LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION OF DIFFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS IN AGRICULTURE: A CASE STUDY IN MORIGAON DISTRICT OF ASSAM

Dr. Chakradhar Deka.

Assistant Professor, Department of Geography,
Charaibahi College, Morigaon, Assam.

INTRODUCTION

Morigaon district is a traditionally backward agrarian region which is constituted by the people of different social groups, viz., indigenous general group of people including both Hindu and Muslim, indigenous scheduled tribes including both Hindu and Christian, indigenous scheduled caste belonging to Hindu and immigrant Muslim.

These social groups living in different regions of the district have different attitudes towards agricultural operation. The size of operational holdings is also different among the groups. Generally majority of the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes have operational holdings of small sizes. There are also significant variations in the sizes of operational holdings among the groups. The nature of agriculture of these groups is still primitive subsistence type in the district, though among the rich people who have large area under cultivation, innovation in agriculture is brought about. On the other hand, the immigrants Muslims with even their small land holdings under cultivation have introduced some commercial crops like jute, vegetables, etc. They intensively cultivate the land using fertilizer, irrigation, H.Y.V. of seeds, etc. and, therefore, productivity is high.

The district is mainly characterised by rural landscape. Agriculture is the backbone of the economy of the district and is the main occupation of the people of the study region. More than 80% of the total labour force is directly engaged in agriculture which reduces the sizes of operational holdings. The cropping intensity and crop diversification are also different among the various social groups. The productivity of soil and irrigational facilities are also different from region to region within the district. Therefore, it is necessary to study the attitudes of different social group towards the agricultural development of Morigaon district in order to formulate strategies for agricultural development on the basis of community and space relation.

Therefore, the study has not only academic value, it will also help the planners to adopt separate plans and programmes for different social groups inhabiting in different regions. This will help to minimize the socio-spatial variation of agricultural development in the study area.

THE STUDY REGION

The present Morigaon district, centrally located in the state of Assam, covering 16 mouzas was upgraded from sub-division to a new district carving out of the old Nagaon district in 1989. It is bounded by the mighty Brahmaputra and Darrang district in the north, Nagaon district in the east, Karbi-Anglong and Meghalaya in the south and Kamrup district in the west and south-west.

Its landmass extends between 26º 2′ 24″ N and 26º 28′ 12″ N latitudes and between 91º 58′ 57″ E and 92º 34′ 48″ E longitudes. The total geographical area of the district is 1559 sq. km. accounting for 1.99 percent of the state's total geographical area. According to 2011 census, the total population of the district is 957,423 of which 50.83 percent are males and 49.17 percent are females.

The greater part of the district is covered with highly fertile alluvial plain. Rice, jute, tomato, cabbage, sweet potato, etc. are the main crops. Many small scale industries are also present in the district. The district has three reserve forests – Sonaikuchi, Kholahat and Bura-Mayang. Pabitara is the famous wild life sanctuary of the district.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives of the present study are as follows:

(i) To identify the spatial variation of people's participation in agriculture,

(ii) To analyse the level of participation of different social groups of the district in agricultural activities. .

DATA BASE AND METHODOLOGY

The primary data are collected from the field study by the researcher. The secondary data have been abstracted from the census record (2011), Agricultural office and Economic and Statistical office of Morigaon district. The data and information thus collected are processed, tabulated, analysed and interpreted by using a specific set of statistical tools and techniques to establish the reality of the facts.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In an agrarian district like Morigaon, the agricultural land and the population are inseparably correlated. Agriculture is the basis of economic structure of the district, where 73.82 percent of the total population are directly engaged in agricultural

activities. The annual growth of population has exerted ever increasing pressure on land. As a result agricultural density in relation to the available land has been increasing. The table 1 shows a clear picture of agricultural density in different mouzas.

The table 1 shows that the agricultural density as a whole of the district is 7.68 persons per hectare as against the general density of 6.72 persons per hectare. This shows that the district is purely agrarian and most of the people earn their livelihood by tilling land.

Among the mouzas, the highest agricultural density is found in Moirabari mouza where the density is 14.46 persons per hectare as against the general density of 14.19 persons per hectare. This clearly shows that in the Moirabari mouza, which is dominated by immigrant Muslim community who are traditionally cultivators and a large number of peasants are engaged in agricultural activities. The second highest agricultural density is found in two mouzas *i.e*. Charaibahi mouza (9.82 persons per hectare), and Bhuragaon with 9.82 persons per hectare. The lowest agricultural density is found in Bokani mouza with 3.80 persons per hectare whereas the general population density is 3.80 persons per hectare.

