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Attainers and Sluggards in Digitisation of Payments: Findings from Grassroots in Assam

Uttam Karmakar¹, Amiya Sarma² and Madhurjya Prasad Bezbaruah³

Abstract

With pervasiveness of ICT, payment modes in India and elsewhere have progressively turned digital. While digitisation of payment brings many advantages to adopters of this mode, for those who may be constrained from moving into these new ways of transactions, the changers may mean a new dimension of disparity to confront. With this concern in mind, a field study was carried out in the Northeast Indian state of Assam for identifying the determinants of the extent of cashless transactions by individuals from different socioeconomic and spatial background. Tobit regression of a customised index of digital payment showed that young urban males with relatively better education and higher economic status are ahead of others in adopting cashless transactions. Superior basic infrastructure, comprised of bank branches, internet connectivity and power supply, enables people in urban areas to change over to cashless modes of transactions to a greater extent than their rural counterpart.

Introduction

With penetration of IT into banking operations, transaction modes have been progressively turning digital. Digital instruments such as debit card, credit card, net banking, UPI (Unified Payments Interface) have been crowding out traditional instruments of paper currency and cheques for monetary transaction (Tee & Ong, 2016). Monetary authorities across the globe have been increasingly switching over to various electronic payment modes due to its micro as well as macro level advantages. While, at the macro level, it saves hefty amounts spent on printing and circulating physical cash, it offers benefits like convenient ways to carry, easy records of transactions, contactless exchanges, etc. at the micro level (Singhral & Garwal, 2018). Among countries, Sweden has attained the highest level of cashlessness

¹Research Scholar, Dept. of Economics, Gauhati University, Guwahati-781014, E-mail: uttamkarmakar@gauhati.ac.in

²Associate Professor, Dept. of Economics, Gauhati University, Guwahati 781014, E-mail: amiya@gauhati.ac.in

³Professor (Retd.), Dept. of Economics, Gauhati University, Guwahati 781014, E-mail: mpb@gauhati.ac.in

with cash-GDP ratio plummeting to 4% (Khiaonarong & Humphrey, 2019). In the emerging economies of India, Russia and China, the ratio has come down to 11.2%, 10.4% and 9.5% respectively (Herwadkar, 2019).

Adoption of cashless payment modes has been found to depend on age, education, income, gender and geographical location (Arvidsson, 2019). Elderly people, due to their lesser exposure to digital ways, mostly find it difficult to move over to digital modes of payment. Antonio and Tuffley (2014) ascribe gender gap in adoption of digital payment modes to sociocultural barriers that women usually face. Rural areas are generally handicapped in going cashless due to deficiencies in digital infrastructure in villages (Keer et al., 2019; Thomas & Krishnamurthi, 2017). Even in developed Japan, generational gap breeds reluctance towards going cashless (Fujiki, 2020).

India has seen a significant transformation in its payment systems over the past few years, with cashless transactions gaining momentum at an unprecedented rate. This shift towards digital payments has been catalysed by several factors, including governmental initiatives, the proliferation of smartphone usage, and the advent of innovative financial technologies. The Indian government's push for digitalization, marked by the launch of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) system in 2016, has been a critical driver in this shift. UPI facilitates instant, real-time payments between banks using mobile devices, making digital transactions accessible to a broader segment of the population. The demonetization move in November 2016, which saw the withdrawal of high-denomination currency notes from circulation, further accelerated the adoption of cashless payment methods as citizens looked for alternative means to carry out their transactions. This period witnessed a surge in the use of mobile wallets, online banking, and card payments, with a notable increase in the setup of Point of Sale (POS) terminals across the country. Financial inclusion initiatives have also played a significant role in this transition. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst for the adoption of contactless payments, with individuals and businesses alike recognizing the convenience and safety of cashless transactions amidst health concerns.

Despite these advances, India's journey towards becoming a cashless economy faces challenges, including gaps in digital literacy, cyber security concerns, and the need for further infrastructure development in rural and semi-urban areas. A large numbers of Indians are still held-up at the digital fault-line from changing over to cashless payment modes. With the poor overcrowding the lower end of the GDP distribution, it is conceivable that those excluded from digital mode of transactions will be well in excess of 10%, despite the cash-GDP ratio coming down to about 10%. As exclusion from cashless transactions can add another dimension to such people's inherent socioeconomic disadvantage, it was felt necessary to examine the role of different socioeconomic factors restricting inclusiveness of digitisation of payment methods. Accordingly, a field study was carried out in August-September 2020 in a few selected urban and rural pockets of the state of Assam in Northeast India, a region known for its large infrastructure deficit and relatively slower economic progress.

This introduction is followed by an outline of materials and methods used. The sample profile and usage patterns of digital payment methods are delineated in section three. In the fourth section, factors influencing the extent of use of digital payment methods are analysed. Findings of the study and implications thereof are summed up in the concluding section.

Review of Literature

The evolution of the cashless economy is closely tied to the advancements in digital payment methods, evolving alongside the growth of information and communication technology (ICT). The inception of cashless transactions in Europe during the 1980s with the introduction of first-generation plastic cards equipped with smart chips for pre-paid, low-value exchanges marked a significant milestone (Hartmann, 2006). The advent of the internet in the 1990s further propelled the adoption and development of various digital payment instruments, including debit and credit cards, net banking, UPI (Unified Payments Interface), IMPS (Immediate Payment Service), and mobile wallets, among others. The widespread availability of internet access and smartphones has significantly enhanced the convenience and appeal of these payment systems to a broad audience, bolstering their popularity. Nonetheless, digital transactions necessitate specific digital platforms for execution, unlike cash, which is universally accepted and does not require any technical infrastructure. The digital payment ecosystem operates on a dual-market model, necessitating that both transaction participants have access to banking services and digital infrastructure (Mukhopadhyay, 2016). Until now, electronic payments have served as an alternative to traditional payment methods. Recent trends in the volume of digital transactions have sparked predictions that such payments could eventually replace physical cash (Council, 2016). This shift would mean a steady decrease in physical cash circulating within the economy while transactions made through non-cash methods increase. Despite the entrenched nature of cash transactions in India, the period following demonetisation has highlighted a clear move towards adopting digital or non-cash payments (Herwadkar et al., 2019; Chodorow-Reich et al., 2020).

Numerous socio-economic elements influence cashless payment behaviours. Research indicates that factors such as age, education, income, gender, and geographical location significantly shape attitudes towards digital payments (Niehaves et al., 2012; Kruger & Seitz, 2017). Digital literacy, encompassing basic ICT knowledge like internet usage and smartphone functionalities, is crucial for engaging in digital transactions. The term “digital divide,” coined in the early 1990s, describes the disparity between individuals with access to ICT and those without (Gunkel, 2003), evolving to also reflect differences in ICT usage levels (Hargittai, 2003). Older generations often encounter difficulties in adopting ICT for digital payments, with studies suggesting that socio-economic factors interplay in complex ways to influence digital payment adoption differently than when considered in isolation. Education, for instance, can mitigate generational divides, enabling older individuals to adapt

to digital payments. Additionally, there's a positive correlation between age, income, and the propensity towards cashless transactions, with males generally perceiving digital payments as more convenient, a perception shaped by societal norms assigning ICT familiarity to males from a young age (Cullen, 2001). Education can also overcome gender-based psychological barriers, increasing women's likelihood to adopt cashless methods.

Rural and underserved areas, hampered by inadequate digital infrastructure, often resist digital payments due to challenges such as insufficient electricity and poor telecom networks (Keer et al., 2019; Thomas and Krishnamurthi, 2017). Even with adequate infrastructure, preferences for cash transactions persist in nations like Japan, where a significant elderly population and a digital divide slow the transition to cashlessness (Omiya et al., 2021; Fujiki, 2020). Similarly, countries such as Nigeria, the Philippines, and initially Denmark, grapple with both infrastructural issues and digital divides. In Denmark, efforts to bridge this gap have been partially successful, with a high internet usage rate indicating readiness for cashless payments (Council, 2016). Indonesia's young demographic shows potential for a cashless transition, yet challenges like poor telecom services and a substantial unbanked population hinder progress (Azali, 2016). In India, the push towards financial inclusion through the Jan-DhanYojana which connected a substantial segment of rural households to the banking system, prepared the ground for big push towards cashlessness (Ravi, 2019). Demonetisation of 2016 compelled many to switch to cashless payment methods (Herwadkar et al., 2019). The transition towards a less cash economy gathered further momentum from the requirement of conducting transactions without physical contacts following outbreak of COVID19 pandemic. This complex interplay of factors highlights the multifaceted challenges and opportunities in the global shift towards cashless economies.

The examination of non-cash payment instruments reveals their adoption challenges and economic implications. Despite the advantages of digital payments, including security and convenience, barriers like high transaction costs and the necessity for digital infrastructure limit widespread acceptance. The critical roles of education in facilitating digital payment adoption and cyber security in building trust are also noted (Widjaja, 2016; Oluchukwu, 2014). This review synthesizes insights into the transition towards a cashless economy, emphasizing digital infrastructure, awareness, and socio-cultural factors as key determinants. The potential benefits of cashless payments for economic growth and transaction efficiency are acknowledged, alongside persistent barriers such as digital divides and infrastructural limitations. Future research is directed towards exploring these gaps, with a particular focus on the socio-economic and cultural barriers to cashless adoption in specific regions to guide targeted policy interventions (Nair, 2016; Kathuria, 2018). The present study probes some of these issues in the context of Assam.

Materials and Methods

Data for the study were collected from a sample of 789 individuals selected through a process of multistage sampling from two districts of Assam. Kamrup Metro and Barpeta districts were selected to represent the urban and rural areas respectively. Expectedly, and as confirmed by RBI Database of Indian Economy (2020), Kamrup Metro had greater density of bank branches and ATMs than Barpeta. The Zoo Road area of Kamrup Metro has many commercial establishments, which attracts lot of people making it a suitable location for conducting a survey using accidental sampling in an urban setting. Two villages were selected in Barpeta district to include both connected and interior locations. One of these villages, SatraBaradi is only about two kilometres away from the district head quarter. The other village Sonapur is almost 12 kilometres away from the head quarter. While the sample size for each village was calculated by applying Yamane formula for 5% error, individuals interviewed were selected using convenient sampling to include people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. While 385 respondents were from Kamrup Metro, 203 and 201 were respectively from Satra Baradi, and Sonpur villages of Barpeta.

Inputs gathered from field survey have been first processed by metrics of ratios and percentages. An Index of Digital Payment has then been constructed to capture the extent of use of digital payment by sample individuals. Finally, a multiple regression analysis has been carried out to identify factors significantly influencing the extent of use of digital payment methods by individuals.

A Broad Profile of the Sample and Extent Adoption of Cashless Transaction

Table 1 provides information on the percentage of respondents falling under different categories of gender, age groups, and years of schooling. The data indicates that urban areas have a greater proportion of individuals with higher education as compared to the villages of Sonapur and Satra Baradi.

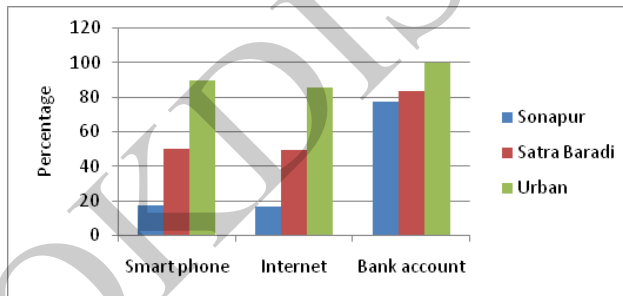
Figure 1 highlights the differences in the possession of amenities between the three areas, with urban having the highest percentage of people with a smartphone, access to the internet, and a bank account, while Sonapur has the lowest percentage. Notably, disparities are less with respect to having bank accounts in the three locations. SatraBaradi stands somewhere in the middle, with a higher percentage of people having smartphones and access to the internet and bank account than Sonapur.

Table 1: Gender, Age Group and Educational Level-wise Distributions of Sample Respondents in Percentages

Row Labels		Urban	Satra Baradi	Sonapur	Total
Gender	Female	47.53	42.36	33.33	42.59
	Male	52.47	57.64	66.67	57.41
	Total	100	100	100	100
Age Groups	15-39	44.94	40.39	60.70	47.78
	40-59	25.45	52.71	33.83	34.60
	60 & above	29.61	6.90	5.47	17.62
Total		100	100	100	100
Years of Schooling	0-5	-	8.87	37.31	11.79
	6 to 10	4.42	45.32	49.75	26.49
	11 to 12	22.60	19.70	7.46	18.00
	>12	72.99	26.11	5.47	43.73
	Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors' calculation using Sample data

Figure 1: Percentage of Respondents having Bank Account, Smart Phone and Internet



Source: Authors' calculation using Sample data

Cashless Payment: Extent of cashless transaction has been sought to be captured in an index. Respondents were asked whether digital modes were used in paying grocery bill, medical bill, electricity bill, remittances to someone, purchases of clothes and train/bus tickets, mobile and TV recharges, home delivery food bill and online purchases. The index is then defined as the ratio of the number of purposes for which payments were made digitally to the total number of transaction types considered

$$\text{Index of cashless payment (ICP)} = \frac{\text{Number of items digitally transacted}}{\text{Number of items transacted}} \quad (\text{Eq1})$$

Table 2: Distribution of Sample Respondents by Extent of Cashless Payment

ICP Range	Urban	Satra Baradi	Sonapur	Total
Low (Below 0.35)	26.45%	36.02%	37.52%	100%
Moderate (0.35 to 0.7)	92.16%	6.86%	0.98%	100%
High (Above 0.7)	97.40%	2.60%	-	100%
Mean ICP	0.48	0.048	0.0032	0.24

Source: Authors' calculation using Sample data

This average index value is 0.48 for urban area whereas it is only 0.048 and 0.0032 for Satra Baradi and Sonapur respectively. The table 2 shows that cashless payment modes are more often used in urban areas than in rural areas. As we move away from the urban area, index values of cashless payment become smaller and smaller.

Factor Influencing Extent of Use of Digital Payment Methods

For explaining variations in the extent of use of cashless payment methods among sample individuals, the following have been listed as the possible explanatory factors. The existing literature is used as guiding lenses while considering the independent variables (Vehovar et al., 2006; Martin, 2003).

i) Age: Age can be an important determinant of adoption of cashless modes of transaction. After certain age, extent of cashless transaction may increase with age. However, among elderly population, we can expect less use of cashless transaction. Accordingly, the respondents have been grouped into three categories: adult, middle-age and the elderly. To capture the three categories, two dummies are used taking elderly age group (60 and above) as base category.

A1: 1 for people's age between 15-39; 0 otherwise

A2: 1 for people's age between 40- 59; 0 otherwise

ii) Gender: To examine the differences of perception regarding digital payments between genders, a dummy variable has been taken.

G = 1 for male and 0 for female

iii) Education: Use of digital payment methods requires the use of various technological devices, including smartphones and computers, which may be more familiar to individuals with higher levels of education. Hence, we may expect a better educated person to use cashless methods for transaction more extensively. The extent of education of a respondent has been captured in her/his years of schooling (**E**).

iv) Economic status: Higher the economic status of the household greater can be its access to facilities for digital transactions. Per capita household income should have been ideally the indicator of economic status of the household. However,

income data is prone to errors. Accordingly, living standard of a household and the respondent belonging to it has been captured counting the possession of selected consumer durables. The items are bicycle, radio, mobile phone, two-wheeler, television, refrigerator, washing machine, computer, and four-wheeler with respective weights from one to nine (The Market Research Society of India, 2011). The index of economic status is calculated with the help of the following formula:

$$\text{Index of economics status (IES)} = \frac{\text{Consumer durable possessed valued by respective weights}}{\text{Sum of weights of all consumer durables considered}} \quad (\text{Eq 2})$$

v) Location: Geographical location is important since the supply of digital infrastructure (telecom network, internet and bank branches) is not equally developed at all places. In order to capture the extent of cashless payment in the rural and urban areas, two dummy variables are constructed based on the three categories of different locations.

R1= 1 for Satra Baradi; 0 otherwise

R2 = 1 for Sonapur; 0 otherwise

The urban area is considered as a benchmark category.

Table 3: Explanatory Variables with their Expected Direction of Impact

Explanatory Variables	Expected Sign
A1	+
A2	+
G	+ / -
E	+
IES	+
R1	-
R2	-

Thus, the basic model has been formulated as-

$$\text{ICP} = F (A1, A2, G, E, \text{IES}, R1, R2) \quad \text{Eq (3)}$$

The dependent variable is not only bounded between 0 and 1 but there are clusters of observations at both the ends. Hence the appropriate econometric specification for equation 3 is Tobit regression. The Tobit regression is defined using the latent variable Y^* where

$$Y_i^* = \alpha + \beta_1 A1_i + \beta_2 A2_i + \gamma G_i + \delta_1 E_i + \lambda \text{IES}_i + \mu_1 R1_i + \mu_2 R2_i + \epsilon_i \quad \text{Eq (4)}$$

ϵ_i is the error term.

Y^* is linked to the values of the dependent variable ICP in the following way:

$$\text{ICP} = Y^* \text{ if } 1 > Y^* > 0$$

ICP = 0 if $Y^* \leq 0$ and

ICP = 1 if $Y^* > 1$

Maximum Likelihood estimates of the parameter in equation 4 along with the model diagnostics are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of Tobit Regression of Index of Cashless Payment

Variables	Estimated Coefficients/ Values	't' values
Constant	-1.911	-13.12***
A1	0.965	20.49***
A2	0.646	13.12***
G	0.163	5.37***
E	0.093	10.02***
IES	0.393	4.21***
R1	-0.603	-5.88***
R2	-0.679	-14.39***

Log likelihood: -170.27, LR Chi2 (12): 1012.80***, Pseudo R2: 0.748

Note: **, *** indicate significance at 5% and 1% level respectively.

Source: Authors' calculation using Sample data

The Tobit regression results of the Index of Cashless Payment (ICP) provide insightful observations into the factors influencing the extent of cashless transaction usage among individuals. The coefficients represent the expected change in the latent propensity to use digital payments per unit change in the predictor variables, holding all other variables constant.

To examine the pattern of cashless transactions among people of different age groups two dummy variables (A1 and A2) are taken in the regression model. The positive and significant coefficient A1 indicates that adults (aged 15-39) are more likely to engage in cashless transactions compared to the elderly (aged 60 and above), suggesting that younger individuals are more inclined towards digital payments. Similarly, the positive and significant coefficient A2 shows that middle-age group individuals (aged 40-59) also have a higher propensity for cashless payments than the elderly, though less so than younger adults. This trend might be attributed to younger and middle-aged adults being more familiar and comfortable with digital technology, having grown up during its rapid evolution. They are likely more adept at navigating digital platforms and thus more inclined to utilize digital payment methods over traditional cash transactions. This reflects a broader shift in societal behaviours towards digitalisation, where younger generations lead in the adoption of new technologies.

The positive and significant coefficient Gender dummy (G), suggests that males are more likely to use digital payment methods compared to females, reflecting possible gender disparities in access to or comfort with digital payment technologies. Cultural and societal norms may also play a role, where men might have more exposure to technological gadgets and platforms, thus feeling more confident in using digital payment systems. This insight underlines the need for targeted educational and outreach programs to bridge the gender gap in digital payment usage, ensuring women have equal access to and confidence in using these technologies. The results confirm the findings of the study by Cooper (2006) on “Digital Divide”.

Cashless payments are also found to be positively influenced by the level of education (E) of the users of various digital platforms. Thus higher educational attainment seems to facilitate the adoption of digital payment methods backed by higher digital literacy making individuals more comfortable with and capable of using digital technologies. Education not only provides the necessary skills to navigate digital platforms but also fosters a mindset open to adopting new technologies. This finding emphasizes the importance of incorporating digital literacy into educational curriculums to prepare individuals for an increasingly digital economy.

The Index of Economic Status (IES) also has a positive and statistically significant coefficient, suggesting that higher economic status is associated with a greater likelihood of using cashless payments. This relationship can be understood through the lens of access and propensity. Higher economic status often correlates with greater access to necessary technologies, such as smartphones and internet services, which are fundamental for engaging in digital transactions. Additionally, individuals with higher economic status may have a larger volume of transactions or more complex financial needs, making the convenience and efficiency of digital payments more appealing. This insight suggests that economic empowerment and access to consumer technology are critical drivers in the transition to a cashless economy.

To examine the extent of cashless payments in rural areas two rural dummies R1 and R2 are considered. While R1 represents a rural area relatively nearer to an urban centre, R2 refers to a relatively distant rural area from the reference urban centre. As the results indicate the coefficient for both the two dummies are statistically significant & negative, indicating that people from both the rural areas are less likely to make cashless payments compared to those from the urban benchmark category.

This disparity likely stems from variations in the availability of digital infrastructure and banking services, which are crucial for supporting digital payments. The considered rural areas, (SatraBaradi and Sonapur), may suffer from inadequate internet connectivity, fewer banking facilities, or limited access to financial education, all of which can hinder the adoption of cashless methods. This finding highlights the importance of addressing infrastructural and service-related gaps to ensure equitable access to digital payment systems across different geographical regions.

Overall, the results highlight the significance of age, gender, education, economic status, and geographical location in determining the extent of cashless payment usage, underlining the multifaceted nature of digital payment adoption across different segments of the population.

Conclusion

Despite spread of digital transactions in India, a significant portion of population still mostly uses physical cash payments in the relatively less developed state of Assam. Digital infrastructure in rural areas being deficient compared to the same in urban areas, proportion of digital transaction is significantly lower in villages than in cities. Given the state of digital infrastructure, economically and educationally more advantaged individuals have been able to take greater advances in shifting to cashless digital modes of transactions. Women and older people have lagged behind their male and younger counterparts respectively in moving over to cashless payment modes. The study thus confirms that the process of change-over to a less-cash economy is beset with disparity along the conventional distributional fault-lines based on gender, location (urban-rural), age, economic status and level of schooling. The changeover, beneficial as it may be in the aggregate, does add a further dimension to inequality in our society. It is however worth noting in this context that even Denmark, which today is practically cashless, experienced age and location specific exclusions in its early stages of drive towards cashlessness. But such exclusions have been overcome by strengthening necessary infrastructure and broadening digital literacy (Eriksen, 2011). This inspires us to think that the observed exclusions in India need not be insurmountable and can be addressed through suitable interventions.

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Partition's Amnesia: Recovering the Long History of Khasi and Jaintia Decolonization Story

Binayak Dutta¹

Abstract

One of the major events in the history of India which continue to excite popular imagination and academic curiosity is the partition of India which was neither a simple cartographic realignment over territories nor an uncritical redistribution of political power and authority over demarcated territorial units. Over the years the experiences of communities across partitioned lands have asserted that partition was not just a part of history but a lived reality of contemporary times. Ongoing struggles of the Khasi and Jaintia communities with border demarcations across their homelands and cartographic manoeuvres over Khasi-Jaintia lands is one such area where partition narratives and experiences are critical to understand the historical experiences of the community over time. The main thrust of the paper is to examine the process and politics of boundary and border making in Khasi and Jaintia lives and its impact in the form of border demarcation, fencing, migration of people and community relations.

In Lieu of an Introduction

When India was partitioned in 1947, the Khasi and Jaintia people found themselves forcefully trans-national, severed from their homes and hearth, kinsmen and their cultivable lands. This paper seeks to understand the Khasi and Jaintia narratives of partition experiences and histories, recognizing the long engagement of these communities with borders and boundary making between India and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) and their experience of deprivation and anxiety over a space that they have traditionally cohabited from the pre-colonial to the contemporary times. Therefore, about twenty years ago, when the Government of India decided to conduct a joint Indo-Bangla Border Survey commencing from 8th December, 2004, it was only natural that the Federal Council of War-Mihngi and War Jaintia (FCWMWJ)² submitted a memorandum to the then Home Minister, Government

¹Associate Professor, Dept. of History, NEHU, Shillong, E-mail: binayakdutta18@gmail.com

² It is an Federation of Ri-War Mihngi local *Dorbar*, Pynursla, Ri War Mihngi Development Council , Dawki, Federation of Five Border States, Mawsynram, the Federation of 25 Khasi States, Ka Dorbar Ki Nongsynshar Ka Ri Hynriewtrep, the Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo People (FKJGP) and the Hynriewtrep National Youth Front.

of India, asserting inter alia that in view of the Government of India decision to undertake a joint survey, the leaders of these local organizations had “resolved to make physical verification of the Main Pillars of Indo-Bangla border, hold meetings, conduct awareness campaign among people and their Dorbars in the Indo-Bangla Areas starting from the 6th December, 2004.”³ This was only a reminder of the fact that despite the passage of six and half decades since partition, the boundary demarcation and border imbroglio was far from any resolution. In northeast India, partition was not a simple realignment of cartographic contours but an intensely social and political event that metamorphosed the life of the communities who fell on the ‘wrong’ side of the boundaries

Partition’s Denial and Deprivation

When the colonial power decided to transfer power, they decided to partition the Indian subcontinent into two parts- India and Pakistan. It was decided that in the event of the partition of Punjab and Bengal, the district of Sylhet would be put up for a referendum to decide whether the district would remain in India as part of Assam or be amalgamated with East Pakistan. It was this process that brought the Khasi and Jaintia within the vortex of Partition politics as Sylhet shared a boundary with both the Khasi and Jaintia homelands. While the Khasis inhabited the tract “of mountainous country extending from Laour, the northwest extremity of Sylhet, to the Eastern boundaries of Cutchar”,⁴ the “Jaintia Kingdom included the Jaintia Hills and a plains country to the south of these hills extending as far as the Surma river.”⁵ But when the Viceroy, in the process of his June 3rd address announced the colonial government’s decision to bring Sylhet within the consideration for partition, he completely ignored the fluid multi-cultural social character of Sylhet and asserted that only the Hindus and Muslims of the district would participate in the referendum, overlooking the presence of the indigenous communities in their shared homelands.

