PART-III
SYNTHESIS
CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present research work basically embodies a detailed social and economic structure of scheduled castes population in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. The main emphasis in this study is given on the analysis of the spatial pattern of socio-economic condition of different groups of scheduled castes in the region.

Chapter I of the work is devoted to the statement of the research problem, objectives, hypotheses, database and methodology, organisation of the work and significance of the study. In the significance of the problem it is stated that for all round development of a society, effective involvement of all its constituent communities is necessary. Therefore development of all section of people especially socio-economically backward section of people is highly essential. The review of relevant literature is also incorporated in Chapter-I to grasp the pioneering work in this field.

The Chapter II deals with the geographical setting of the study area. The Brahmaputra valley consists of eighteen districts. It is found that the entire valley is a plain region surrounded by foothills of the Himalayas in the north and east, while the southern side is bounded by the Karbi hills and the Meghalaya plateau. The whole valley is made up of vast riverine built up and
active flood plain dotted with swamps and beels. The plain is both of agradational and degradational nature created by the drainage system of the mighty river Brahmaputra.

The Brahmaputra valley is characterized by monsoon climate. The average temperature varies from 10°C in winter to 33°C in summer. The average annual rainfall in the valley is 2670.4mm. The soil of the valley is mostly alluvial which contains silt, and clay and sand with a high proportion of humus favouring the luxuriant growth of natural vegetation especially of tropical evergreen, moist deciduous and savanna grass types.

The region is inhabited by a number of ethnic and socio-religious groups. The scheduled castes population in the study area is a native and aboriginal group of people springing up from the early wave of the Aryan immigration. The socio economically backward scheduled castes population in the study area constitutes 6.51 percent (2001) of the total population while the scheduled tribes constitute 11.94 percent. However, the proportion of general population is as high as 78.66 percent of the total population in the study area. The various social groups with different social backgrounds profess different religious faiths viz., Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism etc. Among them, the size of Hindu population is highest in the study area. The scheduled castes people profess Hinduism.

The economy of the valley is mainly based on agriculture. Among the scheduled castes, fishing is the main occupation though a small section of them is engaged in agricultural activities. Besides, carpentry, gold smithy,
shoe making, pottery making, sweeping, cloth washing etc. are followed 
traditional occupations by some section of scheduled castes people. On the 
other hand, unlike them the scheduled tribes, who are also regarded as weaker 
section in the society by the constitution of India have agriculture as their 
main occupation.

All parts of the valley are not well connected in respect of transport 
and communication. The built-up area particularly the middle plain is 
comparatively well connected by roads and railway network.

Chapter III deals with growth, distribution and concentration of 
scheduled castes population in the valley. The study reveals that scheduled 
castes population have high rate of population growth. It is higher than the 
general population during 1951-61 and 1971-91. During the above mentioned 
periods they have recorded growth rates of 71.22 percent and 83.85 percent 
respectively as against 37.21 percent (1951-61) and 53.41 percent (1971-91) 
growth rates for general population. However, in the period 1961-1971, the 
growth rate of scheduled castes population is lower (30.29 percent) than the 
general population (35.70 percent). The growth rate in the period 1991-2001 is 
recorded as 9.45 percent for the scheduled castes as against 18.57 percent for 
the general population.

In the eighteen districts of the Brahmaputra valley the distribution of 
scheduled castes people is not even. Significant spatial variation is observed in 
the distributional pattern of scheduled castes population in the Brahmaputra
valley. According to 1991 census, the district having the highest scheduled castes population to the total population is Morigaon (13.78 percent) located in the middle part of the Brahmaputra valley followed by Bongaigaon (10.74 percent) in the lower Brahmaputra valley. On the other hand, the lowest proportion of the scheduled castes population is claimed by Tinsukia district (2.61 percent) located in the upper Brahmaputra valley. After a decade i.e., 2001, the pattern remains almost similar, recording the Morigaon with highest proportion of scheduled castes to total population claiming 12.93 percent and the lowest is also claimed by Tinsukia district (2.72 percent). They are by and large non-agricultural professional people. Therefore, the settlement of the indigenous scheduled castes is found in areas where there are ample opportunities to pursue their craft fruitfully. It is mentioned earlier that in the rural areas they like to settle near the water bodies like rivers, beels, swamps etc., where there are facilities for fishing and fish trade. This resulted in spatial variation in the distribution of scheduled castes people in the rural areas of the study area. Unlike rural areas, in the urban areas settlement of immigrant scheduled castes population is not related to physical setting of the area. A major section of immigrant people generally dwelt in the slums or near the railway lines in an unhygienic condition. However, indigenous scheduled castes people generally live amidst the generally people without any distinct spatial concentration. The analysis of rural urban distribution of scheduled castes population clearly shows that they live mostly in rural areas (84.25 percent), while in the urban areas their proportion is only 15.75 percent according to 1991 census. In 2001 also the rural schedules caste constitutes 83.12 percent of the total scheduled castes people as against 16.88 percent
urban dwellers. Out of the eighteen districts of the study area the Dhemaji district in the upper Brahmaputra valley claims the highest proportion of rural scheduled castes population recording as high as 99.04 percent, followed by Nalbari district in the lower Brahmaputra valley (96.15 percent) while the lowest is recorded by Dhubri district (57.31 percent) which is also located in the lower Brahmaputra valley. It may be noted here that Dhemaji district in the upper north bank of Brahmaputra valley is chronically flood affected area with negligible development of transport system. So far urban scheduled castes population is concerned the Dhubri district recorded the highest with 42.69 percent followed by Kamrup district (34.52 percent) in the lower Brahmaputra valley. Interestingly the lowest is recorded by the Dhemaji district with only 0.96 percent urban scheduled castes population according to 1991 census. This clearly indicates that there is spatial variation in the distribution of scheduled castes population in the rural and urban areas of the study area. The Lorenz curve clearly shows the inequality in the distribution pattern with Gini's coefficient value, $G=0.21338$ (1991) & $G=0.217139$ (2001).

