CHAPTER FIVE
PROFILE OF THE BROAD FIELD STUDY AREA

5.1 GEOGRAPHY:

Sonitpur district lies between 92.16 to 93.43 degree east longitude and 26.30 to 27.01 degree north latitude. The district is surrounded by the hills of Arunachal Pradesh in the north, Nagaon district in the south, Lakhimpur district in the east and Darrang district in the west. Sonitpur district is spread over an area of 5,324 sq kms, covering 5,272.45 sq km in rural and remaining 51.55 sq km in urban areas. The district accounts for 6.79% of the total areas of the state and is the second largest district of Assam after Karbi Anglong district. The major rivers that flow in the district are Brahmaputra, Ziabharali, Gabharu, Borgang and Buroi.

5.2 ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS:

The District has three civil sub-divisions viz, Tezpur (sadar), Biswanath chariali and Gohpur. There are seven Revenue Circles, twenty fives Mouzas, fourteen Community Development Blocks, one hundred fifty eight Gaon Panchayats, 1,870 Villages and eleven Police Stations. The administrative headquarter of the district is located at Tezpur town.

5.3 DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES:

5.3.1 Population:

According to the 2001 census, the Sonitpur District has 16,81,514 population having a heterogeneous lot. During the period 1991-2001, the population of the district recorded a growth rate of 18.06 per cent, whereas the population for the same period in Assam increased by 18.92 per cent. It is clear that the growth rate of the district is almost equal to that of the
State. Like other districts of the State, Sonitpur too has a higher proportion of people residing in rural areas than those of urban areas. According to 2001 census, the population in the rural areas in Sonitpur district is about 15,05,719, accounting for 89.55% of the total population of the district, while in urban areas the population is 175794 representing 10.45% of the total population. This shows that the rate of urbanization of the district is low.

5.3.2 Population Density & Sex Ratio:

The district with 6.78 per cent area of the State, accommodate about 6.31 per cent of the State's total population as per 2001 Census. The density of population per square kilometer in the district is 316 persons as against 340 persons for the State as a whole. The sex ratio of Sonitpur district is 929 females per thousand males as against 935 for the State as a whole.

5.3.3 Proportion of ST and ST Population:

As per 2001 Census, the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population of Sonitpur district is found to be 87,900 and 1,95,083 constituting of 5.23 per cent and 11.60 per cent of the total population of the district respectively. The scheduled caste and tribe population together accounts for 16.83 per cent of the district's total population, which is lower than that of state figure of 19.26 per cent.

5.3.4 Literacy Rate:

According to 2001 census, the literacy rate of Sonitpur is 59 per cent against 63.25 per cent for Assam as a whole. The male literacy rate in Sonitpur district is 67.54 per cent and for female 49.73 per cent against 71.28 and 54.61 per cent for male and female literacy rate respectively for
Assam as a whole. This shows that the literacy rate of the district is lower than that of the state. However, the literacy rate of urban Sonitpur was 89.58 per cent as against 85.35 per cent for urban Assam.

5.3.5 Work Force:

The total work force of Sonitpur district consists of 6,34,723 persons in 2001, representing 37.75% of total population of the district as per 2001 Census. The male, female work force participation rate in the district accounts for 69.15% and 30.85% respectively. Cultivators and agricultural laborers together account for 46.68 per cent of the total work force of the district. Table 5.1 shows occupation wise distribution of workforce of the district according to 2001 Census.

Table 5.1
Distribution of work force in Sonitpur (2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of workers</th>
<th>Main workers</th>
<th>Marginal workers</th>
<th>Total workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Cultivators</td>
<td>157753</td>
<td>56562</td>
<td>214315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(33.90)</td>
<td>(33.38)</td>
<td>(33.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Agricultural laborers</td>
<td>33526</td>
<td>48487</td>
<td>82013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7.21)</td>
<td>(28.62)</td>
<td>(12.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Household industry workers</td>
<td>9209</td>
<td>9453</td>
<td>18662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.98)</td>
<td>(5.58)</td>
<td>(2.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Other workers</td>
<td>264796</td>
<td>54937</td>
<td>319733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(56.91)</td>
<td>(34.42)</td>
<td>(50.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>465284</td>
<td>169439</td>
<td>634723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Census Abstract, Census of India 2001. (Figures in brackets are per cent of column totals)
5.4 THE ECONOMY:

5.4.1 Agriculture:

Agricultural sector has been considered as the most important sector in the economy of the district engaging 47 per cent of the total working population. Out of the reporting area of 5,324 sq km in Sonitpur district, 1,609.45 sq.km is under net sown covering 30.23 per cent of the geographical area of Sonitpur district. Gross irrigated area is 7.77 per cent to the gross cropped area of the district, which is shown in table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Classification of Geographical Area, Sonitpur District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Geographical area</td>
<td>Sq. km</td>
<td>5324</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net sown area</td>
<td>Sq. km</td>
<td>1609.45</td>
<td>1999-2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross irrigated area to total cropped areas</td>
<td>Sq. km</td>
<td>202.61</td>
<td>1999-2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>Sq. km</td>
<td>1545.56</td>
<td>1999-2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average size of holdings</td>
<td>Hector</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>1995-96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: District level selected statistics, Assam-2003, Statistical hand book Assam- 2005

