CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

I

Apparently one finds some logic in the arguments of the leaders of the Jharkhand movement when they argue that if Andhra Pradesh could be created out of Madras in 1953, if Maharashtra and Gujarat could be carved out of the bilingual Bombay in 1960, if Haryana could emerge out of Punjab in 1966 and Assam could be divided into so many states in the north-east like Meghalaya, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur or Arunachal Pradesh without disturbing India's national unity, then why the demand for an additional state of Jharkhand should be branded as anti-national or separatist?

But the problem lies in the fact that it is not possible to carve out exclusive homelands for each and every linguistic, religious or any other ethnic community in India. First of all, there is no dearth of nationalities or sub-nationalities in this sprawling sub-continent of ours. And granting separate statehood to each of them may well take the number of state-units within India to a few hundreds and the matter still may not end there.

Moreover, different communities in India live together. No region in India has a homogeneous, community-based population and, therefore, it is impossible to carve out exclusive zones for each
and every community. Naturally, granting separate statehood to a particular community always runs the risk of a reaction later. For instance, if a Jharkhand state is created, not all of its inhabitants will necessarily share the Jharkhandi culture, not all of them will take definite pride in the Jharkhandi tradition or participate in different festivals of the region. They might, one day, feel alienated, discriminated against or cornered by the Jharkhandis and demand their own homeland. Actually, there can be no end to such demands for new states as is evident in the north-eastern region of our country. Even after dividing Assam into seven separate states we still find the Bodos, Mising, Deuris and Karbis of Assam, the Zeliangrongs, Meiteis and Kukis of Manipur as well as the Hmar tribals of North-Mizoram dissatisfied and clamouring for more autonomy, more power to manage their own affairs.

However, this is not to oppose the idea of a separate Jharkhand state or similar other new states in India. Rather it is to highlight the risks involved in accepting such demands without discrimination. Creation of new states may well become a never ending process in a multi-ethnic society like that of ours. So while accepting such demands one has to be cautious to see to it that such a demand is backed by the majority population of the region. Whether India will have twenty five, fifty or even more states, it should also be a question of administrative expediency; the importance of ethnicity, language or religion notwithstanding.
It is not clear, however, on what grounds it is believed that exploitation will end with the achievement of a separate statehood for the Jharkhand region. In fact, the creation of a separate state is not an end in itself. Some activists may well be under the illusion that once they get their own homeland all the major problems will be solved. For them the Jharkhand state will be 'free of exploitation .... where those who work will eat and those who loot will go'. But such optimism may not prove to be correct at all. Formation of a separate state may not provide an adequate answer to the problem of exploitation. Some tribals may get an access to better paid jobs, but the majority of them might remain where they are at the present moment, leaving themselves at the mercy of the privileged few.

Moreover, there is no reason to believe that the 'local people' are exploited by the outsider dikus only. The Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes observed in one of his reports that it is not only the plainsman who exploit the tribals. In many areas stronger and more advanced tribals freely exploit their own folk. Even if one looks at the existing realities in the region today, most of the benefits resulting from the reservation policy of the government in educational institutions and government jobs are cornered by those who belong to the upper echelons of the tribal society. So oppression will not end simply by replacing the diku timber merchants or development contractors by merchants and contractors of tribal origin. It is feared that the tribals who would step into the shoes of their diku counterparts would be as oppressive...
as their predecessors. Thus a new set of tribal elites might take over from the present set of beneficiaries once a new state is created. In that case it is most unlikely that the advantages of a tribal homeland will at all percolate down to the lowest stratum of the tribal society.

Besides, those who seek to establish a tribal homeland tend to forget that there are millions of tribals living outside the boundaries of the proposed Jharkhand state. It is neither possible for the new state to accommodate all of them nor it is realistic to expect these people to leave their present occupation and habitation to settle in the proposed state. What will happen to them? Where will they go in case of an anti-tribal reaction sets in later, in the tribal minority areas?

