CHAPTER-II

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS
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Economy is an important constituent of the community life and plays a deciding role in the transition of the cultural and social structure of society. Every community has its own way to meet its basic needs for the existence of its members, failing which they are threatened with extinction. Nature here comes forward to fulfill their needs, of course, depending on their customs, traditions demographic structure. Owing to this, people with the same natural surroundings have developed different economic process to meet their ends. The Nepalese have also their own economic life, which help us to understand an important feature of their culture. Here, the economy deals with material associated with the people. The activities associated with the fulfillment of material constitute a part of economic life.

All societies have structured arrangements to provide the material means of individual and community. It is these structured rules that we call an economic system."¹ Economic system implies two things: the mode and structure of production and its relations, and the process of distribution existing and operating in a given socio-political set up. The mode of production implies technique and organization of economic activities relating to production. The structure of production means social class relations in the performance of production activities and in the process of distribution between different

social classes. "Economic activity is concerned with all such activities of man as are designed to secure him physical survival."

"Economic system is designed to satisfy material wants of the people, to organize production, to control distribution and to determine the rights and claims of ownership within the community."  

"Economic organization is a type of social action. It involves combination of various kinds of human services with one another with non-human goods in such a way that they serve given ends."

Following definition of the term *Economic system*, the mode of production in Nepali economy is traditional, indigenous and culture-oriented. The structure of its production-relations is monolithic in character, because the Nepalese particularly as such, are a singly body without any social class. They are culturally a social unit, at the same time, enterpriser and worker as well as producer and consumer. During colonial period, the structure of the economy was based on forest. They have a very simple technology, which fits in well with their ecological surroundings and conservatives outlook.

Moreover, their economy can be said to be of subsistence type. They practise different types of occupations to sustain themselves and live on "*marginal economy*".

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At socio-economic and cultural level the family is a unit of both production and consumption. The community is economically inter-dependent. The distribution is generally based on gift and ceremonial exchange.

Keeping in view, the above all characteristic of Economic system relating to Nepali people, this chapter deals with the Nepalese system of economic life such as, agriculture, land system, trade with its traditional system and exchanges thereof

Pre-Colonial Economy

Assam, the pivotal state of northeast India, being strategically located at the base of the Eastern Himalaya, lies on the path of various migratory groups, who at sometime or the other in the region’s history made it their home. This is what gave Assam its pluralistic and multicultural ethos. These migrant groups, however, assimilated into the host society to become a part of the distinct ‘Asamiya’ identity. The society accepted them, though not without the occasional checks and the merger was more or less complete. It was, however, the colonial intervention in the 19th century, which generated large-scale mobility of labour and commodities across borders. The process of migration renewed with vigour. Abundant wastelands and forest reserves, sparsely settled local population unresponsive to the various communities that followed the discovery of tea, coal and oil in the region, in the wake of the colonial conquest of the region (1826)

1 The form ‘Asomiya’ instead of Assamese has been used to specifically mean those people, who have accepted/adopted the Asomiya language as their mother tongue. Including those dominated in the state of Assam, the term also includes the Na-Asamiya Muslims, including the Nepalese and many other tribal groups, who speak the Asamiya language.
encouraged migration from different parts of India and across the borders. One group that responded to this need for labour was the Nepalese.\(^6\)

Assam's relation with Nepal is rooted as it was in its matrimonial alliances\(^7\) and ethnic ties,\(^8\) fostered pre-colonial migrations into it. The colonial conquest of the valley opened up the region to the Nepali highlanders. Beginning with deployment of the Gorkhas in the Assam Light Infantry,\(^9\) the British colonial expansion aided migrations. The colonial power required a pliant labour force to help open up forest lands for lumbering, settlement and tea plantations and the Nepali migrants, unlettered and unexposed, provided the perfect fit. Besides granting wastelands on favourable terms and giving pecuniary assistance for their journey to Upper Assam, they were encouraged to settle in the districts of *Lakhimpur*, Sonitpur, (*Darrang*) and *Kamrup*.

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\(^7\) Assam and Nepal had maintained matrimonial alliances in the 8th and the 16th centuries, when the Koch king Bishwa Singh married Ratna Devi of Kathmandu followed by Nildhavaj and Narayan. As a consequence a member of Nepali, Brahmin priests the pandas to the Kamakhya temple Chhetri Warriors, farmers, artisans and headsmen were brought from Nepal.

\(^8\) Suniti Kumar Chatterjee writes that the Limbu, Tamang, Lepcha, Magar, Gurung and Sherpa belong to the Kirata group and they live in the eastern part of Nepal, the Boros, Kacharis, Rabhas and the Mishing also belong to the Kirata group and are recognized as the scheduled Tribes of the Assam plains.

In course of time, compact settlements emerged in parts of Eastern and Upper Assam (Lakhimpur, Digboi, Sadiya) and in Western Assam (Sonitpur, Tezpur, Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar districts). These settlers along with providing the manpower to the expanding colonial economy began to lay the foundations of their own economies as pastoralists and marginal farmers, ex-soldiers combining in them the qualities of a good peasant and military discipline, artisans and semi-skilled professionals, very much in demand, in the urban as well as rural areas. His availability for any kind of chore, from an agricultural labour and dairy farmer to a porter, carpenter, and blacksmith or construction worker in roads made them easily acceptable to both the ruler and the local communities. These provided the pull factors into the region, which began to witness an economic transformation, opening the floodgates to both labour and enterprise. On the Nepal side “usurious conditions in Nepal villages created by taxation levied to finance expansionary wars and occupation and the rapacious system of the Rana family rule,” coupled with ecological crisis through deforestation provided the push factors for this process of migration to start and be sustained. In the modern times, an expanding population without further cultivable land, increasing fragmentation of land holdings and the chronic deficit of food grains ensured the continuing need for migration to ensure survival. This trend reflected in the census reports show that Nepali population in Assam increased from 21,347 (.37%) in 1901 to 88,306 (1.02%) in 1931.


It was only post-colonial period, after 1950, that the population increased significantly in Assam, indicating that the volume of suddenly expanded in the mid-20th century. The earlier trends migration found for manifestation in the *Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950*, the *Tripartite Delhi Agreement* of 1951 and the revised Indo-Nepal Agreement of 1956. All this, particularly Article 7 of the Treaty of 1950, ensured equal rights and privileges in terms of residences, ownership of property, employment, occupation, movement and other similar privileges on a reciprocal basis for both nationals of India and Nepal in both the countries. The non-requirement of a visa or passport for entry into either country overlapped vital issues of citizenship and nationality.\(^{12}\)

By the end of 1950, one in every 10 Nepalese had immigrated. The 1971 Census of India reports that there were 1.3 million Nepalese living in India.\(^{13}\) The Nepali population in Assam was also very high during the period from 1951-1971. Numerically, they rose from 1, 01,338 in 1951 to 3, 49,116 in 1971, indicating a nearly 3.5 times growth within a span of 20 years. The percentage of growth was 1.26% in 1951 to 2.38% in 1971.\(^{14}\) Table No.1.2 shows in the next page.

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\(^{13}\) Ibid, p. 211.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
### Table 1.2

**Growth of Nepali population in Assam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Nepali population in Assam</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>21,347</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>47,654</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>70,344</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>88,306</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1,01,338</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>2,15,213</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>3,49,116</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>4,32,519</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** *Census of India Reports, 1901-71; 1991. M. Hussain, 1993: 258.*

From the early part of the 19th century settlement of Nepalese in Assam took place. Many of them were retired soldiers of the British armed forces operating in the tribal and frontier areas. Besides, many Nepalese migrated to Assam in search of opportunities for gainful employment as graziers. Number of persons born in Nepal and included in the census enumerations in Assam in 1901, 1911, 1921 and 1931 were: 21,347; 47,654; 70,344 and 88,306 respectively.\(^5\) Decadal increase in Nepali Population

was mainly due to the steady flow of immigrants from Nepal. The figure for 1931, 88,306 represented only those who were born in Nepal. The Nepali population including the locally born Nepalese who were identified by languages spoken by them, namely, Rai, Gurung, Limbu, and Magar stood at 1,40,000 in 1931.\(^6\)

The Nepalese settled down mainly in the districts of Sonitpur (Darrang), Lakhimpur and Kamrup as buffalo graziers in the char (sandbank) lands. Considerable areas of such lands were declared as grazing reserves for the Nepali Khutiwalas. Therefore, number of Nepal born persons increased from 35,964 in 1921 to 46,914 in 1931 as shown in the Table 1.3

### Table 1.3

**Increase in the Number of Nepali Immigrants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Number of persons born in Nepal enumerated in Assam in the census of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonitpur (Darrang)</td>
<td>18,997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>8,527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>8,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>35,964</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Census of India, 1931, Vol. III, Assam, p. 53

Origin of economic life

In land-abundant Assam peasants enjoyed from time immemorial the traditional right to graze their cattle freely on the village commons and neighboring forests.\textsuperscript{17} This position had not altered for quite some time even after the annexation of the province. After all, every district had, for many years to come, large areas of un-classed and uncultivated land. In fact, when the first \textit{special grant rules} were introduced on 6\textsuperscript{th} March, 1838 by the British, the new rulers were so liberal that the grant could be made up to the extent of 10,000 acres at one go. Not only this; one-fourth of the total grant was allowed to be retained revenue-free by the grantee in perpetuity.\textsuperscript{18}

It is worthy to note that even as on 30\textsuperscript{th} June, 1951, 17,414 acres of land granted under the erstwhile Rules of 1838 subsisted in the districts of Cachar, Goalpara, Kamrup, Sonitpur (Darrang), Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur.\textsuperscript{19} Although the grant was made for Special Cultivation (cultivation of tea, and coffee) only, this highlights the extent of availability of land during this period. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Nepali migrants who entered Assam and took to cattle-breeding and dairy farming should have enjoyed free access to forests and grassland.

