

## JOHAR

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JHARKHANDI'S ORGANISATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
MANIFESTO, DECLARATION AND GUIDELINES OF FUNCTIONING

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## JHARKHANDI'S ORGANISATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS MANIFESTO - DECLARATION & GUIDELINES FOR FUNCTIONING

### OUR STORY

"Johar" for us Jharkhandis is more than just a word in our language. There is a long tradition behind this word that has filled it with the best we have to offer. "Johar" is a spirit, an attitude, a feeling and an expression of welcome, of gratitude, of praise, of togetherness, a salutation. "Johar" is an act of obeisance..... a blessing.

Even though we all have different languages, there surely is a good reason for it to be one of the most common words used by our different Adviasi people. Our Santhals, our Mundas, our Hos, our Uraons, our Kharias and other Adivasi neighbours greet one another with the expression "Johar". It was the first word we used when we met one another for the first time.

"Johar" was also the first word we used to greet the early diku (non-Adivasi outsider) in Jharkhand. but today, we see that our Johar to the diku has

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not only been misunderstood, but also trampled and affronted. Thus today, our land and community is much worried, for, this land, this air, this water, that has been handed down to us for our protection and to be protected and sustained, has been insulted.

For centuries we lived and roamed in the dense forest and each day we learnt so much from nature, nature, nurtured us like a mother and we in turn respected her. Just as all humans cannot live without free air, we too cannot live without a free forest. But today our forest is being mercilessly destroyed like plucking feathers from a chicken before it is slain, our forest is being shaven clean. If our forest are not bleeding with mines and blastings they are frightened cold with the dreadful teeth of the thousands of saw mills slicing timber, as if trees grow overnight.

In contrast, we, have a season for cutting timber and only during its time can we lumber. We can take only that amount of timber we actually need and not more. To accumulate is shameful for us, We have a time for hunting too, and choose only certain days to eat the flowers and berries of trees, to give time for the trees to have some for herself to pollinate her seed, to give time for the

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birds to have their share and the bee to collect its honey, for the squirrel to collect enough for the dry summer, and from what is left we take and eat and dance.

The trees swayed and were happy, and in the time to the full moon, the trees cast their shadow over our dancing children during the nights of the festival of Maghe, Karma, Sorai and the festival of the flower, Baa and Sarhul, And the trees grew tall and broad and strong and green and laden with flower and fruit and seed, and we too became strong and healthy and laden with happiness and our goats went into the forest to graze and mingled with the deer and often the tiger would lift one and we never attacked the tiger because they too had their rights.

We worked on the good earth and grew our crops and when the good earth got tired producing crops, we let her rest, and shifted to other patches of land and when she felt it, she let beautiful forest grow anew on her bosom.

And we women worked more on the fields and the home producing and rearing children that most often brought much joy to ourselves and our community. We took what was extra for us to the weekly gathering and bartered it for whatever we

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did not have and drank 'Diang' (fermented rice brew) with those we met and shared our joys and sorrows. When one among us fell ill, we developed our own herbs and ways of healing, performed sacrifices to propitiate the evil spirits that they may not interfere in our happiness. When one among us took ill we considered it a threat to all of us and therefore all of us together helped to overcome the illness.

Our attitude towards each living creature was one of tremendous respect and because of this attitude we were able to respect the uniqueness of each one of us irrespective of age or sex or family. Each living creature had his/her place in the cycle of nature and therefore was important; this was a very important lesson that nature in her own way taught us. It was this respect for the living and nature that shaped our understanding of what is human. If all this meaning could be put into one word in our different languages, it is "Johar".

But today let us see what has happened to this word "Johar". We feel that our spirit of welcome has been taken for granted and therefore we have collected here under, the voices and feelings of our people from different corners of Jharkhand.

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We said johar to you but you have taken away our lands and made us landless, .....we said johar to you and humbly offered you a leaf-cup of our fermented rice brew (Diang/Handia) but you grabbed that hand and raped us, just to subordinate us women and satisfy your carnal desire. .... We said johar to you but you brought in these colossal machines and established big factories, dams and townships and thousands of our people are thus homeless. .... We said johar to you, and never imposed our ways of life on you, but we were forced to follow your ways, your laws, even though we do not understand them. Yet you continue to ridicule our ways and customs..... We said johar to you but our song our dance our language and folklore have become just pages in books of libraries where your anthropologists can debate over, thus you have distorted our history; you have misinterpreted our culture and made it a commodity to be marketed at your Universities and Seminars..... We said johar to you but our traditional and reliable health system has been destroyed. The herbs are no longer available as you have planted trees we do not understand in our forest land, even the herbs used by us women to control our fertility are no longer available. In March '89 over 300 of our

