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## Understanding the Occupational structure of Agricultural Labour in Manipur: A case study of Taobungkhok Village

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### ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the occupational structure of male and female agricultural labour in the village of Taobungkhok. The paper tries to show that the agricultural labour not only depend on agricultural employment but also engaged in various non- agricultural occupations for their livelihoods. The paper also emphasizes the significant role of female agricultural labour in the agricultural processes and their economic contributions in supporting the livelihoods of their households.

**Key words:** Occupation structure, on farm, off farm, Self employment

### Introduction-

The term 'Occupation' refers to the type of work performed by an individual and Occupational Structure commonly refers to the distribution of population according to the different types of occupations. In India, Occupations are generally classified as Primary, Secondary and Tertiary activities. Primary activities include agriculture and allied activities, Secondary activities include manufacturing industries, construction work etc and tertiary activities include transport, communications, commerce, administration and other services. (Sarkar,2017).The present study attempts to analyse the occupational structure of Agricultural labour households in Taobungkhok village of Manipur.

An Agricultural Labour or Labourer refers to those people whose livelihood is mainly dependent on the wages earned by rendering their services

as labour in the field of others. As per definition given in Census, An Agricultural Labourer is defined as a person who works on another person's land for wages in money or kind or share. He has no risk in cultivation but merely works on another person's land on wages (Census of India, 2011). However, given the fact that agricultural activities being seasonal in nature and the existence of monocropping cultivation in many parts of India, these agricultural labour donot get agricultural employment throughout the year. Therefore, agricultural labour depends on both agricultural and non-agricultural employment for their survival. In this regard, It has also been stated that seasonal unemployment is a characteristics feature of agricultural employment(Padhi,2007). Studies in various parts of India also pointed out the significance of rural non-agricultural sector in supporting the livelihoods of rural workers and also in the alleviation of rural poverty (Kumar,2016).

The present study attempts to bring out the different occupations (both agricultural and non agricultural activities) that these agricultural labour engaged in a year in order to support their families. The paper is based on data obtained from a field study of a village called Taobungkhok in Imphal West District of Manipur.

#### **Brief profile of the village -**

The state of Manipur lies in the extreme north eastern corner of India. Imphal is the capital city of Manipur. In Manipur, cultivation is almost monocrop, with rice as the major agricultural product and pulses, potatoes, vegetables and other agricultural crops grown throughout the state. The total population of Manipur according to census 2011 is 28,55,794, out of which the number of male population is 14,38,586 and that of female is 14,17,208(Statistical yearbook,2015).

The village that has been chosen for the study namely Taobungkhok is situated at about eight kilometers away from the Patsoi Assembly constituency of Imphal West District of Manipur. The entire village of Taobungkhok is surrounded by paddy fields. The village of Patsoi is situated on the west of Taobungkhok, Changangei on the South, Ghari on the East and Langjing on the

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North. The settlement area of the village is divided into three segments viz, Awang Leikai, Mayai Leikai and Makha Leikai. The total number of Households in Taobungkhok during the surveyed year, in 2007, is 419. The total population of Taobungkhok is 2288 with 1176 male (51.4 percent) and 1112 (48.6 percent) female. Literacy rate of Taobungkhok excluding children population during the surveyed year is 88.6 per cent including 28 post graduates and one PhD.

#### **Objectives of the study-**

- i) To study the occupational structure of agricultural labour in the village under study.
- ii) To examine the average days of employment of agricultural labour in different sectors of employment in a year.
- iii) To analyse the contribution of male and female agricultural labour from different occupations to support their livelihoods.

#### **Methodology-**

The study is based on both primary as well as secondary sources for this analysis. Information was collected in three rounds of survey, the first round of survey was a preliminary type where no structured questionnaires were used. The purpose of the preliminary survey was to understand the location of the villages, its surroundings and to get acquainted with the people residing in it. The second round of survey was a census survey where each household in the village was visited to collect information on the age and sex distribution of the population in the village, their education level, occupational profile and to identify the agricultural labour households in the village. From this survey, a total of 73 agricultural labour households were identified from the total 419 households in the village of Toubungkhok.

In the third round of survey, only those households identified as Agricultural Labour households were interviewed to collect information on the number of days of employment of agricultural and non – agricultural activities for the purpose of the study.

Secondary sources include data from both state and central government publications.

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**Findings of the study-**

The main objective of the study is to understand the occupational structure of agricultural labour in the villages. The distribution of occupation of an agricultural labour has been categorized into three - On farm, Off farm and Self employment. On farm employment here mainly refers to those employment days where these labour work as hired labour in the various agricultural activities in a year within the village. Off farm employment include all sorts of odd jobs such as carpentry, masonry, kutchha house construction, earth work like bunding, land leveling, drain digging, loading and unloading of bricks in the brick fields, stacking of raw bricks and other odd jobs within and outside the village. Self employment for female agricultural labour in Taobungkhok mainly consists of embroidery or handloom activities. On the other hand, for male labourers self employment refers to vegiculture on limited homestead land for family consumption. Information obtained from field study indicates that actual on farm employment in the village of Taobungkhok starts from the month of May. This is the season of sowing and transplanting in the paddy fields. For these processes, most female agricultural labour are involved and very few male labourers are seen to be engaged in this initial stage of agricultural practices. The next agricultural process after transplanting season is Weeding. This process normally continues till the mid of July. This process of weeding also involved mainly female labour. Therefore, it is only during the peak harvesting season that male and female agricultural labour are seen to be equally involved. The harvesting season starts by the end of October and continues till the beginning of December. The month of November is normally regarded as peak season for harvesting.

