Classes

Himachal Pradesh Bench

Case : **Request for inclusion of the caste/sub-caste/community/synonym "Pumba" in the Central List of Other Backward Classes for the State of Himachal Pradesh**

I. Request

This case arises from the request received in the National Commission for Backward Classes from the State Government of Himachal Pradesh for inclusion of caste/sub-caste/community/synonym "Pumba" in the Central List of Other Backward Classes for the State of Himachal Pradesh.

II. Public Hearing

2. The Himachal Pradesh Bench of the Commission consisting of Justice S. Ratnavel Pandian, Hon'ble Chairman, Shri S.K. Purkayastha, Hon'ble Member-Secretary, and Dr. Subbha Somu, Hon'ble Member held a Public Hearing at Shimla on 05th May, 2007 in respect of the requests received by the Commission from Himachal Pradesh.

3. At the Public Hearing, the State Government of Himachal Pradesh was represented by Shri Bhim Sen, Principal Secretary, Department of Social Justice & Empowerment, Smt. Anuradha Thakur, Director (SW), Shri Wahid Khan, Deputy Secretary (Welfare)

AUTHENTICATED



(S.K. Purkayastha)

Member-Secretary

National Commission for Backward Classes
New Delhi

and Shri Suresh Kumar Bhardwaj, Deputy Secretary, HP State Backward Classes Commission.

III. Facts

4. The Position with regard to the caste/community "**Pumba**" as reflected in different lists is given under:-

Mandal List

-

State List

41. Pumba

Central List

-

IV. Submissions at the Public Hearing

On behalf of the caste/community 'Pumba' its representative Shri Naseem Mohammad Diddan, House No.766/4, Nahan, Dist. Sirmour (HP) appeared before the Bench and stated that this caste/community has been left out by the Central Government in its OBC list. The representative further requested the Commission to include the caste/community 'Pumba' in the Central List of OBCs for HP.

The total population of the caste/community in the State is 73. Further, he stated that few persons from this caste/community are in Government jobs. The traditional occupation of the caste/community is cotton carding by subjecting the cotton to the vibration produced by a bow string. The carded cotton is used for padding quilts. There are both Hindu and Muslim cotton carders in their community.

The representative while concluding his evidence, mentioned that in the State of Himachal Pradesh, the caste/community is

AUTHENTICATED



(S.K. Purkayastha)

Member - Secretary

National Commission for Backward Classes
New Delhi

known by different names i.e. Nadaf, Dhunia, Kalaf, Pumba etc. This caste/community is socially, educationally and economically backward. Hence this caste/community be included in the Central List of OBCs for the State of Himachal Pradesh so that the people belonging to this caste/community can avail the benefits provided by the Central Government.

V. The Commission took note of the following Ethnographic Accounts regarding the caste/community "**Pumba**":-

People of India : Himachal Pradesh (Vol.XXIV) by Shri K.S. Singh

Penja. The Penja also known as Pinja, Pinjara, Panjora, Panjuora, Punji or Pinjia is a community of cotton carders. They are also referred to as Naddaf, Dhuna, Dhuniya, Panbakob, Kalaf and Punba elsewhere (Crooke, 1896; Rose 1914). They live mostly in the Paonta tehsil of Sirmaur district which is adjacent to Haryana from where they have migrated and they are more in number in adjoining States of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. The dialect of the people is Haryanavi mixed with Hindi. They use Devanagari and Perso-Arabic scripts. No current population figures for the community are available but according to the 1911 Census, there were only seven people of this community.

The Penja is an endogamous Muslim community belonging to the Sunni sect.The Panchayat tries the cases of divorce and the maulvi is called in to get the formalities completed. In the event of divorce and the woman's subsequent marriage, the children remain in the custody of the father or his family.....A widow can remarry only after observing the period of iddat. Family of the Penja is mostly of the extended type, but nuclear families are also coming up.

Women do not enjoy equal status in relation to men despite the fact that they contribute towards the economic well-being of the family. Women discharges all the household chores as well and have considerable freedom in domestic affairs.

AUTHENTICATED



(S.K. Purkayastha)

Member-Secretary

National Commission for Backward Classes
New Delhi

They also take an active part in rituals and festivals. However their activities mostly remain confined to their homes. They do not visit the mosque to attend holy congregations or addresses in such gatherings. Instead, they perform their religious duties within the confines of their home. In politics they play a very little role which ends with the casting of vote in the general and State elections. Economically they find themselves dependent on their husbands.

