

# Review Article: Issues of Marketing Agriculture Produce and Handloom Products of Ukhrul District

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## ABSTRACT

This is a review paper of two closely twine and knitted together economic activities of the Tangkhul tribe and most of the tribal communities in the North East Region of India. The main occupation and source of livelihood is agriculture but from ancestral days handloom has been a complementary activity carried out during the off-season or after agricultural work to provide for the clothing needs of the family. Both the activities were subsistence self-sufficient and self-consumption economic activity but with the introduction of monetary economy agricultural produce and handloom products are being commercialized and marketed in the local as well as other markets. The nature, scope and methods of marketing agricultural produce and handloom products are similar, the producer, the market, and the consumer of agriculture and handloom are also the same in the local market. Thereby the issues related to marketing: product, market, pricing, and promotion are also homogenous to a large extend.

**Key terms:** Leingapha, self-consumption, Handloom, cultural identity, market, door-to-door, horticulture

## INTRODUCTION

The Tangkhuls are known for their skill in agriculture especially Jhum and terrace farming. Their social and economic life revolves around the agricultural activities, mainly rice cultivation. All their major festivals are heavily oriented to the stages of rice cultivation. Rice cultivation in the Jhum or terrace fields are complemented along with cultivation of many other varieties of vegetables, lentils, fruits, etc. but all these cultivations are on a small self-sufficient scale.

One non-agricultural activity that complements and is significant in the cultural identity of the tribe is the handloom industry. The Tangkhuls shawls and wrap-around are well known for their beauty and elegance. They are mostly bright red and black with motifs and design. One of the identifying marks of the kaleidoscope of tribes in the Northeast region is their traditional costumes.

The Tangkhuls from time immemorial have developed the skills and art of weaving to produce and provide for the needs of the family. They were known to have grown cotton and collected indigo for dyeing from the wild. Every young Tangkhul damsel is expected to learn the art of weaving and this art is taught in the girls' dormitory "Ngala longshim". Weaving is mostly done in the evening after the field work is done, while socializing with friends. There are specific shawls for men and women, and specific costumes for occasions. Thus, the traditional costumes are very critical to the continuity of the tribe identity.

After the introduction of western education which eventually have completely replaced the dormitory system, the art of weaving and interest in agricultural activities are slowly but surely dying and with that the unique cultural and traditional way of life is diluted and vanishing. Monetary system was also introduced with modern education, and the need for money arose that led to the need for market to sell the produce. But marketing the agricultural produce and handloom products has been beset with endless challenges due to small quantity, limited market, lack of marketing skills, distance from the market, etc. The narrative of the challenges of marketing could be generic to all the tribes of Manipur and in other states of the North east region with some degree of deviations.

## Issues of Agricultural marketing in India and North East Region

A Vadivelu and B.R. Kiran (2013) writes in their article *“Problems and prospects of Agricultural marketing in India: An overview”* of the numerous problems associated with the marketing agriculture produce in India. The article highlights the problem of limited market information, illiteracy, multiple middlemen, dependance on money lender, etc. It also emphasizes on the need for market reforms in terms of finance, providing power, building distribution network, create market, punish the black marketers, and create possibilities for the farmers to sell directly to the consumers. It is emphasized that all stakeholders especially the farmers must make an effort to bring about reforms.

Roop Raj (2018) examined the problems besetting the marketing of agriculture produce in India in *“Problems and prospects of Agricultural Marketing in India: An Overview”* and states that the direct marketing by farmers to consumers is small while the largest is managed by the private intermediaries. The intervention of the government in the market has not yielded the expected results because it is dependent on the objectives of intervention. Agricultural marketing in India suffers from poor rural markets, lack of basic infrastructural facilities, large manipulative intermediaries, lack of finance, poor branding and standardization, poor returns, etc. The article emphasizes on the urgent need to reform the agriculture market.

