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**DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSFORMATION OF KOKRAJHAR TOWN:
POPULATION GROWTH, MIGRATION & SOCIO-ECONOMIC
EFFECTS**

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Population Growth, Migration, Socio-Economic impact, Kokrajhar Town, Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).</i>	Kokrajhar Town, which is in Assam and serves as the headquarters for the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), has undergone considerable change demographically and spatially during recent times. This paper explores changes resulting from population growth patterns, migration from rural areas to cities, and socio-economic impacts of these changes in Kokrajhar Town's demographics. The methodology of this study uses secondary census data from the census office as well as primary socio-economic survey data collected from residents in Kokrajhar Town to show how expanding educational institutions, the establishment of administrative institutions, and opportunities for trade have increased the flow of people into Kokrajhar Town. The findings show that although Kokrajhar Town's growth has led to a more diverse economy and increased the number of small businesses in the informal trade sector and expanded public infrastructure, it has also made existing inequalities between horizontal structures more extreme, put pressure on public utilities in Kokrajhar Town, and created a complex multilingual city that needs urgent attention



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	regarding urban planning. Specifically, planning efforts should develop strategies to match infrastructure investment with the availability and sustainability of economic opportunity for a long-term outcome in the future as the largest institutional centre of BTC, located in Lower Assam.
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Introduction

The evaluation of demographic change is a key aspect of understanding how regions experience economic transitions, changes in regional structure, and social change. The demographics of urban areas in Northeast India grow not only under the influence of their existing industries but also in response to the need for places to work and to provide safe spaces for living, administrative services, and educational opportunities. Kokrajhar Town, located on the banks of the Gaurang River, in Lower Assam, is an example of a different kind of development trajectory than most towns that are growing due to industrialisation and migration. Kokrajhar is the capital of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) that resulted from the signing of peace accords between the Bodo people and the Government of India. As such, it is a transportation gateway that connects Assam to the rest of the Indian subcontinent. As a result, the demographic make-up of Kokrajhar has been affected by changes to the administrative boundaries of the BTC, changes to the regional economy and the growth of inward migration.

The recent change in how people interact with their environments has resulted in population explosion. The construction of cities along the BTR differs greatly from traditional economic models of rural-to-urban migration based solely on anticipated economic differences between cities and towns (Harris & Todaro, 1970). The driving force behind population growth in Kokrajhar can be attributed to the confluence of political variables, conflict-driven variables, ecological variables and economic variables. The recent growth of Kokrajhar and its historical development are intrinsically tied to wider civil rights movements and sporadic civil disturbances that have occurred in lower Assam since the late 1980s. The Bodoland Territorial Council created in 2003 by Amendment of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution established an institutionalized localized-state-like structure which consolidated all administrative, developmental, and public service resources into Kokrajhar. The creation of this localized governance through administrative structure has created a strong "pull" for business opportunity, education, and skill development through the urbanization process of Kokrajhar, resulting in large numbers of companies, educators, contractors, and professionals migrating to Kokrajhar.

Originally, Kokrajhar was simply an administrative centre within the former undivided Goalpara district in 1983, it became an independent district. Following the signing of the 2003 and 2020 Bodo Accords, Kokrajhar's political significance has continued to expand. (Boro, 2024). The completion of the infrastructure provided an opportunity for large numbers of people to move into Kokrajhar as has occurred in other urban regions. Kokrajhar Town transitioned from an outpost of a



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largely homogeneous region to a densely populated, multicultural urban centre. The population increase in Kokrajhar Town can be attributed largely to the dual processes of natural biological expansion and migration from rural to urban areas. Migration from rural to urban areas has been driven by a number of push factors in rural areas, including agricultural saturation, poverty, and seasonal vulnerability due to environmental factors. Pull factors in the urbanised area, which have attracted large numbers to the city, include institutional employment, expansion of trade, and improved access to educational facilities (Basumatary, 2013).

These rapid changes in demographics have had a significant socioeconomic impact on the region. With agricultural-based livelihoods diminishing in rural Lower Assam, many of the incoming migrants have been forced into the informal urban economy, where they primarily participate in street vending, manual labour, transportation, and small-scale retailing businesses. In addition to the effects that the increase in population has had on the informal economy of Kokrajhar, the expanding population is also changing the cultural and linguistic landscape of Kokrajhar from a relatively isolated region, to a multi-lingual community with several linguistic groups (Bodo, Assamese, Bengali, and Santali) all residing in close proximity to one another (Brahma, 2011). Because of the challenge presented by the rapid and unregulated increase in population, there are now significant gaps in infrastructure and education, and there continues to be a large disparity between the established formal institutional framework and the rapidly growing informal economy. Understanding the way these factors interact will be crucial for developing public policies that result in equitable distribution of resources and sustainable urban development.

