

Issue 2:: September, 2011

SOJAAK

The Chakma community magazine



CONTENTS

News from the Chakma world, P1

COVER STORY

- >> Mizoram: Time to look beyond elementary education, P2
- >> Arunachal: Dismal state of education BY TEJANG CHAKMA, P4
- >> Tripura: Battle for scripts, P6

PERSPECTIVE

- >> CHT: Community initiative on education BY TANDRA CHAKMA, P7
- >> Have our leaders lost track? BY PARITOSH CHAKMA, P9

Cover Photo: Chakma women leading the march in Agartala streets demanding official recognition of Chakma scripts in Tripura on 18 August, 2011. (Photo: MAADI)

“SOJAAK” is a monthly online magazine of the Chakma community. Its editors are: Paritosh Chakma, Tejang Chakma, Dilip Kanti Chakma and Rup Kumar Chakma.

This online magazine is for private circulation only. Its principal objective is to discuss issues that matter to the global Chakma community and thereby educate ourselves. Articles should be submitted via email only at: sojaak.emagazine@gmail.com

For more, kindly visit our blog: <http://sojaak.wordpress.com/>

It is reported that on July 21st, decision was taken by the government of **Bangladesh** to replace the term 'Adivasi' (indigenous peoples) with 'Khudro Nritattik Jonogosthi' (ethnic minorities). In consequence to this, the term "Adivasi" may be removed from all official records and school textbooks. The decision has *allegedly* come after the government of Bangladesh denied at the United Nations the presence of any "indigenous peoples" in the country.



On August 24th, influential All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) requested the government of India to bring a permanent solution to the decades-old Chakma and Hajong citizenship issue in **Arunachal Pradesh** as soon as possible. The students union leaders regretted that almost one year has passed since the constitution of a high power committee under the Chairmanship of Joint Secretary (North East) in the Ministry of Home Affairs but no concrete step has yet been taken by the MHA.

On August 18th, over 400 Chakma men, women and children marched in the streets of Agartala, capital of **Tripura** demanding official recognition of Chakma script and its introduction in schools. The protestors who came from different corners of the state carried placards and colourful banners written in Chakma, Bengali and Roman scripts. A banner read, "Chakma script is our heart".



Mizoram Chakma Students Union -Aizawl Zone organized its 7th "Social Freshers" at Archive Hall, Babutlang, Aizawl, **Mizoram** on August 20th. Deputy Speaker of Mizoram Legislative Assembly John Rotluangliana was the Chief Guest of the function. Special guests included state minister Nihar Kanti Chakma and MLA Nirupam Chakma.



1st Annual Conference & 2nd Freshers' Meet of Tripura Chakma Students Association was observed at Jharjari in **Tripura** on September 10th. Over 300 students from different colleges of Tripura participated in Conference & Freshers' Meet and thousands enjoyed the cultural function.



Mizoram: Time to look beyond elementary education

I. Introduction

IN India, elementary education (that is up to Class VIII) is fundamental right which is to be provided by the government “free and compulsory” to all children between 6-14 years. Secondary or higher education is not yet a fundamental right, but the government of India has a “scheme for universalization of access to and improvement of quality at secondary stage”, also known as Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) which is now being implemented in all states, including Mizoram.

Now, the RMSA and other educational programmes must be put in the context of the educational problems of the Chakmas in Mizoram. As per an independent survey by an NGO in 2009, in a total of 111 Chakma habitations there were only 31 villages that had Middle Schools and only 5 villages had High Schools. That is, 72% of the villages did not have

Middle Schools and over 96% villages had no High School for their children to attend.

II. Cries for High Schools go unheard: new methods needed

Traditionally, the Chakmas have been demanding high schools in their villages. Petitions have been submitted both in the offices at district headquarters or at the capital, and when their local MLA paid a visit. Nothing happened. No one knew why. We Chakmas only know that “our demands do not bear fruits”. Chakmas have almost stopped demanding. They say they are fed up.

