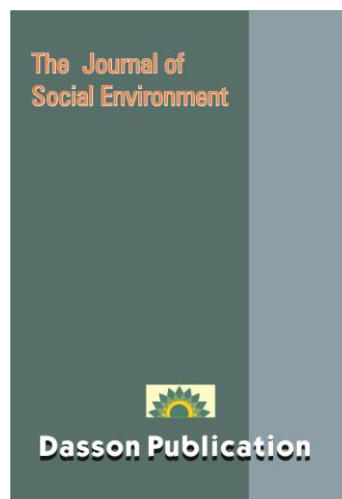


# The Journal of Social Environment



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# **A study on socio-economic disparities in Barpeta district of Assam, India**

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## **Abstract**

*The variations of all demographic characteristics have directly or indirectly been dependent upon the socio-economic development of a region. The study of social characteristics of populations includes a number of elements, which is generally viewed as a basic ingredient of social component influencing economic development. In the district there exist notable spatial variations. As study thus framed is to analyze the existing socio-economic characteristics of the population. The present study is an attempt to provide information and extend examination of variation and problems relating to population in the perspectives of relating to population in the perspectives of regional development and planning in the Barpeta district. The study holds both the subjective and objective assessments. The present district of Barpeta cover an area of 3245 sq. km, within the Indo-Bhutan Border in the north, the district of Nalbari in the east, the part of Kamrup district in the south and the Bongaigaon district in the West. The study area lies between the parallels of 26°5' and 26°51' N and 90°20'E and 91°38'E meridians. The total population of the district now stands at 16,47,201 with an average density 508 persons per sq.km. as per 2001 census.*

**Key words:** 1.Disparities, 2.literacy, 3.population, 4.Socio-economic, 5.social aspect.

## **Introduction**

The understanding of various characteristics of population is must for understanding of various spatial characters of an area, which in turn helps very much the planning for regional development, where in the socio-economic study is very much necessary. It is in this backdrop the study of socio-economic character of population in the Barpeta district has been undertaken for investigation. The investigation of block-wise variation in demographic, social and economic variations of different groups of people is found to be necessary as the social groups play important roles in the socio-economic development of the area concerned. The investigation on different social groups is needful as each and every group behaves and responds differently in the process of development. As study thus framed is to analyze the existing socio-economic characteristics of the population.

The Study of characteristics involved in economic sphere could ooze out socio-economic development, based on resources, work participation, occupational pattern, land use characteristics, etc. A study of these aspects in terms of community wise and block wise details may reveal a number of significant patterns. There are attempted in the present study. An attempt has also been made on the evaluation of basic amenities rendered by educational institutions, banks, post office, and availability of electricity in the village of different blocks. To understand the socio-economic characteristics in terms of population of the Barpeta district, C.D. blocks are considered as the units of study.

### About the study area

The present district of Barpeta along with a part of Baksa district of BTAD conforms to the study area. It had twelve blocks maintaining their own regional identity in respect of the physical, social, cultural and economic entities over an area of 3245 sq. km, within the Indo-Bhutan Border in the north, the district of Nalbari in the east, the part of Kamrup district in the south and the Bongaigaon district in the West. The study area lies between the parallels of 26°5' and 26°51' N and 90°20'E and 91°38'E meridians. The total population of the district now stands at 16,47,201 with an average density 508 persons per sq.km. as per 2001 census. The study area falls under humid sub-tropical climatic region. The climate of the Barpeta district remains mild and pleasant for greater part of the year. The average rainfall increases from south to north. It ranges from 1000mm to 2000mm. The maximum and minimum temperature recorded in the district are 36°C and 9°C respectively. The average relative humidity is more than 80% (ARSAC, 1990). The soil of the study area may be classified as sandy, sandy-loamy, loamy and forests soil.

### Objectives

- i) To examine the areal pattern of distribution of population and evaluation of its varying characteristics.
- ii) To examine the existing pattern of socio-economic status along with its components in the district and analysis the factors responsible for varying development and disparities of socio-economic characteristics in the district.

