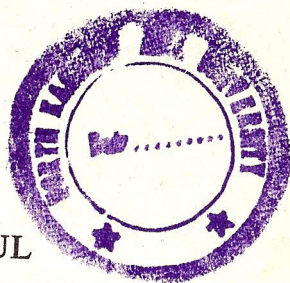


F233  
350

**DIMENSIONS OF TRIBAL  
MOVEMENTS IN INDIA**  
A Study of Udayachal in Assam Valley



MADAN C. PAUL



**INTER-INDIA PUBLICATIONS**  
D-17 RAJA GARDEN EXTN. NEW DELHI-110015 (INDIA)

*Ankur*

**Cataloging in Publication Data—DK**

Paul, Madan C. (Madan Chandra), 1955-

Dimensions of tribal movements in India :

a study of Udayachal in Assam Valley.

(Tribal studies of India series ; T 135)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Udayachal Movement. 2. Social movements—India—Assam. 3. Tribes—India—Assam. 4. Assam (India)—Social conditions. 5. Social structure—India—Assam. 6. Assam (India)—Scheduled tribes. I. Title. II. Series: Tribal studies of India series ; T 135.

Library  
Acc. No 134290  
Acc. by LPA  
Date 24/12/94  
Class by  
Sub heading by  
Transcribed by

ISBN 81-210-0219-2

First Published in India in 1985

© M.C. Paul 1985

Madan Chandra Paul (1955- )

NE  
301.451095416  
PAU;L

Published in India by:  
M.C. Mittal  
INTER-INDIA PUBLICATIONS  
D-17, RAJA GARDEN EXTN.,  
NEW DELHI-110015 (INDIA)  
PHONE : 5413145

Printed in India by :  
DEVENDRA PRINTERS  
New Delhi-110064

*Dedicated to  
my Rev. mother  
Smt. Basanti R. Paul  
&  
beloved wife  
SUSMITA*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

STUDIES of social movements undertaken on the courageous tribal people who have asserted their right in the state of penury have greatly inspired and encouraged me. I greet them with sincere ovation. Although, this study has been conducted under great constraints, the invaluable guidance and advice of Dr. J.S. Gandhi enabled me to overcome these ordeals to a great extent. I express my deep gratitude to him.

I would like to express warm thanks to Dr. R.K. Jain, Chairman, Centre for the Study of Social Systems and other members of the faculty for their valuable suggestions and comments for shaping the work.

I am thankful to the staff of the Central Library, Jawaharlal Nehru University for their meticulous help in connection with my research work. My sincere appreciation to my tribal friends who encouraged and helped me in innumerable ways. Last but not the least, I express my heartfelt thanks to my wife, Susmita, for taking incredible care and interest to see that this study comes out in book form.

New Delhi  
July, 1988

M.C. PAUL

# CONTENTS

|  | <i>Pages</i> |
|--|--------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENT  | 7            |
| LIST OF FIGURE & TABLES  | 11           |
| 1. Introduction  | 13           |
| 2. Social Movements as an area of Study                                    | 17           |
| 3. Conceptualisation and Classification of Tribal Movements                | 36           |
| 4. Movement and Social Structure : The Case of Udayachal Movement in Assam | 60           |
| 5. Interpretation and Implications   | 81           |
| APPENDICES   | 84           |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY   | 95           |
| INDEX  | 105          |

## LIST OF FIGURE & TABLES

|  | <i>Pages</i> |
|--|--------------|
| 4.1 Notional Map of Udayachal—The Proposed Autonomous Plains Tribal Region | 61           |
| 4.1 Importation of Tea Plantation Labourers in 1884-85                     | 68           |
| 4.2 Plan Outlay for North Eastern States                                   | 75           |

## INTRODUCTION

THE 'Tribals' do display a distinct cultural and demographic position in Indian society. Even if they are comparatively insulated, they are maintaining a unique place in the history and civilization of India. They are ecologically more or less isolated and demographically concentrated in certain contiguous geographical regions. Economically their life is wedded to land and forests. Culturally they enjoy a distinct style of life. Distinct language and cultural heritage, forms of religion, love for freedom, and respect for self-identity are a few of the characteristics of the tribal people.

Their self-awareness might be of limited range and depth, but there are numerous instances of their participation in the socio-cultural life of the country as a whole. For more than last two centuries the tribals have been undergoing a diverse socio-economic changes and much of which were initiated by the penetration of British colonialism. The British introduced a new economic system gradually in consonance with their own economic system. It was characterised by commercialisation of land and forests, well-defined property rights, occupational structure, marketing of agricultural surplus, etc. These in turn, produced unprecedented contradictions in the tribal society which was earlier based on relatively undifferentiated economic relations and collective mode of production and consumption. The colonial penetration had diverse purposes and motives to exploit the socio-economic resources of the native economy and this thus introduced new social tensions and conflicts in the

society. In other words, the colonial intervention resulted in the gradual encroachment upon their entire way of life.

