

CHANGING LIVELIHOOD SCENARIO AMONG THE CATTLE BREEDERS OF SORBHOOG AREA, ASSAM: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

A livelihood is a means of making a living. It encompasses people's capabilities, assets, income and activities required to secure the necessities of life. These work intends to study the changing livelihood scenario among the cattle breeders of Sorbhog area which is situated in Barpeta district of Assam. Basically livelihood patterns of people have the interaction with larger social process. The changes taken place in society or in societal processes also impact on local practices of people. Natural setting of the area of Sorbhog is always favourable for cultivation and it is animal friendly. Like other parts of society, people in this area were dependent on traditional livelihood like agriculture, cattle breeding and farming earlier. With the changing period of time due to several factors this livelihood pattern has been moved to other means.

INTRODUCTION

Livelihood of a person refers to its means of securing the basic necessities of life. It refers to a set of activities, involving securing water, food, fodder, medicine, shelter, clothing and capacity to acquire above necessities working either individually or as a group by using endowments for its requirements of the self and its household on a sustainable basis with dignity. In Social Sciences the concept of livelihood extends to include social and cultural means, i.e. "the command an individual, family, or other social group has over an income and/or bundles of resources that can be used to satisfy its needs. This may involve information, cultural knowledge, social networks and legal rights as well as tools, land and other physical resources."

To Sociologist, a change in the livelihood structure reflects not only changes in the economic relations of employment and the labour force but often significant transformations in social structure and social relations because occupation is generally regarded as the most important indicator of a person's social status and life style.

Sorbhog is a significance place which was discovered during the time of Koch dynasty. The ancient name of this place was 'Barnagar' which was well known for its huge production of milk and milk made things like curd, cream, butter. Most of the people in this area engaged in cattle breeding. Basically the main livelihood pattern of this area was agriculture and cattle breeding. People did agricultural work along with cattle breeding on one hand. Rich people who owned big cattle farms or dairy are called 'bathan'. There were many cattle farms in Sorbhog area where they produced huge amount of milk and sold it. Other farmer who owned fewer cattle at home also used to sell it in market and thus they earn sufficiently.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of my work are:

- Primary and secondary causes of changing livelihood pattern among cattle breeders in Sorbhog.
- Consequences of changing livelihood pattern and the new occupations.

METHODOLOGY

This study was analytical and evaluative. Both primary and secondary data were collected for this study. Primary data were collected through qualitative research based on field work in the vast area of Sorbhog. Techniques of data collection were based on unstructured interview schedule among cross section of people and observation. Individual and focus group discussions were also taken place among the local people of Sorbhog. Sampling technique was snow ball sampling and sample size will be around 30 families of Sorbhog area.

Secondary data was collected from various news papers, articles, books and souvenirs.

ASSESSMENT:

Generally, livelihood pattern is involved with change of societal aspects and also with climatic change. Marx talked about social change with changing of mode of production. Marx's focus on the process of social change is so central to this thinking that it informs all his writings. Marx insisted that men make their own history itself. Human history is the process through which men change themselves even as they pit themselves against nature to dominate it. In the course of their history men transform nature to make it better serves for their own

purposes (Abraham F. And Morgan 1989). And thus they transform themselves. Marx conceived of such major successive modes of production in the history of mankind- primitive communism, the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and capital. Each of the stages came into existence through contradictions and antagonisms that had developed in the previous order. As mode of production is changing its strata from primitive to capital, the livelihood pattern of people are also changing from traditional to modern services. In the early primitive society people depended on hunting and gathering, in the next period of evolution people started to do land husbandry and animal husbandry. Later, with the globalisation and capitalisation of Society, whole society changed to modern and post-modernism. People had started to depend on other livelihood pattern in modern industrial and post industrial society. Livelihood of people changes with the impact of changes in larger social and economic processes.

Livelihood change also takes place because of modernisation of society. Modernisation theory emerged in 1950s as an explanation of development of industrial societies in North America and Western Europe. The theory argues that societies develop in fairly predictable stages though which they become increasingly complex. Modernization is the process that changed the society from primarily agricultural to primarily industrial economy. (Gore, 1982) Development depends on the advent of technology and number of other political and social changes. Modernization involves increased levels of technological aspects, schooling, Industries and the development of mass media. Transportation and communication become increasingly sophisticated and accessible and society become more urban and mobile. Organizations become bureaucratic as the division of labour grows more complex and religion declines in public influence. This Modernisation process may also impact on livelihood pattern of society. As modernisation facilitates, there is more availability of different modern services which take less effort and more beneficial. Therefore people have shifted to other services of their effectiveness.

