

# Labour Exchange in Shifting Cultivation: The case of the Tangkhul Naga Tribe in Manipur

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## ABSTRACT

Labour exchange is an integral component and one of the common features among the tribal communities who basically depends on shifting cultivation. It not only serves as an important source of labour force that gathers the labour requirement in this labour intensive form of agriculture system but it also represent an important social and economic phenomenon in the life of the people. But due to steady increased in migration of rural population especially young people to other towns and cities for better education or in search of job followed by increased market integration in shifting cultivation due to improvement in road connectivity and other means of communication, the practice of labour exchange is declining steadily among the tribal society as it is being replaced by the daily wage labour system- a labour system without any social and cultural significance.

## 1. Introduction

Shifting cultivation<sup>1</sup>- commonly known as 'jhum' cultivation in the north east India has discontinued in many parts of the country. But this traditional form of agriculture system which is intrinsically linked with the social and cultural life of the people still remains as the main source of livelihood for many tribal families<sup>2</sup> in the north east region of India; where 90 percent of shifting cultivation is concentrated (Ninan, 1992). In this region, shifting cultivation contribute 85 percent of the total cultivation (Datta et al., 2014). Manipur with 53.8 percent have the maximum land use under shifting cultivation followed by Nagaland with 31.5 (Yadav and Kaneria, 2012). In Manipur, as per the Environmental Information System (ENVIS) Hub Manipur Status of Environment and Related Issues<sup>3</sup>, more than 83,000 families are engaged in this kind of agriculture system. Shifting cultivation- one of the oldest forms of mixed agriculture system followed by the Tangkhul Naga<sup>4</sup> and that has sustained for many years still remain as the main source of livelihood where according to Statistical Year Book of Ukhrul (2014) more than 50 percent of rural families in the district are engaged in this traditional form of agriculture.

In shifting cultivation, apart from the seeds, labour is considered as the other most important inputs (Ninan, 1992, Sengupta, 2013). Unlike other modern agriculture systems, the various agricultural activities involve in shifting cultivation are performed by the manual labour by using traditional tools and equipments. Traditionally, household labour and the exchange of labour are the two main sources of labour force in shifting cultivation (Aryal and Kerkhoff, 2008, Shimray, 2012, Sengupta, 2013). The various agriculture works involves in shifting cultivation are not only heavy and difficult but strenuous and tedious in nature. And so, exchange of labour among the relatives, neighbour, villagers or of cohorts serves as an important labour force that gathers the labour requirements in this labour intensive form of agriculture system. Such cooperative approaches in agriculture not only gathers the labour needed for carrying out such heavy and difficult tasks in shifting cultivation but it is closely related with the social and economic life of the people.<sup>5</sup> Because of this, exchange of labour is considered as one of the common features and an integral component among the tribal communities who basically depends on shifting cultivation (ICIMOD, 2006, Aryal and Kerkhoff, 2008, Shimray, 2012). Many studies also observe such cooperative approach of labour arrangement as an important phenomenon especially among the tribal communities who practice shifting cultivation (Sacchidananda, 1989, Jha, 1997, Gupta, 2005, ICIMOD, 2006, Murtem et al, 2008, Sengupta, 2013, Reimeingam, 2017).

<sup>1</sup> It is also known as 'swidden', 'slash-and-burn' agriculture and 'jhum' cultivation in North east India and Bangladesh is an agricultural system which is characterized by a rotation of field rather than of crops, by short period of cropping alternating with long fallow periods and by clearing by means of 'slash and burn'. The term shifting cultivation and jhum are use synonymously in this writing.

<sup>2</sup> Even though there is no proper data available on the number of household who involves in shifting cultivation, it is believed that not less than four lakhs families in the north eastern region of this country are involved in shifting cultivation (Ninan, 1992).

