CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is a universal phenomenon that the people living mainly on small-scale subsistence agriculture in the rural areas do not like to move outside in search of alternative occupations unless they are pushed by such factors as increasing scarcity of agricultural land due to diminishing land-man ratio or increasing pressure of population on agricultural land, lack of avenues for alternative occupations within the rural sector and increase of literacy and educational attainment associated with unemployment. As a result of such factors, people are pushed away from their rural areas to seek alternative occupations elsewhere wherever they get the opportunity. Thus, the existing socio-cultural landscape is altered and a new landscape is created by the human action through the process of evolution (Rawntree, 1982). It is more so in the case of rurban community. Even the illiterate poor people move away from their villages to do low grade non-agricultural works elsewhere when they do not have required agricultural land (Alexander, 1985). Thus the process of occupational mobility of the rural people is caused in an agrarian situation leaving behind significant changes in the socio-economic structure of the rural areas from where they move away but not completely shedding their relationship with their rural homes.

Such a phenomenon has been observed in the rural areas of the Hajo Block of Assam in the recent years where the density of rural population is very high (453 persons per sq.km.) leading to increasing their pressure on limited agricultural land on
the one hand acting as the ‘push’ factor and on the other the development of silk industry in Sualkuchi area and various job opportunities in the nearby Guwahati city acting as the ‘pull’ factor. Literacy, educational attainment, development of transport system and modernization also lead to the occupational diversification, rendering spectacular changes in the socio-economic structure.

The present problem is studied in the context of the rural areas of the Hajo Block in the Kamrup district of Assam for the period 1971 to 1991 during which the most significant changes had taken place. However, due to the dearth of relevant village level secondary data for the year 2001, the problem of occupational mobility could not be studied during 1991-2001.

It is pertinent to note that no systematic study has so far been made in Assam to address the social, economic, and cultural issues relating to the occupational mobility of rural people. It is, therefore, thought pertinent to make an in-depth study of the problem of occupational mobility and socio-economic change in the rural areas of the Hajo Development Block in the Kamrup district of Assam.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

Considering all the relevant aspects, this Ph.D. work is designed to study the occupational mobility and pattern of socio-economic change in rural areas of the Hajo Block. The principal objectives of the study are:

1. To study the change in land use pattern, landholding structure, its variation and volume of change in spatio-temporal dimension.

2. To analyse the change in population structure of different social groups of people in different Gaon Panchayat.
(3) To study the distributional pattern, and spatio-temporal variation of different social groups of people.

(4) To analyse the change in occupational structure and spatio-temporal variation of working population

(5) To find out the magnitude of over population and surplus agricultural workers.

(6) To find out the population pressure and its effects leading to occupational mobility.

(7) To examine the process of occupational mobility.

(8) To find out the extent and magnitude of the change in occupational mobility during 1971 to 1991.

(9) To study the impact of modernization and industrialization upon the socio-economic change.

(10) To find out the pattern of socio-economic change as a result of occupational mobility.

1.3 HYPOTHESIS

The theoretical background of this study is that the process of occupational mobility of the rural people is caused in an agrarian situation when they are pushed by high pressure of population on extremely small and fragmented landholdings on the one hand and on the other they are pulled by secondary or tertiary jobs in the urban centres. Consequently, significant changes and development occur in the socio-economic condition at the rural areas from where they move away but not completely shedding their relationship with their rural homes contribute to the creation of opportunity and rural resources for rural development. Against such a theoretical background, the following hypotheses are proposed to be tested in the course of this research work.

(1) Low per capita availability of agricultural land is the result of higher density of rural population depending mostly on agriculture.

(2) Higher is the rate of occupational mobility; lower will be the intensity of cropping.
(3) Advancement of education causes large-scale vertical occupational mobility which in turn creates opportunities and family resources to pull workers from farm jobs.

(4) Traditionally stagnant small scale subsistence agriculture acts as a push factor for primary workers to move to the non-farm jobs provided the scopes for which are available elsewhere.

(5) More is the number of surplus primary workers as a result of heavy pressure of population on land in traditional agriculture, greater is the rate of occupational mobility.

(6) More is the occupational mobility, greater is the socio-economic change.

1.4 DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY

This micro level study is primarily based on empirical observation and primary and secondary data collection. It examines the past and present occupational structures of rural people of the Hajo Block in respect of changing socio-economic milieu.

For the purpose of this study, seven gaon panchayats comprising the Hajo Development Block are considered as spatial units because of the reason that the Government of Assam by its Panchayat Act 1972, constituted these gaon panchayats for rural development.

Secondary data have been collected from the (1) Block Development Office, Hajo, (ii) Revenue Circle Office, Hajo, (iii) Panchayat Offices of the Hajo Block, (iv) Directorate of Census Operation, Assam, Guwahati, (v) Directorate of Rural Development, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati and other related Government Departments and organizations.

For the collection of primary data in the first stage, three villages from each of the seven gaon panchayats are selected on the basis of caste, community and religion
to which the people of the selected village belong, and accessibility to roads, towns and market centers.

In the second stage 10 per cent households of each representative village are selected by simple random sampling in order to collect primary data relevant to the topic of this study.

The collected data have been analysed with the help of different quantitative techniques like coefficient of variation and correlation and regression analysis. The result so obtained is cartographically represented on maps and diagrams for interpretation.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE

The study of the present problem is highly significant in solving various agrarian problems in a densely populated region like the Hajo Block of Assam. Different scholars in other parts of the country have done such a study. But so far Assam or North East India is concerned, very little works have been done in this line except the work done by Das on various problems of peasant agriculture in Assam and the work done by H. Khatun on occupational mobility among the Hira population. Her work deals with only one scheduled caste community inhabiting in three villages in and around the environ of the Barpeta town. But in the present study, the author has attempted to carry out his work on salient features of occupational mobility and the pattern of socio-economic change in the Hajo Block. The work comprises all the castes, communities and religious groups of people at micro level areal units (gaon panchayats). Such a micro-level study, taking gaon panchayat as areal unit of study on a problem-stricken area like the Hajo Block is surely an academic contribution and
also useful for building up strategy for socio-economic development in general and a basis for rational agricultural planning in particular.

1.6 REVIEW OF RELEVANT WORKS

Before highlighting the valuable contributions made by different scholars to various aspects of agricultural occupation and manifold dimensions of agricultural geography, the contribution made by James, M. Rubinstine and Robert S. Bacon (1990) towards the key issues of agriculture is more pertinent to cite in this context. They opined that agriculture as an occupation originated when plants and animals were domesticated by humans for their use, the origin of which could not be documented with certainty because it was before the recorded history.

Although a large number of valuable studies and researches have been made by geographers on various aspects of agricultural occupation and manifold dimensions of agricultural geography, it is not encouraging to know that much works have not been done by them on occupational mobility of the people from the rural areas which would have been relevant to the present work. However, an attempt has been made here to review whatever literatures could have been collected.

Alexander, K. C. (1982), in his work on ‘Agricultural Development and Social Transformation’ concluded that agricultural development leads to fundamental transformation in social life of the community as a result of which some members of the farm families moved to non-agricultural occupations.

Gasson (1968), as cited by Morgan and Munton (1971) having analyzed the occupational immobility of small farmers, commented that as a broad generalization, it appears that small farmers who could move out of farming will not, whilst those who would move cannot.
Morgan further cited the view of Gasson (1968) that 'labour is both occupationally and geographically mobile and both forms of mobility are frequently associated. Generally, farmers are less occupationally mobile than other workers.'

Morgan, W.B. and Munton, R.J.C. (1971) analyzing the pressure of population concluded that 'many problems, such as under-employment, subdivision of holdings, lack of capital, and indebtedness occur together in underdeveloped countries, particularly in those frequently described as suffering from over-population, that is the condition in which any further increase in population will result in a decrease in the level of real income.' Over-population ultimately leads to occupational mobility.

Gasson (1968) as cited by Munton and Morgan commented that “British surveys reveals that over 70 per cent of farmers’ sons intend to stay in farming, although the proportion declines as the size of farm business falls.”

On the contrary to this finding, Broom, Leonard and F. Lancasta, Jones (1969) in a study “Father-to-son mobility: Australia in comparative perspective” forwarded the view that Australia being more advanced country in the recent time, the gross rate of occupational mobility between father to son is very high. In a comparative study it is highlighted that according to recent data this type of mobility in Australia is higher than that in Italy but somewhat lower than in the United States.

Reiss, Albert J. Jr. (1995) in the article “Occupational Mobility of Professional Workers” has forwarded the view that various types of professionals have different patterns of mobility. Litwak, Fugena (1960) in the article, “Occupational mobility and extended family cohesion”, has shown that extended family is based upon geographical propinquity, occupational dependence and nepotism.
Pihlbad, C.T. and Dagtin (1960) presented an article, "Residential and occupational mobility in an area of rapid industrialization in Norway". In this article they tried to measure the volume of principal shift and they argued, in course of the study that the principal shift had been from agriculture and fishing towards manual labour, largely unskilled, construction and industry. In other words, occupational mobility took place from the primary sector to the secondary sector.

Goldstein, Sidney (1955) in a study on "Migration and occupational mobility in Norristown, Pennsylvania" has commented that migration is one of the main factors responsible for changes in the occupational composition of Norristown population.

Boserup, P.E. (1965) in her book "The Conditions of Agricultural Growth: the Economics of Agrarian Change under Population Pressure" attacked the Malthusian Theory and forwarded a new concept in order to overcome the challenges of over population and population pressure on agricultural land. She suggested that the Malthusian Theory should be reversed and that increasing population pressure should be viewed as a stimulus for technological change in agriculture which would then provide the increased food necessary for the enlarged population. She also cited two suggestions in this regards, such as substitution of sedentary cultivation for shifting cultivation system and reduction in the length of fallow period in the crop rotation. Likewise, Grigg, D.B. (1976) argued that population increase is not a determinant of the nature and rate of agricultural change in peasant communities. He forwarded the view that peasant communities have a limited number of ways in which they can respond to sustained population growth and resultant population pressure. He suggested that the problem of population pressure cannot be solved within the
societies themselves rather it can be solved by the combination of overseas migration and internal migration to the cities in search of new occupation.

Coming to review the works pertaining to occupational mobility and social change in India, the works of the following authors are worth mentioning.

Sharma, Rao, and Venkateswar (1983) conducted a block level study in five clustered villages of Singunamada Block in Anantapur District of Andhra Pradesh. The study revealed that transformation of traditional agriculture into profitable occupation benefited all sections of the people. The empirical study conducted by Thekheale (1983) in Pithalaipatti village of Tamil Nadu dealt with rural leadership, population structure, caste, community and traditional social institutions. He analysed the changing political system and observed that “the dynamics of rural leadership has set up the social change and modernization in rural India”.

The fullest possible utilization of resources, promotion of productivity, employment and social justice are the main factors for rapid socio-economic growth in rural area according to Mukherjee (1986).

Sharma K.L. (1968), in his study on “Occupational mobility and class structure” forwarded the view that by and large the pressure of circumstances was guiding the occupational mobility. His findings also reflect changes in occupational structure followed by changes in class structure. Saraswati Baidya (1963) in a study on “Caste, craft and change” analyzed the important role of craftsman in our society. The problems of marketing and competition with the machine made goods, growth of population among the community and technological backwardness deprive the artisans from getting their remunerative earning which ultimately push the artisans to leave their caste occupation and shift over to new pursuits of livelihood.
Jain, S.P. (1969) while analyzing the trend of intergenerational mobility in his article, "Social Mobility in a Town: An Intergenerational Analysis, in Seohara", a small town of Uttar Pradesh, has shown that occupational mobility is higher in the third generation among the Muslims who constitute 62 per cent of the total population of the study area.

