CHAPTER III

TRIBAL SITUATION AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES
3.1 Introduction

Almost every thirteenth Indian is a tribal. Etymologically, the term tribe derives its origin from the Latin word ‘tribus’ meaning three divisions. Among the Romans, the tribe was a political division. In the West, as also in India, this term has undergone several semantic changes through the ages and its present implications are vastly different from its original context. The tribe was the highest political unit comprising several Districts, which in turn, were composed of Clans. It occupied a definite geographical area and exercised effective control over its people. Permanent settlement in a particular area gave geographical identity to a tribe. The territory under the domain of a particular tribe was generally named after it. It is believed that India derived its name, ‘Bharat’ from the mighty Bharata tribe (Verma 1994:5). Similarly, the vast Matsya Kingdom, which flourished in the Sixth Century BC, was identified with the Matsya tribe (Verma 1994:2). The Mina tribe, found in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, is believed to be the descendants of the Matsya tribe: The Minas still believe that the universe has its origin in Matsya or Meen, that is the fish, which was the Swayambhoo. Even today, there are a number of regions, which owe their names to the tribes inhabiting them. The Northeast Indian states of Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura are named after the Mizo, Naga, and Trupuri tribes respectively.
3.1.1 Definition

There is no precise definition of the term ‘tribe’, on which there can be general agreement. It is generally applied to a community or a cluster of communities characterized by a common territory, language and cultural heritage, on an inferior technological level (Singh 1972:265). According to Majumdar, a tribe is

A collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name, members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language, and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation and have developed a well-assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligation (Majumdar 1977:71).

It was Mr. W.R.H. Rivers, who gave to anthropological literature the most accepted definition of ‘tribe’:

A social group of a simple kind, the members of which speak a common dialect, have a single government and act together for such common purposes as war. Other characteristics of a tribe have been listed as common name, contiguous territory, a relatively uniform culture or way of life and a trace of common descent (Luiz 1994:1).

Today with the anthropologists and sociologists of western origin, the term ‘tribe’ is defined in the latest edition of the Oxford Dictionary as “a race of people; now applied especially to a primary aggregate of people in a primitive or
barbarous condition, under a headman or chief."(1996:1275). It is in this sense, roughly speaking, that most of the western scholars, working on India, have been using this term, often with a shifting of emphasis.

A tribal community in India had generally the following attributes.

1. They lived in an isolated area as a distinct group culturally and socially.
2. They had originated from one of the oldest ethnological sections of the population.
3. They followed primitive occupations such as gleaning, hunting and gathering of forest produce and were, therefore, backward economically and also educationally.
4. They professed a primitive religion and were not always within the Hindu fold in the usual sense. Even when they are treated as Hindus, they do not exactly fit in the Hindu caste hierarchy.
5. They had their own common dialect.
6. They loved to drink and dance.
7. They were largely non-vegetarians.
8. They dressed scantily (Luiz 1994:11).

3.2 Indian Tribes and Tribal Areas

There are 427 Scheduled Tribes in India. The total number of tribal communities, nevertheless, is estimated to be 642, several of which have now either become extinct or been merged with other communities (Singh 1990:17).
There are some who have undergone transformation of their identity altogether. Tendencies for fusion and fission among the tribal population still continue and it is difficult to work out the exact number of such communities in India without making a reference to any specific point of time. It is, however, evident that the overall population of tribal communities in India is appreciably high. Anthropologically speaking, the proportion of tribe-like population in India is much higher than that of the tribes as such. In reality, very few of the Scheduled Tribes, according to anthropological definition, will as such qualify as tribes. Besides, there is a number of apparent anomalies related to the issue. For example, there are several cases where the same people distributed over adjoining States of India are being treated as tribes in some States but as non-tribes in some other State or States. The Gonds are a Scheduled Tribe in Madhya Pradesh but they are counted as Scheduled Tribes only in certain Districts in Maharastra (Singh 1990: 18).

In areas where scheduling has been done on territorial basis, even the so-called upper Hindu Castes like Brahmans and Kshatriyas enjoy the same privileges and facilities earmarked for Scheduled Tribes, as is the case in Kinnore District of Himachal Pradesh (Singh 1990:19). In Lakshadweep, where most of the people are Muslims, in Ladakh, where most of the people are Buddhists, and in Nicobar, where most of the people are Christians everybody enjoys the Scheduled Tribe status.
Ironically enough, some communities that were eager to assert their non-tribal identity during the pre-Independence days have become very vocal in their claim for the status of the Scheduled Tribe, obviously to avail of certain special benefits Scheduled Tribes are entitled to.

The actual position of tribes in India cannot be properly understood without a probe into their demographic distribution. Most of the major tribes such as the Santal, Bhil, Gond, Oraon, Munda, Ho, Kawar, and Nagesia are several million strong and distributed over a number of States of Central and Eastern India (Singh 1990:23). Although there are pockets of their specific concentration, the bulk are interspersed in their distribution and mostly live in multi-ethnic villages. The tribes in the Southern States of India are demographically smaller but have a very large number of identifiable ethnic groups. Most of them have their separate hamlets too. In the overall population composition of their immediate neighbourhood, they constitute rather an insignificant fraction. The Tribes of North-East India on an average are somewhat larger in this regard than their counterparts in the Southern States. Each, nevertheless, is much smaller than any of the major tribes of Central and Eastern India. The uniqueness of their distribution in the North-East India in more or less exclusive tribal tracts have, however, helped them to form tribal majority States like Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram (Singh 1990:3). Areas identified for scheduling like Kinnore, Ladakh and Lakshadweep have also
a sort of exclusiveness, though they do not have the uniqueness of Nagaland or Mizoram. These special features have helped to create greater solidarity among them and wield real bargaining power. The Negrito tribes as a whole of Andaman Islands, some of the Central and South Indian tribes like the Kodaku and Pando of Madhya Pradesh, the Birhor distributed over West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the Chola Nayakan of Kerala and the Shompen of Great Nicobar Island are rather too small to produce considerable impact on decision making.