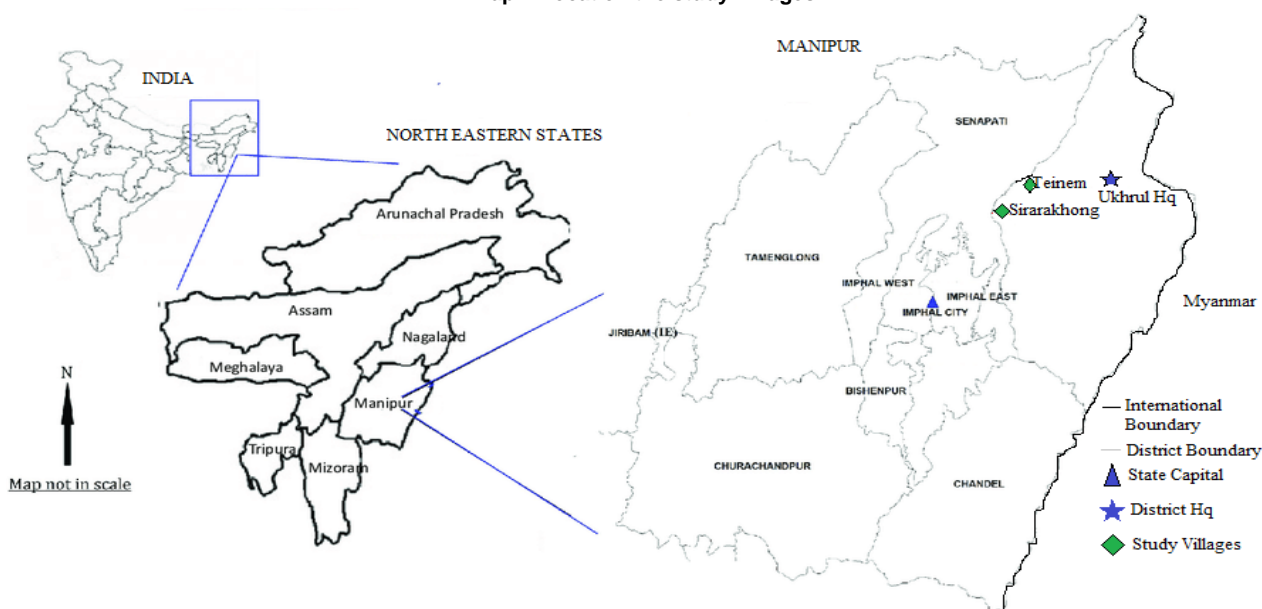
<sup>3</sup> Environmental Information System (ENVIS) Hub Manipur Status of Environment and Related Issues is a website hosted by Directorate of Environment, Govt. of Manipur and sponsored by Ministry of Environment and Forests, Govt. of India. Available at [http://manenvis.nic.in/Database/JhumingandDeforestation\\_2712.aspx#](http://manenvis.nic.in/Database/JhumingandDeforestation_2712.aspx#)

<sup>4</sup> Tangkhul Naga is one of the largest tribe in Manipur (a small state in the north eastern region of India) who basically dominates the Ukhrul district. According to Shimray (2004), the international boundary (Indo-Myanmar) that divides the Tangkhul Naga country makes the Tangkhul Naga tribe a citizen of two countries. Even though, majority of the Tangkhul Naga lives in Ukhrul district of Manipur (India), there are some Tangkhul Nagas who lives along the Somra hills track in Saigong sub-division of Myanmar.

<sup>5</sup> According to Shimray (2012), in the tribal societies, the economic behavior can be hardly separated from the social and cultural life of the people.

In the traditional Tangkhul Naga society, co-operative approaches in agricultural works are one common feature (Shimray, 2012). And so, exchange of labour is considered as one of the most important labour system practice by the Tangkhul Naga (Ruivah, 1982, Shimray, 2012, Raman, 2014). Raman (2014) observes that exchange of labour has been a traditional practice among the Tangkhul Naga for generations. This traditional labour practice is locally known as 'Yar-kathui'<sup>6</sup> and the system of doing their work in rotation by forming labour group are known as 'Yarthot'<sup>7</sup> (Ruivah, 1982). According to Shimray (2012), this traditional form of labour practice not only gathers the labour requirements in shifting cultivation but represent an important social and economic phenomenon in the life of the people. This paper which analyzes the social and economic phenomenon of labour exchange and also explored the dynamics of labour arrangement in shifting cultivation is based on the study in two Tangkhul Naga villages i.e. Sirarakong village and Teinem village of Ukhrul District of Manipur using semi-structured interview and participant observation for a doctoral degree. In these villages, agriculture particularly shifting cultivation, which has been practiced and sustained for many years remains as the main source of livelihood for the villagers. Traditionally, household labour and labour exchange are the two main labour forces that gather the labour requirement in shifting cultivation. But the nature of labour arrangement in shifting cultivation has undergone substantial changes due to increased migration of rural population especially young people to other town and cities for better education or in search of job followed by increased market integration in rural areas due to improvement in road connectivity and other means of communication.

