THE PROBLEM

The phenomenon of social inequality is found universally in all societies, from the simplest to the most complex, although the social inequalities vary considerably in form, nature, extent and function from one society to another. Social inequality refers to the unequal pattern of distribution of something such as wealth, income, occupation and education. It is an objective, descriptive and measurable concept. Social inequality in any form in any society is socially patterned i.e., governed by prevailing laws and norms. Inequalities when ranked lead to formation of social strata which can be arranged hierarchically. This social hierarchical arrangement is called ‘social stratification’. Human societies vary in the extent to which social groups as well as individuals have unequal access to goods and services. Rousseau had made a distinction between natural and social inequality. The former emerges from the unequal division of physical and mental abilities among the members of a society. The latter arises from the social entitlement of people to wealth or economic resources, political power and status regardless of potential abilities possessed by individuals. People who are unequal in property, power and prestige always differ in their life chances, their institutional patterns of conduct, their life styles or cultural patterns and their attitudes, ideologies and beliefs.

Democratic societies, all over the world have been continuously endeavouring to convert themselves into egalitarian societies based on the
cardinal principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. Thus efforts are on
everywhere to provide opportunities to the down trodden to raise their
standards of living, in other words, to move up the ladder of social
hierarchy. This process is referred to as upward social mobility in
sociological literature. Among the factors that facilitate this process,
education is considered to be one of the most important.

Relationship between education and social mobility is complex and
dynamic. While there is no doubt about the fact that education makes an
important contribution towards social mobility of individuals and groups,
there are several factors that sometimes significantly alter the direction and
fate of such a relationship. In a society which is rigidly stratified, it becomes
very difficult for the formal institution of education to remain unaffected or
unbiased. Under those circumstances, it ends up maintaining the status quo
and reinforcing the socio-economic or cultural divide between people. In
many cases, those born in lower status families, for example *dalits*, may
remain in the lower status even after attaining the highest educational
status. At the same time, however, there have been occasions, when schools
have been able to rise above those prejudices and give a fair chance to
people, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, to overcome their
handicaps and move up the social ladder.

Complex identities of race, culture, language, religion, caste and
tribes comprise the Indian subcontinent. This multiplicity and multi-
ethnicity lends the subcontinent its heterogeneous or pluralistic character.
India is the world’s most complex and comprehensive pluralistic society,
enshancing a vast variety of races, tribes, castes, communities, religions,
languages, customs and living styles. All these complex identities have created a sense of identity crisis and all-pervading mistrust and isolation in the mindset of the people. As a consequence, social inequalities got firmly established in the India society. In this context it may be mentioned that India has the second largest tribal population in the world. Tribals have traditionally been distinct cultural groups that have evolved in isolation from the mainstream cultures. With heterogeneous, social, economic, linguistic and religious patterns, these tribes survived in isolation for centuries until the Constitution of India provided them the opportunity for entering the mainstream by upholding the dignity of their respective cultural patterns.

These all-pervading and deep-rooted social inequalities in Indian society led the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution to take solemn pledge with a view to transforming the society into an egalitarian society. The adoption of the four-fold ideal of Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity in our Constitution has been incorporated to eliminate social inequalities, economic disparities and political underprivileges. Therefore, the founding fathers of the Constitution conceived education as a mechanism of social engineering and directed the state to provide equal opportunities of education to all without any regard to the caste, class, religion, sex, or region. However, provisions for protective discrimination in favour of the hitherto exploited and disadvantaged sections of the society have made to uplift them. Equal opportunity in public employment, based on merit, has also been made. A lot of progress has been made since
independence but the dream of an egalitarian society continues to be far from realisation in our country.

In the light of what has been said above it is pertinent to examine as to how far the constitutional provisions have succeeded in equalising educational and occupational opportunities and how far the promise of a better standard of life for the oppressed sections has been fulfilled. The present study, “Education and Social Mobility in the Urban Areas of North Cachar Hills District, Assam,” is an attempt in this direction.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1) To find out the extent of vertical social mobility through three generations in terms of educational and occupational attainments and income of the population under study.

2) To find out the relation between various socio-economic background factors and an individual’s educational and occupational attainments and income.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Since the study is a social survey, no hypotheses are proposed to be tested. Instead, the study is addressed to seeking answers to the following research questions.

1. Does membership of a religious community affect a person’s educational and occupational attainments and income?
2. Does membership of a caste group affect a person’s educational and occupational attainments and income?

3. Does membership of a social category (tribal/non-tribal) affect a person’s educational and occupational attainments and income?

4. Does parents’ and grandparents’ education affect a person’s educational and occupational attainments and income?

5. Does parents’ and grandparents’ occupational status affect a person’s educational and occupational attainments and income?

