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Ethnic Impediments to Agricultural Development in the North-Eastern Region of India: An Institutional Perspective with Reference to Poumai Naga.

Kh.Pou
Dept. of Economics
North-Eastern Hill University,
Shillong, Meghalaya
khsiipou@yahoo.com

Abstract

In diversity, North-East Region is the typical index of India with many different ethnic groups, each with unique history, culture and a common problem of identity crisis and persistent economic underdevelopment. Basically the ethnic groups depend on subsistent agriculture based on traditional practices; jhuming, terrace cultivation, outdated hand tools and implements and agriculture-related ceremonial performance. Most of the ethnic groups are accustomed to a relatively complacent living, in keeping with their own attitudes, practices, and traditions. Each ethnic group has its own unique situation conditioned by its own social institutions and attitudes.

This paper attempts to identify the institutional impediments to development of agriculture of the Poumai ethnic group keeping in mind that conducive social institutional and attitudinal environment is a critical pre-condition for agricultural. The Poumai's past five-decade's history may be more a story of "resistance movement against the occupational force". Their involvement in resistance movement and excesses committed (burning down the village, murdering common people, forced labor without wages, etc) by the Indian arm-forces have to certain extent destroyed their economy. Their economy has no signs of development. This study is based on primary data collected during September-October 2009 through a survey of opinions, conducted on 221 respondents between 20 years to 60 years of age, covering 22 traditional villages ranging from 5 to 15 respondents in each village. On the basis of these data, an attempt has been made to argue that institutional factors from within the ethnic group also act as impediments to effective utilization of available resources in the ethnic economy, leading to low and stagnant agricultural productivity, inhibiting commercial farming/ specialization and adoption/introduction of new technology.

Keywords: Meso-economics, Poumai Naga, ethnic groups, institutional impediments to development, involvement in resistance movement, primary data, stagnant agricultural productivity

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Kh.Pou
Dept. of Economics
North-Eastern Hill University,
Shillong, Meghalaya
khosiipou@yahoo.com

I. Introduction

In diversity, North-East Region is the typical index of India with many different ethnic groups, each with unique history, culture and a common problem of identity crisis and persistent economic underdevelopment. Basically the ethnic groups depend on subsistent agriculture based on traditional practices; jhuming, terrace cultivation, outdated hand tools and implements and agriculture-related ceremonial performance. Most of the ethnic groups are accustomed to a relatively complacent living, in keeping with their own attitudes, practices, and traditions. Each ethnic group has its own unique situation conditioned by its own social institutions and attitudes. Although it may be possible to identify some similar developmental problems among the ethnic groups but it will be very misleading to generalize the underlying factors that cause their emergence and the manifest pattern. Another important point to be noted is that often the literature relating to the ethnic groups in the north-east as a whole is misleading and lack authenticity. The region is not only backward in term of economy but faced with lack of reliable information about their socio-economic conditions and institutional failure e.g. parallel govt. in many ethnic groups. Therefore, it is always appropriate to study each unique group separately basing on primary data. It is also not easy to collect primary data from the field, due to various reasons, especially language and attitude towards investigators. By experience the ethnic groups have developed an abiding notion about investigators as such persons are mostly government agents or have no relation with their well-being. Chances are also very high that the investigators might meet the wrong person of the group for information.

A researcher can look at the causes of underdevelopment from different angles or perspectives. But to understand the problems of agricultural underdevelopment in ethnic societies especially in North-East India, an institutional approach to the issue of a particular ethnic group might be most appropriate as each one is still practicing traditional agricultural system.

II. The Objectives

This paper attempts to identify the institutional impediments to development of agriculture of the Poumai ethnic group keeping in mind that conducive social institutional and attitudinal environment is a critical pre-condition for agricultural development of the ethnic group.

Although this study will be confined mainly to an analysis of those barriers to agricultural development which exist within the social institutions of the ethnic group, the hypothesis will be put forward and examined that the villagers do not make concerted effort to rationalize agricultural production, and that because of their lack of interest in bringing about changes in productive techniques in agriculture, the social and economic barriers to agricultural development were never directly challenged. The paper begins with a brief conceptual framework, then discusses methodological approach to the problem, deals with the background of the study area, and ends with findings and conclusion.

