INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT RESEARCH AND REVIEW

SOCIO ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SINGPHOS: A STUDY OF ASSAM AND ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Ashwini Machey*[1]

[1]Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Dibrugarh University, (Assam) India.

ABSTRACT

The Singpho tribe is one of the important ethnic tribe of North East India. They have been living in the hilly outskirts of the Patkai ravine bordering the Kachin state of Myanmar and Yunnan province of China since centuries. At present the Singphos are suffering from multiple problems and their socio economic condition is deterring. Therefore, the researcher felt it is imperative to study the present socio economic characteristics of the Singphos living in North East India. The study is based on field survey and the study reflected the worst picture in terms of socio economic characteristics of the Singphos.

Keywords: Singpho, tribe, socio economic, characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

India has the second largest concentration of tribal population in the world next only to Africa. There are 533 scheduled tribes as per notified schedule under Article 342 of the Constitution of India in different states and union territories of the country. They speak 105 different languages and 225 subsidiary languages. The languages spoken by Indian tribes can be classified into four major families of languages, viz. Austro-Asiatic family, Tibeto-Chinese family, Dravidian family and Indo-European family. The tribal population groups of India are called as Adivasi, Vanyajati, Vanvasi, Pahari, Adimjati and Anusuchit Jan Jati implying original inhabitants. The tribal population in India according to 2011 census was 104.3 million. This was more than the population of United Kingdom. The tribals formed around 8.6 percent of the country's total population. The population of the tribal had grown at the rate of 23.7 percent during the period 2001 to 2011. This is more than the decadal growth rate of 17.7 percent for the nation as a whole.

The North East India (NEI) is a colourful carpet of different indigenous tribal groups of Australoid, Mongoloid and Caucasoid origins with their own distinct culture, traditions, languages, cuisines, attires and life styles. The NEI comprises of eight incredible states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The habitants of NEI speak Tibeto-Burman, Siamese-Chinese, Austro-Asiatic and Indo-Aryan languages. According to the 1971 census there are 220 languages spoken in the NEI (excluding Sikkim). NEI is the home for more than 166 separate tribes consisting of 12.4 million tribal out of 45.5 million people. As per 2011 census this region has 27.3 percent tribal population.

The Singphos inhabited in the hilly outskirts of the Patkai ravine bordering the Kachin state of Myanmar and Yunnan province of China. The Singphos were most powerful tribe of the frontier for several generations. At present they are mainly concentrated in the upper part of the Tinsukia district and a small size population are inhabited in Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam and hugely found in Changlang and Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh.

The mainlands of the Singphos are India, Myanmar and China. In China they are known as Jingphow, in India as Singpho and in Burma as Kachin. According to the oral history of the Singpho tribe, their ancestors migrated from 'Majoi Singra Bum' or 'Kaang Singra Bum' means naturally flat mountain. It may be somewhere in the highland of Mongolia. It is believed that the Singpho tribe originally migrated from Mongolia in B.C. 700-800 and entered to the south west of Tibet almost in B.C. 600-300 and settled down in the Singpo valley over 400 years and nearly in B.C. 300 – A.D. 100 the Singpho entered Brahmaputra valley (Singda Laban).

According to Singpho scholar Manjela, the Singpho population in India is approximately 25000 in 2011. The 1991 census placed the Singpho population at 3575 in Arunachal Pradesh and a total population of 6442 in Assam according to official source of Margherita Development Block (2001 census).

The Singpho tribe has unique socio-economic-demographic characteristics with varied living patterns. The tribe lives in specified tribal areas, which are almost aloof from the mainstream of the society. Though, an important tribe of the NEI, not much study and research has been undertaken on the Singpho tribe. The Singpho tribe is facing many social, economic and demographic problems. The rate of social mobility is not very high, education and health condition is not satisfactory, demographically they are scattered, they have a low growth rate compared to other tribes of NEI. Traditionally, the Singphos live in deep forest and depend on forest resources and agriculture for their livelihood and most of the Singpho population lives below the poverty line. Low income and high incidence of unemployment, underemployment and high incidence of poverty are other economic problems. So, there is an urgent need of studying the various problems faced by the Singphos to address and understand their socio-economic conditions for providing feasible solutions.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The isolation location of the NEI from the main stream of life is hindering the economic activities of the tribals and beset with the multidimensional problems since centuries. The tribes of NEI are very backward in respect of economic, education and political matters. Though, a number of policies and programmes were initiated for tribal development during the post independence period by the government during different plans, but its fail excel socio-economic conditions of the tribals.

