

Workforce Participation of Schedule Tribes in Assam, India

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Abstract:

Assam holds and supports a large proportion of tribal population, highly differentiated in terms of ethno-lingual characteristics as well as economic responses to their habitats. There are as many as 23 tribal communities which constitute 12.82 per cent of the total population of the state. The tribes of Assam may broadly be divided into two categories: plain tribes and hill tribes. Thus their workforce participation also varies depending on their economic base and prevailing social practices. Workforce is a very significant socio-economic attributes of population. It exerts significant influence on social, cultural and economic characteristics of any society. Besides physical resource base and advancement of science and technology, status of scheduled tribes in the society and their historical background are the most important influencing factors in case of workforce participation of scheduled tribes. Thus, based on census data of 2001 an attempt has been made in this paper to examine inter-tribal differences in workforce participation among the major tribes of Assam and to analyse sex disparity in work participation between male and female among the tribes.

Key words: Schedule Tribe, Workforce Participation, Sex Disparity, Assam, India.

1. Introduction

Workforce composition is a significant aspect of any society. It logically refers to the economic categories into which workers are differentiated. An economically functioning society involves operations of various functions and which cannot be performed by the entire community hence different group of workers are engaged to perform different works to meet out the needs of the society according to the ecological, political, cultural and economic background of the regions. No single component of the workforce, however, operates in isolation. In each part of the territory occupied by a cultural group involves several economic processes to exploit and utilize the available natural resources and culturally induced needs of society. Therefore, workforce structure deals with description and interpretation of the social pattern of the categories of workers as put forth by the census of India and that of these categories as a part of nature of areas.

The objective of this paper is to study workforce participation of major tribal groups in Assam and to analyse sex disparity in work participation. Here an attempt has been made to examine inter-tribal variation in workforce participation.

2. Database and Methodology

The present study entirely depends on secondary data, which are taken from the different Census of India and other relevant government publication of Directorate of Economics and Statistics for the period of 1991 to 2001. Methods adopted in the present study are simple statistical calculation like per cent and graphs. To analyse the sex disparity in workforce

participation, Sopher's Disparity Index has been used. Sopher's Disparity Index is originally stated as follows:

$$D_s = \log (X_2 / X_1) + \log (100 - X_1) / (100 - X_2)$$

Where $X_2 \geq X_1$ and X_2 and X_1 are Work Participation Rate of alphas and non alphas respectively.

3. Assam and its Tribal Composition

Assam is one of the seven states of Northeast India. It is situated within 24° to 28° North latitudes and 89° 42' to 96 ° East longitudes. Assam is bounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on the north, Meghalaya and Tripura on the south, Manipur, Nagaland on the east and West Bengal and Bangladesh on the west. Assam covers a territory of 78,523 sq km, roughly a fourth of it comprising rugged hills and the rest verdant alluvial plains out of which 78,088sq km is occupied by rural and 485 sq km is occupied by urban areas. The state of Assam is divided into 28 districts. Assam is blended with hills and plains. Based on rainfall, terrain and soil characteristics, Assam State has been broadly delineated into the following six agro-climatic zones: A. North Bank Plains B. Upper Brahmaputra Valley C. Central Brahmaputra Valley D. Lower Brahmaputra Valley E. Barak Valley and F. Hills

Assam has an agricultural based economy and more than 70 per cent of the population depends on agriculture as their primary source of livelihood. Rice is the main crop cultivated by the people. In the interior hill areas, the tribal people practice shifting cultivation. The tribal people raise mixed crops along with paddy in jhum cultivation. Racially, there are a number of ethnic groups in Assam including the indigenous tribal communities professing different religious faiths and beliefs and speaking different languages and dialects.

Assam is one of the most ethnically diverse states in the country. A number of ethnic groups are living in the state. Table 1. depicts that total tribal population in the state, according to the Census of India 2001. It has been recorded as 33, 08,570 accounting for 12.41 per cent of state population. The decadal growth rate of tribal population in the state is estimated as 15.15 per cent as compared to 18.92 per cent of total state population growth during 2001. Among the main tribes of Assam, Boros and Miris together account for roughly half of the total tribal population of the state. Boros alone constitute about 41 per cent of the total tribal population, followed by Miris with 18 per cent, Karbis with 11 per cent, Rabha with 8.4 percent and Sonowal Kacharis with 7 per cent. Lalung, Dimasha, Deori constitute 5.2 percent, 3.4 percent and 1.2 percent respectively. Apart from these major groups of ST population there are a few other minor schedule tribes like Chakma, Hmar, Hajong, Lakher etc. together constitute about 5 percent of the total ST population of Assam.

