

Consolidation of India as a Nation(III): Integration of the Tribals

The task of integrating the tribal people into the mainstream was extremely complex, given the varied conditions under which they live in different parts of the country, and their different languages and distinct cultures. The 1971 Census recorded over 400 tribal communities numbering nearly 38 million people and constituting nearly 6.9 per cent of the Indian population. Spread all over India, their greatest concentration is in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, north-eastern India, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan. Except in the Northeast, they constitute minorities in their home states. Residing mostly in the hills and forest areas, in colonial India they lived in relative isolation, and their traditions, habits, cultures and ways of life were markedly different from those of their non-tribal neighbours. Nevertheless, except in the Northeast, the two had for centuries interacted culturally, socially, economically and politically.

In most parts of the country, colonialism brought radical transformation of the tribals as their relative isolation was eroded by the penetration of market forces and they were integrated with the British and princely administrations. A large number of moneylenders, traders, revenue farmers and other middlemen and petty officials invaded the tribal areas and disrupted the tribals' traditional way of life. They were increasingly engulfed in debt and lost their lands to outsiders, often being reduced to the position of agricultural labourers, sharecroppers and rack-rented tenants. Many were forced to retreat further into the hills. Belated legislation to prevent alienation of land by the tribal people failed to halt the process. Verrier Elwin, who lived nearly all his life among the tribal people in central and north-eastern India and who was one of the formative influences in the evolution of the new government's policies towards the tribals, was to refer to the fate of the tribal people under British rule as follows: 'But now they suffered oppression and exploitation, for there soon came merchants and liquor-venders, cajoling, tricking, swindling them in their ignorance and simplicity until bit by bit their broad acres dwindled and they they sank into the poverty in which many of them still live today.'¹ Simultaneously, 'missionaries were destroying their art, their dances, their weaving and their whole culture'²

Colonialism also transformed the tribals' relationship with the forest. They depended on the forest for food, fuel and cattle feed and for raw materials for their handicrafts. In many parts of India the hunger for land by the immigrant peasants from the plains led to the destruction of forests, depriving the tribals of their traditional means of livelihood. To conserve forests and to facilitate their commercial exploitation, the colonial authorities brought large tracts of forest lands under forest laws which forbade shifting cultivation and put severe restrictions on the tribals' use of the forest and their access to forest products.

Loss of land, indebtedness, exploitation by middlemen, denial of access to forests and forest products, and oppression and extortion by policemen, forest officials, and other government officials was to lead to a series of tribal uprisings in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—for example the Santhal uprising and the Munda rebellion led by Birsa Munda—and to the participation of the tribal people in the national and peasant movements in Orissa, Bihar, West

Roots of India's Tribal Policy

The preservation of the tribal people's rich social and cultural heritage lay at the heart of the government's policy of tribal integration. As Jawaharlal Nehru, the main influence in shaping the government's attitude towards the tribals, put it: 'The first problem we have to face there [in the tribal areas] is to inspire them [the tribal people] with confidence and to make them feel at one with India, and to realise that they are part of India and have an honoured place in it.' At the same time, 'India to them should signify not only a protecting force but a liberating one'.³ Indian nationalism, Nehru thought, was capable of accommodating the uniqueness of the tribal people.

There were two major approaches regarding the place to be accorded to tribals in Indian society. One approach was to leave the tribal people alone, uncontaminated by modern influences operating outside their world and to let them stay more or less as they were. The second approach was that of assimilating them completely and as quickly as possible into the Indian society all around them. The disappearance of the tribal way of life was not to be regretted; it was to be welcomed for that would represent their 'upliftment'.

Jawaharlal Nehru rejected both these approaches. The first approach, of treating the tribal people 'as museum specimens to be observed and written about', was, he said, 'to insult them'.⁴ The tribal people, he wrote, 'could not be left cut off from the world as they were'. Isolation was in any case impossible at this stage, for the process of penetration by the outside world had already gone too far and 'it was not possible or desirable to isolate them'.⁵ The second approach of allowing them 'to be engulfed by the masses of Indian humanity',⁶ or of their assimilation through the operation of normal outside forces was also wrong, according to Nehru. This would lead to the loss of the tribals' social and cultural identity and of the many virtues they possessed. In fact, he pointed out, 'if normal factors were allowed to operate, unscrupulous people from outside would take possession of tribal lands . . . and forests and interfere with the life of the tribal people'.⁷ This would also 'upset their whole life and culture, which had so much of good in them'.⁸

Instead of these two approaches, Nehru favoured the policy of integrating the tribal people in Indian society, of making them an integral part of the Indian nation, even while maintaining their distinct identity and culture. There were two basic parameters of the Nehruvian approach: 'the tribal areas have to progress' and 'they have to progress in their own way'. Progress did not mean 'an attempt merely to duplicate what we have got in other parts of India'. Whatever was good in the rest of India would 'be adopted by them gradually'.⁹ Moreover, whatever changes were needed would be 'worked out by the tribals themselves'.¹⁰

The problem was how to combine these two seemingly contradictory approaches. Nehru stood for economic and social development of the tribal people in multifarious ways, especially in the

fields of communication, modern medical facilities, agriculture and education. In this regard, he laid down certain broad guidelines for government policy.

First, the tribals should develop along the lines of their own genius; there should be no imposition or compulsion from outside. The non-tribals should not approach them with a superiority complex. Rather, the understanding should be that they had an equal contribution to make to the evolution of the common culture and social and political life of the country.

Second, tribal rights in land and forests should be respected and no outsider should be able to take possession of tribal lands. The incursion of the market economy into tribal areas had to be strictly controlled and regulated.

Third, it was necessary to encourage the tribal languages which 'must be given all possible support and the conditions in which they can flourish must be safeguarded'.¹¹

Fourth, for administration, reliance should be placed on the tribal people themselves, and administrators should be recruited from amongst them and trained. As few as possible outsiders should be introduced as administrators in tribal areas and they should be carefully chosen. They should have a sympathetic and understanding approach, and should not consider themselves superior to or apart from the tribal people. They should be prepared to share their life with the tribal people among whom they work.

Fifth, there should be no over-administration of tribal areas. The effort should be to administer and develop the tribals' through their own social and cultural institutions.

Nehru's approach was in turn based on the nationalist policy towards tribals since the 1920s when Gandhiji set up ashrams in the tribal areas and promoted constructive work. After independence this policy was supported by Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, and other major political leaders.

To give shape to the government's policy, a beginning was made in the constitution itself which directed under Article 46 that the state should promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the tribal people and should protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation, through special legislation. The governors of the states in which tribal areas were situated were given special responsibility to protect tribal interests, including the power to modify central and state laws in their application to tribal areas, and to frame regulations for the protection of tribals' right to land and also their protection from money lenders. The application of the Fundamental Rights was amended for this purpose. The constitution also extended full political rights to the tribal people. In addition, it provided for reservation of seats in the legislatures and positions in the administrative services for the Scheduled Tribes as in the case of the Scheduled Castes. The constitution also provided for the setting up of Tribal Advisory Councils in all states containing tribal areas to advise on matters concerning the welfare of tribals. A Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was appointed by the President to investigate whether the safeguards provided for them were being observed.

Legislative as well as executive action was taken by the state governments to prevent loss of

tribal lands to non-tribal people and to prevent exploitation of the tribals by money lenders. The central and state governments created special facilities and organized special programmes for the welfare and development of the tribal areas and the tribal people including the promotion of cottage and village industries and generation of employment among them. Large expenditures were undertaken and large sums set apart in the Five-Year Plans for the purpose. The funding for tribal welfare significantly increased after 1971.

In spite of the constitutional safeguards and the efforts of the central and state governments, the tribals' progress and welfare has been very slow, and even dismal. Except in the Northeast, the tribals continue to be poor, indebted, landless and often unemployed. The problem often lies in weak execution of even well-intentioned measures. Quite often there is a divergence between central and state government policies, the latter being less in tune with tribal interests. In particular, state governments have been relatively ineffective in administering the positive policies and laws laid down by the central government or by the state governments themselves, as repeatedly shown by the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and in the reports of the Planning Commission. Quite often the funds allocated for tribal welfare are not spent or are spent without corresponding results, or are even misappropriated. One of the watchdogs of tribal interests, the Tribal Advisory Councils, have not functioned effectively.

Often the administrative personnel are ill-trained or even prejudiced against tribals. But sympathetic officials are also known to be quickly transferred out of tribal areas under the pressure of traders, money lenders, forest contractors and land-grabbers.

A major handicap from which tribals suffer is denial of justice, often because of their unfamiliarity with the laws and the legal system. Laws preventing transfer of land to outsiders have continued to be evaded, leading to alienation of land and eviction of tribals. Rapid extension of mines and industries has worsened their conditions in many areas. While deforestation proceeds apace through the cooperation of corrupt officials and politicians with forest contractors, the tribals' traditional right of access to the forest and its produce is continuously curtailed. Forest laws and regulations are also used by unsympathetic and often corrupt forest officials to harass and exploit the tribal people. As a result of loss of land, deforestation and restrictions on the access to the forest, the tribal people have been facing growing unemployment and have been increasingly driven into more inaccessible stretches of hills and jungles.

The progress of education among the tribal people has been disappointingly slow. In many areas, primary education through the tribal languages has taken place, but in others the state governments have tended to neglect tribal languages and education through their medium.

Tribal society almost everywhere has also been gradually developing class differences and a class structure with those belonging to the upper crust often joining forces with the upper crust of the outsiders. Further, the major gains of whatever development takes place in the fields of education, employment in administration, economy and political patronage are reaped by the small segment of the tribal elites which has slowly emerged and grown.

On the whole, though there are a few danger signals, certain positive developments in the tribal sphere have occurred since 1947. Legislation to protect tribal rights and interests, activities of the

tribal welfare departments, Panchayati Raj, spread of literacy and education, reservations in government services and in higher educational institutions, and repeated elections have led to increasing confidence among the tribal people and greater political participation by them—or at least by the growing middle classes and intelligentsia among them—in the constitutional political processes. They are now insisting on a greater and more active political role for themselves, and acquiring increasing representation in different political structures and institutions. Above all, they are demanding a greater share in national economic development.

Protest movements have sprung up among tribals out of their frustration with the lack of development and welfare. These are bound to produce positive results in time. The government policy has usually been conciliatory, though not necessarily successful in redressing tribal grievances. But some of the protest movements have taken to violence, leading to strong state action against them. Little ground has been gained by them, though they have often dramatically drawn national attention to the tribal condition.

The growing tribal antagonism towards the non-tribal people or outsiders living in tribal areas has been another unfortunate development. Undoubtedly, some of the outsiders like traders, money lenders, landlords and government officials have been a scourge of the tribal areas, but, over decades, many other outsiders—peasants, workers, teachers, doctors and other middle- and lowermiddle-class persons—have now settled there, outnumbering the tribals in almost all tribal areas outside the Northeast. The mass of the tribals and non-tribals are equally poor and have a common interest in economic and social development as also social and economic justice. Besides, most of the middle-class non-tribals, including many of the traders and industrialists, do perform useful economic functions in the tribal areas. Any undue antagonism and antipathy between the tribals and non-tribals would be inimical and even dangerous to both. It is no longer true that the only relationship that can exist between the two is an exploitative one. Tribals cannot expect to revert to isolation from their non-tribal neighbours or to prevent massive interaction with them, including their in-migration. In fact, the two can protect and promote their interests only through mutual cooperation.

Tribals in the Northeast

The tribes of north-eastern India, consisting of over a hundred groups, speaking a wide variety of languages and living in the hill tracts of Assam, shared many of the features and problems of the tribal people in the rest of the country. But their situation was different in several respects. For one, they constituted the overwhelming majority of the population in most of the areas they inhabited. Then, non-tribals had not penetrated these areas to any significant extent, though economic contacts between the tribal and the non-tribal areas had been developing over time. This was because of the British policy in the late nineteenth century.

The tribal areas occupied by the British then formed part of the Assam province but were given a separate administrative status. Their socio-political structure was not disturbed and a deliberate policy of excluding the outsiders from the plains was followed. In particular, no non-tribal plainsmen were allowed to acquire land in the tribal areas because of which the tribals

suffered little loss of land.

At the same time, the British government permitted and even encouraged the Christian missionaries to move in and establish schools, hospitals and churches and to proselytize, thus introducing change and modern ideas among some of the tribal youth. The missionaries, in turn, collaborated with the colonial authorities and helped keep the nationalist influence out of the tribal areas, besides encouraging their isolation from the rest of the population of Assam and India. In fact, immediately after independence, some of the missionaries and other foreigners even promoted sentiment in favour of separate and independent states in north-eastern India.

The virtual absence of any political or cultural contact of the tribals in the Northeast with the political life of the rest of India was also a striking difference. A powerful factor in the unification of the Indian people as a nation was the common bonds forged in the course of the anti-imperialist struggle. But this struggle had little impact among the tribals of the Northeast. To quote Jawaharlal Nehru: 'The essence of our struggle for freedom was the unleashing of a liberating force in India. This force did not even affect the frontier people in one of the most important tribal areas.'¹² And again: 'Thus they never experienced a sensation of being in a country called India and they were hardly influenced by the struggle for freedom or other movements in India. Their chief experience of outsiders was that of British officers and Christian missionaries who generally tried to make them anti-Indian.'¹³

The tribal policy of the Government of India, inspired by Jawaharlal Nehru, was therefore even more relevant to the tribal people of the Northeast. 'All this North-East border area deserves our special attention,' Nehru said in October 1952, 'not only the government's, but of the people of India. Our contacts with them will do us good and will do them good also. They add to the strength, variety and cultural richness of India.'¹⁴

A reflection of this policy was in the Sixth Schedule of the constitution which applied only to the tribal areas of Assam. The Sixth Schedule offered a fair degree of self-government to the tribal people by providing for autonomous districts and the creation of district and regional councils which would exercise some of the legislative and judicial functions within the overall jurisdiction of the Assam legislature and parliament. The objective of the Sixth Schedule was to enable tribals to live according to their own ways. The Government of India also expressed its willingness to further amend the constitutional provisions relating to the tribal people if it was found necessary to do so with a view to promote further autonomy. But this did not mean, Nehru clarified, that the government would countenance secession from India or independence by any area or region, or would tolerate violence in the promotion of any demands.

Nehru's and Verrier Elwin's policies were implemented best of all in the North-East Frontier Agency or NEFA, which was created in 1948 out of the border areas of Assam. NEFA was established as a Union Territory outside the jurisdiction of Assam and placed under a special administration. From the beginning, the administration was manned by a special cadre of officers who were asked to implement specially designed developmental policies without disturbing the social and cultural pattern of the life of the people. As a British anthropologist who spent nearly all his life studying the tribal people and their condition wrote in 1967, 'A measure of isolation

combined with a sympathetic and imaginative policy of a progressive administration has here created a situation unparalleled in other parts of India.¹⁵ NEFA was named Arunachal Pradesh and granted the status of a separate state in 1987. While NEFA was developing comfortably and in harmony with the rest of the country, problems developed in the other tribal areas which were part of Assam administratively. The problems arose because the hill tribes of Assam had no cultural affinity with the Assamese and Bengali residents of the plains. The tribals were afraid of losing their identities and being assimilated by what was, with some justification, seen to be a policy of Assamization. Especially distasteful to them was the attitude of superiority and even contempt often adopted by non-tribals working among them as teachers, doctors, government officials, traders, etc. There was also a feeling among them that the Assamese government failed to understand them and tended to neglect their interests. This feeling represented not so much the reality as the failure of the political leadership of Assam to redress tribal grievances in time and with deep concern.

Soon, resentment against the Assam government began to mount and a demand for a separate hill state arose among some sections of the tribal people in the mid-1950s. But this demand was not pressed with vigour; nor did the Government of India encourage it, for it felt that the future of the hill tribes was intimately connected with Assam though further steps towards greater autonomy could be envisaged.

But the demand gained greater strength when the Assamese leaders moved in 1960 towards making Assamese the sole official language of the state. In 1960, various political parties of the hill areas merged into the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) and again demanded a separate state within the Indian Union. The passage of the Assam Official Language Act, making Assamese the official language of the state, and thus the refusal of the demand for the use of the tribal languages in administration, led to an immediate and strong reaction in the tribal districts. There were hartals and demonstrations, and a major agitation developed. In the 1962 elections, the overwhelming majority of the Assembly seats from the tribal areas were won by the advocates of a separate state, who decided to boycott the State Assembly.

Prolonged discussions and negotiations followed. Several commissions and committees examined the issue. Finally, in 1969, through a constitutional amendment, Meghalaya was carved out of Assam as 'a state within a state' which had complete autonomy except for law and order which remained a function of the Assam government. Meghalaya also shared Assam's High Court, Public Service Commission and governor. Finally, as a part of the reorganization of the Northeast, Meghalaya became a separate state in 1972, incorporating the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia tribes. Simultaneously, the Union Territories of Manipur and Tripura were granted statehood. The transition to statehood in the case of Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh was quite smooth. Trouble arose in the case of Nagaland and Mizoram where secessionist and insurrectionary movements developed.

Nagaland

The Nagas were the inhabitants of the Naga hills along the Northeast frontier on the Assam-

Burma border. They numbered nearly 500,000 in 1961, constituted less than 0.1 per cent of India's population, and consisted of many separate tribes speaking different languages. The British had isolated the Nagas from the rest of the country and left them more or less undisturbed though Christian missionary activity was permitted, which had led to the growth of a small educated stratum.

Immediately after independence, the Government of India followed a policy of integrating the Naga areas with the state of Assam and India as a whole. A section of the Naga leadership, however, opposed such integration and rose in rebellion under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo, demanding separation from India and complete independence. They were encouraged in this move by some of the British officials and missionaries. In 1955, these separatist Nagas declared the formation of an independent government and the launching of a violent insurrection.

The Government of India responded with a two-track policy in line with Jawaharlal Nehru's wider approach towards the tribal people discussed earlier in this chapter. On the one hand, the Government of India made it clear that it would firmly oppose the secessionist demand for the independence of Naga areas and would not tolerate recourse to violence. Towards a violent secessionist movement it would firmly follow a policy of suppression and non-negotiations. As Nehru put it, 'It does not help in dealing with tough people to have weak nerves.'¹⁶ Consequently, when one section of the Nagas organized an armed struggle for independence, the Government of India replied by sending its army to Nagaland in early 1956 to restore peace and order.

On the other hand, Nehru realized that while strong and quick military action would make it clear that the rebels were in a no-win situation, total physical suppression was neither possible nor desirable, for the objective had to be the conciliation and winning over of the Naga people. Nehru was wedded to a 'friendly approach'. Even while encouraging the Nagas to integrate with the rest of the country 'in mind and spirit', he favoured their right to maintain their autonomy in cultural and other matters. He was, therefore, willing to go a long way to win over the Nagas by granting them a large degree of autonomy. Refusing to negotiate with Phizo or his supporters as long as they did not give up their demand for independence or the armed rebellion, he carried on prolonged negotiations with the more moderate, non-violent and non-secessionist Naga leaders, who realized that they could not hope to get a larger degree of autonomy or a more sympathetic leader to settle with than Nehru.

In fact, once the back of the armed rebellion was broken by the middle of 1957, the more moderate Naga leaders headed by Dr Imkongliha Ao came to the fore. They negotiated for the creation of the state of Nagaland within the Indian Union. The Government of India accepted their demand through a series of intermediate steps; and the state of Nagaland came into existence in 1963. A further step forward was taken in the integration of the Indian nation. Also, politics in Nagaland since then followed, for better or for worse, the pattern of politics in the other states of the Union.

With the formation of Nagaland as a state the back of the rebellion was broken as the rebels lost much of their popular support. But though the insurgency has been brought under control, sporadic guerrilla activity by Naga rebels trained in China, Pakistan and Burma (Myanmar) and

periodic terrorist attacks continue till this day.

We may also refer to one other feature of the Naga situation. Even though the record of the Indian army in Nagaland has been on the whole clean, especially if the difficult conditions under which they operate are kept in view, it has not been without blemish. Its behaviour has been sometimes improper and in rare cases even brutal. Too many times innocent people have suffered. But then it has also paid a heavy price through the loss of its soldiers and officers in guerrilla attacks.

Mizoram

A situation similar to that in Nagaland developed a few years later in the autonomous Mizo district of the Northeast. Secessionist demands backed by some British officials had grown there in 1947 but had failed to get much support from the youthful Mizo leadership, which concentrated instead on the issues of democratization of Mizo society, economic development and adequate representation of Mizos in the Assam legislature. However, unhappiness with the Assam government's relief measures during the famine of 1959 and the passage of the Act in 1961, making Assamese the official language of the state, led to the formation of the Mizo National Front (MNF), with Laldenga as president.

While participating in electoral politics, the MNF created a military wing which received arms and ammunition and military training from East Pakistan and China. In March 1966, the MNF declared independence from India, proclaimed a military uprising and attacked military and civilian targets. The Government of India responded with immediate massive counter-insurgency measures by the army. Within a few weeks the insurrection was crushed and government control restored, though stray guerrilla activity continued. Most of the hard-core Mizo leaders escaped to East Pakistan.

In 1973, after the less extremist Mizo leaders had scaled down their demand to that of a separate state of Mizoram within the Indian Union, the Mizo district of Assam was separated from Assam and, as Mizoram, given the status of a Union Territory. Mizo insurgency gained some renewed strength in the late 1970s but was again effectively dealt with by the Indian armed forces. Having decimated the ranks of the separatist insurgents, the Government of India, continuing to follow the Nehruvian tribal policy, was now willing to show consideration, offer liberal terms of amnesty to the remnants of the rebel forces and conduct negotiations for peace.

A settlement was finally arrived at in 1986. Laldenga and the MNF agreed to abandon underground violent activities, surrender before the Indian authorities along with their arms, and re-enter the constitutional political stream. The Government of India agreed to the grant of full statehood to Mizoram, guaranteeing full autonomy in regard to culture, tradition, land laws, etc. As a part of the accord, a government with Laldenga as chief minister was formed in the new state of Mizoram in February 1987.

Jharkhand

Jharkhand, the tribal area of Bihar consisting of the Chota Nagpur and the Santhal Parganas, has for decades spawned movements for state autonomy. In this area are concentrated several major tribes of India, namely, Santhal, Ho, Oraon and Munda. Unlike traditional tribes, nearly all of these practice settled plough agriculture on the basis of family farms. Economic differentiation has set in; there are a significant number of agricultural labourers and a growing number of mining and industrial workers. The landholding pattern among tribals is as unequal and skewed as among non-tribals. A large class of money lenders has also developed among them. The tribal society in Jharkhand has increasingly become a class-divided society. Most of the tribals practise two formal religions—Hinduism and Christianity.

The Jharkhand tribes, however, share some features with other Indian tribes. They have lost most of their land, generally to outsiders, and suffer from indebtedness, loss of employment and low agricultural productivity. They organized several major rebellions during the nineteenth century; and many of them actively participated in the national movement after 1919.

In 1951, the Scheduled Tribes constituted 31.15 per cent of the population in Chota Nagpur (30.94 in 1971) and 44.67 per cent of the population in the Santhal Parganas (36.22 in 1971). Thus, nearly two-thirds of Jharkhand's population in 1971 was non-tribal. The overwhelming majority of both tribals and non-tribals were equally exploited poor peasants, agricultural labourers and mining and industrial workers. Inequality in landholding and the money lender menace were equally prevalent among the two as was the commercialization of agriculture and commercial activity.

