

CHAPTER III

GUWAHATI: MAKING OF A CAPITAL CITY

This chapter introduces the Guwahati city, the field site for this study, in the Kamrup Metropolitan district of Assam, Northeast India. It may be noted that although the city was not the capital of the erstwhile Assam province prior to 1972, that constituted major part of present-day Northeast India, it was nonetheless the social and political hub of the entire region. Historically, the city was the capital of several ancient kingdoms that ruled the region. During the late-medieval period, the city served as the western military-administrative headquarters of the powerful Ahom kingdom (1228-1826). The chapter traces the evolution of the city from a military-administrative post to an urban centre during British rule in the 19th century to becoming the major city of Northeast region, followed by the acceleration of growth after becoming the capital city of present-day Assam in 1972. This trajectory of the growth of the city, with special focus on the aspect of its planning, has been traced through archival data, government records/documents, and narratives from the field. In brief, the focus of this chapter is to trace the history of the city through state planning documents in juxtaposition to the lived reality.

3.1. Introduction

As mentioned, historically the references of Guwahati, then known as Pragjyotishpur, can be found as the capital town of several ruling dynasties, beginning with the Varman dynasty (350-650). In the year 1581, with the spilt of the Koch kingdom of western Assam into Koch Hajo and Koch Bihar, Guwahati rose to prominence again when the capital of Koch Hajo was shifted to North Guwahati, and a palace was constructed there. Later when the Mughals annexed the Koch Hajo kingdom, owing to its strategic location, north Guwahati and south Guwahati became a garrison town of both the Mughals and the Ahoms respectively in 1639 (Gait, 2017).

During the 17th century, many battles were fought between the Mughal and the Ahom armies for complete control over Guwahati, and by extension Assam. One of the most crucial of these was the Battle of Saraighat in 1671. The significance of Guwahati's unique topography and strategically important location was highlighted in this battle

when Lachit Borphukan, the Ahom general, defended Guwahati and Assam against the powerful Mughal army. Though the Ahom army was at a disadvantageous position compared to the Mughal army by its sheer number, Lachit Borphukan launched a naval attack taking advantage of the knowledge of the Brahmaputra River. Guwahati, surrounded by hills and the Brahmaputra River, provided the benefit of the terrain to the Ahom army which led to their extraordinary victoryⁱ.

The decisive battle between both the forces took place in 1682 at the Battle of Itakhuli (or Sukreswar Hill located in Guwahati) when the Ahoms pushed back Mughal control to the west of the Manas river. Consequently, Guwahati became the seat of Borphukan, Viceroy of lower Assam appointed by the Ahom king, as the headquarter was shifted from Kaliabor to Itakhuli. From then onwards Guwahati continued to be the capital of the western region of the Ahom kingdom up to 1826 when the Treaty of Yandaboo ceded Assam to the British East India Company (Barpujari, 1992).

Thereafter, the story of modern Guwahati started in 1826. In 1828, David Scott, the first Commissioner of Revenue and Circuit, and Agent to the Governor General of the East India Company on the Northeast Frontier, was designated the Commissioner of Assam and he established two offices in Guwahati: Revenue and Judicial, and, Maintenance of political relation with the native tribes. Soon after in 1836, a Town Improvement Committee was formed in Guwahati under the initiative of the District Magistrate and Civil Surgeon as a response to the appalling sanitary conditions of the town that resulted in fatal diseases like malaria and black fever. The town achieved the status of Municipal Board in 1853. Later in the year 1874, with the Notification published in the Gazette of India on 07 February, a separate administration for erstwhile undivided Assam was constituted under a Chief Commissioner. Colonel R.H. Keating assumed the post of the Chief Commissioner of Assam and the office of the erstwhile Commissioner was allocated as the Assam Secretariat, making Guwahati the headquarter or administrative capital for the region (Sonowal, 1974).

