

Social Change and Development

A Journal of OKD Institute of Social Change and Development

Vol. XXI, No. 1

January

2024

Contents

Articles

Finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions in North East India: An Evaluation 1-24
K. Vanlalhrualtuanga and Sumarbin Umdor

Rural Employment, Public Policy and COVID-19 Pandemic: A Study of Least Developed Districts of India 25-43
Rajdeep Singha

Rise and Fall of Ethnonationalist Armed Movement in Assam: A Diachronic Narrative of the Assamese Nationality and its Systemic Insecurity 44-66
Dilip Gogoi

Skill Development Trainings and Its impact on Employment and Livelihood Status: A Study on Tribal Youths in Tripura 67-86
Sukanti Roy, Ariful Hoque and Subhrabaran Das

Households' Choice for Tourism Occupations: A Study in Kaziranga and Manas National Parks of Assam 87-101
Pranjal Protim Buragohain and Jitu Saikia

A Study of the Influence of Livelihood Assets on Household Poverty of the Rubber Growers in Assam 102-119
Dibyangana Chakraborty

Book Review

Looking Back to the Context of Political History of Assam 120-125
Akshay Jyoti Sarma

OKDISCD

Finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions in North East India: An Evaluation

K. Vanlalhrualtuanga¹ and Sumarbin Umdor²

Abstract

Finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India primarily comprise of intergovernmental transfer from higher-tier governments through grants and funds allocated by Union and State Finance Commissions. PRI units across different states of India also have a common issue of mobilising resources from their own sources within their jurisdiction. Our study offers an insight into the present situation on the finances of PRIs across the eight states of North East India (NEI) using secondary data mainly covering the 13th, 14th and 15th Finance Commission award periods. The study found the persistence of PRIs' dependence on grants and the low level of revenue generation in NEI. The study also presents a case study comparing the finances of selected PRIs before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting their finances at the grassroots level. Based on the study's observation, suggestions are made to help PRIs become more financially independent institutions.

Introduction

The finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), including the primary model of local government in rural India, mainly revolves around the volume and nature of grants and other financial assistance from higher-level governments with meagre revenue of their own. The grants they received from the Union Finance Commissions (UFCs) and State Finance Commissions (SFCs) are utilised mainly for administrative purposes, with less to spare for developmental activities. Their revenue-generating capacity is also inhibited by their limited taxing capacity and probably because they are closer to the subjects they are levying from. The high revenue dependency of PRIs on the higher tiers of governments persisted within the past three decades across India. The PRIs in North East India (NEI) are no exception from this issue.

¹ Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Economics, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong - 793022, Meghalaya, India, E-mail: kvltuanga@gmail.com

² Professor, Department of Economics, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong - 793022, Meghalaya, India, E-mail: sumdor11@gmail.com

Our study explores and evaluates the finances of PRIs across the eight states of NEI, highlighting the volume of grants from UFCs and SFCs and the level of their own revenue and expenditure. We also conducted a case study analysing the finances of selected PRIs before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study affirms and presents evidence on the inevitable role of grants and the low level of own generation on the finances of PRIs in NEI. It uses secondary data, including UFC and SFC reports, studies commissioned by UFCs, data from the PRIs accounting database *eGramSwaraj*, government documents and other related studies.

The subsequent sections of the paper are arranged in the following manner. Section 2 reviews the literature on PRI finances across India. Section 3 briefly describes different models of local government existing in the NEI. Section 4 presents the grants received by PRIs in NEI from UFCs and devolution by SFCs to local governments (including urban bodies). Section 5 gives an account of the own revenue generation and expenditure of PRIs in NEI. Section 6 presents the case study of selected PRIs before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, Section 7 gives concluding observations and suggestions.

Review of Literature

PRIs have three primary sources of finance. They are i) grants from the central and state governments, ii) own sources of revenue and iii) funding under different central schemes. The central and state government grants are further clubbed into two broad heads: (a) tied (special purpose) grants and (b) untied (general purpose) grants (Reddy & Mohapatra, 2022). The two critical issues with the devolution of funds to PRIs include the heavy reliance of PRIs on the grants of Union and State Finance Commissions and the diversion of sanctioned grants (Sarma, 2018).

Several studies feature PRIs' revenue dependency, defined as the share of grants in PRIs' total income, indicating the extent to which local governments rely on the central and state governments and higher-level local bodies for expenditure needs (Jha, 2004). A study by Panth and Bohra (1995) highlighted that the grants from central and state governments form the primary source of finance, comprising 95 per cent in Maharashtra, 90 per cent in Andhra Pradesh and more than 75 per cent in Bihar, Gujarat and West Bengal. They argued that to strengthen PRIs, it is essential to give them fiscal autonomy by reducing the share of grants in the total receipts and increasing the share of revenue through their own collection. They also supported the recommendation of the Santhanam Committee, suggesting that, for effective development planning, the grants given by the state government to the PRIs should be a consolidated one. Chaudhuri (2003) also observes that revenue dependency was high in most states, with Haryana, Kerala and Punjab being the exceptions. Other studies also discussed the dependency of Panchayats on central and state government grants (Behar & Kumar, 2002; Jha, 2004; Alok, 2009; Oommen, 2015; Sarma, 2017; Reddy et al., 2021)

There have been interesting observations regarding the effects of grants. Jha (2004) postulated that if the component of untied grants is large in total grants, it may even be desirable to have a high revenue dependency until the revenue generation capacity of PRIs increases. On the other hand, a study by Rajaraman and Vasishtha (2000) regarding the rural local governments in Kerala found no empirical evidence, except for one district that suggests the redistributive nature of the distribution formula for untied grants between Panchayats within a district to compensate for low taxable capacity. In this respect, there is also an often discussed issue of the “flypaper effect”, an empirical finding for sub-national governments that lump sum grants increase expenditure more than equivalent increases in voter incomes (Fisher, 1982; Turnbull, 1992 and Hines & Thaler, 1995). A study by Oommen (2015) analysed 24 GPs in Kerala for the years 2012-13 and 2013-14 and concluded that an increase in grants has not adversely affected their tax efforts, and thus there is no flypaper effect in these GPs. Previously Oomen et al. (2007) also concluded that grants seem to enhance, not crowd out, own source revenues and hypothesised that local governments utilise grants efficiently to stimulate economic activity and collection. In this regard, Rao (2011) opined that the hypothesis does not make much sense in a situation where sub-national governments raise very little revenue through taxes, like in the case of local governments in India, since the prospect of replacing own taxes for transfers does not exist.

It is also evident that PRIs’ own revenue is low across the country, and many of them struggle with revenue mobilisation. In 1962, The Government of India formed the Santhanam Committee to study problems of resources and finances of PRIs in different states which pointed out the deplorable failure in collecting taxes and dues on the part of the PRIs. According to the committee, the difficulty seems to be due to proximity which means that the closer the tax-levying body is to the people, the greater the reluctance of local bodies to assess and collect taxes (Panth&Bohra,1995). Bagchi and Ghosh (2004) found that own revenue accounted for only as low as five per cent of the total revenue of Panchayats in West Bengal in 1997-98. A study by Babu (2009) on the revenue position of PRIs in 15 major states of India during 1997-98 and 2002-03 also found that in almost all the states, the own revenue (tax and non-tax) in their total revenue was very negligible. He also pointed out that the own revenues of PRIs are mostly accrued from gram panchayats, indicating that taxation powers are given to lower-tier Panchayats in most states. Several other studies also presented the low own-source revenue generation of PRIs (Jha, 2004; Chaudhuri, 2003; Jena & Gupta, 2008; Datta, 2009; Mohapatra, 2013; Reddy & Mohapatra, 2022).

The twin issue of revenue dependency and the difficulty of raising the own revenue of PRIs have also been a matter of concern in the North East states. In Assam, the Fourth State Finance Commission Report (2011) points out that a sizeable amount of funds allocated to the rural local bodies barely meet the remuneration needs of the PRIs, and almost nothing is left to meet the developmental needs of the rural areas. It implies that no significant resources are mobilised apart from grants from the higher tiers of government. Between 2010-11 to 2014-15, Government of India

grants for Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) provided the main source of revenue for PRIs in Assam, followed by central and state finance commission grants and the own revenue formed less than 10 per cent of their resources. In Sikkim, the rural local governments depend primarily on central and state government grants and have a minimal amount of own revenue, all of which are generated from non-tax revenues (Department of Commerce, Sikkim University, 2019). The same is true with PRIs in Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Manipur (Department of Economics, Rajiv Gandhi University, n.d.; Manipur University, 2018; Department of Economics, Tripura University, n.d.). Three states, viz., Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, have no PRI system in their state. Nonetheless, their local governments, which are mainly in the form of Autonomous District Councils and Village Councils, heavily depend on grants from higher tier governments and have many issues mobilising resources on their own (Umdor, 2014; Umdor&Syiem, 2018; Nunthara, 2014).

A Brief Profile of Local Governments in NEI

Panchayati Raj Institutions

PRIs in NEI precede the Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) 1992. Different states had legal provisions for establishing PRIs in one form or another. Among the states, Assam was one of the pioneer states in establishing PRIs in India with the passing of the Assam Rural Panchayat Act in 1948. This initial act was amended and replaced by subsequent legislations in 1959, 1972, 1986 and finally in 1994, which also incorporated the provisions of the 73rd CAA. Two other states, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, also had their original legislation passed at the state level. In Arunachal Pradesh, a committee was formed in 1964 by the Governor of Assam to consider the expansion and development of modern local self-government in the then NEFA. In Sikkim, the Sikkim Panchayat Act 1993 was enacted and established a two-tier system. Two other states, viz. Manipur and Tripura had their initial legislations guided by United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh) Panchayati Raj Act 1947. After attaining Manipur statehood in 1972, the state government enacted the Manipur Panchayat Raj Act of 1975, which provided for a three-tier system of Panchayats in the State. After the 73rd CAA, The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act 1994 was passed, and it came into force on April 23 1994. The Act provides for a two-tier system. In Tripura, the Tripura Panchayats Act. 1983, was brought into force in January 1984, replacing the United Provinces Panchayat Raj Act of 1947. Subsequently, the Tripura Panchayat Act was passed after the 73rd CAA in 1993, and a three-tier structure PRI was established in the state.

Autonomous District Councils

Autonomous District Councils (ADC) were established under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution on the recommendations of the North-East Frontiers (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee, also known as the Bordoloi sub-committee,

under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi, the then Chief Minister of Assam. (Hansaria & Hansaria 2005). Currently, there are 10 ADCs in four North East states.

Statutory Autonomous Councils

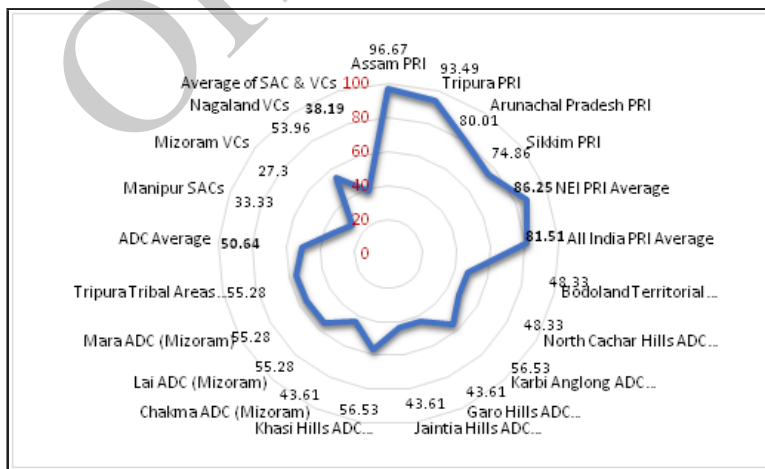
Another variant of local government which resembles ADCs is Statutory Autonomous Councils (SAC). These councils are established through acts passed by the state legislative Assembly. The states of Assam and Manipur have such councils. Currently, there are six SACs each in both states.

Village Councils/Village Development Committees

Another important type of local government in the region is Village Councils (VCs) found in the states of Mizoram and Nagaland. Mizoram had its village councils in 1952 when the traditional chieftainship was abolished. Nagaland had its VCs in 1978.

A study by the Centre for Policy Research (2014) presented an evaluation of the legislative provisions and executive orders of States pertaining to the core functions of local governments. They clubbed the core functions of PRIs for analysis into five main areas. They are Water supply, (b) Sanitation, solid waste management and drainage, (c) Roads, (d) Streetlights, (e) Community assets such as parks, burial and cremation grounds, water ways and other means of communication. Activities under these core functions are divided into two types; main activities and ancillary activities. Each core function is assigned 20 points distributed between main functions (15 points) and ancillary functions (5 points) with a total of 100 points. A summary of the performance of different states of NEI is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Relative Score of Different LGs in NEI based on Five Core Functions



Source: Authors' compilation based on a study by Centre for Policy Research (2014)

Figure 1 shows that the score of PRIs is relatively higher than the ADCs and VCs. The average score of PRIs in NEI is 86.25, higher than the all-India PRI score, which is 81.51, whereas the average scores of ADCs and VCs is 50.64 and 40.63, respectively. Assam PRIs have the highest score, with 96.67, whereas PRIs in Sikkim scored 74.86, the lowest among PRIs. ADCs have an average score of 52.33, where Tripura Tribal Areas ADC scored 65.28, which is the highest, and the lowest score is from ADCs in Meghalaya, in which the three ADCs scored 43.61. Among the two states having VCs, Nagaland scored 53.96, whereas VCs in Mizoram scored 27.3, which is the lowest among all the local governments in NEI. While the study evaluated the local governments based on their legal mandate, it can be argued that the actual functions performed by these bodies would be determined by the availability of funds to them. The Fifteenth Finance Commission (15th FC), in its final report, has recommended a total grant of Rs. 4,36,361 crore for local governments for the award period of 2021-22 to 2025-26 of which Rs. 2,36,805 crore is for Rural Local Bodies (RLBs) including the Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas. It recommended a total of Rs. 4124.8 crore for the RLBs of NEI. This could boost the actual performance of the RLBs in NEI regarding their core functions, especially those in the Sixth Schedule areas, which were not provided with certain grants under the Fourteenth Finance Commission (14th FC).

Grants from Union and State Finance Commissions

Union Finance Commission

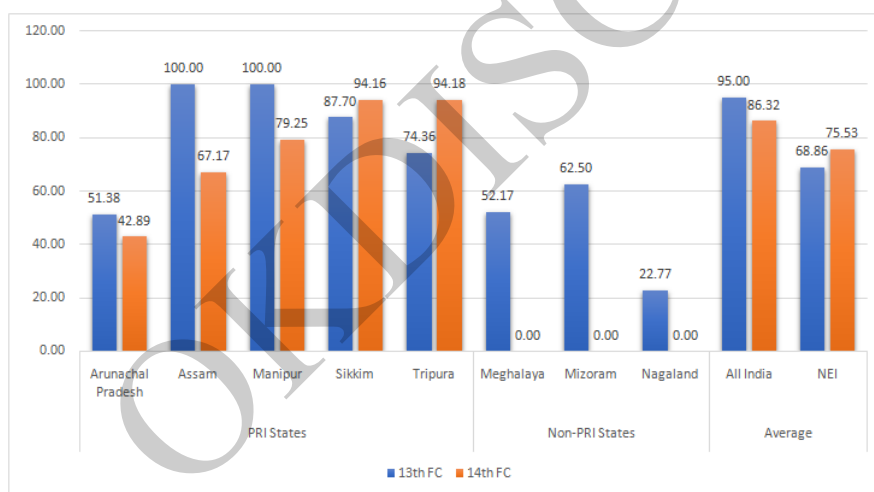
Article 280 (bb &c) of the Indian Constitution requires the UFC to recommend the President as to the “measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of the State to supplement the resources of the Panchayats and Municipalities in the state on the basis of recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State”. Based on this constitutional provision, the Tenth Finance Commission (10th FC) was the earliest to recommend devolution for local governments, although it had not been mandated in its terms of reference. Since then, the article has been incorporated in Terms of Reference (ToR) of all the succeeding UFCs. Most recently, the latest UFC, i.e., 15th FC was assigned the additional task of proposing measurable performance-based incentives for states at the appropriate level of government, which was mentioned in the seventh paragraph of its ToR.

UFC Transfer to LGs in NEI

The UFC grant to PRIs initially consists of only Basic Grants (BG) for the delivery of basic services. Additionally, the 13thFC introduced Performance Grants (PG) effective from 2011-12 based on the performance of PRIs in specific given standards. Under the 13thFC, all the states in NEI received the two types of grants regardless of their form of local government. However, under the 14th FC, non-PRI states viz. Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland ceased to receive these grants. The 15th FC resumed providing these grants to the non-PRI states.

The allocation and release of BGs during the 13th and 14th FC are presented in Figure 2. During the 13th FC, all the states except Nagaland are able to avail more than 50% of BG allocated to them. Assam and Manipur managed to withdraw 100 per cent of their allocation. The states of Sikkim, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and Meghalaya can also receive most of their allocation. There are three states which received a release of more than what they were allotted in that year. Assam had such surplus allocation in 2012-13, Manipur in 2014-15, and Sikkim in 2011-12. The 14th FC BGs were released for the PRI states only. From the given data, we can see that in the fiscal years between 2015-16 to 2019-20, all the PRI states managed to receive more than 50 per cent of their allocation, but only Assam and Manipur could avail 100 per cent. The states of Sikkim and Tripura received 94.18 per cent. Other PRI states also availed a majority of their allocation. At all India levels, 19 out of 29 states are able to draw 100 per cent of their BG funds. Failure to draw the amount allotted to the states is mainly due to non-submission of Utilisation Certificates (UCs).

Figure 2: Percentage of Actual Release of Basic Grants Against Total Allocations During 13th and 14th Finance Commissions

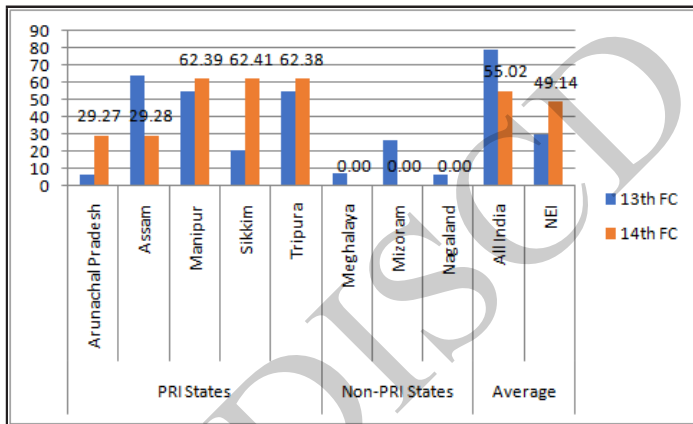


Source: Authors' calculation based on the Annual Report of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (2018-19)

Allocation and release of PGs during the 13th and 14th FC are also shown in Figure 3. The data shows that allocation and actual release differ more widely in PG than in BG. The low percentage of release in states indicates that many PRIs across states failed to meet the criteria set by the UFC for releasing PGs during their recommendation period. During the 13th FC, the release of PG was highest to the state of Assam, which managed to secure 64.13 per cent of the allocation, whereas the same was lowest in Arunachal Pradesh which avail only 6.96 per cent. Two other PRI states, Manipur and Tripura, received a release of more than 50 per cent, whereas all non-PRI states of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland failed to avail 50 per cent of the allocation. Our

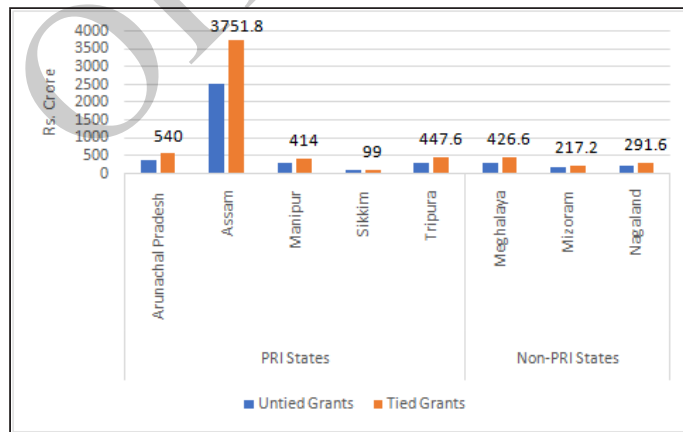
data set for 14th FC, i.e. 2015-16 to 2019-20, is incomplete due to the unavailability of data for the last financial year. From the available data, we can see that out of five PRI states, three states, viz Sikkim, Manipur and Tripura, have availed more than 60 per cent of PGs allocated to them. In contrast, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam were availing only around 30 per cent of the available fund. At all India level, 12 states could avail 100 per cent of their PGs during 13th FC, and only nine states availed 100 per cent under the 14th FC.

Figure 3: Actual Release of Basic Grants as Percentage of Total Allocation During 13th and 14th Finance Commissions



Source: Authors' calculation based on Centre for Policy Research (2014) & Annual Report of Ministry of Panchayati Raj (2018-19)

Figure 4: 15th FC Recommendation of Tied and Untied Grants to RLBs in NEI



Source: Authors' compilation from Ministry of Finance, Government of India (Link: https://swachhbharatmission.gov.in/SBMCMS/writereaddata/portal/images/pdf/RLB_Guidelines_for_the_15th_FC.pdf)

The 15th FC recommendation to RLBs is also classified into tied and untied grants. The tied grants constitute 60 percent of the grants earmarked and are to be utilised for national priorities including drinking water supply, rainwater harvesting and sanitation, while 40 percent is untied and can be used at the discretion of the RLBs. The volume of tied and untied grants allocated to RLBs of NEI by the 15th FC is shown in Figure 4.

State Finance Commissions

Article 243 (I) of the 73rd CAA requires states to set up a State Finance Commission to review the financial position of the Panchayats and to make necessary recommendations to the Governor. It should be constituted within one year from the commencement of the act and thereafter at the expiration of every fifth year. It exempted three states, i.e., Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, since the entirety of these states falls under scheduled and tribal areas. Although exempted, Mizoram and Nagaland constituted their SFCs. The success of states in forming SFCs and implementing their recommendations differ widely nationally and regionally in NEI. Two states, i.e., Assam and Sikkim, had completed their fifth SFC, while two other states, Manipur and Tripura, had their third SFC completed. Arunachal Pradesh has completed its second SFC, while Mizoram and Nagaland have completed their first SFC and formed their second. Meghalaya passed an act in 2012 to establish SFC in the state, but the state is yet to form its first SFC.

SFCs across states have different approaches in determining formulas for vertical and horizontal transfer of funds across local governments. The criteria of transfer used by the latest SFC of North East states are highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: Criteria of Transfer Used by the Latest SFCs of North East States

State	Latest SFC Report	Award Period	Basis for Vertical Sharing between States and LGs		Basis for Horizontal Sharing between LGs	
			Criteria	Percentage	Criteria	Remarks
Arunachal Pradesh	2nd	2015-16 to 2019-20	NA	NA	NA	NA
Assam	5th	2015-16 to 2019-20	Share of Net Own Tax Revenue	15.5% in 2015-16, 15% in 2016-17, 14.50% in 2017-18, 14% in 2018-19, and 13.5% in 2019-2020.	Not Specified	Distribution based on population (2011 census). (80%); -20% density
Manipur	3rd	2013-14 to 2017-18	Share of Total Revenue Receipts	10% of State's own tax revenue (SOTR), non-tax revenue and share in the central taxes.	PRIs (35.28%), ULBs (22.49%) and ADCs (42.33%)	Distribution based on population (2011 census).

Mizoram	1st	2015-16 to 2019-20	Share of Net Own Tax Revenue	15% of state's own tax revenues.	Vcs (24.17%), ULBs (17.50%) and ADCs (58.33%)	Distribution among ADCs, VCs and AMC proposed in 3 stages
Sikkim	5th	2020-21 to 2024-25	Share of Net Own Tax Revenue	4.5% SOTR 2020-2025; 0.5% of net proceeds of SOTR for capacity building of PRIs and ULBs; 0.5% of net proceeds of SOTR for most backward PRIs and ULBs	PRI (70%) and ULB (30%)	Distribution based on expected rural and urban population during 2020-25
Tripura	3rd	2009-10 to 2014-15	Gap Filling Approach	Pre-devolution gap obtained by assessing requirement of establishment expenditure, maintenance expenditure and development expenditure of the RLBs.	Assessment of Pre devolution gap for these LBs	-
Meghalaya	The state is yet to form its first SFC					
Nagaland	2nd	2013-	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A

Source: Authors' compilation from SFC Report of different States

SFCs across states have different approaches in determining formulas for vertical and horizontal transfer of funds across local governments. The SFC report of Arunachal Pradesh does not identify such a formula, and the information required is not available in the report, while the SFC report of Nagaland is also unavailable.

Among the other five states, for determining vertical sharing of resources between the state government and local governments, the share of net own tax revenue is used by three states, namely Assam, Mizoram and Sikkim. The percentage to be transferred varies among these states. Assam Fifth SFC has recommended a share of 15.5 per cent of its net own tax revenue in the year 2015-16, which decreases 0.5 per cent annually thereafter till 2019-20 when the state will share 13.5 per cent. The First SFC of Mizoram has recommended a share of 15 per cent of its net own tax revenue annually during 2015-16 to 2019-20. The Fifth Sikkim SFC recommended a sharing of 4.5 per cent of the state's own tax revenue between 2020-2025, out of which 0.5 per cent of net proceeds of the state's own tax revenue for capacity building of PRIs and ULBs and 0.5 per cent of net proceeds of it for most backward PRIs and ULBs. The Third SFC of Manipur recommended a sharing of total revenue receipt between the state government and local governments, out of which 10 per cent of the state's own tax revenue, non-tax revenue, and share in the central taxes will go to local governments. The Third SFC of Tripura uses a gap-filling approach by recommending the annual share based on the pre-devolution gap obtained by assessing the requirement of establishment expenditure, maintenance expenditure and development across local governments.

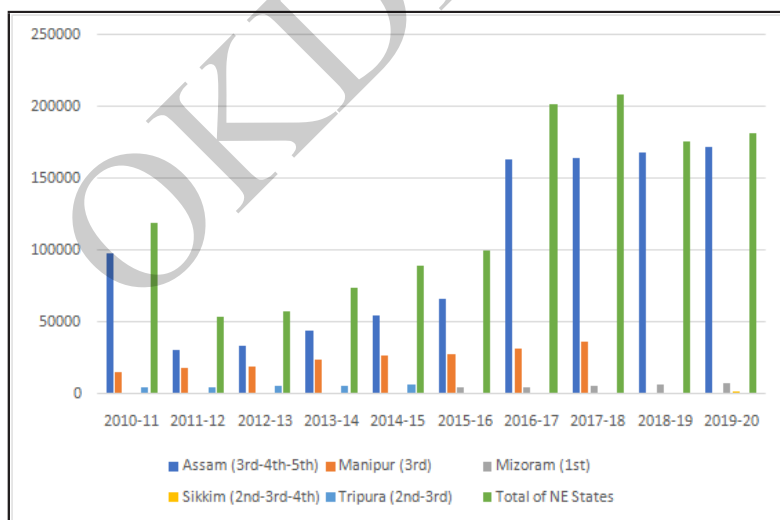
In determining the horizontal sharing of these recommended funds, the SFC of states allocates various quantities to local governments. While Assam and Tripura SFCs had not specified the quantity in terms of percentage, the SFCs of Manipur, Mizoram and

Sikkim made their recommendations in terms of percentage. The Third SFC of Manipur allocated 35.28 per cent to PRIs, 22.49 per cent to ULBs and 42.33 per cent to ADCs, while the First SFC of Mizoram recommended 24.17 per cent to VCs, 17.50 per cent to ULBs and 58.33 per cent to ADCs and the Fifth Sikkim SFC recommended 70 per cent for PRI and 30 per cent for ULBs. For determining devolution across similar local governments, the SFC of all states uses the number of populations as criteria, and the Fifth Assam SFC distinctly uses the density of population in addition to the total population number.

Devolution Recommended by SFCs to Local Bodies (Urban and Rural)

The recommended devolution of SFCs of NE states to local bodies (urban and rural) is given in Figure 4. Data on five of the six states having SFC is available, while data of two states viz. Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh are not available. The C&AG reports show no devolution from the state government to the PRIs in recent years, while we could find certain amounts of devolution to the ULBs. The periodicity and regularity are not uniform among states due to differences in the timing of SFC formation. In Figure 5, we can see the total devolution recommended by SFCs in the five states. The total devolution in Assam is the highest, while devolution in Sikkim is the lowest among the states.

Figure 5: Total Recommended Devolution by SFCs to Local Bodies (Urban & Rural) across NEI



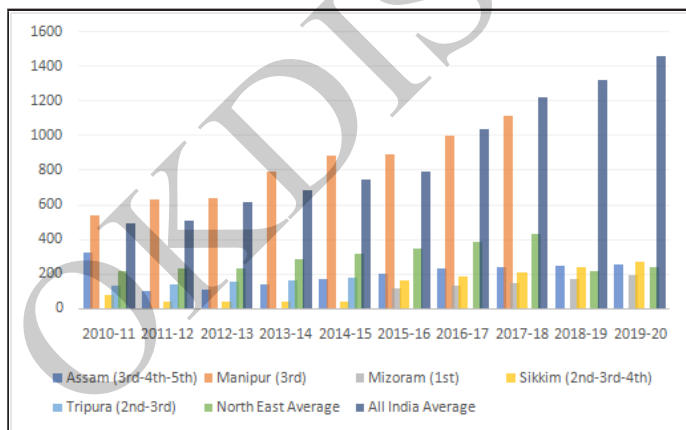
Source: Authors’ compilation based on a study by National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (2018)

Assam SFC has recommended as much as Rs. 98,496 crores for the financial year 2010-11 but is reduced to Rs. 30,659 crores in the next year, which is quite remarkable

given the fact that the remaining of the years saw an increasing trend. Another unique pattern is also found in the case of Sikkim, where the devolution amount was reduced from Rs. 488 crores in 2010-11 to Rs. 246 crores in 2011-12, which remained the same up to the fiscal year 2014-15. In all other cases, there is a continuous increase in the total devolution recommended over the financial years.

Figure 6 shows the per capita devolution recommended by SFCs of the states to their local bodies (urban and rural). Among the five states, Manipur SFC has recommended the highest per capita devolution while Sikkim SFC has the lowest per capita devolution recommended between 2010-11 to 2014-15, but Mizoram SFC has recommended the lowest per capita devolution between 2015-16 to 2019-20. The per capita devolution also saw an unusual reduction from 2010-11 to 2011-12 in Assam and Sikkim, while other states followed the pattern of their total devolution over the years. It can also be seen from the table that the average per capita devolution in NEI is quite low compared to the average of all states in India. In many cases, it only adds up to 50 per cent of the all-India average.

Figure 6: Per Capita Recommended Devolution by SFCs to local bodies (urban and rural) across NEI



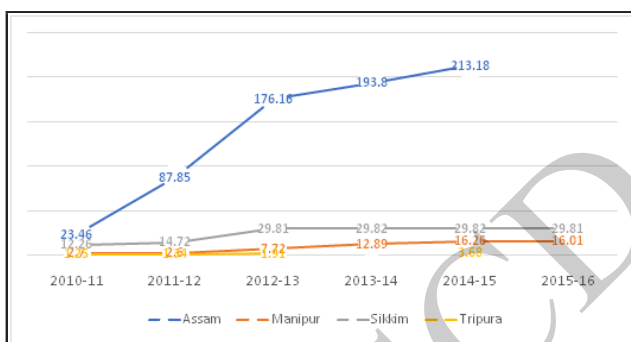
Source: Authors' compilation based on a study by National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (2018)

Own Revenue Generation and Expenditure

Evaluation of State Finances and SFC reports also highlights the amount of own revenue of local bodies across states. Among the PRI states, Arunachal Pradesh is the lone state with no significant revenue collection. The revenue collection of Assam PRIs is shown in the Outcome Evaluation of State Finances (2018) based on the CAG report (2010-11 to 2014-15) and also from the Fifth Assam SFC report (2010-11 to 2019-20). The own revenue and expenditure of Manipur PRIs are available from the

evaluation of state finances for a period between 2010-11 to 2017-18, that of Sikkim is available between 2010-11 to 2015-16, and that of Tripura is also available for the period between 2006-07 to 2016-17. Taking the uniform period of 2010-11 to 2015-16, the performance of different states is given in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Own Revenue Generated by PRIs of NEI from 2010-11 to 2015-16 (Figures in Crore)



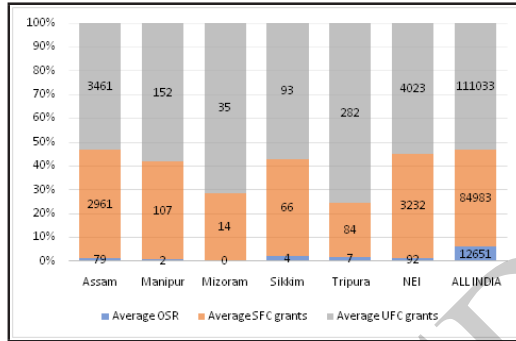
Source: Authors' compilation from evaluation of State finances under the 15th FC& SFC reports

As seen from Table 3, the absolute amount of own revenue raised by PRIs over the years is higher in Assam compared to other states. However, the data on Assam is inconsistent with its Fifth SFC report, which shows a lower and more moderate growth over the same period. Among the other three states, the PRIs of Sikkim have collected the highest revenue, mainly from non-tax revenue. Manipur PRIs had a significant increase in their own revenue collection from 2011-12 to 2014-15 but saw a reduction in 2015-16. Tripura PRIs have a more constant collection rate than Manipur, but the data is unavailable for 2013-14 and 2015-16.

The average share of Own Revenue, SFC grants and UFC grants to PRIs in the years 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2021-22 is found in the Expert Committee Report on Own Source Revenue of Rural Local Bodies, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India. The data shows that the share of own revenue is extremely low in the states of NEI and the share of UFC grants is more than 50 per cent in all the states, and the SFC grants are below 45 per cent.

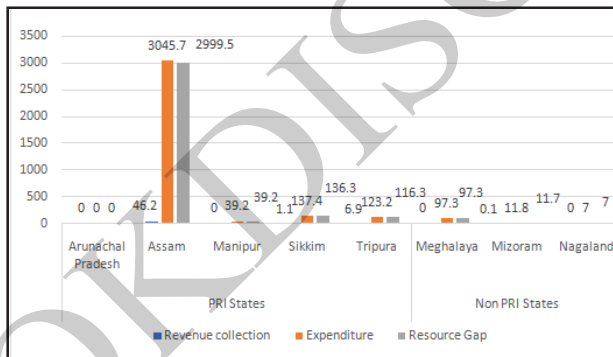
Another recent study which shows the own revenue and expenditure of PRIs is done by Indian Institute of Public Administration (2019), showing an average of revenue collection by panchayats, expenditure by panchayats, and resource gap from 2012-13 to 2017-18. Their finding is summarised in Figure 6. Per Capita Revenue, Per Capita Expenditure and Fiscal Autonomy Index at the Panchayat level in NEI are also shown in Table 2. Apart from data on PRIs, the study also shows data on non-PRI states in which the performance of the existing local government in the states is evaluated for comparison.

Figure 8: Relative Share of Average Own Revenue, Average SFC Grants and Average UFC Grants to PRIs



Source: Authors' compilation from Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India

Figure 9: Average Revenue Collection, Average Expenditure and Resource Gap at Panchayat Level in North East India (Rs. in crore)



Source: Authors' compilation based on a study by Indian Institute of Public Administration (2019)

Table 2: Per Capita Revenue, Per Capita Expenditure and Fiscal Autonomy Index at Panchayat level in PRI and Non-PRI States

Categories	States	Per-capita Revenue (In Rupees)	Per Capita Expenditure (In Rupees)	Share of Own Revenue in Total Expenditure (Fiscal Autonomy Index)
PRI States	Arunachal Pradesh	0	0	0
	Assam	15.6	1028.1	1.5
	Manipur	0	166	0
	Sikkim	21.3	2780	0.8
	Tripura	15.3	274.2	5.6
Non PRI States	Meghalaya	0	373.9	0
	Mizoram	1.4	226.6	0.8
	Nagaland	0	42	0

Source: Same as Figure 9

Among all the states, the absolute amount of own revenue collection by PRI is highest in Assam, as also shown in the Table 2. However, in terms of per capita collection, Sikkim has the highest per capita collection, followed by Assam and Tripura. The amount of expenditure by PRIs is also relatively much higher in Assam compared to the rest of the states. However, the per capita expenditure is highest in Sikkim, which has more than double the per capita expenditure of PRIs in Assam. Manipur came third, with Tripura having the least per capita expenditure among the PRI states. Among the non-PRI states, Meghalaya has the highest per capita expenditure, which Mizoram and Nagaland follow. The per capita expenditure of VCs in Nagaland is relatively low compared to the rest of the PRI and non-PRI states.

