

Susana B. C. Devalle

**Multi-ethnicity in India: The Adivasi Peasants of
Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas**

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The International Secretariat of IWGIA
Fiolstræde 10
DK – 1171 Copenhagen K
Denmark.

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MULTI-ETHNICITY IN INDIA: THE ADIVASI PEASANTS
OF CHOTA NAGPUR AND SANTAL PARGANAS

Copenhagen 1980

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This document has been translated from Spanish by Elisabeth Soltau. Copy editing by Steve Sampson, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

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Copenhagen, April 1980
The Documentation Department of IWGIA

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MAP 1-1. India.

THE ADIVASI PEASANTS
OF CHOTA NAGPUR AND SANTAL PARGANAS*

*"In our fields
In our lands
There is a world of richness."*

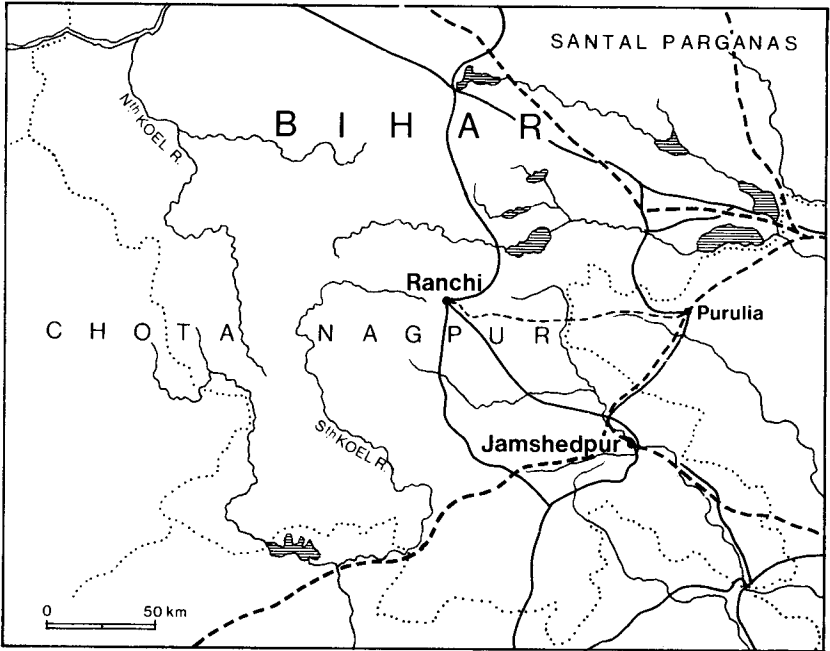
*"We have nothing to eat.
Day by day we starve to death
/and we are torn to pieces.
The dirty mudhouses,
/the poverty and disease
make us moan..."*

(Extracts from Santal songs)

SELF-GOVERNMENT AND CLASS CONFLICTS

Regularly two types of news appear in the Indian newspapers and publications concerning the so-called tribal populations of the State of Bihar, especially from the Chota Nagpur area. One set of news-items (e.g. The Times of India,

* Adivasi: of the Hindi *adi*: original, and *vasi*: inhabitant.



MAP 1-2. The Chota Nagpur area in the state of Bihar.

21 February, 7, 13 and 14 May 1978) reveals the old and persistent demands for self-government in Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas (the State of Jharkhand), for which the Santals and the Mundas have fought since the middle of last century; self-government has been one of the aims of the spontaneous social movements that have arisen in the area since the 19th century, as well as the policy of the Jharkhand Party¹ and its pan-tribalist leader, the Munda Jaipal Singh².

Three years ago, a Munda intellectual referred to the problem of self-government in this way:

"There is an acute awareness that the land of the whole area (Chota Nagpur) belongs to us and that it passes to other hands... The possibility of a separate state was clear and the majority of the people wanted it (in Jaipal Singh's times); there was no opposition in Chota Nagpur, but the government feared a new alien-looking area in the middle of India...The argument that people cannot govern themselves is false... The states that have become separated have attained autonomy through persistent efforts. Our leaders are extremely dispersed and do not present a solid front. Jaipal Singh did not pursue the aim for autonomy with strength." (Personal interview, April 1975).

On 12 May 1978, all business in the town of Ranchi, located in the centre of the Chota Nagpur area, was suspended because of a strike (bandh) organized to press for self-government in Chota Nagpur and in Santal Parganas, which would thus form a separate state in India (The Times of India, 14 May 1978).

Alongside the movements for self-government, a second category of news items reveals the agrarian class struggle between Adivasis and landowners, moneylenders, and the dikus

(the Adivasi designation for persons not belonging to the community.)

According to the 1971 census, the population registered in India as Scheduled Tribes reached 38 million, which is equal to 6.93 per cent of the total population. In the Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas areas, 90 per cent of the population are peasants of Adivasi origin (the Oraons, the Mundas and the Hos are the principal Adivasi communities in Chota Nagpur; the Santals in Santal Parganas). Generally speaking, class position and ethnic ascription more or less coincide in this area. Therefore, the situation of the Adivasis here (and in the majority of cases in other parts of India) should not be seen as a result of the process of "acculturation". Nor should it be seen as a product of community relationships and conflicts or as a result of the particular characteristics of the relations between groups identified by their caste ascription. The inter-ethnic relations in this area reflect class relations.

The rebellions of Adivasis, especially since the 19th century under British rule, were caused by the settlement of outsiders on their lands, plundering of land, oppression, increase of rents, violation of the rights to the forests, forced labour, debt-bondage and exploitation by persons not belonging to the community (see Patel 1974:145 ff.). The plundering of land, the incurring of debts, the extortion and debt-bondage are still the most serious problems to be faced by the Adivasi peasants (cf. Minz 1970).

It is a long-established tradition that the debtor pays the creditor with labour and services. This system is known under various names, for instance as the kamiauti system. Under this system, the debtor has no right to be paid for his work, and he may actually become a serf. "Legal contracts" were made on terms such as the following case dating from the 1930's, described by R. Mukherjee:

"I and my descendants forever bind ourselves to be

ready to perform any work given to us, and to perform all the duties of a menial servant without objection." (Mukherjee 1933)³.

In this case, the signatory and his son fulfilled the contract until they died, and the grandson took it over until he decided to run away. Moreover, the debtor, while working for nothing on the creditor's land, had no time to cultivate his own. The laws promulgated in this respect during the British administration, such as the Bengal Land Tenancy Amendment Act of 1918 or the Bihar and Orissa Kamiauti Agreements Act of 1920 (Roy *et al.* 1964:2120) neither condemned nor eliminated the kamiauti system but simply adjusted it. Mukherjee also mentions the transfer of kamias (debtors), a procedure he calls "contractual". The price is the kamia's debt and his inability to discharge it, as the contract stipulates a fixed date for the payment, usually in a period when the debtor has no means to do so. The characteristics of this system can be summed up as follows: the debtor cannot negotiate the payment of his work (in kind), he is never paid in cash. The kamia's wife earns even less; the condition is hereditary; daily work is not guaranteed and when there is no work the kamia gets nothing to eat but is left to shift for himself by falling back on other activities, such as gathering and selling fuel and fodder. Though it is tending to disappear, the kamiauti system is still pronounced in areas with Adivasi population.

The plundering of land has continued, and the number of landless Adivasi peasants has increased. The methods used to deprive the Adivasis of their land have varied a great deal. The Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 (Bengal Act VI of 1908) (see Government of Bihar and Orissa, Legislative Department 1931) provided that the land of the Adivasis was inalienable and that it should not be "transferable by sale, whether in execution of a decree or order of a Court or otherwise" (*Ibid.*: Chap.II, section 6-8:8, and Chap. XVIII:109). Transfer

of land from an Adivasi to a non-Adivasi has been permitted if approved by the Deputy Commissioner; but, apparently, when one Adivasi asks for permission to buy land from another Adivasi, obstacles are put in his way, thus compelling the latter to sell to a non-Adivasi⁴ (see Bardhan 1973:345). Normally Adivasis receive a very small sum for their land, but this same land will eventually be sold at a much higher price by the non-Adivasi purchaser. As far back as 1915 this situation was described by Hoffmann:

"The lawgiver intended the lands to be made inalienable, i.e. to remain in the possession of the raiyats. The law says: they are unsaleable, i.e., the raiyat cannot give his valuable right in the land for money, but he can give it for nothing" (Hoffmann 1961:337, foot-note, author's underlining).

According to a study made by the Bihar Tribal Research Institute in the district of Ranchi, there were, between 1950 and 1963-1964, 223 cases of alienation and 207 acres of land were transferred from Adivasis to non-Adivasis⁴. The law is easy to break, and, at times this is done quite openly. For example, the Economic and Political Weekly, in its annual number dated February 1974, refers to the legal device in Maharashtra whereby a peasant can be deprived of his land if it is alleged that he is physically incapable of cultivating it:

"Many big landowners produced medical certificates purporting to establish the incapability of Adivasis to cultivate their lands and managed to get these lands on lease for fixed periods. The lands seldom were returned to the Adivasis after the lease period was over. Worse, many landlords who secured Adivasi lands on lease claimed the status and rights of tenants under the Tenancy and Agricultural Land Holdings Act of 1948 and bought the Adivasis' lands,

often for a song." (Economic and Political Weekly, February 1974:174-A).

Another way of passing land from Adivasi to non-Adivasi is the so-called benami transfer in which an Adivasi sells his land to a non-Adivasi, the latter having purchased an Adivasi name from someone else (Patel 1974:29). Not only have the laws been manipulated and a cloak of legality thrown over these frauds to deprive the Adivasi peasants of their land and their labour; at times the powerful rural groups have used direct violence in alliance with the police, the administration, the moneylenders and the politicians. As an example it will be sufficient to mention the information given by Maria Mies about the conflicts between the Bhil peasants (Adivasis) and the dominant rural groups in Maharashtra, which gave rise to the Shahada Movement of 1972-74. Mies establishes definitely:

"All these clashes took place between high caste Hindus and Adivasis or Harijans. Yet, it is evident that they were not sparked off by caste issues, but by economic and political issues. The landless labourers demand higher wages and land, and they have begun to organize themselves to fight for these interests. The dominant rural class, however, uses its political, economic and cultural power, including direct violence, to keep the rural proletariat 'in its place', as they say. In this class struggle the ruling class very skillfully uses caste discrimination, caste feelings and the feudal dependence of the untouchable labourers on the landlord as weapons." (Mies 1976:473).

The events in Bihar, while confirming Mies' assertion also show that there are important exceptions to the usual connection between caste ascription and economic power (upper-Hindu castes being the only dominant rural caste). Since the abolition of the Zamindars in 1956, a new class of rich

peasants has emerged among the so-called Backward or Scheduled Castes. This new rich peasant group has come into conflict not only with the high castes, but also with wage-earning Harijan and Adivasi agricultural labourers, and even labourers belonging to their own caste, at times allying themselves with high caste landlords:

"The major outrages against Harijan sharecroppers and agricultural labourers since March 1977 have occurred in Kargahar, Belchchi, Pathadda, Chhaundadano, Gopalpur and Dharampura. Barring Dharampura, where the landlords were Brahmins, everywhere the attackers belonged to the so-called backward castes of Kurmis and Yadavs. This should not be taken as evidence that upper caste landlords have in any way become less ruthless or exploitative. It is just that the rising class of rich peasants from the backward castes have been more aggressive." (A. Sinha, Economic and Political Weekly, 22 April 1978, p.675)

The same article points out the rather foreseeable consequence of the emergence of this class of rich peasants among the so-called Scheduled Castes, in relation to one of the measures taken to protect the so-called Scheduled Castes and tribes: 24 per cent of the Government posts are reserved for Harijans and Adivasis, and this work requires a certain level of education (also in this field similar measures have been taken). Officially between 75 and 80 per cent of the Harijan and Adivasi children leave school to assist their families with agricultural work. Only the new class of rich peasants in the Scheduled Castes can educate their children to obtain these posts:

"The rich peasant class is ready with its graduates and even 'foreign-returned' doctors and engineers to fill jobs proposed to be reserved for the backward castes... The majority of the backward castes

will remain what they are today - landless labourers, tenants and poor peasants." (Ibid.:676).

The implementation of development plans and the constructing of state or private industrial complexes (steelworks, heavy machinery plants, dams, hydroelectric and irrigation projects, etc.), have hastened the expulsion of the Adivasis from their original lands. Between 1960 and 1964, the construction of 18 projects (cf. Patel 1974:Chap.XI) in Bihar led to 7,961 peasants being removed from their lands. These lands totalled 23,414,57 acres. Only 4,053.02 acres were granted in compensation while the First and the Second Five Year Plan were in force (Ibid.:Table 13, p.128-129). As regards the displaced tribal population, Table 1-1 (see page 14) gives the figures provided by the Government of India and which cover only some of the projects.

The figures supplied by different sources for the number of persons displaced by the big projects do not tally in all respects.

In the case of the establishment of the Heavy Engineering Corporation (H.E.C.) in Hatia and its surroundings, near the town of Ranchi (Bihar), the government acquired about 20 square miles from 1961 to 1962, evacuating the peasants who lived and worked there, mainly Oraons and Mundas. Ten villages, most of them in their entirety, were acquired for the industrial town; portions of six villages were expropriated for the dam; four villages were expropriated for the factory and five others, totally or partly, for the railway network. It is estimated that 77 per cent of the inhabitants were displaced to construct the complex. Some 2,200 families found themselves without home and land, while, about 9,000 families migrated into the area to work in the industry, according to data collected by L.P. Vidyarthi (1967:8). The cash compensations promised to the displaced families were not paid in full, and on 20 May 1961 a demonstration of residents from the village of Hatia marched on Ranchi declaring that they

TABLE 1-1

PROJECT	Number of displaced Adivasi Families	Area from which they were displaced (acres)	Number of re-established families	Area in which they were re-established (acres)
Maithon Dam..... (Bihar and West Bengal)	3,296	13,138	464	2,286
Mayrakshi Dam (Bihar)...	2,910	7,215	---	2,082
Panchet Dam..... (Bihar and West Bengal)	1,916	1,951	---	-----
Hirakud Dam..... (M.P. and Orissa)	1,636	11,116	300	-----
Machkund Hydroelectric... Project (Orissa)	1,500	13,705	450	2,250
Rourkela Steelworks..... Project (Orissa)	1,231	8,158	843	-----
Mandira Dam (Orissa)....	817	4,225	447	1,696
Sindri Fertilizer..... Factory (Bihar)	597	1,228	973	-----
H.E.C., Ranchi (Bihar)...	210	1,502	---	-----
TOTAL.....	14,113	62,238	3,477	8,314

Source: Govt. of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, Report, 1960-61, Delhi 1974, chapter 11, p.115.

would not abandon their land and asking for work and for financial compensation. Another reason for protest was that agricultural land had not been substituted for agricultural land. Some villagers chose to migrate in search for arable land or agricultural work. Those who stayed got employment as unskilled workers but were later replaced by workers from outside the region. Wages varied from Rs. 1.50 to 2.00 (US \$ 0.18 to 0.25) per day in the lowest occupational categories; from 30 to 50 per cent of what an unskilled Adivasi worker earns is used for housing (a room costs 10 to 15 Rs. a month, or US \$ 1.20 to 1.78). People displaced from one village (Satranji) were installed on the arable land of another (Tupudana) whose inhabitants thus became landless. A villager from Satranji explained that they could not leave their native village and that "a hundred baskets of paddy is more valuable than a hundred rupees", while an old peasant from Tupudana, where the people were left without land and in total insecurity, pointed out:

"We do not have enough to eat and wear, and if there is nothing in our stomachs how can we walk long distances to earn in Hatia. We earn one to two rupees a day and this is not enough for our big families." (Cf. Prasad and Sahay 1961: chap.I).

Because the displaced villagers did not receive adequate compensation they have been unable to buy land elsewhere. The alleged prosperity resulting from the establishment of the H.E.C. was indicated in these terms:

"The family income of the villagers has risen; they have learned to live a heterogeneous life in terms of language, religion and social ethics (...) (It) is a good example of the combination of rural and industrial life styles." (Vidyarthi 1970:454).

This picture is modified by the explanations of the local people, newspapers accounts, and general suspicion of this overly optimistic picture; there has been a notable increase in the consumption of luxuries. The great flow of migrants, skilled and unskilled workers, from neighbouring rural areas as well as from Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Nepal, crowded together in the new shanty-towns or miserable slums of Hatia and Dhurwa. Already in 1961, 32,550 persons were living in these slums. In spite of the call from the industry, they continued to work the land whenever possible; work in the factory seems to have been considered secondary or complementary to agriculture. Those peasants who have become industrial workers send considerable portions of their wages home to their native villages. Part of the Adivasi peasantry has thus been turned into a cheap industrial labour force or become part of the reserve army of the unemployed. Strategic natural resources in Bihar and in the Chota Nagpur area are controlled by the State or by private national companies. Despite the rich land, the Adivasi peasantry of Chota Nagpur lives in misery.

Recent news on the situation in Bihar shows how the struggle for economic goals and for self-government are intertwined. On 6 May 1978, the Adivasi peasants in the district of Ranchi stopped work on the irrigation projects of Chiragon, Para Kans and Jaipur and on the hydroelectric project of Koel Karo (cf. the Times of India, 7 May 1978:7). They demanded immediate compensations for their lands (the amount of which is not yet known). These lands were, apparently, acquired without previous notice. In addition, there is the issue of the employment of the displaced persons. This type of conflict is being used to put forward the claim for self-government in Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas and "people are told that their welfare depends on the creation of a separate state for which they should fight together". The Jharkhand Party supports this demand, as it has done traditionally, and so does the Janata Party: it is possible

that the Congress Party will also come to support the demands for autonomy.

The various parties' tactical political interests in bringing up the issue of self-government in Chota Nagpur should be examined carefully: while the Adivasis have long harboured a desire for political autonomy, neither they nor the political groups supporting them have come forth with any concrete proposals; in the case of the political parties, their motives for supporting self-government have remained extremely vague. In an area of conflicting economic interests, eventual self-government could lead to power struggles and political manipulations which could seriously hurt the long term social position of the Adivasis, thus negating any ostensible benefits they could achieve with formal self-government. As a Munda pointed out recently:

"Now, mushrooms of leaders are coming up in each area with contradictory solutions to the same problems, and they fight among themselves."

Furthermore, in spite of the long tradition of protest and the degree of consciousness reached among the peasantry, the peasant movement in the area is still weak. The Adivasi peasants in Bihar have learned from the experience gained in their struggle to defend their economic interests and gradually they are entering the political arena themselves. Moreover, they reckon on the possibility of using strategically the force of their own identity, which has made it possible for them to define themselves and unite in action.

THE STUDY OF ETHNICITY

The realities of ethnicity in multi-ethnic (multi-national) states present two contrasts: on the one hand, ethnicity as a symbolic system defined and understood in different ways by academics and the groups in power, and as understood by those who "exercise" their own ethnic identity as the result of an awakening consciousness. On the other hand there is the so-called ethnic problem, an intellectual and ideological construct which has diverted attention from more fundamental politico-economic conflicts. For example ethnicity is used as an explanation for situations produced by the colonial domination (see, e.g., Mitchell 1956, Gulliver 1969, and Epstein 1973), without a correlate analysis of the colonial situation. Ethnic manipulation was effectively used by colonial powers to prevent the formation of comprehensive alliances among the colonialized people, and this may have encouraged a consolidation of ethnic ascriptions (see, e.g., Bennett 1969 on colonial Uganda⁵). Ethnic problems arise in post-colonial societies whenever national integration and unity seems immediate and relevant. The groups that monopolize the elaboration of national policy and impose their conception of State and Nation are logically those which take on the task of implementing this integration and thus of solving the alleged ethnic problem, or in other words of restructuring the very foundation of the society.

Schemes for national development which ignore the realities of ethnicity or which deny wide participation for all ethnic groups/nationalities in the society, will result in the subordination of weaker groups by more powerful ones, ethnic disintegration and eventual national fragmentation.

Hence the fear for outbursts of ethnic consciousness, expressed in the struggles over economic power and political participation in the newly independent nation (see, e.g., Ghurye 1963). The dominant groups, corresponding or not with ethnic groups, condemn these expressions as indications of particularism to a certain ideal of national unity on whose elaboration the accused have had no influence.

To deny this type of danger does not mean to forget the other possible dangers that threaten the ethnic groups themselves; for example the danger of false consciousness with no possibilities of development, frozen in a closed reasoning, looking inwards, defending a world of refuge in which the possibilities of change are minimal, and making them an easy prey to paternalist politics and assimilation. The manipulation of ethnicity by the very same ethnic groups who foster this closed consciousness without any perspectives, is an obstacle to the emergence of interethnic alliances.

Previous social science approaches have analysed ethnicity using concepts of dual society⁶ and of pluralism, while social groups were analysed as independent and parallel developments, without regard to the class structure and the economic factors⁷. These are studies of a partial reality, that isolate the cultural and behavioural dimensions, with an ahistorical synchronic perspective based on a hypothetical state of social equilibrium; the "ethnic problem" is isolated from the global social context, and the ethnic group conceived as an autonomous subject, in the same way as the individual is taken as a unit of analysis⁹. Furthermore, in some of the studies of colonial societies the colonizer is presented as a civilizing agent¹⁰.

When approaching the study of multi-ethnic societies, we suggest that the following problems should be considered:

1. How do the ethnic groups look upon the so-called ethnic problem and their own ethnicity?
2. What does the ethnic problem cover: class situations, power conflicts, struggles to overcome the economic

exploitation, defence of one's cultural and historical values?

What patterns of domination are reflected by inter-ethnic relations, and how is this expressed ideologically?

3. Has the "ethnic problem" been created by the dominant groups within the society in order to support their own interests and to avoid the emergence of other formulations independent of the dominant national ideological current? To what extent is the sense of national identity that has developed in the multi-ethnic societies artificial and a negation of the integrating force of the ethnicities?
4. What are the conditions that impede or favour the raising of consciousness regarding the socio-economic and political structures within which the ethnic groups are placed. And will the consciousness of their own ethnicity facilitate the formation of class consciousness?
5. What are the historic preconditions for and present composition of the social groupings in the new post-colonial state? Do ideological influences and socio-economic structures from colonial times play a role in the newly independent state?

INDIA AS A NATION WITH MULTI-ETHNIC CONTENT

"Today in India nationhood is still in a process of becoming. Many talk about incorporating or assimilating the minorities into a larger society under the concept of equal citizenship. India is declared to be (a) secular state but there (are) visible signs of the nation becoming a monolithic society where the majority may define the limits of national society and where the majority (is) often confused with the national society."

(Opinion of a contemporary Naga)

ABOUT THE DESIGNATIONS

The British colonial government in India used the term tribe as an element of classification for administrative purposes. The term is still used as a legal category in independent India, but is not based on any systematic criteria. Officially the problem of definition has been avoided. The Constitution (Art. 342) delegates the responsibility of deciding who are tribal to Government officials.

Criteria like those enumerated below are so unsatisfactory that A.R. Desai (1961) considers they could apply to only 20 per cent of the "tribal" population. In the report from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Commission, 1952, tribal people are defined as follows:

1. They live far from the civilized world;
2. They belong to one of the following three groups:
Negroids, Australoids or Mongolids;

3. they speak a tribal dialect;
4. they profess the primitive religion called "animism";
5. they carry on primitive activities (hunting, food-gathering, etc.);
6. they are carnivorous;
7. they go naked or seminaked;
8. they have nomadic habits and like to drink and dance.

The degree of generalization is so high, and the characteristics so random, ethnocentric and inaccurate that this categorization turns out to be useless and, what is worse, erroneous. This lack of comprehension is no pure coincidence. As F.G. Bailey says:

"... both those who advance these criteria and those who dispose of them, already have decided who are the tribal people and who are the caste people... those who make this approach then assume that there will be cultural, or historical, or geographical concomitants of social differences, which they have taken for granted, but not proved." (Bailey 1961:10).

K.S. Mathur dismisses the present classifications as "a typical case of fiction-creation by the Government officers" (Mathur 1972:460).

If the colonizer used the category "tribe" to isolate sections of the population in order to secure a better administration and control (especially after the rebellions in areas with Adivasi population), something similar has taken place in independent India as a result of protective discrimination, though the aims have been different and come near to what may be described as "social welfare". The idea of privileged treatment is not of Adivasi origin, as has sometimes been suggested. The official attitude towards those who are described as Scheduled Tribes or Backward Tribes¹¹ has been that these groups present "special problems" and, therefore, deserve "special treatment". In terms of their position in the economic structure, the majority of Adivasi peasants

are separated from the rest of the peasant sector. The real condition and position of this section of the population are thus unknown in the national context. A current epithet for the Adivasis is that of "backward", if not "primitive." When the reason for this backwardness is searched for as a historical product, this search is limited to the colonial period, and at times the backwardness is attributed to the persistence of cultural elements among the Adivasis themselves. For example:

"We say that due to a peculiar neglect by the colonial administration and due to their inherent different culture the tribal population in India suffered a greater degree of backwardness than the non-tribal population and therefore, today, when they have become an integral part of Independent India, they need a special focus, a special approach and a special treatment... they (the Adivasis) will take a longer time than non-tribals to traverse stages of development... this special focus on tribals is something like an Olympic athlete competing with a mediocre who should be given an initial plus advantage to be able to compete on an equal footing... this type of special approach... fits in extremely well with our governmental policy striving towards democratic socialism... by no stretch of imagination can it be called a policy of discrimination." (Mathur 1967: 13-14).

The official politics conceal - beneath the intention of promoting the social welfare - a paternalist attitude favouring development, and, without intending to, they promote the very tendencies they want to avoid: separation, obstruction of alliances at supraethnic levels, a particularistic consciousness.

Through legislation and practical measures, the groups

that have retained power have defined the function of the State by its multi-ethnic content. It is a State conceived not only as an administrative machinery but with the mission of protecting and guiding these groups which are termed weak and incapable of choosing for themselves what course of action to follow in order to change or modify the situation with which they are confronted (cf. Art. 46, 339 and 340 of the Constitution of 1950). The State offers these groups not only protection and guidance but also plans for their transformation and "development" on terms that officials and academics dictate without consulting the groups in question.

To wind up the problem of designations (which go beyond the mere name), it could be asked how the Adivasis describe themselves today, apart from the particular names of each group and the term "man" (horo in Mundari). In a document from a group of Christian Adivasi leaders, they talk about themselves in the following way:

"We are the native people, the original inhabitants of the land in which we live... We have been in this, our land, since the beginnings of history... We have remained attached to our ancestral land because land has been our blood and without it we would have neither life nor means of living."
(cf. Thomas and Taylor 1965:31 ff.)

A non-convert, educated Munda said, referring to the issue of national identity of the Adivasis:

"We feel that we belong to India. We consider ourselves equal to the Hindus. We introduce ourselves as Adivasis, that is not a pejorative term... We do not identify ourselves as belonging to a certain tribe. We have no caste. We are all equal."
(Personal interview with a Munda, April 1975).

THE IDEA OF UNITY

In a debate in the Constituent Assembly (Constituent Assembly Debates 4:779, cit. in Ghurye 1963:327) the Munda leader Jaipal Singh referred to the question of national symbols as follows:

"The Adivasis have been the first to hoist flags and to fight for their flags... Hereafter, there will be two Flags, one Flag which has been there for the last six thousand years, and the other will be this National Flag which is the symbol of our freedom as Pandit Nehru has put it."

If the handling and interpretation of symbols like these indicate any attitude on the part of the Adivasis, it will be that of appreciation of the plural content of the independent Indian nation, where the different identities (or "loyalties" as others would put it) could be combined without provoking a disastrous development like that presented by G.S. Ghurye (1963):

"Let us hope that (Jaipal Singh) will persuade his co-tribesmen, or 'his folk' as he referred to the Scheduled Tribes, to hoist only the Tricolor Flag and show undivided and unqualified respect for it!"

This simple quotation reflects part of the position that defends the basic unity of the Indian society in terms of a homogeneous nation. It amounts to speaking about uniformity, both cultural and religious, about a "unique pattern" while at the same time mentioning the "diversity".

The idea of unity and of strengthening this sense of belonging to one single and common tradition were necessary during the fight for independence when the unity of the colonized people was in confrontation with the colonizer. With independence came the task of defining the nation-state, which

was expressed as a political unity already obtained and an "emotional integration" still to be completed.

The manifest differences between the attitude that supports unity and that which defends pluralism in India do not seem to be great. The two terms are often used together (the "unity in diversity") and attitudes towards the question apparently vary according to the emphasis put on one of these terms; strictly speaking, there are no great divergencies.

In general, defenders of the unity as well as of the diversity allude to history, culture and religion, but treat them superficially and, at times, the opinions that they express are ill-founded. Even if this way of facing the problem may be excused as necessitated by patriotic concerns, its importance in relation to policy decisions should not be ignored, as will be seen later.

As an example of the position that emphasizes the unity, some of the contributions made at the Seminar on National Integration (16 and 17 April 1958) may be quoted. In his opening address, Sri Humayun Kabir referred to the Indian reality in this way:

"India presents a remarkable variety of peoples who differ from one another in almost all the elements which are usually considered necessary to constitute a nation. India has never had one language... Never have all the Indian people followed any one religion. Nor has the entire territory of geographical India even been ruled from one centre. There are also marked differences in what are called racial characteristics, traditional food habits and customs and institutions in different parts of the country. In spite of these marked divergences, there is equally little doubt that for at least 2000 years or more there has been a general feeling of Indian-ness which has transcended all these distinctions and made the many Indian communities one Indian

people... Thus there has always been a remarkable diversity of thought, action and outlook among the Indian people, but this diversity has been organized within a generally recognizable Indian pattern." (Kabir 1961:8-9, my underlining).

To further explain this characteristic way of life, this Indian pattern, reference is made to a certain religious unity, a cultural homogeneity, a common history. M.N. Srinivas (1961:26 ff.) discusses the concept of Indian unity based on religion (taking one of the dominant religions, Hinduism, as a starting-point) and rejects the idea of integrating India on this basis.

Some consider it an easy task to obtain unity because they will not accept the existence of differences even at obvious levels, a way of rejecting the real differences among certain sections of the population (Dongerkerly 1961:60).

In the conclusions of the above Seminar, the idea of unity is summed up and even forced into historical terms¹²; participants fear that the project of the nation-state proposed by the sections with political control may fail if tendencies towards different projects develop¹³; the relation between national unity and economic and social factors is barely touched upon; ways of implanting the ideas of the culturally dominant groups are outlined in order that the people "may see the unity of the cultural pattern", using "literature and other cultural media in promoting national unity and resisting divisive forces" and by the selection of text books, the use of national symbols and the mass media. In relation to these proposals Srinivas recommends that people should be on the alert and recognizes that:

"The fault is probably in our intelligentsia which conceives of the unity of India in a monolithic way with everyone speaking the same language, wearing the same clothes, eating the same food, singing the same film songs and repeating the same slogans and

views passed on by the various media of mass-communication. Such a concept of unity naturally frightens people (in favor) of diversity and they are also afraid of contact with the outside world. Any attempt to impose a monolithic unity will only produce fission. Mere lip service to the need to appreciate India's heritage, which is rich in diversity, is not enough." (Srinivas 1961:30).

MULTI-IDENTITY AND PLURALISM

When diversity is to be emphasized, it is generally understood in terms of cultural pluralism, of "co-existence" and "interaction" in which the parties concerned should preserve their distinct character (e.g., D.P. Sinha 1972:497) but with a certain integration in view. On the one hand, the problem lies in what is understood by integration and, on the other, the attitude resulting from this comprehension of the existence of a certain pluralism. Integration in India is meant to take place in a careful manner, so that with the words of N. Datta-Majunder:

"The desired integration of the tribal groups in the national democratic structure of India must be brought about without suddenly uprooting them from their traditional cultural moorings and thereby causing them irreparable physical and psychological damage." (1960:27)

The frequent affirmations along these lines leave the impression that integration is conceived as "the meeting of divergent cultures without loss of identity or individuality," an ambiguous, partial and "metaphorical" definition, as G. Chattopadhyay (1972:486 ff.) has put it, which does not

allow for contributions of the different cultures, towards the creation of a multiple and richer structure. In this way, the problem of integration and pluralism is reduced to a meeting of cultures and their possible co-existence. This integration is, in fact, merely a form of tolerance. It lacks the dimension of participation. Though it is sometimes observed that "the wishes of the minorities" have not been taken into account, the problem is left in the hands of the experts (academics or administrators), while the opinion or the participation of the sections "to be integrated" are not taken into consideration (cf. Srinivas and Sankal 1972:121¹⁴).

Appreciations centered on the conception of a Great Tradition still prevail - as it happens the same one to which those who have been charged with the task of designing the national policy ascribe themselves - as well as on the conception of a myriad of Little Traditions, which, after all, correspond to the knowledge, learning and beliefs of the rural population, the common people and sections like the Adivasis, i.e., those who have a different cultural background. Relations between both "poles" have been established, emphasizing the interrelation between the Little and Great Traditions especially in the so-called studies of acculturation. In this connection two dominant models should be mentioned: the model of Sanskritization, or Hinduization, and that of Westernization for with these models the intention of pluralist (cultural) comprehension comes full circle to the conception of the Indian unity. These mechanisms no longer leave room for a certain degree of tolerance but, on the contrary, sanction the presence of levelling ("unifying") cultural forces under the erroneous assumption that cultural uniformity will solve the problem of socio-economic inequality in India. Thus, Srinivas, who has treated the subject of Sanskritization to a large extent, says:

"Sanskritization and Westernization... are producing the same or similar cultural and social forms throughout the country... Sanskritization is not

only transforming the culture of all the castes, and especially that of the lower, but it is also contributing to the decrease of structural distance between the various castes. This is likely to result in greater cohesion among Hindus... It would not be surprising if Sanskritization made some headway among a few non-Hindu groups as well... Westernization is a blanket term for several processes including urbanization, industrialization and the adoption of the ideology as well as the products of modern science." (Srinivas 1961:28)

Both are processes of assimilation and of destruction of ethnic identities; Westernization implies even more, as it is related to the diffusion and implantation of the model of liberal capitalist society and the supplanting of the ideologies peculiar to the society on which it is imposed.

In this panorama of explanations of the desired integration and harmonious cultural coexistence, some outlines drawn by G. Chattopadhyay point towards a vision that comes closer to reality. His classification of fringe communities and core communities, though with the defect of the doubtful and artificial dualism, leads him to emphasize aspects overlooked by other interpretations. Thus:

"A fringe community is allowed economic existence by the core so long as the former performs the peripheral economic tasks of society, i.e. clearing jungles and bringing virgin land under plough, scavenging in cities, manually coal cutting in mining industry, etc. A corollary to this is that as soon as a fringe community tries to enter into areas of main economic activities, the core communities try to stop them. This is an area of conflict in the Indian society." (Chattopadhyay 1972:489).

Unfortunately, this broader vision does not lead Chattopadhyay to new solutions, but to one of the most drastic and

intransigent ones, assimilation, and to the rejection of any kind of integration.

THE PROBLEM OF INTEGRATION:
A VISION CENTERED ON FEAR AND DANGERS

ABOUT THE "FEAR OF LOSING ONE'S IDENTITY"

When expressing their opinions about the reactions of the Adivasis to the integration plans, people often concentrate on the subjects of "fear" and "dangers". This also occurs when discussing the situation of India as a nation-state facing "divisive tendencies", i.e., the collective expression, in words and in action, of its different social components. Those who hail India's cultural diversity recognize the fact that certain groups are against the integration plans. This reaction is explained by these groups' "lack of confidence in social justice." Therefore:

"Religious, linguistic or regional groups at times seem to oppose such integration but if we carefully analyse their attitudes, we will find that what they oppose is not integration but the loss of their identity... the more intense loyalty to a smaller unit arises out of its fear of submergence in the larger groups." (Humayun Kabir 1961:11 and 13).

Within the panorama of interpretations this opinion is important: it points out the genuine necessity of defending one's own identity. But this reaction cannot be explained solely via fear of integration, or lack of understanding. On the contrary, we see the existence of an ethnic consciousness,

of the strength of the historical and cultural content of their identity, and it shows that these groups have a real knowledge of the society at large and recognize their relative position within it.

Humayun Kabir also dismisses, at least in the name of tolerance and coexistence, the fears expressed by the groups professing national integration when the question of loyalties is brought up:

"Loyalty to the nation or the State does not and need not mean the denial of feeling for one's own group or community. For one thing, all human beings are simultaneously members of many different groups... To work for an India in which all languages, all religions, all communities, in a word, all interests and aptitudes will find ample scope for expression and fulfilment, is the surest way of achieving national and emotional integration." (Ibid.:14 and 16).

Declarations like these, however, are no longer sustained when these groups (sections) give vent to their antagonism and conflicts in actions that are not always defensive but can be offensive as well. Then their demonstration of solidarity and their collective actions are seen as expressions of "dangerous provincialism", and, in some cases, considered a threat to the state security. This is illustrated by the reactions to the situation in the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura. There, the "danger" that confronts the Indian nation goes beyond the danger that the Adivasis and their separatist movement may present. In these cases, the "tribal problem" becomes subordinate to national security reasons and to the question of frontiers and strategic areas. The development of these groups is no longer a matter of humane benevolence or progress. On the contrary:

"For real security in the north-eastern region, the tribal people must be brought out of their

isolation into the mainstream of Indian nationalism (with the aim of) restrain(ing) China militarily and politically in Asia." (Rakshat Puri 1972:98).

Another instance in which the reality of the Adivasi situation is lost in a tangle of fears is when they are considered an obstacle to the programmes and activities aimed at "progress," a progress that in the last resort coincides with capitalist development. This is the case in the establishment of state-owned or private industrial complexes, as for instance the industrial complex at Hatia, and the large-scale exploitation of natural resources in areas with Adivasi population. When attempts are made to integrate this section of the population into the industrial capitalistic society, for instance by means of community development programmes, the solution is looked for in the:

"education, persuasion, peaceful replacement of old undesirable tribal practices with new scientifically accepted superior practices." (Mathur 1972: 16 and 20).

THE CIVILIZING MISSION OF THE STATE: A NATIONAL COMMITMENT

The Constitution of India endows the State with a clear mission towards its disadvantaged groups: to protect them and to guide their development. In assuming this task, academics, officials and planners have left little or no room for participation on the part of individuals from the groups "to be guided". This is true even when legal provisions for their formal participation at different levels have been taken (legislative bodies, higher education, etc.)

The mission is generalized into a national commitment:

"To raise economically and educationally backward

tribal people to the general level of the other sections of our nation, and also to go forward as one with them towards better conditions and higher culture." (Chattopadhyay 1972:121).

How do some people (in this case academics) conceive this task? During the Seminar on the Tribal Situation in India (1969) (Singh 1972) lectures were given which stressed their assimilation and integration for "sheer humanistic reasons", as a way of responding to the government initiative "to promoting guided growth and change in tribal society", as a means of eliminating undesirable traits (generally in the field of culture, religion and political levels). However, specific criticism was directed at anthropologists for their narrow perspectives:

"It is only after Independence that a large number of anthropologists have started coming out of the universities. All of them, or a very large majority of them, belong to the core communities, and I suspect that their attitude to tribals are somewhat like that of an elder brother towards his slightly retarded younger brother who nonetheless has some unique gifts like being able to draw well, or is good at tinkering with faulty mechanisms of household gadgets and cars. Even if the younger brother is treated by the psychiatrist and cured, the elder brother must see that the cured younger brother retains his gift. Also, the elder brother must be able to retain his authority over the younger one... Have any anthropologist or the policy-makers in the Government ever asked the backward sections, the tribals, if they wish to retain their individuality and separate identity within the Indian society? I assume that the answer will be a negative one because the anthropologists and the policy-makers believe that they know what is good for those

underprivileged people. But do they really?"
(Chattopadhyay 1972:489-490).

What is it some anthropologists think they know better and what is their exact proposal as to the content of their mission? Fundamentally to modernize, develop and integrate the Adivasis. But the anthropologists do not always clearly explain the significance of each of these aims and the direction in which they point. Nor do they clearly visualize the social, psychological and historical costs in terms of identity, of cultural elimination, entailed by the processes set off by official decrees or elitarian intellectual convictions. It is not only a question of what the Adivasis may lose or gain; it is also a question of what the society at large may lose or gain. The implementation of such programmes have affected the Adivasis at all levels of life, restricting them towards a pattern of development formulated from the top. As early as in 1949, the anthropologists talked about proposing a "planned acculturation" (The Eastern Anthropologist. Tribal Number, 8,1, 1949, cit. Vidyarthi 1974). Later they talked about accelerating the speed of economic and social change among the Adivasis, of finding the most suitable means of socializing the Adivasis within the dominant current of ideas, values, knowledge and symbols; nevertheless any possible contributions of other traditions are by and large excluded. This form of socialization is not devoid of ideology, and the formal educational institutions legitimize a certain social order of which they are a direct product. These institutions also diffuse a certain conception of the "national:" the "official culture" is defined to the detriment of other cultures; a historical tradition is inculcated while other histories are ignored. How does the State become an "educative state" through the formal educational institutions and the mass media, supported by its intellectuals? In the name of national integration (with what purpose?) and national interest (which considering the constant efforts along these lines seems either not to be general or not to have been com-

prehended by everybody) one is enjoined to accept and adapt to a different system of values, to a different conception of reality, to a different knowledge and learning, with the consequent rejection or oblivion of what is one's own, which thus becomes devoid of historical value and force. This tendency is seen, for instance, in relation to the burning issue of language, one of the most important determinants in the definition of identity. If education at the first stages took place in tribal languages, these could later be replaced by the dominant regional language. About this G.S. Ghurye says:

"The end to be achieved is the speedy and effective spread of education among the so-called aborigenes... To achieve this end, the tribal languages may be used, wherever the conditions make their use imperative, even as media of instruction, so the so-called aborigenes may be attracted to the schools and may derive real benefit from them. Two more or less sure results will ensue. First, very soon the so-called aborigenes will show a tendency to modify some traits of their culture, and gradually they will effect a change therein. Second, they will drop their tribal languages and will adopt, in the largest number of cases, the Indo-Aryan languages which, as instrument of expression are more highly evolved than their own languages and possess a varied literature." (Ghurye 1963:183-190).

In the field of value systems and world view some people praise the considerable linguistic progress that has been made in the central part of India (Bengal, Bihar, south of Uttar Pradesh, south of Rajasthan-Madhya Pradesh, north of Bombay and Orissa) as:

"Their economic, political and linguistic assimi-

lation in the rest of the society seems to have almost been completed and there is a satisfactory progress in the religious sphere from animism to Hinduism with their ultimate absorption in the Hindu society; and there remains only cultural variation in the institutional organization of kinship. The other modes of psychological, phenomenological and mythological integration also seem near-won-over." (Doshi 1972:465).

But at the same time there is some alarm at the government's apparent weakness or sentimentality towards the Adivasis, as:

"The official policy in our country has allowed as a friendlier gesture the existence of the plurality of tribal cultures... When such a type of friendly plural existence is given to tribal culture, in any event of frustration it may develop a movement dedicated to complete independence."
(Ibid.:472, my underlining)

Are we now back at the inexplicable fears? Indeed these fears may, in fact, be well grounded, owing to the existence of Adivasi movements of secession and independence in some areas, especially on the north-eastern border and, with different characteristics, in the central area. But we do not believe that they originate in the "friendly cultural pluralism." Behind the fear and the alarm one sees clearly the motives of certain sections of the Indian society that are intolerant of the government's attitude permitting the cultural existence of the Adivasis, a permission that is reduced to the preservation of traditional arts and culture. To let the Adivasis keep their culture means that they have the possibility to affirm their identity, that their thoughts are free, and that it makes it easier, through gaining consciousness of what is their own, to develop a consciousness of reality, of interests that might not coincide, or be agreeable to

the policy making sections or the intellectuals responding to the latter. The integration is finally a partial integration, with definite aims that are not those of developing a new and enriched national consciousness. Thus:

"the force of tribal labour must be organized on a racial basis, leaving aside the political interests and other created interests." (Ibid.: 473).

If the political problems and the obstacles generated by these ethnic manifestations are ignored for the moment, there remains the task of integrating the Adivasi peasant worker into the established economic system, so as to obtain the highest possible exploitation of his labour without stimulating his political consciousness. This can be done by exploiting the Adivasi as a peasant or as cheap labour to be drawn upon when needed outside the rural sector. This process does not seem to have been completed among the Adivasi peasants, though it is maintained that:

"The motivation behind the tribal economic activities was only meagre subsistence... (and that) the new economic policy has provided the tribals with a motivation - a definite purpose of action charged with developmental emotions or sentiments." (Ibid.:466 ff.)

F.G. Bailey (1961) for example notes the switchover to the production of cash-crops (turmeric and oil seeds) by the Khonds. The Oraons now cultivate cotton, the Bhils tobacco, cotton and groundnuts.

SOLUTIONS TO THE "TRIBAL PROBLEM"

PATERNALISM, ASSIMILATION, INTEGRATION

The prevailing conception of "nation" in India produces two solutions to the problem of national identity as regards the Adivasi population: one at the level of identity understood in terms of culture, and the second at the level of economy.

Where the problem is understood as basically cultural, the position is expressed in two ways:

1) by the negation of the identity (ethnic-historical, cultural) of the Adivasis, which leads to the implementation of the most efficient ways of acculturation and de-tribalization, and,

2) conversely, by the idealization of the "tribal", an attitude represented by Verrier Elwin and his proposal of the policy of reservations or isolation, which he himself describes as a policy of philanthropology.

A clear example of the first of these two attitudes towards the problem of identity is the ideas maintained by G.S. Ghurye in The Scheduled Tribes (1963), for whom the Adivasis are:

"imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society... they are in reality Backward Hindus." (Ibid.:19)

Taking as an indicator the instances of hinduization of the Adivasis and the opportunities of social mobility which this process is supposed to provide (a relative and false mobility which, in fact, leads to a strengthening of the existing system), and as a point of reference the social patterns of

the culturally hegemonic Hindu groups, Ghurye states that:

"The proper description of these peoples must refer itself to their place in or near Hindu society and not to their supposed autochthonism." (Ibid.)

The tendency towards negation of identity is reflected in the opinion that the languages of the Adivasis should be eradicated. With the purpose of diffusing education (the official, legitimized education), Ghurye thinks that:

"The preservation of so many uncultivated languages is not very desirable, (and this fact) should be accepted by those who have to carry on the administration." (Ibid.:187).

strengthening his affirmation by adding that:

"In the opinion of many there is very little of value to be preserved in the tribal languages." (Ibid.:189).

As for the language issue, languages are no longer considered as vehicles for expressing identities, but as literary manifestations, and value judgments and ethnocentric criteria are employed to justify their "uselessness." Thus:

"The languages spoken by the so-called aborigenes were till recently only spoken tongues and had no scripts of their own. Needless to say, they have had no literature, the only kind of it being what is known as folk literature, viz., folk-songs and folk-tales." (Ibid.:186).

Contrary to what Ghurye thinks, the Adivasi literature, traditionally oral and now written, is far from insignificant, neither for those for whom it was made (the same people who created it) nor for the scholars as a direct expression and appreciation of everyday reality and historic events (it suffices to mention the protest songs, those with a clear political content or those songs which reflect on present

economic processes¹⁵). The importance of Adivasi literature lies not in its literary perfection, but in its use as a vehicle of expression and communication. It is not just literary production that should be enjoyed in solitude: the songs and the poems are composed to be sung, danced to, memorized and repeated. Years ago, some Adivasis - the Khasis and the Nagas - became interested in writing their own history and in describing elements of their culture such as their folk medical practices (cf. Report by Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, 1952:233:234).

Though it is true, as Ghurye says, that a certain knowledge of the languages spoken by non-Adivasi populations is necessary if the Adivasis are to develop their everyday relationships without obstacles, it is hard to accept that this must entail the gradual elimination of the tribal languages. Finally, focusing on the technological, economic and "cultural" changes, Ghurye proposes the sacrifice of these cultures on the alter of development because he considers them "out of fashion" (Ghurye 1963:329).

The position of Verrier Elwin and his idealization of the tribal formed a complete contrast to this. If the author quoted above proposes the sacrifice of the Adivasi cultures, Elwin proposes their petrification.

Verrier Elwin even suggested the establishment of "national parks" or reservations for the Bhaigas and the Gonds where they could take refuge and, in this way, be protected. Later, when confronted with the strong resistance of the politicians as well as the academics, Elwin had to give up the idea. The first reaction came in 1936, at a meeting of the Indian National Congress held in Faizpur, followed by the resolution passed against it in Haripura and, in 1938, in Bombay. The attacks centred on the anthropologists, who were accused of trying to preserve the Adivasi communities as museum specimens for their personal use and to keep them

"uncivilized" (Elwin 1943, 1960). Academics, like Ghurye, criticized the project for being non-viable as it did not take into consideration the situation of the non-Adivasi population living in the territories where the establishment of reservations was contemplated and because, in economic terms, "Dr. Elwin's proposal will deprive the State of a large income", referring to the important timber resources and to the income proceeding from the land (Ghurye 1963:181-183). In this criticism, the situation of the Adivasis is again subordinate to the needs of the State.

Verrier Elwin combines knowledge and comprehension of the Adivasi societies with a Rousseauan admiration for them. This combination is, however, not the most adequate for finding practical solutions which may help the Adivasis to meet new situations and the administrators to understand the reality. Further, in spite of his profound knowledge of the Adivasi groups he is ignorant of the total reality with which they are faced.

In the words of Elwin:

"I advocate... for the aboriginals a policy of temporary isolation and protection, and for their civilized neighbours a policy of immediate reform... We may fight for the three freedoms - freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom from interference. We may see that the aboriginals get a square deal economically. We may see that they are freed from cheats and impostors, from oppressive landlords and moneylenders, from corrupt and rapacious officials... If there must be schools, we may see that these teach useful crafts like carpentry and agriculture, and not a useless literacy... We may guard them against adventurers who would rob them of their songs, their dances, their festivals, their laughter... But whatever is done, and I would be the last to lay down a general programme, it must be done with caution

and above all with love and reverence. The aboriginals are the real swadeshi products of India, in whose presence everyone is foreign. They are the ancient people with moral claims and rights thousands of years old. They were here first: they should come first in our regard." (Elwin 1943:31-32).

Three elements are reflected in Elwin's scheme: first, a moralist intention of "reforming" the non-Adivasi society which would lead to the eradication of oppression, corruption and exploitation; second, the conception of the Adivasis as "simple children of nature", whose life "is simple and happy, enriched by natural pleasures" and "for all their poverty, their days are spent in the beauty of the hills" (Ibid.:22,31). This conception of the Adivasis as simple and helpless, unable to come up with their own response to the situations with which they are confronted, leads to a variant of paternalism, this time charitable, which well merits Elwin's designation of philanthropology. This circumstance, together with the third characteristic of his thought, the rejection of a programme and of confronting reality with proposals for concrete policies that go beyond that of the reservations, makes him turn to the protectionist attitude that seeks to isolate the Adivasis from the rest of the society for fear that they should become contaminated, and restricts them to an illusory universe where reality will never interfere. Thus:

"It is desired so that these simple children of nature may be protected from those who invariably exploit them, and may continue to live in the freedom and happiness that is their birthright." (Ibid.: 29).

The two solutions to tribal problems presented above - the destruction of the native cultures and the artificial preservation of a tribal paradise imagined by anthropological romanticism - both carry the germ of the negation of the

Adivasi reality. One obliterates it, the other discretely recreates it. In the last instance, they both eliminate it, either by means of an explicit policy or by isolation, and neither of them respects it. The cultures of these groups, being elements that define their identities and possible factors in the strengthening of mutually binding ties, are cut down or reduced to a folkloristic expression. The cultural vitality of the Adivasis, in spite of the attacks by the planned acculturation, does not indicate a capricious survival of "out-dated" traits; on the contrary it reveals an active attitude of resistance which in its own way, communicates solidarity against the forces of the outside¹⁶.

Finally, without adopting extreme positions, today's most conciliatory views advocate a certain respect for the "cultural autonomy" of these groups and, at the same time, suggest that the latter should make themselves familiar with the:

"... 'emerging core' of the Indian national culture so that the elite as well as the masses are oriented toward the core pattern rather than seek an escape model in their search for new identity." (S. Sinha 1972: 421).

(Once more the defense of acculturation in order to concretize the model of Indian unity.)

Other solutions approach the "tribal problem" from an economic point of view. As mentioned above, this approach is based on the assumption that these populations present special characteristics and deserve special treatment. This notion of the special is based on the establishments of fictitious dualisms: life styles, levels of education, "stage of development;" the backwardness of the Adivasis is opposed to the development and modernization of the non-tribal groups. The construction of these alleged dualisms is nothing but a cloak for social stratifications and processes imposed by

society as a whole and of which both "poles" are a result.

The condition of the Adivasis, described as backward and disadvantageous, is sometimes explained as a natural result of inherent characteristics of the Adivasis. This condition is not seen as a product of the establishment of historically developed socio-economic relations. A paternalist discrimination can then justify imposing all kinds of changes and manipulations from the top. In this way, a special administrative structure has developed:

"... for safeguarding the interests of the tribals and to accelerating the tempo of social and economic change." (Vidyarthi 1974:47).

Thus, since 1957, community development programmes for the tribal areas have been introduced. They began with the establishment of forty-three multipurpose tribal blocks, rose to three hundred projects in the Third Plan (1961-1966) and numbered 504 in 1973 (Ibid.:52, Table 2).

The tribal development programmes were based on the community and on its individuals as units of implementation. Special importance was attached to changing the pattern of cultivation from slash-and-burn agriculture to settled agriculture, to the provision of farm implements and credits and to the establishment of pilot farms through which new agricultural practices could be introduced. In the field of education it was wisely planned that the traditional educative organizations, the dormitories for youths, should be converted into Community Centres. According to B.M. Pande, the aim of these Community Development Programmes has been to bring about:

"... comprehensive and integrated changes in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the tribal people so as to create conditions in which they can contribute their maximum to the total growth of country, come nearer to the

people and... (be) integrated with them." (Pande 1968,11,2:33,57).

To which you may add the words of L.P. Vidyarthi:

"... to promote equality and integration between tribals and non-tribals." (1974:70).

What significance do the Adivasis attach to the goals of industrialization and modernization proposed by the Community Development Programmes and by the plans for rapid industrialization in zones of Adivasi peasant population?

With the community and the individual as basis, the plan is to "integrate" smaller units under this centre. The communities should concentrate on their own internal problems but remain subordinate to higher organs hierarchically. With respect to economic and political integration, there is a tendency to disregard those problems which will have their cause in the zones beyond the boundaries of the Adivasi communities. As regards the projects of industrialization, the modern industrial sector has neither been able to nor wished to absorb the displaced agricultural labour (as in the case of the big industries of Chota Nagpur), thus encouraging the survival of the section of Adivasi peasants described as backward, keeping them as a permanent labour force and thus increasing the pool of cheap potential labour.

Advocates of the development programmes proceed on a premise of equality of opportunity and economic integration, which should in turn lead to economic and political homogenization. Despite these lofty ideals, we have, instead, seen the emergence of new patterns of stratification and exploitation. Already in 1946, W.V. Grigson called on Indian thinkers to be "increasingly aware of the aboriginal problem as its own 'colonial' problem." (Grigson 1946,26,2:89).

At the Seminar on Employment of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, U.N. Dhebar clearly pointed out various aspects of the economic situation of these sections: the loss of land caused by the interference of contractors, the forest

service and moneylenders and government acquisitions; and agrarian reforms which "in most cases have been damaging to (these sections)". Dhebar proposed urgent measures: the protection of the Adivasi rights in land and forests; the award of land for cultivation and places for habitation; the granting of credits and facilities for training technical skills and crafts in the industrial, commercial and agricultural sectors. These points were supported in the final discussions and recommendations called for a minimum agricultural wage, establishment of an agricultural industry, and the immediate elimination of debt-bondage." (Government of India Report on Employment of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 1964:23-27, 39-46).

AUTONOMY AND FREEDOM OF DECISION

As already mentioned, participants at the Seminar on National Integration in 1958 acknowledged the plural nature of Indian society. At the time, however, it only resulted in the advocacy of a cultural synthesis through the efforts of the universities and of the formation of youth associations independent of particular ascriptions. The specific situation of the different groups within Indian society were not touched on and, although communalism was rejected, it was understood in terms of groups who remained true to particular loyalties for "fear... that they may not get their due." The nature of the existing socio-economic relations were not taken into consideration.

Indian scholars like Nirmal K. Bose (1964:1-10) recognize and try to solve the general situation of exploitation of the Adivasis through political education and institutionalized political channels. They reject the special treatment which Adivasis are given according to the Constitution because it might accentuate the tendencies towards communalism and

"tribalism", or towards a consciousness of a closed group. Bose poses the problem in terms of eliminating discrimination. He suggests a half-way identification defined by contrast to the extremes¹⁷, and proposes action along Gandhian lines:

"In the Gandhian way, the exploited are organized irrespective of cultural differences, in order to end exploitation by their non-violent strength, unaided, even if that be necessary... Gandhi's task of organization of the non-violent strength of the people through extensive political education and reformation yet remains unaccomplished." (Ibid.)

In between all the material published in the form of plans, recommendations, studies, etc., and the steps taken to "plan" the above partial integration of the Adivasis, there are voices that denounce the official paternalism as dangerous or, at least, counter-productive; they emphasize that the Adivasis should have a free hand to make their own decisions, and encourage their political awakening. In spite of the fact that the plural nature of the Indian nation is sometimes touched on, there are few affirmations referring to a multi-national state and even fewer defending the political autonomy of the areas in India having a majority of Adivasis. As a rule, there is great reluctance to accept the existing situations of regional autonomy; the same applies to tendencies towards autonomy which have existed for a long time in certain parts of India. There is a strong tendency to isolate the great majority of the Adivasis as a separate section from the Indian peasant mass, or to present class struggles as communal conflicts.

There are, in fact, two problems: first, the autonomy, within the conception of India as a multinational, multi-ethnic state, and, second, the character of the political participation of the Adivasis. For the time being, the ideas of a multi-ethnic or multinational state and of autonomy have been defended by the Communist Party of India (CPI) and by some

left-wing intellectuals. In his Note on National Integration (1968) submitted to the President of the National Integration Council of the Ministry of Home Affairs, P. Sundarayya affirms that:

"the great multinational states cannot go on being strong and stable unless their constituting parts are guaranteed the most extensive democracy and a complete autonomy."¹⁸.

At the same time he denounces the serious mistake which sees in the demands made by the national minorities a threat to national unity, when in fact they are manifestations of the prevailing social order. Sundarayya shows:

"the tenacious resistance to the formation of linguistics states, the persistent intent to force a single language to be the official language of the Indian Union, the denial of the democratic rights and autonomy of the states, the refusal to concede complete autonomy and even special status within the Indian Union to individuals living in mountain or forest areas (...) (generally called tribes) the non recognition of the rights of linguistics minorities and of the fact that rights conceded on paper are not being practiced." (Ibid.:8).

Defending the idea of regional autonomy and the self-government of Adivasis, the CPI backed the creation of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Arunachal.

A.B. Bardhan (1973) also sees the issue of autonomy as inevitable in areas with a majority of Adivasi population. He sees it carried out in the form of separate states or special regions within the existing states so that the Adivasi majority may hold the political power. Logically the defense of autonomy leads him to condemn the official paternalism of the tribal development blocks. He proposes that the

initiatives and the opinions of the Adivasis should be taken into account. He also points to the effects of assimilationist efforts such as the "natural" extinction of the tribal languages, which have created counter-trends in the form of tribal segregation and separatist tendencies.

In these cases, the issue of autonomy for the Adivasi areas combines recognition of the rise of ethnic consciousness, with the possibility of their having a formal political organization.

Adivasi expressions of political protest have often been explained as a product of "culture clash" (e.g., Ghurye 1963) caused by:

"ecological-cultural isolation, economical backwardness, and feelings of frustration about a lowly status vis-a-vis the advanced sectors." (S. Sinha 1972: 421).

or by reference to the:

"evil forces of regionalism, communalism and linguism" as "negative aspects of infra-nationalism and subnationalism." (Vidyarthi 1972:438-453).

Similarly, there are those who look upon this (political) protest as a struggle to reach a higher social status by political means. In this case, they stress the importance of pan-tribal alliances which could conceivably create a firm unity based on common characteristics, at times ideologically constructed, and for the struggle for a common territory (Mahapatra 1972:399-409).

But the political action of the Adivasis frequently goes beyond the limits of pantribalism and, without rejecting the aim of autonomy they seek alliances not only with other Adivasis but also with other deprived Indians (generally poor or landless peasants) at the level of the economic struggle. Some sections of Indian society have encouraged these alliances among the peasantry, regarding the Adivasis' struggle as part of the struggle in which workers and peasants

participate. Thus, according to Bardhan:

"The tribal people's struggle is a part of the democratic struggle against the capitalist path of development... There is not conflict between the working people all over India and the tribal people, who are exploited by the same classes... the democratic movement in the country has to recognize in the tribal people's struggle a powerful ally - an ally with tremendous revolutionary potentialities for the realization of national democracy and socialism. Failure on the part of the democratic movement to champion the cause of the tribal people and to integrate their struggles within it will make the tribals helpless prey to the machinations of the rightists, or the adventurism of the ultraleftists." (Bardhan 1973:57).

The latter refers especially to the armed struggle carried on by the Naxalites in West Bengal, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, in the late sixties, in which the Adivasis took an active part fighting together with other peasants. From the following extract it will be seen how the Naxalites looked upon the participation of the Adivasis in the armed struggle, and besides, a certain manipulation of symbols like that of the hero-leaders of the history of the Adivasis of Chota Nagpur may be noted:

"The coordinating committee of the communist revolutionaries of the State of Bihar salutes the rise of the revolutionary movement of the Adivasi people of Chota Nagpur for the emancipation from centuries of exploitation, for the creation of their own state and for the development of their lives... let every Adivasi rise and fight as the great Birsa did, as the great Siddu and Kanu fought against the native and foreign oppressors. Let each Adivasi remember that his struggle is part of the

great popular struggle that is aflame in India and in the whole world against imperialism, feudalism and capitalism." (Statement of the Bihar State Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries, "On the Struggle of the Adivasi People against Oppression and Exploitation", 12 June 1968, Cit. in J.C. Johari 1972:160-162).

Bardhan pointed to the dangers of such "terrorist adventurism". These dangers are the uncontrolled state repression of the Adivasi peasants by means of the police and paramilitary forces, a repression that continues on the pretext of fighting remaining Naxalite elements¹⁹. It is evident that, within the present social and political framework, in order to obtain changes, the Adivasis are able to organize in order to fight for limited but still important aims: for their land, for the elimination of indebtedness and forced labour, for their rights to the forests. In this way, they will also become aware of their history, their situation and their importance within the social framework of today's India as well as of their possibilities in the future.

THE REACTIONS OF THE ADIVASIS OF CHOTA NAGPUR

"Jharkhand abua daku diku senoa"

("Jharkhand is ours. The diku chiefs should go away.")

(Slogan of the Jharkhand Party).

In the course of their long history of resistance and of political expression, the Adivasis have been fighting at two complementary levels: at one level, the agrarian struggle, resisting submission to the global capitalist system, colonial or neo-colonial; and at an other level, in defence of their identity, their native territory, culture, language and history. The struggle has become especially evident since the 19th century. The great movements and rebellions of the time, like the Santal Rebellion (1855) and the Birsaite Movement (1895) were not only turned against the immediate oppressive elements (new landowners, moneylenders, merchants and planters) but also against the colonial administration.

Both rebellions had two explicit objectives: the retrieval of land meaning both agricultural land and national territory, and related to this, the goal of political autonomy and the ideal at the time defined as their own "kingdom". This could be obtained not only by the elimination of persons not belonging to the community (the dikus) recognized as being the oppressors, and by the retrieval of the rights and properties of the Adivasis; it could also be obtained by what Birsa, the leader of the 1895 movement considered as the "homage to the first men of the race", the retrieval of their own culture. These two complementary aspects of the Adivasi political actions in Chota Nagpur persist in the current political activities of the Adivasi peasants in the area, where both ethnic consciousness (strong and with a long history) and

emerging class consciousness continue to operate.

Conscious of their own ethnicity, the Adivasis try to retrieve their history and assert control over the natural resources of their region, and to break their cultural dependency on the state society. This revaluation goes beyond particular groups and cultural variations. In Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas, a basis for pantribal solidarity has been formed and the Adivasis of the region are beginning to see the possibility of accepting a common cultural heritage. This ideological awakening is sufficiently strong to resist or in some cases modify the efforts at hinduization and christianization taking place. The Bhumijes, for example, highly hinduized for a long time, had formerly chosen to abandon the road of resistance for that of emulation and had been struggling to become recognized as Kshatriyans within the caste system; lately, they have agreed to include the term "Adivasi" in the name of the Bhumij Kshatriya association. Though contradictory, this indicates a possible change in their search for identity, and in due course they will have to choose between identifying themselves with their alleged past as Kshatriyas in the caste system, or as Adivasis (cf. Mahapatra 1972:408).

On the other hand, given the strong correlation between ethnic ascription and class situation, and without forgetting the internal stratification of the ethnic groups, the political action has manifested itself in the field of class struggle, above all in the rural sector, and in an incipient way among the Adivasi workers, as is seen from the strikes that have occurred in the industrial complexes of Chota Nagpur. In these cases, and above all in the peasant movements, alliances have been made across ethnic boundaries with other non-Adivasi peasant sections in the struggle against the landowners, the middlemen and those who come to deprive them of their land.

The trend in favour of "re-tribalization" indicates an emergence of a new ideology based on a socio-cultural identity, with roots in concrete socio-economic situations.

It implies resistance to the integration in a state conceived and constructed by hegemonic groups, a resistance that proposes a plurality of identities and rejects a politico-economic integration founded on greater exploitation of them as peasants, or as workers; just as well, it rejects an integration which could be destructive of their cultural identities.

Considering one of the goals that the Adivasis propose themselves - the retrieval of economic and political control of their territory - one should ask about the eventual consequences of this control: who would benefit from it? Would it create new orders of unequal relations? Would alliances on an ethnic basis favour a strengthening of the class consciousness?

Given the emergence of national consciousness and historical initiative, backed by a tradition of protest and resistance, it is possible that this ethnic force would be an effective weapon for achieving full participation in the transformation of India's multi-ethnic society and the creation of new economic, political and social orders.

NOTES

1. The Jharkhand Party, organized as a party in 1951, was from the beginning directed by Adivasi converts, some of whom became its most important leaders, like Jaipal Singh. It has used the defence of ethnic identity to attract the non-Christian Adivasis. In 1963, it merged with the Congress Party. It has tried to unite the Christian and non-Christian Adivasis in the rural and urban areas, and has obtained influence among the migrants of Bihar in North Bengal.
2. Jaipal Singh was the leader of the Jharkhand Party. A Munda, he was educated in Oxford. Nominated President of the Adivasi Sabha in 1939, an organization of Adivasi converts and predecessor of the Party, he exerted a great influence on the movement.
3. R. Mukherjee quotes the Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in Gaya, by Tanner.
4. According to a study by the Bihar Tribal Research Institute made in the district of Ranchi in 1965.
5. G. Bennett refers to the backing of the particularisms in Uganda by the colonial government. This backing was intended to ensure the absence of joint political actions, and indirectly supported the position of the Gandas in the political field.
6. The conception of the dual structure of society is especially prevalent in the field of urban studies on Africa. The tribal pole is considered a static point of reference. The urban pole, however, is looked upon as subject to change, without considering at the

same time the changes that take place at the rural level, which might explain the characteristics of the urban process. The ideas of dichotomy or continuum are artificial creations which ignore the historical conditions that have formed the total structure of the society that is being studied.

7. Approaches based on the concept of pluralism as expressed in the theory of the plural society, concentrate on the study of persistent cleavage between sections differing in "race, ethnicity, religion or culture." Cf. Leo Kuper 1974:240 ff.
8. For instance, in A.L. Epstein 1969, 1973; in J.C. Mitchell 1956, 1969, 1974; in F. Barth 1970. These authors regard the ethnic categories as mechanisms of classification created by the ethnic groups to comprehend the complex relations that developed in the process of urbanization or, on a broader scale, to organize the interaction.
9. Cf., for instance, A.L. Epstein (1969) who takes the individual as a unit of study, as in the case of Chanda. The individuals have been chosen at random without definite criteria as examples, so to establish "present regularities in urban life."
10. In J.C. Mitchell's interpretation, the Europeans are identified as a positive reference group in the crisis of identity created by colonialism. Thus he affirms quoting Wilson: "He saw quite clearly that 'Africans cannot but wish to gain the respect and to share the civilized status and the new wealth of the Europeans, whose general social superiority is always before them'. Wilson's comments, applicable to Broken Hill

in 1939-40, are equally applicable to the modern Copperbelt. The Europeans are in a position of social superiority and Africans aspire to the civilization which is the particular characteristic and prerequisite of the socially superior group. The civilized way of life thus provides a scale along which the prestige of Africans in urban areas (and to an increasing extent in rural areas) may be measured." Clothing, education and position in the occupational hierarchy are used as indicators. As regards the colonizer, he is presented in a favourable light, supporting the idea of "social superiority," the "civilized way of life," and the importance of his values.

11. These groups were identified in this way for the first time in the Indian Government Act of 1935. The special attention that they required was further specified in the Constitution of 1950.
12. See the "Report on the three discussion groups of the Seminar on National Integration" in Report on the Seminar on National Integration, 1958:102-104 :
 "From time immemorial India has been thought as one country... Through all this long history, there has been at least an emerging sense of oneness in the country, and in contrast with the rest of the world, Indians, who speak different languages and have different racial characteristics, and profess different faiths, have thought of themselves as one people."
13. The same Report goes on saying:
 "... it is necessary to take note of elements in contemporary life that tend to weaken our unity and

common purpose. Such things as language and different economic and social interests seem to militate against the growing process of integration. Regionalism is raising its head in many quarters. It is of vital importance, therefore, to overcome the factors that are injurious to our national life and strengthen those that bring us together."

14. In their article "Some aspects of political development in the North Eastern Hill areas of India", M.N. Srinivas and R.D. Sankal ask: "What kind of an attitude, what kind of policy do we in India adopt in regard to the tribal minorities within our national boundaries?"
15. Cf., for instance, the songs compiled by Sureh Singh (The Dust Storm and the Hanging Mist, Calcutta, 1966), of which some are mentioned by W.J. Culshaw and W.C. Archer, "The Santal Rebellion," Man in India, Vol. XXV, Nov. 4, December 1945, and by Martin Orans, The Santal. A Tribe in Search of a Great Tradition, Detroit, 1965.
- Among the books of contemporary poets, for instance, Seled by Ram Dayal Munda (Ranchi, 1967), in Mundari and Hindi, and Hisir, Mundaarii Poems, a collection of contemporary Munda poems edited by Ram Dayal Munda. From the latter, Susana Devalle has translated into Spanish the poem of Ram Dayal Munda, "La Aldea de Hatia se estremece" (Estudios de Asia y Africa, Vol. XII, No. 1, El Colegio de México, México, 1977) which refers to the process of industrialization in Bihar.
16. Cf. C. Guzmán Böckler, Colonialismo y Revolución, Siglo XXI, México, 1975:102. Referring to the natives

of Guatemala, he says: "When all these elements are put together (satisfaction of instincts: preservation of vitality, dances; rationalization and preservation of fundamental principles: pictographic textiles; establishment of territory: however, defensive and offensive at the same time; preservation of their own means of expression: their languages) a clear social strategy appears, which not only points towards the physical and spiritual survival but forms and consolidates a strong collective identity capable of going into action to retrieve what they have lost: from time to land and liberty ... this collective identity cloaks a collective personality of resistance."

17. "A renewed and exaggerated interest in one's past history, and its antithesis in the shape of a co-existent love for westernization are both trends which create barriers between it and other communities which may have had a different history, and yet wish to march in step with it in the direction of 'socialism'." (Bose 1964:10).
18. Note submitted by the Communist Party of India (marxist) to the National Integration Council Meeting in Srinagor, in Calcutta, 20 June 1968.
19. Cf. for instance, recent mentions: "Dark world of the Harijans, Adivasis", Link, Vol.19, No.43, 5 June 1977 p.8-13; "Class war in Bhojpur" parts I and II, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.XIII, No.1, 7 January 1978, and No.3, 21 January 1978; "Growing peasant revolt", ibid., Vol.XIII, No.2, 14 January 1978; "Bihar: another movement in the making", ibid., Vol.XIII, No.10, 11 March 1978, etc...

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PLURIETNICIDAD EN INDIA: LOS ADIVASIS
DE CHOTA NAGPUR Y SANTAL PARGANS

Copenhague 1980

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El siguiente resumen está basado en el documento original escrito en castellano. Deseamos aclarar que, por razones de espacio, no ha sido posible resumir todos los capítulos. Los criterios que se han seguido en la elaboración de este resumen han sido principalmente los de destacar la situación actual de los adivasis.

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Copenhague, Abril de 1980

LOS CAMPESINOS ADIVASIS* DE CHOTA NAGPUR Y SANTAL PARGANAS

*"En nuestros campos
En nuestras tierras
Hay un mundo de riquezas"*

*"Nunca tenemos alimento.
Día a día morimos de hambre
/y nos disecamos.
Las sucias chozas de barro,
/la pobreza y la enfermedad
nos hacen gemir..."*

(Extractos de canciones santales)

Dos tipos de noticias aparecen con cierta regularidad en periódicos y publicaciones indios referentes a la llamada población tribal del estado de Bihar, especialmente sobre la zona de Chota Nagpur. En un caso señalan la persistencia de la vieja demanda del autogobierno en Chota Nagpur y Santal Parganas (el Estado de Jharkhand) por la que ya lucharon los santales y los mundas desde mediados del siglo pasado. Hace tres años un profesional munda se refirió al problema de la autonomía de esta forma:

"Hay una conciencia clara de que la tierra de toda la zona (Chota Nagpur) nos pertenece y de que pasa a otras manos. La solución es la formación de un estado separado gobernado por la propia gente. La

* ADIVASI: del hindi ADI : original y VASI: habitante.

posibilidad de un estado separado era clara (en la época de Jaipal Singh), y la mayoría de la gente lo quería; no había oposición en Chota Nagpur, pero el Gobierno temió la creación de una zona diferente en el medio de la India. El argumento de que la gente no puede gobernarse a sí misma es falso. Los estados que se han separado lo han logrado con persistencia. Nuestros líderes están demasiados dispersos y no presentan un frente sólido. Jaipal Singh no persiguió la meta de la autonomía con firmeza." (Entrevista en 1975 a un intelectual munda).

El 12 de Mayo de 1978 todos los negocios de la ciudad de Ranchi, situada en medio de esta zona, cerraron en una huelga para presionar por la autonomía de Chota Nagpur y Santal Parganas, que formarían así un estado separado dentro de la India.

El otro tipo de noticias de la prensa señala otro aspecto de la situación en Bihar y de la actitud de los adivasis frente a ella: la lucha agraria y los consecuentes enfrentamientos con los terratenientes, los prestamistas y los dikus (designación de los adivasis para las personas ajenas a la comunidad), enfrentamientos que se definen en el terreno de la lucha de clases.

La población registrada en India como Scheduled Tribes alcanzaba a 38 millones según el censo de 1971, cifra que corresponde al 6.93% de la población total del país. En Chota Nagpur y Santal Parganas un 90% de la población es adivasi. De este porcentaje un 95% son campesinos.

El despojo de tierras, el endeudamiento, la extorsión y el trabajo en pago de deudas, son los problemas más agudos que enfrentan los campesinos adivasis. Hay una larga tradición del sistema de pago de deudas con trabajo y servicios al acreedor, conocido bajo distintos nombres, entre otros

como sistema Kamioti. El deudor no tiene en este sistema derechos a paga y en realidad puede pasar a la condición de sirvo de por vida. Se realizaban "contratos legales" en términos como estos (un caso que reporta R. Mukherjee ((1933)) para los años treinta): Yo y mis descendientes por siempre nos comprometemos a estar a disposición para realizar cualquier trabajo que se nos de, y de realizar todas las tareas de un sirviente sin objeción." En este caso el firmante y su hijo cumplieron con el contrato hasta su muerte, y el nieto lo retomó hasta que decidió huir. Además, mientras el deudor trabajaba en el campo del acreedor sin paga, no le quedaba tiempo para cultivar el propio.

Un mecanismo para lograr despojar a los adivasis de sus tierras, se refiere al empleo del recurso legal de la prueba de incapacidad física del campesino para trabajar la tierra:

"Muchos grandes terratenientes conseguían certificados médicos que establecían la incapacidad de los adivasis para cultivar sus tierras y lograban obtener estas tierras en arriendo por períodos fijos. Las tierras rara vez se devolvían a los adivasis una vez terminado el período de arriendo. (Economic and Political Weekly, Febrero de 1974).

La puesta en práctica de planes de desarrollo y el establecimiento de grandes complejos industriales estatales o privados, han contribuido al desalojo de los adivasis de sus tierras. Para el período entre 1960 y 1964 se calcula en 7.961 las familias adivasis que fueron sacadas de sus tierras en Bihar por el establecimiento de 18 proyectos, tierras que sumaban 23.415,57 acres. Solo 4.053,02 fueron otorgados en compensación. Situaciones iguales o parecidas ocurrieron en varias provincias. Algunos de los resultados de esta línea de desarrollo fueron por ejemplo, que una aldea, Satranji, fue reinstalada en las tierras cultivables de otra, Tupudana, donde la gente quedó sin tierras y en la inseguridad total.

Las noticias recientes sobre la situación en Bihar muestran como las luchas por metas económicas y por la autonomía se entrelazan. El 6 de Mayo de 1978 los campesinos adivasis del distrito de Ranchi pararon el trabajo en los proyectos de irrigación de Chiragón, Para Kans y Jaipur y el proyecto hidroeléctrico de Koel Karo, pidiendo el pago inmediato de las compensaciones por sus tierras (de las cuales no se conoce aún el monto), tierras que al parecer fueron adquiridas sin aviso previo. A esto se agrega el asunto del empleo de personas desplazadas. A pesar de la larga tradición de protesta y el grado de conciencia alcanzado entre el campesinado, el movimiento campesino en la zona todavía es débil. Los campesinos adivasis de Bihar cuentan con las experiencias de sus luchas por la defensa de sus intereses económicos y estan pasando gradualmente a la lucha en el terreno político. Cuentan además con la posibilidad de emplear estratégicamente la fuerza de su propia identidad que les ha permitido autodefinirse y unirse para la acción.

PROGRAMAS DE DESARROLLO

Los programas para el desarrollo de la comunidad para las zonas tribales comenzaron en 1957 con el establecimiento de cuarenta y tres unidades (multipurpose tribal blocks), número que aumentó a trescientos en los proyectos del Tercer Plan (1961-1966). Para 1973 las unidades para desarrollo tribal (Tribal Development Blocks) alcanzaban la cifra de 504.

Los programas de desarrollo tribal se basaron en la comunidad y en el individuo en ella como unidades implementarias. Se consideró especialmente el desarrollo de la agricultura por medio de cambios en el patrón de cultivo por quema y roza al de agricultura sedentaria, provisión de implementos de labranza y de créditos, y el establecimiento de granjas piloto para introducir nuevas prácticas agrícolas. En el terreno de la educación se pensó sagazmente en conver-

tir a las organizaciones educativas tradicionales.

El objetivo de estos programas de desarrollo de la Comunidad ha sido el de:

"producir cambios comprehensivos e integrados en la vida social, económica, política y cultural de los tribales para crear condiciones en las que ellos puedan contribuir al máximo al crecimiento total de nuestro país, acercándose a la gente e integrándose." (Pande 1968:33-57).

Que significan entonces las metas de desarrollo y la modernización como se plantean en los Programas de Desarrollo de la Comunidad para los adivasis, y también en los planes de rápida industrialización en zonas con población campesina adivasi. Tomando como eje a la comunidad y al individuo, la integración se programa como la de pequeñas unidades con el centro. La atención de las comunidades se vuelca hacia sus propios problemas de orden interno, y hacia afuera se desarrolla de manera vertical. En el aspecto de la integración económica y política, se tiende a eliminar la detección de problemas compartidos por otros sectores de la sociedad más allá de los límites establecidos artificialmente para formar la unidad, y la acción colectiva queda restringida dentro de estos límites. En cuanto a los proyectos de industrialización, el sector moderno industrial no ha podido ni ha querido absorber la mano de obra agrícola desplazada (como en el caso de las grandes industrias de Chota Nagpur), alertando la persistencia del sector campesino adivasi calificado de atrasado, manteniéndolo fijo como fuerza de trabajo y alimentando así la reserva de mano de obra barata potencial.

En relación con todo esto, existe entre los defensores de estos programas de desarrollo lo que al parecer es la meta de una homogeneización en términos económicos y políticos basada en una supuesta igualdad de oportunidades e interdependencia en las relaciones económicas, homogeneización que aparece como ficticia al querer concretarse a través de los programas de desarrollo, ya que la realidad ha mostrado

que han ido emergiendo nuevos patrones de estratificación y de explotación.

En el Seminario sobre Empleo de las Castas y las Tribus Registradas, U.N. Dhebar señaló varios de los aspectos de la situación económica de estos sectores: pérdida de tierras por la acción de contratistas, el servicio forestal y los prestamistas, y por adquisiciones hechas por el gobierno, y reformas agrarias que "en la mayoría de los lugares los ha perjudicado." Dhebar propuso medidas de tipo urgente: la protección de los derechos de los adivasis sobre la tierra y los bosques; la adjudicación de tierras para el cultivo y de sitios para habitación; provisión de créditos; facilidades para entrenamiento técnico y artesanal en los sectores industrial, comercial y agrícola. Estos puntos fueron respaldados en las discusiones finales, agregándose recomendaciones sobre salarios mínimos en el trabajo agrícola; sobre las ventajas de la agro-industria, y sobre la necesidad inmediata de eliminar las formas de trabajo forzado en pago de deudas. (Govt. of India 1964:1-10).

AUTONOMIA Y LIBERTAD DE DECISION

En el Seminario sobre Integración Nacional de 1958, hubo un cierto reconocimiento de la naturaleza plural de la sociedad india, pero esto llevó en esa ocasión sólo a abogar por la síntesis cultural a través de la labor de las universidades y por la formación de asociaciones de jóvenes que fueran independientes de las adscripciones particulares. No se llegaron a detectar las características de la situación de los distintos sectores de la sociedad india y, si bien se rechazó el comunismo, éste se entendió en términos de grupos que se aferran a lealtades particulares por "temor... de no recibir lo que les corresponde." El tipo de relaciones socioeconómicas vigentes no entró en consideración.

Académicos indios como Nirmal K. Bose (1964:1-10) reconocen y tratan de solucionar la situación general de explotación en la que se encuentran los adivasis a través de la educación política y los canales políticos institucionalizados. Rechazan el tratamiento especial que constitucionalmente se les da porque acentuaría las tendencias comunales y el "tribalismo", o una conciencia de grupo cerrado. Bose pone el problema en términos de la eliminación de la discriminación, sugiere un paso medio de identificación que no queda definido más que por contraste con los extremos, y propone una acción de tipo ghandiano: "A la manera ghandiana los explotados se organizan sin tener en cuenta las diferencias culturales, para dar fin a la explotación por (medio de) su fuerza no violenta. La tarea de Ghandi de organizar a la gente según la no violencia a través de la educación política y la reforma, todavía está incompleta." (*ibid.*:10).

En medio de todos los materiales publicados en forma de planes, recomendaciones, estudios, etc., y las acciones tomadas para "planificar" a los adivasis en vías de esa integración parcial que se mencionó anteriormente, hay voces que denuncian el paternalismo oficial como peligroso o al menos, contraproducente, y ponen énfasis en que se deje libres a los adivasis para tomar las decisiones que les corresponden, alentando a la concientización política de este sector de la población. A pesar de hablarse en algunos casos de la naturaleza plural de la nación india hay pocas afirmaciones que se refieran a un estado multinacional, y son menos aún las que defienden la autonomía política dentro de la India para las zonas con población mayoritariamente adivasi. En general se aceptan con mucha dificultad las instancias en que la autonomía regional ya se ha concretado o las tendencias en ese sentido que han existido en zonas de India desde hace tiempo. La propensión a aislar a una gran mayoría de los adivasis como sector separado de la masa campesina india, o a presentar y canalizar los conflictos de clase en la línea comunales, tiene una fuerza considerable.

En realidad se plantean dos problemas, primero, el de la autonomía, dentro de una concepción de India como estado multinacional, multiétnico; y segundo, el del carácter de la participación política de los adivasis.

Por el momento, y según el material con que contamos, la tesis del estado pluriétnico o multinacional y la de la autonomía han sido defendidas por el Partido Comunista de India y algunos intelectuales de izquierda. En su Note on National Integration (20 de junio de 1968), dirigida al encargado del National Integration Council del Ministerio del Interior (por parte del Partido Comunista de India) P. Sundarayya afirmaba que:

"los grandes estados multinacionales no pueden continuar siendo fuertes y estables a menos que se garantice la más amplia democracia y completa autonomía a sus partes constituyentes",

y denunciaba el serio error de relacionar el casteísmo, el comunalismo y las demandas de las nacionalidades como fuerzas disruptivas para la unidad nacional y como fenómenos independientes, cuando resultan ser manifestaciones del orden social imperante. Sundarayya señala:

"la tenaz resistencia a la formación de estados lingüísticos, el intento persistente de forzar una sola lengua como oficial para la Unión India, la negación de derechos democráticos y de autonomía a los estados, el rechazo a otorgar completa autonomía y aún estados separados dentro de la Unión India a personas que viven en las regiones montañosas o boscosas (...) (generalmente llamadas tribus), el no reconocimiento de los derechos de las minorías lingüísticas y que los derechos concedidos en el papel no se pongan en práctica."

(National Integration 1968:8).

Defendiendo la idea de la autonomía regional y el autogobierno de los adivasis, el CPI respaldó la creación de Nagaland, Maghalaya y Arunachal.

A.B. Bardhan (1973) aborda también el problema de la autonomía como inevitable para las zonas con población mayoritariamente adivasi, en la forma de estados separados o regiones determinadas dentro de los estados existentes, con el fin de que la mayoría adivasi sea la que detente el poder político. La defensa de la autonomía lo lleva lógicamente a condenar el paternalismo oficial, especialmente en la forma de los Tribal Development Blocks, y a proponer que se tenga en cuenta en primer lugar la iniciativa y las opiniones de los adivasis. No deja de señalar el papel que ha tenido la labor asimilacionista, como en el caso de extinción "natural" de las lenguas tribales, en el fortalecimiento de tendencias opuestas a la asimilación como el exclusivismo tribal y las tendencias separatistas.

La consideración de la autonomía para las zonas adivasis va unida en estos casos al reconocimiento de la existencia de una conciencia política en este sector de la población y a su posible organización.

Las expresiones de protestas políticas de los adivasis se han explicado a menudo como el producto de "choques culturales" (Ghurye 1963), como si estuvieran basadas en: "el aislamiento ecológico-cultural, el atraso económico y un sentimiento de frustración por (tener) un estatus bajo vis a vis los sectores avanzados" (Surajit Sinha 1972:421).

Paralelamente, hay quienes las entienden como acciones dirigidas a luchar por alcanzar un estatus social más alto, siguiendo el camino político. En este caso se destaca la importancia de las alianzas pantribales capaces de crear una unidad firme basada en características comunes, a veces construidas ideológicamente, y en la lucha por un territorio común (cf. L.K. Mahapatra 1972:399-409).

Pero la acción política de los adivasis en instancias frecuentes desborda los límites del pantribalismo y, sin

descatar con esto la meta de la autonomía, se buscan alianzas no sólo con otros adivasis sino con otros desposeídos de la India, generalmente campesinos pobres o sin tierras, en el plano de la lucha económica. En este sentido algunos sectores de la sociedad india han alentado las alianzas entre el campesinado, entendiendo estas luchas de los adivasis como parte de la lucha en que participan obreros y campesinos.

Así según Bardhan:

"La lucha del pueblo tribal es parte de la lucha democrática contra el camino de desarrollo capitalista y por la regeneración de la India. No hay conflicto entre la gente trabajadora de toda la India y los tribales, que son explotados por las mismas clases (...) el movimiento democrático del país debe reconocer en la lucha del pueblo tribal a un aliado poderoso, un aliado con potencialidades revolucionarias tremendas, para el logro de la democracia nacional y el socialismo. Si el movimiento democrático fracasa en alentar la causa del pueblo tribal y en integrarlo a sus luchas, los tribales serán presa fácil de las maquinaciones de los derechistas o del aventurerismo de los ultraizquierdistas." (1973:57).

Esto último se refiere específicamente a la lucha armada desarrollada por los naxalitas en Bengala Occidental, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh y Bihar, a fines de los años sesenta, en la cual los adivasis participaron activamente como parte del campesinado junto a otros campesinos. En el siguiente extracto se puede observar como vieron los naxalitas la participación de los adivasis en la lucha armada, y también se aprecia una cierta manipulación de símbolos como la de los líderes-héroes de la historia de los adivasis de Chota Nagpur:

"El Comité coordinador del estado de Bihar de los Revolucionarios comunistas saluda la emergencia del movimiento revolucionario del pueblo adivasi

de Chotanagpur por su emancipación de la explotación de siglos, por la creación de su propio estado y para desarrollar sus vidas (...) que cada adivasi se levante y luche como lo hizo el Gran Birsa, como los Grandes Siddu y Kanu lucharon contra los opresores nativos y extranjeros. Que cada adivasi recuerde que su lucha es parte de la gran lucha popular que arde en India y en todo el mundo contra el imperialismo, el feudalismo y el capitalismo." (Johari 1972:160-162).

El peligro del "aventurerismo terrorista" que señalaba Bardhan es el de la respuesta a éste: la represión desatada contra los campesinos adivasis por el Estado a través de la policía, y por los sectores rurales poderosos mediante fuerzas paramilitares, represión que continúa aún esgrimiendo el argumento de la existencia de focos o de elementos naxalitas para seguir agrediendo a los campesinos.

Es evidente que en el marco social y político vigente, para lograr algunos cambios, los adivasis podrán organizarse para luchar por alcanzar metas limitadas pero, sin embargo, importantes: por su tierra, por eliminar el endeudamiento y el trabajo forzado, por sus derechos sobre los bosques, y además, tomarán conciencia de su historia, de su situación y su papel en el marco social de la India actual, y de sus posibilidades en el futuro.

LA RESPUESTA DE LOS ADIVASIS DE CHOTA NAGPUR

"Jharkhand abua daku diku senoa"

("Jharkhand es nuestro. Los dikus ladrones deben irse.")

Un lema del Partido Jharkhand

En el transcurso de su larga historia de resistencia y de expresión política los adivasis de Chota Nagpur han estado

luchando en dos niveles que no se excluyen sino que se complementan: el de la lucha agraria, resistiendo someterse al sistema socioeconómico global, colonial o capitalista, y el de defensa de su identidad, tanto en términos de territorio como en los de cultura, lengua e historia. Es especialmente a partir del siglo XIX que esta lucha se hace evidente, cuando los adivasis la visualizan como tarea urgente. Los grandes movimientos y rebeliones de entonces como la Rebelión Santal (1855) y el Movimiento Birsaita (1895) no sólo se volcaron contra los elementos opresores inmediatos (nuevos terratenientes, prestamistas, comerciantes, plantadores) sino también contra la administración colonial. En ellos las dos metas explícitas fueron la recuperación de las tierras tanto en su relación directa al trabajo mismo del campesino, como en el sentido del territorio que define al pueblo. A esto último se relaciona la otra meta, la de la autonomía y el ideal que entonces se definía como del "reino propio". Esto último se lograría no sólo con la eliminación de los elementos ajenos a la comunidad (los dikus), reconocidos como opresores, y con la recuperación de los derechos y propiedades de los adivasis, sino además con lo que Birsa, el líder del Movimiento de 1895, consideró el "homenaje a los primeros hombres de la raza": la toma de conciencia de que era necesario recuperar la cultura propia. Esta doble vertiente en las acciones políticas de los adivasis de Chota Nagpur sigue presente. Por las formas que ha estado tomando la expresión política de los campesinos adivasis de la zona, parecería que tanto la conciencia étnica (de larga historia y bastante afirmada) como la conciencia de clase (emergente) están operando.

Así, los adivasis, concientes de su propia etnicidad, tratan de recuperar su historia, de retomar el control sobre los recursos naturales de su región, de romper con la dependencia cultural a la que oponen la corriente de recuperación y revalorización de la cultura propia. Esta revalorización va más allá de los grupos particulares y las variaciones cul-

turales. Se ha ido forjando en Chota Nagpur y Santal Parganas una base común para la solidaridad pantribal, de modo que los adivasis de la región empiezan a reconocer como legítima una herencia común en cuanto a la cultura, el sistema de educación tradicional y las creencias religiosas. Esta tendencia, que implica la legitimización de una tradición cultural común, en parte construida ideológicamente, tiene la fuerza suficiente como para neutralizar o modificar en algunos casos los efectos de los procesos de hinduización y de cristianización. Por ejemplo, en el caso de los bhumijes, muy hinduizados desde hace tiempo, que habían optado por abandonar el camino de la resistencia por el de la emulación, y que han venido luchando por ser reconocidos como kshatriyas dentro del sistema de castas, han accedido últimamente a incluir en el nombre de su Bhumij Kshatriya Association el término "Adivasi". Esto, si bien no deja de ser contradictorio, podría quizás indicar un posible cambio en la búsqueda de su identidad, y en algún momento tendrán que decidir por identificarse con su supuesto pasado de Kshatriyas en el sistema de castas, o como adivasis. (Mahapatra 1972:408).

Por otra parte, dado que hay una gran correlación entre adscripción étnica y situación de clase, y sin olvidar la estratificación interna de los grupos étnicos, la acción política se ha manifestado en el terreno de la lucha de clases, más que nada en el sector rural, y de una manera incipiente entre los obreros adivasis como se ve en las huelgas ocurridas en los complejos industriales de Chota Nagpur. En estos casos, y más que nada en los movimientos campesinos, las alianzas se han definido sobrepasando las fronteras étnicas, concretándose con otros sectores campesinos no adivasis en lucha contra los sectores rurales dominantes, los terratenientes, los intermediarios y quienes vienen a despojarlos de sus tierras.

La corriente en favor de la "retribalización" debe verse como la emergencia de una nueva ideología basada en la iden-

tividad sociocultural, enraizada en situaciones socioeconómicas concretas. Comporta la resistencia a la integración a un Estado pensado y construido por los grupos hegemónicos, resistencia que propone identidades plurales y el rechazo a una integración económica-política que busca explotarlos mejor como campesinos, y ahora como obreros, y el rechazo a una integración destructora de las identidades.

Observando las metas que se proponen los adivasis: la recuperación del control económico y político sobre la zona, cabe preguntarse cuáles serían las consecuencias posibles del logro de las mismas: ¿quienes se beneficiarían con ello?; ¿produciría esto nuevos ordenamientos de relaciones desiguales?; ¿las alianzas sobre bases étnicas favorecerían el fortalecimiento de la conciencia de clase?.

Al darse esta toma de conciencia y con la emergencia de una iniciativa histórica, respaldada por una tradición de protesta y resistencia, es dable suponer que se producirán necesariamente cambios al interior de la sociedad pluri-étnica, y a la vez, la posibilidad de que esta fuerza étnica sea efectivamente un arma para lograr una participación plena en la transformación de la sociedad y en la creación de nuevos ordenamientos económicos, políticos y sociales.

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