PART- I
INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER- I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE PROBLEM

The Indian social fabric is constituted by various socio-cultural groups, both indigenous and alien. The population of the Brahmaputra valley, Assam is constituted by various ethnic groups with diverse socio-cultural attributes. Since the prehistoric period different ethno-linguistic groups had entered the valley from the north, west, and east and settled in its various parts. However, with the passage of time there have been assimilation and interaction to a degree that is permitted during the last four millennium. This has helped in the evolution of the present population structure of the valley.

The scheduled castes population, a constituent group of the region's populace is a native and aboriginal group of people who, in the wake of Aryan colonisation of India came into the close contact with the socio-cultural habits of the Aryans and subsequently adapted to the Hindu norms. In the ancient times the privileged class formed by the Aryans acquired social power in the society and considered the smaller groups of native population as subordinates to them. These groups ultimately came to be known as the Sudras conforming to the lowest stratum of the cast hierarchy of the Hindus. The present scheduled caste belong to such a Sudra community in India, most of them are considered as ‘untouchables’ in different art of the country. ‘Two fundamental and primary strata within the Hindu society are the ritually higher castes and the untouchables, officially called the
"Scheduled castes". The vast majority of the members of the scheduled castes are engaged in certain unclean or menial hereditary occupations which the higher caste people consider socially degrading. Consequently, they have remained at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and usually at a very low economic level. (S.M. Bhardwaj and M.E. Harvey.)

According to the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution, scheduled castes population of India is regarded as a weaker section of the Indian society. The Indian constitution granted some privilege and safeguard for the interest of this socio-economically weaker section of people. The Government has made large scale provision for social, cultural, educational and economic uplift of the people of these castes groups. It may be noted here that, the President of India by public notification under Article 341(1) of the constitution of India listed and declared them socio-economically backward people in our country.

According to 1991 census the Brahmaputra valley has 1274170 scheduled castes people claiming 6.66 percent of the total population as against 1659412 persons claiming 7.40 percent for Assam and 138223277 persons claiming 16.33 percent for the nation as a whole. The proportion of scheduled castes population in the study area however has declined to 6.16 percent in 2001. Prima-facie this figure is not very significant for the Brahmaputra valley but considering the socio-economic backwardness and constitutional safeguard granted to them, they need a careful and detailed study. There are as many as 16 scheduled castes groups in the Brahmaputra valley, according to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes modification order 1956 (1).
It is observed that out of the sixteen castes, only seven are indigenous to the Brahmaputra valley. They are viz., Mali, Bania, Hira, Jalkeout, Jhalomalo, Kaibartta and Mahara. The two other castes Dholi Dugla and Patni are partly indigenous and partly immigrant in origin, especially the immigrants of them came from erstwhile East Bengal and Bihar. The seven other groups, who are purely of immigrant origin, came especially from erstwhile East Bengal and Bihar during the pre-Independence period. These seven groups are Namasudra, Sutradhar, Dhobi, Lalbegi, Bansphor, Mehtor and Muchi. Among all the groups numerically Kaibarttas form the largest group followed by the Namasudra inhabited in the valley according to 1991 census.

An analysis of spatial distribution of scheduled castes population reveals that the Morigaon district in the valley has the highest proportion of the scheduled castes population to the total population (13.78 percent) followed by Bongaigaon. Nagaon, Nalbari and Lakhimpur districts with 10.74 percent, 10.02 percent, 8.78 percent and 8.01 percent respectively. The lowest proportion of scheduled castes population is found in Tinsukia district claiming only 2.61 percent (1991).

It is further observed that the settlements of the indigenous scheduled castes in the Brahmaputra valley are concentrated in the areas where there are ample opportunities for pursuing their craft and occupations fruitfully. The rivers and beels with abundant fish, availability of soil suitable for pottery-making and markets of such products produced by them
determined the settlement pattern of scheduled castes people. The settlements of the immigrant scheduled castes except Namasudra, however, grew up in the urban centres to serve the urban population. Interestingly majority of them presently live in the slum and interior areas near railway line. They had migrated to the valley especially after the British annexation of the state. The Namasudras are distributed both in rural and urban areas of the study area. It is, therefore, found today that there is a distinct spatial variation in the distribution of various groups of scheduled castes in the Brahmaputra valley, Assam.

