

OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE OF MANIPURIS IN BARAK VALLEY

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Abstract: *Occupational structure of a society indicate the engagement of several category of total population of any area etc. occupation means a position of productive engagement for earning income in order to meet both the material and mental needs to life. Therefore, occupation implies some kind of specialized work meant not only for personal survival and development but also for social and economic development. Manipuris settle in agrarian in nature and fairly underdeveloped. It is largely characterized by petty production on a very small scale largely meant for domestic consumption.*

As per the survey report 90% of Meiteis households are farmers directly or indirectly although 25.65% depend exclusively for their survival on agriculture. They work in other fields and also get economically involved in farming activities.

Industries are expected to produce more, employ more and generate more income. But every industrial unit does not produce the same result. The results depend upon the size of industries and also upon the productive of different inputs.

Keywords : Occupation, agrarian, Unemployment, Productive, Survival, Engagement.

1. Introduction

Occupation means a position of productive engagement for earning income in order to meet both material and mental needs of life. Occupation, therefore, implies some kind of specialized work meant not only for personal survival and development but also for social and economic development. Occupation comprises various gainful economic activities. Sentivities of the occupations are different. Some of them have high sensitivity while some. of them low sensitivity. For example, the response of primary sector to the change of the economy is not as fast as that of industrial and business communities. The change in the price mechanism of the industrial economy invites immediate reaction in the supply chain and demand structure. The reaction is reflected in the cost of production and sales price. Subsequently, the purchasing power of the buyer is also affected with its adverse effect on the pattern of consumption and saving. **It** is a fact that the rate of increase in income and employment is normally less than the rate of change in the price behavior.

Now let us look at the behavior of changes in agriculture sector where we come across a number of distortions and imperfections. The change in the price of inputs of agricultural sector gets reflected normally after the .harvest of the season. The rising cost of monetized inputs during the process of green revolution takes its shape generally after a long period of time. The slow sensitivity of agricultural sector is one of the invisible handicaps experienced by the peasant farmers, hose economic asset is fairly low as a result of which e question of self-reliance is_a mere cry in wilderness.

2. Occupational Structure of Manipuris (Meiteis)

The occupational structure of Manipuris in the Barak valley of Assam. On the whole the area where the Manipuris settle is agrarian in nature and fairly underdeveloped. It is largely characterized by petty production on a very small scale largely meant for domestic consumption. Commercialization is fairly limited. Marketable surplus is negligible. Market linkage is restricted to a few items of construction and medicines. There is acute problem of low labour productivity, factor immobility, limited occupational specialization and dearth of entrepreneurial spirit. Interestingly one finds high value of customs, tradition and other social institutions that minimizes the incentive to navigate the challenges and undertake new ventures.

The Meitei area as stated above is pre- industrial where the leading sector is primitive agriculture whose technology is not modernized. There is continuous interaction between human labour and natural resources not necessarily human- machine interaction. The main items of production are food and hand -made clothes. They remain contended with the noble gift of nature like plenty of water, rivers, lakes, forest and green fields. One observes also a new disturbing trend of deforestation and unabated exhaustion of small hillocks for multiplying earth works meant for constructions of different types at different levels. A new trend of unplanned massive destruction of natural resources, particularly the small beautiful hillocks is seen. It needs to be guarded against.

Agriculture in general and subsistence economy in particular is characterized by the scarcity of linkage effects. Agriculture has the weakest link with the economy. The stimulus given to the economy is weak and slow.

Prolonged dependence on agriculture is a sign of primitive economy. The continuous stagnation in agricultural and industrial product speaks of the backwardness of the region and also of the people. Structural stagnation is seen as a sign of growthless event. It must be recalled in this connection that a Particular region will develop when the people in the region is developed. The people on the other hand, will develop when the region is developed. That is to say both region and people should simultaneously develop because the two are reinforcing and mutually supportive. The development is the outcome of the occupational response of the hierarchy of the economy. One cannot expect any amount of growth in the absence of committed and sustained work of different sections e society. If we work in right direction in full swing, then we get development. This is what we do.

What type of work do we do is a relevant question. The meaning of decentralization of work may be referred to. In Europe and Japanese economy, decentralization of economic activities is marked by a functional linkage between the top and the floor. There is a functional connection between the last unit and mother unit. In a way, they work simultaneously and systematically towards a particular shared vision. Do we find such type of economic arrangement in underdeveloped areas like Barak valley where Manipuris settle? Largely the economic activities are marked by isolated, unplanned and disjoint pattern. With this unorganized form of social and economic arrangement one cannot accept the appearance of an impressive trend of development.