Map1: Location the study Villages



Source: Google (edited)

## 2. Nature of Labour Arrangement in Shifting Cultivation

The nature of labour arrangement in shifting cultivation is diverse in different regions, and even within a given culture, but systems are usually integrated into labour and commodity markets (Thrupp et al. 1997). In this labour intensive form of agriculture system, all the agricultural works involves are performed by manual labour without using any plough or animal. In shifting cultivation, unlike the modern agriculture systems where heavy agricultural machineries and equipments are used, the farmers used simple and traditional tools like dagger, sword, axe and hoe, sickle, etc. to perform the various agriculture activities. Labour under shifting cultivation is mainly used in under brushing, felling, burning, secondary clearing, dibbling (i.e. planting with a tool), sowing, hand weeding, transporting, threshing, winnowing, drying and harvesting (Reimeingam, 2017). Moreover, labour practices in shifting cultivation are often linked with the customary rituals or social relation in a given community (Thrupp et al, 1997). For instant among the Tangkhul Naga, working together or sharing labour to someone's family whenever there is a tragedy during the agriculture season is still highly practice.

The other important aspect of labour arrangement in shifting cultivation is the division of labour among the household members. In this kind of agriculture system, labour is typically divided among the household's members where women, men, elders and children participate in distinct tasks (ICIMOD, 2006, Thrupp et al, 1997, Jha, 1997). According to Thrupp et al (1997), men are mostly responsible for cash crop activities and tasks such as cleaning the jhum field, clearing of forest, etc. On the other hand, women play an important role in maintaining subsistence-cropping components. It was observed that in this traditional form of

<sup>6</sup>'Yarkathui' or exchange of labour practiced in the form of 'working-guild' is a collection of groups of people of the same age cohorts that work together on a rotational basis mainly in agriculture activities (Shimray, 2004) and Shimray considered it as a pan-human phenomenon of giving and receiving.

<sup>7</sup>According to Ruivah (1982), even though there is no hard and fast rule regarding their age, their age group approximately falls in the same age group. For instant, there may two or more 'yarthot' among the youth in a village comprising different age group like 15-20 years of age group or 20-25 years of age group.

agriculture system, women play an important role as they are responsible for the selection of seeds, weeding the fields, gathering, processing, and selling the surplus products. Apart from these, it was found that women also involves in clearing the land, make the firebreaks, harvest and conduct the rituals during the shifting cultivation cycle together; whereas men do the identification of land suitable for shifting cultivation and the hard physical work in land preparation (ICIMOD, 2006). Even in case of the Tangkhul Naga tribe, every member of the family participates in agriculture activities during the agriculture season<sup>8</sup>. Study done by Shimray (2004) in some villages observed that there is no clear-cut labour division among the Tangkhul Naga when comes to agriculture work as both men and women are equally participate in activities like plantation, reaping, thrashing, winnowing, etc. But Shimray accepts that there is gender division of labour when comes to household work. This study also substantiates Shimray's observation as it was found that both men and women works together in all the agriculture works especially in shifting cultivation without any labour division.

### 3. Labour Exchange and Its' Underpinning

In shifting cultivation, human labour is mainly operative and labour arrangement are frequently cooperative (Sachchidananda, 1989) where labour are pooled together among the cultivators from other households on reciprocal basis to perform a huge work, by engaging large number of workers, that needs to be completed in a day like harvesting (Reimeingam, 2017). Sharing and exchange of labour is one of the most common labour system practice by the tribal living in the upland areas, and especially in shifting cultivation where labour availability is often the main factor that limits production (ICIMOD, 2006, Thrupp et al. 1997, Cramb et al., 2009). In such practice, even if each family has their own plot of jhum, groups of people tend to work together on all the plots one by one (usually in rotation) in all the agriculture activities like clearing, sowing, weeding, harvesting, etc. And so, mobilizing of labour among the neighbor, relatives, cohort, etc. before the starts of agriculture seasons was an important social activity. In some tribal community, there is a practice where the shifting cultivators' devised institutional ways of mobilizing the necessary labour at the community level (Gupta, 2005) and such activities is often considered as prerequisite for taking up shifting cultivation.

Even in the traditional Tangkhul Naga society, labour exchange is one of the most important labour system and mobilization of labour among the villagers, neighbor, relatives or youth to perform the various agriculture activities like clearing, sowing, weeding, etc is a common practice. According to Ruivah (1982), forming different age groups especially among the village youths from about 13 to 15 years as one age group, from about 16 to 20 years as another group and from 21 and above was a common practice in the traditional Tangkhul Naga society. In regards to the nature of labour exchange and its practice, Mrs. R. Woleng (59 years of age) one of the key informants opine

*"When we were young, we used to 'yarthui' (labour exchange) by forming a group of cohort usually of 8-10 in number (often mixed of boys and girls) to do the various agriculture activities in jhum like sowing, weeding, harvesting, etc. Usually, there will be 2-3 such groups in a village. In the olden days, such labour system was the main source of labour force that performed the various major agriculture works. Such labour system was a common labour arrangement in all the villages. But this traditional labour system is declining not only in my village but in many other villages as well due to one or more reasons."*

The other aspect of such cooperative approach in agriculture work is organizing work parties where the villagers work together on someone's fields, for instance cutting the trees in the field before burning, in exchange for food and drink during the more difficult, time-sensitive activities (Thrupp et al., 1997, Ickowitz, 2002, ICIMOD, 2006, Murtem et al. 2008). In Tangkhul Naga society, if any family in a village could not complete certain agriculture work like sowing, harvesting, etc due to difficult time or death of a family member; the relatives, neighbours, clans' members or even the cohort helps the family to complete the agriculture work. In such practice, the owner whether rich or poor is expects to offer mid-day meal abundantly to the villagers who came to help (Ruivah, 1982). According to Ruivah, if the food is poor they consider it to be miserliness on the part of the owner. Such labour arrangement is still widely practice among the Tangkhul Naga including the study villages; where it was observed that even though, there is no competition with each other as regards the quality of food, they all try their best to maintain their prestige in the society by offering a good meal as possible.

### 4. Exchange of Labour- An Important Social Phenomenon

Many social scientists believed that shifting cultivation continue to exist as it is intrinsically linked with the social and cultural life of the people who practice it (Sachchidananda 1989, Ramakrishnan and Paitnaik, 1992, Jha 1997, Thrupp et al., 1997, Sengupta, 2013). In fact, the livelihood of the tribal who basically depends on shifting cultivation revolves and evolved in community incorporation. It was observed that cooperative approach is requires among the community in this labour intensive form of agriculture to be successful and sustainable (ICIMOD, 2006). In such cooperative approach, all the family members participates in the agriculture activities where the men folk look after the heavier and more labourious work like slashing and burning the jhum field, removals of stumps and logs, and fencing of the field; while the women look after the back-breaking work of sowing, weeding, harvesting, threshing, husking and storage of the crops; and the children participate in the activities especially protection of crops (Jha, 1997, Gupta, 2005, Aryal and Kerkhoff 2008).

<sup>8</sup> According to Shimray (2012), work is a virtue for the Nagas; and so, even children as young as 11 years of age are expected to help with basic household work and agriculture task and are incorporated into work groups based on the age cohort locally known as 'yarnao'.

In a traditional Tangkhul Naga society, one important social phenomenon that shapes the household economy is the co-operation among the villagers, relatives, clan and neighbor in agriculture works. One such traditional institution that imparts such co-operative lessons and social outlook among the young people is the youth dormitory<sup>9</sup> (Horam, 1975). So, children from early age are expected to help with basic household and agricultural tasks and are incorporated into work groups based on the age cohort locally known as 'yarnao'. According to Ruivah (1982), this system of community-based approach life style gives the spirit of hard work to all the people in their agricultural activities. And so, in every walk of life in the traditional Tangkhul Naga, there was the system of 'Yarthot'. According to Ruivah, such practice of cooperative approach in agriculture activities helps to single out the lazy one in the society where they are treated as the ones who create social chaos in the society and considered as the most useless persons in the eye of the society. Such social value and beliefs is still strongly attached even these days as most of the farmers perceived that those individual who is hard working enhances their position and status on the social ladder and thereby derives respect from the villagers. And so, exchange of labour represents an important social phenomenon that fulfils certain social obligations thereby perpetuating the social order within the society.

The farmers also felt that working together of people in the jhum field is not just about the work or a mere physical appearance but it propagates certain intangible social values which increases their sense of belongingness among the villager's and also brings social cohesiveness within the society. Similarly, Aryal and Kerkhoff (2008) also opine that such kind of traditional labour system is possible especially because of the strong co-ordination and close community ties within the community where this form of informal arrangements is possible. According to Shimray (2012), such labour practice gives more space for cultural interaction and sustains its values in the larger social sphere. Moreover, exchange of labour not only serves as an important platform where the youngsters can acquire the necessary skills and knowledge<sup>10</sup> for the continuance of shifting cultivation but it also provides an opportunity where the young people can learn some important traditional social and cultural practices like folksong, khamahon<sup>11</sup>, folktales, etc. Many farmers also expressed that even though, labour exchange basically is to do agricultural work in the jhum field, it's also represent a kind of leisure and gathering where they share foods, news and enjoy together. Similarly, Murtem et al. (2008) believed that such traditional labour practice serves as an important social gathering in which all relatives, neighbor or youth share their views as everyone is busy in their own ways of life. For instant in the traditional Tangkhul Naga society, during the 'Yarra'<sup>12</sup> celebration, the participants (unmarried youth) observed their festival in the morning, evening and at night in gay abundance while in the day time, they worked in their fields in groups usually in turn.

In regards to labour exchange and its social importance, there are two different views among the villagers especially between the big landlords and the marginal farmers. Some of the farmers (mostly big landlords) viewed that social importance of labour exchange is steadily declining and has become irrelevant. According to them, the non-availability of household labour, increased commercialization of shifting cultivation and change in the socio-economic outlook of the people due to expansion of global economy in the rural areas and the subsequent importance of money as a medium of exchange has largely affects such traditional values and practices. But some farmers do not agree this perception. According to them, exchange of labour cannot practice like yesteryears where it was more vibrant and organized, as there change in demographic characters in the rural areas. They argues that even though, such traditional labour system is now practice in a smaller scale as it is mostly confined among the close relatives, neighbor, friends, etc.; it still plays as an important social phenomenon as it not only provides a platform for a young people to impart the traditional knowledge and practices about shifting cultivation but also provides an opportunities to learn certain social values like work ethics, culture and other social norms and practices as well; thereby passing down the rich culture and tradition to younger generation. They have the perception that only those households who have money are now hiring daily wage labourers instead of involving in such labour practice.

## 5. Economic Importance of Labour Exchange

Labour exchange not only represents an importance social phenomenon but it also signifies certain economic importance in the life of the farmers. One such economic importance of exchange of labour is it helps to reduce drudgery and increase productivity (ICIMOD, 2006). According to the farmers, working together of people in such labour intensive form of agriculture system by means of sharing and exchange of labour not only makes the economic pursuit less burdensome but helps in shaping the economy of the household. Ruivah (1982) observed that such cooperative approach in all the agriculture activities helps the rich and the poor alike to get the same number of labour force, and equal facilities, and as a result of which the poor also tried their best to procure as much wealth as possible through this join effort. Ruivah further argues that it is because of this reason, in the Tangkhul society, that there are not many differences in their standard of living, but they are almost in equal standard of living. But as the nature of labour arrangement is slowly changing in the midst of the changing socio-economic system or due to the influence

<sup>9</sup> Among the Nagas, each tribe has their own name of youth dormitory but it is commonly known as 'Morung'. In the traditional Tangkhul Naga society, youth dormitory locally known as 'Longshim' played an important role in shaping one's personality and social outlook.

<sup>10</sup> For instant among the Tangkhul Naga, whenever the villagers look for new sites for shifting cultivation, the villagers observe the tree trunks and branches that indicate soil fertility. If the bark of the tree trunk is mature, the soil is considered fit for cultivation (Shimray, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> It is kind of chanting (usually traditional and folk in styles) where a group of people produces different sound repeatedly in a certain rhythm in unison or alternately. Such folk- chanting are mostly done during celebration, agricultural activities or during special occasions.