In *“Agricultural marketing in India: Issues and challenges”* MD. Moazzam Sulaiman (2017) reiterates the traditional methods of sale prevailing in India in the form of haats, Shandies, mandis, Painths, and Fairs. According to the findings of the research the major issues and problems of agriculture marketing in India are poor infrastructural problems, financial and logistics issues, dependance of farmers on the middlemen, corruption and nepotism, lack of regulation and standardization, etc. The need of the Indian agriculture market is integration, standardization, quality, research, investment, and entrepreneurs.

Saswat Kumar Pani & Damodar Jena (2020) reviews the agricultural marketing situation in India in their article *“Agricultural marketing in India: A review of challenges and prospects.”*. According to them production and marketing of agricultural produce go hand in hand and marketing has significantly changed because production and consumption are at different location. Marketing of agricultural produce in India has been either traditional such as selling of the farm produce in the local market, selling right after harvest, inefficient institutions, etc. and on the other hand, the regulated market where many reforms were introduced such as Agricultural Produce Market Regulations, Agricultural produce livestock marketing, practice of contract farming, E-NAM to integrate connectivity to country wide market, etc. It was concluded that market innovation along with empowering the farmers will be necessary to increase revenue and growth.

In an article published by Akha Khou and L Mothilal (2018) entitled as *“Challenges of Agricultural production and marketing in Northeast, India”* identifies the various challenges of production and marketing in Northeast region of India. Lack of agricultural credit is identified to be the most prominent challenge followed by lack of information, lack of warehousing and various infrastructural facilities, too many intermediaries, unorganized market, lack of market and marketing skills, etc. The paper suggests that development of infrastructural facilities, and interactive dialogues among the regional stakeholders as the most effective way forward.

Manjuree Dkhar and PSS Rao (2019) in their article *“marketing indigenous fruits of Meghalaya: Challenges and Opportunities”* examines how these exotic fruits of the state are marketed. Marketing of three indigenous fruits Sohiong, Sohshang, Sohphie were examined. The findings of the study indicates that the fruits are popular and favoured but selling such indigenous fruits are part time and revenue is minimal but surely helps in income generation. Some problems identified are poor infrastructures facilities, seasonal, short shelf life, poor marketing strategies, and lack of entrepreneurial skills.

## Issues of Agricultural marketing in Manipur

In *“Economics of fresh Naga king chilli in Manipur, India – A case study”* L. Malangmeih and S.M. Rahaman (2016) writes about challenges of cultivating the famous delicacy of the hill tribal communities “The King chilli”. It writes about how traditional method and shifting to modern method is still a challenge because

of the topography, high altitude, distance and lack of accessibility. The challenges to marketing of chilli are the scattered villages, lack of accessibility, and highly perishable and so difficult to reach the consumer. It is also observed that the price fluctuates unpredictably. Marketing is also expensive because the costs of packaging, loading, unloading, transport, and workers are expensive. Due to lack of transport and storage facilities damage is common and a larger margin earned by the intermediaries.

Kenjit Tongbram and et.al. (2021) studied in “*A study on production and marketing constraints of French bean (Phaseolus vulgaris L.) growers in Bishnupur district of Manipur*”. The paper studied the production constraints and marketing constraints, in which price fluctuations is considered to be the most significant constraint followed by perishability, lack of infrastructural facilities, exploitive intermediaries, bandhs and strikes, lack of market and marketing skills, and untimely payments. The paper concludes that production and marketing is critical to successful and profitable farming.

In “*marketing of horticultural produce in Manipur*” by Kh.Dhiren Meetei and Loitongbam Kirankumar Singh (2013), finds that marketing of horticultural produce in Manipur is not systematically organized. The quantity produced is small and the middlemen gets the lion’s share of the price. Prices are not regulated and the farmers do not have the technical expertise nor the marketing skills. Some of the major problems of horticultural marketing in Manipur are unorganized market, producers have little choice to sell, too many intermediaries, lack of finance, etc. developing the agricultural horticultural marketing will be critical to the growth of all sectors of Manipur economy.

An attempt was made by L Kirankumar Singh and Kh. Dhiren Meetei (2014) to identify the problems and prospects of horticulture production and marketing in their article “*Horticultural marketing in the valley districts of Manipur: problems and prospects*”. The findings of the study shows that the production prospects are very high but poor transportation facilities are identified to be the major hurdle in marketing the produce. Introduction of modern method of production and systematic marketing will be important for the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the farmers in the state.

In “*Dynamics of Agricultural Marketing in Manipur: Insights from India’s Easternmost state*” by Brahmacharimayum Tarunbala Devi (2021), the author examines the issue of production and marketing of agricultural produce in Bishnupur and Thoubal districts of Manipur. Emphasis is given to the direct relation between education and land size holding, and productivity and marketability of the produce. The study finds that most of the farmers are not highly educated and the land size holding is small and fragmented. The farmers are resistant to change due to conservative attitude. Many farmers forced to sell produce immediately due to financial constraints, lack of storage facilities, and transportation. The paper suggests for planting of economically viable crops, adopting modern technologies, strengthening efficient linkages across sectors.

Th. Motilal Singh (2021) studied the underlying problems and constraints relating to the production and marketing of the underutilized and unexploited species “Minor crops” of Manipur in “*Problems and constraints in Marketing – A case study on underutilized Horticultural crops of Manipur*”. It brings to the fore the rich horticultural produce of North East hills of India but which are struggling in the market inspite of having huge economic importance and prospects. The paper points out major problems and constraints such as importance and prospects. The paper points out major problems and constraints such as; poor transport, highly perishable, social upheavals, lack of market information, exploitive middlemen, poor storage facilities, poor infrastructural facilities, poor packaging and grading, low price, poor financial support, lack of demand, illegal extortion, corruption, high competition, etc. The paper proposes that if the problems are addressed and concerted efforts are made, the minor crops can have significant impact on the state economy.

In “*The Handloom Industry of Manipur and its Challenges – An Overview*” by Gour Gopal Banik and Neeta Longjam (2023) examines the significance of handloom industry in the state economy of Manipur. The primarily female dominated cottage industry in the rural areas of Manipur is time consuming and labor intensive but it does produces creative, exquisite and intricate handloom textiles. It is still by far the largest industry in the state. The study finds that the handloom products are primarily sold in the local market due to lack of market access, lack of modernization, lack of proper market channels, lack of publicity and promotion, lack of finance, stiff competition from industrial products, lack of government support. Thus, it is important

that the state takes cognizance of the significance of this industry and provide all necessary support to promote and market the industry and the products.

*Ph. Ashalata and Acharya M. (2009)* studied the significant contribution of Manipur to the handloom industry and in turn the importance of handloom industry to the economy of Manipur. Just next to the agriculture, handloom industry is the biggest industry of Manipur. In their study survey and experimental method was used and sample had been selected on the basis of stratified weighted random. Handloom industry in Manipur is entirely the work of women. It is part of domestic duties. It is not only an economic necessity but also a social custom. The women not only have to have skill of weaving but also good knowledge about marketing. It was observed that weaving has not brought about much change in lifestyle but if change has to take place, then the government needs to play a vital role in providing raw materials and markets which will help solve unemployment and improve lifestyle.

*Robita Sorokhaibam and Nandita Laishram (2011)* in their article “Women entrepreneurship in Manipur, North East India” studied the entrepreneurship of women in Manipur and the constraints by women entrepreneurs and also the guidance received by the women entrepreneurs in Manipur. They used tools such as personal interviews and group interviews to gather primary data and analysed the data using simple average.

### **Issues of Marketing Agriculture produce and Handloom products in Ukhrul district**

*Ngaranngam Keishing (2019)* in his article “*Market integration in shifting cultivation – the case of the Tangkhul Naga tribe in Manipur*” writes that with better facilities and market expansion, farmers are shifting from production for self-consumption to commercial farming, from food crops to cash crops. An attempt was made in the paper to analyze the impact of market integration to shifting cultivation. As a result of market integration, Tangkhul farmers are shifting to innovative land use, cropping pattern, crop plantation and production, labor management, etc. and these changes have helped to improve the living conditions with higher income.

