

Social Exclusion of Inhabitants of Chars:

A Study of Dhubri District in Assam

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Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Award of the Degree of***

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I, **Abdullah Khandakar**, hereby declare that the research work embodied in the dissertation titled “**Social Exclusion of Inhabitants of Chars: A Study of Dhubri District in Assam**” submitted to the **Sikkim University** in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is my original work. Any content or any part of this dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**Social Exclusion of Inhabitants of Chars: A Study of Dhubri District in Assam**” submitted to the **Sikkim University** in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** in the **Department of Sociology**, embodies the result of *bona fide* research work carried out by **Abdullah Khandakar** under my guidance and supervision. No part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree, diploma, associate-ship and fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by him.

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Abdullah Khandakar

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

No history of human being hitherto existed without inequality and stratification (Modi 2015: 5). Human society has made ceaseless journey to different stages of civilisation and all the stages hold common in certain forms of inequalities where individuals or groups were excluded from rights and necessities. Despite rise of modern democratic states, acquainted with some great principles like liberty, fraternity, equality, ever in human civilisations, they have been largely unequal as large portion of population are still suffering starvation, lack of basic necessities, exploitation, and deprivation due to several socio-economic, cultural, physical, geographical attributes. Concept of ‘social exclusion’ is a recent development in academic and policy discourse to address those forms of social disadvantages. Yet meaning and definition of it is embedded with lot of ambiguities.

The term “social exclusion” originated, as a concept, in France, where it became popular in the context of economic, social and political crises experienced during the 1980’s (de Haan 1999: 13). Very quickly it made inroad into academic and development discourses and emerged as a popular theme (Pyakurel 2012: 1). It is a multidimensional concept. People may be excluded in many respects, e.g. from livelihoods or earnings, employment, owning property, minimum consumption, housing, education, participation in the functioning of the welfare state, citizenship, personal contacts or self-respects, etc. (Silver 1994: 541). Social exclusion is the process in which individuals or entire communities of people are systematically blocked from (or denied full access to) various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a different group, and which are fundamental to social integration within that particular group (*ibid.*). In traditional fashion, distributional aspect of income is the core to define poverty. However, present discourse moves beyond this narrow domain, rather puts more emphasis on other relational aspects (Sen 2007: 1-8). Shortage and difficulty in relational features lead to deprivation and impoverishment, which further stems exclusion of poor. Social exclusion is a broader concept than poverty, encompassing not only low material means but the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life and in some characterisations alienation and distance from mainstream

society (Duffy 2011: 22). It is an innovative concept to describe deprivation. “It focuses attention on central aspects of deprivation, equally relevant to analysis and policies. Deprivation is a multidimensional phenomenon, and is part and parcel of social relations. The concept of social exclusion can help to ground the understanding of deprivation firmly in traditions of social science analyses” (de Haan 1999: 1).

In a culturally and ethnically plural society like Assam, numbers of social groups are excluded in different terms from the mainstream society based on identity (Das 2010). Amongst them erstwhile East Bengal origin Bengali Muslims are one of the worst sufferers of this process in terms of education, health, economy, employment and other basic amenities. British colonial policies along with prevailing socio-economic, political conditions and geographic homogeneity provoked migration of large number of landless poor peasants from erstwhile East Bengal (presently Bangladesh) (Kar 1980, Guha 1988, Hussain 1993). With the formation of sovereign independent state of India in 1947, those migrant settlers were socially included in political term within the broad frame work of citizenship and other constitutional entitlements. However, like other states...“yet they are also characterized by internal exclusion, most notably of various minority groups residing within state boundaries” (Bond 2006: 610). Despite their existence from the age of colonial rule, they are all branded as illegal foreigners and Bangladeshi in everyday life/tradition by the local inhabitants of mainstream society, which speeds up exclusion of them in multiple spheres of life from mainstream Assamese society (Chakraborty 2011: 55).

Among this social group, a large section lives in the riverine area, scattered river islands in the bed of the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries, locally known as *char*. They are perpetual victims of flood and erosion. At the mercy of riverbank erosion and flood caused by the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries, inhabitants in these areas are rendered homeless regularly. The society is characterised by extreme poverty, marginal achievements in the field of education, health and rampant population growth (Chakraborty 2009, Goswamy 2014). A large percentage of the households depend on daily wage manual labour as the only source of livelihood. To eke out a living, they often migrate to the towns and cities raising the spectre of illegal immigrants or Bangladeshis in the minds of local inhabitants. “Whereas there are ample evidences to show that they are not all ‘economic refugees’ from Bangladesh but a large number are Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from Assam’s own

riverine area, sandy river islands”.¹ “Moreover, the cultural differentiation (in terms of attire, language and socio-cultural traits) between both these two population groups creates such a situation where the *char* dwellers are regarded as intruders into the economic and the cultural space of the dwellers in the mainland. So the cultural boundaries of the social space of the people in the mainland are perceived to be threatened by these ‘outsiders’ or the *char* dwellers. This process reaffirms the group solidarity of the mainland population groups against the ‘other’ i.e. the *char* dwellers, which lays the foundation for social exclusion” (Chakraborty 2011: 55). This impoverished population group is vulnerable to perennial natural disaster, deprived from basic amenities, economic, educational, health facilities. However, daily wage manual labourers are much more vulnerable than the economically well-being sections of the society. The labour class is often subject to victim of ‘suspicious identity’ in their occupational field (Chakraborty 2012). It further stems discriminations of other forms.

Against this backdrop, the present study attempts to understand the degree of multi-dimensional forms of social exclusion of the *char* inhabitants exhibited in the field of economy, education, health, and emphasising to comprehend the forms of exclusion which emanates from their perpetual status as suspected being or illegal immigrant from Bangladesh.

1.2. Review of Literature

The study goes through the review of the existing literatures to internalize the problem of social exclusion of *char* inhabitants. In doing so, review of literature is classified into three categories - (a) review on the concept of social exclusion, (b) review on migration from East Bengal and human inhabitation in *chars* and (c) review on society in *char* areas in Assam. Present study therefore, conducted on the basis of the following literatures which provided a background analysis and over all understanding of the problem.

¹ Dasgupta, A. ‘Internal Displacement and Politics in the State of Assam’. URL: <http://calternatives.org/Internakl/resource/pdf/Internal%20Displacement%20and%20Politics%20in%20the%20State%20of%20Assam.pdf>. Accessed on 10/03/2013.

1.2.1. Concept of Social Exclusion

Inequality and stratification are embedded in social structures and social relations. Social exclusion is re-reading of these stratifications (DIME 2013: 3) that operates in different forms in different societies (de Haan 1999). It is an umbrella concept encompassing all those social pathologies commonly coined as deprivation, discrimination, and marginalisation etc. Language of social exclusion is too powerful and the same time too malleable to encompass any form of deprivation (Sen 2007: 8). A newly born in Europe but quiet vibrant concept very soon made inroad into academic and policy discourse and makes it rapid journey to underdeveloped societies (Alam 2013: 15). However, the authorship of the concept goes to Lene Lenoir (Sen 2007: 1). He enlisted category of persons constituted as ‘excluded’- a tenth of French population: mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons, and other social ‘misfits’ (*ibid.*: 1). Social exclusion is the process in which individuals or entire communities of people are systematically blocked from (or denied full access to) various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a different group, and which are fundamental to social integration within that particular group (Silver 1994). Silver further enlarged the category of excluded person by adding a long list that included exclusion from “a livelihood; secure, permanent employment; earnings; property, credit or land; housing; minimal or prevailing consumption levels; education, skills, and cultural capital; the welfare state; citizenship and legal equality; democratic participation; public goods; the nation or the dominant race; family and sociability; humanity, respect, fulfilment and understanding” (Silver 1994: 541). A person or a population group can be compared and contrasted with these conditions to be judged qualitatively whether she/he or they is/are socially excluded (Chakraborty 2011: 47).

Silver (1994) thus comprehends the issue of social exclusion as multi-dimensional character, varying explanations, different applications in respect to different contexts. In the relational aspect, i.e., relation between individual and society, she identifies three paradigms that deal with different patterns of individual-social interface. *First*, solidarity paradigm, where exclusion is the rupture of social bond between the individual and society manifested in cultural and moral terms. *Second*, specialisation paradigm, which reflects discrimination that denies individuals full access to or participation in exchange or interaction due to specialization and

differences in the competitive market. *Third* is the monopoly paradigm, where exclusion is defined as a consequence of the formation of group monopolies. In this paradigm exclusion arises from the interplay of class, status and political power and serves interests of the 'included' (Silver 1994: 539-534).

Social exclusion as 'situation' and 'process' is highlighted by de Haan (1999) in his work *Social Exclusion: Towards an Holistic understanding of Deprivation*. The notion of social exclusion is a way of conceptualising society, including (and with a focus) on the processes of deprivation that are part and parcel of that society. The mapping and monitoring of deprivation, as descriptions of outcomes is important; but a social exclusion framework takes us beyond that, and identifies the processes that lead to and cause deprivation (de Haan 1999: 12). Defining what the 'processes' are and where from these 'processes' emanates can be seen Sen's (2007) understanding of 'capability deprivation' while he analyses social exclusion in comparison with poverty. According to him, poverty is simply shortage of income, which is, of course, very ancient and still fairly common in the established literature on deprivation and destitution (Sen 2007: 2). This view though far removed from relational notion of social exclusion, is not however entirely without merit, since it has enormous influence on the kind of lives we can lead (*ibid.*: 4). Impoverished lives can lead in multiple social disadvantages in participating mainstream social life. Though poverty and exclusion is sometime used as synonymous but people who are socially excluded need not to be poor, but all the poor are socially excluded (Kummitha 2015: 8). Social exclusion is a broader concept while poverty is one aspect of it (*ibid.*).

At the heart of Sen's theory is the notion of individuals' 'capabilities', which are the opportunities to achieve valuable 'functionings' or 'states of being' (Bhalla and Lapeyre 1997: 416). Thus, 'living may be seen as consisting of a set of interrelated 'functionings', consisting of beings and doings' (*ibid.*). In addressing poverty issues, Sen focuses on valuable functionings which represent the different factors of well-being. Functionings may include both physical elements such as being adequately fed and sheltered and 'more complex social achievements such as taking part in the life of the community, being able to appear in public without shame, and so on' (Sen 2007: 4-5). Sen further develops important concepts of exclusion like 'active' and 'passive' exclusion, 'favourable' and 'unfavourable' exclusion, 'distributional aspect' and 'relational features' of social exclusion. According to Amartya Sen, social exclusion is an endless process; it may move across communities due to several

reasons and sometimes due to causes of active and passive exclusions or unfavourable exclusion and inclusion (Kummitha 2015: 5).

While analysing applicability of the European concept of social exclusion in developing societies, Saith (2001) observes that manifestation of exclusion varies on developed and developing nations. In industrialised countries, the concept of ‘social exclusion’ related to the welfare state and formal employment has developed. In developing countries, the concept of social exclusion is related to ‘basic capabilities’, risk aversion, vulnerability and sustainable livelihoods have developed (Saith 2001: 13). According to him among the industrialised countries patterns of social exclusion are institutionalised, fairly and clearly defined. In developing countries, however, defining what is ‘normal’ and therefore what is outside accepted norms is more complicated. Absence of welfare state and formal labour market make the use of European criteria for exclusion problematic in the developing nations.

Almost same argument forwarded by Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997) in ‘*Social Exclusion: Towards an Analytical and Operational Framework*’. While analysing social exclusion under the categories of economic, social and political dimensions, they reveal that “in poor societies, economic exclusion is at the heart of the problem of exclusion” (Bhalla and Lapeyre 1997: 430) and so in countries “where a majority is excluded from adequate livelihoods (*ibid.*: 423), the *distributional* aspect becomes the most important (*ibid.*: 421). Contrary to this, in the industrialised countries the relational aspect of social exclusion is more important because people have a minimum survival income and so the quality of relationship between the individual and the society is at the heart of social exclusion.

While applying social exclusion in the context of developing societies like India with special and very particular case of caste discrimination, Thorat (2010) observes that the concept of social exclusion in India moves ahead of the conceptual differences. Here it is the denial of equal opportunities imposed by certain groups of society upon others which leads to inability of an individual to participate in the basic political, economic and social functioning off the society (Thorat 2010). Social exclusion of caste here lies in institutionally defined, socially and culturally legitimated imposed prejudice. Upper castes exclude *Dalits* not only from spiritual right, but from total political-economy of the society (Ilaiah 2012).

According to Byrne (1999) social exclusion is not an accidental to the development and practice of capitalism, but it is intrinsic to it. He argues against the

overlapping between domination and exclusion saying that, “exclusion is not domination. It is not to do with identity considered either as something intrinsic or self-chosen. It is to do with specific economic relation.” Arguing ‘social exclusion’ as a form of exploitation, he says, “The battle against exclusion must be a battle against exploitation.”

1.2.2. Migration from East Bengal and Human Inhabitation in Chars

Assam had historically been on the migration interface of diverse population streams. This is what has created the great differentiations of language, religion, culture and society that we see today in Assam state (Dasgupta: *year unstated*). This in-migration trend took a peak during colonial era, which was though a historic necessity but altered demographic pattern of Assam forever (Gohain and Bora 2007: 9). Colonial aspiration of draining resources, expansion of economy through tea plantation, exploration of oil and coal raised demand for labourers (Chakraborty 2009: 30). However it could not be appropriated by indigenous peasantry and toiling class because of some socio-cultural, demographic factors, which resulted in bringing of millions of precarious peasants from erstwhile East Bengal, among which vast majority were Muslim (Kar 1980, Boruah 1980, Hussain 1993). During the 19th century Assam including the Brahmaputra Valley was regarded as a region having vast virgin tracts, forest and rich cultivable lands , which attracted numbers of landless precarious peasants from neighbouring densely populated East Bengal (Bhagabati 2005: 5). Till the days of independence, about one to one and half million of settlers from East Bengal were settled in Assam (Goswamy 1994).

Migration brought commendable prosperity to the economy of the region (Chakraborty 2009). But an abnormal rise of Muslim settlers led to demographic alteration that alerted indigenous inhabitants. It was first noticed in the year 1911 by the indigenous elites and they exposed their awareness in 1916 regarding this migration (Guha 1999: 70). Policies like the ‘Line System’, ‘colonization scheme’ were undertaken to check indiscriminate settlement and occupation of land by migrants (Hussain 1993: 204-205), which led to segregation of migrants from the Asamiyas (Assamese) both physically and psychologically (*ibid.*). Implementation of Line System was supported by indigenous inhabitants while opposed by the migrant settlers, which created dubious and tense atmosphere during the days of latter part of colonial age (Ahmed 2005: 53-54).

With due course of migration, the Muslim immigrants have been able to reclaim huge amount of cultivable waste and fallow lands including the riverine grazing lands and have now consolidate their position economically and culturally in the riverine tracts, especially of the lower and the central Brahmaputra Valley districts of the state (Bhagabati 2005: 5).

During post-independence period, that process of migration did not come to halt (Gohain and Bora 2007). Assam continues to attract migration from newly independent Pakistan (East Pakistan). Indigenous people of Assam expressed their anguish against immigrants which took a peak form during Assam movement (Jana 2008). However, there are contesting perspectives regarding the numbers of immigrants (Mahanta 2013: 55). Much of the available literature points to immigration being problematic for Assam and the north-east though certain studies hold that the illegal immigration issue has been exaggerated (*ibid.*). Theoretically, the Assam movement was an expression of popular discontent against immigrants, irrespective of religious background. But it exhibited communal manifestations in many instances (Hussain 1993). While taking bloody revenge against immigrants, Muslims were soft target of agitators' brutality (Gohain and Bora 2007). Though, it is well known that Na-Asamiya Muslims settled in Assam in million numbers prior to the independence, yet recognising them as illegal immigrants or Bangladeshi developed as popular a fashion during the course of the Assam Movement (*ibid.*). While there was a huge outrage against illegal immigrants, demographer S. K. Das (1980) through his statistical analysis comes to conclusion that, the apprehensions about 'infiltration' of 'Bangladeshi' or 'East Pakistani' Muslims into Assam appear not to be supported by facts...the inflow of immigrants from the Eastern Bengal part of the subcontinent into Assam has been continuous since 1891. The only difference is that while it was the Bengali Muslims who migrated between 1891 and 1947, the vacuum has been filled by the Bengali Hindus since 1947 (Das 1980: 859). An anti-foreigner sentiment was created to consolidate economic backwardness, to ensure socio-economic and cultural safeguard of the indigenous but the hidden agenda of the leaders of the popular movement were to ensure their dominance over the society and politics in Assam (Gohain and Bora 2007). Though there were furious clashes against the immigrants, "that immigration into Assam was under British machinations and supported by the Assamese middle class is beyond doubt. These immigrants who settled down in Assam with their blessings have become overnight 'outsiders' or

‘foreigners’ and the target of virulent attack (Boruah 1980: 56-57). Regarding prolonged issue of immigration, Sanjib Baruah comments, “if Assam’s communities worry about being minorities in their own lands, a persistent cloud of suspicion about the legal status of ‘foreigners’ have not helped Assam’s ‘immigrant’ communities either” (Baruah, 1999: 203).

1.2.3. Society of *Char* Areas in Assam

The bed of the great river Brahmaputra for a length of around 800 km is dotted with innumerable river islands, locally called *chars* or *chaparries* (Bhagabati 2005: 1). *Char* constitutes one of the most socio-economically derived horizons in the region of Assam. Chakraborty (2009) in his work deals with the issue of economy, society, culture, livelihood, showing extreme impoverishment of its dwellers. Despite he brings the issue of prolonged negligence towards the area and people by the state (Chakraborty 2009, 2011). Though there is a separate department established by the government to look into developmental issues of *char* areas but it’s almost all resources are exhausted to provide salary of the department’s staff (Chakraborty 2011).

Unstable nature of *char* results in various socio-economic problems, like lack of health and educational infrastructures, lake of livelihood opportunities etc. which result in exclusion of its inhabitants from vital essentialities of human life (*ibid.*). Unprecedented population growth is the integral issue to the society of *char*. Through his demographic investigation, Goswamy (2014) reveals that demographic parameters like death rate and birth rate, immunisation are miserably far away from state average. Considering educational status, the *char* villages are one of the largest repositories of illiterate population in the state (Chakraborty 2011: 54).

Erosion and displacement are integral to *char* life. Displacement due to perennial flood and erosion easily got mixed up with the ‘foreigners’ issue, because almost entire population of the erosion affected victims belongs to a community that has been potential fuel for creating xenophobia in Assam (Jana 2008: 105). While they appear in mainland in search of livelihood they commonly treated as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh (Jana 2008, Chakraborty 2011, 2012, Dasgupta: *year unstated*), which further exclude this population group from mainstream Assamese society (Chakraborty 2011).

Ismile Hussain, Habibur Rahman, Dr. Mohammad Ali and Nirmal Chandra Bhoi (2005) edited '*Socio-Economic Life of the Char-People*' highlights major socio-economic problems and prospects of *char* inhabitants. *Char* dwellers are hard laborious in nature but their valuable contribution to the economy and agricultural of Assam is hardly recognised by the mainstream society (Zaman 2005, Hussain 2005).

1.3. *Char* Areas of Assam and Dhubri District at a Glance

There are number of scattered miniscule islands in the belly of the river Brahmaputra, locally called as *char*. These *chars* are found to vary greatly in respect of their size, shape and physical vulnerability (*ibid.*). GOA defines *char* as “the sandy land area extended from Sadiya to Dhubri of Assam within the river Brahmaputra or surrounded by water of the river Brahmaputra extended up to nearby embankment, which is recurringly affected by flood and where people live and cultivate the land are second category *char*”².

According to the Socio-economic Survey Reports conducted twice till date by the ‘Directorate of *Char* Areas Development’, number of *char* villages during 1992-93 and 2002-03 were 2,089 and 2,251 respectively (see appendix IV and V). During 1992-93, Barpeta district had the highest number of *char* villages (351) followed by Dhubri (313) and Jorhat (210). While survey during 2002-03 reveals that Dhubri district has the highest number of *char* villages (480) followed by Jorhat (293) and Barpeta (277). The total area under *char* is 3,608 sq. km., which is 4.6 per cent of the total land area of the state.

“The flow pattern of the river, sediment discharge due to soil loss, erosion of band material of the riverbanks and topsoil in the hills along with occurrence of floods determine the intensity of *char* formation in a particular time period and a specific area. Any change in these factors result in the drastic change in the rate of formation and survival of the *chars*. Consequently, it affects the human habitation, as well as livelihood patterns of the *char* dwellers as the loss of land renders them landless and also habitat less” (Chakraborty 2011: 53). Some *chars* are permanent and some are temporary. The flow of the river, the changes in its course and the distance from the *chars* are found to be having a considerable influence on the permanency of the *char* (Sarma 2014: 45). All the *chars* in the river are not inhabited by human being.

² Definition of *char* by “The Department of Char Area Development, Government of Assam”, 1983.

Dhubri district is located at the extreme Western part of Assam. Spatially the district is located on the globe between 89.42 to 90.12 degree east longitude and 26.22 to 25.28 degree north latitude. Geographically, the district is at the distance of 290 km from Guwahati, the capital city of Assam. The river Brahmaputra flows through the district immediately before it enters into Bangladesh. Geographically, it divides the district into North bank and South bank. Presently Dhubri district has total 480 *char* villages. However, there are some other *chars* also located on the tributaries of the river Brahmaputra, which are officially not categorised as *char*. Yet, they carry each and every geographic as well as socio-economic character similar to that of *chars* in the bed of river Brahmaputra. In the district, there are some *chars* founded to be surrounded by the rivers on all sides taking the forms of small islands and while some are found to be located far from the river water. *Chars* of the former category are more prone to erosion.

Socio-economic conditions of these *char* hinterland are extremely miserable in entire Assam, while situation in Dhubri district is further worse. There are total 689,909 (35.4%) populations live in *char* area in the district, where numbers of male and female population are 346,996 and 342,913 respectively (SESRCA 2002-03). Massive poverty and illiteracy is fundamental to the *char* life in the district. There are total 109,748 families live in the *char* areas in the district, among which 75,725 families (69%) live under below poverty line (*ibid.*). Literacy rate is 19.31% in the *char* hinterland of Assam, while *char* areas in Dhubri district has only 14.46% (*ibid.*), which is far below than state average 72.19% in Assam (SESRCA 2002-03, SHBA 2013).

Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood. Cultivation is carried out both during the *rabi* and *kharif* seasons and rice, wheat, jute, lentil, black gram, mustard, rapeseed, and variety of seasonal vegetables are the main produce of the area. Pressure of increasing population on land and erosion uproots many dwellers from conventional sources of livelihood. A great portion of working forces are now earning livelihood as migrating daily wage labourer. Considering the contemporary reality, it can be said that migrating daily wage labour is the major source of livelihood of the *char* dwellers in the Dhubri district of Assam.

