

ETHNIC DEMANDS AND THE JHARKHAND MOVEMENT

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Abstract

Jharkhand has been a movement much talked about in the media and academic circles. The movement began as protest against the outsiders' intrusion in the tribal area and the exploitation meted out to the tribal people largely by British colonialism. The local tribal population revolted against this system, which in course of time took the shape of the movement for a separate state. The movement began with the formation of the Chotanagpur Umati Samaj, and the demand for a separate state got crystallised with the formation of the Adivasi Mahasabha in 1938 under the leadership of Jaipal Singh Munda. In due course of time the Adivasi Mahasabha transformed itself into a party called the Jharkhand Party, which sought to enlist the support of the non-tribals in the region. The Jharkhand Party made an appeal to carve out a separate state before the State Reorganisation Commission. However, it was rejected. Later on the movement got a fillip when ethnic arguments were underplayed and emphasis was laid on regional development. The movement got enormous support from the people and finally gave way to the birth of the 28th state in the Indian Union, called Jharkhand.

The Jharkhand region, due to its dense forests, inaccessible terrain and wild animals, appeared never to have been completely subdued until the colonial period (Government of Bihar 1970: 42). Various adivasi or tribal communities of the region lived in villages peacefully in relative isolation

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until the 16th century. They had a simple life and pattern of economic activities. They heavily depended on land and forest over which they had the traditional rights, called *Khunkatti* or *Bhunihari* (Rekhi 1988: 59). Individuals with these rights were known as *khunkattidars* or *bhunihars*. Under the system each tribal *khunkattidar* paid some amount of land produce to the respective tribal chief for his maintenance, which was not a legal, but moral requirement. In the middle of the 18th century the communitarian tribal system was thrown open to outside influences thereby ending the isolation (Dhan cied in Rekhi 1988: 60). Things began to change after Munda and Oraon tribal communities jointly selected a common leader or 'Raja'. He was given voluntary contribution in kind and a few days of labour every year by the people (Ekkal 1972: 425). People from outside the region were brought into the area by the raja for military and religious purposes. The raja made land grants to the Brahmins who played a major role in legitimising his role (Sengupta 1982: 244). Outsiders' influence contributed to the disintegration of tribal communities by incorporating them in the social division of labour represented by the caste system. The raja later on granted them his customary rights in land (Sengupta 1982: 244). In course of time these people became landlords or zamindars. Things got complicated later on with the coming of the British. Against this backdrop of the external intervention in tribal area of Chotanagpur this paper discusses the course of the tribal movement for Jharkhand up to the independence period in India.

BRITISH INTERVENTION

The Chotanagpur region came under the British rule in 1765 as a part of the grant of *divani* rights over Bihar, Bengal and Orissa after the Battle of Buxar in 1764. However, the first real entry of the British into this region took place in 1772 when the *mahraraja* (the then princely ruler of the region) called them for help in a revenue matter. In 1780 the British established what was called the 'Ramgarh Hill Tract' and a British officer was placed in charge of the whole area. He combined in himself the offices of a judge, magistrate and collector of revenue over an area of more than 16,000 square km. (Hoffman 2005: 18). The headquarters were alternatively at Shergati and Chatra, both more than 160 km. from the capital of Chotanagpur covering its whole plateau region.

In 1793 the 'Permanent Settlement of Cornwallis' was introduced in Bengal in order to stabilise revenue recovery. Under the settlement the zamindars and the revenue collectors were converted into owners of land. This ownership right was made hereditary and transferable. The cultivators were reduced to the low status of mere tenants at the mercy of local revenue collectors appointed by the British Company. This arrangement, later on, was extended to Chotanagpur. Thus, the area was brought under the colonial economy. After their surrender, the tribal chiefs became agents of the British for revenue collection. Against the payment of a fixed sum, it gave them authority to collect revenue from the peasants. Thus the new settlement was responsible for introducing landlordism in Chotanagpur akin to the British system of feudal landlords (DeSa 1975: 45). As a result there was an increase in indebtedness and usury. Tribals (peasants) then had to either sell/auction their land or borrow money to fulfil the revenue demand. The indebtedness of the tribal landowners worsened as their land was auctioned off to recover revenue arrears or outstanding debts. The Permanent Settlement "tried to suddenly substitute contract for custom" (Jha 1971: 72). The result of this policy was that indebtedness and the operation of usurious capital became the pivot around which the land market revolved. This resulted in tribal land getting into the hands of money lenders. With regard to the tribal peasantry, there was no room in the new provisions for the customary land rights of the original settlers and the village office holders. These omissions in the new system gave the zamindars increased power to evict peasants from their land. Customary law was abruptly replaced by contract law (Devalle 1992: 66-67).

The revenue demands necessitated a strong apparatus to maintain law and order and, therefore, gradually the British East India Company took over direct administration of the region. A system of civil justice was introduced. Police stations were established and maintained at government expense. The maharaja and zamindars too were encouraged to set up police stations and appoint police officers. Thus, the year 1806 saw the establishment of the zamindari police system. The involvement of zamindars in the new administrative system led to unfair treatment towards the tribals. In contrast, the newly established civil court of justice and police system proved beneficial for the revenue collectors. The system of the police and court of law became an arena in which the outsiders soon became the

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masters. The police were chiefly men of Bihar, the same province from where the zamindars had originally come (Hoffman 2005: 21).

The new system demanded proofs for land ownership, but the tribals had no title deeds to their land and so could not prove their ownership in the British court. The court language was Hindi which the tribals did not speak. The court officials did not know the languages of the tribals. The latter had no word for such a term as *rent* in their languages. Hence, when rent suits were brought against them, the court officials had to take the help of interpreters who tried to translate the ideas of the tribals into Hindi. The preconceived notions and prejudices of the interpreters against the tribals made it very complicated for the tribals to get justice in the cases presented before the courts. The cases of the tribals were miss-stated before the British officers and the latter found it impossible to recognise the merits of cases due to misconception and misunderstanding. Sir William Hunter aptly made the following observation about the situation. "In the void left by ignorance, prejudice has taken up its seat and the calamity of the non-Aryan races is not merely that they are not understood, but that they are misrepresented. We have gathered our notions we wish to submit concerning them from their immemorial enemies. In this way, extravagant calumnies attained the dignity of state papers, and are copied from one report into another. Thus ignorance begets misrepresentation, and misrepresentation brings forth bitter political fruit" (Hunter 1886: 24). The idea of external control of the tribal life began to take shape in a systematic manner as the British administration deeply entrenched itself in the region. The pauperisation of the tribal peasants led to tribal discontentment accompanied by loss of freedom.