The production of food grains occupies the foremost place in the district. Rice, wheat and maize are the main staple food grains, which are produced in the district. Rice, the main staple food crop of the district occupies 56 per cent of the net sown areas in 2003-04, while the rest of the areas is mainly devoted to produce wheat, maize, jute, sugarcane, potato, rape & mustard, etc. The contribution of agricultural sector to Gross District Domestic Product at current price in 2000-01 is estimated to be about 34.67 per cent.
5.4.2 Industry:

The north bank of Assam is regarded as one of the most industrially backward region. However, Sonitpur district, in contrast to other districts of the north bank is somewhat advanced in industrialization, though major industrial units are still not established in the district. The large and medium industries of the district are Assam Cotton Mill, Chariduar and Tezpur Roller Flour Mill, Tezpur Nizone Biscuits Factory, etc. In 2001, there are 208 registered factories and about 2,333 registered small-scale industries in Sonitpur district. There are a large number of unregistered small and tiny industries in the district covering a wide range of products viz, rice mill, chira mill, rice bran oil, oil expeller, steel fabrication, wooden furniture, washing shop, exercise book, etc.

Apart from these, there are lots of traditional individual artisan oriented industries that are being run by local people. These age old cottage industries play a vital role in the village economy, significant ones being weaving, bamboo and cane works, local wine manufacturing, woodcarving, etc. Among the age-old handicrafts, the local people have a reputation in Japi making. In addition, almost every rural household in the district possesses a loom and manufactures decorative textiles mostly to meet their own requirements. Colliery baskets and tea plucking baskets made of cane and bamboo are also manufactured in this district. Colliery baskets are mostly exported outside the district and tea-plucking baskets are supplied to local tea gardens.

Regarding Handloom and Textile; the district has 6 handloom training centers, 5 units of Weaver extension services producing 14,303 meters of cloth in 2001-02 (statistical hand book, Assam, 2003). In Assam, there are 263 Handloom demonstration circles, out of which 13 units are
located in the district, covering 333 villages and engaging 497 part time weavers and 300 full time weavers of the district.

5.4.3 Transport:

The district is well connected with other places by rail, road and air. The National Highway-51 passes throughout the district. There are numerous district roads joining the important places within and outside the district. The district has a total of 2,422.240 km of roads, of which 210 km is National Highway-51 (NH), 68 km is State Highway and remaining 2144.240 km is PWD roads as on Oct 2003 (Economic Survey of Assam, 2003-04). In 2005, about 2,237 km roads in Sonitpur district are under PWD. The district is well connected by railway under meter gauge that passes through major towns of the district. Even the district is also well connected with the rest of the country through Air transport. The district has one civil airport at Salonibari (Tezpur) to facilitate air traffic movement with nearby districts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

5.5.4 Banking:

As on December 2004, the district had 80 branches of scheduled commercial banks and 30 branches of regional rural banks. The Aggregate deposits and gross credits of commercial banks and regional banks in the district during the same period are Rs 692 crore (deposits), Rs 298 crores (credit) and Rs 125 crores (deposits), Rs 64 crores (credits) respectively.

5.4.5 Gross District Domestic Product:

The Gross District Domestic Product (GDDP) of Sonitpur at current prices during 2000–2001 has been estimated at Rs.1,447.70 crores and per capita Gross District Domestic Product during the same period has been estimated at Rs.8,906. An analysis of the sectoral contribution by
broad groups reveals that during 2000–01 the contribution of primary, secondary and tertiary sectors to the gross district domestic product of Sonitpur at current prices stands at 37.49 per cent, 17.85 per cent and 44.66 per cent respectively.

5.4.6 Human Development Index (HDI):

In 2001, HDI derived for Assam, as a whole is 0.407 against 0.590 for India. It has been found that India comes within the Medium Human Development category, while Assam state would fall in low Human Development category. The HDI value of Sonitpur district was 0.356, and out of total 27 district of Assam, the ranking of Sonitpur district in HDI in Assam was 13th position. Like wise in Income, Sonitpur ranked-21, in Education Sonitpur ranked - 16 & Health ranked-12. (Source- Assam Human Development Report, 2003).

5.5 CONCLUDING COMMENTS:

The subsequence four chapters will deal with the information relating specifically to rural micro enterprise sector of the district, which where collected during the field investigations. The profile of the district drawn in the chapter is meant for ready reference as and when that would be require in the discussion in the forthcoming chapters.
REFERENCES:


