

Chapter II

The Study Area

THE REGION

Assam is the heart land of the Northeast India. It is also known as the gateway of the Northeastern India and is surrounded by six sister states. The state is bounded by Arunachal Pradesh in the Northern side, and Nagaland and Manipur in the Eastern side. In the South, it is defended by Mizoram and Tripura and in the West by Meghalaya. West Bengal also stands in the Western side as the connecting state of Northeastern region with other Indian States.

Assam is the most populous and second largest state in the far flung region. Its capital city Guwahati is the commercial capital of the Northeast India. It occupies a triangular area of 78,438sq.kms in which 77,476.23sq.kms are rural and 961.77sq.kms are urban areas and Assam accounts for about 2.4 percent of the countries total geographical area(Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Guwahati). It has two international borders with Bhutan in the North and Bangladesh in the West. The state essentially consists of two valleys viz, the Brahmaputra Valley in the North and the Barak Valley in the South. Assamese is the communicable language in the Brahmaputra Valley and in the Barak Valley, Bengali is the communicable language.

As per Economic Survey of Assam, 2006-07, there are 27 districts, 53 subdivisions, 237 police stations, 163 Police Outpost, 219 Community Development Blocks and 2489 Gaon Panchayats in Assam (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Guwahati).As regards to rural areas, there are 26,312 villages of which 25,124 are inhabited villages and 1,188 are un-inhabited villages (as per 2001 census). The state has 145 revenue circles (as per 2001 census).

According to the Census of India, 2001, the population of Assam stands at 2,66,55,528 of which 1,37,77,037 are males and 1,28,78,491 are females. The decadal growth of the state's population works out to 18.92 percent during the decade 1991-2001 as against 21.54 percent for the country as a whole. The rural population of the state was 87 percent of the total population. This percentage was much higher than that for all India (72 percent). The proportion of rural population in the state decreased from 89 percent in 1991 to 87 percent in 2001. The proportion of urban population in the state increased from 11 percent in 1991 to 13 percent in 2001 (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Guwahati).

The density of population of Assam has gone up to 340 in 2001 as against 286 in 1991 Census. The sex-ratio in the State shows an improvement from 923 in 1991 to 935 in 2001. The growth of literacy in Assam has shown an encouraging sign. The literacy rate for Assam as per 2001 census comes to 63 percent with 71 percent for males and 55 percent for females. Religion-wise percentage distribution of population as per 2001 census reveals that out of total population in the state 64.89 percent were Hindus, 30.92 percent were Muslims, 3.70 percent were Christians, 0.08 percent were Shikhs, 0.19 percent were Budhists, 0.09 percent were Jains, 0.09 percent were from other religions and persuasions and 0.04 percent were religion not stated (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Guwahati).

Assam being the gateway to other states of the Northeastern region of the country, the need for development of transport and communication sector in the state is of vital importance for speedy economic development of the region. Due to its geographical isolation, transport has been a major bottleneck in the process of economic progress of the state. The existing infrastructures and facilities of transport and communication in the state are hardly adequate enough to meet the requirements. The state is no doubt served by all the modern means of transport viz, roads, railways, waterways, and airways, but there is enough scope for further improvement of the facilities. The Public Work Department (PWD) is mainly responsible for construction and maintenance of Road Network in the state.

Assam is rich in mineral wealth. It holds a unique position in the production of mineral oil. Of the agriculture based industries, tea occupies an important place. There are more than 835 tea plantations in the states. Assam contributes 15.6 percent of the world's tea production and 55 percent of country's tea output. Petroleum and petroleum products amount to a large share of the country's total output of petroleum and natural gas. It can be noted that Assam is the first state of India where oil is struck in 1889 at Digboi. The state has four oil refineries at Bongaigoan, Digboi, Noonmati and Numaligarh. Other industries are jute, paper, silk, handloom, sericulture and manufacture of brass utensils etc.

As regards to natural resources of Assam, forest constitutes an important part of the State's economy. The extensive forests of Assam are a reserve of many useful products like, timber, resins, bamboo, granite, cane etc. About 22.41 percent of the total land area of the state is covered by forest. In India, there are about 1300 kinds of orchids of which 182 are found in Assam alone. Assam is also rich in wild life. There are five national parks and 16 wild life sanctuaries in the state. A large variety of wild life animals and rare species of birds are found here. One can find a proper admixture of both the Indian and Malayan species in the wild life of Assam.

The inhabitants of Assam can be classified in to three broad categories, namely—the Tribals, Non-Tribals and the Schedule Caste. The major Tribes are –Bodo, Kachari, Rabha, Karbi, Mishings, Sonowal Kacharis, Tiwas, Dimasas, Garos, Deuris, Chutias, Varmans etc.

THE DISTRICT

Cachar district is located at the extreme South East corner of Assam. The district head quarter of the district is Silchar. It is surrounded on the East by Manipur, on the West by Tripura and Bangladesh, on the North by North Cachar Hills District and Meghalaya and on the South by Mizoram. It is a heterogeneous land composed of hills, low lands and level plains. The total area of the district is 3786 sq. kms of which 3751.37 sq.kms. are rural areas and 34.63

sq. kms are urban areas (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Guwahati).

As per record of the Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Cachar, Silchar, there are two sub-divisions in the Cachar district, one is Silchar Sub-division and another is Lakhipur Sub-division. The district has 15 Development Blocks, namely, 1.Sonai,2. Narsingpur 3. Lakhipur 4. Rajabajar 5. Udharbond 6. Salchapra 7. Borkhala 8. Katigorah 9. Binnakandi 10. Silchar 11. Palonghat 12. Barjalenga 13. Tapang 14. Kalain and 15. Banskandi. and 5 revenue circles of which four are under Silchar Subdivision and one is under Lakhipur Sub-division. According to 2001 Census, there are 1047 villages and 7 towns in the district. The district has 163 Gaon Panchayats, 7 police stations and 7 constituencies of Assam Legislative Assembly.

According to 2001 Census, the total population of Cachar district was 14,44,921 which was earlier 12,15,385 as in 1991 Census. The sex ratio (female per 1000male) was 932 in 1991 Census has been increased to 945 in 2001 Census. The density of population per sq. km was 382 and decadal growth rate was 18.89 as per 2001 Census. The literacy rate has also been increased as it was in 1991Census 59.16 percent and it has been increased to 67.82 percent in 2001 Census (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Guwahati).

The Narsingpur Development Block is situated in the Southern side of the district head quarter, Silchar. It is on the way of Silchar to Mizoram National High Way. This block is at the distance of about 17 km. from Silchar town. It is the largest block of all the Development Blocks of Cachar District and Sonai and Palonghat Development Blocks are neighboring Blocks of it. Under this Development Block, there are 16 Gaon Panchayats, namely, 1.Narsingpur 2. Nagdirgram 3. Kajidhar 4. Chandpur 5. Jibangram 6. Dholai 7. Panibhora 8. Puthikhal 9. Jamalpur 10. Rajnagar 11. Sewartool 12. Bhagabazar 13. Saptagram 14. Derby 15. Channighat and 16. Cleverhouse. Most of the people of this area are engaged in agriculture and allied activities.

VILLAGES

The study was located in two villages of Cachar district of Assam, namely, Jarultola and Chandpur.

JARULTALA

The village Jarultala or “Jarutola” is located in the South at about 35 kms away from the district Head Quarter Silchar. The village is situated under Jibangram Gaon Panchayat of Narsingpur Development Block under Dholai Constituency. It is surrounded by reserved forest in the East, North and South, and the Western side of the village is bounded by Puni River which is originated from Mizoram hills.

The neighboring villages of this village are Mathurapur Khashiapunji, a Khasi Village and Jibangram Barman Basti which are located in the western side of the village. In front of the village near Northern side reserved forest, a rivulet is running which is meeting in the Puni River. The village is a one line typical village begins from the East and ends in the West. This forest village was established in the end of 18th century. At the first time, the village was inhabited by some tribal communities such as, Hmars, Kukis etc, but after 30 to 40 years of inhabitation they left the place and Manipuris came in and settled in the village.

According to some old people of the village, a person named Takhelamba Singha came along with some families and began to settle there. After a few years, Laishram Anganghal Singha and Huidrom Bhaigya Singha along with some families from different places came and also settled in the village. In the third time after five years of their settlement, Tongbram Nena Singha also came in with some other families and settled there. After about 20 years of settlement of the Manipuris in the place, Barman community also came and settled in the place and established the Barman Basti.

The name of the forest-village “Jarultola” is derived from two words “Jarul” and “Tola”. The term “Jarul” comes from Jarul tree and “Tola” means “Beneath” or “Below”. Therefore, the meaning of the combine word “Jarultola” means “Beneath the Jarul Tree”. Earlier, the village area was full of jarul trees and it looks very beautiful in the month of april-

May when the jarul trees bloom and numerous Jarul tree always give shadow on the large area of the village . So the village was known as “Jarultola” but today it is spelled as Jarultala.

The length of the village is about 2.5 kms and it is about half kilometer far from Jarultola Market. This forest village is connected by a local road which is originated from the PWD road near Jarultola Bazaar. It is the only means of road communication for the villagers. Since the local road is a *Kachcha* road, in the rainy season it becomes mud and it suffers more to the villagers mostly to the students and officials to go outside the village for study and other purposes.

