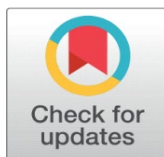
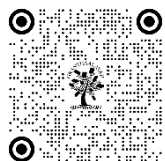


SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE CHAR AREAS IN KAMRUP DISTRICT, ASSAM

Md Shamsul Alom ¹

¹ MA, M. Phil and Research Scholar, Department of Education, Krishnaguru Adhyatmik Visvavidyalaya, Nasatra, Barpeta, Assam, India



DOI

10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.6230

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

The char areas of Assam, formed by the river Brahmaputra, are among the most backward regions of the state. This study examines the socio-economic profile of char dwellers in Kamrup district, focusing on their demographic features, education, livelihood, health and housing and development challenges. The findings show that char households are large and face frequent displacement due to floods and erosion. Literacy is much lower than the state average, especially among girls. Agriculture is the main occupation but remains insecure, forcing many people to migrate seasonally for work. Health services are inadequate, sanitation is poor and housing is fragile. Women suffer from early marriage, poor healthcare and lack of property rights. Government schemes exist but their implementation is weak. NGOs provide limited support through boat schools and mobile health units. Overall, char dwellers remain marginalized, and inclusive development policies are urgently required.

Keywords: Socio-Economic and Char Areas

1. INTRODUCTION

The char areas of Assam represent some of the most unique and marginalized settlements in India. These areas are reverie islands or sandbars formed by the deposition of silt by the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Over time, they have become home to a large number of people, most of who live in precarious conditions. In Kamrup district, the chars are scattered along both banks of the Brahmaputra, extending into the development blocks of Chamaria, Chhaygaon, Boko and parts of Goroimari. The char dwellers belong to different socio-cultural backgrounds, though a large proportion of them are Muslims of East Bengal origin, along with indigenous Assamese communities.

Life in the char areas is shaped by natural factors such as floods, erosion and shifting land, making habitation unstable. The population depends primarily on agriculture and fishing, yet their livelihoods are constantly under threat from environmental instability. Social indicators such as literacy, healthcare, housing and women's empowerment reveal stark underdevelopment when compared to the mainland population. While the state and central governments have introduced several developmental schemes, the effectiveness of these initiatives remains questionable due to geographical isolation, communication barriers and weak governance mechanisms.

Understanding the socio-economic profile of char dwellers in Kamrup district is, therefore, essential for two reasons: firstly, it reveals the challenges of a marginalized group that contributes significantly to Assam's rural economy and

secondly, it provides insights for policy formulation aimed at inclusive growth. This article evaluates the demographic, educational, occupational, health and cultural dimensions of char society while also analyzing the interventions and gaps in government policies.

2. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of studying the socio-economic profile of the char areas in Kamrup district arises from their marginal status in Assam's socio-political landscape. Despite being home to a substantial population, the char areas remain largely neglected in developmental planning. These regions contribute significantly to agricultural production, particularly in crops such as jute, paddy and mustard, yet the farmers remain among the poorest in the state. By analyzing their socio-economic profile, researchers and policymakers can better understand the reasons behind chronic poverty, low literacy and poor health indicators in these regions.

Another key importance of the study is its relevance to education and human rights. The implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, has not reached the char areas effectively, leading to high dropout rates and poor infrastructure in schools. Understanding the educational challenges of char children is crucial for designing targeted interventions. Similarly, healthcare and maternal health issues are directly connected to the right to life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, making this study important from a human rights perspective as well.

From a policy perspective, the study helps assess the efficacy of government schemes like MGNREGS, Janani Suraksha Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana in flood-prone and isolated areas. It also highlights the need for community-specific programs, such as boat schools and mobile health units, to address the unique challenges of chars. Furthermore, the study contributes to the larger discourse on rural development and marginalization in India, offering valuable insights for academics, researchers and planners. In short, this study is significant not only for understanding local socio-economic conditions but also for ensuring inclusive development at the state and national level.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study on the socio-economic profile of the char areas in Kamrup district is guided by the following objectives:

- 1) To study the demographic characteristics of the char population.
- 2) To analyze the educational status and literacy scenario.
- 3) To examine the occupational structure and sources of livelihood.
- 4) To evaluate the health, sanitation and housing conditions.
- 5) To identify the challenges of development and role of government interventions.

These objectives collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the living conditions, challenges and resilience of the char dwellers in Kamrup.

4. LITERATURE REVIEWS

Ali (2013) in his book *Char areas of Assam: Issues of poverty and underdevelopment* provides a comprehensive account of the socio-economic and political backwardness of char dwellers. He emphasizes how geographical isolation, frequent floods and weak governance have contributed to poverty, illiteracy and poor health conditions. This work is highly relevant as it establishes the foundation for understanding systemic underdevelopment in char areas.

Islam and Borah (2015) studied the socio-economic condition of char dwellers in Barpeta district, Assam, highlighting issues of poverty, low literacy and livelihood insecurity. Their findings show that agriculture, being the main occupation, is highly vulnerable to floods and erosion, forcing seasonal migration. The study's empirical data adds depth to understanding livelihood patterns of riverine communities.

Kalita (2018) examined educational backwardness in the char areas of Assam. The author argued that factors such as poverty, gender discrimination, lack of infrastructure and child labor contribute to high dropout rates. The paper also suggests remedial measures like community-based schooling and government intervention. This review is important as it connects education directly with the socio-economic backwardness of char dwellers.

Rahman (2017) explored poverty and livelihood patterns in Assam's char areas, focusing on income, employment and food insecurity. The study revealed that most households depend on agriculture and daily wage labor, but unstable river ecology undermines economic stability. This work adds to the understanding of structural poverty and the coping strategies of marginalized char families.

Sharma (2011) in his article on governance and underdevelopment critically analyzed how policy neglect and weak implementation of development schemes keep the char dwellers marginalized. He pointed out that despite government programs; benefits rarely reach the intended population due to poor infrastructure and administrative apathy. This review highlights the governance gap that worsens socio-economic inequality in char areas.

5. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study combines descriptive and analytical approaches. Since char areas are unique geographical entities, the research design focuses on capturing both quantitative data (literacy rates, population statistics and occupation patterns) and qualitative aspects (people's perceptions, cultural practices, and lived experiences).

Area of Study: The research is confined to selected char villages of Kamrup district, particularly within Chamaria, Chhaygaon, Boko and Goroimari blocks. These areas represent the diversity and challenges faced by char dwellers.

Sampling: A simple random sampling method has been used to select households for field surveys. This ensures that every household has an equal chance of being included, reducing bias in representation.

Sources of Data: Both primary and secondary sources were utilized. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires, household interviews and direct observations. Secondary data was drawn from Census reports, government publications, academic books, journals and reports of NGOs working in char areas.

Tools and Techniques: The study employed questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussions and photography for documenting socio-economic conditions. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, thematic analysis and comparative methods to highlight the disparities between char and mainland populations.

This multi-method approach ensures reliability and validity, making the findings comprehensive and policy-relevant.

6. ANALYSIS OF OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: To study the demographic characteristics of the char population

The char areas of Kamrup district are densely populated despite being geographically small and unstable. Families are typically large, with an average of 6–7 members, reflecting high fertility rates and limited access to family planning. The population is youth-dominated, but this potential remains underutilized due to poor education and employment opportunities. Seasonal migration is a common demographic trend, as men often leave their homes for urban centers to work as laborers or in the informal sector. Additionally, frequent floods and erosion cause repeated displacement, forcing households to rebuild lives on new land patches. This cycle of instability makes demographic features a central factor in the socio-economic backwardness of the region.

Objective 2: To analyze the educational status and literacy scenario.

Educational conditions in the char areas are extremely poor. The literacy rate is significantly below the state average and female literacy is alarmingly low. Most schools are temporary structures, with inadequate classrooms, teaching materials and sanitation facilities. Teachers are always present at school because Shiksha Setu app monitoring every day all teacher and students. Dropout rates are very low. Although the Right to Education Act, 2009, guarantees free and compulsory education, its provisions are not fully implemented in char villages. Thus, education remains one of the weakest aspects of socio-economic life in Kamrup's char areas.

Objective 3: To examine the occupational structure and sources of livelihood.

Agriculture is the backbone of char livelihoods, with paddy, jute and mustard as the major crops. However, the dependence on agriculture is risky due to frequent floods and land erosion. Landlessness is common and many families work as agricultural laborers on others' land. Livestock rearing, fishing and small-scale trading provide supplementary income but are not sufficient to meet household needs. Seasonal migration has become a survival strategy, with men

traveling to Guwahati, Shillong and other cities for work as rickshaw pullers, construction workers or daily wage earners. This unstable occupational structure makes poverty a persistent feature of char society.

Objective 4: To evaluate the health, sanitation and housing conditions.

Health services in char areas are minimal. Few health centers exist and those that do often lack doctors, medicines or proper infrastructure. Maternal and child health remains poor, with high infant and maternal mortality rates due to lack of institutional delivery facilities. Diseases such as malaria, diarrhea and dysentery are widespread because of unsafe drinking water and poor sanitation. Open defecation is still common and very few households have access to toilets. Housing is another major issue, as most homes are temporary huts built with bamboo, straw and mud. These are easily destroyed by floods, leaving families without shelter. Thus, poor health, sanitation and housing conditions reinforce the cycle of poverty.

