

Shifting cultivation and its effects in regarding of perspective in Northern India

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ABSTRACT

Shifting cultivation, known as 'jhum' in north eastern region of India is widely distributed upland slash and burn agriculture system. Efforts to address jhum remained challenging tasks, more so due to its shortening cycle and ecological threats but continued livelihoods dependency for a large population of upland communities. Shifting cultivation practices are linked with the ecological, socio-economic and cultural life of the people and are closely connected to their rituals and festivals. But the current practice of shifting cultivation in the region is an extravagant and unscientific form of land use. The evil effects of shifting cultivation are devastating and far reaching in degrading the environment and ecology of this region. The earlier 15-20 years cycle of shifting cultivation on a particular land has reduced to 2-3 years now. This has resulted in large scale deforestation, soil and nutrient loss and invasion by weeds and other species. The indigenous biodiversity has been affected to a large extent. To mitigate the environmental loss and to provide other alternative livelihood of the local population, an attempt has been made in this paper to explore the opportunities and focuses on the existing scenario of present situation of the practice, its effects, constraints before controlling of the practice and suggestions and remedial measures that would require to restore the ecological balance and sustainable development of the region.

Key words : Shifting cultivation, Jhum, North-East India, Affects, Ecology, Control, Constraints,

North-Eastern region of India has got its definite identity due to its peculiar physical, economic and socio-cultural characteristics. It is a treasure house of diverse problems. The economy of North-Eastern India is also full of potentialities as different valuable natural resources are within the possession of this region. But due to diverse natural location and lack of proper attention, the region couldn't nourish with its resources. The region comprises of eight states namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura having foreign boundary with Bangladesh in the west, Myanmar in the east and Tibet region of China and Bhutan in the north. The region may be safely divided into two broad division—Plain region which comprise of 27 per cent (*i.e.* 68.96 lakh hectares) of the total geographical area of NER and Hill region which comprise of the states like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Sikkim, Nagaland and Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills of Assam. In the region the monsoons usually start in June and last until the end of October. Rainfall in the region is usually heavy due to its peculiar geographical position. The annual rainfall ranges from 70 inches in plains to 250 inches or more in the hills.

The soil of NER is normally acidic in nature. There is much acidity on the soil of the hills whereas new alluvial soils representing the lands on the river banks are less acidic. The phosphoric content of the upper Brahmaputra valley where tea is grown is good but it is low in the lower valley. There is high proportion of nitrogen and organic matters in the soil of hill areas in the region. In the hill states of the region, fruit trees respond quickly as its soil contain heavy clays with a high percentage of organic matter. The development of secondary and tertiary sector in the region is comparatively poor. According to Colin Clarke and Kuznets, the economic development of a region consists in the progressive enlargement of the proportion of tertiary occupation. But due to lack of proper development of secondary and tertiary sector, more than 60 per cent of the total population in the region depends on agriculture for its livelihood. However, in the address before the reconstituted North-Eastern Council (NEC), Dr Manmohan Singh said that income level of rural families in NER can be substantially enhanced practically on a mass scale by harnessing the vast readily available potential in the fields of agriculture, horticulture, medicinal and aromatic herbs and bamboo, water, wind power and minerals, to name just few sectors. Table 1 gives us a crystal clear picture about the features of North-Eastern region:

Agriculture has great importance in the region not only from socio-economic point of view but also from ecological balance in the region. A substantial part of State

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