CHAPTER VII

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DIFFERENT SCHEDULED CASTES GROUPS IN SOME SELECTED VILLAGES AND URBAN CENTRES

CASE STUDY

A comprehensive study of socio-economic structure of scheduled castes population at district level is presented in chapters III to VI. The analysis is primarily based on secondary data. Undoubtedly the foregoing analysis clearly shows the overall spatio-temporal pattern of socio-economic conditions of scheduled castes population and also the variations among different groups. As the secondary data relating to various socio-economic characteristics of scheduled castes population after 1991 is not available, the foregoing analysis basically covers the period upto 1991 census. In the census report of 2001 except growth and the rural and urban composition of scheduled castes population, no data is available. It may be noted here that there are substantial changes and also variations as well as socio-economic transformation among them during the decade 1991-2001 due to the influence of modernisation. In order to get the real picture micro level study is conducted in different villages as well as urban centres located in different parts of the valley. The study is based on field observation and survey is conducted through schedule cum questionnaire.
DESIGN OF THE SURVEY.

Twelve villages located in the upper, middle and lower parts of the Brahmaputra valley inhabited by different scheduled caste groups are surveyed in the present study. The selection of households for primary survey in these twelve villages is made on stratified random sampling basis. The stratification is done through primarily filed observation. Village headman’s comment on economic condition of the household are also taken into consideration in this case. The number of sample household considered in the study is not less than 10 percent of the total households in a village depending on the size of population in that village. In case of very small villages even 100 percent households are surveyed to get a clear picture. Six urban centres are also surveyed taking two urban centers each from upper, middle and lower parts of the Brahmaputra valley in addition to Guwahati, the main city of Assam. In case of urban households different scheduled castes groups are selected from different locations of the towns. In case of urban centres as there are large number of households, at least 25 households are surveyed taking not less than three from each available scheduled castes groups. The necessary data and information pertaining to the demographic and Socio-economic characteristics of scheduled castes population are collected through a scheduled cum questionnaire (appendix VII) by direct interviews.
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF SCHEDULED CASTES POPULATION IN RURAL AREAS

The villages selected in the present study in case of the upper Brahmaputra valley are Metaka and Bhatiapara in Sibsagar district and Jhamira in Dibrugarh district. In the middle Brahmaputra valley the villages are Girimari chapari, Kunwarpara and Punia in Darrang district and Dekapara, Kaibartta chuburi in Sonitpur district. In the lower Brahmaputra valley the villages are Baldamari in Goalpara district, Durahati and Matiabag in Dhubri district and Hadola and Goreswar No 3 in Kamrup district.

TABLE- 7.1

Structure of sample survey in the Brahmaputra valley

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>No. of Schedule d castes Househo id</th>
<th>No. of sample Scheduled castes household</th>
<th>Percentage of sample household to total household</th>
<th>Dominant scheduled castes group.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Brahmaputra valley</td>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>Bhatiapara</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31.25</td>
<td>Kaibartta and Bania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Metaka pathar</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>Kaibartta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
<td>Jhamira</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23.68</td>
<td>Kaibartta and Bania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Brahmaputra valley</td>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>Hadola</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>Mali and Bania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Goreswar no 3</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>Namasudra and Sutradhar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>Baldamari</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28.95</td>
<td>Jalkeot, Kaibartta and Jhalo-malo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dhubri</td>
<td>Durahati</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13.23</td>
<td>Hira and Sutradhar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Matiabag</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11.35</td>
<td>Hira, Namasudra and Dhobi-Dugla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>Girimari chapari</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>Namasutra and Sutradhar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Punia</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>61.90</td>
<td>Kaibartta, Bania and Muchi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sonitpur</td>
<td>Dekapara</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>Kaibartta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kaibartta chuburi</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 7.1

BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY
SELECTED VILLAGES AND URBAN CENTRES

DISTRICTS
1. DHUBRI
2. KOKRAJHAR
3. BONGAIGAON
4. GOALPARA
5. BARPETA
6. NALBARI
7. KAMRUP
8. DARRANG
9. SONITPUR
10. LAKHIMPUR
11. DHANKHI
12. MORIGAON
13. NAGAON
14. GOLAGHAT
15. JORHAT
16. Sibsagar
17. Dibrugarh
18. Tinsukia

SELECTED VILLAGES AND URBAN CENTRES

Fig. 7.1
In the present study above mentioned twelve villages are selected to represent all the major scheduled castes groups of the Brahmaputra valley.

