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## Urbanization in Assam: A Study on Goalpara Town

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### **Abstract:**

*The paper attempts to study the urbanisation process of Assam with special reference to Goalpara town. Goalpara town is one of the oldest towns of Assam and occupied an important place in the history of the region. This paper tries to bring a systematic study of the urbanisation process of Goalpara Town and its descending growth rate during the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

### **1. Introduction**

Goalpara Town, covering an area of 6.5 sq km, situated in the southern part of river Brahmaputra, is one of the oldest towns of Assam. The town was connected to the NH-37 by a road named Agia Road. The Goalpara town played a role of bridge in the field of trade and commerce of the state during colonial period. This was the centre of salt trade of Assam with Bengal and many European merchants settled in this town. The first British go down of lower Assam was established here. This town was a part of the undivided Goalpara district of Assam, which comprises the present districts of Dhubri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon. In 1983, this vast tract of land was divided into two districts and the share of Goalpara town went to new Goalpara district.

The history of urbanization in Goalpara district had a colonial background. The second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of urbanization in this tract of Assam. This was the second Municipal Board of the state of Assam after the Gauhati Municipal Board, established on April 1865. This town was constituted under a Town Committee on May 1875 under the District Towns Act of 1868 and the Bengal Municipal Act of 1876 upgraded it to a Second Class Municipality in 1878. In this paper an attempt is made to study the urban growth of the Goalpara town from 1951 to 1981.

A town is known for its multi-dimensional character, in spite of being a physical or geographical unit it is also a socio-economic and cultural unit. The study on the socio-economic change in urban life is very significant because of its inter-relationship and inter-dependence of the different aspects of life. The inter-relationship and inter-dependence is related to the social, educational changes and functional distribution of the population of an urban area.

This paper tries to bring a systematic study of the urbanization process of Goalpara town and its declining growth rate in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The data are collected from the Government publications like Town Dictionaries of Census of India, Statistical Hand Books and District Gazetteers.

### **2. Growth of Urban Population**

The percentage urban population in India has gone up gradually from about 11% in 1901 to 17% in 1951 and then to 23% in 1981. In Assam the percentage increases from 4.29% in 1951 to 8.82% in 1971. This growth rate shows almost a double increase in urban population. In this growth the migrant population have significant share because the percentage of total migrant urban population in Assam increases from 35% in 1961 to 51.6% in 1971. It registered a decadal increase of 16%. The census statistics of the period, from 1951 to 1981, shows that Goalpara district (undivided) shares an average percentage of 10.2 of the total urban population of Assam.

In 1951, the total population of Assam was 90, 43,707 and only 4.6% population was registered as living in urban areas. The percentage of the urban population of Goalpara district (undivided) living in three urban centres namely Goalpara town, Dhubri town and Gauripur town was 9.8%, while Goalpara town occupied a share of 25% at district level. The female sex ratio of the town was 774 per 1000 male.<sup>1</sup>

The Census of 1961 shows a tremendous rise in the percentage of population living in urban areas of Assam and the percentage grown up from 4.6% in 1951 to 7.6% in 1961. The rise of urban population also can be seen in Goalpara district (undivided) and got fillip of 12.83% and came in third rank after Kamrup and Lakhimpur in urban population desk. This rise resulted to the proliferation of another six towns in Goalpara district (undivided) and the number of urban centres rose to nine. The partition of India and its consequent mobilization of people was one of the important causes of the rise of urban population along with the normal migration of people for socio-economic purposes. The increase of rural-urban migration became an important factor of its rise because 50% of the urban

<sup>1</sup>Census of India: 1951, vol- XII, Assam, Manipur and Tripura, p- 27

population was constituted by the migrant category viz, intra-district, inter-district, inter-state and inter-country migrants and the share was registered as 8.9%, 4.6%, 13.1% and 23.4% respectively.<sup>2</sup>

On the context of Goalpara town, the year 1961 was important because for the first time the municipal boundary of the town was demarcated as 5.18 sq. km. The urban population of the town was increased by a decadal growth variation of +3,500 persons compared to the previous census but at the district level the percentage of urban population was decreased from 25% in 1951 to 13.50% in 1961. The female sex ratio of the town per 1000 male was 761.<sup>3</sup>

The census statistics shows that a considerable portion of 12% of urban population moved out of the town. This out-migration of population from the town was the direct result of the lack of industrial development of the town and growth of nearest town like Bongaigaon town. The railways and heavy industrial development became the strength of the town. The Bongaigaon Railway Junction is one of the major railway junctions of Assam and becomes the gateway to enter into the entire North-East India. The industrial backwardness of the town was another cause of the outmigration. Besides some small scale industries like flour mill, rice mill, soap factories etc. no heavy industries were implant at this town which could facilitate the employment avenues for the people.

