

Changing River Bank-Line and its Impact on Society: A Sociological Study of River Dhansiri at Golaghat

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ABSTRACT

River bank line change is integral and dynamic to the function of river course system. It promotes erosion as well as depositional process of a river. Dhansiri is the main river in the district of Golaghat, Assam. This river has been experiencing some changes in channel morphology due to sedimentation, bank erosion, flood, channel shifting etc. which affects the physical as well as social environment of the inhabitant people of the river bank area of Dhansiri. The researchers have identified some specific changes in respect of economic and social perspectives are concerned from intensive fieldwork. The domain of the study relates to two villages affected by river bank line change in Assam from which some idea can be had of the situation obtaining in the villages of river prone. For the study two villages of Golaghat Revenue Circle namely Mainapara Gaon and Rupjyoti Gaon situated upon western bank and Eastern bank of river Dhansiri in the District of Golaghat Assam are selected respectively. In study 30 respondents from each village by selecting purposive sampling method were interviewed. The researchers have identified some specific changes in respect of economic and social perspectives are concerned.

1. Introduction

River bank line change is integral and dynamic to the function of river course system. It promotes erosion as well as depositional process of a river. Dhansiri is the main river in the district of Golaghat, Assam. It originates from Laisang peak of Nagaland. It flows through a distance of 352 km from south to north before joining the Brahmaputra on its south bank. This river has been experiencing some changes in channel morphology due to sedimentation, bank erosion, flood, channel shifting etc. which affects the physical as well as social environment of the inhabitant people of the river bank area of Dhansiri.

The researchers have identified some specific changes in respect of economic and social perspectives are concerned from intensive fieldwork and literature review. Some factors like high rate of sedimentation, high rate of rainfall, high rate of suspended sediment load during monsoon and shifting cultivation have been noticed during the field work. Loss or gain of land area along the river bank, soil erosion, sedimentation, change in landscape, changes in occupational pattern and agricultural system etc. take place for river bank line change.

Historical background of Golaghat District:

Golaghat, better known as the land of the Doyang-Dhansiri is now a district of Assam. In the remote past, it formed a part of the ancient Kingdom of Kamarupa and later of the Kachari and Ahom kingdom. The archaeological investigations recently made and researches undertaken in this region lead us to believe that at some point of time of history, an independent kingdom arose in this region with Duboriyoni as its capital. This was undoubtedly an independent kingdom of the pre-Kachari and pre-Ahom period. Thus this land of the Doyang-Dhansiri is well-known from ancient past as a great

centre of political activities and a great repository of arte-facts of ancient culture and glory. Evidence regarding this can be found even today in the extensive ruins of ancient buildings, temples, walls, ramparts, tanks, stone images that are scattered in different parts of the Doyang-Dhansiri valley.

Archaeological relics, mentioned above, found in Sarupather, Raja Pukhuri, Nagajuri Khanikar Gaon, Borpathar, Duboriyani, Tengani, Sisupani, Kachamari, Merapani, Dergaon and others sufficiently prove the fact that ancient civilization grew in this valley of Doyang-Dhansiri even before the advent of the Ahoms in the early thirteenth century (1228 AD) and the rise of Kachari power earlier than that in this region. According to Dr. Dinesh Sarkar the stone-inscription discovered at Nagajuri Khanikar Gaon of Sarupathar belongs to the early part of the fifth century AD and it is said to be the oldest inscription found in Assam so far.

The stone-images found at Deopani of Borpathar gives us the name of two Kings. They are Maharajadhiraj Jibra and Maharajadhira Sri Sri Dighlekh Burma; but the name of their dynasty, the period of their rule and the name of the kingdom they ruled could not be ascertained from it. According to tradition, in the ninth and tenth century A.D., there existed a very prosperous Borahi kingdom in the Doyang valley of which Sri Jibra and Sri Sri Dighlekh Burma were the rulers. Some historians are of the view that in the eleventh century, Doyang-Dhansiri Valley formed the eastern extremity of the kingdom of Kamrupa which was then ruled successively by the later kings of Salastambha dynasty and the kings of Pala dynasty. It is to be mentioned here that so far no clear evidence of relics of Pala period are found in this part. According to another authority, Varman kings of Kamarupa who flourished from the middle of fourth to the middle of seventh century conquered and annexed this valley to the empire of Kamrupa. Stone inscriptions of the kings of Varman dynasty unearthed recently

about 15 kilometers away from Duboriyani support such a view.