The difference between the revenue collection and expenditure by panchayats, also known as the 'resource gap', is also shown in Figure 9. The absolute amount of resource gap is highest in Assam, followed by Sikkim, Tripura and Manipur among PRI states. Among non-PRI states, the resource gap is largest in Meghalaya, distantly followed in order by Mizoram and Nagaland.

Another important variable for understanding the fiscal position of PRIs is the percentage share of their own revenue in total expenditure. It can be seen from Table 2 that the scores of all states are remarkably low, which shows the magnitude of revenue dependency of PRIs on their respective state governments and the union government. Among PRI states with the highest share of own revenue is Tripura, with 5.6 per cent of own revenue against expenditure, followed by Assam and Sikkim, while Manipur PRIs have no significant share. Among non-PRI states, Mizoram has a small 0.8 per cent share of own revenue, but the other two states of Meghalaya and Nagaland have no significant share of their own revenue to their total expenditure.

Case Study: Finances of Selected PRIs in NEI During COVID-19 Pandemic

The case study examines the finances of rural local governments (Panchayats and Village Councils) from eight states of NEI which received National Panchayat Awards (NPA) in 2021 before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. These awardee Panchayats are recommended by the State Governments/Union Territories, and the awards are given on National Panchayati Raj Day, celebrated on April 24 every year. The awards are given in four categories, namely.

- * Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar (DDUPSP)
- * Nanaji Deshmukh Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puraskar (NDRGGSP)
- * Gram Panchayat Development Plan Award (GPDPA)
- * Child-friendly Gram Panchayat Award (CFGPA)

Data & Methodology

The data on the finances of PRIs is collected from the *eGramSwaraj* website of the Government of India, which is the online accounting database of PRIs. The monthly

receipt and expenditure amount, as shown in the voucher, are taken for analysis. We categorise the financial year 2019-20 as the pre-COVID-19 period and 2020-21 as the COVID-19 period. We applied purposive sampling in two stages. In the first stage, the availability of monthly receipt and expenditure vouchers of all the PRIs receiving National Panchayat Awards 2021 are checked for three financial years, i.e. 2019-20, which is pre COVID-19 period, as well as 2020-21 and 2021-22 which also can be termed as COVID-19 period. After checking the availability of these accounts, we observed that awardee PRIs in four states-Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, did not provide significant financial information on the website. For this reason, the awardee PRIs/ local governments in these states are excluded in the next stage of analysis. For the second stage of sampling and our final analysis, we select one awardee gram panchayat (GP) which provides the most significant monthly receipt and expenditure on *eGramSwaraj* from each of the remaining four states. GPs with the most updated monthly accounts in 2019-20 and 2020-21 are selected from each state for final analysis. Suppose the number of availabilities of monthly vouchers is similar among GPs in a state. In that case, the GP with the most number of vouchers available in the next year, i.e., 2021-22, is selected. To ensure uniformity across PRIs in the states, only GPs are selected for the final analysis since two states followed a two-tier system of PRI, whereas two of the states followed a three-tier system. The GPs included in the final sample are; Luwangsangbam GP from Manipur, Gogamukh GP from Assam, Budang Kamerey GP from Sikkim and Tuichindrai GP from Tripura. We studied their financial reporting, sources of receipt, including grants from the UFC, grants from state governments and their own revenue generation. The relative share of different sources of receipt, receipt volatility, volume of expenditure and expenditure volatility are examined in the subsequent paragraphs.

Financial Reporting

The availability status of monthly accounts of awardee PRIs in eight NEI states is given in Appendix 1. We can observe from the table that among states having the PRI system, the monthly accounts of all PRIs in Arunachal Pradesh are not updated in *eGramSwaraj*, whereas the accounts of PRIs in Assam, Manipur, Sikkim, and Tripura are regularly updated. All the non-PRI states, i.e. Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, do not update their monthly accounts during 2019-20 to 2021-22. We can find the monthly accounts of VCs of Mizoram being updated a couple of months in 2020-21 and 2021-22, which does not sufficiently provide significant information for analysing their finances. The rural local governments in Meghalaya and Nagaland do not update their monthly accounts during the same period. The details are shown in Appendix 1.

Grants from the Union Finance Commissions

The UFCs recommend grants to PRIs from time to time. The 14th FC grants were received by PRIs till March 2021. They also started receiving the 15th FC grants in March 2021. Even though different UFCs recommend the funds received, they are

categorised together as UFC Grants in our analysis since their sources are the same. The UFC grant constitutes a large percentage of total revenue in the entire sample GPs. Remarkably, it is the sole source of revenue for Luwangsangbam GP in Manipur in both the pre-COVID-19 and COVID-19 periods. It also constitutes a significant percentage of revenue in Gogamukh and Tuichindrai GPs, whereas it formed a smaller share than Grant in Aid in the case of Budang Kamerey. This is shown in Figure 10.

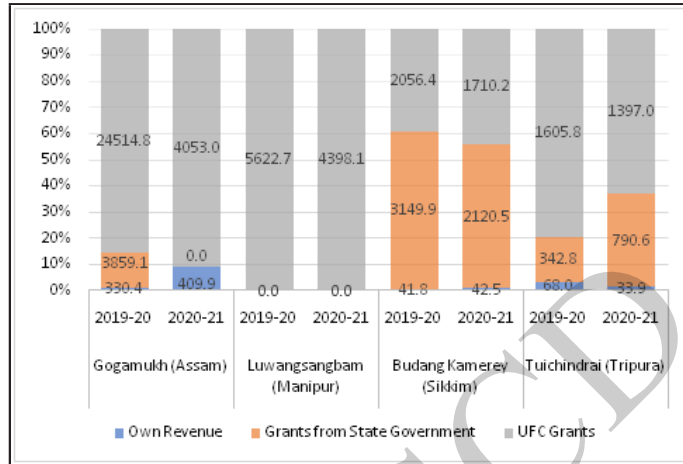
Grant in Aid from State Governments

Due to variations in the formation and effectiveness of SFCs in different states, the devolution of funds varies from state to state. Among our sample PRIs, only Luwangsangbam GP in Manipur did not receive any Grant in Aid (GIA) from the state in both Pre-COVID-19 and Post-COVID-19 periods, while the other three GPs received a certain amount of GIA in the least one of the periods. The highest share of GIA to total revenue was received by Budang Kamerey GP in Sikkim, which received 60.02 per cent and 54 per cent in 2019-2020 and 2020-21, respectively. This shows the successful efforts of their SFC and state government in transferring resources to local governments. Among the other two GPs, Tuichindrai GP in Tripura received 17 per cent and 35.59 per cent GIA out of their total revenue in 2019-20 and 2020-21, respectively, whereas Gogamukh GP received only 0.11 per cent in 2019-20 but did not receive any GIA in 2020-21. This is depicted in Figure 10.

Own Revenue Generation

PRIs in India are known to have a common problem of low own revenue generation despite the constitutional empowerment from the government of India. This issue is also clearly evident in the present study. As shown in Figure 10, the percentage of own revenue to total revenue of the four PRIs is extremely low in the pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 periods. In both years, the own revenue of each of the PRIs is less than 10 per cent of their total receipt. While the rest of the three PRIs collected a small amount of their own revenue each year, Luwangswangbam GP in Manipur did not have any own-revenue collection in both years. Although the share of own revenue generation by Gogamukh GP increases from 0.9 per cent in 2019-20 to 9.18 per cent in 2020-21, analysis of their monthly account shows that Rs. 2,50,000 recorded as own revenue in May 2021 is debited from the UFC Grants which was received previously. If we exclude this amount from the own revenue, the share of own revenue to the total revenue of Gogamukh in 2020-21 will become 3.58 per cent.

Figure 10: Percentage Share of Own Revenue, Grants from State Government and UFC Grants *(Figures in Rs. '000)

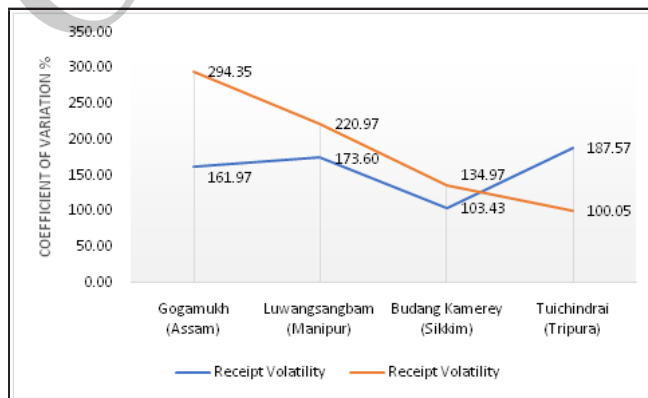


Source: Authors' calculation from eGramswaraj

Receipt Volatility

From the monthly accounts of the GPs, we estimated the volatility of their receipt before and during COVID-19 by estimating the coefficient of variation (Standard Deviation/Mean) of their total receipt. The overall receipt volatility is very high in these GPs. It can be observed from their accounts that their high dependence on grants from the state and union government led to high uncertainty in their monthly receipt. Except for Tuichindrai GP which has lower receipt volatility during the COVID-19 period, the other three GPs saw an even higher volatility in their revenue during the COVID-19 period. The result is shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Receipt Volatility of Sample GPs Before and During COVID-19

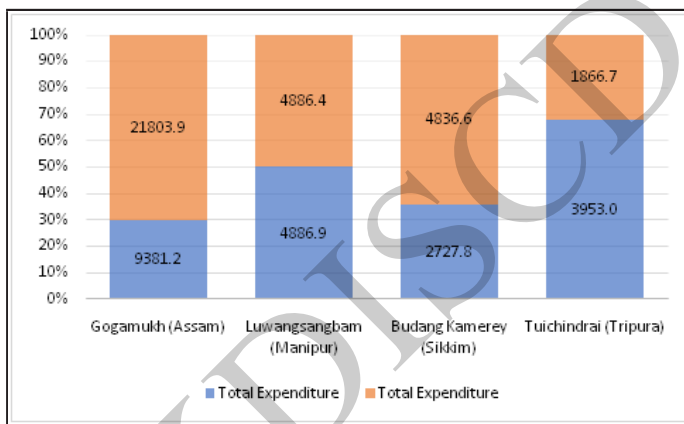


Source: Same as Figure 10

Expenditure Analysis

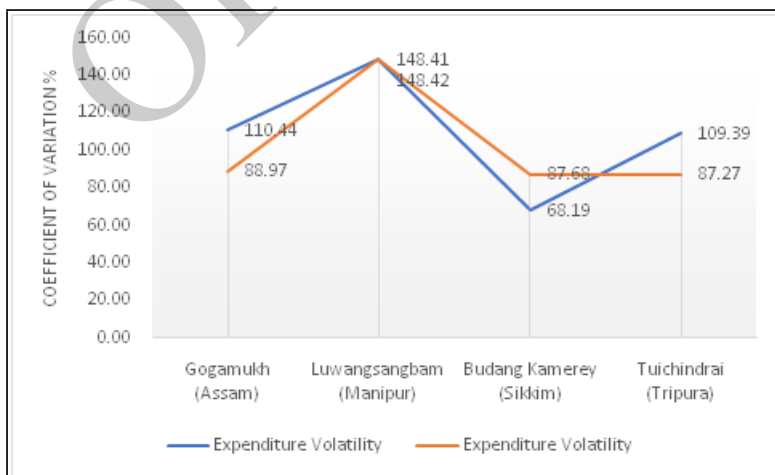
The total expenditure incurred by sample GPs in the pre-COVID-19 and COVID-19 periods is presented in Figure 12. As per their monthly accounts in eGramSwaraj, the total expenditure of two GPs, i.e., Gogamukh GP in Assam and BudangKamerey GP of Sikkim, increases by 132.4 per cent and 77.3 per cent, respectively, from 2019-2020 to 2020-21 whereas the total expenditure of Luwangsangbam GP of Manipur and Tuichindrai GP of Tripura decreases by 0.01 per cent and 52.78 per cent respectively during the same period.

Figure 12: Expenditure of Sample GPs Before and During COVID-19 (Figures in Rs. '000)



Source: Same as Figure 10

Figure 13: Expenditure Volatility of Sample GPs Before and During COVID-19



Source: Same as Figure 10

The expenditure volatility of the sample GPs is also estimated and shown in Figure 13. The data shows high volatility in their monthly expenditure in both years. However, the expenditure volatility does not show a huge difference before and during the COVID-19 period. While the monthly expenditure of Gogamukh GP and Tuichindrai GP are lower before the COVID-19 period, the monthly expenditure of Luwangsangbam GP and Budang Kamerey GP are slightly higher during the COVID-19 period.

Concluding Observations and Suggestions

Our study highlighted the dependence of PRIs in NEI on the UFC grants and shows their inability to draw their earmarked funds. The same issue is also illuminated by the case study, as the UFC grants are the main reason for the increase in the receipt and expenditure of sample GPs amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. These grants do not seem to be substituted by other sources of revenue anytime soon. A proper design of grants for PRIs by each UFCs in which untied funds have a significant share could help in the future. The 15th FC recommendation of tied and untied grants is a positive measure where PRIs and state governments could coordinate to tap the amount of resources allotted to them.

The progress of the NEI states in forming SFCs is quite uneven, and the recommended devolution also varies widely. Each state, including the states which have no mandate to form SFCs, would likely benefit from forming one because there is no other body under the Constitution which could enhance the effective vertical and horizontal distribution of resources within the state. The case study also shows that grants recommended by SFCs are a major source of receipt next to the UFC grant in all the GPs and are even larger than the UFC grant in the case of GPs in Sikkim. Thus, SFCs could play a more significant role in successful revenue sharing and resource mobilisation in each state.

The per capita revenue and per capita expenditure vary widely across NE states. The level of own revenue generation is remarkably low in most states, and the finding that the low percentage of own revenue to total revenue in the sample GPs underlined the weak resource base of these PRIs. This is a persisting issue across India. As suggested by Sahasharnaman (2012), one general solution to this problem might be incentivising competition among PRI units, ranking them according to their contribution towards the provision of certain services and the creation of public assets in their areas. While the NPA are given by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj each year, state governments may also do the same by incorporating more indicators based on local needs and priorities.

The challenge of addressing transparency and accountability remains. Even among Panchayats which received NPA, their accounts are still unevenly updated in the *eGramSwaraj*. Since these are the best-performing PRIs, the PRIs which perform worse will have much bigger challenges. Financial transparency and accountability should be key indicators in the national or state-level ranking of Panchayat performances. Apart from the accounting portal *eGramSwaraj*, the online auditing portal *Audit Online* could be the basis for ranking PRIs and determining the grants transferred to them.

A suggestion made by Alok (2009), arguing that PRIs could borrow under the Local Authorities Loans Act, 1914, a Central Act which enables the grants of loans to local authorities, including panchayats, seems to remain a key alternative for PRIs to raise resources. PRI units in NEI might utilise this option depending on its viability in their respective states.

References

- Alok, V N (2009), "Share of Local Governments in the Union Divisible Pool: An Option before the 13th Finance Commission", *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol.55, No.1, pp. 71–95.
- Babu, M D (2009), *Fiscal Empowerment of Panchayats in India: Real or Rhetoric?*, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, India.
- Bagchi, K K & Ghosh, T K (2004), "*Finances of Panchayats in West Bengal—New Areas of Resource Mobilisation*", *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol.50, No. 3, pp. 777–791.
- Behar, A & Kumar, Y (2002), *Decentralisation in Madhya Pradesh, India: from Panchayati Raj to Gram Swaraj (1995 to 2001)*, Overseas Development Institute, London.
- Centre for Policy Research (2014), "Rural Local Body Core Functions and Finances: A Study for the Fourteenth Finance Commission", First Report, New Delhi
- Chaudhuri, S (2003), *What difference does a constitutional amendment make? The 1994 Panchayati Raj Act and the attempt to revitalise rural local government in India*, Typescript, Columbia University.
- Department of Commerce, Sikkim University (2019), "Report on the State Finances of Sikkim", In <https://fincomindia.nic.in>. Fifteenth Finance Commission, <https://fincomindia.nic.in/ShowContent.aspx?uid1=11&uid2=6&uid3=0&uid4=0>
- Department of Economics, Rajiv Gandhi University (n.d), "Outcome Evaluation of State Finance of Arunachal Pradesh". In <https://fincomindia.nic.in> ,Fifteenth Finance Commission, <https://fincomindia.nic.in/ShowContent.aspx?uid1=11&uid2=6&uid3=0&uid4=0>
- Department of Economics, Tripura University (n.d), "An Evaluation of The State Finances of Tripura (2006-07 to 2016-17)". In <https://fincomindia.nic.in> ,Fifteenth Finance Commission, <https://fincomindia.nic.in/ShowContent.aspx?uid1=11&uid2=6&uid3=0&uid4=0>
- Fisher, R C (1982), "Income and grant effects on local expenditure: The flypaper effect and other difficulties", *Journal of Urban Economics*, Vol.12, No.3, pp. 324-345.
- Guwahati University, Assam (2018), "Outcome Evaluation of State Finances (Assam)", In <https://fincomindia.nic.in/default.aspx> ,Fifteenth Finance Commission , <https://fincomindia.nic.in/ShowContent.aspx?uid1=11&uid2=6&uid3=0&uid4=0>
- Hansaria, B L & Hansaria, V (2005), *Justice BL Hansaria's Sixth Schedule to the Constitution*, Universal Law Publishing Company.
- Hines Jr, J R & Thaler, R H (1995), "Anomalies: The flypaper effect", *Journal of economic perspectives*, Vol.9, No. 4, pp. 217-226.
- Indian Institute of Public Administration (2019), "Financial Matrix for Empowerment: Design of Inter Governmental Fiscal Transfers in India to Rural Local Governments", Governments'

In <https://fincomindia.nic.in/>, Fifteenth Finance Commission, <https://fincomindia.nic.in/ShowContent.aspx?uid1=11&uid2=6&uid3=0&uid4=0>

Jena, P R & Gupta, M (2008), "Revenue efforts of panchayats: Evidence from four states", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.43, No.30, pp. 125-130.

Jha, S (2004), *Panchayats–Functions, Responsibilities and Resources*, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR), Mumbai, India.

Manipur University (2018), "Evaluation of State Finances of Manipur (April 1 2006, to March 31 2017)", In <https://fincomindia.nic.in>, Fifteenth Finance Commission, <https://fincomindia.nic.in/ShowContent.aspx?uid1=11&uid2=6&uid3=0&uid4=0>

Mohapatra, B P (2013), "Decentralised Governance and Fiscal Devolution in India: Why there is a need for policy reform?", *Review of Development and Change*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 191-208.

Nunthara, C (2014), *Mizoram Village Councils leh Local Bodies teDinhmunBih Chianna, Aizawl, Lois Bet*

Oommen, M A, Wallace, S & Muwonge, A (2017), "Towards Streamlining Panchayat Finance in India: A Study Based on Gram Panchayats in Kerala", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 52, No. 38, pp.49-58.

Oommen, M A (2015), "Local Governments in the Fiscal Space of Indian Federalism: Towards More Rational Arrangements", *RULSG Occasional Paper*, Centre for Developmental Studies, Thiruvananthapuram.

Panth, A S & Bohra, O. P (1995), "Finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions", *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 68-77.

Rajaraman, I & Vasishtha, G (2000), "Impact of grants on tax effort of local government", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 35, No. 33, pp. 2943-2948.

Rao, M G, Raghunandan, T. R., Gupta, M., Datta, P., Jena, P. R., & Amarnath, H. K. (2011), "Fiscal Decentralisation to Rural Local Governments in India: Selected Issues and Reform Options", *National Institute of Public Finance and Policy*, New Delhi, 1-29.

Reddy, M G & Mohapatra, B. P (2022), "Finances of Panchayats and Status of Own Revenues in Telangana State: A Critique", *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 68, No. 1, pp. 100-115.

Reddy, M G, Sreedevi, N, & Mohapatra, B P (2021), "Exploring finances of Panchayati Raj institutions in Telangana state: A study", *Centre for Economic and Social Studies*, Begumpet, Hyderabad.

Report of the Fourth Assam State Finance Commission :2011-16 (2012), In <http://sfcassam.nic.in/reports.html> (Volume I, II&III). Assam Secretariat, Dispur, Guwahati. <http://sfcassam.nic.in/4thSFC/FASFC%20Main%20Report-pdf.pdf>

Sarma, A & Chakravarty, D (2018), *Towards Integrating the Third Tier in the Indian Federal System*. In: *Integrating the Third Tier in the Indian Federal System*. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5625-3_8

Turnbull, G K (1992), "Fiscal Illusion, Uncertainty, and the Flypaper Effect", *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 207-223.

Umdor, S (2014), "Local Government Finance in the Sixth Schedule Areas of Northeast India", Final Report, New Delhi: ICSSR, pp. 152.

Umdor, S & Syiem, B. R (2017), "State of Finances of the Autonomous District Councils in Meghalaya", Social Change and Development, Vol. 14, pp. 12-26.

Appendix 1: Availability Status of Monthly Accounts of Awardee PRIs in eGramSwaraj

State	Name of PRI	Tier	Award	Category	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Arunachal Pradesh	Siang	District	DDUPSP	General	0	0	0
	Parong I	Village	DDUPSP	General	0	0	0
	Tassar	Village	DDUPSP	General	0	0	0
	Singin IC	Village	DDUPSP	General	0	0	0
	NamsingSanngo	Village	NDRGGSP	-	0	0	0
	Hukan	Village	GPDPA	-	0	0	0
	Tebitall	Village	CFGPA	-	0	0	0
Assam	Tinsukia	District	DDUPSP	General	12	9	7
	Dimoria	Block	DDUPSP	General	11	12	6
	Machkhowa	Block	DDUPSP	General	12	10	5
	Madhaya Sissitangani	Village	DDUPSP	General	11	10	6
	Kumarpaty	Village	DDUPSP	General	11	7	3
	Azara	Village	DDUPSP	General	12	12	4
	Sonapur	Village	NDRGGSP	-	12	12	5
	Gogamukh	Village	GPDPA	-	12	12	6
Manipur	Talap	Village	CFGPA	-	12	11	7
	Imphal West	District	DDUPSP	General	0	4	4
	Keinou	Village	DDUPSP	Rev. Gen.	10	10	4
	Top Dusara	Village	DDUPSP	N. R. Mgt.	10	9	4
	MayengLamjao	Village	NDRGGSP	-	11	8	0
	Luwangsangbam	Village	GPDPA	-	11	10	1
Meghalaya	Keinou	Village	CFGPA	-	10	10	4
Mawiong	Village	GPDPA	-	0	0	0	
Mizoram	Maubuang	Village	DDUPSP	Sanitation	0	1	3
	Mualthum N	Village	NDRGGSP	-	0	1	1
	KolasibVenglai	Village	GPDPA	-	0	1	3
	Sawleng	Village	CFGPA	-	0	1	3
Nagaland	Kigwema	Village	DDUPSP	General	0	0	0
	Vihokhu	Village	DDUPSP	General	0	0	0
	Vihokhu	Village	NDRGGSP	-	0	0	0
	Kigwema	Village	GPDPA	-	0	0	0
	Zisunyu	Village	CFGPA	-	0	0	0

Sikkim	East District	District	DDUPSP	General	0	3	1
	Lungchok Kamarey	Village	DDUPSP	Rev. Gen.	12	12	5
	Budang Kamarey	Village	DDUPSP	Rev. Gen.	12	12	7
	Singhik	Village	NDRGGSP	-	12	12	6
	Tingvong	Village	GPDPA	-	12	12	7
	Rhenock	Village	CFGPA	-	12	12	7
Tripura	Gomati	District	DDUPSP	General	12	12	6
	Charilam	Block	DDUPSP	General	12	12	3
	Dukli	Block	DDUPSP	General	12	12	5
	North Charilam	Village	DDUPSP	General	12	11	5
	Tuchindrai	Village	DDUPSP	General	12	12	7
	Rowa	Village	NDRGGSP	-	11	12	5
	Nakful	Village	GPDPA	-	10	11	1
	Kadamtala	Village	CFGPA	-	12	12	3

Rural Employment, Public Policy and COVID-19 Pandemic: A Study of Least Developed Districts of India

Rajdeep Singha¹

Abstract

India runs one of the world's largest and costliest employment programmes—the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREGA). This study aims to examine MGNREGA's efficiency at times of crisis and understand the role of publicly funded employment policy in addressing rural employment crises in the least developed districts of India. Calculating the Theil Index from the Government of India's data for MGNREGA makes comparisons of the employment situation between all districts of India and the least developed districts. The results suggest inequalities among the districts with regard to the impact of COVID-19 on employment in general and different groups in particular. The nature of the low statutory wage of MGNREGA and the huge variations between states are the biggest contributors to unemployment inequality in districts.

Introduction

The outbreak of corona virus is much more than a health crisis; its effect is far-reaching. This crisis has transmuted the supply of goods and services and demand for consumption and investment (ILO, 2020). The IMF in July 2020 projected that the global GDP would shrink by 4.9%, which is much more than the reduction at the time of the global financial crisis (2007–09). Different types of macro and micro-level efforts are being made to save the economy. Between March 2020 and May 2021, a total of 3,333 social protection measures have been adopted by 222 countries (Gentilini et al., 2021). The total cost of those policies² was 2.9 trillion USD, which is around 3% of 2021's Global GDP and 4.5 times higher than the global response to the 2010 financial crisis (Gentilini et al., 2021). Among all the different types of policies, wage subsidy is the preferred choice for many countries (58% worldwide opting for it).

¹ Associate Professor, Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, VIP Road, Upper Hengrabari, Six Mile, Guwahati - 781036 Email: rajdeep.singha@gmail.com

² The figure is for a subset of 119 countries for which data was available.

On the evening of March 24, 2020, when the Government of India announced its nation-wide lockdown, every individual of the country was impacted indisputably. According to the Reserve Bank of India (June 2020), the index of consumer confidence was historically the lowest. Future expectations index also witnessed a sharp decrease. In an environment of growing pessimism, according to the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economic (CMIE), unemployment rates in April 2020 and May 2020 was around 23%, showing a three times increase (from 7%) from the previous year. Given the nature of the labour market, where the engagement with informal workforce has been more than 90%, employment rate must have been higher than 23%. During lockdown, the urban areas have been more affected than rural India. Due to loss of livelihood, 10.4 million workers returned home from their places of work (Table 1). The inflow of workers, primarily from urban areas, has escalated the long-lasting problem of rural unemployment. According to the Government of India data, labour force participation rate (LFPR) has been one of the lowest in the world (CPR, 2021). Long persistence unemployment could have discouraged workers from participating in the labour market. Professor Richard Layard (2020) suggested that government initiatives guaranteeing permanent job would curb the permanent decrease in labour force participation. Since 2006, India is successfully running a rural employment guaranteed job programme called Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Many researchers predicted the positive role of MGNREGA in the context of the large-scale return migrations during lockdown (Dr'eze, 2020, Imbert, 2020 a & b). As a strategy to curb down the spread of the virus, rural areas of developing countries pose a totally different kind of challenges in comparisons to developed areas due to lack of infrastructure and strong institutions (Dutta & Fischer, 2021).

Based on the NSS Employment Survey of 2007-08 and Census figures and projections, Srivastava (2020) has estimated that there were approximately 52 million inter-state migrants in the year 2018 and out of 52 million only 43 million are inter-state urban migrants. These figures suggests that the magnitude of the individuals whose livelihoods have high probability of getting affected by the lockdown. Government of India data suggests that out of the total return migrants; more than 70% belonged to the country's poorest region/states, predominately from rural areas (Table 1).

Table 1: State-Wise Number of Migrant Workers Who Have Returned to Their Home State

Sl.No.	Name of the State	No. of Returned Migrant
1	Andhra Pradesh	32571
2	Arunachal Pradesh	2871
3	Assam	426441
4	Bihar	1500612
5	Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu	43747
6	Haryana	1289
7	Jammu & Kashmir	48780

8	Jharkhand	530047
9	Kerala	311124
10	Ladakh	50
11	Lakshadweep	456
12	Madhya Pradesh	753581
13	Maharashtra	182990
14	Manipur	12338
15	Meghalaya	4266
16	Nagaland	11750
17	Pondicherry	1694
18	Punjab	515642
19	Rajasthan	1308130
20	Tamil Nadu	72145
21	Telangana	37050
22	Tripura	34247
23	Uttar Pradesh	3249638
24	West Bengal	1384693
	Total	10466152

Source: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 197, Govt. of India

For a long time, employment through public work has been a well-validated instrument for governments towards creation of jobs and allowance of social protection at the time of recession (Narayanan et al., 2020). Such a policy has been in alignment with J. M. Keynes' suggestion during the Great Depression that governments can play an important role to generate demand and address the problem of unemployment. Several studies have found the effectiveness of the public-funded schemes on long-term economic growth and employment (Mallick, 2006; Abiad et al., 2015). This paper takes MGNREGA as a case study to understand the role of job- guaranteed policy on the poorest regions of India mainly at the time of pandemic. In India, NITI Aayog has been anchoring a programme on selected backward districts, i.e., 'aspirational' districts which can potentially catch up with relatively best-performing districts of the country. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to understand the performance of MGNREGA in aspirational districts during a pandemic. The main focus of this paper is two-fold—understanding the role of public-funded employment-guaranteed policy as a safety net in terms of providing employment at the time of crisis and assessing the role it played in addressing the inequality. This article focuses on regional diversity, gender and social dynamics to understand the inequality.

The study's concepts and context are analysed in the subsequent section. Section 3 pivots around data and methodology; Section 4 depicts the principal empirical

analysis explaining the role of MGNREGA as a shock absorber for the backward rural economy during the pandemic; and the last section presents the conclusions.

Context

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

The success of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS) to address droughts in Maharashtra in 1972 draws the attention of policymakers. With the success of few similar policies like food for work in the past, in 2005, India enacted an Act called Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act with a promise of 100 days guaranteed work in the rural areas. The Act was initially planned as a demand-side policy with two specific characteristics—self-selection to provide the right to work; legal right to work can be claimed by those who demand work within a specific time and with a minimum wage. The scheme was implemented phase-wise. The first phase was introduced with 200 of the most backward districts, the second one on April 1, 2007, including 130 more districts, and the third phase (September 28, 2007) was extended to all the districts of India.

According to Prof. Stieglitz, MGNREGA is one of the largest public-funded employment-guaranteed schemes in the world, a lesson presented before the whole world (Business Standard, 2016). In the wake of the COVID crisis, the government also rightly recognised the role of MGNREGA in rural India and allocated an extra 40,000 crore³ over and above the budgetary allocation of Rs 61,500 crore in the financial year 2020–21 (Table 2). The funds for 2020–21 has been the highest ever allocation in MGNREGA.

Table 2: Funds Release under MGNREGA (Rs in crore)

Year	Fund Release
2014-15	32476.87
2015-16	36644.80
2016-17	48387.16
2017-18	55876.07
2018-19	44598.58
2019-20	71686.70
2020-21	101500.00

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India

Aspirational Districts

In 2018, the Government of India declared 115 districts out of a total of 718 districts as aspirational districts in the country. They are identified on the basis of a composite index.

³ 1 Crore = 10 Million

“The ranking is based on the incremental progress made across 49 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) under 5 broad socio-economic themes - Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development and Infrastructure.” (NITI Aayog, GoI)

The aspirational district’s primary objective is to focus on development to catch up with the ‘developed’ districts of the respective states. The employment is not included while constructing the composite index. Still, the performances of included sectors like agriculture or infrastructures are directly linked with the employment situation of the area.

Data and Methodology

This paper attempts to understand the inequality of employment among the various aspirational districts of India alongside all the districts of India. This study used the Theil inequality index for 2015–16 to 2020–21 using data on total person-days and labour expenditures. The idea of the Theil index is to measure the gap between the existing income of population and the ‘ideal’ situation where everyone has the same income. The Theil index can be negative and positive as well, with negative value representing a negative contribution to inequality and positive values stand for a higher level of inequality. The study’s data source is the Government of India’s online portal for MGNREGA (<https://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/home.aspx>). The data are collected from 113⁴ aspirational districts.

Theil’s T Statistic for the population (T) comprised two components—the ‘between’ group element (T'_g) and the ‘within’ group element (T^w_g).

$$T = T'_g + T^w_g$$

The index can be expressed by:

$$T'_g = \sum_{i=1}^m \left\{ \left(\frac{p_i}{P} \right) * \left(\frac{y_i}{\mu} \right) * \ln \left(\frac{y_i}{\mu} \right) \right\}$$

Where i indexes the groups, p_i is the population of group i , P is the total employment, y_i is the average labour expenditures in group i , and μ is the average labour expenditure across the entire population (Theil, 1967; Battaglia & Iraldo, 2011).

The main advantage of this index is the use of an upper limit (or maximum), which allows normalising the index, enabling comparison results from different geographical areas and time periods. Instead of individual-district level analysis, the crux of the index focuses on the assumption that the individual districts come from

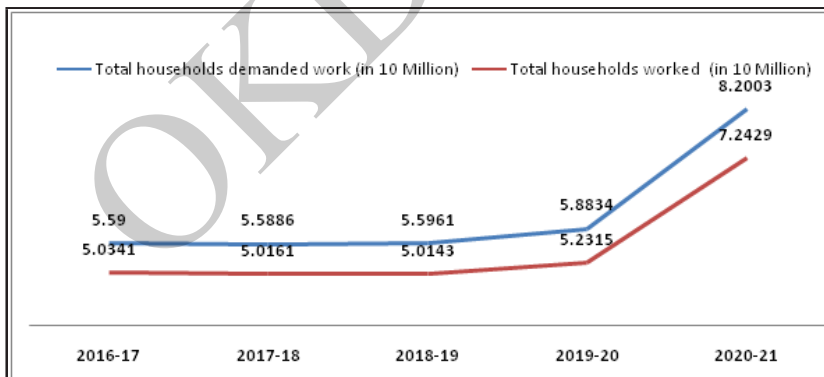
⁴ State of Telangana is not included due to non-availability of data.

a group. Thus, the analysis looks at inequality between groups of individuals and not at inequality between individuals, taking the states as geographic units since this study is interested in the variation in the distribution of employment across states in India. Because the richest group’s labour expenditure share is higher than its number of employment share and the poorest group’s labour expenditure share is lower than its number of employment, the richest group’s contribution to inequality is always positive, and the poorest group’s contribution is always negative (Conceicao, 2001).

Implementation of MGNREGS: All-India Level

During the lockdown, seven states of India officially closed the MGNREGA scheme, but the MGNREGA of others states were also severely affected (Nath, 2020). Notably, as the lockdown was slowly lifted, on April 15, 2020, Indian government explicitly allowed MGNREGA scheme to operate. According to the Centre for Policy Research report, in pre-pandemic India, on average, 90% households, who demanded work, received it. In other words, broadly around 0.5 crore to 0.6 crore households have not received work. The report also suggests that the rate of completion of work has also been decreasing over the period. The completion rate dropped from 97% to 56% between 2016–17 and 2018–19. One of the probable reasons behind the low completion rate was the fund crisis. According to the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) report, people did not find the programme beneficial beyond the daily wage due to the lack of work completion, which failed to create assets.

Figure 1: MGNREGA in Last Five Years

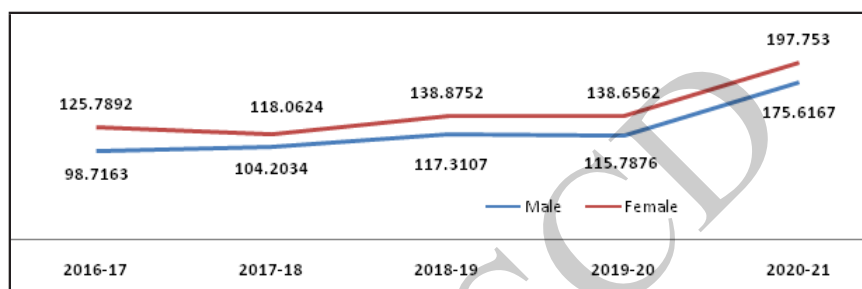


Source: Author’s Calculation

In MGNREGA, the demand for work and household worked both increased significantly. At the household level between 2019–20 and 2020–21, demand for work increased from 5.88 crore to 8.20 crore and the number of the household work increased from 5.23 crore to 7.24 crore. Demand for work and supply of work in MGNREGA is highest in the decade (Narayanan et al., 2020). The pattern is almost the same for all the states in India. The increase in demand in the rural area can be

attributed to the decrease in employment in the country, particularly in the urban areas and return migration (Singh, 2020; Kumar, 2020 Mashi and Slater, 2020). Figure 1 also suggests that the gap between the demand for work and supply of work increased with time, the highest being in 2020–21. Narayanan et al. (2017) observed that the rationing rate⁵ is mordantly pro-poor, and its rate of rationing decreased by almost half between 2009–10 and 2011–12. The recent data also suggest a similar trend, i.e., between 2015–16 and 2020–21, the rationing rate falls from 26% to 0.13%.

