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RURAL LIFE, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND DYNAMICS OF LIVELIHOOD: A CASE STUDY OF AN AGRARIAN VILLAGE IN ASSAM

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Abstract

The rural life surrounds around agriculture, farming and people with different cultural backgrounds. The river is been continuously changing the landscape of the areas nearby. Naltali is a village which has been going on transformation in terms of livelihood. The village has been changing due to some external forces both political and social leading in the change of the land use pattern and agricultural dynamics. The paper is therefore an attempt to investigate the present socioeconomic status and changing nature of rural life and livelihood in village, called Naltali in Naga on district of Assam. The village is inhabited by indigenous non-tribal Assamese people. The village is surveyed through interaction with the local people and focus group discussion has been conducted. A household survey covering the entire families of the village was conducted with a purposively designed schedule to generate first hand data and information for the purpose.

Introduction

The river Brahmaputra erodes away large areas of villages every year at the time of flood. The active flood plain areas are highly affected by flood and its impact can also see in those areas far away from the river. The floodplain villages were once occupied by forest and vegetation and hardly any people resided there. Gradually people from different areas started moving to these places, cleared the land for agriculture and thus evolve settlement. Migration continued even after permanent settlement in search for better opportunities for livelihood. These livelihood opportunities amalgated people from different cultural background and thus diversification of livelihood took place. Our study focus on a small flood plain village located on west part of the Brahmaputra river. The role of river, its impact is more or less significant. The village has a subsistence economy and mainly depends on agriculture. But with the influx of people from different cultural background there has been a diversification in economy. With the increase in

globalization and localization the demand of rural market has increased. Many of the local products have been sold in different areas of the country. People no longer stick to farming activities and has utilized their land for various non farming activities. Since the formation of the village, people have been continuously dealing with the shock and stresses of the environment. Although these adaptive strategies enable people to cope with the stress of the environment but for a sustainable economy, people required to depend more on utilization of the local resources. The local resources are less utilized due to change in the mindset of the young generation. Therefore there has been a shift in the economy from primary and secondary activities to tertiary activities. The study Rural Life, Socioeconomic Status And Dynamics Of Livelihood: A Case Study Of An Agrarian Village In Assam. is therefore undertaken to observe the status of the village life and the livelihood dynamics of the people living in Naltali village.

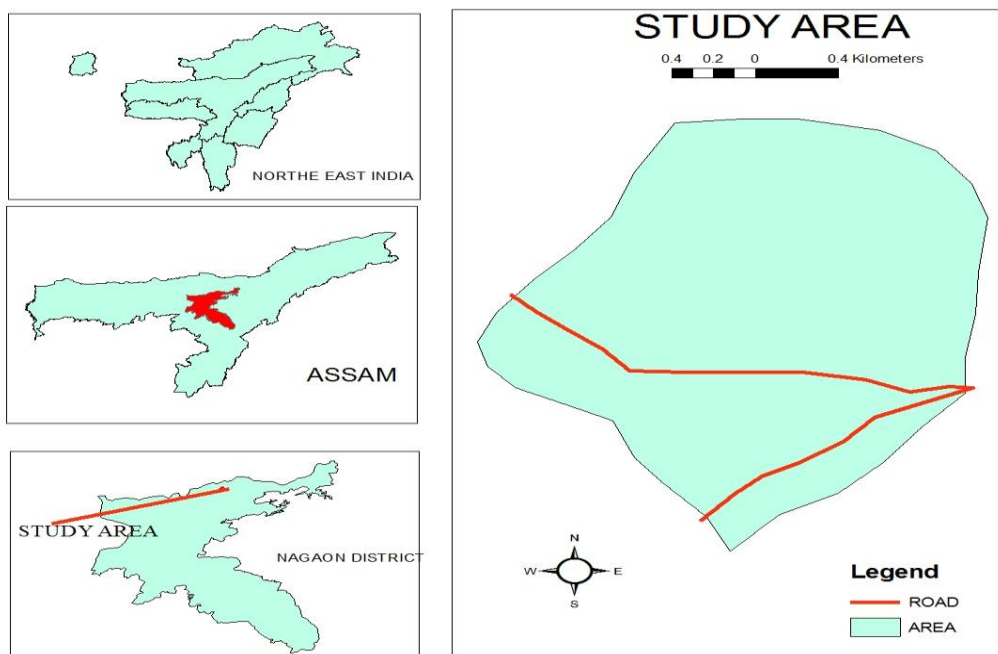
Objectives

- 1) To observe the present socioeconomic status of the village
- 2) To analyse the rural life and the livelihood dynamics of the village people.

