CHAPTER-VI

VOTING TREND AND PROBLEMS OF THE MINORITY COMMUNITY OF SOUTH KAMRUP

**Election** is the most powerful manoeuvering instrument for a democratic country like India, because democracy exists through the electoral process, by which people's representatives are chosen to govern the country through its parliament and state Legislative bodies. Election, therefore, is a normal procedure of Law under the constitution at the end of every five years as required (or any mid term poll).^

Works on election study have dealt with a wide variety of factors which influence the voter's mind in the exercise of their right to vote.

**The vote-bank politics** is now in full play and parties are competing with one another in winning over the Muslims with false hopes, promises that are not meant to be redeemed and hastily conceived and short-lived administrative steps that make no material difference to their lives but sometimes only increase their isolation.

It is to be noted that after the partition of the country, the Muslim minority suffering a great loss in terms of cultural, political and economic status confronted a peculiar situation.

It has already been stated that the religious minority people of erstwhile...
East Pakistan origin were brought by the congress for growing more food in Assam. Subsequently lakhs of people of the same origin entered Assam illegally and under the patronage of congress (I) managed to get their names included in the voters’ list. These voters have been traditional vote banks for congress (I) in Assam. So, these people owe allegiance to congress (I) because it is the congress party which helped them to cross over to Assam and settle here to widen their vote base^\text{1}.

Assam was traditionally the stronghold of congress. Since 1952 till 1977 congress managed majority of seats in the State Legislative Assembly. But congress monopoly was challenged in the election held in 1978, congress rule was overthrown and the \textbf{Janata Party} was brought to power in Assam. Thus there may be said to have been a radical change in the voting behaviour in \textit{minority politics} of Assam. They cast their votes fearlessly in favour of congress (I), who is their most trusted friend^\text{5}.

It is also found from the field study that congress (I) in the immigrant Muslims areas of south kamrup district is washing their brains and poisoning their minds. That the congress (I) is only their big brother has gone deep into their minds. ∨

However, in the aftermath of emergency, the congress party lost the elections to the State legislature in 1978^\text{6}. For the first time a non-govt came to power under the leadership of \textbf{Golap Borbora} of the \textbf{Janata Party}. At the same time it may be observed that the question of Muslim influx remained alive during the period. But it could hardly influence the election results to any significant extent and a majority of the voters of course belonged to the congress party (I).

Table : 6.1 gives an idea of the position of the political parties in south kamrup.
Table: 6.1
Position of the political parties in South Kamrup
Election, 1978 constituency Winner Candidate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislative Assembly</th>
<th>50 Palasbari</th>
<th>JNP</th>
<th>Harendra Goswami</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legislative Assembly</td>
<td>49 Chhaygaon</td>
<td>INC (I)</td>
<td>A.N. Akram Hussain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative Assembly</td>
<td>48 Boko (sc)</td>
<td>JNP</td>
<td>Umesh Das</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Election, 1978 to the Legislative Assembly of Assam

It is observed that the sixth Lok Sabha poll had already shaken the monopolistic hold of the Congress at the centre. Added to this in Assam there was a split in the congress just on the eve of the Assembly election of 1978. Thus the election was held in an unprecedented political atmosphere created by the virtual breakdown of the congress party. An anti-congress wave was clearly discernable. A survey conducted by the centre in 1978 revealed that out of the national sample of 210 Muslim male electors 46.8 P.C. voted for the congress and 39.7 P.C. for the opposition. The study further showed that 39 P.C. of the congress Muslims displayed strong preference of the Party, while 11.4 P.C. had only a weak preference for it.

6.1: 1980: ELECTIONS TO LOK SABHA:

Because of the failure of the Janata experiment at the centre, entire nation had to go to the polls in January 1980 to elect a new Lok Sabha. In the meantime the Assam movement attained unprecedented popularity. This movement raised the issue of the participation of so-called foreign nationals in the electoral process. It demanded the deletion of names of foreign nationals from the electoral rolls and their deportation before holding any elections in Assam. The supporters of the movement succeeded in postponing the elections in 11 out of total 44
constituencies from Assam. No nomination was filed or all the validity nominated candidates withdraw their candidature at the time of mid-term General Election 1980. Undoubtedly, this was a major success of the movement.

The election commission of India wanted to hold the elections but a large number of the Asamiyas were opposed to holding elections. This led to deterioration of law and order situation in the state. When the rest of the country went to the polls, the thickly populated northern part of the kamrup district was rocked by unprecedented violence. Between 200 to 300 people died as a result of violence. The identity of 80 dead-bodies could be established and 78 of them belonged to linguistic and religious minorities (PUCL 1980). Assam for the first time had recorded such an unprecedented election related violence. A proclamation under Art. 356 suspended the State Legislature and placed Assam under President’s Rule which continued till 6 December 1980.