Tribal Discontent

The situation described above made the tribals restless. Periodic uprisings against the exploiters marked the history of the region throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. It is in this regard that Christoph Von Furer Haemendorf, an anthropologist specialising on Indian tribes, observed that "anyone with firsthand experience of conditions in areas where aboriginals are subject to exploitation by more advanced populations must be surprised not by the occurrence of uprisings, but by the infrequency of violent action

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on the part of aboriginals deprived of the ancestral lands and the freedom they enjoyed before their contact with populations superior in economic and political power” (cited in Weiner 1987: 158). These uprisings often began with attacks on government officers, but the money lenders and landlords had to face the brunt as they were the local representatives of the colonial system which was so exploitative. Ranjit Guha observes: “No matter which one of the three main oppressors – sarkar, sahukar or zamindar (government, money-lender or landlord) – was the first to bear the initial brunt of a jacquerie in any particular instance, the peasants often showed a remarkable propensity to extend their operations widely enough to include in their targets the local representatives of one or both of the other groups too” (Guha 1983: 26). The exploiters were invariably outsiders and, therefore, the correspondence was so vivid that the tribal word *diku* came to mean both outsider and exploiter (Sengupta 1982: 3).

The great Kol Insurrection (1831-1832), the Santhal Rebellion (1855), the Birsa Munda Revolt (1895-1900) and Tana Bhagat Movement (1914-1920) are some of the most important tribal revolts. These revolts, based on agrarian grievances, often acquired social and religious overtones. A close examination of the Birsa and Tana Bhagat movements makes it evident that the tribal and the *diku* identities were sharply divided and opposed to each other, and both the movements had an identical aspiration of establishing tribal homelands. Tribal consciousness was quite strong among the Mundas and the Oraons. However, it would be worth knowing the other factors which led to tribal identity formation in the area.

TRIBAL IDENTITY FORMATION

Basically four factors contributed to tribal identity formation in this region. The region is inhabited by different tribal sub-groups among which the Santhals, the Mundas and the Hos are the dominant groups. Although there were several differences with respect to demography, dialect and occupation among them, the cultural and ethnic sentiments united them. Moreover, the major tribes were located in their own geographically distinct regions, and were not dispersed like the Bhils and the Gonds in other regions of India (Singh 1983: 1). Second, the sense of being *adivasis* or the original

settlers of the Jharkhand region also generated a sense of being part of a confederation rather than of an individual tribal group (Louis 2000: 4088). Third, Christianity in a latent way contributed to tribal identity formation by providing education. It also gave them a history, a myth about their ‘golden age’; it accentuated the notion of private rights in land; and also emphasised the sense of separateness from the rest (Singh 1983:2). Finally, the ethnic sense of ‘we’ tribals and ‘they’ dikus united them. The progressive British policy towards the tribals led to the increasing isolation of the tribals from the mainstream society.

The Concept of Tribe

For a layman the word ‘tribe’ is invariably synonymous with primitiveness, savagery and wilderness. The origin of the concept can be considered modern as with the rise of colonialism it has been used politically. In modern India the term came in vogue first when the British penetrated the interior areas at the beginning of their rule. The concept of tribe was an artificial category, through which Europeans constructed a fact of the Indian reality (Devalle 1992: 73), the outcome of a conscious project of the colonial empire. The notion got formalised by the state as part of its legitimising ideology and it operated as a device to catalogue conquered populations, formulate imperial policies and to facilitate the incorporation of these populations into the imperial system. However, it would be biased if we say that the category of tribe was the product of the British mind entirely. To be linked to the wilderness or the jungle had been considered as pejorative since ancient times up to the 18th century (Damodaran 2006a: 46). The colonial discourse on tribe had been largely informed by such concepts prevailing among the dominant caste groups, and the colonial state appropriated such representation as part of its categorisation. In this sense, the construction of the concept of ‘tribe’ may be considered to be more of a Brahmanical construct than that of the colonial state (Dasgupta 2006: 76-77). Therefore, they were considered as backward Indians, the lowest people. Locally they were the natural antithesis of the Brahmins and emerging globally as the conceptual opposite of the white men in the West (Bates 1996: 234).

The British rule appropriated and restructured certain pre-existing social norms and thereby, introduced new attributes, meanings and applications in the communities they identified as tribes (Dasgupta 2006: 77). The 1931 Census was a defining moment for these people. The official designation of “tribe” identified certain populations. Such cataloguing allowed the colonial administration to define and preserve tribal identity (Babiracki 2000-01: 35). Yet, there was no fixed colonial tribal policy. Nor was there a single colonial discourse on tribe. Rather, several, often contradictory, policies towards the so-called “tribals” emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries (Dasgupta 2006: 78).

To summarise, we can say that there were two broad approaches in the colonial period towards the tribals. The first conceptual framework was developed by the British administrator-ethnographer-anthropologist. This model treated tribal communities as “isolates, tribals as Noble Savages, and their primitive conditions were described as a state of arcadian simplicity. These scholars overlooked the operation of the historical processes that led to the formation of the state, the emergence of a complex regional system in the wake of the migration of non-tribal communities and functional castes and the penetration of cultural influences... This led to the build-up of a myth that has bedevilled all historical writings... and inspired all tribal movement” (Singh 1985: 1). Thus, a tribal was viewed as an innocent person who was unaware of the socio-historical dynamics and, therefore, open to be easily fooled by non-tribals. The second approach saw tribes as backward Hindus who were going to be absorbed in the Hindu society. These approaches viewed tribal communities as waiting to be absorbed into the mainstream political and economic system – through either the market economy or the Hindu caste system (Ghurye 1963).