3. Agricultural Occupation

The picture of agricultural occupation is a mixed one in the sense that people in other occupations also are directly or indirectly involved in agricultural activities. The "occupational multiplicity" is evident. Although the percentage of population engaged only in agricultural pursuit is 25.56 in the three districts, those in civil service, business, defence service and private enterprise either lease out their land or engage agricultural labourer for "cultivation". In a way every family is agricultural family in the sense that even in the case of a teacher, or clerk or officer in civil administration, a labourer with his wife is used throughout the year on payment of say about Rs. 4000- 6000 per annum. They are given food and accommodation also. They work on all farms of the landowner. They attend on cattle. They prepare soil in the family garden. They plough the field. They do planning. They thistle the ground. They do harvesting . As such more than 90% of the households are directly or indirectly involved in farming in one way or other. In a way they may be treated as "farm-households".

District wise Presentation

One does not find much difference in the occupational structure of the three districts. The agricultural population i.e. those who do cultivation only - accounts for 27.43 percent in Hailakandi district, followed by 26.37 percent of Karimganj and 23.36 percent of Cachar.

Table- 01
Agricultural population of Manipuris
(as % in Barak valley, 2015-66 of the households' investigation)

District	Percent
Hailakandi	27.43
Karimganj	26.37
Cachar	23.36
Average	25.65

Source: Field Visit

One feature of agricultural activity is that labour productivity is generally low and that the production to meant only for domestic consumption. Large-scale commercial farming is very rare. As such the marketable surplus is also low. On the whole the agricultural atmosphere is characterized by the subsistence farming. Petty production of uneconomic holding without application of modern method. The small and marginal farms are widely prevalent. Irrigation is practically absent. Double cropping is found only in small part of the farms. 90 percent of the agri-land is used for cereals. Cropping pattern remains highly traditional with less percentage of land being devoted to the production of cash crops.

4. Landholding

As stated above 90% of Meiteis households are farmers although 25.65% depend exclusively for their survival on agriculture. They work in other fields and also get economically involved in farming activities.

Land is "mother input" for agricultural operation. Water is next to land in agricultural activity. Both are equally important. There are big desert of vast land because they cannot get water. Only land is therefore not enough. Given the fact that other complimentary inputs are available in the right proportion; the returns depend upon the size of the land. The farm size

will determine the kind of returns. The optimum farm size is determined with reference to (a) Plough unit (b) Work unit and (c) Income unit (Prof. A.M. Khusro, 1973). The minimum feasible holding is that size of the farm which keeps the farm and pairs of bullock fully engaged throughout the year and which generates income sufficient enough to meet both consumption and investment requirements of a farm household. Basic holding is that farm - size below which the operation is uneconomic and subject to high cost and diminishing returns. The economic holding differs from region to region depending upon the degree of fertility and other endowments. The criteria of sufficient income and durable employments are basic. The plough unit of land means the farms-size keeps the farm-animals fully engaged throughout the year. The work unit of land means that farm -size that keeps a farm-household economically engaged while the income -unit of land of land the farm size that generates sufficient income for current maintenance and also for future investment.

The whole exercise was promoted by the "disabilities or diseconomies" of small size while unduly big size is ridden with "disincentives of bad tenure". Both diseconomies and disincentives are not welcome. Below a certain size of land-holding, the farm may exhibit serious diseconomies of small scale. Family man-power, bullock power and lumpy or indivisible inputs may be seriously underutilized and costs per unit (acre) may be unduly high. In other 'words, farming may be a losing initiative.

When farm-size is too small, land is treated as a mere piece of idle property, - not as a source of enterprises and income. The temptation of commercializing the farming with better technique and efficient management is fairly low. At most, 'subsistence" is main consideration. There is no question of improving through innovation. In Europe Japan "Land" is treated as a source of industrial enterprise. They apply all economic laws. They aim at rising marketable surplus and income. Remember in Japan the production of one hectare of land can meet the requirement of 50 persons a year, while in India the production can meet requirements of only 5 persons. See the difference.

Looked at from all prospects, the holding pattern in Barak Valley - particularly, Manipuri inhabited areas is fraught with number of "disabilities". The pattern is marked by large-scale presence of marginal and small farmers which account 86.73 percent. The marginal farm-households account for 31.29 percent. The medium households, who hold a promising future, account only for 15.21 percent. One finds more or less, similar picture in the three districts.

Hailakandi has highest number of marginal farmers accounting for 57.35% followed by Cachar with 56.25%. So far as small-farm-households are concerned, Karimganj has highest percentage of 40.64%, followed by Hailakandi with 27.43 percent. By and large, the holding picture is marked by obvious domination of marginal and small farmers with all visible "disabilities". It is not therefore a surprise that Manipuris (Meiteis) remain in the rut of subsistence economy.

Table – 02
Holding size of Meitei households (2014-15) in Barak Valley

Holding Size	Karimganj	Hailakandi	Cachar
Marginal farms	96	230	207
(0 – 1 ha)	52.74 %	57.35%	56.25%
Small farmers	74	110	95

(1 – 2 ha)	40.64%	27.43%	25.81%
Semi-medium	10	40	56
(2 – 4 ha)	5.49%	9.97%	15.21%
Medium farmers	2	20	10
(4 – 6 ha)	1.09%	4.98%	2.71%
Large farmers	X	X	X
(6 ha and above)			

(Source :- Field Visit)

(Figures in the brackets indicate P.C. of the total holding sizes)

When the annual output from the marginal and small farms is too inadequate to meet the rising cost of living, the only is to work as casual day laborer under all kinds of odds and, disadvantages. The burden of shortage of income is reinforced and intensified by the changing behavior of consumption and rise in prices. The trend of "consumerism" is very fast. Globalization is at the threshold of every family. Many new commodities and new durables are seen on the screen of T. V. Besides, as stated above there is strong tendency of getting wild in the "status-symbol". People buy and consume, not for economic efficiency, but as a mark of higher social status. Blind imitation is a new danger. We hardly cut our coat according to our cloth. We do not have the culture of maintaining the family budget. Both in earning and spending, Manipurians have yet to learn from well-organized and advanced communities. The first step is "calculated learning" with a defined aim. Aimless learning is a wild learning.

It may be a futile exercise.

5. Landless Day labourers

To our surprise the figure of day-labour is on the rise. Day labourers are found in 27.74% of the investigated households in Karimganj. Day Labourer is also found in 36.04% of the households in Hailakandi. In Cachar the percentage of Meiteis families where labourer is found, is 28.09. They are landless. They have less asset.

Table - 03
Landless Day labourers
(as % of families)

Districts	Per cent
Karimganj	27.74
Hailakandi	36.04
Cachar	28.09

(Source: Survey)

The picture of huge percentage of marginal and small farmers read with a good percentage of landless causes labourer is perhaps a grim reminder of the fact that the economy of Meiteis needs a "through restructuring". We have "skills" in few fields. But the skill are not modernized and made competitive. The worse aspect is the terribly low social and economic horizon. We are fighting for limited achievement with very limited resources. Marginalisation is evident. Pauperization is seen. We feel "safe" in a "small" world but we are not "safe" in a long run. Invisible exhaustion takes place in one way or the other. We may have few lands; but people do hardly come forward to use that piece of land as a gold, as a

source of enterprise. Land remains treated as an idle property not being put to rotating pattern of cropping on commercial basis.

The interpersonal difference on small petty matters becomes a hurdle in the way of larger organized move. A few points should be kept in mind that when we have "man" and "land", then we can think of "something" positive; either a project of land or a project of skill. Production may be of goods or services. Even if you cannot act as "bridgehead" you can act as a "bridge". It is not a mere question of "fear of failure" but essentially a question of non-starter. 90% of land remains mono cropped. 70% of men also remain engaged with land-based activities: -that too only for months. They are busy with their own daily activities of survival. So-called educated young men come and go. Gossiping and sitting in a village "durbar" is a nice occasion for them. Availability of a small opportunity for personal glorification is considered important. They do not miss the chance of "idlying away" while the village feeder roads are muddy and dusty. The women folks; - mostly middle-aged, work round the clock. They clean the house. They wash clothes. They prepare food. They go to market. They go to the farm. They sell and buy. The pattern of living has, indeed, women face. But it must be noted that any society needs the active role of men for larger economic competition. Only women will not do. This is a hard fact of life.-

6. Industrial occupation

Industries are expected to produce more, employ more and generate more income. But every industrial unit does not produce the same result. The results depend upon the size of industries and also upon the productivities of different inputs.

The spread effects of the industries are assessed with reference to the size of investment, timing of investment and backward and forward linkages. The sustainability of the industrial unit is important as it provides the board length of time of the successful operation of the industrial unit on a new trajectory of upward scale.

But in less developed area there are many constraints on the expansion of industrial unit such as inefficient infrastructures (roads, transport, communication, water and power supply etc) less supply of skilled and disciplined manpower, absence of appropriate technology and static sufficient supply of raw material. Although much has been said about the efficacies of LPG (Liberalization, Globalization and Privatization), the utilization of local potential remains unanswered issue. The North- Eastern Region is said vast resources particularly hydro-resources. It has not been possible to tap even 10 percent. Besides, the small-scale units like handloom and handicraft and cottage and village industries have to compete II the mass production of the large-scale industries in the market. This becomes an issue of unequal competition inspite of a number of concessions and incentives given to small scale sector.

Both in term in prices and quality of the product the large-scale industries enjoy comparative advantage. The unit cost of production of the bigger enterprises is always less than those of village cottage industries. Hence, the competition between capital-intensive technique and labour intensive technique operates ultimately in favour of capital-intensive technique. Prof. Lewis theory of development based on labour surplus may be unrealistic. In the backward areas like Barak Valley particularly in Hailakandi, Karimganj and Cachar, the impulses of industrial development have yet to be initiated. The most discouraging feature of the entire area is the lack of entrepreneurial spirit in the absence of which the commencement of any worthwhile industry may not be possible. In

fact; what we find in the underdeveloped area covered by the three districts is "risk-aversion". Typically, the role of institutional finance is visibly low and restricted to a few agricultural activities. Industrial investment has yet to see its own light. There are many areas where a single bank branch is not available.

As such the tempo of industrial development is notoriously low in the Meitei inhabited areas. Although here and there in some isolated locations a few activities in handloom sector are seen. Even these activities are largely meant for domestic requirement. When one looks at the main market at Karimganj, Hailakandi and Cachar one can not see the indigenous products in any competitive way on a large scale in any shop establishment. Under this situation one cannot expect high rate of industrial occupation. It is therefore not a wonder that only 17.08 per cent of the investigated households are industrial workers in Karimganj, 17.99 . per cent in Hailakandi and 10.59 per cent in Cachar district. On the whole only 15 .22 per cent are found as industrial worker in the three districts as seen in the table;

Table No : 04
Industrial Occupation
(as % of investigated households)

Districts	Percent
Karimganj	17.08
Hailakandi	17.09
Cachar	10.59
Average	15.22

(Source : Field Visit)

Most of the industrial workers in the three districts belong to cottage and village industries like handloom, handicraft, carpentry, blacksmith, goldsmith, iron work, iron work, brickfield, tailoring, gur, muricheera, *chempak* etc. their income is extremely low and their market is also extremely limited. Employment is equally low. It is largely family based. As such, unless the whole atmosphere is revitalized under a new policy, the prospect of survival of even tiny units is very poor.

Although these tiny units have been age-old, there is neither technological upgradation nor skill development. Innovation is a thing of past and unknown. Innovation hardly takes place. The same technique continues in the same scale in the same atmosphere. The old Manipuri women with the basket on her head with '*cheera-muri*' typically speaks of the pass and present industrial scene of the three districts. In fact, the whole industrial atmosphere looks dull, dirty devoid of any sensitive attempt to find a place in the competitive world. The unorganized character of the industrial units speaks volume. New economic activities cannot be undertaken successfully with old, traditional and conservative relations. The "cluster approach" to industrial development may be rewarding in this area. The age-old wisdom and spirit of organizing small units can be produced in the new cut. The intervention should be based on any of the three or together:-

- A Cluster-development
- B Development based on identified product
- C Development based on identified skill.