It is time we must look things differently, and more intelligently. Those days are over when the government did not answer to demands. Now, new policies have >>>

been framed and information are available with the help of Right to Information Act, 2005.

a. Understanding government policies and our rights

Minorities are special focus of RMSA

The Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh in his Independence Day Speech in 2007 stated that "Special attention would need to be paid to Districts with SC/ST/OBC/Minority concentration." The RMSA which started the next year promises a lot to the educationally backward minorities. (Here *Sojaak* doesn't deal on Scheduled Tribes because even the Mizos are STs and hence, Chakmas are no special).

The vision of RMSA is make secondary education of good quality "available, accessible and affordable" to all young persons in the age group of 14-18 years. It envisages that by 2015 a secondary school would be set up within 5 kilometer of any habitation and a higher secondary school would be set up within 7-10 kilometers of any habitation. These are like music to our ears. In Chakma areas, there is no higher secondary school in sight for 30 kilometres. In the entire Chakma Autonomous District Council, with a population of over 50,000, there is only one higher secondary school at Kamala Nagar! Outside the CADC, there is no higher secondary school in Chakma areas.

Now look at what the RMSA says. The Framework for Implementation of RMSA (available at http://www.education.nic.in/secedu/Framework_Final_RMSA.pdf) says that "High Quality Government Schools should be set up in all areas of Educationally Backward Minorities concentration." In fact, the RMSA gives "special focus" to the educational development of children belonging to the educationally backward minorities. The RMSA explicitly mentions "Providing access to sec-

ondary education with special references to economically weaker sections of the society, the educationally backward, the girls and the disabled children residing in rural areas and other marginalized categories like SC, ST, OBC and Educationally Backward Minorities (EBM)."

It further provides that "The interventions for children belonging to Educationally Backward Minorities will have to be based on intensive micro planning. Special interventions need to be designed to address learning needs of children from these communities and relating education to their life. The State Governments are expected to design specific interventions and campaign programmes to bring them in the Educational Process."

PM's minority programme

Prime Minister's 15 Point-programme for the Welfare of Minorities inter alia provides,

"Under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme, and other similar Government schemes, it will be ensured that a certain percentage of all such schools are located in villages/localities having a substantial population of minority communities"

The Guidelines for implementation of Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities (available at http://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/upload_files/moma/files/pdfs/amended_guidelines.pdf) makes it clear that minorities other than Christians are the actual beneficiaries of the programme. Para 7 (b) states,

"In States, where one of the minority communities notified under Section 2 (c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 is, in fact, in majority, the earmarking of physical/financial targets under different schemes will be only for the other notified mi-

norities. These states are Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. Lakshadweep is the only Union Territory in this group."

The "other notified minorities" in Mizoram are Buddhists, Muslim and Parsis.

Therefore, if at all any funds are sanctioned for establishment of schools - Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme, RMSA and other similar Government schemes - under PM's 15 Point Minority Programme, these assets should have been established in the areas inhabited by Buddhist Chakmas who are the largest minority (8% of state's population). We must remain vigilant where these educational assets are getting sanctioned in Mizoram.

III. Conclusion: No need to reinvent the wheel

In a conference of State Secretaries In-charge of Secondary Education and State Project Directors for RMSA held in New Delhi on 15.12.2010, the government of India "emphasized that new schools should be proposed by State Governments based only on an objective school mapping exercise, and not on arbitrary criteria. All State Governments are therefore required to complete the school mapping exercise at the earliest." The Mizoram government needs political will. It need not invent the wheel again in order to provide Chakmas access to good quality secondary education. All it needs is to strictly comply with the guidelines for implementation of various projects for which it has been granted funds. If these things are done, the day is not far when our villages will bloom with High Schools where our children will shape their future. ■

Arunachal: Dismal state of education

By TEJANG CHAKMA

OVER four decades have elapsed since the Chakmas were settled in Arunachal Pradesh by the Government of India under a definite plan of rehabilitation. However, they remained stateless till date. The lack of citizenship has been the primary reason for their pathetic socio-economic conditions.