Apart from the official version, the ethnic group under study used *adivasi* instead of ‘aboriginal’ or ‘tribe’, which was invented and used by the members themselves for their self identity. The proponents of Jharkhand projected a single tribal identity which included all the tribal sub-groups under adivasi and found full expression by Jaipal Singh Munda in the debates of the Constituent Assembly (Provisional Parliament) and later in the Parliament. Jaipal Singh Munda (1903–1970), an Oxford educated tribal, was India’s first hockey captain in the Olympics. He led the team that won the hockey

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gold medal in the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics. Jaipal Singh Munda had a lengthy political career after his playing days were over.

Construction of Indigenous Identity

The notion of tribal identity with distinctive culture and way of life did not find favour with many members of the Constituent Assembly when it was first debated in the 1940s, because it reminded them all too forcibly, and with good reason, of colonial policies and protectionism (Ghurye 1963). This attitude with an emphasis on the civilising mission on the one hand, and assimilation of tribals into the national mainstream on the other, was contested by Jaipal Singh Munda. He used *adivasi* to denote tribal people. The term *adivasi* is a Hindi word that comes from Sanskrit language. It is a combination of two words, *adi* (which means first or early) and *vasi* (meaning dwellers or settlers or inhabitants). Together it means the first settlers or early inhabitants or early dwellers. This term is commonly used for groups otherwise categorised as “scheduled tribes” in the Constitution of India. However, the Hindi term is *Anusuchit Jana-Jati*. *Anusuchit* meaning scheduled, *Jana* means people and *Jati*, race or races, initially termed as *Van Jati*, meaning forest races. Interestingly both of these terms used in either English or Hindi earlier and later as well do not have the same meaning as *adivasi*. Tribal people of Jharkhand prefer to be called *adivasi* instead of scheduled tribe.

When the debate on the bill for affirmative action plan was first debated Jaipal Singh Munda said: “For the first time in the history of India I find the *adivasis* are now aboriginal and ‘hill’ tribes. I would urge the Honourable Minister not to indulge in such disruptive language. Is a man tribal or not? Has he to be up in the hills before he can be a tribal? What is the new language he is trying to introduce in Republican India” (Munda 1950: 1601)? In the past, dependence of the hill people on the forest might have earned the *adivasi* the contemptuous appellation forest dweller. But according to Jaipal Singh Munda he was proud of that association and hated the monotonous existence faced in the lower plains. It is in this regard that in his first speech he provided a good summation of the *adivasi* case in the following words: “As a jungle, as an *adivasi* ... I am not expected to understand the legal intricacies of the resolution. ... It is the new comers who have driven

away my people. ... I take you all at your words that now we are going to ... where no one would be neglected" (GOI 2003, Vol.1: 143-44). The above statement made by Jaipal Singh Munda speaks a lot. By claiming indigenity he criticised the non-adviasis groups due to whom they have been facing problems of non-inclusion in the mainstream development pattern. Similarly, when asked to speak on the national flag, he said that he had great pleasure in acknowledging this flag as the flag of our country in future. He explained that adviasis were the first to hoist the national flag and defend it. "The flag will give a new message to the adviasis of India that their struggle for freedom for the last 6000 years is at least over, that they will now be as free as any other country" (GOI 2003, Vol.4: 751).

On 24 August 1949 Jaipal Singh Munda delivered a lengthy political speech in the Constituent Assembly. He pointed out that it did not befit the rest of India to tell the tribals what democracy was all about because: "Adviasis society is the most democratic element in this country. Can the rest of India say the same thing? In Adviasis society all are equal, rich or poor. Everyone has equal opportunity and I do not wish that people should get away with the idea that by writing this constitution and operating it we are trying to put a new idea into the Adviasis society. What we are actually doing is you are learning and taking something ... Non-adviasis society has learnt much and has still to learn a good deal. Adviasis are the most democratic people and they will not let India get smaller or weaker.... I would like the members (to) not be so condescending" (GOI 2003, Vol.9: 651).

The above statement points out that adviasis society thought that it was in no way inferior to non-adviasis society in upholding a democratic and egalitarian socio-political structure. The argument charged the mainstream Hindu society of having inflicted the practice of caste based notion of purity and pollution on adviasis. Jaipal Singh Munda also accepted the adviasis case as different from that of the scheduled castes, as his emphasis was on culture and focus on land as the characteristics of the former. During the debates he also emphasised the linguistic aspect of tribal identity. He pointed out that the outsiders were treated suspiciously by tribals because of their ignorance of tribal languages and proclaimed that they would be "treated with less of suspicion than they are now" if they knew the tribal language (GOI 2003,

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Vol.9: 651). At the same time he argued that adviasis were backward who needed support from the rest of the population. He further stated: "What is necessary is that the backward groups in our country should be enabled to stand on their own legs so that they can assert themselves. It is not the intention of this constitution, nor do I desire it, that the advanced community should be carrying my people in their arms for the rest of eternity. All that we plead is that the wherewithal should be provided so that we will be able to stand on our own legs and regain the lost nerves and be useful citizens of India.... I may assure non-adviasis that adviasis will play a much bigger part than you imagine, if only you will be honest about your intentions and let them play a part they have a right to play" (GOI 2003, Vol.9: 651).

The above statements sought fair treatment to adviasis in the new constitutional set up. Instead of feeling pity for the adviasis it was time to give them their due which implied protection in the form of certain reservations in jobs. In this context Jaipal Singh Munda was asked to withdraw the claim for reservation as Muslims and Christians had done so. He strongly opposed it stating: "Adviasis are not giving up anything because they never had anything" (GOI 2003, Vol.9: 651). He asked for concessions for the tribals, as he believed that it would take time for the adviasis to come to the level of the rest of the population. The point to be noted is that Jaipal Singh Munda was emphatic that the tribals were not in any way – politically, culturally or socially – inferior to the rest but only different in terms of values, beliefs and practices. At the same time he sought special considerations towards them. This twofold characterisation of tribal identity was carried on throughout the movement and still survives today.

In sum, the term adviasis reflects the authentic expression of the tribal identity. By making several interventions in official and non-official circles Jaipal Singh Munda tried to infuse a sense of pride among tribals as against the lowly image expressed in terms such as forest tribe, forest and hill tribe, forest and gipsy tribe, backward tribe, forest and primitive tribe, Hindu primitive tribe, etc. Thus, he contested the officially sponsored image and instilled a sense of pride in the adviasis markedly different from the caste-ridden society. For Jaipal Singh Munda the issue of contention was not competence but beliefs, values and practices. Several of his interventions

in the Constituent Assembly brought to the fore that the tribals are the groups which need protection in order to compete as well as maintain their group identity. The same consciousness found its expression in various socio-political organisations later and culminated in the genesis of the Jharkhand Movement.

FORMATION OF SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

Jharkhand region was never an integral part of Bihar. Up to 1905 Bihar, Orissa and Chotanagpur were part of Bengal. In December 1911 the British government declared that the administrative units comprising Bihar, Orissa and Chotanagpur would constitute a separate unit called Bihar (Sharma 1976: 37-41). By this time Christian missions had some socio-economic and religious impact on the tribal population of Chotanagpur. A section of the major groups of the region had embraced Christianity and was being given education. The young educated tribals were moved by the pathetic state of their brethren and felt a strong urge to work for their uplift. This feeling led to the formation of organisations among the tribal communities.

The first effort at formation of organisation led to the founding of the *Dacca Student's Union* by J. Bartholmen and some Anglican missionaries to deal with the problems faced by poor tribal students. The *Munda Oraon Education Conference* (Siksha Sabha), founded by a non-Christian leader, and the *Ranchi Union* also worked towards promoting education, but chiefly among urban tribals. Inter-denominational and, occasionally, pan-tribal solidarity for the socio-economic uplift of the region as a whole found expression in the formation of some societies. In 1912, *Chotanagpur Charitable Association* was founded by all aboriginals, Christians and non-Christians, to raise funds for students.

Chotanagpur Ummati Samaj

Gradually voices were raised for forging unity among the people of Chotanagpur - among Mundas, Oraons, Tamarias, Mahalis, Lohars and Panres. A new sentiment was in the air: "All adivasis are one," "Adivasis of lower category such as Lohar, Panre, Bhuniya and Tamaria should not be looked down upon," etc. This pan-tribal sentiment was, however, weak (Singh

1983: 3). It was not until 1915 that a formal organisation, i.e. the *Chotanagpur Improvement Society* was established with the support of all the major tribal groups. This new organisation was founded by Joel Lakra with the active support of Theble Oraon, BandiRam Oraon and Paul Dayal. It voiced its concern in 1916 over the absence of security for the tribals and stressed the need for the preservation of *tribal identity* in the changing political context. It also offered various suggestions for the economic advancement of the tribal community (Rekhi 1988: 148). In 1928, this society was renamed Chotanagpur Ummati Samaj (CNUS). The CNUS had two objectives: (a) to uplift Chotanagpur from its backward situation and (b) to improve the social, political and economic conditions of the tribals.

The main slogan of the CNUS was, "If we want to hold our own in India, we must hang together or else we shall be hanged separately (Turkey 2002: 15). It meant that if the adivasis were well united among themselves they would be able to ensure their identity. Failing this, they would be socio-culturally fragmented and their identity would be lost. By extending membership and participation to the Christians of all denominations as well as to the non-Christians belonging to different tribal groups in Chotanagpur, the CNUS contributed towards inter-tribal unity in the region. This search for ever broader tribal unity became an important norm in Jharkhand movement subsequently.

When the constitutional reforms in the national movement gave a spur to the pan-tribal sentiment, the CNUS raised the demand for reservation in services and legislative bodies, and gave a call for Chotanagpur autonomy detached from Bihar. A deputation of this organisation met the Simon Commission and put forward what was, perhaps, the first demand for the creation of a separate province in the Jharkhand area. With the introduction of provincial autonomy by the Government of India Act, 1935, Chotanagpur was declared a partially excluded area. It was put under the special responsibility of the Governor under section 92 of the act.

The leadership in the CNUS was provided by the teachers and Christian catechists, most of whom were Oraons, keeping the Mundas away from the organisation. The effort of the CNUS to foster unity among different

tribal groups was also short lived as the Samaj virtually split into three different factions: Umati Samaj, Kisan Sabha and Catholic Sabha.

Kisan Sabha

Some of the leaders of the CNUUS were dissatisfied with the urban and middle class bias of their organisation and were eager to make it a broad based and unified platform for the uplift and advance of the tribal society (Rekhi 1988: 135). They realised that unless the agrarian problem was made a central plank of their activities, the peasantry could not be mobilised. This led leaders like Theble Oraon and his close associate Paul Dayal to form the *Kisan Sabha* (Farmers' Association) in 1931. The Kisan Sabha could not attain any significant success in improving the conditions of the exploited farmers as its priorities, suiting Gangetic Bihar, were not that effective in Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas which were regulated by special tenancy acts (Weiner 1987: 158).

The Kisan Sabha and the CNUUS differed on the means to be adopted for solving the problems faced by the tribal population. Kishan Sabha believed in radical mobilisation of the peasantry to force the government to act whereas the CNUUS sought delivery through petitions and memoranda. This was the major difference between the two organisations. The leadership of the two organisations were similar. Most of the leaders were well educated, middle class people who were acquainted with the areas outside the tribal belt and were of a rational and secular bent of mind. They had little patience with the superstitions of the tribal population and regarded them as signs of backwardness (Jha 1972: 108-09).

Catholic Sabha

Limited effectiveness of the above two organisations - CNUUS and Kisan Sabha - were due to two important factors. First, it was restricted to the Lutheran and Anglican Missionaries. Second, the non-Christian tribals were not involved in their activities. In addition to these organisations, Boniface Lakra and Ignese Beck created the *Chotanagpur Catholic Sabha* in 1936 with the encouragement and support of the archbishop of

Chotanagpur. It aimed at promoting socio-religious and economic advance of the tribals. It also took an active interest in the politics of the area. Ignese Beck and Boniface Lakra both successfully contested the 1937 elections. The CNUUS and the Kishan Sabha had also participated in the elections but lost to the Catholic candidates due to the better organisation and popularity of the Catholic mission. Thus, the influence of the Christian missionaries in the initial stages of the movement was sizeable (Jha 1972: 108-09).

After winning the seat in the legislative assembly Ignese Beck acquired a lot of experience and skills. He got convinced that pan-India parties like the Indian National Congress (INC) would not be able to serve the interests of the tribal people (Rekhi 1988: 138-39). It was up to the tribals themselves to look after their own interests. He also realised that organisations with a limited support base like the CNUUS and the Catholic Sabha would not be able to fight for securing their interests. The need was to weed out denominational differences amongst tribals. He, therefore, thought of forming a pan-denominational and pan-tribal organisation in the Jharkhand region to effectively promote and protect the interests of the tribes and bring about social, economic and political advancement (Vidyarthi and Sahay 1978: 157). Apart from the above factors, the landslide victory of the Congress party in the 1937 elections and creation of a new province of Orissa convinced the tribal leaders of the need for denominational unity and strengthened their resolve to struggle for a separate state. Hence, they decided to form a joint body to ensure it.

Adivasi Mahasabha: Beginning of the Jharkhand Movement

On the initiative of Ignese Beck, the CNUUS, the Kisan Sabha, the Catholic Sabha and the *Hor-Malho Marang Sabha* (Santal-Malho General Conference) of Santal Pragas came together and formed themselves into a single organisation called the Chotanagpur-Santal Pargana Adivasi Sabha (Panchbhai 1982: 34). We see here for the first time the usage of the term 'adivasi' in a political context (Damodaran 2006b: 184). In 1938 the same organisation was named *Adivasi Mahasabha* after Jaipal Singh Munda's insistence on it. Rai Saheb Bandirram Oraon was instrumental in the formation of the Adivasi Mahasabha to a great extent. In the course of its formation,

he went about conducting meetings in Santhal Parganas and toured Singhbhum extensively. As a result, the Santals and the Hos also joined the Uraons, Mundas and Kharias in forming the Adivasi Mahasabha.

Joining of the Catholic tribals of Chotanagpur gave a great boost to the organisation. Government of India Act of 1919 enacted by the British Parliament introduced elections in India. Subsequently, elections proved to be important for the country as a whole and tribals in particular. In the municipal elections of February 1938, both the districts of Ranchi and Singhbhum were captured by adivasi nominees securing majority in the area. Municipal election results encouraged adivasi leaders, and simultaneously the general conference of the Adivasi Mahasabha in May 1938 declared that it would serve as the only body to represent the interests of both the Christian and the non-Christian tribals of the region (Tirkey 2002: 63).

With the outbreak of World War II in 1939 the INC decided to boycott the war efforts. The Congress members, therefore, resigned from all executive posts from the legislatures down to the local self-governments. It was in this context that the adivasi commissioners took charge of the administration of the Ranchi municipality under the leaders - Jilophil Tiggia as president, Paul Dayal as chairman and Ignace Beck as vice-chairman. They functioned from 1939 to 1943 very efficiently. The most remarkable fact in this connection was that the administration by the tribal commissioners in the Ranchi municipality was considered successful and extraordinary. The municipality was in debt of about Rs. 36,000 when the Congress left the charge. The adivasi commissioners earned Rs. 76,000 for the municipality as credit balance in addition to the ordinary administrative expenses (Tirkey 2002: 63). This success was an eye opener to the adivasi leaders that made them realise that they had the required capability to run the administration of even the Jharkhand state if it was granted to them.

At this time, Jaipal Singh Munda entered the arena of tribal politics. He was invited to chair the meeting of the Adivasi Mahasabha in March-April 1939. Later he joined the Adivasi Mahasabha and became its president. In his address on 20 January 1939 he stressed freedom from exploitation and demanded that Chotanagpur and Santal Parganas should become a state

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within India (Tirkey 2002: 63). For him it was a step towards self reliance: “We have trusted others in vain to help us march forward along the path of progress and improvement. Thank God, we have learnt our lesson in time. We must help ourselves. Our great future is in our hands” (Munda 1939). However, by separation he did not mean that Chotanagpur and Santal Parganas would be only for the tribals and that the non-tribals living in this region would be excluded. This is clear from his statement: “We invite everyone living among us, Hindus, Muslims, Anglo-Indians, Europeans, Uraons, Santals, Kharias, Hos and Mundas to unite with us in the province of Chotanagpur league so that our goal may be achieved more quickly” (Munda 1939). This makes it clear that Jaipal Singh Munda was advocating inter-tribal and tribal-non tribal unity in the region. It was clearly an effort of establishing a trans-ethnic unity. However, Adivasi Mahasabha remained essentially an organisation of the tribals.

The Adivasi Mahasabha enjoyed the support of the Forward Bloc and the Congress Socialist Party (Vidyardhi and Sahay 1978: 157). In the INC dominated polity of the late 1940s, the Adivasi Mahasabha was more eager to acquire the support of the INC as it was all powerful. It demanded representation in the Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee and the Congress Working Committee (Rekhi 1988: 143) as adivasi leaders believed that adivasi interests could be best served by the adivasis themselves. This demand did not find favour within the Congress. The claims of Chotanagpur region for representation on the Cabinet was recognised as early as in 1937, but the persons included in the Cabinet were not tribals (Sinhal 1991: 156). Further, Adivasi Mahasabha demanded reservation of seats for adivasis in educational institutions and employment. This demand was extended to limit all jobs in the industrial enterprises in the Jharkhand region exclusively for Chotanagpuris (Sharma 1976: 41-42). The grievance that dikus were cornering all the plush jobs had by then become a political issue.

Adivasi Mahasabha under Jaipal Singh Munda continued to forge a pan-tribal identity and also emphasised unity among the different tribal groups. It achieved substantial advance in the tribal politics of the Jharkhand region. It was able to command a wider support base and claimed to represent pan-tribal interests. The organisation was also supported by the Muslim League

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which in the 1940s was hoping to secure a corridor to connect, what turned out to be the East and West Pakistan after the independence, via the tribal areas of south Bihar. Jaipal Singh Munda and the Adivasi Mahasabha, however, did not become part of the ongoing nationalist movement against the British rule. At this time Jaipal Singh Munda supported the British in World War II, and contributed to the recruitment of soldiers from the tribal areas. This was largely due to the hope in the minds of the tribal leaders that the British would be induced to look at their demands with sympathy (Rekhi 1988: 143).

Highly educated and articulate political workers formed the cadre base of the Adivasi Mahasabha. Their devotion and work made the Adivasi Mahasabha a pan-Chotanagpur movement holding sway in both rural and urban areas. It now demanded a complete separation from Bihar and the creation of a separate state. At times, it also became militant in pursuing its goal but lost popular appeal. It was defeated in the elections in 1946 in which the INC performed well. The defeat was largely because of the emergence of Adinijati Seva Mandal - a voluntary organisation founded by Rajendra Prasad and financed by the government with the objective of weakening the movement led by the Christian tribals for separate Jharkhand state. It provided free education and medical aid to the tribals, to bring them out of the missionary influence. Gradually, the Seva Mandal came to be identified with the Hindus.

Adivasi Mahasabha also lost the support of the Muslim League as the future political arrangements for India had been decided and the Muslim League's demand for a corridor to connect the future East and West Pakistan passing through the tribal areas of Bihar had not been accepted (Prakash 2001: 128). In 1946 when the Congress Ministry was formed in Bihar many insisted that a genuine inhabitant of Chotanagpur be included in it as a minister. But it did not happen. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad and Rajendra Prasad realised the gravity of the situation. Rajendra Prasad tried to assuage the adivasis (Sinha 1991: 156).

Several clashes took place between the Congress workers and members of the Adivasi Mahasabha on the eve of independence. After the

defeat in the elections Jaipal Singh Munda launched a major tirade against the non-advasis. His defeat and antipathy found expression in the slogan "We shall take Jharkhand, Jharkhand is the land of adivasis and non-advasi exploiters will be turned out of the region even by violence" (Rekhi 1988: 144). This estranged the Adivasi Mahasabha further from the INC. Jaipal Singh Munda even demanded an enquiry into the malpractices of the Congress ministry in Bihar (Sharma 1988: 62). Moreover, adivasi leadership in this period saw the Congress as a party of the dikus which had little respect for tribal traditions and culture (Damodaran 2006b: 185).

The Adivasi Mahasabha continued its efforts to unite all the tribals of the area. But, it also changed its policy of antipathy towards the non-tribals and tried to gather their support by opening its membership to the non-tribals. But the participation of non-advasis was very low. Moreover, it was found that the Census of 1941 had given an exaggerated figure of the tribal population and the 1951 Census made it clear that the tribals were never in majority in the area (Singh 1983: 5). Accommodating the non-tribals was not an easy task. It was in this context that Justin Richard, a tribal leader, stepped in and organised the United Jharkhand Party in 1948 keeping it open to the tribals and non-tribals (Singh 1983: 5). Jaipal Singh Munda in the beginning hesitated but later on accepted the offer of forming the new party. Hence, at the Jamshepur session of the Adivasi Mahasabha in 1949-50, it was renamed as "Jharkhand Party." Jaipal Singh Munda became its president and Ignace Beck its secretary. It inaugurated a new phase of a regional movement. The Jharkhand Party held sway over the whole area.

However, the distinction between tribals and non-tribals remained. In the effort to establish tribal solidarity the leaders often resorted to sectarian behaviour against non-tribal autochthones (Sengupta 1982: 29). It must be mentioned that although non-tribals' participation was sought, ethnic arguments did not lose their force as time and again demands were made for tribals. The movement under the Jharkhand Party aspired for a larger area consisting of eighteen districts in south Bihar, three in West Bengal, four in Orissa and two in Madhya Pradesh. This vision of the Jharkhand has come to be known as *Greater Jharkhand*.

REGION AND ETHNIC DEMANDS

The ultimate aim of the Jharkhand movement was the creation of a separate state in order to protect the interests of the tribals and preserve the socio-cultural aspects of tribal heritage where ethnicity became the language of political protest against the rest (Devalle 1992)). A close perusal of the nature and growth of the Jharkhand movement brings into light the following demands in the form of protecting certain group rights which were being eroded by the entry of the outsiders in the area.

Land Rights

One of the great sufferings endured by the tribals in the region has been the alienation of their ancestral land of which they were masters from time immemorial. Land to them has been a part of their socio-cultural heritage. The emotional ties with land resulted from their belief that it contained the burial grounds of their ancestors, with whom they would be united after their death, and the sacrificial grove where they propitiated their spirits (Singh 1966: 190). Apart from providing economic security to tribals, land served as a powerful link with their ancestors. Naturally, loss of land was not merely a matter of economic deprivation to them. It amounted to an affront to their dignity, their 'izzat', a theme recurrent in subaltern perception (Dasgupta 1985: 117).

The Permanent Settlement of 1793 introduced private proprietorship in land with no provision for any special right for the original owners to reclaim land. The zamindars' obligation to revenue payment provided no restriction on their power of extorting rent from the actual cultivators of land. The tribals suddenly found themselves relegated to the status of sharecroppers or agricultural labourers as they lost their land either in mortgage or in outright sale through dubious means. The non-tribals were quick to grab this opportunity and produced valid documents to prove their ownership over most of the arable land in the region.

Tenancy acts like the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (CNT) 1908 and the Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act 1949 (extension of CNT Act) banned

illegal transfer of tribal land and made the prior sanction of the Deputy Commissioner compulsory for transferring land 'from an aboriginal to a non-aboriginal'. But the provisions of the act were discriminatory. While the tribals faced problems in getting permission to purchase land from another tribal under section 46 of the CNT, for a non-tribal it was relatively easy to get possession of the land under section 49 of the said act (Ghosh 1998: 99). The landlord-money lender nexus led to the usurpation of land from tribals by acquiring a compromise decree from court in order to circumvent the provisions of the CNT (Ghosh 1998: 100).

The government-led development activities also initiated ruthless alienation of tribal land. This was possible because of the nexus between powerful rural elites, bureaucracy and the police force (Iyer 2006: 332). With the opening up of the area to mining and industry, in the early years of the 20th century tribals were further uprooted from their ancestral land. Many of them became landless *coolies* (or labourers) working in, what had been, their own land on poor wages. Many industries were set up in this region one after the other, resulting in large scale displacement of the people.

Along with the big industries, ancillary industries were also developed, taking away more and more cultivable land from tribals. The need for power for these industrial units necessitated the construction of several irrigation and power projects which engulfed thousands of acres of land without providing adequate compensation to the owners or making alternate arrangements for their proper rehabilitation. It resulted in mass emigration of tribal people into the tea gardens of Assam and Bengal.

This feeling of loss of land was acute among tribals as is clear from the words of Jaipal Singh Munda when he said that "...land is the bulwark of aboriginal life.... Whenever we have been (in tribal areas) it has been urged upon us that for several years to come, the aboriginal land must be inalienable..... We have been talking about equality. Equality stands well; but I do demand discrimination when it comes to the holding of aboriginal land" (GOI 2003, Vol.3: 462-63). He further argued that if the new Constitution protected the improvident aboriginal from losing his land, the greatest thing would have been achieved (Munda 1948).

Forest Rights

Closely related to land was forest which was under the threat from external incursions. Like land, forest is also intimately connected with tribal life and culture. Forest is a supernatural entity for them. It is the abode of spirits, the place of worship and the seat of life-cycle ceremonies including burial (Singh 1983: ii-iv). Besides, forests occupied the central position in tribal economy as most of the people drew their sustenance from forests.

The tribals of Jharkhand had a symbiotic relationship with the forest (human-tree and human-animal) they lived in. Tribals used dry twigs or branches for their normal fuel needs. They had a long cultural tradition of living in harmony with the forest environment and they alone guarded or safeguarded the dense forests. Each tribal community had woven its myth about the interrelationship of forest and people, which we can term as human-tree and human-animal relationship. The invocation of tradition was instrumental in regulating the use of timber. The entire cultural traditions were geared up to the prevention of abuse of forest's opulence (Das 1991: 176). For generations, forests had grown in the loving care of tribals. The commercial logic of the British imperialism and the burgeoning restrictions on the rights of tribals by the government alienated the forest dwellers from their own milieu. The Indian Forest Act of 1878 was applied to the area designed to maintain control over forest utilisation from the perspective of the strategic needs of the British Empire. The act also enabled the sustained working of compact blocks of forest for commercial timber production. Thus, it was "the emergence of timber as the major commodity that led to a qualitative change in the pattern of harvesting and utilisation of the forest". As a result of this policy there was precipitous fall in the population of the Birhor tribe (Guha and Gadgil 1989: 141-45).

To sum up, the government as well as its agents (outsiders) treated forests as the store house of resources for the development of other places in the country, without taking into consideration that forest is a community of living things - human beings, animals and trees. For the survival of tribals their access to forest was necessary and, therefore, they wanted protection of forest rights.

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Training and Job Reservations

Chotanagpur area has had one of the fastest population growth rates in the country. The British official policy in the area had created certain stereotypes about the tribal population which described them as 'idlers, who live emphatically for the day', 'thrifless and addicted to drink,' 'jumpy and nomadic' (Mohapatra 1985: 263). As a result, the mine owners and the government were recruiting people from different parts of the country. The industrial and mining centres of Janshedpur and Dhanbad had simply exploded with population to the extent of going out of control. Need for skilled labour brought migrants from neighbouring states. The tribals were employed as casual workers in the lowest rung of the workers, such as scavengers, miners and coolies.

The irony of the situation was that, while the external population was coming in, people from Chotanagpur were forced to leave in search of unskilled jobs in faraway places like Punjab and Assam. The Adivasi Mahasabha and its predecessors were pressing for job security for the tribals but due to lack of training and education this was not possible. So, they demanded certain job reservations. When the debates regarding reservation took place in the Constituent Assembly, Jaipal Singh Munda supported provisions for reservation in the legislature and services for 'backward' tribes. He said: "Our attitude has not been on grounds of being a numerical minority at all.... Our standpoint is that there is a tremendous disparity in our social, economic and educational standards, and it is only by some statutory compulsion that we can come up to the general population level. We want to be treated like anybody else. In the past, thanks to the major political parties, thanks to the British government and thanks to every enlightened citizen, we have been isolated and kept as it were in a zoo.... Our point is now that you have got to mix with us. We are willing to mix with you and it is for that reason, because we shall compel you to come to near us, because we must get near to you that we have insisted on a reservation of seats as far as the legislatures are concerned. We have not asked and in fact we have never had separate electorates...." (GOI 2003, Vol.5: 209). He also demanded better educational facilities for the tribal area of Jharkhand. It was in this context that Jaipal Singh Munda proclaimed: "Education is our greatest need.

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The Adivasis are the most backward people, they most need educational facilities” (Munda 1939). This demand was supplemented by the demand for opening up of educational institutions, introduction of Santhali and other aboriginal languages as the medium of instruction in schools as primary education was imparted through Hindi (Munda 1939). Hindi was an alien language as well as inconvenient to the tribals more so because it belonged to the outsiders. The tribal leaders believed that the impact of civilisation threatened the existence of some of the aboriginal languages of the region.

Cultural and Religious Rights

Chotanagpur has been the only cultural region in the entire country where the three major cultural streams - Aryan, Dravidian and Austro-Asian - have met and created a mini-India in the true sense of the term. The culture of Chotanagpur area over the years has attained distinctiveness by fostering a balance between nature and culture, egalitarianism in social structure, accommodative history, equal sharing of economy and a people-oriented art and literature (Munda 1988: 34-35). But this culture, premised in tribal heritage, was facing a crisis of identity due to external influence. The migrant population looked down upon the tribals as they considered some of the practices which were close to nature and its ethos as inferior and superstitious. For instance, liquor drinking was part of the tribal tradition, and it was within bounds. Bowing to the pressure of the Gandhians, the prohibition of alcohol was made a Directive Principle of State Policy in the Constitution of India. Adivasi leaders felt this to be an interference “with the religious rights of the most ancient people in the country.” For drink was part of their festivals, rituals, indeed daily life itself. Jaipal Singh Munda was to say: “It would be impossible for paddy to be transplanted if the Santhal does not get his rice beer.... These ill-clad men ... have to work knee deep in water throughout the day, in drenching rain and in mud. What is it in the rice beer that keeps them alive? I wish the medical authorities in this country would carry out research in their laboratories to find out what it is that the rice beer contains, of which Adivasis need so much and which keeps them against all manner of diseases” (GOI 2003, Vol. 7: 560). He further argued: “How prohibition affects aboriginal life is a question the prohibitionists have refused to examine” (Munda 1948). Similarly some of the cultural practices

like *Dhaomkharia* and *Bithala* were looked down upon by the Hindu society. Bithala was even condemned by the High Court (Munda 1948). These and related practices were a part of the tribal milieu and therefore they believed its continuation as important for tribal identity.

