

QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG MISHING AND TIWA TRIBES IN ASSAM: UNRAVELING SOCIO-ECONOMIC COMPLEXITIES AND CHARTING A PATH TO INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the socio-economic intricacies of the Mishing and Tiwa tribes in Assam, exploring their cultural heritage, historical challenges, and contemporary disparities. The study employs a multidimensional approach, analyzing economic, educational, health, and housing indices to construct a Quality of Life Index. Findings reveal nuanced challenges, from land rights to infrastructural gaps, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions. Recommendations include educational reforms, healthcare investments, economic diversification, and cultural preservation. The research advocates for inclusive policies, urging policymakers to address root causes and embrace a holistic approach for uplifting the vibrant Mishing and Tiwa communities.

Keywords: Tribal communities, Quality of Life Index, Socio-economic challenges, Assam, Inclusive development.

Introduction

Tribal communities in India embody the rich cultural tapestry of the nation, yet they constitute a significant segment of the population that has endured historical socio-economic challenges, leading to their persistent marginalized status¹. Among these communities, the Mishing and Tiwa tribes in Assam stand out due to their unique cultural heritage, distinct socio-economic practices, and the challenges they face in the modern era². India, with its diverse demographic landscape, is home to numerous tribes, each with its own traditions, languages, and ways of life. The Mishing and Tiwa tribes, predominantly residing in the northeastern state of Assam, have played a vital role in shaping the cultural mosaic of the region³. However, despite their cultural richness, these

communities have historically grappled with socio-economic disparities, hindering their integration into the mainstream developmental paradigm⁴. This research endeavors to explore the intricate relationship between poverty and the quality of life among the Mishing and Tiwa tribal people in Assam. Understanding the nuances of these dynamics is paramount for formulating effective policies that not only elevate their standard of living but also foster inclusive development tailored to their unique socio-cultural context.

Historical Context and Economic Significance of Mishing and Tiwa Tribes in Assam

Assam, renowned for its biodiversity and cultural diversity, is home to numerous indigenous tribes, each contributing to the state's socio-economic fabric⁵. The Mishing tribe, predominantly found in the riverine areas of Assam, has historically been engaged in agriculture, fishing, and handloom weaving⁶. Similarly, the Tiwa tribe, with its roots in the hills of central Assam, has been traditionally associated with agriculture and craftsmanship⁷. While these tribes have sustained their cultural practices over centuries, their economic roles have evolved in tandem with broader societal changes. Assam, as an agrarian economy, has witnessed transformations in land use patterns, trade, and economic structures, impacting the Mishing and Tiwa communities⁸. However, the economic integration of these tribes has not always kept pace with the changing dynamics, contributing to their socio-economic challenges.

Despite their unique contributions to Assamese culture and economy, the Mishing and Tiwa tribes face multifaceted challenges. Land rights issues, educational disparities, limited access to healthcare, and infrastructural underdevelopment have perpetuated their marginalized status⁹. The intersectionality of these challenges underscores the need for a comprehensive analysis to address the root causes and formulate targeted interventions. In this context, this research aims to shed light on the living conditions, economic struggles, and cultural resilience of the Mishing and Tiwa tribal people. By identifying the factors influencing their quality of life, this study aspires to contribute to the development of tailored policies that uphold their cultural heritage while addressing their socio-economic needs. Understanding the historical context, economic significance, and contemporary challenges faced by the Mishing and Tiwa tribes in Assam is pivotal for framing the subsequent sections of this research, which will delve into a meticulous analysis of poverty and quality of life indicators among these communities.

Objectives

1. To Develop a Comprehensive Quality of Life Index for Mishing and Tiwa Tribal Communities.
2. To Uncover the Economic Determinants of Enhanced Quality of Life.

Data Source and Methodology

The study has conducted an extensive survey using structured questionnaires to gather primary data from representative samples of the Mishing and Tiwa tribal populations in Assam. The study has used a combination of surveys and secondary data analysis to collect information on economic variables such as household income, employment status, access to financial resources, and ownership of productive assets among the Mishing and Tiwa tribal communities. The surveys were designed to capture the economic activities prevalent in these communities, including traditional occupations and emerging economic opportunities. The survey has covered a diverse set of indicators, including economic well-being, education, healthcare access, cultural engagement, and community participation. Additionally, qualitative data has also been collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to capture nuanced aspects of their quality of life.

Index Construction Methodology

The study has adopted advanced statistical techniques such as Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to assign weights to different indicators based on their relative importance. The constructed Quality of Life Index is a composite measure that reflects the multidimensional nature of well-being among the Mishing and Tiwa tribes. The index has been validated through statistical tests and comparisons with existing well-established indices. For this study, we purposively selected four districts—Morigaon, Nagaon, Kamrup (Rural), and Hojai—dominated by the Tiwa tribe. Similarly, to gain insights into the Mising people, three districts—Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, and Bokakhat—where the Mising tribe is predominant, were purposively chosen. The sample comprises 2000 households each from the Tiwa and Mising tribes in the selected districts.