The state of education, which is generally seen as the foundation for the development and progress of any society, remained grim in Chakma inhabited areas in the state. This was largely due to state government's repressive policy against the Chakmas since 1980s in the wake of the anti-foreigner agitation in Assam. In 1994, schools were withdrawn in Chakma areas in Changlang, Lohit and Papumpare districts, where the Chakmas inhabit and Chakma children were denied admission in other schools outside the Chakma areas. Subsequently, these schools were opened especially with the launch of the Sarva Shiksha Abiyan (SSA), a flagship programme of the Central government for universalisation of elementary education.

The state government can also no longer deprive the Chakma children of elementary education which has become a "fundamental right" with the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), 2009.

Yet, access especially to secondary and higher secondary education continued to be difficult for the Chakma children.

No secondary schools

There is no denying the fact that

most of the Chakma inhabited villages presently have schools following the launch of the Sarva Shiksha Abiyan. But, these schools provide education only up to elementary level. More and more Chakma students are passing out of elementary education every year and consequently pressure on secondary education is increasingly being felt due to lack of secondary schools in the Chakma inhabited areas in all the three districts of Changlang, Lohit and Papumpare.

In the absence of secondary schools and denial of admission in higher schools outside their areas, the Chakma students from Bordumsa, Kharsang and Miao circles are forced to seek admission at Diyun secondary school every year, leading to overcrowding. Many are denied admission.

The situation is worst in Changlang district where majority of the Chakmas live. Presently, the total population of the Chakmas, including the Hajong community, is about 46,691 in the district according to a Special Survey Report of the state government. The Chakmas inhabit in four Circles namely Bordumsa, Diyun, Kharsang and Miao under Changlang district. However, there is only one secondary school in Diyun circle for the Chakma population of these four circles. There is no secondary school for the Chakmas in Bordumsa, Kharsang and Miao circles despite having substan-

tial population. According to the 2001 census, the Chakma population is more than 11,000 in two circles of Bordumsa and Miao alone. While secondary schools outside Chakma areas are not accessible to the Chakma students.

In the absence of secondary schools and denial of admission in higher schools outside their areas, the Chakma students from Bordumsa, Kharsang and Miao circles are forced to seek admission at Diyun secondary school every year. As a result, overcrowding remains a recurring problem at Diyun school, thereby seriously affecting the quality of education.

Recently, the Chakma students from outside Diyun circle were denied admission to Diyun secondary school allegedly on the ground of overcrowding and other unfounded reasons. At least 22 Chakma students from Bordumsa circle, who were given admission initially, were asked not to further attend classes during this academic session. Presently their fates hang in balance.

This problem will continue to be felt unless secondary schools are established in Chakma areas outside Diyun circle. The opening of secondary school in these areas will help Diyun school to maintain its intake capacity, thereby reducing overcrowding. Moreover, the Chakma areas outside Diyun circle deserve secondary schools considering the presence of substantial population and the long distance of Diyun school from their areas.

Non-implementation of RMSA in Chakma areas

During 2008-2009, the Centre launched the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) for the universalisation of secondary education in India. The main aim of the RMSA is to make secondary education of good quality available, accessible and affordable to all young persons in the age group 15-16 years for secondary education and 16-18 years for higher secondary education. main aim of the RMSA is to make secondary education of good quality available, >>

Under RMSA, secondary school has to be provided within 5 km of any habitation and 7-10 km for higher secondary schools. In other words, it suggests that the Chakmas outside of Diyun circle can demand higher schools or upgrade of the existing middle schools to secondary level under the RMSA, while the Chakmas of Diyun circle can insist for upgradation of Diyun secondary school to higher secondary level.

However, it is highly unlikely that the state government will provide higher schools or upgrade the existing schools to higher schools in Chakma areas in Bordumsa circles due to its repressive policy against the Chakmas. Further, the state government will take the advantage of the fact that secondary education is not constitutionally compulsory unlike the elementary education which can be challenged in court.



