CHAPTER -2

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2.1 Geographical Location of the Study Area

Chamaria and Nagarbera Mouza is located in the South Western most part of Kamrup District of Assam, in between 25°56' N to 26°8' N latitude and 90°55' E to 91°12'E longitude. This is a reverine tract, located on the South bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra. Physiographically it is located in the flood plain zone of the river Brahmaputra which is flowing in its Northern side. A major portion of these two mouzas are occupied by marshland and wetland created by river Jaljali and some abandoned channel of the river Brahmaputra. The area is affected by the flood water of the river Brahmaputra and Jaljali almost annually. In such a physiographic condition the settlement of population was very sparse during recent past but, presently the entire area has become thickly populated with a density of 480 persons per square kilometer. It is because a large number of Hindu and Muslim Bengali immigrants from erstwhile East Bengal and East Pakistan (Present Bangladesh) has occupied this low lying pockets of the area.

Presently the total areas in these two mouzas are 205 square kilometer of which Chamaria has occupied 65 square kilometer and Nagarbera has occupied 140 square kilometer. Total population in the areas is 1,04,045 (Census Report 2001). Out of this population Chamaria has 37.40% and Nagarbera has 15.22% of Scheduled Caste population. It is found that, about 95% of this scheduled caste populations are of Bengali origin, who has migrated from erstwhile East Bengal and East Pakistan (Present Bangladesh).

2.2 Historical Background of the Bengali Community of Assam

Assam is a land of diverse ethnic groups and communities living together in its different parts in different times in history. The anthropological
and cultural history of Assam is the history of mixture of the race, tribes, customs, languages, rites and rituals, manners and behaviours and aspects of civilization and culture since ancient times. It is evident that different groups of people characterized by different culture, religious, language and social outlooks come into Assam in different times of history and thus in course of time a composite culture was developed by these different groups and has become now a part of Assamese culture. In the recent past, during 1901 and 1947 and even after that lakhs of peasant Muslim and Hindu Bengali refugees from Bangladesh entered into Assam. It is very much important to say that, the immigrant Muslim who are mainly peasant often called as Miya, Bangal, Baithal or Charua in the study area, who used to live in char lands of the river Brahmaputra. They are also called Bhatia in some particular places of Assam. On the other hand, the Hind Bengali refugees are called Bengali or Bangali almost all parts of Assam. Generally they used to settle in the build-up areas. After independence, the first batch of the above mentioned Bengali people came to Assam in 1950 and used to settle permanently. During this time they became bonafide citizens and had their share of contribution to the promotion of political, economic and cultural life of Assam.

2.3 Causes of Migration

There are different historical, political, economic and geographical factors, responsible for the migration of Bengali community to Assam from Bangladesh. These are explained in brief, below:

2.3.1 The Historical Factor

Assam and Bengal was a single administrative unit during British rule for sometime. During 1905 to 1912, the then British government brought Assam and East Bengal under the province with its capital in Dacca. By that time, there was no any barrier for the movement of the people. Therefore, some Bengali people also came into Assam along with the Muslim peasants and settled in different parts of Assam. During the last part of 19th century and
early part of 20th century, Assam was connected by Eastern Bengal Railways from Chittagang and Calcutta port. During this period, water transport was also developed through the mighty river Brahmaputra. Due to the availability of communication system, some Hindu Bengali people migrated to Assam and permanently settled in the vacant land of both Brahmaputra and Barak Valley. Thus, in different times of history this group of people came to Assam and used to settle permanently.

2.3.2 Political Factor

India divided in 1947 and the East Bengal has became East Pakistan. Pakistan is a Muslim religious state and as a result, the Hindu has become religious minority. The Hindu Bengali community in Pakistan started feeling insecure because of the religious intolerance of the Muslims. In January 1950, a communal riot took place under the inspiration of Muslim League. As a result, the minority Hindu has to face some problems of peace and security of their property and life and therefore they have to come to India for settling permanently. A large number of these refugees took shelter in different parts of Assam.

The second lot of Bengali refugees came to Assam during the great war of Bangladesh in 1971. The arbitrary administration of the Pakistani government on East Pakistan is a remarkable political factor in history, for the migration of the Hindu Bengali community to Assam. The people of East Pakistan were crushed over them quite sternly. As a result a revolution was started for a separate Bangladesh under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the then general secretary of Awami League. To stop the revolution the then Pakistani Government began brutal torture on the people of East Pakistan under the leadership of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. ‘Later the terror of the Pakistani Army was turned against the Hindu minority who constituted about one-tenth of East Pakistan’s Population.’ (Sing, 1985). As a result, a large number of Hindu Bengali people of East Pakistan began to cross the border of
India and entered into Assam. ‘From 17\textsuperscript{th} of April, 1971 to 28\textsuperscript{th} of August 1971 about 69.71 lakhs Hindu Bengali refugees came to India and two-third of them was housed in camps of Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya’ (ibid). They were also offered land for permanent settlement by the government of India.

