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Agrarian Structure of a Village, With Special Reference to Mahara Napomuwa Gaon, Jorhat District

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Abstract:

Agrarian structure can be defined in terms of land relationship of people. In terms of agrarian relation people are classified into poor peasant, small peasant and well to do farmers. There is a relationship between caste and agrarian structure. Even land ownership exists frequently on caste line. The upper caste people traditionally own the large amount of land the name of religion and it is very prominent in the villages from historical time. But now there is a changing comes to the same due to many factors. In this study it will be shown the agrarian structure or classes in a village and land holdings by different caste groups and if there any changes in the agrarian structure with special reference to the Mahara gaon, a village of Jorhat district.

Keywords: *Agrarian, Peasant, adhi (half share), bigha (one third of an acre of land), caste.*

1. Introduction

India is basically an agricultural society. More than half of the people are related to agriculture in India. So, agrarian structure of India is important study to understand the Indian society. Agrarian structure of India has evolved from a historical background. From the study of agrarian structure, it can be known about the class relationship in terms of agriculture. Agrarian structure means the groups of people who are connected with land. It means how the people are related with land, either one can be the owner of land or another can be the labourer of the land. It is the study of classes and social composition of groups that occupy specific class position in relation to land control and land use¹ Agrarian structure can be defined in terms of the relationship which exists between those who have command over land and those who operate this land by supplying labour power productive activity.² So it can be understood basically in terms of relationship existing between the master of land and actual producer. The study of the agrarian structure is basically the study of the agrarian classes which are determined by the land use and land control. Different scholars like D.N. Dhanagare, Daniel thornor have given different classification of it.

Dhanagare made five classifications.³

Landlord - people holding rights over large tracts extending over several villages. They are absentee owner.

Rich peasant - they have considerable holdings in the same village, but do not perform any field work, but they supervise the cultivation.

One another classification under this is the Rich tenants or substantial tenants who enjoy secured right. Their size of landholding is above the sufficiency level.

Middle peasant - they are the landowner of medium size holdings with self-sufficiency.

Poor peasant - (I) tenants who have not sufficient holdings to maintain the family. So they force to rent other's land. (ii) Tenants with very small land holdings. (iii) Share cropper or tenants at will.

Landless labourers - They have no land; they are basically wage earner.

The categories of Thornor also like similar to Dhanagare. But he has made basically 3 major categories.

Malik: - (I) big landlord: it is characterized by the same category given by Dhanagare as "landlord" in his classification. (ii) Rich landowner: this is classified as 'rich peasants' in the classification of Dhanagare.

Kisan: - (I) small land owner: having land holdings to support the family who cultivate in land with family labour.

(ii) Substantial tenants: their size of holding is above the sufficiency level. They are the rich peasant in the classification of Dhanagare.

Mazdoor: - There are three classifications of Majdoor

(I) poor tenants: holds small land and income derived from agriculture is less than wage earning. (ii) Sharecropper or tenant at will. But Dhanagare has mentioned them as poor peasant. (iii) Landless labourer.⁴

These classifications are made by different scholars who are based on the relations of production or are in relation to the means of production. In the Marxian concept MOP can be defined as sum total of forces of production and relation to the production.⁵

In Assam, in the pre Ahom and Ahom period king was the owner of land.⁶ larger plot of land, village's patakas continued to be donated by the rulers of kamrupa in pre Ahom period. Bhaskarvarma in 17th century granted the land of Mayurasalmalagrahara which

was capable of supporting 208 Brahmins. The large scale donation was not limited in pre Ahom. As Brahmins were given large amount of land, so it gave them the control of land tenure. The noble, priests were given revenue free land. Land was donated for the religious purpose. They were Debottor, dhormottae and brohmutter land. In the period like in 16th century land was given to the Vaisnavava satras. As the gosais were the head of the vaisnava satra, so they acquired a large amount of land.⁷

There is also a relationship between caste and agrarian structure in India. As caste system is an important aspect of the study of Indian society, caste differences determine the differences the modes of domestic, social and economic as well as cultural pattern. Even land ownership exists frequently on caste line.⁸ The upper caste people traditionally own the large amount of land in the name of religion.⁹ In this paper the researcher makes an attempt to explore the agrarian classes in the village and the caste system relating to the agrarian structure in the village.

2. Objectives

The main objectives of my study are-

- i. To explore the categories of peasants in the village in terms of land control and land using.
- ii. To study about the relationship between caste and agrarian structure of the village.

3. Universe of the Study

The universe of the study is Mahara Napomuwa goan. It is situated in the district of jorhat under the Teok Mouza. It is 20 km away from Jorhat town. The geographical coordination is 26-50 North, 94 25 East.

