



INCIDENCE OF POVERTY OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES PEOPLE OF DHUBRI DISTRICT OF ASSAM

Dr. Manoranjan Roy

Associate professor & Head
Department of Economics
Bilasipara College, Bilasipara

Abstract

Poverty is a malady that has affected a section of the people even in rich countries. Poverty has been understood differently by different people in different times. Poverty is the greatest challenge for economic development of country. Although Scheduled Castes people constitute a large section of population of Dhubri district, their lives are still characterized by hard work, drudgery and without any adequate basic amenities. A big chunk of them generally live in the slum areas without adequate basic accommodation, water-supply, sanitation, light, public health etc. Many of them, again who are landless and unemployed, migrate from the rural areas to the city and towns in search of labour, jobs, contracts and other petty wage-earning employments.

Poverty, malnutrition and consequent indebtedness are the socio-economic constraints inherited by the Scheduled Castes people from their fore-fathers and these problems still remained unsolved even in spite of the implementation of the special component plan within the state.

The main **objectives** of the research study will be to understand and highlight the poverty scenario among the Scheduled Castes people in particular, of Dhubri district of Assam. And also to suggest remedial measures for improving their socio-economic condition on the basis of the findings, so that the scheduled castes people of Assam in particular of Dhubri district can improve their quality of life.

The **methodology** of the research project will be based on both primary as well as secondary data. The primary data will be collected from various sources and the secondary data will be collected by doing field survey from the sample households of the sample villages with the help of a series of questionnaires prepared for the purpose.

Key Words: Scheduled Castes, Occupation, Poverty, Households, Community, etc.

Introduction

The term scheduled caste owes its origin to the Govt. of India Act 1935. In accordance with this enactment some of the undefined depressed castes were single out in 1936, and listed in a scheduled in order to ensure certain concessions and privileges for them because of their disadvantageous position in the social hierarchy. Because of the fact that their names are shown in a “scheduled of the Act, they came to be known as “scheduled castes”. Gandhiji called them “Harijan,”

Articles 330 and 332 of the constitution conferred political rights on the scheduled castes in the form of reservation of a specified number of seats in the various state assemblies and the parliament on the basis of population. For Assam, it is 7%.

Article 335 ensures reservation of services and posts for the scheduled castes in the affairs of the state. By a Presidential order, in pursuance of article 341, a number of castes were specified as scheduled castes for the purpose of the constitution in general and the above articles in particular.

According to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes orders (amendment) Act, 1976 there are sixteen Scheduled Castes communities in Assam. These are Bansphor, Bhumali/ Mali, BrittalBanka/ Bania, Dhupi/ Dhobi, Hira, Jalkeot, Jhalo/ Malo/ Jhalo-Malo, Kaibartha/ Jaliya, Lalbegi, Mahara, Mehtor/ Bhangi, Muchi/ Rishi, Namasudra, Patni and Sutradhar.

In Assam, majority of the Scheduled Castes people live in villages, a small proportion of them are in towns. In villages they are segregated from caste Hindus and in towns also they are discriminated against. The problems faced by the members of the Scheduled Castes are similar wherever they live.

For centuries these depressed classes have been denied basic civic rights. The services of these depressed classes are utilized by the upper classes for their benefit. But the Scheduled Castes are not given equal status with others. Untouchability continues to be practiced in diverse forms.

They are made to feel that they are born to suffer. The Scheduled Castes are backward largely because they are confined to certain low occupation where their earnings are low and partly due to social disability and illiteracy. The backwardness of the Scheduled Castes has historical, social and political roots. Poverty, lack of educational facilities, discrimination, inability to enter government services and other lucrative jobs have all contributed to their backwardness. The concentration of the Scheduled Castes workers in low paying occupations is the product of a vicious circle of poverty and discrimination

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are

1. To understand and highlight the poverty scenario among the Scheduled Castes people in particular, of Dhubri district of Assam.
2. To suggest remedial measures for improving socio-economic condition of the poor Scheduled Castes people on the basis of the findings, so that the scheduled castes people of Assam in particular of Dhubri district can improve their quality of life.