But the Assam Secretariat was shifted from Guwahati to Shillong which became the new capital as per the Chief Commissioner's Notification no. 49, dated 23 March, 1874. This

ⁱ *The Hero of Saraighat Battle: Bir Lachit Borphukan*. Retrieved on 12 March, 2021 from <http://www.assaminfo.com/famous-people/31/lachit-borphukan-the-hero-of-saraighat-battle.htm>

was done as the pleasant climate of Shillong, located in Khasi hills, was found more suitable for the British officials. However, in the meantime, Guwahati continued to grow, and its status was elevated in 1876 when it was categorized to Class-I category town. The importance of Guwahati increased in 1890 after being connected by the railway line with the rest of India. Guwahati remained a significant town as a hub of important government offices, military cantonments, educational and social institutions, political activities, etc. during the colonial period. After India gained its independence from the British in 1947, Guwahati began to experience phenomenal growth. This was followed by the establishment of important institutions like Gauhati University, Medical College and Engineering College, and later in 1961, the establishment of The Guwahati Oil Refinery. The city was also the most important commercial hub of the entire Northeast India. Furthermore, the city gained political importance and underwent major structural changes after the reorganization of the colonial Assam state and with the shifting of its capital from Shillong to Guwahati (Dispur) in 1972 under the North Eastern Areas Act, 1971ⁱⁱ.

3.2. Guwahati: the Capital City

After India's independence, the colonial Assam witnessed a process of reorganization and several new states were formed in the process, ending with the formation of the separate Meghalaya state on 21 January, 1972. As Shillong was in Meghalaya, there was the need to find a new capital for the state of Assam. However, this process began even before the official creation of the Meghalaya state. On 18 November, 1970, the Assam Cabinet passed the decision for a Site Selection Committee (Sonowal, 1974).

As per Govt. Notification No. GAG.209/70/60 dated 28 May 1971ⁱⁱⁱ, the Site Selection Committee for New Capital for the State of Assam was constituted with the following members:

- Shri S.K. Mallick, I.C.S., Additional Chief Secretary, Govt. of Assam
- Shri R.K. Bhuyan, Chief Engineer (R&B), P.W.D., Govt. of Assam

ⁱⁱ *Master Plan Guwahati 2025*. Retrieved on 28 July, 2016 from <https://gmda.assam.gov.in/portlets/master-plan-guwahati-2025-0>

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: Assam State Archive, Guwahati

- Shri C.S. Chandrasekhara, Additional Chief Planner, Town and Country Planning Organization, Govt. of India
- Shri C.R. Krishnamurthi, I.A.S., Secretary, Revenue Department, Govt. of Assam

In the same notification it was stated that, in the process of recommendation of the location for the capital, the following factors had to be taken under consideration by the Committee:

- The area selected should be fairly high and not subject to floods;
- It should, to the extent possible, be near the geocentre of the State of Assam;
- The area should have scenic beauty;
- The area should not be rocky and should be capable of quick development and ease of construction; the soil should be firm and should be composed of sedimentary or alluvial formations;
- It should not be very far from a Civil Airport;
- It should have easy accessibility by road, trains and inland water transport;
- Power and water sources should be available nearby;
- High level institutional facilities in regard to education, health, commerce, industry and culture should be in close vicinity, if heavy investments on these are to be avoided.

In the meantime, Guwahati (Dispur) was designated as the temporary capital as it fulfilled most of the requirements. With the capital shift, Guwahati became the political-administrative headquarters of the state of Assam. But the search for a new site for capital continued on paper; in the *Report of the Site Selection Committee for New Capital for the State of Assam, 1971*^{iv}, four sites had been shortlisted in the following order of preference:

- i). Amchang-Panikhati-Chandrapur, Kamrup district
- ii). Sonaighuli, Dakhin Gaon, Kamrup district
- iii). Sonapur-Digaru, Kamrup district
- iv). Silghat-Kaliabor, Nowgong district

^{iv} Source: Assam State Archive, Guwahati

However, this plan never materialized once the capital was established in Dispur, and this led to massive structural and social change in the area. Before the capital shift, the present city of Guwahati was part of the South Kamrup Tribal Belt^v. During this shift, when the city underwent major infrastructural changes, in order to meet the requirement of land for the new capital, the protected area falling under the South Kamrup Tribal Belt was de-reserved and a large swathe of agricultural land was converted to non-agricultural land. The purpose of demarcating these areas in the Tribal Belt as protected areas was to provide assurances to the indigenous communities against the loss of their land, as they were largely dependent on agriculture and fishing for their sustenance. But when the new capital of Assam was established in Dispur, "...more than 7 lakh bighas of land from the tribal belt was de-reserved from protected status in preparation for setting up the capital hub" (Gogoi, 2020, 54).

The tribal belt areas consisted of agricultural land and common property resources such as lakes and ponds, grazing grounds, and community forest. Without land ownership documents, the claims of the indigenous communities were undermined, and such land became accessible in the market due to the de-reservation. The change in the land use pattern led to a major change in the demography from indigenous agriculture-based population to accommodate the newly emerging administrative and business classes. The claim of the indigenous communities without legal tenure was challenged as the process of de-reservation led to formalization of land holdings otherwise held commonly. The areas in the vicinity of the capital complex had Bodo-Kachari and Karbi tribal hamlets that were pushed into the periphery.

