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## "Adivasis Were Never Hindus, Separate Column Required For Them": Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren



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Soren said that the Adivasi people were nature worshipers, which is why they are counted as 'indigenous people'.

Supporting a separate religious code for the tribals of India, Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren said they were never Hindus by faith and will never be, and that there should be no confusion about it.

Soren, while addressing the 18th Annual India Conference at Harvard University on Saturday, said that the Adivasis were nature worshipers, which is why they are counted as 'indigenous people'.

The chief minister said that the government had demanded a separate column for Adivasis in the upcoming census from the Centre, to continue their tradition and culture.

"Adivasis were never Hindus, and they never will be... where will the Adivasis go, whether he will write Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Muslim, Christian [in the census]... I came to know that the central government has removed the 'Others' column. It seems they have to adjust in this only," Soren said in his virtual address.

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Soren mentioned the Santhal tribe from Jharkhand that has actively promoted their art and literature. There are various papers published on the indigenous foods of the particular community. But the state has not been able to develop any program where the tribal community can be promoted, unlike other states such as West Bengal, Odisha.

"The customary system of these people is entirely different from the rest of the country. There are 32 tribal communities in Jharkhand, but we have not been able to promote our language, culture," Soren said in his virtual address.

"We are planning to work on projects to promote and take forward these communities, such as creating a tribal university," [The Indian Express](#) quoted him as saying.

Soren said that despite having constitutional provisions, there is a need for a dedicated ministry and laws for the tribals, as they remain at the receiving end of exploitation and discrimination. "It has been 20 years since the state was formed, but Jharkhand is yet to reach where it should have."

Soren said the state government's focus this year is on providing employment but the central government doesn't seem to be a party. "And why should it be. If the central government gives them jobs, everyone will remain busy, who will pick the flag of the BJP." He added that the state will create more vacancies in government jobs and provide more educational opportunities to children from tribal communities.

His government has also decided to start a tribal university for the state's tribal community development.

When asked about the recent state slogan of "Khanan Nahi, Paryatan (tourism, not mining)" in the backdrop of Jharkhand being dominantly a mineral-rich state, the Chief Minister said that almost all countries in the world where minerals are mined are not in a good state. He emphasised tourism as a new measure of growth. "The forests which Adivasi revere as a god, are areas of mines and minerals for others," he said.

Soren said people from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities have been ignored and repressed for years. "The mentality has not changed. I often hear people saying to Adivasi/SC/ST 'tum log is layak nahi ho (you people are not capable)'," Soren said adding that the road to the Chief Minister's office was not easy even for him.

## Row Over Soren's Comments

Soren's remarks on supporting a separate religious code for the Adivasis drew a sharp response from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which accused him of 'speaking the language of a vatican'.

BJP Jharkhand spokesperson Pratul Shahdeo said that saying such things on an international platform shows Soren playing in the hands of the Vatican. Such decisions (having a separate code for a specific community), like the Sarna code, is undertaken by the judiciary and the legislature.

But the discussion on an international platform would invite foreigners to interfere in internal affairs.

Congress' Jharkhand unit spokesperson Kishore Shahdeo refrained from commenting on the issue but said that his party had promised Sarna code in their manifesto. The party came to a resolution passed in the assembly for providing a separate column for the tribals in the census and looks forward to the Centre for honouring it.

## 2011 Census

According to the 2011 Census, tribals account for 26 per cent of the 32.4 million population of Jharkhand, reported Hindustan Times. Activists said a majority of the tribal people in the state who are not Christians opted for the 'Others' column while marking their religious identity in the 2011 Census.

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