The population of the *char* areas of Assam comprises of mainly Na-Asamiya Muslims, Hindu and Nepali. But in the Dhubri district, almost all inhabitants are Muslims. Similarly, inhabitants of the area of study belong to Muslim only.

1.4. Rationale and Scope of the Study

In spite of the vagueness of the term and definition of ‘social exclusion’, it is widely used by social scientists, policy makers to understand backwardness, inequality, discrimination, poverty of certain group or groups in a society. Despite prolonged debate about the usefulness of the concept of social exclusion, it is widely used because of its emphasis on the social and economic processes that create exclusion helpful to the academicians and policy makers to better understand the causes and consequences of exclusion and deprivation. This in turn opens up new possibilities in terms of policy interventions.

Studies show that *char* dwellers, who mostly belong to East Bengal origin Muslim community is one of the most deprived and socially excluded population group regarding its economic, educational, health, employment status and basic amenities. Moreover the population group is also culturally excluded from the mainstream society of Assam and are deprived in labour market due to their suspected status as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

The mighty Brahmaputra flows through the Dhubri district and it has the highest number of *chars* in Assam (SESRCA 2002-03). More than 1/3rd of total population of the district lives in marshy *chars* (*ibid.*), who are rendered homeless regularly due to incessant flood and erosion caused by the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. The district is one of the most socio-economically backward districts in Assam. It has literacy rate of 58.34% as against 72.19% in Assam (SHBA 2013) and a large segment of total population comprises of daily wage manual labourer.

In spite of the bulkiness of literatures on social exclusion, deprivation, poverty etc. very few deal with the complex issue of multidimensional forms of social exclusion and the forced deprivation/exclusion based on identity in the particular context of society of *char* in Assam. Moreover the degree of exclusion may be re-examined through the mirror of its effects on different occupational groups.

Thus, the present study is a sincere attempt to add to existing stock of literatures on social exclusion by comprehending the nature and forms of social exclusion of *char* inhabitants of Dhubri district of Assam, in terms of economic, educational, health status and labour market deprivation, cultural exclusion.

1.5. Objectives

1. To comprehend historical background of the *char* inhabitants in Assam.
2. To analyse the nature and forms of social exclusion in terms of economic, educational, health status of the inhabitants.
3. To understand the perceptions of the mainstream society towards this group.
4. To examine if the nature of exclusion differs across various occupational groups of the society.

1.6. Research Questions

1. What is the historical background of *char* inhabitants in Assam?
2. What are the nature and forms of social exclusion in terms of economic, educational and health status of *char* inhabitants?
3. What is the perception of the mainstream society towards this group?
4. Does the nature of social exclusion differ in various occupational groups?

1.7. Methodology

The research has been based on both the theoretical as well as empirical understanding of the concerned subject-matter. The theoretical framework related to the study is backed by primarily the theories (theoretical underpinnings) of social exclusion. While empirical understanding of social exclusion of the inhabitants of the study area is based on field survey.

The present study is grounded on both the quantitative and qualitative methodologies and analysis of exclusion of the concerned population. It adopts 'historical method' to comprehend the process of settlement and historical roots of social exclusion, while and 'survey method' is adopted to understand their state of exclusion in present context.

The study relies on sources of both forms- primary as well as secondary. Primary data is collected through semi-structured schedule, informal interview with the selected influential; aged old persons of the study area regarding the history of human inhabitation in the area, changing nature of river and its impact on the society. Also primary data is collected from Census of the GOI, information obtained from various offices of the GOA through RTI, some selected pieces of local Assamese newspapers which is used to supplement the information collected from respondents with regard to labour market deprivation and cultural exclusion. Secondary data is

collected from SESRCA of 1992-93 and 2002-03, SHBA 2013, published books, articles, published reports and other related information. Published books belong to both English and Assamese languages.

1.8. Field and Sample Size

The study was conducted in the village *Baladuba* under *Binnachara* GP in the Dhubri district of Assam. It is a highly flood and riverbank erosion prone area. The entire village has been eroded by the river *Gangadhar* and emerged as *char*. There are total 434 families in the *char* village.³ It is mainly a labour class society. As officially estimated, 99.77% of all families are living below poverty line (BPL) and the area is suffering from lack of public health and educational institutions.⁴ According to the 2011 Census report, literacy rate is 52.45% in the *Binnachara* GP, the village *Baladuba* come under its territorial jurisdiction.⁵ Further, the migrating labourer from the area are commonly suspected as illegal immigrants or Bangladeshi, sometimes denied employment, often physically harassed in their occupational field by local inhabitants and police as well and paid unjust wages.

The study focuses on sample size of 100, where information is collected through survey methods. The proposed sample size is based on stratified sampling method on the ground that the study deals with the issue of social exclusion on two different occupational groups, i.e., servicemen in government, semi-government, private institutions and daily wage manual labourer, within the universe of the study, keeping in mind the proportion of different occupational groups to total population in the defined area of the study. Data collected through field survey on economy, education and health have been supplemented with the secondary information collected from respective sources.

1.9. Chapters

Chapters of the study are organised in a sequential order corresponding to the objectives of the study. Being introductory one, the *First* chapter depicts the statement of the problem, conceptual issues and perspectives regarding social exclusion, objectives and methodologies of the study. The *Second* chapter, *Genesis of Social Exclusion: Human Inhabitation in Char Areas and Its Ramifications* is devoted to

³ Source: RTI report obtained from the Office of the Binnachara Gaon Panchayat, RTI no. BGP11/RTI/2015-16, Date: 16/10/2015.

⁴ Source: Same as foot note no.3

⁵ Source: Office the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Dhubri District, Assam. Date: 18/06/2015.

comprehend the historical process of migration and settlement of *char* dweller in the *char* areas of Assam. Primary focus of this chapter is on prevailing socio-political circumstances that seeded the root of social exclusion of *char* dwellers in post-independence era. Outcomes of a purely field based study is elaborated in the *third* chapter – *Degree of Social Exclusion: A Socio-Economic Profile of the Study Area*, where almost each and every figures is compared and contrasted with the figures at district and state level to understand relative significance of exclusion. Chapter *four*, *Social Exclusion of Char Inhabitants: Interplay of Culture and National Identity*, is an account of cultural exclusion, labour market deprivation and some other forms of relational features of social exclusion. Here the chapter depicts the micro as well as macro reality to unveil ‘why’ and ‘how’ exclusion from mainstream society emanates. Concluding chapter *five*, *Conclusion*, ends with the explanation of major findings to suggest for some policy implications.

1.10. Conceptual Clarification

In Assam, erstwhile East Bengal origins Bengali Muslims are known by several names. There is no single name/term to signify the community. Though by origin, they are Bengali, they adopted Assamese as their mother tongue. Along with other migrant groups like Tea planter labourers, they were also accepted and welcomed by middle class elites of mainstream Assamese society to the fold of Assamese culture and thus termed them as ‘Na-Asamiya’. ‘Na’ in Assamese means ‘new’, ‘Asamiya’ means Assamese. Thus Na-Asamiya means New Assamese. We use the term ‘Na-Asamiya Muslims’ throughout the study to refer erstwhile East Bengal origin Muslims. *Char* dweller Muslims belong to this community.

1.11. Limitations of the Work

The study faces number of limitations. It requires various types of data and information regarding socio-economic conditions of the households, developmental schemes and policies implemented etc. But the researcher faces a number of problems to assess socio-economic condition due to certain factors, a) due to time constraint, the study cannot incorporate all the relevant crucial parameters and information, b) many relevant data are not available with the respective departments of the government, c) the geographic nature and population of the study area is ever changing. Officially recorded inhabitants of neighbouring villages are living in the village (study area), record of which is maintained nowhere. Hence, the study does

not claim to figure out completely the actual number of households and population in the area. It relies only upon the official records of households/population. Environmental hazard in the form of flood also created bottleneck to the field survey. Heavy rain and occurrence of flood twice during the field study, made it difficult in collecting required information within due time period.

Genesis of Social Exclusion ***Human Inhabitation in Char Areas and Its Ramifications***

2.1. Introduction

State of social exclusion of a particular social group, in many circumstances is rooted in its past history. Taking into account only contemporary scenario can result in a partial understanding of the phenomenon. When basis of social exclusion of a group of population is principally credited to spatial and cultural factors, it is imperative to have a cautious effort to go through historical roots and its ramifications. Therefore the present chapter is an effort to comprehend the processes of human inhabitation in the *char* hinterland in Assam; reasons that contributed to the processes as well as dynamic interplay of various associated socio-economic, cultural and political factors that laid the foundation of social exclusion of *char* dwellers.

Being a vibrant plural characteristic of demographic and social composition, Assam can be termed a 'mini India' where various cultural, linguistic, racial, religious groups have been living side by side since time immemorial. Different population groups in different stages of human civilization migrated to Assam making it a society with great diversity. However a state sponsored migration into Assam during British colonial and continued even in post-colonial period has dramatically and permanently changed the demographic features of Assam and that migration has always been widely contentious issue that is haunting society and politics of the region till date.

2.2. Migration of Different Population Groups during Colonial Regime

British invasion and consequent unfamiliar new administrative arrangement opened socio-economically insular region of India's North-East to global world. Peoples from different parts of India began to migrate to Assam mostly under the colonial patronage and least self willingly. Several population groups migrated to Assam during the regime, e.g. a) different tribal groups as tea plantation labourer from Bihar, Sotanagpur, Madras province, Orissa, and other areas of mainland India, a) educated Hindu Bengalis from Bengal as clerk of lower rank in offices, tea Gardens, c) labourers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh for construction works, d) Nepalese from Nepal as grazier, milk producer and seller, peon in offices, domestic servant of British officers, retired soldiers of British Gorkha regiment and other poor landless peasants,

e) Marwari businessmen from Rajasthan and f) landless peasants from East Bengal (Gohain and Bora 2007: 10).

Colonial rule and their principle motive of profit generation through exploitation encouraged such human inflow started during late 19th century which was necessitated by prevailing socio-economic circumstances in Assam. Among all the migrant groups, tea plantation labourers were the first whose presence in Assam led to a significant impact on the demography of Assam. British East India Company started tea plantation in 1825. Once it started, get rapidly expanded in the colonial Assam. Tea plantation required large number of labour forces, demand of which could not be met by indigenous population due to several factors. Pre-British Assam was almost depopulated by civil war (known as *Moamaria* rebellion), Burmese invasion, fatal epidemics and diseases (Guha 1988: 38-39, Hussain 1993: 182). The rest survived were not interested in physical labour as a legacy of *paik* system during Ahom rule (Gohain and Bora 2007: 11). As Hunter (1879) noted, “The people are averse to working for daily wages, as they affirm that by doing so they compromise their respectability” (*ibid.*: 11). Similarly Sir Percival Griffiths (1967) observed, “The villagers enjoyed an economy which was almost self-sufficient and were therefore not much interested in the employment offered by the early tea planters, while the population of developed parts of Assam were, as a rule, neither inclined, nor compelled by circumstances, to have come in search of work” (*ibid.*: 11).

Though a very insignificant number of indigenous *Kachari* tribal people engaged in plantation activity, overall local folk was not at all keen on working in tea garden since they had plenty of cultivable land sufficient to satisfy their subsistence economy and farming. By and large, local people did not positively respond to the labour recruitment in new plantation system (Hussain 1993: 182). British planter had to look for other alternatives and subsequently they brought large number of tribal people from Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Telengana etc in the late 19th century. Already alienated from their land as a result of colonial policy, the oppressed and impoverished tribal people started migrating to Assam with an optimism to rebuild their live and livelihood (*ibid.*: 182). According to historian/administrator Edward Gait, the population of plantation labour including their children in 1921 was 1.3 million and 1/6th of the total population of Assam (*ibid.*: 188).

Thus, a new era started in Assam with a different social group adding to its already culturally diverse population which in turn evoked a huge migration of another population group which again very soon resulted in many never happened consequences in the field of economy, society and politics of Assam.

2.3. Rising Expenditure and Consequent Revenue Accumulation Strategies

It was imperative for a profit motivated capitalistic colonial establishment to expand and extend communication, administrative machinery to exploit resources in view of generating more than enough amount of profit. Bringing a new height in modern infrastructures required huge amount of investment expenditures which was determined to be gathered from ruled masses following the principle of exploitative colonialism. A purely agrarian economy could have met the expenses solely from agriculture. Again newly settled huge numbers of tea plantation labourer led in increase of demand for food grains and other services (Chakraborty 2009: 35). The situation left colonial rulers in a tragic state, since neither prevailing land revenue system, farming pattern nor were indigenous farmers encouraging in satisfying the demand of expenditures of both kinds.

Colonial rulers were in search of effective strategies to meet increased expenditures by increasing land revenue. It was expected that burdening with increased land revenue will not only meet its immediate need but would strengthen existing agricultural system also. As Chakraborty (2009) observes, “The government thought this (increase of revenue) might lead to a situation where either (i) the indigenous population in traditional agriculture may choose to shift to plantation sector and save themselves from the burden of high rates of land revenue or, (ii) attempt to commercialise agriculture by cultivating cash crops to increase their income level” (Chakraborty 2009: 29). However it brought no expected outcome even in the wake of repeated increase of land revenue.

Agriculture sector showed no improvement by such land revenue policy, making the situation harder for colonial administrator. In such a situation strategies were undertaken to fulfil the gap of policy and expectation by bringing or inviting peasants from outside.

2.4. Migration from East Bengal to Assam and Human Inhabitation in Char Areas

Though colonial provocation sparked migration of Bengali peasants, several other factors associated with the process are needed to be fully comprehended. Theories of migration suggest necessary predominance of 'push' and 'pull' factors to take it a form. Similarly, migration of peasants from East Bengal to Assam was boosted by a combination of a number of 'push' factors in Bengal province and 'pull' factors in Assam valley, and both factors were naturally framed in a complementary order. Though factors can be studied as several forms but want for voracious profit by the colonial ruler was the nucleus of all.

Raising expenditure and stagnant economy: During late 19th century colonial drainage of resources and consequent infrastructure projects, like railway and communication, new administrative set-up along with an ever increasing demand for food grain as a result of the presence of large number of tea plantation labourers required huge expenditure of revenue (Chakraborty 2009: 35). But expenditures could not be filled up by indigenous agricultural system as well as the economy. It was a purely agrarian economy and since annexation of Assam by British colonist in 1826 to the end of 19th century agriculture sector was at a stagnant situation (*ibid.*: 29-36). Various socio-political situations immediately before the arrival of the colonist, monetization of transaction by them and mode of production of indigenous peasantry were responsible for a stagnant economy. Moreover purpose of revenue generation implies higher amount of land under cultivation. Though colonists were in favour of more revenue generation but did little for the development of agriculture (*ibid.*: 35). Neither much of cultivable land could not be brought under plough nor could produce sufficient amount of food grain. During first 27 years of British rule only 6.3 per cent of total area of Assam was under cultivation (Medhi 1978: 104). All these factors lead to slow pace of agricultural development. "This stagnant agriculture scenario of Assam led the British rulers to initiate the inducement policy of granting cultivable wastelands to peasants from outside the state at concessional terms. These immigrant peasants then could not only bring in more land under the plough but also increase food grain production and commercial crops, which could generate more revenue for the state" (Chakraborty 2009: 35-36).

Colonial aspirations and responses of indigenous and East Bengal peasants: The very feature of British colonist of profit making and draining resources was inevitable to encourage ruled masses to produce more agricultural product as Assam was a purely agrarian society. But the pattern of farming, attributes of

indigenous peasants were not to fulfil their aspiration. There was subsistence mode of production where farmers did not chase for surplus amount. Again as revealed earlier, they were unskilled and not industrious at all. Despite attitude towards physical labour was negative. Local people were not industrious or enterprising, and would not cultivate more land than was sufficient for their own wants (Gohain and Borah 2007: 11). On the contrary, peasants of East Bengal were skilled cultivator, were skilled with commercialisation of agriculture. Documents show that those migrant Bengali peasants were industrious, grew multiple crops and used land whole year for cultivation, were skilled in cropping in *char* lands and waste land whereas local peasants neither knew to cultivate in such land nor they were industrious (*ibid.*: 11). In such a situation, it was favourable for the colonial ruler to encouraged migration of peasants from East Bengal.

Political factors and territorial contiguity: Mentioned factors were complemented by, among others, political factors and territorial contiguity. By the first partition of Bengal in 1905 Assam and East Bengal became integral part of a politically defined geographical boundary which by law prohibited any restriction on human inflow between Assam and East Bengal (Chakraborty 2009: 49). Districts of East Bengal like Rongpur, Bogra, Mymensing, Pabna bordering with Assam where from almost entire migrated population belong, became easier for them to migrate to Assam. British ruler provided incentives to migrant families to encourage migration (Gohain and Borah 2007: 11-14). Statistics show that even when course of migration was at peak during 1921-22, cultivated area constituted only 14% of total area of the Assam (Goswamy 1994 cited in Chakraborty 2009: 47). As an incentive to immigrants, the British government declared revenue free land grants for the initial three years of settlements (*ibid.*: 47). Under such circumstances it was essential to bring more land under plough to heal the economy. Colonial incentive to migration lasted until independence; however migration during 1940's under the 'grow more food' policy was highly controversial issue. More than an economic purpose, it was a politically motivated decision to increase Muslim population in Assam to enjoy political dominance by the Muslim League (Deka 2010, Nath 2012).

Issues of land and population: Assam had abundant fertile virgin soil on one hand and sparsely populated on the other (Boruah 1980: 48). Being a thinly populated region because of socio-economic, environmental and political factors during pre-colonial and colonial period, it could not supply adequate amount of human resources

for a desired economic progress. It was largely depopulated by civil war known as *Moamaria* rebellion and furious massacre by Burmese invader, widespread epidemic during 1880's known as *kalajar* (black fever) and outbreak of earthquake in 1897. Last decades of 19th century witnessed decreased rate of population growth and its density was too thin (Chakraborty 2009: 46). On the contrary "East Bengal experienced a higher pressure of population compared to many other areas of India during the middle and later half of the 19th century. During 1870's, Bengal has the highest density of population comparing to the other provinces of British India and within this region East Bengal Division had the higher density which is adjacent to Assam" (*ibid.*: 40). A geographically contiguous territory with higher density of population inevitably attracted by an area with sparsely population and abundant cultivable land.

System of land settlement and issue of poverty: Besides high pressure of population on land, as an outcome of *zamindari* system, perpetual poverty and famine during colonial age made the condition of peasants of Bengal too miserable. Under this system, there was no permanent land ownership by the peasants and *zamindars* (land lord) acted as intermediary unproductive but an exploitative class. Unlike Assam proper, in Bengal there was *zamindari* system. At the mercy of the system, vast majority peasants were pushed to the edge of life. Especially, districts of East Bengal like Mymenshig, Pabna, Rongpur, Bogra were highly affected by famine which are adjacent to Assam. Moreover increasing price of essential commodities, extreme high pressure on land, indebtedness to local *mahajans* (money lenders) and petty landlords and even unusual rainfall led to impoverished lives of the peasants. Even as early as 1770-71 severe food shortages and famine were common in Bengal and it continued at varying degree till the Great Bengal Famine of 1943. During 1770-71 to 1771-72, about 35 per cent of the population was wiped out due to famines and during 1943, the estimates ranged from 1.5 million to 3 million deaths in Bengal (Sen 1981). Assam on the other hand, was not affected by deadly crisis like famine. Neither there was *zamindari* system (in Assam proper). Prevailing land settlement pattern was known as *raiyatwari* system. There was no intermediary between farmer and state and cost for land holding was much little than under *zamindari* system. Harassed and hungry Bengali peasants took breath as they migrated to Assam. Further, it was also the best complimentary measure for the colonial ruler and *zamindars* to put an end to the revolt by exploited peasants (Boruah 1980: 51).

Role of communication: To drain resources and encourage migration British ruler emphasised to develop communication network. “Francis Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam was among the first who pleaded for multipronged communication network through various regions of East Bengal and Assam for enhancing trade and commerce and easy transfer of population” (Chakraborty 2009: 48). Introducing railway line, connecting East Bengal, specially the districts where masses were prone to migration, increased intensity of migration. However Assam was accessible to Bengal through traditional water transport through the river Brahmaputra, using the route people from East Bengal used to come occasionally (*ibid.*: 50).

Role of local gentry: Apart from those factors role of local gentry, *matabbar*⁶, *Barpetia matigiri*⁷, *marwaris* traders also encouraged migration for the sake of their benefit and profit. In the earlier stages of migration, *matabbars* occupied huge land ranging from 1000 acres to 5000 acres⁸. With an ambition to be land lord they spread the news of availability of cultivable land in Assam to their fellow relatives and neighbours in East Bengal. The impoverished people started to migrate, settled and engaged in cultivation under the *matabbar*. Similarly some *matigiri* who earned profit by selling land to immigrant peasants encouraged migration to accelerate profit. *Marwari* businessmen lend money to the peasants for investing in growing. They were not interested in land but crops for the commercial purpose. They were benefitted by migrant peasants, hence encouraged migration for more profit crop (Hussain 1993: 205). “*Marwari* traders and even Assamese *Mahajans* of Barpeta provided a substantial part of the necessary finance to enable the immigrant peasants to bring virgin soil under the plough...Local *Marwari* and even Assamese moneylenders financed the immigrants so that the latter could reclaim land and expand the cultivation of jute, *ahu* rice, pulses and vegetables” (Boruah 1980: 52).

⁶*Matabbar* is a term of rural Bengal folk which means leader or influential person. Some of them who migrated to Assam in the earlier stages owned huge amount of fallow cultivable lands in riverine area of the river Brahmaputra. They employed/hired labourer in the field also given land to other poor peasant in lease, however unofficially. They became semi-land lord and influential person. This practice has existed until recently. The term gained popularity and secured space in Assamese literature while studying the society.

⁷ There were a section of local people in Barpeta division of Kamrup district, occupied fallow land and sold it to the immigrants to earn money whom were termed as *matigiri* by R. C. Kalita in (Gohain and Bora 2007: 6-35)

⁸ Report of Line System Committee, 1938, Government of Assam, Shillong, p.32.