Inner view of a classroom, Government Secondary School, Diyun. (photo: Ministry of Minority Affairs)

Lack of higher secondary school and increasing drop-out rates

Another issue of concern is the lack of higher secondary school for the Chakmas in the entire Changlang district. The upgradation of the Diyun secondary school to higher secondary level is a long pending demand of the Chakmas. Yet, several pleas of the Chakmas with the authorities have fallen on deaf ears.

The government higher secondary school at Innao, located in non-Chakma area, is the only higher secondary school in the entire Diyun circle. Although, admission is given to students passing out from Diyun school, only few actually gets admissions. Students who have the financial capacity take admission outside the state such as Assam, Delhi, etc. But, the majority of them, who are poor, have no option but to discon-

tinue their studies. Exact figure on the drop-outs does not exist, but it is estimated that 1/3rd of students, mostly girls, were forced to discontinue education every year.

School drop-outs marry early, ends up as unskilled labourers, domestic servants and few even get involve in anti-social activities. Every year, many of these drop-outs, including the girls, are going outside the state such as Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, etc in search of petty jobs. They work in hostile conditions and remain extremely vulnerable to abuse.

Pathetic condition of Diyun Secondary School

The Diyun Secondary School, constructed by the Chakmas themselves on a self-help basis, is the only secondary level school meant for a population of over 46,000 Chakmas, including the Hajong community, in Changlang district. In the absence of any secondary school for the Chakmas in the whole Changlang district, this school has to accommodate not only students from Diyun circle but also students passing out elementary education from outside Diyun circle every year. This results in overcrowding and affects the quality of education.

There are two higher schools outside Chakma areas in Diyun circle, a secondary school at Sompoi and a higher secondary school at Innao. But, these schools are not easily accessible to

the Chakma students. This is another reason for overcrowding at Diyun school. On an average a teacher has to teach more than 100 students especially in Class 9th and 10th standard. The negative impact on the quality of education in Diyun school can be measured from the poor results of class 10th students during academic session 2010-11. Out of the 132 students appeared in class 10th only 21 students had passed, while the rest were declared Eligible for Improvement of Performance (EIOP). In other words, they have failed.

No doubt, admitting large number of students at the school will affect the quality of education. But as the adage goes, "something is better than nothing." this school is the only ray of hope for hundreds of poor Chakma students in the absence of higher schools. With creation of additional rooms, the problem of overcrowding can be sorted out to some extent. There is no lack of fund. The Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India has already sanctioned grant for construction of school buildings for Diyun Secondary school under the Multi Sectoral Development Programme (MsDP) recently. The first installment was released in 2010 but the state government is yet to start construction of infrastructure of the school. ■

(Tejang Chakma is a researcher with an NGO in Delhi)



Tripura: Battle for scripts

ON 18 August 2011, hundreds of Chakmas marched in the streets of Agartala, capital of Tripura, holding placards and colourful banners written in Chakma, Bengali and Roman scripts. They were demanding official recognition of Chakma script and its introduction in schools. A banner read, "Chakma script is our heart". It says it all.

The Tripura government has imposed the Bengali script on Chakmas against the wishes of the community in gross violation of the rights of the linguistic minorities. The Constitution of India has provided several safeguards to the linguistic minorities. Article 29 (1) of the Constitution explicitly states that "any section of citizens" has the right to conserve the "distinct language, script or culture of its own". The Constitution also says that it shall

be the endeavour of every state government to provide adequate facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at primary stage (Article 350 A). Certainly, mother tongue cannot be separate from its script in schools. The Chakmas have the right to express themselves in their own script.

