

Educational Level and Development Characteristics in Char Areas of Goalpara district, Assam, India

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Abstract

Char areas are the particular geophysical formation in the bed of river. The permanent char areas have been converted to farming field as well as the residential, supporting mostly the migrated people having low and very low economic condition. The socio economic and educational status of the char people is characterized by the geophysical condition of the char, mostly affected by the condition of the river water. Education is the backbone of the society to strengthening the socio-economic and cultural life of the people. Education carries tremendous impact in modernizing the behavior and character of the people which creates scientific temper. Without proper educational system development cannot be achieved. The people living in the char areas are experiencing different socio-economic and education condition than the other part of the region. They are struggling for proper education and economic opportunities as the areas are vulnerable and people are lacking behind proper education and amenities including proper economic opportunities.

Goalpara district, situated in the western part of Assam adjacent with the southern bank of river Brahmaputra having 196 char areas under 5 development blocks, where 1,94,534 peoples are living. As per Socio-Economic Survey Report, 2002-2003 of Char Areas of Assam, only 13.65% of population of the char areas of the district is literate. Again most of the people are living under below poverty line. There are only 132 LP schools, 55 ME schools and only 17 High schools in the char areas of the district. It shows that still the char areas of Goalpara district are lacking behind from proper education to cover up the total population living in char areas along with higher education in the area. In this paper an attempt has been made to find out the education scenario and the development characteristics in the char areas in Goalpara district, Assam.

Key words: Education, Landscape, Char, Development, Goalpara.

Introduction :

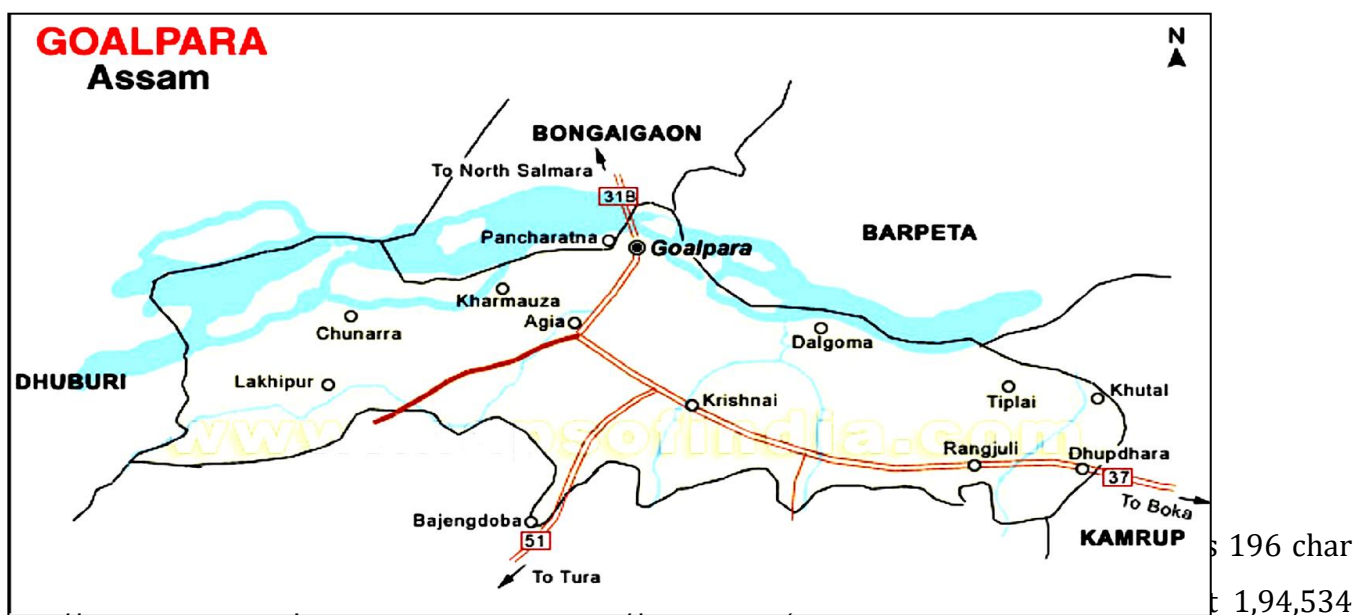
The char areas are particular formation of river bed mostly found in the middle and lower part of a river. It is found in both temporary and permanent in nature. The permanent char areas are occupied by mostly migrant people for residential purposes and also farming practices. The life of the people that grows in the char areas are very particular which are commonly affected by flood water and lack of proper transportation. The particular geophysical condition of the char areas, support a particular type of society having lack of proper amenities and facilities including education. Education is the backbone of society and it contributes towards socio-economic development of the nation. Education is the main instrument of change, modernisation and production. Education is intrinsically intertwined with the development process and constitutes the instrumentality of modernisation of tradition (Raza, 1990). The role of education in economic development has been noted by the researchers (Sodhi, 1985 & Singh, 1974). But there is a great variation in the educational scenario in different parts of the earth's surface and among various societies in different times. Assam is the state of diverse physiography with complex population composition. The education scenario is different among the different types of social groups in the state. The char areas that developed in the bed of a river are very significant today not only physiographically but also as a habitat of a section of people who belongs to fisherman and also land hunger farmer. Char areas are one of the most vulnerable areas both in terms of physiographic and socio-economic condition. Char or chaparies are the river island or may also called sand bars in the bed of river developed due to the sediment deposit. These are the important fluvial feature formed in due course of a river. Char areas are very significant in their formation, size, shape and physiographic vulnerability. Many of the char areas are quite temporary, some are semi permanent and few are almost permanent with some variety of riverine trees, grasses, bushes and certain aquatic plants. The char areas are become habitat of some fisherman and poor migrant farmers. Though the char areas are physiographically isolated, the people living in char areas has socio-economic linkage with the nearest habitation. Therefore in the way of development of a region, the socio-economic condition and educational scenario of char areas has immense implication in the region. But when the whole world is running in 21st century development, in the same time char dwellers are struggling for achieving minimum level of livelihood.

