

## HYDRONYMY OF CENTRAL AND LOWER ASSAM WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON NATURAL HYDRONYMS: LAKE-BEEL (NATURAL PONDS)

**DR. ANUSMITA TALUKDAR**  
**PATHSALA, ASSAM, INDIA**

### **Introduction**

A beel is a term for a pond (wetland) with static water in the Ganges-Brahmaputra flood plains of the Eastern Indian states of West Bengal, and Assam and in the country of Bangladesh (once a part of Pragjyotisa-Kamrupa). The term owes its origins to the word of the same pronunciation meaning 'pond' in the Bengali and Assamese languages. There are different causes for the formation of beels. A string of beels is indicative of their being the remains of a great river that deserted its channel, moving to a new one elsewhere. Typically, beels are formed by abandoned river meandering course, inundation of low lying lands during flooding, where some water gets trapped even after flood waters recede back from the flood plains. Beels may also be caused by filling up of low-lying areas during rains, especially during the monsoon season. In ancient Assam there are large water bodies called haors. A haor is a bowl or saucer shaped shallow depression, also known as a backswamp. Throughout the rainy season a haor is such a vast stretch of turbulent water that it is thought of as a sea, within which the villages appear as islands. It remains under water for seven months of the year. During the dry season water drains out leaving small shallow lakes exposing rich soil extensively cultivated for rice. In the central part today's Bangladesh, important beels are Katla, Chatal, Nagarkanda, and Chanda. In greater Comilla, Faridpur, Dhaka and Pabna districts the beel is sometimes referred to as baor. Ancient Assam comprising present Bangladesh has thousands of beels, with the most common names being Chalan Beel, Gopalganj-Khulna Beel, Meda Beel, Aila beel, Dekhar beel, Kuri beel, Erali beel and Arial Beel. Most of the large beels have shrunk a great deal in recent decades. Regionwise, in the northwest of Bangladesh some of the larger beels are Bara Beel in Pirganj, Tagrai Beel in Kurigram, Lunipukur in Rangpur, Bara Mirzapur Beel in Narail and Keshpathar in Bogra. The old river course of Atrai has beels. In the southern region of Bangladesh, important beels are Boyra, Dakatia, Bara, Kola, Patla, Chatal and Srirampur. In Assam, Derelict and semi-derelict wetlands constituting a part of the Brahmaputra floodplain, the beets are a vitally important fishery resource of Assam. There are about 1392 beets in present Assam, the maximum number being in Nagaon district (289), followed by Cachar (263), North Lakhimpur (153), and Jorhat (131). Together the beets constitute over 80% of Assam's lentic waters. In beels that maintain connection with the river, locally migratory fishes are of considerable significance. The Indian major carps, particularly catla and rohu, depict such forms with *Labeo gonius* also contributing significantly. Gravid fishes of these species enter the beel every year during the monsoon months for spawning. The fishery of Dhir beel is dominated by *Gudusia chapra* and other miscellaneous species including minor carps followed by major carps, cat fishes, live fishes, and common carp. Dominant zooplankton in Dhir beel include Protozoans followed by Copepods, Rotifers and Cladocerans. Due to high decomposition of organic matter at the bottom, beels, in general, are rich in benthos.

**Keywords:** Barbeel, Bardowa beel, Bhairavkunda, Boga, Chalan, Chandubi, Charan, Dhanukhando, Dighali Pukhuri, Deepor, Durgasarovar, Kapla, Kaptai, Koya-kujia, Tamranga.

### **Natural Hydronyms**

#### **Barbeel**

Barbeel implies big or large lake. The Siddheswar Grant of king Sivasimha of 1645 Places it to be in the outskirts of Banganagar within Majali Taluq of Kamrup. It is still known with the name of Barbeel lying to the north of Siddheswar temple of Sualkuchi.