### Data base and methodology

Since the main purpose of the study is to evaluate the nature and problem of socio-economic development and to examine its prospects in the district of Barpeta, the data required for the purpose are collected mainly from the published works like census handbook and other government and nongovernmental organization. At the same the time the researcher has to consult the existing unpublished M.Phil dissertation and Ph.D thesis, journals and books etc. available at different sources. Secondary data have also been collected from the directorate of economic and statistics, Government of Assam, different block offices, etc. Unpublished articles, journals, reports available in libraries and even the articles retracted through internet will stand important material source for the study. Necessary maps are collected from the sources like atlas, books, topographical sheets, etc.

As the C.D. Blocks are inhabited by a cross-section of communities having different socio-economic attainment and standard only one Block viz. Bajali Block is selected based on the appropriateness of study. A good quantum of data is collected from the field also.

The data so collected are processed by using simple but appropriate quantitative methods and techniques and the processed data are represented on maps, graphs, tables, etc. They are analyzed in order to have a picture of reality favourite the theme of the research

### Discussion of the study

Disparity has been a common feature with the groups of people or region to region of a country. Their living style, language, distribution etc. have such disparities. In the socio-economic study of an area, one can find social disparities, economic disparities, distributional disparities among various groups of population constituting the various communities. They may be interent in the micro regional or areal context too. The present study deals with the disparities of community to community block to block etc.

The following few paragraph gives in detail the pattern of locational and socio-economic disparities among the people of the district of Barpeta.

**Location disparity:** The location disparity in the midst of people are best observed with in the totality resource potentials and mobility because of micro topographic difference in the district topographic differences have rendered differential responses of the communities towards micro-regional infrastructural set-up and development. The built up plain having been characterized by flood-free and quite good, land capability condition had rendered developed infrastructural facilities. As such this plain area has mostly been occupied by the high caste Hindus, Indigenous Muslims and urban dwellers, etc. A high percentage of people of this area is rich enough to have control over more than 40 percent of the resources. They enjoy links share of infrastructural facilities and benefit of development. The foothill areas have since long past been settled by the tribals, adibasis in addition to some high caste Hindus of less economic strength. These people had for long least demands for resources mobilization and infrastructural development, only during the last two decades.

So they have raised voice to eliminate disparities in social, economic and infrastructural developments. The low lying areas in the neighborhood of the river Brahmaputra and some big tributaries to the mighty river Brahmaputra have been occupied largely by the poor Muslim peasants of erstwhile, East Pakistani origin. Till today of infrastructural development economic prosperity and social status. Such a stock of people has only the land, that too affected every year by floods causing damage to standing crops, houses, etc. as the major resources for livelihood.

**Disparity in population distribution and quality:**

Because of comparative high quality, the high castes Hindus enjoy much more facilities and benefits of developmental processes. As such the built up areas, even though there have been limitations of resources high concentration of increasing population is going on. As result nodal points are in the process of converting into market centers, and market centers have gone to small urban centers at the cost of move allocation of financial resources to these areas, on the other hand, even though such process have gone in the lowlying and foothill areas, they are logging far behind the status of the built up areas. The poor Muslim peasants having no alternative of places for habitation, they have their increasing concentration only in lowlying areas. Similar is the case with the tribals, adivasis etc. having habitation and occupation in foothill areas.

**Disparity in literacy and educational institutions:**

The general castes people or mostly the high caste Hindus are having high percentages of literates, of course with micro regional variations. The built up areas have by far the comparative high percentage of literates. Similarly the number of schools, colleges, as the means of acquiring knowledge and being educated is comparatively high as compared to that in foothill and lowlying areas. It has been observed that the CD Blocks for example, Bajali, and Bhawanipur dominated by high caste Hindus have percentages of literate people ranging between 53 and 71. (field survey). On the other hand, Chenga, Gumafulbari, Mandia and Rupsi blocks dominated by Muslim peasants have literacy ratis within 14 and 37 percents. (field survey, 2009). The Jalah block in the foothill areas partly dominated by the caste of Hindus has literacy rate of 40.34 percent. (field survey).. From the above description it can be argued that there exist pronounced deviations of literacy rates in different geomorphic areas from the average literacy rate 56.24% (field survey, 2009) of the district as a whole.