\textsuperscript{17} Amalendu Guha, \textit{Planter-Raj ToSwaraj}, People's Publication House, 1988, New Delhi, p. 91.


\textsuperscript{19} Introduction to Assam Land and Revenue Manual, 8\textsuperscript{th} Edition, Govt. of Assam, 1968, Guwahati, p. XII.
Grazing Tax

'The British administration had taken a firm root and the administrative machinery, which started with handful officials, grew larger with the passage of time. As a result, more funds become necessary to meet the increased expenditure on this account.'\textsuperscript{20} Even the assessment of land revenue made sometime in 1854 was revised upward in 1870.\textsuperscript{21}

The scope for mobilizing resources for the exchequer from other avenues was not lost on the British. And soon they introduced, for the first time, the concept of grazing tax, to be levied on every horned animal, which in 1888 were 8 annas for each buffalo and 4 annas for each cow per annum.\textsuperscript{22}

By now, the economics of the grazing fee had made its impact on the new rulers well. Consequently, grazing fee per buffalo was raised to Re.1 in 1907 and still higher in 1912. But there was no full stop. The new dispensation thought it expedient to revise the grazing tax further upward to Rs.3 per buffalo and 6 annas per cow in the valley.

In the hill districts, however, a rate ranging from Rs.6 per head of buffalo prevailed since 1917.\textsuperscript{23}

It is pertinent to note that a significant section amongst the Nepalese in the Brahmaputra Valley, in particular, comprised of professional graziers. During 1919-20,

\textsuperscript{20} The Report of the Assam Land Reforms Commission, Govt. of Assam, 1981, Guwahati, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22} Guha, op.cit., p. 91.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, p. 92.
revenue earned from grazing fees was to the tune of Rs. 2.77 lakh which accounted for by only 1.25 lakh cattle and; the overwhelming bulk of this cattle again belonged six thousand three hundred and nineteen professional graziers of whom, excepting a few hundred, all were Nepali graziers.\textsuperscript{24} This underscores the role of the Nepali graziers in the overall resource mobilization scheme of the Government. There is no denying the fact that they constituted the single largest group of professional graziers in the Brahmaputra Valley till events overtook them and encroachment and de-reservation impelled hundreds of them to seek alternative modes of life. Nevertheless, the Nepali cattle- breeders do still play a pivotal role, albeit under an altogether different environment, in the stat’s milk-economy.

With the steady expansion of cultivation and settlement of large chunks of land for Special Cultivation, the old scenario of land-abundant Assam was bound to undergo a sea change. ‘There was tremendous growth of the tea industry during the three decades of the nineteenth century. The acre-age, actually under tea in the province, increased from a little over 56 thousand acres in 1901....’\textsuperscript{25}

In the circumstances, grazing of cattle and their unrestricted movement could not have been allowed to continue for long. Therefore, the need to allocate certain specified areas with well-defined boundaries to be utilized only for the purpose of grazings appears to have been keenly felt by the British administration, which ultimately came to fruition

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, p. 34.
in the formation of *Village Grazing Grounds* (VGGs) or *Village Grazing Reserves* (VGRs) and *professional Grazing Reserves* (PGRs)

A PGR in Assam ‘is a special feature of the state and is not to be found in most of the states in India.’²⁶ It is interesting to note that when the rules regulating grazing reserves were first framed, VGGs were also brought under their purview. Accordingly, grazing fees were realizable even in a VGG until the Government notification No. 2001-R dated 23 June, 1937 deleted the words “villages grazing ground” from the rules and made them incapable to a VGG altogether. Till then, there was nothing in the grazing rules to debar a professional grazer from utilizing a VGG so long as he paid grazing tax and obtained a permit from the competent authority for the purpose.²⁷

**Old Sonitpur (Darrang) District**

The old district of Sonitpur (Darrang) has been the home to the largest number of Nepali herdsmen since the middle of the nineteenth century. One Dharmananda Timsina had a herd of nearly two hundred buffaloes as far back as in 1840 at a place called Erabari under Silabandha Mouza of the present Sonitpur district. In 1860 or thereabout, one Rudra Bahadur Sirpali owned about one hundred heads of buffaloes and cows each and lived at the same site of the present Loka Priya Gopinath Bordoloi Mental Institute at Tezpur.²⁸ Way back around 1890, one Atibar Pandy was the proud owner of three hundred and fifty heads of buffaloes and one hundred and fifty heads of cows at Pandepal

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²⁶ Report of the Estimate Committee of Assam Legislative Assembly, 1960-61, Govt. of Assam, p. 25.

²⁷ Upadhyaya, op.cit., p. 129.

²⁸ Upadhyaya, op.cit., p. 219.
(named after him). Another very important grazier was Hastabir Karki, who in 1900 had a **Khuti** (cowshed) with as many as one thousand heads of buffaloes at the same site where the present Naduar Block Development office stands. Between 1900 and 1940 many other Nepali migrants are known to have taken up cattle-breeding and dairy farming at various locations under Silabandha Mouza. The Borbhogia, Murahdal and Nagshankar Mauzas also had a significant presence of Nepali graziers since 1901.  

Sonitpur (old Darrang), which earlier was a sub-division under the old district by the same name, there were around two hundred Nepali grazier families at Hetou Chapari, Bhetamara, Chaulkhowa Chapari, Ballimari, Chiring Chapari, Lengrimara, Bangaputa and Dakhin Chapari since about 1880-85. All these were grazing reserves and Bir Bahadur Khatiwada was the **Mohsirder** appointed by the Government for collection of grazing fees. Besides, Mukhia Mahajan, who happened to be the most prominent grazier at Hetou Chapari, others such as Dal Bahadur Chetry, Gajabir Chetri and Jetha Mahajan exercised considerable influence in their respective area.

The Nepali graziers succeeded in establishing a rapport with the local communities. But the arrival of immigrants from East-Bengal in search of land for cultivation and settlement made things difficult. They occupied the grassland and this inevitably caused bad blood between them and the graziers. The graziers pleaded with the authorities for eviction of the encroachers, but step taken by the latter were almost always half-hearted.

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29 Based on statement of Shri Guru Prasad Upadhyaya, Madhupur, P.O. Jamugurihat, Distt. Sonitpur, (Assam). S-02-11

30 Upadhyaya ed., op.cit., p. 130.
However, unable to withstand the onslaught of the encroachers, the graziers ultimately disposed of their animals and putting their trials and tribulations firmly behind, shifted to safer destinations such as Udalguri, Rowta, Orang, Habigaon, Mazbat. Today, there are no graziers left at these locations.31

**Burachapari**

The Burachapori of Sonitpur district was recognized as a professional grazing reserve as early as in 1881.32 In the unclassed forests the ryots were allowed unlimited grazing free of payment for their plough and domestic cattle but Nepalese who reared cattle for dairy purpose were charged for the grazing privilege.

In the year 1892-93, 13,025 buffaloes and 1162 cows paid grazing fees amounting to Rs. 6772.33 This duty was collected “entirely from Nepali herdsmen who obtain a ready and lucrative rate for the dairy produce in the numerous tea gardens of the province.”34

Grazing fees were realized at the rate of 8 annas per head of buffalo and 4 annas per other horned cattle.35 Such grazing fees were unpopular with the graziers. In return for assistance in fire protection reserved forests in the region were left open partly for the

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31 Based on statement of Shri A.B. Chetry of Mangaldoi town, Distt. Darrang, (Assam). 10-04-11
33 Progress Report of Forest Administration in the Province of Assam, 1892-93, p. 10.
34 Ibid.
35 Progress Report of Forest Administration in the Province of Assam, 1892-93, p. 9.
grazing of cattle owned by the Nepalese. As for instance, in the Goalpara division of Assam, 105 sq. metres of reserved forests were left open for grazing in return for assistance in fire protection.\textsuperscript{36} The increase in the migration and settlement of Nepali graziers can be summarized from the table given below, which indicates the number of buffaloes taxed in the Brahmaputra Valley during the period 1895-1920.\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Number of buffaloes in Brahmaputra valley, 1895-1920}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & 1895 & 1900 & 1905 & 1910 & 1915 & 1920 \\
\hline
Number & 15640 & 18735 & 24346 & 40000 & 42000 & 86325 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

Henry Cotton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, noted in 1898 that many of the retired Gorkha Sepoys who were fond of settling down in Assam, preferred cattle grazing to cultivation. \textit{The Administrative Report of Assam 1912-1913} indicates that large number of professional Nepali graziers were migrating to Assam from the adjoining area of Jalpaiguri owing to the rise in the rate of graziers’ fees in that district.\textsuperscript{38}

The increase in the number of herdsman attracted the notice of the Government. With effect from 1 July, 1917 new rules were framed for the regulation of buffaloes was fixed at Rs. 3 and for other horned cattles at 6 annas per head in the Assam Valley

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 1895-96, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{37} Guha, op.cit., p. 92.