<sup>12</sup> 'Yarra' as youth festival is a special festival for young people in the traditional Tangkhul Naga society. It is celebrated in the month of April when the season is adorned with colourful flowers and green leaves. This traditional festival which represents an important social and cultural phenomenon is diminishing as now only few villages are celebrating it.

of some drivers of change, such notion no longer hold true; where according to the farmers, social and economic disparity has become more apparent in the society.

Cramb et al. (2013) identifies that availability of labour and productivity of shifting cultivation is closely inter-related. In other words, declined in household labour or lack of labour force means production of a particular household is curtailed whether by reducing the area cleared and cultivated or by foregoing production for a season or two and drawing down stored supplies. But in case of the study villages, this notion is not the true. Even though, migration is seen as one of the main social problems that influenced the practice of shifting cultivation and labour arrangement in particular, the farmers declined to accept the notion that lack of household labour reduces the area of jhum cultivation or production is curtailed. According to them, such labour gap or the labour requirement can be managed by hiring daily wage labourer.<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon indicates that labour exchange is increasingly replaced by daily wage labourer among the Tangkhul Naga shifting cultivators. In case of the study villages, lack of household labour does not leads to declined in practice of shifting cultivation as being observed by Cramb et al, but changes in the practice of labour arrangement and agriculture practice in particular. It was learned that many families had given up terrace cultivation<sup>14</sup> or reduced the area of terrace cultivation as they allocate most of their time and resources to shifting cultivation. It means that farmers decisions to maintain shifting cultivation is based as much on economic rationales as on tradition or other reasons (Nielsen et al., 2006).

The other economic importance of labour exchange according to the farmers is that it helps to fill gaps in labour or skills in shifting cultivation. According to them, in this kind of labour intensive form of agriculture more labour days are spent when work alone than working in group. This means working together by means of exchange of labour save more time and energy. And so, the farmers accept that exchange of labour helps to maintain the productivity and sustenance of shifting cultivation as also being observed by Datta et al. (2014). Moreover, such cooperative approach and community participation especially in shifting cultivation not only gathers the labour requirement in shifting cultivation but it also serves as an important livelihood strategy for managing community resources. For instant, fire management or taking care of fire during the burning of jhum field in order to avoid spreading to other forest is typically a community-based institutional affair, in which collective action is important.

With increase market integration and commercialization within shifting cultivation due to improvement in road connectivity and other means of communication, the practice of shifting cultivation has undergone substantial changes in these villages. In order to seize the opportunities provided by the outside markets, the shifting cultivators are diversifying the livelihood practice within shifting cultivation by adopting innovative land use system, cropping pattern, etc. based on traditional knowledge and limitations of their local environment. Accordingly, shifting cultivation that was once done as subsistence farming has become more market-oriented in term of production relation. And as such, exchange of labour according to the farmers serves as an important platform where they can exchange experiences and look at each other's innovations as they work together. Similarly, studies by ICIMOD (2006) observed that as shifting cultivators adopt innovative land use system, cropping pattern, etc to enhance production based on their own principles and the limitations of their land, such traditional labour practice helps the farmers to impart new skills, knowledge and farming techniques and practices. Such diffusion<sup>15</sup> of necessary skills, knowledge and other technology is important for the success of innovations even in the practice of shifting cultivation.

## 6. Labour Dynamics in Shifting Cultivation

Labour arrangement in shifting cultivation has undergone substantial changes due to one or more reasons. Traditional labour forces especially household labour and exchange of labour is being replaced by daily wage labourer. This change in labour practice from household kin to hired labour among the tribal community who basically depend on shifting cultivation is viewed as one of the major changes within the tribal societies (Sengupta, 2013). In the traditional Tangkhul Naga society, the practice of hiring wage labour was rare and such practice was not encouraged either by the society (Shimray, 2004). According to Raman (2014), the practice of engaging hired labour is of recent origin in the Tangkhul Naga society and was practically non-existent a decade ago. Traditionally, whenever a labour was hired, it was usually compensated with clothes or paddy and compensation with money is believed to be rare practice in the past. In the olden days, even if they were aware of the value of money, they did not consider it an essential medium of exchange and often services are paid in paddy (Shimray, 2012). This is mainly because of the practice of barter system and exchange of labour where more importance is given to social obligations. Such practice according to Raman (2014) indicates that the Tangkhul Naga community was rich in social capital.