Quite a number of studies on tribal living condition brought forth in NEI. The tribes of the NEI basically encounter the low income and high incidence of unemployment; underemployment and high incidence of poverty. However, in most of the empirical studies the socio-economic condition is not clearly brought out.

The Singphos are still out of reach of development planning of the government. It is due to historical and socio-political reasons they remained far behind in respect of all round development. The British ruler did not take much interest to improve the backward conditions, particularly in respect of health and education. Even after more than six decades of independence, the Singphos are far behind from the main steams. They live in the remote villages fall prey to various contagious diseases due to non availability of pure drinking water, sanitation facilities, required calories and prevalence of huge opium used. There are only a few print documents available regarding their socio-economic and demographic aspect of the Singphos. Demographically the Singphos are small and economically very poor. In view of lags of the earlier studies the present study endeavors to enquire into the socio economic characteristics of the Singpho tribe of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

OBJECTIVES

The prime objective of the study is to trace the present socio-economic characteristics of the Singphos of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Another objective is to provide certain policy measures for the upliftment of the community.

METHODOLOGY

In this study both primary and secondary sources have been used. Secondary data were collected from government and non-government organization in the form of records, reports, census, books, newspapers, journals, thesis and internet data consisting of ethnographic, socio-economic and demographic records.

(a) Coverage: The Singphos are presently habitat in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh of North East India. The Singpho population of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh has been taken as the universe. Out of 30 highly concentrated Singpho villages of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, 6 villages have been taken as the sample for the study. Fifty (50) percent of the total Singpho households of each of the 6 sample villages have been randomly selected for investigation. Thus, the total sample Singpho households will be come 160 (out of 320) and 962 persons.

(b) Data Collection: The primary data will be collected through field study from the sample households of the sample villages with the help of a set of questionnaires prepared for the purpose. From the sample households required information has been collected from Head or any other knowledgeable person of the family.

(c) Data Analysis: The data have been analyzed by using tabular analysis with averages and percentages at appropriate places.

Table 1: Sample Design

State	Sample District	Sample Villages	Singpho Households	No. of Sample Households (50%)
Assam	Tinsukia District	Dibong	36	18
		Ketetong	68	34
Arunachal Pradesh	Lohit District	Namsai Singpho	20	10
		Lathao	14	7
	Changlang District	Mia Singpho	97	49
		Wakhetna	84	42
	Total		**320**	**160**

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study carried out from the 160 households of the Singpho tribe out of 320 households of the six (6) sample villages from Tinsukia district of Assam and Changland and Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh. Here an attempt has been made to study the socio-economic characteristics of the Singpho tribe.

Religion: Religion is a very important socio-economic variable, which play a vital role in the economic development and the growth of the population. Rigid religion and spiritual practice adversely affect on economic development and positive influence on population growth. The religion wise breakup of the sample population reveals that the Singphos have faith in Buddhism. But the Singphos maintain simultaneously the traditional religion of animism and worship to their forefathers.

Language: The population under the present study use Singpho language in their communication. The Singpho language is belonging to Tibeto-Burman family. To communicate other people they use broken Hindi and broken Assamese. The study reveal that there is no school for Singpho language in Assam but it has been found two school in Arunachal Pradesh where Singpho language taught as a third language.

Type of Family: Family is the basic universal social institution. It fulfills the needs and performs functions which are indispensible for the continuity, integration and change in the social system. The Singpho society is a patrilineal joint family as well as nuclear family. In the study it is found that the dominant form of the family structure is joint family, i.e. 55 percent and that of the nuclear family structure is 45 percent.

