

Editorial

Friday, October 12, 2018

Waiting for "Sorry"

Your Govt. is not afraid to say sorry if wrong, Mr. CM have said it many times, say "sorry" now people will be with you

Manipur High Court intervention to the 135 days long impasse at Manipur University is perhaps the only left over alternatives to settle the issue even as it seems more like an emergency rule. May be the verdict of the court for appointment of an Administrator for time being to normalize the situation goes beyond the Manipur University Act 2005, but sometimes, we need sacrifice if it really is to serve the cause of the people. After all laws are made for human being, if it fails to comfort the people by delivering justice there is nothing wrong in ignoring the matter, AG Gardiner wrote in an essay. As far as the motive is for the welfare of the people particularly the students in higher studies in Manipur and as long as the ruling of the court was not influenced by any ruling government and had objective to maintain its autonomy, there is nothing wrong in the appointment of an administrator to settle the issue. It depends on the integrity of the newly appointed Jarnail Singh, the retired IAS officer, who has year long experience to the administration of Manipur.

May be the court verdict reflects some sign of humiliation to the faculty of the Manipur University, but as long as the newly appointed Administrator by the court acted for the cause of the University and handed over the administration to the most qualified faculty member as in-charge until a new VC is appointed, then there is nothing wrong in assuming that half the issues of the Manipur University has been settled.

If the newly appointed Administrator is committed to settle the issue that will not take even a week to convene Court meeting, Executive Council Meeting, Academic Council meeting and so on. The ongoing 2 member enquiry committee may also take only a week to complete the investigation about the series of allegations about financial and administrative irregularity on VC Prof. AP Pandey. Once the enquiry is completed the matter is almost finished as the people still believes the law of the land.

Now, after suspension of the Pro VC prof. Yugindro, it is now the police that have to act. It is known to the public that Prof. Yugindro had confessed to the first lady of the state he had lodged false complaint to the Manipur Police which resulted the midnight crack down at Manipur University. Chief Minister N Biren Singh had stated that the police acted as according to the FIR taken up by the police base on the complaint by Prof. Yugindro. If the FIR was base on the false report then why the police still is not taking up any action against Prof. Yugindro.

Moreover, who could have been the most trustworthy witness then the first lady - Her Excellency the governor of Manipur, for the police to take up action against Prof. Yugindro.

And another puzzling matter is about the 6 faculty members and the students who were detained base on the false report by Prof. Yugindro. They are still detained in judicial custody and there is not a single word from any of the sides running and maintaining the law and order situation of the state.

It is not only about those arrested base on the report of Prof. Yugindro who needs to be release unconditionally but also the two students arrested by police in yesterday's uprising inside Manipur University complex.

135 days the Manipur University was totally crippled. May be the longest agitation is the first of its kind in the history of Indian University. On being examine on why taking such a long time, it is now open secret that the interference of some highly influential political personalities make the government in dilemma in making a collective decision even as the government have limitation over the Manipur University. Its open secret, but fear not, the court has given a direction, the head of the state is with the people, half the people of the state still support you and the remaining half which you felt like your enemy will surely become your best ever supporter if you act now without worrying about the chair you are enjoying now. "To be or not to be", is not what your mind should be occupied but it is "Yes, I am the son of this soil and it's my duty to save my citizen and students", should be what you should convert into action.

After all, Mr. Chief Minister you had said time and again that your government is not fear of saying "I am sorry when you are proven wrong", many times in public platform. This is the only chance you have now to prove that you are man of word.

Say "sorry", and you will regain the name that this newspaper had once quoted - "The People's Chief Minister".

The Adivasi will not dance

By- Hansda Sowendra Shekhar

They pinned me to the ground. They did not let me speak, they did not let me protest, they did not even let me raise my head and look at my fellow musicians and dancers as they were being beaten up by the police. All I could hear were their cries for mercy. I felt sorry for them. I had failed them. Because what I did, I did on my own. Yet, did I have a choice? Had I only spoken to them about my plan, I am sure they would have stood by me. For they too suffer, the same as I. They would have stood by me, they would have spoken with me and together, our voices would have rung our loud. They would have travelled out of our Santhal Pargana, out of our Jharkhand, all the way to Dilli and all of Bharat-dison; the world itself would have come to know of our suffering. Then, perhaps, something would have been done for us. Then, perhaps our President would have agreed with what I said to him.

But I did not share my plan with anyone. I went ahead alone, like a fool. They grabbed me, beat me to the ground, put their hands on my mouth and gagged me. I felt so helpless and so foolish.

But we Santhals are fools, aren't we? All of us Adivasis are fools. Down the years, down generations, the Diku have taken advantage of our foolishness. Tell me if I am wrong.

Lonly said, 'We Adivasi will not dance anymore'-what is wrong with that? We are like toys-someone presses our 'ON' button, or turns a key in our backside, and we Santhals start beating rhythms on our tamak and tumdak, or start blowing tunes on our triyo while someone snatches away our very dancing grounds. Tell me, am I wrong?

