



WORK AND EMPLOYMENT IN A TRADITIONAL SOCIETY : A
GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS WITH REFERENCE TO SELECTED
NAGA VILLAGES

A B S T R A C T

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)
in Geography

By

T. SANGYU YADEN

Department of Geography
School of Human & Environmental Sciences
North-Eastern Hill University
Shillong
1995

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Productive work is a special feature of human civilization. It is work which differentiates man from his animal past. It is through work that man not only satisfies his basic needs of survival, but work becomes a key to transformation of his ecological settings by changing and modifying the nature and in the process, changing and modifying his own self. Work provides him creativity in the form of creating his culture, all aesthetic expressions and social institutions. All tools and technologies are products of this creativity.

In all traditional societies - characterised by simple and traditional technology and existing living in relative isolation, largely non-monetised and relatively removed from significant influences of market economy - work constitutes as a major propeller of these societies in the process of their evolution in consonance with the ecology within which they are placed. Hence, a differentiation may be made between work and employment. Work refers to all 'socially productive work' emanating from the process of adjustment between man and nature. Employment on the other hand, is a concept related to market economy wherein the labour has already become a commodity. In other words, all employment is work, whereas all work need not be employment. All productive work is not necessarily due to

employment. For example, the mother caring her baby is a socially productive work but it does not represent employment in itself. Similarly, the co-operative effort of a group of villagers to construct a village is a socially productive work but it is not employment. To cite an extreme example, one may in the strict sense be a courier employed by a smuggler, but this does not necessarily fall under socially productive work.

In most societies, the nature, patterns and the types of work is governed by a number of forces. First of all, it is the physical attributes of the environment which provide the initial basis of all productive works. Attributes of space differentiate the responses of the social group and is reflected in their patterns of work. But social groups are heterogeneous in their age, sex and in terms of their access to the productive resources as well as in their stage of economic and social development. Each society evolves general or specific principles of its organization according to which work tend to get structured. These principles may range from gender divisions in work to the distribution of work on the basis of age. Responses to work also differs in accordance to many other social, economic and cultural processes.

Works in tribal societies reflect greater harmony with nature and the structure and organization of work in these societies differ substantially from that of non-tribal social order.

In the present study it is proposed to examine the problem of the structure and organization of work in Naga-Himalayas, inhabited by diverse culture groups at different hypsometric levels. The study aims at getting an insight into differential impact of the diverse ecological factors on the patterns of work performed by culture-groups and the structural adjustments made by the people in their attempt to harness the nature. While ecological diversity would be seen as a factor in differentiating cultural responses to works performed by men and women, the role of tribal social structure will be examined to understand the different ways in which these groups transform nature while transforming themselves. An important element which will also be given due importance is the external impulses - the process of modernization, integration of forces of development through state intervention - all of which do not have uniform coverage across space or over time.

OBJECTIVES

The following broad objectives are set before the research:

- (i) to understand the spatial, ecological and cultural parameters of the variation in the patterns of work;
- (ii) to study the structure of work in relation to socio-spatial morphology, gender and age;
- (iii) to evaluate the impact of modern influences in modifying the traditional organization of work and
- (iv) to study the role of modern employment in the acceleration of social stratification.

HYPOTHESIS

The study proposes to examine the following hypothesis during the course of the study :

- (i) The rhythm of work in tribal societies is largely governed by the ecological attributes of the location and agro-climatic conditions. Difficult terrain and inaccessibility is likely to confine the work performed by people to their immediate environment. A large part of the work performed by the people will be related to the land-resources; particularly agriculture and forest.
- (ii) In general, higher the altitude, greater will be the types of work associated with forests, and lesser dependence on agricultural production. With higher altitude, the dependence on collection and gathering economy is likely to be more accentuated.
- (iii) In subsistent tribal economies, the division of labour is more demographic in nature, i.e., based on age and sex.
- (iv) The type of labour - use is likely to be dominated by reciprocity rather than wage-based.
- (v) Patterns of work in areas close to the towns are likely to be influenced more by the urban demands.
- (vi) Greater is the proximity of the village to the towns, social differentiation and wage based employment are expected to be more.

