

## **Gender And Employment At The Tribal Non Tribal Interface: A Case Study of India**

Employment is a crucial element for the growth of any human being. Especially for women, it represents opportunities that will enhance her life with knowledge, empowerment, and independence helping in the fulfilment of her aspirations and dreams. The National Sample Survey Organisation of India defines work as “economic activity”<sup>1</sup>. Hence work is an integral part of the economic activity in an individual’s life forming his /her source of livelihood. The sphere of work is “complex and diverse”<sup>2</sup> as many people work yet, their work is not counted in the actual accounting.

The interaction of interests of the tribal women and non tribal people in the sphere of work is the focus of this study. For the tribal populace, access to work opportunities is difficult to attain<sup>3</sup>. This is a result of the image of the female tribal population as ‘hard workers yet lazy’, ‘of easy virtue’, ‘unable to maintain a routine with a tendency to run away to their villages’ and ‘with a propensity towards intoxicating drinks that render them unable to work’<sup>4</sup>. Differential access to work causes inequality, leading to the marginalisation of the subjugated actor, that is the tribal populace. This study looks at the patterns of work and the extent of engagement in working sphere of the tribal vis a vis the non tribal females through employment/unemployment scenario. The purpose

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<sup>1</sup> Economic activity in the NSS 55<sup>th</sup> round is defined as: Any activity resulting in production of goods and services that add value to national product was considered as an economic activity. Such activities included production of all goods and services for market (market activities), i.e. production for pay or profit, and, the production of primary commodities for own consumption and own account production of fixed assets, among the non-market activities.

The entire spectrum of human activity falls into two categories—economic and non-economic activities. The economic activities have two parts - market activities and non- market activities. Market activities are those that involve remuneration to those who perform it i.e., activity performed for pay or profit. These are essentially production of goods and services for the market including those of government services, etc. Non-market activities are the production for own consumption of primary products including own account processing of primary products and own account production of fixed assets.

<sup>2</sup> Nayyar, Deepak, (2003): ‘Work, Livelihoods and Rights’, *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol 46, No. 1, pp. 3 -13.

<sup>3</sup> Fernandes, Walter (1993): ‘Forests and Tribals: Informal Economy, Dependence and Management Traditions’ in Miri Mrinal (ed): *Continuity and Change in Tribal Society*, IIAS, Shimla, pp. 47-69.

<sup>4</sup> This is an image constructed during the colonial period (in the settlement reports of the various districts and various ethnological works on the tribes of eastern India for eg. Hunter (1869), Mill (1870), Campbell (1902), MacPherson (1908) etc) that holds sway till date. This was perpetuated in post independent India as a measure to discourage the hiring of local labour facilitating import of labour from the plains of north Bihar in Jharkhand. The termination of the coolie gang labour and as well as female labour in coolie gangs is also a part of this strategy.

in the study is to locate the processes wherein the distances between the tribes and the non tribes in the same locality increase and their relationship to the traditional rights and livelihood sustenance, particularly with reference to the tribes. This helps create a map of their achievements and aspirations detailing their experiences of prejudices in the era of globalisation. The socio-political conditions that govern their interactions in the labour market affecting their bargaining power is also incidental in fashioning their broader outlook as well as their sense of the future.

### **Methodology**

The database is built from both secondary (government documents, books, journals etc) and primary sources (focus group discussions). There are many confusing aspects of the definition of work<sup>5</sup>. “It is not surprising that the analysis of work is characterised by abstractions where the focus is on the parts and not on the whole. The domain of concern is often restricted to narrower groups, such as workers in the organised sectors, which leave out the unorganised sectors”<sup>6</sup>. In this study, youth employed in both formal and informal sector will be studied.

Secondary data has been analysed with the help of Census of India, Economic Tables, 2001 and the NSSO reports on employment and unemployment, providing a comparative picture on the general employment situation in India vis a vis the different social groups and rural urban differentials. Sectoral shift is examined for exploring the patterns of change of workforce structures within the tribal and non-tribal population segments. The attempt is to focus on tribal non tribal interface in the labour market at the local level that illustrate the invisible networks of power and social discrimination within the labour institutions.

