

Demographic Study of the Missing Community of Assam: A Study on Lazai Pani Miri Gaon, Dibrugarh, Assam

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Abstract

The Multilingual Demographic Dictionary defines demography as the “Scientific study of human populations primarily with respect to their size, their structure and their developments. “The present study concerns with the change and development of demographic behaviour like mortality, fertility, marriage, family pattern, occupational pattern, etc. There are many factors which are affecting mortality. These are income, occupation, marital status, male- female, poverty, urban-rural difference, health service, etc. This study attempts to determine/measure the present levels of fertility and mortality among the Mishings. Mishings are one of the indigenous ethnic groups of Assam. They have been here since the days of the Chutiya role in Sadiya forming an integral part of Assamese society and culture. Their contribution to the development of Assam’s polity, economy and other aspects of life is no less significant than those of many others. The fertility and mortality behaviour of a population depends on the socio-economic configurations of the concerned population. Therefore, any policy taken for the improvement in the socio-economic and demographic conditions will be fruitful only when it is based on the findings of the study covering the concerned population. The present study is an effort for knowing the demographic behaviour of the Mishings, an important minor tribe of Assam.

1.1: Introduction

The Multilingual Demographic Dictionary defines demography as the “Scientific study of human populations primarily with respect to their size, their structure and their developments. “The present study concerns with the change and development of demographic behaviour like mortality, fertility, marriage, family pattern, occupational pattern, etc. The term ‘demography’ is derived from two Greek words, ‘Demas’ (the people) and ‘Grapho’ (to draw or white). Thus, its meaning is to draw or white about people. The credit for fusing together the two Greek words and coining the term demography goes to Achille Guiland who in 1855 wrote his book *Elements de Statistique Humaine en Demographic Camparcee*. In fact, John Graunt is the real founder of demography, who in 1762 wrote the book *Natural and Political Observation Made upon the Bills of Mortality*. According to Peter R. Cox, “Demography is the study of statistical methods of human population involving primarily the measurements of the size, growth and diminution of the numbers of the people, the proportions of living being born or dying within the same area or region and the related functions of fertility, mortality and marriage.” According to Frank Lorimer, “In broad sense, demography includes both demographic analysis and population studies. A broad study of demography studies both qualitative and quantitative aspects of population.”

From biological view mortality implies the end of that body which had a live birth. However, from the demographic viewpoint mortality devotes the fall in the size of population on account of death. There are many factors which are affecting mortality. These are income, occupation, marital status, male-female, poverty, urban-rural difference, health service, etc.

This study attempts to determine/measure the present levels of fertility and mortality among the Mishings. It has also sought to study the main features influencing their attitude towards additional children as well as their knowledge and practice of family planning, the age at marriage, use of contraceptives, level of education, level of income, occupational structure, child mortality experience etc.

1.2: The Mishings of Assam

Mishings are one of the indigenous ethnic groups of Assam. They have been here since the days of the Chutiya role in Sadiya forming an integral part of Assamese society and culture. Their contribution to the development of Assam's polity, economy and other aspects of life is no less significant than those of many others. Yet, Mishings are still nothing more than "little known neighbour" of the Assamese communities. The Mishing tribe of Assam, Previously known as the Miris forms a fragment of the greater Mongoloid horde occupying the hills and dales of north-eastern India. Mishings are traditionally agriculturalists, while in the hills they adopted Jhum Cultivation. But other than their migration to plains, they adopted permanent type of agricultural cultivation. Their main products are rice, mustard oil seed, black pulse and some other varieties of vegetables. They produce rice mainly for family consumption where as mustered oil seeds and black pulse are produced mainly for cash income. Similarly, they produce vegetables mainly for self consumption. Their techniques of cultivation are the wooden plough spade, axe, large sized knife and similar other implements. The Mishings depend on animal power like bullock, buffaloes, elephants, etc. in carrying out agricultural operations. Every Mishing family keeps at least two or three pairs of bullocks for ploughing purpose. The Mishing community of Assam has a significant contributaion to the demographic pattern of Assam.

2.1. Significance of the Study

The fertility and mortality behaviour of a population depends on the socio-economic configurations of the concerned population. These variables are expected to behave quite differently not only between the tribal and the non-tribal groups living in the plains of the North Eastern Region but also amongst the different tribes of the region because of the differences in their socio-economic conditions as well as the overall life- styles. Therefore, any policy taken for the improvement in the socio-economic and demographic conditions will be fruitful only when it is based on the findings of the study covering the concerned population. The present study is an effort for knowing the demographic behaviour of the Mishings, an important minor tribe of Assam.

2.2. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the present study are –

- i) To assess the demographic behaviour in family pattern of the Mishings of the Lazai Panimiri Gaon of Dibrugarh District in Assam.
- ii) To study the occupational status of the Mishings of the Lazai Panimiri Gaon of Dibrugarh District in Assam.

3. Methodology: The method used for the present study is descriptive survey method.

3.1: Population: There are altogether 13 (thirteen) plain Mishing (plain tribes) villages in the district of Dibrugarh, Assam.

3.2: Sample of the Study and Sampling Design: For the purpose of this study, the Lazai Pani Miri Gaon, Dibrugarh has been selected to represent all other Mishing villages. This village consists of 1,320 population and 160 households. The present study has taken 50% of the total households comprising 80% out of the total of 160 households.

3.3. Tools and Techniques Used: Since, primary source of data has to be collected, a standard questionnaire and interview schedules have been prepared for this purpose.

4: Findings and Analysis: Collected data are presented objective wise as follows:

4.1: Objective III: To Assess the Demographic Behaviour in Family Pattern of the Missings of Lazai Pani Miri Gaon of Dibrugarh District in Assam.

It has been said that in a joint extended family structure fertility is high when as in nuclear family set up fertility is low. In joint families many times major decisions are taken by the older family members. Attitude of the wife towards additional children in different families are as shown in the following table:

Table: 5.3: Type of Family and Wives Attitude towards Additional Children

Sl. No.	Type of the family	Attitude of the wife towards additional children	Attitude of the wife towards additional children	Total
Sl. No.	Type of the family	Yes	No	Total
Sl. No.	O1	O2	O3	O4

Sl. No.	Type of the family	Attitude of the wife towards additional children	Attitude of the wife towards additional children	Total
O1.	Nuclear	18 (33.33)	36 (66.67)	54 (100)
O2.	Joint	10 (38.46)	16 (61.54)	26 (100)
O3.	Total	28 (35.00)	52 (65.00)	80 (100)

The study reveals that the attitude to additional child was higher among the joint Mishings families than that of the nuclear families. Again, out of the total Mishings females living in nuclear family, 66.67% have shown unfavourable attitude to additional children while 61.54% females belonging to joint family have expressed unfavoured attitude to additional children. So, 38.46% of females belonging joint family have expressed favourable attitude to additional children, which is higher than that of the nuclear families (i.e. 33.33%). Why in joint family females attitude to additional child is more positive than that of the nuclear families, whose reasons are explained earlier. But in nuclear family, the attitude towards additional child is more negative or less positive than that of the joint families women because of difficulty in rearing up child, major decisions of a family are taken by the couple or female, literacy etc.

Objective III: To Study the Occupational Status of the Mishings of Lazai Pani Miri Gaon of Dibrugarh District in Assam.

The living pattern of a family is very much influenced by the status and nature of occupation that the husbands and their respective wives. The sample household members have been distributed on the basis of the nature of occupation as shown in the table given below.

Table:- 3.3 Distribution of Family Members by Nature of Occupation

Sl. No.	Nature of work/occupation	No. of males	Percentage	No. of female	Percentage
Sl. No.	O1	O2	O3	O4	O5
O1.	Service	41	29.93	7	8.14
O2.	Business	28	20.44	2	2.33
O3.	Cultivator	45	32.85	25	29.07
O4.	Skilled labour	4	2.92	4	4.65
O5.	Unskilled labour	3	2.19	6	6.98
O6.	Live stock forming	8	5.84	3	3.49
O7.	Petty Business	8	5.84	4	4.65
O8.	Weaving			35	40.70
O9.	Total	137	100.00	86	100.00

In the table -3.3, it shows that among 137 males, 29.33% of males are engaged in service sector and 20.44% in business. Similarly, 2.92% of males are skilled labourer. Again, 5.84% of males are engaged in live-stock farming and petty business. The lowest percentage of males is unskilled labourer, (i.e. 2.19%). The highest percentage of males is engaged in cultivation i.e. 32.85%. Though the cultivators are high among the males of the sample households, the percentage of cultivators is declining and the percentage of husbands is increasing in service and business now-a-days. This is a good sign of the village.

Among the 86 working females of the sample households, 8.14% of females are engaged in service sector, 2.33% of females are engaged in business and same percentage of females are too old to work. It is the lowest percentage of the females. The highest percentage of the females is engaged in weaving, i.e. 40.70% and 29.07% of females are engaged in cultivations, 4.65% of females are engaged in petty business and they are also skilled labourer and 3.49% of females are engaged in live-stock-farming. Spread of education among the females results wives coming out from their household chores to earning occupations. It increases the employments of the women. However the government employment schemes are not showing satisfactory performance in these villages.

5: Summary and Conclusion

The study has studied the impact of various socio-economic and demographic factors on the parent's attitude towards additional child. The attitude to additional child was observed to be higher among the unemployed females than those participating in labour force. A concerted and whole-hearted effort on the part of the government/non-governmental organizations, panchayats and dynamic participation of the members of the community at large is required for changing the state of affairs in the desired direction.

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