Growth of jute industry in Calcutta: Incidence of peasant's migration during first half of 20th century had a positive correlation with the growth of jute industry in Calcutta and in its surrounding. Jute became one of the most profitable commercial agricultural products for farmers and became important exported product to colonial ruler. First jute factory was established in 1854 and within 1939-40 there were 110 factories producing products from jute (Gohain and Bora 2007: 20-21). Bengal provided best suitable soil for jute cultivation and within Bengal, East Bengal produced almost all portion of raw jute. "As the area of jute cultivation in Bengal could no longer be extended, colonial ruler instigated migration of landless Bengali peasants to virgin soil of Assam favourable for jute cropping" (Boruah 1980: 51). Studies show increase in jute cultivation during colonial era by those migrant peasants. Area under jute cultivation continuously increased from 5000 acres in 1901-02 to 277000 acres in 1941-42 (Goswamy 1994: 248).

Thus, various factors encouraged migration and through this process Assam witnessed rapid demographic transformation, human inhabitation and cultivation in large fallow lands, in infested jungles and in riverine traces. A large portion of migrant peasants preferred to settle in the large tracts of sandy plains available in the river belt or River Islands with fertile soil, locally called *char*, because of some unique factors. Indigenous peasants neither preferred to settle nor could use such land for cultivation (Gohain and Bora 2007: 25). Migrant peasants were skilled in cultivating in *char* to grow multiple crops. Above all, neither settling in fallow *chars* did require official difficulties like in plain area in mainland nor had to face violent confrontation with local peasants. Initially those migrant took settlements there and later on spread to plains (Ahmed 2005: 50). During the colonial period such *chars* in lower and middle parts of Assam were settled by Bengali migrants most of whom were Muslims.

2.5. Number of Muslim Migrants from East Bengal

Though ample evidences are there to show the incidences of migration in different stages from East Bengal to Assam during colonial period, but calculating exact numbers of migrants of the first half of 20th century is impossible due to several reasons (Goswamy cited in Chakraborty 2009: 51). There is no evidence of large scale organised migration prior to the Partition of Bengal in 1905, although few seasonal settlements were there in *chars* of the Brahmaputra River in Goalpara district (*ibid.*:

50). Goalpara district which was adjacent to East Bengal was first affected by migration (Kar 1980: 71). “The population of the district increased by 1.4 per cent between 1881 and 1891 but during the next decade, it shot up by 30 per cent, mainly because of migration from Mymensingh; the number of migrants rose by about 150 per cent forming about 20 per cent of the district's population. By 1911, almost all the available lands in the district had been explored by the industrious agriculturists” (*ibid.*71). The number of migrant in the province during this period increased from 49059 to 118233.⁹ Immediately after entering Goalpara, in subsequent phases, migration spread to other districts of in the Brahmaputra valley. By 1921, 258000 migrant were settled in Assam while Guha (1988) estimated the figure as 300000. During the period of 1900-01 to 1920-21, population of Assam increased by 41 per cent (Chakraborty 2009: 50). According to an estimate, by P.C. Goswamy (1994), number of immigrants increased to 575000 in 1931 and during 1931 to 1951, the total number of immigrant from East Bengal was about 430000. Since the last quarter of 19th century to the end of colonial rule, the number of migrant had been steadily increased. It is estimated/speculated that number of settlers from East Bengal in 1951 must have been between one to one and half million (*ibid.*).

2.6. Economic Impact of Migration from East Bengal

Migration of this particular population group had illuminating economic impact. Its economic impact mainly in agricultural sectors can be studied as, a) introduction of multiple crop farming and its quantity and b) increase in area of cultivation.

They were skilled in production of various crops which were unknown to indigenous peasants. They introduced various crop productions in Assam. They cultivated food grains like paddy, pulses, potato, onion, garlic, chilli and various other varieties of vegetables. Commercialisation of agriculture started with the settlement of migrant peasants. They produced commercial products like jute, sugarcane, tobacco etc. (Chakraborty 2009: 56).

Migrant peasants did not only introduce various crops cultivation but also brought large tracts of unused *chars*, infested jungles under plough. They brought prosperity to the economy of Assam by bringing huge virgin soil under cultivation and new pattern of cropping. “During the period of 1901-02 to 1947-48, net sown area

⁹ Census of India, 1951, vol-III, Assam, Part-I, excerpted from (Chakraborty 2009: 50).

in the Brahmaputra valley had increased from 2.40 million acres to 4.79 acres. In terms of percentage of the area sown to total area it increased from 15.3 per cent to 26.5 per cent during the period. There had also been an increase in percentage of area sown more than once from 8.8 per cent to 14.8 per cent during 1901-02 to 1947-48. Double-cropped area as percentage of gross cropped area was high among the immigrant” (*ibid.*: 47-58). Jute was one of the most important commercial products. Migrant peasants were skilled in jute cultivation. For example, the acreage under jute cultivation in the Brahmaputra Valley increased from about 30 thousand acres to more than 106 thousand acres in 1919-20 (*ibid.*: 102). At the mercy of migration of peasants from East Bengal economy of Assam experienced a rapid growth and transformation from subsistence mode of production to commercialisation of agriculture. Following the impact of migration on agriculture they can be termed them as a ‘bless’ to Assam. Historian highlighting the illuminating fact writes “with their superior techniques of cultivation, these East Bengal peasants taught Assam how to grow jute, *mung* (a kind of pulse) and several other crops. For example, the acreage under jute in the Brahmaputra Valley increased as a result of this great population movement from a little less than 30 thousand acres in 1905-06 to more than 106 thousand acres in 1919-20” (Guha 1988: 102).

2.7. Demographic Transformation and Introduction of Line System: Socio-Political Consequences Thereafter

Inflow of tea plantation labourers, peasants from East Bengal, Nepalese and other social groups from different corners of India during colonial regime radically changed the demographic features of Assam. Migration from East Bengal constituted lion share of total migrant population of the same period. Again within the migrants from East Bengal, most of them (about eighty five per cent) were Muslims (Kar 1980: 71-72). This large volume of migration led to a shift in the demographic balance in favour of the Muslims with abnormal rise in their portion from 9 per cent in 1921 to 19 per cent in 1931 and 23 per cent in 1941 (Bhuyan and De *et al.* 2005: 308), while the same figure was just 5.9 per cent in 1874 (Kar 1980: 69-70). Especially districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nawgaon of Brahmaputra valley were highly affected by migration during colonial age. For instance, in Barpeta sub-division (presently a full-fledged district) the proportion of Muslim noticeably increased from 0.1 per cent in 1911 to 49 per cent in 1941 (Bhuyan and De *et al.* cited in Ahmed

2005: 50). Though presence of Muslims in Assam is dated back to medieval ages (*ibid.*: 67-69), but an abnormal rise during colonial rule is solely attributed to extraordinary volume of migration. Such a demographic transition alerted indigenous inhabitants. It was first noticed in the year 1911 by the indigenous elites and they exposed their awareness in 1916 regarding this migration (Guha 1999: 70). With the process of settlement in wasteland, they also make inroads into land occupied by indigenous people, resulted in furious encounters. There was a growing outcry among the indigenous inhabitants and sense of losing identity and dominance, and so appealed to the British ruler to restrict migration and settlement areas for the migrant people (Ahmed 2005: 51).

In order to resolve the issue and to restrict indiscriminate settlements by the migrant peasants from East Bengal in the areas where the indigenous Assamese people inhabited, the British Government officials of Nawgaon district advised an administrative measure known as the 'Line System'. The land according to the 'Line System' were divided into three classes, a) those in which immigrants might settle freely b) those in which they could not settle, and c) where a line was drawn on the map or on the ground on only one side of which they could settle (Guha 1988: 207). Colonial ruler put forwarded three reasons for this system of control, a) to preserve the identity of the Assamese villages, b) to settle the immigrants in an orderly way and c) to earn more revenue for the state (Chakraborty 2009: 53).

Presumed anticipation of solution however could not be achieved due to resistances raised out of the questions of subsistence and political dividend on one hand and administrative loopholes on the other. There were certain short comings in the system which resulted in violation of the system and practice of corruption. The system restricted land settlement with a migrant family not beyond a ceiling of 16 *bighas*, even sub-letting of land to migrants and employing them as agricultural labourer by local inhabitants were strictly prohibited for working in the area fixed by the system for local people (Guha 1988: 207). But at the mercy of corruption among some bureaucrats and profit speculative local landed gentry, all those provisions became ridiculous. Chakraborty (2009) observes, "The corrupt revenue staffs often tempered the pencil drawn alignments of the line on maps. Land record staff in matters dealing with the settling of lands, altered lines and issued *pattas*. The very length of the line to be guarded was in some respects a direct incitement to corruption. In many Assamese closed villages, the immigrants were found cultivating lands of

Assamese gentlemen either as labourers, *adhiars* or regular sub-tenants both in areas of annual and periodic leases. Large numbers of Assamese sold their annual *patta* land to immigrants for one reason or the other and left the immigrants in possession of their lands in villages where they were not supposed to settle. The situation worsened with passage of time” (Chakraborty 2009: 53).

The ‘Line System’ could be successfully implemented in Nawgaon while failed in rest parts of Assam. Additional measures were further undertaken regarding issuing land transaction and *patta* to ensure proper implementation of the ‘Line System’, known as ‘Colonization Scheme’. “...in 1928, it was decided that the number of ‘lines’ should be reduced, simplified and straightened as far as possible with the objectives of allocating considerable blocks land-community wise....the first Colonization Scheme, thereafter started in Nawgaon in 1928, was successively followed by one each in Barpeta and Mangaldai subdivisions. Under all these schemes, a small family was to be given about 20 *bighas* of land on payment of premium. The areas allotted under the Nawgaon Scheme to 1,619 Muslims, 441 Hindu immigrant families amounted in all to 47,636 acres till March 1933” (Guha 1988: 209).

In the wake of ‘Line System’ process migration did not come to halt, rather increased steadily (Hussain 1993: 205). There was a continuous increased inflow of East Bengal peasants during 1931 to 1951 and settlement of migrant peasants during 1941-51 was higher than 1931-41 (Nath 2012). Moreover, it is worthwhile to mention that all the local Assamese people were not against the settlement of migrant peasants, rather supported and encouraged them since they were profited by the migrant peasants (*ibid.*: 205). Local Assamese money lenders, a section of the Assamese society did not oppose to the arrival of the peasants migrants, many Assamese moneylenders and *Marwari* businessmen financed the migrants (Guha 1988: 206). At the mercy of migrant peasants many Assamese farmers had turned into land speculators (Hussain 1993: 205). They sold off their lands to immigrants at a good price, and then they cleared a new plot (*pam*) on wasteland and sold them again. The immigrants were financed by their own head men (*matabbar*) as well as *Marwari* and Assamese (*Barpetia*) moneylenders (*ibid.*: 205).

Implementation of ‘Line System’ and then ‘Colonization Scheme’ created tense atmosphere in the socio-political space of Assam. A dubious and tense situation locating indigenous people and migrant settlers on two contrasting poles, the ‘Line

System' provided mileage to the politics of 'divide and rule' by adding communal flavour and sharply confronting social spaces for the days ahead to come. Indigenous people who were mostly Hindus in religion, supported and insisted proper implementation of the system to restrict settlement of migrants, while migrants, most of whom were Muslims, opposed it vehemently and, standpoint of each supported by quite reasonable grounds, but neglecting each other's (Ahmed 2005: 53-54). Indigenous people while regarded restriction of settlement necessary for safeguard of their identity and dominance, Muslim migrants reacted to it as discriminatory and injustice. Muslims stood in favour of the abolition of the 'Line System' as they thought "men were equal in the eyes of Allah (God), why should thousands of acres of land remain waste, particularly when men in search of livelihood and lebensraum were available to turn them into smiling fields" (Guha 1988: 210).

Till the days of independence, politics in Assam moved around the issue of Line System and conflict-ridden Hindu-Muslim communal politics. Congress and Muslim League, two main political parties, by and large, represented indigenous Assamese Hindus and immigrant Muslims respectively. Gopinath Bordoloi of Indian National Congress and Sayed Sadullah of All India Muslim League emerged as central political leadership representing Hindus and Muslims respectively. Until independence indigenous Assamese Hindu legislators and Muslims legislators of 'Assam Legislative Council' engaged in an intense confrontation on the issue of the 'Line System' and coincidentally both groups enjoyed powers for different terms. Each opposing group, less and more, implemented legislations, policies suited to their interests and ideology as well as of the colonial ruler. During the last decades of colonial rule in India, Government of Assam under the leadership Sadullah encouraged migration under the 'grow more food' policy. During his tenure of 1939-41 migrants were given *pattas* on one *lakh bighas* (Deka 2010: 22). Again during 1943-45, migrants were settled in 174546 *bigha* area (Nath 2012: 65). More than an economic development purpose it was apprehended as a tactic to increase Muslim population in Assam in favour of the political dominance of Muslim League and the policy thus became as notorious as 'grow more Muslims' policy (Chakraborty 2009: 50). Sadullah thus remained to be 'a devil' in the mind of Assamese lasting till date. While in 1946 Government under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi "came forward with a stern measure to deal with immigrant's land settlement issue. He started evicting the migrants without any compromise to human feeling. It brought an

unexpected crisis as a large number of immigrants became homeless” (Ahmed 2005: 60). The scheme of mass eviction created a furious communal hatred between Hindus and Muslim.

The existing atmosphere of hatred was further fuelled by the policy of dividing British ruled India into two independent states, ‘India’ and ‘Pakistan’ which caused loss of lives and property of millions. Similarly in Assam, communal riots during immediate pre and post-independence days took away lives of many Muslims, houses and properties were damaged (Hussain 1993: 210). Though exact figures are not available, various scholars admitted an exodus of *lakh* of Muslims to East Pakistan due to communal riot in 1950.¹⁰

Simultaneously British ruler, on the other hand took great advantage of the political development during the colonial age. They successfully played their ‘divide and rule policy’ to strengthen their establishment in the region. Though the British colonialism was responsible for the demographic change through increasing of Muslim population in Assam (Hussain 1993: 206), they instigated fierce competition by invoking Assamese people against Bengali Muslim peasants. A. C. Mullan who was the superintendent of Census in 1931 wrote, “...has almost completed the conquest of Nawgaon. The Barpeta subdivision of Kamrup has also fallen to their attack and Darrang is being invaded. Sivasagar has so far escaped completely, but the few thousands Mymensinghias in North Lakhimpur are an outpost which may during the next decade; prove to be a valuable basis for major operations. Wheresoever the *carcass*, there are vultures are gathered together. Where there is wasteland thither flock the Mymensinghias” (*ibid.*: 206).

Some scholars argue it as a colonial ‘divide and rule’ policy where they wanted to patronise social conflict between local Assamese people and Muslim migrant peasants. British ruler no doubt played a double role, spreading communal tension which provided high dividend to the colonial ruler. “While Line System failed to execution, they ignored it, because they were interested in raising the quantum of land revenue. The settlement of Muslim peasants raised amount of revenue gradually with the gradual growth of their population” (*ibid.*: 205).

¹⁰ Estimated by Monirul Hussain (1993: 210), cited from the source- “*The Assam Agreement and Its Likely Fallout*” by B.P. Misra (1985), shows that the total numbers of emigrants from Assam to East Pakistan in the wake of communal riot of 1950 were 1,00,000. While following “*Red Rivers and Blue Hills*” by Hem Barua (1962) 53000 immigrant Muslim families were displaced.

Also middle class Assamese were not immune to the 'evil of opportunism'. At the initial stage of migration, it was the local elites who supported and encouraged such migration. Anandaram Dhekial Phukon, a reputed figure among middle class local elite, during 19th century appealed colonial ruler in support of migration as he believed that it would develop agriculture and increase land revenue as well, secondly, would enlighten the society (Gohain and Bora 2007: 13). He further suggested that peasants from Bengal could be invited to Assam (*ibid.*: 13). Successive generation of middle class Assamese were also supportive towards human inflow to Assam with a view to increase population, agricultural productivity in Assam. In 1874 a memorandum was submitted to Lord Northbrook urging him to bring people from mainland India to Assam which was signed by about hundred gentry (Boruah 1980: 49). Going further, a section of middle class local Assamese people profited by virtue of migration of peasants, thereof continued to support migration when Assam was under dark cloud of tension and violence.

2.8. Conclusion: Colonial Legacy and Genesis of Social Exclusion

From the discussion we see that during colonial age there was an extensive migration to Assam from various parts of undivided India which substantially changed demographic features of Assam. Migration at that moment was necessary both for the colonial ruler and the migrants themselves. Local middle class also sought development and change that could be achieved by virtue of those toiling migrants. Migration certainly brought prosperity to the region in economic realm. As a result of migration, stagnant economy begun to moved towards development. However, it also brought panic to the local folk in cultural and political realms. They were supposed to be outnumbered by outsiders which could not be supportive at all. Two contrasting interests, i.e., question of survival and livelihood of the impoverished migrant peasants and question of identity and existence of the local inhabitants, were placed in an order in a historical discourse to welcome an undying 'conflict of interest' where legitimacy of interest of either side could not be nullified. It was the colonial ruler who patronised migration could have brought an optimal solution. But so far as the notion of 'colonialism' is concerned, whose motive is solely profit-making, rather took full advantage of the divisive situation. British ruler not only used the circumstances to pursue their interests, but also propagated it. Since two opposing groups by religion were two contesting groups in undivided India lusted for bloodshed

of one another, it provided ample opportunities to the colonial ruler to pursue their colonial interests.

The history of settlement of the Muslim migrant peasants and concomitant socio-political circumstances had an everlasting effect in the society of Assam and state of being excluded of those immigrants in post-independence era is an outcome of the said historical trajectories. It left this population group in a state of social exclusion in two ways, i.e., a) as a geographically isolated group as *char* inhabitant. Precarious socio-economic condition of *char* dwellers at the present is the result of very geographic nature of the *char* itself and, b) as a different inimical social entity from mainstream Assamese society. Their existence as minority in post-independence period inevitably locates them in the situation of exclusion which is manifested through conflict, discrimination, denigration etc.

Environmental features of *char* like flood, erosion force its inhabitants to live an impoverished life which have been experienced in post-independence era. *Chars* are physically separated from mainland, constituting microscopic isolated geographical territory. Human habitation in such minuscule areas started during colonial period and later colonial policies restricted human settlement beyond the given territorial boundary, which laid deep socio-political impact in post-colonial period. Despite the sense of differences and enmity developed between migrants and local inhabitants in colonial age, has taken a further worsen shape during this period. A combination of political, economic, cultural, geographic factors push them in the in a state of exclusion in multiple contexts.

Contemporary situation of *char* inhabitants in relation to mainstream society of Assam shall be examined in succeeding chapters through a combined effort of empirical observations and theoretical underpinnings of social exclusion. Impoverished migrant peasants who were already a socially excluded group under *zamindari* tyranny in the society of East Bengal moved forward to Assam to rebuild a life free of famine, oppression and exploitation but again they got trapped into vicious cycle of social exclusion in the new society they came to contact. Though socio-economic conditions of *char* dwellers and their undesired perpetual social-political status exhibits extreme form of socially excluded group in Assam in present day context (elaborated detailed in chapter three and chapter four), that very process of social exclusion rooted in the pages of history.

Degree of Social Exclusion:

A Socio-Economic Profile of the Study Area

3.1. Introduction

Like the concept of ‘social exclusion’, manifestation of it is embedded with much of ambiguities. It is understood in many ways as departure from certain norms, incapability in participating mainstream social life, a condition of impoverished life, fracture of social solidarity between individual and society due to cultural and moral terms, income deprivation and lack of livelihood opportunities etc. It may be due to single or multiple factors (Hills *et al.* 2002: 12). Again it varies from society to society. While in developing countries economic exclusion is at the heart of social exclusion where majority are excluded from basic livelihood ((Bhalla and Lapeyre 1997: 421), in developed countries relational aspects are much important (*ibid.*: 424).

Since it paved way to academic and policy discourses, the concept of ‘social exclusion’ has been inherently related with the study of ‘disadvantaged groups’ of various forms. Several or a single factor can signify ones disadvantageous position, thus exhibits the realities of ‘social exclusion’. Impoverished life itself is one of crucial factor denoting an unfavourable position for individual/group vulnerable to be excluded from mainstream life. Impoverished life has wider implications in many other spheres of individual and social life, in achieving basic amenities, entitlements for a normal or decent living, thus further putting them in the vicious circle of poverty and social exclusion as well, which in Sen’s term known as ‘capability deprivation’ (Sen 2007: 4-7). Socio-economic status of a particular area or population group provides us with empirical realities of advantage or disadvantage of the same, which in turn provide scope for analyse in the light of social exclusion. Poor communication, basic health-education-economic and demographic indicators imply backwardness and poverty of the population group, is at risk of vulnerable to be socially excluded.

Analysis of socio-economic factors like literacy, health, demography, sources of income, consumption expenditure etc. provide clear picture of socio-economic condition of a society. Examining a society or a population group through the lens of ‘social exclusion’ implies to comprehend the degree of marginality, deprivation, discrimination based on various factors like geographic, economic, cultural, physical, and psychological etc. Apart from other aspects of social exclusion, degree of

marginality, deprivation and poverty can be realized with a given socio-economic profile of concerned ‘population group’.

The notion of the phrase of ‘socio-economic condition’ encompasses a wide range of indicators. However considering scope and limitations of the study, here certain factors of demography, economy, education, and health are taken into consideration. This chapter analyses the socio-economic issues of the *char* dwellers based on the information collected from the survey of households and gathered information from Census of India, Socio-Economic and Caste Census-2011, Statistical Hand Book of Assam (SHBA)-2013 and other respective sources.

3.2. Demographic Profile

In this section important variables of demography such as family size, age distribution, gender and sex ratio, marital status, age at marriage of women, prevalence of polygamy and family type have been analysed.

3.2.1. Family Size

Table I shows distribution of households according to family size.

Table I
Distribution of Households According to Family Size

Family size	House hold	Percentage
1-3	1	1
4-6	28	28
7-9	51	51
10-12	12	12
13-15	8	8
Total	100	100

Source: Field work, May-June, 2015

The mean size for all the surveyed households in the village is 7.06. More than half of total surveyed household, i.e. 51 per cent of total household have average 8 members. 20 per cent families have members of 10 and above.

3.2.2. Age Distribution

The population of surveyed households have been categorised into four age groups namely, 0 to 5, 6 to 14, 15-59 and those who are 60 and above. Such categorisations have been done deliberately in order to estimate the number of

population in the working age group as well as the respective child and old age dependency ratios.

Table II shows distribution of population according to age in the surveyed village.

