

## HUMAN CAPITAL AS A RESOURCE IN RURAL ECONOMY- WITH REFERENCE TO MISHING COMMUNITY IN ASSAM

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### *Abstract*

*In the last one decade, the concept of human capital has gained momentum in assessing the socio-economic welfare characteristics of tribal communities like the Mishing in the plains of Brahmaputra valley in Assam. It is of utmost importance to consider the human capital aspects while discussing the processes of social and economic development. It is only with high stock of human resource a community or a nation can achieve sustainable economic growth. The objective of the current paper is to make an assessment of the nature of human capital of the Mishing tribe. The main aim of this paper is to see that by taking the example of the Mishing community in Assam how most of the riparian communities normally aim to achieve sustainable development with their stock of human capital. The present paper is based on a research study conducted by the author in two Mishing dominated areas of Assam i.e., Majuli Island and Gogamukh. The paper is based on primary sources of data. The paper concludes that the basic nature of the human capital remains that of agrarian and the pattern of human capital although varies but it is the most flexible form of resource irrespective of space and time.*

**Keywords: Capital, Community, Resource, Sustainable Development.**

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of human capital is at least two centuries old. Human capitals enhance the abilities and opportunities of a community through education, training, and improvements in public health and child welfare. Economic development alone cannot promote the general welfare of a community (Livermore and Midgley, in Hoff, 1998, p.129). United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines Human Resource Development (HDR) “as the policies and programmes that support and sustain equitable opportunities for continuing acquisition and application of skills, knowledge, attitude and competencies which promote individual autonomy and are mutually beneficial to individual and organization, the community and larger environment of which they are part” ( Singh ed., 2003, p. 187).

The Mishing Tribe (also called, the Miris) is a Scheduled Tribe in Assam that inhabits in an extensive area in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and has a substantial population. In Assam they are mostly found to be settled along the northern bank areas of River Brahmaputra like North Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts and along the southern bank of River Brahmaputra in Jorhat, Sibsagar and Dibrugarh districts. In areas like Majuli Island and Gogamukh plagued by distorted development, economic development alone does not provide riparian tribal communities like the Mishings with access to opportunities because the rewards of this progress are shared by few. To avoid this biasness assessment of human capital or assets is important.

## 1.2 OBJECTIVE

The objective of the current paper is to make an assessment of the nature of human capital of the Mishing tribe.

## 1.3 STUDY AREA

The present paper is a comparative study between two homogenous groups of Mishing tribe living in two different geographical environments. The first group settles in Majuli Island of Jorhat district which forms the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra and the second group resides in a mainland area named Gogamukh in Dhemaji district which lies to the north bank of the river Brahmaputra. Both Majuli Island and Gogamukh are traditional Mishing hearth in Assam.

Majuli Island is one of the largest inhabited freshwater river islands in World. It is the cultural capital of Assam. The present geographical area of the island is 421.65 square km. It is located between 26° 45'N to 27° 12'N latitude and 93°39'E to 94° 35'E longitude and 84.50

meters above mean sea level. The total population of Majuli Island is 1, 68,000 (2011 Census of India) and out of this 34 percent of population belongs to Mishing tribe.

Similarly Gogamukh is the administrative head quarter of Mishing tribe in Assam. It is located between 27°44' N to 27°43' N latitude and 94 ° 32 'E to 94 ° 31' E longitudes. The elevation above mean sea level is 102 meters. Its geographical area is 478.28 square kilometre. The total population of Gogamukh according to 2011 census is 98,760. Forty percent out of the total population here too belongs to Mishing tribe.

#### 1.4 METHODOLOGY

The study is based on primary sources of data which is generated through structured household interview schedule. The information is collected by one to one interaction involving both the interviewer and interviewee. To form the required sample few Mishing village are selected in both Majuli Island and Gogamukh. Stratified Random Sampling technique is used for data collected. Simple statistical methods for tabulation and analyses are used.

#### 1.5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implied in the above conceptualization of Human Resource Development we now here try to make an assessment of quality of human assets in Majuli Island and Gogamukh in terms of age group and household size, health, education, skill and occupation.