STUDY AREA

Nagaland has been selected for the present study. Located in the Indo-Burmese hills in the eastern offshoot of the Himalayan ranges and in the march land between India and Myanmar (Burma) the region supports a great variety of tribes belonging to the Naga-ethnic variety. Detached and isolated from the social upheavals in the mainland, these tribes continue to live in geographical cul-de-sac with marginal interaction with the peoples in the neighbouring Brahmaputra valley and often in

isolation to each other within its homeland. Geographical and social isolation of these tribes has fostered and perpetuated subsistence production systems and a mode of living in close relationship and simple understanding of the laws of nature. This is evident from the Naga economy which is by and large subsistence in nature and the society, which has strong links with tribal social order. These peculiarities are far too compelling to study the structure and patterns of work in this region.

The topography of the state is hilly, rugged and mountainous except for a narrow zone in the foothills bordering Assam and small valleys in between the lower ranges of the western and north-western flanks. The average height of the peaks are between 900 and 1,200 metres. The highest point is Saramati in Tuensang district which is 3,840 metres above the sea level. The second highest peak is Japfu in Kohima district with a height of 3,014 metres.

It is very common in Nagaland that the villages are very large and nucleated, located at the hill-top which are largely based on traditional agriculture and other primary occupations. The administrative extent of the region is defined by its location on the west of Myanmar. The northern and western border is provided by the state of Assam and Manipur is on the south of the state.

The state has been divided into 7 districts and 77 circles. It consists of 1170 villages. The state supports over 12

lakhs of population, most of them (85 per cent) living in rural areas. Average density of population is 73 persons per square kilometre. The study aims at getting an insight into differential impact of the diverse ecological factors on the patterns of work performed by the culture-groups and the structural adjustments made by the people in their attempts to harness nature. While ecological diversity would be seen as a factor in differentiating cultural responses to works performed by men and women, the role of tribal social structure will be examined in great detail to understand the different ways in which these groups transform nature while transforming themselves. An important element, which will also be given due importance is the external impulses -- the process of modernization, integration and forces of development through state intervention - all of which do not have a uniform coverage across space or over time.

DATA BASE

This study is primarily based on field data collected from six villages belonging to three different ecological zones. Two schedules were prepared; one for the villages as a whole and the other for the households. The primary data was collected at the household level with the help of household schedules designed to elicit informations on the demographic structure, work characteristics, access to land and other assets, literacy, modern employment, places of work of the members of the family belonging to the sample households. General information

pertaining to the villages as a whole were collected through the help of village schedules which include general ecological characteristics, population pressures, socio-economic infrastructures and facilities, community organizations, developmental efforts by Government or community, etc. Village records maintained by the village administration and the office of the Baptist Churches at different villages provided general data pertaining to demographic structure, agrarian conditions, such as the pattern of land use, cropping patterns, size of land-holding etc., for the village as a whole as well as for the sample household.

Apart from the primary data, secondary information has been used selectively for different purposes. First, it was necessary to get general idea regarding the ecological, economic and socio-cultural attributes of the selected zones as the study was mainly cross-sectional in nature. The study heavily depended on gazetteers, techno-economic surveys, census publications, published books and records to gather ecological and historical data for each of the selected zones. Second, census data have been used to get a broad understanding of the work force structure in various parts of the state as regards the 'main workers' and their industrial distribution. However, some uses of folklore, legends and belief have been referred to understand society's perception of work and employment as it is seen cognitively.

METHODOLOGY

In order to get an insight into the nature of Nagaland's economy, information have been organised with reference to all the physiographic conditions, patterns of land use etc.

The variation in the work force participation and its structure has been analysed in selected sample circles at the village level. As many as 7 circles have been selected depending upon the concentration of a particular tribal group (their share is above 95 per cent) in the circle. Care has been taken to ensure that the selected circles are well distributed in the entire state representing different altitude and ecological zones. Thus the selected circles represent a fair cross-section of regional variation and also provide insights into the nature of inter-tribal variation in work participation and its structure. Circle and village level data have been analysed with reference to,

- a. Percentage of workers to total population (total, male and female).
- b. Percentage of cultivators to total workers (total, male and female).
- c. Percentage of agricultural labourers to total workers (total, male and female).
- d. Percentage of workers in household industries and manufacturing to total workers (total, male and female).
- e. Percentage of other workers to total workers (total, male and female).

