CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

India is a vast multi-linguistic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country. Assam is one of the beautiful states of the North-East Indian Union with its flora and fauna, hills, plains and rivers. In view of this context, Assam is a home land of heterogeneous population coming from different directions at different points of time. At present, the bulk of the population of Assam is made up of the Hindus and the Muslims. While the Hindus account for the majority of the population, the Muslims constitute the second largest religious community of Assam. There are other groups of religious people in Assam believing in Buddhism, Shikhism, Christianity and Jainism but less in number.

Hindu-Muslim population

According to 1991 census total population of Assam is 2,24,14,322 of which 1,50,47,293 are Hindus and their percentage is 67.13. The number of the Muslim population is 63,73,204 and their percentage is 28.43. According to 2001 census total population of Assam is 2, 66, 38,407 of which 1,72,96,425 are the Hindus and 82,40,674 are the Muslims. The percentage of the Hindus is 64.88 and the percentage of the Muslims is 30.90.
According to 2001 census report, district-wise Hindu-Muslim population in Assam are as follows:

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Hindus and Their Percentage</th>
<th>Muslims and Their Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>2515030</td>
<td>1836153 (73%)</td>
<td>625002 (24.85%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>2315387</td>
<td>1106354 (47.9%)</td>
<td>1180267 (50.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>1503943</td>
<td>868532 (57.8%)</td>
<td>534658 (35.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonitpur</td>
<td>1677874</td>
<td>1287646 (76.8%)</td>
<td>26807 (1.59%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barpeta</td>
<td>1642420</td>
<td>662066 (40.2%)</td>
<td>977943 (59.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nalbari</td>
<td>1138184</td>
<td>873744 (76.8%)</td>
<td>253842 (22.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhubri</td>
<td>1634589</td>
<td>405065 (24.8%)</td>
<td>1216455 (74%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>822306</td>
<td>314157 (38.2%)</td>
<td>441516 (53.69%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kakrajhar</td>
<td>930404</td>
<td>594168 (63.9%)</td>
<td>184441 (19.82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morigaon</td>
<td>775874</td>
<td>405302 (52.2%)</td>
<td>369398 (47.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>889325</td>
<td>702881 (8%)</td>
<td>143505 (16.13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
<td>1172056</td>
<td>1075878 (91.8%)</td>
<td>53306 (4.54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhemaji</td>
<td>569468</td>
<td>548780 (96.36%)</td>
<td>10533 (1.84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinsukia</td>
<td>1150146</td>
<td>1029142 (89.57%)</td>
<td>40000 (3.47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibasagar</td>
<td>1052802</td>
<td>927706 (80.11%)</td>
<td>85761 (8.14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorhat</td>
<td>1009197</td>
<td>927706 (91.9%)</td>
<td>47658 (4.72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karbi Anglong</td>
<td>812320</td>
<td>670139 (82.5%)</td>
<td>18091 (2.22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.C. Hills</td>
<td>186189</td>
<td>131429 (70.65%)</td>
<td>4662 (2.50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>1442141</td>
<td>856761 (1.5%)</td>
<td>522051 (36.19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karimganj</td>
<td>1003676</td>
<td>470708 (46.9%)</td>
<td>527214 (52.52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hailakandi</td>
<td>542978</td>
<td>223191 (41.10%)</td>
<td>312846 (56.60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26638407</td>
<td>17296455 (65%)</td>
<td>8240617 (30.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Muslims, the second largest community of Assam is distinctly divided into two categories - (i) the indigenous Assamese Muslims and (ii) the immigrant Muslims.
The indigenous Assamese Muslims grow from the captive soldiers and others who came along with the Muslim invasions during the Medieval period with a few local converts. On the other hand, the immigrant Muslims are those Muslims now living in Char area of Assam whose ancestors migrated from erstwhile East-Bengal (now Bangladesh) to Assam in last decade of the nineteenth century to third decade of the twentieth century. Among indigenous and immigrant Muslims, the formers have a privileged position in the society not because of having accepted Assamese culture which many of the immigrant Muslims too have done but because of their relatively early settlement in the Pre-British era. The indigenous Muslims had also secured access to the stream of modernization much earlier as compared to the other group. In addition, most of them are engaged in trades and vocations which even have promoted their economic affluence. In contrast, the immigrant Muslims are predominantly agricultural group which has caused their low social ranking and esteem of their brethren. These Muslims are scattering in almost all districts of Assam. They are sizeable in numbers in the districts of Dhubri, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgaon, Morigaon and Lakhimpur. They came to Assam by steam-boat in particular and railroad in general in search of food, cloth and shelter and started settlement in the uncultivated low lands of both the banks of the river Brahmaputra. These people came to Assam at the initiative of the British rule as a tool of production as the Assamese Hindu people were unwilling to produce corns on waste lands of Assam. The cultivating Muslim people living in the Char area of the river Brahmaputra are now a constituent part of Assam’s population.

