

Development in the Santal Parganas: an overview of the underlying issues

Jharkhand has always been in a bad state of affairs ever since its formation in the year 2000. Primarily consisting of the two major plateaus Santal Parganas and Chotanagpur, Jharkhand is a home to some of the major Adivasi communities of India like Munda, Santal, Ho, Oraon, Kharia etc.

Santal Parganas, as the name suggests, has a historical heritage to cherish as the area was demarcated and named in the year 1855 by the British government, marking the 'Santal Resurrection' or the great 'Santal Hul' in 1855.

The present situation of the descendants of Sido and Kanhu Murmu, the leaders of the Santal Hul are not leading a healthy life, their children have no access to proper education; I wanted to see them as first citizens at least in my home state Jharkhand. It is an irony that the people who once had the courage to challenge and fight against the colonial power are today living in the most adverse condition being deprived of every basic necessities of life. Leaders of Santal Parganas have always played an important role in the Jharkhand politics; however, it has not been the epicenter for the fruits of development unlike elsewhere in Jharkhand. Infrastructure development in Santal Parganas have been delayed and denied in terms of roads, electricity, educational institutions etc. The second capital of Jharkhand is also home to a good number of Adivasi leaders who have had the opportunity of being in positions of power.

I belong to *Dhanuspuja*, an important village in the midst of *Pakur* town, the largest revenue earner for the state in terms of royalty from the stone mines and crushers in the region. Interestingly, in the development index *Pakur* ranks among the last districts and so in its literacy rate. Having had the opportunity of living with the people of both the plateaus (Chotanagpur & Santal Parganas) in Jharkhand has so far been a terrible, disturbing yet an enriching experience. The situation of the people in both the regions is almost the same. Poverty in all forms is prevalent in the villages; malnourished children are a common sight; corruption and exploitation are a continuous phenomenon; anomalies in the social security schemes of the government which by now has become inevitable. In addition, the state's role in facilitating land grabbing for the companies is an effort initiated to alienate the Adivasis from their roots thereby threatening their very existence; they are being systematically designed to be deprived from their life sustaining resources (jal, jangal, jameen). More so today the jungles of Santal Parganas are being called unsafe and declared as Maoist zones, although there are some proposals of companies who need the forest lands to set up their establishments. What has not changed is the living condition of the people in the villages, who continue to lack all the basic necessities since past many generations. What we fail to understand is the motive behind the continued marginalization of the poor people in the Santal Parganas and



Chotanagpur plateau; the government is not at all interested in addressing the structural conditions of the poor; continued structural deprivation and exploitation for generations have led to abject poverty for most of the people living in the villages.

The government of Jharkhand has completely failed to stick to its core minimum obligation to protect, respect and fulfill the basic human rights of the people. More than half of its populace depends on agriculture, yet nothing commendable has been initiated in terms of strengthening agricultural development in the region. For the government, land is merely a material resource for profit making and so far has signed more than 100 MoUs with big and small companies for establishment of industries in the state. The land which is much sacred having social and cultural significance to the Adivasis of the region has been by all means targeted to be given away for profit making.

I really feel ashamed of the facts till date: so far all the Chief Ministers have been Adivasis; the leader



of opposition is an Adivasi; 28 Adivasi members in the Assembly, still there has not been any commitment shown by these leaders who have nothing to cater to the needs of the Adivasis and the poor people of Jharkhand. For me as a responsible citizen, it becomes easy to say that my Adivasi leaders lack vision and commitment to empower the people bringing all round development for them in their own villages.

Often, I am confronted with people saying 'lack of awareness' among people as the reason for underdevelopment. The newly launched *Dainik Bhaskar* supplement everyday publishes one account of corruption in the state of Jharkhand, by now we are aware of so many cases of corruption by the bureaucrats and other government agencies, so what?? What do we do with our awareness? We certainly have the data with us as regards the different cases; but what is our role? Frankly speaking, we have forgotten our role or have not accepted our role yet as responsible citizens being aware of the realities in different government departments. We have become onlookers to many of the 'violations', 'sins' and are left with the only options of pointing fingers, freezing in our comfort zones and waiting for things to change. Through this writing, I would also like to appeal to the people and the leaders of Jharkhand to act responsibly in matters concerning: transfer of land; MoUs should come first with the consent, which has to be free, prior and informed and consensus of the gram sabha. Provisions of the Fifth Scheduled Area has to be followed in terms of land required for mining in totality. Nail the corrupt and adopt a district to be free of corruption in the next few months and it becomes a model for

other districts. The Ministers have been booked for corruption and are facing trial in jail, what about the bureaucrats who had helped them do so and are still enjoying the positions without any fear?

Infrastructure development like roads, electricity, safe drinking water, and housing for the poor is important but what is most important is the development of 'people', who till now has been forgotten and deliberately ignored by every possible theories and leaders. Need lies is shifting the focus to 'people centred development' in which the state should assure that all the social security schemes are implemented properly and the '*aam aadmi*' should benefit from the schemes rather than limiting him to the cover pages of our annual reports.



Joy Raj Tudu

Jharkhand Initiatives

CNI – Resource Centre for Social Actions on Tribal Identity and Indigenous Rights

Ranchi, Jharkhand

Email: joytudu@gmail.com