



Causes And Consequences Of Poverty Of The Scheduled Castes People of Dhubri District Of Assam

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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 identify the problems faced by the Scheduled Castes people of Assam as well as Dhubri district which are responsible for their backwardness. 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 identify the problems faced by the Scheduled Castes people of Assam as well as Dhubri district which are responsible for their backwardness.
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

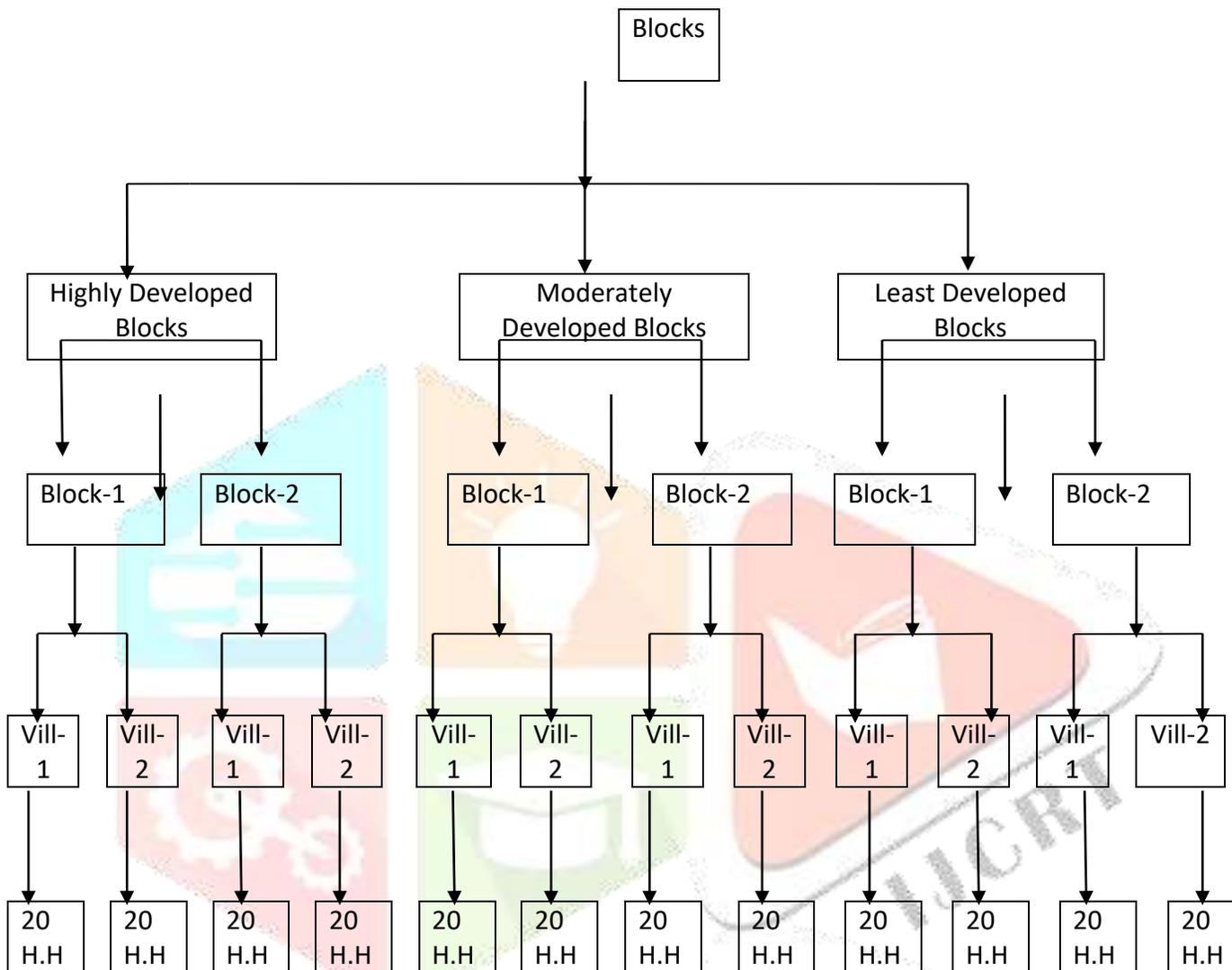
The research project is based on both primary as well as secondary data. The primary data is collected from various sources like books, journals, statistical hand book, economic survey and internet as well. The secondary data is based on field data collected from the sample households of the sample villages 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 Sample Vill :ChotoDighaltari House hold : 128 Population: 386 Male : 198 Female : 188 S.C. : 149 S.T. : 0 Others : 237	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 Sample Vill :Batardal House hold : 116 Population: 401 Male : 204 Female : 197 S.C. : 134 S.T. : 42 Others : 225	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 : Kukurmara-1 House hold : 387 Population: 1779 Male : 918 Female : 861 S.C. : 297 S.T. : 0 Others : 1482
	Bilasipara Development Block		Gauripur Development Block		Sample Vill : Dharmasala-3 House hold : 489 Population: 2442 Male : 1228 Female : 1214 S.C. : 122 S.T. : 0 Others : 2320 Sample Vill :Bhelakoba House hold : 218 Population: 857 Male : 456 Female : 401 S.C. : 126 S.T. : 0 Others : 731

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

Map of Dhubri District



Study Area

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.

DhekialPhukan ,(1829) while discussing the occupations of the Kaibarta people of Assam, said that a greater section of the kaibartas such as , Nadials, Doms and Jaliy, Keots practice fishing and fish trade. There are a few rich and educated kaibartas who engage themselves in other trade and commerce.

Motgomarymortin (1976), Barua, Padma NathGohain (1976), Choudhury , P.C. (1987), Shastri, M. (1990) Gogi, Dr. Leela(1994), Bezbarua, Debandre Kumar (1999) Das, Dr. Provash (1990), Barua , Dr. Bhuban Ch. (2003). Risely, H.H. (1891), all agree that the main occupation of the Kaibartas is fishing.

Barua, Gunanbhiram has discussed about the occupation of the Scheduled Castes people of kaibarta community of Assam. According to him traditional occupation of this community includes fish catching and selling, boat making and plying, lime making and selling, etc. Now they are engaged in agricultural activities and other trades also.

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

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

Majority of the Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district are poverty victim. The causes of the poverty victim are close inter-linkages between socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. They are as follows:

(A). Socio-cultural factors

(i). Joint Family System: Joint family system is still prevailing among the Scheduled Castes people of this region. This characteristic is also seen among the other communities of this region. In Scheduled Castes joint family, the number of children is always ignored. Poverty is widespread in a Scheduled Castes joint family because in such a family, a person always welcomes further additions to his family size to supplement his family income. This large number of children creates a heavy burden on the income of the family. Thus, lack of knowledge rather than lack of willingness are the main obstacles to the spread of poverty among the Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district.

(ii). Universality and practice of early marriage

Marriage is universal among the Scheduled Castes people of this region. In general unmarried men and women of this community do not enjoy a respectable social status in the society. Thus, almost all men and women of marriageable age of this community enter into wed lock.

Again, Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district used to marry at an early age. This early marriage is a common characteristic of this community which gives them a longer span of reproductive activity. It is likely that between 15 to 20 years of age every 8 out of 10 girls are married. Thus, the early marriage is a very common factor for the high rate of growth of population among this community.

Again, the puberty of women starts at an early age of about 15 due to topical climate. Thus, women in this region start fertilizing very soon after they enter reproduction stages. This creates large number of births.

(iii). Illiteracy

Illiteracy is very high among the Scheduled Castes people of this region. Illiteracy is very high due to poorness. Children without getting educational facilities start to help their parents in work and raise the family earnings and, therefore, prove to be assets to the family. Female children are confined to the kitchen rather going to school for cooking purposes. When the children of the poor Scheduled Castes people cannot go to school for education and instead have to work in the fields of landlords and look after their cattle, there are very slim chances that such children when they grow up will be able to break the vicious circle of poverty in future.

(iv). Superstition

In Dhubri district, majority of the Scheduled Castes people are fatalist. They consider their children as the gift of God. They believe that God has created them and given two hands, two legs and a mouth to feed. As a result, they produce children one by one. They do not understand the effect of large family on the income of the family. People belonging to this community are ignorant about biology of reproduction, need of birth control and devices of birth control. They consider family planning program to be a curse, as they against the God's will. As a result, they create large number of birth whose ultimate result is wide spread poverty.

(v). Dowry System

Dowry system is still prevailing among the Scheduled Castes people of this region. This system also prevailing among the other communities of Dhubri district. People of this community have to offer gold, wooden furniture and other things as a dowry in their daughter's marriage. In some cases, the groom party demand hand cash and other costly articles like bike, car, colour television, refrigerator etc. In such a situation, the father of the bride is compelled to sell their property for collecting money. When this phenomenon is happened in case of poor Scheduled Castes, they become helpless and as a result they loss everything within a night and become poorer. Therefore, this dowry system is number one cause of poverty of the Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district.

(vi). Various festivals

Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district are very joyous. Like other people, Scheduled Castes people of this region are admirer of festivity. They observe various traditional festivals in a year. Some of the colourful festivals are Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Kati Puja, Manosha Puja, Shitola Puja, Hoodum Puja, Ganga Puja, Dol Puja etc. Some of these festivals are very expensive and continue to two/ three/ four and more days. During to the festival days, people of this community used to purchase new cloths for their children and for themselves and remain workless till the end of the festivals.

(vii). Exploitation by other communities

The Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district are very poor. They are ignorance and uneducated. The non- scheduled castes people of this region are always taking opportunity to cheat them. They are always depriving them from their legal receive. There is a tendency among the poor Scheduled Castes people of this region to keep their young boys and girls as domestic servant in the house of rich non-scheduled castes people on monthly wage basis. This tendency is more among the girls as compared to boys. They are working in a minimum wage, i.e. rupees five hundred to rupees seven or eight hundred per month.

(B). Economic factors

(i). Unemployment: Employment is admittedly a strong power lever to boost up the socio-economic conditions of a community. The Scheduled Castes Community is, however, in this respect in a bad shape. Unemployment at the moment is chronic problem in the country as a whole and the weaker sections of the community are worst victims. The picture of employment of Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district is very pathetic. In this district, there is no big and small industry. The Scheduled Castes people of this area are completely depend on state Government service. But majority of them are unable to compete with other castes people. Only a few persons are able to success. But both The Central Government and the State Government of Assam have made arrangements for reservation of services and posts in favour of the Scheduled Castes on the basis of population. For Assam it is 7%. A negligible portion of Scheduled Castes people of this region are getting government jobs on the basis of reservation quota mainly on Grade III and Grade Iv categories.

(ii). Minimum wage rate

As per data collection, the average daily wage rate of skilled, unskilled and other agricultural labours is minimum in rural areas of Dhubri district. In some areas, this average rate is less than the state's average rate. And this is mostly happen in Scheduled Castes dominated areas of Dhubri district. The reason is that the income of the general people of this area is very low and the number of the work seekers is huge. As a result, they compel to work in less wages rather than remain workless. But in recent times, the wage rate of the workers have raised and it always remain above than the average wage rate of the state due to high price rise.

(iii). Low Per capita Income

The per capita income gives an idea of standard of living of the people. The per capita income of Assam at current prices for 2010-11 has been worked out at Rs.30569 against Rs.35917 at all India level as per advanced estimates. More than 80 percent of the Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district are living below poverty line. Their average income is nearly Rs. 25,000 per year. The unrelenting pressure of population and lack of alternative employment opportunities outside agriculture lead to the fall in per capita income, disguised unemployment and fall in the marginal productivity of labour to zero or negative level.

(iv). Indebtedness

Indebtedness is another chronic remarkable problem amongst the Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district as in other areas of Assam. The rural Scheduled Castes people are very poor. Their income is very low and therefore they cannot save money. About 50% of the rural Scheduled Castes families is in chronic indebtedness. They usually take loan from village Mahajan on high rate of interest (monthly interest basis) to start small business. Almost lion share of profit of their business goes on recovery of their loan and therefore they cannot improve their economic condition.

(v). Natural Calamities

Dhubri district is unfortunately one of those few districts which are every now and then visited by natural calamities such as floods and droughts. Experience and a study of the problems connected with the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. The rains are totally uncertain in this area. Sometimes rains are insufficient and sometimes have too much of rains resulting in heavy floods which cause wide spread damage and destruction. A total damage to crops, cattles, houses, public institutions in this area has been increasing year by year. Other natural calamities like hailstorm, frost or attack by pest and insects are also common occurrences in these areas in every year. All these natural factors always go against the Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district.

(C). Political factors

Political power is the strongest power for emancipating a nation and a caste from exploitation. Article 330 and 332 of the Constitution conferred political right 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. In Assam state Assembly, out of 126 M.L.A. constituencies, only 8 constituencies are reserved for S.C. on the basis of population. In dhubri district, there are 8 M.L.A. constituencies and all 8 constituencies are open, still no one is reserved for S.C. It is interesting to note that from Independence to till now no S.C. people has come out by winning as M.L.A. as well as M.P. so far by defecting any one on any one seat of all 8 constituencies of Dhubri district. Article 335 ensures reservation of services and posts for the Scheduled Castes in the affairs of the State. Accordingly, The State Government of Assam has made arrangement for reservation of services and posts in favour of the Scheduled Castes on the basis of population. For Assam, it is 7%. But in reality, the Government of Assam has not fulfilled all 7% quotas except Grade III & Grade IV posts due to various reasons. The number of backlog has increasing year by year and the Government has showing no interest for clearing these backlog.

The Government of Assam has constituted a S.C. Development Council for all round development of Scheduled Castes people of Assam. But, the selection of members and Chairman of the Council are totally politically motivated. As a result, 80% fund out of total fund allocating to the Council are misused by the Council by managing minister, top Officials and leader of the ruling Party. The benefit of the various Govt. schemes does not goes to the poor Scheduled Castes people.

Another causes of poverty among the Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district may be termed as administrative problem. The benefits provided by the administration do not go to the genuine needy and the bonafide people. The loan offered by the banks and the subsidies given by the Government Departments are not avail by the Scheduled Castes people for whom the provisions are made. This happens due to lack of real fieldwork and survey on the part of the Departments concerned.

Sensitive Borders

Dhubri district is bounded by sensitive borders in its two sides. Border specially with Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) on the west and south have remained too sensitive since independence. Dhubri district has crowded by influx of refugees from Bangladesh. As a result, several anti-social events like insurgency problem, robbery, money extortion, etc. have been increasing day by day in this area. All the political parties playing vote-bank politics with this issues rather than go for a permanent solution. This adverse factor always goes against the economic interest of the State and also this area by obstructing the easy flow of industrial investment both in the public and private sectors. In spite of possessing huge natural resources, the investments in Dhubri district have remained too risky one due to its sensitive border. The public sector investment in this area is very poor and the flow of investment in the private sector is almost zero. The distribution of registered factories and workers in Assam and Dhubri district is given in the following table.

The Sample Population

The Size of population shapes the quality of life in terms of level of income, education, type of family, family size, infant mortality, life expectancy, etc. It is clear that income plays an important role in determining the standard of living, consumption pattern and fertility of a couple. In the present study the sample households have been distributed on the basis of total monthly income and per capita monthly income.

Table: 1.1
Distribution of Sample households by total family income (Monthly)

Sl. No.	Level of family income (Per Month)	Number of Households	Percentage
1	Up to Rs. 1000	38	15.83%
2	Rs. 1001 to Rs. 2000	81	33.75%
3	Rs. 2001 to Rs. 3000	42	17.50%
4	Rs. 3001 to Rs. 4000	25	10.42%
5	Rs. 4001 to Rs. 5000	23	9.58%
6	Rs. 5001 to Rs. 6000	10	4.17%
7	Rs. 6001 to Rs. 7000	6	2.50%
8	Rs. 7001 to Rs. 8000	4	1.67%
9	Rs. 8001 to Rs. 9000	2	0.83%
10	Rs. 9001 to Rs. 10000	3	1.25%
11	Rs. 10000 +	6	2.50%
12	Total	240	100.00%

Source: Field Survey

It is generally difficult to measure the income and expenditure of the rural mass as they do not maintain the records of income and expenditure and they do not have any regular source of income except the salary earners. The income of the people varies from season to season and time to time. In calculating the average monthly income of a sample family under the present study, summation of money wage earned through primary and secondary sources by the husbands, the wives and the other members of the family and imputed money value of the household products have been taken into account.

Table: 1.1 reveals that 15.83% (38) of sample household have monthly income of less than Rs.1000 or up to Rs. 1000.00. They are very low income group and have no way to earn money. They are generally beggar, widow, old and sick persons. They are generally old persons and have lost their manpower for doing hard work. They are passing their life by doing some low profitable business like begging, wood selling, muri and chira selling etc.

33.75% (81) and 17.50% (42) of sample households have monthly income of less than Rs. 2000.00 and Rs. 3000.00 or up to Rs. 2000.00 or Rs.3000.00 respectively which is not sufficient to meet the necessary expenditure of a family with two or three children. They are generally un-skill labours and have no permanent

plot of land for agriculture. Again, they are unable to get the work throughout the month. They usually get work 15 to 20 days in a month and remain workless in rest of the days of the month.

10.42% (25), 9.58% (23) and 4.17% (10) of sample households have monthly income of less than Rs.4000.00, Rs.5000.00 and Rs.6000.00 or up to Rs.4000.00, Rs. 5000.00 and Rs. 6000.00 respectively. They are generally skill labours and have permanent source of income. Besides, Some of them have small plot of land for agriculture.

