

BIKALI COLLEGE RESEARCH JOURNAL

VOL - I (2008 - 2010)



**RESEARCH COMMITTEE
BIKALI COLLEGE
DHUPDHARA, GOALPARA
ASSAM (INDIA)**

Bikali College Research Journal
Bikali College, Dhupdhara
Goalpara, Assam
783123

Published by Editorial Board Research Journal, Bikali College, Dhupdhara

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Price: Rs. 40/-

Printing : White Leaf Publication, Dhupdhara

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Creating a Female Universe

Mrs. Monalisha Ray Choudhury

Sometimes you want to talk
About love and despair
And the ungratefulness of children
A man no use whatever then
You want then your mother
Or sister
Or the girl with whom you went through school,
And your first love, and
First child-a girl-
And your second
You sit with them and talk
She sews and you sit and sip
And speak of the rate of rice
And the price of tea
And the scarcity of cheese
You know both that you've spoken
Of love and despair and ungrateful children.

(The Female of the Spices-Gauri Deshpande)

The clinched complaint that it's a man's world has more to it than catches the eye. It is an aphorism that captures the andocentric nature of the world we inhabit. The historic, geographic, social, political, intellectual and even mythological definitions of our world are all male, to the complete exclusion of one half of the humanity. And yet it is the male version of the world that has traditionally passed for truth.

The post-modern spirit challenges, among other things, the solidity of traditional 'truths'. Truth now is a hollow construct, made possible by language that is itself hollow and can therefore; accommodate many more such constructs each for which may claim for itself the virtue of veracity. In the book *The Second Sex* (1949) by the eminent French philosopher and novelist Simone de Beauvoir, she wrote a sentence that became very famous and ignited an argument, the sentence is

'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman'. There was no physical or psychological reason why women should be made inferior to men, and yet throughout history and across cultures, women had always been second-class citizens. Biological differences should not be the reason for women's oppression. But their reproductive function has pushed woman to the private sphere and has always put man at an advantageous position. Critics often ask why women have allowed man to subordinate them brought de Beauvoir back to body and motherhood. Excluded from the public sphere, women fail to form alliances made by men in work, business, government etc. However, it should not be made an excuse of the subjugation. As the French feminist Luce Irigaray put it so succinctly: 'equal or different?'. Essentialists believe that because women are biologically different from men, they are psychologically and emotionally different. Difference, they argue is, not something to overcome, as though it were shameful not to be a man, but something to celebrate: women should be proud to be a woman. They should create their own female universe, just as men do, to share, network and empathise with one another.

In India, a multitude of derogatory attributes have been ascribed to women. According to Mannu, "In childhood a woman must be subjected to her father, in youth to her husband and when her husband is dead, to her sons. A woman must never be independent. She is viewed solely as the mother and the wife, and their roles are idealised. The ideal wife is faithful and uncomplaining and her virtues lie in the services she renders to her husband. Practices like giving away of girls in marriage and importance attached to sons for maintaining continuity of the line have strengthened the patrilineal social structure of Hinduism" No matter how long a way we have come from the times of Mannu, no matter how strongly people (women) voiced against such derogatory remarks made by Mannu and the likes yet there are ample evidences to suggest that women have been subordinated, subjugated and exploited in the society. One of reasons for such a situation is because of the process of socialisation and social learning. A child from a tender formative stage learns the difference between the father and the mother and the roles they play, and consequently the child carries into adulthood a set of sex role expectations that are extremely resistant to change. So a girl child accordingly learn to accept the authority from the older generation and from men and by the time they reach adulthood, women are well socialised to seek and find gratification in dependence of men. This sex role socialisation and expectations tend to remain a stubborn part of an individual's life.

A historical study of women in India reveals that there were distinct stages of rise and fall in her status. But because of the strong influence of patriarchy she could not hold on to her elevated status and has forever been pushed down to be dominated, subjugated. In such a situation it is very important to create a universe where women can share, voice and thus solve the various problems faced by them. This is where sensitisation comes in. The society has to be sensitised

towards the problems - seen or unseen - encountered by women in various situation.

The feeling of sisterhood is very important - to share and care for each other. If a woman fails to understand another woman and problems faced by her, the women's world which is still at its formative stage will come crushing down and the very purpose of gender just society will be defeated. We should all work together towards solving our problems and be a part of the movement to break away from the patriarchal socialisation and sensitise and motivate every individual to be aware of the reality. Woman who is worshipped is also immersed in a man's world and eventually becomes invisible. It is high time we become aware of the position we are in and make ourselves visible which can be possible only if we are successful in creating a strong bond of sisterhood and a world of our own.

This does not mean that men are not sympathetic towards the problems of women. But after interviewing a number of women it has been found out that most of them distrust the intension of people who are "intellectually curious" rather than passionately angry about the injustice meted out to women. Moreover, since men are not victimised and women do not feel free to discuss their problems with them the true picture of women's experience and problems do not come out.

Shulamit Reinharz in her book, "Feminist Methods in Social Research" said that the use of semi-structured interviews has become the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve involvement of their respondents in construction of data about their lives. Semi structured refers to research approach whereby the researcher plans to ask questions about a given topic but allows the data-gathering conversation itself to determine how the information is obtained. I used this method in collecting information from women in the two tea gardens of Dibrugarh district namely Nahortoli Tea Estate and Jalan Tea Estate and fifty women residing in Guwahati. The analysis was done to find out how women from two completely different sections of the society feel about the concept of sisterhood and having a world of their own. It has been found out that most of the women from the tea community accept whatever injustice is meted out to them as a part of life which shows their acceptance of the patriarchal socialization process. Though 0.5% of the interviewee had a mild urge to protest against polygamy and alcoholism (two very common features among the men of the two gardens) but the fear of being ostracised has kept them mum. When questioned about the spirit of sisterhood most of them said that they sympathise with each other. But it was quite evident from their lifestyle that their very existence was male oriented.

While interviewing the urban women, most of whom were educated very confidently talked about their life experiences and how their peers and other women relatives came forward to help in times of need. The courage to protest against male domination was more evident among most of these women who has established an identity of their own and had no hesitation to discuss personal problems with friends who readily forward a helping hand. This feeling of sisterhood has lessened

the burden of sorrow of the victimised women who otherwise would have gone into depression or their problems would have become invisible to the world resulting in another meaningless life.

During the research it was observed that though belonging to two different environments the problem of women always remain the same. Whether educated or uneducated, whether employed or unemployed they are always dominated by men be it father, brother, husband or other male relatives. However, it is felt that the women who are already victimized are more than ready to help the ones in distress. This attitude of benevolence can help immensely in creating a world where women will feel protected and feel free to relate their problems without the fear of being ostracized. In two cases of the tea community it has been observed that when the women became aware of the fact that even educated women in higher posts are victimised they drew mental strength from them and made the educated women their role model. Being able to identify their personal problems with that of their educated counterpart the feeling of sisterhood further strengthened and the bonding became stronger.

Keeping in line with the research, I talked to a confirmed victimized woman who narrated her life experience and also the experiences of other women whom she met in the family court during her divorce. Being highly educated and placed at a respectable position in the society she could analyse the problems of the other women and felt pity at their helpless condition. A bond was formed with several women and after discussing their problems she went to the highest possible extend to help them. This is another example of creating a female world.

Another observation has been made during the study regarding law. It has been seen that more the laws are framed for protecting the rights of women the more is the increase of rape, murder for dowry, abandoning fiancées, luring girls into prostitution etc. Justice has often been denied in most cases. Women filing complaints against men are often jeered at because they had the guts to protest against the atrocities committed upon them by others.

Here I would like to quote Mrs.Kiran Bedi, who in her book "As I See" writes, "For the large section of women in India, life is still blurred. A women in there is still not sure of what use is education? Does she have the right to continue her education as much as she wants? Who will she marry, why and when? Will she have control over her own earnings? Will she be allowed to take care of her parents, brothers and sisters in case of need? Will she be able to retain her identity or lose it completely and have to start all over again? Will she have any rights on her husband's earnings? Will she be able to decide when she would like to become a mother and how many times? Can she live away from her husband's home if her job so demands? Can she organize domestic help to allow her to get some rest when she returns home after a long days work? Can she return to her parents' home in case of need or is that no longer her home?" These questions are pondered over by every woman and in finding out answers it is very important to create a world where we have people who are sensitized to the graveness of these questions.

A news report published in Pratidin July 19,2010, an Assamese daily needs attention. According to a report submitted at the Lok Sabha by Mr.Ajay Makan, Central State Home minister, Government of India, Assam records the highest reported cases in human rights violation against women and children. The report states that there were 237 cases in 2007, 210 cases in 2008-09 and 212 cases in 2009-10 and 76 cases in the current year till July were registered. To tackle such cases a great amount of empathy is needed which is not possible unless one is gender sensitive. Research studies can be taken up to find out solutions to problems leading to such cases and the results published which will encourage women of different communities handle their problems with much ease.

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Mrs. Ray Choudhury is a Selection Grade Lecturer & HoD English, Bikali College. She has been engaged in Research work on women empowerment and Gender issues.

Growth of Goalpara Urban Area and Population Characteristics: A Geographical study

Bonti Bordoloi

Introduction :

Goalpara urban area faces rapid urbanization and the need to simultaneously expand and modernize their infrastructure while dealing with profound internal socio-economic inequalities as well as severe environmental deterioration. The tremendous pressures on limited urban land have helped to create both ecological and socio-environmental problems within the town itself. The most critical environmental burdens such as inadequate and unsafe piped water supply, lack of proper sewerage and storm water drainage, lack of provision for garbage collection and disposal, problems in health care services, and others have been facing by the people living in the urban area.

The Goalpara Municipality is one of the oldest (1875) Municipalities in Assam, being presently the Headquarters of the district of Goalpara covers an area of 3159.13 acres with the urbanites of about 49,037 persons; the density is being 3,843 persons per km² (2001). The headquarter town is lying at 26° 10' 43" N latitude and 90° 37' 27" E longitude. Through the Gazette notification by the Assam Government on Feb. 26, 2004 the Goalpara Master Plan area came in to exist to support the processes of expansion of urbanization towards surrounding areas and to develop a coordinated approach for future development. The Goalpara Master Plan covers an area of 7149 hectares (71.49 km²) with 81,092 persons living in the area (Town and Country Planning, Goalpara, 1998). The town is bounded in the north by the Brahmaputra river, east by Rakashini Hills in the south by the Moijonga Tea estate and Urpod *Beel* and in the west Kumri *Beel*. This area experiences an average annual rainfall of 250-280 cm. with much concentration in the summer months. The present Goalpara town was a harbour town before the British came to rule this part of the country for a long time. At the time of the British rule in the region, Goalpara served as the nodal centre not only for the lower Assam but also for the parts of West Bengal and the then East Pakistan. After the Independence of the country, the Goalpara town was considered as the Sub-Divisional Headquarters of Goalpara Sub-Division under Goalpara District. At the time of reorganization of the district of Assam in 1983, the Goalpara Municipality attains the status of the District Headquarters. The present Goalpara Municipality and other revenue areas included in the present Master Plan Area (Goalpara Urban Area) are considered as to be the present study area.

Goalpara urban area though covers a small area it exhibits a mosaic of topographic characteristic features such as hills, built up plains, abandoned channel fills, flood plains, wetlands and actively flood affected areas. Having no scientific Master Plan from the geomorphological consideration, this urban centre has, of late; experiences varied types of geomorphologically

significant environmental problems due to rapid increase of population concentration and diversified economic activities.

Database and methodology

The base map for the study has been prepared from topographical sheets of 1:50,000 scale in consultation with Goalpara Master Plan and satellite imageries. For the present study secondary source of information like census records and books, journals and manuscripts are used besides field investigation in different areas to ascertain different facets of urban problems.

Result and Analysis

An urban centre is a place which plays an important role in moulding the socio-economic structure in any area. The urban centre may develop for dissemination of administration, education, trade and commerce, industry, culture and religion, technology and other various important services and facilities. Urbanization is a process usually takes place in two ways-the expansion of the size of existing urban units and the appearance of new units. This study envisage the growth of urbanization in relation to the expansion of the size of existing urban unit.. The present Goalpara town was a harbour town before the British came to rule this part of the country for a long time. At the time of the British rule in the region, Goalpara served as the nodal centre not only for the lower Assam but also for the parts of West Bengal and the then East Pakistan. During British regime the station of Goalpara was first selected by Captain Davidson after the conquest of Assam. The houses stand on the very summit of an oblong hill about 320 feet high and nearly three miles in circumference, jutting out into the Brahmaputra, so as to be bounded on three sides by the river. Indeed during the rains it is altogether surrounded by water, and converted into a perfect island. The town of Goalpara stands on a low plain to the west ward of the hill. It is very considerable extent, and has a population of more than five thousand (M'cosh, 1837).

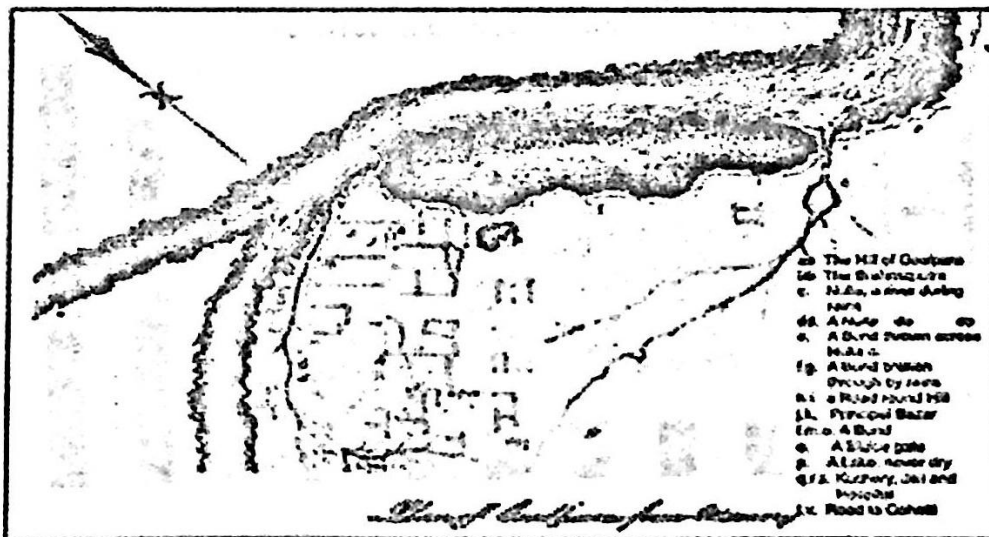


Fig. 1: Sketch diagram of Goalpara town by M'cosh, 1837.

So far population of the urban area is concerned, there are 6287 persons lived as urbanites during 1901 which is decreased to 5964 persons in 1911 showing the negative growth rate population. With the expansion of area the growth rate shows a urban population growth rate of 34.34 percent during 1961. A jump over of areal expansion during 1971 to 1991 the growth rate of population shows a steady growth rate of urban population as 157.9 percent. But the rate of growth of urban population slightly stabilizes in 2001 with an urban growth rate of 13.84 percent (Table 1 and Figure 2).

Table 1 : Trend of growth of urban population in Goalpara Municipality, 1901-2001

Year	Population	Growth rate
1901	6287	
1911	5964	-5.14
1921	6212	4.16
1931	6415	3.27
1941	7793	21.48
1951	10192	30.78
1961	13692	34.34
1971	16703	21.99
1991	43077	157.9
2001	49037	13.84

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

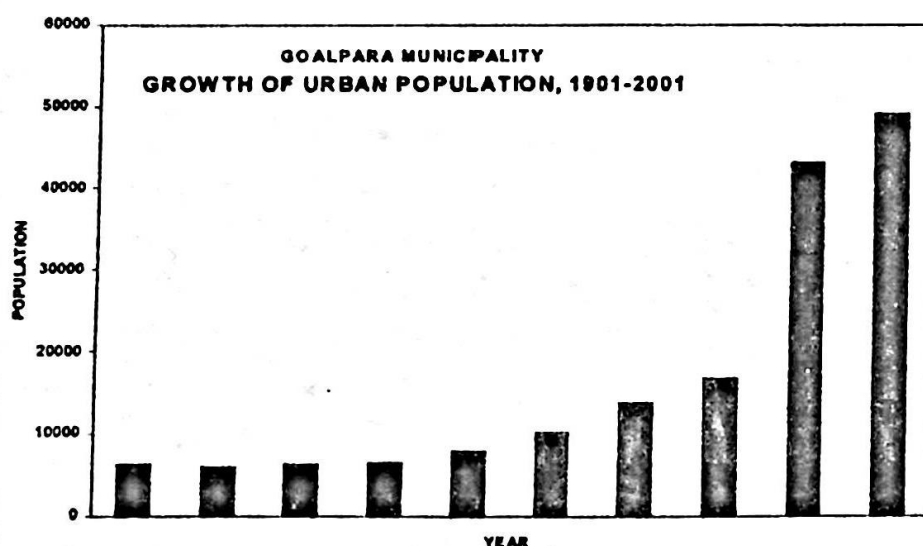


Fig. 2 : Growth of urban population in Goalpara Municipality, 1901-2001

high in comparison to Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe (Fig. 5).

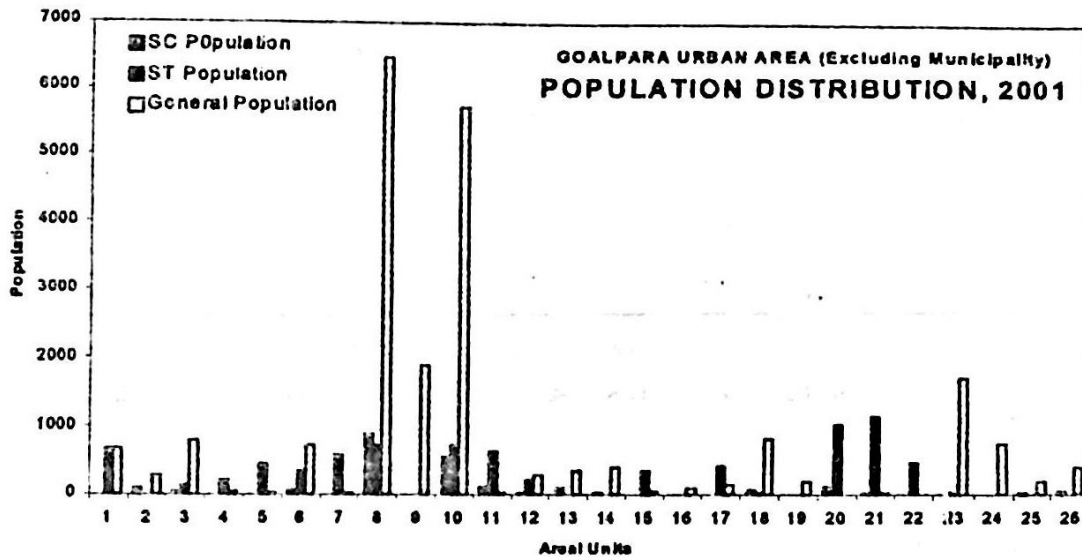


Fig. 4 : Distribution of different categories of population in Goalpara urban area (excluding present Municipality), 2001

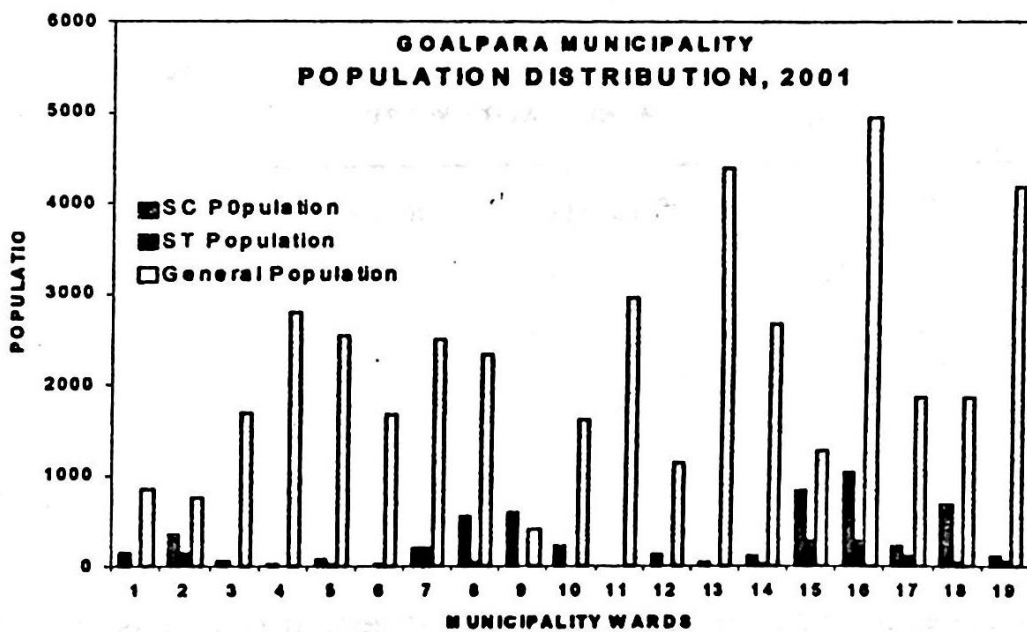


Fig. 5 : Distribution of different categories of population in Goalpara Municipality, 2001

Conclusion

Though the present study is preliminary in nature, yet it throws light on the distributional and compositional characteristics of the population in Goalpara Urban Area. The alarming increase of population with the increase of urban area may create more infrastructural problem in future.

Growth of urban population during 1971-2001 reveals a striking feature of population growth in different municipality wards. It is to be noted that seven new wards have been included during this period. The growth of population in ward number 13, 16 and 19 is very alarming (Fig. 3).

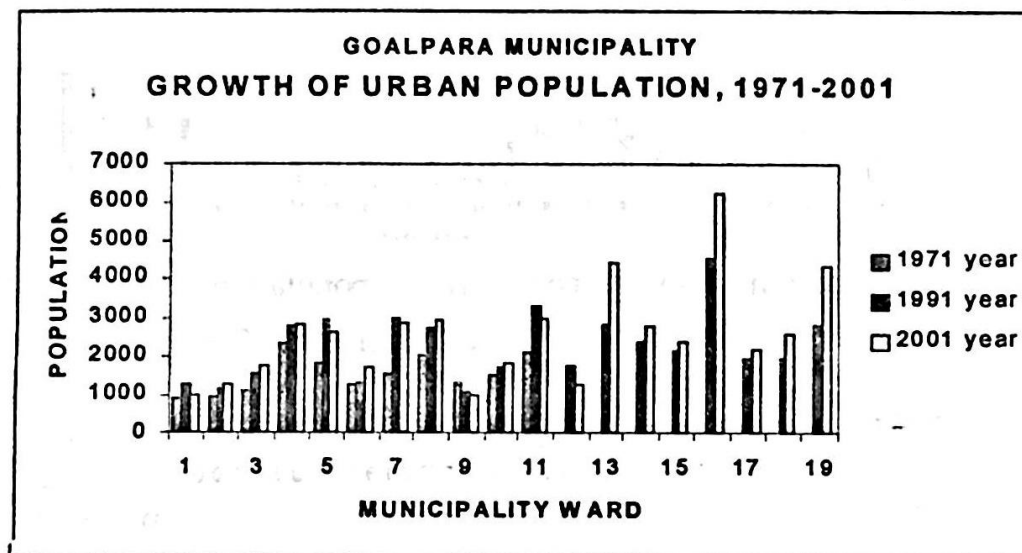


Fig.3 : Ward-wise growth of urban population in Goalpara Municipality, 1971-2001

Due to rapid increase and growth of urban population in Goalpara Municipality, department of town and country planning proposed an ambitious plan for inclusion of more areas in Goalpara urban area and it is approved by the concerned department in 2004. It is indicated in the plan document that the area covered by urban area will be increased to 71.49 km² from 12.49 km². Study of growth, distribution, composition and other characteristics of the population of an urban area is utmost necessary to assess the various needs and available facilities that provide to the people. Distribution of different categories of population viz Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe and general population in Goalpara Urban Area is examined and found that in five different places of Gobindapur, Hasila beel, Bhalukdubbi, Baladmari and Rakhyashini Jungle Block the concentration of general categories of population is much more than that of the other areas (Fig. 4). In contrast to that, the concentration of general category of population within the Municipality Wards is almost

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Mrs. Bordoloi is a Lecturer in the Deptt. of Geography, Bikali College. She has been engaged in research work on urban morphology and river study.