6.2 : 1983 : ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS:

The Assam movement distorted the society and politics in Assam in general and south kamrup in particular very significantly. It virtually forced the centre to impose president’s rule in the state thrice during the active period of the movement. The Election commission was determined to hold elections to the state legislature in February 1983 to meet they called ‘Constitutional obligations’. The leadership of the movement was equally determined to stop the elections at any cost till a solution could be found on the foreign national-question. This created an extremely explosive situation in Assam. Such a situation was obviously fertile for organising massacres in Assam on much larger scale than the earlier massacre of north kamrup. The traditional peace and amity transformed into mutual distrust, hatred and hostility. In fact, the target was obviously the Muslims who were alleged to have participated in the elections.
The Nellie massacre was followed by another massacre at Chamaria in south Kamrup. Because the immigrant Muslims exercised their right to vote like earlier elections. Again the victims belonged to the Na-Asamiya Muslim community as that of Nellie\(^3\).

**Table : 6.2**

The party position of the constituencies in South Kamrup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assembly Constituencies</th>
<th>Elected Candidate</th>
<th>Polls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48 Boko (SC)</td>
<td>Upendra Das</td>
<td>Uncontested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49 Chhaygaon</td>
<td>Harendra Nath Talukdar</td>
<td>17130 (26.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 Palasbari</td>
<td>Mohan Basumatary</td>
<td>Uncontested</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Election, 1983 to the Legislative Assembly of Assam by Chief Elector Office, Assam

After the 1983 elections, the congress (I) came to power in Assam. The elections could not be held in 2 constituencies of the south Kamrup. It is noted that in the election the voter turnout was normally low. Obviously it was not at all a free and fair election.

**6.3 : 1985 : ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS :**

An accord was signed between the leaders of the Asom movement and the Govt of India on August 15, 1985\(^4\) known as Assam Accord. This formally brought to the end of Assam movement (1979-85) after a series of negotiations. The leadership of the movement formed a new regional political party known as the Asam Gana Parishad (AGP). The 1985 elections were largely free and fair. And the turnout of voters was also high\(^5\). The first regional formation, the AGP came to power riding on a wave of Assamese subnationalism.
Table : 6.3

The party position in the constituencies of South Kamrup

1985 : Assembly elections : Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assembly Election</th>
<th>Constituencies</th>
<th>Winner Party</th>
<th>Elected Candidates</th>
<th>Polled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>48 Boko (SC)</td>
<td>IND</td>
<td>Gopinath Das</td>
<td>71642 (86.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>49 Chhaygaon</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>Dr. Kamala Kalita</td>
<td>62412 (82.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 Palasbari</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>Jatin Mali</td>
<td>68571 (85.05)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source : Report on the Eight (8th) General Election to the Assam Legislative Assembly and the House of people, 1985

The electoral politics in the south kamrup of Assam in particular has been a new trend since 1985 and this has significantly changed the political history of the region. It is to be noted that the Na-Asamiya Muslims remained absolutely unrepresented. This basically reflects the narrow social base as well as the mentality of the party. It also depicts clearly the major beneficiaries of the Assam movement. The way congress failed in the wake of the Assam movement, the AGP also failed in the wake of violent politics. Other parties including AGP have failed to take the immigrant Muslims into confidence. The six year long Assam movement on foreign nationals issue demanding detection and deportation widened the gap of misunderstanding. It will be a cumbersome and time consuming exercise for AGP and other parties to win over the minds. In the heydeys of AGP in 1985 the immigrant Muslims of East Pakistan origin had not voted for AGP. Had they voted for AGP, they could have swept the polls.

This may be a reality as the indigenous votes will be divided amongst the AGP, BJP and independents paving the way for congress (I) for a smooth sailing and cake-walk victory. Religious minority votes are not divided. There is not a single constituency in Assam where voters of East Pakistani origin are not there.
Sub-regional party like **United Minority Front** (UMF) articulating the interest of smaller ethnic and cultural community has also made their presence felt. The support base of the congress party seems to have declined.

However, it appears that the 1985 election was critical for Assam as it led to a configuration of the party system and durable alignment of social groups.

The AGP’s rise to power on a wave of Assamese rationalism with two seats in south kamrup indicates that its support base has extended beyond the ethnic Assamese.

6.4: 1991: ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS:

Assam went to the polls in early 1991 under the shadow of militancy and the military operation against it. The last state Govt, i.e., the AGP govt, faced dismissal because of its failure to maintain law and order in the wake of ULFA’s violent activities. The result of the elections went against the AGP. But the AGP staged a remarkable comeback by securing clear majority in the 1991 Assembly election in two constituencies of south kamrup in particular.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assembly Constituencies</th>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Winner Party</th>
<th>Elected Candidates</th>
<th>Polled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>48 Boko (SC)</td>
<td>INC (I)</td>
<td>Gopinath Das</td>
<td>77669 (85.10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>49 Chhaygaon</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>Dr. Kamala Kalita</td>
<td>67004 (83.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 Palasbari</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>Jatin Mali</td>
<td>68998 (84.04%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source*: Report on the general election to the Assam Legislative Assembly and the 10th House of People, 1991

The AGP improved its vote share dramatically compared to the 1985 Assembly elections in the south kamrup. The **Congress (I)** is principally dependent on the support of the immigrant Muslims in south kamrup. The
decline of congress (I)'s hegemony has been met by growing significance of a regional party in the south kamrup district of Assam. The Congress (I) of today is radically different from the congress of the past. It is no longer the umbrella organisation that covers all the various ethnicities and communities of the region. Thus the immigrant Muslims in south kamrup supported AGP for their upliftment and survival.

