

# We want Statehood so that Our Voices are Heard

**As demand for protection of land, culture and jobs under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution gathers steam in Ladakh, Sonam Wangchuk, an education reformer and one of the most popular voices from the region, said on Thursday that the Centre's policy was alienating the youth by sowing seeds of militancy.**

"The fear is not that people will turn against India, the fear is that love for India will subside, and it is dangerous for a country that is facing the Chinese. Unlike people in Mumbai and Delhi, people here have helped the Army during war by acting as porters and supplying food," Mr. Wangchuk said in an interview to *The Hindu*.

He said unemployment and indiscriminate police action against civilians for uttering the phrase "Sixth Schedule" in public had contributed to this feeling and FIRs were being filed "left, right and centre". The Sixth Schedule under Article 244 of the Constitution protects tribal populations, providing autonomy to the communities through creation of autonomous development councils which can frame laws on land, public health, agriculture.

"When I wanted to fast at Khardung La, I was put under house arrest. Four days ago, the Lieutenant-Governor [L-G] of Ladakh had come for a prize distribution ceremony in a stadium in Leh. On seeing him, children started shouting 'Sixth Schedule'. They were taken to the police station. Has it become a crime to say Sixth Schedule in public now?" he said, adding that 12,000 jobs were promised but the recruitment process had been completed only for 800 positions.

## Demand for Statehood

Mr. Wangchuk, an engineer who is also a climate activist, concluded a five-day fast on February 1 to demand statehood for Ladakh and inclusion under the Sixth Schedule. Around 2,000 people in Leh attended the rally to conclude his agitation.

On August 5, 2019, the special status of the former State of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Constitution was revoked by Parliament and the State was bifurcated into two Union Territories — Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, the latter without a Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Wangchuk said they were better off with the special provisions under Article 370 which ensured that big industries would not be able to exploit their resources.

“Earlier we had four MLAs in the State Assembly [of Jammu and Kashmir], now we have zero representation. The L-G, who is an outsider, is sent to govern us. One man decides everything. 90% of the 6,000 crore allocated to Ladakh is at the dispensation of a non-elected person. He may take any decision under pressure or financial gain. By the time he understands the issues, it will be time for him to leave. We demand full statehood so that our voices are heard,” Mr. Wangchuk.