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**Adivasis in India:  
ISSUES OF LIVELIHOOD AND LABOUR MARKET,  
PUBLIC ACTION AND MARKET SOLUTIONS  
January, 2015**



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**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND PANCHAYATI RAJ**  
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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The Adivasis communities in India in general and hinterlands in particular are most disadvantaged communities in terms of their socioeconomic status. They are poorest in terms of income and human development and face several types of vulnerabilities. The situations among the most vulnerable tribes are at rock bottom level. These communities lack access to resources and a majority of them are poor farmers and landless labourers and have to depend on forest and other common property resources for their livelihood. However, there has been erosion in the access to different types of resources. The productivity of their labour in whichever activity they engaged is low and/or the remuneration received is paltry.

In order to understand the labour market situations including the status of human resources among the Adivasi a two-day National seminar was organized by S.R.Sankaran Chair in collaboration with Council for Social Development at NIRD&PR, Hyderabad during 22-23 January, 2015. We are grateful to Professor C.H. Hanumanth Rao, Professor Virginious Xaxa and Professor Dev Nathan for giving the inaugural lecture, Key note Address and Valedictory Lecture respectively. This booklet contains those lectures.

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**Kailash Sarap**  
Professor  
S.R.Sankaran Chair

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An edited version of this 2015 Hyderabad conference keynote appeared as Chapter 4 in Sarap & Motkuri's 2016 book 'Adivasis in India: resources, livelihoods and institutions'. The latter more recent version is however not publicly available.

## LABOUR MARKET AND ADIVASIS: AN OVERVIEW<sup>2</sup>

*Virginus Xaxa\**

### 1. Introduction

The distinctive use of the term 'adivasi' for the purpose of identification and differentiation, as opposed to the term 'tribe,' emerged during the colonial rule. However, it could not assume the form of an official category. So, what assumed official space instead is the use of the term 'tribe'. Though the two terms have different connotations, the communities referred to by them coincide and overlap in actual reality. The term 'tribe' refers to a certain stage in the evolutionary development of human society. It also refers to certain distinctive societal features

that mark it off from other societies. In a sense, the same idea seems to hold true in case of the use of the term 'tribe' in India. On the other side, the term 'adivasi' means 'original inhabitants,' referring thereby to their settlement in the territory prior to those of the immigrants. The two terms are used interchangeably in India except in the Northeast where the term 'adivasi' is used to refer to erstwhile tribal immigrants hailing from the central Indian belt who were brought to work in tea plantations in Assam from the middle of the 19th century. The tribes in this part do not refer to themselves as adivasis. This is

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2 Keynote Address, National Seminar on Labour Market and Issues of Adivasis in India, 22-23 January, 2015 at NIRD&PR, Hyderabad.

\* Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati.

not to say that the use of the term 'original inhabitants' is absent in Northeast India. Rather, the term in use is 'indigenous peoples,' implying that it is more of a recent consciousness and development. The two terms 'tribe' and 'adivasi' (indigenous peoples) have been used interchangeably in this discussion.

Adivasis/tribes have been studied from a variety of dimensions, which has much to do with the disciplinary moorings. Anthropology is one discipline that has for long been associated with the study of tribes. Indeed, 'tribes' became a distinct subject matter of the discipline of anthropology; it was much later that it moved to the study of peasant society and urban community. India has been no exception to this tradition and there is a large body of anthropological studies and literature on tribes. However, topics related to various aspects of the adivasi economy have rarely been explored. The engagement of the other disciplines like sociology, political science and history with regard to adivasi issues has not only been recent, but also limited. Further, themes of interest and concern among them have also been ones central to their own disciplines. Of the social science disciplines, economics has been the

least interested in the study of adivasi issues. This may have something to do with the very nature of the discipline of economics. That explains as to why the concern with an issue such as labour market is missing in tribal literature.

Tribes/adivasis have been conceptually conceived as a society distinct from others based on modes of livelihood and living, which have been generally described as primitive. Such modes of livelihood are not only considered as being predominantly dependent on nature, but also determined by nature. Their sources of livelihood include hunting, food-gathering, pastoralism, slash-and-burn agriculture, and settled cultivation. During the British rule, various tribes in India stood at different stages of development. However, irrespective of their level of development, the British rule did have an impact, which led to unprecedented changes in their economic and social life. Though much has changed since then and especially during the post-independence era of economic development, the then-existing disparities in the level of development and pattern of livelihood are visible even today, which has a significant bearing on the labour market.

Traditionally, apart from the primary source of livelihood, tribes/ adivasis have also been making their living through a combination of modes of livelihood, for example, hunting, food gathering and fishing activities which take place contemporaneously. Similar is the case with slash-and-burn agriculture, which was done in combination with food gathering and hunting. Even tribes with a relatively more advanced mode of livelihood such as settled agriculture, combine agriculture with other modes of livelihood such hunting, fishing and food gathering. However, even during times when there is more than one mode of livelihood, there is no division of labour amongst them with regard to different kinds of work or activity; rather everyone is engaged in the same activity. The division of labour that may prevail is generally based on age and sex. Here, too, there is no rigid division except in some activities. Different modes of livelihood have given way to differential control of resources. Among tribes that are mobile, there is generally no permanent sense of control over the resources, except for a sense of belonging to the 'territory'. Among the settled tribes, a sense of permanent control of resources exists which assumes varying forms such as ownership in the form of a village

community, lineage, or family (extended or nuclear). Where ownership is vested in a community or lineage, the family is generally the effective unit of production, distribution and consumption. The size and quality of land owned by families in the community or lineage vary and give rise to farm size inequality, thus resulting in variations in agricultural productivity. However, social hierarchy (landlord, tenant, sharecropping, and landless labour) has generally been absent. Variations in the size of the farmlands gave rise to additional demand for labour that often led to hiring of attached labour from families with small, uneconomic landholdings. The phenomenon was rare and generally confined to chiefs or founding family of the village. The dominant form of livelihood was cultivation of one's own land. During peak agricultural season, most such families at times were dependent on reciprocal exchange of family labour or community labour. In short, tribal economy on the eve of British rule was marked by a relative absence of market. And, when they set out to establish a market, it remained restricted to a commodity market. Other forms of market, including labour market, were conspicuous by their absence.

Since each tribe has traditionally been a homogeneous and self-contained community, the keynote address attempts to trace the origin of social differentiation among tribes and the emergence of a 'labour market' in tribal regions. It examines the underlying forces and the emerging areas and forms of tribal labour market. The address then explores the extent to which the pattern of labour market, prevalent since the colonial times, has continued in the post-independence era. It delves into the new areas and forms of employment that the period of planned economic development opened up, and also studies the extent of participation of tribes in it. Finally, there is an attempt to look into new avenues of employment that have attracted the tribes following the introduction of the New Economic Policy of 1991.

## **2. The Colonial Period**

The process of social differentiation in tribal society in the form of tenancy, agricultural labour, landless labour, etc., traces its roots to the colonial period. The incorporation of tribal regions into the colonial rule led to their integration into the larger social system, through uniform legal and administrative structure on the one hand and extension of roads, railways and other means of

communication on the other. This facilitated the movement of non-tribals into tribal areas for employment in the colonial administration, as well as for trade and commerce; some even moved to the tribal regions in search of land for cultivation. These developments led to an unprecedented demand for land, contributing to rampant alienation of land from tribes to non-tribes through such means as fraud, deceit, indebtedness, sale, etc. After all, the colonial law introduced the notion of private property in land and written records of rights, a phenomenon alien to the tribal society. This paved the way for a class of owners who rather than cultivating the land themselves, got it done by tribal families whose very land they may have appropriated. It is these very developments that led to social differentiation in tribal society in the form of landlessness, tenancy, and agricultural labour, including a steady decline in the farm size of the tribal families. The differentiation in tribal society was thus not an outcome of internal dynamics within tribal society but was the product of forces external to tribal society. Resultantly, social differentiation in the relational form invariably assumed an ethnic dimension. Despite such developments, a large majority of the tribal population was still dependent

