CHAPTER-2
BACK GROUND OF THE STUDY AREA

The old Kamrup district is a former administrative district located in Western Assam from which Barpeta (1983), Nalbari (1985), Kamrup Rural (2003), Kamrup Metropolitan (2003), and Baksa (2004) districts were formed. It was a large administrative district in colonial times that has been reduced to different size in subsequent periods. In the present study only the undivided Kamrup district of Assam including Kamrup Rural and Kamrup Metropolitan districts are considered and now onwards both the districts are as a whole considered to be Kamrup district in our entire work.

2.1. ORIGIN OF THE NAME KAMRUP

The present Assam was referred to as Kamrup in many of the ancient Indian literature. It was also known as Pragjyotishpur due to the astrology (Jyotishshashtra) practices that prevailed in this part of the country during that time. However, Kamrup became a more predominant name in the later part of the history. A legend is current here which says the reason behind the naming of this place Kamrup:

*Lord Shiva married Parvati, the daughter of Daksha, a very powerful king of that time. The King however, did not like his son-in-law for some reasons and hence did not invite him for the Jagna (the great sacrifice) ceremony which the king organised in a great fashion. Parvati being the daughter of the king could not resist from attending the ceremony and went there with the permission from her husband. As she reached the auspicious venue, Daksha did pass on derogatory comments on her husband and that too in*
front of a huge gathering. She became very annoyed and got disgusted at the discourtesy shown to her husband and sacrificed her life on the spot itself. Overcome with grief at the death of Sati (Parvati), Shiva began a grim penance and wandered about the world carrying her dead body on his head. Shiva's 'dance of death' and penance alarmed all the gods because it threatened to destroy the world. In order to stop the frightful wanderings of Shiva, the supreme god, Vishnu, cut the dead body of Sati into fifty-one pieces with his great weapon, the Shudarshan Chakra (Discuss). The pieces fell onto the earth in fifty-one different places and wherever they fell, the ground was held to be sacred. One of the important organs of Sati fell on Nilachal hill in Guwahati and the place was thenceforth held sacred and it says that the famous Kamakhya Temple was originated from that Sati's organ only. As Shiva continued to do penance, the other gods became afraid that he would thereby acquire universal power. They sent Kamadeva, the God of Love, to make Shiva fall in love again, and thereby break his penance. Kamdeva succeeded in his mission, but Shiva was so enraged at the result that he burnt Kamadeva into ashes by a fiery glance of his third eye. Kamadeva eventually regained his life and his original 'form' (Rupa) in Assam and the land where this took place become known as Kamrup (Kamarupa) (Gait: 1992:49).

Till the Ahom conquest, Kamrup district was known as Pragjyotispur due to the astrology (Jyotishshashtra) practices that prevailed in this part of the country.

During Ahom reign, Gauhati became an important strategic point and saw the famous battle of Saraighat between Ahom and Mughals, and since then Guwahati as well as Kamrup district continue to play
2.2. AREA AND LOCATION

Kamrup district is situated between 25.46 and 26.49 North Latitude and between 90.48 & 91.50 East Longitude. It is bounded by Udalguri and Baksa districts in the north, Meghalaya in the south, Darrang and Morigaon in the east and Goalpara and Nalbari district in the west. It has a total geographical area of 4,34,500 acres.

2.3. ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

Administratively the district is divided into three subdivisions viz. Guwahati, Rangia and Guwahati Sadar. Guwahati subdivision has eight Revenue Circles (Tehsils) with 11 blocks, Rangia subdivision has three Revenue Circles (Tehsils) with four blocks and Guwahati Sadar subdivision has six Revenue Circles (Tehsils) with four blocks. The total number of revenue villages in the district is 1322 of which 735 are under Guwahati Sub Division, 256 villages are under Rangia Sub Division and 331 villages are under Guwahati Sadar Sub Division. There are a total of 162 Gaon Panchayats in Kamrup Rural district covering 991 villages and 22 Gaon Panchayats in Kamrup Metropolitan district covering 331 villages. There is one tribal belt in the district under Guwahati Sub Division namely South Kamrup tribal belt.
2.4. HYDROGRAPHY

