

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF ORGANIC FARMERS IN SIKKIM: A STUDY SOUTH SIKKIM

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ABSTRACT

Farmers are considered as an integral part of human kind, which allows human to sustain for a long periods. In other words, they are the growers and feed millions of millions people around the world. The sustainability of farmers depend on nature and artificial factors, which of course determined their socio-economic conditions. Since farmer produce essential commodities and increase the integrity between primary and secondary sectors but still they are living under the shadow of poverty, debt and illiteracy. These kinds of output or result discourage the youngsters to associate with the same profession (farmer) of their ancestors or parents, which is the only source of income. This type of discontinuity or change in occupation can trigger the migration process started from a rural region and ended in an urban sector. While in developing and under-developed countries, life in rural areas survive on the mercy of the landlords, traditional moneylenders (Saukars) and in the support of nature as well. Along with dependency in nature, the factors like right price, absence of proper marketing, presence of middlemen and shortage of storage facilities decrease the bargaining ability of farmers and force them to sell their commodity on throwaway prices. This type of practise drags the farmer towards poverty, frustration, suicide and so on. The social, economic and political policies, which concerns the development of socio-economic nature of the rural farmers force researchers to raise different questions such as why farmers are always poor or they are living under low economic condition, since they are feeding millions of people?, why famers are forced into commit suicide and migration? why their children are illiterate, dying due to starvation and low health care? Therefore, in this research, author tries to find out the basic factors, which are sufficient to answer the above-mentioned questions. However, this research is only confined within Sikkim, where the type of farming is organic, thus results or outcomes of the same may not be applicable to all other states of India.

KEYWORDS: *Farmers, Socio-Economic, Condition; Poverty, Development*

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INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic condition concept basically differentiates the social habitat among one another on the basis of basic amenities available in their home, such as land, condition of house, income assets, education, occupation, income, earning members, electricity, sanitation, water and so on and categorizes them into low, medium and high socio-economic condition category. In other words, it is a combination of social and economic components or factors, which determines the particular category for particular family or household. In the modern society, socio-economic condition can be treated as an instrument to determine the living standard of the particular family.

Farmers genuinely live in rural areas and associated with agriculture for their income. They create integrity of primary and secondary sectors or dependency with one another. Their contribution towards economic development cannot be undermined, particularly in India. In India, majority of the population live in rural areas and their main occupation is agriculture as a farmer and agricultural labour as well. Agriculture is also done in developed countries, but their techniques and outcomes are different as compared to those in India, in terms of income and agriculture products as well. The average Indian farmer works 80 hours per week which gives \$3000 in a year, whereas in America average farmer works for same number of hours per week and earns \$60000 in a year (Chanana 2016). The occurrence of difference shows that Indian farmers have still a long way to go to achieve a comfortable life, while doing farming and agriculture. There are factors, which create differences among the farmers of developed countries and the rest of the world on the basis of their earning capacity. The farming methods are very modern which makes farming easier and more convenient in the developed countries as compared to the developing and underdeveloped countries, although agriculture is the main engine of the economic development in third world, which provides massive employment in the form of self-employment as a farmer and agricultural labour but it failed to develop self-reliance or socio-economic condition of farmers, especially in India. In India, both natural and social factors are highly active, which pulls the farmers' socio-economic condition downward. Still majority of the farmers are dependent on nature to irrigate their crops. While rainfall is not supportive in all regions, some are affected by floods and some are completely dry, which drag farmers towards miserable conditions and force them toward suicide, migration and change their occupation. Since the Green Revolution, India somehow managed to solve the issues related to farmers, but still more things need to be done. Farmers in India live under the pressure of social factors as well, such as expensive health care, education of the children, cost of the daughter's marriage and social expenses. Since they have no other source of income except agriculture, these issues build the dependency of the farmer towards moneylenders (Saukar), where interest rate is very high that it takes more time than normal to return. On top of this, their illiteracy has a vice-like grip on them, thereby perpetuating their indebtedness, helplessness and ultimately leading to suicide. Therefore, in this condition, they are not able to invest in farming to increase their productivity by adopting modern methods and technology, which would allow them to fight against financial burden or crisis. On the other hand, social conscious or access to knowledge in relation to farmer's educational qualification does not support or help them to achieve maximum agricultural yield through adaptation of modern methods but force them to leave the place or move towards urban centres in search of other options (Das 2015).

OBJECTIVES

Following are the objectives of the study:

- To study the factors, which are associated with the Socio-Economic Condition (SEC) of the farmer and categorize them within the high, medium and low SEC categories.
- To study the impact of government policies or facilities in relation to farming profession and their SEC as well.

METHODOLOGY

This study has been carried out in rural parts of South District of Sikkim during July to August 2019. Sikkim belongs to hills and mountainous landscape features, where agriculture farming is not as easy as compared to other plain regions or states of India. In other words, agriculture is not so common in Sikkim when it counts as a farmer profession due to various factors, such as its physical feature of land, less population, self-employment through tourism, basically homestay business etc. People in Sikkim usually do micro farming for self-consumption and macro level of agricultural farming as a farmer

professionally practices by minority that is why result of this study may not be applicable to other parts of the country, mainly in plain regions. Another reason for the same is that farmers in Sikkim practise only organic farming, since it is the only state in India which is fully organic. There are four Districts in Sikkim, East, West, North and South.

Sample Size

Among the four Districts, only South District has been selected on the basis that it is the smallest in total area as compared to other three districts and second developed district after East. Further, three villages, namely Chemchey, Jaubari and Parbing were selected through lottery method and 20 farmers from each village were selected randomly for the study. Therefore, 60 samples were selected to justify the objectives and conclude the study.

Source of Data and Statistical Tools used

Like any other majority of researches, the result of this research is also based on primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected through door-to-door survey method with self-(researcher) made open questionnaire among the samples only. Secondary data has been collected through various journals, newspapers, books and other related sources. Further to confine the study within the topic and categories, the samples in three different SEC researches focus on limited variables, namely, category, age, education, landholding and its types, condition of house, farming experience, annual income, expenditure, savings, availability of basic and modern facilities, livestock and the number of family members. To justify the mentioned objectives and verify the ground reality, researcher used simple statistical tools like frequency, percentage and descriptive nature.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In India, indebtedness of farmers is not a new issue or phenomenon. Shifting of burden of debt by the farmers' ancestors do not allow them to step towards better economic condition. In particular, the debt-related issues of farmer in agriculture sector was highly active in pre-Green Revolution (Singh and Grewal 1961) period, that is why farmers in India still languish under the silence of poverty. Basic inputs like irrigation, fertilizer, varieties of seeds, dependency of tenants on owners for their support on agriculture and non-agricultural consumption also plays an important role to increase the productivity, which further leads to increase the income of the farmers. Therefore, the absence of such inputs predisposes them towards low economic condition through low income or income deficit. In India, financial provision and lending policies of financial institutions regarding their credit limits, adversely affects on the economic development of the poor farmers, especially small farmers and tenants. Thus, awareness of the various policies and its benefits influences the socio-economic condition of the farmers (Mutonyi and Fungo 2011). Farmers' socio-economic and psychosocial conditions are the major reasons, which encourage suicides in India (Kale *et al.* 2014). In Indian agriculture system, land holding pattern still holds strong gravity, which is directly connected, with socio-economic condition of the farmers (Singh *et al.* 2009). While factors like below poverty line, literacy level, food security, farm size, household income and household size are equally responsible to determine the socio-economic condition of the farmers (Babatunde *et al.* 2007). Along with above-mentioned factors, climate change is also one of the main factors, which generate negative impact on agriculture. In the context of India, its impact is unadjustable because India has 15 agro-climatic zones, diverse seasons, crops and farming system, where millions of people directly or indirectly involve their regular income (Ninan and Satyasiba, 2012). Therefore, climate change and its impact on agriculture also determines the socio-economic condition of farmers. The changing nature of Indian economy and efforts put forth by central and state governments with formation of polices,

especially for farmers, increase their socio-economic condition nowadays. The farmer credit card, loans in low interest rate, providing seeds at subsidized rates, crop insurance schemes and providing basic tools to increase productivity, storage facilities and agricultural marketing are some of the important schemes and policies of the government to support farmers' life in relation to their socio-economic condition (Mugadur and Hiremath 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Types of Reservation Category of the Respondents

Table 1: Reservation Category Details of the Sample Respondents

Sl. No.	Reservation Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	SC	13	21.67
2	ST	18	30.00
3	OBC	12	20.00
4	General	17	28.33
Total		60	100

(Source: Field Survey 2019)

The data in the above table (Table no. 1), reflects that the majority of the farmers belong to the scheduled tribe category, that is 30% of the sample size, followed by General 28.33%, Schedule Caste 21.67% and Other Backward Category 20%. While after survey, it is found that illiteracy (Table No. 2) is the most important factor, which induces them to involve in the agriculture sector as a farmer. However, to some extent, it is their choice to remain as farmers because this profession was forwarded by their ancestors. Therefore, due to these two reasons, they failed to associate themselves in other professions, in other sectors. Most importantly, their educational qualification does not meet the demand of other sectors as a labor (skilled labor force). The second important factor for their attachment in agriculture sector as a farmer is responsibilities towards their family, due to the types of family (Table No. 3), particularly, in families where the number of old-aged, physically disabled, school-going children, children less than 4 years old are more and where only one member of the family is highly active in farming profession.

Educational Qualification of the Respondents

Table 2: Educational Details of the Respondents with Reservation Category

Items Category	Education Qualification of the Respondents with Reservation Category					Total
	Illiteracy	Primary	High School	Secondary	And Above	
SC	12	01	00	00	00	13
ST	10	07	01	00	00	18
OBC	10	00	02	00	00	12
General	11	02	04	00	00	17
Total	43	10	07	00	00	60

(Source: Field Survey 2019)

Educational details of the sample respondents show (Table 3) that majority of the farmers are illiterate and the minority have high school education, which is the last qualification of the study and it means no farmers are either secondary or above qualified in this study. The main reason behind their illiteracy is illiteracy of their parents due to their ignorance with regard to the importance of education and poverty. In this matter, when researcher performs informal interview with the available parents of farmers, they express their view in the following words:

“Since we do not have schools nearby, our village and on the top of that our parents are not educated enough to understand the importance of education for the future generation. Since life in the past generation was unlike what our

children have today. We all are dependent on agriculture to survive and we consider that we all are emotionally attached with that. Therefore, land in terms of agricultural land was the only source of income and we are supposed to be happy if we are able to work in that land. Of course, financial crisis was there regarding educational expenses but in the absence of educational institution and our illiterate nature, the financial complication was nothing. So you just imagine how we managed to survive in the present world without education, where everything is changing in a minute.”

Therefore, they are unaware of the ignorance of the importance of education of their ancestors (farmer), who keep them away from school even if they (ancestors) are in a position to bear the educational expenses.

Nature of the Respondents' Family

Table 3: Nature of the Respondents' Family

Items	Nature of the Respondents' Family with Reservation Category		Total
	Nuclear	Joint	
SC	07	06	13
ST	11	07	18
OBC	08	04	12
General	14	03	17
Total	40	20	60

(Source: Field Survey 2019)

According to data shown in Table No. 3, out of 18 among ST category, 07 sample respondents belong to joint family, which is maximum as compared to other categories. Overall, 20 sample respondents fall under the joint family nature and 40 in nuclear family. After survey, the researcher found that the division of land among youngsters, intake capacity of house, overcrowding and to some extent internal problems in relation to their mentality and responsibilities are the main factors, which encourage and support nuclear nature of the farmer's family. Since this land distribution practise decreases the landholder in terms of size and lead them towards the small and marginalised farmer category. Sometimes, this land distribution practise causes negative impact on the farmer's socio-economic condition directly, for example, any joint family with a small size of land force will sometimes ask some of the family members to leave the house and stay in another's land as a tenant (details in Table No. 4), which will decrease their socio-economic condition due to the rent of the land.

Land Holding

Table 4: Land Holding Types of the Sample Respondents

Types of Land Holding	Category wise Number of Respondents				Total
	SC	ST	OBC	General	
Own	11	16	11	10	48 (80%)
Other's	02	02	01	07	12 (20%)
Total	13	18	12	17	60 (100%)

(Source: Field Survey 2019)

Data mentioned in the above Table (Table No. 4) shows that 48% of sample respondents have their own land and only 12% sample lived in other's land. While the land holding pattern is quite good in study because majority of the farmers have their own land, which share maximum percentage on their income as compared to those who lived in other's land because they used to pay rent to the landlords, which decreases the farmer's income. Therefore, the land-holding pattern in study is more supportive to standardize the farmer's socio-economic condition. However, less holding of land by

ancestors, maximum number of family members, low economic condition and up to some extent food deficiency, are the important factors, which force them to stay in other's land.

Types of Residents

Table 5: Types of Residents of the Sample Respondents along with their Category

Types of Residents	Reservation Category wise Number of Respondents				Total
	SC	ST	OBC	General	
Local	13	17	11	15	56 (93.33%)
Nun-Local (Outside the state)	00	01	01	02	04 (06.67%)
Total	13	18	12	17	60 (100%)

(Source: Field Survey 2019)

In this study, the researcher found that 06.67% of the total samples are migrated from out of the state and they used to stay in other's land because they are in financial crisis due to which they are not in a position to buy a land. This type of residence nature increases the number of samples who lived in other's land (Table No. 4). While among all, the general categories constitute the maximum percentage that is 50%, followed by OBC and ST category, which constitute 25% each. As mentioned above, here it is also the big size of the family, poverty, food deficiency, less land in the family, illiteracy and other social factors are highly active and encourage migration of people from region to region in search of better opportunities and income.

Condition of House of the Sample Respondents

Table 6: Condition of House of the Sample Respondents Category wise

Condition of the House	Reservation Category wise no of Respondents				Total
	SC	ST	OBC	General	
Pucca	11	16	11	10	48 (80%)
Semi Pucca	02	01	00	05	08 (13.33)
Kutchha	00	01	01	02	04 (06.67%)
Total	13	18	12	17	60 (100%)

(Source: Field Survey 2019)

According to data shown in the above table (Table. 6) signifies that only 06.67% out of 60 samples have kutchha house. Since they (06.67%) have migrated from other states and they do not have their own land, their landlords did not allow them to construct pucca house. Similarly, they think that making pucca house in other's land is not a good investment since they have to leave the place in the long run. While 08 (13.33%) samples out of 60 samples belong from those family, where land is less, disputes with the family, newly married couple and mantle difference is high that is why they are forced to leave their parents house and settle in other's land with semi-pucca house since all of them are local and well known by landlords which allow them to construct semi-pucca house. In this study, the researcher found that majority of the sample respondents have their own land and farming is their primary occupation or the only source of their income, which motivates them to live in a pucca house. Of course that land belongs to their ancestor but have their share, where they do farming and bear the basic and necessary expenses of their family.

Basic Facilities Available in the Samples House

Table 7: Availability of Basic Facilities in Samples House

Facilities Available in House	Reservation Category wise No of Respondents				Total
	SC	ST	OBC	General	
Electricity	13	18	12	17	60
Water	13	18	12	17	60
Toilet	13	18	12	17	60
Bathroom	13	18	12	17	60
LPG	13	18	12	17	60

(Source: Field Survey 2019)

Regarding availability of basic facilities within the samples' house, researcher found that 100% samples are fully provided with Electricity, Water, Toilet, Bathroom and LPG (Table 7). This shows that they are living in a hygienic environment. Since they are the farmers, they know the importance of all these facilities and are able to provide all these to their children. In this study, a minor percentage of farmers are not from Sikkim state, but still they are using LPG in Kitchen. However, free distribution of LPG to BPL category is there to help the rural people, but for this, there is some documentation related to residence and state government, which will supply those rural poor people, who only belong to the Sikkim State. Therefore, in this case, they are behind the bar of policies and in this situation, they are able to fix the deficiency of LPG through purchase from the market.

Beneficiaries of the Facilities Provided by the Government to Support Economic Condition of the Farmers and their Farming Capacity

Table 8: Number of Sample Beneficiaries of the Government Facilities

Facilities Provided by the Government	Reservation Category wise No of Sample Beneficiaries				Total
	SC	ST	OBC	General	
Irrigation	13	17	11	15	56 (93.33%)
Loans	13	17	11	15	56 (93.33%)
Seeds	13	17	11	15	56 (93.33%)
Machinery inputs	13	17	11	15	56 (93.33%)

(Source: Field Survey 2019)

Since government support is essential and important to develop socio-economic condition of the farmers and increase the farmers' capacity to increase the output, similarly, in this study, data mentioned in the above table shows that (Table No. 8) 93.33% of sample respondents are benefited by government facilities, which not only increase their capacity to increase their output but encourage them to do agricultural farming as a farmer. While a minor percentage, that is 06.67% (Table No. 8) do not come under the umbrella of government facilities because they belong to other states, which means they have migrated from outside and settled in other's lands as tenant, which is mentioned in table no. 5. As already discussed, proper documentation and its verification is needed to provide any government facilities to any individual or family; therefore, those who are living as tenants do not have any documents, which signify that they are from Sikkim and that is the reason why they are not included in those facilities and they are happily accepting it.

Monthly Income Pattern of the Sample Respondents

Table 9: Monthly Net Income of the Sample Respondents

Income in Rs.	Reservation category wise Number of Respondents				Total
	SC	ST	OBC	General	
Less than 2000	00	00	00	00	00
2001–4000	00	00	00	00	00
4001–6000	00	01	01	02	04 (06.67%)
6001–8000	12	16	11	11	50 (83.33%)
8001–10000	01	01	00	04	06 (10.00%)
10001–12000	00	00	00	00	00
Above 12001	00	00	00	00	00
Total	13	18	12	17	60 (100%)

(Source: Field Survey 2019)

After survey, researcher found that majority of the samples come under the net income line of Rs 6001–8000 per month. Since 70% of them have small and marginalized farmers, which give them limited income. On the other hand, 06.67% out of 60 samples come under the category who earns 4001 to 6000 Rs. per month as a net income. Since all of them are tenants and because of this they used to pay rent to landlords, which obviously decrease their income. Further, there are 10.00% of samples who are able to earn 8001–10000 Rs. per month, just because they belong to nuclear family and have sufficient land. According to samples, ancestral debts and financial flow from any other formal or informal institution excluding government through policies is totally absent and that is why they are able to sustain for a long period.

Monthly Consumption Pattern of the Sample Respondents

Table 10: Monthly Consumption Expenditure Pattern of the Sample Respondents

Consumption in Rs.	Reservation Category wise Number of Respondents				Total
	SC	ST	OBC	General	
Less than 2000	00	00	00	00	00
2001–4000	02	07	09	07	25 (41.67%)
4001–6000	11	11	03	09	34 (56.67%)
6001–8000	00	00	00	01	01 (01.67%)
8001–10000	00	00	00	00	00
10001–12000	00	00	00	00	00
Above 12001	00	00	00	00	00
Total	13	18	12	17	60 (100%)

(Source: Field Survey 2019)

(Note: In this research Consumption expenditure means expenditure related to all necessary items including social expenditure)

Regarding consumption behavior of the samples, data mentioned in the above table (Table No. 10) expresses that 56% to 67% of the samples out of 60 belong to those category whose consumption lies between 4001 and 6000 Rs. per month. Within this category, the number of SC and ST samples is the same, and where regions are almost same like health-related expenditure, maximum number of children and old age people. In this case, they need more money to balance the consumption. On the contrary, less number of people in the family (old age and children as well) and healthy family need less amount to balance the consumption in the family that is why 41.67% fall under 2001–4000 Rs. consumption per month. In the same data, there is one sample that belongs to a general category and falls under the consumption of Rs. 6001–8000 per month. After deep involvement to find out the reason for high consumption, researcher finds out that the

child of that family is enrolled in a private boarding school, which increases their consumption level. On the other hand, children of 59 samples out of 60 were enrolled in government schools. In this study, the researcher found that there is no debt related to traditional financial institution or burden of financial debt from any other institution.

Monthly Saving Pattern of the Sample Respondents

Table 11: Monthly Saving Pattern of the Sample Respondents

Saving in Rs	Reservation Category wise Number of Respondents				Total
	SC	ST	OBC	General	
Less than 2000	08	10	07	12	37 (61.67%)
2001–4000	05	08	05	05	23 (38.33%)
4001–6000	00	00	00	00	00
6001–8000	00	00	00	00	00
8001–10000	00	00	00	00	00
10001–12000	00	00	00	00	00
Above 12001	00	00	00	00	00
Total	13	18	12	17	60 (100%)

(Source: Field Survey 2019)

According to data mentioned in the above table (Table 11), 61.67% of samples are able to save less than 2000 Rs. per month from their income, whereas 38.33% samples save between 2001 and 4000 Rs. per month. To be more specific, 38.33% of samples belong to a nuclear family category, less number of senior citizens, less number of children and no physically disabled persons; therefore, in this environment, monthly consumption of these families is less as compared to 61.67% samples, where sample reason or issues are highly activated, which increase their consumption and decrease their saving. In general, it is good to know that as a farmer, they save for their future and they are financially literate in simple terms. In other words, they are under government observation, where they are benefited by different policies and schemes to support their profession and economic condition, which directly encouraged them to save more for a better future.

Material Possession by the Sample Respondents in their House

Table 12: Material Possession by the Sample Respondents in their House

Items	Reservation Category wise No of Respondent				Total and %
	SC	ST	OBC	General	
Television	13	18	12	17	60 (100%)
Radio	13	18	12	17	60 (100%)
Smart Phone	09	12	10	14	45 (75.00%)
Washing Machine	00	00	00	00	00
Refrigerator	01	06	02	08	17 (28.33%)
Motor Cycle	02	01	00	07	10 (16.67%)
Car (Private)	00	02	01	02	05 (8.33%)
Four wheeler (Taxi)	00	00	00	00	00
Inverter	00	00	00	00	00
Computer	00	00	00	00	00
laptops	08	04	07	11	30 (50.00%)
Solar light	13	17	11	15	56 (93.33%)

(Source: Field Survey 2019)

Accordingly, Television and Radio are the common electronic products in the present time; therefore, all the samples have these two items in their home. As far as laptop is concerned, 30 samples have laptops in their home due to free distribution by the state government to the school-going children from class 10 onwards till graduation. On the other

hand, 75% of samples have smart phones and they know how to use it, whereas other 25% have bar phones. After survey, it was found that they (25% samples) are not in favour of using smart phones or they do not want to use it. Further, to some extent, their illiteracy does not support their interest of using smart phones. While it is found that the financial circumstance is not the main problem for not having smart phones. Similarly, 28.33% of the samples have refrigerator, 16.67% have a two-wheeler and 08.33% have a four-wheeler as a private transport. This further shows that 53.33% of samples are not poor or they are not living under the shadow of poverty, since they have the things like refrigerator, motor cycle and private transport. They purchased them from their own income or they paid monthly EMI from their own income. Therefore, on the basis of availability of materials in the sample's home researcher categories, 53.33% of sample in high socio-economic condition category, 46.67% are in the medium socio-economic condition category.

CONCLUSIONS

Farmers, the growers, are the only source of agriculture to sustain humankind for humanity and create an unconditional integrity between agriculture and industry. Farmers develop the dependency strategy for each mankind in various aspects such as labors, products, raw materials, etc., but in between these production mechanisms, they fail to survive in the long run and factors like debt, low income, illiteracy, high-consumption expenditure, especially health expenses and other natural and unnatural factors infected the life of farmers in rural areas that is why farmers are always growing under the shadow of poverty, live /and die under the same environment. In this study, the researcher found that the picture is different. The farmers under study are free from financial burden of their ancestors or they do not have any debt, which belongs to the local lender. Life of farmers under study is far better as compared to other state's farmers. With the changing time, they developed themselves as professionals, which allow them to earn at least better than the past. In the same sample's house, the members in the family are huge due to which their consumption is more than their savings, but in general, they are all living happily. Availability of self-help groups and other local small organizations helped them to improve their lifestyle. The factors like illiteracy, land holding nature, marketing, size of the family, availability of needful things for agriculture like tools, seeds, organic manure and irrigation are not active to drag the farmers towards poverty. The supportive nature of government towards organic farming helps them to increase income and encourage young people to involve in agriculture and farming.

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