3.2.1. Marginalization of Indigenous Communities

The impact of such changes was first experienced along the present Dispur circle of Guwahati as this area is in the vicinity of the Assam State Secretariat Office. To understand this impact, a study was conducted of the indigenous Karbi community in Hengrabari area in 2017.

^v Tribal belt comprises of villages with 50% or more population from the tribal and backward communities (See, Sharma, 2001)

According to the members of the Karbi community residing there, the present Hengrabari was known as *Polokhaiti*, which was part of a larger area under Karbi chieftainship known as Hengrabari. The area under erstwhile Hengrabari was largely agricultural land comprising of paddy fields as well as fruits and vegetable cultivation. The Karbi population residing there did not experience economic marginalization up to early 1970s as they were a self-sufficient community. Apart from their produce, other necessary items were acquired through barter in the weekly Beltola market, located near the foothills of the Meghalaya state, where various tribal communities met and traded goods. As stated by an elder member^{vi} from the Karbi community while discussing about modes of livelihood,

We were able to meet our daily needs with produce from our cultivation or community forest, cattle rearing and fishing. With the surplus, we used to go to the Beltola market to trade. There was no connection with the rest of Guwahati or other markets... We walked all the way to the market with our goods. We exchanged what we had for something that we wanted... There was no need for money because we produced everything that we needed.

This market was also an opportunity to interact and socialize. As stated by a respondent^{vii},

I remember going to the Beltola market was like going to a *mela* (event). We used to get up early in the morning that day and get ready... We did not just go to trade. That was our weekly outing where we got to meet people from other communities... There was no pressure of selling everything and earning money. We used to go to the market as a family and enjoy exchanging our goods for something else that we found interesting... We used to meet new people, form relations and sometimes learn new things/skills.

^{vi} Gajen Abang interviewed on 2 August, 2017.

^{vii} Rukmini Rahang interviewed on 3 August, 2017.

But as a consequence of the capital shift and thereafter the development of that area, the agricultural land began shrinking. With shrinking agricultural land, the Karbi community could no longer produce surplus; whatever they produced was just about enough for their sustenance. Without any surplus produce, not only did their ties to the Beltola market started diminishing, but more importantly, their mode of livelihood was also severely affected with the loss of land.

The state appropriated land for administrative offices and residential colonies in that area which directly impacted the livelihood as well as the habitat of the Karbis. Expressing his view on this, a Karbi community elder^{viii} said,

New people started coming in to these areas. They worked in government offices and needed a place to stay nearby, because connectivity with the rest of Guwahati was not good then... These *sarkari* (government) officials offered money to us to buy portions of our land. Since we had hardly dealt with money till then, small sum of money also seemed a big deal... We were not educated and the *sarkari* officials told us that having money was more important than having land, because that was the direction in which development was heading.

An interesting point added by another respondent^{ix} highlights the disjunct in the process of development vis-à-vis the indigenous communities.

Whenever the *mauzadars* (revenue officers) came to record the land holdings or to collect taxes, we used to run and hide, because we were never sure what trouble we might get in and we hardly used to have any cash with us. We lost a lot of our land because of this... Later when new people purchased these lands, we got to know that large portions of our land were recorded in government records as unoccupied and saleable land.

^{viii} Podu Tumung interviewed on 8 September, 2017.

^{ix} Komin Taron interviewed on 9 September, 2017.

Because of this apprehension in dealing with government officials, and uncertainty about the process of development, the indigenous communities also suffered at the hands of the local Assamese landlords. An elderly respondent^x who had lost his land in this process expressed,

We were approached by landlords from Uzan Bazaar who said that they would help us keep our land if we shared the land with them. Because we were already losing land, some of us were glad when they told us that they would take care of all the official hassle and we could continue to live and cultivate on our land... But we found out later that the land was transferred in the name of the landlords and we were dispossessed of our own land.

There was no process of protection, compensation or rehabilitation for the indigenous communities who suffered in the name of urban growth. In fact, common property resources (CPRs), such as water bodies, grazing land, community forest, etc. were appropriated by the state as protected reserved areas, which severed the traditional relationship of the Karbis with these commons. As Fernandes and Bharali (2011) have argued, compensation or rehabilitation was provided only for individually-owned land, and such displacement is justified under the rhetoric of development. Without a legal framework in place to deal with the CPRs, these lands were considered state property which dismissed community claims and turned them into encroachers. As a community elder^{xi} lamented,

We have known this place as our home for generations; we have no other ancestral property or village to go back to. We are the original inhabitants of these areas... Village commons to which we had free and shared access are lost, and now we are called encroachers if we enter these areas.

The elders of the Karbi community, who have witnessed the transition, feel alienated in their own locality and community because their perspective of knowing that area is no longer relevant, as those spaces do not even exist anymore. For example, present

^x Nabajyoti Rahang interviewed on 12 September, 2017.

^{xi} Madhab Mitur interviewed on 16 September, 2017.

Hengrabari was known as *Polokhaiti* because the fishes found in the Hahsora *beel* (wetland) in that area were so big that whilst fishing them out, the fishing nets (*polo*) would break (in Assamese *polo khai diye* which became *Polo khaiti*). However, this wetland itself is no longer there as it was filled up with land to accommodate the increasing population. Not only did this affect the ones who earned their livelihood through fishing, but also the very name of the place which represents this relation with the nature is not relevant anymore.

Similarly, another example is the present Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) office which is located on a hillock in that area. This hillock was earlier known *Mokoraguri* as there were large spiders (*mokora*) found in those areas, which were crushed (*guri*) and consumed for their medicinal properties. However, since the hillock was part of a community forest, there was no individual claim to it. Because of this, it became a state appropriated land for public use and restricted its use by the indigenous community. Those names were reflective of the symbiotic relationship that the people of the Karbi community shared with the physical space. But now the meanings associated with those spaces has changed for this indigenous community because of the process of development and urbanization.

With changes in land use patterns and new administrative names given to the newly developed areas, the traditional association of the indigenous population with such areas has been lost. In the case of the Karbis, this has not only caused economic hardship, as they lost their lands and had to relocate, but also serious disruption in their socio-cultural life as they feel alienated in their own habitat. As narrated by two respondents^{xii},

There were separate spaces for ritualistic practices and different occasions... There is an annual sacrificial worship called the *Dehal puja* which is celebrated with a lot of grandeur. Before, this festival used to be celebrated at the *Bangthe's* (cultural head) house... Then there is *Dekamel* headed by the *Okhengchar* (community elder), which is a yearly meeting to take stock of the main events of the community that require discussion or approval or penalties. This meeting used to be conducted

^{xii} Bhulu Rahang and Kamini Abang interviewed on 25 October, 2017.

under the biggest and oldest tree of the village as it was believed to impart wisdom and good judgment... There was a common ground where usually all the weddings happened, as it was not considered to be a private affair but a community event... Another important and sacred space is the main pillar of the house which is worshipped, and no outsiders are allowed to enter that space... But nowadays, all events, be it a festival or a meeting or a wedding, happens in an open field which is the only community space left.

Interestingly, that space now is not only used by the Karbi community but also by members of the Assamese community residing there, and is alternately or more popularly also known as the *Bihutoli* (place where *Bihu*, an Assamese festival is celebrated). Because of the public and open nature of such events nowadays, the events are no longer just a community affair for the Karbis; people from other communities residing in that locality are also invited. Such a cosmopolitan nature of these events has changed the meanings associated with the rituals, and these events end up being a showcase of Karbi culture paraded for everyone to enjoy. There is a shift in the purpose of these events from traditional meanings to public consumption of culture.

It was also found that there is a desire among the young generation of the Karbi community to emulate what is considered “modern”, so as to fit into the larger society. They want to uphold their culture as long as it does not isolate them from the larger society. While discussing the details of such events, two young members^{xiii} of the Karbi community, who are actively involved in the organization of such events, had this to say,

According to tradition, we as a community offer our guests the local alcohol (*horalank*). Before it used to be served in *bahorsunga* (bamboo shoot), but now we have replaced it with disposable glass as it is considered more hygienic... Before we also used to serve certain insects and snails, which were considered delicacies. But now such food items are no longer served in the community events as it might not be well accepted by others.

^{xiii} Gajong Tumung and Kalyani Abang interviewed on 28 October, 2017.

Surrounded by various communities and in a bid to become modern and developed, nowadays they do not even celebrate certain occasions such as the *Johong puja*. This event is considered demonic worship as it invokes and worships *Mahishasura*. The Karbis residing there do not want to be judged and looked down upon by other communities in the area. As such, they do not want the mythology of their ancestry to be associated to a demon because it would portray them as animalistic.

