

An overview of the economic condition of Majuli, the largest inhabited river island of the world

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Abstract

Majuli, the largest inhabited river island of the world is located in the Brahmaputra river of Assam. It was a sub-division of the Jorhat district. Recently it is declared as the 33rd districts of Assam and it is the first river island district of the country. The river island covers the area of 352 square Km and population of around 167,304. Most of the people in the river island are engaged in the agriculture sector. This paper is an attempt to analyze the economic condition of Majuli. The study is based upon the primary data as well as the secondary data. The analysis of this paper found that Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of Majuli. However, the small scale industries or the cottage industries also play a vital role in the economy of the river island. Recently tourism sector has become as a very important one for the economy of Majuli.

Keywords: Agriculture, Island, Majuli, Tourism

Introduction

Majuli is the biggest inhabited river island of the world. It is located in the Brahmaputra river of Assam within the longitude 93^o39' E to 94^o35' E and latitude 26^o45' N to 27^o12' N. Majuli was one of the three sub divisions of Jorhat district. It is declared as the 33rd districts of Assam on 8 September, 2016. It is the first island district of the country. At present the total geographical area of Majuli is 353 Square Km and the total population is 167,304. There are two development blocks in Majuli. One is the Majuli Development Block, Kamalabari and the other is Ujani Majuli Development Block, Jengraimukh. On the other hand, there are 3 Mauzas, 20 Gaon Panchayat and 243 inhabited villages in Majuli. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of Majuli as most of the people in the river island are engaged in the agriculture sector. This research paper is an attempt to analyze the economic condition of Majuli. The study is based upon primary and secondary data. The study found that agriculture plays a vital role in the economy of Majuli as most of the inhabitants in the river island depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The study also finds that the cottage and small scale industries play a crucial role in the economy of Majuli and the tourism sector has a vast potentiality in the river island ^{1, 2, 5}.

Objective of the study

The main objective of this research paper is to analyze the economic condition of Majuli. This paper aims to make an overview of the agriculture sector, small scale or cottage industries and tourism sector of the river island.

Materials and methods

The method is being used in collecting data and information about the economy of Majuli. Most of the data are secondary in nature. The data are collected from different sources such as Development Block and other relevant

publication of Directorate of Economics and Statistics, internet, e-journals, journals and other books written about Majuli. The methods used in this research paper are data collection, data presentation and interpretation.

Results and discussions

This study is an attempt to analyze the economic condition of Majuli. The study found that the economy of Majuli is mainly an agricultural economy as most of the people in the river island are engaged in agriculture sector. The analysis of this paper includes the agriculture and industry of Majuli. It also makes an overview of the tourism sector of the river island.

Agriculture

Agriculture is considered as the backbone of the economy of Majuli. About 75% people of the total population of Majuli depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The river island has suitable natural conditions for agriculture as the soil, rainfall and climate of Majuli are quite suitable for cultivation. Most of the farmers of Majuli are engaged in the cultivation of food grains. Main food grains in the river island are rice, wheat, potato, oil seed (mustard, sunflower, seshmum), pulses (black gram, green gram, pea, lentil, frenchbean), garlic, onion, chlli, banana, sugarcane and several kinds of vegetables. About 41.43 percent of the total geographical area of Majuli is used for cultivation. On the other hand, 38.58 percent is the net cultivated area in the river island. Most of the farmers in Majuli are small farmers as the size of land holding per farmer is 0.95 hectare which is very small. Table-1 shows a clear picture of land utilization in Majuli ^{4, 6, 7}.

Rice is the major food grain cultivated by the farmers of Majuli. Similarly, most of the agricultural land is used for rice cultivation. Three types of rice namely Shali, Aahu and Bao are cultivated in the river island. Each type has different species. Different species of Shali rice are Jahinga, Ranjit, Mala, Sorainikhi, Salpona, Masuri etc. On the other hand, Amona, Indira, Kekua, Bato, Negheri are the types of Bao rice produced in the river island. Besides rice, the farmers of Majuli involve in the cultivation of some commercial crops viz. oilseeds, potato, wheat, garlic, onion, pulses, sugarcane, vegetables etc. Vegetables cultivation is the main source of livelihood for the people of Sar-Chapori areas of Majuli. The Vokot Chapori area of Mauli is well known for sugarcane production.