The temporary or permanent absence of household members especially young people which is seen as one of the major social problem in the study villages not only leads to changes in labour practices but declined in the practice of shifting cultivation

<sup>13</sup> In this case, the daily wage labourer is not necessarily an agriculture labourer. He/she in fact is a cultivator who cultivates smaller area and often involves in such practice to improve or to ensure his/her financial situation.

<sup>14</sup> Terrace cultivation is the other important agriculture system followed by the villagers. It is entirely mono-crop where rice is cultivated as the main crop. The economic importance of terrace cultivation is declining due to vagaries of monsoon, declined in productivity, etc and so majority of the villagers' preferred shifting cultivation.

<sup>15</sup> According to Report of the Inter-Ministerial National Task Force on Rehabilitation of Shifting Cultivation Areas (2008), the close-knit and kinship ties of the tribal communities, which are considered important for mobilization of large amount of labour at a given point of time, necessary for cropping phase of shifting cultivation, may be important for technology diffusion necessary for the success of innovations.

due to loss of skills and knowledge among the young people. Similarly, studies by FAO, IWGIA and AIPP (2015) in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal and Thailand observed that many young people from communities that basically depends on shifting cultivation are leaving their village partly in response to increasing difficulties to make a living in the village and partly because of better access to education and opportunities for off-farm employment in other towns or cities. The other external forces that largely affect the nature of labour arrangement are the increase market integration and commercialization within shifting cultivation. It was observed that exchange of labour which serves both as labor mobilization and for social gatherings, has to a large extent been substituted by paid labourers mainly because of commercialization and market integration (Grogan et al., 2012). Such external forces not only pushed for a greater integration with the urban-based and market economy but increases the chances of hiring daily wage labourer as such trend of market forces encourages the rural farmers to aim for cash income and extensive commercial cropping.

The other important phenomenon that was observed in the study villages is the coming of non-local especially Nepali and Meitei people mainly from the valley areas to work as an agriculture labourer. The non-availability of household labour has not only led to declined in the practice of labour exchange but increase dependence on non-local agriculture labourers especially by some big landlord during peak agriculture season. Usually, group of people or sometimes with their family (mostly in case of Nepali) would come to the village as an agriculture labourer where they often stay for 2-3 months. When the peak agriculture season is over, these non-local labourers would go back to their respective village; or sometimes stay back particularly the Nepalese, who came with their family. During the field study, it was found that 6 (six) Nepali families were staying in one of the study village. According to the villagers, in order to seize the opportunities provided by the outside markets many household are cultivating more and more areas; and as there is labour in-efficiency, hiring of such migrant agriculture labourers during the peak agriculture season has been going on for some years. This shows that labour arrangement among the tribal society who basically depends on shifting cultivation has become more diverse and dynamic. And as such, the traditional labour practices like exchange of labour or the household labour has been challenged by the modern labour systems which lack important social and cultural phenomenon.

## 7. Conclusion

Labour exchange which signifies certain social and economic phenomenon in the life of the shifting cultivators is steadily declining due one or more reasons. With declined in household labour followed by changing socio-economic outlook of the people, exchange of labour- which is one of the main sources of labour force in shifting cultivation is being challenged by daily wage labourer. Discontinuation of such traditional labour practice will not only leads to loss of traditional skills and knowledge for the continuance of shifting cultivation but will largely affect the life of the rural farmers' especially marginal farmers as labour which is one of the main inputs in such labour intensive agriculture system has been commoditized.

Such changes in labour arrangement coupled by increase scarcity of agriculture land and privatization of agriculture land increases the vulnerability of the marginal rural farmers whose livelihood fully or partly depends on shifting cultivation, as they have to struggle to make a living out of it and to take care of the various services like fees for renting jhum land, wages, etc. at the same time. This will further increase the social and economic disparity among the villagers and particular among the tribal society in what was a largely considered as egalitarian society. Continuation of such traditional labour practice is critical especially among the tribal communities who basically depends on shifting cultivation, as it not only represent an important social and economic phenomenon in the life of the people but it also represent a parts of culture and identity of the community.

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