

Part 2

The first General elections of 1952 firmly established the political dominance of the Jharkhand Party (JHP) in the region, and soon thereafter for the creation of a separate province. The culmination of this campaign was a well-attended demonstration by the tribals in 1955 at Ranchi to demonstrate the numerical support for a separate state before the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC). However, the SRC also had to face counter demonstrations that favoured the integrity of Bihar. The anti-Jharkhand camp accused the 'Jharkhandis' of playing into the hands of foreign missionaries. There were quite a few contradictions at play: tribal and non-tribal, and within the tribals – there was conflict based on Christian and non-Christian tribals, and within the Christian tribals, there were issues between Catholics and Protestants.

Be that as it may, the JHP submitted a memorandum to the SRC stressing the economic, socio-political and cultural grounds for demanding the creation of a new state. It emphasised that linguistically, culturally and ethnically the tribal population was separate from the non-tribal people, and hence geographical contiguity and a separate administrative unit was required. Here again, the dilemma was apparent: while on the one hand, the JHP was trying to mobilise people on the issue of Jharkhand, it was eager to secure support of both tribal as well as non-tribal population. The SRC did not pay any heed to the cultural distinctness of the region and built its case on purely lingual basis of reorganisation. Hence, the claim of the Jharkhandis for a separate state was rejected on grounds that the multiplicity of tribal languages did not permit the creation of a new state in the Jharkhand region.

The failure of JHP in convincing the SRC affected its popularity. Gradually even its key supporters began to doubt the intentions of the JHP and its leaders, and a mood of

disillusionment set in. The final nail in the coffin was the merger of JHP with INC in 1963 as a quid pro quo for a ministerial berth in the Vinodanand Jha Bihar cabinet for Jaipal Singh!

Although the JHP was merged into the INC, many splinter groups appeared on the firmament, and representations were made to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1969, and again in 1973 by Jharkhand Party leader N E Horo. This was followed by a third representation by the Jharkhand coordination Committee leader B P Keshori in 1989 to the President of India.

Meanwhile, the seventies saw the second phase of the movement. Here the issues of farmers and workers were in the forefront, and the political demand for Jharkhand took a back seat. The ever increasing resource extraction from Jharkhand, massive displacement of the indigenous and other rural population, and the unprecedented exploitation of the miners and unorganized industrial workers was the immediate cause of the emergence of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (literally Jharkhand Liberation Front) under the mentorship of the Marxist A.K. Roy, Kurmi leader Binod Bihari Mahato and the tribal supremo Shibhu Soren. While Mahato successfully brought the Kurmis into the fold of the Morcha, Shibu Soren, a charismatic Santhal leader became instrumental in forging a Santhal-Kurmi unity. However, the epicentre of the movement shifted from the tribal dominated Ranchi and Dumka to the mining and industrial belt around Dhanbad, Bokaro and Jamshedpur.

The JMM also demanded statehood, but this was not a primary tool of mobilization. Instead, the JMM sought to provide leadership to existing protest movements. They also appealed to a common identity of Jharkhandis as “workers” in both rural and urban areas. The main ideologue AK Roy argued that the Jharkhand “nation” was suffering from a situation of “internal colonialism,” exploited by outside interests.

However, this consolidation did not last long because of serious ideological differences and personality clashes between the three very strong leaders, all of whom wanted

the movement to have different orientations: thus AK Roy was opposed to capitalism itself, Shibhu Soren wanted to dispense 'instant justice' and the ouster of 'dikus' from tribal lands, and Mahato was keen on electoral politics. As such, the movement petered out.

The eighties saw the emergence of the Jharkhand Coordination Committee (JCC) and the All Jharkhand Students' Union (AJSU). These were movements for assertions of the 'Jharkhandi identity', and they consciously eschewed politics.

More than this, it was the mainstreaming of the statehood demand by the leading opposition party the BJP, which till recently had been opposing the formation of new states in the country which gave boost to the formation of Jharkhand. In the first three decades after Independence, the Jana Sangha and RSS had been opposed to the linguistic reorganization of states: they regarded it as a fissiparous tendency. However in both Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, the BJP found it easier to mobilise support in the newly established industrial townships, as well as in mining and irrigation project areas for these were the places to which the new migrants – professionals as well as workers were attracted. Another reason why the BJP and the RSS became active in these regions was to prevent any further proselytization attempts.

Thus the bifurcation of the state had the bipartisan support of both the Congress and the BJP, and though the RJD had its initial reservations, there was a rare political consensus in the country at the turn of the century with regard to the formation of the three new states, of which Jharkhand was the largest. Thus as per the Bihar Reorganization Act 2000, on the 'appointed day, viz the 15th of November, 2000' which coincided with the birth anniversary of Birsa Munda, the great *Adivasi* leader, the state of Jharkhand was carved out of Bihar. Jharkhand had a population of about 2.2 crore and an area of about 80,000 square kilometres which was half of the territory of Bihar. However as the districts in MP, WB and Orissa were not touched, it could be said that the demand for Jharkhand was fulfilled substantially, but not fully!