Objectives

1. To Examining how Trends and Determinants of Population Growth and Rural-Urban Migration in Kokrajhar Town.
2. How the Socio-Economic Changes from Demographic Transformation with Emphasis on Urban Informal Labour Market and Gender Participation.
3. To evaluate what Structural and Infrastructural Challenges Resulting from Growing Urban Population Stress on Kokrajhar Town's Existing Infrastructure.

Methodology

This research employs a mixed methods design containing both primary fieldwork and secondary data analysis as part of this study methodology. Secondary data are taken from the Census of India Reports (1971, 1991, 2001, 2011) including longitudinal population, decadal growth rates, and literacy and gender statistics with the addition of Bodoland Territorial Council Statistical Handbook and the Assam Human Development Reports. And the Primary data will be obtained through a field survey conducted to assess present day micro level trends in the municipality and in the peri urban areas of Kokrajhar Town.



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Area of study

Assam is located within north-eastern India within the tropical climate sphere and one of India's 27 districts. Kokrajhar district occupies 3169 sq. km total land area, and extends from 89° 46' East longitude to 90° 38' east longitudinal and from 26° 19' North latitude to 26° 54' / North latitude. The Kokrajhar Town is located in the north-western in Assam, corner of the state and the headquarter of Bodoland Territorial council (BTC). It is situated on National Highway 27 and has rail connectivity via the Northeast Frontier Railway network. Kokrajhar is located in a strategically important location in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), which allows for both administrative and economic exchange with adjacent districts and states. Kokrajhar's geographical location has played an important role in its development as an urban centre. The town has become a service hub for the surrounding rural communities by providing educational, healthcare, commercial and administrative services. Over time, improvements to transportation and communication networks have increased the town's importance as a regional centre and facilitated the concentration of population in the area.

The Population Growth in Kokrajhar Town

Since 1991, Kokrajhar has experienced continued population growth. The signing of the Second Bodo Accord Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), in 2003 has been considered the pivotal moment in Kokrajhar's demographic changes. Based on Census data, Kokrajhar's total population has been increasing steadily. Below is the total population, decadal growth rate, and spatial area for Kokrajhar since 1990:

Census Year	Total Population	Decadal Growth Rate (%)	Area Sq. Km.
1991	24,180	-	6.50
2001	31,153	28.84	8.20
2011	34,136	9.57	9.15
2021(Projected/Est.)	43,500	27.43	12.40

Source: Compiled from Census of India and Municipal Records.

Based on data from the 2011 census, the Kokrajhar Municipal Board has a total population of 34,136 people with a literacy rate of approximately 89.96% which is significantly higher than the district's average. In addition, the town has a sex ratio of 943 females per 1,000 males and has a large portion of its population engaged in some form of economic activity.

While post-2011 numbers are significantly larger than pre-2011 census results, the projected total for 2021 highlights the impact of municipal area boundary expansion and rapid absorption of rural/semirural communities immediately adjacent to Kokrajhar (Tengapara, Magurmari,



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Bhatarmari). The population growth in Kokrajhar town represents an unmistakable evolution. From a colonial outpost that had stagnated, the town has become an urban area that is developing rapidly. The population during the late 20th and early 21st centuries has grown substantially.

According to the Census of India records for Kokrajhar district in Assam, the following is the population data and decadal growth rates of Kokrajhar for 1971 to 2011.

Census year	Total population	Decadal growth rate	Boundary realignment
1971	416996	53.9%	This period was marked by high immigration and regional growth
1981	No census	-	Due to agitation census was not conducted in Assam
1991	744609	78.6 %	In 1983 Kokrajhar became a fully fledged district
2001	843243	13.2 %	Boundaries established under the early autonomous setup with Kokrajhar.
2011	887,142	5.19 %	Growth in Kokrajhar since the last published census has slowed down dramatically

Declining Growth Rate:

The population growth rate of Kokrajhar during the decade of 1991-2001 dropped dramatically from somewhat over 13% for the period of 1991-2001 to a mere 5.19% for the period of 2001-2011.

Well below State Average:

The 2011 decadal growth rate of 5.19% was significantly below the overall growth rate for the State of Assam of 17.07% for the same period.

Urban & Rural (2011):

As with the previous decade, the census indicates that the vast majority of Kokrajhar district's population is still predominantly rural (approximately 93.8%) and only a very small part



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(approximately 6.2%) of Kokrajhar district's population resides in urban villages (i.e., Kokrajhar and Gossaigaon).

Kokrajhar's Demographic Expansion During 1971-2011

Political turmoil and protests prevented the 1981 decennial census from being taken in the entire state, thus making interpreting the 1971-1991 Census data a means of establishing a comparative basis for the two years. The 1971 Census counted less than 20,000 persons in Kokrajhar. However, after Kokrajhar was designated as the district headquarters in 1983, the next Census in 1991 showed an explosive increase in Kokrajhar's population, other newly formed administrative hubs across Northeast India have also shared this pattern of rapid growth (Narzary, 2016).