I had not expected things to go so wrong. I thought I was speaking to the best man in India our President. I had thought he would listen to my words. Isn't he our neighbor? His forefathers were all from the Birbhum district next door. His ancestral house is still there. Birbhum, where Rabin-haram lived in harmony with Santhals. I have been to that place Rabin-haram set up. What is it called? Yes, Santiniketan. I went there a long time ago, to perform with my troupe. I saw that we Santhals are held in high regard in Santiniketan. Santiniketan is in Birbhum and our President is also from Birbhum. He should have heard me speak, no? But he didn't.

Such a fool I am! A foolish Santhal. A foolish Adivasi.

My name is Mangal. I am a musician. No, wait... I am a farmer. Or... Was a farmer. Was a farmer is right. Because I don't farm anymore. In my village of Matiajore, in Amrapan block of the Pakur district, not many Santhals farm anymore. Only a few of us still have farmland; most of it has been acquired by a mining company. It is a rich company. It is not that we didn't fight the acquisition. We did. While we were fighting, this political leader came that political leader came, this Christian sister came, that Christian father came. Apparently to support us. But we lost. And after we lost, everyone left. The leaders went back to Ranchi and Dilli or wherever they had to go. The Christians returned to their missions. But our land did not come back to us. On the other hand a Christian sister was killed and our boys were implicated in her murder. They and yet our boys killed her. No one bothered to see that our boys had been fighting for our land and rights even just because our boys did not have reporter friends, their fight went unseen; while the Christian sister, with her network of missionaries and their friends got all the attention. Now that our boys are in jail on false charges of murder, who will fight for us? Where are the missionaries and their friends now?

If the missionaries are our well-wishers and were fighting for us, why did they run away? Kill a well-known Christian sister, accuse a few unknown Santhal boys fighting for their lands of her murder, move both obstacles - the Christian sister and the Santhal boys - out of the way, grab as much land as possible, dig as many mines as possible and extract all the coal. This is how this coal company works. Is this scenario so difficult to understand that the media does not get it?

If coal merchants have taken a part of our lands, the other part has been taken over by stone merchants, all Diku - Marwari, Sindhi, Mandal, Bhat, Muslim. They turn our land upside down, inside out, with their heavy machines. They sell the stones they mine from our earth in faraway places - Dilli, Noida, Panjab. This coal company and these quarry owners, they earn so much money from our land. They have built big houses for themselves in town; they wear nice clothes; they send their children to good schools in faraway places; when sick, they get themselves treated by the best doctors in Ranchi, Patna, Bhalgalpur, Malda, Bardhaman, Kolkata. What do we Santhals get in return? Tatters to wear. Barely enough food. Such diseases that we can't breathe properly, we cough blood and forever remain bare bones.

For education, our children are at the mercy of either those free government schools where teachers come only to cook the midday meal or those Christian missionary schools where our children are constantly asked to stop worshipping our Bonga-Buru and start revering Jisu and Mariam. If our children refuse, the sister and the father tell our boys that their Santhal names - Hopna, Som, Singrai - are not good enough. They are renamed David and Mikail and Kristofer and whatnot. And as if that were not enough, Muslims barge into our homes, sleep with our women and we Santhal men can't do a thing.

But what can we do? They outnumber us. Village after village in our Santhal Pargana - which should have been a home for us Santhals - are turning into Muslim villages. Hindus live around Pakur town or in other places. Those few Hindus here, who live in Santhal villages, belong to the lower castes. They too are powerless and outnumbered. But why would the Hindus help us? The rich Hindus living in Pakur town are only interested in our land. They are only interested in making us sing and dance at their weddings. If they come to help us, they will say that we Santhals need to stop eating cow-meat and pit-meat, that we need to stop drinking haandi. They too want to make us forget our Sama religion convert us into Safa-Hor and swell their numbers to become more valuable votebanks. Safa-Hor the pure people the clean people but certainly not as clean and pure as themselves that's for sure. Always a little less than they are. In the eyes of the Hindus we Santhals can only either be Christian or the almost Safa-Hor. We are losing our Sama faith our identities and our roots. We are becoming people from nowhere.

It's the coal and the stone, sir; they are making us lazy. The Koyla Road runs through our village. When the monstrous Hyvas ferry coal on the Koyla Road there is no space for any other vehicle. They are so rough, these truck-drivers they can run down any vehicle that comes in their way. They can't help it, it's their job. The more rounds they make, the more money they earn. And what if they kill? The coal company can't afford to have its business showed down by a few deaths. They give money to the family of the dead the matter remains unreported and the driver goes scot-free, ferrying another load for the company.

And we Santhals? Well, we wait for when there is NO ENTRY on the Koyla Road. For that is when

all our men women and children come out on to the road and swarm up these Hyvas. Then, using nails fingers hands and whatever tools we can manage we steal coal. The drivers can't stop us nor can those pot-bellied Bihari security guards posted along the Koyla Road by the company. For they know that if they do not allow us to steal the coal we will gherao the road and not let their trucks move.

But a few stolen quintals, when the company is mining tones and tones, hardly matters. They know that if we - the descendants of the great rebels Sido and Kanhu - make up our minds we can stop all business in the area. So they behave sensibly, practically. After all, they already have our land they are already stealing our coal, they don't want to snatch away from us our right to re-steal it.

