THE GOALPARA URBAN AREA IN ASSAM: A STUDY OF ITS GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF URBANISATION

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ABSTRACT

The Goalpara urban area covering at present an area of 72.03 km² reflects the processes of urbanisation and consequent pattern development since 1875. This urban area started at the beginning as a market centre on the southern bank of the navigable Brahmaputra in its lower valley part and used to grow from strength to strength to have the status of the second oldest municipality in Assam. The Goalpara urban area had become the Sub-divisional headquarters of the Goalpara Sub-division and the headquarters of the district of the same name. This urban area being the door of the western part of Assam now been connected by railway, national and state highways, a number of other roads of importance. As such there has been rapid increase of activities as well as the problems and prospects in the Goalpara urban area. This urban area is least studied and therefore the present study bears a great significance.

INTRODUCTION

Urbanisation is a process of transformation of human society where village activities are replaced by urban activities. Expansion of an urban centre in the initial stage generally takes place within the town delimit, but after a certain stage due to congestion and crowding, it expanded as satellite centres or urban sprawl in the adjoining area. The Goalpara town, one of the oldest towns of Assam expanded through ages from 5.95 km² with a population of 24,433 persons in 1971 to 72.03 km² embracing a population of 80,591 in 2001 in the urban delimit. This paper is a modest attempt to examine the developmental processes through an analysis and statistical interpretation.
THE STUDY AREA

The Goalpara urban area (Goalpara Master Plan) covers an area of 7203 hectares (72.03 km²) with a total population of 80,591 persons of which 41,626 persons are males and 38,965 are females (2001 Census). This urban area is located latitudinally between 26°06′48″N and 26°11′58″ N and longitudinally between 90°32′40″ E and 90°39′13″ E. The Goalpara Municipality established in 1875 is one of the oldest Municipalities in Assam presently been the Headquarters of the district of Goalpara covering an area of 12.182 km² within the Goalpara Master Plan. The municipality has a population of 49,037 persons, the density being 4,025 persons per km² (2001). The Goalpara Master Plan came to exit after a Gazette notification by the Assam Government on Feb. 26, 2004 so that the master plan could support the processes of expansion at present and future too in an extended urban delimit. Accordingly some rural areas surrounding earlier Goalpara town were included in the Master plan. This master plan (Goalpara urban area) is now bounded on the north by the Brahmaputra river, on the east by the Rakashini Hills, on the south by the Moijonga Tea estate and the Urpod Beel and on the west by the Kumri Beel. This area experiences an average annual rainfall of 2322.5 mm. with its high concentration in the summer months. The present Goalpara Municipality along with some revenue areas included in the present Master Plan Area (Goalpara Urban Area) are considered as to be the present study area (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Location map of the study area (Goalpara urban area)
DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

The base map for the proposed study is prepared from cadastral maps of 1: 3,960 scale in consultation with concerned Survey of India Topographical Maps of 1:50,000 scale. Sorts of data related to human population and categories of communities are collected from the District Census Handbooks of Goalpara district. Other secondary information, viz. health facilities, number of educational institutions, number of industries, and number of vehicles are collected from Department of Health, office of the Inspector of Schools, District Industries and Commerce Centre, and District Transport Office, Government of Assam, Goalpara. All forms of secondary data are analyzed with the help of simple statistical techniques and results are interpreted. Some suggestions are also made for further expansion of the urban area and modification of existing activities.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

History of Urbanization of Goalpara
The history of Goalpara as an administrative unit of district level can be traced back from the time of its annexation by the British in the north eastern part of India. In the long past, the erstwhile Goalpara district along with the present Rangpur and Mymensingh districts of present Bangladesh and the districts of Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, Bogra of West Bengal in addition to a part of the Garo hills district of Meghalaya and some parts of Bhutan constituted the Pragjyotishpura kingdom. The district of Goalpara now divided into districts of Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and the present Goalpara had become a part of British India since 1765 when the whole of the Muhammadan possession in Bengal was ceded to the East India Company. Up to the time of annexation by the British to its empire, Goalpara had formed the easternmost part of the Muhammadan province of Bengal bounded by the Manasriver in the east. This territory, which once formed a part of the Koch kingdom of Parikshit was later added to Rangpur to form the Rangpur district of the Bengal province of the East India Company (Allen and others, 2008 and Gait, 2008, 4th reprint).