7. Service

This sub-sector, interestingly, is the second largest in terms of employment. All those who have employed in civil and defense services come under this category. As stated above the literacy rate of Manipuris (Meiteis) in the three districts above matriculation is as low as 21.50% in Karimganj, 33.89% in Hailakandi and 39.79% in Cachar. In the event of no prospect of higher education being seen and job-opportunity in big enterprises being available in a restricted atmosphere of agrarian economy, those who are close to Xth standard and those who just completed Xth standard are always on look out for any chance of employment in lower category of jobs such as teaching in primary and junior high school, clerical jobs, constable and rifle man in a defence services etc. In Barak valley majority of employment is in this category. In a way the rate of employment is, it appears, high, while their position is very low. The low position has its inherent limitations in terms of low skill, low interaction and low vision. Even after thirty years of services in this category, when they retire, they stay at home "complacent and Comfortable" without any "risky" venture for higher organization and production, Even those who were in officer rank (say Deputy Inspector, Inspector, Sub-Deputy Collector, Bank Manager, Captain etc) do hardly undertake any noteworthy project which have a long chain of "spillover effects", They join farming. But they do not undertake "scientific and large scale commercial farming" as a modern project, The fear of failure is the constant disease. Besides, while the social contact was low during service-period, the base is restricted to a few extended families. The social mobilization with their vast experience has yet to pick up .

Cachar stands highest with 45.1 percent of households being employed in the services sector, by 33.16 percent in Hailakandi district. Karimganj does bad with only 25.82%. It is not a surprise that one finds a large population of marginal workers (68.278) and agricultural labourer.(45.735) in Hailakandi. The marginal workers increase by 31.6 percent annually. This means low-paid-casual works is the only hope; - a sign of rising marginalization and increasing poverty. There is need for a time-bound strategy to tackle this issue of poverty.'

Table No : 05
Services
(as % of households)

Districts	Percent
Cachar	45.1
Hailakandi	33.16
Karimganj	25.82

(Source : Field Visit)

8. Small Business

Manipuris do not belong to business-class. They are weak in establishing any meaningful contact with big business communities and companies. Besides by nature, they

are short tempered. They react very quickly. Quick reaction has its own limitations. If the decision is right it is fine. Otherwise, quick and wrong reaction created enemy and invites trouble. It reflects on its image of the community as a whole. It also speaks of the lack of maturity; False ego is suicidal in the long run. Scramble for a small matter is a futile exercise.

In the age of cut throat competition unless some one establishes a lasting and credible relationship with "Big Guns" and "Big Companies" even the small business may get into trouble. We have just started "Pan dukans" "Roads-Side Restaurant" and "Grocery shops" when the other communities have gone far ahead with multinationals.

Well, Karimanj does good in small business establishment with 13.18% of the households engaged in business, followed by Hailakandi with 10.47%. Manipuris in Cachar district go slow with only 8.19%. Perhaps, they face a very tough competition and barrier of their business communities who have deep, strong and organized roots. Manipuris have joined the transport sector in Hailakandi district particularly in Lala-Sub- Division. Many Tata Sumos owned by them are running from Lala town to Silchar. This is a good development. Profesionalisation is the need of the hour. We have to say good bye to "Occupational Multiplicity" of small world where labour productivity is very low. We cannot be "Jack of All Trades but Master of None". The present era encourage projectisation, specialization and professionalisation. Every economic activity should broad-based and institutionalized. Isolated competition may lose the linkages and arrest further expansion. We have to be united inaction inspired by a vision to capture greater market gradually.

Table : 06
Small Business
(as % of the households)

Districts	Percent
Karimanj	13.18
Hailakandi	10.47
Cachar	8.19

(Source : Ibid)

Table : 07
Occupational Structure of Manipuris (Meiteis) in Barak Valley
(as % of the households)

Sl No	Districts	Karimanj	Hailakandi	Cachar
1	Agriculture	27.43	26.37	13.18
2	Industry	17.08	17.99	10.59
3	Small Business	13.18	10.47	8.19
4	Services	25.82	33.16	45.1
5	Employment in small private establishment	17.03	10.72	12.5

Conclusion:

Over all study reflect that the Manipuris of Barak Valley is agrarian base economy and percentage of industrial base worker is nor difference on small petty matters becomes a hardly in the way of larger organized more.

Service sector, interestingly, is the second largest in terms of employment. All those who have employed in civil and defense services come under this category,

Manipuris do not belong to business – class but due to un-employment problem now a days the educated you generation started to join in the business to earn for living. From the survey report it is found that now engagement in small business is as percentage of household are 13.18 percent in Karimganj District, 10.47 percent in Hailakandi District and 8.19 percent in Cachar District.

Finally it is observe that occupational structure of Manipuris is something different with other neighbor communities living with us in some location and in same environment.

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