Tribal Movements: Resistance to Resurgence

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The paper explores the terms of discourse of present tribal movements, focusing on the emergence of new left formations. The new realms of action articulated by these movements include a reaffirmation of identity, the struggle to recapture control over resources, a rethinking of the political domain and a redefinition of development. The notions of development, nation building and human (individual) rights have been the prime factors in the progressive destruction of the survival systems of tribal peoples. The emerging perspectives within tribal movements signal a shift from resistance to resurgence, towards ethno-development.

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Exploring the Terrain

Myriads of open cooking fires lighting up the pervading darkness and gloom of a large migrant labour camp in the open fields....

This graphic picture, on the one hand, is a fairly factual representation of the situation of the tribal people in India today, evicted from their traditional homelands by the juggernaut of the state and pushed to the brink of survival as homeless refugees. On the other hand, it is a fairly accurate figurative representation of the state of the tribal movements which are impossible to dismiss like so many bush fires.

As tribal people rise up to struggle and fight against repression and resist cooption, their acts of heroic resistance serve to highlight the inhuman conditions of the tribal peoples: a cumulative effect of state policy, constructive marginalisation, abetted subjugation and acquiesced genocide. In some struggles, they are there as people in the forefront, in others they form an important part of and are in the leadership of wider formations of workers, displaced persons, the landless and migrant labour. Some tribal struggles are led by non-party left formations, some by political party fronts, while in others
issue based mass organisations or voluntary agencies. The rich variety of tribal struggles reflects the variations in material conditions, modes of production, social formations, levels of internal and external articulation, mass base and their apparent localised character. This does not lend itself to easy found categories. Like peasant movements, the tribal movements at this state of social formation are bound to remain local, limited and restricted to a dominant tribe or a group of tribes; though in the past decade, we are already beginning to see nation-wide tribal movements emerging. The underlying substratum of these struggles and the similarity of the demands show that these struggles are located in a near same socioeconomic and political base; reflect a shared consciousness of pauperisation, alienation and indignity; and indicate all the tell-tale signs of growing economic and political marginalisation within the matrix of neo-colonialism coupled with feudal oppression, thereby pointing towards the essential unity of all tribal movements.

Till 1887, the main aim of British colonial rule was conquest, with a strong military thrust into resistance areas including the forest depths, the hill sides and hill tops. In the name of good governance, tribal areas were opened up to civil and military officials. Under their mantle, contractors, traders, alcohol vendors and timber merchants entered these areas and with the tacit acquiescence of the rulers, forced the tribals into indebtedness, alienated their lands, looted the environment and pushed them into slavery, while forest legislation made them intruders in their own home. Hence, during colonial rule, the state abetted internal colonisation of tribal areas by mainstream Indians to assist in the task of colonial consolidation. The outsider non-tribals entered primarily to satisfy the 'non-sovereign' requirements of the colonial state, though there is ample evidence to show that these 'piggy back colonisers' assisted the colonists in the discharge of their sovereign functions. Some continued the colonial traditions well into the post-colonial era. In the Kalrayan Hills of Tamil Nadu, for example, the Indian tricolour was hoisted for the first time only in the early eighties.

It is not that the tribal people took the intrusion quietly, silently suffered domination through the ages, and have revolted only when the situation has become unbearable, that little long term systemic change was achieved clearly begs the question. The same can be said of the simplistic classification of tribal movements as issue-based and confined to land alienation, exploitation by money-lenders and landlords,
contractors, traders and officials, indebtedness and bondage. Unfortunately, such classification fails to analyse common class interests of the exploitative sections, firmly entrenched in the Indian state and its political economy. Simplistic descriptions also fail to note that an underlying, but sometimes not so specifically articulated, theme of most tribal movements is a rejection of the mainstream philosophy of materialism, individualism and statism, the weapons of their own victimisation and subjugation and an exploration of alternative forms of egalitarian and democratic civilisations rooted in their culture and ethos. This explains why movements strive to preserve, recuperate, emancipate and revalidate culture and history. History, whether by default or design, tends to gloss over the fact that tribal struggles have been far more numerous, distinct and militant than other peasant movements, and by drawing agrarian, ecology, gender and nationality dimensions into a 'confrontation' was the quintessence of the situation in tribal areas after the rise of the 'state' as a formal political and administrative authority. While the people in the rest of the country adjusted to the rule of the 'conquerors' and found survival spaces under the new regime, the tribal people, living in a political economy and system of governance, integrally and uniquely their own, saw the imposition by the formal state as an act of subjugation, and met it with formidable resistance. Right from 1798 to 1947, tribals fought the British, refused to surrender and forced the British to reckon with their spirit of freedom. Kanhu Santhal, Birsa Munda, Jatra Bhagat, Laxman Naik, Tantya Bhil, Bhagoji Naik, Kuvar Vasava, Rupa Naik, Thamal Dora, Ambul Reddi are a few of the thousands of tribals who entered the battlefield. Revolts rose with unfailing regularity and were suppressed with treachery, brute force, tact, cooption and some reforms. But the uprisings forced the British to admit the over-arching power of the traditional forms of governance and decided to recognise them by special arrangements, a fine example being the Wilkinson Rules which recognise the Munda-Manki system of governance in the Kolhan region of Jharkhand. The edge of the confrontation was somewhat blunted, no doubt, but the seeds of discord remained, as slow and crafty intrusion into their habitat continued and the spirit of self-rule was really not honoured, in spite of endless pronouncements and regulations galore.

In 1947, two major tribal movements in Telengana and Talasari were at their height. Ironically, one of the first decisions of the Indian Government after Independence was to send the armed forces to quell
their struggles. On the transfer of power, the tribal people felt that having driven out the colonisers, they would be able to enjoy Swaraj which meant not only freedom from British rule, but also freedom from the oppression of the *dikus* (outsiders), money-lenders, zamindars and feudal overlords. The agrarian issues which excited them were elimination of *begar* or *veth* (compulsory free labour), *rasad* or *magan* (free supply of provisions for visiting officers) and exactions other than *abwab* (rent). *Ram Rajya* was interpreted as a restoration of the tribal world of primitive freedom, the golden age of the race, memories of which had survived. Freedom meant restoration of agrarian and forest rights. Paradoxically, the five decades since 1947 have marginalised the tribal people in a manner hitherto unknown. Rights over ancestral forests and water resources are denied; traditional forms of forest use are delegitimised and replaced, favouring powerful political and economic sections; state sponsored development processes reduce them to ecological refugees (India, 1990a; Kanchan, 1990; Kothari, 1993; Rego, 1994); modernisation and urbanisation, an integral part of the same paradigm, destroys the ethos, culture, spirituality and way of life of a people; planned population transfer reduces them to a minority in their own environs and suppresses their culture, language, tradition and history and exploits them even more than the private traders, often in the name of protection. Tribals have lost more land and survival resources through state action than through alienation by non-tribals.

Tribal struggles, therefore, are essentially rooted in resistance to three inter-related forces, namely the logic of individualism, modern statist ideology and the capitalist mode of development. While during colonial rule, the state aided and abetted colonisation by outsiders, in post-Independence India, the colonisation of tribal territory is directly a part of state policy. The state protects the colonisers overtly, as in the recent amendment to the Restoration of Tribal Lands Act in Kerala indicates, while it is covert in other states. Transfer of tribal resources takes place overtly for mining or covertly as in the Nagarhole National Park, where tribals are forced to vacate ancestral homelands, surrender traditional rights of access and ritual practices (Centre for Science and the Environment, 1982), while the Taj Group builds a luxury resort in the park. Not surprisingly, the tribal welfare system and its latest avatar, the Tribal Sub Plan, does not intend to harm the exploitative classes but tries to absorb the so-called 'educated' tribals into the mainstream of development. It coopts a few to strengthen the structure
of mediation, to facilitate the articulation of capitalism, and often is a **quid pro quo** in exchange for political quiescence, a method of corrupting the soul of a people, as can be vividly seen with the development process in the Northeast.

Notwithstanding lofty principles and declarations, state practice is deeply rooted in cultural prejudice with the view that tribal cultures should be assimilated into the mainstream of Hindi-Hindu culture. One example is the education system where the National Council for Educational Research and Training study (India, 1990b) reveals 'nothing has changed, the content of the teaching material is not only derogatory to the tribal people, contains no link to their culture and ethos but continuously portrays them in a subservient position and subverts their culture and ethos'. To state it honestly, the existing processes of nation building and cultural domination are destroying tribal culture, languages and local self-rule (India, 1960; Vidyarthi, 1972). The Governor, who is enjoined by the Constitution to report annually on the state of tribal areas, has remained a defaulter for years together (Sinha, 1993).

The situation prevailing in tribal India can be best described, *mutatis mutandis*, as one approximating internal colonisation within the matrix of neo-colonialism, now accelerated by the process of liberalisation and the new economic policy which will only worsen conditions approximating to cultural genocide. Therefore, to understand the internal dynamics of tribal movements, the challenges before them and the nascent shift of movements from resistance to resurgence, we begin by exploring the terms of the discourse.

**Terms of Discourse**

One can start exploring the terms of discourse of tribal movements, from a static point of view of the present, in which case the content of the tribal movement remains more or less the same as it was during colonial rule, the only difference being in the formations, ideological overtones, locus of the movement, dynamics and consequences (Paul Madan, 1989). Within these contours, it can be safely assumed that when contradictions worsen, the forms, bases and structure of protests take shape based on the social conditions. Struggles become vigorous and sharp when discontent is high and the political system allows space for legitimate mobilisation to ventilate popular grievances. In both colonial and post-colonial periods, tribal uprisings erupted under conditions of relative deprivation and socioeconomic oppression. These
uprisings sought and achieved a measure of relief and some restructuring of socioeconomic relations. Hence, within such praxis, the movements and their content continue to be conditioned by the inevitable colonial legacy of exploitation as well as a post-colonial policy of retaining the colonial structure and praxis, albeit in a covert form, couched in different phraseology, which fosters unequal socioeconomic development of peoples and regions. Under such conditions, movements can never determine their own agenda. They are forced to be retroactive, to resist, to recover lost ground, and at times of repression, to survive with no time to recuperate.

This all-pervasive reality appeared to be the fait accompli for tribal movements; tactics changed in form and content, but the strategy remained the same. As a result, politics evaded the common tribal who continued to be alienated in the social and political sphere, even while he/she fought alienation in the economic sphere. The critique of alienation of the tribal men and women in the political process was the most important factor that influenced the decisions of the many political activists entering tribal areas, particularly in the early seventies. Though expressed in different ways, the major agenda was to involve tribal men and women in the processes of articulation, assertion and action as conscious subjects of their own history and to relocate them centrestage within the movement, while the movement itself would attempt to bring their struggles to the centre of the political process. Efforts have been made to draw women both into mass organisations and struggles. The experience of their power during struggle and the ongoing political education has galvanised the political consciousness of tribal women. Women have won grudging respect in the organisations through their valiant resistance, as struggles brought out their revolutionary potential that lay dormant for centuries; though one cannot say with the same confidence that it has demolished the shackles of patriarchy.

While the ongoing oppression and exploitation drew the tribals to the organisations, the reawakening of the history of resistance retained largely in oral traditions; revival of non-materialistic, non-accumulative traditions; strengthening the subaltern through symbolic traditions of non-collaboration with the state; revival of self-governance; building on community cohesiveness; and the retention of traditions of cooperation and relative equality allowed the creation of a new dynamic form of struggle. By taking up issues directly concerning the tribals and building up participatory, non-hierarchical, militant
struggle-centred organisations, the new left formations emerged as a significant social force (Dhanagre, 1988).

The political significance of these struggles is in their sustained challenge of the unquestioned authority of the Indian Government and confrontation with the self-abrogated right of the ruling elites to articulate their class interest as the common interest of the nation. The movements, through a symbolic return to people's existential space, put forward the ethics of survival in sustenance-coexistence and openness rather than the aggression-domination-appropriation-accumulation-expansion-growth-defficiency orientation of the developmental paradigm. Hence, the movements consciously refuse to act as pressure groups lobbying for share of rewards awarded by the development process. The people are challenged to consciously redefine the entire matrix of development and progress, survival and identity, well-being and advancement in concretely experienced forms. The movements try to pose alternative ways of achieving equity, equality, democracy, autonomy and identity. While challenging the indicators of growth, the movements establish, in their organisational praxis, the right to dignity of all life forms, sustainability and equality as new parameters of development. The movements seek to liberate people from the epistemology of 'pseudo' modernity, to fight power relations that construct a picture of a people as 'backward' or primitive, or areas as 'under-developed'. Hence the movements, while resisting the dominant politics of knowledge, strive to provide the space and possibilities to redefine the terms of struggle praxis.

Many tribal movements are seriously concerned about the growing ecological crisis. Convinced that the destruction of the environment is intimately linked to the development paradigm which glorifies profits without questioning the means, and renders the environment subservient to the interests of the ruling elites, the tribal people posit the integrity of the environment and their rights as people of forests to preserve and protect the material basis of life, livelihood and ethos. They see environmental preservation as a basic part of their politics. Based on their experience of struggle, the new movements reject the role of the state as the guardian of marginalised groups and reaffirm the role of struggle as their real bulwark against the state. These movements have shifted the emphasis from the capture of state power in a rigid formalistic sense, to an assertion of the right to govern. Many have re-established the traditional forms of self-governance, albeit with critical interventions to make them more gender just. They,
therefore, take governance back to the public domain, that is, of the people, in which they are the principal actors, an autonomous domain whose existence and raison de etre remains with the masses, and whose idiom, norms and values liberate its citizens rather than subordinate (Guha and Spivak, 1988). Therefore, in their praxis, the organisations explore participatory, non-hierarchical, non-dominating social spaces, decentralised forms of decision making and non-differentiated public spheres. Committed to economic, social and political transformation, these movements nevertheless, posit the central role of expanding spaces that enhance the creation of meaning. Hence the movements try to establish a live link between the economic, social and political problematic within an overarching cultural field and even in its economic, political and cultural struggles, the movement continues to assert that it will not surrender the struggles for meaning in everyday life.²³

In their effort to build on people's sense of history and the historicity of their interventions, the movements regenerate and rearticulate the existing knowledge of the people as valid systems. The tribals in struggle become the central loci, continuously recreating and regenerating subjugated knowledge. Through their struggle they establish their own subjective space to reassert knowledge that reflects their objective autonomy and identity. In re-awakening the consciousness of the past, the movements revitalise subjugated knowledge rendered obsolete by the imposition of dominant knowledge systems and strive to make that knowledge relevant in the contemporary struggle. In other words, the history of struggle, personal and collective, informs their system of thinking and vice versa. The emerging consciousness expresses the tribals' desire to conquer not only political and economic autonomy, but also the power to define themselves, their aspirations and the development process (Parjauli, 1991).

The tension between the modern state and these tribal movements, therefore, can best be characterised as a struggle for hegemony between the dominant paradigm and the alternative peoples' paradigm. When the Indian Government resorts to coercion and cooption to generate consent for its policies, the struggle tries to counter this hegemony by the dual strategy of collaboration and resistance. Hence, the new movements explore diverse forms of struggle and reconstruction continuously seeking new forms of solidarity and widening the base of intervention, expanding cultural and political spaces, creating new institutions of thought and action, evolving new structures and
networks of relations, moving in various dimensions of citizen relationships, creating parallel networks of power, seeking greater autonomy from the state and conventional political parties (Kothari, 1993). The new movements expand the cultural and political terrain by merging with larger networks of thought and action. The movements are continuously articulating new realms of concerted decisive action. These realms will form the central exploration of this paper.

Reaffirming the Tribal Self

Notwithstanding Nehru's policy of Panchsheel, guaranteeing preservation and promotion of tribal identities and cultures, the ambition of building and consolidating a culturally homogeneous political entity clearly implied elimination, absorption or integration of other cultures into the 'mainstream'. This process of consolidation and integration, described as 'sanskritisation' in the Indian context, created within tribal societies, structures which were in conformity with the structures that colonialism created in Indian society as a whole (Roy Burman, 1971) and succeeded in creating elite groups in tribal societies which were internally alienated and externally frustrated (Roy Burman, 1979). The consolidation of 'capitalism' required 'liberating the individual' from the shackles of 'all social collectivities'. This requirement of capitalism found its expression in the emergence of a modern bourgeois democratic state, guaranteeing the autonomy of each individual as a private right, removing all structures of mediation between itself and the individual. The community had no place in this scheme.

In post-colonial India, therefore, the process of nation building, which replicated the European model and the modernisation syndrome, were at essential variance with the corporate or communal psyche of the tribal systems. The triumvirate of nation building, consolidation of capitalism and the bourgeois democratic system all perceived the tribal system, which is based on premises at total variance to theirs, as a major hurdle to their expansion. Consolidation of this formulation of the state required imposition of a 'formal system of administration' on the traditional community forms of social management', and strengthening the supreme autonomy of the individual and postulating a linear model of progress in which the modern state was placed at a higher state of evolution, while the tribals and their civilisations became 'backward' or primitive. The tribal people, though traumatised by negative identity, have preserved parts of their identity through their language, culture, conscious knowledge of
shared history and claims of first occupancy of the territories, values of kinship and institutional reciprocity and limited internal structura-
tion. While modernisation, which decrees that all pre-industrial forms of economic organisation must necessarily disappear, has wrecked the subsistence economies of the tribals, the formation of a modern na-
tion-state by elimination or absorption of smaller or weaker cultural entities and outpourings of national myths, national language, and 'common culture' and identity has severely threatened the existence of tribal people as viable cultural entities. This may be called ethno-
cide. The first challenging realm before any tribal movement, there­fore, is the reaffirming of the political and social self of the tribal in struggle.

While Marx in the German ideology talked about the transformative effects of the revolution on the self, the movements speak of the revolu­tionairy effects of transforming the self both as the cause and effect of struggle. I am therefore I struggle, I struggle therefore I become'. The root of this theme of being and becoming, no doubt, lies in negating alienation but has also emerged from a critique of economism, where things become the basis for selfhood. It is a negation of the logic underlying capitalism which equates quality of human life with quantity of material possessions, an assertion that the goal of struggle is to build more integrated human beings and to enhance the quality of human life; a stress on struggle praxis as the unfolding of latent human strengths and a belief that the self-image is a major factor in determining behaviour.

In terms of political mobilisation, the objective is to explore the psychological ramifications of colonial domination and the emascula-
tion of the mind through reification by the oppressor; to explore forms of psychological equality, and critically examine the political implications of culture, the role of sub cultures, the radical potential of fashioning and affirming identity and its ability to confront oppression simultaneously as an individually experienced and collectively organ-
ised phenomenon.

The focus on identity is effective in empowering when identity politics are construed as the affirmation of the experiences, dignity and rights of historically marginalised people; claiming an identity they are taught to despise and building on the latent strengths of the individual and collective identities in a direct confrontation with the individuals and institutions that have supported or tolerated these forms of discrimination, hatred and exclusion. The basic aim is to reclaim history and identity from what must be called the cultural
terrorism of the oppressor, the struggle for the right to create their own terms to define themselves (Parulekar, 1960) and their relationship to society and to have these terms recognised. This meant that some organisations invested energies into building and sustaining initiatives that promoted alternative views of history, culture and identity.

A central element in reaffirming identity is definitely language and script. Tribal languages have been suppressed either by design or by default, and Constitutional guarantees thrown to the wind. The efforts to evolve a script and build up an indigenous literature in tribal languages could be seen as part of an overall movement to define and assert tribal identity. Looking at tribal movements, particularly among the Santhals, Hos, Mudas, Gonds and the tribes of the Northeast, the identification with language, revival of the script, creation of educational material and the running of schools by volunteers have been an essential part of their movement for identity. The first stems from a recognition that mother tongues are not merely speech varieties but are languages that provide social and emotional identity to individuals, express the essence of their cultures and gives them a sense of rootedness.\textsuperscript{26} Pattanayak (1990) says strongly, 'To control and dictate the access to language is a positive suppression of human talent. It deprives individuals and society of free choices, curbs creativity and innovation and restricts participation or potential participation in multiple spheres of human interaction, thus imposing limits of freedom.'\textsuperscript{27}

But in the midst of this pursuit and expression of identity, the lurking danger is that the notion of solidarity, the understanding of one's central place as a toiler which exhorts all exploited to organise against oppression, domination and exclusion is sometimes sidetracked. Further, the tendency to view self-exploration as a political process in itself carries with it the dangers of balkanisation, while organising around one's own oppression frequently works to reinforce barriers to communication and coalition among diverse groups. The reaffirmation of identity is not a facile task. Can harking back to an idealised romanticised past and identity be in conformity with the tribal in the twentieth century? Can major aspects of this communitarian identity survive with the 'autonomy of the individual' of the modern system? Can relative equality survive in a highly economically and socially stratified society? Can women's status survive with private property? Can the realm of 'community management' find a place in the nation-state? Can non-acquisitiveness hold out when things are the measure of humans? Can ecological equity and symbiosis survive outside the
forest and 'inside the private property of the state'? Where is the dividing line between reaffirming identity and communalism? These are some of the issues of identity that the tribal movements are grappling with today. The challenge before tribal organisations is to be able to reaffirm the positive aspects of tribal identity, when the material basis of the tribal identity has been, in many ways, irretrievably lost.

**Recapturing Control over Resources**

Almost 90 per cent of tribals still live in forest tracts. As forest dwellers, their life support systems have been intricately linked with the forest as the 'anna', 'aarogya' and 'aasra' (food, well-being and security), the basis of their symbiotic relationship and their physical and cultural survival. The fundamental characteristic of the tribal sustenance systems is the organisation by community and a marked tendency for communal control and collective management of survival resources with due respect to and balanced interaction with nature. Two corollaries stem from this one — the right to survival space for all creatures and, within that matrix, the extension of social and political space and freedom for women and children. The second is an honest, non-exploitative relationship with nature and by extension to other human beings. Through the resultant synergy, a greater whole is reproduced.

In order to alienate land and land based endowments, tribal land had to be freed from the supervision of the collectivity (community ownership and control). The state had to demolish customary, usufructuary rights of all the members of the body corporate. It has taken over the forests as the new supreme body corporate. The concepts that were introduced were: the concept of *res nullius* with the right of the sovereign being not only superior but an absolute right over lands that have not been conferred; the creation of individual rights to land by state conferred title; the conferment of titles in the names of the male heads; and the alienability of such titles. The logical consequence of such a process was the subjugation of the woman, and then the subjugation of the tribal people. The struggle to retake the forests has been a central theme of all tribal uprisings, both in colonial and post-colonial India. The forms of the recapturing of the forests have ranged from direct guerilla war in the forests, to destroying departmental plantations, to reaffirming control. In modern times, one classical example is the 'Sal' v/s 'Sagwan' Campaign in the Jharkhand movement wherein sagwan (teak) as the symbol of continual colonisation
of the forest was destroyed, while sal, the symbol of tribal resurgence was preserved (Sengupta, 1982). Modern day versions, in other tribal areas, are the 'Jungle Bachao Manav Bacho' campaign and the 'Jungle Bachao Adivasi Bachao' campaign.

Land and forest as the means of social and cultural reproduction is also the medium that ensures transfer of culture, ethos and philosophy. The continuing resistance of the tribals to state control has been no more than a holding operation. As commercial forestry continues its apparently unstoppable march, many forest dependent communities have been forced to accept the new systems of forest working to accept a subordinate place in the new (state) 'capitalist' system of production.

The struggle to recapture control over resources has to be placed within the ecological crisis confronting the body politic. Contradictions within the ruling elites allow patently conflictive positions to coexist. Eviction of tribals from the forest to ensure its ecological survival is one end of the spectrum. At the other end, the state seeks to hand over large tracts to industry for 'sustainable scientific commercial forestry'. Recolonisation of the forests is once again on the anvil.

Based on anthropocentric premises of mutilation of nature, customary institutions and values, imposition of individualism, statist ideology and reductionist world view, development practices have wreaked havoc with the cultural and cognitive survival of tribal peoples." After forcibly evicting the tribals, the colonial state handed over these common property resources to timber contractors to pillage and loot. Corruption and waste are inherent in the contractor system. Policy documents have acknowledged that contractors exploit both forests and their labour and the need to replace contractors by forest labour cooperatives has been stressed by all the five year plan documents. Yet the states have remained strangely unmoved and retained the contractor system (Gupta, Banerji and Guleria, 1981; India, 1986; 1990a).

It is an admitted fact that forests have been destroyed. The real reasons for degradation of forests, however, are safely hidden under the Official Secrets Act which show the Forest Department (FD) and its offspring, the Forest Development Corporations by their own admission to be major culprits. They admit to be responsible for the destruction of natural forests and degradation of natural environment. Today the FD also admits that life support systems of tribals have been destroyed while commerce and industry has been heavily subsidised (Munshi, 1991). The World Bank and USAID have ironically despoiled the natural forests by single species plantations aimed at
satisfying certain forest based industries. Cash crop plantations, ostensibly for tribal development, have usurped tribal lands and forests. The biosphere reserves, game sanctuaries, national parks and reserved forests deny tribals access to their customary survival resources.

It is in this highly contradictory and conflictive field that the struggle to take over forests, land and water bodies has to be located. Taking control over resources can admit of one political position namely, establishing the right of the forest to survive for its own sake against its perversion as a factory of commercial timber; the right that people of the forests have as against the vandalisers of the forest; the right of the people of India against the forces of neo-colonialism; the right of the future against the forces that seek to deny the future to the forest children and generations to come. It is gratifying that this thinking is growing in both depth and dispersal.

Reclaiming Political Domain

The third realm in the praxis of tribal movements is redefining political domain for the active involvement of the common tribal man and woman; based on the belief that in this domain the tribals posit self-affirming action even while their struggles expand spaces for collective affirmation. An analysis of tribal movements, both in the colonial and much more in the post-colonial era, shows that reclaiming political domain has been a strong motivating force in a large number of tribal upsurges. This is based on the premise that the establishment of one's own nation-state, is intricately linked with the search for identity, control over resources, the forms and patterns of governance and the development paradigm to be followed.

Movements for political autonomy have been rife right through the tribal struggles. Hence the dream of pristine glory has been the motive force behind the movements like Santhal's Sapha Hor yearning for Chai Champa days, Tana Oraon's dream of their old Kurukh Raj, Birsa Munda's Abua Disum (Das, 1992; Raj; 1992; Sinha, 1993). Behind these dreams was the hope to establish alternative structure of political power, and a 'diku' (exploitation) free raj.

The upsurges gathered impetus in the decades before the transfer of power. Demand for a Gond Raj was made in 1941; for a Gondwana State in the early fifties; an Adivasi Swayat Raj in South Gujarat in the fifties and again in the late sixties. In the mid-nineties it was revived under the Gujarat Adivasi Vikas Paksh. In Central India, the Dandakarnya movement, a significant and widespread struggle also revolves around
village and regional autonomy. These struggles are predominantly led by left political forces, or independent non-party activists owing allegiance to other radical left groups. Radical movements of tribals also cover the states of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar where the struggle for autonomy is strong. These radical movements focus on the politicisation and mobilisation of the poorest of the poor tribals and other exploited sections. The object is to explore political space in the decision making process of the tribal peoples as conscious subjects of their own history through militant or semi-militant struggles. One of the most vibrant movements, in spite of its ups and downs, is the Jharkhand movement (Das. 1992). Even in recent times, the 'parallel government' under Shibu Soren worked in the hilly vastness of Giridih forest areas for many months.\(^3\) In the Northeast the central theme of the struggle is to recapture political domain, ranging from establishing self-rule within the framework of the Constitution, while many other movements in the Northeast are waging war demanding secession.\(^3\) It is worth examining the recently revalidated Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, where at a time when the communist banner is supposed to be losing out to the militant upsurge of ethnic identities almost all over the world, the CPI(ML) has struck such strong roots in one of the smallest tribal autonomy movements of India (Bhattacharya, 1993). Whereas in the beginnings of the eighties, several nationality based movements largely demanded reforms within the given framework of the Indian Constitution, by the end of the eighties, many more nationality upsurges have surfaced, fighting militantly for more federalism, autonomy, self-determination and secession. These struggles have become more assertive, and have extended to armed struggles.

Working within a state monopolising both violence and the power to define 'public good'; claiming as *vox populi* to protect democratic space while allowing electoral unaccountability, bureaucratic control and police brutality, has made struggle praxis more demanding. With the exploiter and oppressive sections enjoying police protection, repression of tribal struggles continues unabated. Growing state lawlessness and its partisanship for the elites demands creative ways of defining mechanisms to ensure accountability. The tension between a developmentalist state and the tribal organisations interacting in the field of power through idioms of consent and contestation could be best characterised as a struggle for hegemony versus autonomy. While the state resorts to coercion and persuasion to generate consent for its
policies, the movements of the tribals use the dual strategy of collaboration and struggle to open spaces for resistance and affirmation. ‘Mave Nate Mave Raj’ is one such movement which symbolises both resistance and resurgence. In the early days it meant ‘My Village My Rule’ but as consciousness and intervention in political space grew, it came to signify ‘My Village, Me the Ruler (Government)’. One of the most vibrant forms is in the Kolhan region, where the Kolhan Raksha Sangh has taken up village self-governance as the central theme of its struggle.

Moving beyond protests and agitations to pin accountability of the state organs, the praxis of the tribal organisations has explored several areas. One is the pushing of the Gram Panchayat into open democratic space and building resistance to unaccountability of village officials thereby expanding the political arena. The second is engendering greater political and economic autonomy of the village in administering its own affairs, revitalising traditional panchayats to enable them to administer law and order. The third is redefining relationships with the forest and forest administration to save and regain local control over forest resources. The fourth is the mechanisms of resistance to the abuse of power by the local bureaucracy by rendering their intervention ineffective at the village. Yet another is strengthening community structures of decision making, and, through non-cooperation, resisting imposition of developmental plans and restraining political largesse in routing funds. As representatives of the tribals, the organisations have challenged the state's authority and its claim to represent the people. By affirming the local, the regional and the ethnic, the movements are attempting both to overcome the economic exploitation and political subordination by the state. While the Indian state tries to integrate everybody as a citizen, through the democratic process and as a consumer through the free market, the actors of these movements seek autonomous social governance. The tribal movements, thereby, have developed structures of power outside the traditional political areas of the state.

Redefining Development

The fourth realm of tribal movements is redefining development, an area that unfortunately did not agitate the minds of organisations for a very long time, but has gained prominence today. Tribal areas are resource rich in land, forests, water or minerals, so necessary to fuel India's plans for rapid development. With the assistance and overt and
covert dictates of international money lending institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the nation's rulers have opened these areas for exploitation, even while traditional habitats are being made out of bounds for the tribals in the name of sanctuaries, preserves and national parks. Logging, mining, agribusiness, massive hydroelectric schemes and mega industrial projects often with multinational collaborations, have together institutionalised victimisation of tribal people and irretrievably wrecked their survival basis, in the name of development.

The state has declared one development programme after another with no meaning at all. It has been the practice of the ruling party to mesmerise the poor, particularly at election times by announcing developmental programmes without the requisite political will to implement them effectively. The hard and bitter struggles of the tribal peoples in the pre-Independence era did pressurise the Indian leadership to provide special privileges, preferences and concessions to the members of the Schedules Tribes. There are as many as 20 articles and two special Schedules in the Indian Constitution concerning the welfare of tribals and tribal areas, a unique distinction in the whole world. While the Constitution tends to be protective and paternalistic, it remains ineffective or inoperative in practice. Consequently the relationship of domination and subjugation persists with greater complexities than what prevailed during colonial times. The notions of development, nation building and ironically human (individual) rights have been the chief contributing factors for the progressive destruction of the survival and reproduction of the tribal people (Norgaard, 1988). Interestingly, the first task of the Tribal Sub Plan strategy, formed during the Fifth Five-Year Plan, is to bring the tribals socially and economically at par with the others, so that they can mingle in the mainstream of life. Like the Minimum Wages Act, all the other welfare and enabling legislations remain a dead letter. Studies have shown that 75-90 per cent of the tribals have never received any help from any welfare schemes. Even the Eighth Plan acknowledges that no more than 20 per cent of the tribal people would have received any benefit from the special welfare schemes.

The individual oriented paternalistic welfare system, reaching to a small fraction of the populace while seeking to coopt and assimilate the few, also geared to facilitate the articulation of capitalist interests into an essentially precapitalist matrix. This has further destroyed the tribals' ethics of sharing, values of cooperation, consensus politics,
heritage of self-control and the management of forest resources, marine and animal life. It has stimulated the easy articulation of capitalism and expropriation of surplus.

Today the state has emerged as the single largest alienator of tribal lands and other survival resources. The provisions of regulations concerning alienation of tribal land are not applied with respect to land acquired by the public sector projects and credit cooperatives. The Colonial Land Acquisition Act, 1894, freely permits the state to alienate tribal land for public purposes. It is not simply that the state enjoys a superior right but it can conveniently convert it into an absolute right while alienating tribal lands.

The challenge to the present development process is best signified by the NBA though the issues have been taken up by a number of tribal organisations all over the country over the past few decades. The struggles are not just challenging the dominant model of economic development with its attendant problems of displacement, loss of habitat and control over common property resources. They are challenging the unverified claims of the 'integrity' of the dominant development model; the unquestioned presumption that the ruling classes can unilaterally define 'national interest' and 'public good'. They call for democratising the development space with the right of the 'unheard' peoples' right to voice their objections to the demands of sacrificing habitat, livelihood and continuity of existence for unspecified and undefined good. Yet, in other areas, struggles challenge the right of private ownership created under the Land Acquisition Act over common property resources that have been the survival basis and identity of the tribal community (Narmada Bachao Andolan, n.d.). Some challenge has emerged where the traditional panchayats have intervened to decide the recipients of development largesse and intervention in the village. A tenuous and fragile equation has resulted. When there have been protests, the state has resorted either to other forms of cooptation or outright repression in the case of collective mobilisation.

Conclusion
The emerging perspectives within tribal movements include, as we have seen above, reaffirming of the tribal self, recapturing the control over resources, reclaiming political domain and redefining development. This nascent shift from resistance to resurgence, if taken to its logical conclusion, will be synonymous with ethno development. Broadly speaking, ethno development is the practical manifestation of
internal self-determination which is essentially in conformity with the Constitutional provisions. Ethno implies respect for peoples, societies and cultures and their wishes and desires while development refers to a total phenomenon combining economics, politics, and culture in an all encompassing whole defined by the concerned people themselves. Ethno development then means control of the ethnie over its lands, resources, social organisation and culture, it implies that the tribal ethnies have the right to freely negotiate with the state the kind of relationship they individually wish to have. In other words, it conveys that tribals will choose to confront the challenges posed by the modern world rooted in their traditional institutions and values. This is not a self-imposed isolation or political secession but redefining development and nation building on the basis of the legitimate aspirations of culturally distinct groups. Ethno development should not be confused with romantic tribalism which anthropologists discuss under isolationism, built on conservative resonance theory of cultural relativism. The concept of ethno development does not seek to keep tribals outside the matrix of change or take refuge in the supposedly unadulterated romanticised past. It recognises that the history of the tribal peoples was never still nor can they survive uncontaminated by present or future events, and that the isolationist pattern is paternalistic, anachronistic and discriminatory as it denies tribal peoples the right to elaborate and change, as a strategy of survival, their syncretic complexes.

Tribal movements have come a long way. Two hundred years of struggle is a treasure of experience, few communities can boast of. This treasure trove of learning could provide answers to many peoples and nations who are still torn by strife. The tribal ethos, the way of life, the logic of relationship between person/person and person/nature could provide answers to the questions the world is asking. Tribal societies, particularly those who have retained their systems of meaning and traditions of community solidarity, egalitarian relationship, basic honesty and internal integrity, even in the face of a continuous onslaught, may perhaps provide solutions to a troubled planet. Tribal movements, as processes of discovering and articulating synergistic solutions, can probably contribute in a large measure to the learners of tomorrow.
NOTES

1. The process of pushing the tribals from the traditional homelands to distant frontiers is not new as discussed by Kosambi (1963: 87) and Ray (1972: 11).

2. For an idea of what has happened and is happening to the tribal people (following industrialisation and planned population transfers see Banerjee (1981), Dasgupta (1964), India (1986; 1990a), and Sharma (1978).

3. One cannot but notice that the Santhals came to play a leading, if not a formative, role in the Naxalite insurgency which affected most of the state of West Bengal. Moreover, the organisational symbols of the movement were also drawn from the unique symbolic language of the tribe (Duyker, 1987).

4. Tribals form a significant part of both the leadership and membership of wider movements, significant among which are the Chattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh, Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha and Narmada Bachao Andolan, among many others.

5. The emergence of the non-party left formations of tribals is a relatively new phenomena. They shot into prominence in the Emergency and post-Emergency period. Motivated to enter the tribal areas, not merely because of the failure of the traditional left to enter these arenas anew as much as an answer to the challenge to radically transform the terms of struggle, discourse and praxis, prominent among them are the. Shramik Sanghatna, Bhoomi Sena, Kashtakari Sanghatna, Adivasi Mukti Sanghatan, Adivasi Kisan Sanghatan, Gondwana Sangharsh Samiti, Jan Mukti Andolan and the like (Dhanagre, 1988; Prabhu, 1993).

6. The emergence of issue based organisations as an extension of a voluntary agency working on development issues is a development of the last decade and a half, broadly called Social Action Groups (Sharma, 1992).

7. One of the best known movements in India today is the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA). While the membership and leadership of the NBA includes large sections of non-tribals, the destruction of the lives of the tribals, their livelihood and habitats are central issues of the Andolan. Another important pan-national movement that is currently consolidating itself is the National Front for Tribal Self Rule which is addressing itself to the demand to amend the Constitution and laws to ensure Tribal Self Rule.

8. One finds a fair replica of this position, perhaps inadvertent, but nevertheless a manifestation of the general trend in Bhowmik (1981: 106).

9. If one looks at the legislative and administrative changes undertaken by both the colonial government, beginning with carving out tribal areas as 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas and post-colonial government's land and wage legislation, one cannot fail to notice how most of these changes have been directly a result of tribal struggle.

10. The need to break away from stereotypes and to 'seek an understanding in terms of the tribals' own perception of the issues at stake' is made by Singh (1985: 157).

11. Studies of the subaltern oral traditions in a large number of tribal communities reveal 'philosophical' explorations into the place for equality, symbiosis and community harmony in tribal life. Studies with the Warli people show a large number of 'fables' through which the tribals have explored these values as well as formulated their history in 'parables' (Prabhu and Suresh, 1987).

12. As early as in 1874, the British administration promulgated the Scheduled Districts Act and in 1919 and 1921 delineated the tribal areas as scheduled areas, which were also known as backward tracts, agency areas and the like. The
practices of the colonial administration were subsequently formalised in the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935. The Northeast was considered very backward and 'wholly excluded' from the scope of normal laws.


14. Perhaps the most scathing indictments of the modern Indian Government and its development designs are the 28th and the 29th. Reports of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (India, 1986; 1990a).

15. Some indications of the same is pointed out in Gupta, Banerji and Guleria (1981).

16. That the process of cultural assimilation as a process of merging the independent cultures and ethnicities into the Hindu cultural fold is evident when, in the present situation, the Bharatiya Janata Party, which claims a certain monopoly to represent the interests of the 'Hindu majority', refers to the tribals as van vasis as distinct from 'adivasis' the generic term used to denote tribals and continuously refers to Jharkhand, a typically tribal name for the area as 'Vananchal'.

17. Never has the state been a model employer. As the Commissioner of Scheduled Tribes found, the Forest Department frequently violated the Minimum Wages Act in dealing with tribal forest labourers (Gupta, Banerjee and Guleria, 1981; India, 1986).

18. Some explorations in this direction were made by the Kashtakari Sanghatna and documented in Prabhu (n.d.).

19. While this process is not totally new and has been an important aspect of tribal struggles in all parts of the country, what was a major departure in the new discourse was relocating the present struggle within the matrix of tribal struggles in the past in various parts of the country.

20. Two good examples of this process are the Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha and the concept of 'Sangharsh Aur Nirman' (Struggle and Reconstruction) propounded by Shankar Guha Niyogi. Another vibrant example is the NBA.

21. Tribal India presents a complex differentiated reality. Communities are at different levels of incorporation into the modern market economy. Having faced two centuries of onslaught on their habitats, significant numbers have for several generations, been alienated from their lands and are today scattered across the country. One of the major challenges that movement groups articulate is whether this vast collective experience, most of it locked in their oral history, find a cohesive expression, or whether it is destined to remain fragmented (Rao and Hargopal, 1990).

