

LIVELIHOODS PATTERN OF TIWA TRIBE OF ASSAM: A CASE STUDY.

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study is to examine the livelihood patterns of Tiwa community of Assam. Farming, forest, daily wage earners, service, self-employed and business were major livelihood patterns, with a very low annual income. High level of illiteracy with Tiwa family was a common feature. The households, on an average, owned 1.45 goats, 1.79 cows and 3.68 poultry birds and 0.33 piggeries for their own household purposes such as farm work and food. In order to study the pattern of livelihood diversification Simpson Diversification Index was used. Poor education, low resource base and insufficient infrastructure undermine the livelihood patterns; therefore Tiwa tribal people in the study area deserve special attention for strengthening their livelihoods.

Key words: Livelihood patterns, Tribal, Tiwa, Assam.

Introduction

Scheduled Tribes (STs) predominantly live in the hills of North Eastern Region (as per 2011 census, India) depending on agriculture as their main source of livelihood and income. They are considered to be socially disadvantaged and economically underdeveloped people. Livelihood is the dynamic term with respect to time and place, its meaning vary from place to place and depend upon availability of recourse in particular geographical area, people culture and practice. It is a means of having the basics of life, that is, water, food, cloth, and shelter for making a living that encompasses people's capabilities, assets and income (Chambers 1992). Livelihood diversification is a survival strategy of rural households in developing countries (Ellis, 1999). Diversification may occur either a deliberate household strategy or as an involuntary response to the crisis. Livelihood insecurity, constructed a situation in which current livelihood strategies not able to produce sufficient benefits and are largely compromised in the future which represents an important driver for livelihood diversification in rural economy (Niehof, 2004). Income diversification refers to the composition of household incomes at a given time. In contrast, livelihood diversification interprets this as an active social process whereby households are observed to engage in increasingly complex portfolios of activities over time. In India, majority of agricultural labourers (AL) are drawn from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Sethi, 1984). The rapid changes at the macro level that India witnessed since the early nineties has contributed to the instability of the livelihood pattern of the poorer section of both rural and tribal households. While the benefits of globalisation process have largely accrued to the urban sector growth the tribal and rural sector has not been left behind. The rural non-farm sector has become a major source of livelihood for the poor households. It has become a primary source of income and employment for many of tribal households.

Level of livelihood diversifications among tribal people in India is generally at a low level compared to others. Assam, one of the North Eastern states of India has been found that more than 85 percent population is living in rural area (census, 2011). As per HDI report (2014) among social groups ST have the lowest annually per capita income in Assam and the poverty ratio among them is 40.5 percent. Agriculture is their main source of income but due to primitive nature of agricultural activity and increase in population led to fall in the agricultural production and income of the masses.

The person of Assam is a broad racial inter-mixture of Mongolian, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Iranian and Aryan origin. The hilly tracks of Assam are mostly inhabited by the tribes of Mongolian origin. The Assamese culture is a rich and exotic tapestry of all these races and has evolved over a long assimilative process. Assam's economy is fundamentally based on agriculture. Agriculture sector continues to support more than 75 percent of the State directly or indirectly providing employment of more than 53 percent of the total workforce. Assam occupies a geographical area of 7.8 million hectares of which total cropped area is 4.0 million hectares. However, only 5.4% of the gross cultivated area is irrigated.

