Tribal Underdevelopment in India

Steve Jones

INTRODUCTION

Few countries in the world have made more efforts than India apparently has to protect the rights of their indigenous peoples and to integrate them into national development planning. The Constitution includes provisions which recognize the special needs of the *adivasis* or tribals, countless laws protecting their rights have been enacted, and special development programmes tailored to the tribals' particular problems have been designed. Paradoxically, however, despite these efforts by the Indian Government and the fact that the tribal areas contain well over half of the country's mineral and forest resources the adivasis remain probably the most underdeveloped community in India. In the words of a recent Indian Government Planning Commission report (1973):

> Reviewing the policies and programmes of the preceding five-year plans we are of the opinion that the efforts so far made for social and economic development of the Scheduled Tribes have not brought about an appreciable change in their condition.

This paper attempts to explain the failure of government programmes for tribal development and to assess the role of the State in maintaining the underdevelopment of the adivasis. After briefly describing the situation in tribal areas and the special laws

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and programmes that have been implemented it will be argued as Joshi (1974) has done for the Indian land reform programme that Indian Government concern about protecting and developing tribals is largely rhetorical and bears little relationship to the practice of national and state governments or parastatal organizations. Three main points will be made to show that the Indian Government has not only failed to encourage the development of the tribals but has actively maintained their underdevelopment.[1]

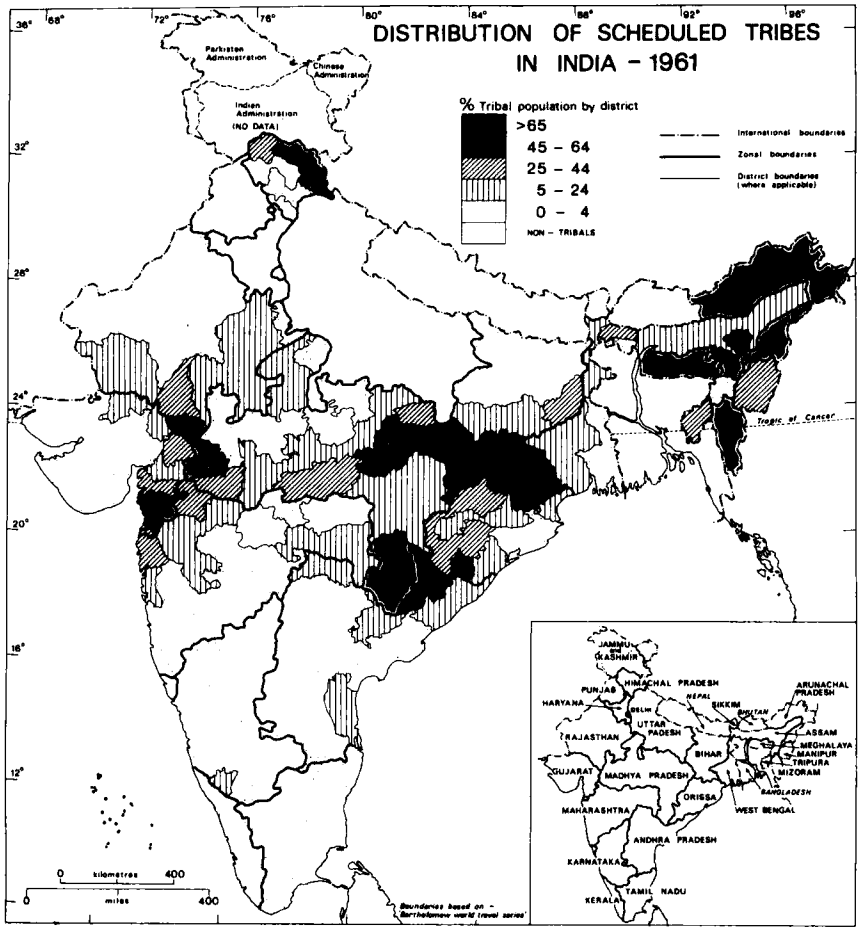
Firstly, it will be argued that the funds allocated to tribal development by successive governments since independence have been both meagre and greatly outweighed by the value of the resources extracted from tribal areas.

Second, it will be shown that the Government supported exploitation of the adivasis' traditional environments has involved heavy social costs for the tribals who have been forced to give up considerable amounts of land and whose customary rights to forests have been severely restricted. Few if any of the benefits of such developments have accrued to the tribals; more often than not they have been forced to become landless labourers, either locally for the forest department or a non-tribal landlord, or in some distant brickworks, plantation or area of high agricultural potential.

Third, it will be argued that in order to facilitate this exploitation the tribals are prevented from acquiring any real political power. The large tribal population of the Central Tribal Belt is split up between eight predominantly non-tribal states so that adivasis never form more than a small minority, and local tribal movements directed against non-tribal exploiters are rapidly put down with the help of the State.

TRIBAL INDIA

According to the 1971 census there are 38 million tribals 'Scheduled' by the Government and therefore covered by its special provisions and programmes. Map 1 shows the distribution of Scheduled Tribes by district and Table 1 by state. Considered at the *taluk* or 'county' level there is an almost continuous belt of tribal predominance from the Indian Ocean just north of Bombay to the far north-east corner of India on the Chinese border and indeed beyond India to the Pacific Ocean. The scope of this paper, however, will be restricted to the Central Tribal Belt (the states of


DISTRIBUTION OF SCHEDULED TRIBES
IN INDIA - 1961
% Tribal population by district
>65
45 - 64
25 - 44
5 - 24
0 - 4
NON - TRIBALS
International boundaries
Zonal boundaries
District boundaries (where applicable)
Pakistan Administration
Chinese Administration
Indian Administration (NO DATA)
Tropic of Cancer
JAMMU & KASHMIR
HIMACHAL PRADESH
PUNJAB
HARYANA
DELHI
UTTAR PRADESH
RAJASTHAN
BIHAR
SIKKIM
ARUNACHAL PRADESH
ASSAM
MEGHALAYA
MANIPUR
TRIPURA
MIZORAM
GUJARAT
MADHYA PRADESH
ORISSA
WEST BENGAL
MAHARASHTRA
ANDHRA PRADESH
KARNATAKA
TAMIL NADU
KERALA
kilometres
miles
400

Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal) where 85 per cent of the Scheduled Tribes live.

Table 1. India: Scheduled Tribe Population by State (1971)

	Total	Schld. Tribe	Percentage
Central Tribal Belt			
Madhya Pradesh	41,654	8,387	20
Orissa	21,945	5,072	23
Bihar	56,363	4,933	9
Gujarat	26,697	3,734	14
Maharashtra	50,412	2,954	6
Rajasthan	25,766	3,126	12
Andhra Pradesh	43,503	1,658	4
West Bengal	44,312	2,540	6
	310,652	32,404	10
North East Tribal Area (Assam, Arunchal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya)	19,583	4,346	22
Other States and Union Territories	217,715	1,265	1
Total India	547,950	38,015	7

Source: 1971 Census of India

The adivasis do not form an homogeneous group, their diversity is kalaedoscopic. They are culturally and linguistically complex — over 200 tribes are scheduled as such by the Government and there are over 30 principal language groups. They vary in size from large groups spreading across many states such as the Gonds, Santals and Bhils, each with over two million people, to small isolated communities numbering only a couple of hundred. The most common method of production is low technology, rainfed sedentary agriculture linked to some exploitation of forest resources, but there are also some three million shifting cultivators and hunter gatherers and some two million tribals not practising agriculture at all — miners and 'urbanized' tribals. Most of the half-million nomadic pastoralists are regarded as members of

nomadic castes not tribes and in addition to the Scheduled Tribes there are 5 million people who by their social organization should also be regarded as adivasis.

However, despite this heterogeneity and the fact that there is no pan-Indian tribal consciousness, it is valid to treat the different tribal communities as one group because they generally suffer from the same overriding manifestations of underdevelopment.

(1) The adivasis are restricted to remote, hilly areas of low agricultural potential as a result of centuries of expropriation of productive lowlands by encroaching non-tribals.[2] This process started milennia ago, accelerated under the British and despite laws and regulations prohibiting the sale of tribal land to non-tribals continues unabated.[3]

(2) Tribals are identified by non-tribal caste-structured society as culturally inferior and are referred to by pejoratives such as *junglee* (rowdy, jungle-man) and *kaliparaj* (nigger) — 'the term adivasi is synonymous with low social status, it implies a pattern of behaviour which is inferior to that of higher castes' (Breman 1974:31). The tribals in turn distinguish themselves from non-tribals who they also call by pejoratives such as *dhikhu* (exploiter) and *ujaliat* (whitey). 'The consciousness of adivasi "weness" arises out of their . . . constant rejection and humiliation . . . by non-adivasis' (Desai 1973:11).

(3) They have very low levels of literacy (11.5 per cent in 1971 compared to 29.5 per cent for the nation as a whole with some tribes under 2 per cent — see Table 2) and a poor understanding of the operation of the modern nation state and their rights within it, a 'simplicity' that is exploited by non-tribal moneylenders, traders and government officials.

Table 2. India: Literacy rates

	1961 %	1971 %	Change
Scheduled Tribe	8.53	11.30	+30%
Scheduled Caste	10.27	14.67	+43%
India (All)	24.02	29.45	+23%
India (Rural)	19.02	23.47	+25%

Source: Census of 1961 and 1971

1961 = Vol. 1 V (i) (Sch. Tribe) and Vol. 1 II (A) (ii)

1971 = Series 1 Paper 1 of 1975 'Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe' and Series I II A (ii)

Table 3. Underdevelopment of Tribal Areas in Andhra Pradesh

Indicator of Development	Non-Tribal Plains	Scheduled Tribal Areas
Percent cultivable area irrigated	31%	6%
Percent villages electrified	22%	1%
Rate of literacy (%)	21%	4%
Area covered by each school	2.9 sq. mls.	6.0 sq. mls.
Beds per 100,000 patients	66	14
Road length per 100 sq. mls.	38 miles	6 miles
Income per capita	394 Rs.	135 Rs.(34%)
Expenditure per capita	287 Rs.	141 Rs.
Balance of Income + Expenditure per capita	+107	-6

Source: Planning Commission (1973) based on 1971 census and surveys carried out in the 1960s.

(4) They were made a special case by both colonial and independent Governments but despite this the tribals' level of socio-economic development is very low relative to the rest of the country. The situation in Andhra Pradesh (Table 3) is typical.

(5) Historically (e.g. Santal Rebellion of 1855-56 and the Birsa Movement by the Mundas of Chotanagpur in 1895) and more recently unrest in tribal areas over exploitation and land alienation has been explicitly tribal versus non-tribal in nature. Only in the Naxalite movement of the late 1960s and close to industrial centres have occasional short-lived tribal-non-tribal class alliances been formed.

PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT

On independence in 1947 the Indian Government inherited a large tribal population and area that was considerably less developed than the rest of the country. In the regions of high potential vast numbers of tribals had lost their land to encroaching non-tribals or had had it taken away by colonial authorities to make way for plantations and industrial developments and were largely landless.

Elsewhere adivasis had been isolated from the rest of the country to protect them from deleterious contact with non-tribals.[4]

The Indian National Congress and particularly its leaders like Jawarharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel, however, was well aware of the tribal peoples' problem and was determined to overcome their extreme poverty and powerlessness and to integrate them equitably into national life. In drawing up the Constitution of India the rights of the tribals were explicitly recognized and clauses were included to permit positive discrimination in their favour. Since then national and state governments have introduced laws and regulations prohibiting the sale of land to non-tribals, outlawing the activities of moneylenders, reserving jobs for tribals in government service and seats for them in the legislatures, and making special funds available for development programmes in tribal areas.[5] However, as the reports of the many government task forces and commissions of enquiry in the past twenty years point out, these special provisions have so far failed to bring any positive changes to the tribals.[6] Four main reasons are given for this.

Firstly the laws and programmes have failed because of the power of the non-tribal landlords, moneylenders and traders who control the tribal economies and local *panchayats* (councils). These groups in alliance with non-tribal government servants — development and revenue officers, administrators and magistrates — have been able to circumvent the laws and regulations and to divert development funds intended for tribals to their own use.

Second, the development programmes have failed because they have often been transferred without modification from the culturally and environmentally different plains areas and because their implementation has been left to poorly trained and culturally prejudiced non-tribal officers.

Third, the programmes have failed because they have not involved the tribals in their own development. The use of the term 'uplift' demonstrates the government's philosophy of development. Development is something done to tribals by non-tribals, not a process in which the tribals are actively involved and control.

Fourth, as will be shown later the funds allocated for tribal development have been totally inadequate for the immense task of providing the necessary infrastructure and inputs.

Given this general agreement about why the government's attempts to 'uplift' the tribals have failed it is surprising that no

new programmes have been implemented which successfully overcome these problems.

The government would probably argue that progress towards tribal development was bound to be slow because of the size of the 'tribal problem' and the competing demands of other sectors of the economy and regions of the country for scarce development funds and manpower. However, in view of its constantly reiterated commitment to adivasi development, these factors alone can hardly explain the government's failure to being about *'any appreciable change in [the tribals'] condition'* (my stress).[7] If successive governments over the last thirty years had been serious about 'uplifting' the tribals, some progress would surely have been achieved. It has not.

In this paper an alternative reason for why the government's efforts to bring development to the tribal peoples have failed will be proposed. No government in India has ever been willing to tackle the problem of tribal development because the State itself is one of the main beneficiaries of tribal exploitation. A corollary of this is that development of and by the tribal peoples will only become possible if Indian society is radically restructured. There are two reasons for this.

Firstly, perhaps the most crucial prerequisite for tribal development is to curb severely the power of the non-tribal moneylenders, landlords and traders that control the tribal economy. However, since the political organisers for the centre and centre-right parties that are likely to control any government under the present political system come from this class it is highly unlikely that this basic change will ever be made. The laws exist, but no government that wants to remain in power can afford to implement them.

Second, the problems of the densely populated plains and urban areas are potentially a much greater threat to the continuing control of the ruling class than those of the peripheral, politically less vocal tribal areas. Therefore the most expedient course of action for any government — state or national — is not to use scarce resources developing the tribal peoples, but rather to exploit the tribal areas for timber, minerals and cheap labour and to invest the surplus created in the potentially explosive non-tribal plains and urban areas.

Therefore, as with the Indian land reform programme the highly publicized statements about 'uplifting' the tribals are little more

than rhetoric. The State in India is maintaining the underdevelopment of the tribals both by not attacking the power of the non-tribal rural oligarchy and by treating tribal areas as an internal colony. In the following sections the colonial nature of the relationship between the State and the adivasis will be explored in more detail.

Table 4. Development Plans: Special Expenditure on Scheduled Tribes
(Rupees Millions)

	1st Plan 1951-56	2nd Plan 1956-61	3rd Plan 1961-66	1966-69	4th Plan 1969-74
TOTAL PLAN (Public Sector)	19,600	46,270	85,770	67,560	162,010
Special Scheduled Tribe Expenditure	173.7	405.1	520.2	342.7	750.0
Special Scheduled Tribe Expenditure as percentage of total expenditure	0.88%	0.87%	0.61%	0.51%	0.46%

Source: 'India 1975: A Reference Manual', 21st Annual Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and Planning Commission (1973)

RESOURCE FLOWS IN AND OUT OF TRIBAL INDIA

If the Government of India were really serious about overcoming tribal underdevelopment one would expect per capita funds allocated to tribal programmes to be at least equal to and probably greater than those allocated to other sectors of the population, and in theory this is the case. The Scheduled Tribes are supposed to benefit both from General Sector expenditure[8] which is meant to be allocated reasonably equitably to all regions and social groups in India, tribals and non-tribals alike, and from special extra funds for tribal welfare and development under the provisions for Backward Classes which I will call 'Special Tribal Expenditure'.[9]

However, despite this apparent positive discrimination, in practice the tribals receive less than their fair share of General Sector funds both because government development policies favour

urban industrial areas and areas of high agricultural potential[10] and because of active discrimination by State officials and politicians (most of whom are non-tribal) against tribal areas. In the 4th Plan the all-India per capita public expenditure was Rs.59 per annum and the special provision for Scheduled Tribes another Rs.4 but as the Planning Commission itself notes (1973) the Scheduled Tribes are often left with little more than a total of Rs.4 per capita per annum:

> Development of the Scheduled Tribes has continued to depend on small outlays under the special sector of Welfare of Backward Classes and not General Sector outlays.[11]

In addition, as Table 4 shows, there has been a continual decline in the proportion of the total plan expenditure allocated to the special Scheduled Tribes programme. Under the first plan Special Tribal Expenditure comprised 0.88 percent of the total public sector expenditure, but by the fourth plan it had sunk to only 0.46 percent (a decline of 47 percent). Supposedly 'bigger' and 'better' development programmes like the Tribal Development Blocks, designed to overcome the deficiencies of previous schemes, have been funded with smaller and smaller proportions of total plan expenditure.

So far then the development of the most underdeveloped community in India has depended on sums that would be insufficient in well-served plains areas and are totally inadequate in the hilly tribal districts where there is almost no infrastructure. If one adds to this the fact that in India the major financial resources are not plan allocations but rather bank and open market borrowing which are generally not available to Scheduled Tribes,[12] it is clear that tribals suffer from a cumulative disadvantage in comparison to non-tribals.

The small amount of resources allocated to tribal development clearly contradicts Government rhetoric about 'uplifting' the tribals. More seriously, it seems that funds spent by the Government of India in tribal areas are considerably less than the value of the minerals and timber extracted from these areas.

Some imbalance of course is to be expected; the job of a government is to allocate national and state resources to those sectors and regions that will make the greatest contribution to overall national welfare, and therefore investment in 'Green Revolution' areas such as Punjab and Haryana may, under some

definitions of welfare, be preferable to investing in tribal areas. But when for every rupee spent in tribal areas for tribal development and welfare at least four (and possibly many more) rupees of resources are taken out, it is difficult to believe that there are serious policies to bring socio-economic development to the tribals.[13]

In 1971/72 India's mineral output was Rs.5426 million and timber Rs.989 million, a total of Rs.6415 million. Eighty-five percent of the mineral wealth comes from the South-East Resources Triangle of Orissa, East Madhya Pradesh, parts of West Bengal and the Chotanagpur area of Southern Bihar (Ford Foundation 1976A), and most of this is mined in predominantly, or until recently predominantly, tribal areas. Similarly, over 50 percent of the national timber output comes from tribal areas. Even on the most conservative estimate[14] in 1971/72 nearly Rs.4000 million of forest and mineral resources came from *talukas* (counties) that were then or on Independence predominantly tribal. This is almost double the amount of money the Scheduled Tribes would have received if their share of the total plan outlay had been proportionate to their numbers (in 1971/72 this would have been Rs.2200 million). However, since tribals do not receive anything like a proportional share of General Sector expenditure, it is probable that the net value of the relatively small forestry sector alone more than pays for the total public expenditure on the 'peripheral' Scheduled Tribes; the vast mineral wealth exploited in the tribal areas is thus almost totally profit to the 'centre'[15]

Thus the value of the resources extracted from tribal areas greatly out-weighs the funds employed by Union and State Governments for tribal welfare and development. There is a substantial net flow of resources from the underdeveloped tribal periphery to the more developed non-tribal urban and lowland agricultural centre.

SOCIAL COSTS OF RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN TRIBAL AREAS

However, it is not just that the tribals do not benefit financially from the exploitation of their areas. Account must also be taken of the deleterious efffects that the huge forestry, mining, urban-industrial and hydro-electric power and irrigation dam schemes are

having on the adivasis' ability to continue their traditional methods of production. In addition to the lack of investment in tribal agriculture and alienation of agricultural land by encroaching non-tribals, tribals are being forced by a combination of land alienation for dams and industrial developments, and prohibitions on the use of forest resources to give up their largely autonomous, self-sufficient methods of production. Instead they become badly paid landless labourers, either harvesting their traditional forests and working in mines for the benefit of the non-tribal areas, or migrating seasonally or permanently to distant brickfields, plantations and areas of high agricultural potential in search of work. The adivasis are paying for the development of the rest of India with economic insecurity, poor wages, social disorganization and cultural shock.

In all States of the Union there are laws controlling sale of tribal agricultural land to non-tribals. Despite this, large amounts of tribal land have been alienated.[16] However, serious as this is, some writers (e.g. M.L. Patel 1974) conjecture[17] that the amount of tribal land taken by individual non-tribals is dwarfed by the amount of land government and parastatal organizations take from tribals for big projects.

Table 5 shows the way in which large public projects disproportionately affect the tribals: in Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal from 1951-61 19 percent of the families displaced by public projects were tribals, although Scheduled Tribes formed only 10 percent of the population in these three states. Projects in tribal areas are much larger than in India as a whole. Usually these projects are either big dams such as the Ukai in Gujarat and Maharashtra which displaced 10,000 adivasi families from good agricultural land in Dhulia District to facilitate the irrigation of largely non-tribal lands in the Plain of Gujarat (Patil 1974), or big urban-industrial developments typical of areas like Chotanagpur (the 'Ruhr of India') in South Bihar (Vidyarthi 1970, Sinha 1968, Naidu 1976). Table 6 shows the displacement and slow rate of rehabilitation of tribal families affected by public projects in Maharashtra. The rate of displacement appears to have speeded up considerably by the 1970s. Large numbers of displaced families are not rehabilitated, and those that are get proportionally less land than they had before being displaced. Extrapolation of these figures suggests that 16 percent of all tribal families in Maharashtra were displaced by a public project between 1951 and 1977. More

Table 5. Displacement of Tribal Families by Public Projects in Plans 1 and 2

	Number Displaced Families	No. Tribal Families Displaced	Displaced Tribal Families as Proportion of Total Displaced Families (percent)	Tribal Population as a Proportion of Total State Population (percent)	Average Size Tribal Project Number of Families	Average Size India Project Number of Families
Bihar	46,664	7,961	17	9	2,592	745
Orissa	20,927	5,184	25	23	5,232	745
West Bengal	15,354	2,388	16	6	3,071	745
Total in the three states	82,945	15,533	19	10		

Source: M.L. Patel (1974) from Reports of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (for first and second plans 1951-61).

generally, where compensation is given it is in the form of cash, often at far less than market rate;[18] the adivasis do not have the know-how or entrepreneurial skills to use cash effectively, and they lose it quickly to liquor traders and other non-tribals. Within a very short time displaced tribal landowners join the army of landless labourers.

Table 6. Rehabilitation of Tribal Families Displaced by Public Projects in Maharashtra

	Families	Land(acres)
(a) Plans 1 and 2 (1951-61)		
Displaced	22,845	94,550
Rehabilitated	12,287	22,270
Pending end 1961	10,558 (46%)	72,280 (76%)
(b) 1971-72 (24 Major Projects)		
Displaced	4,477	16,836
Rehabilitated	1,635	3,554
Pending at end of period	2,842 (63%)	13,282 (79%)

Sources: (a) 12th and 13th Annual Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

(b) 21st Annual Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

In the case of industrial development, not only is land taken for factory or mine development, but there are extra pressures on remaining adivasi land resulting from the immigration of non-tribal traders and workers, attracted by the development. Birsa Seva Dal (an adivasi labour organization in Chotanagpur) report a large number of cases of collusion between bureaucracy and police to illegally alienate tribal land close to but not part of government industrial projects (Jones 1978). A graphic description of this process is given by Srivastava in the case of the Bailadila Iron Ore Mine in Bastar District, Madhya Pradesh, that was developed for export to Japan.

After the establishment of the project, businessmen, contractors, labourers, technicians started coming to the area . . . Vast areas — both barren and fertile —

attracted the outsiders and they established themselves on both sides of the road passing through the village Bade-bacheli . . . allied industries and market centres were also set up . . . a bania (non-tribal) sells commodities of day to day need to the tribals and acts as a money-lender . . . any tribal who is not in a position to repay his debt loses his land to the moneylender . . . the land along the road is no longer in the possession of the tribals. The outsiders are further encroaching on the land situated a little bit in the interior both for cultivation and habitation . . . in Bade-bacheli village 2027 acres of land belonging to tribal cultivators have been officially permitted to be sold to non-tribals . . . but legal alienation of tribal land is not even one tenth of the rate of illegal alienation . . . The thatched huts of the tribals are slowly and gradually being replaced by the *pucca* [brick] tiled house of the outsiders (Srivastava 1972: 71-75)

Thus industrial development is leading to widespread alienation of adivasi land. This might be less damaging if the adivasis were given employment in the new enterprises, and if they were able to share in some of the benefits of the modern schemes. But they are not. There is extremely little tribal involvement in the urban-industrial developments in tribal India. In Chotanagpur, for example, although tribals comprise between 40 and 60 percent of the total population, in none of the major industries is the labour force more than 5 percent tribal; in some of the biggest firms like TISCO (Steel Works) Jamshedpur and Bharat Coking Coal Ltd (Dhanbad), tribals are far less than this.[19] Adivasis are employed in the initial construction phases but after this the jobs invariably go to non-tribal immigrants, in this case primarily from North Bihar and West Bengal. In justification of this discrimination against tribals, it is usually argued that they do not have the technical skills needed, though this need not be an insurmountable problem to a government committed to tribal development; the more probable reason is a combination of anti-tribal discrimination by the non-tribal factory managers, and a desire to employ outsiders on short-term contracts who are easier to control.[20] As a result the urban industrial developments have had almost no advantages for the adivasis: industries have remained small modern non-tribal enclaves in the middle of large areas of rural, tribal underdevelopment.

The combined effect of these various pressures has been dramatic. In Chotanagpur for example, industrialization and urbanization, including alienation of tribal land for public projects, exclusion of adivasis from the modern sector, and increasing penetration of non-tribals into the tribal economy, has been going on since the early 20th century but has speeded up

considerably since Independence. Combined with an almost total failure of colonial and independent governments to invest in tribal agriculture, this has led to a radical change in the population composition of the region. Non-tribals have migrated in, 'pulled' by the new opportunities offered by the urban-industrial developments, while tribals have been 'pushed' out to find work in the tea plantations of Assam and Bengal (up to c.1935) and more recently in the brickfields of Uttar Pradesh and the jute mills of Calcutta. Sometimes the outmigration is seasonal,[21] sometimes it is permanent. It is always for very low wages, usually less than the minimum wage. Indeed it is not uncommon for adivasis in Chotanagpur, recruited to work in jute mills and brick factories in Calcutta, to be given a one-way ticket and then paid so little that they effectively become bonded factory labourers since they can never save enough to return to their home areas. Looked at in wider perspective the industrialists of Chotanagpur and areas like Calcutta are able to employ non-local, often short-term, and therefore poorly organised labour to which they can pay very low rates, while the adivasis and others are forced by the disintegration of their subsistence-economy to become labourers without bargaining power. Over a period of 80 years or so this process of in-and-out migration has created a substantial non-tribal presence in what was an almost exclusively tribal area.[22]

Mrs Gandhi, the ex-Prime Minister of India and leader of the Congress party, was understating considerably when she said in Ranchi in 1969 that the '. . . . big industrial complexes have not come up to people's expectations' and that the 'adivasis have been denied their due share'. The tribals have not only been denied the benefits of the industrial developments in their area which use their local resources; they have also suffered severe social, economic and cultural dislocation as a result.

The picture is not very different when one looks at the impact of forestry development schemes on the tribals. As with mining and industrial developments, the first commercial exploitation of forest resources took place under the British colonial rule,[23] but it was under newly independent India that the most severe restrictions were placed on traditional tribal rights to forests. The 1952 New Forest Policy converted the remaining 'rights' the tribals enjoyed under the British — the grazing of cattle, the collection of firewood, the right to cultivate limited areas — into 'concessions' to be controlled by state forest departments. This, combined with

the avowed aim of increasing total forested area of India from an estimated 25 percent to 33 percent has severely restricted adivasi access to the forest.[24]

Obviously the situation is not uniform throughout the forested areas of India. Shifting cultivation, though outlawed since 1927, is still practised by large numbers of adivasis (The Dhebar Commission in 1962 estimated that there were 2.6 million shifting cultivators in 1961) and it will be many years before the practice ceases altogether. But in areas that are currently being exploited for timber, or where the collection of minor forest produce is commercially important, the situation after the 1952 Policy is described by Bardham (1973:37):

> . . . the one-time 'lord of the forest' was reduced to the status of a subject and placed under the tutelage of the forest department. He became a wage slave at the disposal of the forest department and forest contractor.

The results of these restrictions on customary use were two-fold. In the first place 'forest villages' (referred to in Forest Department records as 'labour camps', which illustrates the department's attitude to the half-million tribals who lived in them) were established for some of those tribals whose traditional areas were designated 'reserve forests'. In order to gain as 'concessions' their traditional 'rights' like collecting minor forest produce and cultivation of foodcrops, tribals were (and are) forced to live in the forest villages where they have to work for the Forest Department at very low wages whenever it requires them to, even if this conflicts with crucial periods in the agricultural cycle. They are not allowed to take other paid work without the permission of the department. They have no tenancy rights in the villages, and are thus subject to summary eviction if they fail to comply with the department's demands.[25]

In addition, tribals living close to designated reserve forests with only limited concessions to use such areas at the discretion of the department, are thereby often obliged either to work for non-tribal forest contractors or forest officers at extremely low wages. Reports of violations of basic human rights by both are common, as are those of collusion between non-tribal contractors and forest officers to exploit the adivasis and prevent any attempt by them to gain control over their traditional resources. In Andhra Pradesh for instance, one of the few flourishing tribal forest co-operatives

in the country — The Koida Co-operative Society — was crushed by the forest department which suddenly, and contrary to previous agreement, demanded Rs.4800 in rent. Because the co-operative could not pay it was evicted and the tribals became labourers again for the non-tribal contractor, who picked up the lease for only half what the tribals were asked (Shilu Ao Commission 1969).

The reason given for excluding the tribals is to develop the forests commercially, tribal forms of land-use like shifting cultivation and the grazing of livestock being considered incompatible with maximum productivity of the forest and, in extreme cases, environmentally damaging. In fact, less than 10 percent of Indian forest land is commercially harvested at the moment (Avard 1975) and therefore there should be large areas over which adivasi methods of production could be practised

Table 7. Exploitation of Forests under the Control of State Forest Departments (1969-70)

	Total expenditure (Rs. millions)	Forest revenue (Rs. millions)	Percent expenditure to revenue
Central Tribal Belt			
Forest 'Miners'			
Madhya Pradesh	76.6	258.6	29
Orissa	39.1	65.8	48
Gujarat	21.7	44.2	49
Andhra Pradesh	31.0	60.2	52
Bihar	25.3	37.9	68
Forest 'Developers'			
Rajasthan	15.6	10.0	155
Maharashtra	89.1	86.0	103
W. Bengal	22.7	24.5	93
Other States			
Forest 'Developers' par excellence			
Haryana	8.0	3.4	231
Punjab	12.5	6.4	193

Source: Forest Statistics Bulletin No. 12 (Central Forestry Commission Ministry of Agriculture).

within ecologically sound limits at no economic cost. The government position is in any case hypocritical.

Patil (1974), among many others, has pointed out that the most serious environmental damage recently caused by rapid deforestation is due not to tribal land use but to indiscriminate logging by forest contractors, presumably with the concurrence of the Forest Department. Table 7 shows clearly that many States, of which Madhya Pradesh is the worst, are mining their forests, cutting them down as quickly as possible for short-term gain (presumably to invest in lowland areas of high agricultural potential or in urban-industrial areas) rather than reinvesting for long-term renewable yield.

THE TRIBALS ARE PREVENTED FROM ACQUIRING ANY REAL POLITICAL POWER

By law seats are reserved for the adivasis in State and Union legislatures; the numbers are shown in Table 8. However, the Government of India Reservations Policy conceals the fact that adivasis cannot acquire real political power in this way. There are three main reasons for this. First the tribal MPs and MLAs (Members of the Legislative Assemblies in each state) do not represent the mass of poor tribals. By the time a tribal has passed through the Indian education system, become fluent in the regional non-tribal language, aware of the way the system operates and can afford to become an MP/MLA he is almost certain to have become alienated from the mass of poor tribals and, living in the state or national capital, is unlikely to represent the tribals' real interests. As the Economic and Political Weekly (1974:175B) put it:

> . . . if one considers the record of the adivasi MPs and the MLAs in fighting for the betterment of the adivasi poor, it looks doubtful that a larger measure of political power for the elites among the adivasis will make much difference to the condition of the adivasi people as a whole.

Obviously there are exceptions to this. In addition, as a larger number of adivasis learn how to operate the system, but are rejected by it, there is more chance that some will return, mobilize and genuinely lead the poor adivasis. But to date the performance of the tribal representatives in *Lok* and *Vidhan Sabhas* (national and state legislatures) has not been impressive.[26]

Table 8: Tribal Reserved Seats in Union and State Parliaments (1 Jan. 1974)

	Lok Sabha (Delhi)			Vidhan Sabha (State legislature)		
	Total Seats	Reserved for Scheduled Tribes	Scheduled Tribes as a Proportion of Total Population (expressed as seats)	Total Seats	Reserved for Scheduled Tribes	Scheduled Tribes as a Proportion of Total Population (expressed as seats)
Andhra Pradesh	42	2	2	294	11	14
Bihar	53	5	5	318	29	30
Gujarat	26	4	4	182	25	28
Madhya Pradesh	40	8	8	320	64	64
Maharashtra	48	3	3	288	17	18
Orissa	21	5	5	147	34	35
Rajasthan	23	3	3	184	21	24
West Bengal	40	2	2	280	16	14
Central Tribal Belt — Total	293	32	32	2013	217	227
All India	534	42	37	3864	329	267

Source: 'India: 1975, A Reference Manual'.

Second, the scheduling of tribals is manipulated to reduce the number of reservations for tribals in some state legislatures. In states where the tribal population forms a large percentage of the total it is obviously in the interests of the powerful non-tribals who control the state to reduce the number of reserved tribal seats in the state legislature, thereby reducing the potential political power of the adivasis.[27] In places this has been achieved by reducing the number of tribals who are officially scheduled and therefore to be taken into account in deciding the size of the tribal quota. For example, prior to the reorganization of states in 1956, in what was later to become Madhya Pradesh, the political power of the adivasis was reduced by not scheduling over 600,000 in the Vidarbha region.

Last and perhaps most important, the tribals in the Central Tribal Belt are split up between 8 states so that everywhere they form politically insignificant minorities in predominantly non-tribal states. There are 32.4 million Scheduled Tribes people in the Central Tribal Belt, split up between eight states in such a way that nowhere do tribals make up more than 23 percent of the total population of the state (Table 1), despite the fact that there are two dense concentrations of tribals that could easily form the basis of new states containing a large proportion of the total tribal population of the Central Tribal Belt. The problem is that these regions include almost all of India's mineral deposits and a large part of her forests; for this reason the Government clearly prefers to have them split up between a number of different states.

The two areas are (1) the 'Jharkhand' region comprising nine districts on the borders of eastern Madhya Pradesh, Southern Bihar and Northern Orissa, with a population of 14.9 million, of which 53 percent are tribals; (2) the Bastar (Southern Madhya Pradesh) and Koraput (Southern Orissa) area, including the agency areas of Northern Andhra Pradesh, with a population of 8.1 million, of which 57 percent are tribals.

These two areas would form viable separate states, or a large composite state with a population of about 28 million, over half of whom would be tribals; such a state would include about 45 percent of all the tribals in the Central Tribal Belt. Singly the states would compare numerically with Punjab (11 million), Haryana (10 million), and of course Nagaland (½ million); fused as one unit the tribal state would be more populous than Orissa (22 million), Gujarat (27 million) or Rajasthan (26 million).[28]

The state boundaries in India were redrawn by the States Reorganising Committee in 1956. The Jharkhand party which was the major opposition party in Bihar at the time, called for a tribal state[29] comprising six districts in South Bihar and nine districts in other states. The proposal was dismissed on the grounds that it would leave Bihar an 'unbalanced' state, and that people outside southern Bihar were against it. No consideration was given to the benefits that would accrue to a large part of the tribal population from having effective political representation for the first time, and a larger measure of control over the development of their area. Similarly, in other parts of India state boundaries were aligned according to whether the inhabitants of the peripheral boundary areas spoke relatively more or less of the non-tribal regional languages such as Hindi and Bengali, Oriya and Telegu. No account was taken of the fact that the boundaries split culturally and economically homogenous tribal areas between different states leaving the adivasis powerless and dependent.

However, despite, or perhaps because of, the tribals' powerlessness within the national and state political system, there have been political uprisings by adivasis in many different parts of India. The history of tribal rebellions against non-tribal oppressors dates back to the Ho revolts against the British in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and since Independence there have been significant adivasi uprisings in the Bhil districts in the West, in Chotnagpur in the East, in the Bastar/Koraput 'dome' in the South-East, and of course in the North-East in Nagaland and Mizoram, to name but a few.

These uprisings have all had three characteristics in common. In the first place, outsiders have usually acted as organizers.[30] All of tribal India is latently revolutionary in that it is severely exploited by non-tribals, but this has only been successfully converted into mass action when outsiders filled what has been called the tribal 'leadership vacuum'. As the Economic and Political Weekly (1972:207) put it:

> . . . left to themselves tribals do not see their problems, it is not perceived by them in a way that can lead to organized revolt. The tribals need a driving force that will give their consciousness organized form.

The most successful of such catalysts, whether communists (like Satyanarayana and Sanyal in Srikakulam), non-violent Gandhians (like Harivallabh Parikh in Boroda District, Gujarat), or

missionaries (in the North-East of India) are those who live with the people for a very long time and understand their concerns. The way in which the adivasis in Srikakulam turned against the incoming Naxalite revolutionaries around 1970, when the Naxalites failed to address themselves to what the tribals perceived as their dominant interest - restoration of illegally alienated land (Das Gupta 1975:58-59) — shows clearly that radical change cannot be imposed on the tribals; it must be born out of the adivasis' own experience and felt needs.

The second common characteristic is that these revolts have all been highly localised; no regional organization has yet emerged. Given the hilly tribal terrain and the lack of communications, it is not surprising that even where there is considerable cultural and linguistic homogeneity over large areas organization is difficult. This has led some people to argue that the most successful future for tribal action in areas like Dhulia District, Maharashtra lies not in forging links with other tribal movements in, say, Gujarat to the north, but in linking isolated adivasi struggles to movements in the nearby non-adivasi areas among *harijans* and other oppressed groups.[31] This should be possible they argue, because the problems of the tribals and non-tribal rural poor focus on the same nexus of problems: land alienation, landlessness, poor wages, perpetual indebtedness and uncertainty of employment. However, although it is important not to see the problem uniquely as tribal interests conflicting with non-tribal interests (as I have done for the sake of clarity in this paper), it should be stressed that except in the industrial areas of Chotanagpur (Das 1975) few such links have ever been forged. Even in the Dhulia revolt, where politically conscious communist cadres have been working for over a decade, no links have been established with the poor peasants of the nearby non-tribal areas.

The third common characteristic of tribal revolts is that they have all been ruthlessly smashed by alliances of rich non-tribal landlords, politicians and the police. As with the revolts of the 19th Century, the reaction of non-tribals to tribal agitation has been violent suppression. A few recently reported examples: in Srikakulam the Congress leader Medida Satyanarayana set about crushing the tribal movement in 1967 in a way which resulted in several tribal deaths culminating in the killing of the leaders by police in 1970 (Naidu 1972); in Bihar in 1973 the Congress leader of Dhanbad District, Kalyan Singh, organised thugs to kill the leaders of a tribal peasant-industrial workers movement — the Jharkhand

Morcha (Das 1975); in Dhulia Congressmen and the state government called in the police to side with the landlords in crushing the rising power of the adivasis (Mies 1976).

It is clear, then, that by a combination of political gerrymandering and violent suppression of popular movements, the State in India has successfully prevented the tribals from acquiring any real political strength. This has allowed continued exploitation of the tribal regions and tribal labour by government-supported forestry, mining and other developments, and by non-tribal landlords, moneylenders and traders who are the political supporters of Congress and other major centre-right parties in tribal areas. It is unlikely that the Government will, of its own free will, give away any real political power, and therefore it would seem that the future for the tribals must lie in organising both among themselves, and with other segments of the rural poor, in order to transform themselves into a real political force. Radical changes in the political structure of the whole country are a pre-requisite to overcoming tribal underdevelopment, but to assess the extent to which this is either possible or likely, is outside the scope of this paper.

CONCLUSION

A major problem of development in any indigenous society like the adivasis' is to decide what rights that society should have to the resources of its traditional environment, and what role the people should play in the exploitation of those resources. There is a continuum of possibilities from a situation of autonomy in which the indigenous people have a large measure of control over the exploitation of the resources in their area and benefit accordingly, through situations of 'internal colonialism' where the indigenous society is exploited by the national and international 'centres', has little control over and derives few benefits from resource exploitation in its area, to extreme colonial policies of ethnocide, when the indigenous culture is destroyed and genocide, when the individuals of the society are killed (for example some South American forest Indians today).

The situation in tribal India is quite clearly neither ethnocidal nor

genocidal, but on the evidence presented in this paper it seems no exaggeration to say that tribal India is an internal colony exploited by the rest of the country. The resource development decisions made by distant bureaucrats in the state capitals, in Delhi and in the boardrooms of the multi-national corporations in the West mean that even the renewable (forest) resources of tribal India are 'mined' to provide investment capital for the further development of the non-tribal plains and the developed world. The tribals receive few benefits from these activities. Given the environmentally dangerous rate at which some states are deforesting and the rapid depletion of many mineral resources in the south-eastern resources 'triangle',[32] it seems likely that the resources of the tribal areas will be largely exhausted without bringing any benefits to their original 'owners'.[33] Manipulation of political power at all levels makes tribal action to stop this process impossible.

In this paper I have of necessity adopted a rather dry, analytical approach avoiding graphic accounts of the gross violations of human rights typical of indigenous societies throughout the world and of the abject poverty of most of the tribal population, although these could easily have been given.[34] I have argued that one cannot hope to explain the underdevelopment of any one group in society by looking at that community in isolation. Rather a wider perspective linking the community to the political and economic power structure of the state, and where useful of the international system must be adopted. The corollary of this, which is relevant to indigenous peoples' development throughout the world, is that there can be no development in marginal, exploited groups such as these unless the political and economic structure of the larger society is conducive to such changes. In India's case the volumes of laws and administrative provisions drawn up to protect and develop the adivasis have proved little more than paper tigers given the realities of the political structure of the country.

• *NOTES*

1. Most of the arguments that will be put forward in this paper apply equally to the other major concentration of tribals in the North-East States and Union Territories (Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunchal Pradesh, Tripura and

Meghalaya). However, because of the strategic importance of this area, the higher levels of literacy resulting from intensive missionary activity over the last century, and the almost continuous violent tribal struggles that have been waged in Nagaland and Mizoram since independence, government policy has differed here. There have been much higher levels of government investment and a willingness on the part of central government to concede the formation of tribal states within the Indian Union.

2. For instance, the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh comprise 38% of the state; have 47% of the forest and 50% of the fallow but only 28% of the net cropped area and 19% of the land that can be brought under cultivation without much heavy investment (Government of Madhya Pradesh 1975).

3. A process Lee and Devore (1968) note is common to all 'indigenous' societies. The Aborigines of Australia who once occupied the more productive ecological niches are now restricted to deserts and the pastoralists of East Africa are constantly losing their best watered land — their crucial dry season grazing — to encroaching cultivators.

4. Ghurye (1963) gives a very comprehensive account of the tribal situation under British rule.

5. For a fuller discussion of the constitutional, legal and administrative provisions and the reasons why they have not succeeded in encouraging tribal development see Jones (1978 forthcoming).

6. The four most important reports are those of the Dhebar Commission (1962), Elwin Commission (1960), Shilu Ao (1969), and the as yet unpublished Planning Commission Report (1973). In addition to these the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes produces (usually belatedly) an annual report and various smaller reports have been published on specific topics such as Tribal Labour (National Commission on Labour, 1969) and the Tribal Economy in Forest Areas (Department of Social Welfare, 1967).

7. Ibidem.

8. Tribal welfare and development (General and Special Expenditures) is funded by both state and central governments in about the ratio 40:60.

9. Backward Classes comprise Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, nomads and denotified communities.

10. Lipton's observation that there is an urban bias in Indian Planning (1968) can usefully be extended to cover areas of high agricultural potential too (Harriss 1974). D. D. Guru (1975) for instance notes how a programme emphasis on medium and major irrigation schemes in Bihar discriminated against the tribal areas of Chotanagpur which are hilly and therefore only suited to minor irrigation schemes like barrages on small streams. In the Plains areas of Bihar 30% of cultivable land that is potentially irrigable has been irrigated. In tribal Chotanagpur the figure is less than 2%.

11. A point noted earlier 'with regret' by the Shilu Ao Commission (1969): '. . . no attempt has been made by any state government with the exception of Andhra Pradesh to ensure that the tribals receive a reasonable share from general development programmes'.

12. Banks generally require land as collateral for loans, but because of laws prohibiting a tribal from selling his land to a non-tribal, tribals are not allowed to use their land in this way and cannot therefore borrow from commercial banks.

13. Comparables are not really being compared here since the figures for the

value of resources taken from the tribal areas include the costs of extraction and transportation. Nevertheless, even if data were available that permitted these costs to be taken into account, it is highly unlikely that the 4:1 ratio would be reduced sufficiently to affect the general validity of the subsequent argument.

14. The precision of my estimates must be taken cautiously since the Government of India does not publish the (politically potentially explosive) value of resources taken from tribal areas. However, they are certainly of the correct magnitude.

15. The net revenue from exploitation of tribal forests in the Central Tribal Belt (assuming that tribal forests comprise 50% of the total) was Rs.243 million in 1969/70; in the same year the special tribal programme only cost Rs.109 million (Annual Report Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 1973:395).

16. All the major government reports (footnote 6) have sections on the prevalence and methods of land alienation. Useful recent studies include Sinha (1968) in Ranchi District, Bihar; Srivastava (1972) in Bastar District, Madhya Pradesh; Masavi (1975) in two districts of Gujarat; and Kulkarni (1974, 1975) in Dhulia District, Maharashtra.

17. This can only be conjecture since it is impossible to know accurately the amount of land lost to individual non-tribals.

18. Because of laws prohibiting the sale of tribal land to non-tribals the market price of tribal land on which government assessed compensation is paid is usually far less than that of non-tribal land. Compensation is hardly ever paid to tribals on the basis of the future use (e.g. for factory development) to which their land is to be put. The appreciation in the value of the land because of its new use accrues to non-tribal intermediaries or government and para-statal organizations.

19. Birsa Seva Dal estimate that tribal employment in these two companies may be as low as 1%. Personal Communication (1976).

20. Non-tribals are brought in on contract from distant areas on short-term contracts and without their families. By constantly turning over the labour force and by recruiting the workers in the most poverty-stricken plains areas a reliable, placid workforce is secured at very low wages.

21. Development workers the author met in Bihar estimated that 250,000 adivasis migrated in the dry season of 1974/75 from the western part of Ranchi District alone primarily to the brick fields of Uttar Pradesh. Migration from other tribal areas such as the Bhil districts in West India is also very common.

22. Ranchi and Singhbuhm districts in Chotanagpur were almost totally tribal in the late 19th Century but by the 1961 census they were reduced to 62% and 46% respectively.

23. The 1894 British Forest Policy Resolution restricted tribal rights in certain forests where they conflicted with the greater (i.e. the Colonial Government's) interest, and the 1927 India Act outlawed shifting cultivation.

24. Reserved forests are areas controlled by the forest department where the New Forest Policy and associated regulations are enforced. To give some idea of the effect of the New Forest Policy on the tribal economy which depends on both agriculture and forest use, in Madhya Pradesh the 'reserved' forest was increased under the independent government from 47% to 78% of the total forested area (Ford Foundation 1976B).

25. It should be noted that it was agreed that the system of forest villages would be abolished at a meeting of State Ministers on Tribal Welfare in Delhi in 1975.

Tribals living in such villages were to be given tenancy rights and the freedom to sell their labour. To the author's knowledge this has not yet been implemented.

26. Throughout this paper I have maintained an inaccurate distinction between oppressed adivasis and non-adivasi oppressors. In doing so I have not addressed myself to the question of class formation within tribal groupings though there is evidence for the emergence of a tribal bourgeoisie — educated, aware of the way the system operates and able freely to buy tribal land — that is coming increasingly to exploit fellow tribals (e.g. Masavi 1975).

27. Where there are no reservations for tribal MPs and MLAs it is usually the case that powerful non-tribals are able economically or physically to coerce tribals to vote for them or their preferred candidate. Thus in many areas tribals are represented by non-tribals whose class interests are antithetical.

28. Additionally perhaps the Bhil area straddling the Gujarat-Maharashtra-Madhya Pradesh border might also be considered (see Desai 1973).

29. For good accounts of the evolution of the Jharkhand Movement from the early decades of the twentieth Century see Jha (1968) and Sharma (1976).

30. A notable exception to this general pattern is Pravin Bhanj-Deo, a tribal who led revolts in his native Bastar in the 1950s which eventually led to his death.

31. See for example Economic and Political Weekly (1974:175B).

32. '. . . the state's mineral resources are going to be depleted considerably by the turn of the century and the position with respect to important minerals like coal, iron, bauxite, kynite, apatite will become critical. Thus the present status of Bihar as being considered as rich in mineral stocks would have changed considerably by 2000 AD . . . most of the minerals are located in Chotanagpur' (Guru 1974).

33. The tribals of course did not 'own' the forest in a modern legal sense though different tribes or groups of tribes did enjoy customary rights to the use of different areas.

34. e.g. '. . . flogging of Bhil [tribal] labourers, rape of Bhil women in broad daylight, burning Bhil huts for "misbehaviour", poisoning Bhil wells' are all common in Dhulia District, Maharashtra (Kulkarni 1974). Harivallabh Parikh's book: Light in Darkness (1973) is a catalogue of such gross violations of human rights. e.g. 'Go into any adivasi village and you will find men, women and children, all bare-backed, men having only rags around their loins and women with torn lehanges and children completely naked. Even during the coldest months they are so clad' (J.C. Hayward 1969).

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Note: In this bibliography EPW refers to Economic and Political Weekly published every week from Bombay.

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