

## A Study on the Socio-Economic Status of Charland Dwellers in Nalbari District, Assam

Mitali Haloy<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Prasenjit Das<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Geography, Bhattadev University

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Bhattadev University

### Abstract

The present study was undertaken to study the socio-economic life of the inhabitants in the char areas of Nalbari district. Assam has about 3.6 lakh hectares of char lands, of which about 2.4 lakh hectare area is cultivable (Directorate of Char Area Development, Assam, 2002–2003). The study area lies under the southern part of the Barkhetri Block where the river Brahmaputra creates around 42 major and tiny chars covering a total geographical area of 1,17,191 bigha (Barkhetri Revenue Circle, 2011). Among the 42 chars, Bhangnamari, Kurihamari and Kalarchar are the major Chars where agriculture is the main economic activity for the local people. Char areas are the highest population density zone in Assam. The increasing population exerts tremendous pressure on the cultivable lands, whose effects could be seen on the general and agricultural land use pattern of the study area. Again, Char dwellers also confront many natural environmental problems like floods, drought, erosion, cyclones, etc. which sometimes stand like a barrier in the way of agricultural development. A field survey was conducted in 2023-2024 to sample Char villages to collect the primary data. It reveals that about 61% of people directly depend on agricultural production for their livelihood. But their poor economic conditions and low literacy level sometimes create a negative impact on their livelihood.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic life, Char land dwellers, agriculture, educational status, land use

### 1. Introduction

Charlands, the granaries of Assam, which were the main hub of the agricultural revolution, are a very important depositional feature found in the Brahmaputra river system. Human habitation of the char areas started during the first part of the 20th century as cultivators settled there in uninhabited areas as their native land. As per the report of GoA (2005), the char areas are distributed into 23 subdivisions, falling under 14 districts, with 2251 villages in 299 gaon- panchyats and 59 development blocks comprising a total population of 24,90,097, where 85–90% of people belong to the Muslim Community. These were the most densely populated areas (690 persons per sq. km), which is much higher than the average population density in the state (340 persons per sq. km). The char area of Nalbari district is also one of the most densely populated areas, comprising a total population of 145800 as per the 2011 census, where 97% of people are engaged in agricultural activity for their livelihood. All the 36 identified char villages come under the gram panchyats (G.P) namely Bhangnamari, Kurihamari, Kalarchar, Bortola and Ghoga. More than 95% of chars are agglomerated in these first three Gram Panchyat and only 5% chars are found in Bortola and Ghoga G.P. It is important to know that Bhangnamari, Kurihamari and Kalarchar are the largest chars which are located in

## 2. Location of the Study Area

Table 1.1 : Identified char areas of Nalbari district, 2024

SL No	Chars (sand bar) of Nalbari District	Area (In hectare)	Selected sand bar for data collection
1	Bhanganmari	1108	Selected
2	Kurihamari	263	Selected
3	Pub Kurihamari	138	Selected
4	Kalarchar	801	Selected
5	Natun Chaprapara	304	Selected
6	No1, Natunchaprapara	511	
7	No.2 NatunChapra Para	89	
8	No.3 NatunChapra para	83	
9	Puran Chaprapara	288	Selected
10	Pachim Kazia	242	Selected
11	No1 Barbala	759	Selected
12	No.2 Barbala	368	
13	No .3 Barbala	776	
14	No.4 Barbala	286	
15	No..5 Barbala	194	
16	Nadia	173	
17	No.1 Bhelengimari	127	
18	No.2.Bhelengimari	186	
19	No.3.Bhelengimari	43	
20	Bangnapota	106	Selected
21	Lawtolipara	340	
22	Sialmari	1584	Selected
23	Tupkar Char	274	
24	Saral pam	26	

25	Pub Kazia	231	
26	Peradhara	389	
27	Madhya Kazia	212	
28	Belbeli	389	
29	N.C. Pub Kazia	594	Selected
30	KaltaliPather	130	
31	Nowapara	3	
32	Balarchar	73	Selected
33	Kalardiya	93	
34	Kaorekhaiti	166	Selected
35	NO 4 Bhelamari	604	
36	NO 3 Bhelamari	43	
Total		11,996	