\textsuperscript{38} Report of the Administration of Assam, 1912-13, p. 5.
including the Garo Hills and the North-East Frontier.\textsuperscript{39} Despite the raising of fees and the exercise of closer control, there were large increases in the number of cattle. The revenue from this source doubled between 1916-17 and 1920-21 from Rs. 1, 83,000 to 3, 41,000. The total revenue of Rs. 2, 77,000 collected in 1919-20 from grazing fee was accounted only one and a quarter lakh of cattle actually assessed.

The overwhelming bulk of these cattle again belonged to 6,316\textsuperscript{m} professional graziers of whom excepting a few hundred, all were Nepali migrants.\textsuperscript{40} In 1937, the total area reserved for grazing grounds in the province at the end of the year amounted to 2,69,460 acres and total revenue actually realized was Rs. 2,82,356.\textsuperscript{41} For the year 1939-40, the total demand for grazing including arrears was estimated at Rs.3,53,115 of which only a sum of Rs. 2,47,052 or 70 per cent was collected.\textsuperscript{42}

Cattle farming were extensively carried out by the Nepalese. Many Gorkha soldiers after retirement took to cattle farming which was a profitable and economically viable profession. Gorkha goths (cowsheds) were established at the foothills of Kangchup, Bishnupur, Irang, and other places.\textsuperscript{43} In 1919 the Kanglatombi-Kangpopki Gorkha Reserve was carved out by the Government with an area of 140 sq. miles to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Guha, op.cit., p. 93.
  \item Extract Revenue Department, No. 79R, dt. 8 Jan. 1938, p. 2.
  \item Report on the Land Revenue Administration of the Assam Valley Division for the year 1939-40, p. 10.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
condense cowsheds and Gurkha settlers in a place.\textsuperscript{44} Grazing fees constituted an expanding source of revenue to the colonial state, a fact not realized by the Government. The steady increase in the number of cattle and grazing fees indicated the emergence of Nepali graziers as an important economic group in the society. In the Khasi hills, for example, Nepali herdsman were allowed grazing rights by the \textit{Syiem}s or chiefs who derived additional revenue from grazing fees collected from them. In 1933 the Tezpur Graziers’ Association was formed by the Nepalese at Singri, with Chabilal Upadhyay as its President, with the above objective, among others, to protect and preserve the lands in Assam. This indicated the extent to which grazing had become a major occupation and source of livelihood for the Nepalese. The threats faced by this grazing community from encroachment by new immigrant cultivators from East Bengal led to such mobilization.

\textbf{Agriculture}

In the overall colonial scheme of the British to augment its revenue by extension to the vast wastelands of Assam, the immigrant Nepalese were also encouraged to take up wastelands. \textit{The Administrative Report of 1905-06} reported that “a noticeable feature of the year was the increased settlement in Lakhimpur, Sonitpur and the Barpeta subdivision of the district of Kamrup”.\textsuperscript{45} The Land Revenue Administrative Report of 1913-14 reported that the Nepalese were establishing considerable colonies in Sonitpur district

\footnote{\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{45} Report on the Administration of Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1905-06, Shillong, 1907, p. 165.
where they held nearly 17,000 acres of cultivable lands. In 1914-15, 35,786 acres of land were settled by Nepalese of which half alone was in Sonitpur; in 1915-16 the extent of land held by them was 40,935 acres which in which 1916-1917 had increased to 13,725 acres.

The Revenue Report of 1919-1920 recorded that Darrang which was at one time sparsely populated was increasingly being colonized. It is reported that ex-tea garden coolies now hold one-ninth of the settled areas while the Nepalese in Darrang have taken up land to an extent unknown elsewhere being now in possession of 28,000 acres. In the year 1939-40, the total area of land settled direct with the ex-tea garden labourers and other immigrants in the Assam Valley division was 10,70,761 acres of which 1,04,773 acres (9.8%) were settled by the Nepalis. The district-wise break up land held is indicated in the following table 1.5

**Table 1.5**

**District-wise breakup of land held in Assam, 1939-40**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Goalpara</th>
<th>Kamrup</th>
<th>Sonitpur (Darrang)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nawgaon</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area (acres)</td>
<td>9790</td>
<td>11386</td>
<td>57186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Districts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>Garo Hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area (acres)</td>
<td>6896</td>
<td>13987</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The total land taken up by that year in Assam increased to 59,719 acres. Most of these lands were used for large-scale cultivation of sugarcane, which was a new commercial crop to be produced in Assam.\textsuperscript{50} This report also invalidates the assumption that Nepalis were not a cultivating class but only graziers and dairy farmers or manual job seekers. At least in Assam this was not the case. In fact in the district of Lakhimpur, Sonitpur (Darrang) and Sibsagar, sugarcane cultivation had undergone considerable expansion.

The Nepali migrants were generally granted land in the midst of jungle usually on the bank of a river, which they cleared and grew sugarcane. Subsequently they moved to a new site in the jungle. These Nepali cultivators produced a jiggery that the Assamese peasants could not compete and often the latter would then abandon its cultivation.\textsuperscript{51} This was particularly the case in Sibsagar district where the crop was earlier cultivated to a considerable extent. In 1886, 10 sugar mill workers were imported to Assam from Sahabad (district of Bihar) to train the cultivators in improved methods of sugar manufacture. The Assamese peasants displayed total indifference to this new training but the Nepali farmers made extensive use of these methods and mills in the district of Lakhimpur where sugar was extensively grown on a commercial basis.\textsuperscript{52}


\footnote{51} Ibid. p. 61

An invaluable forest produce of Assam was rubber obtained from *ficus elastic*, which used to be found in abundance in jungles of Assam. Soon a section of the Nepali migrants took to the extraction of this rubber and its sale to Calcutta market.\(^{53}\) This was a trade in which earlier the Marwari traders, locally called *keyas* or *kaias*, were involved. But the Marwaris were not procurers of rubber. They depended on the tribals of Arunachal Pradesh who procure the rubber and barter it with the Marwaris in exchange of consumer items. Since the Nepalese were procurers as well soon they took over the trade of rubber from the monopoly of the Marwaris. Another production and trade in which the Nepalese defeated the Marwaris was indigenous lac of Assam.\(^{54}\)

The Assamese lac was of two varieties: *ficus cordifolia* and *lacofera* which were reared in varying extent in all the districts of Assam though Kamrup was the main centre. The bulk of lac was collected from the hill tribes which were then brought down to the weekly *hat* at Palashbari, Chayagaon and Boko in the foothills. The earlier practice was that the Marwari traders would pay advance to the hill tribes who would later supply the stipulated quantity. The Marwaris would then export it to the Calcutta firms. The Nepalese outwitted the Marwaris by not only procuring the lac themselves but also selling directly to the Calcutta firms.\(^{55}\)

The other profession that the Nepalis undertook was that of dairy farming. The Burachapari of Tezpur was declared professional grazing reserve in 1881 thereby facilitating dairying by the Nepali community spread from Baraimala to Bhavani Devi

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\(^{53}\) Borpujari, op.cit., p. 61.

\(^{54}\) Ibid.

Than. The grazing lands of the Nepali community were classified according to the *mahajan* (money lender) of the area. Thus, Baraimara centre was under the leadership of Bidyapati, and Ama Chapari was under the leadership of Chhabilal Upadhyaya. Although initially an insignificant source of Government revenue was due to the steady rise of the Nepali immigrants and other graziers along with their cattle. To tap to this potential source the British Government not only increased the grazing fees but also tightened up the collection machinery. The assesses were divided into two classes: (i) professional graziers and (ii) agriculturists.\(^{56}\) While the latter were allowed exemption under the revised rules up to 10 heads of cattle, the former had to pay for the whole herd. Not only was the definition of a professional grazier and anomalies in assessment disputed but there were disputes also between the Government and the agriculturists over grazing fees and the tightening of the collection machinery during 1911-17. Since, the overwhelming bulk of these cattle belonged to the Nepali graziers; they were affected the most by such development.

A steady influx of Nepali graziers into the Brahmaputra Valley of Sonitpur led to an increase in cattle population and milk production.\(^{57}\) As a result of this increase in the number of cattle there was an increase in revenue collection from this source. It was Rs. 1, 83000 in 1916-17, which shot up to Rs.3, 42,000 in 1917-18 and to Rs. 2, 77,000 in 1919-20. In 1920-21 it was recorded as Rs. 341,000.\(^{58}\) In other words, the amount had doubled during the period 1916-17 to 1920-21. The rate of grazing fees per buffalo was

\(^{56}\) Guha, op.cit., pp. 92-93.

\(^{57}\) Guha, op.cit., p. 102.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.
Re. 1/- in 1907, which was increased to Rs.3/- per buffalo and 6 annas (36 paise) per cow. The rate of taxes per buffalo was Re.1/- until 1916 and thereafter Rs.2/-.

After the ex-tea garden laborers and immigrant peasant cultivators from East-Bengal, the Nepalese constituted the third largest single immigrant group to take up land for settlement and cultivation. However, owing to the reduce prices of their dairy produce the Nepalese took to jute and paddy cultivation.

In the year 1939-40, the total area of land settled direct with the ex-tea garden labourers and other immigrants in the Assam Valley division was 10,70,761 acres of which 1,04,773 acres (9.8%) were settled by the Nepalese. Beginning with the annexation of Lower Assam (in 1828) and the subsequent extension and consolidation of British rule throughout the region, the British tried to develop the productive forces of Assam. However, the pre-British economy was essentially a subsistence economy, the British tried to generate more revenue by bringing more wastelands under production.

