What’s Happened - and Happening - with Tribal Identities and ‘Development’ since India’s Independence?
Decolonisation, Internal Colonialism and Hopes for Transcendence

During the Constitutional Assembly debates (1946-9), Jaipal Singh Munda warned that promises to India’s tribal people - or Adibasis - were unlikely to be fulfilled. Several Assembly members clashed with Jaipal, emphasising stereotypes of India’s tribal inhabitants as ‘backward’ and ‘illiterate’, whereas Jaipal summed them up as ‘the most democratic people on earth’.

Has India started to learn from its indigenous cultures, and their values of sharing and long-term sustainability? Or have tribal communities been inducted into modern values of competition and financial profit?

From vicious patterns of identity politics throughout Northeast and Central India, to ever-escalating land-grabs and fabricated ‘encounters’, promises of real development have been repeatedly betrayed. Yet hopes for peace and structural change at the grassroots are carried by dozens of small-scale initiatives, from democratic schools to movements against forced industrialisation...

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