With such change in meanings associated with tradition and space, community relations have also undergone drastic changes. Because the neighborhood now consists of various communities residing together, the culture has become very cosmopolitan. The elders of the community are disheartened because the Karbis are no longer closely associated with one another as a community. The young generation does not feel as connected to the place and the community, as they have grown up in an urbanized world. The only way to ensure full attendance at community events is to impose fines for defaulters. Such a disconnect has led to loss of tradition and language.

In the process of creation of the capital city, the indigenous populations, in this case the Karbis, have experienced not only economic hardship due to losses in life sustaining resources, but also social and cultural marginalization because of disruption of their social and cultural life. Alienation of livelihood disrupts the traditional lifestyle, social networks and cultural practices of indigenous communities (Fernandes and Bharali, 2011). Such marginalization has occurred due to state-initiated land acquisition for various development projects, and due to alienation from the original habitat because of the pressures of urbanization.

Similar process of dispossession and marginalization of indigenous communities has been witnessed in other areas of Guwahati with the onset of the process of urbanization. In this context, Sharma (2013) brings forth an interesting observation about the growth of a city that it is not just demographic and spatial expansion, but there is an overall transformation of the society. In this process, the aboriginals face marginalization and consequently lag behind the emerging urban way of life. Despite living in the city throughout the process of its evolution and growth, there is a sense of lack of belongingness which may lead to “urban apathy” (ibid, 2). The structural reality of the

process of urban development provides opportunities through use of urban space, but at the same time, can also mean denial of opportunities to some. Though cities can be a space of inclusion, participation and opportunities for some, but cities can also be a space of exclusion and marginalization.

The making of Guwahati into a capital city, through the process of marginalization of indigenous communities, is reflective of a process of symbolic development geared towards creating an image befitting that of a capital city. If we go by the plans for its development, on paper these plans are comprehensive and address a range of issues. However, the lived reality of the city is far from what is projected in these plans.

3.3. Guwahati Master Plans

A study of Master Plans provides an understanding of how a city's future growth is visualized. Here, I will be doing a content analysis of two Master Plans (MPs) of Guwahati: one published in 1986 with perspective 2001 and the latest one published in 2009 with perspective 2025. This analysis brings forth the shortcomings of the projected visions of the plans for the city.

3.3.1. Guwahati Master Plan 1986 with perspective 2001

The Guwahati Master Plan 1986 (perspective 2001)^{xiv} was the first comprehensive plan for development of the city after the capital shift. As stated in this MP, the earlier plans for the city were not applicable because of the new developments, which were not visualized for the site of a temporary capital. This modified Final Master Plan and Zoning Regulations for Guwahati was published in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 14 and sub-section (2) of Section 10 of the Assam Town and Country Planning Act, 1959 (Assam Act II of 1960) as amended, read with Rule 4(2) of the Assam Town and Country Planning (Publication of Master Plan and Zoning Regulations) (Amendment) Rules, 1964.

^{xiv} Source: Directorate of Town and Country Planning, Govt. of Assam

The vision of this MP for the city's future growth was to be able to function as a Capital city, Administrative Centre, Trade and Commerce Centre, Industrial Centre, Educational Centre, Transportation Node, and a Nodal Metropolitan Centre. The main objectives of the MP are as follows^{xv}:

- Integration of various areas of Guwahati with adjoining areas
- Development of Inter-city transportation and communication network to discharge regional functions with efficiency
- Give shape to the urban structure with the city functions being acquired by Guwahati in the process of its growth
- Functional disposition by urban use so as to achieve:-
 - i. efficient and judicious utilization of land,
 - ii. harmonious and coherent inter relationship between various uses and activities,
 - iii. functional distribution of work centres and living areas, minimize travel distances and increase efficient functioning activities, and,
 - iv. compact city development.
- Hierarchical city structure in terms of self-contained planning units and ensure disposition of services and amenities on the basis of hierarchy of planning entities
- Gradual removal of existing disorder
- Functionally efficient transportation network and circulation system ensuring safe and at the same time speedy movement of urban and regional traffic

3.3.2. Guwahati Master Plan 2009 with perspective 2025

The new final Master Plan and the Zoning Regulation 2025 for Guwahati^{xvi} was published as approved by Govt. under Section 19 of GMDA Act 1985 vide Govt. order No. GDD. 91/1997/395 dated 09/06/2009 in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (1) of Section 21 of the GMDA Act 1985. This MP highlights the importance of Guwahati, the capital city of Assam, as the most important city in Northeast India. The aim of this MP is not only to develop Guwahati in a way which would make it stand out

^{xv} See, note xiv

^{xvi} *Master Plan Guwahati 2025*. Retrieved on 28 July, 2016 from <https://gmda.assam.gov.in/portlets/master-plan-guwahati-2025-0>

as a state capital, but also facilitate its functions as a gateway to Northeast India. The vision of this MP for the development of Guwahati through 2025 is:

Guwahati city to be
One of the most admired state capitals of India
As gateway to the North-East,
With a unique image of its own.

To achieve this vision, a number of goals have been outlined in the MP^{xvii}:

- Goal 1: To conserve Guwahati's sensitive natural environment (conservation of hills, water bodies and the Brahmaputra river)
- Goal 2: To develop an integrated intra-urban transport system (multi modal transport system integrated with new terminals and improved parking facility)
- Goal 3: To develop well-distributed physical and social infrastructure (provide water supply and sewerage connection to cent percent households; improved solid waste management and drainage system; education, health, security, social and cultural facilities to be distributed hierarchically)
- Goal 4: To provide space for efficient functioning of economic activities (development of New towns for: wholesale market in North-East; industry in North-West; SEZ, IT and Business centre in South-West; and informal sector integrated in the planning process)
- Goal 5: To create an image befitting that of the State capital (development of Riverfront and Dipar Bil, and corridor on the NH bye-pass based on a high quality urban design)
- Goal 6: To create affordable housing for all and develop a city without slums (new dwelling units and upgrade/rehabilitation of existing slums)
- Goal 7: To bring in a system in the land development process (alternative land development processes)

^{xvii} See, note xvi

3.3.3. Analysis / Discussion

The abovementioned vision and objectives of MP perspective 2001 (henceforth, MP01) reflect the aspiration of creating a city that will function as a hub of all important activities in the region. Such a plan does not look inwards on how to solve the already existing problems but looks outwards to what issues need to be solved for the city to achieve the projected image of development. As a result, the underlying issues are not resolved but simply refurbished and presented in the latest MP perspective 2025 (henceforth, MP25). A few points have been discussed here to bring forth the shortcomings of such projected visions for the future of the city.

According to MP01, the estimated population for 2001 was 10,67,400, which was a higher projection than the actual population in 2001 recorded at 8,09,895. Based on the estimated population, the projected need for household units was set at 2,04,790. Despite this buffer, in 2001, the total number of housing units was 1,83,491, which led to a housing shortage of 12,817 dwelling units. This shortage added to the problem of creation of slums in the city, which now has to be addressed in MP25, on top of the ever increasing population and its associated problems.

MP01 envisions the growth of Guwahati in an orderly and planned manner. As such, the land use was classified into neat categories with zones earmarked for: Residential Zone (low, medium and high density); Commercial Zone (retail and wholesale); Industrial Zone (light, medium, obnoxious); Public and Semi-Public Zone; Recreational and Open Space Zone; Green Belt Zone. MP25 categorizes 9 Land Use Zones: Residential Zone; Commercial Zone; Industrial Zone; Public/Semi-Public (P & SP) Facilities Zone; Transport and Communication Zone; Green Belt Zone (Recreational and Open Space); Eco-Sensitive / Eco-Friendly Zone; Composite Use Zone – I (includes Residential, Commercial and P & SP); Composite Use Zone – II (includes Residential, Commercial & SP and existing Industrial). Due to the lack of strict implementation under MP01, there had to be creation of a separate eco-sensitive zone, and the green belt zone was converted into recreational use. The composite zones in MP25 also bring forth the overlap of various zones based on the growth pattern of the city.

While discussing about land use for public and semi-public, MP01 highlights that the city can be enriched with environmental and landscaping treatment which would enhance tourist interest. Out of the proposals to achieve this, the points on wetlands have been focused here: the area along Dipar Beel to be developed into a Botanical Garden cum city forest as well as a regional park with picnic spots, together with boating and fishing facilities; to develop the area around Silsako Beel and few other areas into picnic spots; improvement of Sola Beel proposed for enhancing the recreational facilities of the city. However, these proposals have been reiterated in MP25 as well, which points to the fact that no work had been done towards this. MP25 states that the water quality of Sola Bil is highly polluted because of dumping of waste, which needs to be stopped so that this area can be used as tourist attraction. With regard to Dipar Bil and Silsako Bil, MP25 restates the exact proposal made in MP01.

MP01 states that there is a need for categorized market areas as commercial use of land is inadequate, and the city centre is getting exhausted due to shortage of space. Hence, an area of 660 hectare was earmarked for trade and commerce to meet the existing inadequacies. However, there seems to have been no development in this regard as MP25 proposes a new five-tier system of commercial development: Tier I - City Commercial Centre: Central Business District; Tiers II and III - District Commercial Centres and Community Commercial Centres; Tiers IV and V -Neighbourhood Shopping Centres and Housing Area Shopping Centres.

Regarding circulation of traffic within the city, MP01 states that there was a complete lack of any form or pattern of the existing road network in the city. MP01 envisaged a circulation pattern based on a hierarchical classification of roads: primary distributor which will cater for major movements between sectors; secondary distributor which will distribute traffic within each sector; local distributor will carry traffic to each locality and access roads will lead to individual premises. However, in MP25 a similar but updated plan has been recommended again for the development of a hierarchy based arterial road network system comprising of primary arterial, sub-arterial and collector roads. MP01 also states that several traffic problems arise due to haphazard parking of vehicles which creates problem of free movement in all major roads of the city. Since there was no specified parking space, there needs to be a provision for adequate parking space with

effective parking regulations in all major areas of concentrated activities. However, this issue was not dealt with because of which the problem of parking compounded and has been discussed at length in MP25 under the framework of a comprehensive Parking Policy.

MP01 recognizes the importance of catering to the growing social and cultural needs of the city and proposed cultural institutions of different order to be provided at all levels. Taking into consideration the estimated population in 2001, a civic center and Town Hall were proposed in two major planning units. As Guwahati did not have any recreational club, three such clubs were proposed in different planning units. In addition, each planning unit would contain space for cultural activities, including community halls, auditoriums, and libraries. Though the city does have 5 city clubs and 9 public function halls, MP25 states that based on existing land use survey, presently an area of only 114 hectares is under use for recreational activity which is far from adequate. An area of 5,299 hectares is earmarked in MP25 for recreational use which would include Regional/City recreational areas, City level park (60 ha) and City level sports centre (97 ha) along with District Facility Centres and Community Facility Centres, which is another grand plan on paper.

Under public utilities and services, water supply, drainage and sewerage are discussed here. It is suggested in MP01 that the capacity of the existing water supply units is capable of meeting the additional requirement of the plan period. However, MP25 states that the capacity of the water treatment plants in the city is 98 MLD, although the total water produced is 79 MLD. The requirement of water during the preparation of MP25 was 132 MLD. In preparation to meet this water demand, Guwahati has been divided into four parts: North Guwahati, South Guwahati West, South Guwahati Central and South Guwahati East, with each zone having its own water supply and distribution system.

Regarding sewerage, MP01 states that there is no underground sewerage system in Guwahati with exceptions of the areas such as Maligaon, Railway and Refinery townships, and Defence areas. With regard to drainage, MP01 states that the city does not have any scientific drainage system. Bharalu river, which is the main drainage

channel of the city, is severely polluted. As such an underground drainage system and adequate amount of areas required for water basins and sites for sewerage treatment plant had been proposed in MP01. However, looking into MP25 brings forth the neglect of these concerns. Due to the lack of any facility for sewerage treatment, MP25 proposes 3 sites for sewerage treatment plant: for Eastern Service Sector at Dhirenpara area; for Western Service Sector on the bank of Khanajan river; for North Service Sector near the confluence of Ghorajan river. MP25 also discusses the grossly inadequate and insufficient drainage system of the city and proposes the drainage problem to be tackled basin wise. For this, the city is divided into 6 drainage basins: Bharalu Basin, Dipar Basin, Silsako Basin, Foreshore Basin, North Guwahati Basin and Kalmoni Basin. There is also a requirement for landfill area for solid waste disposal and management which was not even discussed in MP01.

The discussion on the abovementioned points highlights the discrepancy of the MPs spanning over three decades. Even though, the latest MP also promises better urban infrastructural facilities and overall growth of the city, the lived reality is far from this. Infact, in a recent survey conducted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, GoI, Guwahati ranked 46th out of 49 Indian cities on the Ease of Living Index for 2020^{xviii}. To elaborate on this, I will discuss briefly the present scenario of Guwahati city in the following section.

3.4. Guwahati: Present Scenario/ Lived Reality

Guwahati continues to suffer from a multitude of issues which have manifested as a consequence of urban development, be it in the case of displacement of tribal hamlets, degradation of urban commons, or the inefficacy in the case of basic service deliverables.