The proportion of the Scheduled Tribes to the total population of the State/Union territory is highest in Lakshadweep (93.82 per cent), followed by Mizoram (93.55 per cent), Nagaland (83.99 per cent), Meghalaya (80.58 per cent), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (78.82 per cent), Arunachal Pradesh (69.82 per cent) and Tripura (28.44 per cent). The lowest proportions are in Uttar Pradesh (0.21 per cent), Kerala (1.03 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (1.07 per cent). (Singh 1990:23)

The size of the tribal communities is also an important factor to be considered. According to a study conducted by the Anthropological Survey of India in the light of the 1981 census the following conclusions were arrived at. There are communities with very large populations of 3 to 7 millions. The largest tribes were the Gond (7,449,193), the Bhil (7,367,973), the Santal (4,260,842), the Mina (2,087,075) and the Oraon (1,865,995). A few tribes, such as the Haisa, the Tangsa, the Hotang Tangsa, the Katin Tangsa, etc. had only a single member...
Tribes such as the Bomdo, the Jambo Karka and the Kongbo, had between two to ten members. The Andamanese including all subgroups had only 42 members; other small groups included the Jarawas (31), the Chaimal (18), the Onges (97), the Aranadan (236) and the Kochuvelan (53). The 1981 census also recorded five tribes with a single membership, 17 tribes with a population of 2-10 members, and 17 tribes with 101-500 members. Thus, a total of 64 tribes were recorded which had a population of less than 500. To sum up, the number of tribes with a population below 5000 was 96 (22 per cent); between 5000 and 10,000 there were 39 (9 per cent); between 10,000 and 20,000 there were 32 (7 per cent); between 20,000 and 1,00,000 there were 75 (17 per cent); between 1,00,000 and 5,00,000 there were 37 (9 per cent), and the number of those with a population of 5,00,000 and above stood at 19 (4 per cent). (Singh 1990:4)

According to the above survey as many as 294 tribes, i.e. 46.2 per cent were found within the boundaries of existing State/Union Territories. Three hundred and twenty-six tribal communities (51.3 per cent) were spread over two States, and eighty-nine of them (14 per cent) were distributed across three States. This is significant as it shows that the tribes inhabit well-defined territories that cut across the administrative boundaries of adjoining States. Only thirty tribes or 7 per cent of the tribes, are found in four to six States. The tribal people in India inhabit all climatic zones. However, about 52.4 per cent of them live in areas of moderate climate. They also live in extreme/warm climates. About 63.4 per cent
of the tribal communities live in hilly terrains. They also inhabit the deserts (0.2 per cent), the semi-arid zones (1.6 per cent) and the island (2.2 per cent). (Singh 1990:4)

3.3 Tribal Situation In Kerala

No definition of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is found in the Constitution of India. They are specified in accordance with Articles 341 and 342. By virtue of these provisions the President is empowered to draw up a list in consultation with the Governor of each State, subject to revision by the Parliament (Basu 1997:382). According to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders Amendment Act, 1976, there are thirty-five (Census 1991) tribal communities in the State of Kerala (see Appendix). There are also other tribal communities that are included in the list of Scheduled Castes (Verma 1995:187). They claim to be tribals and want to be included in the list of Scheduled Tribes. Accordingly thirteen other communities are also entitled to enjoy the educational privileges at a par with those of the Scheduled Tribes, who are termed as Other Eligible Communities (OEC) (Govt. of Kerala 1996:39). According to the 1991 census the population of Scheduled Tribes all over India is 6.78 crore constituting 8.08 percent of the total population and in the State of Kerala they number 3,20,967, belonging to 69,441 families (Govt. of India 1998:187). They form 1.1 percent of the total population of the State. The gender ratio among the Scheduled
Tribes is 996 women for 1000 men while that of the general population is 1036 for 1000 (Census 1991).

The population growth among the Scheduled Tribes is below the state average. During the 1990's the state average stood at 14.32 percent. The same is only 12.75 percent among the Scheduled Tribes while among the Scheduled Castes it is 13.22 percent. The average strength of a family is also lower among the Scheduled Tribes, that is 4.6 percent as against the 5.3 percent state average. Literacy among the Scheduled Tribes in this most literate State is also comparatively low, that is 57.22 percent against the prestigious 89.81 percent state average. Literacy rate among tribal men is 63.38 percent, while that among tribal women is 50.07 percent. Among the tribal population the largest number of literates live in the District of Kottayam, the area of our study, while the number is the lowest in Palakkadu District (Census 1991).

The majority of tribals in Kerala (55.47 percent) are agricultural labourers, while 16.66 percent of them are marginal agriculturalists. Until recently they were mostly food gatherers and hunters and hence they are believed to have been of Middle Stone Age Culture. People of that remote age had been food gatherers and hunters (Bridget 1995). The Adivasis of Kerala such as Malayar, Irular, Kanikar, Mala-Pulaya, Kadar, Paniyar and Aranadan were all living sencity as such until recently. Dr. A. Ayyappan in his “Kerala Darshan” opines that these tribes might have adopted the present life style just before the turn of the 19th
century (Ayyappan 1951:154). Owing to paucity of forest produce and animals they became ordinary agriculturalists and later owing to the alienation of land most of them were forced to become labourers.