Figure 2: Total Person-Days Worked by Gender (in Crore)



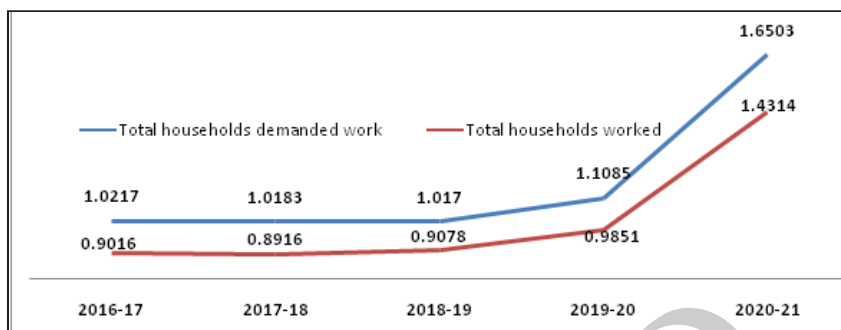
Source: Author's Calculation

Another notable aspect of the MGNREGA is the gender dimensions of employment. Historically, the number of female workers engaged in the scheme is always higher than that of males (Figure 2). Given different social-cultural and economic barriers that negatively affect women's participation, MGNREGA employs more female labour than any other government scheme (Reddy et al., 2014). As pointed by many scholars that the rural employment guarantee programme is one of the most incredible opportunities for rural women of India to move from unpaid to paid jobs (Mattos et al., 2017). The paid jobs are also closely related to their empowerment (Kabeer, 2008; Agarwal, 1997; Folbre, 1986). However, with huge number of male return migrants, the female to male employment ratio has decreased from 1.20 to 1.13 between 2019–20 and 2020–21.

Impact of COVID 19 on MGNREGA: Aspirational District-Level Analysis

This section focuses on the implications of MGNREGA due to COVID in the aspirational districts and tried to correlate with other indicators. The effectiveness of the rural employment guarantee programme is not homogeneous in the country. For example, the agriculturally developed regions have less preference towards MGNREGA compared to the agriculturally less-developed areas.

⁵ Rationing rate is the total households seeking but not getting work/total households seeking work.

Figure 3: MGNREGA in Aspirational Districts (in Crore)

Source: Author's Calculation

However, similar upward trends are observed in the aspirational districts. The demand for work and household work increased substantially between 2019–20 and 2020–21. As demand augmented, the gap between demand and supply also increased in these districts as evident from Figure 3. The unprecedented increase in the demand for work by household could be due to the enormous labour influx in the rural areas owing to job loss in the urban areas due to the lockdown. The increase in allocation of the fund was also not sufficient to suppress the gap.

Table 3: Annual Growth Rate (%) of Total Households Demanded Work and Households Worked

Year	All India		Aspirational Districts	
	Demanded work	Worked	Demanded work	Worked
2017-18	-0.03	-0.36	-0.33	-1.11
2018-19	0.14	-0.04	-0.14	1.81
2019-20	5.13	4.33	9.01	8.52
2020-21	39.38	38.45	48.88	45.31

Source: Author's Calculation

Annual growth rates for 2017–18 to 2020–21 are presented in Table 3. The comparisons between all-India and aspirational districts suggest that except 2017–18, the growth rate of persons worked in the aspirational districts is higher than that at the all-India levels. Remarkably, 2020–21, the demand for work and person worked was significantly elevated. The demand for work is almost 10% higher in the aspirational districts, i.e., 39.38% at the India level and 48.88% at the districts level.

Table 4 presents the annual growth rate of workers according to age groups. It is clear that with time the distribution of work shifted more towards the young population compared to those above 60 years. In an average year, i.e., between 2018–19 and 2019–20, the growth rate of work is highest in the age group above 60 i.e. 7.58%. The pandemic year witnessed a striking 118% worker in the age group 18–30 years.

One of the apparent reasons was the impact of migration. Although the primary objective of the MGNREGA has been to reduce poverty, it is also seen as a policy to reduce rural–urban migration. Table 4 also sheds light on the household’s strategies between ‘right to work’ and ‘right to movement’ (Das, 2015; Dodd et al., 2018). Labour migration from less developed to developed regions is a crucial livelihood strategy for many rural households (de Haan, 2011). A household tries to diversify the income source in a typical year through the migration of young members to urban areas and reliance of the elderly on the local labour market for jobs. Table 3 shows the positive relationship between supply of labour and age. The situation in rural India changed dramatically in pandemic times. Due to significant losses of jobs in the urban areas, the young migrants returned to their villages, and MGNREGA became the last resort for their employment.

Table 4: Annual Growth Rate of Worker by Age Group

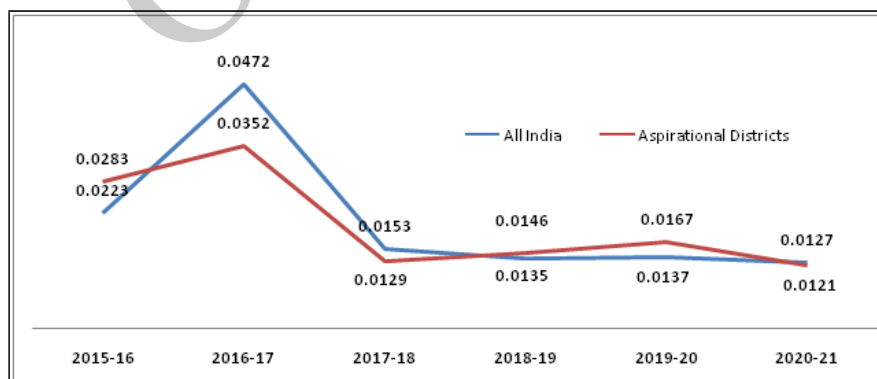
Year/Age Group	18-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	>60	Total
2018–19 and 2019–20	5.47	0.52	4.49	5.51	7.58	3.79
2019–20 and 2020–21	124.13	53.12	40.59	33.22	21.1	48.88
Change	118.66	52.6	36.1	27.71	13.52	45.09

Source: Author’s Calculation

Employment Inequality

In a vast and diverse nation like India, it is crucial to understand the employment dynamics among the aspirational districts vis-à-vis India as a whole. As mentioned above, among the different methods to capture the performances of MGNREGA, the Theil inequality index has been used in this study to understand the degree and source of inequality. The Theil inequality measure was also used to evaluate the performances of different states at the time of the COVID crisis.

Figure 4 :Theil Index



Source: Author’s Calculation

The inequality of employment increased between 2015–16 and 2016–17 and decreased subsequently (Figure 4). The Theil index suggests that the aspirational districts' index value was higher in 2018–19 and 2019–20 compared to the all-India value. In the year 2020–21, the index value for the aspirational districts was 0.012, which is marginally lower than the value at the Indian level. One of the primary reasons behind the relatively high index value of 2016–17 is the demonetisation of the high-value currencies (Jha, 2019).

Table 5: Year-Wise Contributions to the Theil Index: All India

2019-20				2020-21			
State	share of person days	share of Labour Exp.	Index 2019-20	State	share of person days	share of Labour Exp.	Index 2020-21
Karnataka	7.87	8.92	0.023	Karnataka	6.95	7.78	0.015
Kerala	0.34	0.18	0.018	Kerala	0.34	0.47	0.014
AP	2.45	2.61	0.011	AP	2.45	2.53	0.009
Punjab	5.57	5.27	0.003	Manipur	6.12	5.82	0.007
J&K	5.35	4.88	0.003	Odisha	4.93	4.31	0.006
Haryana	0.00	0.00	0.003	J&K	0.00	0.00	0.006
Maharashtra	1.39	1.38	0.002	Haryana	1.29	1.25	0.003
Assam	0.36	0.56	0.002	Punjab	0.48	0.72	0.003
Mizoram	1.02	1.03	0.001	Nagaland	0.90	0.86	0.002
Nagaland	1.23	1.48	0.000	Maharashtra	1.09	1.56	0.002
HP	2.52	2.32	0.000	AR	3.15	2.98	0.001
Sikkim	4.40	6.31	0.000	Assam	3.98	5.26	0.001
Meghalaya	3.15	4.68	0.000	Mizoram	2.74	3.95	0.001
Puducherry	7.59	6.93	0.000	Puducherry	9.17	7.98	0.000
Goa	2.475	2.706	0.000	Goa	1.82	1.98	0.000
Gujarat	0.92	0.54	0.000	Sikkim	0.89	1.44	0.000
Uttarakhand	1.46	1.46	0.000	Meghalaya	1.03	1.02	0.000
Uttar Pradesh	0.76	0.88	0.000	Uttarakhand	0.53	0.59	0.000
Tripura	0.54	0.57	0.000	HP	0.48	0.66	0.000
AR	4.38	4.15	-0.001	Gujarat	5.58	6.18	0.000
Jharkhand	0.03	0.03	-0.002	Tripura	0.03	0.03	-0.001
Odisha	0.92	1.23	-0.002	Jharkhand	1.01	1.25	-0.002
Manipur	12.92	10.52	-0.003	Uttar Pradesh	12.34	10.10	-0.002
Bihar	0.12	0.12	-0.003	Bihar	0.10	0.10	-0.003
West Bengal	9.77	9.29	-0.004	West Bengal	8.94	8.26	-0.004
Chhattisgarh	1.35	1.32	-0.005	Chhattisgarh	1.17	1.07	-0.006
Tamil Nadu	9.61	9.58	-0.005	Tamil Nadu	10.58	10.34	-0.007
MP	0.81	0.78	-0.006	MP	0.81	0.80	-0.011
Rajasthan	10.70	10.25	-0.022	Rajasthan	11.09	10.71	-0.020

Source: Author's Calculation Note: Andhra Pradesh = AP, Arunachal Pradesh = AR, Himachal Pradesh = HP, Madhya Pradesh = MP, Jammu And Kashmir = J&K

Table 5 shows a pan-India analysis of the five largest positive and negative Theil elements for both years. In 2019–20, the top five states with large (most positive) Theil elements were Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir and top five states with smallest (most negative) Theil elements were Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal. The top five most positive contributors are characterised by higher per capita labour expenditure. In 2020–21, in the top five lists, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh remained at the same sequence, but Manipur and Odisha were replaced by Punjab, and Jammu & Kashmir, while the bottom five states continue to be the same.

Table 6: Year-Wise Contributions to the Theil Index: Aspirational Districts

2019-20				2020-21			
State	share of person days	share of Labour Exp.	Index 2019-20	State	share of person days	share of Labour Exp.	Index 2020-21
Karnataka	6.15	8.12	0.0225	AP	15.12	16.71	0.0167
AP	17.09	18.53	0.0149	Haryana	3.02	4.33	0.0156
Kerala	3.24	4.50	0.0147	Kerala	2.69	3.73	0.0122
J&K	1.15	2.10	0.0126	Karnataka	5.06	6.00	0.0102
Haryana	1.38	1.99	0.0073	Odisha	5.60	6.13	0.0055
Punjab	1.05	1.32	0.0030	Manipur	0.73	1.15	0.0052
Nagaland	0.82	1.05	0.0027	J&K	1.55	1.83	0.0031
Mizoram	1.81	1.94	0.0013	Punjab	1.13	1.33	0.0022
Maharashtra	1.48	1.58	0.0010	Maharashtra	1.33	1.43	0.0011
Assam	1.96	1.99	0.0003	Mizoram	1.34	1.41	0.0008
Sikkim	0.98	1.02	0.0003	AR	0.29	0.35	0.0007
Gujarat	3.79	3.73	-0.0006	Nagaland	0.88	0.88	0.0000
Uttarakhand	1.11	1.03	-0.0008	Sikkim	0.94	0.88	-0.0005
AR	0.33	0.21	-0.0010	Assam	2.06	2.00	-0.0006
Meghalaya	2.10	1.97	-0.0013	Uttarakhand	1.01	0.94	-0.0006
HP	5.27	5.09	-0.0018	Meghalaya	1.99	1.90	-0.0008
Uttar Pradesh	3.92	3.68	-0.0023	Gujarat	4.21	4.06	-0.0015
Odisha	3.77	3.47	-0.0028	HP	4.06	3.83	-0.0023
Jharkhand	2.34	2.03	-0.0029	Uttar Pradesh	4.32	4.04	-0.0027
Manipur	0.84	0.40	-0.0030	Jharkhand	3.17	2.86	-0.0029
Bihar	3.38	2.99	-0.0036	Bihar	4.10	3.71	-0.0037
MP	3.50	3.08	-0.0039	Chhattisgarh	3.47	3.00	-0.0043
Chhattisgarh	3.79	3.30	-0.0045	MP	4.56	3.84	-0.0066
Tripura	6.10	5.56	-0.0052	Tripura	5.36	4.61	-0.0070
Rajasthan	5.20	4.13	-0.0095	Rajasthan	4.91	4.01	-0.0082
West Bengal	10.69	9.61	-0.0102	West Bengal	10.33	9.34	-0.0095
Tamil Nadu	6.74	5.58	-0.0105	Tamil Nadu	6.79	5.71	-0.0099

Source: Author's Calculation. Note: Andhra Pradesh = AP, Arunachal Pradesh = AR, Himachal Pradesh = HP, Madhya Pradesh = MP, Jammu And Kashmir = J&K

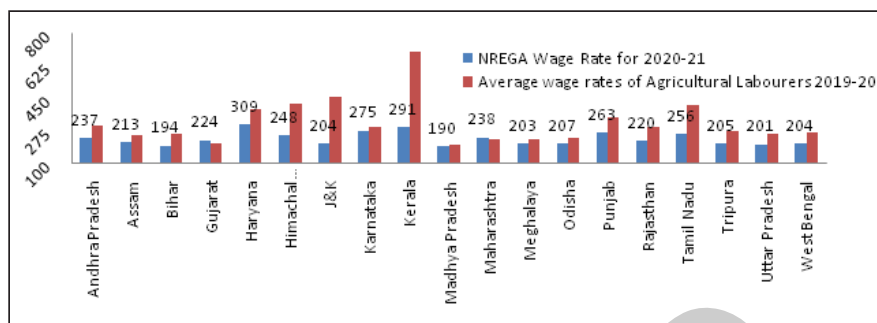
Table 6 shows the state-wise analysis of the index for aspirational districts. The five largest positive contributors of 2019–20 to the index have been Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir and Haryana. The list is almost the same for the year 2020–21 except Odisha in place of Jammu and Kashmir. Interestingly, although the four states, i.e., Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Haryana, remain in the top five, their relative ranking has changed. For instance, Karnataka's (highest positive contributor in 2019–20) contribution to Theil has decreased from 0.023 in 2019–20 to 0.010 in 2020–21. Contrary to Karnataka, Haryana's contribution to the index has increased from 0.007 to 0.017 between 2019–20 and 2020–21. The list of top negative contributors has also not changed except that Madhya Pradesh has replaced Chhattisgarh in 2020–21. Another fascinating fact about the bottom three states, i.e., Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Rajasthan, is that their contribution to Theil decreased between these periods.

It is evident from tables 5 and 6 that the magnitude of inequality of the Theil index depends on the share of employment and share of labour cost. Comparing states at the all-India level and aspirational district level suggest that states with a higher share of cost and lower share of employment, i.e., wage and respective state's share in total employment, are positively contributing to the inequality. Alternatively, it can be said that the source of inequality is the higher cost of per unit employment. A wage difference among the states plays an essential role alongside the supply of the work. The higher percentage of employment with a higher share of labour cost will be more equal compared to a state with higher expenditure on labour but less share of jobs. Therefore, the above analysis suggests two critical factors behind the employment inequality, i.e., wage and supply of work.

The wage⁶ in MGNREGA is decided by the Central Government. According to the latest data (Figure 5), the highest MGNREGA wage is in Haryana (Rs 309), and the lowest is Madhya Pradesh (Rs 190). More than 50% states pay less than the national average MGNREGA wage, i.e., less than Rs 231. The considerable variation of per day wage (standard deviation = 34.62) among the central states is directly linked to employment inequality (tables 4 and 5). According to Mahendra Dev Committee (2014) recommendations, workers should be paid either the minimum wage or the MGNREGA wage, whichever was higher. The committee also recommends that the basis of revision of remuneration should be the consumer price index of rural (CPI-R) instead of the consumer price index of agricultural labour (CPI-AL). The significant advantage of CPI-R is: (1) It captures the price of the whole rural economy, unlike CPI-AL, which only denotes agricultural households (2) The base year for CPI-AL is almost 35 years, i.e., the consumption basket of 1986–87 is used for the calculations (3) The CPI-R gives lesser weight on the food items in comparisons to CPI-AL. The basket of goods in the CPI-AL is primarily food items (almost 72%).

⁶ The total cost of MGNREGA is shared between the central government and respective state governments. The total cost consists of three things namely, wage, material and administrative costs. The central government pays 100% wage of unskilled labour, 75% wage of semi-skilled and skilled labour, 75% of the cost of materials and additional 6% of the administrative expenditures.

Figure 5: Wage Differences between MGNREGA and Agriculture



Source: Author's Compilation of various reports

Table 7: Area-Wise Rates of Minimum Wages of Agricultural Labour (in rupees/day)

Payable w.e.f	Category of worker	Area		
		A	B	C
01-10-2018	Unskilled	355	324	321
	Semi-Skilled /Unskilled Supervisory	389	357	328
	Skilled/ Clerical	422	389	356
	Highly Skilled	467	434	389
01-10-2019	Unskilled	383	350	347
	Semi-Skilled /Unskilled Supervisory	420	385	354
	Skilled/ Clerical	455	420	384
	Highly Skilled	504	469	420
01-04-2020	Unskilled	400	365	362
	Semi-Skilled /Unskilled Supervisory	438	402	369
	Skilled/ Clerical	475	438	401
	Highly Skilled	526	489	438
01-10-2020	Unskilled	407	371	368
	Semi-Skilled /Unskilled Supervisory	445	409	375
	Skilled/ Clerical	483	445	408
	Highly Skilled	535	497	445
01-04-2021	Unskilled	411	375	372
	Semi-Skilled /Unskilled Supervisory	449	413	379
	Skilled/ Clerical	488	449	412
	Highly Skilled	540	502	449

Source: Ministry of Labour & Employment, Govt. of India

Table 7 shows the minimum wage of the agricultural labour. The data is divided into three regions (A, B and C). Category A and B comprise mostly urban areas. In Category C, with reference to rural agricultural labourers, shows that even the

minimum wage of unskilled workers is much higher than the MGNREGA wage (also see Annexure 1). The minimum wage of agricultural labourers in Category C was Rs 362 per day in the year 2020. The gap between wages of the highest paid MGNREGA state, i.e., Haryana, and the minimum wage was Rs 53 per day. In Madhya Pradesh, the wage gap between MGNREGA and minimum wage was Rs 172 per day. For the majority of states, the gap between average agricultural wage (2019–20) and MGNREGA wage (Figure 5) is significant. For instance, the gap is more than Rs 400 for Kerala. In other words, there are discrepancies between MGNREGA wage, Minimum wage and average agricultural wage in rural India. These discrepancies are significant sources for employment inequality either between India's states or between India's aspirational districts, and such inequalities are policy-induced supply-sided ones.

Status of SC, ST and Women in MGNREGA

For more inclusive employments women, scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) are put in the front. Special provision is made under the scheme to develop land and water resources in the individually owned lands of SC, ST, below poverty (BPL) households. In 2008, it extended to small-marginal farmers with job cards. The provisions are formulated in such a way that it can provide employment to the lowest strata of the population. Usually, these groups are subjected to exploitation and marginalisation for a long time. For instance, according to the NSSO data of the different year, the poverty among the STs is much higher than non-tribal. In 2011–12 (NSSO 68th Round), rural poverty of STs was double than their counterpart. The incidences of the poverty among rural STs are 45.3%, whereas the rate of poverty among the non-tribals was 22.9% (Pal, 2015). At the outset, according to the NSSO rounds, the rate of poverty among the ST has decreased over the period of time. The decrease in the rate of poverty is not uniform across the state. Some states are able to record more decline in poverty than others. Similarly, the paid employments to women also help the rural household perform better in many social indicators like health, nutrition, child education, etc. An attempt was made in this section to understand the role of MGNREGA to bring social inclusion.

Table 8 shows that, over time, the inequality reduced across the groups, except during 2016–17. Overall, the disparity among the aspirational districts is less when compared with the pan-India data. In all the three categories, i.e., SC, ST and women in 2015–16, the Theil value was higher in the aspirational districts but decreased faster than the all-India level. These data suggest a positive development, and all the aspirational districts are coming closer with respect to giving paid jobs to women and social categories (SC and ST). Theil elements for women suggest that employment during the crisis become more inclusive. The Theil value of women in aspirational districts decreases from 0.0159 in 2019–20 to 0.0128 in 2020–21. In other words, the crisis is able to reduce the inequality of employment in general but for ST, SC and women in particular.

Table 8: Theil Elements for the MGNREGA by Social Groups and Women

	SC		ST		Women	
	India	AD	India	AD	India	AD
2015-16	0.0132	0.0162	0.0423	0.0500	0.0206	0.0254
2016-17	0.0530	0.0441	0.0255	0.0212	0.0581	0.0425
2017-18	0.0127	0.0114	0.0269	0.0182	0.0171	0.0149
2018-19	0.0124	0.0104	0.0137	0.0148	0.0170	0.0162
2019-20	0.0124	0.0116	0.0125	0.0161	0.0156	0.0159
2020-21	0.0104	0.0090	0.0151	0.0120	0.0141	0.0128

Source: Author's Calculation

Conclusion

In the presence of a long-standing debate about the nature of public-funded job creation, it is crucial to understand the challenges the process entails, addressing the larger goal of a developing society. The academic nuances of the public-funded scheme on employment also evolved over time. The implication of these becomes all the more relevant at the time of crisis. As many policymakers believed the crisis also comes with the opportunity for bold reform. The study attempts to evaluate the world's most expensive job-guaranteed policy, i.e., MGNREGA, and provides a fresh perspective of the rural employment policy and its implications of inequality. The Theil elements are calculated using government data on variables related to MGNREGA. The variables include expenditure on labour; total number of persons who had worked, total households who demanded work and agricultural wage-related variables between 2015–16 and 2020–21. The results have led to two key findings. First, the paper finds a significant rise in demand for work due to restrictions and lockdown of the economy and return migration from urban to rural. The increase in labour supply is associated with more youth, mainly female workers, demanding work during period of study. The allocation of extra funds from the central government helps to increase the number of employments also. The rationing rate, i.e., the gap between demand and supply, also increased during the crisis time. Though the supply of work could not match with an extraordinary increase of demand for work but many studies find that the rationing of jobs is more favorable towards the poor (Narayanan and et al., 2017). Second, the construction and decomposition of the inequality index suggest a decrease in inequality. The less developed districts are able to achieve some amount of employment equality. The reductions in the Theil elements are evident of the rise of some degree of equality at the all-India level and in the aspirational districts particularly with regard to women employment and employment of workers in the SC and ST categories. The state-wise comparisons did indicate the inequality between states.

In states like Kerala, Karnataka, Haryana the rate of inequality are higher. On the other hand, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan are more inclusive in comparisons

to others. One of the main reasons behind employment inequality between and within aspirational districts is wage difference. The MGNREGA wage is decided by the central government using CPI-AL with base year 1986–87. This study also supports the idea of CPI-Rural as a benchmark for the calculation proposed by the Mahendra Deb Committee (2014). As this study proposes, the convergence of MGNREGA wage with the minimum wage of agricultural labourer will provide logical steps towards social justices and will reduce regional inequality of employment. The increase of wages in MGNREGA will be an essential safety net for a rural household in general but more so during the crisis.

References

- Abiad, M. A., Furceri, D., & Topalova, P. 2015. *The macroeconomic effects of public investment: Evidence from advanced economies*. International Monetary Fund.
- Agarwal, B. 1997. "Bargaining' and gender relations: Within and beyond the household", *Feminist Economics*, 3(1): 1–51.
- Conceicao, Pedro (2001). "Inequality Dynamics: A Note on the Time-wise Decompositions of Entropy-based Measures of Inequality with a Special Focus on Theil Measures," UTIP Working Paper19, UTIP and Center for Innovation, Technology and Policy Research, Lisbon, Portugal, April.
- Das, U. (2015) "Can the rural employment guarantee scheme reduce rural out-migration: Evidence from West Bengal, India," *The Journal of Development Studies*, 51(6): 621–641.
- de Haan, A. (2011) "Inclusive growth? Labour migration and poverty in India", Working Paper 513. The Hague: The Institute of Social Studies.
- De Mattos, F. B., & Dasgupta, S. (2017). MGNREGA, *paid work and women's empowerment* (No. 994974190802676). International Labour Organization.
- Dodd, W., Wyngaarden, S., Humphries, S., Patel, K., Majowicz, S., Little, M., & Dewey, C. (2018). The Relationship Between MGNREGA and Internal Labour Migration in Tamil Nadu, India. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 30(2), 178-194.
- Dr'eze, J. 2020. The need for a million worksites now, *The Hindu*, May 25, 2020; <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-need-for-a-millionworksitesnow/article31665949.ece>
- Dutta, A., & Fischer, H. W. (2021). The local governance of COVID-19: Disease prevention and social security in rural India. *World development*, 138, 105234. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105234>
- Folbre, N. 1986. "Hearts and spades: Paradigms of household economics", *World Development*, 14(2): 245–55.
- Gentilini, U., Almenfi, M. B. A., Dale, Pamela, Palacios, R. J., Natarajan, H., Galicia Rabadan, G. A., Okamura, Y., Blomquist, J. D., Abels, M., Demarco, G. C. & Santos, I. V. 2021. "Social protection and jobs responses to COVID-19: A real-time review of country measures" (May 14, 2021), COVID-19 Living Paper Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group; <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/281531621024684216/Social-Protection-and-Jobs-Responses-to-COVID-19-A-Real-Time-Review-of-Country-Measures-May-14-2021>

Government of India (2020). Loss of Jobs: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 197, to be answered on 14.09.2020 .URL: <http://164.100.24.220/loksabhaquestions/annex/174/AU197.pdf>

IANS (2016), 'MGNREGA is most innovative Indian programme: Joseph Stiglitz', Business Standard, July 6, https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/mgnrega-is-most-innovative-indian-programme-joseph-stiglitz-116070600944_1.html

ILO (2020). 'COVID-19 and the world of work: Impact and policy responses, March, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_738753.pdf, accessed on 15 December, 2020.

Imbert, C. and Papp, J. (2020a). Costs and Benefits of Rural-urban Migration: Evidence from India, *Journal of Development Economics* p. 102473.

Imbert, C. and Papp, J. (2020b). Short-term migration, rural public works, and urban labor markets: Evidence from India, *Journal of the European Economic Association* 18(2): 927–963.

Jha, P. 2019. "Prospects for labour and contemporary capitalism: An assessment with reference to India", *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 62: 319–40.

Kabeer, N. 2008. "Paid work, women's empowerment and gender justice" Brighton, Pathways on Women's Empowerment)

Kumar, R. 2020. "Post-lockdown, workers demand more work, better wages under rural jobs scheme", *India Spend* August 20; <https://www.indiaspend.com/post-lockdown-workers-demand-more-work-better-wages-under-rural-jobs-scheme/>

Layard, R. 2020. "How a job guarantee scheme can avoid the slide into long-term unemployment", *LSE COVID-19 Blog*

Mahendra Dev, S Committee (2015) "Report of the Committee on MGNREGA Wage Rate Indexation" <https://www.im4change.org/siteadmin/tinymce/uploaded/Mahendra%20Dev%20Committee%20Final%20Report%202015.pdf>

Mallick, S. K. 2006. "Policy instruments to avoid output collapse: an optimal control model for India", *Applied Financial Economics*, 16:10,761–76; DOI: [10.1080/09603100600684948](https://doi.org/10.1080/09603100600684948)

Mashi, N. and Slater, J. 2020. "In India, engineers and MBAs are turning to manual labour to survive the economic crash", *Washington Post*, September 24, 2020; https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/india-coronavirus-jobs-economy/2020/09/23/6aab7d9c-f859-11ea-85f7-5941188a98cd_story.html

Massimo Battaglia & Fabio Iraldo (2011) Spatial Effects of Labour Policies Promoted in Italy from 1996 to 2006: An Analysis in the EU Context, *European Planning Studies*, 19:2, 311-330, DOI: [10.1080/09654313.2011.532678](https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2011.532678)

Mattos De, Fernanda Bárcia and Sukti Dasgupta (2017): "MGNREGA, Paid Work and Women's Empowerment," Employment Working Paper No 230, International Labour Organization, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_613735.pdf

Narayanan, S., Das, U., Liu, Y., & Barrett, C. B. (2017). The "discouraged worker effect" in public works programs: Evidence from the MGNREGA in India. *World Development*, 100, 31-44.

Nath, D. 2020. Coronavirus: Lockdown hits NREGA workers hard, *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/coronavirus-lockdown-hitsnrega-workers-hard/article31145538.ece>

Pal, G. C. 2015. "Poverty among tribals in India: Variations and vulnerabilities", *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 1(2): 91–107.

Petrović, P., Arsić, M., & Nojković, A. (2021). Increasing public investment can be an effective policy in bad times: Evidence from emerging EU economies. *Economic Modelling*, 94, 580-597.

Reddy, D. N., Reddy, A. A., & Bantilan, M. C. S. 2014. "The impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on rural labor markets and agriculture", *India Review*, 13(3): 251–73.

Singh, M. 2020. "COVID-19 lockdown migrant pressure driving innovations in MGNREGA", 30 Stades: Stories that inspire, June 10, 2020; <https://30stades.com/2020/06/10/covid-19-lockdown-migrant-pressure-driving-innovations-in-mgnrega-india>

Srivastava, Ravi (2020). Understanding circular migration in India: Its nature and dimensions, the crisis under lockdown and the response of the state. Institute for Human Development, Centre for Employment Studies Working Paper Series-WP 04/2020. http://www.ihdia.org/Working%20Papers/2020/IHD-CES_WP_04_2020.pdf. (Accessed 24 September 2021)

Theil, H. 1967. *Economics and information theory*. Amsterdam: North Holland.

Annexure 1: State-wise Wage Rate for Unskilled Manual Workers (w.e.f. April 1, 2020)

Sl. No.	Name of State/ Union territory	Wage rate in rupees per day (in Rs.)
1	Andhra Pradesh	237
2	Arunachal Pradesh	205
3	Assam	213
4	Bihar	194
5	Chhattisgarh	190
6	Goa	280
7	Gujarat	224
8	Haryana	309
9	Himachal Pradesh	Non-scheduled Areas- 198.00 Scheduled Tribes Areas- 248.00
10	Jammu and Kashmir	204
11	Ladakh	204
12	Jharkhand	194
13	Karnataka	275
14	Kerala	291
15	Madhya Pradesh	190
16	Maharashtra	238

17	Manipur	238
18	Meghalaya	203
19	Mizoram	225
20	Nagaland	205
21	Odisha	207
22	Punjab	263
23	Rajasthan	220
24	Sikkim	205
	Sikkim (3 Gram Panchayats named Gnathang, Lachung and Lachen)	308
25	Tamil Nadu	256
26	Telangana	237
27	Tripura	205
28	Uttar Pradesh	201
29	Uttarakhand	201
30	West Bengal	204
31	Andaman and Nicobar	Andaman District- 267.00
		Nicobar District - 282.00
32	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	258
33	Daman and Diu	227
34	Lakshadweep	266
35	Puducherry	256.00

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India (March 23, 2020)

Rise and Fall of Ethnonationalist Armed Movement in Assam: A Diachronic Narrative of the Assamese Nationality and its Systemic Insecurity

Dilip Gogoi¹

Abstract

The article examines the dynamics of state-society conflict in post-colonial Assam. While examining the discourse of Assamese nationality formation through the ethno-political narratives by the emergent elites, the article adopts a historical approach encompassing a diachronic view of history from the pre-colonial formation of ethnic collectivity to colonial exploitation and the subsequent marginalization of the ethnic group rights in the postcolonial period. It explores the root causes of ethnonational assertion of the Assamese nationality– the claim which later provides the grounds for rising armed political struggle by the United Liberation Front of Assam ULFA. Further, the article attempts to comprehend why the sovereign mind and resistance movement is still prevalent among certain section of the Assamese people despite the decline of separatist ethnopolitical armed insurgency led by ULFA in the region. The article explores the gap between the vernacular ethnopolitical narratives and statist response to such ethnonational armed conflict.

Introduction

Claiming sovereign ethnic homeland either through armed struggle or nonviolent means by an identifiable ethno-national group within a recognized territory of a state or between states is not a new phenomenon in post-colonial societies. The post-colonial Assam has witnessed a sovereignty based ethno-nationalist armed conflict since 1980s. This radical ethno-nationalist movement remains mostly unresolved, occasionally takes violent form, gives birth to terrorism, invite states' repression, resulting in gross violation of human rights. The ideologues of armed movement believe that India is a multinational state and every nationality has the right to decide their own destiny by exercising the principle of self-determination. The armed nationalist movement although failed in achieving its goal, has pertinently raised the question of 'sovereign Assam', a radical ideological construct, built on the basis of past history and ethnic

¹ Associate Professor, Cotton University, Panbazar, Ghy- 781001, Email: dilip.gogoi@cottonuniversity.ac.in

collectivity. This radical ideological construct has been still alive among certain section of the people and has been instrumental in igniting the Assamese mind in the event of any potential insecurity to their identity.

It is against this backdrop the article tries to examine the discourse of Assamese identity formation in post-colonial Assam through the ethno-political narratives and how these ethnopolitical narratives ignite and radicalize certain sections of Assamese people on ethno-political line. The article also examines the causes and the reasons as to why there occurs recurrent resistance movement against the state despite the decline of the ethnopolitical armed movement led by ULFA in recent times. While explaining it the article extensively relies on the Assamese vernacular sources including the print, views of the community elites, petitions and memorandums of native organizations along with the ethnographic and historical materials pertaining to the region in charting the question of Assamese nationality and sovereignty from a historical and ethnopolitical standpoint.

The Assamese Identity: An Ethno-National Construct

The formative history of Assamese identity goes back to pre-Ahom period and the consolidation of Assamese nationality harks back to Ahom rule.² Assam, a melting pot of diverse cultural origins mainly consists of the Indo-Aryan and the Austro-Mongoloid people. The migration of people into Assam continues since centuries from both Indian sub-continent and Southeast Asia. The migrant people interacted with the local communities of both the Brahmaputra valley and the hills thereby creating a common identity. The Ahoms decisively formed a greater community by amalgamating the local communities through the policies of accommodation and assimilation into the Ahom kingdom. The Ahoms also partook in the process of *Assamisation* by adoption of Hinduism. As a consequence, the Assamese or '*Asomiya*' *jaati* (nationality) was formed with the process of *Aryanisation* as well as the rise and consolidation of Ahom rule in the Brahmaputra valley.³ The policy of accommodativeness towards the different ethnic groups, absence of caste prejudices⁴ and the presence of assimilative administrative system in the Ahom reign made it possible to form a common political territory to nurture Assamese *jaati*- a distinct composite cultural identity. Most significantly, Sankardeva (1449-1568), a great social reformer and cultural legend, along with his disciple Madhabdeva had prepared the ground for creating a composite cultural identity by propagating-*Vaishnavism*. The neo-Vaishnava movement was instrumental in bringing many tribals within the

² The Ahom rulers continued to maintain their independence and ruling the territory until the British finally occupied Assam. The Mughal rulers of Delhi made several attempts to annex the Ahom kingdom. However, the Ahom kingdom was defended by the Ahom General Lachit Barphukan by defeating the Mughals in the historic battle of Saraighat in 1671 which has remained a symbol of national unity and victory in the collective memory of the Assamese people.

³ Misra, 'The Transformation of Assamese Identity,(2001)2.

⁴ Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations ,1771-1826* (1974) 48.

Hindu fold and thereof the greater Assamese community. It was possible because of the egalitarian and democratic character of the movement. Historian Amalendu Guha noted that during the 17th and 18th centuries large segments of Bodo-Kacharis and other tribal groups embraced Hinduism.⁵ He further said that the neo-Vaishnavite movement had a de-tribalizing role⁶ and brought diverse tribal nationalities under a common faith. Hiren Gohain, an eminent public intellectual of Assam, argues that Sankardeva's neo-Vaishnavism, through its liberal and egalitarian values, provided the base for founding of the modern Assamese nationality.⁷ It helped to evolve a unique social identity for the Assamese by rejecting the conservative Hindu practices as seen to be practiced different parts of India. Nevertheless, the presence of a small section of Muslims was there in Assam who earlier had come as a part of the expeditions of Muslim warriors to Assam in 13th and 14th centuries. In due course of time, this group of Muslim people got assimilated with the emerging Assamese nationality and came to be known as *Asomiya Musulmans*. Even Ahom kings bestowed position, power and eminence on many of these Assamese Muslims and they got assimilated into greater Assamese identity. The demographic position of Assamese community at the time of British entry into Assam indicates the presence of various tribal groups (tribes who originally descended from the hills in the neighborhood such as Rabhas, Garos, Bodo-Kacharis, Mikirs, Lalungs, Hajongs, Miris etc.), the Ahoms, the caste Hindus, the lower caste Hindus and a relatively smaller section of Assamese Muslim. Besides the Assamese language, script with original root in Kamrupi with proto-Nagari script, which is derived from Sanskrit and an 'aprombhasa' of Magadhi and Maithali of Bihar with strong roots of Aryan connection remain an important contributing factor in the formation and growth of Assamese nationality.⁸ However, some scholars⁹ suggest that although it has a Sanskrit root, Assamese came into contact with the local dialects of the Tibeto-Burman language family¹⁰ and Tai. The early period of the development of Assamese language can be traced back to two main centres of writing with two different scripts respectively: one was the kingdom of Kamrupa in the western Assam with its close ties with North Bengal following a proto-Nagari script which was influenced by Magadhi and Maithali of Bihar with some modified Sanskrit words and terms, and the other Centre of writing was Sadiya, in the eastern Assam, and the

⁵ Guha, *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: Society, Polity, Economy* (1991) 25.