At national average for the period of 1961-71, Assam registered a rapid rise of 121% of urban population and the percentage of urban population gone up to 8.82%. The share of urban population of Goalpara district (undivided) almost remain the same of 12.98%, at state level, along with Kamrup and Lakhimpur, while at the same time the districts like Darrang and Sibsagar showed a better rise in the percentage of urban population.

The chronic decline of the population of Goalpara Town can also be seen in the census of 1971. Again the percentage declined from 13.5% in 1961 to 9.69% in 1971. The 3.81% of urban population moved out of the town to the other towns of the district. For example, the urban population of Bongaigaon town rose from 8.57% in 1961 to 14.48% in 1971 and fall under Class III town.

### 3. Occupational Distribution of the Population

Occupational distribution of the population is an important and determining factor of an urban area because as per the census definition of India, at least 75% of the male working population of an urban area should engage in non-agricultural economic pursuits. In 1961, the total urban population of the district was 1, 02,143 and the number of population engaged in non-agricultural services were 35,058 which constitute 32.33% of the urban population. The female sex ratio of the urban workers was 7.06 per 100 male workers. The occupational distribution of the town dwellers has been depicted in the form of a pie diagram as presented in figure 1.

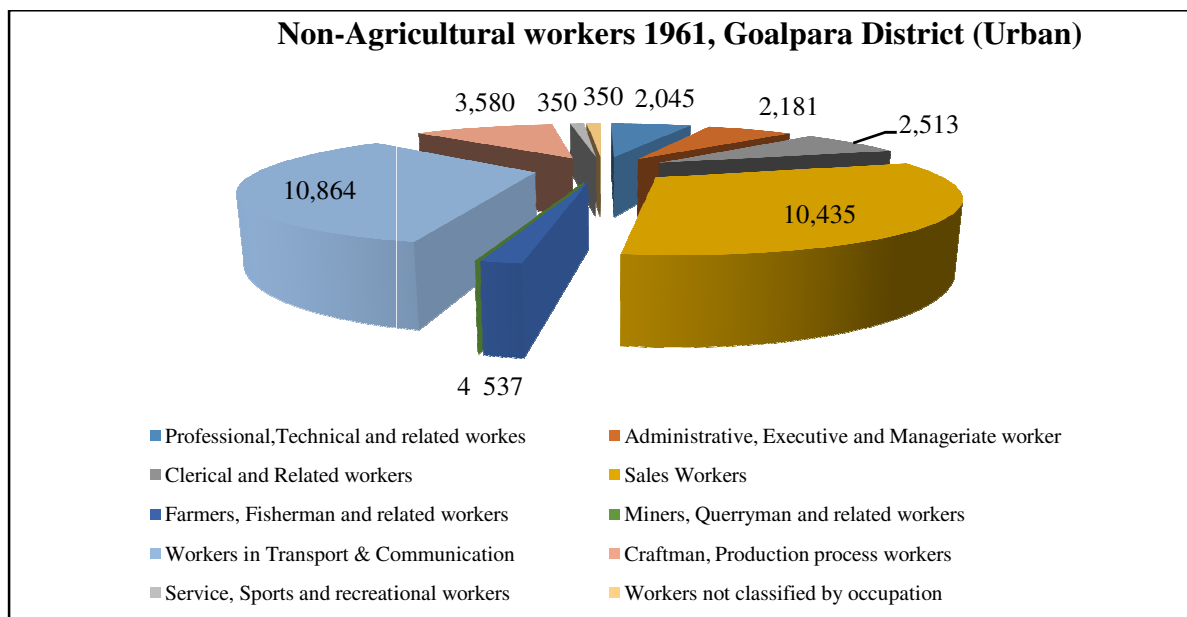


Figure 1: Occupational distribution of the town dwellers in 1961, Goalpara district.

The percentage of non-agricultural urban population of the district dropped in the Census of 1971. The percentage declined from 32% in 1961 to 29% in 1971. The female sex ratio of the working class was 4.45 per 100 males. The 9.15% of the total share of urban workers of the district was engaged in Goalpara town, which comprised 27.4% population of the town. The numbers of women engaged in non-agricultural pursuits of the town was 5.4 compared to 100 male populations. The share of non-agricultural population of the town dwellers has been depicted in the form of a pie diagram as presented in figure 2.

