CHAPTER 4

URBANIZATION IN DIPHU

4.1 Process of Peopling and Urbanization in Diphu:

The process of peopling at Diphu was started with the works of construction of the railway line between Dibrugarh and Lumding connecting Chittagong of East Bengal towards the ending part of the Nineteenth Century. Workers were brought not only from various parts of the country but also from Nepal, and even from far Baghdad.

A man, named Sardar Lamba Rai came to Diphu with his father from eastern Nepal. He worked as a labourer in sawing teak wood for railway sleepers. A few years later, he resigned from the job and became a supplier of railway sleeper to the Assam-Bengal Railway Company. He then imported about one thousand Nepalese sawyers and encamped at Diphu in a long barracks made of tin extending from the present Trading Syndicate near Barowari Puja Mandir to Binapani L.P.School. Within a very short period of time, Lamba Rai became rich and built up a two-storeyed wooden house with concrete floor nearer to the barracks. After his death, son Dhan Bahadur Rai who was studying in Calcutta came to Diphu and carried on father's business-works.

Earthworkers (Nunias) were brought from Bihar. Gorkha labourers from Nepal and Adivasis from Saotal Pargana also came to this place to carry goods in the construction works of the railway line. Since Diphu was a habitable area with sufficient water from the Diphu river, most of the workers were kept here. After the
completion of the construction works and the establishment of the small railway station at Diphu between Manipur Road (Dimapur) and Lumding in 1904, a major section of the labour-class population left the place, and some remained in the areas nearby (Plate-01).

The horrible situation of the Second World War owing to the reaching of Japanese bombers compelled many inhabitants to evacuate Dimapur and they finally took shelter at Diphu. Amongst them were Khor Sing Terang (the first Chief Executive Member of the Mikir Hills District Council), Banka Bihari Das, Golok Bhuyan and so on and so forth.

The outbreak of communal conflicts in East Bengal towards the later part of the 1940s pushed many Hindu Bengalis into Assam. Again, the mass exodus of people to this land took place as a consequence of ethnic clashes occurred there in the then East Pakistan in 1950. Large section of the refugees in several groups reached to settle here in Diphu during these periods. Afterwards, the flow continued irrespective of caste and religion, and it is still to some degree existing in this place.

As soon as the introduction of Mahal system by the British Government in Diphu, Mr. Goswami from Nagaon came to Diphu receiving the permission for Wine Mahal. Likewise, Manager Badal Babu of Singapore Cane Mahal; Rampirit Dubey, Ramchurat, Nanda Kishore Tripathi, Shyam Prasad Tripathi from Banaras; Kiran Rai, Krishna Gopal Chakraborty from Bengal with the license for Opium Mahal came to this place. On the other hand, Bholo Singh, Hukum Singh and later Atma Singh came to Diphu from Borkola of Nagaon district with a view to starting business activities.
In the meantime, the Himatsingka Company of Gauhati (Guwahati) came to Diphu to do timber business. About 14-15 numbers of ten-wheeled GMC-lorry (German Motor Company) were engaged in carrying logs of teak. Since the process of lumbering required large labour-force, the company, therefore, under the managership of Ajit Bandhu Choudhury brought labourers from outside the region. In due course, some of the labour-class population left, and others remained here permanently.

Immediately after the independence of the country, C.S. Booth, an Anglo-Indian was sent to Diphu as a Special Officer, and he was then given the responsibility to act as the first Deputy Commissioner as soon as the creation of the new district of United Mikir and North Cachar Hills.