6.5: 1996: ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS:

Assam went to the polls for electing the members of the state legislature in April 1996—again under the shadow of poor governance, institutionalisation of corruption and violence. The electorate particularly in south kamrup had a little choice before them; either to support the congress (I) or to bring back the AGP once again. It seems the voters of the minority community opted for the latter and voted decisively for the coalition led by the AGP.

In 1996 elections, both from Assembly and parliament the congress found itself in a very difficult situation. The AGP had realised the inherent limitations of its social constituency and this seen the importance of keeping at least the minority groups with it. The other opposition parties and even HMBC joined hands with AGP. The AGP improved its vote share in the south kamrup compared to the debacle of 1991 both in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. Compared to 1991 the congress (I) lost its seats totally and AGP gained three seats in south kamrup.

Table: 6.5
The Party position in the South Kamrup
1996: Assembly Election: Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assembly Constituencies</th>
<th>Winner Party</th>
<th>Elected Candidates</th>
<th>Polled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48 Boko (SC)</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>Jyotiprasad Das</td>
<td>87,050 (87.05%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49 Chhaygaon</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>Dr. Kamala Kalita</td>
<td>78,109 (85%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 Palasbari</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>Jatin Mali</td>
<td>73,316 (86%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Report on the general election to the 10th Assam Legislative Assembly and the 11th House of People, 1996
It is observed from Table 6.5 that the congress (I) not only lost its seats, but also its social base. It also seemed to have lost its influence among the immigrant Muslims particularly in south kamrup. It was also apparent from the election results that the immigrant Muslims had not supported the AGP. Further, the minority support to the congress (I) had not to be seen in the context of the position of the UMF.


The kamrup district has ten Assembly constituencies. The study area is confined within three constituencies in the south kamrup. They are 48 Boko (SC), 49 Chhaygaon, and 50 Palasbari constituency. A review of the voting scenario in the south kamrup will help us more to understand the trends in the elections during 1978-96. The social composition of south kamrup is strongly influenced by two inseparable historical facts—the extraordinary role of immigrant Muslims and the ethnic cultural diversity of these immigrants. The immigrant Muslims have been playing a decisive role in the south kamrup politics. It is to be noted that the congress(I) has enjoyed the unflinching support of this community since independence, except during 1978 and 1985-96 elections when the split in the Muslim votes was inevitable due to the emergence of regional, ethnic and culture based politics. Thus the minority voters cast their votes in favour of the congress owing to their insecure position and stability at that time.

6.6: 48 BOKO (SC) CONSTITUENCY:

48 Boko (SC) constituency is mostly dominated by tribals, linguistically religious minorities, apart from Assamese people. It is a rural constituency over-
85% of the voters reside in villages. Voting in the Assembly election of Bokai constituency since 1952 till 1991 except 1978 and 1996 showed that voters of the minority community cast their votes in favour of congress. In this constituency the congress monopoly was challenged by the Janata Party and AGP in 1978 and 1996 respectively. Within the two terms (1978 to 1996), the constituency was under the control of the Janata Party and AGP.

In the election of 1985, the congress (I) candidate was elected. This time UMF was a factor. The immigrant Muslims who supported the UMF in 1985 had solidly stood behind the congress (I). Over 92% of the immigrant voters cast their votes which was little less than the earlier election. In the election of 1991, the same congress (I) candidate was elected again. There were frequent public meetings and other forms of election of the constituency was that the immigrant Muslims solidly supported the congress (I) candidate who was a linguistic minority. Another point to be highlighted was that the UMF and JAMA extended support to the congress (I); as it was the result of a secret alliance with the congress (I). Congress (I) had been encouraging them to create its vote-bank.

In the election of 1996, the AGP candidate was elected. Because of the strong base of the party, the voters of the minority community which earlier used to go to the congress (I) pockets were divided amongst the congress (I) and AGP candidates. There was a stiff competition between the congress (I) and the AGP candidates.

From the Table 6.6 it is found that over 80% voters of the minority community exercised their franchise. So, the AGP secured first position having obtained 56.59% of the valid votes. The INC (I), BJP and ALIC (I) secured 40.20%, 2.91% and 0.28% of votes respectively. The polling performance showed that the voters were ready and took keen interest.
### Table: 6.6

Annexure-1: Constituency data-summary:
No. and Name of the Assembly constituency: 48 Boko (SC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assembly Elections</th>
<th>Elected Candidates</th>
<th>Party affiliation if any</th>
<th>Valid votes Polled at the Polling Station</th>
<th>Total No. of valid votes Polled in the Constituency</th>
<th>P.C. of votes Polled by each Candidate</th>
<th>Total No. of Elecors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Umesh Das</td>
<td>JNP</td>
<td>26469</td>
<td>49454</td>
<td>72.17%</td>
<td>M-35303 Total-68520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(25 Feb.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-33217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Upendra Das</td>
<td>INC (I)</td>
<td>Uncontested</td>
<td>Uncontested</td>
<td>Uncontested</td>
<td>M-38629 Total-72729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14 Feb.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-34100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Gopinath Das</td>
<td>IND</td>
<td>30,564</td>
<td>69,768</td>
<td>86.36%</td>
<td>M-44455 Total-82962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16 Dec.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-38507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Gopinath Das</td>
<td>INC (I)</td>
<td>36143</td>
<td>77,669</td>
<td>86.36%</td>
<td>M-58936 Total-104395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8 June)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-45459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Jyotiprasad Das</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>49,263</td>
<td>87,050</td>
<td>56.59%</td>
<td>M-57004 Total-111052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(27 April)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-54048</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Reports of the Election Department of Assam
6.7 : 49 CHHAYGAON CONSTITUENCY:

This constituency is an Assamese Hindu dominated part of greater souil kamrup area. The area is inhabited by different communities. Certain areas are predominated by Tribal people. Other areas are occupied by non-tribal people viz., several Hindu castes and Muslims. The immigrant Muslims are chiefly concentrated in the char area in the north of Chhaygaon as that of Boko (S1970 constituency. These people are politically very much conscious since pre-independence period. No political party could establish its hegemony consistently uptil 1977.

It is noteworthy that since 1952 to 1983 except 1978, 1985, 1991, 1996 the immigrant Muslim voters cast their votes in favour of congress. In 1978 congress rule was overthrown and the Janata party was brought to power in Chhaygaon.

Further, the anti-foreigners agitation (1979-1985) led by AASU (All Assam Students' Union) and AAGSP (All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad) contributed much more uniting the Assamese people of Chhaygaon.

In 1978 one Janata candidate won from this constituency. In 1983 Assembly Election, a small number of voters of the minority community fearlessly participated in the election process as majority people boycotted the election in response to the election boycott called by the Movement leaders. In that election, congress (I) candidate secured that seat and came to power.

Regionalism had great influence in Chhaygaon constituency during the movement of anti-foreigners (1979-1985). One of the outcomes of the Assam Accord was the formation of two regional political parties—AGP & UME. It is interesting to note that the voters of Chhaygaon constituency elected the AGP candidate Dr. Kamala Kalita in 1985, 1991, 1996 at a stretch. Hence, it may be
safely concluded that the constituency has been a stronghold of the AGP because of the candidate’s leadership quality. Though the minority voters are mostly illiterate & poor, they exercise their franchises keeping in mind religious considerations, national, regional and even local considerations to some extent. This election, 1985 also drew the attention of the minorities, mostly the religious minority in the constituency.

The AGP candidate has become qualified or able to keep up the electoral promises which made people totally satisfied. Growing satisfaction of the minority community people over the AGP candidate was reflected in the elections of 1991 and 1996. The minority voters showed a preference for the AGP instead of the congress (I) in order to get advantages and for their existence.

6.8: 50 PALASBARI CONSTITUENCY:

The Constituency contains both town and rural voters in which rural voters are in majority. Over 78% of the voters reside in villages. This constituency is an Assamese speaking Hindu dominated constituency of south kamrup. Voting behaviour of Assembly election of 50 Palasbari constituency showed the same as that of 49 Chhaygaon constituency.

Since 1985 to 1996, the constituency was under the control of the AGP. There was a fear-psychosis that the foreigners would threaten the socioeconomic, political and cultural identity of the Assamese people. The problem of identity crisis led to the growth of sub-nationalism forces in the south kamrup. Regionalism had great influence in Palasbari during the movement of anti foreigners (1978-1985). Political consciousness and petty politics affected the voters of the minority community in that election. In addition to that the minority voters were conscious of the manifesto issued by the AGP. The minority voters were influenced during 1985-96 by the party leaders.
### Annexure-2: Constituency data-summary:


**NO. AND NAME OF THE ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCY: 49 CHHAYGAON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assembly Elections</th>
<th>Elected Candidates</th>
<th>Party affiliation if any</th>
<th>Valid votes Polled at the Polling Station</th>
<th>Total No. of valid votes Polled in the Constituency</th>
<th>P.C. of votes Polled by each Candidate</th>
<th>Total No. of Electors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>A.N Akram</td>
<td>INC (I)</td>
<td>13712</td>
<td>43061</td>
<td></td>
<td>M-32772=61589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(25 Feb.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(69.92%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Harendra Nath</td>
<td>INC (I)</td>
<td>9122</td>
<td>17130</td>
<td></td>
<td>M-33737=64493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14 Feb.)</td>
<td>Talukdar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-30786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Dr. Kamala Kalita</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>32751</td>
<td>61258</td>
<td>53.56%</td>
<td>M-37903=70708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16 Dec.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Dr. Kamala Kalita</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>19345</td>
<td>67007</td>
<td>28.87%</td>
<td>M-46808=88300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8 June)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-41492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Dr. Kamala Kalita</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>39103</td>
<td>78109</td>
<td>50.06%</td>
<td>M-50895=97504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(27 April)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-46609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly Elections</td>
<td>Elected Candidates</td>
<td>Party affiliation if any</td>
<td>Valid votes Polled at the Polling Station</td>
<td>Total No. of valid votes Polled in the Constituency</td>
<td>P.C. of votes Polled by each Candidate</td>
<td>Total No. of Electors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Harendra Goswami</td>
<td>JNP</td>
<td>14,923</td>
<td>45046</td>
<td>86.53%</td>
<td>M-35928 Total-66809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(25 Feb.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-30881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Mohan Basumatary</td>
<td>INC (I)</td>
<td>Uncontested</td>
<td>Uncontested</td>
<td>Uncontested</td>
<td>M-38752 Total-73291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14 Feb.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-34539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Jatin Mali</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>57,029</td>
<td>68,571</td>
<td>84.82%</td>
<td>M-42793 Total-80640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16 Dec.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-37841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Jatin Mali</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>48,908</td>
<td>68998</td>
<td>41.54%</td>
<td>M-50694 Total-94497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8 June)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-43803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Jatin Mali</td>
<td>AGP</td>
<td>44,643</td>
<td>73316</td>
<td>60.89%</td>
<td>M-50959 Total-97724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(27 April)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F-46765</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Reports of the Election Department of Assam
Taking into consideration the general trend of the voting behaviour, it is found that the immigrant Muslims in south kamrup resort to religious appeals.