Table 1
AGRICULTURAL DENSITY OF MORIGAON DISTRICT, 2011

Mouzas	Geographical Area in hectares	Total Population	Density of population per hectare	Net cropped Area in hectares	Agricultural Population	Agricultural Density per hectare
Dandua	6517.88	37,670	5.78	5352.28	32121	6.00
Morigaon	7183.90	65,579	9.13	5792.03	32085	5.54
Tetelia	9687.46	31,838	3.23	6631.46	26859	4.05
Uttarkhola	11907.48	64,927	5.45	7508.91	55330	7.37
Charaibahi	5168.08	44,034	8.52	3936.39	38640	9.82
Mikirbheta	5370.94	38,837	5.37	3871.27	30097	7.77
Silpukhuri	8026.51	54,342	6.77	5120.53	46384	9.06
Laharighat	13301.58	1,27,391	9.58	9980.17	95823	9.60
Moirabari	8895.51	1,26,227	14.19	6291.66	90997	14.46
Bhuragaon	10076.96	85,539	8.49	5991.39	58836	9.82
Bokani	11141.47	37,894	3.40	7567.25	28770	3.80
Gova	9176.31	77,227	8.42	4739.69	43511	9.18
Manaha	8618.92	43,463	5.04	4561.34	35868	7.86
Mayang	9463.66	43,897	4.64	4393.69	34414	7.83
Niz-Ghagua	5463.03	27,067	4.95	3934.39	20622	5.24
Pokaria	9533.18	51,491	5.40	6338.55	36443	5.75
District	142532.87	9,57,423	6.72	92011	706800	7.68

Source: Calculated from census data 2011, date collected from Agricultural office of Morigaon District and Economic and statistical office of Morigaon.

From the study, it becomes clear that the highest concentration of farmers over cultivable land is found in Moirabari mouza, because of the fact that agriculture is the single occupation. On the other hand, the Bokani (3.80 persons per hectare) and Tetelia (4.05 persons per hectare) mouzas show very low agricultural density. The Bokani mouza suffers every year from flood. On the other hand, Tetelia mouza is covered by small hills and hillocks which are not suitable for agriculture. Since both the general density and agricultural density in these two mouzas are low, people need not move to other occupations.

As stated earlier, the district is dominated by four major communities scattering over all the mouzas of the district. The field study reveals that there is variation in the size of operational land holdings among the different social groups. The average size of total land holding and the total operational holding of the district are found to be1.72 hectares and 1.46 hectares respectively.

So far the social groups are concerned; the schedule tribe people possess the highest average size of total landholding and also highest average size of operational landholding with 2.05 hectares and 1.69 hectares respectively. It is followed by indigenous general population with 1.81 hectares and 1.55 hectares respectively. The immigrant Muslim community posses 1.67 hectares and 1.5 hectares in both the cases respectively. The average size of total landholdings and total operational holdings are lowest among the scheduled caste community with 1.30 hectares and 1.03 hectares respectively (Table 2). As the former three communities in the rural areas are mainly engaged in primary occupation, their sizes of landholdings and operational holdings are not of economic size. On the other hand , though the scheduled caste people are engaged in primary occupation, they are not traditionally cultivators. They are more interested in fishing, pottery making or such types of activities. So, their extremely small sizes are not of much concerned.

Table 2
LANDHOLDING STRUCTURE, MORIGAON DISTRICT
Including Surveyed Villages
(Based on field Survey)

Community	No. of Villages Surveyed	No. of land holding	Total land holding area (in hectares)	Total operational area (in hectares)	Average size of land holding (in hectares)	Average size of operational land holding (in hectares)
Indigenous General	8	80	144.52	123.72	1.81	1.55
Immigrant Muslim	7	70	116.67	105	1.67	1.50
Scheduled Tribe	8	70	143.43	118.42	2.05	1.69
Scheduled Cast	5	60	78	61.6	1.30	1.03
District	28	280	482.62	408.74	1.72	1.46

Source: Calculated on the basis of the primary data collected from the field

Table 3
LANDHOLDING STRUCTURE, MORIGAON DISTRICT
(Based on field Survey)