The archaeological investigations recently made at Barpathar have thrown new light on the history and civilization of Doyang-Dhansiri. From the stone-inscription discovered at 2 no. Nagajuri Khanikar Gaon and Alichiga Tengani, it may be presumed that the kingdom that existed in this region was an independent kingdom and it never formed a part of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa. Duboriyani of Barpathar was perhaps the capital of this ancient kingdom of Doyang-Dhansiri valley. Because relics of ramparts, bricks-structures, temples, tanks etc. which are generally considered to be the basic requirements for a capital in those days are seen in the area of Duboriyani of Borpathar even today. Modern researches have given us the names of Sri Basundhara Barman and Sri Ratna Burman as rulers of this independent kingdom.

The Doyang-Dhansiri Valley came under the rule of the Ahoms in the sixteenth century. Prior to that period, this part was ruled by the Kacharies living in this region came to be known as Herambial Kachari. Ahom's desire to extend their territory westward brought them into direct and open clashes with the Kacharis. On Ahom pressure the Kacharis withdrew to the south of the river Dhansiri which became the western boundary of the Ahom kingdom. In 1513 A.D., the Ahom king Suhungmung (1497-1539 A.D.) succeeded in annexing the area called Marangi which at that time extended from the river Dhansiri on the east of Kaziranga on the west on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra, by defeating the Kacharis in a series of battle and also by stratagem. The area lying to the south of Golaghat extending up to Dimapur was also annexed by the same king. King Suhungmung himself led the military expenditure to the mouth of the river Doyang and his General Frasengmung Borgohain played a key role in annexing this part to the Ahom kingdom.

During the Ahom rule, the Doyang-Dhansiri valley once again rose into prominence politically, economically and culturally. One Taomung Klinglung was placed for the first time in charge of administration of this newly annexed region and he was also given the charge of conducting political relations with the Kacharis and the Nagas of the Ahoms frontier. He was called Marangi-Khowa Gohain. In course of time, Doyang-Dhansiri valley came to assume so much importance that the valley later came to be divided as Nam-Doyang, Opar-Doyang and Bosa-Doyang for administrative convenience.

After the expulsion of the Kacharis from this region, this valley was brought under the process of village reorganization by the Ahom kings. With a view to checking incursions of the Kacharis, the Ahom kings established villages of other communities by the side of the river Doyang. King Pratap Singha (1603-1631 or 1611-1649 A.D.) transferred and settled a great number of inhabitants from Abhoypur, Dihing and Namdang to Marangi situated on the western side of the river Dhansiri to which Doyang flows. This was done with a view to establishing permanently the Ahom authority on the region wrested from the Kacharis and to protect the frontier properly. Momai Tamuly Barboruah who was the chief architect of village reorganization in Ahom is known to have resided in this

region for some years. A place called Barboruah's hearth or "Barboruah Bari" still exists in this part called Dhekial.

The society that emerged in this region was cosmopolitan in nature. Broadly the population was divided into Aryan and non-Aryan. In this part, however, the non-Aryan elements, particularly the Mongoloid elements predominated. And therefore cast system could not effect a rigid horizontal division of society as it did in other parts of India. Similarly the vertical division of the society after the settlements of Turks at Bokakhat was also extremely lean. Momai Tamuly Barboruah in the region of Pratap Singha was said to have reorganized village life of the Assamese at Bacha-Doyang region in addition to Nowgong according to communities, castes and vocations they held. It may be mentioned here that kings of old kingdom of Kamarupa also followed a systematic policy of establishing 'Agraharas'. Since this part at some point of time in history formed a part of Kamarupa kingdom, the same policy of establishing villages might have been followed in this land by the kings of Kamarupa. Organization of villages in a planned manner and the policy of dispersal followed by the pattern of settlement adopted towards the conquered during the Ahom rule brought about a balanced distribution of population belonging to different tribes and communities in this valley and it obviously help in deepening inter-community, and cast understanding and also promoting harmony and intermingling of people on a wider scale ultimately to promote social cohesiveness.

