

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru¹

Series II, Volume 18

To Jairamdas Doulatram²

Camp: "The Retreat"

Mashobra

April 4, 1952

My dear Jairamdas,³

I have now read carefully your letter of March 20th.

It is quite clear that there is a considerable difference in your position as Governor vis-a-vis the Assam State and as Agent to the Central Government for the North-East Frontier Agency. The responsibility for the Agency area rests with the Central Government and in view of certain developments across the frontier this responsibility has become all the greater. Apart from this, the responsibility for the Tribal Areas also is largely that of the Central Government though in many places it is shared with the State Government. As I wrote to Medhi⁴ sometime ago (I sent you a copy of the letter⁵) we are much concerned about these tribal tracts and propose to give a great deal of thought to the policy to be pursued there. They cannot be treated just as outlying regions. They want special policies and special care. We have to help them to develop, but to develop' on their own lines. They must not have a feeling of any imposition or of any suppression of their own way of life.

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² JN Collection.

³ Governor of Assam at this time

⁴ Bisnuram Medhi, Chief Minister of Assam at this time.

⁵ See Selected Works (second series), Vol. 17, pp. 385-386

Therefore it is quite clear that we cannot hand over these areas to the Assam Government. At the same time it is right and natural that the Assam Government should be kept in close touch with happenings there, apart from military developments which have to be kept secret. The whole matter requires tactful handling. To tell the Assam Government that they must not interfere in any way would be rather an offensive way of approach. But we have to tell them, as politely and cooperatively as possible, that final decisions must rest with the Central Government. It is better for this to be done by the Central Government directly rather than by the Governor. The Governor in Assam has dual functions, just as the old Governor in the North-West Frontier Province used to have dual functions. These dual functions sometimes overlap and sometimes come into slight conflict with each other. But they need not necessarily do so if the situation is handled with tact.

I have indicated previously that officers dealing with the tribal people have to be chosen with extreme care; just as the average Assamese officer might not be suitable, the average ICS officer is usually equally unsuitable. In effect, we have to build up some kind of a special cadre. Apart from general policies involved, the approach has to be most sympathetic and friendly. The test of an officer is, how far he gains popularity among the tribes.

You refer to a case of some teachers having misbehaved with the tribal girls. I agree with you that we should be firm in such matters anywhere, more specially in tribal areas.

You refer to some complaints about the teaching of Hindu religion in schools. I am quite clear that no religion should be imposed in our schools on these people. Certainly festivals can be observed. Even there no festival should be imposed upon them. Generally speaking tribal festivals should be observed. Tribal people are much more festival-minded and given to

dancing and singing than others of the plains. This should be encouraged. The whole point is that the tribal people should feel that they are not under any foreign domination. The movement for independence among the Nagas is entirely based on the assumption that Indians are foreigners ruling over the tribes. Our policy must be aimed at removing this impression.

About the medium of instruction, I think it would certainly be worthwhile to encourage the tribal languages. It may be that we cannot go far in these languages but the mere fact of our trying to encourage them will be greatly welcomed by the tribal folk and produce a friendly atmosphere. The Russians, after the Soviet Revolution, deliberately encouraged every tribal language and thus gained the goodwill of the tribes. They even went so far as to develop new alphabets for these tribal languages.

In addition to the tribal languages, Assamese and Hindi will have to be taught.

I see no objection whatever to Tibetan being taught in areas where it is used by the people. I do not see why the Education Department objected to it.

I therefore agree with the view you have expressed in your letter to the effect that elementary education should be in the tribal or the local language, including Tibetan where necessary, and that Assamese and Hindi might be taught as the children grow up. Effort should be made to prepare simple textbooks in the tribal languages.

As you say in your letter, the Chinese have opened schools to teach Tibetan on the other side of the border. We should learn from them.

