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PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES OF SMALL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN RUSSIA: THE SETU PEOPLE CASE



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There are more than 300,000 persons representing 47 small indigenous peoples from 28 regions of the Russian Federation. Peoples who live in their ancestral lands, self-identify themselves as a separate ethnos, have a population fewer than 50,000 persons are recognized as small-numbered indigenous peoples. Most of the small-numbered indigenous peoples in Russia - 42 peoples - live in the North, Siberia and the Far East of the country. According to the official statistics for the period from 2002 till 2010, the number of small indigenous peoples in Russia increased by 3%. However, some of the peoples count only several dozen individuals.

Each of the peoples has its own history, traditions and problems, further investigation of which might be beneficial for their better understandings and solutions to the challenges facing them.

One of the small indigenous peoples - the Setos, Seto or Setu - lives on the territory of two civilizations, on both sides of the Russian (the Pskov Region) and the EU border (the South-East of Estonia). The Setu is Finno-Ugric indigenous ethnic and linguistic minority that also lives in the Krasnoyarsk and the Perm regions of Russia.

Some research indicates that the first Setu people appeared in the area in 1000 BC. By the middle of 19th century, the Setu people's economy was based on agriculture and breeding. They grew crops and flax, raised cattle, sheep and pigs. As regards customs, the Setu identify themselves through distinctive clothes and singing traditions. Clothes with adornments made of silver coins and pins are truly unique. The contrast among black, white and red prevails in traditional Setu clothes. A song or "leelo" was a way of self-expression that was included in the UNESCO list of cultural heritage in 2009. Material evidence of culture includes the rich tradition of beautiful handicrafts. The Setu cuisine is also of interest, being influenced by both the Russian and Estonian culinary culture. Lenten food also plays an important role in their lives.

The peak of the population density of the Setu was documented by the census of 1903. There were around 22,000 persons. The economy was growing, cultural autonomy was created, schools were developing and newspapers were issued.

During the 20th and early 21st century, the population of the Setu in the historic homeland (Setumaa) decreased 8-9 fold, while in the Russian part of Setumaa, their number decreased by more than 30 times as the result of:

- Migration to other regions of Russia because of the reforms in the beginning of the 20th century;
- Movement of the Setu people to the Central part of Russia and Siberia in 1949-1950;
- Outmigration of approximately 200 young Setu to Estonia to study in the Estonian language (especially from 1993 onwards).

At the same time it worth mentioning some other problems influencing the Setu people today:

- Assimilation of the Setu people either to Russian or Estonian mainstream and, as a result, disappearance of a common traditional habitat;
- Population decline;
- Difficulties of crossing the frontier between their homelands across the two states;
- Using the Setu language (especially when the population is diffused);
- Low competitiveness of traditional types of economic activity resulting in unemployment;
- Self-identification.

Small indigenous people currently have the attention of the federal, regional and local authorities. Thus, the Setu people were added to the official list of recognized small-numbered peoples of Russia by virtue of no. 453 of the 17th of June 2010. Regional authorities initiated a long-term programme to support the Setu people in 2011-2014. This includes organization of 2 ethno-cultural Setu villages, roads and communications, construction, development and support of folk craft, organization of Setu festivals etc. A representative of the Setu people is a regular member of the Community Board on national and religious relations that has been organized by the Governor of the Pskov Region since 2011. Its main objective is to develop consent, mutual respect and tolerance, and to harmonize international and religious relations in the Pskov Region.

Much attention to the Setu people is also paid by scholars and researches. Thus, Pskov State University held a series of investigations aimed at exploring their ethnic identity, demographics and also identifying all the settlements in the Pskov Region in 1999, 2005, 2011 and 2014. One of the tools used was a specially developed questionnaire focusing on the following issues: 1. Ethnic self-identification (nationality, name, ancestors etc.), 2. Language (knowledge, communication skills, language of everyday communication, etc.), 3. Ethnically differentiating features (religion, national costume, etc.), 4. Demography (children, relatives, etc.), 5. Names and surnames (Russian or Estonian, etc.), 6. General information (age, sex, profession etc.).

Taking into account the traditional lifestyle of the Setu people and their priorities in socio-economic development of the Pskov Region it is possible to consider the following possibilities to keep up traditions and develop the Setu economy:

- Tourism: the Setu have a rich history, interesting culture and traditions, and a unique geographical location. They attract more and more tourists from the Pskov Region, others regions of the Russian Federation and abroad.
- Entrepreneurship: the Setu apply traditional knowledge to produce eco-friendly products; they have knowledge and skills in handicrafts, a sustainable approach to forestry and non-wood forest resources which all provide good opportunities for start-ups and small business development among the Setu people.