Such a pattern of distribution of literates clearly indicates the pattern of disparity in the attainment of literacy in the district. It is further more observed hat there is a great disparity in the show of educational institutions per 10,000 population different blocks located in different geomorphic areas. For example, Sarukhetri.

**Disparities in social aspects:**

As regard post offices and sub post offices the built up area are having a quite good number in comparison to that in the foothill and lowlying areas.

As regards in medical facilities, the built up areas have become significantly different ones in comparison to the foothill or lowlying areas. There are many areas being recognized as interior ones having no or extremely inadequate number of medical facilities within a substantially greater area. Educational institutions also play the same role in the map of disparity disposition. The built up, even as there is more need to accommodate. The high concentration of children, have a good number of educational institution of different kinds. The interdistance between such institutions is not so much in the built up areas. Again as road network to comparatively rich in this part of the district these institutions are quite accessible consuming less time labour and money of the students in attending education. Contrary to that the foothill and low-lying areas are getting dismal picture of educational institutions. This is more so in case of char land areas near the river Brahmaputra. Again the recurrently occurred high floods damage the schools, colleges etc. in the low-lying part flood affected part of the district.

**Disparity in economic aspects:**

Disparities in the resources – Not only the micro geomorphic areas or block are getting naturally or artificially distributed / developed resources differently, but also the groups or communities of people are having resources share to the analyzed from the view point of disparity.

Land as economic resource plays a vital role in the development and status of the settlers. Lands in the built-up areas have been more resource valued as compared to that of the foothill or low-lying areas. Such lands owned in the low-lying areas by the poor Muslim peasants of erstwhile East Bengali origin and by the scheduled castes are qualitatively poor. The tribals or scheduled Tribes in the foothills areas are having comparatively less fertile soils. In addition to the quality of soils, the tribal's, scheduled castes or the poor Muslim peasants except a very few are having very to really change the fate of these people in case of land-resources shares.

Similarly other economic resources in terms of per head income or expenditure are generally very limited in the cases of scheduled tribal, scheduled castes and poor Muslim peasants. On the other, even as there is substantial proportion of poor people amongst the general castes, they are not so of the levels as the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and poor Muslim peasants are having.

**Disparity in road network development:**

Like other there are also significant disparities in the development road network in different blocks or geomorphic units. The built-up areas have high degree of road networks with well connections even to interior places. But on the other hand, the lowlying areas have the poorest road network even very short distances. The foothill areas have road networks in between that in the built-up and lowlying areas. Similarly there are some blocks, specially located in the lowlying areas are having least road network development.

**Sex disparity:**

Like, disparities in locational and social amenities aspects, in the sense of horizontality, there are also disparities in vertical direction. Such vertical disparities lie, for example, in case of shares owned by the males and females. Females have to suffer from disparities any kind of aspects like literacy, work participation, leadership etc. As elsewhere in the Barpeta district also there exists disparity in

literacy, work participation etc. The sex disparities in literacy and work participation indicate the pattern of socio-economic development in the district. The disparities between the male and females in educational development play a vital role. However, a brief discussion on sex-disparity in case of literacy is given as described below.

The relative deprivation of women in the field of education is particularly significant because it underlines all other attributes of deprivations (Raza and Agarwal, 1986). In the rural areas women are given less educational opportunities. So in these areas there are very high male-female disparities found in education. According to Sopher 1974, the disparity index (DIS) can be expressed as

$$DIS = \text{Log}_{10} \frac{P(1-q)}{Q(1-p)}$$

**Table 1: Sex disparity in literacy among the total population in barpeta district, 2001**

Blocks	% of male (P)	% of female (Q)	Sex disparity
<b>Bajali</b>	80.11	77.6	<b>0.07</b>
<b>Barpeta</b>	77.19	65.67	<b>0.13</b>
<b>Bhawanipur</b>	61.09	54.15	<b>0.12</b>
<b>Chakchaka</b>	38.44	29.64	<b>0.17</b>
<b>Chenga</b>	29.66	17.84	<b>0.28</b>
<b>Gobordhana</b>	35.84	29.87	<b>0.12</b>
<b>Gomafulbari</b>	43.98	28.16	<b>0.30</b>
<b>Jalah</b>	49.88	37.51	<b>0.21</b>
<b>Mandia</b>	19.94	8.20	<b>0.44</b>
<b>Pakabetbari</b>	29.02	19.11	<b>0.26</b>
<b>Rupsi</b>	38.45	30.09	<b>0.26</b>
<b>Sarukhetri</b>	<b>37.67</b>	<b>25.48</b>	<b>0.24</b>