Employment is measured based on varied status of the employed person, be it current or principal usual status. Multistage Stratified Random Sampling method has been used in the selection of sample districts, blocks, villages and population. In the first stage, two districts – topmost and bottommost have will be selected on the basis of

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<sup>5</sup> Work is defined by different agencies in various ways, the ILO, the Indian Census, and NSSO provide different definitions of work. The approach adopted in this study is based on the work done by the individual in the last seven days.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 4

Composite Index constructed on the basis of selected demographic, social and infrastructure variables<sup>7</sup> using Composite Development Index for regional analysis. Alongside this a Location Quotient for the tribal workers and their work force participation rates has been constructed for examining the concentration of the female tribal workers in the various districts of the state of Jharkhand. These results determine the selection of the districts. Some of the indicators to be utilised for the study are: employment structure, casualisation of labour and structural changes in the workforce. A disparity index for the female tribal workers in relation to their male counterparts and also the non tribal female workers is also calculated to bring out the widespread inequality.

Primary survey in the field has taken the form of focus group discussions amongst the youth both in the informal and formal sector. This has emerged as a case study of employed tribal and non tribal women in Jharkhand. The permanent workers in the coal industry represent the formal sector of employment and the informal sector is based on daily wage labourer also within the coal industry itself. The attempt within these focus group discussions is to bring out the 'youth culture' through

1. Caste/tribe-class continuum
2. Their relationships with the prevalent dominant culture as well as their parent culture leading perhaps to a 'sub-culture amongst youth'.<sup>8</sup>

The survival mechanisms evolved by women from both the population segments of tribes and non tribes is then charted ascertaining their attitudes and values. These then present the fears, tribulations and trepidations faced by them in everyday life as well as the accumulated meanings and means of representation that social groups in various structural niches negotiate to gain a foothold in livelihood survival.

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<sup>7</sup> The variables used will be I. Agricultural Indicators: Land man ratio, 2. Gross Sown Area, 3. Total Irrigated Area, 4. Fertilizer Use, 5. Value of Agricultural Output, II. Non Agricultural Indicators: 1. % Workers in Primary Sector, 2. % Workers in Secondary Sector, 3. % Workers in Tertiary Sector, 4. % Share of Non-Household Workers to total Industrial Workers, 5. Urbanization rate, III. Social Sector Indicators: 1. Educational Facilities, 2. Medical Facilities, 3. Post & Telegraph Facilities, 4. Communication Facilities, 5. Pucca Road, 6. Electricity Facilities, 7. Literacy Rates.

<sup>8</sup> Callouri, Raymond. A (1985): 'The kids are all right: New wave sub-cultural theory', *Social Text*, No. 12, pp. 43-53.

## **Results**

The effort is to look at the level of inequality within the labour markets, especially in the rural labour markets faced by women in their daily activities. The results show the wide gender disparity that exists in the labour market as regards the female tribal labourers. They are both preferred and non-preferred. They are extremely susceptible to sexual exploitation along with being made to work for longer hours for lower wages. It is the tribal female workers who are doubly disadvantaged as they are first female workers and secondly tribal females. The social attitudes regarding them are extensively discriminating and exploiting at all possible levels. This factor shaping their employment opportunities creates inequality resulting in intense deprivation for the tribal females.

## **Conclusion**

The sphere of work is a complex network of relationships and power alliances that structure and regulates opportunities to work. Within these networks, the tribal populations are powerless as most of the opportunities are controlled by the non tribal populations. Amongst the tribes unavailability of economic opportunities causes the increase in casualisation of labour engaged in labouring jobs. The work force participation (WPR) rates of the tribal populace have come down from 55% in 1981 to 37 % in 2001. This is indicator of severe stress within their economy wherein minimum work is unavailable, especially for the women. The wage rates are also depressed in the rural sector where most of the tribal populace are engaged in work. The non tribal population in comparison is in a better position and has resources that help them overcome stress.