Social Life of Assam's Muslim:

The Muslims of Assam can also be divided into four caste-like groups as follows:
1. Syed

Syed means lord. They claim themselves as the descendant of Fatima, the daughter of prophet Hazrat Mahammad. In Assam, this category of Muslims are small in number. They claim themselves as prominent among the Muslims having come from Arab to propagate Islam in Assam. The Syeds are regarded as priestly clan who occupy a dominant position in religious affairs of the Muslim social life in Assam.

2. Sheikh

Sheikh means a leader. The term is especially applied to denote the three branches of the Quraish tribe in Arab. The Siddiqui, the Faruqi and the Abbasi led by Abu Bakkr Siddique, Umar Faruque and Abbas respectively. Prophet Muhammad belongs to this tribe. In the contemporary Muslim society of Assam, the "Sheikhs" are more numerous and are widely scattered throughout Assam. The majority of the Sheikhs are descendants of local people having converted to Islam. All the Muslim migrants who have settled down in different parts of Assam belong to Sheikh category.

3. Goriya

The Goriyas are those Muslims who generally belong to Sheikh category. The origin of the term Goriya is controversial. According to Gait, the ordinary Muslims who have come from Gaur, the ancient Muslim Capital of Bengal is known as Goriya. These people generally used to make various utensils of brass for household usage. They have adopted Assamese language, culture and literature and even molded their domestic life in the line of the Assamese way of living.
4. Moriya

The Moriya is another category of Muslims of Assam. This category of Muslims are the descendants of the Muslim soldiers captured during the Muslim invasions in Assam in early sixteenth century. Their traditional occupation is brass works. In early stage they were not considered as Musalmans as they were deviated from Islamic principles. Since the last few decades, changes have taken place among them and now they follow all doctrines of Shariat (religious principles).

There are also other categories of Muslims in Assam. Those categories are as follows:

1. Uzani or Desi

So far the Uzani Muslims are concerned they are the local Muslims of the undivided Goalpara district of lower Assam. The majority of the Muslims of Goalpara district belong to Uzani Muslims. These Muslims call themselves as Desi (Native). Some of the Uzani Muslims are called Bairbandi as their fore-fathers had come from the Bairband district of erstwhile East Bengal (Now Bangladesh) during the last part of the 19th century. It is said that a good number of the Uzani Muslims are the descendants of the Koch Rajbongshi people who converted themselves to Islam.

2. Bhatiya

This section of Muslims is also considered to have settled in the western part of Assam simultaneously with the Uzanis. They used the term Bhatiya to mean the down stream Musalman originally belonging to Mymenshing and Rangpur district of the erstwhile East Bengal. It is worth mentioning that during the last part of the medieval period, East Bengal was known as Bhatidesh (downward country). The Muslims who migrated to Assam from this land in the late 19th century or some of them much earlier
than this were designated as Bhatiya Musalmans. There is a considerable difference between the Uzani and the Bhatiya Muslims in respects of language, customs, practices, social norms and behaviour. The Bhatiyas are considered as inferior to the Uzans in social status.

3. Charua

The Muslims who have settled in the Char (reverine) areas are known as Charua Muslims. They are relatively new entrants to Assamese society. These Muslims migrated to Assam from erstwhile East Bengal as stated earlier in the last part of the 19th and the first part of the 20th century as farmers and agricultural labourers for better opportunity and settled down permanently. They have tried to assimilate themselves with the larger Assamese society by adopting Assamese language and culture. Their social status stands lower than that of the Assamese Muslims.

4. Dathiya

The Dathiya is an occupationaly stratified group of Muslims. They are fish traders, especially the dry fish. This is their traditional occupation and main source of livelihood. They are engaged in agricultural works as well. The social status of this group of Muslims is comparatively lower than those of other Muslims. They are recognized as Other Backward Class (OBC) in the society.