⁶ Guha (1991) 103.

⁷ For detailed explanation and impact of Sankardeva's Vaishnavism toward formation of the Assamese nationality – see Hiren Gohain, *Asomiya Jatiya Jibanat Mahapurusiya Parampara* (Guwahati, 1990).

⁸ To understand the root of Assamese language see Maheswar Neog, *Asomiya Sahityar Ruprekha* (Guwahati: Publication Broad of Assam, 1974).

⁹ For example Kalirum Medhi mentioned that Assamese language formed with a variety of influences from Sanskrit, Tibeto-Burman, and Tai. For details explanation see Kalirum Medhi, *Assamese Grammar and the origin of the Assamese Language* (Guwahati: Publication Broad of Assam, 1988).

¹⁰ For detailed explanation about presence and influence of Tibeto-Burman family in Assamese language see Upen Rabha Hakacham, *Asomiya Aru Asamar Tibbat- Barmiya Bhasa* (Goalpara: Smt. Manjula Rabha Hakachamzak. Rabha Hakacham, 2000).

inscriptions are in Tai.¹¹ All these scripts available during that period were merged into one when the printing press was established in the 19th century with the creation of standardized Assamese letters under the aegis of American Baptist Missionaries. This initiative marked a new beginning in the growth of Assamese linguistic nationalism.

Politically, another significant development was the enactment of Bengal Eastern Frontier regulation of 1873, particularly section 2 by the British, which created the North East Frontier there by further introducing inner lines by identifying two distinct zones – inner line covering the plains districts and the tribal areas of the hills fell beyond the inner line.¹² The plains of Assam valley have a majority of Hindu population while the hills are mostly inhabited by the Christians and non-Hindu tribal groups. However, the British policy of divide and rule deeply hampered the integration between the plains and hills people. The British Census of 1881, which categorized population according to religion, caste, and tribe, revealed an interesting fact about the population pattern of the region: the non-Muslim and non-Christian population of the valley was classified into three groups -- Tribes uninfluenced by Hinduism, tribes in process of conversion into Hinduism, and Hindu Caste.¹³ As per classification, the Assamese came under the subheading of Hindu caste which indicates the dominance of Hinduism and the influence of Hinduism information of Assamese identity. In such a situation it is difficult to define as to who are the Assamese in the purest form. The process of Assamese nationality formation became more complex when a large scale of population from East Bengal, North and Middle India migrated to Assam during the British period. In the process, the tea tribes and the Muslims who came during the period of British rule from East Bengal became a part of the broader Assamese society. Gradually, Assamese identity found its critical base with the emergence of Assamese language, which united the people on linguistic line. However, a section of the Assamese intelligentsia stressed the poly ethnic nature of the Assamese nationalism and claimed that it was the Hindu, particularly the Vaishnavite faith, which served as a cementing force for Assamese society.¹⁴ With the passage of time, thus, Assamese identity came to acquire a multiethnic secular identity through the process of assimilation wherein the factors of common language and cultural tradition have played a crucial role in shaping the composite Assamese identity.

Print Media and Assamese National Consciousness

During the British regime, one of the most influential factors which strengthened the Assamese national consciousness was the struggle to regain the status of the

¹¹ Saikia, *Assam and India : Fragmented Memories , Cultural Identity , and the Tai- Ahom Struggle*(2005)6.

¹² Inner lines basically designed by the British to demarcate the settle and unsettled areas of the colonial administration for the purpose of jurisdiction. The colonial authority-imposed restriction on the British subjects entry beyond the inner line.

¹³ Guha (1991)131.

¹⁴ Misra(2001)14.

Assamese language. In 1837 when Assamese was replaced by Bengali, however, the emerging Assamese middle class elites like Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan and others in association with the Christian Baptist Missionaries brought out standard Assamese grammar and the first Assamese Journal '*Orunodoi*' (1846-83)¹⁵ which played a significant role in Assamese language as an official medium of instruction in 1873. It was against this backdrop that the Assamese students studying in Calcutta organized the *Asomiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha* (ABUSS), an Assamese literary society in 1888 for the cause of Assamese national identity through the promotion of linguistic nationalism. The provincial litterateurs like Ananda Ram Barua, Gunabhiram Barua, Hem Chandra Barua, Haliram Dhekiyal Phukan, Dinanath Bezbarua, Rajanikanta Bordoloi, Kanaklal Barua and others played a very significant role toward the growth of Assamese national consciousness through their writings. Similarly, a strong sense of linguistic based nationalism also emerged with the writings of Lakhsmi Nath Bezbarua. In his writings '*Asom Desh*' (The land of Assam), Assam finds itself being represented as an autonomous socio-cultural and political entity which is clearly revealed in his poems like '*Mor Desh*' (My Country) and '*Asom Sangeet*' (Song of Assam). '*Mor Desh*' which eulogizes Assam as a country of matchless beauty and uniqueness and which can be found nowhere remains as the '*Jatiya Sangeet*' (National song) in Assam.¹⁶

The role of the native press had also immensely contributed toward the growth of Assamese national consciousness. During the British period a large number of vernacular newspapers and periodicals namely *Assam Bilashini* (1871), *Jonaki* (1889), *Bijulee* (1890), *Assamiya* (1918), *Times of Assam* (1923), *Bonti* (1927), *Avahan* (1929), *The Assam Tribune* (1937) emerged and dedicated themselves to the nationalist cause. Papers like *Chetana* (1919), *Deka Asom* (1935) and *Dainik Batori* (1935) dedicated themselves towards Assam's cause and the latter even strongly advocated the idea of "Assam for the Assamese."

Community Elites and Advocacy for Assamese Nation

The early part of the 20th century witnessed the emergence of a section of conscious and educated Assamese elites. The formation of The *Assam Association* in 1903, followed by *Assam Chatra Sanmilan* in 1916 under the presidentship of Lakshminath Bezbarua and *Assam Sahitya Sabha* in 1917 — a literary body under the presidentship

¹⁵ The publication of *Orunodoi* from Sibsagar was the first print revolution in Assam at the aegis of American Baptist missionary, primarily devoted to innovate a new world of Assamese literature with an emphasis on local dialects instead borrowing from other languages. It is noteworthy that Dr Nathan Brown, Miles Bronson and Oliver T. Cutter played a significant role toward the history of Assamese literary resurgence. This was the first Assamese magazine which introduced the Assamese people to the western modernity and provided a literary network for creating a new generation Assamese intellectuals to re-establish the language.

¹⁶ *Mor Desh* written by Bezbarua in 1910 remains a national song for the Assamese. The song '*O Mor Apunar Desh*' signifies today as symbol of Assamese unity and national pride. It is translated into many local dialects and languages and is sang in common platform for celebrating the heritage of Assamese nationality.

of Padmanath Gohain Baruah—were considered to be significant steps toward the growth of Assamese nationalism in the early stages. The *Sanmilan* and *Sabha*, although both were non-political bodies, produced a group of politically conscious civil society activists in Assam. However, it was *Assam Association*, which by deciding to extend support to Gandhi's non-cooperation programme in 1920, marked the beginning of Assam's formal entry into Indian national struggle led by the Congress. The joining of *Chatra Sanmilan* members in the non-cooperation movement and Gandhi's visit to Assam in August 1921 gave an impetus to the anti-British movement, particularly in the Brahmaputra valley. The popularity of Congress party and its leadership in Assam started taking shape largely among the caste Hindu Assamese which subsequently saw the national movement led by Congress. Conspicuously non-caste Hindu leaders more particularly tribal leaders were absent from the Congress politics. However, a few provincial congress leaders wanted to maintain distinctiveness of the provincial Congress in conformity with Assamese nationality. But they could not succeed as the National Congress politics never created a space for the provincial cause and subsumed it under the umbrella of grand Indian nationalist struggle.

In 1920, Chandra Nath Sarma, the founder of the Congress Party in Assam, voiced his concern about the threat posed to the Assamese identity by immigrants from East Bengal. This migration was encouraged by the British from Sylhet and Mymensingh for their colonial interest to meet the labor shortfall in newly found resource rich Assam. The various degrees of influx of migrant population into Assam have caused land alienation to the native Assamese. Therefore, the provincial congress leaders expressed their concern regarding the settlement of migrants in the province which, however, was not given attention by the national Congress. This development later helped in the construction of Assamese nationality on the provincial line as against the pan Indian nationalism. Inevitably, it became a grave cause of disappointment to the Assamese people when Maulana Bhasani, an immigrant leader, started demanding for the abolition of the Line System which was introduced in 1920 to protect the land of native people. Between 1930 to 1936, fifty-nine grazings, forest and village reserves were opened in Nagaon district for settling the migrants under the colonial immigration scheme.¹⁷ Even Saadullah, who headed the Province during 1937-1946, took a pro-migrant stance and this policy was rightly observed by the Viceroy Lord Wavell and the latter stated that 'grow more food' policy of Saadullah was aimed at 'grow more Muslims.'¹⁸ In this context, even C.S. Mullan's 1931 Report on Census was significant which highlighted the threat posed to the culture and identity of the native Assamese people by the migrant Bengali Muslims. He termed 'immigration as an invasion' and warned that 'in course of time the Assamese homeland would be confined to only two districts of upper Assam' (*The Census of India 1931:50-51*).

¹⁷ Guha, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947* (1977)210.

¹⁸ Misra, *The Periphery Strikes Back: Challenges to the Nation-State in Assam and* (2000)129.

It was against such background that the Assamese middle class intellectuals like Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury, Jnananath Bora and others wrote about the need to defend the Assamese homeland against foreign incursions by espousing the idea of the Assamese nation. Roy Choudhury put forward the idea of an 'Indian federation of linguistic nationalities with dual citizenship'.¹⁹ In his article "*Bharatiyar Swaraj aru Asamiyar Swaraj*" published in *Chetnna*, vol.3(2) 11, 1920 Roy Choudhury offered a distinct idea about Assamese nationalism and its relationship with pan Indian nationalism. He referred India as *Mahajati* and Assamese as *Jati*. Though Roy Choudhury's vision of the Assamese *Jati* did not include the idea of a sovereign Assam²⁰, but his disillusionment with the Congress in later phase drew him closer to the idea of a *Swadhin Asom*.²¹ *Jatiya Mahasabha* under his leadership voiced concerns of Assamese insecurity and accused all India Congress leadership of not being able to foresee the threat to the Assamese identity from the immigrant Muslims.²² Roy Choudhury also formed the *Atmarakshi Bahini* (Self Defense Force)to launch the struggle for Assamese national existence and save the Assamese homeland from the designs of the Muslim League in getting it incorporated into Pakistan.

Jnananath Bora, another leading intellectual, through his writings in 'Awahon', an Assamese journal and 'Dainik Batori', a local daily, put forward his ideas of a 'sovereign Assam'²³ in his article "*Kamrup Aru Bharatvarsha*" published in *Awahon* (3), 1936. In another article "*Asom Desh Bharatvarshar Bhitarat Thakiba Kiyo?*" (Why should Assam stay inside India?) published again in *Awahon* (2), 1938 Bora stated that before the year 1920, "the Assamese people had no idea of the Congress. The Assamese have always lived in a distinct country with its own distinctive administration and never seen Assam as a part of India. He believed that "Assam's regeneration would be possible only if it was separated from India".

The cry for an independent homeland also came from the many native elites particularly from Ahoms, Nagas, Mizos and the Bodo Kacharis at the time of Independence as they feared that Assam's amalgamation with the rest of India would undermine the interest of the native tribal people. The Ahom who have been marginalized by the British and subsequently by the Caste-Hindus²⁴ called for a separate independent political existence for Assam through the *Ahom Association*, formed in 1893but could not succeed due to its strong link with the *mahapurukhia* Vaishnavism of Sankardeva. Nevertheless,

¹⁹ For detail views of Roy Choudhury and role of Jatiya Mahasabha see *Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury Rachanavali*,Guwahati:*Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury Swaroni Committee* , (1986).

²⁰ Baruah, *Social Tensions in Assam: Middle Class Politics*(1991) 61.

²¹ Misra, 2000,p.85.

²² *Jatiya Mahasabha* 9 June 1946. "Case of Great Assamese people and their Homeland: Assam", Memorandum submitted to All India Congress Committee.

²³ Bora wrote his articles in Assamese. For details see Girin Phukon ,*Assam's Attitude to Federalism* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers 1984) 45-82 and Misra (2000) 88-91.

²⁴ See Phukon (1984) 52-56.

a section of the Assamese intelligentsia consistently put forward the argument that ethnically Assam belonged to the Mongoloid people with its culture and civilization closely linked with glorious heritage of South East Asia.

Freedom Struggle and Advocacy for Provincial Sovereignty

The main driving political force - the Provincial Congress and its role in the critical 1940s - can't be ignored when it comes to the matter of shaping the Assamese sovereign mindset. In Jorhat jail, Gopinath Bardoloi initiated a discourse with his jailed colleagues on provincial sovereign rights and the province's future political relations with India. Farkhrudin Ali Ahmed favored the idea of provincial sovereignty for Assam.²⁵ The provincial Congress consistently opposed the Muslim League's design to incorporate Assam into Pakistan. The Grouping Proposal clubbing Bengal and Assam together under Group C as per Cabinet Mission plan which was supported by the All India Congress was vehemently opposed by the Provincial Congress leadership as it would pose a serious threat to the Assamese identity.²⁶ The Provincial Congress under the leadership of Gopinath Bardoloi fought back with Gandhiji's support,²⁷ which ultimately forced the Congress leadership to realize the fate of Assam in case the Grouping Proposal was implemented, and subsequently the proposal was dropped. Once the Muslim majority district of Sylhet decided to be a part of Pakistan through referendum, the threat to Assamese identity temporarily disappeared and demand for independent Assam also died down. However, it facilitated to articulate regionalism on the line of Assamese nationality which was reflected throughout the Constitutional Assembly debates.²⁸ Importantly, the Congress party itself in Assam harbored autonomy for the region and this reflected during the debates of the Constituent Assembly on center-state relations. Bardoloi demanded "fullest possible autonomy" from the Centre so that Assam could utilize its resources for development of the region. However, the provincial leaders, despite their best efforts²⁹ failed to secure greater financial and political autonomy

²⁵ Mahanta, *Confronting the State: ULFA's Quest for Sovereignty* (2013) 298.

²⁶ *An Appeal to the All India Congress Committee* by the Assam Provincial Congress Committee 1946 published by Siddhinath Sarma, General Secretary, Assam PCC. The Assamese people felt betrayed by the top Congress leadership as Nehru, Azad and Patel consistently insisted Assam Provincial Congress on accepting the proposal without realizing the apprehension of the Assamese people. In a special Assam Assembly session (which was held for electing the Assam's representatives to the Constituent Assembly as per the Cabinet Mission Plan, 1946), even Bardoloi moved a resolution and argued that Assam should have a constitution of its own, framed and settled by its own elected representatives (*Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings* 1946:785-797).

²⁷ Gandhi's Advice came to Assam through the emissaries- Bijoy Chandra Bhagawati and Mahendra Mohan Chaudhury who met Gandhiji on behalf of Gopinath Bardoloi on 19 December 1946 (Source: *Harijan*, 29 December 1946) *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*.

²⁸ *Constituent Assembly Debates*. Volumes III to VIII. For a perceptive analysis see chapter 7 'Assamese Demand for Provincial Autonomy: An Analysis of Constituent Assembly Debates' in Phukon (1996) 74-89.

²⁹ The members of Constituent Assembly from Assam- Amiya Kumar Das, Kuladhar Chaliha and others repeatedly stressed the need for economic independence and greater control over the state resources.

except for protection of the tribals in the sixth schedule of the Constitution.³⁰ All these factors shaped the Assamese mindset and added new dimension to post independent provincial politics in Assam.

Post Partition: Burden of Refugees and Assam's Economic Woe

Among many root causes of political unrest, the partition induced refugee burden and Nehru's position over the question of settling the refugees from East Pakistan created a major differences of opinion between the provincial government of Assam and the Centre. After the partition, the continuous influx of the both Hindu and Muslim refugees into Assam posed a serious burden to the provincial government. Despite severe financial and other limitations, the provincial government did its best to provide settlement to the refugees in Assam. However, when the provincial government expressed its incapacibilities to host the refugees indefinitely, Nehru in fact threatened Bardoloi that if his state did not agree to host the refugees from East Pakistan and settle them on its land, the Centre would cut down financial aid to Assam.³¹ This attitude of Nehru further widened the gap between the Centre and the people of the province.

Further, the differences between the Centre and the state were widened over the question of unchecked illegal immigrants into Assam from East Pakistan. The influx of refugee and its settlement in Assam in absence of a proper national refugee law has caused a negative impact on Assamese psyche. Though Indian parliament legislated a law "*The Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) 1950 Act*", it was never implemented in true spirit. This gross insensitivity of the Centre coupled with the non addressal of complex immigrant issue and land questions further sowed the seeds of separatist demands.

Apart from the refugee burden, the partition of India made Assam a completely landlocked state by separating Assam from the rest of India. Assam had access to the Chittagong port through the rail communication between Dibrugarh and the Chittagong port, which was started in 1904.³² The disruption of the rail connectivity from Dibrugarh to Chittagong impacted the economy of Assam which had seen robust trade in timber and tea during the colonial period. The partition severely imbalanced the economy and trade practices in the state resulting in economic slowdown. Consequently, The per capita income of Assam which was Rs. 265 (higher than the national average of Rs.255) slowed down in the post-independence period and fell below the national average.³³

³⁰ The Sixth schedule of Indian constitution is designed to protect the rights of the tribal groups of the region through granting autonomy. Presently it deals with the administration of tribal areas in the state of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram .

³¹ 35 Barooah, *Gopinath Bardoloi: Indian Constitution and Centre-State Relations, 1940-1950*(1990) 32.

³² India Office Records and Private Papers, 'Records of the Assam Bengal Railway Company Papers'. The British Library , London.

³³ Alokesh Barua and Santosh Kr . Das, "Perspective on Growth and Development in the Northeast: The Look East Policy and Beyond"; Margin: *The Journal of Applied Economic Research* 2 (4) , 2008, p. 347.

The popular anger was first expressed in the form of a movement by the people of Assam in 1957 following the Central government's proposal to set up the oil refinery at Barauni instead of Assam on national security ground. This popular movement eventually forced the Centre to set up a small refinery with a capacity of 0.85 million tons at Guwahati. The growing feeling of alienation and unemployment among the youth of Assam triggered the second oil refinery movement under the auspices of All Assam Oil Refinery Sangram Parisad in 1969. The movement was actively supported by the political parties and student bodies who expressed resentment against the Central government for not initiating industrialization and exploiting the state resources in a form of neo-colonialism. This was followed by the state wide agitation led by the All-Assam Students Union in 1974 for economic development of the state. Despite the fact that Assam produced and contributed more than 50 percent to the Indian tea market and earned good number of annual foreign exchanges, but it didn't contribute much to the development of the local economy. Thus, it is the failure of the state and its govern mentality that made little effort to address the critical issues of economic urgency in the state burdened with gradual divergence of per capita income from the national average coupled with unemployment which created a sense of neglect that had its far reaching impact in various movements and organized resistance prevailing in the state for a long time.

Assam for the Assamese: Voices Against the Reorganization of Assam

Declaration of Assamese as Assam's official language by the Government of Assam in 1960 resulted in widespread resentment among the Bengalis and the people from the hills. While Assam adopted Assamese as the official language of the state for safeguarding their identity and culture at the insistence of the Assam Sahitya Sabha and Assamese student community, the non-Assamese speaking people felt insecure in the face of being *Assamised*. This development sparked political reaction from Barak Valley which led to the death of a number of protesters³⁴ thereby worsening the relationship between the Assamese and the non-Assamese speaking people. Subsequently the language policy was changed and Bengali was recognized in Barak valley for administrative and other official purposes. However, *Assam Sahitya Sabha* and students organization continued to insist for implementation of Assamese language for entire Assam.

Similarly the Central government's intention to reorganize Assam and create new state for the hills provoked the Assamese people of the Brahmaputra valley. The popular sentiment against the re-organization of the state was based on the perceptions of the Assamese that those regions which did not have Assamese speaking population and which territorially belonged to Assam were part of greater Assam.³⁵ Similar line

³⁴ For recorded information see *Report on Linguistic , Communal and Ethnic Conflicts in Assam . 2014. Chief Minister's Secretariat, Assam.* p. 28.

³⁵ Misra(2000) 120.

of observation was made by Myron Weiner who stated that the Assamese had twin objectives—make Assam as the land for the Assamese and retain control over all territories that the British had historically annexed to Assam even though some of these areas were predominantly non-Assamese.³⁶ Consequently, the political organizations and civil society bodies such as Assam Anti-Federation Action Council and *Lachit Sena*³⁷ raised their voices against the probable restructuring of Assam on federal basis. The Assam Anti-Federation Action Council called for a state wide strike on January 24, 1968 and appealed for boycotting the Republic day celebration, resulting in wide scale disturbances in the State. In consonance with that, the *Lachit Sena* raised their voice for the slogan - “*Assam for the Assamese.*” The popular movement headed by the Assamese against the Indian government took a key turn when the students in the state organized for the first time ‘Unity Day’ to oppose the proposed reorganization of the state. Notably, several speakers for the first time in post Independent India openly called for Assam’s separation from India³⁸ which later helped the radical forces in articulating the idea of united Assam.

Nationalistic Activism through the Native Press and Intelligentsia

In late 1970s and early part of the 1980s, Assam had witnessed an aggressive regional nationalist sentiment against the backdrop of an insecurity arising out of economic deprivation and continuous influx of immigrants into the state. These two factors exceedingly influenced the native activist which was reflected in their writings published by the native press.³⁹ The organizations like *Purbanchal Lok Parishad* (PLP) led by Nibaran Bora in 1977, *Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal* led by Nagen Hazarika in 1978, *Assam Jatiya Sangha* led by Nitya Hazarika and Bhimkanta Buragohain⁴⁰ in 1979 raised popular consciousness among the native Assamese people against these two grave issues. *Assam Sahitya Sabha* in its Sualkuchi session in 1979 appealed to the authority to protect the Assamese identity and language demanding expulsion of the illegal foreigners from the state. During this period various slogans showing radical sentiments such as ‘*Boycott Non-Assamese*’, ‘*Go back Indians*’, ‘*Be Armed Yourself*’, ‘*We want Sovereignty*’, appeared in many parts of Upper Assam. The Assamese dailies like *Dainik Asom* and *Nagarik* sensitized the local people by extensively publishing series of editorials, reports and lead articles on the issue of land, immigration and

³⁶ Weiner, *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India*, (1988) 121.

³⁷ The Assam Anti-Federation Action Council- a loose Civil society network was formed for opposing the central govt's move to create new states by reorganising Assam. Lachit Sena was a militant outfit of Assamese youths formed in 1967. For Lachit Sena and their involvement in violent political activities in 1968 see *Report on Linguistic, Communal and Ethnic Conflicts in Assam . 2014. Chief Minister's Secretariat, Assam.* p. 36.

³⁸ Das, *Swadhinatar Pssamrastab*(1993) 50.

³⁹ For more information and detailed local narratives on the role of press and provincial intellectuals in shaping the mindset for confronting the state see Mahanta (2013) 31-46.

⁴⁰ He became the main protagonist of ULFA who was popularly known as ‘*Mama*’ among the organisation's cadres . He was the most influential ideologue and architect of the organization.

protection of Assamese identity thereby giving an intellectual base to prepare the ground for anti-foreigner movement in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. A few provincial influential leaders and intellectuals like Nibaran Bora Homen Borgohain contributed a lot to the growth of Assamese nationalist thoughts. Nibaran Bora through his nationalist political activism and writings in *Nilachal*, *Nagarik* and *Dainik Asom* in the late 1970s and 1980 consistently tried to provide an alternative discourse by advocating Assam's cause. He criticized the role of Indian state and nation building process and viewed that Assam is more organically connected to the South East Asian region than the mainland India. His *Swadhin Asom Sambhavne? (Is Independent Assam Possible?)*⁴¹ remains one of the most influential writings adored by the proponents of *Swadhin Asom*.

Homen Borgohain, an influential intellectual, highlighted Assam's economic woes and colonial exploitation under the aegis of Central Government through his series of aggressive nationalistic writings in *Nagarik*. His book *Oupaniveshik Sosonor Biruddhe Asomor Sesh Sangram 1980 (The last Struggle of Assam Against Colonial Exploitation)*⁴² gave an intellectual base for sustaining the Assam Movement by ASSU and ULFA's armed movement although Borgohain was not an ideologue for both the organizations. Both Bora and Borgohain had immense contribution in framing the internal colonial thesis in the state in late 1970s which had, in a significant way, provided a theoretical impetus to the ULFA's armed struggle against the Indian State. At the same time, Suresh Phukan,⁴³ an activist, adopted cultural forms like patriotic songs and drama to spread Assamese nationalism among the younger generation in Upper Assam in 1980s. His writing *Moidamor Pora Moi Lachite Koisu (I, Lachit, Speaking from the Graveyard)*⁴⁴ inspired the Upper Assam youth to take up the national cause and restore the glory of Assam founded by *Sargadeo* Sukapha. Nevertheless, these thoughts stimulated the younger generation for reviving Assamese nationalism.

Impact of Assam Movement and the Assam Accord

In such political quandary, All Assam Students' Union (AASU) emerged as a potent force to mobilize the people against the Central Government on the issues of economic deprivation and neo-colonial form of exploitation. Later, AASU shifted its focus to the foreigner issue following the crucial statement made by the then Chief Election Commissioner S.L. Shakhderon foreign national issue regarding the presence of a sizeable proportion of doubtful citizens in Assam in the conference of state chief

⁴¹ It was written in Assamese. To know in details see Nibaran Bora, *Swadhin Asom Sambhavne?* (Guwahati: Ekhona, 1998).

⁴² About colonial pattern of exploitation in Assam see Homen Borgohain, *Oupaniveshik Sosonor Biruddhe Asomor Sesh Sangram*, (Guwahati: Vintage Bookshop, 1980).

⁴³ He became an ardent supporter of ULFA and he was the president *Assam Jatiya Unnayan Parishad*-a sister organization of ULFA to popularize the organization's ideology and welfare programmes.

⁴⁴ See Suresh Phukan, *Moidamor Pora Moi Lachite Koisu* (Sibsagar: Rupom Prakashan, Phukan, 1980)

Electoral Officers in 1978.⁴⁵ This fact came to light in the mid 1979 when the electoral roll was updated for the parliamentary bye election in the Mongaldoi constituency as caused by the death of Hiralal Patowary, a sitting member of Lok Sabha. This development set a new discourse in the state politics with the formation of *All Assam Gana Sangram Parisad* (AAGSP) comprising several regional bodies along with All Assam Students' Union and *Asom Sahitya Sabha*. Although the AASU leaders consistently maintained that this was a struggle to 'save Assam today so as to save India tomorrow'⁴⁶, there were trends within the movement which seemed to expose the concern for an independent Assam. The *Jatiyatabadi Dal*, *Asom Yavak Samaj* as well as the *Purbanchalya Lok Parisad* were known to harbour secessionist feelings and demand for a sovereign and independent Assam free from the control of the Indian state. The Central Government under the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had to impose President's Rule in the state to suppress the Assam Movement. During the controversial election of 1983 more than hundred lives were killed in police firing.⁴⁷ Importantly, the infamous Nellie massacre⁴⁸, which the state completely failed to deal with, took place during this period. Resultantly, people lost faith on the government and a radical section of followers of the movement sought political alternative for the future of the state⁴⁹ while the moderate section sought the solution to the problem through negotiation within the Indian constitution. Meanwhile, Rajiv Gandhi, who became the Prime Minister after Mrs. Gandhi's assassination, took an affirmative stand on the matter of ending the Assam Movement. Accordingly, the Assam Accord was signed between the Union Government and the leaders of the AASU on 14th August, 1985 in the presence of Rajiv Gandhi just before he 38th India's Independence Day. Although the Assam Accord triggered a hope of protection and preservation of Assamese identity, it introduced two new challenges for the state.⁵⁰ First, an arbitrary cut-off date to determine a foreigner was fixed as on 25th March, 1971 solely for Assam, while for the rest of India the cut-off date for the migrants from Pakistan remained the same as 19 July, 1948. Secondly, the Parliament of India made a separate immigration law exclusively for Assam for detection, determination and deportation of foreigners from Assam through judicial process by enacting the IM (DT) Act, 1983, thereby making detection and deportation of foreigners virtually impossible until it was struck

⁴⁵ The detailed information can be accessed from *Report on Illegal Migration into Assam, 1998*, submitted to the President of India by the Governor of Assam, 8th November.

⁴⁶ *Memorandum* submitted by the AASU before the Prime Minister (2 February 1980).

⁴⁷ It was marked by complete breakdown of state machineries followed by violence where more than hundred agitators were killed in Police firings during the State Assembly Election 1983.

⁴⁸ Nellie is located in Nagoan district of Assam where infamous communal clash took place on 18 February 1983. Around 1,600 innocent people belonging to the Muslim community were killed mercilessly by a local community which was appeared in detail in *India Today* (1983, March 15).

⁴⁹ Although the ULFA came into exist on 7 April, 1979 with a motto 'unity, revolution and liberation' in historic Rang Ghar of Sibsagar, Assam, it has gained momentum during the 1983 controversial election and subsequent state repression for suppressing the Assam Movement.

⁵⁰ For detailed negative impact of Assam Accord see D.N. Bezbaruah, 'Why celebrate a Dead Accord'. *The Assam Tribune* (August 17, 2010).

down by the Supreme Court of India in 2005.⁵¹ Under such development, a section of the participant of Assam agitation, mostly belonged to the *Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad* and the AASU, lost faith in the system and the Accord, and openly propagated liberation of Assam from India through armed struggle for protecting the right of the Assamese people.

The ULFA's Ideological Propagation for Armed Nationalist Movement

In the wake of such a political development, the ULFA has propounded the idea of Sovereign Assam, based on principle of self-determination. They believe that 'nation under foreign occupation has no alternative other than to fight for freedom and national liberation.' They argue that they are not secessionists because Assam was never a part of India at any point of time in history. The treaty of Yandaboo (1826) was signed between British and Burmese – two foreign forces where Assam was not a party to it and the result was the subsequent inclusion of Assam in British India. In its appeal to the United Nations, the ULFA states, "Culturally and racially we Assamese are different and not the part of Indian civilization." The organization claimed that the people of Assam have every right to exercise self-determination through national liberation and appealed to the people of Assam to unite and join the struggle against Indian occupation irrespective of different nationalities, caste, race and religion.

In this context, it needs to be mentioned that Parag Das⁵², an ideologue as well as a critic of the ULFA, through his writings in the local newspapers *Boodhbar* and *Aagan*⁵³ in 1989 and 1990 shaped the ideological foundation of the organization. His book *Swadhinotar Prastab, 1993 (Proposal for Independence)*, which was banned by the Government, advanced the idea of independent Assam by rejecting the Indian constitution. He insisted on the recognition of Right to Secession as a constitutional right for the federating units.⁵⁴ He argued that Assam was never a part of India and therefore people of Assam have the right to exercise self-determination under international laws through referendum. His writings influenced in shaping the organization's ideology and setting the course for its continuing armed struggle. It needs to be mentioned here that leading cultural icons and litterateurs like Lakshminath Bezbarua, Padmanath Gohainbaruah, Jyotiprasad Agarwalla and Bishnuprasad Rabha, Bhupen Hazarika believed that Assam is inextricably connected with Indian civilization which is evident in the fifteenth century saint Sankardeva's idea of *Bharatvarsha*.⁵⁵ Although a section of

⁵¹ The Supreme Court Judgment on *Sarbananda Sonowal vs Union of India*, 2005 (on Scrapping IM(DT) Act 1983.

⁵² He was killed by the secret killers on May 17, 1996. He was also arrested by the Indian State under National Security Act in the year 1992 and under TADA in the year 1993. He was also a human rights defender and led *Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti* (MASS).

⁵³ *Boodhbar* was a weekly newspaper and *Aagan* was a magazine, started by Das in 1990 where he was the editor of both publications.

⁵⁴ Mahanta (2013) 137.

⁵⁵ Misra (2000) 146.

intellectuals of Assam refrained alluring to the ideological views of ULFA. Whatsoever, it cannot be denied that the Assamese people have provided moral and ideological support, while the Indian state has given a political space to grow and sustain the armed struggle for *Swadhin Asom* by non addressal of the region's many-thronged problems.

Phases of ULFA'S Armed Nationalist Struggle vis-à-vis Indian State

The three decades long armed struggle of ULFA against the Indian state couldn't succeed much although it had an impact at the initial *formative romantic* phase (roughly 1979-1990) when the organization had been able to galvanize and mobilize the people for the cause of Assam through a series of developmental social works and at the same time consolidated military strength by acquiring guerrilla training and military strategies before militarily confronting the Indian state. This was followed by phase of *military confrontation* (1990-1996) which was marked by a low intensity war that led to the death of many innocent civilians apart from security forces and armed cadres of the ULFA. During this phase Assam was placed under the National Security Act and Armed Forces Special Powers Act, followed by two major military operations against the armed radical group, namely Operation *Bajrang* and *Rhino*. Although these operations had limited success, still it delivered a psychological blow to the radical group and forced hundreds of cadres to surrender to the Indian security forces. However, the radical armed group re-asserted their armed struggle through subversive activities after AGP Government came to power in 1996 which forced the government to launch a three tier joint operation structure consisting of Army, Para-military forces and the State Police on 20 January, 1997 under the name of '*Unified Command*'. This phase could be well described as a *terror phase* (1996-2004)⁵⁶ for which both state agencies and the non state actors were responsible for disregarding the rule of law and grossly violating human rights, involving extra-legal and extra-judicial killings of innocent people, infamously known as 'secret killings'.⁵⁷ In the meantime, the '*Operation All Clear*', carried out by royal Bhutan Army with the support of the Indian Army in 2003 had caused a major setback to the insurgent groups camping in Bhutan's soil. This event of history forced the organization to think of a negotiated settlement through formation of the People's Consultative Group (PCG) to initiate peace talk with the Union Government. This phase was marked as the phase of *Peace Process* (2005-2007) by the three rounds of talks⁵⁸ but without any substantial outcome. Both the parties were not willing to compromise with the sovereignty question from their respective positions. After the arrest of the top leaders by Bangladesh and then on being handed over to India, the organization headed towards a vertical *fragmentation phase* (2008 onwards) with the formation of two camps namely the *Pro-talk* group led by the Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa, later joined by

⁵⁶ The author has used this term on own to describe this particular phase as *terror phase* due to prevalent of extra-legal and extra-judicial killings of innocent people in the state, resulting gross violations of human rights.

⁵⁷ *Report on Secret Killings of Assam, 1998-2001*, by Justice K.N . Saikia Commission (2007).

⁵⁸ See Arup Borbora, *All About PCG & Talks*(Guwahati: Aank Baak,2010).

Anup Chetia, the General Secretary of the organization who had been lodged in jail in Bangladesh for 17 years and the *Independent* group headed by the Commander-in-Chief Paresh Baruah. The Pro-talk group expressed their desire for dialogue with the Indian government without setting any pre-condition for a negotiated political settlement. At the same time, the civil society also tried to persuade and facilitate the dialogue process between the Group and the Centre with an initiative for peace under the *Sanmilita Jatiya Abhibarttan* led by public intellectual Hiren Gohain.⁵⁹ However, it did not produce any substantive result and subsequently peace initiative collapsed.

After a prolonged gap, the pro-talks signed a tripartite peace deal with the union and the state Government on December 29, 2023 for a negotiated settlement. The new memorandum of settlement primarily has assured for safeguarding the indigenous land and political rights by reserving the maximum state assembly seats for the indigenous people along with a promise for accelerating all round economic development of Assam. As per the deal, the pro talk group has agreed to “renounce violence, disarm, disband the armed organization, vacate their occupied camps, and participate in peaceful democratic process” of state. However, peace process remains incomplete as the ULFA (I) headed by Paresh Baruah rejected peace deal.

Downfall of the ULFA’s Armed Nationalist Movement

The reasons for subsequent downfall of the armed nationalist movement of the ULFA Assam can be traced from the following factors.