An attempt was made to present a generalised pattern of work with reference to work cycle for men and women separately at each altitude zones. The structure and organization of work is examined by a reference to social morphology, gender divisions and age distribution of work. The age distribution of works is classified into three broad categories of the children (5-15), adult (16-59) and old (60+).

SAMPLE DESIGN

In order to study the pattern, structure and organization of work and employment in Nagaland, six villages were selected for intensive field investigation. The villages were selected into one close to the urban area and the other away from it, with the assumption that the villages closer to the urban areas are more likely to be affected by modern influences than the ones away from it.

Nagaland is divided into three broad eco-regions :

1. The high altitude ecological zone,
2. The middle altitude ecological zone and
3. The low altitude ecological zone.

STUDY REGIONS

Eco-regions	Villages	Tribes	Modern influences	District
1.High alt. eco-zone	a.Tuensang b.Khudei	Chang Chang	Close to urban Away from urban	Tuensang Tuensang
2.Middle alt. eco-zone	a.Baimho b.Naghutomi	Sema Sema	Close to urban Away from urban	Zunheboto Zunheboto
3.Low alt. eco-zone	a.Merangkong b.Asangma	Ao Ao	Close to urban Away from urban	Mokokchung Mokokchung
Total - 3	6	3	3+3	3

At least two villages were selected from each of the eco-regions. In the high altitude eco-zone two villages selected for the field work include Tuensang (taking 13 per cent sample households) and Khudei another tribal Chang village which is not accessible to modern means of communications (taking 16 per cent sample households) were chosen. The middle altitude eco-region is represented by Baimho (13 per cent households) located near Zunheboto town and Naghutomi (15 per cent sample households), a Sema village far away from the town has been surveyed. The low altitude ecological zone is represented by Merangkong close to town (taking 20 per cent of sample households) and Asangma, an Ao village (taking 15 per cent of sample households).

ORGANIZATION OF THE CHAPTERS

The study is organized into six chapters :

The First Chapter delineates the research setting with reference to the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, hypothesis, data base, sample design

methodology, organization of chapters and an overview of literature.

The Second Chapter is a descriptive and analytical account of the study area. This chapter emphasises on the regional characteristics of the population and settlement, economy, land use, forest cover, cropping pattern etc.

The Third Chapter is a study of the work cycle based on data collected from six sample villages located in diverse eco-regions.

The Fourth Chapter makes an attempt to study inter-tribal differences in the work participation and its structure in the study area.

The Fifth Chapter emphasises on the social differentiation and variation in economic participation.

The Final Chapter presents a brief summary of findings and implications of the study.

FINDINGS

The main findings of the study are summarised below :

1. The ecological settings of the study area is dominated by Himalayan topography with its accompanying ridges and hills cut into river valleys which provide very little valley area, for most of them flow in V-shaped valleys. Most of the region is too rugged or forested permitting agriculture to be practiced only in the manageable slopes and limited river valleys. At places terracing is practised while in others jhum is the dominant

method of cultivation. As a result, agriculture is of highly subsistence in nature and supports only a part of the requirement of the people. Unprecedented growth in population adds to the problem. The subsistence nature of the agricultural production is indicated by small area available, primitive methods of cultivation such as jhum, very low level of technology and cropping pattern overwhelmingly loaded in favour of food grains. Despite weak agrarian based agriculture continues to absorb a very large proportion of the labour force.

Due to fragile agrarian resource base of the region, the population response to a variety of other economic pursuits offered by the eco-system. Large forest cover naturally provides an economic base for hunting, gathering, lumbering and collection of various food and other items for the people.

Domestication and care of animals is essential as an economic support in a region where agriculture is highly subsistence in nature. Care for a variety of domestic animals and semi-domestic animals like mithun etc., constitutes an important sphere of work.

In an essentially self subsistent economy without much recourse to trade, artisan production of various types keep both men and women constantly engaged.

Recent development in the area through administration, spread of literacy, growth in urbanization and increase in other infrastructural facilities are also opening up new opportunities of work and employment in the modern sector.