6. Does parents’ and grandparents’ income affect a person’s educational and occupational attainments and income?

7. Does a person’s educational attainment affect his/her occupational attainment?

8. Does a person’s educational attainment affect his/her income?

9. Does a person’s occupational attainment affect his/her income?

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Owing to the limitations of time and resources at the disposal of the investigator, it was not possible to have neither an all India study nor a
study even at the level of a state. Therefore, the study is delimited to the two most developed towns, viz., Haflong and Umrangso of North Cachar Hills (now called as Dima Hasao) district of Assam. Haflong is the district headquarters and Umrangso is an industrial town of this district.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

For the present study, a good number of literatures, doctoral works, dissertations, journals etc., were reviewed. The studies reviewed, both Indian and foreign, lead to some serious inferences with regard to the relationship between background factors and educational and occupational attainments and income. Although some studies show a strong relationship between educational and occupational attainments, Anderson’s Paradox supported by data from other studies casts a shadow of doubt on such a relationship. Again the chances of acquiring higher education are restricted for the members of lower working class and lower caste groups especially women and those from rural areas and as such higher education and the associated occupations are accessible only to the elite. These studies also show that there is a lot of inheritance of educational attainments as well as occupational attainments and there is very little mobility across manual – non-manual divide in occupations. Whatever mobility has taken place has been short range only, between the highest levels of manual and lowest levels of non-manual categories.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Population and Sample:
The urban population above the age of eighteen years of the district of North Cachar Hills (known as Dima Hasao district at present) forms the universe for the study. A 5% random sample of the population in this age group in the two towns of Haflong and Umrangso of the district has been included in study.

Tools Used:

A socio-economic survey schedule designed by the investigator under the supervision of his guide was used to collect the requisite data. The information collected through this schedule was supplemented with the census data and other official and non-official records as well as personal interview with the respondents.

Techniques of Analysis:

Outflow Social Mobility Tables have been analysed to assess the extent of mobility and Path Analysis technique is used to examine the mobility process (the dynamics of mobility) of educational and occupational status and income.

CONCLUSIONS

The study leads to the following major findings and suggestions with regard to the three aspects of social mobility examined in this piece of research.

Educational Mobility:

In both Haflong and Umrangso towns, participation of females in higher education is greater than that of their male counterparts, although the male literacy rate is a little higher than that of the female in both the
towns. Moreover, in professional graduation the males dominate over the females. The reason for females’ disadvantage in professional education appears to be the lack of facilities for such education in the district and parents’ unwillingness to send their daughters outside for education.

A similar trend of intergenerational educational mobility is found in both Haflong and Umrangso town although the proportions of upward and downward mobility slightly differ between the two towns. In relation to the extent of intergenerational educational mobility through three generations, the study reveals that educational mobility between fathers - respondents generations is much higher than between grandfathers - fathers generations. The overall higher rates of educational mobility can be attributed to the gradual expansion of educational facilities especially for higher education from grandfather generation through fathers’ generations’ to the respondents’ generation. It is also observed that in father – respondent generations, larger proportion of females are educationally stationary than that of their male counterparts. Downward educational mobility is greater among the females than males and upward educational mobility is lower among the females. Thus gender appears to affect educational attainments of a person and the balance is tilted in favour of males.

An analysis of the path model for the data shows that in Haflong town father’s educational and occupational attainments and quality of the person’s own schooling are the most significant determinants of a person’s educational attainments, while in case of Umrangso memberships of caste and social category are also important in addition to Fathers education,
however in this case father’s occupation is not as not as important as in the former town. While in the case of Haflong, size of a person’s family of origin also influences her/his educational attainment in Umrangso this factor has no influence. It may also be noted that the extent of effect each determinant is different for males and female. Thus the extent of influence of the determinants is a function of gender and place of residence also.

**OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY**

In Haflong town the proportion of males and females employed in manual and non-manual occupations is almost same while in the case of Umrangso town the non-manual occupations are dominated by males and females are mainly employed in manual work. The reasons for this appear to be the fact that Haflong town being the headquarters of the District more job opportunities are available in the government offices and educational institutions etc., where men and women have equal opportunities while Umrangso being an industrial town opportunities for professionally qualified individuals are greater than those with general education and because of this, as has been said earlier, men dominate the scene of professional education, and get employed at the higher rungs of the industrial jobs, while women are left with only a few jobs in government offices or in teaching as a result majority of them are employed in manual work.