Family Size: An attempt has been made to distribute sample households by the size of family members. It is been always consider a small size family is good for all around development of a household. The following table gives an idea about the size of family members of the sample households of the Singpho tribe.

Table 2: Distribution of the Sample Households by the size of Family Members

No. of Family members	No. of Households	Percentage
Up to 4	26	16.25
5 – 8	98	61.25
9 and above	36	22.50
Total	**160**	**100**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

From the above table it is observed that most of the family consist 5–8 members (61.25 percent). Whereas 16.25 percent households have the family members up to 4 and 22.50 percent of households are having 9 and above family members.

Age Distribution of the Sample Population: Age is the important factor which determines the work force and occupation status of the population. The information regarding age distribution of the sample households has been presented in the table below.

Table 3: Distribution of the Sample Population by Age Composition

Age group	Frequency	Percentage of Age group	Percentage of Dependency	Percentage of Working Population
0-14	110	11.43	11.43	-
15-30	340	35.35	-	68.82
31-45	205	21.31		
46-60	117	12.16		
60 +	190	19.75	19.75	-
Total	**962**	**100**	**31.18**	**68.82**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

It appears from the above table that the working population is 68.82 percent (excluding age group 0-14 and 60 +) and dependent and old age population record 31.18 (11.43+19.18) percent.

Sex Composition: Sex composition is another important socio economic variable. Which show the numbers of female per 1000 male persons.

Table 4: Distribution of Sample Population by Sex

Sex	No. of Family Member	Percentage
Male	498	51.77
Female	464	48.23
Total	**962**	**100**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

It is evident from the table that 51.77 percent male as against 48.23 percent female members. The sex ratio has been estimated 931 females per 1000 males, which is less than state sex ratio (954 females per 1000 males in 2011) and that of national (940 in 2011).

Educational Status: The information regarding educational attainment of the population of sample households has been presented below.

Table 5: Distribution of Sample Population by Their Educational Level

Level of education	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate and not eligible to school	346	36.00
Up to Primary level (Class I to IV)	168	17.46
Up to M. E. level (Class V to VII)	149	15.49
Up to Matriculation level (Class VIII to X)	148	15.38
Up to Higher Secondary level (Class 10 + 2)	120	12.47
Graduate	27	2.81
Post Graduate and more	4	0.42
Total	**962**	**100**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

The level of educational attainment of the surveyed population is not satisfactory. It shows in the table that illiteracy (and not eligible for school that is below 4 years) rate is 36.00 percent which is more than national average. Moreover, up to the higher secondary level place 60.80 percent and graduate and post graduate place 2.81 and 0.42 percent respectively.

Occupational Pattern: Occupation as an activity has important place in the economy. It is undertaken for the sake of income generation. The Singphos are basically agriculturist (59.86%). However, occupational distribution is observed among the Singphos. 3.40 percent

persons engage in service; while 2.12 percent in business, 0.58 percent in professional, 0.70 percent wage labour, 17.38 percent small tea grower, 5.87 percent unemployed and 10.09 percent dependents.

Table 6: Distribution of Sample Population by the Nature of Occupation

Nature of Occupation	No. of Working Population	Percentage
Service (both government & private)	29	3.40
Business	18	2.12
Professional	5	0.58
Agriculture	510	59.86
Daily Wage Earner	6	0.70
Small Tea Grower	148	17.38
Unemployed	50	5.87
Does not Arise (Either Old or Student)	86	10.09
Total	**852**	**100**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

N.B. In the present study of distribution of sample population by the nature of occupation age group (0 – 14) is excluded.

Sector-wise population: It tells us on what sector do the people of a community depend for their livelihood.

Table 7: Distribution of Sample Population by Sector-wise

Sectors	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Primary Sector	352 (53%)	312 (47%)	664
Secondary Sector	-	-	-
Tertiary Sector	40 (77%)	12 (23%)	52
Total	**392 (100%)**	**324 (100%)**	**716 (100%)**

Source: Compile by the researcher.

It has been observed from the table that 664 and 52 persons engaged in primary and tertiary sector respectively.

