

Agrarian Transitions and Rural Social Relations in Jharkhand, India

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Abstract : Rural Jharkhand has attracted lesser attention in the field of agrarian studies in India, despite more than eighty percent of its rural population being directly dependent on agriculture as their primary source of livelihood. The limited studies on agrarian issues in Jharkhand have focused predominantly on the subsistence nature of agriculture and low crop productivity. There has also not been much research on agrarian social relations between 'tribe' and 'non-tribe' communities in the region. This paper is an attempt to understand changing agrarian social relations between tribal and non-tribal communities relating them to different kinds of agrarian transitions taking place in two districts of Jharkhand - Palamu and Khunti. In the Palamu region, agrarian relations are dominated by the presence and significant population size of Hindu high caste land owners, whereas in the Khunti region, agrarian relations are characterized by the population size and dominance of tribes and lower caste land owner cum cultivators. The agrarian relations between 'upper castes' and 'tribes' in these regions are primarily related to agricultural daily wage labour. However, the agrarian social relations between Dalits and tribal people take the form of 'communal system of labour exchange' and 'household-based labour'. In addition, the ethnographic study of the region depicts steady agrarian transitions (especially shift from indigenous to 'High Yielding Variety' (HYV) paddy seeds and growing vegetable cultivation) where 'Non-Governmental Organizations' (NGOs) and agricultural input manufacturers and suppliers are playing a critical role in agrarian transitions as intermediaries. While agricultural productivity still remains low, both the regions are witnessing slow but gradual agrarian transitions. Rural-urban linkages in the form of seasonal labour migration are creating capital and technical inflows that are transforming agricultural activities. This study describes and interprets the above changes through the lens of 'regional rurality'.

Keywords : agrarian transitions, rural Jharkhand, regional rurality, tribe and non-tribe

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