On the other hand, if the outsider-dikus, mostly non-tribals, are allowed to stay within Jharkhand (as the liberal definition of ‘Jharkhand’ suggests) the minority tribals might have to face an unequal competition in every sphere of life. These privileged non-tribals, along with the tribal elites, might not allow the majority of the tribals to enjoy what is rightfully due to them. Critics have even gone to the extent of saying that the exploiting elements in the Chotanagpur Plateau, the mahajans, contractors, traders, transport operators - mostly non-tribals, are in favour of a separate Jharkhand state as that would enable them to exploit the poor tribals much more easily, in a permanent fashion.3

Tribals, moreover, are far from a homogenous lot. Intra-tribal rivalry is a common feature of the Jharkhand movement even today.
Tribal leaders very often brand each other as opportunists, selfish and betrayers. Keeping in mind the rivalry between the Tripuri and the Jamatiya communities in Tripura, the tension between the Gorkha and the Nepali communities in Darjeeling or the clash between the Magas and the Kukis in Manipur, one possibly cannot rule out the possibility of a Santal - Munda schism or a Mahato - Bhumij rift within the proposed Jharkhand state in near future. Thus, the formation of a state or an Autonomous Council may not prove to be enough to satisfy tribal aspirations and to remove the obstacles to their path of progress.

Whether one supports the idea of a separate state of Jharkhand or not, whether one accepts the Jharkhandis as a distinct nationality or not, nobody can deny the backwardness of the region compared to the neighbouring areas; nobody can overlook either the exploitation of the tribals in the hands of the privileged sections of the society and perhaps nobody can oppose the idea of granting some degree of autonomy to the people of the region to manage their own affairs in their own way. What is needed actually is an all-round development of the region which offers so much to the rest of the country in terms of its mineral and other natural resources and where the common people had to pay a high price for the large scale industrialisation in the interest of the whole nation.

II

It is true that the movement in the central tribal belt of India, in its present form, does not pose any immediate threat to the country's integrity and sovereignty. Unlike many other
movements in the border areas of the country, the Jharkhand movement, largely because of its geographical location, has not so far degenerated into a secessionist one. The leaders of the movement have more or less confined their demand to the formation of a separate state "within the national and constitutional framework of the Sovereign Democratic Republic of India." But to ignore the movement or to delay a lasting solution to the problems faced by the people of the region would only complicate the situation further deterring the progress of the region as well as that of the country as a whole. The government, therefore, would do well to take up the challenge promptly as these movements, touching a very sensitive corner of human mind, have the potentiality of infecting the minds of other backward communities all over the country, motivating them to rise in protest against all sorts of discrimination and hatred faced by them and clamour for separate homelands. The demands for Kolhanistan, Mithilanchal, Bhojpur, Magadhi or a Chhathisgarh state from the neighbouring areas prove the point.

The problem is, however, a tricky one. If the Chotanagpur region is separated from Bihar, the latter will be left with almost no resources of its own and will have to depend on the Centre for relief. In the words of the Chief Minister of Bihar, Laloo Prasad Yadav, "North Bihar is left with sands and natural calamities" if the state was divided. If the idea of a 'Vrihat Jharkhand Rajya' is to be given shape, that would make the Central Government and the ruling party unpopular to the people of those four states from which the new state is to be carved out. Even in the case of forming an 'Autonomous Council'
disputes are likely to arise regarding the jurisdiction and powers of the Council and its relationship with the government of Bihar. So we find the Centre dilly-dallying with the problem with little desire to find an early solution to the vexed issue. That is why the Jharkhand Area Development Council Bill which was passed by the Bihar Legislative Assembly in August, 1991 has so far, neither received the Presidential assent nor been returned to the state government for reconsideration. The Centre has not shown any urgency to implement the recommendations of the Committee on Jharkhand Matters either. In a statement in Parliament the Union Home Minister S.B. Chavan said that the Centre was prepared to grant statehood to the tribal dominated region, provided the four concerned state governments recommended it. Such statements prove that the Centre is rather keen to put the ball into the courts of four state governments, all led by opposition parties, to shake off responsibility from its own shoulders. Reacting to such an attitude of the government at the Centre, the Chief Minister of Bihar Laloo Prasad Yadav said in an interview, 'First create a Telengana state in Andhra Pradesh (the home state of the Prime Minister) and allow Vidarbha to be separated from Maharashtra (the home state of the Union Home Minister) before dividing Bihar'.

