# ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TAI-TURUNGS: AN ETHNIC TRIBE OF ASSAM

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*Abstract: It is essential to have an estimate of the economic characteristics of a tribe for its development. The Tai-Buddhist population of Assam comprises of the Tai Khamtis, Tai Phakes, Tai Khamyangs, Tai Turungs and Tai-Aitons. Among these the Tai-Turung is a tribe which has remained neglected from the mainstream. This paper with the help of primary data collected by a multistage sampling technique aims to study the economic characteristics of the Tai-Turungs. The paper finds that their Monthly Per Capita Income (MPCI) and employment level is low, while the dependency ratio is high compared to the nation and the state figures.*

*Key words: Economic Characteristics, Tai-Buddhist, Tai-Turungs, Monthly Per Capita Income, Multistage sampling, Dependency ratio, Employment level.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

'Tai' is a generic term meaning 'the free' or 'free men' that represents a major branch of the Mongoloid population of mainland Southeast Asia. In India, the Tai people live in the North East. By the term 'north-east' we mean eight states of India viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim.

A major part of the 'Tai' people of Assam is the 'Turung' or 'Tairung'.According to Gait, (2010) the advent of the Turung people into Assam is believed to have occurred along with General Newbill, following which they started living in Toklai, Jorhat. Being a community which sustained by agriculture, they soon set in search of agricultural lands in different regions near Jorhat. A group of them is believed to have moved to 'Titabar Kosukhat', whereas another group went to 'Nogura' region located near the Jamuguri Railway Station. A third group started living in a village named 'Koliani' in Karbi- Anglong. The Turungs living in Kosukhat later moved to Pathar Shyam, Tipomia, and Pohukatia villages and also to Sorupathar, Rajapukhuri village in Golaghat district. While the Turungs residing in 'Nogura' moved to Abhongpothar and Bosapothar villages and those from 'Koliani' started living in Balipothar of Karbi Anglong.

At present, the exact population of the Turung community cannot be estimated correctly as there has been no recent Census directed to it.

The native Turung people used cotton and 'eri' to weave clothes in their houses and derived dyes from the wild trees and leaves (Boruah, 2003). They wear traditional hand-woven garment known as 'Buka', 'saboo', 'numwot', 'boing Mukai' (female turban), 'Sapai' while the male wear 'Buka' and 'Fumbam' (Boruah, 2003).

They follow Buddhist and are chiefly farmers living in clean, beautiful thatched bamboo huts 'Sang-ghar' (Boruah, 2003).

The cooking technique of this community has specialty of not using oil in their dishes. Moreover, they enjoy eating fish, meat and vegetables roasted in fire, draped in banana leaf or using sticks known as 'khorika'.

The turung people are generally bilingual. When these people are among households or among community people they speak the 'Tai Turung' language, while when conversing with people outside the community they use the 'Assamese' language. Though the Turung people are a part of the Tai-community, the 'Tai-Turung' language has vast differences from rest of the 'Tai' dialect spoken in Assam (Gierson,2005).

Similar to all other Tai communities, the Turung community is also seen to celebrate various colourful festivals. Some of them include 'Tai-Okewa', 'Poisangken', 'Maikusumfai', 'Fralupoy' and 'Poynoinsi' (Boruah, 2003).

This agricultural based community though small in size, has their own identity among the other Tai-Buddhist communities.

Economic characteristics include the level of income, type of occupation, dependency ratio etc. A detailed knowledge to these helps in policy formation for upliftment of an otherwise backward tribe or region.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER:

The paper has the following characteristic:

- To emphasize on the economic characteristics of the Tai-Turungs.
- To make a comparison of the economic characteristics of the Tai-Turungs with that of India and Assam.

## 3. METHODS:

The study is based on primary data. Along with primary data, some amount of secondary data are collected from government sources and reports of research organizations.

The primary data have been compiled through a sample survey of 136 households. Samples have been drawn by following a multi-stage sampling technique, both random and purposive the sampling scheme involves the following stages:

### Stage 1- Selection of the District

The first stage involves the selection of the appropriate districts for the sample collection. They are found in the districts of Jorhat, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong of Assam. In this study, Jorhat and Golaghat districts are considered for the survey as more number of Tai-Turung living villages are present compared to the one village of Karbi-Anglong. It is noted that the district/sub-division-wise Tai-Turung population in Assam were not found in the census of India.

### Stage 2- Selection of Sub-Divisions

In the next stage, the selected districts have been divided into sub-divisions. There are two sub-divisions of the Jorhat District, namely: Jorhat (sadar) and Titabar. From these two sub-divisions of Jorhat district, the Titabar sub-division is chosen for the survey. The Golaghat district has four sub-divisions, namely: Golaghat (sadar), Bokakhat, Dhansiri and Merapani. From these sub-divisions, Dhansiri sub-division is taken for sampling as the Tai-Turung living villages are concentrated in this sub-division.