The traditional economic activity of the Penjas revolves around cotton carding by subjecting the cotton to the vibration produced by a bowstring. The string is usually hung from the ceiling over a pile of cotton. The string is twanged with a wooden scatch and the cotton is turned into a soft fluff. This is used for padding the quilts. They also do the quilting. However, with the introduction of the mechanized cotton carding machines, their age-old profession has suffered a great deal. A majority of the Penja families find it difficult to replace the old system of cotton carding with machines because of insufficient finance. This has resulted in pushing their traditional economic activities into the secondary position. Many of them have acquired land under nautor and are practicing agriculture. Service, contractor ship and labour are the other secondary occupations pursued by some of them to supplement their economic resources. The weekly market system does not operate.

There is also Hindu Penja but they are not found in Himachal Pradesh. Muslim festivals namely Id, Bakrid, Sabarat are celebrated and the famous mosques and mazar are visited.....The Penjas rank along with other occupational castes like Teli, Julahe, Muslim Banjara and the like, with whom they share commensal norms. However, the Hindu communities do not accept anything cooked from their hands. When invited to a feast, the food is separately cooked by a Rajput/Brahman. They, on the other hand traditionally avoid accepting food or water from Chamar, Chuhre and Mehre. Patron-client relationship exists with certain castes but to a minimal level. Cultivator-labour relationship also exists. New modern linkages have developed because of contact with outsiders and due to

AUTHENTICATED



(S.K. Purkayastha)

Member-Secretary

National Commission for Backward Classes
New Delhi

improved network of communication system, rise in literacy level and consequently their taking up occupations in urban areas.

A glossary of the Tribes and castes of Punjab and North Western Frontier Province (Vol.III) by H.A. Rose (Page 283)

Penja, also called Pinjara, Panjora, Panjwara, Punji or Pinjia is a cotton-scutter, who striking a bow with a heavy wooden plectrum uses the vibrations of the bow to separate the fibres of the cotton, to arrange them side by side, and to part them from dirt and other impurities. He is often returned as Nadaf, Dhunia, Panbakob, Kalaf, Pumba etc.

Main Recommendations of Himachal Pradesh State Commission for Backward Classes (Eighth Instalment 1999)

.....the Pumbas ancestors never used "Dhunki" and they are not doing this profession. However, it can be said with certainty that they are treated just like untouchable. They do not understand what is "Pumba" and made half hearted versions as to which community they belonged. Their only version is that they are socially and educationally backward and they may be given reservation in the State Services like Pinja, Panja and Nadaf/Nadaaf.....The State Backward Classes Commission after the visiting the Villages of Pumba community has arrived at the conclusions that (i) the level of education is not more than 6th standard and their economic position is not good; (ii) only few persons are in state services, and some are in Army; (iii) they are in the profession of making 'pattals' i.e. just like plate made out of leaves and bamboo baskets; (iv) the community is residing in far flung area of District Mandi which is a backward region; (v) the community has been allotted land by the Government as they were landless.

V. 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 there are both Hindu and Muslim cotton carders

AUTHENTICATED



(S.K. Purkayastha)
Member-Secretary
National Commission for Backward Classes
New Delhi

(Pumba) but in Himachal Pradesh mostly Muslim cotton carders are found. They observe muslim customs. A widow can remarry only after observing the period of iddat. Very few persons from this caste/community are in Government jobs, which reflect their inadequate representation in services. Contractorship and labour are the other secondary occupations pursued by some of them to supplement their economic resources. The Pumba rank along with other occupational castes like Teli, Julahe, Muslim Banjara and the like, with whom they share commensal norms. In the State of Himachal Pradesh, this caste/community is also known by different names i.e. Nadaf, Dhunia, Kalaf, etc.

"In view of the foregoing facts and evidence, the Bench is of the considered view that the caste/community **"Pumba"** is socially and educationally backward and may be included in the Central List of Other Backward Classes for the State of Himachal Pradesh at entry No.51. The new entry will read as under:-

"51. Pumba"


(Justice S. Ratnavel Pandian)
Chairperson


(S.K. Purkayastha)
Member-Secretary


(Dr. Subbha Somu)
Member

AUTHENTICATED

(S.K. Purkayastha)
Member-Secretary
National Commission for Backward Classes
New Delhi

VI. Advice of the Commission

The Commission considered and agreed in full with the above Finding of the Himachal Pradesh 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 caste/community/sub-caste/synonym "Pumba" is socially and educationally backward and should be included in the Central List of Other Backward Classes for the State of Himachal Pradesh at entry No.51. The new entry will read as under:-

"51. Pumba"

(Justice S. Ratnavel Pandian)
Chairperson

(S.K. Purkayastha)
Member-Secretary

(Dr. Subbha Somu)
Member

AUTHENTICATED

(S.K. Purkayastha)
Member - Secretary
National Commission for Backward Classes
New Delhi