TRIBAL STUDIES IN INDIA: INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES

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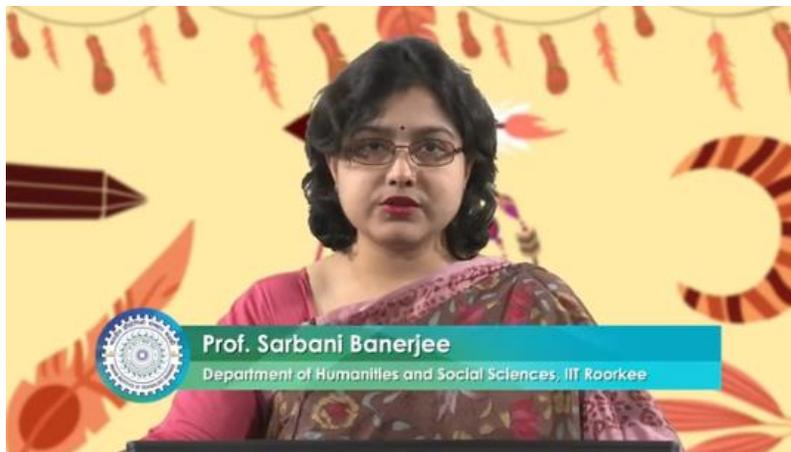
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Lecture40

Lecture 40: Tribal Politics and Political Parties: Case Study of Jharkhand

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Tribal Studies in India: Interdisciplinary Perspectives and Approaches. Today, we are going to study the case of Jharkhand in the context of tribal politics and political parties. We will examine how Jharkhand was formed as a separate state and the politics behind its formation. We will also explore the role of tribal politics, particularly the rights demanded by the tribal communities, which acted as a driving force in the formation of Jharkhand.

Virginia Khakha's analysis of tribal movements identifies the Jharkhand movement as the only significant autonomous tribal movement in India. According to scholar Sujit Kumar, political socialization in Jharkhand's Adivasi community has been a complex process, with voting behavior shaped by missionary education, anti-British rebellions, state jobs, anti-capitalist movements, as well as religious sentiments. The demand for Jharkhand's self-determination began in colonial times but was initially limited to mission-educated

youth and did not reach the wider Adivasi community, which preferred autonomy over a modern society.

In post-independence India, the statehood demand remained unstable and was mostly confined to tribal elites who joined mainstream politics through parties like the Congress. In Jharkhand, the electoral strategies adopted by parties and the nature of governance have always been mutually reinforcing. The creation of a truncated tribal state was possible due to the fluctuations in the Jharkhand statehood movement, which brought the BJP to power instead of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), which was then considered the custodian of the Jharkhand movement. The turbulent course of the statehood movement led to the formation of a truncated tribal state and the BJP's rise to power, despite the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha being seen as the movement's natural leader, having nurtured the cause of Jharkhand.

This cause of Jharkhand as a separate state grew. So, they had actually nurtured this whole idea of Jharkhand as a separate state. However, once it materialized, BJP assumed power. K. Singh states that the Anthropological Survey of India, ASI, conducted a survey which identified the various movements in Eastern India, the most important of them being the movement for the creation of a Jharkhand state.

Jharkhand Movement

- K. S. Singh (1983) states that the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) conducted a survey that identified various movements in eastern India, the **most important** of them being the **movement for the creation of a Jharkhand** state.

- As the most organized and clearly expressed movement for tribal autonomy in Middle India that originated in Chotanagpur, this movement went through several stages before becoming **the Jharkhand Party** in the 1940s.

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As the most organized, clearly expressed, articulate, and well-articulated movement for tribal autonomy in middle India that originated in Chotanagpur, this Jharkhand movement went through several stages before becoming the Jharkhand Party in the 1940s. Chotanagpur, where tribal structures remain relatively strong, became the hub of the most articulated separatist movement due to a confluence of different factors. So, let us look at the different factors why Chotanagpur Chotanagpur went on to become a hub of this separatist movement. First of all, the relatively intact tribal system.

In the Chotanagpur area, we see an unbroken tribal social structure. Next, an advanced tribal region through higher levels of literacy, political awareness, and industrial development, the people in the Chotanagpur region have been more advanced as compared to other tribal regions. Next, geographic concentration. So, major tribal communities were concentrated in a defined geographical area.

Jharkhand Movement

- **Relatively Intact Tribal System:** Unbroken tribal social structure
- **Advanced Tribal Region:** Higher levels of literacy, political awareness, and industrial development
- **Geographic Concentration:** Major tribal communities were concentrated in a defined geographical area
- **Strong Christian Influence:** Major tribes being effectively evangelized

- **Tradition of Militant Struggles:** Long history (over a century) of organized and frequent militant struggles; focused on land issues
- **Rich Anthropological Literature:** Could be used to construct a new historical narrative, legitimizing the tribal search for identity

So, that actually reinforced or added further power and spirit to their movement because of the unitary nature of this movement. As a unified movement, this movement was

would be more amplified and more effective. The next factor we see is the strong Christian influence. Major tribes in the Chotanakpur region were being effectively evangelized.

Furthermore, we see the tradition of militant struggles that have been witnessed in this region. A long history of over a century of organized and frequent militant struggles shaped the culture of the Chotanakpur tribal people, and they have always focused on land issues. Additionally, there is an available rich anthropological literature from the region, which could be used to construct a new historical narrative, legitimizing the tribal search for identity. An overview of the political scenario between the 1950s and 1990s by scholar and critic Amit Prakash aids in understanding the politics of development and tribal identity. So, at the time of India's independence in 1947, Jharkhand's leaders had created a political community in South Bihar, which intended to engage with the larger Indian state—the non-tribal Indian population—just as the nationalists had engaged with the British.