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people died one after the other in many areas of Jharkhand. The government people said it was 'meningitis'; in some villages some medicines were given and we were told that it would cure us. We as yet do not know why so many of us had to die? Why only the poor among us were the victims? Why more women and children died? We hope one day to have answers to these questions. Today, too many people are dying or are getting incapacitated because of the continued attacks of malaria and filaria and the medicines for these diseases are no longer effective..... We said johar to you and even our philosophy and spirituality was not spared, your sociologists and theologians worked overtime to distort our beliefs within the understanding of your religions. Those who could not formulate such distortions, coined our beliefs in derogatory terms, ..... We said johar to you and today our people are forced to migrate to distant lands called Patna, Delhi and Punjab to work as bonded labourers in stone quarries and brick kilns..... We had our own system to conserve water and rear fish and our well-kept forest assured us of regular rain, but today all our rivers, streams and springs and other water sources have been diverted to your townships, your factories and mines and in return you dump your sewage and industrial waste into

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our fields and lands destroying our crops, fish and lands. .... We said johar to you but you have taken some of our people and dressed them in your clothing and ways; they are now lonely and lost and you have thus denied us the joy of remaining as one community. .... We said johar to you and surely wanted you together with us to prosper, but you have amassed wealth and accumulated goods that can see you and your posterity for a hundred years, but each minute our families have to overwork and however much we work we never get a stomach full, we never sold our labour power, and it was shameful for us to work for a wage, but you needed us to build your townships and factories and mines and dams, and you deliberately created circumstances that impoverished us, forcing us to work on your sites as bonded contract labourers at the mercy of inhuman contractors. Without us you could never build this big industrial base and structure, it was all our labour and our materials.

These are the voices of our people echoed in each of our villages. The dikus whom we welcomed with great respect, have not only insulted and misused our welcome and destroyed our culture and all that kept our society happy. Thus for us 'diku' is one who destroys and exploits. First the dikus came as land grabbers, then the British colonisers as

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dikuss who ruled us, now we have these big industries and these townships. Thus from individuals, the dikus have taken the form of massive industries and industrialists, and today in the form of development projects that destroy and make us their victim. This change in the form of the diku continues today, with the state and its machinery becoming the most powerful diku, the administration that is always exploiting us, the police that insults, destroys and kills us only to protect the rich and powerful, the legal system that is more harassing than just, in whose courts and jails thousands of our people are being unjustly treated and punished. Now we have the political system and political parties that too have taken the form of the diku.

Thus the diku is today institutionalised, it has become part of the system and our struggle is against these systems and institutions and those individuals who support these institutions. We understand that from among the non-Adivasis some also, like us are victims of the same system, we recognise them as one among us, and on the other hand we also observe with pain, that some of our relatives have now joined the system. We are forced to count them among the dikus.

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We thus make a difference between the diku who destroys and exploits, against whom our struggle is, and the diku who like us too is being exploited and repressed and who we consider as our friend.

Today, all over the world, concerned individuals and groups and even institutions like the United Nations, are talking about the danger of the destruction of this earth. A search is going on for what is natural and sustaining and what is not. People are trying to experiment with certain ideas. But here in Jharkhand we have for centuries been living in a harmonious environment, we still possess some of these values and traditions.

While we say this, we realise very well that all our ways may not be very correct, and we surely are not against all the ways of the diku, but from the very beginning no one ever cared to sit and talk to us about working together. We are not saying that we will go back to the past in order to start again, but we surely are not going to let this present trend continue. We refuse to be taken as part of the flora & fauna, to be crushed into pulp as raw material in the name and glory of money and power.

We know it is late, but we still think there is some time to salvage some of our good experiences. After all, this earth is for us all. This earth does

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not belong to us, we belong to her. But together we would like to drive out all that has caused us so much injury and harm, the exploitative market system, the unjust legal system, the technology that is destructive and not for the benefit of people and nature, the patriarchal attitude towards women, children and elders, the health system that is more injurious than healing, the education system that prepares people to be competitive and destructive, the fanatic religious trends that practise divisions rather than oneness.

For, if we do not call a stop to this madness the spirit of our ancestors will not forgive us. We know today that they are already angry with us, and when it becomes unbearable to them, they may all join the already over burdened forces that keep the balance of this earth and if this happens neither we, nor the diku, can ever hope or imagine to win a war against this combination.

