CHAPTER II
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY REGION AND
SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

In this chapter our main objectives are twofold: first, to give an introduction to the study region and second, to describe how we have selected samples for our study.

1. The North Lakhimpur Subdivision: Location

The North Lakhimpur Subdivision, the region under our study, is one of the two subdivisions of the Lakhimpur District, Assam (the other subdivision is Dhemaji). The area of North Lakhimpur Subdivision is 1409.60 square Kms and it shares about 37% of the total area of the district of Lakhimpur. The subdivision is situated between 26°50' and 27°90' latitude and between 93°46' and 94°20' E longitude.

The boundaries of the Subdivision extend in the north by Subansiri and Siang districts of Arunachal Pradesh, in the east by a part of Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh and Dhemaji subdivision, in the south by Dhemaji subdivision and Sibsagar district of Assam and in the west by the Sonitpur district of Assam.
2. **Physiographic Features**

The subdivision is not a homogeneous unit; two distinct units can be demarcated as hilly tract and flat level plain. The quality of the soil is alluvial and composed of a mixture of sand and clay in varying proportions. The soil is highly acidic in character. The moisture retentive capacity of the soil is poor and hence the fertility is low.

3. **Climate and Rainfall**

The climate of the North Lakhimpur subdivision is characterised by the relative coolness, abundant summer rainfall, and a highly humid atmosphere throughout the year. The average maximum and minimum temperature is $27.9^\circ C$ and $17.9^\circ C$, the average humidity is $81\%$ and the annual total rainfall is $2544$ mm (average for five years 1972-75). The period from June to about beginning of October is characterised as the South Monsoon season while October and November constitute of post monsoon season.

It rains nearly all the year round. Rainfall is the only source of water for growing crops. Because of heavy rainfall and numerous rivers and rivulets, the area is prone to frequent floods, devastating crops and lives.
4. Population

According to 1971 Census, the population of the subdivision was 398,4 thousand. The percentage of scheduled tribe population in the subdivision works out to be about 18.3% in 1971. Of the total population, 93.64% lived in rural areas and others in the urban areas.

It has been observed that the population of the subdivision is growing very rapidly at the rate of about 36% per decade. It is conjectured that a good part of this increase is attributable to immigrants from the neighbouring countries and other states of India. It is conjectured that immigrants form about 20% of the total population of the subdivision.2

5. Occupational Structure of Population

About 68.92 percent of the working population are cultivators and 7.50 percent are agricultural labourers. Thus, about 76.42% of the people directly depend on agriculture. In non-primary occupations commerce is dominant.

6. Landholding

An important feature of the economy of the subdivision is the predominance of small holdings of cultivable land. Skewness in the distribution is much less in comparison to other districts of Assam. The total area under
cultivation is about 86 thousand hectares and average holding size is about 1.69 hectares (about 3.17 acres). Nevertheless, it is conjectured that skewness in distribution of land is on an increase.  

7. **Irrigation Facilities**

The whole tract of cultivable land is rainfed. There has been no development of irrigation facilities, partly because of the underdevelopment of the subdivision in general and partly because of abundant rivers and frequent heavy rainfall. Cultivation is mainly prone to floods and not droughts. Development of irrigation facilities could have possibly controlled the severity of floods and it could have helped agricultural practices also to improve.

Out of the total land (area of the subdivision) about 20.87% is cultivable waste land, 55% is cultivable (unirrigated) and about 20% is not available for cultivation. About 1.94% of the total area is covered by forests. There are prospects for afforestation of the waste land.

8. **Cropping Pattern**

The principal crop is rice. Sali and Ahu are the varieties of rice cultivated extensively. Mustard and potato are other important crops. No trace of HYV rice cultivation is found.
9. Transport and Communication

The transport and communication network in the subdivision is not well-developed. The most important road is North Trunk road which is the main road link between North Lakhimpur Subdivision and Sonitpur district and Dhemaji subdivision. There is also another road called Kamalabaria PWD Road which covers a distance of 19 miles and connects the subdivision with Majuli. On account of several rivers criss-crossing the subdivision, coupled with heavy and frequent rainfall, most of the roads remain suspended during the summer and rainy seasons.