III

Ethnic tensions and the resultant movements are in no way unique to a multi-ethnic State like that of India. But if there is a sudden spurt in regional movements, if more and more people from every nook and corner clamour for more power and more autonomy
to decide their own fate then one just cannot take it too lightly. A fresh look at the Constitutional provisions relating to the distribution of power between the Centre and the states might help us to explain, at least partially, the present centrifugal trends within our country.

Even a cursory look at the relevant provisions of the Constitution unmistakably points towards the centralising trend within the Indian "Union of States". The founding fathers of the Constitution thought it fit to make the Union government much stronger than the provincial governments in order to maintain unity and integrity of the country. Under the existing system, the state-units in India are practically nothing more than municipalities or administrative zones with little power to satisfy the regional aspirations of the people. These units are, in reality, at the mercy of the Centre for their own existence as the Union Parliament monopolises the power to alter the boundaries of the states or to create new states. But, despite concentration of power in the hands of the Centre for keeping the State in tact, chauvinistic, regional or separatist movements, however, have grown in number over the years. Growing encroachment on the states' resource base and usurpation of more and more fiscal power in the hands of the Centre might, paradoxically, be responsible for the rise in the number of regional parties and separatist forces all over the country.

It is neither possible nor advisable for the Centre to look after the interests of all the nationalities or sub-nationalities and to ensure uniform development of all the regions within this sprawling sub-continent of ours. In fact, the state governments are
not only better acquainted but also better placed to solve the fundamental socio-economic, cultural or even psychological problems of the divergent sections of the people living within its boundaries. Naturally, the state governments often raise their voice of protest against the tendency on the part of the Centre to concentrate all the powers into its own hands. The states oppose the manner in which the Centre tries to regulate their activities and demand a restructuring of the Centre-state relations to have a larger share of economic and political power to manage their own affairs.

Even some state governments with larger territory find it difficult to ensure uniform development all over the state or to satisfy all the communities living within the state. Thus, the neglected people of South Bihar, Northern Uttar Pradesh and Eastern Madhya Pradesh are all on a war path, clamouring for a separate Jharkhand state, an Uttarakhand state or a Chhattisgarh state respectively.

What is needed, therefore, is decentralisation of power. More responsibility and more power in the hands of the state governments, especially financial power, may go a long way to remove the root cause of dissatisfaction and frustration among the people which often give rise to separatist movements. In fact, the demand for more power in the hands of the states is in no way going to make the nation weaker. The idea of strong states is not in conflict with the idea of a strong centre. The centre cannot be made strong by weakening its constituent units. Rather only developed, prosperous and satisfied state-units with greater autonomy and larger responsibility can give birth to a powerful state.
Besides, devolution of power from the state governments down to the grassroots level of panchayats and local bodies is also necessary to strike at the root of dissatisfaction. Experiments with the Panchayati Raj system in West Bengal and in some other states in India amply prove that there is no alternative to the direct participation of the people in solving their own problems. Experiences of the Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council or the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council show that inspite of initial problems of unplanned expenditure or misappropriation of money by these autonomous bodies owing to inexperience, these bodies are, however, free from the risk of being accused of deliberate negligence of people's problems or having evil designs to perpetuate their sufferings. But here also, these autonomous bodies often get involved in conflicts with the state governments with regard to the degree of autonomy to be enjoyed, subjects to be brought under their jurisdiction or the amount of money to be sanctioned by the state governments to them.

What is needed actually in India, therefore, is a truly federal polity anchored in the bedrock of regional autonomy, which will be able to give due respect to and understand the ethos, mores and socio-cultural peculiarities of each and every Community and do justice to their hopes and aspirations. A serious effort has to be made to resolve the various regional conflicts cropping up in different parts of the country with a sympathetic mind and to remove the irritants by evolving a comprehensive policy for the integrated political, economic and socio-cultural development of every region. The problem of regionalism which the Jharkhand movement has thrown up should be considered in this light.
NOTES AND REFERENCES:


5. As quoted in The Statesman (Calcutta), September 17, 1992.