The Muslim voting pattern in the elections, 1978-96 undoubtedly makes it clear that the consensus of the minority community, by and large, has been in favour of committed secular democratic parties\(^35\). The study further showed that 39 per cent of the immigrant Muslims displayed strong preference for the congress (I), while 11.4 per cent had only a weak preference for it\(^36\).

**Poverty** also influences the voting behaviour of the immigrant Muslims in south kamrup where nearly 70% of the total population still live below poverty line\(^37\). There are quite a large number of agricultural labourers among the ‘Char’ people in study area. Most of them who are generally poor and illiterate are still under the command of the party leaders and village headmen or Dewanies. The result is that such people can not behave democratically so far as electoral systems are concerned. Above all, there are rampant corrupt practices during election days.

The percolation of development benefits to the poor have an impact on the voting behaviour of the poor citizens. The poor voters have very basic needs to satisfy. They tend to vote for the party which seek to alleviate their immediate concerns\(^38\).

In south kamrup, we have diverse population. Apart from religious and linguistic trends in our electoral behaviour, there is also community based politics as it is found in the study area.

History of migration is severely related with the “Mia” community of Assam, Which consists of the immigrant Muslims of the former East-Bengal of the undivided India. Most of them are inhabiting throughout the riverine areas, i.e. char area of middle and lower Assam\(^39\). It is to be mentioned that a large
number of these immigrant Muslims are residing in char area of the south kamrup which is bounded by the mighty Brahmaputra in the north and national High way No.37 in the South. To the west and East it is open to the Brahmaputra Valley of Goalpara and Nagaon respectively.

It has already been mentioned that these immigrant Muslim populations had to pass through many trials and tribulations over the decades and they were settling in the riverine areas of south kamrup with utmost sufferings. A large number of Muslims, who migrated from East Bengal were cultivators and daily labourers.

Due to the lack of agricultural modernisation and industrialisation aggravated by the sheer lack of capital and infrastructural facilities, economic development has been remaining stagnant on the one hand, and rampant corruption, bribery, terrorism, lawlessness have created a vicious social condition on the other.

It is pertinent to mention about certain constraints that have been impeding the economic development, geographical isolation complied with lack of infrastructural facilities have become the major causes of extreme backwardness of the ‘char’ areas in south kamrup. The physical, social and institutional constraints; virtual absence of all weather roads in the interior areas, inadequate transport facilities, lack of good drinking water, inadequate marketing facilities and delivery system, absence of higher educational institutions, etc. have made the people inferior. Due to extreme poverty and lack of awareness, middlemen are exploiting the char villagers by purchasing their product at throw away prices.

Another constraint is the non availability of actual data of the ‘char’ area of south kamrup in particular in respect of the socio-economic condition based on empirical research. The people are far away from the main stream of development. The foreign national agitation also has done considerable damage.
in the assimilation and acculturation process\textsuperscript{45} of the ‘\textit{Char}’ people.

Because of the tremendous growth of population in a geographically and naturally fragile area of south kamrup contributed mostly by the high birth rate of the immigrants and fresh immigrants, socio-economic problems like: literacy, lack of health care and sanitation, lack of minimum amenities and environmental degradation and pollution are aggravated rather than solved.\textsuperscript{46}

Following are the specified problems \textsuperscript{47} in the char areas of south kamrup district:

\begin{enumerate}
    \item \textbf{Population Explosion :}
        \begin{enumerate}
            \item Illiteracy,
            \item Lack of awareness and unwillingness for family planning,
            \item Absence of vasectomy and tubectomy for birth control,
            \item Religious superstition,
            \item Early marriage,
            \item Polygamy.
        \end{enumerate}
    \item \textbf{Poverty and Unemployment :}
        \begin{itemize}
            \item Number of BPL families : 18,954 as per 1996-97 census on char areas.
        \end{itemize}

\textbf{Literacy rate :}

\begin{enumerate}
    \item Primary : Male : 23.1; Female : 16.8
    \item Below Matriculation : Male 31.7; Female : 19.8
    \item HSLC/H.S: Male 6.1: Female : 1.4
    \item Graduate & Above : Male : 1.0 ; Female : 0.1
\end{enumerate}

2.7\% are engaged in trade and commerce, 0.4\% in industry, 1.5\% in Govt service, 26\% out of 32\% literate are employed.
Causes:

i) Govt inability to engage educated unemployed youths.
ii) Lack of industries.
iii) Weakness towards govt service.
iv) Less importance in trade and commerce.
v) No scope for self employment.
vi) Deprivation of appearing in national level competitive examination due to lack of proper communication and training coaching and
vii) No serious effort has been made to under take socio economic survey of the char areas in south kamrup.