First, the **ideological shortcomings** arose within the organization against the backdrop of the declining trend of ideological armed movements worldwide.⁶⁰ The ULFA’s ideological commitment to achieve *Swadhin Asom* and establishment of scientific socialism were neither fully conceptualized nor debated. The means to attain an independent Assam too remained uncharted and unexplained. Moreover, waging a war with the Indian state by resorting to an armed movement gained a limited appeal and acceptance in face of the mighty state power. Besides many hardcore cadres including former publicity secretary, Sunil Nath, expressed disillusionment with the organization’s armed struggle. Instead of *Swadhinata* (independence) he talked about *Swadhikar* (self-right) for the Assamese people. Even the Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa and the general Secretary Anup Chetia along with most of the top ranking leaders of the organization who were arrested at different points of time gave up the original claim and favored for a full autonomy to the state.

⁵⁹ *Sanmilita Jatiya Abhibarttan* , Charter of Demands for Discussion between Government of India and the ULFA dated 7May 2011.

⁶⁰ The worldwide decline of the revolutionary armed movements in post-cold war period , more particularly after 9/11 episode and people’s gradual acceptance of a liberal democratic path further weakened the ULFA’s ideological base and international support for their cause .

Second, the **ideological deviations** reflected in the ULFA's activities over the years largely account for its downfall. The Operation Bajrang had a minimal success and the ULFA managed to survive and could operate from the underground. However, the aftermath of the discovery of mass graves at the Lakhpathar camp of the ULFA came as a terrible shock to the people of the state thereby finally knocking down many popular myths about the organization. It unveiled an unknown face of the organization and led to the gradual erosion of mass support especially among the middle class Assamese. Leading intellectuals raised doubt about the organization's structure and its ideological commitment when it embarked on undertaking anti-people actions like suppressing the dissenting voices through the use of gun powers, abductions, killing innocent people specially the Hindi speaking population, indiscriminate bombing in public places - particularly the Dhemaji incident in 2004 in which 10 children died including three adult in Independence day parade,⁶¹ and anti-India campaign by collaborating with the ISI of Pakistan. The Killing of Sanjoy Ghose, a prominent social worker in Majuli river island tarnished the image with national and international repercussions.⁶² 'A terror driven agenda with exclusive focus on arms, international network, money and an obscure ideology gradually made ULFA a near-irrelevant force in Assam.'⁶³ ULFA's pro-immigrant Muslim stance through its formal statement in 1992 revealed yet another ideological deviation. In July 1992 in its publicity pamphlet *Sanjukta Mukti Bahini Asom, Prachar Patra* the ULFA, addressing the people of Assam belonging to the East Bengal origin, recognized migration as an inevitable part of the national life of the state and stated that "their freedom struggle could not be successful without the support from the immigrant population of Assam." This ideological shift of the ULFA invited sharp criticism from the people and eroded the organization's popularity among the Assamese people.

Third, **explicit militaristic character** of the organization for a political struggle largely contributed to its downfall. The last three decades revealed the ULFA's role with ethno-nationalistic aspiration supported with the military wing which remained powerful both in policy decisions and executions from the very beginning. The dominance of powerful armed wing and the weak political wing of the organization has invariably de-popularized the organization. Even after the successive Indian Army operations, the ULFA stressed on military discipline and armed preparedness rather than political

⁶¹ In an interview, Anup Chetia the general secretary of the ULFA, after released from the Jail on 24 December 2015, himself publicly admitted that blast triggered by the organisation in 2004 independence day parade at Dhemaji was a big mistake. He mentioned that while he was in Bangladesh jail, he heard about the Dhemaji blast but he was stunned to know that some of the cadres of the organisation were behind the blast. Tendering an apology on behalf of the organisation he further stated that killing innocent people specially women and children is a heinous crime and nobody should target the innocent civilians including Hindi speaking people in the state.

⁶² In fact, the arrest of the frontline leaders of the Organization became imminent due to the mounting diplomatic pressure upon the Government of Bangladesh by India and international for a for killing the social worker Sanjoy Ghose, admitted Anup Chetia in an interview in local media, after release from the jail.

⁶³ Mahanta, 2013:136.

mobilization of the through democratic methods. The tall claim of support made by the organization from the all the sections of the people of Assam remains ambiguous and questionable. The overt military characteristic of the organization has acted as a deterrent and undermined the possibilities of a politically negotiated settlement of the conflict.

Moreover, **inherent cultural fault lines** that existed among the ethnic communities of Assamese society and the complex multiple ethnic aspirations have weakened the organization's ideological support base. The United Reservation Movement Council of Assam (URMCA), a conglomerate body of plains tribal people, opposed ULFA's idea and regarded it as an Assamese middle class hegemonic militant organization failing to represent the entire ethnic communities of Assam. At the same time, the Bodos among the plains tribes and the Karbis and the Dimasas from the two hill districts of Assam raised their respective voices for protecting their identity and culture through armed struggle and demanded separate statehood. These highly heterogeneous and volatile ethnic complexities in Assam made grounds tougher for ULFA to sustain its armed revolution for *Swadhin Asom*.

State of Assamese Insecurity: Recent Predicaments

Assamese identity today is in a deep crisis due to the external pressure and internal fragmentation. Most of the prominent ethnic groups have been trying to break away from the greater Assamese identity and demanding respective separate ethnic homeland. At the same time, the immigrant settlers have already formed a formidable social and political force in the state. Assuming a grave threat to their identities, the six indigenous ethnic groups namely, Moran, Motak, Chutia, Tai Ahom, Koch Rajbanshi and Tea community are currently demanding schedule tribes status with an objective to protect the land and political rights for the indigenous people. Of late, the indigenous Assamese have been facing yet another level of grave insecurity in course of updating the National Registrar of Citizens (NRC) in Assam with a cut-off date fixed at 25 March 1971 as per direction of the Supreme Court of India.⁶⁴ The Clause 6 of the Assam Accord⁶⁵ although promised constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguard to the Assamese people and is being considered to be the most vital clause, yet it was never implemented by the subsequent government at the Centre. In the midst of NRC exercise, the Centre constituted a High-Level Committee on 16 July 2019 to suggest possible measures to implement the Clause 6 of the Accord with a politically tricky question as to how to define the Assamese people for determining the criteria for constitutional safeguard. Because of the complex multiplicities of

⁶⁴ The Supreme Court of India Judgment on Civil Original Jurisdiction, Writ Petition (Civil) No .562 of 2012, *Assam Sanmilita Mahasangha & Ors. Versus Union of India* along with the Writ Petition (civil) No .274 of 2009 & Writ Petition (civil) No . 876 of 2014.

⁶⁵ Clause Sixth of *Assam Accord* promises “Constitutional, Legislative and Administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate ,shall be provided to protect , preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.”

ethnicity and inherent assimilative character, the definition of the Assamese⁶⁶ has remained inconclusive till date. Moreover, the act of defining a cultural identity by political parameters itself proves to be problematic and unscientific.

The indigenous Assamese initially saw NRC to be a lifeline for the protection of the Assamese identity and recognition of the indigenous political rights over land and resources. However, in course of time the NRC exercise in the state unfolded wide spread dissatisfaction once the official figure of doubtful citizens of East Bengal origin, which was very less than expected by the civil society bodies,⁶⁷ were put up in the public domain. The resentment focused on faulty method of NRC exercise, imposition of cut-off date of 25th March 1971 exclusively to Assam alone instead of 1951, the all-India base year for upgrading NRC. Without having a decisive settlement of the issue of immigrants, Assam entered into another identity tangle when the Central Government through the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019 decided to grant citizenship to the persons belonging to six religious minority communities except Muslim and who had entered India before 31 December 2014 from neighboring Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan on the grounds of religious persecution.⁶⁸ This act of the Centre galvanized the political situation as Assam had already borne the brunt of illegal immigrants as per the Assam Accord and the CAA that seeks to legitimize citizenship to the Hindu immigrants, who came from Bangladesh and settled in the state on the grounds of religious persecution before 31 December 2014. This caused widespread protest including violent protest⁶⁹ by a section of the civil society in the Brahmaputra Valley allaying the fear that this would pose identity crisis to the indigenous people in their own land.

⁶⁶ As per available report in media, the High-Level Committee on *Assam Accord's Clause 6* constituted by the Union Home Ministry has submitted the Report to the Union Home Ministry through the office of the Chief Minister of Assam with a consensus on 1951 NRC as the basis for defining and determining constitutional safeguard to the Assamese people. In 2015, similar line of argument with 1951 NRC to be taken as the basis for definition of the Assamese people, has been put forward by Pranab Gogoi then speaker of Assam Assembly after consulting 53 organizations of the state. The Speaker in his two page report has defined the indigenous person of Assam means "a person belonging to the state of Assam and speaking the Assamese language or any tribal dialect of Assam, or in the case of Cachar the language of the region" (Report on the "Definition of Assamese" 2015. Initiated by the Speaker Pranab Gogoi, Assam Legislative Assembly). *Indigenous Forum Assam* and some tribal organizations insisted that those people living in the state before 24 February 1826, the day of signing the Yandaboo Treaty, and their descendants should be recognized as indigenous people of Assam and eligible for constitutional safeguard (*Guwahati Declaration, 12 February, 2018*. Indigenous Forum, Assam). *Axom Nagarik Samaj's* (ANS) proposal to the High Level Committee on Clause 6 of Assam Accord, takes the view that persons who have been listed in Assam in Census 1891, Census 1951 as indigenous people, Census 1971 recognized themselves belong to an indigenous group in the state and their descendants should be recognized as indigenous people of Assam and eligible for constitutional safeguard.

⁶⁷ As per the official record, declared by the competent authority of NRC on 31 August 2019, total 19,06,657 persons out of 3,30,27,661 applicants were found to be not illegible for citizenship in Assam.

⁶⁸ The rules framed for implementing CAA has been notified on 11 March 2014 by the Home Ministry, Govt. of India. However how it will impact upon Assam vis-à-vis those left out of the NRC and how many people in the state to be granted citizenship is not clear at this juncture

⁶⁹ The anti CAA protest in India initially originated from Assam in the month of December 2019 to protect the rights of Indigenous Assamese and preserve the secular identity of the greater Assamese society. However, anti-CAA protest took a bizarre turn at all India level with a deep religious Hindu-Muslim divide which was not the case in Assam. This protest movement had a sudden halt in the second half of the month of March 2020 due to the outbreak of deadly Covid-19 virus in the state and the country.

Conclusion: The Way Forward

The protracted history of exploitation and marginalization, denial of rights and recognition, and perceived discrimination by both the British colonial and post-colonial state has encouraged ethnonationalist identity movement, leading to the emergence of violent radical armed political struggle in post-colonial Assam. It is true that armed nationalist struggle which created a state of unrest and anarchy in Assam was born out of state-society contradiction. Although the radical group is not a formal body to represent and act on behalf of the Assamese people, it is the Assamese society that has provided ideological and moral support to armed radical movement to fight against the Indian state on the basis of historical grievances and perceived discrimination. The ULFA as an armed insurgent force is on the wane but the ULFA as an idea still remains as a voice to express the historical grievances of the people, though the ULFA's violent method and terror tactics find little support. Notwithstanding ULFA's weak ideological base and the militaristic nature, it must be agreed that the ULFA has been the first armed nationalist insurgent group of the Northeast who has effectively raised the 'internal colonial thesis'⁷⁰ against the Indian state. This continues to ignite the resistance movement against the Centre in the face of any insecurity and crisis of Assamese identity.⁷¹ Lack of comprehensive understanding about the region coupled with wrong perception and prejudices further complicated the situation. While the Centre's dealing with the situation has relied mainly on a simplistic assessment of the region terming it as law-and-order problem threatening the integrity and unity of the nation from the national security view point, the policy making has also been affected by a lack of comprehensive understanding about the region's diverse problems. Therefore, the present crisis of identity and insecurity of indigenous people of Assam need to be addressed closely interlinked with the past complex history, ethnic multiplicities, and the geo-strategic peculiarities of the region. What is needed is an affirmative constitutional engineering on the part of the Indian government to protect indigenous rights and recognition through well charted development intervention that can pave the way for a durable solution.

References

- Asamiya Sanrakshini Sabha*. November 1937. Memorandum presented to Nehru (during Nehru visit to Assam)
- Assam Nagarik Samaj (ANS)*. 2020. Proposal to the High Level Committee on Clause 6 of Assam Accord.
- Barpujari, H.K.(ed.) .1977.*Political History of Assam*, vol.1,1826-1919,Guwahati: GoA.

⁷⁰ Misra (2000). The issue of colonial hinterland was extensively debated in the 1980s in Economic and Political Weekly. A section of intellectuals believed ULFA has borrowed this idea from it.

⁷¹ *Assam Sahitya Sabha* believes Assamese identity at risk due to external pressure and therefore Sabha continuously insist the government to implement the Assam official language act in the state. As per Census 2011, language and mother tongue data, Assam recorded decline of the percentage of Assamese speaking population. It causes a deep sense of insecurity among the Assamese.

- Baruah, A.K. 1991. *Social Tensions in Assam: Middle Class Politics*. Guwahati: Purbaanchal Prakash.
- Barooah, Nirode K. 2010. *Gopinath Bardoloi: 'The Assam Problem' and Nehru's Centre*, Guwahati: Bhabani Print and Publication .
- , 1990. *Gopinath Bardoloi: Indian Constitution and Centre-State Relations, 1940-19509*. Guwahati: Publication Board of Assam.
- Baruah, Sanjib. 1998. 'Politics of Subnationalism: Society versus State in Assam'. in Partha Chatterjee. (ed.) *State and Politics in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 1999. *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*. New Delhi: OUP.
- Baruah, Sunil Pawan. 2000. 'Role of the Press in the Nationalist Upsurge-Brahmaputra Valley' in Bhuyan Arun, (ed) . *Nationalist Upsurge in Assam*. Guwahati: Government of Assam.
- Bezbaruah, D.N . 2010. 'Why celebrate a Dead Accord'. *The Assam Tribune*, August ,17.
- Bhuyan, S.K. 1974. *Anglo-Assamese Relations , 1771-1826*. Guwahati: Lawyer's Book Stall.
- Borbora, Arup. 2010. *All About PCG & Talks*, Guwahati: Aank Baak.
- Bora, Nibaran. 1998. *Swadhin Asom Sambhavne?*. Guwahati: Ekhona.
- Borah, Dhurbajyoti. 1993. *Jatiya Prasna aru Atmanyantran* , Guwahati: Radiant Impression.
- Borgohain, Homen . 1980. *Oupnebeshek Susonor Birueddhe Asomor Sesh Sangram* . Guwahati: Vintage Bookshop.
- Gogoi, Dilip. ed., 2016. *Unheeded Hinterland: Identity and Sovereignty in Northeast India*, London: Routledge.
- Gohain, Hiren. 1985. *Assam : A Burning Questions*, Guwahati: Spectrum.
- , 1990. *Asamiya Jatiya Jibanat Mahapurusiya Parampara* , Guwahati .
- Guha, Amalendu . 1977. *Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947*, New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research.
- , 1991. *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: Society, Polity, Economy*, Calcutta: K.P Bagchi & Company on behalf of the Centre for Studies in Social Science .
- , 1980. 'Little Nationalism turned Chauvinist : Assam's Ant-foreigners Upsurge 1979-80, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.XV. No.41-3 (October)
- Gopinath Bardoloi Papers* . New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
- Guwahati Declaration*, 12 February, 2018. Indigenous Forum, Assam
- India Office Records and Private Papers*, 'Records of the Assam Bengal Railway Company Papers'. The British Library , London.
- Jatiya Mahasabha 9 June 1946*. "Case of Great Assamese people and their Homeland: Assam", Memorandum submitted to All India Congress Committee.
- Mahanta, Nani Gopal. 2013. *Confronting the State: ULFA's Quest for Sovereignty*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Memorandum submitted by the AASU before the Prime Minister* , 2 February 1980

- Misra, Tilottoma.1980. 'Assam: A Colonial Hinterland', *Economic and Political Weekly*. XV(32) August ,: 1357-1564.
- Medhi, Kalirum.1988. *Assamese Grammar and the origin of the Assamese Language*. Guwahati: Publication Broad of Assam.
- Misra, Udayon .2000. *The Periphery Strikes Back: Challenges to the Nation –State in Assam and Nagaland* ,Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study.
- 2001. 'The Transformation of Assamese Identity : A Historical Survey,' *H.K. Barpujari Endowment Lecture (4)*, Shillong : The North East India History Association.
- Notification No.11012/04/2019-NE.VI*. High Level Committee on Clause 6 of Assam Accord, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi, 15 July 2019.
- Neog, Maheswar.1974.*Asomiya Sahityar Ruprekha*.Guwahati:Publication Broad of Assam.
- Phukon, Girin .1984. *Assam's Attitude to Federalism* ,New Delhi:Sterling Publishers.
- 1996.*Politics of Regionalism in Northeast India*.Guwahati:Spectrum Publications.
- Phukon, Suresh .1980. *Moidamor Pora Moi Lachite Koisu*.Sibsagar:Rupom Prakashan.
- A Petition to the General Assembly of United Nations through the Secretary General Mr Perez De Cueller* by the ULFA, 1990.
- Rabha Hakacham, Upen .2000. *Asamiya Aru Asamar Tibbat- Barmiya Bhasa* , Goalpara: Smt. Manjula Rabha Hakachamzak.
- Report of the Line System Committee*.1938.Shillong : Assam Government Press.
- Report on Illegal Migration into Assam,1998*, submitted to the President of India by the Governor of Assam,8th November.
- Report of the Reorganization Commission*, 1956, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi.
- Report on the "Definition of Assamese"* 2015. Initiated by the Speaker Pranab Gogoi, Assam Legislative Assembly
- Report on Secret Killings of Assam* , 1998-2001, by Justice K.N . Saikia Commission , 2007. .
- The Armed Forces (Special Power) Act* 1958. New Delhi: Parliament of India
- The Assam Accord*, 14 August 1985. Signed between the AASU and the
- The Assam Legislative Assembly Proceedings* 1946.
- The Assam Official Language Act* .1960. Guwahati: Government of Assam.
- The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation* , 1873.
- The Census of India*, 1931.
- The Census of India*, 2011. (Language and Mother Tongue data), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India
- The Citizenship (Amendment Act*, 2019. New Delhi: Parliament of India
- The Constituent Assembly Debate on Sixth Schedule* , 6th & 7th September 1949.

The Constituent Assembly Debates (proceeding) 9th December 1946 to 24th January 1950, Volumes III & IV.

The Foreigners (Tribunal) Orders, 1964, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

The Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act 1950. New Delhi: Parliament of India

The IM(DT) Act, 1983. New Delhi, Parliament of India

The Northeastern Areas (Reorganization) Act, 1971. New Delhi, Parliament of India

The Supreme Court of India Judgement on Civil Original Jurisdiction, Writ Petition (Civil) No . 562 of 2012, Assam Sanmilita Mahasangha & Ors. Versus Union of India along with the Writ Petition (civil) No .274 of 2009 & Writ Petition (civil) No . 876 of 2014.

The Supreme Court Judgement on Sarbananda Sonowal vs Union of India, 2005 (on Scrapping IM(DT) Act 1983.

The Treaty of Yandaboo, 24 February 1826.

Sanmilita Jatiya Abhibarttan, Charter of Demands for Discussion between Government of India and the ULFA dated 7 May 2011

Sen, Sumanta and Dubashi, Jagannath. 1983. 'Nellie Massacre: Assam Burns as Ethnic Violence Sings the Sate', India Today, 15 March.

Weiner, Myron 1988. *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

White paper on Foreigners' Issue. 2012. (20 October), Home and Political Department, Government of Assam

Skill Development Trainings and Its impact on Employment and Livelihood Status: A Study on Tribal Youths in Tripura

Sukanti Roy¹, Ariful Hoque² and Subhrabaran Das³

Abstract

The study attempts to evaluate the socio-economic status of tribal youths in Tripura and to assess the impact of various skill development trainings on their employment and livelihood status. For the purpose, a sample of 410 tribal beneficiaries from 15 blocks across six districts in Tripura, who underwent different skill trainings, has been selected using a three-stage purposive random sampling technique. This study finds that various skill development initiatives undertaken by the state government have been somewhat successful in providing employment/self employment opportunities to the beneficiaries as around 27 percent of the total respondents are found to be either gainfully employed in different establishments or self employed by initiating their own income generating activities. A block-level composite index has also been constructed to evaluate the relative performance of the sample blocks in terms of the overall impact of the skill training.

Introduction

Both knowledge and skills are the driving forces for a country's economic growth and social progress. The development of skills can contribute to the structural transformation of an economy by enhancing productivity, employability, competitiveness, income, saving, investment and trade (Rodrick et al., 1995; Epifani, 2008; ILO, 2010; Melo and Das, 2020). In today's highly competitive global environment, technically proficient and skilled persons are considered as human capital. In the process of societal or national development, the contributions of human capital are recognizable. Human capital accumulation is essential to both personal and national development because it drives innovation, creativity, and productivity (Schultz, 1961). The development of human capital makes a significant contribution to both socio-economic progress and

¹Research Scholar, Dept. of Economics, Tripura University, Tripura West, Email: zoyasukantiroy@gmail.com

²Research Scholar, Dept. of Economics, Tripura University, Tripura West, Email: arifulhoque54@yahoo.com

³Professor, Dept. of Economics, Tripura University, Tripura West, India, Email: subhrabaran@rediffmail.com

integration of labour markets (Kriesi and Schweri, 2019). Moreover, the development of human capital through investment in skill trainings transforms a labour-intensive economy into a capital-intensive one (Saner and Yiu, 2014). In every respect, the contributions of men as well as women are equally important. Women are the most dynamic and potentially valuable human resources. Skill development through vocational education and training (VET) is an effective tool for combating poverty and hunger, enhancing farm and non-farm productivity, as well as empowering women (Riaz et al., 2014; Ahamad et al., 2016). Vocational skill training enhances human potential for gainful employment, while simultaneously promoting self-employment and entrepreneurial endeavours (Finch and Crunkilton, 1999). Despite numerous welfare-related initiative for women, the situation of women in India is not very sound (Das and Singh, 2019). The purpose of skill development, particularly for women, is not merely to prepare them for employment; rather, it is to enhance their performance by improving their work quality (Ahamad et al., 2016). Development of skills is essential for women's employability, household productivity and sustainable rural development (Ramakrishna and Sudhakar, 2015). Skill training is positively associated with employability competency (Kumar and Kumar, 2016).

India is the world's "youngest" country, with 54 percent of its people under the age of 25. It has a total workforce of 459 million people (FICCI, 2015). In fact, it is anticipated that the labour force in industrialized countries will shrink by 4 percent over the course of the next 20 years, whereas in India it will grow by 32 percent. Therefore, by skilling its workforce, India might achieve significant economic growth and gain a competitive edge. The Govt. of India introduced the National Skill Policy in 2009 with the goal of providing skill training to a total of 500 million individuals by 2022 (Government of India, 2009). Similarly, with a view to facilitate human capital formation through VET or skill development programmes, the Govt. of India has taken the 'Make in India' initiative and also introduced various skill training schemes for rural and tribal youth, like Pradhan Mantri Kushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS), Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDUGKY) etc. under the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE). The primary goals of these programmes are to alleviate poverty, create diverse revenue streams for low income families and help rural youth realize their career aspirations and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Tribes are indigenous people of the society, having their own religion, culture, occupations, and life styles. They are sometimes viewed as backward people who reside in remote and secluded areas and engage in primitive occupations, animism, and nomadic practices (Mitra, 2008). According to 2011 Census, scheduled tribes consists of around 8.6 percent of the total population in India and more than half of them live in rural areas. Tripura is one of the small hilly states of North-Eastern part of India, which consists of 31.75 percent (as per Census 2011) scheduled tribes. About 95.77 percent of them live in rural areas of Tripura (Statistical Handbook, 2020). There are 19 indigenous tribes in Tripura with varied culture, occupations, and life

styles. Tribes are recognized as among the most marginalized social groups; hence it is of the utmost importance to empower them in genuine sense to know their true potentials. The Govt. of India's approach paper for 12th Five Year Plan has prioritised the inclusion and development of scheduled tribes of the country as the development indicators in terms of health, education, gender and other indices are well below the national average (Planning Commission of India, 2011). Accordingly, the Government has enacted numerous legislations and implemented various developmental schemes, especially for the vulnerable scheduled tribes.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have been undertaken to evaluate the effect of skill development trainings on different aspects of the youths. It has been estimated that a one percent increase in the number of days spent in training will result in a three percent gain in productivity (ILO, 2010). Bausch et al. (2017) evaluate a youth-focused skills training programme in rural and semi-rural Morocco and find that the training has affected participants in a variety of aspects of their lives. The study also reveals that young people from low-income households have limited access to financial services and women lack autonomy in educational and occupational choices. Chakravorty and Bedi (2017) evaluate the impact of DDUGKY on employment of rural poor youth of North Bihar. The study reveals that round 42 percent of the respondents got employment soon after the training; however one third of them left jobs owing to caste-based discrimination and another third left due to a mismatch between their earnings and their living expenditures. Sharma and Nagendra (2016) observe that only 2.3 percent of the Indian workforce has received formal skill training, compared to 68 percent in the UK and 52 percent in USA. They have identified that insufficient scale and restricted capability, skills mismatch, and misuse of funds are the most significant obstacles facing skill initiatives in India. Okada (2012) points out that most of the rural Indian youngsters join the workforce without proper vocational skills, resulting in uncertain, informal and low-wage employment. He opines that our country has a major shortage of skilled employees due to limited access to education and skills training, high school dropout rates, and large labor market mismatches. Sharma and Sethi (2015) observe that India has a total training capacity of around 4.3 million, which is just 36 percent of the entrants and thus depriving every year around 64 percent newcomers of the opportunity of the skill training. Anbuthambi and Chandrasekaran (2017) argue that skill initiatives must be cost-efficient to be sustainable in the long run. It should prioritize rural gender equality and social inclusion. Kanchan and Varshney (2015) observe that 80 percent of the Indian workforce lacks employable skills and that 93 percent of workforce employment is in the unorganized sector. The research indicates that if this gap is narrowed by various skill initiatives, India may become the worldwide centre for skilled personnel, with a surplus of 47 million trained workers by the year 2020. Saini (2015) finds that the skill capacity of Indian labour force is extremely poor; 38 percent is illiterate, 25 percent have a primary education and 36 percent having middle or higher education, whereas just 10 percent is vocationally trained. Chatterjee

and Dev (2017) evaluate the impact of rural entrepreneurship schemes on socio-economic development of 400 rural entrepreneurs in Tripura and find that 56.5 percent of them are not enrolled in any active scheme. Monthly income of the entrepreneurs is found to be too low to maintain a minimal life standard. The research highlights that the social-economic lives of entrepreneurs have not changed significantly despite the introduction of several initiatives for entrepreneurship development.

Objectives

The main objectives of the present study are

- * To analyze the socio-economic status of tribal youths participated in different skill trainings.
- * To evaluate the impact of different skill development trainings on employment and livelihood status of the tribal beneficiaries.

Methodology

Methodology for Data Collection

The present research makes use of both primary and secondary data. The list of total beneficiaries of skill trainings and information on various types of skill development schemes have been obtained from the Tribal Welfare Department, Govt. of Tripura and the Skill Development Institutes. Primary data have been collected from the rural areas of Tripura using a three-stage purposive random sampling technique. Six out of eight districts of Tripura have been chosen in the first stage based on the large demographic size of tribal inhabitants. In the next stage, based on the high concentration of tribal population, four blocks have been selected from Khowai and Sipahijala each, two blocks from each of Gomati, South Tripura and West Tripura, and one block from Dhalai district. So, a total of 15 blocks have been purposefully chosen from six districts. Finally, seven beneficiaries have been selected randomly from the four village councils of each of the selected blocks. Therefore, a total of 410 beneficiaries have been selected. A well-structured schedule has been used to collect data from the beneficiaries.

Methodology for Data Analysis

The impact of different skill development trainings on six dimensions of the sample beneficiaries viz., knowledge gathering, social status, financial status, living status, change in attitude, and change in self-confidence, have been assessed in terms of a composite performance index. Considering these six dimensions, a block-level composite index has been constructed. The dimension index values for each dimension have been calculated by using the following formula

$$Dimension\ Index(DI) = \frac{Actual\ Value - Minimum\ Value}{Maximum\ Value - Minimum\ Value}$$

Finally, the Composite Index (CI) for the impact assessment has been constructed using the following formula.

$$CI = \frac{1}{6} \sum_{i=1}^6 DI_i \quad \forall i = 1, 2, \dots, 6$$

Results and Analysis

Socio-Economic Status of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the block-wise demographic profile of the 410 sample beneficiaries. It is observed that Khowai and South Tripura share more than 50 percent (211 nos.) of the overall sample, while the other four districts share the remainder (199 nos.). Out of the total, 50 percent (205 nos.) are male and the rests are female. This means that both groups comprise an equal proportion of the sample. Of the total 15 sample blocks, Mungiakami has only male beneficiaries, while Charilam and Mohanbhog have only female beneficiaries.

Table 1. Gender-Wise and Age Group-Wise Distribution of the Respondents

District	Block	No. of Respondents	Gender		Age Distribution				
			Male (%)	Female (%)	Below 19	19-24	25-30	31-36	Above 36
Dhalai	Manu	30	70	30.33	-	33.33	46.67	20	-
Gomati	Amarpur	33	51.52	48.48	-	21.21	36.36	33.33	9.09
	Karbook	34	58.82	41.18	5.88	58.82	26.47	2.94	5.88
Khowai	Mungiakami	29	100	-	-	6.9	55.17	37.93	-
	Padmabill	25	16	84	4	40	24	20	12
	Teliamura	14	35.71	64.29	-	-	42.86	50	7.14
	Tulashikhar	38	47.37	52.63	7.89	44.74	26.32	15.79	5.26
Sipahijala	Bishalgarh	11	9.09	90.91	27.27	63.64	9.09	-	-
	Charilam	16	-	100	12.5	56.25	31.25	-	-
	Jampuijala	9	77.78	22.22	33.33	22.22	33.33	11.11	-
	Mohanbhog	24	-	100	4.17	37.5	45.83	8.33	4.17
South Tripura	Bogafa	60	58.33	41.67	8.33	36.67	41.67	6.67	6.67
	Jolaibari	45	73.33	26.67	4.44	11.11	35.56	37.78	11.11
West Tripura	Jirania	12	25	75	8.33	66.67	16.67	-	8.33
	Mandai	30	40	60	3.33	20	36.67	23.33	16.67
Total		410	50	50	5.85	32.68	35.85	19.02	6.59

Source: Computed on the basis of field survey, 2021

The total respondents of the study are distributed between below 19 years of age to 36 and above years. Table 1 shows that 5.85 percent of the respondents are below 19 years of age, while 32.68 percent are between the ages of 19 and 24. A large proportion (35.85 percent) is within the age group of 25-30 years. Further, 19.02 percent are within the age group of 31-36. The proportion of respondents in the age group of above 36 years is found to be 6.59 percent.

Table 2 presents the educational status of the respondents. Only 0.73 percent of the total respondents are found illiterate and the rests are literate. Of the total respondents, 0.73 percent have primary (I-IV) level of education, followed by 11.46 percent who have completed middle school (V-VIII) level of education. A large proportion (49.76 percent) has studied up to secondary level. Around 19 percent have reported to complete higher secondary education. It is noticeable that 16.58 percent have completed graduation and a mere 2.19 percent is found to have studied up to post graduation level.

Table 2. Educational Status of the Respondents

Block	Level of Education					
	I-IV	V-VIII	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduate	Post Graduate
Manu	-	3.33	33.33	20	40	3.33
Amarpur	-	21.21	63.63	3.03	12.12	-
Karbook	-	8.82	61.76	20.59	8.82	-
Mungiakami	-	6.9	24.14	24.14	34.48	10.34
Padmabill	4	24	60	12	-	-
Teliamura	-	-	28.57	14.29	42.86	7.14
Tulashikhar	-	2.63	52.64	23.68	21.05	-
Bishalgarh	-	9.09	72.73	9.09	9.09	-
Charilam	-	-	87.5	-	6.25	6.25
Jampuijala	-	11.11	55.55	22.22	11.11	-
Mohanbhog	-	20.83	54.17	8.33	16.67	-
Bogafa	1.67	6.66	45	28.34	16.66	-
Jolaibari	2.22	24.44	42.22	20	4.44	6.67
Jirania	-	8.33	50	16.66	25	-
Mandai	-	13.34	46.67	26.67	10	-
Total	0.73	11.46	49.76	18.54	16.58	2.19

Source: Computed on the basis of field survey, 2021

The survey data also reveals that among the total 410 respondents, 79.51 percent are Hindu, 13.66 percent are Christian, and 6.82 percent are Buddhists.

Table 3 shows that around 39 percent of the households are living under the above poverty line (APL) category. Majority of the households are living below poverty line, reflecting

thereby the poor economic status of respondents in the study area. Compared block-wise, Charilam has the highest proportion of households living under APL category, followed by Mohanbhog, whereas the highest proportion of households living under below poverty line (BPL) category is found in Jampuijala, followed by Jolaibari.

Table 3. Status and Location of the Sample Households

Block	Household Status		Household Location		
	APL	BPL	Rural	Urban	ADC
Manu	46.65	53.35	43.35	3.35	53.3
Amarpur	30.3	69.7	97	-	3
Karbook	23.5	76.5	23.5	-	76.5
Mungiakami	48.4	51.6	34.5	3.4	62.1
Padmabill	40	60	100	-	-
Teliamura	42.9	57.1	100	-	-
Tulashikhar	23.7	76.3	68.4	-	31.6
Bishalgarh	27.3	72.7	100	-	-
Charilam	93.7	6.3	18.8	-	81.3
Jampuijala	22.2	77.8	66.7	-	33.3
Mohanbhog	66.7	33.3	37.5	-	62.5
Bogafa	41.7	58.3	3.3	-	96.7
Jolaibari	20.1	79.9	-	-	100
Jirania	41.7	58.3	58.3	-	41.7
Mandai	43.4	56.6	26.7	-	73.3
Total	38.8	61.2	42.4	0.5	57.1

Source: Computed on the basis of field survey, 2021

The data in Table 3 also indicates that 42.4 percent of the sample households are located in rural areas where as 57.1 percent are in ADC (Autonomous District Council) area. Only 0.5 percent have reported that their houses are located in urban area. No household is found located in semi-urban area.

Table 4 shows that more than 65 percent of the sample households have kaccha houses and about 23 percent live in semi-pucca houses. The rest of the households have pucca houses. It is obvious from the available data that the condition of housing in the investigated area does not suffice the needs of sustaining a basic standard of living as most of the respondents reported living in kaccha houses.

Table 4 also shows that about 51 percent of the households do not have access to a sanitary latrine and they use kaccha latrine for defecation purpose. Only around 28 percent have pucca sanitation facility and about 20 percent have semi-pucca latrine. Further, the use of non-sanitary facilities is found highest in Jirania (83.3 percent) which establishes low awareness on health and hygienic living of the households.

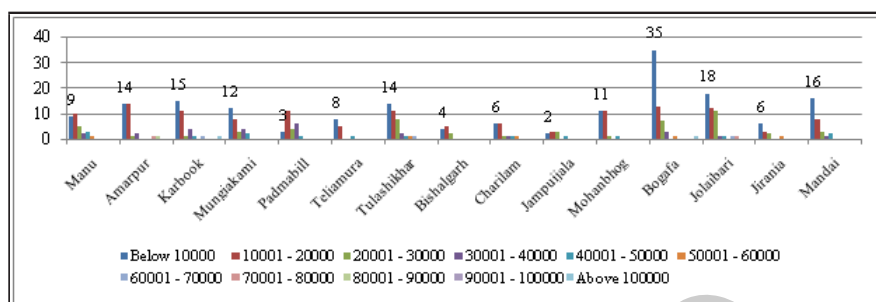
Table 4. House Type and Sanitation Type of the Sample Households

Block	House Type			Sanitation Type		
	Kaccha	Pucca	Semi Pucca	Kaccha	Pucca	Semi Pucca
Manu	73.35	13.3	13.35	46.7	43.3	10
Amarpur	72.7	3	24.2	30.3	24.2	45.5
Karbook	76.5	5.9	17.6	61.8	38.2	-
Mungiakami	75.9	3.4	20.7	58.6	20.7	20.7
Padmabill	60	8	32	36	64	-
Teliamura	28.6	21.4	50	21.4	35.7	42.9
Tulashikhar	71.1	13.2	15.8	60.5	31.6	7.9
Bishalgarh	63.6	9.1	27.3	72.7	27.3	-
Charilam	50	31.3	18.8	68.8	31.3	-
Jampujjala	66.7	22.2	11.1	44.4	33.3	22.2
Mohanbhog	41.7	20.8	37.5	66.7	16.7	16.7
Bogafa	66.7	10	23.3	45	16.7	38.3
Jolaibari	80	6.7	13.3	55.6	26.7	17.8
Jirania	58.3	-	41.7	83.3	-	16.7
Mandai	56.7	13.3	30	43.3	20	36.7
Total	66.1	10.7	23.2	51.4	28.3	20.2

Source: Computed on the basis of field survey, 2021

From the available data it is found that 46.6 percent of the households have the drinking water source from tube wells. This is followed by 32.2 percent having access to water supply for drinking water. Around 9 percent use bore wells and around 10 percent rely on other sources like pond, hand pump, use of motor in house etc. for their drinking water.

The survey data indicates that, out of 410 beneficiary families, 173 households are earning less than or up to Rs.10000 per month. There are 131 and 52 households whose monthly income is in between Rs.10001-20000 and Rs.20001-30000, respectively. Very few families earn monthly more than Rs.50000 income. Only two households earn monthly more than Rs.100000. Figure 1 shows the block-wise distribution of monthly income of the sample households. Majority of the households with a monthly income of less than or equal to Rs. 10,000 reside in the Bogafa block. Bogafa has also the greatest monthly income disparity, followed by Mandai and Jolaibari. The number of households in the first two income categories is almost same in three blocks viz., Amarapur, Charilam and Mohanbhog. Further, the number of sample households whose monthly income lie within Rs.20001-30000 income group is more in two blocks, Tulashikhar and Jolaibari.

Figure 1. Block-Wise Income Distribution of the Sample Households

Source: Computed on the basis of primary survey, 2021.

Further, the average number of saving account per sample household is found to be 1.21, indicating that the sample households are in a better position in terms of having access to banking services. It needs to be mentioned here that the average number of Jan Dhan account per household is found to be very less; only 0.01. This may be due to the fact that the Prime Minister's Jan Dhan Yojna Scheme was not properly implemented in the study area. The average number of ATM card per sample household is found to be 0.64, indicating low level of ATM penetration in the sample area. It is also found that only 4.15 percent of the sample households have fixed deposits with the banks. More than 11 percent have taken loans from the banks. Majority of them have taken loans either from Grameen or Bandhan bank for purposes like household expenditure, medical treatment, purchase of consumer durables, and farm and non-farm businesses.

Skill Development Training Details and Its Impact on Tribal Youths

This section provides the details of different skill trainings that the respondents participated in and the impact of those trainings on their employment and livelihood status. From the survey data, it is observed that 57.6 percent of the respondents received information about the training from panchayat representatives, 27.1 percent from their friends and relatives, and the remaining 15.3 percent reported receiving information from sources like News papers and block offices. Awareness alone is not enough to take advantage of the skill development activities. Participants in these programmes should have a sense that they will benefit in some way from these trainings. Examining from this point of view, the question "What were your expectations from the training?" is put before the respondents to know their opinion. Out of the total 410 beneficiaries, 373 (91 percent) responded this question and provided a combination of responses, which are presented in Table 5. It is observed that 42.09 percent (157) expected to find job after completing the training. Around 16 percent (60) reported that they joined the training to acquire knowledge and 15.82 percent (59) felt that this training would be useful to start their own income generating activities. For 11.53 percent (43), the

hope was to start their own businesses after undergoing the training courses. A small percentage (2.95) joined the courses only to get certificate/scholarship. It is interesting to note that 11.53 percent (43) reported that they had no expectation from the training.

Table 5. Expectations from the Training

District	Expectations						Total
	To Get Job	To Gain Knowledge	Start Own Business	Income Earning	Certificate / Scholarship	No Expectation	
Dhalai	13(48.15)	8(29.63)	1(3.7)	-	-	5(18.52)	27(100)
Gomati	22(32.84)	13(19.4)	14(20.9)	2(2.99)	4(5.97)	12(17.91)	67(100)
Khowai	53(53.54)	15(15.15)	12(12.12)	13(13.13)	-	6(6.06)	99(100)
Sipahijala	30(63.83)	3(6.38)	2(4.26)	7(14.89)	3(6.38)	2(4.26)	47(100)
S. Tripura	28(27.72)	17(16.83)	11(10.89)	28(27.72)	4(3.96)	13(12.87)	101(100)
W. Tripura	11(34.38)	4(12.5)	3(9.38)	9(28.13)	-	5(15.63)	32(100)
Total	157(42.09)	60(16.09)	43(11.53)	59(15.82)	11(2.95)	43(11.53)	373(100)

Source: Computed on the Basis of Field Survey, 2021; Percentages are given in the parentheses

Table 6. Types of Trainings Received by the Respondents

Block	Computer	Driving	Weaving	Makeup Artistry	Hotel Mang.	Customer Care	Steno	Poultry	Others
Manu	36.65	26.65	-	-	-	3.35	23.35	-	10
Amarpur	27.3	15.2	39.4	9.1	-	-	-	-	9.1
Karbook	11.8	-	17.6	20.6	35.3	-	-	11.8	2.9
Mungiakami	24.1	34.5	-	-	-	-	41.4	-	-
Padmabill	24	-	72	-	-	4	-	-	-
Teliamura	57.1	-	14.3	7.1	-	7.1	-	14.3	-
Tulashikhar	26.3	18.4	23.7	13.2	10.5	7.9	-	-	-
Bishalgarh	-	-	81.8	-	18.2	-	-	-	-
Charilam	-	-	12.5	81.3	-	-	6.3	-	-
Jampuijala	-	-	-	-	44.4	33.3	22.2	-	-
Mohanbhog	16.7	-	-	83.3	-	-	-	-	-
Bogafa	18.3	28.3	26.7	5	-	1.7	-	16.7	3.3
Jolaibari	17.8	-	11.1	-	11.1	-	-	55.6	4.4
Jirania	16.7	-	16.7	-	41.7	-	-	8.3	16.7
Mandai	-	13.3	26.7	13.3	23.3	-	-	10	13.3
Total	19.5	12.4	22	13.7	9.5	2.4	5.4	11	4.1

Source: Computed on the basis of field survey, 2021

The training activities that the respondents participated in are computer learning, driving, weaving, makeup artistry, hotel management, etc. The duration of the training courses ranges from less than one month to six months. Table 6 shows that a large

proportion (22 percent) of the respondents has undergone training in weaving, followed by computer learning (19.5 percent) and makeup artistry (13.7 percent). Around 12 percent have been trained on driving, 9.5 percent on hotel management, 5.4 percent on steno and secretarial assistant and 11 percent on poultry and piggery farming. Besides, there are some other trades like paper bag making, food and beverages service, rod binding, etc., in which a negligible proportion of the respondents have been trained.

Table 7. Training Evaluation Details of the Respondents

Block	Exam. Assessment	Knowledge Gathering	Teachers' Quality	Training Beneficial	Stipend Received	Certificate Received
Manu	70	4.35	7.25	33.35	10	66.7
Amarpur	72.7	6.8	7.2	24.2	87.9	30.3
Karbook	52.9	4.4	8.9	17.6	29.4	26.5
Mungiakami	75.9	4.5	7.9	31	-	75.9
Padmabill	84	5.8	6.2	48	56	12
Teliamura	57.1	7.1	8	35.7	71.4	57.1
Tulashikhar	81.6	6.8	8.1	71.1	76.3	50
Bishalgarh	81.8	5.5	6.5	72.7	27.3	27.3
Charilam	100	4.7	4.9	12.5	62.5	68.8
Jampuijala	88.9	6	6.1	22.2	55.6	88.9
Mohanbhog	100	5.3	4.5	4.2	45.8	83.3
Bogafa	95	6.9	7.9	65	48.3	58.3
Jolaibari	97.8	6.9	7.8	31.1	6.7	86.7
Jirania	83.3	4.6	5.6	58.3	16.7	25
Mandai	83.3	6.5	7.3	46.7	36.7	60
Total/ Average	82.4	5.9	7.3	40	41.2	55.6

Source: Computed on the basis of field survey, 2021

Table 7 shows the training evaluation details for recipients of various skill trainings. It is observed that 82.4 percent have undergone regular class/practical tests as part of their training course. On a ten-point rating scale, the respondents were asked how much knowledge they had gained after receiving the training. The average score is found to be 5.9, indicating a moderate level of knowledge acquisition. In terms of knowledge gathering, Teliamura scores the highest (7.1), followed by Bogafa, while Manu scores the lowest (4.35). The quality of a training programme is determined by the trainers' qualifications and experience, as well as their ability to communicate effectively. On a ten-point scale, the respondents were asked to rate the training quality of the teachers in terms of their understanding. The average score is found to be 7.3, indicating that trainers performed very well in their skill trainings. The question 'Is the training beneficial/helpful in your life?' is put before the respondents and two options are given. Only 40 percent believe the training is beneficial to them,

while the rests do not find any usefulness of the training in their lives. Of the total respondents, only 41.2 percent (169) reported receipt of stipend which varies from Rs.200 to maximum Rs.6000, depending on the duration of the training. Around 56 percent reported receiving a certificate upon completion of the course.

Impact of Skill Trainings on Employment

The success of any skill development programme can be accessed in terms of job placement and initiation of one's own revenue generating activities. Examined from this perspective, it can be observed from Table 8 that 110 (26.83 percent) of the total respondents are either gainfully employed in different establishments or self-employed by establishing their own businesses in different trades in which they have undergone skill training. Of the total 110 respondents who are employed/self-employed, 70 (63.64 percent) are male, while the remaining 40 are female. Block-by-block comparison shows that Mungiakami, Padmabill and Bogafa perform relatively better in providing gainful employment/self-employment opportunities to the respondents. Thirty six of them reported that they got employment in different establishments after completion of the training. Twenty respondents were able to get employment in other person's small businesses either on a regular or irregular basis and 54 of them stated that they were able to establish their own businesses in different trades in which they have undergone skill training.

Table 8. Impact of Skill Training on Employment of the Respondents

Block	No. of Respondents	Employed	Job in Others' Small Business	Established Own Business	Total
Manu	30	5(16.67)	2(6.67)	5(16.67)	12(40)
Amarpur	33	-	2(6.06)	4(12.12)	6(18.18)
Karbook	34	1(2.94)	1(2.94)	3(8.82)	5(14.71)
Mungiakami	29	4(13.79)	4(13.79)	6(20.69)	14(48.28)
Padmabill	25	4(16)	-	10(40)	14(56)
Teliamura	14	-	1(7.14)	1(7.14)	2(14.29)
Tulashikhar	38	7(18.42)	-	3(7.89)	10(26.32)
Bishalgarh	11	2(18.18)	-	-	2(18.18)
Charilam	16	2(12.5)	-	-	2(12.5)
Jampuijala	9	1(11.11)	-	2(22.22)	3(33.33)
Mohanbhog	24	-	-	1(4.17)	1(4.17)
Bogafa	60	1(1.67)	5(8.33)	8(13.13)	14(23.33)
Jolaibari	45	1(2.22)	4(8.89)	3(6.67)	8(17.78)
Jirania	12	3(25)	-	2(16.67)	5(41.67)
Mandai	30	5(16.67)	1(3.33)	6(20)	12(40)
Total	410	36(8.78)	20(4.88)	54(13.17)	110(26.83)

Source: Computed on the basis of field survey, 2021; (%) are given in the parentheses

On a whole, it is observed that only 26.83 percent of the total respondents are either gainfully employed or self employed as a result of the skill training courses they participated in. The remaining 300 (73.17 percent) have neither secured employment nor started their own income generating activities.

In order to find out respondents' opinion regarding the possible reasons for not starting post-training follow-up activities, a question put to them on this respect. Only 154 of the total replied to this question, providing a variety of responses which are presented in Table 9. It can be observed that 53.25 percent (82) did not start any follow-up activity in the post training period mainly due to financial constraints. Around 14 percent (21) said that they did not start any follow-up activity because they are still studying. For 9.74 percent (15), lack of suitable location is one of the important constraints that hinder them starting their own income generating activities.

Table 9. Reasons for Not Doing Follow-Up Activities

Reasons	Dhalai	Gomati	Khawai	Sipahijala	S. Tripura	W. Tripura	Total
Lack of Finance	75	33.33	68.18	46.34	54.55	50	53.25
Family Problem	-	25	-	2.44	9.09	12.5	7.14
Training is not Useful	-	4.17	-	2.44	-	-	1.3
Not Get Certificate	-	-	9.09	7.32	-	-	4.55
Still Studying	-	20.83	6.82	4.88	27.27	25	13.64
Lack of Proper Place	-	-	2.27	31.71	-	12.5	9.74
No Interest	25	16.67	13.64	4.88	9.09	-	10.39
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Computed on the basis of field survey, 2021

The next important reason is that 7.14 percent (11) were dealing with family issues. They did not receive any support from their family members in starting their own enterprises that would generate income for them. 4.55 percent (7) of the respondents reported that they did not receive any certificate following the end of their training; as a result, they did not start any self employment activity. A small percentage (1.30 percent) was of the opinion that the training would not be useful in initiating any income generating activity. It is interesting to note that 10.39 percent of the responses show that the trainees had no interest in doing any post-training follow-up activity.

Impact of Skill Training on Improvement in Knowledge and Social Status

Table 10 shows the impact of skill training on improvement in knowledge of the trainees. Most of the respondents (57.8 percent) have replied that there is no improvement in their knowledge after the training. 39.51 percent replied that they learned a lot and gathered a good amount of knowledge. Only 0.49 percent is benefited with excellent improvement in their knowledge after the training. Among all the 15 blocks, Jolaibari has the highest proportion (86.67 percent) of trainees who have not found any change

in their knowledge, while Karbook has the highest proportion (79.41 percent) with good improvement in their knowledge.

Table 10. Improvement in Knowledge and Social Status after Training

Block	Improvement in Knowledge				Improvement in Social Status			
	No Change	Good	Very Good	Excellent	No Change	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Manu	36.67	63.33	-	-	30	70	-	-
Amarpur	72.73	24.24	3.03	-	84.85	12.12	3.03	-
Karbook	20.59	79.41	-	-	47.06	52.94	-	-
Mungiakami	44.83	51.72	-	3.45	41.38	55.17	3.45	-
Padmabill	76	24	-	-	56	44	-	-
Teliamura	71.43	28.57	-	-	57.14	28.57	14.29	-
Tulashikhar	42.11	50	7.89	-	31.58	55.26	13.16	-
Bishalgarh	72.73	27.27	-	-	81.82	18.18	-	-
Charilam	81.25	18.75	-	-	81.25	18.75	-	-
Jampuijala	55.56	33.33	11.11	-	55.56	44.44	-	-
Mohanbhog	45.83	54.17	-	-	79.17	20.83	-	-
Bogafa	71.67	23.33	3.33	1.67	66.67	31.67	1.67	-
Jolaibari	86.67	11.11	2.22	-	84.44	15.56	-	-
Jirania	41.67	50	8.33	-	66.67	16.67	16.67	-
Mandai	43.33	56.67	-	-	53.33	46.67	-	-

Source: Computed on the basis of field survey, 2021

Majority (60.24 percent) of the total respondents believed that there is no improvement in their social standing after being trained. All the respondents are agreed with no excellent improvement in their social status after being trained. 36.83 percent and 2.93 percent reported good and very good social improvement after completion of the training. Compared block-wise, Table 10 shows that majority of the respondents from Amarpur (84.85 percent) have replied they don't find any change in their social standing after the training, followed by Jolaibari (84.44 percent). Most of the respondents from Manu (70 percent) have psychologically agreed that their social status has improved and the training is good for that purpose.

Impact of Skill Training on Improvement in Financial Status and Living Standard

Development of skills can broaden the scope for financial improvement through income generation. Examining from this perspective, it is observed that 23.90 percent of the respondents felt that the impact of training is very good in improving their financial status. However, majority of them (71.95 percent) believed that the training has no impact on changing their financial status. Only 3.9 percent stated the training has a very good impact on improving their financial status. Seen block-wise, Table 11 shows

that the majority of trainees from Mohanbhog block (91.67 percent) have claimed that there has been no improvement in their financial situation after being trained. Only 1.67 percent respondents from Bogafa have reported an excellent impact of the training on improving their financial status. Around 62 percent respondents from Mungiakami have reported that their financial status has improved and is good after the training.

Table 11. Improvement in Financial Status and Living Standard after Training

Block	Improvement in Financial Status				Improvement in Living Standard			
	No Change	Good	Very Good	Excellent	No Change	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Manu	40	56.67	3.35	-	33.33	66.67	-	-
Amarpur	90.91	6.06	3.03	-	87.88	9.09	3.03	-
Karbook	73.53	26.47	-	-	26.47	70.59	2.94	-
Mungiakami	31.03	62.07	6.9	-	27.59	72.41	-	-
Padmabill	48	36	16	-	40	48	12	-
Teliamura	78.57	7.14	14.29	-	78.57	14.29	7.14	-
Tulashikhar	65.79	31.58	2.63	-	23.68	63.16	13.16	-
Bishalgarh	90.91	9.09	-	-	90.91	9.09	-	-
Charilam	87.5	12.5	-	-	87.5	12.5	-	-
Jampuijala	77.78	22.22	-	-	88.89	11.11	-	-
Mohanbhog	91.67	4.17	4.17	-	66.67	33.33	-	-
Bogafa	73.33	21.67	3.33	1.67	58.33	41.67	-	-
Jolaibari	88.89	8.89	2.22	-	66.67	33.33	-	-
Jirania	83.33	8.33	8.33	-	50	41.67	8.33	-
Mandai	80	20	-	-	63.33	36.67	-	-

Source: Computed on the basis of field survey, 2021

It is found that 54.63 percent trainees have reported no improvement in their living standard as they are still not earning. However, 42.44 percent have responded the training is good in improving their living standard. The training has been rated as “very good” by only 2.9 percent of respondents for its ability to improve participants’ standard of living. Compared block-wise, Table 11 shows Bishalgarh has the highest proportion of trainees (90.91 percent) who said that the training did not improve their living standard because they still do not have a job to earn income. None of the trainee has agreed with that the training has an excellent impact on their standard of living.

Impact of Skill Training on Change in Attitude and Self-Confidence

The majority of the respondents (55.85 percent) believe that the skill training has changed their attitude. The remaining 44.15 percent do not think that the training has altered their perspective. Table 12 shows block-wise information about change in attitude of the respondents after being trained. It is noted that all respondents

from Charilam have reported no improvement in their attitudes after completion of training. This is followed by Mohanbhog (87.5 percent) and Bishalgarh (81.82 percent). Respondents from most of the blocks believe that there has been a significant shift in their outlook, and they are eager to get financial support that will enable them to start income generating activities. Only few respondents from three blocks, namely Teliamura, Tulashikhar and Bogafa have reported that there is an excellent improvement in their attitude after receiving the training.

Table 12. Change in Attitude and Self-Confidence after Training

Block	Change in Attitude				Change in Self-Confidence			
	No Change	Good	Very Good	Excellent	No Change	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Manu	16.67	80	3.33	-	20	70	10	-
Amarpur	60.61	33.33	6.06	-	54.55	39.39	6.06	-
Karbook	8.82	91.18	-	-	11.76	88.24	-	-
Mungiakami	31.03	65.52	3.45	-	27.59	68.97	3.45	-
Padmabill	32	60	8	-	16	60	16	8
Teliamura	14.29	71.43	7.14	7.14	7.14	78.57	7.14	7.14
Tulashikhar	21.05	63.16	13.16	2.63	5.26	63.16	26.32	5.26
Bishalgarh	81.82	18.18	-	-	72.73	18.18	9.09	-
Charilam	100	-	-	-	56.25	43.75	-	-
Jampuijala	77.78	22.22	-	-	55.56	33.33	11.11	-
Mohanbhog	87.5	12.5	-	-	25	62.5	8.33	4.17
Bogafa	48.33	38.33	11.67	1.67	28.33	45	16.67	10
Jolaibari	68.89	26.67	4.44	-	24.44	66.67	4.44	4.44
Jirania	41.67	50	8.33	-	41.67	25	33.33	-
Mandai	26.67	73.33	-	-	13.33	70	10	6.67

Source: Computed on the basis of field survey, 2021

Around three-fourth (73.66 percent) of the respondent said they feel their confidence has improved as a result of the training they received. However, 26.34 percent said the training did not have an impact on their confidence. The training has received ratings of “good,” “very good,” and “excellent” from 59.02 percent, 10.73 percent, and 3.9 percent of the respondents, respectively, on its effectiveness in changing the participants’ levels of self-confidence. Block-level data, as depicted in Table 12, shows that majority of the respondents (72.73 percent) from Bishalgarh reported no change in their level of self-confidence after being trained. However, 88.24 percent respondents from Karbook block believed that the training is good in improving their self-confidence. The training has been rated “very good” for improving self-confident by 33.33 percent respondents from Jirania and “excellent” by 7.14 percent respondents from Teliamura block.

Overall Impact Assessment of the Training

The impact of skill trainings on six dimensions of the sample beneficiaries viz., knowledge gathering, social status, financial status, standard of living, change in attitude and change in self-confidence are discussed above. Considering all these dimensions, a block-level composite index is constructed, which can reflect the overall performance of a particular block. Table 13 shows the block-wise composite index of the impact of training on the tribal beneficiaries in Tripura. It is observed that the overall impact of the skill development training is the highest in Manu block under the Dhalai district (0.85).

Table 13. Block-Wise Composite Index of the Overall Impact Assessment

District	Block	Knowledge Index	Social Index	Financial Index	Living Index	Attitude Index	Self-confidence Index	Composite Index	Rank
Dhalai	Manu	0.76	1.00	0.85	0.86	0.91	0.73	0.85	1
Gomati	Amarpur	0.21	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.43	0.27	0.16	13
	Karbook	1.00	0.69	0.30	0.96	1.00	0.90	0.81	3
Khowai	Mungiakami	0.63	0.79	1.00	0.94	0.76	0.62	0.79	4
	Padmabill	0.16	0.53	0.72	0.76	0.75	0.84	0.63	5
	Teliamura	0.23	0.51	0.22	0.18	0.94	0.97	0.51	7
	Tulashikhar	0.67	0.97	0.43	1.00	0.87	1.00	0.82	2
Sipahijala	Bishalgarh	0.21	0.06	0.01	0.00	0.20	0.00	0.08	15
	Charilam	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.05	0.00	0.24	0.09	14
	Jampuijala	0.47	0.53	0.23	0.03	0.24	0.26	0.29	11
	Mohanbhog	0.62	0.10	0.00	0.36	0.14	0.71	0.32	10
South Tripura	Bogafa	0.23	0.33	0.30	0.49	0.57	0.66	0.43	9
	Jolaibari	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.36	0.34	0.72	0.25	12
West Tripura	Jirania	0.68	0.33	0.14	0.61	0.64	0.46	0.48	8
	Mandai	0.66	0.58	0.19	0.41	0.80	0.88	0.59	6

Source: Computed on the basis of field survey, 2021

This is followed by Tulashikhar block (0.82) under Khowai district, Karbook (0.81) under Gomati district, Mungiakami block (0.79) under Khowai district. The moderate overall impact has been observed in Padmabill block (0.63) under Khowai district, which is followed by Mandai (0.59) in West Tripura, Teliamura block (0.51) in Khowai and Jirania (0.48) in West Tripura. The composite index value is minimum in Bishalgarh block (0.08) under Sipahijala district which indicates very poor impact of the skill development training on the beneficiaries. This is followed by Charilam (0.09) under Sipahijala and Amarapur (0.16) under Gomati district.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The study has attempted to evaluate the present socio-economic standing of tribal youths in Tripura and tried to assess the impact of various skill trainings on their employment and livelihood status. Results indicates that various skill initiatives of the state government have been somewhat successful in providing employment or self employment opportunities to the beneficiaries as around 27 percent of the total respondents are found to be either gainfully employed in different establishments or self employed by establishing their own businesses in different trades in which they have undergone skill trainings. Furthermore, a total of 154 beneficiaries have reported that they did not initiate any post-training follow-up activity owing to various reasons, the most prominent of which are financial restraints, family problems and a lack of suitable location. Computation of block-level composite index shows that, out of the 15 sample blocks, Manu has the highest score in terms of the overall impact of the skill training, followed by Tulashikhar and Karbook. The moderate overall impact is observed in Padmabill, Mandai, Teliamura and Jirania blocks. Further, Bishalgarh block has the lowest composite index score, suggesting that the skill trainings provided to the respondents have a little effect on their lives.

Based on the analysis, this study makes the following policy suggestions. *First*, most of the respondents are facing severe financial problem to establish their own income generating activities and they do not even get loans from the formal financial institutions. Therefore, formal credits should be readily available and accessible to respondents. The process of sanctioning loan should be flexible, unbiased and hazard free. *Second*, some of the trainees are found to be more concerned with receiving various forms of financial benefits from the training provider or the government. Therefore, effective counselling is required with the help of NGOs and intellectuals to change the mindset of the trainees. *Third*, income generation would be possible through formation of self help groups (SHGs). Effective monitoring by local government authorities is required for a greater impact.

Acknowledgement: The authors are indebted to Director, Tribal Research Institute and Culture, Govt. of Tripura for providing necessary information as well as support.

References

- Ahamad, T., Sinha, A., & Shastri, R. K. (2016). Women empowerment through skills development & vocational education. *SMS Journal of Entrepreneurship & Innovation*, 2(2), 76-81.
- Anbuthambi, B. and Chandrasekaran, N. (2017). Impact of Skill India on Rural Youth: A Perspective, *ICTACT Journal on Management Studies*, 3(1), 457-460.
- Bausch, J., Dyer, P., Gardiner, D., Kluve, J. and Kovacevic, S. (2017). The Impact of Skills Training on the Financial Behaviour, Employability and Educational Choices of Rural Young People. *Impact Report Series 6*, ILO, Geneva.
- Chakravorty, B. and Bedi, A. S. (2017). Skills Training and Employment Outcomes in Rural Bihar. *IZA – Institute of Labor Economics, Discussion Paper Series No. 10902*, July 2017.
- Chatterjee, R. and Deb, A. K. (2017). Effect of Government Programmes on Entrepreneurship: A Study on NE India with Special Reference to Tripura. *EPRA International Journal of Economic and Business Review*, 5(8), 47-58.
- Das, S. and Singh, P. (2019). Rural Women Empowerment and its Relationship with Economic Development: A Study of Cachar District of the State Assam, *IASSI Quarterly: Contributions to Indian Social Science*, 38(2), 313-332.
- Economic Review of Tripura. (2021). *Economic Review of Tripura, 2020-21*, available at: <https://ecostat.tripura.gov.in/eco-review-2020-21.pdf> (accessed on 10/10/2022)
- Epifani, P., & Gancia, G. (2008). Skill biased of world trade. *The Economic Journal*, 118(530), 927–960.
- Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FICCI). (2015). *Skill development in India-2015*. FICCI Publication.
- Finch, C. R., & Crunkilton, J. R. (1999). *Curriculum development in vocational and technical education. planning, content, and implementation*. Allyn and Bacon, 160 Gould Street.
- Government of India. (2009). *National skill development policy 2009*. Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government of India.
- ILO. (2010). *A skilled workforce for strong, sustainable and balanced growth: A G20 training strategy*. International Labour Office, Geneva.
- Kanchan, S. and Varshney, S. (2015). Skill Development Initiatives and Strategies. *Asian Journal of Management Research*, 5(4), 666-672.
- Kriesi, I., & Schweri, J. (2019). Types of education, achievement, and labor market integration over the life course. *Social Inclusion*, 7(3), 58-64.
- Kumar, M. and Kumar, S. (2016). Impact of Soft Skills Training on Employability Competency in SIMS, Bangalore: A Study with Reference to B-School Graduates, *International Journal of Research in IT & Management*, 6(3), 10-17.
- Melo, Y., & Das, A. K. (2020). The Extent of Participation in Skill Development Trainings and Its Impact on Employment. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 14(2), 290-303.
- Mitra, A. (2008). The status of women among the scheduled tribes in India. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 37, 1202–1217.

- Okada, A. (2012). Skills Development for Youth in India: Challenges and Opportunities. *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*, 15(2), 169-193.
- Planning Commission of India. (2011). *Faster, Sustainable and More Inclusive Growth: An Approach to the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017)*. Govt. of India. Retrieved from www.planningcommission.nic.in
- Ramakrishna, K., & Sudhakar, A. (2015). Women empowerment through skill development: The role of RUDSETIs. *International journal in Management and social Science*, 3(6), 421-434.
- Riaz, A., Siddique, A., Riaz, F., & Malik, N. (2014). Impact assessment of skill development trainings rendered by Punjab rural support programme for empowering rural women. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 3(4), 27-32.
- Rodrick, D., Grossman, G., & Norman, V. (1995). Getting interventions right: How South Korea and Taiwan grew rich. *Economic Policy*, 10(20), 53-107.
- Saini, V. (2015). Skill Development in India: Need, Challenges and Ways Forward. *Abhinav National Monthly Refereed Journal of Research in Arts & Education*, 4(4), 1-9
- Saner, R., & Yiu, L. (2014). Learning to grow: A human capital-focused development strategy, with lesson from Singapore. *International Development Policy*, 5(3), 1-28.
- Schultz, T. W. (1961). Investment in human capital. *The American economic review*, 51(1), 1-17.
- Sharma, E. and Sethi, S. (2015). Skill Development: Opportunities & Challenges in India *Gyan Jyoti E-Journal*, 5(1), 45-55.
- Sharma, L. and Nagendra, A. (2016). Skill Development in India: Challenges and Opportunities. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*, 9(48), 1-8.
- Statistical Handbook of Tripura. (2020). Retrieved from <https://ecostat.tripura.gov.in/> (accessed on 5/10/2022).
- Venkatesh, A., Singh, A. and Kiran, M. B. (2015). Evaluation of Skill Development Programmes: A Project Management Perspective. *International Journal of Humanities and Management Sciences*, 3(5), 358-364.

Households' Choice for Tourism Occupations: A Study in Kaziranga and Manas National Parks of Assam

Pranjal Protim Buragohain¹ and Jitu Saikia²

Abstract

Nature-based tourism in wildlife-protected areas has the potential to diversify the local economy. It provides employment and income-earning opportunities to locals near wildlife destinations. Creating economic opportunities for local households through tourism can compensate for the losses they incur due to the declaration of protected areas. Further, economic opportunities may also help the conservation process as the local people are the protected areas' co-managers. However, the various opportunities provided by tourism may not be accessible to local households as the industry often creates a tourism enclave dominated by large investors. In this regard, it is important to assess the factors influencing the choice decision of the locals in tourism-related income-earning opportunities. This study can help to make the necessary institutional and other arrangements for creating an environment to ensure more participation of local people in tourism-related occupations.

Introduction

The travel and tourism sector are emerging as one of the fastest-growing economic sectors globally. From 2008-09 to 2018-19, the annual average growth of international tourists was 5.32 per cent. In the year 2019-20, international tourist arrivals were 1.5 billion globally, which is 6.83 per cent increase over the previous year³. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) for international tourist arrivals from 1995-96 to 2019-20 is 4.3 per cent. The positive global growth in international tourist arrivals confirms tourism as a leading and resilient economic sector. The data at the regional level reflected that South Asia was the fastest-growing sub-region in Asia and the Pacific in terms of international visits in the year 2017-18, which was mainly due to the strong growth in international visitors in India in the recent period, which was more than 15 per cent in 2017-18 (Hecker, 2018).

¹ Associate Professor, Dept. of Economics, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Email: pranjalprotim@dibru.ac.in

² Assistant Professor, Birangana Sati Sadhani Rajyik Viswavidyalaya, Golaghat

³ Data source – UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, 2019.

India has occupied 34th rank, out of 140 countries, in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI), prepared by World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2019-20. The TTCI ranking for India has been improved, which was 52 (out of 141 countries) in 2015-16 and 40 (out of 136 countries) in 2017-18. The sector is also an important source of foreign exchange earnings (FEE) for India. In 2018-19, the FEE from tourism was Rs. 194,881 crores, compared with Rs. 177,874 crores in 2017-18. The FEE in 2018-19 from tourism in India has registered a growth rate of 9.6 per cent over the previous year. The industry has created 26.74 million jobs in India, which was 5.1 per cent of the total employment in the country in 2018-19.⁴

Nature-based tourism, a subset of the tourism industry, has recently gained popularity among visitors in developing countries. Existing works reflect the demand for protected wildlife areas⁵ Nature-based recreational activities have increased in recent decades (Pergams & Zaradic, 2008; Balmford et al., 2009; Karanth & DeFries, 2010). In the case of India, it is observed that there is an increase in middle-class households⁶ and constitutes 33 per cent of the total population in 2014-15 (Ramanathan & Ramanathan, 2019). The McKinsey Global Institute also forecasts the increase in middle-class families in India from 250 million in 2015-16 to 583 million in 2025-26. The increase in middle-class households in an emerging economy like India will likely generate more future demand for nature-based tourism in different regions. The increase in demand for nature-based tourism can help conserve resources and generate income and employment in the host region.

The local population of a particular destination is significantly influenced by the promotion of tourism in the destinations. Tourism can positively influence the local households' overall economic activities in a nature-based destination such as a wildlife area. From the development perspective of tourism, academicians and policymakers have also given attention to tourism employment and income generation, particularly for the poorest section living nearby remote destinations (Taylor, 2010). However, due to the range of impacts and the stakeholders involved, there is a need for holistic approaches to be followed in tourism development plans that emphasize more inclusiveness to local people. In this respect, it is crucial to investigate the issues related to the tourism occupation of the local households near the tourism destination(s). The paper, therefore, attempts to discuss the factors that determine the choice decision of the local households for tourism-related occupations available in

⁴ Data source – Tourism Satellite Account Research, World Travel and Tourism Council; India Tourism Statistics, 2019, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

⁵ The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defined a protected area as an area of land and/or sea with natural and cultural resources established for the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and managed through legal or other effective means. They cover various situations, such as managed resource areas, protected watersheds, national parks, protected reserves, etc. Another definition given by Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) refers protected area as a geographically defined area regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives.

⁶ The McKinsey Global Institute defines middle-class households in India as households that have real annual disposable incomes between Rs. 200,000 and Rs. 1,000,000

two popular wildlife destinations of Assam, a North-Eastern state of India. The work has focused on two main objectives.

1. To find the factors that determine the local households' selection of tourism occupation.
2. To explore the possible ways to make tourism economically more supportive to the local population living nearby a particular destination.

Review of Literature

Tourism has occupied an important place in academic discussions about conservation and economic benefits to people in nature-based destinations of developing countries (Goodwin, 2002; Sekhar, 2003; Guha & Ghosh, 2007). Promoting tourism in developing countries is a crucial strategy that can lead to community development and poverty alleviation. The industry has been considered the critical means for nature-based destination managers seeking to re-orientate their marginalized local economies (Ashley & Roe, 2002; Binns & Nel, 2002). Some studies reported various advantages of tourism as a strategy for giving economic opportunities to the local people living adjacent to a tourism site (Bennett, 1999; Ashley et al., 2000; Guha & Ghosh, 2007; Lundmark et al., 2010). First, there is a scope for selling local goods and services as tourists come to the destination. The direct interactions of tourists with the locals create an environment for the diversification of their occupation. Second, the importance of tourism in wildlife areas is more as these areas are generally located in remote regions, where the majority of the people are poor. These people have few other options, which can be altered by promoting tourism as it can tap various opportunities associated with cultural, wildlife and landscape diversity in these areas. Third, tourism offers labour-intensive and small-scale opportunities compared with other non-agricultural activities, which are compatible with the limited assets belonging to the locals. Fourth, the high-income elasticity of the sector offers a rapidly growing market where products and services can be built on existing natural and cultural resources. Last, there are other spillover effects arising from better infrastructure, such as health, education, communication and security, which can help accelerate productive activities and improve the living conditions of these people.

Indigenous and local communities are also the co-managers of many wildlife destinations designated as protected areas. They are adversely affected by the declaration of protected areas for the conservation of natural resources. They suffer direct and indirect losses such as loss of access to various resources (fuel-wood, fodder, non-timber forests products), crops and livestock losses due to infestation of wild animals, etc. Thus, conservationists emphasize economic and social issues prevailing in nearby places of protected areas by realizing that many of these areas have limited prospects without the cooperation and support of local people, especially in developing countries (Wells & McShane, 2004). Promoting tourism in these areas can create more sustainable livelihoods for local communities. Employment opportunities such

as shopkeeper, cook, housekeeper, tour guide, etc., offer alternative income sources in place of environmentally destructive actions such as logging, quarrying, over-fishing, poaching, illegal timber extraction, etc.

The works related to the tourism impact on local economies mentioned that, in reality, the various opportunities provided by tourism might not be accessible to households living in the peripheral areas of a destination (Goodwin, 2002; Dieke, 2005). In such a situation, the sector is like a myopic private sector (Spenceley, 2001), often dominated by large investors such as international companies and elites, whose profits are generally repatriated abroad or to the metropolitan centers (Ashley et al., 2000). National governments and donor organizations further aggravate the situation in developing countries. They emphasize promoting private sector investment in tourism development policies without any emphasis on the needs and opportunities of local people. On the other hand, they fail to transfer the non-commercial tourism benefits due to their weak fiscal and planning instruments. The weak linkage between the large private investors and the local economy, the limited role of the government, etc., leave fewer opportunities for the locals to harness tourism's economic opportunities and sell their products in the market.

The adverse impacts, which may occur from the promotion of tourism, do not indicate that the potential of tourism in addressing the livelihood of the locals is less. There are success stories in Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and other African countries, where tourism is supported with a solid institutional framework (Sekhar, 2003). The major aim of such promotion is to diversify the local economic base into sectors that usually bring economic opportunities for the local people. The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), established by the G8⁷ and developing country environment ministers argued that the "natural capital" if properly utilized, could help countries to enhance the quality of life and boost the economy at a local level. As a developing country, people's dependence on natural capital in India is higher than in higher-income countries. Therefore, transforming these natural resources into other forms of wealth is essential for the development and continued survival of the protected areas (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2011), where tourism can be an effective means of achieving various targets of the transformation process. A study by Guha and Ghosh (2007) in Indian Sundarbans found that local tourism participants spend 19 per cent more on food and 38 per cent more on non-food items than non-participants. This may also have a conservation effect as the proportion of forest-dependent households was significantly lower among tourism-participant households.

The literature exploring tourism's impact on local people emphasizes the promotion of tourism in transferring economic benefits to local people in protected areas such as national parks. They have mentioned different advantages that may occur to local people from tourism and its beneficial impact on the conservation of protected areas.

⁷ a group of eight major economies: France, US, UK, Russia, Germany, Japan, Italy, and Canada

In this respect, it is also important to see whether the local households can grab the opportunities of tourism or not by engaging themselves in different tourism-related occupations. However, most of the literature on tourism in protected areas does not give much attention in this direction. Therefore, the paper attempts to investigate the factors determining the participation decision of the local households in different tourism-related occupations in the two most popular wildlife destinations of Assam, a North-Eastern state of India. The paper is based on field-level analyses, which try to find out how tourism can augment local livelihoods and possible ways to make the industry more supportive of local people in nearby protected wildlife areas.

Study Area Database and Methodology

The study is based on primary data collected from the villages near the two wildlife destinations of Assam, viz. Kaziranga and Manas national parks. Kaziranga and Manas attract most of the wildlife visitors compared with the other wildlife areas of Assam. The data of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) and Directorate of Tourism, Assam, show that Kaziranga attracted 75 per cent of the total wildlife visitors of Assam in 2016-17. Manas has the second rank in terms of the number of visits to the wildlife areas of Assam. About 16 per cent of the total wildlife visitors visited Manas during 2016-17. Primary data are collected through a household-level field survey. Kaziranga National Park (KNP) has five ranges, and among them, Kohora and Bagori are famous for visitors, where most recreational activities are performed. Similarly, out of the three ranges in Manas National Park (MNP), Bansbari is popular among visitors for recreational activities. The villages nearest the three ranges of KNP and MNP, where tourism activities are being promoted, are selected for the data collection. Apart from that, the availability of participant households⁸ is also considered as a selection criterion of the sample villages.

Before going to the final data collection from the households, a pilot survey was undertaken by considering 50 individuals from each group. Moreover, feedback from the park officials and the officials of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operational for tourism promotion is considered for the necessary revision and finalization of the interview schedule. Other relevant information has also been collected through focus group discussions (FGD) with the locals and the officials of NGOs operational in those areas. After selecting the villages, stratified random sampling is used to collect the data from the households. The sample households are divided into two groups: participants and non-participants in tourism. Participant household includes at least one member from the household, engaged in a tourism-related occupation. A total of 320 samples were selected for the analyses, including 160 participants and 160 non-participants in tourism activities. Descriptive and appropriate test statistics are calculated to determine the factors influencing the households' tourism occupation participation decision.

⁸. The information on the participant's household is gathered through focus group discussions (FGDs) and from the park authority.

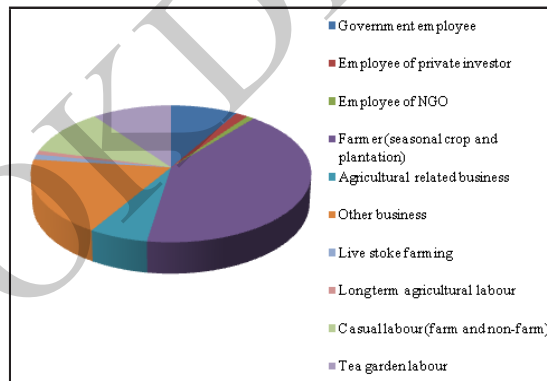
A Profile of the Sample Households

Primary data have been collected from the nine villages of Kaziranga and Manas national parks to analyze the factors influencing the tourism occupation participation decision of the households. Table 1 represents the gender, age and marital status of respondents from the 320 households interviewed during the field survey.

Table 1: Gender, Age and Marital Status of the Respondents

Variable	Category	No of respondents	Percentage of the total
Gender	Male	296	92.50
	Female	24	7.50
Age (in years)	18-30	59	18.44
	31-40	113	35.31
	41-50	104	32.50
	51-60	40	12.50
	61 and above	4	1.25
Marital status	Married	289	90.31
	Unmarried	28	8.75
	Widow	3	0.94

Figure 1: Principal Occupations of the Households

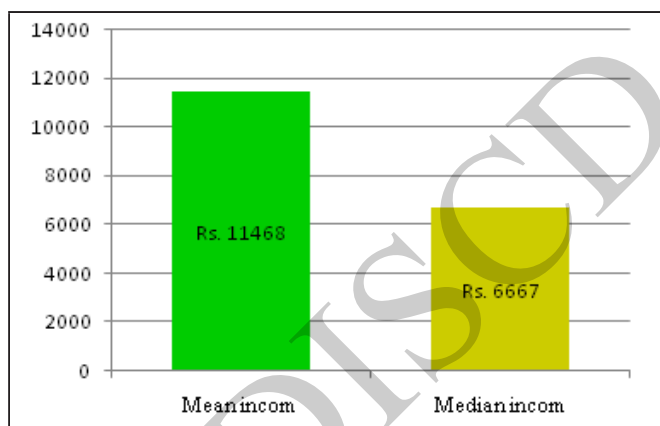


Most of the respondents are male. The distribution of age shows that majority of the respondents are in the age groups of 31 years to 50 years. Figure 1 represents the principal occupations⁹ of the households interviewed in the nine adjacent villages of KNP and MNP. Agriculture and allied activities are the main source of livelihood for the majority of the households in the villages.

⁹ To define principal occupation, the definition of NSS has been used. When a person is pursuing only one type of economic activity, the sector of such economic activity will be his or her principal industry, and the function of the person will be his principal occupation. When a person pursues two or more economic activities, the economic activity in which more labour time is spent will be his or her principal economic activity. The economic activities in which relatively less labour time is spent will be his or her secondary/subsidiary economic activity.

The monthly incomes of the majority of households are low. Figure 2 represents the calculated mean and median monthly incomes of the 320 sample households. The average monthly income of the households is Rs. 11,468, and the median monthly income is Rs. 6,667. The median income reflects that 50 per cent of the households earn less than Rs. 6,667 per month. Moreover, the lower value of median income compared with the mean monthly income reflects that larger proportions of households have significantly low monthly incomes.

Figure 2: Mean and Median Income of the Households



The Gini coefficient is calculated to estimate the extent of income inequality among the sample households. The estimated value of the Gini coefficient is 0.336, which is found relatively equal among households (Todaro & Smith, 2012). The average monthly per capita income (MPCI) of the 320 households in the nine villages of KNP and MNP is Rs. 2,570. The median value of the MPCI for the households is Rs. 1,583. This reflects that the MPCI for 50 per cent of the households are less than Rs. 1,583, and thus, larger portions of the households have very low levels of MPCI. Table 2 shows the summary statistics of incomes of agricultural households and non-agricultural households.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Incomes of Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Households

Indicators	Agricultural households	Non-agricultural households
Lower quartile	4208.33	4166.67
Median	5833.33	6250.00
Upper quartile	8333.33	12500.00

There is a considerable income gap between the agricultural and non-agricultural households. The median income of the agricultural households is around 7 per cent less than the non-agricultural households. The result reflects that agriculture and allied activities remain the principal source of income for the households. However, the income

gap reflects the higher economic stress among farm households. These households may engage themselves in other economic activities such as tourism to increase their level of income (Saini et al., 2022). The following sections are organized to identify the factors influencing the tourism participation decision of the households in KNP and MNP.

Factors Influencing the Tourism Participation Decision of the Households

Age and Tourism Participation Decision

There are studies (Borgoni et al., 2002; Siddiqui & Hamid, 2003) which find that household characteristics such as age, education and employment of the household head¹⁰ along with other determinants can explain the variability in the household's decision. Table 3 represents the age distribution of the household head of the participant and non-participant households of tourism in the sample villages of KNP and MNP.

Table 3: The Age Distribution of Heads of the Participant and Non-Participant Households

Age	Occupation of tourism		Total
	Yes	No	
18 years – 30 years	42(71.19)	17(28.81)	59(100)
31 years – 40 years	62(54.87)	51(45.13)	113(100)
41 years – 50 years	40(38.46)	64(61.54)	104(100)
51 years and above	16(36.36)	28(63.64)	44(100)
Total	160(50)	160(50)	320(100)
Pearson Chi-square(df = 3)	20.475***		
Likelihood ratio(df = 3)	20.911***		

*Note: The figures in the parentheses indicate percentages to the total in each category; and *** indicates $p < 0.01$*

The age distribution of the households' head shows that the number of households engaged in tourism activities declines with the increase in age of the head of the household. Table 4 shows the mean comparison of the age of the households' heads of participant and non-participant families.

Table 4 reflects that there are older persons in the households who are not engaged in tourism-related occupations. The mean age of the head of participant households is 38.23 years, which is less than the mean age of the non-participant households (42.73 years). Moreover, the higher median age (45 years) of the non-participant households' heads compared with their mean age indicates more elderly persons in the households who have not selected tourism as their occupation.

¹⁰ Census of India, 2001 has defined household head/or head of the household as one who is recognized to be so by the household. Such person vests chief responsibility for managing the affairs of the household as also the decision-making on behalf of the household.

Table 4: Comparison of Age of the Households' Head of the Participant and Non-Participants of Tourism Occupations

Descriptive and test statistics	Age of the head of the household	
	Participant	Non-participant
Mean	38.23	42.73
Median	38	45
Standard deviation	10	8.77
Observation	160	160
t-statistic	4.281***	

Note: *** indicate $p < 0.01$

Level of Education and Tourism Occupation Participation

Education significantly influences the households' decision to select an occupation. This is because some job-related characteristics may also restrict certain households from entering a particular occupation. The new occupation requires particular skills to be more productive, and educational achievement, training, cognitive abilities, etc., help the workers to acquire these occupation-specific skills. Empirical results have shown that individuals with higher educational achievements are more likely to choose higher-ranking jobs (Nasir, 2005). Table 5 depicts the number of participating or non-participating households in tourism-related occupations on the basis of level of education of head of the household.

Table 5 reflects that majority of the head of the households have education up to higher secondary level (H. S.). There are only 28 households where the head of the households have attained higher education. Among them, 89.28 per cent households have chosen tourism-related activities as their source of subsidiary income.

Table 5: Number of Tourism Participating and Non-Participating Households in Terms of Level of Education of Household Head

Level of education	Occupation of tourism		Total
	Yes	No	
Upto H. S.	135 (46.23)	157 (53.77)	292 (100)
Graduate and more	25 (89.28)	3 (10.72)	28 (100)
Total	160 (50)	160 (50)	320 (100)
Pearson Chi-square(df = 1)	39.587***		
Likelihood ratio(df = 1)	48.980***		

Note: The figures in the parentheses indicate percentages to the total in each category, and *** indicates $p < 0.01$

Institutional Support and Tourism Participation

The authorities and institutions, such as statutory, autonomous, non-government, government, etc., whose decision(s) and active support(s) in the fields of policy regulation, law, training, marketing, etc., can bring lots of advantages or disadvantages and thereby can change the work participation environment. The occupational participation decision of the households also depends on institutional support. Institutional arrangement(s) in the form(s) of financial help, training and other skill development programs, etc., may give an added advantage to those searching for new opportunities in the tourism industry. In case of awareness, training and skill development, government and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are actively involved at KNP and MNP. The department of tourism, Government of Assam has taken various initiatives to train young people to make them self-employed in tourism industry. Government training such as tourist guide, driving, etc., focus on improving the necessary skills of the individuals like communication, marketing, driving, etc. Apart from the government, there are NGOs in KNP and MNP who have been arranging awareness and training programs for the local people. These NGOs conduct training programs like dairy farming, bee-keeping, weaving, etc., which will empower the people to earn from their local resources. Table 6 shows the number of tourism participant and non-participant households who have availed benefits from different awareness and training programs conducted by the government and NGOs.

Table 6 shows that out of the 195 households that have received institutional help in the form of training and awareness, 55.38 per cent (108) are tourism participants and 44.62 per cent (87) are non-participants. On the other hand, among the households who have not availed institutional training, 58.40 per cent (73) are tourism non-participants and 41.60 per cent (52) are participants. The higher participation rate for tourism occupation by the households whose members get institutional support indicates the role of institution(s) in choosing tourism-related activities in the two national parks of Assam.

Table 6: Number of Tourism Participant and Non-Participant Households Availing the Benefits of Awareness and Training Programs

Awareness and training	Occupation of tourism		Total
	Yes	No	
Yes	108(55.38)	87(44.62)	195(100)
No	52(41.60)	73(58.40)	125(100)
Total	160(50)	160(50)	320(100)
Pearson Chi-square(df = 1)	5.790**		
Likelihood ratio(df = 1)	5.251**		

Note: The figures in the parentheses indicate percentages to the total in each category; and, ** indicates $p < 0.05$

Apart from training, financial support by institutions in the form of credit plays a significant role for entrepreneurial activities of the local households. Banking institutions, insurance, etc., help people save money and take loan to face uncertainty during enabling business to start up, expand and compete with others in the market (Sutton & Jenkins, 2007). Thus, these services may help to reduce vulnerability of the poor households. It ensures utilization and management of assets of the poor households, which generate income for them. Bank, insurance companies, micro finance and credit associations are the common financial institution operated in the villages nearby KNP and MNP. In the field survey it is found that respondents have access to bank loans and micro finance institutions (MFIs). These are the predominant sources of finance used by the sample households. Considering the diversity of loans taken by the households, information have been gathered whether the households borrowed money from these institutional sources. Table 7 shows the number of tourism participant and non-participant households who have taken credit from the bank and MFIs.

Table 7: Source of Credit for the Tourism-Participating and Non-Participating Households in the Sample Villages

Source of credit	Occupation of tourism		Total
	Yes	No	
Yes	65(42.76)	87(57.24)	152(100)
No	95(56.55)	73(43.45)	168(100)
Total	160(50)	160(50)	320(100)
Pearson Chi-square(df = 1)	6.065**		
Likelihood ratio(df = 1)	6.085**		

*Note: The figures in the parentheses indicate percentages to the total in each category; and ** indicates $p < 0.05$*

There are more numbers of tourism participant households who do not borrow money from the institutional sources. The observed result is not in line with the expected one. However, this is not necessarily unusual for the households whose income is low from their principal occupations.

Discussions of the Results

The occupation of the households living in the sample villages shows that majority of them are engaged in the agricultural sector and other elementary works. The income of the households from primary sector activities are low. Apart from that, the problem of low levels of income in these villages is aggravated by the declaration of KNP and MNP as protected areas. The agricultural community in those rural areas suffers direct and indirect losses due to restrictions on the utilization of natural resources such as land, along with the infestation of wild animals to crop fields. Therefore, the loss of income in the agricultural sector can be compensated by giving them opportunities in the tourism sector, which allows them to diversify their occupation(s) as well as source(s) of income.

In case of age and tourism participation, it is observed that such occupational choice decision relates inversely to the age of the head of the household. Previous studies have also reported a negative relationship between age and occupational boundary crossing – as age increased, employees were less likely to change their occupations (Carless & Arnup, 2011; Kattenbach et al, 2014; Kornblum et al., 2018). Thus the result is consistent with the outcome of previous studies that shows a negative effect of age on all forms of career mobility. Younger people are more flexible in their living and working arrangements than the older individuals (Carless & Arnup, 2011), and thus, the household(s) with older head(s) may find prefer to continue with the current profession (principal occupation) of the family. This type of decision by older individuals occur because they have already acquired some degree of specialization and have substantial investment of resources in their current profession. Moreover, the available occupations in tourism sector at KNP and MNP are more suitable for younger individuals compared with older ones. This is because some activities in KNP and MNP like Jeep Safari, Elephant Safari, etc., are more preferable for younger age persons as they require significant amount of physical work. Moreover, tourism provides the scope of self-employment opportunities to the young age people at early stage of their working life, where they have enough time to manage the risk associated with their ventures. Thus, policies related to creating employment opportunities in tourism should try to encourage younger persons and assist them in entering the tourism market.

The tourism and hospitality industry requires dealing with customers as their guests, which depends on communication and other skills of the person selling products to the tourists. The seller of the products requires innovative idea(s) to represent the product(s) and service(s) in promoting area so that they look different and attractive to the customers compared with other destinations. Thus, a person with higher qualifications may have some added advantages while dealing with tourists. Apart from that, occupations such as tour guide, receptionist in hotels, driver of tourist vehicles, etc., also require good communication skills, and the only person with higher education can perform better in these occupations. These may be the possible reasons for the lower participation of the households not having higher education in the sample villages. However, it is equally important to indicate that lower participation in tourism-related activities is not only due to low levels of education. Persons with low levels of education can choose tourism-related activities as their occupation. Tourism is a service-based sector where people from high-skill to low can find income-earning opportunities. However, higher education of individuals suggests a tendency towards more rate of participation of the households due to their flexible (or soft) skills in offering better treatment to tourists coming to their destination. Majority of the individuals of tourism participant households (135 out of 160) having their education upto H. S. level. However, the rate of participation is very high (89.28 per cent) for households with individuals having higher education.

In case of institutional support, the results of the study reflects that tourism occupation participation are more for the households who have received institutional training. Thus,

it is essential to frame policies by the government and non-government organizations to support local individuals in order to increase their participation in tourism occupations by creation of necessary skills.

In the case of credit, there are more numbers of tourism participant households who do not borrow money from institutional sources (Table 7). However, this particular result of borrowing and tourism occupation participation is not necessarily unusual so far as households' income and principal occupations are concerned. In the absence of fully developed financial markets credit constraints as well as risk aversion can affect the decision for occupational choice of the households (Hill & Perez-Reyna, 2017). The income of the households are low, and agriculture and other elementary works are their principal occupations. The low-income households behave like risk averters trying to minimize their financial burden while starting a subsidiary occupation in tourism sector. Moreover, most of the occupations in the tourism do not require a huge financial investment.

Conclusion

The wildlife-based tourism strategies in the state of Assam should accentuate tourism promotion by creating avenues for local participation to give the households an alternative source of income. There is a need to raise income of the households living in proximity to the KNP and the MNP through tourism related activities. Economic benefit of tourism may change the negative attitude of the households towards the protected areas and, thus, indirectly help in the conservation of wildlife areas.

Policies from the government and private partner(s) can play an important role in making tourism more inclusive to local people. There is little scope for any institutional arrangement to directly address demographic variables like the age to increase local participation in tourism occupations. However, programs like skill development training could be designed to ensure the inclusion of more young people rather than older persons. This can increase the participation rate of the households by motivating the young unemployed members. The tourist guide training program, organized by the Department of Tourism, Government of Assam, could be a well-directed initiative in this respect if it could ensure the inclusion of young individuals. Although the tourism industry has the potential to provide employment opportunities for all levels of workers (from skilled to unskilled ones), the role of education in choosing tourism-related occupations cannot be ignored. The various stakeholders, either government or private, working with employment creation in the tourism industry should consider the importance of education and training and accordingly frame policies to empower the people of these areas in choosing livelihood opportunities. Moreover, the MPCII for the households is found to be low in the villages of KNP and MNP. Thus, if policies are adopted properly to encourage people living in proximity to the KNP and MNP to engage in tourism sector, then perhaps people will consider tourism as a main source of livelihood which may improve their socio-economic status. Tourism in Assam has

the potentiality but it needs a proper policy and execution of the same to bring the prosperity to the state through tourism.

Acknowledgment

We pay gratitude to everyone who helped us directly and indirectly in the completion of this research work. We also want to thank all the households in the study areas for their help and cooperation in conducting the field survey for this study.

References

- Ashley, C., Boyd, C., & Goodwin, H. (2000). Pro-poor tourism: Putting poverty at the heart of the tourism agenda. *Natural Resource Perspectives*, Overseas Development Institute, London, (51).
- Ashley, C., & Roe, D. (2002). Making tourism work for the poor: Strategies and challenges in Southern Africa. *Development Southern Africa*, 19, pp 61–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03768350220123855>
- Balmford, A., Beresford, J., Green, J., Naidoo, R., Walpole, M., & Manica, A. (2009). A global perspective on trends in nature-based tourism. *PLoS Biol*, 7, pp 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.1000144>
- Bennett, O. (1999). *Sustainable tourism and poverty elimination study: A report to the Department for International Development*. Deloitte & Touche, UK.
- Binns, T., & Nel, E. (2002). Tourism as a local development strategy in South Africa. *The Geographical Journal*, 168(3), 235-247. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-4959.00051>
- Borgoni, R., Ewert, U. C., & Prskawetz, A. (2002). *How important are household demographic characteristics to explain private car use patterns? A multilevel approach to Austrian data*. MPIDR Working Paper, Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Rostock, Germany.
- Carless, S. A., & Arnup, J. L. (2011). A longitudinal study of the determinants and outcomes of career change. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 78, 80-91
- Dieke, P. U. C. (2005). *Critical success factors for tourism development in less developed countries* [Paper presentation]. Tourism in the Toolbox of Development Projects, University of Leuven, Belgium.
- Goodwin, H. (2002). Local community involvement in tourism around national parks: Opportunities and constraints. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 5(3), 338-360. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500208667928>
- Guha, I., & Ghose, S. (2007). *Does tourism contribute to local livelihoods? A case study of tourism, poverty and conservation in the Indian Sundarbans* [Working paper (26)]. SANDEE, Nepal.
- Hecker, R. (2018). *Asia Pacific: Regional tourism trends* [Market Report]. Horwath HTL, May.
- Hill, E. & Perez-Reyna D. (2017). Financial Development and Occupational Choice. *Journal of Macroeconomics*, 1-17.
- Karant, K. K., & DeFries, R. (2010). Nature-based tourism in Indian protected areas: New challenges for park management. *Conservation Letters*, 4(2), 137-149. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-263X.2010.00154.x>

Kattenbach, R., Schneidhofer, T. M., Lucke J., Latzke, M., Loacker, B., Schramm, F., & Mayrhofer, W. (2014). A quarter of a century of job transitions in Germany. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 84, 49-58.

Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G., (2018). When do employees cross boundaries? Individual and contextual determinants of career mobility. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 27(5), 657-668.

Lundmark, L. J. T., Fredman, P., & Sandell, K. (2010). National parks and protected areas and the role for employment in tourism and forest sectors: A Swedish case. *Ecology and Society*, 15(1), 19-41. <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol15/iss1/art19/>

Ministry of Environment and Forests (2011). *India launches major new study for valuation of its natural capital and ecosystem services* [Press brief]. Government of India, New Delhi. <http://moef.nic.in/downloads/public-information/2011-02-23%20Press%20Brief%20-%20TEEB%20India.pdf>

Nasir, Z. M. (2005). An analysis of occupational choice in Pakistan: A multinomial approach. *The Pakistan Development Review*, 44(1), 57-79.

Pergams, O. R. W., & Zaradic, P. A. (2008). Evidence for a fundamental and pervasive shift away from nature-based recreation. *Proc Natl Acad Sci*, 105, 2295-2300. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0709893105>

Ramanathan, S., & Ramanathan, R. (2019, April 16). Many layers within India's middle class. *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/many-layers-within-india-s-middle-class/story-18h8YO4jgMpeivUgdKyAkO.html>

Sekhar, N. U. (2003). Local people's attitudes towards conservation and wildlife tourism around Sariska Tiger Reserve, India. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 69(4), 339-347. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2003.09.002>

Siddiqui, R., & Hamid, S. (2003). *Gender, poverty, and occupational choice in poor and non-poor households: An analysis based on the household survey data of Pakistan* [MIMAP Technical Paper Series (17)]. Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad.

Spenceley, A. (2001). *Development of national responsible tourism guidelines and indicators for South Africa*. Report to the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, and the Department for International Development, UK.

Sutton, C. N. & Jenkins, B. (2007). *The role the financial services sector in expanding economic opportunity*. [Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative Report (19)]. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Taylor, J. E. (2010). *Technical guidelines for evaluating the impacts of tourism using simulation models*. Impact-evaluation guidelines (229), Inter-American Development Bank, USA.

Todaro, M. P. & Smith, S. C. (2012). *Economic Development* (11th ed.). Pearson Education Limited, New Delhi.

Wells, M. P., & McShane, T. O. (2004). Integrating protected area management with local needs and aspirations. *Ambio*, 33(8), 513-519. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4315540>

A Study of the Influence of Livelihood Assets on Household Poverty of the Rubber Growers in Assam

Dibyangana Chakraborty¹

Abstract

The paper intends to explore the influence of the five livelihood assets (physical, human, natural, financial, and social) on household poverty status of the Rubber growers of Assam. A total of 11 sub-components along with two interaction terms are identified as representatives of the five livelihood assets. Household poverty levels are determined using total annual household incomes of the Rubber growers and the World Bank-devised \$1.90 poverty line. 400 households are surveyed using semi-structured questionnaires from three districts of Assam having Rubber growers of various scheduled tribe and non-scheduled tribe communities. Using logistic regression model, it is found that six sub-components of the selected livelihood assets are significantly influencing Rubber growing Household's poverty status. Relevant recommendations are made to improve the livelihood assets conditions of these Rubber growers, thereby exerting positive influence on their economic wellbeing.

Background

Assam has been known for its rubber plantation. Among the states in India Assam ranks third in respect of area under rubber cultivation and fourth in respect of rubber production (Rubber Board, 2021).

Though Assam has been known for rubber cultivation since colonial era (Majumder, 2016), the state's soil conservation department launched commercial Rubber production in the 1950s (Pradeep et al., 2017). Potentially, Assam can contribute a total of two lakh hectares of Rubber area (Maibangsa and Subramanian, 2000). As per the latest data (2020-21), the state has 57,735 hectares of land under Rubber, i.e., only 28.86% of the state's cultivable land.

The commercial success of Rubber plantation in other parts of India, especially in the states of Kerala and Tripura, has attracted several households (HH) to grow Rubber

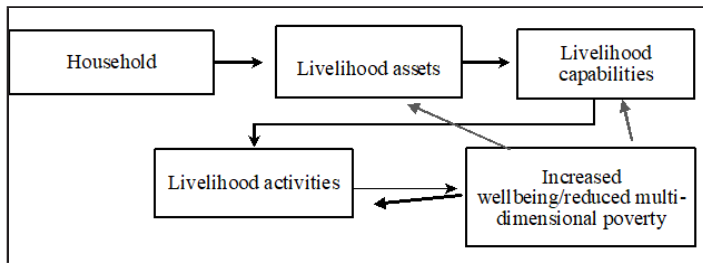
¹ PhD Scholar, Gokhale Institute of Politics & Economics, Pune. Email: ms.dibyangana@gmail.com

in Assam as well. Currently, there are 48,952 Rubber growers in the state, out of which 66.44% belong to various scheduled tribe (ST) communities and the remaining growers belong to various non-ST communities (Rubber Board, 2020). Almost seven decades of commercial existence of Rubber in the state has facilitated a considerable number of households to generate livelihoods from rubber cultivation. It would be interesting to explore how the rubber cultivation and forms of endowments in these households have facilitated the income generation and addressing vulnerability issues. Several existing literatures have studied the role of livelihood assets in shaping HH livelihood strategies, poverty and vulnerability conditions (Hahn et al., 2009; Mulika and Routrey, 2016; Ding et al., 2018). The present study intends to investigate how availability of livelihood assets influence Rubber growing households' poverty status in the state of Assam.

Conceptual Framework

Poverty has been defined as a state in which an individual or a household is below subsistence level of consumption needs. However, poverty is a multi-dimensional concept. Considering an individual as poor based on the income status alone does not fully reflect the deprivations he/she faces in non-monetary spheres of life in the form of ill health, lack of access to education, inaccessibility to sanitation and drinking water, etc. among others. According to Sen's capability approach to development, poverty is being associated with the 'functioning's' and 'capabilities' of an individual, i.e., an individual is termed as 'poor' or his/her 'wellbeing' is compromised if he/she is unable to freely carry out certain 'doing and being,' such as, being nourished and comfortably clothed, being able to participate in the life of society, being healthy, etc. among others (Sen, 1987; Hick, 2012). Livelihood capabilities are a subset of Sen's broader idea of capabilities (Chambers and Conway, 1992). A livelihood is a triumvirate of capabilities, assets, and activities. In simple terms, it refers to means of living, which is earned through certain economic activities, such as agriculture, livestock rearing, business, formal jobs etc. To carry out these activities a household needs to have ownership or access to several livelihood assets. These livelihood assets generate or enhance the livelihood capabilities of a household to give it the necessary push for initiating or enhancing livelihood activities. Consequently, the household's wellbeing is enhanced and the severity of poverty declines. Increased wellbeing boosts the asset base as well as the livelihood capabilities of the household further, leading to improvement or diversification of livelihood activities and subsequently eliminates household poverty (see Figure 1). Hence, the role of livelihood assets in poverty eradication is critical. The present study intends to investigate how a set of livelihood assets influence the monetary poverty status of Rubber growing households of Assam. Relating monetary poverty to other non-monetary deprivations through ownership or access to various livelihood assets shall be useful in understanding the multi-dimensional nature of the household poverty status of these Rubber growers.

Figure 1: Inter-Connections of Livelihood Assets, Livelihood Capabilities and Poverty



Methodology

The study uses the concepts of five livelihood assets as described in the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) by the Department for International Development (DFID), viz, physical, human, natural, financial, and social assets (DFID, 1999). Each of these assets is represented by a few variables or sub-components. In case of the present study, a total of 20 sub-components have been taken into consideration, six under physical assets, five under human assets and three under each of the natural, financial, and social assets based on the socio-economic background of the rubber producing households in the state. (refer Table 1).

Table 1: Brief Description of Livelihood Assets to be Considered for Analysis

Livelihood Assets	Sub-components	Reference literature	Explanation of sub-components
Physical	HH gadgets/appliances	Nath et al., 2013	Availability of TV, fan and hand pump in the house
	Poultry & livestock	Nath et al., 2013	Availability of chicken, duck, pig, goat, and cattle in the HH
	Housing condition	Nath et al., 2013; IIPS and ICF, 2021	The materials with which the walls and the roof of the house are built
	Distance to market (Km)	Abbassi et al., 2020	Distance between the respondent’s house and the nearest local market from where he/she buys inputs for tapping and latex processing
	Road condition	Busono et al., 2017	The material with which the road connecting the respondent’s house with the nearest local market is made
	Ownership of vehicles	Ibrahim et al., 2018	Availability of car, bike and bicycle in the HH to facilitate transportation of inputs from and/ or Rubber sheets to local market

Human	HH size	Xu et al., 2015	Number of HH members
	Training	Nath et al., 2013	Whether at least one member in the HH have received training from Rubber Board on tapping and/or Rubber processing
	Labour type	Viswanathan and Shivakoti, 2007 (in place of availability of family labour)	Involvement of family or hired or both family and hired labour in Rubber tapping and processing
	Education	Ding et al., 2018	Highest education in a HH
	Source of drinking water	Booyesen et al., 2008	Name of the source from which the HH collects drinking water
Natural	Land under Rubber (Hectare)	Nath et al., 2013	Amount of land the HH have under Rubber plantation (in Hectare)
	Tappable Rubber tree stock	Nath et al., 2013	Number of Rubber trees which have been tapped in the previous tapping season by the HH
	Accessibility to water for Rubber processing	Aguilar et al., 2021 (in place of direct natural access to water source)	How difficult it is to get water for Rubber or latex processing
Financial	Savings	Dutta and Guchhait, 2018	Whether the HH has savings account
	Loan burden	Dutta and Guchhait, 2018	Whether the HH have any outstanding loan till the end of the last tapping season
	Subsidy status	Ibrahim et al., 2018	Whether the HH have received at least one instalment of subsidy for plantation development from Rubber Board till the end of the last tapping season
Social	Rubber Growers' Society (RGS) membership	Mohapatra (2022); Islām et al., 2021 (used in place of member of cooperative society)	Whether a HH is having membership in an RGS
	Self Help Group (SHG) membership	Viswanathan, 2008	Whether a HH is having membership in a SHG
	Selling point	Author's contribution	Where did the HH sell Rubber sheets during the previous tapping season

To compute poverty levels of the Rubber growing households, household total annual income (in Rs.) and World Bank-devised \$1.90 poverty line has been used (=average Rs.74.13 per dollar in 2020, according to <https://www.exchangerates.org.uk/>). The annual household Rubber income is obtained from multiplying average yield of Rubber of a household (Kg/hectare) and average domestic price of rubber sheets sold² in 2020-21 price of the same is 141.85/- per Kg for the, as obtained from Indian

² Rubber sheets sold as Ribbed smoked sheet of grade 4

Rubber Statistics, 42nd volume). The average yield of Rubber for a household is computed using average annual yield of Rubber in Assam during 2020-21³ multiplied by amount of land under tappable Rubber trees in the household (hectare). Land under tappable Rubber trees and not land under total number of Rubber trees in a household is considered to take account of the loss of Rubber produce due to some of the Rubber trees being destroyed by cyclones, pest attacks, diseases, and excessive rainfall. Around 375 to 450 trees can be grown in a hectare of land (Bhattacharjee et al., 2021). In the present analysis, 375 tappable Rubber trees/hectare is used for determining land under tappable Rubber trees in a household. To derive household's total annual income, annual income from Rubber is added with income from other sources, such as, plantations other than Rubber, small business, tapping in others' rubber gardens, daily wage labour, etc. The income of the Rubber growing households of Assam, has been estimated as follows;

Household total annual income = Annual Household Rubber income + Annual Household income from other sources

= [Annual average yield of rubber of a Household * RSS 4 average price in domestic market in 2020-21] + Annual Household income from other sources

= [(Land under tappable rubber trees for a Household * Average annual yield of rubber in Assam) * 141.85] + Annual Household income from other sources

= [{No. of tappable trees under a Household * (1/375)} * 1153 * 141.85] + Annual Household income from other sources

A household's minimum annual income threshold is required to consider income-poverty status of that household. Minimum annual income threshold of a –household is the minimum income just enough to cover the minimum annual consumption expenditure of that -household, determined by the World Bank poverty line of \$1.90. The threshold is determined as follows:

Minimum annual income threshold of a household (in rupees)

= Household size * Rs.74.13 * \$1.90 * 365 days

Households whose total annual income could not exceed the minimum annual income thresholds are considered poor in the study and those having positive difference between –household total annual income and minimum annual income threshold are considered non-poor. More specifically,

- Household is **poor** if (Household total annual income – Minimum annual household income threshold) < 0, and

³ According to Indian Rubber Statistics, 42nd volume, average annual Rubber yield in Assam for the year is 1153 kg/hecta

- Household is **non-poor** if (Household total annual income – Minimum annual Household income threshold) > 0.

The present study intends to understand the influence of the livelihood assets on Rubber growing household's poverty levels in Assam. In this regard, the logistic regression model seems fit as it can better deal with dichotomous outcome variables (poverty status in this case; considering non-poor = 1 and poor = 0) than multiple linear regression models. Out of the 20 sub-components of the five livelihood assets in consideration, 'Source of drinking water' and 'Tappable Rubber Tree stock' sub-components are dropped for being highly correlated with 'Accessibility to water for Rubber processing' and 'Land under Rubber' subcomponents respectively ($r = 0.93$ and $r = 0.88$ respectively). Finally, 11 sub-components are found to be individually significantly influencing the logit (L_i) function, i.e., the poverty levels of the Rubber growing HHs at or above 90% level of significance. The details of these individual sub-components' significance status, odd ratios (OR) and standard errors (SE) are given in Annexure 3.

Along with these 11 independent variables, an interaction term is used in the final logistic model to assess odds of being non poor among the Rubber growers, viz., the interaction of 'Training' and 'Labour type' to provide an idea of training-led labour productivity enhancement and its effect on household poverty levels.

The logit (L_i) function for the study therefore is:

$$L_i = \ln [P(\text{Poverty status} = 1) / \{1 - P(\text{Poverty status} = 1)\}]$$

The functional form of the final logistic regression model stands as follows,

$$L_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Poultry and livestock} + \beta_2 \text{Housing condition} + \beta_3 \text{Householdsize} + \beta_4 \text{Training} + \beta_5 \text{Labour type} + \beta_6 \text{Training\#Labour type} + \beta_7 \text{Education} + \beta_8 \text{Land under Rubber} + \beta_9 \text{Savings} + \beta_{10} \text{Subsidy} + \beta_{11} \text{RGS membership} + \beta_{12} \text{Sellingpoint}$$

Where,

Poultry and livestock = 1, if household downs at least one of poultry and livestock
= 0, if household owns none

Housing condition = 1, if pukka wall and tin roof
= 0, otherwise

Household size = No. of individuals included in a household
= 1, if size ≤ 4 ,
= 0, if size > 4

Training = 1, if household has trained members

= 0, no trained members in household

Labour type = 1, if only family labour used

= 0, if hired or both family and hired labour used

Training#Labour type = Interactive effect of training and labour type

= 1, if trained family labour used in plantation

= 0, otherwise

Education = 2, highest education in the household is secondary or above education

= 1, highest level of education in the household is primary education

= 0, no education

Land under Rubber = 1, if landholding size > 2 Hectares

= 0, if landholding size <= 2 Hectares

Savings = 1, if yes

= 0, if no

Subsidy = 1, if yes

= 0, if no

RGS membership = 1, if membership exists

= 0, if membership does not exist

Selling point = 1, if grower sells in RGS

collection = 0, if grower sells in local market or to private dealers through home

Intercepts and coefficients of respective independent variables are represented by β_i 's, where $i = 0, 1, 2, \dots, 12$.

The household level data on income levels as well as the 20 sub-components mentioned were collected from three districts selected purposively due to their prominent contribution in the state's Rubber area, production and employment generation, viz., Goalpara, Kokrajhar and Karimganj (Annexure 2: District wise contribution). Goalpara and Kokrajhar are chosen as Tribal Rubber growing households' representation while Karimganj is primarily a non-Tribal area. A total of 24 villages (10 in Goalpara, 8 in Kokrajhar and 6 in Karimganj) were selected randomly from the list of Rubber grower-intensive villages, collected from the Rubber Board Regional Offices in Agia (Goalpara), Kajalgaon (for Kokrajhar) and Silchar (for Karimganj). Total 400 Rubber growing households selected at random have been surveyed using a semi-structured questionnaire. The sample size was selected based on Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1973);

$$n = N / [1 + N (e^2)]$$

where, n = desired sample size, N = Population size and e^2 = level of precision.

Considering $\pm 5\%$ precision level in the present study (e^2), Yamane's formula gives a sample size of 396.75, which is rounded off to 400. Following the Tribal-non Tribal distributive share in the Rubber growers' population in Assam, 264 growers (164 from Goalpara and 100 from Kokrajhar) (66%) are chosen from Tribal communities while the remaining 136 Rubber growers belong to various non – Tribal communities like scheduled caste (SC), other backward caste (OBC) and general (from Karimganj district).

Findings

General Characteristics of Surveyed HHs

Some of the general features of the Tribal Rubber households and non-Tribal household are shared in Table 2. Table 2 also describes the intra-Tribal Rubber households general characteristics. Tribal growers in the sample are found to belong to three major communities, viz., Rabha (72.34%), Bodo (20.45%) and Garo (7.19%) while the non-Tribal growers mostly belong to the general caste (97.05%), followed by OBC (2.20%) and SCs (0.73%).

It is observed that among the Tribal households, better educational outcomes with larger share in higher secondary and above level of education, larger mean Rubber land size and higher income from Rubber as well as total household income is more among the Bodos compared to Rabha and Garo households. Most Garo households among the Tribal Rubber households are involved in Rubber monoculture and consequently, higher proportion of them depend on Rubber only as a source of income compared to the other two Tribal groups.

Prominent differences between Tribal and non-Tribal Rubber growing households are observed in terms of household size, highest educational attainments in households, share of households practicing Rubber monoculture only and Rubber as well as total household income levels. The non-ST growers' mean household size (8.02) is almost double the size of the ST households (4.80). The lower mean household size among the Tribal is expected to benefit them in terms of per capita land availability compared to their non-Tribal counterparts despite larger average Rubber land of the non-Tribal's.

The Non-STs fall behind in overall educational attainments compared to their ST counterparts. Higher proportion of Tribal households are found with higher secondary or above level of education than the non-Tribal households. Moreover, unlike some of the non-ST households, illiteracy is not observed among the ST households.

The share of households growing only Rubber (monoculture) is much smaller among the STs (2.65%) than the non-STs (28.67%). Among the rest of the households, most ST households engage in poultry and livestock farming (90.15%), paddy cultivation (80.68%) and other plantations like betel nuts, betel leaves and bamboo (6.8%), etc., whereas, the non-STs do paddy cultivation (50%), wage labour (16.91%) and petty businesses viz. grocery shop, and small-time work as car drivers, electrician, etc. (7.35%).

Table 2: General Profile of Tribal and Non-Tribal Communities Growing Rubber

HH characteristics	Tribal				Non-Tribal
	Rabha (n=191)	Bodo (n=54)	Garó (n=19)	Tribal average	
Religion (%)	Hindu (82.72) Christian (17.27)	Hindu (100)	Christian (100)	Hindu (80.30) Christian (19.69)	Muslim (93.38) Hindu (6.61)
Mean HH size	4.75	4.83	5.15	4.80	8.02
HHs with highest education (%)	Primary and less (1.57) Secondary (55.49) Higher secondary and above (42.93)	Primary and less (1.85) Secondary (48.14) Higher secondary and above (50)	Primary and less (15.78) Secondary (36.84) Higher secondary and above (47.36)	Primary and less (2.65) Secondary (52.65) Higher secondary and above (44.69)	Primary and less (18.38) Secondary (63.97) Higher secondary and above (17.64)
HHs practicing Rubber monoculture (%)	2.09	1.85	10.52	2.65	28.67
Mean landholding under Rubber (hectare)	0.61	2.08	0.60	0.91	1.58
HHs earning from Rubber only (%)	80.62	75.92	89.47	80.30	68.38
Mean annual income from Rubber (Rs.)	90,603.25/-	3,97,131.04/-	98,889.34/-	1,53,543.30/-	2,01,635.30/-
Mean annual total HH income (Rs.)	1,01,984.45/-	4,12,953/-	1,18,099.87/-	1,65,685.50/-	2,39,248.50/-

Source: field survey

The lower Rubber incomes of the ST households can be attributed to their lower Rubber landholding size and lesser tappable trees (mean tappable Rubber trees under ST households' are 352.04) compared to those of the non-STs (466.35 mean tappable trees). On the other hand, lesser total annual household income on the part of the Tribal Rubber growers compared to the non-Tribal growers can be attributed to the lower Rubber landholding sizes by the STs as well as the lower proportion of these households deriving income from multiple sources (80.30% ST households earn from Rubber only as against 68.38% of the non-ST households).

HH Poverty Status

Table 3 shows that most Rubber growing households are poor (85.50%). Social group-wise, more Tribal households are found to be poor than the non-Tribals (87.12% and 82.35% respectively). However, the difference in poverty status between the two social groups is insignificant despite the later having higher total annual incomes. This again can be explained by the contrasting household sizes of the two communities (ST mean household size is 4.80 and non-ST mean household size is 8.02), benefitting the STs by reducing their minimum annual household income thresholds compared to the non-STs.

Table 3: Rubber Growing HHs' Poverty Status

Community	Poverty status
ST (No. of HHs)	Poor = 230 Non-poor = 34
	Total = 264 (87.12% poor and 12.87% non-poor)
Non-ST (No. of HHs)	Poor = 112 Non-poor = 24
	Total = 136 (82.35% poor and 17.64% non-poor)
Total	Poor = 342 Non-poor = 58
	Total = 400 (85.5% are poor and 14.5% are non-poor)
Two sample t test	Ho: No difference between poverty status of ST and non-ST Rubber growers.
	t = 1.2825 Pr (T > t) = 0.2004 (Not significant)

Source: Author's calculation based on field survey data

Influence of Livelihood Assets on HH Poverty

In the final logistic regression model, which intends to study the influences of the 11 individually significant sub-components and an interaction term on the household poverty status, five sub-components are found to be significant, viz., 'Householdsize' and 'labour type' of human assets, 'land under Rubber' of natural assets, 'savings' of financial assets and 'selling point' of social assets (refer Table 4).

Among the significant sub-components of the five livelihood assets, smaller 'HHsize,' larger 'land under Rubber,' 'savings' and RGS as the 'selling point' wield positive influence on household poverty as reflected by their respective ORs (>1). Smaller households require lesser minimum household annual income threshold to escape or remain free from poverty. Households' larger Rubber holdings (in this case >2 hectares) imply that they will own more tappable Rubber trees, more Rubber product, and ultimately earn higher income. Savings, along with providing monetary support in economic (crop damage) and/or non-economic distress (health emergency) to the households, also provide investment opportunities in additional livelihood-generating sources and improve economic solvency of the households. Moreover, when these growers sell their Rubber produce in RGSs instead of local markets or through home collection to private dealers, they enjoy unified price for their product, unlike the latter case where differential pricing is observed.

Table 4: Result of Logistic Regression Model

Asset	Sub-component	Odds ratio (OR)	Standard error	
Physical	1.Poultry and livestock	0.7074125	0.3437482	
	1.Housing condition	1.370339	0.613476	
Human	1.HHsize	6.762432 ***	3.273644	
	1.Training	2.11933	1.390708	
	1.Labour type	0.1211392 ***	0.0872942	
	1.Training#1.Labour type	1.121281	0.9726623	
	Education	1.Primary	2.557981	3.837973
		2.Secondary and above	1.207002	1.530448
Natural	1.Land under Rubber	6.113844 ***	3.282511	
Financial	1.Savings	8.783282 ***	4.572453	
	1.Subsidy	1.289167	0.6023047	
Social	1.RGS membership	0.4962801	0.2181683	
	1.Selling point	9.645537 **	8.379811	

Source: Author's calculation based on field data

Note: *Significant at 0.10, **Significant at 0.05, ***Significant at 0.01

In contrast, the family 'labour type' is found to aggravate the poverty conditions of the Rubber growing households significantly (OR<1). By providing family labour in the plantations, the households save on tapping related labour cost of 200/- to 250/- per head per day or 40% to 50% of daily Rubber sheets produced as foregone labour cost. Despite this advantage, households using family labour do not benefit economically due to labour inefficiency ascribed primarily to lack of training. Though insignificant, trained family labour is found to improve households' economic condition (OR=1.12). In fact, training, regardless of the labour type, can increase the likelihood that households are not poor (OR=2.11).

Among the insignificant livelihood assets sub-components, except owning 'poultry and livestock' and having 'RGS membership', the remaining sub-components increase the possibility of the Rubber-growing households reaching non-poverty status. Currently, poultry and livestock farming serve nutritional requirement of these households throughout the year. Alongside household consumption, a few households also sell the livestock for meeting emergency credit requirement. Thus, it may be regarded as an easy-to-liquidate asset that allows poor households to negotiate in the credit-crunch situation. Lack of government support, together with ineffective or nonexistent self-help groups have led to rubber growers' ignorance of the financial benefits of commercial livestock production and hence full realization of its potentiality in income-generation in the study area.

The RGSs function as self-help groups and collectives in several ways, such as, supporting the delivery of subsidized planting materials and inputs, providing training in tapping, plantation management, and rubber processing, giving member growers more negotiating power over Rubber production prices than they would otherwise have when selling to private dealers through home collection or in local market and more. These societies boost the social capital status of the member Rubber growers through promoting networking, bonding and linking among the grower members. However, the RGSs in the study area, in many cases, tend to operate inefficiently. Rubber Board is supposed to oversee the formation, selection of president from the member growers by rotation and smooth functioning of the society within a compact area of 2-3 Kms radius. However as observed, the Board has not been proactive in promoting and supervising the formation and functioning of the RGSs in the study area. RGS leadership is found to comprise of representation from economically well-off people or large Rubber garden owners of the locality and non-rotation of leadership positions like presidentship within the designated timeframe using influence. Consequently, small Rubber growers who partake in RGSs with the hope of reaping collective benefits like free training, collective processing and selling of Rubber sheets at fixed yet higher than market price, fail to obtain so.

Most Rubber growing households in the study region are income-poor (refer table 3). The asset-poverty or asset-scarcity of the Rubber growers has led to low income and monetary poverty to a large extent. Table 5 reflects the poor livelihood assets conditions of these growers.

Table 5: HHs' Ownership/Access Status of Select Livelihood Asset Sub-Components

Items	Share of HHs (%)
Owning poultry and/or livestock	60
Keeping poultry and/or livestock for nutritional requirement only	97.5
HHs not having pukka housing	41.25
HHs having more than 4 members	60
HHs not received training on Rubber tapping and/or plantation management and/or processing	46.25
HHs having more than 2 hectares of Rubber land	12
HHs not having savings account	52.75
HHs not received subsidy from Rubber Board	37.5
HHs with no RGS membership	57
HHs selling Rubber sheets to RGSs	3.25

Source: field survey

The incidence of high share of Rubber households not commercializing livestock farming has been discussed earlier. Lack of decent housing among households, flooding and crop damage during rainy season which lasts for maximum duration of the year in Assam add to their woes. Considerable share of these households accommodates

large families (> 4) which puts pressure on the households in terms of increased income thresholds for survival.

Role of training is another important factor for these households. Unfortunately, 46.25% of Rubber households are untrained, causing damage to the Rubber plants while tapping as well as compromising the quality of the Rubber sheets produced.

Very few households own more than 2 hectares of Rubber land. In some cases, the lands where Rubber is grown by the households are under the ownership of forest department and are illegally occupied by the Rubber growers. These households in absence of legal ownership rights, remain ineligible for subsidy and other benefits like trainings and planting support from Rubber Board.

As shown in Table 2, most Rubber households earn from Rubber only and lack additional livelihood generation sources. Without additional income, possibility of savings shrinks. Not having savings accounts can also be attributed to non-receipt of subsidy from Rubber Board. Savings accounts are also necessary to receive subsidy from the Rubber Board. It has been observed that 37.5% of surveyed households have not received subsidy till the last tapping season. One of the reasons for non-receipt of subsidy is non-availability of land ownership documents with the growers. Without financial assistance from the Board, the growers lose interest in Rubber plantation.

The functioning of the RGSs remain the biggest challenge and the Rubber growers also fail to sell Rubber sheets through RGSs and enjoy unified pricing. Only 3.25% of Rubber households could sell Rubber sheets through RGSs during the last tapping season.

Concluding Remarks

Commercial Rubber plantation was initiated Assam as a permanent settlement-based livelihood generating avenue for the hill-dwelling ST communities. Rubber's commercial viability has also attracted various non-Tribal communities into plantations. However, as seen from the findings of the current study, most of the Rubber growing households of Assam have remained poor. The study also explored the influence of the livelihood assets on the Rubber growing households' poverty status. Some of the identified problems associated with existing asset bases of the growers are limited number of households opting for livelihood diversification, non-commercialization of poultry and livestock farming, inadequate training on plantation management, large HH size, land ownership issue, overall poor social capital status, etc.

To reduce the risk associated with monoculture, households may develop Rubber integrated farm livelihood systems, agro forestry and/or intercropping. There is urgent need for the Rubber Board to take up organisation of a greater number of free of cost training programmes relating to tapping, plantation management and diversification opportunities available with Rubber, etc. in the interior most Rubber-dense areas.

Improvement of the financial assets status of the Rubber growing HHs is expected to enhance HH wellbeing. Local Government along with the Rubber Board should encourage the Rubber growers to open or maintain savings accounts in financial institutions like Grameen Bank, Post office, etc. to receive the necessary subsidy and other supports from the government. Since most of these households are economically backward, Rubber planting or re-planting should be assisted by the Rubber Board through subsidy and other monetary benefits, training, disbursal of poly bags, fertilizer, seeds, intercropping support, etc. At the same time, households which intend to start planting or re-planting in illegally occupied land should be discouraged to do so to avoid irregularities in receiving financial benefits from the Rubber Board.

To improve social assets of the households, there is need for the Rubber Board to engage the Rubber growing communities in making the RGSs more active in facilitating smooth input delivery, price moderation, output sales, etc. Smooth functioning of the RGSs will also provide these households to sell their Rubber sheets through these societies at unified price and at lower transportation cost, thereby improving their financial wellbeing. Similarly, the growers, especially the women of the households may be encouraged to actively build and participate in self-help groups (SHGs) to learn additional livelihood generation skills like piggery etc., to save small amounts of money to develop new livelihood sources such that in the event of distress the diversified income basket help save the Rubber growing households from slipping into adversity.

References

- Abbassi, F. A., Ullah, A., Hashmi, S. M., Hussain, K. and Akhter, N. (2020). The Role of Livelihood Assets' Endowment in Adoption of Rural Livelihood Strategies: An Intra-Regional Comparison of District Bhimber, AJ&K. *Sarhad Journal of Agriculture*, 36 (1) : 258-271.
- Aguilar, F.X., Hendrawan, D., Cai, Z., Roshetko, J.M. and Stallmann, J. (2021). Smallholder farmer resilience to water scarcity. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 24 : 2543–2576.
- Bhattacharjee, A., Bhowmik, M., Paul, C., Chowdhury, B. D., and Debnath, B. (2021). Rubber tree seed utilization for green energy, revenue generation and sustainable development— A comprehensive review. *Industrial Crops and Products*, 174. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indcrop.2021.114186>
- Booyen F., van der Berg, S., von Maltitz, M., and G. du Rand (2008), Using an asset index to assess trends in poverty in seven sub-Saharan African countries, *World Development*, 36 (6): 1113-1130.
- Busono, W., Hidayat, A., Kurniawan, E., Perdanasari, Z., Hutama, J., &Maylinda, S. (2017). Livelihood Assets in Entikong Village, Sanggau Regency, West Kalimantan. *International Journal of Social and Local Economic Governance*, 3 (2): 111-117.
- Chambers, R. and Conway, R. (1992). *Sustainable rural livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21st century*. IDS discussion paper, 296 : 127-130.
- DFID. (1999). Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets. London: Department for International Development.

Ding, W., Jimoh, S. O., Hou, Y., Hou, X. and Zhang, W. (2018). Influence of Livelihood Capitals on Livelihood Strategies of Herdsmen in Inner Mongolia, China. *Sustainability*, 10, 3325.

Dutta, S. and Guchhait, S.K. (2018). Measurement of Livelihood Assets in Sustainable Forest Governance: A Study in Burdwan Forest Division, West Bengal. *Transactions*, 40 (2): 203-216.

Government of Assam (2019). *Statistical Handbook of Assam 2018*. Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Assam. Accessed from <https://des.assam.gov.in/documents-detail/statistical-hand-book>

Government of Assam (2020). *Statistical Handbook of Assam 2019*. Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Assam. Accessed from <https://des.assam.gov.in/documents-detail/statistical-hand-book>

Government of Assam (2021). *Statistical Handbook of Assam 2020*. Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Assam. Accessed from <https://des.assam.gov.in/documents-detail/statistical-hand-book>

Hahn, M.B, Riederer, A. M. and Foster, S.O. (2009). The livelihood vulnerability index: A pragmatic approach to assessing risks from climate variability and change - A case study in Mozambique. *Global Environmental Change*, 19: 74-88.

Hick, R. (2012). The capability approach: Insights for a new poverty focus. *Journal of Social Policy*, 41(2), 291–308.

<https://www.exchangerates.org.uk/> (for dollar to rupee exchange rate in 2020)

Ibrahim, A. Z., Hassan, K. H., Kamaruddin, R. and Anuar, A. R. (2018). The Level of Livelihood Assets Ownership Among Vulnerability Group in East Coast of Malaysia. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, 7 (3) : 157-161.

International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF. 2021. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), India, 2019-21: Assam. Mumbai: IIPS. Accessed from <http://rchiips.org/nfhs/assam.shtml>

Islam, F., Alam, G.M.M., Begum, R., Sarker, M.N.I., and Bhandari, H. (2021). Vulnerability, Food Security and Adaptation to Climate Change of Coastal Rice Farmers in Bangladesh. In: Alam, G.M.M., Edraw-Kwasie, M.O., Nagy, G.J., Leal Filho, W. (eds) *Climate Vulnerability and Resilience in the Global South*. Climate Change Management. Springer, Cham.

Maibangsa, M. and Subramanian, S.R. (2000). Economic feasibility of small-scale rubber plantations in Assam. *Journal of Rubber Research*, 3(4): 250-257.

Majumdar A. (2016). The Colonial State and Resource Frontiers: Tracing the Politics of Appropriating Rubber in the Northeastern Frontier of British India, 1810–84. *Indian Historical Review*, 43 (1): 1–17.

Mohapatra, G. (2022). Integrated Rubber Development Projects and Their Impact on Tribal Livelihoods: The Case of the Northeast Region with Special Reference to Tripura. *Transcience*, 13 (1): 25-39.

Mulika, T. and Routray, J.K. (2016). Farmer livelihood assets contributing to the sustainable livelihoods of smallholder livestock farmers in the Northeast Region of Thailand. *International Journal of Agricultural Management*, 5 (4): 123-134.

Nath, T. K., Inoue, M. and Zoysa, M. D. (2013). Small-Scale Rubber Planting for Enhancement

of People's Livelihoods: A Comparative Study in Three South Asian Countries. *Society & Natural Resources: An International Journal*, 26 (9): 1066-1081.

Pradeep B, Jacob J, Anand S. S, Shebin S. M, Meti S. and Annamalaiathan K. (2017). Identification and mapping of Natural Rubber Plantations and Potential Areas for its Cultivation in Assam using Remote Sensing Technology. *Rubber Science*, 30 (3): 244-254.

Rubber Board (2020). Table 1: State wise area under rubber as on 31-03-2019. Accessed from Rubber Board Zonal Office, Guwahati.

Rubber Board (2021). *Indian Rubber Statistics*. Vol 42.

Sen, A. (1987). *The Standard of Living, The Tanner Lectures*, Claire Hall, Cambridge 1985, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Viswanathan, P.K. and Shivakoti, G.P. (2007). Conceptualising Sustainable Farm - livelihood Systems in the Era of Globalisation: A study of Rubber Integrated Farm Livelihood Systems in North East India. *Social Change and Development*, 5: 111-142.

Viswanathan, P.K. (2008). Emerging Smallholder Rubber Farming Systems in India and Thailand: A Comparative Economic Analysis. *Asian Journal of Agriculture and Development (AJAD)*, 5 (2): 1-19.

Xu, D., Zhang, J., Rasul, G., Liu, S., Xie, F., Cao, M. and Liu, E. (2015). Household Livelihood Strategies and Dependence on Agriculture in the Mountainous Settlements in the Three Gorges Reservoir Area, China. *Sustainability*, 7: 4850-4869.

Yamane, T. (1973). *Statistics: an introductory analysis*. New York: Harper & Row.

Annexure 1.

Area, Production, and Average Yield of Natural Rubber in Major States of India During 2020-21

State	Area (hectare)	Production (tonnes)	Average yield (kg/hectare)
Kerala	5,50,650	5,19,500	1534
Tripura	86,270	73,780	1277
Assam	57,735	34,130	1153
Karnataka	51,370	43,860	1275
Tamilnadu	21,260	19,710	1500
Meghalaya	16,610	9540	1100

Source: *Indian Rubber Statistics, 42nd Vol*

Annexure 2.**Area, Production, and Employment Generation under Rubber Plantation Sector in Top Five Districts of Assam**

Area (Hectare)				
District	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Karimganj	(18746.00)	(16394.00)	(16429.00)	(16429.00)
Goalpara	(8895.84)	(9610.50)	(9610.50)	(9610.50)
Karbi Anglong	(8092.25)	(8589.85)	(8601.01)	((8601.01)
Kokrajhar	(2930.65)	(3390.04)	(3390.04)	(3390.04)
Kamrup	(3028.54)	(3181.54)	(3184.54)	(3184.54)
Production (Metric Ton)				
District	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Goalpara	(4983.00)	(6789.00)	(6809.00)	(8615.00)
Karimganj	(3260.00)	(4194.00)	(3436.00)	(4365.00)
Karbi Anglong	(2518.00)	(2925.00)	(4867.00)	(5964.64)
Bongaigaon	(1206.00)	(1285.00)	(1805.00)	-
Chirang	-	-	-	(1685.00)
Kokrajhar	(1031.00)	(1667.00)	(2206.00)	(2206.00)
Employment generation (no.)				
District	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Karimganj	(58488)	(51149)	(52572)	(63932)
Goalpara	(27755)	(29985)	(29990)	(28832)
Karbi Anglong	(25248)	(26800)	(26835)	(27770)
Kamrup	(9449)	(9926)	(9961)	-
Cachar	-	-	-	(9988)
Kokrajhar	(9144)	(10577)	(10606)	(10760)

Source : *Compiled from Statistical Handbooks of Assam 2018, 2019 and 2020*

Annexure 3.

Individual Sub-Components' Independent Influence on HH Poverty

Livelihood Asset	Sub-component		Odds ratio	Standard error
Physical	HH gadgets	1	2.4	3.056796
		2	2.117647	2.269632
		3	3.73913	3.892365
	Poultry and livestock		0.6208531*	0.1770666
	Housing condition		1.975594**	0.6090038
	Distance to market		1.672222	0.5353425
	Road condition		1.376977	0.6126207
	Vehicles	1	0.6959707	0.295258
2		2.068966	1.070709	
Human	HH size		4.519525 ***	1.401063
	Training		1.771186*	0.5254967
	Labour type		0.0816234***	0.025972
	Education	Up to primary	0.12*	0.1406272
		Secondary or above	0.2579618	0.2385326
Natural	Land under Rubber		11.81818***	4.064684
	Access to water for Rubber processing		0.7205527	0.2049974
Financial	Savings		10.77019 ***	4.500512
	Loan burden		1.203822	0.6674619
	Subsidy		1.691105*	0.5309637
Social	RGS membership		0.500236**	0.1541936
	SHG membership		0.898374	0.2794312
	Selling point		5.521978***	3.180485

Note: *Significant at 0.10, **Significant at 0.05, ***Significant at 0.01

Looking Back to the Context of Political History of Assam

Rajen Saikia (ed.), (2024), *Political History of Assam (1947-1971) Vol. I*; Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati; 590 pages

Akshay Jyoti Sarma¹

The first volume of Political History of Assam edited by eminent historian Rajen Saikia has been an elaborate exercise of analysing the contexts of political developments in Assam at a crucial phase of history of a contesting region confronting with post-colonial complications. With the coverage of a critical timeline from 1947-1971, the book is expected to be the most elucidating compilation on Assam and the Northeast as a repository of political events and social developments that took place during this crucial period of history.

Since the dawn of independence, the north-eastern part of the country remained politically contested and socially volatile. Several political developments coming alongside of independence such as partition and its aftermath, rise of ethnic movements and assertions, rise of insurgency, question of infiltration and refugees etc. among many others left the region as a ground of contestation in the new architecture of the nation-state.

Therefore, a political history of the time is a hugely challenging task underscoring the significance of specific time and context of historical developments and events. The book has been divided into eight (8) chapters including a lucid introduction of Assam including the political developments right from the Varman Dynasty of fourth century to the end of colonial rule in the 1940s. The introductory chapter also vehemently dealt with the journey of economic development in the state of Assam.

The second chapter *Approaches to Nation Building* analyses the journey of Assam that started in independent India after escaping the 'grouping scheme' and many other political hurdles and how the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi was instrumental in the process of building new Assam. He was also instrumental in establishing several institutions including the Gauhati University, Assam Engineering College,

¹ Assistant Professor, OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati, Assam, Email: ajsarma.86@gmail.com

the Ayurvedic College and many other foundational initiatives during his short but profound tenure of leadership in the state. Considering his contribution and vision for the state, Mr. Bordoloi was, therefore, eulogised as the ‘blend of Gandhian nationalism and Nehrubian Modernity’ (p.62). The author also attributed Mr. Bordoloi as a ‘man of clear perspective, courage and governance’ keeping in mind his pioneering works for development of Assam and ‘vision for a better future of the region’ (p.73).

Moreover, the legacy of Gandhian ideology had also significant imprint in the society and polity of Assam in the process of nation building in early years. The author has described how the Bhoodan movement reached the state and the idea of ‘Sarvodaya’ was brought into practice for welfare of people in the region. The author also outlined the history and the journey of the largest political organisation – Indian National Congress in Assam during the given period of time. The Congress leadership in Assam has often been challenged by internal dissent, with different factions aligning themselves with various leaders or ideologies. The concomitant development of counter political organisations and movements was also an important part of post-independent political history in Assam. The author noted the rise of the Forward Block in the state which tried to play a constructive role in the society and politics of the state by advocating for ‘communal harmony and unity in the country’.

The third chapter *Challenges and Responses* deals with critical challenges that the state had to confront in the initial decades after independence. The question of infiltration and refugees which shaped the future course of politics in the state to a great extent has been focussed in the first two sections of the chapter. The following sections describe the rise of different ideological movements including Socialist, Communist and Hindu Nationalist in the state.

Influx of immigrants from East Bengal and subsequently from East Pakistan had been an established fact in the pages of history. Immigration had an alarming effect on the demography of Assam and its impact on the indigenous people of the state has also been immense. Several policies of the colonial and post-colonial governments and the aftermath of partition had resulted not only in changing the demography and but also the socio-cultural and political milieu of the state. The author referred to the political and administrative debates and discourses and also quoted several fact and figures to suggest how Assam was affected by the illegal immigrants and refugees. The role of the central government was always ambiguous as there was no proper move to stop infiltration of people from East Pakistan. The Author quoted many alarming reports and statements suggesting vulnerability of Assam in the wake of continuous and unrestricted influx of people. Pitambardev Goswami, as quoted by the author, wrote a letter to Pandit Nehru in 1962 stating “...due to (defective) policy and inefficiency of Assam Congress and leaders of the Government, basking under the sunshine of your favour, Assam is demonstrably slipping into the bosom of Pakistan by a gradual process” (p.112).

The account of Socialist movements in India and how it grew within the Indian National Congress during the course of freedom struggle has been well depicted by the author. The historical developments such as formation of the Congress Socialist Party to Socialist Party and Praja Socialist Party, the journey of socialist movement in the country and particularly in Assam was a significant development in the post-colonial history of Assam. Though the socialist movements grew in the state, it could not make stronghold due to internal splits and dissidences. The socialist parties 'dissolved themselves in the Janata Party in 1977' (p.179).

The author has distinguished the socialists from the communists on several grounds. Although, both the socialist and communist have common premise of socialism, yet there are differences in their 'ideas and methods' (p.161). In the early years of independence, political organisations with communist ideology such as Communist Party of India (CPI) and Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI), formerly known as Communist League geared up their activities in Assam posing a 'challenge to the state administration' (p.184). There are several political outfits within the domain of communist ideology such as Assam Provincial Student Federation, Kishan Sabha, Krishak Banua Panchayat, Biplabi Chatra Front, Nari Mukti Sangha, Gana Bahini, Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti etc that have had different activities spreading the ideas of communism in the society. Among others, these organisations also spearheaded the process of mobilisation of peasants and workers for their rights. Elaborating on the communist political parties starting with RCPI and CPI to CPI (M) and CPI (ML), the author described incidences and contexts of rise and fall of communist ideology in the state.

Like the socialist and communist, the Hindu nationalist also found strong ground to enter the political arena of Assam. The rise of Muslim League was triggering for a call to unite Hindus and protect the interests of Hindus (p.226). Although, there were many Hindu Nationalist organisations such as Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Mahasabha, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Bharatiya Jana Sangh and Swatantra Party developed relations with Assam from the early years of their inception (p.225), the rise of Hindu nationalist sentiments grew in Assam when the state unit of Muslim League adopted the Pakistan Resolution at Habiganj in January, 1941 (p.232). Quoting Savarkar author states that 'the Hindus outside Assam were not sufficiently aware of the Muslim design to turn Assam into a Muslim majority province (p.233). The author has put the journey of Hindu nationalism in Assam and portrayed a picture that the rise of Hindu nationalism in the state was a response to the rise of radical Muslim political outfits in the state. The chapter also describes the entry of RSS and Jana Sangh in Assam and their slow and well charted course of action to make their imprints to influence the society and politics of the state.

The fourth chapter *Loose end of National Integration* underscores the fallacy of nation-building especially in the Northeast. The author argues that challenges coming from the rise of insurgency movements in the region especially of the Nagas and Mizos

reflect erroneous design of national integration. So far as the integration of Naga Hills was concerned, the author drew a trajectory of historical relations of Nagas with the colonial administration and also with the leadership of independent India. Their demand for independence, levels of negotiation, interaction with the Indian state and contestation thereon etc are well documented in the volume. However, it may be worth-mentioning that the peace negotiation is still under progress between some of the Naga rebel groups and Government of India.

The movement of Mizo National Front had been one of the significant episodes in the history of Assam and the region. The author has described how the Mizo leadership learnt their lessons from the insurgency movement of Nagas and took appropriate measures to end violence in search of peace and prosperity after successful negotiation with the Government of India. The author has tried to put detailed accounts of the history of Mizo identity formation and their political assertion at different phases of colonial and post-colonial setups in the volume.

The fifth chapter *Burden of International Border* focuses two of the significant episodes in the modern history –the Chinese Aggression of 1962 and the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965. The impacts of these two crises were immense on Assam. The Northeast is a significant frontier region of India with its unique geo-strategic location surrounded by five foreign countries including China (Tibet) and Bangladesh (East Pakistan). The aggression that happened at the international border deeply added to the ‘psychological distresses’ of people of Assam (p.337). The author has provided an eloquent documentation on these two events that left the region as a critical borderland of the country.

The sixth chapter *Assam-NEFA Relations* has been a noteworthy contribution of the volume where the author has penned the process of state formation in the region. Today’s Arunachal Pradesh was known as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), an administrative design of the colonial government that continued for more than two decades after independence. The author has brought to light the history and political trajectory of NEFA and its attainment of statehood as Arunachal Pradesh.

A significant theme of political history of Assam *Linguistic, Local and Ethnic Assertions* has been divided in seventh and eighth chapters of the volume. As the theme suggests, these two chapters are dedicated towards understanding multiple historical developments that took place in the state including the rise of different socio-ethnic and political movements and assertions, and the responses from the state to different movements and its interventions for development in the region.

The author has raised the issue of language movement and its genesis in the state which occurred after the independence. The ‘movement to declare Assamese as the official language of Assam was gaining popularity throughout the state (p.358). Though the movement led to eruption of violence in different places of the state, the

author maintains that the linguistic assertion in the state was a parallel development that took place in several other states of the country. Such assertion was leading toward the constitution of State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) in India. The author has also recorded significant developments in the volume with regard to the language movement and also interaction of SRC with the leaders of Assam and different nationalist organisations of the state.

In the third part of the seventh chapter *Dynamics of Development*, author has pointed out assertion of people of Assam with regard to economic development of the state. Assam is a state with rich minerals and natural resources which were explored and exploited by the Union Government but due attention was not given for development of the region. Therefore, there was movement for establishing a refinery in the state marking the quest of people for 'realising economic potential of Assam'. The author has referred to the initiatives of the state government and leadership of different political and social organisations for realising developmental interventions including the oil refineries, power projects, communication infrastructure, fertiliser plants etc in the state.

There had been several assertions for separate state and union territories in Assam prior to the reorganisation of Northeast in 1971. The author has devoted one part of seventh chapter and three parts of eighth chapter to provide analysis of four different assertions of that period. The hill state movement basically under the leadership of All Party Hill Leaders' Conference leading to the creation of the state of Meghalaya was a significant development in Assam. Similarly, there were three other movements –first one was under the leadership of Plain Tribal Council of Assam for creation of a union territory called *Udayachal*; second, the movement in Cachar for creation of a union territory called *Purbachal*; and the third, demand for a separate state comprising upper Assam districts under the leadership of Ujani Asam Rajya Parishad. The author has documented in detail the genesis and trajectory of these movements in the volume. Although all these movements could not be realised in terms of creation of separate state or union territory, they left everlasting effect on the politics of ethnicity and identity in the state.

In trying to put together the trajectory of political history of Assam, the author has highlighted the rise of nativist movements in Assam. The 'increasing unemployment and a sense of economic deprivation' (p.476), which was already there in the minds of Assamese youths, might have prompted such nativist movements in the state, to elucidate his point further, the author referred to the rise of *Lachit Sena* and its activities. Further, the anti-establishment sentiment created the ground for a regional political party to emerge in the state called Peoples Democratic Party.

The efficacy of reorganisation of Northeast and creating new states and union territories in the region has been discussed and analysed in the final section of the last chapter of the volume. The author was of the view that 'despite several decades of achieving

statehood, the states in the North East have continued to remain on the margins of financial development...'(p.488). Most of these states still depend solely on central assistance for their survival. Therefore, the North Eastern Council (NEC) was devised to safeguard internal security, advance the economic development of the region and work towards achieving common targets for the greater benefit of the member states and union territories (p.484). Since inception, the NEC has been contributing in numerous ways to bridge developmental gaps in the region.

The present volume on Political History of Assam (1947-1971) has been an eloquent testament of processes and contestation of state formation in the region called Northeast India. The author has tried to document the history of a period which was politically sensitive, economically fragile and socially volatile. The volume lays bare how the political developments and events of this particular phase of history crafted the political and economic future of the region. The rich sources of data and references remain as one of the greatest strength of the volume and shall continue to be an essential document for the posterity trying to understand the political history of Assam.