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**Deforestation and Transition of Tribal Population: A Study in Kokrajhar district of Assam, India**

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in Kokrajhar district of Assam, India**

**Abstract**

The migrations of tribal people and their changing attitude towards the forests are often held responsible for persistent deforestation in different parts of the world. Even though this discernment is based on facts, analyzing the circumstances that drag tribal people to such situations is also equally important. As per Kokrajhar district of Assam in India is concerned, although the overall growth of tribal population is lower than the growth of other population over the period 1961-2001, there was significantly higher growth rate of tribal population in forest area of the district. Meanwhile the share of tribal population in the non-forest area of the district was decreasing gradually. While, during the middle of the period, growth rate of non-tribal population in the forest area notably declined, during the recent decade there was a slide increase in it. Conversely, tribal population increased erratically during the middle of the period, but during the recent decade it did not only declined all of a sudden, nevertheless the growth rate collapsed to reach a negative value. Despite diminishing of tribal population, deforestation is going on at large scale in the district in recent years too. On the other hand, owing to the too much profit-making attitude of the forest department and devious tactics of some clever outsiders, the attitude of the tribal people towards the forest, who were forest friendly in olden times, is found to deviate substantially and seen to involve in detrimental activities of damaging forests.

**Key words:** Forest area, Non-forest area, Forest village, Other settlements, Scheduled Tribes, Non Scheduled Tribes, Forest department, Census.

**JEL Codes:** A13, J11

**Introduction**

**Tribal people and forests**

There has been an age-old inseparable relationship between the indigenous people and forests. It is evident that at one point of time, most of present forests belonged to the indigenous people who lived in symbiosis with forests. As such, they tend to have close cultural and economic links with the forests and the entire economic activities and livelihood of these people were fully dependent on it. These indigenous people include a high proportion of tribals and at present, they are among the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society in

India (World Bank Report, 2006). With the emergence of British colonial rule in India, the forest and subsistence oriented lifestyle of tribal communities changed because of the British administration's attempt to impose their authority over the forests (Basu, 2010). The first such attempt towards forging legal mechanism to assert and safeguard state control over forests was made through the Indian Forest Act of 1865, which was replaced by a far more comprehensive piece of legislation in 1878. The same Act, according to Briefing Paper of Centre for Civil Society, New Delhi (2003), with minor modifications in 1927, is still operational in independent India. However, recently, through

an act, called the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, the rights of the tribals over the forests have been recognized to some extent.

Along with the growth of technology based modern life, forest resources are being excessively used for different purposes, which has resulted in a loss of forest cover. In most cases, tribal people are blamed for the deforestation (Sekhsaria, 1998). The report of the National Commission on Agriculture (1976) holds the tribals responsible for destruction of forests. However, in India, over 60% of the country's forest cover is found in 187 tribal districts where less than 8% of national population lives. This reflects the culture of the tribal peoples to conserve forests (Sekhsaria, 1998) and as such, tribal people cannot be held sole responsible for deforestation.

### Study area

The state of Assam is in the northeastern region of India and Kokrajhar is one of the twenty-seven districts of Assam, occupying the entrance of the northeastern region from other parts of India lying to the west. It is located on the north bank of river Brahmaputra and shares the international boundary with the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan in the north and interstate boundary with West Bengal in the west. The south is bounded by Dhubri district, while the east is bounded by two districts- Chirang and Bongaigaon.

There had been a frequent change in the boundary of the district since its inception in the year 1983. In 1989, just after six years of its creation, the first change occurred due to creation of new neighboring district of Bongaigaon. After that, there was a major change in the boundary of the district in 2003 due to creation of a tribal autonomous region called Bodoland Territorial Area Districts. The district boundary of 1989 contains a contiguous forest area on the northern part and the people living in this forest area lead almost a homogeneous cultural life. Moreover, two decennial population censuses of 1991 and 2001 were conducted with that boundary. So, for better reflection of forest-people

relationship in the area, the entire contiguous forest area enclosed by the district boundary of 1989 had been considered for the present study (*Figure 1*). The considered area is bounded by 89°46' to 90°38' East Longitudes and 26°19' to 26°54' North Latitudes.

The forest area of the study area fully includes two forest divisions- Haltugaon Forest Division and Kachugaon Forest Division; and partly includes Aie Valley Forest Division and Dhubri Forest Division. Six Reserved Forests are associated with the study area- Guma Reserved Forest, Kachugaon Reserved Forest, Ripu Reserved Forest, Chirang Reserved Forest, Manas Reserved Forest and Bengtol Reserved Forest. Excluding Guma, all Reserve Forests lie within Manas Tiger Reserve created in 1973. As per official records, the forests of Kokrajhar district occupy an area of 1,829 sq km.

### Inception of human population in forest areas of Kokrajhar district

During pre-British period, there were no people inside the forest of the district. Aboriginal forest dwelling communities, such as vanavasi that can be found in other parts of India, were not available in the district. Rather the aboriginal communities of the district, who are now found to live inside the forests, were inhabited in the neighborhood of the forests<sup>1</sup>. During the British time, the administration was in want of population to use as regular laborer in order to extract timber from the forest for earning revenue. Therefore, they enticed the people living in the neighborhood of the forest to live inside the forest by offering some minor right in respect to utilization of minor forest produce. Accordingly, the 'taungya' system was introduced where the laborers were given some amount of land to cultivate in lieu of their physical labor in forestry works. Due to this arrangement, the poor people living in the nearby area started to live inside the allocated forest area in group. These settlements established by the Forest Department were known as forest villages. In this way, the villages inside the forest area came up. Thus, it seems that the forest villages came up because of an arrangement made by the forest department for maintenance of assured supply of labor required in forestry works.

The establishment of Forest Villages started in the Kokrajhar forests during 1911-12. By 1937, Kokrajhar forests acquired a good number of forest villages as given in **Table 1**. After the Forest Act of 1980, the creation of Forest Villages had been stopped and restriction had been imposed on occupying forest lands. At present, the number of Forest Villages within the Kokrajhar District stands at 160. **Table 2** shows the division wise distribution of forest villages.

Kokrajhar district possesses highest number of Forest Villages in comparison to other districts in the state, and in division level, Kachugaon Division of the district has the highest number of Forest Villages, which stands at 106. As per official allocation made by the forest authority, forest villages of the district occupy an area of 242.31 sq km, which is 13.29% of the total recorded forest area of the district.

#### **Attitude of the communities living inside the forests towards the forests**

Mainly, people from four communities live in the forests of the district. They are Bodos, Sonthals (popularly known as Adivasis), Nepalis and Rajbongshis. Among them, Bodos were the oldest and dominant tribe in the district<sup>ii</sup>. They belong to Scheduled Tribes (ST) category of Indian Constitution. Rajbongshi community is a branch of the Bodos (Sunder, 1895) and as such, they are contemporary to the Bodos in the district. Adivasis migrated in the district from Sonthal Pargannas and Chota Nagpur during British period in search of labor and land<sup>iii</sup> and Nepalis migrated from neighboring country of Nepal.

The Bodos constituted majority within and periphery of the forest of the district and were closely connected with forest product utilization and forestry works. Although the main occupation of the Bodos was cultivation, they collected about sixty percent of their foods and drinks from the forest. Their food habit was characterized by the forest edible plants. Nature was their main defender in respect of health care. Their culture, society, religion were founded with forests as base and therefore, these institutions have a close relationship with the nature. They worship a plant called

“*Shijou*” as a symbol of their god, which is planted at the corner of the courtyard of their home. They were very much sincere about utilization of forest products; and various taboos, norms and conventions, guarded by myths, were imposed on their people in order to restraint them from misuse and destruction of scarce and vital trees and plants surrounding them. They celebrate a festival called “Bwishagu” when their nature regains its green look at the arrival of monsoon. In turn of nature’s nurture to them, they guarded the forests and thus, a strong relationship grew up between them. They used to think that they are for forest and forest belonged to them; they were not ready to accept the authority of somebody else over their forest. On the activities and attitude of the Bodos towards the forest, Jacob (1939), the then Deputy Conservator of Forests of Assam, mentioned following lines-

“The Mech is keenly aware of the utility of forests to his domestic economy; like his kinsman the Rabha in Kamrup he is essentially a jungle man.

A keen shikari, he hates the restrictions placed on his incursions into the Reserves for the sake of meat. They are keen fishermen too, fish forming a principal item of their diet; groups of Mech women make almost daily expeditions to the smaller streams in the reserves for catching fish by their primitive methods. One of the subsidiary operations of the Mech ryot [sic] is working out dead-wood and dug-outs from the reserves. He should thus be keenly aware of the necessity for preservation of forests in his own interests.”

On the other hand, Sonthals, who are now popularly known as Adivasis, were provided settlement in the forests after 1902 by British with an intention to use them in managing forestry works. They were also forest friendly and law abiding. The above same forest working planner said that-

“With the constitution of the Kachugaon Reserve in 1902 to provide forest villagers to work for the department, numerous Sonthal villages were formed in the reserves. People of great fecundity, they now form the major source

of labour for work in the reserves. The Sonthal is a very docile person, inured to a hard life but very timid; he has a great respect for the law of the land; and but for his inclination to keep more cattle than he really wants, he is a good neighbour and tenant.”

Unlike people of the above two communities, the activities of Nepalis were not so conducive for sustenance of vegetation. They were identified by British as something unfriendly to the forests. The above same Deputy Conservator of forests opined that-

“With little or no stake in the land—being rarely tillers of the soils—they frequently set fire to the forests to obtain fresh grass for their cattle and to convert tree forests into pasture. The Nepali is also the only man who keeps goats which are so destructive to tender forest seedlings. A born shikari, he is also a bad poacher, frequently setting fire to forest tracts to facilitate his poaching incursions into the reserves and to concentrate game in local early burnt patches of grass-land where they can easily be slaughtered. He is also very much of a smuggler and is often concerned with the smuggling of opium and guns from Bhutan and selling them to the villagers in the vicinity of the reserves. He is also an unruly and indifferent labourer.”

Thus, people living in the forest area and its vicinity used forest resources to a subsistence level in their daily life.

### **Deforestation and transition of tribal population in forest areas**

An analysis of four different satellite images viz. Landsat MSS Satellite Imagery of December 8, 1977, Landsat TM Satellite Imagery of December 14, 1987, Landsat MSS Satellite Imagery of December 14, 1997 and IRS P6 LISS III Satellite Imagery of November 17, 2007 shows that over the last three decades from 1977 to 2007, there was approximately 693 square kilometers of deforestation in the district (*Table 3*). Though there was a slowdown in deforestation in the middle decade, it had risen up again in the recent decade.

There are two components of population of the forest area - 1) population of the forest villages, and 2) population of other settlements. Other settlements include camps established by forest officials, relief camps, and unrecognized villages (sometimes) etc. In the general population census of India, villages within the forest area recognized by the forest department are mentioned as “forest villages” and are allotted distinct village codes. On the other hand, population of the unrecognized villages is generally incorporated in the population of the adjacent forest villages, but sometimes, these were also mentioned independently in old censuses. Populations of the whole district and its forest areas, as figured in different censuses, are as in *Table 4*.

Over the period 1961-2001, the total population of the district has been tripled, whereas the population of the forest area has become almost five times. Contribution of other settlements to the population of forest area was fluctuating. During the first decade of the period, other settlement constituted 13.36% of the forest area population, then it kept on declining and during 1991 it went down as low as 1.48%; but it suddenly rose up again in 2001 to constitute 27.54% of the population of the forest area. This rise up in the population of other settlements was a result of terrible community clash between the two main communities- the Bodos and the Saonthals, residing in the forest area, that took place in 1996, which led people from both communities to leave their forest villages and live at relief camps established within as well as outside forest area. *Table 5* shows the growth rates of population of the district and forest area in different decades since 1961 up to 2001.

The overall growth of ST population of the whole district is lower than the growth of other people in the district during the period 1961-2001. However, as far forest area is concerned, overall increase in ST population is much higher than increase in non-ST population. After independence, initially the growth of population in the forest area was lower than that of the whole district; but during the three middle decades from 1961 to 1991, forest area witnessed an unwarranted population growth rate. This inconsistent growth of population

indicates that there was a significant migration to the district during this period.

Firstly, during seventies, large scale migration to the forest areas of the district from outside took place at the behest of politicians. The civil war in Pakistan that led to creation of Bangladesh in 1972 may be linked to that immigration in the district during beginning part of eight decade of the last century (Zaman, 2011). That time, Kokrajhar was a part of the Goalpara district that shared international boundary with then East Pakistan. Secondly, that migration created trepidation among the local people that their forest lands were going to be occupied by other people. This brought a new trend to migration to the forest area as leading local people also then started encouraging their poor people to occupy the forest lands in order to keep it in their hands instead of handing it over to outsiders. Accordingly, there was a substantial increase in tribal population of the forest area in that period. This migration may be supposed to be extreme during the period 1971-81, because in the later years of this period the Foreigner Deportation Movement, popularly known as Assam Agitation, spearheaded by All Assam Students Union, emerged demanding appropriate measures from government side for prohibiting such migration; but absence of Census 1981 for Assam has left it to be inconclusive.

The share of both ST and non-ST populations of the forest area to their corresponding populations of the district are increasing (*Figure 2*). During the period 1961-2001, while non-ST population share was increased steadily from 12.6% to 14.81%, there was an abrupt increase in the share of ST population from 19.06% to 41.23%. Still, the growth in recent decade indicates about acquiring a trend of moderate growth of ST population in forest area. Up to 1991, family size of the forest area population used to remain bigger than that of non-forest area by a unit, but during 2001, family sizes of both the areas were converged to five members per family.

Increase in the share of ST population of the forest area to the corresponding population of the district seems to be inconsistent with the

fertility point of view, and thus it suggests that migration of ST people into the forest area from non-forest area had taken place. In this regard, isolated life style of tribal people may be a primary factor. Urban area got its inception in the district in the later part of the 1951-61 decade and after then it was growing at fast rate as *Table 6* shows. Initially, urban life was untried for tribals and therefore, until the next decade of 1961-71 they were seemed to live where they were, as urban tribal population increased from 14.49% in 1961 to 16.24% in 1971 along with coming up of new urban areas. However, in the later years, they are seemed not accustomed with complicated urban life style and started to leave urban areas, and in the next two decades of 1971-91, tribal urban population was eventually reduced to 14.7%. On the other hand, expansion of urban area continued and the economy of the district was turned to be regulated by urban economy. Because of this, the native tribal people have no option other than coming out from their interior places and struggle to cope with the new trend of modern life. This attuned awareness to their inevitable emerging complex life is supposed to make them turn their faces towards urban areas. This was reflected in the increase of urban ST population to 18.58% in the year 2001.

Change in ST population during the decade 1991-2001 is very obtrusive. During the decade there was an increase of 97,034 people for the whole district and 12,463 for the forest area. But there was a diminution of 27,064 ST people in the district, out of which 8,733 are from forest area. As such, there has been an increase of 124,098 of non-ST people in the district altogether, out of which 21,196 belonged to forest area. Thus, during this decade the population of non-ST people increased in both forest and non-forest areas, whereas ST population diminished in both these areas. Due to this reduction, ST population of the district climbed down to 33.67% in 2001 from 41.06% in 1991. It has been very difficult to have an explanation on this whole imbroglio of diminishing ST people in the district. The only incident that could lead to this result was the community clashes between the two communities- the Bodos and the Adivasis, as mentioned earlier. People residing in the forest areas were mainly affected in that conflict, as a

result of which, many people had to come out from their villages and, as the Action Plan of Government of Assam for Rehabilitation of the Refugees (1998) mentioned, stayed in 63 relief camps established in the district. The Bodos, being the main ST as well as dominant and single largest community of the district cannot be considered to move out of the district due to the clash; neither there had been any such increase of ST population in its two neighboring districts of Bongaigaon and Dhubri (*Table 7*), which could have validated this idea.

From overall growth of tribal population in the forest area of the district, it looks as if the growth of tribal population is the primary reason of deforestation in the district. However, recent trends in deforestation and population growth engender deviation from this point of view. Despite trimming down of ST population in the forest area of the district, deforestation had substantially risen up again during the decade 1997-2007. Thus, it leads to conclude that tribals and their population increase cannot be held solely responsible for unabated deforestation in the district.

### **A hard reality of changing attitude of local people towards the forests**

During pre-colonial period, tribal people were the sole owner of the forests of the district. During initial times of British period, people inside and vicinity of the forests were allowed certain concessions with regard to the removal of forest produce for domestic use. The villagers living far away from the forests were also allowed to collect produces required for their daily life at comparatively cheap rates from Zamindari forests<sup>iv</sup>. By these considerations, the sentiment of the local people that they were the owner of the forests could be sustained to certain extent. However, in later times the local people observed that the intention of the so called new forest authority was to exploit the forest for lucrative purposes. Local people used minor forest produces such as fire-wood, thatching grass, ekra, nal, etc., for their domestic use and they did not run business of any kind of forest products. Only a small amount of hard-wood timber was consumed locally for fashioning plough-shares and cart-wheels; dugouts of Schima and Chama trees

were fashioned by local Meches and sold locally. Contrary to this, the forest department started exporting timbers to other densely populated places such as Rangpur, Dacca and Mymensingh in the then Bengal. A good quantity of sal trees was felled to meet the requirement of North-eastern system of the Indian Railways for construction of railway sleepers (Jacob, 1939). For the purpose of exploitation of the forests, a tramway was constructed connecting forest with main railway line. This contrasting activity of the Forest Department dismayed local people.

In course of time, a few local people also made an effort to participate in small trades connected to forest produces. However, since they were less expert in comparison to other educated outsiders in such business, they could not compete with later people in small trades such as dead-wood trade<sup>v</sup>. Though the forest department had a concern on possible ousting of local people from such small trades, they were not willing to put stress on conserving the forests for the interest of the economy of the surrounding people<sup>vi</sup>.

After independence also, same forest exploitation by the forest department continued. Timbers of the forests of the district were dispatched to different states, such as West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Maharashtra and Punjab, of India and to the neighboring country of Bangladesh. During 1970-71 to 1972-73, for the three years, quantities of timbers as in *Table 8* were dispatched from the forest of Kachugaon Division to above destinations through Forest Utilization Officer.

Tribal people were historically protected from their forced integration with the mainstream economy, society, cultural and political system as the result of their relative isolation. Their distinct vulnerability arises from their inability to negotiate and cope with the consequences of this forced integration (Mander, 2011). In course of time, firstly, they had been dislodged from the forest ownership; secondly, their isolated life was perturbed, and thirdly, outsider intelligent predators controlled all trades connected with forest produces. Consequently, local people had to remain as spectators of all

these affairs. Since the forest department placed forest villagers inside the forest for their interest of exploiting forests, it was the bounden duty of the department to take steps to uplift the living conditions of these people and make them capable to cope with emerging situations. Furthermore, progress in education can lead to development of human resources, which in turn enhances the capability of the people towards judicious management of the natural resources for their self sustenance (De, 2011). Thus, advancement of the people of the forest area in education could have played a vital role in preventing forest decay. However, the department turned a blind eye on this vital issue. **Table 9** throws a light on want of educational institutions in the forest villages of the district.

Though it seems that, as the number of primary schools exceeds the number of forest villages, each forest village possesses a Primary School, the fact is that among the villages the schools are not evenly distributed. Until this day, there are no primary schools in more than 25 forest villages. The literacy rates of the inhabitants of forest villages in different censuses are as in **Table 10**.

Gradually local people took to think that their forests had been grabbed by others with an ill attitude; and disappearance of their forests, at the hand of these non deserving people, remains to be only a matter of time. On the other hand, they could not grit to fight for the protection of their forests, as they were inferior to the forest abusers in respect of policy and power. Therefore, they thought that it was better to acquire a profit than surrendering whole total of forest proceeds to others. Ultimately, the attitude of the local people towards the forest was deviated from their earlier approach of considering forest as their integral part of life. A small section of the local tribal poor families accepted fire-wood selling as their livelihood; this was the only means by which local people contributed towards the deforestation in the district in early times. Otherwise, the Forest Department got continuous co-operation from the tribal people towards protecting the forests. Furthermore, their wants were few and could be arranged from the forest itself<sup>vii</sup>. They had no other aspiration but to have two times meal a

day in a peaceful way. They were ignorant about the emerging situation, by which their future was going to be wrought; they could not act in a unified way to hold the forest related trades in their hand<sup>viii</sup>. They were so innocent and faithful that money lenders from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and other states used to come to the district to lend money to these people on interest or agreement just before the farmers were about to harvest their crops, at which period they had to struggle with crisis. The money lenders got their monies back with profit as agreed without any difficulty after the farmers had harvested their crops. As time passed on, the wind of modern life grazed these people too. A few people of the area were also attracted by the luxurious life led by other people. This section of the people was incited by some nasty people from outside. With the help of this negligible number of local tribal and other people, the timber smugglers felled valuable trees of the virgin forest. Still the countdown of disappearance of the forest did not begin until some of forest officials joined hands with these smugglers. When high level officials also got involved in that immoral activity, it paved the way of destruction of the green forest of the district.

Then the political movement of the Bodos, demanding a separate state under the constitution of India, came in 1987. To carry on their expensive arms involved struggle the activists found timber selling as the easiest way for collecting money. When there was a political settlement for Bodo problem, the forest of the district had already received a huge damage. After the political settlement, a new trend of clearing natural forests was added in which a section of the rich and politically strong people are engaged in replacing the natural forests by commercial plants like tea, robot etc.

The most disheartening development in the district is that along with commercial timber traders, a section of the common people from the forest dependent communities has also got involved in deforestation activities in an organized way. However, the truth is that these common people have earned nothing out of such nasty activities; there is improvement neither in their financial condition nor in living conditions. In true sense, they have been used



by clever people from outside, who are the true gainers of deforestation. They have been used as a medium for exploiting their own forests.

Quarrels among the forest natives in the question of ownership of the forests were also a factor of unrelenting deforestation in the district. Growing communal sentiments, provoked by social elements, among different forest dependent communities have disrupted the harmony that prevailed among them since long time. Forgetting the truth that they are common owner of their forest, every community living in the forest used to think that they were the real owner of the forests and as such they must have the first right on it. This sometimes resulted in clearing of forests without any purpose but rather only to show his ownership over forest. This worthless attitude was one of the hidden factors that converted a case of brutal murder into an ethnic clash between two forest dependent communities in the district that broke in 1996 (Narzary, 2006).

### Conclusion

In the present context, it is the changing attitude of the forest dwelling communities towards the forest, not the increase in their population, which is leading to the deforestation in the district. In order to slow down deforestation in the district forest department will have to regain active help and co-operation from the forest dwelling communities, without which protection of forests is seemed unfeasible. In this regard, there is an urgent need of a customized conservation approach on the part of forest department. Leaving aside its accent on earning revenue from the forests, more emphasize should be laid on the issues of environmental degradation and foreseeable socio-economic tumbling of the local people because of deforestation. The forest department should adopt necessary measures to convince the local and tribal people that the department is for safeguarding the forest for everybody's interest, and if they stand by the department, their forest could not be destroyed by other people.

The people who are primarily facing, and will be facing, the consequences of clearing forests are the tribals. In the similar way that

developing countries should strive to preserve the environment more (Etim, 2012), preservation of forests are more important to the tribal people for their livelihood and sustenance of their social and cultural systems. However, the fact is that they neither can discern the troubles they are facing because of deforestation nor perceive their gloomy future that is lying behind deforestation. They should be made aware of the inevitable unwarranted crisis that is going to emerge if forests are gone astray. Moreover, leading an isolated life by tribal people from mainstream life can no longer be desired. Their quality of life should be improved by improving their socio-economic condition. There is an urgent need to effect a change in the outlook of tribal people concerning the leading of their life. By imparting proper education, they should be prepared as capable of moving together with mainstream life. Big amount of funds are being allocated for development of tribal life; however, the matter of utilizing these funds in an effective way to bring a qualitative change in their life is also equally important.

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<sup>i</sup> The Meches, a tribe of the Bodo race, have settled down to permanent cultivation of the low-lying tracts in the neighbourhood of the Reserves. –Jacob (1939), p.11

<sup>ii</sup> Till as late as the period of reservation of these forest tracts they were the main, if not the only, inhabitants of these tracts. – same as above

<sup>iii</sup> The Sonthals were originally immigrants from the Sonthal Pargannas and Chota Nagpur who came to Assam in search of labour and land- same as above

<sup>iv</sup> Forests which were within zamindari estates in early times.

<sup>v</sup> Increasing competition in the dead-wood trade from enterprising and educated outsiders is said to be affecting the dead-wood trade of the local Meches-Jacob (1939), p.12.

<sup>vi</sup> The importance of a contented neighbouring population for the proper conservation of these forests and the importance of the proper Conservation of these forests towards the domestic economy of the surrounding population cannot be overemphasised.- same as above

<sup>vii</sup> Their wants are few and easily met from the forest areas which they inhabit. – same as above

viii That ‘unity is strength’ is a doctrine which the unsophisticated Meches have still to learn.- same as above

**Tables and figures:**

**Table 1: No. of Forest Villages up to 1937**

Name of Division	Name of Reserved Forest	No. of Forest Villages
Haltugaon	Manas	11
	Chirang	02
	Bengtal	02
Kachugaon	Kachugaon	90
	Ripu	03
	Guma	12

Source: R. Handique, *British Forest Policy in Assam*

**Table 2: Existing no. of Forest Villages**

Division	Reserve Forest	No. of Forest Villages
Kachugaon	Ripu	18
	Kachugaon	88
Haltugaon	Chirang	21
	Bengtol	02
	Manas	02
Aie Valley	Manas	15
Dhubri	Guma	14

Source: Forest profile of Bodoland Territorial Council

**Table 3: Forest covers of the district**

Year	Forest cover (in sq km)	Decadal decrease
1977	1822.57	-
1987	1469.45	353.12
1997	1357.95	111.5
2007	1129.81	228.14

**Table 4: Populations of the district and its forest area**

Year	Forest Villages		Other Settlements		Forest Area		District	
	Total	ST	Total	ST	Total	ST	Total	ST
1951	27485	-	4238	-	31723	-	202516	-
1961	42537	18838	1365	485	43902	19323	296574	101354
1971	72890	31112	2568	1723	75458	32835	457554	141623
1981*	136082	81597	2707	2057	138789	83654	633142	236836
1991	199272	132080	3000	2389	202272	134469	808730	332049
2001	155636	89879	59099	35857	214735	125736	905764	304985

\*Interpolated figures as there was no census for Assam in 1981

Note: Figure for ST population was not available in 1951 census

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**Table 5: Population growth of the district and its forest area**

Area	Category	Population		Annual Growth Rate of Population During				Ratio of 2001 to 1961 Popln. (1961=100)
		1961	2001	1951-61	1961-71	1971-91	1991-01	
District	Total	296574	905764	3.89	4.43	2.89	1.14	305:100
	ST	101354	304985	-	3.4	4.35	-0.85	300:100
	Non-ST	195220	600779	-	4.93	2.08	2.34	307:100
Forest Area	Total	43902	214735	3.3	5.57	5.05	0.6	489:100
	ST	19323	125736	-	5.45	7.3	-0.67	650:100
	Non-ST	24579	88999	-	5.66	2.35	2.76	362:100

**Table 6: Urban population**

Year	Total	ST	% of ST
1961	9,489	1,375	14.49
1971	17,060	2770	16.24
1991	50,724	7,455	14.70
2001	63,941	11,883	18.58

**Table 7:**

**ST populations in neighboring districts**

District	1991 Census	2001 Census	Increase / Decrease
Bongaigaon	141542	110696	- 30846
Dhubri	32260	32523	263

**Table 8: Timber dispatches to other places**

West Bengal	Bihar	Uttar Pradesh	Orissa	Madhya Pradesh
12564 cubic meter	10464 cubic meter	305 cubic meter	61 cubic meter	34 cubic meter
Tripura	Maharashtra	Punjab	Bangladesh	
30 cubic meter	1 cubic meter	41 cubic meter	77238 running feet	

Source: Working Plan for the Reserved Forests of Kachugaon Division, 1983-84 to 1998-99

**Table 9: Educational institutions in forest areas**

Year	No. of Primary School	No. of Middle School	No. of Secondary School	No. of Senior Secondary School
1971	104	5	nil	nil
2001	168	22	11	nil

