

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru¹

Series II, Volume 26

The Methodist Missionaries²

I saw a deputation today of four Methodist Bishops led by Bishop Mondo³ of Hyderabad. They spoke to me about various matters concerning them and I gave them our usual reply....

2. They pointed out that the Government had in the past encouraged all kinds of semi-known and unknown denominations from America and elsewhere to send their missionaries to India, with the result that the number of missionaries had gone up, undoubtedly, and the people who had come did not represent any of the major organisation, which suffered because of this.

3. I think there is some truth in this and one of the first steps we should take is not to encourage these numerous petty sectarian organisations chiefly from America and partly from Europe. It would be better for us to deal with a few major organisations...

4. They also referred to the vast properties held by foreign missionary societies in India. These societies were prepared to transfer property to Indian ownership, but this would be difficult because of the large sums

¹ Published by the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, Teen Murti House, New Delhi

² Note to the Home Minister, 11 August 1954. JN Collection. Extracts.

³ Shot Kumar Mondol (b. 1896); President, National Christian Council of Asia, 1950-56; also see Selected Works (second series), Vol. 24, p. 332

involved in deeds of transfer. I said that I did not know anything about this. It could be enquired into...

(ii) North Eastern States

1. To Bisnuram Medhi⁴

Camp: Mashobra

July 3rd, 1954

My dear Medhi,⁵

You wrote to me some little time ago about the conference of the autonomous districts, etc., which was held recently. An attempt was made at this conference to demand separation from Assam. But wiser counsels seem to have prevailed and they asked instead for fuller autonomy.⁶ What exactly they meant by this fuller autonomy I do not quite know....

I have been thinking a great deal about this matter. The States Reorganisation Commission will, no doubt, deal with it and make their recommendations.

There can be little doubt that conditions, as they are at present, in these autonomous areas are not wholly satisfactory. Of course, the Naga area is the extreme case,⁷ but even in some of the other autonomous districts there is a sense of dissatisfaction at things as they are. This found expression at that conference. The Nagas, of course, are trying to wean away others also.

In these circumstances, I should like you to consider this entire question afresh. We shall have to deal with it before long. Broadly speaking, I think that our approach should be towards somewhat greater autonomy of these

⁴ JN Collection. A copy of this letter was sent to the Governor of Assam

⁵ (1890-1981); Chief Minister, Assam, 1950-58; also see Selected Works (first series), Vol. 8, p. 483

⁶ See the next item

⁷ The Nagas had even started schools in the Naga Hills which were carrying on the campaign of the Naga National Council (NNC) for independence.

districts, within the State of Assam. They have a very definite individuality of their own, and they should be allowed to feel that they are looking after themselves. That was the whole object of having these autonomous districts. If we go a little further in that direction, it may well help in solving the problem and making them contented members of the State of Assam. You will remember that one of the grievances of the Nagas was that we did not give full effect to Akbar Hydari's⁸ agreement with them.⁹ I do not like any impression that we have backed out. We have to win these as well as other tribal people over and make them contented citizens. The mere law and order approach does not go far, although it is necessary. I should like you to think over this matter and write to me.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

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2. To S. Fazl Ali¹⁰

New Delhi August 10, 1954

My dear Fazl Ali,¹¹

⁸ Muhammad Saleh Akbar Hydari (1894-1948); Governor of Assam, 1947-48; also see Selected Works (second series), Vol. 3, p. 5.

⁹ As per the agreement signed in June 1947 between the NNC and Akbar Hydari, who was negotiating on behalf of the Government of India, authority in respect of judiciary, executive, legislature, land resources, taxation, boundaries, the Arms Act and the Chin Hills was given to the NNC. The Governor of Assam was to ensure the observance of the agreement for ten years and at the end of the period the NNC would be asked whether an extension of the agreement or its replacement was required.

¹⁰ JN Collection

¹¹ (1886-1959); Chairman, States Reorganisation Commission, 1954-55; also see Selected Works (second series), Vol. 3, p. 31

I have received a letter from Jairamdas Doulatram, Governor of Assam, about the Autonomous Districts of Assam.¹² As you will have to consider this matter sometime or other, I think that this letter might be of help to you. I am therefore sending you a copy of this letter, together with the other papers which were sent with it.

This question of the Autonomous Districts in Assam is a ticklish one and we have to proceed with some caution. You perhaps know that of the six Autonomous Districts, one, namely the Naga District, has been non-cooperating. The Nagas have refused to form their District Council and claim independence. That is absurd; and yet this shows the extent to which they are prepared to go. They are tough people, good if they are won over, and a nuisance if they are not. I am anxious to win them over, as well as the other tribes, both from the frontier as well as other points of view.

There can, of course, be no question of independence, and on the whole I feel that any separate State might also create difficulties. But, broadly speaking, I would like to give these District Councils greater powers so that they may have a sensation of self-government. Those powers would have to be limited somewhere. My general approach would be to give them considerable powers, but subject to the Governor or some authority suspending or vetoing a decision.