Methodology

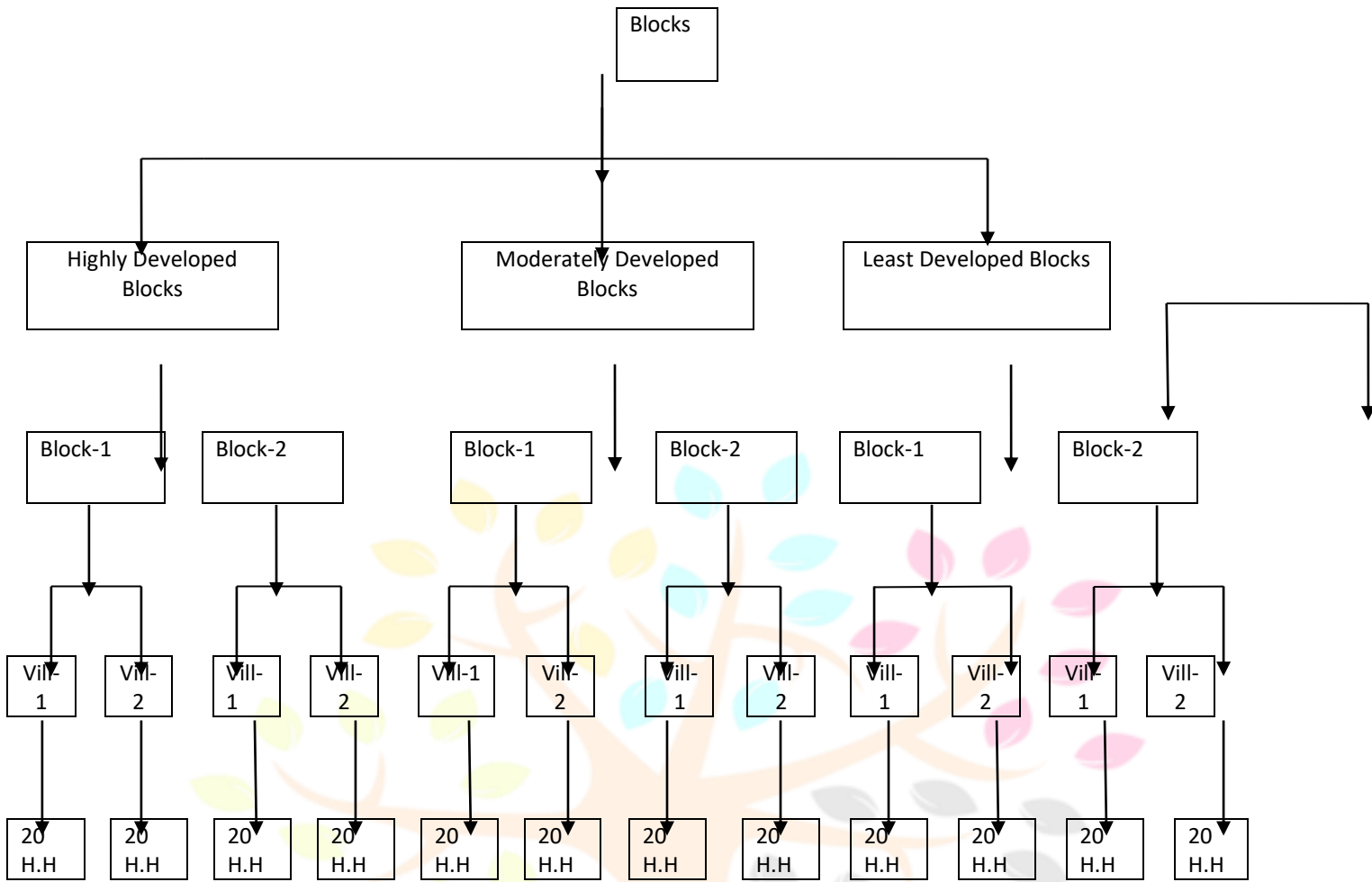
The research project is based on both primary as well as secondary data. The primary data is collected from various sources like books, journals, statistical hand book, economic survey and internet as well. The secondary data is based on field data collected from the sample households of the sample villages with the help of a series of questionnaires prepared for the purpose. The samples are selected with the help of multi-phased (Stratified) sample technique both random and purposive.

Sample Design

Dhubri district consists of three sub-divisions and 14 development blocks. We have categorized the blocks into three heads, on the basis of their level of development, viz, highly developed, moderately developed and least developed block respectively. So in each category several blocks are included. Then two blocks are randomly chosen from each category i.e. altogether six blocks are chosen. We have chosen 2 villages as sample villages from each block so as to give maximum geographical coverage. That is, altogether 12 villages have been chosen. From these 12 villages, 20 households have been taken randomly from each village. Thus, altogether 240 households have been chosen from the entire district.

