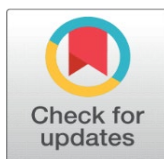
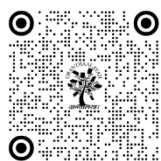


A STUDY ON DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION OF SCHEDULED CASTE PEOPLE OF ASSAM

Dr. Binita Das ¹✉

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Suren Das College, Hajo, India



Corresponding Author

Dr. Binita Das, binitabarbie@gmail.com

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i2.2024.6443](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i2.2024.6443)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Indian education system has always thrived to bridge the gap in social category; still there remains large disparities, especially between the advantaged groups and the disadvantaged groups which have been almost away from education. A disadvantaged group refers to a population that is at a higher risk of experiencing negative effects or harm in specific situations, such as natural disasters or emergencies. Socio-culturally, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and Minorities are known as disadvantaged groups. Disadvantaged groups often face social discrimination, lack access to resources, face cultural differences and economic constraints which affect their educational and social journey. Education and development are the two sides of the same coin. Education is the most important factor for development of a person, a society, a state and a nation. In Assam, literacy rate of one of the disadvantaged classes, that is, Scheduled Castes is below the state average due to various factors. To have a healthy society, there is a need to uplift these classes. As it is seen, in respect of enrolment, retention, and transition rates, the Scheduled Castes children lag behind those children belonging to other categories. Poverty is a major problem in the education of Scheduled Castes. Education helps the weaker section by making them aware of their rights, duties and provisions for their development. Ultimately, education helps to improve and uplift their living standards in society and empowers them.

Keywords: Disadvantaged, Development of Education, Literacy

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is considered the most influential factor in the process of human resource development which leads to economic, social, cultural and political development. To facilitate developmental changes in the economic and social fronts, education must impart necessary knowledge and instill the desire for better way of living among the people. Education is a process that develops the personality and the inherent capabilities of a child. It socialises him or her to play adult roles in society and provides the necessary knowledge and skills required for a member of the society. Education alone can bring necessary changes through peaceful means and if it fails in preserving culture and society, it will itself lose its existence.

Education is a pre-requisite for socio-economic development of any under-privileged group. In absence of education or literacy, development fails to touch them in a desired way forcing them to lead a traditional life. While the societies beyond them march ahead to reap the best of changes and developments, in absence of literacy and further education, they remain unexposed to the change that takes place around them or in the environment. They cannot realize their strength and opportunities to develop themselves. Under this circumstance, their economic development remains arrested. Only education can overcome cultural lags and can act as means of social reconstruction. It can strengthen

democratic forces by making ways for freedom of thought, freedom of expression and freedom of common consent. An illiterate person is like a raw human material in respect of the fact that a literate worker has a greater productivity rate than an illiterate one. To transform the raw human material into a meaningful person, equipped to face the challenges of the society he lives in, he has to go through several processes, and education is the first step towards this process. So, it can be said that education provides the backbone to the society for developing its socio-economic condition.

2. SCHEDULED CASTES IN ASSAM

The emergence of caste stratification in Assam took place at a much later stage compared to other parts of the country. Official records have recognised castes in Assam since 1872. Even prior to that, we find names of some castes in histories, chronicles and descriptive accounts describing their status in the Hindu society. Initially, the Scheduled Castes were known as depressed classes of the society, but according to the constitutional provision, from the year 1950, they were known as Scheduled Castes in India and in Assam. As per Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Order Act 1976, the number of Scheduled Castes in Assam is 16 (sixteen) namely, (1) Bansphor (2) Bhuinmali, Mali (3) Brittal Bania, Bania (4) Dhupi, Dhobi (5) Dugla, Dholi (6) Hira (7) Jalkeot (8) Jhalo Malo, (9) Kaibartta, Jalia (10) Lalbegi (11) Mahara (12) Mehtar, Bhangi. (13) Muchi, Rishi (14) Namasudra (15) Patni (16) Sutradhar.

Following table shows district wise Scheduled Caste population as per 2011 census

Sl. No.	Name of the District	Scheduled Castes population	Percentage of the total SC population of the State
1	Dhubri	70395	3.15
2	Kokrajhar	29570	1.33
3	Goalpara	45094	2.02
4	Bongaigaon	82784	3.71
5	Barpeta	95320	4.27
6	Nalbari	60216	2.7
7	Kamrup	209616	9.39
8	Darrang	40260	1.8
9	Sonitpur	109130	4.89
10	Lakhimpur	81840	3.67
11	Dhemaji	44225	1.98
12	Dibrugarh	58876	2.64
13	Tinsukia	37688	1.69
14	Jorhat	88665	3.97
15	Golaghat	62298	2.79
16	Sibsagar	42347	1.9
17	Nagaon	266350	11.94
18	Morigaon	117841	5.28
19	Cachar	264897	11.87
20	Hailakandi	70659	3.17
21	Karimganj	157890	7.07
22	Karbi Anglong	44961	2.01
23	N.C Hills	4337	0.19
24	Chirang	35135	1.57
25	Udalguri	37844	1.7
26	Baksa	73083	3.28
TOTAL		2231321	7.15%

A characteristic feature of scheduled caste groups is that they are a deprived class both socially and economically, and the source of their deprivation is due to low place accorded to them in the Hindu caste system where they are not only at the bottom of the caste hierarchy but were also untouchables. Another feature is that they are predominantly rural based. Their backwardness can be attributed to lack of literacy and education. The level of literacy among the scheduled groups has been lower than general population. The school enrollment among these groups as compared to other groups also present the same picture, though at primary level the differences between the scheduled and nonscheduled groups were minimal.

For development of education of socially disadvantaged section in Assam, there are various initiatives and efforts made by the government of Assam. Specially Sarba Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is one of the efforts to improve access, equity, and quality of education, tackling the issues of infrastructure and to improve dropout rate and development of teachers. SSA aims to provide useful and relevant elementary education to all bridging social and gender gaps with community participation. SSA focuses on enhancing the efficiency of the schooling system and fostering ownership for quality education. Again, efforts are made on the part of Government of Assam to identify and support children from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and migrant, street children and those from weaker section, through specific certificate and guidelines (The Education (Elementary) Department, Government of Assam Notification vide No. PMA 627/2010/Pt/X/51 dated 4th March 2013).

2.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is an attempt to look into the development of literacy and education among the socially disadvantaged sections of Assam in the 21st century particularly the Scheduled Caste people of Assam.

3. EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN ASSAM

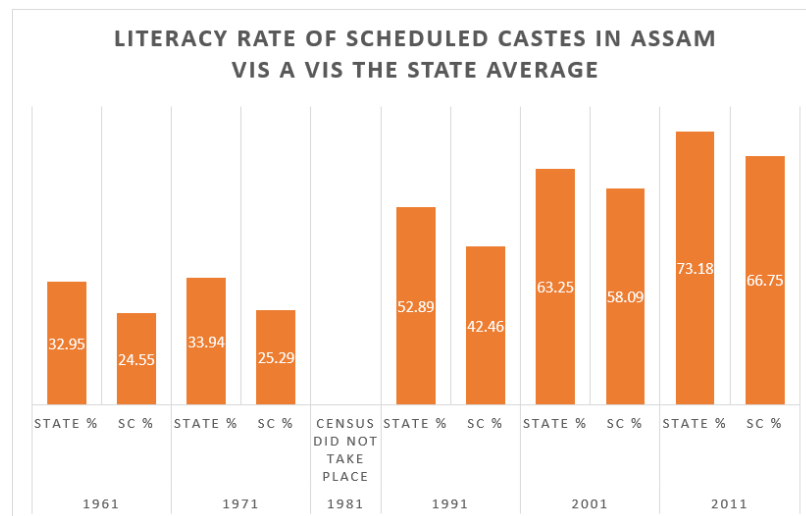
According to various census reports, the literacy rate of Scheduled Castes in Assam is below the state average. The following table shows the literacy rate of Scheduled Castes in Assam vis a vis the state average since 1961 Census.

1961		1971		1981	1991		2001		2011	
State %	SC %	State %	SC %	Census did not take place	State %	SC %	State %	SC %	State %	SC %
32.95	24.55	33.94	25.29		52.89	42.46	63.25	58.09	73.18	66.75

Calculated on the basis of Census data

The data in the table are represented diagrammatically in the following bar diagram for a better understanding.

Figure 1



As per Census data of 1961, literacy rate of Assam was 32.95% and that of Scheduled Castes of Assam was 24.55%. Again, in 1971, the percentage of literacy in Assam was 33.94, whereas Scheduled Castes population recorded 25.29 % literacy. In 1991, the total percentage of literacy in Assam was 52.89 and percentage of literacy among Scheduled Castes was 42.46. Further, total percentage of literacy in Assam as per 2001 Census was 63.25. On the other hand, the percentage of literacy among Scheduled Castes population was 58.09. In the last Census conducted in 2011, total percentage of literacy in Assam was recorded as 73.18 and that of Scheduled Castes population was 66.75.

From the analysis of the above data, it is clear that the literacy rate of the total population of Assam has been increasing gradually so as the literacy rate of Scheduled Caste population. However, the rate of increase in both the cases is not satisfactory despite the concerted efforts on the part of the State Government as well as the Central Government. Literacy rates of Scheduled Caste population even show a more dismal picture; it is not even at par with the State's literacy rate.

While government initiatives like post matric scholarship, free books aim to improve education among Scheduled Castes, due to various challenges like poverty, lack of infrastructure, socio-economic disparities, the educational progress remains very low in the Scheduled Caste communities. Till now dropout rate is very high and female literacy among the scheduled caste is particularly very low. Majority of the Scheduled Caste people are not conscious in getting education and also unaware of the value of education in their lives. The government of India has special schemes including scholarship for education, various educational facilities, financial support and skill education, reservation in job, reservation for education. Though they have various educational schemes and policies but till now they are unaware about their rights and opportunities to upgrade their lives.

4. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Literacy and education together are considered as the most powerful instrument of social change and development. It is only through literacy and education that people can bring desirable changes by developing socio-economic and personal conditions. Scheduled Castes population is still very backward as compared to the developed classes in the state as well as the country. Scheduled Castes of Assam have a big role to play in the socio-economic development of the State. For the development of these socio-economically backward classes, participation of these classes in the process of education is of utmost important. The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) has also a similar aim, "The aim will be to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education including vocational education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2030" (p. 35). To achieve the goal, the upliftment of education of this disadvantaged section is necessary. NEP 2020 has identified the problem: "A multiplicity of factors, including lack of access to quality schools, poverty, social mores & customs, and language have had a detrimental effect on rates of enrolment and retention among the Scheduled Castes. Bridging these gaps in access, participation, and learning outcomes of children belonging to Scheduled Castes will continue to be one of the major goals" (p. 25). In this context, NEP 2020 has suggested some measures to increase access, equity, and inclusion, though with reference to higher education, such as,

- Establishment of new educational institutions, both private and public
- Medium of instruction or programmes in local/Indian languages
- Open distance learning (ODL) and online programmes by institutions
- Making admission process more inclusive

In the context of NEP 2020 and in the context of prevalent education scenario, to achieve the goals of equity, inclusion and quality, the Government must provide financial assistance to the institutions as well as the learners of the disadvantaged classes in the form of scholarships; all non-discrimination and anti-harassment rules should be enforced strictly; curriculum should be more inclusive; and all will have access to quality education irrespective of their caste, creed and geographical location.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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