2.3.3 Geographical Factor

There is a little geographical difference between East Bengal and the districts of Lower Assam. The physiography, the climate and the soil condition are almost similar in this part. Moreover, there is no any physical barrier like sea, ocean, mountain or forest between Assam and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The boundary of India and Bangladesh were, even now very easy to cross. Besides these, the people of this country mainly depend upon agriculture and fishing. Such factors worked as a driving force for the Bengali Hindu community to come and settle here.

2.3.4 Economic Factor

In Bangladesh, almost all the lands were under the hold of zamindars of feudal lords. As a result the tenants had to spend a life of struggle and starvation like slaves. Moreover, in Bangladesh, major portion of land remains under water in all the year round or it is affected by draught. Flood, draught and cyclone are the three major and common devastating factors of the cultivated land in Bangladesh, which forced the people to leave their own homeland. On the other hand, in Assam cultivable land is available and therefore they have been attracted to migrate to Assam. Another important cause of migration is the overcrowded population in Bangladesh, which leads to poverty and to get rid of poverty, a large number of Bengali Hindu and Muslim people came to India in search of better livelihood. The Bengal famine of 1943 is a remarkable evident of the migration of the Bengali community to Assam.

Most of the Bengali people of Chamaria and Nagarbera Mouza have migrated from Mymansingh, Tangail, Shrihatta, Rongpur and some other
district of Bengal in and around 1950. It is found that, about 95% of the total Bengali population in Chamaria and Nagarbera Mouza belong to scheduled caste and their main occupation is fishing. Among the sixteen schedule castes of Assam, six castes, namely, Namasudra, Kaibarta, Jalo, Malo, Palni, Jale Keot and Hira are the largest traditional fishing community. As per 2001 census, the scheduled caste population in Assam is 6.85% out of 26655528 total population and in Kamrup, the percentage of scheduled caste is 6.76 out of 2522324 of which Bengali Namasudras are highest in number. It is found that, in Chamaria and Nagarbera the percentage of scheduled caste population is 37.40 and 15.22 respectively and they are of Bengali origin. Therefore it is relevant to discuss the causes of migration of this Namasudras from East Bengal to Assam. Regarding the migration of the Namasudras, Bhakta Das has comments as follows:

"In Bengal, during the period of king Gopal and other king of his dynasty, Raja Sita Ram was economically sound. They belonged to the aristocrat community in culture and dignity and magnitude of their livelihood was high. But afterwards due to political changes and violence in untouchability indicates during the reign of Raja Ballal Sen who was strong supporter of Brahmin and caste distinction, forced the Namasudras to accept some inhuman rules. But the Namasudras opposed to accept the inhuman rules. The king with all powers operated his force against them and drove them away from their ancestral land and tortured mercilessly and announced all over his state that Namasudras are Chandal, Charal and untouchable. Thus they were placed in the lowest class of Hindu society. Being disgusted by such treatment a large number of Namasudras migrated to Assam. (Bhakta Das, 1986, pp. 32-33)

In the Census Report of 1901 it was mentioned that, Namasudras are chandals. But, Guruchand Thakur, the son of Harichand Thakur and some other educated people of Namasudra community put forward their religious
and scientific arguments to the British against the use of the term chandal and placed a case in the high court of Bengal. As a result, the word ‘Namasudra’ instead of chandal was introduced. After that, they have started to write some other titles. During field study in Chamaria and Nagarbera Mouza the following titles are found among the Namasudras. Mandal, Choudhury, Sarkar, Sutradhar, Das, Namasudra, Talukdar, Rai, Biswas, Dutta, Bairagi, Sakharu, Barhoi, Basu, Pal Paramanik, Mazumdar, Bhomik, Karmakar, Malo, Barman, Bosak etc.

To establish as an upper caste, the Namasudras have collected some historical evidences and presented these writings in different books and souvenir etc. Some of these books are:

Namasudra Jatitatta Katha (Mazumdar, 1987)
Param Purush Harichand Thakur (Biswas, 1985)
A Glimpse of the Scheduled Castes and their socio-economic Development in Assam, (Das, 1986)
Namasudrarai Parasab Bipra (Sarkar, 1975) etc.

Although the percentage of scheduled caste population is very high, there are also some other caste people like Sahas, Brahmins, Kayastha etc. In comparison to other castes of the area the Brahmins are remarkably countable on the finger.

References