While the results of the referendum ensured that Sylhet would join Pakistan, the claims of the other communities who were cohabiting with the Hindus and Muslims in the district, especially the tribal communities was completely ignored. While the issue of suffering of the tea tribes and their deprivation in the voting process is much highlighted by the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha leaders in 1947 and is now well known, the deprivation of the other tribal communities like the Khasi and Jaintias have remained ‘hidden from history’ as they were not included in the referendum politics as participants or showed no interest to assert their claims to participate in the political contest of the referendum. When the focus shifted to the Boundary Commission headed by Sir Cyril Radcliffe to complete the process of partition and boundary demarcation, the Khasi-Jaintias agitated before it but to no avail. It

³Memorandum of the Federal Council of War-Mihngi and War Jaintia to Shri Shivraj Patil, Home Minister, Government of India, dated 2nd December, 2004.

⁴Board of Revenue Papers, File No.24, 1787, Assam State Archives.

⁵S. K. Dutta’s Introduction to Jaintia Buranji, DHAS, 1937, p. ix.

is interesting to note that when a press release was issued by the Bengal Boundary Commission in the Amrita Bazar Patrika dated 23rd July, 1947, stating that ‘ all parties and organizations desired to make representations before the commission should submit 6 copies of their memoranda by 12noon of the 2nd August at the latest’,⁶ the Dewan of Cherra State David Roy pointed out in his Memo that the Khasi State Cherra would have to take necessary steps “ if this Commission will also deal with the boundary with the Khasi States, and Bholaganj and Cherra State in particular.”⁷ Though a fact-finding committee was set up by the Assam Government with Shri Kamini Kumar Sen, M.L.A. as chairman, to assist the Khasi case, the Khasi-Jaintia leaders and traditional chiefs could not take advantage of the situation.⁸ Even though the Jaintia and Khasi pointed out that on the ground, “ beyond Dawki River (south from the Bridge) there are some Khasi villages called Nongsohetc near Jafflong Tea Estate where the Khasi and Jaintias are living for centuries – these Khasis came from some villages (Sohkha, Darrang, Nonngtalangetc. of the Jowai Sub-Division and also from Umsiem and Umkrem villages of the Khyrim state. For generations those Khasi and Jaintias who live there have their own private lands where rice, betelnuts, panleaf and oranges are cultivated,”⁹ such claims fell on deaf ears with the Boundary Commission. Therefore, post-partition history in northeast India began by denying the Khasi-Jaintia their partitioned reality. Oblivious of the situation on the ground, the Boundary Commission headed by Sir Cyril Radcliffe concluded in their report on the Sylhet partition that partition of Sylhet was,

*... limited to the districts of Sylhet and Cachar, since of the other districts of Assam that can be said to adjoin Sylhet neither the Garo hills nor the Khasi and Jaintia hills nor the Lushai hills have anything approaching a Muslim majority of population in respect of which a claim could be made.*¹⁰

Partition perpetuated the uncertainty in Khasi Jaintia lives even on the eve of partition coming into effect as the Radcliffe Award was based on outdated survey maps. The Political officer of the Khasi States, Major R.A. M. Major, in a letter to the Advisor to the Governor of Assam pointed out that,

I have the honour to inform you that though the boundary of the Khasi states and Sylhet and Khasi States and Kamrup have been notified, they have never been demarcated. The notifications are in many cases vague quoting such

⁶Boundary Commission, (K&J Hills and Sylhet) Political Department, File No.3, 1947, Meghalaya State Archives, Shillong.

⁷Boundary Commission, (K&J Hills and Sylhet) Political Department, File No.3, 1947, Meghalaya State Archives, Shillong.

⁸Boundary Commission, K&J Hills, and Sylhet Pakistan, File No. XII, No.3 of 1947, Meghalaya State Archives, Shillong.

⁹Memorandum of A. B. Diengdoh in Boundary Commission File No.37 of 1947, Assam State Archives, Guwahati.

¹⁰Report of the Bengal Boundary Commission (Sylhet district), Fl. No 44-PR/47, Ministry of States, National Archives of India.

*boundaries as the foot of the hill, where the hill gradually merges into the plains it is impossible to say where the foot is. I have repeatedly pointed out the necessity for demarcation the boundary by pillars as there are constant quarrels between the Khasis and plainsmen. The failure to demarcate a boundary now becomes important with Sylhet going to Pakistan and will be a source of still more friction with plainsmen who are always the aggressors to the disadvantage of the Khasis.*¹¹

But despite these official documentary exchanges, the border demarcations remained fragmentary and incomplete as the boundaries were drawn by brute force without taking the Khasi chiefs into confidence and without visiting or verifying the situation on the ground. Though the Government of India was able to complete the accession of the twenty-five Khasi States into the Indian Union by 1948, the last being the Syiem of Nongstoin, a chiefdom located on the India-Pakistan border, who signed it on the 19th of March, 1948,¹² the demarcation of boundaries were hardly resolved as there was “a misunderstanding by the Pakistan Government of the boundary between Pakistan and Indian Dominion in which the Pakistan Government claims parts of Khyrim, Cherra and Shella States territories on the southern slopes of the Khasi states adjoining Sylhet District.”¹³ The imposition of the border also had long lasting effects on the people especially where certain areas along the border were being disputed between India and Pakistan. Though partition had been effected, the demarcations had not been completed as disputed territories were put up for joint surveys of the boundary by the representatives of the Indian Dominion and Pakistan Government.¹⁴ Although the Radcliffe Line claimed to be precise and detailed on paper, people had little idea of its actual delineations. For instance, the Pyrduwah (also known as Padua) in the Khasi-Jaintia hills district, which adjoins the Sylhet district about 6.5 km was left un-demarcated. It was well into 1954, seven years after partition of India, the Proceedings of the Joint Enquiry at Tamabil in connection with the boundary dispute dated 31.08.54 noted that,

*“... the Deputy Directors of Survey East Bengal and Assam jointly inspected the disputed boundary area near Tamabil. They are of opinion that the boundary can be provisionally demarcated with the help of the available cadastral land marks. In order to achieve this a joint traverse party will commence work from 19.09.54. They expect to complete the provisional demarcation of the boundary in dispute over a length of about one mile on either side of the Tamabil gate by about the 3rd of October, 1954.”*¹⁵

¹¹ Boundary Commission, K&J Hills, and Sylhet Pakistan, File No. XII, No.3 of 1947, Meghalaya State Archives, Shillong.

¹² Webster Davis Jyrwa, ‘The Khasi States After British Rule’ I & II, The Shillong Times, dated 28th And 29th May, 1997.

¹³ Boundary Commission, (K&J Hills and Sylhet) Political Department, File No.3, 1947, Meghalaya State Archives, Shillong.

¹⁴ General administration Report for the year 1947-48, File No. 15(7) -P(S)49. National Archives of India, New Delhi.

¹⁵ Tribal Areas Development Department, File No. SD/33/54 Assam State Archives.

While such deadlines were missed many a times, this was not the only border dispute between India and Pakistan affecting both the Khasi and Jaintia people. While the officials wrestled with the border disputes, the hardships of ordinary people only increased leaps and bounds. A Member of the K&J Autonomous District Council in a letter to the Chief Minister pointed out that,

*“a Myntri of the Nongstoin Syiemship within my constituency ... referred to the trouble being experienced by the border people due to delay in surveying the demarcation of the boundary between India and Pakistan. ... a vast tract of the low land which formerly belonged to and cultivated by people of this District is being forcibly taken possession of by the Pakistanis and the local people are thereby afraid and deprived of cultivating there. The Pakistanis are reported to have removed the Boundary Pillars and encroached into our territories...”*¹⁶

Though mostly unacknowledged in official reports, partition adversely affected the Khasi-Jaintia lives in more ways than just uncertainties over boundary demarcation. While boundary demarcation disputes continued to fester well into the twenty-first century, the impact of partition was more profound on the life, livelihood and culture of the Khasi and Jaintia people. The links connecting the Khasis and Jaintias to Sylhet were permanently disrupted. At the stroke of a pen these people became trans-border communities, split into Indians and Pakistanis depending on their residence. The traditional inter-community linkages, involving life, livelihood, and life world of the communities in the area which had remained strong across the hills and plains with tribes depending on their trade with the plains for ages¹⁷ was irreversibly disrupted.

Loss of Land, Livelihood and Life

Centuries old prosperous border-trade based economy was killed by closing the borders and erection of check-posts. In the pre-partition scenario, the plains of Sylhet used to be the main market for the produce of the hills and foothills of the Khasi Jaintia lands. As a result of the partition of Sylhet, a border of about 150 miles in length was created across the Khasi –Jaintia hills bordering Sylhet which was, after 1947, a part of East Pakistan. The boundary of the new state of East Pakistan partitioned the lands inhabited by the Khasi and the Jaintia as boundary came to be demarcated “from boundary pillar no 1071 located at the tri-junction of Rangpur district of Bangladesh, west Garo Hills district of Meghalaya and Goalpara district of Assam and ends at the boundary pillar no 1338 at the tri-junction of Sylhet district of Bangladesh, Jaintia Hills district and Cachar district of Assam.”¹⁸ Partition and the amalgamation of Sylhet with East Pakistan caused “a virtual economic blockade

¹⁶ Tribal Areas Development Department, File No. SD/33/54 Assam State Archives.

¹⁷ General administration Report for the year 1947-48, File No. 15(7) -P(S)49. National Archives of India, New Delhi.

¹⁸ Statement of the then Chief Minister of Meghalaya Donkumar Roy in the Assembly in (2008, May 6) Oneindia News, www.oneindia.com/2008/05/06/border-fencing-with-bangladesh-in-meghalaya-sector-stalled-1210068341.html accessed on 03.05.017.

of the Khasi hills.”¹⁹ The Administrative Report for the Khasi states pointed out,

*the troubles that inevitably followed on the borders after partition resulted in their being unable either to export their produce to the normal centres of trade or to obtain their staple diet of rice from Sylhet.*²⁰

Nari Rustomji who was the Advisor to the Governor of Assam on Tribal Affairs clearly mentioned in his memoir that:

In Partition days, the main market for the produce of the Khasi Hills was in the District of Sylhet skirting their Southern border. With Partition, Pakistan embarked on a virtual economic blockade of the Khasi Hills. Movement of goods between the Khasi hills and Sylhet was discouraged..... The object of the exercise was no doubt to put pressure on the Khasis and create among them a feeling that they would be better off in Pakistan. The hill people on the extreme southern borders of the Khasi hills were driven to a state of near panic...’’²¹

The movement of goods were initially discouraged and subsequently stopped from moving between Khasi-Jaintia hills and East Pakistan. While the Khasi- Jaintia people of the hills found themselves cut away from their kinsmen in the plains they were also reduced to penury without a market for their agricultural produce and mineral resources. Trade which amounted to more than three crores of rupees annually in the pre-partition days came to a standstill which resulted in the tribal communities residing at the borders between Khasi Hills and Sylhet being brought to the brink of starvation.²² A poignant picture of the situation is brought out by a letter sent by Shri H. Nongrem, M.D.C. to the Deputy Commissioner, United K.&J. Hills District which pointed out that

*“I am sending herewith lot of applications from the people of Langrin Syiemship, complaining of their starvation and shortage of food in their localities, I beg to point out that Langrin is in the most interior areas of the District in the border of Pakistan, and moreover, there is no communication... That no rice is available from Pakistan...”*²³

Political changes had serious effects on the supply of rice. Rice imports from Sylhet to the villages on the southern foothills ceased altogether and a small quantity that

¹⁹Nari K. Rustomji (1971),*Enchanted Frontiers: Sikkim, Bhutan and India's North Eastern Borderlands*,Oxford University Press, Delhi, p 110-111.

²⁰General administration Report for the year 1947-48, File No. 15(7) -P(S)49. National Archives of India, New Delhi.

²¹Nari Rustomji,(1971)*Enchanted Frontiers*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, ,p. 110.

²²O.L. Snaitang (1997) *Memoirs of Life and Political Writings of the Hon'ble Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy*, Vol.1, Shillong, Shrolenson Marbaniang, p 170.

²³Tribal Areas Development, File No. SD/4/56 Assam State Archives.

trickles through the border shot up to exorbitant rates.²⁴The affected in the Khasi Hills district amounted to about 80,000 people and about 16,000 households. This resulted in large scale migration of people from these border areas to new settlements selected for their relocation in the Ri-Bhoi region of present day Meghalaya.²⁵While the Khasi- Jaintia people of the hills found themselves cut away from their kinsmen in the plains they were also reduced to penury without a market for their agricultural produce and mineral resources. Trade which amounted to more than three crores of rupees annually in the pre-partition days came to a standstill.²⁶

A major concern for the Khasi and Jaintia people living in the border areas was their loss of land. As most people found their cultivable lands located within East Pakistan, they were regularly confronted with incursions and theft of their produce by the Pakistani nationals. Though the Khasi and Jaintia people had title deeds indicating their ownership of land located in territories which had become East Pakistan, the Pakistani cultivators were cultivating these lands after the boundaries were demarcated and the transfer affected. A petition submitted by ULobsing of Lakhat Bazar Khyrim Syiemship in a memorial submitted to the Minister In-Charge of Tribal Areas Department dated 21st September, 1961 pointed out that,

That your petitioner peacefully owned and possessed one plot of Paddy field at Lakhat Bazar since generation without any disturbance by anybody. The Land is about 8 acres in area.

That on the recent resettlement of boundaries between India and Pakistan the said land fell in Pakistan.

That during the resurvey of boundaries by the two sides- India and Pakistan your petitioner had been assured that even though any plot of land which used to be in his occupation should now fall to Pakistan yet his request to the property would not be disturbed but that he should cultivate as usual and should pay the usual land revenue to Pakistan when rent is demanded.

That before your petitioner could take steps in matter and immediately on the refixing of boundary stones, one Pakistani who is known to our people as Mor Ali of Noagaon (just below Lakhat Bazar) took possession of the said land of your petitioner by ploughing the same under protection of Pakistani Armed Forces against the protest of your petitioner....²⁷

²⁴General administration Report for the year 1947-48, File No. 15(7) -P(S)49. National Archives of India, New Delhi.

²⁵*Ibid* p 175.

²⁶O.L. Snaitang (1997) *Memoirs of Life and Political Writings of the Hon'ble Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy*, Vol.1, Shillong, Shrolenson Marbaniang, p 170.

²⁷File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives, Guwahati.

Though the Minister, in his note to the Secretary of the Department observed that,

*... It is not understood how a Pakistani is cultivating the land now. There will be other cases in which the lands belonging to our people will fall in Pakistan after the boundary has been finally demarcated and the transfer affected. The Deputy Commissioner may be asked to prepare a list of persons likely to be affected after final demarcation and transfer...*²⁸

there were indeed many people who had similar predicament. Presenting an account of his tour of the border areas, Shri Maham Singh, the minister observed,

*When I visited Bholaganj, a complaint was made to me by the villagers of Bholaganj, Naya Bosti, Nalpara, Chakla, Dharam Bosti that no action has upto now been taken on the petition submitted by them on 9.12.61 regarding the loss of paddy fields due to the recent demarcation of boundary between India and Pakistan. The paddy of the Indian Nationals was also forcibly reaped by the Pak Nationals. The area of the land which has fallen into Pakistan now will be about 100 Bighas and they have forcibly reaped the paddy for about 30 Bighas of the land which was cultivated by the Indian Nationals and the loss of paddy would be about 300 maunds.*²⁹

There were also petitions from Khasis from the Indo-Pakistan border areas calling upon the state government to give them compensation for the lands that had been included in Pakistan. U Ram Tangsong hailing from Darrang Village, at Dawki P.O. pointed out that,

*According to the present demarcation of Indo-Pak. boundary, my land will fall in Pakistan territory when the transfer of land be made to Pakistan as a result of the of the present demarcation. The site of my land is at a place called Mawbang near Khad-umkrem, Khyrim Syiemship.S.Dowki and the area is about 5 acres approximately more or less. The approximate number of Betelnut trees (grown up) 3000 trees and the young ones about 2000 Nos. The area falls within our own private lands. If the land is going to be transferred to Pakistan, I request that reasonable compensation be made to me to prevent me from the big loss and to enable me to get a substitute land for the same as I cannot become a Pakistani nationalist.*³⁰

But this loss of land brought the Khasi and Jaintia people to the brink of starvation. Ka Shingai Tynsong from Darrang informed the undersecretary, Department of Tribal Affairs that her land,

²⁸File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives,Guwahati.

²⁹File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives,Guwahati.

³⁰File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives,Guwahati.

“measuring more or less 305 Bighas has been included in Pakistan territory thereby causing misery and starvation to me on day that Pakistan obstructs me from utilizing my land. I have also all the necessary documents on this matter of ownership. In addition to the above I also beg to state that I have allowed 23 other persons to cultivate more than 150 bighas of land with paddy, oranges, betelnuts, etc. and all these people will also suffer the same fate. ... My land in question is full of plantation of various kinds and estimated loss will amount to crores of rupees when calculated the value of plantations and the land.

The greatest impact of partition on the community was however through the violent disruption of the lives of indigenous communities who shared the border with the new Islamic state of Pakistan and who found themselves split between India and Pakistan. The new border became part of routine border disputes in the subsequent years. For example, on 25th February, 1950 the CID, Sub Inspector Shillong, B. Mawlong, stated that at Bholaganj, Shella that most of the Muslim shopkeepers of Bholaganj Bazaar fled to Pakistan the night before, taking with them their respective valuables and movable properties as they were robbed by the Hindus. Under such circumstances he requested the government to take possession of those houses which were once occupied by the Muslims. On the other hand, there were reports that there were also incidents of Hindus in East Pakistan being forced to convert to Islam and their properties was also pillaged by them. As a result most of them left East Pakistan to come to India.³¹

Apart from the destroying daily economic activities of the border people, the issue of national identity became one of the main anxieties at the borders. Construction of borders with defined boundary lines made the borders the zone of maximum securitization and assertion of national identity. Often such security concerns would translate into cases of harassment by state representatives at the border. Allegations of East Pakistani encroachers into India and vice-versa were common. Perhaps the most extensive impact of partition on work in the borderland had to do with agricultural work. With partition the people's access to the agricultural lands came to an end. Cultivable agricultural lands along the border were neglected for many years because of the border disputes. Numerous cultivators found that they had become separated from their most valuable source of income- land. Land owners found that the borders ran between their homes and their fields and secondly inhabitants of the borderland might decide to migrate across the border thereby becoming separated from their fields. Working the land on the other side of the border continued to be a common practice but there were several cases of threat, intimidations and kidnapping forcing many of the people to give up their lands or to move across the border to keep them. The Deputy Commissioner, Khasi and Jaintia Hills reported from the Balat sector that four Indian nationals who went to their orange and betel nut plantations were arrested by the East Pakistan Rangers on 28th December, 1961.³²

³¹ File No. C.164/50, 1950, Home Confidential, Assam State Archives.

³² File No. 62/61, Political 'B' Department Assam Secretariat, Assam State Archives.

Partition introduced the ‘foreigners’ dimension into politics in North East India with the introduction of passport system in 1952. Though there was no restriction of people from East Pakistan to Assam in the initial years after independence, gradually the provincial governments and the Government of India began to discourage migration of people from East Pakistan to India by 1950. The situation became critical as the initial trickle of people wanting to migrate to India from East Pakistan became a large scale flow by 1950 as the political atmosphere in East Pakistan became increasingly hostile to the minority communities. The Census Report for Assam, Manipur and Tripura, 1951 observed, that, “the recent influx of Hindu refugees from Pakistan constitutes the biggest migration stream into Assam during the last decade. As there was no improvement in the situation on the ground and many displaced “most of the refugees ... from the bordering district of Sylhet”³³preferred to settle down in Assam including the hill areas. Along with the plains of Assam, the hill areas also took on the brunt of the settlement and rehabilitation of the displaced. The Census of 1951 revealed that as many as 14,509 persons moved into the hill areas.³⁴ Gradually the numbers rose and even the Khasi and the Jaintia joined the train in view of the atrocities, violence and trespass by the East Pakistan Rangers becoming random in the Khasi and Jaintia inhabited areas since 1950 onwards, persisting well into the 1960s. A memorandum submitted by the people of Dawki in 1959 pointed out that

*as a result of this heavy firing by the Pak forces such a panic was created among the public of Dawki, that they did not think it wise to stay there with their families and children in such an uncertain condition and they took shelter in safer zones... among 80% of the civil population who are Khasis...*³⁵

It was almost prophetically noted in the Census Report of 1951 that, “the far-reaching effects of this loss will continue to be felt by Assam as well as India for many years to come.”³⁶

In Lieu of a Conclusion

Over years, the unresolved boundary question in north east India and the continuous acrimony over the legality of migration across the created state-nation boundaries has become a pointer to the assertion that partition is not an event but a process which is far from its closure. Though the impact of partition, 1947 persists on the lives of the land and the people of India, there are few attempts to negotiate with it. However, it is sad that political expediency and short-term strategies often, contributed to ‘memoside’ and resulted in the loss of thousand testimonies, through the death of witness to the immediate years of decolonization and partition. However, for the Khasi Jaintia partition is not the story of the past. The loss of territory and

³³The Census of India, Vol XII, 1951, Ibid, p.358.

³⁴The Census of India, Vol.XII, 1951, Ibid

³⁵Revenue Department, File No. 20/59. Assam State Archives.

³⁶The Census of 1951, Vol.XII, Ibid, p. 3.

fertile cultivable fields to Pakistan post boundary demarcation and the metamorphic transformation of Khasi-Jaintia life was not just politics but a tragedy in Khasi community and Family lives. A petition submitted by ULobsing of Lakhat Bazar Khyrim Syiemship in a memorial submitted to the Minister In-Charge of Tribal Areas Department dated 21st September, 1961 pointed out that,

That before your petitioner could take steps in matter and immediately on the refixing of boundary stones, one Pakistani who is known to our people as Mor Ali of Noagaon (just below Lakhat Bazar) took possession of the said land of your petitioner by ploughing the same under protection of Pakistani Armed Forces against the protest of your petitioner....³⁷

Ka Shingai Tynsong from Darrang informed the Under Secretary, Department of Tribal Affairs that her land,

“measuring more or less 305 Bighas has been included in Pakistan territory thereby causing misery and starvation to me on day that Pakistan obstructs me from utilizing my land. I have also all the necessary documents on this matter of ownership. In addition to the above I also beg to state that I have allowed 23 other persons to cultivate more than 150 bighas of land with paddy, oranges, betelnuts, etc. and all these people will also suffer the same fate. ...³⁸

Though some attempts have been made for an academic engagement with this loss in recent years, these have been far from adequate and lack a comprehensive character. The Memorandum of the Federal Council of War-Mihngi and War Jaintia pointed out that,

... the Radcliffe Award and the subsequent Central and State Governments have totally ignored the boundary issues raised by our people since 1947, 1950 and 1970 onwards... the present demarcation line between India and Bangladesh is not correct as they were not done in consultation and in accordance with the treaties signed between indigenous chiefs, Rulers, Chieftains, Clan Heads, Village Heads of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo People and accepted by the Government of India during 1947.³⁹

Probably an examination of this history could help scholars to understand the factors that contributed to the Khasi opposition to the Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh since 2011. NGOs, Traditional Chiefs and land owners of the Indo-Bangla border of Meghalaya became vociferous in its opposition to the agreement. G.S. Kharshanlor, the spokesperson of the CCIB pointed out that “the total land under adverse possession is 599.7 acres. If 240 acres come to Meghalaya and 41.7

³⁷ File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives, Guwahati.

³⁸ File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives, Guwahati.

