

Place Names of Dhubri District of Assam: An Onomastic Study

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Abstract: Name is the first identifier of anything. Human beings name everything in the world, including animals, birds, rivers, places and any other objects used in daily life to identify them according to their needs. These naming words are known as nouns. Nouns play a pivotal role in language. Naming the places also is an important phenomenon from socio-cultural point-of-view. Onomastics is the special branch of linguistics that studies these place names or nouns systematically. A name is always influenced by socio-cultural, political and geographical factors. There is a reason behind every name. Dhubri is a historical place located in the western part of Assam. According to the census in 2011, Dhubri district has 1616 revenue villages under nine revenue circles. These names have not yet been studied extensively. Many, especially the younger generation, are not aware of the causes behind the names. As the elderly leave us, the meanings of place names, the real reasons for naming, etc. may gradually disappear. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research on names of places at Dhubri district. The main purpose of this study is to discuss the meaning of these place names, their basic linguistic structures, legends associated with them etc. systematically. It should be noted that there are ethnographic, historical, linguistic, geographical and social factors involved in the creation of place names. A thorough study and systematic analysis of these various aspects is unfolded in this research work.

KEYWORDS: Onomastics, Toponymy, Place names of Dhubri, Word Structure, Word Formation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of Linguistics in recent times, the scientific analysis of names has gained special importance. Nominal words or proper names are important in a person's life. Onomastics is the study of history and origin of proper names. So, the study of place names also comes under the umbrella of Onomastics which is known as Toponymy. Toponymy is the combination of the Greek words 'Topos' (place) and 'onoma' (name). This branch of Onomastics deals with the names of villages, cities, streets, walls, fields, forests, mountains, rivers, ponds, lakes, etc. One of the concepts obtained about the study of toponymy is: "A set of place names is called 'toponymy' and their study is called 'toponomastics'" (Sarat Kumar Phukan, *Toponymy of Assam*, p.4)

Toponymy studies the history associated with the naming process of a place and the contemporary history associated with place names and their importance. Toponymy emphasises on study of geographical location, linguistic analysis of forms and meanings, historical importance of place names, influences of place names in folklore, determination of ethnic groups, cultural elements in place names etc. Toponymy also studies the meaning, location, geography, etymology, history and archaeology related to place names in terms of contemporary resources and time.

The study of place names of Dhubri district of Assam is comparatively a maiden effort. This study, therefore, may create multiple opportunities for upcoming researchers.

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of this study are:

- To identify the origins and meanings of various place names of Dhubri district.
- To study the formation and structures of various place names.
- To find out possible reasons behind naming the places.

Significance of the Study

The study of words helps to enrich a language. Especially nominal words contribute to the development of language abundantly. Discussion on Place Names provides information about the cultural heritage and origins of various names. It is also a topic to learn about the meaning, history and significance of a name. The onomastic study of the place names of Dhubri will help us to understand the historical background and cultural heritage of certain places of the district. Observations on the formation of the words will enrich the vocabulary linguistically.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on an onomastic perspective. Two different approaches are adopted to study the subject. These are:

- a. Collection of Data
- b. Analysis of Data

Methods of Data Collection

Resources for this study have been collected through both primary and secondary sources. The place names have been collected through field studies. Field studies have mainly been adopted two methods- Interview Method and Observation Method.

Secondary resources for the study are various relevant books, magazines, dictionaries, articles, government surveys (Census 2011), internet etc.

Methods of data analysis

In this study, three methods are used to analyse the data:

- a. Etymological Method
- b. Analytical Method
- c. Descriptive Method

III. DISCUSSION

Toponymy studies the history associated with the naming process of a place and the contemporary history associated with place names and their importance. It emphasises on study of geographical location, linguistic analysis of forms and meanings, historical importance of place names, influences of place names in folklore, determination of ethnic groups, cultural elements in place names etc. Toponymy also studies the meaning, location, geography, etymology, history and archaeology related to place names in terms of contemporary resources and time.

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Classification of Place Names of Dhubri

Dhubri is a district of Assam sharing the international border with Bangladesh and intra-national border with the district of Coochbehar of West Bengal. So, along with Assamese, influences of Bangla and Konch Rajbongshi (a local language of Dhubri and Coochbehar) languages are evident in the place names of the district. The place names of Dhubri district may be divided into several categories for the purpose of systematic study. They are classified as follows:

- i. **River-centric and Water Bodies Related:** Tipkaibandar, Gaurangtari, Jalabila, Pukhuripara, Moragadharchar, Dhakabil, Borjabil, Borobil, Bosabil, Dhotabil, Habrubil, Modati etc.
- ii. **Related to Flora:** Belguri, Suparikuti, Kherbari, Jhapusa, Baasbari, Botuatuli, Adabari, Beguntoli, Beltoli, Piasbari, Athiabari, Kadamtola, Sonalguri, Kathalguri, Laokhowa, Thagiri, Polashkandi etc.
- iii. **Related to Fauna:** Pokalagi, Paborchora, Kholisamari, Kholisatari, Koimari, Ghoriadanga, Bausmari, Horinchora, Soulmari, Mowamari, Moishaldanga, Fekamari, Baghmara, Geramari, Geravita, Singimari, Salmara, Andurjhar, Takimari, Airkata, Bauskata etc.
- iv. **Related to Occupation, Title and Name of Persons:** Ramraikuti, Baniamari, Baniapara, Aminerchor, Golakganj, Alomganj, Kazigaon, Montirchor, Raipur, Kamarpara, Golaperalga, Dewaneralga, Bariralga,

Padmeralga, Lalmoniralga etc.

v. **Related to Community, Culture and Religion:** Bamundanga, Bamunerchor, Bangalipara, Lakhiganj, Jogipara etc.

vi. **Food items:** Chirakhowa, Narikolkhowa, Khudigaon, Molakhowa etc.

Onomastic study has been carried out in the following ways:

- General introduction to the place
- Folklore about the naming of the place name
- Possible reason for the name of the place
- Linguistic analysis of the place name

Various words with phrases used as prefixes

It has been noticed that some adjectives are used as prefixes in the names of places of Dhubri district. Some examples are 'Boro', 'Choto', 'Ranga', 'Mora', 'Dakhin', 'Uttar' etc.

Borovita, Borogaon, Borobelguri, Boromera, Chotobelguri, Chotomalgaon, Rangamati, Rangapani, Morakura, Moragadhadhar, Dakhinkaimari, Dakhinraipur, Dakhinkachakhana, Uttartokererchara, Uttarsolmari, Uttarmoragadhadhar, Pachimmaisha, Pachimkonuri, Pubgaikhowa, Pubkonuri etc. are some examples of such place names.

Boro: There are multiple number of words with the prefix '*Boro*' in place names of Dhubri district. For example, Borovita, Borogaon, Borobelguri, Boromera etc. The word '*Boro*' means 'big' in local language of Dhubri.

Boromera: It is located at Agomoni circle of Dhubri. '*Boro*' means 'big' and '*mera*' means 'a turning or diversion of a road'. That is, the name of the place is associated to a big turning or diversion of a road. The present Boromera is located at latitude of 26.1978⁰ North and longitude of 89.7732⁰ East.

Boromera = Boro + mera

= Boro(big) + mera (a turning or diversion of a road)

Word formation = freeform + freeform

Word structure = Adjective + Adjective

Ranga: A good number of words start with the prefix '*Ranga*' in place names of Dhubri district. For example, Rangamati. The word '*Ranga*' means 'red' in local language of Dhubri.

Rangamati: It is located at Bogribari circle of Dhubri. '*Ranga*' means 'red' and '*mati*' means 'soil'. That is, the name of the place is associated to a place of which soil is red in colour. The present Rangamati is located at 26.3331⁰ North latitude and 90.4384⁰ East longitude.

Rangamati = Ranga + mati

= Ranga(red) + mati (soil)

Word formation = freeform + freeform

Word structure = Adjective + Noun

Mora: There are some words with the prefix '*Mora*' in place names of Dhubri district. For example, Morakura, Moragadhadhar etc. The word '*Mora*' means 'dead or decayed' in Assamese language.

Morakura: The place is located at Golakganj circle of Dhubri. '*Mora*' means 'dead or decayed' and '*kura*' means 'comparatively deep spot of river created due to a river cyclone'. That is, the name of the place is associated with a decaying non-existing river leaving a landform as imprint bearing proof of its existence in the past. The present Morakura is located at 26.1344⁰ North latitude and 89.8587⁰ East longitude.

Morakura = Mora + kura

= Mora(dead) + kura (deep spot of a river)

Word formation = freeform + freeform

Word structure = Adjective + Noun

Various words with phrases used as suffixes

Like the prefixes, there are also various suffixes including 'alga', 'kata/kati', 'kuti', 'kanda/kandi', 'khata', 'khowa', 'ganj', 'gram/gaon', 'guri', 'jhar', 'jhora', 'tari', 'danga', 'dabri', 'toli', 'para', 'pur', 'puri', 'bil/bila', 'vita', 'mara/mari', 'ganj' etc. in place names of Dhubri district.

Alga: Some place names have '*alga*' as suffix. For example: Golaperalga, Dewaneralga, Bariralga, Padmeralga, Lalmoniralga etc. Almost all the place names with suffix '*alga*' are found to be rooted in a name of a specific person.

Dewaneralga: Dewaneralga is a village situated at Mancachar circle of undivided Dhubri District. According to the colloquial language of local inhabitants, '*alga*' means a distant land situating afar the main habitat. Usually when one migrates to the new distant land the new land acquires the name under the first person to migrate or the eldest patriarch among the migrants. In case of Dewaneralga, the person with title 'Dewan' was the first to migrate to the land. The present Dewaneralga is located at 22.8058⁰ North latitude and 90.1500⁰ East longitude.

Dewaneralga =Dewan+er+alga
 = Dewan (a title) + er (possessive noun) + alga (a distant inhabited land)
 Wordformation =freeform+boundform+freeform
 Word structure = noun + possessive noun + noun

Kata: Some placenames have 'kata' as suffixes. For example: Airkata, Bauskata, Patakata etc.

Airkata: The present village is situated at South Salmara under undivided Dhubri district of Assam. 'Air' means 'a kind of cat fish', 'kata' means 'to cut'. That is, the place was associated with *Air* fishes. It is said that *Air* fishes were found there abundantly. The present Airkata is located at 25.9553⁰ North and 90.1013⁰ East.

Airkata =Air+kata
 = Air (a kind of cat fish) +kata (to cut)
 Wordformation =freeform+freeform
 Word structure = common noun + verb

Kuti: Some of the placenames have 'kuti' added. Such as Ramraikuti, Nepalikuti, Abhayakuti, Bhandarkuti etc. The word 'kuti' means 'a bungalow'.

Ramraikuti: Ramraikuti is a place located at Agomoni circle of Dhubri district. According to a legend Ramrai, an ascetic of neo-vaishnavism was given responsibility to look after the Satra at the locality of Satrasal, Agomoni by Saint Sankardeva. The name of the place thereafter became popular as Ramraikuti, where 'kuti' means 'a bungalow'. The present location of Ramraikuti is 26.1796⁰ North and 89.7195⁰ East.

Ramraikuti =Ramrai+kuti
 = Ramrai (name of a person) + kuti (a bungalow)
 Wordformation =freeform+freeform
 Word structure = proper noun + common noun

Tari: Some placenames have 'tari' as suffix. Such as Haraltari, Rabantari, Digholtari, Gaurangtari, Fulkatari, Saltari, Kabaitari, Atgharitari etc. The word 'tari' means 'a comparatively high and plain land with temporary habitat of a group of people'.

Saltari: Saltari is a village under Bilasipara circle of Dhubri district. Once the place had abundance of Sal trees (Scientific name: *Shorea robusta*). Eventually the land became a place of habitation for some migrants. The present location of Saltari is 26.2939⁰ North and 90.1366⁰ East.

Saltari =Sal+tari
 = Sal (name of a tree) + tari (comparatively a high and plain land)
 Wordformation =freeform+freeform
 Word structure = noun + noun

Ganj: 'ganj' is a usual suffix in the place names of Dhubri. The place names such as Alomganj, Lakhiganj, Golakganj, Raniganj etc. have the suffix 'ganj'. The Parsi word 'ganj' means 'a market place or treasured place'. Usually, it is added after a title of a person, name of a person, position of a person and name of commodities.

Golakganj: Golakganj is a circle of Dhubri district. There is a legend about the origin of the name Golakganj. As per the legend Golak Chandra Barua, a rich landlord of Gauripur donated land to the Britishers to construct railway via Golakganj. Since then, the place became popular as 'Golakganj'. The present location of Golakganj is 26.4606⁰ North and 84.4402⁰ East.

Golakganj =Golak+ganj
 = Golak (name of a person) + ganj (a market place or treasured place)
 Wordformation =freeform+freeform
 Word structure = Proper noun + noun

IV. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This research work has some findings as follows:

- i. A good number of place names of Dhubri district are river-centric, animal-centric, plant-based, personal, occupation based and related to food items.
- ii. When studying placenames, it has been found that various socio-cultural, historical and folkloristic factors are involved in the formation of the names.
- iii. Some place names are associated with legendary stories.
- iv. Various toponyms are formed by combining two or more free forms. In some exceptional cases, a bound form also follows a free form.
- v. Moreover, formation of place names is seen through addition of suffixes and prefixes with nouns.
- vi. In case of word formation and structure of place names, most of the names are found to be nouns only, but some names are formed by combination of adjectives and verbs with nouns.
- vii. In formation of the place names, influences of Konch Rajbanshi (local language of Dhubri), Assamese, Bangla

and Foreign language like Parsi has been noticed.

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