As a result, it encouraged cash crop production and commercial activity.

An important and in a way, a much sought-after destination of Nepali herdsmen was Burachapari, the second largest river-island in Assam next to Majuli. It is lying to the south of Tezpur town. Settlement of Nepali graziers is believed to have commenced at Burachapari around 1870. The oft-quoted view that it was constituted as a

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59 Ibid.


61 Appendix IV, in Report on the Land Revenue Administration of the Assam Valley Division, 1939-40.

Professional Grazing Reserve in 1881 is, however, not correct, inasmuch as even the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation and the Assam Forest Regulation, two principal Acts under which rules were framed governing grazing reserves, were not in place in 1881.

This aberration notwithstanding, the popular perception that Burachapari graziers started paying regular grazing fees from around 1951 appears to be not very much wide off the mark. As per records in the office of the Deputy Commissioner, Sonitpur, Burachapari PGR; Professional Grazing was constituted vide Government notification No.3129R, dated 31-10-1916. This Professional Grazing Reserve has the unique distinction of churning out thirty-two graduates, six post-graduates one lawyer (till 1982) besides a host of others in various disciplines.

The Kaziranga episode of 1920 had a lesson for the Nepali graziers: they must have an organization of their own to look after their welfare. The Tezpur Graziers' Association-set up in 1933 and later renamed as the Assam Graziers' Association with Chhabilal Upadhyaya as a chairman was a direct outcome of this realization. It is the oldest organization of the Nepalese of the kind in Assam rendering yeomen’s service to the graziers of Burachapari, in particular.

In order to meet headlong the crisis of essential commodities developed at the end of World War-II, the graziers set up the 'Graziers Stores' in 1945, which procured

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63 Upadhyaya, ed., op.cit., p. 131.
64 Ghimire, op.cit., p. 24.
65 Bhandari, op.cit., p. 88.
all essential items of daily use for distribution among its members. Its president was Kewal Ram Adhikari, while Prasad Singh Subba was its secretary. Motilal Chhetri, who later joined the Assam Civil Service (since retired and settled in Guwahati), was the manager of the stores. The establishment of the Graziers’ Co-operative Dairy on 7th February, 1955, at Tezpur was another significant event in the history of Burachapari.66

Prominent among those who took the lead in the venture were Prasad Singh Subba, Narapati Ghimire, Nandalal Upadhyaya, Paramananda Ghimire and Kali Prasad Adhikari. They were actively supported by distinguished Assamese leaders namely, Madhav Sarma, Bijoy Bhagawati and Kamala Prasad Agarwala.67

Burachapari has witnessed many ups and downs during its nearly nine decades old eventful existence. Encroachment began to dog this pristine island since early thirties of the 20th century when landless people from East-Bengal began to make their presence felt. When during 1933-1941, large scale encroachment hit Burachapari, Lambodhar Kalita and Prasad Singh Subba organized a meeting at Tezpur to work out strategies and they adopted a resolution for the eviction of encroachers but to no avail.68 This is not surprising, as the Government of the day had no inclination to effectively deal with the encroachers for political reason. The year 1972 saw the most devastating nature of encroachment in Burachapari, but owing to the assiduous efforts and uncompromising

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66 Upadhyaya, op.cit., p. 131.
68 Bhandari, op.cit., p. 88.
stand of Advocate Khem Raj Adhikari, Bedai Sarma and Nara Bahadur Subedi encroachment stopped, though not for long.\(^6^9\)

The Government stopped the Professional Grazing Reserve status of Burachapari on 10.09.1975 when it was declared a forest reserve with 4406.25 hectares of land.\(^7^0\) But unlike in Kaziranga, here the graziers were not disturbed. They were allowed to continue where they were and carry on their trade as before subject to the observance of certain conditions and payment of grazing tax to the Forest Department, which was Rs.6.00 per buffalo and Rs. 3.00 per cow per annum. But the Burachapari graziers could not remain reassured for long. In 1988 the Government decided to include Burachapari within the *Laokhowa Wild life Sanctuary*.\(^7^1\) The graziers protested as no alternative arrangement for their rehabilitation was made. Litigation ensued and the matter became sub-judice. Presently, there are something like one hundred Nepali graziers families with a sprinkle of Assamese and Bihari.\(^7^2\)

**Animal Husbandry**

The constitution of *Professional Grazing Reserve* (PGR), *Village Grazing Reserve* (VGR) or *Village Grazing Ground* (VGG) have encouraged raising more animals and the success of the early settlers obviously inspired others to follow. They

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\(^6^9\) Ghimire, op.cit., p. 45, 46.

\(^7^0\) Ibid, p. 47.

\(^7^1\) Information collected from Mr. J.B. Hagjer, IAS, Secretary, Department of Forest, Government of Assam. 25-05-11

\(^7^2\) Based on the statement of Shri Somnath Ghimire, Chandmar, Tezpur, Distt, Sonitpur, Assam. 3-07-11
started animal husbandry on river banks and in river islands. Hence, many such islands bore Nepali names. Though most of these places have disappeared in the mighty river Brahmaputra, the names are etched minds of their progeny. Though rearing of cows and buffaloes was taken up side-by-side, more emphasis was given on buffaloes for their capacity to produce more milk and for their sturdiness. The buffaloes of the district of Sonitpur (Darrang) belonged to three district breeds: Assamese, Nepali and Bengali.\textsuperscript{73}

The buffaloes brought by the Nepalese were bred with the Assam local (\textit{Bubalus bubalis i.e., swam buffalos}) ones. They were basically raised under free-range system under which they were let loose most of the time and were driven out to surrounding jungles. One especially built bell was hung in the neck of a prominent she-buffalo of the herd kept it busy in the jungle grazing. The herds were disciplined and they maintained hierarchy. The herd-man tracked the herd even in dense forest only by listening to the jingling sound of the particular bell. The bell popularly known as ‘Goalparia bell’, perhaps, originated from Goalpara\textsuperscript{74} (a district in Assam).

The `cattle-rearing practice did not differ from that of buffalo. The yield from an adult cow ranged from two three litres/day. Mackenzie\textsuperscript{75} in 1885 gave the statistical accounts in Assam as follows:

\textsuperscript{73} Based on the statement of Shri Somnath Ghimire, Chandmari, Tezpur, Distt, Sonitpur, Assam. 3-07-11


\textsuperscript{75} Mackenzie Alexander, \textit{The North-East Frontier of India}, Mittal Publication, 1957, Delhi, p. 548.
Table 1.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surma Valley</th>
<th>Brahmaputra</th>
<th>Hills tracts</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>499</td>
<td>2,521</td>
<td>1,465</td>
<td>4,485</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though no documentary evidence is available on the history of graziers of Kaziranga, it is believed that most of the Nepaese settlers in the Brahmaputra Valley had their *khutis* in Kaziranga reserve. Graziers belonging to various communities like Nepali, Mishing and others set up their cowsheds at Kaziranga prior to 1880. Among the Nepalese, original professional graziers were: Hiralal Luitel, Komila kanta Thalai, Tulsiram, Nandalal Upadhyaya (Pokhrel), Chabilal Upadhyaya, Ramlal Upadhyaya, Sri Narayan Dhungel, Prajapati Dhungel, Dhanapati Bhandari, Hari Narayan Bhattarai, Gangadhar Poudel, Rabilal Bhandari *Arna chapari* was under the leadership of freedom fighter Chhabilal Upadhyaya. Noticeable graziers in this centre were Brihaspati Pokhrel, Laxmi Kanta Khatiwada, Bhaskar Dahal, Ramlal Nepal, Govinda Pokhrel, Laxmi Kanta Pokhrel, Baburam Das, Prabhum Bhattarai, Raghunath Neupane, and Dhanapati Bhandari. In Devithan area Churamoni Pandit was quite prominent.\(^6\)

In earlier days there was not much demand for milk. Neither was there organized marketing system. The milk used to be churned and the fat (butter) separated. From the fat ghee was prepared and marketed. The separated milk (*Tana Doodh*), which had no demand, was thrown into the Brahmaputra. Alternatively, curd was prepared from

\(^6\) Bhandari, op.cit., p. 43.
milk and sold. Butter was also prepared from curd and ghee was the resultant product. The *khutiwala* (Cowherds) utilized the buttermilk. Milk (in lesser quantity), curd and ghee were transported to nearby villages through boat for marketing. Initially, barter system prevailed, which was later replaced by currency. The costs of the items were as follows:

1. Cow milk
   Ana. 1/Seer

2. Buffalo milk
   Ana. 2/Seer

3. Ghee
   Ana. 7/Seer (whole sale)

Taxes

In 1888 the yearly grazing tax for buffaloes was Ana 8 per head and that for cattle; it was Ana 4 per head. The tax was raised to Rs.1 per buffalo in 1907 and still higher again in 1912. The grazing rules, which were framed in 1911, were somewhat modified after an official enquiry in 1915 under the pressure of public opinion.