Variation in the spatial concentration of scheduled castes population is also observed in the study area. Location quotient (LQ) value more than 2 is recorded by Morigaon district in 1991 and 2001 the central Brahmaputra valley which emerges as core in the concentration of scheduled castes population in the study area. The Bongaigaon district in the lower Brahmaputra valley is in the second rank with LQ value 1.61 (1991) and 1.66 (2001) also has higher concentration of scheduled castes population. The
lowest concentration with LQ value only 0.39 (1991) and 0.44 (2001) is recorded by Tinsukia district in the upper Brahmaputra valley. The analysis of temporal variation from 1991-2001 indicates that there is no significance change in the spatial distribution pattern.

The above analysis clearly indicates that there is no such continuity in the spatial concentration of scheduled castes people in the whole Brahmaputra valley. Rather the prevailing physical and economic factors are mainly responsible for uneven distribution and concentration of scheduled castes population in different parts of the study area. This above findings reaffirm the hypothesis number one that there are significant variations in the spatial distribution and concentration of scheduled castes and they are mainly distributed in the rural areas in all the spatial units. Their growth rate is also higher than the general population during the last fifty years except the decade 1961-71 and 1991-2001.

There are sixteen caste groups inhabited in the valley. They are viz., Bansphor, Bhuinmali , Brittial Bania, Dhobi, Dugla-Dholi, Hira, Jalkeot , Jhalo-malo, Kaibartta, Lalbegi, Mahara, Muchi, Mehtar , Namasudra, Patni and Sutradhar. They have different occupations like fishing, goldsmithy, pottery making, sweeping, cloth-washing , Shoemaking, cleaning, gardening, palki- bearing, Leather-tanning etc. With the development of urbanisation and modernization, there has been a slow socio- economic transformation and some of them leave their traditional occupations and are engaged in other
activities like agriculture, petty business, services etc. A major section of them, however, cling to their traditional occupation.

The Demographic characteristics of the scheduled castes population are analysed in chapter IV. It reveals from the study of age- sex composition that among the scheduled castes, the highest proportion of population is found in the lower age group. In the age group 0-9 years the percentage of population is 28.12 (1991). But the percentage of population in the subsequent higher age groups decreased gradually except a minor differences in the age group 60-64 years indicating a heavy economic burden. It reveals from the field survey that the age-sex structure has remained almost unchanged after a decade i.e. in 2001 indicating a slow socio economic progress. The age-sex pyramid further shows that the proportions of both male or female population have been gradually declining and the pyramid tapers towards the apex showing a typical condition of the developing countries. Moreover, there is no such significant disparity in the sex composition in case of the children and young population. In the age group of 15-59 years the proportion of male population is however slightly more recording 53.59 percent as against 52 percent for the female. The cause of slightly lower percentage of female population in this age group may be attributed to high mortality rate of female during child birth due to lack of proper medical care in the rural areas. On the one hand and male selective migration especially from Bihar and West Bengal to the study area in search of employment opportunities on the other. The study of Sex ratio reveals that there is dominance of male among the scheduled castes with 919 females per thousand male (1991) in the
Brahmaputra valley as against 925 for the general population. However, there is significant spatial variation in respect of sex ratio. The Goalpara district has the highest sex ratio with 944 females per thousand males, while Tinsukia district has recorded the lowest sex ratio with only 858 females per thousands males. The dependency ratio of scheduled castes population, is high recording 87.80 percent (1991). There is, however, no significant disparity in respect of dependency ratio with general population. It reveals that one adult working person has to support more than three person of the other unproductive age groups reflecting a heavy economic burden to the society.

The fertility rate among the scheduled castes population is high in the study area. The poor economic condition of scheduled castes people generally posed a hindrance in getting education which in turn ultimately leads to illiteracy. The poor uneducated people are unaware about the ill effect of large-sized family. They are in favour of more number of children considering them as future insurance for their old age. The total fertility rate is 2.23 among the scheduled castes in the study area (2001) which is 2.77 for Assam and 3.92 (1992-93) for the nation as a whole.

The Infant mortality rate among scheduled castes is also high recorded (80 per thousand). This is due to non availability of proper medical facilities in the remote rural areas on the one hand and mothers ignorance about childcare on the other. The field survey in 2001 clearly indicates that the average number of children is directly related to the level of educational attainment of the mother. The average no of children is 2.4 born to an illiterate
mother while it is 1.63 and 1.27 for the mothers having educational attainment level below primary and below H.S.L.C respectively. However, mothers having education graduate and above the average no of children is only 1.20.

The above analysis clearly testified the hypothesis number two which states that the female literacy is the most significant determining factor of the fertility pattern of the scheduled castes population.

The mean age at marriage for scheduled castes population is found to be significantly low and it is lower than the general population especially for females. Among the poor section of scheduled castes people, majority of the females get married at a young age i.e., less than 17 years according to the wish of their parents. They are generally either school dropouts in the early age or illiterate and therefore ignorant and unaware about the modern world. The age at marriage is even below 15 years in case of immigrant scheduled castes population like Bansphor, Muchi, Mehtar and Dhobi groups. In case of indigenous scheduled castes people the average age at marriage for female is comparatively higher recording 16.5 years in rural areas and 17.5 years in the urban areas. The average age at marriage for male is about 7 years more than female. The above analysis reveals that the demographic characteristics of scheduled castes population is not satisfactory.

Chapter V deals with the socio cultural characteristics of scheduled castes population in the Brahmaputra valley. There are sixteen groups among the scheduled castes. Out of them seven are indigenous and seven are immigrant in origin and two groups are partly indigenous and partly
immigrant. The seven indigenous groups in the valley are viz, Kaibartta, Bania, Mali, Mahara Jalkeot, Jhalomalo and Hira while seven immigrant groups are Bansphor, Mehtar, Muchi, Namasudra, Sutradhar, Dhobi and Lalbegi. The Patni and Dholi-Dugla are partly indigenous and partly immigrant in origin. Interestingly the indigenous scheduled castes groups have dwelt mostly in rural areas while the immigrant scheduled caste groups concentrated mostly in urban areas. Out of the 16 groups the Kaibartta group claims the highest proportion of total scheduled castes population claiming as high as 36.96 percent (1991). Their main profession is fishing and fish trade and distributed in the whole of the Brahmaputra valley especially in the upper and middle parts. The second highest group with 32.17 percent of the total scheduled castes population is Namasudra whose main occupation is also fishing and fish trade mainly inhabited in the lower and the middle Brahmaputra valley. The Lalbegi group claims significantly a small size of population recording only 0.04 percent found in the urban areas of the central Brahmaputra valley. So far distribution of two major groups i.e., Kaibartta and Namasudra are concerned, the Jorhat district has recorded, the highest Kaibartta population claiming as high as 83.93 percent. While the Bongaigaon district, has the highest proportion (51.34 percent) of Namasudra population. The study further reveals that there is not only spatial variation but also temporal variation in the distribution of different scheduled castes groups in the study during the 20 years period i.e. from 1971 to 1991.

The temporal variation shows that the Namasudra group though claims the highest proportion of scheduled castes population (37.22) percent in
1971, it ranked second in 1991, while Kaibartta group though ranked second in 1971 has emerged at the top in 1991.

Literacy and educational attainment level are the important social attributes determining the educational status of any group of population. The trend of literacy of the scheduled castes population presents a dismaying picture. According to the census of India the literacy rate among them is only 21.73 percent in 1961 which, has increased to 24.86 percent in 1971 and 42.93 percent in 1991 (including 0-6 years age group population). The literacy rate in 1991, excluding 0-6 years age group is 53.94 percent for scheduled castes in the Brahmaputra valley. The analysis of male female disparity in literacy further reveals that the female literacy is only 42.99 percent in 1991 which is far below than its male counterpart (63.99 percent). This high sex disparity in literacy is mainly due to low status of women in the society. Moreover, in the poor scheduled castes families generally the parents give more preference to their male children in case of education while the female children generally help them in the domestic works.

