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# Inter-Community Variation in Educational Attainment and Livelihood Practices in Morigaon District, Assam

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## Abstract

The district of Morigaon, located in the central Brahmaputra valley of Assam, which is characterized by ethno-religious and linguistic diversity, presents a marked variation in literacy and educational attainment and associated economic participation. This phenomenon is clearly observed in different parts of the district between the Hindus and Muslims. An attempt is made in this paper to examine how the patterns of educational attainment and associated livelihood practices vary among different population groups in the district. The study is based on both primary and secondary data.

**Keywords:** Educational attainment, livelihood practices, literacy rate, work participation rate, inter community variation.

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## Introduction

The socio-economic condition of an area, which is characterized by the interplay of attributes like family structure, education, land holding, work participation rate, occupation, income, expenditure, etc. greatly influences the quality of life of its people. It is, however, found to vary socio-spatially depending on the ethno-religious diversity and geographical variations and locational specificities. An adequate income is necessary to have a comfortable living along with required educational and health facilities. The occupational structure of the workers to a large extent is indicative of the overall economic development scenario of an area. The role of socio-cultural diversities as prevalent among different types of people is no less significant in bringing about regional inequalities/disparities in the level of development. Even the demographic characteristics and livelihood pattern as prevalent in an area are also associated with ethno-religious and social composition of population. As elsewhere in most parts of India, this phenomenon is also found to be true across the state of Assam. The rapid population growth in India including its state of Assam is becoming a problem of serious magnitude, as the country cannot productively employ the growing working-age population (Kayastha, 1997). The varying age structure of population in turn influences the growth of population, employment pattern, age at marriage and education in any area. For instance, the areas with high fertility rate constitute a large proportion of economically dependent population in the age group 0-14. Such a situation may have far reaching implications on the population structure. The differences in age may also result in demographic, social and economic differences in the area (Ghosh 1987). The age structure, which constitutes an important demographic dimension, is largely influenced by fertility, mortality and migration. These three determinants of age structure are interdependent and any change in one of these may influence the other two, and it is through these variables and the associated socio-economic conditions influence the age structure (Clarke, 1972). Education constitutes quite significantly towards social change and development. It is because the education is the key, which gears the whole process of socio-economic change and development. Moreover, the issue of educational development is so basic and fundamental to human life that its differential levels result in disparities among people and places (Desai, 1993). Social change is associated with transformation of socio-cultural practices in a community or society, is greatly influenced by variation in the pattern of social composition of population, educational attainment and occupational structure of the people, social interaction among them, and a host of other factors including degree of urbanization (Das, 2008). Socio-economic status of an area or society is usually described as low, medium and high, as the people with a lower socio-economic status usually have less access to financial, educational and

health resources than those with a higher socio-economic status. Assam, being inhabited by a population of diverse ethno-religious composition and characterized by population problems of diverse and complex nature, has been experiencing very high rates of population growth which have been higher than the country's average almost throughout the last century. As a result the state's population to the country's total has increased significantly. Most importantly, such a high growth rate of population combined with associated changing demographics and socio-economic dimensions of population in the state has significant bearing upon its socio-economic well-being. The state of Assam is being confronted with food shortage, poverty, unemployment and illiteracy among many others. So far Morigaon district is concerned, socially it is lagging behind many other parts of the state, and its economy is largely based on agriculture and allied activities with limited potential for economic development in diverse sectors, and as such it may be considered as a case to investigate the prevailing nature of inter-relationship among social and economic characteristics and livelihood practices. Although there exists two-way relationship between demographic character and livelihood, the contribution of varying demographic character as influenced by ethno-religious diversity would be more significant in determining livelihood practices and associated quality of life in the district. With this background an attempt is made in this paper to understand the inter-community variation in socio-economic characteristics and livelihood practices in Morigaon district of Assam.

### Objectives

The main objectives of the present study are:

- (i) to examine the inter-community variation in literacy and educational attainment and the associated changing pattern in the district; and
- (ii) to investigate the changing pattern of livelihood practices with respect to work-participation, occupation, income level and earning members in the district in their varying socio-spatial contexts.

### Database and Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data have been collected from eighteen sample villages and seven urban localities through household survey with the help of a comprehensive schedule-cum-questionnaire applying stratified random sampling technique and personal enquiry. The five revenue circles of Morigaon district, viz. Bhuragaon, Laharighat, Morigaon, Mayong, and Mikirbheta have been selected for a detailed study. The villages are selected by representing different locations and population groups to understand the inter-community variation in socio-economic characteristics and livelihood practices in the district. Necessary secondary data related to socio-economic characteristics and economic practices have been obtained from various Census of India publications, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Assam, Directorate of Social Welfare, Assam, District Commissioner Office of Morigaon District, Economics and Statistics Department, Morigaon District, etc. The village level data have been collected from the concerned revenue departments and District Census Handbook. The data so obtained from both primary and secondary sources have been processed, analyzed and presented through meaningful statistical and cartographic techniques for giving clear exposition of the problem.

### The Study Area

The district of Morigaon (the study area) is located in the central Brahmaputra valley in Assam on the South bank of the river Brahmaputra. It was upgraded as a district with its headquarters at Morigaon town in the year 1989. Morigaon district has a geographical area of 1,551 km<sup>2</sup> and population of 9,57,423 as per 2011 Census. It is located between 26°0'N–26°30'N latitudes and 92°0'E – 92°30'E longitudes (Fig. 1). The district is surrounded by the mighty river Brahmaputra on the north, Karbi Anglong district on the south, Nagaon district on the east and Kamrup Metro district on the west. The greater part of the district is an alluvial plain criss-crossed by numerous rivers and water ways and dotted with many *beels* and marshes. Morigaon district has one sub-division, namely Morigaon, which was a civil sub-division of the undivided Nagaon district since 1972 to 1989. It consists of five revenue circles, viz. Morigaon Sadar, Mikirbheta, Laharighat, Bhuragaon and Mayong; and five development blocks, viz. Mayong, Kapili, Bhurbandha, Laharighat and Moirabari. The total number of revenue villages in the district is 632 and there are 85 Gram Panchayat under five development blocks.

Physiographically, Morigaon district can be divided into three regions, viz. the north-eastern low-lying plain, the central and the eastern built-up plain, and the south-western plain interspersed with hillocks. Among the rivers of the district, the Brahmaputra, which forms the northern boundary of the district, Kapili, Kolong and Killing are important. There are several water channels between the Brahmaputra and the Kolong, viz. Leteri, Sanduba, Lalipara, Sonai and Pakaria flowing parallel to the Kolong. The district is mainly inhabited by the Hindu (52.21 %) and the Muslim (47.60 %) as the dominant groups. As per 2011 Census, of the district's total population, 12.9% is scheduled castes, 15.6% scheduled tribes and the remaining 71.5% general castes.

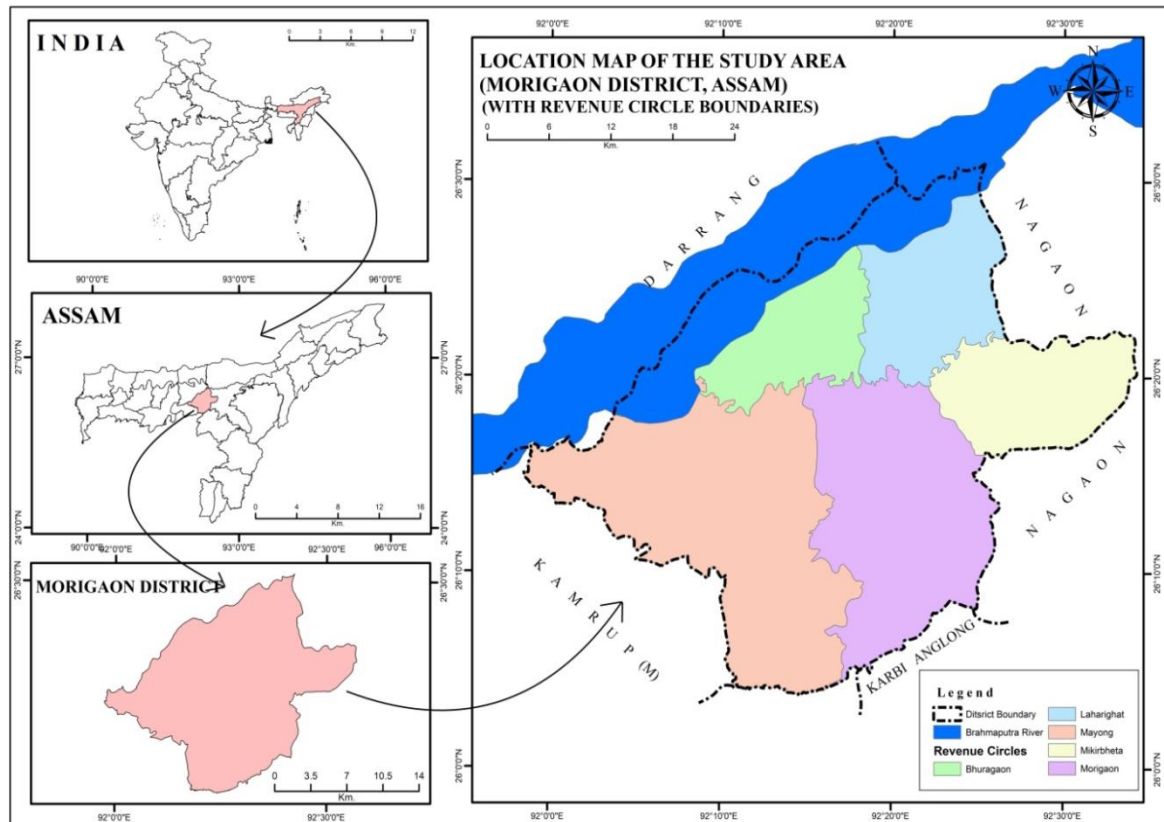


Fig. 1

## Analysis and Discussion

### Educational Attainment

Literacy and the educational attainment, which constitutes one of the vital ingredients of socio-economic development, greatly determines the incidence of some vital demographic attributes like general fertility and mortality, infant mortality, age at marriage, child-woman ratio, age structure and life expectancy. The marked variation in educational attainment, both socio-spatially and in gender terms, is no less significant in the state of Assam, more particularly in its Morigaon district. But unfortunately, Morigaon district as a whole (63.81% as per 2011 Census) and surveyed villages in particular, are lagging much behind in respect of literacy and education than many other districts of the state. Moreover, there exists marked male-female differential in literacy in the district.

### Spatio-Temporal Variation in Literacy Rate

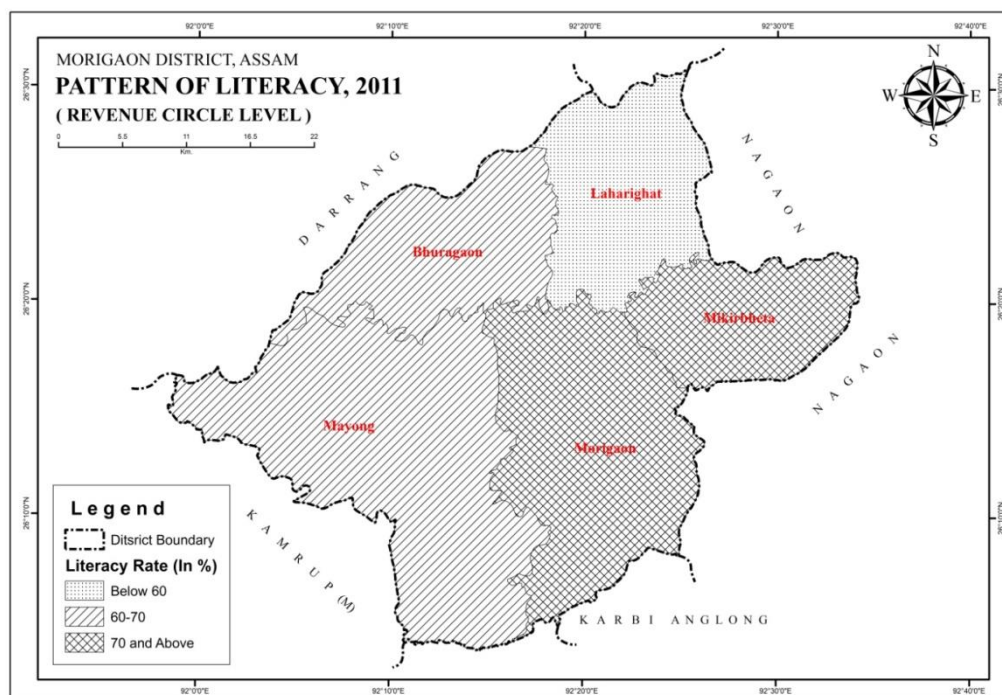
The district of Morigaon presents a very low level of literacy as per 2011 Census (63.81 per cent) as compared to both the state average (72.19 per cent) and national average (74.04 per cent). Despite the literacy rate of Morigaon in 1991 (53.99 per cent) was slightly higher than that of the corresponding state and national averages (52.89 per cent and 52.21 per cent), it has remained behind them by around 10.00 per cent point in 2011 (Table

1 and Fig. 2). In fact, it appears that the district received very little attention from the authorities concerned towards creating a congenial environment including desired awareness for educational development among all sections of the people in the district. Among the revenue circles, the trend of rise in literacy rate has been somewhat faster in Morigaon and Mikirbheta, where it has become higher than even the state and national averages in 2011. On the other hand, Laharighat revenue circle, which is very much affected by bank erosion and floods of the Brahmaputra and inhabited dominantly by non-indigenous Muslim population, still occupies the lowest position in this respect (57.13 per cent). In view of such a situation the entire district exhibits a highly varied and discouraging topography of literacy (Table 1 and Fig. 2).

**Table 1: Literacy Rate (in %) in Morigaon District, Assam at Revenue Circle Level 1991-2011**

| Revenue Circle           | 1991         | 2001         | 2011         |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. Bhuragaon             | 39.95        | 50.43        | 63.44        |
| 2. Laharighat            | 35.93        | 46.92        | 57.13        |
| 3. Morigaon              | 58.67        | 69.94        | 78.55        |
| 4. Mayong                | 47.89        | 58.01        | 67.99        |
| 5. Mikirbheta            | 57.69        | 67.00        | 75.27        |
| <b>Morigaon district</b> | <b>53.99</b> | <b>58.53</b> | <b>63.81</b> |
| <b>Assam</b>             | <b>52.89</b> | <b>63.25</b> | <b>72.19</b> |
| <b>India</b>             | <b>52.21</b> | <b>64.83</b> | <b>74.04</b> |

Source: Census of India, District Census Handbook, Morigaon, 1991-2011.



**Fig. 2**

The primary data collected through sample survey of selected villages and urban localities of Morigaon district present a highly varied picture in terms of literacy rate and its gender disparity. The variation in rural literacy rate is such that it is as low as 41.13 per cent in DighaliPathar village, followed by 43.51 per cent in Balimukh village to as high as 95.00 per cent in Konwargaon, followed by 85.29 per cent in Na-Khulagaon. Such a highly varied pattern of literacy across the district is largely associated with geographical location, educational environment and infrastructure, and ethno-religious composition of population in the areas concerned. Although the literacy rate is found to be somewhat higher in most of the urban localities of Morigaon town, it varies from

as low as 73.83 per cent in Milanpur, followed by 80.11 per cent in Mori Hiragaon to as high as 95.68 per cent in Sonarigaon, followed by 91.30 per cent in Pachatia.

### Gender Disparity in Literacy

The desirable socio-economic development of an area or population group depends on the level of its literacy and its prevailing balance between male and female. So far Morigaon district is concerned, its male literacy as per 2011 Census data stands at 71.90 per cent as against female literacy of 64.04 per cent with gender disparity index of 0.12. While looking at the trend of gender disparity in literacy during 1991-2011 it appears to be somewhat better in the district (0.31 to 0.12) as compared to the state (0.35 to 0.16) and the country (0.48 to 0.23). But in terms of the level of female literacy, the picture is discouraging one. For instance, among the revenue circles in the district, Laharighat circle, which witnesses the lowest level of both male and female literacy rates (59.14 per cent and 55.03 per cent), records the lowest gender disparity (0.07) in this respect. In fact, the picture in this respect is such that gender disparity in literacy in all the revenue circles in the district is lower than the respective average figures of Assam and India (Table 2). Although the sample-based primary data present a very low to moderate level of gender disparity in literacy across the district, on the whole it is found to be quite low in many villages including the urban localities.

**Table 2: Male-Female Disparity in Literacy at Revenue Circle level in Morigaon district, 1991-2011**

| Revenue Circle           | 1991         |              |                  | 2001         |              |                  | 2011         |              |                  |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|
|                          | Male         | Female       | Gender disparity | Male         | Female       | Gender disparity | Male         | Female       | Gender disparity |
| 1.Bhuragaon              | 48.61        | 30.41        | 0.46             | 57.41        | 42.81        | 0.29             | 68.04        | 58.58        | 0.15             |
| 2.Laharighat             | 42.06        | 29.29        | 0.36             | 51.48        | 41.98        | 0.20             | 59.14        | 55.03        | 0.07             |
| 3.Morigaon               | 68.46        | 48.27        | 0.34             | 77.90        | 61.71        | 0.23             | 83.79        | 73.23        | 0.13             |
| 4.Mayong                 | 56.66        | 38.27        | 0.38             | 65.33        | 50.15        | 0.26             | 72.49        | 63.29        | 0.14             |
| 5.Mikirbheta             | 65.61        | 49.54        | 0.28             | 73.79        | 60.00        | 0.21             | 79.10        | 71.48        | 0.10             |
| <b>Morigaon district</b> | <b>56.17</b> | <b>39.19</b> | <b>0.31</b>      | <b>65.14</b> | <b>51.50</b> | <b>0.23</b>      | <b>71.90</b> | <b>64.04</b> | <b>0.12</b>      |
| <b>Assam</b>             | <b>62.34</b> | <b>43.70</b> | <b>0.35</b>      | <b>71.28</b> | <b>54.61</b> | <b>0.26</b>      | <b>77.85</b> | <b>66.27</b> | <b>0.16</b>      |
| <b>India</b>             | <b>64.13</b> | <b>39.29</b> | <b>0.48</b>      | <b>75.26</b> | <b>53.67</b> | <b>0.33</b>      | <b>82.14</b> | <b>65.46</b> | <b>0.23</b>      |

Source: Census of India, District Census Handbook Morigaon, 2011.

### Inter-Community Variation in Literacy and its Gender Disparity

The low level of literacy and its spatial variation across Morigaon district as noticed before may be better understood, if it is analysed between the Hindu and Muslim population, the two major religious groups of the district. So far the literacy rate among the Hindus as per 2011 Census data is concerned, it is found to be higher in Morigaon district (78.37 per cent) as compared to that of Assam (76.66 per cent) and India as a whole (73.30 per cent). But, the picture in the case of Muslims in this respect in the district is quite discouraging (57.76 per cent) as compared to the corresponding figures for the state (61.91 per cent) and country (68.50 per cent). Among the revenue circles in the district, the picture in this respect is somewhat better among the Hindus in Mikirbheta (83.29 per cent) and Morigaon (81.13 per cent), and among the Muslims in Morigaon (68.48 per cent) and Mikirbheta (66.05 per cent). It thus means that the Muslims of the district occupy a very disadvantageous social position having a variety of demographic implications.

It is further observed that although literacy rate among the Hindus in Morigaon district is considerably higher than that among the Muslims, the gender differential in this respect is found to be higher among the Hindus due to the prevalence of almost equally low male and female literacy among the Muslims. Accordingly, so far gender disparity in literacy is concerned, it is found to be as low as 0.07 among the Muslims in the district as against 0.16 and 0.19 respectively in the state and the country, while it is 0.15 among the Hindus of the district as against the corresponding figures of 0.16 and 0.24 in the state and country. It is thus obvious that although

low level of gender disparity in literacy particularly among the Muslims in the district is a welcome phenomenon, its prevailing almost equally low level of literacy among both male and female is not at all encouraging for a balanced socio-economic development of its society.

The inter-community variation in male and female literacy rate across the district may become more clear when village and urban locality level primary data collected during 2018-2020 are analysed. It is accordingly observed that the gender disparity in literacy is highest among the Assamese SC (0.25), followed by indigenous Muslim (0.21), and the lowest among the Hindu Assamese general castes (0.06), followed equally by Bengali SC, Hindu ST and non-indigenous Muslim (0.09). It is thus observed that the Hindu Assamese general castes population occupies an encouraging position in educational development in the district with almost equally high level of literacy among both male and female. The prevalence of high gender disparity among the Assamese SC and indigenous Muslim is largely associated with considerably low level of female literacy as compared to that of male literacy in the midst of overall low level of literacy among them. On the other hand, although the non-indigenous Muslims exhibit low gender disparity in literacy, it is far from satisfactory due to the fact that the literacy rate is almost equally very low among both male and female. Hence, efforts need to be made with priority to improve the literacy level of non-indigenous Muslims, indigenous Muslims and Assamese SC of the district, which would go a long way to check the prevailing high fertility rate among them.

#### **Inter-Community Variation in Educational Attainment and Associated Gender Disparity**

Education being the key indicator of prosperity of a society, the quality of human population of any society can be judged through its educational attainment (Kar, 2007). The educational progress of an area in real term is better understood when the levels of educational attainment are taken into account. This is because, it is the quality and skill of literates which count much, rather than their quantity (Kar and Sharma, 1994). Socio-economic progress and development in a community or a region is mainly reflected through the educational attainment among the literate population in the community. Literacy without educational attainment is a liability to the society, as the high percentage of literates without educational attainment cannot contribute much to the development process of a society due to their limited knowledge and skills.

The educational attainment in a population or area can be assessed through distribution of its literates under different educational levels, viz. Primary, Below HSLC, HSLC & HS, General graduate & above, and Technical graduate and above. Accordingly, the sample data collected from selected villages and urban localities of Morigaon district present a highly varied pattern of educational attainment among the literates. The picture in this respect is found to be quite discouraging particularly in the villages largely inhabited by non-indigenous Muslims, followed by indigenous Muslims, Assamese SC and Hindu ST, as less than 25 per cent of the literates in these areas have educational level above HSLC. On the other hand, the villages inhabited by the Bengali SC and Assamese OBC witness a somewhat moderate position with around 35 per cent literates having educational level above HSLC, and the villages inhabited by Assamese general castes and mixed castes occupy a better position in this respect with more than 50 per cent literates having educational level above HSLC. Although the position of the Assamese general castes and mixed castes is even better in the urban areas of Morigaon town, it is still discouraging in the areas largely occupied by the non-indigenous Muslims and Assamese SC.

When looked at from gender perspective, it is observed that in most cases the proportion of literates with educational level below HSLC is higher among the females than that of males, and as a consequence the disparity index value in this respect turns out to be negative. In contrary, in the case of proportion of literates with educational level HSLC and above, it is found to be higher among the males than that of females with consequent significantly high positive gender disparity (Table 3). The prevalence of gender disparity in this respect is quite high among the non-indigenous Muslim, Bengali SC and Hindu mixed castes; moderate among the indigenous Muslim, Hindu ST and Assamese OBC; and low among the Assamese OBC and Assamese general castes. All these indicate that educational development has been quite low and slow in most parts of the district irrespective of gender with some degree of improvement in the areas largely inhabited by the Assamese general castes and Assamese mixed castes (Table 6).

**Table 3: Inter-community variation in educational level of the literate population among the selected villages and urban areas in Morigaon district, Assam, 2018-2020**

| Major Population Groups           | % of literates with educational level |        |            |        |           |        |                            |        |                            |        |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------|------------|--------|-----------|--------|----------------------------|--------|----------------------------|--------|
|                                   | Primary                               |        | Below HSLC |        | HSLC & HS |        | General graduate and above |        | Technical graduate & above |        |
|                                   | Male                                  | Female | Male       | Female | Male      | Female | Male                       | Female | Male                       | Female |
| 1.Hindu (Assamese General castes) | 20.58                                 | 18.38  | 25.58      | 32.54  | 35.42     | 33.42  | 14.38                      | 11.88  | 3.65                       | 1.39   |
| 2.Hindu (Assamese OBC)            | 21.90                                 | 31.82  | 37.58      | 38.06  | 26.49     | 24.17  | 12.92                      | 8.68   | 1.10                       | 0.17   |
| 3.Hindu (Assamese SC)             | 43.88                                 | 44.00  | 35.35      | 37.48  | 14.57     | 14.17  | 6.51                       | 4.33   | 0.17                       | 0.006  |
| 4.Hindu(Bengali SC)               | 27.29                                 | 15.38  | 34.06      | 33.07  | 29.55     | 10.00  | 9.77                       | 6.15   | 0.75                       | -      |
| 5.Hindu(ST)                       | 34.49                                 | 36.17  | 34.25      | 40.63  | 18.88     | 15.68  | 9.62                       | 6.97   | 3.21                       | 0.54   |
| 6.Hindu(Mixed: General, OBC)      | 17.24                                 | 37.93  | 17.24      | 18.39  | 42.53     | 24.14  | 21.84                      | 19.54  | 1.15                       | -      |
| 7.Muslim(Indigenous)              | 38.60                                 | 50.18  | 29.83      | 29.94  | 23.23     | 22.65  | 8.30                       | 4.73   | 0.311                      | 0.52   |
| 8.Muslim(Non-indigenous)          | 41.80                                 | 50.97  | 39.56      | 36.15  | 14.84     | 11.98  | 3.78                       | 1.37   | -                          | -      |

Source: Primary Survey, 2018-2020.

### Economic Participation and Livelihood Practices

#### Work Participation: Socio-Spatial Variations

According to 2001 Census, the Work Participation Rate (WPR.) is defined as the proportion of total workers to the total population. The composition of working force in an area varies by sex, residence and age. Work participation rate is found to vary spatio-temporally depending upon the demographic, social and economic factors of an area concerned. However, to be more specific, the work participation in an area or population mainly depends on resource potential and its mobilization, and development activities of the area, and associated human resource development. In this respect, there may exist marked gender disparity in work participation. Moreover, the work participation rate is generally higher in the rural areas as compared to the urban areas due to large scale involvement of the rural people in the agricultural sector.

#### Spatio-Temporal Variation in Work Participation Rate and Associated Gender Differential

Work participation rate, also known as worker-population ratio, varies spatio-temporally depending upon a variety of inter-related socio-economic factors. So far the work participation rate in Morigaon district as per 2011 Census is concerned, it is slightly lower than the corresponding averages for Assam and India. The rise in work participation rate during 2001-2011 has also been quite slow in the district like the state and country. Among the revenue circles, the participation rate is quite low in Laharighat circle (Table 4). The prevalence of such a low work participation rate in the district has been largely associated with long continued overall socio-economic backwardness, low level of resource mobilization and low level of human resource development.

**Table 4: Male-Female work participation rate and Gender disparity at revenue circle level  
InMorigaon District, Assam, 2001 and 2011**

| Revenue Circle           | 2001         |              |              |                  | 2011         |              |              |                  |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|
|                          | Person       | Male         | Female       | Gender disparity | Person       | Male         | Female       | Gender disparity |
| 1.Bhuragaon              | 32.87        | 50.13        | 14.22        | 1.09             | 38.04        | 54.01        | 21.16        | 0.86             |
| 2.Laharighat             | 27.62        | 48.32        | 5.46         | 1.55             | 29.32        | 49.85        | 7.82         | 1.43             |
| 3.Morigaon               | 37.92        | 51.56        | 23.78        | 0.79             | 41.37        | 55.71        | 26.78        | 0.69             |
| 4.Mayong                 | 36.86        | 51.93        | 20.80        | 0.84             | 40.36        | 54.31        | 25.78        | 0.70             |
| 5.Mikirbgheta            | 33.55        | 48.53        | 18.10        | 0.91             | 35.65        | 51.70        | 19.68        | 0.89             |
| <b>Morigaon District</b> | <b>33.85</b> | <b>50.24</b> | <b>16.53</b> | <b>0.99</b>      | <b>36.68</b> | <b>53.01</b> | <b>19.78</b> | <b>0.91</b>      |
| <b>Assam</b>             | <b>35.78</b> | <b>49.87</b> | <b>20.71</b> | <b>0.81</b>      | <b>38.35</b> | <b>53.59</b> | <b>22.45</b> | <b>0.81</b>      |
| <b>India</b>             | <b>39.10</b> | <b>51.07</b> | <b>25.06</b> | <b>0.67</b>      | <b>39.79</b> | <b>53.26</b> | <b>25.51</b> | <b>0.69</b>      |

Source: Census of India, District Census Hand book,Morigaon, 2011.

When the variation in work participation rate in Morigaon district is looked at between rural and urban areas as per 2011 Census, it is slightly higher in the rural areas. Although the pattern among the revenue circles in this respect is same, the rural-urban differential is found to be the lowest in Laharighat, and the highest in Morigaon, followed by Bhuragaon (Table 5). This is indicative of the prevalence of limited economic opportunities in the urban areas of the district, where resource mobilisation combined with growth of non-agricultural activities has still been very slow.

**Table 5: Total Work Participation Rate in Morigaon District atRevenue Circle  
Level, 2011**

| Revenue Circle           | Work Participation Rate<br>(As percentage to respective population) |              |              |
|--------------------------|---|--------------|--------------|
|                          | Total   | Rural        | Urban        |
| 1.Bhuragaon              | 38.04   | 38.48        | 32.89        |
| 2.Laharighat             | 29.32   | 29.38        | 27.39        |
| 3.Morigaon               | 41.37   | 42.52        | 34.65        |
| 4.Mayong                 | 40.36   | 40.97        | 35.54        |
| 5.Mikirbgheta            | 35.65   | 35.66        | -            |
| <b>Morigaon District</b> | <b>36.68</b>  | <b>36.90</b> | <b>34.03</b> |
| <b>Assam</b>             | <b>38.35</b>  | <b>38.68</b> | <b>36.41</b> |
| <b>India</b>             | <b>39.79</b>  | <b>41.83</b> | <b>35.31</b> |

Source: Census of India, Primary Census Abstract, Morigaon, 2011.

The data collected through primary survey of the selected villages and urban areas present a marked spatial variation in work participation rate across the district (from 27.44 per cent in Baralimari village to 45.93 per cent in Kachadhara village) due to a variety of locational factors including population composition. From a close look at the distribution of work participation rate in the district, it appears that although there exists no definite pattern between rural and urban areas, it is found to be somewhat lower in the areas inhabited by the general castes Assamese and Bengali SC; moderate in areas inhabited by Assamese OBC, indigenous and non-indigenous Muslims, and Hindu ST; and high in areas inhabited by Assamese SC. This variation is also greatly associated with prevalence of female work participation, i.e. the areas experiencing low female participation rate witness low overall work participation rate and vice versa.

As the female work participation as per 2011 Census in the district is quite low (19.78 per cent) as compared to the male participation (53.01 per cent), the gender disparity in this respect is found to be quite high (0.91). Although there had been slight improvement in this respect during 2001-2011, it is still far from satisfactory. However, there exists marked variation in gender disparity in work participation due to a variety of factors



among the revenue circles (0.69 to 1.43) and villages and urban localities (0.22 per cent to 1.88) in the district (Fig. 3).

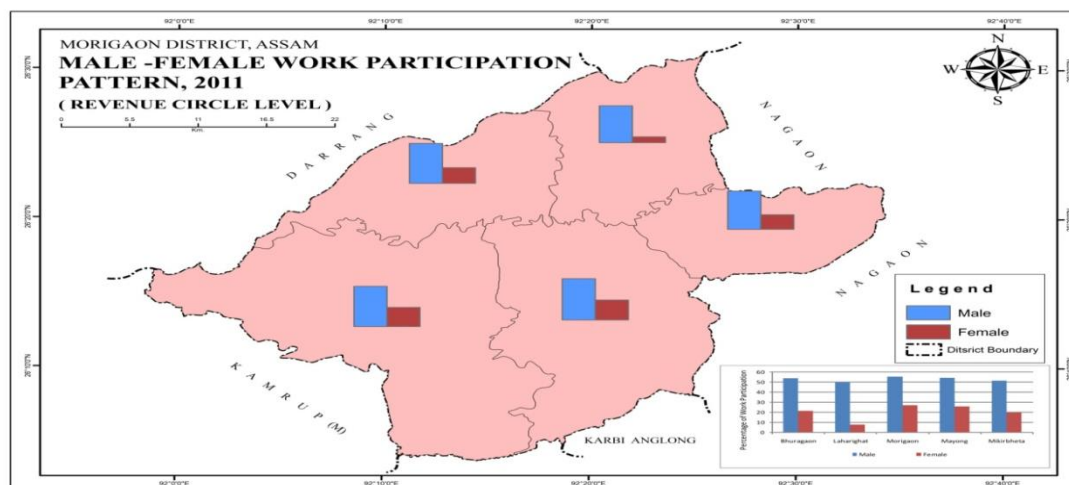


Fig. 3

### Inter-Community Variation in Work Participation and Associated Gender Disparity

The picture of pattern of variation in work participation rate may become more clear if analysis is done among different religious and social groups in the district. Accordingly, when the work participation is looked at between the Hindus and Muslims as per 2011 Census data, it is found to be considerably higher among the Hindus (43.05 per cent) than among the Muslims (30.95 per cent). But, spatially it does not vary much among the revenue circles within both the religious groups (Table 6). As regards male-female disparity in work participation in both the religious groups, although there exist high gender disparity among them, it is found to be significantly high among the Muslims mainly due to the prevalence of very low female work participation. This phenomenon is found to be the same in all the revenue circles with the variation in gender disparity from 0.78 in Mayong circle to as high as 1.51 in Laharighat circle. The picture as revealed by primary data of selected villages and urban areas in the district also further testifies the fact that due to prevalence of very low level of empowerment of non-indigenous Muslim women, the gender disparity in work participation is found to vary from 0.61 (Milanpur urban locality) to 1.46 (BhuyabariPathar). It is further observed among different communities in the district that the gender disparity in work participation is the highest among the Bengali SC (1.88), followed by Hindu mixed castes, non-indigenous Muslim, Hindu Assamese general castes, Assamese OBC, Hindu ST, indigenous Muslim, and the lowest being Assamese SC (0.71).

**Table 6: Work Participation Rate among the Hindu and Muslim at Revenue Circle Level in Morigaon District, 2011**

| Revenue Circle           | Work Participation Rate (%) |              |              |                  |              |              |              |                  |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|
|                          | Hindu                       |              |              |                  | Muslim       |              |              |                  |
|                          | Person                      | Male         | Female       | Gender Disparity | Person       | Male         | Female       | Gender Disparity |
| 1.Bhuragaon              | 47.75                       | 60.04        | 34.69        | 0.53             | 31.67        | 50.05        | 12.31        | 1.23             |
| 2.Laharighat             | 40.67                       | 58.01        | 22.58        | 0.87             | 28.26        | 49.11        | 6.43         | 1.51             |
| 3.Morigaon               | 42.94                       | 56.35        | 29.38        | 0.63             | 35.61        | 53.41        | 17.14        | 1.02             |
| 4.Mayong                 | 43.35                       | 57.51        | 28.60        | 0.67             | 35.15        | 48.41        | 20.89        | 0.78             |
| 5.Mikirbheta             | 40.11                       | 53.13        | 27.51        | 0.64             | 30.93        | 50.25        | 11.10        | 1.27             |
| <b>Morigaon District</b> | <b>43.05</b>                | <b>56.74</b> | <b>29.05</b> | <b>0.64</b>      | <b>30.95</b> | <b>49.71</b> | <b>11.36</b> | <b>1.24</b>      |
| <b>Assam</b>             | <b>41.47</b>                | <b>55.60</b> | <b>26.70</b> | <b>0.70</b>      | <b>32.17</b> | <b>50.24</b> | <b>13.26</b> | <b>1.15</b>      |
| <b>India</b>             | <b>41.04</b>                | <b>53.90</b> | <b>27.34</b> | <b>0.65</b>      | <b>32.57</b> | <b>49.50</b> | <b>14.77</b> | <b>1.07</b>      |

Source: Census of India, District Census Hand book, Morigaon, 2011.

The prevalence of rural-urban differential in work participation in Morigaon and the state of Assam and India as a whole is clearly reflected in the data of work participation rate among the Hindus and Muslims. In view of the prevalence of limited economic opportunities in urban areas particularly among the women population, the overall work participation remains low in urban areas than in the rural areas. But, when compared between the Hindus and Muslims, the work participation is lower among the Muslims due to lack of job reservation, and it is even lower in the urban areas due to traditionally followed restriction of female mobility among the Muslims. This phenomenon has contributed to marked differential in work participation rate between the Hindus and Muslims in most parts of the district as evidenced in the 2011 Census data. But, when the rural-urban differential in work participation is looked at individual religion basis, it is quite significant among the Hindus and insignificant among the Muslims (Table 7).

**Table 7: Rural-urban Work Participation Rate (in %) among Major Religious Groups at Revenue Circle Level in Morigaon District, 2011**

| Revenue Circle           | Hindu        |              | Muslim       |              |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                          | Rural        | Urban        | Rural        | Urban        |
| 1.Bhuragaon              | 49.31        | 35.79        | 31.83        | 28.91        |
| 2.Laharighat             | 41.43        | 32.68        | 28.32        | 25.50        |
| 3.Morigaon               | 44.28        | 35.02        | 36.02        | 33.23        |
| 4.Mayong                 | 44.51        | 36.24        | 35.56        | 32.18        |
| 5.Mikirbheta             | 40.11        | -            | 30.93        | -            |
| <b>Morigaon District</b> | <b>44.02</b> | <b>35.52</b> | <b>30.99</b> | <b>30.17</b> |
| <b>Assam</b>             | <b>42.41</b> | <b>37.22</b> | <b>32.11</b> | <b>33.02</b> |
| <b>India</b>             | <b>43.04</b> | <b>36.20</b> | <b>33.40</b> | <b>31.34</b> |

Source: Census of India, District Census Handbook, Morigaon, 2011.

So far the work participation rate as per 2011 Census among the scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) population of Morigaon district is concerned, it is slightly higher among the ST (45.17 per cent) than the SC (40.77 per cent), which is also true in the case of Assam and India as a whole. Although there exists spatial variation in work participation among the revenue circles, it varies from 33.77 per cent to 42.20 per cent among the SC, and 39.25 per cent to 58.22 per cent among the ST. On the other hand, due to the prevalence of considerably low female work participation among the SC as compared to that of ST, the gender disparity in this respect among the SC is significantly higher (0.75) than that among the ST (0.48), which is also reflected among the revenue circles (Table 8). This phenomenon is associated with traditionally high participation of ST in agricultural activities combined with high female mobility among them for economic reasons as compared to the SC population.

**Table 8: Male-Female work participation rate (in %) and gender disparity among the ST population and SC population at revenue circle level in Morigaon district, Assam, 2011**

| Revenue Circles          | SC Population |              |              |                  | ST Population |              |              |                  |
|--------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|
|                          | Person        | Male         | Female       | Gender disparity | Person        | Male         | Female       | Gender disparity |
| 1.Bhuragaon              | 40.68         | 57.95        | 22.03        | 0.88             | 58.22         | 61.14        | 55.22        | 0.10             |
| 2.Laharighat             | 33.77         | 49.92        | 7.49         | 1.26             | 40.34         | 57.15        | 23.24        | 0.84             |
| 3.Morigaon               | 42.20         | 55.89        | 28.21        | 0.66             | 43.65         | 55.10        | 32.26        | 0.52             |
| 4.Mayong                 | 40.64         | 55.40        | 25.02        | 0.75             | 48.52         | 58.02        | 38.95        | 0.39             |
| 5.Mikirbheta             | 36.57         | 51.81        | 22.03        | 0.81             | 39.25         | 52.69        | 26.09        | 0.68             |
| <b>Morigaon District</b> | <b>40.77</b>  | <b>55.70</b> | <b>25.18</b> | <b>0.75</b>      | <b>45.17</b>  | <b>56.13</b> | <b>34.22</b> | <b>0.48</b>      |
| <b>Assam</b>             | <b>38.16</b>  | <b>55.59</b> | <b>19.78</b> | <b>0.93</b>      | <b>44.00</b>  | <b>53.10</b> | <b>34.80</b> | <b>0.42</b>      |
| <b>India</b>             | <b>40.87</b>  | <b>52.75</b> | <b>28.30</b> | <b>0.59</b>      | <b>48.70</b>  | <b>53.90</b> | <b>43.50</b> | <b>0.21</b>      |

Source: Census of India, PCA, Morigaon, 2011.

### Socio-Spatial Variation in Occupational Structure

The occupational structure of a society is the product of a number of intimately related factors including physical resource base. When the primary resources are utilized on a commercial scale, it generates the diversification of occupational structure. Moreover, the occupational composition of workers reflects the economic character of a region. It is directly related to the economic activities of the people involved in an area along with educational attainment of the people and economic functioning of the area. The occupational structure is very broadly classified into agricultural workers and non-agricultural workers. The agricultural workers include the cultivators and agricultural laborers; and the non-agricultural workers include workers engaged in household industries and other workers.

Being largely rural in character, the economy of Morigaon district is dominated by agriculture and allied activities like fishing, grazing, etc. It is worth mentioning that out of total workforce in the district as per 2011 Census, as high as 67 per cent is engaged in agriculture as against the state and country's average proportions of 46.53 per cent and 50.23 per cent respectively. This is indicative of its prevalence of quite low occupational diversity as compared to many other parts of the country. So far spatial variation in this respect across the district is concerned, among the revenue circles, the proportion of agricultural workers varies from as low as 55.56 per cent (Morigaon circle) to as high as 76.48 per cent (Bhuragaon and Laharighat circles). The prevalence of considerably low agricultural participation in Morigaon circle is due to its considerably high urbanization level, for which a large proportion of workers remains engaged in non-agricultural sector (41.20 per cent) largely consisting of construction, commerce and various public and private services, followed by Mayong circle (33.77 per cent) having the influence of urbanization.

The picture with respect to spatial variation in occupational composition would become more clear from the data of primary survey of selected villages and urban areas of the district. Accordingly, among the selected villages, the proportion of cultivator varies from as low as 6.94 per cent in Na-Khulagaon to as high as 50.93 per cent in DighaliPathar due to the prevalence of agricultural productivity, population composition, urban influence, educational attainment, etc. Between these two villages, while Na-Khula is dominated by mixed general caste population with high educational attainment, DughaliPathar is inhabited by non-indigenous Muslims with traditionally largely dependent on agricultural activities. Among the others, the villages inhabited by Muslim (both non-indigenous and indigenous), Hindu ST, and SC (both Assamese and Bengali) witness high participation of workers in agriculture and daily wage labourer. In view of marginality of land among many people and having some level of educational attainment irrespective of community, there is an emerging trend of workers switching over to business (from as low as 10 per cent BhuyanbariPathar to as high as 50 per cent in Na-Khulagaon) in most parts of the district. Similarly, there is also a trend among the educationally somewhat advanced people of different population groups for participation in various categories of public and private sector jobs (from as low as 2.82 per cent in Boribandha village to as high as 35.00 per cent in Kachadhara village) in recent times. On the other hand, in the case of selected urban localities of Morigaon town, prevalence of a considerably high proportion of workers in agriculture and daily wage labourer among the Muslim (both non-indigenous and indigenous), Hindu ST and SC is indicative of their traditional attachment with agriculture and other primary activities. While participation of urban workers in business (around 20 per cent to 35 per cent) is almost common in all the selected localities inhabited by different population groups, participation in public and private sector jobs is found to be very high in the localities inhabited largely by Hindu general castes, OBC and Hindu ST having somewhat better educational attainment (Table 9).

**Table 9: Inter-community variation in occupational composition among the selected villages and urban areas in Morigaon district, Assam**

| Major Population groups           | Occupational Structure (As percentage of total workers) |                   |          |               |                 |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------|----------|---------------|-----------------|
|                                   | Cultivator  | Daily wage labour | Business | Govt. Service | Private Service |
| 1.Hindu (Assamese general castes) | 20.00   | 6.95              | 27.59    | 20.46         | 24.99           |
| 2.Hindu (Assamese OBC)            | 29.95   | 12.88             | 27.41    | 16.61         | 13.15           |
| 3.Hindu (Assamese SC)             | 33.26   | 21.55             | 22.31    | 10.28         | 11.48           |

|                               |       |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 4.Hindu (Bengali SC)          | 21.95 | 21.95 | 34.15 | 12.20 | 9.76  |
| 5.Hindu (ST)                  | 26.67 | 23.33 | 25.25 | 13.20 | 10.49 |
| 6.Hindu (Mixed: General, OBC) | 6.94  | 16.67 | 50.00 | 13.89 | 12.50 |
| 7.Muslim (Indigenous)         | 25.77 | 32.61 | 22.57 | 8.29  | 10.60 |
| 8.Muslim (Non-indigenous)     | 34.81 | 33.47 | 19.35 | 5.89  | 7.13  |