It is this coal, sir, which is gobbling us up bit There is a blackness - deep, indelible - all along the Koyla Road. The trees and shrubs in our village bear black leaves. Our ochre earth has become black. The stones, the rocks, the sand, all black. The tiles on the roofs of our huts have lost their fire-burnt red. The vines and flowers and peacocks we Santhals draw on the outer walls of our houses are black. Our children - dark skinned as they are - are forever covered with fine black dust. When they cry, and tears stream down their faces it seems as if a river is cutting across a drought-stricken land. Only our eyes burn red like embers. Our children hardly go to school. But everyone - whether they attend school or not - remains on the alert day and night for ways to steal coal and for ways to sell it.

Santhals don't understand business. We get the coal easy yet we don't charge much for it; only enough for food clothes and drink. But these Jolha - you call them Muslim, we, Jolha - they know the value of coal, they know the value of money. They charge the price that is best for them. And the farther coal travels from Matiajore, the higher its price becomes.

A decade earlier, when the Santhals of Matiajore were beginning their annual journey to share crop in the farms of Nambal four Jolha families turned up from nowhere and asked us for shelter. A poor lot, they looked as impoverished as us. Perhaps worse. In return, they offered us their services. They told us that they would look after our fields in our absence and farm them for a share of the produce. We trusted them. They started working on our fields and built four huts in a distant corner of Matiajore. Today, that small cluster of four huts has grown into a tola of more than a hundred houses. Houses not huts. While we Santhals in our own village still live in our mud houses, each Jolha house has at least one brick wall and a cemented yard. This tola is now called the Jolha tola of Matiajore.

Once, Matiajore used to be an exclusively Santhal village. Today, it has a Santhal tola and a Jolha tola, with the latter being the bigger. Sometimes I wonder who the opoloshkyok is here. These Jolha are hardworking and they are always united. They may fight among themselves, they may break each other's scalps for petty matters, they may file FIRs against each other at the thana they may drag each other to court; but if any non-Jolha says even one offensive word to a Jolha, the entire Jolha tola gets together against that person. Jolha leaders from Pakur and Sahebanj and where not come down to express

solidarity. And we Santhals? Our men are beaten up, thrown into police lock-ups, into jails for flimsy reasons and on false charges. Our women are raped, some sell their bodies on Koyla Road. Most of us are fleeing our places of birth. How united are we? Where are our Santhal leaders? Those choruhuhad leaders where are they?

Forgive me. What can I do? I cannot help it. I am sixty years old and sitting in this lock-up after being beaten black and blue, I have no patience anymore. Only anger. So, what was I saying? Yes, there are no Santhals have no money - though we are born on lands under which are buried riches. We only know how to escape.

That is probably why thousands of Santhals from distant corners of Pakur district and elsewhere in the Santhal Pargana board trains to Namal every farming season. They are escaping.

Did I tell you? I was once a farmer. Once, my sons farm now. The eldest stays back to work our fields while the other two migrate seasonally to Namal along with their families. I used to compose songs. I still do. And I still maintain a dance troupe. Though it is not a regular one, the kind I had earlier some fifteen- twenty years ago when was younger and full of energy enthusiasm and hope. Matiajore, Patharkola, Amrapara - I had singers and dancers and musicians from all these villages. I used to compose songs and set them to music. And my troupe young men and women they used to bring my songs to life through their dances through their voices through the rhythms of the tamak and the tumdak and the trilling of the triyo and the banam.

At that time our Santhal Pargana was not broken up into so many districts. Today all Diku, Bihari and all, they have broken up our Santhal Pargana for their own benefits. If it suits them they can go on breaking down districts and create a district measuring just ten feet by ten feet. At that time, when I was younger, even Jharkhand had not been broken away from Bihar. Yet there used to be so much hope. We used to perform in our village, in neighbouring villages in Pakur in Dumka in Sahebanj in Deoghar in Bhubaneswar where we were taken to see the sea at Puri.

What a sight it was! And we performed in Godda too. Godda where my daughter, Mugli, has been married. We used to be paid money. We used to be given good food awarded medals and shields and certificates. We used to be written about in the papers.

All that has changed now. First, all the members of my troupe are old. Some have even died. Many have migrated, or migrated seasonally, the ones who remain hum songs, sing to each other, but a staged performance? No, not again. Like me, even they are tired, disillusioned. All our certificate and shields, what did they give us? Diku children go to schools and colleges, get education, jobs. What do we Santhal get? We Santhals can sing and dance, and we are good for our art, yet, what has our art given us? Displacement, Tuberculosis.

I have turned sixty. Perhaps more. I am called Haram now. Haram respectfully. I am having to wear thick glasses. Even my hearing has weakened. Though my voice is still quite good. People in my village say that my voice still impress them. Sometime they ask me to sing. I sing some of my oldest compositions. It makes them happy. I still compose Songs. Not many. Not many. May be one song every six or eight months. One song of just six to eight lines. And because I have some faith in the past, I am still invited to perform at Public Functions in Pakur and Dumka and Ranchi.

(To be contd.)

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