

17th Session of the UNWGIP
(26-30 July 1999, Geneva, Switzerland)

Item 5: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THEIR LAND

Madame Daes, let me take this opportunity to congratulate you on your reelection.

I bring kind greetings from my people to you, honorable chairperson and distinguished members of the Working Group.

Like all Indigenous Peoples, we **Adivasis**, Indigenous Peoples of India, have similar relationships with our lands that are spiritual and material.

In the area that we call **Jharkhand**, stretching in four states/provinces of India, i.e. Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, the Indigenous Peoples have maintained their distinguished relationship to their lands, forests and rivers. Much of the area where they are concentrated the government has identified under the **Vth schedule**, in which the Indigenous Peoples of that area enjoy the right to **selfrule** and to have their **customary rights** to be respected.

However even in Jharkhand, which has been traditionally known to be an Adivasi area, some areas which were historically treated differently by the governments, have not been granted the Vth. schedule status.

In such areas the Adivasi peoples' ownership of land and territories has been very precarious, fragmented and threatened. Moreover lots of non-indigenous persons from other regions purchased or occupied traditional Adivasi lands.

One such area, on which I am more familiar with, is the **Hazaribagh district in South Bihar**. Here some areas where Adivasi are concentrated, face threats to their lands in particular by **coal mining**. For your information I will present the case of **East Parej Project** which is a very typical example of the threat of land alienation in the Hazaribagh District.

Parej is a village in the Hazaribagh District where many families of **Santhals** belonging to the Indigenous communities reside. They have been living in the village for generations and their oral history states that they have been owners of the land for many generations. Our "**Topa dinda**" (graveyard) stretching back generations, indicate our ancestral relationships to our lands and territories. In our villages including Parej we have also "**Jaher**" (Sarna) which are **sacred groves** (a bunch of this Sarna tree), where we remember and worship our ancestors and the Supreme Power. This also demonstrates our ancient spiritual occupation and spiritual relationship to our land.

Unfortunately, the central **Government of India** through **Coal India Ltd. (CIL)**, under the power of "**Eminent domain**" law, has acquired the lands of many Santhal/Adivasi families in the eastern half of Parej village for the East Parej Project in order to extract coal by **open cast colliery**. This project is **financed by the World Bank**. I like to bring to your notice that such lands are for the most **acquired without the consent of the Santhal/Adivasi families concerned**. There were and still are being **forcibly evicted** from their lands. Under such duress many families have been compelled to accept **meagre compensation** for their lands.

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Compensation has not been appropriate, systematic and proper. As an example here I want to present **the case of Barku Manjhi and Bhola Manjhi.**

Barku Manjhi has got an area of 2.08 acres of land for which he was compensated with 57,477 Indian Rupees (that equals around 1,369 US Dollars) on the other hand Bhola Manjhi having 2.10 acres of land and has been compensated with 216,780 Indian Rupees (that equals around 5,162 US Dollars). Although this land of about equal size is of the same category and located in the same place the compensation in money is about three times difference.

Even though there is an ongoing threat of immediate displacement, the families have not been offered a proper resettlement and rehabilitation yet. In addition the families concerned are not ready to vacate their homes because the alternatives provided by CIL are socially and economically not acceptable and culturally and religiously impossible to substitute.

The government has by notification No. So 664 (dated 10 January '83), acquired or has the intention to acquire in total 1,350 acres of land in East Parej Project. As a result **290 families will be forced to leave their ancestral lands, houses, forests, rivers, etc.,** which presently supports their livelihood and culture. Meanwhile heavy blasting continues in the nearby mines. The tremors of which are felt in the homes resulting in cracks on the walls and the people living in fear. Added to this is the pollution of the air and the water, heavy noise and ruthless cutting of trees. By **disturbing the ecological balance** the company takes away all that what once sustained the life of these people.

Only the family of Mr. Dhaniram Manjhi who happened to be the "Manjhi Haddam" (headman) of Parej village has shifted to the resettlement site. Such shifting removes Adivasis from their traditional, cultural, social and economic way of life to an alienated life and to an existence that is destructive to their culture and religion.

We firmly believe that **once our Santhals/Adivasis are uprooted from their lands and forests, their survival as distinct communities/peoples shall be doomed.**

Before I end, please allow me to draw your attention to the photo-exhibition illustrating this situation I presented to you. You can find it right next to the entrance of this conference room.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson, for giving me the opportunity to make this statement!

Presented by:

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