As noted above, the units of observation is the household and the total size of sample is 240 household

Sample Chart



[N.B. Vill = Villege. H.H. = House hold]



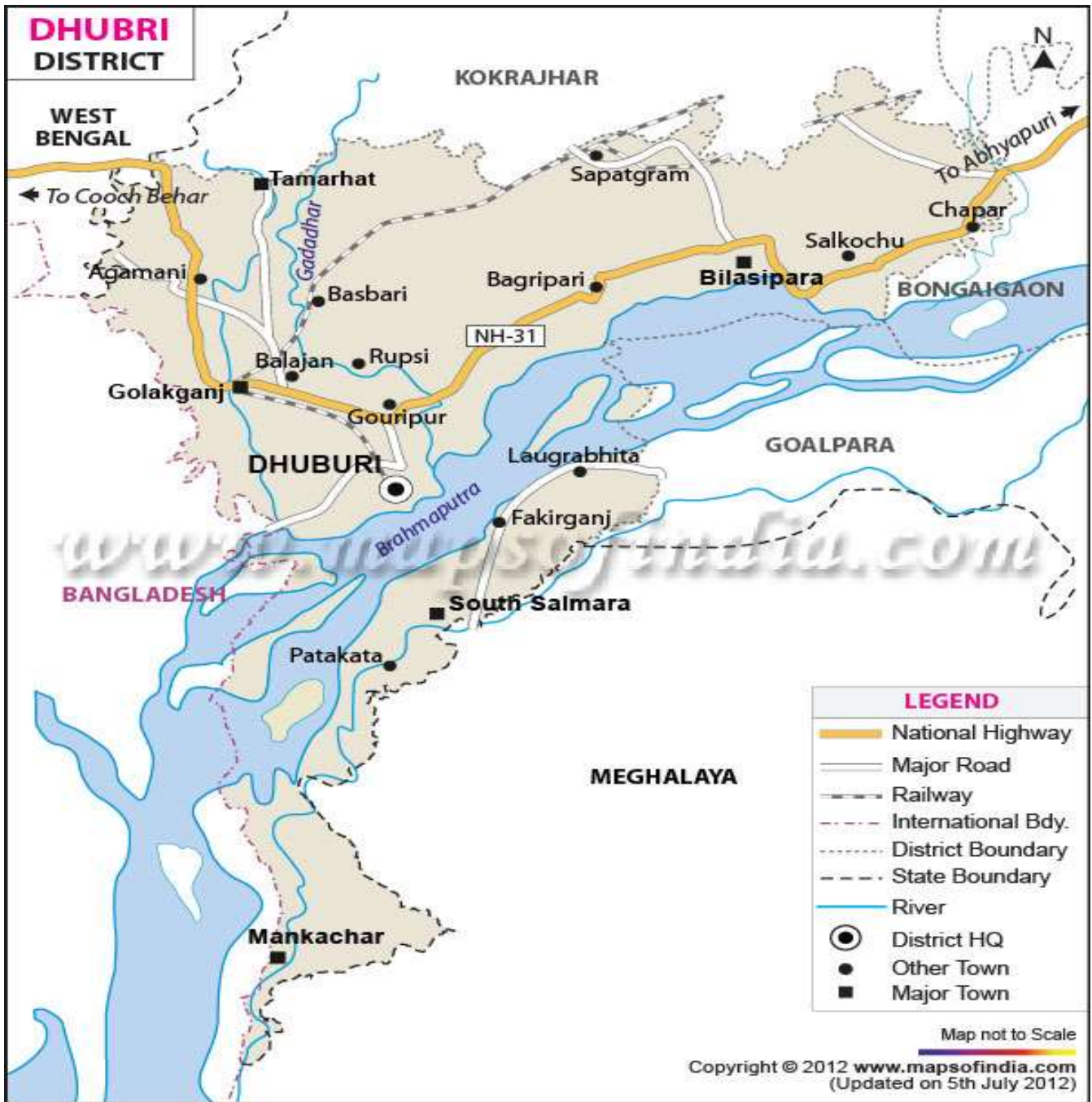
Sample Blocks

	Highly dev. blocks		Moderately dev. block		Least dev. block
Agomani Development Block	Sample Vill : Kaldoba-1 House hold : 538 Population: 2692 Male : 1836 Female : 1306 S.C. : 344 S.T. : 0 Others : 2348	Chapar-Salkocha Development Block	Sample Vill : Baniapara-1 House hold : 103 Population: 333 Male : 159 Female : 174 S.C. : 128 S.T. : 0 Others : 205	Fekamari Development Block	Sample Vill : Hatsingimari House hold : 112 Population: 408 Male : 193 Female : 215 S.C. : 119 S.T. : 36 Others : 253
	Sample Vill : Choto Dighaltari House hold : 128 Population: 386 Male : 198 Female : 188 S.C. : 149 S.T. : 0 Others : 237		Sample Vill : Batardal House hold : 116 Population: 401 Male : 204 Female : 197 S.C. : 134 S.T. : 42 Others : 225		Sample Vill : Kukurmara-1 House hold : 387 Population: 1779 Male : 918 Female : 861 S.C. : 297 S.T. : 0 Others : 1482
Bilasipara Development Block	Sample Vill : Ananda Nagar House hold : 926 Population: 4632 Male : 2317 Female : 2315 S.C. : 304 S.T. : 0 Others : 4328	Gauripur Development Block	Sample Vill : Dharmasala-3 House hold : 489 Population: 2442 Male : 1228 Female : 1214 S.C. : 122 S.T. : 0 Others : 2320	Debitola Development Block	Sample Vill : Asharikandi House hold : 308 Population: 1484 Male : 760 Female : 724 S.C. : 426 S.T. : 0 Others : 1058
	Sample Vill : Futkibari House hold : 159 Population: 633 Male : 326 Female : 307 S.C. : 217 S.T. : 129 Others : 287		Sample Vill : Bhelakoba House hold : 218 Population: 857 Male : 456 Female : 401 S.C. : 126 S.T. : 0 Others : 731		Sample Vill : Geramari-6 House hold : 298 Population: 1422 Male : 759 Female : 663 S.C. : 328 S.T. : 0 Others : 1094

Source (1). [www.drdadhubri\(2\).](http://www.drdadhubri(2).) Block development offices

Research Through Innovation

Map of Dhubri District



Study Area

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Review of Literature

A number of studies about the Scheduled Castes have been undertaken in the past. It is true that the problems of poor Scheduled Castes people of Assam had attracted the attention of scholars in earlier days also. For example, Sarma Thakur (1992), Hazarika (1994), Das (1986) and many others wrote on the problems of Scheduled Castes people of Assam.

Sharma Thakur, Dr., G. C. (1994) points out that the Scheduled Castes people had to face problems in the changing profession because of the changing social scenario. He observes that a few Scheduled Castes families used to live with the earnings of playing drums in festivals and other socio-religious occupations. But now-a-days, people do not employ them in such festivals, a renowned institution mostly of the Scheduled Castes people, is fast disappearing.

Bezbarua, Debandrakumar (1999) has said that the percentage of married among the landless people is more as compared to others. In a study he has found that only 2.76% Kaibarta people support inter-caste marriage.

Sen, Sipra (1999) states that the traditional pattern of social interaction between the Scheduled Castes and the Caste-Hindus reflects the idea of social distance. At present inter caste marriage between them develops.

Mahanta, K.C. (1999) has argued that the common diseases of the scheduled castes people are Dysentery, Malaria, Headache, etc. Diseases like AIDS, Colour blindness, Gonorrhoea, Syphilis, Tetanus are not familiar to the people, though some educated people know these names. They use herbal medicine to cure such diseases. The scheduled caste people go to the doctor only at the time of emergency.

Medhi, Birinchi.Kr (2001) states that normally the kaibarta villages are thickly populated. Most of the huts are made of thatch, bamboo and mud. During the rainy season the villagers suffer from various diseases. The village quack is an integral part of "health culture" of the Scheduled Castes people.

Das, Bhakta (1986) has argued the social status of the Scheduled Castes people in the southern states is deplorable. They are not allowed to wear sandals, silk cloths, golden ornaments, to use umbrellas and the women are not allowed to wear upper garments to cover their breasts.

Results and Discussion

Asset Holding: Asset holding position of a family depends upon the economic status of that family. Again, the economic status of a family depends upon the income of that family. Larger the income of a family, asset will be larger of that family. Therefore, present asset holding position of a family depicts the poverty victimization picture of that family. It is generally difficult to give the accurate account of assets of the rural Scheduled Castes people because they do not want to give the actual information of their assets like gold, silver etc. which we cannot want to see for accuracy. From our experience, it is found that majority of the rural Scheduled Castes people tries to conceal their actual assets with the thinking that if they have showed more assets, they will not get benefit from the Govt. in future.

However, the following table gives an account of some of the assets of sample households which are totally counted by believing in their words and some other assets which are counted from our quarry and empirical study.

