



# The political economy of Dam and Displacement in Assam : a case study of Dakhin Rupahi village, Dhemaji.

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## Abstract

Dams are not a new phenomenon in the so called development history. Today, India is the third largest dam building country in the world. The state tries to equate dam building as nation building. New dams, irrigation schemes, control over water harvesting system are some of the state's power over resources. Most astoundingly, there are not any suitable record of the number of people that have been displaced by dams or scarified in other ways at the alters of National Progress. The study based on the political economy related to dam building and the probable displacement in Dakhin Rupahi village, Dhemaji because of the construction of the Lower Subansiri Dam.

**Keywords:** Political economy, development, displacement

## 1. Introduction

*Dakhin Rupahi* village is situated at the southern bank of the river Subansiri. The village is under block *Baginadi*, panchayat *Sauldhua* in Lakhimpur district. The name of the village denote north by *Dakhin* while *Rupahi* means beautiful. The nearest highway of the village is 57 NH and nearest town is Gugamukh. The river Subansiri is originated from Tibet and enters the plains of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts of Assam. The total length of the river is 326 up to the international boarder.<sup>2</sup> The village has basically Mising<sup>3</sup> dominated population. The floodplain of the river and wetland fringed provide suitable lands for agriculture and livestock for the population of the village. They are unique in their style of housing as they live in thatched houses raised on bamboo stilts. It is known as "Chaang Ghar" which means house on stilts. The structure of the house is comfortable to keep their domestic animals. It also helps to protect them from flood as they basically live bank of rivers. The people of the village are basically farmers and the women are engaged in weaving.

The Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project under supervision of the National Hydel Power Corporation (NHPC) has a potential of the 2000 MW. The *Dakhin Rupahi* village has threatened by unusual erosion, running flourishing paddy fields with heavy siltation and sweeping away homes. The people's movement for Subansiri Brahmaputra valley has a huge protest against the dam. They admitted that once the bigger hydel project goes into operation an immeasurably larger volume of water will rush down into the plains at the foot of the hills.

## 2 Hypothesis

1. People remain unhappy with the construction of dam because it displaces them.
2. People want to hear a proper confirmation from the government for the sake of their security as they have the risk of displacement.

## 3 Aims and objectives

Look into the issue of displacement of the population in Dakhin Rupahi Village because of the

construction of dam on the river Subansiri.

## 4 Methodology

The methodologies adopted in this study are as follows :

### 4.1 Selection of study area.

### 4.2 Selection of sample population

The survey has been based on random sample survey. In random sampling there is an important assumption that the sample observations are independent and have equal probabilities of being chosen. In the particular field work I have surveyed 70 households.

### 4.3 Framing questionnaires

The questions are direct on the basis of *yes* and *no* so that the analysis should be clearly maintained.

### 4.4 Data collection

In the personal survey that I have done in the Dakhin Rupahi village in the month of December 21<sup>st</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013 are in the form of direct questions to the villagers. The primary data collection is based on sample questions and reactions to them by the villagers. The kind of relationship in between the data and information from them are regarded as qualitative for the proper interpretation of them. The articulation of data thus confined with male and female category with age variation as well as occupation. In case of population we differentiate the leaving and non-leaving population in the form of percentage. In the section of assessment we categorise two sub-sections which imply the attention to the adverse impact of the project in the form of *yes* or *no*. It also complied with the usefulness of the river in three distinct categories including bathing, fishing as well as sand collecting differentiating with male and female.

The secondary data sources are based on the relationship of the topic and they are mentioned in 1.3

### 4.5 Data processing

The raw data first categorise in table to concise the numerical form for better understanding. The tabulation of data is processed through various statistical methods in a group for analysing the interpretation.

### 4.6 Data analysis

Analyzing data means the organisation, formal evaluations which help in providing direction of the survey. The tabulation of data are analysed then with various statistical techniques. They are

- **Bar diagram :** Vertical Bar diagrams are used to indicate comparison between categories. Perception of population displacement; occupation variation; response on dam construction and utility of the river in different category are represented in the form of vertical bar diagrams.
  - **Pie diagram:** The perception of population displacement; occupation variation; response on dam construction and utility of the river in different category are converted to percentage. The percentage variation and differentiation then represented by pie diagram which are more clear to analyse.
  - **Correlation:** It is used to find out the degree and strength of two random variables for the study of interdependence and mutual variations. In the particular study we used it for the analysis of utility of the river in different categories with relation to male and female.
  - **Regression:** It is the study of dependence of one variable upon the other variable which is mainly used here to reflect the functional relationship of the utility of the river.
- 4.7 **Cartographic methods:** A proper chochromatic method is used to differentiate the districts from the field area with the help of Arc GIS.