In the immediate neighborhood of the Brahmaputra the land is low, and exposed to annual inundation. In this marshy tract reeds and canes flourish luxuriantly, and the only cultivation is that of rice. At a comparatively short distance from the river banks the ground begins to rise in undulating knolls towards the mountains of Bhutan on the north, and towards the Khasi hills on the south. The hills south of the Brahmaputra in some parts reach the height of 800 feet (240 m). The Brahmaputra, which divides the district into two nearly equal portions, is navigable by river steamers throughout the year, and receives several tributaries navigable by large native boats in the rainy season. The chief of these are the Puthimari, Bornoi, Nona, Pagladiya, Kalajal, Manas, Chaul Khowa and Bamadi on the north, and the Kulsi, Kalang, Digaru and Dibru on the south bank.

2.5. HUMAN RESOURCE BASE

2.5.1. POPULATION

According to the 2001 census Kamrup district has a population of 23,84,610. This gives it a ranking of 327th in India (out of a total of 640). The district has a population density of 436 inhabitants per square kilometre (1,130/sq mt). Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 15.67%.

2.5.2. SEX RATIO

The sex ratio in Kamrup district as per 2001 census stands at 901 females per thousand males while the child sex ratio for children (0-6 years) is 957. Significantly, the sex ratio for rural areas in the district stands higher than the district total.
2.5.3. LITERACY RATE

Kamrup district has the third highest literacy rate in the State. It is the only minority identified district in the State which has more than 70 percent literacy rate.

2.5.4. DISTRIBUTION OF WORKFORCE IN KAMRUP DISTRICT

The distribution of work forces in the district as per the Census 2001 data shows that of the total rural population 32.42 percent are total workers while 67.58 percent are non-workers. Cultivators comprise 39.11 percent, agricultural workers comprise 14.19 percent, 6.89 are household industry workers and 39.81 are other workers.

2.5.5. EDUCATION AND HEALTH

The educational level of the population of the district is abysmally low. Of the total population with some educational attainment 2.12 percent receive education below primary level, 19.41 percent, attain education up to primary level and 17.12 percent complete middle level schooling. Of the total educated only 29 percent complete their matric/higher secondary/diploma courses. The percentage of graduates in the district is only 10.5 percent. The poor educational attainment in the district also reflects the poor quality of employable human resource and low work status for the vast majority of the workforce.

A comparative picture across religious groups shows that the Muslims have the highest child sex ratio in the district at 964 girls per thousand boys which is significantly higher than the state average of 954. The high child sex ratio of the Muslims is attributed to the high birth rates. The infant mortality rate in the district is 77 per thousand live births. As per the estimate of the Assam Human Development Report 2003, 7.28 percent
of the population is not expected to live beyond the age of 40 years. In respect of disease among the population of the district, prevalence of cancer is alarmingly high in the district. The records from the B. Barooah Cancer Institute which is the nodal cancer treatment centre in the North East region, reveals that of the total cancer patients treated during the year 2005-06 highest percentage belonged to Kamrup district. In so far as the status of RCH is concerned 12.1 percent of the girls get married below the age of 18 years. In respect of maternal health, 18.4 percent of the pregnant women received full antenatal care, 44.7 percent had institutional delivery and 55.6 percent had safe deliveries. As many as 3.8 percent of the women suffered some form of post delivery complications as per the RCH 2002-04 Report.

2.5.6. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX

Kamrup is one of the better performing districts in respect of developments in basic human capabilities in three fundamental dimensions, viz., a long and health life, knowledge and a decent standard of living, as indicated by its HDI value of 0.574 (2nd rank), which is far above the state average of 0.407. In terms of income, education and health this district occupies 1st, 3rd and 7th places respectively in district wise rankings.