Community	Total Owned Land (in hectares)	Total Cultivated area (in hectares)	Cultivated owned land (in hectares)	Total own land as percentage of total land holding area	Total cultivated area as percentage of total land holding area	Cultivated owned land as percentage of total owned land	Cultivated owned land as percentage of total cultivated area
Indigenous General	148.04	123	113.96	102.44	85.11	76.98	92.65
Immigrant Muslim	108.56	102.98	85.81	93.05	88.27	79.04	83.33
Scheduled Tribe	139.16	112.51	101.73	97.02	78.44	73.10	90.42
Scheduled Cast	74.54	63.94	51.51	95.56	81.97	69.10	80.56
Total	470.30	402.43	353.01	97.45	83.38	75.06	87.72

Source: Calculated on the basis of the primary data collected from the field

It is also observed that the total owned land as percentage of total landholding areas varies from community to community. Among the social groups, the indigenous general people have the highest (102.44) percentage of it and the lowest (93.05) percent in the case of the immigrant Muslim community. The indigenous general people generally lease out lands, and hence, it makes the percentage of owned land higher than the area of their operational landholdings. On the other hand, immigrant people lease-in lands. That is why their percentage of owned land to the total operational landholding is less in comparison to the other communities. It is 97.02 percent and 95.56 percent in the case of schedule tribe and scheduled caste community respectively. The total cultivated area as percentage of the total landholding area is highest (88.27 percent) in the immigrant Muslim inhabitated villages and lowest in the case of the scheduled tribe communities. It is mainly because of the fact that the immigrants Muslims are traditionally agriculturalists. They do not like to prefer to keep any plot of their agricultural land fallow. On the other hand, the percentage of fallow land among the tribal community is more because they participate in such allied activities of agriculture, such as poultry farming, cattle rearing, pig farming etc., which can compensate their poor income from small size of agricultural fields. The cultivated owned land as percentage of the total owned land is almost same as in the case of total cultivated areas as percentage of total landholding area (Table 3)

The cultivated owned land as percentage of total cultivated area is the highest (92.65 percent) in the case of the indigenous general community. It is relatively lower both in the immigrant and scheduled caste communities. It means that the indigenous general people have a tendency to cultivate their owned land more than leased-in lands whereas the immigrant and scheduled caste communities have no sufficient amount of land to cultivate. The people of the scheduled caste community are not traditionally cultivators. They earned their livelihood by selling their traditional products or by fishing. However, for the large scale supply of comparatively less expensive factory products, their crafts are almost dying out and thus they have turned to agriculture for their livelihood. Therefore, the people of these two communities are compelled to cultivate in the lands of other communities also.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis shows that there is a spatial disparity and community wise variation in the rate of participation in agriculture. The people of indigenous general community are engaged more in service sector than the other three communities. So, the participation of this community in agricultural sector is the lowest as compared to other communities. Among the people

of immigrant Muslims community there are two classes of peasants, *i.e.* one is owner cultivators and the other landless agricultural labourers. The farmers with the help of the latter cultivated the land more intensively than the other three communities. They are traditionally cultivators, hardworkers and thus give more attention to agricultural development. Though a high proportion of the people of scheduled tribe community are engaged in agriculture which is still subsistence, they are not able to generate sufficient return to run their family smoothly. The people of scheduled caste community are traditionally artisans and craftsmen, but the decaying of these traditional activities due to the competitive market, they are compelled to turn agriculture. Therefore, development of agriculture is not still expectable.

Thus, the agricultural practices in different regions inhabited by different communities are different according to their socio-cultural traits. Therefore, separate planning strategies should be adopted for each community. In the case of indigenous general community extension of irrigation facilities and modern inputs should be provided, so that at least some of the educated youths may be attracted towards agriculture. Since the people of immigrant Muslims community are generally laborious and hardworkers, therefore, real agricultural development among them can be made possible by providing infrastructural facilities and modern inputs. In the case of scheduled tribe peasants, extension of education and training facilities should be provided so that they can turn their interest from growing only food crops to adopt innovative measures for growing multiple crops. Like the scheduled tribe peasants, in the case of scheduled caste community also, the extension of education facilities should be provided so that they can develop their traditional occupation as well as agricultural activities.

REFERENCES

Das, M.M., 1992-93. *Landholding structure in Assam, a case study in representative villages,* North-Eastern Geographer, Vol. 24, No.1&2, pp 4-17.

Deka, C., 2008, *Pattern of Agricultural Development and Occupational Mobility in Morigaon district of Assam,* An unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, Gauhati University, Guwahati.