
THE SCHEDULED CASTES OF ASSAM AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL SCENARIO: AN UNDERSTANDING FROM DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Trailokya Dehingia

Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Khowang College

Abstract

The paper provides an account of Scheduled Castes population by emphasizing on educational scenario based on secondary sources. The Scheduled Castes people have no access to education in traditional Indian society. In the early 20th Dr. Ambedkar played significant role for their upliftment. After independence various measures have been taken for the upliftment of the Scheduled Castes by realizing the special importance of education. Of late, the scenario is quite changed. The study revealed that inspite of various problems of the Scheduled Castes, they are aware of need and values of education in the society today and their literacy rate and educational attainment has gradually been increased which is a positive sign for the development of the Scheduled Castes in particular and Indian nation in general.

Key words : scheduled castes, disability, population, education.

This paper is concerned with a specific group of population i.e. Scheduled Castes. In this paper an attempt has been made to understand educational scenario of the Scheduled Castes with special emphasis on government as well as constitutional measures. The second endeavor of the

paper is to highlight sub-caste wise literacy rate of the Scheduled Castes of Assam for understanding their educational status.

The Scheduled Castes :

Since the dawn of history, caste is a complex social institution deeply entrenched in Indian society from

immemorial past. In traditional Indian society the institution of caste alienated many section of the society from the main stream of the Hinduism. The alienated sections of the society have been living outside and down below in social and ritual hierarchy under the four fold Varna system. They were suffering from socio-economic, educational and cultural disabilities. They were restricted to enter in temples and houses of upper castes. They were prohibited from drawing water from 'Savarna' wells. They were considered untouchables. Since the medieval times the so-called untouchables as well as suffering groups called fifth Varna or Panchama and has been added to original four Varna (Behura 2001).

In Indian social system various names have been used to refer these sections. The names are as Untouchables, Chandala, Avarna, Antyaja, Svapha, Panchama, Harijan, Out caste, Depressed class, Exterior caste, Scheduled caste and popularly using name is Dalit. The expression of 'Depressed classes', 'Exterior Castes', and 'Untouchables' were commonly used for the Scheduled Castes during the colonial period. The so-called Untouchables as well as Scheduled Castes Gandhiji called 'Harijans', the people of God.

The term Scheduled Castes is a politico-legal term. It was first coined by the Simon Commission in 1928 and was

embodied in the Government of India Act of 1935 in section 309 (Prakash 1989: 3). In accordance with this enactment some of the undefined depressed castes were singled in 1936 and listed in a schedule in order to ensure their social development in social hierarchy. Their names have been shown in the schedule and they come to be known as 'Scheduled Castes.

The term 'Scheduled Castes' was used by Dr. Ambedkar while drafting the Constitution, it referred to those categories who were poor, exploited socially and ritually or religiously degraded. But the term Scheduled Castes was not defined any where in the Constitution. The Article 366 (2) and (24) of the Constitution reads "Scheduled Castes means such castes races or tribes as are deemed under article 341 to be Scheduled Castes for the purpose of Constitution (Naidu 2004 : 11). According to Article 341 of the Indian Constitution (Nov. 1949), the president after consultation with the Head of the state and by the public notification specifies the castes race or tribes or groups which can be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to the concerned state or Union Territories. It is interesting to note that under Article 341 the Constitution has provision for the inclusion of even any tribe in the Scheduled Castes (Das 1986 : 6). There is no any explanation that who are the

Scheduled Castes except listing a number of castes and sub-castes under Article 341 of the Constitutions.

Article 341 (2) reads Parliament may by law include or exclude from the list of Scheduled Castes specified in a notification issued under clause (1), any caste race or tribe or group within any caste, race or tribe (Naidu 2004).

Social thinkers have tried to define the term in their own way. In this context, we may consider the definition of D.N. Majumdar and G.S. Ghurye Majumdar used the term 'Scheduled Castes' to refer mainly to the untouchable castes. He defines, 'the untouchable castes are those who suffer from various social and political disabilities many of which are traditionally prescribed and socially enforced by higher castes. G.S. Ghurye defines Scheduled Castes are those groups which are named in the Scheduled Castes order in force from time to time (Rao2004:262).

There are various castes in the list of the Scheduled Castes. In Assam, almost all the districts contain a large number of Scheduled Castes people. The Scheduled Castes people are engaged in different field of work at present and have contributed not only in the state's gross economy but national economic structure also. In Assam there are sixteen

Scheduled Castes as records available. These are as Kaibartta, Namasudra, Hira, Bania, Mehtor, Lalbegi, Bansphor, Bhumali or Mali, Dhupi-Dhubi, Dugla-Dholi, Jhalo-Malo, Mahara, Muchi, Patni, Sutradhar, Jalkeot (Jalia).

Population Structure:

The Scheduled Castes population constitutes an important segment of country's population. This segment of population constitutes an important socio-economic and cultural potentiality in terms of nation building process. In Assam the Scheduled Castes population constitute 7.2% population of state's total population. There are 22,31,321 Scheduled Castes population in Assam. According to 2011 Census Report, 82 percentages of Scheduled Castes is living in rural areas. There is wide variation with regard to their rural -urban distribution of population. The sex ratio of the total Scheduled Castes population is 935, which is very close to the national average for Scheduled Castes i.e. 936. The child sex ratio (0-6 age group) at 959 is above the aggregated figure at national level for Scheduled Caste's is 938.

The distribution of sub-caste wise Scheduled Castes population of Assam are shown in the following table 1.1

Table 1.1
The Scheduled Caste Population of Assam (2011 Census)

Sl. No	Name of S.C	Population	Percentage
1	Bansphur	16,359	0.8
2	Bhuimali or Mali	69,535	3.2
3	Bania	50,598	2.9
4	Dhupi-Dhubi	52,431	2.7
5	Dugla-Dholi	7,991	0.5
6	Hira	55,300	2.9
7	Jalkeot	24,774	1.3
8	Jhalo-Malo	80,376	3.9
9	Kaibartta	6,93,219	31.8
10	Lalbegi	790	0.0
11	Mahara	1,822	0.1
12	Mehtor	8835	0.7
13	Muchi	77,643	3.9
14	Namasudra	6,31,542	30.1
15	Patni	1,81,904	8.6
16	Sutradhar	66,303	3.4
	Total	22,31,321	100

Source : A-10 State Primary Census Abstract, Appendix, 2011

Educational Scenario:

Education is considered as the backbone of modern civilizations. Education is the vital key to social change and development. It constitutes the major factor in social status and social mobility.

To bring about change in the desired direction, there is a acknowledged role of education. Education is the entire process of learning that broadens a person's cognitive horizons and develops the skills to choose, evaluate and to add

to the existing stock of knowledge (Atal 2007:20). It is the most important single factor for economic development and social emancipation as well.

But the Scheduled Castes have no access to education in traditional Indian society due to socio-religious restrictions imposed on them. In the early 20th century, Dr. Ambedkar played a significant role for their upliftment. He gave importance to modern education for their upliftment. He exhorted Scheduled Castes youth to acquire education in order to raise their social status. In early 1924 he established 'Bahiskrit' Hitkarini Sabha' with specific aims and objective i.e. opening hostels, libraries, social centres, class rooms etc. In 1928, he established 'Depressed Classes Educational Society' to organize school education on sound basis. The people's Education Society, that he established in 1945, identified role that education could play in social and economic advancement of the untouchables (Naidu 2004: 60).

After independence various measures have been taken for uplifting the Scheduled Castes by realizing special importance of education. With regard to bring about changes in the status of the Scheduled Castes, educational facilities play a vital role. Educational facilities are

expected to improve the qualification of the members of these castes for better jobs and provisions for reservation of seats in services to link education for their upliftment. Article 15 (4) of the Indian Constitution provides special provision for educational development of Scheduled Castes. Article 46 of the Constitution declares, the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation" (Naidu 2004 : 29). In 1954, the Union Government has asked the state Government to provide 15 percent reservation for Scheduled Castes in educational institutions.

Both Articles 15 (4) and 46 of the Constitution are comprehensive enough and steps have been taken to provide facilities such as reservations, hostels, fee reimbursement, scholarships, special coaching, free text books, free uniforms stipends etc. for the Scheduled Castes to pursue education. Planning in India emphasized protective discrimination to Scheduled Castes in the form of reservation of seats, provision of scholarship etc. to ensure their

educational upliftment. Mention may be made here that reservation of seats in educational institution including engineering and medical college, relaxation in age and marks for admission is also a significant measure for their educational development. There are schemes for educational and socio-economic development including protective measures under protection of Civil Right Act 1955. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes prevention of Atrocities Act 1989 adopted the policy of reservation in public employment and educational development for upliftment of people belonging to Scheduled Castes. The pre-metric and post-metric scholarship scheme plays a significant role in pursuing education among the Scheduled Castes. These schemes are implemented through state Government/ Union Territories as centrally sponsored schemes (Chandra 2003 : 2).

The pre-Matric scholarship scheme was introduced in the year 1977-78 particularly for those who are engaged in the so-called unclean occupations. The Post-Matric scholarship scheme is one of the nation-wide popular schemes for the SC and ST students. This scheme was implemented by the government in the year 1994-95 to promote higher

education amongst Scheduled Castes. The scheme extends scholarships to all eligible Scheduled Caste students who pursue post-matriculation courses in recognized institutions.

The special Educational Development Programme for SC girls belonging to low literacy levels is introduced in 1996-97 (Chandra : *ibid*). The main aim of this scheme is to establish special residential schools for Scheduled Castes girls belongs to low literacy groups, where the tradition and environment are not conducive for learning. The another important scheme for Scheduled Castes students is Book Bank Scheme. The objective of this scheme is to provide books to deserving SC and ST students pursuing Medical, Engineering, Agriculture, Veterinary, Law, Chartered Accountancy, MBA and Bio-Science courses in various institutions. The scheme of Upgradation of Merit of SC/ST students is introduced to upgrade the merit of SC & ST students by providing them remedial and special coaching in classes ix to xii. The remedial coaching aims at removing the deficiencies in various subjects. The special coaching is provided with a view to prepare the students for competitive examinations for seeking entry into

professional courses like engineering, medical etc. The scheme provides for 100% central assistance to the state and Union Territories.

The National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986 contemplated the following measures for the development of education among the Scheduled Castes. These are as

- (i) Incentives to SC families to send their children to school regularly till they reach the age of 14
- (ii) Pre-matric scholarship scheme for children of families engaged in low occupation (scavenging, tanning etc) from class I on ward.
- (iii) Constant monitoring to ensure enrolment, retentions and successful completion of courses.
- (iv) Recruitment of teachers from Scheduled Castes.
- (v) Facilities in hostels
- (vi) Locating schools and education centres in such a way so as to facilitate full participation of SCs.
- (vii) Constant innovation in finding new methods to increase participation (Ahuja 1999 : 436)

Education is directly related to the development of an individual in particular

and the community at large. It is the most important single factor for economic development and social emancipation as well. The need of education especially for the Scheduled Castes is quite obvious since education is an important vehicle for social mobility too.

The rate of literacy among the Scheduled Castes has been increased gradually. According to 2011 Census of India Report, the literacy rate of Scheduled Castes of Assam is 66.8% which is above the aggregated national figure for Scheduled Castes i.e. 56.5%. The male and female literacy rate is 72.2% and 61.0% respectively. The gender gap in literacy is quite conspicuous. Although the rate of literacy is increased gradually among the Scheduled Castes in national as well as state level, but the level of education is not increased accordingly. It is also stated in the report of the 2001 Census that the Scheduled Castes having educational level graduation and above are only 2.5%. Jalkeot with 4.7% and Bania with 4.3% are well ahead of the others. On the contrary others are very low. The rate of literacy among the Scheduled Castes of Assam is shown in the table 1.3.