The cropping pattern of Majuli is very simple. Most of the agricultural land in the river island is used for rice cultivation. A small portion of the total agricultural land is used for cultivation of commercial crops viz. oilseeds, potato, pulses, wheat, sugarcane, garlic, onion, banana and vegetables. The agricultural land in the Sar-Chapori areas of the river island is used for the cultivation of sugarcane, pulses and vegetables. Table-2 shows the cropping pattern in Majuli.

Industry

Majuli is one of the industrially backward places of Assam. Geographical isolation, lack of materials and poor transportation are the main obstacles for the development of industry sector in Majuli. In 2009, there are 263 registered factories and 251 registered industries in Majuli. A few cottage and small scale industries have been developed on the basis of the natural resources available in the river island. The rich flora and fauna resources of Majuli provide raw materials for those cottage and small scale industries. Following are the major small scale and cottage industries in Majuli.

Cane and Bamboo Industry

Majuli is very rich in cane and bamboo and the river island is well known for its cane and bamboo industry. The fan made of cane and bamboo, baskets and some other products occupy a good market in the other parts of the state. Cane and bamboo products are available in the Kamalabari Kutir Shilpa Kendra situated at the Uttar Kamalabari Satra. Most of the people in Majuli use the products of cane and bamboo in their day to day life which is made by themselves. Cane and bamboo industry has a great potential and it may provide livelihood for many people of the rural areas in Majuli.

Handloom and Weaving

Majuli is well known for its Handloom and Weaving industry. It is the most important cottage industry of the river island. Endi, Silk and cotton fabrics produced in Majuli are very popular all over the state. The traditional dresses like Mibugalok, Ribigachang, Mirizim, Endi Chadar and other silk and cotton dresses woven by the women of the Mishing tribe occupies a good market in the international level. There is a huge potential of developing the Handloom and Weaving industry in Majuli which may provide the means of livelihood for the people of the river island.

Mask Making Industry

Majuli is well known for its mask making industry. The Natun Chamaguri Satra situated near the Rawanapara Pukhuri is the centre of mask making industry. Masks are used in Bouna, Rasleela and other cultural functions. It is also used for decoration in many places and institutions. Masks made by the Chamaguri Satra of Majuli are displayed at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi, Viswa Bharati University, Kolkata and Srimanta Sankardeva Kalashetra, Guwahaty. The products of Majuli's Mask making industry are also exported to foreign countries.

Pottery Industry

Pottery industry is one of the most important cottage industries of Majuli. Mainly Pottery industry is concentrated in the Salmora mouza. About 90% inhabitants of the Salmora mouza depend on the pottery industry for their livelihood. Pottery is the main occupation of the people of Kumar community in Majuli. The products of pottery industry have a good demand in the rural areas of Assam. The products of pottery industry of Majuli are also exported to the other parts of the state.

Sericulture

Sericulture is one of the most important agro-based industries of Majuli. It is a labour-intensive traditional industry of the river island. Sericulture is the source of livelihood for many people of Majuli. About 2.5% people of the river island are engaged in the sericulture industry. In 2001, 152 villages of Majuli are registered as sericulture villages. In 2009, 4093 kg yield cocoons and 3923 kg silk yarn are produced in the river island.

Boat-Making Industry

Boat is an important necessity for the inhabitants of Majuli. Majuli is well known for its boat-making industry. Some people of the island make boats for business purpose. The areas like Salmora, Dakhinpat, Bargaya of Majuli are well known for their boat-making industry. The Auniati, Natun Kamalabari and Bhogpur Satras are also famous for the boat-making industry. The boat-making industry has a great potentiality in Majuli.

The above mentioned industries are the major small scale and cottage industries of Majuli. Besides these, some other agro-based industries viz. rice mill, mustard seed oil mill, wheat mill are developed in Majuli. There are lots of small scale industries like brick industry, black-smithy, painting and steel fabrication in Majuli. These industries play a vital role in the economy of the river island.

Fishery and Livestock Resources

Fishery is one of the most important sectors of the economy of Majuli. Majuli is famous for fishery and this sector plays a crucial role in the economy of the river island. About 10% - 20% people of schedule caste and schedule tribe community of Majuli are engaged in fishery sector. There are more than 150 wetlands and beels in Majuli where about 100 types of local fish are available. There is a huge potentiality of rearing fish in Majuli as water is available in the river island throughout the year.