So now, once India was gaining its independence, the tribal people further wanted to gain independence from the non-tribal population in the same manner. However, the socialist nature of the Indian state granted it a degree of political legitimacy and support, which proved quite strong for the Jharkhand population. The Jharkhand Party (JHP) could not undermine that at that point. They could not ignore the socialist nature of the Indian state, which was to an extent supporting their cause in many ways.

So, in a way, that curbed the demand for a separate state. for a long time. The Jharkhandi community relied on state resources because their leaders lacked legislative power. The current arrangement at that time had its onus on state-controlled development planning and not the people. Development and identity politics in Jharkhand between 1947 and

1991 has been a very complex journey, with diverse political activities taking place and overall slow development emerging.

According to the Jharkhandi community, despite contributing a high amount of revenue to Bihar's treasury in 1951, the Jharkhand region received only a tiny fraction of the developmental funds. Most of it went to what is Bihar today. Such an exploitative pattern continued for the following five decades, lending further weight to Jharkhand's claim that their region was treated as an internal colony within Bihar. So, there was a stepmotherly feeling as far as Jharkhand's development was concerned. All the funds were being channeled toward the development and growth of Bihar,

thereby ignoring the case of the Jharkhandi community and their demands. While socio-economic indicators generally improved both in Bihar and Jharkhand between 1951 and 1991, Bihar's progress was significantly greater than Jharkhand's. This held true for most indicators except literacy and education, which saw better growth in the case of Jharkhand. This educational advancement in Jharkhand further strengthened the Jharkhand movement and the prominent role played by the All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU) during the 1980s. The disproportionate increase in tax revenue extracted from the Jharkhand region would further fuel the Jharkhand movement, the separatist movement.

This was due to the growing sense of alienation among the Jharkhand population from the rest of the Bihar state government, which they felt was unfairly benefiting from their resources. During the period between 1961 and 1991, the Jharkhand electorate explored a wide array of political choices, from the Congress party to the extreme left. However, national political concerns outweighed the issues of local development, Adivasi autonomy, and regional statehood. To put it plainly, the Jharkhandi community did not see themselves adequately represented by any of these larger political parties, be it the Congress or the left. They were mainly talking about nation-building and the larger national political concerns.

But the Jharkhandi community wanted the onus to be on local development and the focus to be on the question of Adivasi autonomy. The political arena was fractured, therefore, with multiple parties active in the region. The JHP's failure to deliver a separate state led the voters to pragmatically embrace the Congress's developmental scheme and approach. While aspirations for autonomy and statehood never quite went away, the voters recognized significant national political barriers by the early 1960s, thereby moving away from the regional parties. It prompted them to move away from the regional parties.

Additionally, the rise of numerous Jharkhandi parties, which were all competing to be the true inheritors of the JHP's cause and ideology, plunged the movement into a further state of disarray and disorientation. Even after two decades of supporting the Congress's developmental plans, Jharkhand's development progress remained stagnant or very limited. Consequently, voters abandoned the Congress party, and the 1980 election saw support spread across various parties, including the Janata party and the revived JHP. However, the Congress regained favor in the 1984 election, winning all Lok Sabha seats from the region. The election marked a turning point, as the 1989 election also introduced the BJP into Jharkhand's political landscape.

The BJP's arrival brought the issue of autonomy and statehood back to the forefront with proposals for smaller states. Although the party's stereotypical framing of the region as Vanachal and the Adivasis as forest dwellers would contradict with the Adivasi ideology of self-rule. The Adivasis did not very gladly accept the stereotypical imagining about them as forest dwellers. In the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP won five seats with over 30% of the vote due to their statehood promise. The Congress was virtually excluded from the election scenario.

In the 1991 elections, the Jharkhandi Mukti Morcha or JMM, a regional party campaigning for Adivasi self-rule, won six seats. This victory, coupled with the region's slow and stagnant development, together demonstrated a heightened electoral support for Adivasi autonomy and regionalism. Although Jharkhand's political groups such as JMM and AJSU led the statehood demand, the BJP finally took over the agenda, preventing these parties, the former parties, from claiming sole legitimacy. The BJP dominated Jharkhand's 1990s elections. Their clear promise of a separate state, unlike other parties, likely secured them electoral victories.

In the 2004 general elections, which was held after Jharkhand's three-year existence as a state, the BJP, who had been the major beneficiaries of the 1999 electoral patterns, were in control of both the state and the national governments as a part of the NDA or National Democratic Alliance. Despite this, the electoral support that propelled the BJP in 1999 did not quite persist. by the time it was 2004. After the establishment of the Committee on Jharkhand Matters or COJM and the subsequent passing of legislation by the Bihar Vidhan Sabha in 1995,

For the formation of the Jharkhand Area Autonomous Council (JAAC), the long-sought separate state of Jharkhand was finally created in the year 2000. In this light, Amit

Prakash notes that the splitting of political resources at the command of the electorate had thus forced the Jharkhand state to respond with better policy measures. To conclude, post-independence India saw a challenging struggle for tribal autonomy, notably during the formation of Jharkhand and the Jharkhand movement, driven by perceived neglect. While regional parties such as the JMM championed self-rule by the Adivasis, national parties like the BJP also influenced the statehood outcome in 2000. The pursuit of genuine tribal autonomy in Jharkhand continues to be shaped through the interplay of regional aspirations and national politics, with tribal parties navigating this dynamic and the options they currently have in hand.

With this, we come to the end of our lecture today. Let us meet with a new topic and another round of discussions in our next lecture. Thank you.