Table II
Distribution of Population according to Age

Age Group	Male		Female		Grand Total	
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
0-5	68	47.6	75	52.4	143	18.1
6-14	119	53.6	103	46.4	222	28.2
15-59	218	54.7	179	44.3	397	50.3
60+	19	70.4	8	29.6	27	3.4
Total	424	_____	365	_____	789	100

Source: Field work, May-June, 2015

Half of the surveyed population fall in the age group of 15-59 years. It is observed that for the age groups of 0-5 and 6-14 years, the average among the surveyed households are 18.1 and 28.2 per cent respectively. It reveals that percentage of population in the age group of 0-5 among the surveyed household is higher than that of state average of Assam 14.86 per cent and almost similar to that of district average 18.89 per cent (SHBA 2013). Thus the village and the district shows higher share of child population.

3.2.3. Gender and Sex Ratio

Gender and sex ratio is an important variable of demography which helps us to understand the number of female to the total male in a population group. Sex ratio is calculated as number of females against per thousand males. It helps us to understand the extent of gender inequality. A low ratio indicates lesser number of female to total number of male, which is an indicative of greater inequality among the two gender groups. Table III shows sex wise distribution of population according to age group.

Already explained above table II reveals that female population in the 0-5 age group is higher than that of male among the surveyed households. There are 47.6 per cent males compared to 52.4 per cent females. While in all subsequent age groups, male population is higher than female population. In the age group of 6-14 years male population comprises 53.6 per cent and female 46.4 per cent. In the working age

group (15-59 years) male and female comprises 54.7 per cent and 44.3 per cent respectively. Also in age group of 60+ number of male population exceeds female population. In this group male comprises 70.4 per cent while female 29.6 per cent.

Following sex-wise distribution of population of different age groups in the table II, table III shows age specific sex ratio of the population among the surveyed households.

Table III
Sex Ratio According to Age Distribution

Age Group	Sex Ratio
0-5	1102
6-14	865
15-59	821
60+	421
Combined	860

Source: Field work, May-June, 2015

Sex ratio of the sample population surveyed is 860, which is much lower than the state average 958 and at the district level 953 (SHBA 2013). In the age group of 0-5, ratio is in favour of female while in all subsequent groups ratio is overwhelmingly in favour of male. Sex ratio among the age group of 0-5 year is 1102 which is much higher than state average 962 and district average 968 (*ibid.*).

3.2.4. Marital Status

Marriage is an important social institution. It determines the demographic characteristics of a population group. Pattern of marital status is depended on combined effect of various biological, social, economic, cultural, legal factors. “Level of fertility and mortality are influenced by the marital status of a population group. A community with a large portion of unmarried, widow and divorced women represent lower fertility. Again it is generally found that mortality is always lower among the married people than the unmarried of the same age and sex. Because the married persons are generally more secure and protected and they usually lead a more comfort life than those who are unmarried” (Goswamy 2014: 46). Table IV gives the distribution of the marital status among the surveyed population. For this analysis we have excluded the population below 14 years of age.

Table IV
Distribution of Population According to Marital Status

Married			Unmarried			Div.		W1	W2	Total	Total
M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F				
189	178	367 (86.5 %)	48	5	53 (6.7%)	0	0	4	0	4 (0.5%)	424 (100 %)

Source: Field work, May-June, 2015

(Figures in brackets indicate percentage of row total of sample population)

(N.B. Div.- Divorcee, W1- Widow, W2- Widower)

From the table it appears that universal marriage among the adults (both sexes) is the norm among the sample population since nearly 86.5% of the total adults (424 nos.) in the age group of 15 and above are married. Though there is no official estimation available on the *char* dwellers, yet some studies (Chakraborty 2009: 72, Goswamy 2014: 48) show the same norm as nearly about 90%. Unmarried population comprised of 6.7% of total population excluding population of age group 0-14. In the survey no case of divorcee found and only four age old widow was there of age more than 50 years. It is also found that no adult of age 20 and beyond of both sexes were unmarried.

3.2.5. Mean Age at Marriage of Women and Prevalence of Polygamy

Mean age at marriage of women and polygamy are two important socio-economic indicators. It also indicates socio-economic status of a society. Wife's age at marriage can overpoweringly influences health of herself and children as well. It is well known that early marriage is positively correlated with higher fertility and late marriage with lower fertility. On the other hand, when females marry at a lower age, they suffer from higher incidence of chronic diseases and infant mortality among them is higher than the females who marry late. Societies in *char* areas of Assam are infamous for massive early marriage and rampant polygamy.¹¹ Hence the study carefully observed both phenomena among the surveyed population.

¹¹ Same as foot note no. 1

In our study we observed mean age of women at marriage is 15.2 years which is much lower than the legal age of marriage, 18 years. Not a single woman married at the age of 17 and above. Again, contrary to the popular notion of prevalence of polygamy only 1 woman found practising polygamy.

3.2.6. Family Types

Family type may be either joint or nuclear. Family type influences on other socio-economic factors and demographic behaviours. It is well known that fertility in a joint family is higher than a nuclear family. Also in joint families children are not taken proper care and attention which results in higher mortality. Nuclear family is an indicator of economic growth, modernisation, educational advancement and specialization of society. While higher number of joint families suggests prevalence of traditional and socio-economic backwardness of the society.

Among all 100 surveyed households 18 are joint families and rest 82 are nuclear families. Categorisation of families in these two types was based on, a) whether sharing of common kitchen, or b) separated kitchen. Families in which pattern of cooking and sharing meals belong to first type are categorised as joint family while later as nuclear. But in practice most of the nuclear families (77% of total nuclear families) share and live in common yard locally called *chala*. Though they had different kitchens, property of (ownership of land) land held collectively.

3.3. Educational Status

‘Educational status’ is one the most important indicators to assess socio-economic conditions of a given population group. Education is the agent of development and change. It provides better and efficient human resources to the economy. Higher educational status of a society indicates its better socio-economic condition and vice-versa. Level of education directly and indirectly influences other socio-economic factors, demographic behaviours. There is a reciprocal relationship between educational status and economic condition. Higher achievement in education provides better livelihood and more income opportunities thereby affecting condition of living. Higher dropout rate indicate lower economic status and overall living condition.

Educational status also influences demographic behaviours like marriage, fertility, mortality, participation in the work force, use of birth control measures,

health care facilities and hygienic lifestyle and so on. It is observed that in an illiterate society or family population growth tend to be higher. Studies show that illiterate people less use birth control measures. Especially women without education are largely dominated by superstitions and prejudices who not only less prefer to use contraceptives but also they do not have required knowledge regarding female and child nutrition, hygiene and seriousness of illness of their children and themselves. Hence an illiterate society always has higher maternal mortality and infant mortality rate. Several demographic studies reveal negative relationship between the educational level of women and their fertility (Goswamy: 2014).

In our study indicators of 'educational status', like literacy status, dropouts, student-teacher ratio with gender wise distribution and number educational institutions have been taken into consideration. Considering its importance in this particular context, surveyed respondents were asked the reasons of enrolling their children and school dropout.

3.3.1. Literacy Status

Among all, literacy rate is the basic indicator of educational status of a population group. It is the basic parameter in calculating human development index. Definition of literacy by UNO (1970) has been considered to assess literacy among surveyed population. According to it, literacy is the ability of a person to read and write with understanding a short simple statement of his everyday life (Bucciarelli *et al.* 2012: 37). In our study, population above 6 years of age have been considered to calculate literacy rate among the population group and population in the age group of 0-6 years have been excluded though some of them may be a part of school going population. Among the surveyed households, total population excluding the age group of below 6 years are 646 of which 356 are male and 290 female based on which literacy rates are calculated at total average level and gender specific. Table V shows the distribution of total literates according to level of education.

The table reveals a gloomy picture of the population group in the surveyed *char* village. Several studies on *chars* in Assam show an overall pitiable educational condition (Awal 2005, Chakraborty 2009, Goswamy 2014). Present study area exhibits further aggravated situation due to some special reasons associated with the area (discussed in next session). Overall literacy rate is calculated as 41.8% indicating huge gap with both state (72.19%) and district (58.34%) level (SHBA 2013). Even it

is much lower than that of *Gram Panchayat* level (49.76%).¹² Gender specific literacy rates also follow the same direction. Male and female literacy among the sample population are 46% and 36.6% respectively, shows substantial gap with State (77.85% and 66.27%), District (63.10% and 53.33%) and *Gram Panchayat* (55.66% and 43.33) level (*ibid.*).

Table V
Distribution of Total Literates according to Level of Education

Levels of education	Male	Female	Total
Illiterate	192 (54%)	184 (63.4%)	376 (58.2%)
Informal Literate	2 (0.6%)	4 (1.4%)	6 (0.9%)
Up to Lower Primary	90 (25.2%)	62 (21.4%)	152 (23.5%)
Up to Upper Primary	38 (10.6%)	21 (7.2%)	59 (9.1%)
Up to High School	18 (5.1%)	17 (5.9%)	35 (5.4%)
H.S.L.C & above	14 (3.9%)	2 (0.7%)	16 (2.5%)
Graduate	2 (0.6)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.4%)
Post Graduate	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	356 (100%)	290 (100%)	646 (100%)

Source: Field work, May-June, 2015

(Figures in brackets indicate percentage of column total)

Dhubri district is one of the most socio-economically backward districts in Assam and within the district *char* areas are worse than plain areas in many socio-economic indices. Census data (2011) reveals low level of achievement of *Binnachara Gaon Panchayat* in the field of education comparing to its district averages. Following a same order, village *Baladuba*, a *char* village among 10 villages under the *Gram Panchyat* has the greater disparities especially due to its geographical

¹² Information collected from Office of the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Dhubri District, Dhubri, Assam. Date: 18/06/2015.

attributes. Perennial victimization by flood and erosion, shifting of house almost in every 2/3 years, inability to establish any permanent construction and infrastructure pushed the people to low economic status. The table gives that only 2.5% of total surveyed population studied H.S.L.C and beyond. Among male and female the same figure is 3.9% and 0.7% respectively. Majority of the literate population falls within ‘up to Upper Primary and up to high school’ groups, both among male and female. It further reveals higher rate of school dropout, reasons of which are to be discussed in next session.

Condition is worst in higher education. In our survey only 2 male graduates found while no post graduate. According to a school teacher of the locality (respondent) there were only 5 graduates in the entire village all of whom are male while no post graduate. Only 9 household found at least one member of whom studied beyond H.S.L.C and willing to pursue higher education. In case of female, almost all respondents (parents/guardians) showed unwillingness beyond H.S.L.C.

3.3.2. Dropouts

School dropouts are a major problem. It signifies educational status of a society. Higher rate of school dropout indicates not only lower educational status but also more socio-economic backwardness. Distance of school from home, attendance of teachers, motivation of parents, economic condition of the family and some other factors determine school dropout rate. It is widely held that socio-economic condition and poverty and school dropout is positively correlated. Table VI shows distribution of the percentage of dropouts among the surveyed population.

Table VI
School Dropouts according to the Level of Schooling

Level of School	Male			Female			Combined		
	Lit.	Drop.	Pc.	Lit.	Drop.	Pc.	Lit.	Drop.	Pc.
L. Primary	90	52	55.3	62	41	66.1	152	93	61.1
U. Primary	38	20	52.6	21	4	19	59	24	40.6
Secondary	18	2	11.1	17	15	88.2	35	17	48.5
Total	146	74	50.6	100	60	60	246	134	54.4

Source: Field work, May-June, 2015. (Lit.-Literate, Drop.-Dropout, Pc.-Percentage)

The overall rate of school dropout is 54.4%. Lower Primary level has the highest rate (61.1%) of dropout while it is lowest (40.6%) at the Upper Primary level. While at the same time dropout rates in Upper Primary and Lower Primary levels at state level are 9.7% and 10.4% and in district level are 12.2% and 17.9% respectively (SHBA 2013). Various other studies conducted on *char* areas in Assam also expose such a huge gap between figures at state level and *char* areas (Chakraborty 2009, Sheikh 2005).

If we consider the gender wise dropout, it is seen that female dropout rate is higher (60%) than male dropout (50.6%). There are gender wise differences of dropout rates at different levels of schooling also. Among male dropout is highest (55.3%) is at primary level while it is highest at secondary level among females (88.2%). Overall reasons of dropout in the village are lack of educational institutions, massive poverty among dwellers who are not bothering about children's education; most of the guardians prefer their children to work as domestic labourer, restaurant-tea shop workers etc.

Again female dropout rate at secondary level which surpasses that of male is an outcome of marriage at this level. Since mean age at marriage among the surveyed population calculated as 15.2 years even not a single girl married beyond age 17 years, it suggests that most of girls get married at secondary level and give up schooling. That is why secondary level shows massive exodus of female participants from formal education.

3.3.3. Educational Institutions and Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)

Availability of educational institutions and infrastructures also impact in overall educational status of a society. *Char* areas of Assam are suffering from lack of institutional infrastructures and whatever exists are in miserable conditions. In the entire village there are two lower primary schools and one *pre-senior madrassa*¹³, while no institutions beyond that level. Students have to travel to other nearby villages for learning in Upper Primary and Secondary schools. Among three institutions one

¹³ *Madrassa* is an Arabic term means school. In the madrassas in Assam subjects of religious teaching of Islam are taught along with other modern general subjects like science, mathematics, social sciences, English language and one local language. In the *pre-senior madrassas* modern subjects of upper primary level are taught. Recently during 2011-13 number of such institutions provincialised by the Government of Assam and like other governmental educational institutions they are funded, ran and controlled by the Dept. of Education, Government of Assam.

lower primary and pre-senior *madrassa* have been provincialised recently, in 2013.¹⁴ That pre-senior *madrassa* was shifted to the village from opposite side of the river in 2011 due to land erosion by the river and till now it is officially located at that former village. Lower Primary school which has been provincialised during 1990 also has been shifted more than once due to erosion. Besides all the institutes are prone to displacement and among them earlier provincialised school about to shift during the course of the survey.

Infrastructural conditions of those institutions are also not satisfactory. While government running earlier provincialised primary school has tin roof, wall made of tin, toilets but unhygienic, tube-well, tables, chairs, sufficient desks and benches, teaching aids like black board, duster and enough playground, while recently provincialised school is tin roofed, has no wall, one pair of table-chair, no tube well and toilets, only 16 benches and desks, and a tiny area for playground. Pre-senior *madrassa*, on the other hand, has concrete made wall, tin roof, toilets, and sufficient materials. Schools are overcrowded as almost all children in the village are enrolled in these three institutes. There are 2 teachers each in the lower primary schools and number of students in newly provincialised and provincialised earlier are 198 and 220 respectively. And that of pupil teacher ratios (PTR) are 99 in former and 110 in later school. Combined PTR in the lower primary school is 104.5 while figures of the same in state and district levels are 28 and 57.7 respectively (SHBA 2013). For imparting better and quality of education to children there should have standard ratio which educational policy of the government of India determines as 30. With poor infrastructural conditions and unprecedented PTR, one can simply imagine the quality of education being imparted.

3.4. Health Status

To comprehend health status in the surveyed village, information were collected regarding health facilities, immunization of children, family planning, birth and death rates, child-woman ratio, index of fertility, sources of drinking water and sanitary facilities.

¹⁴ A number of educational institutions in Assam are categorised as unprovincialesed (*venture*) institutions which are funded, ran by local people but following the curriculum of state Secondary Education Boards as mandatory. Teaching is offered without any salary. Recently few thousand such institutions are provincialised by the state government and thereby started funding, paying salaries like other governmental institutions.

3.4.1. Health Facilities

Health facilities include availability hospitals and its infrastructure, availability of medicines, sufficient number of doctor, nurses and other staffs etc. It is well known fact that *chars* in Assam have the poorest health facilities. Regarding this dimension scholar observes, “Health facilities in *char* villages are poor. People either rely upon self-medication, which is a strange mixture of various commonly available medical herbs, witchcrafts (in many cases) followed by ‘over the counter’ allopathic drugs. Recently, the pharmacies located at *char* villages, which sell allopathic medicines, have become the main centres of treatment of patients at the first stage. However, it may be well understood that the drugs that these pharmacies prescribe to the helpless patients are not in accordance with the norms of proper treatment” (Chakraborty 2009: 80). This is almost common scenario in the *char* areas in Assam.

Our surveyed *char* village shows almost same trend. There is no health sub-centre in the village. Nearest source of health facility or first point of contact for treatment in public health service is *Durahati* sub-centre which is about 2.5/3 km away from the village. There is only one nurse, one pharmacist and two other staff members with no MBBS doctor. Pharmacist use to prescribe medicine in place of required trained doctor, who at least should be MBBS as per norm of the Government. Patients who had the financial means, preferred to visit to nearest BPHC at *Dharmashala* at a distance of 8/10 kilo meter, instead of relying upon the Sub-centre.

First point of contact, apart from governmental facilities is the untrained rural medical practitioners at the pharmacies owned by the practitioners themselves. There are 3 such pharmacies in near *Durahati* market where people use to visit basically. Those medical practitioners are neither having minimum requirements essential to do it nor they prescribe according to medical norms. If the health practitioners cannot meet their requirements then the patients either moved to Dhubri town (about 30 kilo meter), the district head quarter of Dhubri district or Guwahati (about 220 kilo meter) according to their financial capacities.

It is calculated that for 52.8% household first point of contact is the Sub-centre at *Durahati*, untrained rural medical practitioner is 45.5% and for 1.7% it is witchcraft and traditional medical practitioner. Inhabitants use to visit sub-centre mostly when free medicines are provided for treatment of certain diseases associated with infant and mother’s health. In case of serious diseases patients of 12% households ever went to Dhubri civil hospital or Guwahati Medical College and Hospital, 36% to

Durahati BPHC and rest 52% relied on rural modern medical practitioner and traditional medical practitioner or witch craft.

3.4.2. Immunization

63% of all children (total 168 children) of age group 0-6 years among all surveyed households were totally immunized. At district level the figure is 82%.¹⁵ Rest are partially immunized or not immunized at all. Such an achievement become possible due to presence of NHM workers at village level, but still because of ignorance and prejudice among parents, number of children remains unimmunized.

3.4.3. Family Planning

Family planning encompasses wider meaning; however it is reduced here to mean 'birth control'. It stands for national interest where nation is over populated and also it is necessary for a family considering health of child and mother, and overall wellbeing of the family. Family planning is a product of modern medical sciences which is applied in all over the world at a varying degree. In our survey, it is found that most of the respondents know about it but it does not necessarily means a controlled population. According to untrained modern medical practitioners of *Durahati* market and NHM (National Health Mission) workers that majority of the young couples are aware of contraceptives, pills but most of the couples who use or prefer to adopt birth control only after having more than 2/3 children. It is found that 58% couple used contraceptives which are exclusively used by females only. Most of the contraceptive medicines, tools are accessed from nearest Sub-centre, where these are freely provided. Since contraceptives are freely provided at Sub-centre. During the survey among the households, only a single couple was found who used it to not have more than 2 children.

3.4.4. Birth and Death Rates

In demographic analysis there are number of measurements of birth and death rates which have wide range of implications in policy interventions. Keeping in view the scope of the study, based on number of births and deaths among the surveyed households for a period of one year, i.e., 1st March, 2014 to 28th February, 2015, certain selected measures like CBR, CDR, and IMR have been calculated.

¹⁵ Information collected from the Office of the Joint Director, Dept. of Health, Dhubri District, Dhubri, Assam. Date: 22/06/2015.

CBR is the ratio of total number of live births in a given period in a particular area to the total mid-year population of that area, multiplied by 1000. Total number of live births during the mentioned period in the sample households is 23 against total population of 789. Thus CBR is calculated as 29.1 which are much higher than state average 22.5 (SBHA 2013). CDR is the number of persons of all ages died per 1000 persons in a population during a given year. Total numbers of deaths during the mentioned period were 8 against total population of 789. Hence CDR is 10.1 while it is 7.9 at state level (*ibid.*).

IMR, on the other hand, is defined as the number of children below 1 year died per 1000 live births in a year. In the *char* village during the mentioned period 2 infants died against 25 live births. Hence IMR was calculated as 80 which are much higher than state average 55 (*ibid.*). Studies also show higher rate of IMR in *char* areas which even figured more than double than state average (Chakraborty 2009: 85, Goswamy 2014: 92-101).

3.4.5. Sources and Methods of Purification of Drinking Water

Water is the basic necessity of life and most important ingredient that sustains healthy life. Source of water is considered one of the basic indicators in socio-economic analysis of a society. It signifies the status of socio-economic wellbeing of a concerned population group. In our surveyed village tube well is the only source of drinking water among all the households. 79 households have own tube well while rest 21 families collect from neighbouring households. Method of water purification shows level of awareness about health and hygiene. In the entire village, no household was found consuming it through any method of purification. Unpurified water carries means of diseases but they neither are aware of purifying drinking water nor did they put attention on it. Water collect from tube well is consumed directly. Only in certain cases of diseases, warm water is used following doctor's advice.

3.4.6. Sanitary Facilities

Proper sanitary facilities are essential feature of healthy and decent living. Condition of sanitary facilities indicates level of hygiene in a given society. Improper sanitary facilities are one of most important means of spreading communicable diseases. In the entire village, only one family have concrete made sanitary facilities, rest use pit or *kaccha* latrines and open space. Among sample households 39

households use *kaccha* latrine, 60 use open space while only 1 household use concrete made latrine. The fact reflects very poor sanitary condition in the area.

3.5. Economic Condition

Assessment of economic condition of a particular population group requires to carefully comprehend various factors like source of income, level of income, consumption expenditures, landholdings, possession of assets, indebtedness etc. In the present study certain indicators are taken into considerations keeping in mind the scope and limitations of the study. Considering its significance in this particular context, information regarding officially estimated number of BPL (Below Poverty Line) families are also collected.

3.5.1. Sources of Income or Occupational Details

Depending upon the situation, in our analysis of occupational details are categorised into agriculture cultivator, agriculture labour, migrating labour, business, service and beggar. Since households have both primary and subsidiary sources of income, hence they are also classified depending on if the households have subsidiary occupation or not. During the course of our study many respondent informed that they became unemployed due to shut down of coal mines in Meghalaya, following an order of the apex court of India which are supposed to reopen in near future.

Table VII
Occupational Distribution of Households

Occupations	Primary Occupation	Subsidiary Occupation
Agriculture Cultivator	2	12
Agriculture Labour	-----	3
Daily Wage Labourer	90	-----
Business	4	2
Service	2	-----
Beggar	2	-----

Source: Field work, May-June, 2015

Above table (VII) shows that 90% (total 100 households) households have daily wage labour as their primary source of income. Among 90 households whose primary occupation is daily wage labour, 77 carryout their livelihood as coal mine or coal depot labourer in *Nangal, Latumbai, Botsora* area in Meghalaya and, *Beltola and Koinadhora pahar* area near Guwahati city, 10 masons or associates of mason in

Guwahati and rest 3 works as daily wage manual labourer in the locality. 2 households were found practising agriculture cultivator as their primary occupation. 4 households earn their income primarily from business activities mainly grocery shops (2), tea stall (1) and livestock business (1), 2 households have government service, i.e. Lower Primary school teacher, as their primary source of livelihood, while 2 households earn solely from begging. On the other hand, agriculture cultivator, agriculture labour and business are subsidiary sources of income for 12%, 3% and 2% households respectively. It means that 87% households have no subsidiary source.

