

Tribal livelihood patterns of Dhalai District, Tripura: a geographical study

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Summary

The present paper is an attempt to explore the influence of physical environment on its habitants (tribals) livelihood patterns on the basis of primary data collected from the households at Longtarai valley sub-division in Dhalai district, Tripura (North-East India). The undulating, hilly and sloppy terrains are used for jhum cultivation and rubber plantation and synclinal valleys are used for agricultural practices. The huge forest cover helps them to practice grazing and pasturing. The hot and humid climate of the study area promotes them to work hard in their own working place. Some of the tribals are dependent on forest-based products for their sustainable livelihoods and others are engaged in piggery, goatery, mushroom cultivation and poultry farming as a livelihood pattern for their survival and existence. The study reveals that the livelihood patterns of the tribals are more or less dependent on its physical environment. The present study winds up with a line that 'physical environment makes an influence on the livelihood patterns but it is the human who utilizes the physical environment to fulfil their own necessities.

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Introduction

There has been a rapid proliferation of livelihoods research during the last decade especially in the second half of the 1990s (Murray 2002). Livelihoods perspectives start with how different people in different places live. A variety of definitions are offered in the literature, including, for example, 'the means of gaining a living' (Scoones 2009). A livelihood encompasses income, both cash and in kind, as well as the social institutions (kin, family, compound, village etc.), gender relations, and property rights required to support and to sustain a given standard of living (Ellis 2007). A livelihood also includes access to, and benefits derived from, social and public services provided by the state such as education, health services, roads, water supplies and so on (Lipton & van der Gaag 1993; Blackwood & Lynch 1994). The term livelihood attempts to capture not just what people do but the resources that provide them with the capability to build a satisfactory living, the risk factors that they must consider in managing their resources (Ellis & Freeman 2005; Haldhar et al. 2021). The traditional livelihood system of tribal people (also known as adivasis) has been based on shifting cultivation and collection of edible forest produce. Such a system was rendered sustainable by a level and pattern of utilization of land and forest resources, which ensured their self-generating capacity. When shifting cultivation began to decline from about the second decade of the 20th century, and tribal people took to settled agriculture mainly on the uplands, they actively adapted to upland conditions by growing a large variety of crops. Such a

livelihood system also provided for a nutritionally balanced food consumption basket. All in all, one may say that tribal people were perhaps the earliest 'social ecologists': tribal people's economic conditions of existence were rooted in both subsistence and conservation ethics (Padhi and Panigraha 2011). Studies focusing on livelihood and environmental change were also an important strand of work. A concern for dynamic ecologies, history and longitudinal change, gender and social differentiation and cultural contexts meant that geographers, social anthropologists and socio-economists offered a series of influential rich picture analyses of rural settings in this period (Scoones, 1996). This defined the field of environment and development, as well as wider concerns with livelihoods under stress, with the emphasis on coping strategies and livelihood adaptation (Scoones 2009).

Studies on Livelihood

Livelihood perspectives have central to rural development thinking and practice in the past decade. Their conceptual roots have shaped the way they have emerged. This will enhance the capacity of livelihoods perspectives to address key lacunae of knowledge, politics, scale and dynamics of livelihood. A mobile and flexible term, 'livelihoods' can be attached to all sorts of other words to construct whole fields of development enquiry and practice. These relate to locales (rural or urban livelihoods), occupations (farming, pastoral or fishing livelihoods), social difference (gendered, age-defined livelihoods), directions (livelihood pathways, trajectories), dynamic patterns (sustainable or resilient livelihoods) and many more (Scoones 2009). Livelihoods approaches encompass a broad church and there has been some important work that has

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elaborated what is meant, in different variants of different frameworks, by 'transforming structures and process', 'policies, institutions and processes', 'mediating institutions and organizations', 'sustainable livelihoods governance' or 'drivers of change' (Davies & Hossain 1987; Hyden 1998; Hobley & Shields 2000; DFID 2004). Livelihoods research 'look around' at a moment of time to reconstruct change over time for effective 'policy-making' for the future. Three different approaches to livelihood research respectively the circumspective, the retrospective and the prospective. A Livelihood Diversity Index (LDI) was developed for income sources that varied significantly from household to household (Murray 2010). The tribals of Tripura are basically agriculturists; many of them still depend on Jhum or shifting cultivation. The Jhumias (Jhumias are the tribals who do Jhum cultivation) of Tripura were considered to be self-sufficient in food production in the past but the situation has changed radically now because the govt. of Tripura have banned the Jhum cultivation and therefore they may migrate to elsewhere for their livelihood (Das Gupta, 1986, 1996). Since a large part of the State is under forest cover, the problem of tribal livelihoods in forest areas is a challenging one in respect of both socio-economic and ecological development (Tripura Human development Report 2007) and has also come up with a number of innovative ideas to reduce the practice of Jhum, and promote alternate livelihoods as an alternative source of income for tribals (Sarkar 2010). The nature and dimensions of change in the lives and livelihoods have occurred (Ghosh & Choudhuri 2011). It is in this point of view that an attempt has been made to present an understanding of the adjustment between physical environment of the tribals and their livelihood patterns in Dhalai district, Tripura. The realistic portion of the study accentuates the existing livelihood patterns of the tribal peoples. The main objective of this paper is to seek the adjustment of tribal livelihood patterns with its living natural environment.