According to the 2001 Census, the Kokrajhar Municipal Board had an estimated population of 31,152 by the 2011 Census, Kokrajhar's population inside the Municipal Board's boundaries had grown to 34,136. This count of 34,136 does not accurately reflect Kokrajhar's total municipality. When including the continuous urban development of Kokrajhar and its peri-urban areas through the Magurmari and Tengapara extensions and the area around the Balaji Mandir, the 2011 Census estimates Kokrajhar's functional urban population at over 50,000 (Government of India, 2011). The decennial 2021 Census could not be completed due to delays related to the pandemic and administrative extensions researchers have created small statistical models and utilized the number of registered voters on electoral rolls to provide an estimate of the current population of Kokrajhar, respectively.

The Factors of Population Growth in Kokrajhar Town

The main three structural shifts which have been driving the population growth include:

- i. **Population Increase By Natural Processes (Natural Increase):** Whereas most births have fallen into national demographic transition rates, having better access to health services has reduced infant and mother death rates dramatically compared to rural areas (Medhi, 2019).
- ii. **Centralising Administration (By establishing a BTC/BTR):** It brought in many government employees, many security staff and many institutional advisors - and they created many permanent or semi-permanent places to live in the town.
- iii. **The Immigration of Students for Educational Purposes:** The establishment of the Bodoland University, CIT Kokrajhar, Kokrajhar govt. College now become Kokrajhar University, Law College, Engineering College, B.Ed College and other institutions - introduced a very large number of temporary and floating teachers and students (both



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student/faculty) who play an important role in stimulating the local consumer and housing markets.

Migration and Demographic Change Kokrajhar Town

Demographic transformation in Kokrajhar Town is being primarily driven by migration; whereas stable urban areas have a deterministic demographic structure as a result of organic growth, Kokrajhar has seen its demographic structure affected by a plethora of different waves of migration. Migration into Kokrajhar Town operates according to 3 key vectors of migration:

- i. Rural to Urban Economic Pull.
- ii. Conflict-Induced Displacement and Protection.
- iii. Inter-district and Inter-state.

Rural to Urban Economic Migration

Small farmers and agricultural laborers migrating from rural areas surrounding Kokrajhar, Chirang and Dhubri in search of non-agricultural employment (primarily in construction, retails and informal transport).

Conflict-Induced Displacement and Protection

In Western Assam during the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were a number of ethnic/political conflicts. During periods of instability, wealthy and middle income rural families of a variety of ethnic groups migrated permanently to Kokrajhar Town because they saw Kokrajhar as a safe place, protected by central government security forces (Roy, 2015).

Inter-district and Inter-state School Level Migration

Professionals working in new occupations created by economic development in Assam and the Northeast are moving to Kokrajhar Town from other cities/areas in Assam (e.g. Guwahati, Barpeta, Nagaon) and other states (West Bengal, Bihar).

Shifting Demographic and Social Composition

The social structure of Kokrajhar has been drastically restructured as a result of these migratory flows. Historically dominated by Bodo and Assamese settlements, today Kokrajhar's population is diverse and multi-ethnic with large communities from Bodo, Bengali, Koch-Rajbongshi, Assamese, Gorkha, Bihari, and Marwari ethnic backgrounds (Narzari & Hazarika, 2022). This diversity creates an exciting multicultural environment in the city, but it has led to the development of different residential sections throughout the city that each contains a large number of residents from different socio-ethnic backgrounds. Although these residential segregations create



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common economic activity for all neighbourhoods, they may also reinforce the boundaries between groups because they do not interact frequently at work or home.

Socio-Economic implications in Kokrajhar

Kokrajhar's growing population has caused vast changes to its economy as well as its social structure and infrastructure. These changes provide a mix of benefits because development gains and problems are occurring at the same time.

Changes in the Labour Market and Informal Sector

Migrating people have caused a change in Kokrajhar's labor market by rapidly increasing the size of Kokrajhar's informal economy. Because the large number of rural workers migrating to the city have not been able to find jobs in the public or private sectors, the informal sector has become the main way for the new workers to enter the workforce. The informal sector consists of many different types of workers such as street vendors small business owners manual rickshaw drivers, construction workers, maids, etc. Migration has also driven many women into urban businesses. Over 73% of the women that sell products in Kokrajhar's municipal markets are migrants who have migrated to urban areas due to poverty or forced to migrate because of life's circumstances.

