

CHAPTER - IV

RESEARCH SETTING

Assam occupies a unique place in the map of India due to its strategic geographical location, natural resources, rich bio-diversity, ethnically heterogeneous population and distinct culture (Assam Human Development Report, 2003). Assam is located at the gateway of North East India and is separated by Bangladesh from mainstream India. Assam comprises the Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys along with the Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills. It is one of the second largest states in the north eastern region occupying about 2.4 percent of the country's total geographical area. Its geographical area is 78438 sq. km, with a population density of 379 per sq. km (Census, 2011). The state of Assam had experienced the perennial problems natural calamities like floods, ethnic tension and large bouts of immigration for a long time. Inadequate irrigation facilities, floods and traditional agricultural practices are identified as the major causes of low production and productivity in agriculture in the state (Planning and Development Department, 2002-2003). Barak Valley is the southern part of Assam which is composed of three Districts, namely, Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi District. In the pre- partition days, this area formed a part of the Surma Valley, consisting of two Bengali Speaking districts- Sylhet and Cachar. After independence, most of the part of Sylhet district went to East Pakistan. In 1953, Haflong sub-division of the district was separated from Cachar and was incorporated with Mikir Hills. Gradually for administrative reasons Karimganj and Hilakandi formed as two separate districts.

4.1 Cachar District: An Insight

The present study has been conducted in Cachar district of Assam. The Cachar district is located in the southern part of Assam. It is one of the oldest districts of Assam which is bounded on the North by Barali and Jayantia hill ranges, on the South by the State Mizoram, on the East by sister district Hailakandi and Karimganj. The district was created in 1830 after annexation of Kachari Kingdom by the British. In 1854, North Cachar was annexed and made a part of the district. In 1951 the North Cachar Sub-Division was taken out from Cachar and made a separate district. In 1983

Karimganj sub-division was made a separate district and finally in 1989, Hailakandi sub-divisions got a status of separate district. Cachar district is affluent with tea gardens and accommodates major institutes of higher learning and professional excellence. Cachar district is one of the backward regions of Assam as this region is geographically, historically, socially and economically distinct from other parts of the state. In 2003, the Human Development Index in Cachar was 0.402. This indicates that the district is lagging behind in human development aspect. However, among the 27 district of Assam Cachar ranked 8 in HDI, in the year 2003. The dismal picture towards human development in the district is also reflected in the Gender Development Index (GDI) 2003 of the district which was almost identical to the district's HDI (0.409). This indicates gender inequality in Cachar district with a GDI of 14th rank in Assam in 2003 (Assam Human Development Report, 2003).

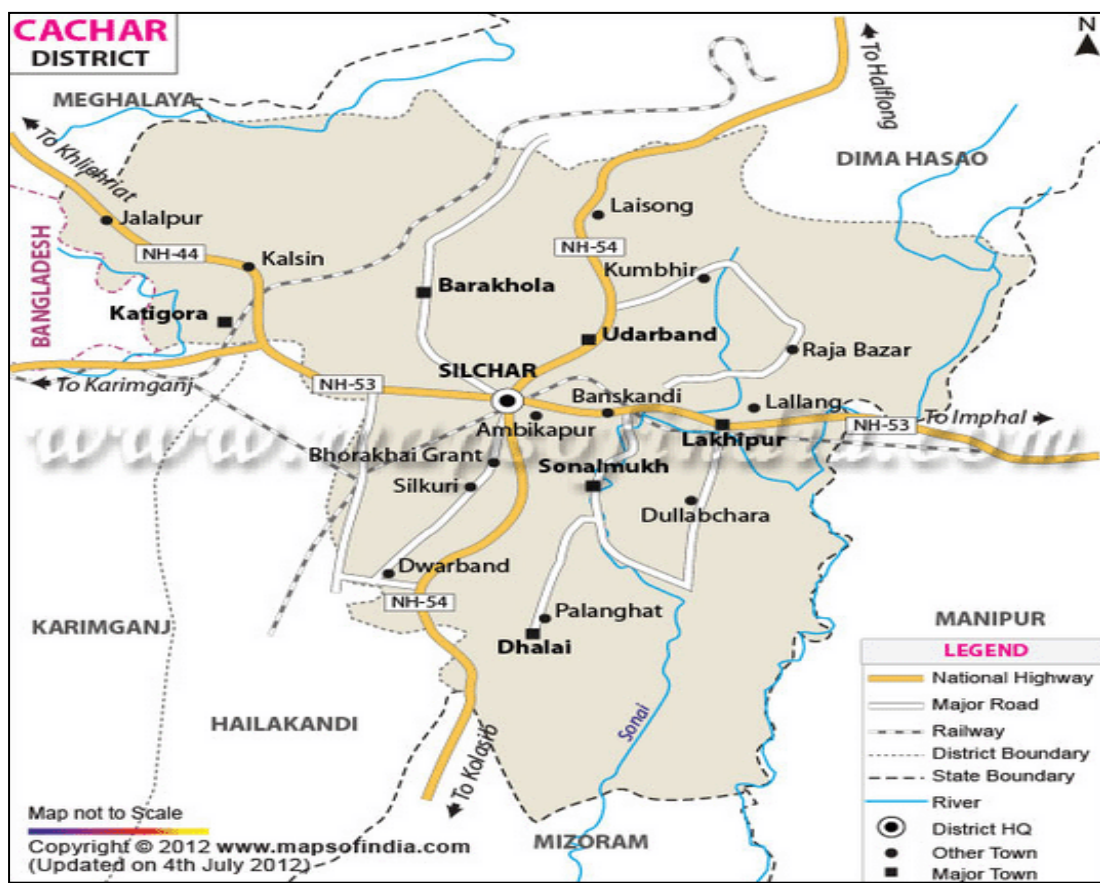


Figure 4.1: Map of Cachar District

Source: www.mapsofindia.com

4.2 Geographical Features:

The Cachar district experiences a sub tropical monsoon climate. It is a temperate region and experiences heavy rainfall. The district occupies an area of 3,786 square kilometers (Census, 2011). The district lies between 92° 24' E and 93° 15' E longitude and 24° 22' N and 25° 8' N latitude. The Barak is the main river of the district and apart from that there are numerous tributaries like Madhera, Chiri, Jatinga, Kalain and Seema. The district is mostly made up of plains, but there are number of hills spread across the district. The town of Silchar is regarded as the main economic gateway to the neighboring areas of Manipur and Mizoram and has a considerable influx of traders and merchants every year, for commercial and business purpose. As per the Statistical Handbook of Assam (2008) Cachar district has two Sub-Division viz. Silchar (Sadar) and Lakhipur. There are five Revenue Circle and fifteen Development Blocks in the district. The table below depicts the geography and administrative divisions of Cachar district.

Table 4.1: Geography and Administrative Divisions

Sl. No.	Particulars	Quantity
1	Total Area (in sq. km.)	3,786
2	Sub-division (No.)	2
3	Revenue Circle (No.)	5
4	CD Block (No.)	15
5	Total Villages (No.)	1104
6	Inhabited Villages (No.)	53
7	Towns (No.)	2
8	Gaon Panchayats (No.)	163
9	Anchalik Panchayat (No.)	15
10	Urban Local Body (No.)	2
11	District Headquarter	Silchar
12.	Major language	Bengali

Source: Statistical Handbook of Assam, 2008

4.3 Demographic Features:

As per 2011 Census, Cachar district is having 1,736,319 million populations consisting of 886,616 males and 849,703 females. This district is having population of 459 in every square kilometer. The sex ratio of Cachar district is 958 and decadal growth rate of population is 20.17 percent. The religious portion of population includes 886,761 Hindus, 522,051 Muslims, and 31,306 Christians (Census, 2011). Bengali is the official Language of this district having most of people mainly speaking Bengali. Despite Bengali, other alternative languages spoken within this district includes Bishnupuriya Manipuri, Meitei Manipuri, Rongmei-Naga, Bhojpuri, Dimasa, Kuki, Mizo, and Khasi. The table below shows the features of Rural-Urban population of Cachar district.

Table 4.2: Rural - Urban Population of Cachar District

Descriptions	Rural	Urban
Total Population	1,420,309	316,010
Male Population	727,130	159,486
Female Population	693,179	156,524
Sex Ratio	953	981
Child Sex Ratio (0-6)	956	952
Child Population (0-6)	214,398	32,428
Male Child(0-6)	109,608	16,615
Female Child(0-6)	104,790	15,813
Child Percentage (0-6)	15.10%	10.26%

Source: Census Report (2011)

4.4 Economic Characteristics

The district headquarters, Silchar, is one of the most important business centres of Assam. In 2006 the Indian government named Cachar one of the country's 250 most backward districts out of a total of 640. It is one of the eleven districts in Assam currently receiving funds from the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF). Agriculture and Plantation, Cultivation, Fishing, Farming, Forestry, Oil and Natural Gas exploration are the major occupation of the district.

4.4.1 Agriculture and Allied Activities:

The economy of Cachar district is basically agrarian in nature. Paddy is the major crop, apart from this other important crops include oil seeds, pulses, cash crop like jute, vegetables etc. The agro climatic conditions of the district are conducive for various agricultural activities. Agriculture in the district is characterized by over dependence on rainfall, predominance of seasonal crops and traditional methods of cultivation. The hilly terrain in the valley is used for tea plantation and the principal crops produced in the plain areas are rice, jute, sugarcane, potato, rape seed, mustard seed etc. The economy of the district is basically agrarian and as such the economic development of the district is highly dependable on agriculture and allied activities. Traditionally, dairy farming is a subsidiary occupation of the farmers of the district. The major plantation sector in the district comprises of 143 numbers of tea gardens with a total area of 4075 hectares (District Agricultural Department, 2002). The district has favorable agro climatic conditions for the development of various horticulture crops. However, the horticulture & plantation crops are generally not grown on commercial scale in the district. The district has high potential for growth of citrus fruits, pineapple, areca nut, lemon, banana and coconut besides rubber and bamboo plantation. Beside these, Cachar district is rich in flora and fauna. There are huge tracts of the Rainforests within northern as well as southern parts in the district that are home of Tigers, Hillock Gibbons, Asian elephants, Gaurs etc. The Barail is lone wildlife sanctuary in this district and in the Barak valley area. It was started by renowned Naturalist named Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury during early 1980s. The sanctuary was eventually notified in the year 2004. The table below depicts basic features of agricultural land in the district.

Table 4.3: Status of Agricultural Land

Sl. No.	Particulars	Qty. (Ha.)
1	Total geographical area	378600
2	Current fellow land	6073
3	Forest land	136093
4	Pasture land	2600
5	Barren and waste land	41701
6	Area under non agriculture	48934
7	Culturable waste land	2037
8	Cultivable area	146219

Source: Status Report, District Agricultural Department, 2002

4.4.2 Industry

The total industrial area in the district is spread across 38.68 acres of land (Census, 2011). The district has 1984 Small Scale Industrial units of which 295 have been registered after the announcement of N.E. Industrial Policy in 1997. The viable industries in the district based on local resources like cane, bamboo, pineapple and other agro based and food processing industries.

4.5 Education

As per 2011 Census, the average literacy rate in Cachar district is 80.36 percent with a male literacy 85.85 percent and female literacy is 74.62 percent. However, the average literacy rate of Cachar district is higher than the state average. Cachar district has a number of well-known educational institutes in North East India. Silchar, the district headquarters, is a major learning hub of Assam. The Table 4.4 highlights that Cachar district has a central university viz. the Assam University, which is situated at Durgakona, 18 km from Silchar. It also has NIT Silchar, one of the 30 NITs in India. The Silchar Medical College and Hospital is the only medical college of southern Assam. To ensure a steady flow of skilled workers the district has ITI Srikona and Silchar Polytechnic. The district also includes a number of degree colleges and prominent schools.

Table 4.4: Educational Profile of the district:

SL.No	Educational Institution	Nos
1	No. of Elementary Schools	1234
2	Secondary School /Higher Secondary Schools	158
3	No. of Colleges	09
4	No. of Engineering College (NIT)	01
5	No. of Medical College (SMC)	01
6	No. of Polytechnics	01
7	No. of ITI	01
8	No. of Teachers Training College	01
9	No. of Law College	01
10	No. of Central University	01

Source: Census Report, 2011

4.6 Health:

Health is a necessary pre-requisite for the development society. Good health and good society should go together (Basu, 1992). The constitution of India has ensured that it is the responsibility of government to provide healthy life to its citizens without any discrimination. Therefore, since independence government of India has launched various health schemes and programmes for the promotion of health and prevention of diseases. However, none of these programmes could have achieved pinnacle in the field of health. As a result in the year, 2005 the government of India, has taken a revolutionary step with the launch of National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). The Mission seeks to provide *accessible, affordable and quality* health care services to rural people with special reference to women and child.

4.7 Health Status of Cachar District

An assessment of health status is possible from key indicators such as Infant Mortality, Maternal Mortality, Crude birth rate, crude death rate, life expectancy etc. The table 4.5 indicates that during 210-2013, Maternal Mortality Rate, Infant Mortality, Neonatal-Mortality Rate, under 5 Mortality Rates, Birth Rate and Sex Ratio

have gradually come down in Assam as well as in Cachar district. As per the data from NRHM, Annual Health Survey it is observed that the MMR rate was 381 in Assam in the year 2010-11 which has gradually come down to 301 in the year 2012-13. Similarly, in Cachar district the rate of MMR was estimated at 342 in the year 2010-11, which has gradually decreased to 281 in the year 2012-13. So from the above data it can be said that since the introduction of NRHM in 2005, the health scenario in Cachar district has improved. Under NRHM, a number of new initiatives like Mobile Medical Unit (MMU), formation of Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committees (VHSNC) in almost each village, Public Private Partnership (PPP) with charitable hospitals and tea garden hospitals, 24X7 delivery facilities along with child care unit have been initiated in the district to strengthen the existing health scenario of the district.

Table 4.5: Health Indicators of Cachar District

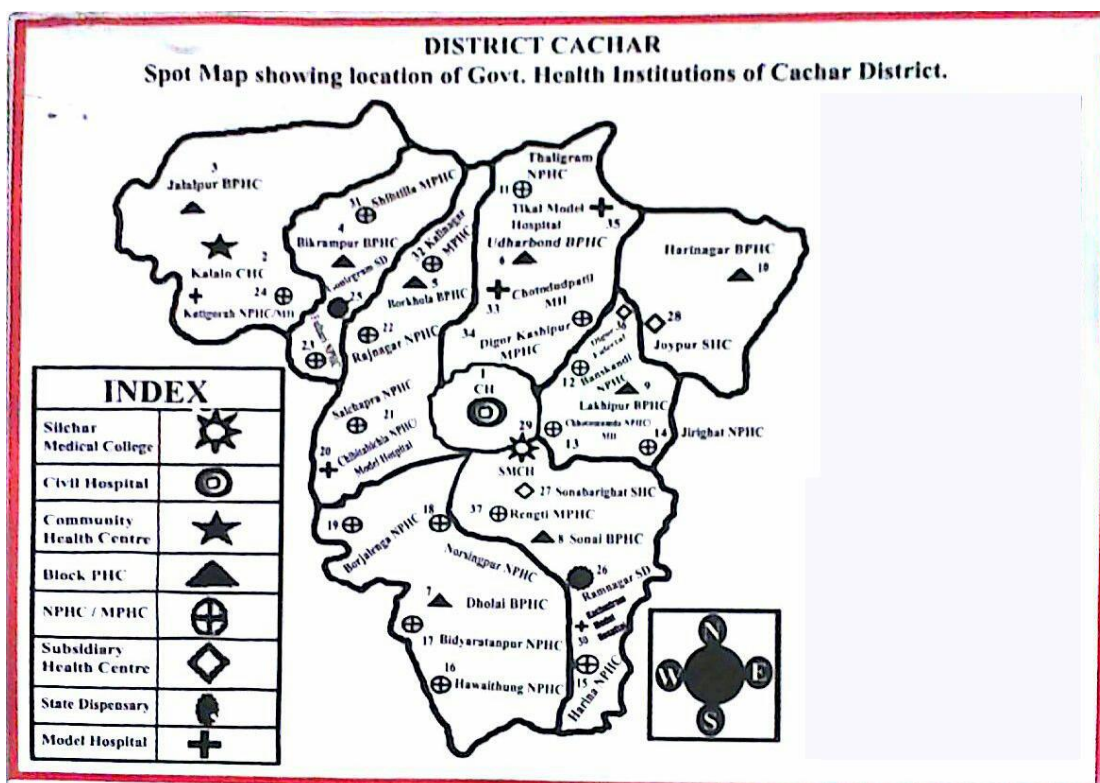
Indicator	Assam			Cachar		
	Annual Health Survey 10-11	Annual Health Survey 11-12	Annual Health Survey 12-13	Annual Health Survey 10-11	Annual Health Survey 11-12	Annual Health Survey 12-13
Maternal Mortality Rate	381	347	301	342	288	281
Infant Mortality Rate	60	57	55	57	54	53
Neo-natal Mortality Rate	39	38	37	36	35	35
Under Five Mortality Rate	78	75	71	79	76	69
Crude Birth Rate (CBR)	21.9	21.3	21.2	26.5	25.8	25.3
Crude Death Rate (CDR)	7.2	7.1	7	7.5	7.4	7.3
Natural Growth Rate	14.7	14.2	14.1	18.9	18.3	18
Sex Ratio (All Ages)	953	959	965	974	984	995
Sex Ratio (At Birth)	925	937	947	929	929	928

Source: (NRHM, Report: 2014)

4.8 Health Services

At present the health infrastructure of Cachar district includes eight BPHCs, twenty Mini PHC, Two hundred seventy Sub-Centres and three Community Health Centers, one District Hospital and one Medical College and Hospital. Beside these, the district is having one cancer specialist hospital. As per NRHM data (2014), the number of beds available in the government health institution is 112. Thus every PHC/Sub-Centre in the district covers an average of 4011 persons while number of beds is only 9 per one lakh population in the rural areas of the district. The district has a total of 14 birth and death registration centers. Beside these, Cachar district is having number of private nursing home to cater the health needs of entire Barak valley. However, as per the Annual Report (2014) there is a shortage 12 civil hospital, 48 PHC and 289 Sub Centres in Cachar district which need to be setup to reduce the gap in the delivery of health services.

The map below (4.2) depicts the location of government health institution in Cachar district.



4.2 Health Map of Cachar District

Source: District Health Mission (Cachar District)