

## Decline of Hindus and the Rise of Muslims in Assam

In view of the special attention that is focused now on Assam because of the ongoing assembly elections, we are once again deviating from the proper sequence to discuss the religious demography of Assam in this note. In the normal course, after describing the unusually high growth in the intensely Muslim pocket of Mewat in Haryana, we should have taken up the much larger pocket of high Muslim presence and growth in western Uttar Pradesh, which borders on Haryana and Delhi. Instead we shall discuss Assam and West Bengal in this and the next note and return to Western UP and other pockets of high Muslim presence and growth later.

The relative growth of Muslims in Assam during 2001-11 has been extraordinarily high. The share of Muslims in the population of the State has risen by 3.3 percentage points in this decade. This is the highest accretion in the Muslim share for any State; the average accretion for India has been only 0.8 percentage points. This is also the highest accretion in the share of Muslims witnessed in Assam in any decade since Independence.

Muslims now form a large majority in seven districts of the Brahmaputra valley, Dhubri, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Darrang, Nagaon and Morigaon; and, in two of the three districts of Barak valley, Hailakandi and Karimganj. In eight sub-districts of the former region, Muslim presence is above 90 percent and in another 6 it is between 80 and 90 percent. This level of dominance of a community in an area indicates not only that their relative growth is higher, but also that others are being excluded from there. Indeed, some of the sub-districts of this region have witnessed a decline in the absolute number of Hindus during the previous decade of 1991-2001 and also during 2001-11.

Here we try to draw a picture of how the religious demography of Assam has been transformed in the course of the last few decades.

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### Religious Demography of Assam

Of the total population of 3.12 crore counted in Assam in 2011, 1.91 crore are Hindus, 1.07 crore Muslims and about 12 lakh Christians. Besides them, there are less than 21 thousand Sikhs, about 55 thousand Buddhists, 26 thousand Jains, 27 thousand ORPs, and nearly 51 thousand have been counted in the category of Religion Not Stated. The rise in this last category has been unusual almost everywhere in this decade. Another noticeable aspect of the data compiled here is the decline in the absolute number of Sikhs from 22.5 thousand in 2001 to 20.7 thousand now. Decline in the Sikhs has also been widespread across the country during 2001-11.

Religious Demography of Assam, 2001-11			
	2001	2011	%GR
Total	2,66,55,528	3,12,05,576	17.07
Hindu	1,72,96,455	1,91,80,759	10.89
Muslim	82,40,611	1,06,79,345	29.59
Christian	9,86,589	11,65,867	18.17
Sikh	22,519	20,672	-8.20
Buddhist	51,029	54,993	7.77
Jain	23,957	25,949	8.31
ORP	22,999	27,118	17.91
RNS	11,369	50,873	347

### *Extraordinarily high growth of Muslims*

But the most significant aspect of the data is the extraordinarily high growth of Muslims during 2001-11. Their growth of 29.6 percent in this decade is 2.7 times that of Hindus at 10.9 percent. More importantly, the rate of growth of Muslims during this decade has *increased*, though marginally, as compared to the previous decade, while there has been a sharp *decline* in the growth of Hindus and of the total population. This has resulted in further widening of the gap between the growth rates of Hindus and Muslims. The growth of Christians during this decade has also declined as compared to the previous decade, though it still remains much higher than that of Hindus.

	Decennial Growth Rates %	
	1991-2001	2001-2011
Total	18.92	17.07
Hindus	14.95	10.89
Muslims	29.30	29.59
Christians	32.54	18.17

### *More Muslims than Hindus have been added in this decade*

As a result of the high growth of Muslims, the accretion to their numbers during 2001-11 has been much higher than others. Of 45.5 lakh additional persons counted in Assam in this decade, 24.4 lakh are Muslims, and only 18.8 lakh Hindus. Looked at in another way, of every 100 persons added to the population in 2001-2011, 54 are Muslims and 41 Hindus. Of the remaining five, 4 are Christians and one has been counted in the RNS category.

	Higher Accretion in Muslim numbers	
	Accretion 2001-2011	% Share in Accretion
Total	45,50,048	100.00
Hindu	18,84,304	41.41
Muslim	24,38,734	53.60
Christian	1,79,278	3.94
Sikh	-1,847	-0.04
Buddhist	3,964	0.09
Jain	1,992	0.04
ORP	4,119	0.09
RNS	39,504	0.87

### *Unusually large rise in the Muslim share during 2001-11*

Assam has been witnessing a decline in the share of Hindus and a rise in that of the Muslims since the beginning of the twentieth century. But the quantum of change seen in this decade is extraordinary. Muslims had gained by 2.48 percentage points in the previous decade of 1991-2001 and before that they had added 3.87 percentage points to their share in the two decades between 1971 and 1991. For 3 decades before 1971, the rise in the share of Muslims had remained under check because of the Partition of 1947. There was in fact a slight decline in the Muslim share in 1941-51; and another slight decline was seen in 1971, probably because of the impending War. The four decades between 1901 and 1941 are the period when Muslims from parts of what later became Bangladesh were settled in Assam in large numbers as a matter of British policy. The rise in the proportion of Muslims that has taken place in the 4 decades since 1971 is comparable to the rise in the 4 decades of British-sponsored Muslim settlement. Even in that period, the rise of 3.35 percentage points in the Muslim proportion seen in the last decade was exceeded only once, in 1921-1931, when the share of Muslims in the then much lower population of the State rose by 4.04 percentage points.

