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

DO NCBC Advice No. 12 Goa/98

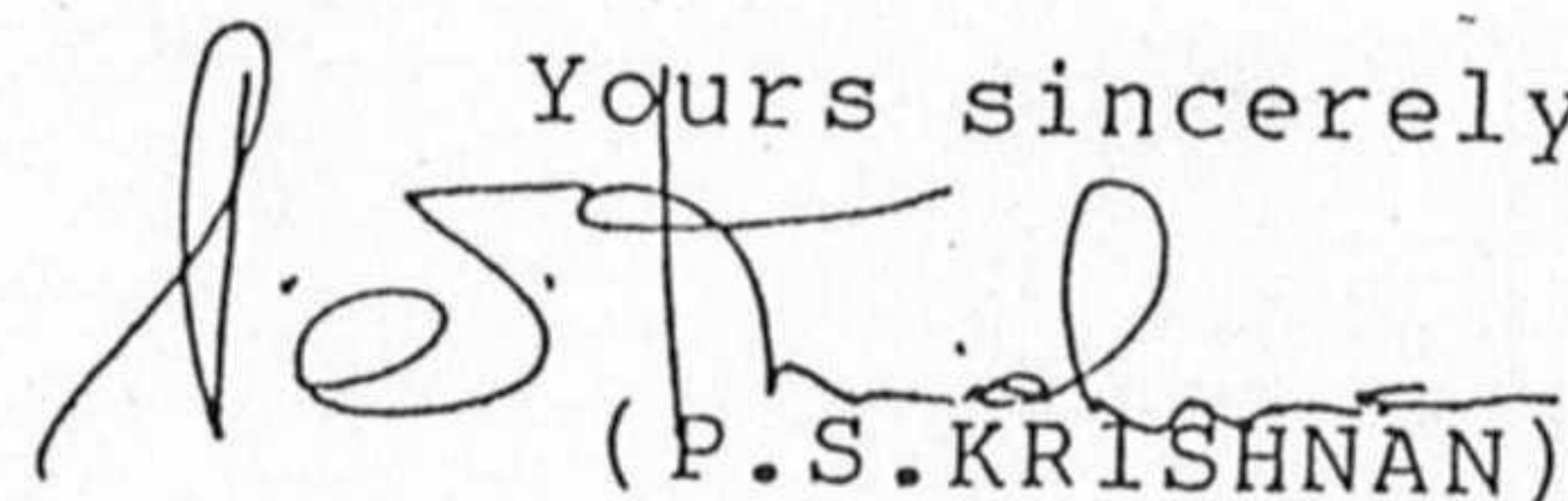
11. 08. 1998

Dear Shri Manavalan,

I am sending herewith the Advice of the National Commission for Backward Classes under Section 9(1) of the NCBC Act, 1993 for Rejection of the Request for Inclusion of 'Suvarnakar(Sonar)' caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for Goa, for necessary action by the Central Government under Section 9(2) of the Act.

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely


(P.S. KRISHNAN)

Encl: As stated.

Shri D.K. Manavalan
Secretary
Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment
Shastri Bhavan
NEW DELHI

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BACKWARD CLASSES

GOA BENCH

FINDINGS

CASE REQUEST FOR INCLUSION OF "SUVARNAKAR(SONAR)" IN THE CENTRAL LIST OF BACKWARD CLASSES FOR GOA.

PER SHRI SAHU AKSHAYA BHAI, MEMBER

I. REQUEST

This case arises from the Request received in this Commission from Gomantak Suvarn Karagir Sangh, Shop No. 8, Francislu Loyala Road, Mahagaon, Goa for inclusion of the "Suvarnakar(Sonar)" caste/community in the Central List of Backward Classes for the state of Goa. The sangh has filled-up the NCBC's Questionnaire in respect of this caste/community and submitted to the NCBC.

II. PUBLIC HEARING

2. The 2-Member Goa Bench of the Commission consisting of Hon'ble Members Shri Sahu Akshaya Bhai and Shri Navtej Puadhi held a Public Hearing in respect of this caste/community at Panaji, Goa on 5.6.97. Prof. U.P. Singh, Hon'ble Member, NCBC, also joined the Bench.

The State Government was represented by Shri J. Digal, Secretary, Director and other officers of the Social Welfare Department.

Shri Narayan Palekar and Shri Ramkrishna Navekar, Members, Gomantak Suvarn Karagir Sangh, Goa appeared before the bench for giving evidence in support of their Request.

AUTHENTICATED

III.

