

The Indigenous People of the North East of India

- An Ethnic Genocide

FILE:

JWIR
SEASIA

India

"Love is the beginning of Wisdom and Loves stems from Understanding.

One cannot Love blindly; he's got to understand first."

^{Love} One has to understand the uniqueness of tribal culture, in order to have them, to experience their warm hospitality, simple ways of living yet a shrewd and sincere judgement of opinions and why we demand our birthright to self-determine our own destiny.

Presently numbering approximately 20 million people, we have existed as a distinctive tribal community for thousands of years, surviving wars, plagues and epidemics, man-made and natural disasters, and we therefore are ^{owe} allegiance to our Land which have suffered with us, and have protected and provided us as a people through all these centuries, comforting our dead, blessing and enriching ^{the living}.

With our unique tribal genius we have been able to live in harmony with nature, possessing the inbuilt knowledge of knowing the extent of development when to do it and how to do it in the best capacity to incurr lasting result for benefitting the present and future generations. We take from nature sufficient enough to keep ourselves fittest for survival without disrupting the balance of natural development, of man and his environment, adopting our ways of living in conformity with the changes of the natural environment.

Yes, we are sensitive to change, for we are able to deeply feel and appreciate the goodness and wisdom of the Creator in giving us this beautiful earth for man to live in harmony and at peace with his fellow man and with mother earth; to develop and not to destroy.

But with the beginning of the 20th century we have witnessed an unprecedented flow of an alien community into this region, indeed, more so after India got her independence - alien in the sense that they are alien to the ways of the indigenous people and an alien to nature. In the name of development, he turns to be a greedy and 'take-all' master, grasping everything that nature has; his unquenchable appetite ^{devouring} the fertile earth slowly turning it to an infertile barren wasteland endangering the existence of man and beast. He pollutes not only the air he breathes but the once pure water that sustains the life of every living being, indifferent to the stench of pollution that saps the life of everything around him, including he himself.

And in the process of this mass silent population invasion the political, economic, socio-cultural and physical structure of the indigenous people is drastically altered, and using the numerical advantage that he possess, he brutally and forcibly subjugate the tribal population, who more or less taken by surprise and being far outnumbered, look on, but, not for long. The inbuilt mechanism warns us of the danger ahead, and we are on the defensive, defending justice - what has rightfully been ours all through history's centuries.

In brief, the following are some of the exploitations presently taking place in the region, which if left unchecked, leaves us, our identity and our supremacy over our own rights, in an uncertain future.

THE PROBLEM OF ILLEGAL FOREIGN INFLUX:

One of the main factors responsible for the present explosive situation in the North East Region is the presence of and incoming large number of illegal

emigrants or infiltrators from neighbouring countries particularly Bangladesh and Nepal, which have caused immense social, political, economic and ethnic imbalance in this region, and the Indian Government's inability or reluctance to check this unabated flow. These infiltrators who find easy access to Government jobs, easy bank loans to set up business in the region and constant exploitation of the region's vast forest resources are not only politically exploited by the national and regional parties for their vote-banks, but also have political ambitions of their own as well.

Their political ambition is seen in the case of Tripura, one of the seven tribal States of the region where, once basically a Tribal State, the tribal population has now been reduced to a minority of less than 25%, the government and all key Government posts being run and held by these illegal infiltrants. It is a travesty of universal constitutional right and more important, is a mockery of the constitutional safeguard of the centre, upon which we in the North East have so long been dependant.

Democracy, as the modern world have christened the political systems of today, is a birthright, a natural phenomon with the people of the N.E. region where there exist ^{an} elected monarch and the city states run by a Local Durbar or parliament and proceedings and issues of the State are decided by the people through their various clan representatives, where the individual is assured by his rights, and the outsider though allowed to reside, there is a check on his continuing influx.

Though the old democratic system still exists today, it exists only in name, and the modern democratic set up is being imposed on the region with its volumous text on human rights and freedom. But in reality the provisions specially provided to protect the rights and interest of the national minorities, are only theatrical, whereas continuing violations of these provisions have put the existence of us tribal in a very critical and dangerous position today, leaving us a subjected race, subject to the whims and fantasies of the majority community.

The entry of Foreign Nationals from the two neighbouring countries i.e. Bangladesh and Nepal, had existed since India's Independance and has been more pronounced since the liberation of Bangladesh. Even after more than 30 years of independance a regrettable feature of centre negligence is that the Indo-Bangladesh border still remains to be demarcated, and to add to the problem no steps whatsoever are taken to check this increasing influx. Rather the hundreds of thousands military and para-military forces that could be used to patrol the border are infact stationed inside the region to reign terror and death upon the tribal people who are fighting and demanding that these infiltrators should be driven out from India soil and all 'black laws' be withdrawn immediately.

WHAT THESE ILLEGAL INFILTRATORS DO WHEN THEY LAND IN OUR SOIL?

The infiltrators numbering approximately 1 lakh 50 thousand in Meghalaya, 23 lakhs in Assam, 1 lakh in Manipur (mostly from Nepal) 30 thousand in Mizoram, and 75% of the total population of Tripura, give themselves to be politically exploited by this national and regional parties of India, who help them registered as voters without having to go to the formalities of getting Indian citizenship. And through their party affiliations and helped by their ^{with} ~~with~~ bills and kin who had already crossed earlier to the region in the pre- and post independant period, they through underhand manipulations manage to get government jobs thereby, depriving the local indigenious people, easy bank loans, (since most of their people are in control of the bank management) to set up business while the tribal people are deprived of the loans by strict formalities and red tapisim.

In this way they manage to control the economy and also the administration.

When they find that they have sufficient number of their own people registered as voters, they set up their own candidates to the State legislature and in later years when they are in the majority, they form a government which amends all the laws that protect tribal rights and lands, placing them more or less in the reservations. As for example, in Tripura, the Land Transfer Act that prohibits the sale of land to non-tribal was amended to give the non-tribals the right to acquire as much land as required.

The important feature to note there is that most tribals acquire land freely and need not have any paper or documents to prove their ownership. The infiltrators take this opportunity through manipulation with their own people in the government to get hold of as much of tribal lands as they require with 'documents' to prove that they are the rightful owners of the land.

WHAT IS THE RESPONSE OF THE TRIBALS NOW:

Tripura:- In Tripura, the tribals though having waken up rather late, have taken up this issue with the Central Government but finding a negative response and no protection from the Indian Constitution, have sought the only alternative left, and that is to fight for independence where they hope to solve the problem by themselves.

In the other states where this problem of infiltration exist, having seen the tragedy in Tripura ^{Facing} a repetition of the same in their own States in the near future because of the increasing unchecked infiltration have launched a peaceful democratic movement demanding that the Government put a stop to this infiltration by completely sealing the border, and deporting all the infiltrators from the region, and effectively implementing the constitutional provisions that protect the rights and lands of the tribal of the region. But not only is the response from the government negative, they have instead sent more and more military and para-military forces to brutally suppress the movement at any cost, and have sealed the region from any legal foreigners entering and reporting the movement and anit-movement activities of the government to the world.

Therefore because of the injustices meted out towards the indigenous people of the region by the Indian Government, the tribals find no alternative but to join hands with the other tribals who are fighting for independence so the problem can be solved by their own Constitution.

Mizoram:- In Mizoram, apart from the presence of a large number of infiltrators, the tribals have been completely neglected by the government in terms of development since independence such that, when a plague occurred that took the lives of many tribals, there were no adequate medical facilities, and since their existed no proper roads and transport to bring aid from outside the State, (at this juncture also, the government barely responded to this ^{vigorous} disaster) many more died. Angered at this total neglect and unable to protect tribal rights, the Mizo too realised that only an independant State can give any real kind of aid and development to their people.

After the Mizo and other tribes have taken up ^(arms) ~~arms~~ against the Government, it has speeded up the construction of roads, and this too mainly to make it easier to transport the arm forces to counter the insurgency, ^{only} not really to develop the region.