During the British rule this reserved forest were under the control of the Britishers and after independence the road connection was made by forest department for their transport and communication. But the size of the road was very small. It was just one meter broad. Later in 1980 when Tongbram Hembabu Singha of this village became Gaon Panchayat President of Jibangram(1979-1984), the local road was made broad but since it has been a *Kachcha* road, the village people feel inconvenient to go outside the village. The PWD road which is connected from Dholai to Bidya Ratanpur was constructed in the year 1962 and now it has become a pitched road.

The village is under Dholai Police station and the post office of the village is at Jibangram which is about 1.5 km far away from the village. As per Jamabandi Record (land record) of 1972-73, the total land of the village is 1021 bighas 10 kathas of which 87 bighas 7 kathas are household land and 934 bighas 3 kathas are agricultural land (record of the Office of the Range Forest Officer, Howaithang Range Office, Dholai).

There are some rules of the forest department to control the forest villages such as,

1) Each household of the village can utilize as agricultural land not more than 10 bighas.

2) One member of each household should provide free labour for seven days yearly to the forest department.

3) In any social performance such as marriage ceremony , Shradha ceremony etc. they should inform to the higher authority of the forest department at least three days earlier of the function.

But all such rules except the rule for land purpose have become inactive.

As regards to educational facilities, there are four LP Schools in the village, namely, No.844 Radhanagar LP School, No. 1595 Jarultola LP School, No.369 Jarultala LP School, and No. 1049 Jarultola LP School. The No.369 Jarultala LP School is the oldest LP School which was established during the British Rule. There is no educational Institution above the lower primary level in this village. Other educational institutions are located at very far away from the village. One multi purpose school is located at Dholai about 10 kms far away from the village. For college level studies, they should go to either Janata College, Kabuganj which is at a distance of 17 kms away from the village or at Silchar which is 40 kms far away from the village.

Only one Middle English school named Jibangram ME School is located at Jibangram near Jarultola Bazaar at about 1.5 km far away from the village. This school was established in 1957. Taurem Sajaw Singha was the founder as well as headmaster of the school who first created educational environment to the area and encouraged the people of the area for higher studies. This school was established by many reputed persons of the area. This was the only middle school in that time which covered students of 10 kms surrounding area of that place.

Regarding the sources of drinking water, the villagers are facing much problem of saved drinking water. No water supply scheme in this interior place has yet been undertaken by the public Health and Engineering Department. So, the main source of drinking water of this village is well and for other purpose of consumption, they use from private ponds. Some households who reside on hills have to fetch water from wells. There are 23 private ponds and 18 wells in the village. Two Shiva Temples, one Village Mandaps along with temple are also situated in the village. There are one RCC bridge and two wooden bridges on the way to the village road.

As per Jamabandi record of 1972-73, there were only 58 households in the village. But from the recent data collected from the village, it is found that it has increased to 103 households of which 52 households are joint family and 51 households are nuclear family. The total population of the village is 566. Of which 78 people are living outside the village. Out of these 78 persons, 68 persons are living for service and 10 persons are doing study. In this village, 34 families are small sized, 61 families medium sized and 8 families large sized. The total number of service holders in the village is 99. Of which, 16 are government employees and 83 are private employees. As far as the type of the house is concerned, on the basis of census conducted by the present researcher, it was found that no houses are RCC, 1 house Assam type with brick walls, nine houses of Assam type half brick wall with bamboo & mud plastered, 8 houses of Assam type wood with bamboo & mud plastered walls with tin roofed, 38 houses of Assam type with bamboo & mud plastered walls with tin roofed, 43 houses of Assam type with bamboo & mud plastered walls with thatch roof and 4 houses of bamboo and polythene roof.

In this village, 17 houses have telephone connection, 43 houses have television, and 49 persons use mobile phone connection and there is no newspaper subscriber family in the village.

CHANDPUR

The village Chandpur is situated in the South-East of the District Head Quarter, Silchar. It is at a distance of about 22 kms away from Silchar town and situated on the way of Sonai to Kabuganj Bazar. This village is located under Chandpur Gaon Pnachayat of Narsingpur Development Block. It is under Sonai Police Station of Sonai Constituency. The village Begins from the North where a Manipuri village Berabak is located and ends in the South nearby Nagdirgram Muslim Basti. This village is bounded in the East by Sonai River and in the West by Bokrakhal rivulet. The neighboring village Jharagul, a Manipuri village and Deplipar, a Muslim village are located in the Eastern side of the village and the people of these villages go

to town through this village Chandpur. The total land of the village is about 1045 bighas of which about 891 bighas are agricultural land and 154 bighas are household land.

The name of the village “Chandpur” is derived from two words “Chandra” and “Pur”. The term “Chandra” comes from the name of a person “Chandra Singha” who first inhabited the place and “Pur” means “Village” or “Place”. In his name, the village was first known as “Chandrapur” and later it became to known as “Chandpur”.

Originally, the villagers were settled in the form of typical line village near the bank of Sonai River in order to get various facilities for living such as, business and transportation of goods and water consumption, because earlier all the transportations were done through river. But due to the development of the road communication and river erosion, the shape of the village has been changed. Some households have shifted from the original place and resided to both sides of the P.W.D. road. This PWD road was earlier a Local Board road connected from Silchar via Sonai to Rukni Tea Estate during the British reign. But later, this local road had been undertaken by the Public Works Department. The E.N.D. of the Sonai River which was constructed in 1962 runs in front of the village which is also treated as main road of the villagers. This PWD road is a pitched road and it runs through the village which is well connected to Silchar town. Therefore, the people of the village do not face any trouble for journey and vehicles are available at any time for this village. Moreover, as the E.N.D. road is situated in front of the village and the PWD road on the other side of the village, the villagers do not feel any inconvenience to go outside the village in the rainy season.

As there is no hill, no forest, the climatic condition of the village is moderate. During summer season, there is heavy rainfall which is always helpful to the agriculturist. Again, when there is no rain it becomes very hot and temperature is very high. The same atmosphere maintains for six months i.e. from early May to October. Then the winter season appears and continues up to March. This winter season also favours the agriculturist for production of the various kinds of vegetables. In this way, the villagers generally depend on nature. The area of the village is not much humid even in the summer season as it is situated on the river bank.

As far as source of water is concerned, the villagers do not face any difficulty for water consumption. They get water from the Sonai River, private ponds, and also from water supply scheme. There are 56 private ponds in the village for water consumption. Moreover, the Public Health Engineering Department has installed a water Supply Scheme to supply drinking water covering the full area of the village. In addition to that an Anua Bil (Part of the dead river) is also situated in the Northern part of the village. Many households are getting water facility from this Anua Bil. The main source of drinking water of the villagers is Supply water and private ponds and for other proposes of consumption they utilize from private ponds and river.

The settlement pattern of the village is one line system unlike the lane system in the town. Houses are located on the both sides of the END road and PWD road. Most of the villagers prefer to Assam type model house. Many houses are generally constructed following E-size and L-size model having various rooms, so that large accommodation can be enjoyed. The neighboring houses are closely related to each other as they are separated from the same family. There are five temples attaching with big Mandaps where in, the villagers perform their social and religious functions. Five priest families are also there to serve these holy temples and Mandaps. In addition to this, there are also three Shiva temples where the “Lai Harauba” festival is performed in the field in front of the temple.

Regarding sanitation facilities of the village, the sanitation system of the village is well and hygienic. All the households use their own latrine either sanitary or temporary latrine. Earlier, villagers used to doff in the bank of the river so that immediately after that they can take bath, because there is a Manipuri custom that if a person went to latrine he is accepted as impure.

In this village, dead bodies are cremated on the bank of Sonai River. There is also a Manipuri custom that any river is treated as holy river as the Ganga river. Therefore, the Manipuris prefer to cremate their dead bodies on the bank of the river so that their ashes may dissolve into the water of the river. So, river is very important for Manipuri Community.

As far as education is concerned, the village has good educational facilities. There are two LP Schools, namely, 134 No. Chandpur Buniadi LP School and 923 No. Uttar Chandpur LP School. The village has two Middle Elementary Schools and one High School. There are two colleges near the village. In addition to this, a Sangit Bidyalaya is also situated in the middle of the village. The 134 no. Chandpur Buniadi LP School is a very old school. It was established in 1850. In that time, there were very few LP Schools in the area, students from very far away used to study in that school. Many Doctorate Holders, Engineers and other educated persons received their education from this school. The medium of teaching in this LP School was at first Bengali but now it has Manipuri Medium. At the High School level, there is bi-lingual system i.e. Manipuri and Bengali. The literacy rate of the village is also quite high. Five Doctorate degree holders and two retired Cornels belong to this village.

There is no Medical Sub-centre in the village. Therefore, the villagers have been suffering from non availability of medical aids at the time of suffering. A branch post office and a market are also situated in the village. The market is weekly but there are a number of permanent shops in the market along with PCO, DTP centre etc. and there are also 8 small rice mills in the village. Therefore, the villagers can fulfil their day to day needs within the village. For selling their huge amount of agricultural products they go to Kabuganj Bazar and Natun Bazar which are located at a distance of 5 km and 7 km respectively. Majority of the people in the village are in service of the Military Department.