Thereafter, the grazing fee was increased to Rs. 3 per buffalo and Ana. 6 per cow which was continued even after the British had left. In the hill districts a rate ranging from Rs. 4 to Rs. 6 per buffalo was in force since 1917. However, the mulch buffaloes were taxed at a concessional rate of Rs. 1 per head until 1916 and Rs. 2 thereafter. Though initially an insignificant source of Government revenue, these grazing fees were indeed an expanding source because of a steady rise in the immigration of Nepali and

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other graziers along with their cattle. The total number of buffaloes and cattle in the Brahmaputra Valley of Sonitpur between 1895 to 1960-61 is shown below:

Table 1.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>15,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>18,735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>24,346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>42,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>86,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-61</td>
<td>44,492 (Estimated)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Taxpaying cattle: 3,442 Nos
2. Non-Tax paying buffaloes 4,36,538 Nos

Due to the constant increase in the number of buffaloes and in the rate of fees as well as tightening up of the collection machinery, the Government revenue increased constantly as shown here under.

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78 Guha, op.cit., pp. 91, 93.
79 Ibid, p. 93.
Table 1.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Thousands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1916-17</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917-18</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-20</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-21</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The constant increase in the buffalo population and higher revenue collection through tax, no doubt, were clear indications of a growing Nepali population. The burden of tax payment was practically limited to the Brahmaputra Valley, which abounded in grazing grounds. For example, as against the total collection of Rs.2, 77,395 as grazing fees from this valley in 1919-20, only Rs. 25,841 was collection from the Surma Valley and the Hill districts.

In 1917-18, only six hundred and twenty two cattle owners of local domiciles were treated as professional graziers. The total revenue of Rs. 277 thousand collected in 1919-20 as grazing fees was procured from only one quarter lac of cattle actually assessed in that year under the rules. The overwhelming bulk of these cattle again

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as ibid, p. 93.
belonged to 6,319 professional graziers of whom excepting a few hundreds, all were Nepali immigrants. A steady influx of graziers into the Brahmaputra Valley led to an increase in cattle population and milk production. The number of Nepal-born persons in Assam increased from 21,000 in 1901 to 88,000 by 1931.

River Islands

The Nepali settlers of the Brahmaputra valley of Sonitpur District started this profession (cattle/buffaloes) since 1860. Also in 1920 when the graziers were forced to move out from Kaziranga, they must have occupied the fertile, verdant river islands. The graziers might have simultaneously started raising buffaloes and cattle in the river islands and on the banks of the Brahmaputra. Since the islands were of temporary nature, which would get submerged during the raining season, the animal husbandry practices adopted by them were of shifting type. In summer, due to floods the graziers had a difficult time in maintaining their herds. However, in the winter raising of animals was comfortable due to availability of grassland. Starting from Dhubri district up to the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh, the Nepali settlers raised cattle and buffaloes in numerous islands and on the riverbanks.

As far as animal husbandry and dairy farming are concerned, all the sites cited above have great historical importance. But here a few important grazing sites only where

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81 Ibid, p. 93.
82 Ibid, p. 102.
83 Bhandari, op. cit., p. 87.
84 Upadhyaya, op. cit., p. 146. For the names of the Islands see appendix I.
animal husbandry activities were carried out by graziers of Nepali origin, who held sway in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.85

Animal Husbandry activities in Sonitpur district

At Tezpur, the dairy activity was mainly concentrated in Burachapor. It has been stated that the Nepalese of Burachapor started their profession of cow and buffalo rearing since around 1860 and at one time the total number of buffalo heads in and around Tezpur area was 9,818 and cows numbered 11,722 together totaling 21,540.86 Among the early settlers in this island the following graziers were prominent: Raghunath Bhattarai (Gothe Mahajan), Raghurir Gharti, Dhana Bhattarai, Sri Krishna Bhattarai, Rudra Lal Bhattarai, Mahananda Bhattarai. Later, the following graziers joined them: Khadananda Adhikari (Khadu Mahajan), Gobinda Pokhrel, Bakhan Singh Budathuki, Mohasingh Karki, Pundit Suryakanta Ghimere, Rabilal Siyakoti, Padma Bahadur Sutar, Syamlal Powdel, Gopilal Ghimire, and Nrip Singh Subedi.87

It has been stated that the settlers reared buffalo’s at Tengakhuti, Pachmille area, the bank of Mara Bharali River and they extended their area up to where the present district jail and court are located. Had they desired, the heart of Tezpur town would have been main concentration.88 In the river Brahmaputra, south to Laukhowa reserve forests

85 Ghimire, op. cit., p. 14. For the names of the Islands see Appendix-I
86 Ibid, p. 15.
87 Upadhyaya, op.cit., p. 146.
88 Ibid, op.cit., p. 147.
some other smaller islands existed which were also occupied by the Nepali graziers. Burachapor was divided into smaller villages to suit the grazing practice. Some of the villages were: Sisow Anti, Dhane, Deshalipal, Betini, Tungpal, Baghara, Jhewani, and Dobhan. Constant soil erosion diminished Burachapor area. Prior to 1950 its land level was high, but the biggest ever earthquake of Assam in 1950 changed all that.\textsuperscript{89}

Informal education was started in Burachapor in 1919 and the first primary school was established in 1930. Formation of Tezpur Graziers’ Association in 1933 with graziers of Burachapor, the Association was reconstituted in 1970 with Nar Bahadur Subedi as President and Bhumi Prasad Poudyal and Dhan Bahadur Dhakal as Joint Secretaries. All of them belonged to Burachapor. The Tezpur Gorkha Chatra Sangha was formed in 1946 at Tezpur and almost all its office bearers were from Burachapor. They published \textit{Prabhat}, an official journal of Tezpur Gorkha Chhatra Sangha in 1946 under the editorship of Narapati Ghimire who hailed from Burachapor. The 4\textsuperscript{th} Annual Conference of All India Gorkha League was hosted at Tezpur 1947. And Burachapor played a very significant role in its success. The graziers not only supplied the entire requirement of milk and milk product, but Prasad Singh Subba, Pandit Narapati Ghimire, Dhan Bahadur Dhakal, Paramananda Ghimire, Bhumi Prasad Poudyal, Bishnu Bhakta Bhattarai, Bhakta Poudyal, Kali Prasad Adhikari, Guru Prasad Adhikari, Gangadhar Siakoti and host of others from Burachapor were the mainstay of the conference. Khemraj Adhikari, the first advocate of Burachapor was also the first to broadcast a

\textsuperscript{89} As informed by Tilak Sarma and Loknath Thapa of Gamiripal, P.O. Jamugurihat, Sonitpur, Assam.
29-08-11
bhajan in *Sagarmatha Anusthan*, a Nepali Programme of All India Radio, Guwahati, in 1948.\(^9\)

With the increasing trend of encroachment of grazing lands coupled with lack of a coherent policy of the government regarding de-reservation of PGRs and VGRs, there has been significant dearth of fodder areas over the years in Assam. Increasing numbers of encroachers are occupying grazing lands. The situation has come to such a pass that domestic animals have to compete with wild animals for space and grazing with the result that the former often fall prey to the latter and obviously, cattle/buffalo raising under free-range system is getting less and less lucrative.

Now-a-days, high milk-yielding cattle like Jersey, Holstein and buffaloes like Murrah, Surti are available who can be reared under intensive system of farming. Time has come for graziers to switch over from the free-range system to intensive of animal husbandry. Milk can also be processed to produce various products, suiting local taste. All these not only have the potential of ushering in a white revolution in the areas but are also destined to open new avenues for employment generation of educated youths.

**Oil Industries**

When all eyes of the world were riveted on Pennsylvania to see more and more astonishing scenario related to the petroleum discovered for the first time there in 1859 through drilling process, the eastern hemisphere was, not unfamiliar to the development. Rather a more interesting fact in this context is that almost 34 years before Pennsylvanian discovery and as early as 1825, Lt. R. Wilcox of the 46 Regiment Native Infantry

\(^9\) As informed by Guruprasda Upadhyaya of Madhupur, P.O. Jamugurihat, Sonitpur Assam. 3-012-11
happened to report the presence of petroleum in jungles near Namchik, a Singphow populated area on the bank of river Buri Dihing in Upper Assam.\footnote{Bhattacharya Pankaj: \textit{Itihasar Pam Khedi Esha Bachhariya Digboi Shodhanagarh; Prantik} (Assamese fortnightly), XXI/17, 1-15 August, 2002; ed. Pradip Boruah et al; Guwahati, Assam, p. 34.}

This report had created a sensation and it was soon followed by similar reports from many reporters and research activists till 1845. A few energetic companies rushed to the field with a view to digging out crude oil, known as liquid gold of the age, but the attempt proved abortive. Ultimately, it was left to H.B Medlicott of the Geological Survey of India. He spelt out as to how the whole process of oil extraction has to be gone about to bear fruits. Responding to him immediately, \textit{Messrs Stewart \\& Company Limited Mackillop} of Calcutta (today's Kolkata) came to the spot with all their traditional equipments and appliances and started boring mechanically to sink some wells along the line from Jaipur to Makum in the south-east part of upper Assam. The operation was successful yielding gallons of crude oil in 1867. But the spectacle of what is called 'oilfield' came into view only after two decades with the advent the \textit{Assam Railway \\& Trading Company Limited (AR&T Co. Ltd)} and the \textit{Assam Petroleum Syndicate} which worked full steam ahead at Digboi and Bapapung\footnote{ Deb Sarmah Dwijesh Chandra (2002): Saru Saru Mnuhar Saru Saru Katha; publisher Author himself, Digboi, Assam, p.55-56.} in Tinsukia district of Assam.