### Stage 3- Selection of Villages

The third stage is the selection of the sample villages from the sub-divisions. There are 3 Tai-Turung living villages in Titabar sub-division of Jorhat district. All the 3 Tai-Turung living villages are selected as sample village. In golaghat district also there are 3 Tai-Turung living villages and all the 3 are purposively selected as sample villages.

**Table 1**
**Sample Districts, Sample Sub-Division and Number of Sample Villages**

| Sample district | Sample sub-division | Total no. of Tai-Turung Living villages | No. of sample villages |
|---|---|---|---|
| Jorhat | Titabar | 3 | 3 |
| Golaghat | Dhansiri | 3 | 3 |

Source: Man-Tai Speaking National Council, Assam, Population cum education   Census (2006)

### Stage 4- Selection of Households

The fourth and the final stage in sampling design is the selection of sample households from the sample villages. For this purpose, 50% households from each sample village are randomly selected as sample households for primary survey. Thus, a total of 136 households are selected as sample households. The table 2 gives a detailed summary of the number of sample households selected from each sample villages.

**Table 2**
**Total number of Tai-Turung Households and the Number of sample households**

| District | Sub-division | Sample villages | No. of total Tai-Turung households* | No. of sample Tai-Turung households |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Jorhat** | **Titabar** | Pathar Shyam | 70 | 35 |
| | | Tipomia | 34 | 17 |
| | | Pahukatia | 52 | 26 |
| **Golaghat** | **Dhansiri** | Rajapukhuri | 80 | 40 |
| | | Bosapothar | 6 | 3 |
| | | Abhong Pothar | 30 | 15 |
| **Total** | | | 272 | 136 |

*Data Source: BLO and Village Head of Sample Villages.

Primary data for the study have been collected with the use of structured questionnaire. The study was conducted during the month of September, 2016.For adequate interpretation of the data simple statistical tools such as percentage, ratios, averages etc. have been used exclusively in the study.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The survey of the 136 households reveal the following results about the economic condition of the Tai-Turungs.

### 4.1 Occupational structure of the Sample Population

The Tai-Buddhist communities which include the Tai- Turung community are chiefly wet rice growers who have carried the Tai heritage of wet rice cultivation. Their main occupation is agriculture. Besides rice cultivation they also cultivate mustard, corn ginger, turmeric, variety of pulses, betel nut, bamboo, banana, etc.( Buragohain, 2014)

The percentage of workable persons in the age group of 15-65 is highest among the Khamtis (76.52), followed by the khamyang (73.48), the Turungs (72.2), the Phakes (71.87), and  the Aitons (71.08) (Buragohain, 2014).

Table 3 will depict the occupational profile of the sample population of the Tai- Turungs. Here the population within the working age group of 15-59 is included for the study.

**Table 3**
**Occupational Structure of the Sample Population (Age Group 15-59)**

| Occupation | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Agriculture and Allied  Activities** | 83 ( 44.1) | 42 (20.8) | 125 (32.0) |
| **Casual Worker** | 42 (22.5) | 36 (17.8) | 78 (20.0) |
| **Others** | 32 (17.0) | 22 (10.9) | 54 (13.8) |
| **Unemployment** | 31 (16.4) | 102 (50.5) | 133 (34.2) |
| **Total** | 188 (100.0) | 202 (100.0) | 390 (100.0) |

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates percentage
Source: Primary Survey

Table 3 highlights that majority of the population is engaged in agriculture and allied activities such as animal husbandry, dairy, poultry, fishery etc. Its percentage stands as 32.0 percent out of a total working sample population of 390.  Casual workers accounts to 20.0 percent. Other occupations such as government and private services, handloom and textile, business, etc incorporates 13.8 percent of the total working population.

Gender wise 44.1 percent of the total working male sample population (188 males) is engaged in agriculture and allied activities. 17.0 percent in engaged in the above mentioned other occupations. Casual workers comprises of 22.3 per cent of the total population. Unemployment accounts for 16.4 per cent of the total sample population.

In case of females, 20.8 per cent is engaged in agriculture and allied activities out of 202 number of female in working age group of 15-59. Women engaged as casual worker account for 17.8 per cent, while women engaged in public and private services, business etc account for 10.9 per cent. The number of unemployed women account for 50.5 per cent. It is observed that a significant fraction of women are unemployed.

### 4.2. Household Income

The table 4 shows the annual income of the sample households.  Out off 136 sample households 63 households have an income level less than 1, 00,000.  They comprises of 46.3 per cent of the sample households. It is observed that the highest proportion of the household lies within the income range of 0 – 1, 00,000. This is indicative of the unsatisfactory economic status of majority of the sample households.