Nagaland:- The Nagas were infact the first from among the tribals, to demand independence from India. Being an independant nation even during the British rule, they demanded from the British that after they left India, the Nagas would be given back their former independant States. Mahatma ^(Gandhi) Gandhi, leader of the Indian independant movement also assured the Naga, that when India achieved its independence, the Nagas would have theirs too. But unfortunately, immediately after independence Gandhi was assassinated, and the Indian Government instead of fulfilling Gandhi's promise, refused their demands and immediately sent in the army

to crush the movement and in the process, countless mass killing, torture, rape and daily harrassment of the innocent people was committed.

WHAT IS INDIA'S RESPONSE TO THEIR DEMANDS

The Indian Government being a country that have acknowledged the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, have since the movement for freedom by the tribals of the North East began, barred any foreigner (except illegal foreigner from Bangladesh and Nepal for political purpose and that is to annex the two countries in future to its mainland as had happened with the State of Sikhem) from knowing and reporting the innumerable human rights violations that it has committed upon the tribal people to the rest of the world. Black Laws are being imposed time and time again ^{on} ~~as~~ the people when they have declare areas as ^{Disturbed} ~~Disturbed~~ Area, such as the Armed forces (special powers) regulations of 1958, North East Armed forces special powers Act, 1972, etc, which empowers an army Havildor or Corporat to shoot to kill or cause the death of any person in the name of maintaining law and order, even if there is no facts to prove that the person is breaking the law, only on mere suspicion, without being questioned in any court of law.

Special Ordinances are promulgated from time to time that can imprison any individual for a period between 6 months to one year without trial.

The present number of military and para-military forces that are stationed in the ^{region} to suppress the tribals in more than 500,000 men, with more special mountaineering divisions to be ^{temporarily} ~~personally~~ stationed in the near future (their permanent camps are now under construction).

Apart from these injustices and exploitations that are being done on the tribals we also face economic exploitations. As for example, Industries that are set up in the region like the plywood industry, paper industry, oil industries etc. are merely ^{fronts} ~~fronts~~ to exploit the natural resources of the tribal region without benefiting or developing the region in any way. The profit and riches acquired from the industries are being increasingly drained off day by day leaving us not better off than what we were, and ~~turning~~ ^{turning} our rich fertile soil barren and wastelands.

Bank Loans are being made easy to the non-tribals to set up business in the region, ~~while~~ ^{while} formalities and red-tape prevent the tribals from acquiring these loans.

Although 79% of India's crude oil ^{is} ~~was~~ found in Assam, it ^{is} ~~was~~ being pumped and refined outside the region, thereby benefiting the other States other than the North Eastern States.

Finally, unable to suppress the tribals' demand for freedom and justice they have adopted another unhuman policy of moral and physical genocide. They are now flooding the region with money and alcohol; money to buy off tribal lands, and to buy tribals into betraying their brother tribals, thus creating ~~all~~ ^{around} suspicion and distrust so as to disorganise the movement, and alcohol to corrupt the morality of the youth and ~~thereby~~ ^{by} killing their inherrent right to freedom and justice and ~~try~~ ^{try} to put the final nail on the tribals coffin.

To the preveledged people of the World who now live in comfort and security enjoying every freedom and rights, man should enjoy, we place before you, the facts and figures, without emotions and without lies, to judge for yourself if our movement for justice is justified. We have tried both the violent and non-violent methods in trying to achieve justice, but the result is suppression, brutal inhuman suppression. We have been fighting in isolation, unknown to the world that we exist, and that as human beings we are living in an inhuman environment.

We therefore put before you our case, that if you feel ^{justified} ~~fair~~, do in any capacity that you can, to help us find the justice and freedom that every man is entitled to. But as our message gets through to you, know that we will continue in our fight, not waiting for when help shall come, for waiting means, another tribal murdered.

God made man to be free - He did not charge ^{any} ~~every~~ thing when he gave us this land. Let no man then enslave his fellow man, for then he would be violating God's Given Law.

Basic Facts that further endanger tribal population being ^{swamped out} ~~successful~~

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Indias present population - More than 650 million

Annual Increase of 13 to 13 million at the rate of 1.4 sec -
1 Indian is born.

and they continually come to our region in large numbers and therefore together with the Foreign Nationals there is an imbalance in the population structure in favour of this outside community, who therefore possess all the political, social and economic advantages.

Number of foreign Nationals registered in the electoral rolls till 1979

Assam - 13 lakhs, though officially it is put at 6 lakhs showing that the government acknowledges their presence and their inclusion in the electoral rolls.

Assam's Indigenous population - 19.5 million
(Plain and Hill tribals)

Presence of F.N. in Assam - 2.3 million

Meghalaya: 39 thousand

Meghalaya's Indigenous population - 1.3 million
(3 tribes combined)

Presence of F.N. in Meghalaya: 1.5 lakhs

Manipur - inclusion of F.N. in electoral rolls - no specific figure yet

Manipur's Indigenous population - 1.4 million
(2 major tribes)

Presence of F.N. in Manipur - 1 lakhs

Nagaland - negligible number of F.N. because of strict regulations of entry - mostly under 'Disturbed Areas'.

Total Tribal population - 0.7 million

Tripura - $\frac{3}{4}$ of total State Population is F.N.

Tribal population - 1.7 million

Mizoram - 30,000 number of F.N. mostly Chakmas from Bangladesh.

Total Tribal population - 0.4 million

- F.N. mostly Chakmas and Tibetan refugees.

Some of the major demands of the Indigenous tribals of the North East were:

- (i) Taking the constitutional provision that all persons entering India after 1951 and who have not registered themselves as Indian citizens shall be treated as Foreigners and be deported forthwith, the people demanded that all Foreign Nationals (F.N) residing in the North East Region (N.E.R.) ^{from 1951} are to be deported immediately, consulting the National Register of Citizen of 1951 and Electoral Rolls of 1952.
- (ii) A fresh and correct electoral roll must be prepared before the elections are held ^{after all F.N. are deleted from Electoral Roll and deported from the region}
- (iii) The Indo-Bangladesh border should be demarcated clearly and completely sealed.

Humanitarian considerations for the F.N. will be considered if the rest of India is prepared to share the border, but the majority of F.N. who have infiltrated into the region not because of any persecution in their home country but because of political motives, must be deported.

- (iv) Immediate and permanent withdrawal of the military and para-military forces from the civilians areas particularly from the villages of the N.E.R.
- (v) Repeal of black laws such as:
 - (a) Assam maintenance of public order (Autonomous District) Act of 1953
 - (b) Armed forces (Special powers) regulation of 1958
 - (c) North East Armed forces special powers Act, 1972, etc.
- (vi) Thorough investigation of the black deeds of the military on the innocent tribal people by an independantly based commission of enquiry, or on International Human rights organisation.

OUR APPEAL TO INDIGENOUS TRIBALS OF THE WORLD: We know that the Indigenous people of the World today are facing genocide of different nature and magnitude in thier respective countries. Each of us know the kind of problems that we are facing throughout the countries and even today in the so called civilized World. But let us not indulge too long in self pity. Feeling sorry for ourselves will not help us nor remove the injustices we face. Rather, let us sit together and pool-in our tribal genius to find a solution, a strategy of how to combat this colonial imperialism that force us to live as a subjected race, second-class citizens. Let us ~~case~~^{come} out of our shells, learn the problems of other indigenous tribes, and in a united international platform help one another to fight for an environment of equality and justice, that our generations to come will live as free men, freely in their own land.

OUR REQUEST TO THE W.C.I.P.: The Indigenous tribals of the North East of India would like to put forward the following request to the W.C.I.P., to put pressure on the Government of India to implement the following demand;

- (i) To deport all Foreign Nationals from the North East Region who have come since the year 1951. (This base year is constitutionally provided in the Indian Constitution).
- (ii) To repeal all Black Laws which are used as repressive measures against the Indigenous tribals of the North East.
- (iii) To remove all military and para-military forces from all civilian areas especially from the villages.
- (iv) To give the Indigenous people of the North East Region more autonomy to rule over their own States.

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