CHAPTER 7
LITERACY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION: A CASE STUDY OF SEVEN REPRESENTATIVE VILLAGES
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7.1 Literacy and Education

Literacy is a pre-requisite condition of socio-economic development. The level of education constitutes the key factor of human resource development process and pattern. W.C. Michell has truly remarked that, incomparably the greatest among the human resource is knowledge. It is greatest because it acts as the mother for other resources. Education has its economic as well as social importance. The economic importance of education has been dealt by Alfred Marchall (1962) and many others. On the other hand, much about social and economic importance of education has been said in the book, 'Education and Development of Nations', edited by Hanson and Brembeck (1971). The thesis of his book is one of the universals in the development of individual and nations. However, special mention in this connection may be made with the quotation from Dean Rusk that, 'education is not luxury which can be afforded after development has occurred; it is an integral part, an inescapable and essential part of development process itself. Dean Rusk further argued that, 'the process of achieving modernity, the process of development in its broadest sense, is one of the fundamental transformation in mind and character of man and his goods.' (ibid, p. 29) The crucial role of education in economic development and social modernization can be evaluated from the Draft Fifth Five Year Plan in India (1974-79). It is here said that, 'education plays a crucial role in economic development and social modernization, it supplies the requisite numbers and quality of persons needed for various tasks and by including among the mass of people, appropriate attitude, skills and personality traits, it
creates the proper climate for development. By crating a well informed educated citizenry, it ensures the effective working of the basic institution on which the economic and social well-being of the country depends. Education also provides the individual with the major means for personal enrichment and social and economic development. The primary function of education is to socialize new generation to overcome their experience and to become a productive and effective member of society. Many leading economists are of the opinion that some basic needs like education make an economy more productive because, education is crucial for development of human capabilities and thereby reduction of poverty. Thus, education is most important basic need for enlighting people, increasing their productivity and capability to eradicate poverty. It is said that, there is little progress without education and there is little education with poverty. Education only can bring a traditional society towards modernity.

In ancient and medieval world education was a privilege of the elite and ruling class. But in the present day world, education is no longer a privilege of any class and education today is treated as a right for every citizen. In Article 26 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) has proclaimed that, ‘everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary education and fundamental stage. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made gradually available, and higher education shall be equally accessible to all the basis of merit.’ Accordingly, Article 45 of the constitution of India (Directive Principle) prescribed that, ‘the state shall endeavour to provide, within a period of 10 years from the commencement of this constitution, for the free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age 14 years.’ But in view of immense difficulties involved such as lack of adequate resources, tremendous increase in population and general poverty of the people, the constitution directive has not been fulfilled till today.
In this chapter, two major components of population quality viz., literacy and economic condition of the Bengali community of Chamaria and Nagarbera Mouza have been identified. Chamaria and Nagarbera Mouza have together 88 villages characterized by different social groups. Of these, the Bengali people are scattered in different parts of these two Mouzas. For field study 4 villages of Nagarbera Mouza and 3 villages of Chamaria Mouza have been selected. Population size, literacy pattern, socio-economic characteristics etc. have been the major criteria behind the selection of these villages. It is found by a reconnaissance survey in the field that, these villages are enough to represent differentiate pattern of socio-economic conditions and literacy pattern of this community as a whole.

7.1.1 Village Malibari Satra

This village is located in Nagarbera Mouza of Kamrup district of Assam. The village has at present 3008 (2001 census) population distributed over 548 families. Of this the number of Bengali people is 2244, consisting of male 1171 and female 1073. Here, 70.60 per cent of the total population is dominated by the Bengali community. The number of household surveyed in this village is 30, with the total population of 170. The average family size lies at 5.66 (=6). The percentage of male and female population is 53.52 and 46.47 respectively. Children below 15 years of age group constitute 35.88 percent of total surveyed population. The percentage in the age group of 15-59 and 60 years above are 60.00 and 5.88 respectively. Percentage of workers constitutes to the total population is 33.52, while the non-workers constitutes the remaining 66.47 percent (Table 7.1). The sources of income of the villages are mainly fishing, agriculture, small business, daily wage labourer, service etc. It was observed during field study that, the village is economically not well off.