Therefore, in continuation with the history of struggles of this Jharkhand, the struggles of our Santhal ancestors who in 1784-85 rose against the British, led by Baba Tilka Majhi and our glorious Kol uprising of 1831-32, our Santhal uprisings of 1855-56 led by Sido and Kanu against the landlords, their henchmen and the East India Co. where over

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25,000 of our ancestors were slaughtered just because the British and firepower which was advantageous to them. Our Munda-Ho uprising of 1895-1900 led by Birsa Munda. Then the Post-Independence struggles, the various peasant uprisings in the Ranchi belt, the firing at a public meeting in the town of Gua Mines in Singhbhum on 8th September, 1980 followed by the butchering of our Adivasis the same day in the same town hospital. The suppression of the Anti-Kharkai Dam Movement and the brutal killing of its leader Gangaram Kalundia on 5th April, 1982, the killing of the fourteen Santhal villagers of Banjhi on 19th April 1985 where Anthony Murmu the ex-Member of Parliament too was killed in the Panchayat Office, all because they were demanding our traditional fishing rights. The brutal repression against the Kolhan Movement where the Bihar Police burnt and looted the houses of over 450 of our Adivasis relatives, and the numerous search and comb operations by the Bihar Police, the Bihar Military Police, the Central Reserve Police, the harassment of over 5000 of those who dwell in the forest, by framing false criminal cases under the oppressive Forest Act in the District Court of Chaibasa in Singhbhum alone, and now very recently the false criminal cases against activists of the

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Jharkhand separate State Movement and Trade Union activities where the Courts do not respect their own process of the law. The cases and harassments of homeless, landless women when they enter the forest to collect leaves and twigs, or when they pick coal along the railway track. Such cases and harassment are common in all the district courts of Jharkhand covering M. P., Orissa and West Bengal.....

In support and continuation with these struggles and the numerous struggles going on this very minute, we are raising the banner of Jharkhandis' Organisation for Human Rights ..... **JOHAR.**



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## DECLARATION OF JHARKHANDI'S ORGANISATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS JOHAR

We pledge to restore dignity and self-respect of our people by struggling for the following rights and freedom,

1. The socio-economic and cultural rights ensured to our people under the Indian Constitution and under various United Nation Human Rights declarations, Covenants, especially the one on Indigenous people.
  2. The right to be united together under one administration which will ensure full autonomy and also the maximum participation of men and women in decisions affecting their lives.
  3. The freedom to choose a path of economic development which will protect us from destitution and ecological degradation, including the right to use our rich natural resources and forest so that the fruits of development are shared by our people men and women equally.
  4. The freedom from all manner of cultural and social oppression, economic exploitation and political repression.
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5. The freedom to express ourselves in accordance with our own unique cultural traditions and to ensure the development of all aspects of our rich culture including language and history.
  6. The freedom to live without State violence and inhuman laws and a legal system designed to perpetuate injustice, and to evolve laws and a legal system which will protect our people from criminalization.
  7. The right of women to participate in socio-economic, cultural and political life and the freedom from gender oppression in all areas.
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## GUIDELINES FOR FUNCTIONING

**JOHAR** is an organisation based on membership with each member responsible to make his/her best effort to run the organisation. Membership is open to all democratic and secular Jharkhandis who believe and accept the spirit of the manifesto and declaration.

1. The relationship and running of the organisation will be based on those values and customs we find healthy and positive among the traditional values and customs of the different Jharkhandi communities, i.e. consensus, co-operation, concern, deep respect for people and egalitarianism.
  2. In this spirit, besides the post of Convenor there will be no other post. For practical purposes a working team may be drawn from the members, who in turn will be fully responsible to the general body of members. Two members from this team will run the bank account in a nationalised bank.
  3. Each district may initiate a JOHAR circle in their area that will be fully independent and autonomous. Each JOHAR circle will maintain relations with other circles and may organise a communicating forms they consider best to help them to function more effectively.
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4. For the healthy growth of the organisation it is very essential that each member develops his/her political consciousness. For this programme should be organised to stimulate the intellectual and spiritual growth of the members by reflection on the local, national and international situation.
  5. JOHAR will have relationships with all Human Rights and Civil Liberties organisations, especially those based in Tribal areas.
  6. While respecting the work of some organisation/institutions engaged in Legal Charitable Activities, JOHAR will not be able to engage in similar activity, because of our wider perspective and also because of our lack of financial resources. However, JOHAR will extend all moral support to such organisations.
  7. JOHAR will financially sustain its activities through contributions from its members, supporters and other concerned individuals. JOHAR will not accept funds from the Industry, Forest Contractors, Foreign Funding Agencies and individuals or institutions it considers as exploiters/diku.
  8. The emphasis of our activity will be more against the violence of the State against individuals, groups or organisations.
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