



## LIVELIHOOD STATUS AND INCOME DISTRIBUTION PATTERN OF TIWA TRIBE IN MORIGAON DISTRICT OF ASSAM

**Dr. Mriganka Saikia**

*Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Dhing College, Assam.*

### **Abstract**

*The main objective of the present study to find out the livelihood issues of Tiwa tribes which is one of the major tribal communities in Assam. Tribal are one of the most underprivileged communities in various social, economic and other issues in our country. The problem of survival has become a major concern of tribal communities in the current scenario. Despite several steps taken from time to time by the authority for the welfare of tribal people, but they still stand at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. The present study designed to get about the idea of livelihood issues of Tiwa tribes in Morigaon district, which is located in almost in middle of Assam. The descriptive research design is adopted and a self-structured interview schedule was used in this research study to collect primary data. The study identifies critical concerns like large dependence on agriculture and its allied activities, which indeed necessitate prompt action from the authorities. This study suggests that the promotion of livelihoods among Tiwa tribes requires alternative occupation with sustainable development in the study area.*

**Key Words:** *Tiwa, Livelihood, Income distribution, Morigaon.*

### **Introduction**

Assam is a melting pot of many ethnic groups, sub-ethnic groups, Castes, tribes and different communities. The cultural assimilation of these different groups has made up a distinct Assamese culture. The STs are a major contributor of religious rituals, culture, language, farming and agriculture methods to the State. 2011 Census reveals that 16 numbers of ethnic groups are notified as scheduled castes (SC) and 25 numbers of ethnic groups as scheduled tribes (ST) in Assam with a variation of 22.2 per cent increase of SC and 17.4 per cent of ST than the last census. There are 3884371 tribal people in Assam, constituting 12.46% of Assam's total population (census, 2011). The major tribes of Assam are Bodos, Mising, Karbi, Dimasa, Sonwal Kachari, Rabha, Tiwa, Deouri etc. Ethnically Tiwas belong to the Monogoloid race. The Tiwa tribe resides in the areas of Assam and Meghalaya. A remarkable peculiarity of the Tiwas is their division into two sub-groups i.e. hill Tiwas and plains dwelling Tiwas. The hill Tiwas reside in the western most area of Karbi Anlong district (Assam) and north-eastern area of Ri-bhoi district (Meghalaya). Plain Tiwas mainly reside in the plains of southern bank of Brahmaputra Valley, in Morigaon and Nagaon districts. Tiwas constitute 5.17% to total tribal population of the state. Out of 1,36,777 ST population in Morigaon district, total Tiwa population is 1,09,530 i.e. 80.07% of its total tribal population. In Nagaon district, Out of 1,15,153 ST population, total Tiwa population is 58511 i.e. 50.81% of its total tribal population. The work participation rate among the scheduled tribes in Assam is 44% as against the corresponding figure of 44.6 % of Tiwa population (Census, 2011). Work participation rate of women greatly determines the character of socio-economic development and quality of life of a society [4]. Women of Tiwa community are very active in their household and agricultural activities. But it is seen that the process of their activities is primitive in nature due to their illiteracy, indifferent attitude in their work [5]. Morigaon is situated between 26.15 degrees North and 26.5 degrees North latitude and between 92 degree East longitude. Morigaon Town, the headquarter of the district is situated 78 Kms. from Dispur, the state capital. The district is bound by the mighty Brahmaputra River on the North, Karbi Anglong district on the South, Nagaon district on the East and Kamrup district on the West. Almost every year, Morigaon has been witnessing devastating floods causing huge loss of human lives, cattle and infrastructure. Recurring floods make the life of the rural people very difficult. The district has a population of 957,423 (2011, Census).

### **Methods**

The main objective of the study is to find out the livelihood issues of Tiwa tribes in Morigaon district of Assam. This specific study has tried to find out the socio-demographic status and to identify the livelihood pattern of the people. The descriptive statistics has been used for the study. A self-structured interview schedule was



administered. The sample size of the current study was 300 households randomly from the district. Systematic statistical analysis was used to know the current problems of the livelihood.

## Results

The livelihood issues of Tiwa tribes were analysed from the primary data collected from the field are interpreted in detail below: The livelihood of a household is defined on the basis of the sources of the household's income during the reference period of 365 days preceding the date of survey. So, only the income from economically gainful activities by household members is considered in the present study. There may be multiple earners in a household and there may be occupational diversification. But, for the sake of convenience, if there are multiple earners, the highest earner is considered as principal earner of the household. Depending on the occupation of the principal earner of the household, this study has categorised households under the following five occupations. These are,

**Cultivator:** A principal earner of the household currently engaged in agriculture (farming) and is either cultivating his own land, or is cultivating under tenancy, where area cultivated is owned by someone else (land owner).