The present Goalpara town or the Municipality on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra from which the district’s name as Goalpara was derived, and Jogighopa on the opposite bank of the river were two frontier trade outposts from which trade was carried within then Assam. According to Gait, in 1792 MrRaush, a salt merchant at Goalpara, was the only European living there since 1768. He had monopoly in export trade with Assam. After expulsion of the Burmese from the Assam valley and its annexation to the British territory in 1826, David Scott, the then special civil commissioner of North East Rangpur was appointed as the commissioner of the new province. Scott’s old charge as commissioner of North East Rangpur was encompassed also with the new province as a separate district under the name Goalpara.

According to the Treaty of Yandaboo between the Burmese and the British on Feb. 24, 1826, the whole of Assam went under the British rule. During that time Goalpara was annexed with Assam Valley Division. At that time a number of Marwari merchants coming from the Marwar area of present Rajasthan got
established in present Goalpara town and engaged themselves in business, then forming a tiny but important market center.

The Goalpara district was again merged with Coochbehar Division under the commission in all matter vide a government notification dated Dec 3, 1866. Ultimately, the Goalpara region was incorporated in the new province called Assam when it was created as a separate administrative unit in 1874. Subsequently, the Goalpara market center was constituted into a Town Committee on 1st May, 1875 under the district town Act of 1868. In 1877, the Town Committee was upgraded to a second class Municipality under the Bengal Municipal Act 1876. As described by Allen and others (2008, reprint) the urban scenario of Goalpara at its earliest stage was in a manner with a magistrate court and a police lock-up, some public buildings including a high school building and a dispensary with 18 beds. A branch of American Baptist Mission was located in the town. There was considerable export trade in jute, mustard, cotton, lac, and Sal timber collected from the surrounding areas through the Goalpara town. The main commodities involving imports are salt, grain, oil and cotton goods and twist. The whole-sale trade was in the hands of the Marwari merchants, but the majority of the retail shopkeepers were the Muhammadans coming from Dacca. There was no public representation and the municipal administration was carried on with the help of government servants and government nominated members till the enactment and execution of the Assam Municipal Act, 1923 when the election was held for the first time in then Assam.

![Fig. 2: Location of Goalpara at the time of inception (after M’ Cosh, 1837)](image)

The Goalpara town covered an area of 5.95 km² had a population of 24,433 persons with a density of 2,803 persons/km² in 1971. The water supply scheme was introduced in Goalpara town in 1963. About two thirds of the town area were having water supply through pipes. The rest of the town area was served with water drawn from wells and tube wells. The Municipality Board had also provided street light since 1956. Like other towns and cities the Goalpara Municipality has also experienced the increasing trend of population as shown in Table 1. Table 2 shows the trend of growth of population in the Goalpara urban area.
TABLE 1: TREND OF GROWTH OF URBAN POPULATION IN GOALPARA MUNICIPALITY, 1901-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Growth rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>6287</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>5964</td>
<td>-5.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>6212</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>6415</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>7793</td>
<td>21.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>10192</td>
<td>30.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>13692</td>
<td>34.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>16703</td>
<td>21.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>43077</td>
<td>157.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>49037</td>
<td>13.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: District Census and Handbooks, 1971, 1991 and 2001

TABLE 2: GROWTH OF POPULATION IN GOALPARA URBAN AREA, 1951-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Growth</th>
<th>Percentage of decennial growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>13,454</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>19,671</td>
<td>6,217</td>
<td>46.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>32,724</td>
<td>13,053</td>
<td>66.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>65,935</td>
<td>33,211</td>
<td>101.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>80,591</td>
<td>14,656</td>
<td>22.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


LOCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF GOALPARA AS URBAN CENTER

The origin of Goalpara market center dates back to the 18th century A. D., when the first salt merchant Mr Raush started his business from an oblong hill called the Holukanda. The structural formation of the area then was such that it stood in the Archean rock mass having a height of about 442.8 feet (135 metres) and the circumference of 2 kms. The hill was jutting out into the Brahmaputra. It was bounded on three sides by the river Brahmaputra. Indeed, during the summer it was all together surrounded by water and converted into an island (Fig. 2). At that time a road was constructed around the hill. It joined the plain or the mainland through a strong bund. A summit in northern part of the hill was leveled down for recreational purposes and also for a parade ground, even as they do not exist today. The hill was endowed with numerous springs of finest water. The Kutcheriy, jail and the jail hospital then stood upon a rocky spot of land at the foot of the Holukanda hill. The town of Goalpara then stood on a low plain in the western part of the hill (Fig. 3).
Subsequently a bazar called the Namuna bazar adjacent to the hill was developed as market. It had a population of more than five thousand as reported by M’ Cosh in 1837. There was a long street with bazar and shops. Almost everything for local use was procurable from these bazar and shops. The town was almost built up of grass, mates and bamboos. With the exception of the principal road, almost all the areas of the town were flooded with rain water (M’ Cosh, 1837).