*Source: Primary Survey, 2018-2020.*

### **Inter-Community Variation in Occupational Structure**

The factors influencing variation in occupational structure may also be understood by analyzing the same as per 2011 Census data for major religious and caste groups in Morigaon district. If comparison is made between the Hindus and Muslims of the district, the Muslims are found to be more attached to agricultural activities compared to the Hindus, as 73.66 per cent of workers among the Muslims are found to be engaged in agriculture as against 61.04 per cent among the Hindus. Although this phenomenon is almost the same in the case of Assam as a whole, it is just otherwise in the case of India as whole. Among the revenue circles, the spatial variation in occupational composition is such that the proportion of agricultural workers among the Muslims has recorded as high as 80.35 per cent in Bhuragaon circle, followed by 77.42 per cent in Laharighat circle. Interestingly, Morigaon circle having considerable proportion of urban population is characterized by uniformly lowest proportion of agricultural workers (around 55 per cent) among both the Hindus and Muslims.

Between two ethnically significant caste groups like scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) also there exists marked differences in occupational composition in Morigaon district as per 2011 Census data. It is observed that the proportion of workers engaged in agriculture among the ST is higher (76.06 per cent) than among the SC (65.18 per cent), which is also true in the case of Assam and India as a whole. Among the revenue circles, the proportion of workers in agricultural activities with respect to the ST is quite high with almost uniform pattern, while the participation of SC in agricultural activities is quite low with marked spatial variation. It is further observed that the SC population of Laharighat circle witnesses the lowest participation in agricultural activities (33.60 per cent) as against 83.43 per cent among the ST in the same circle. In the case of other workers, the SC population records the highest proportion (64.57 per cent) in Laharighat circle, followed by Morigaon (41.94 per cent) and Mikirbheta (41.56 per cent). It is thus clear that the ST population is more attached with agriculture, and the SC, as traditionally an occupational caste, is more attached with non-agricultural activities including various traits and business in the district.

### **Gender Disparity in Occupational Structure**

So far gender disparity in occupational composition is concerned, in view of the prevalence of low proportion of cultivators among women as compared to men, and considerably high proportion of female workers as agricultural labourer, household industry and other worker as compared to male counterparts in Morigaon district and its different parts as per 2011 Census data, the gender disparity is found to be moderate positive in the case of cultivator and low to very high negative in the case of agricultural labourer, household industry and other worker. This is true even in the case of most of the revenue circles. However, the picture in this respect is quite different in the case of various population groups, where the gender disparity in occupational structure is quite high with index value ranging between 0.71 and 1.88.

### **Inter-Community Variation in Employment Pattern**

Employment, which means the state of having a job or being employed with payment for providing services under public and private sectors, greatly influences the economic status of any population group or area. The district of Morigaon, which occupies a low position in socio-economic development front as compared to many other parts of Assam, has not been able to generate employment opportunities in diverse services. Moreover, there exists marked variation in employment rate among different population groups depending on their educational attainment and associated skills, and also prevailing provision of reservation in job among different caste/tribe groups. This phenomenon is very much reflected in the prevalence of highest employment rate among the Assamese general castes based on educational merit (45.42 per cent), followed by Assamese OBC,

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Hindu mixed castes, Hindu ST, Assamese and Bengali SC, indigenous Muslims, and the lowest being non-indigenous Muslims (13.02 per cent). It may be mentioned here that in view of lack of provision for job reservation among the Muslims and also prevalence of lower educational attainment among the large section of them, the employment rate remains so low in them.

### **Income Pattern: Spatial and Inter-Community Variation**

Among the various economic determinants, the level of income is considered most important. Level of income in a family and its sources greatly influences the overall socio-economic condition of the family in an area. Moreover, the standard of living and dietary habits are also greatly determined by income level. Due to the variation in the level of income, the expenditure pattern and quality of life are also found to vary significantly. An adequate income is necessary to have a comfortable living along with required educational and health facilities.

From the field study it reveals that most of the households (around 90 per cent) largely belonging to Muslim community together record very low to medium level of family income. On the other hand, a considerably high proportion of households (above 35 per cent) mainly belonging to Assamese general caste and OBC, living in the villages and urban localities record high to very high level of income. Thus, the level of income is found to be highly varied due to a variety of factors including variation in land holding size, educational level, skill and resource mobilization.

Depending on family type, economic condition, educational attainment, women's mobility, etc the number of earning members per family is found to vary significantly (from 1.56 in Raja Mayong village to 2.90 in Balimukh village) among the selected villages in the district. On the other hand, among the different population groups in the district, it is found to be lowest among the Assamese mixed caste (1.67), followed by Hindu ST, Assamese general caste, and the highest among the Assamese OBC, followed by Indigenous Muslim and non-indigenous Muslim.

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing discussion reveals that despite gradual rise in literacy rate and significant decline in its gender disparity in most parts of Morigaon district, it still remains significantly behind Assam and India including its educational attainment, more particularly in the interior rural areas and Muslim dominant areas of the district. The land holding size of Morigaon district, which is mostly small with moderate degree of variation particularly between the general caste Hindus and Muslims, is largely characterised by dominance of small scale agriculture in the midst of fragmentation of land following breaking of joint family system more visibly in and around the urban areas. The work participation rate in Morigaon district, which is slightly lower than the state and national averages, varies considerably among the revenue circles with lowest being in Laharighat, and there exists marked gender differential in this respect in most parts of the district with highest being in Laharighat, which is clearly visible with quite high gender disparity among both Muslims and Hindus with highest being among the Muslims due to lack of desired women empowerment among them.

Although the economy of Morigaon district is largely based on agriculture, its occupational composition varies both spatially among the revenue circles and socially among the different population groups with considerably somewhat higher degree of participation in non-agricultural activities in the areas like Morigaon circle, followed by Mayong and Mikirbhet with some influence of urbanization, other development activities and educational progress, and interestingly although there exists moderate degree of gender disparity in agricultural sector in favour of male, it is just otherwise in the case of non-agricultural activities including household industry. The pattern of income distribution varies among the different population groups in Morigaon district in such a way that the proportion of households with considerably high income is above 30 per cent among the Assamese general caste and Hindu mixed caste, quite low with below 10 per cent among the non-indigenous Muslims, and moderate with around 15 per cent among the other population groups including OBC, indigenous Muslim, ST and SC. Similarly, the expenditure pattern is also indicative of a somewhat better living standard among the Assamese general caste, followed by OBC, and quite low among the Muslims, ST and SC in the district.

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