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Rights, violence and Indian

Has non-violence lost ground to violent protests in the land of Mahatma Gandhi?

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In India everyone has the right to protest peacefully. But such protests often turn violent. The recent violent protest by Gujjars in Rajasthan demanding tribal status is one example. The protests hit the headlines of very national newspapers and the electronic media in particular the TV news channels were covering almost every bit of the news of Gujjars.

The Justice Jasraj Chopra Committee set up by the Rajasthan government and the Union Law Ministry have stated that Gujjars of Rajasthan do not qualify for inclusion as a Scheduled Tribe.

Yet, the government of Rajasthan has recommended to the Centre for providing "4 to 6 per cent reservation" to the Gujjars under the category of denotified tribe. The Gujjars leaders have been almost immediately invited for talks.

The Gujjars are fortunate enough to be residing in states which are bordering New Delhi. They are at strategic advantage to be able to block all roads to Delhi and can trouble the government at the Centre. Else, if the Gujjars were, for example in the far away North East India, New Delhi would not have cared so much about them despite all their efforts to create instability and unrest. They would have never got

the limelight that they are getting.

More brutal protests

Many ethnic communities in the North East have been trying unsuccessfully to draw the attention of the Centre towards their miserable plight, injustice, and underdevelopment due to the policies of the Central government. Many other minority communities are opposing their respective state governments' discriminatory policies. Many communities have taken up arms against the government of India. Thousands have died, fighting goes on regularly; yet, who cares? It requires the demonstration of some brutality in

the North East for the incident to find a small place in the front page of newspapers in mainland India.

In the land of Mahatma Gandhi the method of non-violence is fast losing grounds and support. Gandhigiri may have become a fashionable concept, but it certainly does not work on the street. Our political leaders and rulers swear by Gandhi, exhort the people to follow Gandhian principles and export Gandhism but do not care for considering the demands, if raised through non-violent ways. The government has often responded to the peaceful protests led by social activist Medha Patkar by arresting her and restricting her rights.

democracy

The conditions of the poor and displaced people for whom Ms Patkar/ Narmada Bachao Andolan is fighting for, continue to remain grim.

Non-violent methods

Irom Sharmila of Manipur can rightly be called the greatest living Gandhian. She has been fasting for more than seven years seeking repeal of the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act from Manipur. Even the colonial British Empire shook when Gandhiji fasted to protest British government's policies. But the government of India has responded by detaining the "iron lady" of Manipur while throwing the recommendations of the Jus-

tice B.P. Jeevan Reddy Committee, appointed by the Prime Minister himself to review the AFSPA, out of the window. The committee recommended for repeal of the Act. If you do not implement the recommendations of a commission/ committee why do you set up that commission/committee in the first place and waste so much of tax payers' money?

While India and Indians may criticize the military junta of Burma for continued detention of Nobel peace prize winner Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the non-violent movement for human rights and democracy in Burma, how is the Indian government different?