2.50% (6), 1.67% (4) and 0.83% (2) of sample households have monthly income of less than Rs.7000.00, Rs.8000.00 and Rs.9000.00 or up to Rs.7000.00, Rs. 8000.00 and Rs. 9000.00 respectively. They have some additional source of income besides permanent source of income. They have also some plot of own land for agriculture. 1.25% (3) and 2.50% (6) of sample households have monthly income of less than Rs.10000.00 or up to Rs.10000.00 and Rs.10000.00 and above respectively. They are generally service holders, pensioners, established businessmen etc.

Table:1.2

Distribution of the households by per capita family income (Monthly)

Sl. No.	Per capita family income (Per Month)	Number. of households	Percentage
1	Up to Rs. 100	21	8.75%
2	Rs. 101 to Rs. 200	22	9.17%
3	Rs. 201 to Rs. 300	28	11.66%
4	Rs. 301 to Rs. 400	27	11.25%
5	Rs. 401 to Rs. 500	41	17.08%
6	Rs. 501 to Rs. 600	27	11.24%
7	Rs. 601 to Rs. 700	20	8.33%
8	Rs. 701 to Rs. 800	13	5.45%
9	Rs. 801 to Rs. 900	9	3.75%
10	Rs. 901 to Rs. 1000	11	4.58%
11	Rs. 1001 to Rs. 2000	12	5.00%
	Rs. 2001+	9	3.75%
12	Total	240	100.00%

Source: Field Survey

In Table: 1.2, sample households have been presented on the basis of per capita monthly income (computed by dividing the total monthly family income by the total number of members of the family). Per capita income is the only basis with which the economic condition of a family can be studied. It is found that 82.93% (199) of the households have per capita income of less than Rs.800.00 or up to Rs. 800.00 per month. Only 17.08% (41) or slightly less households have per capita monthly income of more than Rs. 816.00. In the sample villages, more than 82.93% households live below the poverty line which is much more than the state average.

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: 1.3 shows the number of APL and BPL families of the sample households

Table: 1.3
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	(a). With BPL cards	165	68.75%
		(b). Without BPL cards	38	15.83%
3	Total families	240	100.00%	

Source: Field Survey

Table: 1.3 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.

Suggestions

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). It is observed that majority of the households (28.33%) are unskilled labour. But the income earned from this profession is not sufficient and certain. Therefore, to improve the socio-economic condition of the unskilled labours, it is necessary to improve their skill. For this purpose, special training should be given to them according to their eligibility. Government should take strong steps for proper utilizing the Special Component Plan which is announced for the overall development of the poor Scheduled Castes People of Assam in general.

(2). Fishing is found to be another main occupation of the Kaibartas of Assam. But the income earned from it is very negligible to run the families. It is because the technology and procedure they use for catching, storing and marketing fish are crude and outdated. To improve the socio-economic condition of the Kaibartas, it is necessary to modernize fish catching and fish selling technology so that their productivity can increase and the sustainability of their fish trade can be ensured. For this purpose, special training should be given to the kaibartas in fish catching, fish storing, fishing instrument making etc. They are also expert in cane and bamboo products. But due to financial problems they cannot produce it at a large scale. Agro-farming training should be given to them. Raw materials like, nylon, yarn, bamboo and cane, takau and other items may be provided at subsidized rate. Necessary marketing facilities may also provide to them.

(3). It is found that a huge portion of the respondents (44.44%) are house wives /unemployed. They do not go for work in spite of their wide spread poverty. Majority of them have remained at home for look after their children and cooking purposes as tradition. Awareness should be created among them for going to work according to their capacity which will help in increasing their family income and accordingly economic condition.

(4). It is found that child marriage is still practicing among the Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district of Assam. 35% respondents of the survey area are married below the legal age of marriage which is recognized by constitution as 18 for the females and which prolongs their reproduction period. Therefore, early age at marriage of the scheduled castes people is found to have highly significant influence on the fertility as well as mortality. So, special campaign should be organized to create awareness among them for enhancing the female age at marriage. Hence, all the development plans including the Special Component Plan and Special Assistance programme meant for the scheduled Castes people should stress on the efforts so that fertility of the scheduled Castes women comes down.

(5). 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.

(6). 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.

(7). Another most corrupt scheme is the Public Distribution System (PDS). Public Distribution System is introduced to provide food grains to the poor families of the State under Minimum Need Programme of Govt. of India. In implementing the scheme, the Govt. officials from top bottom are directly involved in corruption. Therefore, the government should take strong step to abolish corruption from this scheme and also should take step that under PDS, the actual poor families are identified and distributed food grains at the fair price shop in a transparent and accountable manner.

(8). 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 againststanding 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.

Conclusion

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 pointprogramme. 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

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 designed 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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