The village roads of the subdivision are unmetalled and during rainy seasons these roads go under water disrupting the transportation link.

10. Marketing facilities and commercial institutions

North Lakhimpur is the most important market centre of the subdivision. But due to poor transportation facilities, there is predominance of local markets. Farmers usually sell their product in these local markets and purchase other commodities from these markets. Thus the villagers exchange their commodities through middlemen.

Some banks are located in the town (North Lakhimpur). But they do not have their branches in the interior areas.
of the subdivision. The people are quite unexposed to institutional sources of finance partly because of poor educational level and communication and transportation facilities and partly because of poor network of financial institutions. As a result, about 96% of the total credit is supplied by local money lenders. Money lending and marketing of agricultural products are integrated activities. Middlemen often supply credit to the farmers. A survey conducted in 1948-49 revealed that about 2/5 of the total number of households were under debt. For recent years we do not have any such information, but our conjecture is that the incidence of indebtedness has increased substantially.

10. Methodology of selection of Villages

We have already mentioned in the introductory chapter of the study that four villages have been selected purposively for drawing sample households. Here we present the main points that we considered for selecting these villages.

First, we hold that distance from a township has important effects on the way of life, economic and social characteristics and attitudes of the people. To keep these effects possibly constant, we have chosen the criterion of distance from town as a guiding principle in selection
of villages. Note that the towns are also the market places and distance from market place affects the endeavours and characteristics of the economy. Hence, if we selected villages at different distances from the township/market place, we should have included "distance" also as an important explanatory variable. This would have increased complexity in analysis. Hence we designed it to select the villages which are at almost equal distance from the township and market place.

Second, we hold that tribals are relatively less exposed to institutional credit facilities and their population has less individualistic and atomistic elements. They are relatively more guided by social and religious principles than by so called market place rationality. We mean to say that the number of "Smithian Scotchman" is less in tribal societies. Since in such cases they are more prone to indebtedness, we have decided to select only those villages which have ethnically homogeneous population (and as a consequence, more closed societies) inhabiting them. Thus, one of the villages selected by us is inhabited exclusively by Boro tribe, another village is inhabited exclusively by Missings and two villages are inhabited exclusively by Sonowal tribe. These last two villages are ethnically one.
We hold that size of a village affects social and economic characteristics of the inhabitant population. Hence we have tried our best to select villages which are similar in population size, such that differences due to population size are not important enough to be taken up for analysis.

Thus we selected four villages, namely Bori Mori (Missing) village, Bhati (Sonowal) Chachari village, Majgao (Sonowal) village and Chorimoria (Boro) village.

11. Selection of Sample Households from the Villages

After selecting the villages we counted the number of households in these villages and order-listed them (separately for each village) by the leading alphabetical character of the first name of the head of the household. The first two villages are inhabited by sixty households each while the third and the fourth villages are inhabited by 42 and 40 households respectively.

We generated four pseudo random numbers. The first two random numbers were such as to lie between 0 and 60 while the third and the fourth were to lie between 0 - 42 and 0 - 40 ranges respectively. These random numbers were generated such that they follow a uniform distribution. These numbers were generated by using a library program.
of a programmable calculator TI programmable 58 - C
(Texas instruments). These four random numbers were used
to identify the first household in each village.

Once the first household was randomly selected in
each village, we proceeded to select sample households
by a systematic sampling procedure. Since we decided to
collect 50% of samples from each village, every alternate
household was to be selected. The list of households were
used to identify these households and they were inter­
viewed. By direct interview of the heads of the sample
household we gathered information and completed our ques­
tionnaires. Over and above filling in the questionnaires,
we had a discourse with the heads of the households on
several issues of indebtedness and problems of the village.
We had discourses with the headmen of these villages. The
gist of these discourses were noted in a diary.
REFERENCES

1. Data collected from "Meteorological Centre", Gauhati and Directorate of Agriculture, Government of Assam, Gauhati.