Findings and Analysis

A. Quality of Life Among Tiwa and Mising Tribes of Assam

The concept of quality of life lacks a universally accepted definition and standardized indicators. This study focuses on identifying key indicators, examining physical quality of life at village, household, and individual levels. Four dimensions—economic, education, health, and housing—are considered vital. Economic indicators, represented by a household's economic index (comprising per capita consumption expenditure and asset index), are crucial for explaining well-being. The study reveals (as shown in table-1) a lower economic index among the Tiwa (0.439) compared to the Mising people (0.486).

Table- 1:Dimension indexes of Household Level Quality of Life index among Tiwa and Mising People of Assam

Dimension Indexes	Tiwa				Mising			
	Max.	Min.	Mean	SD	Max.	Min.	Mean	SD
EI	0.989	0.065	0.439	0.287	0.909	0.090	0.486	0.275
EDUI	0.960	0.113	0.520	0.174	0.897	0.069	0.517	0.267
HI	0.933	0.071	0.533	0.228	0.92	0.104	0.541	0.247
HCI	0.967	0.044	0.434	0.330	0.993	0.038	0.504	0.348
HQLI	0.891	0.096	0.482	0.255	0.877	0.107	0.512	0.284

Source: Computed on the basis of primary data collected during field survey.

Education, a crucial social indicator, significantly influences quality of life through its impact on living conditions and economic status. Lower educational levels correlate with increased economic hardships, often leading to lower incomes and limited employment opportunities. This educational disparity further hampers individuals' ability to cope with economic stresses, highlighting the importance of education as a personal investment with widespread implications for emotional and physical well-being. In our study, the mean household education index (HEI) reveals values of 0.520 among the Tiwa and 0.517 among the Misingtribe, indicating an average level of education attainment among the Tiwas and a subsequent impact on their physical quality of life. Education is not only associated with increased personal control but also correlates with improved awareness of health care and health promotion, thereby positively affecting overall quality of life. The health index, a fundamental dimension of quality of life, demonstrates an average level at 0.533 among the Tiwa and 0.541 among the Mising people. Meanwhile, housing and household amenities serve as essential non-economic indicators reflecting the quality of life. Adequate housing, akin to basic needs like food and clothing, is argued to be integral to societal standards of living. The housing quality index (HQI) underscores that both tribes face challenges in achieving satisfactory housing conditions, with the Mising people exhibiting a relatively better condition (HQI of 0.504) compared to the Tiwas (HQI of 0.434). The study emphasizes the interconnectedness of education, health, and housing in influencing overall quality of life. Despite the lower indicators observed in both tribes, particularly in housing quality, these findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to improve the overall household level quality of life index, which currently stands at a notably poor level for both communities.

B. District wise Households Level QLI

Having established indices to assess the four dimensions of quality of life in the study area, we now examine the block-wise household level Quality of Life Index (QLI). Table-2 reveals that Nagaon and Morigaon districts, where the majority of Tiwa people reside, exhibit lower economic, health, and housing quality indices compared to other selected blocks in the study. In

Morigaon, the average values for economic, health, and housing quality indices among Tiwa people are 0.399, 0.502, and 0.372, respectively.

In Nagaon district, the corresponding figures are 0.384, 0.511, and 0.389. Among Mising people, Bokakhat district displays the highest average economic index value (0.490), followed by Lakhimpur (0.467) and Dhemaji (0.403).

The highest education index among Tiwa people is observed in Hojai (0.587), followed by Kamrup (Rural) (0.565). In the education index, both Nagaon (0.516) and Morigaon (0.529) districts marginally outperform Dhemaji (0.504) and Lakhimpur (0.515) among Mising people. Despite the impact of floods on nearly all sampled blocks, the education index fares relatively better compared to other indices.

Concerning the health index, Kamrup (Rural) exhibits the highest average value (0.571) among all selected districts for both tribes. Regarding the housing quality index (HQI), Lakhimpur district boasts the highest average value (0.502) among Mising people, contrasting with Nagaon district's lowest average value (0.372) among Tiwas. In the housing quality index, Lakhimpur district is followed by Bokakhat (0.502), Hojai (0.481), Kamrup (Rural) (0.478), Dhemaji (0.467), and then Nagaon (0.389).