In the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, innumerable char areas are found having physical and socio-cultural significance. These char areas are attraction of hungry peasants and erosion affected people. Since the early part of last century human activity started in the char areas of Brahmaputra river, starting from East Bengal (presently Bangladesh) and got spread upward to cover the central part and recently upper part as well (A.K. Bhagwati, 2005). In Assam, there are 2251 char villages

spreading in 14 districts covering a total population of 24,90,097, as per Socio Economic Survey Report of Char areas of Assam, 2002-03. Out of the total population only 19.31% people are literate.

Description of Study Area :

Goalpara district, situated in western part of Assam in between the River Brahmaputra to the north and Garo hills to the south extending between 25° 28' N and 26°15' N latitudes and 89°42' E and 90°15' E longitudes covering a geographical area of 1824 sq. km with a total population of 10,08,959 (as per 2011 Census). The district is bounded by river Brahmaputra in the north, foothills of Meghalaya plateau in the south, river Petabhokla in the east and flood plains of Dhubri district in the west. Politically the district is bounded by Bongaigaon and Barpeta district in the north; Kamrup district in the east; Meghalaya state in the south and Dhubri district in the west. The mighty river Brahmaputra flowing from east to west along the northern boundary of the district with numbers of sand bars in the bed and bank of the river, popularly known as 'Char'.



populations (nearly 24% of total population of district) living in the char areas of Goalpara district (as per Socio Economic Survey Report of Char areas of Assam, 2002-03).

Materials and Methods :

The paper is based on both primary and secondary data. Necessary secondary data regarding char areas, char villages, educational institution, total population, literacy rate etc. are collected from various Govt. authorities such as Directorate of Char Area Development, Assam; Office of the Economics and Statistics of Assam; Census Reports; related articles, books, journals and other Govt.

publications, and website of the Govt. authority. Primary data are collected from three randomly selected char villages through interview and survey method. Information also have been collected from the school authorities of the selected char villages about the enrolment and dropout of students of their institution. The data so collected are tabulated and analysed properly.

Results and Discussion :

Development of an area largely depends upon the facility and levels of education. The char areas are more particular, originated in the river bed under certain geophysical condition mostly found as isolated from the main villages. The socio-economic condition of the people living in char areas are struggling for better facilities for their livelihood. Similar situation also prevails in the char villages of Goalpara district. People are largely depends on agricultural activities; some are engaged in fishing and small business, hawkers, daily labour etc. Out of the total families in char areas, 67% families (Table-A) are found below poverty line. The poor socio-economic condition and low literacy level (13.65%) of the people in char area is important constrain in the race of development. The char areas are frequently affected by flood and erosion, which also a barrier for proper development in char areas. The following table (Table-A) shows the block-wise area, population and educational institution in the Goalpara district.

Table A : Block-wise no. of char areas, total population, literacy rate and educational institution in Goalpara District, Assam.

Name of the District / Block	No. of Char villages	No. of Family	Total Population	Family below poverty line	Literacy rate (in %)	Land area (in ha)	Educational Institution				
							L.P.	M.E.	High	H.S.	College
Goalpara	196	30959	194534	20735 (67 %)	13.65	20352	142	58	18	-	2
Jaleswar	86	10880	74434	7739	14.21	7125	59	26	9	-	1
Lakhipur	46	9817	56622	6051	13.51	6498	34	17	6	-	1
Balijana	2	498	2587	343	12.94	275	-	1	-	-	-
Kharmuza	27	3751	23573	2533	13.50	2499	22	9	2	-	
Matia	35	6013	37318	4069	13.57	3955	27	5	1	-	

Source :- Socio Economic Survey Report of Char Areas of Assam, 2002-03 & Char Development Project, Pancharatna, Goalpara.