The Human Poverty Index calculated in 1999 indicates that 17.44 percent of population in the district are in human poverty. The Gender related Development Index for Kamrup in 2001 is estimated to be 0.642, which is above the state average of 0.537, ranking 4th in the state.
2.6. NATURAL RESOURCE BASE

2.6.1. LAND, ITS QUALITY AND UTILISATION PATTERN

Among the 15 agro-climatic regions of the country, categorized/identified on the basis of homogeneity in agro-characteristics, Kamrup falls in the Eastern Himalayan region. This region as a whole has high forest cover and practice of shifting cultivation. Felling of trees in upper reaches/hills and catchments areas of the Eastern Himalayan region has caused denudation and Kamrup district falls under the Lower Brahmaputra Valley zone. Soil structure of the district is mainly alluvial in nature. The result is heavy run-off, massive soil erosion and floods in lower reaches and basins. Large scale floods cause substantial damage to crops in the district. The major portion of the geographical area of Kamrup district is put to agricultural uses. Net area under different crops in the district works out to 1.82 lakh ha forming about 42 percent of the total geographical area.

2.6.2. FORESTRY

Kamrup district is rich in flora and fauna. The forest resource base of the district comprises of 23 reserve forests under three forest divisions of Kamrup East, Kamrup West and North Kamrup. The total forest area in the district is 1,22905.105 hectares excluding the unclassed state forest. Although the total area under reserve forest in the district is 151446.575 hectares, the rate of deforestation in the district is 2.5 percent per annum and rate of urbanization is about 7 percent per annum.
2.6.3. SOIL AND WATER

The district falls under the Brahmaputra river basin. The district has large reservoir of water resources with the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries of Puthimari, Bornoi, Nona, Pagladiya, Kalajal, Manas, Chaul-Khoya and Barnadi on the north, and the Kulsi, Kalang, and Digaru on the south bank. The rivers also act as reservoir for fisheries. The district has a total of 2701 ponds, 59 tanks, 92 beels and 20563 swamps. The district has a total of five registered river fisheries along with 20 registered beel fisheries. The district experiences heavy annual rainfall in the range of 1500 mm to 2600 mm. As the soil in the Eastern Himalayan region is highly susceptible to erosion, top soils of the hills gets washed away and are deposited in lower reaches. Due to rolling nature of the plain especially towards western part of Guwahati sub-division, some pockets are prone to gully erosion. The natural depressions and low-lying areas are still unclaimed causing water stagnation in most of the eastern part of the valley mainly in Chandrapur block.

2.7. ECONOMY

Although the rural economy of Kamrup district is agrarian in nature however, the tertiary sector is dominant in terms of its income share and employment and livelihood generation (Bhagabati: 1968:23). The sector contributes 66 percent of the total income in the Gross District Domestic Product while secondary sector contributes 20 percent. The primary sector contribution is estimated to be 14 percent. The per capita Gross District Domestic Product of Kamrup estimated at Rs.22292 is the highest among the districts of the state.
The industrial base of the district is agro based. The district has 676 (23 percent of State total) industrial units registered which comprise of food products and beverages, manufacture of wood and wood products. The district has a total number of 14776 SSI units which is almost 30 percent of the State total. The largest concentration of industry is in and around Guwahati due to availability of various infrastructure facilities and proximity to the main commercial and trading centres in the N.E. Region. The district is covered under District Rural Industries Project (DRIP) of NABARD from the year 2000-2001. The main objective of DRIP is to create sustainable employment avenues in rural areas through enhanced credit flow to RNFS with complementary promotional support. The industries having major concentration around Guwahati include engineering, agro-based and chemical industries. The forest based industries are concentrated in Palasbari, Sualkuchi, Hajo and North Guwahati. Sualkuchi and North Guwahati are also famous for handloom and handicraft activities. The existing RNFS activities in the district are classified under three broad heads as manufacturing and processing, trade, transport and service.