³⁹ Memorandum of the Federal Council of War-Mihngi and War Jaintia to Shri Shivraj Patil, Home Minister, Government of India, dated 2nd December, 2004

to Bangladesh, what about the remaining 278 acres of land?" This was a persistent question posed by the CCIB to the Government of India since 2011 when the first concrete steps were taken to bring the border demarcation question to a close by the Manmohan Singh Government.⁴⁰ When the proposal for border fencing came, the voices of opposition grew louder. Kmen Myrchiang, the Secretary of CCIB pointed out that "till today we did not have the permanent boundary pillars and we cannot identify the real zero line."⁴¹ This position apparently only reinforced an apprehension voiced in a memorandum submitted by Shri S. Kongwang, one of the Sirdars of Darrang in 1962, which pointed out,

*"Originally the boundary is the natural Pyian River but now the boundary runs a distance of average 5 furlongs from the bank of the river; in some places the boundary runs at a distance of about a mile from the river; and between the river and the pillar; we have a number of gardens and paddy fields which may be valued at several lakh of rupees not to speak of the price of the land now tagged to Pakistan..."*⁴²

Despite passage of time and recent changes in approaches to historical studies, the Khasi and Jaintia stories of everyday experiences relating to partition of India have remained outside mainstream partition discourse, even though spatial location determined the process of possessions and socializations. Though political geographies have changed and East Pakistan gave way to Bangladesh after 1971, the lives of the Khasi and the Jaintias as minority communities have remained as vulnerable as it was since 1947. The recent attempts to overcome the hiatus between the nation and the popular in historical discourse, in real terms, a study of the Khasi- Jaintia grassroots narrative would only strengthen the claim that the gap has widened over the years as most of the partition narratives fail to engage with the reality of partition as an ongoing process. The recent destruction of the bust of U Tirot Singh, a Khasi Chief at the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre, Dhaka, in the wake of the recent student uprising against the Bangladesh government and the anxiety of the indigenous community across the border over their lives and property of their kinsmen⁴³ is a grim reminder of the Khasi and Jaintia partitioned reality. This paper about the Khasi-Jaintia case is only a preliminary attempt to recover the Khasi and Jaintia story into the history of India's partition and correct a historical imbalance.

⁴⁰The Telegraph, December 3, 2014.

⁴¹*Northeast News*, December, 3, 2018.

⁴²File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives, Guwahati

⁴³The Shillong Times, August 7th 2004.

Hindutva and the Muslim Question in Assam: Underlying Tensions and Emerging Dynamics

Nayan Moni Kumar¹ and Akhil Ranjan Dutta²

Abstract

This paper attempts to understand how BJP has dealt with the Muslim question in Assam. It argues that while Muslims have remained as Hindutva's primary political Other in Assam, the frames of religion and indigeneity have shaped BJP's overall politics according to which it has maintained a distinction between Indigenous and the Immigrant Muslims in the state. However, such a distinction has been characterized by much socio-political stress and tensions which reflects BJP's eventual otherization of Muslims in the state.

Introduction

The 'Muslim question' in Assam can be traced back to the colonial period when the region saw the large-scale migration of East Bengal origin Muslims. The colonial machinations aimed at increasing agricultural revenue, led to the promotion of migration from an overpopulated and land scarce East Bengal. Such large-scale migration significantly affected the demographic ratio of Hindus and Muslims in the state leading to much uncertainty about the unfolding landscape. Over the time the colonial period witnessed the multifarious expressions of Hindu and Muslim identity, influencing the broader Assamese identity. This process continued even in the post-colonial period. In this regard, a significant body of literature³ has thrown light on such developments and its political ramifications. However, rather than delving into these historical aspects the present paper focuses on the contemporary politics of Hindutva and how it has negotiated with the Muslim question in Assam. Such an academic exercise is necessary for two important reasons. The contemporary political scene in Assam is marked by two significant developments: the consolidation of Hindutva (more on this later), and the new forms of identity questions in the state. Politics of identity has been the characteristic feature of politics in Assam emanating

¹Research Scholar, Dept. of Political Science, Gauhati University, E-mail: nayankumar083@gmail.com

²Professor, Dept. of Political Science, Gauhati University, E-mail: akhilranjangu@gmail.com

³See, M. Kar, Muslims in Assam Politics, Delhi: Osmos publications, 1990; M.K Nath, The Muslim Question in Assam and Northeast India, Oxon: Routledge, 2021; Udayon Misra, Burden of History: Assam and the Partition: Unresolved Issues, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2018.

from awakening of the ethno-cultural consciousness. The diverse groups inhabiting this state have been pressing either for the creation of separate or autonomous state on the basis of their lingo-cultural identities or for special constitutional safeguards of their respective identities (Phukan, 1996). Some of these demands have also been for recognition of their particular identities by the majoritarian society. Within this broader landscape of identity politics, the contemporary identity questions of the Muslims can be located. Recent times have witnessed the assertion of *Miya* identity led by a section from within the community. Such demands emanate from years of their struggle for recognition from the larger Assamese society. In this regard their struggle for identity has more been about seeking universal recognition that couches their demands in the vocabulary of the politics of universality. Simultaneously, Indigenous Muslims have also asserted their indigeneity and their particular ethnic identities by distancing themselves from the *Miya* Muslims (Kumar, 2024). In this regard, a sense of difference has come to characterize their identity talk, couched more in the vocabulary of the politics of difference. In this unfolding landscape, the present paper seeks to understand how the BJP has navigated the Muslim identity politics in the state.

We argue that, for Hindutva, while Muslims have consistently been the primary political other; in Assam, the frames of religion and indigeneity have shaped BJP's overall politics according to which it has maintained a nuanced distinction between indigenous and immigrant Muslims in the state. Nevertheless, this differentiation has not been without socio-political tensions, reflecting BJP's ultimate otherization of the broader Muslim identity.

Understanding Hindutva's Creative Consolidation

BJP for long dismissed as a cow-belt party, with which presumably the more civilized denizens of the country in the non-cow-belt areas would have nothing to do, has made much headway outside its turf (Prabhakara, 1994). In fact, BJP has managed to make significant gains in non-traditional areas. North East India in general and Assam in particular has long been viewed as one such non-traditional territory for BJP. Many scholars have earlier argued that Assam with its culture of plurality and diversity is a ground which is infertile for the growth of Hindutva ideology (Bhattacharjee 2016; Misra, 2016). Given the complexity of the demography of this region that consist of diverse races, ethnicities, faiths, customs, culture and multiplicity of issues it becomes extremely difficult for an ideology riding on Hindu religious nationalism to identify common ground that enables it to make a dent in this region (Bhattacharjee, 2016). Moreover, the spread of Vaishnavism, particularly in the valley areas, contributed significantly towards the softening and, in many cases, obliteration of many inegalitarian social practices, rituals, orthodoxies and dogmas of Hindu caste system in the state which in turn hindered the growth of the ideology of Hindutva (Goswami, 2020). Political factors were also important in this regard. The growth of BJP was halted to a considerable extent by the Assamese caste

Hindus who used to see BJP only as a *Marwari* party. The BJP's policy of being soft to Hindu immigrants and hard on the Muslim immigrants did not find many takers among the influential section of the Assamese society who were more obsessed with the fear of domination by the Bengalis— both Hindus and Muslims— in all public spheres (Srikanth, 1999). However, despite such odds, Hindutva in the last few years has managed to attain significant political grounds in Assam.

A careful look at the differentiated trajectories of the BJP in different states makes it abundantly clear that the continuing momentum of Hindu nationalism in Indian politics has become regionalised. Hence, any understanding of the trajectory as well as possible futures of Hindutva must take as its point of departure the local and regional dynamics that have provided the conditions for the current advances of Hindu nationalist forces (Hansen, 1996). Such developments, in turn, are part of the regionalization of politics in India that has led to the rise of discrete and distinctive political discourses, mobilization patterns and alliances in each state.

Accordingly, Hindutva's consolidation in this part of the country too has certain regional characters. An important dimension of Hindutva's rise has been its adaptability to a complex socio-political terrain and its creative accommodation of certain apparently contrasting aspects to its ideology, which highlights its pragmatism.⁴ Hindutva activists from the very beginning adopted novel strategies for navigating through complex realities of this region in order to establish itself in the cultural and political imagination of the people.⁵ Further, it had to go through a significant ideological reorientation in the region. Instead of relying on an explicit nationalist agenda, it had to take into account regional concerns; it had to accept the diversity of identities in Assam which were plural, layered and multidimensional. Consequently, its largely majoritarian outlook gave way for the minorities (ethnic, linguistic, religious) in the region which in turn, opened up possibilities for dream alliances at both social and political level (Sethi and Subhrastha, 2017).

Two important frames of 'othering' continue to characterize the politics in North-east Indian, where one frame is defined by ethnicity and indigeneity and another by religion. The presence of either of these frames maybe more or less salient during certain moments and in certain spaces. At times, there may also be significant overlaps between these two frames (Kolås, 2023). Recent studies have emphasized on how these two frames have had an overlapping influence in terms of BJP's electoral

⁴The political consolidation of Hindutva in this region involved different strategies that evolved over the time. See, Akhil Ranjan Dutta, *Hindutva Regime in Assam: Saffron in the Rainbow*, Delhi: Sage, 2021.

⁵Bhattacharjee argues that, the Sangh Parivar has, since the past 60 years or so, been working assiduously towards establishing a base in the social and the cultural realm in Assam. It has relied on the socio-cultural work, which often involved offering support by providing welfare services in the realm of education, health, cultural development, organizing conferences, festivals, establishing publication departments, schools, hospitals, vocational training centres etc for deepening the roots of Hindutva in Assam, See, Malini Bhattacharjee, "Tracing the emergence and consolidation and Hindutva in Assam." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51 (16), 80-87, 2016.

success in Assam (Sircar, 2022; Saikia, 2020; Tripathi et al., 2018). Saikia argues that the crystallization of Hindu votes in Assam and BJP's appropriation of nativist politics or the indigenous discourse of identity were crucial in its electoral success (2020). These two aspects need a bit of elaboration. Even though, Assam's socio-political terrain offered much complexities, certain historical and demographic prerequisites for the rise of Hindutva forces were already present in Assam (Srikanth, 1999). In this regard, the 'Muslim question' assumes considerable political importance. Whether Assam will remain a Hindu dominated state in the face of increasing numbers of Muslims has remained a persistent theme in the state's politics. The increasing number of Muslim population is often seen as a threat to the security and identity of the Hindu population of the state. This concern is closely tied to the issue of illegal migration from Bangladesh, which politics has failed to resolve till now. Further, an important question in Assam today is not merely about illegal migration but about the population explosion of the *Miya* Muslims in the state that has received significant socio-political attention (Mahanta, 2021). This problem provides a fertile ground for BJP to consolidate its position in Assam.⁶ Along with this, BJP has made indigeneity as the core issue of political mobilization (Tripathi et al., 2018). BJP captured the identity narrative or the *Khilonjiya* (Indigeneity) discourse long present in the society and emphasized on preserving the identity and culture of the indigenous people in the face of swift demographic change in the state (Misra, 2016). BJP's rhetoric of protecting *Jati, Mati, Bheti* of the indigenous populace managed to capture the political imagination of the people.

Accordingly, the interplay of religion and indigeneity were crucial in BJP's electoral success. In the background of such developments, we must understand how BJP has navigated the Muslim question in Assam. Based on BJP's political trajectory in the state, we argue that both the frames of religion and indigeneity have come to shape BJP's politics towards the Muslims in Assam.

Muslims in Assam: The Underlying Faults

A presumed singularity of the 'Muslim' as an identity dominates the popular and political discourse. Muslim as an identity and a religious category is often taken for granted to be homogenous and a unified whole transcending regional, cultural-social-political boundaries. This straitjacketing of multiple Muslim identities erases the particularities within the Muslim identity and reduces it to a few stereotypical assumptions, for example- Talaq, Polygamy, High birth rate, conservative, communal

⁶ BJP has made the issue of illegal immigration from Bangladesh one of its main electoral planks, after hijacking the issue from the regional party AGP (Asom Gana Parishad). The Congress government, both at the Centre and in the state, showed apathy towards resolving the issues of deportation and detection of illegal foreigners. While other parties, both national and regional, have failed to address this issue concretely, the BJP took the opportunity to project itself as a party capable and credible enough to resolve this unaddressed issue. Consequently, the focus of the BJP has shifted towards the issue of Muslim population increase in the state, See, Sandhya Goswami, Assam Politics in Post-Congress Era: 1985 and beyond, Delhi: Sage, 2020.

and so on (Ibrahim, 2020). Much of the discourse on Muslims in India has sought to break the myth that the Muslims in India are a monolithic community; rather, contrary to popular assumption they are a heterogeneous lot. They represent both vertical and horizontal unevenness and also exhibit in-depth socio-economic, linguistic and cultural differences. This is true even in the context of the Muslims of Assam, as they form a highly heterogeneous community with a plethora of different dimensions. The Muslims of Assam although belong to the same religious faith, reflect significant sociological variations in terms of caste, class, language, occupation, education, geographical distribution, political ideology and culture (Sircar, 2017). Broadly speaking, Muslims in Assam are generally divided into two groups- Indigenous and Immigrant Muslims.⁷

Indigenous Muslims in Assam, also known as Assamese Muslims, are descendants of the captive prisoners and of the preachers and their disciples believed to have come from outside, as also of the converts from local tribes and communities in ancient and medieval Assam (Nofil, 2021). They were a significant component of the Medieval Assamese society and polity (Baruah, 1978) and over the centuries they have contributed immensely towards the development of the region and have been an integral part of the process of the formation of Assamese nationality. This category of the Muslims is deeply assimilated and relatively well accepted in the larger society and Assamese nationality (Hussain, 1993). By and large they see themselves as part of the larger Assamese speaking community together with Assamese Hindus and many of them are conscious about being distinct from *Miya* Muslims (Nofil, 2021).

On the other hand, *Miya* Muslims are still considered as immigrants at the popular level. The migration of this community started during the colonial period, starting from the late 19th and early 20th century, mainly from Bengal. This was an internal migration of an oppressed peasant community from one part of the same country to another part in search of a better life (Hussain, 1993). What basically started as an economic problem eventually got transformed into a matter of extremely complicated controversy with ramifications into social, political, cultural and linguistic aspects of Assam's life (Kar, 1990). Accordingly, to deal with the emerging concerns due to the ongoing migration, the Assamese middle-class leadership expressed their willingness to assimilate the '*Ana-Axamiyas*' (non-Assamese) into the Assamese nationality. For the Assamese middle class, Assamese language became the primary marker, the sole criteria, of identification as Assamese. Accordingly, over the time, the community came to be known as *Na-Axamiya* or Neo-Assamese. However, such attempts were never complete and in fact were destabilized by contemporary colonial and postcolonial developments. Initially many from within the *Miya* community

⁷Immigrant Muslim' is used to imply those Muslims that came to Assam after the advent of the British colonialism in the nineteenth century. See C.K Sharma, "The Immigration issue in Assam and Conflicts around it", *Asian Ethnicity*, 13(3), 2012, pp. 287-309. Previous academic analyses have often relied on such a distinction. See B.J Dev and D.K Lahiri, *Assam Muslims: Politics and Cohesion*, Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1985; M.K Nath, *The Muslim Question in Assam and Northeast India*, Oxon: Routledge, 2021.

came to accept this designation. It was expected that with the passage of time they would become *Axamiya* (Assamese) from *Na-Axamiya*. But the turbulent anti-foreigner movement in Assam created hurdles on the way of the formation of greater *Axamiya* nationality. Instead of getting recognition as *Axamiya* they were belittled with names, such as *Miya*, Bangladeshi, *Bidexi* (Kumar, 2022). In this regard, Yasmin Saikia has argued that unlike the indigenous Muslims, *Miya* Muslims never got to experience the process of *Xanmiholi*⁸ due to colonial and the post-colonial socio-political developments. Emphasizing on this aspect, Udayon Misra argued that, it would be simplistic to conclude that the cordiality and warmth which has marked the relationship between the large majority of the Assamese-Hindus and the rather small minority of the indigenous Assamese-Muslim community would be continued in the case of Assamese Hindus and the *Miya* Muslims. He has particularly emphasized upon the political capital that the community enjoys today and how that creates a concern for the Assamese Hindus (2014), a concern that has equally been shared by the indigenous Muslims in the state.

An analysis of the identity concerns of the indigenous Muslims vis-à-vis *Miya* Muslims reveals its multidimensional character ranging from social, political, cultural, economic. Indigenous Muslims have long claimed that their unique identity as ‘Assamese Muslims’ have been threatened due to the increasing number of the *Miya* Muslims. They are afraid that due to their identical religious affiliations with the *Miya* Muslims their unique identity with its special feature *Assamese-ness* may be lost (Mumtaz, 2019). It is also argued that the homogenization of the Muslim identity also put indigenous Muslims in a vulnerable position as in the everyday discourse of illegality, the entire Muslim community is branded as illegal immigrants. Further, the growing dominance of the *Miya* Muslims in electoral politics of Assam has made the Assamese Muslims sceptical towards the community. Unlike the *Miya* Muslims, the Assamese Muslims don’t live in contiguous areas. So, they do not have the dominance in any assembly constituency from upper and middle Assam and Barak Valley. In contrast to that due to their numerical strength, the *Miya* Muslims are decisive in at least 30 assembly constituencies from lower and middle Assam and Barak valley (Nath, 2007). Consequently, the loss of political capital has created a sense of concern among the indigenous Muslims as it has significant consequences in terms of the sharing of material benefits from the state. Further, the economic and educational advancement of the *Miya* Muslim community have further challenged the hegemony of the Assamese Muslims. In such a socio-political context, marked by difference, BJP’s politics assumes importance.

⁸ A blend/mix/fusion of histories and identities which helped in the emergence of Assamese as dynamic identity that had Assamese Muslims (and other communities) as its constituting element. For more discussion on this concept, see Yasmin Saikia, “The Muslims of Assam: Present/Absent History” in, *Northeast India: A Place of Relations*, ed. Yasmin Saikia and Amit R. Baishya, 2017.

Good Muslim/Bad Muslim: Understanding Hindutva Politics

A violent rhetoric has characterized the last two legislative assembly elections in Assam. While the 2016 legislative assembly election was touted to be a 'battle', the last battle of *Saraighat* (Sethi and Subhrastha, 2017) to be precise, the 2021 election was a 'clash/conflict of two civilizations' (Express News Service, 2020). The election/battle/clash/conflict was to take place against the illegal (Bangladeshi) immigrants and their culture. Such conflation of election and a battle/clash is based on the otherization of and making an enemy out of the illegal immigrant who have come to 'reside within' and whose numbers have grown exponentially, posing an existential threat- (perceived or real?)- to the indigenous populace of the state. In BJP's imagination the illegal immigrant is none other than a Muslim. Here it must be pointed out that the narrative of illegal immigration has a long history in BJP's notebook. In this regard, Ramchandran argues that, as Hindu nationalist organisations came to the forefront of Indian society and politics, their discourse drew attention to the seemingly unfamiliar, largely unregulated, and surreptitious population flows from neighbouring Bangladesh. A substantial body of propaganda texts drafted by the Sangh Parivar's ideologues or supporters outside the fold chillingly, solidly, and in great detail outlined the supposed manifold dangers of 'infiltration'. Their xenophobic discourses characterized the undocumented immigrants, not commonly as aliens or illegal immigrants but rather as infiltrators representing a visible threat to the long-term existence of an enfeebled Hindu-Indian nation (Ramachandran, 2003). However, in BJP's narrative Hindu Bangladeshis emerge as refugees, and they advocate for their citizenship status while demanding deportation of Muslim Bangladeshis (Shamshad, 2019).

Accordingly, while Muslims have consistently been positioned as an 'Other' in the broader conversations on migration by Hindutva forces, there are certain nuances in the way BJP has dealt with the Muslim question in Assam. BJP's rhetoric has not been linear as it seems to have maintained a 'strategic distinction', at least at a surface level, between the indigenous and the immigrant *Miya* Muslims. As the current chief minister of Assam argued:

When we speak of Muslims in Assam, there are two types - one is the indigenous Assamese Muslims, who usually vote for the BJP and, even if they don't vote for us, they are associated with our culture and heritage. Whereas the other category is of those who do not even have their names properly in the NRC as of now (Sabrang India, 2021).

The BJP has constantly maintained that they have no conflict with the indigenous Assamese Muslims and that they are an important part of Assamese society. Accordingly, they seem to have been promoting the cause of the indigenous Muslims. They have argued that:

Assamese Muslims are being exploited. They do not have any representative in the Assembly or any parliamentary constituency. Nobody talks about them or their plight. So, the BJP is strongly on the side of the Assamese Muslim community (Express News Service, 2020).

However, this outreach to indigenous Muslims is not unusual or exceptional if we see it in the larger context of its attempts to reach out to social groups who are usually not its traditional supporters. In a significant study, Badri Narayan has shown how organizations based on the Hindutva ideology, such as the RSS and its affiliates, work at the grassroots to ensure their expansion socially, culturally and politically. As a part of its strategy to bring more and more sections of the population under its wing, the RSS is constantly trying to reach social communities who are not yet under its influence. Dalits, tribals and Muslims are the groups on which the RSS is working hard. He argues that RSS and its various wings use tactics of appropriation and accommodation to co-opt social groups like Dalits, tribals and minorities within its framework (2021). Through such analyses, Bardi Narayan questions the stereotypes and myths about Hindutva politics, organizations and their socio-political actions, which exist due to certain biases resulting from our distance from grassroot realities (2021). Even though, Badi Narayan's work has faced certain criticisms, his analyses do provide the ever-evolving picture of how politics gets manifested beyond the cliches of critic's accounts (Reddy, 2020).

In this regard, BJP's recent attempts to woo *Pasmanda*⁹ Muslims is a case in point. The BJP's recent overtures to *Pasmanda* Muslims have sparked heated debates in Indian politics as this outreach unfolds against a backdrop of escalating communal tensions and contentious politics, further complicating the matter (Nehal, 2023). Hilal Ahmed argues that BJP's strategy to reach out to *Pasmanda* communities must not be seen through the prism of politically outdated metaphors like 'social justice', 'minority appeasement', and/or desire for 'inclusiveness'. Further, by cautioning against reducing the party's mobilizational strategies and electoral tactics to Hindutva rhetoric, he argues that BJP's *Pasmanda* policy actually stems from party's professional attitude and managerial approach (2023). He writes:

It is true that BJP has been committedly adhering to the ideology of Hindutva since its inception. However, it does not mean that the party leaders do not pay attention to those practical considerations that do not fit well in the Hindutva-driven framework of politics. In fact, many a time the party does not hesitate to deviate from its ideological premises to deal with emerging political realities. BJP, in fact, has produced a workable equilibrium that maintains a balance between party's ideology and the context-specific moves. BJP's Pasmanda outreach is an excellent example of this politics of professionalism (2023).

⁹Pasmanda, a word of Persian origin literally means those who have fallen behind, broken or oppressed.

Such context specific move is also witnessed in BJP's outreach to indigenous Muslims. While BJP has not fundamentally moved away from its Hindutva ideals, it has engaged with the indigenous Muslims in an effort to put them within its broader 'construct' of Assamese identity (however this development remains contentious). Most importantly it has sought to reap political mileage out of the identity concerns of the indigenous Muslims that has remained unacknowledged for years. Accordingly, the government formed a committee to identify the 'indigenous' within the 'Muslim' in Assam. The objective has been to carve out a distinct identity that separates them from the *Miya* Muslims who are considered as non-indigenous/immigrant. The committee was formed following a long demand by indigenous Muslims to protect their identity against the possible identity threat from a large population of *Miya* Muslims. Accordingly, following the committee's report the government has recognized *Goriya, Moriya, Deshi, Syeds* and *Julhas*¹⁰ as 'indigenous' Muslim communities (Singh, 2022). Further, the government has also given the approval for the socio-economic survey of the state's indigenous Muslims population. These moves are aimed at protecting their distinct socio-cultural identity as distinct from *Miya* Muslims.

As against these developments, *Miya* Muslims have emerged as the archetypal 'Bad Muslims'. In the current political landscape, the otherization of the community has manifested across various dimensions including social, political and cultural spheres. However, it is crucial to note that this otherization is not a recent-phenomena. It was during Assam movement, the otherization of *Miya* Muslims peaked when the entire community came to be branded as illegal immigrants. A sense of identity threat to the 'in-group' (the Assamese in this case) characterized the movement which in turn led to infliction of violence on the community. BJP's contemporary politics builds on and exacerbates such existing tensions between the Assamese and the *Miya* Muslims.

As argued earlier, the question of increasing population of *Miya* Muslims has become a focal point in the contemporary political discourse in Assam so much so that in the last few years the government has taken various political measures to address what it sees to be a potential threat to the indigenous population in the state. For example, the Assam government's proposed two child policy recommends cutting benefits in state government funded schemes to those who flout the norms. Interestingly, this proposed two child policy won't be affecting the Scheduled caste and Scheduled tribe and tea garden communities. Further, the government also proposed to form a 'population army' to help curb birth rate in Muslim majority areas. In this regard, Dutta argues that a form of 'population populism' has come to characterize BJP's approach which is marked by both welfarism and a strong underlying sectarianism (Dutta, 2021). In fact, the BJP government at the centre and in Assam has not concealed its fears of a rapid increase in the Muslim population in the state (Dutta, 2017). Accordingly, BJP has been making efforts to consolidate the Hindu bloc, comprising Assamese

¹⁰ For more discussion about these identities, see, Report of the subcommittee on cultural identity of indigenous Assamese Muslims, 2021.