The study of rural - urban distribution of the scheduled castes population of the Brahmaputra valley, Assam shows that as high as 84.25 percent of scheduled castes population dwell in the rural areas, while only 15.75 percent are urban dwellers.

It is further observed that out of the total scheduled castes population in the urban areas, 52.79 percent are male and 47.21 percent are female, while in case of rural areas 51.98 percent are male and 48.02 percent are female showing significant disparity in respect of sex composition in both the areas.

So far growth is concerned, it is noticed that the proportion of the scheduled castes population to the total population has increased during the last two decades from 5.86 percent in 1971 to 6.67 percent in 1991 in the Brahmaputra valley, Assam, showing an increase of 1.81 percent during this period. There
is also spatial variation in respect of growth of scheduled castes population within the valley. The highest growth is recorded by Nalbari district which has increased from 4.84 percent in 1971 to 8.78 percent in 1991 while the lowest is recorded by Goalpara, which has increased from 5.29 percent in 1971 to 5.50 percent in 1991.

According 1991 census, in the Brahmaputra valley 42.93 percent of the scheduled castes population are literates (including 0-6 years age) which is much lower than the literacy rate of scheduled castes population of Assam as a whole (53.94 percent). Among the districts the highest literacy rate is recorded by Sibsagar (57.51 percent) followed by Nagaon (50.47 percent). In the remaining 16 districts, the literacy rates of the scheduled castes are below 50.00 percent, and the lowest is recorded by Dhemaji with only 30.36 percent. So far male and female literacy rates are concerned the male literacy rate of the scheduled castes population is some what higher than that of the female literacy rate. In 1991, the male literacy rate among the scheduled castes people in the valley is 62.67 percent while female literacy rate is only 37.33 percent as against 61.87 percent for male and 43.03 percent for female in case of general population of Assam. The above analysis reveals that the literacy rate among them is very low. Most of the children are school dropouts. Among them especially in case of poor families female children are engaged in domestic works while the male children are engaged in their traditional professions from their early age.
Most of the scheduled castes people in the rural areas are by and large non-agricultural professional people especially engaged in fishing, gold smithy, carpentry, cloth washing, pottery making, sweeping, leather tanning etc. In addition to these traditional occupations, a section of them are also engaged in agricultural and its allied activities. The occupational structure of scheduled caste workforce in the Brahmaputra valley at present falls into following occupational categories:

1. Fishing.
2. Small peasant and Landless agriculture labourers
3. Artisans or small commodity producers like gold smithy, carpentry etc.
4. Services particularly cloth washing, sweeping, cleaning etc.
5. Industrial worker mainly in the industries related with their traditional crafts like leather-tanning, shoe-making, pottery-making, bamboo works etc.

The study further reveals that about two thirds of the working population of scheduled caste are engaged in primary sector and a small section of the workforce is engaged in secondary and tertiary sectors of economy. This is due to low level of performance in the education. However, about one fourth of them is found to be engaged in petty business and small industries.

It is also observed that these people are living in abject poverty and is also surviving in severe under nutritional conditions. Among the scheduled castes,
more than 50 percent of the population live below poverty line. Therefore, it is necessary to make them aware to improve the quality of life. So an attempt has been made in this work to analyze the socio-economic structure of this weaker section of people in the society which will help the planners to formulate strategies for their development. This study will also help to find out the actual grievances of scheduled castes people in the different localities within the valley and therefore has academic value.

1.2. OBJECTIVES.

The main objectives of the study are:

I. To analyse the spatial distribution, concentration and growth of scheduled castes population in the Brahmaputra valley, Assam.

II. To analyse the demographic characteristics like age structure, sex ratio, dependency ratio, fertility rate etc, of the scheduled castes population which have direct bearing on socio-economic conditions of the people.

III. To study the socio-economic characteristics like literacy rate, educational attainment level and occupational pattern, income pattern, food habit, dress pattern etc, of the scheduled castes population.

IV. To find out the gender disparity in respect of educational attainment and employment pattern among the scheduled castes people in the study area.

V. To find out the spatial disparity in respect of socio-economic well being of scheduled castes population in the Brahmaputra valley.
VI. To suggest measures for overall development of scheduled castes population in the study area.

1.3 HYPOTHESIS

I. There is significant spatial variation in the distribution and concentration of scheduled castes population in the study area. Scheduled castes people are mainly distributed in the rural areas of the Brahmaputra valley and their growth is comparatively higher than the general population.