Then, there is the case of Manipur and Tripura. They are both small areas, but very definite and distinct cultural units. I dislike the idea of any

¹² On 1 August 1954, in his letter to Nehru, Doulatram wrote that the demand made by the spokesmen of the Autonomous Districts of Assam for "fuller autonomy under the Sixth Schedule is not in final substitution for a demand for a separate Hill State. The latter demand has been only kept in abeyance and will probably be pressed, in due course, if our response to their present demand does not substantially satisfy them on the two points of (a) more freedom from the State Government's control and (b) more sources of income for their programme of work."

individual cultural unit being submerged with others and thus losing its individuality.

Probably, you know that the people of these autonomous areas of Assam do not like, what they consider, the domination of Assam. There has been a tendency on the part of the Assamese to spread their own way and what they consider their culture over these areas. The hill people resent this and as a consequence there is some dislike of Assam.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

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3. The Tuensang Frontier Division¹³

I have read Dr Verrier Elwin's¹⁴ report on the Tuensang Frontier Division¹⁵ with some care. I have also read the other papers attached to this file. I have found Dr Elwin's report so important and interesting that, in spite of other heavy work, I have found time to read it thoroughly. I think it is an excellent report and, broadly speaking, I agree with his approach to this problem....

4. The report generally speaks well of our administration and of the steps that have been taken. I am glad that a tribute has been paid to the officers and men of the Assam Rifles. I recognise that some of his recommendations might involve certain administrative and political

¹³ Note to Foreign Secretary, 19 August 1954. IN Collection. Extracts

¹⁴ (1902-1964); Anthropological Consultant, NEFA; also see Selected Works (second series), Vol. 21, p. 584

¹⁵ Verrier Elwin undertook a seven-week tour of the Division in March and April 1954, covering 195 miles on foot, and submitted his report on 24 June 1954

consequences¹⁶ and we have to view this matter from this point of view. But I do not see anything very revolutionary about these recommendations and I think that we should endeavour to give effect to them, though the pace may have to be regulated according to circumstances.

5. I agree with the recommendations made by the Joint Secretary in his note.

6. I think that we should write to the Baptist Mission authorities' and inform them that we do not approve of missionary activities in these areas, more especially those carried on by the Baptist Mission. We should also put a complete stop to any extension of these activities in other adjoining areas. I agree that other Mission activities, including Hindu Missions, should not be encouraged. I do not myself see that the Ramakrishna Mission is a Mission in the normal sense of the word. It does not go in for conversion and the like. It is really a service organisation which has done excellent work wherever it has gone. But in this matter I would accept the judgment of Dr Elwin¹⁷ and, for the present at least, we should not encourage even the Ramakrishna Mission to operate in this area.

¹⁶ The report warned of political troubles, including that of separatism, due to Ao colonization and listed the steps to avert them: (i) alternative posts elsewhere for Ao Government staff, special training for Ao teachers and introduction of Basic Education; (ii) replacement of Ao language by Hindi; (iii) drawing of the Inner Line between Tuensang and the Naga Hills; (iv) firm policy towards pastors and evangelists to stop their mis-propaganda against Hinduism and refusal of permission to open new missionary centres; (v) undertaking of welfare schemes like bridge construction, water supply, etc.

¹⁷ Regarding the proposal to allow the Ramakrishna Mission to come and work in NEFA, he wrote that "if a Hindu Mission comes in with official backing, it wi!"¹ weaken our hand in dealing with the Christian Missions" and "the arrival of Hindu missionaries will be regarded as a challenge by the Baptists, who will redouble their efforts".

7. I referred to the Inner Line some months ago and suggested that we should go into this question rather thoroughly and draw up a new line.¹⁸ It appears that in some places there is a gap and there is no marked line at all. These matters should be taken up rather urgently. I do not see why they need involve any considerable delay.

8. I am horrified at the picture of these people being made to give up their old artistic clothes or even lack of clothes in favour of a dirty pair of shorts or some such thing. I am also greatly disturbed at certain shabby articles of modern civilization replacing the artistic products of these people. I am quite clear that we should prevent cheap mill cloth going there as far as we can. We are in fact encouraging hand-spun and hand-woven goods all over India. Surely we should only use these in these areas for presents and for other purposes. Indeed the right course would be to get yarn woven there into artistic pattern and encourage this artistic craft in this area.

9. I do not agree with the criticism that the preservation of tribal art and tribal dress indicates a desire to keep the tribal people as museum specimens. The danger is that these people will lose their culture and have nothing to replace it. I have no doubt that with the opening out of roads and other communications, these remote areas will be influenced by the rest of India. What has usually happened is that these artistic primitive people lose their artistry and get nothing to replace it. I would rather that they remain museum specimens than become such representatives of so-called modern progress. Of course I do not wish them to feel that we are stopping the "clock of progress", though I have my grave doubts as to

¹⁸ Elwin wrote that "the strengthening of the Inner Line was a matter of top priority.... A large number of check-posts would not be required; what is really needed is that our officers should have clear legal authority to check and if necessary remove undesirable visitors, and prevent outsiders settling down".

whether this clock is one of progress or not. We do not wish to stop them from doing what they like, but we must not encourage them to go the wrong way and our officers should be made to realise this fully. Indeed, our officers, if they really wish to understand these people and mix with them, should not be .too much of a class apart. They should have a capacity to sit, eat, dance and sing with them.

10. This is just a brief note. I want to have full particulars from the NEF Agency as to what particular steps are being taken on the lines suggested by Dr Elwin....