**Agricultural labourer:** An individual whose principal earning is derived from agricultural wages is known as an agricultural labourer (Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee, 1956). The present study has found mainly agricultural labourers working in farming, dairy farming and also in rearing of livestock.

**Non-agricultural labourer:** A person whose principal income is derived from daily wage earning from non-farm activities is considered for the present study as a non-agricultural labourer. Examples of Tiwas working as skilled or semi-skilled workers include those in traditional handlooms for preparation of Tiwa garments, cane and bamboo products, unskilled technician working in electronic shop, all types of construction workers, among many others.

**Self-employed:** A person whose principal earning is by virtue of his/her own non-farm enterprises, where he/she is engaged independently in a profession or trade on own account, or with one or a few partners, is defined as self-employed in the present study. A household where the principal earner is self-employed is categorized as a self-employed household.

**Service:** A person is said to be engaged in service in the present study if he/she is a regular/part-time salaried employee under some private agency/enterprise or some government agency/enterprise in the non-farm sector farm enterprises and is receiving a salary in return which is not on the basis of daily or periodic renewal work contract (NSSO, 2011). This clearly includes people who are employees of any local, state, or central governmental unit or in any company.

Occupation wise percentage distribution of principal earner of the households of this study is shown in below table. An overwhelming majority (41.67) of principal earner of households in Morigaon district is found pursuing cultivation as prime occupation. In the selected district, 25 per cent principal earners are working as agricultural labour, followed by 18.33 per cent in service. Again, 8.33 per cent are working as non-agricultural labour and only 9.82 per cent principal earner of the households are self-employed.

Overall, 34.84 per cent principal earner's prime occupation is cultivation followed by 24.21 per cent agricultural labour, 16.06 per cent are in service, 13.8 per cent are working as non-agricultural labour and only 11.09 per cent principal earner of the households are self-employed. Thus almost 60 per cent of the principal earners (or even households) are engaged in agriculture and allied activities. This is indicative of a traditional farm based community which is still under a rural influence and is largely under the domain of the rural informal sector. Hence the occupational distribution is suggestive of a very limited degree of urbanisation or modernisation among Tiwas.



Occupations	Morigaon
Cultivation	125 (41.67)
Agriculture Labour	75 (25.0)
Non-agriculture Labour	25 (8.33)
Self-employed	20 (6.67)
Service	55 (18.33)
All	300 (100)

Figures in the brackets indicate the percentages of the total.

Source: Computed on the basis of primary data collected during field survey.

### Income Distribution Pattern of Tiwa Households

Income distribution pattern shows the relative economic conditions of the people. The major advantage of using income distribution pattern is to examine the sources of livelihood to identify the way in which these sources are related to income and inequality. Income levels of households are associated with the availability of work, the productivity of land, and individual human capital. From table 2, it clears that households with service dominate the higher income categories, because income earned from service is more reliable and more generous, as this income is regular. In this study, about 18.33 per cent households receive wage and salary income engaged in service. This accounts for major share of 43.41 per cent of all sampled income. According to the findings of the present study, by far the most remunerative occupation is service, as opposed to households with agricultural and non-agricultural labour. Besides wages and salaries earned from service, some households derive their income through self-employment though the percentage of self-employed as prime occupation is just 6.67 per cent of the selected households. These households are fairly earning as this is also rewarding. The income earned through self-employment accounts for 18.86 per cent of all income.

In contrast, both agricultural and non-agricultural households account for a relatively small portion of total household incomes because the wages they get are very low. Again, their earnings are also not as certain as in service.

Occupations	Percentage to Total Sample	Total Income (In Rs.)	Percentage share to Total Sample income
Cultivation	41.67	998704	18.86
Agricultural Labour	25.0	634754	11.99
Non-agricultural Labour	8.33	364565	6.88
Self employed	6.67	998995	18.86
Service	18.33	2298586	43.41
Total	100	4146793	100

Source: Computed on the basis of primary data collected during field survey.