The average literacy pattern in the village is 47.05 against the average percentage of 80.59 and 64.28 respectively of total population of the district
and the state. The percentage of male and female literacy in the village is 25.88 and 21.17 respectively (Table 7.2). It should be mentioned here that, in 1961 and 1971 census children below the age of 5 years were taken as illiterate. But in 1991 and 2001 census children below the age of 6 years were considered illiterate. Here, the children below 6 years of age are not taken into consideration.

7.1.2 Village Dokuchi

The village Dokuchi is situated in Nagarbera Mouza. The total population of the village is 1593. It has at present 308 household. Of this total population the number of Bengali people is 189. The number of household surveyed in this village is 19, having a total population of 98. The average size of the family is 5.15. Percentage of children below 15 years of age is 35.71. On the other hand, the age groups of 15-59 percents. The percentage of male and female population is 53.06 and 46.93 respectively. The village has 32.65 percent workers as against 67.35 percent non-workers. The survey made in two different Chubas. They are Sahapara and Bhelupara. Though about 100 percent people of Bhelupara belong to fishing community, some of the villagers have to change their traditional occupation from fishing to some other petty business, daily wage labour etc. On the other hand business is the main profession of the Sahas of Sahapara village. The Sahas are traditionally famous for business and thus the people of Sahapara are still continuing their traditional occupation.

The percentage of literacy rate in average in the village is 49.99. Of which male literacy rate is 26.53 and female literacy rate is 23.46 respectively.

7.1.3 Village Pijupara

The village Pijupara is located in Nagarbera Mouza. At present the total number of household in this village is 619, with a total population of 3536. The number of the Bengali people is 1865, which shows the 52.37
percent of the total population. Out of 619 households of Pijupara village the survey was made in 50 families. The surveyed households have together 315 population having an average family size of 6.3. The percentage of male population is 51.42 and female is 48.57 respectively. 37.77 percent of the total population is found below 15 years while the populations in the age groups of 15-59 and above 60 are 57.46 and 4.76 respectively. The percentage of workers is 31.74 and non-worker is 68.25 in this village. Thus most of the families in this village run with utter poverty.

The average percentage of literacy rate in this village is 40.00. Male and female literacy rate is found 21.59 and 18.41 percent respectively.

7.1.4 Village Nichlamari

It is comparatively a small village than other surveyed villages which is located in Nagarbera Mouza. It has total population of 1017, distributed over 212 households. The total Bengali people in this village is 910, of which male and female population is 484 and 424 respectively. 89.47 percent of the total population of the village is dominated by the Bengali community. The number of household surveyed in this village is 17, having a total population of 93. The average size of the family is 5.47. Of this total Bengali population 58.06 percent is found male against the 41.93 percent of female population. Below the age group of 15 years lies 35.48 percent, while 60.21 percent goes to the age groups of 15-59 years and 4.30 percent is in the age group of 60 years and above. The percentage of workers constitutes to the total population is 35.48 and non-workers is 64.51 percent respectively.

The literacy rate in this village is 39.78 percent only. Of this male and female literacy rate covers 22.58 percent and 17.20 percent respectively.

7.1.5 Village Haulitari

This village is situated in Chamaria Mouza. It is a representative of large sized immigrant Bengali people’s village amongst the surveyed villages. Almost entire population of this village is of erstwhile East Pakistan and (new
Bangladesh) origin. It has at present 269 households and 1550 population comprising 835 male and 704 female. About 99.29 percent of the total population in this village is dominated by the Bengali people. The number of households surveyed in this village is 45 with a total population of 254. The percentage of male and female population is 53.14 and 46.85 respectively. The average family size is 5.64. Children below 15 year of age are 35.82 percent, in between 15-59 years of age is 59.44 percent and above 60 years of age is 4.72 percent respectively. Total workers in this village are 34.25 percent against the 65.74 percent of non-workers. People depend partly upon agriculture, fishing wage labour, petty business etc. The village is economically very backward.

The average percentage of literacy rate in the village is 39.37 which is far below than that of district and state average percentage. Of this male literacy rate is 22.44 and female literacy rate is 16.93 percent.