Objective 5: To identify the challenges of development and role of government interventions

The challenges of development in char areas are multi-dimensional. Geographic isolation, lack of road connectivity and recurrent floods make service delivery very difficult. Poverty, illiteracy and unemployment further add to the underdevelopment. Although the government has introduced several schemes such as MGNREGS, Janani Suraksha Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Mid-day meal programs, their implementation remains weak due to corruption, lack of monitoring and communication barriers. Some NGOs have introduced boat schools and mobile health units, which provide temporary relief. However, without strong government commitment and community participation, these efforts cannot bring long-term development.

7. FINDINGS

The study finds that the char areas of Kamrup district are among the most socio-economically disadvantaged regions of Assam. The main findings include:

- 1) Demographic Pressure: Large families and high fertility rates intensify poverty.
- 2) Educational Backwardness: Low literacy, high dropout and gender disparity in education.
- 3) Economic Vulnerability: Agriculture is risky due to floods and erosion, forcing seasonal migration.
- 4) Health Crisis: Lack of healthcare facilities and sanitation leads to high disease burden.
- 5) Housing Insecurity: Temporary houses are easily destroyed by floods, leading to repeated displacement.
- 6) Women's Marginalization: Women face early marriage, poor health and limited decision-making power.
- 7) Weak Governance: Development schemes are poorly implemented due to inaccessibility and neglect.

These findings highlight the urgent need for integrated and targeted interventions in char areas.

8. SUMMARY

The socio-economic profile of the char areas in Kamrup district highlights a cycle of poverty and marginalization shaped by natural, social and political factors. The demographic analysis shows high population density, large family sizes and frequent displacement due to floods and erosion. Education remains a major area of concern, with low literacy, poor infrastructure and high dropout rates, especially among girls. Occupational patterns are dominated by agriculture, which is unstable and insecure, forcing many to migrate seasonally for work.

Health and sanitation conditions are extremely poor, with inadequate medical facilities, high disease burden and lack of sanitation infrastructure. Housing is fragile and temporary, making families vulnerable to floods. Women in particular face multiple disadvantages due to early marriage, poor access to education and healthcare and limited rights over land and property.

While government schemes and NGO efforts are present, their impact remains limited due to weak implementation and communication barriers. Development in char areas is hindered by isolation, recurrent natural disasters, and lack of sustained policy focus.

The socio-economic conditions of char dwellers in Kamrup district represent one of the most pressing challenges for inclusive development in Assam. Improving education, healthcare, infrastructure and livelihood opportunities,

alongside effective implementation of government schemes, is essential for integrating char dwellers into the mainstream of social and economic progress.

9. CONCLUSION

The char areas of Kamrup district stand as a stark reminder of Assam's developmental imbalance. While these communities contribute significantly to agriculture and local economies, they remain socially, politically and economically marginalized. The challenges they face floods, erosion, illiteracy, poor health and poverty cannot be addressed by piecemeal policies. What is needed is a comprehensive development framework that combines infrastructural investment, quality education, healthcare access, livelihood diversification and women's empowerment. NGOs and community-based organizations can play a supplementary role, but sustained government action with accountability is essential.

Ultimately, improving the socio-economic profile of char areas is not just about development it is about justice and equality. To integrate char dwellers into the mainstream of Assam's progress, policymakers must treat them not as fringe populations but as vital citizens whose rights and dignity deserve full recognition.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Ali, A. (2013). *Char areas of Assam: Issues of poverty and underdevelopment*. Guwahati: EBH Publishers.
- Choudhury, A. M. (2007). The riverbank erosion and flood problem of Assam: A geographical analysis. *Journal of North East India Studies*, 2(1), 45–57.
- Hussain, M. (1993). *The Assam Muslims: Politics and society*. Delhi: Mittal Publications.
- Islam, M. N., & Borah, M. (2015). Socio-economic condition of char dwellers in Assam: A case study of Barpeta district. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management*, 2(3), 221–227. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ijssm.v2i3.12765>
- Kalita, H. (2018). Educational backwardness in char areas of Assam: Causes and remedies. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 7(6), 12–18.
- Rahman, A. (2017). Poverty and livelihood patterns in char areas of Assam: An empirical study. *Journal of Rural Development*, 36(2), 205–220.
- Sharma, C. K. (2011). Governance and underdevelopment in char areas of Assam. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46(52), 67–73.
- Talukdar, P. (2019). Flood and erosion-induced displacement in Assam: A socio-economic study of riverine communities. *Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 9(4), 89–102. <https://doi.org/10.5958/2249-7315.2019.00035.6>
- World Bank. (2015). *India: Assam improving development outcomes in disadvantaged areas*. Washington, DC: World Bank Publications.
- Zaman, M. (2012). Char dwellers in Assam: Problems and prospects. *Indian Journal of Regional Science*, 44(1), 75–84.