5. Sandar or Baramasi

A few number of Muslims of this group are found in parts of Goalpara and Kamrup districts. Actually they were nomadic group of people who settled down later on in Assam before independence. Their traditional occupation is petty trade in cosmetics and other fancy items like cheap bangles, mirror, combs, powder, cream, lip-sticks clips etc. W.E. Hunter observes, “These Baramasis frequently came to the district (Goalpara)
on the occasion of certain local fairs and festivals. These people with their families live in boat and move from place to place selling trinket, drugs and other petty articles of trade.\textsuperscript{34}

6. \textit{Selheti or Selhetiya}

\textit{Selheti} or \textit{Selhetiya} Muslims are those Muslims who came from Sylhet district of erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in late nineteenth century and settled in the district of undivided Cachar of Assam.\textsuperscript{35} Now-a-days, these Muslims are found in some parts of Nowgaon district and in other parts as well. They use colloquial language in social parlance originated in their ancestors’ land, Sylhet.

7. \textit{Manipuri}

\textit{Manipuri} said to have come from Manipur and settled permanently in different parts of Barak Valley. These Muslims use Manipuri Colloquial language in social parlance.

Each of the categories of the Muslims stated above traditionally maintain a certain degree of social distance from each other. Their customs, culture, language, manners, life style etc. are also different.\textsuperscript{36} They are not even close to each other in social relationship. Generally, marriages are not performed among them.\textsuperscript{37} As for example, an Assamese Muslim in general does not prefer to give a girl in marriage with a \textit{Bhatiya} Muslim boy. Likewise, a \textit{Bhatiya} Muslim boy does not want an Assamese Muslim girl for marriage. This practice is prevalent among the different categories of Muslims of Assam. Now-a-days, some relaxation is seen in respect of marriage. An Assamese girl is preferred giving marriage to a \textit{Bhatiya Muslim} boy although such kind of marriage is very few in number.\textsuperscript{38}
Religious Festivals

The Muslims of Assam as a whole celebrate various religious festivals as per Islamic faith. The prominent religious festivals are Idd-Ul-Fitre, Ed-Uz-Zaha, Maharrum, Fatcha-E-Dawaz Daham, Sab-e-Barat and Miladunnabi. In observance of religious festivals equal importance is given to all festivals by each category of the Muslims of Assam.

They also celebrate ceremonies like Akika, Milad-Sharif, circumcision or Sannat in social life.

Char area and population

The mighty river Brahmaputra flows through the plains of Assam for a length of 800 km and is dotted with many mid-channel bars locally called Chars and Chaparis. The Chars are an integral part of the complex fluvial regime of the Brahmaputra river. The Chars are composed of both bed load and suspended load and are generally triangular in shape. Their height naturally can never be greater than the height of the highest flood since they are built under flood environment. During floods the Chars get submerged. Some of them may be completely wiped away by erosions. Generally they are subjected to erosion on their upstream part and deposition on the downstream end. It is pertinent to note that sediment transport in the Brahmaputra increases with the progress of floods during the rainy season. In this season, rivers start to change position resulting in a change in the geometry and location of the Chars. Thus, many of the Chars are quite temporary, while some others are semi-permanent and only a few are almost permanent.

The Char-Chaparis are inhabited mostly by the Muslims of the erstwhile East Bengal origin, Mising Tribals, Nepalis, Bengali Hindus and a few Assamese caste Hindus are also found in Char area of Assam. They all represent the greater Assamese entity.
The Char areas of upper Assam are mainly inhabited by tribal people while the Char areas of the middle and the lower Assam especially the Char-Chaparis of Nowgaon, Morigaon, Darrang, Kamrup, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Goalpara and Dhubri districts are predominantly inhabited by Bengali Muslims. The following chart shows the district wise Char area and other related information of Assam.

Table – 1.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>No.of Vill.</th>
<th>No.of Panchayat</th>
<th>Area in Sq/Km</th>
<th>No. of Family</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>P.C. of Population</th>
<th>Literary Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dhuburi</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>1,09,748</td>
<td>6,89,909</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bongaigaon</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>142.5</td>
<td>27,813</td>
<td>1,35,809</td>
<td>14.98</td>
<td>12.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>198.6</td>
<td>30,136</td>
<td>1,86,826</td>
<td>22.72</td>
<td>13.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barpeta</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>366.5</td>
<td>45,792</td>
<td>2,68,344</td>
<td>16.34</td>
<td>17.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nalbari</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>134.3</td>
<td>16,103</td>
<td>83,602</td>
<td>7.34</td>
<td>16.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>171.7</td>
<td>27,874</td>
<td>1,54,508</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>15.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>167.5</td>
<td>29,617</td>
<td>1,24,405</td>
<td>9.47</td>
<td>12.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitpur</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>141.5</td>
<td>23,428</td>
<td>1,45,729</td>
<td>8.68</td>
<td>16.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>215.2</td>
<td>23,096</td>
<td>1,43,235</td>
<td>16.10</td>
<td>18.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhemaji</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>169.8</td>
<td>19,112</td>
<td>91,230</td>
<td>16.01</td>
<td>15.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgaon</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>120.4</td>
<td>17,920</td>
<td>89,903</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>17.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morigaon</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>119.3</td>
<td>18,129</td>
<td>19,324</td>
<td>11.77</td>
<td>18.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorhat</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>421.7</td>
<td>35,316</td>
<td>2,15,093</td>
<td>21.31</td>
<td>60.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinsukia</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>140.9</td>
<td>10,670</td>
<td>52,605</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source based on survey of the Directorate of Char Areas Development, Assam, 2001-02.

The following statement shows overall information about Char-Chaparis of Assam according to the survey of the Directorate of Char Area Development, Assam, 2001-02.
Table – 1.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Char area</th>
<th>78,438 Sq.km.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Char area</td>
<td>4.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>24,90,397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Char population</td>
<td>9.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Villages</td>
<td>2251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy rate</td>
<td>19.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family below poverty line</td>
<td>2951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total district</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Mahakuma</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Development Block</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Char Areas Muslims**

The *Char* area Muslims are predominantly dependant on agriculture. Now-a-days, some people depend on other occupations also. Carpenter, weaver, tailor, mason and other professional men are also found in small numbers (5%). The *Char* dwellers also rear cows, buffaloes, goats, sheeps, ducks, hens etc. as earning sources of livelihood.

They are generally hard-working people. They like to live in the alluvial *Char* areas to produce various crops and vegetables for their livelihood. They keep themselves engaged in agriculture throughout the year and produce rice, jute, sugarcane, mustard, gram etc. In terms of economic contribution the Muslims of *Char* areas constitute the single decisive factor in up-grading Assam's economy but their appalling illiteracy has sealed their fate at the altar of the *Matabbar* or *Dewani* (dominating influential persons). As an agricultural group they are still in low social rank and esteem inspite of their vital role in the field of Assam's economy. For their low-ranking social and economic
conditions Matabbars and the Govt. of Assam are responsible. Because the Matabbar 
and the Government seem to be indifferent to their social and economic status except 
capturing of votes. Moreover, superstitions, illiteracy, religions-dogmatism are some 
other factors of the socio-economic backwardness of the Char people.50

The Muslims of Char areas are regarded as immigrant Muslims. They are also 
known as Charuwa, Pomuwa, Miah, Mymenshingia and Bhatia. Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, 
in his poem 'Asomiya Dekar Ukti' addressed them as Na Asomiya 51 (New Assamese), 
Bishnu Rabha called them as Pamuwa Na Asomiya 52 in his lecture on 3rd 
November, 1960. Ambikagiri Roychowdhury began to address the Charuwa Muslims as 
Natun Asomiya.53 The name 'Na Asomiya' given by Jyoti Prasad Agarwala was 
elaborately discussed by eminent writer Homen Borgohain in his popular magazine 
'Nilachal' in an article entitled 'Na Asomiya Muslaman' in 1969 and it exerted an 
outstanding impact in the minds of Assamese people.54 However, a sense of hatred grew 
up in the hearts of the Assamese Hindu people towards the permanently settled Charuwa 
Muslims during Assam's Foreigners Movement started from 1979 under the leadership of 
All Assam Students' Union (AASU).55

Since their permanent settlement in Assam the Muslims of Char areas have come 
to the association and assimilation with Assamese culture. They have to some extent 
given up their ancestral traditional culture. Their traditional language has been 
transformed to a new colloquial language due to the influence of Assamese language. 
Now, they feel themselves proud by giving identification as Assamese rather than 
Bengali56. Charuwa Muslims have abandoned their own language and have accepted 
Assamese language as medium of instruction.57 Now-a-days, education is imparted 
through Assamese language in Char area Muslim society. There is not a single school or 
college in Char areas of Assam where education is imparted through Bengali language.58
The Muslims of Char area have their own cultural heritage componenting with various folk-songs, games, food-habits, manners, customs, proverbs, riddles and scriptures. However, the cultural heritage of these people has been transformed to Assamese culture owing to long association with the later.59

The Char areas are backward in education. According to the survey report of the Directorate of Char Areas Development, Assam, 2001-02, literacy rate of Char people is 19.31.60 The low rate literacy has resulted in unexpected birth growth.61 Moreover, illiteracy has sealed the way of sustainable development of Char area.62

The illiterate masses are not aware of politics but their active participation in elections is worth mentioning. They play a significant role in elections as they have a decisive number of voters in Assam.63 In every election a good number of MLAs are elected by these voters to Assam State Legislative Assembly.64 At present, there are six Assembly constituency in Barpeta district. They are – Sarbhog, Jania, Barpeta, Baghbar, Chenga and Sarukhetri. Jania, Baghbar and Chenga constituencies are under Char area of Barpeta district. Dildar Reza is the present MLA of Baghbar constituency, Abdul Khaleque is the MLA of Jania and Liyakat Ali Khan is the MLA of Chenga Constituency.

There are no modem communication and transport facilities in entire Char area.65 Bullock and buffalo carts are only means of communication of this area.

There is no medical facility in Char area. Now-a-days, a few number of dispensaries are found in Char area. But the villagers cannot get treatment by doctors owing to frequent absence of the latter.

There is no suitable market in Char area for selling out agricultural products. However, small markets are found in some places where selling and purchasing of every day essential commodities are carried out to a minimum extent. They do not get proper
price by selling their agro-products due to non-existence of big markets with modern amenities.⁶⁶

In the field of literature, these people have contributions if not significant. A few number of writers, poets and journalists from Char area of Assam are found contributing to Assamese literature by their writings.

**Barpeta District**

Barpeta is one of the backward districts of lower Assam with a land-area of 3245 square kms. The district is situated to the north western part of Guwahati, the capital city of Assam. On the north and the west stands Bangaigaon district. The river Brahmaputra flows on the south. The eastern part of Barpeta district is bordered by Nalbari district. It is hardly 100 kms from Guwahati. Barpeta town known as Satra-Nagari is its head quarter.

At present, total population of this district is 13,29,263.⁶⁷ The number of the Hindu and the Muslim population are 5,62,289 and 7,76,974 respectively.⁶⁸ The percentage of population of both the communities are - (i) Hindus 43.03 and Muslim 56.07. The density of population is 427 per square km.⁶⁹ The district, at present, has 2 sub-divisions, 12 blocks, 8 revenue circles, 2 Mahakuma Parishads, 110 Gaon Panchayats and 828 Villages.⁷⁰

Muslims are numerically predominant in Barpeta district. They can be divided into two categories-⁷¹ (i) indigenous Assamese Muslims and (ii) immigrant Muslims. According to census report, 2001, total number of Muslims in Char area is 2,75,525.⁷²

Barpeta is one of the educationally backward districts of lower Assam. Literacy rate of the district is 57.35.⁷³ The literacy rate of the Muslims of this district is 22.89 only.⁷⁴

As per 2001 census the number of educational institutions of this district are as follows:⁷⁵
Table – 1.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Primary School</th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>M.E. School</th>
<th>M.V. School</th>
<th>H.S. School</th>
<th>College School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>2064</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, there are venture schools and colleges at different places for imparting education. The number of venture schools and colleges is not exactly known.

Barpeta district is also economically backward. It does not have any industry. As a result, 90 percent people directly depend on agriculture for livelihood. This number goes up in respect of Muslims. The percentage of agro-dependent Muslim people of Barpeta district is 95%.

Char area of Barpeta district consists of four blocks. Total number of villages, area and population are as follows:

Table – 1.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Development Block</th>
<th>Area in Hectare</th>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mandia Block</td>
<td>13,295.23</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>1,40,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chenga Block</td>
<td>9,596.81</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>85,364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rupasi Block</td>
<td>4,312.32</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manikpur Block</td>
<td>6,88.00</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8,419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2789236</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>275525</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cultivable land of Char area are as follows:

Table - 1.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block</th>
<th>Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mandia Block</td>
<td>9,30,6.66 Hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chenga Block</td>
<td>6,717.77 Hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rupasi Block</td>
<td>3,018.62 Hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manikpur Block</td>
<td>4,81.60 Hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1952465 Hectares</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Area of Field Survey:

For the field survey I have selected three villages – (i) Village Alopati (ii) Village Majarchar and (iii) Village Baghmar. These three villages are situated at the South of Barpeta under Baghbar constituency. Alopati and Majarchar fall under Alopati – Majarchar Gao Panchayat while Baghmara falls under Baghmarachar Gao Panchayat. Village Alopati is situated at a distance of about 30 kms from Barpeta town. Baghmar village is situated at a distance of about 32 Kms from Barpeta and Majarchar village is about 28 kms from Barpeta. These villages are inhabited by Bengali Muslims whose ancestors had come from erstwhile East Bengal, now Bangladesh in the last part of the 19th Century and first part of the 20th Century. They are all Sheikh Muslims. There are total 600 households in Alopati village. The total population is approximately 4200 out of which 2200 are males and 2000 are females. There are 1200 households in Baghmar village and the total population is around 8400 out of which 4420 are males and 3980 are females. There are 1075 households in Majarchar village and the total population is approximately 7550 out of which males are 4000 and females are 3550. Ahalo Sheikh, Koshi Dewani, Tafiz Mandol Gaoburah, Dhani Mollah and some others came first to Alopati in the last part of the 19th Century.
For interview the researcher has applied Random Sampling method. In Alopati out of 600 households 100 households have been interviewed. In Baghmara out of 1200 households 200 households have been interviewed. In Majarchar out of 1075 households 150 household have been interviewed for collecting data of the topic under the study.

**Objectives of the study**

The main objectives of the study may be outlined as follows:

(i) To analyze the historical background of the Muslims in char area of Barpeta.

(ii) To analyze the social and cultural conditions of the Char area Muslims.

(iii) To highlight the causes of emergence of Char area Muslims as a threat to Assam's entity.

(iv) To identify socio-political problems of the Char area Muslims and their prospects.

(v) To analyze political life of the Char area Muslims and their roles in Assam politics.

(vi) To suggest remedial means and measures for socio-economic and political upliftment of the Char area Muslims.

**Source of data**

The present study is based on different sources of data. The main sources of data are as mentioned below:

(i) Field Survey.

(ii) Government publications such as Census Reports, Statistical Hand Books, Bulletins etc.

(iii) Extensive study of relevant books, journals etc.

**Methodology**

For the study of this thesis data have been collected following different methods and techniques. Both quantitative and qualitative data have been collected. The methods
which the researcher has used to collect data are - (a) Interview method (b) Observation method (c) Historical method and (d) Sampling method.

Interview is the most important method which has been used for collecting information or what the informants know, believe, expect, feel and so on about the relevant data of the topic of this thesis. This method has helped the researcher in collecting information about present social, economic, educational and political conditions and related problems thereof. This has also become useful to know socio-economic and political changes taken place in present-day Char area society of Barpeta district. How traditional culture of the people have changed to a mixed culture with the assimilation of Assamese culture is known by interviewing method. The researcher has to depend mainly on the unstructured questionnaire method for collecting data.

Observation method has helped the researcher in knowing the pattern of house building, material used for house-building, traditional dresses worn by both men and women folks, traditional ornaments used by women-folk, present-day conditions in respects of agriculture, transport and communication, irrigation, medical, education etc.

The researcher has used the quantitative method for household survey and also for educational status, occupational pattern etc. with the help of this method.

Historical method has been used for collecting data in regard to the growth of Muslim population and its expansion in Ahom Kingdom. Moreover, the advent of Muslims to Assam and several movements faced by them from time to time are known to me by historical method.

Scope and limitation

The scope of present study entitled The Char Area Muslims Of Barpeta District: Problems And Prospects is very vast and extensive. Due to lack of adequate
number of books and journals on Char Muslims the study has been made on the books and other literature available on it and the researcher has to depend upon the field survey. The necessary census reports are also not available for which the study has been limited.

In the midst of all these difficulties the researcher has, however, made sincere effort to focus and bring to light all possible aspects under the study of the Char area Muslims of Assam in general and the Muslims of Barpeta district in particular.
References:


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