3) Role of N.G.O,s :

NGO,s to take up practical and physical strategies for the upliftment of socio-economic life of char dwellers in the field of population explosion and unemployment problems.

Natural hazards like, flood, drought, soil erosion, damages made by animals, pests and diseases, poor health of the peasants and deficiency and weak condition of droughts bovine make adverse impact on the agricultural performance in region.

The Brahmaputra valley is one of Flood and erosion prone regions of the country. Flood and erosion is a chronic problem for the occupants of the char areas of south kamrup. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries cause devastating floods almost every year causing loss of crops and property and damage to the environment. In south kamrup in particular foods have become more disastrous after the great earthquakes of 1897 and 1950 and public suffering has been on the rise due to flood and erosion occurring almost every year.
The bankline of the Brahmaputra forms the northern boundary of the area stretching from Palasbari to Nagarbera with a length of about 60 km. Here the river deposits its excessive sediment load resulting in formation of large number of chars. The study area, as most other char areas of the Brahmaputra valley, is also greatly affected by flood hazard. The normal annual rainfall in the south kamrup district is 2125 mm with its maximum amount occurring during a limited period which is responsible to a great extent for over flow of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries.

The char areas of Boko and Chhaygaon constituencies have been affected badly by the flood water of Brahmaputra, which devastate huge areas of agricultural land and human habitation during 1991-95. The another part of the Sontali mouza is affected by the flood created by the backwater of the river Brahmaputra. In the Nagarbera circle, almost all the mouza barring a few villages are affected by flood created simultaneously by the river Brahmaputra and the Kulsi. This part of the kulsi River is known as Jaljali River.

In the Palasbari Circle, the Dakshin Sarubansor Mouza is affected by the flood of the river Brahmaputra. Besides these Mouzas, Chhaygaon constituencies have been affected badly by the flood water of brahmaputra. The most affected villages are Goraimari, Mergenda, Hatipara, Fakirpara, Pukhuripara, Moumari, Champupara, Ghoramara, Hatisala, Bholkamari, Mahimari, etc. in 1986-95.

In the Nagarbera Circle the percentage of cropped area affected was high as 25.16 percent in 1986 and 26.17 percent in 1987. It is observed that the damages done by flood have been increasing gradually in almost all the mouzas of the immigrant Muslim dominated area.

It has been observed in the study area that the conditions of immigrant Muslim
Muslim people from Palasbari to Nagarbera in South Kamrup residing on embankments at Chhaygaon, Gumi, Alikash, Goraimari and Sontali. Nagarbera and many other villages are equally pathetic, and beyond description. They cannot expect to have two square meals, cannot expect medical facilities, education of their children.

The havoc of flood and erosion every year greatly influences the socio-economic activities of the flood affected people and bring about remarkable change to the ecology of the area. Drought is a serious natural hazard which can adversely affect agricultural activity of the immigrant peasants. During the drought spell, nothing can grow and even standing crops are totally damaged. Every year the region suffers from winter drought and summer floods.

Therefore, in order to remove the problem of drought, irrigation should be provided during the winter season for growing rabi crops and flood control measures should be adopted to protect the kharif crops.

Soil erosion is another important physical inhibitory factor affecting the agriculture of South Kamrup. It is a great problem faced by the farmers of the region. The Brahmaputra river has been creating a severe problem of soil erosion near its banks since 1954. Due to severe erosion causing heavy loss of agricultural land and settlement areas, there is excessive pressure on the existing lands. Thus the increasing pressure on land has greatly changed the settlement and land use pattern of the area. It is observed that the people who mainly depend on the primary sector for livelihood have suffered more.

It is found the erosion affected immigrant Muslim people of Nagarbera, Palasbari and its nearby areas are fighting a losing battle living in an embankment not for years but for decades. They are compelled to shift their temporary house every year due to heavy and unabated erosion. So to say, living condition is most unhygienic and deplorable; men, women, children and cattle are living together.
Table 6.9
MOUZAWISE ERODED VILLAGES IN THE SOUTH KAMRUP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Mouzas</th>
<th>Circle</th>
<th>Name of the Eroded Villages</th>
<th>Affected Area (in acres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sontoli</td>
<td>Chamaria</td>
<td>Latariagaon, Lataria Billor Pathar, Jatiadia No.1 Jatiadia No.2</td>
<td>2066</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Revenue Department, Govt. of Assam, 1991
in uttar distress without any source of livelihood\textsuperscript{62}. The male members who are wage earners roam about a great problem. It is observed that the impact of the flood and erosion hazard on human occupancy in the area is tremendous. In fact, it influence every sphere of human activity in the area to a great extent. Mostly affected mouzas in this way were Sontoli, Pub-Chamaria and Dakshin Sarubans mouza.

