ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE NAGAS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RONGMEI NAGAS OF CACHAR DISTRICT, ASSAM

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Abstract

Rongmei – a tribe of north east India and they are mainly inhabited in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland etc.. Due to government tribal policy, the Rongmei of plain districts of Assam do not enjoyed any economic benefit which is enjoyed by the same tribe in other districts and states. They remain backward throughout the year and they practiced a very primitive type of occupation with a much marginalized income. Due to low income they cannot save and they remain under vicious circle of poverty. Due to poverty in most of the cases they cannot manage for education especially in higher education.

Introduction

Cachar district is situated in the southern part of Assam and the district is inhabited by the Bangalis, Manipuri, Bisnupuria and some tribal communities like the Rongmei Nagas, the Hmars, Kuki, Rieng, Mizo, Khasi etc. The main stayed of the economy is agriculture and some agro-based industries. The district itself is surrounded by Barak River and some time we called as Barak Valley. Rongmei also called Ruongmei are found today in the north eastern part of India. They are mainly origin from Manipur (Golmei, 2014). But now they are scattered in different parts of north east and they are mainly concentrated in Cachar district of Assam.

The ancestral home of the Rongmei Naga is in the mountain ranges of Tamenglong district of Manipur and the adjacent mountainous areas of Paren and Haflong. The term Rongmei etymologically "Ruongmei which means southerners" (www. wekepedia). In Barak valley like the other tribal communities the main stayed of their economy is agriculture with Jhum cultivation. Besides these, there are also some families who practiced artisents skill like bamboo, blacksmith, pottery works, bamboo baskets, mats, shields etc.

But now, their pattern of livelihood is changing day by day accordingly their occupational pattern have also changed. Shifting cultivation is still practiced in rural areas but in urban areas it is not possible and they managed with service and business. But still they are very much lagging behind the even the other tribal communities in every angle. Their economy is

46

still very backward and some families have difficult to maintain meal even twice a day. So, the detail stjudy of this community is very important at a micro level. Much have been written about the Nagas in general but it does not reflect the main problems of a small communities like Rongmei. So, the present study is an attempt to highlight the main obstacle of their economic backwardness.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the present study is-

1. To study the economic determinants which stand in the way of their developments
2. To suggest ways and means improvement.

Methodology

In order to study the above study, 50 household have been selected from three villages viz-Fatak Bajar (Silchar), Lakhipur and Sippur where rongei are mostly inhabited. Form silchar town 20 household have been selected randomly and information have been collected regardeing their occupation, income, savings and educational qualification etc. on the other hand, in Lakhipur tawn another 20 household have been selected and n Sippur another 10 household have been selected randomly. In all the sample villages, their economic positions are not same and among the sample villages, Sippur is the most backward areas where no electricity, no proper roads and no proper drinking water.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is keep limited to only the Rongmei tribe in Cachar district of Assam and in particular village Fatak Bajar, Lakhipur town and Sippur village. There are also Rongmei in other district of Assam and the neighboring states of Assam like Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya. But the present study does not cover those areas inhabited by the Rongmei tribe. Moreover, the present study is an attempt to highlight the importance of Rongmei community in a national economy but the political background, social life etc are beyond the scope of the present study.

Population

When we talk of any economic development number of population plays a crucial role. Because, the development of the society depends on number of population. In case of plain districts of Assam, there are numbers of Rongmei since long back. But their community wise population do not appeared in any census after 1971. In the past, economic analysis of Rongmei tribal life received very little attention from the academicians. Only a few scholars have attempted to study the tribal economic problems. Prominent among such economic researches are 'tribal in transition - a socio-economic history of study' by P. J. Go swami, and 'a socio-economic history of south Assam' by Subhas Chatterers.

In Assam, tribes have been classified into schedule tribe (hills) and schedule tribe (plains) (Census of India, 2001). As per the policy of the Government of Assam, if the schedule tribes of the autonomous hill districts reside permanently in the plain districts they are not treated as schedule tribes in the Plains but rather continue to be 'hill tribes in the plains'. Similarly, schedule tribes of plains districts, residing permanently in the hill districts are called 'plains tribes in the hills'. Excluding electoral reservation they are eligible for all economic, educational and employment benefits. In south Assam, tribal communities like the Barman, the Hmar, the Rang, the Hal am, the Tiara, the Kuki, the Naga Rongmei, the Agro, the Khaki, and the Maker have been residing since long.

All these tribes are not getting similar treatment as regards economic, political, and other matters (Go swami, 1995, p. 26). All the hill tribes including the Rongmei of south Assam avail schedule tribe reservation in case of education and employment, and also in case of electoral, they are treated as same with general populations.