Spatial variation in the literacy pattern is also observed in the study area. The highest literacy rate is recorded by Sibsagar district with 70.38 percent literates while the lowest is found in Dhemaji district with only 39.65 percent literates. Both the districts are located in the upper Brahmaputra valley. So far male literacy is concerned the highest male literacy is recorded by Sibsagar district (73.84 percent) and lowest is again by Dhemaji district (52.14 percent). In case of female literacy also the highest is recorded by
Sibsagar district (61.66 percent) and the lowest is recorded by Dhemaji district (25.77 percent). The ecological setting of the Dhemaji district coupled with poverty and inadequate educational facilities are mainly responsible for low level of literacy. Moreover, the Dhemaji district is chronically flood affected and most of the educational institutions are affected by flood and remain close during the summer months. Generally in the flood affected areas the educational and other institutions are in dilapidated condition. In such areas neither the school could attract the students nor the poor people afford to provide education to their children. It is further noticed that the coefficient of variation is high in case of female literacy rate than its male counterpart. According to 1991 census the literacy rate of scheduled castes population is comparatively higher (53.52 percent) literates than the general population with literacy rate is (52.62 percent). There is also significant disparity in rural urban pattern of literacy among the scheduled castes. It is observed that the Brahmaputra valley has recorded 51.11 percent of literates in rural areas while in the urban areas the literacy rate is 65.77 percent. Out of the total 18 districts, Sibsagar and Golaghat in the upper Brahmaputra valley have recorded the highest rural and the highest urban literacy rate with 77.78 percent and 83.1 percent respectively. Though there is positive correlation between urban population and literacy rate the value is not very significant (r = 0.07).

The above analysis clearly indicates that urbanization is not the single factor influencing the literacy pattern of scheduled castes population. As they are by and large professional people and from childhood majority of the male members of a family are engaged in their traditional works leaving a little
scope to get education. Unlike the general population the urbanisation has insignificant role to play on enhancement of literacy among them. The socio-economic backwardness of these castes groups is also one of the major causes of low literacy rate. The above findings though testified the hypothesis no.3 pertaining to urbanization and literacy of the scheduled castes population, it may be noted that the relationship is not highly significant.

The pattern of literacy of scheduled caste groups in 2001 (field study) reveals that the average literacy rate of immigrant scheduled castes population is comparatively lower than the indigenous scheduled castes population. Though most of immigrant scheduled castes live in the urban areas they are generally engaged in manual works like cloth washing, leather tanning, shoe making, sweeping etc. The highest proportion of scheduled castes literates is found among Kaibartta group with 66.79 percent literacy rate (2001). On the other hand in case of immigrant groups the Dhobi group exhibits the highest percentage of literacy recording 61.19 percent. It is interesting to note that though the literacy rate is higher in case of Dhobi their educational attainment level is not very high. Further more, the rural urban literacy differential pattern shows that the indigenous scheduled castes people have higher literacy rate in urban areas than in the rural areas. It is observed that sex disparity in literacy among all groups is very prominent. Moreover, there is spatial variations in respect of sex disperity. According to 1991 census highest sex disparity in the rural literacy is recorded by Dhemaji district (DIS=0.4975) and lowest is recorded by Dibrugarh district (DIS=0.3391). In case of urban literacy the highest sex disparity is found in Nalbari district (DIS=0.4473) and lowest is found in Jorhat district (DIS=0.1760). The prevailing social customs and
tradition and poor economic condition among the scheduled caste groups are
to a great extent responsible for the low level of literacy among them in the
Brahmaputra valley.

An analysis of educational attainment level further reveals a
discouraging picture. As per field study in 2001, the highest percentage of
literates is found below the primary level recording 37.57 percent. In case of
male population the literacy rate below primary level is 36.18 percent while in
case of female it is 40.17 percent. In the higher educational level i.e. above
graduate the literacy rate is only 10.09 percent in the valley as a whole of
which 11.46 percent is male literacy rate and only 7.53 percent is female
literacy rate. It is observed that most of the children are school dropouts
during and after primary stage of education due primarily to financial
constraint. There is also male female disparity in respect of educational
attainment level which is found to be highest in graduate level \((\text{DIS}=0.2012)\). It
is mainly due to the marriage of the females at an early age before completion
of the study on the one hand and preference of the male child in respect of
education on the other.

In India all the scheduled castes groups belong to Hinduism. As they
are regarded as backward classes, their social status is also low in the Hindu
Society. As per the Hindu norms they are called ‘Sudras’ and officially they
are called “Scheduled castes” by the constitution of India. The main language
of scheduled castes population in the Brahmaputra valley is Assamese and it is
common to all the indigenous scheduled castes groups. The immigrant
scheduled castes people are, however, Bengali and Hindi speaking people. Some of them speak “Goalparia” a typical mixed Assamese and Bengali languages. However Assamese is the common language for all sections of people living in the Brahmaputra valley.

The Dress-pattern is similar with Assamese general population in case of indigenous scheduled castes people while for the immigrants it is same with the Bengali and Hindi speaking people of India. However, with the expansion of urbanization and modernization they adapted to the modern dresses.

Chapter VI deals with economic characteristics viz., work participation rate, occupational pattern, income and expenditure pattern and socio economic well-being of scheduled castes people. Among the scheduled castes people in the Brahmaputra valley only 29.48 percent are enumerated as main workers, by the census of India 1991. The proportion of non workers among them is very high recording 64.74 percent, while the proportion of marginal workers is only 5.78 percent. The pattern of work participation in the valley among the scheduled castes is found to be discouraging recording only 35.26 percent. Out of them 49.07 percent are male workers and 20.23 percent are female workers. Thus proportion of scheduled castes male workers is comparatively higher than the proportion of scheduled castes female workers indicating a low economic status of women.