The Doyang-Dhansiri valley also emerged as an important centre of various economic activities during the Ahom rule. Economically, the valley achieved self-sufficiency in various fields. This valley was famous for producing best varieties of rice. Tamuly Pathar, Basa Pathar, Moni pathar, Hamdoi Pathar, Bor Pathar, Layekar Pather, Futukatoli Pathar, etc. were famous rice producing fields. Moreover, places like Gurjugonia was famous for producing molasses.. Kacharihat which is located eight KM east of Golaghat town was not only an ancient trade centre of Upper Assam, it was also an interstate trade centre of the Ahom, the Kacharis and the Naga highlanders. Moreover, Nagahat, Kalarhat, Khitlurhat, Halar Hat were famous market places in those days.

The Khel-paik system introduced by the Ahoms chiefly for political and administrative purpose involved the common people of this region more deeply in the nation building work than the people in other parts of the Ahom kingdom. In history we find that the persons who tried to pass a slothful life were detected and engaged in developmental works. A long road called Dhodar Ali which runs through Golaghat town was constructed by Gdadhur Singha (1688-1696 A.D.) with such people. It represents the work culture developed by the Ahom rulers in this part of the Ahom kingdom.

Like the politico-economic history, the religious history of this region is also interesting. From numerous stone images, idols, temples scattered in different parts of the valley, it may be conjectured that in ancient and medieval period, along with Siva-Sakti cults and animistic beliefs, the worship of Vishnu or Vasudeva was prevalent in the land of Doyang-Dhansiri. After the annexation of this part to the Ahom kingdom, Tai beliefs

and practices and with the settlement of Muslims at Bokakhat, Islamic faith made their appearance.

Under the patronage of the Ahoms, numerous Satras or monasteries sprang up all over Assam. Kuruabahi to the west of Numaligarh was the place where the famous Kuruabahi Satra was established. It was one of the four principal Vaishnavite Satras of Assam-the others being Auniati, Garmr and Bengenaati..

The linguistic history of the land of Doyang-Dhansiri is very significant. A stone-inscription belonging to the 5th century discovered at Nagajuri Khanikar Gaon of Sarupather clearly proves that Assamese had had been the prevailing language in the valley of Doyang-Dhansiri before the rise of Kachari Power and the advent of the Ahoms. It is said that Madhav Kandali, at least a century before the emergence of Sankardeva translated the great epic Ramayana from original Sanskrit to Assamese under the patronage of Mahamanikya Pha probably in the vicinity of Doigrung or Murphulani. It shows that Assamese as a language at the time under review was fully developed and it attained the highest form of development.

In the cultural realm, the significant feature of the land of Doyang-Dhansiri is that it became the meeting place of cultures of the plain and the hill. Friendship, goodwill were assiduously cultivated by the Ahom rulers with the Nagas who lived at the upper course of the rivers Kakodonga, Doying and Dhansiri. The Nagas of this part used to frequent the plain for various reasons. Those who frequented the plain by using water-way were known as Panibotia and those who used land-routes were called Tarbotia. There is instance to show that two thousand Panibotia Nagas worked at Paik under Marangi Khowa Gohain. The Tarbotia Nagas worked under Dayangia Rajkhowa. Another section of Nagas who lived to the east of Panibotia or Tarbotia Nagas were called Dopdaria Nagas who had to assist the royal officers in the hilly parts of the frontier contiguous to the Naga hills. The instances cited above make it ample clear that the Nagas who lived in close proximity with the people in the plains in the Doyang-Dhansiri Valley were almost a part of the Assamese. The astute Ahom rulers by

their policy of conciliation and by efficient frontier administration could bring the Nagas of this region near to the Valley dwellers. The Nagas and the Assamese of the Doyang-Dhansiri Valley lived harmoniously, worked together and mingled to form a single entity irrespective of any hill-plain complex. Thus the ground for the hill-plain amity and friendship was prepared more deeply first in the land of Doyang-Dhansiri under the political leadership of the Ahoms. As hinted earlier, the Turk were the first batch of Muslims to settle near Bokakhat. They too soon became very much Assamised in their manners and habit and mood of living.