Sinha, Anil Kishore (1992) in the article, "Occupational Mobility in West Bengal with special reference to Moyra Caste", has analyzed the impact of education, capital and market which changed the caste based occupation of this community. This is due to the fact that their traditional caste based sweet making profession has ceased to be profitable and meagre in comparison to the other professions like shop-keeping, government services and self owned businesses. These new occupational pursuits are lucrative and enable them to earn more cash money.

Very little works have been done so far on agricultural geography and social geography with reference to occupational mobility and socio-economic change in Assam. In one of the pioneer works done by P.C. Goswami (1963) in his doctoral thesis "The Economic Development of Assam", all the aspects of economic development of Assam were discussed. He also analyzed the agrarian structure, development of agriculture and land system in Assam. But he said nothing about occupational mobility.

Valuable works on agricultural geography in Assam have been done by M.M. Das, (1984). He is the first agricultural geographer in Assam who has attempted to build a normative model for reorganization of peasant agriculture in Assam in his book "Peasant Agriculture in Assam". Another pioneer study in this direction was conducted by Das, M.M. (1995) in his book, "Land Holding Structure: A Problem in
Peasant Agriculture in Assam. He analyzed all the problems of peasant population structure, landholding structure, cropping pattern, productivity of crops, agricultural efficiency etc. The study is based on the village level primary data. But he also did not mention about the phenomenon of occupational mobility in rural areas of Assam except that he hinted the conditions under which surplus man power from agriculture could move for employment in other sectors of economy. He suggested that technological innovation in agriculture and industrialization are the major factors which could stimulate the mobility of the peasants from agriculture to other sectors of the economy (Das, 1984).

Deka, S.C. (1991), in his study on “Hajo Development Block of Assam : A Geographical Analysis in the Dynamics of Its Rural Transformation”, has shown the dynamics of transformation in respect of population and agriculture. He forwarded the view that development in agricultural sector is minimal in comparison to rapid socio-economic development of the society as a whole. Das, H. (1985), in a study on “Population Pressure on Agricultural Land in Pagadia-Puthimari Basin”, has shown that the region witnessed a high intensity of cropping due to the high population pressure during 1961-1971. Goswami, B (1987), in a study on “Impact of Minor Irrigation on Agricultural Land Use and Cropping Pattern : A Case Study of Hajo Block” has shown that only 6.4 per cent of the total net sown area of the Hajo Block is operated under the minor irrigation project. The overall socio-economic change in these areas is found to be significant due to the impact of modernization in agriculture.

Khatun, H. (2003), in her study on “Occupational Mobility among the Hiras in the Environs of Barpeta Town” analysed the undergoing process of occupational mobility due to the impact of modernization and urbanization. Advancement in the
level of education leads to the intergenerational mobility of occupation to a great extent. As a result, most of the artisans left the caste based occupation of pottery making and have taken up other services or business pursuits as their way of livelihood.

If there would have been significant development in the field of agriculture and its allied activities due to the rapid growth of rural population, as Boserup, E. (1965) forwarded her views on her thesis, “The Conditions of Agricultural Growth, the Economics of Agrarian Change under Population Pressure”, the work of the present author would not have been more significant. But the Hajo Block (study region) witnesses a contrasting condition. There has been marked socio-economic development in the Hajo Block, not due to impact of agricultural development but due to the occupational shift of rural workers. However, her findings are found to be useful for the study and research on agricultural geography in relation to the population problems and socio-economic change in different parts of the world. D.B. Grigg (1976) in America, M.M. Das (1979) and K.N. Das (1979) in India have done empirical works to test the thesis of Boserup. In the present work also, the author tries to verify the thesis of Boserup. But in course of study, it is found that the Hajo Block witnesses a reverse situation. Because, majority of the workers belonging to younger generation are not at all willing to take up agriculture and other primary activities as their sole way of earning livelihood. Since the study region of the present author represents a unique situation, it is thought pertinent to take up the present topic for research work at the micro level.