Livestock rearing is one of the most important sources of livelihood for the people of Majuli. The major livestock resources available in the river island are cattle, buffaloes, goat, pig, duck etc. Piggery and goatery are the main sources of income for the tribal communities of Majuli. Besides, rearing of cattle, goat, duck etc. is regarded as a secondary source of income by every household of the river island.

Tourism

Tourism is the biggest and the most important industry of the world. Majuli, the largest river island of the world is one of the most attractive places of Assam. The tourists of different places of the country and the foreign countries visit the river island throughout the year. Majuli is going to be declared as a world heritage site for its unique natural characteristics and culture. It is the land inhabited by different castes and communities. The majority of the populations in the river island belong to the tribal community viz. Mishing, Deuri, Sonowal Kachari etc. The folk life and folk culture of the tribal people of Majuli are sources of attraction for the tourists. For instance, the traditional dresses made by the women of Mishing community are well known in the international level.

The Satras of Majuli are the main attraction for the tourists. There is more than 22 Satras in Majuli. The main Satras are Auniati, Dakhinpat, Begenati, Kamalabari, Garamur, Bhogpur, Natun Chamaguri etc. The Satras of Majuli play a crucial role in the preservation of Assamese culture propounded by Saint Sankardeva. The Satriya dance is well known all over the world and the Satras of Majuli is the nerve centre of Satriya dance. The mask-making art of the Natun Chamaguri Satra of Majuli is world famous and the tourists from different countries of the world visit the satra. Tourists from all over the world come to see the Satras of Majuli. Hence, the Satras are the main components of the tourism sector of the island^{3,7}.

Majuli is the land of many rare varieties of flora and fauna and plays a gracious host to many a flock of migratory birds each year. In the winter season, different species of migratory birds like Siberian Crane, Adjutant Stork and Pelican are found in the river island.

Thus, tourism sector has a vast potentiality in Majuli and the river island has enough elements to attract the attention of the tourists. Expansion of tourism sector may provide employment opportunities to many people of Majuli and may also provide an important contribution to the economy of the river island. The government should take proper initiatives to enhance the tourism sector in Majuli.

Conclusion

From the above analysis we may conclude that a plenty of natural resources is available in Majuli, but the economy of the river island is still very backward as compared to the other places of the state. Lack of infrastructure, geographical isolation, poor transportation, lack of government initiatives are the main reasons of economic underdevelopment of Majuli. Most of the people in the river island depend on agriculture for their livelihood. But, still the traditional agricultural system is applied by the farmers of Majuli and it results low productivity in the agriculture sector of the river island. The industrial sector and the tertiary sector are very poor in Majuli. A few

cottage and small scale industries are developed in Majuli but these are not well enough for the development of the industrial sector of the river island. On the other hand, tourism sector plays a crucial role in the economy Majuli. The island has enough elements to attract the attention of the tourists of different countries. Thus, Majuli has a vast potentiality of income and employment generation through the tourism sector in near future. So, proper initiatives should be taken by the government to develop the tourism of the river island.

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TABLES

Table -1: Land Utilizations in Majuli, 2001

Description of Land	Land(Hectares)	% Total Geographical Area
Total cultivation land	30556	41.43
Net cultivated land	28452	38.58
Gross cultivated land	53689	72.80
Two time cultivation land	20943	28.40
Three time cultivation land	4294	5.82
Average land holding	0.95	NA
Crop intensity	175.70	NA

Source: Sub- Divisional Agricultural Office, Garamur, Majuli.

Table -2: Area under Cropping Pattern, 2001

Sl. No.	Crops	Area(Hectares)	% Total Cultivation Land
1	Rice(Summer)	8799	28.80
2	Rice(Winter)	16140	52.82
3	Rice(Autumn)	3170	10.37

4	Mustard	9894	32.38
5	Wheat	820	2.68
6	Black Gram	400	1.30
7	Pea	80	0.26
8	Potato	1620	5.30
9	Others	1025	3.35
10	Sugarcane	310	1.01
11	Onion	343	1.12
12	Garlic	360	1.18

Source: Statistical Handbook, Assam, 2001.