

WGIP 87/SAS.IND/1

PRESENTATION

BY

THE INDIGENOUS TRIBAL PEOPLE OF INDIA

TO

THE UNITED NATIONS WORKING GROUP  
ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

GENEVA, 3-7 AUGUST 1987

Agenda item 4

Madam Chairperson,

I rise to present our team of Adivasi -Indigenous Tribal People- Representatives from India chosen from different regions of our country and representing the major communities of the Indigenous Tribal People who are nearly 60 million.

But before we submit anything about the Adivasis -i.e. Indigenous Tribal People of India- and their present situation, I would seek your indulgence, Madam Chairperson, to make an observation on the statement of the Government of India Representatives who had made a remark previously that there are no Indigenous Peoples in India as India is "like a melting pot".

By an accident of history, this opinion of the Government of India expressed at the floor of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1984 and again in 1985, has come to our ears and therefore our People thought it fit to depute a team of five representatives of Adivasis i.e. Indigenous Tribal Peoples to appear in person and get the correction done on the floor of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations itself at this session. Our team consists of:

1. Mr. Samar Brahmachoudhury M.P. (Lok Sabha), a representative of the Bodo Tribes in the plains of Assam in Eastern India.
2. Bishop Dr Nirmal Minz, a representative of the Oraon Tribes, from Chhotanagpur, in South Biha.
3. Sharad Kulkarni, from Centre for Tribal Conscientization, Poone, Western India.
4. Dr. Ram Dayal Munda, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ranchi, Bihar, representing Munda Tribe.
5. Prof. A.K.Kisku, from West Bengal, representing Santal Tribes.

We have come here after drawing due attention of the Minister for Home Affairs, Government of India by a letter dated May 4, 1987, and this letter has been acknowledged.

From historical, anthropological and sociological points of view we know that we are the Indigenous Tribal People of India from pre-historic times with distinct social, economic, political and territorial identities. The Aryan invaders, the

Moslem Dynasties and finally the British had established their colonisations in India. But as Adivasis i.e. Indigenous Tribal Peoples, we still maintain our distinct identity with different languages, customs, traditions, cultures, and life-styles inspite of thousands of years of adverse circumstances caused by the colonisers. We are Adivasis i.e. the Indigenous Tribal People in India - a term commonly used in the Parliament and common usage and for which the term Scheduled Tribes is used in the Constitution of India.

The Adivasis i.e. Indigenous Tribal People are scattered all over India. Their major concentrations are as follows: - Khasis, Nagas, Mizos, Garos, Karbis, Dimasas, Bodos, Misings, Rabhas, Lalungs, Deuris, Mismis, Daflas, Akas, Serekdupens, etc. are the major Indigenous Tribal Peoples in north Eastern India; Santals, Mundas, Hos, Kharias, Paharias. Oraons, Konds, etc. are major Adivasis communities inhabiting in a most concentrated way in central India; Gonds, Bhils, Kurkus, Kols, etc. are major Adivasis inhabiting the Western Region of our country, and the Koyas, Todas, Banjaras and othe major Indigenous Tribal Groups are found in South India, including Onge and other in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Government of India has listed 400 major and minor Indigenous Tribal communities as Scheduled Tribes.

In general, we are known under different names: - Adivasis (original settlers) Aborigines, Adim Jati (Original Community), Janjati (scheduled tribes), and Banabasi (Forest dwellers). Others may call us by different names but we call ourselves Adivasis i.e. Indigenous Tribal People as it defines our identity as Indigenous People of India. Whether the Government of India would recognize us as the Indigenous Tribal People or not, we know we still survive and exist as Adivasis as distinct people and at this United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, we have come to express our unity and solidarity with all the Indigenous Peoples all over the world, in our movement for the liberation of the Indigenous Peoples.

II - Please permit us, Madam Chairperson, to substantiate our points by describing the Adivasis situation today. We affirm that the definition given by Mr Jose R. Martinez Cobo is clearly applicable to the Adivasis of India.

During the British regime specific provisions were made to safeguard the rights and interests of Indigenous Tribal People and the territories predominantly inhabited by them as Tribal areas, partially excluded areas and Excluded Areas under Government of India Act 1935. These provisions of special safeguards were enshrined in the Constitution of India in various forms after Independence. The Indigenous Tribal predominance in the North-Eastern Hill Areas were given the right to be autonomous districts under 6th schedule of the Indian Constitution and the remaining Indigenous Tribal areas were given Consultative status to safeguard the Tribal rights and interests through Tribal Advisory Councils in all States throughout the country under Fifth Schedule. But certain other areas including Plains Tribal Areas of Assam were not included under the purview of 5th and 6th Schedule. The autonomous districts under 6th Schedule created namely, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal area elevated to the status of Statehood. But the right of self-determination is denied to Indigenous Tribal Peoples in all the rest of India. The Tribal Advisory Council is practically ineffective. Thus the Indigenous Tribal People in other parts than those in North Eastern Hill States are under the Welfare and Development Programmes of the State and Central Government top bottom, depriving their participation. This process has made the Adivasis "the objects of welfare" and "victims of progress", though the late Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru laid down five basic principles as PANCHSHEEL for the development of Adivasis. These Panchsheels are (1) People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.