Table 1. Tribal Population in Assam during 1991 and 2001

Population			Percent of Total Tribal Population in the State	
Tribe	1991	2001	1991	2001
Boro	11,84,569	13,52,771	41.12	40.9
Miri(Mishing)	3,81,562	5,87,310	13.27	17.8
Mikir(karbi)	3,55,032	3,53,513	12.35	10.7
Rabha	1,35,905	2,77,517	4.73	8.4
Kachari(Sonowal)	1,14,779	2,35,881	3.99	7.1
Lalung	1,12,424	1,70,622	3.91	5.2
Dimasa	84,654	1,10,976	2.95	3.4
Deori	32,633	41,161	1.14	1.2
Others	4,72,863	1,78,819	16.45	5.3
Total Tribal Population	28,74,421	33,08,570	100.00	100.00
Total State Population	2,24,14,322	2,66,55,528		

Source: Census of India, 1991 & 2001.

4. Results and Discussion:

4.1. Work Participation Rate (WPR) among Scheduled Tribes (ST):

WPR denotes the percentage of total workers i.e. total main and marginal workers to the total population in an area. The total WPR of the ST population in Assam is 43.23 percent, of which male participation rate is 50.48 percent and female is 35.76 percent. It indicates that the proportion of Scheduled Tribe male workers is comparatively higher than the female workers indicating a low economic status of women in their society. The females are generally engaged in household domestic works or other unorganized sector of economy and therefore, they are not included in the working population by the census of India.

Table.2 Work Participation Rate of the Different Schedule Tribe, 2001 (In percentage)

Tribe	Work Participation Rate			Sex Disparity
	Person	Male	Female	
Boro	40.85	49.93	32.10	0.32
Miri(Mishing)	32.84	43.84	21.37	0.45
Mikir(Karbi)	40.25	46.02	34.26	0.21
Rabha	41.07	51.21	30.65	0.37
Kachari(Sonowal)	45.79	53.18	37.34	0.25
Lalung	42.51	51.80	33.08	0.22
Dimasa	38.86	46.95	30.36	0.30
Deori	55.45	57.96	52.88	0.07
All Schedule Tribe	43.23	50.48	35.76	0.25

Source: Special Tables for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2001

Among the major STs in the state, Deori have recorded the highest WPR of 55.45 per cent. It is lowest among Miri (32.84 per cent). Deori have recorded almost equal participation of male and female in the workforce with 57.96per cent male and 52.88per cent female WPR. On the contrary the gender gap in WPR is quite significant among Miri(male 43.84 per cent,

female 21.37 per cent), Rabha(male 51.2 per cent, female 30.65 per cent), Boro (male 49.93 per cent, female 32.10 per cent),Lalung (male 51.8 per cent, female 33.08 per cent), and Dimasa (male 46.95 per cent, female 30.36per cent).The disparity index is positive for all the tribes ranging from 0.07 to 0.45. Deori have the lowest sex disparity with 0.07 disparity index but in contrast of that Miri have the highest disparity in work participation with 0.45 disparity index. The graphical representation of Work Participation Rate and sex disparity on work participation rate is given below in the Figure.1and Figure.2