PRESENT STATUS AND TREND OF GOALPARA URBAN AREA

The urban growth of Goalpara had been restricted by the river Brahmaputra on northern side and as such the trend of development of the township has been clearly visible towards the east, west and south of the town. But most of the development is taking place now towards southern direction because of plenty of open and agricultural lands. However, due to lack of economic base and existence of proposed reserved forest in large scale, development process of the township has been very slow.

The present Goalpara town was a harbour town for long before the British came to rule the north eastern part of India. At the time of the British rule, Goalpara served as a nodal centre not only for the present lower part of Assam but also for the greater erstwhile Goalpara region.
The Goalpara town forms one of the oldest Municipalities established in 1875 in Assam. After the Independence of the country, the Goalpara town was given the status of the sub-divisional headquarters of the Goalpara sub-division under the then Goalpara district. At the time of reorganisation of the some of districts of Assam in 1983, the Municipality had attained the status of the Headquarters of the newly formed Goalpara district. For the expansion of urbanisation, the Government of Assam had notified the Goalpara Master Plan for the Goalpara Urban Area including the Goalpara Municipality and surrounding revenue village areas on Feb. 26, 2004.

The present Goalpara urban area covers 72.03 km\(^2\) (7203 hectares) of land, whereas the Municipality area covers 12.18 km\(^2\) only. The total population of Goalpara urban area was 80,591 persons of which 41,626 persons were males and 38,965 are females as per 2001 census (Table 3).

**TABLE 3: A COMPARATIVE PICTURE OF POPULATIONS OF GOALPARA URBAN AREA, GOALPARA DISTRICT AND ASSAM, 2001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Area (km(^2))</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Density (Persons/km(^2))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Goalpara urban area</td>
<td>72.03</td>
<td>80,591</td>
<td>1119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Goalpara district</td>
<td>1824</td>
<td>8,22,306</td>
<td>451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>78438</td>
<td>2,66,38,407</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Compiled from District Census Handbook, Goalpara, 2001*

The Goalpara district has at present two urban centres – Goalpara Municipality and Lakhipur Town. According to 2001 census, the population of the Goalpara Municipality was 49,037, whereas the Lakhipur town had 12,547 persons.

The population of the Goalpara urban area comprises ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse groups. Again there are three broad communities viz. the scheduled castes (SC), scheduled tribes (ST) and general castes people. According to 2001 census, out of the total population of the Goalpara urban area, the scheduled tribes constituted 11.64 percent, while the district and the state had 4.00 and 12.4 per cents respectively. The shares of the scheduled castes and general castes in the urban area were respectively 9.27 and 79.09 per cents (Table 4).

As regards the total literacy rate, the Goalpara urban area is having 58.22 percent of which the males register 63.68 percent and the females 52.39 percent, whereas the Goalpara district accounts for 58.56 percent and the state of Assam has 64.28 percent (Census, 2001). The literacy rate in the Goalpara urban area is slightly lower than the district’s average. This is mainly because of inclusion of a number of revenue village areas within the urban area and a large section of poor working class residing within the urban boundary. The population of the rural areas and the poor working class are having comparatively low rates of literacy.
TABLE 4: COMPARATIVE STATISTICS OF SCHEDULED TRIBES, SCHEDULED CASTES AND GENERAL CASTES POPULATION, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.no.</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>% ST population</th>
<th>% SC population</th>
<th>% General Castes population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Goalpara urban area</td>
<td>11.64</td>
<td>9.27</td>
<td>79.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Goalpara district</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>91.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>12.40</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>80.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from District Census Handbook, Goalpara, 2001

The economy of the Goalpara urban area depends primarily on the tertiary sector. Most of the people are engaged in such activities which are neither cultivator nor agricultural labourers nor household industry workers. Out of 30.28 per cent of total workers (24403) in the study area, 10.50 percent is engaged as cultivators, 2.50 percent as agricultural labourers and 1.70 percent as household industry workers and 85.30 percent as other workers.

Pattern of development

As an urban center starts to grow the range and number of its functions that it supports generally tend to increase. The facilities such as good road networks, markets, health centers, educational and financial institutions, and entertainment centers, etc. strengthen the effectiveness of the town to facilitate the entire populous of the surrounding areas. At the same time, the urban center helps in diversifying the local economic opportunities not only to the urban dwellers but also to those in the neighbouring areas. The urban activities use to expand regularly in the nearby areas like that of an ‘organism’ and in the course of time the small market center with more and more spatial organization becomes a town, a city or a conurbation. The Goalpara town is one of the oldest towns of Assam and it is the second Municipality town established in 1875 in Assam. It is located at the south bank of the river Brahmaputra. Goalpara is primarily an administrative town and almost all the district administrative offices are located here. To accelerate the process of expansion of urbanization towards the surrounding areas, the Government of Assam notified Goalpara Master Plan Area on Feb. 26, 2004. As per the notification it includes the Municipality area and surrounding revenue villages which are considered as the class III Goalpara urban area.

The pattern of development of the Goalpara urban area is restricted towards northern and eastern sides due to the existence of the river Brahmaputra. So the possibility of urban expansion is compounded towards the south and south west. Two main urban patterns of development, viz.

(i) the compact zone and
(ii) satellite markets characterised by both the human and environmental set up are best observed in the Goalpara urban area. These patterns preserve a greater number of large patches of land within which nature can thrive. On the other hand, the patterns of urban sprawl and uncontrolled development along
the newly constructed and developed road sides have created problems not only to the environmental aspect but also to the people living in those areas. The major development of road transport network makes a new type of development. After the construction of the NaranarayanSetu over the river Brahmaputra, the Goalpara urban area is connected with northern districts of Assam by road and railway networks. Before the construction of the NaranarayanSetu, Goalpara was connected to the north bank by ferry services only. The Goalpara urban area has been linked with other parts of the state and the country as well by NH 37 which passes through this area. The Agia road and Matia road passing through the town connect the NH 37 at Solmari and Dudhnoi respectively. These roads and railway carry all the incoming and outgoing vehicular traffics. The other two link roads connecting Goalpara town with other parts are the Pancharatna road and Dakurvita road.

The inception of the Goalpara as an important market centre dates back to 1792 when a salt merchant as mentioned already started to import salt for the people of the region. The establishment of petty traders’ shops, play grounds and a network of communication has helped to develop a pattern of compact expansion of the then Goalpara town. The Swarajroad, and the J N Road constructed more than decade ago to connect the NH37 help to sprawl the settlement in Goaltuli, Bamunpara, Chandaria, Tilapara, and Sonbari areas. The Boro Bazar area gradually developed as an important market centre when the river bank erosion started at the Namuna bazar. In the course of time, the sub-divisional headquarters was housed in the northern side of the Holukanda hill and other sub-divisional offices were also housed in the nearby areas. Gradually the educational institutions, viz. P R Govt HS & M P School, Amolapatty LP School were established and the surrounding areas were developed as important areas for human settlement. Having the facilities of government jobs in different offices, the employees used to settle in the nearby areas. The slow but steady expansion of the town got accelerated after the establishment of the higher educational institutions like the Goalpara College and the Goalpara Law College which helped to develop the present New Market area.
After the construction of the embankment near the PuraniSmasan (Old cremation ground) in ward number 7, the expansion of the town took place towards the southern direction along the main road. The subdivisional administration of Goalpara allotted land to the people coming from different areas at the time of partition of India and as a result two colonies were established near the New Market area. After the reorganisation of the districts of Assam, Goalpara got the status of district headquarters of the district of the same name. It was located in the southern fringe of the town (ward number 7) and as a result more and more expansion took place towards the southern direction. Physical characteristics of the landform in the Goalpara urban area limits the continuous expansion of the commercial activities and as a result the satellite market centres were developed in different areas (Fig. 5).

CONCLUSION

The present study is an appraisal of the pattern of urban growth and development through 100 of years together of oldest municipality like the Goalpara town in North East India. Such municipalities or towns are least studied. From this point of view the present study seems to be a significant one. This Goalpara town needs better treatment through well-designed and well-equipped investigation in order to bring out the real and complex faces of the town.
REFERENCE

- District Census Handbooks 1971, 1991 and 2001