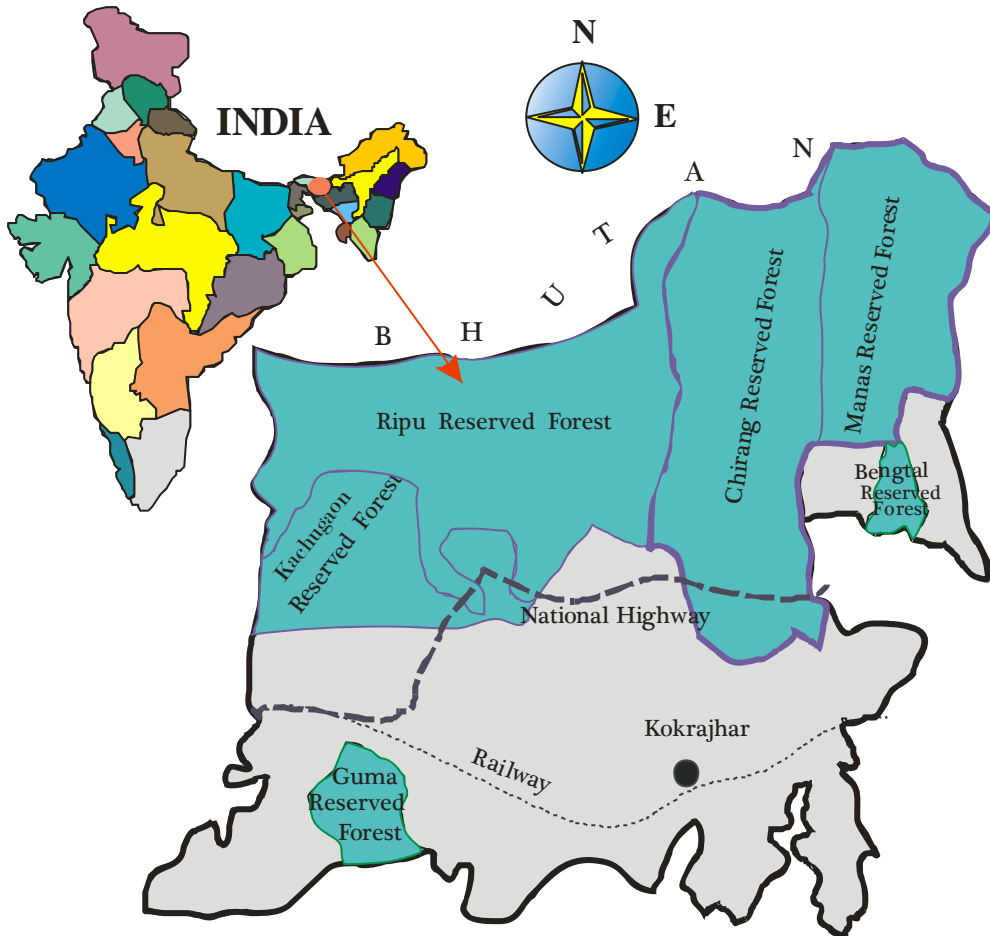
Source: Primary Census Abstracts of Census 1971 and 2001

**Table 10: Literacy rate in forest area**

Year	1961	1971	1991	2001
Literacy rate (%)	11.68	8.37	20.77	26.43

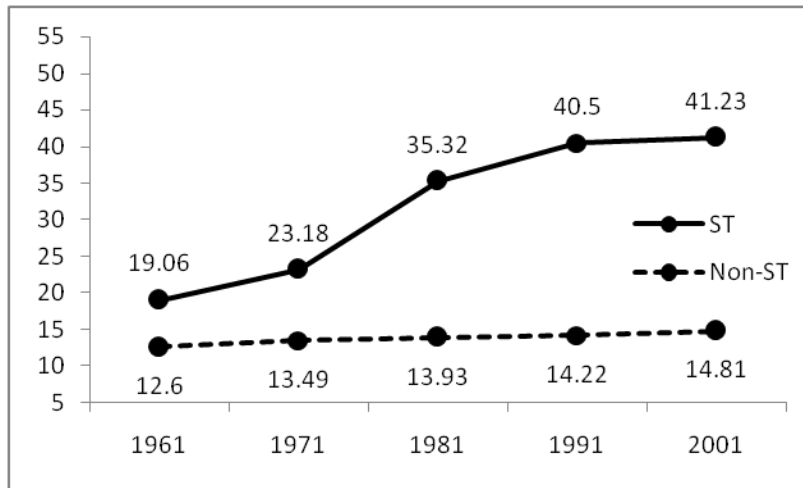
Source: Primary Census Abstracts of corresponding censuses

**Figure 1: Kokrajhar district and its forest areas**



Source: Department of Forests, Bodoland Territorial Council

**Figure 2: Percentage of ST and Non-ST populations of forest area to their corresponding populations of study area**



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