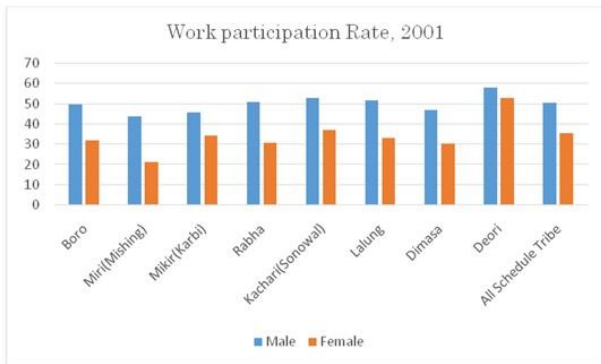


Figure.1

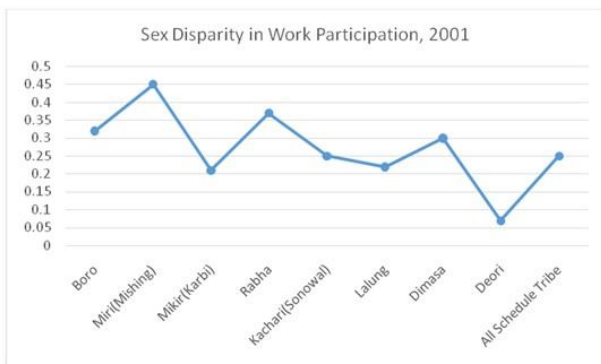


Figure.2

4.2. Work Participation Rate among Schedule Tribes in Rural and Urban Areas:

The cause of significant variation of rural-urban and male-female work participation can be attributed to the availability of infrastructural facilities coupled with prevailing social system and status of women in the backward rural society. The economic opportunities for both rural and urban areas for illiterate socio-economically backward scheduled tribe people are limited. The low rate of female work participation both in rural and urban areas is due mainly to the low female literacy rate and low educational attainment level which resulted in the low percentage of work participation. Sex disparity in work participation is found to be comparatively higher in the urban areas than the rural areas. Among tribes Deori (0.07) have lowest sex disparity and Miri (0.44) have the highest sex disparity in Rural Work Participation Rate (RWPR).

In Urban Work participation Rate (UWPR) among tribes Boro have recorded the highest WPR of 56.79 per cent. But the gender gap is very significant with 87.6 per cent Male Work Participation Rate (MWPR) and only 24.12 percent Female Work Participation Rate (FWPR). Thus the sex disparity index among Boro (1.23) is also very high. In UWPR sex disparity is high for all the schedule tribes in Assam.

Table.3 Rural Work participation Rate (RWPR) of STs in Assam, 2001 (in percentage)

Tribe	Person	Male	Female	Sex Disparity
Boro	41.18	49.52	32.69	0.30
Miri(Mishing)	32.52	43.29	21.31	0.44
Mikir(Karbi)	41.37	46.77	35.77	0.19
Rabha	41.30	51.29	31.05	0.32
Kochari(Sonowal)	46.83	54.46	39.02	0.27
Lalung	42.96	51.96	33.82	0.32
Dimasa	39.96	47.52	32.07	0.28
Deori	57.10	59.10	55.10	0.07
All Schedule Tribe	43.87	50.84	36.72	0.25

Source: Special Tables for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2001

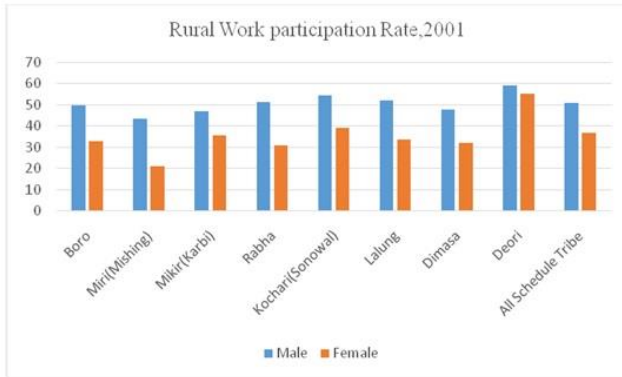


Figure.3

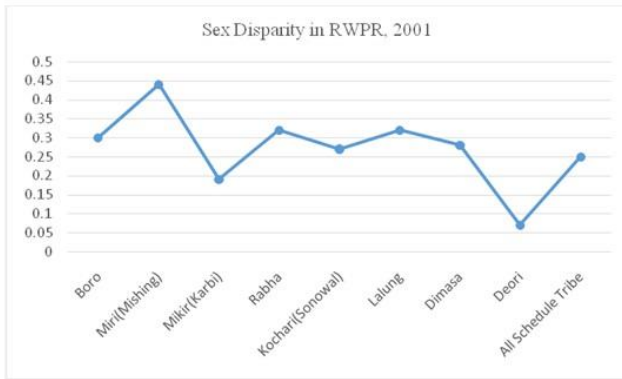


Figure.4

Table.4 Urban Work participation Rate (UWPR) of STs in Assam, 2001 (In percentage)

Tribes	Person	Male	Female	Sex Disparity
Boro	56.79	87.60	24.12	1.23
Miri(Mishing)	50.57	72.88	25.12	0.90
Mikir(Karbi)	27.97	37.84	17.44	0.45
Rabha	31.49	48.30	13.63	0.76
Kochari(Sonowal)	31.74	48.24	14.24	0.74
Lalung	28.87	46.95	10.46	0.87
Dimasa	29.39	42.17	15.19	0.50
Deori	29.60	41.51	16.04	0.56
All Schedule Tribe	30.00	43.39	15.57	0.61

Source: Special Tables for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2001

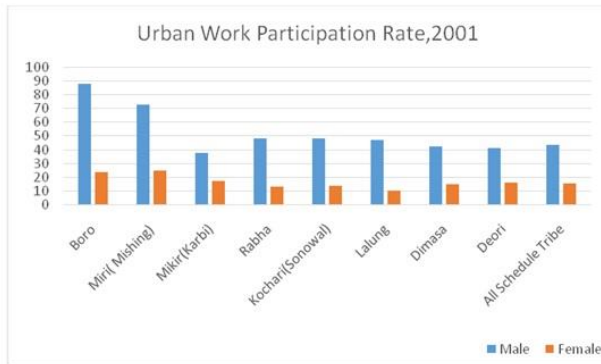


Figure.5

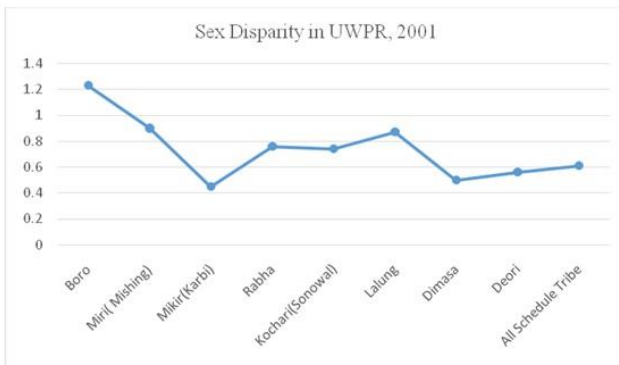


Figure.6

4.4. Inter-tribal variation in workforce pattern:

The data on the distribution of working is presented in Table.5. Among total main workers, male workers constitute a greater proportion than female workers for all the tribes. But female marginal workers are more than male workers which is same for all the tribes. So negative sex disparity can be seen in marginal workers. Lalung have highest sex disparity.

Table5. Main and Marginal Worker of STs in Assam, 2001

Tribes	Main Workers				Marginal Workers			
	Person	Male	Female	Sex Disparity	Person	Male	Female	Sex disparity
Boro	68.59	84.44	43.74	0.83	31.40	15.55	56.28	-0.83
Miri	57.72	71.47	41.69	0.54	42.27	28.52	58.30	-0.54
Mikir	67.83	82.44	47.46	0.70	32.16	21.29	52.53	-0.70
Rabha	67.19	84.26	37.90	0.86	32.80	15.73	62.09	-0.86
Kachari	60.87	77.25	36.53	0.77	39.12	22.74	63.46	-0.77
Lalung	64.89	84.59	33.58	1.03	35.10	15.40	66.41	-1.03
Dimasa	70.20	86.50	43.71	0.91	29.79	13.49	56.28	-0.91
Deori	56.47	67.95	43.61	0.43	43.52	32.04	56.38	-.43
All schedule tribe	65.31	80.93	42.61	0.75	34.68	19.06	57.38	-.75

Source: Special Tables for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2001

As per the occupational diversification is concerned, the Scheduled Tribes of Assam are predominantly cultivators as 70.6 per cent of the total ST main workers have been recorded as cultivators, while merely 6.1 per cent as agricultural labourer.

At the individual ST level, Miri have recorded a high of 85.6 per cent of their total main workers as cultivators, closely followed by Mikir(79.3 per cent) and Deori (78.2 per cent). Rabha have recorded the highest percentage of agricultural labourers, which is only 9 per cent of total main workers thereby indicating that majority of the STs in Assam are not landless. In three of the four categories, viz. cultivators, agricultural labourers and household industries, female marginal workers outnumber male workers.

Table.6 Occupational structure of STs in Assam, Main Workers, 2001

Tribe	Occupation	Person	Male	Female
Boro	Cultivators	64.81	65.65	62.27
	Agricultural labour	8.5	8.23	9.59
	Household Industry	2.44	1.15	6.31
	Other workers	24.17	24.95	21.83
Miri (Mishing)	Cultivators	85.61	83.96	88.90
	Agricultural labour	1.83	1.75	1.93

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	Household Industry	1.53	.76	3.00
	Other workers	11.06	13.52	6.00
Mikir(Karbi)	Cultivators	79.34	79.36	79.29
	Agricultural labour	3.25	3.05	3.81
	Household Industry	2.30	1.17	5.03
	Other workers	15.10	16.44	11.85
Rabha	Cultivators	64.80	66.36	58.85
	Agricultural labour	8.95	7.92	12.93
	Household Industry	28.57	1.29	8.88
	Other workers	23.38	24.43	19.45
Kochari(Sonowal)	Cultivators	63.99	61.31	72.40
	Agricultural labour	4.15	3.91	4.92
	Household Industry	1.78	1.12	3.82
	Other workers	30.04	33.62	18.82
Lalung	Cultivators	69.68	70.44	66.62
	Agricultural labour	8.71	7.12	15.47
	Household Industry	2.11	1.1	6.3
	Other workers	19.36	21.30	11.59
Dimasa	Cultivators	68.87	69.05	68.30
	Agricultural labour	3.85	3.18	6.03
	Household Industry	1.61	.73	4.45
	Other workers	25.64	27.02	21.21
Deori	Cultivators	78.15	73.95	85.49
	Agricultural labour	2.21	2.13	2.31
	Household Industry	1.02	.53	1.87
	Other workers	18.64	23.39	10.33
All Schedule tribe	Cultivators	70.59	70.00	71.00
	Agricultural labour	6.15	5.81	7.12
	Household Industry	2.16	1.08	3.14
	Other workers	21.11	22.95	16.04

Source: Special Tables for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2001

Table.7 Occupational Structure of STs in Assam, Marginal Workers, 2001

Tribe	Occupation	Person	Male	Female
Boro	Cultivators	49.30	45.05	51.11
	Agricultural labour	29.57	27.83	27.83
	Household industry	7.49	9.71	9.71
	Other Workers	13.62	11.30	11.30
Miri(Mishing)	Cultivators	85.37	87.53	84.14
	Agricultural labour	7.54	7.12	7.78
	Household industry	4.05	1.47	5.53
	Other Workers	3.01	3.86	2.53

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Mikir (Karbi)	Cultivators	55.07	60.36	52.60
	Agricultural labour	26.79	25.23	27.52
	Household industry	8.13	3.62	10.24
	Other Workers	9.90	10.77	9.62
Rabha	Cultivators	44.79	42.27	45.89
	Agricultural labour	29.04	34.78	26.54
	Household industry	11.08	2.67	14.73
	Other Workers	15.07	20.26	12.82
Kachari(Sonowal)	Cultivators	75.12	73.98	75.72
	Agricultural labour	13.09	13.76	12.73
	Household industry	4.42	1.55	6.06
	Other Workers	7.29	10.69	5.48
Lalung	Cultivators	53.62	54.70	53.22
	Agricultural labour	35.19	33.59	35.78
	Household industry	6.26	2.39	7.69
	Other Workers	4.91	9.31	3.29
Dimasa	Cultivators	59.24	59.46	59.15
	Agricultural labour	23.61	24.44	23.28
	Household industry	8.42	2.19	10.85
	Other Workers	8.71	13.90	6.69
Deori	Cultivators	82.27	85.12	80.45
	Agricultural labour	10.92	10.57	12.14
	Household industry	2.93	0.90	4.23
	Other Workers	3.86	4.96	3.16
All Schedule Tribe	Cultivators	62.32	63.23	61.88
	Agricultural labour	21.89	22.34	21.16
	Household industry	6.45	2.17	8.52
	Other Workers	9.34	12.24	7.90

Source: Special Tables for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2001

5. Conclusion:

The work participation is reportedly modest for all tribal groups. Among the total workers, 65.31 per cent are main workers, which is nearly equal to that recorded for all STs at the national level (68.9 per cent). Individually, Deori (55.45

percent) have the highest and Miri (32.84) have the lowest WPR. Gender differentials in work participation are noticeable among tribes. This is more or less true for all tribal groups. Among tribes Deori (52.88) have the highest FWPR.

The sex disparity index indicates the presence of disparity in work participation for all the tribes. The sex disparity is higher among urban population than the rural population. In RWPR, sex disparity among Miri is highest and Deori is lowest. In UWPR, the sex disparity is high for all the tribes and highest disparity has been seen among Boros.

Agriculture is the main economic activity of the tribes of Assam. While 70.59 per cent of total ST workers of Assam are 'Cultivators' which is significantly higher than the national average of 44.7 per cent, 'Agricultural Labourers' constitute only 6.15 per cent which is less than half of that recorded by of total STs at the national level (36.9 per cent). 'Other Workers' constitute 21.11 per cent and workers in 'Household Industry' account for only 2.16 per cent.

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