

Situation of tribal migrant labourers of Sabarkantha and Banaskantha districts

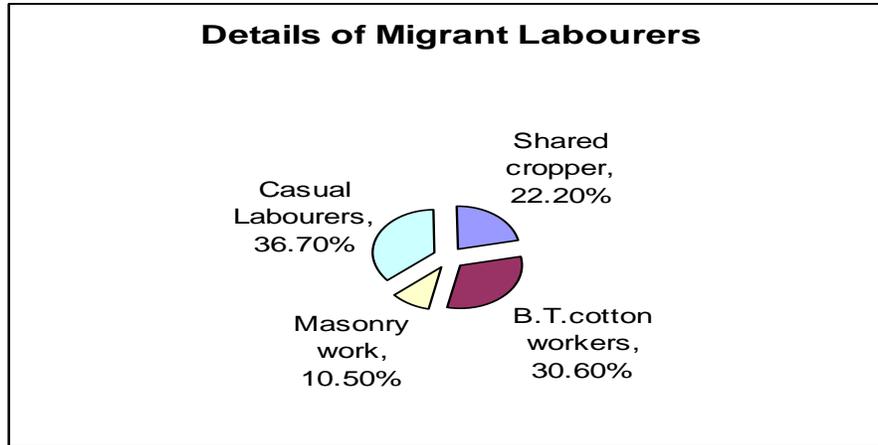
The major problems of the tribes in north Gujarat (Banaskantha, Sabarkantha, Panchmahal, Dahod and Vadodara) are – lower level of literacy, scanty forest cover and no or negligible access to forest or forest produce, high rate of unemployment and high incidences of sickle cell anemia and related health problems. The agriculture has been a subsistence economy as due to small and medium landholding; that too is rain-fed agriculture and traditional ways of farming, which results in low returns. Land alienation among tribals is very rampant across north-eastern belt of Gujarat. It is reported that officially about 7-8% tribals are alienated from land; informal survey reveal this extent to 15%. Our earlier studies reveal that due to a combination of policies of liberalization, privatization, globalization and some political and religious factors; they are on the verge of losing their identity and self respect. Due to frequent cutting of forests in the process of Industrialization, their natural resources of livelihood are diminishing.

In light of problems of unemployment and high rate of migration in search of livelihood, a need was felt to identify reasons for migration, occupations in which tribal migrants are engaged and the problems they face for living and working conditions. This study is part of development intervention for tribal migrants in Sabarkantha (Khedbrahma and Megharaj taluka) and Banaskantha (Danta taluka) districts.

The present study is an attempt to create database on tribal migrants of north Gujarat, total 147 villages of 3 taluka – Megharaj and Khedbrahma of Sabarkantha and Danta of Banaskantha district have been covered through survey while in 18 villages, primary data collection has taken place through participatory and qualitative research techniques during May 2008 and January 2009.

Out of all 62,347 tribals who work as migrant labourers covered under the study:

- ⇒ 13,825 (22.2%) migrate as share croppers,
- ⇒ 19,088 (30.6%) migrate to work on B.T. Cotton farms,
- ⇒ 6,564 (10.5%) migrate for masonry work, and
- ⇒ 22,870 (36.7%) work as casual labourers.



Situation of Share Croppers

Of total 13,825, the highest is from Khedbrahma taluka at 9,411 (68.1%), while 4,396 (31.8%) are from Danta taluka and 18 (0.1%) from Meghraj taluka. They migrate to Mehsana and Gandhinagar district, along with other talukas of Sabarkantha and Banaskantha districts. The share cropper of Khedbrahma gets fourth/fifth or sixth share of the crop, while the share cropper of Danta gets fifth or sixth share and the share cropper of Meghraj gets fifth or seventh share of the crop as the remuneration.

Situation of B.T. Cotton Workers

Of total 19,088, the maximum 11,428 (59.9%) are from Khedbrahma followed by Meghraj with 5219 (27.3%) BT cotton workers, while 2441 (12.8%) of B T cotton workers are from Danta; among them, 9,694 (51.1%) are male, 5,192 (27.3%) are females and 3,280 (21.6%) are children. The tribals of Danta, Khedbrahma and Meghraj migrate to Mehsana, Patan and Gandhinagar districts, along with other talukas of Banaskatha and Sabarkantha district and are usually paid a daily wage between rupees 40 to 60.

Situation of tribals engaged in masonry work

Of total 6,564, 4,811 (73.3%) are from Meghraj, 1,097 (16.7%) are from Khedbrahma and 656 (10%) are from Danta. They migrate to other districts of Gujarat, like Gandhinagar, Kachchh and even to other States like Rajasthan (Mount Abu) for working as masons and are usually paid a daily wage between 65 to 120 rupees.

Situation of casual labourers

Of total 22,870, 15,786 (69%) are from Khedbrahma, 4,919 (21.5%) are from Meghraj and 1665 (7.3%) are from Danta; among them, 2,325 (15%) are children. They migrate to other talukas of Banaskantha, Sabarkantha and to districts of Mehsana, Patan and Gandhinagar.

The migrant casual labourers from Khedbrhama are usually paid Rs. 50-120/-, labourers from Meghraj are paid Rs.40-120/- and from Danta are paid Rs.20-250/- as daily wages.

A high presence of Child Labourers is observed

- ⇒ Of total 62,347, total 13,854 (22.2%) are child labourers, engaged in various income generation activities. The highest number 5,522 (39.9%) of child labourers are engaged in Share cropping, while 4,118 (29.7%) are engaged in B.T. Cotton farms and 3,374 (24.4%) are working as casual labours; the least (840 - 6.1%) is in masonry works, as the occupation is dominantly skilled oriented which an adult does it better than a child.
- ⇒ In a comparison of all the three talukas, the highest presence of Child labour is found in Khedbrahma taluka at 8,660 (62.5%), 2,692 (19.4%) in Meghraj and 2,502 (18.1%) in Danta.

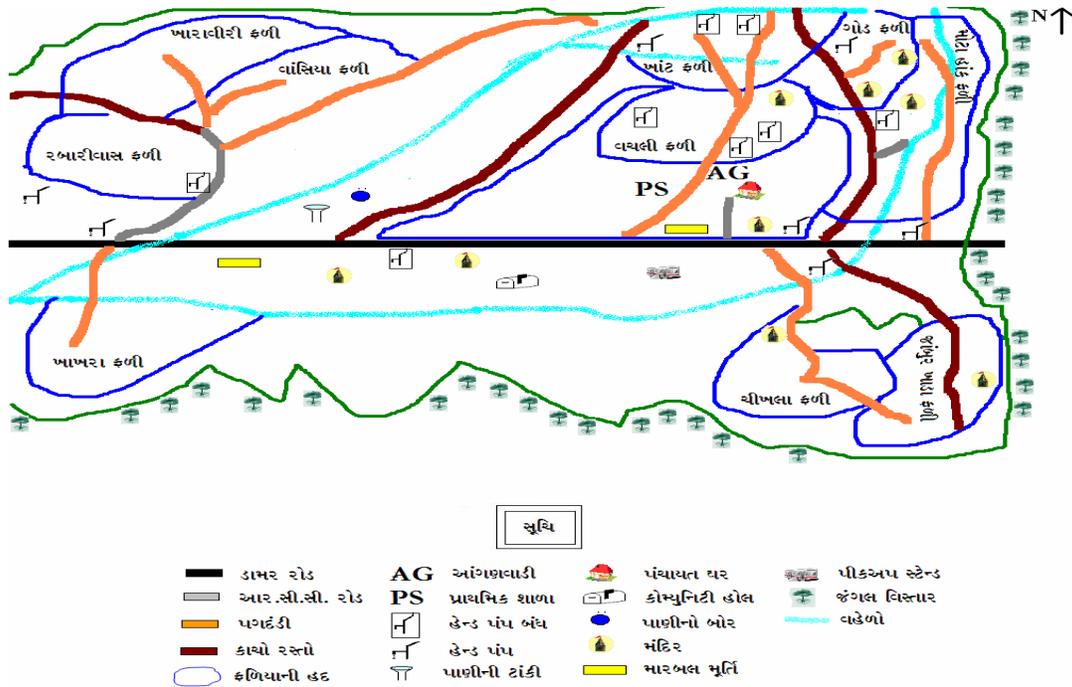
Trend of Migration

In all the four categories of workers, the pattern of migration is found to be very specific and different from the rest categories:

Nature of Movement –

- ⇒ There is always an individual movement for migration to work as masonry worker and in that too, an adult male from each family; similarly, a casual labour mostly migrates individually.
- ⇒ In B.T. Cotton fields, at least one or two children / adolescents tend to migrate from each family.
- ⇒ For share cropping the entire family migrates to distant places and the children do not have choice regarding migration.

Village: Panchha	Taluka: Danta
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Associated Age Group –

- ⇒ For working in B.T. Cotton farms, the adolescents are given preference and a person above the age of 30-35 is not at all hired.
- ⇒ As share cropper, every age group gives contribution through labour; while the adult males take care of farming, the females give a helping hand and also take care of cattle and the children contribute in supportive tasks.
- ⇒ In masonry work, mostly skilled males are observed to be working.
- ⇒ Among casual labourers, a mixed trend is observed and a high number of child labourers are also observed to be working.

Extent of Migration - The share cropper migrates ranging from three months to entire year, depends on the work and need for the labour in the given occupation. The B.T. Cotton workers migrate for maximum three months; the duration of migration for masonry work and casual labour is not fixed; the share croppers migrate as per availability of water and number of crops to be taken in a year.

Major problems of tribal migrants

Low wages and violation of Minimum Wages Act – None of the migrant labourers reported getting minimum wages as per the Minimum Wages Act 1948¹.

- ⇒ B.T. Cotton workers are paid between rupees 40 to 60 as daily wage;

¹ In 2008, through an amendment in the ‘Minimum Wages Act 1948’, the daily minimum wage has fixed as Rs. 100.

- ⇒ For masonry work, the labourers are paid a daily wage between 50 to 200 rupees, as per the skill and need in the market.
- ⇒ The share cropper gets fourth or fifth or sixth share of the crop as the remuneration; there is an uncertainty of payment as the owner of the land, usually denies or delays the payment, changes the accounts and deceives the share cropper.

Ineffective implementation of NREGA

NREGA is not implemented in more than 30% of the villages; of them, about 50% of the population has got their job card made.

Difficulties faced by migrant labours

Long working Hours and lower wages; pathetic living and working conditions; vulnerability of Sexual harassment in form of rape, molestation, abduction or trafficking; Health hazards, vulnerable to accidents and no life security; violation of Human Rights in form of social discrimination, occurrences of child labour, verbal abuse, and ill-treatment is rampant; lack of stability and social security; and adverse impact on the education of the children.

Suggestions

To combat the problems of the tribal migrant labours and to bring a positive change in the scenario few steps are recommended:

- ⇒ Effective enforcement of all Labour Laws for protecting the Interests of the migrant labours are must, such as, only licensed labour contractors should be allowed; legal contract between the land owner and share cropper / labourers or labour contractors should be ensured; good living conditions at workplace should be ensured; insurance coverage against health problems and accidents are provided.
- ⇒ Strict action against occurrences of child labour should be taken.
- ⇒ Supervision and regular inspection of the B.T. Cotton farms by the District labour Officer or special squad should help curbing occurrences of child labour, good living conditions at workplace and due payment of wages.
- ⇒ Apart from these, creating new job avenues in the area taking into consideration the capabilities and requirements of the tribals, protecting forests, averting land alienation among tribals and amending forest protection laws in favour of the tribals is also recommendable.