The indigenous tribal population of the city was dependent on their land and CPRs for sustenance. However, majority of them have been dispossessed from their sources of livelihood due to development-induced displacement. These communities were self-sufficient, and earlier, their immediate need of foods and resources were met by the

^{xviii} Retrieved on 21 March, 2021 from <https://www.timesofmedia.com/gmc-worst-civic-body-guwahati-no-longer-a-livable-city-11542.html>

CPRs. As a result of displacement, not only have they lost their source of livelihood, but now they have to spend money on basic needs, such as food and housing, which adds to the burden. They have been alienated in their own land which has led to deterioration in their social and cultural status.

The implications of this process of marginalization continue till date because most of the displaced have moved to peripheral areas of the city and into the hills in and around the city. In the light of an eviction drive in 2017 in the bordering areas of the Amsung Wildlife Sanctuary, I had visited the areas of Jonohimolu and Nabajyotinagar in Botahghuli. In these areas, there are several *bastis* (hamlets) of Karbi, Rabha, Mising and Bodo tribes. These people claimed that they have been living in that area for more than 30 years. They moved to these peripheries when they were dispossessed from their land within the city, or could not manage to survive in the city with increasing expenses, and felt marginalized and alienated.

These people claim that these lands were legally bought and that they have papers from the Revenue Department to prove their claim. However, these claims are being dismissed by the state on the ground of preservation and extension of the forest area. The state has promised to relocate certain sections of these populations. But the indigenous communities there express their grief saying that, relocating them would mean just providing them with four walls; but the relationship and dependence on that area, and their association with that space, cannot be replaced or compensated for. Such instances of evictions are many, which have sparked one of the most conflictual issues about the land rights of hills dwellers, especially of settlements in Reserve Forest lands, most of whom belong to indigenous tribal communities who face an imminent fear of eviction.

It is to be noted that despite multiple policies and projects for the conservation of urban commons such as hills and wetlands, the condition of the existing wetlands in the city is deplorable. Deepor beel, which is a Ramsar site, does not adhere to any of the measures of the Ramsar Convention, 2002. Three years after it was listed under the Ramsar Convention, a 24-hectare municipal dump yard was designated in the eastern corner of the wetland. Due to unchecked large-scale encroachments in the wetland area, it has led to degradation of the wetland ecology and considerable shrinkage in size and spread of

the wetland area. Even Silsako beel has drastically reduced in size with the coming up of apartments and private residences as well as a number of commercial and other establishments (Desai et al., 2014). Similar is the plight of Sola beel as found through the course of this study. The plight of these wetlands is discussed in detail in Chapter V.

With regard to public services and amenities, Guwahati still suffers from a shortage of water supply, inadequate sewerage and drainage systems, and lack of a solid waste management system. The piped water supply connections cover only 30% of the population which is also not an absolute figure due to inefficient distribution. To meet this water shortage, four major infrastructural Water Supply projects have been undertaken in South West, South East, South Central and North Guwahati. However, these projects are already lagging far behind their proposed target years.

Guwahati still does not have an integrated sewerage and drainage system. Though there is a plan for a sewerage system, this project will be undertaken only after the completion of the Water Supply project which could take years from now to become operational. In the meantime, much of the wastewater generated in the city is collected in septic tanks and disposed of directly into the rivers without treatment. Because of the lack of a proper sewerage system, the drains in the city are turning into sewers, which lead to water-clogging. The situation worsens during the monsoon season as the natural drains to the river basins are blocked, restricting the natural flow of storm water, which thereby leads to flash floods in the city (Bhuyan, 2019).

The present system of solid waste management also suffers from serious drawbacks. The system of primary collection of solid waste is inadequate; there is no process of segregation, and it is dumped into waste storage bins which are not covered and are extremely unhygienic. The waste is then transported in open trucks with manual loading, and then taken to the dumping site at West Boragaon. There is no mechanism for processing or treatment of the waste at the dump site, making it a serious health hazard (Bhuyan, 2019).

Despite the tall claims of MP25, the present scenario of Guwahati is nowhere close to its projection. With a multiplicity of delayed or defunct projects, and increasing degradation

and marginalization, Guwahati's process of urban growth raises serious concerns. There is an increasing trend of privatization and commercialization in the process of governance in recent years, which has only accentuated the extant problems and the gaps between the privileged and the marginalized. This is the result of adopting standardized and imported development models which are neoliberal in character and entail a shift toward commercialization at the expense of public welfare. There is increased bureaucratization and progressive marginalization of people's participation in matters of urban planning and governance. The following chapter discusses at length the implication of such a process of planning on the urban governance of Guwahati city.