**TABLE 4**
**Distribution of Annual Income of the Sample Households**

| Income | Number  of  Households | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| **less than 1,00,000** | 63 | 46.3 |
| **1,00,000 – 2,00,000** | 34 | 25.0 |
| **2,00,000 – 3,00,000** | 16 | 11.7 |
| **3,00,000 -  4,00,000** | 10 | 7.3 |
| **4,00,000 – 5,00,000** | 7 | 5.1 |
| **ABOVE  5,00,000** | 6 | 4.6 |
| **Total** | 136 | 100.0 |

Source: Primary Survey

Again, 34 households comprising of 25.0 per cent of the sample households ranges within the income range of 1, 00,000 – 2, 00,000.  Number of households within 2, 00,000 – 3, 00,000 rupees annual income are 16 in number, computing 11.7 per cent of the total households. Again it is observed that 10 households comprising 7.3 per cent the total households lie within the annual income range of 3, 00,000 – 4, 00,000. Just a mere 7 number of households, 5.1 percent of the sample households lies within the annual income range of rupees 4, 00,000 – 5, 00,000. Households with an annual income of more than 5, 00,000 are just 6 in number comprising 4.6 percent of the total households.  It is seen that number of households continuously decreases with the increase in the range of annual income.

Per-capita income is the amount of income being earned by a person in a certain region. It is defined as the mean income of people in an economic unit. It is calculated to measure standard of living in a country. The per-capita income of the sample household is calculated by the formula-

$$Per\text{-}Capita\ income = \frac{Total\ income\ of\ the\ sample\ population}{Total\ population\ of\ the\ sample}$$

The annual per-capita income of the sample population of the Tai-Turung is calculated as Rs.36, 255 per person per annum. The monthly per-capita income (MPCI) is therefore Rs.3021. This calculated per-capita income is in relation with the per-capita income of Assam, which is Rs.49, 480 per annum and Rs.4123 per month, calculated at current prices of 2004-2005 (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Assam 2015). The All-India per-capita income at 2014-15 was Rs. 87,748 per annum, and Rs.7312 monthly per capita income (MPCI) at current prices of 2004-2005. (Economic Survey of India, 2014-15).

### 3.3. Dependency Ratio of the Sample Population

Dependency ratio is used to measure the pressure on productive population. Dependency ratio is an age-population ratio of those typically not in the labour force (the dependent part) and those typically in the labour force (the productive part). This is a crucial determinant of the study.

**Table 5**
**Availability of Dependents in the Sample Population**

| Age Groups | Sample  Population | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| **0-14** **Youth   Dependents** | 168 | 26.4 |
| **15-59** **Working Age Group** | 390 | 61.2 |
| **60 and Above** **Old Dependents** | 79 | 12.4 |
| **Total** | 637 | 100.0 |

Source: Primary Survey

**Overall dependency ratio** refers to the number of dependents, aged 0 to 14 and above the age of 60, to the total population, aged 15 to 59. It can be computed with the following formula-

$$Overall\ Dependency\ Ratio\ = \frac{Population\ aged\ 0\ to14 + Population\ aged\ 60\ and\ above}{Population\ aged\ 15-59} \times 100$$

With reference to table 5, the overall dependency ratio is 63.3 per cent. This signifies that more than half of the sample population is dependents. According to India Demographics Profile 2016, the overall dependency ratio of the sample population is greater than the overall dependency ratio of India (52.4%). Again, according to the Census report, 2011 the Overall dependency ratio of Assam was 65.37%, which is slightly higher than that of the sample population

**Youth dependency Ratio** is defined as the number of population aged 0-14, to the working age group of population aged 15-59. It is computed with the formula-

$$Youth\ Dependency\ Ratio = \frac{Population\ aged\ 0-14}{Population\ 15-59} \times \mathbf{100}$$

Again, table 5 is used to calculate the youth dependency ratio, which is 43.0 per cent. Again, according to India Demographics Profile 2016, the youth dependency ratio of the sample population is similar to that of India as a whole (43.9). The youth dependency ratio of Assam according to Census 2011 was 54.3%, which is significantly higher than that of the sample population.

**Old dependency ratio** is defined as the number of population aged 60 and above, to the working age group of population aged 15 to 59. It is calculated by the formula-

$$Old\ Dependency\ Ratio = \frac{Population\ aged\ 60\ and\ above}{Population\ aged\ 15\ to\ 59} \times 100$$

Old dependency ratio is calculated is 20.25% from the table 5. The old dependency ratio of the sample population is significantly higher than that of India which is 8.6% (India Demographics Profile, 2016). The old dependency ratio of Assam was 11.02% which is less than that of the sample population of the Tai-Turungs (Census, 2011).

## 5. CONCLUSION:

The paper comes to the conclusion that the economic characteristics of the sample population the Tai-Turungs are not satisfactory. The tribe requires the involvement of the government and other non-governmental organisations to raise the level of income. Further, additional training programs should be introduced among the people of the tribe.

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