Area, People and Methods

The present study was held on among the primitive tribal groups of Dhalai district, Tripura, which is the largest district in state and dominated by tribal peoples. Dhalai district lies between 23°25'19" N to 24°15'37" N latitudes and 91°45'01" E to 92°10'26" E longitudes (Figure 1). The total area of this district is 2495 km². Dhalai district is composed of four sub divisions and five blocks of which 70% area is enclosed by forest area and 59 % of total population belongs to ST communities and wealthy in bio-diversity and natural resources. There are mainly five tribal groups are residing and usually they used to live in the 'Hills and Tillas' for their safety and ethnic reasons. Out of these four sub-divisions, the area of the present study was 'Longtarai Valley', a sub-division of Dhalai district, in total of 100 households has surveyed to gather appropriate data which will helpful to reach the goal of this study through 'Structured interview schedule' method on the basis of random sampling and 'Focus

group discussion' method for knowing their adjustments on physical environment.

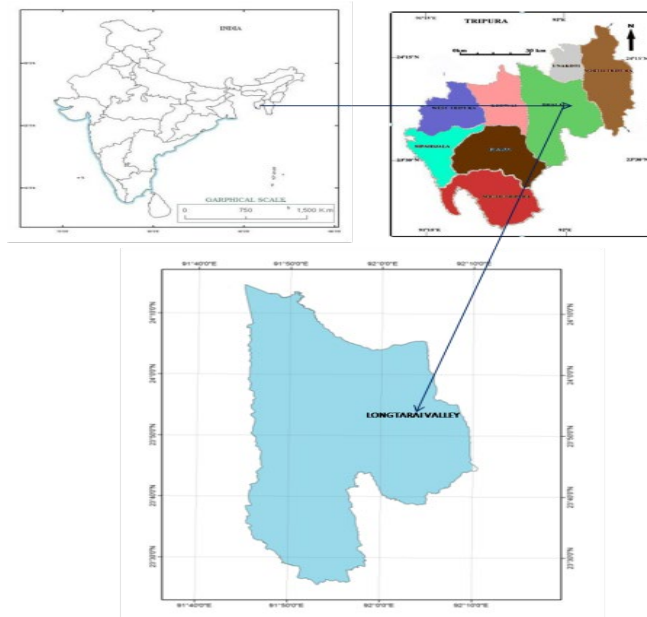


Figure 1. Location map of the study area
Physical background of the study area

The present study area is a most hilly area among the eight districts in Tripura. About 70% of the total geographical area of this district is covered by undulating terrains and narrow valleys. General height of these hills ranges varies from 130 to 759 meters. The hilly tracts in the state Tripura is composed of poorly fossil ferrous succession of alternating shale, mudstones, siltstone and sandstones of Neogene Group (Ganguly 1982). The hill ranges are usually anticline ridges and river valleys are synclinal valleys. There mainly two rivers- Dhalai and Manu drained through this district and generated large synclinal valleys which promote settled agricultural practices and settlements near the river banks as this area is facing problems of safe drinking water. The soil texture of the study area is fine loamy to coarse loamy soil group. The present study area is characterized by lateritic soil, younger alluvial and older alluvial soils with in some extent reddish yellow brown sandy soil. Dhalai district is having the largest Natural vegetation in Tripura. The study area comprises more than 70% vegetative area and largely is having moist mixed deciduous forest with some other herbs and shrubs. The climate of the study area is mostly hot and humid with moderate temperature. The area experiences three seasons i.e. summer, rainy and winter. The area usually gets immense rainfall during south-west monsoon season till September. The average annual rainfall in the study area is 2194 mm. the average no. of rainy days in the present study area is 98 days. The temperature of the study area varies 20°C to 34°C and in winter it goes down 9°C and in 2013, the lowest temperature falls near about 3°C. The humidity in general is high throughout the year. In summer season the relative humidity varies between 75 to 90 percent in morning and from 50 to 60 percent in the evening. In rainy season, the relative humidity is 80-90 percent in the morning and 60 to 70

percent in the evening. Low wind speed (0.4-4.5) km/hr. is found in winter season and high wind speed (8.4) km/hr. is found in summer and rainy seasons. Maximum wind speed of 8.4 km/hr. is observed during June 2005 and minimum wind speed of 0.2 km/hr. is observed during November 2010. The overall environment of Dhalai district is calm and pleasurable.

Livelihood patterns of the tribals

The tribal peoples those who are living in the study area usually do agricultural works. The lion portion of the people are engaged in agricultural practices usually they together practice Settled agriculture and Jhum cultivation though Jhum cultivation has been banned by the Govt. of Tripura because it is not scientifically good for the soil as well as for the environment too but the tribals of this area still practicing Jhum cultivation as it is one of their cultural practice they perform to hold their heritage and also is the way to feed their stomach. The aged persons in between 35-55 and more, males and females are usually worked together in the field preferably females. On the basis of households' survey, 46% of households are engaged in both jhum and settled agriculture as they have both hilly and plain piece of land to practice these both activities and utilized the land to perform both practices seasonally. Settled agricultural practice has done by only 8% of households and 11% of households are only practicing jhum cultivation as they don't have sufficient amount of land to perform both the practices. The 18% of households usually don't have sufficient piece of land to carry out any kind of agricultural activities. Therefore, some of them used to work as a laborer and generally they migrated to the nearby areas or urban areas in search of work and their migration are called short-distance migration as they come back home in the same day as the distance is not too far and others are engaged in mushroom cultivation, goatery, poultry farming, fishery, piggery. With the help of these livelihood patterns, somehow, they can manage to feed their stomach. Only 5% of household's tribal peoples are totally dependent on forest-based products like woods, fruits etc. and they made this as a livelihood pattern. With the help of this forest-based products somehow, they manage and feed their stomach to exist. Remaining 12% of households are having Govt. jobs, so their livelihood pattern is totally different from others and their standard of living is also decent. Therefore, they usually not interested to do any kind of agricultural practices but before getting Govt. jobs, they also did the same agricultural works. The tribals who practice settled agriculture and jhum cultivation both, now they are interested to perform rubber plantation which is a newly emerged livelihood for them. Rubber plantation gives them more income and upright standard of living. Instead of jhum cultivation in the hilly and tilla parts of the study area, they are practicing rubber plantation in the same piece of land, whereas Govt. of Tripura also promotes and helps the persons or families who wanted to practice rubber plantation. Nowadays, it is seen from the study area that the hilly

and tilla parts are full of rubber trees. In rubber plantation areas, the maximum laborers are male, hardly any female labor has seen. Females are usually doing agricultural activities in the paddy fields and in the fields of jhum and rest of time they are busy in household's works.

Impact of physical environment on tribal livelihood patterns

As the study area is mostly hilly and undulating in character, therefore the habitants who are living in this area generally utilized these terrains for their existence. The sloppy nature of the terrains, help the tribals to do jhum cultivation as they don't have much other choices. The families those who have plain lands near the river, they practice settled agriculture. On the other hand, those who have both plain and hilly piece of land, they perform both settled agriculture and jhum cultivation. The persons those who don't have any piece of land to practice agricultural works, they usually converted them as a laborer as the climate of this area is favorable for performing any kind of work as the climate of this area is hot and humid. The tribals of this study area are actually the mongoloids and they have very well-structured body to perform even hard works whereas the general people cannot do. The huge forest cover of this area is being utilized by the tribal peoples through grazing and pasture. The tribals who don't have sufficient land to practice agricultural works, they got help from the various Govt. schemes and introduce some livelihood patterns like piggery, goatery, mushroom cultivation, fishing and poultry farming etc. which give them quiet a decent income to feed their stomach and meet their other expenses which is essential for surviving in the modern era. Recently, a new livelihood pattern has emerged, called rubber plantation. The climate and soil of this area is apt for planting rubber plants as the soil of this area is acidic and helpful for growing rubber plants. As south-west Monsoon gives abundance rainfall to this area, therefore the rubber trees easily get moisture from the atmosphere and produce latex which ultimately gives rubber to us. The persons who have hilly and sloppy lands, they practice rubber plantation in place of jhum cultivation. As jhum cultivation is not scientifically good for the environment and has some problems like soil erosion, loss of soil nutrient, pollution of the environment through burning before planting jhum seeds. This livelihood pattern gains much popularity among tribals as it provides much income and decent standard of living and meet their expenditures like schooling of their children, medicine, clothes, modern gadgets and other essential household goods. Therefore, the livelihood patterns of the tribals in this area are dependent on the physical environment.

Conclusion

considering the present study area is a hilly district with undulating terrains and synclinal valleys and more than two-third of the district's geographical area under the grip of forest cover. The hilly terrains and sloppy tillas

are used to practice jhum cultivation and rubber plantation by tribals. On the other hand, in plain areas (floodplains and lungas) tribals generally do settle agricultural works and made their settlements nearby the fields. Some of the tribals are also practicing piggery, goatery, mushroom cultivation and poultry farming which are very much beneficial for them as climate of the study area permits them to do this kind of practices as a livelihood pattern. The huge forest cover and natural vegetation help in grazing and pasturing. Some aged tribal peoples are dependent on forest based products like collecting woods, fruits etc. which is also a livelihood pattern for the tribals. Tribals do fishing in the swamps and marshes which are formed as a result of depression in between two hilly terrains and in the middle of two tilla lands. The rest of the tribals are worked as a laborer. They worked so hard and sincerely because the climate is suitable for doing such works. So, it should be said that the tribal livelihood patterns are more or less dependent on its physical environment as they utilized their natural environment on their own wants. Therefore, in the concluding part, it is necessary to state that 'physical environment makes influence on the livelihood patterns but it is the human who utilizes the physical environment to fulfill their own necessities'.

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