A large number of families of char areas in south kamrup have also lost their habitation. It is interesting to note that the flood and erosion affected indigenous people have migrated to the south for resettlement and the sandbar\textsuperscript{(Sandbar)} created by the river after erosion of villages have been occupied by the immigrants from Bangladesh either temporarily or permanently depending on the nature of chars. It is worth mentioning here that large chunk of indigenous poor people who had lost all their cultivable lands and other belongings including houses are languishing in uttar distress and sufferings on embankments and some other places for several decade because the governments during 1978-96 have not so far been able to give them alternative sites for their rehabilitation while lakhs of Bangladeshis are getting settlement and enjoying all other basic facilities in the adjoining char areas\textsuperscript{63}. It is also to be noted that the old Muslim settlers got more land area as assistance from the Govt. (Congress) for political benefit. The govs since 1983, the congress (I) in particular, have taken up some steps and chalked out a scheme to work on the damaged embankments\textsuperscript{64}. Because most of the immigrant Muslims are the traditional supporters of Indian National Congress, now known as congress (I), the party till very recently is considered their only savior\textsuperscript{65}.

A survey was also carried out to assess the present socio-economic condition of rehabilitated people in some areas of immigrant Muslims. From
the survey it is found that the people rehabilitated after 1980 have been suffering more. It is also observed that people of the lower income group are worst sufferers. Furthermore, a total of 261 hectars of land has been eroded away affecting 38 villages and 6011 families, the estimated total loss being Rs 2,75,42,500. The loss or damage of public utilities like school buildings, places of worship, market areas, roads etc. is too extensive. There is the problem of waterlogging to the north and south of the embankment besides lowering of fertility of agricultural lands to the south of it. There is always a threat of breaching of the present embankment at several vulnerable points. Of course, seven land spurs have been constructed during 1986 in the vulnerable section extending from Faturi to Panikhaiti under the Palasbari Gumi project to check the area from erosion. Still several erosion is continuing in the study area.

It is evident that most of the people of the area are poverty striken. So, the people of the area have no economic viability to construct a better dwelling. For this reason we see that most of the people are living in thatched houses and huts. An interesting factor is that the people living in the areas of comparatively more severe flood and erosion hazard do not want to construct good and permanent dwellings although they have the ability to do so. Damage of houses during the time of each flood is a common feature. So, the walls of the houses are constructed with bamboo, reeds, canes etc. in some areas. Jute sticks are also used in the case of houses of the immigrants.

The people of char areas in south kamrup are yet to see the light of all round development. They are deprived of many basic amenities of modern living. The foremost obstacles of the people is communication barrier. Even the patients suffering from life threatening diseases can not be shifted promptly to the hospital for difficult communication. In reality, due to the deficiency of caloric content...
in their diet, they fall an easy prey to different diseases. Because of their low income they can not get adequate treatment from the physician. It is observed that it is difficult for a poor peasant to pay the fees of the doctors visit. To purchase medicines and necessary food items prescribed by the physician. Sometimes it so happens that some of the nutritious foods produced by the peasants at their homelike milk, egg, fruits and vegetables which were highly essential for the upkeeping of their health, are required to be sold in order to meet the dire need of cash money essential for the subsistence of the family. That is why they can not take nutritious foods even from their self production.

Further, the environmental condition of the char areas is not congenial for keeping a good health of the peasants. Peasants of these areas do not get pure drinking water which is most essential for a good health. During the rainy season, flood afflicts these people 3 to 4 times within a year and after the recession of each flood when an unhygienic condition prevails. most of the peasants fall easy prey to a variety of diseases like cholera, typhoid, malaria, dysentery, jaundice, diarrhoea, etc.

In respect of sanitation system the study area is very poor. It is mainly because of the poor economic standard of the people. There is also widespread negligence about sanitation in the char areas all over Assam.

Sanitary worsens during the flood season and often it becomes the cause of epidemic. In the households surveyed only 3 percent have sanitary latrines while 34 percent use service latrines and the remaining 63 percent defecate on the open field.

There is no electricity in most of the immigrant Muslim dominated villages. Though the other villages have this advantage, only 19 percent have so far availed the opportunity.

It is known to all that char area villages in riverine areas do not have
electricity for which the student community suffer a lot. It is also observed that the literacy rate in the study area is not only influenced by the population explosion but also by the erosion hazard.

Apart from natural and biological factors, agricultural production and development are affected by some techno economic factors such as surplus farm worker, unfavourable landholding structure fragmentation and subdivision of landholding lack of irrigation, use of traditional implements, little use of HYU seeds, fertilizers and plant protection measures, problem of agriculture marketing, problem of transport and communication, lack of electrification and problem of credit.

Lack of industries, prevalence of traditional peasant agriculture, lack of employment opportunities other than agriculture and lack of proper motivation of and incentives to the people for self employment are some of the reasons of increasing overpopulation throughout the region while becomes a heavy burden on the weak base of the agricultural economy. The law of inheritance and the increasing pressure of population on agricultural land are the two main factors for fragmentation and subdivision of agricultural land holdings. The study region suffers from heavy rainfall during the summer months. The economic condition of the peasants depends to a great extent on the earnings derived from the sales of his surplus produces in the market. In the south bank region of the Kamrup district, traditional free market system of agricultural produces has been prevailing the village traders or agents of wholesalers are the main components of traditional primary market called ‘hat’. Middlemen like delals have great influence over the prices of agricultural products, although the state government sometimes fixes the prices of different goods, mainly those of rice and jute. Jute is the main agricultural cash crop which is produced in large quantities in the region. The secondary jute market of the region is situated at Bijoynagar, Nagarbera, Chamaria, Boko, Chhaygaon, Sontoli and Palasbari are the main
centres of primary markets where form a good number of bales of jute come to Bijoynagar.

It is observed that the villages traders give loan to the peasants before the harvest of crops or in the lean season on condition that the peasants must repay their loan at an exorbitant rate of interest in terms of crops valued at a very low prices. Sometimes they purchase the standing crops in the fields before harvest at a very low price.

This is how the village traders have been depriving the peasants of getting remunerative prices for their outputs. Due to the ignorance about the prevailing price in the market, the peasants do not set actual price from the middlemen who manipulate it to their advantage.

Uniform distribution of market centres is most important if the peasants are to receive remunerative prices for their products. If the market centres are unevenly distributed, then the peasants who are lining at a greater distance away from the market centres will get lower return from the sale of their produce because of higher transportation cost than the peasants living near the market.

Table 6.10 shows the circlewise markets in the char areas of south kamrup.

Table : 6.10

Circlewise markets in the char Areas of south kamrup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of the Circles</th>
<th>Market centres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Nagarbera</td>
<td>1. Nagarbera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Hekra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Mandira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Tupamari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Rangapani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Boko</td>
<td>6. Malibari</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The distribution of market centres have great influence over the prices of agricultural goods which influence agricultural production. The distribution of market centres in all the Circles—Nagarbera, Boko, Chhaygaon and Palasbari are found to be random. Thus, in the Nagarbera, Boko, Chhaygaon and Palasbari circles the peasants whose settlements are away from the markets can not sell their produces early and so they can not except good return as they have to sell their produces at the distance markets.

In the study area, peasant’s income from agriculture on the average is very low. Due to their low earnings, they can not wait for the lean period for getting better prices of their produces. It is a common practice of about 80 percent of the peasants that they sell their produces Just after the harvest or before the harvest of the crops to the middlemen. In order to repay their loans which are generally taken in advance from the Beopari or the Mahajan, they sell their produces at very low prices.

On the other hand, although the immigrant peasants also produce vegetables in large quantities, they are not benefited much, because their villages are far
away from Guwahati city. Because, vegetable growers who have their settlements near the Guwahati city are benefited to some extent by the sale of their products in the markets of the Guwahati city at better prices.

A developed transport and communication system is most important for the development of agricultural economy. Nagarbera is a place from where a large volume of raw jute or jute bales is exported. Therefore, a good and cheap transport system is highly essential for speedy import and export of goods in the area.

There are only two modes of transport available in the study area—roads and waterways.

Road transport in the char areas is highly essential for agricultural development as well as for all kinds of development. But transport services are not extended to many interior places of the area.

On the other hand, water transport in the study area is not available. Boat transport is the only means of transport in Nagarbera and Chamaria. Where from their is not other kind of communication to go to the char areas during the rainy season. Therefore, the people move from here to there with the help of boat and agricultural products are exported and necessary goods are imported by boat. Jute of the Nagarbera Palasbari are exported through the Brahmaputra. So, particularly in chamaria and Nagarbera, boat transport through the Jaljali and the kulsi Rivers plays an important role in transportation and communication. But this area is disconnected from railways or national ways and hence marketing of agriculture products suffer from various causes.

It is found that due to some physical constraints like physiography, drainage, soil condition and natural hazards like floods and bank erosion are found to be responsible for low development of transport and communication system in the
study area which has its direct impact on the socio-economic development process in the area.

Although we know very well that they have been the victims of situational deprivations than their material problems, more emphasis would be laid on their psychological problems. No doubt, the minority community is of the downtrodden like the S.C., ST, OBC, MOBC, women etc. but theirs are something different than many others. In terms of poverty, illiteracy, geographical backwardness ill health etc. there may have similarities with other downtrodden. But it is the Mia community who has been downing with the weightage of its problems and difficulties. Yet it could not ascertain their problems, enemies, friends, rivalries, duties and responsibilities etc. As a result, they have been unorganised as well as unplanned as a whole, which have undermined the good qualities in them.

It is also observed that a large section of the immigrant Muslims in south kamrup who are generally poor and illiterate are still under the command of the political leaders and village headmen or dewanies. Therefore, the common immigrant people must be very cautious against the political leaders who try to deceive them in the name of religion and communal feeling and do not work for the amelioration of their economic condition.

**FOOT NOTE**


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45. Ibid.


48. Ibid.


50. Ibid.


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53. Ibid.


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