N.B. To compile sector wise population unemployed, dependent and age group (0-14) are excluded.

Family Income: Income has profound influence on the socio-economic status of a family. In calculating the yearly income of a sample households the all source of income have been taken into consideration.

Table 8: Distribution of Households by Monthly Family Income

Level of Income (in Rs.)	No. of Households	Percentage
1000 – 2000	22	13.75
2001 – 4000	18	11.25
4001 – 6000	21	13.12
6001 – 8000	16	10.00
8001 – 10000	17	10.62
10001 – 15000	16	13.12
15001 – 20000	10	6.25
20001 – 25000	13	8.13
25001 – 30000	10	6.25
30001 – 35000	10	6.25
35001 and above	7	4.37
Total	**160**	**100**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

It is evident from the table that among the surveyed households only 4.37 percent has annual income more than Rs. 35000 is reported. The sample households belonging to 500-2000 category has highest 13.75 percentages, followed by 13.12 percent of 10001-15000 category.

Housing and Living condition: Better housing and living condition is an important indicator of quality life to live as well as standard of living of the people. The study depict that the housing conditions of the universe as tabulated below-

Table 9: Distribution of the Sample Households by Type of House

Type of House	Number of families	Percentage
Pucca	36	22.5
Semi – Pucca	19	11.87
Chang Ghar	105	65.63
Total	**160**	**100**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

It is evident from the table that 65.63 percent of the total households live in Chang Ghar; while 11.87 percent live in semi-pacca and 22.5 percent in pucca houses.

Table 10: Distribution of the Sample Households by the nos. of Living Rooms

No. of living Room	No. of Households	Percentage
1 to 3	40	25
4 to 6	86	53.75
7 and above	34	21.25
Total	**160**	**100**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

Above table presents the number of living rooms of the sample households. It appears that 25 percent of households are having 1-3 living room followed by the number of household's having 4-6 living room (53.75%) and about 21.25 percent are having 7 and more living rooms.

Table 11: Distribution of the sample households by Toilet Facility

Type of Toilet	No. of Households	Percentage
Sanitary	23	14.37
Pit	130	81.25
Open	7	4.38
Total	**160**	**100**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

Above table reveals that only 14.37 percent households enjoy sanitary toilet facilities, 81.25 percent pit and 4.38 percent open toilet of the sample households. Therefore, it never is a satisfactory situation regarding toilet facilities. On the basis of collected data the hygiene condition of the Singphos is not satisfactory. It is found that only 14.37 percent of the sample households have sanitary toilet while 81.25 percent have pit toilet and 4.38 percent have no toilet facilities.

Drinking water facility is immense essential for good health. The source of drinking water facility scenario is highlighted as the following table.

Table 12: Distribution of Sample Households by the source of Drinking Water Facilities

Source of Drinking Water	No. of Households	Percentage
Pond	-	-
Well	3	1.87
River	10	6.25
Tube – well	147	91.88
Water supply	-	-
Total	**160**	**100**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

From the table 13 it is evident that the 91.88 percent households enjoy tube-well for drinking water while 6.25 percent river and 1.87 percent well. There is no any water supply facility among the sample villages.

Table 13: Distribution of Sample Households by Source of Lighting

Source of Lighting	No. of Households	Percentage
Electricity	120	75
Kerosene	40	25
Total	**160**	**100**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

It has been observed from the above table that most of the households have electrification (75%) as the source of lighting but quality of power is poor as reported by respondents; while 25 percent household used kerosene for lighting.

Table 14: Distribution of Sample Households by Source of Cooking

Source of Cooking	No. of Households	Percentage
L. P. G.	36	22.50
Firewood	109	68.13
L.P.G./Firewood	15	9.37
Total	**160**	**100**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

It is clear from the above table that 22.50 percent use LPG as source of cooking, while 68.13 percent firewood and 9.37 percent households use both LPG and firewood.