48

Table: 1 Distribution of Populations of Tribes in Assam: 1991 and 2001

Serial Number	Name of Tribe	1991	Percentage to the ST population	2001	Percentage to the Schedule Tribe Population	Change in Population between 1991-2001
1.	Chaka	4,187	0.1	2,478	0.0	(-)1709
2.	Dimes	65,009	2.3	11,0976	3.3	45,976
3.	Agro	17,998	0.6	21,112	0.6	3,114
4.	Among	1,638	0.1	256	0.0	(-)1383
5.	Hmar	11,189	0.4	14,460	0.4	3,271
6.	Khaki	11,358	0.4	12,722	0.3	1,364
7.	Any Kuki Tribes	21,883	0.8	28,273	0.8	6,390
8.	Lather	36	0.0	11	0.0	(-)25
9.	Man (Tai speaking)	2,582	0.1	739	0.0	(-)1,814
10.	Any Mizo (Lushai) Tribes	1,031	0.0	2,957	0.0	1926
11.	Maker	285,811	9.9	353,513	10.6	67,702
12.	**Any Naga Tribes**	**15,354**	**0.5**	**21,706**	**0.6**	**6,352**
13.	Pawi	777	0.0	-	-	-
14.	Synching	368	0.0	336	0.0	(-)32
15.	Barman's	13,375	0.5	15,877	0.4	2,502
16.	Boor etc.	1,263,015	44.1	135,2771	40.8	89,755
17.	Doer	35,849	1.2	41,161	1.2	5,312
18.	Ojai	4,582	0.2	1,882	0.0	(-)2,700
19.	Kothari Stonewall	251,725	8.8	235,881	7.1	(-)15,844
20.	Ladling	143,746	5.0	170,622	5.1	26,876
21.	Mach	6,738	0.2	8,997	0.2	2,259
22.	Mire	467,790	16.3	587,310	17.7	119,520
23.	Raba	236,931	8.2	277,517	8.3	40,586
24.	Unclassified/ Generic Tribes.	7,466	0.3	47,013	1.4	39,547
25.	All tribe	2,874,441	-	3,308,570	-	434,129

Sources: Compiled from Data on Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe, Census of India, 1991 and 2001(Office of the Registrar General, Government of India).

In the absence of electoral reservations, however, it is not possible for them to avail any economic benefits implemented specially for schedule tribe. All economic benefits implemented for schedule tribe by the government in south Assam are availed by the schedule tribe (plains) communities.

Household Profile of the Sample Household

A household is the basic unit of the Rongmei economy. The households of the Rongmei tribe of plain districts of Assam are characterized by large number of nuclear families and a small percentage of joint families. Normally they do not have a single family. A majority of the Rongmei's are depending on agriculture for their livelihood. The most common type of agriculture practice is shifting cultivation in the hills. In which scientific method of production like tractors, tilling machine, pump sets etc are not applicable. They used only simple tools like dau, knife, hao, and spade etc for cultivation. They also practice livestock rearing and marketing of horticulture like the other tribes. At the same time they are also engaged in different occupation like private/government service job in government institution and mission school. Small numbers of households are also engaged in hawkers-cum retailers-cum-cloth sellers. The size of land holding also indicates their economic backwardness. Majority of the Rongmei are marginal farmers holding a very insignificance size of land.

As it is seen from table-2 that the present study covers 50 household from 03 Rongmei villages. Among the sample there are 150 males and 145 females and 20 children below the age of 14 year.

Table – 2 Household Profile of Sample Rongmei: 2017

Serial Number	Particulars	Numbers
1.	Number of Sample Villages	03
2.	Number of Sample Households	50.0
3.	Number of Males in the Sample	150.0
4.	Number of Females in the Sample	145.0
5.	Total number of Males and Females in the Sample (3+4)	295.0
6.	Number of Children in the Sample (Below 14 year of age)	20.0
7.	Population (5+6)	315.0

Source: Primary data collected from Field Survey

Occupation

The economy of the Rongmei sample household is very much related with their occupational practice. The sample households who have profitable occupation have comparatively enjoyed a better life. It is important to see the occupation wise distribution of the Rongmei sample household. Accordingly, we made a comparison between the household and their occupation, through exercise in cross-tabulation. It helps us in understanding as to whether a specific type of household has any impact on choice of an occupation (professional) among Rongmei Naga.

In our sample study, there are in total 23 nuclear households. Out of that 13 (26.0 percent) are pure shifting cultivator and about 05.0 (10 percent are shifting cultivator-cum-livestock rarer and the remaining 02.0 (4.0 percent) households are in horticulture marketer and about 03.0 (6.0 percent) households are private/government service job holder.

There are also about 12.0 whose belongs to joint family among Rongmei sample household who are in different occupation. It is found that, 06.0 (12.0 percent) households are pure shifting cultivator and only 01.0 (2.0 percent) households are Local wine seller in the town. Wine seller are mainly found in Silchar and Lakhipur.