##### 1.5.1 AGE- GROUP AND HOUSEHOLD SIZE

The study of the structure of the population, the changes in number and functions are important from the view of economic welfare of a country as well as the village. Age and sex are the two important biological characteristics which exercise considerable influence on the various aspects of the composition and structure of the population.

**Table 1: Distribution of Household According to Age-Groups**

Age Group	Place			
	Majuli Island		Gogamukh	
	No. of HH	Percent	No. of HH	Percent
<20	4	2.5	3	1.87
20-29	29	18.13	37	23.13
30-39	46	28.75	35	21.88
40-49	38	23.75	45	28.13
50-59	23	14.38	24	15
>59	20	12.5	16	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2015

It is evident from table 1 that the highest percent is found in the age groups between 30-39 years and 40-49 years in both Majuli Island and Gogamukh area. Almost a uniform sort of population distribution is noticed among both the groups in Majuli and Gogamukh. The percent of working population is more in both the cases than the percent of dependent population. Maximum number of households falls in middle and working age groups.

**Table 2: Total Number of Members in a Household**

Members	Place	
	Majuli Island	Gogamukh

	No. of HH	Percent	No. of HH	Percent
<3	2	1.25	1	0.63
3-6	119	74.38	121	75.63
7-9	29	18.13	29	18.13
10-12	7	4.38	8	5.00
>12	3	1.88	1	0.63
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2015

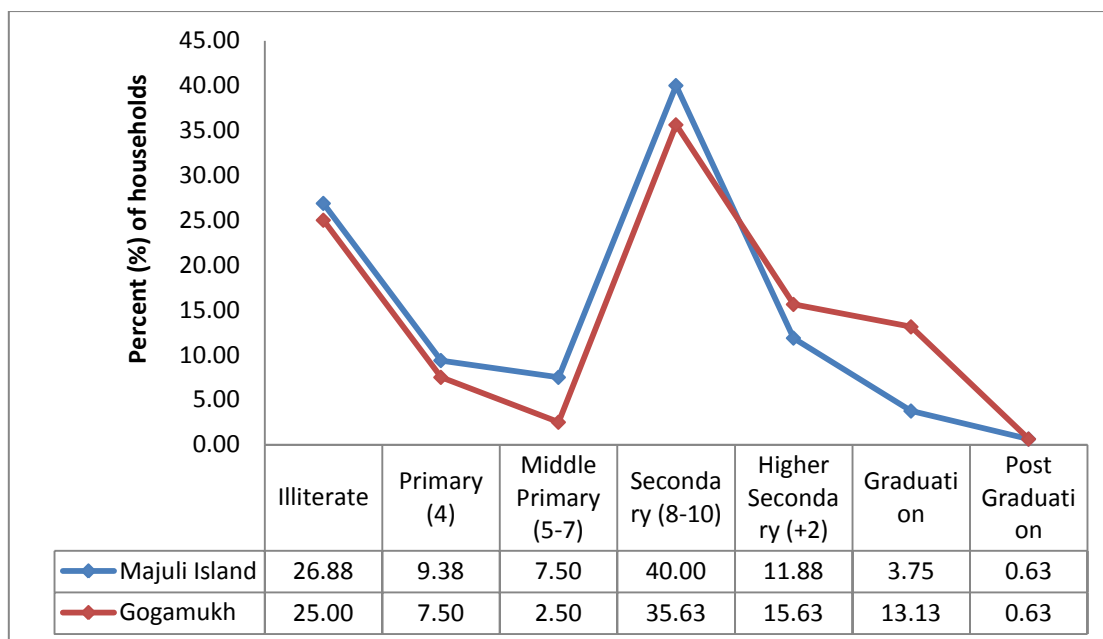
Another interesting factor for assessment of human capital is family size. Traditionally Mishings are known to have large families. It is seen that both in Majuli and Gogamukh highest and almost an equal percent of households are found to have a small family size of 3 to 6 number of members. Only 25 percent of households in both the areas have moderate to large family size of above 7 members. Both in Majuli and Gogamukh 18.13 percent of households have 7 to 9 members in their households. 4.38 percent in Majuli and 5 percent in Gogamukh have 10 to 12 members in their households and only a negligible 1.88 percent in Majuli and 0.63 percent in Gogamukh have a very large family structure of above 12 members.