In fact, the adivasi, out of sheer frustration and inability to cope with the external pressures, had developed marks of a negative self-identity. He was branded as lazy, good for nothing, drunkard and criminal, thereby losing his ‘dignity’ of being a tribal (Munda 1988: 34). The tribal women were molested and no authority was listening to them. These ills had to be countered. A sense of pride and self-respect had to be infused among the tribals. Tribal leaders felt that these objectives could be acquired only through political power. For this they wanted a separate state where they could protect tribal heritage and end exploitation.

Underdevelopment

One of the major issues that remained in consideration was the balance of resource position of the Jharkhand region. The region abounds in minerals and provides a substantial portion of India’s total requirements for them. Easy availability of coal, iron and other minerals led to rapid industrialisation of the region. Though Chotanagpur and Santal Parganas comprise only 2.5 per cent of the total geographical area of India, nevertheless, they account for more than 25 per cent of the mineral wealth of the country. However, development of this region in terms of irrigation facilities, rural electrification, road construction, and level of literacy was very low. Unemployment and indebtedness of the local people were rampant due to the utter negligence of the Bihar government.

In short, the region was treated as a storehouse of resources, necessary for the development of the rest of the country and the tribals resented it. The tribal population felt deeply agitated as the resources of the area were being drained out at the cost of their well being and nothing was done for their benefits. Funds were being curtailed under the garb of checking Christian–Church influence leaving them under destitution (Munda 1948). Tribals believed that it was a deliberate attempt to exploit them. Development

of the region was a demand, which remained vital for the issue of tribal survival.

CONCLUSION

The paper traced the process of ethnic identity formation amongst adivasis from the end of the 18th century, when the tribal area came to be integrated into the colonial economy. The involvement of the colonial regime resulted in the ruthless dispossession of tribals of their life-sustaining resources like land and forest. Land and forest were not only economic resources but also distinct and indispensable part of their culture and identity. Regular subjection to exploitation led different tribal groups to rise against the outsiders (e.g., British officials and revenue agents). Taking cognisance of these revolts the British tried to stem the tide of protest by passing a series of legislations. However, loopholes in the acts made them helpless.

The advent of Christianity marked an important phase in the history of Jharkhand. Evangelical activities of missionaries in the area brought up a section of educated tribals who began to articulate their grievances. Missionaries took the initiative in helping adivasis to recover their land.

At the beginning of 20th century a section of educated tribals formed several small socio-economic organisations to work for the socio-economic advancement of their adivasi counterparts. It began with the initiative of the CNUS and subsequently a number of organisations came to the fore. These organisations worked exclusively for the tribals. Different tribal sub-groups came to terms with each other and constructed an ethnic identity called adivasi. However, this seminal ethnic consciousness was not a given fact as a number of factors went into the making of such an ethnic identity. This ethnic consciousness was fostered by the social organisations. The British policy of enumerating and classifying also helped in shaping the idea of tribe. However, it was not until the formation of the Adivasi Mahasabha that a pan-tribal (ethnic) identity came to be consolidated. The Adivasi Mahasabha under Jaipal Singh Munda tried to unite all tribals under the category of adivasis. The adivasi leader asserted the differences of adivasis in terms of culture and history from the mainstream, and demanded protective measures

to ensure their equality. At the same time a trans-ethnic bond emerged across tribal communities on issues such as land and forest rights, loss of credible employment and the need for reservation, cultural and religious rights, and the great problem of underdevelopment of the region.

With the entry of the Adivasi Mahasabha in the arena of parliamentary politics, demand for a separate state came up, based on three important issues: exploitation of the tribals, minerals and forest resources by outsiders (dikus); ethnic distinctiveness; and administrative unity of the region. However, the attitude of non-tribals remained ambivalent and, therefore, it could not become a full-fledged regional movement. With the formation of the Jharkhand Party ethnic appeal was dropped in favour of a trans-ethnic regional entity called Jharkhand where the emphasis was on uniting the tribals of the contiguous areas and garnering support from the non-tribals. Although efforts were made to bring the non-tribals in the movement, it did not succeed for long due to the uncompromising 'tribal thrust' in the movement. This process got aggravated with the factional politics within tribal sub-groups involving much compromise and wheeling-dealing.

Several processes brought significant changes in the social map of the Jharkhand region and threw up new challenges and demands. Changes were marked by the growth of industrialisation, rise and growth of trade union movement and broader mass struggles, agitations for restoration of land rights, and demands for forest rights and employment opportunities. As a result dramatic changes took place in the demographic and industrial profile of the region and linked it to the rest of the country and world much more intensely. Alongside these changes language and religion played a major role in changing ethnic bonds across the area of *Greater Jharkhand*. Political forces fighting for the cause of a separate state clearly had to address these questions. This concern was reflected in several coordinated efforts to bring together all people living in this area and desirous of a separate state. This churning brought about a re-alignment of social forces and attempt was made to enlist a broad-based support for the cause of Jharkhand movement.

The territorial boundaries remained contested. In its early phase territorial integration of the adjoining areas was based on uniting the tribals of

the three areas and carve out an exclusive tribal state. Later on the geographical area to be delineated for Jharkhand was argued out on the basis of Jharkhandi culture. Such a claim, however, remained highly abstract as more and more people in other states were either integrated in the respective states such as Orissa or Bengal or a process was set in motion to create Chattisgarh in Madhya Pradesh. The process of delimiting the territorial boundary of Jharkhand had been deeply marked by the power factor. This was reflected in the opposition to the territorial claims of Jharkhand by the different states and the Union Government. Moreover, analogous activities in the areas of other states claimed by Jharkhandi activists were not able to draw much support. After 1980s the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and Bhartiya Janata Party, two important political forces in Jharkhand finally forged an alliance to limit their claim to the territorial region of Santhal Parganas and Chotanagpur only. The movement got enormous support from the people and finally gave way to the birth of the 28th province (state), called Jharkhand in the Indian Union.

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