The Tripura government has refused to adopt the Chakma script on the ground that Bengali script was introduced for them on the advice of the Advisory Committee for Development of Chakma Language. Vide letter dated 16 August 2010, Director of SCERT, Tripura informed the General Secretary, Undandhi Sadhak (NGO) that "Chakma Text-Books are being prepared in Bengali Scripts on the basis of the resolution adopted in a meeting of the Advisory Committee for Development of Chakma Language held on

10/08/1998, which was approved by the higher Authority vide DO.No. 256/Min/Edn/99 dated 1-4-99". "In this regards, it may be mentioned here that the Authority of School Education is acting on the basis of the advise/ recommendation of the Advisory Committee for Development of Chakma Language," the letter further pointed out.

On 29 August 2011, Chakma social leaders and Advisory Committee members met state's Education Minister. The Education Minister decided to send the proposal for Cabinet consideration which is being seen as a delaying tactic. The Education Minister also stated that it is difficult to introduce Chakma script in schools because of lack of trained teachers.

The battle for Chakma script is likely to be long and hard fought. ■

Community initiative on education

By TANDRA CHAKMA



MOANOUGHAR is a social, non-political, non-profit and voluntary organization, founded in 1974 by a group of Buddhist monks. Its initial vocation was to provide education to the children of the region's ethnic indigenous minorities. It was at the aftermath of the Liberation War that was particularly bloody and where the indigenous inhabitants were some of the worst victims of atrocities.

Moanoghar was founded on a simple basis. Buddhist temples receive donations from the devotees. The monks at that time, decided to spend these donations for the education of the poor orphan children, rather than spending for other purposes such, construction and/or renovation of temples. Indeed, throughout its existence, Moanoghar is run by public donations, government grants and occasionally, support from abroad.

The above two paragraphs are previous situation and history of Moanoghar in brief. I was working with CARE Bangladesh from the year 2000. At that time the project where I was working focusing with few government schools which basically non functional and with community schools. At that time I had found that community took so many initiative on education but, for less fund support they could not work on it fully. But if they get fund support they can do so many things. My focus is basically on

community initiative, it's about my recent visit to Bandarban. I look after one education program at Bandarban. I will discuss both issues in brief. My main focus is on community participation and creation of taste of blood for education inside community.

My last visit at Bandarban was mainly focus on what kind of community initiative going on and what was its importance. Bandarban is the most remote hilly terrain of among three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Here community set up schools and started to support teachers salary. But it was not regular; it was depend on income of community. On that situation local organization GRAUS submitted a project proposal to Manusher Jonno Foundation focusing those community schools. On the project of GRAUS they focus on teachers' salary, school renovation, teachers training and Income Generation Activity for community schools. From this income community can pay teachers salary and run school renovation other cost involvement of schools. Each school has one SMC (School Management Committee). They lease some land for cultivate ginger or orchard or garden or nursery. From the selling of ginger fruit or tree they get some money. According to their group policy paper they will create a fund first then by using those funds they did other activity for more income. From the portion of income they started to pay teachers salary. The initial income generation fund was bearded by project. Each school need one and half years to fully become self sufficient. It was one kind community support. The other community support I tried to focus in here is on temple base hostel support provided by community. On 23rd Au-

gust last month I had visited one school, where temple committee is supporting 10 students, who were come from 15 to 20 kilometers far away of their school. Here I had found that community supporting six girls and four boys. They arrange bed for student inside meditation hall of temple on temporary basis. The temple committee provided food support for them. Project only provide two hundred taka for each student as management cost. As School Management Committee was well about their roles and responsibility in the very intimal stage of the project, now NGO is gradually transferring so many activities to SMC gradually. I will write another write up on this.