The concept of urbanisation is also related with changing livelihood. Urbanization derives the meaning of increasing number cities and towns. It predominantly results in the physical growth of urban areas horizontally or vertically. Urbanization can describe a specific condition at a set of time i.e. the proportion of total population of area in cities or towns. So the term urbanization can be representative of the level of urban development relative to overall population, or it can represent the rate at which the urban proportion is increasing. Urbanisation process creates more availability of various livelihood opportunities to people of an area like small business entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, and services. Urbanisation may also leads to various industries, services etc. People are attracted by those services which are more beneficial and which needs less labour.

Sorbhog or Barnagar is significant for its history and its cultural importance. But the significance of this place is decreasing with the period of time. The history of Barnagar is not collected systematically. There was an independent state called Barnagar in the west side of ancient Kamrup which was situated under Kampith of Kamrup according to the history of Kochbihar. According to history, Ghilanagar and Bijaypur are the two places which created Barnagar mainly. Barnagar was known as various names in the historical pages like Bijaynagar, Ghilabijaypur, Bijaypur, Ghilanagar etc. As poet Ramsaraswati, a medieval Assamese poet described in Bhishmaparva of Mahabharata-

Brihat Nagar Tantra Karon Je Sthan
Satyabhume Jatne Tak Korisa Nirman |
Tahar Nikote Bohe Sundor Manah
Jat Hoste Torpone Dukhor Howe Nakh ||

(The place which was known as Brihat Nagar, it was discovered nicely with much effort. Beautiful Manash River stands near of this Brihat Nagar with the blessing of what people will be relief from sorrow)

It was clear according to Kochbehar history that there was a Brihat Nagar or Barnagar near the Manash River (Khan Coudhury Amanulla Ahmed, 1936:120). The history of Barnagar before 7th century is not available anywhere. During the time of Gaurha King Ballal Sen between 1119 to 1169 Barnagar was under Gaurha Kingdom (Das. J.C., 1995:3).

It is said that during the time of Koch king Naranarayana, the history of new Barnagar which is now known as Sorbhog had started. Naranarayan came to stay in this place for 12 years during his critical phase of life. There were no population in this area which is now known as Sorbhog. Most of the places were surrounded by forests. It is said that at first only 12 families came to stay in this area with Naranarayana. Those two families called as 'Jarkata'. There were different names of different families like- Baghkata, Bagha, Hengamara, Thoguwa, Maal, Oja, Medhi etc. The population of this place started to increase and there started two villages named Uttar Ganakgarhi and Dakshin Ganakgarhi. Later some other villages which were the part of ancient Barnagar were included with new Barnagar (Mazumder H, 2008:1).

Koch king left Barnagar after 12 years and his nephew Raghudev Ray ruled Barnagar. When population of this area started to increase, the number of cattle also was increasing. People started cattle breeding along with agriculture as traditional livelihood. There were huge productions of milk that time in Barnagar. Therefore this

place was known as Sorbhog. Barnagar has its significant contribution to the Indian independent movement and Assam movement. (Mazumder H., 2008:1)

In 1868 Barnagar circle was established. First sub-deputy collector of Barnagar circle was Rajanikanta Bordoloi. In 1896 the first educational institution of this area Chakchaka M.V. School was established. Later in 1914 an M.E. school was established in Amguri by local people of Sorbhog. In 1935 this M.E. school was promoted to Highschool and it was named as 'Juraram Pathak Higher Secondary School'. But most of the people were uneducated then. Rather they engaged with agriculture and cattle breeding. Later one Madrasa was established in Balagaon. In 1939 Navajyoti College was established by youths of Barnagar. After that many educational institutions including private institutions in various areas were established (Das J.C., 1995:90)

In 1962 with the help of few educated people of this area 'Barnagar College' was established. In 1962 Sorbhog town committee was established and Prabhat Choudhury was the first chairman of it. In 1967 E. N. D. Sub Division was started. One agriculture farm was also started. Later state dispensary, veterinary hospital in Amguri, 30bedded hospital, veterinary sub centre, electronics sub centre in 1889, electronics sub division, soil conservation office(P.W.D.) were started in Sorbhog. In 1960s ramie research centre and in 1975 sericulture farm was established. In 1970 State Bank of India branch and in 1981 Pragjyotish Rural Bank was established. In 1983 fire extinguisher was established in this area (Das J.C., 1995:90)

The total area under Sorbhog town committee is now 4 square k. m. The total population is approx 8,112 according to 2011 census. This Sorbhog area is situated under Damaka chakabaukhi division. Other village areas which are under village panchayat are also the part of great Sorbhog area.