At first the ART&T Co. Ltd. (1881) was allowed boring and drilling within an area of 30 sq. miles from Digboi towards Makum in 1882. With the careful directives of its renowned engineer W.L. Lake in 1889, an attempt was made to sink wells. By next
year about 200 gallons of crude oil was drilled out from the field. The Company soon obtained approval for a ‘lease’ from the Government of India in 1892 to carry out drill not only at Digboi or Makum but also in the immediate vicinity.

A small refinery was established at Margherita in 1893. Eventually, the name of Digboi appeared as the first ‘oil field’ on the map of India and as the second one on that of the world.\(^3\) Later many such oil-fields appeared in many places of Assam, namely, Naharkatia, Moran, Geleki, and Rudrasagar. Considering the increased amount of oil production, the ART & T Co Ltd opened a separate company named the Assam Oil Company Limited (AOC) in 1899 with a view to managing this oil industry independently. The refinery from Margherita was shifted and a new refinery was established at Digboi. The Digboi Refinery started the works of kerosene production, wax extraction, crude oil distillation, drum plant, dubs cracking unit and many other modern plants in phased manner.\(^4\)

In the meantime, the Burma Oil Company (BOC) of the United Kingdom also came forward in 1921 to shoulder the responsibility of commercial and technical sides and thus help the AOC.\(^5\) The role of the Oil India Limited (Oil) in 1959 in oil industry of Duliajan was to cover the work-load of the newly discovered oil-fields at Naharkatia and Moran. While sporadically, the entire region was thus identified as an oil-rich territory,

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\(^3\) Ibid, Pp. 55-61

\(^4\) Ibid, Pp. 77-92.

\(^5\) Ibid, Pp. 93
the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) also appeared on the scene to raise a new dimension.96

**Contribution to the Oil Industry**

The contribution of the Nepalese to the oil industry in Assam is immense. By the 1930s with all the modern types of buildings, and bungalows, lanes and thoroughfares, offices and clubs, drainage and water-supply, shops and markets, schools and hospitals, temples and festivals, sports and theatres Digboi was emerging up as one of the best townships in Assam.97

Credit for this dramatic transformation goes to the laborers, more particularly to the manual work force. The Company alone had about 8,000 workers from various communities in different capacities apart from the thousands of contractors and the civilians in the suburbs at that time. The rank of 'executive' was usually the Agreement holders; 'Babus' were usually clerks, operators, supervisors; the laborers were usually the fitters, turners, welders, drivers and other manual workers. Among the laborers from various activities like Bengali, Telegu, Punjabi, Assamese and Nepali were in sizable numbers.98 In order to procure permanent laborers the Assam Oil Company in its initial stage had to face a problem. Those, who happened to join the work, were also apt to receive their first payment though even settle down there itself.

Hence, the company had no way except engaging some agents to fetch labourers from Shillong, Darjeeling and even from Nepal to employ in the work with bond or

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96 Deb Sarma, op.cit., p. 105.
'agreement'. Thus, they could not quit the job before stipulated time being bounded under 'agreement'. The 'agreement' was dubbed 'girmit' by the common folk. For the settlement of these 'girmit' Nepali laborers the Company constructed a few lines or barracks along the station-Muliabari road, near the railway station and either side of the Shillong-road'...... The Nepali settlers on girmit line started celebrating the first Nepali Durga Puja though the exaction year is not known.99

In this regards an interesting letter dated 28 September, 1923 issued by the General Manager of the AOC to one Jit Bahadur can be cited here in the context of recruiting 'coolies' (laborers). Jit Bahadur was none but the father of a great freedom-fighter and leader of workers' union in later period namely, Bhakta Bahadur Pradhan of Digboi. The letter states:

"Dear sir, We wish you to proceed at once to Raj bhakta khowa, Doors, North Bengal to recruit coolies for work in the refinery here as they are urgently required. ....."
The followings are our terms: 1. All coolies to remain one full year at Digboi, 2. Wages to be: Men-16 per month, women- Rs. 8 per month... we are prepared to pay commission at the rate of Rs. 5 per coolie recruited.... Yours faithfully, General Manager.100

No doubt, in this way both for extracting petroleum and for other miscellaneous works in the refinery, the Nepalese were employed since the inception of the industry. Even in the initial period of oil industry in Assam, it is found that the Nepalese on


account of their daring nature and stout build and loyalty and fidelity were chosen as the
fore-runners to enter the nearby jungles for cleansing and making the site suitable for
industry. Later among the recruited laborers who settled on some of the lanes and roads
of Rastapati, Nalapati, Itabhatta, Mulabari, Toplobasti, Agreement Line, Dhaka Line, and
Goruphatak, in the industry complex and its vicinity, almost one hundred percent were
the Nepalese. ¹⁰¹

Here a list with a few names of such Nepalese working in the AOC during the
1920s and 1930s is given with their year of joining – Thumi Sonar (1916), Pahal Sing
Gurung (1920), Hasta Bahadur Thapa (1924), Ram Bahadur Chetry (1926), Dil Bahadur
Chetry (1926), Nara Bahadur Sonar (1926), Kamal Sing Thapa (1927), Motilal Rana
(1928), and Dasi Sonar (1939). ¹⁰²

Thus, the Nepalese were beyond doubt, the unsung heroes of the early thirties and
forties of the last century who toiled in the dumpjungles, lacerated with thorns, their life-
blood half drained by leeches and often with poor fare look forward to…… ¹⁰³ With
robust build and high degree of endurance they were preferred over others by the British
operators, specially for manual work.

Deployed in the first phase for clearing jungles and constructing roads, they were
rewarded latter with the jobs for preparing drill-sites, transporting and handling
machineries and appliances. The industrial site being not only undulated but also

¹⁰¹ ibid, p. 187.

publishing Co. Ltd, 1951, London.

inaccessible dense humid forest with thorny creepers infested with the dreaded beasts and insects like pachyderms, tigers, jackals, snakes and leeches, it was not a pleasant place to work in any capacity on the part of the local people, particularly the farmers-turned-laborers who were prone to vanish during the harvesting seasons with little certainty of returning.\textsuperscript{104}

The Nepali speaking people from Assam were zealously engaged by the BOC in the drilling activities. Being unskilled they were at first recruited as laborers on contractual basis and were subsequently inducted in Company's payroll whenever the British masters were impressed by their hard work and fidelity.\textsuperscript{105} The BOC, in fact, had welcome all workers even from Nepal or Burma. Ultimately, most of them did not return to their place of origin and they settled in and around Digboi, Duliajan, Tinsukia and Dibrugarh in upper Assam after their retirement or release from job. They become integral parts of the Assamese society. Their offspring have been engaged in these industries in different capacities.\textsuperscript{106} However, a section of workers, who went back to their place of origin, had not been lucky enough to engage to manage jobs for their progeny in the Company. It seems that the Nepalese preferred to settle down in the eastern part of Assam before the oil industry came up there. The first such Nepali recruited by the AOC in its payroll dates back to 1918-20.\textsuperscript{107}

During the Second World War years (1939-45) many Nepalese from Myanmar, erstwhile Burma entering as refuges were inducted into the Company. Eventually, when

\textsuperscript{104} Upadhyaya, op.cit., p. 167.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, p. 167.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid, p. 167.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
the Oil was incorporated in 1959 for the purpose of developing newly discovered oilfields at Naharkatia and Moran, the Nepalese alone constituted almost more than one-fourth of the total manpower transferred to Duliajan and that is said to be the highest work force community-wise. Though over the years their number has dwindled considerably, they still constitute around 5% in the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and 4% in the Oil respectively. A few from this community have been working in the ONGC in different capacities ranking from labor to engineering, technician to chemist, assistant teacher to principal, chowkidar to manager and so on. A dozen executives from this community are also working presently in this industry in different capacities, a few of them in middle level management also.

It should be mentioned here that the Nepalese have been working in the Oil Industry in Assam not only as workers they have equally been involved in safeguarding the interest of the entire working class since long back. On 22 December, 1938 the Assam Oil Company Labor Union (AOC Labor Union) was formed in a nearby Village of Digboi at Borbil in a secret meeting. The office bearers were President- Jaganath Upadhyaya, Vice-president- Sadhu Sing, joint Secretaries- Pritam Sing and Jadhu Nath Bhuyan and other eleven executive members. Two executive members in it from the Nepali community were Bhakta Bahadur Pradhan and Aiman Thapa. The Union was

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108 The information contained is collected from different sources, Viz, books, records and from interviews with old -timber oil Indians’ – Damodor Upadhyaya Dy. Chief Chemist, ONGC, Duliajan, Assam.

2-01-12

109 As informed by Sri Purushottam Bhandari, Lecturer, Jagiroad College, Assam. 2-03-12
registered under Registration No. 43, affiliated to the INTUC with Affiliation No. 8155.\textsuperscript{110}

The Union struck work from 3 April, 1939. The six month strike of the AOC, Digboi had severe repercussion on the employees of the Union. More than 1,300 Nepali employees were victims of this strike. Taking advantage of the semi-military regime enforced by the ordinance of the AOC authorities with the help of the civil authorities, the distress of those 3,000 laborers evicted from Digboi knew no bounds. The labor leaders were either put under arrest or forcibly evicted from Digboi and escorted by police outside Assam.\textsuperscript{111}

The Oil Industry may be given credit not only for inviting the Nepalese of different walks of life to its core complex but also for contributing in the evolution of a cultured section in and around it. Though they hailed from different areas, including some from foreign countries, they all, in course of time, constituted what is known as the ‘Assamese-Nepalese society’ and thus assimilated into the larger Assamese society.

