



WETLAND AND NATURAL SOURCES OF FISHERY IN MAJULI ISLAND: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT:

Majuli district is full of wetlands and natural water bodies. Its creation is also a unique one. Originally this island was created by the mighty river Brahmaputra by changing its course of flow. History reveals that land was attached to southern part of Assam. Due to great earthquake, the mighty river Brahmaputra changed its course of main channel of flow to southern side and original channel has been weakly flowing in the Northern side of the mainland. As a result, the whole land has been surrounded by water and it becomes an island. It came to be recognized as the largest river island of the world and its only tributary is known as the Tuniriver which flows from the east to the west. This Tuniriver also changed its course of flow and its original channel became weak, by creating many water bodies which is known as Morituni. The main Tuniriver is still active and it has been recognized as revenue beel of the Government of Assam. This Tuniriver is attached to many water bodies, namely, Bhakatibeel, Bokajanbeel, MalahaKhowabeel, Kharkharibeel etc. Besides these beels, there are so many beels which can be classified as (a) Revenue beel, (b) beels under JilaParisad and (c) beels under Panchayats. In this paper an attempt has been made to find out different categories of beels and potentialities and land area covered by them.

KEY WORDS: Wetland, beels, revenue, etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

Majuli district is full of wetlands and natural water bodies. Its creation is also a unique one. Originally this island was created by the mighty river Brahmaputra by changing its course of flow. History reveals that land was attached to southern part of Assam. Due to great earthquake, the mighty river Brahmaputra changed its course of main channel of flow to southern side and original channel has been weakly flowing in the Northern side of the mainland. As a result, the whole land has been surrounded by water and it becomes an island. It came to be recognized as the largest river island of the world and its only tributary is known as the Tuniriver which flows from the east to the west. This Tuniriver also changed its course of flow and its original channel became weak, by creating many water bodies which is known as Morituni. The main Tuniriver is still active and it has been recognized as revenue beel of the Government of Assam. This Tuniriver is attached to many water bodies, namely, Bhakatibeel, Bokajanbeel, MalahaKhowabeel, Kharkharibeel etc.

For maintaining the ecological balance and sustainable development, water bodies should be preserved properly. These natural water bodies are full of aquatic plants and animals. These water bodies have been used by people generation after generation for their economic benefits. These water bodies are well integrated to our rural population and it plays the role of a way of life for the fishing communities. Development of primary sector and allied activities- such as animal husbandry, piggery, and poultry to a great extent depend on availability of water bodies. Fertility of land and natural supply of water to



the paddy field to a great extent depends on conservation of water bodies. Different species of birds, insects, aquatic plants, and flora-fauna enrich our environment. Many people earn their livelihood from these water bodies. These water bodies are considered as source of local fish. Demand for local fish in the market is high enough and rural masses fulfill their protein deficiencies by having local varieties of fish. These water bodies are also storehouse of medicinal plants- which provide medicinal supports to our local people- who live near the water bodies. This paper highlights the extent of water bodies and their potentialities in the study area.

II. OBJECTIVES:

This paper is prepared to fulfill the following objectives:

- To know the number of beels in the study area.
- To know the locations of beels in the study area.
- To know the classification of beels according to position of revenue earned by the government.

III. METHODOLOGY:

The study is purely based on exploratory research design. During the time of study, all the official documents relating to water bodies- such as documents published by the blocks, panchayats, revenue departments and census reports of the Government of Assam have been intensively studied to collect required data to publish a comprehensive paper in this regards.

IV. DISCUSSION:

The beels found in Majuli sub-division have been classified as beels under Majuli Development Block (i) beels under UjaniMajuli Development Block (ii) Beels under AFDC and (iv) Beels under revenue head. Table 1.3 reveals that in Majuli there were 140 beel fisheries in the year 2005-2006 Out of this total beel fisheries as high as 45.7 per cent are under Majuli Development block. 43.6 per cent are under UjaniMajuli development block and 4.3 per cent are under Assam Fishfed Development Corporation (AFDC). The remaining 6.4 per cent are revenue beel fisheries.

TABLE:1

BLOCK-WISE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF BEEL FISHERIES IN MAJULI:

BLOCK-WISE BEELS	TOTAL NO. OF BEEL FISHERIES	%	GOVERNMENT VALUE
No. of Beels/ Water Bodies Under Majuli Development Block	64	45.7	12,9,500
No. of Beels/ Water Bodies Under UjaniMajuli Development Block	61	43.6	158809
Beels Under Afdc	6	4.3	383000
Revenue Beels	9	6.4	347017
TOTAL	140	100	1018326

Source: Sub-Divisional Office, Majuli



Table 1 reveals that the state government of Assam earned Rs 3200171 in the year 2005-2006 as revenue from nine revenue beel fisheries of Majuli. The government got maximum revenue (Rs. 68,182 1.0 21.3 per cent) from No. 21 Kharkhori revenue beel fishery while it received minimum revenue (Rs. 14,194/- Le. 4.4 %) from No. 31/32 RupohiMolongbeel fisheries.

TABLE:2**REVENUE EARNED BY GOVERNMENT FROM REVENUE BEEL FISHERIES IN MAJULI:**

Sl No.	Name of Beel Fisheries	Revenue for the year 2011-12		Land Area
		Total	%	In hectares
1	No. 17 LuhitErasuti	63,974	20	176
2	No. 31/32 RupohiMolong	14,194	4.4	131
3	No. 18 SukansutiBorbil	14,687	4.6	54
4	No. 23 GaramurPatharDubi	36,383	11.4	53
5	No. 23 DoriaDubi	27,589	8.6	34
6	No. 21 Kharkhori	68,182	21.3	20
7	No. 13 DakhinpatBorbil	27,866	8.7	14
8	No. 12 Tuni Fishery	50,000	15.6	400
9	Magurmara	17,142	5.4	62
	Total	320017	100	944

Source: Sub-divisional office

Production time of fish in Majuli during (a) peak season and (b) lean season:

The production of fish. The supply of fish is far more than its demand. The production time of fish as well as its supply can be classified under two heads - (a) peak season and (b) lean season.

(a) Peak season: The peak season starts from the month of June and it continues to the month of February and supply of fish is available for nine months. This peak season is found either as (i) flood period - from the month of June to August or as (ii) winter period from the month of August--February. Frequent occurrence of flood makes the fish market uncertain and fluctuation of fish supply is common phenomenon. When the flood water exceeds the danger level, then the supply of fish supply becomes short. During the time of high flood, the communication to outside Majuli is cut off temporarily and local fish selling centres are submerged in water. During the time of flood the fishermen catch hold of a fish anywhere without any restrictions particularly they catch fish in open stream near the bank of the river and besides the embankment and dyke. In this period, the lassee has no right of prohibition and he cannot earmark the boundary of beels and rivers. The fishermen sometimes are able to catch big fish like row, barali, kuhi and sell in the local markets and supply to the markets of Jorhat and Lakhimpur districts. On the other hand, if the flood does not occur, then the supply of fish becomes stable from the month of June. The lassee starts commercial catching with the help of fishermen from the month of August and abundance of fish supply is found in the fish market up to the month of Jan/February.

(b) Lean season: The lean season starts from the month of March to May. This season is also known as breeding season. The department of fishery imposes restrictions to catch fish in this season. Up to eighty decades, the fishermen as well as common people were not aware of Fishery Acts passed by the government from time to time regarding the regulation of fish catching during the time of breeding. So



the fishermen did not hesitate to catch fish from different sources of fish like beels, rivers and ponds without realizing the threat to local species of fish. From the eighty decades onwards the fishermen as well as on general public were aware about the preservation of our local fish so as to enhance their production. Their awareness arose because of initiative taken by the local NGOs, print media, electronic media and department officials actively involved in it.

Besides these beels many low laying areas are available in the study area. Nearly 900 hectares of low laying areas are available for fishery development. These beels are undertaken by the government and local bodies i.e. Panchayats, MohkumaParisad and they give this beels on lease at a high value for the purpose of earning more revenue. This system leads to loss of natural right of catching fish by the common SC people in particular.

Unfortunately these beels and wetlands are highly threatened and on the verge of extinction because of following reason:

- (i) Large scale erosion taken place every which lost their existence.
- (ii) Land reclamation for agricultural purpose
- (iii) Siltation and store of sediments after food
- (iv) Construction of embankment. In these regard, we can site the example of Tuniriver which is turn into a dead river after construction of embankment at Potia portion. The construction of embankment prevents free flow of water and free mobility of fish at their breeding Season and lead to reduce their production.

V. CONCLUSION

Majuli district is endowed with large area of water bodies full of potentialities. Conservation and harnessing of these water bodies is considered as a matter of utmost importance for sustainable and balanced development of the people. Due to rapid growth of population many water bodies have been encroached by some groups with vested interests. Government as well as local people has to be conscious to protect these natural resources. Proper planning is needed to utilize these resources for socio-economic and environmental benefits of the study area.

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