Comparing intergenerational occupational mobility between grandfathers - fathers generations with that between fathers - respondents generations, the study reveals that in Haflong town the extent of downward mobility has decreased from grandfathers - father generations to fathers -
respondents generations, upward mobility has increased and the inheritance of occupational statuses has declined. In Umrangso town, the similar rate of occupational mobility is observed although the proportions slightly differ from Haflong town. However, the extent of inheritance continues to be very large in both the towns. The only difference between the two towns is that in Umrangso the downward mobility has increased from grandfathers – fathers to fathers – respondents generations whereas in Haflong the downward mobility has decreased through three generations which implies that Umrangso, being an industrial town, the mobility across manual - no-manual line and vice versa is less restricted i.e. the social system in Umrangso is more open one than that in Haflong town.

Sex-wise comparison of occupational mobility reveals that in Haflong town occupational inheritance from father to offspring is greater among the females than the males. In Umrangso too, the larger proportions of female respondents were occupationally stationary than that of their male counterparts. In Haflong the rates of both upward and downward mobility are lower in the females than that of their male counterparts whereas in Umrangso downward occupational mobility is almost equal in both sexes though upward occupational mobility is greater in case of males. Thus in both the towns gender appears to have a significant effect upon occupational attainments of a person. The findings stated above indicate shows that the economy of both towns has gradually been shifting from the primary sector to the secondary and tertiary sectors and as a result more and more people are being employed in secondary and tertiary sectors. This
indicates that changes in mobility rates are more due to the changes in occupational structure rather than democratisation of the society.

With regard to occupational placement the analysis shows that in Haflong a person’s first job is the most significant determinant of his/her occupational attainments followed by her/his educational attainments, father’s education, quality of her/his schooling and membership of a social category. The pattern of influence of the various determinants is similar in Umangso, but caste, social category and religion seem to exert greater influence in this town than in Haflong. As in the case of educational attainments the influence of different factors is different for males and females.

Thus it appears that a person’s occupational status depends largely on her/his educational attainments, but, since educational attainments themselves are determined by the various family background factors, it can safely be inferred that even the occupational attainments are largely determined by these very background factors through education. As in the case of educational attainments the extent of influence of the different factors on occupational attainments is also a function of gender and place of residence.

**INCOME MOBILITY**

It is observed that in both Haflong and Umangso towns females are poorly paid in comparison to their male counterparts and the reasons thereof might be that females are generally geographically less mobile and
as a result they have to contend with occupations which offer them relatively lower wages than that of their male counterparts.

Regarding intergenerational income mobility through two generations i.e., fathers – respondents generations this study reveals that the rate of income mobility, especially of the upward type, in Umrangso town is higher than that of Haflong town. The reason might be of that being an industrial town, Umrangso provides relatively greater scope of income opportunity than Haflong town and this finding is further substantiated by the rate of inheritance of income or stationariness which is lower in Umrangso than that of Haflong town.

Sex-wise comparison of income mobility between the two towns reveals that in Haflong town, the rate of income mobility between the sexes is more or less balanced although the rate of upward income mobility is greater among men. It is because Haflong, being a District Headquarters, provides equal income opportunity for both the sexes and it is perhaps because of the various State and Central Government offices, organisations, corporations and institutions paying more or less the same wages to both men and women. Besides male dominance in business class has led men to experience higher upward income mobility than that of women of this town. On the other hand in Umrangso, the rate of income mobility is heavily tilted in favour of men and this rate is not only much higher than that of their women counterparts but also than those of their male counterparts in Haflong town. The sole reason, as stated earlier, is the nature of jobs both (technical and hazardous industrial jobs) that attracts men even from the outside of the district and the state as well. As a result,
the above findings reveal that the gender based income inequality is acute in Umrangso town.

Moreover, among the factors affecting a person’s income the single most significant determinant is her/his father’s income. Other factors like the person’s educational attainments and occupational status have a minor influence and caste, gender, quality of schooling and father’s occupation have a very small effect on income. Here again, as in the case of educational and occupational attainments the influence of each determinant varies with gender and place of residence.

Thus, one can safely infer that the Constitutional provisions for equalising the opportunities for education and occupation and that of earning a decent income have had limited results. Therefore some sort of state control of these opportunities is required to, at least, reduce the existing inequalities.

To conclude it can be said that, in North Cachar Hills district (Dima Hasao) of Assam state-controlled education system needs to be revamped and the policy of protective discrimination needs to be streamlined in such a manner that could protect the educational and cultural rights of the indigenous people. As this study reveals the educational scenario of the underprivileged populations does not appear an encouraging one so the State Government as well as the District Autonomous Council executes the RTE Act 2009 as per the provisions and guidelines of the said Act so that those sections of populations could derive benefits out of the provisions of afore-mentioned Act.