While holding jobs of various natures in different capacities they also set up institutions and establishments considered essential for a thriving nationality- the Nepali nationality. With their district cultural traditional and rich linguistic and literary heritage they have been here for decades.


(ii) Jaishi, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 109, 178.

(iii) As informed by Sri Debi Charan Sedai, Lecturer, Digboi College, Assam. It Sri Sri Nepali Mandir, 1942, Digboi.
History is witness to their accommodative qualities wherever they happen to live. They mould and nourish social, cultural or religious institutions. They were the ones to constitute the Nepali Thakurbari Committee-cum-Bishnu Mandir Committee (1943)\textsuperscript{112} and build the Mandir with a hall at Tapalabasti, Digboi. The Nepali society of Digboi can full credit for the establishment of a Nepali medium school called AOC M.E. School (1947) and setting up a publication trust, namely the Buddha Kumari Smriti Prakashan (1981).

Bhakta Bahadur Pradhan, leading light and pathfinder of the AOC Labor Union and role model for the Nepali belonged to Digboi. One should not also forget the alacrity with which the Nepali community of this town stood as one man and rendered yeoman service both during the Second World War (1939-45) and the Chinese aggression (1962). Politician and social activist Chandra Bahadur Chetry (Ex-MLA) and litterateurs like Haribhakta Katuwal, Man Bahadur Chetry, Agni Bahadur Kshatriy of Sonitpur district and above all Juddhabir Rana, an artist of considerable repute – all of whom hail from Digboi – are proud of Assam.\textsuperscript{113}

The Nepali society of Duliajan, another ‘by-product’ of Oil Industry has earned reputation in the spheres of culture, literature and sports. The Duliajan Nepali Samaj (1962) can rightly claim credit for it.\textsuperscript{114} Apart from it, the Oil Industries have contributed a lot in the socio-economic life of the Nepalese. Most of them who worked in the Oil Industries after retirement settled in and around Digboi, Duliajan, Tinsukia and

\textsuperscript{112} Upadhyaya, op.cit., p.169.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
Dibrugarh in Upper Assam. Historically, there evolved cultured groups who became integral parts of the Assamese society. Their offspring have been engaged in these industries in different capacities.

As stated above, agriculture has been the principal means of livelihood of the Nepalese, a few of them are also engaged in some occupation like Government or semi Government services, small business, dairy farming or even engaged in different kinds of works as daily wages earners of the district.

In Dath Kala, the interior most village of Sonitpur District, 72% inhabitants practice agriculture as the principal means of livelihood. The percentage of population engaged in agriculture in Missamari, Teleni and Tinsuti of Sonitpur District is 70%, 60% and 60% percent respectively.

On the other hand, it decreases to 32% both in Gangsmouthan and Rangachakua, 24% and 20% in Jamuguri and Gameri of Sonitpur District. The geographical location and the poor communication facilities do not permit them to opt for non- agricultural activities in the neighbouring towns.

Generally speaking, proximity to towns and communicable roads provides the scopes for additional sources of income to the village people. The village Jamuguri is situated nearby Semi Township like Jamugurihat and Sootea. As a result, 20% of the inhabitants of this village are engaged in business. In addition to this, the villagers are engaged as salesmen or helpers to the owner of the shop keeper and meet expenses for livelihood. As most of the daily wage earners are illiterate, they have no scope for regular
jobs. Sometimes, they are engaged in construction of roads and other miscellaneous works in and around the village. But most of the labourers of the villages are basically landless people or owners of negligible area of land, which is extremely inadequate for cultivation. Naturally, they have no other way but work as labourers in the fields of other inhabitants who have sufficient land. This is shown in the table 1.9

Table 1.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the village</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>service</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Cattle rearing</th>
<th>No. of house holder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dath Kala</td>
<td>36 72%</td>
<td>5 10%</td>
<td>3 6%</td>
<td>5 10%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleni</td>
<td>30 60%</td>
<td>2 4%</td>
<td>6 12%</td>
<td>9 18%</td>
<td>3 6%</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missamari</td>
<td>35 70%</td>
<td>6 12%</td>
<td>5 10%</td>
<td>4 8%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangmouthan</td>
<td>16 32%</td>
<td>25 50%</td>
<td>8 16%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gameri</td>
<td>10 20%</td>
<td>30 60%</td>
<td>9 18%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamuguri</td>
<td>12 24%</td>
<td>22 44%</td>
<td>10 20%</td>
<td>5 10%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangachakua</td>
<td>26 32%</td>
<td>10 20%</td>
<td>8 16%</td>
<td>6 12%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinsuti</td>
<td>30 60%</td>
<td>7 14%</td>
<td>6 12%</td>
<td>7 14%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48.75%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>13.75%</td>
<td>10.25%</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey conduction.

The table clearly shows the occupational engagements of the Nepali people in some villages. Those who are engaged in Government or semi-Government services constitute 60% in Gameri and 50% in Gangmouthan. The percentage of service holder is 44% in Jamuguri, 20% in Rangachakua, 14% in Tinsuti, 12% in Missamar, 4% in Teleni
and 10% in Dath Kala respectively. The teachers who are engaged in government service mostly teachers in the Primary, Middle English School and High English School in their own village or nearby semi town. Some are engaged in defence service and Panchayat Secretary in the offices of the nearby urban or semi-urban locality. Two persons are engaged in Deficit College and one person of Dath Kala engaged in Higher Secondary School. A tendency to migrate permanently in different towns of the state appears among the persons serving in the nearby town area leaving their original place of residence.

The percentage of persons engaged in the business industry among the Nepalese is very negligible. In Jamuguri 20% are engaged in business. In other villages, the percentage is less than 20. What is significantly observed is that the persons adopting small scale business, government or semi-government services generally have agriculture as their notable secondary occupation or those persons who are landless for which they are compelled to do small business to meet their livelihood.

It is also seen in the surveyed villages like Gameri, Gangmouthan, Tinsuti and Rangachakua, that a small scale of tea plantation has been adopted for their secondary livelihood. Besides it, a large number of the youths of the surveyed villages used to move in different metropolitan cities of the country and engaged in company’s jobs. During the survey it is observed that this phenomenon is due to increase in number of educated unemployed youths. In this way, a source of earning has also been adopted.

So far as the use of technique of production in the agricultural sector is concern, they use the age old method of production. Unavailability of institutional credit, disguised unemployment, lack of marketing facilities and storage are the major problems of the peasants. However, with the passage of time they are also taking the advantage of modern
techniques of production by using tractors or diesel pumpsets instead of bullocks or buffaloes as the implement of their cultivation.

Irrigation facility in the Nepali villages is not satisfactory. Out of eight villages surveyed, irrigation facility is not available in Dath Kala, Teleni, Jamuguri and Tinsuti. In Gangmouthan, Gameri, Rangachakua and Missamari, only a few (less than 10%) can afford to have irrigation facilities. This is clearly shown in table 1.10

**Table 1.10**

**Nepali families with irrigation facilities in different land holding category (in Bighas)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the village</th>
<th>No irrigation</th>
<th>Less than 10</th>
<th>11-19</th>
<th>20-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50 &amp; above</th>
<th>No. of house holder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dath Kala</td>
<td>50/100%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleni</td>
<td>50/100%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missamari</td>
<td>48/96%</td>
<td>2/4%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangmouthan</td>
<td>45/90%</td>
<td>5/10%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gameri</td>
<td>45/90%</td>
<td>5/10%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamuguri</td>
<td>50/100%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>N - L</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangachakua</td>
<td>45/90%</td>
<td>5/10%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinsuti</td>
<td>50/100%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50/100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>386/95.75%</td>
<td>17/4.25%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey conduction.
Although, the provision of irrigation is being done by the Government but most of the systems of irrigation became ineffective due to the negligence of the department as well as no-sanctioning of money by the Government for the repairing works. As a result, the cultivators have to depend on rainfall for water.

Though water supply scheme has been covered in the eight sample surveyed villages for fresh water in the initial stage, it has not been properly implemented due to the negligence of the government. Most of the villagers use well and tube well for drinking water. They are the owners and cultivators of land, except a small number of labourers who work in others' land. This is shown in table 2.2. In Jamuguri 84%, Tinsuti 80%, Missamari 76%, Gameri 74%, Rangachakua and Teleni 72%, of the families possess less than ten bighas of land. The percentage in this category in Gangmouthan is 60%. Only in Dath Kala village, the percentage is 46% in this category. An analysis of the table 2.1 is clearly shown on the next page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the village</th>
<th>Less than 10</th>
<th>11-19</th>
<th>20-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59 above</th>
<th>No. of house holder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dath Kala</td>
<td>23 46%</td>
<td>12 24%</td>
<td>5 10%</td>
<td>4 8%</td>
<td>4 8%</td>
<td>2 4%</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleni</td>
<td>36 72%</td>
<td>12 24%</td>
<td>2 4%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missamari</td>
<td>38 76%</td>
<td>8 16%</td>
<td>6 2%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangmouthana</td>
<td>30 60%</td>
<td>12 24%</td>
<td>7 14%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gameri</td>
<td>37 74%</td>
<td>13 26%</td>
<td>6 12%</td>
<td>3 6%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamuguri</td>
<td>42 84%</td>
<td>4 8%</td>
<td>3 6%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangachakua</td>
<td>36 72%</td>
<td>10 20%</td>
<td>2 4%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinsuti</td>
<td>40 80%</td>
<td>6 12%</td>
<td>2 4%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td>19.25%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>2.75%</td>
<td>1.75%</td>
<td>0.75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source: Field survey Results**

The above table clearly shows that the families possessing land within the limit of 40 to 50 or more are available only in four villages which fall in the rural category. Another most important feature of the villages is that except Tinsuti and Rangachakua all other six villages are situated nearby the Brahmaputra River which during the rainy season affect the fields by flood and sometimes destroy the crops and cause low production. The survey also reveals that the villages are not interested to take loan from the banks.
The rate of expenditure among the Nepalese is higher than that of their income. Very few have savings for their future. Of course, now-a-days, a tendency to save money for the future has been increasing. Their income become low, their propensity to consume is very high. In order to meet the social as well as religious obligations, a large amount of income is spent on performing rituals and religious rites.