II. Female literacy is the most significant determining factor of the fertility pattern of the scheduled castes population.

III. Urbanisation is directly co-related with the literacy of the scheduled castes people.

IV. There is significant gender disparity among the scheduled castes people in respect of literacy and employment pattern.

V. Nutritional deficiency in food habit is a common problem influencing the health condition of scheduled castes people in the study area.

VI. Spatial disparities exist in respect of socio-economic well being of scheduled castes people in the Brahmaputra valley, Assam.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The population problem has to be studied by empirical inductive and theoretical deductive method. This may be expressed through
logico-mathematical symbolization. In the present study the whole work can be divided into the following stages:-

The first stage consists of the study of relevant books, journals, census report of various decades, periodical literature, different maps and toposheets of the Brahmaputra valley, Assam. This also includes study of reports, bulletins and souvenir relating to physiography, population in general and scheduled castes population in particular of the area. This has helped in collection of the secondary data. In order to prepare the thesis the researcher has consulted different library books relating to socio-economic structure of general population as well as scheduled castes population, their origin, historical background, way and degree of adaptation of modern techniques etc. Study of works of similar nature published and unpublished is also carried out.

The Second stage of the work consists of collection of primary data with the help of survey by stratified random sampling method in the study area. In the fieldwork, different types of household with different economic level in different categories of caste villages are selected in order to have an in-depth knowledge about the scheduled castes population in the study area. Schedules and questionnaires are used in the field in order to collect information and data relating to the different aspects of scheduled castes population. This is the main source of primary data for the research work. In the survey ten to fifty percent of the heads of the households were interviewed depending on the size of population in the village in order to get a first hand
knowledge and to develop personal contact. The schedules are canvassed by the researcher herself.

The next phase of the work is the collection of secondary data from different Government and non-government offices, viz. Town Committee Office, Block development Office, Municipal Board Office, Deputy Commissioners Office, scheduled Tribal and scheduled castes research development office, Mauzadar's office, village headman's report, etc. to evaluate the history of scheduled castes population, their growth, socio-economic structure and other activities of the scheduled castes people in the Brahmaputra valley, Assam.

Secondary data relating to scheduled castes population, their distribution, land holding pattern, occupational structure etc are collected from the census of India, 1971, 1991 and 2001. Data relating to education, transport and communication etc are collected from the concerned government departments of different districts of Assam.

During the third stage, the collected data from primary and secondary sources are processed and analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively with the help of different methods and the findings are interpreted accordingly. Data have been cross-checked and analysed as thoroughly as possible. This stage also includes drawing of maps, graphs etc.
Some statistical techniques are also adopted for correct analysis of the data. Some of the data so analysed are used to draw maps and diagrams.

The last stage of the work consists of writing of the thesis incorporating suggestions.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is mentioned earlier that the percentage of scheduled castes population of Assam is 7.40 percent and in the Brahmaputra valley it is 6.66 percent. Though prima facie this figure is not very significant yet considering their importance in the constitutions, number and position in the society, their study is deemed to be very important and meaningful.

It is mentioned earlier that scheduled castes people are regarded as a weaker section by the constitution of India. Thus for proper planning and development of this section of people an in-depth analysis of their demographic and socio-economic structure is essential. Moreover, the study will also give a detailed analysis about their distribution, age-sex structure, fertility rate, health condition, food habit and nutrition, occupational structure, educational level and literacy and gender disparity in respect of various socio-economic characteristics at the district-level. This will help to find out the main constraints of development of scheduled castes population in different spatial units of the Brahmaputra valley. Further the field survey will also help to study the hopes and aspiration of scheduled castes population, assessment of
the development so far made by the government and non-government agencies in the scheduled castes villages, their discontentment against the policies, implemented by the government and thus the findings will help the planners to formulate strategies and review their already implemented policies. From this point of view the study is very significant in a backward area like Brahmaputra valley.

Undoubtedly, education is essential for modernization of society. In the study area the literacy rate among the scheduled castes population is considerably low. As per 1991 census, the percentage of literacy among the scheduled castes population in the valley is only 42.93 percentage (including 0-6 year's population). This is due to their economic backwardness on the one hand and infrastructural backwardness in the areas they live on the other. Numerous programmes for socio-economic development for scheduled castes population are though undertaken by the Central Government as well as the State Governments, these have not made significant progress mainly because of illiteracy and ignorance of this backward class of people. Thus a thorough analysis of different factors relating to education and economy will help to find out the root cause of their backwardness.