## 5. Displacement of population

The riverbank settlements of Dakhin Rupahi Village are generally liable to flood and bank erosion. Like many other north bank tributaries of the Brahmaputra, the Subansiri also regularly creates the problem of flood and bank erosion. Consequently, many of the households had to shift their dwelling to safer places. The ongoing project has, no doubts, infused a sense of uncertainty among the river bank dwellers. Even then they continue to have a strong attachment to their own alluvial living spaces. When asked about the possibility of leaving the river bank for some other better places, 98.57% said no while only 1.4% account for *yes*. In general they opined that no other places are there for them with so much facilities and serenity.

They also admitted that they are satisfied with whatever they are getting in their surrounding which help to maintain their small economy. Many questioned about the financial assistances for shifting their settlements to new sites, because government had not promised them anything on this issue. On the other hand because of the devastating flood a few of the inhabitants are ready to shift if they got better opportunities in the destination. The intensity of leaving or not leaving the place is related to the identity of the culture of the native people and the changing nature of physical as well as social composite structure. The lacunas behind the economic backwardness of the people force them to reply negatively in this issue. It is a sign of weak economy of the particular survey area.

### 5.1 Occupation

In general the village reflect an economy shaped basically by traditional agriculture

practiced by small farmers. It is found that farmers cover 54.28% of the population. Rice occupies the highest proportion of the area. Farmers basically cultivated local rice in traditional ways. It is seen that although autumn and winter rice have been cultivated by the farmers, they generally prefer to grow winter rice. Among the *rabi* crops mustard, black gram are significant. A smaller part of the population is fishermen and boatmen accounting for 2.87% and 1.42% respectively. Fishing is a significant nature of Mising community. Their livelihoods are linked with fishing either directly or indirectly. A negligible portion of the population is engaged with teaching, business and daily worker accounting for 1.42%, 1.42% and 2.87% respectively. Students accounting 5.7% of the total population.

**Table 1 :** Occupation (in %)

Occupation	Number engaged	Percentage
Farmer	38	54.28
Shopkeeper	1	1.42
Boatman	1	1.42
Fisherman	2	2.87
Daily worker	2	2.87
Teacher	1	1.42
Businessman	1	1.42
Housewife	20	28.57
Students	4	5.71
Total	70	

*Source: Personal Survey, 2013*

It is noteworthy that the people, who are engaged certain secondary and tertiary activities, have also taken up agriculture as a necessary essential occupation. Housewives who constitute 28.57% of the total population are engaged in weaving and other household activities including poultry.

### 6. Utility of Subansiri river

The personal survey shows that people of the village basically use the river for bathing, fishing and

for collecting sands & pebbles. As fishing is a significant nature of Mising livelihood, it accounts for 66.13% for male and 33.87% for female. The relation between fishing in between male and female category indicate a village economy in a small scale level basically during summer season. The priority for fishing enables not only the way of living but also the participation of women outside home space. The participation of women in this case directly defines a wave of concerning livelihood. But during the survey

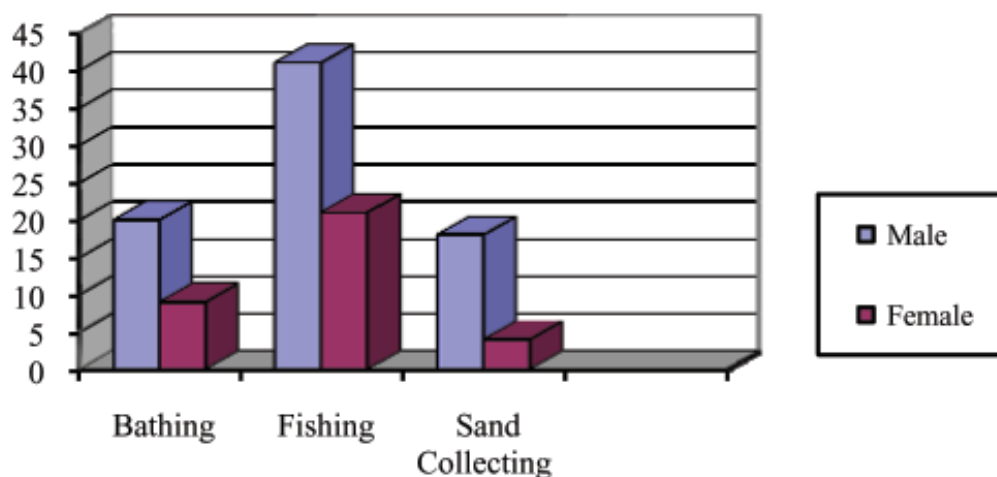
many people admitted that the decreasing fish resources impact not only the fish resources but the participation of women in terms of establishing their representation. For bathing it include 68.96% for male and 31.03% for female. This implies another scene of village outdoor in terms of usefulness of the river and its dependency indicator for water. As the usual circumferences the bathing in river thus controlled by the priority of water availability. The most

interesting phenomena in this case is the sand collecting in the river which imply that 81.81% male and 18.18% engaged in this case. But the point is that most of the villagers collect sands for their personal use. Only a few who have business motive replied that they basically collect sand during winter season as because they have not any other livelihood during this time and then they sale it to some small scale builders.

**Table 2 :** Utility of Subansiri river

Population		Bathing		Fishing		Sand collecting	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Male	47	20	68.96	41	66.13	18	81.81
Female	23	9	31.03	21	33.87	4	18.18
Total	70	29		62		22	

*Source: Personal survey, 2013*

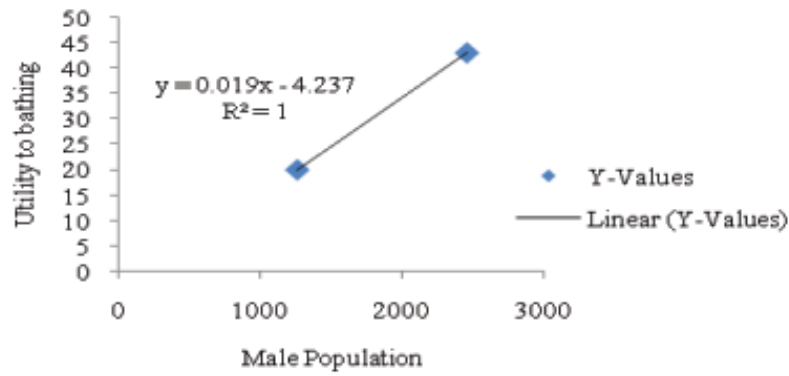


**Fig. 1 :** Utility of Subansiri river (in number)

#### 7. Measuring the utility of Subansiri river with correlation and regression

In the measuring of the utility of the river Subansiri

regarding the two independent variable of male and female, the dependent variables are bathing, fishing and sand collecting.

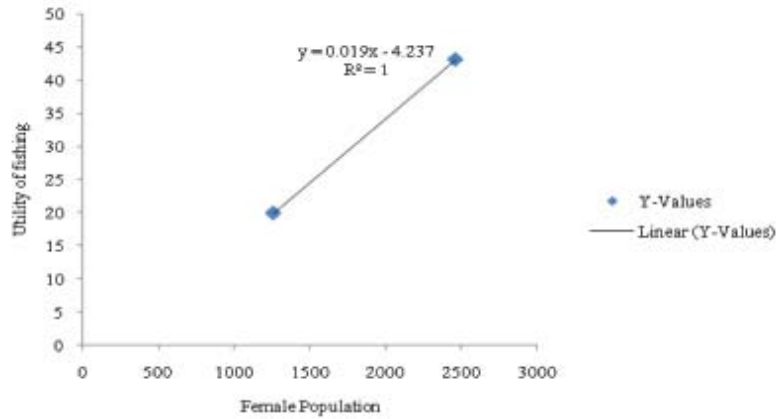


**Fig. 2 :** Regression line : utility to bathing in terms of male population

**7.1 Utility to bathing in terms of male population**

There is a perfect negative relationship in case of correlation in case of bathing of male population. The Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation

Coefficient ‘R’ of x and y is -1. This indicates that there is a strong negative correlation between bathing and male population. Here, R<sup>2</sup> is 1 which means that 100% of variation in y is explained by x.

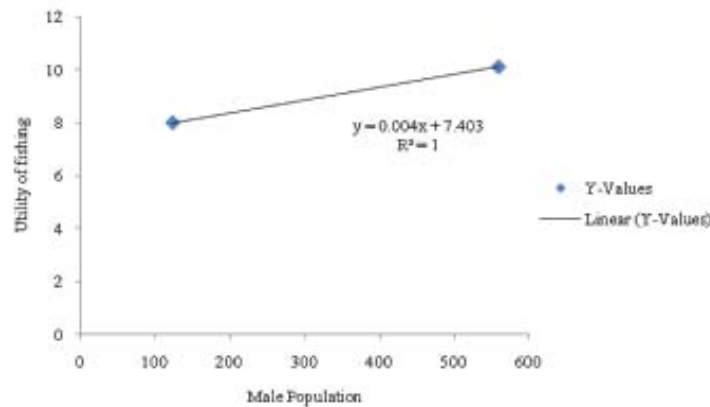


**Fig. 3 :** Regression line : utility to bathing in terms of female population

**7.2 Utility to bathing in terms of female population**

There is also a perfect negative correlation in case

of bathing of female population where the Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient ‘R’ of x and y is also -1.

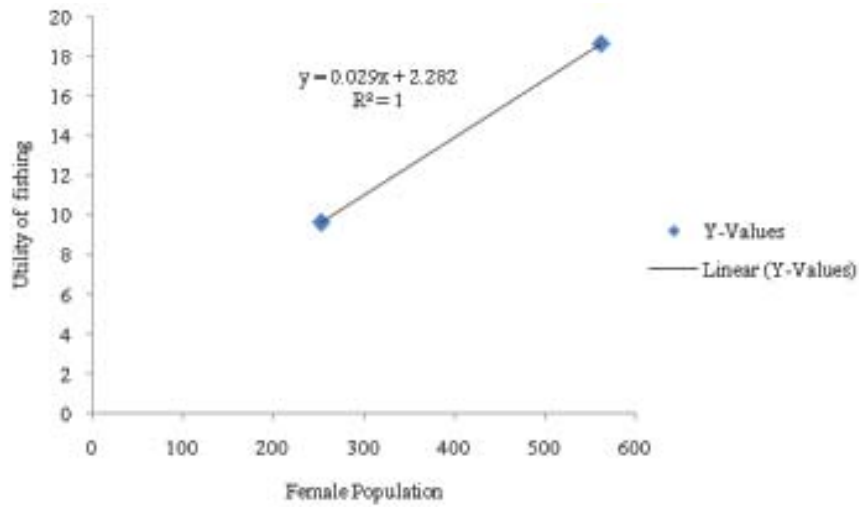


**Fig. 4 :** Regression line : utility to fishing in terms of male population

**7.3 Utility to fishing in terms of male population**

There is a strong negative correlation in case of x and y. This indicates if number of x increases

(decreases), the number of y decreases (increases). The value of  $R^2$  is, the coefficient determination is 1 which means that 100% of variation of y is

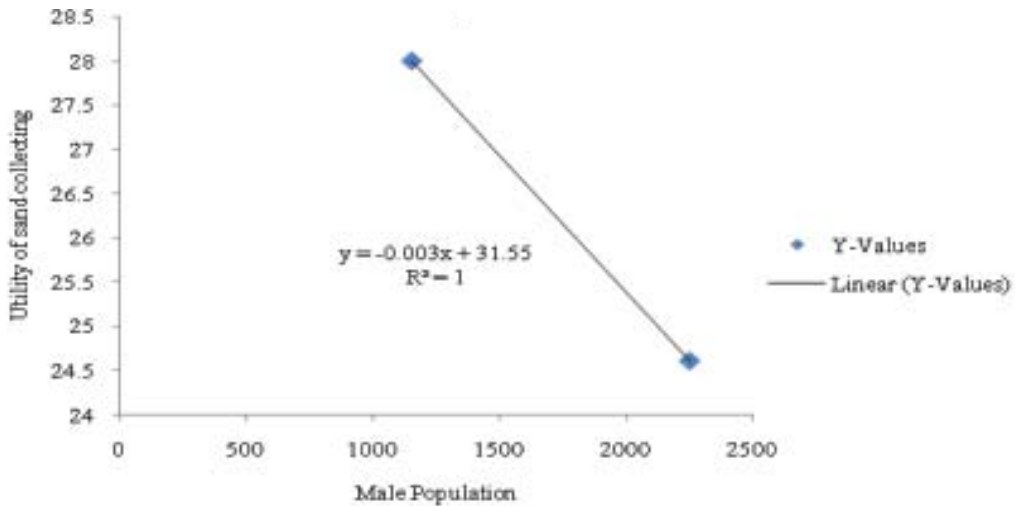


**Fig. 5 :** Regression line : utility to fishing in terms of female population

**7.4 Utility to fishing in terms of female population**

There is also a strong negative correlation coefficient in terms of fishing and female

population which indicate that the variation is inversely proportional regarding the x and y variable.

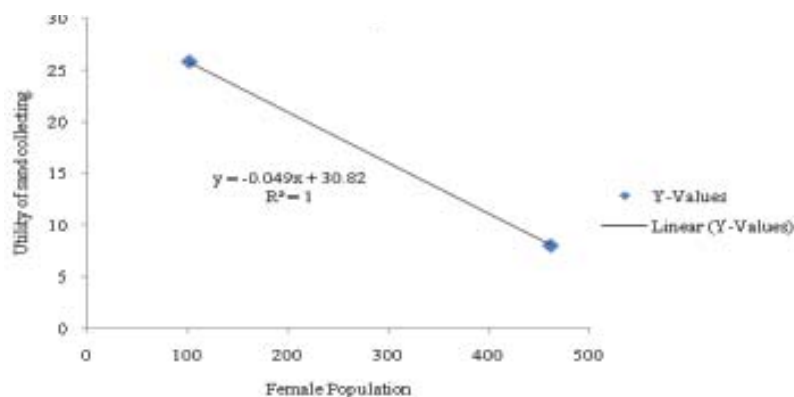


**Fig. 6 :** Regression line : utility to sand collecting in terms of male population

**7.5 Utility to sand collecting in terms of male population**

Collection of sand in terms of male population is

strongly negative. So, the x and y variable in this case are also inversely proportional.



**Fig. 6 :** Regression line : utility to sand collecting in terms of female population

### 7.6 Utility to sand collecting in terms of female population

The Pearson's Product Moment Correlation is .93 here which indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between x and y variable.

### 8. Conclusion

Development and displacement may appear contradictory terms, but they are facts of our national life and these facts are more astonishing than any of our fictions. On the basis of political economy if we go through the social relations, particularly the power relations the authority of resources are under the hands of the state. The vast majority of the Indian people have no idea of what is meant by either modernization or socio economic development. They have some specific needs and for those needs they are dependent on the state. Political economy provides the control and survival in social life. Control processes are broadly political in terms of the powerless section of the society including the tribal people. The broad social, economic,

and cultural shift from a Fordist a Post-Fordist society is also a reflection of class struggle. The struggle from the powerless, resource less village people to the urban class for whom resource extraction is the basic criteria. David Harvey (1989) implied it is as a dispersed, mobile, flexible and recombinant political economy. There are three distinct observations in the village. First, poverty in this term is only an obstruction. The people accept poverty as a way of life. Second, associated with poverty, comes illiteracy. Third, comes inequality itself. Fourth, comes the unawareness of ground reality lack of illiteracy. Fifth, comes corruption. Sixth, is related to all the above, the continued diversion of the resources of the country from the powerless to the powerful. In this regard, the Dakhin Rupahi village is a strong example defending with their livelihood as well as cultural discourse to project the rhetoric behind the capitalist domain. Development and displacement in a tandem way thus locked the identity of the particular village and possess only a misleading utopia suffocating in between reality and rhetoric.

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### Footnotes

1. The study is a part of MA dissertation under Dr. Barkhatullah Khan which is submitted to the Department of Geography, Delhi School of Economics as a project report, 2014
2. Personal Survey, 2013
3. An Indo Mongoloid tribe formerly known as Miris are the second largest ethnic group in Assam.