4. Methodology of the Study

- Sample: Stratified random sampling and snow boll sampling have been used for data collection. 40 households have been taken as sample out of 150 households.
- Methods of data collection: The researcher used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was found by the field study and the secondary data were found in the official report of the village, books, journal article etc.
- Interview method was used for data collection. It was unstructured in nature.

5. Findings and Discussion

The total number of household of the village including the Mahara plot is 150 according to the census report; 2011. They belonged to different caste groups like Brahman, gosais, kolita, Ahom and koivartta etc.

The Number of household by different caste groups are-

gosai	15
Brahmin	10
Kolita	45
Ahom	45
Koivartta	35

Table 1

Category of agrarian classes	No of household /percentage
Rich in land as well as having government job. They are the owner of high amount of land.	2/ 5%
Government job, not related to agriculture	2/ 5%
Having sufficient amount of land holding. They employ labourer only in the day of harvesting and the family members join it.	8/ 20%
Sufficient amount of land holdings, some of those are done by own and some are done by others(<i>adhi</i>)	11/27.5%
People don't have land, but take <i>adhi</i> from others and they become income earner	8/ 20% <i>mz</i>
Only dependent on wage earning	9 /22.5%

Table 2

5.1. Agrarian classification of the village

The first category of people can't be included in any classification given by different scholars especially of Dhanagare and Thornor. They are 5% of the village only.

There are 5% people in the village who have considerable holdings. There are 2 households who own 30 and 40 *bighas* of land. But they perform no works on the field. They have also government jobs. They have the control on their own land, but they don't use family labour in cultivation.

There are some people with substantial holdings as well as they take *adhi* also in the village the family member joins and no outsider laborers are used except in harvesting. They constitute 20% in the village. They are the '*kisan*' or working peasant in the classification of Thorner.

In the village there are some people, they do not have land but they take *adhi*. They do not have the control over the lands. So they can be categorized as 'poor peasant' which constitute 27.5% of the village.

20% households don't have considerable lands, but they take *adhi* and become income earner.

There are approximately 22.5% households who belong to 'landless labour'. They are the wage earner.

In the village there is a category of people who have the substantial land, some of them are done by own, but some of them are by other. They are the category of Petty landowner which is not included in the categorization of Dhanagare and Thorner.

There are some people who own very less amount of land. But their agricultural works are done by some other people. It is one category of peasant who has the control on few amount of land as well as hires labour. This type of category is not included in the classification of Dhanagare and Thorner because they have government jobs and other trading also. Among some *Gosai*, Brahmin small land holding classes can be included this type of category in the village. Though some of them have less land, but they prefer to hire labour, even they have not the sufficient income from other source.

But in the village, it can't be classified the peasants in a single classification. Though the rich land owners do not go to the field, in terms of the small land owners who don't work in other's land generally, but they work for substantial neighborhood in some days. So at the same time he is the cultivation owner as well as agricultural labourer. In terms of '*sauriya protha*' among the Ahom community of the village can be seen which are done by the particular '*suburi*'. In the day of '*boka diya*', the members of the other household of the '*suburi*' (they may not work in other's household generally), join and work in the cultivation and finish the work of *boka diya* in some land as starting. Thus the other day the same people go to the house of the *suburi* which brings the integration to the villagers also.

As there is the differentiation in terms of the forces of production and relation to that among the different classes, so the forces of production, equipments are owned by different agrarian groups differently. The modern equipments seen in the village are tractor, machines spreading fertilizer. But the bullocks are kept almost in the all houses. Among the 40 household the two household of 'rich landowner' have the tractors and the fertilizer spreading machine. They have been owned it for a long time. Besides them, for the introduction of the new schemes like *Assam Bikash Yojana*, *Krisi Yantrikaran Scheme* introduced by Government, some people from the *kisan* or agricultural worker who have a little economic command. Some people who have at least the capacity to effort to the fee for plough by tractor, they use it in their field. All the people prefer to plough by tractor. In the village approximately twenty-five household borrow it from the owner for plough. Though they have not owned it, but the poor peasants also realize the importance of the modern technology. The fertilizer spreading machines are also shared among them.

In the village we can see a change in terms of the attitude towards the agricultural work. People who are poor, landless labourer they are not interested to do the agricultural work or to take any *adhi* from the land holding people because most of them have got the provision of job card and the chip rice. So according to them they do not need to do agricultural work as they do not have their own land.