III. The Conceptual framework

The social institutions play a key role in perception of economic performance, investment, and adoption of new technology or change. North (1991, p.97.) described institutions as “humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction. They consist of both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct), and formal rules (constitutions, laws, property rights). Throughout history, institutions have evolved to maintain order and reduce uncertainty in exchange. Together with the standard constraints of economics they define the choice set and therefore determine transaction and production costs and hence the profitability and feasibility of engaging in economic activity. They evolve incrementally, connecting the past with the present and the future; history in consequence is largely a story of institutional evolution in which the historical performance of economies can only be understood as a part of a sequential story. Institutions provide the incentive structure of an economy; as that structure evolves, it shapes the direction of economic change towards growth, stagnation, or decline”.

Scott (1995 see pp.48-49) defined institutions as;

- Social structures that have a high degree of resilience
- They have cognitive, normative and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources provide stability and meaning to life.
- They are transmitted by various types of carriers including symbolic systems, relational systems, routines and artifacts.
- They operate at multiple levels of jurisdiction from world system to localized interpersonal relationships.
- By definition they connote stability but are subject to change process of both incremental and discontinuous.

According to Liebhafsky (1960), a number of peculiar features are apparently common to all institutions, and indeed, this fact is the basis for identifying institutional behavior. First, institutions are concerned with the determination of authority; they are concerned with conferring rank and status on individuals. Second, they are ceremonial and traditional, based on tribal legend. Third, they derive their support and strength from the appeal which they make to the emotions of the individuals who make up the community in which the institutions exist, and they have been emotionally conditioned by them. Fourth, the institutions of any given society

must be closely related and its members must share the same general beliefs, observe the same mores, respect the same authority, and participate in the same ceremonial observance.

Hamilton (1932) saw an institution as 'a way of thought or action of some prevalence and permanence, which is embedded in the habits of a group or the customs of a people'. Hodgson (2006) argued that institutions are systems of established and embedded social rules that structure social interactions. Hodgson (1998) outlined some common characteristics of institution: a) all institutions involve the interaction of agents, with crucial information feedbacks; b) all institutions have a number of characteristic and common conceptions and routines; c) institutions sustain, and are sustained by shared conceptions and expectations; d) although they are neither immutable nor immortal, institutions have relatively durable, self-reinforcing, and persistent qualities; e) institutions incorporate values, and processes of normative evaluation. In particular, institutions reinforce their own moral legitimacy. He further argued that the introduction of habit and instinct into a theory of human behavior provides a consistency between the socio-economic and biotic levels of analysis, and establishes an important link between the socio-economic and the natural world. The imitation and emulation of behavior leads to the spread of habits, and to the emergence or reinforcement of institutions. In turn, institutions foster and underline particular behaviors and habits, and help transmit them to new members of the group.

In the words of Johnson (1992 see pp. 23-44), Institutions reduce uncertainty, coordinate the use of knowledge, mediate conflicts, and provide incentive systems. By serving these functions institutions provide the stability necessary for the reproduction of society. However, each society has different forms of habits, rules and norms and hence different incentives and disincentive systems for learning and forgetting as well as for processing information. But because individuals have varying degrees of autonomy, individuals and groups can deviate from the prescribed forms of behavior in a society. And of course, these changes at the level of individuals become important in understanding the processes of societal change.

According to Hollingsworth (2000) the basic norms, rules, conventions, habits and values of a society exhibit informal institution. Because they are quite durable, they play an important role in shaping the history of societies, thus contributing to a great deal of path-dependency. Actors attempt to adjust to their contemporary environment, but since they are products of the past, the historical legacy of norms, rules and values influences the decisions they make. These elements are the most fundamental properties of institutions and are the most enduring and resistant to change. The institutions are formed and changed by individual actions and endeavours, just as individual's actions and endeavours are shaped and constrained by institutions. But at a macro level, more exactly at the meso level (Dopfer et al. 2004), it is institutions that provide a cognitive framework whereby individuals can cope with their reality. The micro, meso and macro worlds are connected. At the macro level, there is considerable stability, but at the micro level, individuals have a significant level of autonomy, and there can be widespread diversity. The meso level, mostly made of rules and customs, provides a connection between the micro and the macro worlds. The clearer are the norms and rules of a society, the longer they have been in existence, and the more widely applicable they are, the greater their impact on a society. Hence, the more robust the norms and rules the greater their impact on a society, and the less their

