**Zapatista , Chiapas, Mexico**

1. **What is Zapatista ?** : Zapatista is an anti Industrialism ( anti globalization,anti neo-liberalism) movement by indigenous people in the state of Chiapas of the country Mexico ( 10th largest country in the world by population). This movement is unique because it has lasted for more than 25 years and becoming more and more “civilizational” ie encompassing all facets of life. It is also unique because it is the largest such movement today ----- not a few villages or towns like many such other successful ventures. It is 1000 villages , 3.5 lakh people, 29 municipalities !!
2. **History and Violence** : It started with violence on 1st Jan 1994 against the Mexican Nation State for signing a free trade agreement with USA and Canada ( NAFTA) . Somewhat like Left wing guerilla violent movements in many parts of the world like our Naxalites. But it very quickly gave up violence as futile against modern Nation States. Building autonomous people’s organizations to evolve a different peaceful anti Industrialism society has been its main effort for last 25 years.
3. **Women’s Empowerment** : Right from the beginning bringing women at par in all facets of life has been one of their main agenda starting with a “Women’s Revolutionary Law” . In a culture steeped in patriarchy, this has been a remarkable achievement. In later years this has progressed to fighting for rights of LGBTQ people.
4. **Leader** : It is remarkable that this huge indigenous movement was led for many years by Subcommandante Marcos who is *not indigenous* , and was a *university professor*. A few years back he has stepped down and indigenous woman leader Maria Martinez has taken over. Zapatistas believe that everyone is free to join them , and they have something to teach and learn from all other such movements from all over the world. A very bold attempt to erase the distinction between indigenous and non- indigenous.
5. **Village Participatory Governance** : Every village with approx. 350 population has general assembly where anyone above **age 12** can participate ! There are three bodies ---one for day to day admin, one for land and disputes, one for police !!
6. **Three Tier govt** : Above the village there is a Municipality level govt called Marez ( approx. 35 villages in each Marez ). In 2003 , 5 caracoles, something like a district govt was formed consisting of approx. 5 Marez . What is amazing is that Govt officials are selected by villagers .There is no exam or voting or campaigning. Second amazing thing is that at a time they serve for approx 15 days and then after some gap again for 15 days , to maximum of three years. The third amazing thing is that they get no salary ; the village takes care of their family’s needs !!! The most amazing govt in the world
7. **Education:** Imagine school for everyone , not just children. Teacher is an indigenous person using their own language as medium, and then Spanish also. Imagine teaching one’s Own History. And Politics. And everything needed for Life and Livelihoods. Which means oftentimes learning is happening in fields and clinics and cooperative ventures. And imagine the Teacher *not getting any “salary”* , but materially supported by the community !! Vow Vow Vow –Gandhi and Tagore would have been bowled over.
8. **Health** : Each village has Village Health Promoter whose skills are continuously being upgraded. Each Marez has a clinic . There are a few big hospitals with ambulance. And a special Hospital only for women. Starting with only allopathic , now herbs and traditional practices also included.
9. **Economy** : Stress on Cooperatives rather than individual enterprise. For farming, animal husbandry, food processing, weaving, appropriate technologies, commercial marketing of coffee etc.
10. **Philosophy , Principles , Strategies through Slogans and Images** : All such movements always try to do this with a few lovely slogans and images. But the Zapatistas have really excelled. Some of their slogans are now being used worldwide. Ya Basta , A World Where Many Worlds Fit, Asking We Walk etc
11. **Beyond Chiapas and Mexico** : In last 8 years several international workshops , conferences on various themes ,and two only for women organized by Zapatistas . Because of huge visitor load to this Living Utopia , nowadays one has to ask for written permission to visit and spend time with them.