Table 15: Distribution of Sample Households by Average Land Holding

Land Holdings (in bigha)	No. of Households	Percentage
1 – 2	8	5.00
3 – 5	45	28.13
6 – 10	25	15.62
11 – 15	12	7.50
16 – 20	10	6.25
21 – 25	22	13.75
26 – 30	25	15.62
30 and above	13	8.13
Total	**160**	**100**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

It is seen from the table that size of land holding of the Singpho are large. Among the sample household around 51.25 percent recorded they have more than 10 bigha land.

Source of Food: In the past the Singphos maintained self-sufficient village economy. In the study as a component to analyze this self sufficiency, a proxy variable source of food for consumption has been considered. The following table shows the source of food of the sample respondents.

Table 16: Distribution of the Sample Households by Their Source of Food

Source of Food	No. of Households	Percentage
Homestead and Forest	7	4.37
Homestead and Market	105	65.63
Market	48	30
Total	**160**	**100**

Source: Field survey data, 2013

It has been appeared form the table 16 that most of the sample households (65.63 percent) depend on homestead and market and 30 percent depend on market for their day to day consumption which implies that the Singphos present economy are not self sufficient. It also appears that only 4.37 percent of the households consumed food from their own production. Thus, it can be concluded that the Singphos are not self sufficient with respect to the production of foods and have to depend on the market even they live in villages and forest areas.

MAJOR OBSERVATIONS

On the basis of the field survey data regarding socio economic characteristics of the Singpho tribe, some major observation can be summed up as follows:

1.   The Singphos are faith in Buddhism and side by side they practice worship of their forefather.

2.   They use Singpho language for day to day communication and with other they use Broken Hindi and Broken Assamese.

3.   55 percent of surveyed households are joint family.

4.   The study has found that the working population size contain 68.82 percent.

5.   Educational attainment of the sample population has been found poor. There are 36 percent population recorded illiteracy.

6.   59.46 percent surveyed Singpho population engage in agriculture.

7.   Living and hygiene condition of the Singphos are not satisfactory. Study found that the majority (65.63 percent) of houses are Chang Ghar, with no electrification, no proper sanitary system, insufficient living rooms etc.

8.   It has found in the study that the size of land holding is quite satisfactory.

9.   Sex ratio estimated 931 females per 1000 males which is less than state sex ratio i. e. 954 females per 1000 males (2011) and the national 940 (2011).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

It can be concluded from the study that the socio-economic condition of the Singpho tribe is not satisfactory. Thus the Singphos rightly deserve the status of scheduled tribes. On the basis

of present study, the following are put forward for the improvement of the socio economic conditions of the Singpho tribe of North East India.

1. There is an urgent need to proper implementation of the tribal development policies by the Government.
2. Special schemes should be implemented for the improvement of the education level and health facilities of the Singpho tribe.
3. Steps should be taken to control opium consumption among the Singphos.

REFERENCES

1. Bhatta SC, Bhargava GK. Land and People of Indian States and Union Territories (36 Volumes), Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2005.
2. Borah KC. The Singphos – A Demographoc Profile", Department of Economics, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, 2006.
3. Basu S. Need for Action Research for Health Development among the Tribal Communities of India. South Asian Anthropologist 1996; 17(2): 73-80.
4. Das GN. Tribal Development in North-East India, Director, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Schedule Castes, Jawaharnagar, Guwahati, 2008.
5. Devi SA. Socio Economic Conditions of Tribes, Sonali Publications, New Delhi 2005.
6. Dutta PC. The Singpho, Director of Research, Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar, 1990.
7. Gait E. A History of Assam, EBH Publishers (India), Guwahati. 2008.
8. Mahanta J. Singphos of North East India, DVS Publishers, Panbazar, Guwahati. 2011.
9. Ningkhee R. Singpho Samaj Aru Sabhyata", Published by Folk Cultural Research Centre of North East India, Nagaon. 2008.
10. Rajkumar S. Singfau Janagoshthi, Assam Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat, 1982.
11. Rao SM. Tribal Economy, The Associated Publishers, Kacha Bazar, Ambala Cantt, India 2009.
12. Singda Laban – a book of Singpho history, p- 4.
13. Vidyarthi LP, Rai BK. The Tribal Culture of India, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi (1st edition), 1976.