robustness, the greater their flexibility and the less their effect on shaping a society's outcomes and performances. Social institutions affect individuals through regulative and incentive mechanisms that impinge on the conditions of life and affect individual behavior (Parboteeah and Cullen, 2003). Development consists not merely in a change of production techniques, but also, a reorientation of social norms, values and attitudes. Any analysis of economic development which is to be fruitful and complete must include a set of propositions relating changes in production techniques to changes in social institutions and attitudes (Hoselitz, 1952).

IV. Methodological Issues:

Since economic condition of the underdeveloped community is fundamentally a function of its social institutions and attitude, an institutional approach is chosen to analyze their agricultural economic status. The approach taken is micro-systemic, that is to say institutions, their outcomes and their impact on agents' choices are considered within the overall institutional environment that includes social and customary norms. Following Shea (1959), the following criteria are used in the selection of crucial barriers to agricultural development: the apparent intimacy of the interconnection between the supposed barriers and the productive process, the extent to which they appeared to be mutually reinforcing in their retarding effects, the extent to which relevant historical events could reasonably be shown to be outgrowths of the barriers, and the persistence of the barriers themselves. Identifying the appropriate causes involves a great deal of subjective evaluation; therefore, it is likely that another researcher with a different approach would have chosen a larger or smaller number, or possibly different criteria altogether. These selected themes are not exhaustive; they constitute the minimal number necessary to provide a convincing explanation of the institutional impediments to development of agriculture in Poumai. All are closely interconnected and exhibit complex patterns of mutual interaction.

Data: The present study is based on primary data collected during September-October 2009 through a survey of opinions, conducted on 221 respondents between 20 years to 60 years of age, covering 22 traditional villages ranging from 5 to 15 respondents in each village (one person in each household) according to the size of the village with a well framed schedule. With the researcher's own knowledge about the ethnic culture and practices through socialization as a member and interaction with some knowledgeable members of the ethnic group, the schedule relating to the institutional practices was drafted with the help of an expert. Their opinions relating to the enquiries made by the researcher are shown in five tables.

V. Agricultural economy of the Poumai

North-eastern region is a hilly-region isolated from the main-land India. This region is inhabited by many ethnic groups having different cultures, traditions and histories. Agriculture is their main source of livelihood and employment; there is hardly any industry in the hilly region except a few manufacturing units in the valleys. Poumai Naga is one of the ethnic groups inhabiting the hilly northern part of Manipur and southern part of Nagaland. They live in sixty revenue villages

in Manipur with a population of 1.45 lakh and four villages in Nagaland with a population of about 6.5 thousand (in 2003). They may be one of the most neglected tribes in India, highly alienated and least governed by the state. No literature is available about the socio-economic conditions of the Poumai. Their social structure is based on village, and the economic unit is family. The village consists of *khels* and functions much like an independent state. The village council comprising representatives from each *khel* govern all the members of the village. The village structures are geared primarily towards maintenance of traditional social cohesion and hardly any economic function is found. Attachment to village is so strong that they still live in traditional villages on the hill-tops.

As yet, their main source of livelihoods and employment is subsistence agriculture. They follow the traditional way of cultivation; jhuming and terrace/wet cultivation with traditional hand tools and implements. Rice cultivation is done in terrace fields. Crops like corn, potato, bean, cabbage and other vegetables are cultivated in jhum fields. Cultivation is done for subsistence. Therefore, there is hardly any surplus for commercial purposes except a few quantities of vegetables.

The most important source of making their livelihood is land and they have both common and private land. There is no common land for the whole ethnic group, but in every village the larger portion of the land belongs to clan or sub-clan which is mostly located at the borders. Private land is tiny and scattered and they are mostly located near their village except paddy fields which are mostly located near the rivers. Terrace fields belong to individuals. Most of the jhumings are carried out in common land.

For more than fifty years of government active intervention has not brought about much improvement in their economic condition. The earlier self-sufficiency in food grain (rice) and their rich forest resources have become history for many villages. Today, many villages import rice and timber from other villages or outside the tribe. Their past five-decade's history may be more a story of "resistance movement against the occupational force". Their involvement in resistance movement and excesses committed (burning down the village, murdering common people, forced labor without wages, etc) by the Indian arm-forces have to certain extent destroyed their economy.

The important impediments to agricultural development of the Poumai ethnic Group are identified as:

- 1. Tradition of Subsistence farming*
- 2. The traditional way of keeping domestic animals*
- 3. Adherence to traditional agricultural tools and practices*
- 4. Traditional land holding and use system*
- 5. Settlement on the hill-tops and lingering attachment to village*

The problems and impediments to development are indications of socio-economic and institutional situation of economy. Critical understanding of the people, institutions and attitudes is the key to solution of under-development of the ethnic economy. According to Boas (1944, p. 238) 'in primitive societies the children are constantly exhorted to follow the example of their elders, and every collection of carefully recorded traditions contains numerous references to advice given by parents to children, impressing them with the duty to observe the customs of the tribe. The greater the emotional value of a custom, the stronger will be the desire to inculcate it in the minds of the young'. After reviewing literatures on primitive culture Heineman (1969) concluded that 'the native's approach to life and knowledge stems from the socialization process engendered by the institutions of the culture into which he is born'. Levi-Strauss (1996, see pp.13-22) in his work 'The Savage Mind' maintained that native social systems of thought are transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth and are complete conceptualizations of the individual's universe. They are imprisoned in the events and experiences and never tires of ordering and re-ordering in its search to find meanings. He distinguished the civilized from the primitive by the inverse functions they assign to events and structures as ends and means: the civilized creates events (changing the world) by means of structures and the primitive creates structures by means of events. Thus the thought system of any particular primitive society is limited by the number of natural combinations possible and by the capacity of individuals' memories. Horton (1967) averred that traditional societies are characterized by lack of developed awareness of alternatives to their established thoughts, sacredness of beliefs, and anxiety about threats to them, whereas the advance societies are characterized by awareness of alternatives, diminished sacredness of beliefs, and diminished anxiety about threats to them. He further argued that their intellectual ingenuity and experimental keenness are conditioned by patterns of their cultural behavior and beliefs, though within the limit set by these patterns they show great intelligence. Though awareness of the need to increase agricultural production was there in the ethnic societies, these barriers continue to obstruct the efficient utilization of agricultural resources and chain them to primitive agricultural practices.

Economic life is an integral part of culture and they are intimately interconnected. Baos (1944, pp.193) has rightly pointed out that 'cultural life is always economically conditioned and economic pursuits are always culturally conditioned'. Subsistent agriculture is the backbone of the Poumai economy. Though no statistics are available about their economy, agriculture can be considered as the only source of livelihood of this ethnic group; one can conclude because everyone in the village is engaged in agriculture and there is hardly anyone who is fully engaged in commercial activity. Agriculture is simply a way of lives as it is a practice since time immemorial. They follow memes and routines work not only for economic necessity, it also embodies motives and activities that went far beyond that. These include respect for tradition, religious ideas, and adherence to social organization and general culture. Motivation for a farmer to social conformity would include a desire to gain a social status or it may be driven by the pleasure it provides and a desire to pass time. Adopted memes and routines continue to shape their economic behavior and define identity. Economic choices of the tribal are more dictated by the drive to maximize satisfactions in terms of the traditional values of the culture (Herskovits 1952 see pp.6). As indicated in Table.I their most important crop is paddy; everyone cultivates

paddy. On an average they earn about Rs 21 per day from terrace cultivation and about Rs. 50 from jhuming with more risk whereas prevailing daily average wage rate in the villages is about Rs. 100-150. But they prefer working in their own fields to work as laborers in others work. When enquired as to the reason for such behavior 20% attribute it to lack of regular work and 70% attributes it to prestige issues and social status, security and self-satisfaction attached with paddy they get from their own fields. This is an indication of their agricultural activity, more as a way of their lives than economic activity. About 95.0 % of the respondents take farming as their way of life and 91% stated that it is carried out only for subsistence. Only some farmers from three villages do limited commercial farming (cabbage) once in every year besides their normal subsistent farming; farmers in other villages sometimes imitate but not successful because they are not used to commercial activities. According to 93.7% of the respondents everyone in the village follows routine life of farming - time of clearing forest, ploughing, sowing, and planting - which is conditioned by traditions. All the families in the village are expected to farm for self-sufficiency. The word work is mainly understood as agricultural activity - field works. Traditionally, people work hard in the fields to acquire wealth with an aim to gain social status and recognition in the society by offering merit-of-feast. Even today, though this practice is dying out yet it is still practiced by pagans in some villages. The rich people generously share their hard earned wealth with fellow villagers to acquire social status and recognition. Therefore, still people have the tendency to admire and emulate such customs and practices. Cultivation is just a routine work, every member of the village smoothly follows the tradition, anyone trying to deviate from the established system may earn bad image/name, or the whole villagers might despise him/her. Those who do not cultivate are considered lazy. This strong tradition of subsistent farming acts a stumbling block to commercial farming and innovation of agricultural practices. Commercial farming is something which is not known to many villagers as indicated by subsistent farming, except in two or three villages. When enquired with different villagers on their complete lack of commercial agricultural activities, many pointed to lack of transportation and communication system, but when such problem is compared with the ease of transporting all the huge timbers from their village to different parts of India, their only answer was “yes we are not use to commercial culture and we always have the tendency to follow the easy old culture”. These adopted memes and routines of subsistence and complacent attitudes of the ethnic group have kept them revolving around the traditional agricultural way of life and thus constraint them from specializing or commercializing or investing in certain agricultural ventures convenient to them.

Table-I: Subsistence behavior

Number of respondents=221 persons from 22 traditional villages		No%	Yes%
1	Farming is a way of village life.	5.0	95.0
2	Villagers cultivate many crops for subsistence and self-sufficiency.	8.1	91.9
3	No agricultural produce is marketed by the villagers.	73.3	26.7
4	The villagers do commercial cultivation.	73.8	26.2
5	There are many wild vegetables which have high market values, but not marketed.	78.3	21.7

6	The average earning per day from jhuming is....	Rs 50/
7	The average earning per day from paddy field is...	Rs 21/
8	The prevailing average wage rate per day in the village.	Rs100-150/
9	Why don't you work as wage-labourer and buy rice from the shop instead of working in the paddy fields? About 70 % do not want to as wage earner due to prestige issues and paddy from his/her own field is more lasting, gives social status and self-satisfaction besides economic value and about 20% due to lack of regular work.	

Animal husbandry – cows, buffalos, chicken, pig and dog – is central to Poumai economy and society. It permits them to earn their livings by traditional productive activities and preserves traditional land use system. Animal husbandry fits into economic requirements, ecological conditions, and values while providing cash, and prestige. Animal keeping perpetuates their traditional ways of life. Table.II shows the first hand information from the villagers relating to their way of keeping domestic animals and the farming problems associated with it. Since they do not use animal power for farming and milk cattle, right after the paddy is harvested; cattle are led free in the fields and forests. So they can cultivate crops only for a season in a year because of the tradition of letting the cattle free for about five months. Every year crops and young trees are destroyed by the cattle. Even domestic fowls are kept in the open-field; they destroy vegetable gardens in and around the village. The year after year forest and grass-land also are burnt for cattle grazing. The traditional way of keeping domestic animals is directly limiting cultivable period to not only about half of the year but also destroys crops and trees every year. Animal power which is an important source of power for agricultural activity is also left unused as they are not use to harnessing such power for ploughing and carting. Their system of open-range husbandry and letting cattle free for five months in a year - November to March - is causing serious constraint to cultivation of crops throughout the year and afforestation.

Table-II: Domestic animals and crops

Number of respondents=221 persons from 22 traditional villages		No%	Yes%
1	About 5 months cattle are led free in the forest and fields.	3.6	96.4
2	Grazing is allowed in all the areas through-out the year except in the fields for a period of 7 to 8 months (between harvest and sawing).	2.3	97.7
3	Vegetable gardens in and around the village are often destroyed by chickens.	4.1	95.9
4	Every year cattle destroy some crops.	13.1	86.9
5	Cultivation is not possible for about 6 or 7 months because cattle are led free.	86.4	13.6
6	Afforestation is difficult due to cattle.	16.3	83.7
7	Every year forest and grass-land are burned down to hunt animals and for cattle grazing.	10.9	89.1

To the Poumai, agriculture is not only means of meeting livelihoods but essentially a way of life which they have inherited from their forefathers. Every year they cultivate many varieties of crops - rice, corn, bean, potato, chilly, cucumber, ginger, garlic, pumpkin, etc. - to meet their basic needs from jhum and terrace fields. Rice is most the important staple food they cultivate. Table.III shows that 99.3% of the respondents still use traditional hand tools and implement - axe, knife, spade, and wooden implements - for cultivation. Around 93% indicated the practice of routine farming system inherited from their forefathers. The time of planting or sawing of seeds or ploughing is predetermined by customs and traditions. Every family in the village does both jhuming and terrace cultivation. Indiscriminate felling of trees due to Jhum cultivation has led to degradation of soil fertility and depletion of forest resources. No modern technology or seeds are used in agriculture. They do not have long term plan for cultivation; their plan is limited to only next year. They do jhuming mostly in common land but the scope of improving common land for cultivation is constraint by the following reasons; anyone can use it, even if one cares others do not care (the tragedy of the commons) and one cannot own it after investing in it. According to the respondents shown in Table.III cultivation is done in many tiny fields which are not only very far from home but scattered and on average every family does farming in 10 to 15 fields to meet all their needs every year. Water sources are owned according to who use first. Double cropping and commercial cultivation (except by some villagers in three villages) are still not practiced due to their adherence to traditional system of cultivation as indicated in Table III. The practice of diversified cropping and farming in many tiny and scattered fields are not only incompatible for commercial farming/specialization but also responsible for higher cost of production or low productivity. The increasing population is also posing a serious threat to the sustainability and feasibility of their agricultural economy. It has led to continuous subdivision and fragmentation of land and decline in cycle period. The increasing uneconomic land holdings and declining soil fertility have negative impacts on agricultural productivity. They do not use animal power except about four to five days when some buffalos are used for crushing mud in wet fields during the planting season. They do not have the skill of harnessing animal power. Cattle are reared only for the purpose of meat not for other purposes. Thus the tradition of cultivating many crops, many tiny and scattered fields for subsistent, wastage of animal power, absence of long-term plan and use of traditional hand tools and implements are responsible for low agricultural productivity and lack of specialization and improvement in farming.

Table-III: Nature of Agricultural Practices

Number of respondents=221 persons from 22 traditional villages		No%	Yes%
1	Do you still use the traditional hand tools and implements?	7.2	92.8
2	Double-cropping is practiced.	86.4	13.6
3	No modern technology is used in the village for farming.	81.0	19.0
4	Water sources are free to use for new terrace-cultivation.	75.6	24.4
5	The farmers follow routine plan/ traditional practices.	6.3	93.7

6	Both jhuming and terrace cultivation are practiced.	6.3	93.7
7	Animals are used for farming.	92.3	7.7
8	In agriculture, longest-term plan is next season.	22.4	77.6
9	In how many fields do you cultivate in a year? fields	Average= 10-15	
10	What is the main crop you cultivate? 99.3% =paddy, and 0.7 % =cabbage.		
11	Crops they cultivate: Paddy, potato, cabbage, ginger, chilly, pumpkin, garlic, bean, corn, cucumber etc.		

The Poumai villages function like independent states, each having definite geographical area and no village has control over another village. There are two types of land ownership; common and private ownership. In common land every member has the right to cultivate land and use trees. Common land may be of the village, a clan, a sub-clan or the immediate brothers. Hence everyone in the village has a land to cultivate or forest to use. They have two types of fields; jhum fields which are mostly in common land and terrace fields which are owned by private individuals. The fields are tiny, scattered and far from home. This common ownership of land has certain disadvantages like careless use of land and forest resources, lack of interest to improve or preserve land and forest resources, frequent disputes due to lack of proper boundaries and difficulty of private investment in land for agriculture or other commercial purposes. About 89.6% of the respondents revealed that they do not care common forest land. Private land is continuously under the process of subdivision and fragmentation in every generation. According to Poumai social institutions every child of the parents is entitled to get his/her own share of wealth both land and other form of wealth. Traditionally, property rights and land ownership are reserved for inheritance within families or clans. They are rarely transferred outside the village. Their investment is mostly limited to buying of land and constructing houses. Land has not only economic value but also social value; it gives social status and recognition in the society. They are very sensitive when it comes to land issues. The parents' properties are divided amongst the children; boys will get more than girls. This tradition of dividing parents' land in every generation among the children has led to the continuous sub-division and fragmentation of land holdings; as a consequence cultivation/farming has become unfeasible and unproductive. Private lands are tiny and scattered, no boundary records are maintained; range, stream, stone and trees are used as boundaries as a result boundary disputes are very common. Such disputes often create enmity among the villagers and between villages, even to the extent of fighting and destruction of crops. Around 89.1% of the respondents reported of having land boundary disputes. This is true to common land, inter-village and intra-village land disputes are very common. Frequent land disputes have not only cost them very heavily in term of money, but also in terms of time and other resources. Tiny, scattered and distant fields, communal land holding system and frequent land disputes, are responsible for continuing stagnation of agriculture.