The Valley of Doyang-Dhansiri is well known for its rich historical treasures. In 1826 AD the Britishers took possession of Assam by defeating the Burmese invader. In 1833 AD Swargades Purandar Singha was placed in charge of administration of upper Assam, but soon the whole area was annexed to the British territory on the pretext that Raja Purandar Singha had failed to pay tribute to the company. In 1833 AD, the area was divided into two districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur by East India Company and a proposal for the formation of two sub-divisions one at Joypur and the other at Golaghat was first considered.

W.W. Hunter in his "A Statistical Account of Assam" writes that Golaghat as a sub-division came into being in 1846 AD. On 23.10.1997 AD, Golaghat has been elevated to the position of a District of Assam by the Government of Assam. At present, the district of Golaghat consists of three sub-divisions being Golaghat, Bokakhat and Dhansiri.

2. Method and Methodology

The domain of the study relates to two villages affected by river bank line change in Assam from which some idea can be had of the situation obtaining in the villages of river prone. For the study two villages of Golaghat Revenue Circle namely Mainapara Gaon and Rupjyoti Gaon situated upon western bank and Eastern bank of river Dhansiri in the District of Golaghat Assam are selected respectively. In study we interviewed 30 respondents from each village by selecting purposive sampling method.

3. Social Background of the Respondents:

Religion:

Table 1: 1 Religion of the Respondents

Village	No.of Hindu	P.C	No.of Islam	P.C	Total	P.C.
Mainapara	26	86.67%	04	13.33%	30	100%
Rupjyoti	25	83.33%	05	16.67%	30	100%

Religion has the most important role to play in the life of a man as well as in society. In social life, religion welds together the followers of a particular religion. In the study it was found that out of total respondent 26 (86.67%) were belonged to Hindus, 04 (13.33%) were Islam in village Mainapara, whereas in village Rupjyoti, 25 (83.33%) were Hindus and 5 (16.67%) were Islam.

Sex:

Table 1:2 shows that in village Mainapara 22 (73.33%) respondents were males and 08 (26.67%) respondents were females. Whereas in Village Rupjyoti as many as 19 (63.33%) respondents were males and 11 (36.67%) were females.

Table 1:2 Sex of the Respondents

Village	Male	P.C.	Female	P.C	Total	P.C.
Mainapara	22	73.33%	08	26.67%	30	100%
Rupjyoti	19	63.33%	11	36.67%	30	100%

Age Group:

Age is also an important component of social background of an individual. Thoughts and ideas of individuals are

determined, to a large extent, by age. Table 1:3 shows the age group of the respondents.

Table 1:3 Age-Groups of the Respondents

Age Groups	Mainapara Village		Rupjyoti Village		Total	
	Nos.	P.C.	Nos.	P.C.	Nos.	P.C.
30 – 35	07	23.33%	05	16.67%	12	20%
36 – 40	08	26.67%	07	23.33%	15	25%
41 – 45	05	16.67%	09	30%	14	23.33%
46 – 50	06	20%	04	13.33%	10	16.67%
51 - 55	04	13.33%	05	16.67%	09	15%
Total	30	100%	30	100%	60	100%

Table 1:3 shows that in Village Mainapara, the highest group of respondents belonged to the age group of 36–40. In this group, 08 (26.67%) of the respondents was found. On the other hand, in Village Rupjyoti, the highest group of respondent, i.e. 09 (30%) belonged to the age group of 41-45.

Caste and Community:

Caste is an important factor for the individual of the Indian society. The word 'caste' is used in a man's everyday life, and consideration of caste continues to influence social intercourse even today. Therefore, it is important to know the castes to which the respondents belong. Table 1:4 shows the caste and communities of the respondents.

