

**THE 16th SESSION OF THE UNGWIP  
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GENEVA, SWITZERLAND**

**Statement by Mr. A. Singait**

*"Tribal Welfare Org of India"*

Madam Chairperson / Mr. Chairman,

I bring to all of you warm greetings from my people, Adivasis of India and also from the ~~Indian confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples~~. It is indeed a wonderful privilege to address such an august body where respected United Nations Working Group Members, Officers of various Governments and leaders from different organizations are represented.

*I greet my Indigenous Tribal Brothers and Sisters.*

Madam, I come from the northeastern region of India, which is a mini India almost cut off from the rest of the country except through a narrow strip of land at Siliguri in the North of West Bengal. The Adivasis in the region had their traditional tribal set up. When a tribal became an adult, he had already developed courage and confidence to face his world of hunting, cultivation, construction of a house. He knows his environment thoroughly. This skill of reading and writing acquired in formal education was no match for this. We cannot push him back to his environment unprepared.

Therefore, a balance should be struck somewhere to evolve a system of curriculum where tribal schools should have a supplementary curriculum adapted to the specific local condition in addition to the national educational scheme. The supplementary curriculum should be tribal biased in the sense that tribal crafts, arts, music, and culture should be included to give them a sense of dignity and self-respect.

Tribals feel that education has been imposed on them for reasons other than their enlightenment and improvement of their economic condition. This feeling of imposition will disappear when they are taught their own crafts, cultures, and traditions.

We have also noticed that the way education has been presented to the tribals is wrong. In the beginning, all the teachers were outsiders who taught the children in the schools with the attitude of superiority. They failed to show themselves as missionaries in their profession. Unfortunately, they gave the impression that local people are inferior. Thus a gap was created between the students and the teachers.

A system has to be worked out and teachers should gain confidence of the parents. The school should be a sort of center for dispersal of practical vocational education beyond the skill of reading and writing. The teachers have tremendous responsibilities in this respect.

*Tribal welfare society of India from the Army Advisor.*

*WGIP 98/SAS. IND/5*

In many villages in the North East, we notice very often that the most prominent building in the center or most important point is roofless and without walls. This is the school building of the village. The funds given for construction of the building are insufficient and even the amount is misused.

Teacher Pupil Ratio is about 1:40. Maximum should be 1:20. The question is how effective will be the teaching when a teacher is required to teach 40 students. National school drop out percentage is about 52.7%. For the tribals the percentage is higher.

**MOTHER TONGUES:** Mother tongue is the language of the heart. Unfortunately, in the North East, we were taught education through tongues other than our mother tongues. Most of the tribal tongues are not really developed. Fortunately, the Christian missionaries came to the Northeast and reduced our tongues into writing. Our first literature in our mother tongues was the Bible.

Most of the States impart education to tribal and non-tribal children alike through the medium of regional language. This makes education uninteresting and unreceptive to tribal sentiments. Some way has to be found out to make education more meaningful and productive for tribal people.

There are more than 417 tribal tongues in India. Very few are recognized upto High school level. On 6th June 1996, the Hindustan Times, a leading newspaper, published that 141 of the total of 621 candidates who were selected for Appointment to the highest Service known as Indian Administrative Service, had chosen a language other than English as one of their subjects for the Mains paper. The break-up vis-à-vis the various languages chosen by the 141 selected candidates are as follows: Hindi (105), Marathi (15), Tamil (7), Telegu (6), Urdu (1), Punjabi (1), Kannada (1), Gujarati (4), and Bengali (1).

Sources in the Union Public Service Commission attributed this to the fact that the candidates who choose their Indigenous language to address the crucial test were being rewarded by the assessors with marks in good measures as the latter too have a bias in favor of that particular language.

This is another serious handicap for the Tribal Candidates who do not know Hindi well and whose mother tongues are not recognized.

Madam Chairperson,  
I am so grateful to you for bearing with me.