It is further observed that among the scheduled castes in the Brahmaputra valley 48.02 percent are male main workers and only 9.30 percent are female main workers, while in case of Non workers the
proportions of male and females are 50.93 percent and 79.77 percent respectively (1991). In case of the marginal workers the male workers constitute only 1.05 percent as against 10.93 percent of female workers. The above study indicates that the females among them are mostly non workers. It is because of the fact that they are mostly illiterate and a major section of them with low educational attainment level are not eligible to get a job. Therefore, they are mostly engaged in household domestic works which are not included in the workers categories by the census of India. The proportions of non worker dependents both in the rural and the urban areas are high. It is also observed that the gender division of labour is associated with intensity of poverty and prevailing social norms in addition to the literacy rate. The work participation rate at spatial levels also varies significantly. In the upper north bank of the Brahmaputra valley comprising Dhemaji and Lakhimpur districts the literacy level is better than the lower and the middle Brahmaputra Valley.

The temporal variation shows that work participation rate among the females has been increasing during the twenty years period from 1971 to 1991. The study further reveals that the coefficient of variation value is found to be highest in case of female work participation rate than its male counterpart both in the rural and the urban areas. On the other hand the sex disparity in work participation in the urban areas is comparatively lower than the rural areas. The highest sex disparity (DIS=1.09) is recorded by Dhubri district in respect of rural work participation rate while the highest sex disparity is recorded by Barpeta district (DIS=1.327), in case of the urban areas. The analysis of spatial pattern of sex disparity in participation rate
shows that the sex disparity is higher in the lower Brahmaputra valley than the middle and the upper Brahmaputra valley.

The analysis of occupational pattern further reveals that a very high proportion of workers are engaged in primary sector of economy like any other developing part of the country. The proportion of workers in the primary sector of economy among the scheduled castes people in the valley is as high as 64.29 percent in 1991 as against 71.45 percent in 1971. The temporal variation in the occupational pattern among them during this twenty years period is mainly due to their occupational mobility and availability of employment opportunities in the secondary and tertiary sectors of economy. In the primary sectors the scheduled castes people are engaged mainly in fishing besides working as agricultural labourers and cultivators. Out of the total male workers 45.17 percent are male cultivator and 9.86 percent are agricultural labourer. It is, however, interesting to note that there is also a sizable proportion of female workers in the primary sector who work as agricultural labourers (17.31 percent). This situation is due to poor economic condition of scheduled castes families coupled with very low educational attainment level among the females.

The disproportional distribution of workers with more number of worker in the primary sector in case of scheduled castes shows that they are economically backward. Moreover they are unskilled, illiterate and poverty-sticken people contributing insignificantly to the economic development in the valley.
The workers in the secondary and tertiary sectors are remarkably low among the scheduled castes mainly because of low literacy level among them on the one hand and lack of industrialization and other infrastructural development in the area they live on the other. Among them the secondary workers constitute only 10.95 percent while the tertiary workers claim 24.76 percent of the total work force. In the rural areas among the scheduled castes population, the workers in the secondary sector are as low as 8.04 percent while in the urban areas the proportion of the worker is 25.59 percent. On the other hand workers in the tertiary sector are 18.52 percent in the rural areas as against 60.37 percent in the urban areas. The above analysis reveals that in 1991 the participation of workers in secondary and tertiary sectors of economy in urban areas is higher than the rural areas. It is mainly because of non-availability of infrastructural facilities and lack of employment avenue in rural area.

The analysis of participation of workers in secondary and tertiary sectors further shows significant sex disparity. The female participation rate in the urban areas in secondary sector is 16.72 percent while for the male the participation rate is 28.78 percent. In the urban areas the female participation in tertiary sector is higher (62.25 percent) than its male counterpart (60.16 percent). It is mainly because a large number of females are engaged in sweeping and cleaning works in urban areas in which educational advancement is not a requirement. The females are getting preference to entering in the public as well as private sector jobs especially in the unclean jobs resulting a higher proportion of female workers in tertiary sector of economy in the urban.
areas. In case of rural areas the picture is different. In rural areas only 9.54 percent female workers are engaged in the tertiary sector as against 20.24 percent male workers. It is important to note that in the rural areas unclean jobs are not available for the females. The above analysis reaffirm the hypothesis number four that there is significant gender disparity among the scheduled castes population in respect of literacy and employment pattern.

The study of occupational pattern of different scheduled caste groups reveals that there is variation in division of labour. The indigenous Kaibartta group is claiming the highest percentage of population engaged mainly in fishing and fish trade besides working as small agricultural workers. In addition to fishing now-a-days they are also engaged in different works under secondary and tertiary sectors of economy. Fishing and fish trade are also the main occupations of the Namasudra, Jhalomalo people. The indigenous Bania people are gold smith by profession. Trade and commerce are their other occupations. Sweeping and gardening are the main occupations of Bhuinmali. Hiras are potters by profession. Though Maharas were palki bearers of Zaminders by profession in the past, presently they are engaged in petty trades. They specially found in Goalpara district of the western Brahmaputra Valley where Zamindary system was prevalent in the past. Mehtar, an immigrant group from Bihar presently engaged in sweeping and scavenging. Bansphors are also engaged in sweeping and Bamboo works while Muchis are mainly shoe makers and Dhobis are washermen. Lalbegis are scavengers and sweepers. Bansphor, Muchi, Dhobi and Lalbegi people are immigrant from Bihar. Sutradhars mainly of Bengali speaking people are
carpenter caste. Patnis who originally are boatmen, now-a-days engaged in different works especially they work as labourer. Dholi-Dugla people are drummers and music players concentrated mainly in the western part of the Brahmaputra valley.

The income and expenditure pattern of different scheduled castes groups is analysed from the data collected from field study (2001). It reveals that the monthly average per capita income of scheduled castes population is very low i.e., only Rs 257.21. Out of the total surveyed household 25.33 percent of the household have monthly income below Rs. 900.00 while 47.40 percent have income between Rs 900-1900 and 19.48 percent are between Rs. 1900-2900 income group and only 7.79 percent have income above Rs 2900.

In the rural areas the people derive their income primarily from fishing, poultry farming and working as agricultural labourer. In the urban areas their income level is comparatively high specially among the “Harijan section”(Mehtar, Bansphor, Lalgeli etc). They are paid municipal sweepers. It is worth mentioning that both male and female members of scheduled castes families particularly ‘Harizan’ have regular habit of drinking liquor. Unfortunately they used to spend lion’s share of their income to purchase country made liquor and they have to take loan from the private individuals at high rate of interest to run their families. Most of them live in unhygienic and unhealthy conditions in slum areas of the towns.
The analysis of food habit further shows that there is nutritional deficiency among the poor section of scheduled castes people. The 30 percent of the household is used to take their food twice and 70 percent thrice in a gastronomic day. The scheduled castes people especially the poor section, the diet is not a balanced one. The poor families of scheduled castes cannot afford to have adequate amount of pulses, fish or meat, milk products and fruits in their diet. However the rich people usually take standard diet. Because of their food, the poor people, especially women and children suffer from many diseases like anemia, cataract, night blindness, rickets, general weakness etc. This analysis indicates the validity of the hypothesis number five that nutritional deficiency in food habit is a common problem influencing the health condition of scheduled castes people in the study area.

In order to find out the spatial variation of level of socio economic development of scheduled castes people in the study area, the composite z score values are calculated considering the attributes like proportion of population below six years of age, literacy rate of both male and female population, work participation rate of both male and female population. This helps to identify the relatively backward areas in respect of the level of socio economic development and the factor associated with it. The highest level of socio-economic well-being or the level of development is recorded by Goalpara district with Z score value 3.08 followed by Dhubri (Z score value 2.30) in the lower Brahmaputra valley. On the other hand, lowest level of socio-economic development is found in Bongaigaon (Z score value -2.89), followed by Barpeta (Z score value -2.18). Both the highest and the lowest
values are found in the lower Brahmaputra valley indicating the fact that there is no contiguous area or regular spatial pattern of level of development of the scheduled castes population in the Brahmaputra valley. It depends on the ecological conditions and infrastructural development on the one hand and socio-economic characteristics of scheduled castes people and their attitude towards development on the other. These factors lead to spatial disparity in the level of socio-economic development of scheduled castes population in the study area. This analysis clearly indicates the validity of the hypothesis number six which states that spatial disparity exists in respect of socio-economic well-being of scheduled castes population in the Brahmaputra valley, Assam.

The analysis and findings of the field study of different villages and urban centres in the Brahmaputra valley are presented in chapter VII. The study reveals that the socio-economic characteristics of scheduled castes population in rural areas are similar with the urban areas except some minor differences. Sex ratio on an average among them is 904 females per thousand male which is very low. The proportion of children in the age group (0-6yrs) is high and dependency ratio is also high (83.15 percent). The literacy rate is quite satisfactory which is 56.16 percent in urban but their educational attainment level is very discouraging. It is observed that majority of the people have education below primary level. Sex disparity in literacy is significant.
Economically the scheduled castes people in the study area are backward. They are by and large landless agricultural people in the rural areas. Some of them though pursue their traditional crafts, the income they have derived from such services or occupations is not sufficient, to run their large sized families. Some of them are agricultural people. But small size of operational holdings is also not economically viable to support their families. The average size of operational holding among them is only 0.7 hectare in 2001.

In the urban areas of the Brahmaputra valley the pattern is, however, different depending on literacy and employment pattern. The economic condition of the indigenous people is generally not good. The status in the society is also varies from one group to another depending on the traditional occupations. In case of immigrant scheduled castes particularly the scavenging class irrespective of their earning, the social status is very low.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study and conclusion there of are presented below.

The scheduled castes population is mainly distributed in the rural areas of the Brahmaputra valley recording 84.25 percent of the total population as against 88.90 percent in Assam and 74.28 percent for the country as a whole. In the study area the district Dhemaji has the highest rural scheduled castes population recording as high as 99.04 percent while Dhubri district has recorded the lowest proportion recording only 57.31 percent.
The distribution pattern varies from one district to another depending on varied socio-economic background and favourable environmental condition to pursue the traditional craft of scheduled castes people. Generally the indigenous scheduled castes people are concentrated on the banks of the rivers, beels and swamps in the rural areas, while majority of the immigrant scheduled castes people are concentrated in the slums of the urban areas.

The growth rate of scheduled castes population during 1971-1991 is comparatively higher (83.85 percent) than the general population (53.41 percent) resulted primarily from high fertility rate and migration. The high fertility among them also resulted the high proportion of population in the age group of 0-14 years which is 40.20 percent (1991).

Total fertility rate (TFR) among the scheduled castes population on an average is 2.23 (2001) in the Brahmaputra valley. There is, however, marked variation in the total fertility rates among different social groups ranging from TFR 1.57 to 2.85. The impact of female educational attainment level has significant influence on the fertility pattern of the scheduled castes population. The average number of children born to a scheduled castes woman in the study area varies from 2.4 to 1.2 depending on the educational attainment level of the mother. Infant mortality rate (IMR) is 80 per thousand (2001) which is significantly high. According to 1991 census the percentage of population in the age group 0-6 years is (19.79 percent) very high among them. Dependency ratio is also significantly high with 87.80 percent indicating a low socio-economic status of this section of people in the society.
Low sex ratio among the scheduled castes (919 females per thousand males) is however associated with male selective migration particularly from Bihar and West Bengal coupled with high female mortality rate among all groups of scheduled castes population in the study area. The sex ratio varies noticeably at different spatial units across the valley depending on concentration of indigenous and immigrant scheduled castes people. The strikingly low sex ratio is recorded by Tinsukia district in the upper Brahmaputra valley (858 females per thousand males). In the urban areas there is male selective migration in case of immigrant as well as indigenous population. The situation is also quite dismaying in the Dibrugarh district with sex ratio 893 females per thousand males.

The female age at marriage is especially associated with socio-economic condition of the people in an area and the status of women in the society. The average female age at marriage among the scheduled castes is as low as 17.5 years. The very low female age at marriage is, however, associated with low economic condition on the one hand and preference of male child in the context of education in their society on the other. The age of marriage for male is about 7 years more than their female counterpart. However, disparities in respect age at marriage between indigenous and immigrant scheduled castes as well as rural and urban scheduled castes people are observed in the Brahmaputra valley.

Although literacy is not high among the scheduled castes (53.52 percent, but it is higher than the general population (52.89 percent) according
to 1991 census. The female literacy is, however, significantly low recording only 41.99 percent when compared with its male counterpart (63.99 percent). The rural literacy rate among the scheduled castes on an average for the valley is 51.11 percent while the urban literacy is 65.77 percent. During the period 1971-91 there is significant development in the literacy pattern among the scheduled castes in the study area. In different spatial units (districts) across the valley there is again significant disparity in the literacy pattern between rural and urban as well as male and female population. It is obvious that a significant positive relationship could be expected between urbanization and literacy rate of population. In case of scheduled castes the relationship is, however, not very significant ($r=0.074$). This is due to high percentage of immigrant scheduled castes people in the urban areas, whose literacy rates are low except Dhobi group. Despite having relatively higher literacy rate than the general population, the level of educational attainment is found to be discouraging among the scheduled castes population particularly in case of females.

It is further noticed that the educational attainment level and fertility rates of the females in case of scheduled castes are negatively related. Therefore, it may be concluded that increase of literacy and educational attainment level particularly in case of females are vital towards socio-economic development of scheduled castes population.

The work participation rate in the region as a whole is discouraging as more than three fifth of the total population is non workers. Out of total population less than one third (29.48 percent) is belong to main workers which
reveals a quite dismaying picture. Significant gender disparity also exists in work participation rate (sopher’s disparity index value = 0.580). Majority of workers belong to primary sector of economy (64.29 percent) with small percentage of workers engaged in secondary (10.95 percent) and Tertiary (24.75 percent) sectors.

From the vedic period they are regarded as “sudras” i.e., at the bottom of the castes hierarchy in the Hindu society. Since that period they have been engaged in some traditional professions like sweeping, cleaning, scavenging, shoe-making, leather-tanning, cloth washing, fishing, pottery-making etc. With increase in literacy among them, though there has been socio-economic transformation in the independent India, the progress is very slow. Thus, a majority of them have been engaged in their own traditional occupations even today. The indigenous people in the rural areas live along the bank of the rivers, beels and other water bodies and they are generally engaged in fishing and fish trade. Some of them are landless agricultural labourers and some are cultivators with meagre land holdings.

The average size of land holding is only 0.7 hectare in 2001. Ninety percent of the holdings are below the size of 2 hectare (2001). These are economically non viable to support the agricultural scheduled castes families. Small size of operational holdings, lack of infrastructural development and lack of options in other sectors of economy combined with ecological and social compulsion are basically responsible for high percentage of workers in the primary sector. They mostly belong to low income level people and live in abject poverty. The monthly per capita income on an average is Rs1800.50.
The non recognition of the contribution made by female in wide ranging activities in unorganised sectors of economy including domestic work resulted in the low percentage of female workers. Low educational attainment level posed as the single obstacle in getting a job or to be economically independent especially in case of females.

The food intake of majority of the people is not sufficient as well as unbalanced. A major section of them also have been suffering from severe under nutritional conditions and nutritional deficiency diseases.

The overall pattern of socio-economic well-being clearly indicates a low socio-economic status of scheduled castes population in the study area. Their development is also very low. There is also significant spatial disparity in the pattern of development. The Goalpara district emerges as comparatively most developed in respect of socio-economic development of scheduled castes population while Bongaigaon has recorded as the lowest developed district. Both these districts are located in the lower Brahmaputra valley. Moreover chronically flood affected districts like Dhemaji, Morigaon, Sonitpur, Barpeta have also recorded low socio-economic development. The analysis of spatial disparity in the level of socio-economic development clearly reveals that the ecological setting of the area they live, the infrastructural facilities available, and the attitude of the people towards development are the deciding factors in respect of socio-economic well being of scheduled castes population.
SUGGESTION:

On the basis of the findings of the study, the following suggestions are put forward to improve the socio-economic conditions of scheduled castes population.

1. In order to check the high growth rate of population which reveals from high percentage of children to the total population, and high dependency ratio, efforts should be made by the Government and other welfare agencies including NGO’s to make them aware about the ill-effect of large-sized family. Proper health facilities should also be extended to control birth rate, control infant mortality rate and to improve the health status of all particularly women.

2. Undoubtedly, the women section among the scheduled castes. people in the study area are by and large lagging behind in respect of literacy and level of educational attainment. Therefore, serious effort should be made urgently by the government for promotion of female education among scheduled castes population. It will help to make aware the females about their own health and family welfare, increase the age at marriage and also make them economically independent which otherwise remove the gender disparity in all spheres of life. As an exploited, neglected, deprived and under-previleged community for thousands of years in the
Hindu society, the scheduled castes people got used to live as an inferior and down-trodden group with unhealthy socio-cultural traditions, tabooed customs, age-old superstitions and maintain an outlook to keep themselves busy with petty affairs relating to their everyday life, beliefs and practices within the group. It is expected that the increase in the level of educational attainment among all sections of people of this community will help to develop an attitude to remove the barrier in the society and the people will develop a desire for anything developmental, progressive, and wider. This leads to the quality improvement of human resource and ultimately over-all development of the area they live in.

3. For economic development of the scheduled castes people and to make them as an affluent and prosperous section in the society in future the priorities must be given to strides in the area of agriculture, industry and business. As sizes of operational holdings are very meagre, as far as practicable scientific agriculture should be introduced. Those who do not have land will obviously be trapped up in small pursuits relating to paper work, weaving, knitting, printing work, book-binding, bamboo and cane work, laundry, net-making, ink-making, soap-making, rope-making, commercial painting, dairy farming, poultry farming, small repairing and maintenance work, internal decorations, catering services and many other types of other minor vocations. As jobs are not available to solve the unemployment problem, the govt. and
other agencies or NGO should take initiative to mobilize the scheduled castes youths to go for a commercial career rather than white color jobs after acquiring the minimum education needed. In the present economic situation of the state, especially in the urban areas male and female should have inquisitive and enquiring eye for business and trade opportunities. However, this may be supported with the provision of short term economic benefits in the form of normal cash grants or allotment of tools. It may be noted here that though this type of economic help already have been extended by the state Government and the Central Government, unfortunately the poor people can not utilise the opportunities properly. This will undoubtedly help to bring economic prosperity in the region as a whole and among scheduled castes. in particular and also reduce the gender discrimination in socio economic sphere.

It may be mentioned here that, in view of the limitation of time the treatment of the problem leaves further scope in a number of directions. Intensive work among various scheduled castes groups at micro level, the status of women in their society etc. would surely provide deep insight into the problem. However, it is needless to say that findings of the present work will help to understand the vital problems among different scheduled castes groups in different parts of the region and be useful in formulating
effective plans and programmes for development of scheduled castes population in the study area.