

DARK CLOUDS--ANOTHER TSUNAMI--AND A NEW GOVT. ORDER TO SCATTER AND DESSIMATE SURVIVORS OF TSUNAMI IN TAMILNADU.

The Government of Tamilnadu through its Revenue Department has issued an order- G.O.Ms.No.25,Revenue, dated 13.01.2005 seeking Public- Private Partnership in order to scatter and deessimate those victims of Tsunami who have not yet lost their lives after nature showed its fury. The summarized implication of this Government order is as follows:

1. that those fisherfolk who are now in temporary accommodation (read: & those on the streets- be scattered) and "permanently relocated" in sites to be allotted by the Government.(read and permanently displaced from their ancestral homesteads)
2. that NGOs, companies, corporate houses and charitable institutions (national & international) be invited to send their requests for participating in this programme.
3. that those who can mobilise 75 lakhs (for 50 families) in order to build houses, infrastructure and provide for livelihood be invited to this partnership.
4. that such proposals be given to the collector for his acceptance (or rejection !) and his final decision be forwarded to the Panchayat for its acceptance .

Ominous clouds after Tsunami:

Many of us who have been closely watching dark post Tsunami clouds gathering :

- (a) recently the Government distributed a package along with Rs=3000 to 4000 to survivors in Enore and asked them to vacate the school but not to return to the beach.
- (b) a false warning was spread that yet another Tsunami was about to strike the T.N coastline and that fisherfolk should not go back to the sea
- (c) some vested interests have been spreading the rumour that the fish is poisonous and Government has maintained stoic silence about it.
- (d) relentless efforts are being made by the Government to coopt the voluntary sector through many innovative means
- (e)while the poor are without a roof Government's priority has been a wall along the coast at a cost of Rs= 5000 crores (with ever ready worldbank dollars!).

Real implications for the poor:

Fisherfolk living on the beach from time immemorial in their small thatched houses with their fishing nets and boats on the coast by the side of their houses have eeked out a meagre but highly dignified life by going out into the sea and returning with their catch to the shore. The women folk then collect the catch from the fishing nets and form the first link in a marketing chain which provides livelihood despite denial of the market price.

This high protein diet has not only provided nutrition for them and their children but also for other poor , including dalits. tribals and marginalised dependants on the fishing economy. The right of these fisherfolk to live on the beach is sanctified by customary law

since they have lived on these beaches from time immemorial (Custom has the force of law if the memory of society knoweth not to the contrary and in the case of the fisherfolk- this condition is more than adequately satisfied)

Unfortunately the Government has other plans-they would apparently like to use this natural calamity to clean the beach-and make it available for tourism and big fishing business. The victims of this grand plan-couched in a humanitarian garb- will be the fisherfolk and especially the widowed women, the orphaned children, the bereaved, the elderly and other living members of the fisherfolk who have no boats and nets to return to the sea.

Unprecedented displacement:

Dark clouds are gathering in the seat of power in Tamilnadu-this will be worse than the first Tsunami for the living poor. There are more than seven lakh fisherfolk along the coast living in more than 600 fishing community villages-(Kuppams). Their livelihood is possible only in close harmony and proximity with the sea-hence they live on the beach-because they cannot carry out their self employed livelihood except by living along with their fishing nets and boats. Any proposal to relocate them, if carried out will destroy their livelihood and make them beggars- like so many tribals who have been driven out from the forest.

The state will also create the material conditions under which the unemployed youth will become available to those who seek desperate solutions for livelihood outside the Rule of Law. This will become a classical case where the state destroys existing livelihood and creates the condition for lawlessness to take over and then seek further aid to curtail terrorism and the like. We know from a long history of past experience that Government cannot give them alternate livelihoods. In any case these fisherfolk cannot be forcibly prevented from reclaiming their homestead on the beach-because -they have the right "to prior possession" as well as the "right to livelihood" as laid down by the Supreme Court-even in a celebrated case of fisherfolk themselves. (In Joseph vs. The state of Kerala.)

If in spite of these apprehensions the state is hell bent on "permanent relocation and rehabilitation of the affected persons" (vide Govt order cited above) let them build these new houses with their own funds, provide alternate employment and offer the title deeds to the affected along with alternate jobs and then invite the affected persons to make their choice. If the alternates are attractive and real enough-surely the affected people will take them--- but---till these utopian ideas are put into practice the Government has no right to further displace those affected-hence the NGOs, the corporates, and the charitable institutions must come together in order to rebuild the destroyed houses out of the same thatch with which the fisherfolk historically built their houses and quickly provide boats and nets so that the fisherfolk can return to the sea and resume their life of dignity pending realisation of the new government utopia !

ALL FRIENDS OF FISHERFOLK, DALITS AND THE POOR SHOULD JOIN THEIR VOICES AND ACTIONS TO AVERT THE NEXT STATE SPONSORED TSUNAMI !

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