With the spread of education and modern activity in the tribal areas, a movement for the formation of a separate tribal state of Jharkhand, incorporating Chota Nagpur and the Santhal Parganas of south Bihar and the contiguous tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal, started during the late 1930s and 1940s. Realizing that the interests of the tribal people could be best promoted and their domination by non-tribals ended if they had a state of their own within the Union of India, the Jharkhand party was founded in 1950 under the leadership of the Oxford-educated Jaipal Singh. The party achieved a remarkable success in the 1952 elections when it won 32 seats in Chota Nagpur and emerged as the main Opposition party in the Bihar Assembly. It won 25 seats in 1957.

But the Jharkhand party faced a major dilemma. While it demanded a state where the tribal people would predominate, the population composition of Jharkhand was such that they would still constitute a minority in it. To overcome this problem the party tried to give its demand a regional character by opening its membership to the non-tribals of the area and underplaying its anti-non-tribal rhetoric, even while talking of the empowerment of tribals and their dominance of the new state. The States Reorganisation Commission of 1955, however, rejected the demand for a separate Jharkhand state on the ground that the region did not have a common language. The central government also held that tribals being a minority in Jharkhand could not claim a state of their own.

By the early 1960s the rank and file of the party began to get disheartened and frustrated. The Jharkhand party could win only 20 seats to the Bihar Assembly in 1962. In 1963, a major part of the leadership of the party, including Jaipal Singh, joined Congress, claiming that by 'working

from within Congress' it stood a better chance of getting its demand for a separate state accepted by the government.

Several tribal parties and movements developed in Jharkhand after 1967, the most prominent being the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), which was formed in late 1972. The JMM revived the demand for the Jharkhand state, but it made two innovations. It recognized the hard reality that nearly two-thirds of the population of Jharkhand was non-tribal and that, therefore, a movement which appealed only to the tribal people could not acquire the requisite political strength. The JMM, thus, began to assert that all the older residents of the Jharkhand region, whether tribal or non-tribal, were exploited, discriminated against and dominated by north Bihar and the recent migrants. It put forward the demand for a separate state as a regional one on behalf of the peasants and workers of the region. Concentrating on economic issues, it also acquired the support of the non-tribal poor; several non-tribal leaders and political activists joined it, though the bulk of its following was still that of tribals. The tribal leaders felt that despite the minority character of tribals in the projected Jharkhand state, they would have a far greater representation and weight in the new state than they had in Bihar as a whole.

The JMM turned to a radical programme and ideology. Joined by other groups, especially leftist groups such as the Marxist Coordination Centre, it organized several militant agitations on issues such as recovery of alienated land, money lenders' exploitation, employment of tribals in mines and industries and improved working conditions and higher wages in the latter, police excesses, high-handedness of forest officials and increasing liquor consumption. Shibu Soren emerged as the charismatic leader of the JMM during the early 1970s.

Cooperation with the leftists did not, however, last long; nor did the tribal–non-tribal alliance. The movement for the Jharkhand state underwent constant ups and downs and splits over the years with new groups coming up every so often. Major differences among the Jharkhand leaders pertained to the question of cooperation or alliance with the main all-India parties. Many of them believed that in parliamentary democracy, a small number of MPs or MLAs could not on their own easily get their demands accepted. Shibu Soren, his followers and some others were also aware of the futility of permanently confronting state power and the inevitable recourse to violence and armed struggle as advocated by the movement's ultra-leftist fringe.

The movement also found it difficult to shift completely from tribal to class-based regional politics, since it was basically built around tribal identity and tribal demands. In particular, the policy of reservations for tribals contained the seeds of continuing differences between tribals and non-tribals. Tribal society was also not homogeneous; it contained landlords, rich peasants, traders and money lenders. However, for various reasons, Jharkhand finally came into existence as a state on 15 November 2000. Simultaneously Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand were created out of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh respectively and given the status of states on 1 November and 9 November 2002.