Paddy is the main crop grown in the Nepali villages. Besides food grain crops, the Nepalese also use to grow garden crops which are cultivated with the general methods of agriculture. By and large, most of the families have garden crops in and around their homesteads. The garden crops are potatoes, turmeric, ginger, garlic, cauliflower, cabbage and oil-seeds.

So far as the annual income of the Nepali families in the villages surveyed by the researcher is concerned, (Table 2.3), 9.75% families in the eight villages have annual income of within the bracket of less than Rs. 5000.00 per year which is inadequate for a family of seven or eight. The percentage of families falling below this category is 14% each in Teleni and Missamari and 12% in Jamuguri. However, as per survey report it is less than 10% in Dath Kala, Gameri, Rangachakua and Tinsuti.
Table 2.2

Approximate Annual Income in Nepali Villages (Family wise in Rupees)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Village</th>
<th>Less than Rs. 5000</th>
<th>5000 to 10000</th>
<th>10000 to 15000</th>
<th>15000 to 20000</th>
<th>20000 &amp; above</th>
<th>No. of householder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dath Kala</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleni</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missamari</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangmouthan</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gameri</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamuguri</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangachakua</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinsuti</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.75%</td>
<td>23.25%</td>
<td>16.75%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>38.75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey conduction.

As it is already been mentioned that 72 percent of the families of Dath Kala are engaged in cultivation, but due to lack of irrigation facilities, their annual income is very low. Similarly, lack of modern means of agriculture is also responsible for low income of the Nepali villagers. Only 38% of these eight villages have their annual income more than 20,000. 00. In fact, those families who have their Government services, they fall under this category. This group side by side of their service, engaged in cultivation as their subsidiary occupation.

There are several factors responsible for their economic backwardness. Firstly, the agricultural system is yet traditional system. No modernized system of agricultural
technique has been adopted. They have to depend on nature. During rainy season, most of the crops are damaged by the water. The erosion of riverbank easily accelerates the outflow of water in the field.

However, almost all the surveyed villages belong to the remote area there are no business places that commercially developed

**Road communication**

Communications links to Nepali villages are not satisfactory. Specially, during monsoon it is very difficult to reach these villages. For instance, Dath Kala, Teleni and Gangmouthan are an interior villages inhabited by this community. It is situated at a distance of 110 km. west of the Tezpur town being its subdivision at Gohpur, also a distance of 25 km. North-west bordering Arunachal Pradesh. These three villages are situated on the bank of the river Brahmaputra facing always the threat of erosion. Teleni is nearby Mailbazar which is connected with Bokakhat of Golaghat district through streamer. However, now-a-days, this communication has been discontinued due to the lack of passengers. Another village of Sonitpur District under Biswanath Chariali subdivision is Tinsuti, also an interior village at a distance of 16 km. north of the National Highway. The village Tinsuti is adjacent to Arunachal Pradesh.

**Education**

In respect of education facilities in the surveyed villages, 32% people of Teleni and Missamari are still illiterate. Among the literates also, 51.75% villagers of the eight villages can write their names only. In this category literates upto class X or under matric are covered. The village Teleni has only one Primary School.
There are one Primary, Middle English, Girls’ M.E. and one High School at Dath Kala village. The Girls’ M.E. School is still venture stage and managed by the villagers themselves.

Table 2.3

Level of Education in Nepali Villages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the village</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
<th>Upto class X</th>
<th>Matriculate</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
<th>Post-Graduate</th>
<th>No. of persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dath Kala</td>
<td>12 24%</td>
<td>27 54%</td>
<td>6 12%</td>
<td>2 4%</td>
<td>2 4%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleni</td>
<td>16 32%</td>
<td>24 48%</td>
<td>10 20%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missamari</td>
<td>16 32%</td>
<td>27 54%</td>
<td>4 8%</td>
<td>2 4%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangmouthan</td>
<td>5 10%</td>
<td>25 50%</td>
<td>7 14%</td>
<td>9 18%</td>
<td>4 8%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gameri</td>
<td>7 14%</td>
<td>27 54%</td>
<td>5 10%</td>
<td>6 12%</td>
<td>4 8%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamuguri</td>
<td>8 16%</td>
<td>22 44%</td>
<td>6 12%</td>
<td>7 14%</td>
<td>6 12%</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangachakua</td>
<td>7 14%</td>
<td>30 60%</td>
<td>6 12%</td>
<td>5 10%</td>
<td>2 4%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinsuti</td>
<td>8 16%</td>
<td>25 50%</td>
<td>4 8%</td>
<td>8 16%</td>
<td>5 10%</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>50 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79 19.75%</td>
<td>207 51.75%</td>
<td>48 12%</td>
<td>39 9.75%</td>
<td>24 6%</td>
<td>3 0.75%</td>
<td>400 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey conduction.

It is observed that conscious guardians prefer to send their children to Jyoti Agarwala Higher Secondary School which is a provincialised one. It is situated at a distance of 5 km. from the village of Dath Kala of Sonitpur District. The study reveals that due to financial crisis faced by the guardians, the dropout rate is very high and therefore maximum number of children cannot cross the matriculation/Secondary stage.
It is observed that the guardians prefer to send their children outside Assam for employment in the private sector, companies rather than to send them to Higher Secondary or college level. In fact, the restriction in the Government service in Assam for one reason or the other has made the guardians and their children frustrated which discourages them for higher education.

In Rangachakua, only 14% villagers are literate. However, in this village, 60% villagers are literate in the undermatric category. There is a middle school and primary school in the village. For High School and Higher Secondary students, they have to go to Rangachakua Higher Secondary School which is situated at a distance of 4 km. For degree level education, they have to go to the THB College, at Kasumtola (Jamugurihat) which is situated at a distance of 14 km.

On the other hand, the village Gangmouthan has one Primary School, one Middle School and a Higher Secondary School. For College education students have to go to Behali College, which is situated near Borgang at a distance of 6 km. from the village. However, being a Venture College only of Arts faculty many students prefer to go to Biswanath College at a distance of 29 km.

The survey covers only the head of the families for which there did not appear any master degree holder among the villagers. However, even amongst the guardians 40% villagers’ cover from matriculate to graduates which itself reveals the high literacy rate of the village. Out of the 8 villages surveyed, Teleni is the most backward in literacy rate where only 20% are above matriculate. By and large 19.75% people are illiterate in the villages where 32% are illiterate in the village Teleni and Missamari respectively in the district of Sonitpur under Gohpur Sub-Division.
Over and above, non availability of schools at nearby place, dilapidated condition of the schools, low motivation and engaging elder children to keep younger ones may be attributed to low profile of literacy. It has been observed during that the number of school going children from peasant families is lower. A peasant family whether owner, cultivator or tenant cultivator, generally engage the children in rearing cattle or in helping the children in other field activities or in rearing the younger children. This accounts for low profile school enrolment and high dropouts.

So far as the consumer durables in the Nepali villages are concerned, (as shown table 2.5) 78.25% villagers depend upon bicycles as a traditional means of communication. Those villagers who are the service holder generally in the teaching profession use bikes or scooters as means of communication to their place of service.

Majority of villagers use Television rather than Radio enjoy cricket, Badminton, cinema, and news items. it is found in the survey that only two diesel pumpsets are used at Gangmouthan for milling of rice instead of irrigation. Likewise, at Dath Kala village also, two electric pump sets are used for milling of rice. Just to meet the day-to-day subsistence need of the villages
Table 2.4
Consumer Durables in Nepali Villages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the village</th>
<th>Bicycle Scooter</th>
<th>Bike Other</th>
<th>Car/Any vehicle</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>Thela Bullock carts</th>
<th>Electricity Diesel pumpset</th>
<th>Shop</th>
<th>No. of household surveyed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dath Kala</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleni</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missamari</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangmoutahan</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>NIL</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gameri</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamuguri</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangachakua</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinsuti</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey conduction.

Size of the family is another important demographic factor in the economy. The spectrum of population growth can be matched with size of the family. At the present rural demographic set up and the present level of rural development, a large size family means low per capita family asset including land, high dependency ratio, low per capita and low saving and high intensity of poverty.
Table No.2.5

Distribution of sample Households by family size
(in percentage to total sample family)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Members</th>
<th>No. of Family</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 and above</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>7.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean size family</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey conduction.

Generally, family consisting of 4 or 5 members in considered as a normal family for the purpose of rural development programme. But the sample survey shows the mean size of a family at about 5.11 which is certainly not desirable for the purpose of implementation of rural development programme.