on their farmlands for their livelihood. However, with the passage of time, the size of tribal farmland kept shrinking due to alienation of land from tribes to non-tribes on the one hand and the growing size of the family on the other. This caused the tribes to move away from traditional occupations and even leave home in search of alternative employment. Such movement gained momentum due to the recurrence of famines in the tribal regions of Eastern India at regular intervals all through the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In the economic context, the phenomenon of working outside the home for one's livelihood emerged in the tribal regions. This phenomenon gradually changed to working outside the village, vicinity and even the region due to the expansion of colonial economy as well as the colonial administration. The colonial state took over the vast forests and thereby its existing management. This decision on the one hand restricted livelihood opportunities for tribes, especially for shifting cultivators and food gatherers, but on the other hand created employment opportunities in state administration of forests. Since the major source of revenue under the colonial rule was land, hence the colonial state encouraged reclamation

of forest land for cultivation. The landlord and others who reclaimed land invariably hired tribal people for forest clearance, employed them as tenants and later drove them out in favour of more enterprising peasants who were willing to pay higher rents (Rothermund, 1977; Sen, 1979). Though for a short duration, land reclamation continued into the post-independence period in some parts of India such as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and the Sunderbans region in West Bengal. Tribes from Eastern India have been key players in this reclamation process. In short, there were several factors that opened the space for labour market in tribal society. Of them, land dispossession was the most important reason. It either pushed the tribes towards landlessness or reduced their farm size to uneconomic holdings. The other factor was the pressure on the existing farmlands due to the increasing number of family members. Earlier, whenever such a situation arose, some members would invariably move out and find a new settlement by reclaiming forest land not far away from the native village. This was, however, no longer possible, as the right over forestland was now vested in the state. Also, the recurrence of famines at regular intervals, which had

earlier led to mass deaths, now forced them to look for other modes of employment and livelihood.

While this was one side of the story, the other side was that the colonial state was opening up new avenues for livelihood and employment. The introduction and expansion of infrastructure such as roads and railways under the colonial rule was one such step taken towards employment generation. Tribes filled in this demand by providing unskilled labour required to lay railway tracks as well as for cutting timber that was to be used as 'plates' for railway lines. Mineral extraction and exploitation, too, became an important sphere of economic activity during the colonial period and the tribal population formed the mainstay of its labour force. Much of the tribal labour force employed in these mines came from villages in the vicinity of these mines.

Apart from these new avenues of work within their own regions, other avenues had begun to emerge elsewhere as well. One of these was linked to the development of the plantation economy. A product of the colonial era, plantation economy emerged as a predominant form of economy in the 18th and 19th centuries in the Americas and the adjoining regions. The economy was,

from the very outset, faced with an acute shortage of labour. This led to human trafficking - where people were brought in as slave labour - on an unprecedented scale from Africa. Soon, the plantation economy spread to other parts of world as well. The emergence of the plantation economy in the British colonies as a part of worldwide expansion of the capitalistic economy had already drawn tribal regions of central India into its orbit. Recruitment for employment in plantations in the West Indies, Fiji, Mauritius, etc., had begun, though labour recruited for work overseas came mainly from low caste background (Tinker, 1993). However, the emergence of the plantation economy within India from the middle of the 19th century changed the route of the movement of the population from the tribal regions. Indeed, the population from tribal regions constituted the main labour force for the plantation estates in Assam and Bengal all through the colonial period. However, the recruitment came to halt a few years after independence, as by then a surplus of labour was available in tea estates - both men and women and either as family or individuals. They served under indenture and semi-indenture systems. They were bound within the confines of an estate and were under constant surveillance.

Wages were low, working and living conditions were inhuman, and, hours of work were inordinately long. Violence unleashed was routine and normal (Bhowmik, 1981; Guha, 1977). Although the post-independence period did bring about some changes in their situation, they are still the lowest paid in the organized sector of India's industrial economy; unemployment in plantation economies is an acute problem. And, despite being part of the organized sector, their educational and health status is deplorable. Indeed, unemployed youth in the plantations have begun to move elsewhere in search of employment.

Tribal areas were economically and educationally less developed than the non-tribal areas and hence were described as the backward areas. The British administration took upon itself the rights over resources, especially forestlands initially owned by the tribal communities. Further, while the government imposed land revenue and taxes of various kinds on the tribal people, in turn, it did little to improve their living conditions. Measures that would aid their development - economic, educational and health - were rarely considered. In fact, education, in general, was limited to the middle school level; and, the schools were run by Christian

missionaries. Those who wanted to study further had no other option but to move out of their native places. Modern education did open new opportunities for employment, though limited, in government and missionary institutions for the posts of clerks and school teachers. This kind of employment gained momentum in post-independence era due to the state policy of affirmative action programmes.

### 3. Post-independence Period

The colonial state did nothing to improve the socio-economic conditions of the tribal people other than providing for protective legislative and administrative measures. Such measures aimed to protect tribes from non-tribes who had been largely responsible for exploitation and dispossession of tribes from their land and other resources. This led to series of revolts and rebellions against the British all through the late 18th and 19th centuries. Despite such protective measures, exploitation of tribes and their dispossession from land could not be halted. The post-independence India continues with the protective measures albeit with some modifications. For instance, a certain percentage of seats are reserved for tribal people in educational

institutions and state employment. In addition, unlike under colonial rule, policies and programmes have also been worked out since the first five-year plan for their economic and social (education and health) development. These measures have opened up new avenues of employment and livelihood for tribes, which was almost negligible or limited during the colonial period.

Of the new avenues of employment, state employment has been the most important in the post-independence era. The 7.5 per cent of state employment reserved for tribes in central government services and the share corresponding to the size of the state tribal population in the state government services has thrown open a large pool of employment opportunities for the tribes. However, the occupational status was largely dependent on the level of educational attainment. Nevertheless, educational attainment - at the time such provisions were introduced - was negligible among tribes. In 1961, the literacy rate among tribes was a mere 8.5 per cent; this rose to 11.3 per cent in 1971 and 16.3 per cent in 1981 (GOI, 2013). This being the educational status, it was almost impossible to fill in the central and state quotas. In case of quota for higher grade services, it was even worse, as candidates with the necessary qualifications were not

available. For example, as late as 1974 the share of the scheduled tribes in central government services was a mere 155 (0.46 per cent) in group A services, 258 (0.49 per cent) in group B services, 33,383 (2.13 per cent) in group C services and 47,679 (3.84 per cent) in group D services (GOI, 2001: 21). The scenario has now changed as the literacy rate has increased. In 1991, the literacy rate had gone up to 29.6 per cent as compared to 16.3 per cent in 1981. The literacy rate was 47.1 and 59.0 per cent respectively in 2001 and 2011. With this, a larger number of people with the required qualifications are now available. The increased share of the Scheduled Tribes in central government services in recent years reflects this to a great extent. As on January 2011, for example, the share of scheduled tribes was 33,732 (4.8 per cent) in group A posts, 11,357 (6.1 per cent) in group B posts, 1,74,562 (7.7 per cent) in group C posts, and, 32,791 (6.81 per cent) in group D posts, which included sweepers and cleaners (ACHR, 2013). Paradoxically, however, the process of shrinking of state employment had already begun in the late 1980s as part of structural adjustment programme. One of the important conditionality of structural adjustment programme was the downsizing of state employment. Class C and class D government jobs, for

which tribes are now eligible, have considerably shrunk today. As on January 1, 1994, the employment rate in categories C and D was 2381613 and 1023285 respectively, which stood at 2396426 and 949353 respectively on January 1, 1999 (GOI, 2001:21). This has reduced the number of jobs in state government departments. The share of scheduled tribes in class C and class D for the period 1996–1998 is a pointer to this. During the period, the share of scheduled tribes in class C and class D services was a mere 1,33,179 (5.69 per cent) and 67,453 (6.48 per cent) respectively. Class D here does not include sweepers and cleaners (NCSCST, 1998). For tribes, the status of state employment at the central level is somewhat good; however, the scenario is far from satisfactory at the state level. In case of states, even at the lower level, tribes fall far short of their share to the total population. This can be attributed to lack of eligible candidates as well as discrimination against tribes by the dominant community of the state. Indeed discrimination is widespread and intense at the state level than at the national level. The Asian Centre for Human Rights in its report, *The State and Tribal Employment in Public and Private Sector*, documents the status of employment in states such as Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Chhattisgarh,