Concentration of the tribal population shows a wide variation from 17.25 percent in Wayanadu District to 0.13 percent in Thrissur District. The adivasi areas in various parts of the state are divided into seven geographical divisions (Census 1991).

1. **Kasargod:** Maradis and Koragans are the prominent adivasi's of this area comprising Hosdurg and Kasargod Taluks of the erstwhile Cannoor District.

2. **Wayanadu:** The Wayanadu area consists of south and north Wayanadu of the District of the same name, which lie at 3000 feet above the sea level. This region is inhabited by Paniyar, Kurichiar, Mullakurumar, Kattunaickans (Thenkuruman), Wayanadu Kadans, Adiyars, Kundu Vadiyans, Kanaladies, Thachanadans, etc.

3. **Attappady:** This region, situated between 1200 – 3000 feet above sea level in the District of Palakkadu is peopled mainly by Irular, Mudugar and others. This is the only area falling under the Integrated Tribal Development Project in the State.

4. **Nilamboor:** The savage Chola naickans, known as ‘the Cave Men of Kerala’ live in the Nilamboor valley of Manjery Taluk in the District of

5. Parambikulam:- This area lies in the Chittoor Taluk of Palakkadu District. The presence of the Kadar here with Negrito features has fascinated anthropologists like Ehron Hyles.

6. Idukki:- Adivasi communities consisting chiefly of Malai Arayans, Uraly, Ulladan, Mannan, Muthivan, Paliyar, Kurumbar and Pulayar eke out their pittance in the Taluks of Thodupuzha, Devikulam, Udumpanchola of Idukki District and also the hilly terrain's of Melukavu and Mundakkayam in Kottayam District.

7. Thiruvananthapuram:- The area comprises the Nedumangadu and Neyattinkara Taluks of Thiruvananthapuram District and a few adjacent enclaves in the District of Pathanamthitta, where the Kanikars and Malavedans eke out their living.

3.3.1 Classification of Tribes in Kerala

There is considerable controversy as to the number and particular names of the various tribal communities in the State of Kerala. Officially there are 35 tribal communities in the State (Census 1991). However, the anthropological studies conducted by authentic scholars enumerate differently. A.A. D. Luiz in his “Tribes of Kerala” gives us a list of 48 tribes of Kerala (Luiz 1962:4-5). The
Department of Harijan Welfare now redesignated as the Department of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes enumerated 41 tribes in the State in 1972. According to Nettoor P. Damodaran, author of *Adivasikalude Keralam* (Nettoor 1974:28) provides a list of 45 tribal groups. After scrutinising the list of A.A.D. Luiz and that of the Government, P. Somashekharan Nair, author of ‘Paniyar’ (Nair 1976:210) concludes that the number lies between 41 and 54. To quote the author himself, “On the basis of our examination, it is not incorrect to say that the total number of tribes in Kerala is in between 41 and 54, but this too is not hundred percent accurate. After an exhaustive analysis of the various lists of tribals prepared by different authors and institutions the Kerala Bhasha Institute enumerated 53 groups in the Book *Adivasikalum Adivasikalude Bhashakalum* (Velappan 1994:14).

The reason why we are not in a position to fix the precise number is the absence of consensus among scholars regarding the names and the basis of categorisation. While the anthropologists examine the general features, the folklorists study the folklore and some others depend on linguistics. Consequently they differ on their conclusions as much as on their approaches. On the other hand, the official enumerators are depending on the statistical data regarding the socio-economic aspects. Thus a comprehensive approach is needed to identify the accurate number of tribal groups as well as their distinctive characteristics. Because of the fact that the same tribe was known by different
names in different localities, the process of listing the tribes becomes extremely difficult. Moreover, certain communities which ought to have been included in the list of tribes have been left out altogether (Mathur 1977:42).

3.3.2 Common Features

There are tribal populations in all the Districts of Kerala. Regional and racial differences can be traced among the different tribal groups. Tribal groups such as Kadar, Urali, Paniyan, Kanikar, Malampandaram, Malavedan and Vishawar exhibit characteristics of the Negroid race while the Kurichiar of Wayanadu and the Malai-Arayans of Kottayam are believed to belong to the Proto Austroid race. Anthropological studies reveal striking similarities between the tribes of Kerala and the original inhabitants of Australia and Sri Lanka. There are not only racial differences among the various tribes in Kerala but also striking dissimilarities in their customs, beliefs, practices, diet, dress and habitation. At the same time one can easily identify certain common features in the culture and characteristics of the tribes in Kerala (Velappan 1994:19).

3.3.3 The Gothra Structure

Tribes in Kerala lived as different ‘Gothras’. Each Gothra was called Ilom. A tribe consisted of a number of Illoms. Each tribe had a Totam which might be any of the forces of nature or a tree, a fish, a bird or even any structure or instrument designed by man. Over the millennia, totamism has been a
universal phenomenon among the tribals, and the *adivasis* of Kerala also have been its votaries. According to Sangam literature, neem, courtyard, palm, basket, etc. were some of the symbols adopted by early tribal communities. To kill and eat the animals so considered was taboo. Each Gothra had a Chieftain, popularly known as *Muppan*. Wife of a headman is known as 'Muppathy' among most of the groups. *Kanikaran* (Urali, Paniya, Ulladan), *Poramban* (Malai- Arayan) *Melvakku* (Muthuvan), *Moottuvan* (Kanikar), *Shami* (Mala- Vedan) and *Ooraly* (Malamkuravan) are some other designation for the headman (Luiz 1962:14). In all the tribes excepting the *Kurichiar* the Chieftaincy is hereditary. Among the *Kurichiar* of Wayanadu the chieftaincy is believed to be divinely ordained (Chacko 1994:2). Kinship defined the relationship and respective duties of every member of a Gothra. Descent was traced either through the father or through the mother. However, inheritance is popularly *Makkathayam*. This has been the result of the incursion of external forces into their society, for, *Marumakkathayam* was the rule among the primitive aborigines of Kerala. The Tribal people of modern days are also organised on the Gothra pattern. The *Gothra Maha Sabha*, the recently formed apex body of the various tribal groups in Kerala is an example. (The Hindu Jan 3 2002:2)

### 3.3.4 Legends

Each tribe traces their origin either to some preternatural power or to some heroic personage. These legends usually proclaim the noble origin of the
particular tribe. The popular legends among the *Uralis, Karimpalans, Ulladans* and *Vishavans* trace their origin to some arcane curse that had visited upon their ancestors at a critical point of time in the past, while the legends among the *Kurichiars* and Malai-Arayans trace theirs to royal pedigree. It is to be noted that most of the stories are directly or indirectly related to the *Purans*. All the legends must have absorbed imaginative additions and alternations in the hands of succeeding generations (Velappan 1994:23).

### 3.3.5 Matriarchal Tradition

Most of the tribal groups in Kerala followed the matriarchal social system. Agriculture was considered the responsibility of the women folk while animal husbandry was the chief male occupation. Matriarchal order prevailed among the *Kanikars, Mannans, Vedans, Muthuvans, Vishawans, Parayans, Kurichians, Vettuvans, Karimpalans* and *Kadars*. On the other hand, patriarchal order was followed by the *Kattunaikar* and *Urali* tribes. However, at present among all these tribes, who have adopted settled agriculture, though with very marginal land holdings, patriarchal descent is the order of the day. The Headman is selected on the basis of *Marumakkathayam* system among the *Adiyans, Karimpalans, Kundu Vadiyans, Kadars* and *Thachanadans*. The emphasis is here invariably on matriarchal Kinship. In certain communities there is a combination of both patriarchal and matriarchal systems. Interaction with non tribals in the recent past has resulted in drastic changes in their customs and practices. We can
safely conclude that the matriarchal system is gradually dying out in favour of the patriarchal order (Panoor 1995:98).

3.3.6 Dress, Food and Dwelling

Tribal huts are usually made of bamboo and the roof is thatched with dried grass or leaves. The walls are made of either mud or bamboo poles. Ventilation is facilitated by some holes on the walls. Different tribal groups call their huts by different names such as Chala, Chitta, Pathi and Kudi. The Anamadam’s set up on tree tops to protect themselves from elephants have now become a thing of the past.

As regards their food habits, most of the tribals are non-vegetarians. Rice is the staple food. They eat fish and meat of the hunted game. But the Koragars, Malavedans, Nayadis, Karavazhi Pulayars and Kurumars eat mutton and beef and hence they are considered to be low in status. Almost all the tribes present a pathetic and convincing picture of short supply of food and malnutrition. They drink tea and coffee but their favourite drink is toddy tapped from ‘Azhappana’. At present the adivasis are addicted to arrack, and this slavery is the chief impediment to their progress. Rules of hygiene are practically unknown to most of the groups.

In the early days they have scantily dressed often in leaves or the bark of trees. Nonetheless the young generation has joined the main stream in sartorial manners (Iyer 1937:123).
3.3.7 Marriage Customs

The early form of marriage was the system of abducting the girl. Certain customs among the *Muthuvans* and *Mannans* betray the vestiges of the old practice. On the day of marriage, accompanied by a group of coevals the bride hides herself in the nearby bushes and she is sought out and caught by the relatives of the bridegroom. To the accompaniment of nuptial music she is brought to the *mandapam* and is given away to the groom in a solemn ceremony. The whole thing is redolent of the romantic escapade of ancient times. Instead of the dowry system, a social menace of the Kerala society, theirs was the system of paying the *Pen Panam* (bride price) by the bridegroom to the father-in-law. The practice of *Penpanam* still exists among the *Mala-Vedan, Mala-Kuravar, Thanda pulayar, Mala Pulayar, Kurumabar, Erular, Cholanaickar* and a few others. Among the *Ararandans* and *Aazlars* this payment is to be repeated every year. It is obligatory on the part of the father to repay the *Penpanam* in case of a divorce initiated by the husband.

Service marriage was one of the ancient form of marriage in which the bridegroom had to pay the *penpanam* in the form of manual labour to the father-in-law. Only after paying satisfactory free service for a fixed period, say one or two years, he is allowed to marry the daughter. This form of marriage existed among the *Mannans, Malayars, Uralis, Paniyans, Paliyars, Kurumbars* and some others. Yet another form prevailed among the *Uralis* of Idukki in which there was
the exchange of girls. The bridegroom received a wife in exchange for his sister. Under this system those who had several sisters were so lucky to receive as many wives. But the young men with no sisters had perforce to remain chronic bachelors. This type of exchange marriage is believed to have existed among the tribes such as Irular, Kurichiar, Malampandarma, Vishvar and Marady. The most common custom was that of “Murappennu” (cross-cousin) in which the bridegroom finds his bride from among the daughters of his maternal uncle or paternal aunt (Luiz 1962:22-23).

The common marriage ceremony comprised ‘Thalikettu’ and ‘Pudavakoda’. The practice is followed even today and it is common to all in Kerala society. Yet, so many strange practices prevailed in the past. To cite but a few of them the Karavazhi Pulayan couple were seated on a mat. The bride and the groom placed a ball of rice in each others mouth. Among the Paliyar’s wedding was conducted at cock-crow, the small hours of the morning. The bride and the groom were to stand on a millstone and they betal and betal-nut seven times. The Malayars persisted in the practice of consanguineous marriages. The extra ordinary practice of the father marrying the daughter prevailed among the Azhars. All these strange customs are now things of the past.

3.3.8 Faith and Worship

In ancient days animism and other primordial forms of worship constituted the core of tribal religion in Kerala. But a majority among them have
followed beliefs and practices similar to those of Hinduism and they are often designated as Hindus in Government records. However, a considerable section of *kanikkars, Paliyars* and *Malai Arayans* got converted to Christianity during the latter half of the 19th century and the early half of the 20th century and conversions are still going on in a lesser degree. The tribals other than those converted to Christianity follow a faith akin to Hinduism and animism. It is quite natural because the hallmark of Hinduism is that it lends itself to multifarious constructions and schools.

Ancestral worship is a common aspect of tribal religion. *Pithru Pooja* was a common religious ceremony. There are clear indications of the existence of Totemism, which formed the basis of many beliefs and practices. This enigmatic phenomenon created a belief among some tribes that their families and clans stood in a definite blood relationship to specific animals, vegetation and rocks. Totemic names for groups, and taboos prohibiting the destruction, killing and consuming of totems were common to all these ethnic groups (Velappan 1994:37).

Magic was widely practised. The people who practised both while and black magic were known in different names such as *Mantravadis, Plathis, Pujaris* and *Velichapads*. The tribals reposed greater trust in magicians than in physicians. ‘Odi’ means the name of the chief cult practised by *Nayadis, Ulladans, Paniyans* and others. This was a form of black magic. It was believed
that the *Odiyan* (magician) could make himself miserable and accomplish murder and other atrocious deeds to please his devotees.

Many taboos popular in the primitive society continue to be observed. These are prohibitions and restrictions that were forced how the primitives. The breach of a taboo invites due consequences. The important taboos are related to puberty, menstruation and child birth. There were interesting social taboos. It was objectionable for a man to talk to his nieces after they had attained puberty. A wife was forbidden to address her husband by name. Young *Adiyan* couples were expected to eat unnoticed by the elders (Baly 1995:52). Among *Mannans*, *Muthuvans*, *Paniyans*, *Uralis* and some others a women was bounded to keep away from the presence of her father-in-law. *Uralikurumans* and *Visavans* had *Chavadies* (Common halls) for young men, which combined the features of a dormitory, club and guest room, so that they might have no contact with females, and no knowledge of the sexual life within homes. There were taboos regulating diet, drinking, smoking and the use of vessels. Many considered that violation of social taboos bring about a decline in the standard of morality invite the wrath of the Gods. Even now the incidents of suicide among the tribes are few.

### 3.4 Initiatives of Tribal Development

The problem of tribal development has reached a critical stage and has assumed an added significance in the context of the high priority accorded to social justice in the new planning efforts. The Indian Constitution enjoins on the
State the responsibility to promote, with special care, the educational and economic interests of the Scheduled Tribes, and to protect them from social injustice and from all forms of exploitation. Their development is a special responsibility of the President; the Governors are responsible for reviewing the administration and development of tribal areas and for submitting periodical reports it to the President. The successive plans have been laying considerable emphasis on special development programmes for the tribals; the broad objective of planning has been defined as rapid economic development accompanied by continuous progress towards equality and social justice (Govt. of India 1978:37).

The physical development of an area in itself will not be sufficient; it must go hand in hand with the development of the people of the region. No section of any community should be allowed to be exposed to exploitation and the benefits of development must diffuse as widely as possible. Tribal development can be defined, therefore, as social and economic development of the tribal people through phased and time-bound integrated area development through the implementation of programmes suiting to the genius and the economic condition of the people, ensuring progressive elimination of all forms of exploitation and accelerating the process at work towards equality and justice (Govt. of India 1978:40).
3.4.1 Ten Commandments for Tribal Development

What the tribals experience now was loss of their former status of tribals by being caged in schedule and fed with a dash of modern education and technology which do not help them improve their life and preserve their culture. If the government had a sympathetic tribal policy, their lands would have stayed with them and they would have registered real progress. If the successive governments had followed the principles of tribal policy enunciated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru strictly, the tribals would have realized their Shangrila, the hidden paradise, by now (Singh 1972:267).

Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, laid down ‘10 commandments’ as guidelines for the governments to follow for the uplift of the tribals.¹

They are:

1. The foremost task is to achieve the psychological integration of the tribal people.
2. Full protection should be accorded to the rights of the tribal people to their lands, forests, and all other aspects of their culture.
3. Nothing should be forcibly imposed on the tribal people.
4. Forced de-tribalisation or assimilation of tribal people by non-tribal societies should be resisted.
5. Tribal languages should be developed and allowed to flourish.
6. Development plans for the tribal areas should be drawn up with particular emphasis on roads and communication.

7. Anthropologists are to be appointed as advisors for the administration of tribal areas.

8. We should train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will no doubt be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid bringing too many outsiders into the tribal territory.

9. We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.

10. We should judge results not by statistics or amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved. (The Hindu Sept 2, 2001:5)

3.5 Tribal Revolts

One interesting feature of tribal history in India is the large number of revolts and uprisings that have taken place as a result of the tribal peoples' resolve to resist injustice, oppression and exploitation. There have been as many as 68 uprisings by tribal communities all over the country, from as far back as the mid-eighteenth century when the British were first consolidating their presence in India (Verma 1995:201). And, even after Independence there have been over a
dozen major uprisings since 1956. The most recent ones are the continuing Naga insurgency, the Bodo problem in Assam (Verma 1995:204) and the tribal violence in Tripura. Several sociological problems have been exploited by politicians to give them political overtones. It is evident that the great Indian tribal communities are being exploited even today, by a different set of people and with a different kind of tool. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the great Indian statesman and philosopher, one-time President of the Republic, said: “We must approach the tribal people with affection and friendship and not with condescension or contempt” (Verma 1995:206). That, in the ultimate analysis, holds good even today. We should not deny a chance even to hostile and misguided tribals.

3.6 Tribal Social Movements

Social movements among the tribes aim at collective action to alter, reconstitute, reinterpret, restore, and protect their social structure, with the additional objective of improving their social, cultural, economic and political conditions. Hinduism, Christianity, British rule, modern education and post Independence legislations have generated a level of consciousness among the tribals, which has in turn act in motion several agitations. There have been movements to assert their tribal identity and political solidarity. Ecological-cultural isolation, economic backwardness and a feeling of frustration have been responsible for these movements. Those tribals who are either too isolated from
or too integrated with the Hindu society are not involved in these socio-cultural movements. The Unnati Samaj, an organisation established in 1912 for socio-cultural reforms, and the Adivasi Mahasabha established in 1938, aimed at revivalism in Bihar. The Jharkhand movement in 1950 was, however, started to fight against land alienation, exploitation and for political solidarity among the tribes of Bihar and the adjoining States of Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. This movement ultimately made a demand for and succeeded in the formation of a separate State for the adivasis of these areas (Sharma 1988:93).

The movement led by Ayyankali during the early half of the 20th century and the recent Adivasi-gothra Mahasabha under the leadership of C.K.Janu in Kerala deserve special mention in this regard.

The questions which still remain unsatisfactorily answered are: (1) Why have the tribals been pressing for cultural revivalism, autonomy and restoration of aboriginality? (2) Why have some tribes been making efforts for cultural, ethnic, and linguistic revivalism? (3) Why have some others been raising a hue and cry for the formation of a Separate State, and for a greater share in education institutions, jobs and other opportunities? Exploitation of the adivasis by outsiders, and the dominant segments among the tribals themselves has now come to light.
3.7 National Commission for SCs and STs

By virtue of the Constitution (Sixty-fifth Amendment) Act, 1990, the Special Officer's post under Article 338 of the Constitution has been substituted by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Govt. of India 2000:338). It shall consist of a Chairperson, A Vice-Chairperson and five other members to be appointed by the President. It shall be the duty of the Commission (a) to investigate and monitor all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution or under any other law; (b) to enquire into specific complaints with respect to the deprivation of rights and safeguards of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes; (c) to participate and advise in the planning process of socio-economic development of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union and any State; (d) to present to the President annually, and at such other times as the Commission may deem fit, reports upon the working of these safeguards; (e) to make in such reports recommendations as to the measures that should be taken by the Union or any State for the effective implementation of those safeguards and other measures for the protection, welfare and socio-economic development of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; and (f) to discharge such other functions in relation to the protection, welfare and development and advancement of the Scheduled Castes and
Scheduled Tribes as the President may, subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament, by rule, specify (Govt. of India 2000:338).

The President shall cause all such reports to be laid before each House of Parliament along with a memorandum explaining the action taken or proposed to be taken on the recommendations relating to the Union and the reasons for the non-acceptances, if any, on any of such recommendations. Where any such report or any part thereof, relates to any matter with which any State government is concerned, a copy of such report shall be forwarded to the Governor of the State, who shall cause it to be laid before the legislature of the State.

The Commission shall while investigating and monitoring any matter relating to safeguards provided for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution or any other law for the time being in force or under any order of the government have all powers of a civil court trying a suit and in particular in respect of the following matters, namely: (a) summoning and enforcing attendance of any person from any part of India and examining him on oath; (b) requiring the discovery and production of any document; (c) receiving evidence of affidavits; (d) requisitioning any public record or copy thereof from any court or office; (e) issuing commission for the examination of witnesses and documents; and (f) any other matter which the President may by rule, determine. The Union and every State government shall consult the Commission on all
major policy matters affecting Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. (Govt. of India 2002:425)

3.8 Tribal Development Programmes

The all India literacy rate of scheduled tribes as per 1991 Census was 29.60 against the national average of 52.21 per cent. The gap between percentage of literacy of tribal women and women in general is still wider. It is only 18.19 per cent against 39.29 per cent of general female literacy in the country. The Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) strategy which was evolved during the Fifth Five Year Plan is based on the twin objectives, (1) protection of the interests of the tribals through legal and administrative support; and (2) promotion of development efforts through plan schemes to raise their level of living. At the outset the TSP scheme launched 178 ITPS covering 65.25% of the Scheduled Tribes population. There are now 194 integrated tribal development projects (ITDPs). During the Sixth Plan, pockets outside ITDP areas, having a total population of 10,000 with at least 5,000 scheduled tribes were covered under the Tribal Sub-Plan under Modified Area Development Approach (MADA). So far, 252 MADA pockets have been identified in the country. In addition, 78 clusters with a total population of 5,000 of which 50 per cent are Scheduled Tribes have been identified (Govt. of India 2002:426).
3.8.1 Scheme for Primitive Tribal Groups

There are 75 Scheduled Tribes which have been identified and placed in the list of Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs). These tribes were identified in 15 States/Union Territories on the basis of stagnant or diminishing population, very low level of literacy, i.e. below two per cent and practising shifting cultivation, collecting of minor forest products for livelihood, etc. In the Ninth Plan period a separate plan of action for the development of PTGs has been formulated and a sum of Rs.2 crores has been sanctioned under the scheme in the last two years (Govt. of India 2002:428).

3.8.2 Special Central Assistance

Special Central Assistance (SCA) is given to States/Union Territories as part of a Tribal Sub-Plan strategy. During 1996-97, the entire budget provision of Rs.330 crore was released. Grants are given to the State governments under the First Proviso to Article 275(1) of the Constitution to finance schemes to promote the welfare of Scheduled Tribes and to raise the administration of tribal areas at par with other areas in the State. The amount of Rs.100.00 crore was provided as grants to States/Union Territories during 1999-2000. (Govt. of India 2002:428)
3.8.3 Girls’/Boys’ Hostels for Scheduled Tribes

Girls’ hostels scheme was started in Third Five year Plan with an aim to provide residential facilities to tribal girls in pursuit of education. Central assistance of 50 per cent of cost of construction to the States and cent per cent to the Union Territories is provided under the scheme. Against the budget provision of Rs.3.50 crore for 1996-97 Rs.2.26 crore was released for construction of 59 hostels. During 1999-2000 an amount of Rs.393 lakhs has been released for 29 hostels (Govt. of India 2002:428).

Boys’ hostels scheme was started in 1989-90 on the same pattern of girls’ hostels’ scheme. Against the budget provision of Rs 3.50 crore for 1996-97, an amount of Rs.3.19 crore was released to States/ Union Territories for the construction of 68 hostels. During 1999-2000 an amount of Rs.698 lakhs has been released for the construction of 77 hostels (Govt. of India 2002:428).

3.8.4 Ashram Schools in TSP Area

This Centrally- sponsored scheme was started in 1990-91 to provide Central assistance to the States and the Union Territories on 50 per cent sharing basis and cent per cent, respectively. During 1996-97 against the budget provision of Rs. three crore, an amount of Rs.3.87 crore was released for the construction/ extension of 15 Ashram Schools. During 1999-2000 an amount of
Rs.532.28 lakhs has been released for the construction of 36 *Ashram* Schools (Govt. of India 2002:428).

### 3.8.5 Vocational Training in Tribal Areas

This is a scheme under the Central sector which was started in 1992-93, aimed at giving employment opportunities to the unemployed tribal youth to wean them away from disruptive activities. The Scheme envisages setting up of Vocational Training Centres (VTCs). During 1996-97, against the budget provision of Rs.3 crore an amount of Rs 2.98 crore was released for setting up of 13 VTCs. During 1999-2000 an amount of Rs.375 lakhs has been released for 19 Vocational Training Centres (Govt. of India 2002:428).

### 3.8.6 Education of ST Girls in Low Literacy Pockets

This Scheme launched in 1993-94 aimed at raising the literacy level of tribal females in 48 identified tribal districts in eight States with a female literacy ratio below two per cent. The Scheme envisages residential educational complex upto the fifth standard. The scheme is implemented by voluntary organisations. During 1996-97, an amount of Rs.1.20 crore against the budget provision of rupees two crore was released for setting up of five new complexes and for the improvement of 33 existing complexes. During 1999-2000 an amount of Rs.183.76 lakhs has been released for 75 complexes (Govt. of India 2002:428).
3.8.7 Tribal Research Institutes

Fourteen Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs) have been set up by the States of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Manipur and Tripura. All these institutes, except the ones in Manipur and Uttar Pradesh, have museums, exhibiting tribal articles. These institutes are being used by the States and the Central Government for research, education, collection of data, training, seminars/workshops, professional input in the preparation of tribal sub-plans, publication of tribal literature, codification of tribal customary laws, etc. During 1996-97 the entire budget provision of Rs.1.50 crore was released. During 1999-2000 an amount of Rs.105.5 lakhs has been released to the State governments (Govt. of India 2002:429).

3.8.8 Tribal cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India

In order to save tribals from exploitation by private traders and to offer them remunerative prices for their minor forest produce and surplus agricultural products, the Government has set up the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) in August, 1987 which is registered under the Multi State Co-operative Societies Act, 1984. It started functioning effectively from April 1988. TRIFED dealt in 12 items in 1988-89. For almost all the items the price offered to tribals was fair. In subsequent years the Federation expanded its activities to cover a number of new items. It has been
appointed as a channelising agency for export of gum Karaya and Niger seeds. The authorised share capital of TRIFED is Rs.100 crore and the paid up capital has upto 99.98 Rs 70.73 crore in 99-2000. The Government’s investment in the share capital of TRIFED at the end of 1999-2000 stood at Rs.99.75 crore and the balance of Rs.0.25 crore has been contributed by other share holders.

3.8.9 Scheme of Village Grain Banks

As part of the Government’s efforts to prevent deaths of children in remote and backward tribal areas, mal-nutrition a scheme of Village Grain Banks was launched during 1996-97. A one time grant towards purchase of grains, at the rate of one quintal per family of tribals or Scheduled Castes living below poverty line in such areas, storage facilities for the grain and purchase of weights and scales will be provided by the Ministry of Welfare through TRIFED as the channelising agency. The Bank will be managed by a village committee elected by the beneficiaries themselves, who as members of the bank, can borrow grain from the Grain Banks at times of scarcity. A provision of Rs.1.50 crore was made for the Scheme during 1996-97 for 231 Grain Banks. The allotment for 1997-98 was Rs.2 crore for an additional 312 Grain Banks. An amount of Rs.1 crore has been released during 1999-2000, whereas Rs.2 crore has been earmarked for 2000-01.
3.8.10 Grant-In-Aid for Minor Forest Produce Operations

This is a Central Sector Scheme with provisions for a 100 per cent grant to the State Tribal Development Cooperative Corporations (TDCCs), Forest Development Corporations (FDCs), and Minor Forest Produce (Trading and Development) Federations (MFPTDFs) for taking up the minor forest produce (MFP) operation. Under this scheme grants can be utilised by the states for (1) strengthening the share capital base of TDCCs, FDCs and MFPTDFs for increasing the MFPs presently handled; (2) construction of scientific warehouses; (3) establishing processing industrial units for value addition to MFP items; and (4) research and development activities by the corporations. During 1996-97, the budget provision of Rs four crore was disbursed to five state corporations. In the financial year 1997-98, the budget provision was Rs.10 crore and in 1999-2000, Rs. 13 crore (Govt. of India 2002:429).

3.8.11 Aid to voluntary organizations working for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes

The Ministry gives grant in aid to voluntary organizations working for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes for projects such as residential schools, hostels, medical units, computer training units, short hand and typing training units, libraries and audio-visual units. The grant is generally 90 to 98 percent of the approved total cost of the project and the balance of 10 percent is borne by the
guarantee organizations. During 1999-2000 amount of Rs.14.74 crore was released to 137 NVOs.

3.9 Problems and Challenges

G.S.Ghurye, in his book “The Scheduled Tribes” (1963), lists a number of socio-cultural and economic problems of the tribal people of India. Some tribes represent aristocracy, landlords and noblemen; others consist of the Hinduised sections of tribesmen; and, thirdly, there are tribes and tribal segments that are still isolated from the non-tribal population (Ghurye 1963:181)

Since tribal people are at different social, political, economic and ecological levels, their problems also differ in degree. These differences can be identified in the diversity of their life style as of hill tribes and plainsmen; as those engaged in forest based economic pursuits and the ones who are employed as settled agriculturists; those who are Hinduised or converted to Christianity and those who are adhering to an unadulterated tribal way of life. Despite these distinctions some common problems of the tribal people as a whole are: (1) poverty and exploitation, (2) economic and technological backwardness, (3) socio-cultural handicaps, and (4) problems related to their assimilation with the non-tribal population (Sharma 1988:9)

S.C. Dube’s five-fold classification of the Indian tribes provides a more clear picture of the diversity in the tribal structure as well as the problem they
face (1) aboriginal living in seclusion; (2) tribal groups having an association with the neighbouring non-tribal society while retaining their distinctiveness; (3) tribals living in villages along with caste groups, sects and religious groups and yet retaining their identity; (4) tribals who have been degraded to the status of untouchables, and (5) tribals who enjoy a high social, economic and political status. Such a classification is based primarily on the nature of cultural contact of the tribals with the non-tribals. The U.N. Dhebar Commission (1961) recommended that an area could be declared “tribal” where more than 50 per cent of the people were tribals. Economic criteria have also been suggested, such as dependence upon forests for food, primitive agriculture and forests both as sources of livelihood and occupations, particularly employment in forest industries.

The tribal people had a strong sense of community life before the British rulers and Hindu zamindars and moneylenders intruded into their lives. Exchange of goods and transactions at weekly markets and fairs were the basic mode of economic intercourse. However, the British took over the forests on which the tribal people depended for their livelihood. The moneylenders brought them under their control by extending loans, at exorbitant interest rates and then taking possession their lands on mortgage alienating them from the lands they cultivated. Indebtedness led to exploitation and pauperisation of the tribal people. Hinduisation has also contributed to indebtedness and exploitation; as the tribals
adopted Hindu ways of life and rituals they were forced to spend on rituals as the Hindus did. Tribals occupied a very low rank in the Hindu society even after they embraced Hinduism.

K.S. Singh points out that agrarian issues are basic to tribal development in India. The tribal agrarian problem cannot be treated in isolation (Singh 1972:186) Tribal people have to be treated along with other weaker sections of the Indian society. Keeping the situation of Bihar in view Singh observes that the concept of aliens (diku) is crucial to the understanding of an agrarian situation where non-tribals outnumber the tribals. The class of moneylenders has arisen due to several contributive factors, including the agrarian legislation. Alienation of land has resulted from tribal backwardness and indebtedness. Integrated Tribal Development Blocks have not produced the desired results in the tribal areas. Famine and drought have become recurrent curses. The tribal sub-plan has been introduced to combat problems of famine, drought, illiteracy, indebtedness, exploitation, etc. by taking up special schemes to help the tribals meet emergencies arising from unpredictable, inadvertent weather conditions.

Per capita landholding has decreased among the tribals owing to three reasons: (1) alienation of land due to indebtedness and socio-economic backwardness; (2) increase in tribal population; (3) takeover of tribal lands by the government for establishing industries. Tribal land were alienated long before legislations were passed by the State governments. Today even after such
legislations the process of the tribal elite alienating the tribals from their lands continues. The tribals have been displaced in parts of Bihar, Orissa and some other States by the taking over their lands for establishing industries. But they have not been provided with alternative avenues of employment. The compensation padi to them for their land was quickly spent by them without making any investment in productive and remunerative enterprises.

The dilemma for the tribal people in India is the choice between two bitter alternatives isolation and association. Isolation keeps the tribals away from forces of change and development; and contact with the outer world creates problems of adjustment, cultural shock and the disintegration of tribal social organisation and community living. The intrusion of outsiders into tribal life, for example, has adversely affected the institutions in traditional such as weekly markets, dormitory and reciprocal relationships. The institutions of untouchability- pollution purity and social status have made inroads into tribal life. The tribals to a large extent have become a “caste” or “pseudo-caste” by this process of cultural contact. Ignorance, illiteracy, superstition and poverty are the major problems of the tribal people of the Indian Sub-continent.
Endnotes

1. In a memorandum submitted by P.R.G Mathur and some other social activists to the Chief minister of Kerala on 1st September 2001 requested the Government to look into the suggestions put forward by Late Jawaharlal Nehru

2. Succession through the male line, Patrilineal rule.

3. Matrilineal succession and inheritance.