

- From the mainstream point of view, tribes may be viewed in terms of the status accorded to them in Hindu society, ranging from the high status given to some, to the generally low status accorded to most.

## **MAINSTREAM ATTITUDES TOWARDS TRIBES**

- On the political and economic front, tribal societies were faced with the incursion of money lenders.
- They were also losing their land to non-tribal immigrant settlers, and their access to forests because of the government policy of reservation of forests and the introduction of mining operations.
- Following the various rebellions in tribal areas in then eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the colonial government set up 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas, where the entry of non-tribals was prohibited or regulated. In these areas, the British favoured indirect rule through local kings or headmen.
- The famous isolation versus integration debate of the 1940s built upon this standard picture of tribal societies as isolated wholes.
- The isolationist side argued that tribals needed protection from traders, moneylenders and Hindu and Christian missionaries, all of whom were intent on reducing tribals to detribalised landless labour.
- The integrationists, on the other hand, argued that tribals were merely backward Hindus, and their problems had to be addressed within the same framework as that of other backward classes.
- This opposition dominated the Constituent Assembly debates, which were finally settled along the lines of a compromise which advocated welfare schemes that would enable controlled integration.
- The subsequent schemes for tribal development – five year plans, tribal sub-plans, tribal welfare blocks, special multipurpose area schemes all continue with this mode of thinking.
- But the basic issue here is that the integration of tribes has neglected their own needs or desires; integration has been on the terms of the mainstream society and for its own benefit.
- The tribal societies have had their lands, forests taken away and their communities shattered in the name of development.

## **NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT VERSUS TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT**

- The imperatives of 'development' have governed attitudes towards tribes and shaped the policies of the state.
- National development, particularly in the Nehruvian era, involved the building of large dams, factories and mines.
- Because the tribal areas were located in mineral rich and forest covered parts of the country, tribals have paid a disproportionate price for the development of the rest of Indian society.
- This kind of development has benefited the mainstream at the expense of the tribes.
- The process of dispossessing tribals of their land has occurred as a necessary by-product of the exploitation of minerals and the utilisation of favourable sites for setting up hydroelectric power plants, many of which were in tribal areas