Above data implies that labour force in the village is exclusively migrating labourer, since majority of labour force eke out a living as coal mine labourers (77) and masons (10) in the areas far distant from home. It shows a tremendous changing pattern of livelihood which is common in most of the *char* areas in Assam. There is ever increasing pressure on land due to rampant growth of population and erosion. Available cultivable lands are being used for housing. Besides, incessant erosion of cultivable and homestead lands are also turning farmer into daily wage labourer. The senior inhabitants (age beyond 60 years) recollect their past days, earlier the village used to have enough fertile cultivable lands and all economic activities were associated with agricultural farming. Very few migrated to urban areas. During last 40 years all cultivable fertile land engulfed by the river *Gangadhar* leaving unstable fluvial marshy sandy *char* as its imprint. Erosion had taken away both land and its fertility. Since there is little scope of earning opportunities, people use to migrate to cities and other places in search of livelihood.

3.5.2. Income

Income is basic factor for assessment of economic condition of households. There are disagreements among economists regarding appropriate meaning of income (Haughton and Khandker 2009: 22). While some consider current earnings with net worth value of possessed goods and properties, some other emphasise on changing value of the same. No forms are immune to shortcomings. In our study, only value of current earnings for a period of one year from above stated sources have been considered, putting no regard with possession of goods or properties, changing value and other dynamics of income.

Measuring income of households through field study is also problematic since it is harder to get actual information on income due to various reasons. "People forget,

particularly when asked in a single interview, about items they may have sold, or money they may have received, up to a year before,... people may be reluctant to disclose the full extent of their income.....reluctant to report income earned illegally” (*ibid.*: 23). Hence strategies are adapted to accurately measure as far as possible by gathering information from third persons and second hand sources also. Since most of the households have no regular monthly income, nor they do work for whole year, hence it is translated into annual income for the purpose of analysis. Household’s total income is calculated on the basis of income of husband, wife, other family members and income from supplementary sources taken together.

Table VIII
Levels of Annual Income

Income Level (in rupees)	No. of Households	Per H/hold Average income
Up to 5000	3	3219
5001-10000	7	7812
10001-15000	23	12430
15001-20000	22	17054
20001-30000	16	23602
30001-50000	24	38099
50001-100000	3	71005
Above 100000	2	112054
Total	100	24545.44

Source: Field work, May-June, 2015

Table VIII reveals that 55 households earned average annual income that is less than Rs. 20,000. There are only 3 households who earn average annual income of more than Rs. 50,000. Findings also show that only 2 households earning an average annual income of more than Rs. 1,00,000. If it is assumed that average annual income of less than Rs. 15,000 as the measure of absolute poverty, table gives that 34 households fall in this category. In their wide appreciated socio-economic study on *chars* by Chakraborty (2009), and Goswamy (2014) show almost same trend of income as present study. But share of households falling in the category of 30001-50000 in the present study surpasses both observations. It is due to higher number working members of households working in coal mine depots and mines and rise in monetary wage during last 4/5 years. Observation also reveals that the level of annual

income has positive correlation with number of male working population in the household.

3.5.3. Landholding

Land is an important asset in rural economy and society. Though economy in *char* areas is basically agrarian, there is certain level of changes too. Many uprooted by erosion and over populated families reluctantly shifted their occupation from agricultural farming to daily wage labourer. Hence, gradually land holding is increasingly being meant for housing. Table IX shows distribution of households according to land holding among the surveyed household.

Table IX
Distribution of Households according to Land Holdings
(In *bigha*)

Size of Holdings	H/holds	No. of Households against Types of Land		
		Owned Land	Land Lease In	<i>Land at Mercy</i> ¹⁶
Up to ¼	33	12 (36.36%)	2 (6.06%)	19 (57.58%)
¼ - ½	32	10 (31.25%)	14 (43.75%)	8 (25%)
½ - 1	17	10 (58.82%)	7 (41.18%)	—
1-2	10	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	—
2 & above	8	8 (100%)	—	—

Source: Field work, May-June, 2015

It shows that about one third of total households have merely one quarter *bigha* land or less than this. Among them 36.36% households have own land, 6.06% have land leased in for solely housing purpose and rest 57.58% families are inhabiting on tiny piece of land at the mercy of others, mostly relatives and neighbours. 32 households have ‘one quarter to one half *bigha* land’. Among them while 31.25% have own land, the rest 43.75% have land leased in and 25% provided land to them by relatives on humanitarian ground. 17 households possess quantity of land ranging from ‘one-half *bigha* to one *bigha*’. Only 18 households have land more than one *bigha*,

¹⁶ Some erosion affected landless families have been given tiny pieces of land, mostly by relatives or fellow villagers, to make home and to live. We use category of such land holding as ‘Land at Mercy’.

among which 10 households have not beyond two *bighas* and 8 households have more than two *bighas*. It thus reveals quite small and fragmented land holdings in the study area and is marginal land owner. 27 families are landless and 16 families have land leased in temporarily exclusively for housing purpose. Since land leased in through oral and traditional way for temporary and uncertain period, which have no legal value at all, it is therefore can be assumed that there are 43 landless families in reality. Such upsetting findings are the result of, among others, primarily land erosion by the river the river *Gangadhar*, an active tributary of the river Brahmaputra, which is discussed next section.

3.5.4. Erosion and Displacement

Erosion is fundamental unavoidable vice to the *char* dwellers. Erosion and flood make and remake *chars* endlessly and inhabitants are brutally affected by that endless process. It has deep rooted impact in all spheres of individual and community life; put them at the bottom of society and social life. Erosion takes away cultivable as well as homestead land for ever. Area of the present study is also an incessant victim of erosion. Whole area got engulfed by the river through a gradual process from one side and leaving *char* on opposite side. Typically it is a village of displaced persons of a particular kind, i.e. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Land of each and every household has been eroded once or more. All surveyed households shifted home not less than 6th time for a period of 20 years (from 1994 to 2014). Within the period of 2004-2014, 710 *bigha* lands have been eroded in the area¹⁷. While displaced by several factors, like environmental, riot, developmental etc. are entitled to receive compensations from state, it is crucial here to mention that no displaced families have been provided the same till the day of the survey. Officially it is mentioned that “financial help not provided to the erosion affected families but few families given financial helps by the B.D.O., Gauripur Development Block under *Assam Vikas Yojana*”. However, those beneficiaries, in contrast, never received anything.¹⁸

Table X shows distribution of households among surveyed households according to quantum of land eroded from 2004 to 2014.

¹⁷ Source: RTI reply from the ‘Office of the Circle Officer, Dhubri Sadar Revenue Circle, Dhubri’. RTI no: DBC.4/2013/RTI/164. Ref: Letter No. DDM. 8/2013/122, Date: 21/04/2015.

¹⁸ Source: Same as above. Lines within the inverted comma are directly excerpted from the pages of RTI reply.

Table X
Land Eroded per Household

(In bigha)

No. of Households	Land Eroded
19	1-3
25	4-5
20	6-10
10	10-15
16	16-20
10	Above 20

Source: Field work, May-June, 2015

It shows that all the households had lost both cultivable and homestead land permanently. It resulted in not only shifting of houses but a permanent loss of traditional source of livelihood. Displacing life, makes the inhabitants most vulnerable. They are sufferer of incessant existential threats, that not only bringing shift in homestead and occupational strategies, but also deprived of other vital entitlements like education, health etc.

3.5.5. Number of BPL Families

In our surveyed village it was found that most of the families have BPL card i.e. most of the families live below poverty line. Out of 100 surveyed households 98 have BPL card. According to official data, among total 435 households, 434 living below poverty line which exceeds district and state average with huge gap.¹⁹

3.6. Conclusion: Socio-Economic Profile and Social Exclusion

A brief account of socio-economic profile of the area of study elaborated above clearly exhibits a miserable condition in all the fields of basic entitlements. These findings are not exhaustive in any way but are only some suggestive indicators that throw some light related to various socio-economic realities in this area. Examining social exclusion of the inhabitants of the area of study with the given information requires to comprehend both aspects of the concept, i.e. social exclusion as a situation of being excluded from something which individual or group reason to have, and the processes those exclude ‘them’ from having those things (de Haan

¹⁹Source: RTI reply from the ‘Office of the Binnachara Gaon Panchayat’, No: BGP11/RTI/2015-16. Date: 16/10/2015.

2009: 12), a process that emerges from a condition of being and from deliberate exclusion by others.

In the present study, a population group with low income and almost all of whom are officially categorised as BPL (99.77%), phenomenal incidence of illiteracy (literacy rate is 41.8%), a population entirely comprised of IDPs etc. are signifying an impoverished population group in the present study area, and hence socially excluded too. Since all the poor are socially excluded though all excluded are not poor (Kummitha 2015: 8). Social exclusion is wider concept and poverty is one aspect it and it emerges because of the only reason related to low income (*ibid.*). Again though poverty is commonly held as phenomenon of distributional aspect of income, contemporary understandings of it goes much beyond simply considering income as a sole indicator, rather health, education, housing etc. are given substantial importance.

Being poor are itself a *constitutively relevant* factor that results in multiple deprivations from requirements and rights essential for living a decent life. Situation of being poor can have wider consequences on further deprivation and exclusion which can be prolifically analysed through the notion of ‘capability deprivation’ as developed by Sen (2007: 4). At the heart of Sen’s theory is the notion of individual’s ‘capabilities’, which are the opportunities to achieve valuable ‘functionings’ or ‘states of being’ (Bhalla and Lapeyer 1997: 416). “Living may be seen as consisting of a set of interrelated ‘functionings’, consisting of beings and doings” (Sen 1992: 38).

As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norms for other people in society. A wider meaning of participation/functionings here can be applied in availing the opportunities of quality of education for skill development so as to achieve better employment for a desired earning, advanced medical facilities for hazardous diseases etc. Once social exclusion is understood in this fashion, it can be safely affirmed that the whole area or population group is intensely socially excluded.

In present study area, it is found that literacy rate is only 41.8%, dropout rate in primary level is 61.1%, PTR is 104.5, 60% households use open space for sanitation, no household employs any form of water purification, almost all working forces are unskilled daily wage manual labourer as primary occupation etc. are the figures which exists in no form of official estimations, ranging from district to state levels. Among others, those upsetting figures are also outcomes of the low level of income. Households with low income neither prefer nor can meet the expenses of

education for producing desired skilled productive force essential to compete in competitive job market, construction cost for sanitation, housing and medical expenditures etc.

Moreover, low investment in education, health also results in lack of awareness in health which has wider implications, i.e. higher fertility-mortality rates, higher population growth, low mean age at marriage of women etc. which have been obviously experienced in the present study. Already mentioned findings show that CBR, CDR and IMR are much higher than state, district averages. An alarming figure is 'mean age at marriage of women', i.e. 15.2 years. Which does not only is violating legal norm of the country but also implies vulnerability of women's health and longer period of fertility. Study reveals higher number of children against each couple and CBR than state and district average.

Reciprocally, low income is a result of lack of skill, economic and livelihood opportunities. Since the society (the study area) is at the bottom of educational achievements, they are unable to produce skilled labour force required for modern industrial sectors, private and public enterprises. "The definition used by OECD (2010) adds that "[...] differences in levels of literacy matter both economically and socially: literacy affects, *inter alia*, labour flexibility and quality, employment, training opportunities, income from work and wider participation in civic society" (Bucciarelli *et al.* 2012: 37). Present study reveals that there are only three families having government job (school teacher) and most of the rest working population are unskilled daily wage labourer who are provided with hazardous jobs with extremely low payment and even underpaid of that low wage (discussed in chapter four) and a small number of rural businessmen. Thus, reciprocal order of 'incapabilities' and 'deprivations' keeping individual and society apart from required 'functionings'.

Founding literatures of 'social exclusion' primarily define it as the lack of cohesion or social fracture due to incapable of participation in mainstream social life, to which individual/group has reason to do (Silver 1994, Sen 2007). It therefore requires consideration of social relationships and of opportunities to alter their situation. As already observed, there is little scope for the inhabitant of the sample area to alter their situation up to a desired level due to consistent poverty, exceedingly illiteracy, impoverished health status, unskilled labour force and lack of diverse livelihood opportunities. Such individuals/group's incapacities are outcome two factors, 'active exclusion' and 'passive exclusion'.

A situation of aggravated impoverishment hinders in achieving number of basic and essential entitlements, acts as a tool of 'passive exclusion', while active exclusion requires an external agent to deliberately exclude them from those opportunities and entitlements. A careful analysis of observed information reveals that the state and its policies are itself playing the role of that vary 'external agent'. In this area along with three surrounding neighbouring villages, there were only one government aided Lower Primary school till 2013; another one ran without any financial assistance from the state. Even the only government aided school ran by only one teacher for a period of 20 years, from 1992-2013. With unprecedented PTR, primary schools here are empirically none but a boisterous crowd. Similarly, there is no MBBS or qualified doctor in the nearest sub-centre depriving inhabitants from availing quality of medical treatments.

There is another dimension to this aspect of exclusion which throws light about the skewed pattern of institutional support and distribution of public resources in the *char* areas. Wilson (1978) states that the more unequal the distribution of scarce resources among groups in a society, the more differentiation there is in group social participation in the institutions of society and in group culture (Wilson 1987: 36). Provision of institutional support shows not only limitation but also discriminatory bias within the *chars* of the Brahmaputra River. If one compares the health and education infrastructure facilities in *char* areas of Jorhat district with *char* areas in Dhubri district, the difference becomes apparent (see appendix II and III). Such exclusionary measures of the government attributed largely to the factor of identity where Na-Asamiya Muslim populated areas are deliberately deprived by the state (discussed in details in chapter four). These patterns of institutional discrimination often leads to social exclusion by the creation of social boundary or permanent divisions between the 'ins' and 'outs', which takes the form of social distancing over time or of social distance at any one point in time (Chakraborty 2010: 219-27). These actions of exclusion become structural when it is repeatedly confirmed through social relations and practices.

Social exclusion has spatial dimensions too. Factors like geographical location can foster social exclusion (Hills *et al.*: 2002). If we relate this factor to our area of study, it can be surely assumed that the foremost sense of exclusion among the *char* dwellers stems from their geographic location (Chakraborty 2011: 54-55). Being *char* dweller is itself an excluded mode of being and, "being excluded can sometimes be in

itself a deprivation and this can be of intrinsic importance on its own” (Sen 2007: 10). Following his terms, very nature of *char* is itself excluded bearing *constitutive relevance*, while fostering exclusion from other amenities, facilities, goods and services depicts *instrumental realities* of it.

Geographical exclusion adds further woes to the already excluded *char* dwellers. *Chars* are physically isolated from mainland; means of transportation and accessibility is only traditional river boats. *Chars* are too instable to be wiped out; they formed and reformed continuously by riverbank erosion and flood. Apart from geographical discontinuity, flood and erosion regularly displace *char* inhabitants, taking away land and property.

Findings of the study show that all surveyed household shifted their home not less than 6th times till 2014 due to erosion; all families lost their once fertile cultivable land to the river. It had affected their livelihood opportunities, i.e. shifted from farmer to daily wage labourer. In practice, it is society of environmental refugees. Such geographical attributes have wider implication in impoverished lives by limiting and snatching away livelihood opportunities. Thus, furious and temporal nature of *char* is the sources of all forms of deprivation.

Over all findings suggest that the very nature of the society itself is impoverished, hence excluded too. But it is also deliberately excluded by the discriminatory policies of the state further aggravating the situation. Low income is resulting in deprivation of basic entitlements like educational, health and livelihood opportunities, while negligence of the state to policy towards education, health facilities limiting not only livelihood opportunities but lower level of income too. Despite geographical nature of the area of study, i.e., *char*, is conducive to poverty and exclusion. The whole population group is under vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion which urges external policy intervention by the state authority through welfare and developmental mechanisms to break that undesired cycle.

**Social Exclusion of *Char* Inhabitants:
*Interplay of Culture and National Identity***

4.1. Introduction

Social exclusion is a persistent problem in all societies (Modi 2015). In all the societies particular section(s) are kept outside from activities and accessibilities to necessities and rights enjoyed by the dominant and powerful groups. Those socially excluded groups are identifiable with particular name too. *Slaves* in ancient Greek, *Dalits* in India do not only pertain to an identity, particular economic activities they are assigned with, position in a power structure of the society, but also a socially excluded group too. Terms like *Dalits*, *Slaves* itself carry the sense of social exclusion. In all societies, minorities are prone to exclusion (Giddens 2010: 643). Status of minority cultures and identity as being excluded operates in multiple realms, i.e. economy, culture, identity etc. and they are inherently interrelated.

The present study deals with social exclusion of *char* inhabitants in the Dhubri District of Assam and this chapter focuses on its cultural aspect and its relation with other dimensions of exclusion. This chapter deals with the issue of social exclusion of the *char* inhabitants in general and the area of study in particular. Since almost all the inhabitants belonged to a community often suspected as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh (Jana 2008: 105), hence the study seeks to examine if their state of exclusion is attributed to that suspected mode of being? Are there cultural factors responsible for social exclusion? If it so, then how is it manifested in day-to-day life? Social exclusion is often understood as lack of cohesion, solidarity with mainstream society. Therefore, the chapter attempts to examine, if there any sorts of social fracture between *char* inhabitants and mainstream Assamese society and trace the locus point where from it stems. Lack of solidarity emanates from differences and inequalities (Oomen 2002: 58) and democratic societies adopt different measures to accommodate this undesirable situation. The study seeks to understand the strategies to accommodate *differences*, taking into account its viability and shortcomings. Further in this chapter, attempt is made to understand if the nature of social exclusion differs across various occupational groups?

4.2. Paradigm of Social Exclusion: Culture and Identity

Social exclusion, both in academic and policy discourses, largely deal with economic, political, psychological, physical, geographic issues where exclusion has

been outlined as the process and situation of lack of capabilities in participation of mainstream social life, social misfits, institutions, right to basic entitlements, citizenship rights etc.²⁰ However, in contemporary plural societies, exercising exclusion of minority cultures, discrimination against minority identity groups from basic rights (Giddens 2010: 643), results in popularising concepts like ‘cultural exclusion’ and ‘identity based exclusion’ respectively (Bhargava 2008).

More often than not, in culturally diverse societies, collectives of particular groups or identities are deprived of vital essentialities, subject to various forms of prejudices and humiliations. In culturally plural democratic societies, minorities are often victim of social exclusion despite constitutionally upheld inclusions. Hence, social exclusion of minorities is integrally dealt with in recent developments of the literatures on *Multiculturalism* (Bhargava 2008, Giddens 2010, Engineer 2010). “Culturally diverse democratic societies have been experiencing discrimination of certain degree against ethnic, linguistic, religious minorities, which manifests itself often in such ugly forms of ethnic conflicts, communalism and communal riots, pogroms, ethnic cleansing, class war, secessionist violence and so on” (Bhattacharya *et al.* 2010: 1).

“Cultural exclusion occurs when the culture of a group, including its language, religion or traditional customs, are denigrated or suppressed by the state” (Kymlica cited in Chhetri 2014: 33). It occurs either when one group in society persistently misrecognises, denigrates, humiliates or suppresses another cultural group or when some members of a cultural group suppress, denigrate or misrecognise members of a sub-culture of their own group (Bhargava cited in Chhetri 2014: 33). On the contrary, among others, humanity, respect, fulfilment and understanding of others can be the expressions of inclusion (Silver 1995: 60).

Individual or group may be excluded from jobs, housing facilities, participating in community activities, for being culturally dissimilar from that group of dominant society, despite having other qualities to perform the same. Unlike poverty exclusion, where poor are excluded from basic essentialities due to the poverty itself, victims of cultural or identity based exclusion can be irrespective of class hierarchies. Though it seems a distinct form of social exclusion from economic

²⁰ Rene Lenoir (1974/1989) listed categories of ‘socially excluded’ persons, which is further extended by Hilary Silver (1995) by enlisting a wide range of excluded persons, which can be broadly categorised under economic, political, psychological, physical and geographic factors (Sen 2007: 1).

deprivation or poverty exclusion, but exclusion of both forms are intrinsically and positively correlated and victim of cultural exclusion are much vulnerable to be excluded from basic essentialities. Being excluded from social relations can lead to other deprivations as well, thereby further limiting our living opportunities (Sen 2007: 5). Thus, cultural exclusion or identity based exclusion, which emanates from its differences, has wide impact in deprivations from economic, livelihood and employment opportunities, from political and citizenship rights, from impartial justice and so on. For instance, Caste system does not exclude *Dalits* from spiritual performance alone, but differences of caste hierarchy exclude from total political-economy of the society (Ilaiah 2012).

Cultural diversity and differences are accommodated in different ways in different modern democratic societies to accomplish a more inclusive society. These are *assimilation*, *melting pot* and *cultural pluralism* or *multiculturalism* (Giddens 2010: 642). However, no form of those accommodative models is absolutely immune to the disease of discrimination against ethnic or cultural minorities.

In a multicultural democratic society, state recognises culture of each identity group, ensuring its safeguards and neighbours of different cultural/identity groups ought to have mutual recognitions and respects for each other. However, such an idealised form is a rarity in contemporary democracies, especially in developing nations. There are deprivations, discrimination against minority groups in varying degrees. Equal rights of each individual, irrespective of her/his identity are essential for a cohesive society and state. But minorities are rather deprived.

4.3. Social Exclusion of *Char* Inhabitants: Interplay of Cultural, Identity and Geography

For understanding the phenomenon and process of social exclusion of *char* inhabitants, especially cultural exclusion, we need to have a clear understanding of Muslims in Assam and Na-Asamiya Muslims in particular. Assam is a culturally plural society where various linguistic, religious, ethnic groups have been living for a long. Following religious term, Muslims constitute minority religious group while Hindus in majority. However, “Muslims of Assam are not single religious community: rather, they are a group of several identifiable distinctive ones” (Hussain 1993: 197). There are several categorizations and each of them pertained to varying degree of cohesiveness to mainstream Assamese society. According to Monirul

Hussain (1993), there are four categories of Muslims in Assam: a) Asamiya Muslims, b) Na-Asamiya Muslims, c) Muslims of the Barak Valley and d) North Indian Muslims living in Assam. Asamiya Muslims are comprised of Muslims migrated to Assam during medieval age and indigenous inhabitants converted to Islam. Keeping apart difference in religious affinity, they are closest to mainstream Assamese culture. Muslims of Barak valley are those living in the Barak valley districts. A tiny scale, are the North Indian Muslims, those came to Assam during post-independent period in search of livelihood. Na-Asamiya Muslim belongs to that category who permanently settled in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam in a huge number during the colonial period (Hussain 1993: 197-200).