7.1.6 Village Neuldoba

The village Neuldoba is situated in Chamaria Mouza. The village has 1278 population distributed over 209 families. The total number of the Bengali population in the village is 725, which indicates that 56.72 percent of the total population is dominated by the Bengali community. The number of household surveyed in the village is 17, with a total population of 102. The average size of the family is 6.0. The percentages of male and female population show that, 52.94 and 47.05 respectively. According to the age group the structure of population is below 15 years of age is 37.25 percent, 15-59 years of age is 58.82 percent and above 60 years of age is 3.92 percent. The workers and non-workers to the total population is found 36.27 and 63.72 percent respectively. The economic condition of the village is very poor.

The total literacy rate of the village is 40.19 percent. Of which the percentage of male and female literacy is only 24.50 and 15.68 respectively.
7.1.7 Village Baralimara

The village Baralimara is located in Chamaria Mouza. It is surrounded by marshland and other depressed spots. This village is exclusively dominated by the Bengali community of Bangladesh origin. The village has at present 2543 population distributed over 359 families. Of this population the numbers of Bengali people are 2440. It indicates that, 95.94 percent of the total population in the village is dominated by the Bengali community. The percentage of male and female population in this village is 52.74 and 47.25 respectively. The total number of household surveyed is 25 with the total population of 170. The average family size lies in 6.8 (=7). Children below 15 years of age are 38.82 percent, while the population in the age group of 15-59 comprises 56.47 and above 60 years of age is 4.70 percent respectively. The workers in the village constitute 36.47 percent of the total population against the 63.52 percent of non-workers.

The average literacy rate in the village is 39.41 percent which is the lowest percentage of all the surveyed villages. The male and female literacy rate in the village is 22.94 and 16.47 percent respectively.

7.2 The Analysis

The survey made in 7 different villages of Chamaria and Nagarbera Mouza shows that all the villages are economically and educationally very much backward. The report of Dr. Arjun Sengupta’s commission of 2006 shows that, in India,

-7 crore people can spent Rs. 8.9 per day
-16.7 crore people can spent Rs. 11.6 per day
-20.7 crore people can spent Rs. 14.6 per day
-39.2 crore people can spent Rs. 20.3 per day

Source: Report of Dr. Arjun Sengupta’s Commission, 2006, p.6)

It means that in India, 83.6 crore people are unable to spent more than 20 rupees per day. The present economic conditions of the above villages are
not other than that. During field study the researcher observe that, there are so many causes of backwardness. Such as, economic causes, social causes, educational causes etc. Poverty is one of the major factors responsible for the educational backwardness. There are many parents who are unable to manage two square meals a day. Therefore instead of sending their children to school these people persuade their grown-up children for earning something in order to supplement the family income. Social evils are another cause of educational backwardness. Old traditions like child marriage, secondary position of women folk, illiteracy, narrow religious beliefs etc. are still prevalent among this community. The uneducated guardians can not realize the worth of education and therefore they can not make sacrifice for the education of their children and especially for girls.

Caste is another factor of the backwardness of these people. Interestingly, about 90 percent of the total population in these Mouzas belongs to the Scheduled Castes. The problem of their low statues and economic and educational backwardness is not a recent one; in fact, it is deeply rooted in the historical process since time immemorial. Therefore Dr. B.R. Ambedkar always thought for the upliftment of this backward section of the Indian society. In Article 46 of the Constitution of India also states that, 'The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the weaker sections of the population and in particular of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and shall protect from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

Presently it is observed that people of this community have taken interest in their education by coping themselves with government extension programmes as well as the improvement of infrastructural facilities rendered for the development of education.

The Survey made by the researcher shows that, in Dokuchi village the percentage of literacy rate is a little bit higher (49.99%) than the other
surveyed villages. It is because this village is very adjacent to the Nagarbera Market and it is surrounded by the Assamese society. Moreover, the villagers of Dokuchi village are economically well off than other villages. Because, most of the people of this village are belongs to Saha community, who are traditionally associated with business. On the other hand, in the village Haulitari and Baralimara, the percentage of literacy is very low, i.e. 39.37 and 39.41 percent respectively. It is because the village is highly dominated by the scheduled caste Bengali people. Their main occupation is fishing. Therefore, economically also they are very poor.

References: