

# Migration, Labour force and work situation in Post-Colonial India: A study of Adivasi Tea workers in Terai and Dooars of North Bengal

Saikat Roy

Research Scholar , Department of Political Science

University of North Bengal

In capital (volume one), Marx outlined capitalist mode of production as an order or system that subjugates the masses by evicting them from the means production (primitive accumulation) and by turning them into workers, means of generation of surplus value. The democratic arrangements, the legal and administrative arrangements, extension of workers' democratic rights are termed 'ploys' of the capital to subjugate not only the workers but the entire population. In Marxist analysis the state and market together make all the arrangements for the reproduction of the capitalists order and legitimize them legally and ideologically.

Marx and Engels' critique of the western capitalists order has been winded and concretized by the later Marxists like Lenin, Gramsci, Althusser and Habermas and the post Marxists Foucault in one way or the other. The granting of democratic rights, granting of token participation of common people and their representatives of the planning execution of development programmes, welfare measures and in addressing issues like health, sex, livelihood, marriage, beliefs and ideologies, cognition, conciseness and discourses.

In the advanced capitalists systems of the west, according to Habermas, the market works, on autonomous and anonymous principals, despite planned attempts by the state and the organized bourgeois to control it. What matters the most, however, is the impact of the market and the system on the life world. Market principals may be anonymous, but one can see their link with life. Prices are fixed not only by invisible factors but also by such by life world processes as mob physiology, trust, personal competition, and the like.

Michel Foucault, in his non-Marxists interpretation of western capital order, argues that 'life and living being' are now the heart of new political battles and new politics battles and new politics.

He analyses the introduction of 'life into history' through the development of political economy. The modern day liberal democracies subsist on 'biopolitics'. Biopolitics, according to Foucault, speaks of government-population-political economic relationship, which refers to a dynamic of forces that establishes a new relationship between ontology and politics (Foucault 1991).

Enterprises, the market and labour, Foucault argues, are not spontaneously powers, but rather constitute what liberal government must make possible and real. The market, is an economic and social general regulator, yet it is not a natural mechanism of the market (prices, law of demand and supply) are fragile.

A brief journey into the theories of modern state market nexus in the capitalists' world was necessary to place the state-market relationship in India in perspective. Power or governance in India is fast taking the shape of biopower and the market is reproduce in social and cultural spheres, as Foucault has argued. It is in this task that the state penetrates into the social and cultural spheres and also in the in the individual and social psyche. It appropriates the existing cultural symbols and creates new symbols. It is, therefore, absolutely essential to understand the changing equation between economy and power or the rules to 'bio-power' in order to explore the integrationist mechanics of the liberal-democratic Indian state.

India in post-war ii period pursued welfareism of a kind and at the same time increasingly performed the function of reproduction of the order and the damage-repairing work by periodically coming up with welfare programmes to support the victims of exploitation, and even by coming up with bail-out packages for the 'capital-in crisis' in the line prescribed by kenyes. In the nehruvian model of national development, this was also followed by the latter regimes until early eighties, the state in the pre-globalization period combined capitalized growth with 'welfare packages' for the vulnerable in order to defer the legitimating crisis.

The liberal-democratic order in India has made an elaborate arrangement for the integration of its otherwise "excluded" and marginalized sections into the order through schemes like democratic decentralization, land reforms, capacity building programmes right to education , forest rights act, tribal sub-plan, the policy of protective discrimination, granting of regional autonomy and formation of regional development authority , special welfare programs for the marginalized and poor people including the makes SC's and ST's and so on. This clearly in line with the liberal

model of development where (a) the state makes arrangements for the protection of the victims of the market forces. (b) Reproduces and prepares the labour force for the market, and (c) ensures peace and stability to facilitate smooth sailing of the manufacturing and business activities. But the growing market leaves a negative impact on the welfare character of the state and its ability to arrest the resulting exclusion and marginalization, particularly of the vulnerable sections like the adivasis who have very little control over material resources and skills. When the market rules reign supreme the adivasis who have not experienced much of capacity building stand the risk of further exclusion.

The adivasi (tribal) population in north Bengal is largely constituted of the migrants from the chotanagpur region of central India, who moved out of their original abode in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century because of exploitation by the dikes (aliens), land loss, loss of forests rights, imposition of land rent, and colonial oppression, particularly in the post-Santhal rebellion period. The expanding tea gardens in the Dooars and Terai regions (along with parts of Assam) offered them livelihood although they found themselves in another exploitation and oppressive economic and power arrangement. In the Dooars and Terai the surplus labour force, ejected from the tea garden, took hold of the follow land education (and skill) made them depend on agriculture and tea almost exclusively.

The slow growth of jobs in 'other workers' category has to be understood in the light of stagnation and the planters' refusal to recruit in the permanent worker category. The strength of permanent work force in tea has declined in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts although there has been some increase in the number of casual workers. Four factors are primarily responsible for the economic plights of the adivasis in the region: a) meager control over material and human resources, b) their incapacity to take advantages of the market opportunities, c) inadequate state support, and d) exploitative presentation of the market group which control them. The increase of control over the material and human resources could have enhanced their 'capacity' to take greater advantages of market opportunities and to thwart the penetration of the more powerful exploitation forces. The presentation of the outsiders into the tribal belt with the spread of communication and including market crisis created by the tea garden owners including distinct strategy of casualisation and the threat of closure as a measure to deprive the tea workers and weaken the trade union movement have conversely brought miseries for the adivasis.

Being a part such a depressing reality the adivasis in the region have all reasons to lose confidence in the state and in the conventional organs of the civil society (trade union and mass organizations) which they had trusted for so long as the protectors of their rights. The immigration of more resourceful non-adivasis (Nepalese, Bengali refugees and rajbanshis) into 'their territory' has additionally created a sense of insecurity in the collective psyche of the adivasis in the form of being reduced to an insignificant minority and insecurity relating to livelihood. Neither the state nor the expanding market has any mechanism to free the adivasi psyche of this sense of insecurity. It is such a context that adivasi movement in Dooars and Terai has gained prominence.

The present paper locates the adivasis of North Bengal against the backdrop of their migration history, their struggle for livelihood, their control over resources, material and human, the history of solidarity movement- all in the wider context of the liberal market and the state which work hand in gloves to integrate and subordinate the 'fringe-people' into order. The paper argues that that the state and market work to achieve the integration function for the liberal-democratic order but fail to contain the 'subaltern' forces in search of a greater space within the existing political-economic frame.