Table 1:4 Castes and Communities of the Respondents

Caste/Community	Mainapara Village		Rupjyoti Village		Total	
	Nos.	P.C.	Nos.	P.C.	No	P.C.
Kalita	04	13.33%	03	10%	07	11.67%
Keot	04	13.33%	05	16.67%	09	15%
Koch	06	20%	07	23.33%	13	21.67%
Ahom	06	20%	07	23.33%	13	21.67%
Chutia	08	26.67%	06	20%	14	23.33%
Muslim	02	6.67%	02	6.67%	04	13.33%

Education

Education is an important tool by which we can judge the development of an individual and society. Table 1: 5 shows the educational standard of the respondents.

Table 1: 5 Educational standard of the Respondents

Standard	Mainapara Village		Rupjyoti Village		Total	
	Nos.	P.C.	Nos.	P.C.	No	P.C.
Illiterate	06	20%	05	16.67%	11	18.33%
Primary	08	26.67%	09	30%	17	28.33%
Standard VIII	04	13.33%	04	13.33%	08	13.33%
Read up to X	03	10%	04	13.33%	07	11.67%
HSLC & Above	09	30%	08	26.67%	17	28.33%

Occupation:

Occupation determines, to a great extent, one's mode of living, thinking and behaviour etc. Therefore, it is necessary to

know the occupations of the respondents. Table 1: 6 shows the occupations of the respondents of the villages under study.

Table 1: 6 Occupation of the Respondents

Occupation	Mainapara Village		Rupjyoti Village		Total	
	Nos.	P.C.	Nos.	P.C.	No	P.C.
Agriculture	19	63.33%	17	56.67%	36	60%
Petty Business	06	20%	07	23.33%	13	21.67%
Any Other	05	16.67%	06	20%	11	18.33%

The occupations, such as carpentry, casual labour etc were included in any other category. Table 1: 6 shows that in village Mainapara a large number of respondents i.e. 19 (63.33%) were engaged agriculture and in village Rupjyoti majority of the respondents i.e. 17 (56.67%) were also engaged in the same occupation i.e. agriculture. On the other hand, 06 (20%) and 07 (23.33%) numbers of respondent engaged in Petty Business in both the villages i.e. Mainapara and Rupjyoti respectively. In case of any other occupation category, 05 (16.67%) and 06 (20%) numbers of respondents were engaged in each village of Mainapara and Rupjyoti.

4. Effect on Land use and Occupation pattern among the Respondents

The study further reveals that due to river bank line changes taking place of river Dhansiri there has been considerable effects upon the villagers living at Mainapara Village and Rupjyoti Village under the revenue circle of Golaghat, Assam. The following table 2: 1 shows the effects took place upon the respondents.

Table 2: 1 Effects of river line change upon the Respondents

Effects of River bank line change	Mainapara Village		Rupjyoti Village	
	Nos.	P.C.	Nos.	P.C.
Shifting cultivation to nearby area	08	26.67%	09	30.33%
Taking alternative livelihood	13	43.67%	11	36.33%
Adopting vegetable and potato cultivation at rice producing area.	09	30%	10	33.33%

Table 2: 1 shows that out of total respondents, 08 (26.67%) and 09 (30.33%) respondents have been shifting cultivation due to river bank line change and land erosion, towards adjoining areas of villages Mainapara and Rupjyoti respectively.

The table further reveals that 13 (43.67%) and 11 (36.33%) respondents in two villages undertook alternative livelihood such as petty business, carpentry, casual labour due to river bank erosion and bank line changes. Our study, reveals that 09 (30%) and 10 (33.33%) numbers of respondent have been transferred their rice producing area into vegetable and potato cultivation.

5. Conclusion

The researchers have identified some specific changes in respect of economic and social perspectives are concerned from intensive fieldwork at Mainapara and Rupjyoti village under Golaghat Circle office. Some factors like high rate of sedimentation, high rate of rainfall, high rate of suspended sediment load during monsoon and shifting cultivation have been noticed during the field work. Loss or gain of land area along the river bank, soil erosion, sedimentation, change in landscape, changes in occupational pattern and agricultural system etc. take place due to river bank line change here.

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