Home of nearly 18% of total population of the district, the char areas has great significance in socio-economic development in the Goalpara district. Most of the daily and weekly markets of

Goalpara are markets of agricultural products cultivated by the char dwellers. During the day there is a flow of the hawkers, vendors, daily labours from the char areas to nearby town and villages and back to the char at evening. There is great economic linkage between char people and nearby town or villages. But even than the char areas are very backward and the people in char areas are living in very poor socio-economic condition.

The people of char areas are lacking behind of modern facilities which leads very slow development in the region. Education is the backbone of any kind of development. But the people of the char areas are away from the proper education even lack of proper awareness in education. A huge number of students are found as school dropout in the char villages of the district. The people of the char villages encourage their children for farming and business activities rather than going to the school. For the study field work is done in four char areas of Goalpara district namely Baladmari Char Pt-I, Baladmari Char P-II, Pakhiura char and Ramharir char. The data collected from the selected char villages areas compiled and given in Table-B.

Table B : Total population, literacy rate and educational institution in surveyed char villages.

Name of the Char village	No. of Family	Total Population	Family below poverty line	Literacy rate (in %)	Land area (in ha)	Educational Institution				
						L.P.	M.E.	High	H.S.	College
Baladmari P-I	307	1816	208 (67.75%)	14.98	192	2	1	1	-	-
Baladmari P-II	377	2374	256 (67.90%)	13.02	252	1	1	-	-	-
Pakhiura char	67	458	45 (67.16%)	13.54	49	1	-	-	-	-
Natun basti char	123	611	85 (69.10%)	12.93	611	1	-	-	-	-

Source :- Socio Economic Survey Report of Char Areas of Assam, 2002-03 and field survey.

From the table it is seen that nearly 70% of people are below poverty line and the literacy rate is just about 13%. After gathering field information and careful analysis along with interview with renowned peoples of each char villages, following major findings are summarised.

1. There is shortage of number of schools in char areas.
2. Most of the schools have only one or two teacher.

3. Very poor and erosion affected landless people occupied the char areas. Immigrated people from neighbouring state and countries are also take shelter in char areas.
4. About 80 % of people are engaged in agricultural activities.
5. 20% people are engaged in other activities like fishing, daily labour, rikshow and thela puller, vendors, hawkers and small shop keepers in char areas.
6. 70% families are living under below poverty line.
7. Standard of living is very low with poor sanitation and hygienic condition.
8. Family size of the people of char areas is large. One parent has 3 to 8 children in their family.
9. In most of the area and many of the children go to school very casually. In many cases children are finish their education at primary level due to poor economic condition of family.
10. Most of the families have no capacity to give proper facility to educate their children.
11. Many of the parents are illiterate and some are just primary educated.
12. Among the female literacy is very poor.
13. Most of the guardians are willing to engage their children in their family activity rather to go for school.
14. Children are far away from the higher education as the areas are very backward and poor connectivity with urban areas.
15. Lack of electricity and lack of all weathered road is a major concern.
16. Flood and erosion frequently affected in char areas.
17. Every year the school buildings are used as relief camp during flood affecting the school activity.
18. As the teachers are coming from neighbouring areas, their dedication is seen to be less.

The above points indicate the poor economic as well as education level in char areas. The char villages are definitely a major part of our society with intrinsic relationship with them but they are living in very backward condition. They were link with neighbouring areas and society while the developmental work is not going in the char areas. There is a big gap in the race of development in other areas and char areas. Very poor education level of char areas is one of the major constrains in the development. Therefore there is no such proper awareness too on education in char areas. Towards sustainable development in char areas we have to take some bold steps which are summarised as follows.

1. Proper field based survey is needed for physiographical mapping and flood mapping in char areas.

2. Systematic socio—economic survey to be done through proper authority about peopling processes in char areas and to find out socio-economic-educational status of char dwellers.
3. Planning should be done for mass awareness among the people of char areas regarding family planning and education.
4. Sufficient effort should be given for infrastructure development in the char areas. Government intention is very necessary.
5. Proper steps should be taken for upgradation of the economic status of the people of char areas.

Conclusion :

Char areas are needed to bring forwarded with the support of modern amenities and well planned awareness generation. Education is the only ray of way towards development. The level of education is depends on the socio-economic condition of the people. Goalpara is one of the backward districts of Assam where about 24% of population living in char areas. The char areas are very vulnerable, frequently affected by flood and erosion, where people are living in very poor socio-economic condition. Struggling for living, most of them are depend on agriculture and daily activities in char areas and adjacent villages or urban areas. Development is far behind in the char areas due to lack of minimum education among the people. For sustainable development of a region sustainable effort must be given to develop the socio-economic condition and education level of the people of char areas through the suggestive measures.

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