

Mainstreaming Tribe: Some Questions

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Abstract

The term 'mainstream' may carry different meanings, starting from an activity to ideas and attitudes developed by the majority or dominant group to be shared by others of smaller and less powerful ones. But when the question is mainstreaming tribes, the spirit of sharing hardly manifests itself at all levels. It mostly takes the form of one-sided movement of ideas and activities from the dominant and majority group, who for all practical purposes represent the mainstream, to the marginalised groups of tribes who are clearly at the receiving end. Mainstreaming suggests that the power of control, real or implicit, will be exercised by the group holding a dominant or dominating position representing the mainstream category over the less powerful ones. In any case, mainstreaming effects on tribe demand to be treated a little differently. Tribal historical dynamics working behind the self-directed way of life pursued by them have their own strength. It means tribes may not automatically fall in line with the mainstream, giving up their self-created ethnic identity bolstered by a culture of their creation. The political dimension of the whole problem cannot escape our attention. The regional focus of tribes and the nature of inter-tribal relations in a plural landscape very often determine the tribal position vis-à-vis the mainstream. The whole process of mainstreaming the less privileged groups like tribes calls for a systematic analysis of the prevailing tribal situation at the regional level. North East India seems to be an ideal ground for such an exercise.

Key words: Mainstream; Tribe, Ethnicity; Identity; Culture; Politics; Conflict; Modernity; Human Rights; Youth.