The agro-climatic condition of the district is suitable for sericulture. The muga silk of Assam is popular in India and other countries. Since sericulture mainly involves women in rearing and spinning, it has great potential for creating employment opportunities for them. Around 420 villages in the district are involved in sericulture activities. The silk and weaving industry of Sualkuchi is one of the traditional handicraft activities which has generated employment and provided livelihood opportunities to people in the district.
2.8. PLANTATION AND HORTICULTURE

The agro climatic condition of the district makes it ideally suited for plantation and horticulture. The district has good potential for growing of fruit crops which include pineapple, litchi, orange, lemon, papaya, banana, mango, guava, etc. The district also offers good scope for mushroom cultivation and floriculture, being close to the urban centre like Guwahati.

2.9. LIVESTOCK AND DAIRY

Dairying is practiced by most of the small and marginal farmers and landless labourers in the district and to them this activity provides economic security by serving as a hedge against crop failure. 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. Despite the large population of live stock, the milk production in the district is low mainly due to predominance of local cows with a poor genetic make-up. The approximate annual milk production of the district is 450 lakh litres at present. Though the district has conducive climatic condition for poultry farming, particularly commercial broilers, the activity has not made any significant progress as majority of the population practicing poultry farming are under SF/MF categories whose risk bearing capacity is very less.
2.10. INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY

2.10.1. ROADS

The transport connectivity of the district comprises of roads, railway and air services. The road density in the district per lakh population which stood at 125.3 km. has increased to 302 km. The total road length in the district is 2450 km, of which only 32.32 percent is surfaced. As per the estimates of 2001 census although 70 percent of the villages have paved approach road only 52 percent of the villages have bus connectivity which indicates that less than 50 percent of the villages have no availability or access to faster modes of transportation in the district.

2.10.2. AIR AND WATER TRANSPORT

The district headquarter of Guwahati has an international airport with well developed air connectivity to rest of the country. Although during the pre independence period and even till the end of sixties water ways served as a major mode of transportation for export of tea, however in the post 1971 period, the river transport and shipping facilities gradually stopped as access via Bangladesh was denied. Moreover the absence of night navigation facilities gradually led to decline of the river transport system available during the pre independence period. However, at present there is an IWT deport port at Amingaon which is responsible for cargo handling and transshipment of bulk goods and tea mainly by waterways. The Inland Water Transport (IWT) department runs regular ferry services.
2.10.3. TELECOMMUNICATION

Although the telecommunication facilities in Kamrup district are fairly well developed, the rural telecommunication facilities are still low. Only 28 percent of the villages in the district have P&T facilities. Although the villages have VPT facilities, often, access to VPTS is not available as most of the VPTs are found to be used as personal telephones by the village headman.

2.10.4. POWER AND ENERGY

Next to transport and communication power is the other basic infrastructure which is essential for economic growth. Of the total villages in the district although 77.65 have power supply however, domestic connection for lighting is available in 75 percent of the villages in the district which shows that remaining 25 percent of the households use other sources as lighting. The district has a total demand of 15mw of power while supply is only of 12 mw. This gap in demand and supply indicates that inadequacy of power supply is one of the reasons for slow pace of rural electrification as much also slow pace of industrialization.

2.10.5. BANKING

Access to credit and banking facilities is an important indicator for socio-economic development. The total number of reporting offices in the district stands at 71 which comprises of SBI, SCB and OSCBs. The
population coverage of banking services is estimated to be 31,040 persons per bank office as per the number of offices in 2006. Although the credit deposit ratio in the district stands at 124.79, the rural CD ratio is only 57.35. A further desegregated analysis reveals that while rural areas contribute 53 percent of the total deposits of the district the urban areas contribute only a quarter of the total deposits. However, in respect of credit deployment, 69 percent of the total credit of the district is deployed in urban areas, while only 24 percent of total district credit is deployed in the rural areas. This clearly shows that there is substantial credit transfer from rural to urban areas which is due to both poor absorption capacities in rural areas.
Map 2.1. India showing the location of North-East India
Map 2.2. North-East India showing the location of Undivided Kamrup district (Kamrup Rural District and Kamrup Metropolitan District)
Map 2.3. Showing the location of Kamrup Rural District
Map 2.4. Showing the location of Kamrup Metropolitan District
References:

