

**December 2020: Jharkhand exists as a state for 20 years.
Interview with Adivasi writer and lyricist Jacinta Kerketta.**

Question: In the year 2000 Jharkhand was formed as a state. Do you still remember anything from that time? Where did you live at that time? What expectations regarding Jharkhand did you have or did you get to know from your surroundings?

Jacinta Kerketta: I was in class 8, when my mother decided to come back to our village from Sivan city of Bihar. She told that maybe soon the new state will be formed. Before that she wanted to come to our village and probably be settled in this village again. I was so happy that during holidays I would be able to visit our village. This was the first time when I heard about Jharkhand. When I was in class 10 in 2000, I heard that now we are not in Bihar, but in the new state of Jharkhand.

Question: Jharkhand has existed for 20 years: what is your personal conclusion or evaluation of “20 years Jharkhand” – positive and negative?

Jacinta Kerketta: Many years Adivasi people had fought for it. But when they were about to win, the BJP government hijacked everything and they formed the first government in the new state. That day there was silence everywhere. People were not happy. Police forces were everywhere. Many years the BJP government ruled in Jharkhand, but the main motive was not to develop this state in the sense of what development actually means. Adivasi people's development was not the priority. Many big dams and mining projects started, but Adivasi were always fighting against this. Still Jharkhand state does not have its own language as other states have [note of the translator: Hindi is the official language of Jharkhand. The adivasi languages are not officially acknowledged]. Still Jharkhand's Adivasi culture is not promoted in state. The motives with which people fought for the new state, this is still not completed.

Question: Let us not only look back, let us also look ahead: What will – according to you – be the development of Jharkhand in the coming 20 years? Which hopes, which apprehensions do you see?

Jacinta Kerketta: Jharkhand should be what Adivasis had dreamed about it. Where human beings and humanity get respect. Where Adivasi culture, languages, faiths and nature will be respected and preserved and get space to grow. Where forests, mountains, rivers and Adivasi land will be saved. Where Adivasi people could get jobs, education, health care and good environment also. But all these things are not happening. At present, the new government is from the party [Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, JMM) which was involved in the Jharkhand Movement. So this government is sensitive to Adivasi issues. But still there is so much to do.

Question: Adivasi (scheduled tribes) in Jharkhand have a population share of 26% (as per census 2001). Do Adivasi have a say in the politics of Jharkhand – proportionate to their population share?

Jacinta Kerketta: I find that still Adivasis are not that much aware of political scenario. In interior villages many Adivasis do not know who is ruling in this country or state. Adivasi youth do not even know about themselves. That is why there is no political discussion, no dialogues among Adivasis. Activities and NGOs are more, but there are less intellectuals. Less writers. All this shows that there is a gap. People still do not understand, how politics play a role in every aspect of life. When this awareness will come, they will get a strong voice in politics also.

Question: What should Jharkhand Adivasi do primarily in order to assert themselves in a better way?

Jacinta Kerketta: Adivasis were always on the road and in protest mode. But slowly it is changing. Art, culture, literature reach out to every corner, people and youths are addressing the issue of Adivasis. I think these things will bring more awareness.

Question: Since December 2019 there is a new Jharkhand government, a coalition of several political parties. What is your assessment of this new leadership of Jharkhand? Will this remain a stable government?

Jacinta Kerketta: I hope this Government will be stable. They are working well. I feel they have learned from past. Now they do not want to miss the good chance. I feel they are pro people. Listening to the people. Talking to the people. I feel they are sensitive. But people want to wait until the end to see how it works.