I would very much like to visit the tribal areas and now that you are having a landing place built at Ziro I shall some day come there. But I cannot say when.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

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To Bisnuram Medhi⁶

Camp: "The Retreat"

Mashobra

April 4, 1952

My dear Medhi,

You will remember writing to me about some difficulties you had in regard to the administration of the Tribal Areas under the North-East Frontier Agency. I sent you a reply⁷ pointing out the policy we have to pursue. I should like to repeat this briefly. The tribal areas in India, more specially the areas in the North-East of Assam and in parts of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa, are looked on by us as special areas deserving very special consideration. Our objective there is to promote the progress of the tribal folk without in any way interfering with their customs or way of living and without in any way making them feel that we are imposing anything upon them. That is the right approach anyhow. Recent events have made this policy the only feasible political approach. Otherwise, the tribal people will be alienated from us and will think of themselves more and more as a separate people. The whole of the Zapu Phizo movement⁸ derives from this feeling of separation. In the Jharkhand area of Bihar and in similar areas of Orissa, there is the same feeling growing.⁹ It is a dangerous drift, not

⁶ jN Collection

⁷ See Selected Works (second series), Vol. 17, pp. 385-386.

⁸ The movement led by Zapu Phizo aimed at the formation of Nagaland as an independent sovereign state. The Naga National Council conducted a plebiscite throughout Nagaland in 1951 the verdict of which, the Council claimed, was for the constitution of Nagaland as a separate sovereign state

⁹ The Jharkhand movement dates back to 1928 when Unnati Samaj, a political wing of the Christian Tribals' Association, petitioned the Simon Commission to constitute a tribal state

because it can give us direct trouble but because it will lead to anti-social elements becoming strong.

The Russians after the Soviet Revolution paid very special attention to their tribal people and did not interfere with their language, customs, or way of life. In fact they went out of their way to develop the tribal languages, etc. Thus they won the goodwill of the tribal folk. The Chinese today, on the other side of our border in Tibet, are putting up Tibetan schools for the Tibetans, and not interfering with their ways.

We have to follow more or less the same policy, that is, consider tribal questions from the tribal point of view. These have been our instructions to our Governors and before very long we shall have to meet in Delhi to lay down more precise policies. The carrying out of these policies demand very special men who have experience of tribal affairs and who are very sympathetic to those people. The test of the success of an officer is how far he is popular with the tribal folk. We have in fact to win these tribal people over to our side.

We are thinking in terms of a special cadre of officers trained for this purpose.

In Assam an additional difficulty arises due to the nearness of the frontier and of the developments that have taken place there. We have to face a military problem in addition to political and cultural problems. For this reason we sent a Military Mission sometime ago which made various suggestions. It is inevitable, therefore, that the Central Government should have direct responsibility for these tribal areas in the north-east. We should like of course that responsibility to be discharged, wherever possible, in cooperation with or consultation with the Assam Government. In military

in eastern India. The Jharkhand Party, which became the largest Opposition party in Bihar with 32 legislators following the 1952 assembly elections, stood for a separate state comprising the districts of Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Manbhum, Singhbhum and Palamau and the Santhal Parganas in the Chhota Nagpur region

matters, which have to be kept top secret, this may not always be possible. Nor is it feasible for day to-day affairs. But otherwise it is highly desirable for the Assam Government to be kept in touch and. consulted wherever necessary.

These are the instructions to our Governor in Assam and, so far as I know, he has adhered to that strictly. I think he has done very good work by his tours and otherwise in the Tribal Areas. He has a dual function-as Constitutional Governor for the State of Assam and as Central Government's Agent for the NEF Agency. Naturally, there might be some overlapping sometimes or some possibility of friction, though this can be avoided if people are tactful and intelligent.

The point is, two major considerations have always to be borne in mind: (1) military considerations in regard to the frontier and (2) the special policy to be pursued in regard to the tribal people. Any attempt to impose ourselves on them is doomed to failure. Any attempt therefore to merge them in a way with Assam will fail till the proper time comes for it.

There is the question of language and medium of instruction for primary schools in the tribal areas. I am quite clear that the language should be the tribal language or Tibetan as the case may be. Assamese and Hindi should come in at a later stage. This is the correct approach all over the world today. Having regard to our north-eastern problems it is obviously the correct approach there also.