<sup>2</sup>Census of India: 1961, vol- III, Assam, p- 108

<sup>3</sup>Gazetteer of India: Assam State: Goalpara District, pp- 88-89

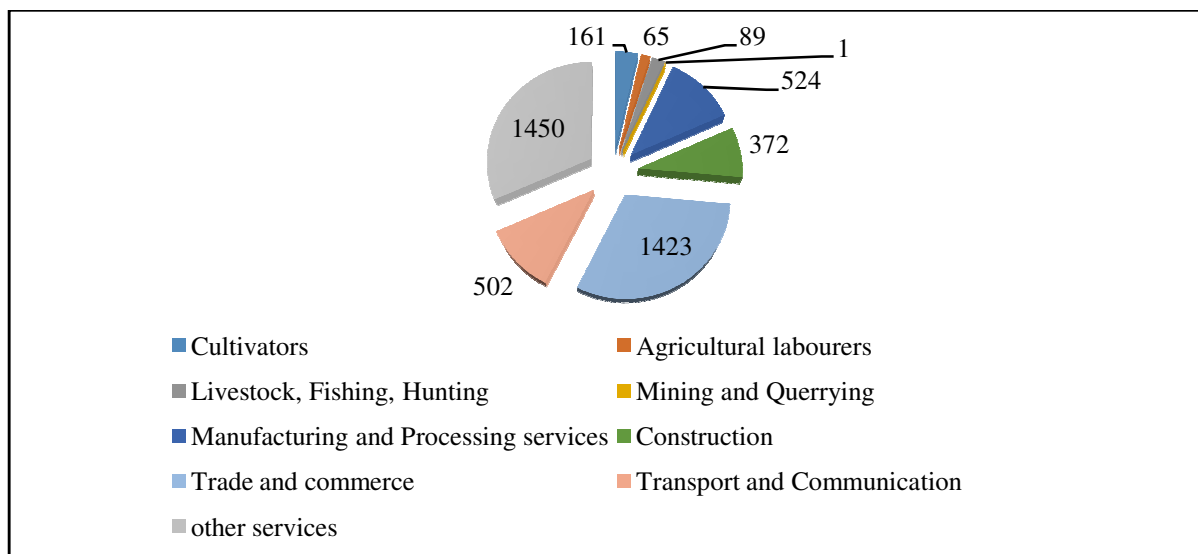


Figure 2: Working class population of Goalpara Town in 1971.

#### 4. Municipal Governance

The history of local self-governance in urban areas of Goalpara district can be traced to the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Municipal Board was established in Goalpara town on May 1, 1875 under the District Towns Act of 1868 and was upgraded into Second Class Municipality under Bengal Municipal Act of 1876. But there was no public representation and municipal administration was carried out by the help of Government servants and government nominated members till the enactment of the Assam Municipal Act of 1923. This Act laid the provision for the commencement of elections through which members were elected to look after the municipal areas properly.

#### 5. Condition of the Basic Urban Amenities

Urban areas in India are known for abject deprivation of civic amenities like water, sanitation and burdened with air pollution, traffic congestion and electricity failure. There is no doubt that big cities have received more attention and most of the programme with increased funds flowed to them, while small cities and towns have been relegated to the background ignoring the fact that better rural and urban linkage could be established only by developing small cities and towns. There has been a serious lack of vision for the small cities and towns.<sup>4</sup>

The condition of drinking water supply facility in urban areas of Goalpara district (undivided) was not satisfactory, except some portions of the municipal areas of Dhubri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon town. Here, the service was provided by the municipalities. The people of the other urban areas of the district depend mostly on ring wells, tube –wells, tanks, rivers, canals etc. for their drinking purposes.<sup>5</sup>

According to the statistics, out of the total 2626 number of household population in 1971, only 36.5% houses had protected toilet facility and rest of the population were dependent on *Kuccha* latrine system.<sup>6</sup> There was no fire brigade service at Goalpara town. Towns are the service points of health and education of a country. Goalpara town had served the region with one 65 bedded Civil Hospital, one nursing Home, 1 Dispensary and 1 Chest Hospital cum T.B. Centre.<sup>7</sup>

In the period between 1947 and 1983, there were 10 Primary, 3 Junior Secondary and 1 Higher Secondary Schools at Goalpara town. The establishment of Goalpara College in 1955, at Goalpara town, was the beginning of imparting collegiate education of the district. Both Arts and Science stream were introduced at the time of establishment.

Among vocational institutions, there were 2 Type Writing centres at the town. There was also a Public Library with a reading room namely District Library Goalpara, Goalpara. Apart from these, two cinema halls namely *Paku* and *Kalpana*, 1 Community cum Auditorium Hall and 1 Stadium were found as its recreation facilities.

#### 6. Conclusion

In summary, it could be concluded that the town, Goalpara, where urbanization process started during the colonial period because of its commercial credibility. However, the town showed a remarkable sluggishness in the phenomenon of urbanization during post-colonial period. The actual reason for this turning down of the process could be traced as the marginalization of the small and medium

<sup>4</sup> R. B. Bhagat, Access to Civic Amenities among Urban Poor in Small Cities and Towns in India, published in URL: [infochangeindia.org/agenda/urbanization/size-matters.htm](http://infochangeindia.org/agenda/urbanization/size-matters.htm), infochange Agenda, August 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Goalpara District Gazetteer, 1979, p-482

<sup>6</sup> Census of India, 1971, voll- III, Assam, Town & Village Dictionary, Goalpara, p-282

<sup>7</sup> Census of India 1981, voll- III, Assam, Town & Village Dictionary, Goalpara, p-458

towns in urban policies of the Government of India. This continuous decline in the process of the urbanization could definitely be a threat to the future existence of the town.

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