Table-IV : Characteristics of land tenure and land use

Number of respondents=221 persons from 22 traditional villages		No%	Yes %
1	We have both jhum fields and terrace fields.	5.0	95.0
2	Fields are scattered and tiny.	0.5	99.5
3	Fields are very far from home.	12.3	87.7
4	We have both common land and private land.	0.9	9.1
5	We don't conserve common forest or land because it is free to all; even if I care others very often destroy.	10.4	89.6
6	We do not have proper boundaries both for common and private land.	86.0	14.0
7	Do you have land boundary dispute?	10.9	9.1
8	Range, stream, stone and trees are used as boundaries.	14.9	5.1
9	Land-holding is becoming smaller and smaller due to division of parents' land among the children.	8.6	91.4
10	Do you pay charges for case settlement?	0.5	99.5

The world historical records show that civilizations started from valleys due its economic advantages of cultivation and transportation. But in the case of the Nagas, villages are situated on the hill-tops, not in the valley and are densely populated. One's social status and identity is attached with his/ her village. Till in the recent past except people who are banished from village for violation village of serious social norms detached from village. Even today, everyone who lives outside the village has strong affiliation with one's own village. A person who is not affiliated to a village is looked down upon.

Settlement on hill-top was logically correct in those headhunting days, but today the location of the village is posing serious problem in term of time, energy and cost required for transportation from village to the fields and vice versa. The increasing population press has forced them to convert more and more forest land into farm land as a consequence on average the distance between fields and village is increasing every year leading to increase in the cost of cultivation. As shown in Table.V some fields are 5 to 6 km away from village. This problem can be solved to a great extent through expanding the settlement from hill-tops to low laying areas but people prefer living in the densely populated villages on the hill-tops mainly due to cultural factors; strong attachment to village, social status, and community life style. The long distance between the fields and villages and increasing distance due population pressure on land have direct relation with increasing cost of cultivation or low agricultural productivity.

Table-V: Distance between fields and village

Number of respondents=221 persons from 22 traditional villages		No%	Yes%
1	Villages are located on the hill-tops.	6.5	93.5
2	Fields are very far from the village, some are as far as 5 to 6 km.	6.3	93.7
3	Your village densely populated.	3.6	96.4
4	Everyone wants to live in village though the fields are far.	21.8	78.2
5	The average distance between village and fields is increasing.	19.2	80.8

VI. Conclusion

The persistent stagnation of the ethnic agriculture of North-East India in the face of active government intervention for more than fifty years merits a critical study on the failures of the government and the respective ethnic groups as each ethnic group has its own unique institutions. Social institutions or culture permeate and influence effective utilization of limited resources, determine incentives to change and the choice set of individuals within the ethnic group. In presenting the case of Poumai, an attempt has been made to argue that institutional factors from within the ethnic group also act as impediments to effective utilization of available resources in the ethnic economy, leading to low and stagnant agricultural productivity, inhibiting commercial farming/specialization and adoption/introduction of new technology.

Therefore, to develop the ethnic agriculture it is important to identify the negative impacts of institutional factors and modify such institutions by the concerned ethnic group on their part for agricultural development. Here the development policy makers can formulate certain policy/programmes to motivate them for any kinds of such attempt made by the ethnic group themselves as direct intervention to change their routine life may not work effectively due to socio-psychological reasons.

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