(2) Tribal Rights in land and forests shall be respected.

(3) We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some Technical personnel from outside, will no doubt, be needed, in the beginning but we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into Tribal territory.

(4) We should not over administer their areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through and not in rivalry to their own social and cultural institutions.

(5) We should judge the results not by statistics or the amount of money spent but by the quality of human character that is ~~is~~ involved.

The spirit and content of the Panchsheel five basic principles are not at all observed and honoured. Rather the Panchsheel is violated by the Government of India bureaucrats and the allied vested interests at the central, regional and local levels. The consequence has been disastrous to economic, social, cultural and political life of the Adivasis threatening their very existence.

The land rights and ownership introduced by the British colonial power and adopted and implemented by the national Government after Independence, the forest laws, making land and forests as commodities for sale and purchase under the money economy and marketing system have enabled outsiders, money-lenders and the Government to grab Adivasi (original inhabitants) land by fair or foul means. Establishments of heavy industries like Steel factories at Jamshedpur, Rourkela, Bokaro and Hatia and mining operations at the very heart of Adivasi area in central India and rapid urbanisation have accentuated the process of land alienation. Heavy dam constructions for irrigation and hydro-electric projects have displaced million of Adivasis and many of them have become landless labourers. Debarred from access to forests and displaced from their land, masses of Adivasis have been driven to abject poverty and many of them have taken to begging which was completely unknown to our people 25-30 years ago. Even the inalienable lands - the Khutkatti and Bhuinhari lands of the Adivasis of Jharkhand and lands within tribal belts and blocks of the Plains of Assam and in other areas as well - are been grabbed and snatched away by the Government under the plea of overriding national interests. Such inalienable lands are also beeing grabbed by other vested interests.

The system of education has domesticated and alienated the Adivasi youth from their own culture and has destroyed the languages of the Indigenous Tribal Peoples of our country. Under the above conditions, territorial integrity,

social and cultural identity of the Adivasis are being shattered and thereby all their social and cultural values, equality among men and women, dignity of labour, community ownership of means of production and distribution for common good, consensus in decision making, education for life and facing life with songs and dance are being eroded very rapidly.

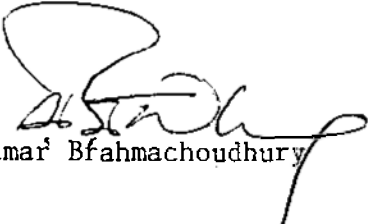
Resistance to the above destructive forces in socio-economic and cultural fields are not wanting. Adivasis have consistently and persistently rebelled against injustices of all kinds. Liberation movements have arisen in the past in almost all the major Adivasis regions of India. But they have all been put down by various kinds of ruthless and repressive measures. Atrocities by police, exploitation by vested interests and the Governments are too many to be mentioned here. Adivasi women have been raped and murdered without being noticed by the Government. Anyone trying to rise in an organised manner against measures and injustices are turned into law and order problem and branded separatist and put down at gunpoints.

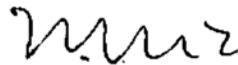
Today the Adivasis i.e. Indigenous Tribal People of India are reduced to a colonial situation and are completely dominated by a system of values and institutions maintained by the dominant ruling group. Therefore it is a question of survival of the Adivasis under the present conditions described above. With our brothers and sisters all over the world, we demand protection, restoration of land and forest rights to our people. We also demand the collective rights of self-determination for economic, social, cultural and political identity of Indigenous Tribal People. These demands of right of self-determination by the Indigenous Tribal People of India have taken a concrete and positive shape in the form of demand for creation of Udayachal State to be carved out of Assam and Jharkhand State consisting of predominant Adivasi areas in South Bihar, Northern Orissa, Western West Bengal and Eastern Madhya Pradesh which are contiguous and compact geographical area but are distributed to these four States and weakened the Adivasi Indigenous Tribal solidarity.

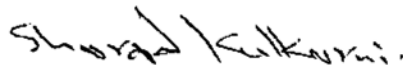
In conclusion, Madam, we Indigenous Tribal People of India are determined to achieve our Fundamental Human Rights of freedom, justice and equality among

humankind and our Rights of Self-Determination in every facet of our collective life. We are prepared to pay any price to achieve our Identity. History of Mankind on this Sacred Earth and in our Mother India must find its new direction in order to reach its natural destination.

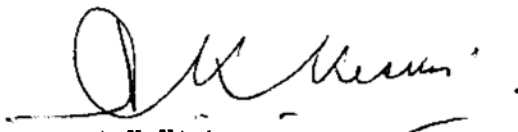
Thank you.

  
Samar Bhattachoudhury

  
Nirmal Minz

  
Sharad Kulkarni

Ram Dayal Munda

  
A.K. Kisku