We have been informed that there was some trouble in Centrally Administrated Areas with some teachers who were alleged to have misbehaved with the tribal girls. This kind of thing has to be rigorously dealt with anywhere, more specially in the tribes because it may have unfortunate consequences.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

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Medium of Instruction for North-Eastern Tribals¹⁰

The Governor of Assam, who functions as the Agent of the Central Government for the North-East Frontier Agency, has written to me about the medium of instruction for the tribal folk in that area. I understand that our Education Department was not agreeable to the tribal languages being used as such media and that therefore Hindi or Assamese was used. In some places the people use Tibetan and wanted Tibetan to be taught in the schools.

2. I think that the medium of instruction in the primary schools in these areas should be the principal tribal language used there. Where Tibetan is used, this should be the medium. This will not only help in the educational process but will be greatly appreciated by the tribal folk. To impose Hindi and Assamese on them right at the beginning would be unfortunate and gives rise to resentment.

3. There is a considerable feeling in the tribal folk that they are being dominated over by us. Indeed there is a movement of independence among the Nagas. We have therefore to avoid any kind of imposition and to allow them to develop according to their own genius.

4. As a matter of fact, the Chinese have opened Tibetan schools across the border. Tibetan-speaking people on our side very naturally claim Tibetan schools and we should provide them.

5. Both from the cultural and political points of view, it seems necessary and desirable that the tribal languages should be encouraged and should be the media of instruction in the primary schools. At later stage Assamese and Hindi can come in. This means that we should make a special effort to prepare some simple text-books for primary schools in the tribal languages. The Governor of Assam has done something in this matter.

¹⁰ Note to the Union Minister for Education, Mashobra, 4 April 1952. IN Collection

6. I hope your Ministry will adopt a policy in this matter which will be on the general lines indicated above.

7. I might mention that the Russians after the Soviet Revolution encouraged their tribal languages very considerably and thereby gained the goodwill of the tribal folk.

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Script for North-Eastern Tribals¹¹

You were good enough to write a note to me about the languages to be taught in the tribal areas in the North-East Frontier Agency. You expressed your full agreement with the policy I suggested but were in some doubt about the script.

2. I think in this matter of script also we should abide by the local sentiment, even though this might cause some difficulty. We should consult representative; of the local population pointing out the pros and cons. If they accept the Roman script, well and good. If they want the Tibetan script, as I think they are likely to do, then we should teach the Tibetan script. We must remember that they are living on the borders of Tibet and they want to deal with Tibet. They cannot do so in the Roman script. It is natural therefore for them to want to learn the Tibetan script.

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To Bisnuram Medhi¹²

New Delhi April 21st, 1952

¹¹ Note to the Union Minister for Education, 9 April 1952. IN Collection.

¹² JN Collection

My dear Chief Minister,

Thank you for your letters of April 18th and 19th. I have noted what you have said about Shri Jairamdas Doulatram and we shall proceed accordingly.

I have already written to you at some length about our policy in regard to the tribal areas.¹³ There is no question of our appeasing men like Zapu Phizo but our policy is definitely aimed at creating a feeling of self-confidence and progress in the minds of the tribal people.

I do not know anything about particular appointments in the NEF Agency that you refer to. Assamese officers should certainly be appointed but any appointments in the tribal areas must be considered chiefly from the point of view of the special capacity of the persons concerned to deal with the tribes. I do not know to which particular appointment you refer. So far as senior engineers are concerned, we have not ever thought of them in provincial terms. We have taken the best we have. At the present moment most of our best engineers apparently come from the Punjab and Madras and they are spread out all over India.

I am very glad to learn of the inauguration of the Garo Hills District Council¹⁴. I hope this will usher in a new era in the Garo Hills.

The railway conference has just been held here¹⁵ and I believe that all aspects of the question were fully considered. You will appreciate that in such a matter efficiency and good service to the public are the main criteria. A final decision has not yet been made about some matters but will no doubt be made soon. Unfortunately provincial considerations played

¹³ See ante, pp. 363-364

¹⁴ The Garo Hills District Council, the first among five autonomous councils formed under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, was inaugurated by Bisnuram Medhi at Tura on 14 April 1952. The district councils were entrusted with wide powers for local administration

¹⁵ See ante, pp. 106-107.

some part in the arguments. I am sure that the fullest consideration must have been given to arguments advanced by your representatives.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru