

# AN APPRAISE ON GEOGRAPHY, CULTURE AND SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS OF PEOPLE OF WORLD LARGEST RIVER ISLAND MAJULI, ASSAM

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**Abstract:** *Geography is the base of any kind of study. Peoples do their activities according to their geography and their grows. Socio economic condition of a group of people also depend upon the geography of the place. Culture and the socioeconomic conditions are the social identity of a society. These three component can considered as the backbone of a society. Accompanying with the changing time along with the culture socioeconomic status of the society is also developing. The culture of people expose themselves in the world and socioeconomic condition of a society means the standard of living of the society. To developed the standard of living in the rural economy government implemented lots of schemes. But still all places are not able to developed equally. Similarly there are differences in culture in place to place due to the geogrpny . This paper is trying exposed the socio cultural and socio economical condition of the people of the world largest island Majuli and Geographical importance of the island. Most of the data collected from the field directly as primary data and some others as secondary data. All the data are classified systematically and analyze step by step.*

**Key Words:** *Geography, Socioeconomic, Culture, Implement, Schemes.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Man is the greatest resource of the world because he has an immense quality to change and convert the existing phenomena. In order to know man's relationship with society and with due reference to environment, social geography emerged. It is concerned with the people who lives in the same environmental condition, works more or less for the same goal, follows same customs and traditions and strive to keep common interest. Thus it is clear that people of the society interact among themselves socially, economically, culturally, politically and their response to the environmental forces are same. In the case of Majuli also it is not differ from others and the peoples relation with the society reflect on their culture.

Majuli, the first river island district is the newest district of Assam which is geographically beautiful and culturally rich. It is the place where Vaisnuvate culture got the new trend in Assam. Satriya culture is the one of the unique identity of this place. Similarly geographically it is also unique because of it lacion in the middle of the river mighty Brahmaputra. out of this its char chapori and beels also attract the tourist to this island like the culture. More than this the society of Majuli is also very lovely and strictly follows the cultural rule and customs. Along with the geography and culture economy of the island is also little bit different. From the general observation it can be trace that most of the people are engaged in primary activities. Majuli is the largest river island of the world is endowed with cultural heritage and rich historical milieu and prominent geography and socioeconomic status is trying to cover under this article.

## 2. OBJECTIVES:

- To identify and evaluate the geography of the study area.
- To enhance the rich vaisnuvaite culture heritage of Majuli
- To examine and asses problems of the society and their economy of the study area.

## 3. METHODOLOGY:

Application of proper methods in any kinds of research study is very important to find out the actual facts and findings of the particular study. Author prepared the paper on the basis of secondary as well as primary data collected from the field through interview and observation method.

### 3.1.GEOGRAPHY OF MAJULI:

#### Location & extent

Majuli the largest river island of the world. It is situated at north of the of the jorhat district of assam.it is the recently announced district of Assam Its geographical location is -----  
 26°45' n to 27°22' n latitude and 93°39' e to 94°35' e longitude  
 But as research scholars survey the location of Majuli laid between  
 26°45'n to 27°30' n latitude and 93°45' e to 94°35' e longitude

**Physiography**

Shape of the island :- Myrobalan  
 Size of the island :- According to unesco (1852) 1250 sq. km,924.60 sq.km (1971) According to Revenue Record of Assam,but having lost significantly to erosion it covers 352 square kilometres as at 2014  
 Boundary :-  
 North –Lkhimpur and Dhemji  
 South – Jorhat District  
 East – Sivasagar District  
 West – Golaghat and Sonitpur District

**Drainage:-**

The island which is situated between the Brahmaputra river. The island is beginning at Tekeliphuta Gaon on the northeastern boarder, where Brahmaputra is divert from the main branch to flow pass the southern boundary of the island. Around this portion , the river is joined by three south bank tributaries named as Dishang, Dikhow and Jhanji from Naga- Patkai range. The diverted branch of the Brahmaputra at Tekeliphuta is known as Kherkotia Suti and confluence with Subansiri River. From there it named as Luhit subansiri and confluence with Brahmaputra, on the southern point of the island. Table of the rivers and its length around Brahmaputra

**TABLE – 1.**

Sl.No	Name of the River	Length of the River (km)
1.	Brahmaputra (up to the island)	2108*
2.	Subansiri (upto confluence with Brahmaputra)	375
3.	Dikhow (upto confluence with Brahmaputra)	236
4.	Dishang (upto confluence with Brahmaputra)	230
5.	Jhanji (upto confluence with Brahmaputra)	108

Source: Flood Control Deptt.,Brahmaputra Board/IJEST

**Geology:**

Geologically, the island is a part of the great alluvial tract of Brahmaputra river, which is by nature a geosynclinal basin formed concomitantly with the elevation of the Himalayas to its north. The island, along with the floodplains of Brahmaputra river in its adjoining areas is formed by alluvial deposits in the form of older alluvium, newer alluvium and recent deltaic deposits of the Pleistocene age [Krishnan (1982)]. Moreover, the area is surrounded by a very complex geological setting of very young and unweathered sedimentary formations covering the entire Brahmaputra basin. On the northern side, the basin is flanked by the Sub-Himalayan ranges consisting mainly of tertiary sandstone, and is marked by the presence of many raised, relatively young terraces. On the eastern and southern sides, the Brahmaputra valley borders with the Naga-Patkai ranges consisting of tertiary formations riddled with numerous active faults. Geological surveys aided by drilling for oil in this part of the valley have shown that under the recent deposits, there are thousands of metres of tertiary sediments which overlie the Archaean Basement complex. Being an active floodplain, the island is marked by an array of alluvial features including natural leaves, crevasses, splay deposits, point bars, channel bars etc. The main channel of Brahmaputra on the southern side is characterised by rapid aggradation, dramatic channel shifts and excessive bank line recession.<sup>1&5</sup>

**Soil:**

Majuli is a plain area constructed by the Brahmaputra river. Soil of the island is different according to the height of the land. At upper Majuli soils are old alluvial and highland areas. At middle Majuli height is gradually low and new alluvial soils. Because of these characteristics, there have also different in crop production. The following table of 1998-99 represent from data of soil use for cultivation

**TABLE 2.**

AREA	HECTOR	PERCENTAGE
TOTAL AREA	88000	
AREA USABLE FOR AGRICULTURE	30556	34.72

AGRICULTURAL USE	28452	98.42(TOTALCULTIVABLE LAND)
TOTAL CROP FIELD	53689	
CULTIVABLE LAND INDEX	189	
AVERAGE AGRICULTURAL LAND	0.95	

Source : Agricultural department Majuli,/ 'Majuli' edited by P.K.Mahanta,p. 175

#### Climate:-

The climate of the island is almost similar to the climate of other parts of the Assam. The annual rainfall is varies here 2000 mm to 2153 mm. Similarly, in the summer seasons the temperature varies between 28° C to 33° C and humidity occurs in 54% to 86%.

#### Vegetation ;-

Different type of vegetation are found in the largest island of India. These are follows as Grasses, Herbs, Shrubs, Creepers, Flowers, Fruits, Trees, Vegetables, Pulse.

#### 4. DEMOGRAOHY:

The word “Demography” is derived from the Greek word “Demo” meaning people and “Graphy” means study. So Demography means the study of population confine with characteristics of population variation and change in the statistical analysis of vital rate irrespective of place, time and classes of people. It is considered as the quantitative study of human population.

Majuli district has total population of 167,304 as per the Census 2011. Out of which 85,566 are males while 81,738 are females. In 2011 there were total 32,236 families residing in Majuli The Average Sex Ratio of Majuli Circle is 955. As per Census 2011, all of the population of Majuli lives in rural areas. The population of Children of age 0-6 years in Majuli is 22062 which is 13% of the total population. There are 11324 male children and 10738 female children between the age 0-6 years. Thus as per the Census 2011 the Child Sex Ratio of Majuli is 948 which is less than Average Sex Ratio ( 955 ) of Majuli.

The total literacy rate of Majuli is 78.56%. The male literacy rate is 74.76% and the female literacy rate is 61.34% in Majuli<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.1. People found in Majuli:

In our society different kind of social groups emerged on the basis of religion, cast and their activities.in Majuli mainly Brahman, Kayastha, Kunch, Kalita, Keout, Nath, Chutia, Ahom, Kachari, Mising, Deuri, Kumar, Koibatra, Boria etc.

#### 5. SOCIETY AND CULTURE:

The island has been the hub of Assamese neo-Vaishnavite culture, initiated around the 15th century by the revered Assamese saint Srimanta Sankardeva and his disciple Madhavdeva. Many Satras or monasteries constructed by the saint still survive and represent the colourful Assamese culture.<sup>5</sup> Majuli as a Vasnavite site has its special distinction which made it unique in the eyes of the world. During 16th century A.D., concomitant with the renaissance period, that changed the face of the world, a similar resurgence in socio-cultural dimension by the great Vaisnava Saint Sankardeva had brought in the ideas of democratic social values, unification of diverse ethnic groups with verdant spiritualism which founded the basic fabric of a casteless social structure, the Assamese Society. It created a system of social governance and community living which continued over centuries, is a unique example of unity in diversity. In addition to that, Majuli is also enriched by the vibrant multicoloured culture of its ethnic inhabitants belonging to the Mishings, the Deoris, the Sonowal Kacharis, the Ahoms and the Nepali Communities.Culture in the river island of Majuli can be viewed and understood in the following categories.:-

**DRAMA:** The form of bhaona was introduced by Shrimanta Sankardeva to convey religious and cultural messages to the people through entertainment.

**MASK MAKING:** Mask making is one of the most famous traditional crafts still practiced in Majuli. Natun Chamaguri Sattra has worldwide acclaim in making exquisite masks.

**MANUSCROT WRITING:** The practice of worshipping religious scriptures led to the emergence of paintings in manuscripts.

**MUSIC:** Ankiya geet and Borgeets are the various types of music which have been composed since the time of Srimanta Sankardev.

**FESTIVALS:** Various festivals are celebrated all over Majuli. Besides the Sattriya festivals, the tribal inhabitants of the land have their own colorful festivals.

**BOAT MAKIN** : Boat making has been practiced in Majuli since the time of the arrival of diverse communities on the Island. Majuli boasts of a multiplicity of ethnic tribes, which have contributed immensely to its rich and colourful cultural heritage.

## 6. OTHER CULTURAL ACTIVITIES:

Fishing Has been the traditional occupation of a section of people since the beginning of human habitation on the island. pottery a traditional form of cottage industry of Kumar community of Majuli. Pots were generally exchanged for paddy, which is the staple food of the inhabitants of this island. Weaving is an important aspect of the cultural life of the people of the Majuli Island. Hand and bamboo craft is the tradition of carving miniatures of gods, goddesses and their incarnation. It has been carried on through several generations by the Bhakats of Sattras and the villagers.<sup>4</sup> Majuli the celebrated land of Satras, socio-religious harmony and cultural genesis, has been always cherished the rich cultural life since the medieval period. Though, before also it was always been a populated area with less density of diverse kind of creeds but its culture and history could not be proficient to marked in historical writings, or almost obscure in the history subsequently being an isolated island and water locked place, it has been utilized by the Ahom kingdom as a detention centre and they used to accommodate revolting and rebellion thoughts and concerns particularly The Sattra is a religious and cultural institution which is concerned with the dissemination of the principles and devotional practices of Neo-Vaishnavism - a religious movement which has had a strong impact on the religious and socio cultural life of people of Assam since the 15th century. They are primarily located on the Majuli Island, the spiritual hub of Assam. The prime focus of the Sattra is to enlighten individuals through spiritual and religious practices. The Sattra is the physical attribute of the religious beliefs of Neo-Vaishnavism. It is also the centre of cultural activities which gives a unique cultural identity to the island. The principles of Neo- Vaishnavism are disseminated to the common man through devotional music, songs, and dance forms. These cultural activities are an integral part of the Sattras. The Sattriya culture has been playing a pivotal role in binding together different ethnic groups of the region through the spread of religious ideologies of Neo-Vaishnavism and its cultural traditions since the 15th century.

## 7. LITERACY:-

Literacy is the one of the most important indicator of socioeconomic development of a region. If te literacy rate high then the there income will be also high, similarly if income is high than development will be fast. Since majuli is a new district of Assam its literacy rate is higher than national average. Liyeracy rate of Majuli is 78.66% where 74.76% male and 61.34% female. Out of the surveyed 100 household 71% literate where 53.68% male and 18.39% female.

## 8. ECONOMIC ACTIVITY:-

Economic condition of a region means the standard of living of the people of any region. most of the people of Majuli depend on agriculture and maximum areas are rural areas so they engaged in primary activities. Some of the people in Majuli engaged in tourism sector .Out of the total population a huge amount of people live without any work.

**Table 3**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Main Workers	53,484	38,148	15,336
Cultivators	37,352	26,477	10,875
Agriculture Labourer	1,373	648	725
Household Industries	2,598	1,389	1,209
Other Workers	12,161	9,634	2,527
Marginal Workers	31,389	11,221	20,168
Non Working	82,431	36,197	46,234

More than it author surveyed the whole island and take 100 persons randomly for better findings. As per the survey following results assess.

## 7. OCCUPATION STRUCTURE :

Occupation is the primary form of activity which is curved out every person in a society. Occupational pattern of our surveyed area is classified into mainly two categories. They are respectively primary and secondary .The total working population of this island is i.e. 70.78% of the total population. The working population of this area mainly engaged in three sectors viz agriculture, business and services.

Table 4

Occupation	No of persons
Agriculture	60
Service	14
Business	16
Others	10

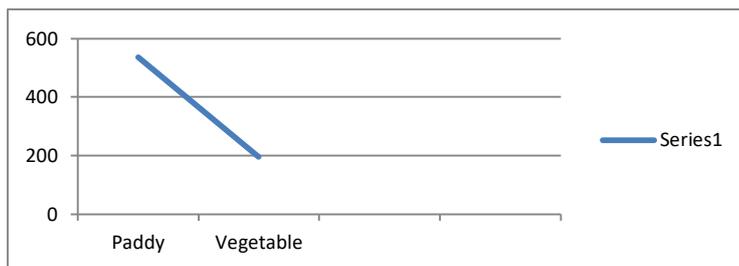


Fig 1 Source: Surveyed by researcher

**INCOME:**

Income is the standard of living of the people, which denote the people economic status in the society. While surveying the household we found that the economy of the people live below poverty line. The lowest annual income of the area is 48000 and highest annual income is 300000

Table-5

Income per month	No of household
Below 4000	40
4000-8000	25
8000-12000	15
Above 12000	20

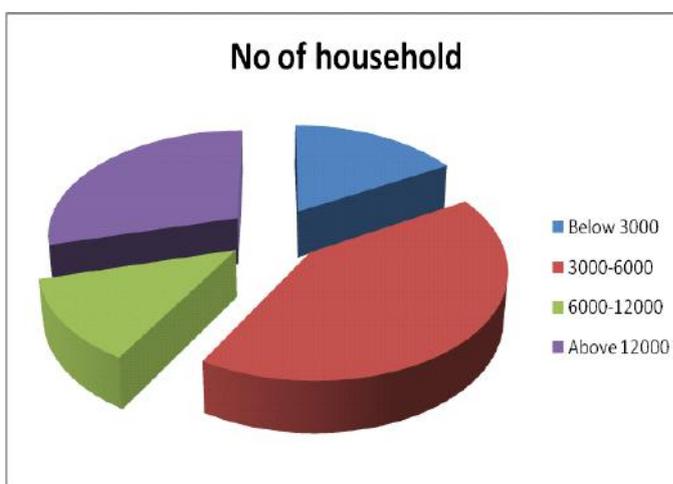


Fig-2 Source: Surveyed by researcher.

**LAND USE:-**

Land use analysis is an important aspect of geographical studies in geography. This aspects of geography is represented in the land use maps prepared with the help of land use building. It has become essential to prepare land use maps because they are recognized as necessary tools for the preparation of land capability and land classification maps which in turn provide guideline for the regional planning development orientation of agriculture.

**8. LAND USE STRUCTURE:**

The total land holding of the surveyed household of the area is 1080 bigha comprising of Bari land, Grazing land, Cropping land and Other. So, the average land hold of every household is 10.8 bigha. Among this high percentage i.e 73% are cultivable land. Bari land share the Bari land. The following table will clearly show the land use pattern of surveyed area.

Table-6

Land use	Total land in bigha	In %
Bari Land	350	32.40
Crop Land	730	67.60

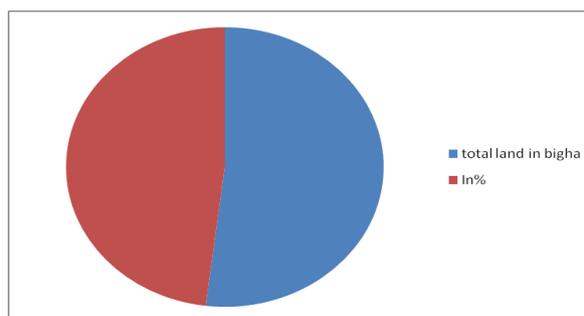


Fig-3 Source: Surveyed by researcher. Diagram on Land use

**9. CROPPING PATTERN:**

Cropping pattern are the extent to which the enable land under different agricultural activities can put to use. There are three main types of crops like paddy and vegetables.

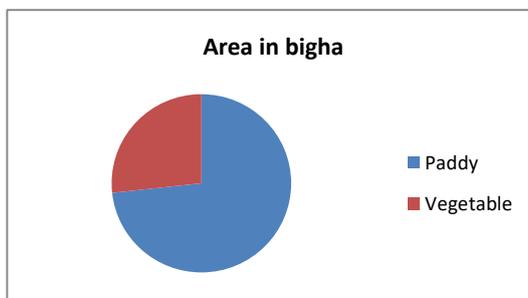
**TYPES OF CROPS:**

While surveying the area we found that the people are mostly involved in paddy crops and few other vegetables like potatoes spinach beans, carrots, radish etc.

The following table shows the pattern of crops.

*Table 7*

<i>Crop type</i>	<i>Area in bigha</i>
<i>Paddy</i>	<i>535</i>
<i>Vegetable</i>	<i>195</i>



*Fig-17 Source: Surveyed by researcher.*

**STRANDERD OF LIVING :**

The standard of living of the people of the villages are generally below average. Most of the people there lives in kuccha houses with tin or thatches roof. Only a few people of the villages have Assam typethatch roof house and RCC houses.

*Table-8*

<i>House type</i>	<i>Number of houses</i>
<i>RCC houses</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Assam type Tin roof house</i>	<i>79</i>
<i>Assam type Thatches roof house</i>	<i>12</i>

**HOUSEHOLD AMENITIES :**

Household amenities like TV, Radio, Bicycle, Electricity etc. has become basic needs of the people in the present age. So people of every corner of the world use these amenities. Similarly people of Majuli also use these amenities as their daily needs.

*Table-17*

<i>Amenities</i>	<i>TV</i>	<i>Radio</i>	<i>CD/VCD</i>	<i>Electricity</i>	<i>Bicycle</i>	<i>Others</i>
<i>Number of Houses</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>93</i>	<i>95</i>	<i>27</i>

**10. FINDINGS:**

- Majuli itself is a greatest river island of the world.
- Vaishnavite art and culture integration.
- Pollution free natural environment.
- Art of handicraft and traditional textile industries.
- It is a river island located in the middle of Brahmaputra river.
- In the area 100 houses randomly serveyed , their total people is 478 where 253 them ate male and 245 are female.
- Out of 478 people 340(71.09%) people of them are literate where male 183(53.68%), female 134(39.35%).
- The people are depended on primary and secondary occupation engaged in agriculture (60%) services (16%) and business (14%).
- The income of the people of the surveyed area can be grouped into 4 categories low income (less than 4000 per month) 40%,lower middle category (Rs4000- 8000)25% upper middle income (6000-12000 per month)15% and high income (above 12000 per month)20%.
- While observing the different age group we can see that the young age group (0-16 yrs) is 40.62% adult age group (17-60yrs) is 55.46% and old age group (above 60 years) is 3.90%. Here we come to know that the dependency ratio of the surveyed area is high.

## 11. PROBLEMS AFFECTING ON SOCIO-ECONOMY OF PEOPLES OF MAJULI:-

- Since it is a riverine area, the transport facility is not well develop, even the roads are Kuccha, which become worst during the rainy season due to which tourist faces many problems to explore the national park.
- Due to the occurrence of heavy flood every year ,the river banks are highly eroded away which is becoming a series problem of Majuli at present and also in the near future.
- The people are also facing lots of problem health sector there is no proper health centre in the area.
- The government has still not given important to the area for that the whole area along with its local people faced problems like flood problem.
- Embankment problem when rivers are overflow.
- Problem of illiteracy.
- Fragmented communication system.
- Lack of awareness about tourist industries.
- Lack of travel industries.
- Lack of good medical facilities.
- Lack of knowledge to identify the tourist spots.
- Less amount of francies for tourism

### 11.1 SOLUTIONS:

1. Government should introduce some scheme to develop the transport and communication system.
2. The local people should be made aware of the importance of the world largest river island, so that they takes steps to conserve the resource.
3. The people and government should take steps for the publicity of the island.
4. Government should improve the hospitality by employing more tourist facility, providing more transport services etc

## 12. CONCLUSION:

At the end of the study it is clear that geography of the island got great importance due to its unique size and shape and its location in the middle of the river. The study of the Geology along with the geography in the study give an idea to the research scholars to study the geological history of the island. In this study climate, vegetation, drainage, soil are also discuss briefly, which helps us to know about the geography of the famous island. On the contrary to it culture and the rituals of the people of Majuli also briefly discuss to understand the society of the island. The most important and Assam's state dance institutions i.e. Satras are also important shows the great culture of Majuli. Similarly Rashliila and Bhauna express the social integrity of the society. Out of these in the article other cultural activities of different community reflects the fraternity in the society. Moreover the study try to trace the socio economic condition of the different people live in Majuli, on the basis of different indicators of society like population, literacy, transportation and communication ,occupation and the different economic activities discuss the living standard of the people of Majuli. After the overall study about the island district lots of problems traced and the researcher try to give suggestion for the very same to change the socioeconomic status and also try to give some chance to study in the near future.

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