

Socio-Economic
and Demographic
Dimensions of
ARUNACHAL
PRADESH

S. D. Jha

'SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC DIMENSIONS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH' is an outcome of the collection of papers on varied topics presented by the author at various national and regional seminars and published in the reputed journals and daily news papers of the eminence in India.

The book consists of forty papers, each dealing with the topic of study threadbare. Each papers is a discreet study and self-contained. Alignment of the present publication has been made according to the linkage of bordering themes in succeeding order of sequences with stipulation to rendering them more thought provoking and interesting reading.

In tune with the broader spectrum of discussions, the studies may be grouped into the areas of social fabric geo-economic factors, play of market-mechanism, planning, demography and appropriate technology.

Last but never the least, the scrutiny of materials and the correlative discussions made in this volume have been aimed at catering to the curious mass and the academic world in particular. The students may benefit the most from the studies with direct approach to the problems.

Dr. Satya Dev Jha, the author of 'SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC DIMENSIONS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH' was born in a remote village of Belahia in Sitamarhi district of Bihar.


Dr. Jha passed his Secondary School examination from M. V. N. G. High School Manikchouk, and graduated with honours in Economics from C.M. College Darbhanga. The author did his post-graduate in Economics from Langat Singh College, Muzaffarpur, Bihar University, and was conferred on the distinction of Doctor of Philosophy in Economics by the University of Gauhati in 1975 for his thesis : Socio-Economic Study of Arunachal Pradesh.

The bright career of Dr Satya Dev Jha is also studded with varied experiences in the fields of demography, agricultural statistics, livestock census, horticultural crop survey and planning. The author has worked pioneering works in the above fields for Arunachal Pradesh. At desk, Dr Jha been creative. By virtue of his merit and perseverance Dr Jha has so far produced two books : (1) The Wealth of Arunachal Pradesh and (2) Arunachal Pradesh (rich land poor people) of excellence. In addition to these, the author has also produced ever first state report on quinquennial agricultural census 1977-78 and state report on quinquennial livestock census 1980-in respect of Arunachal Pradesh. Dr Jha has got quite a good number of papers to his credit.

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S. D. JHA

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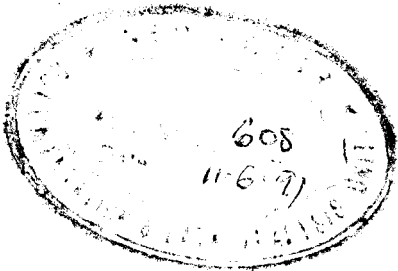
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Land Tenure System Among the Tribals of North East Region

It cannot be disputed that the tribesmen in North-East India have a very strong social sense. It is no exaggeration to mention that every tribal village of this region functions as a co-operative society in its own way. Each tribal family, each clan, each hamlet thinks, lives and works as a unit. It may be said that the sense of co-operation amongst the tribals was very much intense in the past and the non-existence of an organised modern administration may have been the attribute to generate the feeling of being a collective entity they lived in the jungles and mountains where life was harder than today. It is needless to enumerate to other factors the compulsive need to meet natural calamities to bridge rivers and streams, to watch and guard one's own territory, to guard against wild animals etc. All these perhaps taught them co-operation. In the past, to watch, guard and protect one's own territory was of paramount importance; the individual villages were considered as one unit.

It is said that in Arunachal Pradesh each and every village used to live in mutual suspicion. The villagers were not fortunate to enjoy mental peace. This situation mainly

compelled them to remain united. Due to the fear of attack and raid, the people from other villages were not allowed to enter the village. This is the main reason that trade and commerce also could not thrive in Arunachal Pradesh in the past. In Arunachal Pradesh, in trade and commerce when a barter exchange was to take place in food grains between the surplus and deficit villages time and place were also fixed for the purpose. But the past has passed.

At present, no tribal pocket of North-East India is un-administered. Nagaland and Meghalaya have already been declared full-fledged States. Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram are Union Territories. Similarly, the tribal people living in Tripura, Manipur and Assam are enjoying benefits of administration. Now at last, peace has come to the tribals of this region from which they remained deprived for centuries or so. No doubt the British rulers of India also tried to extend the semblance of administration to tribal belts, but the same was restricted only to the opening of outposts only. Outposts were opened either with a view to curb down the tribals' upsurges or to exert authority over the tribesmen or to protect the people of the adjoining plains from the raids and forays. It is needless to say that the Britishers in India did not try to better their economy. It is evident from history, therefore, that the opening of outposts had invoked tribal-resistance. In this connection an example may be cited that one outpost so opened at Balipara was wiped out in 1835 under the command of Tagi Raja of the Akas, a Arunachali tribe. This also further demonstrates their sense of co-operation among them, and all these took the form of tradition. This co-operation has instilled among them almost military unity and discipline. Such co-operation is found in all spheres of life. Before a new field (the tribals are mainly shifting cultivators) they meet together and decide with the help of the village priests and elders. If a new residential house is to be constructed, it is observed in Arunachal Pradesh, each and every household lends a hand; even the affairs of individuals involved the whole village e.g. marriage, death etc. If any one of a household dies, mourning is shared by the whole village. They collectively take it as a social taboo to go to work on the occasion. Similarly,

hunting, fishing and a number of other pursuits are carried out collectively.