FACTS

3. The 'Suvarnkar(Sonar)' caste/community has not been included either in the Mandal List or in the State List of OBCs.

4. The information furnished in the NCBC's Questionnaire by the Gomantak Suvarn Karagir Sangh, Goa contains the following facts in support of their caste/community as backward:-

- (i) The caste/community is generally regarded as "socially not backward but economically backward".
- (ii) The occupation on which the members of the caste/community mainly depend for livelihood is (Craft) Goldsmith, which involve manual labour. The women of the caste/community, as a general practice, are not engaged in agricultural or non-agricultural labour for wages. Children of the caste/community, as a general practice, are, for their family's livelihood or for supplementing their family's low income, engaged in manual labour(Gold Smith). Approximately 12% of the population of the adult members of the caste/community, are actually engaged in the Craft(Gold Smith). Adult members of the caste/community(2.5%) are engaged in other occupations like services.
- (iii) Their representation in the Legislative Assembly was nil. During the twenty five years preceding the date of application, one MLA was belonging to the caste/community.
- (iv) The literacy rate of the caste/community in the state is 100%. About 48% members of the caste/community are matriculates. The number of female matriculates among the members of the caste/community in the State was 3000, and a total number of all graduates among the members of the caste/community in the State was 350 out of which 149 were female.
- (v) A small proportion of the families of the caste/community in the State live in 'Kachcha houses' and large proportion live in 'Pucca houses'.
- (vi) The members of the caste/community held total number of 73 posts in the state services in different categories(Class I-6, Class II-20, Class III-41, Class IV-2). Besides State Govt. Services 25 persons belonging to the caste/community were engaged in the State Level Public Undertaking, autonomous/semi-autonomous establishment. 30 persons of the caste/community were engaged in different professions(Teachers in College/Universities-1, Administrative Personnel in Colleges/Universities-1,

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Member Secretary
National Commission
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Doctors-12, Engineers and Architects-16). Only 6 persons of the community are working in the Central Government Services.

5. During the Public Hearing the representatives of the caste/community stated that they are traditionally craftsmen. Their population in the State is about 13,000. Immediately after the Gold control order was issued, thousands of Gold Smiths(Sonar) suffered heavily and they were uprooted from their traditional craft. The Government of Goa gave reservation in educational institutions as well as for Government jobs, but after some years the concession was removed.

6. According to Mr. Gajendra Nath Usgaonkar, belonging to other community present during the Public Hearing stated that their social status was near to Brahmins and their educational and economic position was very sound.

7. Ethnographic account about Suvarnakar is available in the People of India-Goa, General Editor K.S. Singh(Anthropological Survey of India/Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, 1993, Vol.XXI, pp. 64-69) under the title "Daivadnya Brahmans/Shett". Suvarnakar has been described as follows:-

"The Daivadnya Brahman are popularly known in Goa as Shett. The word Shett is derived from the Sanskrit word shreshthin, i.e. sreshtha. Since goldsmithery was considered superior to any other craftsmanship of the Panchal Brahmans, the Daivadnyas were considered the superior(sreshtha) craftsmen and smiths. Hence the word stuck to them through the centuries. Shetts of Suvarnakars are spread over all the villages of Goa. In Maharashtra and Goa, they are known as Daivadnya and Sonar, which is colloquial for Suvarnakar. Today some of them are mainly engaged in making gold ornaments and running jewellery shops. According to enthoven(1920), the Sonars claim descent from Vishwakarma, the divine architect and occasionally call themselves Panchals. Daivadnyas of the Panchal community claim to be the daivadnya Brahmans or Vishva Brahmans. The Daivadnyas in Goa claim that they are the descendants of the youngest son of Vishwakarma, Vishvadnya or Daivadnya. The word Daivadnya means one who knows astrology and everything of Goa, i.e. one who is expert in making gold and silver idols, and ornaments meant for Goa.....(p.64)

Today, they are dependant not mainly upon goldsmithy. Some of them are in Government services, some are engaged in different types of private business and many are engaged in private professions.....They are reluctant to accept water and cooked food from Mahars, Chambhars, Christians and Muslims but they take their services as tenants, share-croppers and labourers.....(pp. 68-69)

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Member Secretary
National Commission
for Backward Classes

.....The Daivadnya are educationally advanced and progressive. Their children study upto school, college and university level. They have among them scholars, scientists, doctors, judges, lawyers, engineers, politicians and executives. They have their own 89 year old association named 'Gomantak Daivadnya Brahman Samajotkarsha Sanstha'. They run their own Marathi monthly 'Gomanka Kalika' devoted to the development of the community. They are aware of the programmes launched by the Government and avail themselves.(p.69)

8. R.E. Enthoven in his ethnographic work "The Tribes and Castes of Bombay" (Asian Educational Services, new Delhi, Reprint 1990, first published 1922, vol. I, p.294) has stated about Daivadnya caste as follows:-

"Daivadnya - A synonym for Devangan and Konkani Sonars". He further describes that, "Sonars or goldsmiths, from the sanskrit swarnkar worker in gold.....are found all over the Deccan, Konkan, Karnataka and Kanara. In Kanara they are also called Aksalis, Aagsalis or Pattars. Like the other artisan castes such as Sutars, Lohars, Tambats, etc., they claim abscent from Vishvakarma, the divine architect, and occasionally call themselves Panchals. Some divisions of them claim to be Brahmans. The highest in social status are probably the Devangas, who call themselves Daivdnya Brahmans.(Ibid, vol.III, p. 338-339)".

