CHAPTER-2
THE STUDY AREA

2.1. Introduction:

The name ‘Sonitpur’ as well as Tezpur literally means “the city of blood”. It reminds of the romantic legend of Usha and Anirudha. The legend revolves around Banasura, the great Asura king of ancient Tezpur, his beautiful daughter Usha and her friend Chitralekha. The princess saw a handsome prince in her dreams and fell in love with him. Chitralekha, a talented artist, not only painted his portrait from Usha’s description but recognized him to be Anirudha, the grandson of Lord Krishna and ruler of Dwarka. Using her magical powers, Chitralekha married each other according to Gandharva rites, without the knowledge of the king. When Banasura learnt of the clandestine romance, he imprisoned Anirudha, which led to the arrival of Lord Krishna to rescue his grandson. A fierce battle followed and the entire city was drenched in human blood, hence the name Sonitpur or Tezpur, i.e. ‘the city of blood’. The story of love between Usha and Anirudha finds expression in many stories.

2.2. Location of District Overview:

Sonitpur district is spread over an area of 5324 sq. km on north bank of the Brahmaputra River. In terms of area Sonitpur is the second largest district of Assam after Karbianglong district. The district is bounded on the north by Arunachal Pradesh and on the east by Lakhimpur district. The Brahmaputra stand on southern side and Darrang district is on the west. The populations of Sonitpur district are 16,77,874 as per 2001 census. In terms of population it ranks third in Assam after Kamrup and Nagaon districts. The people here are not a homogeneous lot. Rather, they are a mosaic of ethnic groups, and mixture of diverse types of people. The district lies between 26 30’N and 27 01’N latitude and between 92 16’E and 93 43’E longitude. The sonitpur district located between mighty Brahmaputra River and Himalayan foothill of Arunachal Pradesh, the district is largely plain with some hills. The river Brahmaputra forms the
south boundary of the district. A number of rivers which originate in the Himalaya foothills flow southwards and ultimately fall in the Brahmaputra. There are large numbers of river islands in the Brahmaputra. They are generally sandy; some chars are large enough and fit for habitation and cultivation. Water bodies are in abundance in the district. There are lakes and ponds dotting every part of the district. The major lakes are Rowmari, Dighali, Borsola, Rongapani and Dhandi. Hence water bodies along with the rivers and rivulets provide a lot of vistas for fishing in the district. Tourists can also do angling for pleasure, especially over the Bharali River at Bhalukpung. The central and southern portion of the main plain is dotted with hills and hillocks, especially near the river Brahmaputra. Important hills include the Agnigarh and the Bhomuraguri. The region has trees and tea plantations and paddy fields. The northern portion is made up of forest reserves and sparsely populated forest villages. The region abounds in biodiversity with evergreen and deciduous trees of several types. There is a national park (Nameri), a few wildlife sanctuaries (Sonai-ruptai & bor-dikorai), and a number of reserve forest (e.g. Chariduar, Balipara reserve forest). In the extreme north of the region (Bhalukpung, Sijushah, Pabhoi, etc.), are hills and hillocks marking the starting of the Himalayan foothills. The main plain is slightly sloping from east to west, and is at average latitude of 1800 feet from the mean sea level. There are three sub-Divisions of Sonitpur district namely Gohpur, Biswanath and Tezpur subdivision. The sampling stations of the study area in sonitpur district, Assam are shown in figure-2.9a.

2.3 Overview of Study Area Gohpur, Biswanath and Tezpur Sub-Divisions:

The north-eastern part of Sonitpur district is Gohpur Sub-Divisions. Gohpur is situated in the north-east of Sonitpur district under 26 53’-26 88’ N & 93 38’- 93 63’E covering of area 603 sq. km. (Statistical Handbook, Assam 2007). Gohpur Sub-Division is also called Chaiduar, once ‘Chaiduar’ covered the area from the river Dikrong to the river Borgang and during this period, tribal’s (mainly ‘Dafalas’ now Nishis’), from the hills now Arunachal Pradesh, came to the plains through six doors (gates) giving the name of the area as Chaiduar. But for smooth running of administration, the area has been reduced from Howajan to the Buroi River on the eastern part of Sonitpur District is known as Gohpur Sub-Division. Moreover, it is divided into two blocks Chaiduar and
Pub-Chaiduar. Previously, the whole Chaiduar, (undivided) was covered by Halem Revenue Circle but now another circle Gohpur has been created. The north east part of Gohpur Sub-Divisions is reserved forest with an area of 13,310 hectares of land. People belong to Bodo, Nepali, Missing, Deuri community are living here. On the south 28 revenue villages are inhabited by the tribal people of Missing Community.