Topographically, Assam can be divided into three distinct zones: the Brahmaputra valley or the Brahmaputra plains in the north; the KarbiAnlong and the North Cachar Hills in the middle; and the Barak valley or the Barak plain in the south. Assam is the home of many ethnic groups, sub-ethnic groups, Castes, tribes and different communities. The cultural assimilation of these different groups has made up a distinct Assamese culture. The STs are a major contributor of religious rituals, culture, language, farming and agriculture methods to the State. 2011 Census reveals that 16 numbers of ethnic groups are notified as scheduled castes (SC) and 25 numbers of ethnic groups as scheduled tribes (ST) in Assam with a variation of 22.2 per cent increase of SC and 17.4 per cent of ST than the last census. There are 3884371 tribal people in Assam, constituting 12.46% of Assam's total population (census, 2011). The major tribes of Assam are Bodos, Mising, Karbi, Dimasa, SonwalKachari, Rabha, Tiwa, Deouri etc. The Tiwas are one of the many tribes of Assam. Ethnically they belong to the Monogoloid race. The Tiwa tribe resides in the areas of Assam and Meghalaya. A remarkable peculiarity of the Tiwas is their division into two sub-groups i.e. hill Tiwas and plains dwelling Tiwas. The hill Tiwas reside in the western most area of KarbiAnlong district (Assam) and north-eastern area of Ri-bhoi district (Meghalaya). Plain Tiwas mainly reside in the plains of southern bank of Brahmaputra Valley. Tiwas constitute 5.17% to total tribal population of the state. Out of 1,15,153 ST population (2011, census), total Tiwa population is 58511 i.e. 50.81% of its total tribal population. The worker participation rate among the scheduled tribes in Assam is 44% as against the corresponding figure of 44.6 % of Tiwa population (Census, 2011). Recurring floods mostly in rural and tribal villages of Assam make the life of the rural people very difficult. There is a rich body of empirical studies analysing the livelihood pattern of tribal community. Some important in this context are (Bordoloi, Sharma Thakur & Saikia, 1987), (Chambers, & Gordon Conway. 1991), (Fernandes & Menon 1984), (Roy Burman, 1993), (Siva Prasad & Eswarappa. 2007).

Objectives

- To understand the livelihood pattern of plains dwelling Tiwas.
- To find out the changing pattern of their livelihoods.

Research Methods and Materials

The prime objective of this paper is to know the pattern of livelihood of the Tiwa tribal population of Assam of North East India. The objective of this study was to examine and understand the changing scenario and diversification of livelihood pattern that had gradually taken place amongst the indigenous population of Assam. The data used in this study is divided into two parts- social economic data and household data. To know the correctness of the questionnaire, a pilot survey was also conducted in 2018. One village was selected from each of the selected sample district. The case study was conducted in 2019 in the Plains Tiwa villages under Tiwa Autonomous Council of Assam. Plains Tiwas live on the flatlands of the Southern bank of the Brahmaputra valley. In this study, the respondents were selected from Morigaon, Nagaon, Hojai, Kampur(rural)and (Metro), Lakhimpur and Dhemajidistricts of Assam. These districts were purposively selected because more than 95% Tiwa (plains) population resides in these selected districts of Assam. To better understand how livelihood pattern of this tribal people has been changed with the passage of time and socio-economic condition, the respondents were collected from both rural and urban areas of the selected districts. The collected data were analysed and interpreted with the help of descriptive statistics. In order to study the pattern of livelihood diversification Simpson Diversification Index was used.

Findings and Discussion

Educational attainment is the most significant factor influencing socio-economic condition of any society. The standard of living of any society can be well evaluated with the help of their level of education. In Assam, lack of education is mainly responsible for the exploitation and pitiable plight of tribal. After collecting data from 320 randomly selected family households from the sampled districts, it is found that about 17 % households have not a single literate member in their household which was very unfortunate in this digital time, while less than 5% households have at least one graduate member in their household and about 1.5% households have at least one member who have post graduate and others higher degrees. The results show a backward state of educational attainment of Tiwa people of Assam. It is found from Table 1 that, the average household size is found as 5.1, life expectancy has found as 67.9 years.

Table-1				
Households Level Results	Minimum	Maximum	Average	CV
Family Members	3	13	5.1	0.43
Life expectancy	39.5	88.5	67.9	0.62
Sex Ratio	975	1015	989	0.65
Mean Years of Education above 7 Years Households	2	19	6.2	0.45
Mean Expenditure on Health (monthly)	20	5000	59	0.89
Dependency Ratio	0	3.8	0.85	0.29
Per Capita Land Holding (in acre)	0	11	1.25	0.98
Livestock owned	0	15	0.75	1.21
Per capita Monthly Income (in Rs.)	250	68000	950	0.61

Source: Field Survey.

Sex ratio is 989 females per 1,000 males, while for Assam the corresponding figure in 2011 was 958. It shows the higher level of sex ratio compared to Assam. Dependency ratio was 0.73 which is much higher than the corresponding figure for Assam of 0.61 in 2012–2013 (GoI, 2014). Livestock is an important component of mixed farming system and dependence on livestock as an alternative source of income, is significant. Average size of Livestock has been owned by households are found only unfortunately low at 0.75. Per household land holding is totally insignificant which is found as only 1.25 acre land.

The size of land holdings, which determines the agricultural intensity and agricultural income among the surveyed households, have been found as small and medium in size. Per capita household income (monthly) has been found at Rs. 990. It shows a very low level of standard of living among the Tiwa people. Level of poverty has been found very much present among them.

Livelihoods Pattern

Economic status of a society is significantly associated with livelihoods pattern. Economic status of the households is determined by its economically benefitted activities. So, it is very much important to know the livelihoods pattern and also sustainability of their livelihoods of a community to understand their social and economic well being.

Table-2

Livelihoods	Highest Earners of the Households	Percentage
Agriculture and its related activities	185	57.81
Daily wage earners (both firm and non firm activities)	85	26.56
Services (both government and private)	30	9.38
Business	05	1.56
Self-employed	15	4.69
Total	320	100

Source: Field Survey.

The table 2 shows that the main source of livelihood is agriculture and its related activities. About 58% households have been earning their bread and butter from this primary sector of the economy. Hence, it can be aid that agriculture is the principal means of livelihood of plains Tiwas of Assam. But unfortunately the earnings from this source is found very poor due to lack of use of modern inputs of agriculture such as HYV seeds, necessary fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides and also lack of their knowledge of using fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides in their farming. Above recurrent floods especially across Assam and particularly in Morigaon, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji and Nagaon districts have also created unavoidable problems to do farming activities of those farmers of the said districts of Assam. Another important source of livelihood is found as daily workers as almost 26% is dependent upon this non remunerative economic activities such as working in paddy field of the others, rickshaw puller etc. It means almost 84% households don't have better livelihoods to maintain a decent standard of living. Only about 9% households have

highest earning source from services. Households engaged in deferent kind of businesses are found only at about 1.5% and about 4.5% self-employed as earning source. It reflects the very fact that Tiwas are not involved in business activities. They mostly depend on economically not remunerative activities and hence their living standard are still lagging behind the general masses of the country.

Conclusion

Agriculture sector in terms of percentage of households engaged in cultivation of different crops. It was also observed from the resource base of the tribal households that they were not financially and physically sound and did not have adequate facilities for meeting several basic requirements for a reasonable standard of living. The success of dynamic tribal development depends on factors like improved literacy rate, sustainable socio-economic status, women's empowerment, better health care and other human resources. Therefore, it is much desirable to extend basic amenities, empowering women, enhancing their employment opportunities and providing the transport and communication facilities to tribal households.

For a sustainable livelihood pattern a strong resource base is a pre-requisite and the study revealed that many of the resource base of the tribal households are becoming unproductive and inaccessible. Integrated approach is required to bring back the forest resource to more productive phases. While planning for rejuvenation of forest resources, the preferences and priorities of tribal households should be taken into account. Similarly land is one of the most vital resources for productivity and nutritional security but tribal households are found losing this valuable resource

Tribal economy is affected by poverty of the physical environment, ignorance of efficient technique of exploiting natural resources and lack of capital for investment. Poor education, low resource base and insufficient infrastructure undermine the livelihood patterns; therefore like other tribals, Tiwa tribe in the study area deserves special attention for strengthening their livelihoods. As the socio-economic improvement of the tribals still remains in question in spite of implementation of many developmental projects, the sustainable livelihood approach should adopt to mitigate problems related to development in the region. Investigation on tribal livelihoods necessitates examination of socio-economic settings, the resource base, livelihoods options and supportive systems to make their livelihood economically remunerative and sustainable.

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