My second focus is on Moanoghar. As I briefly described the history of Moanoghar on above. Once it was supported by foreign donor agency and government. But by the year 1999, foreign donation was stopped and government took the responsibility of Moanoghar. This funding was stopped at mid 2007. My involvement with Moanoghar was in the year 2006. Manusher Jonno Foundation was approved a project for Moanoghar on the same year. By default I was responsible and monitor the project. It was basically IT, human rights education and life skill support for Moanoghar children. When government support was ended after one year, most of the children and staffs of Moanoghar were panicked. They did not know what to do. As Manusher Jonno Foundation had no mandate to full support like government, so I myself was worried. I opened a Facebook group for fund support and add so many people. Some people started to sponsor children of Moanoghar, >>

but it was not up to the mark. By this time, I was trying my best writing to different former Moanoghar students and others. Some of them responded to my appeal. On 2007 Rotary Club (Kawran Bazar zone) interested to work with Moanoghar. By this time they visited the Moanoghar and decided to work. They are searching for key contact. One of my brother-in-laws who was involved with them proposed my name. Finally they decided to meet with me. I met with them and discussed the Moanoghar issue. As I am not an insider of Moanoghar, I decided to involve someone from Moanoghar. Finally I involved Kirti Nishan Chakma in the discussion with Rotary Club. I remember during my first meeting with them they promised me to start small scale activity with the assurance that if Moanoghar accomplish smoothly then they will increase their support. They kept their promise. By this time I involved some of my colleagues as sponsors who included my boss and her family. Here I have to thank Australian citizens, who support and sponsor Moanoghar children, such as Kabita Chakma and so many others via Bodhi, an NGO. There are also organization like Belo Sadak and so many others who are contrib-

uting to Moanoghar. Here I want to specially thank Dristipat freelance organization who are working as advocate for Moanoghar. I started my journey with Moanoghar with no hope but now I have found so many friends beside me. This proves that small initiatives could become bigger initiatives with hard work, commitment and cooperation of people.

The students of Moanoghar are doing excellent academically. The results of the Moanoghar students in the last Secondary School Certificates (SSC) examination, declared in May 2011, were inspiring, although a further improvement is necessary. A total 138 of students from Moanoghar took part in the exams. Among them 107 students passed which amounts to a pass rate of 79% - higher than the national average and even surpassed Moanoghar School's own previous records. Of the 107 students who passed, one student obtained grade 'A+', 11 students obtained grade 'A' and another 20 students received grade 'A-' (source: Moanoghar news bulletin April-June 2011). In Bangladesh national education system 'A+' is the highest grade for school certificate exam, 'A' is second highest and 'A-' is the third highest..

I started my journey with Moanoghar with no hope but now I have found so many friends beside me. This proves that small initiatives could become bigger initiatives with hard work, commitment and cooperation of people.

There is another good news from Moanoghar. Moanoghar received two lac taka from Trust Bank Dhaka and received 1 lac taka from Dristipat as donation. Moanoghar launched a website www.moanoghar.org. Now around 1200 students from three hill districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts are receiving education support via Moanoghar. This year Moanoghar started language class on Chakma, Marma and Tripura. Gradually it will expand course on other indigenous languages.

It's my cherished dream to help the children of Chittagong Hill Tracts to access basic and higher education. I am dreaming and moving to establish Moanoghar as a university like Shanti Niketan. I think to fulfill my dream I have to wait only one more year. This year Manusher Jonno Foundation and one organization from abroad will be starting a training program. This program will expand gradually. With some help from my friends, both at home and abroad, I am hoping to upgrade Moanoghar as an institution of higher study. It is part of my future plan. Hopefully, with the help of "friends of Moanoghar" we can together advance this plan and achieve it. ■

(Tandra Chakma is Program Manager at Manusher Jonno Foundation, Bangladesh)



Aiming high in life: Moanoghar students in their classroom (photo: Moanoghar)

Have our leaders lost track?

By PARITOSH CHAKMA

"A leader is one who sees more than others see, who sees farther than others see, and who sees before others see" - Leroy Eimes

WHEN we discuss leadership in the context of the Chakma community, often than not we are more likely to get two responses. First, we lack good leaders; and the second, we do not follow our leaders. It's happening for centuries and has become a curse on Chakmas - we tell each other, and each one of us nods our heads in agreement.

This only means one thing: our problems are a two-way street: both the leaders and the led are at fault. But the leaders are expected to "see more than others see", "see farther than others see", and "see before others see".