It is worth mentioning that in Halem revenue circle there are eight big tea gardens under multinational companies and so tea-garden and ex-tea garden laboures are abundant here there over also the people belong to Bodo, Missing, Nepali, Karbi and also living in this Sub-Division. At least 5000 Islam families live in Tinkhania village in Daflagarh area. Napalies are majority on the southern part of Halem and Kolongpur Mouza in the Halem revenue circle. Gohpur Sub-Divisions is proud of rich historical past. Quit India movement leaded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1942 paved the Gohpur to immortalize her name in the page of the history. In this year Konoklata and Mukunda kakoti died when the police aimed their guns at their hearts. Chaiduar gave birth to a number of poets and literates and their contribution to the Assamese literature and culture is unquestionable. Among them Chandra Kumar Agarwala, Haribilas Agarwala, Ananda Chandra Agarwala, Hem Boruah are worth mentioning.

The Gohpur Sub-Division is bounded by Lakhimpur District in east, Biswanath Chariali Sub-Divisions in the west direction (Buroi River), Arunachal Pradesh in the north and the River Brahmaputra in the south direction. According to the 1991 Census the total population of Gohpur Sub-Division i.e. 2,18,210) Gohpur has an average literacy rate of 72% higher than the national average of 59.5% male literacy is 77% and female literacy is 66%. Male constitute 53% of the population and females 47%. There are a few numbers of Historical Temples and ponds at Gohpur. Among them Basudev Doul, Dhandi Devalay, Shree Phulbari devalay, Kalyani Mandir, Bor Pukhuri and Sri Sri Suriya Narayan Temple are main.

Biswanath Chariali (26 42’- 26 72’ N & 93 08’ – 93 68’ E) is another important Sub-Division of the Sonitpur District in the state of Assam. It is at a distance of 75 km from Tezpur and 255 km from Guwahati. The Biswanath Chariali Sub-Division is bounded on the north by Arunachal Pradesh and on the east by Gohpur Sub-Division
(Buroi River). The Brahmaputra and Golaghat district stand on the southern side and Tezpur Sub-Division is on the west. The Sub-Division is celebrated for its expansive tea estates. The Monabari tea estate, largest tea estate in Asia is located here. As of 2001 census of India the population in Biswanath Chariali are 1, 68,300.males constitute 53% of the population and females 47% Biswanath Chariali has an average literacy rate of 80%, higher than the national average of 59.5% with male literacy of 85% and female literacy of 75%.

There are some holy places in this Sub-Division are Biswanath Temple, Borola Stone, Bhaluk Gossain Temple. The Nag Sankar, a place very famous for ancient temples, is at a distance of 15 km away from Biswanath Chariali town.

Beyond Biswanath Chariali at Biswanath Ghat, Biswanath temple popularly known as “Gupta Kashi” is located at the confluence of Bridhaganga (Buroigonga) river with Brahmaputra. The Ghat has a cluster of temples of different gods. From the stone posts, beams and other ruins found there it is believed that once there was a stone temple. During the summer the temple remains under water. Only in winter worship is done by constructing temporary shed which draws lot of tourists. On the third day of Assamese Bihu festival a mela is held there.

2.4. Climate and Rainfall:

The sonitpur district falls in the Sub-Tropical climate region, and enjoys monsoon type of climate. The highest temperature is recorded just prior to the onset of monsoon (around May-early June). Summer rain is heavy, and is principally caused from late June to August by the moisture-laden South-West Monsoon, on striking the Himalayan foothills of the north. Such rain is both a boon and a bane for the people. A boon, for it provides natural irrigation to the fields, and a bane as it causes the rivers to overflow their banks and cause floods. Autumn is dry, and warm. It gets cooler as the months progress. Winters from the month of October to February, and are cold and generally dry, with an average temperature of 16 C. Annual average temperature of the area during winter period various from 6 C to 14 C and during summer, it varies from 29 C to 36 C. It gets quite chilling in late December and early January. on account of snowfall in the upper reaches of Arunachal Pradesh. Springs are cool and pleasant,
occurring in the months of late March and April. Of course, during these months, flash rains and thunder storms are at times caused by cyclonic winds, known in local parlance as Bordoichila. The average annual rainfall in this area is 1979.2 mm (Statistical Handbook, Assam 2007). About 60% to 65% of the annual precipitation is received during south-west monsoon from June to September. The rainfall pattern is almost same though it is slightly more in the northern part than southern. The relative humidity varies from 93% to 75%. The climate is tropical, hot and humid (http/www.sonitpur profile/sonitpur mht.).

2.5. Geomorphology and Drainage

Geomorphology:

Physiographically, the both Sub-Divisions show a monotonous plain topography towards south from north, while the northern part of the area represents an undulating topography (http/www.sonitpur profile/sonitpur mht.). The general elevation of the elevated area is around 100 meters above Mean Sea Level (MSL) and low lying area show altitude about 50 meters above MSL. The slopes of the three sub division are towards south from north.

Drainage:

The river Brahmaputra flowing in east-west direction in the extreme southern parts of the both Sub-Divisions and its tributaries flowing in southern direction, control the entire drainage system of the Sub-Divisions are Buroi, Borgang, Kharoi, Burhigang, and Ghiladhari. These rivers have meandering courses with abandoned channels in the form of bills and ox-bow lakes along their courses. The Sub-Divisions are having a unique water regime with river Buroi and Solengi traversing along the region from north to south direction and Kharoi east to west. The Burhigang and the Ghiladhari are in Biswanath Chariali Sub-Division which are coming from Arunachal hills north to south and end at the Brahmaputra. There cover also some small tributaries of the river Brahmaputra flow through these Sub-Divisions. All the rivulets originated from Arunachal Pradesh.
2.6. Land Use & Soil Type:

Land use pattern of the three Sub-Divisions are as per Assam remote sensing application centre reveals that about 52,674 hectares are covered by reserve forest, 3,937 hectares by fallow land, 2,15,966 hectares covered by Kharif and 51,059 hectares are covered by rabi crops. Principal crop grown in the both Sub-Divisions are paddy followed by pulses, mustard, sugarcane, potato, vegetable, etc. Tea plantation is major cash crops in the highlands covered by older alluvium. Two important soil groups are seen they are (i) deep reddish colored soil developed over older geological formation and (ii) light grey to dark grey colored soil covering the major parts of the Sub-Divisions. Low nitrogen, low phosphate, medium to high potash, acidic characters of the soil are representative of the soil found in the Sub-Divisions. There over also some marshy or peat soil is found in the perennial water logged areas and is black in colour. It contains higher amount of decomposed or semi decomposed humus giving a muddy nature.

2.7. Demographic Pattern:

The demographic pattern of the major communities inhabiting in the three Sub-Divisions are Assamese. They are among the original inhabitants of the place, and the typical culture of the place grew with them. While a majority of them follow Hindu religion, a significant portion of them are also Muslims. The district has a considerable Muslim population. Majority of Muslims have emigrated from former East Bengal (present Bangladesh). They fill up a large portion of reveries areas of the district. There are also Sikhism, Christianity, and Buddhism inhabiting in this area. The Prominent castes among the Assamese include Brahmins, Kalita, Baishya, Koch, Ahom, Yogis, the Scheduled Castes, etc. The Nepali Community is fairly dominant in the central and southern part of the district, especially in the Biswanath Chariali Sub-Division. The Bengali community came from erstwhile undivided Bengal, as officials and clerks of the partition of India, people coming as refugees added significantly to the community. The Adivasi people were brought by the British from Chotanagpur area and Orissa to serve as labourers in the tea gardens. In course of time, they assimilated themselves in
the greater Assamese society, while retaining their basic cultural traits. The Jumur dance is their contribution to the culture of Assam.

2.8. Economy:

The economics of sonitpur district is basically an agrarian economy. Approximately 80-85 percent of the population depends on agriculture allied (primary sector) activities for their livelihood (www.Irc.assam.nic.in). Rain fed cultivation of single paddy crop still continues in most area of the Sub-Divisions. The economy of the district is agriculture based the traditional one, no multinationals or software industries, no big business dealings as such. The economy of both three Sub-Divisions is underdeveloped and has its own pace, trend, tradition and development process. Gohpur, Biswanath Chariali and Tezpur towns are trade centers for Bomdilla, Tawang, Seppa and Itanagar of Arunachal Pradesh. The next most important feature of the economy is the existence of large number of small and big tea gardens.

2.9. Tea Cultivation:

The cultivation occupies a little less than a tenth of the cultivated area of Assam. The most important feature of the economy of Sonitpur is the existence of large number of small and big tea gardens. There are all together seventy three big tea gardens in Sonitpur district (Twenty one in Gohpur & Biswanath Chariali Sub-Divisions). These tea gardens cover approximately 45,222 hectares of land in these Sub-Divisions (http://sonitpur.nic.in/economy.htm). The Monabari tea estate in Biswanath Chariali Sub-Division is largest tea garden with an area of 1096 hectares and the Borgang tea estate is the 2nd largest in the district with an area of 1018 hectares. Most of the tea gardens were previously owned by European concerns like Mecnill & Magor, George Williamson Ltd., Mcleod Russel, British Assam tea garden company, Empire Plantation Limited etc. However in recent years many Indian owned companies like Tata Tea, Brooke Bond etc. are taking over the ownership of the tea gardens. Apart from the big companies gardens a large number of small tea gardens also grow from 1978 (Baruah, K.S., 2008). According to Indian Tea Board the tea gardens which have land from 1.5
hectares to 10.5 hectares are small tea gardens (Borgohani, J.K., 2008). These tea growers are playing great role in the upliftment of the rural economy of the Sub-Divisions. The basically sell green tea-leaves to the big company tea gardens who have own factories for processing (http://sonitpur.gov.in/economy). Assam produced 51% of India’s tea (www.indiatimes.com). The small tea gardens of Assam have a countable contribution to the total tea production in Assam. In Sonitpur district there are 207 registered and a large number of unregistered small tea gardens and covered area of 1209.93 hectares (Tea Board of India, 2004).

**Figure-2.9a.** Sample stations of the study area in Sonitpur District, Assam.