2. The work cycle shows a complex pattern of work mostly related to agriculture. The long period of relative agricultural inactivity allows the rural people to undertake a host of non-agricultural works which need community participation, cooperation of relatives in getting much of the requirements fulfilled without having to depend on wage labour and the interference of the market. The subsistence nature of production and tribal social organization makes the pattern of works a reflection of close interaction between society and ecology.

It is identified that there are significant differences in the work cycle of the three different zones characterized by different agro-climatic conditions. A very significant point that emerges from the study of the work cycle in diverse ecological conditions refers to the nature of community involvement in work. It is noticed that the types of works in highland areas - characterized by more hostile environment and low agricultural resources - involving community participation and reciprocity in labour use is much more compared to the areas located in the foot hills. Environmental factors seem to have fashioned such a difference. Inter-tribal differences in work-cycle appears far less conspicuous compared to environmental differences. Secondly, the rhythm of work located close to urban centres shows modifications primarily as a response to impulses originating from the urban centres. A substantial proportion of the workforce is 'employment' and this results in a low priority being accorded to works involving community participation and reciprocity in

labour-use. The differences in work-cycle between the two sample villages in highland areas is, however, insignificant. This is possibly due to marginal differentiation between rural and urban areas in highland eco-region.

Tribal institutions of lack of gender inequity is amply demonstrated in the work cycles performed by the two sexes. It is evident that the sexual division of labour exists among the Nagas, but this division is based more on complementarity rather than on segregation. Notably, the sexual division of labour in work-cycle shows little variation across eco-regions or among the tribal groups covered under the study.

3. An analysis of the census data regarding the proportion of workforce and its structure shows an overwhelming concentration of the workers in the cultivators category. Participation in other kinds of work is negligible. This is mainly due to the census definition of productive work which relegates multitude of other types of work to insignificance. This is particularly in the case of artisan activity or gathering and hunting which are not considered as main work by the majority of the people. Agricultural labourers are nearly absent. This is understandable as the tribal social order is not yet characterised by large-scale disparity in the distribution of land and other assets.

However, there are interesting differences in work participation rate and the structure of workforce across the selected circles and also between the two sexes. In the foothill

zone, the two selected circles show a low overall participation of work among the Aos and Lothas. While in the former, the male participation rate is higher than the females, in the later the female participation rate exceeds that of the males. The highest participation rate is found among the Angamis living in higher altitudes but the female participation rate is relatively low. Among the Semas, Changs and Konyaks the participation rate among the males and females are almost identical. Work participation rate among the Chakhesang women exceeds that of their men counterparts.

Interestingly the male workforce among the Aos shows a higher proportion engaged in non-agrarian sector while among all other selected tribes agriculture absorbs an overwhelming proportion of the male workforce. It is only among the Angamis that a substantial proportion of the male workforce is engaged in non-agricultural work. Location of the capital town Kohima in this area probably explains the shift.

In the case of females however, irrespective of the ecological and tribal differences the main concentration is in the agricultural sector. The only exception is in Tuli circle located in the foothill zone where a significant proportion of women workers are found engaged in non-agricultural activities.

4. Though the social organization is dominated by subsistent methods of production there are important elements of social differentiation in the sample villages. Although landlessness is

rare, economic differentiation in terms of access to land-holding is taking place at a much faster pace in low altitude ecological zone which offers greater scope for agrarian development. This economic differentiation is far more conspicuous in sample villages located close to the urban centre in nearly all eco-regions. This is sufficient proof of the negative role played by urban development in accelerating the process of socio-economic differentiation in rural tribal areas of Nagaland.

These processes may have significant impact on the nature of work and employment in the traditional tribal economy of Nagaland. For example, areas in close proximity to non-tribal dominance and which offer a relatively more agricultural opportunity are likely to experience a shift from traditional reciprocity in work to those based on wage employment. The experience is likely to be similar in villages located closer to urban centres.

It is evident from the data that the fragile economic base of the villages keeps both men and women constantly absorbed in work. About 80 per cent of the population from both the sexes are engaged in work. It is significant that there is little differences in the participation rate between the males and the females at a aggregative level. Age does not operate as a significant factor in differential participation rates. However, there are significant differences in the participation of work by differential access to land. Interestingly, overall participation declines among those households which do not operate any land or

have a very large access to land. The participation rate is also relatively low in those households having very small holdings.