Hindus, Bengali Hindus, and various other tribal groups in the state. In this regard, BJP's population policies, despite its welfare tinge, cannot be delinked from their political discourse of Muslim otherization. A more aggressive development in this regard is the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019, which despite its humanitarian tone, is rooted in Hindutva's political imagination. In Assam's context the act assumes significance as it seeks to (counter)balance the Muslim population in the state by providing citizenship to non-Muslims minorities from certain countries. In fact, that act has been touted as the biggest arsenal to stop Assam from becoming another Kashmir or a Muslim majority state.

BJP's anti-*Miya* politics has further materialized in a bout of state driven eviction drives. '*Mati* and *Bheti*' (land and home) have remained the two core political pillars of BJP's politics in the state. As one of BJP's stated political aim is to remove and recover encroached lands, it has carried out rounds of eviction drives in the state to that end. The popular discourse on these evictions sees them as being undertaken to clear government lands that have been encroached by 'doubtful citizens'- often translating to Bangladeshi illegal immigrants/*Miya* Muslims. The constant effort through popular media campaigns to establish the evicted masses as illegal Bangladeshis and encroachers further creates suspicion and hostility. In a recent incident of state driven eviction drive in *Jamugurihat*, in the *Sonitpur* district, a local news channel praised the administration for its 'courage' to evict the 'Mini Bangladesh'. Later on, it was taken off the air (DY365, 2021) due to outrage among the people. Such media representation reinforces and legitimizes state's action without scrutiny. However, a careful observation of these state-evictions reveals a pattern of targeting the Muslims in general and *Miya* Muslims in particular (Siddique, 2023; Azad, 2019) who have always remained at the margins in the state. According to Azad, these evictions serve a dual purpose- it reinforces BJP's politics of exclusion by identifying the state's Muslims as 'encroachers' and it polarizes the state on communal lines (2019). Further, it also helps BJP to consolidate its image as the protector of the indigenous interests. An empirical study done by Muktiar et al. too has found that the eviction policy of the government is not only communally divisive but also an attempt to gain political mileage in the name of evicting Bangladeshis (2018). Such political developments further put the *Miya* community in a vulnerable position in the society.

A lot of 'cultural talk' (Mamdani, 2004) has characterized BJP's *Miya*-centric politics. Even during the colonial period that witnessed the large-scale migration of Bengal origin Muslims, Middle class Assamese stalwarts like Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Ambikagiri Raichoudhury, Nilamani Phukan saw the possibility of assimilating these people within the broader Assamese nationality (Hossain, 2021; Hossain, 2018). Such efforts further continued in the postcolonial period. A newly emerged middle class from the *Miya* community led by people like M. Illimuddin Dewan, Ataur Rahman, Ismail Hussain (Sr.) played an important role in bringing the community closer to the Assamese identity (Islam & Kalita, 2007). However, BJP's politics removes the

possibility of such integration. In fact, its politics is based on an anti-thesis between two competing cultures or civilizations- Assamese (read Hindu) and *Miya* (read Muslim), the latter being a threat to the former. The clash of these two civilizations is the new political narrative in today's Assam steered by Hindutva forces which fixes the *Miya* Muslims as the target whose civilization has allegedly posed a serious threat to the identities and age-old civilization of the local and indigenous people. In such cultural talk Badruddin Ajmal, a member of parliament from AIUFD, emerge as the sole representative, protector and a symbol of the *Miya* community. In fact, the community becomes 'Ajmal's people' and their language, culture and ethos emerge as alien to the Assamese community (The Quint, 2023). Such systematic and consistent campaign has gradually manufactured a mass hysteria against the community (Dutta, 2022).

Further, political talk assumes equal or probably more importance in BJP's narrative, as 'our culture' can only be protected if there is a political consolidation of 65% of Assam's population- that includes the caste Hindu Assamese, tribal population, *Bengalis*, *Marwaris* and other Hindi speakers in the state- as against the 35% of the Muslims. Interestingly, the rationale behind promoting such a consolidation is cultural, as it is argued that the roots of 65% of Assam's population is the Indian civilization which stands in contrast to the foreign-ness of the *Miya* Muslims (Sarma, 2019). Accordingly, Assam has witnessed the formation of a 'rainbow coalition', bringing together diverse tribal and non-tribal communities in the region. While this coalition may have limitations beyond electoral arena, there is an expectation that it will extend its influence into the socio-cultural spheres (Sarma, 2019). This experimentation of BJP seems to be in line with its attempt towards constructing a 'non-Brahminical Hindutva' that it has tried in Uttar Pradesh by including OBC's Dalits and others within its fold (Pai and Kumar, 2019). Here too in Assam it has attempted to form a '*Mahajati*' by incorporating every (non-*Miya*) communities in the region so that both cultural and political identity of the Assamese/Indigenous/Hindus can be protected.

Interrogating the Strategic Distinction: Tension within BJP's Politics

An important question that can be raised here is that, in co-opting the concerns of the indigenous Muslims has BJP moved away from its hardcore Hindutva stance? Not necessarily. In Assam, while a soft Hindutva stance of BJP could be witnessed during its initial years (Dutta, 2021), it has not strayed from its fundamental principles of Hindutva. In fact, over the time it has reverted to its original hard-line Hindutva agenda. According to Gohain, during the 2016 legislative assembly election, BJP was uncertain about its hold over the masses and therefore had chosen to stress the indigenous and the Assamese identity. However, during the 2019 general election their stress was on Hindu identity (Gohain in Ameen, 2021) and this trend continued afterwards. In other words, BJP's Hindu supremacist politics, which thrive on hate campaign against Muslims, seem to have overtaken ethnic Assamese nationalism,

prevalent for decades in Assam (Ameen, 2021). Recent studies (Donthi, 2021; Bijukumar, 2019) too have pointed towards the political transition in Assam from ethnonationalism to Hindutva¹¹ which in turn has made the Muslim question a much relevant political issue. In this regard, Nath argues that Muslims constitute more than one-third of the total population in Assam. BJP realises that, in such a demographic equation, only Muslim communalism can help it in the future to return to power through the consolidation of the Hindu votes against the Muslims (2021). Accordingly, in the last few years BJP has brought in its usual political tropes of love jihad, mandir-masjid-madrassa, beef politics, Islamic fundamentalism, flood jihad and all the other issues where religion- Hindu and Muslim- becomes the overt categories of political mobilization.

Drawing parallels with Kashmir the incumbent chief minister has asserted that Muslim in Assam are not a minority, igniting apprehensions about Assamese people sharing the same fate as Kashmiri pandits. He held that Muslims must behave like majority and they must assure that the Kashmir situation is not repeated here (Singh, 2022). Such rhetoric obliterates the internal distinctions within the Muslim category and the extant socio-cultural and political power relations. However, such fading away of the internal boundaries is not new. While the government would like to maintain a distinction between the two categories of the Muslim population at the policy level, how it actually maintains such a distinction at the ground is not very clear. In fact, in some of its actions it has failed to do so. Indigenous Muslims too had to face the government's eviction drive that was ostensibly aimed at *Miya* Muslims who are often portrayed as illegal settlers (Karmakar, 2021). It is for the purpose of ensuring such a distinction that many indigenous Muslim groups have demanded identity cards and a census to identify the indigenous within the Muslims in Assam. In recent times there have also been targeted attacks on historical figures like Bagh Hazarika, a revered personality for the indigenous Muslims who fought for Ahoms against the Mughals. Hindu Jagaran Mancha has termed it as a fictional character. They also alleged that Hazarika's character was created to 'tarnish' the image of Lachit Borphukan, the commander leading the Ahom army (India Today NE, 2021). Another such incident was when a BJP MLA termed noted poet-writer Syed Abdul Malik as 'intellectual Jihadi' creating sharp reaction across the state (The Wire, 2020). Such incidents elicited strong resentment among the indigenous Muslim community bringing out the underlying tensions within BJP's policy of maintaining a distinction between the two groups of Muslims.

BJP often maintains that the indigenous minority communities are sons of the soil and there is no need for them to be afraid of any political discourse. Any discourse may take place in the political arena but the indigenous minority people being the sons of the soil should not be swayed away or be afraid of any such discussion (India Blooms News Service, 2016). However, what is not acknowledged here is

¹¹ This is not however to argue that this process is complete. But it does point towards the political dominance of Hindutva in Assam

that political discourses have the power to construct social realities by positioning the subjects within certain socially othered categories.¹²In the common imaginations, Muslims are seen as a politically conscious community, which is supposed to be fully aware of its communal interests and that they participate in politics to bargain with the state for the protection of their collective, communal, and eventually separatist interests (Ahmed, 2022). This political understanding of the Muslim identity often obliterates specificities within the universal Muslim identity. In this regard, BJP's political discourse assumes significance, as it raises the question of whether the distinction they maintain between indigenous and *Miya* Muslims at the political level gets equally translated into distinction at the social level. In the recent GMC election, BJP held that they do not need the votes from people living in areas like Garigaon, Hatigon. The underlying logic was that, those areas were inhabited by Muslims. The parties winning those two seats were branded as exclusively catering to the needs of the Muslims. Such political discourse, normalizes the otherization of the Muslims in the state. Accordingly, even though the BJP seeks to maintain a distinction between the two groups, everyday political rhetoric often blurs these categories, causing existing social division within the Muslim community to become obscured, with the result that 'Muslim' Identity as a whole emerges as the Other.

Emerging Dynamics

While the recognition ensured by the government as indigenous Muslims might assuage their existing concerns regarding its identity vis-à-vis the *Miya* Muslims, however, concerns and ambiguity still remain. A society that has witnessed significant social assimilation and continuous intermingling between the communities, the move has been seen as divisive. Such labels given to Muslims as indigenous and non-indigenous/immigrants are seen as a strategy to divide the Muslim community and strengthen the Hindutva project (Saikia, 2021). It is also seen as an attempt to further alienate *Miya* Muslims from the mainstream society by creating friendly and enemy Muslims. It has also been argued that in the guise of championing the cause of indigenous Muslims, the BJP and its cohorts are demonising *Miya* Muslims (Hazarika, 2020). Even within the indigenous Muslim community though the decision has been welcomed there remains lot of uneasiness. What has created further concern is the very question of indigeneity itself. While, politics of indigeneity has been a characteristic feature of Assam's politics, yet no such definition of indigenous exists, which keeps it open for legal contestation. Accordingly, many have seen BJP's recognition to the Assamese Muslims as a political gimmick.

Further, BJP's attempt at reconstructing Assamese identity as a Hindu identity, raises significant question regarding the identity of the indigenous Assamese Muslims. In the context of changed demography, as BJP seeks to protect Assamese identity

¹² For more discussion on positioning and discourse, see, Michael Peters and Stephen Appel, Positioning Theory: Discourse, the subject and the problem of desire, *Social Analysis*, No.40, 1996, pp. 120-141; Vivien Burr, *Social Constructionism*, New York: Routledge, 2015.

by including within its fold, communities who have been living here for centuries, like tribals, tea community and the Hindi speakers (Sarma in Press trust of India, 2024); the Muslims seldom find a space within such constructions, at least in popular imaginations. While BJP can still claim that indigenous Muslims are a part of such construction of Assamese identity, how it gets translated and received at the societal level remains ambiguous. This tilt of Assamese identity to its religious Hindu credentials creates an uneasy situation, raising question about what position indigenous Muslims occupy within such an identity that they have long been sharing as equals. Accordingly, is the demand for recognition of particular ethnic identity, as *Goriya*, *Moriya*, *Deshi*, *Julaha* etc., by various groups of indigenous Muslims a response to such socio-political developments? The unsettled nature of these questions calls for a more in-depth examination of the implications and consequences surrounding the recognition of indigenous Muslims and the broader construction of the Assamese identity.

Contemporary Hindutva politics also has significant implication for the *Miya* Muslim identity as the community finds itself marginalized on multiple fronts. *Firstly*, the community has been portrayed as an enemy of the Assamese people and their culture. *Secondly*, the community has been portrayed as a perceived threat to the Indigenous Muslims. The ongoing evictions have further trapped them in a cycle of poverty and hardship (Siddique, 2021). The cultural politics propagated by BJP intensifies the social estrangement experienced by the *Miya* community. Further, their citizenship status has become more tangled, leading to a blurring of the distinction between the citizen and the non-citizen. While such developments intensify marginalization of the community, it also give rise to a counter politics of assertion of the much-detested *Miya* Identity. The realization that they are alone in this battle against a Hindu-right wing behemoth holding forth both at the centre and the state has triggered massive mobilization among the *Miya* Muslim community mainly through its young educated and right conscious generation to articulate their issues as much as possible both at the national and international platforms. Lack of voices rising from within the Assamese community reclaiming the *Miya* Muslims as part of the wider Assamese society, also has aggravated the matter (Pisharoty, 2019). Consequently, as part of this counter politics of assertion, attempts are being made to identify certain contents of that identity representative of the *Miya* culture-*Lungi*(sarong), *Miya* dialect being the most prominent. In fact, There has been emerging articulations about *Miya* culture,¹³even though it has been marred by political controversy. Most importantly there have been attempts at re-appropriation of the *Miya* identity by challenging

¹³ Recently, a private centre showcasing the culture and heritage of Bengali-speaking Muslims was inaugurated primarily by members of the All-Assam *Miya* Parishad at Dapkarbhita in the Lakhipur circle of Goalpara district. They named it [the *Miya* Museum](#). The Parishad had intimated the district head about the opening of the museum. Some legislators and former MLAs of the BJP interpreted the museum as a cultural aggression and asked the government to pull it down. See, Rahul Karmakar, "Why was the *Miya* museum in Assam sealed?", *The Hindu*, October 30, 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/explained-why-was-the-miya-museum-in-assam-sealed/article66074947.ece>

the prevailing stereotypes against the identity.¹⁴ While such an emergent identity discourse has been empowering for the community in the face of virulent attacks by the regime, many have come to see such assertion as providing a ground for BJP to further its divisive politics. Such assertion has been portrayed as separatism which has allowed further subjugation of the *Miya* Muslims in the state (Gohain, 2019). It has provided BJP the means to cast the community as an enemy of the Assamese society. The following narrative substantiates this development:

here is a community which has distorted Assamese language and created a language called Miya... It is not an independent culture, they distorted Assamese poetry and started Miya poetry... So, it is aggression. They tell people that they want to assert their identity. What is the need to assert identity? That means you want to aggressively counter Assamese culture by encroaching on land of our monasteries... We will not accept this type of assertion. This is not acceptable to us... (Sarma in Express News Service, 2022)

The current political conjecture creates a significant dilemma for *Miya* Muslims as they remain unacknowledged as Assamese while simultaneously facing backlash for asserting their particular identity. Accordingly, these developments offer a complex political situation in front of the *Miya* Muslims as they are getting cornered from all the sides.

Conclusion

As the cultural politics promoted by BJP takes the 'popular form', the consequent mix of politics and identity among indigenous and *Miya* Muslims gives rise to new complexities, having significant implications for the socio-political relations between the two communities. In fact, a careful look at the present politics indicates towards the deepening of the faults between the two communities as revealed in the assertion of their respective identities. Such attempt towards the construction and the reconstruction of identities, in turn, has consequences for how certain identities like Indigenous Muslim, *Miya* Muslim, Muslim and the Assamese identity evolve from here. The claim for and the acknowledgement of indigeneity of the indigenous Muslims also reveals the regional character of the Muslim identity. Interestingly, while in the popular imagination, the quintessential indigenous is usually a tribal community, while Muslim being the other, the present politics widens the discourse of indigeneity in the state (while simultaneously remaining exclusive).

The assertion of *Miya* identity has also led to much tension between the majoritarian Assamese community and the *Miya* community. Critiques argue that the attempt to assert the *Miya* identity is a move towards further fragmentation of Assamese identity

¹⁴ See, Urmitapa Dutta, The Politics and Poetics of Fieldnotes: Decolonising Ethnographic Knowing, *Qualitative Enquiry*, 27(5), 2020; *Miya* Poetry: Poetics, Politics and Polemics, Abdul Kalam Azad and Gorky Chakraborty, in *Citizenship in Contemporary Times*, ed. Gorky Chakraborty, Oxon: Routledge, 2023.

by halting the assimilation process of this community into Assamese nationality. While it must be admitted that many from this community have been well accepted today, whether such acceptance reaches to all the members of the community is a question and how we reduce this gap remains the biggest challenge. In fact, the contemporary developments significantly hinder the possibility of assimilation of the community into the larger Assamese nationality. This unfolding landscape presents many questions that remains unanswered, highlighting the complex intercourse of identity and politics in the state.

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Under-five Mortality Among Informal Workers of Assam: An Empirical Analysis

Kanchan Devi¹ and Vandana Upadhyay²

Abstract

Background: *Despite global reductions, high U5 mortality persists in different regions of India and Assam is no exception. Children of informal workers are often vulnerable because their parents are less educated, earn limited income, and face precarious situations such as lack of social security, due to temporary work conditions. Therefore, this study examines U5 mortality trends and determinants among informal workers in Assam.*

Methods: *The study uses both primary data and secondary data. Primary data is collected from a field survey and secondary data from various reports. It examines U5 mortality among Assam's informal workers using logistic regression methods, considering variables like maternal education, family income, healthcare access, and household conditions. Data analysis tools employed are SPSS and Stata 14 software.*

Results: *From 1990 to 2021, global Under-Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) declined significantly from 93 to 38 deaths per thousand live births. India's U5MR also dropped notably from 74.44 in 2005 to 32.63 in 2020. Disparities remain, with higher rates in rural areas and among informal workers. Factors contributing to this include lack of maternal education, poor healthcare access, and inadequate living conditions.*

Conclusion: *Under-Five mortality in Assam is linked to total household births, mother's occupation, ventilation, drinking water, toilet facilities and post-natal visits. Emphasis should be on child care, family planning, support for working mothers, improving environmental and sanitary conditions, and increasing post-natal visits.*

¹ Research Scholar, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar. E-mail: kdevi6044@gmail.com

² Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar. E-mail: vandanaupadhyay.rgu@gmail.com

Background

The mortality rate of children under five years old is referred to as the “under-five” or “U5” mortality rate. A child’s physical and intellectual development begins between the ages of 0 and 5, making this a very important developmental stage of human life (Zewudie et al, 2020). Children are the future assets of a nation. So, child health is an important resource for the development of a nation. The well-being of the child is directly linked to the attainment of a peaceful, productive and prosperous future for mankind. Around 27 per cent of the world population is constituted by children (United Nations Population Division, 2011). Since children constitute 1/3 of the world population, child health is considered a strong indicator to represent the condition of public health in a nation. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a total of 28 per cent of U5 mortality occurs in the Southeast region only (*Maternal and Child Epidemiology Estimation | Institute for International Programs, n.d.*).

Besides this many children from this region are bearing the burden of various diseases. Diseases among children are the common cause of mortality in many developing countries. Even though the global rate of U5 mortality has sharply decreased in recent years, certain Sub-Saharan African nations continue to have higher rates of U5 mortality. The 2018 U5 mortality rate was fifteen times higher than the global average for developed nations, including Ethiopia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and India (Gebretsadik & Gabreyohanne, 2016). With current U5 mortality rate, the achievement of Sustainable Development goals i.e., to reduce U5 mortality to at least 25 per thousand live births may be challenging for India. The challenge becomes more severe as there exist a regional variation in U5 mortality rate among within the country. Shin (1977) examined infant mortality of 63 selected countries and found that child mortality is very closely related to the social class of the people as well as the level of the level of national socio-economic development. Casterline et al. (1989) observed a relationship between income and child mortality in Egypt. He found that though income had little effect on infant mortality but it was inversely child mortality in the study area. Jatrana (2007) conducted research on April 1976 to February 1997 on the infant and child survivorship in Mewat region of Haryana state. He found an association between child mortality and environmental factors in Haryana. Amouzou and Hill (2004) studied under-five mortality in Sub-Saharan Africa and found an association between per capita incomes, literacy, and urbanization in determination of U5 mortality for the 1960-2000. The study found a negative relationship between U5 mortality and per capita income, a positive relation between illiteracy and U5 mortality and a negative relationship between urbanization and child mortality in the study area. Prakasam and Krishnaiah (2000) found household environment factors as an influential factor for determining maternal and child mortality.

Previous studies showed that maternal education, quality and skill care, drinking water quality, birth order, birth weight, birth interval, family income, breast feeding practices, etc., are the responsible factors for U5 mortality rate (Ettarh & Kimani,

2012). Caldwell (1979) found that educational attainment of the mother leads to adopt modern ideas for better hygiene and nutrition, which are supportive to prevent the incidence of common childhood diseases. Adongo et al. (2024) observed that adoption of health care services after child birth is an important factor to determine child mortality differential. Amin et. al. (1986) found that socio-economic variables play an important role in infant and child mortality determination. Hossain et al. (2012) examined the effect of demographic and household variable on the determination of child and child mortality in Charghat than in Rajasthani district of Bangladesh. The logistic regression shows that maternal factor (age at marriage, present age, housing condition) as determinant for infant and under five mortalities in particular region of Bangladesh. The under-five health is strongly dependent on health care behavior (Mishra et.al, 2019). So, the improvement in educational coverage and provision of educational messages is required for improving child health condition (Tarkang, 2004).

Informal workers generally are low-educated, earns limited income and works in vulnerable situation with adverse socio-economic conditions due to temporary and casual nature of work and not availability of social security measures. This study aims to explore the trends and pattern of Under Five Mortality (U5 Mortality) based on secondary data. It also provides an insight into the extent and determinants of under-five mortality among informal workers of Assam based on primary data.

Methods

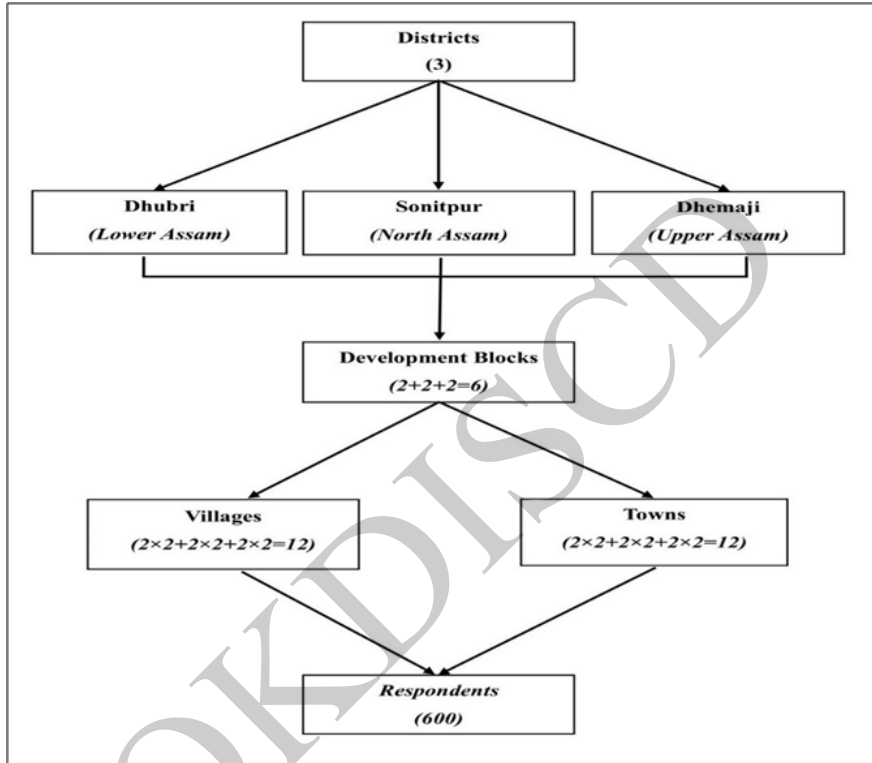
Data Source

The study utilizes both primary and secondary sources of data. Secondary data sources include information from various published sources, articles, WHO reports, the Economic Survey, and multiple rounds of the National Family Health Survey. Primary data has been collected through a field survey.

Field survey was carried out to collect primary data, reference period of the data was 2015-2020. Multi-stage sampling was employed to select the respondents. In the first stage, three districts are selected based on the performance of various health outcomes based on cluster sampling (figure.1). Thus, Dhubri as poorly performing district, Sonitpur as moderately performing and Dhemaji as better performing district were selected from three clusters to represent Assam. In the second stage, distance from the district head quarter was taken as the criterion to select developmental blocks. From each district, the nearest and the farthest developmental blocks were selected. In the third stage also two villages and two towns from each development block were selected based on the distance criterion i.e., the nearest and the farthest. Finally, sample unit i.e., respondent was selected purposively and to identify informal workers appropriate definition of informal worker was taken into consideration. In addition to Yamane's formula, 200 more samples were considered to make it more

representative. Thus, a total of 600 samples from both rural and urban area were selected on the proportionate basis. Information was collected and analyzed on the household basis.

Figure.1 Sampling Framework



Study Variables

The outcome variable in this case is under-five mortality, which is dichotomous in nature and is coded as “0” for households with living children and “1” for households with deceased children.

Independent variables were: Proximal variables such as, number of child birth occurred in the household during the reference period, intermediate variables, viz., maternal education, employment status of the mother, antenatal visits, postnatal visits, breast feeding practices, mother’s age at marriage and employment status and distant variables includes per capita family income, source of drinking water, toilet facility, ventilation facility, utilisation of nearest Health Centre and age of the head of the household (table.1).

Table. 1 Description and Measurements of Independent Variables

Independent Variables and their categorization		Description
Proximal Variable	Birth Type	The variable birth type was recoded in to two categories as “0” for single birth and “1” for multiple birth.
Intermediate variables	Maternal education	Mother’s education was recoded into two groups with a value of “0” for no education and “1” for primary education and above.
	Antenatal visits	The variable ANC visit was recoded in to two categories, “0” for woman who had no any ANC visit during their pregnancy and “1” for woman who had at least one ANC visit during their pregnancy.
	Post natal visits	Coded as “0” for woman who had no any Postnatal visit during their pregnancy and “1” for woman who had at least one Postnatal visit during their pregnancy.
	Breast feeding practices	Recoded as “0” for Partial feeding and “1” for Complete feeding
	Mother’s age at marriage	Continuous variable
	Mother employment Status	Mother’s education was recoded into two groups with a value of “0” for Unemployed mother and “1” for Employed mother.
Distant variables	Per capita family income	Continuous variable
	Source of drinking water	Coded as “1” for in-house source, “0” for out-house source
	Toilet facility	if the Toilet type is Pit, it is “1”, else “0”; if the Toilet type is Open, it is “1”, else “0”.
	Ventilation Facility	if the Ventilation type is moderate, it is “1”, else “0”; if the Ventilation type is poor, it is “1”, else “0”.
	Utilization of nearest health center	Recoded as “0” for Not utilisation and “1” for otherwise
	Age of the Head of the Household	Continuous variable

Data Analysis

Software’s like SPSS and Stata 14 were used to recode and analyse the data. For descriptive statistics frequencies and percentages were used. Estimation is done and results are compared using two sets of logistic methods: binary logistic regression and mixed effect logistic regression method.

Binary Logistic Method

Since, the dependent variable i.e., Occurrence of Under Five Death (U5 Death) in the household, is a qualitative variable, which can only take the value of either 0 or 1. The U5 Death is taken as 1, if the family experience one or more Under 5 death,

otherwise 0. Thus, the following model is estimated:

$$P_{i_0} = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-Z_i}} \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Where,

$$Z_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 TB_i + \alpha_2 MOCC_i + \alpha_3 MEDU_i + \alpha_4 PCI_i + \alpha_5 UTI_i + \alpha_6 BF_i + \alpha_7 MA_i + \alpha_8 DW_i + \alpha_9 ANC_i + \beta_1 PNC_i + \beta_2 AHH_i + \sum_{k=1}^j \sigma_k VEN_{ki} + \sum_{l=1}^l \theta_l TOI_{li} + \epsilon_i$$

Where,

- Z_i = Occurrence of U5 Death (1 for Yes and 0 otherwise)
- α_0 = Intercept (Constant)
- TB_i = Natural log of the number of total births in the household i.
- $MOCC_i$ = Employment Status of the mother i, 0 for Unemployed and 1 for Employed
- $MEDU_i$ = Education status of the mother i, 0 for Uneducated and 1 for at least basic education
- PCI_i = Per Capita Family Income of the respondent i.
- UTI_i = Utilisation of the health care facility, 0 for No utilisation and 1 for otherwise
- BF_i = Type of the breastfeeding by mother, 0 for Partial and 1 for Complete
- MA_i = Marriage Age of the mother i.
- DW_i = Drinking water source, 0 for out-house and 1 for in-house
- ANC_i = Aailed pre-natal care, 0 for Yes and 1 for No
- PNC_i = Aailed post-natal care, 0 for Yes and 1 for No
- AHH_i = Age of the Head of the Household.
- VEN_i = Type of ventilation (Good is the reference Category).
 - VEN_{1i} = if the Ventilation type is moderate, it is 1, else 0.
 - VEN_{2i} = if the Ventilation type is poor, it is 1, else 0.
- TOI_i = Type of toilet (Sanitary is the reference category).
 - TOI_{1i} = if the Toilet type is Pit, it is 1, else 0.
 - TOI_{2i} = If the Toilet type is Open, it is 1, else 0.

Multilevel Fixed Effect Logistic Regression

This estimation method is chosen because the sample shows the characteristic of hierarchical structure. The dependent variable Occurrence of Under-five death (U5 Death) is a qualitative variable, which can only take the value of either 0 or 1. The

U5 death is taken as 1, if the household experience one or more under five death, otherwise 0. Thus, the following model is estimated:

$$P_{ie} = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-z}} \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Where,

$$Z_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 TB_i + \alpha_2 MOCC_i + \alpha_3 MEDU_i + \alpha_4 PCI_i + \alpha_5 UTI_i + \alpha_6 BF_i + \alpha_7 MA_i + \alpha_8 DW_i + \alpha_9 ANC_i + \beta_1 PNC_i + \beta_2 AHH_i + \sum_{k=1}^2 \sigma_k VEN_{ki} + \sum_{k=1}^2 \theta_k TOI_{ki} + \epsilon_i$$

Where,

- Z_i = Occurrence of Child Death (1 for Yes and 0 otherwise)
- α_0 = Intercept (Constant)
- TB_i = Natural log of the number of total births in the household i.
- $MOCC_i$ = Employment Status of the mother i, 0 for Unemployed and 1 for Employed
- $MEDU_i$ = Education status of the mother i, 0 for Uneducated and 1 for at least basic education
- PCI_i = Natural log of Per Capita Family Income of the respondent i.
- UTI_i = Utilisation of the health care facility, 0 for No utilisation and 1 for otherwise
- BF_i = Type of the breastfeeding by mother, 0 for Partial and 1 for Complete
- MA_i = Natural log of Marriage Age of the mother i.
- DW_i = Drinking water source, 0 for out-house and 1 for in-house
- ANC_i = Aailed pre-natal care, 0 for Yes and 1 for No
- PNC_i = Aailed post-natal care, 0 for Yes and 1 for No
- AHH_i = Natural log of Age of the Head of the Household.
- VEN_i = Type of ventilation (Good is the reference Category).
 - VEN_{1i} = if the Ventilation type is moderate, it is 1, else 0.
 - VEN_{2i} = if the Ventilation type is poor, it is 1, else 0.
- TOI_i = Type of toilet (Sanitary is the reference category).
 - TOI_{1i} = if the Toilet type is Pit, it is 1, else 0.
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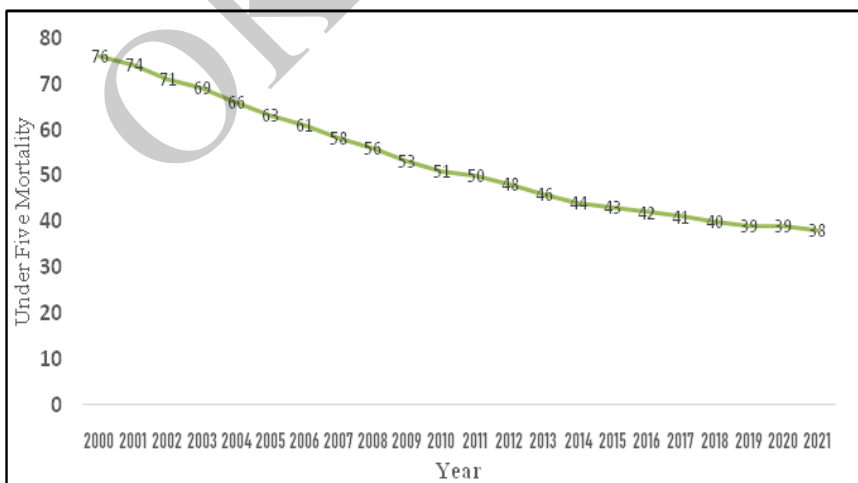
Results

Trends and Pattern of Under Five Mortality: Analysis of Secondary Data

There has been a substantial decrease in decline in child mortality worldwide since the 1990s. During the years 1990 to 2020, a 60 per cent reduction in under-five mortality was experienced by the world (Perin J et. al., 2022). Table 4.5 shows the under-five mortality ratio of some selected countries of the world for the years 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2020. It is seen that the under-five ratio in India has declined from 74.44 per 1000 live births to 32.63 per thousand live births in 2020. Under-five mortality ratio is higher for females than males in all the years, but the decline in U5 mortality during 2020 also shrunk the gap between male and female U5 mortality ratios. Since 1990, the world has shown a remarkable improvement in reducing the cases of child mortality. Under Five Mortality (U5 Mortality) has drastically declined from 93 deaths per thousand live births in 1990 to 38 deaths per thousand live births in 2021 (World Health Organization, n.d.). One of the main reasons for the higher rate of child mortality is the higher rate of death of children at the neonatal stage. Over the years U5 mortality shows a declining trend (Figure.2).

The U5 mortality ratio of India, compared to the U5 mortality of developed nations like Canada, Japan, Germany, Australia, Singapore, Switzerland, United Kingdom, is considerably higher. However, U5 mortality among male children is higher in the aforementioned nations than that in India. The U5 mortality ratio of India is more than other developing nations and neighbours like Bangladesh, Nepal, Srilanka and Bhutan (Table.2).

Figure.2 Trend of U5 Mortality Rate at Global Level



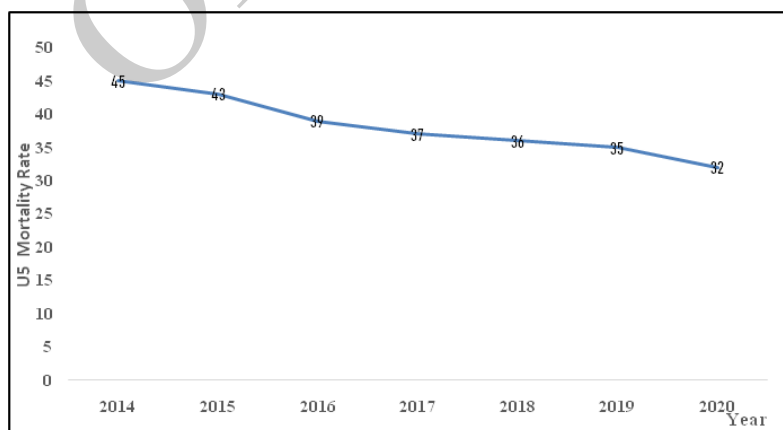
Source: [https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/under-five-mortality-rate-\(probability-of-dying-by-age-5-per-1000-live-births\)](https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/under-five-mortality-rate-(probability-of-dying-by-age-5-per-1000-live-births)).

Table.2 Under Five Mortality Ratio in Some Selected Countries of the World

Year	2005			2010			2015			2020		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Afghanistan	108.4	112.3	104.4	87.76	91.27	84.0	70.45	73.91	66.73	57.98	61.36	54.34
Australia	5.72	6.29	5.12	4.77	5.24	4.27	3.87	4.21	3.52	3.7	4.0	3.35
Bangladesh	64.55	67.84	61.09	49.15	51.78	46.38	38.07	40.2	35.85	29.1	31.03	27.09
Bhutan	57.55	61.31	53.56	42.36	45.53	38.9	33.13	36.04	30.14	27.62	30.17	24.98
Brazil	24.78	27.64	21.8	18.64	20.78	16.37	15.94	17.75	14.03	14.7	16.36	12.96
Canada	6.09	6.59	5.58	5.73	6.17	5.27	5.36	5.74	4.95	4.99	5.37	4.59
France	4.62	5.13	4.09	4.21	4.62	3.78	4.62	5.13	4.09	4.37	4.79	3.92
Germany	4.73	5.19	4.25	4.17	4.56	3.77	3.93	4.24	3.61	3.65	3.93	3.36
India	74.44	70.59	78.45	58.15	55.26	61.23	43.53	42.12	44.98	32.63	32.24	33.03
Japan	3.74	4.01	3.47	3.21	3.41	2.99	2.75	2.89	2.6	2.49	2.61	2.36
Maldives	21.46	29.91	24.21	13.85	15.26	12.37	9.79	10.71	8.81	6.46	7.02	5.87
Myanmar	77.17	82.95	71.04	63.66	68.82	58.21	46.75	51.08	42.29	43.65	47.76	39.39
Nepal	59.38	61.97	56.69	45.89	48.47	43.18	35.52	37.96	32.96	28.16	30.28	25.54
Pakistan	96.27	100.9	91.41	87.11	91.87	82.11	76.02	80.68	71.13	65.18	69.62	60.5
Singapore	2.94	3.17	2.69	2.83	3.06	2.58	2.74	2.95	2.51	2.24	2.41	2.05
Somalia	172.6	179.5	165.4	157.4	164.2	150.2	134.3	140.7	127.7	114.6	120.3	108.7
South Africa	78.84	82.64	74.82	51.98	55.08	48.73	36.35	39.05	33.52	32.22	34.77	29.52
Sri Lanka	14.2	15.41	12.94	11.38	12.44	10.27	8.72	9.6	7.2	6.93	7.56	6.25
Switzerland	5.06	5.52	4.58	4.56	4.93	4.17	4.28	4.63	3.92	4.0	4.32	3.67
UK	6.03	6.62	5.42	5.17	5.66	4.65	4.47	4.82	3.99	4.21	4.59	3.81
USA	7.96	8.76	7.13	7.34	8.02	6.62	6.79	7.4	6.15	6.35	6.92	5.74
Zimbabwe	93.1	99.06	86.79	86.43	92.1	80.33	61.28	66.31	56.05	53.89	58.58	49.02

Source: World Health Organization, 2022.

Figure.3 U5 Mortality in India (2014-2020)

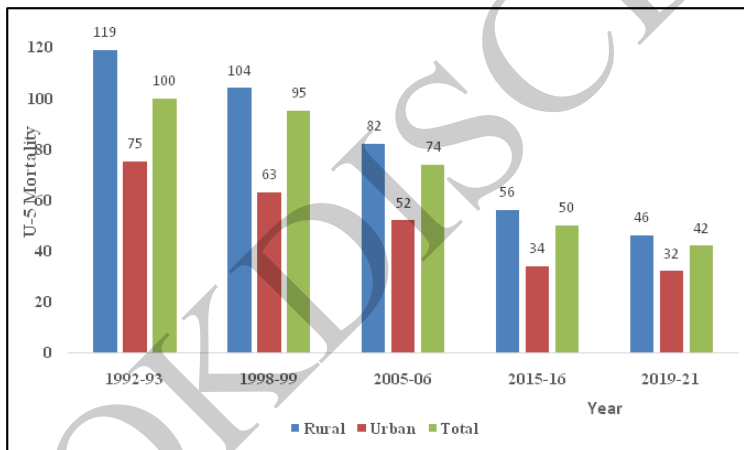


Source: Press Information Bureau. (2022)

Reduction in infant and child mortality has been a long-term issue and an important tenet of the Government of India. It has been a focused subject of different Health Policies, the Twelfth Five Year Plan, the National Health Mission (NHM), and Millenium and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over the years, it has been observed that India has been making progress towards child survival rates of children. During 2014, the U5 mortality rate in India was 45 per thousand live births, which is reduced to 32 per thousand live births during 2020 (Figure.3).

In India, mortality including child mortality rate at the rural level is higher than in the urban area. However, the gap in U5 mortality between rural and urban areas has gradually declined. During the period 1992-93, the gap in the number of occurrences of the death of under-five children between rural and urban areas was 44, which declined to 14 during the period 2019-2020 (Figure.4).

Figure.4 Under-five Mortality in India by Area



Source: <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-022-14436-7>

The death of children under five always does not happen due to medicinal causes rather it is closely related to the social and economic conditions prevailing in the society. In India the most common cause for U5 Mortality is malnutrition. The negative impact of poor sanitation, impure water consumption and unawareness regarding personal hygiene are responsible for 88 per cent of children's deaths from the disease Diarrhea alone (UNICEF, 2011). Due to the improvements in the public health sector and medical services most of the countries are experiencing a decline in mortality. But in India, overall mortality is still high due to the high infant and child mortality rate. As per *NFHS-5*, the Under-five mortality rate in India is 41.9, which declined from 49.7 per thousand live births during 2014-2016. U5 mortality in the states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh is more than the Indian average. The U5 mortality rate in Kerala is the lowest among the states in India. In Assam, it is 39.1 per thousand live births.

Table.3 Under Five Mortality Rates (Per 1000 live births) Across States & UTs in India

State/ Union Territory	Period	
	NFHS-4 (2014-16)	NFHS-5 (2019-21)
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	13.0	24.5
Andhra Pradesh	40.8	35.2
Arunachal Pradesh	32.9	18.8
Assam	56.5	39.1
Bihar	58.1	56.4
Chandigarh	NA	NA
Chhattisgarh	64.3	50.4
Dadra and Nagar Haveli&Daman & Diu	39.9	37.0
Delhi	42.2	30.6
Goa	12.9	10.6
Gujarat	43.5	37.6
Haryana	41.1	38.7
Himachal Pradesh	37.6	28.9
Jammu & Kashmir	37.6	18.5
Jharkhand	54.3	45.4
Karnataka	31.5	29.5
Kerala	7.1	5.2
Lakshadweep	30.2	0.0
Madhya Pradesh	64.6	49.2
Maharashtra	28.7	28.0
Manipur	25.9	30.0
Meghalaya	39.6	40.0
Mizoram	46	24.0
Nagaland	37.5	33.0
Odisha	48.1	41.1
Puducherry	16.2	3.9
Punjab	33.2	32.7
Rajasthan	50.7	37.6
Sikkim	32.2	11.2
Tamil Nadu	26.8	22.3
Telangana	31.7	29.4
Tripura	32.7	43.3
Uttar Pradesh	78.1	59.8
Uttarakhand	46.5	45.6
West Bengal	31.8	25.4
India	49.7	41.9

Source: Economic Survey 2021-22.

Both India and Assam have been performing well in the reduction in U5 rates but the rate of progress of Assam is greater. During the period 1992-93, the U5 mortality rate of Assam was 144 per thousand live births against 100 per thousand live births of India, which declined to 39.1 per thousand live births against 41.9 per thousand live births of India during 2019-20 (Figure.5).

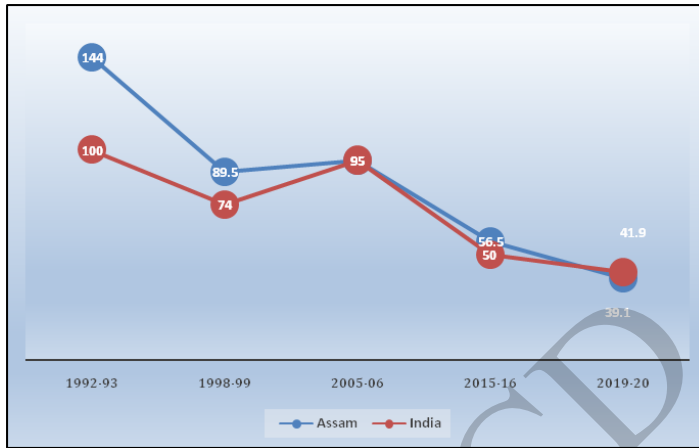
Though the present U5 mortality rate of Assam is relatively lower than India's U5 mortality rate as, but still, it is much higher than the U5 mortality rate of other north-eastern states like Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim.

Table.4 Under-Five Mortality Rate among Northeastern States

Area	Indicators	NFHS-5			NFHS-4
		Urban	Rural	Total	Total
Arunachal Pradesh	Neonatal Mortality Rate	12.5	6.9	7.7	11.8
	Infant Mortality Rate	16.7	12.3	12.9	22.9
	Under-five Mortality Rate	22.2	18.3	18.8	32.9
Assam	Neonatal Mortality Rate	15.2	23.4	22.5	32.8
	Infant Mortality Rate	22.7	33.1	31.9	47.6
	Under-five Mortality Rate	33.0	39.9	39.1	56.5
Manipur	Neonatal Mortality Rate	5.7	22.7	17.2	15.6
	Infant Mortality Rate	12.2	31.1	25.0	21.7
	Under-five Mortality Rate	17.1	36.2	30.0	25.9
Meghalaya	Neonatal Mortality Rate	14.2	20.6	19.8	18.3
	Infant Mortality Rate	23.4	33.6	32.3	29.9
	Under-five Mortality Rate	23.4	42.6	40.0	39.6
Mizoram	Neonatal Mortality Rate	14.4	8.4	11.4	11.2
	Infant Mortality Rate	20.6	22.0	21.3	40.1
	Under-five Mortality Rate	21.8	26.2	24.0	46.0
Nagaland	Neonatal Mortality Rate	8.4	10.8	10.2	16.5
	Infant Mortality Rate	17.0	25.8	23.4	29.5
	Under-five Mortality Rate	22.5	36.8	33.0	37.5
Sikkim	Neonatal Mortality Rate	*	7.8	5.0	20.8
	Infant Mortality Rate	*	17.8	11.2	29.5
	Under-five Mortality Rate	*	17.8	11.2	32.2
Tripura	Neonatal Mortality Rate	13.9	25.2	22.9	13.2
	Infant Mortality Rate	23.2	41.8	37.6	26.7
	Under-five Mortality Rate	24.4	49.0	43.3	32.7
India	Neonatal Mortality Rate	18.0	27.5	24.9	39.5
	Infant Mortality Rate	26.6	38.4	35.2	40.7
	Under-five Mortality Rate	31.5	45.7	41.9	49.7

Source: National Family Health Survey-5.

Figure.5 U5 Mortality Rate Assam Vis-à-vis India



Source: Various Reports of National Family Health Survey.

Extent of Under Five Mortality Rate (U5 Mortality Rate) in the Study Area

For calculating the Under Five Mortality Rate i.e., the U5 mortality rate formula derived from the definition Under Five Mortality of the World Health Organisation (WHO) is used in this study.

$$\text{Thus, } U5 \text{ Mortality} = \frac{(\text{Deaths at age } 0 - 5 \text{ years})}{(\text{Number of surviving children in the specified age range})} \times 1000$$

The table.5 shows the total number of children born alive and surviving in the age group 0-5 years and the number of deaths in the specified age group in the study area during the period 2015-2020.

Table.5 Number of the Live Births and U5 Deaths by Districts

District (1)	Live births (2)	U5 Deaths (3)
Dhemaji	68 (22.97)	3 (18.75)
Sonitpur	83 (28.04)	6 (37.50)
Dhubri	145 (48.99)	7 (43.75)
Total	296 (100.0)	16 (100.0)

Source: Survey data.

Note: Figures in the brackets indicate percentages.

After applying the specified formula to calculate the U5 Mortality, we found that the U5 Mortality Rate in the study area among the informal workers is 54.05 per thousand

live births, which is considerably higher than the state average of 39 per thousand live births and also higher than the national average 41.9 per thousand live births.

Under Five Mortality Rate across Socio-economic Groups

The table.6 shows the proportion of under-five deaths across the socio-economic groups in the study area. The U5 Mortality Rate to a large extent varies among households based on their socio-economic conditions.

Table.6 Number of the Live Births and U5 Deaths by Socio-economic Group

Socio-economic Group (1)	Live births (2)	Number Under Five Deaths (3)
General/Others	194 (65.54)	10 (62.50)
OBC	39 (13.18)	1 (6.25)
SC & ST	63 (21.28)	5 (31.25)
Total	296 (100.0)	16 (100.0)

Source: Survey data.

Note: Figures in the brackets indicate percentages.

It is evident from the table.6 that more than 60 per cent of child deaths under five years occurred in the general/others group, followed by the SC & ST group.

U5 Mortality for General or Others Group

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{U5 Mortality} &= \frac{(\text{Deaths at age 0 – 5 years})}{(\text{Number of surviving children in the specified age range})} \times 1000 \\
 &= \frac{10}{194} \times 1000 \\
 &= 51.55 \text{ per thousand live births.}
 \end{aligned}$$

U5 Mortality for Other Backward Class Group

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{U5 Mortality} &= \frac{(\text{Deaths at age 0 – 5 years})}{(\text{Number of surviving children in the specified age range})} \times 1000 \\
 &= \frac{1}{39} \times 1000 \\
 &= 25.64 \text{ per thousand live births.}
 \end{aligned}$$

U5 Mortality for Scheduled Caste & Scheduled Tribe Group

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{U5 Mortality} &= \frac{(\text{Deaths at age 0 – 5 years})}{(\text{Number of surviving children in the specified age range})} \times 1000 \\
 &= \frac{5}{63} \times 1000
 \end{aligned}$$

= 79.37 per thousand live births.

Thus, it is found that the Under Five Mortality Rate among the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Group is the highest i.e., 79.37 per thousand live births and the lowest among the Other Backward Class i.e., 25.64 per thousand live births.

Under Five Mortality Rate across Gender

U5 mortality rate differs between male and female children due to different socio-cultural beliefs and negligence towards female children. One of the common wisdoms of Indian society is the preference of the son over the daughter, for which many female children are not given due attention and care (United Nations Population Fund. n.d.).

Table.7: Number of the Live Births and U5 Deaths by Gender

Gender (1)	Live births (2)	Number Under Five Deaths (3)
Male	152 (51.35)	8 (50.0)
Female	144 (48.65)	8 (50.0)
Total	296 (100.0)	16 (100.0)

Source: Survey data.

Note: Figures in the brackets indicate percentages.

In the study area, the proportion of U5 deaths for both male and female has no significant difference.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{U5 Mortality for male} &= \frac{(\text{Deaths at age 0 – 5 years})}{(\text{Number of surviving children in the specified age range})} \times 1000 \\
 &= \frac{8}{152} \times 1000 \\
 &= 52.63 \text{ per thousand live births.}
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{U5 Mortality for female} &= \frac{(\text{Deaths at age 0 – 5 years})}{(\text{Number of surviving children in the specified age range})} \times 1000 \\
 &= \frac{8}{144} \times 1000 \\
 &= 55.60 \text{ per thousand live births.}
 \end{aligned}$$

Thus, the study found that U5 mortality for female children is relatively higher than that of males in the study area.

U5 Mortality Rate across Area

The table.8 shows the number of live births and deaths of children of the age of five

during the period 2015-2020.

Table.8 Number of the Live Births and U5 Deaths by Area

Area (1)	Live births (2)	Number Under Five Deaths (3)
Rural	242 (51.35)	14 (87.5)
Urban	54 (48.65)	2 (12.5)
Total	296 (100.0)	16 (100.0))

Source: Survey data.

Note: Figures in the brackets indicate percentages.

A total of 2.5 per cent of the surveyed households had cases of U5 death during the reference period, of which 87.5 per cent occurred in the rural area and only 12.5 in the urban area.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{U5 Mortality in Rural area} &= \frac{(\text{Deaths at age 0 – 5 years})}{(\text{Number of surviving children in the specified age range})} \times 1000 \\
 &= \frac{14}{242} \times 1000 \\
 &= 57.85 \text{ per thousand live births.}
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{U5 Mortality in Urban area} &= \frac{(\text{Deaths at age 0 – 5 years})}{(\text{Number of surviving children in the specified age range})} \times 1000 \\
 &= \frac{2}{54} \times 1000 \\
 &= 37.04 \text{ per thousand live births.}
 \end{aligned}$$

The study found a large gap in child deaths both in rural and urban areas. U5 mortality Rate in the rural area is around 36 per cent more than in the urban area.

Prevalence of Under Five Deaths among Informal Workers

Out of total sample (600), 2.67 per cent households experienced death of under-five child during the period 2015 to 2020. In the household having multiple births during the reference period, the proportion of U5 deaths were much higher (76.2 per cent) than the household having single birth (76.2 per cent) (Table.9). U5 deaths were found different among the mothers. U5 death among mother without education was (15.6 per cent) and for mother having at least primary education or above was 84.4 per cent. Among the mothers with no antenatal visits during last pregnancy, the percentage of U5 death was (66.7 per cent), relative to mother with antenatal visits (33 per cent). The prevalence of U5 deaths were also found higher for the mothers with no postnatal visits (60 per cent), compared to the mothers with post-natal visits (40 per cent). The proportion of U5 death was (33.3 per cent) and (66.7 per cent)

for the breast-feeding practices partial and complete feeding respectively. Among the mothers without any job, the proportion of U5 death was (34.1 per cent) than those with employed mothers (65.9 per cent).

Table.9 Prevalence of U5 Deaths among Sample Participants

Variable	U5 Deaths (in per cent)
Birth Type	
Single	23.8
Multiple	76.2
Maternal Education	
No Education	15.6
At least primary education or above	84.4
Antenatal Visits	
No	66.7
Yes	33.0
Postnatal Visits	
No	60.0
Yes	40.0
Type of Breast-Feeding Practices	
Partial Feeding	33.3
Complete Feeding	66.7
Mother Employment Status	
Unemployed	34.1
Employed	65.9
Source of drinking water	
Out-house premises	57.8
In-house premises	42.2
Toilet Facility	
No standard toilet	55.6
Else	44.4
Ventilation Facility	
Poor	44.4
Else	55.6
Utilisation of nearest healthcare services at least once during the year	
No	68.9
Yes	31.1

In the households with Outhouse water sources, the proportion of U5 deaths was found (57.8 per cent) than the households with in house water sources (42.2 per cent). Among the households with no standard toilet, U5 deaths were higher (55.6 per cent), compared to others (44.4 per cent). U5 deaths among households with poor

ventilation was (44.4 per cent) and it was (55.6 per cent) for others. The prevalence of U5 death was found much higher, among the households no use of nearest hospital services during the year (68.9 per cent), than those which utilized hospital services at least once during the year (31.1 per cent).

Determinants of Under-five Mortality among Informal Workers

Model Comparison/ Binary Logistic Analysis

Due to the binary nature of the dependent variable, the logistic regression analysis is employed. From the analysis, Total Birth (TB at 5 per cent level), Mother’s Occupation (MOCC at 5 per cent level), Ventilation Facility (VEN at 10 per cent level), Drinking Water Facility (DW at 10 per cent level) and Post Natal Care (PNC at 1 per cent level) are found to be statistically significant determinants of U5 mortality among informal workers in the study area (Table.10).

Table.10 Result of the Binary Logistic Regression

Dependent Variable: Child Death (Yes: 1, No: 0)				
Variables			Coefficients	VIF
Notation	Description			
a	Constant		-20.50	---
TB	Total Birth		1.78**	1.59
MOCC	Employment Status	Unemployed	Reference Category	
		Employed	3.78**	1.20
MEDU	Education	Uneducated	Reference Category	
		Basic Education	-12.95	1.11
PCI	Per capita Income		0.17	3.42
UTI	Utilisation	No	Reference Category	
		Yes	-0.35	2.12
BF	Type of Breast Feeding	Partial	Reference Category	
		Complete	1.12	2.31
MA	Age at Marriage		-0.10	1.19
VEN	Ventilation Facility	Good	Reference Category	
		Moderate	2.02*	3.42
		Poor	-2.61	3.31
TOI	Toilet	Sanitary	Reference Category	
		Pit	5.81	3.22
		Open	9.37	3.21
DW	Drinking Water Source	Out House	Reference Category	
		In House	-2.35*	3.12

ANC	Pre-Natal Care	Yes	Reference Category	
		No	1.33	4.41
PNC	Post Natal Care	Yes	Reference Category	
		No	4.73***	3.87
AHH	Age of Household Head		0.02	1.91
Mean VIF				2.63
Cox and Snell R2			0.20	
Nagelkerke R2			0.59	
Hosmer and Lemenshow Test			20.54***	

Notes: ***, **, * represent statistically significant at 1 per cent, 5 per cent and 10 per cent level.

Model Fit and Model Diagnostics: A high Pseudo R²(Nagelkerke) represent a good fit of the model. In this model, the Nagelkerke Pseudo R² value is 0.59 and Cox and Snell R² is 0.20 along with a significant Hosmer and Lemenshow test statistic; these represent that the model has a good fit.

Further, the multicollinearity of the model is checked using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) reported on the last column of the Table 6.4. Since, all the values of VIF are less than 10 (even 5) and mean VIF is 2.63, it can be inferred that the model is free from any severe multicollinearity problem.

Mixed Effect Analysis

Determinants of Under Five Mortality also checked and compared used mixed effect analysis due to hierarchical structure of the explanatory variables. The result brings quite similar results. The analysis of multi effect logistic regression shows Mother's Occupation (MOCC at 5 per cent level), Drinking Water Facility (DW at 5 per cent level), Toilet Facility (TOI at 5 per cent level) and Post Natal care (PNC at 10 per cent level) are statistically significant (Table.11).

Table.11 Result of the Mixed Effect Logistic Regression

Dependent Variable: Child Death (Yes: 1, No: 0)				
Variables		Coefficients	VIF	
Notation	Description			
α	Constant	-3.13	---	
TB	Total Birth	0.24	1.28	
MOCC	Employment Status	Unemployed	(Reference Category)	
		Employed	1.96**	1.12
MEDU	Education	Uneducated	(Reference Category)	
		Basic Education	1.48	1.24
PCI	Per capita Income	0.09	1.32	

UTI	Utilisation	No	(Reference Category)	
		Yes	-1.05	1.15
BF	Type of Breast Feeding	Partial	(Reference Category)	
		Complete	-1.04	1.04
MA	Age at Marriage		-1.87	1.26
VEN	Ventilation Facility	Good	(Reference Category)	
		Moderate	-0.02	1.37
		Poor	-0.64	2.02
TOI	Toilet	Sanitary	(Reference Category)	
		Pit	2.58**	1.18
		Open	---	1.23
DW	Drinking Water Source	Out House	(Reference Category)	
		In House	-2.01**	1.29
ANC	Pre-Natal Care	No	(Reference Category)	
		Yes	-1.43	2.89
PNC	Post Natal Care	No	(Reference Category)	
		Yes	-2.97*	2.92
AHH	Age of Household Head		1.39	1.26
Mean VIF				1.51
Log Likelihood			-27.21	
Wald Chi2			22.86*	

Notes: ***, **, * represent statistically significant at 1 per cent, 5 per cent and 10 per cent level.

Model Fit and Model Diagnostics: A significant Wald Test statistic represents that the model has a good fit. Further, the multicollinearity of the model is checked using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) reported on the last column of the Table 6.5. Since, all the values of VIF are less than 10 (even 5) and mean VIF is 1.51, it can be inferred that the model is free from any severe multicollinearity problem.

Discussion

Death of the Under Five or U5 deaths to large extent are preventable, various Policies at global level including SDGs aim is to reduce such deaths. In this study (2.67 per cent) sample households were found to deaths of the U5 children, which could have been prevented if the factors affecting U5 deaths among the samples were known.

Our study from both binary and multi effect logistic regression, have identified the number of total births, mothers' occupation, ventilation facility, drinking water, toilet facility, post-natal visits as possible determinants of under five deaths among the sample participants.

The coefficient of Total Birth is positive and significant. It reflects that the log-odds of Child death increases as the number of Total births in the household increases; in other words, the likelihood of Child death increases with the increasing number of births in the household. This finding is consistent with previous study of Worku et. al. 2021. This might be because as the number of new born increases in the households, the availability of the care giver and the resources for child nourishment are declined in the poor households. In addition to this, giving birth of twins and more result in undernourishment due to nutritional deficiency. Total birth may also be increases due to increase in parity, which again limits the mother to be busy with the higher parity and thus the last birth may not get sufficient attention, for which the risk of child death increases (Bai, Ruhai et al., 2021).

The study also found the risk of child mortality is more for employed mothers relative to the mothers without any job. The coefficients of 3.78 indicate that compared to women who are unemployed, log-odds of child death increases 3.78 for women who are employed. The odds-ratio indicates that unemployed women are 43.82 times less likely of experiencing child death than the women who are employed. This study also is found similar to the study by Bora (2020). This might be because the employed mothers of poor households, basically are working in informal sector, which involves long work hours, unhygienic working conditions with a lot of physical work (Bertulfo, 2011). This leads to deterioration of their physical and mental health and also reduces their time for children and family, which increases the risk of U5 death.

Ventilation facility is also found to be significant determinants of child death in the study area. The coefficients of 2.02 indicates that compared to women having good ventilation facility in house, log-odds of child death increases 2.02 for women having moderate ventilation facility in house. The odds-ratio indicates that the women having moderate ventilation facility in house are 7.54 times more likely of experiencing child death than the women having good ventilation facility in house. Adebowale (2017) also found good housing conditions as a predicative factor for child death.

Our study also finds drinking water facility as a significant determinant of U5 mortality among the informal workers. The coefficients of -2.35 indicates that compared to women who use out-house source of drinking water, log-odds of child death declines 2.35 for women who uses in-house source of drinking water. The odds-ratio indicates that the women who using *in-house source of drinking water* are 10.49 times less likely of experiencing child death than the women who using *out-house source of drinking water*. This might be due to the fact that using out house as a source of drinking water involves cost of carrying, which reduces usages of water. Moreover, out-house premises also involves the risk of being polluted due to environmental factors. Both the regression analysis reveals drinking water sources as a determinant significant determinant of U5 mortality in the study area. The studies like Patel et.al (2021) also found drinking water sources as a significant determinants of Child mortality.

From the mixed effect analysis, we have found toilet facility also as a significant determinant of U5 mortality among the informal workers. The coefficients of 2.58 indicates that compared to women having sanitary toilet facility in house, log-odds of child death increases 2.58 for women using pit toilet in house. The odds-ratio indicates that the women using Pit toilet facility in house are 13.20 times more likely of experiencing child death than the women using sanitary toilet facility in house. Pit toilets are less hygienic from the wellness aspect, which can negatively impact child's health. Getachew and Bekele (2016) also found a similar kind of result in their study.

In addition to this, both the regression analysis shows postnatal care as a significant determinant of U5 death among informal workers. The negative and significant relationship between the postnatal visit and U5 mortality indicates that the risk of U5 mortality declines for the mothers, who have taken postnatal care and vice versa. This might be the reason that the child gets appropriate and timely services related to new-born care if the mothers visit postnatal checkups. Moreover, postnatal care is crucial as crucial as prenatal or antenatal care in order to induce the survival probability of the child. Our finding is consistent with the previous studies done in similar context (Almazrou et al.,2008).

Strength and Limitation of the Study

The study is based on primary survey with a sizeable sample. Besides, it is based on proper statistical approaches (binary regression due to binary character of the dependent variable) and mixed effect analysis (to examine the cluster level variability), which strengthens the robustness of the analysis. Since, the study is done for the informal workers, records of which are not up to date and sufficiently available, the study has the potential to provide insights for the policy makers and planners at various level to design appropriate interventions. However, the study has the limitation as it is purely based on field survey, which limits coverage and bound to a reference period. Besides, the possibility of recall biased may be there as it is based on self-report of the respondent.

Conclusion

The prevalence of under-five mortality in Assam was significantly associated with number of total births occurred in the household, mother's occupation, ventilation facility, drinking water facility, toilet facility and post-natal visits. Thus, special emphasis should be given to child care and family planning policies, working mothers, environmental and sanitary conditions and increases the post-natal visits.

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Cultural Norms, Social Networking and Visual Self-Presentation: The WhatsApp User Experiences of Young Muslim Women in Assam

Ferdowsee Khanam¹ and Kedilezo Kikhi²

Abstract

Social media and its features are expanding at an alarming rate. Billions of people around the world use social media to share information create content, photos, lifestyle videos, etc, are among few things. From young teens to old, nearly everyone has a smartphone and internet connection. To facilitate people's communication and contact in the network society, major social media have appeared one after another. A great connector in itself but with a dark side. It is in this backdrop the paper explores a new phenomenon- the growing popularity of the use of picture symbols that is, 'emoji', a status feature of WhatsApp, a social media chat App. In the absence of verbal cues, use of 'emojis' not only express emotions but significantly imply a certain kind of cultural values. With respect to values that pervades their offline life, young Muslim women exercise strategic ways while negotiating with the multiple contact users of social media and have developed a community code with the emojis. Drawing from an in-depth interview with the young Muslim women of Karimganj, the paper explores the cultural motivation behind the use of emojis in online photos. The findings suggest that being specifically identified with the 'Muslim' faith, women from the said community are subjected to higher surveillance by the community gatekeepers.

Introduction

This paper explores the 'visual self-presentation' (Mishra & Basu, 2014) of young Muslim women on WhatsApp status. WhatsApp is one of the largest social network sites of the 21st century (Ahad & Lim, 2014). It is a popular smartphone messaging application that allows the users to share messages, photos, videos, etc. It serves as a convenient communicator not only between two persons, but also between a large numbers of community of people who share a distinct social bonding such as, family

¹ PhD Research Scholar, Dept. of Sociology, Tezpur University, Assam, Email: khanamferdowsee289@gmail.com

² Professor of Sociology, NEHU, Shillong Email: kedithejakikhi@yahoo.co.in

groups or student groups. Thus, the growing importance of WhatsApp as a means of communication often allows WhatsApp users to express their thoughts, emotions and opinions on their Whatsapp status. This status is seen in most of the users contact list itself. Busabaa et al. have characterized the significance of “WhatsApp statuses as a new form of announcements” (2022, p.1) since they express emotional, religious, personal and cultural issues.

Digital technology and social media have changed the way individual socialize and build social connections. Social media sites such as, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp allow users to participate in activities such as, putting a display picture (DP), managing users with whom they share a social bond, and viewing their activities (Bourgeois et al., 2014). The social networking sites, to a certain degree, may offer a space for young Muslim women to express and make themselves publicly visible in a way they want, yet for some of these women it has also become a site for scrutiny and surveillance from their own families and from the community members (Mishra & Basu, 2014; Mahmudova & Evolvi, 2021). According to Subramanyam and Smahel (cited in Mishra & Basu, 2014), an individual’s online representation closely resembles and matches their offline identities. When it comes to these Muslim women, they are made aware of offline societal expectations by ‘collapsed contexts’ (Marwick & Boyd, 2010; Afnan et al., 2022) eventually making these women to modify aspects of their online presentation. The research participants of this work emphasized that Islam requires both men and women to behave modestly in private and public life, but the uneven retention of religious knowledge puts additional onus on women to uphold the family’s reputation through their own action. Due to an embedded patriarchal attitudes and norms, “self-disclosures of Muslim women in online becomes more intense” (Pielacited in Misra & Basu, 2014). Thus, while exploring the visual presentation in online settings, one cannot afford to ignore the perceived influence of offline socio-cultural environment. Hence, this paper attempts to explore the experiences of Muslim women’s online self-presentation and highlights the key strategies they employ in their everyday social media use.

Theoretical Framework: Contextualising and Integrating with the Field

Erving Goffman’s principles of dramaturgical performance described in his classic work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday life* have been used as a theoretical framework for developing this essay. Goffman, a Canadian born sociologist and ethnographer of the 20th century, in his book used the metaphor of a theatre to demonstrate how people interact face-to-face with one another in social settings. He defines social interaction as a theatrical performance in which people, like actors in stage plays variety of roles, tailoring their impressions they want to present to each audience in different settings. Goffman’s underlying idea on social interaction is ‘performance’ and ‘impression management’ which is so relevant to the study of social media where the desire and risk of the ‘self’ is played out. According to Goffman, performance is defined “as all the activity of a given participant on a

given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (Goffman, 1959, p. 15). Extending the concept of offline performance in online settings, the process of self-presentation too can be looked at as a performative behaviour (Mishra & Basu, 2014). The process of what people do when they are in the presence of others, according to Goffman, is that, they attempt to control or guide the impression that people might have of him either by expressively accentuating some and suppressing the others. Attributes of performing oneself, like in theatrical performances, in social life, can create a tactful social manoeuvres of impression management in two ways: a) “the expression that one ‘gives’, and b) the expression that one ‘gives off’” (Goffman, 1959, p.2). Goffman uses the concepts such as, frontstage and backstage behaviour, impression management which often gets associated with the world of drama to construct a similar expression of interaction order of social life. In fact, Goffman’s simple idea explains so much about conflicting experiences of participants and provides a better understanding of the participants’ situations.

Given the conflate of offline performance in online settings, as a point of reference in this regard, the participants perform a front stage performance in online settings while maintaining and embodying the ‘manner’ and ‘appearance’ of offline scripted moral standards. More precisely as in real life, negative impression of a woman is bound to have severe consequences, hence in online settings women carry the values of offline world as social networking Apps allow both to watch others as well as being watched off by others, thus, increasing the necessity of managing impressions (Pearce, 2015). Contradiction between appearance and manner and the two types of expression, ‘gives’ and ‘gives off’ is bound to happen through ‘unmeant gestures’ and ‘inopportune intrusions’, which creates embarrassment for the participants. Goffman argues that to reassure the audiences and take control of the scenes created unintentionally or intentionally by the outsiders, the participants segregate the outsider audiences from seeing a performance that is not meant for them. Given, Goffman’s focus on the techniques of impression management, it is not hard to see how the successful implementation of the front stage behaviour by the actors relies on the extent of collaborative relationship and the subsequent strategies, which is something the audiences and the participants share. As Goffman (1959) notes in many cases, unacceptable situation permits the audiences to give ‘hint’ to the performer for ‘better modification of the staged show’. Therefore, Goffman’s theoretical framework is appropriate to understand the compact intricacies of how participants engage in selectively highlighting certain attributes while keeping in check other aspects of their life which gives some inkling of how managing impressions is at work in online spaces. Indeed, Goffman is considered as a “product of televisual age” whose dramaturgical approach is often cited as a useful framework for understanding presentation of self in online platforms (Hogan, 2010).

Methodology

The research participants of this work are selected through purposive and snowball sampling, consisting of 10 young Muslim women of Karimganj district. The women are students pursuing bachelor degree and master programme and while one participant is in teaching profession. The age range of the participants is between 18-30 years. The age group is chosen deliberately as they are often described as 'active social media users' (Sirola et al., 2021), and 'digital natives' (Mahmudova&Evolvi, 2021) because they are actively involved in accessing information from the internet along with constructing construct online identities. The relationship status of the participant varies, as some are single, others are engaged or dating, and while one is married. Except one, all the participants wore hijab. The participants have their own personal Android and two of them have I-Phone. They all use WhatsApp app in their own electronic device. The interviews are conducted by the researcher in Bengali and English mediums. The interviews lasted for about 45 minutes with each participant.

To explore the experience of young Muslim women's use of social networking sites, semi-structured in-depth interviews are performed. In essence, this method allows direct communication with the interviewee of the study and offers possibilities for free-flowing interactions, probing and follow-up questions (Morris, 2015). By performing interviews with the women who use Whatsapp and exercise agency in posting certain types of pictures as their WhatsApp status, the findings speak of media practices, strategies, and life experiences, which otherwise cannot be documented in quantitative study. Moreover, the researcher's positionality as a Muslim woman and belonging from the same place as that of the participants allowed the interviewees to decide how they wanted to narrate their stories and opinions in a more relaxed atmosphere. However, the findings in this essay, in no way intends to generalize the experiences of Muslim women's use of social media, as there exists heterogeneity of Muslim lives.

Oversharing can be Dangerous: Posting Photos and Family Values

In an online environment, where the youngsters are encouraged to upload everything, it makes sense that they feel pressure directly or indirectly to show off their lives regardless of their insecurities.

"I have used emoji few times in photos where I don't want to show my face, rather, I want to show the dress and the place that I have visited", explains Jannat, a bachelor degree student. She started to give emoji on her photos a few months ago after an online incident happened with one of her friends. When I met her friend Marie to know her incident, she narrated and the researcher quotes: "My brother secretly gifted me a smartphone. My parents are unaware of it. I had my own WhatsApp account. Like everyone else, I used to share my individual selfies as well as photos clicked with my friend. Once one classmate of mine took a screenshot of my photo and showed it to her male cousin who somehow managed to get hold of the photo as well

as my contact details. He started bothering me day in and day out to talk to him. He started threatening me with the photos that I have shared in WhatsApp saying that he would morph my image with some ‘undeserving’ elements... (Breathing heavily). When I complained to my brother, he got furious as he had directed me earlier not to post any photos of mine. Seeing no way out, my entire family had to get involved in this matter. False rumours of romantic courtship spread like wildfire. Although I am sure that if he did something I would approach the [cyber] laws. Though he did nothing, yet my brother went out of his way to settle the matter ‘privately’”.

Other participants also expressed the concern of mobile screenshot, sometimes taken by their known persons. They shared their experiences of how acquaintances broke their trust, despite being in their ‘closed circle’ by seeking out personal information and spread rumours out of nothing. This led to the participants using emojis instead of their photo, when the extent of trust in an interpersonal relationship is low (Zhang et al., 2021).

When Yumnah, a hijabi³ and a post-graduate student, set her WhatsApp profile picture in Western attire, she received backlash in the form of indirect comments from her friends. They mocked her for preferring Western attire with ‘small’ hijab. When the researcher asked what kind of comments she got to hear, she replied in a very shy tone, “Why you have clicked photo exposing your breast? Getting modern?” After a brief silence, she added that she witnessed an immediate reaction from her friends. “When I posted that picture, immediately some of my friends (male as well as female) started posting WhatsApp status with ‘right’ way of wearing hijab and ‘wrong’ way of wearing hijab. Obviously, their posting of status is meant for me, Personally, I felt it.”

Shirin, another participant, shared:

“Once I uploaded a group photo of our batch. I wore unna⁴ covering my hair and a male classmate stood next to me. Some of my cousin started discussing about it in our cousin WhatsApp group saying stuff like I am going out with that guy, and now I am declining this, but I would elope with the guy in future and what not !! Whereas I am not (defensively).”

The narratives mentioned above illuminate several analytical points. In the case of Yumnah and Shirin, the disapproval comments has been communicated privately as well as publicly. Yumnah’s case clearly shows instances of online body shaming and clearly highlights the presence of what Murtiningsih et al. have termed as ‘online patriarchy’ (Murtiningsih cited in Aksaret al., 2020, p.69) in a digital world. Importantly, wearing a hijab highlights the responsibility of representing Islam in a positive manner. This suggests self-presentation behaviours are therefore, not only

³ Muslim women who wear hijab (head covering).

⁴ A scarf that comes with shalwar kameez, an outfit favoured by women of South Asian region.

limited to the wearer in offline spaces but extend out to their religious practices in online spaces too. This implies a much deeper notion of self-presentation for Muslim women. Posting 'proper' photos should reflect one's practices and beliefs and thus, conversation flowed to the criteria of upholding religious responsibility even in offline spaces. As Pearce and Vitak noted, "classmates... take a strong interest in monitoring their peers and will punish behavioural code violators through a mixture of shaming..." (Pearce & Vitak, 2015, p.7).

Shirin faces the irk of her cousins when she transgressed the boundary by putting photos perceived as 'taboo photo (Afnan, et al., 2022). In the offline spaces, male family members are typically charged with monitoring and vetting the women's movements. Similarly, with the rise of social media, their domain of responsibility now extends to their female kin's online activities. Pearce and Vitak's (2015) findings demonstrates that it is common for brothers to closely monitor the profile of the female folk for possible behavioural violations. This concurs with El Guindi's statement where she argues that "both body and interactive space needs to be regulated and controlled and both men and women must abide by this temporary desexualisation to make public interaction between them possible" (Guindi, 2000, p.136).

A Lot of People Watching: Evil Eye and Social Control

All the research participants informed of having a personal smartphone as well as their account in WhatsApp. In their social media account, their circle consists of multiple audiences of their life- family, friends, and relatives. One of the prominent features of social media application is that it brings people from offline context and collapses with the online audiences (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). One participant, Suraya puts it, "Now everyone is in WhatsApp, what one is doing, with whom and where one is, everyone gets the information by seeing the photos. As I post photos in WhatsApp, I get to listen to numerous talks". When the researcher asked what kind of talks she listens to, Suraya replied, "Girls from good Musalman families don't show their photos to strangers, society considers use of social media as bad because it is an uncontrolled sphere with lot of unknown and unfamiliar faces." Ana, another participant likewise, feels that her parents disapprove of her posting photos online. She says that "one day, one of her cousins called her mother saying 'control' your daughter's movement, she is going out of her way and posting photos on Instagram and Whatsapp".

Fauzia (another participant) the eldest among five sisters is the first young women in her extended family to come to Guwahati to pursue her post-graduation programme. She never posts photos without her hijab. Once she participated in a university sports in which their group won. She posted a group photo in her WhatsApp status wearing sports T-shirt, shorts and without hijab. Her younger sister in excitement showed the photo to all the family members. Many of her extended family members taunted her mother for sending her outside where they believe that modern influences took over

the family girl. Venna Das, an eminent Indian social scientist and anthropologist points out that daughters are seen as “repository of family honour” (Das, 1976, p.15) and dishonourable behaviour on their part results in forever loss of face for all members within and outside the family. The participant further adds that, “I remember vividly that I wear a long sleeves inner underneath my T-shirt and under the shorts I wear an ankle length leggings. I maintain my bodily modesty and did not wear any dress that my family will disapprove.”

Kiara a teacher-participant shared, “Now-a-days I do not post photos in any social media. In the past, I use to post our couple photos, every time when we are together. But for the past months I have notice that my marital relation has strain to some extent, which was not previously. My mother believes that our relationship has caught the evil eyes. This has happened, she believes, is because I always keep posting our “photos together”, which online people couldn’t handle it. At first, I take it as an age-old superstition but when my child start to fall sick frequently, the idea of ‘*nazar lagigese*’ (caught an evil eye) leaves me thinking.”

The narratives of Ana and Fauzia confirms the fact that an image can speak a thousand words. The way her close-knit social network spin a whole story based on a couple of photos made the young women conscious of their being evaluated in a specific way based on what society considers as ‘proper’ and ‘improper’. Suraya’s case serves as a classic example of how Muslim culture places greater emphasis on female modesty. Although the Quran instructed men to divert their eyes from women just as it ask women to dress modestly. In an offline settings, it is believed by the women that they should not flaunt their beauty to outsiders and to preserve their beauty and share it only with the one whom they would grant access. However, in an online settings, everyone keeps on monitoring and reviewing other people’s status and many a times they share it with others. It is this culture of ubiquitous sharing with unknown people, and that too without the knowledge of the one who posted it, is being understood as ‘uncontrolled sphere with unfamiliar faces’.

Kiara is the only participant who described herself as ‘over sharer of adorable moments in online platform’, believed that gaze with negative intentions from online platform has harmed her family. Indeed, her experience draws attention to a pervasive online anxiety about the potential implication of excessive social media use. Online place is where many people pretty much share their best lives. This consciously or unconsciously attracts ‘unwanted’, or ‘envious gaze’ who think they are being deprived of the same life that someone else is enjoying. Her narratives highlighted that people are watching and making assumptions with negative intent. Predominantly, in every culture be it in South Asia, the concept of *nazar* or in Middle East, the widely held belief of *hasad* is understood as the root cause of all the bad things that can harm a person. Every culture performs *nazar* removal rituals from performing prayer to reading out verses from the holy books, putting a black dot on an infant’s forehead to wearing black threads or *tabeez* to protect themselves from the resentful gaze.

Taking Control in Posting Photos: Resisting and Restricting the (Online) Audiences Serves as a Technique of Self-Presentation

The interviewees shared that they use WhatsApp for a variety of reasons, including instant messaging, keeping in contact with friends, sharing study notes, etc. Through WhatsApp status (which disappears after twenty-four hours), many participants apart from posting their own photos tend to post other things such as, motivational quotes and share video links too. As argued, the nature of the responses that the photos elicit makes the women realize not to put their selves at peril in online platform. Hence, to create their own personal spaces while being aligning more with the expectations of offline communities, they apply the security features of Whatsapp such as, *who can see* their 'profile photo', and 'status updates'. By applying security features, the participants shared that, only close friends could access to see their profile picture and status updates. And those who are likely to create trouble by silently observing what the young women are doing in WhatsApp are being hidden from seeing their online profiles. The participants frequently update the privacy features of WhatsApp to ensure it is working properly. As mentioned earlier, Shirin states, "I am so disturbed by the nature of my cousin's exaggerated discussion that not only I exited the group but even blocked them all. Later, I unblock them as they are my 'relatives'. Sometimes whenever I upload any group or individual photo, I block them for 24 hours. Sometimes I unblock them depending on the kind of photo I intend to give as Whatsapp status. I am not going to stop myself from clicking and posting photos, nor 'am I going to stop myself from expressing what I like.'" Thus, instead of opting out of her social media account, she navigates the cultural and religious expectations by utilising the privacy settings of online space while being experimenting her own self. Marie who was harassed on an online platform states, "I stop posting photos online for a brief period. Seldom do I give photo as my Whatsapp status but whenever I do so, I blur it with the available filter depending on what I want to show to others." Yumnah stubbornly states that despite her friends trying to correct her dress, she do not change her way. "Whenever I post photos, I do not hide myself with an emoji, rather I turn my face away from the mobile camera. Other participants see their favourite celebrities put emojis on their newborn baby's face. They take inspiration from it, evaluate its utility and start to put smiley emojis on their photo to avoid familial tension and discussion and online surveillance. The use of emoji and other creative modes of self-presentation serves as a site of women's agency by subtly undermining the online audiences' authority and discourses about female behaviour and appearance. Kiara who believes that evil eye has caused her strained-marital relation refrains from using evil eye emoji and instead use captions such as *Mashallah* (God has willed it) and *Inshallah* (if God wills it) to ward off an envy eye. She is less concern with the challenges that other participants faced but was more anxious of the costs of social media gaze. To be sure, other participants too share that they 'pay careful attention' or 'worry' about and or at least contemplate when sharing 'happy moments' on any social media as 'they can never know what kind of energy the person gazing at has'. All the research participants spoken to,

express that they feel vulnerable and avoid sharing certain things as the bad energy of the online world translates into the offline world. Further, it is more common for the participants to be socialise by family members, peer and romantic partners of the costs and rewards of social media use, its restriction and access.

Conclusion

To conclude, the findings highlight that young Muslim women use subtle social cue that is, emojis in WhatsApp statuses as a mid-way to navigate the conundrum of socio-cultural, religious, and psychological factors. Though social media is a great connector, yet it is a tricky terrain to manoeuvre. The research participants' narratives illuminate a layered and complex issue to what appears on the surface of simply putting emojis. The narratives show that certain key strategic choices are made to display how fragile the matter of trust is in an online world. Further, the findings also highlight that since their online identities is an extension of their offline identities, they constantly reflect backon how much and what kind of information and images they need to share to uphold the reputation of their family reputation in a digital world. Again, with the development of technology, self-knowledgeable changes have occurred in the behaviour of young minds. Inan online social interactions they are constantly require to safeguard their privacy. Contrary to earlier assumptions that technology makes it easier for users to leave their bodies behind and assume new and alternative identities (Subramanyam & Smahelcited in Mishra & Basu,2014), paradoxically, the findings reveal that Muslim women in digital space face community surveillance in deciding what to post. Actual repercussions of posting made them better understand whom to hide and from what post. This suggests a conscious contextualdecision-making process involve in posting processes. Therefore, front stage behaviour of using emojis indirectly function as backstage performance in the process of impression management whereby“actors attempt to buffer themselves from the deterministic demands that surround them” (Goffman, 1959). Thus,the participants adopt social and technical ways to distance themselves from relatives and unknown faces who violate their privacy and pose as a potential threat. All the participants agree on common grounds that since families and relatives are there in WhatsApp, they remain vigilant of the type of photos they upload on social networking sites. This entails participants' heightened attention to their actions and thoughts when constituting themselves as subjects of their action (Duffy & Chan, 2019). By asserting their right of self-expression in social media platforms, these young women are purposefully resisting the social authority by creating a space of their own in the world of internet. This consciousness pave the way for women to opt for a safer option-emoji to avoid the tedious process of ‘offline patriarchal constructions of femininity’ in an online settings. Thus, discussing the narratives through the lens of the dramaturgical model of Erving Goffman, helps to understand the repercussions of constant monitoring which necessitates the utilisation of pre-emptive privacy techniques for the crafted impressions they want to *give off*.

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The Dynamics of Emerging Land Relations in Nagaland: Contemporary Transformations in Angami Community

Thepfusalie Theunuo¹ and Rabin Deka²

Abstract

The phenomenon of land privatization and commoditization has surfaced as a prominent concern within the present-day Angami society. While historical shifts in land relations have been evident during various periods, the current transformations hold unprecedented significance due to their distinct impact on the social structure. These evolving patterns of land relations are not solely influenced by state-driven developmental programs and policies, but also by the pervasive forces of globalization, privatization, urbanization, commercialization, and intricate market dynamics. In pursuit of a comprehensive understanding, this research seeks to conduct an in-depth analysis of the emerging paradigms of land relations within the contemporary Angami community. The study is structure into two sections. Firstly, we analyse the role of the Indian state in reshaping village-level political institutions and explores the subsequent repercussions on established land relations. Secondly, the study delves into the evolving patterns of land ownership within the present-day landscape. Through this dual analytical framework, the paper offers a nuanced comprehension of the intricate dynamics encompassing contemporary land relations within the Angami community.

Introduction

Land is central in understanding the evolution and dynamics of any agrarian society, particularly in the case of a tribal society, where socio-economic and political lives are centred on land. Land relations, i.e., land-control and land-use patterns of the society in question, elucidate the complexities of the social structure of agrarian and tribal societies. In this study, an attempt has been made to examine the dynamics of emerging land relations of Angami community of Nagaland.

Like the other tribal Naga communities of Nagaland, the Angami community possesses a distinctive historical backdrop of land relationships. Land relationships

¹ Asstt. Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Sazolie College, Jotsoma, Email: thepfusaliethunuo@gmail.com

² Professor Dept. of Sociology, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tezpur University, Assam-784028, Email: rdekatu@gmail.com

in the traditional Angami society were primarily governed by their community life, centred on a village and the clans. As a result, clan and community ownership of land has been the distinctive hallmark of land relations among the Angami in particular, and the tribal societies in general.

The British annexation of the Naga Hills precipitated noteworthy alterations in the established land relations of diverse Naga communities. Initially, the British adhered to a policy of 'non-interference' in land revenue matters concerning the Naga Hills, classifying certain areas as 'excluded' or 'partially excluded'. This stance led to significant shifts in the traditional land relations of these societies during the British colonial period.

The transformations set in motion during colonial rule intensified further during the post-colonial era, particularly in the aftermath of liberalisation. The infiltration of market dynamics, the adoption of settled cultivation practices, the proliferation of urbanisation, and integration into the global market economy exerted profound influence on land tenure systems within hilly regions. The emergence of individual land ownership alongside market-oriented agricultural practices and land transactions has been particularly noteworthy. Post-independence developmental policies pursued by India also impacted the political institutions and land relations within villages.

This paper aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the contemporary evolution of land ownership and land use systems in Angami villages. To achieve this, the paper firstly examines the role of the state and its implications in the ongoing transition. Subsequently, an analysis of the role of village councils is conducted to discern their influence on community land use and ownership systems. Lastly, the paper delves into the emerging patterns of land use and ownership among different levels of social organisation, including clans, sub-clans, lineages, and individual households.

Methodology

Introduction to the Field

The research was conducted within the jurisdiction of Kohima district in the state of Nagaland. Specifically, the study was undertaken in the Chiephobozou administrative block. This block encompasses eighteen Angami villages and one administrative town known as Chiephobozou town. Among these eighteen villages, a deliberate selection was made to focus on five villages for the purpose of this study. These villages are Thizama, Meriema, Tsiesema, Nerhema, and Chiechama. These five villages have been identified due to their notable and rapid transformations in terms of land ownership, land use, and agricultural cropping patterns. They stand as significant examples within the northern group of Angami villages, and their dynamics have been notably influenced by factors such as urban expansion, government establishments, and administrative developments.

Techniques of Data Collection

The research methodology employed a combination of primary and secondary data sources. Secondary data encompassed a wide array of materials, including books, scholarly journals, periodicals, newspapers, governmental records, archival documents, and electronic resources. Primary data, on the other hand, were acquired through direct personal interviews. The method of interviewing individual respondent households was executed using a random stratified approach. This technique, as outlined by C.R. Kothari (Kothari, 2004)involved the selection of households as the primary unit of analysis. The sample size was determined as 25% of the total households, with proportional allocation based on both the overall number of households in the respective village and the aggregate households within each *khel*³ and clan. Interviews were also conducted with individuals deemed pertinent to the research investigation.

In addition to interviews, participant observation was incorporated as a means of collecting primary data. This technique allowed researchers to gain deeper insights into the perspectives and viewpoints indigenous to the studied community.

Issues of Studying One's Own Society

The researcher, being an insider⁴, recognizes both the advantages and drawbacks of examining one's own society. The advantage of insider status is rooted in the researcher's personal life experiences, which provide an in-depth understanding of the society. This familiarity facilitates access to the community and establishes trust, particularly when addressing sensitive topics such as land ownership patterns. However, inherent disadvantages arise when studying one's society, particularly concerning issues related to land. As the researcher's identity is known to respondents, there is potential reluctance to disclose certain information regarding land ownership and related matters.

In the light of the above, some significant theoretical issues related to study of one's own society have been taken into consideration. Land issues are sensitive among the Angami community, as it is directly related to their identity. In the study, therefore, there is a necessity to grasp the nuances, and the complications, involved in dealing with land relationships. There are issues of conducting field work as an insider or 'emic' view and as an outsider or 'etic' view. A researcher requires understanding of both 'emic' (insider) and 'etic' (outsider) views to capture the complex reality. As Marvin Harris noted, there is an internal logic of reality in human culture which are represented distinctly from 'emic' and 'etic' views, and for this reason both 'emic' and 'etic' view are required to captured the intricate cultural reality (Harris, 1990). As

³ Khel is an administrative term which refers to a combination of several clan groups. The Angamis use this term to refer to a clan territory in the village.

⁴ The researcher (thepfusalie Theunuo) of the work under study is an Angami and lives in Thizama village.

Kenneth Pike (1990), also suggested that scientific objectivity is attainable when taking an outsider or an insider stance, and an insider learning to analyse like an outsider (Harris, 1990). Bruce L. Berg and Howard Lune emphasize that the 'emic view' and 'etic view' stem from interpretations of meanings, theoretical and analytic explanations, and understanding the symbols, as mediated through the researcher (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Despite being an insider, the study acknowledges potential conflicts over land ownership within the Angami society, often arising between villages, clans, and individuals. These conflicts could potentially influence the objectivity of the study. For example, individuals may narrate land ownership to serve their personal interests, potentially conflicting with the broader interests of the village community. Informants might also seek to redefine their identity through land ownership or justify ancestral land claims. The researcher's positionality within the kin, clan, and village in relation to land ownership is a complex issue.

In fact, as an insider there is also an issue in the context of relationship of researcher with the members of the kin, clan and village with reference to land ownership. Despite these potential challenges, the researcher maintains a position of objective neutrality in terms of collecting empirical data and articulation of the data. Reflexivity, as defined by Charlotte Aull Davies, involves introspection and self-examination of both the individual and the collective. Davies further noted that it is crucial for ethnographers to understand their relationship with informants and explore how their personal dynamics influence data collection and interpretation (Davies, 1999). Similarly, Soyini Madison has also noted that positionality is a vital part of reflexive ethnography. It entails acknowledging and being accountable for one's research paradigms, positions of authority, and moral responsibilities in representation and interpretation (Madison, 2005). Renato Rosaldo further underscores how an ethnographer's position or life experiences both enable and limit insights (Rosaldo, 1993).

Adhering to ethnographic tradition, the study maintains objectivity by consciously situating the ethnographer in a position of impartiality, neutrality, and objectivity. The awareness of these theoretical underpinnings, along with reflexivity and positionality, guides the researcher in navigating the complexities of studying their own community while ensuring rigorous objectivity.

Post-Independence and Land Relations

India's independence from colonial rule in 1947 marked the inception of a new era in Indian economic reforms (Jodhka, 2012). This transition necessitated a focus on revitalising the stagnant rural agrarian economy and the state assumed responsibility for overseeing this transformation and ensuring its benefits to flow across society. This laid the foundation for development as both a strategic economic approach and an ideological tenet in the newly independent Indian state. (Jodhka, 2012).

To effect a change in the rural socio-economic landscape five-year plans were introduced. Within this framework, all the constituent states of India were brought within the development intervention, Nagaland was no exception. Nagaland was made a state on December 1, 1963, amidst political turmoil between the Nagas and the Government of India and this unfolded under challenging circumstances (Jamir A. , 2002).. The creation of Nagaland as a state was accompanied by the formation of a comprehensive agriculture department in 1963. This move elevated the significance of economic surveys to facilitate the implementation of developmental policies. One noteworthy initiative was the Techno-Economic Survey of Nagaland (1968), which aimed to delineate the state's socio-economic potential, crucial for aligning with the national development policy. This survey emphasised the need for novel economic activities to transform the state's economy. Investment in agriculture emerged as a focal point, urging new agricultural cropping patterns. As a result, the traditional practice of *jhum* cultivation faced scrutiny and criticism from various quarters, it was seen as a hindrance to sustainable growth in the Northeast (Das, 2006). To supplant *jhum* cultivation, alternative strategies were explored, such as permanent cultivation involving commercial tree planting with government subsidies, and also the introduction of cash crop plantations. Initiatives in irrigation, floriculture, and horticulture were undertaken to enhance agricultural production by the tribal communities of the state. Subsidies were provided for constructing irrigation infrastructure, water channels, and tractors. Recent endeavours have aimed to shift from subsistence to sustainable commercial agriculture through demand-driven farmer services, agricultural mechanisation, and information and communication technology adoption (Department of Agriculture, 2023).

The series of interventions ushered in a new era characterised by altered cropping patterns and the commercialization of agricultural produce, driven by state policies. This transformation constitutes a significant shift in post-colonial agrarian scenario of Nagaland.

It is important to note that despite its critical role, state's development process encountered challenges. Some critics argue that the externally-driven development impeded the organic momentum of the economy, failing to establish a robust domestic economic foundation (Jamir B. K., 2002). B.K. Roy Burman argues that the postcolonial development in the Northeast, might have facilitated the diversion of resources from the region and , some development programs bypassed community involvement (Burman, 1989). The National Committee for Development of Backward Areas has recommended individualisation of communal ownership in the north-east for the sake of progress. These development efforts have managed to integrate the tribal economy into the broader market economy, leading to a process akin to what James C. Scott terms "Sedentarization" (Scott, 1998). This shift reflects a broad shift towards settled and market-oriented production systems, that brought the state of Nagaland into the fold of modern economic structures.

Community Land and the Role of the Village Council

Nagaland, sixteenth state of the Indian Union, enjoys protection under Constitutional Article 371(A) granting it autonomy over matters of customary laws and land ownership. Previously known as the Naga Hills District, Nagaland was exempt from the Indian Government Act of 1935' Excluded Areas and was not included under the fifth schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Governor holds plenary powers to enact laws tailored to the state's populace, exempting it from the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution, which pertains to local self-governance. In this context, the Village Council's role becomes pivotal for village governance and development, functioning through the framework of traditional village administration, replacing erstwhile rituals tied to Angami village formation.

In 1964, Nagaland Village Council legislation was introduced to oversee village affairs, with council members elected for three-year terms. Subsequently, the 1970 Area and Regional Council Act established Village Councils in villages with populations of at least one hundred. In 1978, the Nagaland Village and Area Council Acts replaced regional councils, elaborately defining the duties and powers of the Village Council while instituting the Village Development Board (VDB). The 1990 Nagaland Council Act abrogated the 1978 Area Council Act, mandating the establishment of village councils in all recognized villages in Nagaland, adhering to customary practices, with five-year tenure. The Act stipulated that hereditary Village Chiefs or *Angs* and *Gaonburas* hold *ex-officio* positions on the council with voting rights. Under the Village Council Act, the Village Council is fully authorised to administer the village, functioning in alignment with traditional practices, and exercising control over internal village affairs (Nakhro, 2009). This formalisation of the Village Council facilitated the implementation of state development policies aimed at transforming the rural economy. According to the Nagaland Village Council Act of 1990, Village Councils possess complete jurisdiction over internal village administration in accordance with customary laws and practices, including full incorporation of community land into the purview of the authority of the Village Council. In respect of ownership and usage of community land, the Village Council holds legitimate ownership rights. Based on empirical data gathered from sampled villages, the following sections delve into the dynamics of the relationship between the Village Council and the community land in the village.

Thizama Village

The regulation and control of village community land fall within the jurisdiction of the Village Council. While each household possesses the right to access this communal land, specific regulations and laws govern individual land use. The land laws, as stipulated by the Village Council over community land- are outlined below:

- a. Housing: Individual households are allocated plots of land for housing. Prior to constructing any house, the Village Council's consent is obligatory.

Construction without consent is deemed a violation of community land law and may be regarded as unauthorised encroachment.

- b. Terrace land: Each household can own one or more terraced lands. Conversion of community forest land into terrace cultivation necessitates approval of the Village Council.. Non-utilization of terraced fields for a minimum of three years may lead to termination of ownership rights, and incorporation into the community land.
- c. *Jhum land*: Each household is entitled to cultivate a single *jhum* plot per agricultural season.
- d. Forest: Extraction of firewood or timber from the community preserved forest necessitates approval of the Village Council I, and hunting and fishing are allowed⁵.
- e. Timber: Domestic timber extraction from designated community land is limited. A cord of firewood, measuring six feet in height and breadth, is allocated for each household's domestic use.
- f. Adoption: Adopted individuals can become village citizens but are not entitled t to community land. Property usage and inheritance are restricted to parental or clan possessions.
- g. Garden farm: Ownership of one garden per individual is permitted. Village council land regulations curtail extensive cultivation by individual.
- h. Cattle Grazing: Grazing in community forests is allowed without demarcated fields.
- i. Plantation: Individuals are not restricted from engaging in cash crop plantations beyond their home garden.
- j. Bamboo: Bamboo ownership is confined to designated community land areas.
- k. Tree: Exclusive individual tree ownership on community land is prohibited.
- l. Other resources: No individual has the right to extract natural resources like rocks or other mineral resources.

These land laws underscore an agreement between the Village Council and the community, emphasizing that community land cannot be utilised solely for individual gain. These regulations were deemed necessary due to population growth, ensuring equitable land distribution and usage. However, these iregulations have clashed with the traditional land relations. Historically, individual's claimed ownership not only of terrace land but also of trees and bamboo, which held inheritable value. Oak trees,

⁵ Hunting and fishing have no longer remained the major source of food for the people like the traditional society, however hunting and fishing is still observed in Angami villages. Today, both hunting and fishing are regulated by the local youth organizations, which annually ban such activities in all the sample villages.

or *Phrie*, and bamboo trees are particularly esteemed and have served as markers of landed property. J. H. Hutton noted that trees were a kind of property ownership, which were recognized through special trees, though they may grow on the land of another person or community land (Hutton, 1921). Today, traditional ownership rights over these resources have been subsumed under communal property through the village community land laws.

Meriema Village

Based on the traditional method of land use, the Village Council has classified village community land into two distinct categories: agricultural and forest lands. Differentiating from the setup in Thizama village, the Meriema community land is further divided into two agricultural zones, namely *Nadilizhu*⁶ and *Souruzu*. Notably, *Nadilizhu* encompassing approximately thirty *jhum* fields, underwent a transformation in 2014. This change was accomplished through collaboration between the Village Council, the State Forest Department, and the Global Fire Monitoring Centre (GFMC) project, resulting in the conversion of *Nadilizhu's jhum* fields into a community reserved forest. Conversely, the community land at *Souruzu* comprises around one hundred thirty *jhum* fields and continues to be cultivated individually in the forms of terrace farming, *jhum* cultivation, and plantation farming. The delineation of regulations for different community land use system is as follows:

- a. Terrace: Individual households may cultivate without restrictions, provided they pay an annual land tax of two hundred rupees to the Village Council.
- b. *Jhum*: Similar to terrace farming, individual households are allowed unrestricted cultivation upon payment of an annual land tax of one hundred rupees to the Village Council.
- c. Plantation: Individuals can engage in commercial crop plantation farming upon payment of an annual tax of three hundred rupees to the Village Council.
- d. Forest: Reserved Forest access for timber or cultivation is prohibited for individuals; however, hunting and fishing are permitted.
- e. Timber: Extraction of firewood from cord⁷ dimensions within village community land is not allowed.
- f. Bamboo: Individuals are permitted to use bamboo from community land solely for domestic purposes.
- g. Tree: Ownership rights over trees or bamboo on community land are absent; however, individuals can plant and use trees for domestic needs.
- h. Other resources: Utilisation of any natural resources found in community land for personal gain is prohibited.

⁶ In Angami society, land and forest have different nomenclatures and had been passed on through age-long interpretations and beliefs. *Nadilizhu* here literally refers to large *jhum* fields.

⁷ Fresh firewood cut and arranged into six feet in height and breadth.

Nevertheless, a contemporary trend has emerged, wherein efforts are directed towards converting community land into individual ownership for agricultural practices. This began in the early 1990s, sparked by the Village Council leasing community land to individual households in *Souruzu* for the purpose of cultivation without stringent land regulations. This prompted households to rapidly occupy community land for cash crop plantations, terrace farming, and *jhum* cultivation. Subsequently, a substantial portion of the community land was brought under individual possession for cultivation, predominantly for commercial plantations. Presently, an estimated ninety percent of the village community land has passed into individual hands for cultivation⁸.

Tsiesema Village

Individuals use the village community land for terrace cultivation, *jhum* cultivation, and various domestic needs. The Village Council has established specific regulations governing the use of community land as per the new rules and guidelines:

- a. Terrace: Individuals engaged in cultivating community land are required to remit ten percent of their total harvest to the Village Council, or alternatively, pay an annual cash fee of one hundred fifty rupees. Terraced land within the community can be inherited or transferred within the lineage. If such terraced land is left unused for three consecutive years, a terraced field may be cultivated by any village member with the Village Council's consent.
- b. *Jhum*: No taxes are levied on individual *jhum* cultivation. Farmers have the flexibility to cultivate according to their requirements.
- c. Plantation: Community land is not permitted to be used for home gardens or commercial crop plantations, nor is it leased to individuals.
- d. Forest: Extraction of firewood from the community forest land is prohibited for individuals. However, foraging for edible wild roots, tubers, plants, and hunting for sustenance is allowed. Between 1990 and 2001, the Village Council, in collaboration with the state government, executed a teak plantation project on community land under the Nagaland Empowerment of People through Energy Development (NEPED) scheme.
- e. Timber, bamboo and trees: Ownership rights and land use for timber, bamboo, and trees within the village community land are not granted to individuals.
- f. Others: The extraction of any natural resources from the village community land remains restricted⁹.

⁸ Personal interview has been conducted with village elders', village chairman, goanburas across clans in the village.

⁹ Personal interview has been conducted with village elders', village chairman, goanburas across clans in the village.

Nerhema Village

Nerhema village's community land, known as *Thebve Kitsa*, comprises a limited number of *jhum* fields. Presently, the village community land is designated as a preserved forest, subject to direct control and regulation by the Village Council. Stringent restrictions are imposed on the use of this land, prohibiting any form of cultivation, extraction of firewood, timber, bamboo, as well as hunting and foraging. Non-compliance with these restrictions results in cash penalties enforced by the village council. While in the past, terrace and *jhum* cultivation were practised on this land, this form of cultivation in community land has ceased today¹⁰.

Chiechama Village

In Chiechama village, the community land is divided into two sections: *Mezhalieku* and *Tsiathu*. The Village Council holds authority over this land, permitting its cultivation only with their consent in *Mezhalieku*, approximately sixteen *jhum* fields have been designated as a community reserved forest and bamboo plantation. Conversely, *Tsiathu's* community land is used for the construction of fishery ponds by individuals, including Christian denominations such as Baptist, Catholics, Revival, and Pentecost, each owning a pond of around 700 square feet, notably, a portion of *Tsiathu's* community land has been handed over to the central government for airport construction against compensation for such land acquisition by the government. Community lands are also surveyed once in a year; this is to check encroachment if any by an individual through cultivation or timber extraction. According to local sources, this annual land survey has enabled the younger generation to keep track of their traditional village community land boundaries.

Distinct regulations are imposed on various land uses within the community land

- a. Terrace: Individuals can cultivate terraced fields for an annual fee of rupees five hundred per field.
- b. *Jhum*: *Jhum* cultivation is permitted for individual households upon payment of fifty rupees rent to the Village Council.
- c. Plantation: Cultivating commercial crops or maintaining plantation farms in community land is prohibited; however, activities like fishery ponds are allowed without community land tax.
- d. Forest: An individual can access the community forest for timber, for cultivation as well as hunting and fishing.
- e. Timber: An individual can also extract one cord of firewood by paying fifty rupees as a tax to the Village Council.
- f. Bamboo: An individual can use bamboo from village community land for domestic purposes.

¹⁰ Interview was conducted in Nerhema village on with Deizolie Virie, age 71 years 1st June, 2017 and Chairman, Nerhema Village Council and RünküKengürüsie, Gaonbura on 4th June, 2017.

- g. Tree: An individual does not have ownership right over tree and bamboo in village community land.
- h. Other resources: Any types of natural resources found in village community land cannot be used for individual gain, except for hunting, fishing, and foraging, which have no year-round restrictions.

The findings from the field study reveals that the Village Council has emerged as the principal guardian and authority governing the use of community land. The institutionalisation of the Village Council has profoundly influenced land relations, reshaping the community land use system. Revenue generated from leasing community land contributes to developmental activities of the village. Nevertheless, this transition has led to significant repercussions within the Angami community. Traditional land relations and the egalitarian structure of village community land, akin to Marx's concept of 'tribal property ownership,' (Marx & Engels, 1998) has dissolved, giving rise to new dynamics in land ownership and use patterns .

Changing Pattern of Land Ownership and Land Use

Apart from the state interventions, changes in land use systems in the Angami villages have been emerging over the years,. the market economy has played a major role in integrating the communal agrarian structure into a single commodity market. Livelihood in villages, therefore no longer remain static, with the increased expansion of the commodity market. There has been a shift in economic production towards profitable enterprise, with monetary transactions and benefits thereof. This transition has had a direct impact on land relations, necessitating new structural arrangements to negotiate the evolving forces.

In the Angami society, community ownership right over land is a common feature. However, as discussed in preceding sections, a clear transformation has taken place in the pattern of community ownership rights. Village community land or *Mechü lie* are those village lands, which are communally owned by all members of the village community¹¹. Traditionally, community land was accessible to all members of the community for diverse uses, without restrictions, but in recent times transformation in these traditional land rights is visible under the new framework of the land use by the Village Councils. Presently, community land in an Angami village can only be utilised with the explicit consent of the Village Council. In villages with limited community land, regulations have become more stringent. Conversely, in villages with abundant community land, traditional land use practices are fading, replaced by trends of privatisation. Even clan land, once a symbol of clan identity and wealth, is undergoing a process of privatisation. At the same time, the increased commodification of individual land is emerging. This shift indicates a complex reality in which market relations are unfolding in the Angami society. This emerging

¹¹ This includes both agricultural land and non- agricultural lands such as village house sites, jhum, terraces, garden, forest, timber-woodland, as well as uncultivable areas

land relations in fact has no classic notion of primitive accumulation of the kind as Marx described, “written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire”, nor dispossession by land-grabbing corporates or state agencies. The situation is more akin to what Tanya Murray Li (2014) described in her ethnographic studies of indigenous highlanders, of central Sulawesi in Indonesia, where capitalist relations evolved internally through the process of individualization of land rights (Li, 2014). This transition has been discussed in detail in the following sections.

Thizama Village

In Thizama, community land covers approximately seventy percent of the entire village land; clan land consists of fifteen percent, sub-clan five percent as well as five percent of lineage and individual land respectively¹². The percentage wise distribution of land in the village is given in Chart 1. Unlike other villages, Thizama community village land covers larger percentage of land area in the village. This unique distribution pattern, particularly the extensive coverage of community land, is rooted in the village’s historical formation roughly a century ago. It is said that Thizama, historically known as Chüziema village¹³ was formed by seventy warriors from seven clans of Kohima village, leading to the predominant presence of community land due to their settlement history.

This emphasis on community land highlights its critical role in providing sustenance and resources for individual households. Notably, the privatisation of clan land is becoming apparent in Thizama particularly in non-agricultural areas situated near commercial sites. An example of this trend is the *Zatsuc* clan land, which has been subdivided among individual families, each receiving a parcel measuring 120x120 square feet.

In the case of community village land, it can be observed that there is a rush amongst individual households to bring community land under cultivation. Apart from clan land, sub-clan, lineage land and individual land, community land is used largely by individual households for *jhum* cultivation, terrace cultivation, garden farms, and housing. In respect of community land, terraced land and garden farm, these can be inherited or passed down from generation to generation, by the individual families. Every garden farm cultivated, and the majority of terraced fields in the

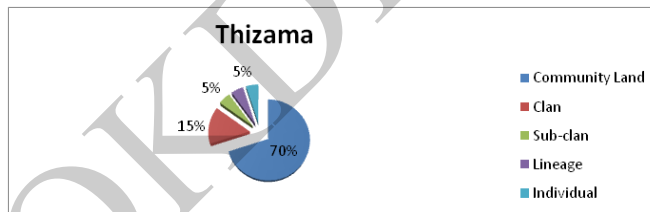
¹² The distribution of land in percentage wise was given by the village elders, village chairman and *gaonburras* across clans and sub-clans. It is observed that the village boundary and land areas of the village are not static; this is because land is often mortgage between villages, clan and individuals which makes its problematic for the villages to have an official geographical area of the village. However, the villagers have developed an approximate estimation of land areas in the village. Thus, based on the local villagers of land estimation, the approximate percentage wise distribution of land is shown through the pie chart for all the sample villages.

¹³ Originally the village is known as Chüziema. Thizama is a name given by the outsiders due to the difficulty in pronouncing the tonal language of the Angami. Today, Thizama is used in all the official matters. Some parts of the history in the village formation are produced from Chüziema Baptist Church Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 11-13th February, 2005.

village, are part of the community land. Thus, an individual household may abandon the terraced field due to drying or inappropriate water streams, landslides, decrease in labour supply, etc.; but none can cultivate it, without the consent of the owner, or as per the tenure rights given by the Village Council. In most of the cases, such terraced land in community land is either converted into tree plantations or used for other domestic and commercial purposes like fishery ponds. It is also a customary practice in the village that every male and married members born in the village, have the customary rights to construct a house in community land, own terraced land, garden farms, pursue *jhum* cultivation and access forest resources like timber and wood in community land. Nevertheless, adopted sons do not possess rights over community land, their inheritance is confined to parental, clan, or lineage property. These land regulations were formalised during the annual Village Council meeting in the year 2019, and local residents have accepted the same due to concerns over accommodating the growing population of the village in the future.

The study reveals a significant pattern where individual households effectively possess substantial portions of community land, utilising it in the form of terraced plots, home gardens, cash crop plantations, and fishery ponds. This phenomenon underscores how community land has become a vital aspect of customary land rights for individual households in Thizama village

Chart 1 Thizama Land Distributions



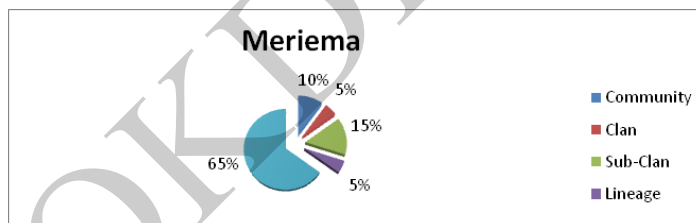
Meriema Village

In Meriema village, the distribution of land is characterised by distinct categories, with community land accounting for ten percent, clan land for five percent, sub-clan land for fifteen percent, lineage land for five percent, and individual land for a significant sixty-five percent of the total village land. This distribution pattern, as depicted in Chart 2, reveals a higher proportion of individual land, primarily attributed to the process of land redistribution among clan, sub-clan, and lineage groups. Notably, the privatisation of clan land has contributed to this growth in individual land ownership. An observable trend in this village is the widespread privatisation of clan land, with certain clans like *Kesienuo* and *Houzha* completely distributing their clan land. This privatisation process has led to increase in land mortgages within the village community as well as to neighbouring communities

such as Ao, Sema, Lotha, Chakesang, Sangtam and others¹⁴. Additionally, clan lands have been mortgaged to government institutions, both state and central government. For instance, in the year 2000, approximately four hundred acres of land from clans including Kesio, Kreditsu, Cheilie, Chiesotsu, and Mechio-o were mortgaged to government entities¹⁵.

The village is also experiencing a shift towards commodification and commercialization of land, which has eclipsed traditional agricultural practices. Many terraced fields on privately-owned individual lands have been abandoned or converted into timber plantations. Consequently, the demand for land has increased, resulting in increase in land mortgage. Land prices have escalated and individual lands are being sold at rates as high as rupees five hundred or more per square foot. This transformation in land market is reshaping the village's overall identity and attracting various Naga communities to settle in Meriema village. A village elder narrated his concerns over these evolving land ownership patterns and the prevalence of land mortgage. He highlighted the impact of privatisation on land holdings, noting that once land becomes private property individuals have the freedom to sell or mortgage it. This shift from communal to individual ownership has raised apprehensions about losing control over valuable lands and the potential consequences of such changes in the identity and character of the village and communal life¹⁶.

Chart 2 Meriema Land Distributions



Tsiesema Village

In Tsiesema village, the distribution of land encompasses different categories, with community village land spanning forty percent of the total land area, while clan and sub-clan land comprise twenty percent, lineage land constitutes five percent, and individual land accounts for fifteen percent. This distribution pattern is visually represented in Chart 3. Notably, the Village Council exercises stringent control over community land, resulting in clan, sub-clan, lineage, and individual lands

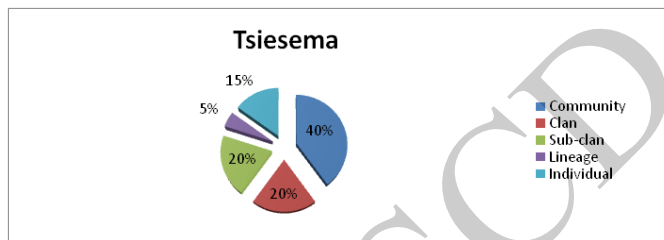
¹⁴ Interview with KhriehieKreditsu of Meriema village, age 65 years, 24th June 2017,

¹⁵ Currently all this land has been utilized by the state and central government in establishing Nagaland University, Kohima campus, State High Court, National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELET), Department of Women Resource Development, Government of Nagaland.

¹⁶ Interview with Neiyalie Mechio of Meriema village, aged 66 years, and Head Goanbura of the village on 4th June 2018

being predominantly used for agricultural, domestic, and commercial purposes. As such, clan land privatisations are also emerging to be a common phenomenon in this village. For instance, *Khro* clan land is on the verge of becoming individual land. Individual land is used for various agricultural practices such as *jhum*, terrace, garden, and cash crop plantation. In spite of fifteen percent of individual land, it covers more than a hundred *jhum* plots on which individuals engage in agriculture and other commercial activities such as stone quarrying, timber plantation and cash crops plantation as well as mortgaging.

Chart 3 Tsiesema Land Distributions



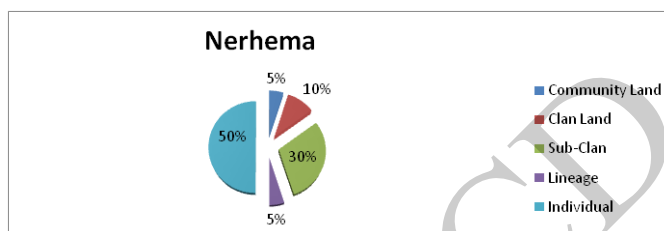
Nerhema Village

Nerhema village community land consists of around thirty *jhum* fields which amount to only five percent of total land area in the village. Clan land is approximately ten percent, sub-clan has thirty percent, lineage land five percent and individual land with a maximum amount of fifty percent. The percentage wise distribution of land in the village is given in Chart 4. The higher percentage of individual land indicates that the privatisation of clan and sub-clan land is increasing. Earlier, most land in the village was either in the form clan, sub-clan, and individual however, a larger percentage of land was a clan and sub-clan land. One of the major changes that have led to decrease in the size of clan land is land distribution among the clan group. Clan and sub-clan land distribution into lineage and individual household ownership was also made necessary, to avoid land dispute over the nature of the land use system. Since clan land would be actively used by a few individual members of a clan in cultivation as well as used for domestic purposes; while some other members would not be able to use it due to several reasons, such as migrating to town for employment or either abandoning the traditional practice of *jhum* cultivation. Another significant reason for the distribution of a clan, sub-clan and lineage land is due to the increase in the price of land and also commercialisation of agricultural. Thus, when land is distributed into individual ownership, one can use it as per one’s own requirements. Hence, privatisation of clan land is observed amongst several clan groups in the village.

Privatisation of clan land is observed amongst *Khrama* clan group and sub-clan such as *Kengurüsie* and *Rülho*. It is observed that the entire *Khrama* clan land has been distributed between the sub-clan *Kengurüsie* and *Rülho*. The *Kengurüsie* has

divided their share of land into the lineage group, which was further distributed to individual households. Although there are still few *jhum* lands belonging to *Kengurüsie* sub-clan group but ninety percent of the sub-clan land has been privatised. While *Rülho* sub-clan have distributed their land and is fully privatised into individual ownership. Today *Rülho* group has no sub-clan community land, except individual land which has also witnessed a number of land mortgages and land disputes among the *Rülho* sub-clan groups¹⁷.

Chart 4: Nerhema Land Distributions



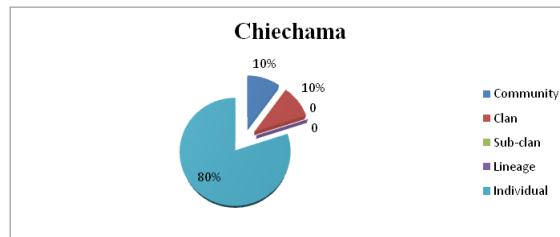
Chiechama Village

Chiechama village community land and clan covers approximately ten percent of the total village land area, while individual land covers approximately eighty percent of total land area in the village. Sub-clan and lineage groups do not own any land in the village. The percentage wise distribution of land in the village is given in Chart 5. The absence of a sub-clan and lineage land in the village had developed only in the recent years, due to distributions of clan land, sub-clan land, and lineage land into individual ownership. This includes terraced land, *jhum* fields, timber woodland, and village residential sites. Thus, the land ownership pattern in the village is classified into three categories: village community land, clan land, and individual land. It is also observed that distribution of clan land among individual households is an ongoing process and is most likely to be privatised in the near future. A prime example of this transition can be seen within the *Rüpreo* clan. The clan land was distributed to three sub-clan groups namely *Kechüyie*, *Kesoseyie* and *Kepayie*. However, each of these sub-clan lands was subsequently allocated to individual families within their respective sub-clan groups¹⁸. Most of the clan land is under forest reservation or timber preserved forest, while individual land has been used for terrace cultivation, *jhum* cultivation, cash crops, plantation farm, timber plantation, etc.

This evolving land distribution reflects a shift towards individual land ownership, impacting the traditional communal ownership of land. The process of privatisation is shaping the landscape of land use and ownership patterns in the sample villages, as community and clan lands gradually give way to individual ownership and diverse land use practices.

¹⁷ Interview were conducted on 7th June 2018 with Rünüti Kengurusie, Head Gaonbura of Nerhema village

¹⁸ Telephonic interview with ThepfukhrietuoRüpreo of Chiechama village was conducted on 16th October 2018.

Chart 5 Chiechama Land Distributions

The findings from the field highlight a clear transformation in the Angami land tenure system. New pattern of land ownership and land use system has emerged over the years, as a result, land privatisation in community land, clan land, sub-clan land and lineage land are taking place. In fact, the process of land privatisation has also resulted in land mortgaging within their community as well as outside their community. The changes in the agrarian economy of the Angami are therefore observed in the context of their changing land relations, which are not only dominating their traditional mode of life but also creating a new mode of life. As Marx noted, the change in the mode of production does not entirely depend on the internal dynamic of the productive forces, pressing upon the existing relations of production, but also the external intercourse (Zeitlin, 1987).

Conclusion

The development policies of the state impacted land relations, as commodification and intervention of market forces became active agents of development. . The engagement and networks of communication between the local villagers with various government departments such as agriculture, horticulture, forestry, and wasteland are leading to the process of restructuring land and agrarian relations. The process of reforestation and permanent cultivation through commercial crops plantation has also brought land at the centre of this transformation.

Although the Village Council is said to govern and administer the village based on customary laws, it has in fact brought radical transformations in the traditional land relations by controlling and regulating the community land use system.

As examined in the study, land privatisation is an emerging issue due to distribution of land among the clan, sub-clan and lineage group into individual ownership. Some important forces contributing to this process of change are the market forces, commercialisation, urbanisation, and land commodification. It is also observed that land market in terms of land mortgage belonging to clan, sub-clan, lineage and individual are emerging. This commodification of land has also created space for new narratives among the villagers in reclaiming their land rights over certain disputed land, at times such narrative become important historical texts (Klapproth, 2004).

However, in this emerging land relations it is also observed that land rights from a gender perspective remains at the periphery and there is lack of engagement with women's rights of ownership over any type of land. In this context, Bina Agarwal (1988) rightly pointed out that the rights of control and ownership tend to define the boundaries of access such as who controls, who distributes, who inherits and to whom it is transferred and what rights it confer to the individuals (Agarwal, 1988), women's ownership rights on land in the emerging land relation in the study area remains unattended without any communal or social concerns.

Thus, the transformation of the rural economy through various agricultural programmes, as well as legitimising the Village Council as the sole guardians of the customary law, has created serious repercussions on Angami society. As a result, there is gradual disappearance of traditional land relations of community land, clan land and lineage land and all these have paved the way for privatisation and commodification of land.

Using insights from the field, the paper has tried to show the transition in land relations in terms of ownership that is merging in the Angami society. This implies that a new mode of production has already developed in the Angami villages today. Although, the feature of traditional land relations has not yet fully disappeared they exist in diluted and subordinate form in the face of emerging land market and privatization of clan and sub-clan lands.

Note

The article constitute a segment of the doctoral dissertation titled "Emerging Land Relations in Nagaland: A Study of Angami Community (2019) submitted by Thepfusalie Theinuo to Department of Sociology, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tezpur University Assam.

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