5.2. Caste and agrarian structure

Land holdings by different caste groups:

Brahmin(household)	Amount of land holdings (<i>bigha</i>)
1	30
2	15/16
2	7/8
2	2/3

Table 3

Gosai (household)	<i>Bigha</i>
1	40
3	7/8
2	3/4

Table 4

Ahom, kolita (household)	<i>Bigha</i>
5	20/25
5	7/8
6	3/4
4	1/2

Table 5

Koivartta (household)	<i>Bigha</i>
2	20
2	7/8
3	1/2 or landless

Table 6

The inter relation between caste and agrarian relation constitute a unique feature of the Indian as well as Assamese society. From the pre Ahom period Brahmins were donated high amount of land. So they occupied a large amount land from the historical period. In the village it is seen that the largest land holdings are from the high caste group. The two families of Brahmin, Gosai in the village own the highest amount of land. So they were the owner of huge land. It can be said as the impact of the Ahom or pre Ahom period in which lands were donated to them. Though earlier *Koivartta* was engaged in the fishing occupation, they had less land and worked in the lands of the upper caste as wage labourer. The high caste people are much accessed to modern education. So they have government job also. But in the earlier time they owned a high amount of land. This village is characterised by the breakdown of joint family, the family become nuclear and the lands are also divided, then there is a change happens in terms of the land holding by these two high caste people in the village. From the table it is seen that we can see all the classification in all the caste groups. But the 'rich land owner' given by Thorner belonged to the Gosai and Brahmin family yet in the village. In the village the Brahmin gosains had a large amount of land and other property. They were ritually and economically powerful. From the earlier time the other landless people as well as the lower caste people had to dependent on their land and worked on their field. The actual labour was done by the landless labourer who has no control over land and the production of land. It is the *Adhikarfamily* which is the rich peasant in the village. Taking the religious opportunity, they took many advantages. Generally, they did not give *adhi* of their lands. Their agricultural works were done by the *sisya* of that *gosai family* at free of cost. They are belonged to kolita, keot etc. According to P.C. Joshi, the property structure along with land was dominated by the upper caste and the peasant producers from the lower caste group. In the village, Earlier the lower caste had to give their laborers in the works of upper caste people. They were at the low rank of the agrarian classification. But the control of land was at the hands of the upper caste

5.3. Changing scenario in terms of caste and agrarian structure in the village:

In the changing trend caste structure is not remains as same as earlier. The upper caste people also belonged to the landless class which was landowning class in nature. In the present time nobody does free labour as *sisya* in the *Adhikar's* family. The land which were given to the *Bhakats* it become as their own property. They have to give only interest of it, not the labour in the *gosais'* house. The same people do the same work as *adhi* system or wage earner, but not free of cost. Along with the caste structure, the economy has been also changed. Most of the families become nuclear. Along with it some people even the upper caste people were forced to limiting of the land. So in the village now it can't be said that the upper caste people own high amount of land or property. Even there are some large land holdings of the lower caste people more than some Brahman Gosais families in the village.

In the village earlier the Brahmins did not go to agricultural field for work. The women were also not allowed to go. They were the class of rich peasant. But at present, it is observed that though they don't work with plough, in the village they go to field and do labour by themselves. But now they are compelled to go to the field and do works as they are not able to carry the cost of it. Thus they become poorpeasant also.

It is very interesting to say that 2 Brahman household of the sample own only 1 or 2 *bigha* land. They have no other source of income. So they work as wage earner even in the non-Brahmin people also.

As the impact of urbanization and sanskritization the lower caste people have accessed to modern education and engage in different jobs, trading etc. So now it is not necessary that they only do labour for other. In the village, some lower caste people are engaged in Government job. So some of them also have migrated from the village and they also become as absentee landowner. In the village it was found that almost 4/5 household of koivartta caste are rich in trading as well as land also. They hire labour for their works. They are sometime from the upper caste also. All of the people of the lower caste do not take *adhi* at present time; on the contrary some of them give *adhi* to other, even to the upper caste people. They have also earned the capacity to buy lands from the large land holding upper caste. So the different land owning classes can be seen in all the all caste groups.

6. Conclusion

In the village we can see the all kinds of agrarian classes of rich peasant, poor peasant, small land owner and the landless laborers. They are dependent to each other's. The special helping hands should be provided to the poor and landless labourer irrespective of caste in the village. The panchayat of the village should be more concerned to the same. From the study it can be seen that though there is a little impact of the high caste people in the Agrarian structure, but for the outcome of different job opportunity and so on, it laid the different opportunity towards the change to all the caste groups. The lower caste people like Koivartta, Ahom community also have earned the ability to buy lands and become owner of the lands. So the relation between caste and agrarian structure has also been changed.

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