The crisis everywhere:

The lack of good leadership and the tendency to disobey our leaders have brought us to where we are now – be it in India or Bangladesh or elsewhere. Instead of focusing on education, development and building solidarity, we are at best in disunity, infightings, fratricidal killings (in the case of CHT only), and total lack of sense about what's going to happen to us in near future. The fact that Chakmas have been entrenched with seemingly unresolved problems reflects one thing very clearly: more than lack of able leadership, the Chakma leaders are unwilling to lead the community from suffering to solutions, from darkness to light, from hopelessness to hope.

Consider the case of CHT. All that we have been witnessing is regular fratricidal killings between political

groups instead of fighting our enemy—both political and societal. In this bloody war, we have lost a good number of able and foresighted leaders. Who has gained out of this? The result is that we have become too feeble to defend ourselves and fight for justice. Instead of becoming leaders of the whole community, we have become leaders of a faction or a group.

See the case of Chakmas in Mizoram. Even after enjoying "autonomy" for four decades, the condition of the people of Chakma Autonomous District Council is pitiable. The CADC Chakmas have the authority to govern themselves or to damn themselves. While the former flows directly from

The fact that Chakmas have been entrenched with seemingly unresolved problems reflects one thing very clearly: more than lack of able leadership, the Chakma leaders are unwilling to lead the community from suffering to solutions, from darkness to light, from hopelessness to hope.

the Indian constitution, the later may flow directly from our selfish souls. And, not surprisingly, the Chakma leaders do the second act in a more comfortable fashion than the first one. Governance is a tough job, to be done effectively by efficient leaders and administrators. Within the CADC areas, take the case of Kamala Nagar, the headquarter which still lives without regular water supply, electricity, proper roads, regular mobile network or unhindered landline phone connectivity, not to talk of the high speed

internet that rules the world. Kamala Nagar is neither properly connected with Aizawl, the state capital, nor even with the second largest town within CADC, Barapsonsury by road. People go to Parva (a village bordering Myanmar) through the Lai Autonomous District Council, because there is no road connectivity through the CADC. A Community Health Centre, without adequate facilities, is entrusted to save the lives of over 50,000 CADC population (of course, the rich ones go to Aizawl and beyond for treatment). The employees virtually survive on loans taken from Bengali traders/shopkeepers at exorbitant interest rates, since the salaries are not paid regularly on time. Even the arrear of entire year of all employees can be snatched away and diverted for other purpose, without a murmur of protest.

Yet, surprisingly, the souls at Kamala Nagar live in peace with themselves. No one is dared to raise a voice; only they murmur to themselves against their fate. Yet, any whisper of dissent is likely to be crushed if it falls into the ears of the political bosses or their cronies. The leader of a particular NGO has even spoken in support of corruption in the Council, albeit indirectly.

If this is the condition of people living at the headquarters, imagine the plight of the common man living in the remotest villages without access to the basic facilities. The saying goes, god helps those who help themselves. This holds true for Chakmas as well.

A fact finding team of Mizoram Chakma Development Forum early this year (this author was part of the team) found that social welfare schemes such as Public Distribution System, Mid Day Meal scheme, Integrated Child Development Scheme, Old Age Pension scheme etc have virtually collapsed in several parts of CADC. Yet, there seems to be no visible intervention from the CADC leadership.

Outside the CADC, Chakmas are losing their lands. Be it Dampa Tiger Reserve in Mamit district or Puankhai Forest Reserve in Lunglei district, >>

Chakmas are losing their lands. Yet, no leader has spoken out against this kind of land acquisitions.

The Chakmas in Mizoram have been deprived of social, educational and economic benefits. Recruitment rules have been framed to bar Chakmas from getting employment which has resulted in huge educated unemployment. The state government has been willfully diverting the Central funds for Buddhist minorities to majority areas thereby denying development under various schemes. The state government has refused to take any measure for the development of Chakma language, script or culture and consistently scuttled the efforts of the National Minority Commission to set up a State Minority Commission to look after the welfare of the non-Christian minorities in the state.