The subject of the present study, i.e. *char* inhabitants, belongs to that category of Na-Asamiya Muslims. Na-Asamiya Muslims are also locally known as *pamua*, *charua*, *abhibashi*, *miya*, *bangal* by mainstream Assamese society. Though official statistic is not available, it can be well assumed that they constitute overwhelmingly majority of Muslim populations in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, since all the districts in the valley with Muslim majority population belong to Muslims of this category. They are concentrated mostly in lower and middle parts of Assam. Among them, a large section live in scattered river islands on the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries locally called *char*. They are literally over burdened by cultural exclusion in general and economic and geographic exclusion in particular.

For a comprehensive and proper understanding of cultural and identity based exclusion of *char* inhabitants in Assam necessitates engagement on the issue integrally with Na-Asamiya Muslims. This is because, considering existential realities, Na-Asamiya Muslim is a ‘cultural identity group’, while *char* inhabitants form a sub-group of that cultural group as a different ‘environmental and geographical’ entity.

4.4. Culture, Identity and Exclusion of *Char* Inhabitants: An Empirical Investigation

The field study was conducted among the migrating labourers of the respective area of study to understand everydayness of exclusion. Among the entire respondents (100), 22 respondents who had worked and are working as daily wage labourer in Guwahati city, Meghalaya, have been asked queries regarding their experiences with local inhabitants of their work place, related to exclusion. Among

all, there are 3 masons and 7 labourers of coal depot at *Beltola* and *Koinadhora Pahar* area of Guwahati city and 12 coal mine labourers in *Nangal, Latumbai and Botsora* area of Meghalaya. For an easier discussion, labourers at Guwahati and Meghalaya have been categorised as C-1 and C-2 respectively. Respondents of C-1 live in labour ghettos and slums at *Hatigaon, Beltola* and *Koinadhora pahar* area in Guwahati city. While respondent of C-2 live in labour ghettos near to coal depots. All they live in an unhygienic, environmentally hazardous, and in filthy condition. As mentioned in Chapter-III, it is exclusively a labour class society. Evicted from traditional source of livelihood, i.e. agriculture, they seasonally migrate and in fewer cases permanently migrate mainly to Guwahati, Meghalaya and some other parts of Upper parts of Assam in search of livelihood. Being displaced by erosion their status in mainland reassembles as refugee. Being environmental refugee on one hand, and belonging to one most hotly contentious identity group in post and pre independence era in this region, they are subject to an amount of hostile treatment. The study seeks to understand the phenomenon, offering some related queries regarding their experiences and reactions.

Regarding their experiences as being different cultural identity while come into contact with local mainstream Assamese people, all respondent of C-1 shared similar experience that they are commonly called pejoratively as *Miya* or Bangladeshi by the employer (if local only) and local inhabitants using vituperative terms like *kela*, with insulting and violative facial expression and derogative tone. *Kela* is a slang term in informal Assamese dialect often used for scolding, meant for disrespect, deprecation. C-2 respondents are called Bangladeshi with similar attitude, not *Miya*. They are all recognised as that being from their physical appearance, dress and language. They wear lungi and keep beard. Lungi is commonly used by Na-Asamiya Muslims in Assam. Bearing beard is socially sacred practice in Muslim society. In the society of the area of study, being without bear, especially for aged person is undesired, subject to condemnation. On the contrary, for the local people they are vindications of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. To escape from derogatory treatment, they (respondents) sometimes wear long pant in workplace replacing lungi and cutting off beard, yet they face similar treatment. It reveals that, beyond dress, language, there are some other factors, i.e. occupation also performs as significant visible identifier. Their reaction as being humiliated by such derogatory terms and

facial expression of hatred is compromised for the sake of life, livelihood, and security.

Since they all are suspected as illegal Bangladeshi from their given bodily features, language, occupation and belonging to home district (Dhubri), they are sometimes arrested by police, subject to physical assault too. Respondent of both categories express same kind of experience and also of their colleagues as eye witness. Respondents of C-1 category were at least once or more have been arrested by Assam police, putting them behind the police lock up at *Dispur* and *Basistha* police stations under Guwahati city. Those incidences are coincides with the uprising of the issue of Bangladeshi in Assam after ethnic strife during 2008 and 2012 in the BTAD area of Assam. Though they all are legal Indian citizens, still their community identity, cultural traits, inability to speak Assamese fluently and being inhabitant of Dhubri district are stronger element of being suspected as Bangladeshi. Police made sudden arrest, victims without knowing their offence. Only after releasing from lock up they came to know the reason of their arrest. While two of them were beaten up by police and rest six were not. Arresting someone requires some official, legal processes, but their incidences are quite violating legal norms. Precarious labourers are too weak to question their arresting or go for any legal action. Rule of law is at beyond their reach.

Experiences of C-2, on the other hand are horrible. All the respondents were at least once beaten up brutally by Meghalaya police and local inhabitants. Among them, *Mokbul Hussain²¹, age 37, male, and *Amjad Ali, age 45, male, along with their colleagues were brutally beaten up for a whole night by the members of local students organisation and then next day by Meghalaya police for solely because of their community identity. *Mokbul Hussain produced PAN card, Voter ID card, certificate from the Office of the local *Gram Panchayat* to them, but those were tore up and relentlessly physically tortured. They were even compelled to make a vow to not enter Meghalaya again. His left hand was broken, still under medical care and is bearing visible marks of physical torture displaying in his body. Though all of them express deep anguish, but they are also aware of possible outcomes if they protest. Despite anguish, most of them take it as usual. They are nonetheless; wish not to give up

²¹ Original name of the respondent (case), marked by star (*), is not mentioned here. Similarly, names of other respondents are not their original name.

livelihood opportunities. Though there are such occasional incidences of brutality, they still go to Meghalaya for the sake of livelihood.

Respondents were also paid unjust wages by their employer. The entire respondents of C-2 category express it as usual phenomenon. Masons and carpenters face this problem often and coal mine or depot labourers are less vulnerable to this problem. One respondent, *Sahidul Islam, age 36, male, who is now working as coal depot labourer at *Latumbai* area of Meghalaya, once denied entire wages for working as mason for 21 days. He along with his other colleagues were denied total wages and threatened by the employer physically assault. In case of C-1, 5 respondents say 'no' of experiencing such incidence, while rest 5 acknowledged it. *Mohidul Sheikh, age 27, male, said that he and his other colleagues were once given low payment for doing job as the assistant of mason in *Chandrapur* area of Guwahati. While they claim due wages, were threatened to be harassed by police or local students' organisations. What are common among those entire respondents is that, such practice is more common in Meghalaya than in Guwahati, almost all migrated labourers face such treatment and this trend is now slowly shrinking.

Entire respondents pointed to the issue of their permanent address, i.e. inhabitant of Dhubri district, are subject to derogation and conviction. Being inhabitant of Dhubri is one of strongest factor to be suspected as illegal intruder through international boundary between India and Bangladesh. So, depending upon contexts, they sometimes do not express their real home district, replace Dhubri district by Barpeta or Goalpara district. Though it does not ensure one's safety, yet there is little scope to be.

4.4.1. An Explanation through the Lens of Exclusion

Above discussion shows that while the *char* inhabitants of village *Baladuba* (area of study) appear in the mainland parts of Assam and North-East India, they are perceived by mainland dwellers as illegal intruders from Bangladesh. Since, their cultural traits, physical attire, dress habits altogether form a unique entity quite different from local Assamese, but are similar to the inhabitants of Bangladesh, those attributes become synonymous with illegal Bangladeshi. Despite their profession as daily wage labourer of low profile kind which is either not performed or avoided by local inhabitants result in designating lower status. Being suspected illegal immigrants or Bangladeshi is a potent factor in Assam to receive hostile perception. With the

given accounts, we can categorise forms of cultural exclusion of *char* inhabitants as, a) denigration of culture, b) designation of dishonoured status, c) harassment, and d) labour market deprivation.

a) Denigration of culture: In a multicultural society, denigration of culture of minorities is a signifier of cultural exclusion of them (Bhargava 2004: 14, Chhetri 2014: 33). Cultural traits of Na-Asamiya Muslims like dress habit, language, and physical appearance are quite different to local Assamese culture. Their massive entry into Assam, chronologically seeded first, the competition for scarce resources and space, and appeared a challenging collective of political competitor, gradually laid an enduring space for confrontation of cultures. They became cultural enemy to the indigenous culture. As an essence of culturally diverse society, being a minority cultural group, Na-Asamiya Muslims became subject of exclusion. Since entire Na-Asamiya Muslim is regarded as enemy and invader to indigenous culture, a psychological construction started during colonial age persisting till date, their unique cultural traits gradually began to be subject of hatred through the process of prejudice and stereotyping substituted by persistence socio-psychological attributes. In the context of present study, entire respondents during the survey, who works as migrating labourer in Guwahati city and Meghalaya, were called as Bangladeshi and *Miya* by the local inhabitants. This is a common feature while erosion induced displaced *char* inhabitants and Na-Asamiya Muslims migrate to Guwahati city and other parts of Assam, in search of livelihood, are termed as Bangladeshi and *Miya* (Chakraborty 2011: 54-57, Shaikh 2013: 149). What is important here is to observe the quality of sense and value embedded with the terms like *Miya* or Bangladeshi while using by locales. These two words are commonly used in a pejorative and derogatory sense to signify those people as having no dignity at all, unwanted outsiders, illegal immigrants, filthy etc. Migrant Na-Asamiya Muslim labourers are signified by their external bodily features of dress habit, physical appearance, language, attire and their occupations as migrating labourer and all those features became subject to denigration.

b) Estimation of dishonoured status: Status implies the positions or the rank one holds in a society. It is the comparative amount of prestige, difference respect accorded to persons who have been assigned different roles in a group or community. Role refers to the specific functions that one is expected to perform in that social group. Every status holder is a role performer. Status is designed by certain forms of

roles they perform (Scott 2009: 175-178), which are, by and large, determined by their economic activities. Thus, there is a reciprocal relationship between status and role. Status is categorised into two forms, i.e. ascribed and achieved. “Ascribed status is usually fixed at birth, while achieved status is a result of some degree of purposive action and choice” (Haralambos 2013: 9).

Status of displaced *char* inhabitants in mainland Assam resembles, in practice, as refugee (Chakraborty 2011: 55) and livelihood seeking impoverished, while for the mainland inhabitants, it resembles as illegal immigrants, which is more like ‘ascribed’ kind. The poor have to labour in conditions of filth; they labour in a mucky, dusty and filthy environment (Teltumbde 2014: 11). They have to live in unhygienic, filthy conditions, too wear dirty clothes. Respondents of the present study use to have the similar mode of life and livelihood at their respective work places. As migrating labourer, they live in labour ghettos, slums; perform jobs in filthy and hazardous conditions, use to wear dirty dress. This trend externalise the responsibility of performing jobs of particular kinds by this particular group of peoples, i.e. *char* inhabitants or Bangladeshi. They usually perform disrespectful low profile jobs, which are not performed by local Assamese. From their (*char* inhabitant’s) recurring pattern of jobs, neighbouring mainland inhabitants wish to assign a status to them, which is too fragile to claim positive estimation of honour to be accorded by them (mainland inhabitants). It results in status of ‘achieved’ kind. Disrespectful prestige earned by their given status-role situation, on the other hand, laid foundation for denigration of their culture. Like *Dalits*, whose position at the bottom of society in the given pattern of social hierarchy in Indian society is, to some extent, estimated from their occupations, migrating *char* inhabitants too earn status from their pattern of occupations. What is peculiar in this particular context is that the *char* inhabitants draw a hostile ‘ascribed’ status and disrespectful ‘achieved’ status, which make it easier to negative stereotyping as illegal Bangladeshi coinciding/externalising occupations with identity.

c) Harassment: Displaced Na-Asamiya Muslims and *char* inhabitants are also physically assaulted by police and some members of civil organisations and orally treat with vituperative language. In a region like Assam and North-East India, where relentless immigration and foreigners are supposed to alter demographic pattern, scrutinizing one’s national identity by authorised body to detect and deport those foreigners through a constitutionally and legally defined democratic process is

indispensable for the survival of that democracy itself. Empirical experience rather reveals practices of undemocratic, inhuman trends, intensify exclusion and discrimination too. Meghalaya provides huge employment opportunities to Na-Asmiya poor labourers and *char* inhabitants through its plentiful natural resources like coal etc. In our study, respondents reveal experiences of brutality in Meghalaya. They have been brutally assaulted by locals and police too. There is some occasional news reports of such incidences in Meghalaya, even sometimes labourers belong to this community are found dead. Almost similar incidences often noticed in Guwahati and in the area of Upper Assam. Immediately after violence in BTAD area, thousands of labourers were ousted from occupation in Upper parts of Assam for being suspected as Bangladeshi. Field study shows, in Guwahati also, labourers are arrested, put to police lock up without any defined legal procedure.

d) Labour market deprivation: Labour market deprivation of particular identity group was observed by Becker and Phelps (Chakraborty 2011: 55-56). It is a form of economic deprivation, nevertheless, emanates from cultural differences, hence cultural exclusion too, where individuals are denied employment for belonging to a particular cultural group. Observing almost similar phenomenon in North-East India, Chakraborty (2011) writes, “There are occasional press reports stating that the *char* dwellers (who visit these areas in search of livelihood) are often evicted and deported from the districts of Upper Assam...This amounts to denial in the labour market which results in exclusion by force...There are often press statements and appeal by people belonging to civil society and their organizations for not employing labourers from disfavoured groups referred as Bangladeshis...So labourers belonging to different sub-cultures are viewed by the employers as the least reliable and therefore become the targets of exclusion” (*ibid.*: 56).

There are several examples of such evictions and press statements to urge a complete economic blockade (Upadhyay 2005: 3002) and those ‘so called foreigners’ are exclusively signified with/by their cultural attributes, occupations, putting a blurred boundary between national identity and cultural identity. For instance, immediately after 2012 violence in BTAD area of Assam, a few thousands Na-Asamiya Muslims labourers were ousted from occupations in some places of Upper

Assam marking them as Bangladeshi.²² They are primarily from *char* areas that migrated to other parts of Assam in search of livelihood. *Char* inhabitants of Dhubri district are most prone to this discriminatory practice as it is perceived as the haven of Bangladeshi. Again, in some instances labourers are blackmailed by the employers to pay unjust wages or no wage. They are threatened to be harassed by civil society organisations and police by labelling her/him Bangladeshi. As mentioned above, some respondents have such experiences in Guwahati and Meghalaya. For the sake of life and livelihood they, accept whatever unjust amount paid by employers. Receiving unjust payment by precarious displaced *char* inhabitants is almost a common phenomenon. Dasgupta observes, “according to published newspaper reports, in 1991, the going daily-wage rate for the internal displaced from the flood-affected areas of Morigaon and Lahorighat in Lower Assam was as little as Rs.5, whereas the average daily wages for the rest of the population at that time was at least Rs.30”.²³

4.4.2. Causes and Processes in Perpetuating Social Exclusion

The idea of ‘cultural exclusion’ and ‘identity based exclusion’ of Na-Asamiya Muslims in general and *char* inhabitants in particular in Assam is primarily attributed to the xenophobic issue of illegal immigration from Bangladesh. This single issue is too powerful to prodigiously overshadow almost all other socio-political issues since the days of independence (Upadhyay 2005: 3002, Mahanta 2013: 55). While geographical features lace up poverty and marginality, cultural and ethnic differences of *char* inhabitants are further doubled up by that issue of illegal immigration from Bangladesh. Displacement due to perennial flood and erosion easily got mixed up with the ‘foreigners’ issue, because almost entire population of the erosion affected victims belongs to a community that has been potential fuel for creating xenophobia in Assam, particularly since the days of the Assam Movement (Jana 2008: 105). The fear of ‘foreigners’ in the psyche of the indigenous people cannot be wished away as simply baseless (*ibid.*: 105), nevertheless, a ‘fear’ as a valid reason for eternal

²² Immediately after conflict in BTAD area of Assam during 2012, there were several press reports of arresting Bangladeshi in Upper parts of Assam. During Assembly session in 2012, an answer to the question raised by one member of the assembly, government of Assam revealed that all such evicted Muslim migrant labourers were proved to be Indian. For instance, in 16th December of 2012, 14 labourers were caught by students’ organisation suspecting them as Bangladeshi nationals, which went viral on local news Media. But, later on, they were proved as genuine India nationals by police investigation. All those labourers were from *char* of Dhubri district. For reference of such incidences, some selected pieces of local news reports (*Asomiya Pratidin, Amar Asom and Gana Adhikar*) within the period of 1st May 2012 to 31st December, 2013, have been analysed.

²³ Same as foot note no. 1

exclusion and marginalisation from vital essentialities is always undesirable. Democratic societies adopt various policies of accommodating differences (Giddens 2010: 643), hence exclusion of minorities. Post-independence records of accommodating undesirable state of Na-Asamiya Muslims and their materialisation, on the other hand, unveils a practice of perpetual *active* exclusion both by the state and mainstream society, to some extent, conditioned by lust for political dominance.

At the mercy of excessively increasing population of Na-Asamiya Muslims, an aggravated fear of losing existence and dominance is rooted in the mind of indigenous people. It manifests in the forms of movements, violence, hatred and denigration etc. That 'fear' gained momentum in the form of massive mobilisation through the Assam Movement (1979-86), ending with the Assam Accord, 1985. Apart from other provisions, the Accord seemed to be a deliberate inclusionary attempt in post-independence era by the state and civil societies in Assam to accommodate the differences and hostilities as well. According to the Assam Accord, 1985, immigrants from Bangladesh who settled in Assam prior to the year 1971 are recognised to be valid Indian citizens. Na-Asamiya Muslims who have been living in Assam since before independence are naturally genuine Indian citizens, while who settled between the period of 1947 and 1971 became citizens through the accord. And rest who immigrated after 1971 are illegal immigrants (Hussain 1993: 153-155).

But while experiencing exclusion from mainstream society in the forms of violence, hatred, denigration; all the constitutional, legal benchmarks are kept aside, merely dress, attire, dialect, occupation, and nativity matter above all. People's perception goes beyond constitutional limits (Deka 2010: 65-55). All the respondents of the survey are genuine Indian citizens, whose prior generations settled there before independence; still they are regarded as illegal intruder.²⁴ Cultural differentiation between both these two population groups creates such a situation where the *char* dwellers are regarded as intruders into the economic and the cultural space of the inhabitants in the mainland. So the cultural boundaries of the social space of the people in the mainland are perceived to be threatened by these 'outsiders' or the *char* dwellers. This process reaffirms the group solidarity of the mainland population

²⁴ All the respondents (total 22) who work as migrating daily wage manual labourer showed the surveyor copies of NRC, 1951, accessed from Dhubri Police Station. In these copies names of their parents, grandparents, and even great grandparents are mentioned. It clearly proves that their ancestors were there since before independence. Despite, some elder persons of the locality (age beyond 70 years) told the surveyor about the human settlement in the area before 1930s, producing valid documents too.

groups against the 'other' i.e. the *char* dwellers, which lays the foundation for social exclusion (Chakraborty 2011:55).

A careful observation shows that geographic nature of *char* itself is the source of not only geographic exclusion and economic deprivation, but further accelerating cultural exclusion of its dwellers. *Char* inhabitants are disintegrated physically from mainland Assamese society. They were restricted to settle within that restricted periphery as a gradual consequence of colonial rule, its land revenue system, fertility of soil, 'The Line System', and 'Colonization Scheme' (Hussain 1993: 205).²⁵ Closed spatial inhabitation laid an impact on psychological differences by creating social distances (*ibid.*: 205). In a culturally diverse society, apart from universal and indiscriminate constitutional, legal entitlements and recognitions, between/among different cultures ought to have continuous dialogue, negotiations, interactions to enhance an atmosphere of tolerance, respect and mutual understandings and recognitions, both at collective and individual level. Going further, these are the prerequisites of accommodation of differences like *assimilation*, *melting pot* or *multiculturalism*. *Char* areas, colonial discourse of its construct, socio-political atmosphere both in pre and post-colonial regime, on the contrary, debarred its dwellers and indigenous inhabitants to form a mutually shared social space by eliminating desired socio-cultural and environmental prerequisites or dialogues, negotiations and interactions between them. Geographic isolation, political circumstances, and social-cultural milieu had deep impact on psychological differences, cultural isolation, economic deprivation and political hostilities. A similar situation is experienced in the area of study. They (inhabitants) are not only geographically segregated from mainland, economically backward for that geographic nature. They are also culturally and psychologically at far distance from mainstream Assamese culture and society.

Perceiving *char* inhabitants as a subject to exclusion emanates from a process known as stereotyping, is a feature of persistence exclusion of minorities in culturally plural society. Stereotyping of and prejudice against minorities are pre-requisites of their exclusion. Negative prejudice and stereotyping keep other segregated physically and psychologically. In a culturally diverse society, exclusion through the

²⁵ Almost similar argument as Hussain (1993) is put forwarded by Anindita Dasgupta in "*Internal Displacement and Politics in the State of Assam*". URL: <http://calternatives.org/resource/pdf/Internal%20Displacement%20and%20Politics%20in%20the%20State%20of%20Assam.pdf>. Accessed on 10/03/2013.

mechanisms of prejudice and stereotyping manifests in extreme forms through conflicts, violence, pogrom, ethnic cleansing etc. Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (2009) defines stereotype as, “to mean the fixed, narrow ‘pictures in our head’, generally resistant to easy change...Usually carries a pejorative meaning...”. “The failure to respect difference and pronounced tendency to misrecognise is often underpinned by the process known as stereotyping. A stereotype is a one sided description generated when complex differences are reduced to a simple cardboard cut-out. Different attributes are condensed into one, is crudely exaggerated, and then suffixed to an individual, group and culture” (Bhargava 2008: 14).

Though it is well known that Na-Asamiya Muslims settled in Assam in million numbers prior to independence, and that ‘time’ as deterministic factor has constitutional and legal significance, still in empirical situation they are all, especially poor, indiscriminately stereotyped as illegal intruder or Bangladeshi into Assam through the leaky international boundary. While experiencing exclusion for suspected foreigners, which are grounded rather on cultural characteristics, views of entire respondents suggest prevalence of a negative stereotyping, where their (respondent’s) culture do not earn respect from mainland dwellers. It is a one sided description by mainstream society and that description of Bangladeshi is resistant to change.