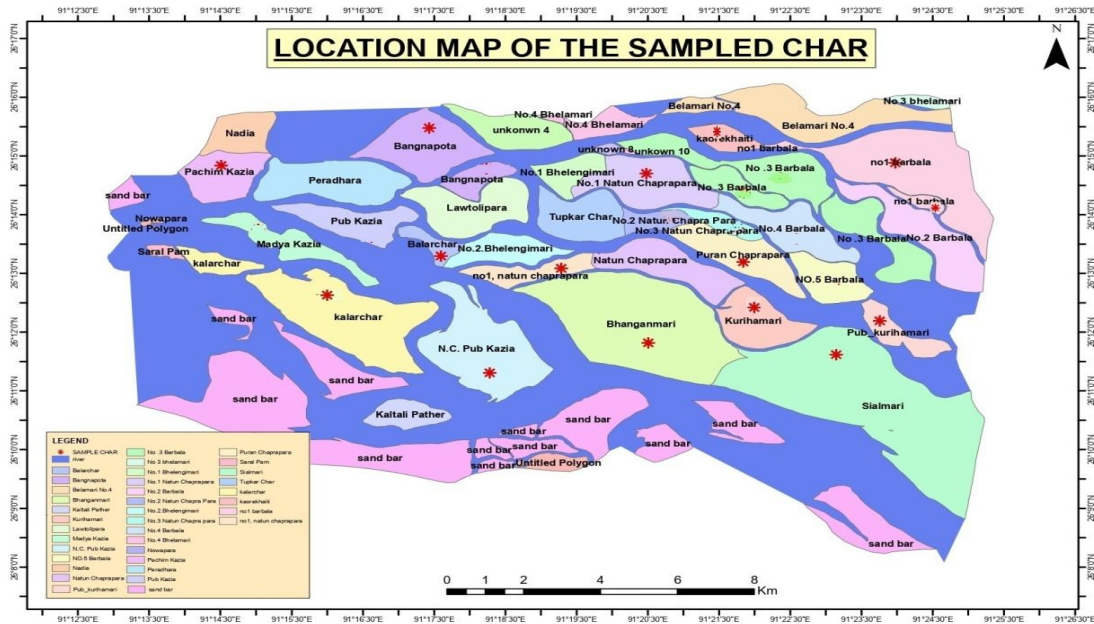
Source: Satellite image, LANDSAT 9 JAUARY 2024

### 3. Objective:

- To know the socio economic condition of the Char land dwellers in Nalbari district.

### 4. Materials and Methods:

The focus of the present study is to determine the socio- economic status of char land dwellers of the study area. Although this study is primarily based on primary data, some secondary data are also used. The primary data for this study has been collected by personal interview by using questionnaire. Due to paucity of time, out of 36 chars (sand bars) of Nalbari District, data were collected only from 13 chars for analysis (table: 1.1& map 2). Required primary data were collected with the help of household survey and the houses were selected through random sampling technique. From each char, 20 % of the households were visited during survey except the Bhangnamari and Kurihamari chars. As Bhangnamari and Kurihamari chars have more than 2500 households, only 5% of the houses could be surveyed. For this study, a total of 614 households out of 8181 households present in selected 13 Chars of Nalbari District have been studied (table 1.2) . Secondary data was collected from the village headman (GaonBurah ), Gram Panchyat, District Census handbook etc.