The stream of flow of non-tribal migrants from different parts of the state as well as the country to this place became larger when Diphu, as the District Headquarters came into being in 1951. There was lacking of sufficient educated people among the hill-tribes of this region during that period. This is why the State Government of Assam sent many in-service experienced personnel from the plain districts to run the newly established offices of various departments at Diphu. The remaining vacancies, in due course, were also filled up through new recruitment especially with the people from the then Nowgong, Sibsagar and Kamrup districts. In such ways, the tiny Diphu soon was converted into a populated area within jungles with a total population of 3,117 by 1961, the year in which Diphu was declared as town constituting the Town Committee by the then Mikir Hills District

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Council. On the other hand, Diphu as the first urban center of former Mikir Hills district was recognized in the 1971 Census when its total population within the Town Committee area was 10,200. It became 23,317; 39,547 and 52,310 by the years of 1981, 1991 and 2001 respectively (Table-3.4).

It should however be boldly mentioned that immigration particularly from erstwhile East Pakistan (presently Bangladesh) to this area has been taking place since the time of partition of the country in 1947. On the other hand, the progressive flow of the district's rural dwellers to this urban centre is causing the fast increase in population number, which eventually impacts upon the demographic structure and composition in the town. It is projected that the total numbers of urban dwellers within the present town boundary of Diphu will be 69,637 by 2010 and 71,886 by 2011 next.

4.2 Spatial Dimensions of Urbanization in Diphu:

Spatial dimension of urbanization is mainly concerned with the areal extent of a town in terms of horizontal direction. Growth in vertical manner is also a very common phenomenon of urban centres.

Prolific horizontal growth is the chief characteristic feature of urbanization in the town of Diphu; while the skyline of vertical growth is almost negligible.

Spatial dimension of urbanization is strongly associated with the land use/land cover pattern of that particular area which reflects the nature and characteristics of functional activities of the urban centre. Based on the recent

23 The Assam Gazette, Extraordinary, Final Master Plan and Zoning Regulation for Diphu, 5th December, 1996, p. 1782.
satellite data and the information extracted from the topographical map of Survey of India for two different periods, the temporal variations in areal extent under different land use/land cover categories have been found out within Diphu urban (Master Plan) area at the time span of 30 (thirty) years.

The following four major land use/land cover categories altogether have been identified for the purpose.

Table – 4.1
Temporal Variation in Areal Extent under Different Land use/Land cover Categories within Diphu Urban (Master Plan) Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use/Land cover Categories</th>
<th>Year 2006-07</th>
<th>Year 1975-76</th>
<th>Variation/Change (area in hectare)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area (in hectare)</td>
<td>Percentage to Total Geographical Area</td>
<td>Area (in hectare)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest land (natural/planted)</td>
<td>1049.28</td>
<td>42.13</td>
<td>1853.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water bodies (tank/pond/lake)</td>
<td>25.02</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>7.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural land</td>
<td>105.67</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>199.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban built-up land</td>
<td>1310.70</td>
<td>52.62</td>
<td>430.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2490.67</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>2490.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (a) Topographical map: Survey of India, 1975-76
(b) Satellite imagery: IRS P6 LISS III FCC, 2006-07.
Forest land (natural/planted):

Within the boundary of the Master Plan area the forest lands comprising moist and mixed-deciduous forest, dense and open scrub land and the degraded forest areas have been clearly observed in both the natural and planted (especially teak tree) forms. This category of land-cover occupies an area of 1853.35 hectare (ha) during 1975-76 which has been reduced to 1049.28 ha during 2006-07 indicating high degree of urbanization during the period at the cost of the forest.

Water bodies:

Water bodies are formed by rivers/streams, other water-saturated areas like ponds, tanks, swamps, marshes, lakes, etc. In this present study, the areas occupied by the running water i.e., rivers and streams have not been estimated even though they form a major part of the water bodies in the locality.

Besides the perennial tanks, ponds or lakes, the low-lying areas usually put under agricultural lands get inundated with rain water during summer. These remain saturated much of the year, and hence considered as wetlands. Based on different sources at different points of time it is found that the number of tanks/ponds/lakes has increased from 7 in 1975-76 to 22 in 2006-07 with the areas of 7.29 ha and 25.02 ha respectively. But by taking the areas under low-lying agricultural land into account, the total wetland area has been found reducing from 206.46 ha in 1975-76 to 130.69 ha in 2006-07 within the Diphu urban area. This can be referred to as the consequence of urbanization following the shrinkage of agricultural lands.
Agricultural land:

The agricultural lands are mainly occupied by *Kharif* crops especially the *Sali* paddy. Apart from the extensive paddy fields, the small narrow valley and low-lying areas between the low-relief hillocks provide fertile soils to produce the crops located away from the town centre. Vegetables are grown basically on the hill-slopes during *Rabi* crop season. It has been observed that there is a change in total area under agricultural land from 199.17 ha during 1975-76 to 105.67 ha during 2006-07. This shrinkage of productive lands is the consequence of conversion of agricultural land into settlement area.

Urban Built-up land:

These are the areas where lots of activities are taking place as a process of urbanization. These include the areas used for residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, institutional (both academic and non-academic) and administrative purposes. The results of this study indicate that there is an increase in the total area under Urban Built-up land from 430.86 ha during 1975-76 to 1310.70 ha during 2006-07 indicating rapid urbanization in this place during last few decades.
DIPHU URBAN AREA
LAND USE/LAND COVER MAP, 2006-07
(Based on Satellite Data)

LEGEND
- Reserved Forest
- Agricultural Land/Plain Area
- Forest/Hilly Area
- Settlement
- Waterbody
- Master Plan Boundary

SCALE
0 1 2 3
KILOMETRE

Source: Satellite Imagery: IRS P6 LISS III FCC, 2006-07
Map – 4.2

DIPHU URBAN AREA
LAND USE/LAND COVER MAP, 1975-76
(Based on Topographical Map)

Source: Topographical Map: Survey of India, 1975-76
While some of the physical features form the town/urban area boundaries especially in the south and east, the general trend of expansion of Diphu is seen toward west, and more particularly toward north (Map-4.3). It has given the urban area an elongated shape extending from the south to the north. The reasons behind the fact are mainly the vicinity to the main road connecting Diphu and the congenial areas for settlement having low-relief flat surface.

Map – 4.3

Source: Town and Country Planning Department, Dipu & Dipu Town Committee
Horizontal expansion of Diphu town in the form of urban sprawl has been taking place at a fast rate resulting in sub-urban growth of settlement beyond the present Master Plan area boundary (Map-4.4). Apart from a few locations, the growth is seen all around. To the north, it is military cantonment (Assam Rifle’s Training Centre) whereas toward south, there is existing Dhansiri Reserved Forest area. These have impeded the sub-urban growth in those particular directions to a considerable extent.

Map - 4.4

Source: Diphu Town Committee Survey Report, 2010; Town and Country Planning Department, Diphu; Satellite Imagery of IRS P6 LISS-IV, 2009
This sub-urban growth has clearly been detected since 1991 Census year. It is estimated that it spread over an area of 184.80 hectares up to the period of 1991 adjacent to the urban (Master Plan area) boundary (Map – 4.4). This continuous expansion of area through sub-urban growth encompassed an area of 260.25 hectares in 2001. The recent Survey report of Diphu Town Committee reveals that the urban sprawl in the form of sub-urban growth is continuously and also contiguously taking place. During this period from 2001 to 2010 the area covered by this growth has been found to be 342.45 hectares.

**Summary Statement:**

Diphu, being considered as a special centre of urban growth has been observed from various angles. The history of peopling, population growth and the process of urbanization in this place are the focal points for explicating the research problem. Practically, the process of peopling started here just after the establishment of the Assam-Bengal Railway line.

The spatial dimensions of urbanization in Diphu town have explicitly been described in respect of land use/land cover patterns for two different periods of 30 years of time span. Changes to a considerable amount have been taking place in all aspects of land use categories. Urban built-up lands have been growing up at the cost of forest and natural wetlands.

Similarly, sub-urban growth is also a very common phenomenon taking place continuously as a result of horizontal expansion of settlement areas in Diphu towards almost all directions except south.