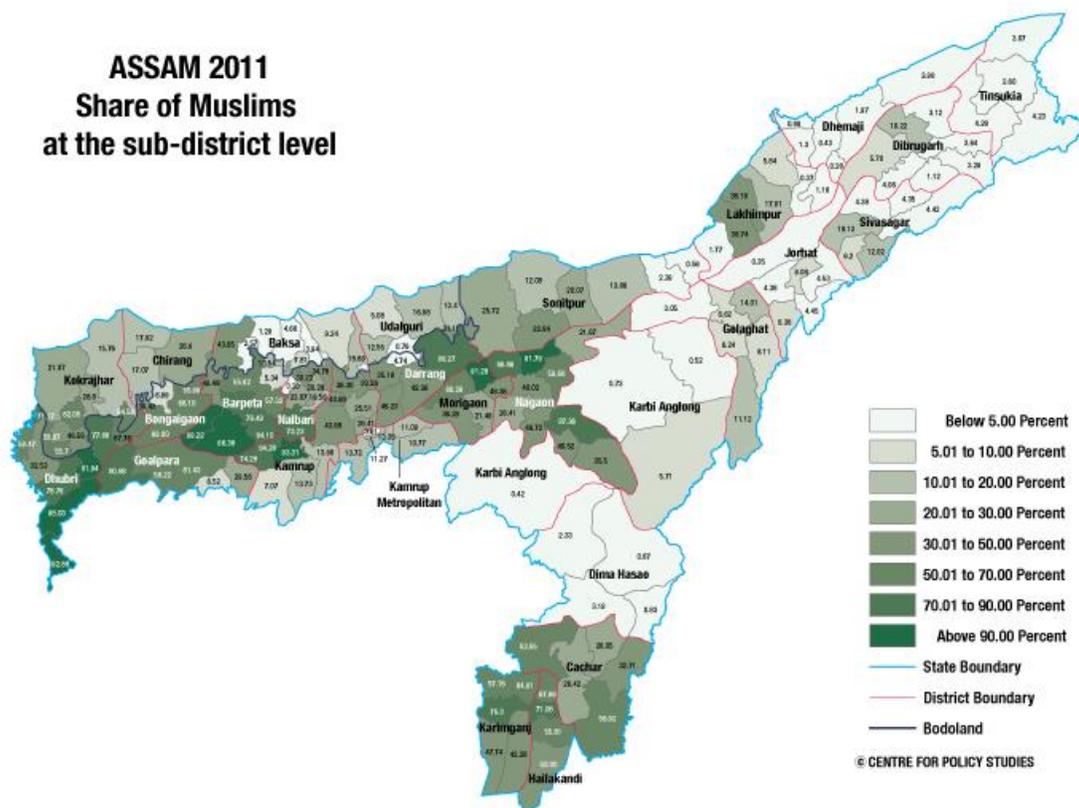
Year	Muslim Share and decadal Accretion in %age points	
	Muslim Share %	Accretion % points
1901	15.03	-
1911	16.21	1.18
1921	18.74	2.53
1931	22.78	4.04
1941	25.13	2.35
1951	24.68	-0.45
1961	25.30	0.62
1971	24.56	-0.74
1991*	28.43	3.87
2001	30.92	2.48
2011	34.22	3.31

\* Census not done in 1981

The rise in the share of Muslims and decline in the share of Hindus recorded in Assam in 2001-2011 is indeed extraordinary and is the highest among all States. In the following, we try to study the nature of the change in the religious composition of the population that has occurred in Assam in some detail.

## Distribution of Muslims across different regions of Assam

Distribution of Muslims across Assam is shown in the Map below. As seen in this Map, Muslims are largely concentrated in two distinct regions. Of the total 1.07 crore Muslims in Assam, 74 lakhs are in the Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nagaon region in the Brahmaputra valley and another 17.5 lakhs are in the Barak valley. There are a total of 14 districts in these two regions. Among these 13, Muslims form a majority of the population in 9, and they have a presence of more than 30 percent in another 3 districts. Muslim presence is low only in Kamrup Metropolitan and Sonitpur districts.



### Lower and North Assam

#### *The region of very high Muslim presence*

Dhubri, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Kamrup (Rural), Kamrup Metropolitan and Nalbari of Lower Assam and Darrang, Sonitpur, Morigaon and Nagaon of North Assam form a contiguous belt occupying both sides of the highly fertile Brahmaputra valley. Before 1961, these 11 districts, along with the newly created 4 districts of Bodoland, were organized as only four districts, Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nagaon. The British had started settling Muslim peasantry in this part of Assam, mainly in the composite Goalpara and to a lesser extent Kamrup districts, from several districts of what later became Bangladesh. That migration has continued even after Independence and

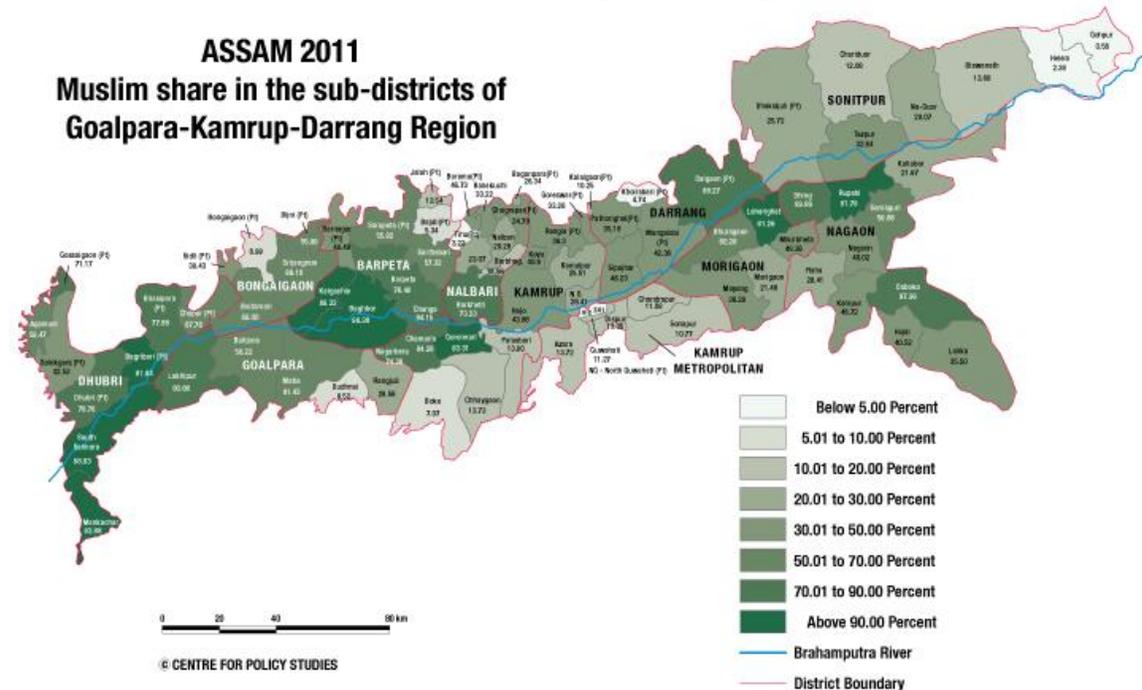
Partition; and, it has become much more intense and has spread to more areas after 1971. As seen in the Table below, Muslims have now established an overwhelming presence in this region; two-thirds of all Muslims in Assam are concentrated in these 11 districts. They form a near majority of the population of the region as a whole. Only in Kamrup (Rural), Kamrup Metropolitan, Nalbari and Sonitpur districts they are not in a majority. If we remove these four districts, their share in the population of the remaining 7 districts goes up to 61 percent.

**Muslims in Goalpara-Kamrup-Darrang-Nagaon Region**

	Total	Muslims	%Share
Dhubri	19,49,258	15,53,023	79.67
Goalpara	10,08,183	5,79,929	57.52
Bongaigaon	7,38,804	3,71,033	50.22
Barpeta	16,93,622	11,98,036	70.74
Nalbari	7,71,639	2,77,488	35.96
Kamrup	1517542	601784	39.66
Kamrup Metro	1253938	151071	12.05
Darrang	9,28,500	5,97,392	64.34
Sonitpur	19,24,110	3,50,536	18.22
Morigaon	9,57,423	5,03,257	52.56
Nagaon	28,23,768	15,63,203	55.36
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,55,66,787</b>	<b>77,46,752</b>	<b>49.76</b>

*Muslims share is above 90 percent in several sub-districts of this region*

In the Map below, we show the share of Muslims in the sub-districts of this region. As seen in this Map, they have a share of 50 percent or more in 36 of the 92 sub-districts of the region and their share is between 40 to 50 percent in another 10. Muslim majority sub-districts are labeled in white in the Map below. In Bagribari (Pt), South Salmara, Manakchar sub-districts of Dhubri, Kalgachia and Baghbor of Barpeta, Rupahi of Nagaon and Goroimari of Kamrup, Muslims form more than 90 percent of the population. Their share is 90 percent in Laharighat of Morigaon.



*Indian Religionists are getting excluded from several sub-districts*

The share of Muslims in these sub-districts could not have possibly risen to the level of 90 percent and above only through their higher rate of growth; it would have also required reduction in the numbers of others. Indeed in many sub-districts of this region, listed in the Table here, the absolute number of Indian Religionists had declined between 1991 and 2001, indicating that they had been constrained to leave. In many other sub-districts, the Indian Religionists had been barely able to retain their numbers in that decade. Similar analysis for 2001-11 is not possible because nearly all the sub-districts of this region have been reorganized in 2011. But the number of Hindus in Kalgachia of Bongaigaon, which has not been reorganized after 2001, has indeed declined from 1,516 in 2001 to 1,391 in 2001.

Subdistricts with Absolute Decline in the Number of Indian Religionists, 1991-2001			
District	Sub-district	1991	2001
Kokrajhar	Bhowaraguri	27,526	27,501
	Dotoma	1,17,553	98,929
Dhubri	Bagribari	32,614	31,273
	Chapar	50,255	49,165
	S Salmara	5,557	4,271
Bongaigaon	Bijni	2,22,132	2,01,744
Barpeta	Kalgachia	3,187	1,632
	Baghbor	14,112	11,028

*Muslim share in this region has increased enormously*

In this region, the share of Muslims has risen much more than the average of the State. Since the districts in this region have been extensively reorganized, it is not possible to compare the current figures with the earlier period. It is, however, possible to get long time-series data for the area covered by the earlier (of 1961) Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang districts together and for the earlier Nagaon district. This would include the whole region of Lower and North Assam that we are discussing along with the four districts of Bodoland. As seen in the Table here, the share of Muslims in Kamrup, Goalpara and Darrang districts together increased from 34.9 to 38.0 percent in 1991-2001 and has further increased to 42.1 percent now. In composite Nagaon, the rise is even higher; the Muslim share here increased from 46.7 to 50.1 percent during 1991-2001 and has further increased to 54.6 percent now. Between 1971 and 2011, there has been an accretion of 12 percentage points in the share of Goalpara-Kamrup-Darrang region and of nearly 15 percentage points in the Nagaon region. During 2001-11, Muslims in the former region have grown by 30 percent and by 33 percent in the latter region, while the Indian Religionists in these regions have grown by around 9 and 11 percent, respectively. If we were to exclude the Bodoland region from Goalpara-Kamrup-Darrang region, then the rise in the share of Muslims and their growth would be even higher and perhaps similar to what is seen in the Nagaon region.

Muslim Share in Percent			
	Goalpara +Kamrup +Darrang of 1961		Nagaon of 1961
1901	14.36		4.83
1941	31.69		38.53
1971	30.04		39.99
1991	34.89		46.71
2001	37.97		50.14
2011	42.06		54.65

In 1901, the share of Muslims in these two regions was merely 14.4 and 4.8 percent respectively. There were only 2 lakh Muslims in the Goalpara-Kamrup-Darrang-Nagaon region in 1901; their number now is 83.5 lakhs. Indian Religionists in this period have multiplied only 6.8 times, their number rising from 14.3 to 97.7 lakhs. If we exclude the Bodoland districts from this region, then the Muslims, who were a miniscule minority in 1901, have now acquired a commanding majority here.

Muslims and IR (in thousands) in the Goalpara-Kamrup-Darrang-Nagaon		
	1901	2011
Indian R.	1,430	9,771
Muslims	204	8,349

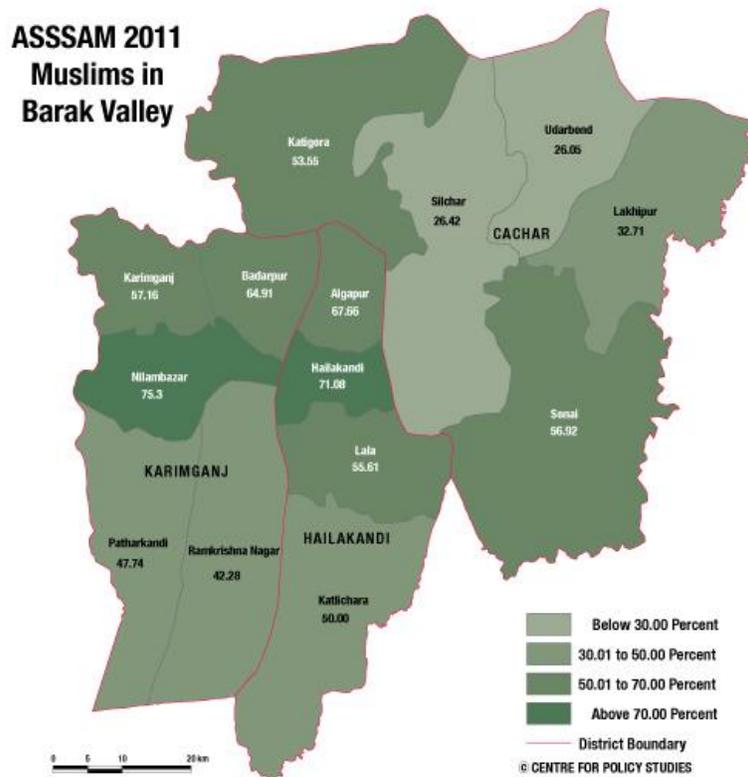
## Barak Valley

The 3 districts of this region accommodate another 17.5 of the 107 lakh Muslims of Assam. They form 48.14 percent of the population of the region; their share here has increased by 2.67 percentage points from 45.47 percent in 2001. They had registered a somewhat smaller gain of 2.45 percentage points during 1991-2001 and of 3.13 percentage points in the two decades between 1971 and 1991.

Muslims have had a significant presence in this region since the beginning of the Census operations in India. But they have gained by 8.25 percentage points in the four decades since 1971. The change in their share used to be more modest earlier.

Of the three districts in this region, Muslims form a majority in Hailakandi and Karimganj, with a presence of 60.1 and 56.4 percent, respectively. In Cachar district, the Muslim share is lower at 37.7 percent. Rise in the share of Muslims during the last decade has been the most pronounced in Karimganj, where they have gained by 4.06 percentage points.

As seen in the Map below, Muslims form a majority in 9 of the 14 sub-districts in this region; their presence is above 40 percent in another two. In 2 of the sub-districts with a Muslim majority, the share of Muslims is above 70 percent.

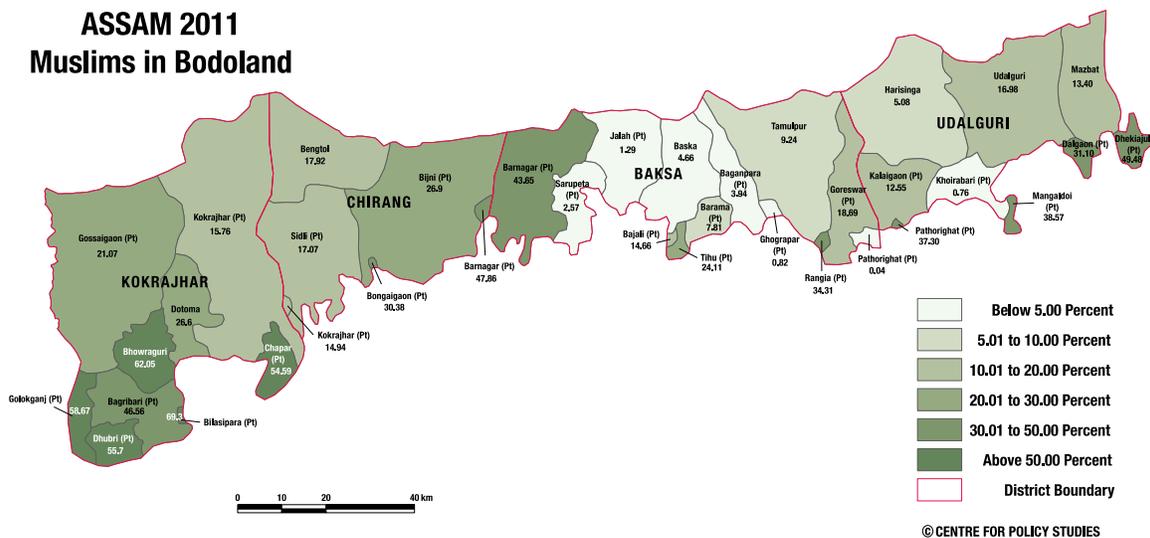


In 1901, there were 2.4 lakhs Muslims in this region, compared to 2 lakhs in the Goalpara-Kamrup-Darrang-Nagaon region. In 2011, there are 17.5 lakh Muslims here, while their number in the latter region has risen to 83.5 lakhs. The growth of Muslims in the region of Lower and North Assam has indeed been abnormally high.

## Bodoland

Bodoland has been formed in the course of the last decade by reorganizing nearly all districts of lower Assam and Darrang of North Assam. This new semi-autonomous region comprises the reorganized district of Kokrajhar and newly carved out districts of Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri. Since Bodoland was, until recently, a part of the Goalpara-Kamrup-Darrang-Nagaon region of very high Muslim presence and growth, it has a considerable Muslim presence. There are a total of 6 lakh Muslims in the region; they form 19 percent of the population. They have a share of 28.4 percent in Kokrajhar and 22.7 percent in Chirang. As seen in the Map below, Muslims are in a majority in 5 of the 9 sub-districts (labeled in white) of Kokrajhar; in Bilasipara (Pt) and Bhowraguri (Pt), their share is as high as 69.3 and 62.0 percent, respectively.

	Total	Muslims	%M
Kokrajhar	8,87,142	2,52,271	28.44
Chirang	4,82,162	1,09,248	22.66
Baksa	9,50,075	1,35,750	14.29
Udalguri	8,31,668	1,05,319	12.66
<b>Total</b>	<b>31,51,047</b>	<b>6,02,588</b>	<b>19.12</b>

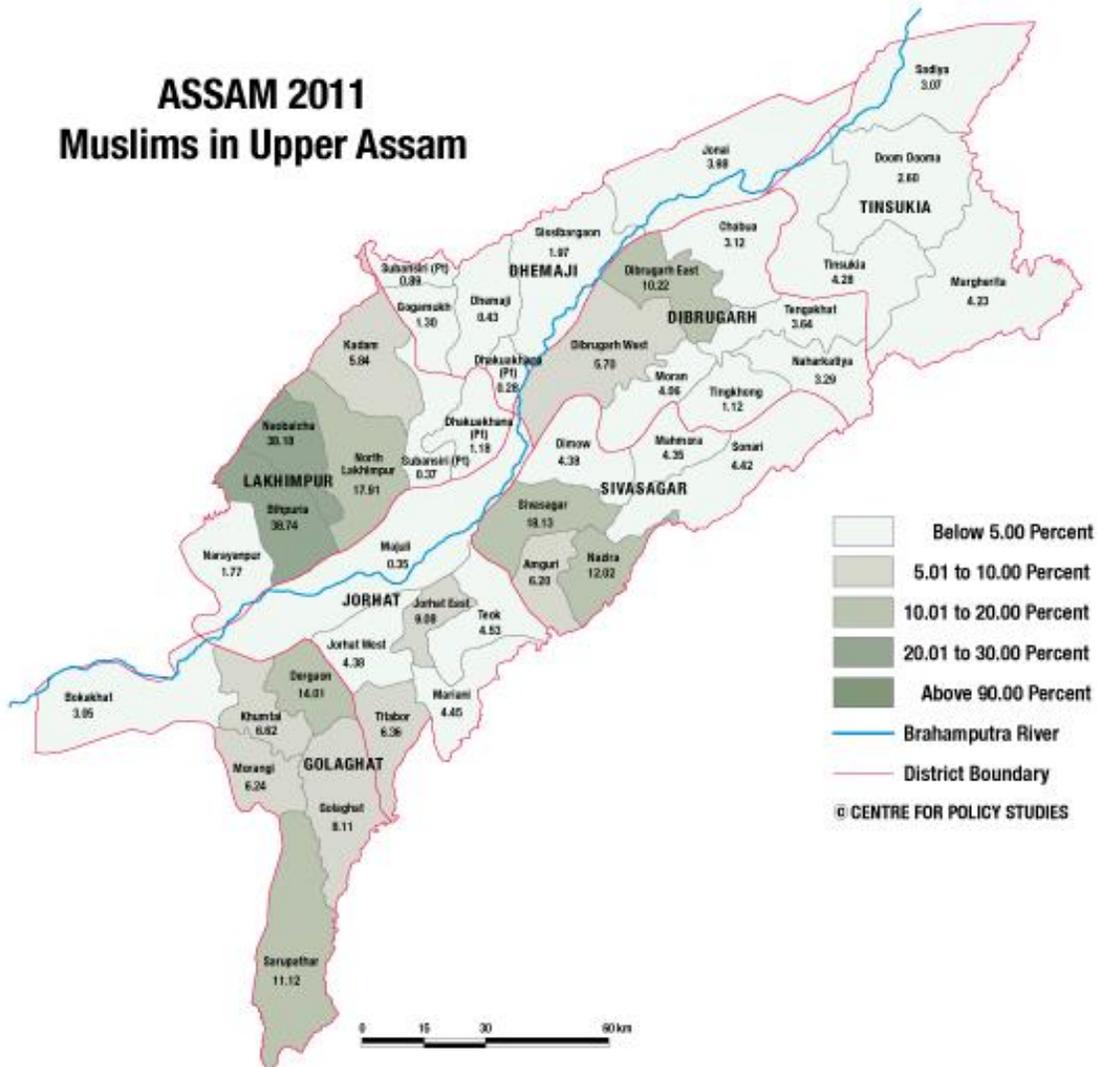


## Upper Assam

This region comprises the earlier two composite districts of Lakhimpur and Sivasagar. This is the region of Assam where Indian Religionists continue to dominate the population. There are not many Muslims (or Christians) in this region. There are 5.6 lakh Muslims in the population of about 77 lakhs, forming 7.3 percent of the total. This number is also very high compared to the Muslim presence in this region in 1901, when there were less than 37 thousand Muslims here. There were 1.9 lakh Muslims in the region in 1971; they have increased to 5.6 lakhs now.

	Total	Muslims	%M
Lakhimpur	10,42,137	1,93,476	18.57
Dhemaji	6,86,133	13,475	1.96
Tinsukia	13,27,929	48,373	3.64
Dibrugarh	13,26,335	64,526	4.86
Sivasagar	11,51,050	95,553	8.30
Jorhat	10,92,256	54,684	5.01
Golaghat	10,66,888	90,312	8.46
<b>Total</b>	<b>76,92,728</b>	<b>5,60,399</b>	<b>7.28</b>

A large proportion of Muslims in this region is in Lakhimpur, where they have a share of 18.6 percent in the population. As seen in the Map below, Muslims in this district are concentrated in the western sub-districts of Bihpuria and Naobaich, where they form more than 38 percent of the population. There are also about 18 percent Muslims in the contiguous North Lakhimpur sub-district. These three account for 1.83 lakhs of 1.93 Muslims in the district. Besides these, Muslim presence in this region is above 10 percent in only five sub-districts. These are: Sivasagar and Nazira of Sivasagar district, Dergaon and Sarupathar of Golaghat and Dibrugarh East of Dibrugarh.



