The paper critically examines the available literature on tribal movements. It points out that exploitation of tribals is premised upon the epistemology of individualism, which has destroyed their survival base, statist ideology and the nation-building process which threatens their linguistic and cultural survival and the capitalist paradigm of development, which has expropriated natural resources. In this context, the state has emerged as the chief enemy of tribal people. The paper makes a case for the right of internal self-determination to tribal regions within the state system. The alternative development paradigm would involve struggles against imperialism and domestic reactionary forces, towards the emergence of multiple coexisting civilisations.

Dr. Jaganath Pathy is Professor at South Gujarat University, Surat.

Introduction

In order to understand various tribal movements in contemporary India, this section presents a brief critical evaluation of several existing assumptions on the subject. It presupposes that not only the paucity of comprehensive and objective material on the issue but also the cultivation of several myths and exaggerations bedevil a proper appraisal of the movements of the tribal peoples. In the process, however, it does invite some scepticism from both social scientists as well as political activists.

Often it has been pointed out that there is an in-built limitation in generalising the variegated tribal movements because of structural variations in social formations, demography, ecology, literacy, occupation, level of external articulation, overlapping bases, shifting crystallisations, paradoxical objectives, strategies and tactics and so on. As there does not exist a single unified tribal peoples movement, every tribal movement needs to be studied independently. Detailed studies are, of course, essential but in the absence of a general framework, they
take separateness to an absurd level. Neither knowledge nor practice will benefit much from such exercises. The search ought to be to find whether various contemporary struggles can analytically fall into a more or less common frame of interpretation.

All the tribal peoples of the country, including the so called 'primitive groups' and shifting cultivators, are trapped in the unequal national and global market. Though some have not launched any visible movement for administrative and academic recognition, their everyday acts of defiance and retributions against subjugation and exploitation are no less significant. The organised struggles mostly appear among the relatively large population with some literacy, awareness of Indian democratic process and socioeconomic differentiation. Their struggles invariably centre around land, labour and culture, indicating an outline of tribal philosophy and ideology.

To put it succinctly, despite their apparently localised nature, these struggles have originated within a certain set of grievances. It is not the simple manifestation of alienation but a reflection of the crisis in the political economy. Every struggle conveys the fact that their socioeconomic-political-cultural marginalisation is within the matrix of colonial, neo-colonial and feudal oppression and exploitation.

Incidentally, though various tribal movements insist upon the identity of the corporate groups they represent, there is an unambiguous tendency to stimulate a pan-regional-national identity and civilisation. This suggests that the specific ethnic identity and distinctions among themselves are becoming less significant than their common subjugated existence.

Besides, most tribal movements tend to reject the mainstream philosophy of materialism, individualism and statism for they consider those as weapons of their victimisation. As an alternative they propound their forms of egalitarian and democratic civilisation.

In short, the fact that all tribal movements have more or less similar demands and are located in the same socioeconomic formation and have a shared consciousness of dispossession and indignity indicate the essential unity of all tribal movements and, thus, greater scope for generalisation. This, however, does not mean that surface level diversities are insignificant but are matters of detail. The various existing typologies of tribal movements in terms of political, agrarian, cultural, linguistic, and so on, fail to recognise the overlapping of dimensions in social space and changes in emphasis over time.
The treatment of the movements in North-east India as distinct from the rest of tribal India has perhaps some justification, but only in a very relative sense. Colonial history created artificial boundaries and, thus, several Northeastern nationalities have their counterparts in Myanmar, the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, Tibet and Yunan Provinces of China, Thailand, Laos and Kampuchea. The region was never completely integrated into the political economy of colonialism. Comparatively speaking, their participation in India’s freedom struggle was very limited. Except in Tripura, the tribals constitute an overwhelming majority in the Northeast. Extension of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution has helped in the survival of their institutions, and limited land and forest alienation. Therefore, there are no agrarian and forest based movements (Singh, 1985: 264).

Too much should not be read into the Sixth Schedule model of political and economic autonomy. Unilaterally imposing the colonial law of *res nullius*, that is, which has not been conferred by sovereign belongs to sovereign, and operationalising the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 as amended in 1984, the Indian state has alienated huge areas of land and forest even in the Northeast. It has also enforced the law of *terra nullius* that is land belongs to none in certain parts of the Northeast. Similarly, the reservation of forests, environmental and wildlife projects and no occupancy zones in the international borders cumulatively eroded the survival base of the peoples. Non-tribal traders and refugees have also contributed to the process of resource alienation, although in a much smaller scale than in Central and South India. Indeed all over the Northeast, there are demands for withdrawal of trade license and land allotment permits to non-tribals, removal of the refugees and imposition of an effective check on the influx of foreign nationals, reservation of jobs for locals and, of course, removal of undemocratic acts and military establishments.

We are also told that the dominant form of movements in the Northeast has been political — as if struggles elsewhere are apolitical — with objectives from autonomy to independence, and the means ranging from constitutional agitation to armed insurgency. Except in Arunachal Pradesh, where the Freedom of Religion Act forbids religious conversion, Christianity has provided a strong sense of identity and assertion (Singh, 1985: 265). It seems that there is a deliberate attempt to separate nationality and autonomy struggles from class struggles. This inter connectedness between the two and the specific stage of social revolution are ignored. Ethnic relations and social
division of labour are intertwined. The economy of the Northeast is firmly integrated with the overall economy of the country. Indeed the region heavily depends on the financial subventions of the Centre. Though the movements appear only 'political' to some social scientists, agrarian issues and economic aspirations provide the essential stimulus. The articulation of internal colonialism and neo-colonialism and their repressive methods of subjugation release the human potential for liberation struggles. In short, what is argued here is not that there is no difference between the struggles of the tribal peoples in the Northeast and elsewhere, but to emphasise that the differences are neither absolute nor qualitative.

Furthermore, the belief that the tribal movements are distinct from the non-tribal movements assumes that these movements have some sort of unique complex structure and processes. This is partly misleading and is, in fact, a delusion. It ignores the onslaught of world capitalism, commodification of labour and movement of peoples across borders. The struggles of the tribal peoples can only be understood in terms of their internal divisions and the articulation of the different modes of production within their structures. Ruling classes of both tribals and non-tribals have at once contradictions and alliances. Moreover, the bulk of the Indian tribals live interspersed with non-tribals, with whom, for long, they have had social and production relations. Hence, it is crucial to grasp the tribal struggles as an integral and heterogeneously exploited part of the constantly changing wider political economy. Besides, as the non-tribal toiling peoples of the region frequently join them, the magnification of the division in academic circles amounts to distraction from the political unity and organised struggles of the peoples.

Likewise the view that the tribal movements are normally guided by traditional internal religious and secular elite, Christian missions or a minority of educated elite is dubious and belongs to the status quo of the state. Curiously there is little literature on counter-elite structures. Evidence suggests that the tribes that are more internally differentiated provide greater resistance and their upper stratum — traditional elite or educated class — serve as the rallying points for struggles against the common experienced grievances. Politics is then the concentrated expression of the socioeconomic desires of the peoples. The frequent pronouncements that the non-tribals, their political organisations and the educated tribal middle class indoctrinate the tribal masses to struggle, need to be explored in concrete contexts. But
this certainly is not amenable to any generalisation. Thus the assumption that the tribal movements are essentially rooted in the limited class aspirations of the rising tribal elites needs to be discarded as a general principle. If one treats the people as so gullible then the concerned social history should be rewritten.

Incidentally there is enormous literature on tribal servility, timidity, docility and passivity, indicating that they have remained silent bearers of domination, or at best launched intermittent, spasmodic, sporadic and spontaneous outbursts with little substantive consequence. But the social history and the social context amply demonstrate that the tribal peoples' struggles have so far been numerous and also more striking than even the non-tribal peasant movements. Besides the social horizon of the tribal movements is far wider than the caste linked peasant and labour struggles, for the former encompass agrarian, nationality, ecology, gender and other dimensions within a single realm.

Reluctantly though, in recent years, there is a rising agreement that the tribal movements are worth a special reflection. But unfortunately, most of the struggles are analysed in culturological terms. Despite the permanent and recurrent struggles of so many tribal peoples to preserve their independence, territorial resources and liberty, the mainstream scholarship has preferred to concentrate and magnify the processes of assimilation, acculturation and emulation of the so-called 'great tradition'. Sure enough, this process did take place during certain historical moments, when there were also stories of rejection of cultural hegemony, revitalisation of self in a dynamic way and ethnic insurrections.

Though the sanskritisation process predates colonialism, it gained momentum only after the second half of the nineteenth century. To an extent, it did provide an alternative to colonial domination in the political sense. But the subsequent freedom struggle, state sponsored capitalism, tribal welfare and the democratic system together eroded whatever little strength the sanskritisation process had. Consequently there was a paradigmatic shift.

It is not simply that the acculturation process has slowed down in the recent times. As demonstrated in the Indian censuses the percentage of tribals returning to their indigenous religions has doubled between 1981 and 1991. It is primarily a negation of ethnic mobilisation and assertions of tribal identities. Perhaps a section of the tribal elite may indulge in acculturation at surface levels but as their very survival depends on the non-elite and securing a position equal to the
non-tribals is near impossible, the option left is to return back to the tribal masses, sooner or later. Likewise, in the absence of active political organisations, the emulating process does get facilitated not in terms of socio-ritual mobility but for the unavoidable necessity of adjustment with the non-tribals so as to secure a limited share in the regional power structure. Highlighting vertical movements in ritual status rather than horizontal solidarity movements of socioeconomic and political mobilisations obfuscates understanding of the tribal scenario.

In case the aforesaid is a misadventure, how does one explain the fact that most of the tribal movements strive to preserve, recuperate, revalidate and elaborate customary elements of culture and history? In the context of cultural hegemony, the search to preserve their ways of life and its creative recovery is integral to the struggle for a just social order. These attempts have serious secular dimensions and objectives, and are largely part of the political processes underway. Construction of region-wide cultures indicates that the configuration of the trans-ethnic consciousness is essentially a basis of politics of a different mode of articulation of the national question. In short, the culturological explanations to the contemporary tribal movements are misplaced and overstretched without adequate substance.

For the time being, finally, most often the tribal movements are ascribed to land alienation, indebtedness, bondage and unequal exchanges and are directed against individual landlords, moneylenders, contractors, traders and officials of the forest and revenue departments. Most often such targeting is done without any analysis of their common class interests. False identification of the problem with individual exploiters ultimately contributes to the maintenance of the nature of the state character. Of course, some of the recent struggles, especially those organised by the left political groups, address their struggles against the state rather than against individuals. To them, the conflict is not between the tribes and non-tribes as such but between the ruling classes and subject classes, wherein of course, the tribals being largely subjugated; the struggles should incorporate both ethnic and class conflicts together, as far as possible.

Mention may be made that it is the state that restricts the tribal rights of cultivation, denies usufructuary rights over ancestral forest and water resources, displaces them without their consent and with meagre compensation, and interestingly pays much less than the non-tribal traders of the so-called minor forest produces. Both exploit the tribals
but in conception and practice, the state is the greater criminal than the petty non-tribal traders. The non-tribal exploiters are either creatures of state or secondary to it as oppressors of the tribals. Tribal peoples have lost more land and survival resources through state action than alienation by non-tribal individuals. In fact, the magnitude of the non-tribal affluents alienating the tribal resource base has considerably declined in recent years. None the less, the state has protected, overtly or covertly, the classes that exploit the tribal resources. Not surprisingly, the state's tribal welfare system never intends to harm the exploitative classes in the tribal areas. The disempowerment of the tribal peoples is not the product of violations of rights but rather the result of systemic social process grounded firmly with the general contradictions of the social order.

The state strategies have so devastated the tribal lives that practically any politics that enter into their midst, are forced into struggles. Each and every movement is thus a political struggle, deliberately or otherwise subscribing to an ideology to alter the power dynamics and thereby challenging the state's authority. Accordingly any struggle that hesitates to target the nature of the state and simply focuses on individual exploiters can neither sustain the struggle nor escape from the effective machinery of absorption.

In this context, to presume that the tribal uprisings emerge under conditions of relative deprivation (Gough, 1974: 1393), that is, of deprivation considered outrageous by comparison with the past or with conditions of others in the present, appear incredible. It seems to be oblivious of both the motive forces of struggles and the prevailing near total alienation. Comparison with the past disregards the dynamic character of existence, and comparison with the present order is redundant, for there cannot be comparison between a negation and degrees of positive accomplishments. It is not a question of aspiration to preserve traditional culture nor a share of power by the new elite. An exploitative syndrome can hardly be comprehended within a framework of relative grievances. What about the continuous persecution and physical brutalities? Mere deprivation and dissatisfaction can hardly actualise a movement.

This is no exhaustive critique of the scholarship on tribal movements. It only highlights those poignant issues — perhaps in a somewhat contentious way — so as to provoke further discussion on the subject by more knowledgeable scholars and activists.
The Impetus

The tribal peoples’ struggles are essentially rooted in three interrelated forces, namely the epistemology of individualism, statist ideology and the capitalist model of development. Each one has multiple dimensions but owing to the constraints of space, this section highlights only those aspects which have had a direct bearing on tribal movements in India in recent years.

For the last two centuries, Western philosophy and law have been preoccupied with liberating individuals from all social collectivities. This epistemological individualism has rested on the concept of a direct link between individual and state, without any structure of mediation. The all pervasive imposition of individualism, espousing a specific variety of nation building and the modernisation syndrome has ravaged the existence of the tribal peoples.

The fundamental characteristic of tribal subsistence systems is their organisation by community and the marked tendency for communal control and collective management of survival resources, with due respect to and balanced interaction with nature. A greater whole is reproduced through synergy and collaboration. As capitalism cannot expand into such a matrix of holistic and futuristic epistemology, positivism, universality of truth and linearity of progress are imposed with devastating consequences to tribal peoples, cultures and environment.

In order to alienate land and land based endowments and legalise the subjugation of the tribal peoples, the notion of *res nullius* is introduced, which holds that if the property is not of individual, then in effect it is of the state, that is, not superior but absolute right. The introduction of such a conception has consistently denied the customary corporate rights over land and forest and consequently threatened the survival and social reproduction of large masses of tribal peoples. The following provides a glimpse into the scenario.

1. As no individual exercises exclusive property rights in the bourgeois sense, over village pastures, community forests, hunting places, hill streams, rivulets, sacred groves, and so on, the Indian legal system has derecognised these corporate usufructuary rights of the tribals. At the same time the state has encouraged the affluent sections to personalise the traditional impersonal resources and under the aegis of environmental projects usurped much of these resources. Needless to note the
tribals had freely collected fodder, fuel, medicinal plants, large quantities of food items and marketable commodities from these areas. Indeed these so-called 'minor' forest produce still provide between 30 to 50 per cent of their total income even in the existing very unequal market. Several communities, including the so-called 'primitive groups' are entirely dependent on these corporate resources. The derecognition of land-based resources, which cover between 40 to 80 per cent of the total land in tribal areas, has seriously disturbed the very survival of the large masses of tribal people.

2. In the name of forest management, nearly 5000 forest villages with over 200,000 tribal families have been forcibly removed from remote forests, totally disregarding their right on the land they have been cultivating for several decades. They are only 'temporarily' allowed to cultivate land in forests on the condition that they cannot deny to work for the forest department and forest contractors as and when they are asked, failing which, they are liable to be summarily evicted without compensation. This is a new sort of feudalism created by the democratic state.

3. To ensure individual proprietorship, it is necessary to survey agricultural lands and settle with individuals. But a large part of tribal areas is not yet surveyed and elsewhere the records of rights are either faulty or dated. The cadastral survey and settlement by the usual plain table method, which cannot survey lands located above 10° slope denies the occupancy rights of the tribals on upland resources. A study in Orissa found that not even 10 per cent of the tribal lands are recorded in their favour (India, 1987: 5-6). Approximately between 25 to 40 per cent of agricultural lands of tribals is located above 10° slope. Instead of improving the method of cadastral survey, the state has conveniently denied the traditional possessionary rights of the tribals.

4. In certain tribal regions, not finding any individual owner, the government has made the village, lineage or clan headmen or chief as the real owners of land, who were only customarily responsible for management of the community resources and their effective periodic redistribution. Accordingly, a kind of state sponsored feudalisation is promoted whereby the tribal peasants are demoted to the level of tenants.

5. Agricultural lands, which are not under continuous cultivation, are treated as under illegal occupation. So the communal
shifting land is derecognised. Nearly 12 per cent of the tribals depend on this type of cultivation. Today every shifting cultivator is more afraid of the local corrupt forest and police official than the wild animals.

6. On the so-called development and environmental projects, we will return soon in some detail. But suffice here to mention that the tribals and other toiling masses are always the losers and the gainers are international bureaucratic capital and the rising middle class.

7. Whereas the state is under direct scrutiny in the aforesaid, this one indicates that with the overt and covert connivance of the state machinery, the affluent non-tribals, despite the legal prohibition, contribute to the process of dispossession of tribals under diverse subterfuges. Besides several states (for example, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala) permit the non-tribals to continue to hold onto certain amount of alienated tribal lands.

The aforesaid suggests that alienation of tribal resources by non-tribal affluents is simplistic, as it evades the complex and overwhelming issue of dispossession by the state and its agencies. Let us elaborate a bit on the backlash of development. Based upon anthropocentric premises of mutilation of nature, customary institutions and values, imposition of individualism, statist ideology and reductionist worldview, the development practices have wrecked the physical, cultural and cognitive survival of the large masses of the country, especially tribals, Dalits, minorities, women and children. Development has become a label for plunder and violence.

Agribusiness, plantations, afforestation by monoculture species, refuge settlements, villageification, highway projects, some land reform measures, biosphere reserves, game sanctuaries, national parks and reserved forests have displaced the tribal peoples from their survival bases and sustainable use of the forest resources.

In the past, exploitation of tribal territorial resources was found to be difficult and uneconomic. But the recent rapid technological advancement and unrivalled economic and political strength of world capitalism has favoured invasion and extraction of natural resources from the ecologically fragile territories of the tribal peoples. Thus forced evictions of tribals to make way for mammoth capital intensive development projects have become a distressingly routine and ever-increasing phenomenon. The Land Acquisition Act, 1894, as amended in 1984 is indiscriminately invoked to alienate tribal resources in the
name of public purposes. Not surprisingly, most of these big projects are located in the tribal areas.

Despite intense forestry, mining and industrial activities, the tribals live in juxtaposition with alien capitalist relations and cultures, with traumatic results. Nearly seven million tribals have been displaced by dams, mines, industries, townships and so on, but curiously there is no national policy for their relocation and rehabilitation. In fact, the Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act, 1957, denies compensation to the displaced people. Again space does not permit us to deal with the available nature of compensation market values of private resources, the plight of those not in possession of valid documents, and India's international commitments. But suffice to stress that India happens to be one of the worst countries with regard to the rehabilitation of the displaced, especially with regard to the displaced tribals.

Still some may argue that the massive expenditure on tribal welfare might have compensated the deprivation caused by institutionalisation of individualism, supremacy of the state and capitalist development, but there is nothing to suggest in this regard, including the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The tribal welfare system is primarily a product of their struggles and represents a quid pro quo in exchange for political quiescence.

Turning to the crucial issue of preservation and dynamics of cultural and political identity of the tribal peoples, notwithstanding Nehru's five benevolent principles, the practice has been deeply rooted in cultural prejudices, and the view that their cultures should be assimilated into the mainstream Hindu-Hindi culture is consolidated. This covers languages, customs, cultural practices, religions, politics and management principles, among others. Without elaboration, it may be stated that the existing process of nation building and cultural domination have emaciated the tribal cultural linguistic and local self-rule. Their struggles, thus, are for recognition of collective rights over survival resources and internal self-determination in the legitimate cultural, linguistic and political spheres, as well as a dynamic strategy for sustainable development.

**Some Illustrations**

The prologue of this paper held that the existing typologies on tribal movements are largely misleading, precisely because the descriptive categories are neither exclusive nor permanent. In addition, all the
movements, in the final analysis, are political and hence treatment of political movement as a separate category amounts to a negation of the political strength of all other tribal movements and underestimates the counter violence against the state. Even cultural revitalisation and social mobility movements are basically struggles for a political space. Nonetheless, at a given moment and in a particular socio-political context, certain dimension(s) may receive priority over the rest and that may temporarily indicate the uniqueness.

Whereas in the beginning of the 1980s, several nationality based movements were largely demanding reforms within the given framework of the Indian Constitution, by the end of the 1980s, many more nationality upsurges surfaced, fighting militantly for more federalism, autonomy, self-determination and secession. In this decade, such struggles have become more assertive, inclusive of armed struggles. Greater realisation of the contradictions in the material conditions of life has provided the necessary impetus for organised nationality struggles in certain tribal regions. Tentatively, the conditions that facilitate insurgency in the Northeast India include the following.

1. Trans-border tribal peoples like the Nagas, Chakmas, Mishamis, Mizos, Singphos among others find themselves scattered in several neighbouring countries due to the artificial demarcation of boundaries by the erstwhile coloni al rulers. The ideology of the nation-state and of course nationalism of the power elite entice the scattered peoples to merge into a single union to safeguard their political and cultural autonomy. Also, to an extent, the recent global instruments and assertions of indigenous and tribal peoples for self-determination might have been a contributing factor in some cases.

2. The arbitrary imposition of the colonial concept of *res nullius* that allows the state to appropriate the customary land and land based resources; the siphoning out of the local resources for processing in the rich infrastructural regions; the constant threats of involuntary displacement on account of proposed massive mining, hydel power, environmental and wild life projects; and the influx of large number of outsiders and settlement of refugees without their consent, impress that to defend their material survival with dignity, they ought to have political control over their traditional territory.

3. The state system that treats every militant nationality struggle as essentially one of law and order, and indiscriminately deploys
its repressive machinery, precludes scope for creative political dialogue, let alone to explore alternative avenues of accommodation of their dynamic aspirations. Consequently, the scope for armed insurgencies gets expanded.

Needless to mention that neither the aforesaid is comprehensive nor are the factors independent. The last point, however, needs a little elaboration. There are a large number of militant organisations in the Northeast with the combined objective of separation from the Indian Union and establishment of an egalitarian social order. The last few years have witnessed not only an increase in the number of such militant groups but also an increasing level of coordination among themselves.

The state has responded to these struggles by banning all organisations, deploying military and paramilitary forces to quell the movements at whatever cost, with the support of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, Disturbed Areas Act, Public Security Act, Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, National Security Act and so on. Consequently hundreds of people died in false encounters; thousands tortured in custody; women physically assaulted; houses and crops blazed; people forced into concentrated villages away from their subsistence bases, and much more. In short, political assertions being handled in military terms, the separatist movements are getting consolidated.

In the prevailing context, one tends to support the tribal and indigenous peoples' struggles for self-determination and for their own enlightened development, but there can be substantial differences on the question of viability of autonomy in the proposed carved out states. The emerging global political economy in the last few years has changed so markedly that the so called nation-states are tending to be superfluous. Instead, there is a clear move towards the formation of regional blocks like the European Union which indicate a progressive decline of state boundaries as arenas of prime political action. Moreover, the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation and other multilateral institutions unilaterally dictate the terms and conditions all over the globe and operate through the state structures in the interest of neo-colonialism. To underestimate the struggles in terms of small size of population, territorial spread and multiple ethnic existence may be old fashioned but certainly such a state is easy to be subjugated by imperialism than otherwise. Under the repression of the global forces, the
ability of the small states to fulfill the democratic and progressive rights of their own people will remain limited.

Meanwhile, let there be no illusion that signing of various accords for statehood and autonomous district councils have resolved the national and class aspirations of the tribal peoples. Struggles for separation from the Indian Union continue almost everywhere in the Northeast. The Naga movement that began with India's Independence led to the formation of Nagaland state in 1963, after a lot of sacrifice and prolonged negotiations. Constitutionally it enjoys greater autonomy than any other state of the country and yet, the struggle for an independent Naga country continues undaunted.

Like the Nagas, the Mizos built a territorial identity and fought against official imposition of Assamese. As the Pataskar Commission (1966) did not favour statehood and recommended autonomous councils for hill peoples which the Assam Government declined to entertain, the struggle of the Mizo National Front for separate statehood gained momentum. After years of punitive actions and repression, a peace accord was signed in 1976 which culminated into the formation of a separate state of Mizoland within the Indian Union. That, however, did not mean the end of the nationality struggles for separation.

Similarly the rejection of the States Reorganisation Committee (1953) for the creation of an Eastern Frontier State and Assam Government's decision to treat Assamese as the state language united all hill leaders with the objective of creating a separate state within the framework of the Constitution of India. But unlike the above struggles, the APHLC led struggles were less violent, if not non-violent, which led to the formation of an autonomous state of Meghalaya in 1972, covering the Khasi-Jaintia Hills District and Garo Hills District.

The peace accords in terms of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution do not seem to have satisfied the grievances of the tribal peoples. After over four decades of armed resistance movement of Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad and then Tripura Upajati Juba Samitee against non-tribal alienation of tribal land, influx of refugees, indebtedness, restriction on shifting cultivation and non-recognition of Kag Barak language, in 1984, through the 49th Amendment of the Constitution, the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council was established. The district covers nearly 70 per cent of the total area of the state and 30 per cent of state's population. The council provided for continuance of non-tribal landholders who were settled in the
district before 1971. More than elsewhere in the Northeast, the tribals here are highly structured and for long, have been a part of the capitalist economy, and thus it is worth studying which classes have benefited or otherwise from the Council. Anyway Tripura guerrillas are also relentlessly fighting against the Centre for separation.

Following prolonged struggle in 1993 the Bodoland Autonom­ous Council was negotiated between ABSU, BPAC and the Ass­sam Government. The Council is not covered by any special Article or Schedule of the Constitution. Besides, there is an unresolved jurisdictional problem over a 10 km. stretch belt bordering Bhutan, and limited financial and legal status of the Council. Authorisation of illegal encroachments of lands by non-tribals prior to 1966 is another serious matter of contention. Small wonder the Bodo Security Force, All Bodo Students Union, Bodoland Peoples Party, Bodoland Sate Movement Council, Peoples Democratic Front and others fight for separate Bodoland. The Accord is unlikely to survive without some sort of non-territorial federalism.

More or less the same can be seen in the context of Karbi Anglong Council, Mising Autonomous Council, Lalung Autonomous Council, Rabha Autonomous Council, and North Cachar Council. In sum, the aforesaid suggests that limited legal autonomy does not provide any guarantee for long term peace.

Though there have been several autonomy movements in the middle Indian tribal belt like Bhilistan, Gondwana, Chattisgarh, Telengana, Marathwada, Uttarakhand, Gorkhaland and the Jharkhand movement appears conspicuous. Jharkhand, covering 26 contiguous districts falling in the present day Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal, happens to be the biggest store of minerals, and a centre for steel refining. The consequent deforestation and displacement has created a cheap labour market. Agriculture is now more backward than its status before independence. The different tribals of this region are struggling for long, for a separate state within India. The State Reorganisation Commission (1953) denied the status in terms of their demography and absence of a link language. But implicitly it was the consideration of an adverse effect on the revenue and employment potential of the four states.

Anyway, the Jharkhand movement got radicalised when the agrarian question received prominence. The Left led trade unions of the coal mines and the CPI(ML) supported the issue. The formation of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) in 1973 attracted both tribal and non-tribal
peasantry, artisans, mine workers and unemployed youth. The crucial idea was that liberation of the Jharkhandis was possible only with the liberation of all toiling masses, including non-tribals of the region (Mullick, 1993: 459-62). The Jharkhandi identity and consciousness have become somewhat concretised. But, unfortunately, the inherent fragmentation of the movement and free operationalisation of avenues for cooptation of leadership diminished the scope for achieving their objective. Consequently in Bihar, the Jharkhand Area Autonomous Council was created in 1995 with an assurance of transferring 42 subjects from the state and access to a minimum of a quarter of the annual budget of Bihar. But after over a year, the interim council continues without any election and that too without any financial or other departmental transfer. Small wonder that the Jharkhand Peoples' Party, All Jharkhand Students Union, JMM (Mardi) and others demand dissolution of the Council and fight for statehood.

In the South Gujarat region, another tribal movement for statehood began in 1969 but collapsed soon in the absence of grassroots mobilisation. In the mid-1990s, it was revived under the Gujarat Adijati Vikas Paksh. It is too early to reflect on its strength. Nonetheless the available information suggests that it is inclined to provide a common platform for tribals of Gujarat and Maharashtra, to begin with, and is open to Dalits and concerned leaders of different parliamentary political parties. The movement rotates around land, forest and water resources, protection of tribal culture and self-respect and extension of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution as per the Bhuria Committee recommendation, subject to the formation of a separate state of tribals of western India at the earliest time frame. Indeed since the submission of the Bhuria Committee Report, at a number of places, there is a rising demand for its implementation in the Fifth Schedule Areas.

The demands for separate tribal states in middle India and extension of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to tribal areas are perfectly legitimate and constitutional. There is an urgent need for establishment of another states' reorganisation commission with enlarged terms and conditions. But as the non-tribal toiling masses are also interposed in the limited-contiguous tribal habitat of the central and western India, the strategies of struggles for statehood need careful planning. To avoid unnecessary civil confrontations, perhaps some form of non-territorial federalism, appropriate to the specific context, can be explored.

In the central Indian tribal belt, the most significant and widespread struggle revolve around the issues of land, forest, labours, expropriation
of local corporate resources, usury, bondage, forced displacement, bureaucratic corruption, oppression of women and village or regional autonomy. These struggles are predominantly organised by the left political forces, parliamentary or non-parliamentary, or independent non-party activists owing allegiance to one or the other radical left groups. In addition, to a lesser extent, a few activists of voluntary organisations are also involved in the process. The available space forbids any indulgence in details, and thus to some extent the dynamic trends and limitations are only highlighted.

The radical left movements in tribal areas cover the states of the Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar and Gujarat. They have essentially confined themselves to the conscientisation and mobilisation of the poorest of the poor tribals, Dalits and other most exploited sections whose inarticulacy is axiomatic to urban intellectuals. The objective is to explore a political space in the decision making process of the tribal peoples as conscious subjects of their own history through militant or semi-militant struggles.

The achievement from the long drawn tribal peoples radical struggle include that the obnoxious semi-feudal relations, their extra-economic coercive methods of surplus appropriation, usury and bondage, the right of the landlords to decide the village disputes and the like have been irretrievably broken or at least, substantively reduced. A large area of forest and waste land is taken up for regular cultivation, and illegal extractions of the local bureaucracy have been controlled. Through struggle, the tribals have regained several times more land than the state sponsored restoration of alienated land, redistribution of ceiling surplus land and allotment of waste land for cultivation to the tribal poor. Wages of agricultural labourers, farm servants, and forest labourers have gone up between six to eight times. Besides in certain active regions, they are entitled for medical reimbursements for injuries during work, additional wages for heavier workload like sugarcane harvesting and even paid leave for twenty days in a year. The mine and industrial workers too did receive certain material benefits. Likewise the price of forest produce, especially beedi leaf has increased five to six times. Moreover, the tribals of the region now generally believe that without continuous struggle, their democratic survival and self-development remain threatened. The scenario in most other areas mentioned above are more or less similar.

Not surprisingly the ruling classes and the state institutions and agents work hard to undermine the gains through peoples' struggles.
Implicitly the landlords are allowed to repossess the tribal alienated lands, in fact even through new legislations, pay lower wages than the minimum wages in official programmes like the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, pay much less than the private traders, on the collection of minor forest produce, allow the plantation management to raise their own private armed forces like in the Assam tea gardens and is intolerant of even minimum democratic dissent; the murder of Shankar Guha Niyogi illustrates the extent of intolerance.

Special efforts are made to draw women into both mass organisations and movements and also armed struggles. Participation in the movements, valiant resistances against anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces as well as the blatant ills of patriarchy, genuine respect in the organisation previously unknown to them, the real experience of the class power during struggle, material success due to the struggle plus continuous political education, galvanised the political consciousness of the tribal and Dalit women. In sum, the class struggles in the tribal areas brought the revolutionary potentiality of women that was dormant for centuries.

As a consequence of large participation of women, the disparity in wages on the basis of sex has narrowed down, a relatively fair remuneration for minor forest resource collections has been achieved, physical atrocities committed by aliens have declined and consequently there are fewer cases of rape, molestation and so on. Dowry and harassment of wives have reduced considerably; alcohol abuse and domestic violence too has dwindled for fear of the threat of public humiliation and peoples' courts, the accusations of witchcraft waned and so on.

The tribal movements are seriously concerned with the increasing ecological crisis. But they are critical of the glorification of conservation and the treatment of environment as a non-political generalised issue. Their position is that as the destruction of the environment is linked to the nature of ruling classes and the oppressive development paradigm, any environmental strategy should first locate the class basis of the crisis and struggle for abolishing that class. Otherwise it would simply diffuse the peoples struggles against imperialism and capitalism. In sum, the attempt is to consider ecological issues in terms of class politics.

This section seems to illustrate at least the following propositions.

1. The current tribal movements can neither be understood in terms of the colonial past nor sociocultural mobility towards
the twice-born cultural complex but only through the matrix of neo-colonialism, internal colonialism, historical prerogatives of tribal peoples and eco-predatory global politics. •

2. All tribal movements, including class and gender, are intrinsically associated with the ethnic/nationality question, which in fact provide the internal strength, at least in the initial stage. The ethnic contradictions are not necessarily products of false consciousness but have bearings on the material bases. For long, Marxist scholarship has recognised that the superstructures have a material existence and that as such, they have a fundamental role in the constitution of people's subjectivity (Althusser, 1971). It is the contradictory consciousness of the masses that potentially act as counter-hegemonies to that of the ruling class culture. At the same time a pure ethnic movement, in isolation of class, gender and ecology, may survive for a while, but eventual absorption into the general structure of politics cannot be ruled out. Hence every revolutionary movement must judiciously incorporate the dimensions of ethnicity with class and gender in a single matrix (Pathy, 1988: 198-99).

3. Despite the growth of internal structuration and known inherent heterogeneity, common grievances and aspirations provide the basis for unity with other tribes and non-tribal masses and thereby, consolidate regional loyalties and consciousness. The intra-tribal differences get undermined, inter-tribal unity is built through the process of syncretism and commonalities, and the non-tribal oppressed tend to join the movements. Indeed the strength of the movement is somewhat determined by the effective participation of the regional non-tribal oppressed and the women.

4. The movements which incorporate in the programme, the chief demand that assumes maximum benefit to the largest number of people in a particular region, at the immediate instant ensure the largest active participation. The mixed class-composition and inherent conflicting interests with regard to farm wage or seizure of land appear natural, but largely when the state is not openly the target. Hence the debate around which class of the peasantry is more revolutionary and in what context (Dhanagare, 1983; Mukherjee, 1978) needs re-evaluation and updating.

5. Not only are the tribals more assertive than the non-tribal peasants, but their movements almost always transcend the
limits of Gandhian non-violence and bourgeois formulae of negotiations, and opt for the path of violent revolutionary class and nationality struggles. Their relatively cohesive life, limited internal contradictions and extensive alien exploitation contribute to the specificity.

6. Most tribal movements, especially those led by the left, consciously struggle against the path of development adopted by the Indian state, which has benefited the imperialist countries and local comprador class subservient to them and preserved the decadent rule of the feudal lords.

7. The strategies of divide and rule, distribution of patronage, mediation structure, intimidation, concentration camps, torture, fake encounters and brutal mass repressions have either collapsed or become redundant. It is high time that the state found other responsible strategies along with the victims in a democratic way.

By Way of Summation

Paradoxically the formation of modern states in the recent decades has led to a corresponding marginalisation of the tribal and indigenous peoples. Every struggle of the tribal peoples, even for cultural and administrative autonomy has been denounced as terrorist and secessionist, and accordingly repressed. But the struggles of the tribal peoples are essentially anti-feudal and anti-imperialist to achieve some form of collective internal self-determination that would provide an interactive structure from a position of strength to negotiate with the larger political system. Limiting the power of the state and a genuine decentralisation and dispersion of the state in favour of the basic socioeconomic and ethnic collectives on the principle of equity and efficiency is, of course, the historical imperative.

In effect, most movements are directed towards recuperating their inalienable traditional rights to control, use and manage their ancestral land, land based resources including flora and fauna, water, and sub-soil endowments in their own territories. They also demand the right to defend and use their languages, customs, laws and authority in the management of their affairs. In addition, there is the urge for cessation of subtle forms of discrimination, and imposition of any alien model of development without their informed consent. These objectives are perfectly within the purview of Indian democratic constitution.

In lieu of the right of secession, most tribal movements in India seek internal self-determination, that is a set of extensive grant of liberty
within the state system. This, of course, means that in the event of conflicts, the local laws have precedence over the laws made by others, elsewhere. Whereas autonomy operates by grant and thus not absolute right, it does impose responsibility on individuals to respect the community, transborder interaction and to follow the internal human rights standards. The right to select one's own government or an ongoing say in the choice of its political system without external interferences, and to pursue their own political, economic, social and cultural development constitute the scope of internal self-determination (Cassese, 1979: 138; Pomerance, 1982: 310). Certainly this would act as a pacifier and to a great extent avoid secession.

It is high time to have another round of states reorganisation and grant the status of statehood to those tribal regions which are marked by specificity and tenacity of identity and do not have any major adverse impact on other peoples, and are of course apparently viable. When the tribals are dispersed over several areas, some kind of participatory framework of multilayered non-territorial federalism can be worked out. The original Sixth Schedule of the Constitution provides the broad guidelines of self-management and sustainable self-development. This can be improved by strengthening the democratic content and proper devolution of political, legal and executive power.

The aforesaid can only be meaningful through political activism of the system, and not simply of the victims of the process. In the ultimate analysis, the alternative development paradigm must be situated in the decisive struggles against imperialism and domestic reactionary forces. The resultant scenario would be the emergence of multiple coexisting civilisations. Tomorrow will judge us.

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Tribal Religions of India. Contemporary tribal communities have a great variety and complexity in their religious beliefs and practices. However, they share one characteristic which binds them "by common understanding as to the ultimate nature and purpose of life" (Redfield, R, The Primitive World and Its Transformations, Ithaca, Ill., 1953, p. 12). This ultimate purpose is "the creation of a meaningful order through imitation of the celestial model, transmitted by myths and celebrated in rituals" (Kitagawa, Joseph M., Religions of the East, Philadelphia, 1968). The tribal memoir, Bad Indians by Deborah Miranda is an intricately written body of work that recounts the social and historical story of an entire peoples. The memoir's use of several different mediums assists in exposing all aspects of Indian life including periods of subjugation through missionization and secularization. The period labeled as "Reinvention" focuses deeply on the wave of immense interest in the study of Indian culture by white men. Miranda includes in this period a section: Read More. Recent papers in Indian tribal art and culture. Papers. People. The Tribal and its Portrayal: A Comparative Study of Gopinath Mohanty's Paraja and Kamala Markandaya's The Coffer Dams. India is the amalgamation of various customs, religions, rituals, lifestyles, languages and people. The literature of the country also emphasizes this aspect of diversity and struggles of the survival of all these classes of people. The more. India is the amalgamation of various customs, religions, rituals, lifestyles, languages and people. The literature of the country also emphasizes this aspect of diversity and struggles of the survival of all these classes of people. The more. 

15 Guha, Ramachandra, and Gadgil, M. (1989). About 104 million people in India are members of Scheduled Tribes, which accounts for 8.6% of India's population (according to the 2011 census). In the census of India from 1871 to 1941, tribals have been counted in different religions from other religions, 1871 (other religion), 1881 (Aboriginal), 1891 (forest tribe), 1901 (animist), 1911 (Animist), 1921 (Primitive), 1931 (Tribal religion), 1941 (tribes), However, since the census of 1951, the tribal population has been stopped separately. Many Tribal revolts in contemporary India: the Naxalite conflict. British influence and tribal revolt in Bastar. Tribal revolt in contemporary Bastar: the rise of the Naxalites. Conclusion. These decisions in Bastar led to the rise of the contemporary Naxalite insurgency, which is only the latest incarnation of tribal unrest in the region. The case of Bastar, therefore, reaffirms the central role of British colonialism in producing tribal conflict in India by showcasing its effects even in areas that never formally came under the ambit of direct rule. Tribes of India: The Struggle for Survival, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 34. 15 Guha, Ramachandra, and Gadgil, M. (1989).