Yet, the Chakma leaders have maintained a stony silence. They are invisible when it comes to raising the voice against injustice and for our development.

Tripura has a unique case. On August 18th, hundreds of Chakmas marched down the streets of Agartala, the state capital, demand introduction of Chakma script in schools. The Tripura state government has refused to recognize the Chakma script and instead imposed the Bengali script. The defence of the state government is that the decision to use Bengali script by Chakmas was taken by Chakmas themselves at a 1998 meeting of government-appointed Advisory Committee for Development of Chakma Language. This means that the Chakmas have been pleading with Chakma leaders in the Advisory Committee for adoption of Chakma script. What an irony!

Three kinds of leaders

In Mizoram, you can find three kinds of (Chakma) leaders. First ones are the political leaders, who are too political and little social in the sense that they have no time for the public. The political class is cut off from the

common people and the problems they face on daily basis. The village level political class thinks they are the kings, and they are more busy in misleading the people than finding solutions to the problems of their respective villages. In the land of the blind, the one-eyed is the king.

Second ones are the NGO workers, who are however not activists. They do humanitarian works, such as building houses ravaged by cyclones, construct village foot bridge, or clear the roads.

The third ones are the bred who survive on other's miseries. They are mainly stationed in towns like Aizawl/Lunglei (or even in villages) and often siphon off people's funds through forgery and cheating. One such person recently *allegedly* borrowed Rs 10 lakh from a rich (Mizo) man claiming himself to be the president of a Chakma social organization! (This author has a copy of that agreement signed while borrowing the money). Otherwise, one wonders how do they manage to feed their families and educate their children without any job? However, I do not paint all in the same brush; there are good guys too.

Leaders out of sync?

In my analysis here, I am focusing on the first two groups of leaders (political leaders and NGO workers). The third group needs no introduction; its better to leave them alone.

The case of the Chakma villagers of Parva I in the Chakma District Council is symptomatic of the problems faced by the community in Mizoram on daily basis. Every year, people die of malaria, water borne diseases and other unknown diseases; yet the health sub centre in the village is an empty dilapidated house. It was not operationalized ever since it was constructed several years ago. There is no Anganwadi Centre for 1,359 people. The only High School in this area catering to over 7 villages has been lying defunct since 1998. The Public Distribution System does not work properly.

The poorest of the poor have to starve during the monsoon but the food godown that was set up in 1997 is abandoned. Yet, the CADC administration did nothing to assuage their sufferings. I wonder whether the officials even know that the fundamental right to life also includes the right to food or is starvation treated as just a "normal" thing?

The lethargic manner in which our leaders deal with our day to day problems reflect that they are either incapable or are not willing. Or are they out of sync in the 21st century?

In Mizoram, our leaders did their best according to the situation in the 20th century. They walked miles for days in the absence of roads and were even thrown out of buses in the middle of nowhere during hostility days of 1990s. There were no telephones and waited for days to get a message passed to the other end or to receive information. Yet, they managed quite well.

However, the 21st century is the age of information technology with which our older generation leaders seem to be out of sync. The Indian government brought in a number of rights based laws, for example, Right to Information Act, the Right to Education Act, Forest Rights Act, job guarantee Act (NREGS) etc. But are we aware of these legal entitlements and how to ensure these entitlements, if denied? Or, how many of our leaders are proactive in the defense of our rights?

In conclusion, I would say that Chakmas are facing leadership crisis which must be addressed. The political leaders must feel the pulse of the common man and solve their problems. NGO leaders must shift their focus to activism and raise their voice against anything which is not in the interest of the community. If we fail to do these, then, in the coming days we will witness increasing role of the "third kind" of leadership described by me above. Society would no longer be in safe hands. ■

(The views expressed are personal of the author)

Read the previous issue online:

<http://sojaak.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/sojaak-aug2011.pdf>