22. The tribals of Dahanu, for that matter, interpret their role as 'Junglache Raje' (Kings of the Forest) to taking control over the forest and defending it from predatory processes and even the forest department itself. They have called the movement for ecological equity as 'Jungle Bachao, Adivasi Bachao' (Save the Forests, Save the Tribals).

23. For a fairly extensive treatment of the subject from the Latin American perspective, see Escobar (1992).

24. This are has been explored in Prabhu (n.d.).

25. An exploration of this theme is undertaken by Prabhu (1993).

26. Although the Article 350A of the Constitution directs the state to ensure that primary education is in the mother tongue, in the case of the tribal people, this
directive has been thrown to the winds. Even in the case of languages where a script hurts and the State Governments have recognised these as mediums of education, no steps have been taken to translate these into practice (Nambissan, 1986).

27. The Manipuri script was lost as the puyas (sacred texts) were burnt down. There can be no culture without a language and script and the old script is now an integral part of the Manipuri’s search for identity. The Chakmas claim to have discovered a script of their own. The Savaras of Ganjam and Koraput districts are also reported to have found a script for themselves. The process of discovery of scripts will go on as long as the search for a new identity is on, because language is an ingredient of self-consciousness, an essential complement to language, which is indispensable to cultural identity (Singh, 1982). Probably the most dynamic of the identity movements in middle India is the one based on the Santali script, the 01 Chiki fashioned by Raghunath Murmu. The new script symbolised a return to the great tradition of the past and set off a revivalistic movement.

28. While religion is a central part of tribal identity as providing the meaning systems for both ecological equity and community sensibilities, one doubt remains whether reverting back to traditional tribal religion, without somehow re-examining the material base for the religious experience, will succeed as an emancipating process.

29. Most tribal communities have also evolved elaborate fables or ecological explanations that re-integrate the forest in their meaning system at critical movements of the transition and change in the mode of production. Also see Roy Burman (1976).

30. A good example of this process in sub-altern oral tradition is the fable of Mirig and Kanseri, which posits the link between private property and patriarchy, the emergence of the witch-hunting practice as a form of women’s subjugation consonant with male ascendancy.

31. Some exploration of how displacement from land threatens identity is taken up by Hakim (1996).

32. The struggle for Jharkhand with all its tips and downs is perhaps the longest struggle for political domain of the tribals in the country today. The story of autonomy for the people of Chhota Nagpur and Santhal Parganas can be dated from the days of Kolhan and Damin-i-Koh system in Singbhum and Santhal Parganas respectively as part of the British dispensation of autonomy given to people of this area in the last century, embodied in the Wilkinson Rules. The Jharkhand movement got radicalised when the agrarian question received importance and the left trade unions of coal miners and the CPI (ML) supported the issue. The formation of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) in 1973, attracted both tribal and non-tribal peasantry, around agrarian issues and demands for legal and institutional safeguards to insure tribals against land expropriation and debt bondage. There were demands for a more dominant role for the tribals in regional administration and improved educational facilities and increased employment opportunities for mine workers and unemployed youth. The JMM combined in its operations, elements of agrarian radicalism and cultural revivalism (Singh. 1985, 273). The JMM emerged as a major political force in the industrial and mining belt of Chhota Nagpur and in state politics after the 1980 general elections. In less than a decade the JMM was on the decline. The leadership, coopted into
the system of parliamentary democracy, was unable to answer the basic problems of the tribes (Sinha, 1993: 404—5). It is true that presently Jharkhand has become a political tool in the hands of some self-aspiring tribal leaders. But one should not forget that the demand for a separate state has originated from the centuries old socioeconomic suppression and usurpation and alienation of tribal ancestral lands and the state's brazen antipathy towards the tribals of Jharkhand. In spite of many an upheaval, this demand is getting stronger and stronger at the grassroots level.

33. Tribal movements in the Northeast stand in a category by themselves because of the region's unique geo-political situation and historical background. This region was not completely integrated within the politico-economic system of colonialism. It remained relatively isolated from the cultural systems of the mainland and the political upheavals of the freedom struggle. Further, unlike middle India, the tribals in the Northeast are in an overwhelming majority and have never faced any threat to their identity of the kind that inspired the millenarian movements elsewhere in the country. The Indian Government has alienated large tracts of land and forest in the Northeast. The entrenchment of traders-turned-money lenders in these areas has also contributed to the process of resource alienation. Considering the geo-political factor and the relative isolation from the political system and the cultural influences from the mainland, the dominant form of the movement has been political, seeking goals ranging from autonomy to independence and relying on means ranging from constitutional agitation to armed insurgency. Even the cultural movements of this region are only a dimension of these political processes (Singh, 1985: 264-5). The state, however, has failed to handle the demand for autonomy. Treating every militant nationality struggle as a law and order problem; the deployment of repressive machinery; use of repressive laws like the Armed Forces Act, Disturbed Areas Act, Public Security Act, Terrorist and Disturbed Activities (Prevention) Act, National Security Act; banning organisation; false encounters; custodial death; torture; assaults on women; and burning of villages (Nag and Nag, 1995: 738) have only helped in the hardening of attitudes.

34. The Kolhan Raksha Sangh, founded in 1977, was initially an offshoot of the Jharkhand movement and had sprung up from the frustration and above all the over dependence on special concessions handed out to the tribals of Kolhan as alms by the government (Raichaudhari, 1992). Presently the Kolhan movement has adopted a broader and unique shape in the form of 'Gram Swaraj'. The new thrust, reminds us of the ancestral social system of the tribals which may be described as primitive communism or primitive socialism' on the other (Das, 1992: 123). The concept has grown beyond 'gram swaraj' to 'ham hi Sarkar', that is, every village community should be organised in the form of a basic unit of self-governance in keeping with 'principles of democracy'.

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