About 25.0 per cent selected households under this study are engaged as agricultural labour but this work tends to be seasonal and the income accounts for only 11.99 per cent of total household incomes. Similarly, 8.33 per cent of selected households engage in non-agricultural work, but it accounts for only 6.88 per cent of total sampled incomes. Major proportion of our sampled households have found as cultivator households. About 41.67 per cent of selected Tiwa households are engaged in this occupation. However, the income they received from cultivation is modest and so agricultural income formed only 18.86 per cent of total household incomes. Thus, it clears the fact that there are clear differences in incomes contribution to total household incomes across occupation

Table-3 shows summary statistics of monthly per capita income (MPCI) across Occupation. The average value of MPCI is the highest (Rs.6384.96) of households with service corresponding to the lowest average of MPCI (Rs. 991.11) of agricultural labour households. The maximum value of MPCI is found at Rs. 8000 of households with service as against of minimum MPCI is of households with agricultural labour at Rs. 750.

Occupations	Max MPCI	Min MPCI	MEAN	SD
Cultivation	3875	800	1115.96	349.93
Agricultural Labour	1275	750	991.03	164.60
Non- agricultural Labour	1850	780	1012.96	304.56
Self-employed	7500	815	3936.35	2474.69
Service	8000	975	6384.96	2987.46
overall	8000	750	2131.85	1674.34

Source: Computed on the basis of primary data collected during field survey.

As per the recommendation of Expert Group (Rangarajan) 2014, households of rural Assam which per capita consumption expenditure are below Rs. 1009.66 are considered as living below poverty line. In the present study, the recommendation of Expert Group (Rangarajan) is considered in order to estimate the poverty ratio among Tiwas of Morigaon district of Assam. Table-4 shows that the average MPCE of agricultural labour households and non-agricultural labour households are Rs. 972.17 and Rs. 1000.55 respectively. It indicates that the incidence of poverty is more in agricultural and non-agricultural labour households among selected Tiwa households.

The average value of MPCE of cultivator households is found at Rs 1019.80 which is marginally above the poverty line considered for rural Assam i.e. Rs 1009.66. Occupation wise the highest average of MPCE is found households with service (Rs. 4874.88) which is followed by self-employed households in non-agriculture (Rs.2829.18).

Occupations	Max MPCE	Min MPCE	MEAN	SD
Cultivation	2550	800	1019.80	349.93
Agricultural Labour	1200	750	972.17	164.60
Non- agricultural Labour	1750	780	1000.55	304.56
Self employed	4500	815	2829.18	2474.69
Service	6670	975	4874.88	2987.46
Overall	6670	750	1738.47	1262.28

Source: Computed on the basis of primary data collected during field survey.

They are living below the poverty line. Almost 33 per cent people fall into this category, while the economic condition of cultivator households (41.67 per cent) also very depressive as their mean MPCE is only Rs. 1019.8. Thus the economic conditions of large number of Tiwa households are very deplorable.



### Policy Suggestions

1. Education is the key to reduce the farm distress and to diversify the livelihood of the households. The primary task of the government is to create awareness about the importance of education within the community irrespective of their current occupation and economic conditions.
2. Crop rotation, multiple cropping are extremely vital to raise yield per bigha as well as total annual output. Cultivators should be provided proper training on use of modern equipment (wherever possible), chemical fertilizers, pesticides and HYV seeds so that farm incomes can be raised.
3. Morigaon district has swampy lands and beels (inland water bodies) providing scope for fishing on commercial scale. This would be able to divert excess manpower from agriculture to other occupations.
4. Fishery-cum-poultry farm, fishery-cum-duckery and allied schemes may be provided so that households that live on daily wage and partly cultivation, may get better opportunity to enhance their earning capacity. The planners should try to use these unutilized but potential avenues to raise income of the poor and needy.
5. For livestock development there is a greater need to make a paradigm shift from production orientation to quality and cost orientation for generating higher profits and higher returns to self-employed in agriculture.
6. Most of the poor express their reluctance to bear the cost of education. So, the government and NGOs should provide free books, uniform and other allied facilities to the poor, especially, to the girl child.
7. Poverty alleviation schemes should be redesigned in such a way that the targeted families are in a position to create permanent assets which might help to generate sufficient incomes leading to a permanent improvement in their standard of living and become self sufficient.

### Conclusion

Livelihood, for Tiwa tribe in Morigaon district of Assam, is highly dominated by informal occupation. So the standard of their living is also very deplorable. To improve their livelihood status and raise their income, strategies must lay emphasis on the equitable and efficient delivery of public services, expansion of agricultural and non-farm sector, and the strengthening of food security and the informal sector. The official data on income and expenditure, health and educational attainment provided by the socio-economic institutions have to be reliable, relevant, quality-based, adequate, accessible, and supervised by expert research groups, but not administratively motivated. Otherwise, it will cause difficulties in policy implementation, research and financial assistance for fostering the well-being of the Tiwa people living in Assam.

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