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Jharkhand - Past, Present & Future

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Dr. Rajiv Balakrishnan**

The earliest of the settlers in Chotanagpur (now a substantial part of Jharkhand), are believed to have been the Munda, who may have migrated from South-East Asia (though the evidence for this is tenuous), or as Munda myth tells it, they could have come in by a circuitous route, with a point of entry from the north-west that '... may carry a trace of historical memory' (Thapar and Siddiqi 1979: 20-21). Thapar and Siddiqi, in their reconstruction of the social history of the region, focus on the Munda tribe and tell of how, in the early phase, land belonged to the lineage or khunt. Land rights depended on membership of the lineage, whose ancestors had first cleared and settled it. The lineage landowners (khuntkhattidars) collected 'a tribute or a kind of rent' from affinal relatives resident in the village, and craftsmen from outside the lineage provided professional services. As cultivation expanded, groups of villages were constituted into units called pattis, for administration and services. The head of the patti, the manki, was pledged military services by the village chiefs, whose gifts to him, in course of time, got transformed into dues. The old order was giving way to '... a hierarchical arrangement of power based on access to land and its produce which ran counter to the original lineage system with its stress on egalitarianism' (Thapar and Siddiqi 1979: 24).

A child adopted by one of the mankis, dynastic chronicles suggest, became the first king of Chotanagpur, or, a Sakadvipi Brahmin family given a grant of villages in Chotanagpur built up a power base through revenue collection and taxes. The Chotanagpur of this time had been drawn into the orbit of the agrarian system of northern and eastern India, in which

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kings made grants '... initially of land and later of villages, to either religious or secular grantees'. The grants carried rights of ownership and revenue from the land, and in the case of grants of villages, of administrative authority and rights to the collection of taxes and dues. The earliest grants were to Buddhist monasteries or Brahmins. Later, secular grants, more common in the later half of the first millennium AD, began to be made to officers '... in lieu of salaries for services'. By the 13th century, new lands were exhausted in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal, and was at this point that eyes appear to have been cast on Chotanagpur. The Ghadvalas of western Uttar Pradesh acquired feudatories in Chotanagpur such as the Khayaravalas of Palamau, who themselves made grants, '... thus encouraging the process of subinfeudation', and in north west Chotanagpur in Bhagelkhand, a land grant system had been firmly set in place by the Kalacuri kings (Thapar and Siddiqi 1979: 25-26). The dynasties were legitimised in terms of Sanskrit courtly culture, which deepened the differentiation between the tribes, on the one hand, and the representatives of the State, on the other. A more fundamental change was that with land grants made by the king for military, administrative and personal services tribal lineage rights got eroded. Even bhuinhari land (the remnant of the old khuntkatti system) was threatened when the grantee 'acquired the bhuinharis of those who had died intestate or had migrated'. Not just land rights, politico-juridical rights too passed into the hands of 'professionals outside the lineage, and often from outside the region' (Thapar and Siddiqi 1979: 28-31).

It was in the seventeenth century that the diamond mines of Khokhara 'in the south of contemporary Bihar' attracted the attention of the Emperor Jahangir, following which Kokhara's ruler, Durjan Sal, was reduced to a tribute-paying chieftain of the Mughal Empire. When the Empire declined it granted the right of revenue collection in Bengal to the East India Company, and in 1772, the ruler of Chotanagpur acknowledged the suzerainty of the British. To meet the revenue payments of the Company land was leased to thiccadars (contractors), who gradually assumed zamindari (landownership) rights (Thapar and Siddiqi 1979: 32-35). Force was one weapon in the armoury of the thikadars in their bid to take possession of tribal lands; they also took recourse to law: 'They posed as zamindars and tried with a fair degree of success to impose the zamindari concept of the

ryot-landlord relationship on the Mundas and establish it before the courts' (K.S. Singh 1983: 10-11). Tribal chiefs, under the policy of protection of 'ancient families', became zamindars. Cash rent, excise, tax and other levies came to be imposed, and a new system of taxation was introduced, along with 'the commutation of feudal dues and services into rent' (K.S. Singh 1979: 69-70). Moneylenders emerged on the scene to oil the wheels of the new machinery - a new class of tribal moneylenders, and also, the diku (alien) class, which 'became a creature and agent of the colonial system'. The diku started as rent-generators and rent collectors and 'spearheaded the development of commercial capitalism in the region'. The influx of dikus and 'land hungry peasants' sparked off tribal revolts, mostly in the 19th century (K.S. Singh 1979: 69-70, 78).

As for the non tribal immigrants who came in search of fortunes and sanctuary from feudal oppression in the plains '... of Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and even further west', long years of close contact between them and the autochthons fostered a cultural homogeneity, 'to some extent' - though the culture of the broader Gangetic plain is in evidence, particularly in the border areas (Sengupta 1982: 6). The chronicler of the Birsa Munda movement tells us likewise that before the coming of the diku, '... the loom of time had woven the tribals and non-tribals (Sadans) into a culturally integrated community'. The Tantis or Swansis (weavers), the Ghasis (fishermen, and marriage musicians), Bhogtas (rice pounders), Lohars (blacksmiths), Doms etc. '... imparted fullness and economic self-sufficiency to the tribal village', shared the way of life of the tribals and participated in their ceremonies and social occasions (K.S. Singh 1983: 19). Colonial administrator-anthropologists like Dalton and Risley, who noted 'a degree of commonness' between the different communities of Chotanagpur may have exaggerated the differences out of ignorance, or they may have done it by intent, as part of the colonial policy of 'divide and rule', and this could have inhibited the emergence of a nascent Jharkhand nationality (Sengupta 1982: 6, 9). The continued exploitation of the region, which began under colonial rule and was perpetuated in independent India as 'swadeshi colonisation' fostered an autonomy demand, and, for it to succeed, ethnic divisions had to be bridged and a common cultural identity forged. We now turn to these issues, as we begin our review of contributions to this volume.

In his '*Jharkhand Katha – A Tale of Swadeshi Colonisation*', the first of the papers in the series, Prof. A.K. Singh recounts how the economic exploitation of India by the British had moved Sakham Ganesh Deoshakar of Jharkhand to write his incendiary *Desher Katha*, which was banned by the British for its 'tendency to excite disaffection toward His Majesty or the Government by law in British India'. If Deoshkar were alive, A.K. Singh says, he '... would have written *Jharkhand Katha* to describe the exploitation of Jharkhand by North Bihar'. The author cites evidences to argue his case for *swadeshi* colonisation, which he sums up succinctly in this popular jingle coined by him: '*Har rupaya ka sattar paise / Jharkhand ki den hai / Milta usko bis hi lekin / Kaisa yeh andher hai / Es tukra ko hai dhikar / Jharkhand ki hai lalkar*. (For every hundred paise (of the erstwhile Bihar government's revenue) Jharkhand contributes seventy, but gets only twenty in return. What injustice! Fie on this crumb! This is the challenge of Jharkhand!)'.

Of the evidences A.K. Singh cites in support of *swadeshi* colonisation, one is based on data gathered by the Committee on Jharkhand Matters (COJM) on 9 development parameters – (i) agricultural production, (ii) irrigation, (iii) godown storage capacity, (iv) rural electrification, (v) bank branches, (vi) literacy, (vii) health services, (viii) road length and (ix) population. Composite development scores compiled from these data showed that the districts of the Jharkhand region of erstwhile Bihar *all* had lower scores than the districts in Central Bihar, and further, that the Jharkhand region district with the *highest* score (Dhanbad), ranked 19, was lower in rank than the districts in Central Bihar, with the *lowest* score for Jahanabad, ranked 21. A.K. Singh also accuses the big factories, irrigation projects, dams, mines – Jawaharlal Nehru's 'temples of modern India', which had 'sprouted all over the country, mostly on tribal lands', of 'making the tribal people victims and refugees of development'. Even a Government of India estimate, A.K. Singh says, 'which is always an underestimate', shows 1,80,000 people displaced by the coal mines alone in just a few years (1981-1985).

Even worse, the jobs went to outsiders. This resource-rich region has the TISCO and TELCO factories of the Tatas, the Aluminium factory at Muri, the Copper plant at Ghatshila, lead smelting units in Tundoo, uranium

mining at Jadugoda, and the Mica unit at Giridih. 1894, the year the railways reached the Jharia coalfields, marked the beginning of a spectacular increase of mining. A few years later, the Steel Plant was set up in Jamshedpur, and since the fifties, '... the works of the Damodar Valley Corporation, the Fertiliser plant at Sindri, the Heavy Engineering factory at Ranchi and the giant Steel plant at Bokaro have been the landmarks in the development of this region'. It was however the immigrants from outside who have taken away the lion's share of the benefits, and not necessarily through fair means. In the initial years of the coal mines, it is true, it was the *adivasis* who were mainly engaged in mining activities, but with an improvement in working conditions, 'the Jharkhandi miner has almost become an extinct category' (Sengupta 1982: 11-15).

We now take a closer look at this issue of jobs and migrants, with detailed census data compiled and analysed by Madhumita Bandyopadhyay, in her paper, the next in the collection, titled 'Migration into Chotanagpur and its Demographic Consequences, 1850-1950'. Bandyopadhyay draws upon data from various censuses, starting with the first British Indian census of 1872, to show how, in the late colonial period, mining activities in the resource-rich Chotanagpur plateau stimulated a massive migrant influx. The author's data show that a good deal of the migration originated from *within* Chotanagpur itself. The influx from outside was however of sufficient magnitude to change the ethnic composition of the region. *Thana* level data compiled for the decades from 1891 to 1951 show that till 1921, high growth rates *thanas* tended to be concentrated on the periphery of the plateau. In the 1911-1921 decade, vast areas in the interior witnessed negative growth rate at a time when the periphery showed pockets of high growth. After 1921, not only were negative growth *thanas* conspicuously few, in two of the three decades from 1921-1951, the pattern of relatively high growth *thanas* on the periphery was no longer in evidence. Indications are that it was after 1921 that the colonial non-tribal incursion into the interior tribal regions had assumed a definitive character. This, the author argues, is suggested also by data showing that while only the *thanas* on the margins of the plateau showed high population density up to 1921, thereafter, some interior *thanas* did so as well.

With the spread of mining and industrial activity in Chotanagpur, the workforce participation rate in the region rose rapidly, Bandyopadhyay points out, citing census data for 1911 and 1921. The tribal population of the region mostly found work as unskilled labour in the newly opened mines and industries, but even in this work category, the mines began to employ outsiders. By 1921, the tribals constituted a mere 10% of the unskilled labour in the coal mines of Hazaribagh and Singhbhum, the mica mines of Hazaribagh, and the brick tile, fire-brick and Lac factories of Manbhum. In the brick-tile and firebrick factories and the iron mines of Singhbhum, the tribal share of unskilled labour was a mere 15%. In the Singhbhum copper mines, the tribal workers still constituted about 65% of the total unskilled labour, but that was an exception to the rule. It was in the context of unemployment and poverty that there occurred a massive tribal exodus from Chotanagpur, the author argues. In the late nineteenth century, with the setting up of the tea plantations of Assam, tribal emigrants from Chotanagpur found work there as tea garden labourers. As a consequence of the incursion of outsiders and the tribal exodus, the tribal share of the Chotanagpur population got diluted. The author documents this with data for the decade from 1881 to 1951. Except in Ranchi district, where the tribal share of population actually increased from 45% in 1881 to 60% in 1951, all the districts of Chotanagpur showed a decline in their tribal population share. In Singhbhum, it actually fell from more than half (62%) in 1881 to less than half (48%) in 1951. The growing non-tribal presence in the region is attested to also by the author's population growth rate statistics for the tribal and non-tribal segments of the Chotanagpur population; after 1911, the growth rate was far higher for the non-tribal as compared to the tribal population. In a post independence democratic set-up, the change in the ethnic composition of Chotaganpur - to which the job-seeking immigrants had contributed, meant that tribal unrests spawned by the exploitation and oppression got overshadowed by a movement for regional autonomy in which the ethnic factor was downplayed.

Yet, the autonomy movement in Chotanagpur had been centred in tribal ethnicity - to begin with, K.S. Singh tells us in his paper, the third in the collection, on 'Ecology, Ethnicity, Regionalism & State Formation'. The tribals had a centuries old tradition of militant protest, and as the major

tribes were spatially concentrated, there was an overlap between the ethnic and regional bases of mobilisation. Also, '... there was a rich corpus of anthropological literature to draw upon in order to create a new sense of history, which could legitimise the tribals' search for identity'. Christianity, which came into Chotanagpur in a big way, was a major factor as well. The missionaries established movements to combat liquor consumption among the tribals, they formed cooperative societies to extricate the tribals from the stranglehold of moneylenders, and they formed societies to promote education. In the 1920s and 1930s – the era of constitutional reform, the Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj, led by tribal leaders and catechists, organised for employment and education of the tribes and reservations for them in the government services and legislative bodies. It was a time that harked back to the golden age of the tribes, saw the revival of the tribal assembly or *parha*, '... and the discovery of lost 'scripts', said to have been used by the tribes in their heyday'. The Samaj drew the attention of the government to the problems of the tribes, and for the first time, a demand for Statehood was made, by the anthropologist S.C. Roy.

With the Congress party sweeping the polls in the 1937 elections, the first under the Government of India Act of 1935, the Adivasi Mahasabha emerged as a regional party. It 'commanded a wider political base, and possessed pan-tribal composition and objectives'. Like the Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj, the Adivasi Mahasabha was 'loyalist'; its leader, Jaipal Singh, supported the British war effort and 'played a prominent role in recruiting tribals for the British army'. The Mahasabha organised a movement for a separate State, but its militancy did not yield the desired results, and in the elections of 1946, it lost to the Congress, following which it was wound up as a political body. The militant movement failed, and in the newly framed Constitution of India, the Fifth and Sixth Schedules gave the tribals '... more than the anthropologists and the British administrators had prepared them for'. Not only that, the missionaries and minorities were reassured by the secular credentials of the new Constitution.

In 1950, the Jharkhand Party was formed. The census of 1951, like that of 1931, showed the tribals to be a minority in Chotanagpur, which paved the way for the Jharkhand Party as a regional party for all Chotanagpuris.

'There was thus a transition from ethnicity to regionalism as a formative factor in the movement'. 1952-1957 was the heyday of the Jharkhand Party. From the 1960s, it declined, due to various reasons - the development process drew the tribes into its fold; tribal representation in the governments of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa suggested that the tribals could secure their interests via power sharing; and a schism grew between the advanced Christian and non-Christian segments of the tribals, in the context of competition in educational, employment and developmental spheres, due to which the non-Christian tribals began to seek refuge in the Congress and the Jan Sangh. Also, the Jharkhand Party did not have a programme to address agrarian issues; it was led by town-based professionals, '... who had little feel for rural problems'. The agrarian factor had led to the radicalisation of politics, as did the *naxalite* movement. Left parties entered the political fray, took up agrarian issues, and were committed to tribal autonomy. The Jharkhand Party's political goal of a separate State was not given up, but it got weakened. Eventually, the Jharkhand Party merged with the Congress. The death of Jaipal Singh and the lack of a charismatic leadership, and the political vacuum created by the merger led to a proliferation of political parties, with the rump Jharkhand Party itself splitting into factions. The Jharkhand parties aligned either with the Congress or left parties, and ethnicity receded into the background. Yet, K.S. Singh goes on to say, autonomy as a counter to underdevelopment came to be accepted by all political forces, bringing together the tribes and the non-tribes. 'In the process, they invoked cultural symbols and created myths and legends to provide a cultural underpinning to their political demands for autonomy'.

In the next paper - the fourth, titled 'Jharkhand & Jharkhand Movement - a Personal Perspective', K.S. Singh tells, among other things, of his meetings with the tribal leader, Jaipal Singh, who urged him to write on the Jharkhand movement; of his documentation of the movement, in a number of papers he wrote from 1972 to 1985, in which he '... continued to explore its shifting, even widening bases as it metamorphosed from a tribal to a regional movement'; of the efforts to build cultural bridges between the tribes and non tribes and forge a Jharkhand nationality, and the author's initiative, as Vice Chancellor of Ranchi University, to set up a Department of Tribal Languages, '... which emerged as the engine of

literary and cultural upsurge'; of his book on Birsa Munda - 'had emerged as the icon of all people of Jharkhand engaged in the struggle for identify and emancipation' - and its impact on literary and cultural activists. K. S. Singh talks also of Rajiv Gandhi's statesmanship in setting up the Committee on Jharkhand Matters, with an Expert Group comprising three members, including himself; its advocacy of autonomy or a new State, and its concern with the need to protect tribal interests. As a member of the COJM and its Expert Group, the author had visited many parts of Jharkhand, and '... was impressed to see the swelling tide of popular support for a separate State'. Support for a larger Jharkhand State was however either weak or limited in Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and tribal regions adjoining Bihar, he says. With the collapse of the experiment with autonomy, the author tells us, the demand for a State gained increasing currency, with the elections of the 1990s showing the growing clout of the pro-Jharkhand parties. In 2000, a hundred years after Birsa Munda demanded independence, the Jharkhand State was born. 'The Jharkhand movement had fulfilled itself, very substantially, as few movements in history have done. There was a feeling of liberation as the Jharkhand State was formed, a new sense of self-respect among the tribal people, an expectation of a new order among all...' The challenges before the new State, according to K.S. Singh, include issues of poverty, a leadership role for women, support for the ongoing cultural resurgence, a clean, honest administration, strengthening of safeguards for tribals, the restoration of the forest cover and the cleaning up of polluted rivers.

Let us now go back a couple of steps and take a look at what A.K. Singh, in his *Jharkhand Katha*, has to say on the subject of autonomy for the region. When the States Reorganisation Committee was constituted in 1953, he tells us, it received several memoranda asking for the separation of Jharkhand from Bihar. One of the objections of the SRC was that this was a tribal demand, and tribals comprised only a third of the population. A.K. Singh points out that this was factually incorrect, and though the tribals had taken the initiative, the demand had the support of both tribals and non-tribals. The most well argued memorandum submitted to the SRC, in A.K. Singh's view, was the one of the Chotanagpur Sanjukta Sangh, which stressed the Chotanagpur's 'multi-lingual and multi-racial culture, similar to Switzerland, and couched its demand on behalf of all

communities of Jharkhand, not just the tribals. Unlike the SRC, the Committee on Jharkhand Matters (COJM), formed by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, on 23rd August, 1989, accepted that the demand for Jharkhand had wide political support and was not merely a tribal demand. The COJM '... recognised the wider social base of the Jharkhand movement ... [and] accepted the stand that the region had been neglected and exploited'. No decision was however taken on the formation of a new State. Instead, the Jharkhand Autonomous Area Council (JADC) bill was passed by the Bihar assembly and sent to the centre for approval. 'The JADC Chairman and Vice Chairman were to be nominated by the Chief Minister and to serve at the pleasure of the State government, which had the power to dissolve the Council'. The GOI advised modification of the document paved the way for the JAAC (Jharkhand Autonomous Area Council) bill, which was agreed to by all the concern parties and was adopted in the State legislative assembly. The JAAC, A.K. Singh points out, notwithstanding its limitations in terms of powers and funds, gave Jharkhand a legitimacy and identity which it did not earlier have. 'Jharkhand', till then, '... was a dirty nine letter word in the vocabulary of the governments of Bihar and India'. The JAAC did not however meet the aspirations of the people. As K.S. Singh points out, elections were not held, delegation of powers were insufficient, and funds allocations were inadequate. The demand for a full-fledged State grew, he adds, with the support of political parties. Prof. A.K. Singh, though he did not live to see the day, predicted, with a prophetic vision, had predicted that the Jharkhand movement 'was destined to achieve its goal of full Statehood'.

The COJM, in its report submitted in 1990, K.S. Singh points out, had not only recommended substantial autonomy and safeguards for the tribal people, but also, more broad-based efforts to promote a common cultural identity. It is true, the rapacious exploiters of the colonial period, the *diku* - a class of middlemen between the administration and the people, 'who alone could meet the demand for money to pay taxes, repay debts etc.' - had already fostered a sense of 'we' and 'they' (K.S. Singh 1983: 10, 1979 78). The popular revolts in the region since the arrival of the East India Company, tribal as well as non-tribal, were directed against exploiters who were '...almost invariably outsiders', and term *diku* came to mean both 'exploiter' as well as 'outsider', 'the second one being the

derived meaning' (Sengupta 1982: 3). The common identity vis a vis the *diku* was however only a *juxtaposed* identity. The need for a regional / national identity began to be felt when multi-ethnic political formations began to emerge, and it was in this context, in 1938, a hundred years after the concept of *diku* began to be articulated, that the term 'Jharkhand' gained currency (Sengupta 1979: 4-5).

Even before the coming of the *diku*, as we have seen, the region witnessed social transformations in which the influx of immigrants was an important factor. There is a viewpoint however, that 'the Chotanagpur plateau in eastern India was cut off from the mainstream of Indian history until the last couple of centuries, and ... that the tribal institutions here have remained virtually untouched since their early beginnings' (Thapar and Siddiqi 1979: 19). In their historical reconstruction of the region, Thapar and Siddiqi (1979) debunk the myth, and in his paper on 'An Archaeological Perspective of Modern Jharkhand', the sixth in our collection, Dilip Chakrabarti adds to the weight of evidence. He argues that '... neither geographically nor archaeologically was Jharkhand an isolated area cut off from the mainstream of Indian history'. The evidences he presents include that of a large number of routes connecting the Chotanagpur plateau to the surrounding regions, of which one was referred to in an 8th century AD inscription. For West Bengal's riverine plains, and those of Bihar, and for eastern Orissa, Chakrabarti says, '... the plateau must have been the most important source of minerals, stones and possibly even timber in the ancient context'. The author speculates that, by the second millennium BC, when Eastern India was in the Copper Age, Jharkhand must have supplied not only copper, but various other metals including lead, tin and gold. Between the late centuries BC and early centuries AD, he argues, '... the Ranchi plateau was the focus of an organised State, which was possibly a part of the larger political complex of the contemporary middle Ganga valley'. He cites archaeological evidence to show also that '... the Chotanagpur resources were joining the course of trade in the Ganga plain of the Buddhist period through Rajgir, the eastern terminal point of a trade route which went all the way up to Paithan in Maharashtra'.

We move on now to the sixth paper in our series, 'Development, Identity and the Development of Identity', in which Nirmal Sengupta shows how

the divide between the tribes and the non-tribes has roots in the ethnographic categorisations of the census enumerations of British India, which helped shape ethnic identities in the country. It was a time when 'race' was influential in Europe and the superiority of the white races could be explained in terms of evolutionary race theories. Though 'caste', not 'race' became the enumeration category, efforts were made to establish a correspondence between 'caste' and 'race'. The concept of 'tribe' emerged when the communities could not all be classified into the main religion and caste categories. In the evolutionary scheme of things, the 'tribes', which stood outside the mainstream, came to be viewed as 'backward', he argues. When provincial autonomy was granted in 1936, the colonial government brought out as a hastily released list of 'backward tribes' needing special protection. Post independence, it metamorphosed into the list of 'Scheduled Tribes'. Indigenous peoples not in the list began to think of themselves as outsiders, and were so thought of by those in the list. This has hindered united protest and struggle against the wrongs that the Jharkhand people as a whole had to suffer, Sengupta argues. At the root of it was a shrewd divisive propaganda, the author argues. In the beginning, at a time when the term *adivasi* meant all autochtones, who comprised around 90% of the population, the Jharkhand movement was regionalist. It was however was robbed of its mass base by the ethnographic categorisations of the colonial State.

For the Jharkhand movement to succeed, Sengupta says, there had to be a 'dilution' of tribal identities. The Jharkhand movement was rooted in the problems of the region; tribes and non-tribes both had been displaced by mines, industries and river valleys, the inundation of forests deprived millions of subsistence. When local people displaced by the Subarnareka dam protested, the author says, the policemen who fired on them did not bother to see whether their targets were tribals or non-tribals. Even in matters of employment, the local people were discriminated against. In political as well as literary and cultural circles, activists struggled to bridge the gap between the tribes and the non-tribes. It worked, and, eventually, the autonomy demand had to be conceded. With the formation of a new State, however, new problems loom large on the horizons. There are apprehensions about whether the political process will protect human rights and whether displacement and devastation will continue with the support

of some of the Jharkhandi politicians. New struggles have already started to crystallise as a consequence of the betterment of some and the deprivation of others, the author points out.

The identification of 'tribal' with 'indigenous' not only engendered a divisive propaganda, it also gave rise to another problem, Sengupta argues. The nomenclature 'indigenous', he explains, has come to be used to identify peoples entitled to the safeguards of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Concern with the plight of the peoples of resource-rich and forested regions whose homelands lay on the path of the development process had led to the formation of such groups in the 1980s. The affected people were defined as 'indigenous', an appellation that had connotations of aboriginality, cultural distinctiveness, and self-identification. The criteria were unequivocally met only in the case of the North American and South American Indians, the aboriginal Australians, and the Maori of New Zealand. According to the ICITP (Indian Council of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples), a body that was created by the initiative of Jharkhand activists, the Scheduled Tribes qualify. The government, on the other hand, says that the Scheduled Tribes are not the only indigenous people of India. As Sengupta points out, the '... whole set of misconceived history, directly and indirectly promoted by the government list of Scheduled Tribes, has now turned against the government positions, lending weight to 'indigenous people' status for Scheduled Tribes'. This is one facet of the irony, the author says; the other is that 'movements like the Jharkhand movement, which developed by contesting the myth, now favour indigenous status'. The author goes on to make out a case for the extension of the UN criteria.

In the next and seventh paper, 'Jharkhand Movement - A View From Within', Ram Dayal Munda notes that with the arrival of British rule and its Permanent Settlement, many revolts broke out, among them the Kol rebellion of 1831-32, the Santhal rebellion of 1855-56, and the Birsa movement of 1895-1900. In the face of such resolute and uncompromising struggles, the British were forced to yield ground – the Wilkinson Rule of 1834, in response to the Kol Rebellion, provided for self rule in the Kolhan area; the Santhal Pargana Regulation Act, in deference the Santhal insurrection, incorporated provisions to ensure the non transferability of

land in the Santhal Parganas; the Chotanagpur Land Tenure Act was a concession to the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and the Sardar Movement of 1859-65; and the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908, which prohibited the transfer of tribal land to non tribals, came in the aftermath of the Birsa movement of 1895-1900. Subsequently, the early 1900s saw a period of social reform – organisations were set up for the welfare of the region, missionaries started new schools and hospitals, and new hopes and aspirations took shape. A political awakening was ushered in, and eventually, the Jharkhand Party emerged in Independent India as the torchbearer of an incipient regional political movement. Its activities to promote the development of Jharkhand flourished within the former State of Bihar and sustained the activities in the 'periphery' - the Jharkhand cultural areas of Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Orissa, where, however, they were unable to move in the desired direction of State formation.

Post independence, the struggles for autonomy in Jharkhand acquired a democratic colouring, with the *bandhs* and blockades to prevent the outflow of raw materials from this resource rich region meant only to bring the government to the negotiating table. Internal colonialism and the neglect of the development of the Jharkhand region, the displacement of its people by dams, mining, power plants and industries, and the influx of outsiders to take advantage of the new opportunities, all served to fuel the cause of Jharkhand Statehood, so much so that support for it became a political compulsion across political divides. Still, the Jharkhandi parties with local roots and a history of struggle in the area were sidelined, and their statehood demand hijacked by the vote-hungry national parties. This, as Munda sees it, was a corollary of the many weaknesses of the Jharkhand movement itself. Of these, one is the issue of instilling awareness in the people. While the Jharkhandi leaders had some success on this front to their credit, they succeeded more in urban as compared to rural areas. Then there is the agenda of mass-mobilisation. The Jharkhand movement – the country's oldest, was also the most democratic, and the casualties from such activities as the blowing up of railway tracks minimal, but, except for a few occasions, it has been largely urban and youth oriented; its leadership had failed to mobilise the masses in a common struggle. Moreover, the Jharkhandi leaders have been accustomed to functioning in an activist mode and were not geared to fighting elections through money, muscle and

manipulative power – all of which are lacking in Jharkhandi culture, according to Munda. This puts them at a disadvantage, so much so that success depends on their ability to stop the bogus voting that can spell victory for their opponents. The author is however candid enough to point also to failings of the Jharkhandi leadership – the self interest of its leaders and the inability to come together to fight unitedly for a common cause, in part because unity was stymied by vested interests; the 'total lack of co-ordination among themselves', due to which the opponent could divide them at the hustings; and their proclivity to sell their votes to vested interest groups and become 'yes men' to bigger national party bosses.

As if all this were not bad enough, the Jharkhandi leaders failed miserably to seize the advantage at the negotiating table. When the States Reorganisation Committee visited Jharkhand in 1955, Jaipal Singh, the leader of the Jharkhand Party, then the largest opposition group in the Bihar legislature, had his party's memorandum presented by a junior delegation, which was not able to rebut the SRC's objections to the demand for a separate Jharkhand statehood, which Jaipal Singh himself could have done quite forcefully. Again, in 1963, when the Jharkhand Party merged with the Congress, it did not exact the political mileage it could have as the price of merger. In 1992, another Jharkhandi party, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, withdrew its support to the ruling party in Bihar - the Janata Dal, so as to bring about the fall of the then Bihar Chief Minister, Laloo Prasad Yadav, who was unwilling for Bihar to be vivisected so that Jharkhand might be born, and whose professed stand was: 'Jharkhand over my dead body'. President's rule would follow, it was anticipated, and pave the way for the formation of a Jharkhand state carved out of Bihar. Yadav was however able to secure the allegiance of a section of the 16 Jharkhand Mukti Morcha MLAs who opposed him, with the result that his government survived and President's Rule was averted. A year later, the JMM extended its support to the Congress government of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to enable it survive a no-confidence motion in parliament. Effective bargaining by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha could have resulted in a Jharkhand State. Not only did that not happen, allegations of bribe taking by the JMM legislators in return for votes discredited the JMM in the eyes of the electorate and created a political vacuum. This created the conditions for the BJP to hijack the agenda of

Jharkhand statehood. As a consequence, the Jharkhandi leaders have been eclipsed in the new Jharkhand State.

The displacement and exploitation of the Jharkhand people, the author says, do not concern the BJP and its *Hindutva parivar*. 'How can they be', he asks, 'when the people of Jharkhand are exploited mainly by merchants, businessmen, big landowners, industrialists and bureaucrats who are political supporters of the BJP, and are adherents to its *Hindutva* philosophy, which advocates a monolithic Hindu religion and culture for all Indians and fosters fundamentalism, communalism and fanaticism in different parts of the country'?' The essential elements of BJP's game plan, according to Munda, has been to build up electoral clout in the Jharkhand region, so as to counter its weakness in central and north Bihar, and, '... as the ruling party, to provide its loyalists and supporters opportunities for exploiting Jharkhand's vast mineral and forest resources'. In the new Jharkhand State, the ruling party officials and the bureaucracy are anti Jharkhandi, and outsiders hold the key posts. Moreover, the provisions of the Bihar State Reorganisation Act, by which the new State was born, are such as to favour its continued exploitation by Bihar, the author says. The weaknesses of the Jharkhand movement, it appears, have brought its chickens home to roost. The Jharkhand State is now a reality, but she is jinxed by the ghosts of her past, and there are miles to go before the river can reach the sea. The only hope, Munda says, is to dislodge the present government and work for a resurgence of the Jharkhand movement, based on the Jharkhandi ideals of equality, co-operation, consensus and coexistence.

Munda's recommends, for the new State, an industrial policy in which provision for compensation, rehabilitation and employment are built into people-displacing industrial projects; a high priority to agriculture, which is the main economic base, together with a check-damming of rivers and rivulets at short intervals to raise the water table and keep the wells, the main source of irrigation, from going dry; and a new forest policy aimed at giving the forests back to the people, so that they can play a major role

* Jharkhand was even earlier home to strange bedfellows; the *diku*, who 'spearheaded the development of commercial capitalism in the tribal regions', and 'gained control of credit, trade, and, in some cases, even food-grain production', were resented but accommodated; 'The tribals hated them but could not do without them' (K.S. Singh 1979: 79).

in forest conservation. The author goes on to chalk out a blueprint of action, in which there is a stress on literacy and education - compulsory primary education in the mother tongue, with gradual introduction of State and national languages at higher levels; employment oriented schooling at the higher secondary stage; partial finance of education through national and international aid; and inexpensive 'rice and dal' residential *ashram* schools for girls, where their studies will not be hindered by household tasks and sibling care responsibilities. Munda also makes out a case for solar energy, which local people can manage themselves, as a source of their energy needs, and, in particular, for literacy-related activities; and for efforts to see that the Jharkhandi people are able to take full advantage of the forests, which are not only a source of fuel wood and timber but also, of edible and medicinal plants. He suggests that the local people be trained as health workers and advocates the use of herbal medicines, which are widely accepted anyway. Also on his list of priorities for the new State is the need to curb land alienation and displacement due to industrialisation.

We now take a look at two items on Munda's list - a priority to agriculture and a curbing of land alienation. First, the state of agriculture, as profiled by Seema Singh, in her paper, the eighth in the collection, which reports on the stagnant rural economy of Jharkhand, on the basis of data gathered from three blocks of Ranch district in 1994-95 - Burmu, Angarra and Karra. Agriculture, the main source of livelihood, drew in labour from most households, but with agriculture at a subsistence level, households participated in non-agricultural activities too as a survival strategy. Non farm activities were of two types - Non-farm self-employment and non-farm wage employment. Non-farm self-employment activities included trade of agro products, trade of minor forest produce, manufacturing - artisanal work and making rice beer, shop keeping, and specialised services provided by barbers, village doctors and midwives. Non-farm wage employment included skilled as well as unskilled work. Overall, non-farm activities were lower yielding than farm activities. It was found also that the government's anti-poverty programmes in the region functioned very poorly. Capital invested in self-employment activities yielded far more for households that did not benefit from poverty alleviation programmes as compared to those that did.

The struggle for survival is so bleak here that women from every household participate in some form of economic activity. Two thirds of the females in the age group 15+ participated in economic activity as against a corresponding figure of 17.6% for Bihar in 1987-88. When all activities ('main' and 'marginal') are considered, as many as four fifths of the women were found to be engaged in the labour force. The data indicate also that workers have to participate in more than one activity as a survival strategy. This is more so in the case of tribal women, suggesting that they get a lower return per activity, and hence need to participate in a larger number of activities. Another coping strategy is that in the agricultural lean season, people migrate out in large numbers for employment in the non farm sectors, in brick kilns or in construction work, where the wage rate ranges from 30-45 rupees per day.

Singh concludes by saying that the agricultural sector has been badly neglected, and there is a need to increase productivity through irrigation, credit and other inputs. The scope for watershed development is tremendous and should be explored, and the scope for social forestry should be tapped. Small irrigation projects too have been neglected, she adds. Along with agricultural development, there should be a focus on the non-farm sector, with an integrated approach emphasising raw materials, credit, marketing etc., the author says. There is a need also to increase the coverage of government programmes, and involve local *panchayats* in the implementation of anti-poverty and employment generation schemes. Aspects that affect women workers like child care and drudgery should be suitably addressed, and in the long run, measures should be taken to build skills, she says.

We focus now on the issue of land alienation, in the ninth and last paper in our volume, which profiles tribal land alienation in the Dumka and Ranchi districts of the former State of Bihar, now in Jharkhand, on the basis of data from a survey of tribal households whose lands were alienated. The revenue circles from where the households in the sample were drawn were regions prone to a high incidence of cases filed under the Special Areas Regulation (SAR) Act for the restoration or regularisation of alienated tribal land. This, it was hoped, would not only facilitate an easy and adequate sampling of cases of land alienation, but also help gauge whether SAR has acted as a deterrent to the alienation of tribal land. The paper reports also on the acquisition of

tribal land by the State for public use. In Dumka, 501 acres were lost to an irrigation project, and a few additional acres were taken over for other purposes. Ranchi, which attracted more investment, saw a more widespread land acquisition by the State – for an irrigation project (182.53 acres), industrial project (140.90 acres), airport, railway road (144.14 acres), and for use of the Army / Bihar Military Police / Bazaar / Dairy.

Most of the land transfers reported by the sample households occurred either through *sada patta* (land transferred without legal documentation) or *dan patra* (gift). As much as 76.21% of the tribal land transfers in Ranchi were through *sada patta*, with *dan patra* accounting for a mere 3.49%. In Dumka, tribal land transfer through *sada patta* constituted a substantial 36.78%, but was overshadowed by the 52.47% share of *dan patra*. Though *dan patra* can be given only to relatives, the extensive land transfers under this category in Dumka were to either tribal recipients who were not even remotely related to the donor, or even to non-tribals. In Dumka, transfers through *dan patra* and *sada patta* accounted for close to 90% of all tribal land transfers, as against the corresponding figure of 76.21 for Ranchi.

Of the 956.78 acres of tribal land transfers reported by the sample households, the lands from the Ranchi segment of the sample constituted as much as 90%. The share of the Dumka households increased over time, but still, the land transfers of the Ranchi households continued to dominate. In their explanation of this pattern, the authors argue that not only was land in demand for setting up small industries and businesses in urban centres like Ranchi, the public sector investment in and around the area also attracted a considerable influx of migrants wanting land to settle down. The tribals here, it seems, were initially not aware of the value of their land, especially in the case of lands near the urban centres, so they fell prey to middlemen and agents. Cities like Dumka also grew and experienced similar problems.

In time, deterrents to tribal land transfer began to emerge - the enactment of Special Areas Regulation (SAR) Act of 1969, which reflected the concerns and pressures of the tribal leadership, a number of cases instituted under SAR, and a growing tribal consciousness. As per the retrospective data of the authors' study, post 1970, there was a decline in land alienated due to sale and encroachment. However, mortgage, which provides a convenient way for the tribal to procure money, especially in times of dire need, has

been growing in popularity, in rural areas particularly. The CNT Act specifically permits mortgage of tribal land for a period of five years, or through *bhugutbandha* mortgage, under which the land automatically reverts to the mortgagee after a period of seven years. In a majority of instances, according to the authors, the land remains under mortgage for a considerable period of time. There even have been cases in which the tribal does not get back his land. The respondents from the study however expressed optimism on this score.

The data also show that as much as a third of the land transfers reported by the sample households were alienated to other tribals. This element of land transfer has been growing over time, the data also show; the tribal to tribal share of land transfer increased in both Ranchi and Dumka in the period 'Before 1970 - 1971-1996'. In Ranchi, it was still overshadowed by tribal to non-tribal transfers, but in Dumka, tribal to tribal transfers rose from 20.25% to 54.31%. The authors explain the substantial tribal to tribal component of land transfers to the land hunger of the tribal political and administrative elite wanting to settle in urban centres.

To conclude, we have seen how an autonomy movement was fostered in Jharkhand, and how it culminated ultimately, in Statehood. We have seen how the region is backward and plagued by poverty, and we have sketched out the problems that lie ahead. We wish the fledgling State well. May she rise up to the challenges that face her. In the words of the Vulcan greeting, may she 'Live Long and Prosper'!

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