Kerala and Karnataka. This report indeed reveals and reinforces the observation with regard to discriminatory treatment meted out, as discussed before (ACHR, 2013).

A tiny section from the educated class could also enter the private sector in the region, but mostly in low-level white collar jobs. Post-independence, the activities that had begun under the British rule underwent economic expansion. Mineral extraction was one such activity that created employment opportunities - mainly unskilled work - for the tribal population. Besides mineral extraction, tribal regions also witnessed other development activities. Some of these concerned economic infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, dams, irrigation, and power (thermal and hydraulic). Industrial projects in the form of PSUs (Public Sector Undertakings) also came up in large numbers in tribal regions. These infrastructure and industrial projects did open additional employment opportunities of a different kind and level. Most of these required certain qualifications, which, as mentioned earlier, was in short supply due to low educational qualification of the tribal people. And, those who did get jobs (a small number) suffered prejudice. At the same time, the tribal labour force filled

in for the labour required at construction sites. Non-tribal labour force had no interest in such work and hence was not available. However, once the construction phase was over and regular appointment had begun, tribes found themselves out of the labour market - even for jobs that required little skill. Even if they were employed, it was more of an exception than a rule. Thus, while the projects did provide employment opportunities to the adivasis, it was only for a short duration. From a long-term perspective, they did not gain much.

The development of tribal communities has been one of the key agendas of the Indian state in the post-independence era. Various programmes and schemes have been launched from time to time to improve the livelihood situation of the tribal people. Yet poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition loom large among tribal communities. The percentage of tribal population living below poverty line was still 47.2 per cent as compared to 36.8 per cent for scheduled castes, 26.7 per cent for OBCs, and 16.1 per cent for others. The urban scenario shows a similar pattern (GOI, 2013:31). At the same time, the protective measures provided in the Constitution and laws to safeguard the interests of the tribal population have failed. Further, the alienation of land from

tribes to non-tribes continues unabated. This has been aggravated by industrial, mining and other infrastructure development projects in states, which has divested millions of tribal people from their land and other resources. As per the information available, in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar (including Jharkhand), Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh (including Chhattisgarh), Rajasthan and Orissa alone, a total of 21.3 million have been displaced because of projects mentioned above between 1951 and 1990. Of this 8.54 million, about 40 per cent were tribal people. Further, of the 8.54 million, only 2.12 million constituted a mere 24.8 per cent of the displaced (GOI, 2001:39). That largely explains as to why their condition has turned out to be worse than before despite a plethora of tribal welfare schemes. This is evident from the rise in the number of landless labourers, agricultural labourers, marginal farmers and small farmers. Among the self-employed agricultural workers, a large chunk constituted marginal, small and medium farm households. In 2005–06, marginal, small and medium farm households constituted 49.08, 25.69 and 24.14 per cent respectively of the total tribal farm households (GOI undated). Landlessness, too, has increased manifold. It is worth noting that it is

unimaginable to think of tribes as landless in a traditional social setting. However, by 1993–94, as high as 47.89 per cent of the total tribal population was identified as ‘rural labour households’. Of this, 54.07 per cent possessed some land, while the remaining 45.92 per cent were landless (Thorat, 2006).

While development induced displacement, referred to above, curtailed the scope of livelihood on the one hand and opened up new avenues of employment on the other, long-term employment was still a distant dream. Hence, owing to the resultant livelihood problems, the tribal population like in the colonial era has been forced to move to other places for work. However, tribal migration in post-independence era has taken a different trajectory. Though the rural to rural movement continues, the rural to urban movement has also gained momentum, especially in the last two decades. Migration has been both short- as well as long-term.