Further it is realised that if a society is to go ahead or develop socio-economically, all the communities that formed the society must live in emity and have to involve themselves in the process of development. The population of the Brahmaputra valley is composed of various ethnic and socio-cultural groups. Therefore, for all-round development of the society the
problems and prospects of all the groups should be assessed carefully. Therefore the study is very significant for socio-economic development of the Brahmaputra valley in general and scheduled castes population in particular.

1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The thesis has been divided into three main parts: the preliminaries, comprising of acknowledgement, contents etc. the main text and the reference part containing bibliography, appendix etc. Again the main text has been divided into three parts, viz. part I. Introductory, part II. Analysis and part III. Synthesis. Introductory part consists of Chapter I. Introduction and chapter II Geographical background of the study area.

The part II i.e. Analysis, comprises of chapter III. Growth Distribution and concentration of scheduled castes population. Chapter IV. Demographic characteristics, which includes age - sex composition dependency ratio, fertilely pattern, mortality pattern, Infant morality rate and age at marriage. Chapter V. Socio-cultural characteristics of scheduled castes population which incorporate different social groups among scheduled castes people, literacy and educational attainment level, religion and social status, linguistic composition and dress pattern, etc. Chapter VI includes economic characteristics of scheduled castes population which deals with occupation pattern and gender disparity income and expenditure pattern, land holding pattern food habit and nutritional deficiency and Socio-economic well being of scheduled castes population in the study area. Chapter VII deals with the case
study in some selected scheduled castes villages and scheduled castes households in urban centres.

The part III. i.e. Synthesis which comprises of the chapter VIII. These chapter contains summary, conclusion and suggestions.

1.7 REVIEW OF SIMILAR STUDIES

The present study belongs to the field of population Geography. The development of population geography as a systematic branch of geography is very recent. It is the study of man in his reciprocal relationship to the earth. It was only after 1953 that population geography has emerged as a separate discipline of study, when Trewartha (1953) enunciated the framework of this subject in his presidential address in the Association of American Geographers. According to him, man is the pivotal point from which all other elements are observed and it is in the context of man that meaning and significance of the elements are derived. Trewartha stressed "it is concerned with understanding the regional difference in the earth's covering of people". Thus scientific studies in population geography has started appearing after fifties of the twentieth Century. The works of Zelinsky (1966), Clarke (1965) are worth mentioning in this regard.

So far the systematic study of population geography in India is concerned some valuable contributions are made in different aspects of population by different authors. The first systematic study on population
geography was conducted by G.S Gosal in 1979 on the problem 'A Geographical analysis of India's population' where he discussed the distribution, growth migration sex-ratio literacy and occupational structure of population of India with special reference to rural population. The work of R.C Chandna (1986) is also worth mentioning. He made important contribution in this line. The works of P Dayal'. (1959), S.L.Bhatt(1961), B N. Gosh (1987) are also worth mentioning in this regard.

Systematic research works carried out in India on Social landscape are very limited and restricted to tribes, caste, religious groups, etc. In this context profs Moonis Raza's (1977) three fold contents of social Geography into social components, social processes and social methods are note worthy; He has studied the spatial pattern of clustering and concentration of tribal population of India in a very systematic way.

Some social geographers also deal with the social aspects of different groups of Population in India. Mention may be made here about the contribution of H.N Sharma(1992), who clearly writes about the social aspects of population in North East India in a very systematic way. Besides, D.K Nayak (1991) in his research work, "female participation in economic activity in selected rural areas in India", clearly writes about the female participation in economic activities like occupation income pattern etc. Mention may be made here about the work of S.Mehta (1967) who in his article "India's rural female working force and its occupational structure" deals with the Gender issue in Geography. Other important works in this field include social geography.
concepts and theories by M. Taher(1993) which is also related with this branch of social geography. In this context the work of R. Ranamisamy, may also be mentioned. He, in his research work, "spatial analysis of ecological setting, occupational structure and socioeconomic transformation of the scheduled tribe," clearly studied the occupation structure and socio-economic transformation etc. These are the contributions of Indian geographers and social researchers to the population and social geography.