The tribal society as a whole in North-East India is a classless society. Although tribe divisions are existent along with clan divisions, they do not admit untouchability at all. They are also free from the complexes of superiority and inferiority of their respective tribes and clans.

As regards the stratification with respect to the tribal society in the region, it cannot be denied that the same is prevalent. For instance, in every tribal village there is system of headmanship. This headmanship of the village no doubt, enjoys a higher status in the society and other facilities too. In this connection, the example of the Nocte and the Wancho tribes of Arunachal Pradesh may be cited whose village chiefs are paid tributes by villagers.

But, Headmanship is exclusively administrative in character. Next, this system is a great unifying force amongst the tribals of the region. No individual of either sex is discriminated on the above grounds for social and religious purposes.

In the past, evil practice like slavery was prevalent amongst the tribesmen of the region; and a vivid demarcation of a sort of class was visible. Now that evil practice has also been eradicated after the advent of administration. Still the sense of untouchability was not there. It is also interesting and astonishing to note that beggary is totally absent among them. If an individual is helpless, the society takes care of him/her. But there are no untouchables.

The system of economy prevailing amongst the tribals of North East India, including those tribals living in Assam, Manipur and Tripura, should be viewed looking into their practising economic pursuits. As such the tribesmen of this region mainly pursue agricultural activities, and rearing and raising livestock, forestry, and homecrafts as secondary ones. The above fact is evident from the figures: there are 309 cultivators in Meghalaya, 203 in Nagaland and 211 in Arunachal Pradesh out of total respective workers of 447, 262 and 270 (figures should be read in 000's). In other sectors of the economy in the above tribal areas of North East India, there is an incredibly low figure of workers. It would also be quite relevant

to mention here that the land is divided between cultivation and forest.

In North-East India, the tribal communities practise shifting cultivation by and large. The term which is in frequent use for the above system of agriculture is *jhum*, an Assamese word. There, are also other terms used locally amongst the tribal communities, for example, 'BAGAMA' among the Gatos, 'LYNGKHALUM' or 'SHYRTI' among the Khasis, 'RIT' among the Mikirs, 'TEKONG LU' among the Ao Nagas, 'ADIABIK' among the Adis and 'HOOKUISMONG' among the Reangs of Tripura. But this system of cultivation is practised in a primitive manner and tools and implements. It may be said that land had been the only factor of production utilised for subsistence till recently and even now, along with traditional variables inputs of labour and seed. The tribal states of North-East India record low density of population per square kilometre. For instance, Meghalaya records 45, Nagaland 31 and Arunachal Pradesh only 6 persons per square kilometre. These densities of population is incredibly low in relation to that of the country as a whole. However, the possession of either land, that is to say, the arable land and forest land, is not bridleless in the tribal region.

Each and every tribal village in North-East India has a boundary. Within this village boundary a clan or an individual may own land. Therefore, the land within the jurisdiction of a tribal village symbolises village unity. The social organisation and style of life are woven around their lands. Any process leading to dissociation of their symbolic or effective command over lands is looked upon as threat to the existence of their village community.

Thus the tribal village communities carry on *JHUM* cultivation essentially within the jurisdiction of their respective villages. As regards their pattern of ownership over *jhuming* land, the same differs from area to area and village to village on account of many factors. However, the ownership may be brought under three broad headings such as (1) individual, (2) clan and (3) village. As such, amongst the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh, the village forms agricultural unit, each having its own *jhuming* fields within the boundaries, demarcated by natural features e.g. hills or rivers or stream. Again it is

observed that among many tribes of Arunachal Pradesh a continuous stretch of land is cleared by a single clan, that is to say owned, and the members of other clans of the same village are entitled to utilise the land so long as they reside in the village without having any right to transfer even to descendants. However, the latter can transfer with prior permission of the village council. Simultaneously, a strong sense of individual ownership of arable land is visible prevailing among a few tribes of Arunachal namely the Apatanis, the Monpas and the Khaptis and others but within the framework of communal possession.

Among the Ao Naga tribe it is noted that when an individual lacks land, he can take the same on lease from other individuals who have surplus land. With respect to Manipur chief setting a new village, used to pay some sort of tribute to the chief of the community within whose jurisdiction the territory acquired by the former was considered to fall. Among the CHEROS of Manipur it is found that the land of the village under jhum cultivation lies in the possession of the village community as a whole. And all members of the village have equal right to any part of that village.

Among the Kuki and Mizo groups, the village chief is the sole authority of the land and the villagers have to utilise land on rent basis. But among the Mikirs, the Jhum land is almost owned individually.

Again amongst the Khasis, land is possessed jointly by clan or privately by individuals. Among the Garos, lineage group is the owner of a particular community land where the members retain the right to carry on shifting cultivation. Some of the tribal villages of North-East India hold common land and in the need individuals of such villages can take land for jhum operations seeking the consent of the village council. Thus, it is evident that land under shifting cultivation is almost held by the village community as a whole amongst the tribesmen of the North-East India.