SOCIO ECONOMIC SETTING OF SORBHOG AREA

Sorbhog is one of the socio-economically significant places. The place Sorbhog is not fully village or not fully town though it is under Sorbhog town committee. Most of the people of this area are from Koch community. There are also other communities like Muslim, Bengali, Nepali, Bodo, Marwary etc. People from Muslim and Hindu religion prevail here. Most of the people in Sorbhog are from Hindu religion. Other people are from Muslim religion.

This place is significant one in terms of culture, education, literature, politics etc. Ancient Kamrupiya language, culture, song, poetry, dance, instrumental practices etc are still keep holding the significance of this place. People of this area are the followers of such traditional customs practices. The historical temple *Gorokhiya*

Gokhai Than is concerned as one of the culturally most significant by the local people of Sorbhog. People follow such practices relating to this significant temple.

Migration is one of the important societal aspects of Sorbhog. There are both in migration and out migration are been taking place. People migrate here basically for occupational interest.

TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOOD PATTERN

People in Sorbhog were mostly dependent on traditional livelihood. Before the influence of modernisation, Sorbhog was a place where most people are the follower of traditional livelihood pattern. They did cultivation of rice, pulse, vegetables etc. Every people had land for agriculture of more or less amount. Rich people of Sorbhog were called 'Mahajans' at that time. They owned huge amount of land. Mahajans of Sorbhog also owned cattle farms which were called 'Bathan' in local dialect. Grassy field on the bank of the rivers needed for bathans. Therefore bathans were generally founded on the Bank of river. As the 'mahajans' were the rich people of Sorbhog, they had such a position and fame in society at that time. They didn't work there in bathans. Rather they hired worker to work and look after their bathans. The workers were called 'gowal' by the local people. There were three-four 'gowals' hired for a bathan. One of them was main gowal who lead the other 'gowals'. He also maintained the earnings and salary of other 'gowals'. They daily look after of bathans, feed cattles, daily clean the specific space where the cattles were kept and also they extracted milk from cattle's. All these things were sold in town areas and other nearby areas. Thus dairy business was continued by the people. Mainly 'mahajans' got the benefits of this dairy business and the workers only got a little amount of money instead of working in dairy farm. So, there was the exploitation of poor gowals by Mahajans.

Poor people also owned one or two cattle for their agricultural work and milk production etc. They produced enough milk in home. Half amount of the milk they consumed in home and they sold other amount of milk in market. Animal husbandry and agriculture were the main occupations of the small farmers. They were dependent on these two aspects of livelihood.

Barnagar or Sorbhog was less populated area at that time; therefore it was suitable for cattle breeding. There were huge fields for cattle breeding. Cattles can have enough grass to eat as there were less population in this area at that time. Therefore cattles gave huge amount of milk (Kalita B., 2013:30) People sold it in market and had other necessary things they needed. Thus people lived in the traditional and rural set up depending on traditional livelihood pattern at that time. Because there were no educational institutions in Sorbhog at that time,

very less people could get the opportunity to be educated. Approx 95% of people had farming land and cattle breeding.

CAUSES OF CHANGING LIVELIHOOD SCENARIO

Basically change in livelihood takes place because of several factors like economic, demographic, environmental etc. These factors led to the changing livelihood scenario of Sorbhog. It is discussed earlier that Sorbhog was a place where people were dependent on mostly traditional livelihood pattern. But changes have taken place in terms of livelihood as society changes. People are shifting to modern livelihood pattern. The numbers of cattle breeders, cattle farms are also decreasing; presently there are very few cattle farms found in Sorbhog. There are many causes that these changes have taken place.

The first cause can be stated as migration. People from other parts of Barpeta are found in Sorbhog. They migrated at different times for their livelihood earning and had settled permanently. The migration of people had taken place from nearby districts like Nalbari, Kamrup, Bongaigaon, Goalpara. They migrated at various times because of their livelihood earning and had settled permanently. People from different states had migrated in Sorbhog during the colonial and post colonial period and fully settled in Sorbhog. They have settled permanently and occupied most of the land of Sorbhog area.

Secondly urbanisation can be stated as the cause which leads to change livelihood pattern people of Sorbhog. From the colonial period the urbanisation process of Sorbhog started to taken place. Railway station in Sorbhog started in 1868 during the British period. In 1896, the first educational institution was established in Sorbhog. Before some went other places for schooling. The number of educational institutions had increased later. After independence various Government offices were established including Sorbhog town committee, E.N.D. Sub Division, Agriculture, veterenary, hospitals, electricity Board, PWD office, Ramie research centre, sericulture centre, police station, and various banks. Numbers of houses, offices, quarters also increased. This urbanisation somehow stood as one of the factor for changing livelihood pattern.

As the numbers of houses, shops are increasing, the land for agriculture and cattle breeding are decreasing. People were attracted by modern livelihood options. On the other hand urbanisation leads to migration also. Many people migrated to Sorbhog as offices, schools, colleges, health centres and were settled permanently.

Cattle breeding as an occupation is not easy. A heavy task with hard work is needed for this. And the income of this livelihood option is comparatively lower than others. Other livelihoods needed little task. Therefore people transformed to other livelihood options as they found other options more effective than cattle breeding.

Livelihood among the cattle breeders of Sorbhog changed as people are becoming educated and have shifted to better options for their livelihood. Later change had come to the people as people started to get educated. Many government and private schools and colleges were established in Sorbhog. People become more attracted to education and other livelihood options. As people are becoming more educated, they choose other and better livelihood options like business, government or private job.

According to the local people there are lack of grass and grassy fields for cattles. As population in Sorbhog are increasing, the grassy fields for cattle's are being occupied by people. So it becomes problematic for cattle breeders as there is lack of grasses. Therefore, people have sold their cattle and have shifted to other livelihood options.

As it is cited that land nearby river side are needed for cattle farms, but most of the river side lands are now occupied by immigrants. Immigrants have settled and they occupied in most of the lands on the bank of river. This also effects on cattle breeding.

Once the place, Sorbhog or Barnagar included many places. It included most of the places of Baksa district like Kahitama, Labdanguri, Panbari, Bishnupur, Bhatarmari, Dimajuli, and Sengmari It included north western side of Baksa district which were also the parts of Greater Barnagar. And those places were the main hubs for cattle farms once . As Baksa district was announced, all these places have come under Baksa District of Assam. Those places are no more part of Barnagar or Sorbhog. With the influence of different problems the cattle breeding activities among the people of Sorbhog area are decreasing.

Changing livelihood of people has also an impact upon the economic and social relations of Sorbhog. In the past, the societal relationship of people in Sorbhog was feudal. Economic structure was also simple. But as livelihood of people changed, the societal and economic relationship also changed. Society has become more or less capitalist and economic structure has also become complex.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

The demography of Sorbhog has come through a structural change. Once where almost every family earned their livelihood by cattle breeding along with farming, but only a few families are now owning cattle. Koch Rajbangsi people who were concerned the indigenous people of Sorbhog and who mostly involved with cattle breeding once, now most of them have left their livelihood. Now the cattle breeders are mostly from Muslim community and many of them are immigrants. This business was previously dominated by the Hindus particularly the Koch Rajbongshis. But with the influx of Muslim immigrants, not only the Muslim population grew but to a large extent, they overtake the cattle breeding from the local people.

There are only few people owning dairy shops in Sorbhog. Significantly they do not have their cattle farms in Sorbhog as there is no suitable place for cattle farm. They have their cattle farms in Baksa district where milk is produced and are delivered to Sorbhog dairy shops. But increasing demands of money from insurgency groups appear as the threatening to the cattle farms. Many of them have left their dairy farms in Baksa District. A number of milk traders from Baksa district had left their dairy farm from where most of the dairy products came to Sorbhog.

As a consequence dairy products from other states like Bihar, West Bengal have taken over the space Sorbhog milk product. A huge amount of milk is brought from Bihar or West Bengal to the dairy shops. The milk products come from the other states are sold in the name of Sorbhog dairy products.

Insufficiency of milk production have affected in the quality of the milk also. Quality of local milk product in Sorbhog now has been deteriorated. It is becoming impossible for the dairy farms to supply sufficient amount of milk as per the demand of people.

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