While the informal economy is very important in providing workers a way of making a living, but the lack of labour rights, well defined social protection systems / social security and worker protection means they have little protection from risks. Their daily earnings often have rapid fluctuations and they usually depend on informal credit networks or high interest loans from local money lenders for their working capital. And also, the availability of large numbers of cheap workers has kept the cost of many of the services in the town low, which has benefited the growing urban middle class, but has also contributed to creating a great deal of economic disparity and leaving many people in the town living in economically unstable situations.

Structural Pressure on Civic Infrastructure

Kokrajhar Municipal Board was originally a low-density semi-urban settlement. Due to the current over-population density of the Kokrajhar Municipal area, all basic amenities are near exhaustion:

Waste Management: The daily amount of municipal solid waste generated currently exceeds the amount collected therefore, unauthorized dumping sites have developed along the banks of the Gourang River, which poses environmental hazards to the surrounding area (Das & Daimari, 2021).

Water Supply and Drainage: The heavy reliance on private tube well water has contributed to a decline in the local water table during the pre-monsoon months. The inadequate



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supply of concrete drainage channels has caused many low-lying wards to have artificial water logging after heavy rainfall during the monsoon.

Irrigation system has provided significant economic returns to rural economies. It enhances productivity in agriculture and supports the development of successful agricultural systems. There are two ways that irrigated methods of growth and productivity fall into two main types Major and medium irrigation and Minor irrigation. Types of minor irrigation may be broken down into: Flow and lift. The total irrigation potential created in Kokrajhar district at the end of 2012-13 for Rabi season grew to 4065 hectares (ha) and 10,968 ha during Kharif. Of the total minor irrigation (flow) 6230 ha and the total major irrigation (flow) is 4750 ha by the end of 2012-13 for the district. In the state, total irrigation created is 682,782 by the end of 2012-13. At the end of 2012-13, total irrigation potential created in the state was 428,440 ha (flow) and 254,342 ha for major and medium irrigation. Although the progress of irrigation potential for minor irrigation is fairly positive at the state level, it continues to lag behind major and medium irrigation systems at the district and state level, when compared to the averages for the district (both flow and lift).

Traffic and Transport: Due to the large volume of private vehicles, E-rickshaws, and commercial transport in the narrow grid layout of all historical roads in Kokrajhar, there is a need for systematic traffic zoning and road widening. In 2012-2013, there were 4,038 registered vehicles in this District compared with 227,367 in the State. The total number of registered cars in this District is lower than the District average which is 8,421 registered cars. The following table illustrates the growth of registered cars:

Year	Motor Vehicle Registered in District
2008-2009	1,843
2009-2010	-
2010-2011	4,237
2011-2012	4,953
2012-2013	4,038

Source: Statistical Hand Book of BTC 2009 to 2012

Real Estate, Land Use & Spatial Expansion

The most visibly impacted area due to the demographic transformation is the hyper-inflation of land values in and around Kokrajhar Town. The premium placed on urban security and accessibility to the administration has changed land from being a traditional asset, to becoming a highly speculative asset in Kokrajhar which has resulted in displacing lower income local residents from the formal real estate market (Brahma, 2019). Urban sprawl has resulted in the development of



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residential colonies (e.g. Shantinagar, Subhashpalli, Bhatarmari extensions) on formerly prime agricultural land or wetlands along the edges of the town. The unchecked spatial conversion associated with urban sprawl presents a significant long term ecological risk to the natural drainage basins in Kokrajhar Town.

The Development of New Social Relations and Cultural Integration

As diverse communities live together socially, they create conditions for cultural exchange such as public festivals, different foods available to eat, and businesses that operate in many languages. While these signs of urban integration are visible, there are other deeper issues that may cause concern among people who live in the area. These concerns include political representation, land rights, and dominance over a particular group's culture. For example, local Indigenous Peoples have expressed concern that their population may be watered down due to the increasing number of immigrants from other countries and their views about the importance of this issue play an important role in local elections and how people look for municipalities to provide services (Narzari & Hazarika, 2022).

Conclusion

The evolution of Kokrajhar Town due to the change in the demographics from its administrative development, as well as by migration, demonstrates how an urban centre of medium size located within a sensitive frontier, is able to evolve rapidly. As the result of a steady increase in population driven by institutional development and growth, economic opportunities, and security-related behaviours, Kokrajhar has experienced rapid growth from being a quiet sub-divisional town to being the headquarters of the Bodoland Territorial Council. While Kokrajhar continues to experience greater commercial activity and infrastructure development and cultural diversity as a result of these dynamics, there have been significant negative impacts to the municipality's infrastructure due to pressure from rapid population growth, unregulated land-use changes and socio-economic inequality. In order for Kokrajhar to achieve long-term sustainable urban development, governance must shift from being reactive crisis managers to being proactive in the creation of urban master plans. Achieving a proper balance between the pace of modernization and the preservation of ecological and social capital (or the local environment) will be the primary objective for policy makers, planners and residents of Kokrajhar Town.

AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.



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