Map : 2

Table 1.2: Selection of size for sample households

Selected Chars	Total No. of households	No. of sample households
Bhangnamari	2780	139
Kurihamari	3590	179
Pub Kurihamari	205	41
Kalarchar	551	44
No1Natun Charapara	99	20
Puran Charapara	88	18
PacimKazia	149	30
No 1 Barbala	104	20
Bangnapota	129	26
Sialmari	220	44
N.C. Pub Kazia	95	19
Balarchar	115	23
Kaorekhaiti	56	12
Total	8181	614

## 5. Result and Discussion:

### 5.1 Socio-Economic Status

#### 5.1.1 Demographic Characteristics

The life of people of char areas used to centre on the river environment. It is seen that there is an inverse relationship between the distance of the river and population distribution. Among the various physical factors, access to the water and soil fertility are the most influencing factors which directly and indirectly impact on the population distribution of the study area. It has been reveals from the from field survey which is conducted in the 13 numbers of selected char in 2023-2024 , that the total population of the selected chars is 3239 , out of which 52.27% is male and 47.61 % is female. The table 1.3 shows that the distribution of population is very high in the Kurihamari (895) and Bhangnamari char (695) . Both of this chars are situated in the middle part of the Brahmaputra River which generally called as mid channel bars. However, the chars located in the far from the main river such as Kaorekhaiti (72) and N.C. Pub Kazia(97) has the lowest population distribution compared to other chars of the study area.

Table 1.3: Demographic pattern of the surveyed char in the study area

Sl No	Char	Total surveyed House holds (more then 2500=5% Below 1000=20%)	Total population	P.c male populatio n (in%)	P.c of female population (in %)
1	Bhangnamari	139	695	51.9	48.05
2	Kurihamari	179	895	50.5	49.4
3	Pub Kurihamari	41	205	58.5	41.5
4	Kalarchar	44	265	52.9	46.8
5	No 1 Natun Charapara	20	132	47.8	52.3
6	Puran Charapara	18	109	51.4	48.62
7	Pacim Kazia	30	149	52.35	47.66
8	No 1 Barbala	20	143	55.25	44.76
9	Bangnapota	26	116	52.59	47.42
10	Sialmari	44	223	53.82	46.19

11	N.C. Pub Kazia	19	97	54.64	43.3
12	Balarchar	23	138	54.34	45.65
13	Kaorekhaiti	12	72	48.62	51.39
total		614	3239	52.27	47.61

Source: Field survey 2023-2024

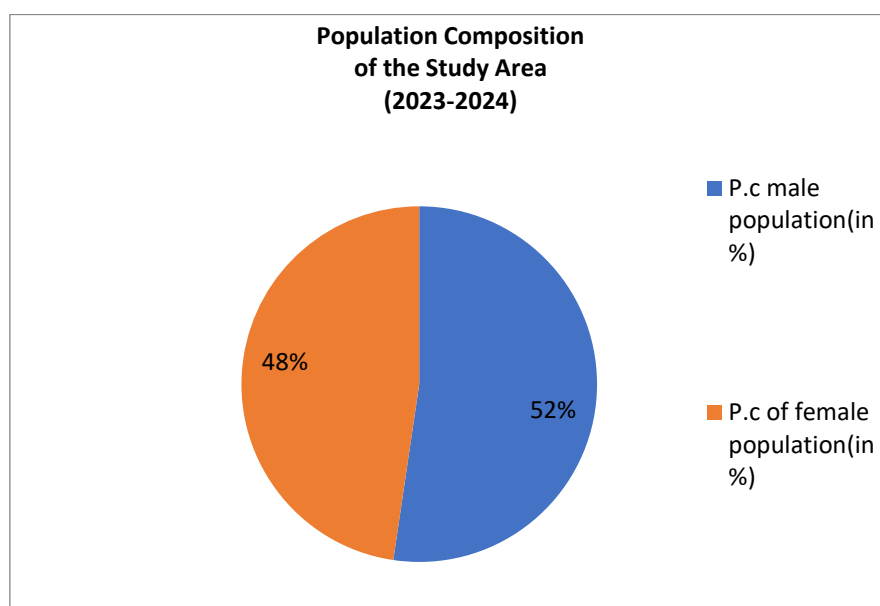


Fig 1.1: Population composition of the study area, 2023-2024

### 5.1.2: Educational Status

Education plays a very important role in socio-economic progress of any society. It empowers society by giving them knowledge, skills, and confidence in themselves and helps them to fully participate in national development process. However, unfortunately, in char areas of Nalbari district, most of the people are either illiterate or drop out from primary and middle level school. A few have crossed the secondary and graduate level. From the tabulated data it has been observed that male literacy is more (31.28 %) then female literacy (20.82%). The highest male literacy level is found in percentage is found in Bangnapota char (41.3%) and lowest male literacy is found in Kaorekhaiti Char (25.2%). On the other hand, highest female literacy level is found in Kalarchar Char (29.06 %) and lowest level of female literacy is seen in Pub Kurihamari Char (14.2 %).



**Table 1.4: Literacy pattern of the surveyed chars in the study area**

Sl No	Chars	Total surveyed House holds	Literacy level (%)	
			Male	Female
1	Bhangnamari	139	36.13	23.87
2	Kurihamari	179	31.2	16.6
3	Pub Kurihamari	41	34.2	14.2
4	Kalarchar	44	30.2	29.06
5	No 1 Natun Charapara	20	31.8	21.23
6	Puran Charapara	18	25.7	27.5
7	Pacim Kazia	30	33.6	26.8
8	No 1 Barbala	20	26.5	20.27
9	Bangnapota	26	41.3	16.37
10	Sialmari	44	32.28	18.4
11	N.C. Pub Kazia	19	25.9	15
12	Balarchar	23	32.60	24.7
13	Kaorekhaiti	12	25.2	16.7
total	Average literacy rate	614	31.28	20.82

**Table 1.5: Educational status of char lands of Nalbari District, 2023-2024**

S I No	Sampled char	Educational qualification							Total
		No education	Lower primary	Upper primary	High school	Higher secondary	Graduation and above	Others	
1	Bhangnama ri	206	99	58	38	29	45	15	490
2	Kurihamari	286	106	123	68	40	33	20	676



3	Pub Kurihamari	67	35	26	12	8	15	5	168
4	Kalarchar	86	38	28	18	5	6	1	182
5	No1Natun Charapara	45	15	12	7	2	4	2	87
6	Puran Charapara	32	12	5	8	5	2	1	65
7	PacimKazia	40	28	12	6	4	5	-	95
8	No 1 Barbala	35	26	10	7	2	5	2	87
9	Bangnapota	23	15	18	5	8	7	-	76
10	Sialmari	68	46	28	24	5	12	6	189
11	N.C.Pub Kazia	22	18	9	7	15	3	1	75
12	Balarchar	36	29	15	12	8	10	2	112
13	Kaorekhaiti	26	16	8	10	1	3	-	64
<b>Total</b>		<b>972</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>2366</b>
<b>Percentage</b>		<b>41%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field survey 2023-2024

From table 1.5, which shows the educational status of the study area, it is clear that the char lands of Nalbari district are really lagging behind in education, as more than two-fifths of the people surveyed have never gone to school. Again, one-fifth of the people surveyed could only complete lower primary education. The percentage of people completing upper primary education is only 15 %, which is also very low. The percentage of people who passed high school, higher secondary education and graduation are all in single digits. Therefore, it is crystal clear that char areas of Nalbari District are very backward in education, especially in higher education. Without improving the educational standard of the study area, it will be difficult to improve its socio-economic condition.

## 5.2: Land Use Pattern

During the field study, four categories of land use pattern have been identified in sampled chars. These are- i) Built up land ii) Cultivable land iii) Fellow land iv) Livestock farmland. The table 2.9 and fig 2.4 has been displayed the percentage of above mention land use category for 13 samples chars. Among the 13 char Pub Kurihamari has the highest cultivable land (74.05%) and and Kaorekhaiti has lowest cultivable land (53.89%). However the percentage of fellow

land is very less compared to other area. But, Balarchar has highest percentage i.e 25.78% because the soil of this char is very sandy, thus all the seasons not suitable for certain crops lie rice, maize, etc.

Table 1.5: Land use pattern of the surveyed chart

Sl No	Chars	Total surveyed House holds	Land use (in %)			
			Built up land (%)	Cultivable land (%)	Fellow land (%)	Livestock Farmland (%)
1	Bhangnamari	139	139	18.76	68.75	5.89
2	Kurihamari	179	179	21.50	69.06	4.56
3	Pub Kurihamari	41	41	5.56	74.05	11.49
4	Kalarchar	44	44	7.2	68.78	10.46
5	No 1 NatunCharapara	20	20	4.34	68.85	11.49
6	PuranCharapara	18	18	6.58	67.9	14.65
7	PacimKazia	30	30	5.87	64.67	9.82
8	No 1 Barbala	20	20	14.9	63.7	9.44
9	Bangnapota	26	26	8.89	62.87	12.32
10	Sialmari	44	44	12.8	68.8	8.5
11	N.C. Pub Kazia	19	19	14.2	59.87	8.73
12	Balarchar	23	23	5.06	59.8	25.78
13	Kaorekhaiti	12	12	8.79	53.89	15.32
			614	10.34	44.69	11.39

Source: Field survey 2023-2024

### 5.3: Occupational Pattern

Occupational pattern of char land dwellers has completely different from the other areas in Nalbari district. Most of the people are engaged more than one economic activity for their livelihoods. The natural calamities, lack of own land, lack of proper training, poor economic conditions etc are major cause which are directly and indirectly influence their occupational

pattern . Although all the three major occupational categories i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary are present, people are mostly engaged in primary activities followed by tertiary and secondary activities. The major primary activities present in char land areas are farmer, agricultural labourers and fisherman. Secondary activities include the fishing net makers and construction related workers. The people who are engaged in tertiary activities include the shopkeepers, vegetable sellers transport workers, pensioner /service man etc. Table 1.6 and fig 1.4 presented the distribution of occupation pattern of the study area. From the table, it is seen that overwhelming percentage of people are engaged in primary activities (61 %), followed by tertiary (21 %) and secondary activities (18%).

Sl No	Char	Primary activities			Secondary activities		Tertiary activities				
		farmer	Agricultural labourer	fisherman	Fishing net maker	Construction	Shop	Service/ pensioner	Vegetable sellers	Transport workers	total
1	Bhangnamari	159	104	5	4	69	17	2	42	12	414
2	Kurihamari	249	85	4	-	54	29	3	60	5	489
3	Pub Kurihamari	37	40	-	-	35	19	1	21	4	157
4	Kalarchar	34	28	-	2	30	5	2	19	3	123
5	No 1 Natun Charapara	25	20	2	-	18	7	-	4	5	81
6	Puran Charapara	28	17	-	-	12	10	1	3	2	73
7	Pacim Kazia	21	10	-	-	5	3	2	12	-	53
8	No 1 Barbala	24	16	2	-	12	4	1	4	4	67
9	Bangnapota	19	15	-	4	8	12	-	2	5	65
10	Sialmari	25	16	2	-	27	3	1	3	4	81
11	N.C. Pub Kazia	12	10	-	-	12	6	-	4	2	46

12	Balarchar	15	12	1	-	14	2	1	3	1	49
13	Kaorekhaiti	9	7	-	-	11	1	-	2	-	30
to tal		657	380	16	10	30 7	11 8	14	179	47	1728
Percentage(%)		1053(61%)			317(18%)		358(21%)				

## 6. Conclusion

The socio-economic status of char land dwellers of Nalbari District is influenced by a complex set of factors that includes education, economic participation, and government policies. The study reveals that socio-economic condition of char land dwellers is really backward and it is unfortunate that even after 70 years of independence the people of the study area are not able to enjoy fruits of development and are silently suffering from ignorance, poverty and unemployment. They also confront many natural environmental problems like flood, drought, erosion, cyclones etc. which are sometimes stands like a barrier on the way of economic development. However 61 people are directly depends on agricultural production for their livelihood. But their poor economic conditions and low literacy level sometimes creates negative impact on their livelihood. Therefore, the government and Non government institutions should take some necessary initiatives to improve their socio economic conditions. Following are some of the suggestions, if implemented, may bring drastic change in the fortunes of char land dwellers.

- Modern agricultural technology should be introduce to improved crop productivity and reduce post harvest losses.
- Diversify the economic activities by generating other economic activities like tourism, livestock rearing and fisheries.
- Improvement in infrastructural facilities.
- Effort should be made to improve the quality of education in the study area.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of both central and state governments to join hands to uplift the condition of women in backward states.

## Referances

1. Ahmed et al. (2022), *A Comprehensive Appraisal of the Farming Scenario in Riverine Areas of Lower Assam*, India, Asian Journal of Agricultural Extension, Economics, and Sociology, ISSN: 23207027, pp. 288–294.

2. Bhagabati, A. K. (2004): *The Char Areas of Brahmaputra Valley, Assam, Challenges for Sustainable Development*, Globalization and Development Dilemma (Reflection from North East India), Mittal Publication,
3. Barua, C.R., C.R. and Singha, M.G. (2020): *Agricultural Practices and Sustainability among the Char Inhabitants of Sipajhar Development Block of Darrang District, Assam*, IJCRT, vol. 8, ISSN 2320-2882
4. Das, P. J., et al. (2019): *Community Resilience To Water-Induced Disasters And Climate Change: A Study and Documentation Of Good Practices in Selected River Islans Of The Brahmaputra River Basin, Assam* (WACREP REPORT 2019)
5. Gogoi, N., et al (2015): *Analytical and Fertilizer Recommendations for Soil Health Card of Assam*, Tulika Offset press, Kahikuchi, Guwahati.
6. Ibrahim, K., et al. (2011), Impact of Agroforestry Livelihood Improvement on Farmer of Char Kalibari Area of Mymensingh, J. Agrofor. Environ. 5(2):7780
7. Islam, M.N., et al. (2015): *Performance of Different Crops: Productivity Enhancement Through Adaptation of Crop Varieties at Charlands of Bangladesh*, Journal of Agricultural Research
8. Islam, M.M., et al. (2018): Jute Fiber Yield and Economics in Charland Areas of Bangladesh, Research in Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences, vol. 2, pp-59-65.
9. Karim, A. (2015) *Methodology framework for assessing ecosystem service of selected chars in Bangladesh and India*, IUCN, Dhaka, Bangladesh, Pp viii+36
10. Karim, A.M. (2017): *Challenges and Opportunities in Crop Production in Different Types of Char Lands of Bangladesh: Diversity in Crops and Cropping*, Trop. Agr. Develop. Vol. 61(2), pp. 77–93
11. Murtaza, A.F., & Borgohain, P. (2019): *Livelihood of Char Dwellers in the Midst of the Brahmaputra: A Case Study of Chaprapara Char in Nalbari District*, Harnessing Wetlands or Sustainable Livelihood, Notion Press, ISBN-978-1-68466-657-7
12. Nath, R.K. (2021): *Socio-economic Status of the Farming Community of Char Area of Dhubri District, Assam*, AJAEES, ISSN: 2320-7027, PP 14-20
13. Prashnani et al. (2019): *Spatio-Temporal Study of Brahmaputra River Islans (Chars) for Agricultural Expansion in Assam, India*, The International Archives of Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing, and Spatial Information Sciences, vol. XLII-3/W6
14. Pal, S. (2022): *Charland Mapping and Analyzing Suitability for Settlement and Agriculture in the Ganga River within the Stretch of West Bengal, India*, Geocarto International
15. Talukdar, M. C., et al. (2009): *Crop Suitability for Char Areas of Nalbari District, Assam*, Agropedology, pp. 41–46.
16. Zico et al. (2011): *Study on Agroforestry and Plant Diversity in Char Gobadia of Mymensingh District*, J. Agrofor. Environ., ISSN-1995-6983, pp. 101–104