Those instances of everydayness of stereotyping are grounded on a generalised form which is known as *generic* sentences in Linguistic term. In the fashion of *generic* sentences, *all* makes strong claims than its counterpart with the quantifier *some* (Bagchi 2008: 310). Much of debates concerning Bangladeshi in Assam can be seen through the lens of this linguistic binary/interpretation of *all* and *some*. Claims of existence of Bangladeshi talked/placed in either fashion. In a bulk of moderate literatures *all* and *none* are surpassed by *some*, which are justified by census report, various reports/statements released by authorised bodies. Almost all the literatures never nullify the phenomenon completely, claiming *some* Bangladeshi are there in Assam living illegally; coming through leaky international boundary between India and Bangladesh, enrolled their names in the voters lists and other authorised identity cards through corrupted administrative loopholes, make it extremely difficult to detect the ‘illegal’ among ‘legal’.

But what ought to be the matter of concern for our investigation is the experience in everyday life, in public domain, rather than academic one. Local common folk regard same group of people with more stern generic sense. *Generic*

sentences, more precisely generic senses, are appropriated by different other features, like occupation, spatial specialisation of settlement, physical features, language, dress habits and thus condensed into one single entity, i.e. Bangladeshi. Inhabitants of *chars* dressed with unfamiliar/dissimilarly unique way, with different language, physical appearance, even with different occupations are used to signify, unlike academicians, with *all*. Thus, synonymous of national identity and cultural traits results in a strong stereotype, this is too rigid to change.

In the process of cultural determinism of the issue of illegal Bangladeshi, *char* inhabitants are more vulnerable than their fellow members of Na-Asamiya Muslim community residing in mainland Assam. *Chars* are commonly portrayed as safe haven of Bangladeshi, is a popular slogan popularised during the Assam Movement (Gohain and Bora 2007: 117), and a long held common mainstream view. At the mercy of its geographic contiguity with Bangladesh, displaced migrant labourers from *chars* of Dhubri district are extremely prone to be being stigmatised as illegal Bangladeshi. In the field survey all respondent shared similar experience. Introducing themselves to local inhabitants, police, as inhabitant of Dhubri district and its *char* is no less than a curse. Our field investigation reveals that it attracts hostile perception and brutal treatment. The people in the mainland are unaware about the existential threat in the *char* areas that forces its dwellers to migrate to these areas. So, an unfamiliar terrain, unfriendly social milieu make these migrants suspicious in the eyes of the people, which alienate them from the mainland population (Chakraborty 2011: 55).

Though there are different contesting perspectives regarding the presence and scale of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh (Mahanta 2013: 55), grounded both at ideological and data-based level, the xenophobia is not completely baseless. Since even after independence and post-1971 there is a steady growth of Muslim population, which can be explained, apart from other factors, with that phenomenon of illegal immigration. In a parliamentary democratic set up like India, number determines almost everything (*ibid.*: 58), both in overt and covertly. More illegal immigrants mean aggravated threat to future of indigenous. Excessive number can translate into higher electoral constituencies, manifest in more political representations and concentration of power. A steady growth of Muslim population revealed by Census reports in each decade heightens that woe. Share of Muslim population to the total increased from 12.40% in 1901 increased up to 31% in 2011 (see appendix VI). It clearly signifies a steady growth of Muslim population in

Assam. The whole phenomenal growth is exclusively attributed to illegal intruders, mainly from Bangladesh, through the mechanisms of media, literatures and civil society organisations, while keeping aside other dimensions.

Study of population growth occupies principal concern in the demographic investigations where growth of population is not studied in isolated from socio-economic realities and development concerns (Ramakrishnan 2015). Once if it is investigated through this fashion, will reveal another facts and factors. Achievements in the fields of key human development indices like literacy rate, CBR, CDR, IMR, life expectancy, per capita availability of institutional loan and facilities like number of educational, health and financial institutions, trained doctor per thousand populations, PTR etc. reveals poorest in the districts populated with majority of Na-Asamiya Muslim population while Dhubri district has the poorest achievements among all (Mannan 2013: 11-16). Due to its physical and environmental features, conditions of the *char* areas among those districts are further aggravated.

Our field observation shows a situation of extreme impoverishment and an alarming higher population explosion in the respective area of study, almost same (with little variations) as other field based studies like Chakraborty (2009) and Goswamy (2014). Empirical experiences of the present study further reveal that ousted from land, home and traditional occupations, the aggravated impoverished *char* inhabitant have only mean to survive, i.e. daily wage labour. More children are blessings to them. There are potential internal factors to population explosion. Hence, while appearance of migrant labourers in mainland evokes the issue of illegal infiltrators, there are ample evidences to show that they are not all 'economic refugees' from Bangladesh but a large number are 'internally displaced persons' from Assam's own sand banks and river islands.²⁶ But, so far as multicultural society is concerned, logical analysis, facts and data are too fragile to overshadow negative stereotyping and deep rooted prejudice. In multicultural society once prejudice is imposed on minorities by majority, anything that questions its legitimacy are brushed aside (Bhargava 2008: 14). In the preceding chapter, it is found that the present area of the study is extremely over populated, reaching much beyond national, state, even district figures.

²⁶ Same as foot note no. 1

In pursuit of bringing gap between the ‘phobia’ and ‘reality’, it necessitates unearthing realities in *char* through critical engagement to put it in public domain and for policy interventions. Following intellectual tradition and tradition of media in Assam, it can be safely said that bulk of works have been done on the issue of conflict and movements locating immigration and over increasing numbers of Na-Asamiya Muslims in a nucleus zone surrounding which all pathologies move, but quite little been done to understand existential realities in *char* areas. Following this tradition, a social scientist from this region observes that massive displacement of *char* dwellers have remained unnoticed for almost a hundred years.²⁷

4.4.3. Assimilation as an Inclusionary Measure: Unearthing Its Limitations

Since differences and hostilities were realised since before independence, measures were undertaken in cultural realm with an optimism to minimise by bringing them closer through the process of *assimilation*. During colonial age, local elites demanded *assimilation* of immigrants by adopting Assamese language and culture while at the same time; it was a matter of opportunity for the survival and security of immigrant settlers (Jana 2008: 107). Since 1930’s Na-Asamiya Muslim of Brahmaputra valley began to announce Assamese as their mother tongue. But along with continuous immigration of refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) even after independence (Hussain 2000: 4519) and prolonged silence on the existential issues of *char* laid bitter consequences on the viability of the process of deliberate *assimilation* of Na-Asmiya Muslims with mainstream Assamese culture. Non-viability is further accelerated by complex effects of stereotyping on poor, communal aspect of the issue of illegal immigration or Bangladeshi and interest of political class, on the other hand, offer a fertile ground for perpetual exclusion.

One’s inability to relate with others excludes him/her from those others (Sen 2007: 5), which suggest for alternative opportunities to alter the situation of exclusion, specifically in case of cultural exclusion, by inclusion by relating with others through the experience of *sameness*. One such inclusionary alternative is to attain deliberate cultural similarity. Cultural similarities reinforce inclusion while dissimilarities do exclusion. Individual of one cultural group can be included to another different cultural group by adopting its cultural traits, process of which is known as *assimilation*. It happens in a culturally diverse society where minority cultural groups

²⁷ Same as foot note no. 1

get assimilated with majority cultural groups. *Assimilation* means that immigrants abandon their original customs and practices, moulding their behaviour to the values and norms of the majority, where immigrants change their language, dress, lifestyles and cultural as part of integrating into a new social order (Giddens 2010: 643).

Accommodation of differences and hostilities between minority cultural group of Na-Asamiya Muslim and majority Assamese were expected to sort out by assimilating that minority to majority through adopting Assamese language as mother tongue and using as medium of instructions. Language is fundamental trait of culture, through which members of one cultural group can learn, get accustomed with other traits like norms, value, morals etc. Na-Asamiya Muslims use different dialects and mother tongue but announce Assamese as their mother tongue in Census, uses Assamese as their medium of instruction, a process that started during late colonial period. Similarly, entire inhabitants of the study area uses *Ujani* or *Deshi* dialect, but announce Assamese as their mother tongue in Census survey and uses Assamese as the only medium of instruction. Also those who permanently migrated to Guwahati before 10/15 years, their children use Assamese as mother tongue, forgetting own dialect. A section of Na-Asamiya Muslim population contributes to Assamese literature, enriching its domain, but also section of the new generation use Assamese language both officially and in everyday life, exhibiting cultural mobility. Many scholars view that process of *assimilation* is on-going. A smooth and working process of *assimilation* requires socio-political, cultural and economic conditions favourable to it. But there are opposing contesting schools of social scientists among the mainstream Assamese society regarding that process of *assimilation*, while everyday experience of underprivileged among Na-Asamiya Muslims constitutively resists to the process.

A sudden leap to another culture through the cord of language requires deliberate efforts to learn that new language and its values. Given that the present social and educational settings, it can be materialised through institutional process which offered by the universal education system in the society. Availing that facility requires ones capability to access the facilities. Among Na-Asamiya Muslims, only economically well-off section can learn it from schooling and among them a few up to higher level to adopt values, cherish history and cultural heritage of Assamese society and nationality as well. It brings closer members of one another, provided space of negotiations, interactions and moulding a common understanding too, essential for

reducing socio-psychological gap in between, thus bringing much closer to inclusion. As already revealed, majority of Na-Asamiya Muslims people are not only impoverished and illiterate, but the conditions of educational infrastructures are too poor to be educated up to that desired standard. Situation in *char* in entire Assam is further aggravating like area of the present study. They are at the bottom of educational achievement. As our field observation hints at, expecting cultural mobility through given condition is ludicrous.

As mentioned above displaced *char* inhabitants are quickly catch out as illegal immigrants or Bangladeshi nationals from their given visible cultural, physical and occupational features. In the whole process of stereotyping them as illegal immigrants, among others, dress, occupation and language perform as key identifiers to perceive them as Bangladeshi. Media, especially recent visual media further supplements in moulding the perception of mainstream Assamese people, by visualising people of unique form of dress, physical appearance as a distinct marker of Bangladeshi. Popular phrase of *dari-tupi-lungi*²⁸ has a significant symbolic value representing illegal immigrants, nevertheless, in a derogative way. In the whole trajectory of stereotyping; only poor are subjected to it. Economically well-off people neither migrate as labourer nor do they use to wear dress in similar fashion to that of labourers. Due to their well understanding of Assamese language, literatures, culture, common values, economically well-off sections are more incorporated to mainstream society than impoverished fellow community members. While cultural determinism matters beyond constitutional limits, perceptions vary on class and occupational groups and fruit of *assimilation*, thereby, goes to the few economic well-off sections.

That *assimilation* has some other furious contestations. While criticising *assimilation* as an effective tool to accommodate differences, “She (Iris Young) criticizes *assimilationist* theories for ignoring power, asserting that it is cultural domination that compels out-groups to reject their long standing cultural identities, not the attractiveness of mainstream values themselves” (Seidman and Alexander 2008: 19). Linguistic nationalism of Assamese required numerical majority over other

²⁸ *Dari* and *tupi* are Assamese terms mean beard and a particular form of hat usually used by Muslims respectively. In Assam, Muslims and Na-Asamiya Muslims in particular commonly wear lungi, but not by indigenous Assamese folk. Combination of *beard, hate and lungi* as a symbolic signifier of illegal Bangladeshi occupies a representative concern in popular discourse of mainstream Assamese society. All these three traits in a combined form have communal significance, since it can represent the Muslims only. Thus, as a corollary, it can be derived from the phenomenon that communal aspect is intrinsically embedded in the issue of illegal immigration.

linguistic groups to sustain dominance which was appropriated by Na-Asamiya Muslims. Simultaneously, it is lesser an attractiveness or greatness of Assamese language or culture, but more a strategy to ensure security and survival to be gained at the cost of long held traditional language of Na-Asamiya Muslims.

While *assimilation* is perceived as a tool to bring homogeneity, it does not ensure equality, even that of 'homogeneity' too. "Despite *assimilationist* ambitions, modern societies do not actually succeed in eliminating cultural differences and establishing homogeneity; they succeed only in subjecting the cultural differences of less powerful groups to prejudice and discrimination" (*ibid.*: 19), and Assam can be a true instance of it, viewing interactions of two cultures for more than a period of half century, even in every day social life.

Despite, there are other hindrances like communal aspect of the issue of illegal immigration and political profitability of that issue. Ideologically the Assam Movement was secular but it had communal manifestations too (Gohain and Bora 2007). Observing that feature of the Assam Movement, Hussain (1993) comments, "...provided that a social movement, though ideologically based on secular issues, may turn non-secular in expression" (Hussain 1993: 142). At the mercy of the Assam Accord 1985, post-1971 immigrants have their legal status as 'foreigners' irrespective of their religious identity. It is evident that members of both religions were affected by anti-foreigners agitations in different times. But while treated as Bangladeshi by local inhabitants in everyday life, it is observed that mostly Muslims are stigmatised. Our field study reveals that, while respondents are commonly called as Bangladeshi, their colleague Hindu Bengali and Hindu Koch Rajbangsi labourers from West Bengal, and Lower and Middle parts of Assam are not treated as same. Symbolic representations by media, collective violence and massacres, and instances of catching Bangladeshi by civil society organisations in Upper parts of Assam are very sharply determined by communal perception. Since politics in Assam is being shifted towards communalism (Srikant 1999: 3412-3414), exclusion of Na-Asamiya Muslims may take a robust form in near future.

The whole issue of Na-Asamiya Muslims and infiltration is too powerful to ignite political mileage. Since the days of independence, it has been always the biggest political issue, overshadowing all other issues and too potent to mobilise millions of voters. The question of migration and rightful citizenship has become the pivot around which Assam's entire politics has come to revolve, and on which

elections are won and lost (Upadhyay 2005: 3002). Despite, there is growing communalising of this issue, which serves nobody, other than politicians (Mahanta 2013: 311). Voting behaviour of the inhabitants of area of study largely determined by the issue of 'illegal immigration', especially during Legislative Assembly and Parliamentary elections. Since it can provide easiest political gain, eternality of that issue is most favoured by political groups. While lamenting over failure on up gradation of NRC to permanently settle the issue of illegal immigration, it is unworthy to view the 'failure' in isolation from the interest of political groups. Similarly, while lamenting over the silence on the precariousness of the *char* inhabitants, these are all seemed to be deliberately kept aside for easy earning of political gain which in turn makes *char* inhabitants as well as Na-Asamiya a perpetual victim of exclusion. Their state of being puppet in the political game put them at the bottom of the society (Nath 2012: 270).

4.5. Conclusion

From our above discussion on the exclusion of *char* inhabitants highlighting cultural and factor of identity, we found that their persistent status as illegal immigrants in post-independence era results in cultural exclusion which are manifested in different forms. Their cultural traits are different from local inhabitants, which make it easier to externalise culture and national identity as synonymous. More observable distinct traits are somehow perpetuated by the aggravating socio-economic conditions of *char* dwellers. At the mercy of their precarious state, inclusionary measure through *assimilation* has made little inroad. Without having adequate requirements for decent living and accessibilities of basic entitlements up to a desired level, accommodating cultural differences through the process of *assimilation* can hardly be effective. Incorporating them to Assamese culture without striking at the root of its precariousness is simply to treat the outward symptoms of a disease, or draw a line on the surface of water. *Assimilation* certainly brings fruits differently, to some extent, corresponding to different class or occupational groups.

Precarious conditions of *char* dwellers draw little attention from mainstream intelligentsia. Rather they put a political overtone due to gut-fear of an economically weak community – of losing political power and land to a continuous inflow of illegal immigrants, which is in reality a humanitarian and socio-economic issue. Since the issue of illegal immigration provides easiest political profitability in the region, their

status-quo is most preferred by political groups. And in this trajectory of complementary nature of economic, geographic and cultural or identity based exclusion, *char* inhabitants have to live in a vicious cycle of social exclusion.

Conclusion

5.1. Conclusion

The concept of social exclusion is still emerging and so flexible to mean any subject of disadvantageousness. Multi-dimensional significance of exclusion inevitably can result in reductionism of any attempt to typify social exclusion into a close-ended concept. That is why the study deliberately avoided, a) defining what social exclusion is and, b) fitting our analysis to a particular paradigm of social exclusion. Commonly held understanding of social exclusion as a ‘situation’ and ‘process’ and its ‘multi-dimensionality’ is the central thread of the study following which our analysis makes its journey.

In the analysis of the present study, being inhabitants of a particular geographic location, their socio-economic status and belonging to a particular minority identity group are regarded as ‘situations’, while deprivation emanating from its geographic location, forced deprivation by mainstream society and state from required entitlements, recognitions and social relations are understood as the ‘processes’ of social exclusion. However, both forms are mutually inter-related.

This present study entitled “Social Exclusion of Inhabitants of *Chars*: A Study of Dhubri District in Assam” is undertaken and carried out among the *char* dwellers in the village *Baladuba* under Dhubri district of Assam, taking 100 respondents as sample population. The study was undertaken with special emphasis on social exclusion of *char* inhabitants in certain respects of life, livelihood and social relations. Though the findings are based on micro-level analysis, yet considering homogeneity of historical, ethnic, cultural, economic, political and geographic features of *chars* and its inhabitants in entire lower parts of Brahmaputra valley, they throw some important light upon the various issues related to social exclusion of *char* dwellers in Assam in general. The study consists of total five chapters and the concluding chapter is aimed at stating the findings and inferring conclusion of the study and drawing its policy implications.

The study was undertaken with the basic objectives of understanding historical back ground of *char* settlers where seeds of exclusion were implanted, their socio-economic conditions and perception of mainstream society towards *char* settlers that varies corresponding to different class hierarchies and position of those dwellers. All those anticipated objectives have been examined through the lens of social exclusion.

Prevailing socio-economic and political circumstances during colonial ruled Assam necessitated immigration of large numbers of impoverished peasants from erstwhile East Bengal (now Bangladesh). Though they brought commendable prosperity to the agriculture and economy of the region, their presence in huge numbers led to social disturbance in the forms of conflict and contest between indigenous and those migrants. Realisation among indigenous inhabitants of being outnumbered by Muslim migrants resulted in conflict, which seeded the foundation of *relational* features exclusion of latter in post-colonial era. Parallel to this, colonial land policies, fertility of land and other situations resulted in settlement of a large portion of those migrants in *char* areas in the Brahmaputra valley. Unstable and furious environment of *char* making flood and erosion fundamental to its feature results in degrading socio-economic conditions of its dwellers experienced in the post-independence era.

To examine *distributional* aspect of social exclusion they study went through a field study to unearth existential socio-economic realities in the study area, where the parameters of the investigation were categorised under economy, health and education.

Economically, the study observes that almost all families in the area live under below poverty line; daily wage labourer is the only source of livelihood for more than 90% households exhibiting no diverse livelihood opportunities. Despite landholding is too fragmented and too little that almost all families are marginal landowners and own land within the range of $1/4^{\text{th}}$ *bigha* to 2 *bighas*, while 43% of those households are landless in reality, who do not legally own any piece of land. Findings suggest that economically, the society is at the bare minimum level and in extreme margin in the entire region of Assam.

Findings of health care situation also show a vulnerable condition where first point of contact for 47.2% inhabitants is untrained rural medical practitioner, witchcraft and traditional medical practitioner. Fertility and mortality rates are too upsetting. CBR, CDR, IMR among the inhabitants are calculated as 29.1, 10.1 and 80 respectively. In this area no household employs any form of water purification for drinking purpose. Regarding sanitary facilities, upsetting finding is that 60% household use open space for defecation, indicating very poor sanitation facilities and unhygienic condition in the area. The scenario in the field of education follows same pattern as economy and health. Overall literacy rate is 41.8%, while male and female

literacy among the sample population are 46% and 36.6% respectively. Education here is by no means a vehicle for change and development as finding shows rate of school dropout is 54.4% and combined PTR of two schools in the area is 104.5.

Comparing with macro situation, the scenario reveals that almost all figures of the findings exist in nowhere of any official statistics ranging from district to state level, while almost similar figures are available among the studies conducted on the society of *char* in Assam, like Chakraborty (2009) and Goswamy (2014). Except achievement in the 'immunization of children' which reaches nearly to state and district average, yet relatively low. Miserable achievements in the fields of those basic human development indicators, i.e., economy, education and health are intrinsically interrelated, where disadvantageous situation in any leads further deprivation to another. It has wider effects in almost every sphere of life. It results in social impairment in the forms of capability deprivations, results in lack of confidence, ignorance, lack of accessibility to basic entitlements etc. and thus creates a robust vicious cycle of social exclusion. Moreover, erosion of land is the integral to *char* life determining degree of misfortune of its dwellers. Our study finds that all the households shifted their homes not less than 6th times in an average during last twenty years and within the period of 2004-2014, 710 *bigha* lands have been eroded in the area.

If we examine their state of exclusion, the first and foremost idea emerges that temporal and furious environmental or geographic nature of *char* due to flood and incessant erosion of land, which happens to be *constitutive* element of exclusion results in the *instrumental* realities what we have observed in the findings of *distributional* aspects of exclusion. The geographic location of the *chars* is such that they create conditions for economic exclusion, which is further accelerated by the state through its discriminatory practices, institutional deprivations. Authorised official information reveals that the *char* areas of Dhubri district and other districts with Na-Asamiya Muslim majority are deprived from required attention for policy interventions, while *char* areas inhabited by other than that population group have far better socio-economic achievements and indicators due to better institutional supports.

When erosion affected precarious *char* inhabitants appear in the mainland in search of livelihood, they are commonly perceived as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh enhancing *relational* features of social exclusion. Perceiving of *char*

inhabitants as illegal immigrants (read Bangladeshi) again results in exclusion from mainstream society of Assam through multiple expressions. Being Bangladeshi in the soil of Assam is a subject of inimical attention that is expressed through denigration, labour market deprivation, harassment, physical assaults etc. Present study reveals that due to their (respondent's) status as suspected being or Bangladeshi, they were some time kept behind the bar and brutally assaulted by police violating legal and constitutional entitlements. Also the narration by respondents reveals that same treatments were received by them from members of civil society organisations and are paid unjust wages.

The study highlighted that there are other forms of exclusion that emerges from that same inimical perception, which we categorise as 'cultural exclusion'. Their cultural traits, physical attire and occupational features are dissimilar to the mainland dwellers. Along with their status as illegal immigrant, the cultural features too became the subject of hatred and humiliation. All the respondents have the similar experience as being called as Bangladeshi and *Miya* with hostile and denigrative sense, commonly using vituperative ugly words like *kela* and some other inexpressible ugliest terms. *Tupi* (hat used by Muslims) and *lungi* are the most common dress pattern among these *char* dwellers and keeping beard (*dari*) is the culturally significant practice among them. Mainland inhabitants commonly use the phrase of *dari-tupi-lungi* to signify those *char* dwellers or Na-Asmiya Muslims, but are uttered only in a derogatory and disgraceful sense.