Table 1.2
Literacy Rate of the Scheduled Castes

Sl.No	Name of SC	Literacy Rate (7 years and above)		
		Total	Male	Female
1	All Scheduled Castes	66.8	72.2	61.0
2	Bansfor	53.5	62.4	44.5
3	Bhuimali	71.0	75.6	66.2
4	Bania	76.6	81.4	71.5
5	Dhupi	74.6	79.3	69.8
6	Dugla	57.1	63.0	49.9
7	Hira	70.7	76.3	65.0
8	Jalkeot	67.7	74.2	61.1
9	Jhalo-Malo	57.1	64.6	49.1
10	Kaibartta	70.1	75.0	65.0
11	Lalbegi	62.9	69.1	56.5
12	Mahara	67.2	76.9	54.9
13	Mehtor	53.1	70.6	55.4
14	Muchi	53.1	61.9	44.0
15	Namasudra	61.8	68.0	55.3
16	Patni	74.4	77.4	77.2
17	Sutradhar	66.8	72.8	60.5

Source : A-10 State Primary Census Abstract, Appendix, 2011

The above table (1.2) shows a good number of literacy rates of the Scheduled Castes of Assam. But, it can be inferred from the table that the gender gap in literacy among them is still a noticeable matter. In spite of the importance of imparting education to the Scheduled Castes and the various efforts taken by the Government they are still remained educationally backward. Many

reasons prevented the Scheduled Castes from taking up education. The main obstacles in the way of educational development of Scheduled Castes are the economic backwardness and poverty. Besides these, lack of knowledge of educational facilities, lack of appreciation for the value of education, home and school environment and traditional apathy towards education are the reasons for

educational backwardness of the Scheduled Castes (Naidu 2004 : 65, 66).

It has also been known that most of the Scheduled Castes people are yet to realize the paramount importance of education, of course primary schools are generally available in the villages. In some of the schools infrastructural conditions are not adequate. Moreover, number of required teachers in some schools is also lacking. At the same time, though the number of Scheduled Castes School going children has gradually increased, yet, large numbers of students are dropout in the elementary level. The reasons for drop-out are lack of proper guidance, deplorable economic condition of the people, repeated failure in the examinations and marriage of girls at an early age etc.

Conclusion:

Various studies and research works conducted on Scheduled Castes in Indian context revealed that educational attainment among them has gradually been increased. Of course, from the above discussion it may be stated that there are

variety of problems among the Scheduled Castes with regard to development of education and upliftment of their socio-economic status inspite of providing various opportunities by the government. Of late, they try their best for socio-economic and educational development of their future generation. It has been noticed that educated section though small in numbers are seemed to enjoy better social position in comparison to the common masses. Now, they are aware of need and values of education in present day society. At the same time, it is felt that unless a proper mechanism being generated for building awareness in the first changing societal scenario among them it will remain a long cherished dream for overall development of Scheduled Castes people. In this context various voluntaries organization, non government organization and government publicity media should play definite role by organizing awareness programmes in the scheduled caste inhabited areas for their all round development in the days to come.

Reference :

1. Ahuja, Ram (1993), Indian Social System, Rawat publication, Jaipur and New Delhi.
2. ibid (2005), Society in India, Concepts Theories and Recent Trends, Rawat Publication, New Delhi.

-
3. Atal, Yogesh (2007), On Education and Development, Essays on the Sociology of Education, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, New Delhi.
 4. Behura, N.K.(2001), The scheduled Castes and their problems, in Man and Life. A Journal of the Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology, Vol. 27,Nos.1&2; Jan- Jun,2001,pp.05-15.
 5. Census Report of India, 2011.
 6. Chandra, R. (2003), Dalit Identity in the New Millenium, Untouchability and the Law, Volume - 10 commonwealth, New Delhi.
 7. Chatterjee, S.K. (2000), Educational Development of Scheduled Castes : Looking Ahead, Gyan Publication, New Delhi.
 8. Das, Bhakta (1986), A Glimpse of the Scheduled Castes and their Socio-economic Development in Assam, Omsons Publication, New Delhi, Guwahati.
 9. Naidu, R V K (2004), Empowerment of Scheduled Castes, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi.
 10. Prakash, Nirupama (1989), Scheduled Castes Socio-economic changes, Chugh Publication, Allahabad.
 11. Yadav, S.K. (1991), Education of Scheduled Castes, Common Wealth Publication, New Delhi.