As noted earlier, tribal regions witnessed new forms of employment in colonial India. These predominant forms of employment were ‘rural’ in nature, for instance, plantation agriculture, farm forestry, forest management and mining. Of these, plantation agriculture has been the

most dominant form. However, by late 1950s, the movement of labour to the plantations in Assam and Bengal almost came to halt considering the drying up of demand. Similarly, the demand for labour in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, too, has been on the wane. This has led to short-term migration, even to distant places where construction work for roads, buildings, dams, etc., was in progress. Also, some tribes have moved to the green revolution belt of Punjab and Haryana because of demand for labour in these regions. Still others have left their native villages to work in brick-kiln sectors of neighbouring states. For example, a large number of tribes from Jharkhand have been going to Bengal and Assam to work in brick-kilns. Similarly, a large percentage of tribal population, especially from Southern districts of Odisha, has been migrating to South Indian states and Gujarat for short- and long-term work. There have, of course, been attempts by governments to restrict such movement by creating employment opportunities locally. However, there has not been much success. Of such attempts, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), introduced under UPA regime in 2006 was one such scheme. The scheme, though successful in providing some

employment and restraining migration, seems to have gone out of steam due to limitations that have cropped up. Beginning with 3298.73 lakh man-days of employment in 2006–07, the man-days of employment did witness an increase and remained steady for some time. However, it soon began to fade. In 2010–11, it came down to 5361.80 lakh man-days of employment and in 2011–12 to a mere 2822.16 lakh (GOI undated; ACHR, 2013).

The predominant form of migration has been from rural to rural setting. This is so even today. However, in the post-independence era, especially since the last two decades or so, migration has taken place from a rural setting to an urban setting. Many new towns have come up in the tribal regions because of the emergence of modern industrial and mining and related enterprises. The fruit of these developments was, however, not enjoyed by the people living in these regions. And yet, even though limited, it did open up some avenues of work, mainly as unskilled and semi-skilled workers in towns that have emerged in the wake of industrial, mineral and allied activities. Of those who lost land due to industrial/mining activities or were affected by it, some were absorbed as

unskilled and low-paid manual workers. And, those who could not be absorbed were forced to fend for themselves as informal sector workers. Since tribes did not have skills other than agriculture related, they were pushed to work in areas which required minimum skills, for instance, rickshaw pulling or working as domestic help. However, even in these domains, the entry of tribals has been rather limited, either due to lack of skill or because they are averse to the idea and value of such work. Further, developments in tribal regions have invariably attracted migration of people from outside since the colonial period, which has pushed the tribes out of both formal and informal labour market. At the same time, it is important to note, that the towns in tribal regions have generally been small- and/or medium-sized, and hence have failed to create a volume of work and demand that could absorb a wider and a diverse segment of the population. Thus, within the region, the movement of tribals from a rural setting to an urban setting has remained restricted. This explains as to why tribal population strength is low in urban areas despite rapid urbanization.

The creation of new districts and administrative set-ups in tribal regions

has also contributed to the growth of towns in recent years. At the same time, the push that came with a greater reliance on market forces starting with the economic reform of 1991 has given a spurt to a host of economic activities. This has led to the shift of the tribal population from a rural to an urban setting. In 1971, only one million out of the total population of 38 million were listed as 'urban'. The figure was 3 million out of the 52 million in 1981. Since 2001, however, there has been a phenomenal increase in tribal population in urban areas. Whereas it was 7 million out of 84 million (2.4 per cent) in 2001, the figure stood at 11 million out of the 104 million population (2.8 per cent) in 2011. The figure was 2.0 per cent and 2.3 per cent in 1981 and 1991 respectively (GOI, 2011). There is, of course, considerable state variation in respect of tribal population in urban areas. In the Northeast, the share of tribal population to total urban population ranges from over 70 per cent in Meghalaya and Nagaland to over 90 per cent in Mizoram as per 2011 census. The same is a mere 6 per cent in Manipur and 5 per cent in Assam. In the rest of India, the share of tribal population in urban areas ranges from about 10 per cent in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh to over 3 per cent in Maharashtra and Gujarat.