Occupational status of the respondents as well as displaced *char* dwellers in the cities and its related features also act as stimulus in moulding such derogatory sense. They do low profile jobs like coal depot labourers, mason, garbage picker etc., usually avoided by local inhabitants and do those works in a filthy condition. These features are too fragile to claim honour to be accorded by the mainstream society.

Recognition of respondents as illegal immigrants from their given attributes provide us a complex nexus between of nationality and culture, and that makes our finding particular in this context is that all those denigrative features become synonymous with the idea of illegal immigrants or Bangladeshi. Those attributes are condensed into one mostly hatred and hostile identity, i.e., Bangladeshi. While constitution of India demarcates those as illegal citizens immigrated after independence and in case of Assam it is 1971, cultural determinism of the same issue goes beyond this constitutional limit. Violation of constitutional boundary results in

unfavourable inclusion for the *char* dwellers. Experiences of field observation reveals that though respondents are genuine Indian citizens, they enjoy all the political rights but above said form of exclusion invalidates their inclusion in other aspects of social relations and functioning.

All those experienced *relational* features of social exclusion makes hurdles in the way of *assimilation*, an inclusionary strategy for Na-Asamiya Muslim or *char* inhabitants to the mainstream Assamese society. Adopting Assamese as mother tongue and medium of instruction to assimilate this migrant group was a policy adopted during colonial age under a mutual understanding of the opposite groups. Nevertheless, a generation attained up to that desired level, but majority are at far distance from the anticipation by virtue of their precarious socio-economic conditions. Experiences of two respondents, who work as school teacher, suggest that the expressions of cultural exclusion do not reach to the economically well-off sections mainly due to their economic condition. Since they do not migrate to cities, do not perform the jobs and wear dress like displaced *char* labourers, they are not portrayed as Bangladeshi in everyday life experience. Thus the study makes an inference here that without addressing the *distributional* issues like employment, education, issue of erosion and health etc. relational features of exclusion cannot be abated, since, due to precarious socio-economic features, *char* inhabitants are vulnerable to be stigmatised as Bangladeshi, but not their fellow community members of economically well off sections.

Discrimination remains embedded within the social structures and social relations, which are expressed through both conscious and unconscious actions that ultimately contribute to and sustain deprivation. If social relation and structure here is embedded with exclusion then what can be reverse to it? Is it inclusion? Does exclusion always mean lack of inclusion and vice versa? A cursory understanding of the concept would reveal that although there is lack of proper agreement among the scholars about the exact form of social exclusion and the related indicators to measure them, it can be surely agreed that “very few people are totally excluded from all social relationship at once; there are many more people who are socially excluded in some respects than there are people excluded in all respects” (Silver 2006). Thereby, it is opined that “it is virtually impossible for human beings to exist totally outside societal influences” (*ibid.*). *Char* inhabitants are politically included as valid citizens of India and have equal rights to participate in political activities, to access legal and

constitutional entitlements. The socio-economically and educationally wellbeing section of Na-Asamiya Muslims are included in many respects of social life than their fellow impoverished community members. Despite having inclusion in some respects, *char* inhabitants are deprived by the state and mainstream society from those basic necessities which are necessary to have a quality of life and livelihood, fitting one to have a sense of self dignity, in other words, in terms of indicators of human and social development.

Multi-dimensionality of the concept of social exclusion implies that it has multifaceted meanings like unemployment, poverty, labour market deprivation, distribution of public resources, lack of socialisation, lack of civic engagement etc. but defining what exactly is social exclusion varies on different contexts. If multi-dimensionality of social exclusion is integral to the understanding of the subject of social exclusion, then it can safely be said that the present study area and *char* areas in Assam as well are socially excluded in true sense. In our study we find that the society of study area is not only socio-economically at the bottom, but its dwellers are socially and culturally excluded from mainstream Assamese society and everything is fostering other.

A condition of exclusion that results in deprivation from vital necessities and social functionings is always undesirable. Eternal marginalisation of a particular population group in democratic system is the failure and malfunctioning of that democracy. In a democratic system, prolonged deprivation and suppression of a group/community results in emergence of that group as a pathological condition of the system. Similarly, a state of impoverished being of *char* inhabitants for a period of more than a half century is leading to various socio-economic pathologies to not only for themselves but to the society and democratic establishment of the region also. One of the best productive social groups in the region is turning to be fatal social condition by virtue of prolonged negligence and discrimination. To a large extent, they have lost faith upon the democratic establishment of the nation. To bring their confidence and make a more inclusive society, educational infrastructures, health care facilities, institutional loan facilities, employment opportunities etc. and other basic infrastructures should be developed to a desired level to uplift them from the situation of massive poverty and illiteracy. Moreover, protecting land from riverbank erosion is an utmost want of *char*, which has been drawn little attention from the state till date.

To liberate them from the condition of everlasting suspected being, updation of NRC should be implemented as soon as possible taking into mutual faith of both, the indigenous groups and Na-Asamiya Muslims. Lessening hostility requires efforts of both sides. To make an environment free of hatred, denigration of one another requires respecting, recognition and tolerance of other and other's culture. It suggests that the more we root our thought and practice to the multicultural nations, the more successful we appear in avoiding the extremes i.e. social exclusion.

Apart from all other aspects, social exclusion of *char* inhabitants and Na-Asamiya Muslims as well has a political dimension. Their precarious state either in terms of socio-economic condition or social relation brings the best fruit to political groups. Very fortunately and coincidentally too, almost after thirty years of Assam accord, NRC is being updated during course of the study. But, as updation is moving towards its final result, contentious issue of immigration is being diverted by elites of mainstream society towards the issue of 'indigenouness'; locating 'indigenous vs. new comers' as the contrasting poles of conflict in place of prolonged contestation of 'Indian citizens vs. foreigners (read Bangladeshi)'. It suggests hostile differences and consequent political dividends would not let to forget by the dominant groups. Even after updation of NRC, issues of differences are remained same as 'old wine in new bottle'. Despite the fact that, Assam has experienced an expansion of communalism in the contemporary politics and society and following the wave, government of India recently recognises communal aspect of illegal immigration by accepting only non-Muslim immigrants of post 1971. All these very recent political developments make apprehensive about the future for *char* inhabitants or Na-Asamiya; they may have to live under the gloomy shadow of exclusion.

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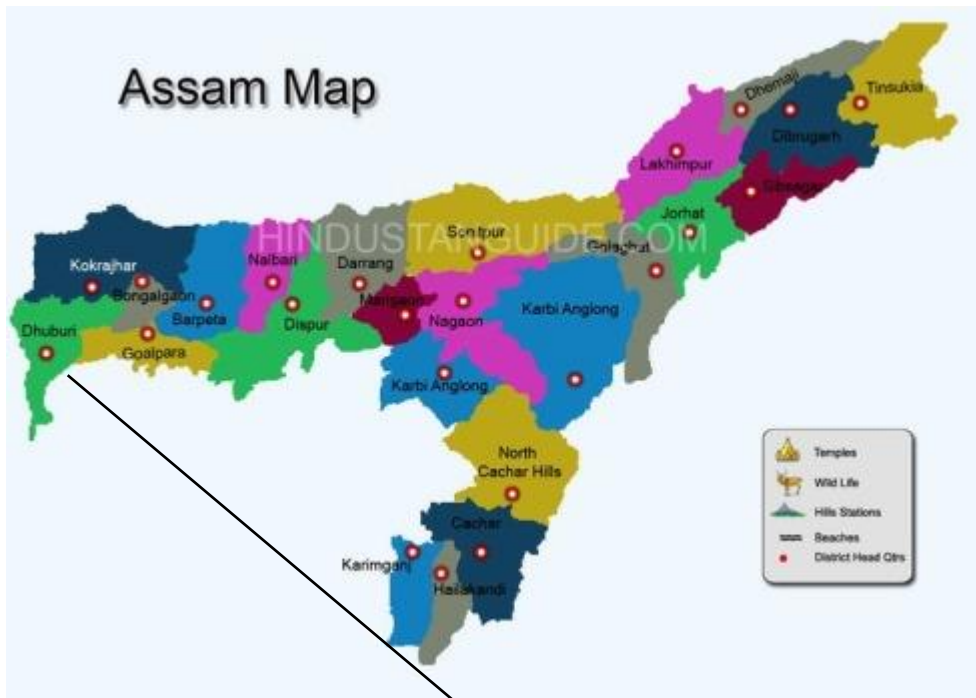
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APPENDIX I
 Map of Assam and Dhubri District



STUDY AREA

N.B. Not according to scale

Source: https://www.google.co.in/search?q=maps+of+assam&rlz=1C1EJFA_enIN670_IN670&espv=2&biw=1366&bih=667&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi12pazzuHKAhXHB04KHfNC7YQsAQIHA#imgrc=362ZcyyYd0UcAM

APPENDIX II

Comparative Analysis of the Educational & Health Institutions in Char Areas of Jorhat District and Dhubri District, Assam

Educational, Health Institutions & Population	Char Areas of Jorhat District (Majuli)	Char Areas of Dhubri District
L. P. Schools	423	315
M. E. Schools	138	116
High Schools	90	37
Higher Secondary Schools	4	2
Colleges	8	2
P. H. C	8	14
Sub-Centre	16	23
Total Population in Chars	215,095	689,909

Source: *SESRCA 2002-03, Char Areas Development Authority, Government of Assam.*

APPENDIX III

Comparative Analysis of the Ratio of 'Educational & Health Institutions and Population' in Char areas of Jorhat and Dhubri District, Assam

Educational & health institutions	Char Areas of Jorhat District (Majuli)	Char Areas of Dhubri District
L.P. Schools	508.49	2190.18
M. E. Schools	1558.65	5947.49
High Schools	2389.94	7665.65
Higher Secondary Schools	53773.75	344954.50
Colleges	26886.87	344954.50
P. H. C	26886.87	49279.21
Sub-Centre	13443.43	29996.04

Source: Calculated from *SESRCA 2002-03, Char Areas Development Authority, Government of Assam.*

APPENDIX IV
Selected Statistics of *Char* Areas in Assam, 1992-93

Sl. No	Name of Districts	No. of Char Villages	Total Population	Total Land (ha)	Total Cultivable Land (ha)	BPL Population (%)	Literacy (%)
1	Barpeta	351	275525	27881.36	19516.95	55	12.90
2	Bongaigaon	150	110215	11367	7956.90	54	12.85
3	Darrang	121	135879	6661.36	4662.95	55	10.12
4	Dhemaji	95	68998	13517	9461.90	46.8	14.44
5	Dhubri	313	233206	86925.22	60847.65	54.2	19.06
6	Goalpara	187	130007	11623.45	8136.41	53.2	8.38
7	Jorhat	210	141901	5576.38	3903.46	25	31.90
8	Kamrup	148	105687	5401.72	3781.20	53	16.85
9	Lakhimpur	182	110200	12069.51	8455.65	49	14.01
10	Morigaon	41	55581	6804.66	4763.26	52.5	8.02
11	Nagaon	29	45161	3265.25	2285.67	55	9.44
12	Nalbari	58	62892	8558.97	5500.58	54.2	7.09
13	Sonitpur	118	92061	24014.06	20309.84	43	12.63
14	Tinisukia	86	33034	10324	7226.80	34.5	14.20

Source: *SESRCA 1992-93, Char Areas Development Authority, Government of Assam.*

APPENDIX V
Selected Statistics of *Char* Areas in Assam, 2002-03

Sl. No	Name of Districts	No. of Char villages	Total Population	Total Land (ha)	Cultivable Land (ha)	BPL Population (%)	Literacy (%)
1	Barpeta	277	268344	36655	24736	67.99	17.63
2	Bongaigaon	117	135809	14256	9520	67.50	12.46
3	Darrang	134	142405	16765	11239	66.94	12.34
4	Dhemaji	149	91203	16976	11347	70.93	15.69
5	Dhubri	480	689909	99898	67124	69	14.46
6	Goalpara	179	186826	19860	13278	68.57	13.65
7	Jorhat	293	215095	42174	28016	64	60.55
8	Kamrup	175	154508	17167	11654	68	15.16
9	Lakhimpur	109	143235	21523	14451	69.02	18.50
10	Morigaon	39	91324	11932	7954	67	18.50
11	Nagaon	43	89803	12036	8056	66.79	17.59
12	Nalbari	32	83602	13432	8996	68.36	16.24
13	Sonitpur	145	145729	24168	16410	68	16.93
14	Tinisukia	79	52605	14094	9496	68.90	14.00

Source: *SESRCA 2002-03, Char Areas Development Authority, Government of Assam*

APPENDIX VI

Total Population and Muslim Population of Assam since 1901

Year	Total Population (in lakh)	Muslim Population	Increase of Muslim Population	% of increase of Muslim Population
1901	2383.96	503,670	-----	-----
1911	2520.93	634,101	130431	25.9
1921	2513.21	880,426	246325	38.25
1931	2789.77	1,279,388	398962	45.31
1941	3186.61	1,696,978	417590	32.64
1951	3610.88	1,995,936	298958	17.62
1961	4392.35	2,765,509	769573	38.56
1971	5481.60	3,594,006	828497	29.96
1991*	8464.21	6,373,204	2779198	77.33
2001	10286.11	8,240,611	187407	29.30
2011	12105.70	10,679,345	2438734	29.59

N.B. * *Variation for two decades (1971-1991). In 1981, census was not conducted in Assam due to disturbed conditions resulting from insurgency.*

Source: Statistical Hand Book of Assam, 2013 and
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Assam

APPENDIX VII

Social Exclusion of Inhabitants of Chars

A Study of Dhubri District in Assam

(Schedule for field survey of individual household)

Name of the surveyor: Abdullah Khandakar

Name of the supervisor: Dr.SandhyaThapa

Name of the programme: M.Phil, Department of Sociology, Sikkim University,
Gangtok, Sikkim, India.

A. BASIC DATA

1.1. Name of the Village:

1.2. Name of the Block:

1.3. Household number:

1.4. Address of household:

a) Name

b) Religion: Hindu/Muslim/ Others

c) Social Category: SC/ST/OBC/Generals/Others

1.5. Family Structure:

a) Joint Family

b) Nuclear Family

c) Semi- joint family

1.6. Principal Occupation:

1.7. Household Size:

1.8. Do you have BPL card? Yes/No

1.9. Details of Household Members:

I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Sl. No	Relationship to the head of the household	Age	Sex (M/F)	Marital Status	Educational Background
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

Code for:

A. Relationship to the head of household

- a) Head b) wife or husband c) Son d) daughter
d) Son or daughter in law e) Grandchild f) Parent

B. Marital status

- a) Married b) Unmarried c) Widower d) Divorced

C. Educational attainment

- a) Illiterate b) Literate but below primary level
c) Primary but not completed high school d) Completed HSLC
e) Completed HS (10+2) f) Graduate f) Post Graduate
g) Technical/professional education h) Others

B. INFORMATION REGARDING ECONOMY

1. Income Details

1.1. Agricultural Income Description:

1.1.1. From own land, land leased in & share cropping (taken/given) [use tick mark]

Types of crops produced & sold annually:

Rice		Wheat		Pulses		Jute		Oil Seed		Vegetables	
T.	S.	T.	S.	T.	S.	T.	S.	T.	S.	T.Q.	S. Q.
Q.	Q.	Q.	Q.	Q.	Q.	Q.	Q.	Q.	Q.		

Code: T.Q.= Total Quantity (in kg.)

T.S.=Total Sold

1.1.2. Area of land cultivated:

1.1.3. Market price of products (at per unit e.g., kg, quintal, bundle etc)

Rice _____ Wheat _____

Pulses _____

Jute _____ Oil seed _____

Vegetables _____

1.1.4. Total income earned from agricultural sources.

Rs _____

1.1.5. Income from non-agricultural sources:

Sl. No.	Occupation		Monthly Income (in Rs)		*Relationship with Head	Skilled/unskilled labourer (Y/N)
	Main	Subsidiary	Main Income	Subsidiary Income		
1						
2						
3						
4						

**Mention 'A' where all the members of the family altogether are jointly associated with same occupation, in which instance calculation of income separately is problematic.*

Code for relationship with head: Same as 1.12. (A)

Code for occupation:

- a) Mason b) Carpenter c) Agricultural labourer d) Tea shop e) Grocery shop
 f) Tea stall/restaurant worker g) Fisherman h) Rickshaw puller i) Handcart puller
 j) Coalmine labourer k) Industry Worker l) Service (Govt./Private)
 m) Self-employed (mention) n) Bricklin Labour o) Household servant
 p) Wood cutter q) Boatman r) Vehicle driver s) Owned vehicle driver
 t) Money lending u) Pension v) Electronic mechanic
 w) Bi-cycle Mechanic x) Motor-garage Mechanic y) Others(Specify)
 z) Farmer

1.1.6. Income from agricultural-allied sources:

Sl. No.	Livestock/poultry etc.	Number of livestock	Sold per year	*Sold daily (from sl.no.10-13)	**Price rate/litre	Total value (annually) (inRs.)
1	Bullock					
3	Cow					
4	Buffalo					
5	Goat					
6	Sheep					
7	Hen					
8	Duck					

9	Pigeon					
10	Fish	_____				
11	Egg	_____				
12	Milk	_____				
13	Grass	_____				
14	Banana	_____				
15	Pulm/coconut	_____				
16	Other					
<i>Total annual income</i>						

* *Separate column, since can't be numbered.*

** *To measure price per livestock/animal et from sl.no. 1 to 9 and price per litre, kilogram from sl. No.10 to 15*

2. Description of Residential House

2.1. Type of residential house: *Pakka* *Kaccha*

2.2. Type of Residential House:

Assam Type

Bamboo with straw roof

Bamboo with tin roof

Others (Specify)

2.3. Main source of lighting for household:

Electricity

Kerosene

Bio-gas

Solar

Other (Specify)

2.4. Fuel used for cooking:

Wood

Cow dung

Electricity

LPG

Kerosene

Others (Specify)

2.5. Main source of Drinking Water

Public tap

Tube well

River

Pond

Well

Others (Specify)

2.6. Methods to purify drinking water

Boiling

Filtration (Traditional/ New methods)

Using Chemical

No treatment

2.7. Toilet facility in the household

Open space

With specific tank

With sock pit

Others

3. Land Details

3.1. Are you landless [Yes/No]

3.2. If yes, then where are you living?

- a) Rented home b) Homestead land given by relatives/neighbour to live
- c) Govt. Land c) Occupied land d) Occupied *char* land e) Others

3.3. Land area used for homestead other than the purpose of cultivation: _____

3.4. Do you have agricultural land? [Yes/No]

3.5. If yes, total land possessed (in *bighas/ kathas*): _____

3.6. Land erosion Detail

3.6.1. Have your land been eroded by river? [Yes/No]

3.6.2. If yes, please state area of land eroded: _____

3.6.3. Have you become landless due to erosion? [Yes/No]

3.6.4. When it was eroded? Mention the year(s): _____

3.6.5. Type of land eroded-

- a) Agricultural b) Non-Agricultural b) Homestead
- d) Other (Specify)

3.6.6. How many times have you shifted your home due to erosion? _____

3.6.7. Have you received any assistance from govt. as a rehabilitation/compensation package? [Yes/No]

3.6.8. If yes, please mention amount you received: _____

3.6.9. Have you ever heard of compensation schemes for erosion victims? [Yes/No]

3.6.10. Have your land again emerged in the form of *char*? [Yes/No]

3.6.11. If yes, then state the area (approximate)? (*in bigha*)

3.6.12. Are you using the land? [Yes/No]

3.6.13. If yes, then state for what purpose? _____

C. INFORMATION REGARDING EDUCATION

1.1. Causes of illiteracy

- a) Lack of opportunities for education
- b) Economic Cause

- c) Lack of interest d) Social cause e) Other

1.2. Why do you send your children to school? _____

1.3. Why did your son/daughter discontinue school education? _____

1.4. What is the distance of school from home (in meter/kilo meter)

1.4.1. L.P. School: _____

1.4.2. M.E. School: _____

1.4.3. High School: _____

1.4.4. Higher Secondary School: _____

1.4.5. College: _____

C. INFORMATION REGARDING HEALTH CARE

1.1. Diseases and treatment

2.1. Generally which is your first point of contact in case of illness?

- (a) Sub-centre/BPHC/ SD/CHC (b) Untrained rural medical practitioner
(c) Private Hospital/ Nursing home (e) Orthodox/traditional healer (f) Others

2.2. For major diseases

- (a) Sub-centre/BPHC/ SD/CHC (b) Untrained village medical practitioner
(c) Private Hospital/ Nursing home (e) Orthodox practice (f) Others

2.3. Does Sub-centre/BPHC/ MPHC/CHC/SD provide free medicine? [Yes/No]

2.4. If yes, then for what type of diseases _____

3. Issue of Family planning

3.1. Have you accepted method of family planning? [Yes/No]

3.2. If not, why?

- a) Ignorance b) Economic causes c) Social cause d) Other

3.3. Have you heard/know about family planning? Yes/No]

3.4. What type of family planning measure do you adopt?

- (a) Temporary (b) Permanent (c) Both

3.5. Eligible couple in the family (H/W):

3.6. Number of children: *Living* _____ *Dead* _____

5.1. Immunization

(a) Fully immunisation (b) Partly immunization (c) No immunization

[Full immunisation=1BCG+3OPVBDPT+1Measles]

6.1. Maternity coverage (mother/mothers in the family):

6.2. Were you given T/T immunization?

7.1. Live birth in the family

Sl. No.	Name	D.O.B or age	Sex	Place of delivery*	Relation with head of the family	Personnel who conducted delivery**	Survival at present (Y/N)
1							
2							
3							
4							

Codes: *(a) Home (b) Govt. hospital (c) Pvt. hosp (d) PHC/Sub-centre

(e) Others

** (f) Trained (g) Untrained

8.1. Mortality in family

Sl. No.	Name	D.O.B or age	Sex	Relationship with head of the family	Kind of disease
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					

N.B. Here death means within six weeks after delivery

D. LABOUR MARKET EXPERIENCE

1.1. Where do you work as migrating labourer?.....

1.2. State your occupation as migrating labourer.....

1.3. Term(s) use to signify you by the local inhabitant.....

1.4. Do you feel humiliated/honoured by this/these terms? State why.....

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1.5. Where do you reside there? Please give a short description.....

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1.6. State your experience with police, if any

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1.7. State your experience with local inhabitants regarding the issue of Bangladeshi.....

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1.8. Any other experience/incidence? Please state.....

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