This indicates that with growth of population and fragmentation of land holding size there is a decline in the size of families too. Unlike before, the Mishings of present generation do not consider having large families an advantage. Agriculture is no longer a profitable occupation for them. Moreover with rapid pace of modernisation and improvement in education, health and medical facilities and awareness about family planning are slowly and gradually changing the mindsets of rural communities like the Mishings of Assam as well. All these factors have contributed in bringing down the size of family structures among the Mishings irrespective of location of their habitats.

### 1.5.2 EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Literacy and education among the villagers are important parameters of rural development. Education provides the rural communities like the Mishings the adequate knowledge required to manage their own resources for their individual household level gains without being exploited by intermediary persons or by external forces.

#### **Figure 1. Percent of Educational Status of the Head/Interviewee Households**



Source: Field Survey, 2015

Figure 1 highlight on the educational aspects of the head/interviewee of the household. One interesting fact to be noticed is that in both Majuli Island and Gogamukh 75 percent of the head of the household/interviewee are found to possess some formal education ranging from primary school education to higher education like post graduation. 26.88 percent in Majuli and 25 percent in Gogamukh are found to be illiterate. In both the island and mainland among the educated lot maximum percent of household is found in the Secondary category. In Majuli 40 percent and in Gogamukh 35.63 percent of the head of household/interviewee has studied till secondary level. Of course compared to Majuli Island we find that in the higher education category of above secondary level there are more number of person in Gogamukh than in Majuli. Being a mainland territory educational opportunities are more in Gogamukh than in Majuli. It is found that 13.13 percent of head of household /interviewee are graduates in Gogamukh than only 3.75 percent in Majuli Island. So being a mainland territory the Mishing households have better access to higher education.

So comparing from figure 1 it is assumed that formal education is not a new thing for the Mishing of both Majuli Island and Gogamukh. It is only in terms of opportunities and constrains they vary. Majuli being a river island may be rich in resources but lacks in infrastructure. While Gogamukh being a mainland territory is rich in terms of infrastructural facilities like roads, railways, roadways etc., which makes it easy for the Mishings of the mainland territory to gain easy access to means of higher education.

**Table 3: General Health Condition of Households**

Health Condition	Place			
	Majuli Island		Gogamukh	
	No. of HH	Percent	No. of HH	Percent
Good	96	60.00	111	69.38
Moderate	55	34.38	44	27.50
Poor	9	5.63	5	3.13
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Like education health is also an important factor of human capital. Health condition of the households greatly affects the livelihood and income of the people. Poor health calls for an increased expenditure on medical treatment which reduces a household's financial capital. If the health condition of the family members of a household is not good it significantly reduces the financial and human capital of a household and pushes the household into poverty trap by reducing its assets from which it is difficult to recover for a household. From table 3 it may be stated that the overall general health condition of a good majority of Mishing household is good. The hard and industrious nature of the people has enabled them to keep their health in good condition.

### 1.5.3 SKILLS

Researcher Harry Johnson defined skill as “the ability to execute a pattern of behavioural elements in proper relation to a certain environment (Johnson, 1961, p.163 in Campos, 2005, p.6). Skill encompasses economic and institutional factors as well as innate abilities and personal characteristics (Cohen and Zaidi, 2002, p.4). A skill is not a reflexive action; it is a complex movement that requires practice. Skills are central to improve employability and livelihood opportunities, reduce poverty, enhance productivity. We discuss and categorize the skills of Mishing households into two classes i.e., traditional skills known and practiced in the household and modern skill learned and practised in the household.

#### 1.5.3.1 TRADITIONAL SKILLS

The rural community adopts a set of specific traditional skills to support their livelihood system. The Mishings of Assam are settled subsistence farmers. So being tillers of the soil and owing to limited means of livelihood and sustainability they have acquired some traditional skills which they practice as allied activities in relation to agriculture for sustenance.

**Table 4: Traditional Skills Known and Practised by the Households**

Traditional Skills	Place			
	Majuli Island		Gogamukh	
	No. of HH	Percent	No. of HH	Percent
No Traditional Skills	0	0.00	1	0.63
Farming	16	10.00	23	14.38
Weaving	2	1.25	1	0.63
Farming & animal rearing	34	21.25	2	1.25
Farming & fishing	23	14.38	12	7.50
Farming & weaving	25	15.63	36	22.50
Farming & basketry	12	7.50	6	3.75
Farming & house-building	23	14.38	25	15.63
Farming, animal rearing & fishing	5	3.13	3	1.88
Farming, animal rearing & weaving	0	0.00	7	4.38
Farming, animal rearing & house-building	2	1.25	1	0.63
Farming & others	6	3.75	0	0.00
Farming, fishing & weaving	7	4.38	7	4.38

Farming, fishing & house-building	1	0.63	5	3.13
Farming, weaving & basketry	2	1.25	0	0.00
Farming, weaving & house-building	0	0.00	11	6.88
Others	2	1.25	20	12.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 4 focuses on some of the traditional skills which are known and practised by the Mishing households of Majuli Island and Gogamukh. It is seen that farming is the most common traditional activity found to be practised by the household. Along with farming we see that the households practise a host of other traditional activities in combination. The table clearly shows that in most of the cases natural resource based activities like farming; animal rearing, fishing/hunting, and weaving, basketry, house building and forest gathering are found to be the most dominant activities practiced by the households. When compared in terms of both traditional skills known and practiced by the households of Majuli Island and Gogamukh there are many differences that can be noticed and analysed. Like for example when observed from table 4 that the Mishings of Gogamukh have more variety in practising the known traditional skills than the Mishings of Majuli Island. This indicates presence of more choice and opportunities on the main land compared to island. In Majuli the pressure is more on land and water resources which tend to create a stress on the existing natural resources for future sustainability and survivability of the coming generations. It may be assumed that except farming a few traditional activities like animal rearing, fishing, weaving, house-building and to some extent basketry holds good for both the groups in on the island and mainland. In fact both basketry and weaving holds a great potentiality for development in the form of cottage industry if done on a proper scientific basis with modern equipments with a little bit of aid and subsidy from the government which will play a greater role in reducing dependency of the people on natural resources with supplementary sources of income guaranteeing better livelihood opportunities for both the present as well as for the future Mishing generations to come.

### 1.5.3.2 MODERN SKILLS

In a traditional rural economy like that of Mishing in Assam acquisition of modern skills through practical training and knowledge can be of utmost importance. Acquiring knowledge of modern livelihood skills and practically implementing them can greatly lead to increase in their income levels and provide better flexibility to their overall livelihood system which in the long run can help rural tribal communities like Mishings to cope and recover from shocks and stresses.

**Table 5: Modern Skills Known/Learned in the Household**

Modern Skills	Place			
	Majuli Island		Gogamukh	
	No. of HH	Percent	No. of HH	Percent
No Modern Skill	71	44.38	81	50.63
Poultry	1	0.63	4	2.50
Piggery	14	8.75	12	7.50
Psciculture	9	5.63	21	13.13
Dairy	3	1.88	2	1.25

Horticulture/Silviculture	4	2.50	0	0.00
Vegetable farming	15	9.38	7	4.38
Modern crop farming	15	9.38	0	0.00
Poultry & piggery	2	1.25	9	5.63
Vegetable & modern crop farming	6	3.75	0	0.00
Others	20	12.5	24	15.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2015

As a counter to the traditional skills known and practiced by the households to derive their livelihood we also took stock of the modern skills which are learnt by the households of both Majuli Island and Gogamukh. Poultry, Psciculture, Dairy, Vegetable farming, modern crop farming are some of the important modern activities seems to be learned by the households. Like traditional activities even modern activities seems to be known or learned in single or in combination of two or more than two activities as seen in table 5. The main question that arises is that whether these Mishing households in both the areas practise these modern vocations. Only acquiring the knowledge will not solve the purpose of their livelihood but practically utilising this knowledge into activity or vocation will reduce their dependency on natural resources. The following table below reflects on this issue.