But the above ownership of land under shifting cultivation has been brought under different regulations and legislations specially during the post independence period of India. For, the administration of independent India considered cultivation to be technical and therefore made provisions for

the technical innovations. The administration rightly made up its mind to bring the cultivation technique of the tribesmen of North-East India on scientific line. In this connection to rationalise the affairs of land was of paramount significance which resulted in these regulations: (I) Regulation III of 1947. Arunachal Pradesh, (II) Chin Hills Regulation of 1896 in Nagaland (extended), (III) the Garo Hills District (Jhum) Regulation of 1954, (IV) the Mikir Hills District (Jhum) Regulation of 1954, (V) the Lushai Hills District (Jhum) Regulation of 1954 and (VI) the Powai-Lakher Regional Council (Jhum) Regulation of 1956 to regulate the shifting cultivation in the entire tribal areas of this region.

However, the above regulations and legislations did not violate the basic norms of the traditional system of ownership of the lands with regard to shifting cultivation. For instance, prior to independence, land tenure system operating in the autonomous hill districts of Assam was guided by Regulation V of 1896, that is to say, the Chin Hills Regulation of 1896, under which the rights of the village communities as well as of the individuals over their respective lands was preserved. After the commencement of the Indian constitution, many separate legislations were promulgated by the Mizo, the Garo and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Councils where the rights of the village communities were recognised as well as of the traditional chiefs. But it is paradoxically noted that the rights of the chiefs were abolished by the legislation promulgated by the council of Mizo Hills District. The rights of the village communities were also curtailed substantially. However, the room for the payment of compensation was made. In respect of North Cachar and Mikir Hills, the Assam Land Regulation of 1896 was extended and the rights of the village communities were curtailed. On the other hand, Manipur administration had defied the rights of the village communities over their respective territories which was questioned in the court. And the court finally recognised the rights of the village communities.

The operations of jhum cultivation are guided by the Chin Hills Regulation of 1896 in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh (the Jhum Regulation of 1947 in then NEFA is the adoption of Chin Hills Regulation at 1896). The only

difference is that rights of the village communities to jhum land is recognised when the village has enjoyed the right to utilise the same for not less than 30 years prior to the promulgation of the Regulation in Nagaland and not less than 5 years in Arunachal Pradesh. These Regulations also guide the jhum intervals in the respective areas of the tribal communities. Thus, it is noted that the rights of the tribal village communities prevail over lands throughout this region of our country.

Forest Lands

The pattern of ownership with respect to land under forests also reveals the same as noted in regard to the land under shifting cultivation. Practically speaking, the habitations of the tribesmen in North-East India are surrounded by jungles. In other words, they live in forest; they delight in forest; they sing in forest; they dance in forest; they decorate their figures with forest; they worship in forest; they practice jhum in forest; they hunt in forest; and they fish in forest. To the tribals, there is no life without forest. Thus, tribals of North-East India cannot be separated from forest as fish from water.

This is, perhaps, the reason that the ownership of the village communities prevails over the forests in the respective territories. But due to the fabulous advancement in science and technology, the importance of forests has been noted during the modern time from the stand point of economic development, and vice versa. Further, the concept of scientific and rational utilisation of forest wealth in the country is followed by the imposition of limitations on the indiscriminate deforestation, which is a paradox to the wide practice of shifting cultivation by the tribesmen of North-East India. Despite this imposition of limitations on indiscriminate deforestation has got 'Plan-integration justification in the greater interest of the country as a whole. These are the attributes that many Forest Regulations have been promulgated by the different hills district councils of North-East India mostly during the fifties and the sixties of this century other than a few of late.

The operations of the said regulations, in this region, have been brought under different categories from the view

point of scientific and rational exploitation. However, the rights of the village communities have not been denied.

A few examples may be cited in this regard so as to better expose the situation. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Balipara Frontier Tract, Jhum Land Regulation of 1947 regulates the forest affairs, according to which the rights of the chiefs as well as of the village communities have been recognised while bringing the forests under reservation. As such, the revenue of the forests is divided between the Government and the chiefs and the villagers at the ratio of 25:75 respectively (Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh). Under an agreement the Forest Department of Nagaland Government can deduct the management cost to the tune of 25 per cent and the balance of the revenue to be handed over to the Range Council for onward distribution among the chiefs and the village communities of their respective forests. In Manipur although the forests belong to the Government, yet the rights of the tribesmen as to jhuming, wood rights, hunting and grazing rights have been granted. Similarly, a number of traditional rights and concessions enjoyed by the tribal population of Tripura have been honoured.

Thus it is found that a very healthy socio-economic atmosphere is prevailing in the whole tribal region of North-East India for implementing diverse economic programme of developments on co-operative lines. Of late, the Union Irrigation and Agriculture Minister Shri Jagjeevan Ram rightly pointed out that there is ample scope for co-operative farming in the region, on the eve of inaugurating a branch of Agricultural Research Complex Centre of Kohima Nagaland.