Table: 1.1**Status of assets holding of sample households.**

Sl. No	Name of Assets	No. of Households	Percentage
1	Car	1	0.42%
2	Bike	7	2.92%
3	Colour T.V.	32	13.33%
4	Refrigerator	2	0.83%
5	Bicycle	194	80.83%
6	Fan	60	25.00%
7	Radio	32	13.33%
8	D.V.D / V.C.D.	44	18.33%
9	Home theatre	48	20.00%
10	Watch	152	63.33%
11	Mobile phone	202	84.17%
12	Gold	35	14.58%
13	Gold below 10 gram	24	10.00%
14	Gold above 10 gram	11	4.58%
15	Silver	81	33.75%
16	Silver below 20 gram	37	15.42%
17	Silver above 20 gram	44	18.33%

Source: Field Survey

In table: 1.1, the sample populations have been distributed in accordance with availability of their assets holding position. In our surveyed villages, only one household (0.42%) is found who has a Maruti 800 car for private use and only two households (0.83%) have the Refrigerators. Only 13.33% (32), 25% (60), 13.33% (32), 18.33% (44), and 20% (48) households have Colour T.V., Fan, Radio, D.V.D. / V.C.D. and Music system respectively. Majority of the households i.e. 80.83% (194) and 63.33% (152) households have the bicycle and Watch for domestic uses. It is surprise that while conducting survey it has found that 84.17% (202) households have Mobile phone. They have somehow managed a Mobile phone.

In case of ornaments, 15.58% (35) and 33.75% (81) of the households have the valuable ornaments like gold and silver respectively. But out of 15.58% gold ornament holders, only 4.58% (11) of them have above 10 gram and rest 10% (24) households have minimum gold ornament below 10 gram. Similarly, 33.75% (81) of the households have the silver ornament of which 15.42% (37) households have below 10 gram and 18.33% households have above 10 gram.

APL and BPL families

On the basis of income, the sample households are divided into two groups viz. APL and BPL families. The APL families are provided with APL rice, S.K. Oil, Sugar and Iodized salt as per quantum of allocation in each month. The BPL families are provided district ration cards for issuance of PDS items at subsidized rates. Besides, the Government of Assam is also providing various facilities to the BPL families like dwelling House under IAY scheme, tube well, well, electricity, gas etc. for improving their economic condition. Table: 1.2 shows the number of APL and BPL families of the sample households

Table: 1.2
Number of APL and BPL families of the sample households

Sl. No.	Type of families	Number of families	Percentage
	1	2	3
1	APL families	37	15.42%
2	BPL families	165	68.75%
	(a). With BPL cards	165	68.75%
	(b). Without BPL cards	38	15.83%
3	Total families	240	100.00%

Source: Field Survey

Table: 1.2 reveals that out of 240 Scheduled Castes families, only 15.24% (37) families belong to APL category (above poverty line) and rest 84.58% (203) families belong to BPL category (below poverty line). But in survey area it is found that out of the 84.58% BPL families, 68.75% (165) BPL families have BPL cards and 15.83% (38) BPL families have no BPL cards for various reasons. They are getting neither benefit of APL categories nor benefit of BPL categories.

Housing condition

Housing condition is an important determinant of social and economic status of a family in the society which is indirectly related to income of the family. The modern concept of housing is not only a physical shelter but also an immediate surrounding of it. Besides the shelter, house is a place where a family can develop physically, mentally and socially. A house is healthy if it provides physical protection and shelter, place of cooking and eating, washing and excretory functions, prevention the spread of communicable diseases, protection from noise, pollution, heat and cold, encourages personal development and mental health. Overcrowding housing condition may disturb couple's privacy which ultimately affects fertility levels. Similarly, high mortality and morbidity rate are observed in those houses where the housing condition is sub-standard. The respiratory infections like whooping cough, tuberculosis, influenza and skin diseases are common among the respondents living in an unhygienic condition.

Housing condition is a qualitative variable and in the study of poverty it is taken as dummy variable. It is also found that the pucca houses in the sample villages have the minimum basic amenities of life as compared to the semi-pucca and kutcha houses. So, the housing condition of the pucca houses are assumed as good housing condition and the semi-pucca and kutcha houses are taken as bad housing condition. Table: 1.3. shows the distribution of sample households on the basis of type of house.

Table: 1.3
Distribution of sample households by type of house.

Sl. No.	Housing condition	Number of households	Percentage of total households
	1	2	3
1	Pucca	24	10%
2	Semi pucca	126	52.50%
3	Kutcha	90	37.50%
4	Total	240	100.00%

Source: Field Survey

It is observed from the table that only 10% (24) families of the sample households are living in pucca houses. More than 50% families i.e. 52.50% families of the sample households are living in semi-pucca houses. Semi-pucca houses are those houses which are given under the IAY scheme (Indra Awaas Yojana) by the government. All the beneficiaries of IAY are living in below poverty line. 37.50% (90) families of the sample households are living in kutcha houses. The sample households who are living in kutcha houses also belong to BPL category but they are still unable to get the IAY houses and some of them are in waiting list of receiving the IAY houses. The kutcha houses are made of wood, bamboo, thatch, cane, reed, mud, etc. The kutcha houses have raised earthen plinths with wooden or bamboo poles supporting the thatched roofs. The walls are made of reed or split bamboo plastered with a mixture of mud and cow-dung. Thus, in total (kutcha and semi-pucca) 90% (216) families of the sample households are living in below poverty line.

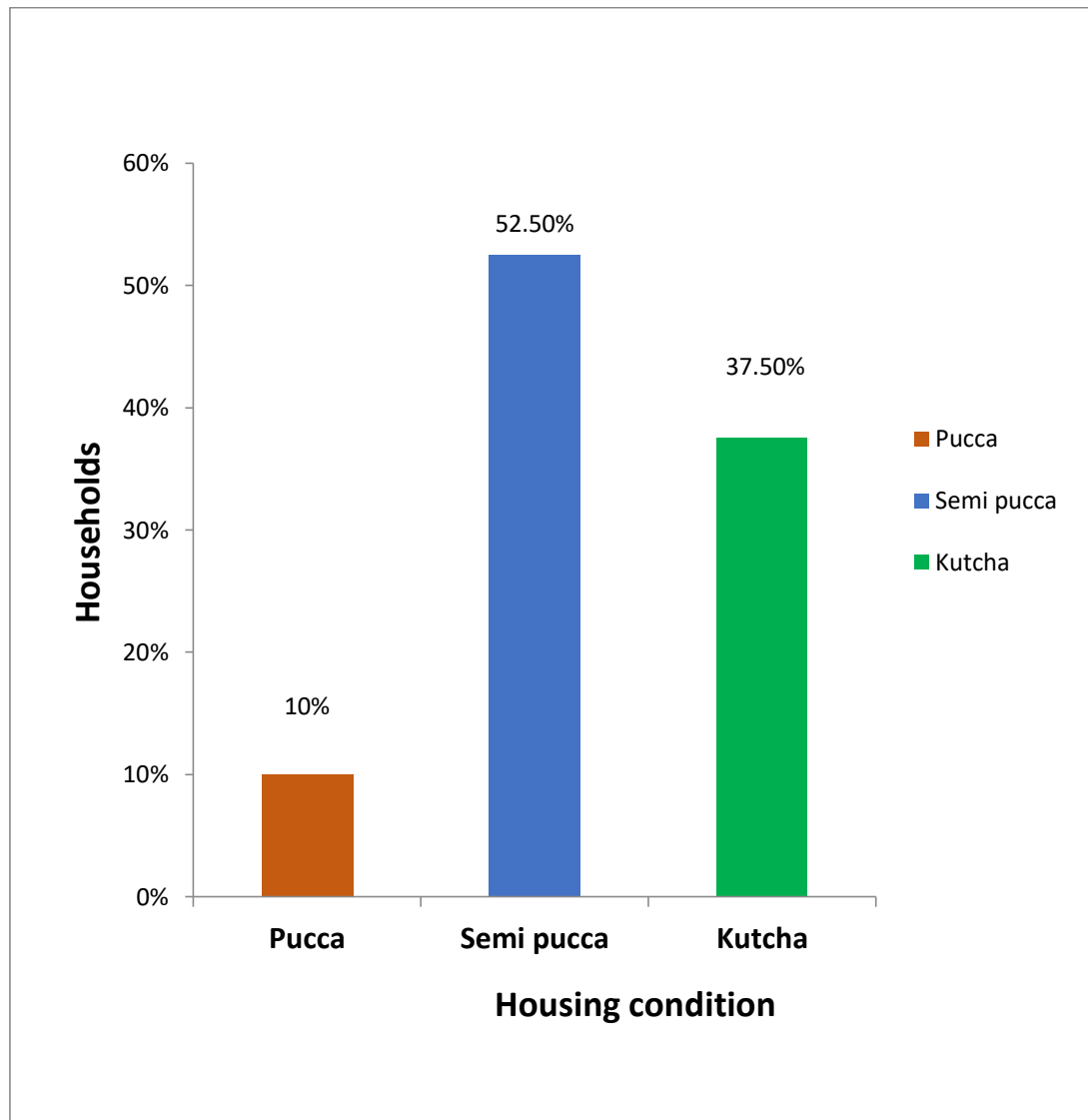


Table: 1.4
Distribution of the households by housing condition

Type of facilities			Number of families	Percentage
Bathroom	1	Pucca	27	11.25%
	2	Kutchra	20	8.33%
	3	No Bathroom / open	193	80.42%
Source of water	1	Tape (Individual)	6	2.50%
	2	Tape (Common)	16	6.67%
	3	Well (Individual)	20	8.33%
	4	Well (Common)	14	5.83%
	5	Tube well (Individual)	118	49.17%
	6	Tube well (Common)	38	15.83%
	7	Surface water (pond, river, spring)	28	11.67%
Latrine	1	Pucca	39	16.25%
	2	Kutchra	49	20.42%
	3	Open space	152	63.33%
Source of lighting	1	Electricity	92	38.33%
	2	Kerosene	148	61.67%
Source of cooking energy	1	Fire wood & other (Cow-dung)	216	90.00%
	2	Kerosene	-----	-----
	3	Gas	24	10.00%