Database and Methodology

The study is mainly based on primary survey and secondary data are collected from various sources such as questionnaire survey books, journals, articles published and unpublished works internet and from various offices. To collect the primary data we conduct a questionnaire survey for that we have selected some household based on systematic random sampling technique. Both qualitative and quantitative parameters have been used to carry out the whole study successfully. We collected cadastral maps of the village from Kaliabor Revenue circle office and collected censuses data from primary census abstract. By using Microsoft excel and word we have processed and analyzed the data. We have also used GIS technique for preparation of map.

Fig : 1 Locational map of Naltali village



The village has a north south extension of 9 km towards north it is bounded by Kotiasapori and silghat areas towards east by the Bhumuraguri regions and its south and west side is flanked by Kuhimari and Dolapani areas. The village is located on the left bank of the Brahmaputra river, 8 miles south from the Tezpur town. The village is called Naltoli because of the production of too much nal kosu in these regions. But later when people started doing agriculture these were replaced by other crops. The village is 126 years old and is a part of the Nagaon district. The village has changed a lot since the earthquake of 1897. Since time, people came and settled here due to different livelihood opportunities from adjoining areas of Satia, Jammuguri.

Nal and Domonti people came here and resided so the place has got its name from it as Naltali. The village is dominated by mainly Assamese people but many traces of Bengali and Nepali speaking people are also observed towards west Naltali region. Although there is a cultural difference observed but people have a common source of livelihood i.e. agriculture. This is a small village having total of 3127 bigha land of which 36 bigha is agricultural land and 912 bigha is settlement. The total population of the village is 2557 and the no. of household in the village is 572. The local language of the people is Assamese.

Table1 : Population table showing percentage of literacy and worker

Year	Total Population	% of male literacy	% of female literacy	% of male worker	% of female worker
1971	1441	62.18	37.81	99.11	0.88
1991	2028	60.48	39.60	92.77	7.22
2001	2311	57.86	42.13	87.42	12.57
2011	2557	53.76	46.23	89.25	10.74

Source: Primary census abstract.

The total population of the village has been increasing from 1971 onwards, either through birth or migration. But the percentage of female worker is comparatively less than the male workers. Although it has increased with time but the growth percentage is very less. The 10-12% of female workers is mainly through agriculture and activities like weaving.

Village life

Agriculture is the main occupation of the people in these regions. Both male and female population goes to the field and works for the whole day. They either cultivate in their own land or they give their own land to their neighbours or other people in the village for production. The role of women cannot be denied here because they do both the household and field work together. Many of them are financially independent by opening some small (goot) consisting of 10-20 members under which they make a lot of assamese items from local ingredients and sell them together in nearby areas. Although it is not a growing industry but it is a helping hand in running their life. Moreover every household has a (ttat-khal) where they weave asomiya mekhela chadar, gamucha and sell them within their village. These agricultural fields are endowed with mostly paddy and jute. However crops like cabbage, potato, mustard oil and even tea is done in small scale mainly for subsistence purpose, if any year there is a surplus they used to sell them in the local market or else some brokers takes away to some adjoining market areas like sullung where they get a better price for these items. Paddy and jute crops are cultivated by each household and they have a small house made of bamboo known

as locally (bhoral ghor) and the jute is stacked within the house at a particular corner. The village people are poor and not highly adaptable to new technologies so until they are provided by the government with good financial support and proper steps to use these technologies it is farsight for the village people. The source of water to the village is through handpumps and well. The water level is also at a good height for easy procurement of water. Moreover people have pond near their house apart from it the village lake is the only fresh water body but these is also not used for domestic purposes. The village has a dense settlement and there is combination of brick and bamboo houses. Electricity is not a problem in the village. Villagers get their daily requirements from the nearby shops. Moreover some families own cattle which is another base of their dependence. Mostly the Nepali and Bengali keep cow and goats but this is observed less among the Assamese people. Milk is not sold commercially and is used for subsistence only. Education facilities are mainly confined to primary schools and a large no. of anganwadis have developed.

There is less amount of health facilities in the village although there is a PHC in the area but necessary amount of medical facilities are not provided there. People have to move to Kaliabar and Tezpur for better medical facilities. There is one visiting doctor who comes to the village once in a month. People generally apply local medicines obtained from nature and thus treat themselves on own.

Results and Discussion

Process of peopling

The process of people migrating from one villages to other or from faraway places took place with search of better livelihood and opportunities. Earlier people used to migrate due to the effects of flood but the reasons have changed with time. People now have adapted themselves to these flood hazards but the imbalance in opportunities in some areas over other is the main cause of migration. Naltali is a market centre and people here come to from different villages to work as laborers in agricultural fields, to sell products in the market at greater prices and for some good education facilities. People from this village also have moved from here to other areas in search of employment and for better education. Though the percentage is very negligible in comparison to other villages, but these processes have increased since time.

Table 1.1 : Migration of people in Naltali village in different year

YEAR	Religion/Caste	Purpose	Places from where people migrated
1890	Assamese people	Hunting and travelling	From satia and different places of Kaliabor
1897	Assamese people	Due to spread of diseases	Satia, Tezpur areas
1990	Assamese people	Farm activities	Borbhugia and Kaliabor
2000	Some Bengali and Nepali	Business purpose	Other villages of Nagaon

The table shows the purpose and places from where people migrated to different areas. Many Assamese, Bengali and Nepali people migrated to these areas from adjoining areas of Natali village.

Present socioeconomic status of the village

The village people are mainly depended on agriculture. Agriculture being the base other activities have grown side by side. People are engaged in non farming activities and thus they have shifted to services and business. Agriculture has a command over all the other activities. Some people are engaged in business and services but the percentage is less. Moreover there are labourers working in agricultural fields and nursery beds. These plants from nurseries are sold to faraway places and thus they require good care but the workers are less. People who are educated have also started a small business. Apart from the male counterparts the female are seen working in the agricultural fields and they have started their own business through weaving clothes and selling them. Moreover every women are involved in some goot from where they collectively make food items like pitha, laddoo, pickle(assamese items) and sell it to other people nearby. Among the Bengali and Nepali community people these are less observed they work in agricultural fields and keep cows and ducks and thus run their family.

Table 1.2 : Occupational structure of the village

Year	% of cultivators			% of workers in Household industry			% of workers in other activity		
	Percent	Male	Female	Percent	Male	Female	Percent	Male	Female
2001	25.70	27.74	8.69	3.62	3.92	1.08	38.66	37.5	47.82
2011	36.75	40.66	9.61	4.11	3.31	9.61	36.88	39.0	22.11

Dynamics of Livelihood

The main source of livelihood is agriculture, although people are also involved in other nonfarm activities. For firewood, village people get it from the trees, some people also buy it from local people. Many people have opened shops in front of their home. Some other goes to the nearby Kaliabor market for selling their crops.



Plates 1 : Daily market area of Naltali village

A negligible section of the people migrate to other areas for better opportunities but the rest of them have engaged themselves in their own villages. Other sources of livelihood are like wood cutting, furniture making business, labour. Although the farmers are less educated but this doesnot hamper in the amount of production as because they have good knowledge of land. Some people from areas like Sonitpur, Nagaon, Marigaon works as labourer in the village mainly in nurseries. Cultivation of strawberries is rare fruit cultivation observed in the village. These nurseries are done in green houses where the seedlings are taken proper care of. They are sold to people in faraway places. They work as a care takers of these nurseries and send a sum of money to their homes for sustaining their family. Sometimes local people give tem land and allow them to make their own houses and stay there after a particular time interval. Cultivation here is mainly disturbed by monkeys and fox. These monkeys were less earlier but a large amount of monkeys were freed by forest department in these areas, due to which the production yield has declined. People donot cultivate much rather than the major crops. The local people have utilized their environment to a large extent and so are environmentally sustainable. They make brooms of bamboo, from local trees gives them wood from which they make furniture, moreover the trunk of the coconut tree is even used as local chairs in many households. Many types of medicinal herbs moreover can be seen such as aparijita, trifola.

Conclusion

The village has a subsistence economy, agriculture been highly significant. But from last 10 years with rapid change in economy there has been diversification of livelihood opportunities. People are less interested towards agriculture and more on non farming activities. These have led to under utilization of the fertile land. Moreover much land has been seen bare without growing any crops.

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