The average days of employment of male and female agricultural labour in each category of occupation were calculated in order to obtain their total employment in a year.

Table 1 shows the average days of employment for female labour in on farm activities, off farm activities and self employment in a year.

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Table 1

**Distribution of average days of employment of female Agricultural Labour in a year in Taobungkhok (excluding non workers):**

Months	On farm	Self - employment	Off farm	Total
April	1.1	9.5	6.1	16.7
May	23.5	0.7	1.5	25.7
June	24.1	0.6	1.5	26.2
July	9	6.5	4.6	20.1
August	0	9.2	6.8	16
September	0	10.2	6.8	17
October	4.6	6.4	3.5	14.5
November	25.4	0	0	25.4
December	2.8	4.2	7.7	14.7
January	0	12.6	7.9	20.5
February	0	12.2	7.9	20.1
March	0	12.2	7.9	20.1
Total	90.5	84.3	62.2	237

Source: sample survey

The table shows that female members of Agricultural Labour households in Taobungkhok are employed 237 days in a year on an average. Out of the total of 237 days, 90.5 days (38 per cent) in on farm activities, 62.2 days (26 per cent) in off farm activities and 84.3 days (36 per cent) of self employment.

Table 2 shows the average days of employment of male Agricultural Labour in a year in Taobungkhok.

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Table 2

**Distribution of average days of employment of Male Agricultural Labour in a year in Taobungkhok (excluding non workers):**

Months	On farm	Self - employment	Off farm	Total
April	0.4	0	13.8	14.2
May	12.1	0	13.8	25.9
June	2.9	0	15.0	17.9
July	0	0	15.0	15.0
August	0	0	15.0	15.0
September	0	0	13.8	13.8
October	3.5	0	13.8	17.3
November	16.0	0	13.8	29.8
December	14.8	0	13.8	28.6
January	0	2.5	16.3	18.8
February	0	2.5	16.3	18.8
March	0	2.5	16.3	18.8
Total	49.7	7.5	176.7	233.9

Source: sample survey

It has been shown that male members of Agricultural labour households in Taobungkhok are employed for about 240 days in a year, with 49.7 days (21 per cent) in on farm activities, 7.5 days (3 per cent) of self employment and 176.7 days (76 per cent) in off farm employment .

On the whole, table 1 and table 2 shows that the average employment day for female labour in a year is 237 and for male labour, the average days of employment for male labour in a year is about 240 days. This picture of *Dr. Silvia Lisam*

employment structure shows that female employment days outweighs the male employment on an average.

Cultivation in Taobungkhok is monocropping and rain fed, therefore, the months of January, February, March and April appear to be slack season. The days of self employment is more during the lean season. During the peak agricultural season, these labourers are involved in agricultural activities and therefore, they get lesser time for self employment. The employment days of self employment is more during the lean season. It is clearly reflected in the findings that the female labour try to get themselves employed in some or other activity during off season either as self employment or in Off farm activities.

Another important observation from the study is the average day of on farm employment for male labour in Taobungkhok is much lesser as compared to that of female labour. Major reason for this gap being the gender division on the nature of activities in each agricultural processes. For instance, activities like transplanting and weeding are mostly carried out by female labour. Male labourers are mostly engaged during the peak harvesting season only. Chattopadhyay in his study on the employment of Labour in Maharashtra and Assam in the year 1967-68 and 1970-71 also found the same phenomenon where agricultural operations like harvesting and transplanting involved mostly female labour(Chattopadhyay,1982). Similarly, Venkateshwaran's study pointed out this phenomenon of women's major involvement in the process of transplanting and weeding in agricultural operations (Venkateshwaran, 1995).This is the major reason for a high percentage share of employment in off farm activities particularly for male labour in the village under study. The male labourers often move out of the village in search of employment in the urban areas during lean seasons.

### **Conclusion-**

It is evident from the findings of this study that agricultural labour donot get employment in agricultural sector throughout the year. The rural non farm sector also plays a significant role in providing livelihoods to these agricultural labour families. As reflected in the findings of the occupational structure and

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average employment days of male and female agricultural labour, the average days of employment of female agricultural labour outweighs the average days of employment of male agricultural labour. It is also clear from this analysis that the average days of on farm employment for female labour is much higher as compared to the average days of male agricultural labour. However, these labour have to depend on various occupations apart from agricultural sector in order to support their families.

Note: The surveys referred to in this article are a part of my doctoral thesis submitted to Manipur University

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