Source: Field Survey

In table: 1.4, the sample population have been distributed in accordance with availability of certain facilities. It appears from the table that the housing condition of the surveyed population is far from satisfactory as most of the households do not enjoy the basic amenities of life, such as pucca bathroom, pucca latrine, pure drinking water, etc.

Table: 1.4 shows that the percentage of households having pucca bathroom is 11.25% (27). Only 8.33% (20) households have kutchra bathroom while 80.42% (193) households don't have any bathroom facilities. Individual hygiene and methods of sanitation play a key role in keeping good health of the people of a community including their children. In the sample villages, only 16.25% (39) households have pucca latrines and 20.42% (49) households have kutchra latrines. More than 50% i.e. 63.33% (152) households do not possess latrines and they use the nearby jungles or fields for this purpose. The children use any corner of the courtyard to release the stool.

Only 9.17% (22) households have pipe water facilities of which 2.50% (6) households have own pipe water facilities and 6.67% (16) households have govt. pipe water facilities which is supplied by the Public Health Department of the state.

Similarly, 14.16% (34) households are fetch water for household uses from wells of which 8.33% (20) households have own wells and 6.67% (16) households use common wells which are made by six ring-wells supplied by the government. Again, 49.17% (118) households have their own tube wells while 15.83% (38) households use common tube wells (supplied by Govt.)

which are generally stay in a public place. 11.67% (28) of the households are still using surface water (pond, river, spring) for household uses and drinking purposes.

In the surveyed villages, 38.33% (92) households have electricity and 61.67% households use kerosene for lighting. Regarding the type of fuel used for cooking, fire wood is the most common type. As many as 90% (216) households use fire wood and others mainly cow-dung as a source of fuel and only 10% (24) households use L.P.G. But it is to be noted that among the L. P. G. connection holder families, few of them have received free Govt. L.P.G. connection under the Randhanjyoti scheme of the government.

Suggestion

In the light of the findings of the study, the following suggestions have been put forward for the improvement of the socio-economic condition and demographic life of the scheduled castes people of Dhubri district of Assam.

- (1). In survey area it is found that out of the 84.58% BPL families, 68.75% BPL families have BPL cards and 15.83% BPL families have no BPL cards for various reasons. One of the main reasons is detected that the panchayat members seek bribe for listing their names as BPL category. They are so poor that they have no capacity for offering money for that purpose. As a result, they are getting neither benefit of APL categories nor benefit of BPL categories. Therefore, it is suggested that the government should immediately look into the matter and step should be taken for issue of BPL cards to that families immediately.
- (2). It is found that 37.50% families of the sample households are living in kutchha houses. The households who are living in kutchha houses also belong to BPL category but they are still unable to get the IAY houses. It is also found that there is huge corruption for selecting IAY beneficiaries from panchayat level to officer level. During survey time it is clear that more than 20% IAY beneficiaries is not the actual beneficiaries. They actually belong to APL category. They somehow managed officer and get the IAY houses. Therefore, it is necessary that the government should immediately make transparency in the scheme in selecting the IAY beneficiaries so that only the actual beneficiaries come out for selection. Together the government should take strong step against the persons who are involved in corruption for selecting the IAY beneficiaries.
- (3). In survey area it is found that most of the households do not enjoy the basic amenities of life, such as pucca bathroom, pucca latrine, pure drinking water, etc. Only 8.33% households have kutchha bathroom while 80.42% households don't have any bathroom facilities. Similarly, only 20.42% households have kutchha latrines and 63.33% households do not possess any latrines, they use the nearby jungles or fields for this purpose. The children use any corner of the courtyard to release the stool. Hence, the government should create awareness among the people that in the 20th Ist century it is very shame for us to send our mother and sister in open space to give up stool. Consequently, the government should also make time bound scheme for facilitating the toilet facilities to those families in minimum cost. The government should also construct the public toilet in village areas also in a minimum distance. Then only we can expect some changes in scenario.
- (4). In survey areas it is found that only 6.67% households have got govt. pipe water facilities which is supplied by the Public Health Department of the State. Again, 11.67% of the households are still using surface water (pond, river, spring) for household uses and drinking purposes. Therefore, it is suggested that the Public Health Department of the State should spread the free water supply scheme in more areas so that more and more people can take the benefit of it. The Public Health Department of the State should give tube wells or wells to those individuals who are still using surface water like pond, river and spring water for household uses and drinking purposes. Besides, in these areas, the Public Health Department should give the facilities of common wells and common tube wells in public places in a minimum distance.
- (5). It is found that in surveyed villages, 38.33% households have electricity and 61.67% households use kerosene for lighting. Therefore, it is suggested that electrification should be increased so that more and more households can be electrified. Again, it is found that more than 90% households use fire wood and others mainly cow-dung as a source of fuel and only 10% households use L.P.G. for cooking. Hence, the government should take step to give L.P.G. connection to more and more families under the Randhanjyoti scheme of the govt.

- (6). The Scheduled Castes people are in the habit of taking loan from the village money-lenders at an exorbitant rate of interest. In our field study, it is found that the village money-lenders come forward to provide loans to the needy persons at the time of their disaster against standing crops at high rate of interest like 5% to 10% rate of interest per month. The main reason of taking loan from the village money-lenders is that they face difficulties to follow the complicated procedures of the banks or other Govt. agencies due to their illiteracy and ignorance. Again, the loans offered by the banks and the subsidies given by the government department are not availed by the Scheduled Castes people due to corruption. Therefore, it is suggested that the government should directed the bank authorities to provide loan with easy procedure and easy documentation. Similarly, the government should take strong step to remove corruption in providing subsidy loans. Illiteracy is one of the major hindrances of the poor Scheduled Castes people of de-link of banking habit. So, literacy must increase among them and this is also the responsibility of the state government to fulfill the educational needs of the people.
- (7). Womens' labour force participation is found to have great influence on fertility as well as couple' attitude to extra children among the scheduled Castes people of Assam. Since most of the respondents in the sample villages are found to be semi-literate or illiterate, government jobs are not available to them. But, the women folk are good in weaving, net making, handicraft, etc. In this connection, special training should be introduced for Scheduled Castes Women to improve their skill in these trades, which will not only enhance their family income but also reduce fertility.
- (8). The Directorate of Welfare of Scheduled Castes, Assam has been implementing various welfare schemes for all round development of the scheduled castes people including implementation and monitoring of the point 11 (A) of 20 point programme. Besides, as per directive of the Govt. the Assam State Development Corporation for Scheduled Castes Ltd. is implementing some schemes for the benefit of the poor Scheduled Castes people of the state living below the poverty line. These schemes are helpful in eradicating poverty but in reality there is huge corruption in implementation of the schemes. Under these schemes, 80% to 90% funds and in some cases 100% funds are looted. The implementing agencies from top to bottom are involved in corruption. This kind of mindset has to be changed. The government should take proper step to stop corruption. Another shortcoming of the schemes is that the government is not allocating sufficient funds for these schemes from the beginning. Even no fund has been allocating in the budget against some of these schemes from 2007. Therefore, it is suggested that the government should allocated huge fund in the budget against these schemes for the benefit of the poor Scheduled Castes people of the state living below poverty line.

In the planning and implementation of poverty reduction programmes, the bureaucracy plays the most important role. They are involved in detailed planning, allocation of allotted funds for the lower tiers of the administration and line departments, flow of funds, approving the plans and projects prepared by the lower tiers and monitoring inputs, outputs and outcomes of development interventions. Since the weaknesses in implementation are the root cause of failure and sub-optimal performance of programmes, it brings into focus the functioning of the bureaucracy in terms of its accountability, transparency and interface with the civil society.

Conclusion

There is no denying fact that the Scheduled Castes people of Assam are socially and economically very poor. Social backwardness is due to certain socio-cultural factors which make them neglected by others. Economic backwardness is due to the dependence on the indigenous occupations. However, growth of population, sub-division and fragmentation of land holding, pressure of population, tough competition from machine-made goods, lack of technical knowledge of modern system of production, lack of capital money, influx of outsiders on the trade once solely meant for Scheduled Castes are the main causes of poverty, homelessness and unemployment among the Scheduled Castes of Assam.

From the aforesaid discussion it could be inferred that without reforming the bureaucracy and changing their mindset, the development interventions are unlikely to be effective and efficient. Furthermore, specific reforms need to be design to make development administration responsible, transparent, accountable and culpable.

Lastly, a whole-hearted effort of the Government, Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs), Gaon Panchayats, dynamic role of the educated youths, Mahila Samities, etc are required for a drastic change in the socio-economic and demographic life of the Scheduled Castes people of Assam.

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