*U.A. Shimray (2004)* in his article “Women’s work in Naga Society: household work, workforce participation and division of labour” has attempted to understand the household work, workforce participation, division of labour and women’s position in Naga society with special reference to the Tangkhul Nagas Manipur state. Using a qualitative approach, the average time spent on housework and agricultural activities by men, women and children and the gendered division of labour are examined. Although Naga society is patriarchal, women enjoy considerable freedom and play an important role in family and community life. Women have a greater range of responsibilities, domestic work – within and outside the homestead – to various agricultural activities and bear a greater work burden as well. Gender disparity measures reveal that men’s responsibility for household activities is shrinking while women’s work frontier is expanding, as they take over work traditionally designated as ‘male’.

*T.C. Hodson (1911)* in his book “The Naga tribes of Manipur” has highlighted the social, economic and political life the Naga. He has made a mention of the kind of dress worn, the major villages that engage in the industry of cloth weaving, source of raw material. He talks about the process of production and consumption.

*Khashim Ruivah (1993)* has highlighted the importance and usage of the traditionally woven products during marriage and other occasions. He has also written in detail about the dormitory culture where all the girls in the dorm learn the art of making and exhibiting shawls. It was an art that every bride must know and this industry is one of the major and universal cottage industry.

*A.S.W. Shimray (2001)* makes a brief mention of the weaving industry and the chapter of “Economy”. He examines the process of production, the nature of the product, the kind and design of the product. He also mentions how the tradition has survived and the raw material used in the industry has changed

*U.A. Shimray (2008)* has also studied and highlighted about the traditional cultural attire of the Nagas and the Tangkhuls in particular. The uniqueness on exclusiveness of some clothes woven especially for men and women and is considered a taboo one way or the other.



Awungashi Samshokwo Varekan & et.al. (20215) in their article “*Marketing Practices and Challenges of Agricultural Produce in Ukhrul district of Manipur*” made an attempt to underline the challenges of the marketing practices of agricultural produce in Ukhrul district of Manipur. The article clearly indicates that the market in unorganized, transportation facilities are poor, door-to-door individual sale, individual pricing, poor standardization and grading, low production, poor market place and facilities. These practices are compounded with the problems of distant village, lack of marketing knowledge and skills, lack of information, poor market logistics, lack of finance, poor infrastructural facilities, lack of entrepreneurial skills, and unpredictable social conditions, etc. The paper suggests that every stakeholder need to make concerted effort to resolve the problem to innovate and expand the market and marketing of agricultural produce.

## CONCLUSIONS

Agriculture and Handloom are the two most important and prominent economic activities of the Tangkhuls in Manipur. These are not only economical important but it is also the cultural identity of the tribe. Both these economic activities are facing serious challenges and issues in production and marketing.

The importance and issues related to agriculture and handloom sector seems to be generic throughout the Northeast region of India and this could be attributed to the topography, the social beliefs and practices, economic backwardness, etc. It is also observed that inspite of its socio-economic importance, it is being neglected and rapidly losing out to other professions and large-scale factory products. The marketing issues and challenges of both the sectors are generic; local market, small production, poor grading and packaging, sold immediately after production, market is far, low publicity, overwhelmed with imported goods, poor pricing, lack of entrepreneurial skills, etc.

One of the greatest impactful factors limiting the marketing of agricultural and handloom products of the Tangkhul is the uncertain, explosive and unpredictable ethnic violence and strife that prevails in Manipur. Considering the socio-economic significance and prospects of these complementary sectors, it is imperative that all the stakeholders make concerted effort to find long term solutions to the issues of marketing. Efforts must be made for the traditional and the modern to co-exist and thrive. Expanding and innovating the market without compromising the cultural identity, will bring in immense returns to the growth and development of the economy. The issues and challenges can be turned into prospects and opportunities with necessary support and the will to correct the wrong.

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