It is revealed that the female workers dominate the percentage of workers within the villages (above 70 per cent) with the only exception of Khudei being dominated by males (81.1 per cent). However, the percentage of workers within the region, within the state and outside the state is dominated by males in all the sample villages. Interestingly, there is not a single female workers outside and within the state in the villages far away from the urban centres except Asangma, 1.3 per cent (within the state) and, 0.6 per cent (outside).

The working population is engaged in a multiplicity of work. Due to the weak agrarian base only a small proportion of the workforce is engaged in cultivation which is about 25 per cent males in Asangma to 30 per cent males in Merangkong and female with about 22 per cent in Baimho to 28 per cent in Merangkong. This is irrespective of the differences in land holdings. Animal husbandry absorbs a very significant of more than 20 per cent of workforce in all sample villages. It is observed that female participation in animal husbandry is more than males in all the sample villages. Though hunting is increasingly becoming irrelevant exercise, a large proportion of the male workforce continues to depend on it especially in the villages far away from the towns in general, and in the villages located at interior high altitude ecological zone in particular. It is further noticed that a small proportion of the male

workforce continues to depend on it even in the villages accessible to urban areas. Collection and gathering activities naturally occupy an important area of work in a traditional economy. More than 30 per cent of the workforce is engaged in this traditional task in almost all the sample villages. Artisan activity constitute a significant sector in which 9-14 per cent of the male workforce is engaged in all the sample villages. However, the percentage of female participation in artisan activity is marginally more than the males (i.e., 13-17 per cent) in all the selected study villages. Tuensang is the only exception where the proportion of male artisan workers exceeds that of the females. It is however revealed that in service sector proportion of male workforce is far more than that of females in all the sample villages. Female involvement in trade and commerce is insignificant as is evident from the data. Not a single person among both the sexes in the sample households were reported in this class in Naghutomi. It is also highlighted that there was no female participation in this sector among the sample households in Khudei.

Sexual division is less clear in most of the works in the traditional sector though the females are more active in animal husbandry and artisan activity, while both men and women are in equal proportion in cultivation and gathering activities. But activities connected with formal services, trade and business are works more with men than women.

It is significant that the segment which has moved away from land based production is largely represented in formal services, trade and business generally dominated by the men while women remain active in animal husbandry gathering and artisan activities leading to a sharper sexual division of labour. There is a greater equality between sexes in the participation of diverse categories of work though the major concentration takes place in cultivation and gathering.

The sexual division of labour in the traditional sector is well defined when the broad activities are broken into occupations or work processes. For example in cultivation, cutting of the forests, ploughing and threshing is dominantly a male activity while preparation of the soil, sowing and weeding are female activities. In animal husbandry milking and feeding etc., are female activities while collection of fodder and grazing are dominantly male activities. Artisan production like weaving, knitting is exclusively female tasks, while basketry, wood carving and blacksmithing are exclusively male occupations.

5. A study of the important occupations under the category of trade and business show that a very large proportion of the workers are engaged in petty trades such as in vegetables, betel nut and, selling of pork and beef etc. Females are numerous only in vegetable trade.

Teaching and jobs under the state Government seem to be the only occupations to which the literate segment is responding.

It is the primary schools in which a very large proportion of the workers in the formal services are employed. A study of the types of jobs under the state Government services indicate that only low paid tertiary employment is available to the village population. The largest number of employment is in the category of Class IV such as drivers, steno-typist, police constables, peons/chawkidars and sweepers.

The sample villages may not be a truly representative case study to permit generalizations for the state as a whole. However, some of the trends in work participation in the sample villages are worth noting :

a. The ecological bases of highland agriculture being limited, the population relies on a number other resources of work as sources of work.

b. Sexual divisions of labour is less clear in the traditional sphere but is emerging strongly in the non-agrarian tertiary sector.

MEMO LIBRARY
Acc. No. 103250
Acc. by
Date 23-2001
Class by
Sub Heading by
Enter by
Transcribed by