Table-2: Block wise Quality of Life index at the Households' Level of Tiwa People in Tiwa and Mising People of Assam

Districts	Domains of HQLI	Max.	Min.	Mean	SD
Nagaon (Tiwa)	EI	0.892	0.092	0.399	0.283
	EDUI	0.913	0.096	0.516	0.217
	HI	0.776	0.035	0.501	0.260
	HQI	0.816	0.089	0.372	0.321
Morigaon (Tiwa)	EI	0.909	0.090	0.384	0.286
	EDUI	0.803	0.142	0.529	0.168
	HI	0.830	0.047	0.511	0.278
	HQI	0.867	0.103	0.389	0.325

Kamrup (Rural) (Tiwa)	EI	0.911	0.122	0.406	0.305
	EDUI	0.920	0.154	0.565	0.189
	HI	0.850	0.069	0.571	0.247
	HQI	0.903	0.119	0.478	0.307
Hojai (Tiwa)	EI	0.901	0.024	0.401	0.230
	EDUI	0.980	0.204	0.587	0.211
	HI	0.9	0.138	0.54	0.208
	HQI	0.903	0.019	0.481	0.247
Dhemaji (Mising)	EI	0.829	0.017	0.403	0.217
	EDUI	0.968	0.294	0.569	0.136
	HI	0.928	0.069	0.558	0.234
	HQI	0.968	0.019	0.467	0.269
Lakhimpur (Mising)	EI	0.886	0.068	0.467	0.203
	EDUI	0.894	0.034	0.515	0.265
	HI	0.867	0.140	0.539	0.191
	HQI	0.993	0.108	0.505	0.225
Bokakhat (Mising)	EI	0.909	0.073	0.490	0.198
	EDUI	0.925	0.003	0.522	0.233
	HI	0.92	0.114	0.548	0.205
	HQI	0.883	0.132	0.502	0.238

Source: Computed on the basis of primary data collected during field survey.

Recommendations and Suggestions

To enhance the quality of life for the Tiwa and Mising tribes in Assam, targeted interventions are crucial. Firstly, there is a need for comprehensive educational reforms. Initiatives focusing on

improving access to quality education, especially in districts with lower education indices like Nagaon and Morigaon, can empower individuals, leading to enhanced economic opportunities.

Addressing healthcare disparities is equally vital. Strategic investments in healthcare infrastructure, coupled with awareness campaigns, can improve health indices. Kamrup (Rural)'s success in health outcomes suggests replicating effective healthcare models in other districts. Economic empowerment is pivotal. Given the agrarian roots of these tribes, promoting sustainable agricultural practices and providing skill development opportunities can uplift economic indices. Bokakhat's higher economic index among the Mising tribe indicates the potential for economic growth through diversified livelihoods.

Housing quality improvement programs, especially in Nagaon and Morigaon, can significantly impact overall quality of life. Government initiatives should focus on infrastructural development to ensure access to basic amenities. Lastly, community participation and cultural preservation efforts should be encouraged. Empowering local institutions can foster a sense of ownership and inclusivity, contributing to overall well-being.

In summary, a multi-dimensional approach encompassing education, healthcare, economic empowerment, infrastructure development, and cultural preservation is essential for elevating the quality of life for the Tiwa and Mising tribes in Assam.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study on the Mishing and Tiwa tribes in Assam unravels a multifaceted narrative of cultural richness, economic intricacies, and persistent challenges. The historical context highlights the invaluable contributions of these tribes to Assamese culture amid enduring socio-economic disparities and marginalization. The identified challenges, from land rights issues to educational disparities, limited healthcare access, and infrastructural underdevelopment, necessitate a nuanced and comprehensive approach for meaningful improvement. The findings underscore the interwoven dimensions of economic, educational, health, and housing indices, collectively shaping the quality of life for these tribes. Fundamental transformations are pivotal, requiring initiatives that enhance access to quality education, particularly in districts with lower education indices like Nagaon and Morigaon, aiming to empower individuals and thereby enhance economic opportunities. Healthcare disparities are equally critical, prompting strategic investments in healthcare infrastructure and awareness campaigns to improve health indices. The district-wise analysis reveals variations in indices, emphasizing the importance of tailored strategies for specific regions.

The recommendations put forth advocate for a multi-dimensional strategy that encompasses education, healthcare, economic empowerment, infrastructure development, and cultural

preservation. Fundamental shifts in educational paradigms, targeted healthcare interventions, economic empowerment through sustainable practices, and infrastructural development are identified as critical focal points for policy interventions. Economic diversification, especially through the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices and skill development opportunities, stands out as pivotal for uplifting economic indices. Housing quality improvement programs, particularly in districts like Nagaon and Morigaon, are deemed essential to significantly impact the overall quality of life. Furthermore, community participation and the preservation of cultural heritage emerge as imperative aspects of holistic development, underlining the significance of empowering local institutions to foster a sense of ownership and inclusivity. Ultimately, this research serves as a clarion call for policymakers to craft and implement inclusive policies that honor the unique socio-cultural context of the Mishing and Tiwa tribes. By addressing the root causes of socio-economic challenges and embracing a multi-pronged approach, Assam can pave the way for the elevation of the quality of life for these vibrant tribal communities. The study lays the groundwork for informed, targeted, and culturally sensitive interventions that can usher in positive transformations for the Mishing and Tiwa tribes in Assam, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive developmental paradigm.

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