.....Further he mentions about the Devangas that, "Devangans, also known as Devagnis, are chiefly found in Thana, Kolaba, Ratnagiri, Kanara, Poona and Satara districts and in the Kolhapur state and Goa. They are spilt up into two territorial divisions, Deshi and Konkani".

"The Konkani in Ratnagiri are divided into Tanksale and Angsale of whom the former are socially superior as having been originally employed in minting coins under the Marathas, where latter only tested them. They claim to be Brahmans and style themselves Daivadnya Brahmans, claiming descent from the Vedic Brahman artisans such as Vishvakarma or Twashti and the Ribhus. They derive the term Daivadnya, from daiva pertaining to god, and dnya knower, the term Daivadnya, according to them, meaning 'one who knows(the work) relating to gods, viz., that of making idols, raths(cars) and decaras(shrines for idols) of gold and silver and ornaments, etc. required for idols".(Ibid, p.343)

"In connection with the Sonar claims to Brahman rank it is worthy of notice that their functions as makers of idols and of ornaments and other requisites for the gods, involving access to the inner sanctuary of the temples has undoubtedly led to their being assigned a special status in the past. They appear to have been allowed in early Hindu times to reside in the quarter of the city allotted to Brahmans for residence".(Ibid, p.344)

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Member Secretary
National Commission
Scheduled Castes

IV. FINDINGS

From the above evidence and ethnographic literature, Suvarnakar(Sonar) is known as Daivadnya Brahman and is popularly known in Goa as Shett. People of this community maintain a considerable distance from people of low castes – Mahars, Chambhars, Christians and Muslim and are reluctant to accept water and cooked food from them. According to Enthovan the Sonar claim to Brahman rank. The literature evidence supports that the caste 'Suvarnkar(Sonar)' socially and educationally advance caste and not a backward community, though the traditional occupation of the caste/community was "Gold Smithy", which at present is not being done by the majority of population. This is an interesting example of an originally artisanal community which has undergone vertical upward mobility and has risen not only occupationally and economically, but also remarkably in terms of social status. The NCBC's Guidelines for consideration of Requests for Inclusion and Complaints of Under-Inclusion and the Procedural Clarification on the same Guidelines, which indicating castes/communities which in terms of the caste system are identified with traditional crafts as prima facie Backward Classes, has envisaged the existence of such communities by adding a proviso as follows:-

"..... and being satisfied that there are no sufficient grounds to take a contrary view regarding the backwardness of the caste or community making the Requests....."

The sangh has also admitted in the NCBC Questionnaire that the caste/community under consideration is "socially not backward" but claimed to be "economically backward". The Constitution of India while providing for classification of classes of citizens for the purpose of job reservation and other developmental support, economic, educational etc., has, reading together Articles 340(1), 15(4) and 16(4), envisaged only Socially and Educationally Backward Classes and has not envisaged a category called 'economically backward'. Such a term nowhere occurs in the relevant Constitutional provisions. In order to be recognised as a Backward Class, it should be first established that the caste or community in question is Socially Backward and after this threshold is passed, it must be established that the caste or community is also educationally backward, and finally also that it is not adequately represented in the posts and services of the State. The 'Suvarnakar(Sonar)' has not even been able to pass the test of Social Backwardness. It is not a matter for regret, but a matter for them to feel happy that being an artisanal community they were able to raise to a level where they have ceased to be Socially Backward. What is regrettable is that after this difficult achievement, they have sought entry into the list of Backward Classes, which is not possible to concede since they are no more Socially Backward, and in fact are Socially Advanced. Therefore the Request of the caste/community for inclusion in the Central List of Backward Classes for Goa should be rejected.

Ashaya
03.08.98
(SAHU AKSHAYA BHAI)

ATT. NOTIFIED
P. S. Krishnan
P. S. KRISHNAN
Member Secretary
National Commission
for Backward Classes

Navtej Puadhi
6.8.98
(NAVTEJ PUADHI)

V. ADVICE OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission considered and agreed in full with the above findings of Goa 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:-

Request for inclusion of "Suvarnakar(Sonar)" in the Central List of Backward Classes for Goa be rejected as it is not socially and educationally backward.

Kshayan
03.08.98

Kestaji
6-8-98

Kishan
7.8.98

P. S. Krishnan
7.8.98

P. S. Krishnan
10.8.98

ATTESTATION

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