Source: Government statistics office, barpeta district, assam (calculated from collected data)

Sex disparity in literacy among the total population irrespective of regional or community wise distribution is found very high in Mandia block (Table 1) with disparity index value of 0.44. The index value is very low in case of the Bajali block with disparity index value of only 0.07. There is a high difference between the two blocks in respect of male and female education. In the mostly general castes dominated both the males and female are exposed to education to a large extent. Again the Pathsala town along with market centres like Patacharkuchi, etc. are having substantial number of literates and educated person leading the block to have both the male and female literates of high number. The surrounding rural areas of the Pathsala and Patacharkuchi are developed in education. The Bajali block is followed by the Barpeta and Bhawanipur blocks. At the same time the Mandia block is having disparity index value of 0.44. The disparity in literacy among the males and females in the block being high indicates lack of educational facilities on the one hand, and keeping the children by their parents away from getting education because of economic reason on the other, the other blocks are in between the highest and lowest disparity index values. The disparity index values are also high in case of the Chenga and Rupsi blocks.

### Sex disparity in work participation:

Like male-female disparity in literacy, there is also perceptible disparity in work participation of males and females. The work participation made by the females needs to be rectified as the females in Assam don't remain idle; rather they join the family works at home and outside the home as well.

**Table2: Sex disparity in work participation among the total population in barpeta district, 2001**

Blocks	% of male (P)	% of female (Q)	Sex disparity
<b>Bajali</b>	63.26	35.90	<b>0.49</b>
<b>Barpeta</b>	N.A.	N.A.	
<b>Bhawanipur</b>	46.87	21.06	<b>0.51</b>
<b>Chakchaka</b>	67.26	34.56	<b>0.59</b>
<b>Chenga</b>	58.67	13.37	<b>0.96</b>
<b>Gobordhana</b>	38.11	18.82	<b>0.44</b>
<b>Gomafulbari</b>	N.A.	N.A.	
<b>Jalah</b>	55.18	20.35	<b>0.68</b>
<b>Mandia</b>	N.A.	N.A.	
<b>Pakabetbari</b>	48.19	26.17	<b>0.41</b>
<b>Rupsi</b>	23.21	11.24	<b>0.38</b>
<b>Sarukhetri</b>	<b>45.05</b>	<b>18.06</b>	<b>0.57</b>

Source: Government statistics office, Barpeta district, assam

However, as per the census definition, sex disparity in case of work participation is the highest in the Chenga block whereas it is the lowest in case of the Rupsi block. The respective index value is 0.96 and 0.38 (Table2)

### Conclusion

The present study on regional structure in respect of population distribution, economic and social characteristics of the people of the district of Barpeta has given an idea of present and future pattern of development in the district in particular and the Brahmaputra valley in general. The spatial variation in population, economic and social characteristics may lead to generate different types of problems in the arena of trend of socio-economic development. The district has enormous natural and human resources yet to be utilized. Hence the population growth should be maintained or controlled through various planning process including the awareness. Pressure on agricultural land is very high. To serve this population mechanized form of agriculture should be performed in a very high scientific manner.

Towards more literacy in the district among the general people, awareness and effective steps are required as they are lagging behind. Educational institutions, transport facilities, awareness to education, etc. are still required. Workers are still low in percentage. Hence industrialization is must for the development of the district. There is marked sex disparity among male and female work participation. In all social groups and also revenue blocks among female and male work participation varies highly. Female's contribution is very less and they depend on male workers. These constitute the demographic, social and economic components which have led to the differential socio-economic developments in Barpeta district. Deprivation of female in the society, less infrastructural development, less awareness of education, less job opportunity, have together increased the variations in the development of the district.

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