



# The arrogance of the ignorant

Posted at: 01/04/2019

## **It is tragic that 'New India' chooses to attack Adivasis and forest-dwellers instead of those destroying its ecology**

- When the tsunami hit the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in 2004, thousands perished.
- However, some of the oldest Adivasi tribes, the Jarawas and the Onges, lost nobody.
- These communities followed animals to the highlands well before the waves hit.
- Formal education was of little survival value in a context where you needed swift instincts.
- That those forests inhabited by Adivasis are some of the best conserved in the subcontinent is a long-standing fact contrary to the understanding of supposedly educated Indians.
- What is invaluable is what is often described as 'indigenous knowledge' — as though the knowledge gained over centuries of lived experience is of somehow lower valency than the literacy acquired in a school, or perhaps of no value at all.

### **Relationship with nature**

- Sadly, the articulate arrogance of 'New India' is such that it is unable to see any virtue in the lives of Adivasis and other forest-dwellers who have lived in and by the forests since times immemorial.
- Ensconced as it is in the air-conditioned offices of metropolitan India, duly estranged from any living ecology of the earth, while fully predatory on it, it sees people who live in and by the jungles as 'underdeveloped' criminals who are among those responsible for the thinning of the forests.
- Even the courts would fall to such abysmal levels of understanding has become a defining feature of the reforms era.
- On February 13, the Supreme Court ruled that over 1.12 million

households from 17 States, who have had their claims rejected under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006, are to be evicted by the State governments before July 27.

- It is not clear what fraction of these are individual claims and what fraction are community claims.
- Nor are all of these Adivasi households, some might fall under the 'other traditional forest-dwellers' category.
- Ironically, the FRA contains no legal provision for the eviction of rejected claimants.
- In the face of loud protests from around the country, the court issued a stay order (till July 10) on its ruling.
- The judges know that we live in an ecologically imperilled time when metropolitan India has much to answer for its corporate-consumer excesses.
- And yet, it is among the weakest and the wisest that they choose to attack.
- The conservationist petitioners and courts show little courage when it comes to tackling the land mafias, builder-developers, realtors, constructors and miners, but their conscience is ablaze over conserving Adivasis in the jungles.

### **A dying civilisation**

- This is the arrogance of ignorant India and it shall not abdicate till it has laid to rest the last hopes of what was 'a wounded civilisation', and is now a dying one.
- If remote habitats are emptied of Adivasis, there may be nobody to forewarn us when ecologically perilous tipping points are crossed in the future.
- To make matters worse, worrying amendments that have been proposed to the Indian Forest Act, 1927, which further strengthen the stranglehold of forest officials over India's jungles and its inhabitants, have now been made public.
- Perhaps some day, when their decisions affect them, the folly of their pronouncements will dawn upon those who preside on the fates of millions today.