Table: 3 Cross Tabulation of Household and Occupation wise Distribution of Sample Rongmei Household: 2014

Serial Number	Type of Households	According to First Classification of Occupations				
		Pure Shifting Cultivator	Local Wine Seller	Horticulture Marketer	Private/ Government Service Job Holders	All Household
1.	Nuclear	13.0 (26.0)	05.0 (10.0)	02.0 (4.0)	3.0 (6.0)	23.0
2.	Joint	06.0 (12.0)	01.0 (2.0)	03.0 (6.0)	02.0 (4.0)	12.0
3.	Extended	07.0 (14.0)	04.0 (8.0)	02.0 (4.0)	02.0 (4.0)	15.0
4.	All Occupations	26.0	10.0	07.0	07.0	50.0

Source: Primary data collected from Field Survey

The remaining 03.0 (6.0 percent) are in horticulture marketer and 02.0 (4.0 percent) are private/government service job holder. In an extended household, about 07.0 (14.0 percent) are pure shifting cultivator and 04.0 (8.0 percent) each of the extended households are Local

wine seller and 02.0 (4.0 percent) are horticulture marketer and 02.0 (4.0 percent) are private/government service job holder. It means that majority of the Rongmei households are pure shifting cultivator and the highest percentage belong to joint households.

Income, Savings

In our study, we find that income of the Rongmei's are very low which is not sufficient for savings. The low level of income is mainly due to traditional occupations which results in low savings. The low level of income and savings among the Rongmei tribe are one of their economic backwardness. In most of the cases their income is not sufficient for savings. Only government employees among the sample Rongmei households have savings in terms of Life Insurance Corporation (LIC). They are therefore dependent upon credit. The study also found that, maximum credit requirements of Rongmei sample household comes from private money lender and only a small requirements of credit is bone by financial institution. Though interest charge is low in financial institutions, but requires security in terms of individual land documents, service documents which are not available to majority of the Rongmei. Added with these, majority of the Rongmei engaged in service are also a fourth grade employees and temporary. Majority of them are in sweeper, toilet cleaner in the hospital and different offices.

Table: 4 Monthly Average Income of the Sample Household:2017

SL. No	Level of Income in rupees	No. of Household	Percentage to the total household
1	Up to 5000	22	44.0
2	5001 to 10,000	14	28.0
3	10.001 to 15,000	09	18.0
4	15, 001 to 20,000	4	08.0
5	20,001 and above	01	02.0
Total		50	100.0

Source: Primary data collected from Field Survey

Among the 50 sample households, 22 households (44.0 percent) are having monthly income less than rupees 5000 and 14 households (28.0 percent) have monthly income ranges from rupees 5001 to 10, 000. There are also 09 sample households (18.0 percent) whose income is ranges from rupees 10,001 to 15,000 and 04 households (08.0 percent) have income in between rupees 15,001 to 20,000. Only a single household is found having monthly income rupees 20,001 and above. It is evident from the table that due to low level of occupation majority of them have a very low income which is not sufficient for savings.

52

Poverty

Poverty is an important indicator when we talk of economic status of any society. It is defined as a social phenomenon in which a section of the society is unable to fulfill even its basic necessities of life. When a substantial segment of a society is deprived of the minimum level o living and continues at a bare substance level, that society is said to be plagued with mass poverty. Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society such as lack of enough food to feed and lack of clothe in a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living in marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation. According to World Bank, poverty is pronounced as deprivation in well-being, and comprises many dimensions. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life. In short poverty is characterized by lack of minimum levels of living and basic necessities of life. In the present study, we identify the household living below poverty to those household who have Below Poverty Line Card (BPL Card) which is issued by the government of Assam and among them 38 (76.0 percent) Households have BPL Card it means that more than half of the household are living below poverty line which is above all India ST population 47.1 rural in the year 2009-10 recorded by Planning Commission Government of India.

Concluding Remarks

It is evident from the above studies that due to negligence from the part of the government that the Rongmei Naga including all the Scheduled Tribe (Hills) in plain districts of Assam are more distress than the other tribes in India. Most of the tribals in north east have their own state/districts. But the Rongmei of North East does not have any state/districts so far in India. Especially in the plain districts of Assam, the Rongmei do not enjoy any economic which is enjoyed by the Rongmei in other parts of north eastern state and they themselves are managed with a very low and primitive type of occupation. Consequently, their income is lower than the tribal living in other parts of the region which is not sufficient for savings. Due to poor occupational choice their income is not only low but most of them

53

are under the clutches of money lender and the number of households living below poverty line is more than 76.0 percent as per sample survey. It the government either state or central do not change their tribal policy by providing scheduled tribe facilities to the Rongmei of plain districts in near future, their economic status will remain behind the other Rongmei living in different regions.

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