On numerous occasions, there were riots, revolts, uprisings, etc. against colonial rule and its exploitative socio-economic network. In almost all pockets of India, tribals were surging with 'resistance' of this sort against the deprivation of their lands and forests. Surface-observation of this phenomena may lead us to categorise them as scattered 'events, or 'episodes' and not as 'movements'. But these 'events' of resistance by the tribal people were centred around the issues affecting their existence itself. Resistance, as we know, is a core-characteristic of a social 'movement'.<sup>1</sup> Viewed from a particular period of time and space it may not look like a 'movement' in the proper sense of the term but these 'events' were surely phases of a 'movement' where persons in hundreds and thousands rose against the high-handed exploitative forces. Over a period of time, during the colonial rule, such 'movements' in tribal society might have taken different nature, forms, dimensions and magnitudes. But these were surely sustained attempts on their part to oppose the exploitative system which affect their existence in one way or the other. Such attempts have continued even after Independence and have not ceased.

We wish to note at this stage that the objective factors or the contradictions within the socio-economic system provide a necessary impetus to bring forth 'movements' of varied nature. However, the subjective factors like consciousness, ideology, contribute to acceleration and maturation of the 'movements'. As Marx<sup>2</sup> put it, it is the awareness of the contradictions in the material condition of life which provide the sufficient reason and impetus to 'fight it out'.

The transformations brought out by the colonial system in the tribal society, thus, caused deprivation, frustration and deep-seated resentment amongst the tribal masses. This irretrievable discontentment and deprivation generated an emotional state of mind wherein the tribals were compelled to move for a better alternative of equitable social order free from exploitation and injustice. The glaring example is that of 'Udayachal' movement

in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. It is a product of the socio-economic crisis introduced long back by the colonial rulers.

We find that the tribals reacted fiercely when their economic interests got affected, religious beliefs scoffed at and their freedom attacked. They got infuriated when their traditional customs and manners, civic rights were curtailed, and their judicial system and tribal codes were ignored. During the Independence movement in India the tribals did participate with other non-tribal people in their common goal of driving out the Britishers from India. But, by keeping the salient features of the colonial socio-economic system,<sup>4</sup> the post-Independence rulers under the garb of 'welfare economy' accentuated deprivations and inequalities among the tribals. It is this system which produces at present, a lot of contradictions that make the tribals prone to 'movements' of various types and dimensions.

The chapterisation of this book is as follows. Chapter 1 is introduction. Chapter 2 is intended to clarify certain concepts employed in the study of social movements. I have also discussed analytically three important theories of social movements: Structural functional theory,<sup>5</sup> Revitalistic theory,<sup>6</sup> and the Relative deprivation theory in terms of social conflict.<sup>7</sup> Chapter 3 is intended to conceptualize and classify the various (tribal movements and fundamental causes of eruptions in various tribal pockets of India during the colonial and post-colonial periods.)

In chapter 4, I tried to observe the transformations of the self-sufficient simple tribal social system of Assam valley into a more complex social system based on exploitative socio-economic relations. The contradictions brought once by the latter could not be resolved by the post-colonial rulers but have rather accentuated and matured into inequalities, deprivations and discriminations. These have been analysed in the case of the 'Udayachal movement' in Assam which is a product of the legacy of the contradictions of the colonial socio-economic system. We have analysed the social bases of conflict and tensions within the existing set-up with the help of the relative

deprivation theory. This means that we have drawn upon the theory of 'conflict' rather than trying to bring in the entire theory of Marxian dialectism. However, this study is an exploratory one by using whatever meagre data on the Udayachal movement are available.

Finally, the last chapter has analysed the present state of the 'Udayachal movement'. It has also peeped into the viability of its activation in course of time and its further implications for the socio-political atmosphere in the tribal society of North-East India.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. K.S. Singh, "Colonial Transformation of Tribal Society in Middle India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 29, 1978, p. 1229; See also M.S.A. Rao, *Social Movements and Social Transformations*, 1979, p. 16.
2. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1970, p. 20.
3. Udayachal means land of dawn : Uday-dawn, achal-land.
4. Hamza Alavi, "Imperialism : Old and New", *The Socialist Register*, 1964, p. 105.
5. N.J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behaviour*, 1967; See Talcott Parsons, *The Social System*, 1951.
6. A.F.C. Wallace, "Revitalisation Theory", in *American Anthropologist*, No. 58, 1965.
7. Karl Marx, *A Contribution. . .*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-232.