#### **Bardowa Beel**

A lake stands in the northern side of Bardowa Satra, 16 km north from Nagaon. The hydronym stands after the toponym Bardowa. According to history a canal dug by Sankardeva and his disciples to drain out water from this lake removed the water problem of Bardowa. This canal is popularly known as Akashiganga.

#### **Barpeta Beel**

It had its shape of the crescent moon and on its banks Madhavdeva founded Barpeta Satra. Barpeta Grant of king Sivasimha records the Barpeta Bil as on the eastern side of the Barpeta Satra of Kamrup. This lake is lying by the side of Barpeta Town. The hydronym stands after the toponym Barpeta.

#### **Bhairavkunda (Bhramarakunda)**

The pond Bhairavkunda was held in high esteem in medieval time. One of the chronicles says that, three Koch princes, who were younger brothers of Naranarayan performed pacificator ablutions here in AD 1546 on their way to Sola from Kochbihar. It was heard that the construction of the Nalkhamora temple and also a fort on the banks of this holy pond by Koch king Naranarayan. Further, it indicates the building of the Gohain Kamal Ali connecting Bhairavkunda by the same king. This pond is surrounded by the Amarigiri Bils, at a distance of 14 km north of Udalguri Town and still regarded as sacred by the Hindus and the Bhutias.

### **Bogalake**

Bogalake, a legendary beauty, is a naturally created water reserve on hilltop. Bogalake is highest natural Lake of Bangladesh once within geopolitical boundary of Pragjyotisa Bhukti. It is 1500 fts above sea level & 15km away from Ruma Sadar Upazilla. This lake has covered an area of 15 acres. The color of the water is blue. When you see this lake, you look as if there were a familiarity between the blue of sky with the blue colour of the water in Bogalake. The attractions of Bogalake catch the attention of the travelers who are yearning for the unquenchable thirst for beauty and adventures. Small tribe community like Bawm, Khumi have localities beside the Bogalake. The people who live around the Boga Lake are 'Boom' by religion. They have their own language.

### **Chalan Beel**

Chalan Beel is a wetland in Bangladesh (once a part of Ancient Assam). It is a large inland depression, marshy in character, with rich flora and fauna. Forty-seven rivers and other waterways flow into the Chalan Beel. As silt builds up in the beel, its size is being reduced. Chalan Beel is an extensive lowland area in the lower Atrai basin, and spreads across Singra and Gurudaspur upazilas on Natore District, Chatmohar, Bhanga and Faridpur upazilas of Pabna District, and Ullahpara, Raiganj and Tarash upazilas of Sirajganj District. It consists of a series of beels connected to one another by various channels to form a continuous water body during the rainy season. Although the beel area expands into a vast water body with dense aquatic vegetation as long as the Jamuna remains flooded during the monsoon months, it dries out in the winter months, leaving only patches of water in the central parts of this zone. Chalan Beel is fast silting up. The most important factor dominating the river history in Bengal is the large proportion of silt carried by its rivers. It is the silt which has created the land and made it habitable by building it up through the centuries. It is silt which is fertilizing the land, but the silt, which has been the most beneficial gift of nature, has also produced most of the river problems now confronting the people of Bengal. Silt deposited in the old river channel beds has forced them to change course, creating problems for abandoned areas while assisting in developing new areas. The main volume of water from the Ganges River began flowing through the Padma channel in the sixteenth century. Silt from the Padma helped in building up the southern portion of north Bengal. This is the most plausible explanation for the existence of a depression around Chalan Beel. The Teesta was active in the region until it changed its course in 1787. This territory lies in between the land raised in the north by the Teesta system when it was active and that in the south by the Padma. However, there is another explanation for the creation of the depression. The Padma has been changing its course over the centuries. In Ven den Brouck's map of Bengal, prepared in 1660, the main channel of the Padma is shown as flowing through Faridpur-Bakharganj, but there also is a suggestion of another, possibly earlier channel. This channel runs through Rampur Boalia in Rajshahi, Chalan Beel, Dhaleswari and Buriganga before meeting the Meghna. At that time the Jamuna was virtually non-existent and the Brahmaputra used to flow through its old channel. The banks of the beel are covered with dense stands of kash, babla, nol, dhol kolmi, simul, and date palm. Seven species of frogs and one species of toad represent the amphibian fauna. Chalan Beel has a total of 34 species of reptiles include ten turtles and tortoises, nine lizards and various snake species. There are 27 species of mammals from 12 families.

### **Chandubi**

The Chandubi Lake and Hill is situated at a distance of 64 kilometers from the center of the city of Guwahati. A large Lake and wet land, created by the devastating earthquake of 1897. The lake is at the base of Garo hills bordering Assam and Meghalaya. The place is surrounded by deep forest, tea garden and small and discrete villages. This lake attracts sizable amount of migratory birds during winter. The beauty of the lake and its surroundings lays a charm that lures a huge number of tourists who visit the place to relax in the lap of nature. An ideal place for a day out and picnic.

### **Charan Beel**

The hydronym Charan is situated in Morigaon district and formed due to natural process i.e., it rests on the abandoned course of a river.

### **Dhanukhanda Beel**

The hydronym stands after the toponym Dhanukhanda. The Guru-charits refer to the lake of Dhanukhanda was in the neighbourhood of Patbausi and Silagram of Kamrup (Barpeta), which is associated with the life of Sankardeva. The Ahom King Laksmisimha's records this lake as the southern boundary of Sundaridia Satra. Most probably, Dhanukhanda Bil is same with Barbila mentioned in the Sundaridiya Grant of Sivasimha AD 1738 stated earlier.

### **Dighali Pukhuri**

A rectangular tanks in the heart of Guwahati city, covering an area some 25 bighas of land, so the name. Traditions say that it was excavated at the time of Bhagadatta, an ancient King of Kamrupa and a hero of the Mahabharata, to commemorate his daughter Bhanumati's marriage with Kaurava Prince Duryyodhana. But old records are silent as to its existence till the last part of the AD 18th century. A grant of Gaurinathsimha records Dighali Pukhuri as the eastern boundary of the Ketekibari naval bases (near Lotasil) within the city of Guwahati during the Ahom rule, which connected this, with the river Brahmaputra by a canal called Naojan through the Ugratara Tank and it was extended up to Chala beel. Dighalipukhuri is also once a part of old course of the river Brahmaputra later developed by some medieval king and a few suggest the king was Ratnapala.

### **Dipor Beel**

Dipor is a natural lake lying in the south-west of Guwahati, in Rani Area bounded by NF Railway Line and Garchuk to the east, Ajra-Barjhar to the west, Kamakhya and Gauhati University towards north and Matia-Chakdoi hill in the south with an area of 3788 Bighas today. David Scott records it Dobo-jheel or Doohyeheel, which was assigned to Dhuz, a prince of Rani by the Ahom King Rundrasimha for the distinguished services he rendered in the time of Mughal invasion, reserving merely the right of two nets for fishing the lake for the temple of Kamakhya. According to him, the Rani Raja's residence was in the hills to the southward of this lake. Water area of Dipor Bil covers 10.1 sq. km and including swam area 40 sq. km. Old Skt. Dipa means elephant, i.e., a bil where elephants plays is Dipar Beel. According to local tradition, one king Aripatta (not Arimatta of Jitari dynasty), had his headquarters in the middle of today's Dipor Beel. But, due to a big earthquake the entire area surrounding Dipor region along with the headquarters of Aripatta sunk down and formed a big natural pond and since a Dip (hillock) submerged here, so place receives its name Dipor Beel. After this episode, king Aripatta took asylum at Patgaon area near Rani Area, where people observe Durga Puja today. Dipar Bil region was known as Dabai-Sachan in ancient times.

### **Durgasarovar**

The Ahom king Pramattasimha arranged to excavate this hydronym in AD 1744 through Tarun Duara Barphukan, 20 at the eastern gate of the Kamakhya temple of Nilachal Hill to meet the water problem of its inhabitants. This rectangular tank comprises about 3 bighas of land, lying in the south side of the N.F. Railway line of Kamakhya gate. Local tradition says it is an ancient tank founded by Asura king's later Pramattasimha cleaned it.

### **Kapla, Kapala beel**

Kapla beel at Sarukshetri mouza in Barpeta district is the largest beel in Asom. This wetland filled with natural, geographical and historical resources and encompassing a huge area has the potential to be developed as a tourist destination or spot. In the medieval period Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavdeva made an encampment on its bank.

### **Kaptai Lake**

Kaptai Lake is the largest man-made freshwater body in Bangladesh though created primarily for hydroelectric power generation; it contributes to produce significant quantity of freshwater fishes, navigation, flood control and agriculture. It is located in the Kaptai Upazila under Rangamat District of Chittagong Division. The lake was created as a result of building the Kaptai Dam on the Karnaphuli River, as part of the Karnaphuli Hydroelectric project. The Kaptai Lake's average depth is 100 feet (30 m) and maximum depth is 495 feet (151 m). River Kasalong, the right arm of the lake, is fed by two streams, the Mayni and the Kasalong, in the north and laterally by the Karnafuli. The left arm, Rangamati-Kaptai is fed by two streams, the Chengi in the north and the Ringkhyang in the south. The Karnafuli forms three prominent loops one at Rangamati, one at Dhuliachhari and the other at Kaptai. The Rangamati and the Dhuliachhari loops are now under the reservoir of the earth-filled Dam. The Kaptai Lake has drowned almost the whole of the middle-Karnafuli valley and the lower reaches of the Chengi, Kasalong and Rinkhyong rivers. Geologically, the lower part of Kaptai Lake, in and around the Kaptai-Rangamati region, is composed mainly of yellowish brown, fine to medium grained, massive to cross-bedded sandstone with alternating shale and salty shale and the upper part is featured by yellowish brown, fine to medium grained, subangular to subrounded, moderately to poorly sorted, massive too thick-bedded and occasionally cross bedded sandstone with quartz granules, pebbles, clay galls and contains well preserved leaf impressions. However, around Shubalong and Barkal, the lake mainly comprises Bhuban formation. As the local people remove the protective vegetation around the lake, these rocks are exposed to the monsoon rains and thus eroded easily. This results in Landslides, and the loose rock material is washed down the slopes and carried by rivers into the lake. As a result, the lake is silting up rapidly. By the early 1990s, in its 30-year existence, it had already lost about 25% of its volume due to siltation.

### **Koya-Kujia Beel**

Koya Kujia Beel is an enchanting tourist spot, situated 3 km's away from Abhayapuri Town in the district of Bongaigaon, Assam. A beautiful scenic location and many people come and gather during picnic season particularly during January-December every year. It covers with a beautiful lawn, one fish breeding centre of Fishery Department of Assam Government and one beel where migratory birds fly down during January-December.

### **Sonbeel**

Sonbeel, an ox-bow lake between Hailakandi and Karimganj district of Assam. This is the second waterbody in Assam to be accorded the status of being a national wetland after Deepor Beel on the outskirts of Guwahati. Sonbeel measures 3458.12 hectares. Son Beel is the confluence of two streams — Singla and Kachua. While Singla serves as an inlet of the water into the Son Beel, the outlet is called the Kachua stream. But the inflow of water was impeded when a long embankment was built in the early fifties along Karimganj. The beel's 'degradation' began when migrants from then East Pakistan began settling on its banks after Partition. Over a lakh people, mostly fishermen from Patni, Namashudra and Kaibartas still live near the lake. It's not surprising given the fact that the beel's waters are full of rui (carp), katla, mrigel, puti, maka and chela baiya. The pollution,

too, has made the lake an unsuitable haunt for barheaded goose, adjutant stork, lesser teal, white-breasted water hen, spotted dove, purple heron and common swallow, which used to flock to the wetland for years.

#### **Sujal Beel**

Literally Sujal bil means 'the lake of pure water'. By the Gopeswar Grant issued in 1651 and 1739-40 by king Sivasimha assigned the Sujal bil to the temple of Gopeswar, situated in Devduar of Kamrup. It is lying towards the northwest side of the Gopeswar temple.

#### **Tamranga Beel**

The hydronym is situated in old Goalpara district and it is connected with series of legends with Rabha King Dadan, his generals Tona and Maruksetri in early medieval period. Tamranga natural lake is a beautiful location and destination of migratory birds during winters. The lake is considered as ornithologist's paradise as a large number of migratory birds visit here during winter. It is a combination of two lakes Tamranga (larger lake) and Kanara (smaller lake) and is fed by the floodwater of Brahmaputra River.

#### **Jarain Pitcher Plant Lake**

Mawsmai in Amlarem subdivision of War-Jaintia region amid the natural habitat of the carnivorous pitcher plant -Nepenthes Khasiana spreads over an area of 50,000 square metres. A pretty lake sits placidly amid gravelled footpaths, arch bridges, pitcher plant garden and greenhouse -interpretation Centre. The railings of the boat-house are styled on the pitcher plant. A pitcher plant replica in the middle of the lake doubles up as a fountain -the setting is perfect for a leisurely boat ride. There are paddle-boats to engage visitors as they soak in the greenery of the low lying hillocks around.

#### **Thadlaskein Lake**

Eight km from Jowai on National highway 44 is a man-made lake at Thadlaskein fed by a Perennial spring. According to tradition, one Chieftain Sajar Nangli had an irreconcilable difference with the king of Jaintiyapur. Not wanting to be blamed for an inevitable bloodbath he decided to flee from the Kingdom with his followers. Before his departure, however, they dug the present day lake with the ends of bows as a memorial. The lake is revered by the people of Raid Mukhla who continue to offer sacrifices near the Lake. A popular picnic spot for locals.

#### **Umhang Lake**

This lake at Wataw (Bataw) village overlooking the plains of Bangladesh is flanked on either side by lush green forests. This lake is attributed to Sajar Nangli who dined at this spot and drank water from a spring to quench his thirst. He and his followers decided to create a lake unlike any other in the Jaintiya Kingdom, so they spent several months digging this magnificent lake. Here too the people of Wataw (Bataw) regard the Umhang Lake with reverence and pay homage along with sacrifices annually.

All these Natural Hydronyms (Beels, Lakes, Hawars and Dobas etc.) played a major role in maintaining the balance ecological situation for the people of Ancient Pragjyotisa-Kamrupa for ages.

#### **Conclusion**

The forms of many large beets have favoured extensive development of marginal and submerged vegetation dominated by macrophytes. With high values of light quality and quantity combined with appropriate temperature regime and total alkalinity, the submerged macrophytes play a major role in determining plankton productivity and primary productivity in beets. Owing to a high rate of accumulation of nutrients, macrophytes compete with phytoplankton and, under macrophyte-dominated conditions, phytoplankton do not get enough nutrients for their growth. As a result, phytoplankton, in general, is poor in beets. In Dhir beet, phytoplankton is dominated by Chlorophyceae (Pediastrum, Spirogyra, Eudorina Mongeotia) and Myxophyceae (Microcystis, Anabena, and Oscillatoria). Macrophytes include Hydrilla verticillata and Vallisneria spiralis. Other species are Salvinia, Lemna, Wolffia, Potamogeton, Najas, and Trapa. A conspicuous feature of the beels, is the unusually high proportion of detritus. The disturbances and threats are imminent to the beels. Infestation by water hyacinth is a problem. Reclamation for agriculture and urbanisation, over-exploitation of fishery resources, and pollution from domestic and industrial wastes and agricultural run-off are other problems. Various government departments involved in the development of beels are unable to coordinate their activities to formulate and implement a common strategy for beet management.

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