It is mentioned earlier that, the selected villages are located in the upper, middle and lower parts of the Brahmaputra valley and therefore, they clearly reflect the socio-economic characteristics of the scheduled castes population in different parts of the study area.

The survey reveals that the sex ratio of the scheduled castes population in the valley is only 904 females per thousand males (2001). The proportion of children in the age group (0-6yrs) is high claiming 17.49 percent of the total population. Dependency ratio is 83.15 percent which is also significantly high. This is primarily due to high birth rate among the scheduled castes population in the study area. Lack of awareness among them and illiteracy are the main causes of high birth rate of population. Moreover they are fatalists and they considered their children as gift of God.

Socially scheduled castes people belong to deprive caste groups and therefore, their social status is also very low. Prima facie their literacy rate in the whole valley is quite satisfactory (56.16 percent) but when their educational attainment level is considered it is very discouraging. The educational attainment level among them is low when compared with other sections of people in the study area. However, during the last thirty years some changes have been taking place in their social life due to modernisation.
Due to the low educational attainment level coupled with low social status in the society the scheduled castes people in these villages have low social mobility. Though a major section of scheduled castes people live in the same village with the general people, distinct spatial location is observed in the distribution of scheduled castes households. It is peculiar that in case of indigenous scheduled castes especially the Kaibartta, Bania, Hira, Namasudra households are distributed side by side or face to face in cluster in one side of a village. Thus in the same village scheduled castes population are found in isolation from the general population. This is particularly due to low social status of scheduled castes people in the society. Economically the scheduled castes people in the Brahmaputra valley are generally not well to do and they are mostly landless agricultural people. Some of them though pursue their traditional crafts, the income they derive from their work is not sufficient to run their family. The life style of the scheduled castes people except a few rich people both in rural and urban areas in the Brahmaputra valley is very simple. A major section of them are not aware about their health and live in an unhygienic condition. They are generally fatalist and their living standard is similar with other general poor people of the region. One bicycle and one radio is common to all. Use of fire wood for cooking purpose is also common in all poor household. Generally the females of Kaibarita, Bania, Mali and Jalkeot groups extend the economic support to their families with other subsidiary source of earning like weaving, spinning, breeding cows, goats and poultry. Females of the Kaibarta and Namasudra groups also work outside especially they are engaged in fish trade and supplement the family.
economy. The females of Mehtar and Bansphor generally work outside especially in cleaning works and extend the economic support to their families. Cataract is common in case of females generally after fifty years of age due to use of firewood in cooking purpose in a unscientific *chulla* (Oven). General weakness, anemia, cough and fever are also common diseases of the women. Among the children cough, fever and diarrhoea are very common diseases. Dowry system is totally absent among the Assamese indigenous scheduled castes people while among the immigrants except Namasudra it still prevails. Adoption of family planning measures are totally absent in case of older generation while the younger generation of all groups are at present aware about the family planning. Among the well to do section the awareness is more.

In order to have a clear understanding of the spatial variation in respect of socio-economic conditions of scheduled castes population the whole Brahmaputra valley is divided into three divisions viz., the upper Brahmaputra valley, the middle Brahmaputra valley and the lower Brahmaputra valley.

**THE UPPER BURAHPUTRA VALLEY**

In the upper Brahmaputra valley three villages viz., Bhatiapara, Metaka pathar and Jhamira are surveyed. All these three villages are located in the south of the river Brahmaputra in the plain region. In the first two villages
i.e. Bhatiapara and Meteka pathar, the majority of the people are Assamese and in the village Jhamira the people are mainly Bengali speaking.

The demographic characteristics is not satisfactory in the villages of the upper Brahmaputra valley. The sex ratio is only with 910 females per thousand males and there is relatively high proportion of children in the age group 0-5 years claiming 19.37 percent of the total population. It is observed that due to high birth rate, the average family size is large with seven persons. The average age at marriage for the female is low which is only 17 years and for male the age is 26 years. Consequently the average women child ratio is found to be high. The families are nuclear types. The houses are Assam types mostly with tin roofed. Wall of some of the houses are mud plastered and half brick wall. It may be mentioned here that some of the houses of the poor are built by the government as a part of the Indira Awas Yojana. Regular supply of drinking water is available in all the three villages. Besides, the people use water from tube well, pond, and river for domestic purposes.

Though transport network is comparatively better in the upper Brahmaputra valley the socio-economic condition is not very satisfactory in all the villages. The average literacy rate in these villages of the upper Brahmaputra Valley is 61.16 percent which is comparatively higher than the middle (56.06 percent) and lower (51.25 percent) Brahmaputra valley. The educational attainment level is also not satisfactory in this part with only 22 percent H.S.L.C. passed and 10 percent are graduate. School drop out are common among the poor section of people in all the spatial units. The work participation rate in the upper Brahmaputra valley is not satisfactory.
Female participation in economic activities is also low recording only 23.95 percent. They are mostly engaged in unorganised sector of economy. A section of women from poor scheduled castes families has to work in other’s houses on part time daily/ monthly basis due to poor economic condition. It is hoped that with the growing impact of modernization and extension of educational facilities the socio-economic condition of the scheduled castes people will be improved to a certain extent. It is to be noted here that the scheduled castes household still occupy a low social status in the Hindu society due to certain traditional bindings. The people are also not conscious about their constitutional rights and reservation. Only five percent of them are conscious about their rights. No households in these villages gets any other financial help from the Government or the other agencies except the house.

THE MIDDLE BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY

The middle Brahmaputra valley comprising Sonitpur, Darrang, Morigaon and Nagaon districts. The two districts viz., Darrang and Sonitpur are located in the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra while the other two districts viz., Marigaon and Nagaon are located in the southern bank. In the middle Brahmaputra valley four villages, Girimari chapari, Punia, Kunwarpara and Dekapara Kaibartta chuburi are surveyed. They are located in the Northern bank of the river Brahmaputra. All the villages are socio-economically backward with minimal impact of modernization. The village Girimari
Chapari is of Darrang district, dominated by Bengali speaking Namasudra people while Dekapara kaibartta chuburi of Sonitpur district are dominated by Assamese speaking Kaibartta group. On the other hand Punia and kunwarpara village of Darrang district dominated by Assamese speaking Bania Hira and Muchi groups. The average sex ratio in these villages is low recording only 903 females per thousand males. Proportion of children in 0-5 years age group is also high claiming 17.98 percent of the total population. The average size of the family is relatively large with nine (9) family members. The average age at marriage for female is low recording only 16 years as against 25 years for male. The families are nuclear type.

Socio-economic condition of all these villages in the middle Brahmaputra valley is also not good. They are socially as well as economically backward when compared to the upper and lower Brahmaputra valley. It is discouraging fact that the scheduled castes people of Dekapara kaibartta chuburi, a village very near to Tezpur town though well connected by transport network are very poor and socio-economically very backward. Unlike the upper Brahmaputra valley, the scheduled castes population in the middle Brahmaputra valley have recorded a lower literacy rate (50.24 percent). Majority of the aged people above 50 years of age both man and women are illiterates. The level of educational attainment is also very low with 45 percent of literates having education upto primary level, 17 percent H.S.L.C passed and only 8 percent graduate and above. Their economic condition is also discouraging. The overall work participation rate is though very low (38.4 percent) but the female participation rate as a labour or other
activities is comparatively higher in this part than the upper and lower Brahmaputra valley recording 24.71 percent. They are very poor people and therefore they have no way out except to work as daily labourer in agriculture or other household works to earn their livelihood. Some of them also work as part time labourer. Agriculture is the main occupation in most of the villages though some are engaged in fishing, fish trade, poultry rearing gold smithy, leather works etc. The proportion of owner cultivator is meagre and majority of them are agricultural labourers. As the sizes of operational holdings are very small, they have very little scope for occupational mobility. Traditional occupations like gold smithy, leather works, fishing also persist in the absence of economic diversifications in the middle Brahmaputra valley. The villages in the middle Brahmaputra valley are found in clusters. By and large, most of them are landless agricultural casual labourers and some of them are engaged in menial jobs which has added to lower their social and ritual status. Depending on their traditional occupations they have lower social and ritual status in a village. Like in upper Brahmaputra valley a major households have a bicycle and a radio. They use firewood for cooking purposes. The poor section is not aware about the education of their children and also about women and children health.

Though the state as well as the central Governments have been implementing different welfare schemes to uplift the socio-economic conditions of the scheduled castes people, they are still remain backward. In the remote areas except a few they are not even aware about their reservation and constitutional rights. In the Dekapara kaibartta chuburi the condition of
THE LOWER BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY

In the lower Brahmaputra valley, five villages viz., Hadola, Goreswar No. 3, Baldamari, Durahati, Matiabag are surveyed. Both indigenous and immigrant scheduled castes groups are dominant in this part of the valley. They are mostly Assamese and Bengali speaking people.

In this part of the valley there is very low sex ratio recording only 898 females per thousand males. The proportion of children population between 0-5 years age is 15.12 percent. The average family size among them is high which is more than 8 members. In most of the families the average age at marriage for female is 15.5 years as against 24 years for male. The families are Nuclear type. It is important to note that the Hadola village inhabited by indigenous scheduled castes population has better demographic condition than the other four villages.

Socio-economic condition of the scheduled castes population in the study area is not satisfactory. The literacy rate is also not encouraging recording only 56.37 percent. As the education of the children is not getting priority in the families of the surveyed villages, majority of the children are
school dropouts. However, there is a little difference between the Hadola village dominated by indigenous scheduled castes population and other three villages inhabited by immigrant scheduled castes population. It is generally observed that in the immigrant dominated villages instead of sending their children to the school, the parents have engaged them in some other works especially as laboures. The impact of modernisation in the villages of the lower Brahmaputra valley is though significant because of low level of literacy they are not getting opportunities to engage themselves in the secondary and tertiary works. The Sutradhar carpenter groups in the Durahati and Baldamari villages are generally engaged in the carpentry works outside their own village. The potters of the Matiabag and Durahati villages are mostly engaged in making earthen pots. It is mentioned earlier that except a few they are illiterate and therefore they have no way out except to cling to their traditional occupations. Depending on economic condition some of the females work as a part time labourers to extend economic support to their families. However, in Hadola village dominated by indigenous scheduled castes people, females participation outside their home is not found. The male workers of the Hadola village along with their children are working as gardener and some of them are engaged in petty business especially relating to flower business. Besides some of them are either cultivators or agricultural labourers. In case of indigenous households in addition to bicycle and radio thirty percent of the households have Tape recorder and television. Bicycle and radio are not common in all households of immigrant scheduled castes. The social status also depends on the economic activity of the people. However status of carpenter, mali (flower sellers) and potter groups have
better social status than the other scavenging groups or washer man or fisherman. The above analysis clearly indicates a wide disparity in respect of socio-economic condition between the immigrant and indigenous scheduled castes population in the study area.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF SCHEDULED CASTES POPULATION IN THE URBAN AREAS

In the urban areas of the Brahmaputra valley the socio-economic condition is different from the rural areas depending on literacy and employment opportunity, economic condition of the people, their status in the society etc. In case of immigrant scheduled castes, particularly the scavenging class like Mehtar, Lalbegi etc., irrespective of their earning the social status is very low and majority of them are engaged in their traditional occupations.

In order to understand the problem clearly six urban centres viz., Sibsagar and Dibrugarh in the upper Brahmaputra valley, Mangaldoi and Nagaon in the middle Brahmaputra valley, and Goalpara and Guwahati, in the lower Brahmaputra valley are surveyed considering three households from each group with low, medium, high economic status. The indigenous and immigrant households in the urban areas are surveyed separately to find out the disparity among them.

The indigenous scheduled castes population in the urban areas of the Brahmaputra valley generally earning their livelihood from their traditional
professions like catching and selling fish, gold smithy, pottery making and petty trades, while the immigrant groups like Mehtor and Banspor work as municipal sweepers and cleaners on the other hand Dhobis who are distributed all over the residential and market places of the urban centres serve the urban society by washing cloths. A big chunk of immigrant scheduled castes population generally lives in the slum areas without adequate housing accommodation, water supply, sanitation, light, public health facilities etc. It is further observed that many of the landless and unemployed rural scheduled castes people have migrated from the rural areas to the city and the town in search of job, contracts and other petty wage-earning employment.

In the urban area economic conditions of the indigenous scheduled people is found to be better. However, it depends on the occupations of the head of the family or members. Families are generally nuclear types. Harijan people have comparatively more average earning from their services, but their economic condition is not satisfactory as they used to spend a major amount of their earning for drinking country made liquor. Even the women section of them have such habits.

The study further reveals that there is disparity in respect of social status among various groups. The people of immigrants scheduled castes especially who are engaged in unclean jobs have lower status than the other indigenous groups. Generally the scavenging groups along with the Dhobies and Muchis are relegated to very low social status by the indigenous people. In the urban areas of the Brahmaputra valley the status of indigenous scheduled
castes people depend on literacy and employment pattern and economic condition. It is observed that there is no significant spatial variation in respect of socio-economic conditions of scheduled castes population in different urban centres of the Brahmaputra valley depending on their location in the upper middle or lower parts. However significant variations observed among various groups.

Some demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the ten major groups of scheduled castes population living in the six urban centres of the study area are presented in the table 7.2 for clear understanding of the problem.

Table 7.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Sex ratio</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Average age at marriage for female</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bansphor</td>
<td>1019</td>
<td>15.46</td>
<td>15.5 years</td>
<td>Sweeping and Bamboo works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhobi</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>61.19</td>
<td>16.5 years</td>
<td>Cloth washing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muchi</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>44.82</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Shoe making and leather tanning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehtar</td>
<td>1059</td>
<td>57.14</td>
<td>15.5 years</td>
<td>Sweeping and cleaning (municipal scavenger, chandal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutradhar</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>48.90</td>
<td>16.5 years</td>
<td>Carpenter, Rikshaw puller.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namasudra</td>
<td>1058</td>
<td>53.01</td>
<td>16.5 years</td>
<td>Fish trade and other petty trade service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaibartta</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>66.79</td>
<td>18.5 years</td>
<td>Fish trade and service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bania</td>
<td>778</td>
<td>53.85</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>Petty trade and service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>52.77</td>
<td>17.5 years</td>
<td>Flower selling, gardening and service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hira</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>51.92</td>
<td>15.5 years</td>
<td>Pottery and other works</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table 7.2 reveals that the Dhobi population has the lowest sex ratio recording only 426 females per thousand males. The Dhobis are immigrant people. Mostly the male workers of Dhobi generally have migrated to the town area leaving their female members of their families at their own permanent residence. So their sex ratio is very low. The similar condition is also observed in case of Muchi group and Mali groups. Among the other three groups viz., Bansphor, Mehtar and Namasudra sex ratio is high (more than 1000). The Hira, Bania, Sutradhar and Kaibratta people are mostly rural. Though some of the families are urban dwellers, generally male persons from rural areas are migrated to the urban areas in search of employment opportunities leaving their female members in the villages. Therefore, the sex ratio is also low among these groups. However, a section of service holders who come from distant places are dwelt in the urban areas with their families.

So far the literacy is concern in case of the surveyed households, the highest literacy rate is recorded by Kaibratta (66.76 percent) followed by Dhobi (61.19 percent) and the lowest is recorded by Bansphor (15.46 percent). A detailed analysis of literacy pattern among the different groups is, however, presented in the chapter V.

It is interesting to note that the Dhobi people who are urban dwellers have low sex ratio while they have high literacy rate. Moreover, they are purely urban dwellers. It has been mentioned in the chapter V that male literacy is always higher than the female literacy in all the groups irrespective of urban and rural areas of the study area.
The average age at marriage for female particularly among the immigrant groups is low which is 15.5 years. The immigrant people who basically have come from Bihar and west Bengal, the age at marriage for female is very low due to prevailing dowry system among the immigrant scheduled castes population on the one hand and social customs and traditions on the other.

The average age at marriage for females among the indigenous groups is comparatively more than the immigrant groups. The economic condition of a family is the most important determining factor in this case. Because the well-to-do families have sent their daughters to school and colleges and they do not prefer early marriage.

A detailed analysis of economic condition of scheduled castes population is presented in chapter VI. However, it may be noted here that a major section of scheduled castes population in the urban areas belongs to the low-income group and their standard of living is low with minimum amenities. Only a small section of them are rich and their standard of living is high. The rich people are mostly service holders and business persons.