



STATUS OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION AMONG THE SCHEDULED CASTE OF LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT : Scheduled caste (SC) population constitutes a sizeable portion of the total population of Assam accounting for 6.32 per cent according to the 2011 census. They comprised a socially backward class in the Indian society- downtrodden illiterate people of the Indian social fabric . Literacy and educational attainment are considered the hallmark of a modern society. The traits of the modern society, such as, industrialisation, modernisation and urbanisation are closely associated with the level of literacy and education.

KEY WORDS : Population, Scheduled Caste, Women's education, Literacy, Sex ratio,

1. INTRODUCTION

Assam, a state in the North –East India, is enriched with great human resource potential that yet to be tapped to its fullest extent, as most of the women are still being uneducated. In order to tap this resource and utilise it to the maximum, it is essential to take a stock of the existing position and the actions taken by various agencies in the promotion of women's education. The attitude of the parents towards the education of their daughters/women happens to be one of the key factors in the speedier development of women's education.

The society of rural Assam is influenced by the socio-religious move prevalent in our patriarchal society which are impediments to women's progress. Patriarchy perpetuates the subjugation of women. Although the Assamese Hindu society because of its tribal base is much liberal in many respects, particularly in regard to women, still the over-all picture is not a happy one (Baruah, 1988 and Dubey, 1988).. In spite of remarkable heroic roles in the country's struggle for freedom by the Assamese women, it is regrettable that the status of women in the present society especially in the rural scheduled caste areas is very low. Status is related to society's attitude towards women, socio-religious moves and values, socio-economic status, women's awareness of the problem, progress of education, policy of the government etc.

Education is regarded as a key factor leading to the political, economic and social development of a society. It is also being realized that the overall development of the nation depends on the position it adheres to women's education , as women have an important role to play in the development of the nation. UNESCO has played a pivotal role while trying to focus the attention of the world communities on problems related to women and has tried to define ways to improve their status, health and education. Hence, they dedicated 1975 as the International year of Women and a decade 1976 –1985 as the Decade of Women. Though Indian women enjoyed freedom and a good status earlier, over the years, due to various reasons , the status of women and importance of their education was pushed to the background. In recent years, gradually the important role that a woman can play is getting recognized and of late, efforts are being made to uplift the status of women through various programmes. Education of women is felt to be the key input in the development of the country in all fields.

The SCs are a native and aboriginal group of people, who in the wake of Aryan colonisation of India came into close contact with the socio-cultural habits of the Aryans and subsequently adopted the Hindu social norms, which are divided as the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Sudras*. In ancient times, the privileged class formed by the Aryans acquired social power in the society and considered the smaller groups of population as sub-ordinates to them. This group known as *Sudras* conform to the lowest stratum of the caste hierarchy of the Hindus.. The *Sudras* have suffered various socio-economic and political discriminations in society; some of them were even called as untouchables (Baruah, 2014) and referred to as depressed class until 1935. Afterwards the term "Scheduled Caste" was applied to them in the government of India Act, 1935. According to the Sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution, SCs are regarded as the weakest sections of India and therefore, a backward class of the society (Baruah, 2014 ; Bhattacharyya, 2009; 2013).

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study is to examine the status of women's education pertaining to the Scheduled Caste people of Lakhimpur district of Assam.

The domain of the study is divided as per the following objectives :

- 1) To study the status of women's education among the scheduled caste people of Lakhimpur district of Assam.
- 2) To study the attitude of parents towards girls'/women education.
- 3) To find out the reasons for low literacy rate among the girl children/women.
- 4) To offer suggestions for further upliftment of women's education in the concerned backward sector.

3. METHODOLOGY

Methodology is one of the important aspects of social research. It is the most systematic and logical of the principles which leads to scientific investigations. Social research has been defined by **P. V. Young (1992)** in the following words, " Social research may be defined as a scientific undertaking which, by means of logical and systematized technique aims to :- i) discover new facts or verify and tested old facts; ii) analyze their sequences, inter-relationships and casual explanations which were derived within an appropriate theoretical frame of reference; iii) develop new scientific tools, concepts and theories which would facilitate reliable and valid study of

human behaviour .

The study was undertaken in North Lakhimpur sub-division of Lakhimpur district of Assam. Lakhimpur district is located in the North Bank of the Brahmaputra river of Assam, extending from 26°49` N latitude to 27°38` N latitude and 93°42` E longitude to 94°38` E longitude. The district is surrounded by Arunachal Pradesh to the North, Dhemaji district to the East, Sibsagar and Jorhat

districts to the South and Biswanath district to the West .

- i) **The universe of the Study** : The area of the present study is North Lakhimpur sub-division of Lakhimpur district of Assam.
- ii) **Selection of the universe** : The field of study was in rural areas of North Lakhimpur sub-division of of Lakhimpur district of Assam. Two (2) numbers of Scheduled Caste villages from rural areas are being selected of which one is with high literate people, while the other is with lower rate of education. All the households were considered as respondents for the study for more accuracy of results.
- iii) **Collection of Data** : Data pertaining to the objectives of the study were taken through :-
 - i) Direct interview as per questioner developed,
 - ii) Secondary data from Census report as well as various literatures.

1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Women, the soul of society, has been covered very little in the 'He-History' of India. Wherever her coverage is found, she has always been presented with a derogatory status, whereas, women are the nuclei of the society. Hobhouse (1979), an eminent Sociologist has rightly pointed out , in unequivocal terms, that "the position of women in a given society is the sure index of the development of the country to which they belong". Social status is a position in a social group or in society (Fairchild). In modern social science, status denotes ; a) a position in a social system with respect to occupants of other position in the same structure; b) place with respect to the distribution of rights, , obligations, power, authority within the same system as in the phrases ' high status' or 'low status' (Gold and William, 1967). Sociologists have used the concept of status as the key term in the understanding of the social differentiation and stratification of human society (Jain, 1988).. In North East India and Assam as well, though a number of works on Scheduled caste people has been carried out, but studies relating to scheduled caste women are still very limited.

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Assam Scenario : Assam is estimated to have a total population of 3,11,69,272 nos. of which 1 ,59,54,927 nos. are males while 1,52,14,345 nos. are females as per Population Census 2011. Then children population within the age group of 0-6 years is 45,11,307 nos. (males child of 23,05,088 nos. and female child of 22,06,219 nos.).. Average sex ratio of Assam is 958 while 962 is the child sex ratio. The literacy rate is 73.18 per cent with male literacy of 83.52 per cent against 70.67 per cent female literacy rate . (Table 1).

Table 1: Profile of Population, Child population, Sex ratio and Literacy percentage of Assam

Total population (No.)	Male (No.)	Female (No.)	Sex ratio	Total families (No.)	Child popln (0-6 Y)	Male child (No.)	Female child (No.)	Child Sex ratio	Total literacy rate (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
3,11,69,272	1,59,54,927	1,52,14,345	958	2,04,307	45,11,307	23,05,088	22,06,219	954	73.18	83.52	70.67

Source : Census Report, 2011

Educational level of Scheduled Caste people of Assam : There are higher percentage (55.41%) of illiterate people among the Scheduled caste people in Assam. Education below primary level (I to IV) constitutes 40.17 per cent while it is 0.96 per cent who have read above primary level. Above Matric standard (HSLC) it is only 21.33 per cent while, only 7.54 per cent are up to graduate level (Table 2).

Table 2 : Status of Educational Level of Scheduled Caste population in Assam

Educational Level	Percentage share of literates		
	Total	Male	Female
Below Primary (I to IV)	37.57	36.18	40.17
Above Primary up to Matric (V to X)	29.68	28.99	0.96
Above Matric (HSLC) below graduate	22.66	23.37	21.33
Graduate and Technical	10.09	11.46	7.54
Illiterates	43.84	34.75	55.41
Literates(all)	56.16	65.25	44.58

Source : Goswami Borooah(2014)

Table- 3. Education and various level of women education in *Kaibartta* Society of Lakhimpur district and Assam

State/District	Total population	Male	Female	Population rate
Assam	2231321	1145314	1086007	7.15%
Lakhimpur	81840	41689	40151	7.9%

(Census Report 2011).

Table 4: Profile of Population, Child population, Sex ratio and Literacy percentage of Lakhimpur District, Assam

Total population (No.)	Male (No.)	Female (No.)	Sex ratio	Total Families (No.)	Urban populn (8.76%)	Rural popln (91.24%)	Child popln (0-6 Y)	Male child (No.)	Female child (No.)	Child Sex ratio	Total literacy rate (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1,042,137	5,29,674	512,463	968	2,04,307	91,333	9,50,804	1,56,739	80,016	76,723	959	77.20	83.52	70.67

Source : Census Report, 2011

Table 5: Profile of Population, Child population, Sex ratio and Literacy percentage of Lakhimpur District, Assam

Total population (No.)	Male (No.)	Female (No.)	Sex ratio	Total families (No.)	Urban popln	Rural popln	Child popln (0-6 Y)	Male child (No.)	Female child (No.)	Child Sex ratio	Total literacy rate (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
2,50,643	1,28,254	1,22,389	954	50,196	23.9%	76.1%	34,426	17,662	16,764	949	79.24%	73.06 (%)	63.43 (%)

Source : Census Report, 2011

1)Bacha Gaon : Bacha gaon is a large village located in North Lakhimpur Circle of Lakhimpur district, Assam with total 880 families.. Bacha gaon village has the population of 4,339 of which 2,194 are male while 2,145 are female as per Population Census 2011. In Bacha gaon population of children with age 0-6 is 600 which makes up 13.83 % of total population of village. Average Sex Ratio of Bacha gaon village is 978 which is higher than Assam state average of 958. Child Sex Ratio for Bacha gaon 813, lower than Assam average of 962. The village has higher literacy rate compared to Assam. In 2011, literacy rate of Bacha gaon village was 84.65 per cent compared to 72.19 per cent of Assam. In Bacha gaon male literacy stands at 91.63 per cent, while female literacy rate is 77.72 per cent (Table 6.).

Table 6: Profile of Population, Child population, Sex ratio and Literacy percentage of Bacha Gaon, North Lakhimpur District, Assam

Total population (No.)	Male (No.)	Female (No.)	Sex ratio	Total Families (No.)	Child popln (0-6 Y)	Male child (No.)	Female child (No.)	Child Sex ratio	Total literacy rate (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
4,339	2,194	2,145	978	880	600	17,662	16,764	813	84.65	91.63	77.72

Source : Census Report, 2011.

Table 7: Profile of Population and educational status of Bacha Gaone, North Lakhimpur

Total Population	Numbers of women (no.)	Primary School level (no.)	High School level (no.)	Higher Secondary level (no.)	Various job and Professions (no.)	Children (no.)	Uneducated (no.)
4,339	2,143	437	268	136	53	600	1,302

Bocha Gaon, situated at a distance of 15 km from district head quarter North lakhimpur in the southern side of North Lakhimpur town is inhabited by the *Kaibartta* community. The number of women in primary level education is more (437 nos.) and the number of women is lower (268 nos.) in upper primary level. In addition, the number of women involved in employment, business and various professions is very of 53 numbers and the illiterate women in the village is very high i.e. 1,302 numbers (Table 7).

Table 8 : Profile of Population and educational status of Gharmara village, North Lakhimpur

Total populn (No.)	Male (No.)	Female No.)	Sex ratio	Total family (No.)	Child popln (0-6 Y)	Female child (0-6 Y)	Child Sex ratio	Total literacy rate (%)	Male popln	Female popln
4031	2042	1989 (49.3%)	975	796	403 (13.8 %)	194 48.1 %	813	91.12	2,042	1,989

2) Gharmara Gaon : Gharmara gaon is a large village located in North Lakhimpur Circle of Lakhimpur district, Assam.. Gharmara gaon has the population of 4,031 of which 2,042 are male while 1,989 are female as per Population Census 2011. The population of children with age 0-6 is 403 which makes up 13.83 per cent of total population of the village. Average Sex Ratio of the village is 975 which is higher than Assam state average of 958. Child Sex Ratio for Gharmara gaon is 813, lower than Assam average of 962. The village has higher literacy rate compared to Assam. In 2011, literacy rate of Gharmara gaon was 91.12 per cent compared to 72.19 per cent of Assam. (Table 8).

Table 9 : Profile of Population and educational status of Gharmara, \ village, North Lakhimpur

Total Population	Numbers of women (no.)	Primary school level (no.)	High School Level (no.)	Higher Secondary Level (no.)	Various job and Professions (no.)	Children (no.)	Uneducated (no.)
4,031	1,989	287	219	148	39	403	1,337

: Gharmara, in the eastern side of North Lakhimpur district is inhabited by *Kaibartta* community. The number of women in primary level education is more (287 nos.) and the number of women is lower (219 nos.) in upper primary level. In addition, the number of women involved in employment, business and various professions is very low (39 no.)) and illiterate women in the villages is even higher i.e. 1,337 numbers (Table 9).

Problems of education in both *Kaibartta* villages:

1. Most of the women are economically weak due to lack of money. Women are deprived of education.
2. Often children are excluded from education due to early marriage.
3. Some of the children are kept busy in house work and busy in different fields.
4. A small number of children are employed as house keeper in other people's homes. As a result, there is no opportunity to get education.
5. Women are not given equal priority over men because of women education.

Causes of School Drop out:

1. Poor academic performance in the examinations.
2. Poor learning and financial involvement.
3. Lack of Secondary schools nearby the village
4. Forced withdrawal of married adolescence
5. Never enrolling in school or enrolling too late
6. Influencing of relation and demand on first daughter

FINDINGS

1. Both the villages have high population more than 4,000 farm families.
2. The number of female people are around 47–49 per cent of total population.
3. Education up to high school level is quite lower than primary level.
4. At the Graduate level, less number of girls are found to have their education.
5. The portion of uneducated girls/women are found beyond 1,000 numbers in both the villages.
6. Engagement in government jobs or in private organizations are very less compared to the total female population in both the villages.
7. The school drop out is found to be in alarming figure in both the villages.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it can be seen that the women of the Kaibartta community of the schedule castes could not develop due to lack of the education, education shows people the way out of darkness. The curiosity of the people to know what they don't know. The scope of human knowledge increases for the uninitiated. Education is essential to make this knowledge effective, acquisition of knowledge, development of personality, upliftment of social order, increase of production, building a real civic body, showing the way of livelihood, character building. Women's education is important for various reasons like modernization, improving the social status of all women, especially in the backward areas of the scheduled caste as well as ensuring an educated level of education from primary to higher education. In this case, the welfare of the scheduled castes undertaken by the government should be more comprehensive and effective.

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