In addition to the above mentioned works, some works on gender geography may also be quoted here which are directly related to population studies. In the beginning of eighties several thought-provoking, conceptual and methodological studies done by eminent geographers in abroad have considerably strengthened the theoretical foundation of Gender geography. In a study D.E Sopher(1980) has analysed the pattern of literacy in India applying his well recognized disparity measures and tried to focus the emerging sex disparity in literacy with certain correlation. It is worth mentioning that in some of the works by Y.P Agarwall and Murlidhar (1986), M.S.Kumar (1994), and L. Mc dowell (1988) appearing in the late eighties and early nineties have further widened the horizon of Gender Geography. The work of B.K.Kar (2001) in early twenty first century have also special reference in respect of Gender Geography.

Besides this, population of North East India has been also studied and explained by many social scientists and geographers. In Assam also Geographical aspects of population have been studied by many scholars
It may be noted here that a large number of works dealing with the social and economic aspects of different groups of population have been carried out in different parts of the state. The works of Scholars like L. Datta (1998) in her article entitled "A Glimpse of population growth in undivided Nagaon district" clearly studied population distribution and growth. H.N Sharma (1992), in his research article "Social profile of North-East India: spatial pattern of literacy and educational levels" also clearly described the distribution in respect of literacy, caste, social disparity etc. H.N.Sharma and B. Kar (1997) analysed the spatial pattern of population growth, distribution and concentration in NorthEast India. M.Taher (1987), in his research article "Population base of Assam", also clearly described the pattern of population concentration, peopling process and its characteristics and historical background. The contribution of S. Talukdar (1983), A.R.Saikia (1985), J. Patgiri (1988), are worth mentioning in this context. They studied the characteristics of tribal population and muslim population other important contribution is made by M.C.Bhuyan(1977), who has very clearly discussed about the immigration in Assam. The above mentioned works mainly deal with the population studies basically socio-economic structure of different groups of population in a very systematic way.

So far the study on scheduled castes population is concerned, only limited number of works are available. The origins of the Indian Caste system are shrouded in what was mysterious of the proto-historic period. It is generally admitted that India is caste- specific. Mention may be made here in this connection about the works of F.G.Bailey(1960) entitled "Tribe caste and
nation" in which he clearly studies the caste system in the nation
M, N. Srinivas (1962); in his article entitled "Caste in modern India and other
essay's" mainly deals with the caste system in modern India. T. Thapar (1977),
has also studied "Tribe, caste and religion", and analysed and distinguished
between, tribe, and caste and religion. R. H. Trivedi (1977) deals with
"Scheduled castes women in exploitation" in a very systematic way. L. R. Singh
and D. Nath (1981) in their article entitled "Spatial pattern of rural scheduled
castes population in the Saryupar plain" have studied the spatial pattern,
distribution and growth of rural scheduled castes population. Eminent
scholars, viz, R. C. Chandana (1972) G. S. Ghurya (1960), D. K. Lahiri and Dev
(1982) and G. L. Jambholkar (1976) have dealt with scheduled castes
population in a very systematic way.

The recent works on scheduled castes population in the form of
research paper by B. R. Pant (1997) "Social well-being of scheduled castes
population in the Uttarakhand region, India, is noteworthy. In his paper he
primarily deals with housing, environment, dietary habits, food nutrition,
intake pattern and hygienic condition of scheduled castes population in a very
systematic way. S. M. Bhardwaj and M. E. Harvey (1975) in their paper entitled
"occupational structure of the scheduled castes and general population of the
Punjab. A comparative multivariate analysis", clearly deal with various
economic criteria of development of scheduled castes and general population
in Punjab. In this paper they clearly distinguish the occupational structure of
the scheduled castes and general population. M. Taher (1979) in his research
paper "Scheduled castes population in Assam -. A spatial analysis " clearly
deals with various aspects of socio-economic characteristics of scheduled castes population and has analysed the spatial distribution of the scheduled castes population in the physical, socio-economic and historical context. L.Datta and M.Goswami (2003) in their article entitled “Socio-economic well being of scheduled castes population in Assam discussed the, food, nutrition, and dietary habit and socio-economic characteristics of scheduled castes population in Assam.

So far the study area is concerned, excepting a few no significant work has yet been done, in the context of the scheduled castes population. However, the different census reports and the "statistical Hand Book of Assam" have provided a vivid statistical data which are most essential to study the scheduled castes population in the Brahmaputra valley.

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