**Table 6: Modern Skills Practised by the Households**

Modern Skills Practiced	Place			
	Majuli Island		Gogamukh	
	No. of HH	Percent	No. of HH	Percent
Do not practice the learned modern skills	107	66.88	117	73.13
Poultry	0	0.00	2	1.25
Piggery	1	0.63	4	2.50
Psciculture	8	5.00	16	10.00
Horticulture/ silviculture	4	2.50	0	0.00
Vegetable farming	9	5.63	6	3.75
Modern crop farming	14	8.75	0	0.00
Poultry& piggery	3	1.88	2	1.25
Psciculture & horticulture/silviculture	0	0.00	2	1.25
Psciculture & vegetable farming	1	0.63	2	1.25
Psciculture & modern crop farming	0	0.00	2	1.25
Horticulture/silviculture & modern crop farming	2	1.25	0	0.00
Others	11	6.88	7	4.38
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2015

In comparison to table 5 we find that both in Majuli Island and Gogamukh maximum number of households do not practice the learned modern skills. 33.12 percent of households in Majuli Island and 26.87 percent in Gogamukh are found to practice the modern vocations to some extent. Among those who practise these modern skills the highest percent of 8.75 households in Majuli is found to be engaged in modern crop farming and in Gogamukh the highest 10 percent is engaged under psciculture. Therefore, the situation of Mishings on the island and on the mainland is similar with regards to practise of the modern vocations.



#### 1.5.4 OCCUPATION:

The occupational structure in Majuli Island and Gogamukh does not exhibit any characteristics significantly different from the characteristics of any other rural economy across the country.

**Table 7: Main Occupation of the Households**

Occupations	Place			
	Majuli Island		Gogamukh	
	No. of HH	Percent	No. of HH	Percent
Teaching Professionals	6	3.75	5	3.13
Clerical Support Workers	2	1.25	2	1.25
Protective Service Workers	1	0.63	3	1.88
Subsistence farmers, fishers, hunters and gatherers	92	57.50	124	77.50
Building and related trade workers (excluding electricians)	8	5.00	4	2.50
Food processing, woodworking, garments and other craft and related trade workers	8	5.00	1	0.63
Drivers and mobile plant operators	4	2.50	0	0.00
Agricultural, forestry and fishery labourers	14	8.75	8	5.00
Labourers in Mining, construction, Manufacturing and Transport	7	4.38	1	0.63
Street and Related sales and service workers	7	4.38	1	0.63
Refuse workers and other elementary workers	2	1.25	0	0.00
Others	9	5.63	11	6.88
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Unlike other rural communities even in our case also we find that subsistence agriculture and allied activities are the main occupation of the households in both Majuli and Gogamukh. Mishing economy is a subsistence economy. But an interesting picture is coming out from the table 7. We find that the occupational structure of the Mishings in Majuli Island is different from the occupational structure of mainland Gogamukh. The Mishing group on the island have a variety in their occupation in comparison to the mainland group. It is evident from table 7 that 57.50 percent of households in Majuli Island have subsistence farming as their main occupation. Whereas compared to Majuli the percent of households whose main occupation is subsistence farming is more in Gogamukh. 77.50 percent of Mishing households on the mainland have subsistence farming as their main occupation. On the other hand it is evident that 42.5 percent of households in Majuli Island have other variety of occupations as seen in table 7. But in comparison to Majuli on a very small percent of 22.5 percent of households in Gogamukh have different occupations other than subsistence farming. So the percent of household who have non-agricultural occupation is more in Majuli Island in comparison to Gogamukh. This is mainly due to the fact that isolation and limitation of land resources have compelled many Mishing families on Majuli Island today to adopt other occupations other than farming.

## 1.6 CONCLUSION:

The concept of human capital has an intrinsic relationship in a rural economy like that of Mishings in Majuli Island and Gogamukh area of Assam. The quality of human resource in both the areas varies and depends on a number of factors. Overall when compared we found that the basic quality of human resource remain more or less agrarian in nature. Among both the Mishings groups in Majuli Island and Gogamukh it is observed that the households are more inclined towards natural resource based activities. It is found from the study that when we talk of human capital with respect to rural tribal communities it has two independent dimension of human and capital. These two dimensions together serves as a resource for the riparian communities like Mishings that can generate stream of livelihood benefits both for the individual households and society over periods of time. Therefore, human capital is the most flexible resource in a rural economy as it possesses both utility and transferability irrespective of space and time.

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