West Bengal had as low as 1.5 per cent tribal population in urban areas (GOI, 2011). This has led to visible change in the nature of occupation. The number of people engaged in secondary, especially tertiary, sectors has steadily risen. The phenomenon has been more pronounced in the Northeast region as compared to other parts of tribal regions in India. However, only a small section of those engaged in secondary and tertiary sectors are in the organized sector. Even in this sector, a large chunk forms part of the informal economy within the organized sector. A very large chunk of those employed in the secondary and tertiary sectors form part of an unorganized sector.

While this has been so, there has also been steady migration of tribals from a rural setting to an urban setting outside the tribal region. Such movement, to begin with, has been more in the nature of search for white-collar jobs because of expansion of education and the policy of reservation for tribes in government and semi-government services. Tribal migrants to the metropolis comprise those with higher education. The provision for reservation in employment in government and semi-government institutions has greatly facilitated their entry. However, the share of tribes in various types of employment despite

the provision of reservation falls short of the size of the population. The gap between share and the actual position has been either due to lack of qualified personnel or being discriminated against because of their tribal identity. Following this shift, there has also been movement of tribes to urban centres for work as unskilled/semi-skilled workers in the industrial sector and its allied activities.

Tribal migration to both rural and urban settings has been male-centred. Since the movement of women was linked to those of the men, it was invariably as an associate or a dependent. Though the movement of women from tribal regions to metropolis for domestic work seems to date back to the late 1970s, there is a departure from the historical pattern. It witnessed an unprecedented increase in 1980s and more so in 1990s. Today, a large number of tribal women venture out alone in search of employment, especially to metropolitan cities like Delhi, Calcutta, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Goa. Of course, they also move to small towns in immediate vicinity. The recent movement, unlike the one in the past, is individual-based, and includes both men and women. Rather, women seem to outnumber men. Women have overwhelmingly

been engaged as domestic workers. Those working as domestic workers mainly hail from Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal. As compared to tribes from peninsular India, the migration of tribes from the Northeast to the metropolitan cities in other parts of India is a more recent phenomenon. The principal reason for migration, to begin with, was to attain higher education, which still persists. However, what is different today is that students, on completion of their studies, look for employment opportunities in metropolitan cities rather than going back to their native places. In addition, tribes from the region have also been migrating to other parts of India in search of employment. The migration and employment of tribes in the metropolis shows two distinct patterns. This is linked to education and skill. The nature and type of work that tribes from peninsular India are engaged in the metropolis relate mainly to works such as domestic help, construction workers and other low-paid menial jobs. In contrast, tribes from the Northeast are mainly employed in retail shops, hotels, restaurants and other hospitality related work. However, both form an important segment of informal and unorganized labour market.

A historical overview of labour market and tribes shows that they have been mainly absorbed in agriculture and agriculture-related activities such as in forests, plantation, quarries, mines, etc. These were spheres of work for which non-tribal labour force either did not have the skill for or were not forthcoming. Wages are low, and, living and working conditions deplorable. Today, there is lack of work in such occupational fields, which, in turn, has led to acute unemployment and livelihood problems in tribal areas. Hence, there has been unprecedented migration of tribes, especially of youth, to cities in search of employment. In spheres of work where both tribes and non-tribes were/are available, preference has generally been given to non-tribes—thus indicating the presence of labour market discrimination against tribes. This was partly addressed through the provision of reservation policy.

However, despite policies of reservation, discrimination is not altogether absent. That explains as to why there has been relatively higher percentage of tribes in state employment. And yet, here too, the share of tribes falls far short of the total share viz. the size of their population. This has been the case not only at the higher levels of employment, but even at the lower levels for which, generally, skills and qualifications are readily available. When viewed against the larger backdrop, i.e. the national level, the situation is even worse in states, since prejudice and discrimination against tribes are more intense at state level rather than the national level. The share of tribes in non-state organized sector is almost invisible; however, their presence in unorganized sector is significant.

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