### Karbi Anglong and Dima Hsao Region

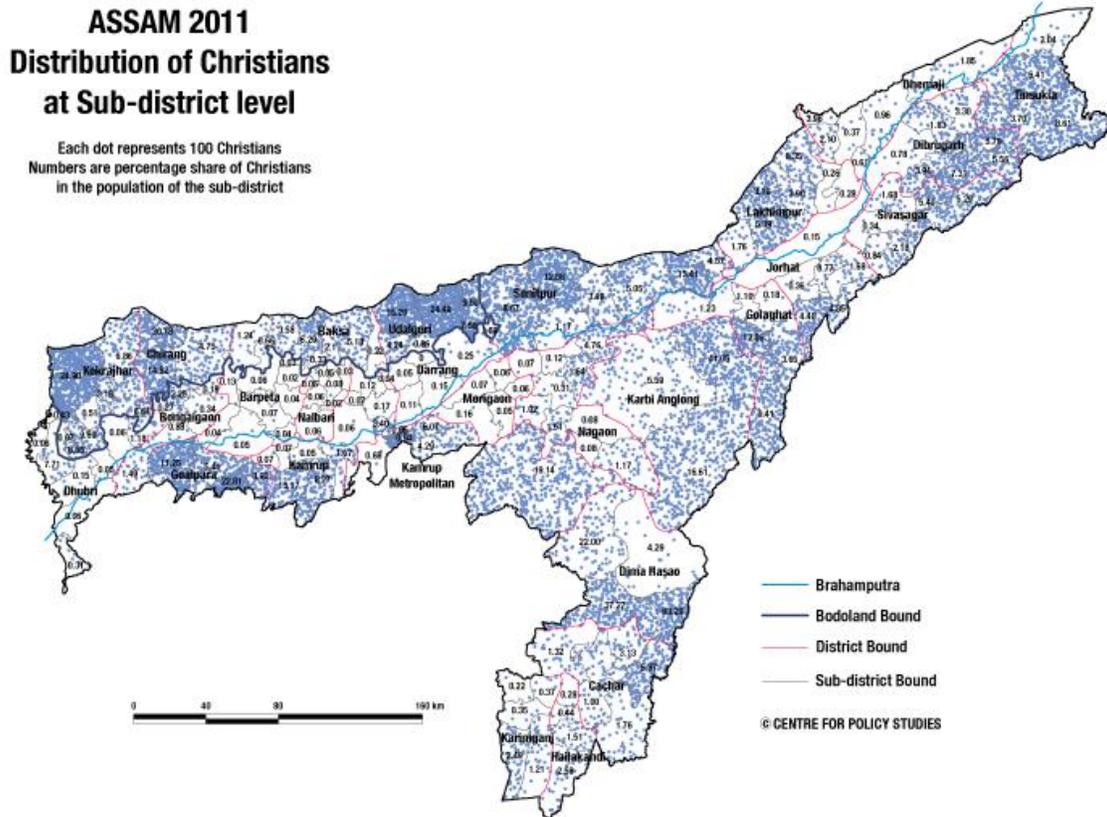
There are not many Muslims in this region of Assam. In 2011, only 24.6 thousand Muslims have been counted in the population of 11.7 lakhs. They have a share of only 2.1 percent in this region. As we see below, Christians have a significant presence here.

## Distribution of Christians in Assam

Christian presence in Assam is not very high. In 2011, a total of 11.66 lakh Christians have been counted in the total population of 3.12 crore. They have a share of 3.74 percent in the State. It is marginally above their share of 3.70 percent in 2001. As in much of the northeast, there were few Christians in Assam before Independence; their share in the population of Assam in 1941 was 0.56 percent and it was 0.41 percent in 1901. In 1931, their share was somewhat higher at 1.42 percent.

Christians in Assam, 2011			
Region	Total	Christians	%C
Goalpara etc.	1,55,66,787	3,08,981	1.98
Bodoland	31,51,047	2,88,129	9.14
Upper Assam	76,92,728	2,89,553	3.76
Karbi-Dimasa	11,70,415	2,21,099	18.89
Cachar	36,24,599	58,105	1.60
Total Assam	3,12,05,576	11,65,867	3.74

As seen in the Table above and the Map below, Christians have a share of 18.9 percent in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hsao region; they also have a relatively high share of 9.1 percent in Bodoland. In the latter region, their presence is more than 10 percent in all districts except Baksa, where their share is only 2.8 percent. Their share is as high as 63.3 percent in Mahur sub-district of Dima Hsao and 41 percent in Silonijan of Karbi Anglong. They have a share of more than 20 percent in 6 other sub-districts, two of these are in Dima Hsao, one each in Kokrajhar, Udalguri and Chirang of Bodoland, and one of these sub-districts, Dudhnai, is in Goalpara district.



### *Rapid Growth of Christianity in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hsao*

These two districts together were earlier known as United North Cachar and Mikir Hills. In this composite district, the share of Christians has increased steadily from 6.7 percent in 1951 to 18.9 percent in 2011. During 2001-11 alone, there has been an accretion of more than 2 percentage points in the Christian share. The number of Christians in the composite district has increased from 11 thousand in 1951 to 2.2 lakhs in 2011. Rise in the proportion of Christians has been more pronounced in Dima Hsao district, where there has been an accretion of 3 percentage points to their share in the last decade, from 26.7 percent in 2001 to 29.6 percent in 2011. The share of Christians in Dima Hsao in 1971, when the two districts were separated, was 21.9 percent. Density of population in Dima Hsao is rather low; the district has a total population of 2.1 lakh persons; of them 63 thousand are Christians. Karbi Anglong has 1.6 lakh Christians in a population of 9.6 lakh.

#### **Christian Share in United N Cachar and Mikir Hills**

Year	Christian Share %
1951	6.66
1961	9.85
1971	10.31
1981	na
1991	14.70
2001	16.77
2011	18.89

### **Summing Up**

1. Of all States in India, Assam has experienced the largest rise in the share of Muslims during 2001-11. It was expected that following the rapid rise of Muslims in the previous several decades, the imbalance in the growth of different communities in Assam would now begin to moderate. Instead, it has considerably worsened.
2. There has been an accretion of 3.3 percentage points in the share of Muslims during 2001-11; this is not only the largest accretion compared to all other States, it is also the largest experienced since Independence and the second largest since the beginning of the Census period.
3. The share of Muslims in Assam has now gone up to 34.2 percent; it was 15.1 percent in 1901, 24.7 percent in 1951 and 24.6 percent in 1971. Thus, in the four decades between 1971 and 2011, the accretion to the Muslim share has been exactly equal to what was added to their share in the five decades of the pre-Independence period of 1901-51. In both the periods, Muslims have added 9.6 percentage points to their share. In absolute terms, the rise of the latter period is much bigger than that of the pre-Independence period, because it has taken place on a much larger base of Muslim population.
4. During 2001-11, accretion to the number of Muslims is nearly one and a half time the accretion to the Hindu numbers. Among the total of 45.5 lakh persons added to the population between 2001 and 2011, 24.4 lakh are Muslims and 18.8 lakh Hindus.
5. Number of Muslims in Assam has now risen to 1.07 crore; there were less than 5 lakh Muslims here in 1901 and less than 20 lakh in 1951. The number of Indian Religionists in this period has gone up from 28 lakhs in 1901 to 1.94 crore now. Muslims have multiplied nearly 22 times, while Indian Religionists have multiplied less than 7 times. Between 1971 and 2011 alone, the number of Muslims has tripled, while Indian Religionist have grown by a factor of 1.8.

6. Muslims in Assam are concentrated in two regions: One, Goalpara-Kamrup-Darrang-Nagaon region of Brahmaputra valley and Cachar region of Barak valley. Of 1.07 crore Muslims in Assam, 83.5 lakh are in the former and another 17.5 lakh in the latter region. There are only 6 lakh Muslims elsewhere in Assam.

7. In 1901, there were only 2.1 lakh Muslims in the Brahmaputra valley region mentioned above; their number here has multiplied more than 40 times. In Cachar, there were 2.4 lakh Muslims in 1901; they have multiplied by only around 7 times. The growth of Muslims in the former region is clearly abnormal.

8. Part of the reason for this abnormal growth is in the organized effort by the British in the pre-Independence period to settle Muslim peasantry from several districts of what is now Bangladesh in particularly the highly fertile Goalpara region of Brahmaputra valley.

9. But the larger reason is that the migration that was initiated by the British did not cease after Independence and Partition. The numbers indicate that the inflow as well as growth of Muslims has greatly increased after 1971. There seems to have been another spurt in this phenomenon during 2001-11.

10. As a result of Muslim inflow and growth, Muslims now form a majority or near majority in both Goalpara-Kamrup-Darrang-Nagaon region (excluding Bodoland) and in Cachar. In several districts in these two regions, their presence is above 60 percent.

11. Several sub-districts of these two regions, and especially in the Brahmaputra valley region, have become nearly exclusively Muslim; share of Muslims in these is above 90 percent and is even near 100 percent in some. There is Census evidence to indicate that Hindus from these sub-districts have been constrained to leave.

12. Muslims, thus, have now acquired a commanding majority in a large and relatively more fertile and densely populated part of Assam. The numbers and the trends indicate that this majority has now become permanent and is going to become more and more entrenched in the coming decades.

13. The turning of a major and most fertile part of Assam into a region of entrenched Muslim majority in just the last 4 decades must rank amongst the greatest failures of the polity of Independent India. It is an indicator of the gross manner in which the Indian political, administrative and intellectual elite has failed India. Similar failure can be seen in the way first much of the northeast and now Arunachal Pradesh have been allowed to become exclusively Christian regions and the way Muslims have been allowed to dominate northern Kerala. All this has happened in the decades after Independence, and mostly after 1981. But, of all these failures, Assam is perhaps going to prove the most expensive for the nation and the people.

P/S: More than a couple of decades ago, in the late 1980s, when the militancy in Kashmir was building up to a peak, a very senior and respected political scientist told me that we

are all worried about Jammu and Kashmir, but the situation of Assam is of much more critical. India, he said, can live with the recalcitrance of the Kashmiri Muslims, but the strain of Assam, a part of Ganga-Brahmaputra Valley, acquiring a Muslim majority would be too much for Indian polity to bear. He also said that he has spoken about his concern to all those who matter, but nobody cares. Nobody has indeed cared. And, the data of Census 2011 indicates that the denouement has come to pass. Let us hope the Indian society throws up the wisdom and vigor to deal with it.